

H-Gram 020: "Tanker War," Central Solomons Campaign, U.S. Navy Submarine Versus U-Boat in World War I, Battle of Santiago de Cuba

25 July 2018

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I've been writing these H-grams to track primarily with the 100th anniversary of World War I, 75th anniversary of World War II, and 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. This edition will also see the end of the Spanish-American War (120 years) and "Tanker War" (30 years). So, for example, I didn't write anything about the Battle of Midway this year (76th) since there wasn't much more I could say about it after what I wrote last year for the 75th anniversary. However, if you would like to read about events that occurred "last year" or missed some H-grams, all "back issues" can be found here [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>].



Sunrise off Sicily, as seen from a U.S. Navy attack transport. Taken on the morning of the invasion, 10 July 1943. Note the already-empty davits (80-G-K-2143).

30th Anniversary of the "Tanker War"

The Tragic End: Shoot-Down of Iran Air Flight 655, 3 July 1988

The "Tanker War" in the Arabian Gulf reached a tragic culminating point on 3 July 1988, when the Aegis cruiser USS Vincennes (CG-49) shot down Iran Air flight 655, killing all 274 passengers, including 66

children, and 16 crew members aboard. A series of human errors by U.S. Navy personnel led the commanding officer of Vincennes, Captain William C. Rogers III, to believe he was under attack by an Iranian Air Force F-14 (none were airborne). With no intent to become a victim like USS Stark (FFG-31), on 17 May 1987, Rogers gave the order that resulted in the destruction of an Iranian passenger jet, on a short scheduled flight—albeit 30 minutes behind schedule—on a commercial airway from Bandar Abbas, Iran, to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. A week later, Iraq launched a major offensive into Iran, with extensive use of chemical weapons. The combination of the two events caused Iranian leadership to conclude that the United States was now actively engaged in the war on the side of Iraq, which then led Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini to accept United Nations Resolution 598 on 20 July 1988, which led to a cease-fire effective 20 August. The sad irony is that the deaths of 290 aboard Flight 655 were a significant factor in ending a bloody eight-year war between Iran and Iraq that had cost the lives of over 500,000 soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians. Although the situation in the Arabian Gulf remained tense (and still is today) the “Tanker War” was over. For more on the “Tanker War,” USS Stark, USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG-58), and Operation Praying Mantis, please see H-Gram 018. For more on the shoot-down of Iran Air 655, please see attachment H-020-1.

75th Anniversary of World War II

Central Solomon Islands Campaign: Kula Gulf, Kolombangara, Vella Gulf, PT-109 and Battles with No Names (A Case Study in Slowness to Learn)

The United States and Allies began advancing in earnest up the Central Solomon Island chain in the late spring and early summer of 1943 toward the Japanese stronghold of Rabaul—located just to the northwest of Bougainville and the northern Solomon Islands—and the ultimate objective of the Solomon Islands Campaign. The operation to capture Munda airfield on the island of New

Georgia provoked several pitched naval battles between the U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy—the battles of Kula Gulf, Kolombangara and Vella Gulf—and a near continuous stream of lesser battles with no names, one of which included the loss of PT-109, commanded by future President John F. Kennedy.

Despite the great losses on both sides during the Guadalcanal campaign—which the U.S. Navy could replace and the Japanese could not—during the battles in the Central Solomons in June through August 1943, the Japanese navy showed it was still full of fight, aggressive, highly competent, and still had some surprises for the U.S. Navy—such as new passive radar detection capability which turned the U.S. Navy’s use of radar to the Japanese advantage at Kolombangara. Although the U.S. Navy had learned and incorporated numerous lessons from the previous battles in the Solomons—for example, new or refitted ships now had something approximating a combat information center (CIC) to integrate radar with communications and weapons control—it still failed to understand the magnitude of the threat posed by the Japanese Type 93 oxygen torpedo. The torpedo, which after the war was known as “Long Lance,” cost the light cruiser USS Helena (CL-50), several destroyers, and caused severe damage to other cruisers and destroyers. The Japanese destroyers’ ability to reload their torpedoes during a battle also came as a rude and costly shock. Both navies struggled with command and control of their forces during night battles. For example, U.S. PT-boats accidentally gave the coup de grace to Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner’s flagship, the USS McCawley (APA-4), which had been crippled by a daylight aerial torpedo attack, mistaking it for a Japanese transport. In turn, the Japanese were surprised by minefields laid by U.S. destroyers converted to fast minelayers. U.S. PT-boats waged frequent combat with Japanese troop-carrying barges, which although slow, were heavily armed and armored and proved to be very tough targets.

Neither side committed battleships or even heavy cruisers to the fight in the Central Solomons,

except for one Japanese attempt by heavy cruisers that was broken up by air attack. The Japanese carriers remained far away, although their air groups, operating from land bases, were committed to the fight, and their planes mostly lost. The United States used the fleet carriers USS Enterprise (CV-6) and USS Saratoga (CV-3), sparingly, as they were the only ones left until new Essex-class carriers started coming on-line very late in 1943. Through it all, near-constant battles for air supremacy were waged over the Central Solomons (inspiring future mediocre TV shows like Baa-Baa Black Sheep) and by this time the degradation of Japanese pilot skills was readily apparent. Although aircraft losses were heavy on both sides, they were much greater for the Japanese.

By August 1943, the United States was in possession of key locations in the Central Solomons, and had bypassed several Japanese-held islands (the beginnings of the "island-hopping" strategy) and preparing to advance to Bougainville in the Northern Solomons. The campaign both ashore and at sea had proved even more costly than expected, because the Japanese Navy just didn't know how to quit. For more on the Central Solomon Islands campaign, please see attachment H-020-2.

Operation Husky: Invasion of Sicily

I had planned to write about Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily (which commenced on 9 July 1943), but the Central Solomon Islands campaign sucked up all my bandwidth this month, so I will write on Husky next month. In terms of the number of troops in the initial landings (eight divisions across about 100 miles of beaches) the invasion of Sicily (a combined United Kingdom/United States operation) was the largest amphibious operation in history, and the major landings actually took place at night. The operation was very successful, despite rough seas, and resulted in relatively few U.S. Navy losses (one destroyer, one minesweeper, several LSTs, a number of smaller amphibious craft, and an ammunition ship in a

spectacular explosion) despite occasionally intense German and Italian resistance. The operation was only marred by one of the worst "friendly fire" incidents of the war, when U.S. Navy ships and U.S. Army shore batteries accidentally shot down 23 U.S. transport aircraft at night, killing over 60 crew and 81 U.S. paratroopers aboard. More in a future H-gram.

100th Anniversary of World War I

The Fog of War: USS AL-2 Versus UB-65, 10 July 1918

On 10 July 1918, the U.S. submarine AL-2 (SS-41) attempted to engage a German U-boat later believed to be UB-65, south of Fastnet Light on the south coast of Ireland, when a German torpedo apparently detonated prematurely about 200 feet from AL-2's engine room. At that time, the periscope of the U-boat was sighted about 80 yards off the starboard quarter just beyond the explosion. Both ships then submerged, and in the confused sequence of maneuvering that followed, AL-2 attempted to ram the U-boat underwater. The acoustic signatures were even more confusing and at the time AL-2 thought there was a second German U-boat in the area.

In analysis shortly after the attack, it was believed that the UB-65 had been damaged by the premature explosion of her own torpedo, and as a result of AL-2's maneuvers, UB-65 did not have the chance to reach the surface before her damage proved fatal and she sank. Although it was clear that AL-2 did not directly sink UB-65, the British Admiralty (in charge of Allied submarine operations in the Western Approaches to Great Britain and Ireland) gave AL-2 credit for sinking UB-65, which would make UB-65 the first submarine to be sunk by a U.S. submarine.

The commanding officer of AL-2, Lieutenant Paul F. Foster, USN, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal (DSM) for the attack and for the rest

of AL-2's deployment to European waters. At the time, the DSM was the second highest Navy award, above a Navy Cross, and could be awarded for valor. Lieutenant Foster had previously been awarded the Medal of Honor for courage under fire as an ensign in the Vera Cruz operations in April 1914, and he would later be awarded a Navy Cross for his actions during a turret explosion aboard USS Trenton (CL-11) in 1924, making him the first Navy member to be awarded all three of the highest Navy decorations.

However, in 1930, the German Admiralty assessed that UB-65 was lost with all hands in an accident off Padstow, England on or after 14 July 1918 (four days after the incident with AL-2), and diving expeditions in 2003 and 2004 located and then positively identified UB-65 near the position the Germans reported, displaying no outward signs of any combat damage. UB-65 was actually a cursed ship if there ever was one, suffering numerous accidents during her short career, and was supposedly believed by her own crew to be haunted. She has since passed into "ghost story" lore with numerous embellishments of the facts and fabrications to be found on the Internet. For more on the engagement and the accident-prone history of UB-65, please see attachment H-020-4.

120th Anniversary of Spanish-American War

The Last Battle: Santiago de Cuba, 3 July 1898

As U.S. Army troops closed in on Santiago de Cuba, including Theodore Roosevelt's famous charge of the "Rough Riders" up San Juan Hill, Spanish Admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete had a choice. He could keep his force of four cruisers and two destroyers in port, where they were likely soon to be destroyed by American ground artillery, or he could sortie from the harbor and attempt to run the blockade of five U.S. Navy battleships and numerous other ships right

outside the harbor. Admiral Cervera's cruisers were designed to be fast, but poor maintenance, lack of training, and lack of resources had taken their toll. Nevertheless, on 3 July 1898, Cervera decided to go out in a blaze of glory, although it was mostly a blaze of American gunfire—the great majority of which missed—although enough hits were taken to do the job. USS Oregon (Battleship No. 3), steamed all the way around Cape Horn from the U.S. West Coast in anticipation of the outbreak of war. She proved herself to be the fastest ship in the U.S. force and ran down the one Spanish cruiser that had a chance of getting away.

When the Battle of Santiago was over, the entire Spanish force was destroyed, with 343 dead, 151 wounded and 1,889 captured (many of whom were saved by extraordinarily brave and chivalrous actions by U.S. Navy Sailors). The U.S. Navy suffered one dead and one wounded. The decisive defeat of the Spanish squadron ensured the U.S. victory over Spanish forces in Cuba, resulting in Cuban independence (sort of) from Spain and an end to the Spanish-American War with an armistice on 12 August 1898. The victory was marred by the appalling lack of accuracy of U.S. naval gunfire, and the unseemly public dispute between Rear Admiral William T. Sampson and Rear Admiral Winfield Schley over who should get the credit for the victory. As a result, neither achieved the degree of fame and adulation given Admiral George Dewey at the earlier Battle of Manila Bay, even though the Spanish squadron at Santiago put up a much better and more courageous fight. For more on the Battle of Santiago, please see attachments H-020-5 and H-020-6.

Note: I write these H-grams under a significant time crunch, so I generally rely on secondary sources (that I have good reason to believe are accurate and credible), which is why I don't claim H-grams to be "scholarly." Nevertheless, many of these secondary sources would not exist were it not for the work of the NHHHC Histories Branch's Documentary Histories Section in compiling primary source material in a manner easily

accessible to scholars and other authors of popular history. For example, our website includes a documentary history of the Navy in the Spanish-American War, which makes available a plethora of transcribed primary sources along with short introductory essays and annotation. Included are sections on recent topics, such as the Battle of Manila Bay, and forthcoming topics, such as the Naval War Board. So, if you are interested in a "deeper dive" on U.S. Naval History, try this link [<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/publications/documentary-histories/united-states-navy-s.html>].



USS Vincennes (CG-49), June 1986 (NH 106519-KN)

H-020-1: The Fog of War: USS Vincennes Tragedy —3 July 1988

H-Gram 020, Attachment 1
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
September 2018

Following the execution of Operation Praying Mantis on 18 April 1988, President Ronald Reagan gave U.S. Navy ships authority to engage Iranian warships that were in the act of attacking neutral merchant ships in the Arabian Gulf. This was an even more aggressive expansion of the previous

rules of engagement, which only allowed U.S. Navy ships to aggressively maneuver to deter a potential Iranian attack on neutral shipping, but to fire only in self-defense or perception of Iranian hostile intent toward a U.S. Navy ship. U.S. Navy ships were still barred from taking retaliatory action against an attack on neutral shipping that had already occurred. The U.S. Navy also increased its force levels inside the Strait of Hormuz.

Over the objection of CNO Admiral Carlisle Trost, the Secretary of Defense approved orders sending the Aegis cruiser USS *Vincennes* (CG-49) on a short-notice deployment into the Arabian Gulf—the first time a “latest-and-greatest” Aegis cruiser had operated in the very confined water

space inside the Arabian Gulf. The Aegis cruiser had by far the most sophisticated radar and anti-aircraft missile suite in the world. *Vincennes* had a reputation as a "robo-cruiser," partly because of her powerful technological capability and partly because of the particularly aggressive way in which Captain William C. Rogers III handled his ship. Captain Rogers repeatedly lobbied the commander of the Joint Task Force Middle East, Rear Admiral Anthony "Tony" Less, to permit *Vincennes* to take a more active role than just providing air defense coverage to the southern Arabian Gulf.

The severe losses inflicted on the Iranian Navy during Operation Praying Mantis in April 1988 bought only about a month of relative calm. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) which had suffered much less loss and damage than the regular Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) increased their tempo of operations in late May 1988. Continued Iraqi attacks on land and at sea in the northern Arabian Gulf caused the Iranians to resume retaliatory attacks on neutral merchant shipping in the southern Arabian Gulf, which was presumed by the Iranians to be providing indirect aid to the Iraqi war effort. In addition, the Iranian Air Force deployed three F-14 Tomcat fighters (provided by the United States before the overthrow of the Shah of Iran) from Bushehr in the northern gulf, to Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz. Although Iranian F-14s had not been fitted with an air-to-ground capability when delivered, the Iranians had shown considerable ingenuity in modifying their aircraft to carry ordnance they weren't designed for, including their U.S.-supplied F-4 Phantom II and P-3 Orion aircraft. Although there was no actual intelligence that the Iranians had modified their F-14s with air-to-surface missiles, it was assessed to be possible that they could have done so.

On 2 July 1988, the cruiser USS *Halsey* (CG-23) issued radio warnings to two Iranian aircraft near the Strait of Hormuz before the contacts turned away. Later the same day, the frigate USS *Elmer Montgomery* (FF-1082) fired warning shots at

three IRGCN speed boats that were in the process of attacking the Danish-flag ship *Karama Maersk*. On the morning of 3 July, several IRGCN small boats threatened a Pakistani merchant ship. Rear Admiral Less concurred with sending a helicopter from *Vincennes* to investigate. As a precaution, Rogers moved *Vincennes* 50 miles off her assigned air defense station, south of Abu Musa Island, northeast toward the Strait of Hormuz, an action countermanded by the destroyer squadron (DESRON) commander. The helicopter continued to monitor several IRGCN speed boats that were still in Iranian territorial waters. One of the IRGCN boats fired ten rounds of machine gun fire ahead of the helicopter. The helicopter reported it was under fire. Rogers reversed course again back toward the Strait of Hormuz at maximum speed in response to the helicopter's report, and in doing so crossed into Iranian territorial waters along with *Elmer Montgomery*, violating standing orders not to go into Iranian waters, due to the fact that his helicopter reported being under fire.

As the *Vincennes* and *Elmer Montgomery* closed on the IRGCN boats, two of the IRGCN boats turned toward the U.S. ships, while others appeared to be on erratic courses. Assessing that the IRGCN boats were commencing an attack, Captain Rogers requested permission from Rear Admiral Less to open fire, which was granted, although Less did not know that *Vincennes* was inside Iranian territorial waters. At 0943, *Vincennes* opened fire and the IRGCN boats responded with ineffective machine gun fire. *Vincennes* fired almost 100 5-inch rounds, hitting and sinking two IRGCN boats and damaging a third with a near miss.

At 0947, Iran Air Flight 655, an Airbus A300, took off 27 minutes late on a regularly scheduled flight (every Sunday and Tuesday from Bandar Abbas, a dual-use military and civilian airport) to Dubai—normally a short 30-minute flight. The pilot, Moshe Rezaian, was very experienced on this particular route. The flight was slightly off center, but still well-within the published flight corridor, Amber 59. Rezaian had no idea a surface action

was going on directly under his flight path. Although Flight 655 was detected by *Vincennes's* radar shortly after takeoff, the cruiser also detected a Mode II (military) identification, friend or foe (IFF) reading, most likely from an F-14 on the ground at Bandar Abbas. The operator mistakenly correlated the Mode II signal with the aircraft taking off rather than with the plane on the ground. The Aegis detected Flight 655's Mode III (civilian) IFF transponder soon after take-off, but *Vincennes's* anti-air warfare coordinator accepted the Mode II correlation as valid since Iranian military aircraft were known to transmit both Mode II and Mode III IFF. Just to be sure, the anti-air warfare coordinator had a Sailor check the published flight schedule, and was told there was none (this was partly due to darkness in CIC, a time-zone change between Bandar Abbas and Dubai, and that Flight 655 was late). As a result, while in the middle of a surface action, Rogers received a report that an Iranian F-14 had taken off from Bandar Abbas and was on a course toward *Vincennes*. Also, at that moment, *Vincennes's* forward 5-inch mount jammed, and Rogers ordered the rudder hard-over to bring her aft gun to bear, which caused the ship to heel so far over that just about everything went flying in the CIC and on the bridge.

Meanwhile, USS *Sides* (FFG-14), under the command of Commander David Carlson, operating in the Strait of Hormuz, detected the takeoff of Flight 655, and was informed of the designation as an F-14. Carlson ordered verbal radio warnings which resulted in no acknowledgement from Flight 655. Carlson then ordered *Sides's* missile radar to paint the target, an action intended to get a reaction (which would be likely from a military aircraft equipped with a radar warning receiver) but got none. With no electronic emissions indicative of an F-14, and with *Sides's* radar continuing to indicate a gradual ascent to flight altitude by the contact, Carlson assessed it to be a civilian airliner. Carlson assumed that the Aegis radar on *Vincennes* would have a better picture than he did, so he did not transmit his assessment.

Vincennes broadcasted multiple radio warnings to the contact as it closed at 360 knots, with no response. Rogers asked for an update on the contact using its computer-generated track ID number, 4474. The response from CIC was that "TN 4474 is descending, speed 450 knots." This report was true, but for the wrong aircraft. The Aegis system computer had correlated *Sides's* radar track number, TN4131, to Flight 655. TN 4474 had been reassigned by the computer to what was a U.S. Navy jet over the Gulf of Oman descending toward the carrier. By now, the CIC on *Vincennes* was convinced an Iranian F-14 had taken off from Bandar Abbas to help protect the IRGCN speedboats and was descending to attack *Vincennes*, even though the cruiser's own radar showed TN4131 ascending, and squawking only the correct Mode III IFF.

Given the short flight duration, Rezaian's cockpit workload was heavy, and he was in contact (in English) with either Bandar Abbas or Dubai air traffic control during much of the flight. It will never be known whether he ever heard the radio warnings, or if his radio was set to the right frequency, or if he heard the warnings. Did he understand they were meant for him? It is not known whether he received the September 1987 notice to airmen (NOTAM) requiring all aircraft in the Arabian Gulf to monitor the international air distress and military air distress frequencies, and be prepared to identify themselves to U.S. Navy ships. Whatever the case, he did not respond. After repeated warnings—seven on military air distress and three on international air distress, but none on air traffic control frequencies—and the contact approaching to within 10 miles, Rogers initiated the sequence of orders to fire. Two SM-2MR missiles were fired and two hit, one in the wing, the other the tail. The plane broke up in flight, and bodies fell from the sky. It wasn't long before Dubai tower initiated queries for the missing aircraft, and the IRGCN speedboats were directed by higher authority to break off the engagement with *Vincennes* and commence a search and rescue mission, which was futile.

The post-mortem of the shoot-down would be one of the more emotionally charged events in recent U.S. naval history, as the shock set in that the most sophisticated anti-aircraft weapon system in the world had accidentally shot down a commercial airliner. Unsubstantiated rumors and speculation quickly spread, including via intelligence channels. The assumption was that the Iranians had to be conducting some sort of nefarious activity, such as having the airliner provide cover for an F-14 flying on its wing, or that because the bodies were all found without clothes (which had been blown off) the Iranians had packed the plane with people already dead in order to create an incident to discredit the United States. The reality is that it was just a commercial airliner that took off late.

The investigation of the shoot-down by Rear Admiral William Fogarty accurately depicts what happened, although some details were initially redacted from public release, such as the fact that *Vincennes* had gone into Iranian territorial waters after the IRGCN speedboats, which were not actively attacking neutral ships, and which had fired only a short burst, probably as a warning, at *Vincennes's* helicopter. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William Crowe's statement (at a press conference shortly after the event) that *Vincennes* was operating in international waters was incorrect— which he later publically admitted.

The investigation concluded that “Based on the information used by the CO in making his decision, the short time available to him in which to make his decision, and his personal belief that his ship and USS *Montgomery* were being threatened, he acted in a prudent manner.” Rear Admiral Fogarty did not recommend any disciplinary action, which was backed all the way up the chain of command. Rogers was awarded an end-of-tour Legion of Merit. There were others in the Navy—including commanding officers (COs) of other ships on the scene who had correctly evaluated the contact as a commercial airliner—who were less charitable, believing that Rogers's

over-aggressive actions had gotten him into a jam of his own making. There was a combat camera team aboard the *Vincennes*, and the footage depicts considerable confusion and even ill-discipline amongst the crew (cheering, shouting, football game atmosphere) that contributed to one of the most tragic events in U.S. Navy history. For their part, the Iranians still believe that the shoot-down was deliberate and that it was a war crime.

Sources include: *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*, by Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Historian David Crist (2012) and “Formal Investigation into the Circumstances Surrounding the Downing of Iran Air Flight 655 on 3 July 1988,” by Rear Admiral William Fogarty.



Warships from Rear Admiral. A. S. Merrill's cruiser-destroyer force shelling Japanese-held Munda Airfield, New Georgia, July 1943. This attack was delivered in support of U.S. land operations against the Japanese positions at Munda (SC 181667).

H-020-2: Central Solomon Islands Campaign: Kula Gulf, Kolombangara, Vella Gulf, PT-109, and Battles with No Names (Not High-Velocity Learning)

*H-Gram 020, Attachment 2
Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC
July 2018*

All of the major night surface actions in the Central Solomon Islands campaign would take place around the island of Kolombangara, as U.S. Navy forces tried to interdict Japanese destroyer- transports (the return of the “Tokyo Express”) trying to bring reinforcements and supplies to Japanese army forces fighting to hold New Georgia after the U.S. landings. For orientation, the Solomon Islands are located to the northeast of Australia and New Guinea. The chain is roughly 500 miles long and oriented in a northwest-southeast direction. At the northwestern end of the chain is the large island of Bougainville, which is where Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was shot down in April 1943 (see H-Gram 018). One of the islands at the southeastern end of the chain is Guadalcanal. Running between Bougainville and

Guadalcanal is a passage of water about 300 miles long known as "The Slot." On the north side of The Slot, and parallel to it, are several very large, long narrow islands. On the south side of The Slot about halfway between Guadalcanal and Bougainville are a jumble of islands, of which the irregularly shaped New Georgia is the largest. Just to the northwest of New Georgia is a roughly circular island known as Kolombangara. Separating Kolombanga from New Georgia to the east is Kula Gulf, and, to the south, Blackett Strait. To the west of Kolombangara is Vella Gulf, and to the north is The Slot. Ferocious night surface actions would be fought in waters on all sides of Kolombangara.

Except for continuing air battles, a comparative lull existed in the Solomon Islands for several months in early 1943 as both Japanese and U.S. forces licked their wounds after the bloody battles around Guadalcanal in late 1942. Execution of planned U.S. offensive operations up the Solomon Islands chain was delayed and severely hampered by lack of resources (the unofficial name given to the Guadalcanal Campaign was "Operation Shoestring," and the paucity of resources persisted well into 1943). The European theater of operations still had priority in accordance with the agreed Allied strategy of "Germany First." The Allied invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky), executed in early July 1943, was to that point the largest amphibious operation in history (and in some respects was even bigger than the D-Day landings at Normandy in 1944) and, as a result, resources of any kind, particularly landing craft, were in exceedingly short supply anywhere else.

The massive U.S. shipbuilding program was underway, but except for several new *Cleveland*-class cruisers and *Fletcher*-class destroyers, U.S. Navy forces in the Solomon Islands were still limited to ships that had been built prior to the war, and almost all the heavy cruisers in the Pacific had been sunk or damaged. Several new fast battleships were available and, although the U.S.

Navy had no idea just how many Japanese torpedoes had been fired at, and missed, the USS *Washington* (BB-56) and USS *South Dakota* (BB-57) in the night action off Guadalcanal on 14-15 November 1942 (H-Gram 012), Vice Admiral William Halsey sensed that he had gotten lucky, and wisely decided not to risk battleships in the constrained and poorly charted waters of the Central Solomons.

The Allied command and control during the Central Solomons campaign was more convoluted on paper than it was in practice. Although Guadalcanal was in Admiral Chester Nimitz's area of operations, the central and northern Solomons were in General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific area of operations. However, MacArthur was heavily engaged in the New Guinea campaign (supported by his own navy, the small but growing Seventh Fleet, which I will cover in a future H-gram) and readily ceded tactical control of operations in the Central Solomons to Admiral Nimitz's Third Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Halsey. Halsey and MacArthur actually hit it off pretty well (a rarity), probably because MacArthur mostly left Halsey alone to run the Central Solomons campaign as Halsey saw fit. To deal with the constant air battles over the Central Solomons, a new joint command was established, "Commander, Aircraft, Solomons (ComAirSols), based on Guadalcanal. ComAirSols was perhaps the first truly "joint" U.S. operational command, in many ways more "joint" than any air campaign that followed it up to and including Desert Storm. At the time of the New Georgia landing, AirSols was commanded by Rear Admiral Marc A. "Pete" Mitscher.

Selected Battles and Actions in the Central Solomon Islands Campaign

17 February 1943: Night Air Attack on U.S. Convoy

On the morning of 17 February 1943, a U.S. force of four transports, six escorting destroyers, and a

tanker was transiting en route to land the troops in the Russell Islands (which are about 30 miles up The Slot from Guadalcanal and had been evacuated by the Japanese), when it was sighted and trailed by Japanese scout aircraft. The transport task unit commander, Captain Ingolf N. Kiland, correctly anticipated that he would be subject to a major air raid after dusk, and disposed his force and made course changes accordingly. For over an hour the ships and aircraft tried to gain positional advantage, until 12 Betty twin-engine torpedo bombers commenced a night torpedo attack from multiple axes. However, the fully alerted U.S. Navy force, many now armed with the new 5-inch proximity fuze rounds and 40-mm Bofors guns, shot down five of the bombers and disrupted the rest so that no torpedoes hit home. The U.S. landings in the Russell Islands on 20 February 1943 were unopposed, but the U.S. occupation didn't significantly change the overall situation.

6 March 1943: The Battle of Blackett Strait

(This battle has no name in Morison's *History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, but more contemporary accounts have taken to calling it the Battle of Blackett Strait, although it was actually fought in the Kula Gulf and might more properly be called the "First Battle of Kula Gulf.")

In the pre-dawn hours of 6 March 1943, Task Force 68 (TF-68), consisting of the new light cruisers *Montpelier* (CL-57), *Cleveland* (CL-55), and *Denver* (CL-58), and three destroyers, under the command of Rear Admiral Aaron Stanton "Tip" Merrill, entered Kula Gulf from The Slot with the intent to bombard the Japanese airfield under construction at Vila on Kolombangara. Two Japanese destroyers (*Murusame* and *Minegumo*, both veterans of multiple Tokyo Express runs to Guadalcanal) were already at Vila on a routine mission to bring supplies. Instead of opting to return the way they came, via Blackett Strait to the south and then west through Vella Gulf, they decided to head home through Kula Gulf and westward around northern Kolombangara.

At 0057 on 6 March, U.S. radar detected the two Japanese destroyers, which were unaware of TF-68's presence. At 0101, TF-68's cruisers commenced fire with their rapid-fire 6-inch guns, and USS *Waller* (DD-466) fired torpedoes. Repeating the same tactical error as at the disastrous Battle of Tassafaronga (H-Gram 013) off Guadalcanal in November 1942, all the U.S. cruisers concentrated their radar-directed fire on the lead Japanese ship. *Murusame* was smothered by a deluge of shells and a torpedo, and the ship exploded, broke in two, and sank with 128 of her crew (53 survived). Unlike Tassafaronga, the trail destroyer, *Minegumo*, was unable to launch any torpedoes before the U.S. cruisers shifted fire and sank her, too, with a loss of 46 of her crew, including her commanding officer. Merrill reported sinking two Japanese light cruisers, which was typical of the constant misidentification (and inflation of enemy losses) that characterized U.S. operational reporting throughout the war, although, in consolation, Japanese reports were much worse. The battle was marred by the disappearance with all hands of the submarine USS *Grampus* (SS-207), which was stationed to cover the Japanese exit route south of Kolombangara. There was some indication that *Murusame* and *Minegumo* encountered and sank *Grampus* in Blackett Strait before the battle started, but this is not confirmed.

20 March 1943: Commencement of U.S. Aerial Minelaying Flights

After dusk on 20 March 1943, 42 U.S. Navy and Marine Corps TBF Avenger torpedo bombers, each carrying one Mark-12 magnetic mine, supported by a diversionary raid by 18 B-17 and B-24 heavy bombers, mined the harbor of Kahili in the northern Solomons, without loss. They did the same thing the next night. During the course of the month, over 100 additional mines were delivered by air around Bougainville, with the most significant Japanese victims being light cruiser *Yubari* (damaged) and the submarine *RO-103*, which was lost, possibly due to a mine.

7 May 1943: Blackett Strait Mining Operations

Just before midnight on 6-7 May 1943, the destroyer USS *Radford* (DD-446) led three converted destroyer-minelayers, *Preble* (DM-20,) *Gamble* (DM-15), and *Breese* (DM-18,) into Blackett Strait and in a textbook-perfect operation laid over 250 mines in 17 minutes, withdrawing without detection. On the night of 7-8 May, four Japanese destroyers blundered into the minefield. The *Oyashio* and *Kagero* were crippled, but remained afloat, and the *Kurashio* hit more mines and sank. The next morning, the undamaged *Michishio* was rescuing men from the crippled destroyers. In response to a coast watcher report, Guadalcanal launched a 60-plane strike, but poor weather prevented all but 18 Dauntless dive bombers from getting through. However, they succeeded in sinking the two cripples, while *Michishio* was subsequently strafed by Wildcat fighters. (Samuel Eliot Morison identifies this Japanese destroyer as *Michishio*, but more recent information indicates that destroyer was in Japan undergoing repair at that time; however, I have been unable to come up with an alternate candidate).

On the night of 12-13 May, the U.S. conducted another minelaying operation in Ferguson Passage (which feeds Blackett Strait and Kula Gulf from the south), covered by two bombardment groups, shelling the airstrips at Munda on New Georgia and Vila on Kolombangara, under the overall command of Rear Admiral Walden Lee "Pug" Ainsworth. The minelaying operation and the bombardments were successful; however, the Japanese were now wise to minelaying ops and swept the field within 24 hours. Unfortunately, the operation was marred by several accidents, including a turret explosion on the light cruiser USS *Nashville* (CL-43), which killed 20 men; a powder cartridge cooked off on destroyer USS *Nicholson* (DD-442), wrecking the gun mount; other 6-inch guns jamming; an anchor carried away on cruiser USS *St. Louis* (CL-49); engine

casualties; and a near-collision. Night combat was dangerous, even when no enemy showed up.

Using the limited numbers of landing craft available, U.S. Army units and Marines landed at multiple locations on the Island of New Georgia, with the primary objective to capture the airfield at Munda (which had been bombed so many times it wasn't operational by then), catching the Japanese by surprise. Unlike on Guadalcanal, where Japanese army commanders behaved with appalling arrogance and misguided contempt for the fighting spirit of U.S. forces (resulting in pointless slaughter of their own troops), the commander of Japanese forces on New Georgia, Major General Noburo Sasaki, proved to be a very effective and wily leader, conducting a protracted fighting withdrawal across the island that inflicted heavy casualties on U.S. forces, who got bogged down in swamps and jungles. Unlike on Guadalcanal, the Japanese reacted very swiftly, and quickly got over 4,500 troop reinforcements by destroyer-transport and barge onto New Georgia—through U.S. Navy forces trying to prevent this effort. The campaign to take New Georgia proved far longer than planned, and would ultimately require over 30,000 troops to subdue the Island at a cost of over 1,000 dead. The island was not secured until late August, when remaining Japanese troops pulled yet another disappearing act, hopping on barges across the Kula Gulf and taking up positions with a sizable Japanese force on Kolombangara (although some Japanese troops on New Georgia continued to resist until October). Morison's verdict on the campaign was: "The strategy and tactics of the New Georgia campaign were amongst the least successful of any Allied campaign in the Pacific."

Prior to the 16 June 1943 landing on New Georgia, the Japanese launched two sizable air strikes on the U.S. force assembling off Guadalcanal, without apparently putting two and two together that they were attacking an invasion force. Most of the Japanese planes were shot down and only two bombs hit, damaging the

freighter *Celena*, which had to be beached, and LST-340, which was fully loaded with soldiers and vehicles. Nine Japanese Val dive bombers attacked LST-340, achieving two near-misses, one direct hit, and strafed her, killing one Navy crewman and nine Army passengers. The bomb ignited gasoline and ammunition, causing an intense fire. The Army troops were ordered to abandon ship and swim for nearby rescue vessels. However, the skipper, Lieutenant William Villella, was true to the dictum, "don't give up the ship." He ordered his engineers to set the starboard engine to flank speed (the port engine had been damaged) before abandoning the engine room. He then steered for the beach and made it before the engine quit. Two other LSTs joined the crew of LST 340 in fighting the fire, despite exploding ammunition, and together saved the ship.

30 June 1943: Landings on Rendova and Loss of USS McCawley (APA-4)

Concurrent with the landings on New Georgia, U.S. Navy forces landed several thousand Army troops on the island of Rendova, just south of New Georgia, meeting minimal resistance ashore. However, shore batteries on New Georgia eventually opened fire on U.S. destroyers supporting the Rendova landing, hitting and damaging the destroyer USS *Gwin* (DD-433), killing three crewmen. (*Gwin* had been the sole U.S. destroyer to survive the night action off Guadalcanal on 14-15 November 1942, but she would not survive much longer.) The first Japanese counterstrike on the U.S. landings on New Georgia was a sweep by 27 Zero fighters, which were nearly wiped out by U.S. air cover, by now flying the much superior F-4U Corsair fighters, among others. The second strike, several hours later, consisted of 25 twin-engine Betty bombers armed with torpedoes, escorted by 24 Zero fighters, which located Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner's amphibious force off New Georgia. Of the Japanese aircraft, only ten Bettys got through the U.S. fighter cover and shipboard anti-aircraft fire. Only one torpedo hit, striking Turner's flagship, the USS *McCawley* (APA-4) in

the engine room, immobilizing her, and killing 15 of her crew. Progressive flooding forced Turner to shift his flag. The destroyer *Ralph Talbot* (DD-390) took off most of *McCawley's* crew, and the ship was taken under tow. Eight Val dive bombers then attacked her, one of which was shot down by a Marine officer who manned the aft machine gun on the crippled ship, while two others were shot down by escorts; the Japanese planes scored no hits. *McCawley's* skeleton crew continued to fight a valiant but losing battle to save the ship, but even they were eventually ordered off the transport. After dusk, Turner was trying to decide whether or not to order *McCawley* scuttled, when two torpedoes hit her and she sank. As it turned out, the torpedoes were fired by U.S. PT-boats who mistook *McCawley* for a Japanese transport (they'd been informed there were no friendlies in that area), after which Turner assumed direct control of the PT-boat squadron.

1 July 1943: The Mystery of Japanese Submarine RO-101

On 1 July 1943, the Japanese submarine *RO-101* was spotted on the surface near the landing area on Rendova after nightfall, and USS *Radford* (DD-446) attacked. *Radford* blazed away with 5-inch guns and machine guns and fired a torpedo (which missed), blowing off *RO-101's* conning tower and puncturing the hull with one 5-inch round. *RO-101* went under before *Radford* could ram her. *Radford* dropped depth charges in the pool of oil for good measure, according to the destroyer's account. Morison notes in *History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II* that somehow *RO-101* survived and was still operational in late 1943. Japanese records for *RO-101* tell a completely different story. In the Japanese version, the submarine attempted to penetrate the PT-boat screen around the Rendova landing beach on 1 and 2 July but was unable to do so. There is no indication of an engagement with a U.S. destroyer. However, Japanese accounts do show that, on 12 July 1943, *RO-101* was on the surface recharging batteries when she was attacked by the USS *Taylor* (DD-468). The

torpedo officer and two lookouts were killed by *Taylor's* fire, and the skipper had to drag bodies away to get down into the submarine and take her under. *RO-101* then survived *Taylor's* depth-charge attack with damage that was repairable. U.S. records show *Taylor* (commanded by future Rear Admiral Benjamin Katz) engaged an "RO-type" submarine on that date with undetermined result, although later assessed as *RO-107* sunk. *RO-101* was probably actually sunk by USS *Saufley* (DD-468) and a PBY Catalina in the northern Solomons on 15 September 1943 and lost with all hands. I haven't been able to figure out what submarine *Radford* sank, if any, although *RO-107* and *RO-103* were lost in the central Solomons and their exact fate is unknown. The fog of war eventually turns in to the fog of history.

2 July 1943: Air Raid on Rendova

On 2 July, a Japanese air raid by 24 Japanese army twin-engine bombers and 20 Navy Zero fighters caught the American beachhead on Rendova by surprise. Radar did not detect the incoming raid and no air raid alert was sounded. Army troops on the ground were still standing in chow lines, thinking the planes were U.S. B-25 twin-engine bombers when the bombs fell. Fifty-nine men were killed and 77 wounded; damage was extensive. That night, the Japanese light cruiser *Yubari* made it through the gauntlet of U.S. forces, shelled the Rendova beachhead, and then got away. Fortunately, all *Yubari's* shells landed in the jungle.

5 July 1943: Loss of USS Strong (DD-467)

On the night of 4-5 July, a task force under the command of Rear Admiral "Pug" Ainsworth, consisting of three light cruisers and nine destroyers, entered Kula Gulf from the north with the intent of bombarding Vila, on Kolombangara, to provide cover for another landing on New Georgia (after the first ones had quickly become bogged down). At 0026 on 6 July, light cruisers *Honolulu* (CL-48), *Helena* (CL-50), and *St. Louis* (CL-49), and the destroyers *O'Bannon* (DD-450)

and *Chevalier* (DD-451) opened fire on Vila. The light cruisers fired over 3,000 rounds. The group then transited to the east side of Kula Gulf and shelled Japanese positions on New Georgia in preparation for the planned pre-dawn landings.

The destroyers *Nicholas* (DD-449) and *Strong* had previously detached from the main group to search for Japanese ships or submarines at the south end of Kula Gulf and the entrance to Blackett Strait. At 0031 on 5 July, radar on *Ralph Talbot* (DD-390) detected two unidentified radar contacts apparently exiting Kula Gulf toward Blackett Strait. Ainsworth was attempting to determine the identity of these contacts when, at 0049, a torpedo from out of nowhere hit the *Strong*, inflicting fatal damage. The torpedo actually came from a group of Japanese destroyers, led by *Niizuki*, transporting Japanese troop reinforcements, that was entering Kula Gulf many miles to the northwest. Having seen the flashes of the U.S. bombardment, and with his ships loaded with troops, the Japanese commander opted not to engage, but three of the four destroyers fired torpedoes at long range as the group turned to depart. U.S. radar detected the group, but it was not deemed a threat due to the distance, the U.S. commanders still being clueless about the range of Japanese torpedoes. The landings just before dawn were successful as *Radford* and *Gwin* (DD-433) silenced Japanese shore batteries.

After *Strong* did not respond to radio calls, Ainsworth ordered the destroyers *Chevalier* and *O'Bannon* to search. *Chevalier* and *O'Bannon* found *Strong* crippled, but still afloat, and *Chevalier* came alongside and began to transfer *Strong's* crew via nets. Japanese shore batteries, aided by a spotter plane, opened fire. *Strong* was hit by a dud. *O'Bannon* broke off rescue efforts to return fire. *Chevalier* remained alongside, as Japanese shells came closer, and in seven minutes took 241 of *Strong's* crew aboard before *Strong* sank a minute later. Some of *Strong's* depth charges exploded, accounting for most of

the 46 of her crew who were lost. The skipper of *Strong*, Commander Gus Wellings, was one of the few in the water who survived and was rescued later by other destroyers. (Of note, the Vulcan Group, which found the wrecks of *Indianapolis* [CA-35], *Lexington* [CV-2], *Juneau* [CL-52], and *Helena* [CL-50] in 2017/2018, searched for *Strong* in Kula Gulf, but was unable to find her.)

Early Morning, 6 July 1943: The Battle of Kula Gulf

As Rear Admiral Ainsworth and Task Group 36.1 were transiting back to the Guadalcanal area after the bombardments at Vila and New Georgia, he received intelligence from Vice Admiral Halsey that a Japanese Tokyo Express was setting up to go into Kula Gulf. Despite the prodigious expenditure of ammunition the night before, and having just enough fuel to do it, Ainsworth reversed course intent on intercepting the Tokyo Express Run on the night of 5-6 July. TG 36.1 consisted of light cruisers *Honolulu* (CL-48), *Helena*, and *St. Louis* (CL-49); and the destroyers *Nicholas* (DD-449), *O'Bannon* (DD-450), *Radford* (DD-446), and *Jenkins* (DD-447). As noted above, *Strong* had been sunk the night before, and *Chevalier* was burdened with *Strong's* survivors.

Ten Japanese destroyers, in three groups, under the overall command of Rear Admiral Akiyama, were en route to Kula Gulf to carry 2,600 combat troops and supplies to Vila, Kolombangara, where they would then go by barge across the Kula Gulf to New Georgia. The groups were divided into two transport groups and one support group. The support group was the same group that had torpedoed and sunk *Strong* the night before, and the lead destroyer in the group, *Niizuki*, had one of the first Japanese radar sets to be installed on a destroyer. She also had passive radar detection gear, which was a new Japanese innovation to counter U.S. radar. The Tokyo Express run avoided the usual U.S. air attacks due to bad flying weather. Once in Kula Gulf, Akiyama detached one of the transport groups of three

destroyers to proceed ahead down the east coast of Kolombangara and off-load at Vila.

Shortly after midnight, the U.S. force entered Kula Gulf from the northeast, while the Japanese force had entered from the northwest. At 0106, the new Japanese radar detector registered the U.S. force, so surprise was lost before Ainsworth even knew it. At 0140, U.S. radar detected the Japanese at a range of 24,700 yards and TG36.1 shifted from cruising to battle disposition. At 0146, Japanese radar detected the U.S. force. At 0154, Ainsworth gave the order to open fire as range decreased to 10,000 yards. The U.S. picture was confused because just before contact Akiyama had detached the second group of transport destroyers. Akiyama's three-destroyer support force was already up to 30 knots and evading, when the U.S. opened fire, and he had ordered the second transport group, despite having 1,200 troops embarked, to reverse course and get in the impending fight. Because of the confused radar picture, the U.S. ships didn't open fire until 0157 and the range was down to 7,000 yards.

Yet again, repeating the Tassafaronga pattern, all three U.S. light cruisers concentrated their fire on the lead Japanese ship, Akiyama's flagship, the destroyer *Niizuki*. As *Niizuki* was smothered in shellfire, the untouched *Suzukaze* and *Tanikaze* maintained fire discipline (i.e., no gunfire), evaded into the darkness, and fired 16 "Long Lance" torpedoes at the U.S. cruiser line as it was blazing away with rapid-fire 6-inch guns (which the Japanese called "machine-gun cruisers"). *Helena*, which had run out of flashless powder as a result of the shore bombardment the night before, made an ideal aim point for the Japanese torpedoes. "Happy *Helena*" had survived a torpedo hit at Pearl Harbor and then, with minimal damage, the Battle of Cape Esperance, the horrific battle of Friday the 13th (November 1942) off Guadalcanal, and the torpedo attack that destroyed *Juneau*. *Helena's* luck ran out when she was hit by four torpedoes (one a dud), causing her to jackknife between turrets one and two. There

was no doubt from the very beginning that the damage was fatal, and Captain Charles P. Cecil quickly ordered abandon ship. *Helena* sank in about six minutes, except for her severed bow, which remained afloat for hours.

As *Suzukaze* and *Tanikaze* made good their escape (*O'Bannon* and *Radford* fired nine torpedoes at them in a futile stern chase), the second group of Japanese destroyer-transport, under the command of Captain Yamashiro, which had reversed course back to the north on Akiyama's order (one of his last), entered the engagement and were engaged by the U.S. cruisers. The U.S. cruisers fired over 2,500 6-inch rounds in the first 20 minutes and even crossed Yamashiro's "T," but only achieved a few more hits, although the deluge of shellfire disrupted Yamashiro's group from getting off a torpedo attack. The four destroyers escaped with relatively minor damage. Convinced he had sunk many more ships than he had, and running low on fuel and ammunition, Ainsworth broke off the engagement at about 0230. As Ainsworth's force exited the battle area, *Nicholas* fired five torpedoes at the flaming wreckage of *Niizuki*, with no discernable result. *Nicholas* and *Radford* were then directed to remain behind and search for *Helena* survivors.

In the meantime, *Helena's* commanding officer, Captain Cecil, had formed his rafts into a convoy. At 0341, *Radford* and *Nicholas* located the main group of *Helena* survivors in the water. Just after they commenced rescue ops, they broke off because radar detected *Suzukaze* and *Tanikaze*, which had reloaded their torpedo tubes and were coming back looking to resume the fight. However, not seeing anything, the two Japanese destroyers withdrew. *Radford* and *Nicholas* resumed rescuing *Helena's* crew. Meanwhile, the group of four Japanese destroyers under Yamashiro, which had escaped, proceeded to Vila, offloaded their 1,200 army troops, and then headed for home. Three of the destroyers headed south and west intent on escape via Blackett Strait

and Vella Gulf, but one ran aground. Captain Yamashiro took his flagship, *Amagiri* (which would later sink *PT-109*) north back into the Kula Gulf to try to find any survivors from *Niizuki*. *Amagiri* found some, and was in the process of rescuing them at the same time *Radford* and *Nicholas* were rescuing *Helena* survivors 13,000 yards away. The Japanese and U.S. ships detected each other, broke off rescue operations (again, for the Americans) and attacked each other. *Amagiri* fired torpedoes at *Nicholas* and *Nicholas* fired torpedoes at *Amagiri*. All missed (by 15 feet in the case of the Japanese). The exchange of gunfire that followed knocked out *Amagiri's* fire control circuits, and her skipper elected at that point to withdraw. Almost all of *Niizuki's* crew of 300 would be lost, including her skipper and Rear Admiral Akiyama.

The other Japanese transport group successfully off-loaded their troops at Vila, and two of the three elected to withdraw via Blackett Strait, while the *Mochizuki*, which had encountered delay on off-loading, elected to take her chances alone in Kula Gulf. *Mochizuki* transited northbound hugging the east coast of Kolombangara and once again interrupted the efforts of *Nicholas* and *O'Bannon* to rescue *Helena* survivors, of which a number had now been pulled from the water. *Mochizuki* launched one torpedo at the U.S. destroyers that missed and, after a brief exchange of gunfire, made her escape under a smoke screen. The U.S. destroyers, with *Helena* survivors on board (eventually over 600), were in no mood for a fight by then either and screened themselves in smoke. When the two destroyers departed, they left behind four lifeboats with volunteer crews, which continued rescue work into the next day.

The Japanese destroyer that had run aground, the *Nagatsuki*, tried valiantly to get off the rocks, but she was hard aground. Most of her crew got off by small boat to Kolombangara at dawn before the inevitable U.S. airstrikes rolled in, bombing her throughout the day until her magazine blew up.

12-13 July 1943: Battle of Kolombangara

About the best that can be said for the Battle of Kolombangara is that it could have been a lot worse. With the difference of a few feet from where Japanese torpedoes hit, it could have been another Tassafaronga disaster.

During the days after the Battle of Kula Gulf, two U.S. cruiser-destroyer groups were operating in the waters around Kolombangara, sometimes on alternate nights and sometimes on the same nights in different locations. On 12 July 1943, Rear Admiral Ainsworth received orders to proceed up The Slot to interdict another Japanese reinforcement/resupply run by the Tokyo Express. Task Force 18 consisted of the light cruisers *Honolulu* and *St. Louis*, both veterans of the Battle of Kula Gulf, and the Royal New Zealand Navy light cruiser HMNZS *Leander* (75) replacing the sunken *Helena*. This time, ten destroyers accompanied the U.S. cruisers.

Ainsworth's battle plan was essentially the same as at Kula Gulf: Use radar to smother the Japanese ships with shellfire before the Japanese could launch torpedoes, and turn away in the event they did launch. The problem with the plan is that Ainsworth still did not know how far Japanese torpedoes could go (nor did he know Japanese destroyers could reload torpedoes at sea).

The Japanese task group consisted of the battle-veteran light cruiser *Jintsu*, with Rear Admiral Shunji Izaki embarked, and five destroyers, supporting four destroyer-transports carrying 1,200 troops. Using their new radar-detection device (which also provided line-of-bearing), Izaki was aware of and tracking the U.S. force for almost two hours before the U.S. gained radar contact. Despite the warning that he would be opposed, Izaki boldly decided to press on with the mission. His force was still in The Slot, transiting southeasterly, just north of Kolombangara, while Ainsworth's force was transiting westerly across the mouth of Kula Gulf.

At 0100, the flagship *Honolulu*'s radar made contact with the Japanese. Ainsworth ordered his van destroyers to race ahead and at 0109 gave them orders to attack with torpedoes. *Nicholas* (DD-449) immediately launched torpedoes at the lead Japanese ship, *Jintsu*, at a range of 7,000 yards. *Jintsu* replied with torpedoes and gunfire. Ainsworth waited until the range from his cruisers to *Jintsu* closed to 10,000 yards. Repeating the now-familiar pattern, the three U.S. light cruisers smothered *Jintsu* with 2,630 rounds of rapid-fire 6-inch shells in about ten minutes, while the other Japanese ships remained unscathed and set up for a stealthy torpedo attack. *Jintsu* was also hit by two torpedoes from U.S. destroyers, which, in an anomaly, actually worked. *Jintsu* broke into two floating, burning halves that drifted apart. Admiral Izaki, the captain, and 482 of her crew were lost, almost all hands. However, *Jintsu*'s torpedoes and those of other destroyers were already on the way.

Leander was hit by a torpedo that killed 28 crewmen and put her out of action for the remainder of the battle (and actually for the rest of the war). Other torpedoes were near-misses. The destroyer *Radford* narrowly avoided two torpedoes and destroyer *Jenkins* (DD-447) dodged one. In the meantime, the four Japanese destroyer-transports, burdened with troops and supplies, had reversed course to avoid the battle. Four of the destroyers in the support group, having fired their torpedoes, began to withdraw to the northwest, while the destroyer *Mikazuki* tried to stand by *Jintsu* until it was quickly deemed hopeless.

In the confusion of the night battle, Ainsworth's van destroyers broke off pursuit of the retiring Japanese destroyers and reversed course to the east to rejoin the cruisers, while at the same time Ainsworth decided to pursue the Japanese destroyers to the west with his cruisers, unbeknownst to each other due to communications challenges. This nearly resulted

in a “blue-on-blue” engagement. At the same time, the five Japanese destroyers had also reversed course, having reloaded their torpedoes in 18 minutes. Precious time was lost on the flagship *Honolulu* trying sort out friend from foe. At 0203, Ainsworth was still uncertain and ordered his cruisers to illuminate the group he thought might be Japanese with star shells. Meanwhile the Japanese had already launched their second load of torpedoes, and 31 torpedoes were en route the U.S. cruisers. The star shells confirmed that the contacts were Japanese and Ainsworth ordered his cruisers to turn to unmask their main batteries, unfortunately right into the paths of the oncoming torpedoes.

Before she could obey the command to commence firing, *St. Louis* was hit by a torpedo, fortunately well forward, as was *Honolulu*, while the destroyer *Gwin* received a fatal hit amidships in her engine room. *Honolulu*, maneuvering radically to avoid numerous torpedoes, narrowly avoided colliding with the burning *Gwin*, while a second torpedo hit *Honolulu* square in the stern without exploding, and stuck there for several minutes, long enough for the gun captain of the aftermost machine guns to request permission for his crew to abandon their posts because there was a torpedo stuck in the stern directly below them. The report was initially disbelieved, but the captain gave permission, as the torpedo slid back in the water on its own. *Gwin* had been the only one of the four U.S. destroyers in the night action off Guadalcanal on 14–15 November to survive the battle, and had rescued almost the entire crew of *Benham* (DD-397). Despite a valiant attempt to save their ship, *Gwin*’s crew was taken off by *Ralph Talbot* before she was scuttled. Two officers and 59 men of *Gwin*’s crew were lost.

In the unnamed action that resulted in the loss of the destroyer *Strong*, and in the battles of Kula Gulf and Kolombangara, the Japanese accomplished their mission of transporting troops to Kolombangara, then ferried them across Kula Gulf to New Georgia, at a cost of one light cruiser

and two destroyers. The U.S. had lost one light cruiser and two destroyers, plus three other light cruisers significantly damaged. Had *Honolulu* and *St. Louis* not been hit so far forward (which resulted in no deaths on either cruiser), the results of Kolombangara could have been even worse than Tassafaronga. The U.S. Navy had learned many lessons from the battles off Guadalcanal, but still failed to comprehend the true extent of Japanese torpedo capability. The Americans continued to repeat the flawed tactic of concentrating the fire of all of their cruisers on the lead (or largest) Japanese ship, while unknowingly well within effective Japanese torpedo range, leaving the other Japanese ships free to launch torpedo attacks, which only by luck were not far more effective.

Both sides claimed to sink many more ships than they actually did. Rear Admiral Ainsworth claimed to have sunk seven to nine Japanese ships at Kula Gulf (actual score: two) and five more sunk at Kolombangara (actual score: one). This was not all that unusual. U.S. post-battle reports regularly inflated the size enemy ships (heavy cruisers reported as battleships, destroyers reported as cruisers, etc.) and claimed more sunk and damaged than was actually the case. Japanese operational reporting was just as bad, and often worse. The Japanese claimed to have sunk all three Allied cruisers and several destroyers at Kolombangara, although a big difference was that their admiral was dead. Nevertheless, subsequent U.S. intelligence reporting would determine with a decent degree of accuracy the real tally of enemy ships lost, often to the consternation, and even anger, of U.S. operational commanders, who did not appreciate having their victories downgraded by the intelligence types.

The postscript to the Battle of Kula Gulf was the extraordinary effort to rescue the survivors of *Helena*. Most of the crew was actually rescued the night of the battle, many of them from Captain Cecil’s well-disciplined raft convoy. However, about 200 of *Helena*’s crew were not able to reach

rafts and initially remained clustered around the bow, which floated for several hours, before it finally sank (at various points during the night both the U.S. and Japanese fired torpedoes and shells at the floating bow thinking it was an enemy ship). After daybreak on 6 July, a Navy PB4Y-2 (B-24) Liberator patrol bomber sighted the cluster of survivors and dropped four life rafts (one of which sank before opening), which wasn't near enough for the whole group, but was a help. Over the next day, the current carried the group of survivors toward the northwest (and toward the Japanese-held islands), past the north coast of Kolombangara, all the way across Vella Gulf, during which about a quarter of their number died from wounds, drowning, or exposure. Fortunately, Japanese Zero fighters that buzzed the group several times opted not to strafe, apparently unsure whether the oil-soaked survivors were not their own. Finally, the current carried the remaining 165 survivors close enough to the Japanese-held island of Vella LaVella, that they were able to reach shore in two groups eight miles apart.

On Vella LaVella, two Australian coast watchers and their Melanesian (native) militia saw the Americans come ashore, provided assistance (including wiping out a Japanese patrol that came too close), and radioed for help. There were too many survivors for a PBY or submarine rescue, and any partial rescue would alert the Japanese, who would almost certainly respond with far more than one patrol. As a result, Captain Francis X. McInerney (who had been DESRON 21 commander at both Kula Gulf and Kolombangara) led the destroyers *Nicholas*, *Radford*, *Jenkins* and *O'Bannon* (also all veterans of both battles) up The Slot in the farthest penetration yet attempted deep in "enemy" waters, which drew the attention of Japanese night reconnaissance aircraft. Meanwhile, the destroyer transports *Dent* (APD-9) and *Waters* (APD-8), escorted by four destroyers of DESRON 12 (led by Captain Thomas J. Ryan, who had been awarded a Medal of Honor for his actions in rescuing Japanese during the great

Tokyo earthquake of 1923), transited south of New Georgia and entered Vella Gulf from the south via Gizo Strait. While three of the southern group of destroyers stood guard, the destroyer *Taylor* led *Dent* and *Waters* through treacherous, poorly-charted waters, using lead-line soundings for some of it. Landing craft from *Dent* and *Waters* picked up 61 survivors and one Japanese POW from one location, then felt their way eight miles northward and picked up 104 survivors and 16 Chinese. By daybreak, the entire U.S. force was transiting at maximum speed down The Slot, passing survivors of the Japanese cruise *Jintsu*, who refused to be rescued, except for two who had found their way onto an abandoned lifeboat from the sunken *Gwin*. In the end, 168 of "Happy *Helena's*" crew would be lost, but 739 were saved.

Helena would be the first ship to be awarded the newly created Navy Unit Commendation (NUC) for her actions at Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal, and Kula Gulf. Captain Charles P. Cecil would be awarded his second Navy Cross, but would perish in an accidental plane crash before the war ended. Captain (and future vice admiral) Francis X. McInerney would be awarded a Navy Cross for Kula Gulf, a Silver Star for Kolombangara, and a Legion of Merit with Combat V for the rescue of *Helena* survivors from Vella LaVella. The *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class frigate FFG-8 would be named in his honor. The Vulcan Group located and positively identified *Helena's* wreck on 11 April 2018.

18 July 1943: Sinking of LST-342 and Loss of Combat Artist McClelland Barclay

On 18 July 1943, Japanese submarine *RO-106* torpedoed and sank *LST-342* off the Solomon Islands. The explosion broke the ship in two; the stern section sank immediately, while the bow remained afloat and was pulled into harbor. Among those killed was famed artist McClelland Barclay, who had had a very successful career painting covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* and numerous other periodicals. Beginning in 1938, he painted numerous recruiting posters for the

U.S. Navy, many of which were among the most famous and popular during and even after the war, before becoming a reserve officer. Barclay became one of first, and most prolific, Navy combat artists (NHHC still has the program and two combat artists). Barclay stated: "A camera cannot catch the human element of a fight, the sweat and blood and courage our boys expend every time they face the enemy." Barclay's body was never recovered. (Please see attachment H-020-3 for an example of his work.)

19-20 July 1943: Unnamed Air-to-Surface Action

On the night of 19-20 July, the Japanese decided to have a surprise in store for the U.S. light cruisers, believing that they had sunk several of them and now had the upper hand. This time the Tokyo Express run to Kolombangara consisted of three heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and nine destroyers, commanded by Rear Admiral Shoji Nishimura, who expected to overpower any U.S. opposition. However, on this night, the U.S. Navy had sent no surface forces into the Kula Gulf. At 2230 on 19 July, a U.S. Navy radar-equipped PBY Catalina "Black Cat" flying boat detected the Japanese task force heading down The Slot. Six TBF Avenger torpedo bombers (carrying bombs) from Henderson Field on Guadalcanal launched on a daring night strike against the Japanese force, sank the destroyer *Yugure*, and hit and damaged the heavy cruiser *Kumano* with a 2,000-pound bomb. A follow-on pre-dawn strike by five TBFs (with torpedoes) and eight U.S. Army Air Force B-25 bombers employing skip-bombing tactics attacked the force, but hit nothing, although the attack did cause Nishimura to decide he'd had enough. The destroyer *Kiyonami* was left behind to pick up survivors from *Yugure*, only to be sunk herself after daybreak by B-25s. Two B-25s and two Avengers were lost in the strikes.

2 August 1943: The Loss of PT-109 (LTJG John F. Kennedy, Commanding)

The night of 2 August 1943 was not one of the better ones for U.S. PT-boats operating around New Georgia. At the time, there were four PT-boat squadrons, with 52 boats, operating around New Georgia from two bases, one on the island of Rendova, just south of New Georgia, and the other at Lever Harbor on the north side of the island. All were under Commander Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons South Pacific, Captain E. J. "Mike" Moran (who had been skipper of the badly damaged light cruiser USS *Boise* [CL-47] at the Battle of Cape Esperance [H-gram 011]). After the accidental sinking of Vice Admiral Turner's flagship (although it was already done for), the PT-boats were kept on a very tight leash. In fact, whenever Rear Admiral Ainsworth or Rear Admiral Merrill brought their cruiser-destroyer forces in the waters of Kula Gulf and Kolombangara, the PT-boats were ordered to stay in port and out of the way.

The PT-boats actually had their hands full with Japanese troop barges, with frequent engagements between them as the barges brought troops from Kolombangara to reinforce the defense in what had become a protracted fight on New Georgia. The boats had a great speed advantage over the barges, most of which were the "Type A Daihatsu," but torpedoes were not effective against them. Although relatively slow, the barges were heavily armed and armored (and more so as the engagements continued) and generally had 100-120 combat troops embarked, who were not passive observers and energetically joined in firing back at the attackers with a number of automatic weapons that easily perforated the wooden hulls of the PT-boats. Throughout the summer of 1943, there was an escalation on both sides of the size of weapons carried, with the barges mounting anti-tank field pieces and some of the PT-boats mounting a single Bofors 40-mm cannon in addition to machine guns of smaller caliber. The barges hugged the coast during daylight under jungle

canopy, where they were effectively immune to U.S. air strikes, and they came out only at night.

The Japanese planned (and U.S. Navy intelligence detected) another Tokyo Express run for the night of 1-2 August, consisting of five destroyers. This time the Japanese sent 18 bombers to strike the PT-boat base at Rendova during daylight on 1 August, sinking two PT-boats (*PT-117* and *PT-164*) that were caught in the harbor. Two torpedoes were blown off *PT-164* and ran an erratic course around the harbor until they beached themselves. (This is the air raid loosely depicted in the movie *PT-109*.) Since neither of Ainsworth's or Merrill's cruisers were in position to interdict, 15 PT-boats from Rendova, split in four groups, took up stations in Blackett Strait, between Kolombangara and New Georgia.

PT-159 and *PT-157* attacked what they thought were landing craft and got a rude surprise when the Japanese destroyers opened up. Nevertheless, despite the loss of surprise, the two PT-boats closed to attack and fired six torpedoes, with no hits. *PT-171* then conducted a solo attack under fire, launching four torpedoes for no hits; the other three PT-boats in company with *PT-171* did not see the Japanese until it was too late to intercept. *PT-107* and three other boats tried to attack, but only *PT-107* was able get a firing solution; however, all four torpedoes missed. Three more PT-boats then attacked and, despite being strafed by a Japanese float plane in the dark, fired 12 torpedoes at the Japanese destroyers—all missed. The unscathed Japanese destroyers exited Blackett Strait to the east and off-loaded their troops and supplies at Vila, Kolombangara.

PT-109, under the command of Lieutenant Junior Grade (and future President) John F. Kennedy, lingered in Blackett Strait in loose company with *PT-162* and *PT-169* in the event the Japanese chose to exit the Kula Gulf the same way they went in. And they did. A lookout on *PT-109* spotted the destroyer *Amagiri* bearing down on

them only at the last moment. With less than ten seconds to react, Kennedy attempted to take evasive action, but he'd been idling so as not to have his wake attract the Japanese float plane that had attacked earlier. It was too late and *Amagiri* sliced *PT-109* in two, crushing the after section, causing a large explosion, but leaving the bow half afloat and surrounded by flames. *PT-162* avoided being rammed and sunk by *Amagiri* by only a few yards. Information from Japanese sources indicates that *Amagiri's* actions were deliberate. *PT-169* fired torpedoes at a Japanese destroyer, but they did not arm because the range was too close. *PT-157* subsequently fired two torpedoes at the retiring Japanese, with no hits. The tally for the night was one PT-boat sunk and 30 torpedoes fired in exchange for a dent in *Amagiri's* bow and a successful Japanese re-supply run. The tactics at the time called for PT-boats that had expended their torpedoes to return to base. Unfortunately, the first boats to expend torpedoes were the few that had radar, so, on a moonless night, none of the boats remaining in Blackett Strait had radar, including *PT-109*.

Of *PT-109's* 13-man crew, two were killed in the collision, six were on the bow section and five were somewhere out in the water. Kennedy was able to get them all on the bow, although it was slowly sinking. At 1400 on 2 August, Kennedy decided they would have to swim for it. Using a timber to hold lanterns, shoes, and those who couldn't swim, the crew made for Plum Pudding Island, since the other islands in proximity were Japanese-held. Kennedy towed his severely burned senior machinist mate with a life jacket strap clenched in his teeth. It took four hours to reach the island, which turned out to have no water or food. Kennedy then swam 1.25 miles to scout Naru and Olasana Islands. Finding potable water—and no Japanese—on Olasana Island, Kennedy swam back to Plum Pudding Island and led his crew on another swim to Olasana.

A coast watcher on Kolombangara had seen and reported the explosion when *Amagiri* rammed *PT-109*. The torpedo boat base at Rendova then held a memorial service for the crew of *PT-109* (I hate to be uncharitable, but a search might have been more appropriate). The crew survived for six days on coconuts. At night, Kennedy would swim out with a lantern into Ferguson Passage attempting to flag down the next PT-boat patrol, of which for some reason there were none. Meanwhile, the coast watcher had dispatched two native islanders (Biaku Gasa and Eroni Kumana) to look for possible survivors. They found Kennedy and his crew. After initial tense moments when the islanders pointed their submachine guns at the survivors, unsure if they were American or Japanese, Kennedy convinced the islanders they were friendly. Gasa indicated that Kennedy should carve a message on a coconut, because neither spoke any English. The islanders took the coconut 35 nautical miles to Rendova, at great risk. The Japanese were known to torture any islanders caught aiding the Allies, before killing them. A canoe then came to take Kennedy to the coast watcher (Australian Sublieutenant Arthur Reginald Evans) to coordinate the rescue, and *PT-109*'s crew were subsequently picked up by *PT-157*.

Kennedy and the executive officer, Ensign Leonard J. Thom, would be awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and Kennedy would also receive a Purple Heart. Of the 11 survivors, Seaman Second Class Raymond Albert would subsequently be killed in action in October 1943. When Kennedy was running for President, the story of *PT-109* became a cultural sensation, with books, TV shows, a movie, toys, and even a top 10 song by Jimmy Dean (it may be the only hit song to mention a Japanese destroyer). The *Amagiri* was the only one of the five Japanese destroyers to escape unscathed during Captain Arleigh Burke's lopsided victory at the Battle of Cape St. George later in 1943, before succumbing to a mine strike in the Makassar Strait on 23 April 1944. *Amagiri* took over two hours to sink, so almost

all her crew survived. The skipper of *Amagiri* at the time the destroyer rammed *PT-109*, Lieutenant Commander Kohei Hanami, survived the war and was an invited guest at JFK's inauguration. In 2002, an expedition by Bob Ballard located a torpedo tube and then the forward section of *PT-109*, which were left in place in accordance with U.S. Navy policy. And, of note, Kennedy's first duty station after joining the Navy in October 1941 was the Office of Naval Intelligence.

6-7 August 1943: Battle of Vella Gulf

On the night of 6-7 August 1943, a force of six destroyers (Task Group 31.2) under the command of Commander Frederick Moosbrugger intercepted four Japanese destroyers carrying 900 soldiers in Vella Gulf on the west side of Kolombangara, to the surprise of the Japanese. Following the loss of *Helena*, the near-loss of HMNZS *Leander*, and the "could have been a lot worse" damage to *Honolulu* and *St. Louis*, the U.S. Navy was having second thoughts (again) about committing cruisers into the confined waters of the Central Solomons, especially as it had now become plainly evident that the Japanese had a much superior torpedo. Moosbrugger was given orders to take on the expected Tokyo Express run using only destroyers.

Moosbrugger's force transited south of New Georgia and entered Vella Gulf from the south via the poorly charted and treacherous Gizo Strait. The Japanese force entered Vella Gulf from the northwest, heading for Blackett Strait to go around the south end of Kolombangara to Vila. Based on aircraft reconnaissance reports, Moosbrugger knew the Japanese were coming. The Japanese task group, under the command of Captain Kaju Sugiura, was not expecting to encounter U.S. ships on the west side of Kolombangara since previous engagements had all been on the east side in Kula Gulf or to the south in Blackett Strait.

Moosbrugger arrayed his force in two staggered columns heading north in Vella Gulf. The destroyers *Dunlap* (DD-384,) *Craven* (DD-382), and *Maury* (DD-401) were to the west (port) and slightly ahead of the second column of *Lang* (DD-399,) *Sterrett* (DD-407), and *Stack* (DD-406). At 2033 on 6 August, U.S. radar detected the Japanese destroyers to the northwest, steaming in a single column heading southeast. The first group of U.S. destroyers maneuvered to engage the Japanese on a parallel reciprocal course, while the second group of U.S. destroyers turned to the west to cross behind the first group and cross the Japanese "T." With visibility of only two miles, the Japanese were still unaware of the presence of U.S. ships when Moosbrugger ordered *Dunlap*, *Craven*, and *Maury* to fire torpedoes at 2341. Twenty-four torpedoes were heading for the Japanese with a near perfect set-up, with a 4,000-yard run and torpedoes striking perpendicular to the Japanese course. By now, the destroyer men were as aware as the submariners about how faulty U.S. torpedoes were, with the magnetic exploders being the prime suspect. Moosbrugger's destroyers disconnected the magnetic exploders so the weapons would operate as contact torpedoes.

At 2342, a lookout on the lead Japanese destroyer, *Hagikaze*, sighted an unidentified contact to the east. Within seconds, *Arashi* reported seeing a PT-boat in the same direction, and *Shigure* reported a wake in the same direction. *Kawakaze* then injected confusion by reporting an imaginary PT-boat to the southwest. After another minute, *Hagikaze* identified the contacts to the east as four destroyers. Although the Japanese ships had been at battle stations, the surprise still resulted in a mad scramble. *Hagikaze* and *Arashi* desperately turned to port (toward U.S. ships) to try to comb the incoming torpedo wakes, while *Kawakaze* turned away. One or two torpedoes hit *Hagikaze* in a fireroom, and two or three hit *Arashi*. *Kawakaze* was hit by a torpedo in her forward magazine that blew up the forward part of the ship into a massive ball of fire.

Shigure (a charmed ship), bringing up the rear, did not turn, and U.S. torpedoes passed underneath her hull without exploding, and one actually hit but failed to explode. *Shigure* counter-fired eight torpedoes at 2345, but Moosbrugger's destroyers had already executed a turn away in anticipation of Japanese torpedoes, while the turn west of the second group of U.S. destroyers took them out of the path of *Shigure's* torpedoes. *Shigure* then reversed course to exit the battle area to the north. *Shigure* fought in ten major battles—and was the sole survivor of two of them, Vella Gulf and Surigao Strait—and a host of smaller actions, including the action against *PT-109*. Damaged repeatedly but not fatally, until she was torpedoed by submarine *USS Blackfin* (SS-322) in March 1945.

Only after confirmation that U.S. torpedoes were hitting home did the U.S. destroyers open fire with guns. Both groups of destroyers then poured fire into the three crippled Japanese destroyers, and *Lang* fired four torpedoes for good measure. *Kawakaze* went down quickly and, by midnight, the other two had been reduced to burning derelicts. In the meantime, *Shigure* had reloaded her torpedoes and came charging back into the fight just as *Arashi* suffered a massive magazine explosion seen for many miles. With a PBY Black Cat now overhead, and believing that one of the burning ships was a U.S. victim of his torpedoes, the commanding officer of the *Shigure* thought better of re-engaging and once again exited the battle area at high speed. (Of note, *Arashi* was the destroyer that inadvertently led Lieutenant Commander Wade McClusky and *Enterprise* air group to the Japanese carriers at Midway.)

U.S. ships attempted to pick up some Japanese survivors, but all refused rescue. Over 1,500 Japanese sailors and embarked soldiers perished in the Battle of Vella Gulf; only about 300 made their way to shore. Moosbrugger's force suffered no casualties due to the enemy, and only one injury due to an accident. It was the first truly one-sided U.S. victory of the Solomon Islands

campaign and Moosbrugger received widespread accolades. Admiral Nimitz stated that the victory "was due to good intelligence of the enemy's movements, wise planning, the utmost exploitation of surprise, the withholding of torpedo fire until salvos would course at right angles to the enemy, turning away before he could counterattack, and prompt follow up with gunfire," to which Morison added "good training, and the commander's ability to make correct estimates and quick decisions." I would add that had visibility not been so poor, Japanese torpedoes might well have been on the way first.

Moosbrugger was ordered to conduct a repeat on the night of 9-10 August, but only found a few barges, which put up a spirited fight, hitting *Lang* with .25-caliber machine-gun fire and spinning in such tight circles that they frustrated American gunnery: "like shooting cockroaches with a pistol." After prodigious expenditure of ammunition, one and maybe two of the plucky barges finally went down. Thus ended the naval portion of the Solomon Islands campaign. As a result of the protracted and poorly run fight on New Georgia, U.S. strategists decided to bypass Kolombangara and skip to Vella LaVella (which the U.S. should probably have skipped, too) in preparation to move against the primary objective in the northern Solomon Islands: Bougainville. (And, this H-gram should make it clear why we have a cruiser named after the Battle of Vella Gulf (CG-72) and none named after the Battles of Kula Gulf and Kolombangara.)

H-020-3: McClelland Barclay

H-Gram 020, Attachment 3

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

July 2018





The USS AL-2 in Bantry Bay, Ireland, after encounter with the German submarine UB-65 on 10 July 1918 off Fastnet Light, Ireland, which resulted in the sinking of the U-boat (NH 51121)

H-020-4: The Fog of War—Lieutenant John Foster and *AL-2* Versus *UB-65*, 10 July 1918

H-Gram 020, Attachment 4

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

July 2018

Given the limited communications, acoustic, and “identification, friend or foe” technology of the 1917-1918 period, it wouldn’t seem like a “good idea” to operate Allied submarines in waters

infested with German U-boats, due to the risk of fratricidal engagements. That did not stop either the Royal Navy or the U.S. Navy from doing so. The advantage of using submarines was that U-boats would generally see Allied destroyers and escorts long before they could see the submarine periscope or conning tower, enabling the U-boats to avoid being attacked. In theory, the low freeboard of a submarine would enable it to approach a U-boat undetected and conduct a surprise attack. In June 1917, the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, Vice Admiral William S. Sims, recommended that U.S. Navy submarines be deployed to the European Theater. On 2 July 1917, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral William S. Benson ordered 12 submarines be readied for deployment. L-2 was one of the submarines deemed most capable of making the transatlantic crossing. It took until December 1917

for the submarines to be trained and ready to deploy.

On 4 December, eight submarines under tow departed Melville, Rhode Island, for European waters via the Azores, in company with the submarine tenders USS Fulton (AS-1)* and USS Bushnell (AS-2), with the commander of the submarine flotilla embarked, Captain Thomas C. Hart—future four-star commander of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet at the start of World War II. L-2, under the command of Medal of Honor awardee Lieutenant Paul F. Foster, was under tow by the tug USS Conestoga (AT-54), which would later disappear without a trace with her crew of 56 after departing San Francisco Bay in 1921—and was found in 2015. A gale caused the force to scatter, and it regrouped in Bermuda on 13 December. After repair work in the Azores and several patrols near the Azores, L-2 departed and arrived at Queenstown, Ireland on 27 Jan 1918. Due to the number of destroyers and other ships operating out of Queenstown, the submarine's base was moved to Berehaven on Bantry Bay, further to the west, but still on the south coast of Ireland. Since the British already had L-class submarines, L-2 was renamed AL-2 and a large "A" painted on her.

On 25 May 1918, AL-2 got underway from Bantry Bay for a patrol, and the next day sighted what was believed to be a German submarine. Throughout the day, AL-2 made multiple attempts to get in firing position, eventually doing so, but because the identity of the submarine could not be confirmed, and because batteries were running low, AL-2 broke off the attempt.

On the morning of 10 July 1918, AL-2 was returning from a patrol south of Ireland when she encountered the destroyers USS Parker (DD-48) and USS McCall (DD-28). Despite sending blinker and smoke bomb recognition signals, one of the destroyers opened fire on AL-2, getting off five rounds, with no hits, before finally recognizing AL-2 as friendly.

AL-2 continued toward Berehaven and, at 1755 local, sighted what was initially thought to be a nun buoy. At 1830, a submarine fired a torpedo at AL-2 that detonated 200 feet from her engine room, according to Lieutenant Foster's later report. The periscope of the submarine was clearly visible on the starboard quarter at a range of 80 yards, which would have put her not far from the explosion. Her skipper took her down to 70 feet and listened, detecting sounds of what the crew evaluated as two submarines. AL-2 attempted to chase one of the submarines while submerged via sound. Foster then attempted to ram the closest submarine, according to his after-action report. Foster then gave chase to one of the two U-boats, but eventually lost her, and spent two hours circling around trying to regain contact.

Foster eventually surfaced and reported to Bushnell in Bantry Bay about the explosion and the possibility that the U-boat had sunk. The log entries and after-action reports depict an extremely confusing picture of using the technology of the time to try to track submerged submarines while submerged. In reality, there almost certainly was no second submarine present, although some accounts have postulated that UB-65 was torpedoed by a second German submarine that was trying to hit AL-2—or thought UB-65 was an Allied submarine. However, this does not comport with German records or British intelligence which had a very good handle on which German submarines were on patrol and their general patrol area—thanks to breaking the German codes—and the Germans' propensity to communicate frequently on the radio (a liability they continued into WWII).

The British gave AL-2 credit for sinking UB-65, and for many years the engagement was reported as follows; "The AL-2 on the surface was torpedoed by UB-65 submerged, but turned and crash-dived steeply in an attempt to ram UB-65 and thereby forced the German submarine to crushing depth and the bottom - from which it never arose. This action was described by Josephus Daniels,

Secretary of the Navy as follows: "...had the AL-2 struck the enemy submarine, both boats would have been lost, but Lieutenant Paul F. Foster, the commanding officer, did not hesitate because of the risk, and heroically offered himself, his crew, and his boat as a sacrifice in an endeavor to destroy the enemy - Lieutenant Foster's daring as a submarine commander formed one of the most thrilling chapters of the war." Later accounts suggested that some of Foster's crew were less than "thrilled" about his zeal to ram another submarine while submerged. There was no doubting Foster's courage: He had been awarded a Medal of Honor for valor under fire ashore—disembarked from the battleship USS Utah (BB-31) at Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1914—and would later be awarded a Navy Cross for his actions during a turret explosion and fire aboard the light cruiser USS Trenton (CL-11) an event in which Ensign Henry Clay Dexter and Boatswains Mate First Class George Cholister would be awarded posthumous Medals of Honor and 12 other Sailors would die.

This all made for a good war story, award citation, and great press, but it turned out it wasn't true, at least the part about UB-65 sinking. In 2004, an expedition by the British "Channel 4 Wreck Detectives" dove on an unidentified sunken U-boat that had been located off Padstow, England the year before during a routine survey by the Royal Navy. Based on design features, and the big help of identification numbers stamped on a propeller, the wreck was positively identified as UB-65, many miles from the site of the engagement with AL-2. There were no external signs of damage, although aft hatches were open, suggesting an escape attempt. The Germans had initially concluded that UB-65 had been sunk by the premature detonation of her own torpedo during the engagement with AL-2, but in 1930 the Germans had reassessed it to be lost due to accidental causes off Padstow, England, on or after 14 July 1918. Exactly how the Germans figured this out in 1930 is unclear, but presumably was based on the previously unexplained loss of a Portuguese vessel off Padstow on 14 July (the

presumption being that UB-65 had sunk it before further radio contact was lost).

It actually turns out that determination of U-boat losses in World War I is a very imprecise science, and there are widely differing accounts of the time, place and means of loss of a number of sunken U-boats. There are also wildly varying accounts of the loss of UB-65. I have tried to remain as close to the original AL-2 logs and after-action reports as possible, even though they are confusing. However, UB-65's reputation as a "haunted" ship has resulted in embellished, and probably even fabricated, accounts. Whether UB-65 was haunted or not, is obviously dubious, some of her crew supposedly believed she was haunted and even reported seeing ghosts. The submarine also suffered a long string of accidents, a number of them fatal, which does appear factual.

While UB-65 was under construction in 1917, three crewmembers were asphyxiated by diesel fumes in the engine room, and two more crewmen (some accounts say workers) were crushed by a falling girder. During sea trials, a crewman was washed overboard and never recovered. During a test run, a ballast tank fracture caused water to reach the batteries, resulting in toxic gas that killed two crewmen. On the first test dive, UB-65 suffered another ballast tank fracture and the sub sank to the (apparently shallow) bottom, where the crew was trapped for 12 hours until they finally found a way to get the submarine to the surface. As the submarine was being loaded with torpedoes prior to its first patrol, one of the torpedoes exploded, killing the ship's second officer (executive officer) and killing several other crewmen (some sources say four, others eight, and some none) and wounding several others, and requiring extensive repairs to the submarine.

It was supposedly the ghost of the executive officer that haunted the ship, but it appears the "ghost stories" are actually traceable to a British journalist, Hector Charles Bywater, who wrote about the numerous sightings of ghosts aboard

the ship after the war. There appear to be no other accounts prior to Bywater's, suggesting fabrication. In the 1920s, Bywater also wrote two books about a future war between the United States and Japan. *The Great Pacific War*, which he wrote in 1925, fairly accurately depicted the actions by the U.S. and Japanese navies during World War II—and was popular in Japan—although contrary to some accounts it did not predict the attack on Pearl Harbor. Foreign agents on both sides were known to plant false rumors in an attempt to degrade enemy morale, and this could be the origin of ghost stories, although I could find no evidence of this in this case.

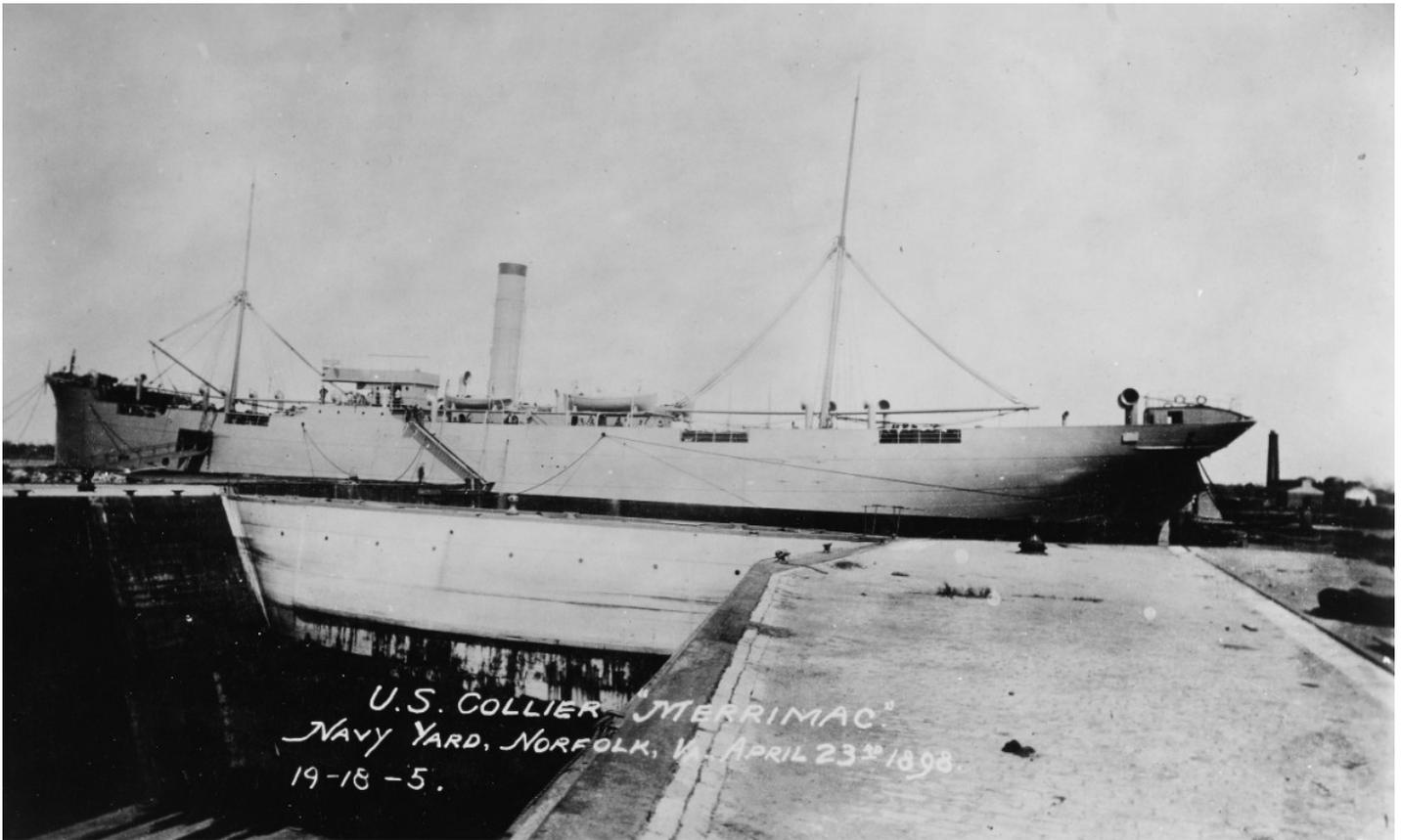
UB-65's first skipper was replaced, by some accounts because of his inability to control his spooked crew, but more likely because of loss of confidence in his command abilities due to all the accidents. UB-65 went on to conduct six patrols under the command of Kapitänleutnant Martin Shelle, sinking six Allied merchant ships and the sloop HMS Arbutus, and damaging six others. It's possible that the encounter with AL-2 resulted in some kind of internal (or not visible) damage that resulted in the loss of UB-65 several days later, and not during the encounter with AL-2. However, given UB-65's accident-prone history, it's entirely plausible she sank all by herself. All that is known for sure now is her location, and the fact that all 37 of her crew were lost, and probably had nothing to do with ghosts.

The Spruance-class destroyer USS Paul Foster (DD-964), in commission from February 1976 until March 2003, was named in honor of Paul F. Foster, who retired as a vice admiral in 1946, after being recalled to active duty at the start of World War II. He served as assistant Navy inspector general, and inspector for President Franklin Roosevelt.

Sources include; *Naval History and Heritage (NHHHC) Command Dictionary of American Fighting Ships* entry for L-2, updated in Jun 2018 from official U.S. Navy records by NHHHC Historian Christopher B. Havern, Sr., and "The Haunted U-

boat" by Commander Richard-Compton-Hall (director, Royal Navy Sub Museum), U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, March 1990. The internet is full of the various undocumented "ghost story" versions.

*Note: The system of two-letter codes to denote ship types was not implemented until after World War I. So, in 1918, the submarine tender USS Fulton would have been designated "Submarine Tender No. 1," not AS-1. The USS Utah would be "Battleship No. 31," not BB-31. However, for the sake of brevity, I used the more modern system.



USS Merrimac at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia, 23 April 1898 (NH 809).

H-020-5: Forgotten Valor—USS *Merrimac*'s Suicide Mission

H-Gram 020, [Attachment 5](#)

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

July 2018

On the night of 2-3 June 1898, the old collier USS *Merrimac*, under the command of Lieutenant Richmond P. Hobson and with a volunteer crew of seven, steamed into the entrance to Santiago de Cuba and attempted to scuttle herself in the channel to block the Spanish squadron in port—under the orders of Rear Admiral William T. Sampson. However, alert Spanish shore batteries opened heavy fire and disabled *Merrimac*'s steering gear, leaving the ship and her crew adrift

in the channel until she came in range of the Spanish ships in the harbor. These shelled *Merrimac* before she was sunk—probably by a torpedo fired from *Plutón*. Unfortunately, *Merrimac* did not sink in a spot that would effectively block the channel. Somewhat miraculously, *Merrimac*'s entire crew survived. Admiral Cervera personally motored out and picked up Lieutenant Hobson and his crew, and treated them with great chivalry. *Merrimac* was the only U.S. Navy ship sunk during the war. (A makeshift raft used by Lieutenant Hobson and his crew—which, by chance, I happened to notice yesterday—is hanging from the ceiling in the National Museum of the U.S. Navy.)

While the Spanish held the crew as prisoners of war, U.S. newspapers wrote about the ship's "suicide mission"; the men were idolized as national heroes before they even went home to a "rock star" welcome when they were released after the Battle of Santiago. All seven crewmen

were awarded the Medal of Honor—the only case I know in which the entire crew of a ship received the medal. Hobson was the only naval officer to receive the Medal of Honor—in 1933, for some reason—for action in the Spanish-American War. In the aftermath of the war, Hobson’s hero status rivaled that of Admiral Dewey: He dined with President McKinley, was swamped with speaking engagements, and became known as “the most kissed man in America,” as ladies everywhere swooned. Hobson would go on to a political career as a U.S. congressman from Alabama, where he would be the only congressman from the South to vote for the Women’s Suffrage Bill of 1915 (which didn’t pass) and he would later become known as the “Father of American Prohibition.” In fact, he had been ostracized by his classmates at the U.S. Naval Academy (Class of 1889) because of his total refusal to drink alcohol or smoke tobacco, yet still finished first in his class. And, in a little more trivia, famous inventor Nikola Tesla was the best man at Hobson’s wedding in 1905. The destroyer USS *Hobson* (DD-464) was named in his honor, earning six battle stars— including D-Day at Normandy and Okinawa—before being sunk in a collision with the carrier USS *Wasp* (CV-18) on the night of 22 April 1952, with the loss of 176 of her crew.



Depiction of the Battle of Santiago de Cuba, 3 July 1898, by artist Fred S. Cozzens (NH 85767-KN)

H-020-6: Forgotten Valor—USS Merrimac’s Suicide Mission

H-Gram 020, Attachment 6

Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC

July 2018

Admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete was recalled to active duty upon the outbreak of the Spanish-American War and given command of the Spanish Caribbean Squadron (which was still in the

eastern Atlantic). Despite his efforts to convince Spanish government leaders that the ships in his squadron were woefully unprepared to engage U.S. naval forces in battle, he was ordered to steam to the Caribbean anyway, leaving from the Cape Verde Islands on 29 April 1898. The biggest effect of the Spanish Caribbean Squadron was to sow panic up and down the U.S. East Coast, inflamed by hyped newspaper coverage. The United States expected the Spanish squadron to show up just about anywhere, including fears that the Spanish would sail up the Potomac and burn down Washington, DC. Instead, Cervera took a route intended to avoid contact with U.S. ships because the abysmal material condition of his ships precluded him from doing much of anything

else. Cervera put in at the relatively undeveloped port of Santiago de Cuba instead of at Havana or Cienfuegos, which the United States expected. By 29 May, however, Cervera's squadron was bottled up in the Santiago harbor by a vastly superior U.S. naval force.

The Spanish squadron consisted of the cruisers *Cristóbal Colón*, *Almirante Oquendo*, *Vizcaya*, and *Infanta Maria Teresa*, and the new torpedo-boat destroyers *Plutón* and *Furor*. The cruisers were lightly armored and armed compared to U.S. cruisers, displacing about 7,000 tons and armed with two 11-inch and 10 5.5-inch guns each, except for *Cristóbal Colón*, which did not have her main battery installed. The ships were plagued by all manner of materiel and personnel deficiencies. The *Plutón* and *Furor* had recently been built in the United Kingdom and were advanced torpedo-boat destroyers for their day, but still suffered serious problems. Santiago de Cuba was well defended with shore batteries, including torpedoes and sea mines, so much so that the U.S. Navy would not risk warships trying to force the channel—to the eventual consternation of the U.S. Army commander charged with capturing Santiago.

At the start of the Spanish-American War, there were two primary U.S. Navy forces in the Atlantic: the North Atlantic Squadron, under the command of Rear Admiral William T. Sampson, and the "Flying Squadron," under the command of Commodore Winfield Scott Schley. The two forces were merged off Santiago with Rear Admiral Sampson in overall command. The combined force consisted of the battleships USS *Indiana*, USS *Massachusetts*, USS *Iowa*, and the older USS *Texas* (a near-sister of the sunken USS *Maine*). The force was bolstered by the arrival of the West Coast battleship USS *Oregon*. With the exception of *Texas*, the other four battleships were of modern design, comparable to the best in the world. Sampson flew his flag in the armored cruiser USS *New York* and Schley flew his in the armored cruiser USS *Brooklyn*, both of which

approached battleships in terms of capability, but were slightly faster. Other light cruisers, torpedo boats, and auxiliaries rounded out the U.S. force. The U.S. ships took station in a semi-circle off Santiago, with auxiliaries at the ready to be used to force the channel (i.e., one-time-use minesweepers) if that became necessary, and the brand-new torpedo boats stood by to guard the flagships.

When Spanish ground forces lost San Juan Hill to Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders on 2 July 1898, the Spanish concluded that U.S. artillery would soon be in range of the Spanish ships in the harbor. Cervera's ships began getting up steam on the afternoon of 2 July, with the breakout planned for 0900 on Sunday, 3 July, when the Spanish hoped the U.S. crews would be at church services. At 0845 on 3 July, Rear Admiral Sampson, embarked on *New York*, took her and the torpedo boat *Ericsson* (TB No. 2) out of the blockade to steam away to attend a meeting with Major General William Shafter (with whom Army-Navy relations were extremely poor, which was pretty much the case for the duration of the campaign in Cuba). *New York* was only one of two ships in the U.S. force fast enough to run down the Spanish cruisers if they got through the blockade. In addition, the battleship *Massachusetts* and cruisers *Newark* and *New Orleans* had detached to Guantanamo Bay for coaling. Thus, when the breakout occurred, U.S. forces were at their lowest ebb, consisting of the armored cruiser *Brooklyn* with Commodore Schley embarked (in tactical command with the departure of Sampson), the four battleships *Texas*, *Oregon*, *Iowa*, *Indiana*, and two armed yachts. The U.S. disposition showed weakness to the west, which the Spanish noted.

At 0930, the Spanish squadron was sighted exiting the channel and the battle commenced almost immediately as *Iowa* opened fire, followed shortly by *Texas*, *Oregon*, and *Indiana*. Cervera's flagship, *Infanta Maria Teresa*, and the *Vizcaya* steamed toward *Brooklyn* under a storm of fire,

while the two other cruisers broke for the west, followed by the two torpedo-boat destroyers. *Brooklyn*, with Schley embarked, headed directly for Cervera's flagship and the two were on a collision course. Schley blinked first, and *Brooklyn* made a hard starboard "retrograde" turn of about 360 degrees, nearly colliding with *Texas* and forcing *Texas* to go to all stop. *Infanta Maria Teresa* then broke for the west, with the other three Spanish cruisers in trail, their speed suffering due to poor-quality coal (a shipment of high-quality coal had been intercepted by the U.S. auxiliary cruiser USS *Saint Paul* on 25 May). Nevertheless, the Spanish cruisers began to pull away from the U.S. battleships.

Oregon, which had been at the rear, began overtaking the other U.S. vessels, achieving unprecedented speeds approaching 20 knots. Although *Oregon* fouled *Texas*'s range, she gained on the Spanish, while *Iowa* was hit below the waterline by a Spanish shell and slowed. As the battle devolved into a chase, Cervera ordered his flagship to essentially sacrifice herself by turning toward the oncoming America battleships and engaging *Brooklyn* again in attempt to cover the escape of the other three cruisers. *Brooklyn* was hit over 20 times, mostly from *Infanta Maria Teresa*, but suffered only two casualties. Besides bad coal, the Spanish also had bad ammunition; many rounds had been apparently filled with sawdust at the factory, presumably to up the factory's profit margin. However, *Infanta Maria Teresa*'s fire main had been severed by one of the first hits, most of her bridge crew were killed, and she soon caught fire under the hail of U.S. shells. Burning furiously, with her topsides mostly wrecked, Cervera ordered her run aground. Cervera survived and was rescued by the U.S. armed yacht *Gloucester*.

The other three Spanish cruisers continued their desperate attempt to escape. A defective breech-block mechanism caused a premature explosion, killing the entire gun crew in one of *Almirante Oquendo*'s 11-inch gun turrets, followed by the

explosion of one of her own boilers. She was hit a total of 57 times by U.S. shells. *Almirante Oquendo*'s mortally wounded skipper ordered her scuttled, and she sank in shallow water not far from *Infanta Maria Teresa*.

Meanwhile, the two torpedo-boat destroyers, *Plutón* and *Furor*, were courageously engaged by the armed yacht *Gloucester*, which actually inflicted considerable damage on the two as they passed by at close range, slowing them enough that they were savaged by hits from U.S. battleships *Iowa* and *Indiana* and the armored cruiser *New York*—as Sampson aboard his flagship had reversed course and was trying to get into the fight from behind. In the end, *Plutón* was almost severed in two by a 13-inch shell from a U.S. battleship and sank, while the damaged *Furor* grounded with the loss of over two thirds of their crews.

To the west, *Brooklyn* and *Vizcaya* steamed side-by-side exchanging fire at range of 1,200 yards for almost an hour. Despite firing almost 300 shells at *Brooklyn*, almost none of *Vizcaya*'s rounds did any significant damage; only one of *Brooklyn*'s secondary armament guns was knocked out. Although many of *Brooklyn*'s shells missed, many hit—with serious results. In the end, *Vizcaya* was hit over 200 times, mostly by *Brooklyn* and some by *Texas*. As *Brooklyn* closed to within 1,000 yards, *Vizcaya* suffered a massive explosion, possibly from one of her own torpedoes being prepared for launch. The burning ship was then ordered to beach herself and she literally struck her colors (one of the last times that probably ever happened).

With fire concentrated on *Vizcaya*, the *Cristóbal Colón* continued her attempt to escape. She was probably the fastest ship in either fleet, aided by lacking her primary armament (due to a contracting dispute with the builder). As *Brooklyn* fell behind, there was only one U.S. ship with a chance of catching *Cristóbal Colón*—and that was *Oregon*. For over an hour, *Oregon* pursued the

Cristóbal Colón along the coast, gaining on her slightly because of superior coal and her innovative engineering plant that made her the fastest U.S. battleship. The Spanish cruiser's luck ran out when a point of land ahead would force her to turn seaward, enabling *Oregon* to cut her off. *Oregon* opened fire at extreme range, with her shells bracketing *Cristóbal Colón* just astern. Having seen *Vizcaya* explode, the skipper of *Cristóbal Colón* realized that escape was now impossible, so he turned the still mostly undamaged vessel to shore, ran her aground, scuttled the ship, and struck her colors. The skipper of *Brooklyn*, Captain Cook, went aboard *Cristóbal Colón* to accept her surrender, while U.S. Sailors went aboard in an unsuccessful attempt to keep her from sinking and to tend to Spanish wounded.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sailors from *Iowa* and *Ericsson*—which had returned with Sampson's flagship *New York* and the armed yacht *Hist*—went aboard the burning *Vizcaya*, while Sailors from *Gloucester* and the auxiliary cruiser *Harvard* did the same for the burning and beached *Infanta Maria Teresa* and *Almirante Oquendo*. In many cases, the U.S. Sailors displayed exceptional valor in rescuing Spanish sailors from fire and exploding ammunition. The *Iowa* rescued the captain of the *Vizcaya* from the water, who handed his sword over to Captain Robley Evans (who would later command the Great White Fleet). Robley accepted the sword and then handed it back out of respect for the valor of the Spanish.

Although less than 3 percent of U.S. shells fired actually hit a Spanish ship, the result was still the complete destruction of the entire Spanish squadron—of 1,200 major caliber rounds fired, only 42 hit their target, and the rate was not much better for smaller caliber weapons. Trying to find a solution to gunnery accuracy would result in considerable controversy, and eventual reforms, in the U.S. Navy. However, the accuracy problem was overshadowed by the squabble between Sampson and Schley over who deserved credit,

which broke out almost immediately. Sampson was in overall command, but was absent for all but the very end of the battle. Sampson sent a message to Secretary of the Navy John Davis Long announcing that the fleet under his command had gained a great victory, without mentioning Schley's role as being in tactical command during battle. To Schley's dismay, the press initially gave all the credit to Sampson.

It wasn't long before the press, the public, Congress, and even the Navy split into pro-Sampson and pro-Schley camps. Alfred Thayer Mahan sided with Sampson. The press soon found Sampson's meticulous preparation of the fleet for battle to be boring compared to Schley on the bridge of *Brooklyn* under Spanish fire. Thomas Edison made one of his first movies about Schley and the sensationalist press played up Schley's role even further. Others, however, then attempted to impugn Schley by claiming that *Brooklyn's* "retrograde" turn to avoid collision with *Infanta Maria Teresa* was actually an act of cowardice on Schley's part. Prior to the war, both Schley and Sampson had been captains, with Schley having a lineal number of eight and Sampson ten. Both were promoted to rear admiral during the war, and overall command of the blockade force had been given to Sampson, despite being technically slightly junior to Schley. After the battle, Secretary Long promoted both to vice admiral (and permanent rear admiral), moving Schley up six numbers and Sampson up eight numbers—one ahead of Schley. This leap-frog in seniority caused an uproar within Navy ranks (which today looks like ensigns squabbling over date of rank, but in 1898 was viewed as a big deal). The whole dispute, and the charge of cowardice against Schley, actually resulted in the Navy holding a court of inquiry in September 1901. The court of inquiry strongly criticized Schley's actions, particularly the "retrograde" turn that endangered *Texas* and concluded that Schley "did not project the right image as a naval officer." The president of the board, Admiral George Dewey, dissented. Schley appealed the court's

conclusion to President Theodore Roosevelt, who responded by ordering that all public discussion of the sorry spectacle cease.

history/nhhc/research/publications/documentary-histories/united-states-navy-s.html].

The Spanish-American War formally ended with the Treaty of Paris in December 1898 and left the United States with an overseas empire that included the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and essentially in control of a nominally independent Cuba. The defeat eliminated Spain as a naval power in the Western Hemisphere. The Spanish prisoners from the Battle of Santiago were treated very well. Admiral Cervera was taken to Annapolis, where he was warmly welcomed by the citizens of the city; his bravery under overwhelming U.S. fire had upheld Spanish honor and earned the respect of the U.S. Navy and the Spanish Navy, albeit at considerable cost.

Sources include, *The Spanish American War* by Al Nofi (1996), *Sea Power* by E. B. Potter (the classic United States Naval Academy "Z-power" textbook), and *History of the U.S. Navy, Volume One 1775-1941* by my Naval Academy adviser, Professor Robert William Love, Jr.

Note: I write these H-grams under a significant time crunch, so I generally rely on secondary sources (that I have good reason to believe are accurate and credible), which is why I don't claim H-grams to be "scholarly." Nevertheless, many of these secondary sources would not exist were it not for the work of the NHHC Histories Branch's Documentary Histories Section in compiling primary-source material in a manner easily accessible to scholars and other authors of popular history. For example, our website includes a documentary history of the Navy in the Spanish-American War, which makes available a plethora of transcribed primary sources along with short introductory essays and annotation. There are sections on recent topics, such as the Battle of Manila Bay, and forthcoming topics, such as the Naval War Board. So, if you are interested in a "deeper dive" on U.S. Naval History, try this link: [<https://www.history.navy.mil/content/>