

The War in the Pacific 3

From Lae to Tokyo Bay

17

Leyte Gulf
October 1944



September 1944 – New Guinea

- Following a decision in September 1944 that No. 71 Wing would not advance to Morotai with No. 10 Operational Group but instead support the Australian 6th Division in the Aitape–Wewak campaign, overall control of the wing returned to Northern Command.
- The same month, the first Beauforts of No. 7 Squadron arrived in Aitape to augment Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons; the wing was further strengthened in November with a flight of CAC Boomerangs from No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron.



New Guinea. 1944. A Beaufort bomber of No. 8 Squadron RAAF above the shore-line during a bombing attack on Wewak.

September 1944 – B29

- The raids against Japan from Chinese airfields continued at relatively low intensity. Japan was bombed on:
- 8 September (90)
- 26 September (83)
- Throughout the period, B-29 raids were also launched from China and India against other targets throughout Southeast Asia.
- The overall effectiveness of all these attacks was disappointing, due to an intolerable logistic situation, unfavorable weather, and early training problems with a new, complex and untried airplane.



B-29 of the 16th Bombardment Group during World War II in 1944

September 1944 – Air Defence

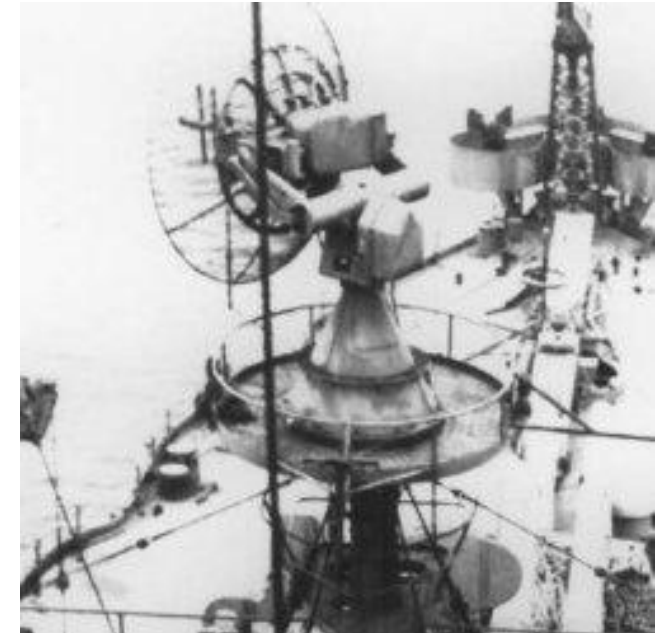
- In September 1944 the Office of the CNO issued an updated fighter director vocabulary having a special section with a visual FD vocabulary.
- It was even more terse than the standard vocabulary, with shortened phrases to support the quick reactions needed.
- To begin with, the ship's call sign was followed by the word "Snap." For example, "this is Ganymede Snap." This way, the pilots knew they were talking to a visual controller and should use the visual control vocabulary.
- Some examples of the vocabulary:
 - Vector Pronto - Dive as low as possible and go on the magnetic bearing given.
 - Steady - given after the controller has called for a port or starboard turn to tell the pilot to stop the turn. This works because the controller could see the aircraft's heading.
 - Up __ - Climb the number of feet given
 - Masthead - Fly just above the water.



September 1944 – Air Defence

- A lighter version was also developed, the SCR-784. The only real difference was that the new design weighed 12,000 lb, whereas the original was 20,000.
- The lighter version was navalised for fighter direction as the SP which was installed on Fleet Carriers, Battleships, Cruisers and some Destroyers from September 1944.

SP Radar



Wavelength	10 cm
Pulse Width	1 or 5 microsecond
Pulse Repetition Frequency	120 or 600 Hz
Power	700-1000 kW
Range	35 nautical miles (65 km) on low-flying bomber 70 nautical miles (130 km) on bomber at altitude 40 nautical miles (70 km) on fighter 35 nautical miles (65 km) on battleship 25 nautical miles (45 km) on destroyer 15 nautical miles (30 km) on submarine
Antenna	Parabolic
Scope	PPI with 10, 50, and 80 nautical mile (19, 90, and 150 km) distance scales
Scan rate	6 rotations per minute
Accuracy	200 yards/1.5 degree 180 meters/1.5 degree
Resolution	200 yards/0.5 degrees 180 meters/0.5 degrees
Weight	9000 lbs 4100 kg
Production:	300 from 1944-9

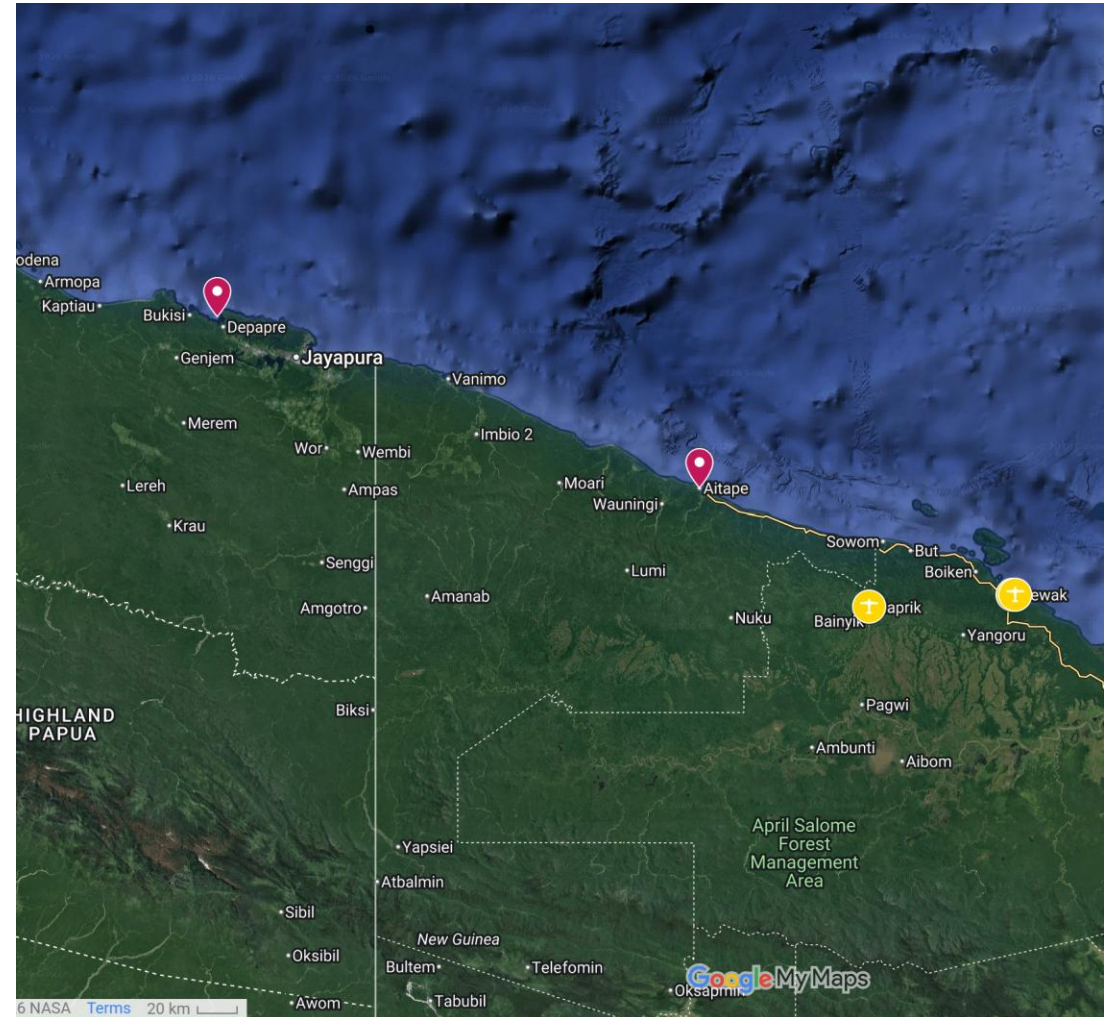
September 1944 – SW Pacific

- In September 1944, MacArthur's Advance General Headquarters moved from Port Moresby to Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea.
- They were joined by a small group of Australians led by Lieutenant General Frank Berryman, Blamey's chief of staff.
- Berryman kept Blamey informed of the mood in MacArthur's headquarters, observing the ever-increasing marginalisation of Australian forces.
- Berryman could not get a definite decision from MacArthur's staff on the employment of Australian ground forces.
- Photo: General Douglas MacArthur ... with him is Major General Whitehead



September 1944 – SW Pacific

- MacArthur made Hollandia a centre from which the fight against the Japanese in the Pacific was coordinated.
- The town of Hollandia did not offer any facilities. A road network of hundreds of kilometres and a large number of buildings were built in a very short time.
- They also made the Sentani airfields operational and used them during heavy fighting further inland during the Battle of Driniumor River.
- Both Humboldt Bay and Tanahmerah Bay were developed with naval base, ammunition, repair and fuel facilities.
- The site was subsequently renamed “Base G” and accommodated more than 100,000 American soldiers.
- General MacArthur moved to Hollandia with the staff of the American Sixth Army and took up residence in a villa on the slopes of the Cyclops Mountains overlooking Lake Sentani.
- Hollandia was the first location captured which was outside Australian administration.



September 1944 - Australia

- The association between General MacArthur and the Australian Government (in the persons of Curtin, Blamey, and the Secretary of the Defence Department, Sir Frederick Shedden) had been harmonious, but nevertheless those who had been close to the American headquarters knew that at least some of its senior members would be happy to snap the link.
- The cooperation of allies produces many difficulties and irritations, particularly when the larger one is established in the territory of the smaller.
- And a headquarters staff of which an astute American observer was to write that they considered Washington and perhaps even the President himself to be under the domination of "Communists and British Imperialists", was not likely to find the atmosphere of Australia, a British country with a Labour Government, entirely congenial.
- Charles Willoughby, McArthur's G2 was one of the staff thus described. He was an admirer of Mussolini, writing that "Historical judgment, freed from the emotional haze of the moment, will credit Mussolini with wiping out a memory of defeat by re-establishing the traditional military supremacy of the white race".



Willoughby at his desk in Australia. He was a German whose origins were obscured by the many lies he told about his early life.

September 1944 – Dutch New Guinea

- Throughout the month squadrons of No. 78 Wing had continued their operations against the Vogelkop airfields.
 - The squadrons completed 1,120 operational sorties of all kinds, and 216 tons of bombs and 278,000 rounds of ammunition were expended during the month.
 - Enemy airstrips within the radius of action which the wing attacked included Samate, Jefman, Babo , Utarom, Ransiki, Faan and Langgur, all of which had been put out of action.
 - Squadrons' effort for the month:
 - No. 75 Squadron 375 sorties 1,075 hours
 - No. 78 Squadron 363 sorties 1,046 hours
 - No. 80 Squadron 382 sorties 1,148 hours
- [Map](#)

September 1944 – Manhattan Project

- Despite protests from TVA that it was unnecessary, the Manhattan District built a coal-fired power plant at K-25 with eight 25 MW generators to provide secure access to power.
- Steam generated from the K-25 power plant was subsequently used by S-50.



The S-50 plant is the dark building to the upper left behind the Oak Ridge powerhouse (with smokestacks).

September 1944 – Manhattan Project

- The thermal diffusion process was based on Chapman and Enskog's theory that when a mixed gas passes through a temperature gradient, the heavier one tends to concentrate at the cold end and the lighter one at the warm end.
- Groves contracted with the H. K. Ferguson Company to build the thermal diffusion plant, which was designated S-50.
- Plans called for the installation of 2,142 48-foot-tall diffusion columns arranged in 21 racks. Inside each column were three concentric tubes. Steam, obtained from the nearby K-25 powerhouse at a pressure of 100 pounds per square inch and temperature of 545 °F, flowed downward through the innermost 1.25-inch (32 mm) nickel pipe, while water at 155 °F flowed upward through the outermost iron pipe. The uranium hexafluoride flowed in the middle copper pipe, and isotope separation of the uranium occurred between the nickel and copper pipes.
- Work commenced on 9 July 1944, and S-50 began partial operation in September.
- Leaks limited production and forced shutdowns over the next few months.



The S-50 plant is the dark building to the upper left behind the Oak Ridge powerhouse (with smokestacks).

September 1944 – North West Area

- In September Air Commodore Charlesworth, who had replaced Air Vice-Marshal Cole as air officer commanding, reported that No. 80 (fighter) Wing was causing him some concern.
- It had been moved to the Darwin area but had nothing to do except train.
- After July, the enemy did not even send reconnaissance aircraft over northern Australia.
- The spirit of the men was still high but there was a danger of a drop in morale unless they were given some active role in the war.
- Charlesworth said in a report to Bostock: "I cannot urge too strongly the early employment of it on active operations in some other theatre or its withdrawal to a southern location where personnel may rest."
- The bombers and Beaufighters meanwhile were very busy attacking airfields, Ambon was practically destroyed in August, and suppressing Japanese shipping, all beyond the maximum range of the fighters.
- Almost daily attacks on Ambon continued in September.



Air Commodore Charlesworth in Japan, c. 1949

1 October 1944 - Ulithi

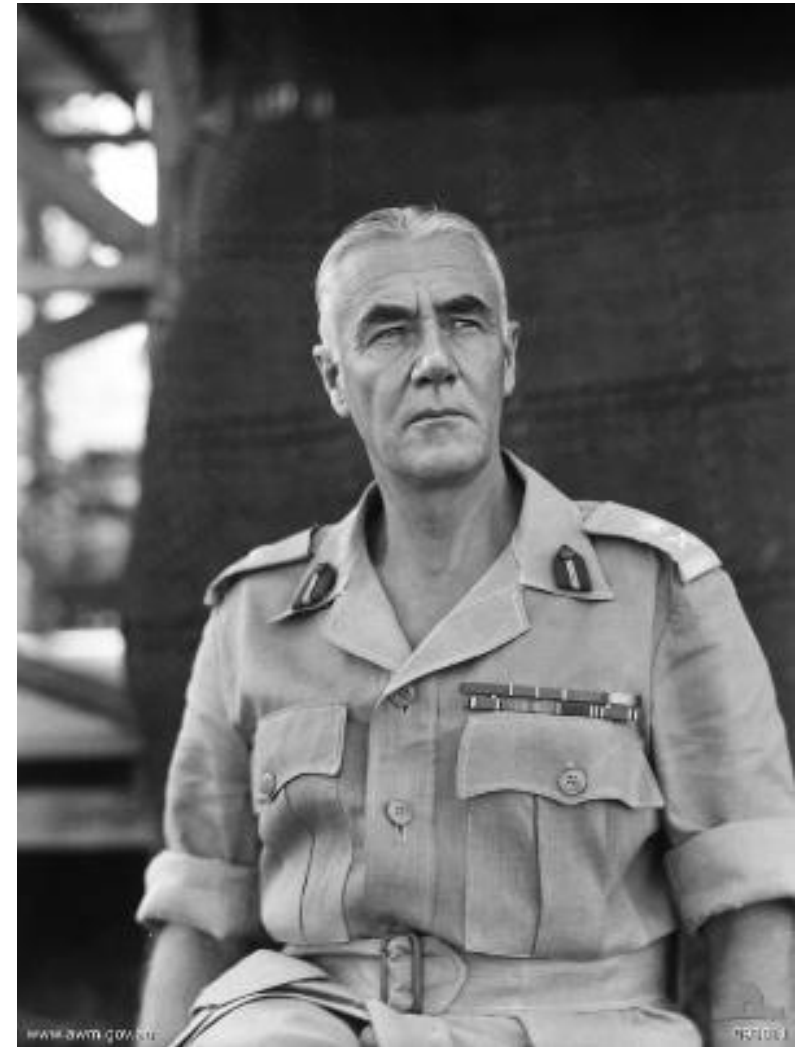
- The US Navy Seabee 18th Special Battalion arrived at Ulithi on 1 October, followed by the 88th Naval Construction Battalion on 11 November.
- The Seabees did major construction on five islands of the atoll, notably including building a large fleet recreation center on Mogmog Island for 20,000 troops, docking piers, small plane airstrips, seaplane base, pontoon piers, and camps.
- Over 9,000 men were stationed at the base to run the operations.



Mogmog Island Ulithi fleet recreation center arrival dock in 1944

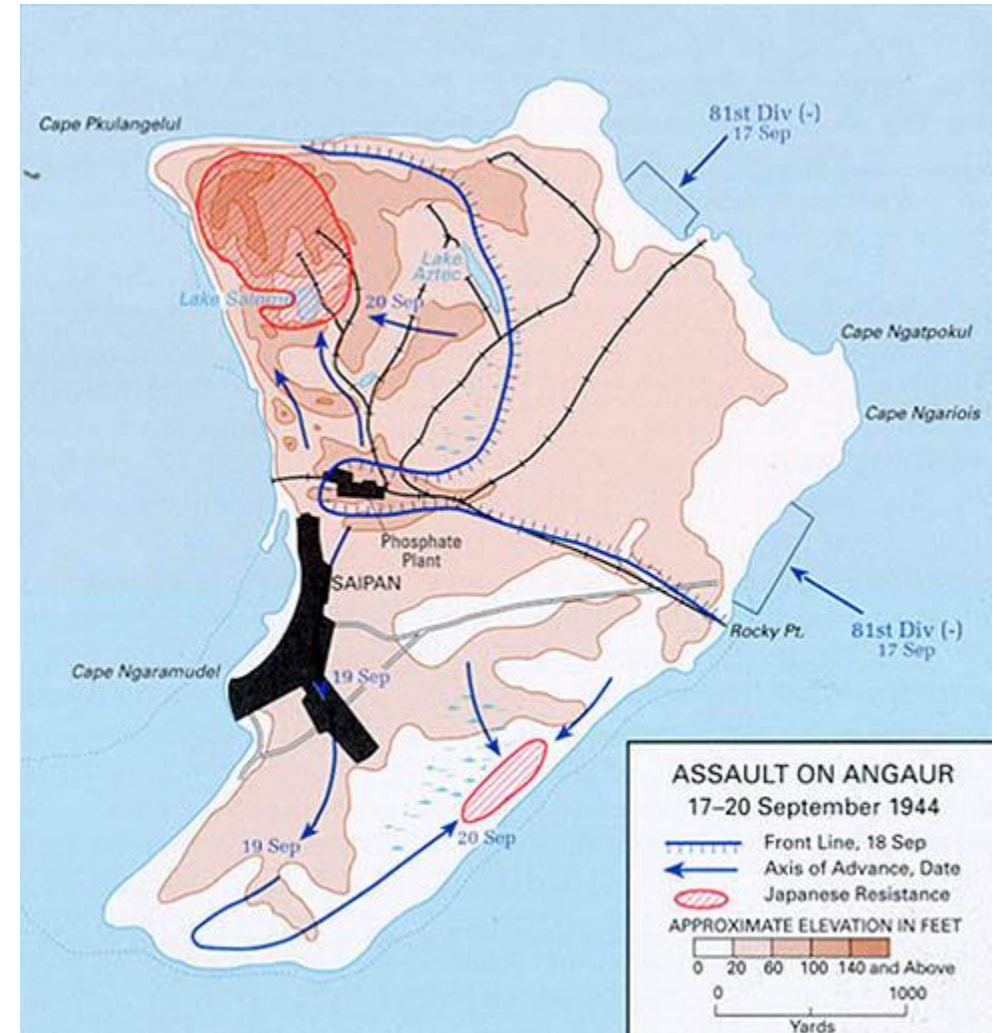
2 October 1944 – New Guinea

- In the new phase, Blamey would command a total of six subordinate formations: First Army, Second Army, I Corps, Northern Territory Force, Western Command and 11th Division.
- Lieut-General Sturdee's First Army opened its headquarters at Lae on 2nd October.
- Under it would be
 - Savige's II Corps with headquarters at Torokina in Bougainville;
 - Major-General A. H. Ramsay's 5th Division on New Britain;
 - Major-General J. E. S. Stevens' 6th Division at Aitape; and
 - the 8th Brigade in the area west of Madang.
- The deployment of twelve brigades in New Guinea and the Solomons left in Australia, apart from I Corps training on the Atherton Tableland, only two brigades of infantry.
- Photo: Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee, GOC First Army c. 1945



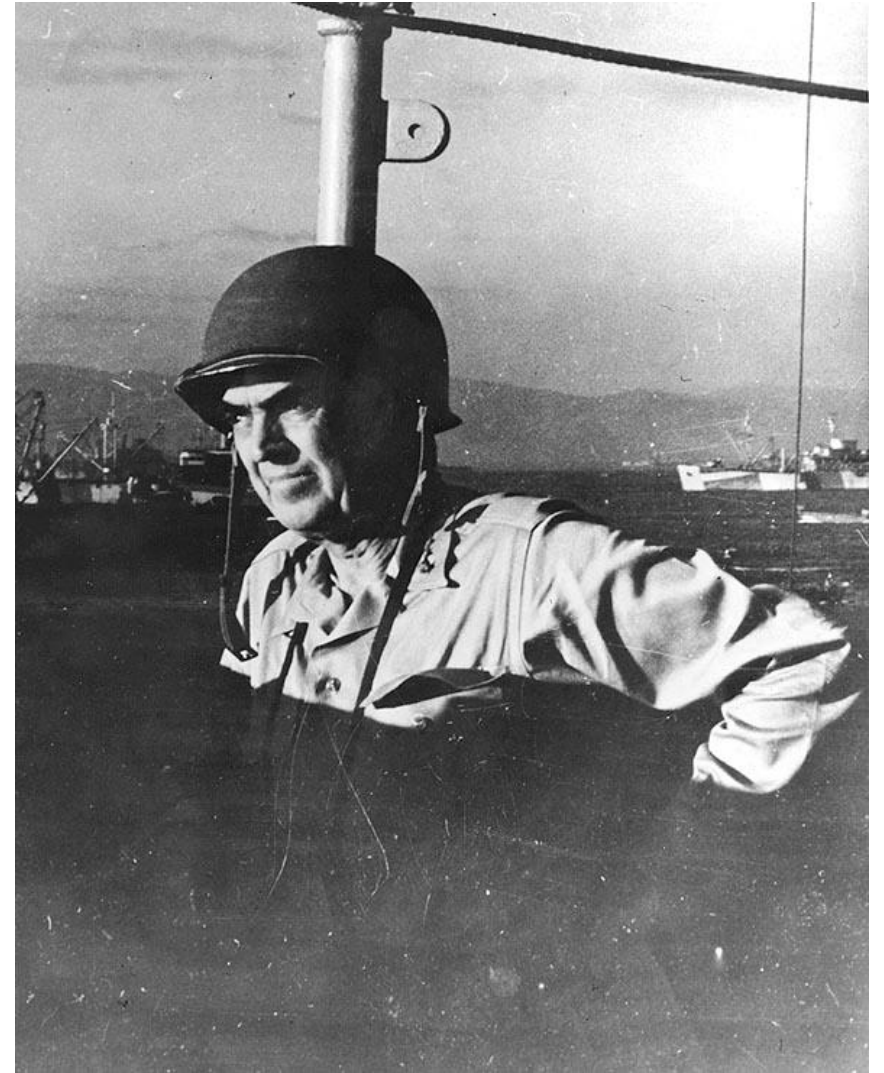
1 - 22 October 1944 – The Palaus

- the Japanese still had about 300 more soldiers in the Bowl and surrounding areas that held out for almost four more weeks.
- Toward the end of the first week of October, the protracted conflict had degenerated into patrol action with sniping, ambushing, and extensive booby-trapping employed by both sides.
- The last day of fighting was 22 October with a total of 36 days of fighting and blasting the Japanese resistance from their caves with explosives, tanks, artillery and flamethrowers.
- The 322nd RCT sustained 80% of the American casualties on Angaur, with a 47% casualty rate.



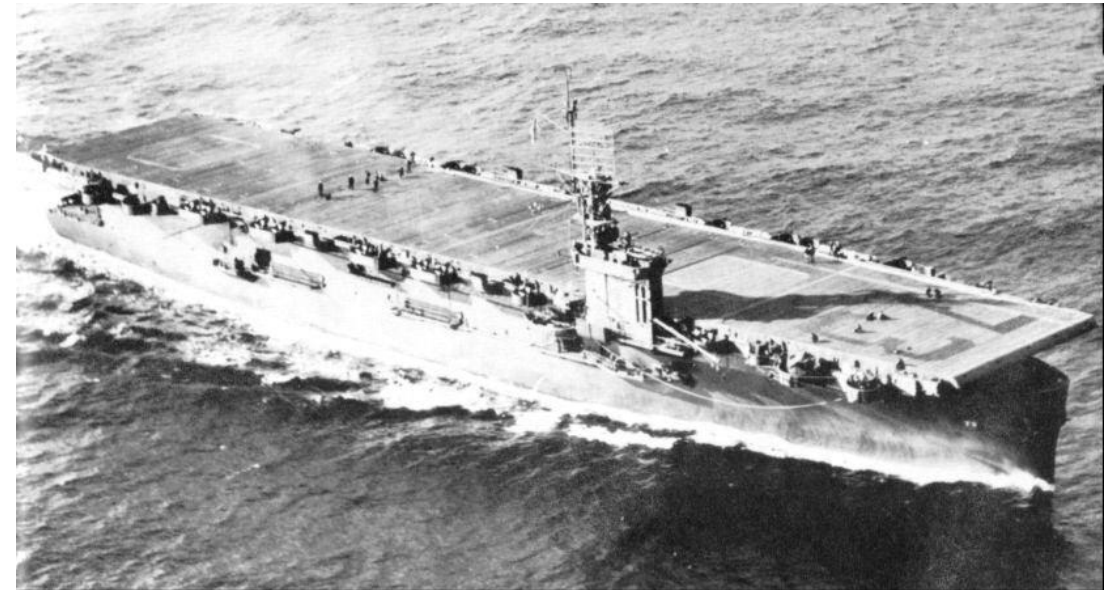
10 October 1944 - Pacific

- MacArthur's forces would invade the island of Leyte in the central Philippines. Amphibious forces and close naval support would be provided by Seventh Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid. The U.S. Third Fleet, commanded by Admiral William F. Halsey Jr., with all the Fast Carriers and all the Fast Battleships, would provide more distant air cover for the invasion.
- There would be no single American admiral in overall command. Kinkaid fell under MacArthur as Supreme Allied Commander Southwest Pacific Area, whereas Halsey's Third Fleet reported to Nimitz as Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Areas.



10 October 1944 - Pacific

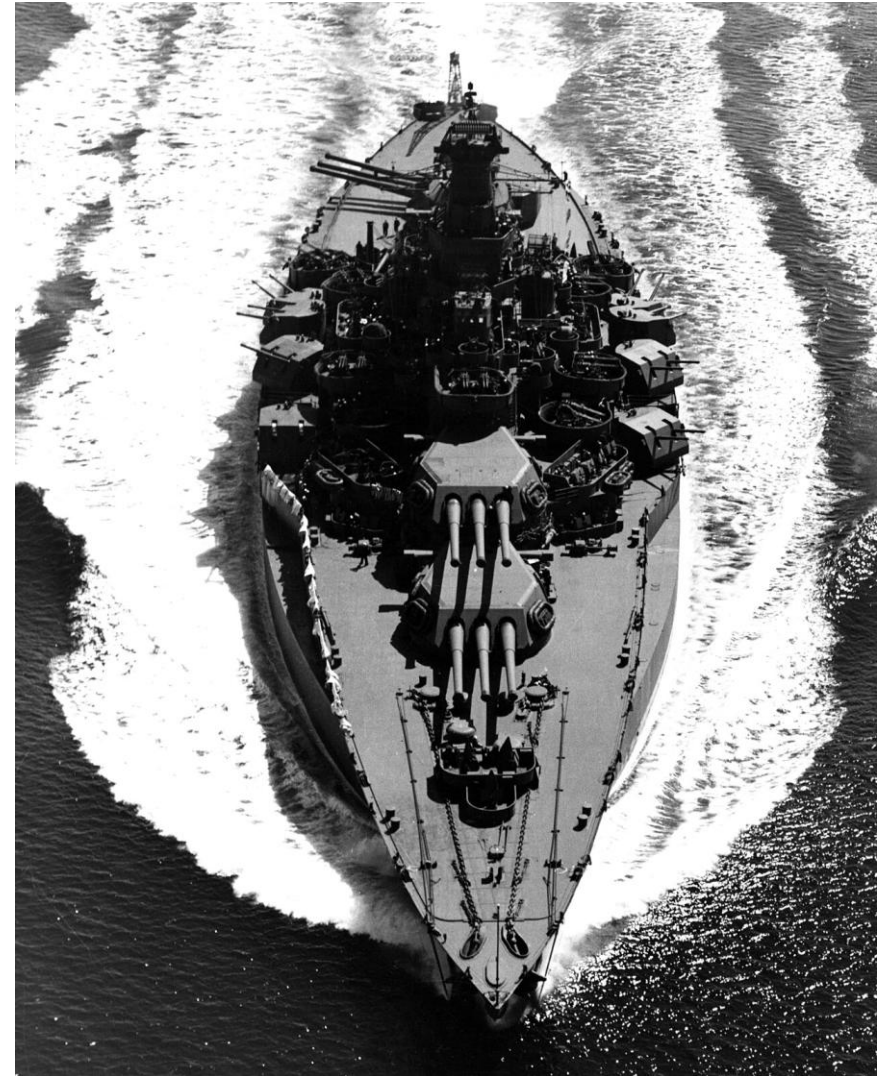
- Over the first six months of the Second Happy Time, German submarines sank over two million tons of shipping off the Eastern Seaboard of the United States.
- The 1942 escort carrier program had already called for the conversion of twenty-four hulls, but President FDR believed that more were needed to stem the loss of shipping.
- It was against the backdrop of these losses that the industrialist Henry Kaiser, assisted by FDR's advisor Thomas Corcoran, gave a presentation to the president for a 20 kn carrier design that was to be produced at scale at his shipyards.
- On 8 June 1942, Roosevelt declared his support for the Kaiser design.
- Although Kaiser wished to build at least a hundred ships, the Navy ordered fifty.
- Fifty Casablanca class carriers were laid down, launched and commissioned in less than two years – 3 November 1942 to 8 July 1944.
- The 7th fleet had 18 Escort Carriers, 14 of the Casabancas and 4 of the earlier conversions in 3 task groups each with a small screen of destroyers and destroyer escorts under the overall command of Rear Admiral Thomas Sprague.



Casablanca Class Escort Carrier Gambier Bay. 20 knots typical air group 16 Wildcat Fighters and 12 Avenger torpedo bombers.

10 October 1944 - Pacific

- The 7th fleet had 6 old Battleships, 5 Heavy and 4 Light Cruisers, 28 destroyers and 39 PT Boats in Task force 77.2 commanded by Rear Admiral Jesse Oldendorf.
- All but one of the Battleships had been sunk or severely damaged at Pearl Harbor but subsequently raised and repaired or in two cases rebuilt.
- Photo: Battleship Tennessee after modernization



12 October 1944 - Pacific

- On 6 October 1944 Halsey's Fast Carrier Task Force sortied to carry out a series of air strikes on Japanese targets in the western Pacific to ensure that Japanese aircraft based there could not interdict the American amphibious landings on Leyte.
- These began with attacks on Okinawa on 10 October and moved on to Formosa on 12 October.
- The Japanese command launched waves of air attacks against the Third Fleet's carriers. In what Admiral Halsey refers to as a "knock-down, drag-out fight between carrier-based and land-based air"
- The night carrier Independence brought down three Japanese planes on the night of 12 October 1944 in operations near Formosa.
- The task force drew a number of Japanese aerial counter attacks by land based planes. These were usually at night or at sunset when the attackers could approach out of the setting sun.
- They were usually composed of numerous bombers and torpedo planes, sometimes with fighter escort.



13 October 1944 - Pacific

- At night one or two leaders would illuminate the target ships with running lights or flares to guide the others in for a coordinated attack.
- In this manner the cruiser Canberra was torpedoed on the night of 13 October.
- The torpedo hit below her armour belt. The explosion killed 23 personnel and exposed the engineering spaces to the ocean, stalling the ship.
- USS Wichita took Canberra in tow for a rendezvous with the tug USS Munsee, which took over the tow after putting a salvage crew aboard.
- During the tow, the salvage officer from Munsee was killed while diving in the cruiser's flooded engine room to make temporary repairs.
- A week into the tow towards Ulithi, Munsee was joined by the tug Watch Hill. It took another week for the two tugs to bring Canberra to the repair ship USS Ajax.
- After temporary repairs at Manus, Canberra sailed under her own power to Boston Navy Yard.



The U.S. Navy heavy cruiser USS Canberra (CA-70) operating with Task Force 38 in the Western Pacific, 10 October 1944, three days before she was torpedoed off Formosa. Her camouflage is Design 18a in the Measure 31-32-33.

14 October 1944 - Pacific

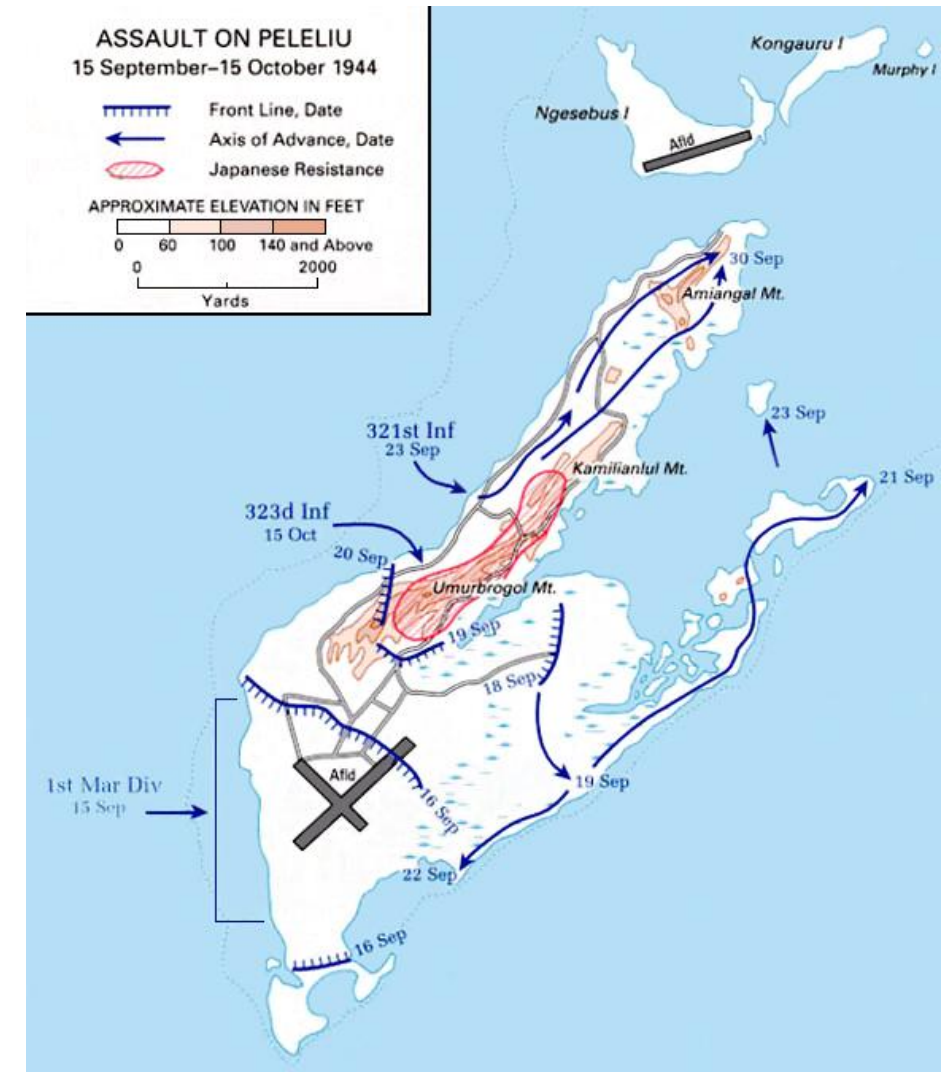
- USS Houston's anti-aircraft gunners claimed four aircraft shot down on 12 October, and three more on 14 October.
- During the latter engagement late in the day, a Japanese bomber hit Houston with a torpedo in one of her engine rooms.
- The hole flooded all four machinery spaces disabling power throughout the ship.
- The ship's damage control teams began work immediately and began efforts to control flooding; eventually, they were able to contain flooding and pump some undamaged compartments empty.
- In both the Canberra and Houston cases there was no night CAP aloft.
- The Third Fleet FDO wrote the attacks were "the worst problem of all."



USS Canberra (foreground) and Houston (background) under tow on 18 October

15 October 1944 - Palaus

- By 15 October the 7th Marines had suffered 46% casualties, and Geiger relieved them with the 5th Marines.
- Col. Harris adopted siege tactics, using bulldozers and flamethrower tanks to methodically destroy Japanese positions, and pushed into the ridges from the north.



15 October 1944 - Palaus

- "My surprise and chagrin when concealed batteries opened up on the [assault craft] can be imagined," admitted Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf, commanding the fire-support group at Peleliu, on discovering his three-day preliminary bombardment had failed to protect the D-Day landing.
- In fairness to Oldendorf, there was plenty of "surprise and chagrin" to be shared with other senior Navy and Marine Corps officers, who likewise misjudged the island's terrain and its Japanese defenders.
- Inadequate intelligence, rosy assumptions and unimaginative planning, characterized the campaign to seize Peleliu and Angaur.
- Admiral Oldendorf "ran out of targets" at Peleliu because Japanese gunners refused to reveal their camouflaged positions by firing at the U.S. ships and because the Third Amphibious Force had woefully deficient target intelligence.
- Geiger worried about the assault plan. Peleliu was scheduled to receive two days of pre-D-Day bombardment; the total tonnage being even less than Tarawa had received in three hours. The paucity of time and tonnage seemed absurd to Geiger, fresh from the 13-day preliminary shelling of Guam.
- Admiral Fort (photo) anticipated Geiger's protest, warning him not to expect another Guam, declaring, "I don't have the ships and we don't have the ammo."



16 October 1944 - Pacific

- USS Boston took Houston under tow until the tug Pawnee took over the tow later that night.
- As the ship could no longer feed or house her crew, most of the men were evacuated save the damage control teams.
- Houston and Canberra again came under heavy attack on 16 October, and Houston was hit in the stern by a second torpedo.
- The explosion ignited a tank of fuel for the ship's reconnaissance floatplanes, causing a major fire in the aircraft hangar, though the remaining crew suppressed the blaze within fifteen minutes.
- Flooding from this hit further degraded the ship's buoyancy and stability. Another 300 men were evacuated, leaving just 200 aboard to continue damage control efforts.
- Houston and Canberra reached Ulithi by 27 October; there, Houston underwent temporary repairs alongside the repair ship Hector. Significant hull repairs were made and much of the flooding pumped out. This allowed her to steam to Manus Island where the floating dry dock ABSD-2 allowed the rest of the hull damage to be plated over and the remaining water pumped out. Two boilers and two engines were restored to operation, allowing her to steam to the New York Navy Yard.



A Japanese torpedo hits the starboard quarter of USS Houston (CL-81), in the afternoon of 16 October 1944. This view shows burning fuel at the base of the torpedo explosion's water column. Houston was under tow by the tug USS Pawnee when hit again. The USS Canberra is under tow in the distance.

16 October 1944 - Pacific

- When Canberra and Houston were hit by torpedoes, Cowpens provided air cover for their safe withdrawal, rejoining her task group on 20 October.
- The Formosa Air Battle lasted for three days, and American forces inflicted serious damage to the Japanese 2nd Air Fleet based on the island.
- The Japanese lost roughly 600 aircraft in three days – almost their entire air strength in the region.



16 October 1944

- Until sunset, day fighters provided task force cover, and at sunset a large CAP of sixteen to twenty-four fighters, including eight night fighters would be launched.
- The night fighters worked in pairs; one VHF channel would be assigned to each pair, and each pair would be controlled by a separate FDO.
- The night carrier Independence sailed separated from the main fleet body, with her own CAP and surface escort, so she could launch and recover her night fighters without interfering with task force operations.
- Usually at night, two destroyer pickets would be placed about fifty miles from the main body in the direction from which attack was expected, and each would have control of two night fighters.
- They could give early attack warning, conduct intercepts on their own, and even make attackers think they had found their primary target.
- From the sixteenth through the end of October Independence ran fifteen night interceptions, of which they scored seven kills.



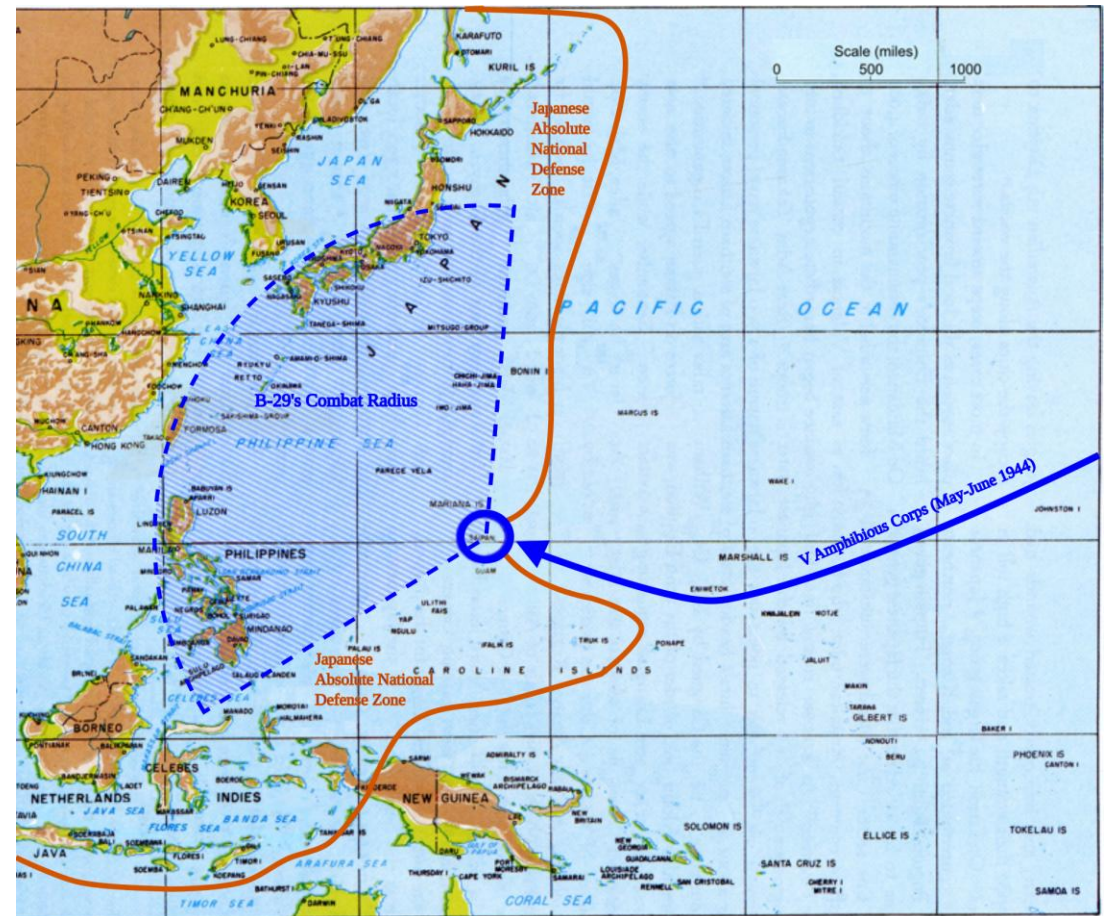
- On 18th October Blamey issued to Sturdee an operation instruction which defined the role of the First Army in the Bougainville, New Britain and Aitape areas as "by offensive action to destroy enemy resistance as opportunity offers without committing major forces".



Wewak Area, New Guinea, 1945. Blamey (right) visits the 6th Division, and talks with its commander, Major General Jack Stevens (left), and the Signal Officer in Chief Major General Colin Simpson (third from left).

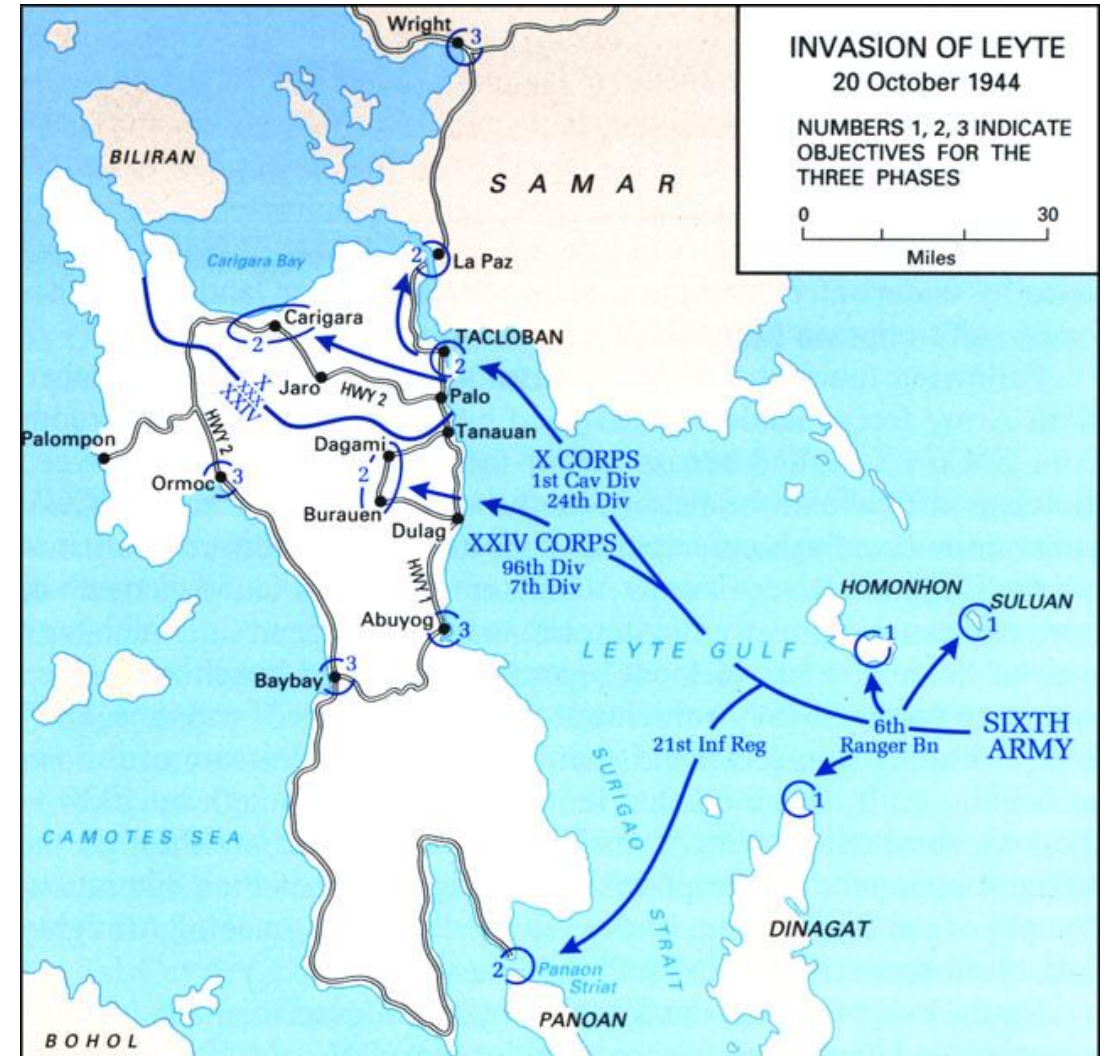
19 October 1944 - Marianas

- The first runway on Saipan was complete by 19 October.
- The 73rd Bombardment Wing began arriving on 12 October.



20 October 1944 - Leyte

- Following four hours of heavy naval gunfire on A-day, 20 October, Sixth Army forces landed on assigned beaches at 10:00.
- X Corps pushed across a 4 mi stretch of beach between Tacloban airfield and the Palo River. 15 mi to the south, XXIV Corps units came ashore across a 3 mi strand between San José and the Daguitan River.
- Troops found as much resistance from swampy terrain as from Japanese fire.
- Within an hour of landing, units in most sectors had secured beachheads deep enough to receive heavy vehicles and large amounts of supplies.
- Only in the 24th Division sector did enemy fire force a diversion of follow-up landing craft. But even then the sector was secure enough by 13:30 to allow Gen. MacArthur to make his dramatic entrance onto Red Beach and announce to the populace the beginning of their liberation: "People of the Philippines, I have returned! By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil."
- Invasion of Leyte Map, 20 October 1944



20 October 1944 - Leyte

- Douglas MacArthur wades ashore during initial landings at Leyte, Philippine Islands.
- Left to right: Philippine President Sergio Osmena; Lieutenant General George Kenney (obscured); Colonel Courtney Whitney; Brigadier General Carlos Romulo; General Douglas MacArthur; Lieutenant General Richard Sutherland; CBS radio correspondent Bill Dunn; Staff Sergeant Francisco Salveron



21 October 1944 - Leyte

- At 6 a.m. Shropshire engaged a dive bomber which made a sudden appearance between her and Australia, lying a short distance away inshore of Shropshire.
- The aircraft dived at Shropshire but was apparently put off by the heavy barrage which that ship put up.
- It pulled out of its dive and flew very close off Shropshire's star board quarter at a height of about 50 feet, and losing altitude. It came under fire from the after Bofors gun and observers in Shropshire claimed that the aircraft was hit, and that one of its wheels dipped in the water.
- It retired to the westward, but "it then turned east again and, although under heavy fire, passed up the port side of Australia and crashed into the foremast at 0605".



Shropshire arriving in Sydney Harbour on 30 November 1945. The cruiser has just returned from Japan and is transporting Australian soldiers home.

21 October 1944 - Leyte

- Australia was thus the first Allied ship to be hit by a suicide aircraft.
- The American Naval Historian believes isolated instances of Japanese pilots crashing aircraft on ships when bombs missed or the aircraft was badly damaged had been observed since 1942, and the attack on Australia was in this category, and was not an organised Kamikaze attack.
- In this story we have certainly seen attempts to do this by both Japanese and American pilots.
- Photo; Rear Admiral Professor Samuel Eliot Morison, Jonathan Trumbull Professor of American History at Harvard and author of the 15 volumes of the History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, which he had persuaded his friend the President to commission.



20th February 1942 - Sea

- Twin engined bombers attacked Lexington when it attempted to raid Rabaul.
- One of the bombers, damaged but still airborne, attempted to crash onto the carrier. Sherman kept Lexington's stern pointed at the attacker while every gun on the ship opened up. The attacker ran out of air, smacked the water and exploded 75 yards short of the ship at 16.51.
- Lexington had just finished recovering Lovelace's Wildcats at 17.09 when the surviving bombers dropped their bombs, the closest struck the water only 100 feet astern of the wildly maneuvering carrier.
- Once again one of the damaged bombers appeared to be trying to ram the ship. In a furious barrage of anti aircraft fire it hit the sea and exploded 1,500 yards off Lexington's port bow at 17.12.



A Mitsubishi G4M bomber photographed from Lexington's flight deck on 20 February 1942

26th October 1942 - Sea

- At 09:14, a dive bomber was set on fire by *Hornet's* anti-aircraft guns; the pilot deliberately crashed into *Hornet's* stack, killing seven men and spreading burning aviation fuel over the signal deck.
- At (10.44), 16 more torpedo planes arrived and split up to attack *Enterprise*. One group of torpedo bombers was attacked by two CAP Wildcats which shot down three of them and damaged a fourth. On fire, the fourth damaged aircraft purposely crashed into the destroyer *Smith*, setting the ship on fire and killing 57 of her crew. The torpedo carried by this aircraft detonated shortly after impact, causing more damage.



... and seconds later crashes into the carrier.

21 October 1944 - Leyte

- Captain Nichols in Shropshire, now senior officer of the squadron, reported damage in Australia:
- There was a large explosion and an intense fire was started in the Air Defence position and bridge.
- Type 273 Radar Hut and lantern fell on to the compass platform, both H.A. Directors and D.C.T. were put out of action, and the port strut of the foremast was broken.
- The fire was brought under control very quickly and by 0635 the large quantity of wreckage on the compass platform and A.D.P. had been cleared away.
- Commodore J. A. Collins suffered burns and wounds; Captain E. F. V. Dechaineux and Commander J. F. Rayment were mortally wounded.
- Thirty officers and men were killed or died of wounds and 64 officers and men were wounded, 26 seriously.
- Australia retired to Manus and then to Espiritu Santo where she was repaired and was ready to sail to rejoin by 28 November.
- Photo: The bridge and forward superstructure of Australia in September 1944. This area was damaged when a Japanese bomber collided with the ship on 21 October 1944. Captain Emile Dechaineux (white uniform, facing right), was among those killed



21 October 1944 - Leyte



American Submarines were operated in two distinct chains of command.

TF 17 under Vice Admiral Charles A. Lockwood (right) who served as Commander Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet reporting directly to Admiral Nimitz as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet.

TG 71.1 under Rear Admiral Ralph W. Christie (left) who served as Commander Submarines, South West Pacific reporting to Admiral Nimitz (administrative) and Commander Submarines, Seventh Fleet reporting to Admiral Kinkaid (operational).

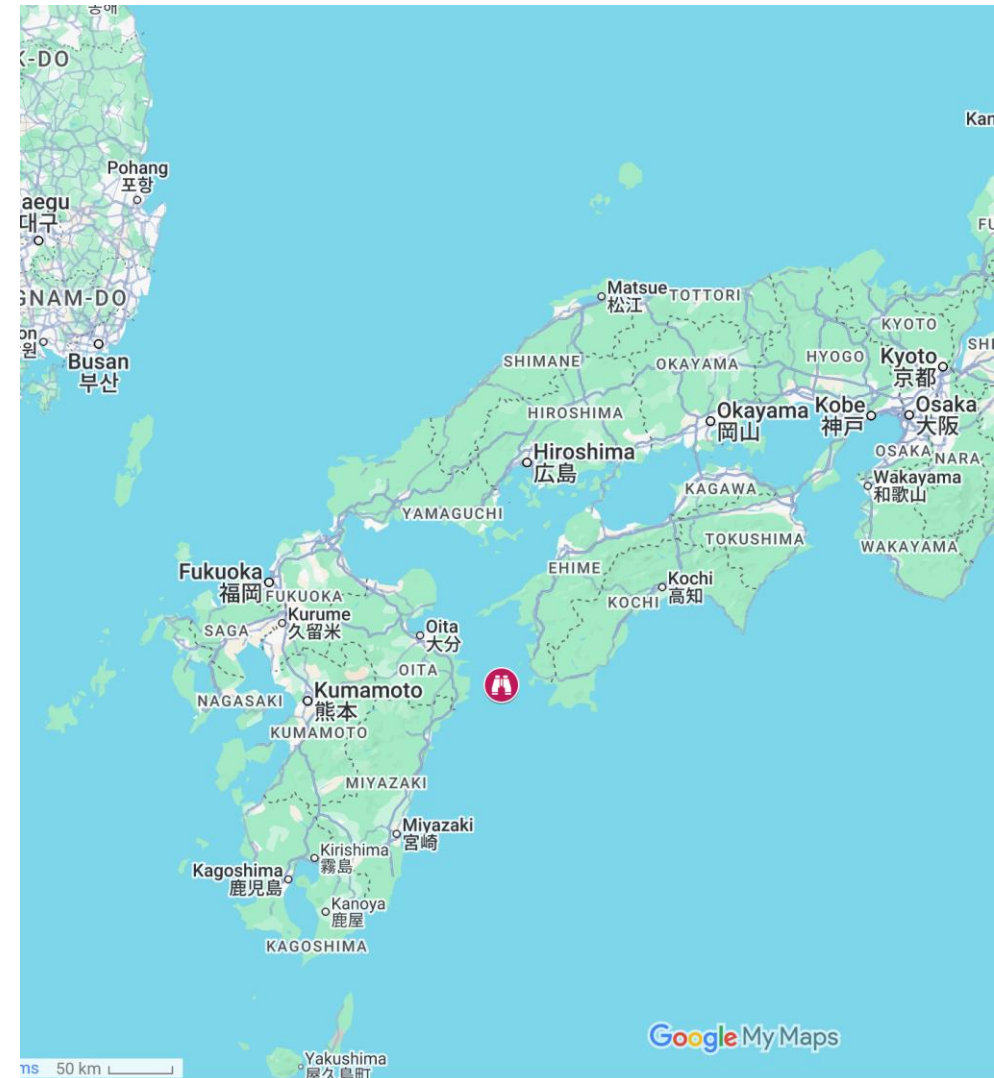
TF 17 operating from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii had 26 submarines located in the waters between Japan and the northern Philippines.

- TG 71.1 operating from several tenders in Australia had 14 submarines located in Palawan Passage, northern Palawan, Brunei Bay, Makassar Strait, Sulu Sea, Manila, and the northwest coast of Luzon. These forces constituted what was believed to be a watertight blockade around Leyte.
- Indication and warning were the main objectives of the Submarine Force in and around Leyte. Admiral Halsey and Admiral Kincaid received a steady stream of intercepts with accurate accounts of Japanese fleet movements.



21 October 1944 - Leyte

- A wolfpack led by USS BESUGO was stationed to intercept, report and attack Japanese forces moving out of the Inland Sea and into Bungo Suido.
- On **18 October** however the wolfpack left the area, with the concurrence of Admiral Lockwood, due to little observed outbound traffic and a desire to “get some good hunting before fuel supplies ran low.”
- USS DARTER and USS DACE were assigned as a wolfpack in Palawan Passage, their orders were to intercept, report, and attack Japanese forces.
- At daybreak on **October 19th**, while surfaced, both DACE and DARTER intercepted two Japanese torpedo boats by radar. Their guard was raised to a high level.
- No contacts were sighted on the 20th and 21st. DACE held intermittent contact on a fast moving group of ships **early on the 22nd** but was unable to maneuver into a firing position.
- DACE received a routine message to return to base after her allotted time on station. The DACE Commanding Officer stated he had that “funny feeling in his bones” and was granted permission to remain on station.



22 October 1944 - Leyte

- Japan's "Southern Force" consisted of the old battleships Yamashiro (flag) and Fusō, the heavy cruiser Mogami, and four destroyers.
- This task force left Brunei at 15:00 on 22 October, turning eastward into the Sulu Sea and then northeasterly past the southern tip of Negros Island into the Mindanao Sea then northeastward and into the south entrance to the Surigao Strait, intending to exit the Strait into Leyte Gulf.



23 October 1944 - Leyte

- Darter and Dace were positioned together on the surface at 01:16 on 23 October, when Darter's radar detected a Japanese formation in the Palawan Passage at a range of 30,000 yd.
- Her captain flashed the contact report and promptly made visual contact.
- The two submarines motored on the surface at full power for several hours to gain a position ahead of the Japanese formation, with the intention of making a submerged attack at first light while Darter made two further contact reports.
- At 05:24, Darter fired a salvo of six torpedoes, at least four of which hit the heavy cruiser Atago. Ten minutes later, using her stern tubes she launched another spread of torpedoes two of which hit Atago's sister ship, Takao.
- At 05:56, Dace made four torpedo hits on the heavy cruiser Maya (sister to Atago and Takao).
- Atago and Maya both went down quickly with significant loss of life.
- Takao turned back to Brunei, escorted by two destroyers, and was followed by the two submarines.



23 October 1944 - Leyte

- On 22 October, Halsey had detached two of his carrier groups to the fleet base at Ulithi to take on provisions and rearm.
- Darter's report was most important because the location of this Japanese task force had been unknown for some days.
- When Darter's contact report came in **early on the 23rd** Halsey recalled Davison's group, but allowed Vice Admiral John S. McCain, with the strongest of TF 38's carrier groups, to continue towards Ulithi.



24 October 1944 - Leyte

- Halsey finally recalled McCain on **24 October**—but the delay meant the most powerful American carrier group played little part in the coming battle and Third Fleet was therefore effectively deprived of nearly 40% of its air strength for most of the engagement.
- On the **morning** of 24 October, only three groups were available to strike Kurita's force, and the one best positioned to do so—Gerald F. Bogan's (photo) Task Group 38.2 (TG 38.2)—was by mischance the weakest of the groups, containing only one large carrier—USS Intrepid—and the Independence-class light carriers Independence and Cabot.



24 October 1944 - Leyte

- On the **morning of 24 October** 1944 RADM Frederick C. Sherman's Task Group 38.3 was ninety miles at sea directly east of Manila; their job to intercept any Manila area based aerial attackers that might try to disrupt the Leyte invasion.
- At **0807** the air search radar operators on the Task Group flagship Essex detected a large raid seventy-five miles to the west.
- They were stacked in altitudes from 1,000 feet up to 25,000 feet.
- Aboard Essex, Task Group 38.3 Fighter Director Officer Lt jg John B. Connally looked over the status boards that showed the fighter and deck conditions of the two task group fleet carriers, Essex and Lexington, and the two light carriers Langley and Princeton.
- Noting the unusually large size of the raid showing on the radar screens, Connally had all fighters on missions return to the task group area with the distress signal "Hey Rube". This was the only time as a task group FDO that he ever sent such a distress call. Next, he had all carriers launch every available fighter and then assigned specific fighter groups and targets to FDOs throughout the task group.



The photo shows Connally sitting in front of another former junior grade Lieutenant we have heard of in this story, just before they were both shot.

24 October 1944 - Leyte

- **Soon,** seven Essex Hellcats, led by EAGC CDR McCampbell (photo) were ready for launch.
- Connally, as task group FDO, did not normally conduct intercepts but rather coordinated the actions of other FDOs. He checked the assignments on his plots and saw that every FDO in the group was already very busy.
- So he personally took charge of vectoring two of them, McCampbell and wingman Lt jg Rushing, toward Zeros at 25,000 feet who were providing top cover for the oncoming enemy dive and torpedo bombers.
- When McCampbell tallyhoed, he reported they were outnumbered about thirty-to-one and asked for more fighters.
- Connally remembers listening to McCampbell tell his wingman which Zero to take on first and which one he was attacking.



24 October 1944 - Leyte

- The dogfight lasted for over ninety minutes, and the two pilots broke off only when their ammunition was gone. Rushing had shot down six Zeros, and McCampbell, nine.
- All but one of the entire Japanese air armada had been either shot down or turned back. That one dove from cloud cover and put a bomb through the flight deck of the light carrier Princeton just before 10.00.
- It ignited fires which at 15.24 caused warheads in the torpedo storeroom to explode. Princeton continued burning and exploding throughout the day until she had to be abandoned in the afternoon.
- At 17:46 USS Reno sank her with a torpedo.
- Connally was awarded the Bronze Star, McCampbell the Medal of Honor.



The light cruiser Birmingham fights fires aboard the burning light carrier Princeton, 24 October 1944. Ammunition explosions in Princeton severely damaged Birmingham's superstructure and killed 241 and injured 412 of her crew.

24 October 1944 - Leyte

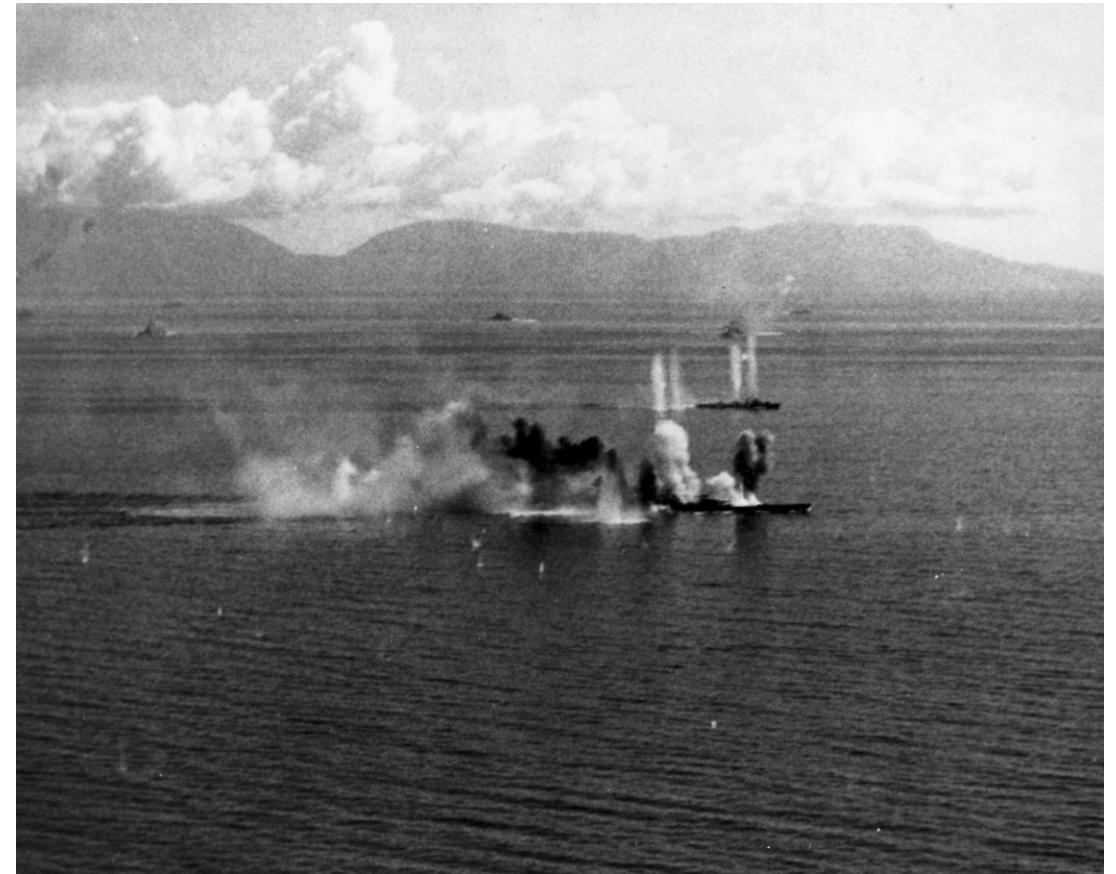
- On 24 October, while transiting the Sibuyan Sea, Kurita's ships were spotted by a reconnaissance aircraft from the fleet carrier USS Intrepid at about 8.20
- Planes from the carriers Intrepid and Cabot of Bogan's group attacked at about 10:30, scoring hits on the battleships Nagato, Yamato, and Musashi, and badly damaging the heavy cruiser Myōkō which retired to Borneo via Coron Bay.
- A second wave from Intrepid, Essex and Lexington attacked about 12.00, with VB-15 Helldivers and VF-15 Hellcats from Essex, scoring another 10 hits on Musashi.
- As she withdrew, listing to port, a third wave from Enterprise and Franklin attacked at 13.31 and hit her with an additional 11 bombs and eight torpedoes.
- Two hours later, nine Helldivers from Enterprise attacked with 450-kilogram (1,000 lb) armour-piercing bombs and scored four hits which killed the entire forward damage control team, before another wave of Enterprise aircraft hit Musashi with three more torpedoes, opening up her starboard bow and reducing her speed to 13 knots (24 km/h; 15 mph).



Musashi departing Brunei in October 1944 for the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Musashi was one of two Yamato-class battleships built for the IJN beginning in the late 1930s. The Yamato-class ships were the heaviest and most powerfully armed battleships ever constructed, displacing almost 72,000 long tons fully loaded and armed with a main battery of nine 18.1 in guns.

24 October 1944 - Leyte

- At 15:25, Musashi was attacked by 37 aircraft from Intrepid, the fleet carrier Franklin and the light carrier Cabot. The ship was hit by 13 bombs and 11 more torpedoes during this attack, for a loss of three Avengers and three Helldivers.
- Her speed was reduced to 6 knots, her main steering engine was temporarily knocked out and her rudder was briefly jammed 15 degrees to port.
- In all, five fleet carriers and one light carrier of Third Fleet flew 259 sorties with bombs carried by Helldivers and torpedoes launched by TBF Avengers against Center Force on 24 October.
- The Japanese turned around to get out of range of the aircraft, passing the crippled Musashi as they retreated.
- Halsey assumed that this retreat signified that this threat was dealt with for the time being. The Japanese, however, waited until 17:15 before turning around again to head for the San Bernardino Strait with four battleships and 8 cruisers still battle worthy.
- After being struck by at least 17 bombs and 19 torpedoes, Musashi finally capsized and sank at about 19:35 at 13°07'N 122°32'E.



Musashi heavily damaged and still under attack; her draft has noticeably increased nearly to the deck. The destroyer Kiyoshimo is seen being strafed behind her.

24 October 1944 - Leyte

- A Second Japanese Striking Force comprised heavy cruisers Nachi (flag) and Ashigara, the light cruiser Abukuma, and 4 destroyers was following the Southern Force.
- The Japanese Southern Force was attacked by U.S. Navy bombers on **24 October** but sustained only minor damage.
- The Japanese were unable to synchronize their movements because of the strict radio silence imposed on the Center and Southern Forces.
- The second Striking Force was 25 nautical miles (29 mi; 46 km) behind the Southern Force, and the Center Force was still in the Sibuyan Sea, several hours from the San Bernadino Strait.



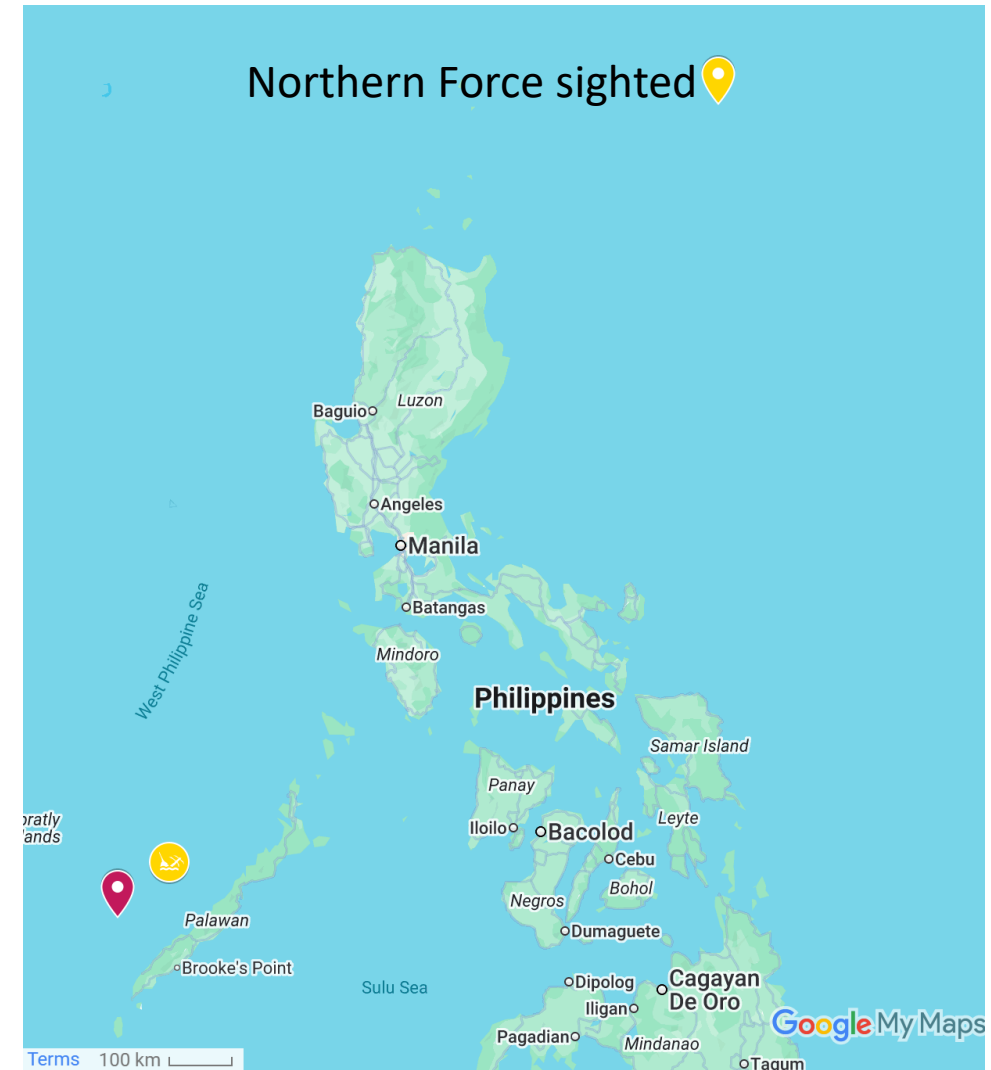
24 October 1944 - Pacific

- At 15:12 on 24 October, Halsey sent a radio message to his subordinate task group commanders giving details of this contingency plan:
- BATDIV 7 BILOXI, VINCENNES, MIAMI, DESRON 52 LESS STEVEN POTTER, FROM TG 38.2 AND WASHINGTON, ALABAMA, WICHITA, NEW ORLEANS, DESDIV 100, PATTERSON, BAGLEY FROM TG 38.4 WILL BE FORMED AS TASK FORCE 34 UNDER VICE ADMIRAL LEE, COMMANDER BATTLE LINE. TF 34 TO ENGAGE DECISIVELY AT LONG RANGES. CTG 38.4 CONDUCT CARRIERS OF TG 38.2 AND TG 38.4 CLEAR OF SURFACE FIGHTING. INSTRUCTIONS FOR TG 38.3 AND TG 38.1 LATER. HALSEY, OTC IN NEW JERSEY.
- Halsey sent information copies of this message to CinCPac and CominCh, but he did not include Admiral Kinkaid as an addressee but it was picked up by Seventh Fleet anyway.
- Halsey intended TF 34 as a contingency to be formed and detached when he ordered it, by writing "will be formed," he meant the future tense, but he neglected to say when TF 34 would be formed or under what circumstances.
- Admiral Kinkaid of Seventh Fleet believed Halsey was speaking in the present tense, so he concluded TF 34 had been formed and would take station off the San Bernardino Strait.
- Kinkaid's light escort carrier group, lacking battleships for naval action and set up to attack ground troops and submarines, not capital ships, positioned itself south of the strait to support the invasion force. Admiral Nimitz, in Pearl Harbor, reached exactly the same conclusion.



24 October 1944 - Leyte

- Third Fleet's aircraft located a force of 4 carriers, 2 hybrid battleship/carriers and their screen at 16:40 on 24 October.
- Halsey convinced that this Northern Force constituted the main Japanese threat was determined to seize what he saw as a golden opportunity to destroy Japan's last remaining carrier strength.
- Believing Center Force had been neutralized by Third Fleet's air strikes earlier in the day in the Sibuyan Sea, and its remnants were retiring, Halsey radioed (to Nimitz and Kinkaid):
- CENTRAL FORCE HEAVILY DAMAGED ACCORDING TO STRIKE REPORTS.
- AM PROCEEDING NORTH WITH THREE GROUPS TO ATTACK CARRIER FORCES AT DAWN
- The words "with three groups" proved dangerously misleading. In light of the intercepted 15:12 24 October "...will be formed as Task Force 34" message from Halsey, Admiral Kinkaid and his staff assumed, as did Admiral Nimitz at Pacific Fleet headquarters, that TF 34—commanded by Vice Admiral Lee—had now been formed as a separate entity.
- They assumed that Halsey was leaving this powerful surface force guarding the San Bernardino Strait (and covering Seventh Fleet's northern flank), while he took his three available carrier groups northwards in pursuit of the Japanese carriers.
- But Task Force 34 had not been detached from his other forces, and Lee's battleships were on their way northwards with Third Fleet's carriers. As Woodward wrote: "Everything was pulled out from San Bernardino Strait. Not so much as a picket destroyer was left"



24 October 1944 - Pacific

- Halsey did send out a second message at **17:10** clarifying his intentions in regard to TF 34.
- IF THE ENEMY SORTIES [through San Bernardino Strait] TF 34 WILL BE FORMED WHEN DIRECTED BY ME.
- Unfortunately, Halsey sent this second message by voice radio, so Seventh Fleet did not intercept it (due to the range limitations of the ship-to-ship voice radio networks in use at the time) and Halsey did not follow up with a telegraphic message to Nimitz or King, or Kinkaid.



24 October 1944 - Leyte

- At **22:36**, PT-131 (Ensign Peter Gadd) was operating off Bohol when it made contact with the approaching Japanese ships.
- The PT boats made repeated attacks for more than three and a half hours as the Southern Force streamed northward.
- No torpedo hits were scored, but the PT boats did send contact reports which were of use to Oldendorf and his force.
- As the Japanese Southern Force approached the exit from Surigao Strait, it ran into a deadly trap set by Admiral Oldendorf.



24/5 October 1944 - Leyte

- With Dace, Dartar tracked the damaged cruiser through the tortuous channels of Palawan Passage until just after midnight of 24–25 October when Dartar grounded on Bombay Shoal 9.456°N 116.933°E.
- With the tide receding, all Dace's and Dartar's efforts to get her off failed.
- All confidential papers and equipment were destroyed, and the entire crew taken off to Dace.
- When the demolition charges planted in Dartar failed to destroy her, Dace fired torpedoes which exploded on the reef due to the shallow water. Dace did, however, score 21 hits with her 3 in (76 mm) gun.
- Rock was called in and fired 10 torpedoes at Dartar with similar lack of success.
- Finally, Nautilus arrived on 31 October and scored 55 hits with her 6 in guns. Her report states, "It is doubtful that any equipment in DARTER at 1130 this date would be of any value to Japan – except as scrap."
- Photo: Destruction on the deck after she was grounded and destroyed by shellfire on Bombay Shoal off Palawan



24/5 October 1944 - Leyte

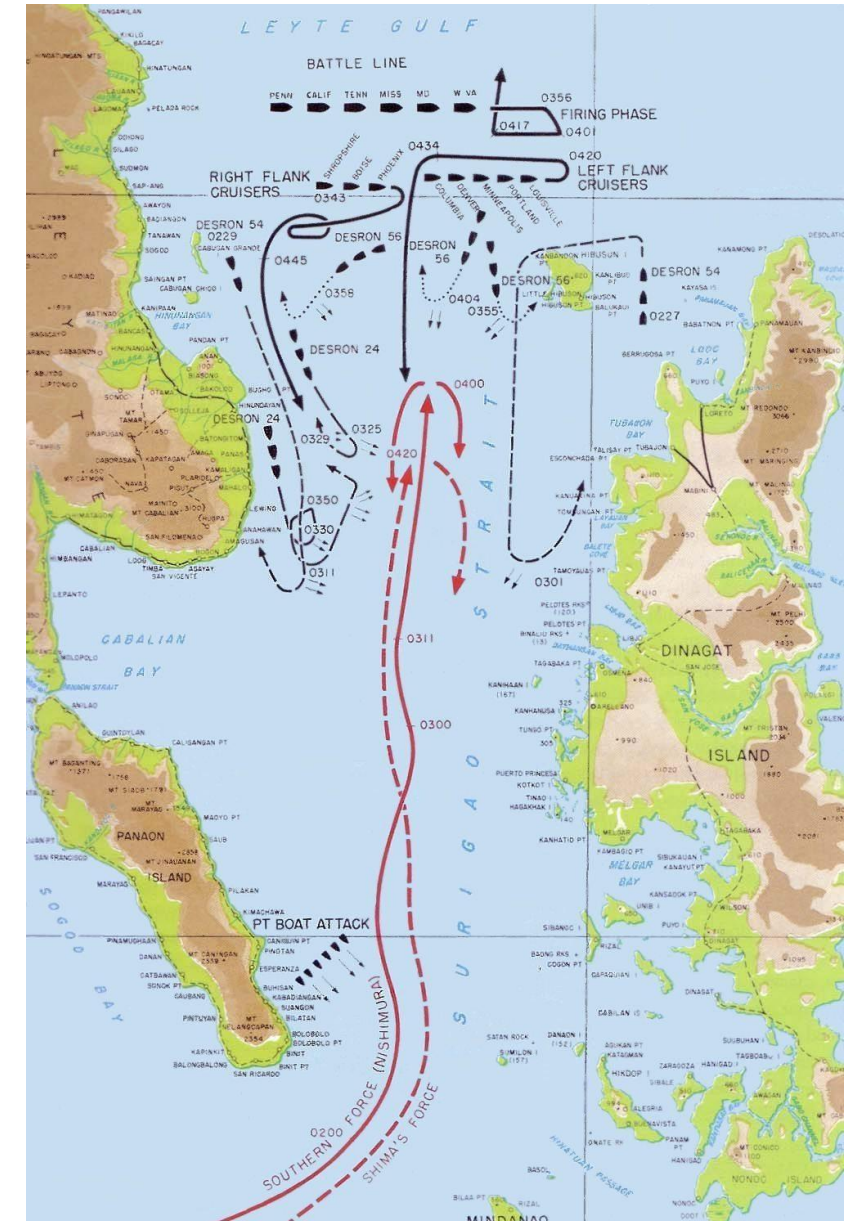
- Halsey and his staff ignored information from a night reconnaissance aircraft from the light carrier Independence that Kurita's powerful surface force had turned back towards the San Bernardino Strait and that, after a long blackout, the navigation lights in the strait had been turned on.
- When Rear Admiral Gerald F. Bogan—commanding TG 38.2—radioed this information to Halsey's flagship, he was rebuffed by a staff officer, who tersely replied "Yes, yes, we have that information."
- Vice Admiral Lee, who had correctly deduced that Ozawa's force was on a decoy mission and indicated this in a blinker message to Halsey's flagship, was similarly rebuffed.
- Commodore Arleigh Burke and Commander James H. Flatley of Mitscher's staff had come to the same conclusion. They were sufficiently worried about the situation to wake Mitscher, who asked, "Does Admiral Halsey have that report?" On being told that Halsey did, Mitscher commented, "If he wants my advice he'll ask for it" and went back to sleep.
- The entire available strength of Third Fleet continued to steam northwards towards Ozawa's decoy force, leaving the San Bernardino Strait completely unguarded.



Vice Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., USN (center)
With members of his staff, while he was Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, Pacific Fleet, in late 1941, or Commander Task Force 16, in the first months of 1942.

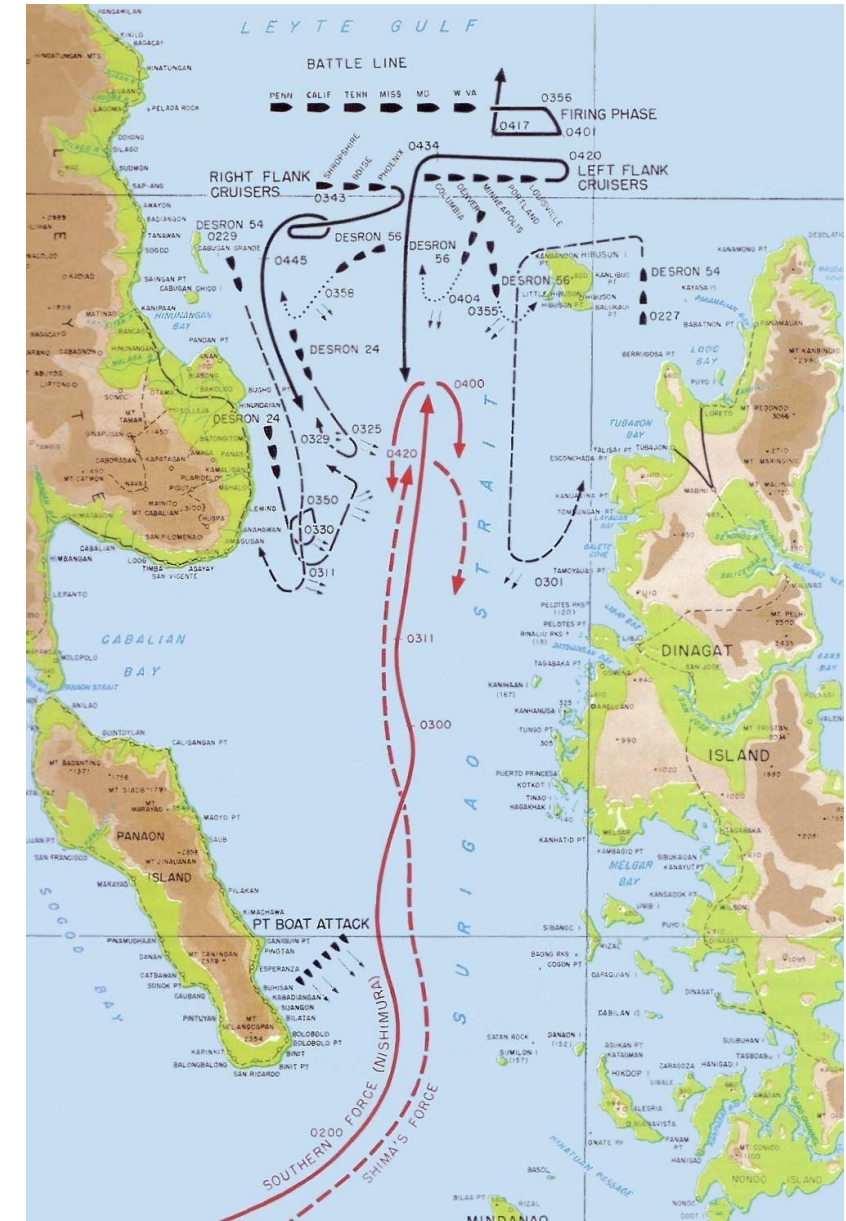
25 October 1944 - Leyte

- When the Southern Force entered the Surigao Strait at 02:00, second Striking Force was 25 nautical miles behind it, and the Center Force was still in the Sibuyan Sea, several hours from the beaches at Leyte.
- The Southern Force passed unscathed through the gauntlet of PT boats.
- However, their luck ran out a short time later, as they were subjected to devastating torpedo attacks from the American destroyers deployed on both sides of their axis of advance.
- At about 03:00, both Japanese battleships were hit by torpedoes. Yamashiro was able to steam on, but
- Fusō was torpedoed by USS Melvin and fell out of formation and later sank.
- Two of Nishimura's four destroyers were also sunk and another forced to retire.
- At 03:16, West Virginia's radar picked up the surviving ships of the Southern Force at a range of 42,000 yds. West Virginia tracked them as they approached in the pitch-black night. At 03:53, she fired the eight 16 in guns of her main battery at a range of 22,800 yds, hitting Yamashiro with her first salvo.
- At 03:55, California and Tennessee joined in firing their 14 in guns.
- Radar fire control allowed these American battleships to hit targets from a distance at which the Japanese battleships, with their inferior fire control systems, could not return fire.
- Maryland eventually succeeded in visually ranging on the splashes of the other battleships' shells and then opened fire. Mississippi only fired once in the battle-line action, a full salvo of twelve 14-inch shells.
- The American battle line fired 285 half ton shells from their main batteries



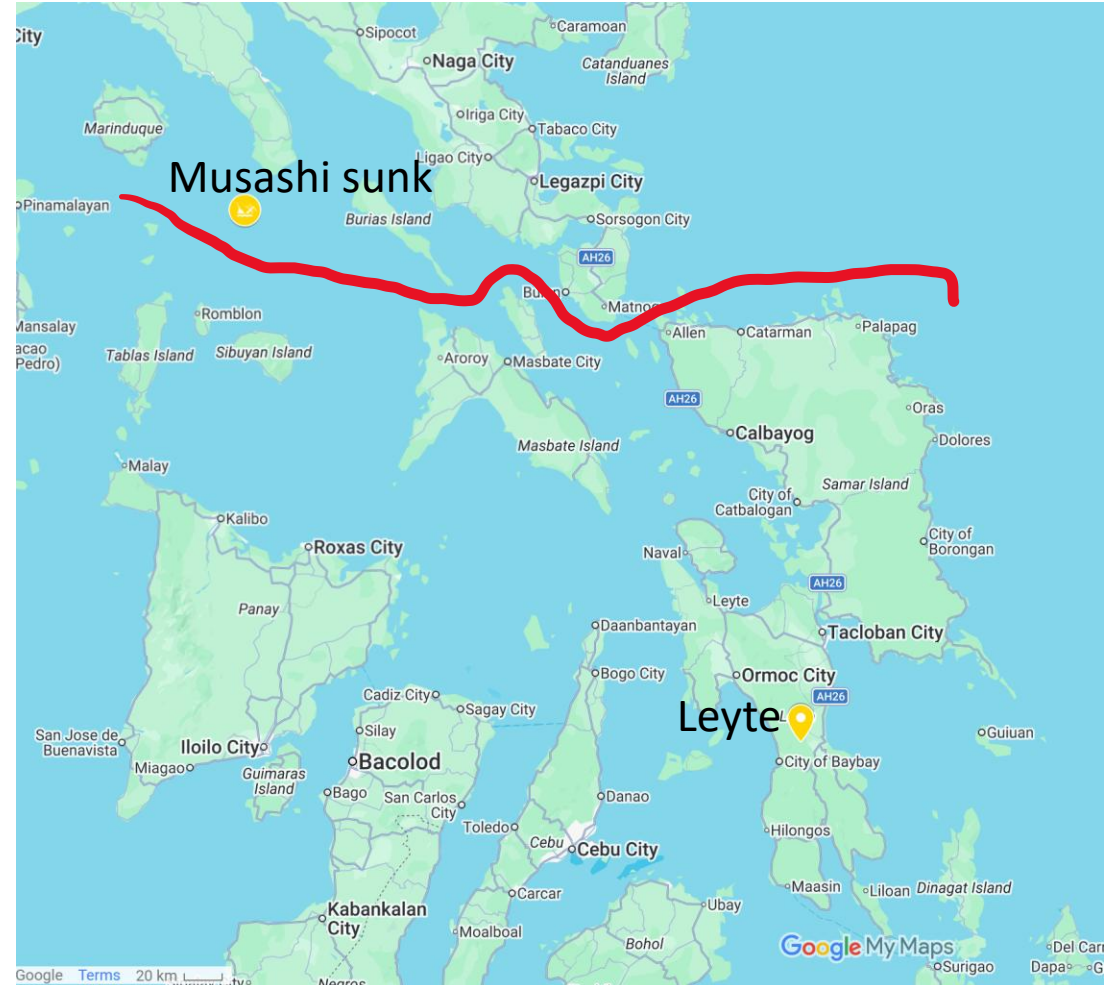
25 October 1944 - Leyte

- Yamashiro and Mogami were crippled by a combination of 16-inch and 14-inch armor-piercing shells, as well as the fire of Oldendorf's flanking cruisers. The cruisers that had the latest radar equipment fired well over 2,000 rounds of armor-piercing 6-inch and 8-inch shells.
- The Japanese command had apparently lost grasp of the tactical picture, with all ships firing all batteries in several directions
- Shigure turned and fled but lost steering and stopped dead. At 04:05 Yamashiro was struck by a torpedo fired by the destroyer Bennion, and suddenly sank at about 04:20.
- Mogami and Shigure retreated southwards down the Strait. The destroyer Albert W. Grant was hit by friendly fire during the night battle but did not sink.
- the "Second Striking Force" approached Surigao Strait about 40 mi astern of Nishimura. PT-137 hit the light cruiser Abukuma with a torpedo that crippled her and caused her to fall out of formation.
- The two heavy cruisers, Nachi and Ashigara, and four destroyers next encountered remnants of the leading force and turned to retire before coming into range of the U.S. battleships.
- The flagship Nachi collided with Mogami, flooding Mogami's steering room and causing her to fall behind in the retreat.
- Mogami was further damaged by American carrier aircraft the next morning, abandoned and scuttled by a torpedo from Akebono.
- Aside from the collision damage to heavy cruiser Nachi and a PT torpedo hit to light cruiser Abukuma, Shima's forces were unscathed.



25 October 1944 - Leyte

- Kinkaid and his staff assumed Halsey was taking his three available carrier groups northwards but leaving the battleships of TF 34 covering the San Bernardino Strait against the Japanese Center Force.
- In fact, Halsey had not yet formed TF 34, and all six of Willis Lee's battleships were on their way northwards with the carriers, as well as every available cruiser and destroyer of Third Fleet.
- Center Force emerged unopposed from San Bernardino Strait at 03:00 on 25 October and steamed southward along the coast of the island of Samar.
- In its path stood only Seventh Fleet's three escort carrier units (call signs 'Taffy' 1, 2, and 3), with 18 small, slow, and unarmored escort carriers, which carried up to 28 airplanes each, protected by a screen of lightly armed and unarmored destroyers and smaller destroyer escorts (DEs).
- Despite the losses in the Palawan Passage and Sibuyan Sea, the Center Force was still very powerful, consisting of four battleships (including the giant Yamato), six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and eleven destroyers.



25 October 1944 - Leyte

- Around **dawn** on 25 October, Ozawa launched 75 aircraft, the bulk of his few aircraft, to attack Third Fleet.
- Most were shot down by American combat air patrols, and no damage was done to the U.S. ships. A few Japanese planes survived and made their way to land bases on Luzon.
- During the night, Halsey had passed tactical command of TF 38 to Admiral Mitscher, who ordered the American carrier groups to launch their first strike wave, of 180 aircraft, at dawn—before the Northern Force had been located.



25 October 1944 - Leyte

- When the search aircraft made contact at 07:10, this strike wave was orbiting ahead of the task force.
- At 08:00, as the attack went in, its escorting fighters destroyed Ozawa's combat air patrol of about 30 planes.
- The U.S. air strikes continued until the evening, by which time TF 38 had flown 527 sorties against the Northern Force, sinking Zuikaku, the light carriers Chitose and Zuihō, and the destroyer Akizuki, all with heavy loss of life.
- The light carrier Chiyoda and the cruiser Tama were crippled.



The crew of Zuikaku salute as the flag is lowered on the listing carrier after an airstrike. She was the last carrier participating in the attack on Pearl Harbor to be sunk.

25 October 1944 – Leyte

- Steaming about 60 nmi east of Samar before dawn on October 25, St. Lo launched a four-plane antisubmarine patrol while the remaining carriers of Taffy 3 prepared for the day's air strikes against the landing beaches.
- At 06:37, Ensign William C. Brooks, flying a Grumman TBF Avenger from St. Lo, sighted a number of ships expected to be from Halsey's Third Fleet, but they appeared to be Japanese.
- When he was notified, Admiral Sprague was incredulous, and he demanded positive identification.
- Flying in for an even closer look, Brooks reported, "I can see pagoda masts. I see the biggest meatball flag on the biggest battleship I ever saw!"
- Photo: Yamato hit by a bomb near her forward gun turret in the Sibuyan Sea, 24 October 1944



25 October 1944 – Leyte

- Brooks had spotted the largest of the three attacking Japanese forces, consisting of four battleships, six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and eleven destroyers.
- They were approaching from the west-northwest only 17 nmi away, and they were already well within gun and visual range of the closest task group, Taffy 3.
- Armed only with depth charges in case of an encounter with enemy submarines, the aviators nevertheless carried out the first attack of the battle, dropping several depth charges which just bounced off the bow of a cruiser.
- The lookouts of Taffy 3 spotted the anti-aircraft fire to the north. The Japanese came upon Taffy 3 at 06:45, achieving complete tactical surprise.
- At about the same time, others in Taffy 3 had picked up targets from surface radar and Japanese radio traffic.
- Photo: Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague, Commander of Taffy 3, onboard USS Fanshaw Bay (CVE-70), off Okinawa, Japan, April 1945. Rear Admiral Thomas Sprague (no relation) was in overall command of all 3 Taffies and in direct command of Taffy 1.



25 October 1944 - Leyte

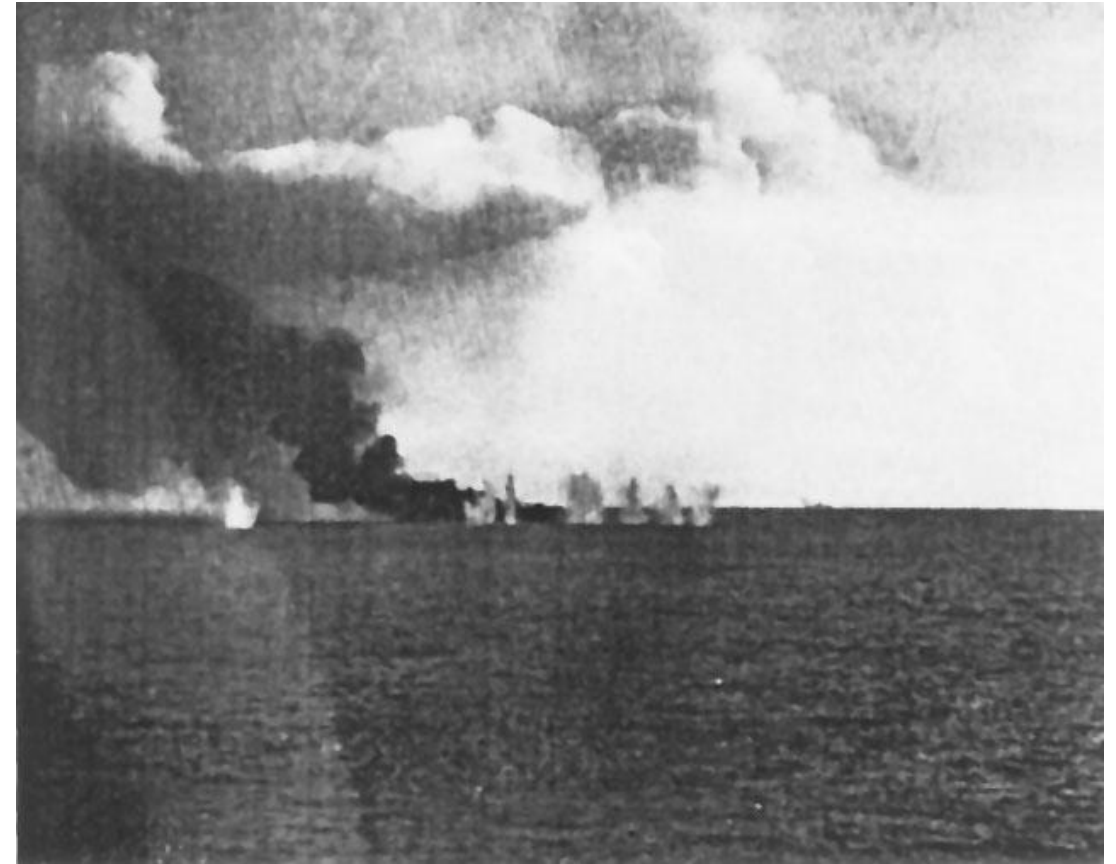
- At 06:50 Admiral Sprague ordered a formation course change to 090, directed his carriers to turn to launch their aircraft and then withdraw towards a squall to the east, hoping that bad visibility would reduce the accuracy of Japanese gunfire.
- He ordered his escorts to the rear of the formation to generate smoke to mask the retreating carriers and ordered the carriers to take evasive action and then launched all available aircraft with whatever armament they were already loaded with.
- Some had rockets, machine guns, depth charges, or nothing at all. Very few carried anti-ship bombs or aerial torpedoes which would have enabled aircraft to sink heavy armored warships.
- Their pilots were ordered "to attack the Japanese task force and proceed to Tacloban airstrip, Leyte, to rearm and refuel". Many of the planes continued to make "dry runs" after expending their ammunition and ordnance to distract the enemy.



Gambier Bay and her escorts laying a smoke screen early in the battle.

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- At about 07:00, Yamato opened fire at a range of 17 nmi.
- Color-coded dye loads were used in the battleships' armor-piercing shells so that the spotters of each ship could identify its own fall of shot, a common practice for the capital ships of many navies. The Americans, unfamiliar with battleship combat, were soon astonished by the spectacle of colorful geysers as the first volleys of shellfire found their range. Nagato used a brilliant pink; Haruna used a greenish-yellow variously described as green or yellow by the Americans; and Kongō used a blood-red dye which could appear red, purple, or even blue in some circumstances. Yamato used no dye loads, so her shell splashes appeared white.
- The different colored splashes prompted one White Plains sailor to quip "They're shooting at us in Technicolor!"
- Not finding the silhouettes of the tiny escort carriers in his identification manuals, Kurita mistook them for large fleet carriers and assumed that he had a task group of the Third Fleet under his guns.
- His first priority was to eliminate the carrier threat, ordering a "General Attack": rather than a carefully orchestrated effort, each division in his task force was to attack separately.
- The Japanese had just changed to a circular anti-aircraft formation, and the order caused some confusion, allowing Sprague to lead the Japanese into a stern chase, which restricted the Japanese to using only their forward guns, and restricted their anti-aircraft gunnery. Sprague's ships would not lose as much of their firepower in a stern chase, as their stern chase weapons were more numerous than their forward guns, and his carriers would still be able to operate aircraft.



Leyte Gambier Bay Straddle

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- Yamato fired the first shots of the battle as her forward six 18.1-inch guns opened fire at the escort carrier White Plains at 35,000 yards.
- On the third salvo, one of these shells landed mere feet underneath White Plains' keel, disabling a boiler and electrical power.
- However, damage control brought these back online after 3 minutes. But Yamato's shell damaged White Plains' hull beyond repair.
- Yamato with four more salvos straddled the escort carrier Kitkun Bay multiple times, while Nagato straddled the escort carrier Saint Lo several times at 35,000 yards.
- However, the extreme range made gunfire mostly ineffective, prompting the battleships to cease firing



Yamato firing on USS White Plains. This is likely the salvo that damaged her

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- Three destroyers and four smaller destroyer escorts had been tasked to protect the escort carriers from aircraft and submarines. The destroyers were fast enough to keep up with a fast carrier task force. Each had five single-mounted 5-inch guns and several light anti-aircraft guns, none of which were effective against armored warships. Only their ten 21-inch (533 mm) Mark-15 torpedoes—housed in two swiveling five-tube launchers amidships—posed a serious threat to battleships and cruisers.
- An advantage the American destroyers had was the radar-controlled Mark 37 Gun Fire Control System, which provided coordinated automatic firing of their 5-inch guns as long as the gun director was pointing at the target despite poor visibility and their own radical evasive maneuvering.
- The Japanese reliance on optical range finders and mechanical calculators made it difficult for them to identify their targets through the rain and smoke and limited their ability to maneuver while firing.



The destroyers USS Johnston and USS Hoel making smoke under fire.

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- The four destroyer escorts were smaller and slower, designed to protect slow freighter convoys against submarines. They were armed with two 5-inch guns without automatic fire control, and three torpedoes, although their crews rarely trained for torpedo attacks.
- Since the torpedoes had a range of only about 5.5 nmi, they were best used at night: during daylight, an attack on heavy warships would have to pass through a gauntlet of shellfire that could reach out to 25 nmi. In this battle they would be launched against a fleet led by the largest battleship in history, although it was the ships' ability to generate dense, heavy smoke from their funnels and chemical smoke generators which would most influence the course of the battle.



USS Heermann and a John C. Butler-class destroyer escort (likely Samuel B. Roberts)[35] laying a smoke screen.

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- After laying down smoke to hide the carriers from Japanese gunners, they were soon making desperate torpedo runs, using their smoke for concealment.
- The ship profiles and aggressiveness caused the Japanese to think the destroyers were cruisers, and the destroyer escorts were full-sized destroyers.
- Their lack of armor allowed armor-piercing rounds to pass right through without exploding, until the Japanese gunners switched to high-explosive (HE) shells, which caused much more damage.
- Their speed and agility enabled some ships to dodge shellfire completely before launching torpedoes.
- Effective damage control and redundancy in propulsion and power systems kept them running and fighting even after they had absorbed dozens of hits before they sank, although the decks would be littered with the dead and the seriously wounded.
- Destroyers from Taffy 2 to the south also found themselves under shellfire, but as they were spotted by Gambier Bay, which had signaled for their assistance, they were ordered back to protect their own carriers.



The destroyers USS Johnston and USS Hoel making smoke under fire.

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- After the order for a General Attack, the Japanese Fifth Cruiser and Tenth Destroyer Divisions cut across the course of the Third Battleship Division in their haste to close with the American carriers, forcing the battleship Kongō to turn north out of formation; Kongō acted independently for the remainder of the battle.
- Concerned that his destroyers would burn too much fuel in a stern chase of what he presumed were fast carriers while obstructing his battleships' line of fire, Kurita ordered his destroyers to the rear of his formation at 07:10.
- The Tenth Destroyer Squadron then turned away as ordered just as they were gaining on the right flank of the American formation.
- The Second Destroyer Squadron, ordered to fall in behind Third Battleship Division, steamed north from their position on the south side of Kurita's formation seeking division flagship Kongō, leaving no Japanese units in position to intercept the American carriers when they turned back south at 07:30.
- Despite his General Attack order, Kurita continued to dictate fleet course changes throughout the battle.
- After the Japanese opened fire Sprague ordered his ships to "chase salvos" to throw off their enemy's aim.
- At 7:00, Commander Evans in the destroyer Johnston responded to Japanese shell fire on the carriers by laying down a protective smokescreen and zigzagging.
- About 7:10, Gunnery Officer Robert Hagen began firing at the closest attackers, then 8.9 nmi away, and registered several hits on the leading heavy cruisers. The Japanese ships targeted Johnston and soon shell splashes were bracketing the destroyer.
- Without consulting his commanders, Evans brought his ship to flank speed and headed toward the enemy.
- Johnston's charge led several Japanese ships to switch their fire from the carriers to the approaching American "cruiser". Nagato and Haruna unleashed their main guns on Johnston, while Yamato fired 19 6.1-inch shells from her secondary battery; all of this fire missed Johnston, sometimes narrowly.
- At 7:15, Hagen concentrated fire on Kumano, the flagship of the leading heavy cruiser squadron, setting fire to her superstructure with 5-inch shell.
- At about 07:20 Taffy 3 entered the squall, and the Japanese fire slackened markedly as they did not have gunnery radar that could penetrate the rain and smoke.

25 October 1944 - Leyte

- At 07:16, Sprague had ordered Commander Thomas aboard Hoel, in charge of the small destroyer screen, to attack.
- Hoel began a long sprint to get into firing position for their torpedoes. At 07:20, Hoel located Kongō at 14,000 yards and sped to engage the battleship; this was a perfect opportunity as Kongō was blinded by rain squalls and was completely unaware of Hoel's presence.
- However, the same could not be said for the heavy cruiser Haguro, which noticed an enemy "cruiser" at 10,300 at 07:26 and opened fire.
- Haguro's first salvo scored a pair of 8-inch shell hits to Hoel's bridge and rangefinder, destroying her mark 37 director, FD radar, PPI scope, machine gun control, and all voice radio communications.
- Hoel commenced firing on Kongō as Haguro's second salvo landed an 8-inch hit to her forward fire room two feet above the waterline, then her third salvo landed three additional 8-inch shells hit started a powder fire in her turret 3 magazines, punctured and flooded her port engine and after generator, dropping her speed to 17 knots.
- In response, Hoel unloaded five torpedoes at the still blinded Kongō, right when three more 8-inch shells destroyed her turrets 4 and 5 and aft AA mounts.
- Haguro's final salvo landed a 5-inch shell which holed the destroyer below the waterline before she ceased fire and wrote off the enemy "cruiser" as sunk.
- For all this effort, Kongō noticed a spread of torpedoes some distance ahead of her and continued in a straight line.



The destroyers USS Johnston and USS Hoel making smoke under fire.

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- At a distance of 18,000 yards, Kumano and sistership Suzuya returned fire ineffectively.
- Johnston closed to 10,300 yard, swerved to broadside, and dumped all ten of her torpedoes into the water. At 7:27, Kumano noticed three of Johnston's torpedoes swimming her way at 27 knots and attempted to turn to avoid, but it was too late.
- One mark 15 torpedo smashed into the cruiser and blew off her entire bow. Her speed was reduced to 12 knots in reverse as Suzuya stopped to remove Captain Teraoka from the crippled Kumano.
- As this was being done a flight of aircraft from Gambier Bay attacked the stationary cruiser and scored a bomb near miss which bent one of her port propellers, cutting Suzuya's speed to 22 knots and taking her out of the battle.
- Johnston retreated as Japanese fire increased in intensity, yet not a single shell hit the victorious destroyer.



Kumano under air attacks on 26 October 1944, seen missing her bow courtesy of Johnston

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- Mere minutes later, Johnston's luck began to run out as Yamato had been tracking the enemy "cruiser" which had torpedoed Kumano.
- Three first salvo 18.1-inch shells hit Johnston aft below the waterline, cutting her speed to 17 knots and destroying her 5-inch (127 mm) turrets 3, 4, and 5.
- Immediately afterwards, three first salvo 6.1-inch shells from Yamato's secondary battery tore into the destroyer, one hitting aft and destroying an AA director, while two hit the torpedo director and bridge, causing numerous casualties and severing the fingers of Commander Evans's left hand.
- The ship was mangled badly, with dead and dying sailors strewn across her bloody decks.
- However, Johnston was crippled but not sunk as she hid behind a rain squall and conducted damage control for 10 minutes as Yamato fired AP shells from her main guns that over-penetrated Johnston without exploding.



Ernest E. Evans, the Commander of Johnston for the entirety of her service, present at her commissioning, October 27, 1943

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- With Johnston and Hoel dealt with for the time being, the Japanese continued to close the range on the American escort carriers.
- Much of the gunfire for the next 20 minutes was focused on the destroyer escorts, John C. Butler and Raymond coming under heavy fire but not receiving a hit.
- Raymond and Dennis fired their torpedoes without obtaining a hit.
- However, solid hits were scored by 08:50 as Haruna fired on an enemy "destroyer" at 17,000 yards and claimed a hit after two salvos were fired before rain squalls blinded her.
- The range and bearing match the escort carrier Kalinin Bay, which was hit by a 14-inch (356 mm) shell.
- Meanwhile, the Japanese heavy cruisers began to close the range, with Chikuma leading Tone, Haguro, and Chōkai. Haguro fired on the escort carrier Fanshaw Bay at 17,200 yards and landed a pair of 8-inch hits to her forward flight deck, before briefly firing on Heermann.
- Just after 08:00, Haguro switched fire to the Kalinin Bay and in a running gunnery duel in which Tone joined in, Kalinin Bay was hit by three 8-inch - two hitting the stern and one hitting the bow - while Haguro in turn took two hits from Kalinin Bay's lone 5-inch gun that damaged her radio transmitter and communication cables.
- However, critical damage came at 07:25 when Fanshaw Bay aircraft took vengeance on her opponent and gouged Haguro with a pair of 100 pound bombs which exploded inside her turret 2 magazines, starting a powder fire which forced the cruiser to conduct damage control.



Escort carrier USS Kalinin Bay taking a 14-inch (356 mm) shell hit from the Japanese battleship Haruna

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- Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Thomas Sprague (no relation to Clifton) ordered the sixteen escort carriers in his three task units to immediately launch all their aircraft – totalling 450 planes – equipped with whatever weapons they had available, even if these were only machine guns or depth charges.
- The escort carriers had planes more suited for patrol and anti-submarine duties, including older models such as the FM-2 Wildcat, although they also had the TBM Avenger torpedo bombers.
- However, the fact that the Japanese force had no air cover meant that Sprague's planes could attack unopposed by Japanese fighter aircraft.
- Consequently, the air counterattacks were almost unceasing, and some, especially several of the strikes launched from Felix Stump's Taffy 2, were heavy.



TBM Avenger bomber/torpedo bomber as carried on the Casablanca carriers

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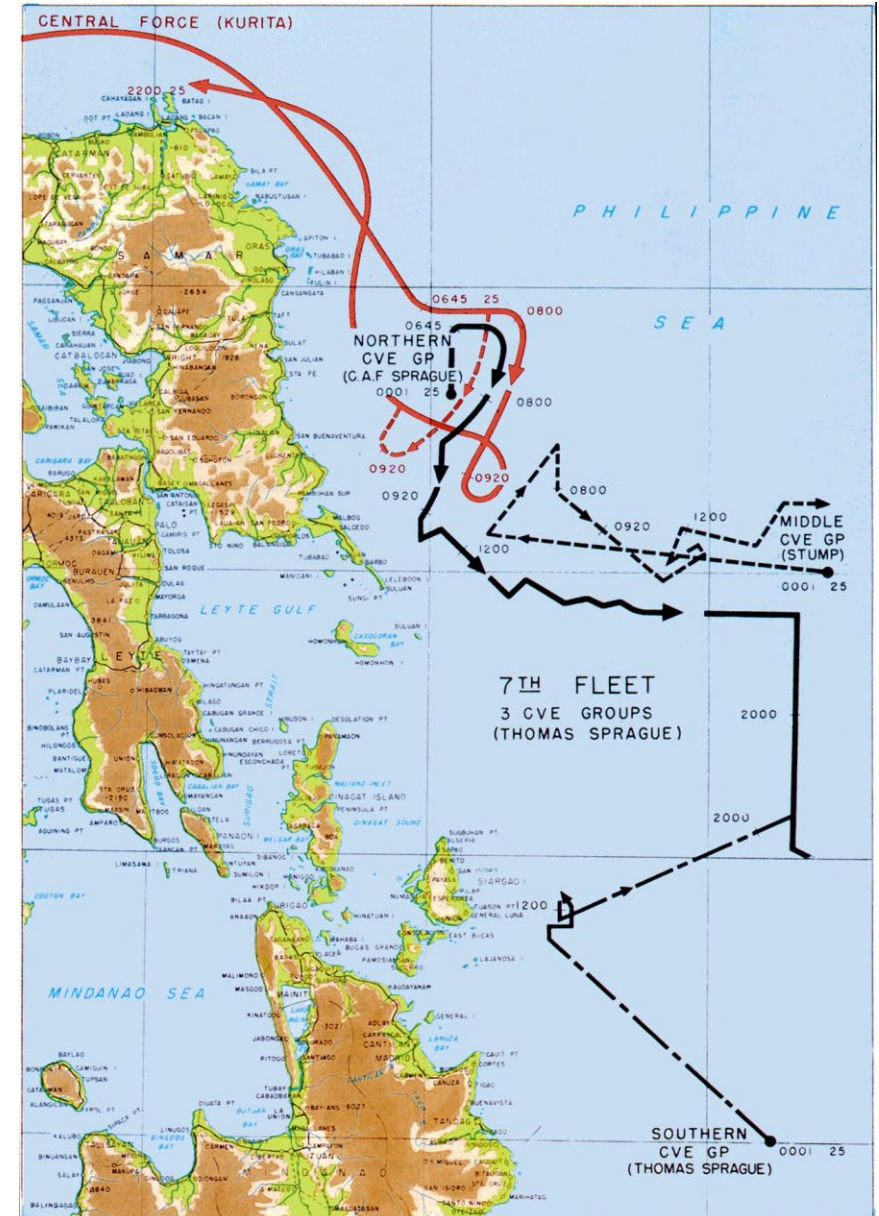
- The carriers of Taffy 3 turned south and retreated through the shellfire. Gambier Bay, at the rear of the American formation, became the focus of the battleship Yamato and sustained multiple hits before capsizing at 09:07.
- Four Grumman TBM Avenger torpedo bombers went down with Gambier Bay. Several other carriers were damaged but were able to escape.



USS Gambier Bay photographed at 08:43 the moment a salvo of shells began to hit the ship. This salvo will destroy the forward engine room and leave her dead in the water, leading her to be abandoned. This appears to be from Yamato's main battery, given six splashes are spotted and two land later than the rest, corresponding with her ripple firing in which the middle barrel was fired after the left and right barrel to reduce shell dispersion

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- Finally, Kurita received word that the Southern Force that he was to meet had been destroyed the previous night.
- Calculating that the fight was not worth further losses and believing he had already sunk or damaged several American carriers, Kurita broke off the engagement at 09:20 with the order: "all ships, my course north, speed 20." and ultimately withdrew back through the San Bernardino Strait.
- Heermann was turning in circles evading the Japanese attack, when the gunfire suddenly stopped, leaving Heermann as the only American destroyer to survive the battle.
- As he retreated north and then west through the San Bernardino Strait, the smaller and heavily damaged American force continued to press the battle. While watching the Japanese retreat, Admiral Sprague heard a nearby sailor exclaim, "Damn it, boys, they're getting away!".
- At 10:50, the damaged Suzuya was waddling at 20 knots when a flight of Kitkun Bay aircraft attacked the heavy cruiser and scored multiple straddles and near misses, which detonated her starboard torpedoes and engulfing the ship in flames which, when they reached the remaining torpedoes and 5-inch (127 mm) ammunition, caused further destruction.
- The abandon ship order was issued as the destroyer Okinami evacuated the sinking Suzuya and rescued 620 men; 247 Suzuya sailors perished.



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- Kurita's retirement to save the rest of his fleet ignored this analysis from the CinC Combined Fleet.
- "Should we lose in the Philippines operations, even though the fleet should be left, the shipping lane to the south would be completely cut off so that the fleet, if it should come back to Japanese waters, could not obtain its fuel supply.
- If it should remain in southern waters, it could not receive supplies of ammunition and arms. There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines."
 - Admiral Soemu Toyoda (photo),
 - Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet 3 May 1944 -29 May 1945



