

THE BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA ISLAND

Submitted by: Joe Czarnecki

Date: 14 October 1942

Time: 02:40 local

Wind: Out of the ESE at 7-10 knots

Seas: Sea State 3

Visibility: Night Visibility Code 8

Location: Between Savo and Florida Islands in the northwestern branch of Ironbottom Sound. Japanese Guide is in 9 degrees 10 minutes South by 160 degrees East, heading 315 at 29 knots. American Guide is in 9 degrees 5 minutes South by 159 degrees 45 minutes East, heading 030 at 20 knots.

GENERAL SITUATION:

Deeply concerned with the situation in the South Pacific, Admiral Nimitz meets with Vice Admiral Ghormley at New Caledonia on 3 October 1942 regarding the situation on Guadalcanal. Unhappy with Ghormley's pessimism and lack of energy, Nimitz urges greater action from the South Pacific Commander. To stiffen Ghormley's backbone, Nimitz risks the defense of Hawaii by dispatching two of the Pacific Fleet's few operational battleships to the South Pacific from where they are operating on the Hawaii to Samoa life-line.

Goaded by Nimitz and relieved of a painful dental condition by CinCPac's own dentist, Ghormley dispatches the destroyers *Monssen* and *MacDonough* to bombard Japanese positions on 9 October in support of a Marine offensive on the Matanikau river. On the night of 11/12 October he sends Rear Admiral Norman Scott to intercept a Japanese reinforcement unit. Scott intercepts and mauls the covering force, but fails to connect with the reinforcements in the Battle of Cape Esperence. Rear Admiral Hill arrives late on 12 October with his battleships. Ghormley orders him to combine with those elements of Scott's force that are still battle-worthy, as well as the two destroyers from the bombardment mission, then repeat Scott's sweep of 11/12 October on the night of 13/14 October.

Delayed by the need to refuel Scott's ships, and slowed by the old battleships, Hill arrives west of Cape Esperence well behind schedule as the last Japanese shells crash into Henderson Field.

The Japanese have meanwhile been building up to a "decisive attack" scheduled for 17 October 1942. The reinforcement mission of 11/12 October is merely part of a larger tapestry, the next element of which is a bombardment of the American air field, intended to free the Imperial Navy to operate in daylight within range of the island.

Vice Admiral Kurita's battleships, one loaded with special bombardment ammunition, and escorted by Rear Admiral Tanaka's light cruiser and nine destroyers, approach Guadalcanal on the night of 13 October, opening fire at 0140, the morning of 14 October

and pouring over 900 rounds of heavy ammunition into the air field, destroying fuel and supplies and reducing the American air force on the island from 39 operational planes to 5. Turning north to retire at 0230, Kurita's fellow admiral, Tanaka, shells Tulagi harbor, and the destroyer *Naganami* drives off Tulagi's feeble riposte of four PT boats.

JAPANESE ORDERS:

Bombard the American air field on Guadalcanal and render it unusable.
Destroy any shipping anchored off Guadalcanal or in Tulagi Harbor.
Withdraw from the radius of Guadalcanal-based aircraft before daylight.

JAPANESE SITUATION REPORT:

Admiral Kurita, in *Kongo*, has successfully bombarded Henderson Field, depleting all of his special bombardment and HE ammunition for his ships' main batteries. Admiral Tanaka, in *Isuzu*, has also shelled Tulagi harbor with his light cruiser and Destroyer Divisions 15 and 31 (less *Naganami*). Destroyer *Naganami* of Destroyer Division 31 has shelled and driven off enemy torpedo boats. The force has just completed its turn to 315T and is retiring at 29 knots to the northwest. Airborne spotters have expended their flares and are proceeding to their recovery point.

JAPANESE FORMATION:

Kongo (Guide) is leading *Haruna* with an 800 yard interval.
Umikaze is 2000 yards to port of *Kongo* and trailed by *Kawakaze* and *Suzukaze* at 500 yard intervals.
Hayashio is 3000 yards to starboard of *Kongo* and preceded by *Kuroshio*, *Oyashio* and *Isuzu* at 500 yard intervals, and trailed by *Makinami* and *Takanami* at 500 yard intervals.
Naganami is tracking 1000 yards to starboard of *Kongo*, 4000 yards astern.

JAPANESE ORDER OF BATTLE:

Third Squadron, Vice Admiral Kurita Takeo (Command=5/7).

Kongo (F), Kongo Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.

Radar= 1 Type 21.

14" ammunition= 290 APC, 0 SAP, 0 CPC, 0 HE.

6" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 1540 CPC, 1233 HE.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 480 CPC, 1920 HE.

Haruna, Kongo Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.

Radar= 1 Type 22.

14" ammunition= 237 APC, 0 SAP, 0 CPC, 0 HE.

6" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 1540 CPC, 1239 HE.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 480 CPC, 1920 HE.

Second Destroyer Squadron, Rear Admiral Tanaka Raizo (Command=9/11).

Isuzu (F), Nagara Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.

5.5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 672 CPC, 0 HE.

3" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 0 CPC, 480 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 8.

Destroyer Division 15, Captain Sato T.

Kuroshio, Kagero Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 360 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Oyashio (F), Kagero Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 360 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Hayashio, Kagero Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 360 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Destroyer Division 24, Captain Harai Y.

Kawakaze, Shiratsuyu Class.

Crew= +3, Command= 8/10.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 375 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Suzukaze, Shiratsuyu Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 5/7.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 375 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Umikaze (F), Shiratsuyu Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 375 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

Destroyer Division 31,

Takanami, Yugumo Class.

Crew= -1, Command= 5/7.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 360 CPC, 0 HE.

Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.
Makinami, Yugumo Class.
Crew= -1, Command= 8/10.
5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 360 CPC, 0 HE.
Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.
Naganami (F), Yugumo Class.
Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.
5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 270 CPC, 0 HE.
Torpedoes= 8 Type 93, plus 8 reloads.

UNITED STATES ORDERS:

Intercept enemy surface forces attempting to bring reinforcements to, or bombard positions upon, Guadalcanal. "Derail the Tokyo Express."

UNITED STATES SITUATION REPORT:

Having arrived too late to prevent the bombardment of Henderson Field, and alerted by PT boat reports that the Japanese are heading for the northern exit of Ironbottom Sound, Admiral Hill and Admiral Scott have just turned to 030T at 20 knots. Their intention is to cross the "T" of the Japanese force and prevent their exit from Ironbottom Sound via the north passage around Savo Island. *Maryland* and *Colorado*, have each launched two spotter planes with flares.

UNITED STATES FORMATION:

The American ships are in a single column line-ahead formation on course 030T at 20 knots maintaining a 600 yard interval: *Laffey*, *Buchanan*, *McCalla*, *San Francisco* (*Guide*), *Helena*, *Maryland*, *Colorado*, *Monssen*; *MacDonough*.

UNITED STATES ORDER OF BATTLE:

Battleship Division Four, Rear Admiral Harry Hill (Command=6/8).

BB-46 *Maryland*, Colorado Class.
Crew= 0, Command= 7/9.
Radars= 1 SK S/ASR, 1 FC (Mk3) FCR, 2 FD (Mk4) FCR.
16" ammunition= 720 APC, 0 SAP, 0 CPC, 0 HE.
5"/51 ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 1800 CPC, 1800 HE.
5"/25 ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 640 CPC, 2560 HE.
BB-45 *Colorado*, Colorado Class.
Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.
Radars= 1 SK S/ASR, 1 FC (Mk3) FCR, 2 FD (Mk4) FCR.
16" ammunition= 720 APC, 0 SAP, 0 CPC, 0 HE.
5"/51 ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 1800 CPC, 1800 HE.

5"/25 ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 640 CPC, 2560 HE.

Cruiser Division Six, Rear Admiral Norman Scott (Command=8/10).

CA-38 *San Francisco*, New Orleans Class.

Crew= +1, Command= 7/9.

Radars= 1 SK S/ASR, 2 FC (Mk3) FCR, 2 FD (Mk4) FCR.

8" ammunition= 612 APC, 0 SAP, 432 CPC, 0 HE.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 846 CPC, 1242 HE.

Cruiser Division Nine

CL-50 *Helena*, St. Louis Class.

Crew= +1, Command= 7/9.

Radars= 1 SK S/ASR, 1 SG SSR, 2 FC (Mk3) FCR, 2 FD (Mk4) FCR.

6" ammunition= 420 APC, 0 SAP, 900 CPC, 0 HE.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 765 CPC, 1215 HE.

Destroyer Division 23

DD 459 *Laffey*, Benson Class.

Crew= +1, Command= 7/9.

Radar= 1 FD (Mk4) FCR.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 276 CPC, 492 HE.

Torpedoes= 5 Mark XV.

DD 484 *Buchanan*, Livermore Class.

Crew= +1, Command= 7/9.

Radar= 1 FD (Mk4) FCR.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 276 CPC, 492 HE.

Torpedoes= 0 Mark XV.

Destroyer Division 24

DD 488 *McCalla*, Livermore Class.

Crew= +1, Command= 7/9.

Radar= 1 FD (Mk4) FCR.

5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 276 CPC, 492 HE.

Torpedoes= 5 Mark XV.

Destroyer Division 22

DD 436 *Monssen*, Livermore Class.

Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.

Radar= 1 FD (Mk4) FCR.
5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 600 CPC, 360 HE.
Torpedoes= 10 Mark XV.

Destroyer Division 1

DD 351 *MacDonough*, Farragut Class.
Crew= 0, Command= 6/8.
Radar= 1 FD (Mk4) FCR.
5" ammunition= 0 APC, 0 SAP, 750 CPC, 450 HE.
Torpedoes= 8 Mark XV.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS:

1) Balky radars. The first time a Japanese or American battleship fires its main battery, roll percentile dice for *each* radar set on the ship. On a roll of 01-50, that radar set will remain in operation and behave normally for the rest of the action unless damaged or destroyed by enemy action. On a roll of 51-00, the radar set immediately fails, but may be repaired (make a Severity Roll). If the set is repaired, repeat the procedure for that radar set on the next main battery salvo with the same probabilities. If the set fails again, it may again be repaired. If at any time a set that initially failed passes its shock check, it will remain in operation and behave normally for the rest of the action unless damaged or destroyed by enemy action.

2) Balking TBS. The first time an American battleship or the cruiser *Helena* fires its main battery, roll percentile dice. On a roll of 01-50, that ship's TBS set will remain in operation and behave normally for the rest of the action unless damaged or destroyed by enemy action. On a roll of 51-75, the TBS set transmits and receives intermittently; the problem will not be discovered and will persist throughout the action even if the unit is damaged by enemy action and subsequently repaired. On a roll of 76-00, the TBS set immediately fails, but may be repaired (make a Severity Roll). If the set is repaired, repeat the procedure for that TBS set on the next main battery salvo with the same probabilities. If the set fails again, it may again be repaired. If at any time a set that initially failed passes its shock check, or suffers an intermittent transmit and receive result, the set will operate accordingly for the rest of the action unless damaged or destroyed by enemy action.

Ships suffering intermittent transmission and reception are subject to the following restrictions:

- a) When issuing flag commands, said commands are only successfully transmitted on a roll of 01-50. If the roll is unsuccessful, only the flagship will execute the flag command, all other ships will continue to execute the previous turn's flag command.
- b) When receiving flag commands, said commands are only successfully received on a roll of 01-50. If the roll is unsuccessful, the ship does not receive the flag command and

will continue to execute the previous turn's flag command. Ships suffering intermittent reception do not reveal the fact to the flag.

3) Friendly fire concerns. The American admirals will not release the destroyers for a torpedo attack in any fashion that could result in their fouling the range for the gun ships for fear of firing on them as happened to the *Duncan* and *Fahrenheit* at Cape Esperence.

ALTERNATIVES:

- 1) Substitute Battleship Division Three (*New Mexico* and *Mississippi*) for Battleship Division Four. It was the other available American battleship formation.
- 2) Include CA-25 *Salt Lake City* in the American formation between *San Francisco* and *Helena*. *Salt Lake City* has suffered one 6" and two 8" shell hits for x Damage Points and is carrying Damage Effects #125 and #510 from the Cape Esperence action.
- 3) Do not play with the balky TBS rule.
- 4) Eliminate Japanese Destroyer Division 24 from the order of battle. Consider them to have executed a Tokyo Express run and to have exited the battle area through the south passage behind and unnoticed by the Americans (whom they also failed to notice).
- 5) Disregard the friend fire concerns.

G.O.D. NOTES:

This action is interesting for its ammunition restrictions. Only the American battleships are fully loaded. The Japanese have shot out their entire load of HE ammunition, and do not have that option available. The American cruisers and destroyers have shot out varying combinations of APC and HE ammunition. There is the real possibility that some ships may run out of ammunition. The Japanese lack the very type of ammunition in theory most suitable to punishing the American battleships; the American cruisers lack much of their ammunition theoretically capable of most threatening the Japanese battleships.

The tactical situation is also interesting. The Japanese need to leave and their best chance of avoiding retaliation from Henderson Field (assuming they haven't eliminated the CACTUS Air Force) or the Hornet Task Force is to go *through* the American force. The Americans are, of course, spoiling for a fight and unlikely to get out of the way. Additionally, the Americans have electronics problems unknown to the Japanese that are likely to turn a neat "T"-crossing into a melee. This is a rare situation where a knock-down/drag-out fight is appropriate, so gamers should love it.

The command arrangements are also something to note. In both cases, the senior admiral is the less capable. Interestingly, the American ships in this action are, thanks to Cape Esperence, the more experienced in a general sense than the Japanese, most of whom have done a lot of steaming, but not much fighting, with the notable exception of the *Kawakaze*. [Courtesy of the TROMs at the [Nihon Kaigun](http://www.combinedfleet.com/kaigun.htm) web site: <http://www.combinedfleet.com/kaigun.htm>, this is some myth-busting that helps put the Solomons actions in perspective.]