



H-Gram 013: Night of the Long Lances

7 December 2017

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USS *Alchiba* (AK-23) aground and afire off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, circa late November 1942. She had been torpedoed by the Japanese submarine I-16 on 28 November. Men are handling cargo on the beach, possibly assisting in unloading *Alchiba* while she was fighting her fires. Note barbed wire fencing in the foreground (USMC 52796).

I have been writing these H-grams for a year now and generally tracking with the 100th anniversary of World War I, the 75th anniversary of World War II, and the 50th anniversary of Vietnam. "Back Issues" can be found on Naval History and Heritage Command website (so, if you want to catch up on Pearl Harbor for the 76th anniversary, H-Gram 001 covers that). I send these out with the approval of the CNO in partial fulfillment of the Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority line of effort "Learn at higher velocity" sub-task to know our history and not re-learn the lessons of the past (at least the hard way.) You are welcome and encouraged to

disseminate these further as desired, and to add your own observations.

75th Anniversary of World War II

1. Guadalcanal: Forgotten Valor–USS *Alchiba* (AK-23)

*If ever there was a ship that lived up to Captain James Lawrence's dying words, "Don't give up the ship," it was the unlikely cargo vessel USS *Alchiba* (AK-23). *Alchiba*, under the command of Commander James S. Freeman, USN, arrived off Lunga Point, Guadalcanal, for yet another resupply*

run, to off-load a critical cargo of gasoline, bombs, and other ammunition destined for the U.S. Marines on the island, where fierce fighting was still raging. On the morning of 28 November 1942, the Japanese midget submarine Ha-10, launched from submarine I-16, penetrated through a screen of five destroyers and hit Alchiba with a torpedo in a forward (number 2) hold. Ha-10 did not survive the U.S. counterattack, but the damage to Alchiba was severe. With the forward hold area burning out of control and his ship sinking with a 17 degree list, Freeman rang up flank speed to get Alchiba into shallow water off Lunga Point, where he ran her aground. Despite the potential for imminent catastrophe and exploding machine-gun ammunition, the crew of Alchiba, led by the executive officer, Commander Howard H. Shaw, USN, fought the fire forward while other members of the crew commenced off-loading all the supplies and ammunition they could from aft. They fought the fire for over five days, and got almost every salvageable bit of cargo on to Guadalcanal, and then set about salvaging the ship.

Astonishingly, throughout this ordeal only four of Alchiba's crew were wounded and none killed. However, on 7 December, the midget submarine Ha-38, launched from I-24, fired two torpedoes at Alchiba. One passed right under her stern without exploding, but the second hit in her engineering spaces, killing three and wounding six men. Ha-38 was never seen again. The damage this time was also severe, and the Navy Department announced to the press that Alchiba had been lost. This came as a surprise to her crew, who were still aboard and fighting to save their ship—which they did after many more days. Alchiba ultimately survived, was redesignated as an attack cargo ship (AKA-6), and served throughout the Pacific for the rest of the war (although she was prone to engineering casualties). Like the Sailors on USS Canopus (AS-9) and other valiant auxiliaries of the doomed Asiatic Fleet (see H-Gram 003), the crew of Alchiba proved that American Sailors would exhibit the greatest of bravery, regardless of whether they were on the newest warship or an "expendable" cargo ship. For the crew's valor, Commander Freeman (a future rear admiral) was awarded the Navy Cross, Commander Shaw was awarded a Silver Star, and the Alchiba became the only cargo ship to be awarded a

Presidential Unit Citation.

2. Guadalcanal: Battle of Tassafaronga—Night of the Long Lances

On the night of 30 November/1 December 1942, a U.S. force of five cruisers and six destroyers (Task Force 67) under the command of Rear Admiral Carleton H. Wright, ambushed a Japanese "Tokyo Express" run consisting of eight destroyers (six of which were encumbered by hundreds of supply barrels) under the command of Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka. Although the U.S. was armed with intelligence that the Japanese were coming, made excellent use of the new SG radar technology aboard U.S. flagships that detected the Japanese first (at 23,000 yards), had carefully absorbed and incorporated numerous lessons from the previous night battles in Iron Bottom Sound, possessed overwhelming advantage in firepower, and opened fire first, the result was still one of the worst debacles in the history of the United States Navy.

At Tassafaronga, for the loss of one destroyer, the Japanese sank the heavy cruiser USS Northampton (CA-26) and grievously damaged the heavy cruisers Minneapolis (CA-36), New Orleans (CA-32), and Pensacola (CA-24). The three cruisers were saved only by extraordinarily heroic and determined damage-control actions by their crews and by the fact that six of the Japanese destroyers did not have their torpedo reloads aboard, preventing them from picking off the U.S. cripples. All three damaged cruisers would be out of action for over a year. U.S. casualties included 395 Sailors killed and 153 wounded. The short version of the battle is that the U.S. ships, with their radar superiority, concentrated their fire on the closest Japanese destroyer and blew her to smithereens. Meanwhile, the other Japanese destroyers, hidden by the flames of the sacrificial Takanami, withheld their fire and launched a swarm of torpedoes at the U.S. cruiser line, lit up by their own gunfire flashes like "mechanical ducks in a shooting gallery" as historian Samuel Eliot Morison described it. The result was arguably the most successful surface torpedo attack in history.

Extensive recriminations occurred following this battle, but also significant learning. Rear Admiral

Wright's career as a combat commander was over within days. Wright has been extensively criticized for squandering an opportunity to fire torpedoes first due to five minutes of indecision. The criticisms are probably valid, but had the destroyers launched torpedoes when the commanding officer of USS Fletcher (DD-445), Commander William M. Cole, requested, the result probably would have been yet another example of the notorious unreliability of U.S. Navy torpedoes, the defects of which had still not been corrected or in some cases even recognized yet. (Wright would go on to preside over another controversy, the court-martial of 50 African-American stevedores who refused to go back to work until safety measures had been improved following the disastrous Port Chicago, California, ammunition explosion on 17 July 1944, which killed 302 mostly African-American stevedores.)

Cole, who had brought his ship ("Lucky 13") unscathed through two of the most horrific battles of the war (and rescued 646 Sailors of Northampton) would be heavily criticized for his actions by Vice Admiral William Halsey (Wright would get a Navy Cross for the debacle, but Cole would not), which Halsey later admitted was unfair. Nevertheless, Cole went on to command DESDIV 44 in DESRON 22, and his experience translated into future victories. The other DESDIV in DESRON 22 was DESDIV 43, commanded by Arleigh Burke, and it was Cole's experience at Tassafaronga that led to Burke's standing orders to his own ships that "destroyers are to attack the enemy on first contact without awaiting orders from task force commander," which were instrumental in Burke's success in the battles of Empress Augusta Bay and Cape St. George. Cole also influenced Commander Frederick Moosbrugger's tactics at the Battle of Vella Gulf, in which Moosbrugger withheld gunfire until his own torpedoes were observed hitting home, surprising the Japanese. Also using lessons learned in the Battle of Tassafaronga, Rear Admiral Mahlon Tisdale (commander of a group of two cruisers) and the executive officer of Fletcher, Commander Joseph Wylie, would go on to play very prominent roles in the development of the combat information center (CIC) and U.S. Navy command-and-control doctrine that would guide U.S. Navy operations for decades (more on that in the next H-gram).

Nevertheless, the one lesson that U.S. Navy leaders stubbornly refused to learn was that the Japanese Type 93 Oxygen Torpedo ("Long Lance") was significantly superior, despite the pre-war intelligence (which had been ignored), and despite the late Rear Admiral Norman Scott's report following the Battle of Cape Esperance. In his post-battle report for Tassafaronga, Rear Admiral Wright correctly noted that "it was improbable that [Japanese] torpedoes with speed-distance characteristics such as our own" could have inflicted damage such as was observed. Rather than concluding that the Japanese had superior torpedoes, Wright concluded that the U.S. losses were due to lucky shots from Japanese submarines (none were present.) More U.S. ships would fall to the Long Lance in battles in the Central Solomon Islands in 1943 and 1944 as a result of this U.S. failure to understand the enemy. For more on the Battle of Tassafaronga, please see attachment H-013-1.

Attachment H-013-2 is a U.S. Navy photo taken after the Battle of Tassafaronga off Guadalcanal shows a U.S. PT boat bringing survivors of the heavy cruiser USS Northampton (CA-26) into Tulagi harbor. In the background is the heavy cruiser New Orleans (CA-32) with her bow blown off, including her number 1 main battery turret. New Orleans survived despite losing almost a quarter of her length.

Operation Torch: The Naval Battle of Casablanca, 8-10 November 1942

As the French naval forces in Casablanca, Morocco sortied to oppose the U.S. landings on the morning of 8 November 1942, the U.S. flagship USS Augusta (CA-31), opened fire. The shock wave from a main battery salvo blew out the bottom of a boat in a davit that had been loaded with the gear of Major General George S. Patton, sending it into the ocean below. Patton's experience was hardly unique. By the end of the day, almost half of 347 landing craft participating in the landings near Casablanca had been wrecked, mostly due to operational causes rather than French action. The landings had been opposed as an unnecessary diversion by both CNO Admiral Ernest J. King and Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army General

George C. Marshall, and Torch demonstrated that the Allies still had a lot to learn about conducting large-scale amphibious operations. From the days of the Athenian invasion of Syracuse, the Mongols' attempt to invade Japan, the Spanish Armada, and Gallipoli, these had a long and distinguished history of not ending well.

Because France has been such a great ally of the United States, the Naval Battle of Casablanca, the largest surface action in the Atlantic since the Napoleonic Wars, is rarely mentioned in polite company. But I'm a historian, so, so much for that. The conventional narrative is that the French put up a token resistance, with minimal casualties, to the U.S. and British invasion of French North Africa (the French protectorate/colonies of Morocco and Algeria) in November 1942 before quickly switching to the Allied side. The reality is that the French, and in particular the French navy, fought –and fought hard–and paid a high price for their loyalty to the Vichy French government, then in power in the part of southern France not occupied by Nazi Germany.

It is now regarded as traitorous and collaborationist, but under the terms of the surrender agreement with the Germans, the French government with its capital in Vichy was seen by most of the surviving French armed forces as the legitimate government of France (and was at first recognized as such by the United States for that matter, and former CNO Admiral William Leahy was for a time the U.S. Ambassador to Vichy France). The terms of the surrender also demanded that Vichy France remain "neutral" for the duration of the war. Originally, the French navy was required to keep its ships immobile and unarmed. However, the British Royal Navy preemptively attacked French naval units in port at Mers el-Khebir, Algeria, in July 1940, killing almost 1,300 French sailors, to keep French warships from falling into German hands. In response, the Germans changed the agreement, allowing the French to keep their ships in readiness and armed to fight, with the stipulation that they were to aggressively defend Vichy France's "neutrality" against the Allies by armed force if necessary. Feeling they had been knifed in the back by their own ally (the British), the French navy complied, and the result was its resistance to the U.S. landings in Morocco and the

Allied landings in Algeria. In fact, by numerous accounts, the great majority of French sailors who sortied on 8 November from Casablanca had no idea who they were actually going out to fight–British, Germans, or Americans. They received orders to fight, and that's exactly what they did.

On 8 November, the French naval forces in Casablanca, commanded by Vice Admiral Felix Michelier, consisted of the non-operational new battleship Jean Bart (although her forward main battery turret, quad 15-inch guns, worked fine), one light cruiser, two large destroyers (flotilla leaders), seven destroyers, eight sloops/corvettes, 11 minesweepers, and 11 submarines. By the time the battle was over, the Jean Bart was sunk at the pier, the light cruiser was grounded and burned out, the two destroyer leaders were grounded, four destroyers were sunk, seven submarines were sunk, numerous freighters and liners were sunk in Casablanca harbor, and almost all other French ships damaged. The French ships fought valiantly against great odds, and none of them surrendered, gave up, or shirked their duty until they were finally ordered to surrender after several days by Michelier—and only after he got orders from higher up in the Vichy government. None of them ever hauled down a French flag. Over 460 French sailors were killed and at least 200 wounded.

The U.S. Navy force supporting the U.S. Army landings in Morocco consisted of over a hundred ships, commanded by Rear Admiral Kent Hewitt, embarked in Augusta, and included the aircraft carrier Ranger (CV-4), the new fast battleship Massachusetts (BB-59), the old battleships New York (BB-34) and Texas (BB-35), four new converted escort carriers (CVE), and numerous cruisers and destroyers. The force was divided to support three separate landings: the main landing just north of Casablanca, another farther north at Port Lyautey, and one to the south of Casablanca at Safi. The Texas covered the northern landing and the New York covered the southern, and Ranger's aircraft engaged wherever needed.

The main landing at Casablanca was covered by the Massachusetts, three heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and 14 destroyers. Massachusetts engaged in a

gunnery duel with the immobile Jean Bart and won, knocking out her forward turret. The French managed to repaired, but concealed the repairs until Jean Bart opened up again a couple days later, at which point she was bombed and sunk at the pier by aircraft from Ranger. The formidable French shore battery at El Hank repeatedly straddled U.S. warships, with several hits. French submarines nearly hit several U.S. ships with torpedoes. In the end, Massachusetts, Augusta, a light cruiser, and two destroyers were lightly damaged, although four transports were sunk by German U-boats that arrived in the area on 10 November, accounting for most of the 174 U.S. service members killed at sea (one of the German subs was sunk, too). For more on the Operation Torch landings and the Naval Battle of Casablanca, please see attachment H-013-3.

4. Forgotten Valor: The Battles of Safi Harbor, Wadi Sebou, and Oran Harbor, 8-10 November 1942

Three U.S. World War I-vintage destroyers were awarded Presidential Unit Citations for successful operations of extreme audacity during Operation Torch. The USS Bernadou (DD-153) and USS Cole (DD-155) steamed right into the Vichy French port of Safi, Morocco, during the pre-dawn hours of 8 November, silenced French artillery fire, and disembarked U.S. Army raiders, who captured the critical port facilities intact, enabling U.S. tanks to get ashore. On 10 November, the USS Dallas (DD-199) steamed ten miles up a narrow, shallow, winding river in broad daylight under heavy French fire, disembarking Army raiders to capture an airfield at Port Lyautey, Morocco. However, during predawn hours of 8 November, two British ships (flying American flags and carrying U.S. Army raiders and a U.S. Navy anti-sabotage detachment) forced their way into the Vichy French port of Oran, Algeria, where they were cut to ribbons and sunk by intense resistance from French navy ships in port, with over 307 killed (189 U.S. Army, 113 British and 3 U.S. Navy Sailors, and 2 U.S. Marines), over 250 wounded, and all survivors captured. For more on these actions please see attachment H-013-4.

100th Anniversary of World War I

5. World War I: Loss of USS Jacob Jones (Destroyer No. 61), 6 December 1917

On 6 December 1917, the USS Jacob Jones (Destroyer No. 61) was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-53, becoming the first U.S. destroyer ever lost as the result of enemy action. U-53 was the same boat (with the same skipper, Hans Rose) that made a surprise port call in Newport, Rhode Island, in October 1916 (see H-Gram 008, H-008-1).

6. World War I: U.S. Navy's Battleship Division Nine in European Waters, 7 December 1917

Also on 6 December, a French merchant ship carrying ammunition collided with another ship in Halifax harbor, resulting in a massive explosion that leveled much of the city and killed 2,000 people. U.S. Navy ships responded and provided relief. And, on 7 December, the first four U.S. battleships to deploy to the European theater reached the British Royal Navy base at Scapa Flow. For more, please see attachment H-013-5.

Attachment H-013-6 shows the first U.S. battleships in the European theater in World War I arriving at the British base at Scapa Flow on 7 December 1917.

(Sources for this H-gram include, Guadalcanal by Richard Frank; Neptune's Inferno by James Hornfischer, The Conquering Tide by Ian Toll; Information at Sea by Captain Timothy Wolters, USNR; Combined Fleet Decoded by John Prados; Operations in North African Waters and The Struggle for Guadalcanal, volumes II and V of the History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II by Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison; United States Navy and World War I: 1914-1922 Chronology by Dr. Frank A. Blazich, Jr.)



USS Minneapolis (CA-36) at Tulagi with torpedo damage received in the Battle of Tassafaronga. Photograph was taken on 1 December 1942, as work began to cut away the wreckage of her bow (80-G-211215).

H-013-1: The Battle of Tassafaronga—Night of the Long Lances

30 November–1 December 1942

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 1](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2018*

Both the U.S. Navy and Imperial Japanese Navy were stunned by the scale of their losses in the brutal battles in mid-November in 1942 in the

waters around Guadalcanal. However, despite the losses, U.S. strength was increasing and Japan's was not. For example, by the end of November, the strength of the U.S. Marine, Navy, and Army Air Force operating from the Henderson Field complex on Guadalcanal had risen from 85 to almost 190 aircraft, and had now achieved almost unchallenged mastery of the skies over the island and the surrounding waters, at least in daylight. Japan's options to reinforce Guadalcanal were practically nonexistent, nor were Japan's options to resupply its forces already on the island much better. The runs by the "Tokyo Express" (referred to as the "Rat Transportation" system by the Japanese) could not hope to provide Japanese

troops with enough food, let alone ammunition. Increasingly desperate, the Japanese began relying on submarines for delivery of supplies to Guadalcanal, and, in the last three weeks of November, 16 Japanese submarines made runs to the island; each run delivered about one days' food supply. But even this method was dangerous, and increasing numbers of U.S. PT boats (including one that would become famous—PT-109) harassed the subs. Although Operation Watchtower had often been referred to as "Operation Shoestring" by the Americans due to supply shortfalls, to the Japanese, Guadalcanal would become known as "Starvation Island," and, by December, Japanese troops were dying of disease and starvation in large numbers.

As the Japanese high command debated its next moves regarding Guadalcanal, Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, who had led multiple successful "Tokyo Express" runs to Guadalcanal, was ordered to do so again, arriving on the night of 30 November/1 December. Using a newly devised system of buoyant drums half-filled with food and supplies, which would be dropped overboard to be picked up by small Japanese boats from Guadalcanal, the destroyers would be able to more efficiently complete their mission and get out of range of U.S. aircraft by first light. For this run, Tanaka would have eight destroyers, three of them brand-new construction, one of which, the *Naganami*, would serve as his flagship, and another, the *Takanami*, would serve as a picket. The other six destroyers had their torpedo reloads and much of their ammunition off-loaded to compensate for the weight of hundreds of supply barrels on deck. Captain Sato, commander of Destroyer Division 15, would lead the first reinforcement unit of *Oyashio*, *Kuroshio*, and *Kagero* with the other new destroyer *Makinami* attached. *Takanami* would act as a picket to seaward of this group as they hugged the northern Guadalcanal coast. The second reinforcement group of *Suzukaze* and *Kawakaze* would follow behind, with the flagship *Naganami* acting as picket, an unusual position for a Japanese flagship, which was generally

expected to lead from the front. (Although Tanaka would be lionized by the U.S. Navy for his success in this battle, the Japanese would give credit to Sato.)

As the Japanese position was weakening, the U.S. position was strengthening. The repaired carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) joined *Enterprise* (CV-6), and the repaired battleship USS *North Carolina* (BB-55) rejoined her sister USS *Washington* (BB-56) and newly arrived new-construction USS *Indiana* (BB-58), which had replaced the damaged USS *South Dakota* (BB-57). With increasing strength, Vice Admiral William Halsey, Commander of U.S. Forces in the South Pacific, was determined to challenge the next "Tokyo Express" run, and, on 24 November, Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid (who had been relieved of command of the Carrier Task Force after the defeat at Santa Cruz in late October, and none too happy about it) was ordered by Halsey to form up a cruiser-destroyer force (TF-67) to stop the next Japanese resupply attempt (which was waiting for darker moon conditions). Kinkaid's operation plan incorporated many lessons learned from the previous battles. The U.S. force would consist of two cruiser groups and one destroyer group with the flagships of each equipped with the new greatly superior SG radar. The SG-equipped destroyer group would lead the cruisers by 10,000 yards with the intent of conducting a torpedo attack, while the cruisers would commence firing, from longer range, only after the torpedoes hit home.

Based on radio intelligence, the U.S. knew that the Japanese were coming, although the intelligence indicated six destroyers and eight transports would be involved (instead of eight destroyers, of which six were acting as transports). Additional reports from coast watchers indicated that the "Tokyo Express" had left the station. At the same time, on 28 November, on orders from CNO King, Kinkaid was abruptly transferred to take command of U.S. Navy forces in the Aleutians, and Rear Admiral Carleton Wright was placed in command of TF-67. Although Wright had

commanded cruiser-destroyer groups escorting aircraft carriers, he had no experience in night surface combat. The reason for this change of command remains baffling, although Wright decided for the most part to stick with Kinkaid's battle plan—except that the lead destroyers were kept closer to the cruiser line.

As Tanaka's force approached from west of Savo Island, the Japanese were expecting the possibility of a surface engagement based on being spotted by a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft and reports from Japanese reconnaissance aircraft of a large number of U.S. cruisers and destroyers off Guadalcanal earlier in the day. However, they continued onward.

From the east, Wright's force approached, with a line of four destroyers just ahead of the cruiser line, offset in the direction of expected engagement. Led by *Fletcher* (DD-445,) the SG-equipped "Lucky 13" survivor of the November Friday the 13th Battle, the destroyer line consisted of *Perkins* (DD-377 and also SG-equipped), *Maurey* (DD-401), and *Drayton* (DD-366). Leading the cruiser line was Wright's SG-equipped flagship, the heavy cruiser *Minneapolis* (CA-36,) followed by SG-equipped *New Orleans* (CA-32) and *Pensacola* (CA-24). Following behind the first cruiser group, was TG-67.2.3 under the command of Rear Admiral Mahlon S. Tisdale, embarked on the SG-equipped light cruiser *Honolulu* (CL-48), followed by the SG-equipped heavy cruiser *Northampton* (CA-26). Like Wright, none of the U.S. cruisers had any experience in night surface combat, although to be fair, all those that did were sunk or out-of-action. Bringing up the rear were the two destroyers *Lamson* (DD-367) and *Lardner* (DD-487) that had been ordered by Halsey to be stripped from the escort of a convoy leaving Guadalcanal at the last minute; the skippers of the two destroyers had no clue what the battle plan was except to "follow me."

At 2240 on 30 November, Wright's cruiser float planes, which had been flown off the cruisers to

Tulagi so as not to be a fire hazard, finally got airborne after struggling for hours due to the glassy sea. At 2306, *Minneapolis's* SG radar detected the Japanese destroyers at 23,000 yards, correctly discerning as the approaching radar blips resolved themselves into eight contacts. The SG radar on *Fletcher* tracked the four destroyers of the first reinforcement group. At 2312, *Takanami* lookouts detected the U.S. ships, and *Takanami* radioed warning, and Tanaka ordered the unloading cancelled (some of the destroyers threw the barrels over the side prematurely, while others kept them on board) and for his ships to prepare to engage.

At 2315, with range at 7,000 yards and a good target angle, Commander Cole on *Fletcher* requested permission to launch torpedoes. After two minutes, Wright responded with "no." An argument then ensued between the two as to whether the Japanese were in appropriate torpedo range, with Cole insisting they were, although the Japanese were soon passing abeam on an opposite course, which would result in a torpedo shot from behind as the Japanese destroyers were opening the range. At 2320, after another excruciating two-minute delay as the target angle became worse, Wright finally gave the order to launch torpedoes. *Fletcher* fired all ten torpedoes and *Perkins* eight. Without SG radar, *Maurey* and *Drayton* could not see what *Fletcher* and *Perkins* were firing at, so only launched three torpedoes between them. However, before the U.S. torpedoes could reach their targets, Wright gave the order for the cruisers to open fire. The Japanese destroyers assumed (based on their own doctrine) that once guns started firing, torpedoes would already be on the way and took immediate evasive action. Between evading, the bad target angle, and probably the unreliability of U.S. torpedoes, none of them hit anything.

The closest Japanese destroyer to the U.S. force, the picket *Takanami*, found herself on the receiving end of concentrated radar-directed fire

from all five U.S. cruisers. She launched her torpedoes, and, once she was on fire, she opened fire with her guns and fought valiantly until she was smothered by the avalanche of shellfire. Only 33 of her 244 crewmen would survive to make it ashore on Guadalcanal, where their prospects weren't good either.

The remainder of the Japanese destroyers retained their doctrinal discipline and refrained from opening fire, or even increasing speed so as to keep their wake down. With American gunners blinded by their own flashes and the burning pyre of *Takanami*, Captain Sato deliberately and calmly led his four destroyers into a course reversal, paralleling the U.S. cruisers, and unleashed the possibly most devastating surface torpedo attack in history. Two other destroyers in the second reinforcement group did the same a few minutes later. Between 2223 and 2233, six Japanese destroyers fired 44 Long Lance torpedoes at the U.S. cruisers (and demonstrated why *Washington* and *South Dakota* were so incredibly lucky during the 14 November battle).

At 2327, two torpedoes struck the flagship *Minneapolis* just as she fired her ninth salvo at *Takanami*. One torpedo blew off her bow, which dragged alongside the ship. The other hit in fireroom number 2. As flooding spread to other boiler spaces, 33 men were drowned, for a total of 37 killed and 26 wounded. *Minneapolis's* main battery got off two more salvos before she lost power, and was out of action, struggling to stay afloat. Her skipper, Captain Charles E. Rosendall, would receive a Navy Cross for saving his ship despite crippling damage.

While steering to avoid the *Minneapolis*, the *New Orleans* was struck by a torpedo forward that detonated a bomb-storage magazine, severing the ship in two just forward of number 2 main-battery turret, killing everyone in that turret and forward. As flaming oil from the explosion washed over the ship, the skipper of *New Orleans*, Captain Clifford H. Roper, quickly gave the order to

abandon ship, which was countermanded by the executive officer, Commander Whitaker F. Riggs, from aft control. *New Orleans* would lose 183 men, with another 20 wounded, but her crew saved the ship. Much credit goes to the damage-control officer, Lieutenant Commander Hubert M. Hayter, who stayed at his post until the very end, giving away his gas mask to a junior sailor as toxic gas filled the compartment. Lieutenant Richard Haines and Ensign Andrew Foreman also stayed at their post and perished with Hayter, after ensuring that all enlisted Sailors got out of DC Central. All three would receive posthumous Navy Crosses and have ships named after them: *Hayter* (DE-212,) *Haines* (DE-792), and *Foreman* (DE-633). The skipper was also awarded a Navy Cross, while the executive officer received a Legion of Merit. Of note, the ship's chaplain, Lieutenant Commander Howell Forgy, who had earned immortality by shouting encouragement to anti-aircraft gunners on *New Orleans* at Pearl Harbor with "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition!" survived the battle. After emergency repairs at Tulagi, *New Orleans* would sail to Australia, stern-first, for more extensive repair.

While trying to pass the flaming wrecks of *Minneapolis* and *New Orleans*, the *Pensacola*, under the command of Captain Frank L. Lowe, steered toward the engaged side (and was barely missed by *Minneapolis's* tenth salvo) and silhouetted herself in front of the burning U.S. ships, which probably didn't make a difference given how many torpedoes were already headed her way. One torpedo struck *Pensacola* just under her mainmast, igniting severe fires and causing a dangerous list. As *Pensacola's* crew desperately tried to save her, 150 rounds of 8-inch ammunition in turret number 3 began to explode, fortunately one after the other rather than all at once. *Pensacola's* crew would pay dearly to save her—125 killed and 72 wounded—but they did. Her skipper was also awarded a Navy Cross.

The light cruiser *Honolulu*, flagship of Rear Admiral Tisdale and commanded by Captain

Robert Hayler, steered to the disengaged side of the three burning cruisers and was not hit. Hayler would receive the first of his three Navy Crosses for his action at Tassafaronga. Rear Admiral Wright, aboard crippled *Minneapolis*, passed command of TF-67 to Tisdale, who decided the pursue the Japanese destroyers, now retreating at high speed, with *Honolulu* and *Northampton*, ordering the destroyers *Lamson* and *Lardner* to stand by the stricken cruisers. As they made good their escape, Tanaka's destroyers launched most of their remaining torpedoes. Two torpedoes struck *Northampton*; one hit the after engine room and the second 40 feet farther aft. The damage was fatal. Although *Northampton's* crew, under the command of Captain Willard A. Kitts, struggled mightily to save her, she succumbed to her damage. *Northampton's* chief engineer, Commander-select Hilan Ebert, stayed at his post in after engineering until it was too late, but made sure others got out. Ebert was awarded a posthumous Navy Cross, and the USS *Ebert* (DE-768) was named in his honor. Captain Kitts also was awarded a Navy Cross. *Northampton* lost 50 killed, with 35 wounded. *Fletcher* would rescue 646 *Northampton* Sailors and *Drayton* rescued another 127 from the waters of Iron Bottom Sound.

Thus ended one of the most ignominious defeats in U.S. Navy history, although technically Wright and TF-67 succeeded in their mission, since none of the supplies from Tanaka's destroyers made it ashore to starving Japanese troops on Guadalcanal.

After firing his torpedoes at the Japanese, the *Fletcher's* skipper, Commander Cole, mindful of lessons from earlier battles, immediately led his four destroyers out of the line of fire of the cruisers. However, he led them in a particularly circuitous route all the way around Savo Island before rejoining, which did ensure none of the destroyers were hit by either side, but which also earned him a rebuke from Halsey for not providing sufficient support to the cruisers and for

exhibiting poor torpedo tactics. The torpedo fiasco, however, was the fault of Rear Admiral Wright's delay, not due to Cole. Halsey nevertheless awarded a Navy Cross to Wright, as well as to Tisdale and all five cruiser skippers. None were awarded to any destroyer skippers. As a result of Tassafaronga, the PT boats would bear the brunt of harassing further "Tokyo Express" runs. The U.S. Navy was through with committing cruisers to Iron Bottom Sound. By the time of Tassafaronga, every U.S. heavy cruiser that had fought in the waters of Guadalcanal had been sunk or badly damaged. In January 1943, the repaired USS *Chicago* (CA-29,) the sole U.S. heavy cruiser to survive the debacle at Savo Island in August 1942 due to what some considered the less-than-heroic actions of her skipper, Captain Howard Bode (who would take his own life just before the Board of Inquiry released its results), returned for operations in "safer" waters south of Guadalcanal. But like the plot of a bad Freddy Krueger movie, *Chicago* would not escape her fate. The Japanese still had one more sharp stick in the eye for the U.S. Navy at the Battle of Rennell Island in January 1943.



U.S. Navy photo taken after the Battle of Tassafaronga off Guadalcanal shows a U.S. PT boat bringing survivors of the heavy cruiser USS Northampton (CA-26) into Tulagi harbor. In the background is the heavy cruiser New Orleans (CA-32) with her bow blown off, including her number 1 main battery turret. New Orleans survived despite losing almost a quarter of her length.

H-013-2: Survivors of Tassafaronga

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 2](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2017*



USS Wichita (CA-45) engaging the French battleship Jean Bart, off Casablanca, Morocco, on 8 November 1942. Note the shell splashes off Wichita's bow.

H-013-3: Operation Torch—The Naval Battle of Casablanca

8 November 1942

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 3](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2017*

The concept of Operation Torch was extraordinarily audacious, especially the invasion of French Morocco, which entailed transporting 35,000 U.S. Army troops and 250 tanks in complete secrecy 4,000 miles through U-boat-infested waters and landing them, at night, on a hostile shore. The big question was, “how hostile?” Would the Vichy French forces fight or capitulate peacefully? The plan had to assume that the French would fight, which proved to be a correct assumption. Although there were extensive secret negotiations between Allied and Vichy officials, the short story is that those Vichy

officials who were willing to surrender didn’t have the authority to order surrender, and those who had authority were either unwilling to do so, or were not trusted enough to be told the Allied invasion was coming. In effect, the paramount need for secrecy was the primary reason why French forces fought; the attack was underway before they could receive orders to not resist. However, had the secrecy not been maintained, the Germans would have had enough time to react with U-boats and inflict considerable losses.

Operation Torch was also a rush job, because the landings in Morocco had to be executed before the sea conditions became too bad for amphibious operations, and the date chosen for the landings, 8 November, was already as late as possible in the season. Any significant delay would result in a postponement until spring, which would not provide the relief that the Russians on the Eastern Front and the British in Egypt needed (although as it turned out, Operation Torch didn’t do all that much to relieve German pressure in either place, since the Germans were content to let the Vichy French lose their colonies in Africa). In many cases, the need

for speed and secrecy came at the expense of training, which would become apparent during the operation. For example, the U.S. Navy aircrews on the four new escort carriers (converted tankers) were so green that they were not allowed to conduct training en route under the rationale that it was better to suffer operational losses during and following combat missions rather than to lose the planes to accidents before the battle even started.

Operation Torch was also complicated. It makes the Japanese organization for the Midway operation look not quite so bad. In a nutshell, there were three major objectives: Casablanca, Morocco and Oran and Algiers, Algeria. The operations to invade French Algeria were Allied, with the troops going ashore mostly American, while the ships at sea were almost all British, under British command. The invasion of French Morocco was almost entirely a U.S. operation. The focus of this H-gram is on the operations of Task Force 34, under the command of Rear Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, and, in particular, the naval battle that occurred on 8 November off Casablanca between units of the Vichy French navy and the U.S. Navy.

Due to security reasons, Task Force 34 (about 102 ships) departed from multiple ports and followed multiple circuitous and deceptive routes. The mission of TF 34 was to put 35,000 U.S. troops, under the command of Major General George S. Patton, ashore at three primary landing areas in French Morocco. The primary landing site was Fedala, about 12 nautical miles north of the port and Vichy French naval base at Casablanca, where about 19,000 U.S. troops would go ashore. The northern landing area was near Port Lyautey and a nearby airfield, where 9,000 troops would go ashore. The southern objective was the port at Safi, about 140 nautical miles south of Casablanca, where tanks and about 6,500 troops would land. The port of Casablanca itself was too heavily defended to take directly, hence the need

to land armor to the north and south and take Casablanca from the flank.

Naval air cover for the operation was critical, as intelligence indicated that about 168 French aircraft were based in the area and could oppose the landings. Air cover was provided by the USS *Ranger* (CV-4) and four *Sangamon*-class converted tankers, carrying a total of 108 F4F Wildcat fighters, 36 SBD Dauntless dive bombers, and 28 TBF Avenger torpedo bombers, as well as ferrying 76 U.S. Army Air Force P-40F fighters (which could be flown off a carrier, but not operate from one).

Rear Admiral Hewitt was embarked on the heavy cruiser USS *Augusta* (CA-31) with Major General Patton. TG 34.1 was the covering group, commanded by Rear Admiral Robert Giffen, and consisted of the brand new battleship USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59), the heavy cruisers USS *Wichita* (CA-45) and USS *Tuscaloosa* (CA-37), and a screen of four destroyers and an oiler. TG-34.2 was commanded by Rear Admiral Ernest D. McWhorter embarked on *Ranger*. *Ranger*, along with USS *Suwannee* (ACV-27), would provide general air cover, with 54 Wildcats and 18 SBDs on *Ranger* and 29 Wildcats and nine TBFs on *Suwannee*. The new light cruiser USS *Cleveland* (CL-55) and five destroyers screened the carriers. (The designation ACV would subsequently be changed to CVE.) *Suwannee* was commanded by Captain J. J. "Jocko" Clark, the first Native American to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy ('17), who would go on to a distinguished career as carrier, carrier group, and fleet commander in the Pacific and Korean War. Four U.S. submarines provided pre-invasion scouting and navigational beacon services.

The Center Attack Group (TG 34.9) covered the main landings at Fedala, near Casablanca, and included *Augusta*, the light cruiser USS *Brooklyn* (CL-40), ten destroyers, six minesweepers, and 15 troop transport/cargo ships.

The Northern Attack Group (TG 34.8) under Rear Admiral Monroe Kelly included the old battleship USS *Texas* (BB-35); the escort carrier USS *Sangamon* (ACV-26) with 12 Wildcats, nine SBDs and nine TBFs embarked; the escort carrier USS *Chenango* (ACV-28) with 76 U.S. Army Air Force P-40Fs aboard; the light cruiser USS *Savannah* (CL-42); seven destroyers; eight transport/cargo ships; and a number of other miscellaneous vessels.

The Southern Attack Group (TG 34.10) under the command of Rear Admiral Lyal A. Davidson embarked on USS *Philadelphia* (CL-41) included the old battleship USS *New York* (BB-34), eight destroyers, two assault destroyers, three mincraft, six troop transport/cargo vessels, and two oilers. The escort carrier USS *Santee* (ACV-29) with 14 Wildcats, nine SBDs, and eight TBFs provided air support to the southern group.

As the 102 ships of TF 34 approached the Moroccan coast, Hewitt was faced with a difficult decision since the weather forecast for the day of the landing was very poor. However, delay risked losing the element of surprise, resulting in greater French opposition and German U-boat threat, and there was no guarantee that the weather would get appreciably better any time soon. Hewitt made the decision to accept the risk, and a significant number of landing craft were lost due to the sea conditions, but it would prove to be the correct decision.

The first conflict between U.S. and French forces occurred at about 0500 on 8 November when an armed French steamer, the *Victoria*, blundered into the staging area, and the minesweeper USS *Hogan* (DMS-6) fired warning shots across her bow. The *Victoria* returned machine-gun fire and tried to ram the *Hogan*, which responded with lethal 20-mm fire, killing the *Victoria*'s gunnery officer and forcing her surrender.

The code word to indicate that the French were resisting was "batter up." The response giving

permission to engage resisting French forces was "play ball." The first "batter up" occurred at first light, as French anti-aircraft guns opened fire on *Ranger* VF-9 fighters flying near an airfield near Rabat. Receiving the "play ball" signal, the fighters then proceeded to strafe and destroy seven French aircraft on one airfield and fourteen bombers on another. *Ranger* VF-14 fighters engaged in a dogfight with French fighters, in which eight French fighters and four Wildcats were shot down. A VF-9 Wildcat was shot down later in the morning and additional French aircraft were destroyed on the ground. During the course of the day, about 20 French aircraft were shot down, but a number were able to get airborne and strafe U.S. troops on the beach. For some reason the French did not go after the U.S. floatplanes providing spotting services for U.S. ships giving gunfire support. Over the next two days, U.S. aircraft losses, including operational losses, included 25 F4F Wildcat fighters, nine SBD Dauntless dive bombers, and ten TBF Avenger torpedo bombers.

The landings at Fedala commenced before dawn, and, although marked by significant confusion, delay, and operational losses of landing craft, enough troops were ashore before daybreak to preclude the French from being able to counter-attack. Nevertheless, at first light and as the French realized troops were coming ashore, they opened fire on the soldiers, landing craft, and supporting ships. By 1700, almost half the 347 landing craft in use had been wrecked due to navigational errors and sea conditions; very few were actually lost to French fire. Nevertheless, the destroyer USS *Murphy* (DD-603) was hit early on by shore battery fire, with three killed. The minesweeper USS *Palmer* (DMS-5) was also hit twice with minimal damage.

The commander of Vichy French naval forces in the Atlantic was Vice Admiral F. C. Michelier. Michelier was considered too loyal to the Vichy regime by those Frenchmen who were willing to work with the Allies and therefore was not trusted

to be informed of the impending Allied landing. Nevertheless, a number of indicators, including a failed coup attempt against Vichy army leaders in French North Africa, convinced Michelier that something was amiss, and he issued several alerts beginning at 0130 on 8 November. He apparently did not hear a radio broadcast by President Franklin Roosevelt imploring the French in North Africa not to fight. This broadcast was timed based on operations against French Algeria in the Mediterranean and preceded operations in Morocco, much to the consternation of senior leaders in TF 34 who heard it (and had not been informed it was coming) and believed it would blow the element of surprise. As it turned out, for whatever reason, practically no one in the Vichy hierarchy heard the broadcast. As a result, Michelier had not received any instructions from high not to fight. So, when the U.S. invasion force showed up by surprise, he gave orders to his forces to engage.

At about 0700, as the *Massachusetts*, *Wichita*, and *Tuscaloosa* were preparing to engage French shore batteries, *Tuscaloosa* approached the entrance to Casablanca Harbor and reported that her scout plane was being fired upon, two French aircraft were closing, and two submarines were standing out from the harbor. The cruiser subsequently shot down one of the French aircraft. The formidable French shore battery known as El Hank (four 8-inch guns) opened fire and straddled *Massachusetts* with its first salvo. The unfinished and immobile French battleship *Jean Bart* opened fire with her operable forward quad 15-inch turret from pierside in Casablanca Harbor and hit a couple hundred yards from *Massachusetts*. *Massachusetts* received the "play ball" code at 0704, and she and *Tuscaloosa* concentrated their fire on *Jean Bart*.

Massachusetts fired nine full 16-inch gun salvos (9 x 9 = 81 rounds) and hit *Jean Bart* five times within 16 minutes. The first shell hit in an empty magazine. The last shell to hit glanced off the number 1 turret's armor and bounced into the city, apparently without exploding, as it later

became a souvenir at French navy headquarters. The hit, however, jammed the drive train of the turret and put *Jean Bart*'s main battery out of action for eight hours. *Jean Bart*'s 15-inch guns had sufficient range to reach the landing area at Fedala, but *Massachusetts*'s quick action eliminated that threat. El Hank, however, was not easily silenced and would dog U.S. ships all day, despite hundreds of rounds fired its way. *Tuscaloosa* and *Wichita* fired on the submarine berthing area, and, along with *Ranger* dive bombers, sank three French submarines, and a number of merchant ships in the harbor. However, eight French submarines succeeded in exiting the harbor. *Massachusetts*'s only damage was a round from El Hank through her commissioning pennant.

At 0815, six French ships sortied at high speed from the harbor. Two destroyer leaders (i.e., large destroyers that served as flotilla leaders) and four destroyers, made a beeline for the Fedala landing area. *Ranger* aircraft strafed the destroyers, which shot down one of the *Ranger* SBDs. The French destroyers got close enough to hit several landing craft as they exchanged fire with the U.S. destroyers *Wilkes* (DD-441) and *Ludlow* (DD-428). *Ludlow* and the French destroyer leader *Milan* exchanged hits on each other. The flagship *Augusta* and light cruiser *Brooklyn* arrived to force the French destroyers to turn away about four miles from the landing area. The French ships then hid themselves in a very effective smoke screen, darting out to fire a few salvos before hiding themselves again while the U.S. ships expended prodigious amounts of ammunition. Major General Patton, aboard *Augusta*, apparently greatly enjoyed the display of naval gunfire, despite having his gear blown overboard.

At 1000, as the French destroyers bobbed and weaved in the smoke screen, the French light cruiser *Primauguet* sortied, and the *Massachusetts* and *Tuscaloosa* closed in on the destroyer action and one of them finally hit a French destroyer, the *Fougueux*, which blew up and sank. About the

same time, the El Hank shore battery hit *Augusta* with an 8-inch round that fortunately did little damage. Shortly afterward, *Massachusetts* was almost hit by multiple torpedoes from an unidentified French submarine, while *Tuscaloosa* narrowly avoided four torpedoes from the French submarine *Medusa*, and *Brooklyn* dodged five torpedoes from the French submarine *Amazon*e at the same time she and three U.S. destroyers were engaging the *Primauguet* and the remaining five French destroyers. At 1008, *Brooklyn* was hit by a dud shell, but got payback at 1112, when she hit the French destroyer *Boulannais* with a full salvo, causing her to roll over and sink.

By 1100, *Massachusetts* had expended 60 percent of her 16-inch shells and began to conserve ammunition as a hedge in the event the French naval forces at Dakar, West Africa (including the battleship *Richelieu*) showed up unexpectedly. By this time, the French ships' luck had begun to run out under the hail of U.S. fire. The light cruiser *Primauguet* had been hit multiple times by *Augusta* and *Brooklyn*, including three hits below the waterline and one 8-inch hit on her number 3 turret, and she made a run for the harbor. The destroyer leader *Milan* had been hit five times and also made for port. The destroyer *Brestois* was also hit by *Augusta* and U.S. destroyers; she made it into the harbor, only to be strafed by *Ranger* aircraft and sank at the pier at 2100.

At 1115, the three remaining French ships, destroyer leader *Albatross*, and destroyers *Frondeur* and *L'Alcyon* formed up to conduct a coordinated torpedo attack on the U.S. cruisers, but the attack was broken up by *Tuscaloosa* and *Wichita*, although *Wichita* was hit by a shell from El Hank and had to dodge three torpedoes from a French submarine. *Frondeur* was hit aft, limped into port, and was finished off by strafing. *Albatross* was hit twice by shells, then by two bombs from *Ranger* aircraft and was left dead-in-the-water. Of the seven French surface combatants that sortied, only *L'Alcyon* returned to port undamaged.

At 1245, the French navy vessel *La Grandier* (Morison called it an "aviso-colonial" whatever that is, but it was said to resemble a light cruiser from a distance) and two coastal minesweepers sortied from Casablanca. Their mission was actually to rescue French survivors from the morning engagement, but their movement was interpreted as a threat. Two French destroyers that had not been engaged in the morning, the *Tempête* and *Simoun*, milled about smartly around the breakwater trying to lure U.S. ships back into range for El Hank, for which the U.S. ships had gained a healthy respect by this time. *Augusta*, *Brooklyn*, destroyers, and aircraft attacked the rescue ships, which managed to avoid being hit. In the meantime, a French tug came out and began to tow *Albatross* into port, but *Ranger* aircraft strafed, bombed, and forced *Albatross* to be beached. *Ranger* aircraft also repeatedly strafed the now grounded *Milan* and *Primauguet*. A direct bomb hit on *Primauguet*'s bridge killed the commanding officer, executive officer, and eight officers, and wounded Rear Admiral Gervais de Lafond.

Although the French had put up a spirited fight, and U.S. reports indicate an admiration for their professionalism, the battle ended up very one-sided. The French scored one hit each on the *Massachusetts*, *Augusta*, *Brooklyn*, *Ludlow*, and *Murphy*, none of which caused major damage and only the three deaths on *Murphy*. The French also destroyed about 40 landing boats, most as a result of strafing by French aircraft in the early morning. The French lost four destroyers sunk, and the battleship *Jean Bart* disabled, the light cruiser *Primauguet* heavily damaged, burned out, and aground, and two destroyer leaders damaged and aground. The French also lost eight submarines; three were sunk in port before they could get underway, the *Méduse* was bombed by U.S. carrier aircraft on 8 and 9 November and beached. The *Sidi-Ferruch*, *Conq rant*, and *Sybille* all went missing; at least one was sunk by U.S. depth charges. The *Le Tonnant* made it to Cadiz, Spain, where she was scuttled by her own crew.

Of the eight subs that sortied from Casablanca, two made it safely to Dakar, and only *Orphée* returned to Casablanca unscathed.

However, the French navy wasn't quite done yet. Action on 9 November was almost entirely on the ground and in the air. French aircraft bombed the transports off the beachhead at Fedala with no hits, and one bomber attacked the light cruiser *Brooklyn* with four bombs, which were near-misses. Six *Ranger* Wildcats engaged in a dogfight with eleven French fighters and shot down five of them and damaged four, for no losses. U.S. carrier aircraft also flew numerous missions in support of U.S. Army advances toward Casablanca, taking out tanks and a column of trucks bringing reinforcements. A plane known as the "phantom raider," a Messerschmitt Bf-109 that had repeatedly strafed the beachhead, was finally shot down.

On 10 November, fighting continued as American troops closed in around Casablanca. Vice Admiral Michelier was determined to defend the port until the end. The survivors of the four sunken French destroyers were formed up into an infantry unit that, with a Senegalese battalion, would form the last-ditch defense, which was significantly bolstered by anti-aircraft guns on the *Jean Bart* and other ships in port. Two French corvettes sortied from the port and attacked U.S. Army troops from the seaward flanks. *Augusta* and four destroyers succeeded in driving the French corvettes back, at which point—by surprise—*Jean Bart* opened up on *Augusta* with her repaired main battery. The French had fixed *Jean Bart's* damaged drive train for the one operational turret, but had left it so that it appeared still damaged to deceive U.S. scout aircraft. The deception was successful. Although only able to fire two-gun salvos, *Jean Bart* repeatedly straddled *Augusta* with ten salvos, at one point drenching *Augusta's* bridge with yellow-dyed water from a near miss. In the forenoon, four torpedoes from a submarine passed under the stern of *Ranger*, but did not explode. So, at 1500,

nine *Ranger* dive bombers rolled in on *Jean Bart* with nine 1,000-pound bombs, achieving two direct hits, which caused the battleship to settle to the shallow bottom (*Jean Bart* would eventually be refloated and repaired). (Of note, one of these SBD Dauntless dive bombers was later lost on a training mission over Lake Michigan, raised from the lake in the late 1990's by A and T Recovery at the behest of the Navy and Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, and restored by the Kalamazoo Air Zoo, where it is now on loan from the Navy for display.)

On the morning of 11 November, Vice Admiral Michelier finally received orders from Admiral François Darlan via General Nogues to cease fighting. Darlan was the senior Vichy French official in French North Africa (by accident, he came to visit his sick son on 7 November) with authority to order a cease-fire. Darlan had been commander-in-chief of the French navy at the start of the war, and, when France surrendered and the Vichy government was formed, he remained in command of the Vichy French navy. Darlan had given his word that no French ships would fall into German hands, an assurance that wasn't good enough for British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The Royal Navy subsequently sank and damaged much of the French Fleet at Mers al-Khebir, Algeria (where it had gone after evacuating French bases on the Atlantic and English Channel). Embittered by this action, Darlan rose to become the number-two official in the Vichy government after Marshal Petain. Darlan offered Hitler active military cooperation against the British, but the Germans didn't trust the French either, and eventually he was reduced to just being the commander-in-chief of the Vichy French armed forces. When Operation Torch commenced, Darlan was captured by pro-Allied French forces (not associated with General Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces). Long story short, Darlan made a deal with General Dwight D. Eisenhower to surrender French Forces in North Africa in exchange for being named high commissioner. It worked, but it incensed de

Gaulle. It also incensed Hitler, and the Germans invaded and occupied the part of southern France still under Vichy control, and the remainder of the French fleet at Toulon scuttled itself rather than fall in German hands. Darlan was assassinated by yet another French faction two months later.

Rear admiral Hewitt and Michelier met ashore at Fedhala on the morning of 11 November. Hewitt said he regretted having to fire on French ships. Michelier responded with, "I had my orders and did my duty, you had yours and did your duty; now that it is over, we are ready to cooperate." The price to the French was about 460 sailors killed and over 200 wounded. Overall, Operation Torch cost the lives of about 1,300 French, 526 Americans, and 574 British.

And then the Germans showed up, although the first casualty was one of the missing French subs, mistaken for a U-boat and sunk by planes from the escort carrier *Suwannee* on the afternoon of 11 November. With the approach of the first follow-up high-speed supply convoy, and intelligence indicating German U-boats were approaching, Hewitt had to decide whether to bring the convoy in to Casablanca or bring in the 15 transports anchored off Fedala because there was not room for both. Although the convoy was capable of maneuvering against the U-boat threat, Hewitt decided to bring it in. Less than an hour after making the decision, the transport USS *Joseph Hewes* (AP-50), followed by the tanker USS *Winooski* (AO-38) and the destroyer USS *Hambleton* (DD-455) were all hit by torpedoes, probably from *U-173*. *Hewes* sank rapidly with 90 percent of her cargo and about 100 men, although most of her embarked troops were already ashore. *Winooski* was damaged, but was able to resume refueling operations the next day. *Hambleton* suffered 20 killed, missing, or fatally wounded, and lost all power, but remained afloat and was towed into port by the tug USS *Cherokee* (AT-66) and eventually returned to the United States.

Throughout the morning of 12 November, the *Ranger* and other U.S. ships played cat and mouse with German submarines, with multiple reports of near-miss torpedoes and depth-charge attacks. By 1730, the German submarine *U-130*, hugging the coast so close she scraped bottom, had worked her way into the transport anchorage. *U-130* fired four torpedoes from her bow tubes and one from a stern tube, and all five hit. The transports *Edward Rutledge* (AP-52,) *Tasker H. Bliss* (AP-42,) and *Hugh L. Scott* (AP-43) were hit and sunk, with the loss of another 74 U.S. servicemen, although over 1,000 were rescued from the water. *U-173* torpedoed the cargo ship *Electra* (AK-21) on 15 November in the approaches to Casablanca, but *Electra* was saved by great damage control and with the assistance of other ships and the tug *Cherokee*. *U-173* was depth-charged and sunk by the destroyer USS *Woolsey* (DD-437) on 16 November. *U-130* made good her escape. The U-boat attacks demonstrated the importance of maintaining the secrecy of the invasion. Had the Germans been able to muster more than two U-boats to oppose the landings sooner, the results could have been devastating. As it was, the British escort carrier HMS *Avenger* was sunk by *U-155* on 15 November during the Mediterranean portion of Operation Torch, with 516 of her crew lost.



USS Cole (DD-155) during the North African campaign, November 1942. Her mast was removed to facilitate her role in the landings at Safi, Morocco, on 8 November 1942 (80-G-31435).

H-013-4: Forgotten Valor—The Battles of Safi Harbor, Wadi Sebou, and Oran Harbor 8 - 10 November 1942

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 4](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2017*

The Battle of Safi Harbor, 8 November 1942

The famous British Admiral Lord Nelson reputedly said, “A ship’s a fool that fights a fort,” so one wonders about the wisdom of using a ship to

break into a heavily defended harbor. But, at 0428 on 8 November 1942, the heavily modified World War I-vintage destroyer, USS *Bernadou* (DD-153,) penetrated the harbor of Safi, the only port (besides Casablanca itself) in Morocco with facilities to off-load medium tanks, which would be needed for the assault on Casablanca. With her funnels and masts cut down very low to make her more stealthy, *Bernadou’s* mission of bringing 197 U.S. Army soldiers trained in night raider tactics into Safi to prevent Vichy French sabotage of the critical port infrastructure depended to a large degree on surprise for success. *Bernadou’s* skipper, Dublin-born Lieutenant Commander (and future rear admiral) Robert E. Braddy, could tell by the high-speed traffic converging on the port that the French had been alerted (having presumably failed a challenge signal from a French light a few

minutes earlier was also another indicator). However, although the French expected "something," they didn't expect a destroyer to come barreling right into the port. In the darkness and confusion the French did not open fire until *Bernadou* was already in the harbor, taking the destroyer under fire from multiple directions, with 155-mm, 75-mm, and machine guns, despite *Bernadou's* firing of an American flag flare. At 0428, the supporting destroyer, USS *Mervine* (DD-489), gave the radio call "batter up," indicating the French were resisting. She immediately received the "play ball" response from Rear Admiral L. A. Davidson, giving U.S. ships permission to open fire (the first such call of Operation Torch), which also caused the battleship USS *New York* (BB-34) and light cruiser USS *Philadelphia* (CL-41) to commence firing on French positions. Although French shells were hitting all around *Bernadou*, her guns proved quicker and more accurate than those of the French, silencing the artillery with 3-inch rounds and the machine guns with grenade launchers. *Bernadou* literally fought a fort, silencing a 75-mm battery in the Old Portuguese Fort. With her primary planned berth fouled, *Bernadou* beached herself at the head of the harbor and Army troops went ashore and fanned out through the port.

USS *Cole* (DD-155), under the command of Lieutenant Commander (and future rear admiral) George G. Palmer, and modified in the same manner as *Bernadou*, was supposed to be following immediately behind *Bernadou* and leading a wave of Army assault craft, but nearly ran head-on into the breakwater since she was erroneously navigating off a light in a house window instead of the lighthouse (which was out). As it turned out, the delay was providential, as the army craft had gotten lost, too, and had *Cole* led them in at the peak of French resistance, casualties would have been higher. Nevertheless, the *Cole* brought her 197 embarked troops into the harbor along with the accompanying wave of assault craft and suppressed renewed French resistance. Despite the at-times intense French

resistance, only ten U.S. Army troops were killed and damage to *Bernadou* and *Cole* was minimal. French casualties numbered 27 killed and 44 wounded. Although *Bernadou* was high on the rocks, both she and *Cole* would continue to serve as convoy escorts throughout the war. In this case, the sheer audacity of the plan led to success, and both destroyers were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation; the commanding officers, Braddy and Palmer, were awarded the Navy Cross.

The Battle of Wadi Sebou, 10 November 1942

North of Casablanca, U.S. Army troops trying to take Port Lyautey and the airfield were bogged down by determined resistance from 3,000 to 4,000 French troops and well-placed artillery (84 U.S. troops would be killed in this fight). French aircraft flying from the airfield periodically strafed the U.S. beachhead and engaged in dogfights with U.S. Navy aircraft (and gave a creditable account of themselves). As a result, the USS *Dallas* (DD-199), commanded by Lieutenant Commander (and future rear admiral) Robert Brodie, Jr., was given orders to execute a highly daring mission to go ten miles up the narrow Wadi Sebou (river) in daylight on 10 November and land 75 Army raiders directly onto the airfield. Like the *Bernadou* and *Cole*, the *Dallas* had been modified for exactly such a mission. Earlier on 8 November, *Dallas* had tried to break through the boom blocking the river mouth and had been driven off by intense French fire.

Before dawn on 10 November, a net-cutting party on rubber boats, led by naval reservist Ensign Mark Starkweather, succeeded in cutting the boom while under heavy French fire; every one of the party was wounded. Starkweather would be awarded a Navy Cross. However, first light would reveal that the breach was in shoal water where *Dallas* couldn't go. Nevertheless, *Dallas* rammed and cut through the boom herself (and you thought this was a just a scene from the movie *Sand Pebbles*) and proceeded up river against an ebb tide under heavy French fire. *Dallas* was

piloted by a Free French civilian, René Malevergne, who had been imprisoned by the Vichy French for anti-Nazi activity, but had escaped to England; Malevergne knew the river well. Despite this, *Dallas* ran aground multiple times in the narrow, winding, shallow river. In one case, a French near-miss lifted *Dallas*'s stern out of the mud in which she was stuck, enabling her to resume progress. Squeezing between French ships that had been deliberately sunk to block the river, and with French fire reportedly turning the river to "froth" (French artillery had difficulty adjusting to her speed), *Dallas* resumed upriver, returning fire along the way. At one point, an "over" from *Dallas* took out an unseen anti-tank gun that was holding up a column of U.S. tanks. A SOC seaplane, launched from the light cruiser USS *Savannah* (CL-42), dropped a depth charge and silenced a threatening artillery battery. (Depth charges, with their fuses set to instantaneous, were discovered to be highly effective anti-tank weapons during Operation Torch.) At some points, *Dallas* literally plowed a trench through the soft mud until she reached her destination at the airfield, and, except for her bottom, virtually unscathed. *Dallas*'s embarked Army troops quickly captured the airfield. By 1030 that morning, U.S. Army Air Force P-40 fighters, flown off one of the U.S. escort carriers, were operating from Lyautey airfield. For his audacity, Lieutenant Commander Brodie would be awarded the Navy Cross. René Malevergne would also be the first foreign civilian to be awarded a Navy Cross. *Dallas* received a Presidential Unit Citation.

The Battle of Oran Harbor, 8 November 1942

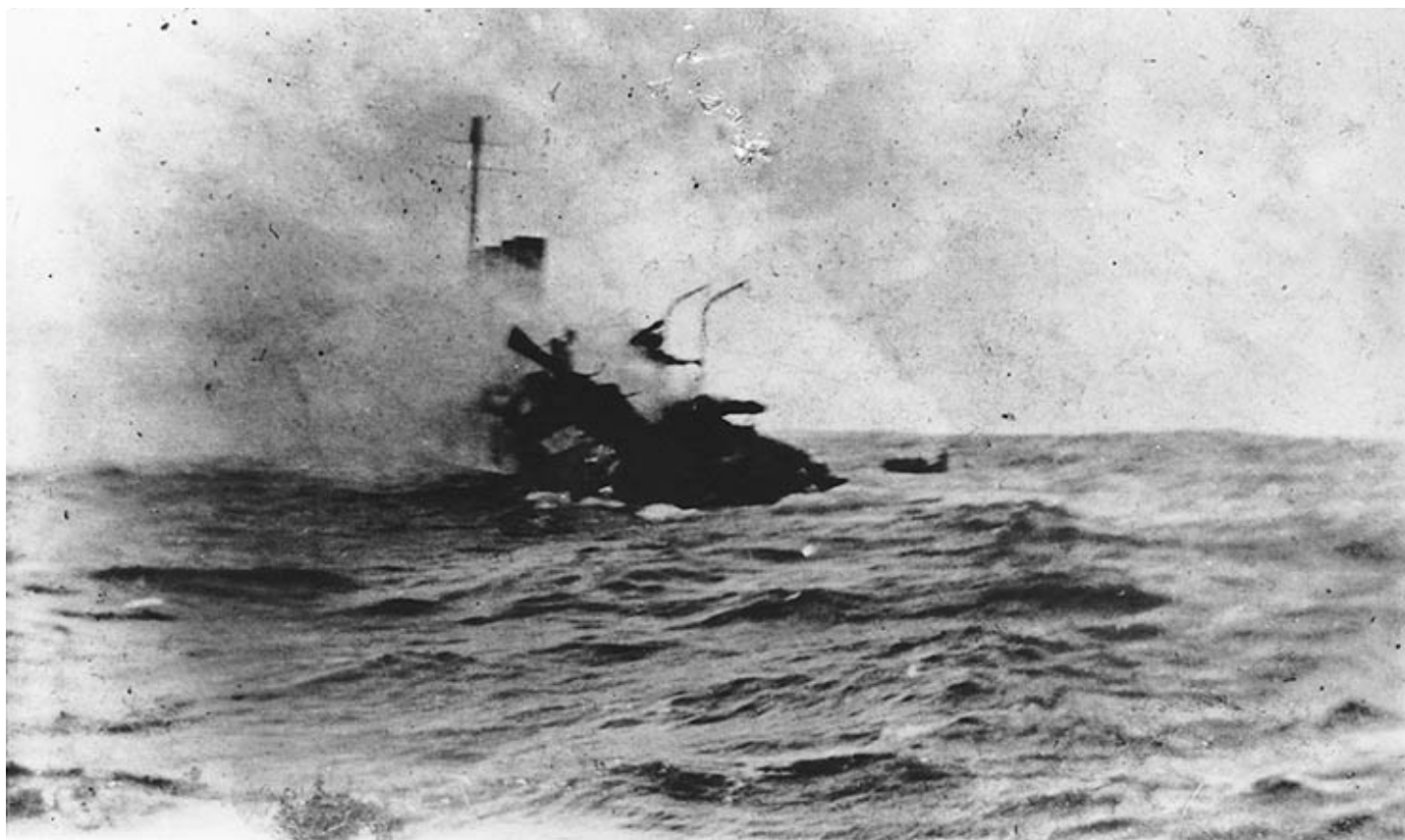
The Operation Torch landings in Algeria were under British command, so I have not discussed them much in this H-gram. However, I am including the operation to take Oran harbor as an example of the very fine line between audacious and foolhardy. The HMS *Walney* and HMS *Hartland* were both former U.S. Coast Guard *Lake*-class cutters that had been transferred to the United Kingdom as part of Lend-Lease. They had

been modified in similar ways to the *Bernadou*, *Cole*, and *Dallas* above. The ships were commanded and crewed by the British, but their mission was to take about 400 U.S. Army raiders and a 33-man U.S. Navy detachment (five officers, 22 Sailors, and seven Marines under the command of Lieutenant Commander G. D. Dickey) into the heavily defended Vichy French port of Oran. The Navy detachment's mission was to prevent French ships from being scuttled and blocking the harbor. Although they were now British ships, both ships flew oversized U.S. ensigns. The reason was because after France surrendered to Germany in June 1940, the Royal Navy had preemptively attacked the French fleet at Mers el-Kebir, Algeria, to keep it from falling into German hands, sinking and damaging many French ships and killing almost 1,300 French sailors. The British correctly assumed the French might still be sore about it, and hoped incorrectly that the U.S. flag might get a better reception. U.S. Rear Admiral A. C. Bennett (Commander, Advance Group, Amphibious Forces Atlantic Fleet) objected to the plan, arguing that if the French resisted, then the port was too heavily defended for success, and if the French did not resist, then the mission was unnecessary. Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe (and former CNO) Admiral Harold Stark agreed with Bennett, but the British admiral in charge of the Torch landings in Algeria, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, believed that with the element of surprise the operation could be successful, a decision he later admitted was a mistake.

Almost everything went wrong from the beginning. French searchlights quickly picked up the two ships, and shore batteries opened up. Unlike Safi and Port Lyautey, Oran had a number of French navy destroyers and submarines in port, and their crews reacted very quickly and effectively. By the time *Walney* and *Hartland* (with the U.S. Navy detachment embarked) broke through the booms into the narrow harbor after 0300 on 8 November, they were being hammered mercilessly from all sides by French warships.

After she unsuccessfully attempted to ram an underway French destroyer, the bridge of *Walney* was completely shot away as she drifted to the head of the harbor before sinking. At one point, the French destroyer *Typhon*, still pier-side, poured salvo after salvo of 4.7-inch fire into *Hartland* from a range of 100 feet. Fires below drove U.S. Army troops topside, where they were slaughtered by point-blank machine-gun fire before *Hartland* sank. Casualties were very heavy. Of 393 U.S. Army raiders embarked, 189 were killed and 157 wounded. A total of 113 British crewmen were killed and 86 wounded. The U.S. Navy detachment came out comparatively well with five killed (including two Marines) and seven wounded, and was credited with saving the lives of many army soldiers, who were unfamiliar with life jackets and water survival. The survivors were all taken prisoner by the French and held until the Vichy French in Algeria switched sides a few days later.

(This section is primarily derived from Samuel Eliot Morison's *History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. II, Operations in North African Waters*.)



USS Jacob Jones (DD-61) was sunk by German submarine U-53 on the night of 6 December 1917. After fleeing from the mortally wounded vessel, Seaman William G. Ellis captured her final destruction in this photograph (Smithsonian Photograph 72-4509-A).

H-013-5: World War I Continued

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 5](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2017*

On 6 December 1917, the destroyer USS *Jacob Jones* (Destroyer No. 61), sailing alone, was torpedoed and sunk by the German submarine U-53 near the Isle of Scilly, England, the first U.S. destroyer lost to enemy action. Under the command of Commander David W. Bagley, the *Jacob Jones* sighted and attempted to avoid the torpedo, which struck aft and blew off the rudder, but did not detonate the depth charges on the stern. This was reportedly the longest successful torpedo shot to that date (3,000 yards). The explosion knocked out the *Jacob Jones*'s radio, so no distress call could be sent, as the ship sank in

about eight minutes. However, as the *Jacob Jones* went down by the stern, the bow increasingly approached vertical and the stern reached depths where the depth charges began to go off, killing many of the survivors in the water. Out of the crew of 110, two officers and 62 enlisted men were ultimately lost due to the initial explosion, the detonation of the depth charges, and exposure before survivors were rescued the next day. Lieutenant Junior Grade Stanton F. Kalk repeatedly helped rescue other Sailors and equalize the loads on the rafts before he succumbed to hypothermia. Kalk and Bagley would be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal (at that time a higher award than the Navy Cross). Bagley had taken a raft with several oarsmen to try to reach the nearest land to get help. When his group was rescued by a British patrol vessel, Bagley learned that another ship had rescued the other survivors in the vicinity of the sinking. Chief Boatswain's Mate Harry Gibson and Chief Electrician's Mate L. J. Kelly would also

be awarded the Navy Cross, Gibson posthumously. Lieutenant Norman Scott was one of the survivors; he would go on to become a rear admiral leading a U.S. task force to victory in the Battle of Cape Esperance before being awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal on 13 November 1942.

The *U-53*, under the command of *Kapitänleutnant* Hans Rose, surfaced and took two of the seriously wounded survivors on board for medical care (they also were among the first U.S. POW's of the war) and in an act of chivalry very rare by that time of the war, Rose radioed the coordinates of the sinking to the U.S. destroyer base at Queenstown, Ireland. Of note, Rose had brazenly brought *U-53* into Newport, Rhode Island, in October 1916 (and paid reciprocal courtesy calls on Rear Admiral Albert Gleaves and Rear Admiral Austin Knight) before departing and sinking several merchant ships just outside U.S. territorial waters. *Jacob Jones* had been in port Newport when *U-53* made its call. In addition to *Jacob Jones*, Rose also sank 87 merchant ships (over 224,000 gross registered tons) during the war, the fifth highest total for a U-boat skipper.

The name "Jacob Jones" was quickly bestowed on a new-construction destroyer (DD-130), which was commissioned in 1919. At dawn on 28 February 1942, *Jacob Jones* was hit by at least two torpedoes fired by *U-578*, which hit the forward magazine, resulting in a massive explosion that disintegrated the forward end of the ship. Another torpedo then blew off the stern. Only about 25 to 30 survived the initial explosions before *Jacob Jones*'s own depth charges exploded, killing even more. Only 12 survivors were ultimately rescued. An *Edsall*-class destroyer-escort was then named "Jacob Jones" (DE-130) and she served on convoy duty in the Atlantic and did not get sunk.

However, 6 December 1917, was a particularly bad day for the Allies. The French cargo ship *SS*

Mont Blanc, loaded with explosives, collided with a Norwegian steamer in Halifax harbor, Nova Scotia, and exploded in what was one of the largest man-made non-atomic explosions in history, killing over 2,000 residents of Halifax and sailors in the harbor. The U.S. protected cruiser *USS Tacoma* (C-18) and troop ship *USS Von Steuben* (ID-3017) were struck by shock waves, but not seriously damaged; the two ships subsequently participated in relief efforts.

Something happened on 7 December besides Pearl Harbor. Battleship Division Nine arrived at the British base of Scapa Flow in 1917, after crossing the Atlantic—the first U.S. battleships to arrive in the European theater. Under the command of Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman, the division consisted of the battleships *USS Delaware* (BB-28), *USS Florida* (BB-30), *USS Wyoming* (BB-32), and *USS New York* (BB-34). The U.S. battleships, designated the Sixth Battle Squadron, would operate as an integral part of the Royal Navy Grand Fleet under the overall command of Admiral Sir David Beatty. The arrival of the battleships was the result of months of negotiation between the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy. At the time of U.S. entry into the war, the British were in desperate need of help from U.S. Navy destroyers to combat the U-boat threat and to implement the new convoy scheme. The British did not have an urgent need for more battleships, since they essentially had the German High Seas Fleet bottled up in the North Sea, and the German surface fleet made only one large-scale, but half-hearted, sortie after the Battle of Jutland. The British were also short of oil, but had plenty of coal. As a result, the first division of battleships that the U.S. sent consisted of the newest coal-burning battleships, while newer oil-fired battleships remained in the U.S. east coast, at least initially. Although the U.S. battleships would never see combat against the German High Sea Fleet, they enabled the Grand Fleet to keep its numbers steady as older British battleships went in for overhaul, and their presence served as a big morale boost.



"Arrival of the American Fleet at Scapa Flow, 7 December 1917." Oil on canvas by Bernard F. Gribble, depicting the U.S. Navy's Battleship Division Nine being greeted by British Admiral David Beatty and the crew of HMS Queen Elizabeth. Ships of the American column are (from front) USS New York (BB-34), USS Wyoming (BB-32), USS Florida (BB-30) and USS Delaware (BB-28) (NH 58841-KN).

H-013-6: Arrival of Battleship Division Nine at Scapa Flow 7 December 1917

*H-Gram 013, [Attachment 6](#)
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
December 2017*