

ABSTRACT

Darren L. Poupore. WILLIAM F. HALSEY AND THE EXERCISE OF COMMAND: THE BATTLE OF THE SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS, 26 OCTOBER 1942. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael A. Palmer) Department of History, July 2004.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Vice Admiral William F. Halsey's exercise of command in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands on 25-26 October 1942. The pressures of command had increased significantly by the Second World War. Drawing from Halsey's unpublished memoir, his written correspondence with his superior, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, and the oral history interview of his aide and flag lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander William H. Ashford, this thesis studies Halsey's methods in coping with the pressures of command.

Halsey articulated his philosophy of command in a thesis submitted to the Naval War College in 1933. Influenced by Lieutenant Commander Dudley W. Knox's writings on the "initiative of the subordinate," Halsey advocated a decentralized approach to command, control, and communications. This thesis demonstrates, however, that Halsey abandoned that approach in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands by constantly interfering with the tactical commanders at the scene of the action.

Rather than viewing Halsey as an overly aggressive, action-starved commander who could not prevent himself from meddling in the affairs of his subordinates, this thesis argues that the unusual circumstances of the battle compelled Halsey to adopt a more centralized style of command. Halsey had relieved Rear Admiral Robert L. Ghormley as Commander, South Pacific Area (ComSoPac) just a few days before the battle and had

inherited his subordinates, carrier commanders Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid and Rear Admiral George D. Murray. Halsey had stated in his paper that you should indoctrinate your subordinates before the battle and trust them to take the initiative. If you do not trust them, you should remove them. At Santa Cruz, he did not trust Kinkaid or Murray. These facts complicate Halsey's Naval War College model. What do you do as a commander if you do not trust your subordinates, but circumstances (in this case time) prevent you from replacing them? Halsey chose to manage the subordinates he did not trust, violating his own decentralized philosophy of command.

WILLIAM F. HALSEY AND THE EXERCISE OF COMMAND:
THE BATTLE OF THE SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS, 26 OCTOBER 1942

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Darren L. Poupore

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In memory of my grandmother,

Gladys Hilpertshauser

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CHAPTER 1

“THIS IS THE HOTTEST POTATO THEY EVER HANDED ME”

18-25 OCTOBER 1942

On the afternoon of the eighteenth of October 1942, a Coronado seaplane touched down in the harbor of the Allied base of Noumea in the South Pacific. A whaleboat came alongside before the propellers had stopped turning. As Vice Admiral William F. Halsey stepped into the whaleboat, an officer handed him a sealed envelope. Inside was an urgent dispatch from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CinCPac) and Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA). It read: “Immediately upon your arrival in Noumea, you will relieve Rear Admiral Robert L. Ghormley of the duties of Commander South Pacific Area [ComSoPac] and South Pacific Forces.” “Jesus Christ and General Jackson!” Halsey reacted, “This is the hottest potato they ever handed me!”¹

Halsey knew that Nimitz had relieved Ghormley for his failure to instill confidence, both in his leadership and the prospect of victory, throughout the South Pacific Area, as well as at headquarters in Pearl Harbor. The operation in the Solomons was being fought on a “shoestring,” and in mid-October 1942 the campaign was teetering on the edge of defeat. Nimitz expected Halsey to turn the situation around and secure a victory that would finally turn the tide in the Pacific War.

¹ Fadm. William F. Halsey and J. Bryan III, Admiral Halsey's Story (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1947), 108-109; and E. B. Potter, Bull Halsey (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 177.

Halsey was no stranger to command responsibility. He had been leading naval carrier task forces since December 1941. But the South Pacific command was joint, and included units from the navy, marines, and army (both ground and air).

Halsey arrived in Noumea with a well thought-out philosophy of command. He believed in a decentralized approach that granted to subordinates the greatest leeway to act on their own initiative. Halsey based his concept of command on several assumptions: that he had trust and confidence in his subordinates; and that there had been opportunities for the senior officers of the South Pacific command to meld into something approaching a team.

Unfortunately, the same forces that had convinced Nimitz that Ghormley had to be abruptly and unceremoniously relieved would test Halsey's skills as a commander before he had time to acquaint himself with his new subordinates, or to acquaint them with his aggressive philosophy of command.

On 18 October Halsey was on the fourth day of his inspection tour of the South Pacific in preparation for assuming command of the carrier Enterprise and the rest of Task Force 16. He was headed to Guadalcanal in the southeast Solomon Islands when he received an order from Nimitz to proceed to Noumea instead. Halsey had been hospitalized in late May 1942 for a severe case of dermatitis. He had recovered by August and in early September was given temporary duty as Commander, Air Force, Pacific Fleet, until repairs of the battle-damaged Enterprise were completed at Pearl Harbor.

Nimitz had given Halsey a difficult job. On 7 August some 11,000 American marines had landed on Guadalcanal and had captured a nearly completed 3,600-foot enemy airfield on its northern shore. The amphibious assault of Guadalcanal was the first Allied counteroffensive against Japan in the Second World War, prompted by a Japanese South Pacific advance in early 1942 that threatened the Allied sea lines of communications between Hawaii and Australia. The Japanese had set up bases on New Britain, New Ireland, and the Admiralty and Solomon Islands. If the Allies could hold Guadalcanal, they could use it as a launching point for a step-by-step advance through the Solomon Islands to the Japanese stronghold at Rabaul.

The Americans had quickly consolidated their position on Guadalcanal after 7 August. They rushed the captured Japanese airfield, which they renamed Henderson Field, to completion using captured equipment. They set up a defensive perimeter of artillery emplacements, foxholes, and outposts, and shuttled in planes, aviation fuel, and munitions. The airfield was operating by 20 August. The Americans now commanded the air around Guadalcanal.

The Japanese were determined to recapture the crucial airfield and stop the Allied advance. They committed the Combined Fleet, the powerful mission fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy, to stopping the American offensive.² The Imperial Army slowly and steadily increased its ground forces on the west end of Guadalcanal. In the next two

² The Combined Fleet was composed of five mobile fleets of all of the principal warships of the navy. They were: 1st Fleet (battleships), 2nd Fleet (cruisers), 3rd Fleet (carriers), 6th Fleet (submarines), and 11th Air Fleet (land-based aircraft).

months of bitter fighting—through two surface fleet engagements, one fleet carrier battle, four land battles, and numerous air battles³—the Americans and Japanese struggled for control of Guadalcanal.

In mid-October the Japanese had intensified their offensive against the Americans at Henderson Field. On the evening of 13 October the Japanese battleships Kongo and Haruna entered the sound north of Guadalcanal and began shelling Henderson Field with high explosive projectiles. Rear Admiral Tanaka Raizo, commander of the destroyers escorting the battleships, witnessed the event:

The scene defied description as the fires and explosions from the thirty-six-centimeter shell hits on the airfield set off enemy planes, fuel dumps, and ammunition stores. The scene was topped off by flare bombs from our observation planes flying over the field, the whole spectacle making the Ryogoku fireworks display seem like mere child's play. The night's pitch darkness was transformed by fire into the brightness of day.⁴

On Guadalcanal, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the American ground forces, was shaken by "a terrific explosion . . . [that] bowled us down like a row of ten pins."⁵ The battleships pounded Henderson Field with more than nine hundred shells for over eighty minutes. Heavy cruisers continued the naval bombardment the next two nights, pumping nearly 1700 shells into the American positions. They left Henderson

³ The battles waged were the Battle of Savo Island (9 August), the Battle of Cape Esperance (11-12 October), the Battle of Eastern Solomons (24 August), the Battle of the Tenaru (21 August), the Battle of Edson's Ridge (13-14 September), and the Battles of the Matanikau (27 September and 6-9 October).

⁴ Radm. Tanaka Raizo, "Struggle for Guadalcanal" in David C. Evans, ed., The Japanese Navy in World War II: In the Words of Former Japanese Naval Officers (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 181-182.

⁵ Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, Once a Marine: The Memoirs of General A.A. Vandegrift, United States Marine Corps (New York: Ballentine Books, Inc., 1966), 174-175. The near-miss knocked Vandegrift to "the floor, unhurt except in dignity."

Field a shambles. The runways were cratered, and only fourteen of ninety American aircraft were operational.

On the morning of 15 October a Japanese high-speed convoy of six large transport ships escorted by eight destroyers arrived off Tassafaronga, ten miles west of Henderson Field. The Japanese landed 7,700 troops⁶ and unloaded heavy artillery, tanks, ammunition, and provisions. The ground war was escalating, as revealed by the following table of approximate troop strengths:⁷

Date	American Troops	Japanese Troops
7 August 1942	10,000	2,200
20 August 1942	10,000	3,600
12 September 1942	11,000	6,000
23 October 1942	23,000	22,000

Amidst the fighting in the last month, Admiral Nimitz had become concerned about Ghormley's South Pacific command. Several journalists and officers returning from the South Pacific had reported defeatism at ComSoPac headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia. Lieutenant General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold had visited the South Pacific in late September: "It looked to me as if everybody on that South Pacific Front had a bad case of the jitters." News correspondent Hanson Baldwin noted on his Pacific tour: "Perhaps our greatest problem . . . is leadership. Errors of judgement on the part of some . . . of our naval leaders—errors that stem in large measure from overcaution and the defensive complex—have resulted in costly and unnecessary losses. . . . An invigorated

⁶ Sum of 4,500 troops from the High-Speed Convoy of 15 October, 1,100 troops landed from a Tokyo Express run of 15 October, and 2,100 troops from another Tokyo Express run of 17 October.

⁷ E. B. Potter and Fadm. Chester W. Nimitz, eds., The Great Sea War: The Story of Naval Action in World War II (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), 263, note.

leadership and an offensive spirit [is not] sufficiently apparent."⁸ Bothered by these reports, Nimitz visited the South Pacific in late September. Nimitz found Ghormley and his staff physically and emotionally exhausted. Worse yet, it appeared that a pessimistic attitude had set in among the staff. During one conference with Nimitz, Ghormley was interrupted by a staff officer who handed him some priority radio dispatches.

"Revealingly, instead of acting on the messages, Ghormley's reaction was to mutter, 'My God, what are we going to do about this?'"⁹

Back at Pearl Harbor, Nimitz had continued to receive Ghormley's somber letters, which complained of a lack of materiel and base facilities. Nimitz wondered if Ghormley possessed the right attitude to command a protracted campaign. A dispatch on 15 October convinced Nimitz to make a change. Ghormley stated: "Present forces . . . insufficient to garrison present bases and therefore obviously inadequate [to] support offensive operations. [I] have neither on hand nor in sight [the] sufficient force to render Cactus [Allied codename for Guadalcanal] secure against present infiltration tactics."¹⁰

⁸ Lt. Gen. Henry H. Arnold, Global Mission (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1949), 342; Hanson W. Baldwin, "Japan's Hold Unbroken," New York Times, 23 October 1942, p. 4, col. 2; and Hanson W. Baldwin, "Lessons of the Solomons Campaign," New York Times, 24 October 1942, p. 3, col. 5.

⁹ E. B. Potter, Nimitz (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 191-192; Fadm. William D. Leahy, I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman Based on His Notes and Diaries Made at the Time, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950), 117; Potter, Bull Halsey, 157; and Arnold, Global Mission, 340.

¹⁰ Radm. Robert L. Ghormley to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 15 October 1942, Serial 0051, "Personal Correspondence of Fleet Admiral Nimitz with Commander South Pacific Force, 1942-1943," Series XIII, Subseries 14, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Papers, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Nimitz Correspondence).

Nimitz had ordered a staff meeting that evening. He began: "I don't want to hear, or see, such pessimism. Remember, the enemy is hurt too." Each staff member agreed that although Ghormley was a "dedicated and intelligent officer, he did not have the required qualities." They concluded that "the atmosphere at his command headquarters was intolerable and the critical situation there requires a more aggressive commander."¹¹

With prompt approval from Admiral Ernest J. King, Nimitz ordered Halsey to relieve Ghormley as ComSoPac.¹²

"Bull Halsey," extolled by the press for conducting the raids on the Marshall and Gilbert Islands and Wake and Marcus Islands in February-March 1942, as well as leading the Doolittle Raid on Japan in April 1942, had developed a legendary reputation in the navy. Morale soared on Guadalcanal and at sea as news of Halsey's appointment spread. One officer recalled: "I'll never forget it! One minute we were too limp with malaria to crawl out of our foxholes; the next, we were running around whooping like kids."¹³

¹¹ Potter, Nimitz, 196-197. Last quote, "Command Summary, Fleet Admiral C.W. Nimitz, U.S. Navy," Book Two, "1 September 1942- 31 December 1942," Series I, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Papers, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 1096 (hereafter cited as Command Summary). The CinCPac Command Summary, or Grey Book, is a series of binders containing a diary of the events of the war that were maintained on a daily basis by Nimitz's staff.

¹² Vadm. Robert L. Ghormley, "South Pacific Command- April Through October 1942- Narrative Account," Forces File, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 1943, 23; and Adm. William F. Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign- Narrative Account, 20 April 1942 to 15 June 1944," Serial 021, Forces File, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 1944, 4. Nimitz sent Ghormley a separate dispatch: "After carefully weighing all factors, have decided that talents and previous experience of Halsey can best be applied to the situation by having him take over duties of ComSoPac as soon as practicable after his arrival Noumea 18th your date. I greatly appreciate your loyal and devoted efforts toward the accomplishment of a most difficult task . . ." Potter, Nimitz, 197.

¹³ Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 116.

Lieutenant Commander William H. Ashford, Jr., arrived with three other members of Halsey's old staff in Noumea a week later. Ashford had served as Halsey's aide and flag lieutenant since 1937 but had recently been assigned as tactical officer to Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid. They were taken to ComSoPac headquarters aboard the old repair ship Argonne. Ashford was shocked to find Ghormley's staff "so exhausted from lack of sleep, overwork, and from the strain being placed on their shoulders that they were in a kind of daze. I felt they had just about reached the limit of human endurance."¹⁴ They proceeded to Halsey's cabin. The admiral was sitting behind a desk sifting through a stack of dispatches. "It's a goddamn mess," Halsey exclaimed. "Look around and see what's to be done and do it."¹⁵

Unfamiliar with the tactical situation at Guadalcanal, Halsey asked General Vandegrift to fly to Noumea to give a firsthand report. He could not leave headquarters this early for a trip to the front to see for himself. Vandegrift arrived on the evening of 23 October accompanied by Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, commandant of the Marine Corps; Major General Millard F. Harmon, the senior Army officer in the South Pacific; Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, commander of the amphibious forces; Major General Alexander M. Patch, commander of the Army's Americal Division in New

¹⁴ A letter from Ghormley to Nimitz illustrates the extent of fatigue among Ghormley and his staff: "I have not been off the ship since I arrived August 1, but manage to keep going all right. Once in a while I can get a fairly good night's sleep without interruption." Radm. Robert L. Ghormley to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 7 September 1942, Nimitz Correspondence.

¹⁵ Radm. William H. Ashford, Jr., interview by Donald R. Lennon, 1978-1979, Collection Number OH55, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 70-72 (hereafter cited as Ashford Oral History); and Potter, Bull Halsey, 138. Ashford served as the air operations officer on Halsey's new ComSoPac staff.

Caledonia (slated to relieve the marines on Guadalcanal); and other staff officers. Halsey opened the meeting by asking Vandegrift to describe the conditions at Guadalcanal.

Vandegrift gave a thorough report, emphasizing the need for air and ground reinforcements. Then, as Vandegrift recalled:

Gray eyebrows bristling, the compactly built Halsey drummed the desk a moment with his fingers. He abruptly turned to me. "Can you hold?" "Yes, I can hold. But I have to have more active support than I have been getting." He nodded. "You go on back there, Vandegrift. I promise to get you everything I have."¹⁶

The next morning Halsey cancelled the proposed construction of an airfield on Ndeni in the Santa Cruz Islands, diverting the needed troops to Guadalcanal.

On 25 October Vandegrift returned from the meeting at Noumea to discover Henderson Field under attack by Japanese ground forces of the 17th Army. Japanese troops assaulted Henderson Field for three consecutive nights from 23-25 October, but failed to dislodge the entrenched Americans. The battle culminated the night of the 25th, and daylight revealed that the Japanese forces had been shattered. The 17th Army began a general withdrawal on 29 October.

The Combined Fleet maneuvered north of the Solomon Islands waiting to learn the outcome of the land offensive. The Combined Fleet held a unique position in the Imperial Japanese Navy. The structure of the Imperial Navy consisted of a Naval General Staff responsible for strategy and operations and a Navy Ministry for administrative and

¹⁶ Vandegrift, Once a Marine, 184; and Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 116-118.

logistical duties. Captain Fuchida Mitsuo, who served as Senior Staff Officer in Combined Fleet Headquarters, observed:

The Chief of Naval General Staff [Admiral Nagano Osami] was automatically Chief of the Navy Section of Imperial General Headquarters and, in the latter capacity, issued orders and directives to Commander in Chief Combined Fleet [Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku] embodying top-level strategic and operational decisions. Actually, however, Combined Fleet, rather than the General Staff, often played the dominant role in shaping fleet strategy.¹⁷

With Admiral Yamamoto's prestigious reputation and exceptionally credible war record, the Combined Fleet staff held a powerful position in the Imperial Navy.¹⁸

Yamamoto planned to steam south and mop up any American forces trying to flee or interfere, as well as to fly in planes to the recaptured airfield. On 25 October 17th Army headquarters sent the following telegram: "Control of the units was difficult due to the complicated terrain. Only an enemy position protruding from the south end of the airfield was taken, but the airfield was not penetrated."¹⁹ The land offensive had failed, but Yamamoto did not yield. In his quest to lure out and annihilate the American carrier fleet, a goal that had eluded him since the Pearl Harbor attack, he ordered the Combined Fleet to advance southward at high speed.

¹⁷ Capt. Fuchida Mitsuo and Cdr. Okumiya Masatake, Midway, the Battle that Doomed Japan: The Japanese Navy's Story (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1955), 48-49.

¹⁸ For more on Yamamoto, see: Agawa Hiroyuki, The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1979); and John Deane Potter, Yamamoto: The Man Who Menaced America (New York: The Viking Press, 1965).

¹⁹ Adm. Ugaki Matome, Fading Victory: The Diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki 1941-1945, trans. Masataka Chihaya (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 245-247. Another telegram was sent the following day, informing the navy that the final attempt had also failed. This report is corroborated in Japanese Monograph 98, 43.

The disposition of the Japanese ships, which resembled a triangle, involved a characteristic division of forces. Yamamoto placed his precious carriers in the rear and his battle line in the van. The Advance Force occupied the western corner of the triangle. One hundred miles east of this group steamed the carrier strike force of the Combined Fleet. The Vanguard Force operated sixty miles south of the main body and formed the southeastern corner of the triangle.

Vice Admiral Kondo Nobutake commanded the Advance Force. It consisted of the battleships Kongo and Haruna, five cruisers, and twelve destroyers. It also included the carriers Junyo and Hiyo of Carrier Division 2, commanded by Rear Admiral Kakuta Kakuji.²⁰ Vice Admiral Nagumo Chuichi commanded the carrier strike force. It consisted of the fleet carriers Zuikaku and Shokaku and the light carrier Zuiho of Carrier Division 1 and one cruiser and eight destroyers. Rear Admiral Abe Hiroaki commanded the Vanguard Force. It consisted of the battleships Hiei and Kirishima, four cruisers, and seven destroyers.²¹

Intelligence at CinCPac headquarters knew that the Combined Fleet was on the move. It issued an ULTRA bulletin on 16 October: "At least two carriers believed Solomons area. C-in-C Combined Fleet is in direct tactical command present operation." It issued another on 23 October: "Indications of another Japanese offensive soon. Exact

²⁰ The Hiyo would not participate in the upcoming Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. On 21 October a fire broke out in the generator room causing severe engine problems. It was sent back to Truk for repairs. Richard B. Frank, Guadalcanal, (New York: Random House, 1990), 370; and Ugaki, Fading Victory, 243.

²¹ Frank, Guadalcanal, 368-369.

date and place not known but believe will be within two or three days and directed against Guadalcanal."²²

"It was apparently becoming necessary to go into a surface action," Halsey recalled. "With only two members of my own personal staff²³ and an inherited staff that I knew little of, hurried planning had to be accomplished."²⁴ Halsey scraped together every ship he could muster in the SoPac area. Task Force 17, consisting of the fleet carrier Hornet, heavy cruisers Northampton and Pennsacola, light cruisers San Diego and Juneau, and six destroyers, was operating east of the Solomon Islands as the only American carrier group in the South Pacific. Task Force 16, consisting of the fleet carrier Enterprise, battleship South Dakota, heavy cruiser Portland, light cruiser San Juan, and eight destroyers, was racing to the South Pacific from Hawaii.²⁵ On 24 October Task Force 16 reached the SoPac area and at 1355 linked up with Task Force 17 southeast of

²² ULTRA was the code name for U.S. Special Intelligence gained from the interception, exploitation, and analysis of Japanese military and naval radio transmissions. John Winton, Ultra in the Pacific: How Breaking Japanese Codes and Cyphers Affected Naval Operations Against Japan 1941-1945 (London: Leo Cooper, 1993), 85.

²³ Ashford and the three other members of Halsey's personal staff did not arrive in Noumea until 24 October.

²⁴ Fadm. William F. Halsey, "A Memoir," unpublished memoir, Box 623, Folder 5, World War II Command File, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 379 (hereafter cited as Halsey Memoir). This is Halsey's original memoir. Bryan used only a fraction of this material in Admiral Halsey's Story.

²⁵ Kinkaid, commander of TF16, later recalled, "[Because] this Intelligence came along indicating that the Japs again were heading for Guadalcanal with a very big force, Nimitz called me in and gave me four days [to reach the South Pacific]." Kinkaid had to break in a new air group and a new destroyer squadron on the way. Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid, "The Reminiscences of Admiral Thomas Cassin Kinkaid," interview by John T. Mason, Jr., 1961, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, 199-201 (hereafter cited as Kinkaid Oral History).

the Santa Cruz Islands.²⁶ The two carrier groups formed Task Force 61. "Carrier power varies as the square—two carriers are four times as powerful as one. Until the Enterprise arrived, our plight had been almost hopeless," Halsey later wrote. "Now we had a fighting chance."²⁷ He boldly ordered Kinkaid, commander of Task Force 61, to "make sweep around north Santa Cruz Islands thence southwesterly east of San Cristobal to area in Coral Sea in position to intercept enemy forces approaching Cactus-Ringbolt [Guadalcanal-Tulagi]."²⁸

At Truk, Yamamoto and his staff suspected that the American carriers were on the move. They issued a warning to their forces: "The enemy seems to intend to attack our task force's flank from the direction of Santa Cruz Islands after concentrating their remaining carriers, while luring our attention to the battleship groups... take strict precautions to the east."²⁹

In the late afternoon of 24 October the carrier Shokaku maneuvered north of the Solomon Islands with the other ships of Carrier Division 1. Nagumo conferred with his

²⁶ "Deck Log Book of the U.S.S. Enterprise CV-6," 24 October 1942, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Enterprise Log Book); CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz) to CominCh (Adm. Ernest J. King), "Action Report, Solomons Islands Campaign, Battle of Santa Cruz- 26 October 1942," serial 00413 of 6 January 1943, Box 21, CinCPac Files, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 5 (hereafter cited as Nimitz Report).

²⁷ Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 120.

²⁸ Commander Task Force 61 (Radm. Thomas C. Kinkaid) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Carrier Action North of the Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October 1942," serial 0077 of 20 November 1942, in Nimitz Report, 149 (hereafter cited as Kinkaid Report).

²⁹ The battleship group was Task Force 64 under Radm. Willis A. Lee, composed of battleship Washington, three cruisers, and six destroyers. It was operating southeast of Guadalcanal and would not participate in the upcoming carrier battle. Ugaki, Fading Victory, 243, 248.

staff officers on board the flagship. Despite the accurate intelligence provided by Combined Fleet Headquarters, they were concerned about the whereabouts of the American carrier force. Lieutenant Commander Okumiya Masatake, Kakuta's air officer on the Junyo, described their frustration:

By October 23 intelligence reported an ominous buildup of enemy carrier strength . . . [but] after October 16 we could find no trace of the enemy carriers in the area; they had apparently disappeared. A week later we encountered a sudden increase in enemy reconnaissance-plane activities; the two facts appeared to be linked together. . . . We sought vainly for some indication of the whereabouts of the enemy ships. On October 24 we picked up an American radio broadcast which stated that "a major sea and air battle is expected in the near future in the Solomon Islands area." *Something was in the wind.*³⁰

The carrier strike force, as directed by Combined Fleet Headquarters, was to reverse course in a few hours and steam southward to be in position to engage the American carrier forces on the morning of 25 October. But Nagumo was worried. He turned to his staff officers: "At Midway, the enemy struck us at a time of his choosing. Now too, there is no doubt that the enemy pinpoints our position as if on a chessboard. We are running blind." He decided to send a message to Combined Fleet Headquarters. He asked: "May I suggest halting our southward advance until we receive definite word that the Army has captured [the] Guadalcanal airfields? There seems to be a possibility of our being trapped if we continue going like this." Vice Admiral Ugaki Matome, chief of staff of the Combined Fleet, sternly responded: "Your Striking Force will proceed quickly to the enemy direction. The operation orders stand, without change." Nagumo continued to

³⁰ Cdr. Okumiya Masatake, Horikoshi Jiro, with Martin Caidin, Zero!, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1956), 255-256. His emphasis.

retire northward for one more hour before finally reversing course at 2300. He had set the Combined Fleet ten hours behind schedule.³¹

The next morning ten Consolidated PBV Catalina patrol bombers and six Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers took off from Espiritu Santo and turned northward to search for enemy ships approaching Guadalcanal. First Lieutenant Mario Sesso, flying a B-17, made the first sighting of the Combined Fleet. At 0958 he radioed: "Force consisting of fourteen vessels including BBs CAs DDs and a possible CV in latitude 08°20'S, longitude 162°10'E." Sesso had spotted Kondo's Advance Force. A swarm of Mitsubishi A6M2 Model 21 ("Zeke") Zero fighters immediately jumped the bomber. The B-17 shot down one Zero, fought off the rest, and returned to Espiritu Santo despite its battered condition and the casualties on board.³²

Minutes later a second sighting came. A PBV, flying in a search sector to the east of Sesso's, spotted a large Japanese carrier group conducting flight operations at 1000. The pilot reported "2 BB, 2 CV, 2 CA, 2 CL, and at least 4 DD" operating in latitude 08°51'S, longitude 164°30'E, 130 miles east of the Advance Force. The carrier strike

³¹ Capt. Hara Tameichi with Fred Saito and Roger Pineau, Japanese Destroyer Captain, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 126-127; Ugaki, Fading Victory, 245; and John B. Lundstrom, The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 342-343. When Ugaki later discovered that Nagumo's "task force was located too far north," Ugaki privately remarked, "[This is] disobedience to orders" and called Nagumo's actions "outrageous, arbitrary, and deplorable."

³² ComAirSoPac to ComSoPac 250809 of October 1942, "War Diary of Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force (Vadm. William F. Halsey)," Volume II, "September - December 1942," Box 49, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 56 (hereafter cited as ComSoPac War Diary); and Ira Wolfert, Battle of the Solomons (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), 108-110. Wolfert was a news correspondent sent to the South Pacific in October 1942.

force had been exposed. Nagumo immediately ordered: "Cut refueling. Turn the carriers around and head due north!"³³

In Noumea, Halsey restlessly examined the contact reports that he had copied in the last hour. The PBY sighting of the two enemy carriers particularly caught his attention. Intending to spur Kinkaid into prompt action, Halsey ordered: "From ComSoPac to CTF 61, 64 --- Strike."³⁴ A minute later, at 1051, he sent a second dispatch: "From ComSoPac to all ships and bases SoPac Area --- Major Japanese movement appears in progress. Guadalcanal probably prime objective but attack on one or more other points possible. This is a general alert take all steps."³⁵

Upon hearing that enemy carriers were operating to the north, Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, commander of the South Pacific air forces (ComAirSoPac), quickly readied several B-17 strikes from Espiritu Santo. The first strike took off at 1045. The twelve bombers failed to find the enemy. A second group of six bombers departed at 1239 and sighted the Vanguard Force at 1430. Forty minutes later they executed a level bombing attack from 15,000 feet on a battleship in this force, but attained no hits.³⁶

³³ Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Battle of Santa Cruz, 26 October 1942- Report of," serial 0015 of 10 November 1942, in Nimitz Report, 202 (hereafter cited as Hardison Report); Kinkaid Report, 150; and Command Summary, 1102. Nagumo quote from Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 127.

³⁴ ComSoPac to CTF 61, 64 232350 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 53.

³⁵ ComSoPac to All Ships and Bases SoPac Area 242351 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 54.

³⁶ ComAirSoPac to ComSoPac 250306 of October 1942 and ComAirSoPac to ComSoPac 251459 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 55, 57; Japanese Monograph 98, 42; and Ugaki, Fading Victory, 246.

At 1150 Kinkaid received an updated report from the PBY that made the 1000 sighting, relayed from the seaplane tender Curtiss. The two Japanese carriers and supporting ships were spotted steaming at twenty-five knots on a course heading of 145 degrees—directly towards Task Force 61. Kinkaid examined the chart in front of him. A distance of 360 miles separated the enemy carriers from the American carriers. He reasoned: "If [we assume that] the enemy continues on the reported course and speed the two forces will approach each other rapidly," closing the interval enough to make a strike feasible.³⁷ He ordered the ships of Task Force 61 to change course toward the contact. At 1242 Task Force 61 accelerated to twenty-seven knots. An afternoon search to the northwest had already been planned. A strike group would now accompany the search group.

The Enterprise launched twelve Douglas SBD Dauntless dive-bombers at 1330. The SBDs departed in pairs to conduct a two hundred mile search in a ninety-degree arc to the northwest. At 1420 a strike group of five SBDs, seven Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers, and eight Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters took off with orders to "proceed out on the median line of the search to 150 miles [and] then return if no contact is made."³⁸

³⁷ Kinkaid Report, 150.

³⁸ Quote: Kinkaid Report, 150. 16 F4Fs, 12 SBDs, and 7 TBFs were originally assigned for the mission. Strike group numbers: Radm. Edward L. Feightner, "The Enterprise and Guadalcanal" in E.T. Wooldridge, ed., Carrier Warfare in the Pacific: An Oral History Collection (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 80; Kinkaid Report, 150; Commander, Torpedo Squadron Ten (Lt. Albert P. Coffin) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Action, October 26, 1942 - Report of," enclosure A (hereafter cited as Coffin Report), in Commander Air Group Ten (Cdr. Richard K. Gaines) to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action, October 26, 1942, in

After three hours of searching without sighting the enemy, the search group returned on time shortly before sunset, at 1712. The Enterprise successfully recovered these planes in the next twenty minutes. But there was no sign of the attack group.

The strike group should have been landing at 1735. Instead the pilots were still looking for the Japanese carriers. Ensign Edward L. Feightner, one of the fighter pilots in the strike group, later wrote: "We got out to 175 miles, and it was absolutely one of these days you could see for 100 miles. We still didn't have a task force in sight, so we flew another 75 miles northeast of there."³⁹ With what Kinkaid later termed "excess zeal," Lieutenant Commander James A. Thomas had carelessly led his strike group one hundred miles farther than ordered "in the hope of making contact."⁴⁰

After traveling some 250 miles on the outward leg, the twenty planes of the strike group finally turned back towards Task Force 61. Feightner described the return flight:

We were all down to about forty-two gallons, and we were still a long ways from home at this point. Right after that, it got dark . . . The moon wasn't up yet; it was really black . . . [Lieutenant Stanley W. "Swede"] Vejtasa was down low, making small turns, and all of a sudden he just straightened out and headed off. He later said he had found an oil slick from the task force with his wing lights, down on the water. We were

Santa Cruz Islands and Stewart Island Area," enclosure F (hereafter cited as Gaines Report), in Hardison Report, 392; and Commander, Fighting Squadron 10 (Lt. Cdr. James H. Flatley, Jr.) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Fighting Squadron Ten Action Reports for October 25 and 26, 1942," enclosure A in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, 346 (hereafter cited as Flatley Report).

³⁹ Feightner, "Enterprise and Guadalcanal," 80-81. In Kinkaid Report, Kinkaid stated that the strike group flew out to 200 miles on the outward leg, and then 80 miles to the northeastward.

⁴⁰ Kinkaid Report, 150. Apparently there was some miscommunication between Kinkaid and the pilots. Some pilots, such as Flatley, thought the outward leg was 200 miles, not 150. Flatley Report, 346.

literally only ten or fifteen feet off the water at this point, and everybody else was following us. Forty-five miles away, we found the task force.⁴¹

The Enterprise began recovering planes immediately at 1830. Most of the pilots had never made a night landing. The fighters landed first since they were lowest on fuel. The landings were successful but time-consuming as many were wave-offs. Then the SBDs came in. At 1909 one of the dive-bombers missed the arresting wires, slammed into the island, and crashed into the tail of another SBD. Both planes were total losses. Several more minutes passed while the crew cleared the wreckage off the flight deck. The Hornet began landing some of the aircraft to help alleviate the congestion above the Enterprise. By this time several of the planes, with their fuel expended, had dropped into the water. Five planes eventually made water landings. The executive officer of the squadron, second from last to land, "came around and was in the groove when he ran out of fuel, and went under the fantail." The destroyers in the carrier group rescued all of the aircrew except two.⁴²

The losses in aircraft were hard to swallow since earlier in the day a deck crash on Enterprise had damaged five other planes. The Enterprise would fight a major carrier battle the next morning with thirteen fewer airplanes than it had the day before. Halsey

⁴¹ Feightner, "Enterprise and Guadalcanal," 81-82.

⁴² Sources for the search and strike mission of 25 October: Kinkaid Report, 150; Enterprise Log Book, 25 October 1942; "TF17 Track Chart for Period 1200 October 24 to 1200 October 27, 1942," enclosure A (hereafter cited as TF17 Track Chart), in Commander Task Force 17 (Radm. George D. Murray) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Preliminary Report of Action October 26, 1942," serial 0050 of 30 October 1942 (hereafter cited as Murray Report), in Nimitz Report, 135-136; Feightner, "Enterprise and Guadalcanal," 80-82; Kinkaid Oral History, 202-203; Coffin Report, 392; Flatley Report, 346; Hardison Report, 202; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 348-352.

wrote: "This of course was a big jolt." Hardison tried to compensate for some of the day's losses by putting four spare F4Fs, which had been slated for the Cactus Air Force, into commission. Nevertheless, the Enterprise now packed a lighter punch.⁴³

Meanwhile, Nagumo weighed his options with his staff. They had been steaming northward for twelve hours with no contact with the enemy. "We must presume that the enemy contact has failed," a staff officer told Nagumo. Nagumo agreed; he ordered all the ships in his task force to refuel. Two hours later he instructed his ships to reverse course and head southward again at twenty knots.⁴⁴

Later that evening the pilots of Carrier Air Group Ten (CAG-10) gathered in the Enterprise's wardroom. Commander John G. Crommelin, Jr., the air officer, stood before the aviators:

You men do not need to be babied, and I don't intend to hold your hands. We know that the Jap task force we are looking for will have a three-to-one superiority over us. . . . The offensive strength we have in the Pacific at this moment is in the hands of you men in this room and of those on the Hornet. . . . Wherever we have met the Jap at sea with our carriers, despite overwhelming odds, we have stopped them. . . . The Japs are determined to drive us out of the South Pacific. If they get through to Guadalcanal with their carriers tomorrow, the Japs will take it. If Guadalcanal falls, our lifeline to Australia will be menaced. To stop them, you must knock out their carrier force. . . . We are on the right side of this war. God is with

⁴³ Kinkaid Report, 150; Enterprise Log Book, 25 October 1942; Eric Hammel, Guadalcanal: The Carrier Battles: Carrier Operations in the Solomons August - October, 1942 (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987), 324-328; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 348, 353. Halsey quote: Vadm. William F. Halsey to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 31 October 1942, Nimitz Correspondence.

⁴⁴ Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 127.

us. Let's knock those Jap bastards off the face of the earth. God bless you.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Eugene Burns, Then There Was One: The U.S.S. *Enterprise* and the First Year of War (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), 111-113. Associated Press correspondent Burns was assigned to the *Enterprise*.

CHAPTER 2

"WE MUST USE EVERYTHING WE HAVE TO THE LIMIT"

26 OCTOBER 1942

During the night of 25 October Task Force 61 continued on a northwestwardly course, closing with the enemy. The Hornet kept a strike group ready on deck in case it came within striking distance of enemy carriers.

While the American carriers churned through the waters of the South Pacific, Fitch's tireless PBYs searched for Japanese flattops. At 0250 Lieutenant Glen Hoffman located the main body of the Combined Fleet. He quickly executed a glide bombing run. Destroyer commander Captain Hara Tameichi described the attack:

... every alarm sounded on carrier Shokaku. "Air raid! Air raid!" Staff officers jumped. [Captain] Takada [Toshitane, Nagumo's senior staff officer] dashed to the bridge in time to see four water plumes rising on the starboard side of carrier Zuikaku, some five thousand meters astern of Shokaku. He held his breath until the water pillars subsided, and he saw that Zuikaku was safe. The bombs had fallen at least three hundred meters away from the carrier. Takada almost fell down the ladder racing to the admiral's cabin to report these events.¹

Convinced that he had tripped the enemy trap, Nagumo ordered: "Emergency turn, together, 180 degrees to starboard. All ships, execute turn, speed twenty-four knots."²

After the bombing attack Hoffman radioed: "Contact with [a] large carrier and approximately six other vessels [at] 0310, latitude 07°35'S longitude 164°15'E on [a] southerly course, speed 10. Attacked carrier with four bombs, one near miss."³ Kinkaid,

¹ Quote: Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 127-128. Also Japanese Monograph 98, 42; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 356; and Okumiya, Zero!, 257.

² Okumiya, Zero!, 257; Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 128. The ships turned at 0330.

³ CTF63 to All Ships & Bases SoPac 251755 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 59.

however, did not receive the contact report. Apparently some of the ships in the task force received it directly and assumed that Kinkaid had also. It was not until 0512 that Kinkaid received the two hour-old report, relayed from the Curtiss.

At 0505, the Enterprise launched the first of sixteen SBDs for the dawn search. Kinkaid ordered ten SBDs from Scouting Squadron Ten (VS-10) and six SBDs from Bombing Squadron Ten (VB-10) to conduct a two hundred mile search in a 125-degree arc from 235 to 000 degrees. Had Kinkaid received the 0310 contact report earlier than 0512, just eight minutes before the last search plane took off, he would have considered "the possibilities of narrowing the search to a small sector, utilizing the extra planes in the striking group and sending that group immediately behind the scouting line."⁴

News correspondent Eugene Burns stood on the bridge with Kinkaid and watched the dawn light come over the horizon. "Admiral Kinkaid is wearing the same torn shirt he had on yesterday. Maybe [he] slept in it." As they watched the search planes lift off the deck, Kinkaid turned to Burns: "A PBY made contact this morning. [It] looks like a fight."⁵ The fourth carrier battle of the war, which would later be called the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands,⁶ had begun.

⁴ Kinkaid Report, 151.

⁵ Burns, Then There Was One, 119-120.

⁶ Originally, the U.S. Navy termed this battle the Third Battle of Savo Island before settling on the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. This cumbersome title differentiates it from the Battle of Santa Cruz, the naval battle fought in 1657 between the English and the Spanish fleets off Santa Cruz de Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. U.S. Navy sources often used the titles the Battle of Santa Cruz and the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands interchangeably. The Japanese called this battle the Naval Battle of the South Pacific. Radm. Samuel Eliot Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. 5, The Struggle for Guadalcanal August 1942-February 1943 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 199; David Eggenberger, ed., The Encyclopedia of Battles (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1985), 383; and Detwiler, "Chronology of Pacific War," 6.

"Waiting for contact reports adds years," Kinkaid told Burns. Finally at 0630 Kinkaid received the first of two important reports from the morning search. Lieutenant Vivien W. Welch in B-13 and Lieutenant (jg) Bruce A. McGraw in B-21 spotted an enemy force of battleships and screening vessels at 0617. They circled the force twenty miles to the west. When they were unable to locate any carriers, Welch transmitted, "2 BB, 1 CA, 7 DD. Latitude 08°10'S, longitude 163°55'E. Course North, Speed 20" at 0630. The SBDs had discovered Abe's Vanguard Force.⁷ About twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Commander James R. "Bucky" Lee in S-1, searching a sector east of Welch's, sighted the carrier striking force of the Combined Fleet. At 0650 Lee reported, "Two CV's and accompanying vessels in latitude 07°05'S, longitude 163°38'E." Lee, now joined by Lieutenant (jg) William E. Johnson in S-8, began climbing in order to send amplifying reports and to execute a bombing attack on the carriers.⁸

The Combined Fleet had also been busy this morning. Captain Hara Tameichi of the Amatsukaze, one of the destroyer escorts of Carrier Division 1, watched "in the predawn darkness [as] red-shaded flashlights moved to and fro on Shokaku's deck." All hands were preparing planes for an extensive search to find the American carriers. Nagumo directed the Vanguard Force to catapult its reconnaissance seaplanes to search to the east and south. The first of seven seaplanes took off at 0415. After the last had been

⁷ Commander, Bombing Squadron Ten (Lt. Cdr. James A. Thomas) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Report of Action, October 26, 1942," enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, 381-382 (hereafter cited as Thomas Report), in Nimitz Report, and Nimitz Report, 7. Kinkaid quote: Burns, Then There Was One, 120.

⁸ Commander, Scouting Squadron Ten (Lt. Cdr. James R. Lee) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Report of Action, October 16 to October 26, 1942," enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 386 (hereafter cited as Lee Report); Navigator, U.S.S. Enterprise (Cdr. Richard W. Ruble) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "War Diary for October 26, 1942," enclosure D, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 321 (hereafter cited as TF16 War Diary); and Kinkaid Report, 151.

launched, the Vanguard Force turned northward to follow the movements of Nagumo's force. Thirty minutes later the Combined Fleet's carriers launched thirteen Nakajima B5N2 Type 97 ("Kate") torpedo bombers to also search to the southeast.⁹

At 0650 one of the Shokaku search planes spotted Task Force 17. The pilot radioed: "Have sighted one enemy aircraft carrier and fifteen other vessels. Enemy fleet is bearing to northwest." The report placed the contact 210 miles from the Japanese carriers.¹⁰ Nagumo immediately ordered his carriers to launch air strikes. At 0710 the Shokaku launched the first plane of a sixty-two-plane strike group from Carrier Division 1. Lieutenant Commander Murata Shigeharu, the commander of the entire first strike wave, led twenty Kate torpedo bombers from the Shokaku, while Lieutenant Takahashi Sadamu flew one of twenty-one Aichi D3A1 Type 99 ("Val") dive-bombers from the Zuikaku. Each of the three carriers contributed to an escort of twenty-one Zero fighters. The Zuiho and the Zuikaku each launched one additional Kate to maintain contact. At 0730 Murata's group of torpedo bombers gathered most of the Zeros and proceeded to the contact. Takahashi's Val contingent departed ten minutes later. They quickly caught up with Murata.¹¹

⁹ Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 128; and U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, Vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), interrogation of Capt. Watanabe Yasuji, 541 (hereafter cited as Watanabe Interrogation). Watanabe, who was on Yamamoto's Combined Fleet staff, submitted notes of the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands from the CinC Combined Fleet staff log as part of his interrogation.

¹⁰ Contact report quote from Okumiya, Zero!, 258. In Japanese Destroyer Captain, 128, Hara mentioned that the scout plane specified "one Saratoga-class carrier and fifteen other ships." Also Watanabe Interrogation, 541; and Japanese Monograph 98, 42. Surprisingly, the American sources were accurate in describing the Japanese search. In Nimitz Report, 7, Nimitz wrote, "From captured documents it is known that a Japanese search plane sighted part of TF 61 at 0650."

¹¹ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 361.

While the Zuikaku, Shokaku, and Zuiho of Carrier Division 1 were busily preparing planes for the first strike, two American SBDs were stalking the Japanese carriers from high above. Before Lee and Johnson could attempt a bombing run, however, several Zeros intercepted them at 0705. The SBDs darted in and out of puffy, cumulus clouds in an attempt to evade the Japanese fighters. Lee and Johnson were unable to return due to "determined enemy air opposition," but they did clear the way for two other venturesome SBD pilots. Lieutenant Stockton Birney Strong in S-13 and Ensign Charles B. Irvine in S-2 had received Welch's contact report at 0640, changed course to the southwest, and flew an additional eighty miles to intercept the enemy carriers. With most of the Japanese combat air patrol chasing Lee and Johnson, Strong and Irvine approached Nagumo's carriers uncontested at 14,000 feet. At 0730 the two SBDs pushed over against the light carrier Zuiho. One of the pilots made a direct hit on the carrier's stern, tearing an immense fifty-foot hole in the flight deck and igniting a massive fire. Several Zeros pounced on S-13 and S-2 as they pulled out of their dives. For the next forty-five miles Strong and Irvine tried to elude the Zeros. They downed one before losing the rest in a large cloud. The fires were quickly contained on Zuiho, but Captain Obayashi Sueo reported to Nagumo that he could no longer receive any planes.¹²

The flight deck crews of the Shokaku and Zuikaku scrambled to get a second strike group aloft before the imminent American attack arrived. At 0800 a Shokaku strike group stood ready, but the Zuikaku crews needed another thirty minutes to finish loading the torpedo bombers. Nagumo hesitated. Should he split the attack group and

¹² Lee Report, 386-387; Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 129; Okumiya, Zero!, 259; Burns, Then There Was One, 139-144; Cdr. Harold L. Buell, Dauntless Helldivers: A Dive-Bomber Pilot's Epic Story of the Carrier Battles (New York: Orion Books, 1991), 146-149; and Wantanabe Interrogation, 541. Ugaki, in Fading Victory, 254, confirms the one bomb hit. Strong and Irvine claimed two hits on the carrier. In Lee Report, 391, the squadron commander praised Strong and Irvine: "Their performance is thought to be the most outstanding demonstration of intrepidity and determination of the entire naval engagement."

send the Shokaku contingent ahead or delay the Shokaku launchings a half hour so that they could accompany the Zuikaku planes? Reminded of the Midway disaster when the Americans caught the Japanese carriers with planes on their decks, Nagumo chose "speed over coordination." The Shokaku launched twenty Val dive-bombers and five Zeros at 0810. Lieutenant Commander Seki Mamoru formed his attack group and departed at 0818. At 0840 the first of seventeen Kates and four Zeros, under Lieutenant Imajuku Shigeichiro, took off from the Zuikaku. Imajuku organized his strike group and departed at 0900.¹³

On Enterprise, Kinkaid acted swiftly upon receiving Lee's 0650 contact report. Some quick plotting on the charts revealed that the Japanese carriers were operating only 185 miles to the northwest of their position. Kinkaid ordered Task Force 61 to change course to 330 degrees and increase speed to twenty-seven knots to close with the enemy while the flight crews prepared strikes.¹⁴ The Hornet launched the first plane of the strike at 0731. Lieutenant Commander William J. "Gus" Widhelm led fifteen SBDs of Scouting Squadron Eight (VS-8) and Bombing Squadron Eight (VB-8), while Lieutenant Edwin B. Parker, Jr., commanded six torpedo-laden TBFs of Torpedo Squadron Six (VT-6). The fifteen Dauntlesses were each armed with a one thousand-pound bomb. Eight F4Fs of Fighting Squadron Seventy-two (VF-72), commanded by Lieutenant Commander Henry G. "Mike" Sanchez, would provide escort. The Hornet launched the last plane at 0743. Its elevators immediately began bringing up planes for a second strike.

¹³ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 362, 369-370; and Frank, Guadalcanal, 383. One of the twenty Vals in Seki's strike group aborted after take-off.

¹⁴ Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; and "Deck Log Book of the U.S.S. Hornet CV-8," 26 October 1942, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Hornet Log Book). Task Force 61 changed course and speed at 0708.

The Enterprise entered the fray next. Because of the previous day's losses and because it had contributed the sixteen SBDs for the morning search, as well as most of the planes for the combat air patrol and inner air patrol, it could only muster a meager nineteen-plane strike group.¹⁵ It consisted of eight TBFs under Lieutenant Commander John A. Collett of Torpedo Squadron Ten (VT-10), three VS-10 dive-bombers under Lieutenant (jg) George Glen Estes, and a fighter escort of eight F4Fs under Lieutenant Commander James H. Flatley, Jr., of Fighting Squadron Ten (VF-10). Commander Richard K. Gaines, the group commander, flew an unarmed, ninth TBF.

The Enterprise launched the fighters first, starting at 0747. As each pilot taxied up to the take-off spot on the flight deck, they read a message on a small blackboard: "Proceed without Hornet." As the planes continued to be launched, Flatley circled above the Enterprise in his F4F. He watched Hornet's first wave depart independently. Flatley believed this to be a grave blunder. He later stated that the Enterprise group was "poorly balanced and too inadequate to accomplish" the task, while the Hornet group lacked a sufficient fighter escort. He argued, "Commander Air should have known this and ordered us to join forces." What Flatley did not know was that Kinkaid had ordered the Enterprise strike group to join the Hornet group if it would not cause delay, otherwise to proceed independently. However, by the time the planes were launching, the order had been modified on the chalkboard to just "Proceed without Hornet."¹⁶

¹⁵ In addition, three SBD and two TBF crews from Enterprise were marooned on Hornet after ferrying five replacement planes over the previous morning. They were not returned to the Enterprise because the flight deck had already been re-spotted with a strike group. Hammel, Guadalcanal, 349-350; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 348, 353.

¹⁶ Commander, Fighting Squadron 10 (Lt. Cdr. James H. Flatley, Jr.) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Comments on Air Action of Air Group Ten Attack Force on October 26, 1942, by Leader of Escort VF" enclosure B (hereafter cited as Flatley Strike Report), in Flatley Report, enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 349; Thomas G. Miller, The Cactus Air Force (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 153; and Lundstrom, First

The Hornet strike group departed at 0750. Murata's sixty-two-plane strike group had a twenty minute head start on the Americans.

The Enterprise strike group rendezvoused at 0810 and proceeded on a northwestwardly bearing. The three SBDs climbed to six thousand feet, followed by the eight TBFs. An escort of two four-plane divisions of F4Fs flew to the right and left, slightly ahead and one thousand feet above them. The faster fighters had to slowly weave in wide S-turns to maintain their position in the formation.

Twenty minutes into their flight, the TBFs suddenly came under attack by nine Zero fighters. They had peeled off from their strike group and had completely surprised the Enterprise planes.¹⁷ Appearing out of the sun from behind, the first of the three Zero divisions ambushed Collett's lead TBF, which quickly caught fire with "flames gushing from his engine into the cockpit." Two of the three crew managed to bail out before the plane plunged into the sea.

The second and third Zero divisions concentrated on the TBFs in the rear of the formation. They quickly battered Ensign John M. Reed's TBF. With his plane falling apart, Reed yelled "Bail out! Bail out!" over the intercom. Only the turret gunner got out before the bomber blew apart. In the TBF ahead of Reed's, a horrified tunnel gunner watched the plane explode with its "engine coming by our wing tip, the prop still spinning."¹⁸ The Zeros continued to attack the TBF formation. Two more TBFs, piloted

Team and Guadalcanal, 360. A photograph of a sailor holding up the blackboard can be seen in Burns, Then There Was One, 208.

¹⁷ The Zeros so surprised the Americans that some of the F4F pilots had not yet charged their guns and some of the TBF aircrew had not yet turned on their transmitters. Later, Flatley candidly wrote, "We were cruising along feeling quite secure at 5000 feet when suddenly we were attacked by enemy VF." Flatley Strike Report, 349-350.

¹⁸ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 366.

by Lieutenant (jg) Richard K. Batten and Lieutenant Marvin D. Norton, were so severely damaged that they were forced to turn back towards Task Force 61.

The F4Fs on the left side of the formation finally became aware of the Zero attack. They charged their guns, dropped their wing tanks, and dove toward the TBFs. Ensign Willis B. Reding described the ensuing dogfight:

Before we could reach the torpedo planes, we were hit by eight or ten Zeros from above on both sides and out of the sun. We took evasive action and the Zeros continued to attack. They made steep runs at such quick intervals that we were unable to get effective shots at any of them. When we could raise the nose enough to shoot head-on, they broke away. After seven or eight minutes, at least one of our planes was smoking and the sections became separated.¹⁹

The right-hand fighter group was turning back from another shallow turn when VF-10 commander Flatley glanced over his left shoulder at the TBF formation. A shocked Flatley discovered a brutal dogfight taking place. He ordered his fighters to release their drop tanks, then observed a Zero

. . . taking position below and ahead of the TBFs preparatory for an attack from underneath. . . . I immediately attacked the Zero who had started his approach. The first attack was a diving turn, full deflection shot. The Zero immediately tried to pull up and away. Our VF recovered above and on the outside of the Zero. The next attack was an astern approach at extreme range and the enemy was badly hit and commenced smoking. A third high side attack plunged him into the sea.²⁰

¹⁹ Ensign Steve G. Kona, Ensign Donald Gordon, Ensign Maurice N. Wickendoll, and Ensign Willis B. Reding to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Reports of Action of Various VF10 Pilots" enclosure E (hereafter cited as VF-10 Pilots Report), in Flatley Report, enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 368.

²⁰ Flatley Strike Report, 347-348.

After the kill Flatley's four fighters reluctantly joined up with the strike group, which had been reduced to four TBFs and three SBDs. They pressed on to the objective.²¹

Meanwhile, Reding and his wingman, Ensign Raleigh E. ("Dusty") Rhodes, were in the fight of their lives. Their division leader and his wingman had already been shot down by a swarm of Zeros. The third Zero division now tore into Reding and Rhodes with several swift passes. Rhodes' wing tank caught fire and his guns would not fire. His F4F started smoking; then his engine failed. He pushed back the remains of the canopy, stood up, kicked back the stick, and pulled the ripcord. He catapulted from his F4F and hit the water at the bottom of the first swing of his parachute. Reding fared little better than Rhodes. A 20-mm cannon shell hit his instrument panel, knocking out his .50-caliber guns, radio, and electrical system. His fuselage and wings were riddled with machine-gun rounds. With three Zeros still harassing him, Reding pushed his Wildcat into a steep dive and pulled out just above the sea. One of the Zeros followed Reding down, but it eventually broke off its pursuit. Reding aimed his battered fighter toward Task Force 61.

The Zeros' ambush had cut the Enterprise strike group nearly in half. In turn, the American fighters and the TBF gunners had shot down four Zeros.²²

²¹ The three SBDs were flying at a higher altitude and ahead of the formation and were not attacked. Group commander Gaines, flying some three thousand feet above the strike group, was not discovered.

²² Sources for the Zero attack on the Enterprise strike group: Flatley Strike Report, 347-350; VF-10 Pilots Report, 368; Coffin Report, 392-395; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 363-369; Cdr. Edward P. Stafford, The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise (New York: Random House, 1962), 156-160; Hammel, Guadalcanal, 351-359; Burns, Then There Was One, 126-127; and Stanley Johnston, The Grim Reapers, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1943), 129-131. Pilots of the second Hornet strike, who were ten minutes behind the Enterprise group and came upon the dogfight in progress, noted the attack in their action report. See Executive Officer, Torpedo Squadron Six (Lt. Ward F. Powell) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Action Report on October 26, 1942, Second Division VT Planes," enclosure B (hereafter cited as Powell Report), in Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason) to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action of Hornet Air Group, October 26, 1942," serial 00101 of 3 November 1942 (hereafter cited as Hornet AG Report), in Nimitz Report, 181; and Commander, Fighting Squadron Seventy-Two (Lt. Cdr. Henry G.

At 0756 the Hornet launched the first plane of its second strike group. Lieutenant John J. Lynch led nine VB-8 and VS-8 dive-bombers, followed by Lieutenant Ward F. Powell's nine VT-6 torpedo bombers. The Avengers each carried four small 500-pound bombs instead of the more powerful torpedoes. Commander M. E. A. Gouin, the Hornet's air officer, must not have trusted the unreliable American torpedo. Seven Wildcats of VF-72 accompanied the bombers. Commander Walter F. Rodee, flying an additional TBF, formed his strike group and departed on a northwestwardly bearing at 0815.²³

Meanwhile, the Junyo was steaming eastward at full speed with Kondo's Advance Force in order to get in striking range of the American carriers. Kakuta was furious at learning that the enemy contact was 330 miles away; he was determined to get his lone carrier of Carrier Division 2 in the fight. He had narrowed the gap to 280 miles by 0905. At that time, he ordered the Junyo to launch its strike. It consisted of seventeen Val dive-bombers under group commander Lieutenant Shiga Yoshio. An escort of twelve Zeros followed.²⁴

Sanchez) to Commander Task Force 17 (RADM. George D. Murray), "Action Report of October 26, 1942," enclosure E, in Hornet AG Report, in Nimitz Report, 188 (hereafter cited as Sanchez Report).

²³ Sources for American strikes: Air Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Cdr. M.E.A. Gouin) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Action Report - Monday, October 26, 1942," enclosure D (hereafter cited as Gouin Report), in Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason) to Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and subsequent loss of U.S.S. Hornet," serial 00100 of 30 October 1942 (hereafter cited as Mason Report), in ComSoPac (VADM. William F. Halsey) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet," serial 00173a of 20 November 1942 (hereafter cited as Halsey Report), in Nimitz Report, 38; Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; Kinkaid Report, 151; Commander, Torpedo Squadron Six (Lt. Edwin B. Parker, Jr.) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Action Report for October 26, 1942 of First Division of VT Planes," enclosure A, in Hornet AG Report, in Nimitz Report, 179 (hereafter cited as Parker Report); and Powell Report, 181.

²⁴ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 429; and Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 129-130.

The Japanese had now thrown 139 aircraft against Task Force 61. In contrast, the Americans had only thrown seventy-five aircraft against the Combined Fleet.

With all of the strike groups from Enterprise and Hornet launched, Kinkaid now concentrated on Task Force 61's defenses. He first focused on replenishing the combat air patrol (CAP) of each carrier. The CAP fighters were low on fuel from being aloft for nearly three hours. At 0802 the Enterprise launched its second CAP of eleven F4Fs, and a few minutes later it began recovering the first CAP fighters. The Hornet launched its second CAP of eight F4Fs at 0822. By 0830 all of the Hornet fighters from the first CAP had landed.²⁵

The pilots of the Hornet's first strike group had flown about sixty miles out on their leg when they unexpectedly looked up and saw the planes of the first Japanese strike group pass over them. VF-72 Commander Sanchez quickly radioed back, "Stand by for dive-bombing attack. Twenty-four dive-bombers passing over us now."²⁶ The warning compelled Kinkaid to break radio silence and order, "Launch all planes immediately. Jap planes coming in."²⁷ The air departments of both carriers scrambled to get the remaining planes off the flight decks. Both carriers started launching fighters at 0846. The Hornet

²⁵ Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; TF16 War Diary, 321; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; TF17 Track Chart, 136; and Gouin Report, 38-39.

²⁶ Gus Widhelm later commented, "Boy, did we look few-ish- they had seventy-two planes. I tallied 36 fighters, 18 torpedoes and 18 dive bombers." Alexander R. Griffin, A Ship to Remember: The Saga of the Hornet (New York: Howell, Soskin, Publishers, 1943): 242. "Stand by..." quote from "Chronological Log of Battle North of Santa Cruz Islands," Enclosure A (hereafter cited as CruDiv 5 Chronological Log), in Commander Task Force 17.2 (Commander Cruiser Division Five) (Radm. Howard H. Good) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Action Report of Air Action fought north of Santa Cruz Islands October 26, 1942," serial 0111 of 2 November 1942 (hereafter cited as Good Report), in Nimitz Report, 632; also TF17 Track Chart, 136; Sanchez Report, 188; and Mason Report, 22. Sanchez gave his warning at 0824.

²⁷ "Excerpts from Communication Logs," Enclosure C (hereafter cited as CruDiv 5 Communication Log), in Good Report, in Nimitz Report, 642.

sent its third CAP of seven F4Fs up by 0848; the Enterprise launched its third CAP of eleven F4Fs by 0853.²⁸

A fighter umbrella of thirty-seven F4Fs now circled above Task Force 61. Kinkaid informed Rear Admiral George D. Murray, commander of Task Force 17, that the Fighter Director Officer (FDO) on board the Enterprise would handle overall fighter direction. He expected the Japanese attack from the northward. The Enterprise was the northernmost of the two carriers, and the duty carrier (Enterprise) usually controlled fighter direction of the task force. The Enterprise's FDO was a rookie. Commander John Griffin had just replaced Commander Leonard Dow, Enterprise's FDO since before the outbreak of the war. After the war, Kinkaid reflected on the situation:

We had a new fighter director in the Enterprise. It is almost too bad to say that, because he was a man who was the head of our fighter director school, but he hadn't had the practical experience. I had had a very good fighter director before that who was ordered off just a day or two before that by Halsey, to join his staff, and this other fellow had been coming along to get experience. So he took over, and it wasn't handled well.

The Hornet's FDO, Lieutenant Allan Foster Fleming, was far more experienced.²⁹

By 0841 Task Force 61 steamed at twenty-seven knots on a base course of 120°, with the Hornet about ten miles to the west of the Enterprise. A tight, protective ring of cruisers and destroyers encircled each carrier. Enterprise also had the battleship South Dakota stationed off its stern. At 0846 Task Force 16 changed course to the north (020°) to enter a rain squall. Realizing that Task Force 17 had remained on the base course and

²⁸ Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; and Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; also Gouin Report, 38-39; and TF16 War Diary, 323.

²⁹ Kinkaid Oral History, 204. About Fleming, Lundstrom stated, "Events proved him an outstanding carrier fighter director." Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 282. Dow was one of three officers who arrived with Lt. Cdr. Bill Ashford in Noumea on 23 October. Ashford Oral History, 71; and Potter, Bull Halsey, 138.

that the two task forces were rapidly separating (fifteen miles by 0902), Kinkaid ordered Murray to close at 0902. Task Force 17 changed course to 040° at 0904.³⁰ The extra distance between TF16 and TF17 made it even more difficult for Griffin and Fleming to protect the two carriers.

Griffin had placed most of the combat air patrol at the low altitude of 10,000 feet to conserve fuel and oxygen. He assumed that radar would give him adequate warning to send them higher when the time came. Yet by 0838, the radar screens remained blank. Fourteen minutes had passed since the warning of incoming enemy bombers. Hearing someone warn over the radio of enemy planes "off to port," an uneasy Griffin ordered both CAPs to "Look for Hawks [enemy VB] on port beam. Angels [altitude] high. Look south of Reaper Base [Enterprise]." The warning had actually come from one of the Enterprise strike planes during their dogfight with the Zero escorts. When the fighters reported finding nothing to the south, he ordered the Enterprise F4Fs to return to base at 0847, and the Hornet F4Fs to "protect Blue Base [Hornet]." Fleming immediately took over control of the Hornet's CAP and ordered them to "orbit base."³¹ The radar on both carriers was malfunctioning badly. Griffin and Fleming were blindly grasping to locate the enemy.

The sixty-two planes of Murata's strike group were about thirty-five miles to the west of the American task force when they spotted the ship wakes of Task Force 17 at

³⁰ Mason Report, 22; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; Commander Task Force 61 (RADM. Thomas C. Kinkaid) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "First Endorsement on CTF-17 Secret Letter Serial 0050 dated October 30, 1942 Preliminary Report of Action, October 26, 1942," serial 0052 of 3 November 1942, in Nimitz Report, 144 (hereafter cited as Kinkaid Endorsement to Murray Report); and Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942.

³¹ CruDiv 5 Communication Log, 648; Sanchez Report, 190; Gouin Report, 39; "Excerpts From Pensacola Log of Fighter Director Circuit 10/26/42," Enclosure A (hereafter cited as Gouin Fighter Director Circuit Log), in Gouin Report, in Mason Report, in Nimitz Report, 45; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 385.

0853. They did not notice Task Force 16, still concealed in the rainsquall. Murata instructed his planes: "Assume attack formation." Takahashi's twenty-one Val dive-bombers would approach the carrier from the west at 17,000 feet. Murata, "the torpedo ace of the Japanese Navy,"³² would take eleven Kate torpedo bombers and approach the carrier from the south, while Lieutenant Washimi Goro and ten other Kates would approach from the north. By expertly dividing his attack, Murata would hit the carrier simultaneously from both bows. At 0858 Murata ordered "All forces attack."³³

Moments earlier a radar contact had finally appeared on Fleming's screen. He immediately dispatched eight F4Fs of Hornet's CAP on a westward bearing of 260° against a large bogey (unidentified aircraft) thirty-five miles ahead. A minute later Griffin informed Fleming over the fighter director frequency: "We have something [at] 240°." Griffin sent seven Enterprise F4Fs fifteen miles west of base and told them "Large bogey now twenty miles [from base]." At 0857 Lieutenant (jg) Thomas G. Gallagher, Jr., one of the eight Hornet fighter pilots, radioed: "Tally ho [making intercept]. Dead ahead Angels 17. Seven planes, Hawks, six more about to make attack."³⁴ Fleming and Griffin immediately ordered the rest of the fighters of the CAP to buster (proceed at best speed) westward to intercept the enemy planes.

³² Gordon W. Prange, At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981): 196-197. Murata "knew no fear; he was calm and cold as a rock in zero weather, was never nervous and under the worst of circumstances always smiling." He was considered "something of a hero among the airmen of the Imperial Navy."

³³ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 386-388; Okumiya, Zero!, 261; and Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 130. Okumiya reports the order as "All planes go in," while Hara reports it as "All planes attacking." The author used the Lundstrom quote because Lundstrom based his account on the Shokaku and Zuikaku Kodochoshos (air squadron war diaries).

³⁴ CruDiv 5 Communication Log, 648; Gouin Fighter Director Circuit Log, 45; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 387.

While the torpedo bombers circled to the north and south of Task Force 17, Takahashi's dive-bombers continued to close in from the west. They formed a compact column composed of three seven-plane divisions, with a small escort of eight Zeros positioned above and behind them. Twenty miles west of the Hornet, they encountered the Hornet F4Fs, charging in from below at 15,000 feet.

Despite being deployed too late and too low, the CAP fighters made the best of the situation. They targeted Takahashi's lead Val. They battered his plane with several swift passes, forcing Takahashi to seek refuge in some clouds. The rest of the first division drifted northward as they tried to follow the frantic maneuvers of their crippled leader. The Wildcats then engaged most of the third division of Vals and the eight escorting Zeros. The F4Fs shot down three of the seven Vals in the ensuing dogfight, at a cost of three of their own fighters. The third division of dive-bombers disintegrated under the CAP pressure and was never able to make an effective attack on the Hornet.³⁵

The second division of Val dive-bombers, virtually unscathed from the CAP attacks, pressed on. When lookouts on board Hornet spotted the dive-bombers approaching from the west at 0908, Captain Charles P. Mason, commanding officer of the Hornet, ordered the carrier to commence radical evasive maneuvering at twenty-eight knots. A minute later the five-inch anti-aircraft (AA) guns opened up at a range of 10,500 yards. The seven Vals of the second division slanted down in gradual descents from 12,000 feet and emerged from the cloud cover at 5,000 feet. At 0910 they plunged into steep dives at the Hornet from astern. The first two dive-bombers planted a couple of near misses off the carrier's starboard side. Task Force 17's intense anti-aircraft fire

³⁵ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 388-390. There is a gap in the Hornet action reports and other historical sources for the action between the combat air patrol and the strike group. Lundstrom based his account on correspondence with several Hornet fighter pilots involved in the action.

collected one of these planes. Lieutenant J. K. Blough, navigator of the Hornet, recorded the event in the carrier's logbook: "0912 Enemy plane crashed dead ahead and burst into intense flame; changed course to 040° to avoid flame."³⁶ The last five Vals pushed through and hit the carrier with three armor-piercing bombs in quick succession. One bomb struck the flight deck abreast the bridge and exploded down on the third deck near the forward messing compartment. It started heavy fires and killed a large number of men in the repair party and bomb-handling crew in the area. Moments later two more bombs hit aft between the amidships and aft elevators. One pierced the flight deck and drilled down to the third deck before exploding, starting severe fires in the CPO quarters. It bulged a large area in the hanger deck. The other exploded while penetrating the flight deck, "creating considerable loss of life both on hanger and flight decks as well as destroying the deck over an area ten feet in diameter."³⁷ The second division had skillfully delivered the first powerful blow to the Hornet, achieving three bomb hits at a cost of three of their own.

Twelve miles away, Kinkaid could clearly make out through his telescope the Hornet and the action happening around it. He saw black bursts of AA fire and flaming streaks in the sky as enemy planes were shot down. He dispatched to Halsey: "Am being attacked by enemy aircraft."³⁸

³⁶ Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942.

³⁷ Quote from Gouin Report, 40. Sources for this attack: Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; Mason Report, 22-24; Gouin Report, 39-40; Gunnery Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (J.W. Smith) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Report of participation of the Gunnery Department in the action of October 26, 1942," enclosure G (hereafter cited as Smith Report), in Mason Report, in Nimitz Report, 83-84; and Frank, Guadalcanal, 385-386. The author followed Frank's account for the sequence of bomb hits, which he based on War Damage Report No. 30, 8 July 1943, USS Hornet (CV 8), Loss in Action Santa Cruz 26 October 1942, Bureau of Ships, Navy Department.

³⁸ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 252220 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 58. Details of view from Enterprise from Burns, Then There Was One, 121.

At 0912 the Hornet received the warning "Torpedo planes coming in."³⁹ Approaching the carrier from off its starboard quarter, Murata and ten other Kate torpedo bombers fanned out into a right echelon. The Hornet's air officer remarked that "they were well spaced in azimuth and the timing was superb."⁴⁰ They fought through devastating AA fire as they passed over the protective screen in long, descending glides. Skimming over the water, they pushed to within 1000-1500 yards before releasing their torpedoes. Eight of the eleven planes managed to launch torpedoes at the carrier. Five of the eleven, including the incomparable Murata, were shot down.

Temporarily scattered by the F4F attack on their leader, the five remaining Vals of the first division of dive-bombers⁴¹ formed up and flew north to get in position to begin their dive-bombing run. The first division, now positioned ahead of the Hornet, pushed over from 12,000 feet. Standing on Hornet's signal bridge, Associated Press correspondent Charles McMurtry spotted Warrant Officer Sato Shigeyuki's dive-bomber at 0914:

I picked up a third Japanese diving right for the place I was standing. He soon was aflame. For a thousand feet I never took my eye off him and he never wavered an inch from a straight line to the signal bridge . . . The plane deflected off our stack. A split second later, a fiery mass, it passed only eight feet from me, sheared off a wing on the signal bridge and burned a hole in the flight deck sixty feet below. I was surprised that my hands and face felt hot. I discovered they were burned.⁴²

³⁹ TF17 Track Chart, 136; and CruDiv 5 Chronological Log, 633.

⁴⁰ Gouin Report, 40.

⁴¹ The first division had been reduced by two: Takahashi, his crippled plane plagued with a jammed rudder, made a water landing after "six hours of frustrating circling flight"; and one other Val was shot down by the American combat air patrol prior to the attack on Hornet. A Japanese tanker rescued Takahashi and his crew. Okumiya, Zero!, 263; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 397.

⁴² Charles McMurtry, "Carrier Fight Cost Enemy 50 Planes," New York Times, 30 November 1942, p. 6, col. 1-2.

Communication officer Oscar H. Dodson, stationed on the Flag Bridge, also witnessed Sato's crash:

Part of the dive bomber which crashed into the forward port side of the stack penetrated the Signalmen's enclosure where three signalmen had taken cover. These men were lost. The crashing plane covered the Signal Bridge with a blanket of burning gasoline. About nine members of the signal force found their clothes burning . . . In spite of intense heat, and dive bombers coming down, the remaining signalmen heroically fought to put out the burning clothes of their comrades. Before their clothing could be removed or the fire put out four signalmen burned to death. Six others received severe burns.⁴³

The gasoline from the dive-bomber ignited a stubborn fire on the flight deck and in the ready room below that burned for two hours before it was brought under control.

Incidentally, Sato's bomb detached from his plane during the crash and ended up unexploded in the passageway behind the ready room. It was quickly secured and later disarmed. The other four Vals that dove on Hornet missed their target.⁴⁴

On the bridge, Capt. Mason had barely composed himself from Sato's crash—the dive-bomber had screamed over his head and struck the island only forty feet behind him—when he spotted two torpedo wakes side by side streaking straight for the Hornet's starboard beam. "Hoping to throw my stern around so they would pass aft, I ordered instantly, 'Right full rudder,'" Mason later recalled, and "[I] saw the ship swerve as the

⁴³ Communication Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Lt. Cdr. Oscar H. Dodson) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Report of Action October 26, 1942," enclosure H (hereafter cited as Dodson Report), in Mason Report, in Nimitz Report, 90, 92.

⁴⁴ Sources for the first division's attack: Mason Report, 23; Gouin Report, 40; Smith Report, 84; Dodson Report, 90, 92; McMurtry, "Carrier Fight," p. 6, col. 1-2; Radm. Charles P. Mason, "How We Lost a Gallant Lady: Don Eddy Interviews Rear Admiral Charles P. Mason," interview by Don Eddy. The American Magazine 136 (November, 1943): 33; Hans Lengerer and Sumie Kobler-Edamatsu, "Vor 40 Jahren: Die Schlacht bei den Santa-Cruz Inseln" (Forty Years Ago: The Battle Off the Santa Cruz Islands) Marine-Rundschau 80 (1983):85-87; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 396-398. Lundstrom corrected the historical record that Sato, not Seki, crashed into the Hornet's island.

torpedoes passed out of sight under the overhang of the flight deck."⁴⁵ Everyone on the bridge held his breath. The seconds ticked by. Suddenly an explosion jarred the ship and "a geyser boiled out of the sea." A few seconds later a second explosion shook the ship. The two torpedoes had struck the engineering spaces on the Hornet's starboard side. A third torpedo had barely missed the carrier's bow. Commander Edward P. Creehan, Hornet's engineer officer, was stationed in the forward engine room:

. . . a large hole of increasing size opened in the center starboard side of the forward engine room. Through this hole (four or more feet in diameter) an avalanche of oil and sea water poured into the engine room. An immediate decision was required and the Engineer Officer ordered "All Hands Abandon the Forward Engine Room."⁴⁶

With the forward engine room and two adjacent fire rooms flooded, the carrier listed eight degrees to starboard. The Hornet lost all propulsion, electrical power, and communications. The rudder was jammed hard right. The carrier lost water pressure in the fire main, meaning massive bucket brigades had to be formed to fight the persistent fires on several decks.⁴⁷

Approaching the Hornet from its port side, Wishimi's nine torpedo bombers fared much worse than Murata's group. The Kates encountered intense anti-aircraft fire and

⁴⁵ Mason, "Gallant Lady," 33. McMurtry also spotted one of the torpedoes. "It appeared only four of five inches wide- a clear, blue, pale streak through the deep blue ocean. The water boiled white at its head." McMurtry, "Carrier Fight," p.6, col. 3.

⁴⁶ Engineer Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Cdr. E. P. Creehan) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Report of action with enemy on Monday, October 26, 1942," enclosure E (hereafter cited as Creehan Report), in Mason Report, in Nimitz Report, 51.

⁴⁷ Giving the superior Japanese torpedo its due, Halsey stated, "There was a saying in the South Pacific forces . . . that every time a Japanese torpedo hit, our ships stopped; and that every time one of our torpedos [sic] hit, the Japanese ship made two knots extra speed." Halsey Memoir, 381.

tenacious CAP fighters. Only four managed to bear in close enough to Hornet to release their torpedoes. All four missed. Four of the nine planes escaped safely.⁴⁸

Now dead in the water, the Hornet was about to take another blow. A lone dive-bomber, a straggler from the third division of Vals—the division that earlier had been torn apart by the American CAP—appeared in a shallow dive off the Hornet's stern at 0917. All the guns of Task Force 17 opened up on it. The now flaming dive-bomber released its bomb but missed, planting it in the water fifty yards off the carrier's bow. The pilot pulled up and passed over the ship from port to starboard. He abruptly made a tight circle ahead of the carrier, accelerated toward the ship, and deliberately crashed his bomber into the side just forward of the port gun gallery. The plane exploded and its wreckage ended up in the forward elevator pit, where a violent fire started.⁴⁹

The Enterprise, fortunate to have missed the first wave of Japanese planes, would soon attract enemy attention. At 0927 one of the Kate pilots, while retiring from his attack on Hornet, spotted a second group of ships, including a carrier, off in the distance. He quickly reported Task Force 16's position and bearing back to the Shokaku.⁵⁰

On Enterprise, Kinkaid had been witnessing the battle on the horizon intently. When he noticed fires on the island structure and a high plume of smoke emitting from

⁴⁸ Sources for starboard torpedo attack: Dodson Report, 90-91; Smith Report, 84; Gouin Report, 40-41; Mason, "Gallant Lady," 33, 102; McMurtry, "Carrier Fight," p. 6, col. 2-3; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; Creehan Report, 51-53; and Mason Report, 23. Sources for port torpedo attack: Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 398-401; and Smith Report, 84.

⁴⁹ Gouin Report, 40; Dodson Report, 90; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 402; and Mason Report, 24. Executive officer Cdr. Apollo Soucek and air operations officer Lt. Cdr. Francis D. Foley spotted another loose, fused bomb on the forecastle deck that "apparently had been knocked off the wing of the Jap plane in the elevator well." Foley later recalled, "We managed to free the bomb and roll it gingerly into the shallow scupper, then worm it over the side. It splashed harmlessly into the sea, to our immense relief!" Radm. Francis D. Foley, "Every Good Ship Has a Heart." Naval History 6 (Winter, 1992): 25.

⁵⁰ Nimitz Report, 9; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 402-403.

the Hornet, he sent: "From CTF 16 to CTF 17--- Are you hurt?" After a minute ticked by with no answer, Rear Admiral Howard H. Good, commander of the TF 17 cruisers, grimly responded: "CTF 17 unable [to] receive you. Answer [to] your question is affirmative."⁵¹

The ships of Task Force 17 now organized to assist the wounded Hornet. The cruisers and most of the destroyers encircled the stationary carrier to help protect it. The destroyers Morris, Mustin and Russell came alongside and their crews passed fire hoses to help fight the blazing fires aboard.

By this time the SBDs from the morning search were returning and began circling above the Enterprise. Also waiting to land were many combat air patrol F4Fs from both carriers. Kinkaid radioed Good: "Please ask CTF 17 if he wants us to take [his] chickens [aircraft] aboard." Good replied, "affirmative."⁵² Realizing that Hornet must be seriously damaged, Kinkaid informed Halsey at 0949: "Hornet hurt." Halsey must have been startled by the brief but direct dispatch. One minute later, Kinkaid received the following order in typical Halsey fashion: "Operate from and in positions from which you can strike quickly and effectively. We must use everything we have to the limit."⁵³

⁵¹ CruDiv 5 Communication Log, 642.

⁵² Ibid.; CruDiv 5 Chronological Log, 634.

⁵³ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 252249 of October 1942 and ComSoPac to CTF 64, 61 252250 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 59.

CHAPTER 3

“THE GREATEST CARRIER DUEL”

26 OCTOBER 1942

The bombers of the first Hornet strike pushed northwestward as they searched for enemy carriers. At 0850 strike group commander Gus Widhelm spotted ship wakes on the horizon. He radioed escort leader Mike Sanchez, “Gus to Mike: Do you see carriers?” The reply came back as “Mike to Gus: No carriers in sight out here. Let’s return.” Widhelm was enraged with what he thought was Sanchez’s response, but actually the reply had come from a crafty Japanese radioman who had intercepted the U.S. radio frequencies.¹ As Widhelm pressed in he identified two heavy cruisers and two escorting destroyers. The cruisers—Tone and Chikuma—had become separated from the other capital ships of Abe’s Vanguard Force. Seeking bigger targets, Widhelm continued on his course. At 0905 he came upon another group of Japanese ships. This one included two battleships and two cruisers. The Americans had found the rest of the Vanguard Force.

The Japanese were ready for the incoming American bombers. The Shokaku’s radar team had expertly picked them up seventy-eight miles out at 0840. The fleet FDO had done a fine job of placing the twenty-three Zeros of the CAP at different altitudes and bearings to be in position to intercept the enemy planes. As the first Hornet wave passed over the Vanguard Force three CAP Zeros attacked.

Sanchez and the other escorts kept them from harassing the dive-bombers and torpedo bombers, but in the ensuing dogfight,² the Zeros downed two Wildcats and damaged two more so severely that they were forced to turn home. The F4Fs reciprocated by shooting down two of the three Zeros.

Seeing the attacking Zeros tangle with his escorts, Widhelm made an abrupt right turn toward some clouds. TBF leader Edwin Parker, who was flying several thousand feet below Widhelm, did not notice Widhelm's turn and kept his six Avengers pointed on the same course.

Widhelm's fortuitous turn aimed the American dive-bombers right at the carriers of the Combined Fleet. The dive-bombers, with no fighter escorts, pushed on through the clouds. As they passed through, Widhelm sighted a "carrier task force consisting of one large carrier, with a distinctly pronounced island, which looked fully as large as our Saratoga class, [and] also one converted carrier. The flight deck extend[ed] the complete length of the ship, and [was] painted a brick red color." He noticed that one carrier was smoking.³ He had discovered the Shokaku and Zuiho, the latter still burning from Strong and Irvine's bombing attack nearly two hours earlier. Cloud cover concealed the Zuikaku. Widhelm first tried to contact Walt

¹ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 370. Widhelm, convinced that Sanchez had spoken those words, actually took a swing at Sanchez a week later.

² For a more detailed account of the dogfight, see Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 371-374.

³ Commander, Bombing Squadron Eight (Lt. James E. Vose) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Action on 26 October 1942," Enclosure C, in Halsey Report, 111 (hereafter cited as Vose Report); and Commander, Scouting Squadron Eight (Lt. Cdr. William J. Widhelm) and Commander, Bombing Squadron Eight (Lt. James E. Vose) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet (Capt. Charles P. Mason), "Action Report of 26 October, With Enemy Japanese Fleet- Solomon Island Area," Enclosure C, in Hornet AG Report, in Nimitz Report, 183 (hereafter cited as Widhelm and Vose Report).

Rodee, the leader of the second Hornet strike group. Getting no response, Widhelm then transmitted, "Contact bearing about 345. I have one in sight and am going after them."⁴

Almost immediately the Dauntlesses encountered twelve CAP Zeros. The Zeros attacked repeatedly during the twenty-five mile approach to the carriers. The fifteen SBDs tried to fight them off, with Widhelm's rear gunner acting as fire-control director, but the Zeros inflicted serious damage on them. During one pass a Zero riddled Widhelm's plane with 20-mm cannon rounds, causing it to stream oil. Three dive-bombers soon dropped from formation. Now trailing thick smoke, Widhelm coaxed his bomber to the pushover point.

In the final approach Widhelm's plane finally expired. The engine froze and the propeller stopped. Widhelm turned out of formation and began a long glide to the sea below.⁵ Lieutenant James E. Vose took over the lead. At 0927 the eleven remaining dive-bombers nosed over into their dives against the carrier Shokaku. Captain Hara Tameichi, commanding one of the destroyer escorts, witnessed the attack:

I glanced up and saw about a dozen dive-bombers approaching from out of a cloud bank at 2,000 meters. . . . General alarm was sounded, and all hands went to battle stations. . . . All [of the] ships opened fire at the approaching enemy planes.

⁴ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 374.

⁵ Widhelm ditched his SBD, made it to his life raft with his radioman, and had a front-row seat for the dive-bombing attack. They were picked up three days later by an American patrol plane. For more on Widhelm's experience, see Burns, Then There Was One, 145-148; Johnston, Grim Reapers, 133-138; and Griffin, Ship to Remember, 241-250.

Twisting and turning at full speed, the carrier succeeded in missing the first several bombs. Hara continued:

I saw two enemy bombers pierce Shokaku's gunfire and dive full toward the carrier from a height of about 700 meters. The planes arced up at the last moment and disappeared into the clouds. The next instant I saw two or three silver streaks, which appeared like thunderbolts, reaching toward the bulky carrier. Their impact raised flashes at the fore and amidship, near the bridge, of Shokaku. The whole deck bulged quickly and burst. Flames shot from the cleavages. I groaned as the flames rose and black and white smoke came belching out of the deck.⁶

The dive-bombers made four direct one thousand-pound bomb hits on the carrier.

The bombs tore immense holes in the flight deck and ignited fierce fires in the hanger deck. The Shokaku could still make thirty-one knots, but it had lost all communications, its anti-aircraft guns had been knocked out, and it could not launch or receive planes. With dogged determination and some luck, the Americans had knocked the Shokaku out of the battle. It would survive to fight another day, however, unless the remaining American strike groups could follow up on Widhelm's success.⁷

⁶ First quote: Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 130. Second quote: *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷ Kinkaid praised the pilots of Hornet's first wave: "By valiant performance, although attacked by Zeros, [they] fought their way in and attacked the enemy carrier." Kinkaid Report, 151. In his after-action report, Vose accurately stated, "I claim four direct hits on this carrier." Vose Report, 111. This was unusual as the airmen on both sides typically exaggerated their claims. Sources for attack on Shokaku: Widhelm and Vose Report, 183-184; Vose Report, 110-111; Sanchez Report, 187-188; Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 130-131; Ugaki, Fading Victory, 249-250, 252-254; Okumiya, Zero!, 260; Japanese Monograph 98, 42; Watanabe Interrogation, 541; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 369-377; Barrett Tillman, The Dauntless Dive Bomber of World War Two (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 154-158; and Frank, Guadalcanal, 386-387.

While Parker's Avengers continued northwestwardly looking for Japanese carriers and Widhelm's dive-bombers attacked the Shokaku, the second Hornet wave approached the cruisers Chikuma and Tone and the destroyers Tanikaze and Urakaze. On their flight out they had heard the broadcast "From Mike to Gus: No carriers in sight out here; Let's return," but had failed to hear Widhelm's subsequent reports of an enemy carrier. SBD leader J.J. Lynch later explained:

The first group was thirty minutes before us without apparent carrier contact and as visibility was unlimited I thought that [the Japanese] carriers [had turned northward and] were outside our effective range. Accordingly, I called Group Commander [Rodee] and said that unless otherwise directed I would attack heavy cruiser of Tone class. . . . Not receiving any reply, I led the group into the attack.⁸

TBF leader Ward Powell "observed [his] accompanying scout bombers attack the leading cruiser" of the enemy group, but chose to stay on course to look for enemy carriers. His nine torpedo bombers "proceeded on around this force."⁹ The second Hornet strike fragmented into two groups.

Lynch's nine dive-bombers pushed over from 11,500 feet against the Chikuma. At 0926 one of the first dive-bombers made a direct hit on the port side of the bridge, knocking out the cruiser's anti-aircraft guns. A few minutes later a thousand-pound bomb struck the starboard half of the bridge and exploded, wounding Captain Komura Keizo, killing the executive officer, and demolishing the cruiser's superstructure. Komura later commented in an interrogation after the war: "It was a

⁸ J[ohn] J. Lynch, Lieutenant, USN to Commander Task Force 17 (Radm. George D. Murray), "Action October 26, 1942, in Solomon area against Japanese forces - Report of," Enclosure D, in Hornet AG Report, in Nimitz Report, 185 (hereafter cited as Lynch Report).

⁹ Powell Report, 181.

skillful attack because we were maneuvering at high speed and firing all guns.

Unfortunately, we were not close enough to the other ships for protection and we did not have air cover.”¹⁰ Pulling out from his dive, Lynch noticed: “Flames and heavy smoke poured from the ship although she was still underway at reduced speed. . . . Just as we were leaving the scene, we could see an explosion which sent a heavy cloud of smoke into the air.”¹¹

The small Enterprise strike group of four TBFs, four F4Fs, and three SBDs now entered the picture. While en route F4F leader Jimmy Flatley and new TBF leader Lieutenant Macdonald Thompson had received Widhelm’s contact report of an enemy carrier. Thompson had decided to “tail in behind the Hornet group.”¹² But neither Flatley nor Thompson realized that Widhelm had made a right turn to the north. They continued on a northwestwardly bearing and soon spotted ship wakes to the west. They circled above for the next ten minutes, dipping in and out of towering cumulus clouds, looking for carriers and scouting the task group below. This group was Abe’s Vanguard Force consisting of the battleships Hiei and Kirishima, the heavy cruiser Suzuuya, the light cruiser Nagara, and four destroyers. While they were searching Flatley realized that the three SBDs accompanying them had disappeared. Glen Estes had missed Thompson’s turn to port and had kept his three dive-bombers

¹⁰ U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, Vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), interrogation of Radm. Komura Keizo, 461 (hereafter cited as Komura Interrogation).

¹¹ Lynch Report, 185.

¹² Flatley Strike Report, 348.

pointed to the northwest. For the third time this day, an American strike group had split apart.

With no carrier evident in the enemy force below, Thompson asked Flatley if his F4Fs could go on another ninety miles. "My answer was negative because of fuel remaining," Flatley stated. "We had already been in the air [for] two hours and had dropped our wing tanks during the 0830 combat."¹³ Thompson picked the closest capital ship to attack. The four torpedo bombers descended in pairs on the heavy cruiser Suzuya at 0940. They approached from off its port side and fired their torpedoes from an altitude of three hundred feet. Only three of the four torpedoes would release. The Suzuya made a sharp starboard turn at full speed and evaded all three. Encountering light AA fire, all TBFs and F4Fs retired safely to the southeast.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the three Enterprise SBDs had continued searching to the northwest. When they were unable to find enemy carriers in that direction, they turned back southward. They came upon the cruisers Tone and Chikuma just as Lynch's dive-bombers were departing. Estes decided to settle on a heavy cruiser. At 0939 the three dive-bombers dove from 12,000 feet on the smoking Chikuma. The SBDs planted two near misses close off the starboard side amidships. They hit so close that Capt. Komura "thought that they were hits at first."¹⁵ One of the near

¹³ Ibid. "As it turned out," Flatley continued, "Two of the four TBFs landed in the water out of gas . . . The VF landed with anywhere from five to eighteen gallons remaining."

¹⁴ Coffin Report, 393-394; Flatley Strike Report, 348; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 378-379. Lundstrom based his account on the Suzuya action report.

¹⁵ Komura Interrogation, 461.

misses “inflicted a big hole at her side,” flooding her engine room and causing her to reduce speed.¹⁶ As the dive-bombers pulled out of their dives they met some AA fire from the other three ships in the force. A Zero briefly engaged them, but broke off his pursuit as they left the area.

After splitting off from Lynch’s dive-bombers, Powell’s nine TBFs had pushed northwestward looking for the enemy carriers they knew were somewhere in the area. Powell stated, “We continued flying ten minutes to the north, observed nothing. We continued flying ten minutes to the northwest, again observing no targets. We then returned to the enemy force previously sighted.”¹⁷ The nine bomb-equipped TBFs concentrated on the unlucky Chikuma in their glide-bombing attack. One bomb exploded on a torpedo tube mount aft, igniting a reconnaissance seaplane nearby. By 0959 Chikuma was “burning fiercely” from three successive attacks. The cruiser had taken a severe beating. Its crew suffered extremely high casualties: 192 killed and 95 wounded.¹⁸

The last remaining American strike group, Parker’s six Hornet TBFs, arrived over the cruisers Tone and Chikuma the same time that Powell’s TBFs did. Parker

¹⁶ The SBD pilots thought they had attacked a Kongo-class battleship. Lee Report, 388. “Big hole” quote, Ugaki, Fading Victory, 254. Ugaki noted that Chikuma “really owes her survival to well-executed damage control.”

¹⁷ Powell Report, 181.

¹⁸ Powell claimed five hits on a Tone-class cruiser. “Burning fiercely” quote from Sanchez Report, 189. Sources for all attacks on Chikuma: Lynch Report, 185-186; Powell Report, 181-182; Sanchez Report, 188-189; Lee Report, 388; Komura Interrogation, 461; Ugaki, Fading Victory, 249, 254; Japanese Monograph 98, 42; Okumiya, Zero!, 260; Burns, Then There Was One, 134-135; Frank, Guadalcanal, 388; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 378-382. Lundstrom based his account on the Chikuma and Tone action reports.

had been searching for enemy flattops for the last forty-five minutes. After reaching the end of his 210-mile leg and then searching another fifty miles to the north and west, Parker had decided to return to the area of his original sighting. While Powell targeted the wounded Chikuma, Parker led his six TBFs in a torpedo attack against the heavy cruiser Tone. Five of the six Avengers released their torpedoes at the twisting Tone. All five missed.

The six torpedo bombers reformed after the attack and headed home. On their way they noticed "an exceptionally large fire over the horizon to the northeast."¹⁹ Carrier Shokaku was still burning.

Back on Enterprise, Kinkaid was busy trying to land the more than three-dozen aircraft that were low on fuel and circling above his carrier. Waiting to land were sixteen SBDs from the morning search, four inner air patrol SBDs, seventeen combat air patrol F4Fs from both carriers,²⁰ and two damaged SBDs from Enterprise's strike group that had limped home. At 0926 Enterprise turned into the wind and began recovering airplanes. Landing Signal Officer (LSO) Lieutenant James G. Daniels III brought in plane after plane until the flight deck was full. He successfully landed twenty SBDs and seven F4Fs. At 0958 Crommelin shut down the

¹⁹ Quote, Parker Report, 179. Sources for attack on Tone: Parker Report, 179; U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, Vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), interrogation of Cdr. Okumiya Masatake, 79 (hereafter cited as Okumiya Interrogation; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 380-382.

²⁰ Included in this group was Willis Reding, victim of the Zero ambush an hour earlier who had nursed his battered fighter all the way back to TF 16.

flight deck so that it could be re-spotted. Twelve planes still remained over the carrier.²¹

Hoping to alleviate the congestion above Enterprise, and knowing that his carrier would have to accommodate Hornet's planes with the carrier out of the action, Hardison ordered his deck crew to immediately re-service the SBDs that had just landed. Hardison planned to send ten of the dive-bombers to attack the Vanguard Force and then proceed on to Henderson Field.²² Hardison also planned to land, refuel, rearm, and launch some of the CAP fighters after the strike against the Vanguard Force was launched.

Meanwhile, the nineteen Val dive-bombers and five escorting Zeros of Nagumo's second strike closed in on Task Force 17 from the northwest. The seventeen Kate torpedo bombers of the second strike were forty-five minutes behind. Strike group commander Seki Mamoru sighted a task group with a damaged carrier at its center at 0953, but did not see a second enemy carrier that he had been instructed to find. He continued on and at 1000 he spotted the ship wakes of a second carrier force. He immediately sent a contact report back to Nagumo and organized his final approach to the enemy carrier.²³

If Hardison had known that enemy aircraft were only a few minutes away when he ordered the ten SBDs to be rearmed and refueled, he may have reconsidered

²¹ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 408; and Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942.

²² Hardison Report, 204; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 409. Lundstrom's information comes from VB-10 war diary, 26 October 1942.

²³ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 409-410.

his decision. Hardison was well aware of the danger of being caught with aircraft on board a carrier.

At 1000 a large number of bogies suddenly appeared on South Dakota's radar screen. The battleship reported the enemy planes at a distance of twenty-three miles. A moment later, Japanese translators on board Enterprise, who were monitoring radio traffic for Kinkaid, overheard Seki say, "I [have] sighted another carrier." Hardison ordered Enterprise to turn right, changing course from 200° to 250°. ²⁴

A dozen American planes still circled at low altitude over Enterprise even as enemy planes approached from the north. For Lieutenant (jg) Dick Batten, whose TBF had been damaged when Zeros ambushed the Enterprise strike group, time had run out. At 1000 he ditched his torpedo bomber off Enterprise's port quarter.

The destroyer Porter closed in to pick up the aircrew. As it slowed to make the rescue, a lookout suddenly shouted, "Torpedo wake on the port bow!" Two CAP fighter pilots also spotted the circling torpedo and dove on it. They strafed it hoping to set off its warhead, but only succeeded in gaining the attention of the rest of the task force in the form of AA fire. The torpedo turned ahead of Porter. On its second pass it struck the port side of the destroyer, "shaking the ship violently and sending a column of water at least a hundred feet in the air." Batten's TBF crew, who had made it onto a life raft, was thrown back into the water by the explosion. With a

²⁴ Kinkaid Report, 152; Hardison Report, 204; and Kinkaid Oral History, 204. Course changes from Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942.

twenty-foot square hole in its side, the Porter stopped dead in the water. Fifteen of its crew had died in the explosion.²⁵

The Americans believed that a Japanese submarine had fired the torpedo. The torpedo was actually American. When Batten had ditched his Avenger, the crash had jarred loose its torpedo. It had circled from the wreckage until it found its way into the side of the unfortunate Porter.²⁶

At the time the Porter was hit John Griffin confronted a confusing picture. He was now coordinating both the Enterprise and Hornet combat air patrols since Hornet's communications were out. The radar teams on Enterprise, South Dakota, and Northampton reported multiple bogies from many bearings. With most of the bogies bearing from the north, Griffin dispatched four CAP fighters in that direction,

²⁵ Commanding Officer, USS Porter (Lt. Cdr. David G. Roberts) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "U.S.S. Porter - Report of Torpedoing," 31 October 1942, in Nimitz Report, 445-463 (hereafter cited as Roberts Report); Coffin Report, 392-395; Lieutenant Albert D. Pollack to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Harrison), "Narrative of Events by Lieut. A.D. Pollack, U.S.N., Leader of one combat air patrol on Oct. 26, 1942," enclosure C (hereafter cited as Pollack Report), in Flatley Report, enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 355; Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; Burns, Then There Was One, 122-123, 125-127; Frank, Guadalcanal, 388-389; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 411. The two quotes are from Roberts Report, 448.

²⁶ Credit should go to Mr. James Sawruk for correcting the historical record. Until recently most historians followed Samuel Eliot Morison in attributing the torpedo to a Japanese submarine. The exception was Hans Lengerer and Sumie Kobler-Edamatsu, who after examining the official Japanese records, contended in an obscure German article in 1983 that "no Japanese submarine was operating in the fighting zone." They correctly argued that "the sinking of the DD Porter was caused by an air torpedo," but assumed that it had come from a lingering Kate from the first strike on Hornet. Lengerer, "Forty Years Ago," 85, 87. After the battle commanding officer Roberts stated "the possibility that the torpedo which hit Porter came from the TBF plane whose personnel were being rescued must be given careful consideration," but historians later dismissed the theory. Roberts Report, 454. Ultimately Sawruk (who was unaware of the Lengerer article) solved the mystery by pointing to Batten's TBF as the source of the torpedo, and Richard Frank and John Lundstrom conveyed his conclusion in their books in 1990 and 1994, respectively. Frank, Guadalcanal, 389, endnote, 719; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 583-584, footnote 10; and Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 28 March 1995. This author only has one lingering doubt about how the torpedo was dislodged from the TBF. Batten stated that he "was unable to jettison the torpedo" before his crash landing but also stated that his "bomb bay doors were closed." Roberts Report, 460.

but the pilots could not spot them in the thick clouds. The inexperienced Griffin had placed most of the fighters at too low of an altitude to be of any help, gave confusing vectors to the fighter pilots, and failed to give any altitude information at all. The end result was that the CAP was too low and too late to defend the Enterprise. It was only after the dive-bombing attack had begun that Griffin radioed, "Look out for hawks ahead . . . climb and look closely."²⁷

In the final approach only two CAP Wildcats encountered Seki's bombers at 16,000 feet before they pushed over. Ensign Maurice Wickendoll and his wingman Ensign Edward Feightner targeted one of the nineteen Vals and "made a low side approach and started firing."²⁸ After several passes, the dive-bomber plummeted in flames. Two escorting Zeros briefly forced them away.

At 1015 the first Val in a long line of dive-bombers dove unopposed on carrier Enterprise. Because of the cloud cover the dive-bombers were not spotted until well into their dives. But once they were seen, Task Force 16 threw up a blanket of dense AA fire at them. Assistant Gunnery Officer Lieutenant Commander Elias B. Mott II remarked: "I was amazed at the tremendous burst of fire power . . . the starboard side

²⁷ Sanchez Report, 190; Hardison Report, 204; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 410-411; Commander, Fighting Squadron 10 (Lt. Cdr. James H. Flatley, Jr.) to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Composition of Combat Patrol and Comments on Fighter Direction from the U.S.S. Enterprise on October 26, 1942" enclosure I (hereafter cited as Flatley CAP Report), in Flatley Report, enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 376-377; and Gouin Fighter Director Circuit Log, 49.

²⁸ VF-10 Pilots Report, 367.

looked like a sheet of flame.”²⁹ The new 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns that had just been placed on Enterprise and South Dakota were making a difference.

Stationed high up in Sky Control with unlimited visibility, Mott spotted the incoming bombers and gave the clockwise bearing and elevation over the bullhorns. Telephone talkers then relayed the information to the gun batteries. Mott recalled, “As each plane came down, a veritable cone of tracer shells enveloped the plane. You could see the plane being hit and bounced by exploding shells.” One of the first victims was Seki. The Val pilot behind him witnessed his demise: “Lieutenant Commander Seki’s plane seemed to have taken several direct hits. . . . I noticed the bomber enter the dive and suddenly begin to roll over on its back. Flame shot out of the bomber and, still inverted, it continued diving toward the enemy ship.”³⁰ The plane broke up seconds later and its wreckage fell to the sea.

As the bombers pushed through, Enterprise maneuvered radically below. Turning left in a circle, it experienced a close call at 1016. “A flaming Japanese plane passed so close ahead of Sky Control that we felt the heat from the flames,” remembered Mott. “He crashed into the sea very close to the starboard side and his bomb went off. The resultant explosion shook the ship. . . . Sky Control whipped round violently and we had difficulty keeping our feet.”³¹

²⁹ Capt. Elias B. Mott, “The Battles of Santa Cruz and Guadalcanal Revised.” Shipmate 47 (September, 1985): 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Okumiya, Zero!, 262.

³¹ Mott, “Santa Cruz,” 24.

A few minutes into the attack, correspondent Eugene Burns described the activities on the bridge. "Our AA and five-inchers drown out everything, but not your fear," wrote Burns. "I flatten out on the steel deck. God, I'm scared. Admiral Kinkaid is the only man up. . . . [He is] calmly pacing the bridge lighting a cigarette and appraising the fight."³²

A few of the Japanese dive-bombers eluded the heavy AA fire and scored hits on the Enterprise. The first bomb hit originated from a bomber diving from astern. Standing on the open bridge, John Crommelin looked up as it descended on the ship and announced, "I think that son-of-a-bitch is going to get us." The bomb pierced the forward end of the flight deck, passed through the forecastle deck, and exploded in midair off the extreme bow. The bomb's concussion blew an SBD parked forward overboard. Another SBD caught fire and was quickly pushed over the side. Ensign Marshall Field, Jr., the battery officer of the 1.1-inch AA battery on the bow, had also seen the bomb coming:

We caught the plane in our fire about halfway down its dive, when it was released. I looked up and saw the bomb about 100 feet right above me. As the bomb hit a short distance behind us, I could hear the splintering, cracking noise like firewood snapping. Then there was a terrific explosion and a flash. I felt myself picked off my feet and hurtling through space. Then I lit on my back on the forecastle. When I got up I was bleeding.

³² Burns, Then There Was One, 121; and Eugene Burns, "The Battle of Santa Cruz Islands," press release, 26 October 1942, Collection Number 549, James Victor Rowney Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 1.

The bomb knocked out the 1.1-inch battery, and fragments from it peppered the hull and superstructure, leaving jagged holes of all sizes.³³

One minute later a second bomb struck, penetrating the flight deck ten feet behind the forward elevator. It exploded in the hanger deck, where the ten SBDs of Hardison's strike group were being fueled and loaded with bombs. The blast destroyed five parked planes and two more in the overhead. It triggered other explosions on the second and third decks, wiping out Repair Party Two, igniting fierce fires, and killing forty men. The bomb also knocked the forward elevator out of commission.³⁴

The batteries of Task Force 16 continued to put up a barrage of anti-aircraft fire and the dive-bombers of Nagumo's second strike continued to fall. Ten of the nineteen Vals that attacked the Enterprise were shot down.³⁵ One of the last bombers diving on Enterprise, however, succeeded in placing its bomb only ten feet off the starboard side. At 1019 "there was a muffled explosion aft of the island . . . and almost every man standing on his feet aboard the Enterprise was knocked to her deck." The near-hit opened a three-inch seam in the side plating, flooding two empty fuel tanks and opening a third that was full. The carrier began leaving a thick trail of

³³ Hardison Report, 204; Mott, "Santa Cruz," 24; Buell, Dauntless Helldivers, 142; Burns, Then There Was One, 133; and Cdr. Edward P. Stafford, The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1962, reprint, 1988), 192.

³⁴ There is some question whether the bomb split in two, with one half exploding on the flight deck and the other on the third deck, or if the bomb hit in tact and triggered successive explosions on several decks. The author chose the latter. Hardison Report, 204-205; Stafford, Big E, 193; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 415; Frank, Guadalcanal, 389-390; and Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942.

³⁵ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 416. Three Vals were downed by F4Fs.

oil. The No. 2 high-pressure steam turbine was damaged. The ship shook so violently that "planes parked in Fly I were bounced clear of the deck and the farthest one forward . . . fell over the side. One plane in Fly III was bounced into the starboard 20mm battery."³⁶

The nine surviving Vals recovered from their dives, rendezvoused, and retired northwestward. In the lull, Enterprise licked its wounds. At 1032 it changed course from 300° to 250° to enter another rainsquall. It still steamed at twenty-seven knots.³⁷ The firefighting and damage control crews worked feverishly about the ship. Medical personnel attended to the wounded and dying in dressing stations. Gunnery crews removed empty shell casings from around the AA guns.

The lull in the battle did not last long. At 1035 a bogey bearing 330° appeared on Enterprise's radar. Griffin dispatched the CAP fighters in that direction, but warned that the bogey "may be friendly." Five minutes later Griffin ordered: "Look for bogey 330°- large group."³⁸ The second part of Nagumo's second strike was closing in on Task Force 16.

Lieutenant Imajuku coordinated his attack on the enemy carrier as his seventeen Kate torpedo bombers approached Task Force 16. He instructed Lieutenant Yusuhara Masayuki to take eight Kates around the rear of the task force

³⁶ First quote, Stafford, Big E, 195-195. Second quote, Hardison Report, 205. Also Frank, Guadalcanal, 390.

³⁷ Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942. After the radical left turn during the attack, Enterprise had steadied on course 225°, then had briefly turned to 300° when a periscope was reported.

³⁸ Gouin Fighter Director Circuit Log, 49-50; and CruDiv5 Communication Log, 649.

and attack the carrier's port bow, while he and seven other Kates³⁹ would attack its starboard bow.

Racing out to the northwest, F4F pilot Ensign William H. Leder spotted Imajuku's torpedo bombers just as they were separating into two groups about ten miles from Enterprise. He quickly radioed: "Tally-ho, nine o'clock down." Griffin immediately responded with "Reaper and Blue planes, look out for fishes [torpedo bombers]."⁴⁰

This time Griffin effectively directed the combat air patrol out ahead of the enemy planes. The results showed. Most of the fighters swarmed on Yusuvara's bombers, which were still angling for Enterprise's port bow. The Wildcats downed one Kate, forced another to abort its attack, crippled a third, and damaged the remaining five.

Only one F4F intercepted Imajuku's bombers. Ensign George L. Wrenn was cruising at 500 feet waiting to land when the eight Kates flew by him, skimming the waves. Wrenn quickly wheeled in behind Imajuku and fired several bursts at the leader. The port wing detached from the plane, the fuselage rolled to starboard, the starboard wing clipped the water, and the bomber crashed into the sea. The ships of Task Force 16 also joined in with AA fire. "I will be forever grateful to the

³⁹ One of the seventeen Kates was a contact plane and did not attack Enterprise.

⁴⁰ Lieutenant Stanley W. Vejtasa to Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise (Capt. Osborne B. Hardison), "Narrative of Events by Lieut. S. W. Vejtasa, U.S.N., Leader of one combat patrol on October 26, 1942," enclosure D (hereafter cited as Vejtasa Report), in Flatley Report, enclosure A, in Gaines Report, enclosure F, in Hardison Report, in Nimitz Report, 360; CruDiv5 Communication Log, 649; and Gouin Fighter Director Circuit Log 50.

Almighty,” Mott later stated, “that we did not receive a simultaneous dive-bombing and torpedo attack where we would have had to divide our fire power.”⁴¹ Such a coordinated attack had destroyed the Hornet just a couple of hours earlier. The torpedo bombers flew outside the screen as they tried to gain position off both sides of the carrier’s bow. Watching from the bridge, Kinkaid turned to Eugene Burns. “Burns, you’re the most favored civilian alive. You’re seeing the greatest carrier duel of history. Perhaps it will never happen again.”⁴²

One of the remaining Kates approaching from the port side was struck by AA tracers and caught on fire. Realizing that he could not make it to the carrier, the pilot turned toward the destroyer Smith and deliberately crashed his flaming plane into its forecastle at 1048. There was an immediate flash and fires broke out on the forecastle. A few minutes later the ship shook from a second explosion when the torpedo warhead ignited. Despite the fact that its bow was engulfed in flames and its crew had suffered heavy casualties, the Smith maintained its position in the screen and its after guns continued to fire at incoming planes. When it later plowed its bow into the South Dakota’s wake to put out its fires, Admiral Kinkaid exclaimed, “Damn nice seamanship!”⁴³

⁴¹ Mott, “Santa Cruz,” 25. Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 420-426; Vejtasa Report, 360-362; and VF-10 Pilots Report, 365-367. AA fire had also damaged Imajuku’s bomber.

⁴² Burns, Then There Was One, 122.

⁴³ Kinkaid later praised the Smith: “The magnificent performance of the Smith in [the] action gave a thrill of admiration to everyone who saw it.” Commanding Officer (Lt. Cdr. Hunter Wood, Jr.) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), “Action Report, U.S.S. Smith, October 26, 1942,” serial 00327 of 2 November

Five of Imajuku's torpedo bombers approached the Enterprise from the starboard side. Captain Hardison stood on Enterprise's bridge and watched the torpedo bombers as they quickly made their drops and turned away.

Captain Hardison . . . could see the parallel wakes of three torpedoes close together and moving fast, the middle one slightly ahead. It was a beautiful drop and if the Big E continued on course they would hit her amidships and rip out her insides. For a second the bridge watch was silent, poised. The quartermaster at the helm, the seaman at the engine order telegraph, the officer of the deck, waited for the skipper's command. At the end of that long second it came. "Right full rudder." "Right full rudder, sir!" The helmsman spun his wheel, pulling over the top and down hard with his right hand, letting it carry around to the bottom, then reaching up for another hold, getting his back into it, bending his knees a little with each downward pull. The gray pointer slid down the right side of the rudder and angle indicator mounted by the wheel until it stopped at 35 degrees right. . . . The Big E's stern began to slide across the sea to the left, and slowly the bow came right toward the bubbling echelon of the torpedo tracks, as though to meet them. The flight deck with its smoldering holes leaned down to port and, having done all that could be done, Captain Hardison stood on the port wing of the bridge to witness its success or failure. Admiral Kinkaid came silently to stand beside him. Now there were only a few hundred yards separating Enterprise and the three bubbling lines on the sea's surface. They seemed to increase speed as the bow swung onto them and then from the bridge they were out of sight under the port overhang of the turning deck as the captain ordered: "Rudder amidships" and the quartermaster spun the wheel down to port. The Big E straightened up from her turn and the three torpedoes, running straight and true, passed ten yards down her portside, parallel, at 40 knots.⁴⁴

Hardison turned to locate the remaining torpedo planes. The last five of Yusuvara's bombers approached Enterprise from dead astern. They swung wide to

1942, in Nimitz Report, 467-469; and Burns, Then There Was One, 123-124, 128-130. Fifty-seven of Smith's crew died in the explosion. Frank, Guadalcanal, 390-391.

⁴⁴ Quoted from Stafford, Big E, 196-197. One of these torpedoes struck the side of cruiser Portland at the end of its run, but the dud failed to explode. Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 425, footnote 38.

port as they tried to gain a favorable launching position against the carrier's port beam. Hardison kept the carrier in a starboard turn, pointing its stern at the planes. This prolonged the approach. The guns of the task force opened up on the circling planes and shot down three of them. The other two launched their torpedoes, but Hardison easily evaded them.⁴⁵

With the torpedo threat gone, Kinkaid turned his attention to the disabled Porter. Kinkaid's flag lieutenant brought a message to him from the destroyer Shaw, which was standing by Porter. Shaw was asking whether to sink the Porter or try to tow it into port. Kinkaid answered instantly, "Sink her." After all personnel were removed, Shaw opened fire on Porter. At 1210, the Porter rolled over on its side and sank stern first. Shaw left to catch up with Task Force 16.⁴⁶

Steaming three hundred miles to the northwest of Task Force 16, Vice Admiral Kondo had overheard the reports of heavy damage to the enemy carriers. At 1018 he had ordered his two battleships and four cruisers of the Advance Force and Rear Admiral Abe's two battleships and three cruisers of the Vanguard Force to join. They raced southeastward in an attempt to catch the wounded American forces in a surface engagement.

At the same time, Kondo had also detached the Junyo and two destroyers to join with Nagumo's forces. Since the attack on the Shokaku at 0930, the Zuiho, Shokaku, and Zuikaku had been retiring on a northwestwardly course. After

⁴⁵ Hardison Report, 205-206.

⁴⁶ Kinkaid Oral History, 207; Roberts Report, 449, 454, 459; and CruDiv5 Communication Log, 642. Kinkaid gave the order to sink Porter at 1046.

recovering aircraft, Kukuta turned the Junyo in the direction of Carrier Division 1 at 1045.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the planes of Junyo's first strike group came upon Task Force 17. Strike group leader Lieutenant Shiga sighted a burning enemy carrier and its escorts, but failed to spot the second carrier that he knew to be in the area. He knew they had been airborne for over two hours and had exhausted most of their fuel. The overcast skies also obscured their visibility. He decided to attack one of the cruisers in the force and radioed Kukuta this information. Just then, Kukuta received a new contact report from a reconnaissance plane that had sighted a second, undamaged carrier. Kukuta immediately relayed the message to Shiga and ordered him to attack the carrier. Shiga pressed on.

On Junyo, Kukuta waited tensely. Finally the radio crackled, "Enemy aircraft carrier in sight. . . . All planes go in!" Kukuta smiled at the news. The battle appeared to be in their favor. One enemy carrier was already damaged and smoking and a second one was being attacked. He turned to his staff, "Our men have become quite proficient. The ship functions as a team. Perhaps we shall compensate for Midway."⁴⁸

The ships of Task Force 16 regrouped from the successive attacks on Enterprise. They did not realize that enemy bombers were closing. Enterprise's radar

⁴⁷ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 430, 439; and Ugaki, Fading Victory, 249-250. Abe ordered the stricken Chikuma to retire with two destroyers at 1108.

⁴⁸ Okumiya, Zero!, 264-265.

had temporarily gone out after the torpedo attack. Some of the other ships in the force picked up bogies to the west but assumed that they were friendly planes.

In their final approach, Shiga's seventeen dive-bombers found the task force steaming through a rainsquall, with the cloud base at only 500 to 1500 feet. At 1121 they pushed through the low, thick clouds and dove on several ships of the task force. The low cloud cover forced them to dive at shallow angles to keep their target in sight with the reduced visibility. It also hindered the American gunners, who could not see the bombers until the last few seconds of their dive.

Nine of the seventeen dive-bombers made runs at Enterprise. AA fire shot down the first three, but at 1124 the carrier shook violently from a near miss. The bomb glanced off the starboard hull forward and exploded below the waterline, dishing in the side plating and opening two voids to the sea. The near miss also jammed the forward elevator in the up position.⁴⁹

The reduced visibility spread the attack out to several other ships in the formation. At 1125 nine dive-bombers simultaneously descended on the battleship South Dakota and the two cruisers Portland and San Juan. Six Vals targeted the San Juan, peppering the light cruiser with several near misses on both sides of the ship. Then at 1128 a bomb pierced the fantail deck, penetrated the second and third decks, and exploded underneath the keel. The rudder jammed hard right and for thirteen minutes the ship turned out of control in tight circles.

⁴⁹ Commanding Officer (Capt. J.E. Maher) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action, U.S.S. San Juan- October 26, 1942," serial 004 of 31 October 1942, in Nimitz Report, 445-446 (hereafter cited as Maher Report); Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; Hardison Report, 206; Frank, Guadalcanal, 391-392; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 431.

At the same moment several dive bombers attacked South Dakota. After several near misses, one bomb struck directly atop the forward 16-inch armored turret. The bomb caused little damage to the ship and the turret crew was actually unaware that a bomb had exploded just above them. But bomb fragments sprayed the ship's superstructure, wounding fifty of its crew. One fragment struck commanding officer Captain Thomas L. Gatch, who was standing outside the armored conning tower, in the neck and opened up his jugular vein. Quick action by the helmsman, who applied pressure until the corpsman arrived, saved his life.⁵⁰

The battle over Task Force 16 had ended. Empty shell casings were piled up around the guns and a reek of cordite pervaded the carrier. Mott noted that there was "a feeling of concussion from the gunfire and the bombs." The Enterprise had fired 400 rounds of five-inch shells, 4000 rounds of 40mm shells, and 46,000 rounds of 20mm shells during the action. Eugene Burns went below to the wardroom where the second bomb had hit. "I saw horribly burned faces . . . There was a mixed smell of rags and flesh and Foamite . . . The men worked silently."⁵¹

There was no break for the flight deck crew. Planes from both carriers with dry fuel tanks had been desperately circling the carrier waiting to land. At 1130 the

⁵⁰ Maher Report, 440-441, 446; Commander Cruisers, Task Force Sixteen (RADM. Mahon S. Tisdale) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "Report of Action- October 26, 1942," serial 028 of 29 October 1942, in Nimitz Report, 116-117; Hammel, Guadalcanal, 446-447; Okumiya, Zero!, 269-270; Capt. Erling H. Hustvedt, interview by Donald R. Lennon, 22 November 1985, Collection Number OH80, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 32; and James V. Claypool and Carl Wiegman, God On a Battleground (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1951), 5. Hustvedt was a junior officer in the Fire Control Division on South Dakota; Claypool was South Dakota's chaplain.

⁵¹ First quote: Mott, "Santa Cruz," 25; second quote: Burns, Then There Was One, 124.

Enterprise turned into the wind with its forward elevator stuck in the up position. The Landing Signal Officers started landing Hornet and Enterprise planes indiscriminately at 1139. As the planes came in, the flight deck filled farther and farther aft with fewer arresting wires available. They continued landing plane after plane until only one arresting wire was left. LSO Lieutenant Robin M. Lindsey was then ordered to stop, but he ignored the order. More planes landed flawlessly. When officers up in Air Operations complained to John Crommelin, he responded, "Leave the kid alone, he's hot." Lindsey brought in the last ten planes with that one wire. The last plane landed at 1222. The crew chocked the fighter right where it had landed, with the tail of the plane ahead of it just a few feet away. The two LSOs had achieved a remarkable feat: they had landed forty-seven planes in shortened landing areas without a single accident. Only five F4Fs had to ditch in the sea. Now the carrier's flight deck temporarily closed down to re-spot the deck and strike the SBDs below.

Despite the excellent job of Enterprise's flight deck crew, twenty-one TBFs still waited aloft. At 1251 the Enterprise launched a new combat air patrol of twenty-five fighters to help clear the deck. The Avengers continued to wait. Finally, at 1318 the carrier opened its deck again. Ten TBFs made landings. In the meantime, eight others were forced to make water landings. Thirteen SBDs were later sent to Espiritu Santo to clear more room on the deck.⁵²

⁵² Enterprise Log Book, 26 October 1942; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 441-445; Hardison Report, 206-207; and Kinkaid Report, 153. Crommelin quote: James H. Belote and William H. Belote, Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces During World War II (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 176-177.

While Hardison attended to recovering aircraft after the last attack, Kinkaid accessed the strategic picture. He knew that Enterprise was damaged but by no means crippled. Hornet was dead in the water over the horizon. He knew his strike groups had damaged two enemy carriers, and suspected that there were still one or two more in the area. He realized that Enterprise had to retire or he would risk losing it. Hornet would have to fend for itself. At 1135 Kinkaid radioed Murray and Halsey: "I am proceeding southeastward toward Roses [Efate]. When ready proceed in the same direction."⁵³

Five minutes later Halsey received the first real information on the state of the Hornet. Rear Admiral Howard H. Good, commander of the cruiser force protecting Hornet, sent a dispatch at 1140: "Hornet attacked by Orange [Japanese] carrier planes at 0911L . . . Several bomb hits one or more torpedo hits. Now dead in the water and burning somewhat. Northampton preparing take in tow. Have lost touch with Kinkaid."⁵⁴

Since 0930 efforts had been underway to save Hornet. The destroyers Morris and Russell had come alongside the carrier and passed water hoses to fight the fires, as the carrier still had no water pressure. Hundreds of men on board Hornet had

⁵³ Kinkaid withdrawal, Kinkaid Report, 153; Kinkaid dispatch, Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 440. Kinkaid later received criticism from many in the navy who believed that he had abandoned Hornet. Vice Admiral John Towers blamed Kinkaid for the loss of the Hornet throughout the war. Kinkaid's biographer, Gerald Wheeler, defended Kinkaid's withdrawal: "Perhaps some of Flatley's Wildcats could have prevented that last torpedo from being launched into Hornet [elaborated below], but it was still a stricken and powerless vessel awaiting a tow, and attempting to salvage it . . . would have endangered the remaining ships of both task forces." Gerald E. Wheeler, Kinkaid of the Seventh Fleet: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, U.S. Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996) 282; 286.

formed bucket brigades. They lowered buckets over the side, hoisted them up, and passed them along until they had a steady stream on the fire. By 1000 most of the fires were under control.

When it became apparent that the Hornet would not regain power, Murray had ordered the cruiser Northampton to take Hornet in tow. At 1035 the Northampton had come close aboard the carrier's port bow and had cast a towing cable to the men on the carrier's forecastle. They secured the line. At 1110 the Northampton took a light strain, and the carrier began moving ahead slowly. By 1140 the carrier was moving along at three to four knots. Then the towline broke. It could not be retrieved because the Hornet had no power to pull the heavy line back up to the forecastle.

Realizing that he could not exercise command of Task Force 17 from the crippled carrier, Murray transferred to the cruiser Pensacola with part of his staff. He left by motor whaleboat at 1145.

At Combined Fleet headquarters in Truk, Yamamoto's staff critically appraised the situation. The Junyo and its two destroyers caught up with the Zuikaku, Shokaku, and Zuiho at 1223. The Junyo turned on a parallel course, retiring with Carrier Division 1 towards the northwestward. In Truk, Ugaki remarked: "Dazed by small damage, the main body of the task force and the Second CV Division were withdrawing to the northwest. If left under way as they were, they would be more

⁵⁴ Quoted from Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 440. The dispatch does not appear in SoPac War Diary or CinCPac Command Summary.

than three hundred miles away from the enemy and eventually miss him.” So the Combined Fleet staff sent Nagumo and Kakuta a strictly worded order to turn around and attack the enemy.⁵⁵ Nagumo detached the Zuikaku and Junyo southward. Unable to transfer to Zuikaku, Nagumo remained on the retiring Shokaku and ordered Kakuta to take command of the two undamaged carriers.

At 1306 Junyo launched its second strike of seven Kates and eight Zeros led by Lieutenant Irikiin Yoshiaki. Nearby, the Zuikaku was readying its follow-up strike.⁵⁶ Yamamoto hoped that these strike groups would deliver the fatal blow against the wounded, retreating enemy.

On Enterprise, Kinkaid sent his first detailed report to Halsey at 1300: “Two enemy CVs damaged. Enterprise no serious damage but deck immobilized due to Hornet planes. Am retiring southeastward. Will fly excess planes to Espiritu Santo. Unable to give Hornet fighter coverage.” Ten minutes later, Kinkaid sent another dispatch to Halsey. He was receiving more information on the enemy’s damage from the returning air crews.

One carrier of Shokaku class hit by 3 – 1000 pounders. Other carrier smoking and being attacked by B17s in position latitude 07°05’S longitude 163°56’. Mogami CA hit by 2 – 1000 pound bombs. 1 hit and 2 near misses on BB. Enterprise attacked 4 times. No serious damage. Flight deck immobilized by portion of Hornet group. Will endeavor to send extra planes to Espiritu Santo.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ugaki, Fading Victory, 249-250.

⁵⁶ Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 132-133; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 439-440, 446; Frank, Guadalcanal, 393-395; and Okumiya, Zero!, 260.

⁵⁷ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 260200 of October 1942 and CTF 61 to ComSoPac 260210 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 60-61.

Meanwhile, salvage operations continued on and around the Hornet. The crew of the Hornet managed to drag a second towline, this one an enormous two-inch cable, all the way from the after elevator pit to the forecastle. By 1330 the line had been passed to and secured on Northampton. The cruiser started to take a strain on the cable, and increased the strain until the carrier was making a steady three knots.⁵⁸

A half hour passed and Northampton continued to tow Hornet. On board Pensacola, Murray reported to Halsey: "Position latitude 09°17' longitude 167°22', course 135, speed 6 – Hornet in tow. No aircraft. Essential air coverage be provided destination Tongatabu."⁵⁹ Halsey did not respond.

Another hour passed and Hornet continued southeastwardly under tow. At 1457 Northampton suddenly picked up several bogies on its radar and warned the rest of the task force. Murray ordered the ships of Task Force 17 to form a tight, protective, circular screen.

Lieutenant Irikiin's fifteen-plane strike group had initially searched to the northwest of Task Force 17. When Irikiin turned southward, he spotted a damaged enemy carrier with a distinct list.

At 1520 the seven torpedo bombers entered a fast, weaving glide against Hornet's starboard side. Northampton immediately cast off and turned hard to port. The Kates pressed in. Lieutenant Commander Dodson sighted one approaching low

⁵⁸ Soucek Report, 34; Mason Report, 25; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; and Mason, "Gallant Lady," 104.

⁵⁹ CTF 17 to ComSoPac 260300 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 61.

over the water: "The torpedo plane came straight in to about 1500 yards and dropped his torpedo then turned away toward the ship's bow. This torpedo ran straight, hot and normal, striking the ship under the island." It struck at 1523. On the bridge, the explosion knocked Captain Mason and several others to their knees. Down in the bowels of the carrier, Commander Creehan was working with a repair party. He had the unforgettable experience of witnessing a torpedo explosion from inside a ship:

A sickly green flash momentarily lighted the scullery department . . . This was preceded by a thud so deceptive as to almost make one believe that the torpedo had struck the port side. Immediately following the flash, a hissing sound as of escaping air was heard followed by a dull rumbling noise. The deck on the port side seemed to crack open and a geyser of fuel oil which quickly reached a depth of two feet swept all personnel at Repair V off their feet and flung them headlong down the sloping decks of Repair V compartment to the starboard side.⁶⁰

The carrier immediately took a more pronounced list to 14 ½ degrees. Irikiin had delivered the coup de grâce to Hornet. The torpedo hit eliminated any possibility of the carrier moving under its own power. Captain Mason ordered the crew to prepare to abandon ship.

On board the carrier Junyo, still racing southward toward the enemy, lookouts began sighting returning planes from the first strike. Lieutenant Commander Okumiya watched from the bridge:

We searched the sky with apprehension. There were only a few planes in the air in comparison to the number launched several hours before. We could see only five or six dive-bombers. The planes lurched and staggered onto the deck, every single fighter and bomber bullet-holed.

⁶⁰ First quote: Dodson Report, 91; Mason account: Mason, "Gallant Lady," 105; second quote: Creehan Report, 55. Creehan and the other men escaped through a scuttle from the third to second deck.

Some planes were literally flying sieves. As the pilots climbed wearily from their cramped cockpits they told of unbelievable opposition, of skies choked with anti-aircraft shell bursts and tracers.⁶¹

Kukuta immediately ordered another strike composed of the remnants of the first strike group. They could only muster a strike of ten still-operable planes. Junyo launched its third and final strike of four Vals and six Zeros at 1535. Lieutenant Shiga once again led the strike group.⁶²

As the planes of Junyo's final strike were launching, the first planes of Zuikaku's final strike arrived over Task Force 17. At 1540 two Val dive-bombers dove on the carrier and shook the ship violently with a near miss. The list increased to 18 degrees. A reluctant Captain Mason gave the order for all hands to abandon ship.

The crew left the ship in a quiet and orderly manner. With life jackets on, they descended down knotted lines on the port side of the ship and entered the water. Destroyers closed in to begin the time-consuming task of picking them up.

Mason left the bridge at 1550 and arrived on the flight deck just in time to witness the attack by the rest of Zuikaku's strike group. Executing a horizontal bombing attack at 8000 feet, six Kate bombers in a perfect closed vee formation came out of the clouds and dropped their 800-kilogram bombs on the Hornet. Floating in the water, Commander Lawrence Bean, one of the ship's doctors, spotted the large bombs. They "seemed to take a long time to descend. Five just missed the ship on

⁶¹ Okumiya, Zero!, 265.

⁶² Ibid., 265-268; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 446-447; and Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 133. See Okumiya for more detail on the preparations for and personalities of the third strike.

the far side from us and one hit a five-inch gun platform and sent the gun up in the air as if it was a matchstick. Suddenly the force of the explosion hit us and the men were thrown out of the water but no harm was done."⁶³ The bomb hit contributed little to the damage of the carrier.

On board the withdrawing Enterprise, Kinkaid realized that his carrier had taken more punishment than he originally thought. Years later he explained what happened:

[The bombs] were pretty bad hits, and on the bridge we didn't even know it. We saw that plane blown off the deck, but when the action was over I actually made a report to Halsey that the Japs had left, the action was over, and the Enterprise was undamaged. Of course I told him what had happened to the Hornet. But about an hour later, why, I had to change that, and tell him what damage we did have.⁶⁴

At 1540 Kinkaid reported to Halsey:

My 260200. Damage Enterprise more extensive. 2 bomb hits. Number 1 elevator out of commission. Can operate reduced number of planes. More details later. South Dakota bomb hit on turret 1. Portland steering gear unreliable. San Juan two small compartments flooded. Porter sunk. Other DDs damaged. Request tanker latitude 14S, longitude 17E soon as practicable.

⁶³ Cdr. Lawrence L. Bean, "Death of the Hornet" in The Air Forces Reader (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944), 329. Sources for the second Junyo strike and the final Zuikaku strike: Mason Report, 25-26; Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942; Creehan Report, 55-56; Soucek Report, 34-35; Mason, "Gallant Lady," 104-106; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 447-448; CruDiv5 Chronological Log, 636; and CruDiv5 Communication Log, 643.

⁶⁴ Kinkaid Oral History, 205.

Halsey must have groaned when he received the dispatch. It became evident to him that the battle had turned against them. He ordered all task force commanders in the SoPac area to "retire to southward. More later."⁶⁵

At Pearl Harbor, Admiral Nimitz was monitoring the events of the battle as well. When a signal from Ugaki to Kondo ordering the capture of Hornet was decrypted, followed by reports from direction-finder stations that the Japanese surface fleet was closing in on the disabled carrier, Nimitz passed the intelligence on to Halsey. Halsey acted quickly, sending Kinkaid an urgent dispatch: "Sink Hornet with torpedoes." Kinkaid relayed the order to Murray. At 1607 Murray ordered the destroyer Mustin to "torpedo Hornet as soon as all personnel are picked up."⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the evacuation of the Hornet was nearly complete. Captain Mason was the last person to abandon ship. The last entry in Hornet's logbook states, "1627 Commanding Officer left the ship after conducting personal inspection of island structure and flight and hanger deck areas."⁶⁷ Mason left behind 118 dead.

All but two rafts and two boatloads of men had been rescued by the destroyers when Shiga's strike group discovered Task Force 17. The four dive-bombers and six Zeros constituted the Combined Fleet's eighth and final strike against the American carriers. At 1702 the four Vals dove on the stationary Hornet. One bomb pierced the

⁶⁵ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 260440 of October 1942 and ComSoPac to All TF Coms SoPac, ComSoWestPacFor 260450 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 62.

⁶⁶ Winton, Ultra in the Pacific, 88; Potter, Nimitz, 246; Potter, Bull Halsey, 183; Ashford Oral History, 73; and Mason Report, 37.

⁶⁷ Hornet Log Book, 26 October 1942. For more personal details on Mason leaving the ship, see Mason, "Gallant Lady," 105-106.

flight deck and exploded on the hanger deck, sparking a large fire. The rest missed. Packed in a motor whaleboat, Creehan watched one dive-bomber "fly over our boat at about 300 feet weaving and banking as he managed to escape the fire of the entire screen."⁶⁸ All four dive-bombers escaped safely.

When the destroyers had picked up all of the survivors, the Mustin closed in at 1740 to complete the Hornet's demise. The rest of the task force began a high-speed retirement eastward. The Mustin fired eight torpedoes at the Hornet; only three exploded. The carrier remained afloat. At 1831 the Mustin informed Murray, "Have fired all torpedoes, no luck yet." Murray responded, "Detail one of your boys to join you and complete job immediately." The destroyer Anderson detached from Task Force 17. Half an hour later it fired eight torpedoes at Hornet; six struck the carrier. The Hornet still refused to sink.

The Mustin and Anderson turned to their five-inch guns. In the next half hour they pumped 300 rounds into the Hornet. The carrier was aflame and exploding from stem to stern, but it still remained afloat. Japanese scout planes circled overhead and observed and reported the events below. When radar detected Japanese surface forces closing from the west, the two destroyers departed at 2036. Twenty-four minutes later two Japanese destroyers came upon the burning derelict, followed by other ships of Kondo's force. To the north on Junyo's bridge, Okumiya watched the red glow lighting the horizon. Realizing that the enemy carrier, now listing 45

⁶⁸ Creehan Report, 56; Soucek Report, 35; and Mason Report, 27.

degrees, was hopeless, Kondo ordered his destroyers to finish it off. The destroyers fired four more torpedoes into the carrier's side. The Hornet finally disappeared under the surface at 0130.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Mason Report, 27, 37; CruDiv5 Communication Log, 645-646; Ugaki, Fading Victory, 251-252; Okumiya, Zero!, 270-272; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 449-450; and Frank, Guadalcanal, 398-399.

CHAPTER 4

“AERIAL WARFARE IS A BATTLE OF ATTRITION”

AFTERMATH

After the Hornet sank in the early morning of 27 October, the ships of the Advance Force and Vanguard Force remained in the area. Hoping to engage the wounded American forces, the Japanese surface fleet launched searches at dawn. When the search planes failed to locate the enemy, Yamamoto ordered a general retirement to Truk. Many ships were critically low on fuel.

Pursuant to Halsey's order, the ships of Task Forces 16 and 17 continued to withdraw southward toward Noumea. Late in the morning Kinkaid informed Halsey that the Enterprise, Portland, San Juan, Smith, and Maury needed to proceed to port for damage assessment and repair. He also stated that the vessels of Task Force 17 had caught up with Task Force 16 and were about to join.¹ Task Force 61 arrived in Noumea three days later.

Just after midnight on 27 October, Combined Fleet headquarters issued “Combined Fleet Summary Action Report No. 1”:

The Combined Fleet, operating in the seas near the Solomons, engaged the enemy fleet, which consisted of more than twenty ships, including four carriers, four battleships, and cruisers and destroyers in the sea north of Santa Cruz in the early morning of the 26th. All of the enemy carriers were destroyed by 2000, driving the enemy into confusion. We are now chasing the remnant with the whole strength of our night assault force.²

¹ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 270045 of October 1942, CinCPac Command Summary, 962. There is no mention of the damage to the destroyer Mahan, which collided with the South Dakota during retirement.

² Ugaki, Fading Victory, 252.

On the way back to Truk, Nagumo called a special conference on board Zuikaku to reevaluate the battle. Staff officers and commanders debated over the number of enemy carriers that had been present. The presence of the first carrier was confirmed when they had witnessed the Hornet's demise. Captured aircrews identified a second enemy carrier as the Enterprise. Japanese radio intelligence concluded that a third carrier was present after eavesdropping on American radio frequencies. They had correctly identified "blue base" (Hornet) and "reaper base" (Enterprise), but "red base" (Enterprise's old call sign, called out accidentally by pilots and FDOs during the battle) fooled them into believing that a third carrier participated in the battle. Returning Japanese pilots reported that four enemy carriers were present. With the heavy losses among the squadron commanders, the staff officers were relying on reports from younger officers, who "were prone to allow the excitement of battle to color their observations." Despite these reports, the officers on board Zuikaku reduced the enemy carrier strength from four to three carriers. Nagumo reported to Yamamoto in Truk that the enemy had lost three carriers, one battleship, two cruisers, and one destroyer.³

The day after the battle, the United States Navy released a statement to the press:

On October 26th, a Pacific Fleet carrier Task Force exchanged air attacks with strong enemy forces northeast of Guadalcanal. The U.S.S. Porter (destroyer) was sunk by enemy action and one of our aircraft carriers was severely damaged. Other U.S. vessels have reported lesser damage. Two enemy aircraft carriers were damaged in this action, the details of which are still incomplete.

³ Quote: Okumiya, Zero!, 275. Ibid., 273-275; Ugaki, Fading Victory, 255; Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 453-454; and Frank, Guadalcanal, 399-400.

The navy announced four days later that the “severely damaged carrier” subsequently sank.⁴

Once all reports had been submitted, Nimitz’s CinCPac staff determined enemy losses. They concluded that American forces did not sink any enemy ships, but did damage two enemy carriers, one battleship, three cruisers, and one light cruiser.⁵

Actual ship losses to both combatants reveal that the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands was a tactical defeat for the U.S. Navy. The Americans lost the carrier Hornet and the destroyer Porter, while the carrier Enterprise, battleship South Dakota, light cruiser San Juan, and destroyers Smith and Mahan sustained damage. The Japanese lost no ships, although the carriers Shokaku and Zuiho, cruiser Chikuma, and destroyer Teruzuki were damaged.⁶

American repairmen worked feverishly on the damaged ships at anchor in Noumea. They patched up Enterprise and South Dakota well enough that both participated in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal (13-15 November 1942). The Enterprise contributed greatly to the outcome of the battle.

⁴ U.S. Dept. of the Navy, Navy Communiques 1-300 and Pertinent Press Releases December 10, 1941 to March 5, 1943 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 117, 120; and “Chart Room Collection of Dispatches and Related Records, President’s Summary – Office of War Information Report,” Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations – Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, Record Group 38, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 26 October 1942, 2.

⁵ Nimitz Report, 2.

⁶ A PBY from Espiritu Santo successfully attacked the Teruzuki on the early morning of 27 October.

On 2 November the damaged Shokaku, Zuiho, and Chikuma pulled out of Truk lagoon and headed for Japan. Surprisingly, the Zuikaku left for Japan two days later.⁷ The carrier was undamaged, but the Combined Fleet sent it home to reestablish the air arm of Carrier Division 1.

The ships remained in Japan for the rest of the year. A repaired Zuiho, joined by Zuikaku, did not leave the Inland Sea until 17 January 1943. Workers did not complete Shokaku's repairs until February. With Hiyo anchored at Truk with engine problems for all of November, and Zuikaku, Shokaku and Zuiho in Japan, Junyo was the last remaining carrier operating in the Solomon Islands area.⁸ Looking back at the battle in 1945, Kinkaid surmised: "The Battle of Santa Cruz had far reaching results. Because of the destruction of the air groups, no enemy carriers took part in the actions of 13-15 November which constituted the last effort of the Japs to recover Guadalcanal."⁹

Aircraft losses were heavy on both sides. Between 25-27 October, the U.S. Navy lost eighty aircraft, or 46 percent of the aircraft on board Enterprise and Hornet. The Combined Fleet lost ninety-nine aircraft, or 49 percent of the aircraft on board Shokaku, Zuikaku, Zuiho, and Junyo.¹⁰

⁷ Ugaki, Fading Victory, 256-257.

⁸ Hata Ikuhiko and Izawa Yasuho, Japanese Naval Aces and Fighter Units in World War II (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 49; and Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 258, note 11.

⁹ Kinkaid Narrative, 902.

¹⁰ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 454-455. The author cross-checked the statistics with Frank, Guadalcanal, 400-401. Frank's numbers varied slightly: 81 and 97, respectively.

Losses in a more valuable commodity, pilots and aircrew, reveal a different picture. The U.S. Navy came out of the battle with light losses in pilots and aircrew:¹¹

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	14	63	22%
Dive-bombers	2	94	2%
Torpedo bombers	10	78	13%
Total	26	235	11%

The Combined Fleet suffered devastating losses:¹²

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	16	80	20%
Dive-bombers	64	122	53%
Torpedo bombers	68	171	40%
Total	148	373	40%

Among the Japanese aviators killed in the battle were many experienced veterans who had been fighting since the Pearl Harbor attack: four fighter pilots, twenty-seven dive-bomber aircrew, and thirty-one torpedo bomber aircrew.¹³

A 40 percent loss in Japanese aircrews is even more shocking when one realizes the value of the Japanese aviator to the Combined Fleet. The Japanese pilot was the product of the most selective and the most intense pilot-training program of its era. In 1937 the Imperial Navy accepted only 70 of 1,500 candidates for one of its six pilot-

¹¹ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 456; Frank, Guadalcanal, 376-377, 401. Frank stated that a total of 24 aircrew were lost.

¹² Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 28 March 1995. They are based on the original Japanese flight schedules for the battle and Sawruk's research into the fate of each Japanese airman. "Aircrew Prior" numbers from Frank, Guadalcanal, 374-375. Mr. Sawruk is a close collaborator with John Lundstrom in researching Pacific War aviation. Richard Frank described Sawruk as "a researcher par excellence who has discovered and explored previously overlooked documentary source material and is an expert in naval aircraft deployment, operations and losses. . . . He has also filled large voids in the record on many points." The author cross-checked his statistics with Frank, Guadalcanal, 374-375, 400, 602; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 454.

¹³ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 454, footnote 42.

training classes; only 25 in the class graduated as pilots.¹⁴ By 1942, the Japanese aviator, a veteran of the war in China, the Pearl Harbor attack, various raids conducted in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and Eastern Solomons, had years of combat experience. At the beginning of the war the Imperial Navy wielded an elite force of 3,500 well-seasoned and superbly trained pilots. The Combined Fleet selected the best 600 pilots from this group for its carrier forces.¹⁵ In 1942 the Japanese carrier pilot was unquestionably the best in the world.

Yet many American participants in the battle commented that the Japanese aviators were less skilled than in previous battles. In his action report for Santa Cruz, Nimitz stated: "In these attacks Japanese pilots as a whole were not as resolute or skilled as in previous actions. Less than half the dive bombers made steep dives, a glide of 45° or less being characteristic of many of the attacks."¹⁶ The Americans' assertions were based upon their observation that the Japanese dive-bombers did not make steep dives on the American carriers. The extremely low cloud cover (2,000 to 5,000 feet) that day, not inexperience, forced the Japanese pilots to make shallow dives. Lt. Cdr. Elias B. Mott, Enterprise's Assistant Gunnery Officer, revealed a keen sense of judgment when he

¹⁴ This figure (25 of 70) was typical; usually only one-third of a Japanese pilot-training class graduated. In contrast, the U.S. Navy Aviation Cadet Program at Pensacola usually graduated two-thirds of its classes. Belote, Titans of the Seas, 26-27; John B. Lundstrom, The First Team: Pacific Naval Air Combat from Pearl Harbor to Midway (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 454-456; Hammel, Guadalcanal, 56-57; and Miller, Cactus Air Force, 4.

¹⁵ The statement regarding Combined Fleet selecting the 600 best pilots is from Frank, Guadalcanal, 611.

¹⁶ Kinkaid Report, 14.

remarked after the battle, "The [Japanese] pilots were good. They were the veterans of the Pearl Harbor attack and they bore right down towards a low drop point."¹⁷

Accentuating the aircrew losses at Santa Cruz were the deaths of most of the squadron and group leaders. Twenty-three section, division, squadron, and group leaders¹⁸ died in the battle. Two of the three dive-bomber squadron leaders and three of the four torpedo squadron leaders died. In contrast, the U.S. Navy only lost four section leaders and one squadron leader.¹⁹ The Combined Fleet sorely missed these leaders, especially the superb Murata, in the following months of fighting.

The depletion of the core of elite Japanese aviators becomes more evident when one considers the 40 percent loss of aviators at Santa Cruz as the culmination of a succession of aircrew losses that started with the Pearl Harbor attack. Japanese aircrew losses were heavier than one would expect at Pearl Harbor:²⁰

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	9	78	12%
Dive-bombers	30	258	12%
Torpedo bombers	22	429	5%
Total	61	765	8%

¹⁷ Mott, "The Battles of Santa Cruz," 25.

¹⁸ This figure includes both the pilots and their accompanying aircrew.

¹⁹ Frank, Guadalcanal, 400-401; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 454, 456.

²⁰ Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 21 April 1995. The author cross-checked Mr. Sawruk's numbers with Dull, Imperial Japanese Navy, 18.

The U.S. Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy waged three major carrier battles between the Pearl Harbor attack and the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. At the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 7-8) the Combined Fleet lost the following aircrew:²¹

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	7	49	14%
Dive-bombers	24	72	33%
Torpedo bombers	58	126	46%
Total	89	247	36%

Japanese aircrew losses at the Battle of Midway (June 4-7) were surprisingly light, considering that four Japanese fleet carriers were sunk:²²

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	23	76	30%
Dive-bombers	35	145	24%
Torpedo bombers	44	216	20%
Total	102	437	23%

The light aircrew casualties at Midway can be attributed to the fact that most of the Japanese aviators from Kaga, Agaki, Siryu, and Hiryu jumped overboard before their carriers sank. The escorting destroyers rescued them from the water.²³ As part of a

²¹ Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 21 April 1995. "Aircrew Prior" numbers from Lundstrom, First Team, 188.

²² Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 16 March 1995. The author cross-checked Mr. Sawruk's numbers with Lundstrom, First Team, 331.

²³ U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Interrogations of Japanese Officials, Vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), interrogations of Cdr. Okumiya Masatake, 79 (hereafter cited as Okumiya Interrogation); Capt. Ohmae Toshikazu, 176 (hereafter cited as Ohmae Interrogation); and Gordon W. Prange, Miracle at Midway (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 311. Many historians erroneously assumed that since the Combined Fleet lost four carriers, that it had also lost most of its aviators. For instance, in Imperial Japanese Navy, 175, 184, Paul Dull stated "Japanese losses were great: about 2,200 [ship] crewman lost their lives, as did most of the crack pilots of the 234 planes lost. . . . Midway had decimated Japanese carrier-based air power." Many other historians made the same error: Ronald H. Spector, Eagle Against the Sun: The American War With Japan (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 175-176; B. H. Liddell Hart, History of Second World War (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 353; and John Toland, The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire (New York: Random

massive reorganization of the Combined Fleet on 14 July,²⁴ the surviving Midway pilots were reassigned to the existing carriers of the Combined Fleet: Shokaku, Zuikaku, Zuiho, Junyo, Hiyo, and Ryujo.²⁵

In the Battle of the Eastern Solomons (August 24), the Combined Fleet suffered the following aircrew losses:²⁶

Aircraft Type:	Aircrew Losses:	Aircrew Prior:	Percentage Lost:
Fighters	7	74	10%
Dive-bombers	44	108	41%
Torpedo bombers	10	135	7%
Total	61	317	19%

As the fighting continued through the first year of the war, the losses in aviators (pilots and aircrew) began to mount: from 61 at Pearl Harbor to 89 at Coral Sea, then 102 at Midway to 61 at Eastern Solomons, and culminating with 148 at Santa Cruz. A total of 461 of the Imperial Japanese Navy's best aviators died in the first five carrier battles of the Pacific war. Of the 461 aviators, 363 were Pearl Harbor veterans. More specifically, 215 pilots lost their lives. Two hundred fifteen of the six hundred first-rate carrier

House, 1970), 426. Samuel Eliot Morison was one of the exceptions: "[Yamamoto] had lost all of his fast carriers together with their entire complement of planes, about 250 in number," then added in a footnote, "This does not necessarily include the aviators . . ." RADM. Samuel Eliot Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol. 4, Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942 - August 1942 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 139-140.

²⁴ The Zuiho joined the Fifth Carrier Division of the Zuikaku and Shokaku to form the new First Carrier Division, and the old Fourth Carrier Division of Junyo, Hiyo, and Ryujo became the new Second Carrier Division.

²⁵ Hata and Izawa, Japanese Naval Aces, 49; and Okumiya Interrogation, 79.

²⁶ Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letter to author, 21 April 1995. "Aircrew Prior" numbers from Frank, Guadalcanal, 167-168; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 106. The author cross-checked Mr. Sawruk's statistics with Frank, Guadalcanal, 167-168, 192-193, 602; and Lundstrom First Team and Guadalcanal, 106.

pilots—more than one-third—were dead.²⁷ If one adds the 708 Japanese aircrew losses from land-based naval units who participated in the air war over Guadalcanal, the total rises to a staggering 1169 aviators.²⁸

One week after the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Captain Hara Tameichi visited Admiral Nagumo, who had just been relieved as Commander in Chief of the Third Fleet. A solemn Nagumo told Hara: "Damage to our ships was minor at Santa Cruz, but we lost a number of our best pilots and flight leaders. Just between us, Hara, this battle was a tactical win, but a shattering strategic loss for Japan."²⁹

The Americans, too, sensed a change in the winds. One day after the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Nimitz's staff at CinCPac headquarters noted: "No report of enemy plane losses has been received but they must have been very heavy. If the percentage of loss approaches that of previous recent engagements (and it should as we have been loading our ships with AA), the three enemy carriers thought to have been in the battle will be unable to do much more damage soon."³⁰ CinCPac staff's hunch proved to be entirely correct. Several months later Nimitz submitted his final post-action report for the

²⁷ Statistics from Mr. James Sawruk, letters to author, 16 March 1995, 28 March 1995, and 21 April 1995.

²⁸ Frank, Guadalcanal, 761-763. The official Japanese sources do not specify how many aviators of the 25th Air Flotilla in Rabaul, composed entirely of naval aviators, were lost. Frank's statistics are based upon research by Sawruk, Lundstrom, and Frank, and corroborated in Ugaki, Fading Victory, 317. Frank's statistics are conservative.

²⁹ Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, 134-135. Ugaki corroborated the severe damage to the naval air arm in his diary, writing on 28 October that the Emperor "regretted the loss of 'many capable fliers,'" and on 31 October that the Combined Fleet staff was making "plans for replenishing the reduced air strength." Ugaki, Fading Victory, 253, 256. It is significant to point out that this is the first time in the diary that Ugaki mentions losses in pilots.

³⁰ Command Summary, 1104.

battle. In it he concluded: "We turned back the Japanese again in their offensive to regain Guadalcanal, and shattered their carrier air strength on the eve of the critical days of mid-November."³¹ The era in which superior Japanese aviators dominated the Pacific skies had come to an end on 26 October 1942. The United States and Japan would not fight another carrier battle in the war on an even playing field.

Why had the U.S. Navy damaged the Japanese Navy air arm so severely and so quickly? In the 1930s the Imperial Japanese Navy had chosen a policy of developing and then utilizing a highly-skilled, yet small, force of naval aviators. By 1941 there were 3,500 pilots in the navy. In contrast, there were 6,500 pilots in the U.S. Navy. As war with the United States quickly approached, the Japanese Navy realized that it lacked pilots. In August 1941 it expanded its pilot training program with the goal of eventually producing 15,000 naval pilots.³² But it was too late.

In addition, the Imperial Japanese Navy's organizational structure did not provide the flexibility to overcome heavy losses in its air groups. The Japanese air group was an inseparable part of the carrier. The pilots and other aircrew and the armorers, mechanics, and other ground crew joined the rest of the carrier's crew to form a cohesive unit. Unlike its American counterpart, the air group could not be pulled from the carrier when it suffered heavy losses and be replaced by a reserve air group. After the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, the Combined Fleet sent the Zuikaku home to Japan for repairs. The

³¹ Nimitz Report, 18. Halsey and Kinkaid echoed Nimitz's conclusion at later occasions. See Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 122; and Radm. Thomas C. Kinkaid, "South Pacific, Aleutians and Seventh Fleet-Narrative Account," Forces File, Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 1945, 902.

³² Lundstrom, First Team, 452-455; Hammel, Guadalcanal, 55-57.

ship itself was undamaged, yet the Japanese Navy considered Zuikaku to be crippled because a substantial part of its air group had been destroyed.³³

The Japanese pilot training program simply could not keep up with the heavy attrition in aircrew that had occurred in the first year of fighting. It took between thirteen and fifteen months for a pilot candidate to complete basic aviation training. Then the new pilots underwent joint aviation training, where they were assigned to active land-based and carrier-based groups. The rookie pilots were seasoned slowly with the veterans. The navy estimated that it took a full year of joint aviation training to qualify the new pilots as fully capable pilots. Before the war this method of training proved highly effective. But when the carrier air groups began suffering heavy losses and began receiving high numbers of green pilots, they could neither train the rookies properly nor keep the entire air group at the same level of combat readiness.³⁴

After the war Captain Fuchida Mitsuo criticized this aspect of the pilot training program, pointing out that the rookie pilots out of basic aviation training were not combat ready when they joined an air group. He argued:

Under the "crack-man policy" all our best pilots were assigned to and kept on combat duty with the carrier air groups. . . . Some of the best and most experienced flyers should have been sent to naval air stations as instructors to impart their wisdom and battle experience to fledgling students. . . . There was no reserve of able pilots available to fill the ranks left vacant by losses . . . our short-sighted leaders failed to realize that aerial warfare is a battle of attrition and that a strictly limited number of

³³ Paul Fontenoy, "The Development of Japanese Naval Aviation, 1912-1941." Paper presented at the faculty seminar of the Research and Publication Committee, 19 January 1995, at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC: 9-10, 19-20; and Lundstrom, First Team, 183.

³⁴ Lundstrom, First Team, 456-457.

even the most skillful pilots could not possibly win out over an unlimited number of able pilots.³⁵

A new generation of naval pilots tried to replace veterans like Murata, but that generation was markedly inferior in skill and experience. In December 1942 Rear Admiral Sakamaki Munetaka, the chief of staff of the 11th Air Fleet, commented that the newly arrived airmen for the land-based air groups in the Solomons "possessed but a third of the skill of the men they replaced."³⁶

³⁵ Fuchida, Midway, 242-243.

³⁶ Frank, Guadalcanal, 524-525; 611-612.

CHAPTER 5

“I BELIEVE IN VIOLATING THE RULES”

Halsey

General Douglas MacArthur once told Admiral William F. Halsey, “When you leave the Pacific, Bill, it will become just another damned ocean!”¹ Halsey had commanded destroyers for most of his career until 1934. Then, at the age of fifty-two, he earned his wings as a naval aviator, and thereafter embarked on a career of commanding carriers. He served as captain of the carrier Saratoga. In 1938 the navy promoted him to Rear Admiral and assigned him to the new carriers Yorktown and Enterprise as commander of Carrier Division 2. In June 1940 the navy promoted him to Vice Admiral, and at the start of the war he commanded all of the carrier forces in the Pacific Fleet. Flying his flag in the carrier Enterprise, Halsey gained nationwide attention when he conducted several raids in the Pacific in the first six months of the war.

Halsey’s biographer, E. B. Potter, described Bill Halsey as dedicated, decisive, and fearless. He was friendly and accessible, but rough-hewn. Though courteous and considerate, he was impetuous and quickly moved by his emotions. He tended to speak first and think afterward. He operated on hunches, backed by innate shrewdness. One officer who served under him said he was a “very fine man. Not a mastermind, by any

¹ This thesis is not a biography of Halsey. For more biographical information, see E.B. Potter’s Bull Halsey (1985). Two other biographies exist- Benis Frank’s Halsey (1974) and James Merrill’s A Sailor’s Admiral (1976). Both are popular histories. The MacArthur quote is from Potter, Bull Halsey, 396.

means, but a very sound, fine person." Halsey held an unswerving loyalty to seniors and subordinates alike. Above all he was an inspiring leader. Another officer stated:

"Halsey was beloved by everybody that worked for him and he was very, very, aggressive. He was a fine fighting admiral . . . We spent some bad times at Guadalcanal. We needed a man like Halsey . . . [His men] would follow him through hell and high water."²

Halsey was known foremost for his audacity. He had often said that he would shoot first and argue afterwards. He was a tough fighter and a bold risk-taker and was admired throughout the navy for it. At the onset of the war, he stated his philosophy of carrier operations:

I think [Confederate cavalry] General [Nathan Bedford] Forrest's description is the best thing I know, to get to the other fellow with everything you have and as fast as you can and to dump it on him. You have to scout out and find it, and as soon as you find it, send everything you can at him and hit him with it.

When asked: "You would have no hesitancy in using your carrier as an offensive weapon?" Halsey responded, "I would consider myself to be a very poor specimen of a naval officer if I thought in any other direction."³

In 1942, at the age of sixty, Halsey remained as aggressive and determined as ever. During the Guadalcanal campaign he wrote: "If I have any principle of naval warfare burned into my brain, it is that the best defense is a strong offense. Lord Nelson

² Ibid., 35, 152; and Vadm. Glenn B. Davis, interview by Donald R. Lennon, 1977, Collection Number 343, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 46-47 (hereafter cited as Davis Oral History).

³ Potter, Bull Halsey, 39. Forrest's modus operandi was "Get there first with the most men."

expressed this very well: 'No captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy.'"⁴ Halsey enjoyed expressing this view to the press. Life magazine ran an article on 29 June 1942 titled "Admiral William Halsey is a Task Force Commander" and quoted Halsey saying, "Hit hard, hit fast, hit often."

The press loved the charismatic Halsey, who never shied away from reporters. They needed a hero, and "Bull Halsey" fit the bill. Both Newsweek and Time ran stories about Halsey in their November 1942 issues. Newsweek called him "tough and hard-driving" and Time referred to him as a "tough, aggressive, restless man" and a "knuckle-swinger" who was "saltier than sodium chloride."⁵

Halsey's determination was a product of his contempt for the Japanese. While visiting Guadalcanal a week after the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Halsey met several reporters. When asked his strategy for winning the war, he thundered, "Kill Japs, Kill Japs, and keep on killing Japs." Two months later he told reporters: "When we first started out against them I held that one of our men was equal to three Japanese. I have now increased this to twenty. . . . There is nothing to be worried about in their tactics. Any normal naval officer can lick them."⁶ But his contempt for the Japanese went beyond public rallying cries. In a private letter to Nimitz, Halsey wrote:

From Button [Espiritu Santo] I went to Cactus [Guadalcanal] and spent a day and night with Vandegrift. . . . We went, as is the usual custom, to all

⁴ Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 128; and Potter, Bull Halsey, 195.

⁵ "War Blazes Higher in Pacific as Africa Fighting is Resumed," Newsweek 20 (2 November 1942): 19-20; and "Battle of the Pacific," Time 40 (2 November 1942): 31.

⁶ Halsey, Admiral Halsey's Story, 123; and Potter, Bull Halsey, 215.

the front lines. I think the pleasantest [sic] sight I saw was the yellow monkeys [sic] being dumped headfirst into the ground, stink as they did. The plane attacks by the Nips was [sic] anything but impressive. This indicates one of two things or both. Either a severe shortage of planes or paucity of trained pilots [sic]. I do not believe he is quitting because of lack of guts. He has not brains enough to know what guts are. He is merely a savage with a very thin veneer of civilization. We are rapidly making good Japs. They have not yet been dead six months, but when that time comes they will be good Japs. Our slogan is kill Japs and then kill Japs and next kill Japs, and by God we will do it.⁷

Even after placing these comments in the context of war in 1942—a bloody, destructive, total war that included horrors such as the Bataan death march, the dropping of the atomic bombs, and the Holocaust—one still cannot ignore Halsey's racism and downright hatred of the Japanese.

Command

Halsey, as a commander, struggled with the problems that confronted all military leaders since the beginnings of warfare. It was not until the twentieth century that command as a concept was named and defined. Command may be defined as the authority vested in a designated individual for the direction, coordination, and control of military forces in the accomplishment of a mission.⁸ The terms command and control (C²) and command, control, and communications (C³) are more recent descriptions of the same process that have only appeared in the last twenty-five years.

⁷ Vadm. William F. Halsey to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 17 November 1942, Nimitz Correspondence.

⁸ Capt. John V. Noel, Jr. and Capt. Edward L. Beach, Naval Terms Dictionary (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1971), 70; and United States Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1984), 76-77.

The third part of C³—communications—is the means by which a commander controls his forces. It is a critical part of the command process. Chester Nimitz once said, “From single ship, to force, to fleet, to Navy Department—all through the command echelon—effective coordination and ultimate operational success depends upon efficient communications.”⁹

In the decades preceding the Second World War, new technological advances transformed communications. At the forefront was the invention of the wireless telegraph, later called radio, in 1897. Earlier advances in communications, such as the telegraph (1837), Morse code (1844), submarine telegraph cable (1850), and telephone (1876), had little impact on naval operations as the sender and recipient of messages were still tied to wires and cables. But when Guglielmo Marconi put Rudolph Hertz’s theory of the existence of electromagnetic waves to practical use, he provided navies with the first new means of communication since the introduction of the (visual) signal book in the late eighteenth century. The wireless telegraph, moreover, offered instantaneous communications not limited by visual distance or nightfall.

The next two decades saw the continued development of the wireless by various parties. Marconi improved his version of the wireless repeatedly. In 1901 he sent and received the first radio signals across the Atlantic Ocean. The U.S. Navy, spurned by the Marconi interests, plunged into its own development of the radio with considerable success. In 1912 a naval aircraft successfully communicated by radio with a ground

⁹ Linwood S. Howeth, History of Communications Electronics in the United States Navy (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), xi.

station for the first time. In the interwar years additional technical improvements made the radio more portable, stronger, simpler to operate, and more reliable with less interference.¹⁰

By 1942 the radio was in widespread use in all theaters of the Second World War. In the Pacific, a war was being fought across a vast ocean by forces separated at times by thousands of miles. The control of these forces would have been impossible without the use of the radio. The carriers, the main offensive arm for both combatants, simply could not have functioned without the radio. Carrier operations such as scouting and combat air patrol depended on the use of the radio.

While a technological breakthrough in communications, the radio also had its limitations. It was susceptible to jamming, mutual interference, and overloads and could still be unreliable in certain conditions. Worst of all, long-range radio transmissions were vulnerable to interception. Both sides were aware of this and encoded and encrypted their radio transmissions, but ultimately radio intelligence (cryptanalysis) operations turned the radio against its user.

The cryptanalysts used several methods to exploit enemy radio transmissions. Whenever enemy forces sent radio messages, they used direction finding receivers at stations scattered throughout the Pacific to pinpoint their locations. Traffic analysts often predicted future enemy movements by carefully studying the location, pattern, and

¹⁰ Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie, From Crossbow to H-Bomb: The Evolution of the Weapons and Tactics of Warfare (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 168-169; Smithsonian Visual Timeline of Inventions (London: Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 1994), 36-38, 45, 49; and Howeth, History of Communications, xiii, 189-191.

volume of radio traffic. Through an accumulated knowledge of the Japanese code and the application of mathematical theory, Allied code breakers succeeded in reading significant parts of JN-25, the main code used by the Imperial Japanese Navy. All of this intelligence, codenamed Ultra, played a key role in U.S. naval operations in the Pacific. The Japanese also successfully exploited Allied radio signals throughout the war.

The U.S. Navy kept the Ultra secret highly confidential, with only selected flag and senior officers aware of it. Halsey was let in on the secret at the beginning of the war. In fact, his Ultra intelligence officer, Major Bankston T. Holcombe, Jr., was the first to be attached to a task force commander's staff in the Pacific.¹¹

Of course radio was not the only form of communication used by the navy in the Second World War. As Commander, South Pacific Area (ComSoPac), Halsey wrote regularly to Nimitz, keeping his boss apprised of all aspects of his command and his rationale for the important decisions that he made. Halsey also liked to call meetings so he and his subordinates could talk about key problems facing his command. Lieutenant Commander William Ashford, the air operations officer on Halsey's ComSoPac staff, provided some insight into Halsey's mess:

[The] conversation was lively and stimulating. Halsey would throw out a question, generally involving current operations, and let everybody chew on it. The junior officer there had as much say as the senior . . . Many times he would take the advice of some of the junior members instead of that of his Chief of Staff or senior members. He insisted on keeping his staff, who were members of his mess, small and he encouraged them to talk about any and everything.¹²

¹¹ Winton, *Ultra in the Pacific*, 8, 13-14.

¹² Ashford Oral History, 29-30.

Halsey conducted his meetings in a similar fashion. E. B. Potter described them in detail:

The way Halsey conducted his morning conferences would have pained General Robert of *Rules of Order* fame. He disregarded procedural details and brushed aside any business that could be handled out of council. But the necessary ground was usually covered. . . . [Halsey] liked having his staff around him, talking and arguing. He encouraged them to express themselves, regardless of rank. Junior officers never hesitated to disagree sharply with him, his deputy, or his chief of staff. . . . Arguments came to an end when Halsey made up his mind. 'Okay, lads,' he would say, 'that's it. That's what we'll do.'¹³

Halsey called a conference three days before the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands to discuss the situation at Guadalcanal. All of the key individuals who would fight in the Battle of Henderson Field were there. Halsey likely would have called a meeting of his senior naval commanders if time had permitted. But Kinkaid was steaming in the Enterprise from Pearl Harbor to the South Pacific, and Murray was stationed east of the Solomons in the Hornet, waiting to meet with Kinkaid. By that time, they had already received their orders to intercept the Japanese carrier forces approaching Guadalcanal. Halsey made that order by radio. In fact, all of the communications between Halsey and his tactical commanders at sea (and his superiors in Pearl Harbor and Washington) during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands were by radio.

Many contemporaries believed that the radio would solve the problems of command and control. With ship-to-ship radio, commanders could more centrally control the forces under their command. Yet along with the radio came the airplane, torpedo, radar, longer-range rifled weapons, and numerous other technological

¹³ Potter, Bull Halsey, 271-272.

developments. These technologies changed the environment in which command decisions were made. World War II-era ships were faster, operated in more complex task forces, and wielded weapons that could strike at distances measured in miles, and in the case of aircraft carriers, hundreds of miles. Hours before the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Kinkaid commented to correspondent Eugene Burns on how naval warfare had changed between the world wars: "Now a battle can be won or lost within five minutes."¹⁴ The tempo of warfare had increased, and the commander's decision-making window had narrowed. The commander of the Second World War utilized a more efficient means of communication in the radio, but he also faced far greater pressures of command.¹⁵

Halsey in Command

The Northward Sweep Around Santa Cruz

When Halsey assumed command of the South Pacific Area in October 1942, he immediately turned his attention to the mounting threat to Guadalcanal. This is what command required of him at that juncture, according to historian Martin van Crevald:

The exercise of command involves a great many things. . . . There is, in the first place, the gathering of information on the state of one's own

¹⁴ Burns, Then There Was One, 115.

¹⁵ Michael A. Palmer, "'The Initiative of the Subordinate': Naval Command and Control from the Great War through the Second World War," Chapter Seven of "Command at Sea: Naval Command and Control Since the Seventeenth Century," photocopy, 457, 476-478.

forces- a problem that should not be underestimated- as well as on the enemy and on such external factors as the weather and the terrain. The information having been gathered, means must be found to store, retrieve, filter, classify, distribute, and display it. On the basis of the information thus processed, an estimate of the situation must be formed. Objectives must be laid down and alternative methods for attaining them worked out. A decision must be made. Detailed planning must be got under way. Orders must be drafted and transmitted, their arrival and proper understanding by the recipients verified. Execution must be monitored by means of a feedback system, at which point the process repeats itself.¹⁶

The author will use this explanation of command as a case study to illustrate the process.

Halsey had little information with which to form an estimate of the situation. He knew Japanese land forces were mounting another offensive on Guadalcanal, as Vandegrift reported a buildup of enemy troops and equipment to the west of Henderson Field. The Ultra bulletins that he received daily were only of limited help. The Ultra cryptanalysts were working mostly in the dark, as they had not broken the newest version of the Japanese code (which they did not break until early November for Halsey's next clash with the Japanese). Most Ultra intelligence at this time came from traffic analysis. Ultra bulletins from Pearl Harbor warned of the presence of a large enemy carrier force, estimated to consist of two carriers, operating just north of the Solomon Islands. Intelligence predicted a major Japanese offensive against Guadalcanal around 23 October. Ultra analysts in Washington estimated a large force of four Japanese carriers. Reconnaissance from Espiritu Santo confirmed the presence of one enemy carrier a few days later. Halsey later explained: "It must be remembered that we never had any exact

¹⁶ Martin van Creveld, Command in War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 6-7.

knowledge of the opposing enemy before, during, or after an engagement, particularly when it was a long-range air engagement.”¹⁷

As for his own forces, Halsey knew that the Hornet task force was available in the South Pacific. A battleship and cruiser task force under Rear Admiral Willis Lee also stood ready. The Enterprise task group was racing to the South Pacific and would not arrive until 23 or 24 October. But could Halsey count on it arriving in time?

As for weather conditions, Halsey received daily reports forecasting the weather for the region. He did not have to worry about typhoons, as the season for tropical cyclones in the South Pacific did not begin until December. As it turned out, Halsey did not have to worry about the weather at all, as the weather conditions during the week of the battle were relatively mild. On board Enterprise, Captain Hardison described the weather the day of the battle: “[It] was mostly fair with broken to scattered cumulus and strato-cumulus clouds at 2000 feet. There were 5/10 to 7/10 clouds from 1000 to 1245, decreasing to 1/10 after 1300; scattered light showers; ceiling 2000 feet to unlimited; visibility 15 miles plus; surface winds SE 6-10 knots; sea smooth with slight swell.” Right before the battle the staff at CinCPac headquarters had noted that a northern front the last few days had “reduced the efficiency of the search” for the Japanese carriers.¹⁸ But the same cloud cover that the Americans complained about also helped conceal the Enterprise in the early stages of the battle just a few hours later.

¹⁷ Halsey Memoir, 380-381.

¹⁸ Hardison quote from Hardison Report, 202-203. CinCPac quote from Command Summary, 1104.

Halsey's objective was clear: protect Henderson Field. Halsey's first dilemma centered on two possible courses of action: engage the Combined Fleet with the Hornet and Enterprise; or save the American carriers for another day. He knew that the situation on Guadalcanal was critical. In fact, he referred to it as "extremely precarious" to his staff. He also knew that he had promised Vandegrift that he would give him everything that he had. No one knows if his decision was verbally debated or whether it was inherently made, but one cannot imagine Halsey debating it for long. Halsey committed the carriers to battle for the defense of Guadalcanal. To do otherwise would go against everything he believed.

Halsey then had to decide how to oppose the carriers of the Combined Fleet and weigh the alternative methods of doing so. Should he keep his carriers close to Guadalcanal and wait for the enemy carriers to come to him? Should he send his carriers to the north, west, or east, where Yamamoto might not expect them? Where should he send his surface fleet of battleships and cruisers? Should he utilize land-based air out of Henderson Field? Halsey elaborated on his planning in his memoir:

At the time of taking over command, through reconnaissance and intelligence, it became apparent that the Japs were about to make a heavy attack on Guadalcanal to capture Henderson Field. This was the key point in Guadalcanal. A surface force of combatant, transport, and supply ships was known to be building in the Buin-Faisi area in south Bougainville. This caused great anxiety because of my great responsibility and lack of familiarity with the area and the forces under my command. It was apparently becoming necessary to go into a surface action. We maintained operational control of all surface ships in the South Pacific in our headquarters. With only two members of my own personal staff and an inherited staff that I knew little of, hurried planning had to be accomplished. We were faced with a proposition where it was necessary to keep our surface ships beyond the range of Japanese land-based air and at the same time be in a position to intercept and engage an enemy surface

force attacking Guadalcanal. . . . Our plan was roughly to attempt to get on the flank of the enemy in the rather vain hope that we would not be detected and that we would be able to get in the first attack. The Hornet carrier group under command of Rear Admiral George Murray was given an area to the northern and eastern of the Santa Cruz Islands. The surface ship force with no carrier present commanded by Rear Admiral, afterwards Vice Admiral "Chink" [sic] Lee, was placed to the eastward of Guadalcanal. . . . I had directed them [the Enterprise group] to expedite arrival and to rendezvous with the Hornet group.¹⁹

Halsey consummated his bold plan with the order to Task Force 61: "Make sweep around north Santa Cruz Islands thence southwesterly east of San Cristobal to area in Coral Sea in position to intercept enemy forces approaching Cactus-Ringbolt [Guadalcanal-Tulagi].²⁰

Many historians have regarded Halsey's order as an overly aggressive move.

Two historians in particular have pointedly criticized Halsey. In 1985 British historian Adrian Stewart published a sound history titled Guadalcanal: World War II's Fiercest Naval Campaign. In it he opined:

At the precise moment that the Americans had in practice gained the upper hand on, and in the skies above Guadalcanal . . . they experienced a sharp, if luckily indecisive defeat at sea: the Battle of Santa Cruz. It was a defeat made the more unpalatable by being quite unnecessary . . . The combined carrier groups . . . could well have remained on the defensive. Had they done so and had the Japanese fleet continued its advance, Kinkaid would have been aided by the aircraft at Henderson Field when he engaged it. . . . Unfortunately Halsey scorned defensive fighting . . . Heedless of the disaster that would result from the loss of America's last two serviceable carriers, he ordered them off to attack Kondo. . . . Halsey was running a great risk.²¹

¹⁹ Halsey Memoir, 379-380.

²⁰ Kinkaid Report, 149.

²¹ Adrian Stewart, Guadalcanal: World War II's Fiercest Naval Campaign (London: William Kimber & Co., 1985), 97-98.

More recently, John B. Lundstrom published his definitive history The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign. In it he argued:

At the risk of second-guessing an aggressive commander eager to get at the enemy, ComSoPac's carrier counterattack now looks like a dangerous, almost foolhardy gesture. . . . Now in response to the obvious threat to Cactus and just plain excitement over the chance to destroy enemy carriers, he forgot caution. Instead of keeping them south of Guadalcanal to counter direct threats against Cactus, he committed Kinkaid's Enterprise and Hornet (two-thirds of America's surviving fast carriers) into battle northeast of the Solomons near the limit of Allied land-based air support.²²

Had Halsey kept his carriers south of Guadalcanal, he could have used land-based air at Henderson Field. But on the evening of 25 October, the Cactus Air Force only wielded twenty-nine operational planes. Had the Enterprise and Hornet operated from the rear, they would have been able to shield Henderson Field from Japanese air strikes, but they would have been out of range to strike the enemy carriers. If Halsey had moved them closer to Henderson Field, they would have been susceptible to Japanese land-based air in Rabaul and Buin, a formidable force of eighty-six fighters and bombers on 25 October.²³

Halsey's plan was indeed risky. Both historians failed to understand Halsey's philosophy of war. He was not passive or cautious by nature. He once said: "I believe in violating the rules. We violate them every day." Had he placed his carriers south of Guadalcanal, he would have effectively shifted his strategy from an offensive to a defensive one. Halsey, who believed that "the best defense is a strong offense," was not

²² Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 353-355.

²³ Miller, Cactus Air Force, 147, 229; and Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 331-336, 343-346.

about to do that. He was a fighter. Some may think that he jeopardized two-thirds of the American carrier fleet, but Halsey believed that “you can’t make an omelet without breaking the eggs.”²⁴

By boldly sending his carriers around the Santa Cruz Islands, Halsey tried to replicate the Battle of Midway. While on sick leave he had studied the battle thoroughly. Midway had proven the advantages of surprise in carrier operations. The best tactic was simply to hit the enemy before he can hit you. Although Yamamoto’s staff suspected that the American carriers were to the east, Halsey’s move around the Santa Cruz Islands kept Nagumo’s staff guessing for several days. At one point, disturbed that they had located the American battleships but not the American carriers, Nagumo wondered if they were blundering into an American trap with the battleships as the bait. The Japanese carriers reversed course to the north several times on the eve of the battle. In the end, the adversaries spotted each other at almost the same time. This can be attributed more to a failure in communications (when the Americans should have had a two-hour jump on the Japanese) than to an unsound plan.

Command and Historical Perspective

Command decisions, like managerial decisions in the business world, or any decisions made by humans for that matter, will always be judged after the fact. After the Battle of

²⁴ Stewart, *Guadalcanal*, 98; and “Battle of the Pacific: Hit Hard, Hit Fast, Hit Often,” *Time* 40 (30 November 1942): 30.

the Eastern Solomons, Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher commented: "Boys, I'm going to get two dispatches tonight, one from Admiral Nimitz telling me what a wonderful job we did, and one from [Admiral Ernest J.] King saying, 'Why in hell didn't you use your destroyers and make torpedo attacks?' and by God, they'll both be right."²⁵ It is human nature to question the decisions and actions of others, especially when the stakes are high. Moreover, decisions are often judged with the benefit of hindsight. When we look back at a decision that we already know the results of, we view the decision with bias. If the results of the decision were successful, then we deem it a "bold" decision; if they were not, then we deem it a "risky" decision. Stewart and Lundstrom's statements illustrate this fact. Stewart clearly regarded the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands "a sharp, if luckily indecisive defeat at sea." Consequently, he called Halsey's plan risky. Lundstrom went further by calling it "dangerous and foolhardy." Criticism is nothing new to the naval commander. Captain Gilven M. Slonim once wrote: "Were a composite recorded of all criticism thrust upon military commanders throughout history, one might, on the basis of such compilation, deduce that no military man in the history of warfare—land, naval, or air—ever made a truly sound decision."²⁶

A few years after the war, when he was completing Admiral Halsey's Story, Halsey contemplated the role of the historian. In a proposed preamble for his book, he wrote: "Post battle analysis, carried out in a cool, quiet office, with plenty of time, will

²⁵ Capt. Gilven M. Slonim, "A Flagship View of Command Decisions," United States Naval Institute Proceedings 84 (April, 1958): 80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

invariably bring to light facts and factors not recognized in the heat of combat.”²⁷ The autobiography was published in 1947 as historians were increasingly criticizing Halsey’s actions in the Battle of Leyte Gulf (1944). The criticism intensified in the next several years. In 1951 Halsey cautioned historian Samuel Eliot Morison: “I realize that long after the event it is very difficult if not impossible to place oneself in the position of a Fleet Commander at the time of the specific occurrence. . . . To correctly evaluate any decisions made at a prior time it is necessary to consider only the information available to the person who made the decision at the time such a decision was made.”²⁸ The final years of Halsey’s life were marred by constant criticism of his decisions at Leyte, and he stubbornly refused to admit that he might have erred while exercising command.

Despite the fact that Halsey was obviously defending his own wartime command decisions, he made some astute points. Historians can spend months and even years analyzing a single moment in time. They have the luxury of time in sorting through mounds of information, sorting out the accurate from the inaccurate. When judging a command decision, historians should consider it within the environment it was made. They should take into account the amount of time the commander had to make the decision and the commander’s level of fatigue. They should weigh the command decision based only on the information (and misinformation) known at the time. Most

²⁷ Adm. William F. Halsey to Joseph Bryan III, 12 August 1947, Container 13, Special Correspondence, 1936-1959, Joseph Bryan III 1947-1949, William Frederick Halsey Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Halsey Correspondence). The statement was not published in the preamble.

²⁸ Adm. William F. Halsey to Samuel Eliot Morison, January 1951, in Potter, Bull Halsey, 412.

wartime commanders were making decisions in a pressure-filled "fog of war." Historians should remind themselves that command decisions were not made as calmly and as rationally as they are now analyzing them.

Halsey Looks Back

Five days after the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Halsey sat down and wrote a lengthy letter to his superior, Admiral Nimitz:

Dear Chester:

I have been fairly well occupied, as a consequence this is one of the first opportunities I have had to write. I will try to give you as briefly as possible the still disjointed story of the recent battle.

After reporting Task Force 61's losses in aircraft and the damage to the Enterprise and the South Dakota, Halsey candidly reflected on the past two weeks' events:

As you may well imagine, I was completely taken aback when I received your orders on my arrival here. I took over a strange job with a strange staff and I had to begin throwing punches almost immediately. As a consequence quick decisions had to be made. Since the action, I have about reached the conclusion that the yellow bastards have been playing us for suckers. Their pattern of attack has been practically the same on the four occasions they have come down. The scouting force of submarines probably on the surface backed up by cruisers and possibly battleships and behind that their carriers, two together and one separated some forty or fifty miles, with accompanying battleships, cruisers and destroyers. These are placed generally to the northward of the Santa Cruz Islands. To the westward and generally northward of the Solomons-Guadalcanal area, their covering force. With the transports again to the westward of this force [sic]. I think they have sucked us out beyond the easy reach of our shore-based aircraft and are willing to play attrition tactics with us. It is my present intention, if this occurs again, to keep my forces, particularly carriers, closer about Button [Espiritu Santo] and make him come to us and then begin counter punching. . . . I had no chance to use Lee during this action, nor do I believe he was in a good position to render any

support. Because of subs and air scouts, it was very difficult to keep anything close about enough to be useful in the Guadalcanal area.²⁹

Shaken by the losses of the Hornet and Porter and the damage to the Enterprise and four other ships, Halsey apparently had second thoughts about his aggressive strategy. At one point in the letter he wrote: "Thank God we were fortunate again and saved most of the officers and crew of the Hornet." With the torpedoing of the destroyer Porter during the battle (which at the time was attributed to a Japanese submarine) and the battleship Washington's slim escape from two Japanese sub torpedoes the day after the battle,

Halsey also worried about the enemy submarine threat:

The question of keeping battleships and carriers continuously at sea in the submarine-infested waters, I believe to be a mistake. On every occasion so far our intelligence has given us two or more days notice of impending attack. At present it is my intention to hold heavy ships out of the area and to depend on these reports for bringing them in when the necessity arises.³⁰

Despite the uncharacteristic caution shown in the letter, Halsey would continue to commit every ship available in the SoPac area to fight for Guadalcanal. Two weeks later in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, he strayed from his plan to keep the Enterprise safely near Espiritu Santo. He ordered Task Force 16 to steam south of Guadalcanal to be in position to strike Japanese surface ships and transports as well as to cover American vessels in the area. Halsey did order Kinkaid to remain at least sixty miles south of

²⁹ Vadm. William F. Halsey to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 31 October 1942, Nimitz Correspondence.

³⁰ Ibid. Halsey added, "There is an elegant chance for employing Hunter or Killer Squadrons to get the yellow subs. However, at the moment, I am hamstrung by a lack of suitable vessels. Send me anything and everything that will float, can listen, and drop depth charges and we will give the sharks some damn fine monkey meat to eat."

Guadalcanal, thus adopting a strategy in which he could use Task Force 16 offensively yet at the same time protecting the Enterprise. It was a defensive strategy to preserve his last remaining and partially damaged carrier. He aggressively committed every other ship under his command, including the battleships South Dakota and Washington, in the fight to save Guadalcanal.

Halsey's boss approved of his conduct in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. In announcing Halsey's promotion to full Admiral, one of the U.S. Navy's highest honors, Admiral Nimitz wrote:

Halsey's conduct of his present command leaves nothing to be desired. He is professionally competent and militarily aggressive without being reckless or foolhardy. He has that rare combination of intellectual capacity and military audacity, and can calculate to a cat's whisker the risk involved in operations when successful accomplishments will bring great returns. He possesses superb leadership qualities which have earned him a tremendous following of his men. His only enemies are Japs.³¹

³¹"Battle of the Pacific: Hit Hard, Hit Fast, Hit Often," Time 40 (30 November 1942): 28.

CHAPTER 6

“THE RESULT OF THE BATTLE LIES IN THE HANDS OF COMMAND”

In 1933 William F. Halsey submitted a thesis to the Naval War College entitled “The Relationship in War of Naval Strategy, Tactics, and Command.” In it he wrote:

It is the men that count in the final analysis of battle. Other things being equal, the battle will go to the more ably commanded and better trained fleet. As the training of the fleet is a direct function of command, this statement may be narrowed. The result of the battle lies in the hands of command.

He continued:

The commander-in-chief is the keystone of the fleet. He must be a presence that is felt throughout his command, and he must be known and trusted down through the lowest rating. His subordinates must feel that he has their well being always close to his heart, and that they have a leader whom they will gladly follow in battle.¹

Nine years after his attendance at the Naval War College, at the age of sixty, Halsey faced the first battle of his naval career. The responsibilities of command weighed heavily on his mind on the evening before the carrier raids of the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. He later wrote: “The night was clear and calm, and I was the exact opposite. As a commanding officer on the eve of his first action, I felt that I should set an example of composure, but I was so nervous that I took myself to my emergency cabin, out of sight.” Mindful of the thousands of American lives that would hinge on his command decisions the next day, a restless Halsey “tossed and twisted, drank coffee, read mystery stories,

¹ Capt. William F. Halsey, “The Relationship in War of Naval Strategy, Tactics, and Command,” Naval War College thesis, 16 May 1933, Container 45, Speeches and Writings, 1933-1957, William Frederick Halsey Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 3, 7 (hereafter cited as Halsey Thesis).

and smoked cigarettes.”² Throughout the war Halsey’s staff had to keep an eye on him to keep him from worrying too much before battle. They would often send him out of the chart room and see that he got some sleep.

The Fog of War

Every commander throughout history has struggled with two critical factors while exercising command: information and time. In his *magnum opus* On War, the nineteenth-century Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz wrote: “A great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character.” He continued: “The great uncertainty of all data in war is a peculiar difficulty, because all action must, to a certain extent, be planned in a mere twilight, which in addition not unfrequently [sic] – like the effect of a fog or moonshine – gives to things exaggerated dimensions and an unnatural appearance.”³ The fog of war, what Clausewitz also called the “imperfect knowledge of circumstances,”⁴ can be simply defined as uncertainty. It is an inherent element of warfare. Every commander must contend with the fog of war. During battle a commander is forced to make critical decisions based on incomplete and often inaccurate information. Moreover, the commander is forced to make these decisions under the pressures of time.

² Halsey, Admiral Halsey’s Story, 90, 95.

³ Carl von Clausewitz, On War (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 162, 189.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

By the Second World War, with the radio on all naval ships, the volume of information had increased significantly. Commanders now had more information to discern, and this information was not necessarily more accurate or more complete. U.S. naval officers were constantly plagued with erroneous contact reports throughout the Pacific war. In the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, scout pilots regularly misidentified enemy battleships, cruisers, and destroyers and miscalculated the number of enemy carriers present. Admiral Kinkaid received the most critical contact report of the battle, the one that initially pinpointed the Japanese carrier striking force, over two hours late.

In addition to the problems of volume and quality of information, World War II commanders struggled with another problem. With the advent of the airplane and aircraft carrier, the tempo of warfare had increased to the point that commanders were forced to make command decisions much more quickly. By 1942 the decision-making window had narrowed to just a few critical minutes. One naval commander keenly stated: "Time is the only commodity which you can never regain."⁵ Halsey was well aware of the pressures imposed on officers exercising command. In 1947 he wrote: "It must be borne in mind that decisions and conclusions in battle must be reached in a matter of minutes. The men making these decisions and arriving at conclusions are under great strain and frequently fatigued."⁶ During the Second World War the fog of war remained as thick as ever.

⁵ Michael A. Palmer, "Burke and Nelson: Decentralized Style of Command," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 117 (July 1991): 58. The statement was made in 1945 by Commodore Arleigh Burke.

⁶ Adm. William F. Halsey to Joseph Bryan III, 12 August 1947, Halsey Correspondence.

In Command in War, Martin Van Creveld wrote: "From Plato to NATO, the history of command in war consists essentially of an endless quest for certainty." He argued that all commanders choose between two approaches for coping with uncertainty, centralization and decentralization, based on how they distribute its burden throughout the various ranks of the command hierarchy. For example, by centralizing control, a commander can gain greater certainty at the top level of command, but at the expense of less certainty at the bottom levels of command where subordinates are often left uninformed and undirected. On the other hand, by decentralizing control, a commander accepts less certainty at the top, where he may be left out of touch with events of the battle, but increases certainty at the bottom where subordinates are granted the initiative and are allowed a freedom of action. Van Creveld continued:

So long as command systems remain imperfect—and imperfect they must remain until there is nothing left to command—both ways of coping with uncertainty will remain open to commanders at all levels. If twenty-five centuries of historical experience are any guide, the second way [decentralization] will be superior to the first. . . . The fact that, historically speaking, those armies have been most successful which did not turn their troops into automatons, did not attempt to control everything from the top, and allowed subordinate commanders considerable latitude has been abundantly demonstrated.⁷

Nelson

Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson was among the first naval commanders to embrace a decentralized style of command. Nelson exercised command in an era in which the

⁷ Van Creveld, Command in War, 264, 270, 274; and Michael A. Palmer, "A Regular Confusion," Prologue of "Command at Sea: Naval Command and Control Since the Seventeenth Century," photocopy, 26-27.

signal book was the predominant form of communication, in which commanders had use of hundreds of signals. Yet he rejected the idea of centralizing command by controlling the entire fleet from his flagship. Historian Michael A. Palmer has written extensively on Nelson. Palmer wrote: "Nelson thought the commanders who viewed the signal book as the means to control engagements were chasing a chimera. He acknowledged the value of sophisticated signaling systems for the fleet under sail, but he believed that in battle signals would 'either be misunderstood, or, if waited for, very probably, from various causes, be impossible for the commander-in-chief to make.'" Nelson "believed that centralization bred confusion, hesitation, and inactivity among subordinates denied initiative in expectation of a command."⁸ Moreover, he realized that during battle captains were often better placed than their admiral to make command decisions. He adopted a style of leadership that embraced delegation of authority and reliance on doctrine. This he came to call the Nelson Touch. Weeks before the Battle of the Nile (1798), when he was pursuing the French fleet in the Mediterranean,

Nelson ordered his captains to the Vanguard, the flagship, whenever the weather permitted. There his "Band of Brothers" became acquainted with his tactics and plans. When the British finally discovered the French at anchor in Aboukir Bay, Nelson immediately made the signal to attack. Captain Edward Berry noted that the method employed had been one of several "formed two months before an opportunity presented itself of executing any of them, and the advantage now was, that they were familiar to the understanding of every Captain in the Fleet." Nelson's captains received no signals. His subordinates "could ascertain with precision what were the ideas and intentions of their Commander, without the aid of any further instructions; by which means signals became almost unnecessary."

⁸ Palmer, "Burke and Nelson," 58.

They fought and won a great victory in the dark. Captain Thomas Foley, on his own initiative, led the line inshore of the anchored French fleet.⁹

Commanders, Nelson believed, must grant their subordinates the initiative and trust that they will use it. After the Nile he wrote: "I had the happiness to command a Band of Brothers; therefore, night was to my advantage. Each knew his duty, and I was sure each would feel for a French ship."¹⁰ Using this same command style, Nelson followed up his victory at the Nile with victories at Copenhagen and Trafalgar.

Knox and King

More than one hundred years after the death of Nelson, an officer on the staff of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, published a series of articles that profoundly shaped command methods in the U.S. Navy in the twentieth century. In an article that appeared in the March 1913 issue of the United States Naval Institute Proceedings, Lieutenant Commander Dudley W. Knox presented a critical examination of the U.S. Navy's existing command system. He advocated reform within the navy with a new, well-defined doctrine of command.

Knox had been influenced by the British military historian Colonel G. F. R. Henderson and his writings on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. In 1902 Henderson had examined the command of Prussian Field Marshal Helmuth von Molke. He wrote:

⁹ Michael A. Palmer, "'Beavers' and 'Brothers'; Burke and Nelson: The Decentralized Style of Command" (draft for journal article, photocopy, 1991), 6-7.

¹⁰ Palmer, "A Regular Confusion," 24.

The study of war had done far more for Prussia than educating its soldiers and producing a sound system of organization. It had led to the establishment of a sound system of command; and this system proved a marvelous instrument in the hands of a great leader. It was based on the recognition of three facts: first, that an army cannot be effectively controlled by direct orders from headquarters; second, that the man on the spot is the best judge of the situation; and third, that intelligent cooperation is of infinitely more value than mechanical obedience. . . . It was understood . . . in the Prussian armies of 1866 and 1870, that no order was to be blindly obeyed unless the superior who issued it was actually present, and therefore cognizant of the situation at the time it was received. If this was not the case, the recipient was to use his own judgment, and act as he believed his superior would have directed him to do had he been aware how matters stood. Again, officers not in direct communication with headquarters were expected not only to watch for and utilize, on their own initiative, all opportunities of furthering the plan of campaign or battle, but, without waiting for instructions, to march to the thunder of the cannon, and render prompt assistance wherever it might be required. . . . The first step was to make a clear distinction between 'orders' and 'instructions.' An 'order' was to be obeyed, instantly and to the letter. 'Instructions' were an expression of the commander's wishes, not to be carried out unless they were manifestly practicable. . . . The second step was to train all officers to arrive at correct decisions, and so to make certain, so far as possible, that subordinates, when left to themselves, would act as their superiors would wish them to do. The third step was to discourage to the utmost the spirit of rash and selfish enterprise. . . . The benefit to the state was enormous. It is true that the initiative of the subordinates sometimes degenerated into reckless audacity, and critics have dilated on these rare instances with ludicrous persistence, forgetting the hundreds of others where it was exercised to the best purpose, forgetting the spirit of mutual confidence that permeated the whole army, and forgetting, at the same time, the deplorable results of centralization in the armies they overthrew. . . . 'To what,' asks the ablest commentator on the Franco-German war, 'did the Germans owe their uninterrupted triumph? What was the cause of the constant disasters of the French? What new system did the Germans put in practice, and what are the elements of success of which the French were bereft? The system is, so to speak, official and authoritative amongst the Germans. It is the initiative of the subordinate leaders. . . . In executing the orders of the supreme command, the subordinate leaders not only did over and over again more than was demanded of them, but surpassed the highest expectations of their superiors, notably at Sedan. It often happened that the faults, more or less inevitable, of the higher authorities were repaired by their subordinates, who thus won for them victories which they had not

always deserved. In a word, the Germans were indebted to the subordinate leaders that not a single favorable occasion throughout the whole campaign was allowed to escape unutilized.’¹¹

Drawing from Henderson’s work, Knox criticized the U.S. Navy’s current system of “highly centralized authority” that made lengthy, detailed orders necessary. He wrote, “Recent cases are known where it was the custom for the commanding officer to personally supervise and direct the most minute details of such work as the painting and cleaning of the ship, and to personally direct the officers of the deck during a great part of the day in nearly every matter that might arise, great or trivial.” “Our present system of command,” he continued, “. . . can scarcely be classed with that of Nelson and Von Moltke; it has never stood the supreme test of a large fleet action against a formidable enemy; and it is safe to say that even our greatest triumphs were accomplished in spite of glaring system faults which most of us will candidly admit.” Using Von Moltke’s model that Henderson had disseminated, Knox proposed that the navy adopt a new policy; that the doctrine of the ‘initiative of the subordinate’ shall govern the relations between seniors and juniors.”¹²

In the next two years Knox published three more articles strengthening his argument for the adoption of the “initiative of the subordinate” system of command. The first focused exclusively on Nelson and the advantages of his command methods; the second examined command and tactics in four historical examples: the battles of Texel

¹¹ Colonel G.F.R. Henderson, The Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1891-1903 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910) 4-8.

¹² Lt. Cdr. Dudley W. Knox, “Trained Initiative and Unity of Action: The True Bases of Military Efficiency,” United States Naval Institute Proceedings 39 (March 1913): 47, 52-53, 56-57, 59.

(1673), Trafalgar (1805), Lissa (1866), and Tsushima (1905).¹³ In his last article, Knox argued:

From the very nature of extensive military operations, whether they be afloat or ashore, the commander of the whole force cannot possibly have cognizance of events immediately upon their occurrence. His vision is too limited and his communication system too precarious and slow. . . . The time factor is [also] so very pressing and acute in naval operations . . . that it is normally imperative for the subordinate commander himself to decide and to act, even before his superior can be acquainted with the special situation which has been met. . . . [Subordinates] must, in war, frequently act on their own initiative in anticipation of the desires of higher authority.

Knox continued:

It is very essential to the student to note and to comprehend thoroughly that no plan . . . can possibly be coordinately executed by a large force of vessels of several types operating against a strong and efficient enemy, unless the squadron, division and ship commanders have the same conceptions of war as their commander-in-chief and are well indoctrinated. . . . [But] for some unaccountable reason the American Navy . . . [has] never seriously endeavored to indoctrinate [its] officers, and thus to furnish a basis for harmonious decisions during hostilities. It is all the more striking that the navy has failed in this respect, because of the supreme importance of the time factor afloat. With us 'time is everything,' even more than with Nelson, whose conspicuous successes were largely due to the high degree of mutual understanding that existed among his subordinate commanders; and Nelson's indoctrination, more than anything else, made such understanding possible.¹⁴

Knox submitted the papers to the United States Naval Institute for its annual essay contest; he won the top prize two years in a row. The effect of these articles in the navy was considerable. The Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet at that time, Admiral

¹³ Lt. Cdr. Dudley W. Knox, "The Great Lesson From Nelson For To-day," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 40 (March-April 1914): 295-318; and "Old Principles and Modern Applications," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 40 (July-August 1914): 1009-1039.

Henry T. Mayo, agreed with Knox's writings. Just a few years later, in the months immediately preceding and during the First World War, Mayo instilled in his commanders the importance of the principle of "decentralization of authority" and "initiative of the subordinate." Later, in the interwar years, students at the Naval War College read Knox's work as assigned reading. In 1924, the Navy's War Instructions manual included a section on command, echoing Knox's views on initiative:

Commanders of all ranks must carefully bear in mind that in war it is impossible for them to exercise over their commands the same personal control that finds place in peacetime exercises. Delegation of command is a necessity, and commanders must, therefore, take every opportunity of training their subordinates in accepting responsibility for departure from, or variations in, the mode of carrying out orders or directions originally given, impressing on them at the same time that such departures or variations must always be justified by the circumstances of the case. It is imperative that all officers should be taught to think, and, subject to general instructions and accepted principles, to act for themselves.

The commander in chief, O.T.C. (officer in tactical command), the senior officer present, or other competent authority on the spot, may, in their discretion, change the disposition of forces, the character of operations, or movements of any standard procedure to meet the conditions which obtain at the time.

Changes in the disposition of forces or of procedures, however, are to be in general accord with the plans of the commander in chief, or other superior authority, and are to further the mission of the forces acting.¹⁵

In January 1941 Admiral Ernest J. King assumed command of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. King was a personal friend of Dudley Knox. They had served together early in their careers and had shared an interest in military history. They had often studied and

¹⁴ Lt. Cdr. Dudley W. Knox, "The Role of Doctrine in Naval Warfare," United States Naval Institute Proceedings 41 (March-April 1915): 328, 333, 344.

¹⁵ Adm. Ernest J. King and Cdr. Walter Muir Whitehill, Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1952), 144; and Palmer, "Initiative of the Subordinate," 461, 463-464.

discussed the works of military writers, various military campaigns, and the science and theory of war. King had edited the Naval Institute's Proceedings when Knox's prize essay "The Great Lesson from Nelson to Today" was published. King had also served on Admiral Mayo's staff from 1915-1919. Mayo's decentralized command methods had indelibly influenced the young King. Therefore, in 1941, the new Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet set forth in two memoranda his expectations for the exercise of command in his fleet:

I have been concerned for many years over the increasing tendency—now grown almost to "standard practice"—of flag officers and other group commanders to issue orders and instructions in which their subordinates are told "how" as well as "what" to do to such an extent and in such detail that the "Custom of the service" has virtually become the antithesis of that essential element of command—"initiative of the subordinate." . . . If subordinates are deprived—as they now are—of that training and experience which will enable them to act "on their own"—if they do not know, by constant practice, how to exercise "initiative of the subordinates"—if they are reluctant (afraid) to act because they are accustomed to detailed orders and instructions—if they are not habituated to think, to judge, to decide and to act for themselves in their several echelons of command—we shall be in sorry case when the time of "active operations" arrives. . . . It is essential to extend the knowledge and the practice of "initiative of the subordinate" in principle and in application until they are universal in the exercise of command throughout all the echelons of command. Henceforth, we must all see to it that full use is made of the echelons of command—whether administrative (type) or operative (task)—by habitually framing orders and instructions to echelon commanders so as to tell them "what to do" but not "how to do it" unless the particular circumstances so demand.¹⁶

King was promoted to Commander in Chief, United States Fleet in December 1941 and then to Chief of Naval Operations in March 1942. The two memoranda that he penned

¹⁶ King and Whitehill, Fleet Admiral King, 313-314.

on “the initiative of the subordinate” on the eve of the Second World War set the tone for the U.S. Navy.

Santa Cruz

Before the war Bill Halsey was aware of the changing philosophy of command in the U.S. Navy. In his 1933 Naval War College thesis on command and control, he echoed Knox’s decentralized approach. Halsey wrote, “The commander-in-chief must convey his intentions to his subordinates through a plan or plans. These plans assign tasks to the subordinates. Discretion is left to the subordinate in executing these tasks. The controlling thought of the subordinate must be, will my action support the plan. If this thought is constantly present, no action by the subordinate can be far wrong.”¹⁷ Yet Halsey, an apparent advocate of the “initiative of the subordinate,” did not exercise command using a decentralized approach in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands.

Launching the Strikes

On 25 October Halsey anxiously monitored dispatches and contact reports coming in at ComSoPac headquarters in Noumea. A carrier battle was imminent. Rear Admiral Kinkaid was maneuvering the Hornet, Enterprise, and rest of Task Force 61 north of the Solomon Islands, knowing that a large Japanese carrier force lurked somewhere over the horizon. At 0958 a contact report came from a B-17 on patrol, sighting a force of enemy

battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and a possible carrier. At 1000 a PBY reported a Japanese force of two battleships, two carriers, four cruisers, and at least four destroyers. The sightings were 360 miles away from Task Force 61. Halsey waited for a response from Kinkaid. After fifty minutes, with still no action from Kinkaid, he ran out of patience. He sent a curt, one-word command: "Strike."¹⁸

Kinkaid believed that the contacts were outside of the range of his strike aircraft. Yet pressured by Halsey he reexamined the charts. He reasoned that if Task Force 61 turned toward the contact and increased its speed, and if the contact continued on its bearing directly toward Task Force 61, they could close the interval enough to make a strike feasible. After waiting almost an hour to close the distance, Kinkaid ordered a search group launched at 1330 and a strike group launched at 1420. Both groups returned without contacting the enemy. The strike group returned after dark and had a difficult time finding Task Force 61. It eventually found the Enterprise, but deck crashes and water landings cost the Americans eight planes.

After the war, in his 1946 unpublished memoir, Halsey explained the order that he sent to Kinkaid. He wrote: "Contact was made by a reconnaissance plane of three enemy forces and on receipt of this news I sent a signal to all our surface forces: "Attack repeat attack."¹⁹ Halsey had paraphrased the original "strike" order. In his autobiography, published in 1947, his explanation was watered down further. He wrote: "Our patrol

¹⁸ ComSoPac to CTF 61, 64 232350 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 53.

¹⁹ Halsey Memoir, 380.

planes reported two large forces steaming southward. The Enterprise launched a search and a strike, but no contact was made; the enemy had retired. . . . Action was now so obviously a matter of hours that I sent a final dispatch to all my combat commands: Attack repeat attack. The rest was in their hands.”²⁰

There was more to Halsey’s order than the simplistic explanation given in his autobiography. By October 1942, a frustrated Halsey was, as Nimitz put it, “itching to get into the fight.”²¹ With the exception of participating in a few carrier raids early in 1942—most notably the Doolittle raid on Tokyo—Halsey had missed every naval battle since the outbreak of the war.²² Halsey was out to sea in the Enterprise when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He had launched strikes on the afternoon of the 7 December in a vain attempt to retaliate against the Japanese, but failed to find the enemy. Later that month, he was sent on a mission to relieve the beleaguered American forces at Wake Island, but he was recalled when the island fell to the Japanese before he could get there. In May he raced to the South Pacific in the Enterprise only to arrive a few days late and to learn that Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher had engaged Yamamoto’s carriers in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Between June and August 1942 Halsey was hospitalized with a severe case of dermatitis, which kept him out of the Battles of Midway and Eastern Solomons. Halsey followed the events of the Battle of Midway while flat on his

²⁰ Halsey, Admiral Halsey’s Story, 121. Joseph Bryan III co-wrote and edited the autobiography, although Halsey reviewed the chapters and amended them as needed before they were published.

²¹ Potter, Bull Halsey, 87.

²² He had led the carrier raids on Wake and Marcus Islands and the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in February-March 1942.

back in the hospital. He lamented: "Missing the Battle of Midway has been the greatest disappointment of my life." By the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Halsey had still not fought a battle at sea. After his recovery from dermatitis in late August, he pledged: "I am going back to the Pacific where I intend personally to have a crack at those yellow-bellied sons of bitches and their carriers."²³

Halsey was apprehensive about Kinkaid serving as commander of Task Force 61. A meeting with Kinkaid before the battle may have alleviated some of Halsey's worries. Yet Halsey did not have a chance to meet with Kinkaid, or any of his senior naval commanders, before the battle. Kinkaid and Murray were already out to sea when Halsey assumed command of the SoPac area. Halsey preferred to meet with his subordinates before major engagements. In his Naval War College thesis he had written:

The conferences held by commanders with their immediate subordinates are a most important part of an officers [sic] training. Many valuable suggestions are made at these conferences. Points not understood are ironed out, and the subordinates learn the commander's ideas and reactions. Ideas can never be so clearly conveyed in writing, as they can by personal and intimate discussion. In this way, and in this way only, can the commander impress his personality upon his subordinates.²⁴

Halsey met with Kinkaid before the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal to discuss how to use the damaged Enterprise in the upcoming battle. Before the Doolittle raid, Halsey and his chief of staff met with the strike group commander, army Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle, and ironed out the details of the operation. Before the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Halsey and members of his staff attended a conference with Douglas MacArthur's staff to

²³ Both quotes from Potter, Bull Halsey, 166.

²⁴ Halsey Thesis, 6.

coordinate the invasion of the central Philippines. On some occasions, however, such as the raids on Wake and Marcus Islands and the Marshall and Gilbert Islands, Halsey did not meet with his subordinates.

A conference with Kinkaid, Murray, and Lee would have given Halsey an opportunity to convey his ideas and intentions and to "impress his personality" upon them. If he had met with them, the mission may have been clearer. They would have learned of Halsey's intention to engage the enemy no matter what. They would have learned of his pledge to Vandegrift to give him everything that he had. They would have learned that he had studied the Battle of Midway thoroughly and had come away with the conviction that he had to hit the enemy carriers first. Would a Nelsonian-style conference have eliminated the confusion at this point in the battle? Probably. Would Kinkaid have ordered the strike sooner? Perhaps. Would Halsey still have interfered? Possibly. Later in the battle, after Kinkaid informed Halsey that the Hornet had been damaged, Halsey ordered Kinkaid and Lee to "Operate from and in positions from which you can strike quickly and effectively. We must use everything we have to the limit." Halsey was meddling in the affairs of his commanders, but he obviously felt that he had not conveyed his intentions clearly enough.

Nevertheless, Halsey's "strike" order had far-reaching consequences. As tactical commander of Task Force 61, and physically present at the scene of the action, Kinkaid had more information at hand and a clearer picture of the tactical situation. He was in a far better position to make that decision. Yet Halsey interfered with Kinkaid's command

and forced him to act. He left him no option but to order the strike. Against his better judgment, Kinkaid ordered the strike that resulted in the loss of eight aircraft, more than 10 percent of the Enterprise's operational plane strength, on the eve of the battle.²⁵ The losses would have been much heavier if not for the good fortune of the pilots and the keen eyesight of Lieutenant Stanley Vejtasa, who spotted an oil slick in the dark that eventually led to Task Force 61.

The failure of the search and strike mission on 25 October greatly influenced Kinkaid's decision-making the following day. Shortly after the Enterprise launched a morning search at 0500, Kinkaid learned of a two-hour old PBY contact report that had located the Japanese carriers. Choosing a more cautious approach to air strikes than the previous day, he elected not to immediately launch a strike. His decision was against the urging of some members of his staff. He may have distrusted a contact report that was two hours old and wanted more current information. He may have doubted the reliability of a sighting made in the dark. He may have had misgivings about the information provided by Admiral Fitch's PBYs. He later criticized their performance in the battle:

In no case has information from shore based aircraft been complete and continuous enough to permit our carriers to withhold the search group and utilize all available planes in striking groups. . . . Our search launched a half hour before sunrise on 26 October made the contacts which led to action. Had we depended on our shore based aircraft for contacts that morning and elected to withhold the carrier search in favor of a larger attack group, a catastrophe would most assuredly have resulted.²⁶

²⁵ Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 348, 353.

²⁶ Kinkaid Endorsement to Murray Report, 146.

He may have thought back a few months to the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, when Fletcher had sent the bulk of his strike aircraft against a smaller target before he had located the larger target. But most certainly he decided to wait because of the previous night's fiasco. Commander John Griffin, the fighter director officer for Enterprise, noted that Kinkaid was "more cautious than the previous day and mindful of the losses suffered."²⁷

Kinkaid stated in his action report that if the contact report had arrived earlier it "would not have justified withholding the search," but he would have considered sending a strike group to follow the search group.²⁸ If this opportunity—an almost identical situation to the day before—had presented itself, it would have been interesting to see if Kinkaid would have decided to launch a combination search/strike mission again.

Halsey, after reading Kinkaid's comments, wrote:

That the Force Commander did not receive [the contact report] until 0512 . . . indicates a serious communication delinquency within the Task Force. Had the report reached the Task Force Commander prior to launching of the search, a search and attack group could have been launched to cover a narrowed sector, thus permitting a group attack on enemy CV with 1000 lb. bombs and torpedoes as soon as it was discovered. Or had the Task Force Commander received this report direct from the plane and immediately launched the Hornet striking group which had been standing by to make a moonlight attack, it is possible that the enemy carrier(s) would have been completely surprised and destroyed with all planes on board.²⁹

²⁷ Quote by Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 358.

²⁸ Kinkaid Report, 151.

²⁹ Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force (Vadm. William F. Halsey) to CinCPac (Adm. Chester W. Nimitz), "First Endorsement to CTF-61 Secret Letter 0077 of November 20, 1942 Report of Carrier Action North of the Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October, 1942," serial 00130b of 30 November 1942, in Nimitz Report, 157 (hereafter cited as Halsey Endorsement to Kinkaid Report). His emphasis.

Halsey obviously wanted Kinkaid to make that decision. But in light of the previous day's events, it is doubtful if Kinkaid would have launched that strike.

Murray's Plea for Air Cover

In the late morning of 26 October, Halsey monitored the battle's developments from ComSoPac headquarters. Enemy aircraft had attacked both the Enterprise and the Hornet. He had been informed that the Hornet was damaged, but he did not know the extent of the damage. Beginning at 1135, four important dispatches came in:

261135 - From CTF 61 to CTF 17 --- I am proceeding southeastward toward Roses [Efate]. When ready proceed in the same direction.

261140 - From CTF 17.2 [Rear Admiral Good, commander of Task Force 17 cruiser force] to ComSoPac --- Hornet attacked by Orange [Japanese] carrier planes at 0911L. . . . Several bomb hits one or more torpedo hits. Now dead in the water and burning somewhat. Northampton preparing take in tow. Have lost touch with Kinkaid.³⁰

261300 - From CTF 61 to ComSoPac --- Two enemy CVs damaged. Enterprise no serious damage but deck immobilized due to Hornet planes. Am retiring southeastward. Will fly excess planes to Espiritu Santo. Unable to give Hornet fighter coverage.

261400 - From CTF 17 to ComSoPac --- Position latitude 09°17' longitude 167°22', course 135, speed 6 - Hornet in tow. No aircraft. Essential air coverage be provided destination Tongatabu."³¹

³⁰ Both dispatches from Lundstrom, First Team and Guadalcanal, 440.

³¹ CTF 61 to ComSoPac 260200 of October 1942 and CTF 17 to ComSoPac 260300 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 60-61.

The first two dispatches gave Halsey a much clearer picture of the situation: Kinkaid was withdrawing in Enterprise with the rest of Task Force 16; the crippled Hornet was dead in the water; and Murray, Good, and the rest of Task Force 17 were trying to save Hornet by towing it to port. This was a dangerous proposition considering that two undamaged enemy aircraft carriers remained in the area. Halsey showed uncharacteristic restraint in the next two hours. He gave no orders. Halsey realized that Murray, in the last dispatch, was appealing to him to intervene and order Kinkaid to provide him air cover. At this time Halsey and Murray did not know of the damage to Enterprise. They only knew that Enterprise's deck was immobilized with Hornet's planes. This fact helps explain Murray's thoughts at that moment and his plea to Halsey. Halsey also knew that Kinkaid had stated that he could not (or would not) provide fighter coverage to Task Force 17. In this case, Halsey did not overrule the decision of the tactical commander at the scene of the battle.

No one knows if Halsey concurred with Kinkaid's decision. But one can assume, given Halsey's command style earlier in the battle, that if he had disagreed with Kinkaid's decision to withdraw, he would have ordered him to turn around and provide air cover for the crippled Hornet. Halsey apparently agreed with Kinkaid's strategic assessment that there was little that the Enterprise could have done at that time and that, had he stayed to provide air cover, he would have risked losing the Enterprise, the last operational carrier in the Pacific theater.

The Scuttling of the Hornet

At 1540 the mood in ComSoPac headquarters changed considerably. Throughout the day the Hornet had taken repeated blows from the enemy. By the late afternoon three torpedoes and four bombs had struck the carrier; two enemy planes had also crashed into it. It listed eighteen degrees to starboard, dead in the water. Efforts to tow it had failed. Despite the Hornet's ordeal, the situation did not seem entirely bleak to Halsey and his staff because it appeared that the Enterprise had survived the battle unscathed. Then at 1540 a troubling report from Kinkaid came in:

Damage Enterprise more extensive. 2 bomb hits. Number 1 elevator out of commission. Can operate reduced number of planes. More details later. South Dakota bomb hit on turret 1. Portland steering gear unreliable. San Juan two small compartments flooded. Porter sunk. Other DDs damaged. Request tanker latitude 14S, longitude 17E soon as practicable.³²

For Halsey, the report changed the entire strategic picture. It was now clear that they were losing the battle. Both of his carriers were severely damaged. Moreover, he knew that one or two undamaged enemy carriers were still in the area. He realized that it was time to cut his losses. He ordered all of his task force commanders to "retire to southward. More later."³³

The situation soon worsened. Reports from CinCPac headquarters indicated that the Japanese were attempting to capture the wounded Hornet. Signals Intelligence in Pearl Harbor had decrypted signals from Combined Fleet headquarters ordering Kondo to

³² CTF 61 to ComSoPac 260440 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 62.

³³ ComSoPac to All TF Coms SoPac, ComSoWestPacFor 260450 of October 1942, ComSoPac War Diary, 62.

seize and tow the carrier. Later direction-finding stations reported that a Japanese surface fleet was racing toward Task Force 17. Admiral Nimitz quickly conveyed the intelligence to Halsey.

Halsey had few options. Task Force 16, with the damaged Enterprise, was withdrawing to the southeast and had already put over 100 miles between it and Task Force 17. Admiral Lee's battleship and cruiser task force was out of the battle, over 400 miles away, and could not intercept Kondo's force. The four cruisers and six destroyers of Task Force 17 were no match for a large enemy battleship force well trained in night tactics. Even if enough surface forces had been within reach, Halsey would have had to weigh if they were worth risking for a crippled carrier. Still, the enemy could not be allowed to capture the Hornet. Halsey faced a tough decision.

Lieutenant Commander William Ashford, Halsey's air operations officer, described the evening's events at ComSoPac headquarters:

The battle took place in the forenoon, and during that afternoon and far into the night we were receiving battle reports and intelligence reports. . . . [That night] Miles Browning [Halsey's chief of staff] came in and handed me an urgent dispatch to send to Admiral Kinkaid, the OTC, in the Enterprise. He was grim. The dispatch read, "Sink Hornet with torpedoes." Intelligence had been received that the Japanese surface forces, including battleships, were closing on our task force. . . . The Japs knew the condition of the Hornet and were out to get her.³⁴

Decisive action was needed the moment that the information on the approaching Japanese surface force arrived. When Nimitz received the information at Pearl Harbor, he resisted the temptation to interfere with Halsey's command and simply relayed the

³⁴ Ashford Oral History, 73.

information. When Halsey received the same information, he denied Murray the initiative and ordered him to sink the Hornet. Yet one wonders if Halsey knew what was happening at the scene of the battle when he gave the order. Specifically, one wonders if Halsey had the information to determine if the Hornet could be evacuated in time before the Japanese surface fleet arrived. It was only about 150 miles away at 1600. Did he know if Mason had already ordered the Hornet's crew to abandon ship? If so, did he know how far along the evacuation was and how many of the roughly 2000 men were still on board? Was he aware that another Japanese strike group was about to attack Hornet, slowing down the evacuation? Halsey may have known the answers to these questions when he made his decision. But in this situation Murray was more informed than Halsey. A more useful, decentralized approach would have been for Halsey to pass the intelligence on to Murray with an estimate of how far away the Japanese forces were, and, as Nimitz did with Halsey, trust Murray to act on it.

Conclusion

At first glance, it is easy for historians to look at Halsey's actions in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands and perceive him as an overly aggressive, action-starved commander who could not prevent himself from meddling in the tactical command of his subordinates. And historians could easily point out that he did not follow the advice he laid out in his 1933 Naval War College thesis:

situation in a distant theatre. It is also easy to size up this situation entirely wrong. The man on the spot may have information, not available to the commander, that gives an entirely different picture. The subordinate must be trusted, or if not trusted, removed. The commander should furnish the subordinate with all available information, and leave the execution of the mission to the man on the spot. To interfere may be to invite disaster.³⁵

Halsey clearly interfered with the operations of his subordinates, and to ill effect. A closer analysis of his motivations, however, reveals a different perspective. Halsey interfered, violating his own "trust" principles, because he did not trust or have confidence in Kinkaid or Murray.

Halsey stated in his memoir that he experienced "great anxiety" before the battle because of his lack of familiarity with the forces under his command.³⁶ Kinkaid had served briefly under Halsey before, commanding the cruiser squadron that escorted Halsey's Task Force 16 in May 1942. By the time of Santa Cruz, Kinkaid had become a seasoned commander who had fought in the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and Eastern Solomons, but he had only commanded carrier forces in the last battle. In fact, Kinkaid was not an aviator. There was a growing consensus in the navy to only allow aviators to command carrier task forces. The early battles of 1942 had given the fast carrier captains invaluable experience, and when they were promoted to rear admiral, "this meant that the carrier task forces would be commanded increasingly by experienced pilots who had handled carriers in battle."³⁷ Capable men such as Rear Admirals Frederick C. "Ted"

³⁵ Halsey Thesis, 6-7.

³⁶ Halsey Memoir, 379.

³⁷ Clark G. Reynolds, The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), 30.

Sherman, Dewitt C. "Duke" Ramsey, and Marc A. "Pete" Mitscher stood ready in October 1942. In just a few weeks, Kinkaid would become the last non-aviator to command a carrier task force.³⁸

Even Kinkaid was aware that he was a dying breed. A few weeks before the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, he was informed that Halsey would take over command of Task Force 16, while he would take over command of Task Force 17. Both forces would come under the command of Halsey as Commander, Task Force 61. A relieved Kinkaid confided to his wife: "I am glad it has come out this way because there are a lot of aviators in the offing and there is some inclination to push them ahead of us ordinary mortals."³⁹

Nimitz and many others at Pearl Harbor did not want to entrust Kinkaid with the responsibility of commanding the American carrier forces. Nimitz's original plan called for Halsey to command Task Force 61, but the decision to fire ComSoPac Rear Admiral Robert Ghormley sooner than expected compelled Nimitz to place Halsey in Noumea. With intelligence warning that the Japanese were mounting another offensive, there was no time to shuttle a replacement for Halsey to the South Pacific. Kinkaid ended up taking over Task Force 61 by default.

In addition, Vice Admiral John H. Towers, Commander Air Force Pacific Fleet (ComAirPac), particularly disliked Kinkaid. He viewed him as a non-aviator who was

³⁸ Ibid., 30-34.

³⁹ Wheeler, Kinkaid of the Seventh Fleet, 266.

inept at commanding carriers. When Towers learned of the loss of Hornet at Santa Cruz, he immediately blamed Kinkaid. He held this conviction throughout the war. On 9 November he asked Nimitz to relieve Kinkaid.⁴⁰ Nimitz may have acted on this if time had permitted.

From Halsey's point of view as the new ComSoPac, his top carrier commander was a non-aviator who he did not know well and who he had not worked with extensively. In his Naval War College thesis, Halsey had written:

It is of the utmost military importance that the subordinate[s] should know their immediate superior in command; and it is of greater importance that the commander should know his subordinates, their capabilities and limitations. To live and work together breeds teamwork, and no force is efficient without this. No matter how many stars are gathered together, if the team is being continually shifted, it will be an easy victim for a mediocre opponent.⁴¹

Halsey must have felt uneasy about being placed in a situation in which he did not know his subordinate's capabilities and limitations firsthand. As a carrier commander who had earned his wings, Halsey probably shared the prevailing skepticism among naval airmen of non-aviators commanding carriers. He also may have known of Towers' low opinion of Kinkaid.

Had Halsey wanted to replace Kinkaid after Santa Cruz, he had one carrier admiral in the South Pacific at his disposal. With the loss of the Hornet, Murray was without a carrier task force to command. Yet many in the navy, particularly Jack

⁴⁰ Clark G. Reynolds, Admiral John H. Towers: The Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 408-409, 493, 609 note 7, 611 note 55.

⁴¹ Halsey Thesis, 6.

Towers, did not consider Murray to be aggressive enough to be an effective combat commander. An unrelenting determination to fight the enemy, something that Murray lacked, was an absolute prerequisite for carrier command.⁴² Murray had served under Halsey as captain of the Enterprise during the carrier raids in early 1942. Halsey had flown his flag in Enterprise. He certainly knew Murray well.

Halsey revealed his true intentions regarding the command of his carrier forces shortly after the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. In a letter to Nimitz dated 17 November, he wrote:

It is my intention to put him [Rear Admiral Ted Sherman] in command of task group 16 and give Tom Kinkaid one of the striking groups of cruisers and destroyers that I am about to establish. I believe it would be inexcusable to have a man of Sherman's Air experience not utilized in the Enterprise when he is available. This is absolutely no reflection on Tom Kinkaid as I consider he has done a fine job. I am merely placing my tools where I believe they will be most useful. As soon as I can get some flag officers, I would like to send Tom back to the States for a rest. He has done a noble job and has been at it a long long time.⁴³

Sherman was known as a fearless leader, an intelligent tactician, a demanding taskmaster and a risk-taker. He was also a close favorite of Halsey.⁴⁴ Halsey had wanted Sherman to command Task Force 61 from the beginning and was waiting for a break in the fighting to make a change in command.

⁴² Reynolds, Fast Carriers, 91, 236; and Reynolds, Admiral John Towers, 401. It is interesting to note that Towers did not think highly of Kinkaid, Murray, Mason, or Hardison—all of the carrier commanders except Halsey at the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands.

⁴³ Vadm. William F. Halsey to Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, 17 November 1942, Nimitz Correspondence.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, Fast Carriers, xiii, 25, 71.

These facts complicate Halsey's Naval War College model. Halsey stated that if you do not trust your subordinate, you should remove him. At Santa Cruz, he did not trust Kinkaid with the command of his carrier task forces. He apparently held a similar opinion of Murray. What do you do as a commander if you do not trust your subordinate, but circumstances (in this case time) prevent you from replacing him? Is it better to leave him on his own in keeping with the principles of decentralization? Or do you go against the "initiative of the subordinate" and attempt to manage his operations, knowing that your involvement may compound the problem?

Halsey admired Admiral Horatio Nelson and his philosophy of command. He studied the writings of Captain Dudley W. Knox. He ascribed to the decentralized approach of command and control that both men advocated. He believed that you should indoctrinate your subordinate officers before the battle, delegate command during the battle, and allow your officers to practice "the initiative of the subordinate." Yet given the unusual circumstances of the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Halsey felt it necessary to interfere with the subordinates he could not trust, thus disregarding his own personal philosophy of command.

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