

Solomon Islands Campaign: XII
The Bougainville Landing
and the
Battle of Empress Augusta Bay

27 October - 2 November 1943

"COMBAT NARRATIVES were written to fill a temporary requirement before the appearance of official and semiofficial complete histories. Due to hastily gathered and oftentimes incomplete information there are certain inaccuracies."

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Washington, D. C.

1 March 1945.

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HEWLETT THÉBAUD,
REAR ADMIRAL, U. S. N.,
Director of Naval Intelligence.

Foreword

1 March 1945.

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.



E. J. KING,

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The Bougainville Landing and the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay

27 October-2 November 1943

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

AS EARLY as 11 July 1943 the South Pacific Command had decided that as part of the final phase of the Solomon Islands Campaign an assault should be made upon Bougainville Island, the largest of the group. In enemy hands this island constituted the next major obstacle to our forces driving northward through the New Georgia Group; in ours it would provide a base for future operations against the great Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain.

Bougainville presented problems which were unique in the Solomons Campaign. It is the northernmost of the larger islands and has adequate harbors and a terrain favorable for airfields. Moreover the enemy could easily transport reinforcements of men and material from Rabaul and support his operations by air from bases on New Britain, New Ireland, and Truk—all of which were beyond the range of our land-based fighters. Japanese supply and communication routes to the island were well protected and within easy reach of enemy naval establishments at Truk, Kavieng, Buka, Kieta, and minor bases in southern Bougainville and adjacent islands.

The Japanese had had nearly two years in which to construct defenses on Bougainville, as compared with a month in which to prepare against our attack on Guadalcanal. They had built two airfields at the northern end, two on the southern, one in the Shortland area to the south, and one field and a seaplane base on the east coast. Strong ground forces were concentrated in and around southern Bougainville and garrisons were established on the east coast and to the north.

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Between August and October numerous developments in Pacific strategy took place which influenced plans for the Bougainville operation. In the Solomons, South Pacific forces pressing northward and westward, virtually completed the occupation of New Georgia with the capture of Munda on 5 August and landed on Vella Lavella ten days later. In less than two months the occupation of the latter island was completed, and by 9 October the Japanese had been compelled to evacuate the by-passed island of Kolombangara.¹ Across the Solomon Sea to the west, Allied forces, carrying the New Guinea Campaign farther into the Huon Gulf area, took Salamaua and Lae in September. On 2 October they captured Finschhafen and thus placed themselves closer to the Japanese base at Rabaul than our South Pacific forces, which were advancing toward it from the southeast.

In the meantime, due east of Bougainville, preparatory steps were being taken to mount the Central Pacific Campaign by the occupation, in August, of additional atolls in the Ellice Islands. Raids preliminary to the Gilbert Islands operation began with an air strike on Marcus Island on the last day of August, followed by a strike on Tarawa Atoll on 18 September and an air strike and bombardment of Wake Island in the first week in October. D-day for the Gilbert Islands landings was to be 20 November, and forces were already being assembled for that purpose while the Bougainville operation was being prepared.

Preliminary Plans

The final conception of the Bougainville operation evolved through a series of preliminary plans which were changed under the impact of a continuously shifting strategic situation. Some of the alterations were drastic departures from the original thinking, and the final plan bore small relation to the first.

The first plan, outlined in a letter of 11 July 1943 from COMSOPAC, Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., envisaged a forthright assault about 15 October on southern Bougainville Island, including the airfields at Kahili and Ballale, the Shortland-Faisi area and Tonolei Harbor. The Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps, Lt. Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift, was put in command of land forces for the operation and instructed to collect and disseminate combat intelligence, initiate detailed

¹ See Combat Narratives, "Operations in the New Georgia Area, 21 June-5 August 1943," and "Kolombangara and Vella Lavella, 6 August-7 October 1943."

planning, and keep COMSOPAC constantly in touch with the development of plans.

Preliminary study of the mission and of enemy strength in the area indicated that Allied ground forces available would be insufficient for an assault on the strongly defended area of southern Bougainville. Advised of this, COMSOPAC changed the plan on 5 August to limit it to the seizure of Shortland, Faisi, Ballale, and such adjacent islands as were necessary to furnish a base for further operations and to deny enemy air and naval forces the use of southern Bougainville. The tentative date for the operation was left unchanged.

Both the bolder plan of July and the more limited one of August conceived of the operation mainly as a ground campaign for the seizure of enemy airfields already constructed. Had either of these plans been followed, the Bougainville operation would have proved similar to those of New Georgia and Guadalcanal. As combat intelligence accumulated and the strategic picture developed, it was realized, however, that the enemy was more vulnerable in shipping and in the air than on the ground. When means of striking the enemy where he was weakest and avoiding him where he was strongest were considered, the alternative of seizing undeveloped or weakly-held areas and constructing our own fields presented itself. This is precisely what we had done when we landed on Vella Lavella and by-passed Kolombangara on 15 August.

At the request of COMSOPAC, Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, Lt. Gen. Millard F. Harmon, USA, Maj. Gen. Charles D. Barrett, USMC, and Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson presented a memorandum on 7 September expressing their complete agreement that the attack on the Shortland area should be abandoned, and that the following alternative plan be substituted: (1) Complete the projected airfields in New Georgia and Vella Lavella; (2) Continue and increase the air effort to neutralize enemy airfields in the southern Bougainville area, and put heavy pressure on airfields in the Buka area; (3) On D-day, simultaneously seize the Treasury Islands and the Choiseul Bay area, install radar equipment at both places, construct airfields on one or both, and establish motor torpedo boat advance bases and staging points for landing craft at both positions. All this was for the purpose of strangling and containing southern Bougainville; (4) Airfields in the Buka area were then to be neutralized by air action. It was recommended that a further advance, after completion of step 4, be made up the northeastern coast following the Choiseul-

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Kieta axis, or up the southwestern coast following the Treasury Island-Empress Augusta Bay axis. Choice of the line of advance would be determined after reconnaissance of the area and observation of enemy reactions.

Intelligence was gathered by amphibious methods on an unprecedented scale. Ground patrols were landed by submarine, seaplane, and motor torpedo boat to penetrate defended beaches. Careful studies were made of the Shortland area, the Treasury Islands, Choiseul, southern and northern Bougainville, and the Kieta and Numa Numa areas. On the basis of these studies, Buka was rejected as being too distant to permit aircraft fighter cover, Kahili as too strongly defended, and Shortland because of insufficient beach area. Kieta and Numa Numa were discarded because of their strong enemy garrisons and airfields.

On 22 September COMSOPAC issued a warning order, cancelling the preliminary plans of 11 July and 5 August and instructing the Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps to be prepared on or about 1 November to execute either one of two plans. Plan I called for the seizure of Treasury Island and the northern Empress Augusta Bay area, Bougainville, and the construction of airfields in the latter area. Plan II was in two phases: (1) the seizure of the Treasury Islands and the Choiseul Bay area, the installation of radars and PT bases at both places and an airfield on Choiseul, in preparation for the second phase; and (2) during the latter part of December 1943, the seizure of an enemy airfield in the vicinity of Tenekau Bay on the east coast of Bougainville, between Kieta and Numa Numa.

COMSOPAC's operation plan was to be issued later. Admiral Wilkinson was placed in command of the operation and instructed to coordinate detailed planning. General Vandegrift, as earlier, was to be in command of land forces.

The success of the Vella Lavella operation, which by-passed Kolombangara and in a few weeks forced its evacuation without a fight, led to a further re-examination of Solomons strategy. It was thought that Plan II, outlined above, would delay unduly the completion of the Solomons Campaign. Moreover, our fighters operating from an airfield on Choiseul would not be able to cover later bomber strikes at Rabaul. It was decided that the operation should look more definitely toward the reduction of the great base around which the Japanese had built the defense of the Bismarck Archipelago-Solomons area. Thoughts then turned to the

bolder plan of establishing a beachhead on Bougainville and by-passing the strongholds to the south. Representatives from the staff of COMSOPAC conferred with General Douglas MacArthur, who shared their distaste for a direct assault on the Shortland area, and favored an attack on Bougainville. He requested that Admiral Halsey investigate the possibility of this move.

Tactical and other considerations dictated the selection of northern Empress Augusta Bay, about half way up the western coast of Bougainville, as the objective. It presented, however, a number of disadvantages. The low, swampy, timbered coast had limited protection from onshore winds. There was only a meager network of foot trails, and no satisfactory anchorage for larger vessels. The Cape Torokina area, where the landing beaches were sought, was practically undeveloped. Moreover, some of the nearby native tribes were known to favor the enemy. To offset these disadvantages, defenses in the area were reported to be comparatively weak. Beach trails and inland foot trails were only irregularly patrolled. The Torokina area also appeared to comprise a natural defensive region of approximately eight by six miles. The area was almost equidistant from enemy installations to the north at Buka and to the south in the Shortland area and lay astride enemy communications to Rabaul. These, among other considerations, dictated the selection of Cape Torokina as the site for a beachhead.

The Treasury Islands landing was retained from the earlier plans to provide protection for future convoys to Empress Augusta Bay. The Choiseul phase of the operation was not abandoned, but the determination of its relation to other phases remained to be formulated.

The Bougainville operation was designed as a flanking movement to cut the enemy's line of communication, avoid a frontal attack, and force the enemy to withdraw eventually from his strongest positions without a fight. In some ways this strategy had been anticipated in the Vella Lavella-Kolombangara operation. But the Bougainville operation was of greater complexity and import. It was designed not only to leave thousands of enemy troops slowly strangling in southern Bougainville, Choiseul, and the Shortland area, but also to advance our air and naval bases so as to enlarge the field of targets to include Rabaul and New Britain, far beyond the immediate objective. Furthermore, unlike the Vella Lavella operation, the Bougainville operation was not intended to conquer an entire island. It was designed simply as the capture of a

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beachhead, which could hold within its comparatively small perimeter a bomber field, a fighter strip, and an advanced naval base.

The conception was bold, and the risk of provoking violent enemy air-land-surface action was calculated and accepted. "Enthusiasm for the plan was far from unanimous, even in the South Pacific," reported Admiral Halsey, "but, the decision having been made, all hands were told to 'get going.'"

Final Plans

In his operation plan of 12 October 1943 COMSOPAC set 1 November as D-day. This plan fixed only the major objectives and assigned the major commands. Admiral Wilkinson, who was placed in command of the operation, was directed to seize and hold the Treasury Islands on D minus 5 day and to establish there radars and minimum facilities for small craft. On D-day he was to seize and hold a suitable site in the northern Empress Augusta Bay area, where he was to establish facilities for small craft and construct such airfields as might be directed by COMSOPAC. In addition he was to lay defensive and offensive minefields as directed.

In the same operation plan Admiral Halsey directed Commander Aircraft, South Pacific, Maj. Gen. Ralph J. Mitchell, USMC, to support the operation with land-based planes by providing defensive reconnaissance, air cover, and air support for forces engaged. He was also to provide support by strikes against airfields on Bougainville and against any enemy units threatening the attack force. Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman, commander of a carrier task force, was directed to be prepared to support operations of the land-based planes by strikes against enemy bases and also to base aircraft ashore when directed. Rear Admiral Aaron S. Merrill, in command of a task force of cruisers and destroyers, was directed to destroy enemy surface vessels which might threaten Admiral Wilkinson's operations or the South Pacific position, and to attack enemy bases as directed by COMSOPAC. Submarines under command of Capt. James Fife, Jr., were to attack enemy shipping and surface units. Prior to and during the operation, aircraft of the Southwest Pacific were to conduct striking missions against Rabaul.

Even as late as 12 October the final conception of the Choiseul phase of the operation was still unformulated; in fact, in his operation plan of that date COMSOPAC directed Admiral Wilkinson to be prepared, on five days notice, to establish PT advance bases in the northwest half of Choi-

seul. This conception was later abandoned. It was feared, however, that since the Treasury Islands were on a direct line to the proposed Bougainville beachhead, the landing there might serve to point out our main objective to the Japanese and cause them to reinforce the area.

To throw the enemy off the scent, the Choiseul landing was retained, though modified into a diversionary movement. The size and position of Choiseul would suggest its use as a base for attack against either Shortland or Bougainville—and if the latter, the base would suggest a landing on the east rather than the west coast. The last major change in the operation plan, that adopting the Choiseul diversion, was made on 22 October. Marines were to be landed at Voza, Choiseul, on D minus 5 day, or the night of the day of the Treasury landing. They were to conduct a raid lasting about twelve days, striking the enemy at several places and attempting to confuse him. As the diversionary movement was described by Maj. Gen. Roy S. Geiger, USMC,² it was "a series of short right jabs designed to throw the enemy off balance and conceal the real power of the left hook to his midriff at Empress Augusta Bay."

The Third Marine Division, reinforced, Maj. Gen. Allen H. Turnage commanding, was assigned the northern Empress Augusta Bay mission. These troops conducted landing exercises on beaches of the New Hebrides and Guadalcanal during the period 17-19 October. The Eighth New Zealand Brigade Group, reinforced, commanded by Brigadier R. A. Row, was assigned the Treasury Islands operation, and carried out landing exercises on Florida Island on 14-17 October. The force for the Choiseul diversion was the 2nd Marine Parachute Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Victor H. Krulak.

Admiral Wilkinson, Commander Third Amphibious Force, had the responsibility for the detailed planning of the naval operations. His operation plan of 15 October, amended and elaborated by his operation order of the 18th, included plans for logistics, naval gunfire, minesweeping, minelaying, communications and boat pools along with schedules for debarkation, ship movements and cruising dispositions for the Treasury and Empress Augusta Bay operations. The ships and craft at Admiral Wilkinson's disposal for the two landings were divided into the Northern Force, for Empress Augusta Bay, and the Southern Force, for the Treasury Islands. Admiral Wilkinson designated Rear Admiral George

² General Geiger relieved General Vandegrift as Commander First Marine Amphibious Corps on 9 November 1943.

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H. Fort commander of the latter force, and retained command of the Northern Force himself.

Enemy Situation

Every effort was made to encourage the enemy in the belief that our target was the Buin-Shortland area. He learned of our Shortland reconnaissance party, and undoubtedly took note of low-flying photographic missions and bombing attacks which assisted him toward the same conclusion. To the satisfaction of all, it was observed that he was moving reinforcements, artillery, and heavy equipment into the area, rapidly replacing aircraft combat losses (at least in September), developing existing air bases, and also constructing new ones.

Our intelligence revealed that Japanese air reconnaissance was active in the Bougainville area, that numerous observation posts were located along the coast and on outlying islands, and that patrolling was active along the shoreline. Air and submarine attack was to be expected, and surface attack was possible. The natives, except those on Treasury Island, were believed to be pro-Japanese. Our forces were warned particularly against natives in the Empress Augusta Bay area, who might appear friendly but might well be scouts for the enemy.

Enemy naval strength in the Rabaul-Solomons area as of 11 October was estimated to be one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, eight to ten destroyers, twelve submarines, twenty-one patrol craft, plus necessary auxiliaries, numerous barges, and some PT boats. Large naval forces were at Truk.

Estimated enemy ground strength as of the same date was as follows:

Bougainville and Shortland Islands (including air, labor, and service troops).....	35,000
Choiseul Island (including evacuees).....	2,000
New Britain (Rabaul area).....	56,000
New Ireland.....	5,500
Total.....	98,500

As for the troops in the Bougainville area, 5,000 were thought to be in the northern sector (Buka area), 5,000 in the eastern sector (Numa Numa-Kieta), 17,000 in the southern sector, 5,000 to 6,000 in the Shortland Islands, 3,000 in Ballale and surrounding islands, and 132 in the Treasury Islands. All indications were that the enemy considered the defense of southern Bougainville of prime importance.

As of 9 October enemy air strength was estimated to be 160 fighters, 120 medium bombers, 66 dive or light bombers, and 39 float planes based on Bougainville, on New Ireland, and in the vicinity of Rabaul. Approximately 72 per cent of these planes were thought to be based in the Rabaul area, 20 per cent in the Bougainville area, and eight per cent on New Ireland. It became increasingly evident that under severe punishment by Allied planes the enemy was gradually displaying less confidence in his ability to protect his air bases in southern Bougainville. The strength of aircraft at Buka continued high, but concentrations at Kahili, Ballale, and Kara began to dwindle—a clear recognition of Allied air and naval superiority.

In the vicinity of Empress Augusta Bay, the Japanese were believed to have an outpost located in the Cape Torokina area with an estimated strength of not more than 100 men and possibly some antiaircraft machine guns. A small observation post was believed to be located near the Laruma River. Small forces were also known to be near Mawareka, with reserves, including artillery, at Mosigetta, totalling in all about 1,000 men. Large forces were known to be located in the Buka, Kieta, and Kahili areas.

In late October there were indications that the enemy was preparing to counter further by-passing or flanking movements by increasing the number of mobile troops available to repulse landings on lightly defended areas. About the same time, intelligence photographs disclosed military activity at Cape Torokina, including emplacement of antiaircraft positions, and construction of a slit trench and some minor buildings. This was in no wise alarming, however, and indicated no enemy awareness of the impending assault upon the position.

Neutralization of Enemy Airfields

Between our northernmost airfield at Barakoma and the proposed landing site at Cape Torokina were three enemy airfields. Kahili, a large and well-developed airfield, lay at the southern tip of Bougainville, and Kara, a new strip, lay seven miles inland from Kahili and to the northwest. Ballale airfield was on the island of Ballale thirteen miles southeast of Kahili. Twenty-eight miles north of Kahili on the east coast of Bougainville was located Kieta airdrome, nonoperational at the time, and nearby was Kieta seaplane anchorage. Radar, radio, and other installations were grouped around these fields. To the northwest at the

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tip of Bougainville Island was Bonis airstrip, and just across a narrow passage was Buka airstrip, on Buka Island.

The campaign to neutralize these airfields, or at least those at the southern end of Bougainville, by means of land-based aircraft bombing, was intensified on 15 October 1943. From that date through 31 October planes based at Barakoma and Munda, under ComAirNorSols, Brig. Gen. Field Harris, USMC, carried out an average of approximately four attacks a day, ranging in strength from 100 planes down to strafing attacks by a few fighters.³ Kahili was subjected to 18 attacks, Kara to 17, Ballale 6, Buka 7, and Kieta 2 within this period. On an average day of four attacks such as 23 October, 59 tons were dropped on Kara and 68 tons on Kahili.

Enemy air activity in the South Pacific area was greatly reduced during the month. Enemy sorties declined from 801 in September to 495 in October, while his losses increased from 148 in September to 173 in the latter month. By comparison, our aircraft in the South Pacific flew 3,259 sorties in October, with a loss of 26 planes in combat. More than 90 per cent of our air effort was directed against enemy land targets—principally in the southern Bougainville area.

The success of this effort is attested by the fact that all enemy airfields in the southern Bougainville area were practically neutralized by the end of October, thereby removing one of the major hazards to the projected operations against the Treasury Islands, Choiseul, and Bougainville.

In the meantime the Fifth Army Air Force of the Southwest Pacific area, under command of Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney, USA, intensified the heavy air offensive it had mounted against the enemy in mid-August. A considerable part of this offensive was aimed at the Japanese base at Rabaul. On 12 October Allied planes struck the Rabaul area in one of the heaviest attacks ever made in the Southwest Pacific theater up to that time. Heavy and medium bombers with strong fighter protection dropped 350 tons of bombs and expended 250,000 rounds of ammunition in strafing. Allied medium bombers in low-level attacks on three airfields in the area destroyed an estimated 100 aircraft on the ground, and damaged 51 others before they could take off. Of the 40 enemy fighters able to attempt interception, 26 were reported shot down in combat over the targets. During the same attack our heavy bombers struck at enemy shipping in the harbor, sinking three destroyers, three medium-sized merchant vessels

³ See Appendix A for detailed tabulation of these air attacks.

totaling 18,000 tons, 43 small cargo vessels of less than 500 tons each, and 70 harbor craft. In addition, a submarine, a submarine tender, a destroyer tender, and another merchant ship were hit and seriously damaged. Wharves, warehouses, barracks, administration buildings, and fuel and ammunition dumps were demolished or heavily damaged. Our losses amounted to only five planes.

In the week that followed, Allied planes destroyed or damaged approximately 250 Japanese aircraft in the New Guinea-New Britain area. Of these, 138 were shot down in air combat, 36 were probably destroyed in combat, 70 were claimed to have been wrecked on the ground, and another 12 damaged on the ground. Included in this air activity was a second attack on the Rabaul area on 18 October, this time by 55 B-25's. Our force claimed to have destroyed 24 enemy aircraft in air combat and 36 on the ground. It also reported the sinking of one enemy destroyer, one gunboat, one medium-sized cargo vessel, and the probable sinking of one gunboat and another medium-sized cargo vessel.

Allied planes carried out four additional attacks on the Rabaul area before the end of October: one on the 23rd, another on the following day, one on the 26th, and one on the 29th. The size of the attacking forces ranged from 60 to 145 planes. Our forces claimed to have destroyed 226 enemy aircraft in air combat or on the ground and probably destroyed 106 others. Even allowing for considerable inaccuracies in reporting planes destroyed on the ground, it is evident that the Japanese suffered heavy losses as a result of these attacks. While the enemy rapidly replaced his losses, his menace to our Bougainville landing was somewhat reduced by the end of October.

SEIZURE OF TREASURY ISLANDS

In his operation plan issued 12 October 1943, Admiral Halsey had directed that Admiral Wilkinson, in addition to other operations, "seize and hold Treasury Islands on Dog minus 5 day, capture and destroy enemy forces, and establish thereat radars and minimum facilities for small craft as necessary."

Prior to the issuance of this order, on the night of 22-23 August, a submarine had landed a reconnaissance party of Naval and Marine officers and men on Mono Island of the Treasury Group. These men were evacuated by the same means on the night of 27-28 August. Their report indicated that the best landing beach on the island was in Blanche Harbor

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between the Saveke River mouth and Falamai Point. This beach appeared suitable for all types of landing craft, and had an ample water supply nearby. The additional advantage of sufficient dispersal and bivouac areas for troops gave this beach superiority over all others examined. The reconnaissance party saw signs of enemy patrols and activities, but no Japanese were sighted. Beaches Orange One and Orange Two were therefore located by the operational orders between the mouth of Saveke River and Falamai Point. Beaches Purple One, Two, and Three were located on the north shore of Stirling Island, where no opposition was anticipated. In addition, Beach Emerald was selected at Soanotalu, on the northern shore of Mono Island.

Admiral Wilkinson on 15 October designated Rear Admiral George H. Fort as Commander Southern Force in command of the Treasury operation. MTB's based at Lambu Lambu, Vella Lavella and at Lever Harbor on northern New Georgia were to screen the approach by a picket line from the Shortlands to Choiseul. He also made the following ground units, under command of Brigadier Row, NZEF, available for the operation:

8th New Zealand Brigade Group (less certain detachments).

198th Combat Artillery (AA) less detachments and one provisional battalion.

Detachment Headquarters, ComAirNorSols, including Argus 6.⁴

2nd Platoon, Company A, 1st Corps Signal Bn., IMAC.⁵

Advanced Naval Base:

Communication Unit No. 8.

Boat Pool No. 10.

Company A, 87th Construction Battalion.

1st Battalion, 14th New Zealand Brigade (in reserve).

The New Zealanders were seasoned veterans who had participated in the campaigns of North Africa, Greece and Crete.

Admiral Halsey directed the task force commanded by Rear Admiral Aaron S. Merrill to cover the operation from surface attack. He also

⁴The first Argus unit was shipped overseas in March 1943. By the middle of that year sufficient combat experience had been obtained to permit a redefinition of the mission of an Argus unit and to justify the reorganization of the unit so that it might more efficiently perform its functions. Its purpose has been described as follows: "To provide, during the development stage of a United States Naval Base, a comprehensive air warning, surface warning, and fighter direction organization which will coordinate all radar operations under the Area Commander." This conception is much broader than originally contemplated. The complement of an Argus unit is approximately 20 officers and 178 men.

⁵First Marine Amphibious Corps.

directed shore-based aircraft to support the operation by furnishing air cover and support, and to neutralize enemy airfields in the Bougainville area.

In order to obtain last minute information a reconnaissance party of two New Zealand noncommissioned officers and some natives was landed by PT boat on Mono Island the night of 21-22 October. This party reported that, according to friendly natives, the enemy had recently landed reinforcements and that his strength was about 225 men; that medium caliber guns had been emplaced on both sides of Falamai Point; that machine guns were emplaced on Mono Island along the approaches to the landing beaches; that there was an observation post at Laifa Point with direct wire communication with the radio station near the Saveke River; and that Stirling Island was unoccupied by the enemy. The reconnaissance party, evacuated the night of 22-23 October, brought with them some Mono Island natives to act as guides for the landing.

On the night of 25-26 October an advance party of New Zealand noncommissioned officers and some natives landed on Mono. Their mission was to cut communication lines between the observation post at Laifa Point and the radio station just prior to the landing.

Loading and Approach

Transport units under Admiral Fort were divided into five groups, each with its tactical commander.⁶ The First Transport Group under Commander John D. Sweeney, ComTransDiv 12, consisted of eight APD's screened by the *Eaton*, *Pringle*, and *Philip*. The Second Transport Group, under Captain Jack E. Hurff, ComDesRon 22, was made up of eight LCI(L)'s and two newly converted LCI gunboats screened by the *Waller*, *Cony*, *Sausley*, *Adroit*, *Conflict*, and *Daring*. The Third Transport Group, under Commander James R. Pahl, ComDesDiv 44, consisted of two LST's screened by the *Conway*, *Renshaw*, and YMS's 197 and 260. The Fourth Transport Group, under Lt. (jg) Martin E. Bergstrom, was composed of one APC and three LCT's screened by two PT boats, and the Fifth Transport Group under Lieut. James E. Locke, consisted of one APC, six LCM's, and an aircraft rescue boat.

⁶ For task group organization see Appendix B.

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The five transport groups were loaded and departed independently, so timed as to arrive at Blanche Harbor on 27 October as follows:

Unit	Depart	Arrive 27 October
1st Transport Group.....	Guadalcanal 1230 26 October.....	0520
2nd Transport Group.....	Guadalcanal 0400 26 October.....	0555
3rd Transport Group.....	Guadalcanal 1930 25 October.....	0640
4th Transport Group.....	Rendova 1200 26 October.....	0830
5th Transport Group.....	Lambu Lambu 1900 26 October.....	0830

Five days prior to the loading, the APD's and LCI(L)'s embarked troops and conducted a landing rehearsal.

The several groups made independent passages without incident, except that a flare was dropped near the LCI gunboats between Simbo and Treasury Islands. The groups passed before dawn, as scheduled, in the area between Simbo and Treasury Islands. The element of surprise was extremely important, since there were reported to be approximately 25,000 Japanese in the Shortland-Buin area with 83 barges at their disposal. These forces could have heavily reinforced the Treasury Islands in a few hours. Complete radio silence was therefore maintained except for three orders by high frequency voice radio (TBS), which included an order delaying H-hour by 20 minutes.

Since practically every unit venturing west or north of Vella Lavella at night previous to this operation had been quickly detected by enemy float-plane snoopers, it was considered almost certain that our approach would be discovered during the night; but despite the flare dropped near one of the smaller task units, it seems probable that the enemy made no contact and that surprise was fairly complete. The covering cruiser group under Admiral Merrill, to the westward, was discovered by snoopers, however, and many flares and float lights were dropped near the formation. "Fortunately," as Capt. Arleigh A. Burke, ComDesRon 23, remarked in his report, "the bogie became so interested in playing 'hide and seek' with the [covering] task force that it is believed he did not see the landing forces coming up towards Treasury Island from the South."

Landing and Unloading

At 0540 the seven APD's of the First Transport Group lay to 1,300 yards off Cummings Point, Stirling Island, bearing 060° T., just south of

the entrance to Blanche Harbor, and commenced the debarkation of troops into boats. Sunrise was approaching, with visibility good, the sky partly cloudy, wind northeast, force 2. The *Eaton*, as fighter director ship, proceeded to her station four miles off the harbor, while the *Pringle* and *Philip* began their shore bombardment within five minutes after the transport group arrived. The air spotter was already over the targets, and at 0600 the fighter cover of 32 planes arrived on station.

Since it was impracticable to operate destroyers in the narrow waters of Blanche Harbor, the fire support area was located west of the entrance. All firing at this stage was on pre-arranged targets. Preparatory fire of the *Pringle* was delivered approximately according to schedule, with good battery performance. No assistance, unfortunately, was obtained from the air spotter, who subsequently reported radio material failure responsible for his inability to aid the gunners. While it later developed that much of the *Pringle's* fire was a little too far back from the beach to be of maximum effectiveness, she nevertheless covered her assigned area reasonably well. The preparatory fire of the *Philip*, which suffered several gun casualties, was disappointing in accuracy, timing and quantity. At 0623, three minutes before the boats of the assault wave hit the beach, the destroyers ceased fire. The *Pringle* maneuvered clear of the fire support area to patrol west of Blanche Harbor, while the *Philip* proceeded independently to patrol on east-west courses approximately 6,000 yards south of Stirling Island.

In the meantime the loaded boats from the APD's had rounded Cummings Point under the arched tracers of 5-inch shells, the sight of which "gave confidence to the boats." Two newly converted LCI (L) gunboats had left the Second Transport Group during the night and escorted the landing boats of the APD's into the harbor. The major assault was to be made on Beach Orange at Falamai, the only suitable beach on the northern coast of Mono Island. A smaller force was to land on the Purple beaches of Stirling Island where no opposition was expected. In order to reach Falamai it was necessary to proceed two miles up the harbor, which averaged only about 1,000 yards in width. Since no enemy resistance was expected on Stirling Island, and Japanese machine-gun positions were reported along the southern coast of Mono Island as well as on both sides of Falamai Peninsula, the assault wave was routed close to Stirling Island to a point just beyond Watson Island, where the boats bound for the Orange beaches turned left.

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Before that point was reached, the boats from the *Stringham* and *Talbot* turned right and proceeded independently to Beaches Purple 2 and 3. The New Zealand troops were landed on Stirling Island without opposition. Although the beaches were bad, no difficulty was encountered.

Resistance quickly developed on the opposite side of the harbor, however. Despite air bombing the previous day and bombardment by the fire support group the approaching boats were fired on by a number of machine guns, some mortars, and a twin-mount 40-mm. automatic gun located at Falamai. Fortunately only one boat was disabled by gunfire although several were perforated by bullets. Five naval personnel and several New Zealand troops were wounded on the way in.

At this point the newly converted LCI(L) gunboats, which had arrived from Noumea just in time to participate in this operation, saw their first action. Equipped with 3-inch guns, two of these craft accompanied the assault boats, one preceding and one on the flank. Just prior to the landing one of the gunboats rounded Watson Island and knocked out the 40-mm. twin-mount, thus saving many lives. The gunboats also returned the fire of several enemy machine guns. Their performance during this operation, for which they had no time to train, was described by Admiral Fort as "especially creditable." They continued to operate in the harbor throughout the morning.

The assault wave hit the beach at H-hour (0626) exactly. The wave consisted of 16 LCP(R)'s carrying 640 men to the Orange beaches. The APD's lay in the transport area for about two hours, landing 1,600 men and at least 80 tons of stores. In the meantime, the *McKean*, which had left the formation at 0430 and proceeded independently to Beach Emerald at Soanotalu on the north coast of Mono to land troops, returned to the transport area at 0708 and reported that the landing was successful and unopposed. At 0800 the APD's departed under the escort of the *Conway* and *Renshaw*.

The Second Transport Group, which included eight LCI(L)'s, completed its approach by 0630, and the *Cony* and *Waller* took stations as fighter director ships. The LCI(L)'s, under Comdr. J. McDonald Smith, rounded the west end of Stirling Island at 0630 in two columns as follows: port column—Nos. 222 (F), 334, 24, and 336; starboard column—Nos. 61, 67, 69, and 330. The landing craft were preceded by the AM's *Adroit*, *Conflict*, and *Daring*. The columns on their way up the harbor passed the Higgins boats of the APD's returning from the beaches and observed

shore fire converging on the gunboats accompanying the landing craft, all of which were vigorously returning the fire. The LCI(L)'s opened fire in order of station in column as they came abreast of the enemy installations, silencing some of them. Three of the landing craft in the right column, Nos. 61, 67, and 69, swung to starboard after they were midway down the channel and proceeded to the Purple beaches on Stirling Island. The remaining craft swung to port to approach the Orange beaches, on which they let go their ramps about 0647.

The LCI(L)'s were under rifle and mortar fire on the Orange beaches throughout their unloading period. Four shells exploded near No. 334, and two near the stern of the No. 330 as she was retracting. Observers on LCI(L) 24 spotted an active pillbox some 60 yards off her port bow, an inactive one about 20 yards off her starboard bow, and a very active pillbox some 80 yards off her starboard bow. They were all well camouflaged with netting and foliage and blended into the jungle background. Two dead men lay before one pillbox, and others lay at the water's edge. Soon two Japanese snipers tumbled from the tops of coconut trees near the beach.

In spite of this opposition, the eight LCI(L)'s achieved the rather remarkable feat of debarking 1,600 troops and 150 tons of cargo within 35 minutes. LCI(L) 330 completed the debarkation of 299 officers and men and 14 tons of heavy equipment and supplies in 14 minutes, which, according to Admiral Wilkinson "would be considered an outstanding performance even without any opposition from the beach." There were no casualties among naval personnel and no damage of any consequence to the craft. By 0730 the LCI(L)'s were underway with the AM's for Guadalcanal escorted by the *Waller*, *Pringle*, and *Saufley*.

About 0715 LST's 399 and 485 of the Third Transport Group stood in to Blanche Harbor preceded by two YMS's sweeping for all types of mines. Seeing no evidence of a beach party or beachmaster, the commanding officers selected their own landing sites and beached exactly on schedule, at 0735, LST 399 at Beach Orange 1, and No. 485 at Orange 2. Five minutes later both ships were subjected to heavy fire from one or more 80-mm. mortars, two or more 30-mm. mountain guns, and considerable sniping with small arms. Within the ensuing 50 minutes LST 399 received two direct hits. One on the port side amidships tore a three-by-four-foot hole in the bulkhead and started a fire, which was quickly extinguished; another hit on the breech of a 40-mm. gun destroyed the

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gun and killed three of its crew. LST 435 received two direct hits on the forecastle and several near hits. These hits wounded eight men, one of whom subsequently died, but did relatively minor damage to the vessel.

LST 399 found herself in especially difficult straits. She was bracketed by a score of shells from the mortar that made the two direct hits. It was also discovered that a large, well-covered, active pillbox was located about eight yards from her port bow door, and that Japanese snipers were quite active. During a lull in the firing the ramp was lowered, but the first man off the ship was shot down, and the two who followed were dropped in their tracks. It became necessary to close the ramp for protection. Several New Zealand troops were standing on shore out of the arc of the pillbox's fire ineffectually firing Bren guns into the pillbox. None of the LST's forward automatic weapons could be brought to bear on the box. Personnel aboard ship opened up on the snipers and brought one down, but at that point they received orders from the beach to cease firing. It had become apparent that the soldiers ashore were not going to silence the pillbox, which had become so active that all hands aboard ship had to take cover. No unloading could be attempted until the pillbox was silenced.

At 0815 the LST requested permission to leave this beach, but received the reply, "Not granted." Whereupon, a resourceful New Zealander mounted a D-8 bulldozer, and with the great blade raised high to protect him from fire, he rolled heavily down the ramp, several soldiers covering him with Bren guns as he came out. He then worked to the "blind side" of the pillbox, lowered his blade, and ploughed the pillbox and its seven occupants under the earth, "tamping it down well all around, effectively silencing its fire."

Both LST's began unloading operations at 0830. In the meantime the *Eaton*, with Admiral Fort, entered the harbor in an attempt to silence the mortar fire. However, she could not locate the battery, which ceased fire when the *Eaton* approached. The *Philip*, on station south of Stirling Island, was assigned a target by the shore fire control party and fired five salvos. There was no more mortar fire for hours, though whether as the result of hits by the *Philip* was not known.

The Fifth Transport Group, consisting of one APc, six LCM's, and an aircraft rescue boat, arrived off the western entrance of the harbor about 1830, and the Fourth Transport Group, composed of one APc, three LCT's, and a screen of two PT boats, arrived about 1850. Both

groups were ordered to report to Commander Naval Base, Treasury Islands, for beaching and unloading assignments.

Unloading from LST 399, which was the task of a detail of officers and men from the New Zealand Brigade Group, proceeded well at first, but after the mobile equipment was ashore the unloading came to "an almost abrupt halt." It was necessary that unloading be speeded by hand, since the ship never had more than three trucks and some jeeps. Many of the unloading crew were soldiers who had just come back from jungle fighting, and were not easily convinced that unloading by hand was necessary. LST 485, for lack of bulldozer, road, or unloading area, also had to resort to unloading by hand.

At 1120 mortar fire was reopened from a new position on the hillside about 500 yards off the bow of the No. 399, which was bracketed and then hit on the port side. Shells continued screaming over the forecastle and striking the beach, and at 1125 another shell struck the ship on the port side, this time in the capstan control room, wrecking the capstan machinery. A few minutes later, on about the 20th salvo, the mortar (or mortars) registered a direct hit on a large ammunition dump at Falamai. A violent explosion knocked men off their feet on Beach Orange 2, fired the native village, and set off small arms dumps. Burning debris, shrapnel from exploding 90-mm. shells, and exploding pyrotechnics covered the forward part of LST 399, so that the whole forecastle seemed on fire. The heat grew so intense that the forward guns had to be abandoned, and when it was noticed that the heat was blistering the paint on the starboard bow, the forward magazine was flooded. Hoses were manned up forward, by means of which several clusters of fire on the deck were extinguished. The commanding officer of LST Group 15, Comdr. Vilhelm K. Busck, then signalled LST 399 to retract and rebeach 50 yards to the west, which she promptly did.

At 1155 the *Philip* and the two LCI(G)'s entered the channel in an attempt to silence the mortar fire, but by the time they had established contact with the shore party the mortar had ceased firing. Mortar fire was never resumed.

Commander LST Group 15, after getting unloading started again on LST 485, proceeded to LST 399 where he found the unloading detail demoralized by the previous shelling. With the aid of a New Zealand officer he finally got some work under way though it went forward slowly. Upon rebeaching, LST 399 found that her forward electrical

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apparatus had shorted out, and that the ramp had to be lowered by hand. At 1515 Comdr. Busck was again called back to the ship by an appeal for him to use his authority to speed the work of discharging cargo. A few minutes after he arrived bogies were reported; a Zeke came over pursued by two P-38's, and DD's offshore opened a gun-plane duel. For a time it was impossible to control the unloading parties.

By 1600 the enemy planes were driven off, and unloading was resumed, continuing until after dark. At 1841 LST 485, having completely unloaded and retracted, lay to off the stern of No. 399 to protect her sister ship. LST 399 reported at 1902 that unloading was at a standstill, although she still had 20 tons of cargo aboard and was under orders to unload completely. Finding it impossible to resume unloading, she retracted at 1943 and both LST's stood out of the channel, led by the *Philip* and accompanied by the two YMS's. When LST 399 was about 1,000 yards from the beach she received reports of bogies and heard enemy planes overhead. Soon thereafter she saw the beach she had just left go up in a huge mass of flame, eight or ten bombs having been dropped.

Air Attack

Shortly before the air attack on the LST's in the afternoon, the *Philip* had been operating in the restricted waters of the harbor, where she was in a vulnerable position. She was given ample warning, however, by the fighter director ship *Cony*, which picked up the bogies by SC-2 radar at 1508, distance 47 miles. The *Philip* promptly stood out of the harbor, and the *Cony* increased speed to 30 knots.

Fighter director personnel on the *Cony* plotted four groups of enemy planes approaching the area. Basing their estimates on the number of raids tracked and on the radar reports, fighter directors estimated that there were from 30 to 40 Val dive bombers and 50 to 60 Zeke and Hamp fighters. Our air forces consisted of 16 P-38's on station divided into two groups of eight each, one at 20,000 feet and one at 25,000 feet. We also had 16 P-40's, all at 10,000 feet, and eight P-39's at 10,000 feet. We had eight P-38's and eight P-40's orbiting in the general area 15 miles northeast of the Treasury Islands. The other flights were orbiting in a general area 15 miles northwest of the islands. The fighters were vectored out and constantly fed new plots. Three of the enemy groups were apparently intercepted. Several "tally-ho's" were heard, but no information on any of the raids was given by any of the aircraft in the 12 divisions

under the *Cony's* direction. Ship's officers and men, however, reported seeing many enemy aircraft shot down. Our fighter planes claimed to have destroyed 12 enemy planes and reported no losses themselves. The attack was not turned back, however.

At 1525 the *Cony* sighted a large formation of horizontal bombers approaching from the west on a course that would take them over Blanche Harbor. Our fighters were engaging the enemy bombers and were seen to shoot down four or five of them. Seventeen enemy planes were counted as the formation closed. Our fighters were still engaging the bombers when they began unloading bombs. One large geyser was seen in the western entrance to the harbor, but this attack was not pressed home because of the successful interception.

A few minutes later, at 1532, a group of Vals attacked the *Cony* and *Philip* from the southwest. The planes were not intercepted before they reached their attack position. They came in out of the sun in an attack that the *Philip* described as "the best coordinated and severest this ship had experienced." The *Philip* maneuvered at high speed with full rudder throughout the attack, firing on each plane in turn with her main battery and automatic guns. A number of 20-mm. hits were observed, and one plane was seen trailing white smoke. The planes followed close on one another, making runs from port quarter to port bow, dropping their bombs, and levelling off to starboard. Approximately 12 bombs landed from 15 to 100 yards off the starboard side, but none of them hit the *Philip*.

Some ten or twelve planes attacked the *Cony* in three or four waves from different sectors. Maneuvering in a series of radical turns, the *Cony* opened fire with her main battery and automatic weapons on each group. At 1533 the crew of No. 5 gun reported a shell jammed in the gun, which had to be drenched down the bore and outside. The *Cony* shot down five planes during the attack—one by 5-inch gunfire, and four by 40- and 20-mm. One other was possibly shot down and three were damaged.

About six bombs fell within 100 yards of the *Cony*. Then at 1534 two bombs struck her main deck aft abreast No. 4 gun. One of the bombs hit the starboard main deck at frame 163, one foot inboard, and exploded on contact; the other hit and penetrated the port main deck at frame 157, eight feet inboard, angled through bulkhead 157 and the longitudinal bulkhead between compartments C-202-E and C-4-F and exploded in the

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latter compartment. The shock of the bomb explosions was felt throughout the ship. Speed began to fall off at once, but since the enemy planes continued to attack, the ship continued to make all speed possible with one engine and to maneuver radically. More bombs fell wide of the ship. By the time the last group passed the *Cony*, about 1537, our fighters had intercepted them, and the enemy planes began their withdrawal toward Bougainville. By the end of the action 5-inch guns Nos. 3, 4, and 5 were out of action, 40-mm. guns, 3, 4, and 5 were without electrical power, and one 20-mm. gun was out of action.

As a result of the bombing, the *Cony's* after deckhouse was severely riddled and buckled, and the crew's head and washroom were demolished. On the first platform, bulkhead 157 and all bulkheads between that and 148 were ruptured. The after engine room bulkhead was bulged and seams were opened, and the machine shop and its equipment were demolished. On the second platform, bulkhead 157 was ruptured at the port, center, and starboard sections, and the center section of bulkhead 152 was demolished. The after engine room was flooded with oil from the ruptured after bulkhead to a level of one foot below the upper grating. A steam leak necessitated abandoning the engine room. Fire was reported in the after living spaces and in No. 4 handling room. The order was given to flood the after magazines.

Four enlisted men were killed in the action, four others were so seriously wounded or burned that they later died, three men were wounded or burned seriously, and seven others slightly.

Within Blanche Harbor, LCI Gunboat 22 was attacked by two dive bombers. One bomb missed the craft by about 50 yards but none struck her. Many hits from the gunboat's fire were observed on the second attacking plane, which was driven off smoking and probably severely damaged. The beached LST's, however, were not attacked.

As soon as the attack ended, the *Cony* informed the *Philip* that her damage was serious, that she would begin retirement from the area at once, and that the *Philip* was to assume fighter director duties. At reduced speed the *Cony* proceeded, her after engine room still flooded and blanketed with steam, and the fires still burning in her after living spaces. The fires were brought under control about 1900, but continued to smoulder all night. At 2000 she joined the *Waller* and proceeded in company with that ship and with the *Apache*, which joined at 2400. The fires were extinguished by 0630 the following morning, and the after

engine room was pumped out by 0800. At 1049 the *Cony* wiped a spring bearing and had to be taken in tow by the *Apache*. She reached Purvis Bay without further incident.

In the meantime the LST's were being harassed on their retirement course by Japanese planes. At 2024, about 40 minutes after they began retiring, several flares and float lights were dropped near the ships. The *Philip* was escorting and the *Saufley* later joined. At 2257, without warning from any radar-equipped vessel, a plane dropped two bombs and a float light close to No. 399. The ship received several splinters of shrapnel along the port side, one of which penetrated the conning station, while another cut the forestay. The severe shaking given the vessel broke the amplifier tubes.

The remainder of the trip was uneventful save for the extraordinary work done by the three doctors embarked on LST 485. An operating room had been improvised in the troop quarters, and all the seriously wounded were taken aboard that ship. One doctor and two corpsmen were sent from LST 399 to LST 485, which had 45 wounded aboard. During the 30 hours en route to Guadalcanal, the three medical officers and assisting corpsmen worked without sleep or rest, performing 15 major operations and giving 120 plasma and 50 dextrose injections. All except five of the wounded were saved.

THE CHOISEUL DIVERSION

As a diversion for the Treasury landings and for the Bougainville operation to come, a landing of the 2nd Marine Parachute Battalion, under command of Lt. Col. Victor H. Krulak, on Choiseul Island, was planned for midnight of D minus 5 day, which was the day of the landing on the Treasury Islands. The operation was to be carried out by part of the ships that participated in the Treasury landings. Reports indicated that many enemy evacuees from Kolombangara were moving to the western part of Choiseul for ultimate transfer to Bougainville and elsewhere. Their removal from Choiseul had begun on 20 October.

TransDiv 22 and TransDiv 12 completed unloading at Treasury Islands at 0800 on 27 October and began the return to Guadalcanal. Wounded were transferred to TransDiv 12, and TransDiv 22 exchanged damaged boats for good ones. TransDiv 22, Comdr. Robert H. Wilkinson in the *Kilty*, with the *Ward*, *Crosby*, and *McKean*, left the convoy en route to Guadalcanal and set course for Juno River, Vella Lavella Island, via

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Gizo Strait. The *Conway* accompanied the high speed troop ships. This force lay to off Juno River at 1830. So smooth was the planning that a large number of loaded boats were off the beach and ready to come alongside as soon as the APD's stopped. The 800 men of the 2nd Marine Parachute Battalion, acting as infantry, were embarked expeditiously.

TransDiv 22, in column, fell in astern of the *Conway* as guide and proceeded across the Slot at a speed of 15 knots. The night was dark with intermittent rain squalls, sea calm, and wind force 1 and 2. The passage across the Slot was uneventful. When the shore was 12,000 yards ahead on bearing 000° T. speed was reduced to 10 knots and course adjusted to head westward of the Zino Islands. At 2310 an explosion was heard that was believed to be a bomb dropped on the port quarter of the rear APD. At 2314 a plane was heard overhead, but was not sighted or revealed by radar. No further attack was made at this time.

At 2322 all engines of the APD's were stopped when the ships were 2,400 yards offshore at Voza on the southwest coast of Choiseul. After proceeding farther toward the shore, the *Conway* retired and took patrol station about 3,000 yards to the seaward of TransDiv 22. At about 2352 a boat with a scouting party left the APD's, and at 0019 the first wave of boats followed.

A night fighter was assigned to the force, but remained at a high altitude. At 0145 a Japanese twin-float observation seaplane of the Jake type crossed over the *Conway* at an altitude of 200 feet and dropped two bombs which exploded some 200 yards off the port quarter. The plane did not renew the attack and our destroyers did not take it under fire. At 0209 the landing was completed and the boats hoisted in. The return trip was without incident.

The Marines were unopposed in their landing, but were discovered shortly thereafter. On the 29th they raided a barge group at Vagara, from which the enemy fled, leaving the Marines to destroy the supplies and barges. At 1800 the same day the Marines met a strong force between Vagara and Voza. In succeeding days they continued patrol and raiding activities along a 25-mile line, destroying enemy installations, barges, and supplies. Their swift and vigorous activity surprised the enemy and created the impression that a larger force was at work. Its mission completed, the battalion was withdrawn in LCI's at 0150 on 4 November. Our losses during the entire operation were nine killed, two missing, and fifteen wounded, one of whom was captured. Known enemy casualties were 143 killed. In addition, the battalion disrupted

the withdrawal of Kolombangara refugees along the coast of Choiseul and captured valuable intelligence material. It is believed that our strategy worked well, for by 2 November the enemy had begun to gather strong detachments to oppose the Marines. Their attention was thus to some extent diverted from our primary objective, Bougainville.

BUKA-BONIS AND SHORTLAND BOMBARDMENTS

The landing operations at Empress Augusta Bay were coordinated with a series of surface bombardments and air strikes designed to neutralize enemy airfields to the north and south of the beachhead. These operations opened shortly after midnight with a surface bombardment of Buka and Bonis, followed by an air strike at dawn from carrier-based planes. Also at dawn the task force that had bombarded Buka and Bonis earlier was to bombard enemy bases in the Shortland Islands south of Bougainville. H-hour at Torokina Point was set for 0715, about an hour after sunrise. A second air strike on Buka and Bonis was scheduled to occur about two hours after the assault wave reached the shore at Empress Augusta Bay. These events occurred as follows:

- 0021 Surface bombardment of Buka and Bonis.
- 0624 First air strike on Buka and Bonis.
- 0631 Surface bombardment of Shortland Islands.
- 0726 First assault wave reaches beach at Torokina Point.
- 0930 Second air strike on Buka and Bonis.

Buka-Bonis

Admiral Halsey's plan called for a surface bombardment of Buka and Bonis airfields shortly after midnight on D-day. These two airfields, lying on opposite sides of Buka Passage at the northern tip of Bougainville Island, endangered our landing forces at Empress Augusta Bay and had to be rendered inoperative. This was to be followed by a shelling of the Shortland area at 0600 on D-day.

These missions were assigned to a task force under the command of Rear Admiral Aaron S. Merrill, who was also ordered to cover the operations at Empress Augusta Bay. Task Force Merrill was organized as follows, ships listed in normal order, van to rear:

- DesDiv 45, Capt. Arleigh A. Burke, ComDesRon 23:
 - Charles F. Ausburne (F), Comdr. Luther K. Reynolds.
 - Dyson, Comdr. Roy A. Gano.
 - Stanly, Comdr. Robert W. Cavenagh.
 - Claxton, Comdr. Herald F. Stout.

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CruDiv 12, Rear Admiral Merrill, ComTaskFor:
Montpelier (FF), Capt. Robert G. Tobin.
Cleveland, Capt. Andrew G. Shepard.
Columbia, Capt. Frank E. Beatty.
Denver, Capt. Robert P. Briscoe.

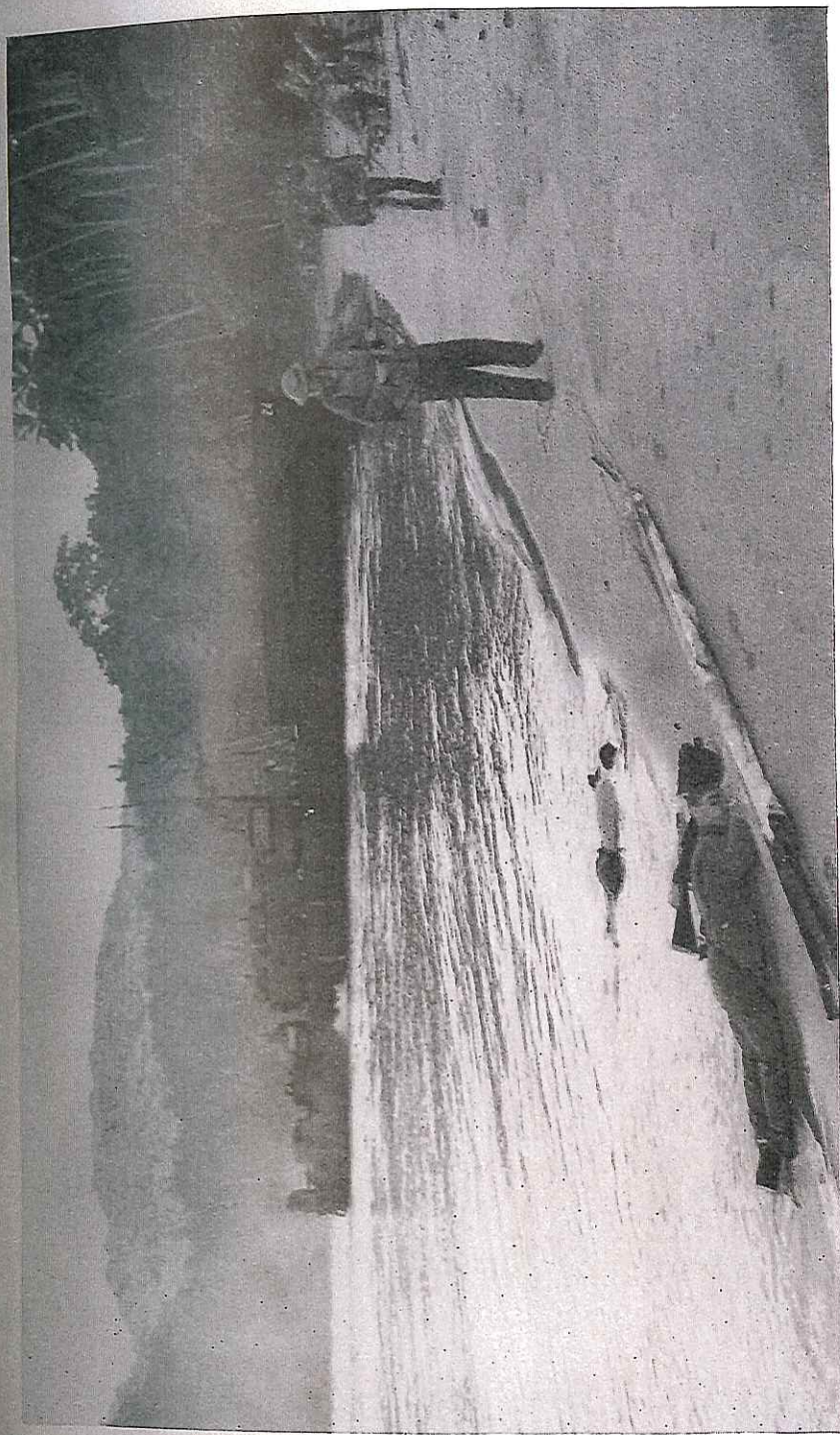
DesDiv 46, Comdr. Bernard L. Austin:
Spence (F), Comdr. Henry J. Armstrong, Jr.
Thatcher, Comdr. Leland R. Lampman.
Converse, Comdr. Dewitt C. E. Hamberger.
Footé, Comdr. Alston Ramsay.

Admiral Merrill and his staff spent the day before their departure at Admiral Halsey's headquarters, studying mosaics made from reconnaissance photographs, collecting grid overlays to be used during the bombardments, and discussing with photographic interpreters the latest air intelligence of target locations in the Buka and Shortland areas. Information thus acquired was pronounced "most gratifying—not only from a gunnery perspective but from the point of view of safe navigation as well." Navigational hazards in the Buka area were formidable, since it was known that our charts contained many discrepancies, and our information concerning location of reefs and shoals was scanty.

Task Force Merrill left Port Purvis at 0230 on 31 October for the run of 537 miles to the north end of Bougainville. The course lay south of the Russell Islands and the New Georgia Group and west of the Treasury Islands, striking due north from a point in latitude 06°39' S., longitude 154°25' E.—a track that would pass well clear of the uncharted reefs on the west coast of Bougainville Island.

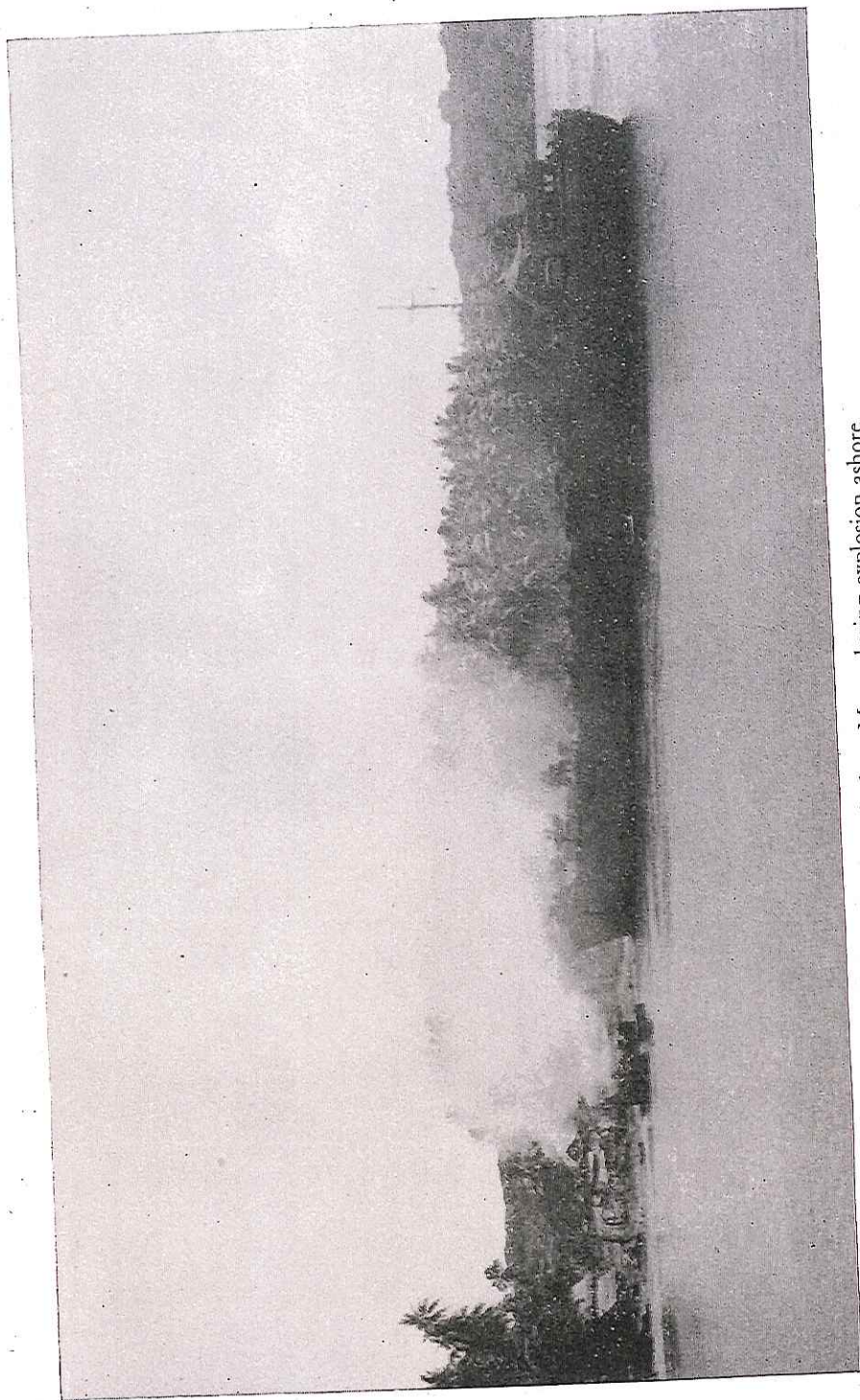
In this deep penetration into enemy waters, it was hoped that surprise could be achieved and that enemy planes could be caught on the fields during the bombardment. Strict radio silence, including TBS, was ordered, and a night fighter was assigned to cover the task force and prevent enemy snoopers from reporting our movements. The *Columbia* was fighter director ship. Little was expected of the night fighter, however, when the night proved to be dark and overcast.

At 1854, while on course 310°, speed 29 knots, the task force picked up a bogey bearing 337°, distance 24 miles. This plane closed to within five miles at 1906, then disappeared from the screen at 50 miles on bearing 355°, the approximate course to Buka. Admiral Merrill considered it reasonable to assume that his high-speed wake had been sighted and that the snooper was returning to report in person. In addition, a radio report



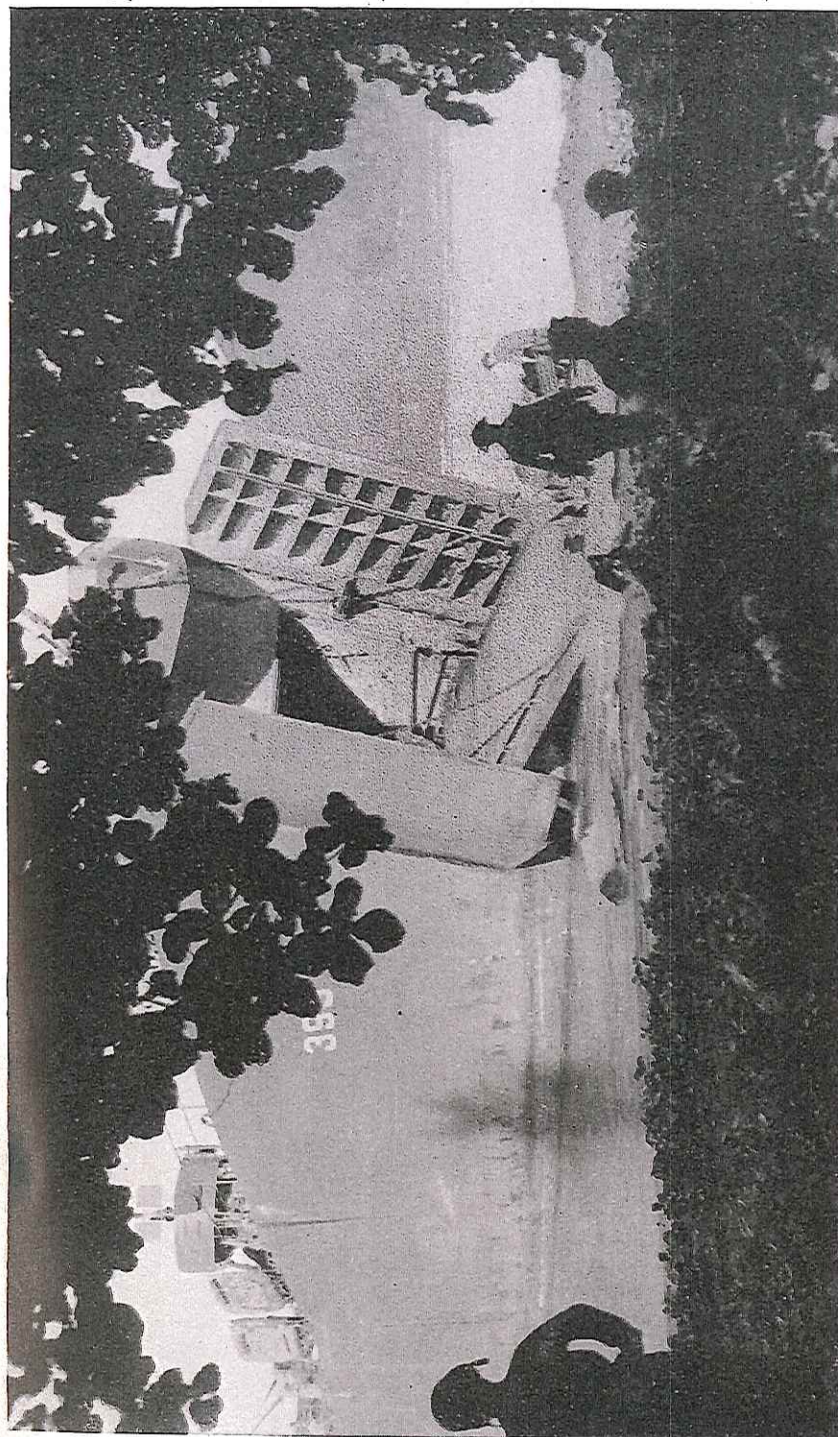
Beach fighting on Mono Island; LCI 24 beached

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LST 399 beached on Mono during explosion ashore

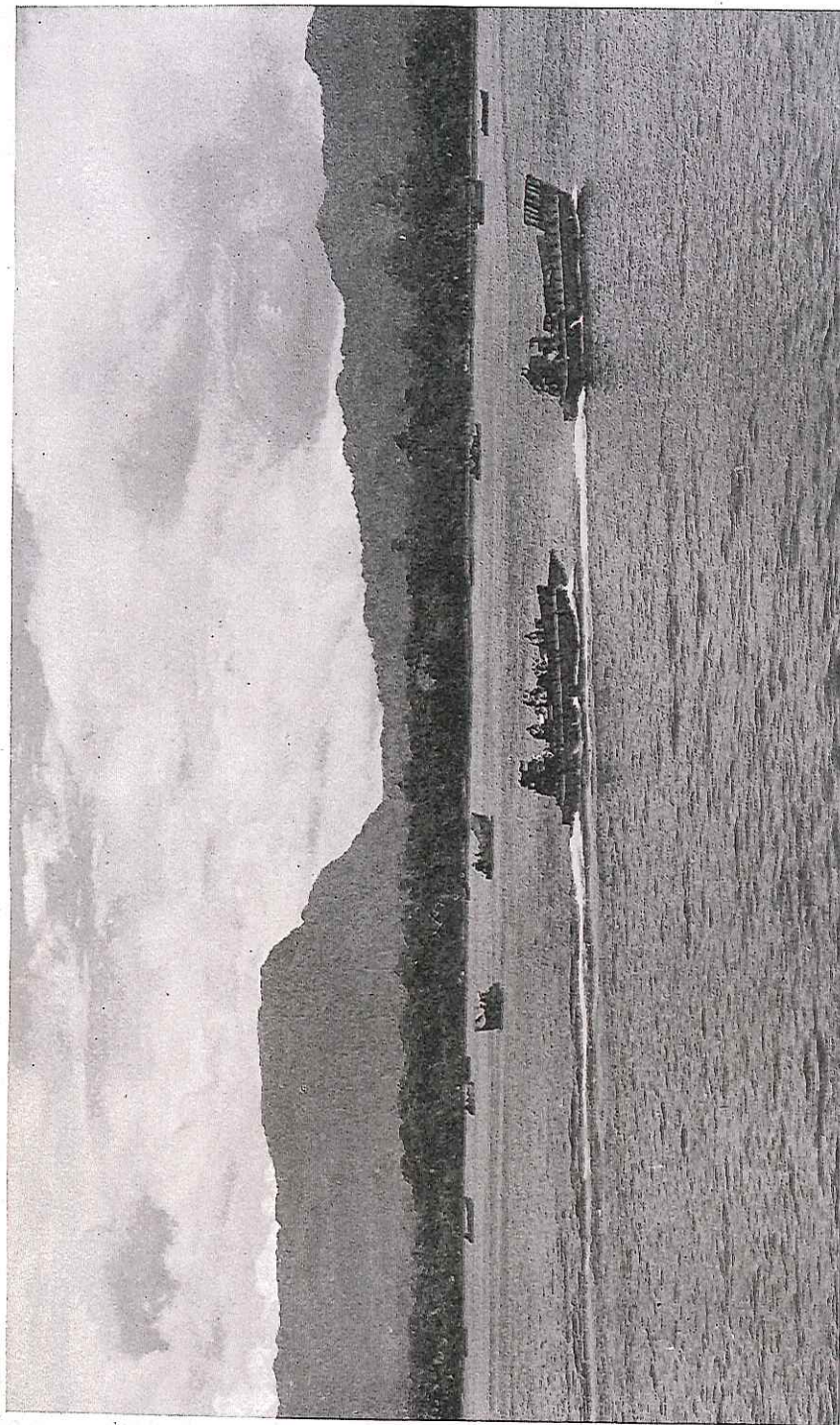


LST 399 unloading cargo on Mono

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Landing craft approaching Bougainville

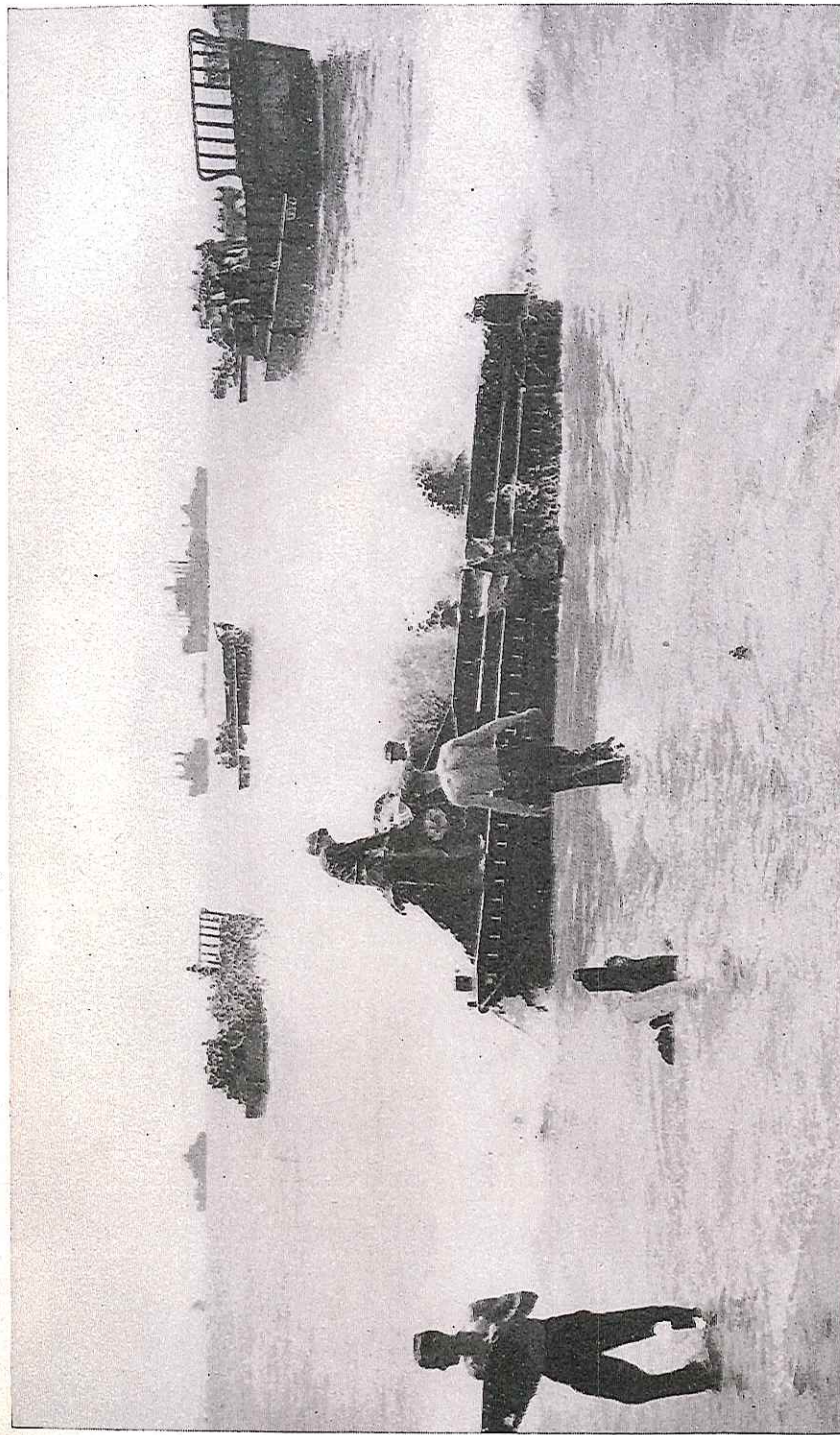
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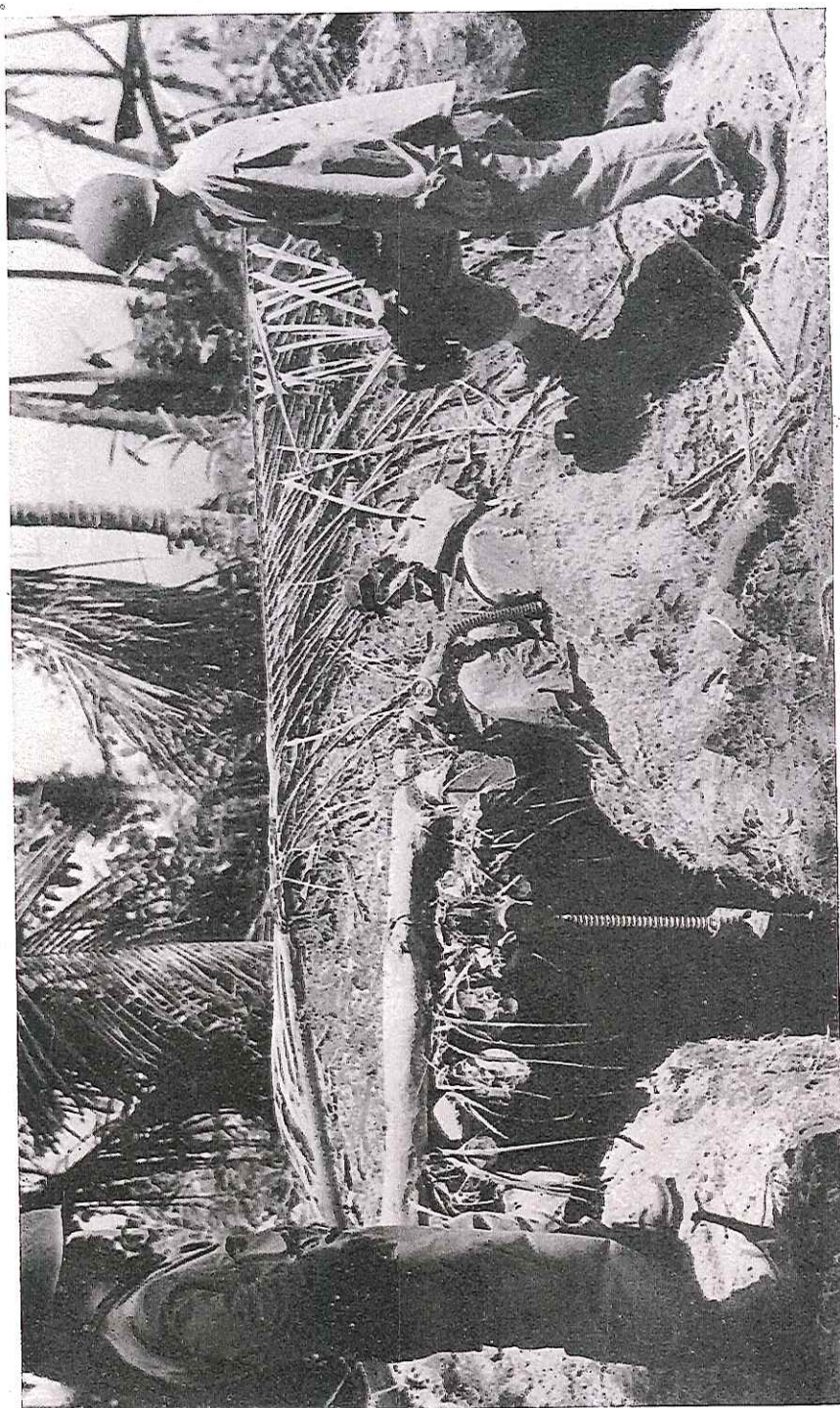


Marines landing on Bougainville

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Landing craft with transports



Japanese pillbox on Bougainville

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was intercepted which indicated that the enemy had sighted our force and suspected that Buka was our objective. The time of the report, curiously, would indicate that its origin was Treasury Island and not a reconnaissance plane. During the next four hours bogies were on the screen constantly, but none of them showed any evidence of having sighted the task force. Beginning at 2329, definite indications of enemy radar transmissions from the direction of Buka were received.

At 2336½ the task force changed course to 090° and headed directly for the beach to the north of Buka, having slowed to 20 knots 12 minutes previously. Convinced that Buka had been alerted by this time, CTF broke radio silence to say: "Confident we are expected, be on the alert for traps." DesDiv 45, less *Stanly*, led the bombardment formation 7,000 yards in the van, and DesDiv 46 split, the first section 3,000 yards ahead of the cruisers, the second section 1,500 yards astern. The *Stanly* was designated picket vessel on a station ten miles from the leading cruiser on a northwest line of bearing. She was to keep between the formation and St. George's Channel, the entrance to Rabaul, from which direction intercepting enemy forces would come. The *Stanly* was to rejoin astern when the final retirement course of the formation was taken.

Enemy submarines had been reported concentrating in the northern Solomons. As an additional precaution one of our submarines had been stationed south of Rabaul to warn of the sortie of enemy units. Also radar-equipped Liberators were ranging the area northwest of Buka to give warning of danger from that direction. Two Liberators remained on ground alert at Munda. Two Black Cats, with a spotter from CruDiv 12 in each, reported on station over the targets in due time.

The cruisers were to cover assigned target areas with both 5-inch and 6-inch batteries, their offside 5-inch batteries to be alert to take under fire any targets, air or surface, encountered to seaward. The leading cruiser, the *Montpelier*, was assigned the Bougainville shore line of Buka Strait, and the Buka strip and supply area to the west of the field. The *Cleveland* was assigned Buka field with its revetments, as well as the supply and personnel area to the south and east of the field; the *Columbia*, Buka field with revetments, and the supply and personnel area to the west and northwest of the field; and the *Denver*, the headquarters, supply and personnel area to the north and northeast of the field for her 6-inch battery, and for her 5-inch battery, Buka field and revetment areas on each side of the field. Destroyers were to open fire at discretion after the

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cruisers; unless moving targets threatened the formation or shore batteries opened fire, whereupon destroyers were to begin firing in advance of the cruisers. The leading destroyer was not to fire except against specific shore batteries and surface or air units threatening our forces. This ship's primary function was a careful visual and radar search for early detection of moving surface units and a lookout and sound search for navigational dangers in the track of the task force. Other destroyers, except those in the rear, were to be assigned targets upon receipt of late intelligence reports. Rear destroyers were to fire only at specific shore batteries and surface or air targets, and were to maintain careful radar and visual search for early detection of moving surface units threatening our forces. Each cruiser was allotted 750 rounds of 6-inch 47 caliber H. C., of which the first 200 were to be fired with flashless and the remainder with smokeless powder; and 600 rounds of 5-inch 38 antiaircraft common, to be fired in the same manner.

At 2348 the *Charles F. Ausburne* came to 160° T., the firing course, which roughly paralleled the coast line and the outlying islands. An instant later a flashing white light was reported on the starboard bow. There were two friendly planes on the screen, assumed to be our spotters, and a bogey 12 miles to the southwest. CTF directed the force to take all bogies in range under fire once the bombardment started.

At 0021 the signal was executed to "commence firing," and the cruisers opened fire, obtained their spots promptly, and began pumping projectiles over the hills on their targets. Shore batteries replied and were immediately taken under fire by the destroyers. A few rounds from the *Ausburne* silenced one battery in short order before it scored any hits. Other shore batteries continued persistently, despite the fire from our destroyers.

At 0027 the van destroyer *Ausburne* turned to the retiring course 220° T. Shortly thereafter reports were received indicating small surface targets, presumably enemy PT's, approaching at high speed from the port quarter, and CTF ordered them taken under fire. Fire was opened immediately, and at 0030½ the *Cleveland* reported that the PT's had turned away, probably after launching torpedoes. Ships were instructed to maneuver independently to avoid torpedoes. Ships in the rear of the formation continued firing their 40-mm. batteries.

The bombardment continued, with gunfire from the six-mile column described by one spectator as "impressive." Most encouraging spots were

continually coming in from the plane spotters. The navigational fix used in firing was apparently excellent, as initial salvos "in all cases" fell where they were intended to fall, and, as Admiral Merrill reported, the gunners had "no greater problem than 'turning the crank.'" Fires which grew rapidly in intensity were started at both Buka and Bonis, until the area for miles around was lighted up and the hills in the foreground were silhouetted against the fires beyond.

About 0037 two enemy planes approached from the starboard beam of the formation and dropped four white flares which floated in midair and silhouetted the ships from the beach. Up to this point fire from the shore batteries had been spasmodic and inaccurate, reported only as "gun flashes from the beach." As soon as the flares were dropped, however, splashes could be seen and shells heard overhead. One shell exploded abreast the flag office aboard the *Montpelier*, wetting down the exposed gun crews and wrecking the Admiral's typewriter, but causing no further damage. These batteries were taken under fire, while ships astern were firing at planes making runs at the formation. The *Cleveland* reported at 0039 that she was firing at a periscope on her starboard bow, though with no apparent results.

According to plan, as each ship in the column came up to the water in which the *Ausburne* had turned, she turned to retirement course 220° T. and ceased firing. By 0038 the last ship had completed firing and turned away. Speed was increased to 28 knots and retirement begun.

Shortly after the bombardment began, the *Stanly*, at that time about ten miles to the northwest of the bombardment formation on a course approximately parallel to that of the formation, picked up a large pip on her radar approaching from the west toward the bombardment formation. Knowing that there were no friendly surface ships in this area, the *Stanly* opened fire, full radar control. The target ship was making speeds between 24 and 28 knots at a distance of between 16,000 and 18,000 yards. The target could never be clearly seen, but shortly after the *Stanly* opened fire a very heavy black smoke seemed to envelop the ship and so continued as long as she was in sight. Radar indicated that shells were coming close to the target, but no definite hits could be spotted. Nor did the *Stanly* observe any hits as the result of the half salvo of torpedoes she fired. The target then turned to the west and ran away, still smoking badly. It was believed that the target was a "small destroyer," and that she was damaged. Instead of pursuing, the *Stanly* set course to rejoin the formation, which was then retiring at high speed.

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At 0050, 12 minutes after retirement was started, a number of float lights were dropped ahead of the formation, which promptly changed course to 280° by station units and increased speed to 30 knots. Fifteen minutes later cruisers and destroyers opened fire on bogies to starboard, which quickly retired.

The *Stanly*, back on the starboard quarter of the formation, after a lively exchange with shore batteries on her way to rejoin, reported a surface target at 0128 bearing 330°, distance six miles, and was ordered to open fire. She fired on targets which she took for PT's closing at high speed, and believed she scored hits with her 5-inch battery. At any rate, the targets quickly retired.

In the meantime, the formation, and especially the destroyers ahead, were much preoccupied with bogies. One plane strafed the *Ausburne*, though no one was injured. The destroyers maneuvered violently at full speed, and all ships were firing intermittently for the next 30 minutes. At 0155 a number of small radar surface targets, perhaps as many as five, were reported bearing from 137° to 150° and changing bearing to the left. Course was changed to 250°, and the pips drew aft rapidly and then disappeared from the screen. It was concluded that these pips were caused by the clashing of high speed wakes, a phenomenon previously observed while operating up the Slot. Enemy planes continued their harassing tactics until 0209, when three float lights were released on the port bow of the formation at a distance of 12,000 yards. The enemy did not follow up with an attack, however, and no bombs or torpedoes were noted during the harassing tactics.

More than two hours after the bombardment, when the task force was 60 miles to the south of Buka, Admiral Merrill could still see the fires at Buka burning brightly. Earlier it was noticed that four fires were burning, three at Buka and one at Bonis field. One of those at Buka appeared to be enormous and to be spreading. Further reports from the spotting planes reported the shooting to have been "beautiful." The remainder of the night was spent in clearing away empties for action at dawn the next morning.

Shortland Area

Steaming south at 30 knots after the Buka-Bonis bombardment, Task Force Merrill speculated with interest and some apprehension concerning its reception by enemy shore batteries in the Shortland area at the end of the 192-mile run. This was to be the first bombardment of enemy instal-

lations conducted during broad daylight in the South Pacific. The task force had shelled the same objectives before on the night of 29-30 June 1943, but that bombardment had been conducted during a heavy rain and thunderstorm in conditions of zero visibility. Thus return fire had been precluded, as were any observations of the accuracy of our gunnery.

Approximate location of shore batteries in the Shortlands was fairly well known. It was believed that the heaviest of these were 6-inch batteries and that our own 6-inch naval guns would outrange them. This fact was not altogether reassuring, however, since the objectives of the task force lay well beyond the shore batteries, thus requiring our ships to close them considerably inside our maximum range. It was not anticipated that we could achieve any degree of surprise, and, as it turned out, none was achieved.

During the run southward all hands were busily occupied clearing decks, repairing blast damage, getting up ammunition, and readying batteries for the dawn bombardment. At 0306 on 1 November the head of the column turned left to 130°. A few minutes later the bombardment formation passed the main body of the Northern Force on its way northward to effect the landing at Empress Augusta Bay. At 0538, as scheduled, a formation of five B-25's crossed overhead on its way to strafe the Faisi seaplane base.

The bombardment of installations on the small islands to the southeast of Shortland Island was to be conducted at high speed with a change of course between two firing intervals. The first leg, course 090° T., was designed to permit the enfilading of the reverse slope of Poporang Island, the seaplane area, by indirect fire, as well as to allow a better range coverage of the eastern end of Shortland and Faisi Islands. The second leg, course 050° T., would permit direct fire with visual observation of results. In addition, this course would bring Ballale Island with its airfield and installations in range of the cruiser 6-inch batteries.

On the first leg the *Montpelier's* 5-inch battery was assigned targets on Poporang Island; the *Cleveland's* 6-inch battery was assigned Faisi Island while her 5-inch guns were to deliver counter battery fire on Morgusaia and Poporang; the *Columbia's* heavier batteries were to be trained on Korovo; the *Denver's* 6-inch guns were assigned the north shore of Kulitanai Bay and Lofung Plantation, and her 5-inch guns were to deliver counter battery fire. The guns of the destroyers were assigned counter bat-

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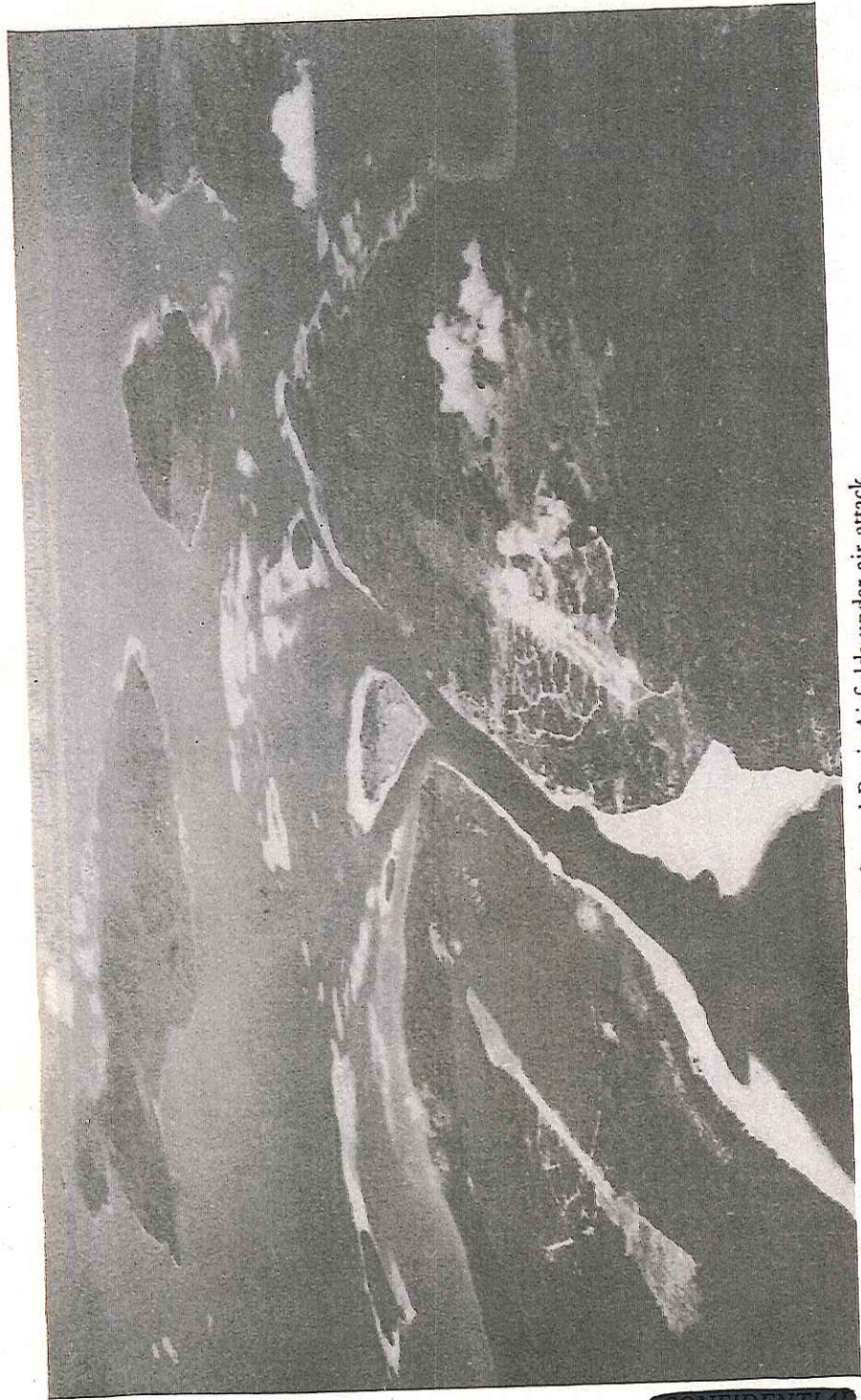
tery fire among the various islands. On the second firing leg the targets of the *Montpelier* were on Ballale Island, those of the *Cleveland* on Poporang, those of the *Columbia* on Faisi, and those of the *Denver* at Korovo. Destroyer targets were located on the same islands, with the leading two destroyers firing on Alu and Munia Islands in addition. Salvo fire was to be commenced simultaneously on signal. No air spotting would be available. Ships were to use individual spotting planes and make maximum use of radar spots as well as visual observation of fall of shot.

The sun rose at 0614. With speed still 30 knots, the formation ceased zigzagging at 0615 and started maneuvering by turn signal to upset enemy fire control solutions. Four minutes later the shore batteries on Shortland Island opened fire on the leading destroyers at 13,000 yards range. ComDesRon 23 was ordered to silence these batteries, and the remainder of the force was instructed to return shore battery fire at discretion. When fire was opened, the head of the column was about seven miles west of the point at which the bombardment was to begin. At 0623 the *Cleveland* opened against the batteries ashore, followed a minute later by the *Montpelier*, with the other ships joining in shortly thereafter.

Enemy fire was unexpectedly heavy. By 0622 the *Ausburne* had been straddled repeatedly, though not hit. Soon splashes were observed all along our column, but generally well short of their mark. While the enemy's deflection was excellent, his range was poor. An early morning haze and the clouds of smoke overhanging the target area obscured the results of our return fire. At 0629 a fresh group of shore batteries, well placed on the highest point of Morgusaia Island, opened up and were answered by the van destroyers.

The scheduled bombardment was ordered at 0631, and the cruisers and destroyers started pouring shells into their previously assigned objectives. The formation continued to maneuver rapidly by turn signal, tactics which seemed to upset the enemy's fire control. The volume of fire was heavy, but continued to be poor in range and became bad in deflection. At 0631, however, the *Ausburne* received a near hit astern which spread fragments over her fantail without causing any casualties. Two minutes later a very ragged 6-inch salvo straddled the *Montpelier*. One shell passed between her stacks and landed 50 yards beyond. Another landed in her wake about 50 yards astern, and an instant later a third landed just short of her port beam.

The van destroyers in the meantime were having their difficulties. All



Buka and Bonis Airfields under air attack

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three were being straddled consistently and were weaving back and forth, all the while trying to silence the enemy artillery. According to plan there was to have been a pause in the bombardment as the course was shifted to the northeast, but the van destroyers continued firing as the *Ausburne* changed course to 050° at 0636. Immediately after this change of course, the shore batteries got the range on the destroyer flagship and began straddling her again. The only ship that was hit, however, was the *Dyson*. A 6-inch shell in her bow above the water line resulted in minor damage, another cut through the rigging, and a near hit caused minor shrapnel damage and wounded five men.

All ships received occasional straddles or near hits, but these seemed governed more by chance than by intelligent fire control. Minor caliber shells, probably from 3-inch, dual-purpose batteries, were consistently short and their spotting was poor. Ranges were from 10,000 to 17,000 yards. "It did not seem possible that the enemy could continue to fire with the volume of fire poured at him from our ships," observed Com-DesRon 23. Many enemy batteries were, in fact, silenced, but it is supposed that in most cases this was the result of personnel casualties at the guns rather than direct hits on the batteries themselves, many of which were well protected on reverse slopes.

At 0639 the cruisers reached the end of the first firing leg and entered the second phase of the bombardment on course 050° T. At 0650 the *Montpelier* opened up on Ballale airfield at 22,000 yards, getting the range after three salvos, and thereafter covering the field and revetment areas thoroughly. Enemy fire continued heavy during the second phase of the bombardment. Four 6-inch guns on the crest of the ridge of Poporang Island were consistently close to their target but made no hits. Two of them were never knocked out and continued to fire after the force had retired. The cruisers ceased firing at 0657 and began retirement on course 100° T., changing at 0702½ to course 115° T. A friendly plane informed CTF that large fires were started at Nila, behind the ridge on Poporang. This area, containing a seaplane base, repair shops, hangars, and air defenses, was one of the most important objectives listed.

Shortly after 0700, all hands were piped below for coffee and eggs. Officers and men of Task Force Merrill could congratulate themselves upon a successful night's work. Within the next 24 hours, however, these same officers and men were to see action that would make the previous 12 hours seem uneventful by comparison.

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BUKA-BONIS AIR STRIKES

The surface bombardment of Buka and Bonis on the night of 31 October-1 November was followed up within a few hours by a carrier-based air strike launched before dawn, and later by three additional strikes during 1 and 2 November. These strikes were designed to supplement the surface bombardment in rendering these enemy airfields temporarily ineffective during landing operations and initial establishment of our landing forces at Empress Augusta Bay.

The carrier task force that carried out these strikes was under the command of Rear Admiral Frederick C. Sherman, and consisted of the following vessels:

Carriers:

Saratoga (CV) (FF), Capt. John H. Cassady.
Air Group 12.
Princeton (CVL), Capt. George R. Henderson.
Air Group 23.

Cruisers:

San Diego (CLAA), (F, ComCruDiv 11, Rear Admiral Floyd J. Wiltse), Capt. Lester J. Hudson.
San Juan (CLAA), Capt. Guy W. Clark.

Destroyers:

Lardner, (F, ComDesRon 12, Comdr. Roger W. Simpson), Lt. Comdr. Otto C. Schatz, Jr.
Farenholt, Lt. Comdr. Alcorn G. Beckmann.
Woodworth, Lt. Comdr. Charles R. Stephan.
Buchanan, Comdr. Floyd B. Myhre.
Lansdowne, (ComDesDiv 24, Comdr. Frank H. Ball), Comdr. Francis J. Foley.
Grayson, Lt. Comdr. W. Veasy Pratt.
Sterett, (ComDesDiv 15, Comdr. Charles J. Stewart), Lt. Comdr. Frank T. Gould.
Stack, Lt. Comdr. Philip T. Sherman.
Wilson, Lt. Comdr. Charles K. Duncan.
Edwards, Lt. Comdr. Paul G. Osler.

Sailing from Espiritu Santo on 29 October, Task Force Sherman made its run to the launching point at 25 knots on the afternoon of 30 October. All flight operations during the following two days were conducted in an area between 65 and 180 miles east of Buka.

There were two strikes on the morning of 1 November and two on

the following morning. The first strike took off at 0427 and consisted of 18 VF, 15 VB, and 11 VT. Weather at the launching point was unfavorable, there being a completely glassy sea without a breath of wind except for occasional puffs from various directions. The weather difficulties were aggravated by complete darkness and occasional rain squalls in the area at the time of the first launching. Because of these conditions three planes, two TBF's and one SBD, went into the water. All personnel, except one aviation radioman, were recovered, with only minor injuries to some.

The difficulties of rendezvous during complete darkness, with a low ceiling and without any horizon, in addition to the long catapult intervals aboard the *Princeton*, delayed the departure of groups on their mission until an hour and 40 minutes after the initial launching, or until about 10 minutes after sunrise. Thus little advantage was gained to compensate for the difficulties and casualties of the pre-dawn take-off.

The approach to the target was from the northeast, with the TBF's at 10,000 feet, speed 140 knots, and fighter planes above as high cover. The TBF's made a glide-bombing approach, dive angle 40°, released at about 2,500 feet, and pulled out at 1,500. The F6F's started strafing runs at 4,000 and strafed down to 50 feet. There was heavy and light antiaircraft fire of medium intensity, generally trailing, and inaccurate as to altitude. Three 1,000-pound bombs were dropped on the Buka runway, and 72 100-pound bombs on dispersal and supply areas. One hit caused a column of black smoke in the repair shop area, but strafing damage to the Bonis field was concealed by palm trees. A medium or small tanker or AK, eight miles south of Buka Passage, was set afire by strafing runs, and two small barges the vessel had in tow were also set afire. A small AK and two small craft were strafed and damaged by low-altitude runs of two F6F's. The AK was observed beached four hours later.

The second strike, consisting of 14 VF, 21 VB, and 11 VT, was launched about 0930. Under the more favorable conditions of daylight, no launching casualties occurred. Tactics were the same as those used in the first strike. Three 2,000-pound bombs were dropped on the Buka runway, and 72 100-pound bombs in clusters in the supply and revetment areas southeast of the runway, probably damaging one of three Bettys observed on the ground. Antiaircraft positions were strafed and silenced by fighters. Two medium AK's and two motor launches were hit in strafing runs and one motor launch set afire.

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At dawn on 2 November the third strike, composed of 16 VF, 19 VB, and 10 VT, was launched. One plane crashed on launching, probably because the engine was not turning over properly at the take-off. Two hits were scored in the middle of the Bonis runway with 2,000-pound bombs, while another bomb of the same size fell in the revetment area southeast of the runway. Six 500-pound bombs were dropped in train across the aircraft dispersal and revetment area. Shipping was also attacked; two AK's of the three-island type with two cargo masts and single stacks were strafed, and hits were observed along their entire length. Three antiaircraft positions were hit and one was silenced. Rear gunners of the TBF's strafed buildings at the east end of the Bonis runway. The ships, a few miles of Sohina Island, were left smoking, and several hours later were observed to be blackened near their bridges.

The fourth strike, launched at 1036 the same day, consisted of 12 VF, 20 VB, and 9 VT. The TBF's this time maneuvered to approach the Bonis strip from the northwest and drop their bombs along the length of the runway, northeast to southwest, and in the dispersal area south and north of the runway. Thirteen 500-pound bombs were dropped in train along the runway, and incendiary clusters were seen to fall in dispersal areas. Strafing runs were made along the length of the runway; one fuel fire was started, and several enemy personnel were believed killed. Two landing barges and several antiaircraft positions were hit. One of our planes was hit by antiaircraft fire, burst into flames, and exploded when it crashed. A plane to the rear of the one that was hit collided with it and landed in the water. The pilot and radioman were rescued.

In the four strikes on the Buka-Bonis airfields and their operating areas a total of about 93 tons of bombs was dropped. The target area was well covered, and it is believed that both of the landing strips were made temporarily unserviceable for a considerable time. Our planes reported that 14 medium bombers of the Betty type, 2 float planes, 2 fighters, and 3 unidentified planes were destroyed on the ground; 6 Bettys, 3 fighters, and 3 unidentified planes were damaged. In addition, three freighters, five barges, and one cutter were destroyed, and six freighters, three barges, and two small ships were damaged. Much damage was also done to adjacent buildings, supply areas, antiaircraft defenses, and revetments.

Our planes encountered no enemy air opposition and only moderate antiaircraft fire over the target area. Our losses were three pilots and

four crew members killed or missing, three F6F's and two TBF's lost in combat, and two F6F's, three TBF's, and one SBD lost in launching. Seventeen planes were damaged, only one of which suffered major damage.

Although Task Force Sherman was at one time within 65 miles of Buka and about 35 miles of Kieta, the formation was not attacked while in the launching area. At all times the formation was within range of aircraft from enemy bases at Rabaul and Kavieng. One snooper was intercepted about 0830 on 2 November and shot down about 30 miles from the task force. It was not ascertained whether this snooper had opportunity to report the presence and location of the task force. Since Tokyo broadcasts later claimed the sinking of one large and one medium carrier, however, it would seem that the enemy was at least informed of the composition of our striking force.

LANDING ON BOUGAINVILLE

Preparations

While the preliminary air strikes, bombardments, and amphibious actions were underway, preparations for the landing at Empress Augusta Bay were carried forward. Naval forces made available for the first echelon consisted of eight transports, four cargo ships, seven destroyers, four destroyer minesweepers, and two fleet tugs.⁷ These forces, called the Main Body, Northern Force, were organized around three divisions of the Transport Group, which was under command of Commodore Lawrence F. Reifsnider.

TransDiv Able, commanded by Capt. Anton B. Anderson, consisted of the AP's *President Jackson*, *President Adams*, *President Hayes*, and *George Clymer* screened by DesDiv 90, Comdr. Edmund B. Taylor in the *Anthony*, with *Wadsworth*, *Terry*, *Braine*, *Sigourney*, and *Renshaw*. TransDiv Baker, commanded by Capt. George B. Ashe, was composed of the *American Legion*, *Fuller*, *Crescent City*, and *Hunter Liggett* (APA), screened by DesRon 45, Capt. Ralph Earle, Jr., in the *Fullam*, with the *Bennett*, *Guest*, *Conway*, and *Hudson*. TransDiv Charlie, commanded by Capt. Henry E. Thornhill, was composed of the *Alhena* (AK), *Alchiba* (AKA), *Libra* (AK), and *Titania* (AKA), plus the *Sioux*, with ComMinRon 2, Comdr. Wayne R. Loud in the *Hopkins*, *Hovey*, *Dorsey*, and *Southard*.

⁷ See Appendix C for Task Force Organization.

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The Landing Force was composed as follows:

- 3rd MarDiv (less 21st Regimental Combat Team and other troops reserved for later echelon).
- 2nd Provisional Raider Regiment.
- 3rd Defense Bn. (less detachments).
- Corps Troops assigned ComGen IMAC.
- Detachment Hdqtrs. ComAirNorSols, including Argus 5.
- Detachment Naval Base Unit No. 7, including Communication Unit No. 7 and Boat Pool No. 11.
- Total personnel—14,321.

The period 13 to 30 October was devoted to training and rehearsal at Guadalcanal, Efate, and Espiritu Santo. The training of each transport division included a full scale debarkation and unloading of all equipment and supplies. After the training was completed, such readjustments in the final loading were made as were found expedient. It was estimated that the average time of unloading APA's and AKA's would be four and one-half hours, assuming a 2,500 yard run to the beach. The Third Marine Division had been given a period of amphibious training by the Transport Group prior to departure from Auckland for Guadalcanal.

Much concern was felt by those responsible for operation plans regarding inaccuracies in available charts of the northern Empress Augusta Bay area and its approaches. An aerial photographic survey prior to the operation disclosed the coast line of the area to be eight to ten miles out of positions indicated by Hydrographic Office charts, which were known to be approximations only. The southwest coast of Bougainville is low and fronted with islets and reefs, some of the latter being charted as much as 17 miles off shore. Reconnaissance by the submarine *Guardfish* located two shoals of less than four fathoms not previously charted. There remained the question as to the exact geographical location of Cape Torokina, upon which the approach was to be made. Several dangerous shoals were located during the initial and subsequent operations in the area. Eleven landing beach sites were selected, which began at Torokina Point and extended approximately three and one-half miles up the coast, and a twelfth beach was chosen on the eastern shore of Puruata Island.^s There was some apprehension concerning the condition of the beaches, about which little was known.

^s See diagram on page 42.

In order to secure the latest information regarding enemy strength in the proposed landing area, an advance party composed of two Marine officers, one coast watcher, and several native policemen was landed on the night of 27 October in the vicinity of Atsinima Bay, a few miles north of the landing beaches. This party was to communicate information obtained to Admiral Wilkinson by radio. Unfortunately, efforts to establish radio communication with the party were unsuccessful.

Approach

As a precaution against alerting the enemy, operation orders postponed the merging of the three transport divisions until the forenoon of the last daylight run prior to the landing. To effect the rendezvous of the three divisions, TransDiv Baker departed from Efate late in the afternoon of 28 October and proceeded directly to a point about 20 miles south of the eastern end of San Cristobal Island, being joined en route by the *Conway* from Guadalcanal. In the meantime, TransDiv Charlie left Guadalcanal in the forenoon of 30 October and made rendezvous with TransDiv Baker just before dark on the same day. The two divisions then proceeded during the night on a westerly course south of Guadalcanal to effect a rendezvous with TransDiv Able at a point about 84 miles west of that island. The remaining division, Able, departed from Espiritu Santo in the late afternoon of 28 October for Guadalcanal via the usual route north of San Cristobal and was joined en route by the *Renshaw*. During the evening of 30 October Admiral Wilkinson, commander of the task force, and General Vandegrift, Commanding General, First Marine Amphibious Corps, embarked in the *Clymer* off Koli Point. TransDiv Able departed during darkness the same evening and joined TransDivs Baker and Charlie at the rendezvous point the following morning at 0740.

On signal from CTF, ComTransGroup, Commo. Reifsnider, assumed tactical command of the transport group and screen. The main body then proceeded on a northwesterly course, with transports in line of three division columns. At 1800 course was changed in the direction of the Shortland area until after dark as a possible deception associated with our seizure of Treasury Island and the diversionary landing on Choiseul.

Three night fighters reported in succession during the night and were continuously vectored by the fighter director in *Conway*. Eight separate bogies were chased, but none was intercepted. While the task force was

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in the vicinity of Treasury Island, considerable antiaircraft fire by our occupation force was observed.

The task force proceeded without incident until 0432, 1 November, when course 045° T. was taken to approach Cape Torokina and speed was reduced from 15 to 12 knots. Minesweepers were sent ahead at 20 knots with the *Wadsworth*, assigned as navigation ship for sweepers, taking station about 6,000 yards ahead of the transport column. The *Hudson* took station 500 yards directly ahead of the transports as their guide. Final arrival in the transport area was set for daylight to permit visual detection of uncharted shoals believed to be offshore. H-hour was tentatively set for 0715 but was changed by signal on arrival to 0730.

Shore Bombardment

Initial shore bombardment of Cape Torokina was delivered by the *Wadsworth*, on station 7,000 yards ahead of the transport group, and the minesweeper group following the destroyer. It became light enough during the approach to see Point Torokina at a range of about 12,000 yards. The *Wadsworth* opened fire with her forward guns at 0547, when the range was closed to 7,900 yards. Fire was deliberate and intermittent. By 0603, with the range at 3,000 yards, all five guns would bear, and five-gun salvos were used. One building on the beach was demolished. This phase of the bombardment was maintained until 0630.

Ships comprising the main fire support group, according to operation orders, were the *Anthony*, *Wadsworth*, *Terry*, and *Sigourney*. The fire support area assigned the *Anthony* was well to the seaward of those assigned other vessels. Opening on Puruata Island at 0603 with her 5-inch battery, the *Anthony* fired two-gun salvos at ranges from 13,300 to 11,000 yards, until 0718, with one interruption of six minutes. She then shifted fire to targets back of the landing beaches. Fire was indirect, controlled from plot, and spotted by aircraft. Her target area was reported to be well covered. It later developed that only 29 Japanese armed with rifles and machine guns were on Puruata Island.

The *Wadsworth* and *Terry*, as anticipated, experienced difficulty in covering the target areas assigned. One of these was at the western end of the landing beach. Another, especially critical, was on the north-western face of Torokina Point. It was known that new defenses had been constructed by the enemy in the latter area, and it was fully expected that the Marines from the *President Adams*, landing on Beach Blue One

facing these defenses, would meet with resistance. The firing area best adapted to covering these areas was pre-empted as one of the boat assembly points, and could not be used. From the area that had to be used the line of fire was through tall palm trees, which not only exploded shells prematurely but also prevented direct observation of the targets—as did smoke and dust raised by the bomb explosions from our planes attacking this area. These factors, plus the early arrival of the first assault wave, prevented full expenditure of ammunition allotted. Moreover, the trajectory proved too flat for plunging fire, and the line of fire did not permit the most effective direct fire against enemy emplacements. It came as no surprise, therefore, that fire support was ineffectual in neutralizing enemy pillboxes in this area.

The *Sigourney* experienced no unusual difficulty in carrying out her scheduled fire mission. Shore fire control parties, which were under orders not to call for naval gunfire on targets closer than 500 yards to our own troops, requested no supporting gunfire.

During the entrance to the transport area, the transports were to fire ranging shots on Cape Torokina and to spray Puruata Island with 20-mm. gunfire. At 0615 the *Hunter Liggett*, at the head of the transport column, arrived at the turning point about 3,000 yards from Point Torokina, turned left, and opened fire on Torokina Point with her 3-inch battery for ranging in event of any possible need for counter-battery fire. She also fired bursts of 20-mm. fire at Puruata on passing abeam. Each transport in succession followed the same procedure.

Landing and Beach Conditions

Sweepers found no mines and reported sufficient depth of water for the transports which followed. The transports formed on the inshore line for debarkation, and the cargo vessels on a second line about 500 yards to seaward. By 0645 all transports were in the transport area, and the signal "land the landing force" was executed. Ships dropped anchor underfoot and headed seaward. Boats were lowered away, nets fixed in place, and Marines swarmed over the sides to take their places in the LCVP's and LCM's. Between 7,000 and 8,000 troops were to be landed in the first trip.

The line of departure for the boats was the line of bearing of the transports. The signal to start the first assault wave for the ship with the longest run to the beach (*President Adams* at 5,000 yards) was executed by the OTC at 0710. Simultaneously the fire support group commenced

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bombardment of prearranged targets. It was the responsibility of each transport to start its wave of boats at the proper time to reach assigned beaches on schedule.

Bombardment was lifted at 0721, and immediately thereafter 31 TBF's from Munda bombed and strafed the landing beaches for five minutes. The first wave from the *President Jackson* hit the beach at 0726, H-hour minus 4 minutes.

It was clear, even from the transport area, that surf on the beach was bad, but boat crews found conditions worse than anticipated. This was especially true of the four northernmost of the twelve landing beaches.⁹ The beach was very narrow and had a 12-foot bank immediately back of the surf line for a considerable part of its length. Coxswains reported that the steepness of the beach prevented proper grounding of boats along the length of their keels. Admiral Halsey pronounced the beach and terrain conditions "worse than anything ever encountered before in the South Pacific." For more than a mile inland the terrain consisted of swamp except for two narrow corridors of land raised a few inches above swamp level. The beaches were so narrow that in most places two bulldozers could not pass abreast between jungle and sea.

What followed, according to one officer, was "almost a disaster." Beach Yellow Four assigned to the *Alchiba* proved almost entirely unworkable. Effective measures to stop landing on this beach, however, were not taken until practically all the LCVP's and tank lighters carried by the *Alchiba* were hopelessly broached to or otherwise out of commission. Of the first wave of boats from the *American Legion* on Beach Red Two, both tank lighters and at least three ramp boats were stranded. Bulldozers and tractors in the tank lighters were landed before the boats broached and filled with water. Conditions grew worse as the cargo was landed because of the longer time required to unload. By noon approximately 20 boats of the *Legion* were stranded. Eleven boats attached to the *Hunter Liggett*, assigned Beach Red One, were lost during the landing operations, and in addition to these, eight LCVP's and one tank lighter were also lost. Eighty-six boats from the entire transport group, 64 of them LCVP's and 22 LCM's, were broached and stranded during the landing operations.

Later in the morning, when the surf grew worse, the *Crescent City*, *American Legion*, *Hunter Liggett*, *Alchiba*, and *Titania* were shifted to

⁹ See diagram of beaches on opposite page.

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beaches assigned other ships to the east. This caused additional delay and considerable congestion, while the loss of the large number of boats proved a serious handicap. Because of intervening shoals, the tug *Sioux* was unable to get close enough to the beach to assist in salvaging stranded boats.

While moving at slow speed through the transport area to shift beaches, the *American Legion* grounded on an uncharted shoal in four and one-half fathoms of water. The ship remained on even keel, but some damage was done to certain tanks by pounding. With the assistance of the tugs *Sioux* and *Apache* and her own engines, the *American Legion* succeeded in backing clear of the reef after three hours.

As anticipated, the heaviest enemy resistance was encountered by the boats from the *President Adams* on Beach Blue One. Machine-gun fire from the northern side of Puruata Island was also encountered on the way in to the beach. Our fire support group did not lift bombardment until a few minutes before H-hour, making it necessary for the first wave of boats to slow down at 500 yards from the beach to avoid shells, some of which were falling in the water approximately 100 yards off shore. Shore batteries on Torokina Point held their fire until our boats were only 50 yards offshore, then opened up with deadly accuracy.

Enemy defenses on Beach Blue One included a total of two 77-mm. guns, two 90-mm. mortars, and fifteen machine guns located about ten yards from the water's edge, all well emplaced in pillboxes. The defending trenches were protected by an abattis constructed of three layers of logs and sand, which proved to be impervious to destroyer gunfire. Later examination of the defenses revealed that most of the destroyer projectiles were exploded above ground by striking palm trees, and the bombs of the TBF's fell too far back from the beach. The pillboxes containing the 77-mm. mortars were untouched, despite the fact that destroyers fired some 900 rounds of 5-inch shells at this beach. The 77-mm. guns, which did the greater part of the damage, had a very narrow traverse, but our boats were compelled to pass this arc of fire when approaching the beach.

Of the eight boats in the first wave from the *President Adams*, three received direct hits. No. 2 boat received heavy machine-gun fire and shrapnel through both sides, wounding the coxswain. Boat No. 3 received one mortar shell which blew machine gun and scarfing 50 feet in the air, decapitating the coxswain and wounding the bowman. The bowman backed the boat off, the coxswain's body still hanging over the side. Boat No. 29 received a shell in the side which wounded the bowman

and sank the boat in about four feet of water. Boat No. 15 received machine-gun or rifle fire, and the boat of the boat group commander, who was wounded, was sunk.

Ten other boats were damaged by gunfire to such an extent that they had to be hoisted for repair. The second wave of eight boats landed and retracted without damage or casualties. In the third wave, however, boat No. 21 received three shells through the ramp just prior to striking the beach. Five Marines were seen to climb out over the side. The remainder of the 30 aboard the boat were killed or wounded. Coxswain and bowman jumped off the stern and were picked up by a salvage boat. No. 21 was backed off the beach by a member of the beach party, and moved off at highest speed. The boat filled rapidly, however, and soon sank. A few Marines were able to put on life jackets, but only five of those remaining aboard were saved.

All boats from the *President Adams* landed in the face of heavy fire, and many coxswains and other personnel were specially mentioned for coolness and devotion to duty under fire. Salvage boats operated throughout the landing period of nine hours within easy range of enemy guns, and officers and men of the beach party repeatedly risked their lives to rescue wounded men from the water.

With 60 per cent of the Marine shore party withdrawn to press the attack against the enemy, Lt. (jg) James H. Moore remained for nine hours under the most difficult conditions to organize the unloading of boats so as to permit the landing of 500 tons of cargo and vehicles. A determined effort was made by the enemy to disrupt unloading by means of machine-gun and rifle fire. Lt. (jg) Moore required approximately one hour to crawl to the headquarters of the shore party commander to report the situation. There the decision was made to land supplies at another beach, since it appeared that Beach Blue One could not be held.

Only light resistance was encountered from the beaches to the north of Torokina. It was estimated that there were only about 300 Japanese in all opposing the landing, but their resistance was stubborn and determined. Our losses in the landing were 70 killed and missing and 124 wounded. About half the enemy force was killed, and the remaining Japanese fled inland.

Air Opposition

Since some air opposition to the landing might be expected, despite the heavy pounding which had been given the enemy airfields, a fighter

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patrol of 32 planes was stationed over Empress Augusta Bay from dawn to dusk. With the help of excellent fighter direction, this patrol drove off a number of enemy planes which attempted to enter the area. Two attacks, however, succeeded in breaking through.

Warning of the first attack came at 0718 when bogies were reported bearing 305° T., distance 50 miles. The last boats were just leaving the transports when the latter were ordered to come to course 210° by emergency turn signal and stand out from the unloading area in preparation for air attack. ComDesDiv 90 ordered the fire support group to close and screen the transports.

Three attack groups, one of torpedo planes and two of bombers, were plotted by radar. The fighter director group in *Conway* vectored out the fighter cover. Eight Kittyhawks of the patrol intercepted 30 Zekes at 0800, of which they shot down seven, with one probable, without damage to our planes. About ten minutes later eight P-38's intercepted between 15 and 20 Zekes, shot down seven, and probably downed three more, suffering no losses themselves.

In the meantime all ships were steaming on various courses at various speeds, maneuvering radically. Some twelve Vals broke through our fighter cover and closed for attack at 0830. A number of bombs were dropped in the transport area, but only the destroyers were seriously threatened. Six Vals glided out of the sun to dive-bomb the *Sigourney* and *Wadsworth*. The planes were sighted at nearer than 10,000 yards, and firing was commenced immediately. The first bombs fell near the *Sigourney*. Several seconds later the first of six bombs to straddle the *Wadsworth* exploded 25 yards off the starboard quarter. Other bombs fell from 100 to 500 yards away, causing no damage. A near hit, 25 feet from frame 208 on the port side, however, killed two men, wounded five seriously, and four slightly. Hull and superstructure were sprayed with fragments which caused minor damage. Four of the attacking planes were shot down by our ships, two of which were claimed by the *Wadsworth* and one by the *Bennett*. The remaining planes retired after enemy fighters strafed the beaches with little effect.

At 0930 the transports returned to the transport area and resumed unloading. Several bogies were reported during the morning, but it was not until after noon that a second attack developed. Radar warning came about 1248, and the transport group was again ordered underway. The disposition was maneuvered as before. Planes were sighted at 1316 drop-

ping bombs over the landing beach. They also dropped a few around the formation, but they caused no damage. At this time the *American Legion* was still grounded on a shoal in the transport area. The *Bennett* was ordered to screen the grounded vessel, and about 1357 she took under fire a low-flying Zero making a shallow dive at the beach directly north of the *American Legion*. Two observers believed they saw a plane crash as the result of this fire. The bombs dropped on the beach and the strafing of the same area by enemy planes caused little damage and few casualties.

Our fighter patrol was vectored out in the meantime with good results. Eight F4U's engaged six Zekes at 1345, shooting down one and severely damaging three others. A few minutes later eight F4U's shot down one of 12 Zekes encountered over central Bougainville. All of these fights were without loss to our planes. At unspecified times during the afternoon, eight F4U's encountered 30 to 40 Zekes covering 16 Bettys. The enemy made no attempt to attack, but our planes shot down three Zekes and probably destroyed one other Zeke and one Betty.

Unloading and Retirement

By 1500 all ships had returned to the transport area and again resumed unloading. Each ship provided its own shore party details, except that the naval platoons for AKA's were formed from embarked personnel of the Naval base unit. The AKA's had a shore service platoon of 200, plus ship details of 20 men per hatch and boat details of three men per LCM and two men per LCVP. The APA's had a similar complement. The total number of troops employed in the shore party for the division landed was roughly 5,700, or somewhat over one-third of the total embarked.

Some delay was inevitable in the use of Marine unloading parties, since the troops had combat duties in addition to unloading duties. Thus, the *American Legion* found that after shifting to Beach Blue Three, the Marine unloading parties were late in arriving at the new beach. By the time they had arrived and dug their second set of fox holes, unloading was about over for the day. The *American Legion's* beach party of 20 men did most of the unloading at this beach.

There were numerous other causes for delay in unloading: the two air attacks, during which all ships had to suspend unloading and remain underway for maneuvering; the poor beaches at the northern area which necessitated the shifting of five ships to new beaches; the consequent con-

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gestion, and the grounding of the *American Legion* for several hours; the loss of 86 landing craft by stranding and others by enemy gunfire; and interference by enemy snipers.

These and additional deterrents made it impossible to complete before dark the unloading of the *Liggett*, *Legion*, *Crescent City*, and *Alchiba*. The eight other ships completed unloading before 1800, at which time CTF ordered the entire transport group to get underway and retire toward Guadalcanal along the track of the approach. All ships steamed south and east together until 2300, when Commo. Reifsnider, with the four ships that had not completed unloading, left the formation as previously directed by CTF and proceeded to return to Torokina Point. They were expected to arrive after dawn on 2 November to complete unloading. These ships were screened by DesRon 45 with the *Fullam*, *Guest*, *Hudson*, *Bennett*, and *Braine*, plus the *Sioux*. The remainder of the transport group proceeded to Guadalcanal, where they arrived without incident about 2400 on 2 November.

The ships under Commo. Reifsnider which were to return to Torokina Point steered various courses to regulate the time of their arrival, and to avoid contact with the minelayer group returning at high speed from the north. About 0250, 2 November, the force sighted considerable illumination over the horizon resulting from flares and gunfire from the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, then in progress between our covering force of cruisers and the Japanese force it had intercepted. The transports changed course to the east at 0300 to avoid the battle area, which was about 35 miles distant. A few hours later the *Sioux* was directed by dispatch from CTF to proceed at best speed to take in tow the *Foote*, torpedoed during the night action.

The transports arrived off Torokina at 0905 and commenced unloading with the assistance of boats from the boat pool. Numerous bogies were picked up by radar, but no attack developed. By 1500 all four ships were completely unloaded and departed for Guadalcanal. At 1616 the *Apache* joined the formation as relief for the *Sioux*, and at 1000 the following day, 3 November, the *Nashville* and *Pringle* joined. The transports arrived at Tulagi at 0045, 4 November, without further incident.

Mine Laying

For protection against surface bombardment, a three-row defensive minefield was laid off Cape Moltke, fifteen miles northwest of Torokina, on the night of 1-2 November. The minelaying unit, composed of

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the *Breese*, *Gamble*, and *Sicard*, with *Renshaw* as screen, completed the successful laying of the field shortly after midnight and retired southward. A second unit, composed of the *Tracy* and *Pruitt*, screened by the *Eaton*, laid an offensive, two-row minefield on the same night at the eastern entrance to the Shortland area on the south coast of Bougainville.

BATTLE OF EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY

Refueling

As the only cruiser task force available in the area, Task Force Merrill had orders to remain underway north of Vella Lavella in the vicinity of Treasury Island after completing the daylight bombardment of the Shortland Islands. The force was expected to be in readiness to intercept and destroy any enemy surface vessels attacking our ships unloading at Cape Torokina, and to cover the eventual retirement of the transports and mining ships from that area.

As soon as all ships were out of range of the Shortland shore batteries, at about 0730, the formation was slowed to 20 knots on course 115°. The formation at that time consisted of the *Charles Ausburne*, *Dyson*, and *Claxton* in column 6,000 yards ahead of the guide; *Spence* and *Thatcher* in column 3,000 yards ahead of the guide; *Montpelier* (guide), *Cleveland*, *Columbia*, and *Denver* in column, distance 1,000 yards; *Converse*, *Foote*, and *Stanly* in column 1,500 yards astern of the *Denver*.

These ships had been underway for 29 hours and had cruised 766 miles at near maximum speeds. As a consequence the 2,100-ton destroyers, uneconomical at high speeds and small in fuel capacity at best, found their oil supply below the margin of safety for any but a small engagement fought at moderate speeds. Knowing that his destroyers would be no closer to a source of fuel than they were at the completion of the bombardment, and being unable to predict the extent of the contemplated action, Admiral Merrill ordered ComDesRon 23 to proceed with DesDiv 45 to Hathorn Sound at the head of Kula Gulf, 108 miles distant, to refuel and to rejoin the formation at a rendezvous to be designated later. CruDiv 12 and DesDiv 46 in the meantime cruised north and west of Vella Lavella, while their crews were working to repair blast damage and clean batteries in preparation for further action.

DesDiv 45 arrived in Hathorn Sound at 1115. The *Charles Ausburne* and *Dyson* went alongside the oil barge to fuel, while the *Stanly* and *Claxton* patrolled at the entrance for submarines. Realizing that a long

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run was in prospect before the division could rejoin the task force, and expecting momentarily report of the appearance of surface resistance, the destroyer captains were in "a fever of impatience" to complete fueling. "Everybody tried to get more capacity out of the barge fuel pumps than was in them," reported Capt. Burke, who described the experience as "the battle for fuel." By 1305 the *Dyson* and *Ausburne* cleared the barge and retired to take up patrol, while the *Stanly* and *Claxton* stood in for their turn. While the fueling was proceeding, an intelligence report was received that a Japanese task force had been sighted near St. George's Channel.

At 1630 the second section completed fueling and followed the first section, which had already stood out of Kula Gulf, rejoining at 1800 and proceeding at 32 knots. It was realized that the *Stanly* might have trouble maintaining this speed since she had gas fumes in one fireroom and it was feared that the temporary superheater tubes in one boiler might blow out at any time. Moreover, shortly after quitting Kula Gulf, the *Dyson* was damaged by a submerged object which caused her to vibrate at high speeds, though not limiting her speed at the time. Proceeding south of Treasury Island, the division finally joined Task Force Merrill at 2330, taking station 6,000 yards astern of CruDiv 12, with DesDiv 46 ahead 3,000 yards, course 130°, speed 15 knots. By station unit column movement the task force came to fleet course and axis 000° T. at 0017, which put the task force in column with DesDiv 45 in the van.

Approach

In the meantime the enemy had begun to concentrate surface forces around Rabaul. The presence of two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and ten destroyers had been reported, and other light units had been sighted escorting convoys converging on Rabaul. It now appeared that enemy surface forces might constitute the major threat to our landing forces.

Our intelligence officers thought it possible that the following assumptions were made by the enemy: (a) that there was only one U. S. cruiser task force in the South Pacific area, (b) that this task force had bombarded Buka at midnight on 1 November and the Shortland Islands at dawn the same day, (c) that the same task force had covered unloading operations of the transports at Empress Augusta Bay and had left the landing area with the transports at dusk of 1 November, (d) that these

operations must have left the destroyers and probably the cruisers low on fuel and ammunition, (e) that these continuous operations must have caused fatigue among the task force personnel, (f) that, accordingly, the task force was retiring for fuel, ammunition, and rest. If he made these assumptions, the enemy probably considered the night of 1-2 November an ideal time to destroy our landing force at Empress Augusta Bay without fear of heavy opposition from surface forces.

Excellent contact reports from planes shadowing the Japanese force kept Admiral Merrill well informed throughout the day as to the number of enemy ships, their course, and speed. At 0750 a scout plane reported sighting an enemy task force of four light cruisers and six destroyers southeast of St. George's Channel on course 300°, speed 25 knots. On the basis of this information Admiral Wilkinson requested Task Force Merrill to intercept the enemy in case he reversed course. ComAirSols reported at 0915 that the enemy force was nearing St. George's Channel, that continuous air search was being maintained, and that if the ships reversed course, "we will sink them before they reach Torokina."

Reasons for the delay in the unloading of the transports at Torokina, scheduled to depart at 1600, have already been reviewed. Task Force Merrill was informed that the force would depart the Empress Augusta Bay area about 1800, and that one division would retire until 2300, then return to Empress Augusta Bay to complete unloading the following morning. Task Force Merrill was requested to cover this operation. Interest was heightened by a contact report from ComAirSols Plane One, "Sighted eight enemy vessels 04-50 lat., 152-40 long., at 2050."

At 2328 the task force received a directive from COMSOPAC ordering it to cover from the west ships of the Torokina Landing Force landing troops at daybreak and DM's laying defense mines at Cape Moltke. Three successive reports of the enemy's position, course, and speed from reconnaissance planes enabled Admiral Merrill to set course and speed for his own task force that would accurately intercept the enemy at the point selected. This was of great advantage, since it permitted steaming at the lowest necessary speed and thus reduced chances of a high speed wake being discovered by enemy snoopers.

There was a new moon in the sky, but it gave little light. The night was dark and overcast, with occasional patches of clear sky and bright stars breaking through. From time to time flashes of heat lightning would silhouette ships of the formation. The wind was from the south-

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west, force 1; the sea was smooth, with gentle swells from the southwest. Visibility was about 6,000 yards, though this varied considerably during the night.

At a speed of 25 knots the force could expect detection by snoopers and at 28 knots it could be sure of discovery. It was hoped that with conditions as they were a speed of 20 knots would prevent detection, and therefore that speed was used during the early stages of the approach. Since no enemy planes appeared to come near the task force, it was thought that probably all available enemy planes were reporting the operations of our transports and minelayers. About an hour before the anticipated interception, speed was increased to 25 knots and later to 28 knots.

The task force was deployed during the approach in line of bearing of unit guides, bearing of line north-south, with DesDiv 45 forming a van striking group, and DesDiv 46 a rear striking group. The point of interception chosen was closer to the uncharted shoals surrounding Empress Augusta Bay than the Task Force Commander would have liked. His choice was dictated by its only alternative, however, which was a much higher speed of approach for an interception farther westward. While the latter choice would have given more sea room for turn-aways to avoid enemy torpedoes, it would have at the same time increased the chances of detection.

At 0100 signal was given for General Quarters. The enemy force was then on course 125° T., speed 25 knots, and his bearing from our force was 325° T., distance 83 miles. At 0222 the task force picked up surface targets bearing 018°, distance 20,000 yards. These targets were soon identified as the mining group returning from Cape Moltke. The southerly course of this group would take it between Task Force Merrill and Empress Augusta Bay. The *Renshaw*, leading the group, reported that she was "bringing her snooper with her." Remaining with the mining group, the enemy snooper apparently did not detect the task force.

Farther off in the darkness to the south and east moved the twelve transports and cargo vessels, four of which were already maneuvering to return to Torokina Point to complete their unloading. The only protection between these vessels and the certain destruction threatened by the guns of the Japanese task force bearing down upon them from the direction of St. George's Channel was Admiral Merrill's column of cruisers and destroyers, their radar antennae revolving slowly to pick up contact with the enemy force.

Battle Plans

In general, it was the plan of the commander of the task force to maintain his cruisers in position across the entrance of Empress Augusta Bay and to block the entrance to any enemy units, preventing at all hazards his breaking through to destroy our transports. It was also his intention to push the enemy gradually to the westward in order, first, to gain sea room for maneuvering and, second, to enable any of our crippled ships to retire on the disengaged side. This general plan was followed throughout the ensuing hour of intensive gunnery dueling.

For a number of reasons it was the task force commander's desire to fight the action close to maximum enemy torpedo range. (1) Recent actions in the area tended to confirm intelligence reports of a 24-inch enemy torpedo with a range of approximately 24,000 yards at 27 knots and an explosive charge double that of our own 21-inch torpedo. These reports stated further that cruisers were being equipped to carry not less than 24 such torpedoes. (2) Since the cruisers of Task Force Merrill constituted the principal surface strength left in the South Pacific area to cover planned landing operations from night attacks by surface forces, it was felt that every precaution should be taken against torpedoes. It was considered more important, therefore, to defeat and turn back the enemy than it was to annihilate him at the expense of losing several of our cruisers or having them knocked out of action for the remainder of current operations. (3) It was believed that our radar fire control would give us the advantage over the enemy's optical control in a night engagement at longer ranges.

It was a surprise to learn in the ensuing engagement that the enemy OTC shared our own commanding officer's predilection for long ranges. The reason became apparent when reports started coming in of 10-gun, 8-inch salvos falling close aboard. Even after learning of the presence of 8-inch guns in the enemy line, however, it was elected to match 6-inch against 8-inch gunfire at ranges of 16,000 to 20,000 yards rather than close to effective torpedo ranges during the early stages of the battle. This decision was made in spite of the realization that our 6-inch fire would not penetrate enemy armor at long ranges.

Our destroyer attack doctrine under conditions of low visibility envisioned an undetected approach to torpedo-firing position, and required the destroyers, where possible, to attack on opposite bows of a single column. Should the enemy be disposed in two or more columns, attack

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groups were to attack different columns, and after launching torpedoes, retire in opposite directions, parallel the target course, and open gunfire. They were to open fire after the cruisers, however, unless under gunfire themselves. These tactics were calculated to exploit the element of surprise to the fullest.

Instead of disposing his forces by types, with heavy units in the center, the enemy apparently had one cruiser in the northern column, one in the southern, and two heavies in the center column.

To appreciate fully the circumstances under which our ships fought this battle, several additional factors should be considered. In the first place the task force was newly formed, and had never operated together as a unit. For DesDiv 46, this was the first night torpedo attack, simulated or actual, ever conducted by the division as a unit. One of the division's ships, the *Thatcher* (involved in a collision during the action), had just joined the task force after a period of escort duty. Yet the division was compelled to deliver a torpedo attack in conditions of almost total darkness, with high speed maneuvers, under enemy gunfire. One important human factor should not be forgotten—that of physical fatigue and nervous strain. These officers and men had within the past 30 hours delivered two major shore bombardments, one of them opposed by surface and air forces, the other delivered in broad daylight under intense shore fire, and they had maneuvered in the hours following those actions in constant expectation of being called upon at any time to oppose superior enemy surface forces.

It is of further assistance in understanding the problems of our captains to realize that the action was so spread out that no one ship had all others on the PPI scope continuously. Problems of identification were increased by the large number of enemy vessels and their initial disposition in three widely separated groups which scattered in all directions under our attack. In addition were the complications contributed by the radical maneuvering of CruDiv 12, the widely separated, independent, and uncoordinated movements of DesDivs 45 and 46, and the large number of vessels that became separated from their regular units. It was in view of these circumstances that CINCPAC, in describing the action, remarked that, "the picture is far more complicated than that of any surface engagement of the past year."

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Battle Chronology

- 0229 OTC reports contact with enemy.
- 0231 DesDiv 45 leaves formation to attack.
- 0245 DesDiv 46 leaves formation to maneuver for attack.
DesDiv 45 fires torpedoes at northern enemy group.
- 0248¹/₂ Northern enemy group turns away .
- 0249 CruDiv 12 opens gunfire on northern group.
- 0251-0254 DesDiv 45 firing on northern group.
- 0253 Enemy aircraft drops flares off bow of cruisers.
- 0301 Foote torpedoed and disabled.
- 0302 Thatcher collides with Spence.
- 0310 All targets in northern enemy group reported dead in water.
- 0312 Brilliant illumination by enemy starshells.
- 0320 Spence hit by enemy shell.
- 0325 Denver hit by three enemy shells.
Cruisers ordered to make smoke to counter enemy illumination.
- 0328 Spence and Converse fire torpedoes at northern enemy group.
- 0349 CruDiv 12 ceases gunfire.
- 0349¹/₂-0351 DesDiv 45 firing on northern enemy group.
- 0352 DesDiv 46 fires torpedoes at escaping target.
- 0358-0413 DesDiv 46 firing on targets.
- 0445 DesDiv 45 straddles Spence with five salvos.
- 0512-0523 Spence firing on Fubuki class destroyer.
- 0518-0536 DesDiv 45 firing intermittently on Spence's target.
- 0539 Target sinks.
- 0539 DesRon 23 forming up for retirement.
- 0700 Task Force Merrill retiring on course 180° T.

Initial Attack

At 0027 CTF Merrill made the initial radar contact with the enemy bearing 306°, distance 16 miles. He at once ordered a change of course that placed the ships in a line of bearing of station unit guides 000°, course 000°, speed 28 knots. Shortly after the initial contact, which proved to be with the northernmost of the three enemy groups, the other two groups appeared on the screen. From this it was determined that the enemy was disposed on a line of bearing of division guides at 90° from his estimated course of 120° T. Observers' reports vary somewhat in their estimates, but it appears that there were probably three destroyers and one light cruiser in each of two flanking divisions, at about 6,000 yards interval from the two heavy cruisers and two destroyers forming the center division. From flank to flank, therefore, the enemy force was spread over more than eight miles. The timing of our interception of

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the enemy force had been so accurate that our task force was almost in a "capping" position when the first contact was made. The ensuing action took place in an area roughly 45 miles west-northwest of Empress Augusta Bay.

Radar operators in the *Charles Ausburne*, flagship of van Division 45, made contact on the northern flank division of the enemy force at 0231, bearing 291° , distance 30,100 yards. ComDesRon 23 at once ordered his flagship to throw over her rudder and reported to the OTC that he was "heading in." Taking course 311° , which was collision course with the only enemy group on their screen, Division 45 initiated the torpedo attack by doctrine of the fleet. When the order was received from OTC to attack, it came "as a friendly pat on the back as we went in," according to the squadron commander.

ComDesDiv 46, at the rear of the column, in the meantime reported no contact with the enemy. After the van division had turned off to port, the column continued on course 000° T. until 0239, when the course of the cruiser division was reversed by Turn 18, and the rear destroyer division was instructed to countermarch to the right. ComDesDiv 46, Comdr. Austin, reported contact with the enemy at 0245 and was directed to attack the rear column, whereupon he turned right and left the formation. CruDiv 12 continued on course 180° awaiting word that DesDiv 45 had fired torpedoes.

ComDesRon 23, with the van destroyers, was approaching the enemy column at a very high relative speed on collision course, intending to fire on the enemy's starboard bow and pass between the northern and center column. At a range of about 15,000 yards, however, the enemy appeared to change course to the right. Since a firing position between the two enemy columns would have been very embarrassing to the cruisers, both during the attack and the subsequent retirement down the cruisers' line of fire, it was decided instead to fire torpedoes on the enemy's port bow. This plan would also permit a surprise attack, avoid a melee, and allow a retirement toward the north, the direction the enemy would have to take on retirement. The enemy, meanwhile, came back to his southeasterly course.

At 0245, when the *Ausburne* was 5,600 yards on the port bow of the northeasterly group of four ships on course 320° (reverse of the enemy course), the order was given to fire torpedoes. Division 45 immediately fired one-half salvo and at 0246 executed Turn 9 and retired on course

050°. As she turned away the *Claxton* fired a second half salvo at her target, bearing 254° T., distance 6,350 yards, since she believed it to be a cruiser.

Waiting anxiously for the results of the torpedo attack, Capt. Burke was disappointed to learn that the enemy had turned to a southerly course about three and one-half minutes after our torpedoes were fired. Nevertheless, after the proper lapse of time, "three explosions, small but definite," were seen among the Japanese ships. About two minutes later two additional explosions occurred, which were attributed to the second half salvo fired by the *Claxton* as the division turned away. The leading enemy ship stopped, and one destroyer was observed to steam off at high speed to the northwest. The squadron commander believed that one destroyer was sunk and one seriously damaged by this torpedo attack.

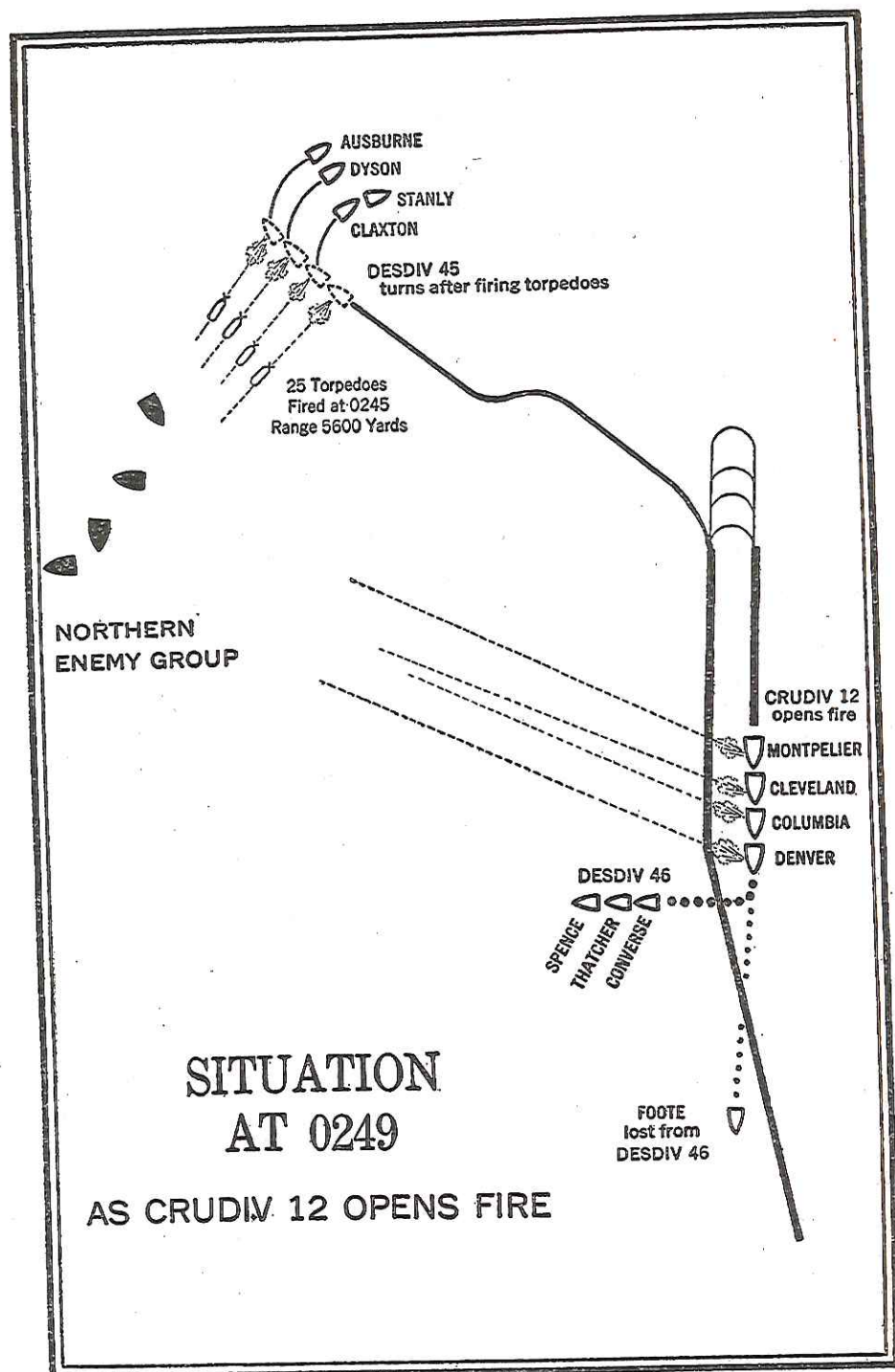
Capt. Burke received persistent reports of torpedo wakes passing the formation, though he himself saw none. He decided, however, to hold to his retirement course of 050° until he had opened to 10,000 or 11,000 yards, instead of turning to his gun-firing course at 8,000 yards as he had originally intended. The enemy force did not open up with gunfire, nor did any of its torpedoes hit, although several torpedoes were reported passing close by on a parallel course.

Cruiser Gunfire and Radical Maneuvers

The four cruisers, meanwhile, had completed their northern loop and were headed south, holding gunfire until DesDiv 45's torpedoes had reached their target. The commander of the task force received from Capt. Burke the message, "My guppies are swimming," at 0245, and estimated that the torpedoes would cross the enemy's track six minutes later. An alert CIC aboard the *Montpelier* promptly picked up the enemy's evasive maneuver when it occurred three and one-half minutes after torpedoes were fired. Instead of waiting for the torpedoes to complete their run, therefore, Admiral Merrill ordered the cruisers to commence firing at 0249. Gunfire was returned almost immediately by the enemy cruisers. It was clearly observed that our ships were hitting from the start.

The cruiser gunfire action, 60 minutes in length, was divided into two phases. The first phase was from 0249 to about 0306, during which the target consisted of the remaining ships in the northernmost enemy group. In the second phase, from about 0310 to 0349, the targets were mainly ships in the center and southernmost groups. In both phases the forma-

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tion employed extremely complex maneuvers dictated by the need for opening and closing ranges with the various enemy groups, by the maneuvers of DesDiv 46, and by the necessity for avoiding destroyers separated from their formations.¹⁰

Since range to the northern enemy group was opening, CruDiv 12 executed turn 2 toward the enemy at 0251, taking course 200°. Our gunfire appeared to be hitting steadily, but the enemy's splashes were falling 2,000 to 3,000 yards short, and his starshells were also short. At 0253 enemy aircraft flares were dropped on the starboard bow,¹¹ that is, on the engaged side. In the meantime the *Foote* had become separated from DesDiv 46 and was cutting across the course of the cruisers to join her division, which had executed a turn 9 at 0254 to clear the cruiser fire and keep from being illuminated by enemy star shells. The *Denver* was compelled to sheer to the left to avoid collision with the *Foote*.

About this time the northern enemy group, having completely reversed course, was steering course 310° at greatly reduced speed. Since our cruiser force was already approaching maximum range, and range was opening still farther, the formation was ordered at 0258 to execute turn 3 to course 230° in order to close, and again at 0302 turn 13 to course 000°.

The *Montpelier*, which had been firing for nine minutes on a target she believed to be a cruiser in the northern enemy group, scored hits with at least three salvos, and at 0258 reported her target was dead in the water. A few minutes later the target was again moving ahead at seven knots, but after being taken under fire a second time was not seen to move again. The *Cleveland* saw a group of her tracers produce a tremendous flash upon impact on her target. The *Denver* complained that her Mark 8 radar was not effective for spotting 6-inch projectiles beyond 18,000 yards, and she therefore received no spots for the greater part of the action.

Reporting generally on the cruisers' gunnery, Admiral Merrill wrote: "As for our own gunfire it was superb. . . . The Flag Captain, who lived through the earlier Savo battles and is considered a very competent witness, is positive of four enemy magazine explosions as a result of the cruiser fire. He, as well as many other observers on the bridge of the flagship, reports that one ship in the center column blew up completely."

¹⁰ The consequent complexity of maneuvers, multiplicity of targets, and overlapping of tracks make it advisable for the reader to follow the accompanying track chart opposite page 56.

¹¹ *Montpelier* did not believe these were aircraft flares.

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Enemy gunfire was excellent for the most part but unlucky. The Japanese appeared to have no radar fire control, and to depend entirely upon optical control assisted by superior artificial illumination in the form of aircraft flares and starshells. The exceptional performance of the latter was reported to have been "painfully evident" to our forces. The starshells were thought to have been 8-inch projectiles fired from a main battery turret, offset from the fire control solution as necessary to give proper illumination. They gave a brilliant light and descended slowly.

The enemy's opening salvos were short and consistently ahead of his targets, his patterns small, the 10-gun salvos appearing almost as one enormous splash when seen from the line of fire. Observers agreed on the excellence of the enemy's flashless powder, which made a mere pinpoint of light in the darkness and often was not seen at all. Although enemy fire was very heavy, our luck held up, and he did not register a single hit on the cruisers during this first phase.

At 0306 the head of the cruiser column, which was steaming north at the time, turned sharply to the right in order to avoid collision with a ship dead ahead and apparently disabled. A flash of lightning or gunfire revealed the ship's silhouette to the *Cleveland*, which identified her as the *Foote*, almost under her bow at the time. The *Foote* flashed a blinker message as the *Cleveland* missed her narrowly, saying she had been torpedoed aft on the starboard side and was completely disabled.

At about 0310 all targets of the northern enemy group were reported to have fled or to be dead in the water. In the meantime the *Cleveland* had taken under fire a ship in the middle enemy group, range 20,900 yards, bearing 269°, which was seen to be burning in two places, and on which a large explosion occurred. The *Columbia* opened fire on a target in the southern group, which soon retired in a westerly direction, and was tracked to a position northwest of the center group. The *Denver* had shifted fire to a ship in the center group, while the *Montpelier* was still firing on her original target, now dead in the water.

In order to close the center enemy group and to cut off its approach to our transports, turn 18 was executed at 0310, thus bringing the column to course 180°. About two minutes after the turn was executed, the enemy's illumination became most effective. Flares from enemy planes augmented the effect of his starshells, and course had to be altered temporarily to the left to bring a string of brilliant flares to the engaged side. For the next ten minutes the enemy's illumination improved steadily, and

as it improved so did his shooting. He scored straddles with small patterns, the three leading ships being straddled salvo after salvo only a few feet ahead. As Admiral Merrill put it, "had the enemy's luck been as good as his shooting we would have suffered severe casualties."

To combat the enemy's effective illumination, the task force used both chemical and funnel smoke, behind which constant and radical maneuvers were executed. The smoke had the effect of filling the space between the low overcast, which reflected the illumination, and the surface of the water. During the interval between 0258 and 0340 the cruisers went through what might be described as an elaborate "figure eight," using simultaneous turn movements. These maneuvers were conducted by voice radio amid the deafening roar of 6-inch and 5-inch gunfire without once having the formation confused or disrupted. Counter-illumination by starshells dropped short of the enemy was also employed, but our starshells proved to be ineffective.

The only one of our cruisers to suffer damage from enemy gunfire was the *Denver*. Between 0320 and 0325 she received three 8-inch hits from three different salvos. None of these shells detonated or caused serious damage, but the *Denver* took on considerable water as a result and was forced to turn out of the formation on the disengaged side. She continued firing at increased ranges and was able to rejoin the formation a few minutes later. The *Columbia* took a hit near the bow from the base plug of an 8-inch shell, which lodged in the sail locker after penetrating her plating.

At 0326, when the formation was approaching the lower turn of the "figure eight," it was noted that the range was reduced to 13,000 yards and that we were closing rapidly with the center and southern enemy groups. The southern group, estimated to be composed of one light cruiser and three destroyers, represented approximately 50 torpedoes. Although it was apparent that this group was suffering heavily from our gunfire, the OTC ordered course reversed to bring the cruisers to a northern course and take them out of dangerous enemy torpedo waters. This maneuver placed our formation behind a heavy smoke screen which effectively frustrated the Japanese illumination tactics, and his gunfire fell off immediately. The smoke screen in no way interfered with our own radar-controlled gunfire, which continued at a high rate. Many bursts and four large explosions among enemy ships indicated that he was taking severe punishment.

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At 0332, when all ships save the *Denver* had ceased firing, the force executed a 2 turn toward the enemy, followed at 0335 by a 4 turn to course 300°. By this time the enemy had ceased firing and was definitely retiring. Shortly after our last turn a target was picked up to the south bearing 241°, distant 23,900 yards. At 0339 this target, believed to be a destroyer, was taken under fire. Since range was closing too slowly, 12 turn was executed at 0342, bringing the course to 180°. At the same time the ships were ordered to cease making smoke. By 0349 the target was dead in the water, and all ships had ceased fire. The *Montpelier's* efforts to illuminate the cripple with starshells proved ineffective, and though the force changed course at 0350 to 240° in order to close range, the ship was never picked up again, and may have sunk.

This ended the gunfire phase of the cruiser action, although the division continued maneuvers farther to the west searching for further targets.

Destroyer Division 46

The actions of DesDiv 46 are concurrent with those of CruDiv 12, described above, though for the most part independent and uncoordinated with either the action of the cruisers or that of DesDiv 45. For the sake of clarity the actions of both destroyer divisions are described separately.

It will be recalled that the *Foote* became separated from her division at the outset. This occurred when the commander of the task force ordered the ships to stand by for turn 18, then executed it at about the same time he directed DesDiv 46, at the rear of the column, to execute a counter-march. The *Foote*, rear ship in DesDiv 46, executed turn 18 instead, became separated from her division, and proceeded southward. The other three ships of the division, on obtaining contact with the enemy, were released from the formation by the OTC and at 0247 executed column right to course 270°, increasing speed to 32 knots and at 0251 to 34 knots. The cruisers had in the meantime opened fire and enemy starshells were falling close aboard and to starboard. In order to clear the cruisers' line of fire and to prevent the starshells getting on his disengaged side, ComDesDiv 46 ordered turn 9 at 0254.

Cutting across the bows of the cruisers, the *Foote* had almost rejoined her division when she was hit by a torpedo at 0301. It was the belief of ComDesDiv 46 that the northern enemy group fired torpedoes at his destroyers between 0248 and 0250, and that while the three ships in formation were saved by their turn away at 0254, the *Foote* remained in

ers at that time firing on our cruisers and illuminating them with star shells—as friendly. With range at about 6,000 yards and no time to investigate, ComDesDiv 46 immediately swung to the right to course 010° at 0320 and headed for the northern group that had him under fire. It was this group, already under attack by the cruisers and DesDiv 45, against which ComDesDiv 46 launched his torpedo attack under the impression that he was attacking the enemy center group.¹³

“A golden opportunity to attack two Japanese heavy cruisers at close range, 4,000–6,000 yards, with thirty torpedoes, was lost,” observed Admiral Merrill, “because the Division Commander was not able easily to get into the CIC from time to time to check the decision of the evaluator. Had he been able to step directly into the CIC from time to time and look at the plot, his experience would have told him immediately that this unit could *not* have been friendly.” To appreciate the circumstances under which the CIC was laboring at that time it should be recalled that the ship had just received an enemy shell and suffered a collision with the *Thatcher*. It is also true that the tactical situation had by this time become very complex.

At 0328 the *Spence* fired five torpedoes at a target, range 6,000 yards, which at the time of firing seemed to have stopped dead in the water. The *Converse* fired three torpedoes at the same target. At the expected time two underwater explosions were heard by personnel in the CIC room, although no explosion was seen from topside. The target remained afloat, dead in the water, and was later fired upon by DesDiv 46 at 0349.

Instead of opening gunfire on the torpedoed target, which now seemed to be out of the action, ComDesDiv 46 swung left to course 320° at 0330½ to take up pursuit of two survivors from the enemy group retiring to the northwest. Since one of these targets was making only 18 knots, our vessels steaming at 34 knots had no difficulty in overhauling it rapidly. The target became dimly visible to the flagship at 3,000 yards, and at 0352 the division turned left and fired 19 torpedoes. About two minutes later two very heavy underwater explosions were heard, so heavy that the captain of the *Spence* instructed all repair parties to ascertain whether the ship had been struck again by gunfire. No flashes of the explosion were noted, but a heavy black column of smoke was seen to rise vertically from the target group. When range had opened to 7,000 yards, course was changed to the west, and gunfire was opened at 0358. The division was

¹³ This was not clear until revealed by later study of track charts.

the line of fire, presenting her starboard side as a target, and was hit. Admiral Merrill believed the torpedoes were fired about 0245 and that the one striking the *Foote* ran about 21,000 yards at 36 knots. The *Foote's* stern completely demolished, she was put out of the remainder of the action, and had to be towed in later.¹² She reported three enlisted men dead, one officer and fifteen enlisted men missing, and two officers and fifteen enlisted men requiring medical attention.

Having cleared enemy illumination, though still under fire, DesDiv 46 executed turn 9 at 0300. During this maneuver the *Thatcher* collided in a side-swiping blow with the *Spence*. The *Thatcher* sustained considerable structural damage to her starboard side; blowers 5 and 7 were put out of action, her no. 3 40-mm. clipping room bashed in, and her starboard shaft knocked out of line. This did not prevent her from continuing in the fight at full speed. The *Spence* suffered considerable structural damage on her port side, several frames being buckled, some of them badly, although none of this damage interfered with her fighting effectiveness.

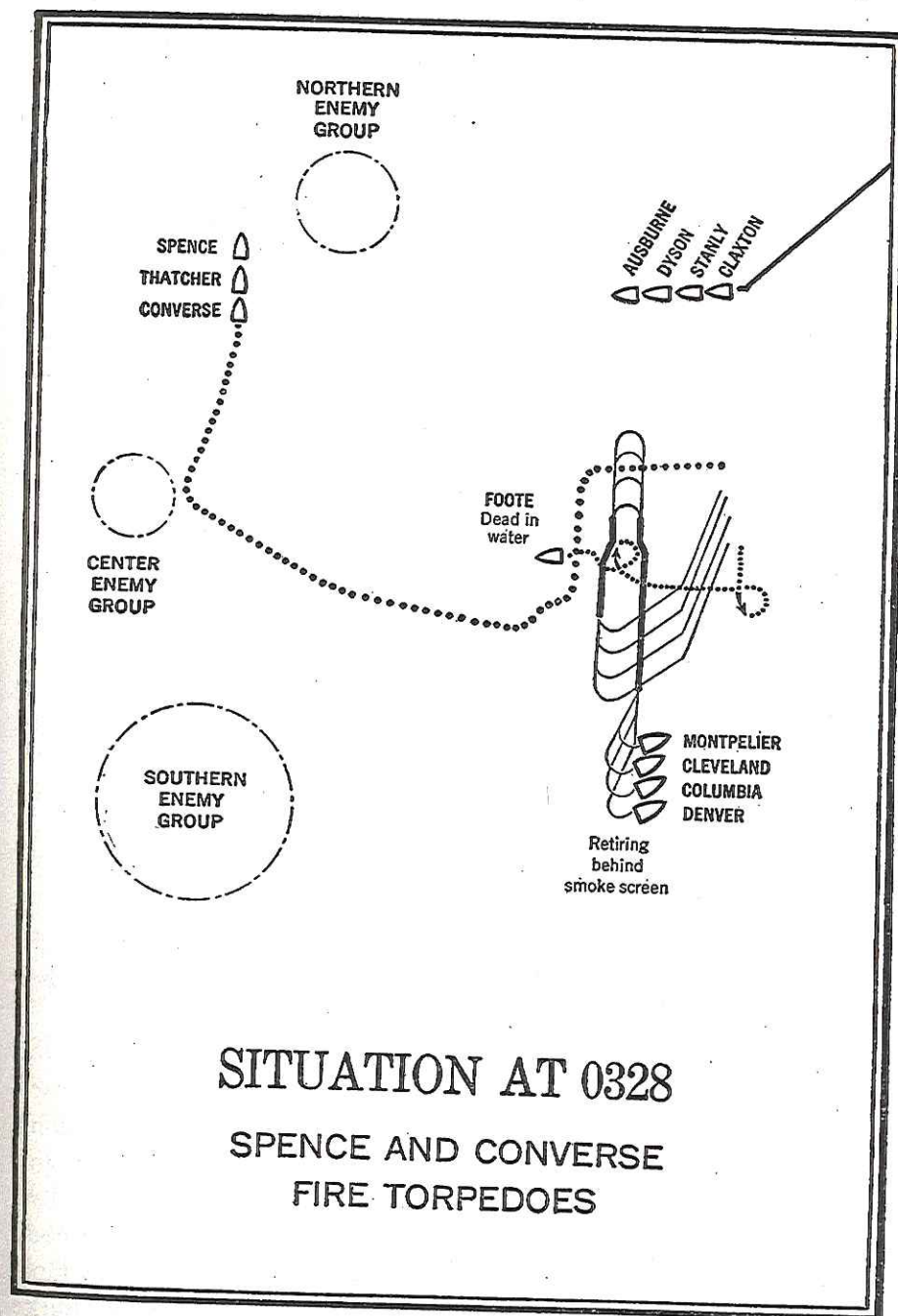
The *Spence*, *Thatcher*, and *Converse* continued to close for a torpedo attack, taking a westerly course. At 0311 the formation was illuminated by starshells, and enemy gunfire began to improve. The *Spence* sustained two near hits, and one hit which pierced the hull at the water line, leaving a diagonal hole four feet in length and six inches in width. The bulkheads between C-201-L, C-203-L, and C-7-5 were all opened, permitting full passage of fuel oil and sea water into all compartments. The after fuel system was contaminated, which interfered with her speed later in the action, though not at this time.

Thus, before DesDiv 46 had joined the attack, one of its units had been knocked out of action by torpedo, two had collided, and one of the latter had sustained gunfire damage.

Both the enemy's center group and his northern group were on the flagship *Spence's* screen, and the center group was the natural target for DesDiv 46, since the northern group had already been attacked by DesDiv 45. Unfortunately the *Spence's* CIC, located two decks below the bridge, mistakenly identified the center group—which contained the heavy cruis-

¹² All structure and machinery aft of bulkhead 182 except a few deck fittings were missing. There was a heavy wrinkle on the deck, sides, and bottom at frame 167. Both shaft struts and hangars were broken and the exterior shafting was badly bent. Stern tube sections and tail shafts required renewal. The starboard propeller was gone and the port damaged but could be repaired. Starboard propulsion units appeared undamaged.

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now swinging in a wide arc through west to northwest, firing continuously. A hit was observed by the flagship after the second salvo, and fire broke out on the targets and burned with increasing intensity. The *Thatcher* believed that one of the two targets which were on fire later sank, since it disappeared from her radar screen. One of the targets was observed to escape to the northwest at high speed.

At 0410 the flagship *Spence* began to lose speed as a result of her earlier battle damage. Since the ship was low on fuel anyway, the captain became more than ever concerned over the ship's remaining supply of uncontaminated fuel. He turned to the left, slowed to 20 knots, and left the *Thatcher* and *Converse* to pursue the enemy for a short period before beginning their retirement from the action. The subsequent adventures of the *Spence* were closely associated with those of DesDiv 45, with which she later joined up. It is, therefore, necessary to take up the account of DesDiv 45 at the point following its initial torpedo attack.

Destroyer Division 45

DesDiv 45 turned to course 110° at 0251 and a minute later at a range of 12,000 yards opened fire on the enemy forces the division had just attacked with torpedoes. The ships ceased firing at 0254. In the meantime our cruisers had turned south and were rapidly drawing away from the destroyer division. In order to close the cruisers somewhat and reach a position north of them, Capt. Burke decided to maintain his course until he reached maximum gun range from the enemy. At maximum range he intended to turn by ship's turn movement to the left on course 320°, thus putting the division in normal order, then to turn left again and head for a position about 10,000 yards northwest of our cruisers in order to be in position to intercept any Japanese torpedo attack. This would also have the advantage of keeping the force together and enabling it to fight a concerted action.

Upon reaching maximum gun range, Capt. Burke found that the enemy targets had scattered, that the PPI screen had become so confused that he was unable to keep in mind the position of his own division along with the positions of the cruiser division, the other destroyer division, and the many enemy ships. About the same time the PPI scope showed two pips between the flagship *Charles Ausburne* and the cruisers, in fairly good position for a torpedo attack on the latter. Puzzled at how two Japanese ships could have arrived at this position so quickly, Capt. Burke checked with the *Dyson*. It was then discovered that in the retirement

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from the torpedo firing course the *Stanly* and *Claxton* had become widely separated from the other section of the division, and that it was these ships which were at first taken to be Japanese vessels.

By the time the *Stanly* and *Claxton* were located, the *Dyson* and *Ausburne* had executed a 60° ship's turn movement to the left. Capt. Burke was now confronted with a choice between heading for the enemy with only two ships, hoping that the other two would be able to join later, or making a column movement to the right and picking up the *Stanly* and *Claxton* before going back into the battle.

Capt. Burke took the latter course, but instead of turning directly toward the lost section of the division or taking the nearest course to close the enemy, he continued on course 060° until 0309, then turned first left and then to the right while the *Stanly* and *Claxton* maneuvered to rejoin. The purpose of the elaborate maneuver is not clear. The division was concentrated at 0318 and, taking course 230°, began a wide sweep to the right. All these maneuvers required more than an hour, and the entire cruiser gunfire action had been fought and concluded before DesDiv 45 was again able to bring its guns to bear upon the enemy.

At 0339 the division picked up a target dead in the water bearing 284° T., distance 12,700 yards. This was at first thought to be the *Footie*, but when later it was identified as an enemy ship, course 320° was taken to close. The division opened fire on this target at 0349, obtaining many hits but drawing no return fire. This seems to have been the target that DesDiv 46 hit with torpedoes and left dead in the water at 0328. DesDiv 45, without slowing, continued firing until 0351. The target, believed to have been "larger than a destroyer," was left burning and seemed to be settling.

ComDesRon 23, without pausing, next gave chase to what he described as "a target on course 330°, bearing 283°, range 21,100, making about 34 knots." Complaining that "a stern chase is a long chase," he finally gave up the pursuit—which was fortunate, since the bearing, range, and speed indicate that his intended target was DesDiv 46.

At 0413 the division came to course 270° and at 0415 to 260° in order to investigate gunfire seen to port—which was that of DesDiv 46. ComDesRon 23 had little idea where DesDiv 46 was operating at this time. In the words of his flagship captain, "From 0416 to 0510 we were trying to distinguish our own forces from the enemy, with little or no result." He added, "We seldom if ever received IFF from our ships. . . . Ours

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was on continuously, but we could not identify individual targets. They may have been all enemy—if so we passed up some beautiful ones.”

One instance of a “beautiful one” passed up occurred between 0415 and 0420, when a crippled and smoking enemy ship escaped to the north between our two divisions, while their commanders discussed its identity. ComDesRon 23 had just spotted a smoking target coming toward him at 24 knots, and asked ComDesDiv 46 over TBS, “Are there any enemies coming toward me?” To which ComDesDiv 46 replied, “Don’t really know where you are.” There ensued the following conversation:

<i>Called ship</i>	<i>Calling ship</i>	<i>Message</i>
DesDiv 45	ComDesRon 23	Do not open fire on smoking ship, think it is ComDesDiv 46.
ComDesRon 23	ComDesDiv 46	We are east of you I think. [Actually west.]
ComDesDiv 46	ComDesRon 23	Is your target smoking badly? We have one 7,000 yards and want to open up.
ComDesRon 23	ComDesDiv 46	Oh, Oh. Don’t do it. That is us.
	ComDesRon 23	Aye, Aye.

At 0420 Division 45, continuing in a westerly direction, received IFF from two contacts to the northeast, which they took for the *Converse* and *Thatcher*. These were enemy ships, since the *Converse* and *Thatcher* were to the southwest of Division 45 at that time. At 0427 the two ships of Division 46 passed Division 45 to the south at a distance of less than 1,000 yards on the opposite course without either division, for some unknown reason, being aware of the presence of the other.

ComDesRon 23 reported to Admiral Merrill at 0438: “There’s a hell of a lot of ships of both nationalities in one little huddle on our port bow. If we can identify one as enemy, we will take care of him!” He then asked the ships of his division if anyone had any doubt that the ship on his port beam was enemy. No one had any doubts. Whereupon the order was given, “Commence firing on target.” The target was straddled five times when the *Spence* spoke up:

“Cease firing. Cease firing. Goddam it, that’s me!”

“Were you hit?” inquired ComDesRon 23.

“Negative,” replied the *Spence*, “but they aren’t all here yet!”

The Squadron Commander was relieved to learn that the *Spence* was still unharmed when the tracers stopped coming. “At least we knew where the *Spence* was,” he remarked. He directed that ship to trail his division in order to simplify the problem of identification.

The *Spence*, in the meantime, was tracking a target to the southeast and continued in a wide sweep to the southwest to investigate. Division 45 changed course to the northeast to give chase to a target escaping to the north. These maneuvers required an hour before the *Spence* joined up with Division 45.

To the south, meanwhile, the cruiser division had maneuvered to a position almost as far west as that occupied by the destroyers. The *Montpelier* had been tracking an unidentified target for several minutes but holding fire for fear the target might be the *Spence*. At 0456 the *Montpelier* fired an offset salvo across the bow of the target, bearing 330°, distance 17,500 yards. Since no complaint was heard from friendly ships, this salvo was followed at 0459 by another from the cruiser division. Thereupon the *Spence* asked who was firing upon her and threatened to return fire. The OTC then ordered the cruisers to cease firing. As a matter of fact, the cruisers' target *was* an enemy ship, but the *Spence's* complaint cannot be attributed to an oversensitivity upon being made the target of friendly ships. By an odd coincidence the *Spence* was at that time on the same bearing, but beyond the cruisers' target, which was apparently firing at the *Spence*. A few minutes later, after the cruisers had reversed course and were headed east, the *Montpelier* announced over TBS that she had a target bearing 030° at 22,000 yards and was going to open fire unless the target identified itself. Fortunately the *Converse* said she believed that she was the target, as she proved to be when she turned on her fighting lights.

The *Spence* cut back east about 0500 to close a target that seemed to be firing upon her. She closed to a range of 4,000 yards before establishing the identity of the target as definitely enemy and opened fire at 0512. The target was soon in flames, and three explosions and several flashes were observed on her. The target was dead in the water by 0521, when the *Spence* found herself running low on ammunition and called upon ComDesRon 23 to stand toward the target to help finish her off. Turning back to the southwest, the Squadron Commander ordered his ships to take the *Spence's* target under fire, and was soon encountering splashes from gunfire himself. The enemy was pounded until 0538, when he sank stern first and disappeared from all screens. This ship was thought to have been a *Fubuki* class destroyer.

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Retirement

Expecting a heavy air attack at dawn or shortly thereafter, Admiral Merrill had at 0456 directed Capt. Burke to collect his destroyer squadron and retire on him. Compliance with this order had been delayed, however, in order to develop enemy contacts. After the *Spence* and Division 45 had finished off their destroyer target, the task force commander renewed his order to retire, instructing the destroyers to rendezvous with the cruisers at latitude $06^{\circ}30'$ S., longitude $154^{\circ}45'$ W., which was approximately the position of the *Foote's* torpedoing.

Capt. Burke requested permission to pursue the Japanese farther, but was directed to rejoin, and when he later reported that he was returning to pick up survivors, this order was repeated. Enemy planes were already beginning to appear, indicating what was in store for the task force after daylight. At 0559 an enemy plane was tracked coming in low on the port side of the cruiser formation. The division executed emergency turn 9 and shortly thereafter 9 turn back to the course.

The *Converse* and *Thatcher* joined up as daylight was breaking, and by that time the other destroyers were in sight. At 0602 the formation passed through a heavy oil slick about 500 yards in width that stretched off to the horizon on course 320° .¹⁴ The *Claxton* was directed to take the crippled *Foote* in tow, with the *Ausburne* and *Thatcher* as escorts. The cruisers and the remaining four destroyers circled the group until the *Foote* was under tow, then at 0700 stood to the southward toward the transport group. The tug *Sioux*, which had been requested, was soon in sight, and friendly planes of the requested air cover were on the screen.

It is impossible at this time to estimate with any degree of accuracy the extent of the damage Task Force Merrill inflicted upon the enemy. The evidence supporting claims of ships sunk is largely of radar character and not conclusive. It is established, however, that one light cruiser of the *Sendai* class was sunk and that a fleet destroyer also went down.¹⁵ Surviving enemy ships must have suffered damage heavy enough to compel them to abandon a mission of great importance and flee from an enemy force hardly as strong as their own. Had it not been for the numerous difficulties in identification, resulting in passing up several

¹⁴ The oil slick was reported by a plane the same day as disappearing over the horizon in the latitude of Buka. The ship was not among those claimed by the task force to have been sunk.

¹⁵ Capt. Burke considered his estimate of two destroyers and one "large ship" sunk "very conservative."

"beautiful ones," and for the delays and lengthy maneuvers occasioned by units becoming separated from their divisions, the punishment inflicted on the enemy would have been still heavier.

As it was, Task Force Merrill enjoyed the satisfaction of defeating and turning back a superior enemy force and thereby saving the Bougainville landing force from certain disaster. It was an added satisfaction that this mission was accomplished without damage other than the torpedoing of one destroyer, which was later towed in, and minor damage to other vessels as the result of gunfire and collision.

ANTIAIRCRAFT ACTION FOLLOWING THE BATTLE OF EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY

No sleep or relaxation was in prospect for personnel of Task Force Merrill at the end of the long night action of 1-2 November, in spite of the fact that this was the second consecutive night action and the third engagement with enemy forces in less than 36 hours. No one had any doubt that the force would have to undergo an air attack from Rabaul very shortly. Conditions were perfect for air operations. The sky was clear, but for a few scattered cumulus clouds, and visibility was excellent. The sea was calm, and there were no friendly rain squalls in the vicinity in which to seek cover. Decks had to be cleared and ready ammunition replenished by the weary crews, who were momentarily expecting the call to General Quarters.

The slow-moving group towing and escorting the crippled *Foote* provided an easy and inviting target for Japanese planes. This group, composed of the *Claxton*, which had the *Foote* under tow, with the *Charles Ausburne* and *Thatcher* as escorts, rapidly fell to the rear of the four cruisers and the remaining destroyers, which were making 18 knots, course 180°. By 0742, 2 November 1943, the cruiser group was in latitude 06°40'07" S., longitude 154°23'09" E., a position about 40 miles southwest of Empress Augusta Bay. The towing group of destroyers was nearly hull down, ten miles to the north.

At 0743 the task force flagship reported over TBS "many bogies bearing 320° T., distance 59 miles." This was the general bearing of Rabaul. General Quarters was sounded at once, and men ran to their stations. A circular antiaircraft disposition was ordered, with destroyers forming on circle 2.5, and the formation speed of the cruiser group was increased to the *Denver's* maximum of 25 knots. Base course was changed to 140° T., the approximate direction from which the air cover

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was expected to arrive. All ships confirmed the contact as enemy planes, and at 0745 the *Denver* picked up a second group bearing 340° T., range 43 miles, which five minutes later merged into one large group bearing 310°-330° T., distance 30 miles. The flagship CIC estimated the enemy group to consist of 50 to 100 planes on course 140° T., speed 180 knots, headed directly for the task force.

Fighter director with the transports at Empress Augusta Bay was requested to send all available planes in his fighter cover to intercept the enemy raid and direct them to give the maximum possible coverage to the crippled *Foote* and her group. The air cover was promptly vectored out, and at 0757 several friendly planes appeared on the screen bearing 330° T., distance 14 miles, in position to intercept the attacking planes, now 20 miles distant from the cruisers. At about the same time our fighter cover of four P-38's was sighted over the cruisers—"a small number for the work ahead," as Admiral Merrill remarked.

Just before 0800 the enemy planes were sighted directly over the *Foote* group by the cruisers. These ships, apparently not so well posted on the development of the attack as the cruiser group, at first took the attacking planes to be friendly aircraft, since many of the latter were appearing from the south preparing to form a cover for the ships. In addition, planes from a bombing strike on an enemy airfield were expected to pass over the formation at about 0800.

As the planes closed, however, they were identified visually as enemy, and the four ships opened fire. An umbrella of 5-inch bursts was seen to take shape above the group by Admiral Merrill, who feared that "the *Foote* was undergoing a new, and perhaps fatal, ordeal." To his surprise, however, the Japanese passed up the slower group and continued directly for the cruisers, a decision the Admiral attributed to "some freak Oriental characteristic." Antiaircraft fire from the *Foote* group accounted for one enemy plane shot down and one more probably shot down as the attack group passed overhead.

As the enemy closed for attack on the cruisers, the flagship identified the attack group as made up largely of Val dive bombers and some high-level Betty bombers covered by fighters at a higher altitude. The number was variously estimated at between 60 to 70 planes.

Emergency 9 turn was ordered to unmask the 5-inch batteries when the enemy reached the eight-mile limit at 0803, and as he reached the "peel-off" position, emergency turn 36 was executed. At 0805, when

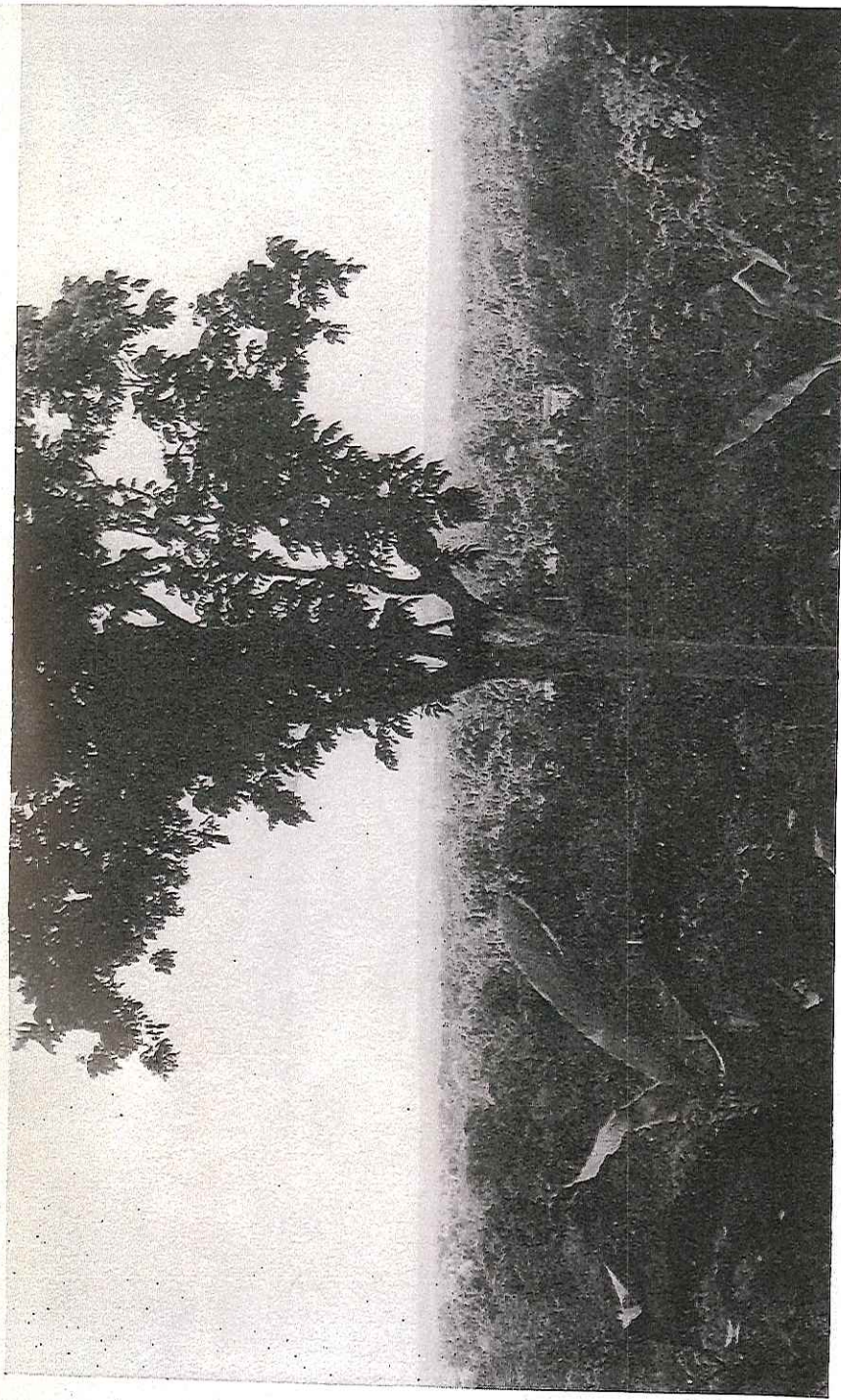
range had closed to 14,000 yards, bearing 110° T., all 5-inch batteries opened up at the diving planes, "firing like overgrown machine guns." Seeing this tremendous barrage headed their way, our own fighters apparently thought the ships were firing at them, for a report of "cease firing—friendly planes" was suddenly heard over the fighter director circuit. Some ships unfortunately held fire momentarily, but immediately resumed fire as the Vals continued their dives.

The first three dive bombers "seemed incredibly slow" in reaching their release point. The 40-mm. batteries had now joined in and then the 20-mm.'s. "The scene was one of an organized hell," according to the OTC's report, "in which it was impossible to speak, hear, or even think. As the ships passed the first 90° of their turn in excellent formation, the air seemed completely filled with bursting shrapnel and, to our great glee, enemy planes in a severe state of disrepair." The *Montpelier*, which claimed five planes down for sure and two more possibly, scored one hit with a 6-inch projectile that tore the target to pieces in midair. Other ships reported direct hits with their main batteries, and several planes were seen to disintegrate in the air. The *Cleveland* reported two planes apparently hit by her 5-inch bursts, but claimed only seven planes possibly shot down. She saw four Japanese aviators bail out and open parachutes, one of whom descended through 20-mm. fire and was hit, falling within 100 yards of the cruiser. The *Columbia* claimed four for sure and three more planes possibly shot down, besides several damaged, and the *Denver* claimed two for sure and one possibly shot down. The four destroyers also contributed their part to the action, but the firing was so general that it is virtually impossible to corroborate the claim of any individual ship.

Some planes were observed to continue their dives past the release point and crash into the sea, indicating a dead pilot at the stick. One plane passed flaming over the flagship and exploded beyond. Other planes made low runs at ships in what appeared to be attempted skip-bombing attacks. Though there were no torpedo planes in the attack, the presence of orbiting aircraft at a low altitude—apparently those that had finished their attacks—gave the impression that a torpedo attack was imminent. Some planes, after being hit, attempted to crash dive on ships in the formation, but all fortunately missed.

At 0807 emergency turn 36 was ordered again to keep the formation spinning to the right. The *Spence* was hampered in maneuvering by

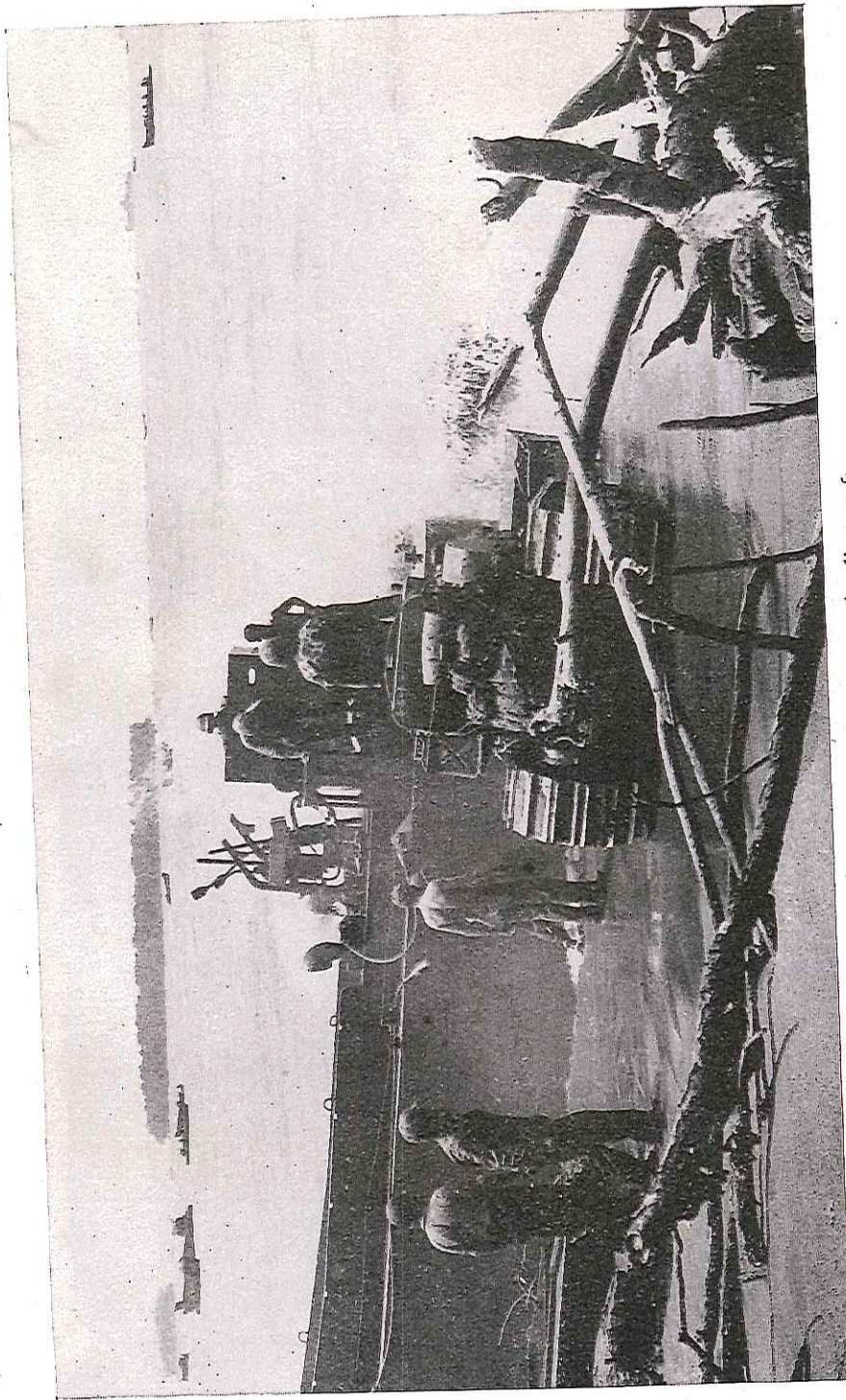
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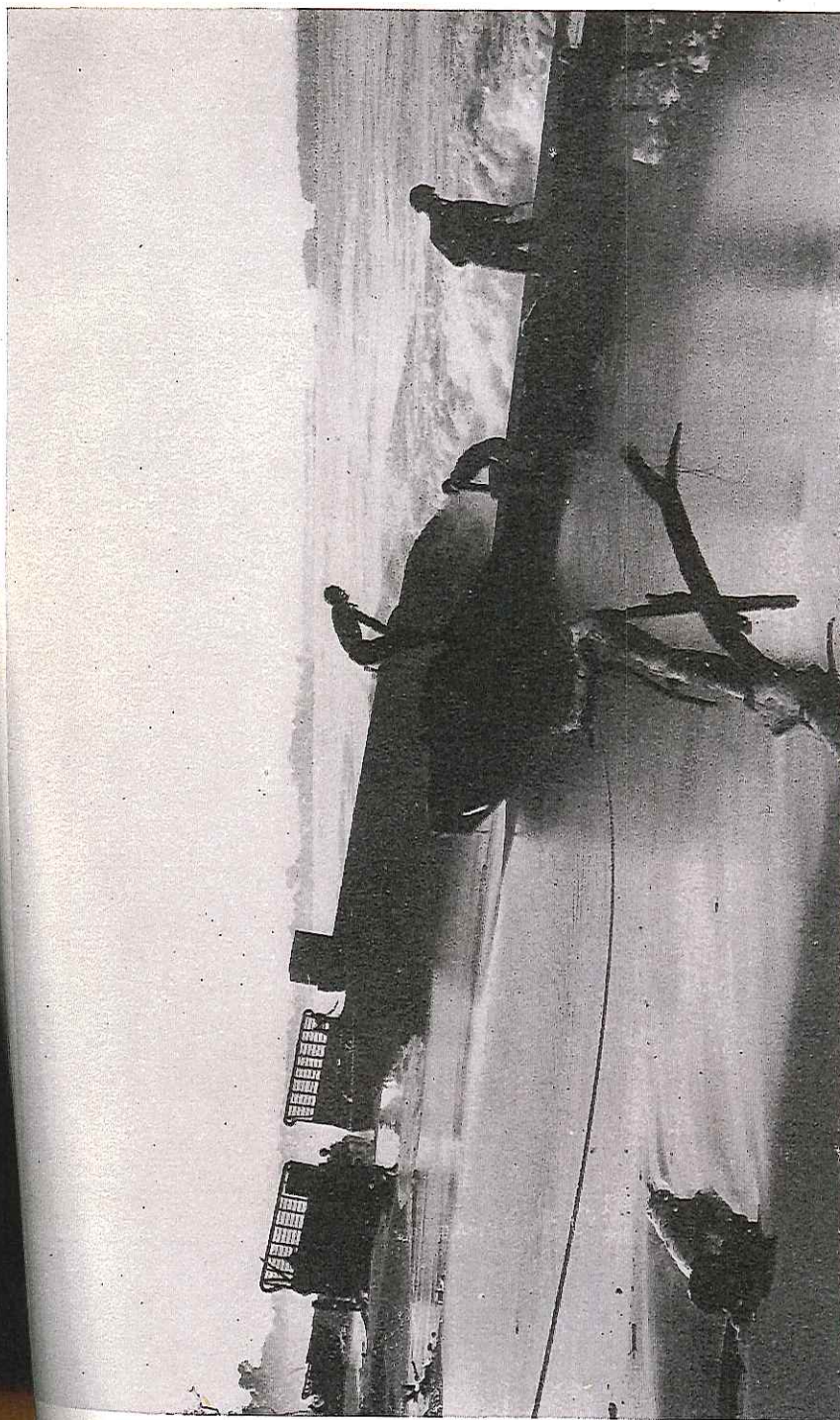
Bougainville terrain from Hellzapoppin Ridge

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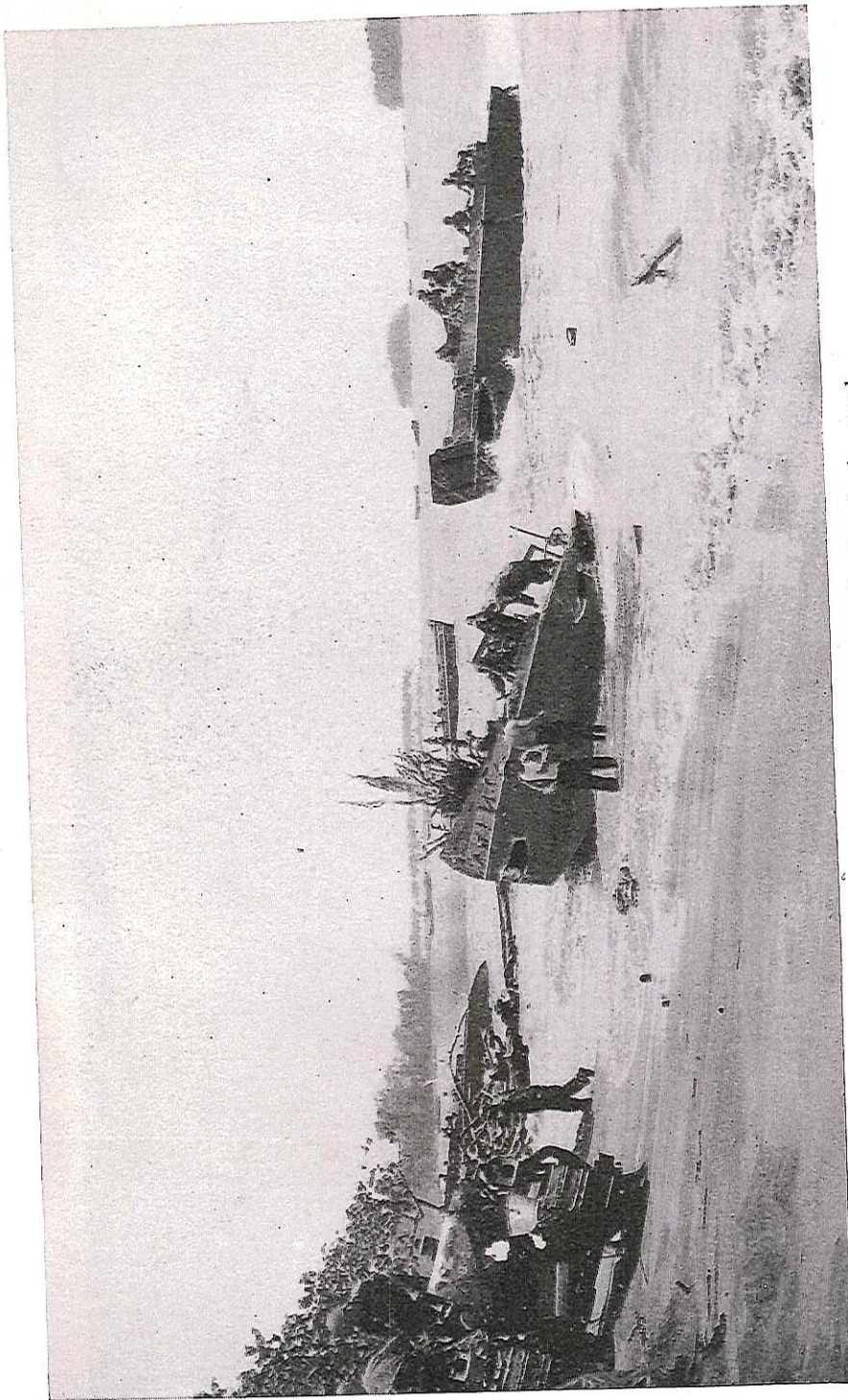
Bulldozer attempts to salvage landing craft



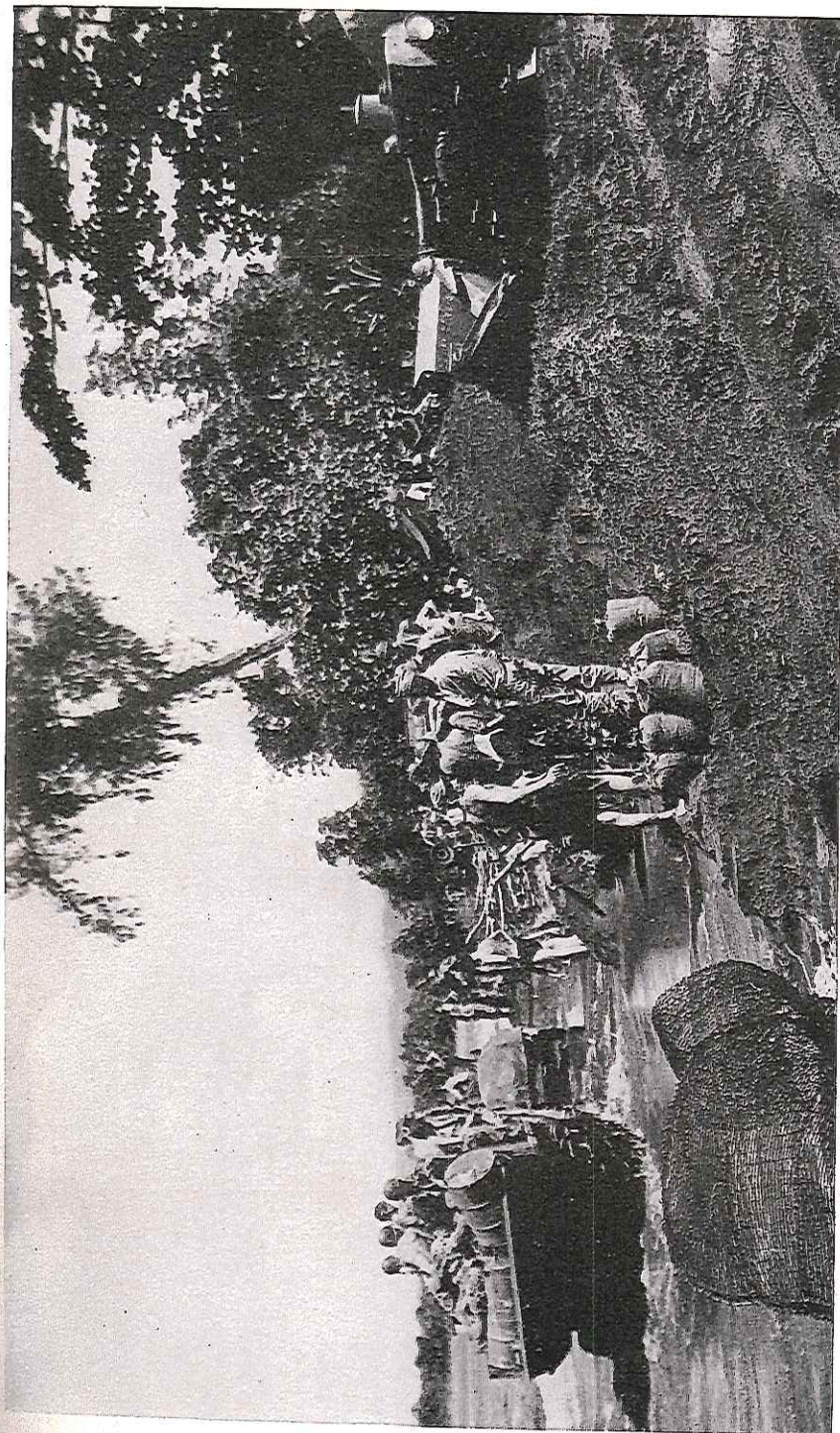
Landing craft stranded on Bougainville

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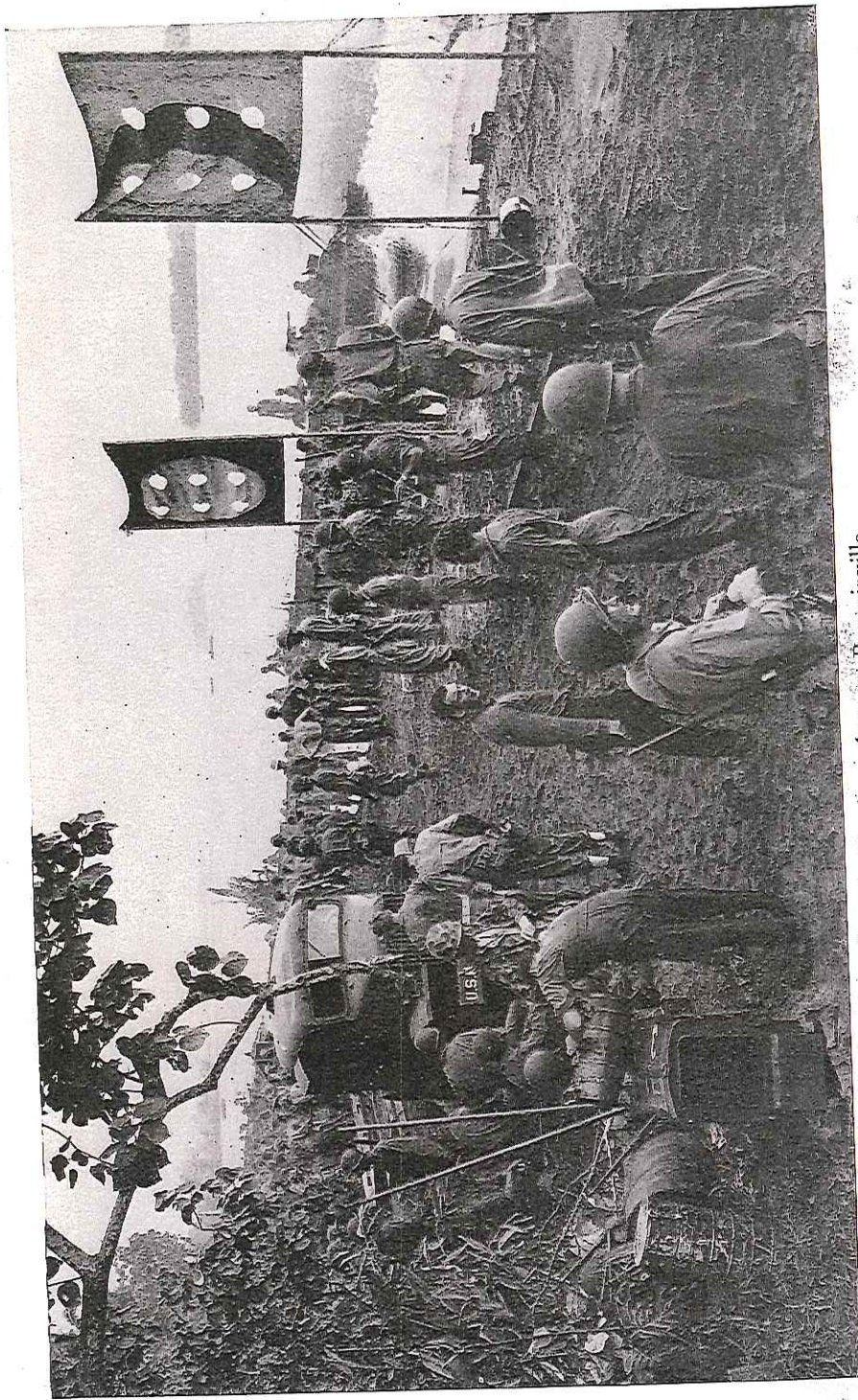


Landing craft with Torokina Point and islands in background



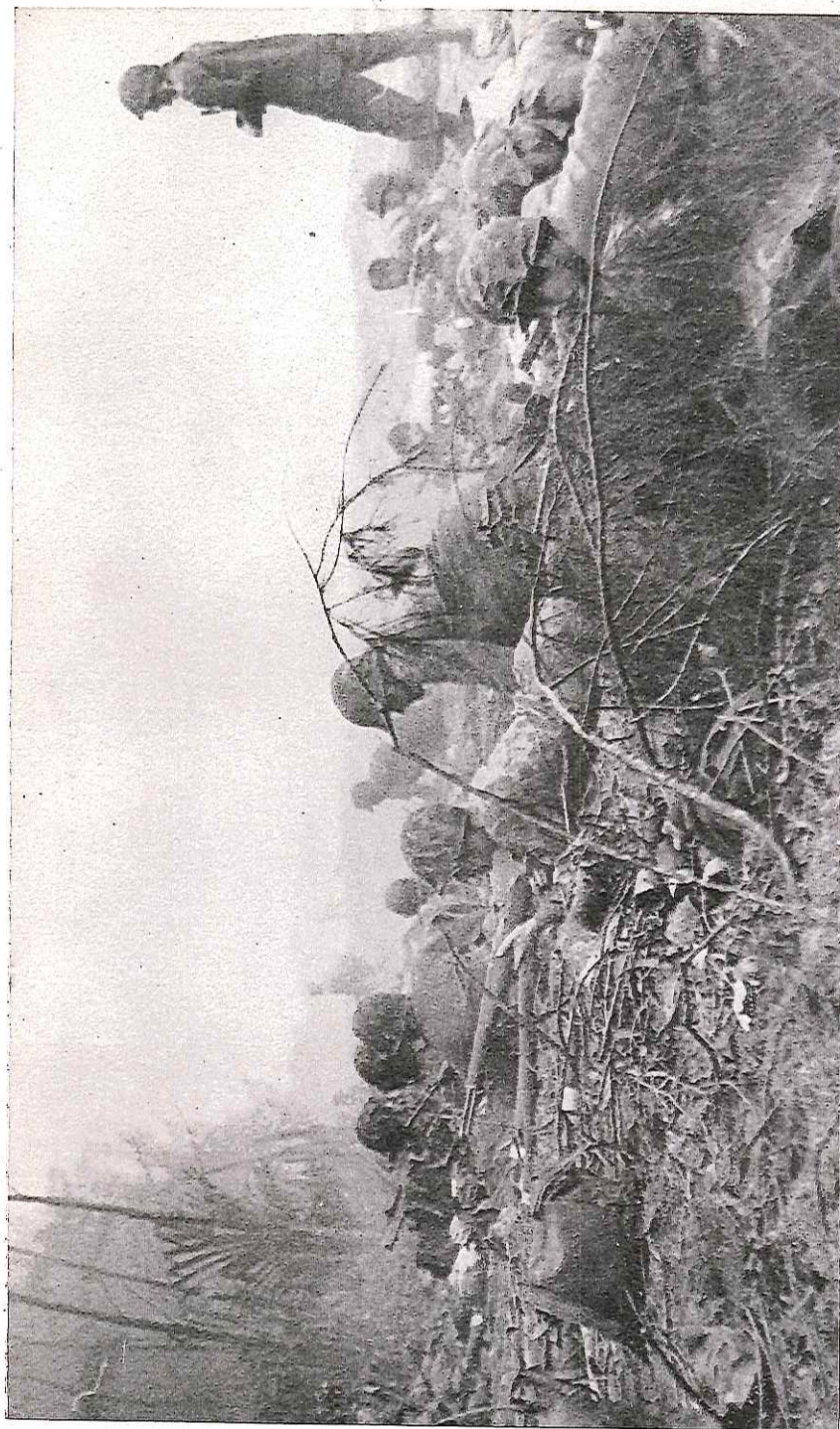
Crowded beach conditions at Bougainville

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Beach markers on Bougainville

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Marines defending the Bougainville beachhead

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the shell hole at her waterline received the night before, which limited her rudder angle on left turns to 10°. Thanks to our evasive action and the rattled aim of Japanese aviators, the only direct hits scored on the task force were two small bombs dropped on the *Montpelier's* starboard catapult. These completely disabled the catapult and wounded eight men, one of them seriously. Five bombs were released above the *Cleveland*, three of which were very near hits. Although the nearest bomb amidships to port threw water and a fragment on board, the ship suffered no serious damage. One small bomb fell in the wake of the *Columbia*, and the detonation was felt by personnel stationed below, but no damage whatsoever was done. The destroyers also received several near hits, but suffered no damage.

Each wave of three dive bombers descended at a 45° glide, all three attacking the same heavy ship. Since the interval between the waves was considerably greater than that used by our own air groups, the ships' batteries had sufficient time to concentrate on each individual wave. A very general impression aboard our ships was that the attacking aviators were not the best the Japanese had to offer. Several planes were seen to turn away from intense gunfire. They did not press home their attacks in the face of automatic weapon fire and did not appear overly aggressive. As the *Denver* report remarked, "they appeared to be imbued with a wholesome respect for our AA fire."

It is not known exactly how many planes the Japanese lost in the attack. At one time during the action, however, ten enemy planes were counted on the water, and seven additional planes were seen to crash well outside the formation.

By 0812 the attack was all over, and the enemy was reforming about 15 miles to the westward. The flagship's radar screen showed many friendly planes crossing overhead in hot pursuit as the formation steadied again at 0113 on course 150° T. By 0835 the radar screen was entirely clear of bogies, and shortly thereafter the CIC reported the approach of a large group of friendly planes. These planes were soon sighted going north in search of crippled Japanese ships seeking to return to Rabaul from the previous night's battle.

☆ ☆ ☆

Fighting sleep and fatigue, the task force continued toward the Treasury Islands, but about noon it was met with a dispatch from COMSOPAC

directing the force to cover the unloading of the transports at Empress Augusta Bay and their subsequent withdrawal to Guadalcanal.

So low on fuel and ammunition it could hardly fight another action, the task force, then in a position 30 miles southeast of the Treasury Islands, reversed course at 1350. The cruisers plus the *Stanly* and *Dyson* headed back to Empress Augusta Bay, while the two remaining ships, *Spence* and *Converse*, continued to Port Purvis for fuel and battle repairs, arriving there at 0700 the next morning.

At 1610 the welcome news came that the transport group had departed Empress Augusta Bay at 1500. The cruiser group joined up with the transports about dark. Shortly before that time the *Foote* was sighted under tow by the *Sioux* making good progress at nine knots. ComDesRon 23 in the *Charles Ausburne* was ordered to join the cruiser group escorting the transports and to assume command of the destroyer screen. The *Thatcher* was ordered to proceed independently to Hathorn Sound for fuel.

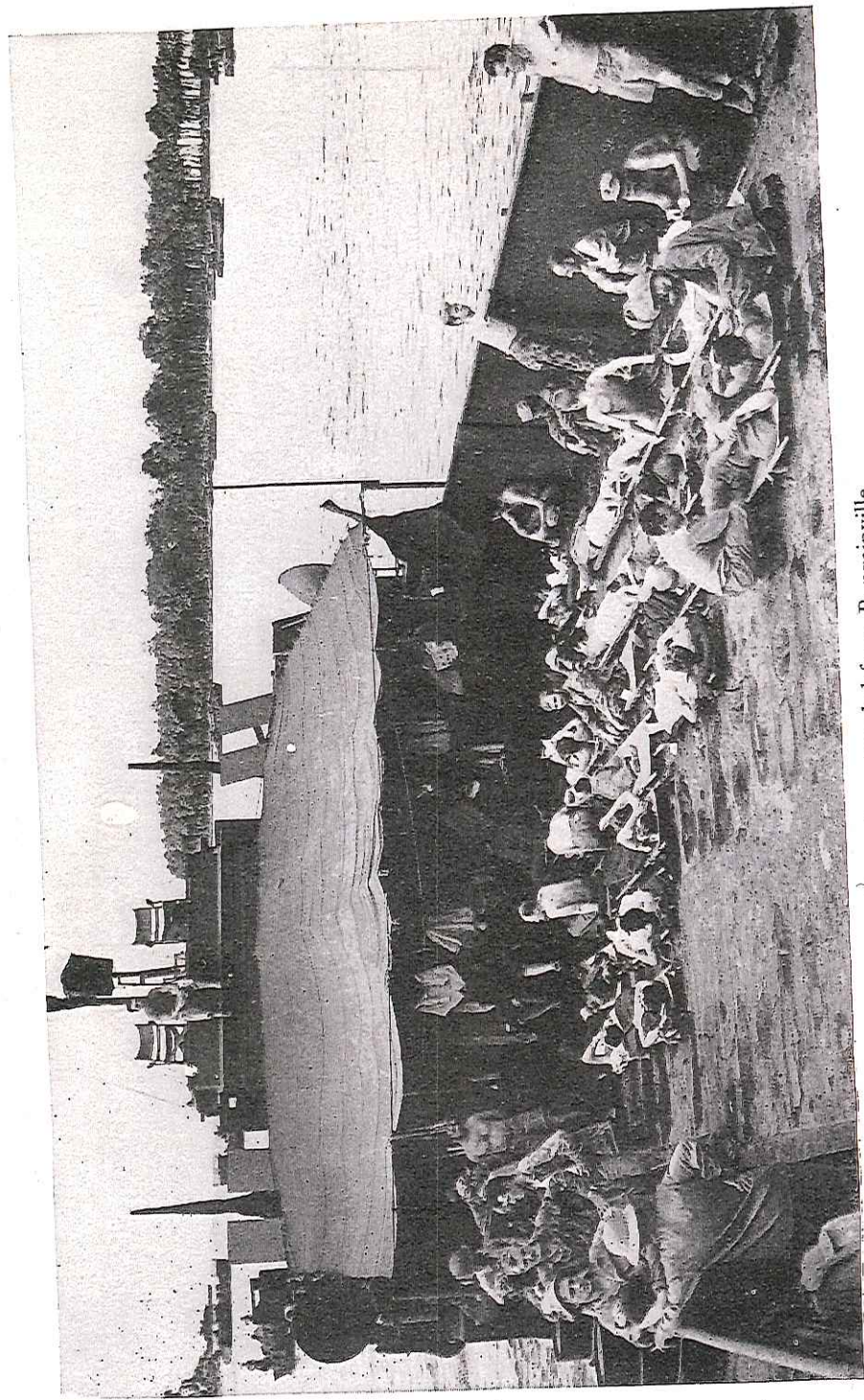
Fortunately a foul weather front developed to the northwest and became increasingly heavy as the night came on. Night attack from Rabaul was thus precluded, and the force was unmolested by the enemy in its passage. At 0900 the following morning the *Nashville*, Capt. Herman A. Spanagel, and one destroyer were sighted off Rendova Island and directed to escort the transports to Guadalcanal in accordance with a dispatch received from COMSOPAC. Task Force Merrill entered Port Purvis at 1630, 3 November, and began the replenishment of fuel, ammunition—and sleep. The arrival of the crippled *Foote* the next morning was cheered by all hands.

CONCLUSION

By 2 November the assault phase of the Bougainville operation was completed, and all immediate objectives had been attained. The Japanese cruiser task force—the major threat to the landing operation—had been met, badly crippled, and routed. Enemy airfields on Bougainville beyond and to the rear of our beachhead at Torokina Point had been temporarily neutralized or weakened to such an extent that they held no immediate threat to our landing operation. Allied air supremacy made Japanese counter landings and reinforcements impossible for some time to come, while reinforcement by land routes from southern Bougainville presented grave difficulties.

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Evacuating wounded from Bougainville

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In order to exploit advantages thus achieved, the defense perimeter of the Bougainville beachhead had to be expanded, air strips constructed, and a naval base established. The beachhead had to be supplied and reinforced by echelons that followed a course within close range of several enemy airfields. The numerous enemy airfields had to be kept neutralized, and a constant guard maintained against attack by enemy surface forces.

The Bougainville operation laid the foundations for an offensive naval and air base deep in enemy territory, athwart Japanese lines of sea and air communications. This base would enlarge the field of targets far beyond the immediate objective to include New Britain and New Ireland. In by-passing the heaviest concentration of enemy troops, we had avoided for the present a long ground campaign such as had been fought at Guadalcanal and New Georgia. Thousands of Japanese troops were left behind in southern Bougainville, the Shortlands, and Choiseul virtually cut off from their sources of supplies. These results were attained with great economy of force and with losses far below the expected minimum.

APPENDIX A AIR STRIKES ON ENEMY AIR INSTALLATIONS AND STRIPS

15 October-31 October 1943

Date	Planes	Target	Comments	Losses	
				Enemy	Allied
Oct. 15	21 B-24's, 16 F4U's and 12 P-38's.	Kahili personnel and supply.	4 explosions, several fires, good pattern, 10-15 Zekes intercepting.	6	0
16	6 B-25's.....	Buka.....	Large explosions and fires.....	0	0
	6 B-25's.....	Ballale....	Good pattern on runway.....	0	0
	3 B-24's.....	Kara and Kahili airdromes.	Unobserved results.....	0	0
17	21 F4U's.....	Ballale....	Engaged 30-40 Zekes and Hamps.	14/2	0 (1 op)
18	28 B-24's, 32 SBD's.	Ballale....	29 tons bombs—many hits.....	3	0
19	19 F4U's.....	Kahili.....	Encountered 15-20 Zekes.....	8/2	0
	4 PV's.....	Ballale....	AA position—4 explosions.....	0	0
	4 PV's.....	Kara.....	Large explosion, one fire.....	0	1
	24 B-24's, 14 P-38's.	Kahili.....	Large fires started, one AA position hit.	6	2 (op)
	12 TBF's, 20 SBD's, 20 VF.	Kara.....	AA positions and buildings hit. Many hits on runway.	0	0
	2 F4U's.....	Kara.....	Strafing attack on strip.....	5 (on ground)	0
	4 PV's.....	Kakasa....	8 tons dropped, large explosion, heavy smoke.	0	0
20	24 F4U's.....	Kahili.....	Encountered 20 Zekes.....	3	2
	24 P-40's.....	Kahili.....	No enemy contacts.....	0	0
	2 PV's.....	Kakasa....	Report village badly damaged from previous raid.	0	0
	7 SBD's plus VF...	Kakasa....	2 explosions, much smoke.....	0	0
21	2 B-25's, 36 VF....	Kara.....	7 tons on airdrome, 15 hits on runway and buildings.	0	0
	3 PV's.....	Kakasa....	2 tons dropped, unobserved results.	0	0
	10 B-24's, 20 F6F's.	Kahili.....	33 tons with unobserved results.	0	0
22	9 B-29's, 12 F6F's..	Pora Pora, Choiseul.	36 tons on beach.....	0	0
	9 B-24's, 8 F6F's...	Choiseul coast.	9 tons, unobserved results.....	1	2
	12 B-24's, 16 P-40's.	Kahili.....	48 tons on Emberly's Lease. 9 Zekes intercepted.	1 dam.	1 dam.
	24 TBF's, 48 SBD's, 68 VF.	Kahili.....	32 tons dropped; 15 hits destroyed 2 grounded Bettys and several AA guns.	2	0
23	24 VF.....	Kara.....	Runway strafed, 16 grounded planes destroyed.	16 (on ground)	0
	24 SBD's, 18 TBF's, 60 VF.	Kara.....	28 tons on runway and AA positions.	0	1 (op)
	11 B-24's, 16 P-38's.	Kahili.....	44 tons on runway.....	0	0
	6 B-24's, 16 VF....	Kahili.....	24 tons on runway, many craters noted.	0	0
	24 SBD's, 18 TBF's, 36 VF.	Kara.....	36 tons on gun positions, ammo dumps, runway and dispersal.	0	1

¹ Total weight dropped 23 Oct. was: Kara, 59 tons; Kahili, 68 tons.

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Date	Planes	Target	Comments	Losses	
				Enemy	Allied
Oct. 24	9 B-24's, 13 VF....	Kahili.....	26 tons on runway and revetments.	0	0
	47 SBD's, 22 TBF's, 28 VF.	Kahili.....	Many hits on runway, gun positions, operations tower.	0	0
	19 B-24's, 14 VF..	Kahili.....	26 tons on runway, dispersal and repair areas.	0	0
	30 B-25's, 39 VF..	Kahili.....	44 tons on runway, revetments and repair area. Fires started.	0	3 dam.
25	31 SBD's, 30 VF, 18 TBF's.	Ballale....	33 tons, 11 hits on runway, others on AA position.	1 (ground)	2 dam.
26	30 SBD's, 42 VF, 18 TBF's.	Kara.....	33 tons; many hits on runway, AA positions, buildings.	0	0
	7 PB4Y's, 15 P-38's	Kahili.....	17 tons; many hits on runway..	0	0
	36 TBF's, 49 SBD's, 22 B-25's, 69 VF.	Kahili.....	88 tons; runway and AA positions severely pounded.	0	1
	20 B-24's, 16 VF...	Kahili.....	Many hits on center of strip...	0	7 dam.
	8 B-24's.....	Buka.....	Grounded planes and many personnel destroyed.	6 (ground)	0
	6 B-25's, 15 P-38's.	Buka.....	216 para. bombs dropped. Grounded planes and control tower hit.	5 (ground)	0
	5 PV's.....	Mono Island.	7½ tons; started large fire and demolished huts at Falami.	0	0
27	17 B-24's.....	Kara & Kahili.	16½ tons; many hits on runways.	0	0
	32 VF.....	Treasury Islands.	Fighter cover for landing on Treasury Islands.	12	0
28	39 SBD's, 46 VF, 19 TBF's.	Kara.....	33½ tons on runway.....	0	4 dam.
	19 B-24's.....	Kara.....	54 tons of which 70 percent hit runway and revetments.	0	0
	38 SBD's, 32 VF, 21 TBF's.	Ballale....	39 tons on runway and revetments.	0	11 dam.
29	40 B-25's, 22 F4F's.	Buka.....	Runway and revetments bombed and strafed.	0	0
	9 B-25's.....	Buka.....	648 para. frags. on Buka strip. Grounded planes hit.	0	0
	21 B-24's.....	Buka.....	28 tons on runway and revetments.	0	0
	11 B-24's, 24 VF...	Buka.....	16½ tons on runway and dispersals.	0	0
	12 PV's, 1 B-25....	Bonis.....	3 tons and 48 para. bombs, 90 percent on runway and revetments.	0	0
30	12 TBF's, 26 VF...	Choiseul...	2 tons in support of ground troops.	0	0
	16 B-24's.....	Kara.....	47½ tons; unobserved results...	0	0
	68 SBD's, 27 TBF's, 50 VF.	Kara.....	61 tons dropped.....	0	0
	6 B-25's, 32 VF....	Kieta.....	2½ tons on runway, installations strafed.	0	3
	4 PV's, 12 P-39's...	Kieta.....	Frag. clusters dropped, runway strafed.	0	1 dam.
	14 VF, 12 P-39's...	Tonolei Harbor.	Strafed shipping.....	0	0
31	19 B-24's.....	Kara.....	75 tons; 80 percent on runway..	0	1 dam.
	34 SBD's, 54 VF, 24 TBF's.	Kara.....	39 tons; many hits on runways and AA guns.	0	2 dam.
	23 B-25's, 16 VF...	Kara.....	34 tons dropped.....	0	0

APPENDIX B
TREASURY ISLANDS OPERATION
TASK FORCE ORGANIZATION

Task Group Fort

Rear Admiral George H. Fort

Main Body, Southern Force

Advance Transport Group, Comdr. John D. Sweeney.

TransDiv 12 (APD's), Comdr. John D. Sweeney.

Stringham, (F), Lt. Comdr. Ralph H. Moureau.

Talbot, Lt. Comdr. Charles C. Morgan.

Waters, Lt. Comdr. Charles J. McWhinnie.

Dent, Lt. Comdr. Ralph A. Wilhelm.

TransDiv 22 (APD's), Comdr. Robert H. Wilkinson.

Kilty, (F), Lieut. John W. Coolidge.

Crosby, Lt. Comdr. Marston W. Burdick.

Ward, Lt. Comdr. Frederick W. Lemley.

McKean, Lt. Comdr. Ralph L. Ramey.

Escort (DD's), Lt. Comdr. George DeMetropolis.

Eaton, (FF) (F), Lt. Comdr. Edward F. Jackson.

Pringle, Lt. Comdr. George DeMetropolis.

Philip, Lt. Comdr. William H. Groverman, Jr.

Second Transport Group, Capt. Jack E. Hurff.

LCI Unit, Comdr. James McD. Smith.

LCI(L)'s 222, (F), 330, 334, 336, 24, 61, 67, 69.

LCI(L) Gunboats 22 and 23.

Escort (DD's), Capt. Jack E. Hurff.

Waller, (F), Lt. Comdr. William T. Dutton.

Cony, Comdr. Harry D. Johnston.

Sausley, Comdr. Bert F. Brown.

Minesweeping Unit (AM's), Lt. Comdr. Allan D. Curtis.

Adroit, Lieut. William D. White.

Conflict, Lt. Comdr. Allan D. Curtis.

Daring, Lieut. William T. Hunt.

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Main Body, Southern Force—Continued.

Third Transport Group, Comdr. James R. Pahl.

LST Unit, Comdr. Vilhelm K. Busck.

LST 399, Lieut. Joseph M. Fabre.

LST 485, Lieut. Clinton E. Stover.

Escort (DD's), Comdr. James R. Pahl.

Conway, (F), Lt. Comdr. Harold G. Bowen, Jr.

Renshaw, Lt. Comdr. Jacob A. Lark.

Minesweeping Unit, Lieut. Beckwith A. Brown.

YMS 96, Lieut. Edgar G. Glosson.

YMS 197, Lieut. Beckwith A. Brown.

Fourth Transport Group, Lt. (jg) Martin E. Bergstrom.

LCT Unit

LCT(5)'s 321, 325, 330.

APc 37 (F).

Escort

2 MTB's.

Fifth Transport Group, Lieut. James E. Locke.

APc 33, 6 LCM(3)'s.

Service Group (AT's)

Apache, Lieut. Clyde S. Horner.

Sioux, Lt. (jg) Leonard M. Jahnsen.

Scouting Force

22 MTB's.

APPENDIX C

BOUGAINVILLE OPERATION—TASK FORCE ORGANIZATION

Task Force Wilkinson

Rear Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson

Main Body, Northern Force

Transport Group, Commo. Lawrence F. Reifsnider.

TransDiv Able (AP's), Capt. Anton B. Anderson.

President Jackson, (F), Capt. Elmer P. Abernethy.

President Adams, Capt. Felix L. Johnson.

President Hayes, Capt. Henry C. Flanagan.

George Clymer, (FF), Capt. Frank R. Talbot.

Destroyers:

Anthony (ComDesDiv 90, Comdr. Edmund B. Taylor), Lt. Comdr.

Blinn Van Mater.

Wadsworth, Comdr. John F. Walsh.

Terry, Comdr. Ralph R. Phelan.

Braine, Comdr. John F. Newman, Jr.

Sigourney, Comdr. Walter L. Dyer.

Renshaw, Lt. Comdr. Jacob A. Lark.

TransDiv Baker (AP's), Capt. George B. Ashe.

American Legion, (F), Comdr. Ratcliffe C. Welles.

Fuller, Capt. Melville E. Eaton.

Crescent City, Comdr. Lionel L. Rowe.

Hunter Liggett (APA), (F, Commo. Reifsnider), Capt. Roderick S. Patch, USCG.

Destroyers:

Fullam (ComDesRon 45, Capt. Ralph Earle, Jr.), Lt. Comdr. William D. Kelly.

Bennett, Lt. Comdr. Philip F. Hauck.

Guest, Lt. Comdr. Earle K. McLaren.

Hudson, Comdr. William R. Smedberg, III.

Conway, Lt. Comdr. Harold P. Bowen, Jr.

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Main Body, Northern Force—Continued.

Transport Group, Commo, Lawrence F. Reifsnider—Continued.

TransDiv Charlie, Capt. Henry E. Thornhill.

Alhena (AK), Comdr. Howard W. Bradbury.

Alchiba (AKA), (F), Comdr. Howard R. Shaw.

Libra (AK), Comdr. Floyd F. Ferris.

Titania (AKA), Comdr. Herbert E. Berger.

Minesweeper Group, Comdr. Wayne R. Loud.

Hopkins, (F), Lieut. Alton L. Waldron.

Hovey, Lt. Comdr. Edwin A. McDonald.

Dorsey, Lt. Comdr. Archibald E. Teall.

Southard, Lt. Comdr. Frederick R. Matthews.

Conflict, Lt. Comdr. Allan D. Curtis.

Advent, Lieut. Franklyn S. Wooster.

Daring, Lieut. William T. Hunt.

Adroit, Lieut. William D. White.

YMS 96, Lieut. Edgar G. Glosson.

YMS 197, Lieut. Beckwith A. Brown.

YMS 238, Lieut. Jacques Chevalier.

YMS 243, Lieut. John P. Moloney.

Third Marine Division, Reinforced, Maj. Gen. Allen H. Turnage.

3rd MarDiv (less 21st Regt. Combat Team and other troops reserved for later echelons).

APPENDIX D

Symbols of U. S. Navy Ships

AB	Crane Ship.	AS	Submarine Tender.
ACM	Auxiliary Mine Layer.	ASR	Submarine Rescue Vessel.
AD	Destroyer Tender.	ATA	Ocean Tug, Auxiliary.
AE	Ammunition Ship.	ATF	Ocean Tug, Fleet.
AF	Provision Storeship.	ATO	Ocean Tug, Old.
AG	Miscellaneous Auxiliary.	ATR	Ocean Tug, Rescue.
AGC	Amphibious Force Flagship.	AV	Seaplane Tender, Large.
AGP	Motor Torpedo Boat Tender.	AVC	Catapult Lighter.
AGS	Surveying Ship.	AVD	Seaplane Tender (high speed).
AH	Hospital Ship.	AVP	Seaplane Tender, Small.
AK	Cargo Ship.	AW	Distilling Ship.
AKA	Cargo Ship, Attack.	AX	(Planned Auxiliary, New Construction.)
AKN	Net Cargo Ship.	BB	Battleship.
AKS	General Stores Issue Ship.	CA	Heavy Cruiser.
AKV	Cargo Ship and Aircraft Ferry.	CAZ	(Planned Auxiliary, Conversion.)
AM	Mine Sweeper.	CB	Large Cruiser.
AMb	Base Mine Sweeper.	CL	Light Cruiser.
AMc	Coastal Mine Sweeper.	CM	Mine Layer.
AN	Net Layer.	CMc	Coastal Mine Layer.
AO	Oiler.	CV	Aircraft Carrier.
AOG	Gasoline Tanker.	CVB	Aircraft Carrier, Large.
AP	Transport.	CVE	Aircraft Carrier, Escort.
APA	Transport, Attack.	CVL	Aircraft Carrier, Small.
APB	Barracks Ship (self-propelled).	DD	Destroyer.
APc	Coastal Transport.	DE	Destroyer Escort.
APD	Transport (high speed).	DM	Light Mine Layer.
APH	Transport for Wounded.	DMS	Mine Sweeper (high speed).
APL	Barracks Ship (non-self-propelled).	IX	Miscellaneous Unclassified.
APV	Transport and Aircraft Ferry.	LCC (1)	Landing Craft, Control (Mk. I).
AR	Repair Ship.	LCC (2)	Landing Craft, Control (Mk. II).
ARB	Repair Ship, Battle Damage.	LCI (FF)	Landing Craft, Infantry (floatilla flagship).
ARG	Repair Ship, Internal Combustion Engine.	LCI (G)	Landing Craft, Infantry (gunboat).
ARH	Repair Ship, Heavy Hull.	LCI (L)	Landing Craft, Infantry (large).
ARL	Repair Ship, Landing Craft.	LCM (2)	Landing Craft, Mechanized (Mk. II).
ARS	Salvage Vessel.		
ARS (T)	Salvage Craft Tender.		
ARV	Aircraft Repair Ship.		
ARV (A)	Aircraft Repair Ship (aircraft).		
ARV (E)	Aircraft Repair Ship (engine).		

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LCM (3)	Landing Craft, Mechanized (Mk. III).	PGM	Motor Gunboat.
LCM (6)	Landing Craft, Mechanized (Mk. VI).	PR	River Gunboat.
LCP (L)	Landing Craft, Personnel (large).	PT	Motor Torpedo Boat.
LCP (N)	Landing Craft, Personnel (nested).	PY	Yacht.
LCP (R)	Landing Craft, Personnel (with ramp).	PYc	Coastal Yacht.
LCR (L)	Landing Craft, Rubber (large).	SC	Submarine Chaser (110').
LCR (S)	Landing Craft, Rubber (small).	SS	Submarine.
LCS (L) (3)	Landing Craft, Support (large) (Mk. III).	YA	Ash Lighter.
LCS (S) (1)	Landing Craft, Support (small) (Mk. I).	YAG	Miscellaneous District Auxiliary.
LCS (S) (2)	Landing Craft, Support (small) (Mk. II).	YC	Open Lighter.
LCT (5)	Landing Craft, Tank (Mk. V).	YCF	Car Float.
LCT (6)	Landing Craft, Tank (Mk. VI).	YCK	Open Cargo Lighter.
LCV	Landing Craft, Vehicle.	YCV	Aircraft Transportation Lighter.
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel.	YDG	Degaussing Vessel.
LSD	Landing Ship, Dock.	YDT	Diving Tender.
LSM	Landing Ship, Medium.	YF	Covered Lighter; Range Tender; Provision Store Lighter.
LSM (R)	Landing Ship, Medium (rocket).	YFB	Ferryboat and Launch.
LST	Landing Ship, Tank.	YFT	Torpedo Transportation Lighter.
LSV	Landing Ship, Vehicle.	YG	Garbage Lighter.
LSX	(Planned Landing Ship.)	YHB	Houseboat.
LVT (1)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. I).	YHT	Heating Scow.
LVT (A) (1)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (armored) (Mk. I).	YMS	Motor Mine Sweeper.
LVT (2)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. II).	YN	Net Tender.
LVT (A) (2)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (armored) (Mk. II).	YNg	Gate Vessel.
LVT (3)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. III).	YNT	Net Tender, Tug Class.
LVT (4)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Mk. IV).	YO	Fuel Oil Barge.
LVT (A) (4)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (armored) (Mk. IV).	YOG	Gasoline Barge.
PC	Submarine Chaser (173').	YOS	Oil Storage Barge.
PCE	Patrol Craft Escort.	YP	District Patrol Vessel.
PCE (R)	Patrol Craft Escort (rescue).	YPK	Pontoon Stowage Barge.
PCS	Submarine Chaser (136').	YR	Floating Workshop.
PE	Eagle Boat.	YRD (H)	Floating Workshop, Dry Dock (hull).
PF	Frigate.	YRD (M)	Floating Workshop, Dry Dock (machinery).
PG	Gunboat.	YS	Stevedore Barge.
		YSD	Seaplane Wrecking Derrick.
		YSP	Salvage Pontoon.
		YSR	Sludge Removal Barge.
		YTB	Harbor Tug, Big.
		YTL	Harbor Tug, Little.
		YTM	Harbor Tug, Medium.
		YTT	Torpedo Testing Barge.
		YTX	(Planned District Craft.)
		YW	Water Barge.
		AT, YT	Tugs (Ocean, Harbor).

APPENDIX E

List of Published Combat Narratives

The Java Sea Campaign, January–February 1942 (out of print)
Early Raids in the Pacific Ocean, 1 February–10 March 1942
The Battle of the Coral Sea, 4–8 May 1942
The Battle of Midway, 3–6 June 1942
The Landing in the Solomons, 7–8 August 1942
The Battle of Savo Island, 9 August 1942
The Battle of the Eastern Solomons, 23–25 August 1942
Battle of Cape Esperance, 11 October 1942
Battle of Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October 1942
The Landings in North Africa, November 1942
Battle of Guadalcanal, 11–15 November 1942
Miscellaneous Actions in the South Pacific, 8 August 1942–22 January 1943 (out of print)
Battle of Tassafaronga, 30 November 1942
Japanese Evacuation of Guadalcanal, 29 January–8 February 1943 (including loss of the *Chicago*)
Bombardments of Munda and Vila-Stanmore, January–May 1943
Operations in the New Georgia Area, 21 June–5 August 1943
Kolombangara and Vella Lavella, 6 August–7 October 1943
The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942–August 1943
The Bougainville Landing and the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, 27 October–2 November 1943

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