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Miscellaneous Actions in the South Pacific

8 August 1942—22 January 1943

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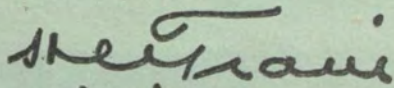
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REAR ADMIRAL, U. S. N.,
Director of Naval Intelligence.

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A torpedo strikes the *O'Brien* as the *Wasp* burns in the background.

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COMBAT NARRATIVES

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in the
South Pacific



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Foreword

January 8, 1943.

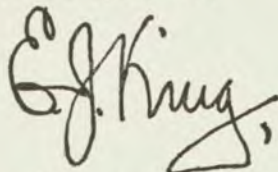
Combat Narratives have been prepared by the Publications Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence for the information of the officers of the United States Navy.

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

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

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

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



ADMIRAL, U. S. N.,

Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations.

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The Raid on Makin Island

THE diversionary raid on Makin Island in the northern Gilberts on August 17-18, 1942, was unique in American naval history. Under the command of Comdr. John M. Haines, a task group consisting of 2 submarines and 222 officers and men of the Second Marine Raider Battalion carried out the attack. The raiders, Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson USMCR commanding, were transported approximately 2,000 miles from Pearl Harbor to Makin in two of our largest submarines, the *Nautilus* (F) and the *Argonaut*.¹ No surface vessels were used except as escorts in and out of Pearl Harbor. The *Argonaut*, Lt. Comdr. John R. Pierce commanding, carried a total of 220 men, which is believed the largest number ever carried aboard a submarine for long distance, offensive purposes. The *Nautilus*, Lt. Comdr. William H. Brockman, Jr. commanding, had 100 Marines aboard.

Plan of attack

This operation was linked with our landings on Guadalcanal and Florida Islands in the Solomons on August 7th, and our bombardment of Kiska in the Aleutians, also on the 7th. The strategical purpose of the plan was to induce the enemy to spread his forces still further to meet a third focus of attack.

The tactical elements of the plan were simple. The raid had as immediate objectives the destruction of all enemy troops and installations, and the securing, if possible, of documents and prisoners. Upon successful completion of this mission, the raider task group was then, if circumstances permitted, to destroy any installations which the Japanese might have erected at Little Makin, immediately to the north, and on Apaiang and Maraki Islands to the south. A Japanese force of approximately 250 officers and men was estimated to be guarding Makin, possibly supported by seaplanes and a few surface craft. The number of the enemy on the other islands was not known, and these were not in fact attacked as developments during the raid indicated that the Japanese had not made any significant installations there.

¹ The *Argonaut* was converted after the Makin raid from a mine-laying submarine to an auxiliary transport submarine. She has since been sunk.

According to the plan the *Nautilus* was to arrive off the objective 24 hours in advance of the *Argonaut* in order to conduct preliminary periscope reconnaissance.

The action

On August 8th at about 0900 (Zone minus 9½) the task group left Pearl Harbor on the outward leg of their 4,000-mile cruise. The two submarines were under escort until nightfall, after which they proceeded independently.

The voyage proving uneventful, both boats moved almost entirely on the surface. This added to the comfort of the personnel, for even with air-conditioning units and ventilators, the temperature inside the submarines was generally over 90° and the humidity about 85 percent. Under different circumstances the inadequacy of the air-conditioning apparatus might have been serious, but calisthenics on deck twice a day and frequent disembarkation exercises kept all hands in good shape. Mess was somewhat of a problem, but a satisfactory plan was worked out for two meals a day with soup and crackers at midday. Nevertheless the galley was constantly in operation, as each meal required some three and a half hours to serve and baking had to be done at night. Though the men had practically no water in which to wash on their outward trip, careful conservation would seem normally to assure a sufficient supply for essential bathing purposes. So likewise the toilet and berthing facilities were adequate, but barely so. As the men off duty spent most of their time in their berths, these accommodations proved barely sufficient. Confined quarters limited recreation to reading, phonograph-playing, and acey-deucey.

Both boats made daily training and trim dives on their trip. Because of her slower speed, the *Argonaut* proceeded on the surface until the last day, when she submerged during daylight. To reach her destination at the time scheduled, the *Nautilus* maintained a surface speed of about 14.5 knots and submerged for 2 days prior to her arrival. By 0300² on August 16th she made landfall on Little Makin atoll. All islands of this group were entirely blacked out, and no action was taken until daybreak.

Submerged reconnaissance off the southeast coast of Makin Island during the morning and early afternoon of the 16th revealed few prominent features. Ukiangong Point on the south coast and the south-

² All times, unless otherwise specified, are Zone minus 12.

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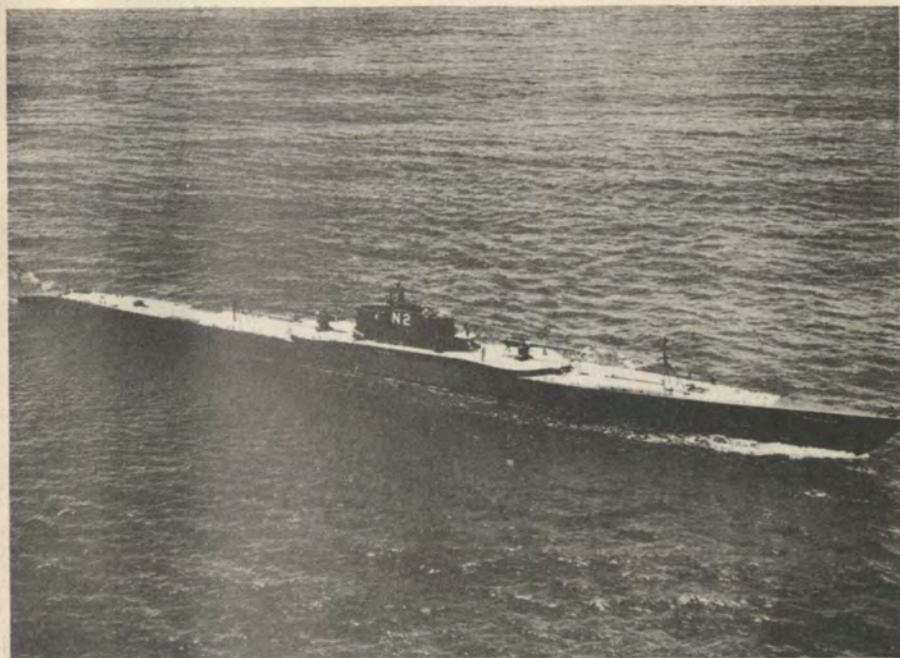
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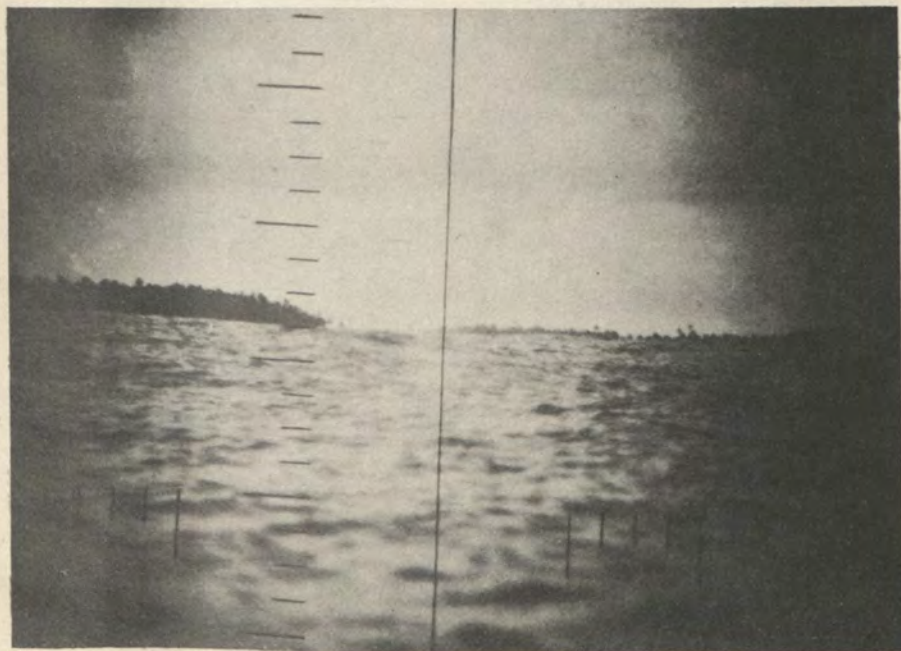
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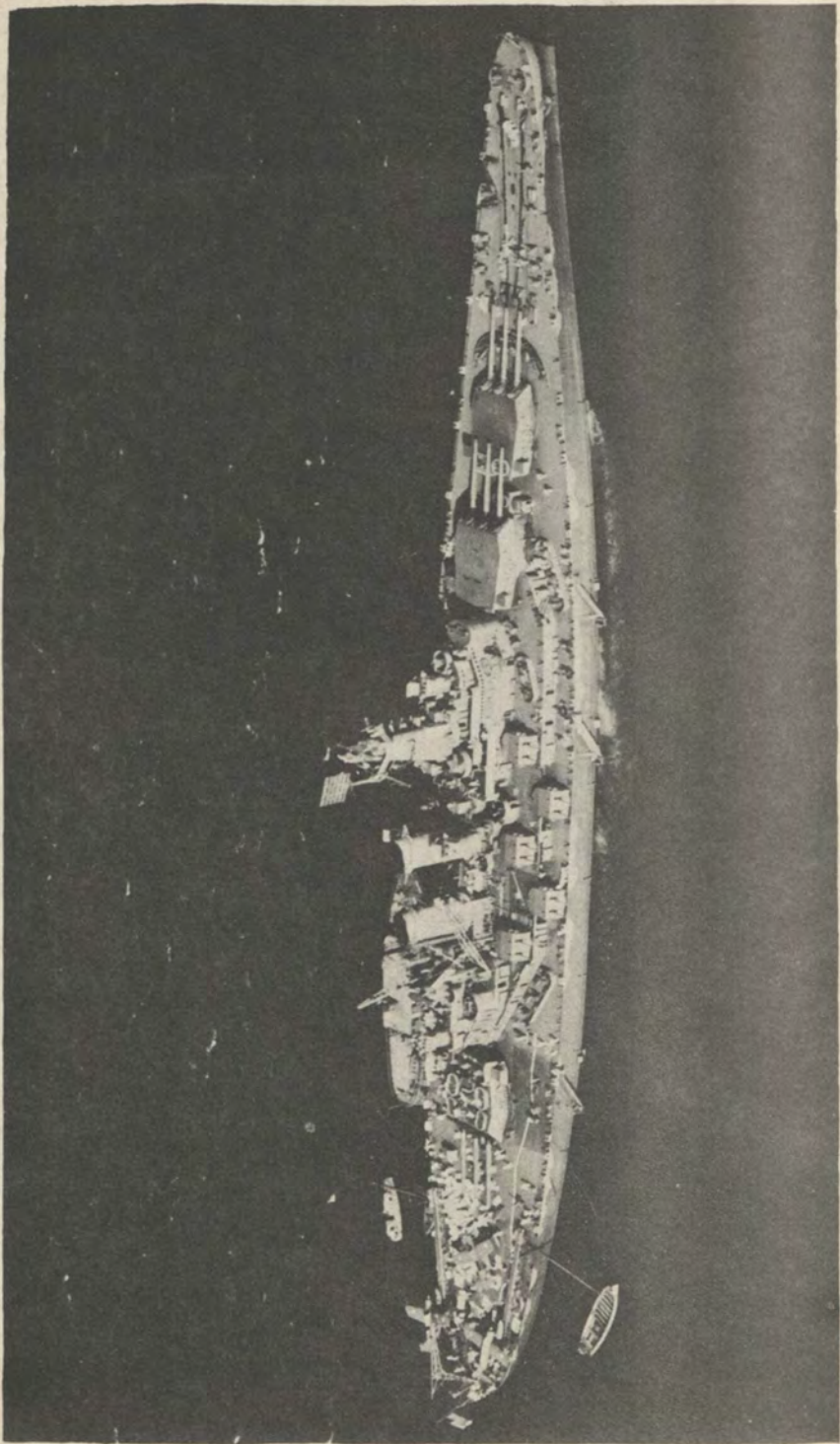


The *Nautilus*.



Periscope view of Makin Island at dawn on the day of the raid.

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The North Carolina.

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east point at Tanimaiaki were taken as tangents, and trees were also used for ranges and bearings. The southern bight where the landing was to be made was surveyed, and the set and drift of current checked approximately with data available in the pilot charts. With the limited battery capacity remaining and in the presence of strong and unfavorable currents, the projected reconnaissance of the alternate landing beach and the lagoon entrance at Flink Point proved impracticable. Immediately after dark, therefore, the *Nautilus* surfaced and proceeded to her rendezvous with the *Argonaut*. Despite strong, changeable currents and heavy rain squalls, the two boats sighted each other at 2116.

Final changes in operations orders were passed to the *Argonaut*, as were plans for attacking Little Makin Island after the main raid. The primary objective, however, was to land opposite the village of Butaritari, overcome resistance, and occupy the village itself. After destruction of enemy installations our force was to withdraw, not later than 2100 on the 17th. After contact had been made both boats advanced together on various courses to the agreed point of debarkation. The night was clear with scattered clouds and a northeast wind, force 4. While the submarines proceeded through moderate swells, the raider unit prepared for the attack.

For weeks the Marines had undergone intensive training at Midway and in the Hawaiian Islands. Night landings from submarines had been practiced on several occasions, as had the handling of rubber boats in surf. By the time the debarkation point was reached, therefore, all necessary gear had been rigged and the rubber boats, equipped with outboard motors, made ready for landing.

The set observed by the *Nautilus* on her reconnaissance off the south coast necessitated a careful approach to the rendezvous for it tended to move the submarines toward the bight which forms this part of the atoll. By 0300, however, they had reached their destination off the weather side of Makin, and as foreseen, the tide was high, facilitating the rubber boats' transit of the reef. However, the set and a strong onshore wind tended to set the submarines' sterns toward the reef dimly visible in the darkness. They were therefore continually obliged to kick their motors ahead slightly to keep clear. This movement was held to a minimum, however, because of the necessity of keeping the boats alongside.

The plan of attack required that all the landing boats assemble alongside the *Nautilus* so that they might get under way together and proceed to two separate beaches in order to land. It had also been planned for

the *Argonaut's* boats to pick up some of the raiders from the *Nautilus*, but in the darkness some confusion resulted from the crowding of boats. Added to this was the continuous noise from the wash of the swell through the *Nautilus'* limber holes and the more distant roar of the surf. Despite the difficulty in making orders audible and in starting the motors, the raiding unit was assembled and cleared at the time scheduled. Lt. Col. Carlson, commanding the Marine unit, made a quick change of plans because of the confusion ensuing from embarkation in the boats, and word was passed to as many as possible that all boats were to land together rather than in two separate parties as previously planned.

This decision resulted in the landing, about 0500, of 15 out of 18 boats at the beach on the opposite side of the island from the government wharf. Two of the other boats landed a mile to the north, and these men rejoined the main body later in the day. The last boat, with Lieut. Oscar F. Peatross and 11 men, headed for the beach originally designated and landed behind the enemy well to the south of our main body. The landings in all cases were made easily through the surf without detection by the enemy. A guard was posted, boats hidden in the foliage above the beach, and before dawn the 2 companies had completed reorganization into their respective units. By this time our submarines had moved about 4 miles offshore and contact had been established by voice radio. Communication between ship and shore was poor, because of the dense foliage, jamming by the enemy, and the low strength of the Marines' portable radios.

One man accidentally fired his rifle during this reorganization of the raiders. Realizing the alarm had been given, the Marine commander directed Company A to cross the atoll, seize the road on the lagoon side, and then report their position with respect to the wharves. Japanese defense positions, including a barbed wire fence, a portable "hedgehog" road block, and an emplacement of four machine guns, had been erected in an easterly direction across the island. Our surprise landing, however, enabled the Marines to overrun these installations before they could be occupied, and by 0545 Lieut. Merwin C. Plumley reported from the government wharf that his company had taken the government house. As yet they had encountered no opposition.

Our landing in the Solomons, coupled with the air and naval attacks on Kiska 10 days earlier, had disturbed and alerted the enemy. Natives reported that maneuvers had been held by the defending forces in the vicinity of Butaritari in preparation for a raid. On the morning of the

17th the garrison was apparently awake and fully clothed—captured documents indicate their reveille was at 0600 local time—and in a short time enemy troops moved up from their barracks. Company A had by this time been directed to deploy across the island and advance south, while Company B was held in reserve on the left flank. Shortly thereafter contact was made with the Japanese on the lagoon road near the native hospital, and our advance was halted by machine-gun fire on the right flank. Some of the Japanese had come up on bicycles, while others came by truck. Fire from our .55 caliber antitank rifles forced the latter reinforcements to unload about 300 yards down the road, and by 0630 we were heavily engaged.

Snipers at first proved troublesome. Strapped to the heavy foliage of palm trees, they put up effective resistance. Their jungle-green camouflage suits, sometimes supplemented by individual nets, proved hard to detect and frequently the snipers could be killed off only by the uneconomical method of shooting away the fronds in which they were concealed. Others revealed themselves by moving after their fire indicated their position. Natives, who were invariably friendly, later reported that several of the Japanese had been strapped to trees 3 days before our attack. Some had gone so far as to hang coconuts over themselves, and one had tied the tops of two palms together. After being spotted, this sniper cut the trees apart so that when they separated the Marines could not tell which tree he was in.

Our radiomen were targets for snipers if they were seen using phones, and hand or arm signals by the officers to direct their men also attracted enemy fire. Experience, as always, proved a good teacher, and officers soon learned to use voice signals entirely. Likewise the enemy's lack of acquaintance with the Garand rifle proved costly to several of his number. After one of our Marines had fired, a Japanese would frequently raise his head to take aim, thinking our rifle had bolt-action. The raiders were quick to show him his error.

Natives, who had moved north from Butaritari village ahead of the Japanese, reported the majority of the enemy at On Chong's Wharf, with others near Ukiangong Point on the lakes. The submarines were therefore requested by Lt. Col. Carlson to open fire with the deck guns on this region. The *Nautilus*, then on a southwest course, complied almost immediately with 12 salvos (24 rounds). Unfortunately the submarines had no bombardment ammunition, though this would have been most useful had it been available. The atoll for about a mile from

the extreme end of the point was taken under fire, and fire was only checked when it became necessary to reverse course so as to avoid unmasking the shore battery believed located at Flink Point. The *Argonaut* did not follow suit in opening fire, since she was unable to establish communication with the shore at any time. The *Nautilus* was also having some trouble due to radio interference at about this time.

Before the *Nautilus* had completed reversal of her course to renew fire on the island, she received a request to open fire on a merchant ship 8,000 yards, bearing 350° , from the government pier. Communication with the spotter ashore now failed entirely, and the absence of landmarks prevented the obtaining of a point of aim in deflection. A further difficulty lay in the fact that trees obscured the line of fire. Since the *Nautilus'* own position was not exactly known, a computed range of 14,000 yards and bearing of 84° relative was used, and firing commenced. Twenty-three salvos were fired, widely laddered in range and deflection to cover the entire lagoon anchorage thoroughly. Reports from Marines ashore indicate that a small transport of about 3,500 tons had entered the lagoon from the west at about this time, as had a patrol vessel of about 1,000 tons.

At 0902 the *Argonaut* suddenly submerged on a false plane contact, and the *Nautilus* followed suit. Both boats surfaced in about an hour, and voice radio contact was reestablished with the shore. The task group commander ordered the *Argonaut* to open fire on the transport ship in the lagoon, while it was decided to move the *Nautilus* over to the lagoon entrance in order to fire directly at the ship or to use torpedoes. He did not realize at the time that both the transport and patrol ship had already been destroyed by the *Nautilus'* fire, despite the lack of spotting information. The Marines had previously informed the *Nautilus* that they had discovered no evidence of a shore battery at Flink Point near the lagoon entrance. Natives said that 60 Japanese were lost on the transport. At 1039 a biplane was sighted to the southeast and both submarines made emergency dives, remaining submerged for approximately 2 hours.

On shore, meanwhile, the enemy had taken toll of our right flank. Machine guns forced the Marines to take cover, and then snipers in trees on the flank fired on them. Less effective as Japanese defense weapons were two grenade throwers, which caused no casualties, and two 90-mm. mortars. As the mortar shells usually detonated in the branches of trees they proved of little value against our raiders, and their

limited range made them equally ineffective weapons against the submarines. A flame thrower was also found by the raiders but was not used during the engagement.

The stalemate was broken when a platoon from Company B was directed to support Company A's left flank. Progress continued to be slow, however, as the Marines had to overcome machine-gun emplacements which had been carefully concealed and located so that their fire might be most effective. In addition, the dense underbrush gave ample opportunity for fighting at close quarters.

The tenacity of the Japanese was illustrated throughout the day. For example, they would man a machine gun until all were dead. At one emplacement 5 Japanese in succession were killed after each had taken charge of a gun from which he had pulled his dead predecessor. Taking advantage of the fact that these guns fire high, the Marines crawled up to close quarters to throw hand grenades. The final wiping out was occasionally done with knives. Similar effective work was, meanwhile, being done behind the enemy lines. Lieut. Peatross' unit of 11 men, which had landed south of the other boats, made the most of its opportunity to harass the enemy. Near the trading station they killed 8 Japanese soldiers, with the loss of 3 Marines. They burned a truck, destroyed a radio station, searched houses, and did other damage before struggling through the surf to rejoin the *Nautilus* that evening.

Cooperation of the natives throughout the engagement was complete. The local police chief killed two snipers with a Garand rifle that a Marine had given him to hold. Some natives opened coconuts to relieve the men's thirst, while others carried ammunition for the machine gunners. They also furnished information as to the number and disposition of isolated enemy groups which proved useful even though not wholly reliable.

At 1130 the first enemy planes over Makin were observed. These were 2 Navy reconnaissance scouts which circled the island for about 15 minutes, dropped 2 bombs and then flew north. At 1255 the *Nautilus* surfaced momentarily but 12 shore-based enemy planes were seen approaching at a high altitude from the southeast, and she was forced to submerge immediately. By underwater sound communication the *Argonaut* was directed not to surface until ordered, and both submarines remained submerged during the afternoon. They correctly anticipated and observed continued air activity over the atoll until shortly before nightfall. All hands found opportunity to catch up on sleep, which had

been impossible the previous night. The task group commander directed both submarines to proceed to their rendezvous so as to be able to recover the returning raiders after 1830. The *Argonaut* indicated that her exhausted batteries would necessitate surfacing at an earlier hour if this order were to be carried out. She was, accordingly granted permission to proceed at minimum speed in order to conserve her battery. At 1722 the *Argonaut* surfaced and headed for the rendezvous, where the *Nautilus* joined her about 1845.

The raider unit experienced 2 more raids by planes during the afternoon. At 1320 12 planes, consisting of 2 seaplanes, 4 Zero fighters, 4 reconnaissance bombers, and 2 Kawanishi flying boats arrived over the atoll. For an hour and a quarter they bombed and strafed, but no casualties of any kind were sustained. The Marines took cover or froze in their tracks—an effective defense since our forces received no damage from air action during the 2 days. One of the four-engine bombers landed in the lagoon, as did a seaplane. Effective fire from our machine guns and a Boys antitank .55-caliber rifle caused the latter to take fire and damaged the bomber. This plane managed to take off after violent circling in the lagoon, but crashed almost immediately. Natives informed the Marines that the bomber had brought 35 men to reinforce the enemy defenses, and that more were expected. The proximity of other islands in the Gilberts made this report seem plausible.

During the day the enemy attempted three counterattacks, in addition to some unsuccessful infiltration tactics. After several minutes of yelling and shrieking to get in the proper frame of mind, the Japanese came forward on the run, waving their rifles. With them they brought their machine guns. Rifle fire easily quenched their exuberance, and in one instance a submachine gun dispatched eight Japanese who came out bunched together. The second and third counterattacks were frontal like the first and likewise were preceded by yelling. Forewarned by the noise our raiders easily repulsed these efforts.

Before the third and last air attack at 1630 on August 17th, the Marines had withdrawn their right and center about 200 yards to avoid the thick foliage so favorable to the snipers. Our move was also designed to lure the enemy from his positions. He refused to be drawn out, but our maneuver proved decidedly successful in the bombing which ensued. The Japanese planes dropped their missiles on the area most strongly held by their confederates and from which we had recently withdrawn. The absence of communication between Japanese planes and ground forces

was thus apparent. No panels, rockets, or radios seem to have been used and this lack of coordination was costly to the enemy.

At 1700 Lt. Col. Carlson's estimate of the situation resulted in an order for a slow withdrawal. The operations plan required retirement by 2100 at the latest. Though the raiders' mission of destroying installations and capturing documents and prisoners had not been accomplished, 2 planes and 2 ships had been sunk and considerable damage done to enemy forces. Enemy resistance was continuing, and the likelihood of reinforcements made withdrawal seem more sound than the continuance of an engagement which might prove difficult to break off abruptly. Though this attempted night embarkation proved costly, the need for coordinating activities aboard ship and ashore would seem to indicate the necessity for a specific hour of withdrawal. As it turned out, the withdrawal was premature and illustrates the truth of the Marine commander's comment—after the raid—that “No matter how bad your own situation may appear to be, there is always the possibility that the situation of the enemy is much worse.”

By 1900 the raider force had been withdrawn to the beach. The boats then began entering the water, starting with those on the outboard flanks. The retirement had been timed to take advantage of falling darkness and the high tide. The peculiar nature of the surf was a factor which had not been taken into account, however, and although it had seemed of ordinary proportions it proved rapid and severe. At this point came, as Admiral Nimitz has commented, “the major disaster and major good fortune of the expedition.” The rubber boats full of men and equipment were overturned or forced back by the short, quick rollers. Gasoline motors refused to work, and no Diesels were available to tow the boats through the surf. Even the loss of equipment and jettisoning of motors did not help in the exhausting struggle to navigate the surf. Nor could furious paddling or swimming with the boats in tow do more than tire the men, for the rollers came in such quick succession that sufficient momentum could not be gained.

The Marines' efforts to return to the submarines cost them much equipment and some lives. Only 53 men in 4 boats came aboard the *Nautilus* during the evening of the 17th, while the *Argonaut* received 3 boats. About 120 raiders were obliged to remain all night on the rainy beach with the little equipment salvaged. Half-clothed, almost entirely unarmed, and in a state of complete exhaustion, they had reached as Lt. Col. Carlson stated later, “the spiritual low point of the expedition.”

The Marine commander now decided to wait for the dawn, and then move northward in search of outrigger canoes to aid in the withdrawal. A watch was therefore established and the men got what rest they could. One sentry, Pvt. Hawkins, killed three of a Japanese patrol of eight before he fell, seriously wounded. It was evident that enemy resistance had not yet ceased. Four men were stretcher cases, and others less seriously wounded had not yet been able to make the return trip to the submarines. The failure of further sporadic attempts during the night indicated the danger and futility of such efforts.

The two submarines remained about 3,000 yards offshore during the night and maintained blinker communication with personnel ashore. The task group commander decided to send the two reserve landing boats and motors which were aboard the *Argonaut* to assist in the rescue of the men still ashore. A complete reserve of arms had not been brought along but all available equipment was made ready. As the *Argonaut's* senior Marine officer, Lieut. Plumley, advised against any attempt at assistance until daybreak, action was held in abeyance. The Marines who had reached the ships were too exhausted to make the trip again, so it was decided to ask for volunteers. From the Marines who volunteered to make the trip at daybreak, five were chosen—Sgt. Robert V. Allard, Sgt. Dallas H. Cook, Pvt. John J. Kerns, Pfc. Richard N. Olbert, and Pvt. Donald R. Robeton. They were furnished with all available equipment, including a line-throwing gun for use in endeavoring to pull boats over the reef, and were directed to assure the Marine commander that the submarines would remain indefinitely to get the men off, except as forced by planes to submerge during the day.

At daybreak on the 18th several boats were seen putting off from shore. The submarines moved to within 500 yards of the reef, and two boats were recovered by the *Nautilus* and two by the *Argonaut*. In one was Maj. James Roosevelt, executive officer of the raiders, who had been directed to take charge of the Marines in the submarines while Lt. Col. Carlson remained ashore. One of the five volunteers in the boat from the *Nautilus* had managed to relay the message to those ashore by swimming in through the surf, but before the volunteers could render any further assistance they were severely strafed by Japanese planes and never were seen again. At 0821 the *Nautilus* and the *Argonaut* submerged on a plane contact. Upon surfacing half an hour later, contacts were again made and both submarines were obliged to dive once more. Two bombs were dropped in the water at this time. One man who

decided to swim to the *Nautilus* arrived "exhausted" as she dived, but nevertheless he was able to swim ashore. The submarines, to avoid detection and to prevent compromising the point of recovery, moved offshore and remained submerged until late afternoon.

Stranded ashore until nightfall, the Marines sent out patrols. Now, as Admiral Nimitz later reported, "the good fortune of their disaster was revealed." Contrary to the impression received from the fighting of the previous day, it was discovered that few Japs remained alive. Eighty-three enemy dead were counted, some near their machine guns and others behind palm trees which our machine guns had pierced. Bodies were searched for papers, and equipment was taken to arm our troops. Although natives reported 8 Japanese soldiers remaining on the island, only 2 snipers were encountered during the day, 1 at the north end of the atoll and another near On Chong's Wharf. Both were shot. Thus it was discovered that the main defense force had numbered only about 90 men. Natives also reported about 100 Japanese workers who had been trained as reserves, but no contact was made with them. Our casualties from the 2 days' fighting totaled 18 dead. Capt. Gerald P. Holtom, intelligence officer for the Marine commander, was the only officer killed. Fourteen men were wounded, of whom 2 were officers. The missing totaled 12 men, including the 5 volunteers who manned the rubber boat. The other 7 Marines were presumably drowned attempting to buck the surf. There were no Navy casualties.

Between 0920 and 1730 on the 18th four flights of planes attacked the various Makin atolls, but the raiders took cover and were unscathed. On the main island the enemy concentrated his bombs near On Chong's and King's Wharves, but in addition he bombed the small islands to the north, apparently believing these also had been occupied. This fact, as well as natives' reports that no military installations had been set up on Little Makin, indicated that no military value existed in an attack there.

Destruction of enemy installations included the firing of 700 to 1,000 barrels of aviation gasoline, demolition of the main radio station at On Chong's Wharf, and destruction of other facilities. The Japanese plan of defense was based on lookouts, and a mobile reserve which used trucks and bicycles. The raiders found that two defensive positions had been prepared. On the opposite side of the island from On Chong's Wharf was a trench with barbed wire protection, and also an emplacement for a 20-mm. machine gun. The other prepared position had been

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captured by the Marines who had seized the government wharf early on the 17th. Its fire trench contained four machine gun positions, with barbed wire entanglements 75 yards to the east. A new type machine gun mounted on a high and heavy tripod, apparently adaptable for anti-aircraft use, was discovered. Midway between the two trenches and about opposite the enemy barracks was another post, evidently to be used as a rifle or machine gun position.

At the Japanese trading station the Marines found fish, canned meat, biscuits, and other stores, all of which were destroyed before departure. During the afternoon Lieut. Lamb and two men volunteered to examine the small sloop with auxiliary motor anchored in the lagoon, to determine whether it could be used to take our troops to the submarines. A Japanese marine was guarding the ship but a hand grenade through the port finished him off. Unfortunately, the ship was so dilapidated as to be worthless.

By this time it had been decided that the evacuation should be made from the lee side of the atoll to the west. The submarines, which surfaced about 1820, were therefore requested to meet the Marines at the lagoon entrance at Flink Point by 2130. Only 4 landing boats were still serviceable and these were carried from the sea beach to the lagoon, where natives provided an outrigger in addition. These 5 boats were lashed together and proved adequate to accommodate the 70 Marines still remaining. The absence of surf on the western side of the island made embarkation easy, though progress was slow. Blinker signals had established contact with the submarines and by midnight all surviving personnel were safely on board. Huge flames from the aviation gasoline, fired during the afternoon, symbolized the successful completion of the mission.

The return journey to Pearl Harbor was begun at once. Our loss of equipment in the surf on the night of the 17th made the projected raid upon Apaiang and Maraki inadvisable. The major objectives had been accomplished and Japanese reinforcements now would have to be sent to bolster defenses in the Gilberts as well as the Solomons. Once again both submarines proceeded independently and almost entirely on the surface. Despite difficult conditions, the boats' surgeons, Lieuts. William B. McCracken and Stephen L. Stigler, performed operations during the 19th on the more seriously wounded. Otherwise the return trip was uneventful. On August 25th the *Nautilus* entered Pearl Harbor while the *Argonaut* reached her mooring the following day.

CONCLUSIONS

The success of the Makin expedition resulted from the willing cooperation of all the participants. "Unity of mind and effort," as Lt. Col. Carlson declared, welded the personnel of the submarines and the Marine raiders into an effective fighting team. In addition to its immediate success as a diversion, the Makin raid gave us information about several relatively unknown factors. Practical knowledge was gained about a new type of warfare, and the submarine proved itself an adequate, if uncomfortable, means of transporting troops for long distances.

Defects in execution were made evident during the raid. CINCPAC has emphasized the necessity of more thorough drill in landing operations and extensive training in handling boats in heavy surf. The inadequacy of ship-to-shore communication was clearly demonstrated, as was the need for Diesel-powered boats. Admiral Nimitz has also suggested that more complete reconnaissance might be furnished by landing a man ashore before the raid, and that active patrols after the landing could substantiate unreliable reports by natives as to the disposition of the enemy. In addition, CINCPAC indicated that the experience at Makin revealed the need for mobility and rapidity in execution of plans, and above all the importance of the offensive in raider operations.

Making the most of the element of surprise, the Marine raiders and their submarine brothers-in-arms had indicated their potentialities. An untried method of approach to hostile territory had proven satisfactory, and the experience gained was most valuable. Admiral Nimitz summarized the significance of this raid in these words:

"Through the courage and endurance of the Marines and cool-headed cooperation of submarine personnel, this expedition was successfully carried to completion against, and by the aid of, various chances of fortune. Losses were somewhat larger than they should have been but the goals of the expedition were achieved. Considerable damage was inflicted on the Japanese, and at a crucial time in the Solomon Islands operations they were forced to divert men, ships, and planes to the relief of Makin Island."

Submarine Encounters

31 August—15 September 1942

WHEN the first major Japanese attempt to drive the Americans from the Solomons Islands was frustrated in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on August 23d-25th, the enemy turned to harassing our supply lines into the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area. This effort took the form of a strong submarine offensive, with the attacks concentrated in the Coral Sea area between the Solomons and the important supply base at Espiritu Santo. In the brief span of 2 weeks between the end of August and the 15th of September, the Japanese delivered several successful blows, sinking one aircraft carrier and seriously damaging another carrier, a battleship, and a destroyer. The number of submarines involved was probably not large; on the other hand, certain similarities of conditions during the brief span of these operations probably accounted for much of their success.

During this period, both Americans and Japanese were primarily occupied with moving troops and supplies into the islands in preparation for the resumption of large-scale land activity which was believed imminent. The Americans, however, under the disadvantage of possessing fewer supply bases, had to concentrate their reinforcement efforts on the supply lines from Espiritu Santo and New Caledonia to Guadalcanal. Our task forces thus had a comparatively limited field in which to carry out their convoy and patrol duties. This limitation, coupled with the necessity for remaining in the same general area for fairly long periods of time, rendered our vessels particularly liable to underwater attack.

With the breaking off of action on the 24th of August, Task Force FOX,¹ Vice Admiral Frank J. Fletcher commanding, refueled and headed for the convoy route from Espiritu Santo, where it spent the next

¹ Numbers identifying task forces have been omitted from all Combat Narratives in the interests of security. The Navy flag names for the first letters of surnames of commanding officers have been substituted.

As Captain of the Minneapolis, instead of Capt. Charles E. Rosendahl, read Capt. Frank J. Lowry. (Capt. Rosendahl relieved Capt. Lowry on 8 Sept. 1942).

5 days patrolling with Task Force MIKE and Task Force NEGAT. As of August 31, the composition of Task Force FOX was as follows:

Task Force FOX: Vice Admiral Fletcher.

1 aircraft carrier:

Saratoga (F), Capt. DeWitt C. Ramsey.

1 battleship:

North Carolina, Capt. George H. Fort.

2 heavy cruisers:

Minneapolis, Capt. Charles E. Rosendahl.

New Orleans, Capt. Walter S. DeLany.

1 light cruiser (antiaircraft):

Atlanta, Capt. Samuel P. Jenkins.

7 destroyers:

Dewey, Lt. Comdr. Charles F. Chillingworth, Jr.

Farragut, Lt. Comdr. Henry D. Rozendahl.

Grayson, Lt. Comdr. Frederick J. Bell.

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

Monssen, Comdr. Roland N. Smoot.

Phelps, Lt. Comdr. Edward L. Beck.

Worden, Comdr. William G. Pogue.

Vice Admiral Fletcher's specific mission was to support the forces on Tulagi and Guadalcanal, defend the islands against enemy attack, destroy any hostile forces encountered, safeguard the carriers, and protect the lines of communication between Guadalcanal and the Santa Cruz Islands. He was to remain south of latitude 10° S. unless suitable targets were found elsewhere or the situation materially changed. Task Force FOX therefore spent most of this period within a small operational area of 150 by 60 miles, bounded by latitude $10^{\circ} 30'$ and 13° S. and longitude $163^{\circ} 30'$ and $164^{\circ} 30'$ E.

There was, at the time, no doubt in the minds of the various commanders that enemy submarines were patrolling in the proposed operational area. In fact, two planes reported sighting surfaced submarines on the 25th, while on the same day two destroyers from the formation made and attacked a sound contact. Again on the 26th, two patrol planes from the *Wasp* attacked a submarine, apparently without success. That afternoon four planes from the *Saratoga* shot down a four-engined Kawanishi seaplane suspected of operating with the undersea craft as a spotter.

THE SARATOGA

Three days passed in routine patrol, without incidents and even without contacts. The first intimation of possible action came at 0310² on August 31st, when the *North Carolina's* radar picked up an unidentified surface object while the force was proceeding northward. The *North Carolina*, stationed as part of the *Saratoga's* screen, did not leave position. Instead, the destroyer *Farenholt* was sent to investigate. As she sought to close with the object, however, contact disappeared from the radar screen, exactly the way a diving submarine—or a clearing rain squall—would disappear.

Dawn came without further alarms, and found the task forces zig-zagging north at 13 knots.³ The *Saratoga* was in the center of Task Force FOX, screened by the *North Carolina* and the cruisers, with the destroyers dispersed from 50° to 230° R. about 3,500 yards outside. Six miles away, Task Force MIKE steamed in company, grouped around the *Hornet* as duty carrier. The day broke clear, with scattered clouds above, fair to good visibility, a southeast wind blowing 12 to 16 knots, smooth sea and moderate swell. At 0639 the *Saratoga* Task Force reversed course and stood into the wind to launch its dawn search, paralleling the *Hornet* group which had just sent up its planes. At 0655, with planes in the air, the fleet changed course to 140° T. and speed to 13 knots, and proceeded steadily without zigzagging. These evolutions placed *Saratoga* about 25 miles from the earlier unidentified contact, on a course which would intersect her old track.

At 0726 the fleet began zigzagging and at 0741, following the zigzag, steadied on course 180° T. A very few moments later the *MacDonough*, which bore 150° on the *Saratoga's* starboard bow at 3,500 yards distance, made a sound contact close at hand almost dead ahead. At the same time she sighted a periscope only 10 yards away abreast of No. 1 gun. Immediately she hoisted the submarine warning signal and dropped two depth charges; depth was not set, however, and before she could attack a torpedo broached astern. Grating sounds were heard on the ship's hull, possibly indicating contact with the submarine itself.

At 0747 the *MacDonough* broadcast word by TBS that the torpedo was headed directly for the *Saratoga* on course 050° T. The carrier rang up full speed, put her rudder over full right, and sounded general quarters.

² All times are Zone minus 12.

³ See chart, opposite p. 18.

At her 13-knot speed, however, she swung sluggishly. At 0748, 2 minutes after the initial contact, a torpedo struck her starboard blister just abaft the superstructure. In the next 2 minutes the *Saratoga* managed to swing to course 290° T. and build her speed up to 16 knots. A second torpedo was then sighted passing astern from starboard. Between 0751 and 0752, three more torpedoes broached approximately 4,000 yards away.

At 0753 the *Saratoga's* engines died as the flooding from the hit put the electrical propulsion system out of commission. The ship immediately developed a 4° list to starboard. A quick survey of the damage showed that the explosion took place at frame 131, some 14 feet above the keel line. It tore a hole in the blister plating, flooding No. 15 fireroom and partially flooding No. 13. There was no flash, flame or smoke; no fires occurred, and the gasoline system was undamaged. However, there was severe structural damage for about 8 frames, with flooding inboard through 5 bulkheads and over an area of 10 frames fore and aft of each side of the point of impact. The vector of the explosion appeared to have been upward and outboard. Twelve men were injured in varying degrees, the most seriously hurt suffering a broken leg.

Meanwhile the other heavy ships in the formation maneuvered radically, while the *North Carolina* swung to join Task Force MIKE. At 0805 the *Minneapolis* and the *North Carolina* were ordered to prepare to take the stricken ship in tow. At 0836, however, before preparations could be completed, the *Saratoga* got under way with power on one shaft, and soon had her speed up to 6 knots. Her crew set to work to reduce the list, while the two heavy vessels continued their towing preparations in case power should fail once more. By 1026 she was on an even keel. Barely 30 minutes later, however, all power was lost again when her bus bars and control panel wiring arched.

Meanwhile the smaller vessels had not forgotten the presence of the submarine. The destroyers made contact as soon as the torpedo was fired, and made two separate runs dropping depth charges. No discernible results were obtained, however, so when the task force left the immediate area the *Monssen* stayed behind, searching the surrounding waters. She made four separate runs on good contacts between 0948 and 1020, and on the last one probably sank the attacker. Large air bubbles were raised exactly in the plotted position of the contact, and although the *Monssen* searched for 10 hours more, she heard nothing further.⁴

⁴The Japanese never claimed the torpedoing, indicating that the submarine may not have returned to port.



The *Zane*.



The *McFarland's* jury rudder made of telephone poles and I beams.

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The first line to the *Saratoga* came aboard from the *Minneapolis* at 1204, and a half an hour later the tow started slowly ahead. Meanwhile the carrier's engineers worked to restart the engines. At 1310 power was obtained on shafts No. 1 and No. 4; by using both engines and tow, the two ships gradually worked their speed up to 10 knots. During this period, the *Saratoga* successfully launched 20 scout bombers and 9 torpedo bombers for flight to Espiritu Santo. As the *Saratoga* regained power and built up her speed, preparations were made for casting off the tow, and at 1637 the cruiser took in her line, the *Saratoga* continuing at 12 knots under her own power.

With the *Saratoga* back in position, the task force zigzagged down in cruising disposition toward Tongatabu, where all vessels arrived in the forenoon of September 6th. The *Saratoga* made temporary repairs, and on September 12th sailed for Pearl Harbor, arriving 9 days later. Thorough repairs were effected and improved and increased antiaircraft armament was installed. Early in November, she was once more ready for sea.

THE HORNET

Following the attack on the *Saratoga* and the withdrawal of Task Force FOX, Task Force MIKE, which now included the *North Carolina*, proceeded to protected waters east of Espiritu Santo for fueling. The 2d and 3d of September were occupied in taking on oil, and on the 4th the group steamed to its new patrol area between Espiritu Santo and Santa Cruz, taking a station centered on or about longitude 164° E., just south of the waters where the *Saratoga* was hit. At this time, the task force was under orders from COMSOPAC to support the Guadalcanal operations, but to remain below latitude 12° S.

As of September 6th, the composition of the force was as follows:

Task Force MIKE: Rear Admiral George D. Murray.

1 aircraft carrier:

Hornet (F), Capt. Charles P. Mason.

1 battleship:

North Carolina, Capt. George H. Fort.

Cruisers: Rear Admiral Howard H. Good.

2 heavy cruisers:

Northampton, Capt. William D. Chandler.

Pensacola, Capt. Frank L. Lowe.

1 light cruiser (antiaircraft):

San Diego, Capt. Benjamin F. Perry.
7 destroyers: Capt. Gilbert C. Hoover.
Morris, Lt. Comdr. Randolph B. Boyer.
Russell, Comdr. Glenn R. Hartwig.
Anderson, Lt. Comdr. Richard A. Guthrie.
Mustin, Comdr. Wallis F. Peterson.
O'Brien, Lt. Comdr. Thomas Burrowes.
Patterson, Comdr. Frank R. Walker.
Bagley, Comdr. George A. Sinclair.

The patrol continued without incident until early in the afternoon of September 6th. At 1240 that day, when the group was steaming southwest at 15 knots in position 13°20' S., 162°40' E., course was changed to 135° T. into the wind to permit the *Hornet* to launch a patrol of torpedo bombers. The first planes became airborne at 1245; 6 minutes later, at 1251, one of the TBF's on patrol over the formation sighted a torpedo heading for the carrier. The plane immediately dropped a depth bomb, the explosion of which apparently affected the torpedo, for it broached and exploded. A few seconds later another exploded about 100 yards from the first one. A third torpedo missed the *Hornet*, and passed to port parallel to the *North Carolina* while she was swinging to starboard. The battleship increased speed from 15 to 25 knots. As she did so, she sighted a periscope bearing 245° T., about 2,000 yards away, and eluded another torpedo on her port beam.

During this entire period, none of the task force members was able to raise a sound contact. Without any definite guide except the approximate position of the periscope which had immediately disappeared, planes from the *Hornet* and destroyers sowed a pattern of depth charges. No evidences of success were noted. It was believed, however, that the attack came from astern, and that the task force's change of course for the plane launching had upset the enemy's aim. Later that afternoon the *Russell* made a sound contact in the same general area, and attacked with depth charges, raising a large quantity of oil to the surface. Two scout bombers also sighted and depth bombed a submarine on the surface, inflicting possible damage.

Following the narrow escape of the *Hornet* and the *North Carolina*, the task force spent the remainder of the day clearing the submarine area to the south. On September 7th, the day after the attack, the vessels returned east through the same general waters of the advance. Four more contacts, of doubtful veracity, kept the group zigzagging, but no attacks were

made. By the 10th the formation had retired to the eastward of the New Hebrides, where the vessels fueled from the *Sabine*.

In the meantime Task Force NEGAT, which had sortied from Noumea on September 8th,⁵ was steaming northward on an escorting mission. On the 11th, in the same approximate position where they had previously separated, the two groups reunited and completed fueling. After taking aboard about 20 fighter planes from Espiritu Santo destined for Guadalcanal, the two groups headed for the operational area they had covered in the past fortnight. They did not merge organizationally, however; Task Force MIKE continued its disposition around the *Hornet* and Task Force NEGAT around the *Wasp*, with about a 6-mile interval between the carriers.

On the morning of the 13th, having arrived about 50 miles short of the position where the *Saratoga* was torpedoed, they sent off the fighter planes and provided an escort of carrier scouts as far as San Cristobal Island. At 0700 the task forces reversed course, and steamed for more than 7 hours through the same waters as in the advance. At this time another task force was transporting the Seventh Marines to Guadalcanal as reinforcements; the carrier groups were operating in general support, in accordance with COMSOPAC's directive to remain below latitude 12° S., and east of a line between Ndeni and Espiritu Santo except when the situation demanded other tactics.

At noon on the 14th, when the task forces were headed westward once more, a report was received that an enemy force of four battleships and seven carriers was standing down from the northwest at 17 knots. A second report soon afterwards corrected the estimate to three battleships, four carriers, four destroyers, and one transport. Still another report told of a second enemy group consisting of three cruisers and three destroyers, somewhat farther to the north. The American task forces, on receipt of this information, turned to course 330° T., and increased speed to 23 knots, crossing the previous day's track and heading for an attack launching position. The land-based scout plane which had made the original report maintained contact with the enemy, and transmitted frequent information bulletins. At 1430 the *Wasp* launched a tactical

⁵When it sailed from Noumea, on the 8th, Task Force NEGAT consisted of *Wasp*, *San Francisco*, *Salt Lake City*, *Lang*, *Farenholt*, *Buchanan*, *Aaron Ward*, *Sterett*, *Stack*, and *Guadalupe*. It was escorting the *McCawley* and *H. M. N. Z. S. Leander*. The *McCawley*, *Leander*, and *Lang* left the formation on September 9th. On September 10th, the *Juneau*, *Lansdowne*, *Duncan*, *Laffey*, and *Lardner* joined the task force, and the *Stack* and *Sterett* were detached. The following day the *Helena* joined, and the *Guadalupe* and *Buchanan* were detached.

scout group, while the *Hornet* put off an attack group. Soon afterwards, however, the enemy reversed course and retired to the north. The American planes failed to make contact, so the task forces turned back to their patrol area after steaming about 225 miles.⁶

THE WASP

Task Forces NEGAT⁷ and MIKE, after retiring to the east, continued their patrol until about midnight, when they headed west once more to come within supporting distance of the transport group bound for Guadalcanal. Dawn on the 15th promised a clear day. The sea was slight with a few whitecaps, the sky partly covered by detached cumulus clouds. The wind was east-southeast at force 3, and the visibility about 20,000 yards. Task Force NEGAT was centered on the *Wasp*, with the *Helena*, *Salt Lake City*, *San Francisco*, and *Juneau* forming the inner screen at 2,500 yards and the destroyers in a circle 4,000 yards away. Nearly seven miles to the southeast steamed Task Force MIKE, conforming to the movements of the *Wasp* group, but otherwise maintaining its own disposition. Grouped around the *Hornet* (F) were the *North Carolina*, *San Diego*, *Northampton*, and *Pensacola*, with the six destroyers forming the outer screen at the same intervals as Task Force NEGAT. From

⁶ A group of B-17's from Espiritu Santo later found an enemy force in the general area covered by the reports, and scored two or three possible hits on battleships.

⁷ As of Sept. 15.

Task Force NEGAT: Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes.

1 aircraft carrier:

Wasp (F), Capt. Forrest P. Sherman.

Cruisers: Rear Admiral Norman Scott.

2 heavy cruisers:

San Francisco, Capt. Charles H. McMorris.

Salt Lake City, Capt. Ernest G. Small.

1 light cruiser:

Helena, Capt. Oliver M. Read.

1 light cruiser (antiaircraft):

Juneau, Capt. Lyman K. Swenson.

6 destroyers:

Farenholt, Comdr. Eugene T. Seaward.

Aaron Ward, Comdr. Orville F. Gregor.

Lansdowne, Lt. Comdr. William R. Smedberg, III.

Duncan, Lt. Comdr. Edmund B. Taylor.

Laffey, Lt. Comdr. William E. Hank.

Lardner, Lt. Comdr. Willard M. Sweetser.

0100 on, the two groups steamed on base course 280° T. at 16 knots, except when turning into the wind for flight operations. At 0650 they began zigzagging.

During this time, the *Wasp* was duty carrier. Every 2 hours she swung to the southeast to conduct flight operations while the *Hornet* stood by with her striking force on alert. In the course of these operations, the *Wasp's* planes made several 200-mile searches to the north and east to shield the transport group from the general direction of the contacts made the previous day. The searches revealed nothing suspicious, and the transport group reported no contacts.

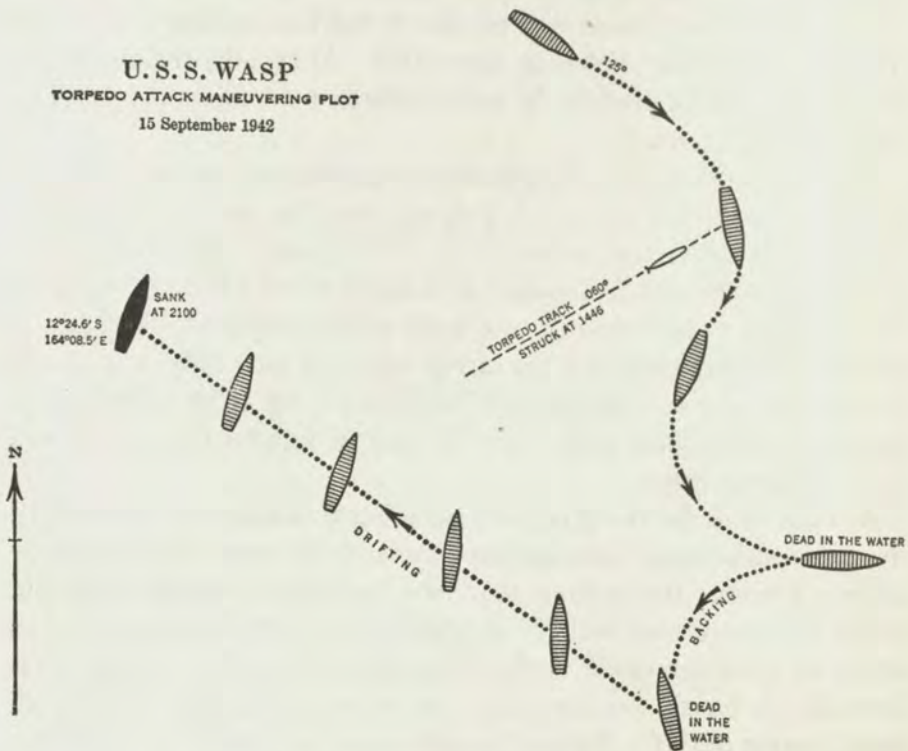
By noon the task forces were approaching longitude 164° E., near latitude 12° S., when suddenly a large bogey came in on the *Wasp's* radar screen from the west. The *Wasp* immediately went to general quarters, and dispatched a group of fighters to investigate the contact. At 1214, 16 miles ahead of the group's course, the planes shot down a shadowing Kawanishi 97 four-engined flying boat. The question of whether or not the Japanese plane had been able to transmit a contact report before it fell in flames remains unanswered—but in the light of subsequent events it seems possible that it had communicated with submarines in the vicinity before its destruction. At 1334 the *Helena* sighted the wreckage of the plane in the water as the two task forces continued on their westward course.

At 1417 the *Wasp*, signalling that she was about to launch and recover aircraft, swung into the wind and, reducing her speed to 13 knots, launched 24 planes and recovered 11. The *Hornet* Task Force, which still included the *North Carolina*, conformed to the *Wasp's* movements, remaining at a point about 5 or 6 miles to the northwest. By 1442 recovery was completed, and the carrier began to turn right at 16 knots to her base course. Aircraft on her decks were being refueled and moved, in accordance with orders to spot 16 fighters for take-off and strike all scouts below.

At 1444, while the *Wasp* was still swinging with standard right rudder, three torpedoes were sighted close aboard, three points forward of the starboard beam. Immediately she threw her rudder over full right, but before the rate of turn could be noticeably increased, the three torpedoes struck in rapid succession in the magazine and gasoline stowage areas forward. A fourth torpedo passed just ahead of the ship on approximately course 060° T. Two of the strikes were well below the water line, between frame 30 and the bridge; the third, which had broached just

before striking the ship, ended its run close to the surface, and struck 50 or 75 feet forward of the bridge with tremendous above-water effect. The hits were so close together that observers on the other ships thought the *Wasp* had been struck only once, or at most twice. The same impression prevailed among many of the ship's own personnel.

At the moment when she was hit, the *Wasp's* gasoline system was in use and a roaring fuel explosion, probably caused by the torpedo which had broached, sent flames shooting 150 feet into the air. Planes on the flight and hangar decks were lifted and dropped with such force that their landing gear collapsed, while planes triced to the overhead of the hangar broke loose and crashed on those below. Flames raced across the hangar deck and broke out in many places forward, amid the crash of exploding ready ammunition which showered the bow with fragments. Because the initial shock had ruptured the forward water mains, the crew was unable successfully to fight the blaze, which by this time had spread to the oil and gasoline on the water alongside. Damage to switchboards and generators caused light and power failures.



As soon as the torpedoes struck, Capt. Sherman slowed speed to 10 knots, at the same time bringing the rudder full left to get the wind on the starboard bow. While this maneuver was being carried out, a heavy internal explosion shattered the forward part of the ship. Unable to make headway, the carrier was brought dead in the water, then backed down with right rudder to get the wind on the starboard quarter. By this means it was hoped to keep the fire away from the undamaged portion of the *Wasp*, retain the low side to windward, and back clear of the burning oil spreading over the water.

By correcting trim the list was soon reduced to approximately 4°. Almost at once, however, a series of explosions began, apparently fed by gasoline tanks, fuel from ruptured lines, ammunition in hoists and clipping rooms, bombs, torpedo air flasks, and possibly one magazine. Men caught in the flames forward began abandoning ship at about 1500. At 1505 a particularly violent explosion tore loose the forward 1.1-inch gun mount, killing all the personnel on the port wing of the bridge. Shortly after 1505, the remainder of the bridge was abandoned.

By this time the ship was badly shattered from No. 2 elevator well down and forward at least to the splinter deck. Both sides of the hull had been blown out, and personnel in the water could see daylight right through the ship in the region of frame 25. By 1515 the fire had spread throughout the forward half of the vessel and was raging completely out of control. The interior of the island structure had been evacuated. At 1520, having gathered as full an account as possible of conditions throughout the *Wasp* and consulted with the task force commander, Capt. Sherman gave the order to abandon ship.

Because of the inferno forward, most of the surviving personnel went overboard from the stern. Wounded seamen were lowered over the rail onto rafts and rubber boats, after which the unharmed left the ship in an orderly manner. After making certain that the flight and hangar decks were clear of personnel, Capt. Sherman lowered himself into the water at 1600.

During this time, the cruiser group of Task Force TARE remained in the immediate area, maneuvering at high speed. At 1510, when the *Wasp* was no longer maneuverable, Rear Admiral Scott on the *San Francisco* assumed tactical command of the task force. For a time it seemed as though the fire might be controlled from the other ships, and the *Wasp* taken in tow by one or more vessels. Accordingly the cruisers laid out

hoses preliminary to sending them aboard the *Wasp*, and both the *San Francisco* and the *Salt Lake City* made preparations for the towing operation.

This plan was not abandoned until 1700. Meanwhile destroyers of the task force circled the carrier, screening the cruisers, and attempted to follow down and attack submarine contacts. The *Farenholt*, *Lardner*, *Laffey*, *Lansdowne*, and *Duncan* also attempted to pick up survivors. Because of the ever-present submarine hazard, however, they had to remain well clear of the ship and change station frequently, thereby delaying the rescue of men in the water.

The carrier continued to burn, explosions of increasing intensity taking place throughout the rest of the afternoon and early evening. At 1745 Rear Admiral Noyes ordered that the *Wasp* be sunk by torpedoes, and the cruisers cleared the area.⁸ The *Lansdowne* was assigned to the task of destruction; between 1908 and 2011 she fired 4 torpedoes into the burning hull. At 2027 the destroyers pulled away, leaving the *Wasp* completely enveloped in flames, the starboard side of her flight deck at the water's edge. At 2100 the *Wasp* went down. Loss of life was remarkably light, with 26 officers and 167 men dead or missing out of a total complement of 201 officers and 2,046 men.

THE NORTH CAROLINA

The other ships of the formation, during the attack on the *Wasp*, were maneuvering to avoid the torpedoes which resulted in her sinking. At 1444, when the torpedoes were first noted, Task Force NEGAT began a sharp turn to base course, and while engaged in the turn saw smoke and flames burst from the stricken carrier. At 1450, when the group had just steadied on course 280° T., another torpedo wake passed directly under the bow of the *Lansdowne* from ahead, and ran under almost her entire length. Transmitting an urgent TBS message that the torpedo was coming directly for the force on course 080° T., the *Lansdowne* raced down the wake in an unavailing attempt to locate the submarine.

The *North Carolina*, on receipt of the message, began a starboard turn with 10° rudder, conforming to the movements of the *Hornet*. She had barely started this maneuver when a second message was received from

⁸ Rear Admiral Noyes had been picked up by the *Farenholt*. His order was a directive to Rear Admiral Scott, who remained in tactical command.

the *Mustin*, then about 60° on the battleship's port bow and 500 yards distant, regaining her screen station. This intercept informed the *North Carolina* that a "torpedo passed astern headed for you." The battleship, at this time about 2,500 yards astern of the *Hornet*, rang up emergency flank speed and full right rudder. A few moments later, before the turn could be fairly executed, the torpedo was sighted from the battleship close aboard, and at 1452, with the ship's head at 295° T., it struck her on the port side at frame 45-46, about 20 feet below the water line.

One quick, sharp detonation rocked the ship, while a thick column of oil and water leaped to approximately the height of her stacks. In a very few moments she had developed a 5½° list to port, and a heavy oil slick began to spread out over the water. Flooding on the first platform deck carried through four bulkheads from the skin of the ship, while the flash of the explosion penetrated to No. 1 handling room and nearby spaces. Heavy, acrid smoke rolled through the forward compartments, pouring up through the forecastle hatch. Capt. Fort ordered the forward magazines flooded, in the belief, generally held by the other officers, that they were on fire.

Fortunately, however, there was no serious blaze, and the shock effect appeared, on second glance, to be slight. Within 6 minutes an even trim was restored, and despite the damage to the hull the *North Carolina* soon built up her speed to 25 knots. By radical maneuvering, conforming with the observed course changes of the *Hornet*, she was soon able to regain her position in the formation. A total of five men were killed in the blast.

The battleship maintained position in the task force until 2000, when Rear Admiral Murray ordered her to proceed to Tongatabu escorted by the *Anderson*. She arrived at the harbor, where a thorough inspection was made, on September 19th. Her underwater damage was found to be considerably greater than that ordinarily caused by a single torpedo. The hole in the hull turned out to be about 32 feet long by 18 feet high, beginning just below the armor belt. Furthermore, there was severe structural damage, including three cracked sections of armor belt, a bulged roller plate support for Turret No. 1, buckled decks, and severe rupture of the seams and joints of the armored plate on No. 5 torpedo bulkhead, causing flooding of magazines and nearby spaces. After temporary repairs at Tongatabu she was able to continue to Pearl Harbor, at a sustained speed of 18 knots and a maximum of 24 knots, for complete overhaul and improvements to her antiaircraft armament.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

THE O'BRIEN

At the time the *North Carolina* was hit, the *O'Brien* was a few hundred yards on her port quarter proceeding at 19 knots. Two minutes after the torpedo struck the battleship, the destroyer rang up flank speed, turning right to conform with the *Hornet*. A moment later the *O'Brien* sighted still another torpedo two points forward of her port beam, about a thousand yards away, heading on 350° T. at a speed of about 27 knots. As it passed close under the destroyer's stern about 4 or 5 feet away, another torpedo was sighted close aboard at a distance of less than 200 yards, coming parallel with the first on collision course. A moment later it struck the *O'Brien's* stem with a heavy detonation, blowing away the forefoot back to frame 10 and up to the main deck. Despite extensive flooding forward and shock damage throughout the vessel, the *O'Brien* was able to keep formation and continue under her own power.⁹ Almost miraculously, none of her crew was killed or seriously wounded.

CONCLUSION

Task Force MIKE left the area where the *Wasp* was torpedoed at 1500, heading south at 25 knots. Between 1500 and 1600 the *Pensacola* took station directly ahead of the *Hornet* and close aboard, zigzagging at high speed from one side of the carrier's bows to the other to provide additional screening against submarines.

Meanwhile the *Wasp* planes which were in the air at the time of the torpedoing returned to the location of their ship and were "aghast" to find her in flames. After spending half an hour flying about over the assembled task force, their gasoline began to run low, and they set out in search of the *Hornet*. As they did so, several *Hornet* dive bombers appeared, having been sent out to guide the *Wasp* planes to safety on the remaining carrier. In this manner, all but 1 of the 26 *Wasp* planes in the air were recovered. The one exception ran out of gas and landed in the sea short of her goal; her pilot, Ens. Robert A. Escher, and an enlisted radioman were picked up by cruisers from Task Force NEGAT.

It was never clear how many submarines attacked the *Wasp* group. There may have been only two, and there were probably not more than three. None was ever located, despite the fact that the narrow intervals

⁹ Structural weakening, however, was extensive. En route from Noumea to the West Coast for repairs, the *O'Brien* broke in two and sank.

separating the torpedoes which struck the *Wasp* and the *O'Brien* indicated that the enemy subs were quite close at hand. Another corroborating factor was that most witnesses agreed that the torpedoes appeared to be still rising when they struck, as though fired from close aboard; although one observer in the *Wasp* reported that their wakes extended about 5,000 yards. In any case, dogged tracing of all contacts by the destroyers yielded no positive results.

Throughout the encounters, conditions were particularly favorable for this type of attack. During the 3½ days between 0500 on September 12th and 1445 on September 15th, the *Wasp* remained within an area only 300 miles from east to west and 170 miles from north to south. She crossed her tracks 12 times during this period, although when the attack took place she was some 150 miles from the nearest crossing. The point where she was torpedoed lay only 60 miles north of a point she had reached 2 days previously. The *Saratoga* was torpedoed at a point only 100 miles north of the scene of the *Wasp* attack, and the *Hornet* encounter took place about the same distance to the southwest.

In all the attacks, the ships were operating at comparatively slow speeds, ranging between 13 and 15 knots. This was in part because of the necessity for fuel conservation on the part of the destroyers. The encounters all took place coincident with, or soon after, turning into the wind for flight operations or swinging back onto base course after their completion. This not only necessitated considerably lowered speeds, but also meant that zigzagging had ceased.

Furthermore, while the carriers were launching and recovering planes, the destroyers in the screen were operating at high speeds in order to regain their stations. At such speeds, their sound gear became ineffective, and remained so for some time after they had slowed. In the case of the *Wasp*, at least, the screen was temporarily disarranged to such an extent that an arc of 90°, including the direction from which the torpedoes were fired, was uncovered.

Small Ship Actions

THE following narratives deal with some of the smaller ship actions which occurred in the Solomon Islands area between August 1942 and January 1943, when the battle for control of the islands was at its height.

Many of these minor actions had their inception in efforts by one side or the other to strengthen and supply their ground forces during periods when major naval units remained comparatively inactive. Supply missions were constantly hampered and harried by both surface and air craft, and many brushes arose out of these hit-and-run forays.

Much of the evacuation of wounded personnel as well as the landing of necessary reinforcements fell to the lot of American destroyers, seaplane tenders, patrol craft, and other light units. The success of the first phase of the Solomons campaign was in no small part due to the persistence with which these small vessels carried out their missions, often devoid of surface and air support, and always in danger of attack by overpowering enemy forces.

THE LOSS OF THE *COLHOUN*

The 1,060-ton transport *Colhoun*, (Lt. Comdr. George B. Madden), one of the old flush-deck destroyers resurrected for duty in the Pacific early in the war, went down off Kukum, Guadalcanal, the afternoon of August 30, 1942, as a result of what CINCPAC described as "excellent bombing" by the Japanese.

The *Colhoun* was engaged in a routine servicing operation in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area the day she met her end. She had been in the area almost constantly since the initial attack on the Solomons, when, as a component of TransDiv 12, she carried units of the first Marine Raider Battalion to their beachhead. TransDiv 12 in its entirety, comprising in addition to the *Colhoun*, the *Little*, *Gregory*, and *McKean*, had seen much action and had suffered many aerial attacks in the intervening weeks. By virtue of sufficient warnings, however, and by the use of radical maneuvers and high speed, it had always escaped damage.

Redesigned specifically as troop carriers, the *Colhoun* and her sister ships had their armament drastically reduced to permit the stowage of

landing boats. This reduction had necessarily left them with small protection against either surface or air attacks. They were equipped with listening gear and depth charges, however, so that in spite of the evident danger in sending them to advanced areas where they would be subjected to strong enemy attack, they could also be used as escort vessels when the need arose. Because of the limited number of light ships available in the Solomons, and because of the depletion of other task forces when called upon to furnish destroyers for escort duty, this need arose frequently. And it was while acting as an escort and antisubmarine screen that the *Colhoun* underwent her final attack.

At 0600¹ the morning of August 30th, the *Colhoun*, accompanied by the *Gregory* and the auxiliary *Kopara*, left the inner harbor of Tulagi for the Marine garrison at Kukum, just west of Lunga Point. The *Colhoun* had aboard about 17 tons of miscellaneous stores for the Marines, and the other vessels were similarly laden. The trip across the channel was negotiated swiftly, and by 0930 the *Colhoun*, first vessel to unload, had discharged her cargo. While the *Kopara* in turn moved in to unload, the *Colhoun* took station as antisubmarine screen, patrolling to seaward, while the *Gregory*, which had already unloaded, returned to Tulagi.

At 1115, while the *Kopara* was still unloading, the signal station on Guadalcanal reported that an air raid was expected at about 1230. The *Kopara* cut short her discharging, and at 1130, escorted by the *Colhoun*, got under way and stood out to sea in a general northwesterly direction. For more than 2 hours, in squally southeast winds, the two vessels stood up and down the channel while American fighters patrolled the air over the island. No enemy planes arrived, however, and at 1340, when the weather had cleared somewhat, they returned to Kukum.

Lt. Comdr. Madden, as Task Unit Commander, directed the *Kopara* to lie to and complete discharging her cargo, while the *Colhoun* resumed her activities as antisubmarine screen. Meanwhile the *Little* also stood in to Kukum and began landing troop reinforcements.

At 1415, as the *Little* tied up, a second message was received from the signal station, announcing that another wave of Japanese planes was expected at about 1500. The *Colhoun* immediately went to general quarters, and set material condition AFIRM. At 1430 Lt. Comdr. Madden gave orders to secure the *Colhoun's* 4-inch battery,² with the exception of gun

¹ All times given are Zone minus 11.

² Lt. Comdr. Madden believed that these guns would be useless against an air attack, and that their use would needlessly expose gun crews and ammunition parties.

No. 2 which was kept manned for possible antisubmarine use. The *Colhoun* then took station to seaward of the *Little* and *Kopara*, and began antisubmarine patrol at a speed of 10 to 12 knots. At this time it was noted that 13 planes, all ours, were over the field—12 fighters and 1 Flying Fortress, apparently coming in to land.

The *Colhoun* continued her patrol for nearly an hour. Suddenly, at 1512, while the ship was on a southwesterly course steaming at 10 knots, aircraft lookouts reported a formation of planes approaching from the starboard beam. As first observed, the planes were at an altitude of from 15,000 to 18,000 feet, heading southeast at a 90° angle from the ship, flying in two V's of nine planes each. Radar contact had not been made. After about 6 seconds of searching observation, the planes were identified as Mitsubishi MC20's and the word was immediately passed to the anti-aircraft batteries. Lt. Comdr. Madden ordered full ahead.

Hardly had they been identified as hostile when the planes disappeared behind a cloud bank. The *Colhoun* continued on her course, and word was passed to the port batteries to be on the alert to pick up the planes when they had crossed the ship and came again into view.³

About 4 seconds later, without warning, while the aircraft were still invisible, two bombs struck close aboard the starboard quarter. In a matter of seconds two more bombs hit, one striking No. 3 boat, the other scoring a direct hit on the after searchlight platform. The after davits were blown down and forward, blocking the after engine room hatches, while the wreckage of the after searchlight tower blew forward, tearing away most of the outer stack of boiler No. 2. Flaming Diesel oil from the wreckage of boats No. 3 and No. 4 added to the confusion.

Although the planes still could not be seen, all anti-aircraft guns opened fire immediately. A string of five or six bombs, extending from the bridge to just abaft the fantail, then landed close aboard to starboard, not more than 50 or 75 feet away. With the concussion of these bombs the ship heeled sharply to port, and the foremast collapsed into the water. The explosion also blasted from the ship the No. 1 20-mm. gun and the No. 2 4-inch gun. Underwater concussion knocked the main engines from their bed plates; brought down a number of steam, oil, and water lines; ruptured the fire mains; and threw several pumps off their bases. The lubricating oil cooler pump in the after engine room was thrown through the bulkhead into the forward engine room, while boiler No. 2

³ No friendly planes were visible at this time.

collapsed and fell from the saddles, carrying away oil and steam lines in the fireroom.

The stricken ship swiftly settled by the stern. Lt. Comdr. Madden immediately ordered hard right rudder, intending, while the ship still had way on her, to swing through the water in which the bombs had just landed. After turning the wheel futilely, the quartermaster reported that he had lost steering control.⁴ He was immediately ordered aft to take over on the after deck house controls, and left the bridge; but before he could arrive two more bombs hit. The first struck the after edge of the after deck house. The second hit the after bulkhead of the after engine room, rupturing the bulkhead and setting fire to the fuel oil in the D tanks.

The quartermaster could not get through the burning oil to shift the steering control, and neither the forward nor the after engine room could be reached by ship's telephone. The fantail and part of the after deck house were by this time under water.⁵ Since the repair party was unable to penetrate the flames emanating from the D tanks, and the ship was sinking rapidly, Lt. Comdr. Madden ordered all the wounded to be put in boats Nos. 1 and 2, which appeared to be still serviceable. Directing this work from the galley deck house was the executive officer, Lt. (jg) R. E. Newmann.

The boats were soon found to be unserviceable, riddled by bomb fragments, with the davits twisted and jammed. The sinking was now accelerated, with the stern rapidly disappearing under water. It was immediately apparent that the vessel could not be saved, and the captain gave the order to abandon ship. At 1514, after ascertaining that no living person was left on board, he jumped over the side. Immediately after he left, the *Colhoun* went down.

The four serviceable life rafts had been released just before the sinking. The uninjured men voluntarily vacated the rafts in the water and assisted their seriously wounded shipmates aboard. Tank lighters which immediately put out from Guadalcanal were directed by swimmers to wounded and exhausted men.

The lives of many, if not all, the survivors were saved by the unselfish presence of mind of two of the crew—Gunner's Mate Second Class Robert L. Pound and Yeoman Second Class Jerry E. Studstill. When the first bomb landed close aboard the starboard quarter, Pound immediately went aft to assist Studstill in setting the depth charges on safe. Despite the fact

⁴It is believed that the ropes were cut by fragments from the first two bomb hits.

⁵All men stationed in the vicinity of the after deck house were killed by the blast.

that the battering which the ship received must have jarred off some of the safety forks, not a single charge exploded when the ship went down. Neither Pound nor Studstill was seen again. A final count of the casualties showed a total loss of 51 men—6 known dead and 45 missing.

THE GREGORY AND THE LITTLE

Six days after the loss of the *Colhoun*, the remainder of TransDiv 12 was almost wiped out when the *Gregory* and the *Little* sank after a surface action with one Japanese light cruiser and two destroyers. The attack came as a surprise while the two vessels were on routine patrol off Lunga Point the night of September 4th-5th, 1942.

On the morning of the 4th the *Gregory* and *Little*, in accordance with CINCPAC's orders, loaded personnel of a Marine battalion for a raid on Savo Island. However, no Japanese were found on the island, and early that evening the two vessels returned to Guadalcanal where the Marines were disembarked. Previously, the two vessels had either screened or anchored in Tulagi Harbor at night. But because of the fact that the sun had already set by the time the Marines had landed, the division commander, Comdr. Hugh W. Hadley, decided against attempting to return to his base. Visibility was poor and obviously would become worse as the night wore on.

For this reason, and because of the necessity of protecting the ships from submarine attack, a patrol plan was worked out which was intended to insure their safety throughout the night. The two ships were to steam darkened at 10 knots 2 miles offshore on reciprocal courses 130° T. and 310° T., reversing the course every hour on the hour, turning always to the right. The eastern end of the run was about 4 miles NW. of Lunga Point. With a force three wind from ESE. and a 2-knot current towards the northwest, it was inevitable that some set to the north and west should occur. The course roughly paralleled the beach, however, and the two vessels had no difficulty in keeping clear.

Shortly after dusk the patrol began, with the *Little* (Lt. Comdr. Gus B. Lofberg, Jr.) about 300 to 400 yards ahead of the *Gregory* (Lt. Comdr. Harry F. Bauer). It was an exceptionally dark night, with few stars and a low haze. Visibility was about 2,000 yards, and no shore landmarks could be seen.⁶ Steaming was maintained as scheduled. At midnight the last turn from 310° to 130° was executed, the *Little* leading

⁶ The *Gregory's* officers estimated visibility to be even lower, at about 400-500 yards.

and the *Gregory* following in her wake. The vessels had almost reached the eastern end of their run when, at 0056, the officer of the deck on the *Gregory* observed gunfire bearing 100° T. Almost simultaneously the *Little* heard and saw flashes to the eastward. Both ships immediately went to general quarters, in the belief that a Japanese submarine was shelling the beach, as was customary.⁷

At this point, at 0100, the *Little* executed her regular turn, the *Gregory* following, and both vessels headed northwest. A few moments later the *Little's* radar picked up four echoes bearing 100° T., approximately 4,000 yards distant. Almost immediately a string of five flares fell from a plane between the American ships and the radar contact to port.⁸ Their immediate effect was to silhouette both the *Little* and *Gregory* for a group of enemy ships on the starboard quarter. Less than a minute after the flares lit up the area, the *Little* was illuminated by a searchlight from starboard quarter and fired on simultaneously by one or more ships astern of the illuminating vessel. The *Little* immediately returned the fire with her No. 3 gun, the only 4-inch gun which could bear that far aft, and fired her 20-mm., .50-caliber, and .30-caliber guns at the searchlight without discernible effect. The *Gregory* also opened fire with all guns that could bear, and was immediately caught by a searchlight from the port quarter, while the enemy opened fire from that side.

Faced with this new peril, the *Gregory* tried to bring her .30-caliber boat guns to bear on the port searchlight, but the scarf rings were jammed and the attempt was vain. The enemy's gunfire appeared to be extremely accurate on the *Gregory*, though not so successful in the first salvos directed at the *Little*. Two hits were scored on the port wing of the *Gregory's* bridge almost immediately, and other shells crashed into the No. 2 stack, the port galley passageway, and the fireroom. The first Japanese salvo fired at the *Little* landed 800 yards over on the port bow, the second 300 yards over, and the third 200 yards short. On the fourth salvo, however, the *Little* was struck hard on the starboard quarter, one shell entering the steering engine room, one penetrating the D tanks which were filled with Diesel oil, and one putting the after 4-inch gun out of commission after it had fired only three rounds. The hit in the oil tanks set the entire stern and after deck house afire.

⁷ The fact that the firing appeared to be single-gun salvos tended to bear out this interpretation.

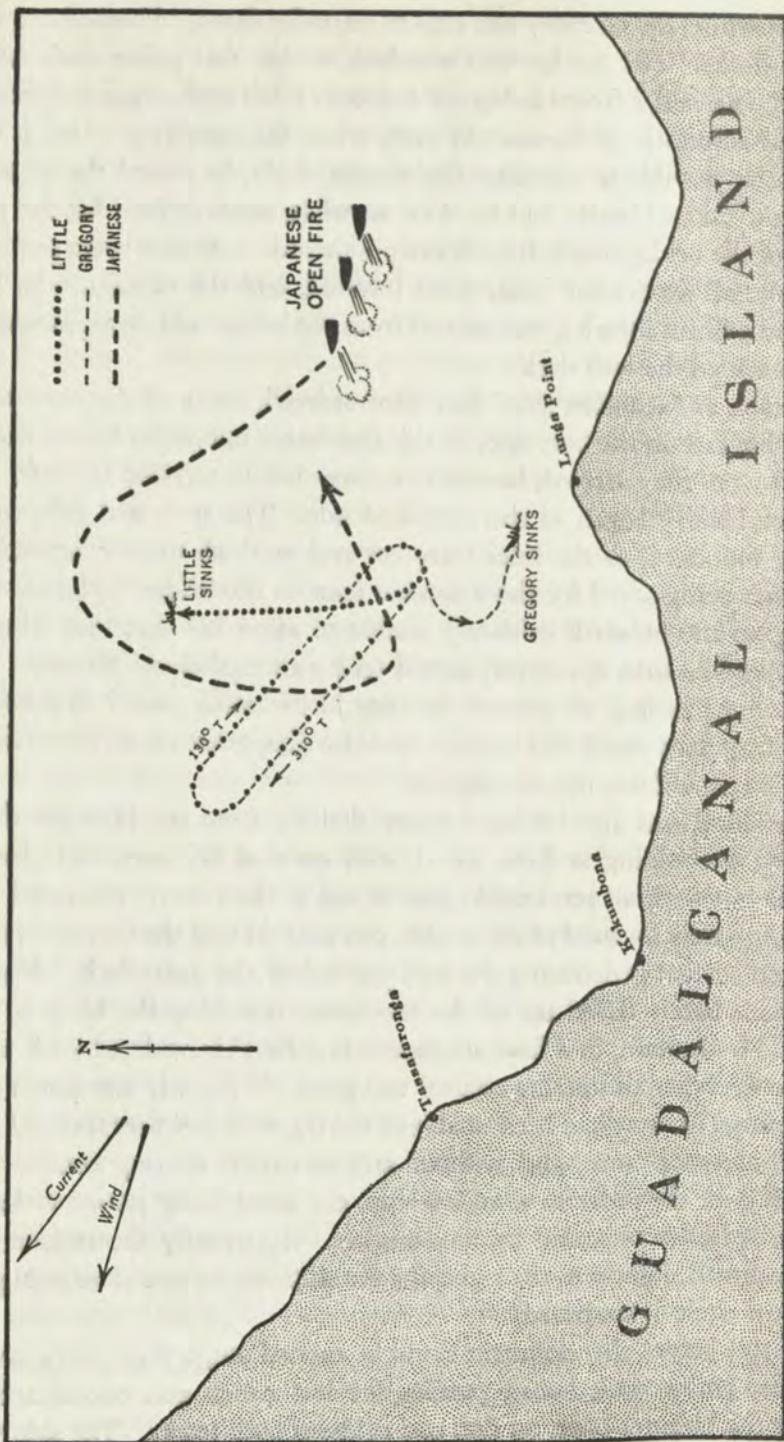
⁸ It was later learned that the flares were dropped by a PBY in an attempt to illuminate what it believed to be a submarine on the surface.

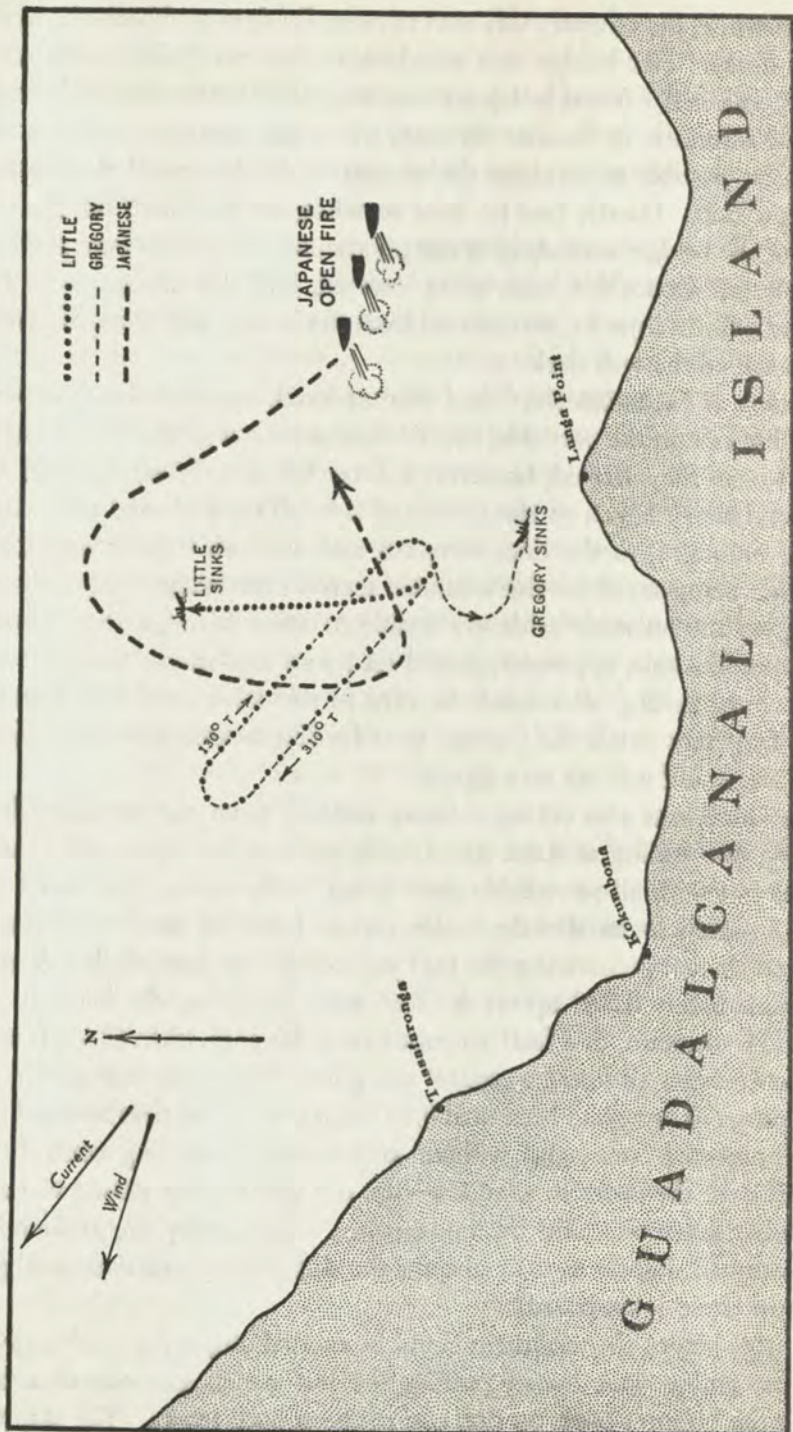
Meanwhile, the *Gregory* was seen to be badly damaged both above and below decks. Her bridge was smashed, bridge and galley deck house ablaze, both boiler fronts collapsed, fireroom filled with steam and smoke, and the forecastle in flames. At 0103, when the captain saw that it was no longer possible to continue the unequal fight, he passed the word to abandon ship. Hardly had he done so when another shell hit the port wing of the bridge, exploding in the pilothouse. Life rafts were put over the side, all serviceable boats were lowered, and the captain, who had suffered painful injuries, was carried from the bridge and propped against a bulwark on the well deck.

As soon as "abandon ship" had been ordered, many of the crew went to the life raft on the port side, by this time more out of the line of enemy fire. Just as they arrived, however, a direct hit demolished the raft, and a general move began to the starboard side. The starboard rafts could not be unlocked, so the lines were cut and one raft thrown overboard, the other being saved for the wounded men on the bridge. The captain, sitting on the bulwark evidently unable to move his legs, then himself went over the side, apparently jarred off by an explosion. Shrapnel was by this time hitting all around the men in the water, and it is probable that a fragment struck the captain, since he disappeared soon after taking to the water and was not seen again.

The *Little* was also taking a heavy shelling from the Japanese ships. At 0105, proceeding at flank speed, with most of her stern still blazing fiercely but with all serviceable guns firing at the enemy, the vessel was struck squarely forward of the bridge, one shell hitting the forward 4-inch gun and several penetrating the hull just below the main deck. A large fire immediately flared up on the forecastle, matching the blaze in the stern. Her captain, in a final attempt to save his ship, ordered a left turn, only to find that all steering control was gone. With only one 4-inch gun remaining (its crew had been unable to fire it), with bad fires forward and the whole stern afire, and without any means of steering control, the captain gave the order to abandon ship, the word being passed verbally, by all battle circuits, and by loudspeaker. Apparently the rudder had been jammed slightly to the right, for the ship was by this time swinging in a slow circle to starboard.

At 0106, before abandonment could be carried out, a third salvo struck near the galley deck house, putting the last 4-inch gun out of action, setting the Higgins boats on fire, and riddling both stacks. The ship was





slowing rapidly, and as she lost way stopped turning. Finally she came to rest, dead in the water, heading north. From her decks the *Gregory* could be seen about 2 miles off the starboard quarter, ablaze from stem to stern, with no way on.

A few moments after both ships stopped maneuvering, three Japanese vessels passed between them in column, steaming at about 25 knots, affording the victims their first opportunity to identify the attackers. Their course took them through groups of *Little* survivors in the water, so that they could be readily identified by their stems, curve of their forecastle decks, number and position of gun mounts and searchlights, stack shapes and position, and mast structures. Observers agreed that they were almost certainly two destroyers of the *Asashio* class and one light cruiser of the *Yubari* class. They made no effort to rescue survivors. Several of the men in the water noticed that the Japanese were using gas ejection air after each salvo on at least one of the ships, and that all three were burning a green over a white light on their foremasts. One of the *Little's* officers who abandoned ship some time after the others did not see the three ships in column; he did, however, sight a large ship having three mounts or turrets forward, low, high, and low, suggesting that one heavy cruiser of the *Nati* class was present, but not in the immediate company of the three light cruisers. One officer from the *Gregory* confirmed his description of this ship.

That the Japanese vessels were on a bombardment mission when diverted by the *Gregory* and the *Little* is evidenced by the type and quality of their projectiles. The widespread injury to personnel, and the many fierce fires which their hits started made it almost certain that the Japanese shells were shrapnel-filled incendiaries.

As in the case of the *Gregory*, the commanding officer of the *Little* was lost with the ship. The division commander, Comdr. Hadley, whose station was on the *Little*, also died. Both men remained on the bridge until the last, and were believed struck down by the final enemy salvo.

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When the *Little* was abandoned, she was about 7 miles offshore. Life saving equipment aboard consisted of eight 25-man life rafts, plus a dual tube pneumatic (carbon dioxide) life belt and a kapok life jacket for each man. The life belts were definitely not effective. Many were punctured by shrapnel or broke their buckles when the wearers hit the water; others showed inexplicable leaks when inflated. The kapok jackets, on the other

hand, were "extremely satisfactory." They stopped shrapnel in many cases, efficiently supported unconscious men in the water, provided some warmth to men picked up by the rafts, and in general were instrumental in saving many lives. Six of the rafts were released before the sinking, but three of them landed upside down, making it impossible to get at the drinking water, rations, and paddles.

The abandonment of the *Gregory* was supervised by the senior officer remaining uninjured aboard—Lieut. Heinrich Heine, Jr. After all boats had shoved off and all hands, to his knowledge, had abandoned ship, he joined a final group of about 15 men on a life raft off the starboard quarter. They pulled away at 0123. Twelve minutes later, at 0135, the enemy resumed shelling in what appeared to be a deliberate attempt to kill personnel in the water. Most of the personnel were in the water until about 0700, when planes from Guadalcanal sighted the survivors and directed landing boats to their rescue.

U. S. S. *McFARLAND*

In the early afternoon of October 14, 1942, the 1,190-ton destroyer-seaplane tender *McFarland*, Lt. Comdr. John C. Alderman, left Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides for Guadalcanal, in accordance with orders from COMAIRSOPAC. The vessel had been instructed to load 12 torpedoes and 200 drums of aviation gasoline and to proceed north of Espiritu Santo and south and west of San Cristobal Island at a speed in advance of 17 knots in order to arrive in Lunga Roads via Lengo Channel in the early evening of October 16th. At Guadalcanal she was to unload her torpedoes and tanked aviation gasoline, and deliver her drummed gasoline as an emergency supply. After unloading, the *McFarland* was to proceed to Vanikoro in the Santa Cruz Islands to relieve the *Ballard* at that station.

The *McFarland* got under way at 1505. The voyage was, for the most part, uneventful. Test firing of all anti-aircraft guns was held on the 15th, and that afternoon a plane believed to be a torpedo-carrying Mitsubishi 97 maneuvered close aboard to starboard. The plane did not attack, however, and the *McFarland* reduced speed and changed course so as to make landfall at Nura Island in Indispensable Strait.

The navigator and executive officer, Lieut. Earle G. Gardner, Jr., made a landfall at dawn on the 16th. All hands were at battle stations as the ship entered the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area when at 0500 another message was received from COMAIRSOPAC. By this directive, the *McFarland*

was instructed to withdraw to latitude $13^{\circ}30'$ S., longitude $161^{\circ}15'$ E., thereby delaying her arrival at Lunga Roads until the morning of the 17th. Since the message was 5 hours late in delivery, the *McFarland* replied that she was already in Lengo Channel, and could arrive at Lunga Roads before 0800. If the Guadalcanal area were clear, she proposed that she stand in and unload her torpedoes as well as 40,000 gallons of gasoline. COMAIRSOPAC confirmed this decision, subject to approval and advice from Guadalcanal, and ordered the *McFarland* to accomplish her unloading in time to retire before dusk that night. Accordingly, Guadalcanal advised that the area was clear, and instructed the *McFarland* to approach the beach to the eastward of Lunga Point.

As the *McFarland* approached Lunga, she sighted the YP239⁹ aground, under fire from enemy guns in the hills near Kokombona. Lt. Comdr. Alderman decided, however, that his own cargo was too valuable to risk by going to the aid of the smaller vessel, so he stood in toward Lunga Lagoon well out of the range of the enemy guns.

At 1320 the *McFarland* arrived off the lagoon and anchored some 500 yards east of Lunga Point about 300 yards off the beach. The torpedoes and the drummed fuel were unloaded, as well as some 37 mm. ammunition, aircraft flares and drummed lubricating oil. To receive aviation gasoline from the tanks, a large sectional barge containing gasoline drums was secured to port. While the gasoline was being pumped into the barge and the lighter, boats were bringing out to the ship ambulatory Marine hospital patients and passengers, including "war neurotics," for evacuation to Espiritu Santo.

At 1410 the unloading was interrupted briefly by a "condition red" signal from the shore station.¹⁰ The *McFarland* slipped her anchor and got under way toward the channel but the signal shortly changed to green.¹¹ The ship returned to the anchorage, picked up her anchor, and continued discharging her cargo.

At 1700, while several of the ship's crew were on the barge assisting in the unloading, a group of friendly fighter planes was seen to take off from Henderson Field and patrol overhead. Since Lt. Comdr. Alderman had been informed that this usually meant that enemy planes were expected, he immediately asked the shore station if "condition red" were

⁹ District patrol vessel.

¹⁰ Enemy aircraft overhead.

¹¹ All clear.

once more in force. The station replied negatively. He then asked if the fighters were taking off to repel a raid, but received a reply that they were merely practicing new tactics. Immediately afterwards the shore station signalled that a submarine periscope had been sighted approaching close to Lunga Point from the west.

By this time the *McFarland* had discharged approximately 20,000 gallons of gasoline from her tanks. Members of the crew were recalled from the barge, special sea details were stationed, the anchor was weighed, and the ship got under way and stood out on an easterly course away from the reported submarine at 1715. The barge and tank lighter were still secured alongside. At that time it was believed that by maintaining one-third speed the ship could keep ahead of the submerged submarine and at the same time be able to discharge the remainder of the bulk gasoline. The barge had its own motive power, and could presumably make its own way back to the beach after being cast off. Meanwhile, pumping was continued and the *McFarland*, with barge and lighter, moved east, away from the sun, at about 5 knots. At 1725 she signalled the shore station that she was standing down the channel "towing barges until all are filled."

At 1750, with the shore station apparently still in condition green, nine Aichi type-99 dive bombers suddenly attacked the ship from the starboard, or land side, coming in at an angle of 045° R., in a steep dive of at least 60°. Each plane carried two bombs on racks outboard of the fixed landing gear, and released the bombs at approximately 300 feet.¹² Despite the surprise nature of the attack, the guns were manned and an effective anti-aircraft fire opened within a few seconds of sighting the planes.

With the first dive all hands took their battle stations, and full ahead was rung up on the engines. The ship could not maneuver readily because of the vessels alongside, although fortunately these were cast off and clear of the *McFarland* by the time the last bomb had been dropped. The whole action, from the first attack until cease firing, lasted only about a minute, during which time one plane was shot down in flames by one of the ship's 20 mm's and another was hit and seen to wobble over the ship and jettison its bombs. One of the first bombs, however, fell very close aboard amidships on the port side, blowing a seaman off the port bridge

¹² There is some disagreement as to the type of bombs. The ship's war diary and the anti-aircraft report estimated them at about 300 pounds. However, the report of the executive officer to the C. O. fixed the type at about 100 pounds.

bulwarks, and an officer and a seaman into the pilothouse from the port wing of the bridge, without causing any personnel or material casualties.¹³

Many other near hits were felt, mostly astern because of the *McFarland's* rapid acceleration. The last plane to cross the ship scored a hit with one or both of her bombs in the immediate vicinity of the depth charge rack on the port side of the fantail, setting off at least one of the depth charges. A tremendous explosion followed, throwing the entire ship's personnel off their feet. Steering control was completely lost, and all attempts to communicate with the steering engine room and after steering station, both by phone and voice tube, were futile.

Almost simultaneously the gasoline barge, which by this time was just off the starboard quarter, exploded.¹⁴ Flames from the barge shot "several hundred feet" into the air. The fate of the men on the barge—12 sailors and marines—was never learned, but it is believed they died in the flames.

Meanwhile, the large number of passengers aboard, particularly the ambulatory patients and the "war neurotics," were seriously impeding the work of crew members at their battle stations. Some congregated in the various passageways, some became panic stricken, and some attempted to seize weapons and even life jackets from crew members. The executive officer's report stated that "it is possible that by their action and shouts they had some effect on the nervous state of members of the ship's company, thereby reducing their efficiency." However, the C. O.'s action report said that although "some of the 'war neurotic' passengers were panicky, yet there was no panic among the crew. All did what was necessary to be done quickly, efficiently, and with a minimum of direction—sometimes with no direction at all."

The executive officer, unable to communicate with the steering-engine room and noting that the *McFarland* had swung on a northerly course in the general direction of Tulagi, ran aft from the bridge. He found the entire stern of the ship blown off from the after bulkhead of the washroom. The head and washroom themselves were filled with bodies of dead and dying marines and sailors. Seeing that water was rising rapidly in the after living quarters, he sent a seaman forward to report

¹³ Several pieces of shrapnel were discovered inside the pilothouse the next morning.

¹⁴ The ship's war diary states that the explosion of the depth charge ignited the barge. However, several observers noticed the occupants of the planes' rear cockpits throwing out "small black objects." The executive officer, in his report to the C. O., said "it is possible that these were incendiaries, and that one of them hit the barge."

to the captain, and with another officer began carrying out the wounded.

By this time the ship was settling rapidly by the stern with a port list. Orders were given to flood the forward peak tanks, pump oil from the "D" group of oil tanks to the forecandle group, and to shift all able personnel to the starboard side. It seemed doubtful that the *McFarland* could be maneuvered at all, and if she did not sink there was danger of beaching in the vicinity of Taivu Point in enemy-held territory. The port engine throttle had been wrecked by the explosion, and steam equivalent to about one-third speed was flowing constantly into the ahead turbine. In addition, the wreckage of the stern caused the ship to veer violently to starboard. The engine room crew found, however, that by admitting more steam to the astern turbine the port engine could be backed about two-thirds. This, together with full ahead on the starboard engine, allowed the ship to make a general course for Tulagi at about 5 knots. Although the ship had stopped settling and had been brought on an even keel by shifting all available weight forward, a lifeboat was lowered to the rail ready to receive the wounded, the gripes were cast off the other boat, and all life rafts were made ready to drop.

At 1925 the *McFarland* established visual communication with the signal station on Gavutu and requested the services of a YP boat and Higgins boats for towing and transfer of wounded. At 1950, with the ship dead in the water about 5 miles southwest of Tulagi, PT boats and tank lighters arrived alongside. The passengers and wounded were transferred to the tank lighters, while one of the PT boats unsuccessfully tried to take the ship in tow.

The *McFarland's* difficulties were not yet over. At 2050, while still waiting for a YP boat to take her in tow, fire broke out in the after crew's compartment near the after magazine, which was immediately flooded. Dense smoke filled the after compartments, until two seamen located and extinguished a burning mattress.

At 2103, the *YP-239* took the ship in tow, and at 2340 anchor was dropped in Tulagi Harbor off "D" Medical Company Hospital.

A final estimate of the casualties showed 2 passengers killed, 17 wounded, and 13 missing out of a total of 160 aboard, while 7 of the ship's company were killed, 11 wounded, and 5 missing out of a total of 136.

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REPAIRING THE *McFARLAND*

By early morning of the 17th, the *McFarland* had discharged the wounded and the passengers. Crippled as she was, completely unable to maneuver, her officers decided it would be folly to leave her lying in the unprotected harbor, easy prey for Japanese planes, while assessing the damage and undertaking repairs. Accordingly, it was decided to move the ship that day to the mangrove shelter of the narrow but deep Maliali River, about 2 miles north and west of Tulagi on Florida Island.

That same evening, with the *McFarland* safely tied up and camouflaged, port side to the beach, in the impromptu berth that was to be her home for the next 41 days, Lt. Comdr. Alderman took stock of the damage. Detailed examination made it more certain than ever that at least one depth charge had exploded when the bomb struck the fantail, for the stern was completely gone aft of frame 164. Between this and frame 137, all compartments were flooded, as were the after fuel tanks. The after crew's compartment was awash, although the pumps were temporarily holding their own against the intruding water. By an almost miraculous chance, the propellers were practically undamaged. The propeller struts, however, were quite shaky and unsafe. In view of these facts, Lt. Comdr. Alderman decided, and communicated to COMAIRSOPAC his decision, that with the services of a salvage tug he could have the *McFarland* ready to proceed under her own power under a jury rudder within a week. The camouflaged location, he pointed out, was ideal for salvage operations.

Lt. Comdr. Alderman filed a second dispatch to COMAIRSOPAC the following day. In this message, he reported that the *McFarland's* engines were working, but that the ship could not leave the anchorage under her own power until the jury rudder had been rigged, the shaft struts stiffened, and the flooded after compartments pumped out.

He made the alternative suggestions that the ship either be taken in tow within 24 hours or that she remain where she was until she could proceed under her own power, trimmed by the bow in order to facilitate the repair work aft. If the latter course should be followed, he said, he believed he could get under way within 2 weeks of the receipt of suitable salvage equipment.

COMAIRSOPAC consulted with COMSOPAC on the course to be followed. Finally, on the 20th, their decision was communicated to Lt.

Comdr. Alderman. Both officers doubted that it would be either economical or advisable to remove the *McFarland* from Tulagi. Because of her age and potential usefulness where she was, it was decided to retain her as Tulagi station tender. However, 7 hours later a second despatch arrived at the *McFarland* from COMSOPAC, advising Lt. Comdr. Alderman that an order to transfer the ship to Espiritu Santo, in tow of the auxiliary fleet tug *Seminole*, would be issued as soon as antisubmarine escort should be available.

Meanwhile, the crew set to work to make what emergency repairs they could. Fortunately they discovered a source of raw materials in an old Japanese submarine base on nearby Tanambogo, captured when the Marines occupied Tulagi. Steel was available from Diesel-oil storage tanks supported by large metal I beams set into concrete. Seasoned, creosoted pine wood came from telephone poles the Japanese had set up for a communication line to their base. Hacking and slicing the poles with improvised tools, the crew fashioned a strong but unwieldy rudder, 25 feet long. The I beams were used to fashion outrigger struts on the vessel's quarters to hold the blocks through which the steering lines were rove.

On the 29th, with the *McFarland* still lying in her camouflaged berth, COMAIRSOPAC ordered Lt. Comdr. Alderman to additional duty as commander of the naval base at Tulagi, under direction of the commanding general in that area. If the repair work had proceeded slowly enough before, because of the necessity of all hands spending a considerable period each day at gun stations watching enemy planes overhead, the need for establishing a centralized naval organization at Tulagi made an even further drain on the available manpower.

Lt. Comdr. Alderman explained to his officers the importance of setting up the base, and much as they wished to salvage the *McFarland* in the briefest period possible, all officers who could be spared from the ship asked to be put to work. The communications officer and his crew set up and got in running order Radio Tulagi; the air officer supervised the construction of a naval air station at Halavo; the engineering officer laid the foundation for an adequate boat repair shop on the island; and the executive officer organized the entire base, and arranged for its smooth-running administration.

Despite these delays, the *McFarland* was judged ready for sea by Thanksgiving, although her patched-up condition necessarily affected her speed and maneuverability. Finally, on November 26th, at 1617, the

battered vessel cast off from her camouflaged river bank, and got under way in tow of YP-239 en route to Tulagi to join the destroyer *Trever*, which would accompany her to Espiritu Santo. Upon clearing the harbor, the YP cast off the tow, and the *McFarland*, for the first time in 6 weeks, stood out to sea under her own power, steering with her engines and the jury rudder. At 1900 she joined the *Trever*, proceeding eastward through Lengo Channel. Three days later, at 0720 on the 29th, the *McFarland* was towed into Espiritu Santo, and tied up alongside the base tender *Rigel*. Further temporary repairs soon fitted her for the long and arduous return trip to Pearl Harbor and drydock, where a new stern was built, complete repairs made, and the *McFarland* finally returned to duty.

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U. S. S. *TREVER*, *ZANE*, *SEMINOLE*, AND YP-284

Task Unit AFIRM, comprising the destroyers *Trever*, Lt. Comdr. Dwight M. Agnew, the *Zane*, Lt. Comdr. Peyton L. Wirtz, and four PT boats of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron THREE, was created October 22d at Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. The *Trever* and the *Zane*, 1,190-ton flush deckers of the World War I type, were veterans of Southwest Pacific action, and had served as part of the transport unit of a raider group and as members of the screening unit of a task group under Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner. The specific purpose of the formation of the task unit was the transportation of the PT boats—Nos. 37, 39, 45, and 61—and certain necessary supplies from Espiritu Santo to Tulagi. Once arrived there, according to COMTASKFOR instructions, the PT boats would report to their squadron commander, the task unit would be dissolved, and the *Trever* and the *Zane* would return to Espiritu Santo.

The vessels got under way from Espiritu Santo on October 23d, the *Trever*, carrying PT boat equipment, torpedoes, ammunition and aviation gasoline, leaving the harbor early in the morning with the 4 PT boats in tow while the *Zane* delayed to load 175 drums of aviation gasoline from the cargo ship *Hercules*. At 1010 the *Zane* left the harbor, and at 1430 joined the *Trever* and the PT boats. By 1452 the *Zane* had taken PT 39 and 45 in tow, and the united task unit, under the *Trever's* captain as commander, proceeded on course 319° T. at approximately 18 knots.

On October 25th, at 0310, the vessels entered Sealark Channel, and at 0515, off the entrance to Tulagi Harbor, they cast off the PT boats.

The *Trever* and the *Zane* immediately entered the roadstead and proceeded to unload—the former moored alongside the station wharf, the latter to an artillery barge at Makambo Island. Unloading of both ships was completed by 0700, and they lay to awaiting further orders from the Commanding General, First Marine Division, concerning a shore bombardment mission scheduled for that afternoon at 1400.¹⁶ The task unit commander at this time was well aware that considerable enemy surface forces had been reported in the vicinity,¹⁷ but lacking other orders or cancellation of his existing orders decided that the safest course was to remain at his berth.

At 0809, a general air raid alarm was sounded. Both ships immediately got under way, and stood out into the harbor, the *Zane* taking shelter about 700 yards ahead of the *Trever* in the lee of Tulagi, Kokotambu, and Songoangona Islands. Neither left the harbor, since the shore station at Tulagi had advised them that previous raids had nearly always been directed at Guadalcanal rather than at Tulagi.

At 0952 the *Zane* sighted a ship's mast in the vicinity of Savo Island, and at 0955, while both ships were still standing by, the Tulagi signal station warned that three enemy ships had been sighted "in the Straits."¹⁸ Almost simultaneously the *Zane* sighted two enemy destroyers near Savo at a range of about 30,000 yards. The ship previously sighted was several miles astern of the other two. Although the distance was too great to permit battle colors to be distinguished, silhouette identification made it almost certain that the two leading ships were destroyers of the *Hibiki* class. The signal station recommended that the *Trever* and the *Zane* seek shelter in the Maliali River, where the damaged *McFarland* and *Jamestown* were secured.

The *Trever's* captain, however, decided against entering the river. As commander of the task unit, he stated that he had "no liking to be bottled up," and pointed out that the river was completely uncharted. Furthermore, he reasoned, the presence of completely uncamouflaged ships near two well-camouflaged vessels would expose all four to discovery and damage. Therefore he signalled the shore station to advise the Com-

¹⁶ Commander, Task Force TARE, had authorized their use on this fire support mission by message the previous day.

¹⁷ Additional dispatches to this effect were received at about 0730.

¹⁸ Both vessels correctly interpreted this to mean the straits between Florida and Savo Islands.

manding General, Guadalcanal, that his command was retiring to sea to await further orders or advice as to when to return to carry out the scheduled operation with the Marine unit. At 1004 he ordered both vessels to proceed at maximum speed, the *Zane* leading as she had been lying to ahead of the *Trever*.

The vessels stood out on a southerly course for Sealark Channel, the *Zane* having been instructed to cut all corners as closely as possible. The first range obtained on the enemy showed him to be about 24,000 yards distant on a southerly but converging course, traveling at about 25 knots. Hope of escaping undetected was dashed when, at 1018,¹⁹ the Japanese suddenly veered to approximately 070° T., and headed at high speed for the *Trever* and the *Zane* on a collision course. Range at the start of this maneuver was about 16,000 yards. The second and third enemy ships cut across the corner, and closed up on the leader when the range was approximately 13,500 yards.²⁰

Meanwhile the 1,450-ton auxiliary fleet tug *Seminole*, Lt. Comdr. William G. Fewel, and the *YP-284*, Lieut. C. Rasmussen, had arrived at Guadalcanal from Tulagi with a cargo of howitzers, ammunition and aviation gasoline, as well as 146 Marines. Neither vessel completed her unloading. The *Seminole* had discharged about 200 drums of gasoline and 4 howitzers when unloading was interrupted by a brief enemy air raid—presumably the one referred to in the alert sent to the *Trever* and the *Zane*. The *YP-284* had been standing by, waiting for lighters to put out from the station.

At approximately 1015, the approach of the Japanese cruiser and the two destroyers (mistaken for three destroyers) was observed from Guadalcanal. As they were apparently heading for the island, the Guadalcanal N. O. B. ordered the *Seminole* and the *YP-284* to abandon any attempt to unload and run for Tulagi. At 1030 both vessels sighted the Japanese force. The *YP-284* radioed Tulagi, asking if the vessels were friendly, and immediately received a negative reply.

By this time the enemy force had closed with the *Trever* and the *Zane* to a range of 11,000 to 12,000 yards²¹ and at 1030 all opened fire.²² The *Trever's* commander immediately ordered retaliatory fire, although

¹⁹ *Trever's* estimate.

²⁰ See chart opposite p. 19.

²¹ The *Trever's* executive officer estimated the range at this time at 9,200 yards.

²² The *Zane's* war diary gives "commence fire" at 1015. The two war diaries are at variance by several minutes throughout.

the distance was well outside the limiting range of the American 3-inch 50-caliber guns. "It was felt," he reported, "that the sense of hitting back would steady all hands, although it later proved that steadying was not required."

The enemy was apparently firing 5-inch bombardment projectiles, rather than HE, as the flashes were observed to be about the size of those made by a blind-loaded and plugged shell. Their first salvo was over by several hundred yards. The second salvo, which followed immediately, was short by about 300 yards. The salvos appeared to be 6-gun broadsides, falling in closely grouped small patterns of three splashes each. It was believed, because of the nature of the patterns, that the leader and possibly the second ship were firing at the *Zane*, which was still leading, and the third was aiming at the *Trever*. The second ship may have been dividing her fire. One salvo of three splashes closely boxed the *Zane*, one projectile landing just forward of her bow and the other two just aft of this point, one on each side. Both vessels were by this time steering as evasively as was possible in the shoal waters, and the *Trever*, in zigzagging, had maneuvered to port of the *Zane*.

Although the rate of fire of the American ships was nearly three to the Japanese one, at no time could either vessel bring more than three guns to bear at once, and usually only two could be used. Salvos were straddling, like the enemy's. Matters were further complicated at this point by the failure of the *Trever's* No. 4 gun. The locking screw holding the breech-block operating spring case into the housing collar sheared, allowing the spring case to come forward and disengage from the housing. The gun was being operated in the semiautomatic condition, and in the heat of battle the casualty was not at first observed. Four or five additional shots were fired before the rod connecting chain chewed itself off on the edge of the housing collar and put the breech mechanism out of commission.

By 1035, range had closed to about 7,000-8,500 yards. It soon became apparent to both commanders that the two ships could not possibly reach Sealark Channel, so the *Trever* turned hard left to Nggela Channel, ordering the *Zane* to follow. This maneuver, once executed, placed the ships almost directly abeam.

The Japanese salvos, straddling every time, now were landing closer. Again the *Zane* was ringed closely, with one shot landing a few feet from the stern and the other barely missing her bows, causing the *Trever's* captain to report that "it seemed incredible they could land so

close and not hit." Meanwhile, at least four salvos from the American ships were definitely seen to have hit, and several other "possibles" were scored—by which ship they were fired was impossible to determine.²³

At about 1035, when the range was no longer closing, one projectile from a Japanese straddling salvo hit the sight yoke on *Zane's* No. 3 3-inch gun near the galley deck house. Three men were instantly killed, four were seriously wounded, and five were slightly wounded, and the gun was completely disabled. Since guns No. 1 and No. 2 on both ships would not bear, this meant that both combined had only two guns firing, each at a rate of about one shot every 4 seconds. Escape, according to the *Trever's* commander, "at this point . . . seemed impossible."

Suddenly, at about 1040, the enemy ceased fire, and turned sharply south to engage the *Seminole* and *YP-284*.²⁴ The *Trever* and the *Zane*, both making more than 29 knots, proceeded on into Indispensable Strait. At about 1100 the casing on the *Trever's* No. 2 boiler burned through, the heat from the fire igniting a gun cover lying near the stack on the galley deck house. However, ammunition near the blaze was quickly removed, and the fire was soon brought under control.

Examination of damage to the *Zane* showed that, besides hitting the No. 3 gun, the Japanese had cut the rigging and antennae and had shot away all halyards to the fore except one to the gaff which held the ensign. The starboard side of each stack was perforated, the steam exhaust line to atmosphere was ruptured, and all vertical surfaces within a radius of 15 feet of No. 3 gun were damaged.

Identification of shell fragments recovered on the *Zane*, coupled with silhouettes and salvo size, confirmed the earlier belief that the two leading Japanese vessels were destroyers of either the *Hibiki* or *Hatuharu* class. The third vessel was never positively identified, but is believed to have been a light cruiser.

The *Seminole* and the *YP-284*, counting on the Japanese continuing the engagement with the destroyers, had held steadily on their course for Tulagi. The enemy's change of direction found the *Seminole* a little short of midchannel and the slower *YP* about 5 miles off Guadalcanal. Both vessels saw the danger simultaneously. The *Seminole*

²³ One of the aviators who later bombed the enemy ships reported that one of them was smoking and burning prior to the bombing attack.

²⁴ It is believed that the airfield on Guadalcanal was their primary objective, and the destroyers were secondary.

changed course and headed for Lengo Channel, and the YP-284 did an about-face and started to run for Guadalcanal.

The Japanese force opened fire on the YP first, at approximately 1050. The second salvo struck home, setting fire to the ship's cargo, but the YP continued on her course. Several more salvos were poured into the little vessel, and at 1100 a direct hit crashed into the engine room, severely damaging the refrigeration ammonia receivers. As fumes from the receivers filled the ship, Lieut. Rasmussen had the engines stopped and ordered all hands to abandon ship. The YP, which had made little progress during the brief engagement, was still about 5 miles from shore when crew and passengers went over the side. She sank in 270 fathoms of water.

The enemy continued firing on the YP for a few minutes after the abandonment, then directed his guns toward the *Seminole*, which by this time had changed course again hoping to get in under the protection of the Guadalcanal shore batteries. The first salvo to hit the *Seminole* struck at about 1115, and was followed in rapid succession by two more hitting salvos.

Fire broke out with the first hits, and fed by the damaged drums of aviation gasoline, rapidly got out of control. By 1120 the ship was "one mass of flames," with burning gasoline pouring into the interior through the shell holes. The commanding officer gave the order to abandon ship, and shortly afterwards the *Seminole* sank in 20 fathoms of water about 1,000 yards offshore between Lunga and Koli Points.

Casualties on both vessels were remarkably low. The *Seminole* lost but one man, while only two were wounded, which her captain attributed to the fact that the majority of the Japanese projectiles passed completely through the ship without exploding. No crew members were lost aboard the YP-284, although three passengers—members of Battery "I" of the Tenth Marines—were killed.

Having disposed of its secondary objectives, the Japanese force turned to the northwest, bombarded Guadalcanal for a short time, then stood out to the northeastward of Savo Island. Meanwhile, four bombers from Guadalcanal had attacked the enemy, dropping their first bombs at about the time the Japanese ships turned away from the *Trever* and the *Zane* to attack the *Seminole* and the YP-284. The third Japanese ship in column suffered a direct hit and began burning fiercely, flames and black smoke rising in a tall column matching that from the *Seminole*.

As the Japanese turned toward the northwest, they threw out a smoke screen, which effectively hid their retirement from surface observers. Another Guadalcanal bomber, however, scored a hit on one of the two leading ships, and a column of dark smoke rose above the screen, giving strong evidence of considerable damage.

While the heavy enemy smoke screen and the thick fumes from the burning vessels made accurate observation of the results impossible, even from the air, it was known that at least one, and very possibly both, destroyers exploded and sank. A possibility that the cruiser also was severely damaged was seen in the fact that a fourth cloud of smoke was noted rising to the northwest of the burning destroyers.

Despite the fact that the *Trever* and the *Zane* were completely outclassed in size, numbers, and fire power by the Japanese vessels, it seems evident that their courageous action contributed in no small degree to the probable double sinking. In the first place, their one-sided engagement gave Army bombers time to take off from a field which had previously been reported as too muddy for use. Secondly, one or more direct hits on the nearest Japanese vessel set that ship afire and adversely affected its maneuverability, leaving it a sitting target for the aircraft.

Two days later, on October 27th, the *Trever* and *Zane* received a "well done" from COMSOPAC, with the additional comment that both showed the fighting spirit which will win the war. CINCPAC also congratulated the ships on their spirit and accomplishment.

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MTBron TWO

By December 7, 1942—the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor—the situation of the Japanese forces on Guadalcanal was becoming extremely grave. On December 4th, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox had announced that the enemy had not succeeded in delivering reinforcements or supplies to Guadalcanal Island for 3 weeks. A few days earlier, in the battle of Lunga Point on November 30th–December 1st, a desperate attempt to reinforce the Japanese garrison had been frustrated by a United States task force in the waters immediately north of the island. During the action, nine enemy ships were sunk—two cruisers or large destroyers, four destroyers, two troop transports, and a cargo ship. One United States cruiser—the *Northampton*—was lost and other vessels

were damaged, but the enemy was prevented from landing effective forces.

On the evening of the 7th, it appeared that the Japanese, whose main concentration was at Cape Esperance on the northwest corner of the island, might attempt once more to land reinforcements or supplies. First indications of such a move came from a Guadalcanal search plane, which reported just before dusk that it had sighted at least nine enemy destroyers standing down toward Guadalcanal from the northwest. Soon afterwards a coastwatcher reported having seen eight destroyers and three possible light cruisers in the same area. Aircraft were not able to attack or make further reconnaissance before darkness fell; and because the danger was imminent and major American naval forces were not immediately available, it fell to the eight PT boats of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron TWO to take up security patrol of the northern and western approaches to the island.

To make certain that the enemy forces would not slip by unobserved, and gain the roadstead between Guadalcanal and Florida, if such was their intent, squadron commander Lieut. Rollin E. Westholm had divided his eight boats into three mutually supporting operational groups. The first group of two vessels was to conduct a steady patrol of the area from Kokumbona to Cape Esperance; a second pair was to operate in the general vicinity of northwest Guadalcanal; and the third, comprising the remainder of the vessels, was to be held to the south of Savo Island, hidden from enemy approaches, whence it could sally forth as a striking force if the need should arise.

Composition of the squadron during the evening was as follows:

1. Kokumbona to Cape Esperance patrol:
 - PT-109 Lieut. Westholm.
 - PT-43 Lieut. C. E. Tilden.
2. Northwest Guadalcanal patrol:
 - PT-48 Lieut. R. L. Searles.
 - PT-40 Lieut. H. S. Taylor.
3. Striking force near Savo Island:
 - PT-59 Lieut. J. W. Searles.
 - PT-44 Lieut. F. Freeland.
 - PT-36 Lt. (jg) M. G. Pettit.
 - PT-37 Lt. (jg) L. H. Gamble.

In addition, a Curtiss scout-observation plane from Guadalcanal was to be in the air over the general patrol area from 2300 on the 7th to 0245

on the 8th to drop illuminating flares as needed and when signalled by the PT boats.

All groups got underway late in the evening, and as no further reports had been received, the squadron disposition was maintained unchanged. The striking force and the northwest Guadalcanal patrol proceeded immediately to their designated areas; the Kokumbona-Esperance patrol timed its run to be just east of Tassafaronga heading west at midnight. In this way, it was believed, none of the patrols would be outflanked, and patrol No. 1 could move up the coast and intercept any ships which might slip by Cape Esperance and move eastward hugging the Guadalcanal shore line.

At 2320 the first contact was made.²⁶ Patrol No. 2, off northwest Guadalcanal, sighted an undetermined number of ships in the darkness about 1½ to 2 miles distant and approximately 3 miles north-northwest of Cape Esperance, heading on a course of 130° T. Both PT boats immediately swerved to intercept the Japanese force; but just as they started their run ahead, one of the three engines of *PT-48* suddenly failed. Simultaneously the leading ships of the enemy opened fire ineffectively. Unable to restart the dead motor, *PT-48* continued on her course on two engines, but had barely got clear across the enemy's bows when a second motor quit, and the Japanese fired another salvo.

By this time, the plight of *PT-48* was highly perilous. With only one-third power, her main advantage—superior speed—was gone, leaving her, for all practical purposes, a sitting target in the immediate path of the vastly superior Japanese forces.

All this was immediately obvious to her companion, whose commander, Lieut. Taylor, swung his ship in a daring maneuver to attempt to draw off the enemy fire. Reversing her course in a tight circle, *PT-40* ran back across the oncoming enemy's bows, laying a smoke screen, then swerved to run south-southeast down the channel. The ruse worked. Apparently unaware of the mechanical difficulties aboard *PT-48*, or counting on the other ships finishing her off, the two leading Japanese vessels, which appeared to be destroyers, left their crippled prey and turned to chase *PT-40*. The pursuit continued, with intermittent inaccurate firing, until it became evident that the smaller craft was outdistancing the destroyers. They gave up the chase 2 miles southeast of the Savo Island-Cape Esperance line and reversed course to join

²⁶ See chart opposite p. 56.

their fellows. By this time *PT-48*, also laying smoke, had reached Savo, eluding the remaining enemy ships, and had anchored close in to the protecting south shore.

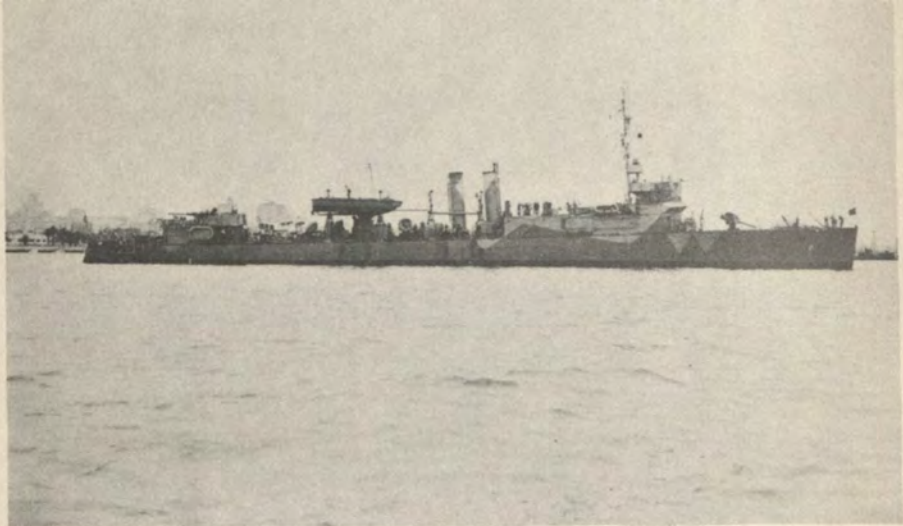
Meanwhile, the other patrols, advised of the contact, were making for the scene. The Kokumbona group, unfortunately at the far end of its beat, increased its speed to 16 knots, and proceeded west up the Guadalcanal coast. The striking group, south of Savo, immediately deployed and made visual contact at 2335. For the first time, the size of the opposing force was accurately determined. It was seen to consist of six ships, probably five destroyers and a larger vessel, steaming in hourglass formation with two destroyers ahead of the large ship and three astern.²⁶

Upon sighting our striking force, the Japanese reduced speed, and as soon as the Americans came within effective range, opened a heavy fire. The first salvo went wild, and the striking force, thus far unscathed, continued to close. At 2340, when the range was believed to be right, *PT-37* fired two torpedoes at the leader. No results were observed.

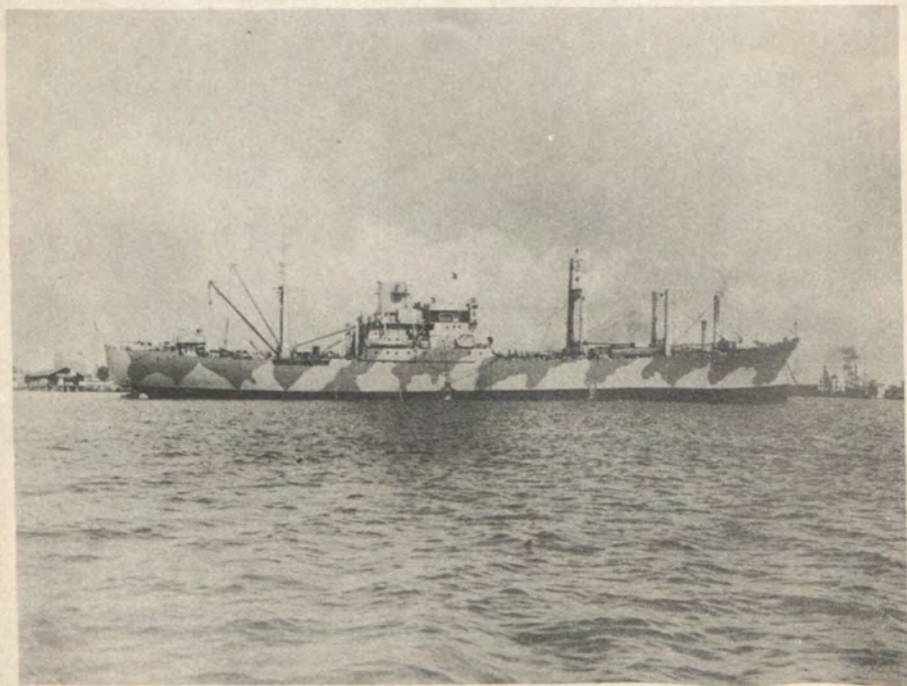
Close on its heels *PT-59* moved in, and let fly with two torpedoes at the nearest destroyer. The target turned slightly to starboard, avoiding the torpedoes, but thereby exposed the large ship²⁷ and another destroyer to the line of fire. The captain of *PT-59* believed that at least one hit might have been scored on one of these vessels. Meanwhile the *PT-59* strafed the leading destroyer as it continued on its run to a bare hundred yards range, sweeping the decks, bridge, and deck guns with four 50-caliber guns and one 20-mm. At this close range, the destroyer itself could hardly miss the PT, and returned its fire heavily. *PT-59* was struck at least 10 times by 25-caliber bullets, shrapnel, and machine-gun bullets, but almost miraculously suffered no casualties. The worst damage was caused by two 25-caliber bullets, which pierced one of her turrets, struck a machine-gun belt, and started a lively blaze. C. E. Osborne, gunner's mate second class, detached the blazing belt and threw it out onto the deck, where it was extinguished.

²⁶ CINCPAC's report on the Solomon Islands campaign from the Battle of Lunga Point on November 30, 1942, to the Munda bombardment, January 4th-5th, 1943, gives the enemy force in this engagement as, "at least eight ships." It is probable that the two destroyers chasing *PT-40* were missed by the striking group.

²⁷ CINCPAC reported the large ship to be either a destroyer leader or a minelayer. The coast-watcher who made the original report (assuming he was referring to the same vessel) identified it as possibly a light cruiser. It was never positively identified by the PT crews.



The high-speed transport *Colhoun*.



The *Alchiba* in war paint.

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The other boats of the striking force had come within range by this time, and a wild melee developed on the dark waters illuminated by explosions and the flash of guns. Barely 3 minutes after *PT-59* made her initial run, *PT-36* closed with one of the leading destroyers and fired four torpedoes as she swept past. At least one of the torpedoes struck home, and most probably another hit the mark. *PT-36* was unscathed, and as she roared out of range, *PT-44* dashed in on one of the after destroyers firing her torpedoes. Two certain hits resulted, and it is believed the destroyer sank almost immediately after the twin explosion.

The violence and concentration of the torpedo explosions was attested by the Kokumbona patrol, now proceeding rapidly up the coast hoping to join the fray. At about 2350, *PT-109*, carrying the squadron commander, heard "a terrific explosion" in the waters to the north—probably the two torpedo hits scored by *PT-44*. At the same time *PT-40*, returning from the waters south of the Savo-Esperance line where she had led her pursuers, saw the flashes of two torpedo hits near Esperance and one halfway between Esperance and Savo.

The enemy by this time had had enough. Without attempting to press their tremendous advantage in fire power, despite the fact that it must have been evident that the PT's would soon run out of torpedoes, the Japanese ships turned and precipitately retired to the north. No effort was made to unload the large ship; and if, as some observers believed, the Japanese intended to plant mines in the channels off Guadalcanal and Florida, they were unable to accomplish that purpose.

At 0015 on the 8th, *PT-109* and *PT-43* of the Kokumbona patrol arrived at the scene of the action off Cape Esperance. *PT-59*, damaged by enemy shell fire, was by this time retiring to her base escorted by *PT-44* and *PT-36*. A few moments later the observation plane, which had been in the air above the action and which was following the retreating Japanese, radioed the position of the enemy force about 7 miles northwest of the Cape. *PT-109* and *PT-43* immediately gave chase. For 10 minutes the hopeless pursuit continued, until at 0025 the SOC signalled that the Japanese were 15 miles northwest of Esperance, heading north at high speed.

Meanwhile *PT-37*, which had fired two torpedoes during the engagement and then retired southeast, spotted a light on the Guadalcanal shore about 5 miles southwest of Cape Esperance. Calling the observation plane, she remained in the neighborhood until an aerial flare showed

a large Japanese ship close ashore, bow on the beach. *PT-37* immediately fired her two remaining torpedoes, scoring one direct hit, then returned to her base.²⁸

Action for the night was over, but the alarms were not. *PT-109* and *PT-43*, unable to close with the fleeing Japanese, returned to their coastal patrol. At 0115, proceeding down the Guadalcanal shoreline, they noted a light on the beach about a mile southwest of Cape Esperance, and immediately called the observation plane. The plane's flares showed a group of tents and grass huts, which it strafed with machine-gun fire, but no activity was disclosed. Further patrol activities revealed no hostile craft, and made certain that no Japanese had reached the island.

At 0400 the night's work ended. *PT-48*, whose engine failure had put her out of action in the first moments of the skirmish, reported her position in the protected waters south of Savo Island, and asked for assistance in returning to port. *PT-109* and *PT-43*, by this time convinced that the Japanese would not return, abandoned their patrol and escorted *PT-48* back to their base.

A dispatch from COMSOPAC to CINCPAC, dated December 9, 1942, perhaps gives the best summation of the work of the PT squadrons in the Guadalcanal area: "They are performing heroic services, and it is confidently expected that they will set a high record of valor and achievement in the service of their country."

In this one night engagement, with a minimum of damage to themselves, the PT boats attacked a vastly superior Japanese force, probably sinking at least one destroyer and scoring torpedo and gunfire hits on others. More important, they turned back decisively a strong attempt to reinforce Japanese troops menacing our garrisons on Guadalcanal, and thereby probably lessened the time necessary for driving the enemy from the island.

☆ ☆ ☆

SAVING THE *ALCHIBA*

While unloading munitions and other supplies for our garrison at Guadalcanal, the 6,200-ton cargo auxiliary *Alchiba*, formerly the merchant vessel *Mormacdove*, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine early on the morning of November 28th, 1942. Afire and listing badly, *Alchiba* was beached to prevent her total loss. The crew fought the fires, in spite

²⁸ It is believed that this ship had been run aground during a previous action.

of exploding cargo and other hazards, for 4 grueling days and nights before bringing it under control. Primary salvage work was being done on December 7th when *Alchiba* was torpedoed a second time. There was little hope of saving the ship, her captain, Comdr. John S. Freeman, reporting that salvage appeared "improbable."

Nevertheless, *Alchiba* was brought "home" and repaired. The story of how this was done, termed "a saga of tenacious and courageous effort" by COMSOPAC, is outlined below. The Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, made the following comment—"This is an outstanding record of saving a ship that might have been lost many times. While fighting fire and explosion from the first torpedo hit received November 28th, the ship was bombed, was a bystander at the November 30th action, was again torpedoed on December 7th, and experienced other attacks. That the ship was still saved under these circumstances was the result of leadership of the captain and resolute efforts of *Alchiba's* crew."

The *Alchiba* left Noumea, New Caledonia, on November 21, 1942, with a cargo of aviation gasoline, bombs, ammunition, and provisions for American forces in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area. She was a part of Task Unit BAKER, consisting of the *Barnett*, *Lardner*, *Lamson*, and *Hughes*. Besides her internal cargo, the *Alchiba* towed a flat-top barge loaded with Marston mats.

The voyage to the Solomons was uneventful, and at 0652 of November 26th the *Alchiba* dropped anchor in Tulagi Harbor. Although by that time Japanese strength appeared to be declining in Guadalcanal-Tulagi, the area was by no means quiet. Enemy air attacks were frequent and submarines an ever-present menace. Moreover, there was no guarantee against attacks by light surface units. Ashore on Guadalcanal, Marines and newly arrived contingents of U.S. Army troops were engaged in extensive mopping-up operations. The *Alchiba* got an early reminder of conditions on Guadalcanal, noting in her log as she approached at 0413, "observed searchlights and anti-aircraft fire on the beach."

The day of the 26th was spent unloading a part of the *Alchiba's* cargo at Tulagi. The following day she unloaded additional cargo at Guadalcanal, returning to Tulagi Harbor at nightfall. She crossed to Guadalcanal again on the 28th, anchoring off Lunga Point at 0546 in 30 fathoms of water. The *Barnett* was at anchor nearby, the two cargo vessels being screened by the destroyers *Lamson*, *Lardner*, *Hughes*, *McKean*, and *Manley*.

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It was difficult to conceive of a submarine penetrating this protection undetected. However, one did, for at 0616, without warning, a torpedo hit the *Alchiba* on the port side approximately at frame 125, the explosion entering No. 2 hold. Almost immediately this space was a mass of flames, and the fire quickly spread to No. 1 hold. The ship assumed a 17° list.

Comdr. Freeman, considering the nature of the *Alchiba's* cargo and fearing that she might blow up or sink at any moment, order the anchor hove up and the ship beached. As he approached the shore he steered somewhat to port in order to be clear of landing facilities in case his ship exploded. At 0625 the *Alchiba* nosed into the sand, lying normal to the beach, aground along about 157 feet of her length, with 20 feet of water at the stem and 42 under the stern. Her position was approximately 2 miles east of Lunga Point.

Alchiba was in condition 3 when the torpedo struck. The executive officer, Comdr. Howard R. Shaw, went immediately to the bridge and directed the engine room to turn on the carbon dioxide extinguishers in the forward part of the ship and to flood the forward magazines.

There was very little confusion aboard. The ship's medical officer reported some difficulty in making his way to the dispensary. The *Alchiba* had a number of Army personnel aboard, and these men and some of the ship's crew clogged companionways for a time while making their way aft away from the area of the fires. The only fatalities occurred among the Army men. Two privates were missing when a muster was called to determine the extent of casualties. These men were last seen struggling in the water near the propeller. Of the ship's company, only 1 man was injured (burns) by the torpedo explosion. However, there were about 10 patients in sick bay, and as soon as the ship grounded they were taken ashore in small boats.

Every effort was made to confine the fires. Depth charges were set on safe, blowers were secured, all wires leading aft were cut, hoses were played on surfaces which became overheated, and the crew, where possible, began removing explosive cargo from the vicinity of the blaze.

In spite of every effort, the fire gained headway. By 0700 all CO₂ had been exhausted, and fire fighting had to be carried on with hoses alone. Hold No. 2 contained machine-gun ammunition, and it was not long before this began exploding. The ammunition flew about the forward part of the ship, projectiles or cases even landing on the bridge 40 feet

above the main deck. Fire fighting parties moved about among the flying missiles seemingly unaware of the danger, and somehow escaped injury.

A heavy explosion under No. 2 hatch carried away the pontoon hatch covers and Marston mats lying on them. Minor explosions were almost continuous. The fire raging in holds 1 and 2 threatened at any moment to break in No. 3, which was filled with hand grenades and ammunition. Burning oil and gasoline on the surface of the water in holds 1 and 2 added to the danger. Chief Boatswain's Mate F. S. Edwards organized a party of men to unload explosives from No. 3 hold. All power forward had been secured, and this hazardous work had to be done by hand. Men lowered themselves into the smoke and intense heat of the threatened hold and passed up ammunition by hand to others on deck. From there it was passed aft along the deck to where it could be discharged.

The men in No. 3 hold made exhaustive efforts to close the watertight door between it and hold No. 2, but the door had been blown open and badly distorted by the torpedo blast and resisted all efforts. Edwards was overcome by smoke in attempting to close the door and had to be sent to the beach for treatment. Subsequently a hose was played on the aperture and was effective in confining the fire.

Additional explosives, including hand grenades and 75-mm. shells, were unloaded from No. 3 upper 'tween decks. An extremely heavy explosion shook the ship at 0948. About this time the decks, kingposts, and structure forward became very hot, and many men received minor but painful burns. Some went right on fighting fires. Others took time only to report to the dispensary for treatment before going back to man hoses or pass cargo. The deck was so hot in some places that Marston mats had to be put down in order to enable men to walk about without burning their feet.

The fleet minesweeper *Bobolink*, Lieut. James L. Foley, came alongside to port at 1115 and passed over five fire hoses. These were put to use at once and assisted materially in reducing the heat, but there was no way of getting much water to some of the 'tween decks spaces, and in these the fire burned unchecked. Ready box ammunition in the forward part of the ship began exploding at 1242, and the remainder was thrown overboard. Several times burning oil or gasoline burst through the *Alchiba's* port side, endangering the *Bobolink*, but the smaller vessel drove the flames clear with hoses.

Between 1308 and 1336 the screening destroyers, which had been hunting the *Alchiba's* attacker, dropped eight depth charges 3 or more miles to the northward, but the results were not known.

The wind, which had been from the southeast, shifted south at 1646, blowing the smoke back over the *Alchiba* and *Bobolink*. Many men fighting fire were overcome at their work and the dispensary was filled with the choked and exhausted. The more serious cases were evacuated to the beach. Others, revived by fresh air and brandy, returned to duty. The dense smoke and fumes isolated a group of men on the forecastle head who were playing hoses into No. 1 hold. Food and bedding were taken to them in small boats. The *Bobolink* moved around to the starboard side to get clear of the smoke.

By 0030 on the morning of the 29th, conditions had become so hazardous that the men on the *Alchiba's* forecastle were removed, and the *Bobolink* was instructed to cast off and stand by for further assistance. It was necessary to cut two of the *Bobolink's* hoses because of the hot decks and suffocating smoke on the forecastle. Soon afterward, all personnel except selected officers and men necessary to fight fire and continue the discharging of ammunition from No. 5 hold were evacuated. The executive officer established a camp on the beach with tents and material procured from naval headquarters. Many men, too exhausted to look for cots, collapsed and slept among their personal belongings on the ground.

Aboard ship, the skeleton crew continued to fight the fire, and by 0330 succeeded in restricting it to the forward part of the ship, where it continued to burn with frequent explosions. At this time an air raid occurred. Lit by her own fires, the *Alchiba* was a prime target. However, although a salvo of eight bombs fell some yards to starboard, she suffered no additional damage.

With daylight on the 29th, working parties from the camp ashore came aboard and resumed fire fighting and unloading.

Meanwhile, the supplying of Guadalcanal went on. Hardly a day passed when one or more of our cargo vessels was not unloading within hailing distance of the *Alchiba*. Her crew welcomed the presence of these other ships, for it meant additional protection in the form of screening destroyers. The *Alchiba*, of course, was immobilized, and the fact that destroyers screening the ship occasionally dropped depth charges indicating the presence of enemy submarines, did not add to the composure of her crew. However, though the men could not but realize the

precariousness of their position, they kept resolutely at the prime task of trying to save their ship from the fires which threatened to destroy her from within.

By noon of the 29th the wind, which heretofore had been light, increased to force 4, adding to the difficulty of fire fighting. Three hours later the wind abated, but at 1707 fire broke through into No. 3 hatch and ignited gas and oil on the water there. The handling of ammunition in this hatch had to be discontinued until the fire could be driven back into No. 2 hold.

At 2108 a heavy explosion in No. 1 hold appeared to reduce the fire there. This blast was difficult to explain, since No. 1 hold contained no explosives and was completely flooded, but was nevertheless welcomed. Later that night heavy gunfire was heard on the beach. The *Alchiba* could only guess as to whether it was ours or the enemy's. A large convoy put in on the morning of November 30th, and for a time the *Alchiba* enjoyed the added screen protection. All ammunition had been removed from No. 3 upper 'tween decks, and the work of removing it from the lower deck was begun. Pontoon ribbons were unloaded, and the *Bobolink* came alongside to take off Marston mats. At 1930 a tank lighter was used to carry a 3,300-pound stream anchor out abreast the stern. The anchor, with about 45 fathoms of towing cable, was employed to keep the *Alchiba's* stern in deep water. All this time fire fighting continued.

At dark all other vessels left the area, and the *Alchiba's* captain went ashore to ascertain the tactical situation. He was informed that an enemy surface force was approaching; also that all screening ships had to be employed with our task forces. This left the *Alchiba* unprotected. It was then decided to keep only a few officers and men on board with boats standing by in case a hurried departure became necessary. Gun crews were assigned from those on board for fire fighting and ship keeping.

Little was known of the tactical situation. Every effort was made to keep the fires forward under hatches in order to avoid detection. However, every so often there would be a flare-up which illuminated the ship. About 2200 a light was observed to the northward, and it was assumed that it came from our fighting ships going to meet the enemy. Some time later more lights were seen, and at 2320 a surface engagement began about 10 miles to the westward off Savo Island. Star shells, splashes, gunfire, and burning ships were observed, but it was impossible to dis-

tinguish friend from foe. "The engagement seemed to be of considerable magnitude," the *Alchiba* reported, "but details could not be observed." The battle lasted approximately 25 minutes, but it was some time before the *Alchiba* knew that the Japanese had been driven off. During the battle and again at 0425 there were air raid alerts, accompanied by some anti-aircraft fire from Guadalcanal. There was a natural anxiety aboard the *Alchiba* during the battle, for an enemy break through would almost certainly be followed by a bombardment of our shore positions and the Japanese would not be likely to ignore a big cargo ship. Nevertheless, those aboard stuck it out.

Additional air raid alerts of 15 minutes' duration sounded at 0905 and 1040 on the first of December. Between times, work on the *Alchiba* was continued. A 50-hand Marine working party came aboard at 0700 to assist with the removal of cargo and debris. At 1330 one of the Marines was fatally injured when a section of Marston mat caught in his clothing and threw him over the side onto a pontoon barge.

Later in the day two of the *Alchiba's* crew were overcome by carbon monoxide while working in a compartment which had previously been found safe. These men, with the aid of H. R. Robbins, Seaman First Class, who had been posted outside, struggled to safety. Further accidents of this nature were prevented by issuance of an order that no compartments were to be entered until tested for safety.

December 1st also was marked by the fact that provisions in the cold storage spaces began to go bad, and by the commencement of the business of making the after end of the ship habitable. This type of work was continued on the 2d, as well as the hoisting in of lifeboats, life rafts and the running of temporary leads to deck machinery forward. At 1435 on December 2d—104 hours after the first torpedoing—the fires finally were brought under control, although still smoldering in holds No. 1 and 2.

December 3d was uneventful, as the work of unloading and rehabilitating continued. On the 4th, however, there was a torpedo scare and another air raid alert. On that day the *Joseph Teal* was unloading 900 yards off the *Alchiba's* port quarter. Three destroyers and one PC formed the screen. At 0656 a torpedo was sighted crossing the stern of the *Joseph Teal* and bearing toward the after part of the *Alchiba*. The torpedo apparently was near the end of its run. It curved away, passed 70 yards astern, and did not explode. A second torpedo nosed into the

beach some 400 yards on the port beam. The fact that this attack, as well as the first one, was launched from an undetected source led to the belief that midget enemy submarines were responsible. Depth charges were dropped with unknown results.

Later in the morning the *Bobolink* came alongside to remove heavy debris from the *Alchiba's* No. 2 hold. An unsuccessful attempt was made to pump out No. 3 hold with the *Bobolink's* pumps. Efforts to lower the water in holds No. 1 and 3 with the ship's own pumps had previously failed. A diver was sent down to determine the extent of hull damage, but his findings were inconclusive. Nevertheless, the chances of saving the ship now appeared to be good.

There were air raid alerts the afternoon of the third and the morning of the fourth. Meanwhile, working parties continued to come out from the beach to remove debris and damaged cargo from holds No. 1, 2, and 3. All unimpaired cargo had been discharged by this time. Steps to insure the safety of Government property aboard and ashore were taken, such as posting sentries and standing watches.

A SERONSOPAC²⁹ officer, Capt. Homer N. Wallin, came aboard on the 5th to make a salvage inspection. He reported that the chances of saving the *Alchiba* appeared excellent. This word was greeted with cheers by the tired crew. "In spite of the state of exhaustion which was quite apparent," the captain reported, "the news that the work done might yet save the ship brought new energy to all concerned throughout December 6th." The *Joseph Teal* and *Kopara* were unloading nearby on the 6th, and their screen "gave an additional sense of security."

This state of affairs lasted only until the morning of December 7th. The *Joseph Teal* stood in again that morning and began unloading 600 yards on the *Alchiba's* port beam. At 0759, what appeared to be the conning tower of a midget submarine was sighted close aboard on the *Alchiba's* port quarter, and immediately afterward a torpedo struck her at frame 55 on the port side. The engine room, evaporator room, and No. 4 hold were flooded at once. The blast blew away main deck hatch covers and threw fragments of metal around the weather deck. Three men below decks were missing and six were injured. Gun crews opened fire with the 5-inch and 3-inch guns. A plane dropped a bomb where the submarine had been sighted. Later a PC dropped about eight depth charges 700 yards distant from the *Alchiba* on her port beam, but again

²⁹ Service Squadron, South Pacific.

the results were indeterminate. The hunt for the enemy submarine was continued for several hours. Another air raid alert sounded at 1045, and the all clear did not come until 1127.

The *Alchiba's* captain, in the meantime, had sent all working parties ashore and ordered the removal of all portable gear and equipage which could be gotten off. The business of stripping the ship continued throughout the day. Meanwhile, the *Alchiba* had settled gradually by the stern. The bow rose about 40 inches above the previous level as she pivoted on the bottom. No. 5 hold began to fill with water leaking through from No. 4. When all removable gear had been taken ashore, all hands except the commanding officer, 5 other officers, and 11 men were ordered to the beach at 1730. The men's spirits reached a low ebb at this point. Even the captain expressed doubt as to the feasibility of saving the ship. Hope was not abandoned, however, and the advice of the Service Squadron, South Pacific, was sought.

Salvage priority went to combatant units, and it was some time before work could be done on the *Alchiba*. Minor repair work was continued by the ship's crew. On December 12th Capt. Wallin again came aboard to make an inspection and plan the actual salvage operation. He left the ship the following day.

On the 13th, the submarine rescue vessel *Ortolan*, Lieut. A. P. Holland, made a salvage inspection of the *Alchiba*, and the next day began rigging the latter's holds for removal of cargo so that clearance could be had for patching work.

The *Ortolan* continued the work of jettisoning damaged cargo and pumping out the *Alchiba's* flooded holds until the 17th, when ordered away to assist a grounded vessel. She returned on the 20th, and on the 23d the ocean-going tug *Navajo* also joined in the salvage work on the *Alchiba*. With divers and welders from the *Ortolan* doing the repairs and the *Navajo* supplying power to the *Alchiba's* deck winches, the cargo vessel was readied for moving on the 27th. The two small vessels pulled her off the beach at 1012, and towed her across to Tulagi Harbor where she dropped anchor at 1614. There the *Ortolan* recommenced salvage operations. Routine salvage work continued without any more serious interruption than almost daily air raid alerts, and by the 9th of January, 1943, the *Alchiba* had been put in habitable condition. At 1100 the camp ashore was policed and turned over to the commanding officer, Tulagi, and all hands were quartered aboard once more.

At 1414 on January 18th, the *Alchiba*, towed by the *Navajo* and assisted by the *Ortolan*, weighed anchor and set course for the New Hebrides. Outside the harbor, the *Ortolan* cast off and *PC-477* and *PC-479* were picked up as escorts. Despite her slow speed of about 6 knots in tow, the trip was uneventful, and at 1744 on the 22d the *Alchiba* dropped anchor in Segond Channel, on the south coast of Espiritu Santo. Several hours later an air raid alert followed by anti-aircraft fire on the beach made her feel at home.

The *Vestal* took over the job of repairing the *Alchiba* at Espiritu Santo. There the *Alchiba* remained until May 5th, at which time, under her own power, she began the journey home to the West Coast for final repairs before returning to duty with the fleet.

DESIGNATIONS OF U. S. NAVAL AIRCRAFT

Model	Class	Manufacturer	U. S. name	British name
BD.....	Bomber.....	Douglas.....	Havoc.....	Boston III Havoc. Buffalo.
F2A.....	Fighter.....	Brewster.....	Buffalo.....	
F3A.....	do.....	do.....	Corsair.....	
F4F.....	do.....	Grumman.....	Wildcat.....	Martlet.
F6F.....	do.....	do.....	Hellcat.....	
KF7F.....	do.....	do.....	do.....	
FG.....	do.....	Goodyear.....	Corsair.....	
FM.....	do.....	Eastern Aircraft.....	Wildcat.....	Martlet V.
F4U.....	do.....	Chance-Vought.....	Corsair.....	Corsair.
GB.....	Transport.....	Beech.....	Traveler.....	
GH.....	do.....	Howard.....	do.....	
GK.....	do.....	Fairchild.....	Forwarder.....	
HE.....	Ambulance.....	Piper.....	Grasshopp'r.....	
J2F.....	Utility.....	Grumman.....	Duck.....	
J4F.....	do.....	do.....	Widgeon.....	
JRB.....	Utility, multi-engine.....	Beech.....	Voyager.....	
JRF.....	do.....	Grumman.....	do.....	Goose I.
JRS.....	Utility, multi-engine.....	Vought-Sikorsky.....	do.....	
JR2S.....	do.....	Vought-Sikorsky.....	Excalibur.....	Excalibur.
NE.....	Trainer, primary.....	Piper.....	Grasshopp'r.....	
NH.....	Trainer, advanced.....	Howard.....	do.....	
NP.....	Trainer, primary.....	Spartan.....	do.....	
NR.....	do.....	Ryan.....	Recruit.....	
N2S.....	do.....	Stearman (Boeing).....	Caydet.....	Caydet.
N2T.....	do.....	Timm.....	Tutor.....	
N3N.....	do.....	Naval Aircraft Factory.....	do.....	
OS2N.....	Observation scout.....	do.....	Kingfisher.....	Kingfisher.
OS2U.....	do.....	Vought-Sikorsky.....	do.....	
XPBB.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat.....	Boeing.....	Sea Ranger.....	
PBJ.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, land plane.....	North American.....	Mitchell.....	
PBM.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat.....	Martin.....	Mariner.....	Mariner.
PBN.....	do.....	Naval Aircraft Factory.....	Catalina.....	
PBO.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane.....	Lockheed.....	Hudson.....	Hudson III.
PBY-5.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat.....	Consolidated.....	Catalina.....	Catalina.
P4Y.....	do.....	do.....	do.....	Do.
XPB2M.....	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, boat.....	Martin.....	Mars.....	
PB2Y-3.....	do.....	Consolidated.....	Coronado.....	
PB4Y.....	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, landplane.....	do.....	Liberator.....	Liberator.
PV.....	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane.....	Vega.....	Ventura.....	Ventura.

DESIGNATIONS OF U. S. NAVAL AIRCRAFT—Continued

Model	Class	Manufacturer	U. S. name	British name
R5C.....	Transport, multi-engine.	Curtiss.....	Commando.	
R4D-1.....	do.....	Douglas.....	Skytrain...	
R4D-2.....	do.....	do.....		
R4D-3.....	do.....	do.....	Skytrooper.	
R4D-4.....	do.....	do.....		
R5D.....	do.....	do.....	Skymaster.	
R5O.....	do.....	Lockheed.....	Lodestar...	Lodestar.
RB-1.....	Transport (cargo), multi-engine.	Budd.....		
SB2A.....	Scout bomber.....	Brewster.....	Buccaneer..	Bermuda.
SBC.....	do.....	Curtiss.....	Helldiver..	Cleveland.
SB2C.....	do.....	do.....	do.....	
SBD.....	do.....	Douglas.....	Dauntless..	
SB2D.....	do.....	do.....		
SBF.....	do.....	Fairchild.....	Helldiver..	
SBN.....	do.....	Naval Aircraft Factory.		
SB2U.....	do.....	Vought-Sikorsky...	Vindicator..	Chesapeake.
SBW.....	do.....	Canadian Car and Foundry.	Helldiver..	
SNB-1.....	Trainer, advanced.....	Beech.....	Kansas.....	
SNB-2.....	do.....	do.....	Navigator..	
SNC.....	do.....	Curtiss.....	Falcon.....	
SNJ.....	do.....	North American.....	Texan.....	Harvard, I, II.
SNV.....	do.....	Vultee.....	Valiant.....	
SOC.....	Scout observation.....	Curtiss.....	Seagull.....	Seamew.
SO3C.....	do.....	do.....	do.....	
TBD.....	Torpedo bomber.....	Douglas.....	Devastator..	
TBF.....	do.....	Grumman.....	Avenger.....	Tarpon.
TBM.....	do.....	Eastern Aircraft.....	do.....	
TBV.....	do.....	Vultee.....		

SYMBOLS OF U. S. NAVY SHIPS

AB	Crane ship.	APD	Troop transport (high speed).
ACV	Auxiliary aircraft carrier.	APH	Transport for wounded.
AD	Destroyer tender.	APR	Rescue transport.
AE	Ammunition ship.	APS	Auxiliary cargo submarine.
AF	Store ship.	APV	Aircraft transport.
AG	Miscellaneous auxiliary.	AR	Repair ship.
AGC	General communications vessel.	ARD	Floating drydock.
AGS	Surveying ship.	ARH	Heavy hull repair ship.
AH	Hospital ship.	ARS	Salvage vessel.
AK	Cargo ship.	AS	Submarine tender.
AKF	Refrigerated cargo ship.	ASR	Submarine rescue vessel.
AKS	General stores issue ship.	AT	Ocean-going tug.
AM	Large mine sweeper.	ATR	Salvage tug.
AMb	Base mine sweeper.	AV	Seaplane tender (large).
AMc	Coastal mine sweeper.	AVC	Catapult lighter.
AN	Net layer.	AVD	Seaplane tender (converted DD).
AO	Oiler.	AVP	Seaplane tender (small).
AOG	Gasoline tanker.		
AP	Transport.	BB	Battleship.
APc	Coastal transport.		

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SYMBOLS OF U. S. NAVY SHIPS—Continued

CA	Heavy cruiser.	SM	Mine laying submarine.
CB	Large cruiser.	SS	Submarine.
CL	Light cruiser.	YA	Ash lighter.
CM	Mine layer.	YAG	District auxiliary, miscellaneous.
CMc	Coastal mine layer.	YC	Open lighter.
CV	Aircraft carrier.	YCF	Car float.
DD	Destroyer.	YCK	Open cargo lighter.
DE	Destroyer escort vessel.	YCV	Aircraft transportation lighter.
DM	Light mine layer (high speed).	YD	Floating derrick.
DMS	Mine sweeper (high speed).	YDT	Diving tender.
IX	Unclassified.	YF	Covered lighter; range tender; provision store lighter.
LCI(L)	Landing craft, infantry (large).	YFB	Ferry boat and launch.
LCM(2)	50-foot landing craft, mechanized, Mk. II.	YFD	Floating drydock.
LCM(3)	50-foot landing craft, mechanized, Mk. III.	YFT	Torpedo transportation lighter.
LCP(L)	36-foot landing craft, personnel (large).	YG	Garbage lighter.
LCP(R)	36-foot landing craft, personnel (with ramp).	YH	Ambulance boat.
LCR(L)	Landing craft, rubber (large).	YHB	Houseboat.
LCR(S)	Landing craft, rubber (small).	YHT	Heating scow.
LCS(S)	Landing craft, support (small).	YM	Dredge.
LCT(5)	Landing craft, tank, Mk. V.	YMS	Motor mine sweeper.
LCV	Landing craft, vehicle.	YMT	Motor tug.
LCVP	Landing craft, vehicle and personnel.	YN	Net tender.
LSD	Landing ship, dock.	YNg	Gate vessel.
LST	Landing ship, tank.	YNT	Net tender (tug class).
LVT	Landing vehicle, tracked (unarmored).	YO	Fuel oil barge.
LVT(A)	Landing vehicle, tracked (armored).	YOG	Gasoline barge.
PC	Submarine chaser.	YOS	Oil storage barge
PE	Eagle boat.	YP	District patrol vessel.
PG	Gun boat.	YPD	Floating pile driver.
PR	River gun boat.	YPK	Pontoon stowage barge.
PT	Motor torpedo boat.	YR	Floating workshop.
PTC	Motor boat submarine chaser.	YRC	Submarine rescue chamber.
PY	Yacht.	YRD	Floating pile driver.
PYc	Coastal yacht.	YS	Stevedore barge.
		YSD	Seaplane wrecking derrick.
		YSP	Salvage pontoon.
		YSR	Sludge removal barge.
		YT	Harbor tug.
		YTT	Torpedo testing barge.
		YW	Water barge.