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THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF
PHILIPPINE ISLANDS
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THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph shall deal with the events leading up to, and the action that took place in, the Naval battle occurring off the Philippine Islands during the period 23-26 October 1944, and since designated "The Battle for Leyte Gulf" - the last and most decisive fleet action fought in the Pacific.

To more fully understand the action, the reasons for it, and some of its implications, it will be necessary to reconstruct events in the Western Pacific as they occurred in the late summer of 1944.

On 15 September 1944, the Central Pacific forces of Admiral Nimitz invaded Peliliu Island in the Palau Group. On the same day, General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Forces invaded Morotai Island, northwest of New Guinea. (1)

These two islands were to be the final jump-off points for launching a series of invasions that had as their final objective the reconquest of the Philippines.

Peliliu and Morotai were well suited for the purpose, Peliliu being only some 500 miles east of Mindanao, largest southern island of the Philippine group. Morotai was even closer, only some 300 miles to the south of Mindanao.

Before the actual invasion of the Philippines, it was planned to make three more invasions to secure firm advanced bases for use against the Japanese. As a continuation of the Central Pacific campaign, Yap Island was to be invaded 26 September 1944, followed by landings on Talaud and Sangihe Islands, northwest of Morotai, on 15 October 1944, by the Southwest Pacific Forces.

The schedule then called for landings on Mindanao on 15 November 1944 as the first step in the actual reconquest of the Philippines, followed by amphibious operations against Leyte on 20 December 1944.

(1) B-2, P.7.

Although such a plan was a duplication of some of the short island hops of the Solomon Islands and New Guinea campaigns earlier in the war, it was felt such steps were necessary. For one thing, it was known that there were some 70 Japanese airfields and airstrips operational throughout the Philippines, capable of easy and quick reinforcement from Formosa and the Empire. In addition, the winding straits and passages between various islands of the Philippine group were presumably mined and covered by enemy land-based air power; thus being denied to our forces. Large American bases were deemed necessary for support before the enemy airfields could be neutralized and a path swept through the straits and passages.

To begin with, as a means of diverting Japanese attention from the projected Morotai-Peliliu invasions, a unit of Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet began a series of air strikes against the Japanese in the Volcano and Bonin Islands on 31 August 1944. The other three units of the Third Fleet began air operations against the main islands of the Philippine group that were to last until 15 September 1944 - the day of the Morotai-Peliliu landings.

The air strikes against the Philippines revealed such a scarcity of enemy power that Admiral Halsey realized the reports of Japanese strength in the Islands had been exaggerated. Consequently, on 13 September he recommended to Admiral Nimitz that the projected invasions of Yap, Taland-Sangihe and Mindanao be abandoned and that plans be drawn up to invade Leyte as soon as practicable.

Admiral Nimitz concurred, and after General MacArthur stated he could shift his plans to invade Leyte on 20 October instead of 20 December, as originally planned, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 15 September, gave their full approval for the change in plans. (2)

To further help speed up the operation, Admiral Nimitz ordered the Third Amphibious Force, already at sea, combat-loaded for the invasion of Yap, diverted to the Southwest Pacific Forces and placed under General MacArthur's command. (3)

(2) B-3, P. 227.

(3) B-1, P. 308.

Leyte Island

Although at first glance Leyte Island would not seem to be the best location for the initial landings in the Philippines, it had several advantages as far as amphibious operations were concerned: (See Chart I)

First, the beaches were broad and offered good amphibious landing areas. (4)

Secondly, the approaches into Leyte Gulf from the Pacific Ocean were known to be lightly defended.

Thirdly, Leyte Gulf itself was about 40 miles square, and free of offshore reefs, thus offering a good anchorage for the invasion fleet. (5)

Fourthly, command of Leyte offered good access to the remainder of the Central Philippines in that it commanded both approaches to Surigao Strait.

And finally, the occupation of Leyte would by-pass and isolate Japanese forces to the south, mainly on Mindanao.

The Seventh Fleet

The Organization Charts show the composition of the United States Seventh Fleet during the action described in this monograph. It is suggested that this chart be left open for ready reference during the reading of the monograph to aid in identifying the different fleet units, commanders, and types of vessels mentioned in the discussion below and subsequently in the Narration.

To transport his Army forces to the landing area, provide naval gunfire and carrier aircraft support, and protect the landing area, General MacArthur had under his command the Seventh United States Fleet, composed primarily of Task Force 77, and commanded by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid. (6)

This fleet was broken down into four Task Groups: a Flagship Group, a Bombardment and Fire Support Group, a Close Covering Group, and an Escort Carrier Group. The Task Groups within the fleet were further broken down organizationally. The Bombardment and Fire Support Group consisted of two Task Units: Fire Support Unit North, and Fire Support Unit South. The

(4) B-3, P. 601.

(5) B-1, P. 311.

(6) B-1, P. 311.

Escort Carrier Group was split into three smaller Carrier Groups: the Northern, Central, and Southern Escort Carrier Group.

Since the miscellaneous vessels comprising the Seventh Fleet Train were not physically involved in the naval actions that followed the Leyte landings, they are not shown in detail on the Organization Charts, but are only listed as to the approximate total number, by type of ship, to give an indication of the size of the Fleet.

Aside from the very complicated plans for the invasion, only tentative plans were prepared by Admiral Kinkaid should the Japanese attack his Fleet with Naval Forces. Rear Admiral Oldendorf's Bombardment and Fire Support Group, with possible attachments of cruisers and destroyers from the Close Covering Groups, was to be stationed between the enemy and our amphibious forces with the mission of destroying the enemy. If possible, assistance in the form of air strikes was to be rendered by Rear Admiral T. L. Sprague's planes from the Escort Carrier Groups. (7)

This plan was based on the assumption that any enemy fleet units approaching from north of the Philippines would be intercepted and destroyed by Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet. It was further assumed that any attempt by the Japanese to oppose the landings would come through San Bernadino Strait from the Sulu Sea and the Celebes Sea. (See Chart I)

Since the Seventh Fleet mission was mainly one of support of troops ashore, the allotment of armor-piercing projectiles necessary to fight opposing fleet units was cut to between 20% and 30% of that normally carried in combat vessels. The same thing was also true of the ammunition supplied the aircraft of the Escort Carrier Groups. Under these conditions, Admiral Kinkaid could not, nor was he expected to, fight a sustained surface action against Japanese capital ships. (8)

That job was up to Admiral Halsey and his Third Fleet.

(7) B-2, P.27.

(8) B-2, P.95.

The Third Fleet

The Organization Chart indicates the composition of the United States Third Fleet during the action described in this monograph. Again it is suggested that the Chart be left open during the reading of the monograph for ease in identification.

The Leyte operation was to be given general support by the Third Fleet, composed of Task Force 38, a part of Admiral Nimitz's Central Pacific Forces. The commander of the Third Fleet was Admiral William F. Halsey, with Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher operating under his orders as Commander, Task Force 38.

The general mission of the Third Fleet with regard to the Leyte operation was to cover and support the Seventh Fleet and Southwest Pacific Forces, destroy enemy naval or air forces that threatened the Philippine Islands area, and protect sea and air communication along the Central Pacific supply routes. In addition, "In case opportunity for destruction of a major portion of the enemy fleet offers or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task". (9)

The Third Fleet was the largest striking force of the Navy, and as such had more fire-power than had ever been assembled under one commander prior to this time. It could engage and conquer any fleet the Japanese were then capable of putting to sea.

It would be well to note at this time that there was not a joint commander to coordinate the efforts and movements of the Seventh and Third Fleets. Admiral Halsey reported to Admiral Nimitz, while Admiral Kinkaid took his orders from General MacArthur. Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur in turn reported, of course, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This, then, was the only common command facility linking the two fleets. Coordination was left up to personal contact between the two fleet commanders, but communication was sometimes so bad that messages often took two or more hours to relay from fleet commander to fleet commander.

General Situation with Regard to the Japanese

Prior to the landings on Peililiu and Morotai the Japanese had prepared a plan of counter-attack for use when the Americans invaded the Philippines. In general, it consisted of an attack by the heaviest and strongest units of what was left of the Japanese Fleet against the landing forces. A diversionary attack was to be made in an attempt to draw off any heavy surface fighting units of the U. S. Fleet that might be supporting the invasion effort, in the hope that the attack by a main unit would be able to surprise and destroy the American landing force.

In October 1944, Admiral Toyoda, Japanese Naval commander, had at his disposal the Fleet shown in the Organization Chart. Those ships designated as the Northern Force of Vice Admiral Ozawa, and the Second Diversion Attack Force of Vice Admiral Shima, were located near the home islands of Japan. The ships of the First Diversion Attack Force under Admiral Kurita, were based at Lingga, near Singapore.

As a matter of interest, it should be explained that the battleships Yamato and Misashi, with Admiral Kurita at Lingga, were the most powerful battleships in the world. In fact, their existence was known to only a few outside Japan, so secret had been their construction. Mounting 18-inch guns, these ships had never been committed to combat by the Japanese. If no ships other than these two could force their way through to a landing area, the damage they could do to the transports and cargo vessels would be tremendous. (10)

To try to save the Philippines the Japanese were prepared to sacrifice their entire remaining fleet. As Admiral Toyoda summed the situation up after the war: "Should we lose in the Philippines, even though the Fleet should be left, the shipping lane to the south would be completely severed, so that the Fleet, if it should come back to Japanese waters, could not

obtain its fuel supply. (Oil from Java and the East Indies.) If it should remain in southern waters, it could not receive supplies of ammunition and arms (from Japan). There would be no sense in saving the Fleet at the expense of the Philippines." (11)

Although it would appear the Japanese could not hope to overcome the massed power of the Seventh and Third Fleets, they had a number of advantages in their favor: They could use land-based air power; geography was on their side (behind a screen of islands extending from the Empire to Singapore they could maneuver, concentrate, and service their fleet); the distance and question of divided command between Admiral Halsey and Admiral Kinkaid was in their favor. These facts the Japanese were aware of, and could use to advantage. (12)

More advantages were gained after the landing, but these the Japanese could not foresee: The critical shortage of supplies that developed as a result of the ships being used which had been combat-loaded for the Yap landings. Since the Yap landings had been expected to be relatively simple, the ships had not been loaded to supply an operation the size of Leyte, and there had not been time to re-arrange their cargo between the time of diversion and the date set for invasion. (13)

Further, the rains were so heavy during the first few days ashore at Leyte that American forces were not able to adhere to their schedule for the completion of air fields and air strips for land-based aircraft.

Once American activity in the Leyte area was reported, and Leyte established as the target, the Japanese completed their final plan for the defense of the Philippines and set it in action. (14)

Admiral Ozawa was to sortie with his carriers from Japan and act as a decoy to draw Admiral Halsey and the Third Fleet away from the Philippines.

Admiral Kurita was to sortie from Lingga and attack the land-forces in the Leyte Gulf area.

(11) B-2, P. 21.

(12) B-2, P. 27.

(13) B-2, P. 40.

(14) B-1, P. 333.

Admiral Shima was to sortie from Japan and also attack the landing forces in the Leyte Gulf area.

Note well the mission of Admiral Ozawa and his Northern Force as a decoy. Although it was built around aircraft carriers, this Force was definitely nothing more than a decoy, and all ships were to be sacrificed if necessary, to lure Admiral Halsey away from Leyte.

The possible sacrifice of four major aircraft carriers on the part of the Japanese was a desperate measure, to say the least; for it must be remembered that at this period of the fighting in the Pacific the aircraft carrier was considered the supreme weapon of the war. As one author states: "It would have seemed improbable to the point of absurdity in October 1944, that a modern naval power would stake the existence of its fleet on (surface) gunnery and throw away its last carriers as an expendable diversion force." (15) Even though the Japanese had only a little over a hundred aircraft, they could distribute to the four carriers, they felt sure these carriers alone would be enough to draw Admiral Halsey toward them, once their presence in the area was reported to him. (16)

NARRATION

Amphibious Operations Against Leyte

Seventh Fleet units began sailing to participate in the Leyte invasion on 11 October 1944. The minesweepers were the first to leave the base at Hollandia Bay, New Guinea, and after a rendezvous at sea several days later with other groups, the combined fleet made for Leyte Gulf. (17)

To the north, the Third Fleet began, also on 11 October, a series of air strikes against Okinawa, Formosa, and Luzon, that were to last until 16 October. They were for the purpose of obtaining the latest information regarding the Japanese and to destroy as much air and surface strength as possible so as to lessen interference with the Leyte landings. The Third Fleet was then to sail south and stand by off the Philippines. (18)

(15) B-2, P. 132.

(16) B-2, P. 129.

(17) B-1, P. 313.

(18) B-2, P. 17.

Results were impressive to say the least. The Japanese lost 807 aircraft, 26 ships, and their aviation facilities in the Formosa area were seriously reduced. The Third Fleet lost 76 planes in combat, 13 in operational losses, and the cruisers HMAS, CANBERRA, and USS HOUSTON were seriously damaged.

Meanwhile, the Seventh Fleet arrived off Leyte Gulf on the evening of 16 October 1944, almost in the center of a typhoon that was then raging in the area. (17)

In spite of the rough seas, landings were made by detachments of Rangers at 0800, 17 October, on the islands of Suluan, Homonohon, and Dinagat. (19) With these islands in the mouth of Leyte Gulf secured, the approaches to the landing area from the Pacific were open to the ships.

While the Rangers were making their landing, the minesweepers entered Leyte Gulf and began their sweeping operations. Before sunset the next day, the sweepers reported the Gulf clear of mines, although one minesweeper was lost to the rough sea, and the fire-support and demolition ships entered Leyte Gulf and took up their positions. (17)

At nightfall, 19 October, the invasion fleet moved into Leyte Gulf. During the night the transports and other vessels deployed to their exact positions off the landing areas by the use of their radar. (20)

The combined naval bombardment and air strikes from the Escort Carrier Groups started at dawn on 20 October 1944. This phase was continued until 0945, when rocket-bearing LCI's moved in closer to shore to deliver rocket and mortar barrages on the landing areas.

At exactly 1000, 20 October 1944, Lt General Walter Krueger's Sixth Army landed on Leyte. The Tenth Corps was put ashore in the Tacloban area at the north of Leyte, while the Twenty-fourth Corps went ashore further south, between Dulag and San Jose. (21)

(17) B-1, P. 313.

(19) B-6, P. 283.

(20) B-1, P. 315.

(21) B-2, P. 31.

Resistance to the initial assault was relatively light, with no enemy air attacks developing until the morning of 21 October. During the next ten days of the amphibious portion of the operation, and exclusive of the naval battles, three ships were sunk and several damaged.

All in all, the amphibious phase of the operations went off very smoothly. Admiral Kinkaid later stated that: "The amphibious part of this operation lost the headlines in the papers because of the big battles that followed, but it was the best planned and best executed amphibious operation I saw during the whole war. No naval commander could ask for a better plan." (22)

The Battle of the Sibuyan Sea

When word was received of the Ranger landings in the mouth of Leyte Gulf on 17 October, the Japanese ^{Naval} plan for the defense of the Philippines was put into action.

On 18 October 1944, Admiral Kurita, with his First Diversion Attack Force, set sail from the Japanese Naval Base at Lingga at 0100, bound for Brunei, Borneo. The fleet arrived at Brunei about noon on 20 October. (23)

By this time the American landings on Leyte had begun, so Admiral Kurita decided to split his force into two components to continue the attack; the Central Force with himself in command, and the Southern Force with Admiral Nishimura in command.

The Central Force sailed from Brunei at 0800, 22 October, bound eventually for Leyte Gulf by way of the west side of Palawan Island, the Sibuyan Sea, San Bernadino Strait, and then south along the east side of Samar into the Gulf. The Southern Force left Brunei at 1500 on the same day, and after sailing through the Sulu Sea and Surigao Strait, was to join up with Admiral Kurita in Leyte Gulf on 25 October. (See Chart I) (24)

Neither Admiral Halsey or Admiral Kinkaid had any definite knowledge regarding the Japanese, although some fleet activity was indicated to them by the reports of the sighting of oilers and other auxiliaries in the area between North Borneo and Mindoro.

(22) B-1, P. 321.

(23) B-6, P. 297.

(24) B-6, P. 318.

First indication that the Japanese fleets were on the move was a contact made by two American submarines, USS DARTER and DACE, at 0016, 23 October, in their patrol area west of Palawan Island. (25) The initial contact was made by the submarines' radar, and during the rest of the night they tracked their contact by this means, sending off three reports of the presence of the ships in the meantime. (26) This contact of course was the Central Force.

Admiral Kurita, from his flagship ATAGO, a heavy cruiser, had his force disposed in two groups. Each group was composed of two columns of heavy ships, cruisers leading, with fifteen destroyers forming a protective screen around the whole fleet.

At 0530, 23 October, the USS DARTER attacked the lead cruiser on the left flank of the port column, and registered four torpedo hits on the ATAGO. (26) The ATAGO sank while Admiral Kurita was transferring his flag to destroyer KISHINAMI. At the same time the DARTER fired two more torpedoes at the heavy cruiser TAKAO, registering two hits, which, although serious enough to cause the TAKAO to become inoperational, did not sink her. (27)

Because the attack had come from the west, the Force changed course to the east, right into the range of the waiting submarine USS DACE, which had taken position on the right flank of the Force. The DACE attacked and registered four torpedo hits on the heavy cruiser MAYA, which were so serious the MAYA sank in four minutes. (26)

Within less than half an hour these two submarines had sunk two heavy cruisers and damaged a third. Because of its damage, the TAKAO was ordered back to Brunei with the destroyers NAGANAMI and ASASHIMO as escorts. Admiral Kurita's Central Force had been cut by five ships already.

The next contact with the Central Force was made after sunset on 23 October by the submarine ANGLER off the northern end of Palawan. ANGLER tracked Admiral Kurita on a northeast course toward Mindoro Strait, but was not able to make an attack. (28)

- (25) B-2, P. 33.
- (26) B-1, P. 338, 339.
- (27) B-6, P. 298.
- (28) B-2, P. 39.

Shortly after midnight on 24 October, another submarine, the GUITARRO, made contact and followed the Force after it had turned southeast. (See Chart I)

On the basis of the 23 October contact with the Central Force by DARTER and DACE, Admiral Halsey ordered his three remaining Task Groups to move closer to the Philippines and be prepared to launch air strikes to cover the western approaches to the Islands. (29)

The fourth Task Group, TG 38.1, under Vice Admiral McCain, had been detached earlier and at the time was bound for Ulithi to give his crews a much needed rest. (30)

The three Task Groups refueled at sea some 280 miles off Samar the morning of 23 October and then began moving toward their launching positions.

By morning of 24 October the Groups were in position and began to launch their search planes. (See Chart I) (31)

Task Group 38.3, commanded by Rear Admiral Sherman, was about sixty miles east of Polillo Island, off the east central coast of Luzon. Its search planes were to cover the western approach to Luzon from Lingayen Gulf in the north to Mindoro Strait in the south.

Rear Admiral Bogan, with Task Group 38.2, was 140 miles southeast of Admiral Sherman, about fifty miles off the eastern end of San Bernadino Strait. His search sector extended from Manila Bay in the north to the Sulu Sea in the south. Admiral Halsey's flagship, the battleship NEW JERSEY, was a part of this Task Group.

The third Task Group, TG 38.4, was about 160 miles southeast of Admiral Bogan's Group, and some sixty miles east of the southern tip of Samar. Rear Admiral Davison, commander of this Task Group, had a search sector extending into the Sulu Sea west of Panay and Negros Islands.

The search sectors of the planes were so arranged that they consisted of a series of overlapping arcs with radii of more than 300 miles extending toward the west from the Task Groups.

(29) B-4, P. 211.

(30) B-2, P. 44.

(31) B-2, P. 47.

The search planes were launched as teams of bombers and fighters from each carrier shortly after 0600 on 24 October. Once in the air, fighter planes were stationed at intervals of 100 and 200 miles west of the launching positions to be used as relay points for radio messages between the search planes farther to the west and the carriers.

Contact with the Japanese was reported to Admiral Halsey at 0820, 24 October, when a search plane from Admiral Bogan's Task Group located the Central Force near Mindoro Island. (32) Although this first contact was indefinite as to the number of ships and their type, it was sufficient to make Admiral Halsey realize the Central Force was a major threat to the security of the landing forces in Leyte Gulf. (See Chart I)

Therefore, at 0827, he ordered Admiral Sherman's Task Group to the north and Admiral Davison's Task Group to the south to close on the Task Group off San Bernadino Strait at their fastest possible speed.

By 0845 all Task Groups had been ordered to launch air strikes against the Central Force as soon as they were in range, and Admiral McCain had been ordered to reverse course from Ulithi and return to Leyte with all possible speed.

Just as Admiral Halsey was receiving reports of the contact with the Central Force, planes from Admiral Davison's Task Group located the Southern Force of Admiral Nishimura in the Sulu Sea south of Negros Island, steaming east on a direct course for Surigao Strait. The fighters and bombers of the search teams made bombing, strafing, and rocket attacks on the Southern Force, and although hits were made on the battleship FUSO and the destroyer SELLURE, the speed of this fleet was not affected. (See Chart 1)(33)

Although the order to move to San Bernadino Strait would take Admiral Davison's Task Group out of range of the Southern Force and force him to break off his air attacks, it was deemed advisable to throw as much air strength as possible against the more powerful Central Force. This left the problem of stopping the Southern Force squarely up to Admiral Kinkaid with the Seventh Fleet.

(32) B-4, P. 211.

(33) B-2, P. 51.

While the first attacks were in progress against the then-known Japanese forces, Admiral Sherman's Task Group off Polillo Island was taken under attack by Japanese aircraft. Shortly after the contact with the Central Force was reported, Admiral Sherman's carriers were preparing to launch strikes against it when the radar picked up three large raids moving in on the Group from Luzon. First estimates placed the number of enemy planes at about eighty, and it became necessary to use the fighters that had been scheduled to protect the bombers on the strike against the Central Force as protection for the carriers. This was necessary since the fighters normally used for this work were still out on searches.

The fighters so broke up the Japanese attack that no organized group of planes was able to reach the carriers, but at 0938 a lone plane dived out of a low cloud and dropped a 550-pound bomb on the flight deck of the light carrier USS PRINCETON. (34) The bomb penetrated the flight deck and exploded below -- setting off fires in the gasoline tanks of planes hastily stored in the hangar when the raid started. The resulting fires and explosions were particularly severe -- one of the elevators was even blown high in the air and landed upside down back on the flight deck. The cruisers BIRMINGHAM and RENO, together with some destroyers were left to aid the PRINCETON when Admiral Sherman went south to join Admiral Halsey. (35)

The fires were nearly under control on the PRINCETON by late afternoon when, without any warning, the whole after end exploded, killing over 200 crew members on the decks of the BIRMINGHAM, then alongside, aiding in fighting the fires. The carrier by this time was so badly burned and torn apart she was abandoned and sunk by two torpedoes from the RENO.

During this period - early morning to afternoon - Admiral Sherman's Group was under intermittent Japanese air attacks. When one group of enemy aircraft was spotted coming in from the north and northeast, searches were ordered launched in that direction to see if their carriers could be located, since up to that time no aircraft carriers had been reported in any of the Japanese forces. (36)

(34) B-2, P. 57.

(35) B-1, P. 371, 373.

(36) B-1, P. 377.

Meanwhile, off San Bernadino Strait, the INTREPID, CABOT, and INDEPENDENCE, at 0845, launched their first organized air strike against the Central Force. Between them, a flight of 59 planes was put in the air. (37) At 1020 this flight sighted the Central Force east of Mindoro Island moving on a northeast course through Tablas Strait in the direction of the Sibuyan Sea. By now the Central Force was in a cruising formation of two columns of battleships and cruisers with a screen of destroyers. (38)

The air group took positions that would enable them to make a coordinated attack on the Force from all directions. Although the planes were met with intense anti-aircraft fire from the ships, they managed to make torpedo hits on the battleship MUSASHI and the cruiser MYOKO. The hits on the MUSASHI did not seem to do any appreciable damage, but the MYOKO was so seriously damaged that Admiral Kurita ordered her to retire alone to Brunei. (39)

A second strike of 35 planes made another attack at 1245, this time locating the fleet some thirty miles farther east than the position of the first attack. Between attacks the Central Force had made an average speed of 18 knots, had negotiated Tablas Strait, and was entering the Sibuyan Sea south-east of Marinduque Island. When the planes attacked from the north flank of the formation, the Japanese started radical evasion maneuvers and threw up another heavy anti-aircraft barrage. Three more torpedo hits were made on MUSASHI in addition to many near misses. This slowed the ship down and when the planes left, MUSASHI was just circling in the water. (38, 39)

The Central Force was hit again at 1330 by planes from Admiral Sherman's Task Group, and later in the afternoon by planes from Admiral Davison's Task Group steaming up from the south.

By 1600 on the afternoon of 24 October, five waves of aircraft had attacked the Central Force, damaging it as follows: cruiser MYOKO out of action and retiring to Brunei; battle ship MUSASHI badly damaged, retiring to Bako escorted by the badly damaged destroyer KIYOSHIMO; battleships YAMATO, NAGATO, HARUNA, and KONGO all with bomb damage, although their fighting power was unimpaired; destroyer YAHAGI seriously damaged by near misses. (40)

(38) B-2, P. 60.

(39) B-1, P. 373.

(40) B-1, P. 375.

Because of the complete lack of air support of any type from Japanese shore-based aircraft, a belief that Admiral Ozawa had failed to decoy the Third Fleet away from the Philippines, and the possibility of even stronger air attacks in the narrow waters east of the Sibuyan Sea, Admiral Kurita, at 1600, ordered the Central Force to come about and head west.

At 1800, planes from Admiral Bogan's Task Group made the last air attack of the day and again hit the MEISASHI with torpedoes, causing the ship to finally capsize and sink. The planes also reported the fact that the Central Force had come about and headed west, thereby creating the impression it had given up trying to force San Bernadino Strait. (40)

An hour after the last attack, Admiral Kurita received a dispatch from Admiral Toyoda ordering the whole Japanese Fleet to continue the attacks as originally planned. Accordingly, Admiral Kurita again reversed course and headed east once more. (41)

It was during this phase of the Battle for Leyte Gulf that an event occurred which had a great effect on future actions, and should be explained to clarify these future actions.

To go back to the morning of 24 October, it will be remembered that it was deduced from the contact reports that the Japanese were making a major effort against the invasion forces in Leyte Gulf. However, none of these contact reports had mentioned the presence of any Japanese aircraft carriers; all reported units were surface units. Admiral Halsey's staff were certain that an operation on the scale of the one the Japanese were attempting would be incomplete without the presence of the aircraft carriers. (42)

When Admiral Halsey learned that Admiral Sherman had been attacked by carrier aircraft coming from the north and northeast, he ordered searches made in that direction in an attempt to locate the carriers. (43)

Later in the day Admiral Halsey became fearful that the heavy ships of the Central Force might attempt to break through San Bernadino Strait in spite of the terrific air attacks to which they were being subjected. So, at 1512, he sent a preparatory dispatch to the Task Groups of Task Force 38,

(40) B-1, P. 375.

(42) B-1, P. 377.

(41) B-2, P. 87.

(43) B-1, P. 369.

ordering that four fast battleships, two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and fourteen destroyers "WILL BE FORMED AS TF 34 UNDER VADM LEE (Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee), COMMANDER BATTLE LINE X TF 34 WILL ENGAGE DECISIVELY AT LONG RANGE X". (44) In addition, the Task Group commanders were informed by radio by Admiral Halsey: "If the enemy sorties (through San Bernadino Strait) Task Force 34 will be formed when directed by me." (45)

At 1640 the Japanese Northern Force was sighted about 200 miles from Cape Engano, the northern tip of Luzon, by one of the search planes. This sighting indicated that a coordinated plan was in action by the Japanese. The deliberate speed of the Japanese indicated there was a focus point for the three fleets with 25 October set as the earliest date at which they could begin concerted action.

When the Northern Force was sighted, Admiral Halsey was left with three courses of action: (46)

1. He could guard San Bernadino Strait with the whole fleet and wait for the Northern Force to strike.
2. He could form Task Force 34, leave it to guard San Bernadino Strait, and strike the Northern Force with carriers.
3. He could leave San Bernadino Strait unguarded and strike with the entire Third Fleet at the Northern Force.

The first plan was rejected because it left the initiative up to the Japanese. The second plan was rejected because it split the fleet.

The third plan of action was adopted because it kept the Third Fleet intact, and offered the best possibility for destruction of the Northern Force by surprising it. In addition, of course, latest reports of the Central Force reported that it was heavily damaged and retreating. Thus, it now seemed that the Northern Force was the greatest threat to the forces in Leyte Gulf.

And although not mentioned in any official reports, it must be considered what a lure an aircraft carrier must have held for a man of Admiral Halsey's temperament.

(44) B-4, P.214.

(45) B-4, P.214.

(46) B-4, P.216.

Therefore, he ordered Admiral McCain with Task Group 38.1 to close the Third Fleet at best possible speed, and Admirals Bogan and Davison to turn their Task Groups north toward the Northern Force and join up with Admiral Sherman on their way to attack.

At 1950 Admiral Halsey sent the following dispatch to Admiral Kinkaid: "CENTRAL FORCE HEAVILY DAMAGED ACCORDING TO STRIKE REPORTS I AM PROCEEDING NORTH WITH THREE GROUPS TO ATTACK CARRIER FORCE." (46)

The decoy had worked as the Japanese had planned. The heavy units of the Third Fleet were being lured away from Leyte Gulf by a carrier force that at that time had only some 29 aircraft aboard four carriers. (47)

This was when the situation really got confused. What Admiral Halsey did not know was that Admiral Kinkaid had intercepted his earlier preparatory dispatch regarding the forming of Task Force 34. When Admiral Kinkaid received the second dispatch he had assumed the three groups mentioned were the carrier groups and that Task Force 34 had been formed and was guarding San Bernadino Strait. Naturally, in Leyte Gulf, Admiral Kinkaid had not been able to receive the radio message from Admiral Halsey that Task Force 34 would be formed when he ordered. Actually, the fourth group of Task Force 38 was Admiral McCain's group returning from Ulithi, but Admiral Kinkaid did not know this. By that time he was also deep in his preparations for the battle to be fought in Surigao Strait, and was not able to request a confirmation as to the exact location of Task Force 34 until after this battle.

To add to the confusion, during the evening of 24 October a search plane discovered the Central force had come about and was again heading for San Bernadino Strait. (48) Somehow this information never reached Admiral Kinkaid, and in spite of knowing the Central Force had come about, the Third Fleet still continued north away from the Strait, thinking Admiral Kinkaid had been informed, and was taking care of his security in that direction.

(46) See footnote P.19.

(47) B-1, P. 381-3.

(48) B-2, P. 87.

The Battle of Surigao Strait

When Admiral Halsey withdrew the support of Admiral Davison's Task Group to the north to assist in the attacks on the Central Force on the morning of 24 October, Admiral Kinkaid was faced with the necessity of engaging and defeating the Southern Force with the old battleships and other vessels of his Seventh Fleet. (49)

From contact reports received during daylight hours on 24 October, it was apparent the Japanese would try to force Surigao Strait during the night of 24-25 October. The Seventh Fleet was therefore ordered to prepare for a night battle in Surigao Strait. (50) (See Chart I)

This Strait, in which an almost classic textbook battle was to be fought, was the body of water separating Leyte from the island of Dinagat. The Strait is about thirty miles long, twelve miles wide at its southern entrance, widening to 25 miles at the northern end where it enters Leyte Gulf.

Rear Admiral Oldendorf, commander of the Bombardment and Fire Support Group, was placed in command of the combat components of the Seventh Fleet, and, as such, he evolved the following plan: Basically he intended to plug Surigao Strait at its northern end where it entered Leyte Gulf. To plug the Strait, the battle line, consisting of battleships and cruisers, was to steam back and forth across the northern end of the Strait at a speed of five knots. Both sides of the battle line were to be flanked to the south with a screen of destroyers. (51) (See Chart I)

The approaches to the southern entrance to the Strait were to be patrolled by a screen of 39 PT boats. Nine boats were to patrol the Mindanao Sea as far out as sixty miles from the south entrance of the Strait; fifteen boats were to patrol the entrance to the Strait itself; and the remaining fifteen boats were to be stationed inside the Strait.

The defense plan called for the PT boats to make attacks on the Southern Force both before and during its passage of Surigao Strait. When in range, the destroyers stationed near the north end of the Strait were to make successive torpedo attacks and then retire to the north up the sides of the Strait,

(49) B-2, P. 53. (50) B-1, P. 350.

(51) B-1, P. 352.

keeping close to the islands of Leyte and Dinagat. This was to keep against a land background as a defence against enemy radar, and also to keep out of the line of fire of the battle line. (52)

The battle line was not to open fire until the Japanese had approached to within 17,000 to 20,000 yards. Such short range was specified in order to get a good fire effect and as high a percentage of hits as possible, for it will be remembered that the combat vessels were only supplied with a small percentage of their normal allotment of armor-piercing shells. And some of this had been used in the reduction of shore targets in support of the ground troops ashore on Leyte. Further, only a few of the older battleships had been equipped with the latest radar fire control equipment.

To add to his difficulties, the combat ships were also low on fuel since Admiral Kinkaid had originally planned to have all his ships refuel on 25 October, and consequently the arrival of tankers and oilers had not been scheduled until that date. (53)

One thing Admiral Kinkaid had in his favor, as far as weapons were concerned, was that the situation was very favorable for making torpedo attacks - both from the PT boats and the destroyers. And one torpedo could certainly do a lot more damage than a salvo of shells if the torpedo was placed in the right spot.

This battle was one of the few in history that promised to be a classic situation of battle line against battle line, and it also offered the possibility of execution of the theoretically perfect naval maneuver of crossing the enemy "T".

Between 2200 and 2300, 24 October, the PT boats made contact with the Southern Force. As ordered, they reported and then attacked, but due to difficulty with the radio communication, it was after midnight before their contact reports reached Leyte Gulf. (54)

The attacks by the PT boats continued until the Southern Force was well within Surigao Strait, and although the boats were unable to seriously damage any of the Japanese ships, Admiral Kinkaid and Admiral Oldendorf at least knew the identification, course location, and speed of the Southern Force

(52) B-2, P. 95-6. (53) B-2, P. 96. (54) B-2, P. 101.

when the attack was broken off. (55)

By the time he was well within the Strait Admiral Nishimura had his Southern Force disposed in column with the two destroyers MICHISHIO and ASAGUMO in the lead, followed by the battleships YAMASHIRO (flagship) and FUSO, brought up at the rear by the heavy cruiser MOGAMI. Two other destroyers, SHIGURE and YAMAGUMO, were stationed on the flanks of the flagship. (56)

The next attack, after the PT boats retired, was made by the destroyers USS MELVIN, McGOWAN, and REMEY. From their position on the east side of Surigao Strait they began to steam south at 0230, 25 October. (57)

The destroyers picked the Southern Force up by radar, and at a speed of 30 knots closed the range to about 1200 yards. From this range, beginning at 0300, the three ships fired a spread of 27 torpedoes, then changed course to the northeast and started to retire up the coast of Dinagat behind a smoke screen.

The Japanese turned on their searchlights and fired star shells to illuminate the destroyers, then opened fire. The fire continued for about fifteen minutes, but no hits were made, and the destroyers escaped without injury.

Explosions were heard in the vicinity of the Japanese Force about the time the torpedoes should have completed their runs, but no definite results were able to be ascertained.

While the Japanese fire was directed on the ships retiring up the Dinagat coast, two other destroyers, USS McDERMOTT and USS MONSSEN, made an approach from the west, hugging the Leyte coast. At 0310, McDERMOTT and MONSSEN fired a spread of twenty torpedoes at a range of about 9,000 yards, made sharp right turns, and then headed north again up the Leyte coast. Although they too were illuminated and fired upon they escaped without damage.

The next attack was made by Destroyer Squadron 24, consisting of one Australian and five United States destroyers. (58) The squadron was divided into two sections, both sections being stationed on the right flank of the battle line, near Leyte. (59)

(55) B-1, P. 355. (57) B-2, P. 104. (59) B-2, P. 106-8.
(56) B-1, P. 356. (58) B-1, P. 357.

Shortly after 0300, the first section of Destroyer Squadron 24, composed of the destroyers USS KILLEN, BEALE, and HMAS ARUNTA, started to close the Southern Force at a speed of 25 knots.

By now the Southern Force appeared on the radar screen to have divided into two groups - one large ship and three small ones leading three others on a northerly course at a speed of 18 knots.

The first section of Destroyer Squadron 24 fired a partial spread of torpedoes at ranges of from 7,000 to 8,000 yards from the Japanese at 0325, then turned and started to retire to the north. On this course they fired the remainder of their torpedoes at 0329.

While the first section retired and headed for Leyte, the second section of the Squadron, the destroyers USS BACHE, DALY, and HUTCHINS, had been heading south. Deep in the Strait they turned north and at 0329 fired their torpedoes at a range of about 7,000 yards, and then opened fire on the Japanese with their 5-inch guns. Although the Japanese returned the fire with 5-inch and 8-inch guns, no hits were made on the three destroyers.

At 0344 three round balls of flame were observed in the direction of the Japanese fleet, and explosions were heard. In the light of the explosions, BACHE, DALY, and HUTCHINS fired the remainder of their torpedoes and then commenced their gunfire again. They were joined in the gunfire by the three ships of the first section - KILLEN, BEALE, and ARUNTA - which had reversed course and returned to the scene of the action.

It was later learned that as a result of the torpedo attacks the Japanese battleship YAMASHIRO had been sunk and the destroyers MICHISHIO and ASAGUMO badly damaged. The MICHISHIO sank at 0355 and the ASAGUMO turned south shortly thereafter, but because of the loss of personnel and records of this Japanese fleet in the battle, the exact time the YAMASHIRO sank is not definitely known.

The three remaining ships of the Southern Force - FUSO, MOGAMI, and SHIGURE - still continued north up the Strait, where they were attacked a

third time. (60) This torpedo attack was made by nine destroyers from Destroyer Squadron 56 - split into three sections of three ships each. (61)

Section II - the destroyers USS HALFORD, BRYANT, and ROBINSON - attacked from the west on the Leyte side of Surigao Strait. Section III - destroyers USS EDWARDS, LEUTZ, and BENNION - attacked from the east side of the Strait. Although both sections were taken under fire by the remnants of the Southern Force, they managed to get their torpedoes off and retired north along their respective sides of the Strait without suffering any damage.

Section I - the destroyers USS NEWCOMB, LEARY, and GRANT - attacked from the north down the center of the Strait. Although they too were taken under fire, they still managed to get off their torpedoes at the enemy. However, instead of being able to retire to the west toward Leyte to get out of the line of fire of the battle line, the intense Japanese fire forced the three destroyers to retreat due north back up the Strait toward the battle-line.

At 0350 the ships of the battle-line opened fire on the MOGAMI, FUSO, and SHIGURE. The range had then closed to a distance of 17,000 yards, and although radar was used for the firing, the hits seemed to concentrate on FUSO and MOGAMI.

At 0356, although FUSO and MOGAMI were both burning brilliantly, they were seen to change course toward the west. The American battle-line, which had been steaming east along the northern end of the Strait, also reversed course to the west. (62)

Unluckily, the NEWCOMB, LEARY, and GRANT were almost squarely between the two fleets when the cruisers and battleships of the Seventh Fleet opened fire. In the exchange of shots the GRANT was hit and severely damaged by fire from both the American and Japanese fleets. (63)

Admiral Oldendorf did not learn of the presence of the three destroyers until 0410, and he immediately gave the order to "cease fire" to the battle

(60) B-2, P 109.

(62) B-2, P 115.

(61) B-1, P 357-8.

(63) B-1, P. 358.

line. After making sure that the ships were finally clear of the line of fire, except the damaged GRANT, the order to "open fire" on the Japanese was again given at 0419. (64)

Even though they had the "open fire" order, no vessels executed it because they had no targets.

At 0418 the FUSO had disappeared from the Seventh Fleet radar screens - indicating she had sunk. Otherwise, the only thing that could be seen were two fires east and west of the position where the FUSO sank.

While this battle was in progress, Admiral Shima and his Second Diversion Attack Force showed up on the scene of action. He also had the mission of forcing Surigao Strait, (65) but until he intercepted a radio message from Admiral Nishamura to the Southern Force, he did not have any idea the Southern Force was on the same mission. There was no contact, communication, or coordination between the efforts of the two commanders. Some of this lack of coordination was due to personal feelings between the two Admirals, and the rest to the fact that they claimed no common superior short of Admiral Toyoda in Tokyo.

At 0321 the light cruiser ABUKUMA was torpedoed by one of the PT boats and so seriously damaged that she had to be left behind while the rest of the Second Diversion Attack Force proceeded up Surigao Strait.

At 0345 Admiral Shima's flagship, the heavy cruiser NACHI, contacted the retreating destroyer SHIGURE, the only vessel of the Southern Force that came out of the battle. But other than exchanging ship names, the SHIGURE offered no information regarding the battle to the north, nor did Admiral Shima request any. And the SHIGURE then continued to sail toward the south, out of the Strait.

On his course to the north, Admiral Shima finally reached the position of the still-burning MOGAMI. Here he decided there was no use in going any

(64) B-2, P.119-20.

(65) B-2, P.121-2.

further north, ordered a spread of torpedoes fired, then ordered a turn to the south and retreated. Admiral Shima couldn't seem to do anything correctly, for while his flagship NACHI was executing the order to change course to the south, it collided with the burning MOGAMI. (66) The result was that the NACHI was left with a large hole in her port side when she finally pulled free. No attempt was made to aid the MOGAMI. (67)

At 0431 Admiral Oldendorf ordered a pursuit to the south to finish off any cripples that the Seventh Fleet might find. It was during this pursuit that the destroyer ASAGUMO was located and sunk. (68)

Fearing Japanese torpedo attacks that could be disastrous to the Seventh Fleet in the narrow waters of the Strait, the pursuit was broken off shortly after 0730. (69)

Later during the day the MOGAMI was attacked and sunk by planes from the Escort Carrier Group, while Army B-24's completed the sinking of the ABUKUMA.

There was no question that Admiral Oldendorf had won a great battle, but the celebration was short-lived. At 0745, while his ships were steaming north, bound back toward Leyte Gulf, he was informed by Admiral Kinkaid that the Central Force had broken through San Bernadino Strait and was attacking the Escort Carrier Group off Samar. (70)

The Battle Off Samar

In order to keep this account from becoming too confusing, some of the events of the afternoon of 24 October will be recalled again.

It will be remembered that at 1512 of that afternoon, Admiral Halsey had sent a preparatory dispatch to the three Task Groups of Task Force 38 regarding the possible forming of Task Force 34 - a group of heavy surface combat units destined to engage the Central Force should it try to force San Bernadino Strait.

Admiral Kinkaid had intercepted this dispatch, and when he received a

(66) B-1, P 363.

(69) B-2, P 126.

(67) B-2, P 123.

(70) B-1, P. 365.

(68) B-1, P 364.

later dispatch from Admiral Halsey informing him that three Task Groups were steaming north to engage the Northern Force, Admiral Kinkaid assumed Task Force 34 had been left behind to guard San Bernadino Strait, while actually it was steaming north with Admiral Halsey. Admiral Kinkaid was not aware of the fact that Admiral McCain's Task Group had been detached, and that the Third Fleet at that particular time was composed of only three Task Groups.

Furthermore, the last information that reached Admiral Kinkaid regarding the Central Force was that it had turned west and was retiring from San Bernadino Strait. The later report from a search plane that the Central Force had come about again and would pass through San Bernadino Strait at midnight never reached him. (71)

Because of the night battle in Surigao Strait it was 0412, 25 October before Admiral Kinkaid was able to send a dispatch to Admiral Halsey informing him of the action in Surigao Strait and also put in a routine request for information regarding the location of Task Force 34. (72)

By the time Admiral Halsey received this dispatch, at 0648, replied to it that Task Force 34 was steaming north with him, and the reply delivered to Admiral Kinkaid, the Central Force had negotiated San Bernadino Strait and was attacking the Seventh Fleet escort carriers off Samar. (73)

At dawn on 25 October the Escort Carrier Groups were in position to the east of Leyte Gulf to begin launching air strikes for the day's operations - such missions as antisubmarine patrols, air support for troops on Leyte, and air strikes against the Japanese forces retreating south in Surigao Strait. (74)

The Northern Escort Carrier Group of Admiral C. A. F. Sprague was the northernmost of the three Escort Carrier Groups and in a position some fifty miles to the east of Central Samar. The group then consisted of six escort carriers, three destroyers, and four destroyer escorts. (See Chart III)

(71) B-2, P 84. (73) B-4, P 218.
(72) B-1, P 383. (74) B-2, P.163.

At 0645, one of the planes on antisubmarine patrol reported there was an enemy fleet estimated to consist of "four battleships, seven cruisers, and eleven destroyers sighted twenty miles northwest of task group and closing at thirty knots". (75)

As soon as Admiral Sprague found the Central Force bearing down on his light ships from the northwest, he ordered an immediate change of course to due east, and further ordered the carriers to launch all their planes as soon as possible. Admiral Kinkaid, of course, was immediately informed of the situation in which the Northern Escort Carrier Group found itself. (76)

At 0658 the battleship YAMATO opened fire on the light vessels of the group at a range of 38,000 yards. (77) This was the first time the 18-inch guns of the YAMATO had been fired in a surface battle, and the first time ships of the Navy had ever been taken under fire by such heavy caliber guns. (78)

As the Japanese could make almost double the speed of Admiral Sprague's ships they rapidly closed the range. To try and screen his fleet and lessen the effectiveness of the shell fire, Admiral Sprague ordered the destroyers and destroyer escorts to lay a smoke screen between the carriers and the Central Force. Under cover of the smoke screen the carriers were ordered to complete launching their planes and then ease toward the south, making as much smoke as possible. (79)

By 0720 the Central Force had closed the range to 25,000 yards, but luckily the carriers were able to plunge into a smoke screen which reduced visibility to half a mile. (80)

The first attack on the Central Force was made at this time by the destroyer JOHNSTON. The JOHNSTON closed to within 18,000 yards of a heavy cruiser, opened fire with her 5-inch guns, and kept closing the range until she was within 10,000 yards of the cruiser, where she launched a salvo of ten torpedoes. The JOHNSTON was taken under fire when she came out of a smoke screen and was hit by three 14-inch and three 6-inch shells that

(75) B-1, P 384.

(76) B-2, P 166.

(76) B-2, P 165.

(79) B-1, P 388.

(77) B-1, P 387.

(80) B-2, P 172.

wrecked the after engine room, the three 5-inch guns aft, and the gyrocompass, (81) causing her speed to be reduced to about 16 knots. (79) But the torpedoes the JOHNSTON had fired had damaged the heavy cruiser CHIKUMA seriously enough to cause the ship to become unnavigable. (82)

Then at 0740 the remainder of the destroyers and the destroyer escorts were ordered to make a torpedo attack on the Central Force. (80) Although a daylight torpedo attack was a desperate measure, Admiral Sprague was trying anything to keep the Japanese from his carriers.

At the same time, Japanese heavy cruisers changed course to the east and left the Central Force to try a flanking movement on the carriers, with a good chance of success. Cruisers of this class could steam at 30 knots, (79) while the best speed the Escort Carriers could make was about 17 knots. (83)

The next attack on the Central Force was made by the destroyer HOEL at 0740. The HOEL engaged the leading Japanese battleship, the KONGO, at a range of 14,000 yards, and although taking one direct hit after another, was able to close the range to 9,000 yards and launch a spread of five torpedoes at the KONGO. Immediately after loosing the torpedoes, a 14-inch shell destroyed the HOEL's after turbine, after guns, and her electrical steering gear. (84)

Using only one engine and steering manually, the HOEL closed to within 6000 yards of the cruiser KUMANO, and launched her remaining five torpedoes. When the HOEL attempted to retreat she was surrounded by the capital ships of the Central Force. (85) By radical maneuvers the HOEL managed to stay afloat until 0855, when she finally sank, after receiving more than forty hits from 14-inch, 8-inch, and 5-inch shells.

By the time the HOEL attacked, enough emergency repairs had been made to the damaged JOHNSTON so that she was able to offer fire support to the attacking ships, but not much more than that. (86)

(79,80) Footnotes on p.29. (83) B-2, P 168. (86) B-2, P176.

(81) B-2, P 175.

(84) B-1, P 390.

(82) B-6, P 304.

(85) B-2, P 178-9.

The third destroyer, USS HEERMANN, followed the HOEL, and at 0745 launched seven torpedoes at a column of cruisers 7,000 yards away. The HEERMANN then engaged the battleship KONGO, and was able to do enough damage to the fire control system by raking the KONGO's superstructure with her 5-inch guns, so that she received only minor damage from the main and broadside batteries of the KONGO. The HEERMANN closed to within 4,400 yards of KONGO, loosed her remaining three torpedoes, and broke off the action by steaming into a convenient rain squall. (85)

When the carriers emerged from the rain squall in which they had sought protection earlier, they were in fairly good formation - a large circle, with the USS ST LO at the north, and in clockwise rotation, the USS KALININ BAY, GAMBIER BAY? KITKUN BAY? WHITE PLAINS, and FANSHAW BAY (Admiral Sprague's flagship). While in the rain squall they had gradually changed course to the south and by now were laying their own smoke screen. (87)

At this time the Central Force battleships were in a position about ten miles north of the formation, while four cruisers - HAGURO, CHOKAI, TONE, and CHIKUMA - were positioned about 15,000 or 16,000 yards northeast of the carrier formation. These cruisers had so maneuvered that they had gradually forced the carriers to change course from east through south to southwest. (88)

Three carriers, the ST LO? GAMBIER BAY, and KALININ BAY, on the northeast side of the formation, took terrific punishment from direct hits and near misses. (87)

At 0810 the GAMBIER BAY took a hit on the flight deck and a near miss that caused the forward engine room to be flooded. With the loss of one engine, her speed was reduced to eleven knots and she dropped behind the formation. By 0850 the ship had been so badly damaged that she was abandoned - and sank at 0910 while a Japanese cruiser fired at her from a range of less than 2,000 yards. (85)

(85) Footnote on p.30.

(87) B - 1, P 391-2.

(88) B-2, P. 183.

By now the four destroyer escorts were preparing to attack. But low visibility prevented them from making a coordinated attack, so each ship went in alone.

The ROBERTS steamed to within 4,000 yards of a cruiser under cover of the smoke screen previously laid down by the destroyers and launched four torpedoes. At the same time the DENNIS and RAYMOND launched their torpedoes, but at a greater range. (89) No attack was made by the BUTLER because the ship could not get in a firing position. (90)

All four destroyer escorts retired on a southwesterly course after their torpedo attacks, started laying smoke to the rear of the carriers, and with their two 5-inch guns, engaged the Japanese cruisers in a running battle.

The ROBERTS took serious hits at about 0900 that knocked out all power, air, and communications, and she sank shortly after. (91) The DENNIS had both her 5-inch turrets made inoperative. Only the RAYMOND and BUTLER escaped serious damage in the fight. (90)

After the two remaining destroyers, JOHNSTON and HEERMANN, and the three destroyer escorts, RAYMOND, BUTLER, and DENNIS, rejoined the carriers retreating to the southwest, they continued to carry out their mission of screening the carriers from the Japanese - zigzagging back and forth, laying smoke, and shooting at any Japanese ship that came within range. (92) At one time the crippled JOHNSTON had, in succession "engaged a heavy cruiser to starboard, a battleship 7,000 yards off her port beam, another heavy cruiser which was firing on the GAMBIER BAY, and a column of (Japanese) destroyers which was closing the formation". (93) During this phase of the battle the JOHNSTON was sunk. The carriers had even joined in the fight by firing back with the only weapon they had available - one 5-inch gun mounted at their stern.

The air squadrons of the Northern Escort Carrier Group were not able to offer much help to the ships during the early phase of the battle. Because

(89) B-1, P 393. (92) B-1, P 397.
(90) B-2, P 178. (93) B-2, P 181.
(91) B-1, P 394.

of the hurry with which they had been launched when the Central Force was sighted, few of them were adequately armed to engage capital ships; (94) their planned missions for that day had been mostly shore support. Some of the planes were armed with nothing larger than 100-pound bombs capable of inflicting only superficial damage to the topsides of the Japanese ships.

The Carrier Groups to the south launched air strikes against the Central Force as soon as they could, but because the weather slowed down their rendezvous and made it hard to locate the Japanese, these strikes did not really become effective until about 0900. The Central Escort Carrier Group was able to launch six full-scale strikes against the Japanese - the planes being armed with torpedoes, semi armor-piercing bombs, and rockets. (95) When all their bombs and torpedoes had been used the planes continued to make dummy runs on the Japanese to try to force them to make evasive maneuvers and thus spoil their aim and slow them down. (96)

By 0920 two Japanese cruisers were within 10,000 yards of the eastern edge of the Northern Escort Carrier formation, and were threatening to hinder the escape of the carriers to Leyte Gulf. By now the Group had really taken a beating from the Japanese. The GAMBLER BAY had been sunk; the HOEL, JOHNSTON, and ROBERTS were either sunk or sinking; the FANSHAW BAY, KALININ BAY, DENNIS, and HEERMANN had been badly hit. (97)

Then at 0925, just when the situation was about at its worst for the carriers, the Japanese quit. The cruisers close on the east, for no apparent reason, ceased fire, came about, and headed north. (98)

When the cruisers retired to the north, the surface phase of the battle ended, but the Escort Carrier Groups were still subjected to air attacks.

Between 0750 and 0800, four Japanese Kamikaze aircraft had dived at carriers of the Central Carrier Group. The Santee and Suwanee were both damaged in this manner. Simultaneously, the Santee was hit by torpedo fire from an undetected submarine. None of the damage was serious enough to sink the ships, however.

(94) B-2, P 187.

(97) B-1, P 398.

(95) B-1 P 399.

(98) B-2, P.194.

(96) B-1, P 397.

The Northern Escort Carrier Group was attacked by Kamikaze planes about 1050, with attacks being made on the ST LO, WHITE PLAINS, KITKUN BAY, and KALININ BAY. Except for the WHITE PLAINS, which managed to shoot down the planes attacking it, all the other ships were hit and damaged. The hits on the ST LO were so serious that she sank at 1120. (99)

Before ending the account of the Battle off Samar, it might be well to try to explain why Admiral Kurita broke off the action and retired, just when he had victory in his hand. (100)

On the morning of the 25th of October, Admiral Kurita had sighted Admiral Sprague's Escort Carrier Group just before 0700. Having no reconnaissance aircraft available, Admiral Kurita could not obtain any accurate information about the Carrier Group at any time during the fight.

The attack that followed the sighting was an unorganized pursuit, each Japanese ship going at top speed and each ship fighting alone. The formation became widely scattered, and the YAMATO, slowed down from the bomb hits made in the Sibuyan Sea Battle, soon was left behind by the faster cruisers.

The smoke screen laid down by the destroyers also lessened the effectiveness of the Japanese fire because so much of their aiming depended on visual sighting.

The torpedo attacks made by the destroyers and destroyer escorts also disrupted and slowed down the main Japanese formation.

From the YAMATO Admiral Kurita finally lost sight of the escort carriers and his cruisers because of the smoke and frequent rain squalls.

Thinking the Escort Carriers too fast, Admiral Kurita decided to call off the chase. He did not know that his two cruisers TONE and HAGURO were only 10,000 yards from the carriers.

Admiral Kurita later said that he still intended to push through into Leyte Gulf, but before he went any further he wanted to collect his ships, get them into some kind of formation, piece together any information they might have, and, in general, weigh the situation.

(99) B-1, P 400

(100) B-1, P 418

Some of the Japanese ships had been damaged quite badly during the course of the battle. The CHOKAI and KUMANO, two of the cruisers that had flanked Admiral Sprague from the east, had both been bombed and shelled heavily and were in such shape that they were unmaneuverable. The light cruiser KUMANO had been disabled by a torpedo fired from one of the destroyers, and the light cruiser SUZUYA, which had been standing by to aid the KUMANO, had been torpedoed and bombed. The KUMANO could still make about 15 knots, so she was ordered to sail for Manila with the destroyer HAYASHIMO as escort.

But the CHOKAI, CHIKUMA, and the SUZUYA could not be saved - so Admiral Kurita ordered them abandoned and they were sunk by torpedoes from the Japanese destroyers.

This left Admiral Kurita with a force of four battleships, two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and seven destroyers, still a strong force, but Admiral Kurita began to doubt if it was strong enough to force its way into Leyte Gulf. He was afraid that the United States forces were waiting in Leyte Gulf for him to enter and thus trap him. And he was aided in this idea by some false messages that were put on the air by the Seventh Fleet.

Besides, the Central Force was now behind schedule, and in addition, the original plan to join with Admiral Nishimura and make an exit from Leyte Gulf through Surigao Strait could not be carried out. (101)

When he intercepted a radio message from Admiral Ozawa that the Northern Force was planning to make a night torpedo attack, Admiral Kurita made up his mind. He would take the remainder of the Central Force north and join Admiral Ozawa.

The Battle off Cape Engano

It will be remembered that at 1950, 24 October, Admiral Halsey had informed Admiral Kinkaid that he was proceeding north with three Groups to (101) B-1, B 419.

attack the Japanese carrier force. It will also be remembered that this dispatch and the earlier preparatory one regarding the forming of Task Force 34 were misinterpreted by Admiral Kinkaid to mean that Task Force 34 was on guard at San Bernadino Strait. Admiral Halsey was not aware that there was any confusion regarding his dispatches.

Nor was he aware that Admiral Kinkaid had never been informed the Central Force had again started east and was heading for San Bernadino Strait.

Nevertheless, by shortly after midnight on the morning of 25 October, the three Task Groups then comprising Task Force 38 and the Third Fleet, were about 180 miles east of Cape Engano, the northern tip of Luzon. (102)

At this time night search planes were launched in an attempt to get the exact location of the Japanese Northern Force. The search revealed a group of twelve ships eighty miles east of the Third Fleet at 0208, 25 October. Two more contacts with other groups of Japanese ships at 0220 and 0235 were made in the same general area. (103)

Believing a surface battle might develop because of the reported presence of heavy ships with the Northern Force, Admiral Halsey, at 0253, directed that Task Force 34 be formed to proceed ahead of the three Task Groups. Task Force 34 was composed as originally planned: six battleships, seven cruisers, and eighteen destroyers. (104)

Due to engine trouble, the search plane which had originally located the Northern Force and was tracking it, was forced to return at 0300. Once the Northern Force was lost, it was not found again during the rest of the night. (105)

At about 0600, 25 October, search planes were again launched to the north and west of the Third Fleet. (106)

Between the launching and the first contact, Admiral Halsey received the dispatch from Admiral Kinkaid that told about the battle of Surigao Strait and requested information as to the whereabouts of Task Force 34. By the

(102) B-1, P 400. (105) B-1, P 405.
(103) B-4, P 217. (106) B-2, P 138.
(104) B-2, P 136.

time the answer was relayed to Admiral Kinkaid the Central Force had already come through San Bernadino Strait and was attacking his Northern Escort Carrier Group off Samar. (105)

Contact was made with the whole Northern Force at 0735. The force had closed up during the night and at the time it was located some 140 miles to the northeast of Admiral Halsey's position. The Northern Force then consisted of one large aircraft carrier, three light aircraft carriers, two battleships with flight decks aft, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers. (107)

Organized flights of planes had been put on the air earlier to wait for contact to be reported, circling in the meantime, and by 0810 these had arrived at the contact location and began to make the first attacks. (108)

As soon as the attacks began, the Japanese sent up a terrific anti-aircraft barrage and started radical evasive maneuvers. But more surprising than anything else, there was a complete lack of air opposition. Naturally this was puzzling to Admiral Halsey and his staff, for with four aircraft carriers they expected to have to fight a great number of air battles to reach their targets. They knew nothing of the fact that the primary mission of the Northern Force was to decoy the Third Fleet away from Leyte Gulf, and that when Admiral Ozawa had left Japan he had so few aircraft.

By the time the first attack was over the carrier ZUIKAUKU had received a torpedo hit that forced it to be steered manually, the light carriers ZUIHO, CHOYODA, CHITOSE, and the destroyer AKITSUKI had all been bombed, and the light cruiser TAMA had been torpedoed, and damaged. (109)

At 0857 the AKITSUKI sank, followed forty minutes later by the CHITOSE. The CHOYODA and the TAMA were forced to drop out of line because of their torpedo and bomb damage.

While this strike was in progress, Admiral Halsey, aboard the battleship NEW JERSEY, had been receiving a stream of messages from Admiral Kinkaid. At 0602 Admiral Halsey received a message that the Southern Force

(105) See footnote p.36.

(108) B-1, P 406.

(107) B-2, P 139.

(109) B-6, P 313.

had been practically destroyed and that its remnants were retreating south down Surigao Strait. (110)

Then at 0622 he received the news that the Central Force had come through San Bernadino Strait and was attacking the Northern Escort Carrier Group. Eight minutes later, at 0630, he received an urgent request for fast battleships to be sent to Leyte Gulf.

Believing the Northern Force which his carrier planes were attacking to be the more important of the two forces, and that the battleships and cruisers of Admiral Oldendorf's forces could provide the needed support - Admiral Halsey ordered his Fourth Task Group, Admiral McCain's, then fueling 400 miles northeast of Leyte Gulf, to proceed to Samar and render all possible aid to the Seventh Fleet. (111) Not for almost another hour did Admiral Halsey learn the battleships of the Seventh Fleet were nearly out of ammunition. Somewhere the message had been delayed. (112)

Admiral Nimitz was also confused as to the location of Task Force 34, for at 1000 Admiral Halsey received a dispatch from him asking where Task Force 34 was located. (111) Right after this message, another transmission, in the clear, arrived from Admiral Kinkaid, asking where Admiral Lee (Commander, Task Force 34) was, and to send him to Leyte Gulf immediately. (112)

These dispatches were so urgent that by now Admiral Halsey was forced to order Task Force 34 and Admiral Bogan's Task Group 38.2 to change course for Leyte Gulf. (113)

Admiral Mitscher, with the remaining two depleted Task Groups, was to continue the attacks against the Northern Force. (114)

Because of the necessity for refueling and reshuffling the ships, Task Force 34 and Task Group 38.2 could not even begin to start for Leyte Gulf until 1115. And when the units started south, the heavy cruisers WICHITA and NEW ORLEANS, the light cruisers SANTA FE and MOBILE, and ten destroyers were left behind with Admiral Mitscher.

(110) B-4, 219. (113) B-4, P 221.
(111) B-1, P 407-8. (114) B-1, P 408.
(112) B-4, P 220.

Changing course to the south was a blow to the Third Fleet plans, for the units of Task Force 34 had been within 45 miles of the Northern Force when they were ordered to come about. (115)

The air groups made their second attack on the Northern Force at 1000. (116) It was only a small strike, and not much damage was done to the Japanese, although some hits were made. (117)

At 1330 the third strike was over the Japanese force. The carriers ZUIKAKU and ZUIHO were attacked with bombs and torpedoes, and large fires were started on the ZUIHO.

Finally, at 1414, the ZUIKAKU sank, followed at 1527 by the ZUIHO. (116)

At 1400, Admiral Mitscher detached the cruisers WICHITA, NEW ORLEANS, SANTA FE, MOBILE, and twelve destroyers from his Task Groups to strike north ahead of the carriers and sink any Japanese stragglers they could find. (118)

At 1600 one of the search planes returning from an earlier strike directed the ships to the position of the damaged CHOYODA. The ships commenced firing and by 1647 the CHOYODA rolled over and sank.

The cruisers and destroyers then continued north after the retreating Northern Force and overtook and sank the destroyer HAKATSUKI at 2100. By now the search planes reported the remnants of the Northern Force were some 50 miles farther north. So the chase was abandoned and the ships returned to the Task Force to refuel. (119)

Although, as far as the Third Fleet was concerned, the battle was over, the attacks on the Northern Force were not finished. For at 2300, submarines attacked the Northern Force and sank the light cruiser TAMA. (120)

Although it was not known until after the war, Admiral Ozawa had sailed back and forth from north to south actually looking for the American fleet to make an attack. No contact was ever made, but records studied afterward indicate that if he had kept heading south on his course he would have made contact. He finally turned north just a little too soon. (121)

(115) B-2, P 147. (118) B-1, P 410. (121) B-2, P 162.
(116) B-6, P 313. (119) B-2, P 158.
(117) B-2, P 148. (120) B-2, P 161.

With the sinking of the cruiser TAMAMA the Battle off Cape Engano came to an end.

Mop-up; The End of a Navy

After breaking off the attack on the Escort Carriers off Samar the morning of 25 October, the Central Force had circled about in the vicinity for some three hours, first heading in one direction and then another. At 1045 they were heading northeast, at 1100 they changed course to the south toward Leyte Gulf. Finally, at 1310, Admiral Kurita made his decision to go north and came about again. (122)

During all this time the Central Force was under constant air attacks from the planes of the Escort Carrier Groups.

Coming from the east, Admiral McCain's Task Group began to launch their planes at 1030, even though they were still at extremely long range of 335 miles from Leyte. Although this distance was beyond the range of the planes, the fast carriers of this Task Group could make better than 30 knots, and by the time they were ready to pick up their planes after the strike they would be much closer to Leyte. And if necessary, the planes could land on emergency strips near Tacloban.

The combat ships of the Seventh Fleet which had successfully completed the battle of Surigao Strait were still loading fuel and ammunition, and when the Central Force turned north for the final time they were not yet ready to put to sea. As a consequence, they never left Leyte Gulf.

On his way south from Cape Engano, Admiral Halsey kept splitting his fleet, leaving behind the slower ships, in an attempt to cut off the retreat of the Central Force through San Bernadino Strait. But Admiral Kurita beat him to it by three hours, and slipped through the Strait at 2130, 25 October.

For Admiral Kurita had changed his mind again. On his way north he decided he was too low on fuel to go to the aid of the Northern Force, and so changed course for San Bernadino Strait and his base at Brunei.

(122) B-1, P 413.

At 0030, 26 October, when Admiral Halsey arrived off San Bernadino, there was only one Japanese ship that had not managed to slip through - the destroyer NOWAKE. The fleet sunk her with a spread of torpedoes.

At dawn on 26 October, Admiral Bogan rendezvoused with Admiral McCain, and at 0600 the two Task Groups launched their first combined strike against the retreating Central Force.

The planes caught Admiral Kurita heading south in Tablas Strait along the east coast of Mindoro. A torpedo attack stopped the light cruiser NOSHIRO dead in the water, and the second strike dive bombers finished the sinking. (123)

The crippled cruiser KUMANO was hit again by torpedoes and bombs and left dead in the water. The Japanese attempted to hide and camouflage the ship on the west coast of Luzon, but she was discovered a month later and definitely sunk this time.

Later in the day the destroyer HAYASHIMO was sunk south of Mindoro by an aircraft torpedo.

But by the afternoon of 26 October, Admiral Kurita's fleet was well into the Sulu Sea and beyond the range of the Third Fleet aircraft.

But the sinking of Japanese ships was not over.

The sinking of the cruiser YAMA by a submarine the evening of 25 October has already been noted.

On 27 October, the destroyer FUJINAMI was sunk south of Mindoro. On the same day aircraft sank the cruiser KINU and the destroyer URANAMI and two transports which had sneaked troops ashore on Leyte under cover of the sea battles.

The next day, 28 October, the destroyer SHIRANUHI was sent to rescue the survivors of the KINU, was caught west of Panay by aircraft, and sunk.

This sinking finally brought to a close the Battle for Leyte Gulf. As for the results, a statement made after the war by Admiral Ozawa, the commander of the decoy Northern Force, gives the best indication of its effect on the Japanese Fleet: "After this battle the surface force became strictly (123) B-1, P 415.

auxiliary, so that we relied on land forces, special (Kamikaze) attack, and air power. There was no further use assigned to surface vessels, with exception of some special ships." (124)

Although the United States Fleets fought many battles after Leyte Gulf, they were actions against land-based forces in support of our own ground troops.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Battle for Leyte Gulf was a definite, complete, and decisive victory for the American Forces. The recapitulation of ships sunk is shown below, and better illustrates the results than any other means: (125)

<u>TYPE SHIP</u>	<u>JAPANESE</u>	<u>AMERICAN</u>
Battleships	3	0
Large Aircraft Carriers	1	0
Light Aircraft Carriers	3	1
Escort Aircraft Carriers	0	2
Heavy Cruisers	6	0
Light Cruisers	4	0
Destroyers	11	2
Destroyer Escorts	0	1

To begin with the Japanese side of the operation will be taken up first and then the American.

The big glaring fault of the whole Japanese failure was the all-around lack of cooperation and coordination on all sides. The fleets steaming toward Leyte Gulf at no time had any direct communication with each other, and as a consequence none of the various commanders knew what the others were doing, what was happening to them, or what their plans were. As an example, Admiral Shima steamed up Surigao Strait toward the American Forces in Leyte Gulf knowing nothing more than he had learned from an intercepted radio

(124) B-2, P. 230

(125) B-1, P. 423.

message - that Admiral Nishimura had some ships ahead of him somewhere.

There was no cooperation or coordination between the land force commanders and the fleet commanders - as witness the failure of Admiral Kurita to get any kind of air cover during the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea on 24 October. Instead, the Japanese commanders in the Philippines had sent their aircraft against the Carrier Group of Admiral Sherman off Luzon, and were making attacks against the forces unloading in Leyte Gulf.

The Japanese operations were well-planned and thought out, and had there been any kind of cooperation short of Tokyo, it might well have succeeded.

Another thing, Admiral Kurita was the perfect example of a man who forgot his mission. Remember, when he left Lingga he was to force Leyte Gulf, and destroy amphibious forces there. Then, on the morning of 25 October, just when he was almost ready to go into the Gulf, he turned and headed north. Presumably to aid Admiral Ozawa, he changed the whole mission of the force right in the middle of the operation. Not even questioning after the war could bring out any definite reason for the change in course. Of the whole Japanese Fleet, only Admiral Ozawa completed his mission. He was to decoy the Third Fleet away from the Philippines, and he did. Of course his fleet was destroyed in the process, but he completed his mission.

Admiral Shima seemed to be just an extra fleet floating around the islands for all he accomplished. Once he was deep in Surigao Strait, he decided there was no use going any farther, so he turned around and headed south, not even attempting to find out what the situation was with regard to the Southern Force or to make any attempts to attack the American Forces; other than the one spread of torpedoes he fired just before retreating.

Admiral Kurita did not do a very good job in evaluating the Northern Escort Carrier Group. For he consistently overestimated the size and speed of the ships. In addition, he let the Central Force get out of hand when they first sighted the carriers on the morning of 25 October, thus losing time later in the morning when he had to call off further fighting to re-organize and attempt to evaluate information.

As for the American Forces, there were two glaring faults that were apparent throughout the whole operation. First and foremost was the lack of a common commander to coordinate their actions during the battles, and secondly, the slowness of communications between the two Fleet commanders. The failure to establish good communication between the Fleets was a fault of both commanders.

Admiral Halsey can also be criticised for his failure to adequately inform Admiral Kinkaid regarding the movements of each component of the Third Fleet. Had Admiral Kinkaid known that the Third Fleet was composed of only three Task Groups instead of four, as was set up in the organization charts, some of the confusion might have been lessened. In addition, Admiral Halsey, was not specific enough in his dispatches to Admiral Kinkaid when he left for the attack on the Northern Force. This is borne out by the fact that even Admiral Nimitz had to send a special message of inquiry about the location of Task Force 34.

Further, Admiral Halsey was not consistent. For leaving San Bernadino Strait to go after the Northern Force he gave the reason that he wanted to keep the fleet intact. Yet when he returned toward Leyte Gulf he kept splitting the fleet all the way from Cape Engano south.

Part of the fault for confusion between the two commanders as to location of Task Force 34 can also be laid at the feet of Admiral Kinkaid. Instead of waiting as long as he did, he should have immediately requested confirmation to resolve any doubts about such an important factor in the conduct of the battle.

And the two commanders can be criticized together for not making sure that the best means of communication was available between them, instead of messages being two or more hours on the way.

On the other side of the picture, there can be no criticism of Admiral Kinkaid and Admiral Oldendorf for the night battle that was fought in Surigao Strait the night of 24-25 October. The battle was perfectly planned and fought entirely according to that plan. In addition, of course, it illustrated a classic textbook solution by crossing the enemy "T".

Further, Admiral Sprague with the light ships of the Northern Escort Carrier Group off Samar fought his ships well and added to the confusion of the enemy. He showed that a small force can sometimes turn the tide of battle against a much stronger enemy. His daring daylight torpedo attacks and the use of so much smoke both slowed down and thoroughly confused Admiral Kurita.

Admiral Halsey should be given credit for vigorously prosecuting the attacks against the Central Force while it was in the Sibuyan Sea, and the attacks against the Northern Force. Undoubtedly, the air attacks to which the Central Force had been subjected, and the resulting damage, must have been a factor in Admiral Kurita's decision to break off the fighting off Samar on 25 October.

The sinking of the carriers of the Northern Force must also be to Admiral Halsey's credit.

And in addition, the large number of aircraft destroyed, ships sunk, and installations put out of action by the ranging, slashing, strikes of the Third Fleet for two months prior to the Leyte invasion, undoubtedly were a major contribution to the success of the whole Philippine Islands campaign.

LESSONS

1. The best of communication and coordination are necessary between two commanders if they wish to win battles.
2. The mission of a force must always be kept in mind and not changed in the middle of battle if a commander wishes to succeed.
3. A much smaller force can delay and confuse a very strong enemy by aggressive use of what it has available.