



# H-Gram 040: “One Helluva Day”—Lingayen Gulf and the Death of Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler

9 January 2020

This H-Gram covers:

- The combat death of Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler, 6 January 1945
- Actions in the Philippines in late 1944 and early 1945: Leyte, Ormoc, and Mindoro
- Amphibious landings in the Lingayen Gulf, 9 January 1945

The costly U.S. and Allied naval campaign in the Philippines required securing the island of Leyte, capturing the island of Mindoro, and then conducting the main amphibious landing on the island of Luzon at Lingayen Gulf under concerted and increasingly effective Japanese kamikaze attacks during the period of November 1944 to January 1945. The suicide attacks claimed the escort carrier Ommaney Bay (CVE-79) and caused serious damage to other major U.S. warships. The latter included the kamikaze strike on the heavy cruiser Louisville (CA-28) on 6 January 1945 that resulted in the death of Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler (USNA '15), who was posthumously awarded a Navy Cross and Silver Star, and was one of four U.S. admirals killed in battle during World War II. Also covered is the posthumous Medal of Honor to the commanding officer of USS Walke (DD-723), Commander George F. Davis.

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Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler, circa 1944 (NHHC photo).

Command website [<https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams.html>].

## Overview

Japanese kamikaze pilots were briefed to strike U.S. ships in the bridge area in order to inflict maximum casualties on senior personnel and degrade the ship's ability to conduct further operations. That's exactly what the kamikaze pilot who attacked the heavy cruiser

Louisville late on the afternoon of 6 January 1945 in Lingayen Gulf intended to do. Louisville was the flagship of Commander, Cruiser Division FOUR, Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler, assigned the task of bombarding Japanese positions ashore in advance of the amphibious landing planned for 9 January 1945. The previous day, Louisville had been hit by a kamikaze whose aim was slightly off and who impacted on the armored faceplate of turret No. 2 (the 8-inch triple turret just in front of the bridge). The strike only killed one man, but wounded 59, including Louisville's commanding officer, Captain Rex Legrand Hicks, who continued to command his ship despite being severely burned before the extent of his injuries forced him to relinquish command to the executive officer (Hicks would be awarded a Silver Star for his gallantry).

The next day, "Lucky Lou's" luck ran out. Despite intense anti-aircraft fire, the kamikaze hit Louisville right in the flag bridge area on the starboard side, with devastating result. Given the relative proximity of Japanese airfields on Luzon to the Lingayen beachhead area, the kamikaze still had a large amount of fuel. The resulting gasoline fireball turned the topside area on the forward superstructure into an inferno, killing many bridge personnel and gunners, who had stood their ground and fired at the plane until impact; 32 men would die and another 56 were wounded, many grievously. Rear Admiral Chandler was in an exposed weather position when the plane hit, jumping from the flag bridge to the signal bridge and emerging with his clothes on fire. Others doused the flames, and despite his severe injuries he assisted Sailors in manning a fire hose and then attempted to remain in command of his task force until finally being compelled by his chief of staff to seek medical attention, and even then refusing preferential treatment, patiently waiting his turn. Unfortunately, Chandler's lungs had been severely scorched and despite the best efforts of the medical staff, he died the next day, and was buried at sea.

Chandler was the grandson of a Secretary of the Navy and son of a U.S. Navy rear admiral, and had graduated near the top of his class in Annapolis in 1915. He had distinguished himself even before World War II broke out, when in command of the elderly light cruiser Omaha (CL-4) in November 1941, he had identified a German blockade runner (Odenwald) disguised as a U.S. merchant ship in the South Atlantic. Chandler ordered Odenwald to stop and sent a boarding party, which went aboard the blockade

runner just as the German scuttling charges went off. However, the boarding team was able to prevent the ship from sinking. A prize crew was put on board that took Odenwald to Puerto Rico (the boarding team and prize crew thus became the last U.S. Sailors to receive "prize money" for capturing a ship, although not until the court case was finally settled after the war). As a rear admiral, Chandler served with distinction in the Caribbean, the invasion of southern France (receiving a Legion of Merit for each tour), and as Battleship Division TWO commander during the Battle of Surigao Strait.

Chandler was posthumously awarded a Navy Cross (for Lingayen Gulf), a Silver Star (for Surigao Strait) and an Army Distinguished Service Medal (from General Douglas MacArthur). The Gearing-class destroyer Theodore E. Chandler (DD-717) was named in his honor and served from 1946 to 1975, earning nine battle stars in the Korean War and eight battle stars and a Navy Unit Commendation in the Vietnam War (and being hit by Communist shore fire in 1967). The Kidd-class guided missile destroyer Chandler (DDG-996) was also named in his honor and served from 1982 to 1999. For a short biography of Rear Admiral Chandler and text of his award citations, please see attachment H-040-1, which also includes a photo of Louisville being hit by a kamikaze at Lingayen Gulf on 6 January 1945.



USS Belleau Wood (CVL-24), center, and USS Franklin (CV-13), right, afire after they were hit by kamikaze attacks in the Leyte Gulf area off the Philippines on 30 October 1944. Photographed from USS Mugford (DD-389), whose port midships 20-mm guns are in the foreground (80-G-273074).

The U.S. Navy was in for a rude shock after exalting in the great victory in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. There were many who believed that because of the staggering losses in ships, aircraft, and men that the Japanese had been "licked" and war would be over soon. However, not only did the Japanese not quit, they unleashed a fearsome new weapon, the manned suicide aircraft: the kamikaze ("divine wind"). The psychological impact was profound as ship after ship was hit by kamikaze, often with devastating results even when a ship wasn't sunk. In the Philippines campaign, one out of four kamikaze hit a ship, many times in the bridge area. The kamikaze were harder to shoot down and would keep on coming no matter what: only the physical disintegration of the suicide aircraft would stop the attack once committed, and, even then, killing debris from the plane might hit the ship. The concept that an enemy would willingly kill themselves to achieve an outcome was unfathomable to most Americans. Navy leadership was so concerned about what the impact of suicide attacks might be on morale that for many months the Navy used wartime censorship to keep the fact of kamikaze attacks from the American public.

The Japanese kamikaze pilots were not crazy. By this time of the war, the Japanese were well aware that practically every plane that went out against a U.S. carrier task force failed to return—so even a conventional attack was essentially a suicide mission—and that every pilot's days were almost certainly numbered anyway. The kamikaze pilots were volunteers, initially from among the most junior pilots, while the more senior and experienced pilots flew escort missions to help the kamikaze get to their targets. However, as the campaign went on, even the most senior Japanese pilots began flying suicide missions. By the time of the culmination of the Philippine campaign at Lingayen Gulf, U.S. ships were being hit by some exceptionally good pilots (far better than would be the case off Okinawa later in the spring of 1945).

Ultimately U.S. Navy Sailors responded to the kamikaze threat with grim determination and resolve equal to that of the enemy pilots. There are numerous examples of U.S. gunners standing their ground and firing on the kamikaze right up until the moment of impact, even in the face of certain death. The U.S. Navy responded with numerous operational and technical innovations that I will cover in a future H-gram, as most were not in effect (except the bravery of the gunners) during the Philippine campaign.

In the initial weeks after the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the battle ashore became a protracted campaign, in significant part due to delay in developing airfields for U.S. Army tactical aircraft. U.S. carriers and escort ships were forced to remain tethered to the Leyte area to provide critical air support, especially as the Japanese continued to flow aircraft into the area, and even at times achieved air superiority at night. This negated the advantage of naval mobility, and soon U.S. ships were frequently being hit by kamikaze and even a submarine. Several U.S. fleet carriers were put out of action by kamikaze strikes, including Franklin (CV-13), Belleau Wood (CVL-24), Lexington (CV-16), and Intrepid (CV-11), while light cruiser Reno (CL-96) was knocked out of the war by a submarine torpedo. Destroyer Abner Read (DD-526) was sunk with large loss of life.

In order to interrupt the flow of Japanese troops and material into the west side of Leyte via Ormoc Bay, U.S. destroyers and PT boats made sweeps before mounting an amphibious assault into the bay on 7 December 1944. These operations cost three destroyers and a destroyer-transport sunk: Cooper (DD-695) by torpedo in a surface action, and Mahan (DD-364), Reid (DD-639), and Ward (APD-16) by kamikaze (Cooper and Reid with heavy loss of life), along with numerous other ships damaged.

After Leyte, the next island to be taken was Mindoro. The landing on 15 December 1944 and occupation by the Army went well, but the approach and sustainment was very costly to the U.S. Navy. The first ship to be hit by a kamikaze was the flagship for the entire operation, the light cruiser Nashville (CL-43), with horrific casualties (133 dead). During the operation, two Liberty ships carrying ammunition, John Burke and Lewis L. Dyche, were hit by kamikaze and vaporized with their entire crews when they blew up. Numerous other Navy ships were hit and damaged. The Japanese even sent a cruiser-destroyer surface action group to attack the beachhead area, which was successful in catching the Americans by surprise, but not successful in the result, losing a destroyer to a U.S. PT boat (this would be the second-to-last offensive sortie by a Japanese navy force during the war).

For more detail on the costly battles around Leyte, the landings at Ormoc Bay, and the landings on Mindoro, please see attachment H-040-2.



*USS Louisville (CA-28) (right) in Surigao Strait, Philippines, with an escort carrier and destroyer escort. All are units of task force 77.4, en route for the Lingayen Gulf on 3 January 1945 (NH 94433).*

The major U.S. invasion of Luzon took place on 9 January 1945 at the southern end of Lingayen Gulf, with pre-invasion bombardment commencing on 6 January, a date that naval historian Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison described as "one helluva day" as kamikaze took a fearsome toll on U.S. ships and crews. The escort carrier Ommaney Bay (CVE-79) was sunk by a kamikaze on the transit to Lingayen. Louisville (CA-28), Columbia (CL-56), and HMAS Australia were hit by kamikaze on the transit. (Louisville would be hit twice, Columbia three times, and Australia five times during the operation.) In the Lingayen area, battleships New Mexico (BB-40), Mississippi (BB-41), and Vice Admiral Oldendorf's flagship California (BB-44) would be hit with major casualties, with a British lieutenant general killed on New Mexico. Escort carriers Manila Bay (CVE-61), Savo Island (CVE-78), Kadashan Bay (CVE-76), Kitkun Bay (CVE-71), and Salamaua (CVE-96) were hit, along with numerous other ships, often in the bridge and often with heavy loss of life. The destroyer Walke (DD-723) was hit in the bridge, and her commanding officer, Commander George F. Davis, would be awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for continuing to command his ship even while suffering mortal wounds as a "living torch." The light cruiser Boise (CL-47), with General MacArthur aboard, was nearly hit by a torpedo from a Japanese midget submarine. The Japanese even used suicide boats in an attempt to inflict casualties during the landings. During the

operation 45 U.S. and two Australian ships would be hit or suffer damaging near misses from kamikaze attacks or bombs.

In the end, the Japanese army chose not to defend Luzon at the Lingayen beachhead, and the landings by U.S. Army troops were essentially unopposed. In hindsight, the sacrifice of so many U.S. Sailors at Lingayen Gulf to conduct pre-landing bombardment was not necessary, but that detracts nothing from the extraordinary bravery of the Sailors and the resolve of the commanders to fight their way through to victory.

For more detail on the Lingayen landings, please see attachment H-040-3.

Sources for this H-gram are primarily the Naval History and Heritage Command Dictionary of American Fighting Ships (DANFS) for U.S. ships and combinedfleet.com for Japanese ships. Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison's two volumes, *Leyte (XII)* and *The Liberation of the Philippines (XIII)*, from his *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* series are key sources. Two very useful websites are the Military Times Hall of Valor (<https://valor.militarytimes.com>) for award citations, and USNA Virtual Memorial Hall (<https://usnamemorialhall.org>), since the great majority of ship/squadron commanding officers and senior Navy commanders at this time were Naval Academy graduates.



# H-040-1: Rear Admiral Theodore Edson Chandler

*H-Gram 040, Attachment 1*

*Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC*

*January 2020*

Theodore Edson Chandler entered the U.S. Naval Academy in 1911. He was the son of Rear Admiral Lloyd Horowitz Chandler and grandson of Secretary of the Navy William Eaton Chandler. Chandler lettered in basketball and lacrosse, and graduated high in his class in June 1915. He served his initial tours on battleships *Florida* (Battleship No. 30) and *New Hampshire* (Battleship No. 25), and briefly in the armored cruiser *Montana* (Armored Cruiser No. 13). He was in the commissioning crew of destroyer *Conner* (Destroyer No. 72), serving aboard her during World War I, based at Brest, France. When the war ended, he became the commissioning executive officer for the destroyer *Chandler* (DD-206), named for his grandfather, operating in European waters. He then became part of the commissioning crew of battleship *West Virginia* (BB-48) and then served aboard battleship *Colorado* (BB-45). In April 1929, he assumed command of destroyer *Pope* (DD-225) serving with the Yangtze River Patrol in China. From May 1932 to February 1934 he was commanding officer of the destroyer *Buchanan* (DD-484). In April 1935, he commenced a tour as assistant U.S. Naval attaché to Paris, Madrid, and Lisbon. In June 1938, he was the commissioning executive officer for the light cruiser *Nashville* (CL-43) until 1940. Finally, apparently in payback for serving on the newest ships in the Navy, he was given command of the oldest light cruiser, USS *Omaha* (CL-4), in October 1941. As skipper of *Omaha*, Chandler would receive a Letter of Commendation with Ribbon from the Secretary of the Navy:

*Your operations on the occasion of the seizure of the German motorship ODENWALD on 6 November*



Rear Admiral Theodore E. Chandler, 26 December 1894–7 January 1945 (80-G-302408).

*1941, are noted with great interest. The identification of the ODENWALD by you as a hostile ship, even though disguised as to nationality by the flying of and otherwise subversive use of the United States flag, the subsequent salvage of and the taking into port of the ODENWALD under her own power by the salvage and boarding parties sent by your direction from the Task Group under your command bespeaks of the efficient plans made for such an emergency, and made possible the saving of this ship under the attendant hazardous conditions. You are hereby commended for your initiative and sound judgement on this occasion.*

Chandler detached from *Omaha* on 6 February 1943. As rear admiral, he served as Commander All Forces, Aruba-Curacao, Netherlands West Indies, from April 1943 to July 1944, and was awarded a Legion of Merit. On 31 July 1944, he assumed

command of Cruiser Division TWO and participated in the invasion of Southern France (Operation Dragoon) in August 1944. Chandler was subsequently awarded a second Legion of Merit. He then assumed command of Battleship Division TWO during the Battle of Surigao Strait. After he was killed at Lingayen Gulf, he was posthumously awarded a Silver Star for his actions at Surigao Strait:

*Silver Star: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commander of a Battleship Division in action against major units of the enemy Japanese fleet during the Battle of Surigao Strait in the early hours of 25 October 1944. When a formidable column of Japanese warships entered the narrow confines of the Strait and advanced under the cover of darkness toward our waiting forces, Rear Admiral Chandler, with his division placed among other battleships in the strategic T-formation across the northern end of Surigao, hurled the full power of his heavy guns at the confused enemy force. During the shattering broadsides of his mighty vessels with unrelenting fury, he waged fierce battle against the enemy in a prolonged engagement which resulted in the destruction of two Japanese battleships and three destroyers before effective return fire could be brought to bear on our ships. Subsequently retiring his division unscathed from the action, Rear Admiral Chandler, by his brilliant leadership, outstanding professional skill and indomitable fighting spirit in the face of tremendous odds, contributed materially to the defeat of the enemy in this decisive action and his undaunted courage throughout upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.*

Chandler was posthumously awarded a Navy Cross for his actions at Lingayen Gulf:

*Navy Cross: For extraordinary heroism as Commander, Cruiser Division FOUR, in action against Japanese forces in Lingayen Gulf, Philippine Islands, on 6 January 1945. Skillfully coordinating the fire of his division with that of other heavy naval units during the initial bombardment of Luzon prior to scheduled landing operations at Lingayen, Rear Admiral Chandler ordered the smashing broadsides of his powerful guns with unrelenting aggressiveness despite a heavy overcast the reduced visibility and while under persistent attack by enemy aircraft.*

*Observing the progress of operations from an exposed position on the flag bridge when a Japanese suicide bomber attacked and hit his cruiser, setting the flag bridge afire, he emerged from the raging inferno with his clothes ablaze. Determined to remain in action, he steadfastly continued to direct his units until compelled by his Chief of Staff to proceed to the dressing station for treatment of severe burns. Stout-hearted and indomitable in the face of almost certain death, Rear Admiral Chandler succumbed to his injuries the following day. By his inspiring devotion to duty and heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout, he enhanced and sustained the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in defense of his ship.*



*USS Louisville (CA-28) is hit by a kamikaze in Lingayen Gulf, Philippines, 6 January 1945. Photographed from USS Salamaua (CVE-96) (80-G-363217).*

For a more complete biography of Rear Admiral Chandler, please see the Naval History and Heritage Command biography at [\[https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/library/research-guides/modern-biographical-files-ndl/modern-bios-c/chandler-theodore-edson.html\]](https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/library/research-guides/modern-biographical-files-ndl/modern-bios-c/chandler-theodore-edson.html).



USS *Intrepid* (CV-11) crewmembers clearing away wreckage in the hangar deck after the ship was hit by *kamikaze* aircraft off the Philippines, 25 November 1944 (80-G-270840).

## H-040-2: Leyte, Ormoc Bay, and Mindoro

*H-Gram 040, Attachment 2*

*Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC*

*January 2020*

### Securing Leyte, October–December 1944

Although the Battle of Leyte Gulf on 24–25 October 1944 was a decisive U.S. Navy victory, the battle ashore for control of the island was far from over. Support from the U.S. Navy was still required, which

the Japanese made increasingly painful with increased use of *kamikaze* suicide aircraft. More U.S. ships would be hit, sunk, and damaged during the two months it took to secure Leyte than during the Battle of Leyte Gulf itself. Although no ships as large as the light carrier *Princeton* (CVL-23) were sunk, several large fleet carriers were put out of action, in some cases for months (although they were quickly replaced by new-construction carriers that continued to join the fleet).

A key complicating factor in securing Leyte was the abysmal weather. The one finished airfield, Tacloban, was initially incapable of handling many aircraft, and alternative airfield construction sites proved to be so muddy that they were virtually unusable. As a result, forward deployment of U.S.

Army aircraft to Leyte, to provide organic tactical air support and air defense to the Army forces ashore, was repeatedly delayed. As a result, Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet carriers remained tethered to the Leyte area to provide the air support that the Army couldn't. This made the U.S. carriers susceptible to continuing Japanese air attacks as the Japanese continued to funnel more aircraft into the Philippines, albeit mostly with insufficiently trained pilots (although the resort to *kamikaze* tactics began to mitigate the training problem for the Japanese). In addition, the carrier task groups were vulnerable to typhoons, and suffered significant damage during Typhoon Cobra in December 1944. Despite shortfalls, Japanese aircraft still remained a potent threat, and at times in October and November 1944, Japanese aircraft retained an upper hand at night in the skies around Leyte.

At the last moment, just before the U.S. landings on Leyte, the Japanese army decided it would not send any reinforcements to the island, and would concentrate their defense on the main island of Luzon instead. This caused great consternation in the Japanese navy, which had already committed its forces to the *Sho-1* plan to defend the Philippines—and the forces were already moving. So, in effect, the Japanese navy was going to sacrifice itself to attack forces invading an island (Leyte) that the Japanese army didn't plan to defend (other than by the woefully inadequate ground forces already on the island). This was probably an underrated factor in Vice Admiral Kurita's decision not to continue into Leyte Gulf, and probably lose his entire force in a pointless mission when he turned away on 25 October 1944.

However, once U.S. forces were ashore on Leyte and began to get bogged down in the mud, Japanese army headquarters in Tokyo overruled the army commander in the Philippines (General Yamashita) and directed that the forces on Leyte be reinforced. This required the Japanese navy to set up "Tokyo Express" runs with troop-carrying destroyers to deliver Japanese soldiers from Luzon to the west coast of Leyte at Ormoc Bay. The Japanese navy would pay dearly for this mission. Many troops were lost to U.S. aircraft on the transit, and were never enough to change the outcome on Leyte. However,

they were enough to protract the U.S. Army advance.

### ***Continued Kamikaze Attacks, October–November 1944***

On 27 October 1944, fast carrier Task Group 38.2 was operating east of Luzon attacking Japanese airfields on that island and shipping in Manila Bay, damaging the heavy cruiser *Nachi* and slightly damaging heavy cruiser *Ashigara*. On 29 October, a *kamikaze* struck *Intrepid* (CV-11) on a port side gun position, killing 10 and wounding 6, but the carrier continued operations.

On 30 October 1944, carrier *Franklin* (CV-13) took a more serious hit from a *kamikaze*. Three *kamikaze* attacked. The first hit the water off *Franklin's* starboard side. The second crashed through the flight deck into the gallery deck, killing 56 men and wounding 60. The third *kamikaze* aborted its dive at *Franklin* and aimed for the light carrier *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) instead. Despite being "shot down," the plane still crashed into the carrier's flight deck, causing fires and setting off ammunition, killing 92 men and wounding 54 more. Both carriers had to return to the States for repairs.

On 1 November 1944, *kamikaze* inflicted significant damage on U.S. destroyers supporting operations inside Leyte Gulf. At 0950, the destroyer *Claxton* (DD-571) was badly damaged by a *kamikaze* that exploded in the water right alongside, causing serious flooding, killing 5, and wounding 23. The destroyer *Ammen* (DD-527) was hit by an already-flaming twin-engine Frances bomber just aft of the bridge. The strike destroyed a searchlight and both funnels, with 5 dead and 21 wounded. Nevertheless, *Ammen* remained battle-worthy and continued to fight for several days. The destroyer *Killen* (DD-593) was attacked by seven aircraft, downed four, but was hit by a bomb on her port side that killed 15 men. *Killen* had to return to the States for repair. The destroyer *Bush* (DD-529) was attacked by several Betty torpedo bombers, shot down several, dodged at least two torpedoes, but avoided being hit except by a shower of shrapnel that wounded two men including the executive officer.



At 1330 on 1 November 1944, destroyer *Abner Read* (DD-526) was attacked by a Val kamikaze. Although the plane came apart under fire, the bomb went down one of the stacks and detonated in an engine room, while the remains of the plane hit the ship and started a major fire aft. At 1352, a massive internal explosion caused the destroyer to list heavily and begin to sink by the stern. The ship finally went down by 1415 with 22 of her crew. The remainder were rescued by other destroyers, including 187 by the already-damaged *Claxton*. *Claxton* was repaired by tender off Leyte and remained in the Philippine action for several months. (Of note, *Abner Read*'s stern was blown off by a mine off Kiska in the Aleutians on 18 August 1943, with the loss of 71 men. Her crew saved the ship against the odds, and she was repaired with a new stern and returned to service in December 1943. *Abner Read*'s original stern was located, by chance, during a NOAA research expedition in July 2017).

Demonstrating the risks of carrier task forces operating too long in the same waters, on 2 November 1944, just before midnight, the light cruiser *Reno* (CL-96), escorting *Lexington* (CV-16), was hit by two torpedoes on the port side fired by Japanese submarine *I-41*. One of the torpedoes failed to detonate and had to be defused while stuck in the side of the ship. The other exploded, causing serious damage, with 46 men killed (Morison says only two were killed; the actual number could not be confirmed). Dead in the water with a destroyer left behind to defend her, an unknown Japanese



*Japanese cruiser Nachi under air attack from Task Group 38.3, in Manila Bay, 5 November 1944. Photographed by a plane from USS Essex (CV-9). Nachi was sunk in this attack (80-G-287018).*

submarine fired three torpedoes at *Reno* that missed. *Reno* was towed 700 miles to Ulithi, pumping out prodigious amounts of water to stay afloat, and would eventually return to the States, but would not be repaired in time for the end of the war. On 5 November 1944, Japanese heavy cruiser *Nachi*'s luck ran out at she was attacked in Manila Bay by multiple waves of U.S. carrier aircraft from TG 38.3, absorbing numerous bomb and torpedo hits throughout the day as she maneuvered desperately to survive before finally being hit by five torpedoes in that afternoon. These blew her into three parts and she finally sank with 808 crewmen. During concurrent fighter sweeps, the Americans claimed to destroy 439 Japanese aircraft (real number unknown, but probably considerable) for a loss of 25 aircraft in combat and 18 operational losses, along with 18 pilots and crew.

Also on 5 November 1944, the Japanese got some measure of revenge on TG 38.3 when a kamikaze hit the carrier *Lexington* (CV-16) near the island, causing a major fire that burned out much of the island superstructure. *Lexington* suffered 50 killed and 132 wounded, but had the fires out in 20 minutes and was able to continue operations.

Meanwhile, Japanese destroyers and transports had been running reinforcement convoys to Ormoc Bay on the west coast of Leyte, eventually getting almost 45,000 troops and 10,000 tons of supplies ashore, adding to the 22,000 troops already there (against 101,000 U.S. troops on the Island by 1 November). However, on 11 November 1944, 347 Task Force 38 carrier aircraft dealt a devastating blow to the operation, sinking four Japanese destroyers and several transports in a convoy en route Ormoc, with the loss of about 10,000 troops, and then sinking two more destroyers as they returned to Manila. However, due to the continuing need for the carriers to support Leyte operations, Admiral Halsey reluctantly recommended on 11 November that planned carrier air strikes on Japan be postponed.

Task Force 38 fast carriers conducted another series of airstrikes on Luzon, Manila Bay, and other Philippine Islands on 13 and 14 November, sinking the light cruiser *Kiso*, five more destroyers, about seven transports, and claiming destruction of 84

aircraft in the air and on the ground, for the loss of 25 U.S. aircraft, mostly due to ground anti-aircraft fire.

On 25 November, carrier aircraft from *Ticonderoga* (CV-14) caught up with the heavy cruiser *Kumano* in Dasol Bay, Luzon, and sank her. *Kumano* had been badly damaged during the Battle off Samar on 25 October 1944 by a torpedo from destroyer *Johnston* (DD-557), hit again by two bombs from carrier aircraft on 26 October, and was hit by two torpedoes of 23 fired by four U.S. submarines on 6 November 1944. It took five torpedoes and four bombs from *Ticonderoga*'s aircraft to finally sink her with 398 of her crew including her captain.

Also on 25 November, the Japanese attacked TF-38 in significant force. The carrier *Hancock* (CV-19) was hit and lightly damaged by a *kamikaze*. At 1253, *Intrepid* (CV-11) was hit by a *kamikaze* that crashed into a 20-mm gun tub manned by six black stewards who stood their ground and kept firing to the bitter end. The *kamikaze* started a serious fire on *Intrepid*, soon followed by a second *kamikaze* hit. A total of 66 crewmen were killed on *Intrepid* and 35 wounded. Although the fire was put out in two hours and the carrier remained on station, she subsequently returned to the States for repair. During this raid, another *Kamikaze* hit the light carrier *Cabot* (CVL-28) and another almost hit her. *Cabot* suffered 36 killed and 16 wounded, but was able to return to action following temporary repairs at Ulithi. At 1255, carrier *Essex* was hit by a *kamikaze* in a spectacular crash caught on film, which killed 15 crewmen and wounded 44, but only caused superficial damage to the ship. Nevertheless, the damage to the carriers was significant enough to cause the cancellation of strikes on the 26th and temporary withdrawal to a safer distance.

Although the carriers could maneuver to safer waters, the ships defending resupply operations in Leyte Gulf could not. On 18 November, the attack transport *Alpine* (APA-92) was hit and damaged by a *kamikaze* while unloading troops, without loss of troops, but five of her crew were killed. On 23 November, the attack transport *James O'Hara* (APA-90) was also hit, but not significantly damaged.

On 27 November, 25 to 30 Japanese planes attacked U.S. shipping in Leyte Gulf, which was temporarily without fighter cover. Light cruiser *St. Louis* (CL-49) shot down several planes, dodged a torpedo, but was hit by two *kamikaze* and seriously damaged, with 16 crewmen lost and 43 wounded. *St. Louis* had to return to the States for repair. Battleship *Colorado* (BB-45) continued to pay for being absent during the Pearl Harbor attack (see H-Gram 033) and was hit by two *kamikaze*, which killed 19 and wounded 72, although the ship only needed forward-area repairs and she would continue to participate in Philippine operations. Light cruiser *Montpelier* (CL-57) downed several *kamikaze* before being slightly damaged by one. Battleship *Maryland* (BB-46) dodged a torpedo from a conventional air raid. However, as sunset approached, *Maryland* was surprised by a *kamikaze* that crashed between the forward main battery turrets, piercing several decks, starting fires, causing considerable damage and destroying the medical department, killing 31 and wounded 30. Nevertheless, *Maryland* continued operations for several more days until returning to Pearl Harbor for repair and extensive refit.

While the attack on *Maryland* was underway, other *kamikaze* attacked destroyer *Saufley* (DD-465), which sustained minor damage, and the destroyer *Aulick* (DD-569), which suffered severe damage. *Aulick* was attacked by six *kamikaze*, one dropped a bomb and crashed close aboard while another clipped the starboard side of the bridge with its wingtip before crashing and exploding near the bow, setting the No. 2 gun and handling room on fire. Several men were killed on the bridge and all told, *Aulick* suffered 32 dead and 64 wounded.

### ***Ormoc Bay Engagements, November-December 1944***

From Leyte Gulf, on the east side of Leyte, getting to Ormoc Bay, on the west side of Leyte, was difficult. The northern way around Leyte was too narrow to safely navigate, while the southern route required a lengthy circuitous path through Surigao Strait and around a number of smaller islands and treacherous shoal water. Up until late November, interdiction of

Japanese reinforcement convoys had been exclusively conducted by Army and Navy aircraft. The first night surface sweep of Ormoc Bay took place on 27 November by four U.S. destroyers, *Waller* (DD-466), *Saufley* (DD-465), *Renshaw* (DD-499), and *Pringle* (DD-477), under the command of Captain Robert H. Smith, commander of Destroyer Squadron 22, aided by a radar-equipped "Black Cat" PBY Catalina flying boat. The force bombarded Japanese positions ashore before the Black Cat detected Japanese submarine (possibly *I-46*) entering Ormoc Bay. The U.S. destroyers fired on the sub and closed to 40-mm gun range, and the sub briefly returned fire, sinking before *Waller* could ram it. *I-46* was lost with all 112 hands sometime in this period.

On the night of 28-29 November, a force of four U.S. PT boats conducted a night sweep of Ormoc Bay and sank two Japanese patrol craft. On the night of 29-30 November, Captain Smith led four destroyers, *Waller*, *Renshaw*, *Cony* (DD-508), and *Conner* (DD-582), into Ormoc Bay, but missed a Japanese convoy. On the night of 1-2 December, destroyers *Conway* (DD-507), *Cony*, *Eaton* (DD-510), and *Sigourney* (DD-502) swept Ormoc Bay, sinking a Japanese freighter.

On 2 December 1944, sightings by aircraft suggested the Japanese were going to make a "Tokyo Express" run into Ormoc Bay. The destroyers *Allen M. Sumner* (DD-692), with Commander J. C. Zahm embarked in tactical command, *Moale* (DD-692), and *Cooper* (DD-695) commenced a night sweep of the bay (all three destroyers were the latest and greatest *Sumner*-class, with three dual 5-inch guns, ten 21-inch torpedo tubes, and enhanced anti-aircraft weapons and radars). The U.S. ships were under continuous observation and night air attack by Japanese aircraft, which scored a number of near misses on them.

Shortly after midnight, U.S. radar detected two Japanese ships. *Sumner* and *Cooper* opened fire on the small Japanese destroyer *Kuwa*, which had large numbers of men topside, and sank her. *Moale* engaged the small destroyer *Take* with guns until *Sumner* and *Cooper* joined in. However, one of *Take*'s four torpedoes struck *Cooper* amidships,

breaking her in two and causing her to sink in less than 30 seconds. Over half of *Cooper*'s crew went down with the ship, including the executive officer. Ten officers and 181 enlisted men were lost. During the night, drifting groups of survivors from *Cooper* and *Kuwa* were close enough to exchange words in English. The next day one PBY rescued 56 *Cooper* survivors and another PBY rescued 48 more, and a few survivors made it to shore.

By this time, U.S. Army commanders had enough of trying to slog through the mud across the mountainous interior of Leyte and decided to conduct an amphibious operation to land the 77th Infantry Division in Ormoc Bay. As a preliminary to this operation, the commander of Destroyer Squadron 5, Captain W. M. Cole, was tasked with transporting troops, vehicles, and ammunition into the bay and land them at a beach that was in the hands of friendly Filipino guerillas. Cole's force consisted of destroyers *Flusser* (DD-368), *Drayton* (DD-366), *Lamson* (DD-367), and *Shaw* (DD-373), eight LSM's and three LCI's, which departed Leyte Gulf on 4 December and intending to make most of the trip in darkness. The landing went off with minimal trouble at 2248.

Before dawn, as Cole's force was returning, *Drayton* was strafed by a Japanese aircraft. At 1100 on 5 December, as the force was transiting Surigao Strait, eight Japanese aircraft attacked. Several were shot down, but one *kamikaze* hit and sank *LSM-20*, another extensively damaged *LSM-23*. The last *kamikaze* narrowly missed *Drayton*'s bridge before crashing near the forward 5-inch gun, killing 6 and wounding 12. Destroyers *Mugford* (DD-389) and *Lavallette* (DD-448) arrived from Leyte Gulf to augment the escort, and, at 1710, *Mugford* was hit and damaged by a *kamikaze*, losing 8 men.



USS Ward (APD-16) burning in Ormoc Bay, Leyte, after being struck by a kamikaze, 7 December 1944, during the Ormoc landings (80-G-270774).

## Landings at Ormoc Bay, 7 December 1945

The landing at Ormoc on 7 December proved to be a great success for the U.S. Army and costly for the U.S. Navy. The Ormoc Attack Group (TG 78.3), carrying the 77th Infantry Division, was commanded by Rear Admiral A. D. Struble, and included nine fast destroyer-transports, four LST's, 27 LCI's, 12 LSM's, nine minesweepers, several patrol and control craft, escorted by 12 destroyers. The veteran destroyers *Nicholas* (DD-449), *O'Bannon* (DD-450), *Fletcher* (DD-445), and *Lavallette* swept ahead of the main force, but were shadowed and reported by Japanese aircraft. Except for some desultory shore battery fire directed without effect at destroyers *Barton* (DD-722), *Laffey* (DD-724), and *O'Brien* (DD-725), the landings at dawn went according to plan and tactical surprise was achieved. Just before 1000, however, Japanese aircraft launched one of their most effective air assaults of the Philippines campaign. The Japanese aircraft conducted a conventional torpedo attack until they were hit, at which point they turned themselves into *kamikaze*.

Within a space of four minutes, destroyer *Mahan* (DD-364) was attacked by nine aircraft. The first four were shot down or missed, but the fifth hit *Mahan* just behind the bridge. The sixth hit *Mahan* at the waterline and, almost simultaneously, one of the

aircraft that had missed overhead turned back and also hit the destroyer, followed by yet another plane, which strafed *Mahan*. The eighth plane crashed short and the ninth just passed overhead and continued on. Fires quickly spread to the flooding controls, preventing the forward magazines from being flooded, which the commanding officer assessed were in imminent danger. He ordered the ship abandoned. The crew obeyed, but only with great reluctance as they were determined to save their ship. Destroyers *Lamson* and *Walke* (DD-723) picked up survivors, and on order from Rear Admiral Struble, *Walke* scuttled *Mahan* with gunfire and torpedoes.

The destroyer-transport *Ward* (APD-16) was hit and heavily damaged by a *kamikaze*, which started severe fires that were deemed to be out of control. The ship was ordered abandoned, over the objection of some of the crew, who wanted to keep fighting the fires. Like *Mahan*, Struble ordered *Ward* to be scuttled and *O'Brien* was given the order to do so. Before her conversion to a destroyer-transport, *Ward* (DD-139) had been the destroyer that fired the first shot of the Pacific War, sinking a Japanese midget submarine that was trying to enter Pearl Harbor just before the air attack. On 7 December 1941, William W. Outerbridge was in command of *Ward*. On 7 December 1944, in an irony of fate, Outerbridge was in command of *O'Brien* and had the sad distinction and duty to sink his former command, which he carried out.

At 1100 on 7 December 1944, another Japanese air raid developed. Several *kamikaze* were shot down and others achieved near misses on several U.S. ships. Destroyer-transport *Liddle* (APD-60) was showered by fragments from a *kamikaze* that blew up only 30 feet away, but a few minutes later a *kamikaze* hit *Liddle* in the bridge from dead ahead, destroying the bridge, combat information center, radio room, and killing the skipper, Lieutenant commander L. C. Brogger, USNR. The executive officer, Lieutenant R. K. Hawes, assumed command and, despite the loss of 36 killed and 22 seriously wounded, brought the ship through the rest of the battle.



Later in the afternoon, destroyer *Lamson* was serving as the fighter-director destroyer controlling 12 Army P-38 fighters. *Lamson* directed four of them against a Dinah twin-engine bomber, which then dove on the ship, narrowly missing with a large bomb, before crashing in the sea. Later, a *kamikaze* hit *Lamson* on her aft funnel and then crashed into the forward superstructure, starting a fire that engulfed much of the forward part of the ship, killing 21 men, and wounding another 50. Most of those killed were trapped in the No. 1 fireroom when the hatches were jammed by the plane's bomb. As the fires approached the forward magazine, she was ordered abandoned and scuttled. However, Captain Cole countermanded his own scuttling order and directed the tug *ATR-31* to take *Lamson* under tow, and the badly damaged ship was ultimately saved.

On 10 December 1944, Japanese aircraft attacked into Leyte Gulf again. Destroyer *Hughes* (DD-410) was hit and damaged by a *kamikaze*, suffering 23 casualties. Liberty ship *William S. Ladd* was hit by *kamikaze* and so badly damaged she had to be abandoned. *PT-323* was hit and sunk by two *kamikaze* and *LCT-1075* was sunk in the same attack.

On 11 December 1944, the Japanese attempted their last "Tokyo Express" run to Leyte, and the U.S. Navy commenced a second resupply convoy to the beachhead at Ormoc, a mission that became known as the "Terrible Second." At around 1700, 10 to 12 Jill bombers attacked and as many as seven concentrated on destroyer *Reid* (DD-369), all in less than a minute. The first Jill crashed just off *Reid's* bow, starting a fire and causing underwater damage. The second Jill was shot down. The third dropped a torpedo that missed and the plane flew away. Others crashed near the ship. The last Jill crashed into *Reid* in the port quarter between the No. 3 and No. 4 guns, and the bomb penetrated the magazine, which exploded and blew her stern apart. *Reid* rolled on her beam and sank in two minutes, taking 103 of her crew with her; 152 were rescued. Destroyer *Caldwell* (DD-605) was narrowly missed by a *kamikaze*, which passed the ship so closely that the bridge was drenched with gasoline and debris.

The next day on the return passage, *Caldwell* was hit on the bridge by a *kamikaze* as she was simultaneously straddled by two bombs that sprayed the ship with shrapnel: 33 of her crew were killed and 40 were wounded, including the commanding officer. Nevertheless, *Caldwell* continued to shoot at Japanese aircraft and her crew saved the ship. For the Japanese part, the destroyer *Uzuki* was torpedoed and sunk by *PT-490* and *PT-492*, and destroyer *Yuzuki* was sunk by U.S. Marine Corps aircraft on the last Leyte "Tokyo Express" run.

### ***Mindoro Landings, December 1944***

After Leyte, the island of Mindoro was the next target on General MacArthur's invasion list, with a landing date set for 15 December 1944 (it had been delayed by the protracted campaign to secure Leyte). By capturing Mindoro, the Manila and Lingayen Gulf areas on Luzon would be in range of U.S. Army Air Forces fighter cover, which would be important for MacArthur's plan to land at Lingayen and advance to Manila from the north. The Japanese had not seen fit to heavily garrison or fortify Mindoro, so the assault and capture of the island was comparatively easy with few U.S. Army casualties. The same was not true for the U.S. Navy forces that brought the Army to Mindoro.

The Mindoro Attack Group was also under the command of Rear Admiral Struble, embarked on the light cruiser *Nashville* (CL-43). *Nashville* had embarked General MacArthur for the landings at Leyte in late October 1944, and had been held out of the Battle of Surigao Strait by Seventh Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, for that reason (despite MacArthur wanting to get in the fight). In addition, the attack group embarked 16,500 Army personnel (including 11,878 combat troops) aboard 8 destroyer-transports, 30 LSTs, 12 LSMs, 31 LCIs, supported by 10 large and 7 small minesweepers, 14 other small craft, and 12 escorting destroyers. A Close Covering Group included 1 heavy cruiser, 2 light cruisers, and 7 destroyers, along with a force of 23 PT-boats. A Heavy Covering Group, including 3 older

battleships and 6 escort carriers, operated in the Sulu Sea to provide additional support if necessary.

The Mindoro Attack Group was sighted by a Japanese scout aircraft at 0900 on 13 December before it entered the Sulu Sea and, a few hours later, a Japanese *kamikaze* group was launched. Just after 1500, a lone Val dive-bomber came in by surprise at low altitude, attacking *Nashville* from astern and hitting her in the superstructure near Struble's cabin. Both bombs aboard the *kamikaze* exploded. It was a devastating hit, destroying the flag bridge, combat information center, and communications spaces, and starting fires that caused ready 5-inch and 40-mm ammunition to cook off. By the time fires were brought under control, 133 officers and men had been killed or had died of their wounds, and another 190 were wounded. The U.S. Army commander of the Mindoro force, General Dunkel, was among the wounded, and the dead included his chief of staff as well as Struble's chief of staff. Struble, Dunkel, and about 50 other staff officers (and several war correspondents) were transferred to destroyer *Dashiell* (DD-659) to continue the operation, while the badly damaged *Nashville* returned to Leyte Gulf under her own power.

Later on the 13 December, three *kamikaze* broke through the fighter cover and attacked the Heavy Covering Group as it entered the Sulu Sea. One of the *kamikaze* hit destroyer *Haraden* (DD-585), its wing hitting the bridge before the fuselage impacted the forward funnel and its bomb exploded, showering the aft part of the ship with burning gasoline, and causing her to go dead in the water. The crew of *Haraden* saved their ship, at a cost of 14 dead and 24 wounded, and she was able to make it back to Leyte under her own power.

On 14 December, the Japanese planned a 186-plane strike on the U.S. force, which was fortunately broken up by U.S. carrier plane sweeps from Task Force 38 (Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet carriers), and cloud cover. The landings on Mindoro commenced on 15 December as scheduled. Opposition from shore was minimal, but *kamikaze* attacked the ships, achieving near misses on escort carriers *Savo Island* (CVE-78) and *Marcus Island* (CVE-77). Flaming wreckage from a disintegrating *kamikaze* hit

destroyer *Ralph Talbot*. In the beach area, *kamikaze* hit *LST-738* and *LST-472*. Destroyer *Moale* shot down a *kamikaze* and then came alongside *LST-738* to fight the fire. There, she was damaged by a large explosion aboard the LST, which holed *Moale*, killing one and wounding ten. *Moale* still was able to rescue 88 of *LST-738*'s crew after the LST had to be abandoned, and later sunk by U.S. gunfire.

*LST-472* (which was participating in her 13th amphibious assault of the war) was attacked by five aircraft, three of which were shot down, but one crashed into the main deck near the superstructure, penetrating the ship and knocking out all her water mains. Unable to control the fires, *LST-472* was abandoned with six dead, and also had to be sunk by "friendly" gunfire. Destroyer *O'Brien* rescued 198 survivors of *LST-472*.

On 17 December, a *kamikaze* hit *PT-300* off Mindoro, destroying the boat, and killing or wounding all but one aboard, including seriously wounding the PT squadron commander.

After the successful landings on Mindoro, several convoys bringing supplies to the U.S. forces ashore were also attacked by *kamikaze*. On 21 December, *kamikaze* hit *LST-460* and *LST-749*. Both were lost, along with 107 soldiers and sailors of the 774 aboard the two vessels. The Liberty ship *Juan De Fuca* was also hit by a *kamikaze*, but the damage was not enough to keep her from continuing with the mission. At Dusk, after the remaining 12 LSTs unloaded at Mindoro and commenced a return to Leyte, four *kamikaze*, initially misidentified as friendly aircraft, attacked. One made a nearly vertical dive on destroyer *Newcomb* (DD-586). *Newcomb*'s skipper, Commander I. E. McMillian, later remarked, "An angel of the Lord tapped me on the shoulder and told me to look up." Due to quick-reaction ship handling, the *kamikaze* crashed a few yards from the bridge. The other *kamikaze* were shot down.

### ***The Naval Battle of Mindoro***

In a comparatively lame attempt to duplicate their success at Savo Island off Guadalcanal in 1942, the

Japanese dispatched a force from Cam Ranh Bay in Japanese-occupied French Indochina (Vietnam) to attack the U.S. landing area at Mindoro. This would prove to be the second-to-last offensive sortie by a Japanese naval force in World War II. Under the command of Rear Admiral Masatomi Kimura, the force consisted of the heavy cruiser *Ashigara*, the light cruiser *Oyodo*, destroyer *Kasumi* (the flagship), and five more destroyers. The forces eluded U.S. reconnaissance for two days as it crossed the South China Sea before it was sighted on 26 December 1944, essentially catching the Americans flat-footed, with the closest significant U.S. surface force, under Rear Admiral Theodore Chandler, over 200 miles away. The initial report by a U.S. Navy Liberator misidentified *Ashigara* as the super-battleship *Yamato*, but got the overall force composition correct. In some desperation, virtually every U.S. Army plane on Mindoro—92 fighters, 13 B-25 bombers, and several P-61s—launched a night strike against the Japanese force.

As Kimura's force approached the Mindoro beachhead area after dark on 26 December, they were opposed by nine U.S. PT boats. Although heavily outgunned, the PT boats fought a running battle with the Japanese. However, the boats suffered more damage from near-miss bombs and strafing by U.S. Army aircraft that mistook them for Japanese in the dark, despite the PT boats' vain attempts to signal that they were friendly. Kimura's force cautiously stayed outside the PT boat patrol line, and shelled the beachhead and airfield for about 30 minutes from a distance, inflicting minimal damage and no casualties (a far cry from the bombardments at Guadalcanal). The Liberty ship *James H. Breasted* was hit and damaged by either Japanese fire or by U.S. aircraft.

As the Japanese were retiring, two PT boats that had been hastily recalled from a guerilla-support mission attacked. *PT-221* was caught in Japanese searchlights and accurate gunfire, but managed to escape. In the meantime, *PT-223*, under the command of Lieutenant (j.g.) Harry E. Griffen, USNR, closed to 4,000 yards and, at 0105 on 27 December, launched two torpedoes. One of these hit and sank the destroyer *Kiyoshimo*, one of the newest Japanese destroyers. *Kiyoshimo* had been crippled

by two direct hits from U.S. Army bombers, but it was the torpedo that sank her, with a loss of 82 of her crew (another Japanese destroyer rescued 169 survivors, and 5 were rescued and captured by U.S. PT boats).

## Convoy Uncle 15

On 27 and 28 December 1944, the Mindoro resupply convoy Uncle 15 was repeatedly attacked by *kamikaze*. At 1012 on 28 December, a group of *kamikaze* attacked and one hit the Liberty ship *John Burke*, which was loaded with ammunition. *John Burke* was obliterated in a massive explosion along with all 68 of her Merchant Marine crew. A *kamikaze* also hit the Liberty ship *William Sharon*. The destroyer *Wilson* (DD-408) came alongside and evacuated *William Sharon*'s crew, and then on a third attempt, despite exploding ready-use ammo, put firefighters on board and saved the ship. At 1830 on 28 December, *LST-750* was struck by an aerial torpedo and had to be scuttled.

When convoy Uncle 15 arrived at Mindoro on the early morning of 30 December, *kamikaze* aircraft attacked again, and destroyers *Gansevoort* (DD-608) and *Pringle* (DD-477), the PT boat tender *Orestes* (AGP-10), and aviation gasoline tanker *Porcupine* (IX-126) were all hit in the space of about two minutes. *Gansevoort* was badly damaged with 34 killed and wounded, while *Pringle* suffered 11 killed and 20 wounded, and *Orestes* suffered 45 dead. After *Porcupine* had been abandoned, the damaged *Gansevoort*, which had been anchored, was ordered to torpedo the stern of the *Porcupine* in an attempt to blow it free before the flames reached the aviation gasoline. Although a torpedo hit, it did not have the desired effect, and ultimately the large supply of gasoline went up in flames, at one point imperiling *Gansevoort*, which had to be hastily re-located. Several hours later, the Liberty ship *Hobart Baker* was hit by a bomb and sunk off Mindoro.

Over the next days, Liberty ships *Simon G. Reed* and *Juan De Fuca* were bombed and sunk off Mindoro. The Liberty ship *John Clayton* was hit by a bomb and had to be beached to prevent sinking. Finally, at 1730 on 4 January, a *kamikaze* hit the Liberty ship

*Lewis L. Dyche*, which had a cargo of ammunition and, like *John Burke*, blew up in a catastrophic explosion that killed all 71 merchant mariners aboard and damaged two PT boats a quarter mile away. By this time, however, the U.S. Lingayen invasion force was on the move and the Japanese *kamikaze* had more lucrative targets than Liberty ships and LSTs. As costly as the Mindoro invasion was for the U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine, the Japanese lost 103 planes in the Mindoro beachhead area, and probably an equivalent number on the way to Mindoro, along with a brand-new destroyer.



*USS Wasp (CV-18) air combat intelligence officers plot raids for pilots, on the eve of the Mindoro landings, 14 December, 1944 (80-G-294154).*





Anti-aircraft fire from ships of the U.S. Navy task force in Lingayen Gulf, Luzon. Taken from USS *Boise* (CL-47) on 10 January 1945 (80-G-304355).

## H-040-3: The Invasion of Luzon—Battle of Lingayen Gulf, January 1945

*H-Gram 040, Attachment 3*

*Samuel J. Cox, Director NHHC*

*January 2020*

The invasion of Luzon, the main island of the Philippines, was set for 9 January 1945, with preliminary minesweeping and bombardment operations by the U.S. Navy to commence on 6 January. The plan called for 68,000 U.S. troops of

the Sixth Army to be put ashore on the first day at the southern end of Lingayen Gulf (with over 200,000 troops to be ashore within several days) all under the overall command of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. The landing beaches at Lingayen are about 110 miles north northwest of the Philippine capital of Manila, MacArthur's primary objective. Although there were a couple other possible landing areas and avenues of approach to Manila, Lingayen was the best from an Army ground perspective (and was also where the Japanese landed when they invaded the Philippines in December 1941). The challenge from a Navy perspective was that landing at Lingayen would require a long transit up the western side of the Philippines, within relatively short range of Japanese airfields, making surprise unlikely and the likelihood

of sustained air attack very serious. In addition, Lingayen Gulf is also notorious shoal water that seriously constrains ship maneuverability, frequently with adverse sea conditions (the Japanese lost more troops to surf at Lingayen than to U.S. opposition in 1941).

The overall naval commander for the Lingayen operation was the Seventh Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, embarked on the command and control ship *Wasatch* (AGC-9) in command of Task Force 77, the Luzon Attack Force. General MacArthur was embarked on the light cruiser *Boise* (CL-47). The Commander of the Sixth Army, Lieutenant Walter Krueger, was embarked with Kinkaid on *Wasatch*. The lead element of the force was Task Group 77.2, the Bombardment and Fire Support Group, under the command of Vice Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf (victor of the Battle of Surigao Strait), embarked on the older battleship *California* (BB-44). Oldendorf would be supported by Task Group 77.4, the Escort Carrier Group, under Rear Admiral C.T. Durgin. Following three days behind Oldendorf were Task Force 78, the San Fabian Attack Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Daniel E. Barbey, and Task Force 79, the Lingayen Attack Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Theodore Wilkinson. TF-78 and TF-79 carried the Army assault forces and would put more U.S. troops ashore on the first day at Lingayen than the first day of the D-Day landings at Normandy.

Vice Admiral Oldendorf's TF-77.2 consisted of 164 ships, including six of the older battleships, six cruisers, and 19 destroyers, accompanied by an escort carrier group with 12 escort carriers, 14 destroyers, six destroyer escorts, a minesweeping and hydrographic group of 72 vessels, ten destroyer-transport with underwater demolition teams (UDT), two fleet tugs, a seaplane tender, and 11 LCI gunboats. TF-77.2 commenced departure from Leyte Gulf on 2 December, with the slowest units leaving first, to transit via Surigao Strait, the Sulu Sea, Mindoro Strait, and then up the west coast of Luzon. The minesweeper/hydro force was spotted by Japanese army aircraft on 2 January.

The first *kamikaze* attack on Oldendorf's force occurred on 3 January, when a Val dive-bomber

crashed into the oiler *Cowanesque* (AO-79). Her crew quickly brought the fire under control, rolled the Val's unexploded bomb over the side, and continued her mission, at a cost of two dead.

As the main part of Oldendorf's force passed through Surigao Strait into the Sulu Sea, it divided into a van and rear group, each group centered around a nucleus of escort carriers, which combined could sustain a combat air patrol of about 40 aircraft in daylight hours, supplemented as weather and flying conditions permitted by U.S. Army aircraft flying from Leyte and Mindoro. The escort carrier *Makin Island* (CVE-93) served as the primary fighter direction for the van and *Natoma Bay* (CVE-62) served the same function for the rear. During the day, the combat air patrol thwarted a 120-plane effort by the Japanese. (At this point in the war, Japanese *kamikaze* strikes and their escorts would turn back if it looked like fighter opposition was too great—the object was to die striking a U.S. ship, not to die getting shot down on the way to the ship.) Nevertheless, one *kamikaze* got close enough to *Makin Island* to crash 500 yards astern.



General Douglas MacArthur and staff coming aboard USS *Boise* (CL-47) on 5 January 1945 prior to the Lingayen Gulf landings (80-G-304363).

### ***Loss of Ommaney Bay (CVE-79)***

At about 1700 on 4 January, approximately 15 Japanese planes were detected on radar at a range of about 45 miles from Oldendorf's force. The planes then split into two groups. Intercept was

complicated by false radar returns from islands in the Sulu Sea, although an Army P-47 succeeded in shooting down one of a group of two Japanese P1Y Frances twin-engine bombers (a three-crewmen fast successor to the Betty bomber), but the results of the intercept were not reported and the survivor continued inbound. At 1712, the Frances penetrated the screen, with a blinding sun at its back, approaching the escort carrier *Ommaney Bay* bow on. Despite the ship's radar and having put on extra lookouts, the Frances was not detected until it was too late. Only the battleship *New Mexico* (BB-40) managed to fire any rounds, but to no avail.

The Frances hit the island superstructure, just missing the commanding officer and executive officer, but wiping out the signal bridge before crashing into the flight deck, releasing two bombs as it did do. One bomb penetrated the flight deck, exploding amongst fully fueled aircraft in the forward hangar bay, while the second bomb penetrated to the second deck before exploding, rupturing the fire main. Wreckage from the plane hit a TBM Avenger on the flight deck, starting a fire that engulfed the aft end of the flight deck. The intense flames and exploding ammunition made it difficult for destroyers to approach and assist, although the *Bell* (DD-587) was damaged when she collided with *Ommaney Bay* while attempting to fight the fire.

At 1745, wounded crewmen were lowered into the water on litters with flotation and able-bodied swimmers to assist. At 1750, the entire topside area was in flames and there was no way to prevent flames from reaching the torpedo stowage area aft, which would result in a massive explosion like the ones that sank *Liscome Bay* (CVE-56) and *Princeton* (CVL-23 ). Captain Howard L. Young gave the order to abandon ship and was probably the last living man off at 1812. At 1818, the torpedoes blew, and a massive explosion ripped *Ommaney Bay* apart, hitting nearby destroyers with debris and killing an unknown number of sailors in the water, including two from destroyer escort *Eichenberger* (DE-202), who were in a whaleboat rescuing survivors. Despite this, *Ommaney Bay* refused to sink until the destroyer *Burns* (DD-588) was ordered to sink her with torpedoes. All told, 93 crewmen of *Ommaney Bay* died and another 65 were wounded. Seven survivors

of the escort carrier would be killed aboard the light cruiser *Columbia* (CL-56), when she was hit by *kamikaze* on 6 and 9 January. (Captain Young was awarded a Navy Cross for *Ommaney Bay*'s role in turning back the Japanese force during the Battle off Samar on 25 October 1944).

### ***Sinking of Japanese Destroyer Momi***

By 5 January 1945, Oldendorf's force was about 150 miles west of Japanese airfields on Luzon, and Japanese reconnaissance aircraft tracked the force, giving the Japanese clear indication the destination was Lingayen Gulf. Despite bad weather that grounded U.S. Army aircraft on Mindoro, combat air patrols from the escort carriers succeed in thwarting Japanese strikes in the early morning and then again around noon. However, the Japanese destroyers *Momi* and *Hinoki* picked a bad time to try to flee from Manila back to Formosa. (*Momi* and *Hinoki* had been the escorts for the carrier *Unryu* when she was sunk by submarine *Redfish* [SS-395] on 19 December 1944.)

At 1430, U.S. Navy aircraft sighted the Japanese destroyers. The closest U.S. surface force was the minesweeper group and escorts. The commander of the minesweeper group ordered the destroyer *Bennion* (DD-662) and Australian sloop *Warrego* and frigate *Gascoyne* to intercept. (Future CNO Lieutenant James Holloway III had detached from *Bennion* for flight training before this action.) As *Bennion* was the fighter-direction ship for the minesweeper group, she used two combat air patrol aircraft to search and spot.

At 1550, *Bennion* sighted the Japanese destroyers on the horizon. The destroyers turned back toward Manila and boosted speed to 27 knots. *Bennion* pursued alone as *Warrego* and *Gascoyne* could not keep up. After an hour of stern chase, *Bennion* had closed to 18,200 yards and commenced fire. The Japanese destroyers increased speed even more and made smoke, but *Bennion* gained until 14,000 yards when report of an inbound air raid forced her to break off. *Bennion* turned and fired several broadsides as the Japanese returned fire, but no one was hit. With position information from *Bennion*,

19 Wildcat fighters and 16 Avenger torpedo bombers found the Japanese an hour later and attacked. *Momi* was hit by one torpedo and sunk with all hands. *Hinoki* was also hit by a torpedo with a loss of 21 crewmen, but managed to limp back into Manila.

### ***Kamikaze Attacks, 5 January 1945***

As the engagement with the Japanese destroyers was going on, 16 *kamikaze* and four escort aircraft attacked Oldendorf's force around 1650 when it was about 100 nautical miles west of Manila. One *kamikaze* hit the heavy cruiser *Louisville* (CA-28) on the forward face of the No. 2 turret, killing one crewman and injuring 59 more. *Louisville*'s commanding officer, Captain Hicks, was badly burned (see overview for additional information). Although the turret was put out of action, *Louisville* still had two others, and the embarked flag officer, Rear Admiral Theodore Chandler, was determined to continue with the mission to lead his cruiser force in the bombardment of Lingayen, scheduled for the next day. The executive officer assumed command, and the "Lucky Lou" continued on. (*Louisville*'s damaged turret would later be replaced and would end up being used during a series of atomic bomb tests in Nevada in 1957—it is still in the desert somewhere.)

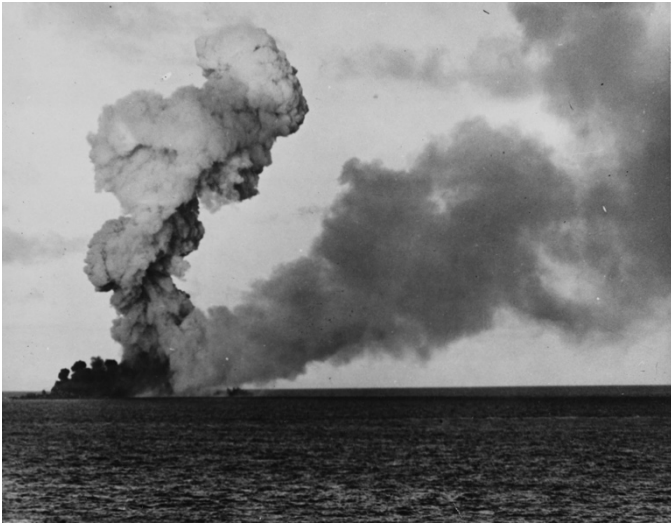
The same group of *kamikaze* that hit *Louisville* also attacked the Australian heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia*, which was hit by a *kamikaze* with a bomb that killed 25 and wounded 30. *Australia* had by chance survived the disaster at Savo Island in August 1942, but had been damaged off Leyte with heavy loss of life when it was hit by a crippled Japanese aircraft, which some accounts claim as the first *kamikaze* attack and others refute. There was no question about this hit. The Australian destroyer HMAS *Arunta* was nearly hit by two *kamikaze*, one crashing close enough to kill two crewmen and cause the ship to temporarily go dead in the water.

The escort carrier *Savo Island* (CVE-78) narrowly avoided being hit by a *kamikaze* thanks to extraordinary ship handling by Captain Ekstrom and innovative use of the 24-inch searchlight to blind the

*kamikaze* pilot in his terminal dive. As a result, only the radar antenna was clipped and damaged. Escort carrier *Manila Bay* (CVE-61) had less luck as she was attacked by two *kamikaze* nearly simultaneously. One crashed her flight deck at the base of the island and its bomb detonated, starting fires, while the second aimed for the bridge but narrowly missed, crashing 30 feet off the stern. *Manila Bay* suffered 22 killed and 56 wounded, but her crew was able to bring the fires under control and within 24 hours the carrier was ready resume limited flight operations.

Another *kamikaze* hit the destroyer escort *Stafford* (DE-411) amidships on her starboard side, opening a 12-by-16-foot hole and flooding No. 2 fire room and engine room. Most crewmen were taken off the ship, while a nucleus damage control party jettisoned all topside weight, which enabled the ship to survive. The destroyer *Halligan* (DD-584) and tug *Quapaw* stood by the stricken ship for several days, nearly being hit by friendly aircraft after being mistaken for Japanese, before *Stafford* could join a slow return convoy to Leyte. *Stafford* suffered two killed and ten wounded, but the ship was saved, repaired, and returned to the fight off Okinawa later in 1945. *Halligan* would be sunk by a mine off Okinawa with half her crew in March 1945. As this attack was going on, the minesweeper group also came under attack by four *kamikaze*. Three scored near misses on three minesweepers, luckily with no serious damage, while one *kamikaze* hit *LCI(G)-70*, killing six, wounding nine, and wrecking her main 3-inch gun, but she was able to continue and participate in the landings.





USS *Ommaney Bay* (CVE-79) exploding after being hit by a *kamikaze* attack in the Sulu Sea off Luzon, during the Lingayen operation, 4 January 1944. Two destroyers are standing by (NH 43063).

### ***“One Helluva Day” – Lingayen Gulf, 6 January 1945***

Vice Admiral Oldendorf’s bombardment force arrived off Lingayen Gulf before dawn on 6 January 1945. The minesweepers entered the gulf first, followed by designated bombardment ships. After sunrise as the ships commenced preliminary bombardment, the first *kamikaze* attacks came in, flying from airfields that were very close. The first attack consisted of ten Japanese planes, five of which were shot down by combat air patrol for the loss of one U.S. aircraft and no ships were damaged. Between 1122 and 1143, another *kamikaze* attack began in earnest, and one crashed close aboard destroyer *Richard P. Leary* after grazing the two forward 5-inch gun turrets.

At noon, the battleship *New Mexico* (BB-40), flagship for Rear Admiral George L. Weyler, commander of the San Fabian fire support force, took a devastating *kamikaze* hit right in the bridge on the port side, killing her commanding officer, Captain Robert W. Fleming, and 29 others and wounding 87 more. Among the dead was British Lieutenant General Herbert Lumsden, who was Prime Minister Churchill’s personal representative to General MacArthur’s headquarters, along with *Time* magazine’s correspondent William Chickering. Weyler was with British Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser on

the starboard side and neither were hurt, although Fraser’s secretary was killed. Fraser was the commander of the British Pacific Fleet, which would grow rapidly in size once Germany surrendered in May 1945, and was onboard *New Mexico* as an observer. Despite the hit, *New Mexico*’s main battery remained in action and continued to shell Japanese positions ashore. Captain Fleming would be awarded a posthumous Silver Star.

As the attack on *New Mexico* was occurring, the destroyer *Walke* (DD-723) was attacked by four *kamikaze* in quick succession. *Walke* shot down two, but was hit on the port side of her bridge by the third. Luckily, the plane’s bomb passed clean through the ship without detonating, but 13 men would be killed and 24 wounded. The commanding officer, Commander George F. Davis (USNA ’34), was sprayed by flaming gasoline and for a moment “burned like a living torch.” Sailors near him doused the flames, and despite his severe burns he continued to con the ship as she engaged and downed the fourth attacker, which crashed close aboard. Continuing to exhort his crew to heroic efforts to save the ship, only when he was convinced the ship would remain afloat did he consent to relinquishing command to the executive officer. Despite the damage, *Walke*’s crew not only saved their ship, but remained in the battle until after the landings occurred on 9 January. Sadly, Davis succumbed to his burn injuries a few hours after the hit. The *Forrest Sherman*-class destroyer DD-937 would be named in his honor and would serve from 1955 to 1982. Davis would be awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor:

*For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of the USS WALKE engaged in a detached mission in support of minesweeping operations to clear the waters for entry of our heavy surface and amphibious forces preparatory to the invasion of Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippine Islands, 6 January 1945. Operating without gun support of other surface ships when four Japanese suicide planes were detected flying low overland to attack simultaneously, CDR Davis boldly took his position in the exposed wings of the bridge and directed control to pick up the leading plane and open fire.*

*Alert and fearless as the WALKE's deadly fire sent the first target crashing into the water and caught the second as it passed close over the bridge to plunge into the sea off portside, he remained steadfast in the path of the third plane plunging swiftly to crash the after end of the bridge structure. Seriously wounded when the plane struck, drenched in gasoline and immediately enveloped in flames, he coned the WALKE in the midst of the wreckage; he rallied his command to heroic efforts; he exhorted his officers and men to save the ship and, still on his feet, saw the barrage from his guns destroy the fourth suicide bomber. With the fires under control and the safety of the ship assured, he consented to being carried below. Succumbing several hours later, CDR Davis, by his example of valor and his unhesitating self-sacrifice, steeled the fighting spirit of his command into unyielding purpose in completing a vital mission. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country.*

Also around noon, three *kamikaze* attacked the destroyer *Allen M. Sumner* (DD-692 ), lead ship of a new class of destroyers, as she provided cover to the minesweeping force. This first plane turned away in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire, while a second acted as a decoy for a third plane which was diving out of the sun. The third *kamikaze* crashed the ship near the after funnel and after torpedo bank, killing 14 and wounding 29. Despite severe damage, her crew put out the flames. Although forced to withdraw from inside the gulf, she continued to provide cover for ships operating just outside the gulf, only departing for repairs on 14 January.

A few minutes after noon, two Zeke *kamikaze* attacked the minesweeper group. Despite attempts to maneuver and evade the Zekes, destroyer-minesweeper *Long* (DMS-12) was hit portside below the bridge just above the waterline at 1215. With fires and explosions amidships, internal communications were lost. Concerned that the forward magazine was at risk of blowing, the skipper gave permission to the crew trapped in the bow area to abandon ship. This order was misinterpreted and those crewmen aft went over the side, too. *Long's* crew was rescued by destroyer-minesweeper *Hovey* (DMS-11), and the tug *Apache* (AT-67) came alongside and put the fires out and attempted to put

*Long's* skipper and a salvage team back on board, but this was interrupted by continuing air raids. At 1730, a second *kamikaze* hit *Long* in almost the same spot, causing an explosion that destroyed the bridge and broke the ship's back. *Long* remained afloat until the next day when she capsized and sank. She suffered 35 wounded, one of whom later died.

At 1252, the destroyer-transport *Brooks* (APD-10 ) was hit amidships portside by a *kamikaze*, which started a fire, severed the main and auxiliary steam lines, and caused the forward engine room the flood. Australian destroyer HMAS *Warramunga*, which had almost been hit by the same *kamikaze*, came alongside, brought the fires under control, and then towed *Brooks* out of the Gulf. *Brooks* suffered 3 dead and 11 wounded and, although she was towed back to the States, her damage was not repaired and she was decommissioned before the war ended.

At 1427, two Zekes dove almost strait down from out of the overcast as the destroyers *O'Brien* (DD-725) and *Barton* (DD-722) were passing in close proximity to each other as *O'Brien* was handing off minesweeper escort duty to *Barton*. One of the Zekes crashed about 10 feet ahead of *Barton* without serious damage and the other crashed on *O'Brien's* fantail, fortunately a glancing blow with minimal damage and no casualties. Later in the afternoon, destroyer-minesweeper *Southard* (DMS-10) was hit by a *kamikaze* after of her stacks. Although the *kamikaze's* engine embedded in the ship, the fuselage bounced off the ship. *Southard* had to cut loose her sweep gear and had to be towed clear by destroyer-minesweeper *Breese* (DM-18) to make repairs, but she was back in action the next day sweeping for mines, and fortunately suffered no deaths in the attack.

The situation in Lingayen Gulf would have been even worse were it not for the sweeps by Task Force 38 fighters of the Japanese Luzon airfields and by an overcast that hampered both U.S. and Japanese operations. The U.S. ships could not see the Japanese aircraft until they broke through the overcast with very little time to react. The Japanese only had to find their way to Lingayen Gulf, knowing

there would be targets there, but they too had little time to react and pick targets once they dropped below the overcast. The TF-38 aircraft did succeed in destroying about 14 Japanese aircraft in the air and another 18 on the ground, but at a high cost of 17 U.S. aircraft, mostly shot down by anti-aircraft fire.

*Kamikaze* attacks continued in the afternoon. At 1720, five *kamikaze* and one escort approached from astern of destroyer *Newcomb* (DD-586). (*Newcomb* had hit the battleship *Yamashiro* with a torpedo during the Battle of Surigao Strait). The 20-mm gunners on the stern of *Newcomb* downed one *kamikaze*, but the other used *Newcomb* as cover, flying by at deck level, during which two of *Newcomb*'s crew were killed and 15 wounded by "friendly" anti-aircraft fire. The *kamikaze* then banked sharp left and crashed into Oldendorf's flagship, *California*, at the base of the mainmast. A gasoline fire raged and a secondary turret was destroyed by a "friendly" 5-inch round that hit the ship. Although the crew put out the fire in short order, casualties were heavy, with 45 killed and 151 wounded. This action prompted Oldendorf to send a message, "A day which was characterized by brilliant performance on the part of many ships was seriously marred by indiscriminate, promiscuous and uncontrolled shooting. Ammunition was wasted, death and injury to shipmates inflicted, and material damage caused to our ships. All hands are enjoined to make certain their guns are fired at the enemy and not at their shipmates."

At about 1720, a *kamikaze* attacked the light cruiser *Columbia* (CL-56), which was conducting a fire support mission in support of underwater demolition teams. Earlier in the afternoon, at 1425 another *kamikaze* had barely missed *Columbia*, passing between her masts and spraying her decks with gasoline, which luckily did not ignite. This second *kamikaze* struck *Columbia*'s port quarter and the bomb it was carrying penetrated two decks before exploding in proximity to the aft ammunition magazines, which were promptly flooded, probably preventing a catastrophic explosion. The strike killed 13 (including three survivors of *Ommamey Bay*) and wounded 44, but throughout the ordeal, *Columbia*'s forward turrets remained in action, and the crew

humped ammunition from the aft magazines (after they were drained) to the forward magazines.

At 1828, *Columbia*'s gunners shot down a *kamikaze* attempting to hit HMAS *Australia*. *Australia* had already been hit by a *kamikaze* at 1734, the second in two days, which decimated topside gun crews again to the point that there were only enough qualified anti-aircraft gunners to man guns on one side of the ship at a time. This hit killed 14 and wounded 26 crewmen. Nevertheless, *Australia* continued her main battery firing mission.

At 1730, a *kamikaze* hit heavy cruiser *Louisville* (CA-28), also for the second time in two days, this time far more severe than the first. The *kamikaze* hit on the starboard side of the bridge structure, destroying the flag bridge, sky control, other key spaces, and a 40-mm gun mount in a massive fireball (which was captured on film and can be seen in YouTube). The hit killed 32 men and wounded 56. Rear Admiral Theodore Chandler, commander of Cruiser Division FOUR, was severely burned and his lungs scorched by superheated air. Nevertheless, he assisted in manning a hose to help put out the fire, and attempted to continue commanding his cruiser force until his chief of staff finally compelled him to seek aid. In the sickbay, he patiently waited his turn with other badly burned men, but unfortunately succumbed to his wounds the next day. Chandler would be posthumously awarded a Navy Cross (see overview), along with a posthumous Silver Star (for his actions in command of Battleship Division TWO during the battle of Surigao Strait). *Louisville*'s executive officer, Commander William P. McCarty, survived both *kamikaze* hits and would be awarded a Silver Star for his actions in temporary command of the ship after Captain Hicks was severely wounded in the first hit. Although *Louisville* remained in the battle area, her bombardment control duties were assumed by *California* on the landing day (9 January).

The results of the *kamikaze* attacks on 6 January 1945 were deeply concerning to everyone in the chain of command, for although the attacks seemed endless, they had been carried out by only 28 *kamikaze* and 15 fighter escorts. Nonetheless, they sank one ship and damaged 11 on one day, some



On 9 January 1945, USS *Blue Ridge* (AGC-2), left, and USS *Thuban* (AKA-19) lie off the Lingayan transport area, White Beach, as seen from USS *Felend* (APA-11)(80-G-300633).

## Lingayen Gulf, 7-8 January 1945

A Japanese air attack came in before dawn on 7 January 1945. At 0439, destroyer-minesweeper *Chandler* (DMS-9, formerly DD-206 and named after Rear Admiral Chandler's grandfather, a Secretary of the Navy), engaged at least two Japanese aircraft along with destroyer minesweeper *Hovey* (DMS-11), which was still packed with survivors from the *Long* (sunk the day before) and *Brooks* (damaged the day before). One Japanese plane was shot down, but only after it launched a torpedo that struck *Hovey* amidships, sinking her within three minutes and taking 22 of her crew and 24 survivors of *Long* and *Brooks* with her. *Chandler* was able to rescue 229 survivors of all three ships.

At 0655, the bombardment and fire support re-entered Lingayen Gulf and, by the afternoon, six UDT teams were in operation along the beaches as ships continued to blast suspected Japanese positions. It wasn't until 1815 that the next Japanese air attacks came in. The destroyer-minesweeper *Palmer* (DMS-5) had been damaged by a large explosion at 1545 that knocked out her port turbine and had to recover her sweep gear and leave formation to effect repairs. At 1840, a Japanese twin-engine Dinah bomber attacked and dropped two bombs that hit *Palmer* on her port side, causing a huge fire. *Palmer* sank in six minutes with a loss of 28 of her crew and 38 wounded, although 123 were rescued.

At 0720 on 8 January, lookouts on *California* reported five Japanese aircraft heading for the HMAS *Australia*, and the planes were taken under fire by multiple ships. The aircraft was actually one twin-engine *kamikaze* being pursued by four U.S. Wildcat fighters. All the planes were shot up and one of the Wildcats was forced to ditch. The *kamikaze* hit the water about 20 yards from *Australia*, but skidded into the side of the ship, fortunately with little damage. Another *kamikaze* was shot down as it attacked *Australia* a few minutes later and it also skidded into the side of the ship. However, this time the bomb went off, blowing an 8-by-14-foot hole in the ship, and causing a five-degree list but no serious casualties. At this point, Oldendorf made the offer to *Australia* to withdraw, which was declined by

severely. At that point in the war, one out of four *kamikaze* scored a hit on a ship, a vast improvement in accuracy over conventional attacks. The *kamikaze* also proved much harder to hit, as they were travelling at a significantly higher speed in their terminal approach compared to a plane that was trying to drop a weapon accurately. The attacks were also a shock to the sailors, particularly those who assumed the Japanese were "licked" after their massive losses in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The idea of fighting an enemy that not only was willing to die, but actually intended to die, was an alien concept debilitating to morale. In fact, the U.S. Navy was so concerned about what the impact of the *kamikaze* might be on the home front, that news of the deliberate Japanese campaign of suicide attacks was censored and kept from the public until March 1945.

Nevertheless, despite the *kamikaze*, Rear Admiral Oldendorf did not seriously consider halting or postponing the Lingayen landings, but did warn that if the following echelons of troop transports got the same treatment, many soldiers might die before they ever got ashore. He exhorted both MacArthur and Halsey (via Kinkaid) for maximum air effort to suppress the Japanese airfields on Luzon.

her captain. *Australia* was hit again at 1311 (the fifth hit in three days). This *kamikaze* aimed for the bridge, but the plane hit the mast and forward funnel, causing damage but no serious casualties.

### ***The Lingayen Invasion Force***

Meanwhile, the main Allied invasion forces were en route to Lingayen. Light cruiser *Boise* (CL-47), with General MacArthur embarked, had transited Surigao Strait on the night of 4-5 January. At 1509 on 5 January, while transiting the Sulu Sea, light cruiser *Phoenix* (CL-46) reported torpedo wakes headed for *Boise*. *Boise* immediately and successfully maneuvered to avoid the torpedoes. An aircraft on ASW patrol bombed the point of origin, resulting in the midget submarine *HA-82* coming to the surface. Destroyer *Taylor* (DD-468) had also sighted the wakes was running them down to the source, and sighted, rammed, depth-charged, and sank *HA-82*. After daybreak on 7 January, as *Boise* transited Mindoro Strait, a Japanese plane managed to drop a bomb that missed off the ship's port quarter. *LST-912* was also hit in the attack, with four killed, but was able to continue her mission.

At about 2100 on the night of 7-8 January, a U.S. Army aircraft reported a surface contact west of Manila. This was the Japanese destroyer *Hinoki*, which had concluded emergency repairs after being hit by a U.S. aerial torpedo during the engagement on 5 January. *Hinoki* picked an even more inopportune time to try to flee from Manila. Vice Admiral Barbey directed his right flank destroyers, *Charles Ausburne* (DD-557, Arleigh Burke's former flagship at the Battle of Cape St. George ), *Braine* (DD-630), *Shaw* (DD-373, resurrected after her bow had been blown off at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941), and *Russell* (DD-414) to close and destroy the contact. The U.S. destroyers opened fire at 10,000 yards and closed to 1,100 yards, sinking *Hinoki* with all hands at 2255. This would also be the last significant surface action between the U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy in the war.

After daybreak on 8 January, the escort carriers supporting the Lingayen invasion force came under under almost continuous attack. Despite heavy anti-

aircraft fire, a *kamikaze* made a beeline for the bridge of *Kadashan Bay* (CVE-76), only at the last moment nose-diving and hitting the ship just above the waterline at 0751. The hit blew a 9-by-17-foot hole, destroyed the junior officers quarters, sparked a gasoline fire, and rendered her gasoline system inoperative. The fire was quickly brought under control, although controlling the flooding took longer. Although no one was killed and only three wounded, the damage was bad enough that the ship had to withdraw to Leyte for temporary repairs, after transferring her aircraft to *Marcus Island* (CVE-77).

The attack transport *Callaway* (APA-35), which was manned by a mostly U.S. Coast Guard crew, was hit on the starboard bridge wing. The fire was contained, but 29 of her crew were killed and 22 were wounded, although none of the 1,188 troops aboard were hurt. The damage was superficial and the ship continued with her mission.

Just before sunset on 8 January, six *kamikaze* made an attack on the escort carriers supporting the Lingayen invasion force. Fighters shot four down, and one turned away, but one continued its attack run. Despite intense fire from multiple escorts, the plane struck the escort carrier *Kitkun Bay* (CVE-71) on the portside amidships at the waterline, blowing a 20-by-9-foot hole in the ship, starting a large fire, and causing a 17 degree list. At the same time, an errant 5-inch shell from a U.S. ship struck just under the forward gun sponson at the bow. A total of 16 men were killed and another 37 wounded. The fires were brought under control by 1910, but the list continued to increase. The skipper ordered all but essential damage control personnel off the ship, and destroyers took aboard 724 men, while 200 remained aboard. Despite the risk of explosion, the fleet tug *Chowanac* (ATF-100) took *Kitkun Bay* under tow while engineers were able to get up steam and the list was reduced to 4 degrees. The embarked flag officer, Rear Admiral Ralph Ofstie, transferred his flag to *Shamrock Bay* (CVE-84). *Kitkun Bay* was a survivor of the Taffy 3 battle off Samar in October 1944, and survived this ordeal as well and returned to the fight after repairs.

## ***Lingayen Landings, 9 January 1945***

The landings at Lingayen occurred on schedule on 9 January 1945. As it turned out, the Japanese commander, General Tomoyuki Yamashita (arguably Japan's best general), had decided not to defend at the beaches and instead fight from inland positions in the hills, having absorbed the lesson of the futility of trying to withstand battleship bombardment at the beachhead. As a result, the landings were virtually unopposed, and the sacrifice of the U.S. ships in conducting three days of bombardment under heavy *kamikaze* attack was essentially unnecessary. By 16 January, the U.S. Army's XIV Corps would be 30 miles inland, suffering only 30 killed. I Corps suffered 220 killed, almost all well after the landings. (This said, the liberation of the Philippines by the U.S. Army would ultimately prove to be very costly, with over 16,000 U.S. soldiers dead or missing, as General Yamashita put up a tough fight, just not on the beaches of Lingayen).

Despite the relative lack of opposition ashore, some *kamikaze* continued to get through the gauntlet of fighters and anti-aircraft fire. In the early morning during the landings, light cruiser *Columbia* was providing fire support and surrounded by landing craft, limiting her mobility when she was struck for a third time by a *kamikaze*, this time sustaining 24 dead, 97 wounded, and the loss of six gun directors and a gun mount. Despite the shortage of able-bodied men after three *kamikaze* hits, her crew nevertheless put out the fires, repaired damage, and continued to provide gunfire support to forces ashore. *Columbia* would be awarded a Navy Unit Commendation for the actions of her crew in continuing her mission despite repeated serious damage.

Although Japanese opposition from shore was limited, it was not non-existent. During the landings at San Fabian, the destroyer *Jenkins* (DD-447) was hit and damaged by a 75-mm shore battery that killed three and wounded ten. Three LSTs and two LSMs were hit and damaged by artillery fire from shore, with six killed and 31 wounded.

As the battleship *Mississippi* (BB-41) and heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia* were standing by to provide

fire support to the San Fabian landings, two Val *kamikaze* made an attack run. One Val crashed into the *Mississippi*, killing 23 and wounding 63, but not seriously damaging the ship. The second Val was taken under fire by *Mississippi* gunners and it ultimately hit a strut in *Australia*'s foremast, crashed into the top of the cruiser's forward stack, and went overboard, inflicting no casualties.

On 9 January 1945, four *kamikaze* made an attack run just after sunset. During the ensuing nighttime confusion, battleship *Colorado* (BB-45) was hit in sky control at 1905 by a "friendly" 5-inch shell that inflicted considerable damage, killing 18 and wounding 51. *Colorado* had only one air defense station and this hit virtually wiped out her key air defense personnel, significantly degrading the ship's ability to defend herself.

Also on the night of 9-10 January, the Japanese unleashed a new weapon, small suicide boats. The boats were 18-foot-long, fast plywood craft with a crew of three Japanese army personnel, and fitted with two 260-pound depth charges. The Japanese army had about 70 of them hidden around Lingayen Gulf and they had apparently managed to avoid being destroyed in the three-day bombardment. The Japanese reported that all 70 went out to attack, but most were unaccounted for. The destroyer *Philip* (DD-498) alertly detected some of the boats on radar (no easy feat given they were made of wood), sent out an alarm, challenged one of them, and opened fire. The boat turned to attack *Philip*, but exploded 20 yards short. Ten U.S. ships were attacked by suicide boats that night and several sustained significant damage from boats exploding close aboard, but only *LCI(M)-974* was sunk. Radio Tokyo claimed 20 to 30 Allied ships sunk, but this essentially ended the suicide boat threat in the Philippines. However, the Allies learned the lesson, and a key reason for taking Kerama Retto prior to the invasion of Okinawa later in 1945 was to eliminate a base for Japanese suicide boats.

## ***Lingayen Aftermath***

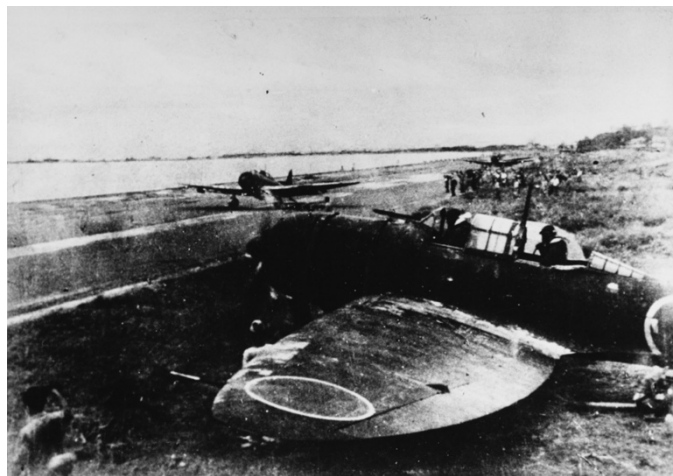
By 10 January, the Japanese navy and army air forces in the Philippines had been essentially



eliminated, but a few *kamikaze* still got through. At 0711 on 10 January, the destroyer escort *LeRay Wilson* (DE-414) shot down a twin-engine bomber, but the starboard wing flew into the ship's side and killed six gunner. However, *LeRay Wilson* was able to continue operations.

At sunrise on 12 January, the destroyer escorts *Gilligan* (DE-508) and *Richard W. Suesens* (DE-342) were on ASW patrol at Lingayen Gulf. *Gilligan* detected an incoming Betty twin-engine bomber at 8 miles and finally sighted it at very low altitude at 1,000 yards firing its nose gun at the ship. In a rarely recorded case of a sailor losing his nerve, a range finder operator jumped from his station down onto the main battery director, knocking it off target, preventing the 5-inch guns from getting off more than one round before the plane struck. The *kamikaze* flew directly into the muzzles of the No. 2 40-mm gun, killing 12 men and wounding 13, who stayed at their station firing until the very end. Despite a massive fireball, *Gilligan's* crew was able to get the fires under control by 0715. Another *kamikaze* came in for an attack on *Richard W. Suesens*, which was searching for *Gilligan* crewmen who had been blown overboard. Despite her damage, *Gilligan's* gunners joined in firing on the *kamikaze*, which was in a near-vertical dive. The *kamikaze* pilot was probably killed, but the plane's momentum carried it down and it clipped the aft 40-mm gun as it crashed into the sea close aboard, wounding 11.

In the morning of 12 January (Morison says 12 January but some other accounts say 11 January), the destroyer transport *Belknap* (APD-34) was hit by a *kamikaze* that struck the No. 2 stack and knocked out her engines, killing 38 and wounding 49 including members of UDT 9 who were embarked (UDT 9 lost 11 dead and 13 wounded). *Belknap* was towed back to the States, but was not repaired before the war ended. (The ship had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation as DD-251 as part of the *Bogue* [CVE-9] hunter-killer group against German submarines in the Atlantic.) Also on the 12th, the SS *Kyle V. Johnson* was hit by a *kamikaze*, with 129 Army troops killed.



Japanese "Val" dive-bombers take off on a *kamikaze* mission from an airfield on the outskirts of Manila, Philippines, in 1944-45 (NH 73099).

The last successful *kamikaze* attack in Philippine waters occurred at 0858 on 13 November, when a *kamikaze* dove vertically out of a heavy overcast at the escort carrier *Salamaua* (CVE-96), which was waiting to refuel from an oiler. The attack came as a complete surprise, and the plane was not fired on as it dove into *Salamaua's* flight deck, penetrated deep into the ship along with two 500-pound bombs, leaving a 16-by-30-foot hole in the flight deck. One bomb narrowly missed *Salamaua's* bomb stowage area and the other failed to detonate. Numerous fires were started and the aft engine room was flooded. Power, communications, and steering were lost, and the ship listed 8 degrees to starboard. Despite the severe damage, *Salamaua's* crew got the flooding and fires quickly under control, with the exception of a persistent gasoline fire on the hangar deck, which was finally put out. Despite the several close calls with potential catastrophic damage, *Salamaua's* crew saved their ship at a cost of 15 dead and 88 wounded, astonishingly low considering the severity of damage. *Salamaua* would be repaired and return to battle in time for the Okinawa campaign.