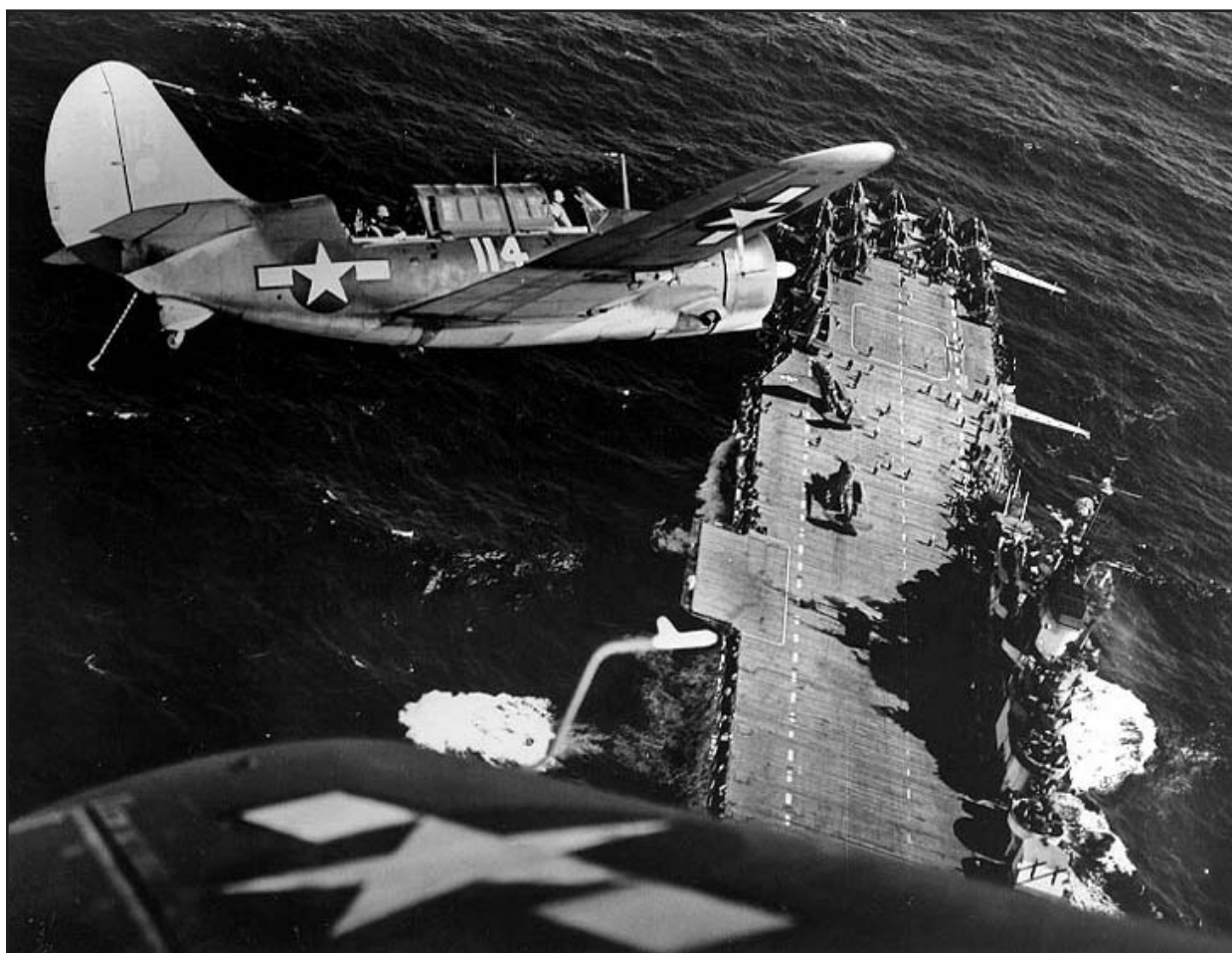


G U R P S[®]

Leyte Gulf

**AN e23 SOURCEBOOK
FOR GURPS[®] FROM
STEVE JACKSON GAMES
FOR 3 TO 6 PLAYERS**

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1. AN EPIC END

The Battle of Leyte Gulf is neither widely known by the general public nor the subject of exciting war movies. It is, however, famous for several reasons. It remains the largest naval action ever fought, and on the Japanese side included the two largest warships the world had seen. It also witnessed the return of MacArthur to the Philippines. Finally, the infamous Japanese *kamikaze* suicide pilots first sortied in this engagement.

COLLISION COURSE

U.S. General Douglas MacArthur had convinced Filipino President Manuel L. Quezon to appoint him to the splendid rank of field marshal – but the egotistical MacArthur was a defeated man when he boarded a patrol boat on the night of March 11, 1942, to flee the Philippines. Regardless, head held high, he made a vow to return, one that bordered on arrogance given the overwhelming Japanese victories of the time. In the next two years, however, the United States turned the tide and began to bear down on the Japanese empire with overwhelming might. In early 1944, the Allied advances reached a decision point: Should their main thrust continue toward Formosa (the direct route to Japan) or divert to the Philippines (an important resource in what remained of the Japanese conquests)?

MacArthur skillfully argued against U.S. Admiral Chester Nimitz to convince U.S. President Roosevelt in late July 1944 that the Philippines should be given priority. The landing of U.S. forces at Leyte was scheduled for December 20, 1944. Admiral William Halsey already was roaming the area with his 3rd Fleet, however, meeting little opposition and overwhelming those Japanese forces he did encounter. Given that intelligence, the aggressive U.S. commanders brought the invasion date forward.

American troops went ashore on October 20 and met some opposition, but not nearly enough to prevent

the establishment of beachheads. Four hours later, MacArthur fulfilled his promise to return, and promptly made it clear that Leyte was as much a personal victory as a political or military goal. “I have returned,” he intoned in a speech on the landing beach, ignoring the thousands of troops and sailors also involved in the invasion. “I now call upon your supreme effort. . . . Rally to me.”

Meanwhile, the increasingly desperate Japanese had anticipated that the Americans might return to the Philippines; their high command drew up four plans for counterattacks depending on whether the main Allied thrust targeted the Philippines, Formosa, the Ryukyus, or Kyushu. *Sho Ichi Go* (Operation Victory One) dealt with the Philippine archipelago. The plan was for the various elements of the Japanese fleet to converge on the invasion area and utterly wipe out the Allied landing force. No provision was made as to what would happen next, and it isn’t clear that even the planners



expected the desperate measure to succeed. At a minimum, though, they intended to inflict so many casualties that the United States would feel compelled to offer easier terms for ending the war.

The effort was to be an “all-or-nothing” rush to glory or defeat. Japanese Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa’s force of mostly empty aircraft carriers would act as a decoy; they would approach from the north to lure Halsey’s deadly 3rd Fleet away from the battle. Meanwhile, a Center Force and two southern fleets of surface warships would converge on Leyte Gulf in a pincers movement.

The complex plan called for precise timing and a great deal of luck. The center and two southern groups would take direct routes to Leyte Gulf through narrow straits that would leave them highly vulnerable to air attacks if detected, but offered good odds of rapidly slipping under the “umbrella” of aerial reconnaissance undetected. With good fortune, and if the Japanese admirals coordinated the attack well, it held the possibility of achieving complete surprise.

Fittingly, Japanese prewar naval strategy – prior to the rise of the aircraft carriers – had anticipated a final fleet encounter between Japan and the United States in the region of the Philippines. The superbattleships *Yamato* and *Musashi* had been built to carry the day in exactly this sort of epic confrontation. Now, for the first time, these two vessels would join the war. The hopes of the Japanese military leadership sailed with them.

THE BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF

The following narrative does not weigh events as a standard history would, presenting the ebb and flow of the Battle of Leyte Gulf from an admiral’s perspective. Instead, it briefly describes the larger scheme of things, while isolating particularly good opportunities for role-playing in greater detail.

The events take place from October 23-25, 1944. To maintain the proper feel, times are given in military format, with p.m. times adding 12 to their civilian notation. Thus, 0630 is 6:30 a.m. while 1830 means 6:30 p.m.

This chapter only briefly describes the types of ships and composition of units involved in the battle. Those with no previous familiarity with the Battle of Leyte Gulf can find more complete descriptions of the forces in Chapter 2.

ADMIRAL TAKEO KURITA

Takeo Kurita was born in 1899. He graduated from the Japanese Naval Academy at Etijima and commenced a career that included service on destroyers and cruisers. He was present at Midway, Guadalcanal, and the Battle of the Philippine Sea. He was uncertain, if not defeatist, in the exercise of his commands, to the extent that he had retreated and abandoned his shore bombardment when faced with four torpedo boats at Guadalcanal. His willingness to retreat in the face of a strong fighting spirit (not to be confused with a numerically stronger or more powerful opposition) was underscored at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, when Kurita quickly advocated withdrawal. This tendency to avoid risk became an important factor in the battle off Samar Island on October 25. On the other hand, he was a recognized expert in the use of torpedoes, and for his entire career had served on surface ships, which would play the dominant role in the fighting this day.



BATTLE STATIONS!

The U.S. military command knew that the defenseless supply ships and transports anchored in Leyte Gulf would make a very tempting target for their opponents, so deadly Navy submarines prowled the waters around the staging area, serving as the eyes of the 3rd and 7th fleets. They included the *Darter* under Commander David McClintock and the *Dace* under Commander Bladen Claggett. These vessels had formed a two-sub wolfpack to patrol the entrance of Palawan Passage, near the treacherous Dangerous Ground. These waters that led into the Sibuyan Sea had earned their no-nonsense name because of the large number of ships that had been wrecked over the centuries on their coral reefs.

As October 23 began, *Darter* and *Dace* loitered on the calm surface, a short distance apart, exchanging information. At 0116 the radar screen on *Darter* picked up a contact at 30,000 yards. Eager for an engagement, both subs immediately dived and maneuvered into a position to shadow the approaching contact. It proved to be more than two dozen ships . . . the Japanese Center Force, under Admiral Takeo Kurita. This was rather more opportunity than they had anticipated. The U.S. submariners refrained from attacking immediately. Instead, they tailed the Japanese, in order to assess the fleet's strength in the dawn light. In the meantime, they made preliminary estimates and radioed them off. The first reached Halsey around 0630.

Kurita's fleet was sailing in two columns. The port (or left) column was led by Kurita in his flagship, the heavy cruiser *Atago*. The starboard column was centered on the *Yamato* and the *Musashi*, the two superbattleships built secretly in defiance of prewar naval treaties. Inexplicably, Kurita had not set a destroyer screen ahead of his force to prowl for submarines. Furthermore, though his fleet could sail at speeds that few submarines could match, it maintained only a stately 16 knots. Japan had very little oil left, and Kurita's bunkers had not been filled even for this decisive assignment. He had to nurse his fleet's fuel.

After making a final report, the *Darter* took an attack position to launch torpedoes at the port column. The *Dace* maneuvered so as to be able to make a later run on the starboard ships. The first kills of the largest naval battle in history were only moments away.

TORPEDOES AWAY

At 0632, the *Darter* fired six torpedoes at the lead target at a range inside 1,000 yards. Immediately turning, McClintock was able to fire four more "fish" from the stern tubes. The noise of explosions was heard shortly after, and the view that greeted the commander through his periscope was "the sight of a lifetime." The

Atago was burning fiercely and already sinking. Torpedoes also slammed into the *Takao*, behind the flagship, but the heavy cruiser did not sink. It did withdraw from the battle, however, and took with it two destroyers for protection, furthering weakening the Center Force. The *Darter* dove to avoid vengeful destroyers.

Minutes later, Claggett patiently controlled his excitement, allowing two light cruisers to pass him by as he waited for richer pickings. The third vessel of the starboard column came into view and *Dace* fired off its brace of torpedoes at 0654. Shortly after, explosions were heard on both the *Dace* and the *Darter*. The Japanese heavy cruiser *Maya* had been hit and sank within four minutes. Had Claggett waited for just one more target to come into view, it would have been the *Yamato*. *Dace* then began to evade reprisals from the Japanese ships, enduring two depth-charge attacks without damage, despite the proximity of the explosions.

WHAT IF?

If *Darter* and *Dace* had not detected Kurita's Center Force, then the Japanese plan could have worked, perhaps even resulting in the single most deadly day in U.S. naval history. There were no other Allied submarines in the Sibuyan Sea to intercept Kurita, though he might well have been spotted by air patrols. As described in the main text, Halsey set off in pursuit of Ozawa's northern carrier force though he *had* spotted Kurita, because he believed him to be retreating. Had the U.S. commanders had either more or less information, it is likely that as the Japanese fleet emerged from San Bernardino Strait, Halsey would have been waiting for it – though with less information the Americans would have been taken by surprise, and been considerably less ready to fight. Regardless, the U.S. 3rd Fleet would have gone up against both the *Yamato* and the *Musashi* (which would not have been sunk without the reports from *Darter* and *Dace*). Such a battle would no doubt have been grand, bloody, and decisive for one side or the other.

DD To the Rescue

As *Atago* sank beneath the waves, Kurita was forced to find safety in a rubber lifeboat. Command of the Center Force transferred to Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, commander of Battle Division 1, aboard the mighty *Yamato*. He ordered a radical change of course

as a precaution against further torpedo attacks, but soon after resumed the previous course.

Kurita was fished out of the seas near Palawan Island by the destroyer *Kishinami*. He would eventually board the *Yamato* (his new flagship) in the afternoon of October 24 and once again take command.

Aside from the losses inflicted by the *Darter* and *Dace*, the Allied forces had obtained three other important victories. The foremost was the detection of the Center Force. The second was that the *Atago* suffered so much damage and sank so rapidly that key communication personnel were lost, a fact that would eventually come to haunt the Japanese fleet. Finally, the seeds of doubt and defeat had been planted in the mind of a commander not known for his steely resolve under fire.

DAUGHTER OF THE SEA

As the Center Force, under the temporary command of Ugaki, left the area, McClintock bided his time. He returned to periscope depth at 0920 and observed the damaged *Takao* withdrawing under guard with air surveillance loitering overhead. For five hours, the *Darter* tried to maneuver into an attack position, but McClintock had to finally give up for the moment and settle on joining the *Dace* to seek another kill sometime after dark.

Then disaster struck. The *Darter* had been navigating the torturous Palawan Passage by dead reckoning for more than 24 hours. Shortly after midnight on October 24, the luck of the USS *Darter* ran out. The submarine ran aground on Bombay Shoal, a jagged coral reef. Immediately, a Japanese destroyer headed to the area, but was unable to locate the source of the noise it had picked up and retreated again. Attempts to free the *Darter* failed, and with dawn approaching McClintock was forced to order abandon ship. The crew transferred to *Dace*. Explosives failed to suitably destroy the rugged sub, as did torpedoes and gunfire from the *Dace*. As dawn broke, a Japanese plane arrived and promptly bombed the hapless *Darter*, presumably believing it to be a viable target and more easily hit than the *Dace*, which was under way. *Darter* remained intact in the face of the additional abuse. (Six days later, friendly forces finally were able to send the submarine to the bottom of the ocean.) The *Dace*, crammed with two full crews, sailed back to Fremantle, in Western Australia. A lack of sleeping space and a diet of soup and peanut-butter sandwiches on the return journey didn't stop the sailors from celebrating their victories.

ENEMY FLEET SIGHTED

Despite the losses suffered in Palawan Passage, the Center Force remained formidable. After Kurita resumed command, his group continued sailing through the night to the Sibuyan Sea.

Owing to the report from the *Darter* on the morning of October 24, Halsey had ordered reconnaissance planes to take to the air and track down the Japanese force. Each team was comprised of one Helldiver bomber and two Hellcat fighters, and would sweep 10° of an arc extending over the search area. Crucially, Halsey didn't order searches to the north or northeast at this time; he was worried about the lack of available air cover should a Japanese attack be launched against his ships.

Lieutenant Adams, a Helldiver pilot aboard the *Intrepid*, took off just before 0600. A veteran of many air battles since the summer, he welcomed the complex geography of the Philippine islands that contrasted sharply with the large expanses of featureless water that he was used to navigating.

Near Mindoro Island, he picked up his first radar contract. Soon, he and his wingmen spotted the white churning wakes of the Japanese ships, easily detected on the ocean below. Minutes later, the ships themselves could easily be seen. A rapid radio broadcast followed, and was relayed to Halsey. Aggressive to the bone, the Bull immediately ordered an air attack, bypassing Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher, the resident expert on carrier warfare. Halsey's orders from Nimitz prohibited him from sailing through San Bernardino Strait to seek a surface battle. The U.S. Navy suspected that the Japanese had laid lethal minefields throughout the internal seas of the Philippines.

DOG FIGHT

Though Halsey was predictably eager for a fight, and issued orders to that effect, it still took time to make the necessary arrangements. In the meantime, the Japanese launched aircraft from Luzon at Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman's Group 3, part of Task Force 38 (designated TG 38.3), which was itself part of Halsey's 3rd Fleet.

The Japanese planes came in three waves. All the attacks were broken up, but not without some heroic piloting. Commander David McCampbell led seven Hellcats that scrambled from the USS *Essex* and courageously climbed to engage about 60 enemy planes (an assortment of fighters, bombers, and torpedo-bombers). They won an incredible victory. The bombers were quickly scared away, leaving the fighters flying to maintain a tight protective circle. For over an hour,

McC Campbell and his group took their time in finding targets of opportunity. The group battled until low fuel and ammunition forced a return to first the *Essex*, then the *Lexington*, and finally the *Langley*. (The first two carriers had no deck space to land a plane, and AA crews on the *Essex* actually opened fire on McC Campbell in confusion.) McC Campbell shot down at least nine planes, a combat record that still stands to this day. His wingman scored six, and the other pilots shot down at least two each. For his exploits, McC Campbell was awarded the Medal of Honor. He would finish the war with 35 confirmed kills, the most recorded by any naval pilot.

DISASTER STRIKES

As successful as the American pilots were in repelling the waves of enemy planes, one Japanese plane – a “Judy” dive bomber, skillfully piloted – dropped out of low cloud cover over the *USS Princeton* at 0938. Breaking through a veritable hail of AA gunfire, the pilot dropped his 550-lb. bomb on target before being shot down. The ordnance tore through three decks before exploding in the bake shop. The blast wave reached six stowed Avengers, armed and ready for an attack. The aviation fuel carried by the planes then ignited, and in turn set off the torpedoes slung below each fuselage. At 1000, the *Princeton* came to a stop and soon after all crew members except the firefighting parties were ordered to abandon ship.

Sherman arranged his forces to provide air cover – thus delaying an attack on Kurita for the time being – and several destroyers came alongside the flaming *Princeton* to provide support in fighting the fires and removing the crew. Captain Thomas Inglis of the *Birmingham* took command of this operation, and several volunteers boarded the carrier to help fight the fires more directly.

During the course of the attempt to save the *Princeton*, a false submarine sighting was reported. Meanwhile, a large raid from Ozawa’s Northern Force, using almost all of his available planes, was broken up several miles from the task group. (Ozawa had intended the attack to lure 3rd Fleet into pursuing him, but for the moment the Japanese timing appeared to be badly bungled, with the Luzon-based attack and sighting of Kurita’s force pinning the Americans in place.) No further damage was inflicted on the men and ships of TG 38.3.

Five hours passed, and the commanders in the rescue-and-salvage operation decided that anything that would explode on *Princeton* already would have exploded. It seemed that both crew and ship would be largely saved. At 1523 the *Birmingham* moved into position to tow the heavily damaged vessel.

Then everyone’s luck ran out.

DD Carnage

As the *Birmingham* closed to set up a towline with the *Princeton*, the deck of the rescuing vessel was alive with seamen. Firefighters, medics, AA crews, and sailors setting up the towlines were all hard at work. Meanwhile, the flames on the stricken carrier finally reached the torpedo stores.

The resulting explosion was colossal. Sharp shards of metal rocketed through the air as the *Princeton* became a huge fragmentation grenade. The deadly shrapnel cuts its way across the crowded decks of the *Birmingham*. “Blood ran freely down the waterways and continued to run for some time,” said one eyewitness – 229 crewmen were killed, while 420 more were wounded. The volunteer firefighters on the deck of the *Princeton* were similarly torn to pieces.

Rent and bleeding sailors, many barely adults, refused immediate treatment. They directed medics to give aid to fallen comrades with even more serious wounds. Others demanded to be simply hit over the head to dull the pain, rather than be given morphine when others, in far worse condition, clearly needed it more.

Finally, it was conceded that the *Princeton* could not be saved. The *USS Irwin* had bumped into the carrier on several occasions during the rescue attempt, damaging its torpedo director. Nevertheless, it fired its fish to scuttle the vessel. The *Irwin*’s misguided torpedoes almost hit their own ship on two occasions, doing U-turns in the water. It was finally left to the *Reno* to sink *Princeton*, which became the U.S. Navy’s first major warship loss to air attack since January 1943. The toll included 108 men on board with another 190 wounded.

The warships *Birmingham*, *Gatling*, *Irwin*, and *Morrison* all left the battle area to journey to Ulithi for repairs.

ENTERPRISE ENTERS THE FRAY

The Japanese Center Force was not the only one to fail to reach Leyte Gulf undetected. Also on the morning of October 24, U.S. planes detected the larger of the two groups approaching from the south, called the Southern Force. Under Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura, this fleet was heading into the Mindanao Sea, between the islands of Negros and Mindanao, when spotted about 0900. (Sources disagree on the precise time.)

Planes from the *USS Enterprise* launched an attack at 0918, but it had little effect and certainly did not deter Nishimura. The battleship *Fuso* and destroyer *Shigure* suffered some damage. No further attacks were forthcoming that day, as Halsey chose to concentrate TG 38.4 – the southernmost of his task groups, under Rear

Admiral Ralph E. Davison – against Kurita. Halsey also considered that Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid’s 7th Fleet was more than capable of dealing with the southern threat, though on this occasion – as at a crucial time later in the battle – Halsey neglected to make his conclusion or his intentions clear to his comrade.

At this point in the battle, late in the morning of October 24, the Japanese had lost almost all surprise on both the center and southern prongs of their pincer attack. Both fleets had attempted to reach Leyte Gulf by stealth, and failed, while the Northern Force – which *wanted* to be detected – remained beyond American notice. The Japanese still had a minor element of surprise on their side because the smaller southern group, under Admiral Kiyohide Shima, was operating independently of the Southern Force proper – but Shima’s ships had to pass through the same confined waters in which the Southern Force had been spotted. A reasonable Japanese observer could conclude that the empire’s proud warships were steaming toward a debacle – but circumstances would soon reopen their window of opportunity.

VICE ADMIRAL SHOJI NISHIMURA

Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura had established a less-than-exemplary service record during the Pacific War. In February 1942, the failure of his destroyers to challenge U.S. ships allowed a victory in the Makassar Strait to go to his enemy. Later in the same year, he bungled a torpedo attack in the Battle of the Java Sea. He lost more ships in the Guadalcanal campaign and more the following year in an attack on Vella Lavella. One author has suggested that Nishimura may have had a death wish owing to the loss of his son, Teiji, in the Philippines. This may explain in part his fearless charge through Surigao Strait on October 24.

THE BATTLE OF SIBUYAN SEA

At the same time that the *Birmingham* was fighting to save the doomed *Princeton*, U.S. pilots were savaging Kurita’s Center Force. For most of October 24, Kurita’s vessels were under almost constant attack, as six waves of aircraft soared through the clouds to dispense death and destruction on the ships of war that cut through the waves below.

LEYTE GULF

Kurita had sighted Adams and his escort of Hellcats at 0810 and immediately put his group on full alert. Trained AA crews took their positions, and all available eyes turned upward to survey the blue, cloud-dotted sky. Then, at 1020, the first specks appeared on the horizon, some 40 minutes after the *Princeton* had been struck.

The first wave was from TG 38.2, under Rear Admiral Gerald F. Bogan, and consisted of Hellcats, Helldivers, and Avengers. Defensive fire was reasonably accurate, but was not successful enough to deter the Americans. Both the *Musashi* and *Myoko* were struck, the latter being forced to retire and return to Brunei. As the *Sho Ichi Go* plan stipulated, no air cover was provided – instead, the few Japanese planes that remained available would be consolidated to attack American ships at a decisive moment. Kurita and his brave crews could only grit their teeth and bear the brunt of the assault.

The second wave, also from TG 38.2, swooped down at 1245. By this time, Kurita’s force had entered the Sibuyan Sea. The planes concentrated on the *Musashi*, and were able to inflict enough damage to force the great battleship to slow and drop behind the main formation. The third wave faced still-accurate AA fire at 1330, and several planes from TG 38.3 were destroyed. Both the *Musashi* and *Yamato* were targeted successfully. By this time, the *Musashi* was in serious trouble, and the heavy cruiser *Tone* was dispatched to provide cover for the limping giant.

Three more attacks followed, often overlapping, one from each remaining task group under Halsey. The *Yamato* suffered further damage, as did the *Nagato* and the *Haruna*. The *Musashi*’s death knell was sounded by planes from TG 38.4 under Davison. This was the only sortie flown by the pilots of this group against Kurita, though they had earlier attacked Nishimura. The pilots from the *Enterprise* and *Franklin* had a field day against the slow-moving superbattleship. At the end of the attack, Admiral Toshihei Inoguchi, commander of the *Musashi*, was ordered to beach his titan on Sibuyan Island. Escorted by two destroyers that replaced the *Tone*, the *Musashi* never made it. At 1935, the behemoth sank beneath the waters of the Sibuyan Sea. Shortly after, a huge underwater explosion erupted. The *Musashi* was slain. Inoguchi, 38 other officers, and 984 men went with it. The survivors eventually made their way to Manila and participated in the defense of that city in February and March of 1945. As Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto had earlier predicted, the *Musashi* was sunk before being able to engage its huge guns against an enemy ship. Air power reigned supreme.

As Kurita and his men came to terms with the fact that an “indestructible” superbattleship had been sunk in a few hours of air attacks, the sixth and final wave flew in. The planes were again from TG 38.2 and the pilots were making their third sortie of the day. Tired

and nervous above the targets, the aviators apparently achieved very little in the way of material damage against the Center Force. But, as the last plane turned away toward its home carrier, a remarkable sight could be discerned below. It seemed that this final attack had proved too much for Kurita. At 1600, his force began reversing course. It appeared that Halsey had won, and it seemed that the beaches of Leyte Gulf would be safe from an attack from this central approach.

WHAT IF?

History points to the Japanese failure to provide Kurita with air cover as a potentially battle-turning mistake. GMs who want to explore variations on this epic battle might have the Japanese planes from Luzon provide combat air patrols for Kurita (which would require flying in relay) rather than attack Task Group 38.3.

This would deny the pilot McCampbell and his men the opportunity to stage their aerial heroics. Nor would the *Princeton* have been sunk, nor the destroyers that came to aid her have been damaged while doing so. The disaster that befell the *Birmingham* would not therefore have happened, either. On the other hand, the U.S. pilots attacking Center Force might have had a much tougher time of it.

Consider also the repercussions for later in the battle, particularly with regard to Halsey's decision to move northward. Depending on the success (or lack of it) that his pilots had experienced above their targets, his fateful choice to head north, based on the observation that Kurita appeared to be retiring, might well have been different.

MISCOMMUNICATION

In the hours following the American victory in the Sibuyan Sea, a series of decisions and miscommunications occurred that very nearly meant disaster for the invasion force on the beaches of Leyte.

The U.S. pilots, like all combat aviators, were prone to confusion over their targets. As a result, claims of damage were almost inevitably wildly inflated. This was an understood fact of life for experts on carrier-based warfare, such as Mitscher, commander of Task Force 38 Fast Carrier Force and an adviser to Halsey. Unfortunately, Halsey himself seems to have taken the reports of his victorious airmen at face value. He was inclined to believe what his pilots told him – that they had severely damaged Kurita's force, rendering it unfit

ADMIRAL WILLIAM F. HALSEY

Admiral William F. Halsey's aggressive nature earned him the popular nickname "Bull." He led the naval counterattack against the Japanese in the Pacific, striking against the Marshall Islands in January 1941. He then led the task force that enabled the "Doolittle Raid" to be carried out against Tokyo. Both actions inflicted minimal damage, but caused a surge of confidence. Halsey's first major victory came in the Guadalcanal campaign when, after relieving the former commander, he was able to finally secure victory against superior Japanese naval and air forces that had been highly confident of their own success.

Like many other colorful commanders, Halsey cheerfully ignored rules when he felt that they got in the way of results. His fighting spirit and "loose cannon" image played a part in his decision to head north after Ozawa on the evening of October 24. A cooler head, however, might have reached the same conclusion: The commander of 5th Fleet, Admiral Raymond Spruance, was roundly criticized for failing to pursue the Japanese fleet when it put in an appearance at the Marianas in the summer of 1944 during the Allied invasion. Spruance had instead decided to follow his orders and maintain the defense of the landings. Halsey was determined not to repeat what he and many others saw as a mistake.



WHAT IF?

Having sailed undetected, Ozawa sent out seemingly careless radio messages on October 21, in hopes that the U.S. 3rd Fleet would pick them up and come search for him, leaving San Bernardino open for Kurita. Had Halsey picked up this traffic, he probably would have reacted exactly according to the Japanese plan. The Center Force had not been detected yet, and the passage through the straits was a very bold move by the Japanese given their limited air cover.

In this scenario, allowing a day for searches and maneuvering, it is most likely that Ozawa would have been attacked, probably at some time on the 23rd, and defeated. How much of his force that Halsey would have taken north is difficult to guess. Perhaps he would have followed the same thought process that he did on the 24th and refused to divide his force. A crucial point, though, is that both Kinkaid and Nimitz would have been aware of the situation and San Bernardino Strait would have been constantly searched.

Assuming that other events happened as they did, *Darter* and *Dace* would have attacked Kurita on the 23rd and Halsey would have rapidly turned back south again. Whether he would have returned to the San Bernardino Strait in time largely would have depended on how successful Ozawa had been in luring 3rd Fleet farther and farther north. Most likely, Halsey would have just had time to get back and engage Center Force.

With hindsight, it would appear that Ozawa's early failure, as much as it caused him no end of concern, might have actually worked in favor of the Japanese. As events will reveal, the feint proved effective despite having arrived after the initial thrust.

for combat, and that it was now retreating away from the Sibuyan Sea.

At this point, Halsey still had no inkling that Ozawa was nearby with his toothless carriers. While his waves of planes fought to sink the *Yamato* and *Musashi*, Halsey finally ordered reconnaissance flights toward the north on October 24. At 1540, shortly before the sixth wave was to retire, these U.S. flights finally spotted part of Ozawa's Northern Force. Soon after, another plane even farther north reported the sighting of two destroyers. Then, at 1640, a pilot incorrectly reported sighting two fleet carriers, one light carrier, and several support vessels forming a protective screen around

them. Though the details were off, the Americans had finally noticed the Japanese bait.

Ozawa was playing his part in the overall strategy of *Sho Ichi Go* as well as he could. He had begun the campaign by breaking radio silence, in the hope of alerting the Americans to his presence. Before noon on October 24, he launched the majority of the few planes that he had to attack Halsey's force from the north – clearly indicating that carriers were in the vicinity. Still, Halsey failed to take notice. Ozawa therefore ordered a detachment south to threaten 3rd Fleet in the afternoon, and it was the destroyer screen of this force that was first sighted.

Halsey was aggressive to the point of being rash. He nursed a deep hatred of the Japanese that could lead him to underrate his enemy. Though he took pride in being a maverick, his superiors greatly appreciated his indomitable fighting spirit. As commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT or, more commonly, CINCPAC), Nimitz had added a caveat to Halsey's orders prior to operations at Leyte Gulf. He advised his subordinate that "in case opportunity for destruction of major portion of the enemy fleet is offered or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task." Thus, while Halsey's primary mission was to help ensure the success of the beach landings on Leyte, he had a clear "escape clause" allowing him to abandon this responsibility to seek out a major naval victory.

As evening arrived on October 24, Halsey believed that Kurita was retreating with a ravaged fleet. Scout planes had found a "major portion of the enemy fleet" to the north and Halsey possessed more than enough firepower to bring about its destruction. Furthermore, this new northern target included carriers, the richest prize in naval fighting. Halsey also was concerned that this northern fleet would allow the Japanese to "shuttle-bomb" the American units, which would involve hopping from carriers to a land base on Leyte's far side, thus doubling the number of bombing runs that the Japanese could make with each round trip. Halsey decided that his primary task had become pursuing the northern Japanese force. Not everyone close to the U.S. commander agreed with his evaluation, but he brushed off any protests or advice.

Though his conclusion was sound enough, his following decision to send his entire fleet in pursuit has been debated ever since. It certainly conformed with centuries of naval doctrine that stressed concentrating one's forces, but it left San Bernardino Strait unguarded. Halsey appreciated that – having already tried once to attack from that direction – the Japanese might try again. At 1512 on October 24, he issued a battle order to create Task Force 34 in the event of a renewed attack. This would consist of four battleships, three heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and two squadrons of destroyers. This task force was to deal with Kurita should he turn about and attempt to pass through San

WHAT IF?

It's possible that Ozawa's Northern Force could have remained undetected, despite his every effort to be noticed. (This would require that the U.S. commanders either fail to send out search planes to the north, or that those planes fail to find the carrier group.) Should this occur, then Halsey would have remained in position to engage Center Force. Probably his battle plan would have looked much the same as his real-life contingency plan, with the surface warships that made up Task Force 34 directly engaging the Japanese in a massive battle, while the carriers loitered to the rear.

Given the Japanese timing, Kurita and Halsey would have clashed sometime in the dawn hours of October 25. The U.S. battle line would have been formed and, depending on the level of daylight available, carrier planes would have scrambled immediately or shortly after the first of Kurita's vessels nosed its way out of the strait. Not only did the confined waters increase the risk from aerial attack – giving the warships no room for evasive maneuvers – but they also might have spelled doom in a surface engagement. Kurita's ships were forced to traverse the narrow passage in column formation. This would have allowed Halsey the luxury of “crossing the enemy's T” – that is, of being able to arrange all his ships to fire simultaneously at each Japanese ship as it emerged from the strait. Unless the GM invents some new circumstance to improve their fortunes, the Japanese would be hard-pressed to come away with anything other than an utter defeat.

Bernardino Strait. The carriers of TG 38.2 and TG 38.4 were to remain outside of the range of Japanese guns. This, then, was his contingency plan.

A crucial misunderstanding, however, arose over the wording of his order, which stated that Task Force 34 “will be formed.” Halsey meant this to mean that preparations should be made at the time the order was issued, just in case, but the force would only be formed if a renewed Japanese threat arose. Though Halsey neglected to even include Kinkaid among those addressed, his fellow commander picked up the order off the airwaves. (Allied naval commanders were in the practice of listening in on everything that they received, whether addressed to them or not.) Both Kinkaid and Nimitz, among others, understood the order to mean that TF34 was being formed at the time, in effect to maintain the 3rd Fleet's guard over San Bernardino Strait. A further

communication from Halsey at 1710 clarified the situation – but neither Kinkaid nor Nimitz received a copy.

At 2022, Halsey informed Kinkaid that he was proceeding north to engage Ozawa early the following morning with three groups. To Halsey, this meant his TG 38.2, TG 38.3, and TG 38.4 – basically his entire fleet. Vice Admiral John McCain's TG 38.1 was also to make its way north, but was separated from Halsey's main body. Kinkaid, on the other hand, thought that Halsey had just finished reordering his ships into four groups, or five if TG 38.1 was included. He thought that the three carrier task groups (as TG 38.2, TG 38.3, and TG 38.4) would head north while the fourth group, the new Task Force 34, would remain guarding the strait. Kinkaid even made a mental note to himself congratulating Halsey on how well he had ordered his forces, little realizing that TF 34 did not yet exist.

Throughout most of the night, as Halsey steamed north, Kinkaid and his commanders believed that passage through San Bernardino Strait was denied by Halsey's powerful battleship force. Soon enough, the 7th Fleet commander would realize that things were seriously amiss.

A FATEFUL NIGHT

As evening fell on the still waters of Surigao Strait on October 24, Kinkaid reflected on the events of the day and the current situation from his perspective. He believed San Bernardino Strait in the north to be guarded by Halsey's Task Force 34. He was aware that a southern Japanese fleet was steaming toward him. Even though his intelligence exaggerated the strength of this Southern Force, Kinkaid had decided that he would decisively engage the enemy in a night action and effect their destruction. At 1215 that afternoon, he had instructed 7th Fleet to prepare for combat.

Rear Admiral Jesse Oldendorf – the commander of Kinkaid's Bombardment and Fire Support Group (Task Group 77.2, with six old battleships, five cruisers, and 15 destroyers) – was ordered to prepare a hot welcome for the Japanese force expected to sail through Surigao Strait that night. Oldendorf immediately recognized that, given the north-south orientation of the strait, with careful positioning of his forces he could engage the enemy from three directions as it sailed through the channel toward Leyte Gulf. Oldendorf's battleships were to form the battle line extending across the northern exit from the passage; his cruisers and destroyers were to form up on his flanks and farther south.

Even farther south, around the entrance to Surigao Strait, diminutive PT boats were stationed in groups of three. The primary mission of these boats was to provide advance warning of the advance of Nishimura, with torpedo runs to be attempted as a secondary task. Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, the overall commander of Task Group 77.4, was told to ensure that his

VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS KINKAID

Though only an average student at Annapolis, Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid had built a solid record at the Battle of the Coral Sea and Midway in 1941, then commanding a carrier group at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in 1942. In the Solomons campaign, circumstances forced Kinkaid to demonstrate the concept of “island hopping” when he was ordered to take Kiska Island with an insufficient force. Instead, he passed it by until such a time as he had enough men and materiel – an interval that also served to weaken the isolated Japanese garrison. Nimitz adopted this tactic, as did MacArthur. In 1943, Kinkaid took command of 7th Fleet, not so popularly called “MacArthur’s Navy,” and quickly earned the respect of his Army superior. From this time on, a policy came to the fore of bypassing enemy strongpoints whenever possible. To a large extent, this explains why MacArthur’s casualty rate was so low throughout his campaign in the South West Pacific.



escort carriers were ready to launch planes at first light the following morning. These would pursue and finish off damaged Japanese ships retreating from the battle. This preparation was to have an impact on events the following day.

Finally, Oldendorf summoned Rear Admiral Russell S. Berkey and Rear Admiral G.L. Weyler aboard

the *USS Louisville*, his flagship. Berkey would command the right flank while Weyler took charge of the main battle line and Oldendorf himself would lead the left flank. The commanders discussed the coming engagement. Some concern was expressed over the scarcity of armor-piercing (AP) shells, but all agreed that Oldendorf’s plan of battle was sound. They decided that each of the battleships should fire only five full salvos of AP shells, after which they would switch to high-capacity (HC) shells normally used against unarmored targets. With no time to waste, the various ships made their final maneuvers in the dark and took their stations to await the coming storm.

Sting Like a Bee

Around 1900, Nishimura received confirmation from Admiral Soemu Toyoda, commander of the Combined Fleet in Tokyo, that “all forces will dash to the attack.” Even though the northern prong of the Japanese attack had been momentarily blunted, the southern force was to carry out its orders without delay.

Aboard PT-131, Ensign Peter Gadd recorded the first radar contact with the southern Japanese forces at 2236. Along with its two mates, PT-131 sped closer to the area indicated, and at 2250 the majority of Nishimura’s forces could be made out in the darkness. Unfortunately, two minutes later hawk-eyed Japanese lookouts were able to spot the small PTs even without the help of radar. The night action had started.

The three PTs sped in to gain a suitable position to launch torpedoes. At this stage in the battle, however, Japanese gunnery was extremely accurate and – despite the small size, high speed, and comparatively superb maneuverability of the PTs – one boat had its gun knocked out while taking casualties and a second suffered a direct hit (though the shell failed to explode). The outmatched boats retreated behind their own smokescreen. Initially, no signal was given as to the sighting or composition of Nishimura’s force (though this was the primary mission of the PTs), but a message was later sent via PT-127, a member of another section, which finally reached Kinkaid at 0026 on October 25.

Four more PT-boat strikes were launched against Nishimura, but with no effect. Around 0230, the U.S. destroyers took over the fight. Although it may appear that the activities of the PT boats were ineffectual, the early warning given and the continued reports allowed the destroyer commander, Captain Jesse Coward, to engage Nishimura with devastating effect, having anticipated his movements.

Close In for the Kill

Destroyer Squadron 54 under Coward consisted of seven of the small warships. Since the commencement of the Army’s landings, these vessels had patrolled and guarded Surigao Strait. In the early hours of October

25, Coward on board his ship and four others of his command formed the second wave to be thrown against Nishimura's fleet. Two destroyers were left to protect against a possible enemy entry into the strait from another direction.

Coward split the remainder of his squadron into two sections, with orders to attack from separate directions. They would then escape north by hugging the coastline to make detection difficult; the ships would not be silhouetted and the proximity of the landmass would interfere with the inferior Japanese radar.

Coward's ship, *Remey*, accompanied by *McGowan* and *Melvin*, sought a position east of Nishimura. *McDermut* (under Commander Richard Phillips) and *Monssen* steamed to the west. By 0245, all of the ships had established radar contact and had an accurate picture of the strength of the enemy they faced. As Coward's section closed to less than 8 kilometers, the destroyers created a smoke screen to aid their eventual retreat. Speed was increased to 30 knots and, just as the searchlight of the *Yamashiro* illuminated the shadowy waters and picked out the American vessels, the order to fire torpedoes was given at 0300. Quickly the destroyers turned away, taking evasive action and further increasing their speed. Coward and his men escaped unharmed.

Nishimura made no effort to dodge what he should have anticipated as being a torpedo attack, possibly for fear of collisions in the confined waters. At 0309, the battleship *Fuso* was hit. The ship took almost an hour to sink completely, but it had been ripped in two by internal explosions and took no further part in the action.

On the opposite side of the strait, Phillips closed in for his attack. Shells began to fall around the destroyers at 0308, but no damage was caused. A few minutes later, another spread of deadly torpedoes was plowing through the waves toward the Southern Force.

A heart-stopping moment followed for the two destroyers' crews, as a bright green flare lit up the sky silhouetting their ships. A Japanese searchlight quickly singled out *Monssen*, and splashes from gunfire reared up around the vessel. Luckily, no damage was caused,

and the two ships skillfully weaved their way back through their smoke screens to safety.

This time, Nishimura had the presence of mind to realign his forces to take them out of the path of the torpedoes that were closing on his fleet. His tactical command was lacking, however, and his orders brought his own destroyers into the path of the torpedoes. *Michisio* and *Asagumo* were both hit and forced to leave the advancing formation. A third ship, *Yamagumo*, exploded violently. Nishimura's own flagship, *Yamashiro*, was also hit, but to little effect.

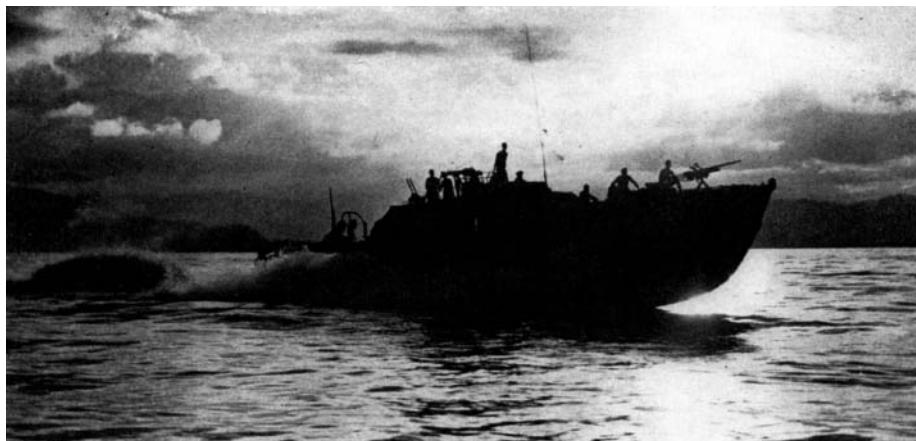
As Coward launched his first torpedoes just after 0300, Captain Kenmore McManes of Destroyer Squadron 24 received orders to leave his position on the right of the Allied flank and head south, putting him west of the Southern Force and able to gain an attack position. His first section consisted of *Killen*, *Beale*, and *HMAS Arunta* (an Australian ship); his second section included *Hutchins* (McManes' command vessel), *Daly*, and *Bache*. The first section was able to make a run at 0323. *Yamashiro* was hit again, and slowed temporarily before regaining speed. The destroyers sped away undamaged. The second section targeted Nishimura at 0330, but all torpedoes missed. These destroyers were also able to return north without damage, but not without a fright. This time, in addition to their guns, the Japanese countered with their own torpedoes. Two narrowly slid by *Daly*'s bows. One destroyer captain observed that "the enemy torpedo deficiency lies in his religion, not in his ballistics."

Luck was with the *Hutchins* that night, also. It launched a spread of torpedoes at *Asagumo*, all of which missed, but the hapless *Michisio* came across the path of the errant fish. Several warheads detonated against it at 0358. The unfortunate ship sank immediately.

For his part, Nishimura continued to plow straight ahead, undeterred by the fact that he had lost several ships and all surprise.

Sailing Into Hell

Having been found out before their sneak attack could properly form, the Japanese naval commanders knew exactly what they were facing by sailing through a strait to meet a waiting enemy. The Japanese themselves had "crossed the T" of the Russian fleet in their great naval victory at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905. Each Japanese ship emerging from the confined waters would find itself only able to fire its forward guns, while



the entire Allied fleet would be lying broadside to them and deliver a withering hail of shells, sinking each victim one by one.

The U.S. commanders, too, knew what sort of opportunity that they held. Some even hoped that the destroyers would not be *too* successful and drive Nishimura away.

As *Yamashiro* advanced to 22,800 yards from the U.S. main battle line, Oldendorf ordered all ships to open fire. The Japanese flagship was by this time only 15,600 yards from the U.S. cruisers, which had formed a gunnery line in front of their own battleships. The cruisers were the first to fire, followed by the *West Virginia* two minutes later. Then all hell broke loose.

Shells of all calibers punctured the armored skins of *Yamashiro* and *Mogami*. By 0400, both ships were burning. *Shigure*, a smaller destroyer and therefore not considered a prime target, quickly turned tail and set off back down the strait. This charmed vessel was the only ship of Nishimura's Southern Force that was able to make its way to safety. Valiantly, *Yamashiro* and *Mogami* returned fire, but their ravaged gun crews and control systems lacked accuracy; no hits were recorded. *Mogami* was even able to fire off its torpedoes, but was finally forced to attempt a retreat. *Yamashiro* was seemingly out of control.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Minutes earlier, at 0335, Destroyer Squadron 56 under Captain Roland Smoot had received orders to head south to engage Nishimura. The ships did so promptly in three waves. The first (*Robinson*, *Bryant*, and *Halford*) approached from the east and failed to find a mark for their torpedoes. The second wave (*Heywood L. Edwards*, *Bennion*, and *Leutze*) came in from the west but recorded no hits.

The Japanese finally got their revenge, if not directly, against the third wave. *Yamashiro*, perhaps supported by *Mogami* and *Shigure*, brought fire down on *Newcomb*, *Richard P. Leary*, and *Albert W. Grant*. All three ships, led by Smoot himself, got torpedoes away then sped north under heavy fire. The destroyers were forced to escape up the center of the strait. The American battle line, in the fog of war, ranged their sights on these new targets and incoming shells from both north and south fell around the third wave. *Newcomb* and *Leary*, at the head of the section, escaped damage, but *Grant* was hit 19 times, over half of the hits being U.S. shells. The ship was severely damaged and the loss of life was high, in part because the medical personnel were among the first casualties. In total, 34 crew died with 94 wounded. At 0420, *Grant* lost all power and floated helplessly in the water.

The surviving sailors struggled heroically to save the ship. Moving in darkness, dodging jets of scalding

steam and fierce flames, they dragged injured men to the deck so that first aid could be administered. The fires were controlled and the flooding checked. *Newcombe* towed the *Grant* away, allowing it to be repaired in time to fight alongside the *Birmingham* in the invasion of Okinawa.

At 0409, Oldendorf ordered his ships to cease firing. *Mogami* and *Shigure* were already vacating the area, but incredibly *Yamashiro* also began somehow to travel back down the strait. Japanese ships were deservedly given great respect for the amount of damage that they could endure before sinking, and *Yamashiro* was proving to be a splendid example. The ship was too close, however, to the American surface force, and two torpedoes finally sank it at 0419. Only a few crew members were rescued in the daylight hours. Nishimura went down with his ship.

By the time that the end finally came to Nishimura and his Southern Force, Shima's troubles had already begun.

Folly

Oldendorf received a report at 0038 giving details of Shima's approach as the second Japanese battle group braved the southern approach. Shima had received reports from Nishimura that PT boats had attacked the latter. Shima was prepared with an advance screen of two destroyers, though he later recalled these. In any case, most of the PT boats had been unable to reorganize, and several had no more torpedoes. An attack by PT-134 failed to cause any damage, but a sortie by PT-137 was successful. Its torpedoes missed by passing under the destroyer at which they were aimed, but then struck the light cruiser *Abukuma*. The damaged Japanese vessel lost speed rapidly and was forced to turn about and leave Shima to continue heading north up the strait. This action finally blooded the PT boats, but it would be their only victory weighed against the risks of making several torpedo runs.

Shima headed toward Leyte Gulf, faithful to his orders. Soon, he could see brilliant gun flashes lighting the night sky, evidence of the U.S. battle line in action against Nishimura. Though he could perhaps guess,



Shima was at this time unaware of what lay ahead – Nishimura had failed to provide clear information.

Shima next encountered the two halves of *Fuso* still burning in the water. Worse, he concluded that the sinking segments were the remains of both *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*. Then he came across the retreating *Shigure* and *Mogami*. The former sighting provided a somewhat (unintended) comical communiqué. As *Shigure* steamed past, *Nachi* used light signals to announce, “I am *Nachi*.” *Shigure* replied, “I am *Shigure*,” and added nothing else other than, “I have rudder difficulties.” The *Shigure* command staff failed to mention the immense firepower that had been unleashed farther up the narrow passage, or the destruction of Nishimura’s Southern Force.

At 0420, Shima released torpedoes in a token attack on what were probably *Louisville* and *Portland*. The salvo missed wildly, and two of the underwater missiles were later found stranded on a nearby beach. Whatever stomach that he once had for the fight had disappeared, so Shima wheeled about to retrace the perilous course back down Surigao Strait. Things were not quite so simple, though, and *Nachi* and the slow-moving *Mogami* collided. Both were damaged, and the speed of *Nachi* dropped. Shima contemplated a return to the attack later in the morning, but dawn and a realistic evaluation of the situation persuaded him otherwise. Accompanied by the remnants of Nishimura’s force, Shima’s group sought to live to fight another day.

Oldendorf’s cruisers and destroyers probed down Surigao Strait and brought *Mogami* under gunfire. Apparently indestructible, this heavy cruiser continued southward. *Mogami*, *Nachi*, and *Shigure* faced attacks by PT boats, but no losses were suffered. A detachment of cruiser and destroyers led by Rear Admiral Robert Hayler sank *Asagumo* at 0721. Planes from U.S. escort carriers in the unit Taffy 1 finally put *Mogami* to rest three hours after the raid began at 0830. Only *Shigure* of Nishimura’s command was able to make it home.

THE BATTLE OF CAPE ENGANO

At 2345 on October 24, TG 38.2 and TG 38.4 joined up with TG 38.3, the farthest north of the three task forces under Halsey. This pitted 65 warships against the 17 that Ozawa controlled. Clearly, any battle to be fought in the north would be short-lived and disastrous for the Japanese. The only challenge for the Americans was actually locating Ozawa’s fleet.

Radar-equipped U.S. planes located some converted carriers from the Northern Force at 0208 October 25. These were under the command of Rear Admiral Chieki Matsuda, and had been deliberately sent further south by Ozawa to “divert the enemy effectively.” The

main carriers were discovered 30 minutes later. At 0700, these two groups united once again.

Despite the sighting, U.S. planning was flawed because the spotting pilot greatly miscalculated the distance between the Japanese and U.S. fleets. This led Mitscher to believe that Ozawa was much closer, so much so that he ordered Task Force 34 to be formed to engage in surface combat. The final composition of this formidable force included six battleships, two heavy cruisers, five light cruisers, and 18 destroyers. After some redeployment, TF 34 set off again to close the distance between the two groups. Planes were ordered to be prepared at 0430 for a bombing run at first light.

Mitscher lost contact with the Northern Force for a few hours because one reconnaissance plane broke down and the replacement had an equipment failure. In the morning light, a new search began. The immense first wave of U.S. carrier bombers, under McCampbell, took to the air, so as to be ready to move out the moment that the Japanese were sighted.

At 0710, the regrouped Japanese Northern Force was finally located slightly east of where the Americans had expected it to be. At once, McCampbell led his assault screaming onto the targets. By this time, the 3rd Fleet aviators were very fatigued, and Japanese observers were not impressed by the skills displayed in this attack. Nevertheless, their AA fire failed to drive off the brave U.S. air crews. The *Chitose* suffered serious bomb damage in the first attack before sinking at 0937, as did the destroyer *Akitsuki*. Both *Zuiho* and *Zuikaku* were also hit during this first round.

As the second wave approached, about 25 land-based Japanese aircraft under Admiral Shigeru Fukudome attempted to defend the Northern Force. U.S. fighters rebuffed this relieving force, and no further air assistance was attempted. The second run began at around 1000. The light carrier *Chiyoda* was brought to a halt by dive bombers. Ozawa was forced to divide his force and detailed several vessels to either tow *Chiyoda* or remove the personnel from the ship and bring them to safety. Ozawa himself took the opportunity between strikes two and three to vacate the *Zuikaku* and board the light cruiser *Oyodo* around 1100, so as to be able to take more effective command of the Northern Force. *Zuikaku* was moving too slowly, owing to the damage it had suffered earlier.

Nimitz Steps In

As the Northern Force endured the incessant U.S. attacks, Halsey and his staff were becoming alarmingly aware of developments to the south. The first message arrived at 0822 from Kinkaid, reporting that Japanese forces were targeting the escort carriers around Leyte! Despite the terrible beating that his fleet had received, Kurita had turned Center Force back onto its original course and yet again braved the San Bernardino Strait

under cover of darkness, this time finding the passage wide open. Night patrols launched from *USS Independence* saw the warships approaching (and the navigation lights ashore turned on by Japanese units to guide them), but someone in the communication's chain of command failed to forward this news to Halsey. Not only did Halsey not find out that Kurita had renegotiated the strait until after the fact, but that news itself was late. The U.S. naval commanders would suffer from their "Fox schedule" of communications in which general fleet broadcasts had to first pass through the Naval Communications Center on Manus, creating delays. The system further failed to distinguish between messages of different priorities.

Halsey downplayed the importance of the news, startling as it was. He maintained, even after the war, that 7th Fleet was capable of protecting itself. This overlooked that the pilots of 7th Fleet's escort carriers only had experience in flying ground-support and supply missions – not naval-bombing sorties. Halsey was not even prepared to dispatch a part of his surface force – which outnumbered Ozawa's units by about 4-to-1 – to assist 7th Fleet. Instead, he ordered an increase in speed north, away from Leyte Gulf, to close on Ozawa.

At 0848, Halsey did request that McCain's carrier TG 38.1 steam to the southwest to lend aid. Still, McCain's planes would not be able to reach the engagement for at least another three hours, the time it would take for the carriers to close within extreme strike range and for the planes to cover the remaining miles. Task Force 34, meanwhile, pushed on aggressively, leaving behind the carriers so as to be able to finish off any damaged ships not sunk by the planes.

More pleas for help followed, and still Halsey refused to change course, even though he was made explicitly aware of the ships closing in on the small escort carriers covering Leyte Gulf, grouped in formations called Taffy 1 (p. 26), Taffy 2, and Taffy 3. The communiqués also pointed out that 7th Fleet's warships had depleted their stores of ammunition in the night action guarding Surigao Strait. In any case, it would take them too long to reach the new arena of combat.

Finally – with 7th Fleet's baby carriers facing destruction and the Army beachheads under peril – Nimitz intervened. Like Kinkaid, Nimitz thought that Task Force 34 had been guarding San Bernardino Strait. How had the Japanese slipped past? At 1000, CINCPAC requested confirmation of the situation, with Nimitz querying to Halsey, "Where is, repeat, where is Task Force 34? The world wonders."

The tone of the message (see sidebar, p. 17) made Halsey livid, prompting him to throw his hat to the deck in disgust. He believed that Nimitz had intended to embarrass him, particularly as copies were also sent to Admiral Ernest King (commander in chief of the U.S. Fleet) and Kinkaid. In his anger, Halsey delayed even further, taking almost an hour before finally ordering

ADMIRAL CHESTER NIMITZ

Admiral Chester Nimitz was both commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) and commander in chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas (CINCPOA). Having been promoted over older men, he effectively fought his way through the Central Pacific area and was in command of the majority of the U.S. Navy's strength.

Nimitz could appear soft to some, and always tried to be careful in manner. He listened well, and brought out the best in his staff. He knew his commanders, and was fair in evaluating their skills. It was his innovation that had Halsey and Spruance rotate command of the same fleet – designated 3rd Fleet when under Halsey or 5th Fleet when under Spruance. This saw both men spend half their time aiding in planning (and having their own understanding of high command's desires sharpened) and half their time implementing this work.

Originally, Nimitz had favored an attack on Formosa, bypassing the Philippine archipelago, but he was eventually won over to MacArthur's way of thinking.



Task Force 34 to turn about a little before 1100. The warships were less than 50 miles from their prey – Ozawa's carriers – when they gave up the chase.

By this point, Halsey was clearly confused and had lost his command edge. Only hours before, the Bull had refused to split his forces to allow one group to guard San Bernardino Strait while another pursued Ozawa. As he headed south, he did just this, causing further delays as the fleet reorganized. Some ships were left under Mitscher to press an air attack on Ozawa. More time was lost later when the destroyers were refueled en route. Another staggering decision followed late in the afternoon. Task Force 34 was disbanded and Task Force 34.5 formed from the fastest ships then available. These were to speed southward ahead of the pack – but this could have been rough going for the Americans if the relatively small TF 34.5 had met up with a relatively intact Center Force.

Ozawa Escapes

Of course, Halsey's decision to turn about also afforded Ozawa the chance to make a narrow escape, but attacks from 3rd Fleet's carriers under Mitscher continued throughout October 25. The third strike was the largest and loitered over the targets for about an hour from 1310. *Zuikaku* was sunk, ending the career of the last of the Japanese carriers that had conducted the raid on Pearl Harbor. *Zuiho* was also severely damaged and was finally sent down at 1526 by pilots in the fourth strike. The fifth strike began at around 1710, and achieved near misses against *Ise*. The final sixth strike arrived about an hour later. Some hits were claimed, but no more vessels were sunk.

The Northern Force, meanwhile, was fleeing toward the protection of ground-based planes on Formosa and the Sakashima Gunto. A few U.S. ships continued to harass the fleeing ships, sinking the light carrier *Chiyoda* and destroyer *Hatsuzaki*, but the pursuers checked their advance at 2130 and returned to 3rd Fleet. The submarine *USS Haddock*, also in the area, claimed hits on one of Ozawa's ships, but these are unverified. The *USS Jallao* later successfully attacked and sunk the light cruiser *Tama*, the last ship of the Northern Force to go down. The survivors returned to Amami Island on October 27. The Northern Force would become the only one of the four Japanese fleets to complete its mission, and ironically largely survived it despite having been intended as a sacrificial lamb.

THE BATTLE OFF SAMAR

Despite all of its initial failings, the Japanese navy had a chance to make its Leyte Gulf gamble pay off as the remains of Center Force steamed toward the vulnerable support ships off Samar. Miscommunications, controversial decisions, and clumsy responses to the ill-handled Japanese feints had left 3rd Fleet's warships

VICE ADMIRAL JISABURO OZAWA

By the end of the war, Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa was recognized by his former American enemies as being the most competent Japanese naval commander other than Yamamoto himself. Before the war, he had been a respected instructor at the Japanese naval academy. He had previously served as the chief of staff to the commander of the Combined Fleet and had experience commanding both battleships and aircraft carriers. He was present at the Battle of the Philippine Sea and performed well as the overall commander of the Japanese forces.

Ozawa was the natural choice to take command of the Japanese effort in Leyte Gulf, but the lack of both planes and pilots made his carrier force all but useless, and ensured for his ships the thankless and dangerous task of acting as a decoy. With Ozawa removed from the main action, it fell to Kurita to attempt to carry out the crucial defeat of the Allied landing force. Ozawa nevertheless went to his fate stoically. "I expected the complete destruction of my fleet," he declared after the war.

too far north to help, and 7th Fleet's warships too far south. The crucial shipping – and the beachhead it served – was falling within the range of Japanese guns.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, their enemy was about to overcome his own initial failings. In charge of a woefully inferior scattering of destroyers and escort carriers, Rear Admiral Clifton A. Sprague was about to fight one of the U.S. Navy's finest engagements.

The Fearless Few

By 0630 on October 25, the various ships and crews of Taffy 3 had completed most of their routine jobs. A combat air patrol was aloft and anti-submarine sweeps were being undertaken. It was at this moment that Kurita was speeding down to descend on Sprague's group, just hidden beyond the horizon.

Kurita's Center Force was arranged in four columns, each 5 kilometers apart. His surprise was almost total and, despite clear weather broken only by a few scattered rain clouds, he steamed closer undetected. Sprague was not expecting an attack from the north, believing San Bernardino Strait to be guarded.

At 0637, Japanese voices were picked up on the radio, and at 0645 AA fire was observed in the distance. The pilot of an American plane on submarine patrol was busily making the first report of contact. Finally, a

THE WORLD WONDERS

The U.S. Navy had a standard protocol in which a random phrase was added to the beginning and end of every coded message. Called “padding,” this was intended to make the messages harder for the Japanese to decode, by adding non-military terminology that would make guesswork infinitely more difficult. In handling the messages, signalmen simply stripped off the meaningless portions, which were offset by double-letter signals to clearly identify them. Their commanders only read the relevant text.

The full text of Nimitz’s fateful query to Halsey (p. 8) was transmitted as TURKEY TROTS TO WATER GG WHERE IS REPEAT WHERE IS TASK FORCE 34 RR THE WORLD WONDERS. Clearly, the last phrase was intended as padding, but the signalman who handled the query for Halsey apparently thought it was meant to add a snarky tone to the question. He left it in Halsey’s copy, transforming a somewhat urgent bit of military-speak into something that sounded patronizing and (by the standards of the time) rather insulting.

It has been speculated that the unknown ensign who added the final line while coding Nimitz’s message had in mind Tennyson’s poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” A passage of that work reads, “When can their glory fade? O the wild charge they made! All the world wondered.” If so, his clumsy bit of literary license ended up playing a pivotal role in a pivotal battle.

radar contact confirmed that the enemy was bearing down on Taffy 3.

Kurita was surprised, too. He did not expect to find carriers here, and incorrectly decided that they were full-sized fleet carriers from Halsey’s command. Given the thrashing that those ships had inflicted on him the day before, he prudently decided to take out these carriers before proceeding, unaware that the small escort carriers represented only a tiny fraction of the threat that he was envisioning. Kurita changed to an easterly course so that the carriers would have to approach him if they wanted to optimize their air-launch procedure by heading into the wind. That ended up placing the combatants on parallel courses.

The Japanese commander then made a huge mistake. Having stumbled across his prey, every second counted, and he’d lost half of his communications staff

in the sinking of the *Atago* (p. 4). To keep things simple, and quick, he ordered a general attack, in which each ship acted independently. While this did get his fleet into action with minimal delay, it resulted in the captains of the heavy cruisers racing to be first to reach the enemy. This in turn made it impossible to stage an initial torpedo run by the destroyers and light cruisers – and the Japanese were justly famous for the quality of their torpedo attacks.

Soon enough, the first shell splashes began to wash over the decks of the escort carriers, particularly those of *White Plains*, which was closest to Kurita. The skilled Japanese gunners were getting the range rapidly. Vision remained good at this point, such that Sprague remarked, “It did not appear that any of our ships could survive another five minutes of the heavy-caliber fire being received.”

The “jeep carriers” were not alone, however, and the destroyers and destroyer-escorts on hand were beginning to lay a smoke screen. A timely rain squall also provided respite for 15 minutes. Lacking proper targeting radar, the Japanese gunners began to lose their accuracy.

In the meantime, the escort carriers launched what planes they could while other planes returned from patrols. Most of these planes – and pilots – were ill-prepared for anti-shipping strikes, but in this desperate hour they filled the American ideal of making do. Depth charges were dropped on the Japanese fleet from planes equipped to hunt for submarines. Others simply faked a bombing attack to distract the Japanese AA gunners from those few planes bearing real weapons. One pilot from *Gambier Bay* spent two solid hours “attacking” Center Force without any ammunition. Though the first organized air counterattack would not take place until 0830, this makeshift reprisal scored some hits and did enough damage to the heavy cruiser *Suzuya* to force it to reduce speed a little.

Against All Odds

The destroyer *Johnston* stood closest to the formidable Japanese force. Without awaiting orders, Commander Ernest Evans turned his ship to meet the oncoming fleet as soon as it was sighted, a single 2,100-ton David intent on slowing down a squadron of Goliaths. Blazing away with its five 5-inch guns, *Johnston* targeted the heavy cruisers as they attempted to outflank the escort carriers. Evans commenced firing at 0710 against *Kumano* and barely let up thereafter. The formidable Japanese return fire failed to strike his ship.

Sprague ordered all of his destroyers to press in for a torpedo attack at 0716. *Johnston* was already in position to make an attack run. From a range of 10,000 yards, its fish struck the *Kumano*, which dropped behind. *Suzuya* was forced to delay its advance to collect Admiral Shiraishi, head of Cruiser Division 7.



Suzuya was itself later immobilized, most likely in an attack from a plane from Taffy 1. At 0730, the Japanese finally inflicted a severe wound on *Johnston*, but the destroyer was not out of the fight. The crew frantically carried out repairs under cover of the same fortuitous squall that had sheltered Sprague and the carriers.

In moving along, that rain cloud had left behind the carriers, however, which appeared to be in dire straits despite the harassment that Center Force had endured. Kurita's four remaining heavy cruisers were working their way around the fleeing flattops to force them back into the path of the battleships, including *Yamato*. Destroyers were also closing on the opposite flank and working into position to launch their deadly "Long Lance" torpedoes.

Far to the south, Oldendorf received instructions at 0850 to face Kurita, though he was some distance away and, in the event of a drawn-out fight, dangerously low on suitable ammunition with which to damage enemy warships. On the other hand, the commander of 7th Fleet was able to scramble the aircraft of Taffy 2 and Taffy 1 in support of Taffy 3. It would take some time, however, for these flights to become organized, because many of the aircraft already had taken off on the day's "routine" missions (typically ground support for the Army troops still fighting their way inland).

The escort vessels of Taffy 3 continued their bitter fight, aided by the worsening weather and increasingly thick smoke. The racing American ships sometimes narrowly avoided colliding in the soup, but this was a small hazard to face in comparison to the protection from Japanese guns.

The battle deteriorated into isolated fights. The destroyer *Hoel* faced off against the battleship *Kongo*, but the Japanese 14-inch guns shattered the tiny U.S. vessel. Shortly after, at 0742, Sprague ordered a second torpedo attack. *Hoel* remained able to lead this, though not before *Heerman* had to quickly reverse direction to slip past its burning mate and avoid ramming it. Behind *Heerman* came the even smaller *Samuel B. Roberts*, a destroyer escort more suited to face gunboats than cruisers. Its captain, Lieutenant Commander Robert Copeland, straightforwardly warned his crew that they were facing "overwhelming odds against which survival could not be expected." It wasn't any more information than most of them could deduce for themselves, and his honesty likely only served to harden their resolve. Last in line was the irrepressible *Johnston*. Though Evans had fired all his torpedoes, his ship could still draw fire from the other ships and lend gun support, despite the fact that 5-inch shells would bounce off most of its targets.

Against all odds, these four diminutive warships sailed into harm's way. *Hoel* failed to inflict any damage on its target, *Haguro*, and endured several gun hits in reply. At 0830 the destroyer was dead in the water, an easy target for Japanese gunners. At 0835, *Hoel* was abandoned, and 20 minutes later sank.

Heerman also failed to damage *Haguro*, but avoided the return fire. Pushing his luck, *Heerman*'s captain, Commander Amos Hathaway, set course to take on the immense battleships. At 0800, he fired torpedoes toward *Haruna*. The warheads missed their mark, but *Yamato* found itself sailing into the path of the errant spread. Kurita changed course and was finally forced to flee northward for the moment, away from the main battle, to escape a fate similar to that of *Musashi* the day before. Japan's most formidable warship had left the fight and would never really get back into it. His command and control already impaired by the loss of his staff, Kurita was removed from the battle.

Roberts closed to within 4,000 yards before releasing torpedoes. A hit was reported on *Chokai*, though it is unconfirmed. (*Chokai* later sank, and with it the ship's records. It is possible the attack by *Roberts* contributed to the loss.) At a minimum, *Chokai* was forced to change course, thereby disrupting the pursuit of the carriers. *Roberts* was able to avoid the immense broadsides that chased it away.

Unsurprisingly, *Johnston* failed to inflict any significant damage, but Evans did persuade the cruisers to

shift their gunfire to target his nearly punchless ship. The assault had failed to score any significant damage, but did hold up the Japanese advance long enough for the CVEs to launch more planes and for the last three destroyer escorts – *Dennis*, *John C. Butler*, and *Raymond* – to join the one-sided fray. These escorts engaged the Japanese cruisers without suffering any damage, but failed to score any hits of their own.

As valiant as these efforts were, the Japanese warships could only be momentarily diverted. Closer and closer the cruisers and destroyers came, until the escort carriers were able to open fire accurately with their single 5-inch gun each. This fire amounted to mosquitoes harassing a grizzly bear, and Center Force began turning its guns to the carriers as they came within range. *Kalinin Bay* took the first hits, but the worst of the fire began to fall on *Gambier Bay*.

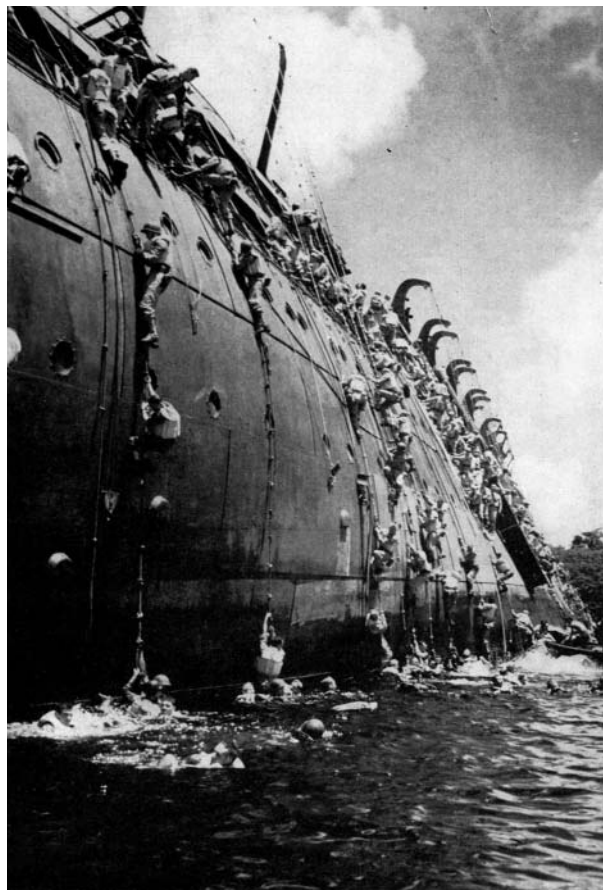
The captain of *Gambier Bay* attempted to “chase the salvos” – or deliberately steer a course toward the most recent shell splashes, on the assumption that the Japanese gunners would shift their aim and not target the same place twice. This worked for a time, but as the range closed the shells came closer. At 0810, *Gambier Bay* took its first pounding. A near miss tore a hole below the water line and flooding was immediate. As the carrier lost speed, it attracted more attention, and soon shells were plowing into it from all angles. Both *Johnston* and *Heerman* tried to draw fire away from the stricken ship, with the latter having some limited success but also being hit in reply. At 0850, *Gambier Bay*'s Captain Walter Vieweg ordered that his ship be abandoned. At 0907, the carrier sank.

As the crew of *Gambier Bay* listened to their captain's orders, *Roberts* was hit. The resulting drop in speed allowed several Japanese guns to pour accurate fire into the indomitable vessel. At 0900, a huge explosion opened a hole in the port side. The ship lost all power and was doomed. Despite this, the crew of #2 gun kept firing, though without power they could not clean their gun's barrel with compressed air after each shot. This made it very likely that the gun would burst, and everyone manning it knew as much. They got off six more rounds before the seventh blew up the barrel.

Most of the crew was killed, with two mortally wounded. A third survivor, his body ripped open from neck to thigh, somehow remained standing and trying to load the shattered piece. He was pulled to safety, but died minutes later. *Roberts* sank at 1005, fulfilling Copeland's prophecy for many of its crew.

Meanwhile, the pilots of Taffy 3 continued to fight their mostly makeshift battle. Running out of fuel with their carriers under fire, they landed at Tacloban Airfield to rearm and refuel. The airfield, however, did not possess many anti-shipping weapons, so they continued to make do with whatever arms could be found.

Shortly before 0900, an assault wave from Taffy 2 braved Kurita's AA fire. The pilots had little practice in



attacking ships, and also carried an ill-sorted assortment of rockets and 100-lb. bombs. Still, they managed to put together a quite effective strike, earning praise from the Japanese who called the attack “the most skilful work of [the American] planes.” Serious damage was inflicted on the cruisers *Suzuya* and *Chikuma*, the latter of which broke off from the attack at 0902 before slowly sinking. The destroyers *Hayashimo* and *Hamanami* also were hit. *Tone* and *Haguro* were forced away from their targets while evading the attacks. At 0905, Avenger pilots surprised *Chokai* and after enduring a dive-bombing attack the ship blew up and sank. All of this carnage broke the concentration of the Japanese gunners, who sought new targets among Taffy 2’s ships. This gave some respite for the escort carriers of Taffy 3, though *Tone* and *Haguro* were still closing and inflicting damage.

At this point, the remaining column of four Japanese destroyers led by a light cruiser was poised to make a lethal torpedo run on the escort carriers. The Americans had spent their few resources slowing the main Japanese advance, and it appeared inevitable that Center Force was about to even the score quite substantially. As the warships churned toward their victims, closing the range, out of the smoke steamed none other than the *USS Johnston*.

Evans opened fire with his guns, inflicted some damage, and was battered in return. Somehow, though, his fearless attack caused the entire Japanese column to panic, launching their torpedoes at extreme range before turning in retreat. This gave the carriers much better odds of evading the fish. Improving their chances, Lieutenant Leonard Waldrop pulled off a stunt worthy of Hollywood. Flying an Avenger overhead, he lined up one of the torpedoes in his sights and fired away with his machine guns, causing it to explode prematurely.

The *Johnston*, though, had finally bitten off more than it could chew. Gunfire smashed into it until at 0940 it was left dead in the water. The Japanese continued to fire, so that even as a floating corpse the destroyer was helping to save the escort carriers. At 0945, Evans ordered the crew to abandon ship, and at 1010 the giant-slayer finally slipped under. Eyewitnesses saw Evans make it into the water and away from the wreck, but he was never seen again. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor and had a building named after him at the U.S. Navy’s Surface Warfare Officers School. Perhaps more poignantly, crew members said they saw one of the Japanese destroyer captains come to attention and salute the dying *Johnston*.

Weakened but still dangerous, Center Force continued on course for the landing beaches. Despite all the sacrifices, it seemed that MacArthur’s landing was to be challenged after all. There was precious little left to protect the escort carriers, and Taffy 2 was now threatened. The outlook was about as bleak as it could get –

WHAT IF?

Some criticism was leveled at Kinkaid after the action for failing to order a routine surveillance flight of the area around the exit of San Bernardino Strait. As mentioned, Kinkaid had assumed that such a search would be a waste of resources given his belief that Task Force 34 was in position to provide protection.

Had Kurita been seen from the air, then Sprague would have had much more time to both head south and to ensure that his planes were recalled and refitted with different munitions. At the same time, Taffy 1 and Taffy 2 could have made their way to the edges of the probable battle area to lend more air support. Task Group 38.1 would also have been in better position to launch air support at an earlier time. Finally, the warships under Oldendorf could have steamed north, despite being low on AP ammunition and generally outclassed. Whether the information, and a presumably hurried message to Halsey, would have brought 3rd Fleet south at an earlier time is impossible to say.

then the Japanese armada inexplicably turned and steamed away. At his moment of victory, Kurita gave up on Japan’s quest to score a telling, heartfelt blow against the United States.

The wave of relief that coursed through the spent U.S. Navy forces was not quite shared by all. “God-dammit, boys!” shouted one of Sprague’s signalmen in disgust. “They’re getting away!”

Kurita’s Retreat

Though he survived the war, Kurita never provided a clear explanation as to what caused him to give up the fight. Apparently, the initial plan had been to disengage only long enough to reorganize his forces – nor did he know at the time how close to victory that he was. Instead of reorganizing, however, or at least coming together to provide the most formidable screen of AA fire possible, the ships of Center Force simply loitered, for about three hours.

Kurita, it appeared, was of two minds and struggling to make a decision as to his best course of action. He also was very tired, having survived having a ship blown out from under him the day before. His orders were to attack the beachhead at all costs – and he knew that meant sacrificing his entire fleet if need be – but making such promises while staring at a neat map miles away was one thing, while living them out was another. He expected the American air attacks to increase in frequency and viciousness. His officers were routinely

WHAT IF?

What if Halsey, upon learning of Kurita's move against Taffy 3, had instantly reversed his course and sailed back south to close in on Center Force? Halsey received his first call for help at 0822, sent by Kinkaid at 0707. The 3rd Fleet by this time was some 350 miles north of Leyte Gulf. It would have been impossible for Halsey to return in time to lend support with his battleships, yet he could have brought the experienced pilots of the fleet carriers within striking distance far more quickly. Furthermore, if Halsey had turned back to help Kinkaid, his ships would not have had to have been refueled – as they were on the afternoon of October 25 – to make the extra distance back to Leyte Gulf. This could have put the battle line of 3rd Fleet in position to intercept Kurita as he attempted to file back into San Bernardino Strait.

overstating the nature of the U.S. defenders, reporting destroyers to be cruisers and destroyer escorts to be destroyers. He had no air cover and he knew that Nishimura and Shima would not be arriving from the south to close the pincer. Finally, he suspected that Halsey's armada would be arriving at any moment.

The Americans launched a large and mostly coordinated air assault at 1220, which appears to have made up Kurita's mind. At 1236, he radioed Tokyo that he was abandoning the plan, and with that he began to retrace his steps through San Bernardino Strait in hopes of quickly escaping the range of carrier aircraft. Still, McCain's Task Group 38.1 managed to fly two sorties against Center Force and Taffy 2 flew one more before the Japanese ships got too far away. Later, the destroyer *Nowake* was sunk by the fast ships of Task Group 34.5. Halsey, however, had missed his chance to engage Kurita's fleet decisively. By 2140, Kurita had entered the strait and spent the night traversing the narrow passage.

DIVINE WIND

Almost as an afterthought, the first suicidal attack by *kamikaze* pilots began at 0740 on October 25 against Taffy 1, which at that time was far removed from the action farther north involving Kurita and Taffy 3. American AA gunners were caught off guard in the opening moments. The first plane of the *Asahi* flight buried itself in the fleet carrier *Santee*, causing immense damage and fires that were nevertheless brought under control by 0751. The second plane was brought down by gunfire from the carrier *Suwanee*, and

it crashed near the carrier *Sangamon*. The third was also hit and fell from the sky while on target for the carrier *Petrof Bay*.

In the lull between attacks, the submarine I-56 appeared at an opportune moment and put a torpedo into *Santee* at 0756. The lone wolf escaped, but was unable to sink *Santee*. The final *kamikaze* plane dived down and, despite suffering some apparent damage, still managed to slam into *Suwanee*. The crew worked tirelessly at repairs, and the carrier remained afloat and ready for action.

To the north, the planes of the *Shikishima* group arrived near Taffy 3 at 1049. The combat air patrol was unable to intercept the fast-flying marauders, though some AA fire was thrown up. The first plane caused some fires on *Kitkun Bay*. The second and third planes were broken up by gunfire before they could fly into the same target. The fourth plane was destroyed above the flight deck of *White Plains*, raining material as well as bodily remains down on the crew below. *St. Lo* was not so lucky, and the fifth plane succeeded in crashing into the flight deck. Internal explosions followed, and at 1100 the carrier was abandoned. It sank at 1125. The *kamikaze* had claimed their first victim.

A third group of 15 planes, this time "Judy" bombers, approached at 1110. *Kalinin Bay* of Taffy 3 was struck but remained afloat. A fourth sortie, around noon against Taffy 1, saw *Suwanee* nearly mortally wounded. It required several hours and numerous acts of bravery to save the carrier before it could retreat to Manus for repairs. This ended the *kamikaze* attacks. Despite some scattered successes, the *Sho Ichi Go* plan had failed to thwart the American invasion of Leyte.





2. THE ARMADAS

The Battle of Leyte Gulf remains the largest naval engagement fought in history, and the last occasion on which great warships fired broadsides at one another. In terms of the number of ships involved, more were engaged from October 23-25, 1944, than at the epic Battle of Jutland between Britain and Germany in the Great War (282 at Leyte compared to 250 at Jutland). In terms of tonnage, estimates are that 1.6 million tons of combat shipping was present at Jutland compared to 2 million tons at Leyte. Additionally, the U.S. Navy was fielding this awesome force some 7,000 miles away from its Pearl Harbor home. Even the arena was vast, with the fighting spread across some 100,000 square miles, and the fighting included every aspect of naval warfare then in existence, including the suicide attacks of the *kamikaze*.

This chapter describes the many ships and forces that took part in this historic battle. The following military designations are used to describe the type of each ship involved:

BB – Battleship
CA – Heavy Cruiser
CL – Light Cruiser
CV – Fleet aircraft carrier
CVE – Escort Carrier
CVL – Light Carrier
DD – Destroyer
DE – Destroyer Escort
LCI – Landing Craft, Infantry
PC – Patrol Craft

THE U.S. ARMADA

The U.S. armada was without a doubt the most powerful naval force in the world by late 1944. At its core was the Pacific Fleet, designated 3rd Fleet at the time of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The smaller 7th Fleet, dedicated to support of MacArthur's Army operations,

also took part. These two fleets represented the majority of American naval strength at the time.

THE PACIFIC FLEET

As mentioned on p. 15, Nimitz alternated the command of the "Big Blue Fleet," as the Navy proudly called the Pacific unit. Under Spruance it was called the 5th Fleet, while under Halsey the same unit became the 3rd Fleet. Halsey's rotation had been under way since August 26, 1944, when the Battle of Leyte Gulf took place.

The combat core of the Pacific Fleet was Task Force 38, or the Fast Carrier Force, under Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher. TF 38 was further divided into four task groups, TG 38.1 to TG 38.4. The fleet was supported and supplied by Task Group 30.8, or the At Sea Logistics Group 3rd Fleet. It gained further offensive capability from Task Force 17, the Supporting Submarines Pacific Fleet. (In the case of this battle, though, submarines of the 7th Fleet held the most important role; see p. 25.)

TALKING PAST ONE ANOTHER

One of the major failures in the U.S. operations in the Philippines was that 3rd and 7th fleets lacked a direct line of communications. Subordinated to MacArthur, 7th Fleet reported directly to him. As an attached Navy resource, 3rd Fleet reported to Nimitz at Pearl Harbor. Some blame MacArthur – in his role as supreme commander of Allied forces in the South West Pacific Area – for this oversight. Of course, the Navy itself should have been acutely aware of the lack of coordination. Regardless of who was to blame, the complex lines of communication directly contributed to the Japanese Center Force's ability to slip through the American net into Leyte Gulf.

Task Force 38

By itself, Task Force 38 was a supremely powerful fighting force. Given the right conditions, there was no other navy to match it in the world. The fleet combined long-range capability utilizing planes from fleet and light carriers with modern, heavily armed battleships and a host of destroyers capable of making darting torpedo runs at close range. Such tactics were further enhanced by the improvements seen in the performance of American torpedoes since the early days of the war. Earlier types had exploded prematurely, run too deeply, or had gone badly off target, among other problems.

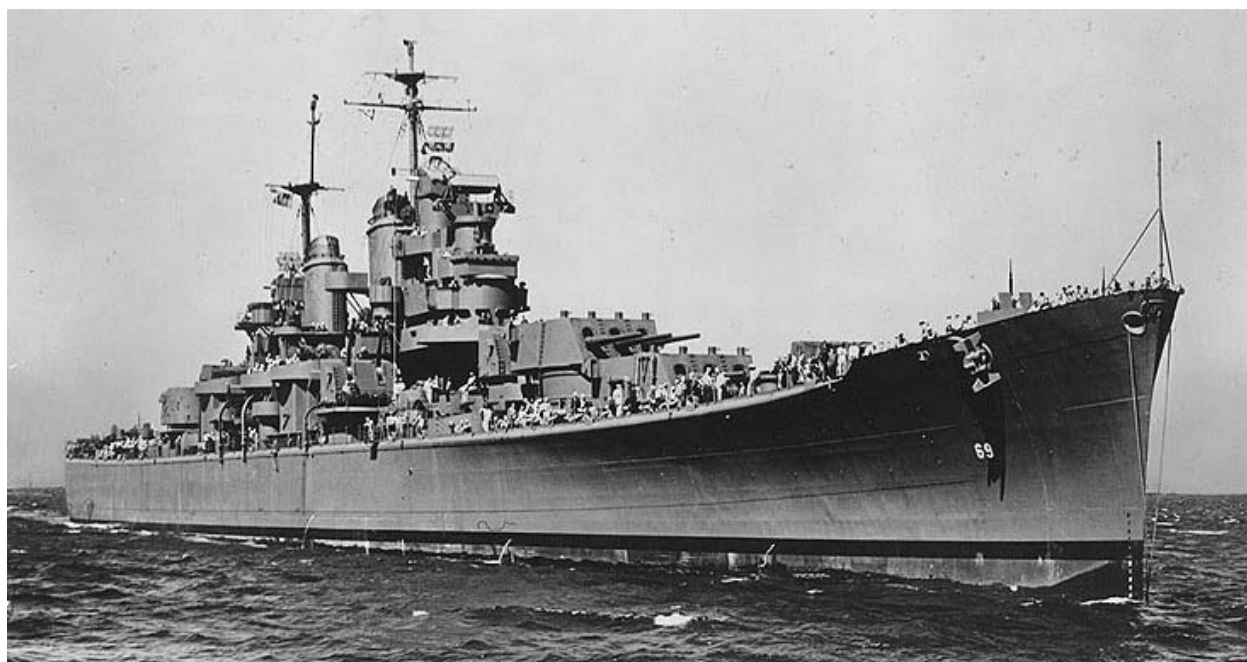
Various ships from each of the task force's four groups were designated to join the ad hoc Task Force 34 during the course of the battle. These vessels are indicated with a "34" after their name, below. As originally compiled, Task Force 34 was never assembled, though several *What If?* scenarios in Chapter 1 describe how it might have faced Center Force in a truly colossal battle royale. An altered composition was ordered, made up of speedier ships, to chase Ozawa's carriers to the north. (Halsey's plan was to pound Ozawa's carrier group with air attacks and have the fast-moving task force follow up to finish off any cripples or any ships giving protection to damaged vessels.) Those vessels marked with a star (*) pursued Ozawa to the north. Additionally, Task Force 34.5 was created under Rear Admiral Oscar Badger. This again included the fastest remaining ships of 3rd Fleet. Badger was to drive south to lend support to 7th Fleet or to head off a retreating Center Force. A relatively intact Center Force might have outgunned TF 34.5, however. Those ships included in TF 34.5 are also indicated below, with a 34.5 after their names.

The pilots of Task Force 38 had been in combat from the first weeks of September, flying missions against targets in the Southern and Central Philippines. The success of these missions had led to the invasion of Leyte being moved forward. Halsey believed that Japanese air strength was by then negligible (and he was essentially correct, though the high command scraped up a few squadrons to throw into this last-stand effort). In early October, strikes were conducted against Okinawa, Luzon, and Formosa.

Task Group 38.1

Under Vice Admiral John S. McCain, TG 38.1 spent most of the Battle of Leyte Gulf arriving too late to take part in various fights. It had originally been ordered to Ulithi by Halsey to replenish its stores. The most powerful group in terms of available aircraft, it was recalled on the morning of October 24 once Center Force had been detected and Halsey was preparing to launch air assaults. McCain dutifully changed course, though he was over a day's sail away.

On the following morning (October 25) Center Force had emerged from San Bernardino Strait and was laying into Sprague's Taffy 3. Halsey issued new orders. McCain was to sail to the Leyte Gulf area to offer what support he might to 7th Fleet. It was clear to McCain how desperate the situation was, and in response he ordered one of the longest-reaching carrier strikes of the war. His planes could not be armed with torpedoes, as the extra weight would have prevented them from reaching their targets and returning safely. Still, by the time that the pilots of TG 38.1 arrived at the site, Center Force was already heading north, having disengaged from Taffy 3. TG 38.1's planes nevertheless prosecuted their attack, and this may have had some



effect in shaping Kurita's final decision to completely retire from the action.

Strikes were launched from fleet carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet* along with assaults from light carriers *Monterey* and *Cowpens*. Fleet carrier *Hancock* also supplied pilots for the action against Kurita, having been temporarily detached from TG 38.2 to TG 38.1 on October 22.

Task Group 38.1 included the following ships: *Wasp* (CV), *Hornet* (CV), *Hancock* (CV), *Monterey* (CVL), *Cowpens* (CVL), *Boston* (CA), *San Diego* (CL), *Oakland* (CL), *Izard* (DD), *Charrette* (DD), *Conner* (DD), *Bell* (DD), *Burns* (DD), *Cogswell* (DD), *Caperton* (DD), *Ingersoll* (DD), *Knapp* (DD), *Boyd* (DD), *Cowell* (DD), *McCalla* (DD), *Grayson* (DD), and *Woodworth* (DD).



TG 38.1 also included TG 30.2 under Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith. This group was formed on October 6 and was made up of the following vessels: *Chester* (CA), *Pensacola* (CA), *Salt Lake City* (CA), *Dunlap* (DD), *Fanning* (DD), *Cummings* (DD), *Cassin* (DD), and *Downes* (DD).

Hancock was detached from TG 38.2 over the course of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. *San Diego* and *Oakland* had previously been detached from TG 38.2 on October 15.

Task Group 38.2

TG 38.2 was commanded by Rear Admiral G.F. Bogan. The group was initially located east of San Bernardino Strait and included the following ships: *Intrepid* (CV), *Cabot* (CVL), *Independence* (CVL), *Iowa* (BB) (34.5), *New Jersey* (BB) (34.5), *Biloxi* (CL) (34.5), *Vincennes* (CL) (34.5), *Miami* (CL) (34.5), *Owen* (DD) (34.5), *Miller* (DD) (34.5), *The Sullivans* (DD) (34.5), *Tingey* (DD) (34.5), *Hickox* (DD) (34.5), *Hunt* (DD) (34.5), *Lewis Hancock* (DD) (34.5), *Marshall* (DD) (34.5), *Cushing* (DD), *Colahan* (DD), *Halsey Powell* (DD), *Uhlmann* (DD), *Yarnall* (DD), *Twining* (DD), *Stockham* (DD), and *Wedderburn* (DD).

Biloxi was transferred from TG 38.4 on October 22.

Task Group 38.3

TG 38.3 was commanded by Rear Admiral F.C. Sherman. The group was initially located to the east of Luzon. TG 38.2 and TG 38.4 headed north to unite with TG 38.3 during the night of October 24-25. This task group included the following ships: *Essex* (CV), *Lexington* (CV), *Langley* (CVL), *Massachusetts* (BB) (34), *South Dakota* (BB) (34), *Santa Fe** (CL) (34), *Mobile** (CL) (34), *Reno* (CL), *Porterfield** (DD), *C.K. Bronson** (DD) (34), *Cotton** (DD) (34), *Dortch** (DD) (34), *Healy* (DD) (34), *Cogswell** (DD) (34), *Caperton** (DD) (34), *Ingersoll** (DD) (34), *Knapp** (DD) (34), *Callaghan* (DD), *Cassin Young* (DD), *Preston* (DD), *Laws* (DD), and *Longshaw* (DD).

For his bravery and skill during the attack on the *Musashi*, Lt. Warren Parish of the *USS Essex*, piloting a Helldiver, was awarded the Navy Cross for scoring a confirmed direct hit on the battleship.

Task Group 38.4

Rear Admiral R.E. Davison commanded TG 38.4. This group was initially the closest to 7th Fleet, operating east of Leyte Gulf. The following ships made up TG 38.4: *Enterprise* (CV), *Franklin* (CV), *San Jacinto* (CVL), *Belleau Wood* (CVL), *Washington* (BB) (34), *Alabama* (BB) (34), *New Orleans** (CA) (34), *Wichita** (CA) (34), *Maury* (DD), *Gridley* (DD), *Helm* (DD), *McCall* (DD), *Mugford* (DD), *Ralph Talbot* (DD), *Patterson** (DD) (34), *Bagley** (DD) (34), *Wilkes* (DD), *Nicholson* (DD), *Swanson* (DD), and *Irwin* (DD).

Alabama and *Irwin* joined TG 38.4 from TG 38.3 on October 23. *Wichita* was detached from TG 38.1 on October 21.

U.S. 7TH FLEET

The 7th Fleet, under the strategic command of General MacArthur and the tactical command (in October 1944) of Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, had been operational since March 1943, growing from a small nucleus of a few submarines and a tender. In preparation for action off Leyte, numerous warships were transferred to 7th Fleet to be able to lend direct fire support to the invasion by bombarding beach targets. These ships would also provide protection for the transport units in the case of air assault (and any possible attack from the sea, though Japanese interference was not expected). Eighteen diminutive escort carriers also came under the temporary control of Kinkaid.

These were slow-moving ships whose planes would also provide direct ground support for the infantry until land airstrips could be captured and established. Finally, the amphibious landing craft of 3rd Fleet were lent to 7th Fleet, to allow the landing to take place and to allow Halsey to rove for any Japanese naval threat.

Three surface groups in particular featured heavily in the Battle of Leyte Gulf: the Fire Support and Bombardment Group (TG 77.2), the Escort Carrier Group (TG 77.4), and Task Group 78.12, hastily put together after the main action off Samar to search for survivors. Task Group 71.1, or Supporting Submarines 7th Fleet, also played a large role. Both *Darter* and *Dace* (p. 4) operated with TG 71.1 under the command of Rear Admiral Ralph W. Christie.

Fire Support And Bombardment Group (Task Group 77.2)

Task Group 77.2 was arranged in response to Nishimura's effort to drive north through Surigao Strait. The group was essentially comprised of vessels from Fire Support Unit North (Rear Admiral G.L. Weyler), Fire Support Unit South (Rear Admiral J.B. Oldendorf), and TG 77.3 Close Covering Group (Rear Admiral R.S. Berkey). TG 77.3 contained ships from the Australian Navy. Already present in the area of Surigao Strait on the night of October 24 was TG 79.11 (Desron 54) under Captain J.G. Coward. This force had been conducting routine antisubmarine patrols across the northern entrance of the strait since the invasion. Although officially under the command of Vice Admiral Wilkinson, Coward was determined to offer his services to Oldendorf and instructed his superior to that effect. (In other words, he didn't wait for orders.)

Task Group 77.2 was divided into three sections:

The left flank (under Rear Admiral J.B. Oldendorf) included: *Louisville* (CA), *Portland* (CA), *Minneapolis* (CA), *Denver* (CL), *Columbia* (CL), *Newcomb* (DD), *Richard P. Leary* (DD), *Albert W. Grant* (DD) (in Desron 56 under Captain Smoot), *Robinson* (DD), *Halford* (DD), *Bryant* (DD) (in Desdiv 112 under Captain Conely), *Heywood L. Edwards* (DD), *Bennion* (DD), and *Leutze* (DD) (under Commander Boulware).

The battle line (under Rear Admiral G.L. Weyler) included: *Mississippi* (BB), *Maryland* (BB), *West Virginia* (BB), *Tennessee* (BB), *California* (BB), *Pennsylvania* (BB), *Claxton* (DD), *Cony* (DD), *Thorn* (DD), *Aulick* (DD), *Sigourney* (DD), and *Welles* (DD) (in Desdiv "X-Ray" under Commander Hubbard).

The right flank (under Rear Admiral R.S. Berkey) included: *HMAS Shropshire* (CA), *Phoenix* (CL), *Boise* (CL), *Hutchins* (DD), *Daly* (DD), *Bache* (DD), *Killen* (DD), *Beale* (DD) (in Desron 24 under Captain

7TH FLEET AMMUNITION

When planning the role of 7th Fleet in support of the Leyte landings, the U.S. Navy expected no major opposition from the Japanese Navy. The primary role of the fleet was determined to be the targeting of shore-based units and strongpoints and the protection of the escort carriers. As a result, the warships of 7th Fleet were issued 75% high-capacity shells (basically high-explosive shells, for shore bombardment) and only 25% armor-piercing shells (AP shells, for use against armor-plated enemy ships). This supply situation helped shape the tactics decided upon by Oldendorf when facing Nishimura in Surigao Strait. The lack of AP munitions could have been far more telling on October 25, as the American battleships could not outlast Kurita's Northern Force in a running gun battle had they faced off against one another.

McManes), *Remey* (DD), *McGowan* (DD), *Melvin* (DD), *Mertz* (DD) (in Desron 54 under Captain Coward), *McDermut* (DD), *Monssen* (DD), and *McNair* (DD) (in Desdiv 108 under Commander Phillips).

Task Group 77.4

Task Group 77.4 (Escort Carrier Group) was under the overall command of Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague (no relation to the more famous Rear Admiral Clifton A.F. Sprague, below). He also retained command of Taffy 1. TG 77.4 was composed of 18 carriers and various support vessels, including screen destroyers and destroyer escorts. Details of those vessels not directly involved in the fighting in the Battle of Leyte Gulf are not provided here.

TG 77.4 had as its mission the support of MacArthur's landings until land-based airstrips could be established. The type of missions typically flown by the pilots included combat air patrols, air searches, supply drops, and attacks against land targets. The principal arms of TG 77.4 were organized into three subgroups, each with a "Taffy" identification from their respective radio call signs.

Taffy 1 (Task Group 77.4.1) was located to the northeast of Mindanao Island and far to the east of Leyte Island. Taffy 1 was the southernmost of the three escort carrier groups. It included: *Sangamon* (CVE), *Suwannee* (CVE), *Chenango* (CVE), *Santee* (CVE), *Saginaw* (CVE), *Petrof Bay* (CVE), *McCord* (DD), *Trathern* (DD), *Hazelwood* (DD), *Edmonds* (DE),

REVENGE

Of the battleships of Oldendorf's battle line arrayed against Nishimura on October 24, five were refitted "survivors" of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. *Pennsylvania*, *Tennessee*, and *Maryland* had all been heavily damaged. *West Virginia* and *California* had in fact been sunk, but later salvaged. Though the aircraft carrier was now the predominant tool of naval warfare, the battleships still had a final part to play and the action in Surigao Strait demonstrated that they still had a formidable punch. In addition, *West Virginia*, *Tennessee*, and *California* were all equipped with the newest Mark 8 fire-control radar, ideal for night actions. (The others were outfitted with an older Mark 3 radar.)

Richard S. Bull (DE), *Richard M. Rowell* (DE), *Eversole* (DE), and *Coolbaugh* (DE).

Taffy 2 (Task Group 77.4.2) was located in the middle of the three carrier task groups, to the north of Taffy 1 and southeast of Taffy 3. It lay to the east of Leyte Island and was commanded by Rear Admiral Felix B. Stump. It included: *Natoma Bay* (CVE), *Manila Bay* (CVE), *Marcus Island* (CVE), *Kadashan Bay* (CVE), *Savo Island* (CVE), *Ommaney Bay* (CVE), *Haggard* (DD), *Franks* (DD), *Hailey* (DD), *Richard W. Suesens* (DE), *Abercrombie* (DE), *Oberrender* (DE), *Leroy Wilson* (DE), and *Walter C. Wann* (DE).

Taffy 3 (Task Group 77.4.3) was under Rear Admiral Clifton A.F. Sprague. It was the northernmost of the Taffy groups, cruising to the east of Samar Island and northeast of Leyte Gulf. Taffy 3 faced the onslaught of Kurita's Center Force on the morning of October 25. It included: *Fanshaw Bay* (CVE), *St. Lo* (CVE), *White*

Plains (CVE), *Kalinin Bay* (CVE), *Kitkun Bay* (CVE), *Gambier Bay* (CVE), *Hoel* (DD), *Heermann* (DD), *Johnston* (DD), *Dennis* (DE), *John C. Butler* (DE), *Raymond* (DE), and *Samuel B. Roberts* (DE).

DD Task Group 78.12

TG 78.12 was hastily formed on the afternoon of October 25 to search for survivors of the action off Samar Island. Rear Admiral Barbey (commander of TF 78), taking the advice of a Captain Charles Adair, placed Lieutenant Commander J.A. Baxter in command of a small group to locate and rescue sailors in the water. TF 78.12 included PC-623 and PC-1119 and five LCIs. A doctor and a pharmacist's mate also sailed with the patrol.

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMADA

Like its American counterpart, the Imperial Japanese force assembled for the Battle of Leyte Gulf was, at first glance, the most powerful tasked for a mission under the Japanese flag since Midway. Details will reveal, however, that the Japanese suffered from key shortages in air crew, planes, fuel, and ammunition that hindered the armada from being as effective as its composition would suggest.

There were four different groups that operated around the Philippines from October 23-25, 1944. Each had a crucial role to play if the battle plan was to be executed successfully and the Americans repelled from the beaches of Leyte.

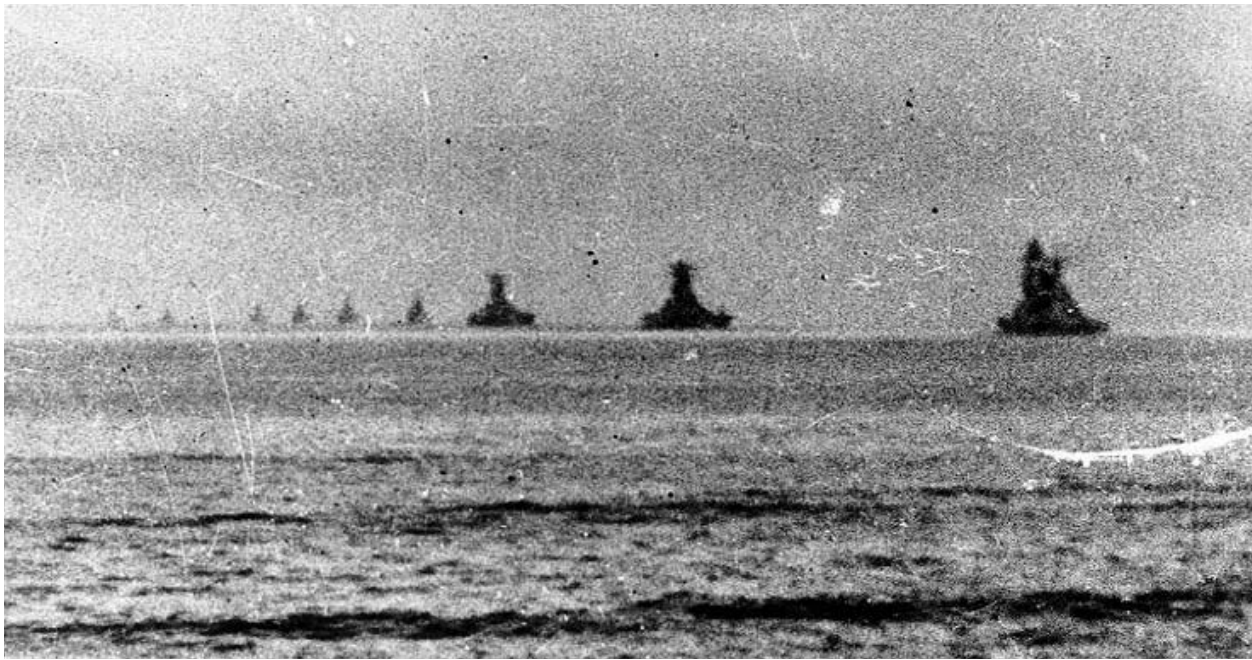
CENTER FORCE

Center Force was under the command of Admiral Kurita. The Japanese referred to this group as Force "A" of the First Striking Force (which also included Nishimura's fleet). This was the main attack force; it was equipped to deal with the heaviest fighting and was able to inflict the most serious damage on the troop transports that lay off the Leyte coast.

Kurita was to sail south of Mindoro Island, pass through Tablas Strait into the Sibuyan Sea, head east toward Samar, then make his way through the San Bernardino Strait. Following this, the Center Force would sweep south around Samar to capture the Amer-

INEFFECTIVE JAPANESE AP SHELLS

The crews of the U.S. escort carriers often quipped that the designation CVE stood for "Combustible, Vulnerable, Expendable." Yet it was their very vulnerability that saved the carriers from even more serious damage on October 25. The thin, unarmored sides of the ships often caused the Japanese armor-piercing shells to fail to detonate on impact. Many passed right through the superstructures. More dangerous were shots that in fact were off-target, but which detonated on the ocean's surface at the waterline.



icans in a pincer movement while Nishimura and Shima sped northward from Surigao Strait.

The Center Force, along with Nishimura's Southern Force, had been stationed at Lingga Roads, near Singapore, to be close to the oil supply there. This divided the Japanese fleet (Ozawa sortied from home waters) and also made supplying the battle ships with ammunition difficult, as the munition factories were located on the Japanese homeland. The group (First Striking Force) left Lingga Roads for Brunei Bay on October 19 where it refueled and Kurita (Force "A") and Nishimura (Force "C") split apart.

Kurita was aware that he could not expect to receive air cover as he advanced toward his objective. He certainly expected no help from any Army fighters flying from bases on the islands. Instead he emphasized anti-aircraft training and increased the number of 25mm guns on board all ships appreciably. The crews were also trained for night actions, something of a Japanese specialty in the early years of the war.

After leaving Brunei Bay Kurita had the following ships under his command: *Yamato* (BB), *Musashi* (BB), *Nagato* (BB), *Kongo* (BB), *Haruna* (BB), *Atago* (CA), *Chikuma* (CA), *Chokai* (CA), *Haguro* (CA), *Kumano* (CA), *Maya* (CA), *Myoko* (CA), *Suzuya* (CA), *Takao* (CA), *Tone* (CA), *Noshiro* (CL), *Yahagi* (CL), *Akishimo* (DD), *Asashimo* (DD), *Fujinami* (DD), *Hamakaze* (DD), *Hamanami* (DD), *Hayashimo* (DD), *Isokaze* (DD), *Kishinami* (DD), *Kiyoshimo* (DD), *Naganami* (DD), *Nowake* (DD), *Shimakaze* (DD), *Okinami* (DD), *Urakaze* (DD), and *Yukikaze* (DD).

NORTHERN FORCE

Admiral Ozawa's Northern Force was the "bait" dangled to lure Halsey's 3rd Fleet away from Leyte

Gulf and allow Kurita to enter unopposed. The Japanese referred to this force as the Main Body of the Mobile Force (under Ozawa). Ozawa's air fleet was seriously underpowered, owing to earlier losses, particularly in the Formosa air battle. Ozawa had about 116 planes, about half the normal strength for his force. Furthermore, few of the pilots were skilled enough to reliably land on a carrier, forcing them to fly on to land bases after a raid. As a comparison, American pilots by late 1944 usually had at least 300 hours of flight time; the Japanese pilots were lucky to have just a few hours.

Though Ozawa disliked his mission on a personal level, and later described it as a "bitter experience," he and his men were willing to sacrifice themselves if their action would allow Kurita to succeed. On October 20, Ozawa's Northern Force left Bungo Suido at the entrance to the Inland Sea. Ozawa expected a fight immediately, but was pleasantly surprised to find that the American submarines stationed as lookouts had decided just the day before that the Imperial Navy would not be leaving the protection of the home waters, and had left the area to search for merchant shipping targets.

The fleet included: *Zuikaku* (CV), *Chitose* (CL), *Chiyoda* (CL), *Zuiho* (CL), *Hyuga* (BB), *Ise* (BB), *Isuzu* (CL), *Oyodo* (CL), *Tama* (CL), *Akitsuki* (DD), *Fuyutsuki* (DD), *Hatsutsuki* (DD), *Shimotsuki* (DD), *Suzutsuki* (DD), *Wakatsuki* (DD), *Kiri* (DD), *Kuwa* (DD), *Maki* (DD), and *Sugi* (DD).

Both *Hyuga* and *Ise* were semi-converted battle-ships, retaining the fore guns but having a flight deck and hangar grafted onto their sterns. The first six destroyers listed were of the larger *Terutsuki* class and were often mistaken for light cruisers.

SOUTHERN FORCE (VAN)

Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura was to form the southern prong of the pincer that was to close upon the American troop transports in Leyte Gulf. After departing from Brunei Bay, Nishimura split from Kurita and swung west then north to avoid detection from the air. He then changed course and headed east, skirting the southern tip of Palawan and entering the Sulu Sea. At the southern end of Negros he picked up Shima's force as a tail. Nishimura was to continue east into the Mindanao Sea before turning northeast to pass through Surigao Strait into Leyte Gulf.

The Japanese referred to Nishimura's group as Force "C", part of the First Striking Force under Kurita. After Nishimura left Kurita's Center Force outside Brunei he had the following ships under his command: *Yamashiro* (BB), *Fuso* (BB), *Mogami* (CA), *Asagumo* (DD), *Michishio* (DD), *Shigure* (DD), and *Yamagumo* (DD).

SOUTHERN FORCE (REAR)

The Japanese labeled Shima's group as the Second Striking Force and it formed the rear of the Southern Force, behind Nishimura's van. It was part of the Southwest Area Force under Mikawa (though perplexingly, Shima was directly answerable to Toyoda in Tokyo). Nishimura on the other hand was responsible to Kurita. The next senior commander both Nishimura and Shima mutually enjoyed was Admiral Toyoda, commander of the Combined Fleet, in Tokyo. Shima himself was not a battle-hardened veteran and had spent much of his career in staff and school assignments. He lacked combat experience, though he was in fact senior to Nishimura by a slight margin.

Despite Halsey's devastating attacks on Formosa (October 12-14), Japanese pilots were overly optimistic in their claims of the amount of damage inflicted in return. This prompted another of Halsey's famous comments that, "[I] am now retiring toward the enemy following the salvage of all the 3rd Fleet ships reported sunk by radio Tokyo." Shima's fast group was therefore ordered to sail out to finish off any remaining crippled ships. Shima probably had a nasty surprise when he found that the American fleets were still very much active and overwhelmingly powerful! He beat a hasty retreat back to Amami Island (northeast of Okinawa). Only on October 21 did Shima receive his orders to cooperate with the First Striking Force (more precisely, Nishimura's Force "C") and pass through Surigao Strait. Shima had no communication with Nishimura,

and there was no unified strategy (and no reason for the two commanders to seek to forge one, divided as they were by different chains of command).

At the time of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Shima had the following vessels under his command: *Ashigara* (CA), *Nachi* (CA), *Abukuma* (CL), *Akebono* (DD), *Kasumi* (DD), *Shiranuhi* (DD), and *Ushio* (DD).

Japanese Naval Aircraft

Japan's naval air strength had been pounded in the leadup to the Leyte operation, with strikes against airfields on Okinawa, Luzon, and Formosa. Around 500 Japanese planes were destroyed. More aircraft were sent out against Halsey's 3rd Fleet on the 15th and 16th but most never returned. These latter losses were of men and machines destined for carrier service and deprived Ozawa of needed manpower, something to which he strongly objected. The pilots in general were also substandard, an important contributing factor to the decision to use suicide tactics to thwart the American advance.

Land-Based Aircraft

There were two air groups charged with the defense of the Philippines. The 5th Base Air Force was under Vice Admiral Onishi at the time of the Battle of Leyte Gulf and was made up of around 300-400 aircraft, not all of which were operational. Reinforcements, the remains of Japan's air armada, had been flown in from Formosa on October 22. Lieutenant General Tominaga commanded 4th Air Army with 237 aircraft, 83 of them fighters. Unusually, the plan was for the two forces to *combine* attacks against the landing force. Only since the fall of Saipan had the Army and Navy begun to realize that coordinated action was necessary. No air cover was supplied to Kurita.

Asahi Kamikaze Flight

The *Asahi* special attack unit was based at Davao on Mindanao Island. The flight included six Zeroes, four of which were to crash into the American ships. The group quickly located Taffy 1 and became the first purposeful and successful suicide attack carried out by the Japanese in the war.

Shikishima Kamikaze Flight

The *Shikashima* special attack unit was based at Mabalacat on Luzon Island, northwest of Manila. The flight that engaged Taffy 1 on October 25 was led by Lieutenant Seki. He was one of five pilots in Zero fighters, each carrying a 250-kilogram bomb. Four other Zeroes accompanied the suicide pilots to provide air cover and to report on the expected success of the mission.

3. THE ARMORY

VEHICLE STATISTICS KEY

The following pages describe a few of the U.S. and Japanese warships that played a notable part in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Additional examples and details on equipment can be found in *GURPS WWII: Dogfaces* and *Banzai!*.

VEHICLES KEY

The military vehicles in this section are presented in the following format:

Descriptive Text

Each vehicle writeup begins with general descriptive text, which usually includes a mix of information on the class of ship as well as information on the particular ship that took part in the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Subassemblies

This lists the chassis and each subassembly, with any options applied to each, followed by the size modifier to see or target that particular structure. Note that the remainder of the writeup will use this structure name or an abbreviation in brackets to indicate the placement of other components. For instance, [OM 1] means the item in question is housed in the subassembly designated Open Mount 1 in this passage. If no placement is described, the item is assumed to be in the vehicle's body.

Powertrain

This describes the vehicle's engines, transmission, and electric motors (if any), fuel tankage, and batteries

carried either as motive power sources or simply to turn over the engine and to power accessories such as radios.

Occupancy (Occ)

This describes where and how the vehicle seats its occupants. (Again, unless otherwise designated, all crew stations are assumed to be in the body.) A "CS" is a crew station while a "PS" is a passenger station. An "SR" would indicate standing room used as makeshift passenger space. An "X" prefix means the station is exposed, while an "M" prefix means the station is a motorcycle seat. Long-term accommodations such as bunks will be covered in the descriptive text.

Cargo

This heading includes *all* empty space within the vehicle except bilges and access space, but it almost always will be design "waste" space rather than a true cargo hold of some sort. Unless specific cargo space is assigned under *Equipment* (see below), assume that the largest single item that this space could hold would be just 10% as big as it is. For instance, a vehicle with 27 VSPs of empty space not truly dedicated to a cargo hold could not fit another crew station, because its single largest "nook" would be only 2.7 VSPs in size. The remainder of the space is scattered about the vehicle in other "crannies" of similar size. Unless the vehicle is specifically designed to haul cargo, the GM should feel free to place these restrictions on any empty space.

Armor

This lists the armor values on each face of each vehicular structure as PD value followed by DR value. (Note that motive subassemblies will always have uniform values on all facings unless the GM is using design rules beyond the scope of this setting; that value is still repeated for each facing simply as a convenience.) A "W" following the armor value denotes that it is wooden. An "S" denotes that it includes DR 15 of standoff armor (see pp. W140-141). A "C" indicates cloth armor. Any special notes are below the armor values.

Weaponry

This lists each weapon (or set of identical weapons), its placement, and its ammunition stores. Any special notes are below the listings. See pp. W133-135 for weapons statistics. *GURPS WWII Motor Pool* greatly expands on this selection.

Equipment

This lists each structure with general equipment installed, followed by the equipment within it. See pp. W136-140 for descriptions of general equipment and p. W:D75 for equipment specific to the U.S. forces.

Statistics

Size gives the length, width, and height of the vehicle. *Payload* is the weight of a standard load of fuel, personnel, ammunition, and cargo. *Lwt.* is loaded weight. *Volume* is the amount of space the vehicle would take up if stored within another (presumably larger) vehicle. *Maint.* or *MH* describes either the maintenance interval in hours (p. W144) or the number of men required to keep up maintenance working eight-hour shifts on a long-occupancy vehicle. *Cost* is the vehicle cost. (Note that a “retail” price might be *much* higher; this figure is “cost of production.” In addition, conversion rates were highly subjective during the war, so this should not be mistaken for a historical reference. It is of more use for comparing the values of various pieces of equipment.)

HT measures how robust the vehicle is; see p. W144. *HPs* measures the hit points of each structure; see p. W156.

wSpeed, etc. provide the vehicle’s performance characteristics in each of its routine modes of travel; see pp. W145-149. Special characteristics for each mode are described under the general statistics line.

Design Notes

These notes indicate where components were purchased and then modified to historical values, or where any particularly notable “fudging” of calculated data to historical values had to take place.

Variants

Unlike most other sourcebooks, all the information presented in the following pages is related to the one variant of a class of ship that was present in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. This section describes some or all of the other types of the class of ship or earlier or later variants on the specific ship presented. Appropriate supporting statistics are provided if the variant is much more complex than swapping one component for another.

U.S. FORCES

The following pages highlight some of the ships that sailed in the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

USS PRINCETON

The *Independence*-class carriers were converted *Cleveland*-class CL hulls intended as a stopgap before larger *Essex*-class carriers could be completed. The ships were relatively cheap to manufacture and lacked many refinements. They had no elevator, only a small air group, and a lack of serious firepower. The intended 5-inch DP guns were never installed. Armor was installed, but it was never more than modest. That said, these light carriers performed admirably in augmenting the fleet carriers and saw a lot of action.

Princeton began construction as a light cruiser (*Tallahassee*, CL-61) on June 2, 1941. The frame was reclassified as a carrier (CV-23) on February 16, 1942, and renamed *Princeton* on March 31, 1942. It was launched later that year, on October 18. The ship was reclassified again the following year, as CVL-23 on July 15, 1943.

Princeton saw action first at Baker Island, where it was ordered to give air cover while an airfield was constructed. On the way back to Pearl Harbor, the pilots on board carried out strikes against targets on Makin and Tarawa. After a short break, the crew joined up with Task Force 38 on October 20, 1943. *Princeton*’s planes were again active in combat over Bougainville, Rabaul, and later at Nauru, as part of 5th Fleet. The New Year witnessed additional strikes against Wotje, Taroa, Engebi airfield on Eniwetok, and finally the invasion beaches on Eniwetok. Taking time to replenish, *Princeton* returned to the fray once more before providing support for the Hollandia operation and raids on Truk and Ponape.

A busy summer followed. *Princeton* was present when Saipan was taken, and later engaged in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Other assaults were conducted successfully. As summer turned to autumn, the crew remained busy, not least the pilots, who struck against the Palaus, Mindanao, the Visayas, and Luzon. *Princeton* flight crews also took part in the Formosa air battle. During the opening stages of the invasion at Leyte, *Princeton* lent ground support and protected the shipping. On October 24, a lone bomb struck deep and sealed the fate of this light carrier (p. 6).

Princeton carried 45 aircraft in total. It cost about \$148,000 to fit the carrier with fuel, provisions, and ammunition. The ship had a crew of 1,569.

Subassemblies: Light Cruiser chassis +10; water-proofed Medium Naval superstructure [Body:T] +6; eight full-rotation Large Weapon open turrets 1-8 [Body:T] +1; four full-rotation Large Weapon turrets 9-12 [Super:T] +1; 10 full-rotation Small Weapon open mounts 13-22 [Body:T] +0; six full-rotation Small Weapon open mounts 23-28 [Super:T] +0.

Powertrain: four 18,650-kW steam turbines with four 18,650-kW screw propellers, 780,000-gallon standard fuel tanks, 120,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: See above. **Cargo:** 12,000 Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/280	4/280	4/280	4/200	4/280
Super:	4/100	4/100	4/100	4/100	—
Turrets:	3/8	3/8	3/8	3/8	—
OMs:	4/40	—	—	—	—

Weaponry

24×40mm Med. Gr. ACs/M-1 [OMs1-12:F] (208 SAPHE rounds each).

16×20mm Long Gr. ACs/M-2 [OMs 13-28:F] (540 SAPHE rounds each).

Equipment

Body: 60 bilge pumps; two 18-foot cranes; 30 fire extinguishers; two launch catapults; 12000 cargo; 35,750-sf flight deck; 216,000-gallon self-sealing fuel tanks for aviation gas; very large radio transmitter and receiver; very large radio direction finder; 1,550 bunks; 10 cabins; one luxury cabin; 64 environmental controls; 31,400 man-day provisions; 12 halls; 20 hospital beds; four surgeries; 16 workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; precision navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 5-mile radar; air search non-targeting 10-mile radar; five medium radio transmitters and receivers; two large radio transmitters and receivers.

Statistics

Size: 623'×72'×170' **Payload:** 3,299 tons
Lwt: 9,674 tons
Volume: 110,437 **Maint.:** 4 hours **Price:** \$2.9 million

HT: 7. **HPs:** 150K Body, 2,300 Superstructure, 120 each Turret, 45 each OM.

wSpeed: 15 **wAccel:** 1 **wMR:** 0.02
wSR: 5 **wDecel:** 0.1

Draft: 18'. Flotation Rating: 10,190 tons.

Design Notes

The historical draft value has been used.



USS BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham (CL-62) was a *Cleveland*-class light cruiser, the most common cruiser class in U.S. service. Not a single ship of this line was lost during the war. *Birmingham* was launched on March 20, 1942, and commissioned under Captain J. Wilkes on January 29, 1943. The design had evolved from the earlier *Brooklyn* class, and though not perfect, it was a resilient ship with great firepower. These light cruisers were also maneuverable, enhancing their ability to survive on the high seas.

This improved engineering areas had the two boiler rooms well separated by an engine room. (The



Brooklyn-class vessels had the boiler rooms together.) The biggest change from earlier versions was the addition of four main turrets with triple 6-inch guns. The deck space saved allowed for a greater secondary armament, with six twin 5-inch DP mountings. The length of the ship was also increased by a small amount and the hull was strengthened. This latter modification was well demonstrated by *Houston*, which was able to take the increase in pressure caused by two aerial torpedo hits that saw its displacement increase to almost twice the standard tonnage from flooding.

Birmingham saw service first in the Mediterranean during the invasion of Sicily before being reassigned to the Pacific Fleet. The crew was busy for the rest of the year, seeing action at Tarawa, Wake Island, and Empress Augusta Bay. *Birmingham* was damaged in this latter combat and retired to Mare Island Navy Yard. The ship sortied once more in February of the next year and was again kept busy. *Birmingham* was present at Saipan, the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Tinian, and Guam. This was as a member of Task Force 57 (then with 5th Fleet). The tour of duty continued under

Halsey and *Birmingham* lent protective support to the carriers of 3rd Fleet while Philippine airfields were attacked. Task Force 38 then moved onto Okinawa, Luzon, and Formosa.

As noted in Chapter 1, not only was *Birmingham* damaged while helping to fight the fires on *Princeton*, but that ship's final explosion cut down many of the cruiser's crew, which was working topside. Following repairs, *Birmingham* closed in on the Japanese mainland and served at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, where a *kamikaze* pilot crashed into the busy ship. *Birmingham* went out of commission on January 2, 1947.

It cost around \$544,000 to provision *Birmingham*, which had a full complement of 1,425. *Birmingham* carried four seaplanes.

Subassemblies: Light Cruiser chassis +10; waterproofed Small Ship superstructure [Body:T] +7; four waterproofed limited-rotation Large Naval turrets with mild slope [Body:T] +6; six waterproofed limited-rotation Large Secondary turrets [Body:T] +4; four waterproofed Large Weapon turrets [Sup:T] +2; 19 Small Weapon open mounts [10 Body:T and nine Sup:T] +0.

Powertrain: Four 18,650-kW steam turbines with four 18,650-kW screw propellers; 600,000-gallon standard fuel tanks; 80,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: See above. **Cargo:** 400 Body, 150 Sup.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/328	4/328	4/328	4/164	4/328
Super:	4/246	4/246	4/246	4/246	—
LN Turs:	4/246	4/246	4/246	4/246	—
LS Turs:	4/200	4/200	4/200	4/200	—
LW Turs:	4/115	4/115	4/115	4/115	—
OMs:	4/40	—	—	—	—

Weaponry

12×150mm Medium DPs [LN Turs:F] (108 rounds each).*

12×127mm Short DPs/Mk 12 [LS Turs:F] (328 rounds each).**

8×40mm Med. Gr. ACs/M-1 [LW Turs:F] (400 rounds each).

19×20mm Long Gr. ACs/M-1 [OMs:F] (520 SAPHE rounds each).

* Linked in sets of three. ** Linked in pairs.

Equipment

Body: 60 bilge pumps; crane; 30 fire extinguishers; 400 cargo; two launch catapults; very large radio transmitter and receiver; large radio direction finder; 1,145 bunks; 56 cabins; 51 environmental controls; 25,000 man-day provisions; 12 halls; 10 hospital beds; surgery; eight workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; IFF; precision navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 10-mile radar; air-search non-targeting 15-mile radar; fire-direction center; two mini targeting computers (one for 150mm Medium DP guns, one for 127mm Short DP guns); 150 cargo.

Statistics

Size: 608'×64'×150' **Payload:** 2,592 tons
Lwt: 10,330 tons
Volume: 122,499 **Maint.:** 3 hours **Price:** \$3.2 million

HT: 7. **HPs:** 240K **Body,** 6,600 **Superstructure,** 3K each LN Turret, 900 each LS Turret, 120 each LW Turret, 45 each OM.

wSpeed: 36 **wAccel:** 1 **wDecel:** 0.1
wMR: 0.02 **wSR:** 5
Draft: 23.5'. **Flotation Rating:** 11,307 tons.

Design Notes

The historical draft has been used.

Variants

Some units were converted to *Independence*-class light carriers on the order of President Roosevelt. The big CVs would simply take too long to build and delays were setting back completion dates. The narrow cruiser hull necessitated the inelegant step of having all necessary appendages topside jutting out over the sides of the ship. No replacement planes could be carried. The *USS Princeton* (p. 31) is an example of a converted *Cleveland*-class light cruiser. Armor was very limited.

Two others were completed postwar as the *Fargo* class, with slight modifications. Several ships were converted to use a Talos missile launcher (as a missile cruiser) following the Korean War.

USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS

American destroyer escorts were first produced under pressure from the British Royal Navy, which needed smaller escorts for cross-channel duties to keep the war machine alive in Europe. Although initial demands were for escorts capable in anti-submarine warfare (resulting in the *Evarts* class), the U.S. high command was concerned over the ability of the small escorts to fight a surface battle. Five more subtypes were created. Three of them utilized a turbo-electric drive: the *Buckleys*, the *Butlers*, and the *Rudderows*. Along with an improvement in speed, these latter two classes were armed with 5-inch guns and torpedoes.

Construction of *Samuel B. Roberts* (DE-413) began on December 6, 1943. It was launched on January 20, 1944, and commissioned on April 28 of the same year under Lieutenant Commander R.W. Copeland. Copeland, coming from the naval reserve, served as the commander of the ship until October 25. Much of his crew was inexperienced and averaged less than one year's service. Nevertheless, Copeland and his men sailed to join the Pacific Fleet on July 22 from Norfolk.

Early active duty included simple escort work until the ship was called to join Taffy 3. Work was routine until October 25, when Kurita's Center Force sailed over the horizon. Copeland immediately requested permission for his "Little Wolf" (the larger destroyers were known as "Wolves") to accompany the first torpedo run made by the DDs. Initially, an order was not forthcoming, but Commander Thomas, commanding the screen, quickly changed his mind. Copeland, however, was not entirely sure how to "form up" for a torpedo attack and instead trailed a few thousand yards behind the lead destroyers. His crew was nervous and had never made a torpedo run before.



Once committed to the attack, though, the escort and the crew performed beyond expectation. With excellent use of smoke, the DE sailed to within 4,000 yards of the heavy cruiser column before launching three torpedoes. Withdrawing, *Roberts* continued to fire 5-inch ordnance at the enemy and escaped untouched for an interval until the first enemy shell crashed home at around 0850. Further damage was endured quickly thereafter. A hole measuring some 35' in length and 9' feet high was ripped along the port side. Seawater poured in and all power was lost.

The ship was abandoned by 0935 and sank at 1005. The survivors now faced the problem of staying alive in shark-infested waters before help arrived. Three of the eight officers were killed outright, went missing or died later of wounds; 86 of 170 enlisted men met a similar fate.

After the engagement, Copeland wrote that *Roberts* sailed into an impossible battle. He concluded his battle report with, "In the face of this knowledge, the men zealously manned their stations wherever they might be, and fought and worked with such calmness, courage, and efficiency that no higher honor could be conceived than to command such a group of men." *Samuel B. Roberts* was listed in the Presidential Unit Citation given to Taffy 3 "for extraordinary heroism in action."

Opinions are split as to which DE is the most revered. Although *Samuel B. Roberts* is the best known of the *Butler* class, *USS England* (of the *Buckley* class), which sank six Japanese submarines in the space of 12 days in May 1944, is often held as being the premier fighting escort.

The greatest asset of the *Butler* class was speed and maneuverability. Armor was thin, but machinery was dispersed to help protect against torpedo attacks in particular. *Roberts* was able to absorb a great deal of damage off Samar, more than 20 hits, including at least one HC shell from a 14-inch gun.

Outfitting the destroyer escort with fuel, ammunition, and provisions costs about \$138,000.

Subassemblies: Medium Destroyer chassis +9; waterproofed Large Conning superstructure [Body:T] +5; waterproofed full-rotation Large Secondary Turret [Body:T] +4; two waterproofed Small Secondary turrets [Body:T] +4; four Large Weapon open mounts [Body:T] +2; 10 Small Weapon open mounts [1-6 Body:T, 7-10 Sup:T] +0.

Powertrain: two 4,476-kW steam turbines and two 4,476-kW screw propellers; 156,000-gallon standard fuel tanks; 40,000-kWs batteries

Occ: See above. **Cargo:** 100 Body, 40 Sup.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/90	4/45	4/45	3/20	4/45
Super:	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20	—
LS Tur:	4/60	4/60	4/60	4/60	—
SS Turs:	4/60	4/60	4/60	4/60	—
LW OMs:	4/40	—	—	—	—
SW OMs:	4/20	—	—	—	—

Weaponry

2×127mm Short DP Guns/Mk 12 [SS Turs:F] (328 rounds each).

4×40mm Medium Gr ACs/Mk1/2 [LW OMs:F] (104 rounds each).*

10×20mm Long Gr ACs/Mk 2/3/4 [SW OMs:F] (540 rounds each).

3×533mm Torpedo Tubes [LS Tur:F] (3 torpedoes).

K-Gun [Body:T facing F] (10 Mk 7 depth charges).

Hedgehog [Body:T facing F] (12 hedgehog bombs).

* Linked in pairs.

Equipment

Body: Five bilge pumps; three fire extinguishers; 100 cargo; very large radio transmitter and receiver; large radio direction finder; 5.5 tons of hardpoints (for Mk 7 depth charges); 201 bunks; eight cabins; nine environmental controls; 4,300 man-day provisions; two hospital beds; surgery; four workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; precision navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 5-mile radar; air-search non-targeting 10-mile radar; mini targeting computer (for 127mm Short DP guns).

Statistics

Size: 306'×37'×85' **Payload:** 560 tons

Lwt: 1,496 tons

Volume: 33,605 **Maint.:** 10 hours **Price:** \$352,100

HT: 12. **HPs:** 108K Body, 1,500 Super, 900 LS Turret, 560 each SS Turret, 120 each LW OM, 45 each SW OM.

wSpeed: 30 **wAccel:** 0.9 **wDecel:** 0.1

wMR: 0.02 **wSR:** 5

Draft: 9.4'. **Flotation Rating:** 3,103 tons.

Design Notes

The historical draft has been used.

Variants

The construction of two other ships was delayed until completion in 1955 with radar picket equipment. These ships continued in service until 1960.

USS GAMBIER BAY

The *Casablanca* class of escort carriers (nicknamed “Kaisers”) was a marvel of wartime mass production. Fifty of these vessels were built very quickly, the final ship completed exactly one year after the first. The design was economical and easily replicated, but at the expense of comfort and armor.

The basic plan called for a flight deck to be attached to a mercantile vessel between 450’ and 500’ long. Dispersing the machinery did not prevent several of the ships from blowing up after a bombing or torpedo attack. The lack of armor, however, sometimes provided an edge against AP shells (p. 26).

The CVEs were intended to fill support and supply operations – bringing replacement planes to the combat carriers or providing air screens for rear-area operations. These “baby flattops” were crucial in ensuring the success of landings in North Africa, Salerno, Mindoro, and Luzon. The pilots were inexperienced at attacking enemy vessels, except possibly submarines, though even this type of combat was seldom experienced.

Gambier Bay (CVE-73) was launched on November 22, 1943. After early supply duties, *Gambier Bay* joined Task Group 52.11 for the invasion of the Marianas in May 1944. The pilots of this carrier gave air support to the initial landings on June 15 and attacked ground units and strongpoints. On June 17, a large enemy air attack was turned back, then another on June 18. *Gambier Bay* performed these same duties at both Tinian (late July) and Guam (early August). September was equally busy, with troops going ashore at Peleliu and Angaur.

From Manus, both *Gambier Bay* and *Kitkun Bay* escorted transports and amphibious landing craft to the Leyte Gulf area before joining Taffy 3 under Rear Admiral Clifton A.F. Sprague. The crew of *Gambier Bay* conducted similar missions as before until October 25, when Center Force sailed from San Bernardino Strait with guns blazing. The pilots fought bravely to save the ship, along with other airmen and the sailors of the screen vessels. The crew of the carrier’s sole 5-inch gun did what they could, as well. Despite the fierce defense, *Gambier Bay* couldn’t withstand the shelling, with most of the damage caused by near misses. After the CVE stopped dead in the water, shell after shell ripped into the superstructure. At 0907 the ship went under. The crew that survived faced hours of discomfort and danger in the deep Philippine Sea before a rescue was affected. *Gambier Bay*, like *Samuel B. Roberts*, shared in the Presidential Unit Citation for Taffy 3.

The 860 crew members lived uncomfortably day to day with only the minimum of niceties. *Gambier Bay* carried 30 planes. It cost around \$137,000 to feed the crew and replenish fuel and ammunition.

Subassemblies: Light Cruiser +10; waterproofed Large Conning superstructure [Body:T] +5; full-rotation Large Secondary turret [Body:T] +4; four full-rotation Large Weapon open mounts [Body:T] +1; 20 full-rotation Small Weapon open mounts [16 Body:T, four Super:T] +0.

Powertrain: Two 5,968-kW steam turbines with two 5,968-kW screws; 720,000-gallon standard fuel tanks; 120,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: See above. **Cargo:** 10,000 Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/130	4/130	4/130	4/130	4/130
Super:	4/100	4/100	4/100	4/100	–
Turret:	4/150	4/150	4/150	4/150	–
LW OMs:	4/40	–	–	–	–
SW OMs:	4/40	–	–	–	–

Weaponry

127mm Short DP Gun/Mk 12 [Tur:F] (330 rounds).
8×40mm Medium Gr. ACs/M-1 [LW OMs:F] (416 rounds each).
20×20mm Long Gr ACs/Mk 1 [SW OMs:F] (360 SAPHE rounds each).

Equipment

Body: 30 bilge pumps; two 3-ton cranes; 40 fire extinguishers; two launch catapults; 25,000-sf flight deck; 144,000-gallon self-sealing fuel tanks (for aviation gas); hangar bay; 10,000 cargo; 844 bunks; 10 cabins; 17,200 man-day provisions; two halls; 12 hospital beds; four surgeries; 12 workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; precision navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 5-mile radar; air-search non-targeting 10-mile radar; very large radio transmitter and receiver; large radio direction finder.

Statistics

Size: 512’×65’×150’ **Payload:** 2,787 tons
Lwt: 6,197 tons
Volume: 110,084 **Maint.:** 6 hours **Price:** \$1.24 million

HT: 4. **HPs:** 240K Body, 1,500 Super, 900 Turret, 120 each LW OM, 30 each SM OM.

wSpeed: 24 **wAccel:** 0.3 **wMR:** 0.02
wSR: 5 **wDecel:** 0.1
Draft: 18’. **Flotation Rating:** 10,128 tons.

Design Notes

Historical value for draft has been used.

JAPANESE SHIPS

The following pages describe just two of the warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy that engaged the American forces at the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

MUSASHI

Japan's superbattleships were intended to be superior to anything that America could get through the Panama Canal. The resulting massive ships – the *Yamato* and *Musashi* – were built in great secrecy and at enormous expense at the Nagasaki shipyard before being launched on November 1, 1940. Both were used cautiously and never came to blows with the enemy fleet until the Battle of Leyte Gulf. *Musashi* was sunk before a naval target could be brought under fire.

The ships' main gun turrets were huge, each the same weight as a destroyer. Each housed three immense 18.1-inch guns. This arrangement was still new to the Japanese. The caliber of each gun contravened pre-war naval agreements, and they remain the largest ever installed on a vessel. A problem, however, was that the huge blast when firing would have melted any lesser arms exposed on the deck, and would have knocked out and injured any exposed crew members as well. For this reason, AA guns were concentrated around the central superstructure, which proved a weakness in the ships' defenses.

The ships were massively armored, particularly in the central command areas of both hull and superstructure. Weight concerns and steel shortages, however, left much of the bow and stern comparatively unprotected – the very same regions that lacked AA guns because of concern about the main guns' muzzle flash. In theory, these unarmored areas could fill with water and the

armored midsection would keep the ship afloat. This is what happened in the Sibuyan Sea. The *Musashi* was methodically hit on port and starboard sides in unarmored areas for the most part, so that the ship slowly sank evenly. (A few hits punched through the central armor, too.) The U.S. pilots learned their lesson, and when *Yamamoto* was sunk, the port side was purposely targeted by itself, to tip over the ship.

The hull design was quite sophisticated – it had to be, to hold together a ship of this size. The power plants, though, could only deliver a range of 7,200 miles at 16 knots.

In the Battle of Leyte Gulf, *Musashi* endured a full day of air assaults before its engines finally gave out. Circling destroyers were wary of coming too close to transfer survivors, and as the situation became more critical Captain Inoguchi gave the order to abandon ship. The captain himself, after presenting a small gift to his second in command, locked himself in the captain's quarters on #2 bridge and later went down with the ship at 1935. As the colossal warship settled on the seabed, either fuel or ammunition stores detonated, setting off a massive explosion. Of the original 2,399 crew members, 1,376 were rescued. During the attack by 3rd Fleet carrier planes, *Musashi* had been struck more than 30 times by bombs or torpedoes.

It costs \$1.23 million to outfit *Musashi* with fuel, ammunition, and provisions for combat operations. (In reality, the ship often sailed with less fuel than this, however.) The battleship carried seven seaplanes.

Subassemblies: Heavy Battleship chassis +12; waterproofed Large Capital superstructure [Body:T] +9; three waterproofed limited-rotation Huge Naval turrets with mild slope [Body:T] +6; four waterproofed limited-rotation Large Secondary turrets with mild slope [Sup:T] +4; six waterproofed limited-rotation Small Secondary turrets with mild slope [Sup:T] +4; 25 waterproofed limited-rotation Large Weapon turrets [Sup:T] +2; 25 full-rotation Small Weapon open mounts [Body:T] +0.

Powertrain: Four 27,979-kW steam turbines with four 27,979-kW screw propellers; 1.6 million-gallon standard fuel tanks; 160,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: See above.

Cargo: 3,000 Body, 1,000 Super



Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/656	4/656	4/656	4/738	4/328
Super:	4/1,312	4/1,312	4/1,312	4/656	–
HN Turs:	4/2,132	4/2,132	4/2,132	4/2,132	–
LS Turs:	4/410	4/410	4/410	4/410	–
SS Turs:	4/410	4/410	4/410	4/410	–
LW Turs:	4/80	4/80	4/80	4/80	–
OMs:	4/40	–	–	–	–

Weaponry

9×18” Naval Guns/Type 94 Shiki [HN Turs:F] (100 rounds each).

12×155mm Med. DP Guns/Type 3 Shiki [LS Turs:F] (201 rounds each).

12×127mm Short DP Guns/Type 89 Shiki [SS Turs:F] (270 rounds each).

100×20mm Short Air ACs/Type 99-1 Shiki [75 LW Turs:F, 25 OMs:F] (360 rounds each).

Equipment

Body: 300 bilge pumps; 3-ton crane; 40 fire extinguishers; two launch catapults; 3,000 cargo; very large radio transmitter and receiver; immense radio transmitter and receiver; very immense radio direction finder; 1,470 bunks; 18 cabins; two luxury cabins; 60 environmental controls; 48,000 man-day provisions; 26 halls; 40 hospital beds; eight surgeries; 24 workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 8-mile radar; air-search non-targeting 12-mile radar; 1,000 cargo; seven medium radio transmitters and receivers; three large radio transmitters and receivers.

Statistics

Size: 785’×140’×220’ **Payload:** 5,861 tons

Lwt: 66,051 tons

Volume: 918,710 **Maint.:** 1.2 hours

Price: \$28.6 million

HT: 7. HP 960K Body, 25K Super, 4,200 each HN Turret, 900 each LS Turret, 560 each SS Turret, 120 each LW Turret, 45 each OM.

wSpeed: 36 **wAccel:** 0.3 **wDecel:** 0.1

wMR: 0.02 **wSR:** 6

Draft: 30’. Flotation Rating: 84,710 tons.

Design Notes

Both *Musashi* and *Yamato* were originally intended to have a crew of 1,500. As built, the ships would have been luxurious by Japanese standards. Wartime conditions, however, saw the number of crew increase

so that living conditions became as poor as usual. Historical draft has been used.

Variants

The program to build superbattleships was cut short after Pearl Harbor and Midway, when it became clear that aircraft carriers were becoming the dominant vessels of naval combat. A third ship, *Shinano*, was completed as a vast carrier, the largest of the war. Operationally, *Shinano* was intended to act as a support ship. The luckless vessel was sunk as soon as it left Tokyo Bay by a roving American submarine.

A fourth ship, the unnamed “111,” was never completed. This vessel was intended to use 16 to 20 3.9-inch DP guns combined with more effective armor. Three other variations were planned, “797” (without 6.1-inch guns and more 3.9-inch DP guns), and “798” and “799” (intended to be outfitted with 20.1-inch guns).

SHIGURE

Shigure, the “luckiest ship of the war,” was originally designed to be a *Hatsuharu*-class destroyer. This class of ship was famous for being the first to wield the deadly Japanese “Long Lance” torpedoes. Japan had been attempting to overcome what they saw as the unequal agreements reached in the Washington Treaty and at the London Naval conferences by maximizing the potential of each ship. This would result in the IJN enjoying superiority for each class of ship, which would compensate for the fewer ships officially allowed the Japanese. Experimentation followed with mixed results. One of the first attempts was the *Tomozuru*, but this ship capsized in a typhoon in 1934.

The *Shiratsuyu* class was commissioned in 1936. *Shigure*, the second ship of this class built, utilized a quadruple-tube torpedo mount with reloads. The rear single turret was replaced with anti-aircraft guns in wartime conditions. The ship could cruise for 6,000 miles at 15 knots. Such designs helped gain Japan the premier position with regard to the manufacture of destroyers. These vessels also incorporated a quick reload system for the torpedoes, giving an offensive edge. On the other hand, lack of the best sonar and radar meant that the vessels rarely could conduct antisubmarine duties with the highest effectiveness.

Much of the career of *Shigure* was taken up with escort duty. The ship was active in the Guadalcanal campaign, leading troop-transport runs. In 1942, on a troop-transport mission to Kolombangara on August 6-7, *Shigure* was the only survivor of four Japanese ships in the Battle of Vella Gulf. Ten days later, *Shigure* again engaged American destroyers. In the Battle of Vella Lavella (October 6-7, 1942), *Shigure* played a part in damaging the destroyer *Selfridge* in a combined torpedo attack. The vessel suffered damage on June 8, 1944.

After rescuing survivors from *Harusame*, two shells struck home and several sailors were killed or wounded. *Shigure* also was present at the Battle of the Philippine Sea (June 19-20, 1944).

At Leyte, Commander Nishino steered the *Shigure* through Surigao Strait as part of Nishimura's Southern Force. The ship was detached from Desron 2 (under Kurita) to join with Desdiv 4 under Captain K. Takahashi for the Battle of Leyte Gulf. After escaping the strait, *Shigure* made it back to Brunei on October 27. The luck of this ship ran out on January 24, 1945. The submarine *USS Blackfin* torpedoed *Shigure* 160 miles east of Khota Bharu, Malaya. The ship sank in 10 minutes.

It costs around \$20,000 to maintain the *Shigure* in supplies, fuel, and ammunition.



Subassemblies: Heavy Destroyer chassis +9; water-proofed Large Conning superstructure [Body:T] +5; two waterproofed full-rotation Medium Secondary turrets 1-2 [Body:T] +4; two waterproofed full-rotation Small Secondary turrets 3-4 [Body:T] +4; 10 full-rotation Large Weapon open mounts 5-14 [Body:T] +1; four Small Weapon open mounts 15-18 [Body:T] +0.

Powertrain: Two 19,396-kW steam turbines with two 19,396-kW screw propellers; 559,500-gallon standard fuel tanks; 40,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: See above. **Cargo:** 300 Body, 100 Sup.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/180	4/60	4/60	4/60	4/60
Sup:	4/60	4/60	4/60	4/60	—
MS Turs:	4/90	4/60	4/60	4/60	—
SS Turs:	4/90	4/60	4/60	4/60	—
LW OMs:	4/60	—	—	—	—
SW OMs:	4/40	—	—	—	—

Weaponry

4×127mm Short DP Guns/Type 89 Shiki [Turs 3-4:F] (330 rounds each).

20×20mm Short Air ACs/Type 99-1 Shiki [OMs 5-14:F] (360 rounds each).

4×VLG HMGs/Type 93 Shiki [OMs 15-18:F] (600 AP rounds each).

5×610mm Torpedo Tubes (10 Type 93-1 Shiki torpedoes total) [Turs 1-2].

16×depth charges [Body:T facing B].

Equipment

Body: 15 bilge pumps; two 2-ton torpedo cranes; 10 tons of hardpoints (for depth charges); eight fire extinguishers; 300 cargo; very large radio transmitter and receiver; large radio direction finder; 170 bunks; five environmental controls; 7,200 man-day provisions; hall; four hospital beds; surgery; four workshops. **Super:** Autopilot; navigation instruments; sea-search non-targeting 5-mile radar; air-search non-targeting 8-mile radar; 100 cargo.

Statistics

Size: 360'×30'×110' **Payload:** 639 tons

Lwt: 2,372 tons

Volume: 55,910 **Maint.:** 4.5 hours **Price:** \$1.9 million

HT: 11. 150K Body, 1,500 Super, 750 each MS Tur, 560 each SS Tur, 120 each LW OM, 45 each SM OM.

wSpeed: 36 **wAccel:** 2.5 **wDecel:** 0.1
wMR: 0.02 **wSR:** 5

Draft: 12'. **Flotation Rating:** 5,148 tons.

4.

CAMPAIGNS

The following scenarios are intended to be played as one-offs, either as stand-alone adventures or to represent a part of the larger Battle of Leyte Gulf in an ongoing campaign. Given the huge distances involved and the short timeframe – not to mention that many actions were occurring simultaneously – it will be difficult to credibly roleplay a mini-campaign covering the events of October 23 to 25 completely, unless the PCs move about the region via airplane. What is more suitable and feasible would be for one of the scenarios detailed below to feature in a wider campaign centered on, for example, MacArthur’s return to the Philippines or life aboard one of the warships (perhaps an aircraft carrier). Or a Japanese naval campaign might feature the battle as its epic conclusion.

If you want to play a series of action-packed engagements in a mini-campaign, then the exploits of the pilots in 3rd Fleet (under Halsey) are ideal. Numerous missions were carried out against Formosa, Okinawa, and Luzon, leading up to the sinking of *Musashi* and the sorties made against the Northern Force. Kinkaid was operational everywhere MacArthur went.

On the Japanese side, the survivors from *Musashi* ended up in Manila, taking part in the battle for that city when American ground troops liberated the capital. Placing the PCs in that role would allow the GM to change the campaign’s nature dramatically without deviating from the historical. For a Japanese campaign with much better than average odds of survival, place the PCs among the crew of the *Shigure*, which led a charmed life throughout the war before and after the engagement in Surigao Strait.

Finally, the various naval actions around Leyte may provide a backdrop for a land-based, army campaign. Perhaps the characters are Filipinos that have fought a war of resistance against the Japanese. Now they are employed briefly as sea-rescue units, sailing out quickly to pick up downed pilots after one of the air engagements. American soldiers may have to undertake a daring mission to capture an airfield intact. A squad of Japanese elite soldiers may be charged with the assassination of MacArthur.

ROLEPLAYING THE BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF

GURPS WWII describes three basic approaches to running scenarios (see pp. W158-160). The Battle of Leyte Gulf offers ample opportunity for American sailors or soldiers to engage in a campaign of any of these types. Playing the Japanese side with a gritty or mildly heroic approach would also work, though a truly cinematic Japanese-based campaign would not maintain the historical feel of the engagement. That said, a Japanese campaign could take on a “Tragic Heroes” alternative to cinematic action, in which the PCs are true inheritors of the samurai spirit, capable of victory over great odds, but must face the certain (and, from their perspective, tragic) knowledge that the American forces are overwhelming and they are doomed. The resulting flavor would not be purely cinematic, but up until the very end the action could be.

Whatever your style of play, the Battle of Leyte Gulf concentrates a lot of action into a few days. The commanders in particular must have hardly slept during this time. The GM can make fatigue play a large role in the combatants’ ability to survive and overcome during the final day of fighting.

SCENARIOS

Each of the following scenarios builds upon the information presented in Chapter 1. Of course, GMs should feel free to alter them to taste.

ENEMY CLOSING

In this scenario, the characters are crew members of the *USS Dace* at the time of the first sighting of Kuri-ta’s Center Force.

Scene #1

It's early morning, just past midnight, on October 23. *Dace* has been at sea for over three weeks. The crew is impatient for an enemy contact, having sunk only an oiler and a transport. Orders are to patrol Palawan Passage in partnership with *Darter*.

A radar warning breaks the monotony while the two commanders are talking on the surface by megaphone. Immediately, the submarine dives. The vessel tracks the Japanese group through the night, though no attack is yet ordered. The PC sailors, if not officers themselves, are challenged at this point to find out as much information as possible from their shipmates about what is going on and what the captain may order. The men are excited and becoming more tense.

Scene #2

Commander Bladen D. Claggett is maneuvering for a torpedo attack in the early dawn half-light. He has led his vessel ahead of Kurita's Center Force to target the starboard column. He orders a final weapons check, but it fails. Tube 1 is malfunctioning! There are only a few moments to correct the problem. The PCs are ordered to lend whatever help they can. The other tubes are working fine.

Whether tube 1 is operational or not, three other "fish" zoom away on target. Immediately, *Dace* begins to turn. Everything is quiet for two minutes, then a sharp, powerful underwater explosion is heard. The next load of torpedoes from the rear tubes speeds away. Claggett's voice calls all hands to stations, warning the crew to be ready for depth-charge attacks. A sense of motion can be felt. *Dace* is moving to escape.

Scene #3

A fast ship can be heard overhead. The crew is wide-eyed and alert. Some men are praying quietly and a few are grinning broadly, hiding their fear in a different way. Moments seem to turn into hours, then the first depth charge detonates. It's close! Seconds later, another eruption rocks the submarine. One of the crew nearby can't bear it. (The GM might require the PCs to make Will rolls at this point, as well.) He screams out

in panic. Immediately, an NCO orders the PCs to shut him up, if they're ordinary sailors. The frightened sailor struggles but can be subdued. A third charge seems more distant. The ship has survived for the time being.

Scene #4

Dace is making good speed. Then a sharp change in course can be felt. All of the crew pause for a second, looking up, and expecting further evasive action. Claggett relaxes everyone, though, by announcing that *Darter* is experiencing some difficulties. *Dace* will give aid.

The space between the two submarines is quickly closed and *Dace* surfaces. After a few minutes, the PCs are summoned topside. They are ordered to bring lines (ropes) with them.

On the narrow deck, an unusual sight greets the rescue party. *Darter* is wedged on a coral reef and can't move. Rafts are hauled out to ferry a small team across. *Darter* has to be freed. The rescue party is commanded to sail across to the stranded submarine and investigate the problem, setting up a lifeline at the very least to allow for the evacuation of the *Darter*'s crew.

Historically, *Darter* wasn't res-

cued. If the PCs, though, are particularly ingenious or just plain lucky, the GM should consider mildly altering things by allowing them to free the grounded vessel. The task would be very challenging, however. Should the salvage operation be successful, then both submarines return to Fremantle, Australia, without incident. Otherwise, move on to Scene #5.

Scene #5

The attempts to pull *Darter* from the ragged reef have failed. The sailors are ordered to transport demolition charges to the stranded submarine, so it can be destroyed. The area must be vacated as daylight is breaking. Once a raft has been loaded up, the crossing can be made. At the mid-point of the trip, the sound of an aircraft engine is heard. Everyone stops and worried eyes turn upward. High above, a dark shape can be made out. It circles once, then begins to swoop down.



Commander Claggett hurriedly orders an emergency dive. The raft is stranded between the two vessels, exposed to attack. The hatches on *Dace* are closing and it already is beginning to get under way.

The Japanese pilot chooses the easier of the two large targets, *Darter*. Historically, his bombs missed, but the GM may wish to make a roll to make things potentially more exciting. The GM may also roll to see if the pilot spots and strafes the small boat bobbing on the waves.

Scene #6

After the excitement of the air attack, the explosives are finally placed on board *Darter*, the crew of which has already been evacuated and is aboard *Dace*. The sailors, their harrowing mission completed, return to safety. A detonation is distinctly heard, but *Darter* remains in one piece. Claggett orders the PCs, who happen to still be topside, to man the sub's 4-inch gun and put a few rounds into *Darter*. Just then a sonar "ping" is heard. Another submarine, surely an enemy one, is in the area. Claggett doesn't want to take any risks, and leaves to return home.

Historically, *Darter* wasn't sunk on this occasion, but the GM may reward especially good shooting. If *Darter* still survives, it will be sunk on October 31 by the *Nautilus*. For now, the submarine crammed with two full crews must move away so as not to be caught by a roving destroyer or more aircraft.

Scene #7

It's a long, uncomfortable trip back to Australia. Social situations can be gamed out, including card games or minor arguments. *Dace* makes it back to Fremantle and both crews are given shore leave following debriefing.

MEDIC!

In this scenario, the PCs are among the crew of the *USS Birmingham* at the time of the first Japanese air attacks against 3rd Fleet on October 24.

Scene #1

A stray bomb has hit the fleet carrier *Princeton*. Though the damage is severe, the captain believes that the ship is salvageable. Destroyers are already on the scene providing what help they can. Captain Thomas B. Inglis of the *Birmingham* hopes that, with the state-of-the-art equipment aboard his ship, he will be able to quickly bring the fires under control. Most of *Princeton*'s crew (which includes several hundred sailors) is on the flight deck's forward end. Some have already descended nets or jumped into the water to be rescued by destroyers.

As the *Birmingham* pulls alongside at 1055, Inglis calls for volunteers to board *Princeton* to help extinguish the flames. Fire hoses are available. Lieutenant Alan Reed commands the rescue party, which hopefully the PCs will feel inspired to join.

Scene #2

As soon as the firefighting team is onboard, a lieutenant requests a small detail to go below to the second deck. It is known that 12 men are trapped in the executive officer's office, on the port side forward. Reportedly, they already have suffered serious burns, and it is vital to reach them as soon as possible. The lieutenant (an NPC) will lead the mission. He informs his team that the fire is very fierce below.

The GM should hurry events along, here. Belowdecks, the air is thick with smoke, and respiratory equipment is highly advised. It is also generally dark, with thick, black smoke roiling through the rooms and corridors. Hot water covers the decking. When the party reaches the office that they seek, the hatch handle is hot enough to seriously burn an unprotected hand. The dozen survivors remain alive, but all of them are in poor shape and half can't move without assistance.

As the sailors struggle to get their charges back up to safety, the GM may decide to insert a (non-historical) additional wave of Japanese air raiders. As the rescuers hear the sirens go off, informing everyone to take cover, they must decide which is the greater threat: the fires raging around them or the bombs about to explode topside.

Scene #3

By early afternoon, most of the fires have been brought under control. The members of the team from *Birmingham* are all hungry and tired. Flames still rage in the rear of the hangar, however, and are approaching the torpedo stowage compartments. Captain W.H. Buracker is becoming very worried, and summons everyone available for another effort to prevent the dangerous fires from touching off the warheads. Time is of the essence here, and players should be forced into making snap decisions without planning or discussion.

Historically, the firefighters failed to overcome this last hurdle, but the GM may reward ingenious work and allow the carrier to be saved. If so, *Princeton* is tugged away and eventually makes it back to Pearl Harbor to be refitted. Otherwise, move on to Scene #4.

Scene #4

If the fires rage unchecked, then at 1523 the torpedo does explode. The sailors will not necessarily be aware of this danger, though Buracker knows of the threat. (Historically, he assumed that because earlier fires hadn't set them off, then the warheads *probably* were safe from this threat.) To give the sailors some chance of

survival, someone or something should give them an indication of the risk. Then, perhaps, someone trips and clangs their equipment against a torpedo's nose to add a little excitement to the escape.

The explosion's damage to the carrier is immense and anyone still close to the stowage areas will almost certainly be killed. The *Birmingham* is still alongside *Princeton*, and it is at this point that the *Princeton* crew, assembled on the deck, is shredded.

At this time, the sailor probably will decide that their best course is to jump back onto their own ship (presuming that they didn't jump into the sea to make their escape), then aid in treating the wounded. Boarding is not so easy, however, because the seas are rough. If still aboard the carrier, they must jump from one pitching deck to another. If afloat, the waters will slap them against the side of the ship's hull at times, then pull them away from it at other times.

Virtually everyone topside on *Birmingham* has a wound of some kind, and most of them are serious. The rescuers should concern themselves with offering what medical attention they can. Those with many medical skills may be called upon not only to roll for treatments, but to roll to determine which of several gravely injured sailors needs the most help the soonest.

Aftermath

At 1638, Buracker left the *Princeton*. His carrier was eventually torpedoed and sunk by *Reno*. *Birmingham* was able to make it back to the West Coast to be repaired and receive a new crew in time to participate in the naval operations around Okinawa.



ADRIFT

This scenario covers the actions of crew members on an escort carrier entangled in the engagement off Samar on October 25. The scenario was written with the *Gambier Bay* in mind, but is easily adaptable if you want to use a different ship.

Scene #1

The action starts as Japanese cruisers close in on their prey: the PC's ship! Shells of various caliber are falling all around the vessel; some pass through the structure without exploding, but some are hitting the water close by or on the water line. These hits are taking an increasingly heavy toll. The accuracy of Japanese gunfire is steadily improving, as the distance becomes shorter.

In this first scene, the seamen have perhaps only moments to gather whatever supplies they wish from the ship. Any actions taken are urgent and a sense that time is limited should be conveyed.

Scene #2

A shell hits very close by and explodes. Shrapnel flies through the air (possible causing injury) and everyone is knocked down to the ground, momentarily concussed and disoriented. When the smoke clears, the survivors learn just how lucky they were. Only a few feet away, they see the mangled bodies of other sailors. One of these men is still alive, though he is seriously wounded and clearly needs help. Once the characters are back on their feet, they have the opportunity to administer some basic first aid – but all the while more shells should whistle in, with the GM reminding them that the clock is ticking. After first aid is applied, the injured sailor will still need help to move to safety – but this will slow down the sailors' movement even more. The tension between self-preservation and helping a fallen comrade should be played for all it's worth.

Scene #3

The ship rocks as more rounds find their mark. A passing sailor, with a gashed head, calls out that the captain has ordered abandon ship. He doesn't stop to explain, but he's hastily pulling his life preserver over his head. The ship is listing heavily to port.

The drop from the deck down into the water from the starboard side is a long one. Fires are raging across the deck, and fire parties have seemingly given up on the task of controlling the flames. If the sailors take the time to look, they will find life rafts that can be cut loose and thrown down into the water first. Ropes can also be suspended to allow a climber a swift but controlled descent. Jumping is even quicker, but the GM should require a Swimming roll to avoid injury. If the wounded man from the previous scene is still with the group, special and time-consuming arrangements will have to be made to get him down into the water.



Scene #4

The best thing that a swimmer could do in the water was to find a life raft. If one wasn't thrown down before the descent, then there will be a few others passing by. Many will already be full to overflowing, however. The second thing to do is to swim away from the sinking ship as fast and far as possible before inflating one's life preserver (which will slow down the swimmer significantly). As a vessel goes under, it sucks down any debris and people on the surface. Any wounded will find swimming difficult. The GM should check also that heavy equipment (such as a helmet or revolver) is not being worn or carried. These things will drag a swimmer under. Also, the Japanese are still firing explosive shells at the ship, and most of them will fall into the nearby waters filled with escaping sailors.

Scene #5

Assuming that the survivors have put some distance between themselves and the ship, the sailors can have a moment to catch their breath. (Perhaps the GM and players, too. The first four scenes are best covered at a very fast pace.) Other swimmers and life rafts are bobbing on the waves, and the chances of making it back to dry land will be greatly increased if the various survivors band together and support one another.

To add some drama, if the PCs have managed to acquire a life raft, their search of it reveals that the kegs of water have either been lost or their spigots came loose as the boat hit the ocean. There is no food, either, but there is a basic first-aid kit. Unfortunately, the band-aids slide off easily when wet, as do tourniquets. It will be very hard to stop any bleeding for the injured. The raft does have a Very pistol and flares.

As the boats and rafts band together, all of them will acquire at least one wounded passenger. Many unharmed sailors will be left in the water, clinging to the ropes lining the sides of a life vessel.

Morale is high at this point, as talk turns to rescue. No one reasonably expects to be picked up until the main action has ended, but it can be seen that American planes are strafing the Japanese ships.

Scene #6

Once several rafts are joined together, the sailors can busy themselves rounding up stragglers still swimming from the ship. These are the final escapees, as at this time the vessel finally slips beneath the waves.

This is also the moment in the battle that Kurita orders his forces to regroup to the north. Miraculously, the Japanese ships begin turning about. One ship, a destroyer, is on a course to pass by the survivors. Some of the men warn that the Japanese are going to shoot as they pass by and several people look scared. The destroyer is close enough for individual figures to be easily discernible on deck. Equally curious eyes stare down at bodies in the rafts. The GM should play up the tension before announcing that the Japanese crew comes to attention, and fires no shots at the waterlogged refugees as the destroyer glides past.

The area quickly becomes quiet. Gunfire dies off completely, though in the distance American planes are still making runs against Kurita's retreating cruisers and destroyers. The injured begin to complain about the agony of having salt water in their wounds. Even if freshwater is available (from other rafts in the group, for instance), no one prudent will invest such a limited resource in rinsing wounds that will soon be splashed with sea spray again.

Afternoon comes and goes and the sun begins to set. There is no sign of any rescue party, though aircraft intermittently pass overhead.

Scene #7

During the night, everyone is cold. For many of the wounded, the temperature drop is too much and they succumb to exposure. Those in the water are becoming numb. This provides the group with a dilemma. The

dead (in the boats) are taking up space that could be more usefully used by other wounded men, or even someone uninjured but becoming tired and weary. And yet, if the dead are disposed of at sea, their torn bodies will attract the attention of sharks. Historically, this is what happened to those that made it off the various ships sunk from Taffy 3.

If the dead are not jettisoned, then one by one men will fall asleep or become delirious and drop off. Some can be swum after and saved, but others will never be seen again.

Scene #8

Day breaks, and with it comes the sun. Unprotected, the sailors are quickly sunburned. Thirst is now also a major concern. Anyone who drinks salt water will suffer acute hallucinations, to the extent that they may believe they can swim for shore. Some will attempt this, though they may be prevented. Any wounded that made it through the night are in a far worse position now; they still don't have any water and are further dehydrated by the sun. More die. If everyone dead or too weak to stay afloat is piled into the rafts with the injured, they will begin to founder. Again, though, simply leaving the dead will lure in a far more immediate hazard than sunburn and thirst . . .

If sharks do attack the survivors, the first hint might be when something ominously big brushes up

against one of the floating sailors. Once one of them bites someone still conscious, panic may streak throughout the remaining men. The sharks can be beaten back by oars, but there is considerable risk of being bitten while doing so.

The day passes with still no sign of help.

Scene #9

As night sets, the drone of a plane is heard. There is some discussion about whether it would be American or Japanese, but with little left to lose it is decided to fire the Very pistol. Soon after the flare goes up, the plane heads away.

An hour passes before a dim light can be seen far away. Another flare is fired, with the argument again being that life as a prisoner-of-war would be preferable to spending an indefinite period treading water in the ocean. The light comes closer until a voice calls out, "Anyone there?" A PT boat slowly glides over and begins to pull men out of the water. On board, food and water is available. The survivors are put ashore at San Pedro Bay.

From here, those who made it through the Battle of Samar will most likely sail to Australia first and then back to America. They will be assigned to a new ship and begin retraining, most likely for an action involving the Japanese homeland.



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