

H012.1 Guadalcanal: Battle of Friday the 13th

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The battles that took place in the sound between Guadalcanal and Tulagi after midnight on the night of 12-13 Nov 1942 and on 14-15 Nov are known by multiple names. RADM Samuel Eliot Morison in the History of U.S. Naval Operations in WWII refers to them as the “Naval Battle of Guadalcanal” with part one on 12-13 Nov and part two on 14-15 Nov. Other works call it the First Night Battle of Guadalcanal (which is confusing since Savo Island and Cape Esperance were also night battles off Guadalcanal.) Other sources refer to the Third and Fourth Battles of Savo Island, and Japanese sources refer to the Third and Fourth Battles of the Solomon Sea. Regardless, these two battles were the decisive engagements of the Guadalcanal campaign that turned the tide in U.S. favor.

This time, U.S. naval intelligence and code-breakers provided extensive warning of the timing and force composition of the next major Japanese push to reinforce and re-take Guadalcanal, occupied by U.S. Marines since 7 Aug 52 (and since October, some U.S. Army troops as well.) Following the disastrous failure by Japanese Army forces to penetrate the U.S. perimeter and re-take Henderson Field in late October, the Japanese high command determined that yet another major reinforcement attempt take place, although the Japanese Army still grossly under-estimated the number of U.S. troops on Guadalcanal and how much force would be needed to evict them. As for the Japanese Navy, coming off their costly “victory” in the Battle of Santa Cruz, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet,) determined that there was a narrow window to conduct a major reinforcement effort while there were no operational U.S. carriers in the region.

Yamamoto believed the USS HORNET (CV-8) and USS ENTERPRISE (CV-6) had been sunk, but ENTERPRISE was only badly damaged, and as of early November still had her forward elevator jammed in the up position and was trailing an oil slick. The Japanese, too, were shorthanded with aircraft carriers; the fleet carriers ZUIKAKU and the badly damaged SHOKAKU, with their decimated air groups, as well as the damaged light carrier ZUIHO had returned to Japan, leaving only the medium carrier JUNYO, with a reduced air group, available to support operations, along with about 125 operational land-based bombers and fighters, and about 25 operational float planes. Nevertheless, Yamamoto amassed a force of four battleships, three heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, and twenty-one destroyers for the operation, under the overall command of Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo. Another four heavy cruisers, a light cruiser, and six destroyers under RADM Gunichi Mikawa (the victor at the Battle of Savo Island) were assigned to the operation. An additional 12 destroyers were to provide escort services for eleven Japanese troop transports with 7,000 troops and large quantities of ammunition and supplies embarked.

Believing that the U.S. carriers were out of the picture, the key to the Japanese operation was to suppress (and preferably destroy) the U.S. aircraft at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. Failure to do so would have dire consequences, as the slow transports would be acutely vulnerable to daylight U.S. air attacks from Henderson Field (by then a complex of three airstrips, with 77 operational aircraft on 12

Nov) This critical mission fell to Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe and Battleship Division 11 (HIEI and KIRISHIMA) escorted by one light cruiser (NAGARA) and eleven destroyers.

Vice Admiral William Halsey, the commander of all U.S. forces in the South Pacific Area since 18 Oct, understood that aggressive measures would be needed to prevent a reoccurrence of the devastating battleship bombardment by KONGO and HARUNA of Henderson Field in October. Unlike his predecessor, VADM Ghormley, VADM Halsey flew to Guadalcanal on 8 Nov to see first-hand the situation, where he experienced first-hand an embarrassing nighttime shelling by the Japanese destroyer KAGERO (opposed ineffectually by three U.S. PT boats.) Halsey had given his word to Major General Arch Vandegrift, USMC, commander of U.S. forces on Guadalcanal, that the U.S. Navy would make maximum effort to reinforce, and defend, Guadalcanal, and in early November, U.S. surface ships began regularly entering the sound north of Guadalcanal to conduct extensive daylight shore bombardment of Japanese positions on Guadalcanal. Halsey's options were limited however; lack of tankers contributed to a serious fuel shortage, he had no operational carriers, and the concurrent Allied Invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch) which commenced on 8 Nov 42, had left the South Pacific with resources only barely adequate to support the Guadalcanal mission, and many have argued resources were inadequate.

On 12 Nov 42, two U.S. convoys converged on Guadalcanal, bringing 5,500 Army and Marine troops to the Guadalcanal. One group (TG 67.1,) commanded by RADM Kelly Turner himself, included four transports escorted by cruisers SAN FRANCISCO (CA-38)(with RADM Daniel Callaghan embarked,) PORTLAND (CA-33,) HELENA (CL-50,) and JUNEAU (CL-52) plus 10 destroyers. RADM Norman Scott, embarked on the anti-aircraft cruiser ATLANTA (CL-51) with three destroyers escorted three transports, one of which was damaged by air attack and had to turn back with a destroyer. At dawn on 12 Nov, six U.S. transports were off Guadalcanal offloading troops and supplies.

At 1405 on 12 Nov, a major Japanese air raid came in over Florida Island and Tulagi from the north, and attacked U.S. ships in the sound between Tulagi and Guadalcanal. Alerted by coastwatchers that the strike was inbound, the flight of 16 G4M Betty twin-engine torpedo bombers escorted by 30 Zero fighters (which didn't do a very good escort job) was badly mauled by Marine fighters from Henderson, while others were downed by U.S. shipboard anti-aircraft fire. Only two of the Betty's made it back to their base at Rabaul, and none of their torpedoes hit. However, one damaged Betty kept coming at the SAN FRANCISCO after dropping its torpedo (which missed .) Gunners on SAN FRANCISCO stood their ground and kept firing at the Betty until it crashed into the after superstructure, wiping out most of the ship's anti-aircraft gunners (3 of 4 20mm mounts) with a massive spray of flaming gasoline. The explosion killed 24 Sailors and wounded another 45, including the Executive Officer, CDR Mark Crouter (whose decision to remain aboard would cost him his life in the battle to follow, resulting in a posthumous Navy Cross.) Despite significant damage, there was no serious discussion by CAPT Cassin Young and RADM Dan Callaghan about withdrawing SAN FRANCISCO from the expected fight that night.

By this time, both Halsey and Turner had sufficient intelligence and air reconnaissance reports to know that the major Japanese force was on the way. They did not know the exact composition of the bombardment force, but knew several Japanese battleships would be involved in the operation, and

assumed there would be a bombardment. Despite the heavy odds, RADM Turner stripped almost all the escorts from his convoy, except one damaged destroyer and two that were low on fuel, and combined them into a single Task Force (TG 67.4), under the tactical command of RADM Callaghan, to attempt to stop the Japanese bombardment. Given the odds, this was an extremely bold decision, which many in the force considered to be suicidal.

Turner's decision to make Callaghan the commander, instead of RADM Scott, who was embarked on USS ATLANTA, remains controversial to this day. Callaghan was only 15 days senior to Scott, but Scott had combat experience and had been the victor at the Battle of Cape Esperance, where he had learned numerous lessons in night fighting the hard way. Callaghan's choice of SAN FRANCISCO as his flag ship has also been heavily criticized (although Scott had made the same decision at Cape Esperance and there is no evidence he would have done differently if still in command of the Task Force.) SAN FRANCISCO was the "traditional" choice, since she was the largest ship in the task force, and was also the "sentimental" choice having been Callaghan's previous command as a captain.

What SAN FRANCISCO lacked was the latest SG search radar carried on the heavy cruiser USS PORTLAND (CA-33) and the light cruiser USS HELENA (CL-50,) both of which would have made suitable flagships. (Two destroyers, USS FLETCHER (DD-445) and USS O'BANNON (DD-450) and the anti-aircraft cruiser JUNEAU also had SG radars.) The SG radar had much better contact discrimination, was less prone to false alarms, and had a radar "scope" that provided a "birds-eye" view of the battlefield. The older (by a year) SC radar carried on SAN FRANCISCO and ATLANTA had none of these advantages. Callaghan would also be criticized for not putting his SG-equipped destroyers in the lead (O'BANNON was fourth in line, and the FLETCHER last, although Callaghan expected to make a column turn before the battle that would have put FLETCHER first. Callaghan had also chosen to put his most combat-experienced skipper, LCDR Edward Parker (two Navy Crosses in action in the Dutch East Indies) on CUSHING in the lead, despite an inoperable fire control radar on CUSHING. To be fair to Callaghan and Scott, neither of them had much opportunity to train or become familiar with the new radar technology, nor did any of the ships have a configuration that optimally integrated radar information into command decision-making. CAPT Gilbert Hoover on HELENA had done the most to create an ad hoc arrangement for using radar. Callaghan also did not publish a battle plan, and whatever his plan might have been, no one was left alive who might have known it.

Callaghan chose the same line-ahead column formation that Scott had at Cape Esperance, a "lesson learned" from that battle to best maintain control and avoid the confusion and "friendly fire" that damaged U.S. destroyers in that battle. Callaghan's force consisted of 13 ships, in a single line, in the following order; destroyers CUSHING, LAFFEY, STERRET and O'BANNON, followed by anti-aircraft cruiser ATLANTA (with RADM Scott embarked,) heavy cruiser SAN FRANCISCO (with RADM Callaghan embarked,) heavy cruiser PORTLAND, light cruiser HELENA, and anti-aircraft cruiser JUNEAU, followed by destroyers AARON WARD, BARTON, MONSSEN, and FLETCHER. The down-side of a line of ships is that it made a great target for Japanese torpedoes, especially since the U.S. still didn't grasp the fact that Japanese torpedoes were more powerful, and had a much greater range than U.S. torpedoes (and left little wake due to their oxygen fuel) not to mention being much more reliable.

After midnight, the Japanese Bombardment Group emerged from a series of torrential rain squalls with their formation in disarray, still basically in a (very rough) circular cruising disposition. The night was very dark, even when it was not raining. The two battleships were prepared for shore bombardment, with anti-personnel, incendiary and general-purpose high explosive rounds (i.e., not armor-piercing) in the hoists ready to fire. Like RADM Goto before him at Cape Esperance, RADM Abe was not expecting to encounter an American surface force at night. Abe did not know for sure where all his own ships were, and he squandered precious time trying to figure it out. As a result, the Japanese were once again caught by surprise. In fact, this time, at 0124 American radar on HELENA detected the Japanese (at 13.5 miles, ten miles from CUSHING in the lead) before Japanese lookouts detected the Americans.

Callaghan did not appear to receive or react to radar contacts from HELENA on Japanese force disposition, focusing his attention on what LCDR Parker on the lead destroyer, CUSHING, could see, which in the dark night was pretty much nothing. With talk-between-ships (TBS,) the U.S. Navy's relatively new means for short-range voice communications, clobbered by too many ships on the net, critical contact information was also dropped. Much has been made of Callaghan's failure to use his radar advantage to gain surprise over the Japanese. My assessment (which is not the standard one) is that had Callaghan opened fire earlier, his 8", 6" and 5" guns would have had limited impact on the Japanese battleships, which would have then had more time to switch to appropriate ammunition and find the range to kill Callaghan's cruisers at a distance, with 14" guns and torpedoes. With only two battleships in the Japanese formation, crossing the Japanese "T" wouldn't have done much good either, since it would only have taken a couple minutes for the battleships to turn their broadsides to the U.S. line.

At 0142, CUSHING and the lead Japanese destroyers, closing on each other unseen at a combined speed of over 40 knots to a CPA of 2,000 yards were startled to see enemy ships so close. CUSHING veered away to avoid a collision, while the three destroyers piled up behind her, resulting in a ripple effect of confusion down the U.S. line. Whether Callaghan meant it or not, the result was that the U.S. line pierced into the center of Japanese dispersed formation like a Javelin before blunting on the hard rock that was the battleship Hiei. The Japanese, despite their surprise, actually opened fire first at 0148, revealing to Callaghan that there were Japanese ships all around, leading to his famous (and much maligned) order for "Odd ships fire to starboard and even ships fire to port." (The purpose of Callaghan's order was to prevent U.S. ships from all targeting the same Japanese ships (which happened several times in later battles with very bad results for the U.S.) It was maligned because some U.S. ships already had targeting solutions on close-by Japanese ships, awaiting the order to open fire, and were forced to shift to targets on the opposite side to comply with Callaghan's order.) From there the battle quickly degenerated into chaos, a bit like a multi-car pile-up on the interstate in fog. The battle became individual ship versus individual ship, with such intermingled maneuvers that an accurate reconstruction or chronology is impossible. So, I will follow the methodology of Richard Frank in his excellent book, "Guadalcanal," and give a brief synopsis of what happened to each ship in the American line.

1. USS CUSHING (DD-376,) LCDR Edward N. Parker commanding. Lost in action. 72 KIA/68 WIA.

After avoiding the Japanese destroyer YUDACHI leading the van, CUSHING found herself closing to within 1,000 yards of battleship HIEI to port, but in response to Callaghan's even/odd order, targeted a Japanese destroyer with her main battery on the opposite side instead, while raking the battleship with 20mm canon fire and one torpedo to no effect. CUSHING was hit almost immediately by Japanese shells, including her engineering spaces. Before going dead in the water, CUSHING fired six torpedoes at HIEI at a range of 1,200 yards, which missed or failed to work. CUSHING was then hit at least 17 more times before LCDR Parker was forced to give the order to abandon ship. The light cruiser NAGARA (which had been fired upon by numerous U.S. ships but escaped serious damage) and the destroyer YUKIKAZE gave CUSHING the final blows as they exited the battle area.

LCDR Parker awarded a third Navy Cross (future Vice Admiral.)

2. USS LAFFEY (DD-459,) LCDR William E. Hank commanding. Lost in action. 57 KIA/114 WIA

LAFFEY sighted both Japanese battleships shortly after CUSHING came under fire. LAFFEY passed under the bow of HIEI at a range of 20 yards, blasting the battleship at point-blank range with 5" shells and 20mm fire (officers on the bridge of LAFFEY also fired their side-arms at the battleship.) RADM Abe and the captain of HIEI were both wounded and Abe's Chief of Staff killed by fire from LAFFEY. Abe did not remember the rest of the battle after being wounded. The early hits from LAFFEY and CUSHING, set HIEI's massive superstructure aflame (described by some as a like a burning high rise apartment building) with the result that HIEI drew fire and numerous hits (over 85) from almost every U.S. ship engaged in the battle, resulting in massive topside damage, but none which penetrated to her vitals. In the confusion HIEI also fired on several Japanese destroyers. LAFFEY escaped from HIEI only to run into the large anti-aircraft destroyer TERUZUKI, which scored repeated hits on LAFFEY and blew off her stern with a torpedo before a salvo of 14" shells from the battleship KIRISHIMA hit LAFFEY. TERUZUKI avoided using her searchlight and as a result avoided drawing fire. As fires raged out of control from more hits by three other Japanese destroyers, LCDR Hank gave the order to abandon ship, just before a massive explosion tore LAFFEY apart, killing Hank and many men.

Presidential Unit Citation. LCDR Hank awarded posthumous Navy Cross. Allen M. Sumner-class DD-702 named in honor of LCDR Hank.

3. USS STERETT (DD-407,) CDR Jesse G. Coward commanding. Damaged. 29 KIA/ 22 WIA.

STERETT shifted her guns from port to starboard in response to Callaghan's order and got off 13 salvos at probably the light cruiser NAGARA, before a hit crippled her steering. Additional hits inflicted yet more damage. STERETT launched four torpedoes at either HIEI or KIRISHIMA, which either missed or didn't work, while hitting the battleship with multiple 5" rounds. STERETT also fired two torpedoes at a Japanese destroyer. By 0227, STERETT had sustained eleven direct hits, including three 14" bombardment rounds, knocking out half her main battery. With all torpedoes expended, steering by her engines, STERETT limped out of the battle area.

Presidential Unit Citation. CDR Coward awarded first of two Navy Crosses.

4. USS O'BANNON (DD-450,) CDR Edwin Wilkinson commanding. No damage. 0 KIA/0 WIA.

O'BANNON led a charmed life throughout the entire war. Maneuvering to avoid the flaming wrecks of CUSHING and LAFFEY, the O'BANNON became the lead of the U.S. column by default, closing within 1,800 yards of HIEI. O'BANNON scored numerous 5" hits on HIEI while the battleship's 14" shells passed within feet overhead and other fire missed. O'BANNON fired two torpedoes at HIEI with no effect. O'BANNON'S only damage came from chunks of LAFFEY falling from the sky.

Presidential Unit Citation. CDR Wilkinson awarded Navy Cross. O'BANNON would earn 17 Battle Stars in WWII (tied for third) with no combat casualties. (The crew of O'BANNON attributed their good fortune to a St. Christopher's medal mounted on the bridge. When O'BANNON was being scrapped, two former crewmen (who were also Pearl Harbor survivors) went onboard and retrieved the medal. They later presented it to RADM Winston Copeland, Commander THEODORE ROOSEVELT Battle Group, just prior to TR's 1999 deployment, during which TR's Airwing (CVW-8) flew over 3,000 strike sorties in Kosovo/Serbia and 40 more in Iraq without suffering a combat loss or casualty. RADM Copeland subsequently presented the medal to then-CDR Ted Carter (now VADM, USNA Superintendent) where it now hangs in the Supe's conference room.)

5. USS ATLANTA (CL-51,) CAPT Samuel P. Jenkins commanding. RADM Norman Scott embarked. Lost in Action. 170 KIA/103 WIA.

Moments before the Japanese opened fire, RADM Abe ordered his ships to illuminate targets with searchlight, and ATLANTA was caught in the "cross-fire" of searchlights. ATLANTA fired at the offending lights, while coming under Japanese fire from multiple directions. ATLANTA's forward main 5" gun mounts engaged the HIEI to port while her after mounts engaged three Japanese destroyers to starboard, which had crossed through the U.S. formation ahead of ATLANTA, hitting the HIEI and the destroyers multiple times. One of the three Japanese destroyers, the AKATSUKI, was hit by so many U.S. ships simultaneously that she became a flaming wreck and sank with few survivors. However, a torpedo from one of the destroyers crippled the ATLANTA along with multiple 5" hits from the destroyers and 6" hits from HIEI's secondary batteries. With visibility reduced even further by smoke, ATLANTA then drifted into the line of fire of SAN FRANCISCO and was hit by two full main 8" battery salvoes from SAN FRANCISCO which hit high in ATLANTA's superstructure on a flat trajectory, aimed most likely for targets beyond. These shells (with tell-tale SAN FRANCISCO green dye,) killed RADM Scott and three of his four staff officers. ATLANTA was hit by at least 13 rounds from the NAGARA and HIEI, and 19 from SAN FRANCISCO.

Presidential Unit Citation. RADM Scott awarded posthumous Medal of Honor. CAPT Jenkins awarded Navy Cross. Fletcher-class DD-690 and Kidd-class DDG-995 named in honor of Scott.

6. USS SAN FRANCISCO (CA-38,) CAPT Cassin Young commanding. RADM Daniel Callaghan embarked. Heavily damaged. 86 KIA (including 7 USMC)/ 85 WIA plus 24 KIA /45 WIA in 12 Nov air attack.

SAN FRANCISCO opened fire on the Japanese destroyer YUDACHI, hitting her multiple times. As numerous other U.S. ships started to pummel YUDACHI, SAN FRANCISCO shifted fire to the destroyer

HARUSAME, which suddenly reversed course and possibly passed behind the drifting ATLANTA which was caught in the cross-fire and heavily hit by SAN FRANCISCO, which prompted Callaghan to issue an order "Cease fire own ships," which resulted in confusion about whether he meant a general cease-fire, which Callaghan had to then clarify. SAN FRANCISCO then encountered the battleship HIEI on opposite course. Both flagships fired broadsides into each other at a range of 2,500 yards, while both ships were being hit by other ships from opposite directions. During this brief duel, SAN FRANCISCO hit HIEI with numerous 8" shells, one of which crippled HIEI's steering and would be the cause of HIEI's doom. SAN FRANCISCO was hit by fire from the light cruiser NAGARA and was engaged by the battleship KIRISHIMA as well. The destroyer AMATSUKAZE fired four torpedoes at SAN FRANCISCO, too close to arm, and narrowly avoided a collision. With SAN FRANCISCO taking hits on both sides, HIEI's third 14" salvo hit SAN FRANCISCO in the bridge area, and the several hits from HIEI's secondary batteries mortally wounded CAPT Cassin Young, and another hit killed RADM Callaghan and all but one of his staff, and yet another hit killed the acting XO, CDR Joseph C. Hubbard in after control, while the wounded XO, CDR Crouter was killed in his bunk. The only survivors in the pilot house were LCDR Bruce McCandless and a quartermaster. After determining that LCDR Herbert Schonland, the damage control officer, was senior surviving officer, the two agreed that Schonland would stay below in engineering to keep the ship (which had sustained over 45 hits by this point) from sinking while McCandless would fight the ship topside. Knowing that if he withdrew from the battle, other U.S. ships might follow, thinking they were following Callaghan, McCandless chose to stay in the fight, still exchanging fire with HIEI and KIRISHIMA, although by this time most of SAN FRANCISCO's guns were out of action. About the time Callaghan was killed (0200), RADM Abe lost his nerve and ordered the bombardment cancelled and his ships to withdraw and regroup, despite the fact that KIRISHIMA was unscathed.

Presidential Unit Citation. RADM Callaghan awarded posthumous Medal of Honor. CAPT Young awarded posthumous Navy Cross (previously awarded Medal of Honor at Pearl Harbor.) LCDR Herbert Schonland and LCDR Bruce McCandless awarded Medals of Honor. BM1 Reinhardt Keppler awarded posthumous Medal of Honor. Crew of SAN FRANCISCO were awarded 32 Navy Crosses, 21 Silver Stars and 1 Bronze star with combat V. Fletcher-class DD-792 and Kidd-class DDG-994 named in honor of Callaghan. Fletcher-class DD-793 named in honor of Young (and is now a museum ship in Boston.) Gearing-class DD-765 named in honor of BM1 Keppler. Knox-class frigate FF-1084 named in honor of RADM Bruce McCandless and his father Commodore Byron McCandless. USS HARMON (DE-678) was the first warship named for an African-American, Mess Attendant First Class Leonard Roy Harmon, killed while shielding wounded with his body. The following destroyer escorts were named after SAN FRANCISCO crewmen who were awarded a posthumous Navy Cross; William Finnie Cates -- Canon-class USS CATES (DE-763); Mark Hannah Crouter -- Evarts-class USS CROUTER (DE-11); Buckley-class USS DAMON M. CUMINGS (DE-643); George Raymond Eisele -- Evarts-class USS EISELE (DE-34); Jacques Rodney Eisner -- Canon-class USS EISNER (DE-192); George Irvin Falgout -- Edsall-class USS FALGOUT (DE-324); Andrew Jackson Gandy -- Canon-class USS GANDY (DE-764); Eugene F. George -- Buckley-class USS GEORGE (DE-697); Butler-class USS ALBERT T. HARRIS (DE-447); Buckley-class USS JOSEPH HUBBARD (DE-211); Louis Marcel LeHardy -- Evarts-class USS LEHARDY (DE-20); Harry James Lowe, Jr. -- Edsall-class USS LOWE (DE-325); Jackson Keith Loy -- Buckley-class USS LOY (DE-160); Buckley-class USS WILLIAM T. POWELL (DE-213); Frank O. Slater -- Canon-class destroyer escort USS SLATER (DE-766) -- now a museum

ship in Albany, NY; Kenneth J. Spangenberg -- Buckley-class USS SPANGENBERG (DE-223); Butler-class USS JOHN L. WILLIAMSON (DE-370); Jean C. Witter -- Buckley-class USS WITTER (DE-636); Jack William Wintle -- Evarts-class USS WINTLE (DE-25.)

7. USS PORTLAND (CA-33,) CAPT Laurence T. DuBose commanding. Damaged. 16 KIA/10 WIA.

Following SAN FRANCISCO, PORTLAND initially opened fire on a Japanese destroyer, when at 0158 PORTLAND was hit by one of eight torpedoes from the YUDACHI on starboard side aft which severed the starboard screws and resulted in plate damage that forced PORTLAND into a starboard circle. PORTLAND spent the rest of the battle churning in a circle, and at the conclusion of the first (of many) circles, got a firing solution on HIEI with her forward batteries, hitting HIEI with 10 to 14 8" shells.

Meritorious Unit Commendation. CAPT Du Bose awarded second Navy Cross.

8. USS HELENA (CL-50,) CAPT Gilbert C. Hoover commanding. Damaged. 1 KIA/13 WIA

HELENA opened fire on the Japanese destroyer AKUTSUKI, which returned fire causing minor damage to HELENA. HELENA then picked her way through burning ships, engaging several Japanese vessels, including the Japanese destroyer AMATSUKAZE (whose skipper, CDR Tameichi Hara, would write the book "Japanese Destroyer Captain" shortly after the war, one of the first Japanese accounts translated into English with wide distribution (in USNI book catalog even now.)) HELENA engaged AMATSUKAZE while AMATSUKAZE was pumping rounds into SAN FRANCISCO after sinking the BARTON. AMATSUKAZE was hit 37 times, with 43 killed, but survived the battle due to three other destroyers that distracted the HELENA. HELENA was hit five times with minimal damage, while her rapid-fire 6" guns inflicted much greater damage to the Japanese.

Navy Unit Citation (combined with later actions in Solomons.) CAPT Hoover awarded third Navy Cross. HELENA would be sunk at the Battle of Kula Gulf, 6 Jul 43.

9. USS JUNEAU (CL-51,) CAPT Lyman K. Swenson commanding. Lost in Action. 683 KIA/4 WIA

JUNEAU was hit by a torpedo before she even had a chance to fire more than a few rounds in the battle. Severely damaged, with her keel probably broken by the torpedo, and her steering disabled, JUNEAU limped from the battle area after almost colliding with HELENA. At 0159, the destroyer AMATSUKAZE claimed to have launched four torpedoes at a ship identified as JUNEAU, with one observed hit at 0202, although she may have been hit by a torpedo from the lead Japanese destroyer, YUDACHI.

CAPT Swenson awarded posthumous Navy Cross. Allen M. Sumner-class DD-729 named in honor of CAPT Swenson. Fletcher-class DDG-537 and Arleigh Burke-class DDG-68 named in honor of the five Sullivan brothers.

10. USS AARON WARD (DD-483, CDR Orville F. Gregor commanding. Damaged. 15 KIA/38 WIA.

AARON WARD, leading the trailing four destroyers, plowed into the mass of wrecked and burning ships on both sides. The trail destroyers could all see the carnage ahead, but none of them faltered. Opening fire on HIEI at 7,000 yards, AARON WARD had to go to an emergency backing bell to avoid hitting a burning Japanese destroyer. The YUDACHI (which seemed to be everywhere in the battle) was hit by either gunfire from AARON WARD or by friendly fire from another Japanese destroyer, the ASAGUMO, which left her dead in the water. Two torpedoes passed under AARON WARD, which probably hit the BARTON. AARON WARD attempted to launch torpedoes at HIEI, but SAN FRANCISCO was then too close to HIEI and AARON WARD checked fire, before blasting her way through a couple Japanese destroyers on both sides. Damaged by nine direct hits, including three 14" battleship shells, AARON WARD lost power at about 0235 and went dead in the water.

CDR Gregor awarded Navy Cross (future RADM). USS AARON WARD would be bombed and sunk off Guadalcanal 7 Apr 43.

11. USS BARTON (DD-599,) LCDR Douglas H. Fox commanding. Lost in action. 165 KIA/31 WIA.

After firing at Japanese destroyers for about seven minutes, BARTON nearly collided with an unidentified vessel. While she was momentarily stationary, she was hit by two Japanese torpedoes and exploded, broke in two and sank in a matter of minutes, taking the great majority of her crew with her. BARTON was probably hit by at least two of eight torpedoes fired by the destroyer AMATSUKAZE at 0154.

LCDR Fox awarded a second Navy Cross, posthumously. Allen M. Sumner-class DD-779 named in honor of LCDR Fox.

12. USS MONSSEN (DD-436,) LCDR Charles E. McCombs commanding. Lost in action. 145 KIA/37 WIA.

MONSSEN followed AARON WARD and BARTON into the pile up, when a torpedo went under her keel and another missed ahead. MONSSEN then fired five torpedoes at the HIEI at 4,000 yards, with the usual result for American torpedoes, nothing. MONSSEN then engaged a destroyer to starboard with five torpedoes and another to port at a quarter mile with guns, including 20mm. MONSSEN was then illuminated by star shells which LCDR McCombs believed came from a U.S. ship. He flicked on his recognition lights, before being deluged by 37 hits from multiple ships, including three 14" shells, before being abandoned at 0220.

LCDR McCombs was awarded a Navy Cross.

13. USS FLETCHER (DD-445,) CDR William M. Cole, commanding. 0 KIA/O WIA

Triskaidekaphobia (fear of the number 13) ran rampant on FLETCHER as the 13th ship in a line of 13 ships going into battle on Friday the 13th, with a hull number that added up to 13. However, the skipper, CDR William Cole (USNA '13) considered it a good omen, and he was right. FLETCHER was the only U.S. ship to emerge from the battle completely unscathed. FLETCHER fired on multiple Japanese targets. Although Cole and his XO Joseph Wylie had created a space that functioned much like a combat information center (CIC) with the new SG radar, even that did not prevent them from firing five

torpedoes at what was possibly the U.S. light cruiser HELENA, which in this case fortunately worked as U.S. torpedoes usually did. Wylie would go on to play a major role in the Navy's development of the "Combat Information Center."

CDR Cole awarded a Navy Cross.

By 0230 the battle was essentially over, after 40 minutes of sheer hell for both sides. After determining that he was probably the senior surviving officer in the force, CAPT Gilbert Hoover of HELENA gave the order to withdraw and regroup. Only O'BANNON and FLETCHER and the badly damaged SAN FRANCISCO were able to do so. Daybreak revealed a sea littered with sinking, burning, and crippled wrecks. On the American side, LAFFEY and BARTON had gone down. The burning hulks of CUSHING and MONSSEN were still afloat but would sink during the day. ATLANTA was dead in the water and slowly sinking; she would have to be scuttled late in the day despite intense efforts to save her. AARON WARD was dead in the water. The badly damaged JUNEAU and STERETT limped away and were eventually able to link up with HELENA. PORTLAND continued to churn in high-speed circles. After nightfall, the tug BOBOLINK finally pushed PORTLAND into Tulagi, but only after a U.S. PT-boat fired torpedoes at PORTLAND, which fortunately had no effect. BOBOLINK had done heroic rescue work throughout the day. About 1,400 U.S. survivors were rescued and brought ashore to Guadalcanal, many badly wounded.

On the Japanese side; HIEI was still afloat but rudderless, slowing trying to get out of the battle area using her engines to steer, firing on the AARON WARD but only straddling her before the tug BOBOLINK towed AARON WARD to Tulagi. The other battleship, KIRISHIMA had been grazed by one 6" shell and escaped. AKATSUKI had gone down. YUDACHI was still afloat and burning, although her 207 surviving crew members had been taken aboard the destroyer SAMIDARE during the night. SAMIDARE fired one torpedo into YUDACHI to scuttle her, which didn't do the job. However, although PORTLAND was still trapped in her circular hell, her guns worked fine. PORTLAND fired five 8" main battery salvos at YUDACHI, the last hitting the after magazine, obliterating her in a massive explosion. The heavily damaged AMATSUKAZE made good her escape, and most of the remainder of the Japanese ships withdrew with varying degrees of damage.

At 1100 on 13 Nov, CAPT Hoover's ad hoc group of survivors, HELENA, FLETCHER, O'BANNON and the damaged JUNEAU and STERETT were headed toward the relative safety of Espiritu Santo, when they encountered Japanese submarine I-26. I-26 was the same submarine that had torpedoed and put the carrier USS SARATOGA (CV-3) out of action for months at the end of Sep (and sent RADM Frank Jack Fletcher to the States for good) and the same submarine that had failed to alert RADM Goto of RADM Turner's force resulting the Japanese defeat at the Battle of Cape Esperance. This time I-26 would get the job done, firing a spread of torpedoes at SAN FRANCISCO. SAN FRANCISCO maneuvered to avoid, but with all her communications gear destroyed in the battle could not provide warning. One torpedo that missed SAN FRANCISCO hit JUNEAU instead, resulting in a catastrophic explosion that obliterated the ship. Parts of JUNEAU rained down on SAN FRANCISCO. In Hornfischer's book, the chapter title,

“Cruiser in the Sky” pretty much sums it up. No one who observed the explosion believed that anyone could have survived, but approximately 100 of her crew of almost 700 did, initially, including one of the five Sullivan brothers (George.)

With only the FLETCHER capable of ASW operations (O'BANNON had been temporarily detached from the group in order to communicate with higher headquarters (and not give away the location of Hoover's force,)) and an effective Japanese submarine on the loose, Hoover had no real choice but to exit the area as fast as possible. Searching for survivors was not an option unless he wanted to get more of his ships sunk. Hoover signaled a passing B-17 bomber with flashing light, which passed on the coordinates when it arrived at Henderson field, which then became lost. After ten days adrift in the most horrific conditions, only 10 men from JUNEAU would ultimately be rescued and did not include George Sullivan; 683 crewmen were lost. Upon RADM Turner's recommendation, VADM Halsey found Hoover's conduct deficient and he was relieved of command, which Halsey later admitted was an injustice, tarnishing the reputation of an officer who had just been awarded a third Navy Cross.

The HIEI could not get away fast enough. U.S. aircraft launching from Henderson field at first light were stunned to find a Japanese battleship only a few miles from Guadalcanal. Seventy sorties attacked HIEI throughout the day, hitting HIEI with at least three bombs and four torpedoes (with many more claimed) and still HIEI would not go down. CAPT Nishida resisted two orders from RADM Abe to abandon the ship. An incorrect report that his engines had been damaged finally caused Nishida to give the order, over the vehement protestations of his crew, who still believed the ship could be saved. Destroyers came alongside and rescued most of her crew, but 300 had still died. U.S. aircraft hit HIEI with two more torpedoes during the abandonment operation. Around 1830 a message came in from ADM Yamamoto ordering that HIEI not be scuttled, so that she could serve as a diversion from the transport convoy the next day. Sometime during the night of 13-14 Nov, HIEI finally succumbed.

HIEI had taken an enormous beating, but the guns of U.S. cruisers and destroyers lacked the power to inflict fatal damage on a battleship, as CAPT Young had predicted. Had it not been for SAN FRANCISCO's hit that knocked out HIEI's steering, she probably would have survived. (One of the torpedoes that hit HIEI was dropped from a Torpedo Squadron Eight (VT-8) TBF Avenger flown by skipper LCDR Harold “Swede” Larsen. Larsen had led the detachment of VT-8 that had transitioned from the TBD Devastator to the TBF and had arrived on Oahu the day after USS HORNET and the rest of VT-8 had left for the Battle of Midway. Six of Larsen's det flew on to Midway and five were lost in the battle, while all 15 of the squadron's TBD's on HORNET were lost. VT-8 subsequently cross-decked to the USS SARATOGA, participated in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, and then operated from Henderson Field after SARATOGA was torpedoed. In an epic tale of endurance, only three of VT-8's TBF's were still operational by mid-November, and Larsen's attack on HIEI would be the second-to-last combat mission flown by VT-8 before it was decommissioned.)

At a cost of 1,429 men and six ships, Callaghan and TG 67.4 had bought one day's respite for Henderson Field from a major bombardment, and a delay to the Japanese transport force that would make them vulnerable to daylight air attack. Whether the sacrifice was worth it remains open to debate. Even if all 7,000 Japanese troops had made it to Guadalcanal, the Japanese army forces lacked

the power to drive the Marines into the sea (and U.S. forces had just been reinforced with 5,500 troops.) What is not debatable is the extraordinary valor of the U.S. Sailors who went into battle against overwhelming odds and never wavered in their dedication to duty. If anyone ever exemplified the Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment, it was the Sailors of TG 67.4.

But, KIRISHIMA was headed back to Guadalcanal, with another powerful Japanese task group, for another round.

