

World War II  
75th Anniversary Commemorative Series

---

COMBAT NARRATIVES

---

The Battles of  
**Savo Island**  
9 August 1942  
and the  
**Eastern Solomons**  
23–25 August 1942



Naval History and Heritage Command

U.S. Navy



Official U.S. Navy Reprint Published 2017 by

Naval History and Heritage Command  
805 Kidder Breese Street SE  
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060

[www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil)

**ISBN 978-1-943604-09-8**

This is the Official U.S. Government edition of this publication and is herin identified to certify its authenticity. Use of 978-1-943604-09-8 is for U.S. Navy Editions only. The Secretary of the Navy requests that any reprinted edition clearly be labeled as a copy of the authentic work with a new ISBN.

Cover: “Battle of Savo Island, 9 August 1942” Unknown Japanese artist. Oil on canvas. (Naval History and Heritage Command)

**Foreword to the  
Naval History and Heritage Command  
75th Anniversary Edition**

In recognition of the sacrifices made 75 years ago during World War II, the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) has chosen to republish select volumes from a series, Combat Narratives, produced by the Publications Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence during the early days of World War II. Twenty-five years ago, a similar set was produced by NHHC's predecessor Naval Historical Center.

This set differs from the original and 50th anniversary issues only in that these volumes will be published solely as freely distributable PDFs available from the NHHC website at [www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil).



# **Foreword to the Naval Historical Center 50th Anniversary Edition**

*The Battle of Savo Island and the Battle of the Eastern Solomons* comprise one of a series of 21 published and 13 unpublished Combat Narratives of specific naval campaigns produced by the Publications Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence during World War II. Selected volumes in this series are being republished by the Naval Historical Center as part of the Navy's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World War II.

The Combat Narratives were superseded long ago by accounts such as Samuel Eliot Morrison's *History of the United States Navy Operations in World War II* that could be more comprehensive and accurate because of the abundance of American, Allied, and enemy source materials that became available after 1945. But the Combat Narratives continue to be of interest and value since they demonstrate the perceptions of naval operations during the war itself. Because of the contemporary, immediate view offered by these studies, they are well suited for republication in the 1990s as veterans, historians, and the American public turn their attention once again to a war that engulfed much of the world a half century ago.

The Combat Narrative program originated in a directive issued in February 1942 by Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, that instructed the Office of Naval Intelligence to prepare and disseminate these studies. A small team composed of professionally trained writers and historians produced the narratives. The authors based their accounts on research and analysis of the available primary source material, including action reports and war diaries, augmented by interviews with individual participants. Since the narratives were classified Confidential during the war, only a few thousand copies were published at the time, and their distribution was primarily restricted to commissioned officers in the Navy.

The Guadalcanal Campaign was one of the most arduous campaigns of World War II. While it began auspiciously for American forces with little opposition from the Japanese, the battle quickly degenerated into a contest of wills that lasted for six months during which the tide of battle ebbed and flowed as both sides injected more and more forces into the struggle. The key to the entire campaign was the control of the sea approaches to Guadalcanal. The first of many Japanese challenges to American sea power was the Battle of Savo Island, one of the worst defeats ever suffered by the U.S. Navy. That engagement provided American naval forces with a bitter lesson in the superiority of Japanese nighttime naval tactics.

The U.S. Navy redeemed itself in another action that is described in this narrative. Two weeks

after Savo Island, during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, American planes sank an enemy light carrier and a damaged seaplane carrier, and the Japanese lost 75 planes. American losses were 25 planes and damage to the carrier *Enterprise*. The significance of this battle was that it turned back the first major Japanese effort to retake Guadalcanal.

The Office of Naval Intelligence first published this narrative in 1943 without attribution. Administrative records from the period indicate that Ensign Winston B. Lewis wrote the account of the Battle of Savo Island, while Lieutenant (jg) Henry A. Mustin authored the description of the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. Both were Naval Reserve officers. Lewis was a professional historian who taught at Boston's Simmons College prior to the war; after the war he taught history and political science at Amherst College and later joined the faculty of the U.S. Naval Academy. Before World War II, Mustin was a journalist with the *Washington Evening Star*. After the war, he returned to that newspaper and later was associated with the Columbia Broadcasting System, Mutual Broadcasting, and the Voice of America.

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable editorial and publication assistance offered in undertaking this project by Mrs. Sandra K. Russell, Managing Editor, *Naval Aviation News* magazine; Commander Roger Zeimet, USNR, Naval Historical Center Reserve Detachment 206; and Dr. William S. Dudley, Senior Historian, Naval Historical Center. We also are grateful to Rear Admiral Kendell M. Pease Jr., Chief of Information, and Captain Jack Gallant, USNR, Executive Director, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps WWII 50th Anniversary Commemoration Committee, who generously allocated the funds from the Department of the Navy's World War II commemoration program that made this publication possible.

Dean C. Allard  
Director of Naval History

*COMBAT NARRATIVES*

---

---

**Solomon Islands Campaign**

**II**

**The Battle of Savo Island**

**9 August 1942**

**III**

**The Battle of the  
Eastern Solomons**

**23–25 August 1942**



~~Confidential~~

**Office of Naval Intelligence  
U. S. Navy**



*COMBAT NARRATIVES*

**Solomon Islands Campaign**

**II**

**The Battle of Savo Island**

**9 August 1942**

**III**

**The Battle of  
the Eastern Solomons**

**23–25 August 1942**



~~Confidential~~

PUBLICATIONS BRANCH  
OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE • UNITED STATES NAVY

1943



# Foreword

8 January 1943.

Combat Narratives have been prepared by the Publications Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence for the information of the officers of the United States Navy.

The data on which these studies are based are those official documents which are suitable for a *confidential* publication. This material has been collated and presented in chronological order.

In perusing these narratives, the reader should bear in mind that while they recount in considerable detail the engagements in which our forces participated, certain underlying aspects of these operations must be kept in a secret category until after the end of the war.

It should be remembered also that the observations of men in battle are sometimes at variance. As a result, the reports of commanding officers may differ although they participated in the same action and shared a common purpose. In general, Combat Narratives represent a reasoned interpretation of these discrepancies. In those instances where views cannot be reconciled, extracts from the conflicting evidence are reprinted.

Thus, an effort has been made to provide accurate and, within the above-mentioned limitations, complete narratives with charts covering raids, combats, joint operations, and battles in which our Fleets have engaged in the current war. It is hoped that these narratives will afford a clear view of what has occurred, and form a basis for a broader understanding which will result in ever more successful operations.

/s/ E.J. King  
ADMIRAL, U.S.N.,  
Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, and Chief of Naval Operations.

## Charts and Illustrations

### Battle of Savo Island and Battle of the Eastern Solomons

	<i>Page</i>
Chart: Disposition of Screening Force, Battle of Savo Island .....	Frontispiece
Illustration: View of Savo Island .....	Frontispiece
Illustration: Removing <i>Canberra</i> personnel .....	5
Illustrations: <i>Canberra</i> burning .....	6
<i>Chicago</i> with damaged bow .....	6
Chart: Attack on South Cruiser Force .....	7
Chart: Attack on North Cruiser Force .....	8
Chart: Battle of the Eastern Solomons .....	36
Illustrations: <i>Enterprise</i> and screen maneuvering .....	37
Japanese bomber crashes into the sea .....	37
<i>Enterprise</i> after second bomb hit .....	58
The battle above the <i>Enterprise</i> .....	59
Second hit on <i>Enterprise</i> .....	60
Third hit on <i>Enterprise</i> .....	60
Fighting fire on <i>Enterprise</i> .....	61

# Contents

## Battle of Savo Island

Introduction .....	1
Disposition of our forces, night of 8 August.....	2
Warnings .....	3
Attack on our Southern Group.....	4
The Northern Group.....	13
XRAY transports .....	27
Our destroyers .....	28
End of the <i>Canberra</i> .....	29
End of the <i>Astoria</i> .....	31
The day of 9 August.....	33
Observations .....	34

## The Battle of the Eastern Solomons

Introduction .....	39
Disposition of our forces.....	39
Task Force FOX .....	40
Task Force KING.....	41
Events of the 23rd .....	41
Events of the 24th .....	42
Air search and patrol.....	43
The <i>Saratoga</i> Attack Group.....	44
Guadalcanal attacked .....	46
The Second Attack Group.....	46
Air Combat Patrol.....	48
Air attack on the Enterprise force .....	50
The retirement.....	54
Guadalcanal bombarded.....	55
Events of the 25th .....	55
Summary of results .....	56
Conclusions .....	57
Appendix I: Victories credited to fighter pilots defending the fleet, 24 August.....	63
Appendix II: Designations of United States naval ships and aircraft.....	65



**NAVY DEPARTMENT**  
Office of Naval Intelligence  
Washington, D.C.

*1 October, 1943.*

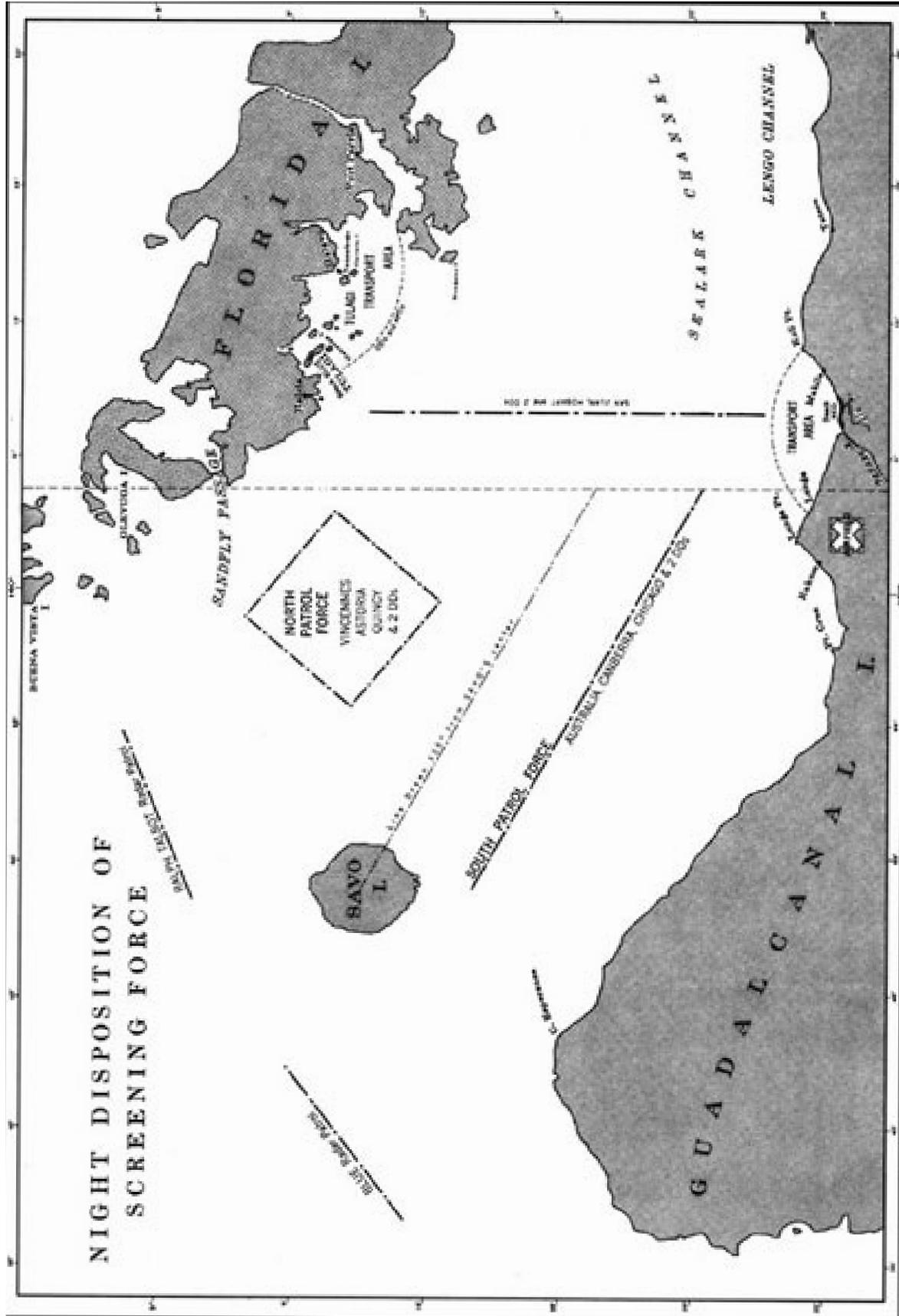
Combat Narratives are confidential publications issued under a directive of the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, for the information of commissioned officers of the U.S. Navy only.

Information printed herein should be guarded (a) in circulation and by custody measures for confidential publications as set forth in Articles 75 ½ and 76 of Naval Regulations and (b) in avoiding discussion of this material within the hearing of any but commissioned officers. Combat Narratives are not to be removed from the ship or station for which they are provided. Reproduction of this material in any form is not authorized except by specific approval of the Director of Naval Intelligence.

Officers who have participated in the operations recounted herein are invited to forward to the Director of Naval Intelligence, via their commanding officers, accounts of personal experiences and observations which they esteem to have value for historical and instructional purposes. It is hoped that such contributions will increase the value and render ever more authoritative such new editions of these publications as may be promulgated to the service in the future.

When the copies provided have served their purpose, they may be destroyed by burning. However, reports acknowledging receipt or destruction of these publications need not be made.

*/s/*  
Roscoe E. Schuirmann  
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.,  
Director of Naval Intelligence.



*Night Disposition of Screening Force. Shows Savo Island, Sealtark Channel, Florida Island, and Guadalcanal.*



*View of Savo Island from the east. Cape Esperance at left.*



# The Battle of Savo Island

9 August 1942

## INTRODUCTION

THE MARINES landed in the Solomons in the early morning of 7 August 1942.<sup>1</sup> On Guadalcanal the Japanese, apparently believing that only a naval raid was in prospect, retired to the hills, so that our landing was made almost without opposition. On the smaller islands, however, they could not withdraw. On Tulagi and Gavutu they offered the most desperate resistance, and on Tanambogo even succeeded in repulsing our first landing. Consequently on the evening of the 8th the Marines were still engaged in mopping up snipers or in securing their positions on these islands.

This stubborn resistance prevented the completion of our initial operation in one day as planned. Furthermore, the unloading of our transports and cargo vessels was considerably delayed by two air attacks on the 7th and another on the 8th. This protraction of the action had serious consequences, for late in the evening of the 8th our three aircraft carriers, the *Wasp*, *Saratoga*, and *Enterprise*, which had been providing air support from stations south of Guadalcanal, asked permission to retire. Not only was their fuel running low but they had lost 20 of their 99 fighters. Although they had not been sighted by the enemy, it was felt that they ought not to remain within a limited area where the enemy had shown considerable air strength.

In view of the Japanese air raids of the preceding 2 days, the prospective loss of our air protection would leave our ships in a precarious position. The danger was emphasized by information which was received from Melbourne sometime during the afternoon or evening of the 8th.<sup>2</sup> This placed three Japanese cruisers, three destroyers and two gunboats or seaplane tenders at latitude 05°49' S., longitude 156°07' E., course 120° T., speed 15 knots at about 1130.<sup>3</sup> This position is off the east coast of Bougainville, about 300 miles from Guadalcanal. Shortly before midnight Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, Commander of the Amphibious Force, sent a message to Rear Admiral John

---

<sup>1</sup> This is described in the Combat Narrative *The Landing in the Solomons*, which should be consulted for details of the action and for the organization of our forces.

<sup>2</sup> There appear to have been several broadcasts of this warning. An entry in Admiral Turner's diary indicates that he received it at 1800. It was broadcast again from Melbourne at 1821. Admiral Crutchley says that it was received "during the day" and that he discussed it with Admiral Turner. Capt. Greenman of the *Astoria* remarks that it was received "during the day." Lt. Comdr. Walter B. Davidson in his report for the *Astoria*'s communication department says that an urgent report of the contact in plain language was received from Honolulu during the 1800-2000 watch, and that a coded rebroadcast of the report was being decoded when the battle started. The *Quincy*'s chief radio electrician, W. R. Daniel, remarks that details of the enemy force were received as early as 1600. Capt. Riefkohl of the *Vincennes* says the report was received "during the afternoon of 8 August" and that there was another report, apparently of the same force, giving their position as of 1200 some 25 miles south of the first reported position. The news of the enemy force was either officially announced or had become general "scuttlebutt" on the *Vincennes* by evening and caused some men not on watch to sleep beside their guns that night.

<sup>3</sup> Times in this Narrative are Zone minus 11.

S. McCain, Commander Aircraft, South Pacific Force, suggesting that this enemy force might operate torpedo planes from Rekata Bay, Santa Isabel Island, and recommending that strong air detachments strike there on the morning of the 9th.

Because of these developments a conference was held about midnight on board the *McCawley*, Admiral Turner's flagship. In view of the danger of air attack it was decided to withdraw our ships as early as possible the following morning. Meanwhile the transports continued to unload and land supplies throughout the night both at Guadalcanal and at Tulagi-Gavutu. Supplies were particularly needed in the latter area because it had been necessary to land the Second Marines to reinforce our depleted forces there.

### **DISPOSITION OF OUR FORCES, NIGHT OF 8 AUGUST**

Of the 19 transports in the Task Force, 14 were anchored or underway near Guadalcanal and 5 were in the Tulagi area on the night of 8-9 August. The latter were screened by an arc of vessels composed of the transport destroyers *Colhoun*, *Little*, and *McKean*, reinforced by the destroyers *Henley* and *Ellet*. The *Monssen* had been giving fire support to our troops on Makambo Island that evening, but with the fall of darkness had taken her assigned position screening the *San Juan* on patrol.

The larger group of transports off Guadalcanal was screened by several ships on the arc of a circle of 6,000 yards radius with the Tenaru River as its center. On this arc were the minesweepers *Trever*, *Hopkins*, *Zane*, *Southard* and *Hovey*, and the destroyers *Selfridge*, *Mugford* and *Dewey*.

The transport *George F. Elliott*, which had been hit during the day's bombing attack, had drifted eastward along the shallow water. As the fire on board could not be controlled, it was decided to sink her. In the evening the *Dewey* expended three torpedoes without sending her down. She was still burning brightly when the destroyer *Hull*, having taken off her crew for transfer to the *Hunter Liggett*, fired four more into her an hour before midnight. Even then she did not sink, but was still afloat and burning when our ships departed on the evening of the 9th.

The disposition of our cruisers and the remaining destroyers was governed by "Special Instructions to the Screening Group," issued by Rear Admiral V. A. C. Crutchley, R. N., commander of the escort groups and second in command of the Amphibious Forces. To protect the disembarkation area from attack from the eastward, the American *San Juan* and the Australian *Hobart*, both light cruisers, were assigned to the area east of longitude 160° 04' E., guarding Lengo and Sealark Channels. They were screened by the destroyers *Monssen* and *Buchanan*. At 1850 these ships began their patrol at 15 knots on courses 000° and 180° between Guadalcanal and the Tulagi area.

As a precaution against surprise from the northwest, two destroyers were assigned to radar guard and antisubmarine patrol beyond Savo Island. The *Ralph Talbot* was north of the island, patrolling between positions 08° 59' S., 159° 55' E. and 09° 01' S., 159° 49' E. The *Blue* was stationed west of the island between positions 09° 05' S., 159° 42' E.<sup>4</sup> and 09° 09' S., 159° 37' E., patrolling on courses 051° and 231° at 12 knots.

---

<sup>4</sup> The *Blue*'s report gives this as 159° 24' E., but this appears to be a typographical error.

The area inside Savo Island, between Guadalcanal and Florida, was divided into two patrol districts by a line drawn 125° T. from the center of Savo. It was upon the vessels patrolling these sectors that the Japanese raid was to fall. The area to the north of this line was assigned to the heavy cruisers *Vincennes*, *Astoria*, and *Quincy*, screened by the *Helm* and *Wilson*. The last-named replaced the *Jarvis*, which had been damaged by a torpedo during the day's air attack. This group was patrolling at a speed of 10 knots on a square, the center of which lay approximately midway between Savo and the western end of Florida Island. At midnight it turned onto course 045° T. and was to make a change of 90° to the right approximately every half hour.

The area to the south of the line was covered by the *Chicago* and H.M.A.S. *Canberra*, screened by the *Patterson* and *Bagley*. H.M.A.S. *Australia* was the flag and lead ship of this group, but at the time of the action she was absent, having taken Admiral Crutchley to the conference aboard the *McCawley*. Capt. Howard D. Bode of the *Chicago* was left in command of the group, although the *Canberra* ahead of his ship acted as guide. The group was steering various courses in a general northwest-southeast line—the base patrol course was 305°-125° T.—reversing course approximately every hour.

Admiral Crutchley's instructions were that in case of a night attack each cruiser group was to act independently, but was to support the other as required. In addition to the Melbourne warning, a dispatch had been received indicating that enemy submarines were in the area, and night orders placed emphasis on alertness and the necessity for keeping a sharp all-around lookout. The destroyers were to shadow unknown vessels, disseminate information and illuminate targets as needed. It was provided that if they should be ordered to form a striking force, all destroyers of Squadron FOUR except the *Blue* and *Talbot* were to concentrate 5 miles northwest of Savo Island. This arrangement was to cause some confusion during the battle.

## WARNINGS

There was no moon on the night of 8-9 August, and low-hanging clouds, moved by a 4-knot breeze from the northeast, drifted across the sky and added to the darkness. Occasional thundershowers swept the otherwise calm sea. Mist and rain hung heavily about Savo Island and visibility in that direction was particularly bad.

An hour before midnight the *Astoria* appears to have made a radar contact, but it is not clear whether it was on a ship or a plane.<sup>5</sup> Most likely it was the latter, for about the same time the *San Juan* reported to the *Vincennes* by TBS<sup>6</sup> that she had sighted an aircraft flying eastward from Savo Island, and this word was given the captain. At 2345 the *Ralph Talbot* on patrol north of Savo sighted an unidentified, cruiser-type plane low over the island. She at once reported on both the TBO<sup>7</sup> and TBS: "Warning, warning,

---

<sup>5</sup> W. W. Johns, Fire Controlman, First Class, who was on watch in Spot I from 2000 to 2400, says that he turned over the following information to his relief: "A report had been received over the JS circuit that at about 2300 a radar contact on the *Astoria* SC radar had been made bearing north, distance 34 miles, no other data available." Ens. William F. Cramer, who was on watch in *Astoria*'s radar plot during the same period, says that the radar antenna was operating through a 360° sweep, but that because of the surrounding land there was serious interference on all sides, except for a small arc varying from the west to the northwest, depending on the position of the ship. They were operating on a 30,000-yard scale and "nothing unusual was noticed on the screen."

<sup>6</sup> TBS is short wave, voice radio.

<sup>7</sup> TBO is a portable radio, used also by the Marines.

plane over Savo headed east.” This was repeated for several minutes on both transmitters. Neither the Task Force Commander nor Commander Destroyer Squadron FOUR responded to his code call, and Commander Destroyer Division EIGHT undertook to get the warning through to Admiral Turner.

The *Blue* to the west of Savo received the *Ralph Talbot’s* warning and a moment later picked up the plane on her radar. Subsequently the plane could be heard as it apparently circled the island and moved off to the south. Some observers believed they saw its running lights. The *Vincennes* also heard the warning, but Admiral Crutchley did not hear of it until just before the battle started. The *Quincy’s* radar also picked up the plane, and the bridge reported it to Control Forward, but five or ten minutes later sent word to disregard the contact.

Planes continued to fly over at intervals during the next hour and a half. At about 0100 the *Quincy* (apparently then on a course of 225°) heard a plane pass to starboard going forward. At about the same time the watch in *Astoria’s* sky control reported to the bridge that a plane was overhead, and aircraft engines were heard and reported on the *Canberra*. Half an hour later the plane was heard, seemingly going in the opposite direction. Shortly after this, a plane crossed the *Quincy’s* port quarter. These contacts were reported to the bridge, but apparently were not passed on to the gunnery control stations, nor was any further warning broadcast to other ships, so far as can be determined.

### ATTACK ON OUR SOUTHERN GROUP

No more than half an hour elapsed from the time enemy ships appeared without warning around the southern corner of Savo Island till they ceased fire and passed back out to sea. In that short interval they crossed ahead of our southern cruiser group, putting the *Canberra* completely out of action within a minute or two and damaging the *Chicago*, then crossed astern of our northern group, battering our cruisers so badly that all three sank—the *Vincennes* and *Quincy* within an hour.

The action opened with two almost simultaneous events: contact by our southern cruiser force with the enemy surface force and the dropping of flares by aircraft over XRAY, the transport area off Guadalcanal.

At about 0145 several bright flares were dropped from above the clouds over the north coast of Guadalcanal, just southeast of our transport group. They were in a straight line, evenly spaced about a mile apart, and provided a strong and continuous illumination which silhouetted our transports clearly for an enemy coming from the northwest. On the *San Juan* it was remarked that these flares were exceptionally large, blue-white and intensely brilliant. They burned without flickering and lighted up the entire area. After laying one series the plane returned and repeated the process. Probably the enemy intended to maintain a continuous illumination, for when the first flares were dropped the enemy surface force was just rounding Savo Island, still some 20 minutes away from the beach.

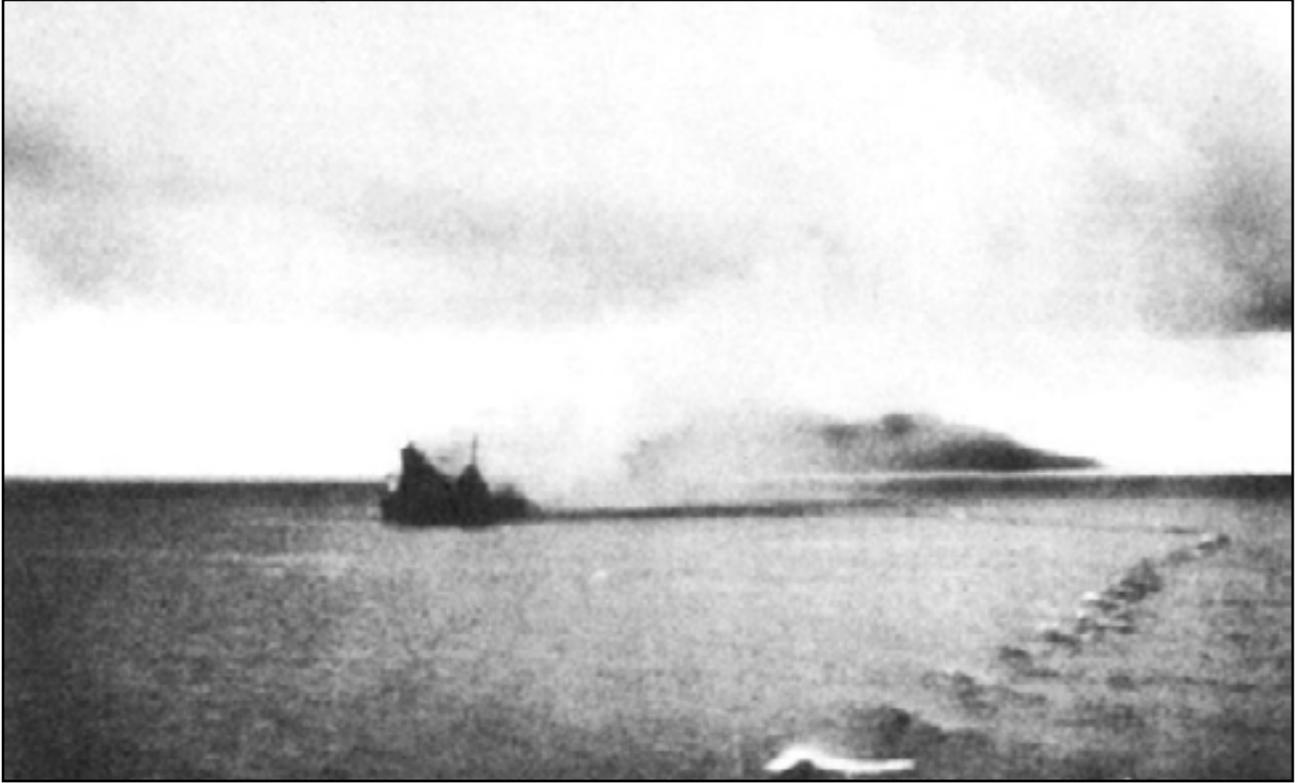
At this time the cruisers of our southern group were on course 310° T., about 4 miles south of Savo Island.<sup>8</sup> This was near the northern end of their patrol and they were to reverse their course in a few minutes. The *Canberra* was leading, with the *Chicago* about 600 yards astern. The *Patterson* was

---

<sup>8</sup> See chart, Frontispiece.



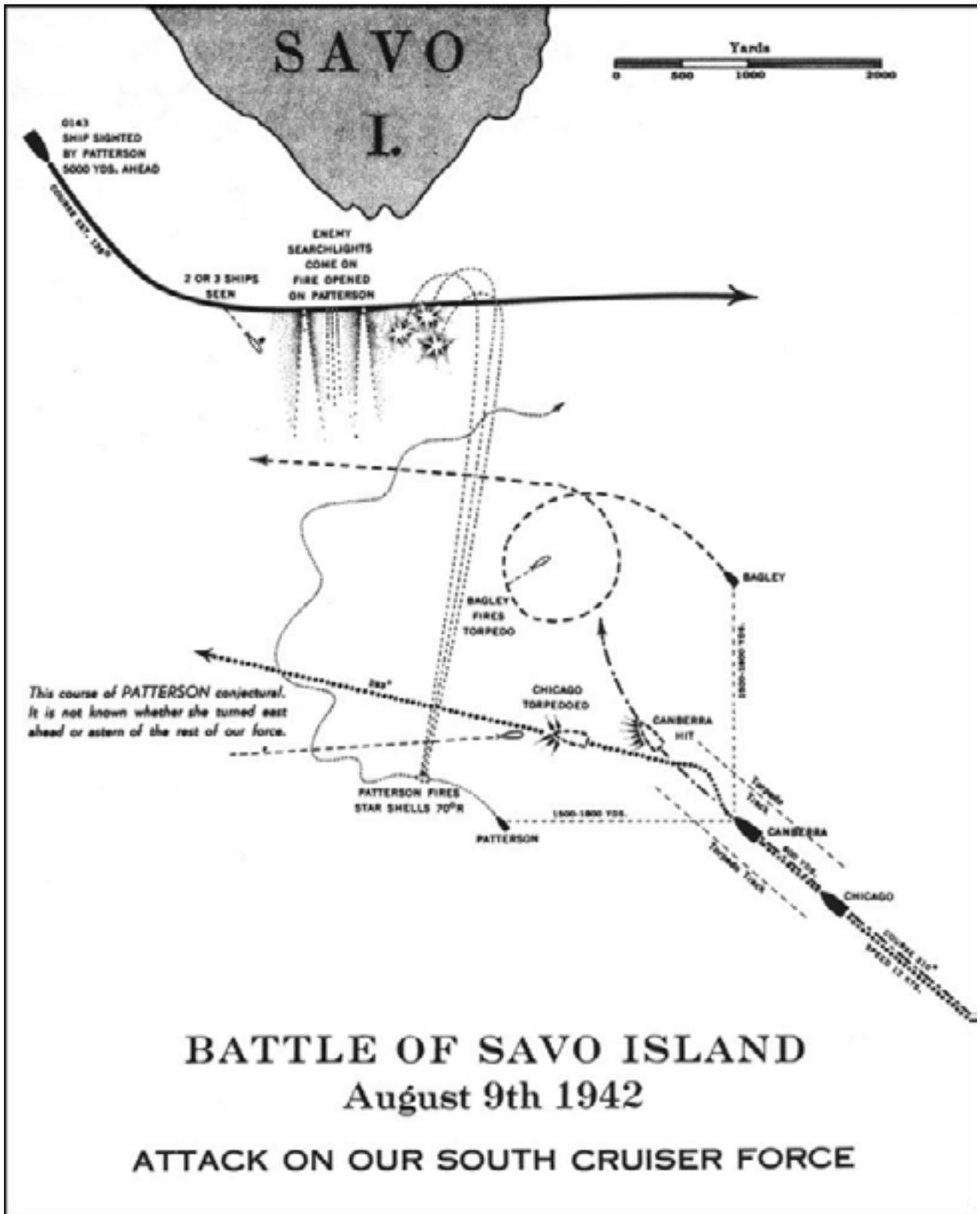
*Destroyers removing personnel from the Canberra*

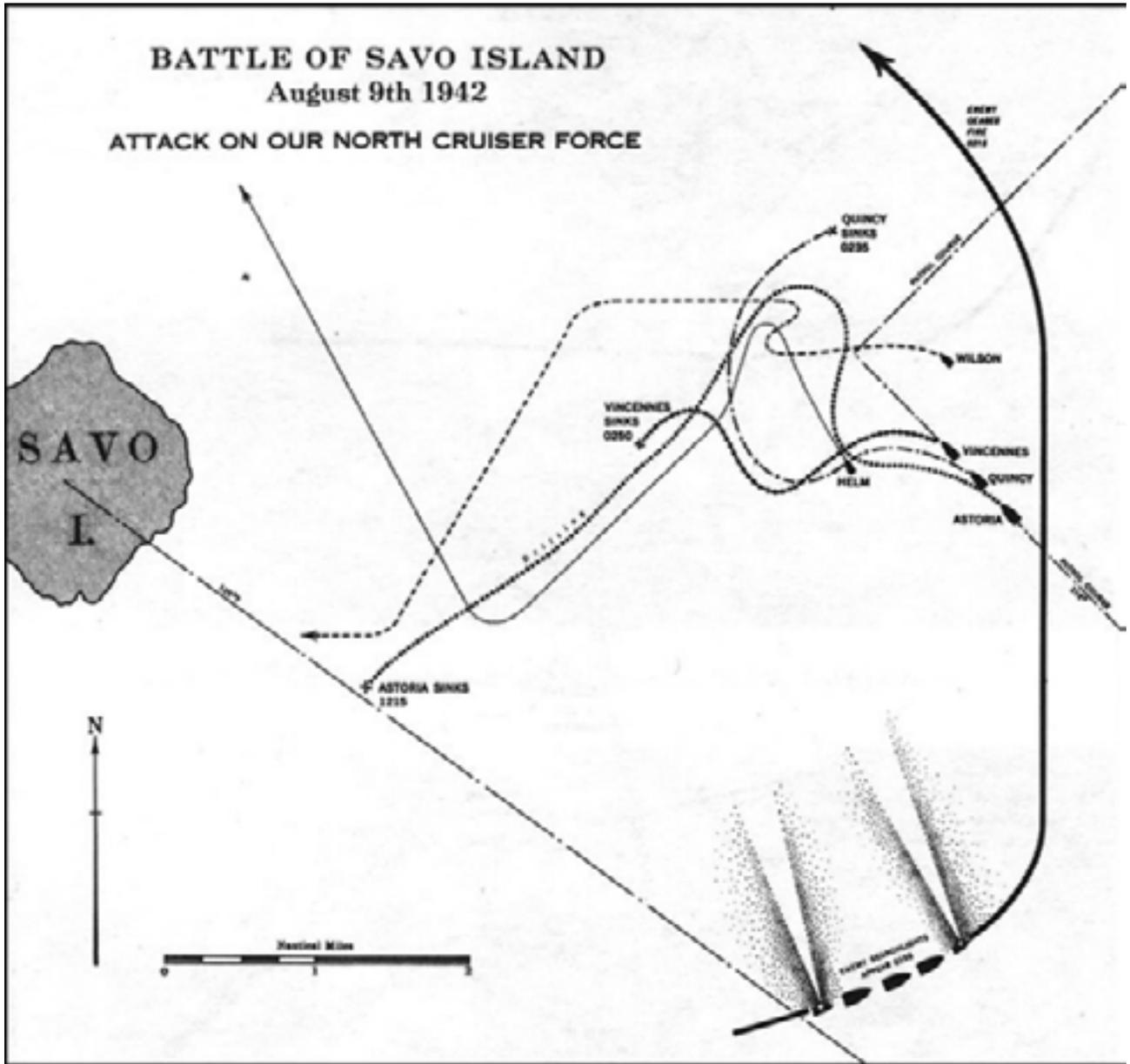


*Canberra with destroyer alongside, Savo Island in background.*



*Chicago, showing damaged bow.*





about 45° on her port bow, distant 1,500-1,800 yards, while the *Bagley* was in the same relative position on the starboard bow.

The Australian cruiser was in the second degree of readiness, except that turrets B and Y<sup>9</sup> were not manned, although their crews were sleeping near their quarters. One 4-inch gun on each side of the ship was manned. All guns were empty. The *Chicago*'s state of readiness is not reported.

At about 0143<sup>10</sup> the watch on the *Patterson* sighted a ship dead ahead. It was about 5,000 yards distant, on a southeasterly course and very close to Savo Island. The destroyer at once notified the *Canberra* and *Chicago* by blinker and broadcast by TBS to all ships: "Warning, warning, strange ships entering harbor."<sup>11</sup> At the same time she turned left to unmask her guns and torpedo batteries.

Within a minute and a half of sighting, the enemy changed course to the eastward, following the south shore of Savo Island closely. With the change of course 2 ships could be seen, one of which appeared to be a *Mogami*-type heavy cruiser, the second a *Jintsu*-type light cruiser. Some observers on the *Patterson*'s bridge reported seeing 3 cruisers and thought that the second in the column was of the *Katori* class.

When their movement and the *Patterson*'s turn had brought the Japanese cruisers to relative bearing 70° and a distance of 2,000 yards Comdr. Frank R. Walker ordered "Fire torpedoes," but at the same instant the destroyer's guns opened fire, so that the order went unheard and no torpedoes left the tubes. Before this was realized, "something" was reported close on the port bow and the captain ran to the port wing of the bridge to investigate, but was not able to make out anything.

The *Patterson*'s opening salvos were two four-gun star shell spreads, after which No. 3 gun continued star shell illumination until it was hit. These were used in preference to the searchlight in order to avoid the possible silhouetting of our own cruisers. Why the *Patterson*'s star shells did not enable our men to see the enemy more clearly than they did is puzzling. As the *Patterson*'s other guns opened with service projectiles, the gunnery officer saw the rear enemy cruiser fire a spread of eight torpedoes. Meanwhile both enemy ships had illuminated our destroyer with their searchlights and had opened heavy fire upon her. One shell hit the No. 4 gun shelter and ignited ready service powder. The after part of the ship was for a moment enveloped in flames and No. 3 and 4 guns were put out of action, the latter only temporarily. The ship zigzagged at high speed while a torpedo passed about 50 yards on her starboard quarter. She then steadied out on an easterly course, roughly parallel to that of the enemy. Her No. 1 and 2 guns maintained a rapid and accurate fire, in which No. 4 soon rejoined. The rear enemy cruiser was hit several times, its searchlight extinguished and a fire started amidships.

The *Patterson* did not cease fire till about 0200, when the Japanese cruisers turned north. Before she

---

<sup>9</sup> Her turrets were lettered from forward aft, A, B, X and Y.

<sup>10</sup> There is no precise agreement as to the time of the opening of the action. The *Patterson*, which was evidently the first to sight the enemy, gives the time as 0146. The *Bagley*, which must have been a minute later in making contact, gives it as 0144. The *Canberra*, which was still later, records the time as 0143. The *Chicago* saw the *Canberra* swing to starboard at 0145.

<sup>11</sup> Comdr. Callahan of the *Ralph Talbot* reports: "The following was heard at about 0150 on the TBS . . . 'Warning, warning, 3 enemy ships inside Savo Island.' The voice was recognized as that of Comdr. Walker of the *Patterson*."

lost contact the enemy must have opened fire on our northern cruiser group. All told, the *Patterson* fired 20 rounds of illuminating and 50 rounds of service ammunition.

It was just before the enemy ships changed from a southeasterly to an easterly course, and therefore about a minute after the *Patterson*'s sighting them, that the *Bagley* saw unidentified vessels about 3,000 yards distant, slightly on her port bow.<sup>12</sup> The ships appeared to be on a course of about 135°, moving at high speed, perhaps about 30 knots.

The *Bagley*, like the *Patterson*, swung hard left in order to fire torpedoes. In less than a minute the enemy was abeam, about 2,000 yards distant, but before the primers could be inserted in the starboard torpedo battery, the *Bagley* had turned past safe firing bearing. She therefore continued her turn to the left to bring the port tubes to bear. This required 2 or 3 minutes more, and by this time the range had increased to 3,000-4,000 yards. The enemy formation was becoming very indistinct when four torpedoes were fired. Neither the commanding officer, Lt. Comdr. George A. Sinclair, nor the officer of the deck observed any hit, but the junior officer of the deck saw an explosion in the enemy area about 2 minutes after the firing, and the sound operator, who had followed the torpedoes with the sound gear, reported two intense explosions at the same time. After firing her torpedoes the *Bagley* continued her circle, went westward, and scanned the passage between Savo and Guadalcanal without sighting anything.

It was evidently very soon after the *Bagley* sighted the enemy that the port lookout on the *Canberra* reported a ship dead ahead, but neither the officer of the watch nor the yeoman of the watch could see it.<sup>13</sup> At the same time there was an explosion at some distance on the starboard bow. It does not seem likely that this could have been caused by the *Bagley*'s torpedoes, for they were fired at least 3 minutes after sighting the enemy and would have required 2 minutes more to reach their target. About this time the *Astoria* also heard a heavy, distant, underwater explosion.

Capt. F. E. Getting, R. A. N., and the navigating officer of the *Canberra* were called promptly, but before they could take any action two torpedoes were seen passing down either side of the *Canberra* on opposite course. Presumably these were the same which passed near the *Chicago* a moment later. The general alarm was sounded and the Evershed<sup>14</sup> was trained on two ships less than a mile distant on the port bow. These appeared to be destroyers or light cruisers. According to the reports of the other ships in the formation, the *Canberra* was at this time swinging hard right to unmask her guns. Before they could be brought to bear, she was hit by at least 24 five-inch shells, and one or two torpedoes struck her on the starboard side between the boiler rooms. The four-inch gun deck was hit particularly badly. All the guns were put out of action and most of the crews killed. One hit on the barbette jammed turret A in train and another shell exploded between the guns of turret X. The plane and catapult were

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Bagley* gives her position at this time as about 1.7 miles from Savo Island, the left tangent of which bore 310° T.

<sup>13</sup> The *Bagley* reported that the *Canberra* turned right only a few seconds after the *Bagley* sighted the enemy vessels. Furthermore, it would have taken only slightly more than a minute for the enemy ships to have moved from directly ahead of the *Patterson* to directly ahead of the *Canberra*, assuming their speed to have been about 25 knots. It is just possible that the ship first seen by the lookout was the *Bagley* turning left in front of the *Canberra*.

<sup>14</sup> The Evershed is a target bearing designation system. Generally a sight is mounted on either wing of the bridge, from which bearings are transmitted to appropriate stations on the ship.

struck and burst into flames. A serious fire was started by hits in the torpedo spaces, and other fires broke out at various points. As a result of the torpedo explosion, light failed all over the ship. The engine rooms filled with smoke and had to be abandoned.

The *Canberra* may have been able to fire a few shots in return, for the *Bagley* reported that as the cruiser turned right she opened fire with her main battery, and that it was the second or third enemy salvo which landed. The *Chicago* too reported that the *Canberra* (then on her starboard bow) opened fire.<sup>15</sup> According to the *Canberra*'s own report, the port 4-inch guns may have fired one or two salvos before being put out of action, and one gun of turret X may have fired one salvo. Possibly two of the port torpedoes were fired.

Within a minute or two the ship stopped and lay helpless. She was listing about 10° to starboard and was lighted by several intense fires. Upon receipt of word that the captain was down,<sup>16</sup> the executive officer, Comdr. J. A. Walsh, R. A. N., took command.

Apparently the *Chicago* did not sight the Japanese ships until the *Canberra* swung to starboard, but 3 minutes earlier she had seen two orange colored flashes near the surface of the water close to Savo Island. Capt. Bode was apparently on deck, as the *Chicago*'s report does not mention his being called. The flashes were followed very shortly by the appearance of the first flare over the transport area, and the *Canberra* was seen to turn about 2 minutes later. As she turned, two dark objects could be seen between the *Canberra* and *Patterson* and another to the right of the *Canberra*. It seems probable that it was this last which fired the torpedoes into the cruiser's starboard side. It will be remembered that 2 or 3 minutes before this, the *Patterson* had seen "something" on her port bow as she turned left and that not long afterward a torpedo passed on her starboard quarter.

Whatever the objects were, the *Chicago*'s 5-inch director was trained on the one to the right, beyond the *Canberra*. She was preparing to fire a star-shell spread when the starboard bridge lookout reported a torpedo wake to starboard and she started to turn with right full rudder. The ship had turned only a little to starboard when the main battery control officer sighted two torpedo wakes bearing 345° R., crossing from port to starboard. Since the first torpedo to starboard had not been seen on the bridge and that to port had been, the ship was given left full rudder. It was intended to steady out when the ship's course paralleled the wakes, but at that point something that was thought to be a destroyer in a position to fire torpedoes was seen farther to port, and the order was given to swing farther to the left.

Before the helmsman could comply, the talker in main battery control forward saw the wake of a torpedo headed for the port bow on bearing 345° R., and at almost the same moment it struck the bow well forward. "The forward part of the ship to amidships was deluged with a column of water which was well above the level of the foretop." The bow below the water line was largely blown off, but this did not seriously alter the trim of the ship or impair operation at the moment. The *Chicago*'s track chart shows that she was on course 283° T. when she was hit. Since the torpedo was seen approaching

---

<sup>15</sup> The sequence of events according to the *Chicago* was as follows: 0142 orange flashes seen; 0143 first of 5 aircraft flares seen, bearing 160° to 170° R.; 0145 *Canberra* turns; 0146 dark objects and torpedo wakes sighted; 0147 *Chicago* hit by torpedo, flashes of gunfire seen on both port and starboard bows, *Canberra* opens fire, *Chicago* fires star shells.

<sup>16</sup> Capt. Getting was seriously wounded and died a day later.

on 345° R., it must have come from 268° T.; i. e., it came not from the direction of the enemy cruiser line, but from the west. Perhaps it was fired by the destroyer, or whatever it was, seen to port shortly before the *Chicago* was hit.

At the same time that the *Chicago* was torpedoed, flashes of gunfire were observed close aboard, bearing 320° R. Since the *Patterson* had opened fire by this time and must have been somewhere on the *Chicago*'s port bow, she may have been responsible for the flashes seen.

It appears that the *Chicago* had not yet sized up the situation. Her port battery fired two four-gun salvos of star shells toward the flashes bearing 320° R., while the starboard battery fired the same number at 45° R., set for 5,000 yards, to illuminate what appeared to be a cruiser beyond the *Canberra*. This cruiser was firing on the Australian ship, which lay about 1,200 yards distant, bearing 45° R. from the *Chicago*. To the left of the *Canberra*, 2,500 to 4,000 yards distant, were two destroyers which were thought to be enemy. Probably they formed the guard astern of the enemy cruisers. Not one of the 16 star shells fired by the *Chicago* at this critical moment functioned, so that positive identification could not be made.

At this time a shell hit the starboard leg of the *Chicago*'s foremast, detonated over the forward funnel, and showered shrapnel over the ship. Shortly afterwards a ship ahead, which was thought to be the *Patterson*, illuminated with her searchlight two ships which appeared to be destroyers on the port bow. The *Chicago*'s port battery opened up on the left hand destroyer with a range of 7,200 yards. The target was hit twice, apparently not by our cruiser but by the destroyer thought to be the *Patterson*. A minute later the latter ship turned off her searchlight and crossed the line of fire of the *Chicago*'s port battery on a course opposite to that of the *Chicago*.

There is some possibility that the *Chicago*'s identification of these ships was mistaken. In the *Patterson*'s report it is specifically stated that she did not use her searchlight for fear of silhouetting our cruisers, but used star shells instead.

Meanwhile the poor visibility had prevented the main battery director from picking up the cruiser on the starboard bow, and the starboard 5-inch battery had expended all ready service star shells without the main battery's being able to get a "set up" on the target. This was due largely to the fact that out of a total of 44 star shells fired by the *Chicago* during the action, only 6 functioned.

At about this time the port 5-inch battery also lost its target, the destroyer 7,200 yards on the port bow, but just before firing ceased the burst of a hit was seen. In an effort to relocate this target, the shutters on No. 2 and 4 searchlights were opened as the ship was swinging to port, but they swept only empty sea. In the meantime the gun engagement to starboard (probably involving the main enemy cruiser force) had moved on to the northward. Director II was on a ship bearing 120° R., but soon reported it as a friendly destroyer, while another ship bearing 270° was also identified as friendly. Probably the former was the *Patterson* and the latter the *Bagley*.

In fact the enemy had completely left our southern group and was now engaging the *Vincennes* group. With no target in sight there was time to take stock of the situation aboard the *Chicago*. Damage

control reported some forward compartments flooded, but shoring of bulkheads was already underway and it was thought the ship could do 25 knots. A message was decoded ordering withdrawal toward Lengo Channel, and the *Chicago* slowed down to 12 knots. Five or six minutes later, before she had turned back, a gun action was seen to the westward of Savo Island. The *Chicago* moved toward it at full speed, and a few minutes later fired a star shell spread bearing 100° R. set for 11,000 yards. The ships were out of range, however, and the *Chicago* ceased fire. A fire was visible in the distance but it was not certain whether it was on one of the ships or on the far side of Savo Island. A range of 18,000 yards was obtained on it, but the firing had ceased, no ships were visible, and the *Chicago* again slowed to 12 knots.

It is impossible to say what this engagement seen from the *Chicago* was. The time was about 0205, whereas the only known engagement beyond Savo was that of the *Ralph Talbot* about 0220.

Of the ships in our southern group, the *Canberra* had been put out of action before she could fire more than a few rounds. The *Chicago* had gone off to the west while the enemy passed to the eastward, and had been able to take no effective action. The *Bagley*, after firing her torpedoes, had started on a futile search of the channel to the west. Only the *Patterson* had correctly estimated the situation and had followed the main enemy force to the east.

The entire engagement with our southern group seems to have lasted no more than 10 minutes. Since the enemy cruisers passed to the eastward, they must have opened fire on our northern force immediately after breaking off action with the southern.

### THE NORTHERN GROUP

Our northern cruiser group was patrolling its square at a speed of 10 knots. The *Helm* was 1,500 yards on the port bow and the *Wilson* 2,000 yards on the starboard bow of the *Vincennes*. The *Quincy* and *Astoria* followed rather closely in order to enjoy the maximum antisubmarine protection from the destroyers. All three cruisers were in Condition of Readiness II. On the *Vincennes* all guns of the main battery had remained loaded since the noon air attack, and two guns in each turret were manned. Broadside antiaircraft and heavy machine gun batteries were fully manned, as were plot and most control stations. Steam was available for 30 knots. The *Quincy* was in Material Condition of Readiness YOKE, with Ammunition Condition of Readiness I in main and antiaircraft batteries. On the *Astoria* all guns of the main battery were loaded and two guns in each turret were manned. The antiaircraft battery was completely manned. The ship was in Material Condition ZED, with a few exceptions necessary because of the heat, which had caused several cases of prostration during the day.

At about 0120 the group turned onto course 315°. <sup>17</sup> Since course was altered approximately every

---

<sup>17</sup> It is not entirely clear whether this was 0120 or later, as accounts were contradictory. Capt. Riefkohl, in command of the group, said, "at 0120 change of course to 315° was ordered and at 0200 to course 045°." Lt. Comdr. Heneberger, senior surviving officer of the *Quincy*: "At 0050 orders were received that change of course would be made at 10 minutes before and 20 minutes after the hour . . . At 0120 the formation changed course to 315° (T) . . . At 0145 a fix was obtained . . . Orders were received for the formation to remain on course 315° (T) until the end of the hour." But Lt. Comdr. Topper, who was supervisory officer of the deck on the *Astoria* stated, "At about 0120, while on course 225° T., word was broadcast over TBS from the *Vincennes*, the senior ship of our group, that the formation would continue on its present course until 0140, at which time we would change course to right by column movement the

half hour, another change was due at 0150. But at about 0145 the *Vincennes* ordered by TBS that the course be held until 0200. The *Quincy* and *Wilson* had some difficulty in getting these orders and they were repeated several times. Thus the orders and their acknowledgment occupied the TBS for several minutes—at a most critical time, as it turned out.

Probably the first incident in the rapid succession of events which was to follow came about 0145, when a lookout on the *Vincennes*' main deck aft saw a submarine surface and then submerge about 600 yards distant on the port quarter.<sup>18</sup> This was reported to the pilot house, but it is not certain that the report was acknowledged. About the same time one of the sky lookouts called the attention of Lt. Comdr. Robert R. Craighill, assistant gunnery officer, to “a shape he thought he saw about broad on the port bow.” Lt. Comdr. Craighill searched the area with binoculars, but there was a rain squall in the vicinity of Savo and he could make out nothing.

Perhaps about 2 minutes later—about 0147 as nearly as may be determined<sup>19</sup>—the *Patterson*'s message came over the TBS: “Warning, warning, strange ships entering the harbor.” The report was received on the *Vincennes*, but it did not reach the captain asleep in his emergency cabin adjoining the pilot house, and it is not certain that it was heard by the executive officer on the bridge. The warning was also heard on the *Quincy* and general quarters was sounded, but the report was not passed on to the gunnery control stations. The *Astoria* was using her TBS to acknowledge orders regarding the change of course and did not receive the report. The *Wilson* heard the broadcast, but apparently the *Helm* did not.

By this time flares or star shells were seen. Actually the first of these seem to have appeared a minute or two before the TBS warning. There were two groups visible from the *Vincennes*. The first were almost astern. Very shortly afterward, flares or star shells and then gunfire were seen to port, in the direction of our southern force. Those astern were well below the overcast, white and evenly spaced across the sky from about 200° to 180° R. Those to the right appeared first, the others following in quick succession. They were apparently laid about normal to the course of our ships, although to one or two observers they seemed rather to parallel it. The estimates of their distance run from 3,000 to 10,000 yards.

It was not at once clear whether they were star shells or flares. Lt. Comdr. Truesdell, gunnery officer of the *Astoria*, believed they were flares: “Their interval of appearing was so short that it indicated that they could not have been fired by a single pair of guns. Also, if fired simultaneously from one battery they should appear almost simultaneously.”

It seems probable that these were the flares dropped near the transport area, which otherwise were not

---

same amount that we would normally have changed at 0130. The *Quincy* and destroyer 408 (*Wilson*) experienced some trouble in getting this information over the TBS, and it was repeated several times. At 0140 the *Vincennes* changed course to right to 315° T., the *Astoria* changing course by column movement at about 0144.” Lt. (jg) Noel A. Burkey, jr., who was officer of the deck on the *Astoria*, wrote, “At 0140 the formation started making a change of course to 315° T., the *Astoria* making her turn about 0145. About 5 minutes later the lookouts, main battery control and bridge personnel reported white flares on our port quarter.”

<sup>18</sup> For chronology of the northern cruiser action see table pp. 24–25.

<sup>19</sup> The *Ellet* at Tulagi recorded its receipt at 0146. Naturally it is impossible for the officers on our ships which were engaged to recall at precisely what time events took place. The following is based upon the sequence of events as reconstructed by our officers, with an attempt to relate and synchronize accounts.

seen from our cruisers. The direction is about right, as is the time. If this is true, the estimates were in error and they were at a considerably greater distance than they seemed. If, on the other hand, they were really only 3,000 to 4,000 yards astern, they must have been near the southern corner of the patrol square and designed to illuminate our cruiser group.

At any rate, the flares did give the *Vincennes* group a very brief warning, and it was by their light that the enemy cruisers were first identified from the *Astoria* so that fire could be opened promptly.

One or the other of the two groups of flares was seen from all of our cruisers. On the *Astoria*, R. A. Radke, Quartermaster Second Class, sighted the flares astern and then saw a ship at a considerable distance on the port bow open fire—evidently the Japanese firing on our southern force. He thereupon promptly rang the general alarm on his own initiative. Just as he pulled the switch, he received the order from the bridge to “stand by the general alarm.” At the *Quincy*’s control forward it was at first thought that the flares astern were star shells fired by our destroyers near Tulagi to locate the enemy plane which had been heard shortly before. But very soon afterwards the TBS warning was received; Capt. Samuel N. Moore was called, general quarters was sounded, all boilers were lighted off and Condition ZED was set throughout the ship. This was, however, probably about 2 minutes later than on the other ships.

Lt. Comdr. Craighill of the *Vincennes* sighted the star shells astern, but it was the flares over the *Canberra* and *Chicago* that were seen from the bridge. Comdr. William E. A. Mullan, executive officer, at once ordered general quarters sounded. He described the scene: “Almost at once there was a great display of light, and silhouettes of a group of ships southeast of Savo Island could distinctly be seen and recognized as the southern group of Allied ships. They were, I believe, on approximately the same course as the *Vincennes*, which was northwest.”

Capt. Frederick L. Riefkohl of the *Vincennes*, commanding our northern cruiser group, had been called promptly. As he stepped from his emergency cabin, to which he had retired less than 2 hours earlier, he could see three or four star shells at a distance on the port beam, and a ship firing star shells toward the southeast. Another ship to the left was firing toward the first. “I estimated,” he reports, “that *Australia* group had made contact with a destroyer. I received no report of the contact or orders to concentrate. I thought this contact probably a destroyer and a ruse to draw off my group while the main attack force passed through my sector to attack the transports. If enemy heavy ships had been sighted I expected *Australia* group would illuminate and engage them, and the situation would soon be clarified. I considered turning right to course 045° T., but felt I might be called on to support *Australia* group. I signalled speed 15 knots and decided to hold my course temporarily. Fired no star shell as I did not wish to disclose myself to an enemy approaching my sector from seaward.”

The brief warning given the *Vincennes* group was inadequate. In spite of the fact that a large proportion of the men were either on watch or sleeping near their posts, it is doubtful if battle stations were completely manned on any of our cruisers by the time searchlights were turned on them and a rain of shells followed. Lt. Comdr. Chester E. Carroll of the *Helm* describes the opening of the action: “The *Vincennes* group continued on course. A few minutes later our force was under fire, the *Quincy*

apparently being hit immediately, with large fires amidships. One cruiser immediately opened fire, followed by the other two. The point of aim of the cruisers was not clear, as some fire was to port and some to starboard.” Lt. Comdr. Walter H. Price of the *Wilson* remarks, “Our cruisers appeared to be enveloped in a plunging fire as soon as they were illuminated.”

Capt. Riefkohl’s order for an increase in speed had just gone out on the TBS when a searchlight appeared about 7,000 yards on the port quarter (250° R.). This light, which seemed to be directed at the *Astoria*, was followed at once by a second to the right, which picked out the *Quincy*, and third light still further to the right, which was turned on the *Vincennes*.<sup>20</sup> Lt. Comdr. Truesdell suggests that the enemy used destroyers ahead and astern to illuminate and to draw our fire, for the cruiser upon which the *Astoria* opened fire a moment later was to the right of a searchlight and did not have a searchlight on.

Enemy fire followed the searchlights, and a salvo seems to have landed near each of our cruisers as soon as it was illuminated. Lt. Comdr. Truesdell speculates that the enemy may have concentrated upon each of our cruisers in turn, two ships initially firing upon the leader of our column and the third ship firing upon our second cruiser. A comparison of the reports, however, indicates that our ships were taken under fire almost simultaneously, the *Astoria* at the rear perhaps slightly before the *Vincennes* in the van. It seems that for the first few minutes at least, only one cruiser was firing on each of ours.

The *Astoria* was the first of our cruisers to return the enemy’s fire. This was due to the alertness and initiative of the gunnery officer. At the first appearance of the flares, Lt. Comdr. Truesdell had ordered the main battery trained out on the port quarter. At the same time he requested the bridge to sound general quarters. Very shortly afterwards he and the ship’s spotter, Lt. (jg) Carl A. Sander, saw on the port quarter the silhouette of a Japanese cruiser which Lt. Sander identified as of the *Nachi* class. Then the first searchlight came on. Almost simultaneously, a salvo landed 500 yards short and 200 yards ahead of the *Astoria*. Lt. Comdr. Truesdell asked permission to fire. A second enemy salvo landed 500 yards short, 100 yards ahead. The next would probably be on in deflection. Receiving no answer from the Bridge, Lt. Comdr. Truesdell himself gave the order to fire, and the main battery sent off a salvo toward the port quarter. All 3 turrets fired, but it is not certain whether 6 or 9 guns participated. The range was 5,500 yards, bearing 240° R. (about 195° T.). The general alarm was still ringing and Capt. William G. Greenman, who had just been called, was astonished to hear the main battery fire as he awoke. He was just entering the pilot house when the battery fired again.

Capt. Greenman’s first impression on seeing the flares and searchlights inside the bay was that our ships had sighted a submarine on the surface and that we were firing into our own ships. Lt. Comdr. Topper, who was on the bridge, reports him as asking, “Who sounded the general alarm? Who gave the order to commence firing? Topper, I think we are firing on our own ships. Let’s not get excited and act too hasty. *Cease firing.*”

Upon this order, firing ceased. Someone on the port wing of the bridge reported searchlights illuminating our ships, while word came from main battery control that the ships had been identified

---

<sup>20</sup> This account is based on the reports of Capt. Riefkohl and Lt Comdr. R. L. Adams, gunnery officer of the *Vincennes*. Capt. Riefkohl says the first searchlight bore 205° T. On the *Astoria* it was thought that the first light was directed at the *Vincennes*.

as Japanese cruisers. By this time, too, the *Vincennes*' order to increase speed to 15 knots had been reported to the captain. Then the JA talker reported, "Mr. Truesdell said for God's sake give the word to commence firing." The captain then ordered, "Sound general quarters,"—it was in fact sounded this second time—and almost immediately, "Commence firing," with the remark, "Whether our ships or not we will have to stop them."

"I believe this remark," explains Lt. Comdr. Topper, "was caused by the splashes that had just landed ahead and to port of the *Astoria*." This was probably the enemy's third salvo, which was still about 500 yards short.

Our other two cruisers opened fire not long after the *Astoria*. On the *Vincennes* the general alarm must have been sounded very nearly as promptly. The 8-inch guns were already loaded, but control had not yet received word that the battery was manned when the first enemy searchlight appeared.<sup>21</sup> Lt. Comdr. Robert L. Adams, the gunnery officer, immediately ordered the main battery trained out to the left to pick up the target, but before the guns could be brought to bear the second and third enemy searchlights came on and an enemy salvo landed 75 to 100 yards short. The *Vincennes* replied with an 8-inch salvo, using a radar range of 8,250 yards. (This was somewhat greater than the range obtained by our other cruisers.) Simultaneously the 5-inch battery fired a broadside of star shells for illumination. Before the *Vincennes* could fire again an enemy salvo landed on the well deck and hangar, where intense fires broke out. The bridge, too, was hit, and the communications officer and two men in the pilot house were killed.<sup>22</sup> After this salvo electric power for the guns failed, but within a minute it was restored and the 8-inch battery resumed fire. By this time the ship was being hit heavily, and word came from aft that Battle II had been hit. Sky Forward and Sky Aft were hit about the same time. Only one badly wounded man survived the hit on the latter station.

Of our three cruisers the *Quincy* was hit most severely. Since it was at first thought that the star shells astern had been fired by our own destroyers, general quarters was not sounded until about 2 minutes later, when the TBS warning came through. Just before the enemy searchlights came on, the silhouettes of three cruisers rounding the southern end of Savo could be discerned from the bridge. These had three turrets forward, the middle being the highest. Apparently none of this information was passed on to the control stations, so that "the first intimation the gunnery control stations had that enemy ships were in the vicinity was when they turned searchlights on the formation, immediately followed by a salvo falling just short of the U.S.S. *Vincennes*."<sup>23</sup>

When the enemy searchlights came on, the Bridge ordered, "Fire on the searchlights." But the batteries were not yet completely manned and plot had not yet reported ready to Control Forward when the ship was hit on the 1.1-inch gun mounts on the main deck aft. Very shortly afterwards the *Quincy* was able to reply with a full nine-gun salvo. A range of 6,000 yards was used, although just before the guns

---

<sup>21</sup> According to one report this was about 1 minute after general quarters was sounded, according to another, 5 minutes.

<sup>22</sup> According to the report of Lt. Comdr. Adams, the *Vincennes* was hit immediately after firing her first salvo, but Capt. Riefkohl's and Lt. Comdr. Craighill's reports indicate that she was hit on the bridge just before the turrets fired. At any rate, the two events were very close together.

<sup>23</sup> Report of Lt. Comdr. Harry B. Heneberger, senior surviving officer.

were fired a radar range of 5,800 yards was obtained. Target angle was estimated to be 60° and speed 15 knots. (Our other cruisers assumed a target angle of 315° and speed of at least 25 knots, which was probably more accurate.) Meanwhile the ship received many hits. A plane in the port catapult caught fire, which illuminated the ship as similar casualties illuminated our other cruisers. From our other ships the *Quincy* soon appeared a mass of flames.

Thus in the first 2 or 3 minutes of action our cruisers had been hit repeatedly and set ablaze before they could fire more than one or two salvos each. While it is clear that the main enemy force was on their port quarter, crossing astern of our formation, it is just possible that other enemy ships were to starboard. Lt. Comdr. Ellis K. Wakefield, who was in sky forward on the *Astoria*, says that when our ships opened fire on the searchlights on their port quarter one of his talkers observed shooting in our direction from ships on the starboard quarter. Lt. Comdr. Wakefield thereupon "ordered sky forward to commence firing at flashes of light, apparently from gunfire, bearing about 150° R.," but he received no acknowledgment of this order. Comdr. Mullan of the *Vincennes*, remarks, "At this time [the time of the first enemy hits] there was a great deal of illumination on the starboard hand, but I do not know from what source."

When our cruisers opened fire, the *Helm* on the port bow of the *Vincennes* opened fire also. However, no target was visible and the situation was not clear, so that "cease fire" had to be ordered at once. Although it appeared that our cruisers were being illuminated from the southeast, smoke from the fires already blazing on them so obscured the picture that there could be no certainty.

Soon orders were received on TBS from the *Vincennes* for the screening destroyers to attack. Since it could not yet be ascertained in which direction the attack should be made, the *Helm* remained in formation for several minutes before heading south. At about 0200, after she had been moving south for a few minutes, a ship could be seen about 8,000 yards on the port bow, partially illuminated by a searchlight. It was close to the southern shore of Savo Island, apparently headed seaward. The *Helm* changed course to the southwest and closed at full speed, preparing to make an attack. As she approached, however, the ship was again illuminated and could be identified as one of our own destroyers. Probably it was the *Patterson*, which had trailed the enemy eastward and had lost contact about this time.

The *Wilson*, on the starboard bow of the *Vincennes*, had the advantage of having received the TBS warning and also enjoyed a clearer view of the situation. When the enemy searchlights came on, she immediately opened fire on the right hand light with all four 5-inch guns, using a range of 12,000 yards. After two salvos she had to turn to the left to keep guns No. 1 and 2 bearing. Evidently she did not receive the order to attack, for Lt. Comdr. Price remarks that the order to increase speed to 15 knots was the last he received from the *Vincennes*. After a few moments of action all three of our cruisers were seen to be on fire. As the *Wilson* continued firing rapidly, it is possible that it was her gun flashes that Lt. Comdr. Wakefield saw to starboard of the *Astoria*, although she should have been on the starboard bow, rather than the quarter.

Meanwhile the bearing of the enemy force on the port quarter was drawing rapidly astern. After the

first salvo or two the forward directors and turrets of our ships could no longer bear, and gunnery officers began to request that their ships come left.

When the first enemy salvos landed, Capt. Riefkohl on the *Vincennes* ordered speed increased to 20 knots and started a turn to the left “with a view of closing the enemy and continuing around on a reverse course if he stood in toward the transport area.” He intended to make the turn by simultaneous ship movements, but all communications had failed after the bridge had been hit, and he could send no signal. The *Quincy*<sup>24</sup> seems to have followed the lead of the *Vincennes*, while Capt. Greenman of the *Astoria*, seeing that the ships ahead were 10° to 15° to the left of the base course, ordered left rudder and full speed ahead. The *Astoria*’s speed, however, increased only slightly.

During this turn to the left our ships were taking a terrific pounding, but they continued to fire. With the *Vincennes*’ second salvo—she fired only two to port from the main battery—there was an explosion on the target and the enemy searchlight went out. The assistant gunnery officer, Lt. Comdr. Craighill, saw the target make a radical turn to the left as if it had gone out of control, after which it was lost from sight. Inasmuch as the *Vincennes* 5-inch battery, the *Wilson*, and perhaps the *Quincy* may have been firing on the same target, it cannot be determined who made the hit.

The *Quincy* was badly on fire and had received a hit in her No. 1 fireroom. Sometime very early in the engagement the bridge was hit and many of the personnel there were killed. She was firing, but the enemy was drawing astern so rapidly that after one or two salvos from the main battery, director I and the two forward turrets could no longer bear. Control was shifted to director II with orders to fire turret III. This turret, however, had just been hit and was jammed in train, so that for a few minutes not one gun of the main battery could be used.

On board the *Astoria* the interval between the order to cease fire and commence fire had been only a minute or two. After the first two salvos, turret II had reached the limit of its train (218° R.), but the order to turn left was given at about the same time as the order to recommence fire, so that the turret could soon bear again. Before the *Astoria* could resume fire, the enemy fourth salvo arrived. It was about 200 yards short, but seems to have been good for one hit on the *Astoria*’s bow. The fifth Japanese salvo was on the target, making four or more hits amidships. Fires were started in the hangar and at other points. Power for turret III was temporarily interrupted, so that the *Astoria*’s answering salvo (her third) was fired by only the six guns of turrets I and II. The enemy at this time was about 6,200 yards distant, bearing 235° R.

Having once found the *Astoria*’s range, the enemy kept it. Immediately after firing the third salvo, turret I received a direct hit. Flames sprang up, then quickly died down as the turret burned out. At the same time a hit on the barbette of turret II put the shell hoist for the right-hand gun out of commission, so that the fourth salvo was fired by only 2 guns. The range was now 6,000 yards, bearing 225° R.

The 5-inch battery seems to have opened fire about the same time as the main battery, and the 1.1-inch

---

<sup>24</sup> The *Quincy*’s report gives the impression that she started turning to starboard at the opening of the action, but it is clear from the other reports that she first followed the *Vincennes* to the left. It was actually a little later that she turned to starboard.

at the time of the captain's order to resume fire. However, either the guns or their ready service boxes were hit before many of them could fire more than 6 or 7 rounds, while the director in sky forward was hit, forcing the 1.1-inch guns onto local control.

During this time our ships were turning left, but, as Lt. Comdr. Truesdell remarked, "all ships turned too slowly, and the increase of speed was too slow to clear the next astern." As a result the *Astoria* found herself coming up into the *Quincy's* line of fire and had to turn sharply to the right across her stern to clear her. This shift to the right brought the enemy bearing astern more rapidly, so that after one or two more salvos neither director I nor turret II could bear. Control was shifted to director II, which fired another three-gun salvo from turret III, bearing 170° R., range 5,000 yards. Meanwhile turret II had trained around to starboard, and director I was soon able to fire two more salvos with both turrets. That was all, for shortly both the main battery control and director I ceased to function and turret III lost power. Only turret I was able to fire a little longer on local control.

In these few minutes the ship had been raked heavily from both quarters as the enemy crossed astern. The boat deck had been hit and was flaming after the 5-inch guns had fired about eight salvos. Power for these was lost, and what remained went onto local control until the progress of the fire soon put an end to their activity. Sky Aft reported that they were getting burned and were forced to break off communication. The bridge was hit and the helmsman fell. Another man took his place. The engine rooms were being abandoned, their crews driven out by smoke and flames drawn down their ventilators and intakes. After this the ship began to lose speed.

It could not have been long after the *Astoria* swung right across the *Quincy's* stern that the *Vincennes* at the head of our group turned to starboard. Her forward turrets had again reached their limit of train to the left, and the ship was being hit severely. The previous turn to the left had brought the ship's head around to about 275° T. when Capt. Riefkohl, in an attempt to throw off the enemy's fire and to enable the forward guns to bear, turned hard right and signalled flank speed. The engine room answered the signal, but only about 19.5 knots was reached.

While the ship was turning right two or three torpedoes crashed into the port side under the sick bay and near No. 4 fireroom. The ship "shook and shuddered" under the impact of the explosion, which seems to have been remarkably heavy. Since no flash from torpedo tubes had been seen, Capt. Riefkohl thought that the torpedoes might have been fired by a submarine. At about the same time a hit on the main battery control station aft killed most of the men there, while other hits fell on the rangefinder hoods of the forward turrets and fragments penetrated the officers' booth of turret II, seriously wounding personnel there.

After the torpedoing, power was lost for the main battery. Diesel auxiliaries were cut in for turrets I and III, but there was none available for turret II. During this turn to the right only turret III continued firing.

Until the *Vincennes* turned right, two destroyers which were thought to be the *Helm* and the *Wilson* were ahead on the starboard hand. Our cruisers' turn to the left would probably have brought them into this relative position. "One destroyer was then observed crossing our bow from port to starboard,

while the other was crossing from starboard to port. The one crossing from port to starboard may have been an enemy, but as the two vessels barely missed colliding and did not fire on one another, it is believed that they were both friendly. One DD, on our starboard hand, probably *Wilson*, was observed firing star shell and what appeared as heavy antiaircraft machine-gun fire.”<sup>25</sup>

The *Wilson*'s account of the episode explains that when the *Vincennes* turned right, she, too, turned right, unmasking her starboard battery. She had continued on this course for several minutes when “the gun flashes disclosed a *Monssen*-type destroyer close aboard the starboard bow on a collision course. In order to avoid collision, speed was increased to 30 knots and the ship swung hard left. Continued this left turn until clear of the destroyer and the battery was unmasked to port. Reopened fire as soon as possible.” By this time the *Wilson* had lost sight of all our cruisers except the *Astoria*, which was under heavy fire. She continued fire on the searchlight till it went out. Then she shifted her aim to a light to the left, which was still illuminating the *Astoria*, and fired till it went out. By that time no more targets were visible, and the location of our own forces was unknown, so the *Wilson* headed toward Savo Island.

The *Helm* does not mention the near collision, and, if the times given in her report are correct, she was in fact making her excursion to the south at that moment. This makes it appear quite possible that the second destroyer was Japanese. If it was really the *Helm*, the incident must have occurred just before she went south, for when she returned and “passed through the cruisers between the *Vincennes* and *Quincy*, the latter appeared to be stopped and to have suffered heavy damage.” The *Vincennes* was by that time firing in an easterly direction and it could be seen that our cruisers were illuminated by a searchlight to the east. The *Helm* remained near the *Vincennes* for some time, and orders were given to fire on the searchlight, but almost immediately it went out.

The *Quincy* had indeed suffered heavy damage. She had started swinging to starboard about the same time as the *Vincennes*. As soon as they could bear on the starboard quarter, turrets I and II reopened fire (turret III had been hit and jammed in train), while the starboard antiaircraft battery started firing star shells. It got off only three salvos, however, before being put out of action. After two salvos turret II exploded and burned out, and turret I was put out of action by a hit in the shell deck and a fire in upper powder. By this time the entire 5-inch battery had been knocked out by direct hits, shrapnel, explosion of ready service boxes, and by fires on board.

It was about this time that control forward received its last communication from the bridge: “We’re going down between them—give them hell!” But there was little besides fighting spirit left on the *Quincy*. Not one gun of either the main or 5-inch battery could fire, and the ship must already have been losing headway. No. 1 fireroom had been hit soon after the beginning of the action. A hit above No. 2 fireroom about the time the *Quincy* started to turn right forced its abandonment. It was believed that while she was turning a torpedo struck between No. 3 and 4 firerooms, probably about the same time the *Vincennes* was torpedoed. The No. 1 and 2 engine rooms continued to operate as long as there was steam. Then, because of the list which was developing to port, the crew left No. 2 engine room. It

---

<sup>25</sup> Capt. Riefkohl's report.

appears that No. 1 engine room was not abandoned before the ship capsized.

Soon after the 5-inch battery had been knocked out, an enemy vessel with mushroom top stacks passed about 2,000 yards to port, blazing at the *Quincy* with all her guns. Perhaps it was the same ship which Marine Gunner Jack Nelson saw pass very close along the port side of the *Vincennes* on a parallel course, raking her with fire.

It was probably very shortly after the *Quincy's* Control Forward received the last determined message from the Bridge that the latter suffered another hit which killed practically everyone in the pilot house. At about the same time a hit killed almost everyone in Battle II. By this time the boats on the boat deck were burning, the galley was in flames, the fire on the fantail was out of control, and the hangar and well deck were "a blazing inferno." Steam was escaping from No. I stack with a deafening roar. The forward battle lookout was hit, as was the 1.1-inch clipping room. The resulting flames enveloped the forward control stations and reached up to the forward sky director.

"When the flames which engulfed the forward control station subsided, an officer went to the bridge to see what the orders were regarding firing and maneuvering. He found a quartermaster spinning the wheel, trying to turn the ship to port, who said that the captain had told him to beach the ship. He had no steering control. Just then the captain rose up about half way and collapsed dead without having uttered any sound except a moan. No others were moving in the pilot house, which was thick with bodies."<sup>26</sup>

Enemy fire had stopped when the control officer received this information and ordered the abandonment of the sky control stations. These had been inoperative for several minutes. By this time "the ship was listing rapidly to port, the forecastle was awash, water coming over the gun deck to port, and fires were blazing intermittently throughout the whole length of the ship. The party aloft found nothing but carnage about the gun decks, and dense smoke and heat coming from below decks." The ship was almost dead in the water and was going over when the gunnery officer, as the senior officer present, ordered abandon ship. A minute after this group got clear, "the ship capsized to port, the bow went under, the stern raised and the ship slid from view into the depths." This was about 0235 or soon after.

The *Astoria*, after swinging right to avoid the *Quincy*, moved northward for 4 or 5 minutes "under the heaviest concentration of enemy fire." Her engine rooms were being abandoned because of the fires above them and the ship was losing speed. She next swung left and was on a southwesterly course when the *Quincy* was seen on the port bow "blazing fiercely from stem to stern." The *Quincy* still had considerable way on and was swinging to the right. For a moment it looked as if a collision was inevitable, but the *Astoria* put her rudder hard left and swung clear. The *Quincy* could be seen coasting off astern and not long afterwards appeared to blow up.<sup>27</sup>

After clearing the *Quincy*, the *Astoria* steadied out on a course of 185°. By this time only turret II was still in commission, and only No. 1 gun of the secondary battery could still fire. As the *Astoria*

---

<sup>26</sup> Report of Lt. Comdr. Heneberger, senior surviving officer.

<sup>27</sup> While the *Quincy* may not literally have blown up, it seems clear that there was a very heavy explosion aboard before she sank, which gave that impression to men on our other ships.

steadied out, an enemy searchlight appeared to the east, just abaft the port beam. Lt. Comdr. Davidson, the communications officer, climbed up to the trainer's sight of turret II and coached its guns onto the target. The turret fired and the shells could be seen to hit.

This was probably the last salvo fired by any of our cruisers. Enemy fire had been diminishing and ceased shortly afterwards, at about 0215. It was fortunate, for at about that time the quartermaster reported that steering control was lost, and the engine room advised that power had failed. Since the bridge had ceased to be useful as a control station, it was abandoned. While the ship drifted on toward the southwest the work of assembling the wounded began.

After the *Vincennes* had been torpedoed during her turn to the right, power for the main battery failed. Diesel auxiliaries were cut in for turrets I and III, but II had to go onto hand power. About the same time the forward magazines had to be flooded because of the progress of a fire in the vicinity. Steering control in the pilot house was lost and steering had to be shifted aft. Soon it was lost there too. The captain desired to turn left and attempted to do so by stopping the port engine, but communication could not be established with the engine room. At this time the explosion of another torpedo was felt. It was believed to have hit the port side at No. I fireroom.

During the turn to the right, only turret III had been able to fire, but as soon as turret II could bear to starboard it also joined in firing two salvos at a searchlight to the east. All director circuits were dead and fire was locally controlled. A hit was definitely seen, though the searchlight did not go out.

During these few minutes the ship was raked by a heavy fire from starboard. Turret I was prevented from joining in these last salvos by a hit on the starboard side of its barbette, which jammed it in train. One shell hit on top of turret II, while an 8-inch projectile penetrated its face and set fire to exposed powder. Powder in both turrets burned without exploding. Turret III, after one or two salvos, was also put out of action. Lt. Comdr. Adams, making his way along the gun deck about this time "noted many hits in the vicinity of the 5-inch battery and that there were many dead and wounded at each gun." Only No. 1 gun was still firing. After the rest of its crew had been wiped out, Sgt. R. L. Harmon, USMC, was joined by Ens. R. Peters, and it was reported that the gun scored a hit on the conning tower of a submarine which was seen at about 400 yards distance.

About 0210, searchlights, apparently from two destroyers, illuminated the ship from bearing 120° R. Capt. Riefkohl at first felt that these might be friendly and ordered a large set of colors hoisted and illuminated. They were run up on the one remaining halyard on the starboard signal yard, "but were illuminated only by enemy searchlights." A messenger was sent asking for fire on these lights, but the gunnery officer, Lt. Comdr. Adams, reported that he had no guns left with which to fire. The captain next asked for smoke to protect the ship, but none could be made.

The ship by this time (about 0210) was dead in the water and was listing to port. There was no means of fighting fires or of controlling damage, and she was swept so heavily by enemy fire that the captain was considering her abandonment in order to save his men. Before this was done, however, the fire diminished and then ceased at about 0215.

*Chronological table*

[Times are very approximate and the relation of events largely conjectural]

	<i>Vincennes</i>	<i>Quincy</i>	<i>Astoria</i>
0145	SS surfaces on port quarter. Flares astern (sighted by gunnery officer).	Flares thought to be star shells fired by own DD's near Tulagi.	Flares sighted. Main battery ordered to train out to port. Firing seen to port. General alarm sounded.
0155	Star shells and firing to port—seen from bridge. TBS warning heard by operator. Not clear that it reached any officer on bridge. Captain called. General alarm  Speed 15 knots signalled to group. Searchlights on port quarter. Main battery ordered to train out.  Enemy (5-inch?) salvo lands close. Port 5-inch battery firing star shells.  <i>Vincennes</i> hit on bridge hangar, Battle II. <i>Vincennes</i> fires first main battery salvo Power lost for main and 5-inch batteries for 1 minute. Intership communication lost. Speed 20 knots ordered. Course changed left to 275°.  Several fires on <i>Vincennes</i> .  Direct hits on Sky Forward and Sky Aft.  Second <i>Vincennes</i> salvo (9 guns). Explosion on target and searchlight goes out. <i>Vincennes</i> hit continuously. Forward turrets reach limit of train.  <i>Vincennes</i> starts turn to right. Captain orders 25 knots. <i>Vincennes</i> hit on port side by 2 or 3 torpedoes. Power for main battery lost. Main Battery Control Aft is hit. Hits on rangefinder hoods, turrets I and II.	Warning received.  General alarm Silhouettes of 3 cruisers seen rounding Savo. Bridge orders fire on searchlight. Batteries not yet ready.  <i>Quincy</i> hit on 1.1-inch gun mounts.  <i>Quincy</i> fires 9-gun salvo.  Bearing drawing rapidly aft on port side. Plane on catapult hit and afire <i>Quincy</i> follows in turn to left.  Turret III jammed in train by hit on barbettes. No. 1 fireroom hit.  Ship hit heavily.  <i>Quincy</i> badly on fire.  <i>Quincy</i> follows in turn to right.  Turrets I and II trained to starboard. <i>Quincy</i> torpedoed. Starboard AA battery fires 3 salvos before being put out of action.	TBS in use—warning not received. Japanese cruiser seen by gunnery officer.  Two enemy salvos near <i>Astoria</i> . <i>Astoria</i> fires first salvo (all turrets). <i>Astoria</i> 2nd salvo. Capt. orders cease fire.  Turret II at limit of train.  Enemy 3rd salvo short. Capt. orders resume fire. <i>Astoria</i> follows in turn to left. Enemy 4th salvo—hit on <i>Astoria</i> 's bow. Enemy's 5th salvo lands amidships. Boat deck and hangar on fire. Turret III temporarily loses power. <i>Astoria</i> 's 3rd salvo. (Turrets I and II). Turret I hit and burns out. Turret II fires 2 guns. Turret II and III—6 guns.  Turret II at limit of train.  <i>Astoria</i> turns hard right to clear <i>Quincy</i> 's line of fire.  Turret III—3 guns.  Turret II trained to starboard.
0200			

Chronological table—Continued

	<i>Vincennes</i>	<i>Quincy</i>	<i>Astoria</i>
0205	<p>Steering control lost. Diesel auxiliaries cut in for turrets I and III. Turret II goes onto hand power. Forward magazine flooded. Turret III fires during turn to right. Destroyers nearly collide ahead. Power lost in after engine room. <i>Vincennes</i> hit heavily from starboard. Captain desires to turn left but has no steering control. Communication with engine room lost</p> <p>Another torpedo hits <i>Vincennes</i>.</p> <p>Turret I jammed in train by hit on barrette; powder burns. Turrets II and III fire 2 salvos to starboard. A hit observed. Main battery control station hit—turrets go onto local control. Turret II hit in face and burns. Ship illuminated by DD's to starboard.</p>	<p>Is it at this time that enemy destroyer pass along port side on parallel course?</p> <p>Bridge is hit. Battle II is hit.</p> <p>Turrets I and II fire salvo to starboard.</p> <p>Turret II explodes and burns out</p> <p>Turret I out of action. Enemy ship rakes <i>Quincy</i> from 2,000 yards on port side.</p>	<p>Turrets II and III—6 guns.</p> <p>Ship turns to port.</p> <p>Turret II—3 guns to port quarter.</p>
0210	<p>No gun able to fire.</p> <p>Ship stopping and listing to port</p> <p>Heavily raked by enemy fire. Enemy fire diminishes. Enemy searchlight goes off Enemy fire ceases.</p>	<p>Bridge is hit again. Forward control station in flames. Ship on fire throughout her entire length and listing to port.</p>	<p>Near collision with <i>Quincy</i>.</p> <p>Turret II fires and hits searchlight.</p> <p>Steering control lost. Power lost. Bridge abandoned.</p>
0215			

As the list was increasing rapidly, the captain soon afterwards gave the order to prepare to abandon ship. The few serviceable life rafts were put over and the wounded put on them. The life jackets which had escaped the fire were distributed, but too few remained, and it is probable that some men were lost by drowning. At 0230 the captain gave the order to abandon ship. Ten minutes later he left the bridge. Water was already coming over the upper deck. Lt. Comdr. Craighill, who left just before the captain, describes the end: "The ship was then listed to about 45° and was going over at an increasing rate. The top decks, particularly amidships, were brightly lighted by the numerous fires and as we kicked away I could see no signs of life about them, except one man on the well deck, who eventually made his way to the starboard bulwark, just forward of the catapult tower and climbed over the side. When we were

about 200 yards off the ship she finally reached her beam ends, seemed to hesitate before the stacks went under and, with burning planes and cranes crashing to port and into the water, she turned slowly over and went down bow first.”

The last of our ships to have contact with the enemy was the *Ralph Talbot*, on patrol northeast of Savo. After sighting and reporting the enemy plane before the battle, this destroyer had seen no further evidence of the enemy until about 0150, when gunfire was seen in what was thought to be the direction of XRAY. She then reported by TBS that nothing was in sight north of Savo, and stood in toward the island at 25 knots. She was at about the center of her patrol course at 0215 when she was illuminated by a searchlight about 10,000 yards on her port bow. The light swung off, but 2 minutes later she was again illuminated by a searchlight, now about 7,000 yards on her port beam, and the illuminating ship started firing. She fired about six salvos, all but two too short. Lt. Comdr. Joseph W. Callahan was convinced that the other ship was a friendly destroyer from Tulagi, and so did not return the fire, but headed west at maximum speed, zigzagging to throw off the fire. One shell, however, struck a torpedo tube, killing two men and putting the tube out of commission. Meanwhile the *Talbot* was flashing her fighting lights and broadcasting on the TBS that she was being fired upon by a friendly ship. Apparently in response to this, fire ceased.

The *Ralph Talbot* was still illuminated by the destroyer’s searchlight when she saw indistinctly an enemy cruiser thought to be of the *Tone* class on a northwesterly course on her port quarter, crossing from port to starboard. Within a minute the cruiser had crossed to the starboard quarter, turned two searchlights on our destroyer and opened fire with its secondary battery and after turret. The *Ralph Talbot* opened fire on a range finder range of 9,000 yards, but after the first salvo obtained a radar range of 3,300 yards, which was used for subsequent salvos. The *Talbot*’s own searchlight could not be used, as a near-hit had severed the cables leading to it.

The *Talbot* then turned hard right to fire her starboard torpedoes, but one tube failed to fire. Immediately afterwards, a shell landed in the after part of the chart house, destroying the radars and the automatic gun train and elevator orders. The destroyer next swung left to fire her port torpedo battery, but it was discovered that fire-control circuits had been cut by the hit. Only one torpedo was fired by local control.

The enemy now had the range, and three 5-inch hits landed in rapid succession, one in the wardroom, one on the starboard torpedo battery, and one on No. 4 gun. This last killed 21 men. The *Talbot* had the satisfaction of seeing a shell from her No. 3 gun land directly on one of the searchlights, which flared up and went out. This ended the action, for the cruiser turned off its other light and could no longer be seen.

The *Talbot* was listing 20° to port and had a bad fire in the chart house and pyrotechnics locker. In an attempt to correct the list she jettisoned all removable gear from the port side as she limped slowly to the westward of Savo Island. It was not until almost noon that she was able to proceed and rejoin the transport forces.

Although the *Talbot*’s report speaks with apparent certainty of her being illuminated and fired upon by

a friendly destroyer “from Tulagi” just before her contact with the cruiser, it seems very probable that this identification was a mistake and that it was no accident that the searchlight remained on her until the cruiser could pick her out. Neither the *Ellet* nor the *Henley*, our two destroyers from the Tulagi area, recounts any such incident, and neither was near the *Talbot* at the time.<sup>28</sup> The only one of our destroyers in the area was the *Helm*. She reports observing a ship illuminated and firing at 0220. She headed for the scene of action at 30 knots, but in about 5 minutes a flash of lightning revealed the destroyer as one of our own. The firing, according to the *Helm*, lasted for only a few salvos. It seems clear that the *Helm* was merely an observer of the action and neither illuminated nor fired upon the *Talbot*.

How the enemy had passed the *Blue* without being detected is unexplained. Except for the planes seen before midnight, her first intimation of the presence of the enemy was the opening of gunfire to the southeast. She then observed one or more aircraft operating over the battle area “showing intermittent flashing red and white lights as though using them for signalling.”

At about 0215, when she was some 9 miles west of Savo, she sighted to the southeast a “harmless, small, two-masted schooner with slow speed auxiliary engine, on easterly course.” It was perhaps the same schooner which the *Hull* sank with her main battery west of Kukum on the 9th. It was then thought that she was directing Japanese troop movements.

A little later the *Blue* witnessed the action of the *Ralph Talbot* northeast of Savo. Then about 0250, while on a southerly course, she sighted an unidentified ship rounding Cape Esperance. Comdr. Harold Williams closed until about 0325, when the ship was identified as the *Jarvis*. Badly damaged by a torpedo in the air raid of the 8th, she had been ordered by Admiral Turner at 1800 to sail for Fila Harbor, Efate. The *Hovey* was to escort her, but failed to make contact, as she was expected to leave via Lengo Channel. This was the last seen of the *Jarvis*.

### “XRAY” TRANSPORTS

The enemy had ceased fire on the *Vincennes* group about 0215, and headed out to sea, briefly engaging the *Ralph Talbot* about 0320–23. Within half an hour both the *Quincy* and the *Vincennes* had gone down. The *Canberra* remained afloat until morning, when she was sunk by our own destroyers, and the *Astoria* finally succumbed to her wounds about noon.

No one in our forces, however, could know that the Japanese had completely withdrawn and that their entire effort had been thrown into the half-hour between 0145 and 0215. When at about 0235, while the *Quincy* was going down, flares were dropped over Florida Island, evidently to silhouette our transports off Tulagi and Gavutu, it seemed likely that more action was yet to come. Consequently “alarms and excursions continued until dawn, and it was only with daylight that the enemy’s retirement and our own situation became clear.

Back at XRAY, as soon as the first flares appeared, unloading ceased, boats cast off and headed for the beach, and all ships were darkened and got underway promptly. Under cover of darkness and rain,

---

<sup>28</sup> There is no report from our transport destroyers stationed there, but so far as is known they remained in the harbor.

they moved out Lengo Channel to the eastward at about 10 knots. Some reports indicate that this was done without orders, but the truth seems to be that some of the ships failed to receive the orders issued and merely followed the others. There was great tenseness as our ships laid to, expecting attack momentarily and knowing that it would be difficult to distinguish friend from enemy. The *Betelgeuse* diary records that “all ships were covered at all times with our guns in case they turned out to be enemy. It is most remarkable that none of our ships in the transport group fired on any other ship during the entire period, although all ships must have had each other covered and the slightest mis-move on anyone’s part would have caused much indiscriminate firing.”

The minesweeper *Hopkins*, on which was the Commander of the Minesweeper Division, offers an example of the confusion which prevailed that night. After receiving from the Task Force Commander a dispatch which could not be broken down, the *Hopkins* could not again contact the Commander. She then failed to find the transports near XRAY. She next stood out around the northwest corner of Guadalcanal, the Task Group Commander having “received no information as to existing situation, the intentions of TFC, the disposition of own or enemy forces. He was unable to make contact with any transports and was doubtful as to the *Hopkins*’ position . . .” A request for a verification of the dispatch resulted in another cypher to which the *Hopkins* had no key.

Admiral Crutchley on the *Australia* had very little more success in obtaining a picture of the situation. After his midnight conference he had decided not to return to his southern cruiser group. The *Australia* had just begun a patrol of her own within the destroyer circle at XRAY when the flares were dropped over the beach and gunfire was seen near Savo. Admiral Crutchley at once ordered the *Australia* to a position about 7 miles west of XRAY to patrol on courses 060°–240°, in order to be in a position to intercept any of the enemy who might break through our cruisers. At the same time he ordered those of our destroyers not engaged to concentrate on the *Australia* in this position. This order, however, was sent out in a cypher not generally understood, and most of our destroyers proceeded to concentrate at the previously assigned rendezvous 5 miles northwest of Savo.

Meanwhile Admiral Crutchley was able to obtain only the most fragmentary news of the action. The *Chicago* reported her damage and that the *Canberra* was burning near Savo, but nothing could be learned of the *Vincennes* group. At about 0500 Admiral Crutchley, acting upon orders from Admiral Turner, instructed the Commander of Destroyer Squadron FOUR to investigate the condition of the *Canberra* and *Patterson* (it was believed the latter might have been damaged) and to abandon and destroy them if they could not join in the withdrawal planned for 0630. At 0545 the situation remained obscure, and Admiral Crutchley sent a message to the escort forces ordering them to be prepared to give battle at dawn near the transports.

## OUR DESTROYERS

Two of our destroyers, the *Ellet* and the *Henley*, were stationed off Tulagi. The *Henley* received Admiral Crutchley’s order to concentrate at 0206, deciphered it correctly, and attempted to join the *Australia*. She failed to find the cruiser, however, nearly collided with the *Mugford*, wandered about in the heavy rain and fog for several hours and finally turned to the XRAY area about dawn. On the way toward the beach she made sound contact with a submarine and dropped depth charges without positive results.

The *Ellet* had received *Patterson's* warning of strange ships entering the harbor and saw the gunfire which followed. As the transports seemed safe within Tulagi inner harbor, the *Ellet* closed the scene of action at once. "Ceiling was low, visibility was reduced by moderate rain. Identification of own and enemy force was difficult." The action was over before she arrived. Upon approaching a burning ship, she found it was the *Astoria* and began to pick up survivors who had been forced overboard, shortly moving along to rescue survivors from the *Quincy*. Before 0700 she had picked up nearly 500 officers and men.

Of the destroyers stationed at XRAY, *Dewey* and *Hull* appear to have remained in the vicinity through the action. The *Mugford*, however, upon seeing gunfire to seaward, lighted off two more boilers and headed for the destroyer rendezvous at 25 knots. This was about 0210. After steaming a few minutes she encountered (and nearly collided with) the *Henley*. After some time near the latter and after some conversation with ComDesDiv SEVEN, Comdr. Robert Hall Smith, the *Mugford* moved on toward Savo. She passed men in the water before reaching the rendezvous, where she found the *Selfridge*.

That destroyer, with ComDesRon FOUR (Capt. Cornelius W. Flynn) aboard, had received Admiral Crutchley's message shortly after 0200, misunderstood it as an order to concentrate northwest of Savo, and headed northwest at 20 knots. On the way she passed the burning *Astoria* and men in the water. After waiting at the rendezvous for a while, she saw the *Mugford* come up and fall in astern. The *Helm* and *Wilson* were also present. The *Selfridge* was returning to the transport area when she was ordered to stand by the *Canberra*. Upon arriving in the vicinity of the cruiser at 0640 she found the *Patterson* already removing personnel.

### END OF THE CANBERRA

When the enemy left the *Canberra* she was lying helpless and afire approximately 5 miles southeast of Savo Island. Capt. Getting was fatally wounded, and the executive officer, Comdr. J. A. Walsh, R. A. N., took command. He at once initiated measures to save the ship. Gasoline tanks were jettisoned and torpedoes fired. Bucket brigades were formed and enough progress was made in fighting the fire to permit some ammunition to be reached and dumped overboard. All magazines had been flooded. All rafts and cutters were lowered, and as many wounded as possible were placed in the cutters.

About 0300 the *Patterson*, which had been directed by the *Chicago* to stand by the *Canberra*, approached and was asked to come along the windward side amidships to supply hose for fighting the fire. As the *Patterson* drew up, however, the remaining ready service ammunition on the *Canberra* began to explode and the cruiser signalled, "You had better wait." It was not until an hour later that the destroyer could finally secure along her port side to pass over four hoses and a pump. By this time the fires had gained considerable headway, and the ship was listing about 17° to starboard. Heavy rain squalls with thunder and lightning passed over from time to time. They made the sea choppy, but not enough water fell to aid appreciably in controlling the fires.

The *Patterson* about 0500 received Admiral Crutchley's message stating that it was urgent that the Task Force leave the area by 0630, and that if the *Canberra* could not be put in condition to depart by that time, she should be abandoned and destroyed. When this order was communicated to Comdr.

Walsh he “realized that the situation was hopeless” and decided to abandon ship. Some of the wounded had already been transferred to the destroyer, but abandonment of the ship was delayed because none of the *Canberra*’s crew would leave until all wounded had been removed.

This process was presently interrupted by a radar contact made by the *Patterson* about 8,000 yards on the port quarter. The contact slowly approached to 3,000 yards. The *Patterson* challenged three times without receiving any reply. Then she ordered all lights out on the *Canberra* and hastily got underway, cutting or parting all lines.

The *Patterson* then illuminated the strange ship, and was at once fired upon. The *Patterson* fired three salvos in reply before it was realized that the ship resembled the *Chicago*, and an emergency identification signal was fired. Thereupon both ships ceased fire. Fortunately no damage resulted from this exchange.

When this incident occurred, the *Chicago* was en route from the XRAY area to investigate gunfire seen in the direction of Savo. At 0525 a vessel which she had been tracking by radar illuminated her. Although orders had been given not to fire, two guns of the starboard 5-inch battery at once fired on the searchlight. The officer in charge of the starboard battery immediately ordered cease fire, but when the destroyer returned the fire, the starboard 5-inch and 1.1-inch control officers ordered fire. The captain then ordered cease fire. The destroyer made what the *Chicago* considered the wrong identification signal, but both ships ceased fire.

Meanwhile on board the *Canberra* preparations continued for removing the rest of the wounded and abandoning ship. Dawn was breaking when about 0550 a cruiser and a destroyer were seen on the port beam, and soon afterward the *Chicago*, the *Patterson* and the *Blue* could be identified. The two destroyers completed taking off personnel. The *Patterson* had on board 400 survivors and the *Blue* about 250, who were subsequently transferred to the transports at XRAY. When the *Canberra* was abandoned she was listing about 20° and was burning furiously amidships.

This task was scarcely completed when (0640) the *Selfridge* arrived in the vicinity of the *Canberra*. She was returning from the destroyer rendezvous with the *Mugford* when at 0540 she received orders that all ships were to retire at 0630. The *Mugford* on the way toward the transport area stopped to pick up survivors from the cruisers, chiefly from the *Vincennes*, while the *Selfridge* received orders to stand by the *Canberra*. On the way she again passed the *Astoria*, still burning. The sun was just rising when she approached the Australian cruiser, the last of the personnel of which were being removed by the *Patterson*.

The *Selfridge* was then ordered to sink the *Canberra*. She fired at her 263 rounds of 5-inch shells and 4 torpedoes. Only one of the torpedoes exploded under the cruiser. One passed the *Canberra* and exploded in the wake of the *Ellet*, which was coming up at full speed.

While the *Selfridge* was firing these shells into the *Canberra*, the *Ellet*, which had spent the last few hours picking up survivors of the *Quincy*, came up about 0730. The *Ellet* from a distance observed the *Selfridge* firing on the burning cruiser. Being unable to contact the *Selfridge* by TBS, the *Ellet*

concluded that she was engaged with a disabled Japanese cruiser. She therefore closed at full speed, setting course to cross the bow of the cruiser. At 5,000 yards she fired her first salvo, which was on for several hits. She then ceased fire on information from CornDesRon FOUR that the cruiser was the *Canberra*. The *Selfridge's* large expenditure of ammunition having failed to send the *Canberra* down, the *Ellet* was a little later ordered to complete the job. Choosing a favorable angle she fired a torpedo into the cruiser, which turned over to starboard and sank by the bow at 0800.

### END OF THE ASTORIA

When the enemy ceased fire at 0215, the *Astoria* had lost power and steering control. The captain abandoned the now useless bridge and took a station on the communication deck forward of turret II. About 400 men, 70 of whom were wounded, were assembled on the forecastle deck.<sup>29</sup> The ship had a 3° list to port, but the first lieutenant, Lt. Comdr. Topper, after an investigation reported that the ship was tight forward of the engineering spaces and that there were no serious fires below the second deck. The fires amidships prevented access aft, and conditions there were unknown, but the ship appeared to be on fire all the way from the navigation bridge aft.

There was, however, a group of about 150 men, headed by the executive officer, Comdr. Frank E. Shoup, Jr., on the fantail of the vessel, similarly unaware that there were any other survivors on the ship. Comdr. Shoup and others had abandoned Battle II about the time of the near-collision with the *Quincy*. Because all regular access was cut off, they came down by means of a rope, after lowering the wounded. All mainmast stations were abandoned about the same time. As it was feared that the enemy was closing in to finish off the ship, turret III was kept manned, although it had no power, and the 1.1-inch guns were kept manned until the ship was abandoned. The 8-inch magazine remained cool and so was not flooded until sometime later when smoke began to enter it. The blowing up of the *Quincy* astern, however, caused considerable apprehension about a magazine explosion.

Life rafts were lowered over the side and secured, and the wounded were put on them with enough able-bodied men to care for them. Those who were too badly injured to be moved were lashed to buoyant mattresses.

Meanwhile an effort to salvage the ship was underway. The engineer officer, Lt. Comdr. John D. Hayes, had appeared on deck, almost overcome by smoke, but soon recovered and assisted in directing this work. He thought that the engine rooms were intact and most of the firerooms. Upon reception of this encouraging report, bucket brigades were formed and were soon making sufficient headway to be able to penetrate a little into the hangar. The work was greatly assisted by rain, which began about 0330.

Meanwhile the captain had organized a similar effort forward and made some progress in driving the fire aft along the starboard side. During this work it was discovered that No. 1 fireroom was completely in flames, and the fire in this area appeared so extensive that the captain ordered the flooding of the magazines. The 8-inch rooms were flooded, but it seemed doubtful that the flooding of the 5-inch

---

<sup>29</sup> This was Capt. Greenman's rough estimate. The Bagley reports that she took off 450, of whom 185 were wounded.

magazines was successful. A particularly intense and persistent fire in the wardroom area defied all attempts to subdue it, and ultimately balked the effort to save the ship. A gasoline-powered handy billy had been rigged up, but the small stream of water it could pump into this fire had very little effect. The sound of this pump about 0400 was the first indication to those on the fantail that there was other life on the ship. In spite of these efforts, the fire continued to spread until it reached the ammunition in the hoists, causing frequent explosions.

The *Bagley* was finally attracted by blinker and was asked to come alongside and place her starboard bow against that of the *Astoria*. The wounded were transferred, followed by the able bodied. While the *Bagley* was pulling away a flashing light could be seen on the stern of the *Astoria*, welcome evidence that there were men alive in that part of the ship.

Since there seemed to be no dangerous fire aft on the *Astoria*, the *Bagley* signalled to those on the stern that they had been seen and then turned to the more urgent task of rescuing survivors from the *Vincennes* on rafts or in the water and those who had been forced by fire to jump overboard from the *Astoria*. At daylight the *Bagley* put her bow alongside the *Astoria*'s stern and took off the men.

Inasmuch as a survey of the situation indicated that the cruiser might yet be saved, a salvage crew of about 325, headed by the captain and all able bodied officers, was put back aboard. The list had not increased, and the engineer officer reported that he thought he could get up steam if he could get power. The fires seemed to have moderated and the prospects seemed good.

Bucket brigades were again formed, and the engineer officer and his men went to work. About 0700 the minesweeper *Hopkins* came up and attempted to take the *Astoria* in tow. The first line parted, but a cable from the *Astoria* held and the *Hopkins* was making progress, in spite of the cruiser's tendency to swing sideways, when the minesweeper was called away.

A report to the Task Force Commander that there was a possibility of salvaging the *Astoria* if power and water were made available brought up the *Wilson* about 0900. She began to pump water into the fire forward, but an hour later she too was called away. Word was sent that the *Buchanan* was coming to help fight the fire and the *Alchiba* to take the ship in tow. Before they arrived, the fire gained new headway and the list increased to 10°. There were frequent explosions, and after a particularly heavy one at 1100, yellow gas could be seen coming to the surface abreast the forward magazine. When the list increased to 15° the holes in the port side began to take water. Attempts had been made to plug them, but these were ineffective. When the *Buchanan* came up at 1130 it was already evident that the ship would not remain afloat much longer. By 1200 the main deck was awash to port, and the order was given to abandon ship. The crew left with the two life rafts and with powder cans which had been lashed together.

By the time the executive officer and captain left, the list was close to 45° and water on the main deck had reached the barbette of turret III. Soon afterward "the *Astoria* turned over on her port beam and then rolled slowly and settled slightly by the stern. The bottom at the bow raised a few feet above the water as she disappeared below the surface at 1215."

Before the *Buchanan* had finished picking up the survivors from the water, she made a submarine contact and left to track it, but returned later and, with the *Alchiba*, picked up the entire salvage crew.

### THE DAY OF 9 AUGUST

During the battle our aircraft carriers were south of San Cristobal Island, roughly 150 miles from Savo. Although they had on the evening of the 8th requested permission to retire, it was not received from COMSOPAC until 0330 on the 9th. This was, of course, more than an hour after the battle, but our carriers withdrew without having received any real information of what had taken place. At 1000 on the 9th Admiral Kinkaid on the *Enterprise* noted in his diary that planes returning from Tulagi saw “no evidence of surface action there or enemy ships,” and that night, “still only meager reports of surface action today, whereas prompt reports of situation might have permitted aircraft units from task group to participate and engage enemy forces present.”

It proved impractical for our Task Force to leave at 0630 as planned. The task of transferring and caring for the wounded from our cruisers necessitated some delay. Furthermore, Tanambogo did not fall completely into our possession until the afternoon of the 9th. More Marines had to be landed there and in the Tulagi area, and it was absolutely necessary to land further supplies. At 0630 orders were issued that departure be delayed until 0700, and that transports continue unloading until that time. “About 0700,” the *Zeilin* reports, “after several hatches had been closed up and boats hoisted in, word was received that the ship would not get underway at 0700 and to continue with the unloading.”

At 0840 there was an air raid warning, and our ships again had to cease unloading and stand out in formation to repel the attack which did not materialize. About 1120, when our ships were returning to the anchorage, they received orders to hoist all boats as quickly as possible and to prepare to leave the Guadalcanal area. Those in the Tulagi area were told to have their boats hoisted by 1830.

All these delays had seriously retarded the unloading of supplies, which was particularly urgent in the Tulagi area. The case of the *Betelgeuse* was probably typical: “Although the *Betelgeuse* was in the unloading area from 0650 August 7th until 1440 August 9th (a period of 55 hours and 50 minutes), the major part of this time was used up in awaiting orders to land after a beachhead had been secured, ceasing unloading due to orders from the beach, getting underway and coming to anchor, underway at sea to avoid the enemy, manning general quarters stations, scattering and recalling boats, diversion of ship’s boats to assist in unloading of other ships.”<sup>30</sup> As a consequence, our ships departed without having unloaded all supplies. (The *Betelgeuse* estimated that 50 percent remained on board.)

The transports from the XRAY area left by Lengo Channel for Noumea at 1530.<sup>31</sup> Those in the YOKE area continued unloading a few hours more and did not depart till 1900, but these extra hours were not enough and the Marines in the Tulagi area were left with meager supplies.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The *Betelgeuse*’s unloading time was divided as follows: 7 August, 3 hrs. 50 min., 6 hrs. 40 min.; 8 August, 4 hrs. 00 min., 0 hrs. 35 min., 7 hrs. 20 min.; 9 August, 1 hr. 55 min., 2 hrs. 00 min.

<sup>31</sup> According to plans for a Local Naval Defense Force for Guadalcanal and Tulagi, a total of 12 tank lighters, 20 T-boats with 2 depth charges each, and 30 TR boats with 5 officers and 236 enlisted men were sent ashore before our transports sailed. Some additional men and boats were unavoidably left in the area.

<sup>32</sup> The 6,100 Marines in the Tulagi area were left with 39,000 rations, 3,000,000 rounds of .30-caliber ammunition, 30,000 rounds of

## OBSERVATIONS

“The fact must be faced that we had an adequate force placed with the very purpose of repelling surface attack and when that surface attack was made, it destroyed our force,” said Admiral Crutchley. After full allowance for the element of surprise and for the fact that the attacker at night enjoys an immense advantage, there remain many questions about the action which cannot be answered.

It is unexplained how the enemy managed to pass the two destroyers stationed to give warning of just such an attack. Visibility of course was very low. The enemy might have escaped radar detection for a while by approaching close to the shore of the islands, but to reach Savo Island he had to cross open water, and at this point our radars should have picked him up easily. The nature of the radar search conducted by the two destroyers was not reported. It was suggested, without any evidence, that their search may have been intermittent, and not continuous. If this is true, the enemy could have crossed the open water at a time when the radar was not in actual operation. Admiral Crutchley suggested that our failure could be explained by the enemy’s having detected our patrolling destroyers from the air and having made a wide circuit to the westward, approaching close along the shore of Guadalcanal.

Of less importance but of considerable interest is the problem of the “something” seen close aboard the *Patterson* at the beginning of the engagement, and the “dark objects” seen between our ships by the *Chicago*. They may explain the fact that both the *Chicago* and the *Canberra* were struck by torpedoes which could scarcely have been fired from the enemy cruiser line.

Because the enemy cruisers came in very close to Savo Island, their destroyers may well have been on their starboard bow, perhaps at some distance. If they failed to turn eastward quickly as did the cruisers, they might have passed through our formation. It seems probable, however, that in spite of the poor visibility, enemy destroyers would have been recognized at the close range at which they passed.

Secondly, it is possible that the “seaplane tenders or gunboats” reported in the Melbourne dispatch were in fact tenders for motor torpedo boats, and that some of these were present. The restricted waters, smooth sea, and poor visibility were well suited to their operation.

The most likely conjecture is that enemy submarines were operating on the surface in coordination with the attacking cruisers. A lookout on the *Vincennes* saw a submarine surface just as the action began. Capt. Riefkohl believed his ship might have been torpedoed by a submarine, and, at the close of the action, the last 5-inch gun on his ship was reported to have hit the conning tower of a submarine. The following morning several of our destroyers made sound contacts, and the *Mugford* believed that she sank a submarine.

The attacking ships were never seen with sufficient clarity to make identification certain. Admiral Crutchley reported, “The consensus of opinion assesses the enemy force as comprising one 8-inch cruiser (which I think might have been the *Chokai*) and two light cruisers of the 5.5-inch type. Probably there were three destroyers. This would correspond to the force reported in the Melbourne warning.

---

.45-caliber. The 10,900 Marines in the Guadalcanal area were left 567,000 rations, 6,000,000 rounds of .30-caliber and 6,000,000 rounds of .45-caliber ammunition.

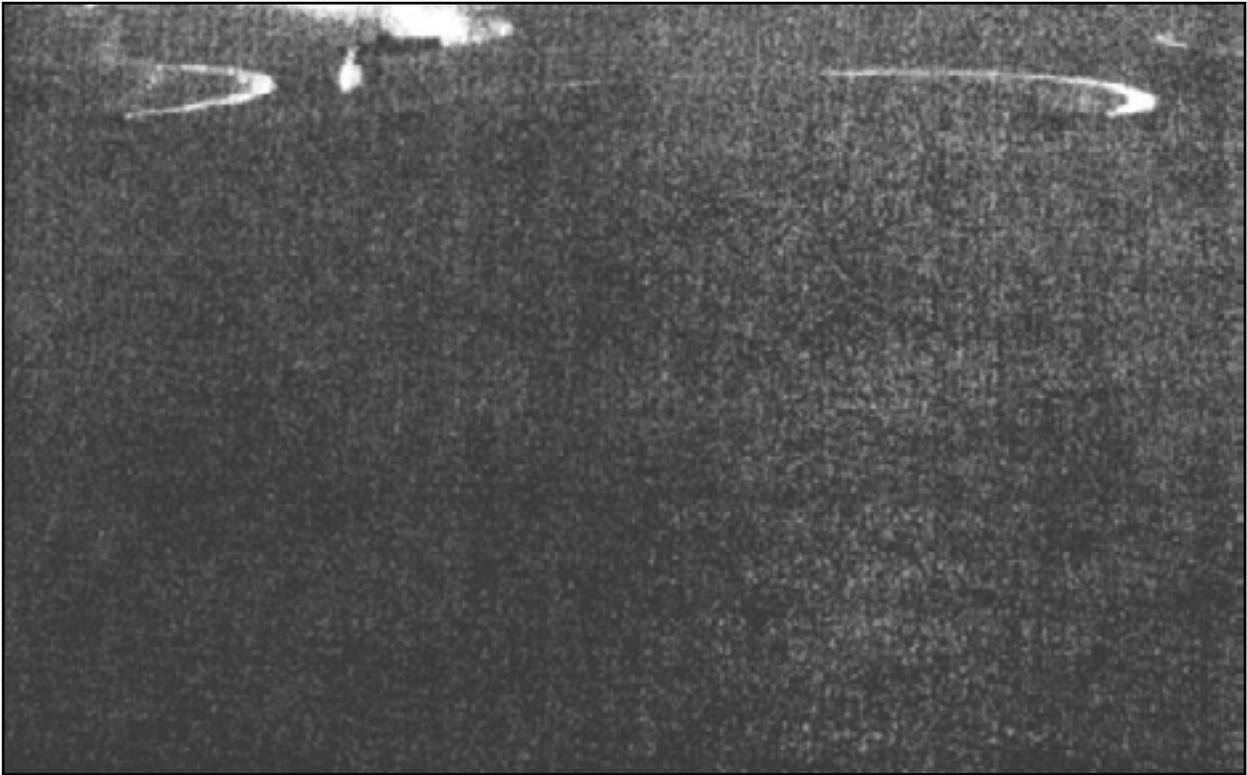
There is some question as to whether the enemy operated in one or two groups. The latter suggestion came from some officers of the *Vincennes* group who believed that they had been caught in a cross fire.

This could be explained by the fact that the enemy crossed astern of this group at such speed that the leading vessels of the enemy column might have been firing on our ships from their starboard quarter while the last ships of the column were still firing from the port quarter. Admiral Crutchley remarked, "The *Vincennes* suggests that the other enemy force consisted of destroyers. As the enemy had two separate transport groups to attack, there seems to be good reason for dividing his force into two sections, but if this were so, the enemy destroyer force apparently destined to be the one sent against Squadron Y at Tulagi was not intercepted by any of our patrols and it becomes difficult to explain why they did not go on to attack their real objective." The fact that the enemy planes dropped flares over Tulagi considerably later than over Guadalcanal indicates that the enemy plan was probably for a single force to attack first one and then the other.

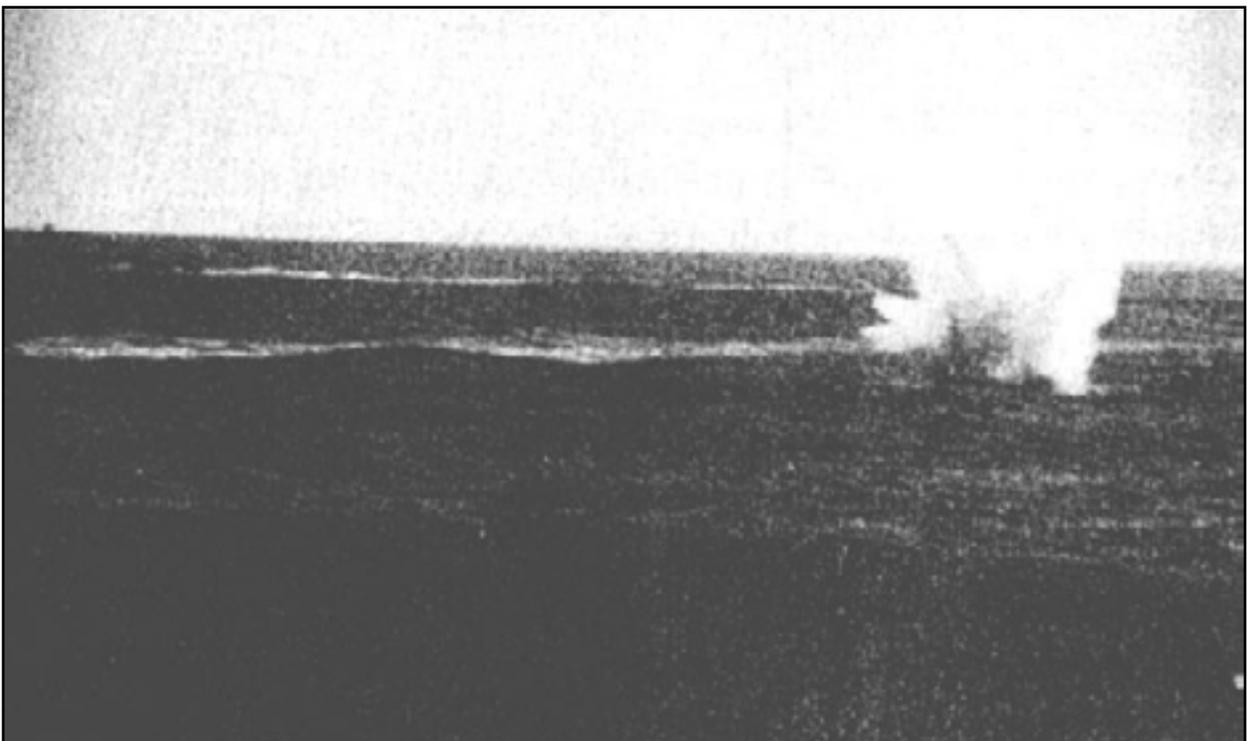
It seems certain that our ships scored several hits on the Japanese, but there was no evidence that we inflicted any considerable damage. None of the enemy ships was seen to be seriously on fire, and apparently all cleared the area at high speed.

The redeeming feature of the battle was the splendid performance of our officers and men. They had been on the alert for days and had had about 48 hours of continuous, active operations immediately before the battle. In spite of this, their conduct under the most trying circumstances was beyond praise, and they made it, in the happy phrase of one of our officers, "a night in which heroism was commonplace."





*Enterprise and screen maneuvering during attack.*



*Japanese dive bomber crashes off starboard bow of Enterprise.*



# The Battle of the Eastern Solomons

23–25 August 1942

## INTRODUCTION

A period of relative inactivity followed our successful occupation of the lower Solomons on 7–8 August and our severe losses in the night action off Savo Island on the 9th. During this “breathing spell” of about 2 weeks we carried out small-scale reinforcing operations for the Marines in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area, while the Japanese employed surface units and aircraft in an attempt to prevent this reinforcement. Daring enemy attacks on the small convoys carrying supplies and munitions to the Marines considerably retarded the strengthening of our positions.

At the same time, the enemy rapidly brought reinforcements to the Rabaul (New Britain) area for a major attack on our newly won footholds in the Solomons.

Between 9 and 23 August, groups of Japanese cruisers and destroyers bombarded Guadalcanal with relative impunity almost nightly. Operating in the close waters between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, these enemy ships would have been good targets for carrier planes and surface ships, in both of which we were superior numerically for a time. However, in order that our carriers' presence might be concealed from the enemy, we operated our task forces well to the south of Guadalcanal, out of range of hostile search planes. Consequently, the Japanese not only succeeded in causing us damage and seriously restricting our flow of supplies, but also they took advantage of the passing days in which they were not attacked to bring up powerful reinforcements.

We were aware of the steady accumulation of Japanese strength in the Rabaul area, having been informed of it by air reconnaissance, and other intelligence means. By 23 August whatever local fleet superiority we had enjoyed had vanished, the enemy having on the scene of impending action a force estimated as follows:

3–4 carriers—*Zuikaku*, *Shokaku*, *Ryujo* and possibly a fourth smaller carrier.

1–2 battleships.

7–15 heavy and light cruisers.

10–20 destroyers.

15 or more transports, cargo ships and oilers.

166 land-based bombing and fighting planes.

## DISPOSITION OF OUR FORCES

The three carrier task forces which participated in the initial Solomons attack operated to the southeastward thereafter. Their mission, briefly, was: (a) to support the Tulagi-Guadalcanal garrisons,

(b) to cover the Espiritu Santo-Noumea line of communications, (c) to cover the movement of our aviation ground crews, equipment and supplies into the Solomons, and (d) to destroy enemy forces encountered. Our combined strength was approximately 3 carriers, 1 fast battleship, 5 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser and 18 destroyers.

Our fourth and remaining carrier task force, built around the *Hornet*, was kept in readiness at Pearl Harbor, and on the 17th, when events indicated that the enemy would commit a large part of his strength in the South Pacific, was dispatched to the scene of impending conflict. However, the *Hornet* group arrived on the 29th, too late to participate in the action under discussion.

The three available task forces, combined as Task Force FOX<sup>1</sup> under command of Vice Admiral Frank J. Fletcher in the *Saratoga*, included the *Enterprise* group, under Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, and the *Wasp* group, under Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes.

Also available was the Marine Air Group at Guadalcanal, consisting at that time of approximately 12 scout bombers and 20 fighters, and the long-range patrol planes attached to Air Forces, South Pacific, consisting of 39 PBY's and 30 B-17's. The patrol planes, under the command of Rear Admiral John S. McCain, were making daily searches from bases at New Caledonia and in the New Hebrides.

By the 23d, our surface units were operating about 100 to 150 miles southeast of Guadalcanal in full expectancy that the Japanese soon would move. However, a combination of fueling needs and imperfect intelligence reports concerning the location of enemy carriers resulted in our being deprived of the *Wasp* group at the very moment when it was most needed. About 1700 on the 23d Admiral Fletcher received a dispatch stating that all Japanese carriers were north of Truk. Consequently, Task force NEGAT, including two heavy cruisers and seven destroyers in addition to the *Wasp*, was sent south at 1830<sup>2</sup> to top off. This left at Admiral Fletcher's disposal Task Forces FOX and KING, composed as follows:

*Task Force FOX:*

1 carrier:

*Saratoga* (flagship of Admiral Fletcher), Capt. DeWitt C. Ramsey.

2 heavy cruisers:

*Minneapolis* (flagship of Rear Admiral Carleton H. Wright), Capt. Frank J. Lowry.

*New Orleans*, Capt. Walter S. DeLany.

5 destroyers:

*Phelps* (Capt. Samuel B. Brewer, ComDesRon ONE), Lt. Comdr. Edward L. Beck.

*Farragut* (Comdr. Francis X. McInerney, ComDesDiv Two), Comdr. George P. Hunter.

*Worden*, Lt. Comdr. William G. Pogue.

*MacDonough*, Lt. Comdr. Erle Van E. Dennett.

*Dale*, Lt. Comdr. Anthony L. Rorschach.

---

<sup>1</sup> Task Force numbers have been omitted in the interest of security. Flag symbols for the first letter of the surnames of commanding officers have been substituted.

<sup>2</sup> All times used are Zone minus 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>.

Task Force KING:

1 carrier:

*Enterprise* (flagship of Rear Admiral Kinkaid), Capt. Arthur C. Davis.

1 battleship:

*North Carolina*, Captain George H. Fort.

1 heavy cruiser

*Portland* (flagship of Rear Admiral Mahlon S. Tisdale), Capt. Laurance T. DuBose.

1 light cruiser (AA):

*Atlanta*, Capt. Samuel P. Jenkins.

6 destroyers:

*Balch* (Capt. Edward P. Sauer, ComDesRon SIX), Lt. Comdr. Harold H. Tiemroth.

*Maury*, Lt. Comdr. Geizer L. Sims.

*Benham*, Lt. Comdr. Joseph M. Worthington.

*Ellet*, Lt. Comdr. Francis H. Gardner.

*Grayson* (Comdr. Harold R. Holcomb, ComDesDiv 22), Lt. Comdr. Frederick J. Bell.

*Monssen*, Comdr. Roland N. Smoot.

### EVENTS OF THE 23d

The first positive evidence that the Japanese were moving on Guadalcanal was the sighting at 1040 on the 23d of an enemy transport force. This force, comprising four transports supported by two cruisers and three destroyers, was sighted by one of COMAIRSOPAC's long-range search planes 250 miles north of Guadalcanal, standing south at an estimated 17 knots. About this time Task Force FOX was in latitude 10° S., longitude 163° E. The *Enterprise* as duty carrier had conducted the dawn search to a distance of 180 miles, eight SBD's covering sectors 345° to 045°. As was later learned, the enemy was out of range. However, it was significant that our scouts sighted two Japanese submarines proceeding south at high speed, presumably screening and searching ahead of the enemy's main body.<sup>3</sup> The first of these submarines was located at latitude 07°30' S., longitude 162°15' E., on course 180° by Lieut. Turner F. Caldwell, Jr., who bombed it without visible effect at 0725. At 0815, two other scouts piloted by Lieut. Stockton B. Strong and Ens. John F. Richey sighted a submarine at latitude 06°48' S., longitude 163°20' E., on course 200°. Both our planes dropped bombs close aboard as the submarine crash-dived, and when it resurfaced twice soon thereafter, strafed it. Some damage was believed done.

The dawn search planes returned at 1020.

Meanwhile, following the receipt of COMAIRSOPAC'S contact report on the enemy occupation force, the *Saratoga* launched an attack group at about 1510, consisting of 31 SBD's armed with 1,000-pound bombs and 6 TBF's armed with torpedoes. (As was learned subsequently, the enemy changed course to the northwest at about 1300. This information, based on a PBY contact, was not received by the

---

<sup>3</sup> Also of interest regarding the enemy's search and screening tactics was the interception on the 22d of a Japanese four-engine Kawanishi flying boat by an *Enterprise* fighter plane. The enemy aircraft was picked up by radar scouting at 5,000 feet, 55 miles from Task Force FOX. Lieut. Albert O. Vorse shot it down at a distance of 25 miles from our force.

*Saratoga* until around 0100 on the 24th, and as a result her striking group was launched on a hopeless mission.) Following instructions, these planes, with the exception of 1 torpedo plane which was forced back to the carrier after failing to find the enemy, proceeded to the airfield completed by the Marines at Guadalcanal and spent the night there.

A Marine attack group was launched from Guadalcanal at 1645 with the enemy occupation forces as its objective also, but failed to make contact.

Like the *Saratoga* planes, it received no word of the enemy's change of course.

While the *Saratoga* and Marine striking groups were endeavoring to find the enemy, the *Enterprise* launched an afternoon search at 1450. At 1530, two SBD's of this group piloted by Ens. George G. Estes and Ens. Elmer Maul sighted and attacked an enemy submarine in latitude 08°54' S., longitude 162°17' E., on course 160°. Both pilots scored near-hits with their 500-pound bombs, and a large oil slick evidenced almost certain damage to the enemy.

The *Saratoga* striking group spent an uncomfortable night on Guadalcanal. Most pilots and crews slept in their planes, and all were aroused about 0200 by an enemy submarine bombarding the Marine shore positions.

Originally it had been planned for the group to rendezvous with the *Saratoga* at 0800 on the 24th, but this plan was changed after a conference on the island. Comdr. Harry D. Felt, the *Saratoga* Air Group Commander, decided to keep his planes in readiness on Henderson Field until the Marine scout planes had completed their morning search. Word was sent to Admiral Fletcher that the group would rendezvous with the carrier at 1100 instead of 0800. When the Marine search proved negative, the group, minus two dive bombers which were forced back to the island field, returned to the *Saratoga* about 1130. They immediately were refueled and rearmed and were launched to attack a Japanese carrier located by a search plane 2 hours earlier.

### **EVENTS OF THE 24th**

The essentials of the action of the 24th were simple. The opposing forces made air contact at about the same time. Our planes attacked the Japanese not long after their aircraft had dive bombed us. In terms of ships as well as planes we inflicted far more damage than we received. Most pronounced was our ability to destroy enemy planes, whether in air combat or by anti-aircraft fire. Air losses decided the issue, and the Japanese, all but stripped of carrier aircraft support, broke off the fight although their powerful surface force was still largely intact. However, in detail the story of the battle presents difficulties of narration because of the many overlapping phases. In an effort to present a clear picture, each major phase has been told below in its entirety.

Task Force FOX had pursued a northerly course during the night of the 23d, the two carrier groups proceeding together tactically but actually separated by about 5 miles. (The course made good between 1200 on the 23d and 1200 on the 24th was 347°T.)

Our position at 0800 on the 24th was approximately latitude 09°06' S., longitude 162°51' E. (east of

Malaita Island). The weather cleared to a marked degree during the early forenoon, making operating and flying conditions excellent. However, the wind was from the southeast, and later in the morning, when it became evident from enemy submarine and plane contacts that the Japanese were aware of our position, frequent turns into the wind by our carriers to launch or retrieve planes considerably delayed our efforts to close the enemy to the northward.

#### *Air Search and Patrol*

*Enterprise* planes again made the dawn search, 20 SBD's taking off at 0630 to cover a sector from 290° to 070° T., to a distance of 200 miles. No contacts were made and all planes returned at 1050. However, at 1105 Lieut. Roger B. Woodhull, flying intermediate air patrol, sighted and unsuccessfully attacked a Japanese submarine in latitude 09°21' S., longitude 163°35' E., on course 180°.

In the meantime, the *Enterprise* had picked up a report from COMAIRSOPAC that one of his planes at 0935 had sighted a Japanese force consisting of one carrier, two heavy cruisers, and one destroyer in latitude 04°40' S., longitude 161°15' E., on course 180°, north of Malaita. This report was received at 1017. The enemy's 0935 position placed him 281 miles from Task Force FOX, bearing 343°. At 1158 the *Saratoga* intercepted a second report on the same enemy formation transmitted by another of COMAIRSOPAC's planes.

Not satisfied with available information, Admiral Fletcher at 1210 ordered the *Enterprise* to conduct another air search and informed Admiral Kinkaid that the *Saratoga* striking group was being held in readiness pending receipt of more definite word concerning the enemy.

Our 1315 position was latitude 08°56' S., longitude 163°03' E., and at this point the *Enterprise* launched a 23-plane search to cover sector 270° to 090° to a distance of 250 miles. These aircraft, which remained airborne until after the enemy planes had attacked our force, made the following contacts:

1. At 1440 a small carrier, believed to be the *Ryujo*, a heavy cruiser, and three destroyers bearing 317 degrees T., distance 198 miles from our force. Word of this contact did not reach the *Enterprise* until 1548. The delay was attributed to the fact that fighter direction was using the same general frequency employed by the scout planes, which could have drowned out the contact reports, and to the existence of local interference which developed when the carrier was operating at high speed.
2. At 1500 two large carriers, four heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, and at least eight destroyers bearing 340° T., distance 198 miles from our force. No contact report was received by the *Enterprise* and the existence of the Japanese force was not known until the scout plane which made it returned aboard about 1840. The two large carriers were believed to be *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*.
3. At 1510 three heavy cruisers, three to five destroyers, with other ships, possibly cruisers, bearing 347° T., distance 225 miles from our force. This report was received promptly.

On the basis of these contacts, the enemy formation was spread out through an arc 60 to 80 miles wide, centered at about longitude 162° E., steering south.

Several of the *Enterprise* search planes attacked enemy ships after making contacts. Lieut. Ray Davis and Ens. Robert C. Shaw of Bombing Squadron SIX each dropped a 500-pound bomb at either the *Shokaku* or *Zuikaku*. Lieut. Davis' bomb hit about 5 feet off the starboard side, abaft amidships, and Ens. Shaw's some 20 feet off the starboard quarter. Both pilots dived through heavy antiaircraft fire from the carrier and screening ships. There were about 20 planes on the carrier's deck and 7 or 8 in the air. One Zero started a run on our planes, but was shot down by the fire of one of his own cruisers.

Lieut. George T. Howe, Jr., and Ens. Robert D. Gibson, also of VB-6, dive bombed the largest cruiser in the enemy formation which included no carrier. Each released a 500-pound bomb, one being a near-hit off the starboard quarter and the other off the port bow.

Lt. Comdr. Charles M. Jett, commander of Torpedo Squadron THREE, and his wing man, Ens. Robert J. Bye, made horizontal bombing runs on the *Ryujo*, dropping four 500-pound bombs about 150 feet astern of the enemy carrier. They encountered no enemy planes, observing only four or five on *Ryujo*'s deck.

Lieut. John N. Myers and Machinist H. L. Corl also of VT-3, were attacked by Zeros while maneuvering to bomb the *Ryujo*, and Corl was shot down.<sup>4</sup>

Several of our scouts exchanged shots with enemy planes which were returning from their attack on our Force. Four were forced down, the pilots and crews of three being rescued by destroyers. The fourth plane landed on Stewart Island, and its pilot and crew also were saved.

The scouts returned about 1715 and had to remain in the air until the Japanese planes attacking our force were beaten off. They were warned by radio to stand clear of the *Enterprise*, but several pilots did not receive the message and consequently found themselves in the thick of the fight. It was felt generally that the Japanese attack group followed our returning search planes back to the fleet.

#### *The "Saratoga" Attack Group*

The *Saratoga* attack group, which had been held in readiness pending the outcome of the second *Enterprise* search flight, was launched at 1435 with the *Ryujo* as its objective. The group originally consisted of 30 dive bombers and 8 torpedo planes and was led by Comdr. Felt, the Air Group Commander. One bomber and 1 torpedo plane were forced back by mechanical difficulties. While en route with the remainder of the group, about 1440, Comdr. Felt intercepted a report from a friendly search plane stating that an enemy carrier, 1 heavy cruiser, and 2 destroyers had been sighted some 75 miles northeast of the position of the *Ryujo* as reported by the *Enterprise* planes.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Although wounded, Delmer D. Wiley, Radioman Third Class, Corl's rear seat gunner, managed to inflate his rubber boat, and after drifting alone for 15 days, reached a small island where he was befriended by natives. On April 11, 1943, 218 days after the action, Wiley returned to American-held Florida Island.

<sup>5</sup> This sighting, and the fact that Army B-17's claimed hits on a small carrier in the same vicinity 4 hours after the *Saratoga* group had attacked and presumably sunk the *Ryujo*, made it appear likely that the Japanese had four aircraft carriers—two large and two small—in

Comdr. Felt altered course to cover the sighting report intercepted from the search plane, but failed to make contact and altered his planes' course southwestward. At 1606 the *Ryujo*, a cruiser,<sup>6</sup> and three destroyers were sighted in latitude 06°30' S., longitude 160°45' E., steering a southwesterly course at about 30 knots.

The weather in the enemy's vicinity was excellent, ceiling unlimited, visibility 20 miles with a light breeze from the southeast.

As Comdr. Felt approached, he ordered seven dive bombers and two torpedo planes to attack the cruiser and the remaining planes to concentrate on the carrier. The attack began at 1620. As our planes drew near, the *Ryujo* turned into the wind and launched one or two planes, but as soon as the first bomb fell she turned hard right and continued in a tight clockwise circle throughout the attack. As the bombing progressed, Comdr. Felt noted that the *Ryujo* was avoiding direct hits and ordered the planes previously detailed to the cruiser to desist from attacking her and join in the assault on the carrier.

Scouting Squadron THREE attacked first, diving, as did all planes, from about 14,000 feet from the northwest quadrant. Of fifteen 1,000-pound bombs, two were very near or hit the side of the *Ryujo*, six were near-hits, and the rest were wide of the mark. The squadron commander, Lt. Comdr. Louis J. Kirn, reported that the *Ryujo* was smoking heavily as a result of the near-hits. One rear seat man in the squadron witnessed the destruction of an enemy plane when it flew into the spout of water thrown up by one of our bombs.

There were seven or eight enemy planes near the *Ryujo* at a low altitude. These made ineffectual passes at our SBD's. Lieut. Fred J. Schroeder and his rear seat man shot down a torpedo plane about a mile from the formation.

Bombing Squadron THREE attacked next, obtaining three direct hits and several near-hits out of thirteen 1,000-pound bombs released. Pilots said the *Ryujo*'s deck from amidships aft was smoking fiercely, with flames shooting out from the hangar deck. About four Nakajima type 97 dive bombers attempted to interfere. One was shot down by J. V. Godfrey, Aviation Radioman Third Class, a rear seat gunner.

Comdr. Felt made his dive just ahead of VB-3, scoring a hit on the flight deck just abaft and to the left of amidships.

The TBF's of Torpedo Squadron EIGHT attacked last, when the dive bombers had about completed their work. Three torpedo planes approached from the starboard bow and two from the port bow, gliding in at 200 knots and releasing from 200 feet altitude at an average range of 800 to 900 yards. Three preliminary "passes" were made because dense smoke from the bomb hits obscured the target. One certain and two possible torpedo hits were scored on the *Ryujo*, which was now fatally damaged. A torpedo which missed the carrier hit and blew up a destroyer.

---

this area.

<sup>6</sup> This ship was described as a heavy cruiser by several of the senior officers of Task Force FOX, as well as by CINCPAC, but the pilots of VT-8 who torpedoed her called her a light cruiser.

In the meantime, the two torpedo planes which had just been ordered to attack the cruiser failed to receive the redirection to release at the *Ryujo*. These two planes, without support of any kind, and in the face of antiaircraft fire and the attacks of enemy fighters, pressed home their attacks and obtained a hit on the cruiser. The pilots, Ens. Corwin F. Morgan and Ens. Robert A. Divine, were warmly praised for their persistence. Both returned safely but Ens. Divine's plane was badly shot up.

The attack group rendezvoused and returned to base in two separate sections. At 1725 15 planes of VS-3 together with 3 of VB-3 sighted a group of 18 enemy bombers, 9 torpedo planes and 3 fighters in estimated latitude 07°45' S., longitude 162°10' E. The movements of this Japanese flight were later to cause us considerable anxiety.

At 1740 the same group encountered four Japanese dive bombers flying in the opposite direction, and altered their own course to pass beneath them. As the enemy went over, our free gunners brought their combined fire to bear, and shot down three aircraft and damaged the fourth.

They next sighted 3 enemy dive bombers at 1814, but the enemy fled as our planes turned toward them. These 18 planes landed aboard the *Saratoga* about 1845.

The second group of *Saratoga* aircraft—three from VS-3 and seven from VB-3—made contact on opposite course with four enemy dive bombers at 1730. Two of the enemy were shot down in flames by our SBD's.

All these planes but one, received by the *Enterprise*, landed on the *Saratoga* after sunset. Not a pilot, crewman, or plane of the *Saratoga* attack group was lost.

#### *Guadalcanal attacked*

Just as the *Saratoga* attack group was taking off, the carrier's radar detected a large group of unidentified planes bearing 350°, distance 112 miles. These planes faded off the screen at 103 miles on estimated course 220°, which would have brought them to Guadalcanal. The airfield there was attacked about an hour later (1540) by twin- and single- engine bombers of a carrier type, supported by land-type Zero fighters. This, plus the fact that the *Ryujo*'s deck was all but empty when she was sighted by *Enterprise* search planes around 1440,<sup>7</sup> makes it probable that *Ryujo* planes participated in the attack on Guadalcanal. Marine fighters of VMF-223 shot down 5 twin-engine bombers, 5 single-engine bombers, and 11 Zeros, with the loss of 3 F4F's.

#### *The Second Attack Group*

While our first, or *Saratoga*, group was striking the *Ryujo*, the *Enterprise* held ready a small attack group made up of planes which were not employed in the search for enemy ships. This consisted of 11 SBD's, 7 TBF's, and 7 F4F's. The idea of sending these planes off to attack the *Ryujo* was considered earlier in the afternoon, but was abandoned in the face of approaching darkness, it being felt that our planes would not be able to return before nightfall. Later, however, the approach of enemy planes

---

<sup>7</sup> Enemy planes did not attack our force until 1711, which would mean that *Ryujo* planes would have had to have been air-borne nearly 3 hours before taking part in that action.

necessitated their launching, which was completed at 1708 just before the Japanese attack group dived on our ships. When our aircraft were air-borne, all except the fighters were ordered to attack *Ryujo*. The bombers were given the alternative of landing on Guadalcanal if they considered it more expedient than trying to find their way back to the *Enterprise*.

At the same time as the *Enterprise* planes were sent off, the *Saratoga* launched her remaining SBD's and TBF's, two planes of VB-3 and five of VT-8. The *Saratoga* pilots had manned their planes only for the purpose of taxiing them forward. While this was being done, word was received of the impending enemy air attack, and the planes were ordered to clear the ship. When they were airborne they received orders to rendezvous with the *Enterprise* planes and combine to attack enemy ships in latitude 06°10' S., longitude 162°50' E. No information was received as to the target assigned to the *Enterprise* planes, and it was assumed that they had been given the same objective. However, the *Saratoga* planes did not make contact with the *Enterprise* planes, and proceeded alone. Arriving at the assigned position at 1755, they turned northwestward and at 1805 sighted an enemy formation consisting of four heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, and six to eight destroyers in latitude 06°10' S. longitude 162°20' E., on course 150°. The TBF's attacked through a heavy curtain of antiaircraft fire, obtaining a hit on one of the heavy cruisers. One pilot could not release his torpedo, probably due to failure to open the bomb bay doors. Two of the five planes did not return to the ship, the pilot and crew of one being located on the 28th safe on San Cristobal Island. The other plane presumably was shot down.

The two SBD's of the *Saratoga* group, having more altitude on the approach than the TBF's, sighted a battleship about 10 miles to the west of the large formation attacked by the torpedo planes. The battleship was believed to be the *Mutsu*. Diving through heavy antiaircraft fire, our planes obtained one direct hit and one possible hit or near-hit with 1,000-pound bombs.

The *Enterprise* planes, meanwhile, did not find the *Ryujo* or any other Japanese ship. The torpedo planes were unable to rendezvous with the SBD's, and after searching for the enemy until after dark at 1900, headed home. Previously one TBF had been forced back because of a landing gear failure. Of the remaining five, one crashed into the barrier while landing on the *Enterprise* and the other four landed safely on the *Saratoga* about 2200. They had jettisoned their torpedoes in order to lighten their planes for the return trip. The amount of gasoline with which the TBF's landed aboard varied between 4 and 40 gallons.

The free gunner of one TBF, C. L. Gibson, Aviation Radioman Third Class, was credited with shooting down an enemy dive bomber which attacked his plane shortly after it left the carrier.

The 11 SBD's, led by Lieut. Turner F. Caldwell, Jr., landed just after dark on Guadalcanal. These planes remained at Guadalcanal for several weeks, operating with the Marine Scouting Squadron, VMS-232.

The experience of Lt. Comdr. Maxwell F. Leslie, commander of the *Enterprise* air group, typified the difficulties which beset planes of the second attack group. Lt. Comdr. Leslie's plane was launched after the rest of the *Enterprise* aircraft were in the air. Hardly was his SBD airborne when the Japanese planes began their dives. His job being to lead the attack, Comdr. Leslie circled our formation endeavoring to rendezvous with his planes, but they already had departed. Of their departure without him he

wrote, “This was a correct decision which was justified by their limited gasoline supply, approaching darkness<sup>8</sup> and mutual plane support.”

As he circled the formation Lt. Comdr. Leslie was fired on by the *North Carolina*, sustaining minor damage. He was also attacked by an enemy dive bomber which his rear gunner believed he shot down.

About 1850, while approaching the position in which he expected to find the enemy ships, Lt. Comdr. Leslie encountered broken clouds. Knowing that these would obscure the moon, which was full, he directed all planes to attack and return at their discretion. As no answer was received, he assumed that his inter-plane transmitter was out of order.

At 1905 Lt. Comdr. Leslie heard a plane of VT-3 report being over the target and told the squadron to attack. It later developed that the VT-3 plane was over Roncador Reef, which in that light resembled several ships moving at high speed.

Lt. Comdr. Leslie landed aboard the *Saratoga* about 2333.

#### *Air combat patrol*

The *Enterprise* had been directed by Admiral Fletcher to “take over all duties on return of search planes,” and consequently maintained inner air patrols for both carrier forces in addition to conducting the afternoon search. A message from the Admiral about 1630 specified that the *Enterprise* also should exercise fighter direction control. Lt. Comdr. Leonard J. Dow, assisted by Lieut. Henry A. Rowe, took over this task.

Besides the 8 or 10 SBD’s available for intermediate air patrol, the two carriers had a combined strength of 54 fighters (F4F-4’s).

Generally speaking, the SBD’s on patrol when the Japanese air attack materialized flew out of range of our antiaircraft fire and waited until the action was over before returning to land. However, several of these planes took part in the air fighting. Ens. Howard R. Burnett, observing the direction of the enemy planes’ dives, flew his SBD into the path of their retirement, and attacked several with his two fixed guns. At 1715 he shot down an Aichi type 99 dive bomber.

Four or more fighters from one or the other carrier were kept aloft after 1030. At 1100 Lieut. David C. Richardson, of the *Saratoga*’s Fighting Squadron FIVE, was vectored out by the fighter director, and shot down a Japanese Sikorski-type S44 or S45 flying boat about 55 miles distant from our formation. This plane evidently had been shadowing our ships. A second flying boat “snooper” was destroyed by another VF-5 pilot, Lieut. Richard Gray, at 1320, only 8 miles from our formation. This plane was not identified as to type. An *Enterprise* pilot, Machinist D. C. Barnes of Fighting Squadron SIX, shot down a third Japanese observation plane within sighting distance of our force at about the same time. It was a single-float, single-engine aircraft.

The three “snoopers” were detected by radar, and radar also picked up the approaching Japanese

---

<sup>8</sup> Sunset was at 1833.

attack group. At 1632 the fighter directors of both the *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* reported a large flight of unidentified planes bearing 320°, distance 88 miles. The echo of this flight faded from the screen almost immediately, and was not picked up again until 17 minutes later. Altitude of the “bogeys” was estimated at 12,000 feet. The presence of enemy submarines and search planes near our Task Force made it almost certain that our presence was known to the Japanese, and an air attack was anticipated. Therefore Lt. Comdr. Dow requested that all available *Saratoga* fighters be launched, and all ships were notified by TBS and warning net of the position of the unidentified flight. Thereafter fighters landed for fuel or ammunition on whichever of our two carriers had her deck clear to receive them at the moment they required servicing.

The second radar contact, recorded by Lt. Comdr. Dow at 1634 was a smaller unidentified flight bearing 315°, distance 44 miles. Vectored out to intercept, two of our combat sections made contact, and reported that the “bogeys” were *Enterprise* planes returning from a search flight.

In the meantime, two *Saratoga* fighter sections were directed out on bearing 320° at sufficient altitude to intercept the large flight originally detected.

At 1649 the large unidentified flight reappeared on the radar screen bearing 320°, distance 44 miles. The altitude again was estimated at 12,000 feet. The warning to the Task Force was repeated.

At this time we had 38 fighters in the air; two sections having landed and five others having taken off since 1630. They were distributed as follows:

Three sections over the carriers between 10,000 and 15,000 feet.

Nine fighters bearing 325°, distance 40 miles, circling at 15,000 feet.

Four sections en route to intercept the flight contacted at 1649.

At 1653 the *Enterprise* launched the seven fighters spotted with her small attack group, and these F4F's were ordered to circle overhead at 15,000 feet. Also, all fighters were told to be on the lookout for low-flying enemy torpedo planes, since a *Saratoga* plane had just reported “bandits” at 8,000 feet.

An *Enterprise* fighter made the first contact with the enemy attack group at 1655, bearing 300° at a distance of 33 miles from our formation. The pilot reported that there were 36 Japanese bombers at 12,000 feet, with many other planes both above and below them. By this time we had 53 fighters in the air, and all were informed of the contact. Very soon afterward the fighter radio circuit became clogged with unessential transmissions such as “Look at that one go down,” or “I'm in high blower, where are you, Bill?” This chatter, a distinct violation of radio discipline, so jammed the circuit that the fighter director received very little information, and he in turn was unable to disseminate what little he received. However, perceiving that several pilots were attacking Zeros, Lt. Comdr. Dow transmitted the general instruction that our fighters should concentrate on enemy dive bombers and torpedo planes rather than fighters.

At 1659, when the enemy flight was about 20-25 miles from our formation, it split into numerous smaller groups which came in from 300° to 000°.

Despite the fact that the enemy flight was tracked all the way in from 44 miles distant, allowing our planes 22 minutes in which to intercept, several dive bombers attacked effectively. The enemy's success was attributed to our poor radio discipline, which precluded satisfactory fighter direction, and to the interposition of enemy fighters between our fighters and his bombers.

CINCPAC's comment regarding the fighter direction was that while it was "not as effective as it should have been," it nevertheless was "distinctly superior at long range to any results achieved heretofore."

Not including "probables" or damaged planes, Fighting Squadron SIX shot down 12 Aichi type 99 dive bombers, 10 Zeros, 1 Me-109, and 3 Mitsubishi type 97 torpedo planes, a total of 26 aircraft. Fighting Squadron FIVE accounted for 14 dive bombers and 3 Zeros. Thus 43<sup>9</sup> aircraft of the enemy attack group were destroyed by our fighters. We lost 5 fighter pilots in action, 3 from the *Saratoga* and 2 from the *Enterprise*. While these figures are impressive, a post-action study of the operations of 38 VF-5 and VF-6 fighters which were attached to the *Saratoga* shows that the results could have been more satisfactory had more fighters been in a position to intercept the enemy prior to the commencement of his attack. According to this study, prepared by Lt. Comdr. Leroy C. Simpler, commanding officer of VF-5:

Four pilots first engaged the enemy prior to his "push-over."

Seven pilots first engaged at the push-over point or in the dive.

Seven pilots first engaged during retirement.

Twelve pilots were engaged by enemy fighters before they could attack his dive bombers or torpedo planes.

Eight pilots never engaged at all.

#### *Air attack on the Enterprise force*

The enemy air attack group is believed to have consisted originally of about 75 planes—36 dive bombers, 12 torpedo planes, and 27 fighters. Although no proof is available, it is probable that these planes came from the *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*. At any rate, all the enemy's torpedo planes were turned back or shot down, and about 6 of his dive bombers were destroyed before reaching the release point, so that approximately 30 dive bombers remained for our ships to contend with. For some reason, possibly because it was nearest in their line of flight, all enemy planes concentrated on the *Enterprise* group of vessels. The *Saratoga* force, about 8 miles away on the disengaged side, was not attacked.

There was ample warning of the approaching enemy planes. As already has been stated, the Japanese attack group first was picked up by radar 88 miles away, and was tracked continuously, during the last 22 minutes of its approach. However, probably because of the many planes in the air near our force, both enemy and friendly, it was not possible to track the Japanese aircraft with fire-control radar. The result was that fire was not opened until the Japanese planes had begun their dives.

Task Force FOX had gradually built up speed in expectation of an air attack, so that by the time it materialized our ships were making 27 knots. Both carrier forces were in circular anti-aircraft

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix, page 63, for a tabulation of credited air victories.

disposition VICTOR ONE.<sup>10</sup> In the case of the *Enterprise* group, the support distance was 2,000 yards for the cruisers, and 1,800 yards for the destroyers. The *North Carolina* was on station 2,500 yards off the carrier's port quarter. The course was 080° when the attack commenced, and thereafter varied widely, due to radical maneuvering. The *Enterprise* had been in Condition AFIRM and at general quarters since 1335.

Weather conditions in the vicinity of our ships were excellent. Ceiling and visibility were unlimited, one pilot reporting that he could see the force 80 miles distant. The wind was force two. The sun bore 285°. Our position was latitude 08°38' S., longitude 163°30' E. (east of the Stewart Islands).

The *Enterprise* radar lost track of the enemy group when it came within its minimum range, but, on the basis of previous tracking, radar plot reported at 1709 that "the enemy planes are directly overhead now!" In spite of this warning and the excellent visibility, the first plane was sighted after it already had entered its dive. Effective enemy plane camouflage and the fact that the first dives were made on the *Enterprise* from the port quarter, out of the sun, probably accounted for this belated visual contact. In the case of the *Enterprise*, the first plane was sighted at 12,000 feet by a 20-mm. battery officer. Although the target was well beyond effective range, he promptly opened fire with one gun, thus calling the ships' attention to the attacker and giving them a point of aim.

The *Enterprise* was the prime target, although the *North Carolina* was also singled out by several dive bombers. Planes dived at the carrier at intervals of about 7 seconds for a period of approximately 4 minutes, interrupted only by two short lulls of 20 or 30 seconds duration. All dives were steep—65 or 70 degrees—and were, to quote Capt Davis, "well executed and absolutely determined." Bombs were released at from 1,500 to 2,000 feet, and pull-outs were generally low.

The volume of our antiaircraft fire was tremendous. The 5-inch fire of the *Enterprise* and of the screening ships which could bring their batteries to bear was such that several planes broke off their attacks, and others were seen to emerge from bursts on fire. Three planes disintegrated as though directly hit. The 1.1-inch mounts and 20-mm. guns, used in local control, also were extremely effective. These small-caliber automatic weapons were particularly useful in destroying planes which completed their dives and attempted to retire after pulling out low over the formation. Although all ships' accounts differed in some respects, the following excerpts from the *Grayson*'s report are illuminating:

"The first plane crossed from starboard to port, coming up on *Grayson*'s starboard quarter at an altitude of about 300 feet, strafing as he passed. This fire slashed the canvas top to No. 3 gun, and wounded several of the gun crew and adjacent 20-mm. crew. *Grayson*'s after 20-mm. groups trained on the plane and poured in a well-directed, concentrated fire. It was almost impossible to miss. The plane staggered, then crashed close aboard on the port beam.

"The next three planes to get clear of *Enterprise* came along the starboard side of *Grayson*. The first of these was brought down by the *North Carolina*, whose volume of fire was so great that the ship

---

<sup>10</sup> In this position cruisers and destroyers form a circular screen around the aircraft carrier, the movements of which they follow, maintaining their distance and true bearing, though not their relative bearing, from the carrier.

appeared in flames amidships. The second, passing at what appeared to be slow speed, provided a close target for *Grayson's* 20-mm. battery. This plane was hit repeatedly, and crashed about 100 yards on *Grayson's* port bow. The third plane, and the last to pass near the *Grayson*, was fired on only by one 20-mm. gun, for the others in the starboard battery were reloading or firing at distant targets. This plane flew into the terrific low-altitude barrage being laid by the *North Carolina* and *Atlanta* and was not seen thereafter.”

At least 10 planes crashed near the *Enterprise*, and others flew away smoking heavily. Some of those which crashed had never pulled out of their dives. Two burning planes narrowly missed striking the carrier's flight deck.

The *Enterprise* sustained three direct hits and several close misses. Near the end of the third minute of the attack a near-hit barely cleared the flight deck on the port quarter, striking the water under the fantail. The resulting explosion under the overhang of the flight deck raised the deck about a foot, bulging the steel plates, and shattering the wooden deck. A gunner in a 20-mm. sponson projecting abaft the fantail was hurled up in the air and 15 feet across the flight deck, landing in another gun sponson on the port quarter. He was not seriously hurt. (CINCPAC's remark on this incident was that it was “one for Ripley.”) A few seconds later, while many gunners were recovering from the shock and deluge of sea water thrown over the stern by this near-hit, a large bomb struck the forward starboard corner of the No. 3 elevator on the flight deck, penetrating to the third deck before detonating. The explosion wrecked compartments for as much as 16 frames on the second and third decks, bulged and ruptured decks, started numerous fires, cut fragment holes in the side plating, and killed about 35 men.

All power failed on the after 5-inch guns as a result of the first bomb hit, and thereafter they had to be trained, elevated, and loaded by hand. This reduced the rate of fire by more than half.

Shortly after the first hit a second large bomb struck about 20 feet away, exploding in the No. 3 gun gallery. The blast set off ready powder, put both 5-inch guns out of commission and killed all men at the guns (about 38). The only members of the gun crews who escaped had just left their stations to assist in fighting fires started by the first bomb.

The third hit followed closely upon the other two. This bomb, apparently smaller than the others and of a low-order detonation, struck the flight deck at frame 137 starboard just abaft the island structure. It exploded before completely penetrating the flight deck. Damage, other than the crippling of the No. 2 elevator, was not great.

Near-hits which caused appreciable damage exploded (1) under the port fantail, raising the port after corner of the flight deck about a foot, tearing loose all degaussing cables for a length of 30 feet, springing the third and fourth decks, and causing minor deflection of the side plating; (2) near frame 80, port side, resulting in numerous fragment holes above the water line, rupturing gasoline mains, one fire-main riser and one damage-control riser, damaging arresting wires No. 1 and 2 and the first barrier, and resulting subsequently in the grounding out of the starboard steering motor.

Fires started by the hits near the No. 3 elevator were stubborn, mainly because of the large quantities

of inflammable materials in the aviation issue storeroom and the chief petty officers' quarters, which were affected.

The *North Carolina*, meanwhile, was also under attack. As the action began, the *Enterprise* had increased speed to 30 knots, and the battleship, unable to maintain station, gradually dropped astern. At the end of the engagement she was some 4,000 yards from the carrier.

An estimated 16 dive bombers, 12 level bombers, and 8 glide bombers or torpedo planes<sup>11</sup> attacked the *North Carolina*. The first planes observed were diving on the *Enterprise*. These the battleship engaged with 1 group of 3 of her twin 5-inch 38 mounts. Two minutes later she was under dive-bombing attack herself. Without shifting her protective barrage from over the *Enterprise*, the *North Carolina* opened fire with 3 other 5-inch mounts on the planes attacking her. So heavy was her 5-inch and automatic-weapon fire that some aircraft turned away. Of those that persisted, only 3 were able to come through to a point where they could place their bombs dangerously close. Two bombs fell within 15 yards and the other within about 25 yards, knocking gunners down, shaking the ship, and deluging her decks with water, but causing no further damage. Most diving attacks were from about 20° to the right of the sun. During the dive bombing, low-flying planes appeared on the port quarter and later others in numerous directions at altitudes ranging from 50 to 5,000 feet. Some of these maneuvered in and out at 6,000 to 10,000 yards. Others approached more directly as if for a torpedo attack. Still others glided in from 6,000 feet, leveling off at 50 to 100 feet.

At the height of the action the *North Carolina* had almost all her antiaircraft guns going, i.e., twenty 5-inch, four quadruple 1.1-inch mounts, forty 20-mm. and twenty-six .50-caliber machine guns.

There were about 10 dive bombers in the first wave to attack the *North Carolina*. While these and the torpedo or glide bombers were drawing most of her fire, a second group of six dive bombers came in from the port quarter, opposed only by the after 20-mm. guns, which got two of them. Four bombs fell within 150 yards of the ship. About the same time eight horizontal bombers passed over unobserved at 15,000 feet and dropped a salvo of heavy bombs between the *North Carolina* and the *Enterprise*. This salvo ended the attack, although for another several minutes planes flying low about the formation were fired on. Several of these planes proved to be friendly.

Assigning credit to ships for shooting down enemy aircraft proved difficult. *Enterprise* claimed 15, *North Carolina* 7, *Portland* 1, *Atlanta* none (this despite the excellent 5-inch barrage she maintained over the carrier), *Balch* 2, *Benham* none, *Monssen* 1, *Ellet* none, and *Grayson* 1. Undoubtedly overlapping existed in these claims, because all ships, except the *North Carolina*, which became separated, made it clear that more often than not planes at which they fired also were under fire of other ships of the formation. On the other hand, no "probables" or "possibles" were included in these claims.

Capt. Davis and other high-ranking officers present concluded that approximately 70 enemy planes were destroyed at the scene of the action. The fighters received credit for 43 planes of the Japanese

---

<sup>11</sup> There is no concrete evidence that enemy torpedo planes took part in the attack on the *North Carolina*, although several eye witnesses so described low-flying aircraft. Available reports indicate that several Japanese fighters or dive bombers faked torpedo runs on the ship to distract her gunners and draw their fire from planes which had not yet released their bombs.

attack group and three “snoopers.” An SBD on inner air patrol was credited with one dive bomber. Another dive bomber was credited to a *Saratoga* TBF leaving the carrier on an attack mission. A dive bomber and a torpedo-plane were destroyed near the *Ryujo* by planes of our attack group, and these aircraft accounted for five additional dive bombers which they encountered while returning to the task force. On a mathematical basis, then, our antiaircraft fire would have to have brought down 15 planes to bring the total destroyed during the fleet action to 70. Whatever the case, very few Japanese pilots who participated in the attack on our ships got back to tell what happened.

### *The Retirement*

When all our planes had returned or been given up for lost, Admiral Fletcher ordered a retirement to the south in order to refuel and to get the *Enterprise* started towards port and repairs.

The *Grayson* was detached at 1756 to search astern for planes which might land out of fuel in the water. As the destroyer proceeded north, she was passed by several of our aircraft returning from attack missions, but located no survivors. At 2030 she set course for a rendezvous with the main body.

The *Wasp* group, having completed fueling, was standing north to join the action, and it was Admiral Fletcher’s original intent to return with the *Saratoga* group after refueling, join the *Wasp* group, and continue the action. (The two forces passed each other at about 0330 on the 25th.)

*Enterprise* damage control functioned extremely well, as did the medical department. Within an hour after the engagement the ship was steaming at 24 knots, landing aircraft. All fires were brought under control within 40 minutes, although the more stubborn ones kept recurring in clothing, bedding, and such material until about 0100 on the 25th. Seventy-four officers and men were killed outright. Of the 95 wounded, only 4 later died, and at no time did the doctors call upon the rest of the ship for aid. Officers and men of these departments demonstrated the results of exhaustive drill and training to meet just the sort of emergency which arose.

In spite of all precautions, a steering casualty which resulted indirectly from bomb damage could have led to the loss of the ship. The *Enterprise* was retiring at 24 knots with the rest of the Task Force when suddenly at 1850 her rudder moved from neutral to full right and jammed there. Capt. Davis immediately warned screening ships by whistle and backed his engines full. The turning carrier cleared the *Balch* by a small margin. An investigation disclosed that water and foamite used in fighting fires near the gun gallery had escaped down a severed ventilator trunk to the steering engine room, grounding out the control panels. Thirty-eight minutes were required to rig standby steering, and during this time the ship was kept moving at 10 knots to reduce the submarine hazard. Radar plot, meanwhile, had been reporting the movements of a large Japanese air attack group. CINCPAC considered that this was the same group of 18 dive bombers, 9 torpedo planes, and 3 fighters encountered by our returning attack group section at 1725 in latitude 07°45’ S., longitude 162°10’ E. Granting an error in the time of sighting as reported by our planes, it could very well have been the same group. In any case, the flight was first detected by radar at 1721 bearing 265° T., distance 50 miles, on a southerly course. It proceeded to a point bearing 185° T., distance 83 miles, then changed course to the west and again to the northwest at about 1857, fading from the screen at 70 miles, bearing 230° T. A different change

of course could have brought the enemy planes to our Task Force about the time that the *Enterprise* suffered her steering casualty.

No interception was attempted because most of our fighters were low on either fuel or ammunition. The enemy planes were heard trying to home their carrier well after dark. Possibly some of them were lost.

### GUADALCANAL BOMBARDED

About midnight on the 24th four Japanese ships, probably destroyers, began bombarding our positions on Guadalcanal. The firing continued for an hour. Between 0245 and 0300 eight dive bombers were sent out from Henderson Field. Three of these Marine planes located four enemy destroyers, scoring hits on one of them. Large oil patches observed the next day indicated that the enemy ship may have sunk.

### EVENTS OF THE 25th

Our forces retired southward throughout the night of the 24th, and at 0800 on the 25th made a fueling rendezvous with the oilers *Cimarron* and *Platte* in latitude 13°04' S., longitude 164°03'30" E. At this point the *Enterprise*, with the *Portland*, *Balch*, *Maury*, *Benham*, and *Ellet* as escort, was detached and proceeded via Tongatabu to Pearl Harbor for repairs.

The remainder of Task Force KING—*North Carolina*, *Atlanta*, *Grayson*, and *Monssen*—was combined with Task Force FOX and returned to the north the same evening to join forces with the *Wasp* group.

At 1143, when the *Grayson* had made visual contact with Task Force FOX on returning from her search for survivors of air action, she sighted a Japanese submarine several miles to the west of our formation. Establishing sound contact at 1216, the destroyer began a depth-charge attack, later being assisted by the *Patterson*<sup>12</sup> and *Monssen*. The submarine was sunk.

Two other Japanese submarines were sighted during the day. One of them was sunk by a direct bomb hit scored by Ens. Estes of VS-5 at 0950 in latitude 12°30' S., longitude 164°10' E.

We had every expectation that the carrier action would be rejoined on the 25th, but such was not the case. The *Wasp* group took up station southeastward of Guadalcanal, but made no contact with the enemy.

Guadalcanal expected a dawn air attack, but none came. Just before dawn eight dive bombers with fighter escort left Henderson Field to search for enemy carriers. At 0835, about 125 miles to the north, this group came upon an occupation force of one large and three small transports, supported by a heavy cruiser, light cruisers, and four destroyers. They hit both the large (14,000-ton) transport and the heavy cruiser with 1,000-pound bombs. The transport was gutted and doubtless destroyed.

A force of eight Army B-17's, which took off from Espiritu Santo at 0617 for the purpose of attacking

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Patterson* joined after the carrier action.

carriers, also came upon the occupation force already bombed by the Marine group. At 1015 they released their bombs, hitting one cruiser or destroyer, with the result that “it broke in two.” Another cruiser was observed to be burning. This may have been the one hit earlier by the Marines.

Our search planes made numerous contacts with scattered enemy forces during the day. As was the case at Midway, several groups of enemy ships continued to close their objective after their air strength had been crippled. By noon, however, it became obvious that the Japanese ships all had turned tail, and were retiring at high speed.

The last Japanese blow was struck at noon when 21 heavy bombers dropped bombs on Guadalcanal from 27,000 feet, killing four men and wounding five, but doing little material damage.

“The Japanese had shot their bolt,” CINCPAC reported, “and with air forces seriously reduced were retiring.”

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

#### *Enemy ships believed sunk:*<sup>13</sup>

- 1 CV, *Ryujo*.....By *Saratoga* attack group.
- 1 CL or DD.....By Army B-17s.
- 3 DDs.....One probably sunk by Marine attack group; one by *Saratoga* attack group (torpedo); one by Marine attack group.
- 2 SSs.....One by *Enterprise* plane; one by *Grayson*, *Patterson* and *Monssen*.
- 1 AP.....By Marine attack group.

#### *Enemy ships believed damaged:*

- 1 CV.....Possibly hit by Army B-17's.
- 1 BB, *Mutsu*.....One 1,000-pound bomb hit by *Saratoga* attack group.
- 2 CA's.....One hit by *Saratoga* attack group (torpedo); one hit by at least one 1,000-pound bomb by Marine attack group.
- 1 CL.....Torpedo hit by *Saratoga* attack group.

#### *Enemy aircraft believed destroyed:*

Approximately 2 carrier groups plus 21 land or carrier based planes downed by Marine planes, a total of about 90 aircraft.

#### *Own ships damaged:*

- 1 CV, *Enterprise*.

#### *Own plane losses:*

A total of about 20 aircraft. Of 17 carrier planes involved, 7 were shot down or otherwise lost in combat; 7 were lost through water landing, the crews being saved; and 3 were expended because of severe damage. The remaining 3 planes were Marine fighters shot down defending Guadalcanal.

---

<sup>13</sup> Subsequent information made the following minimum enemy losses seem certain: 1 CV (*Ryujo*), 1 DD, 1 AP.

## CONCLUSIONS

The outstanding defect of the action lay in communications failures, paramount among them the nonreceipt of our scout planes' contact report on the enemy group including the *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku*. The attack group which was sent out at 1435 on the 24th to strike the *Ryujo* should have had the two large carriers for targets. Not only would the *Zuikaku* and *Shokaku* have been more suitable objectives, but also they were closer to us. Costly as well was the nonreceipt of the search plane contact report on the Japanese occupation force's course change which led to the launching of the *Saratoga* attack group on a hopeless mission on the 23d. Moreover, it was a different sort of communications failure—an overloaded circuit—which prevented more satisfactory fighter direction.

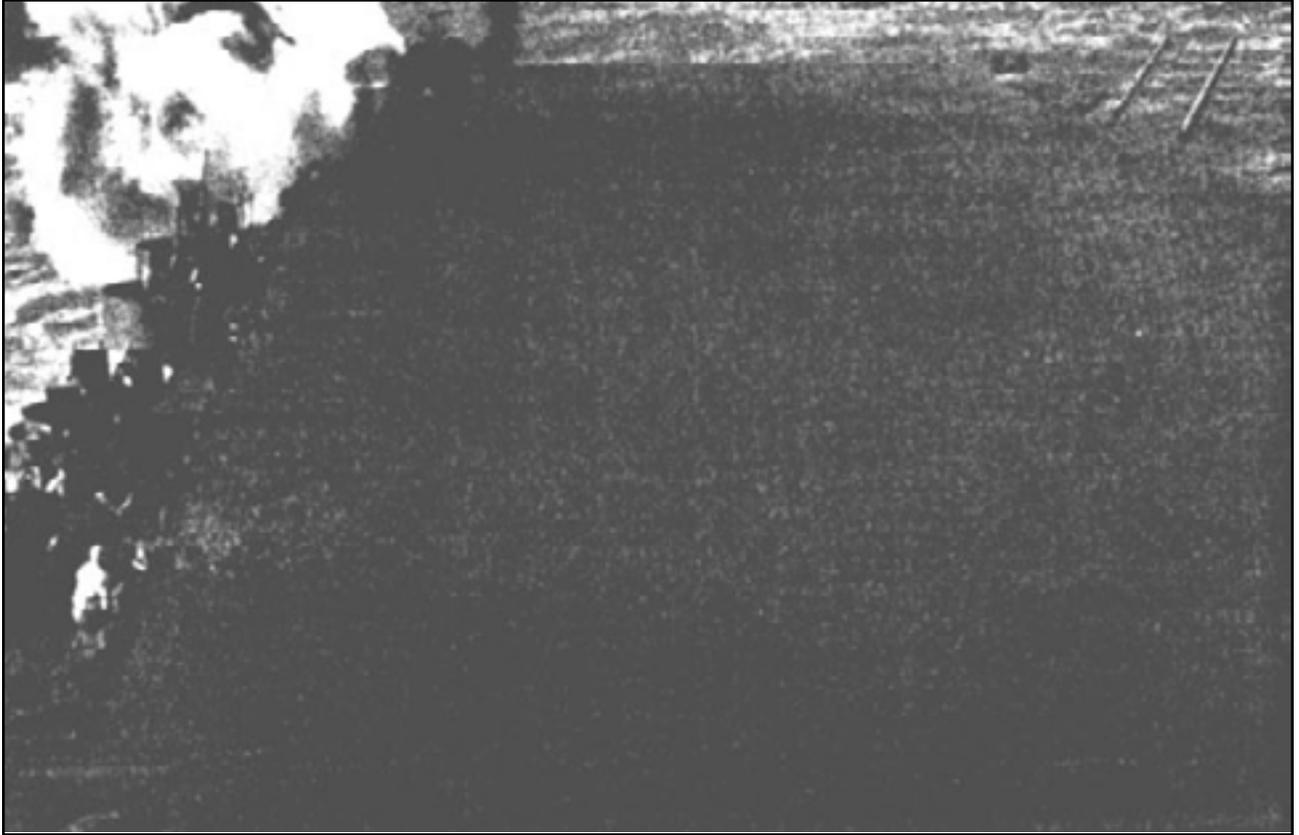
In spite of these difficulties the performance of our men and ships was, on the whole, excellent. CINCPAC termed the Battle of the Eastern Solomons a “major victory, second only to Midway in forces involved,” pointing out that it “permitted continued consolidation of our positions in the Solomons,” besides resulting in “serious losses” to the enemy.



*Enterprise after second bomb hit (taken from Portland).*



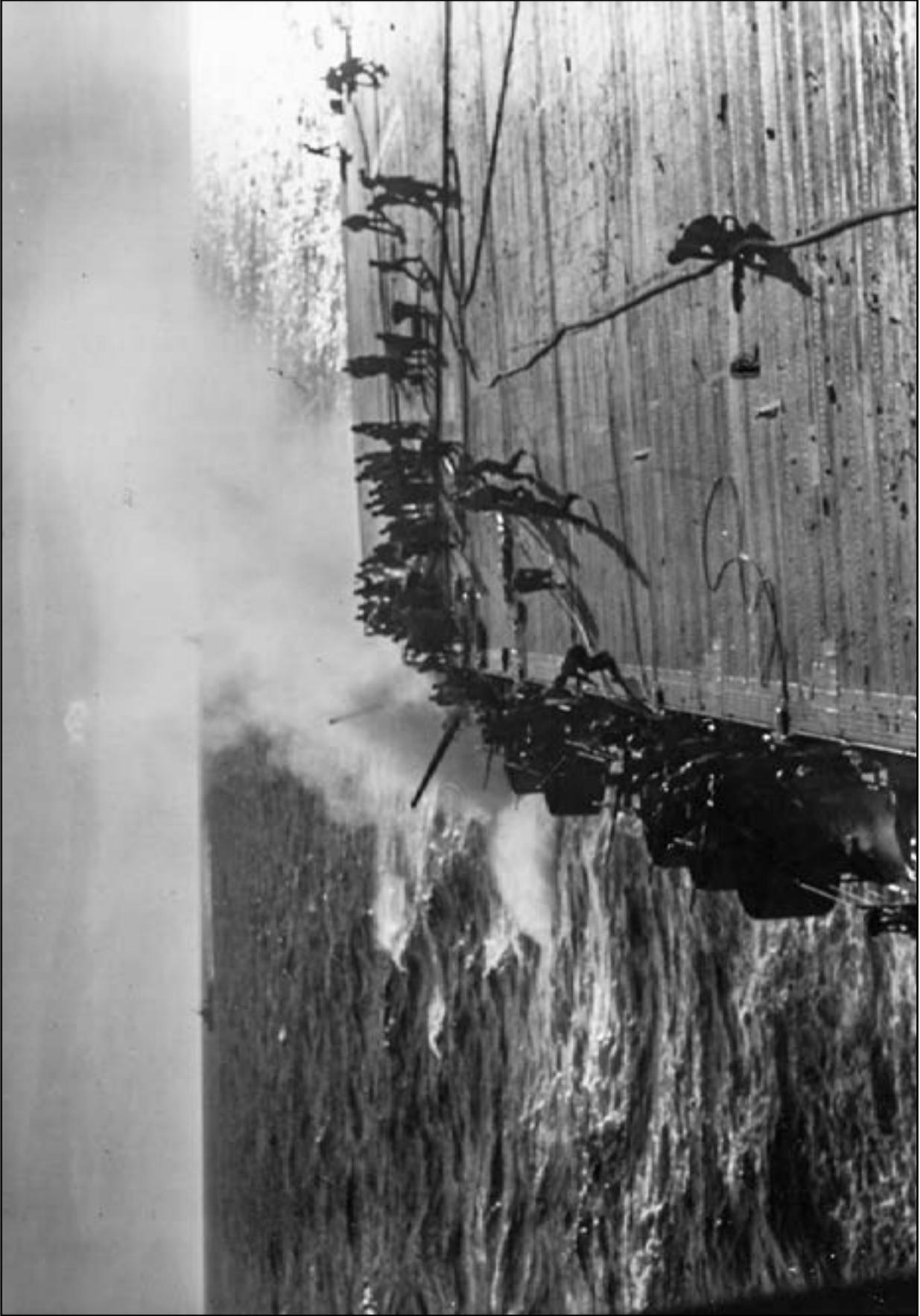
*The battle above the Enterprise; enemy dive bomber exploding in mid-air.*



*Second hit on Enterprise.*



*Third hit on Enterprise.*



*Fighting fire resulting from second hit. Damage from third hit visible in foreground.*



## APPENDIX I

*Victories credited to fighter pilots defending the fleet, 24 August*

### FIGHTING SQUADRON SIX

Pilot	Plane type	Number
Lieut. Louis H. Bauer	Aichi type 99 VB	1
Ens. Douglas M. Johnson	...do...	1
L. P. Mankin API/C	...do...	1
Ens. George W. Brooks	...do...	1
Ens. Robert A. M. Dibb	...do...	2
Mach. D. E. Runyon	...do...	3
Gun. C. E. Brewer	...do...	2
Three Men	...do...	1
		12
Ens. Robert M. Disque	Zero VF	2
Ens. Charles W. Lindsey	...do...	1
Lt.(jg) Theodore S. Gay	...do...	1
Ens. Francis R. Register	...do...	1
Mach. Runyon	...do...	1
Ens. James A. Halford, Jr	...do...	1
Lieut. Albert O. Vorse, Jr	...do...	1
Mach. H. M. Sumrall	...do...	1
Gun. Brewer	...do...	1
		10
Ens. Register	Me-109 VF	1
		1
Rdo. Elect. T. W. Rhodes	Mitsubishi type 97 VT	1
Ens. Brooks	...do...	1
Ens. Harry A. March, Jr.	...do...	1
		3
		26

## FIGHTING SQUADRON FIVE

Pilot	Plane type	Number
Lieut. Hayden M. Jensen	Aichi type 99 VB	3
Lt.(jg) Carlton B. Starkes	...do...	2
Ens. Benjamin F. Cutrie	...do...	1
Ens. John B. McDonald, Jr.	...do...	2
Lieut Richard E. Harmer	...do...	1
Ens. Mark K. Bright	...do...	1
Ens. Wayne C. Presley	...do...	1
Ens. Charles B. Eichenberger, Jr.	...do...	1
Ens. John M. Kleinman	...do...	2
		-----
		14
Lt.(jg) Starkes	Zero VF	1
Ens. Leon W. Haynes	...do...	1
Lieut. Richard Gray	...do...	1
		-----
		3
		=====
		17

## Appendix II

### Symbols of U.S. Navy Ships

<b>AB</b>	Crane Ship	<b>CM</b>	Mine Layer
<b>AD</b>	Destroyer Tender	<b>CMc</b>	Coastal Mine Layer
<b>AE</b>	Ammunition Ship	<b>CV</b>	Aircraft Carrier
<b>AF</b>	Provision Storeship	<b>CVB</b>	Aircraft Carrier, Large
<b>AG</b>	Miscellaneous Auxiliary	<b>CVE</b>	Aircraft Carrier, Escort
<b>AGC</b>	Amphibious Force Flagship	<b>CVL</b>	Aircraft Carrier, Light
<b>AGP</b>	Motor Torpedo Boat Tender		
<b>AGS</b>	Surveying Ship	<b>DD</b>	Destroyer
<b>AH</b>	Hospital Ship	<b>DE</b>	Destroyer Escort
<b>AK</b>	Cargo Ship	<b>DM</b>	Light Minelayer, High Speed
<b>AKA</b>	Cargo Ship, Attack	<b>DMS</b>	Minesweeper, High Speed
<b>AKF</b>	Refrigerated Cargo Ship		
<b>AKS</b>	General Stores Issue Ship	<b>IX</b>	Unclassified
<b>AM</b>	Minesweeper		
<b>AMb</b>	Base Minesweeper	<b>LCC</b>	Landing Craft, Control
<b>AMc</b>	Coastal Minesweeper	<b>LCI(L)</b>	Landing Craft, Infantry (Large)
<b>AN</b>	Net Layer	<b>LCM(2)</b>	Landing Craft Mechanized (Mk. II)
<b>AO</b>	Oiler	<b>LCM(3)</b>	Landing Craft, Mechanized (Mk. III)
<b>AOG</b>	Gasoline Tanker	<b>LCP(L)</b>	Landing Craft, Personnel (Large)
<b>AP</b>	Transport	<b>LCP(R)</b>	Landing Craft, Personnel (Ramp)
<b>APA</b>	Transport, Attack	<b>LCP(N)</b>	Landing Craft, Personnel (Nested)
<b>APc</b>	Coastal Transport	<b>LCR(L)</b>	Landing Craft, Rubber (Large)
<b>APD</b>	Transport, High Speed	<b>LCR(S)</b>	Landing Craft, Rubber (Small)
<b>APH</b>	Transport for Wounded	<b>LCS(S)</b>	Landing Craft, Support (Small)
<b>APM</b>	Mechanized Artillery Transport	<b>LCT(5)</b>	Landing Craft, Tank (Mk. V)
<b>APR</b>	Rescue Transport	<b>LCT(6)</b>	Landing Craft, Tank (Mk. VI)
<b>APS</b>	Auxiliary Cargo Submarine	<b>LCV</b>	Landing Craft, Vehicle
<b>APV</b>	Transport and Aircraft Ferry	<b>LCVP</b>	Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel
<b>AR</b>	Repair Ship	<b>LSD</b>	Landing Ship, Dock
<b>ARB</b>	Repair Ship, Battle Damage	<b>LST</b>	Landing Ship, Tank
<b>ARD</b>	Floating Drydock	<b>LVT(1)</b>	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. I)
<b>ARG</b>	Repair Ship, Internal Combustion Engine	<b>LVT(A1)</b>	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Armored Mk. I)
<b>ARH</b>	Repair Ship, Heavy Hull	<b>LVT(2)</b>	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. II)
<b>ARL</b>	Repair Ship, Landing Craft	<b>LVT(A2)</b>	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Armored Mk. II)
<b>ARS</b>	Salvage Vessel		
<b>AS</b>	Submarine Tender	<b>PC</b>	Submarine Chaser (173')
<b>ASR</b>	Submarine Rescue Vessel	<b>PCE</b>	Patrol Craft Escort
<b>AT</b>	Oceangoing Tug	<b>PCE(R)</b>	Patrol Craft Escort (Rescue)
<b>ATR</b>	Rescue Tug	<b>PCS</b>	Submarine Chaser (136')
<b>AV</b>	Seaplane Tender, Large	<b>PE</b>	Eagle Boat
<b>AVC</b>	Catapult Lighter	<b>PF</b>	Frigate
<b>AVD</b>	Seaplane Tender, High Speed	<b>PG</b>	Gunboat
<b>AVP</b>	Seaplane Tender, Small	<b>PR</b>	River Gunboat
<b>AX</b>	Auxiliary Tender, Large	<b>PT</b>	Motor Torpedo Boat
<b>AY</b>	Auxiliary Tender, Small	<b>PTC</b>	Motorboat Submarine Chaser
		<b>PY</b>	Yacht
<b>BB</b>	Battleship	<b>PYc</b>	Coastal Yacht
<b>CA</b>	Heavy Cruiser	<b>SC</b>	Submarine Chaser (110')
<b>CB</b>	Large Cruiser	<b>SM</b>	Submarine, Minelayer
<b>CL</b>	Light Cruiser	<b>SS</b>	Submarine

**YA** Ash Lighter  
**YAG** Miscellaneous District Auxiliary  
**YC** Open Lighter  
**YCF** Car Float  
**YCK** Open Cargo Lighter  
**YCV** Aircraft Transportation Lighter  
**YD** Floating Derrick  
**YDG** Degaussing Vessel  
**YDT** Diving Tender  
**YF** Covered Lighter; Range Tender;  
     Provision Store Lighter  
**YFB** Ferryboat and Launch  
**YFD** Floating Drydock  
**YFT** Torpedo Transportation Lighter  
**YG** Garbage Lighter  
**YH** Houseboat  
**YHB** Ambulance Boat  
**YHT** Heating Scow  
**YM** Dredge  
**YMS** Motor Mine Sweeper  
**YMT** Motor Tug

**YN** Net Tender  
**YNg** Gate Vessel  
**YNT** Net Tender, Tug Class  
**YO** Fuel Oil Barge  
**YOG** Gasoline Barge  
**YOS** Oil Storage Barge  
**YP** District Patrol Vessel  
**YPD** Floating Pile Driver  
**YPK** Pontoon Stowage Barge  
**YR** Floating Workshop  
**YRC** Submarine Rescue Chamber  
**YRD(H)** Floating Workshop, Drydock (Hull)  
**YRD(M)** Floating Workshop, Drydock (Machinery)  
**YS** Stevedore Barge  
**YSD** Seaplane Wrecking Derrick  
**YSP** Salvage Pontoon  
**YSR** Sludge Removal Barge  
**YT** Harbor Tug  
**YTT** Torpedo Testing Barge  
**YW** Water Barge

### Designations of U.S. Naval Aircraft

Model designation		Class	Manufacturer	U.S. name	British name
(Navy)	(Army)				
BD	A-20	Bomber	Douglas	Havoc	Boston III, Havoc
XBTC		<i>ditto</i>	Curtiss		
F2A		Fighter	Brewster	Buffalo	Buffalo
F3A		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Corsair	Corsair
F4F		<i>ditto</i>	Grumman	Wildcat	Martlet
F6F		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Hellcat	Hellcat
F7F		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>		
FG		<i>ditto</i>	Goodyear	Corsair	Corsair
FM		<i>ditto</i>	Eastern Aircraft	Wildcat	Martlet V
F4U		<i>ditto</i>	Chance-Vaught	Corsair	Corsair
GB	C-43	Transport	Beech	Traveler	
GH		<i>ditto</i>	Howard		
GK	C-61	<i>ditto</i>	Fairchild	Forwarder	
HE	L-4	Ambulance	Piper	Grasshopper	
J2F	OA-12	Utility	Grumman	Duck	
J4F		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Widgeon	
JRB	C-45	Utility, multi-engine	Beech	Voyager	
JRC-1	C-78	<i>ditto</i>	Cessna		
JRF	OA-9	<i>ditto</i>	Grumman		Goose I.
XJRM-1		<i>ditto</i>	Martin	Mars	
JRS		<i>ditto</i>	Vought-Sikorsky		
JR2S		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Excalibur	
JRY-1		Utility (cargo), multi-engine	Consolidated		
NE	O-59	Trainer, primary	Piper	Grasshopper	
NH		Trainer, advanced	Howard		
NP		Trainer, primary	Spartan		
NR	PT-21	<i>ditto</i>	Ryan	Recruit	
N2S	PT-17	<i>ditto</i>	Stearman (Boeing)	Caydet	
N2T		<i>ditto</i>	Timm	Tutor	
N3N		<i>ditto</i>	Naval Aircraft Factory		
OS2N		Observation scout	<i>ditto</i>	Kingfisher	

OS2U		<i>ditto</i>	Vought-Sikorsky	<i>ditto</i>	Kingfisher
XPBB		Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat	Boeing	Sea Ranger	
PB2B		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Catalina	Catalina
PBJ	B-25	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane	North American	Mitchell	
PBM		Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat	Martin	Mariner	Mariner
PBN		<i>ditto</i>	Naval Aircraft Factory	Catalina	
PBO	A-29	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane	Lockheed	Hudson	Hudson III
PBV		Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat	Vickers	Catalina	Catalina
PBY-5	OA-10	<i>ditto</i>	Consolidated	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>
P4Y		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>		
PB2Y-3		Patrol bomber, 4-engine, boat	<i>ditto</i>	Coronado	Coronado
PB4Y	B-24	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, landplane	<i>ditto</i>	Liberator	Liberator
PV	B-34	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane	Vega	Ventura	Ventura
R5C	C-46	Transport, multi- engine	Curtiss	Commando	
R4D-1,5	C-47, 47A	<i>ditto</i>	Douglas	Skytrain	
R4D-2,4	C-49, 49A	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>		
R4D-3	C-53	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Skytrooper	
R5D	C-54	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Skymaster	
R5O	C-60	<i>ditto</i>	Lockheed	Lodestar	Lodestar
RB-1	C-93	Transport (cargo), multi- engine	Budd		
SB2A	A-34	Scout bomber	Brewster	Buccaneer	Bermuda
SBC	77-A	<i>ditto</i>	Curtiss	Helldiver	Cleveland
SB2C	A-25	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Helldiver
SBD	A-24	<i>ditto</i>	Douglas	Dauntless	
SB2D		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>		
SBF	A-25	<i>ditto</i>	Fairchild	Helldiver	
SBN		<i>ditto</i>	Naval Aircraft Factory		

SB2U		<i>ditto</i>	Vought-Sikorsky	Vindicator	Chesapeake
SBW	A-25	<i>ditto</i>	Canadian Car & Foundry	Helldiver	Helldiver
SC-1		Scout observation	Curtiss		
SNB-1	AT-11	Trainer, advanced	Beech	Kansas	
SNB-2	AT-7	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Navigator	
SNC		<i>ditto</i>	Curtiss	Falcon	
SNJ	AT-6	<i>ditto</i>	North American	Texan	Harvard I, II
SNV	BT-13, 15	<i>ditto</i>	Vultee	Valiant	
SOC		Scout observation	Curtiss	Seagull	
SO3C		<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>	Seamew
TBD		Torpedo bomber	Douglas	Devastator	
TBF		<i>ditto</i>	Grumman	Avenger	Tarpon
TBM		<i>ditto</i>	Eastern Aircraft	<i>ditto</i>	<i>ditto</i>
TBV		<i>ditto</i>	Vultee		



**Naval History and Heritage Command**

**U.S. Navy**

