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Commanders and Command Decisions: The Impact on Naval Combat in the Solomon Islands, November 1942

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Commanders and Command Decisions: The Impact on Naval Combat in the Solomon Islands, November 1942

By

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Colonel, United States Marine Corps

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College for completion of requirements for the Advanced Research Project (ARP) Academic year 2003-2004

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy

Signature: _____
20 May 2004

COMMAND TIME COMPARISON

Name	Years	Commands/Time	XO/Time	Total Command Time
Callaghan	31	2 / 22 months	1/ 12 months	3/ 33 months
Halsey	30	11/ 173 months	2/ 15 months	13/ 16 years
Lee	34	5/ 95 months	2/ 23 months	7/ 10 years
Scott	31	4/ 71 months	3/ 34 months	7/ 9 years
Good	30	7/ 83 months	1/ 6 months	8/ 7.5 years
Wright	30	3/ 30 months	2/ 19 months	5/ 4 years
Tisdale	30	6/ 107 months	4/ 56 months	10/ 13.5 years
Ainsworth	32	3/ 42 months	3/ 48 months	6/ 7.5 years
Merrill	28	7/ 78 months	0/ 0 months	7/ 6.5 years
Burke	19	1/ 13 months	1/ 24 months	2/ 37 months

Cincpac File No.
A2-11/FF12
P17-1/(05)
Serial 02543

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
FLAGSHIP OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

August 20, 1942.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ UNCLASS

PACIFIC FLEET CONFIDENTIAL LETTER 32CL-42.

From: Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet.
To: PACIFIC FLEET.

Subject: Command Relationships - task force and task group commanders.

Reference: (a) Secnav Conf. Ltr. (SC) P17-1 of July 18, 1942.

1. Reference (a) is quoted for information.

"1. Article 660, U. S. Navy Regulations, shall be construed as giving Commanders in Ch authority to order in command of Task Forces or Task Groups any officer he desires, rega less of relative rank.

"2. Any provisions of Navy Regulations in conflict herewith are suspended.

"3. A Commander in Chief ordering an officer to command a Task Force or Task Gr to which a senior may be attached shall, in his orders, refer to this letter as authority."

C. W. NIMITZ

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P. V. Mercer,
Flag Secretary.

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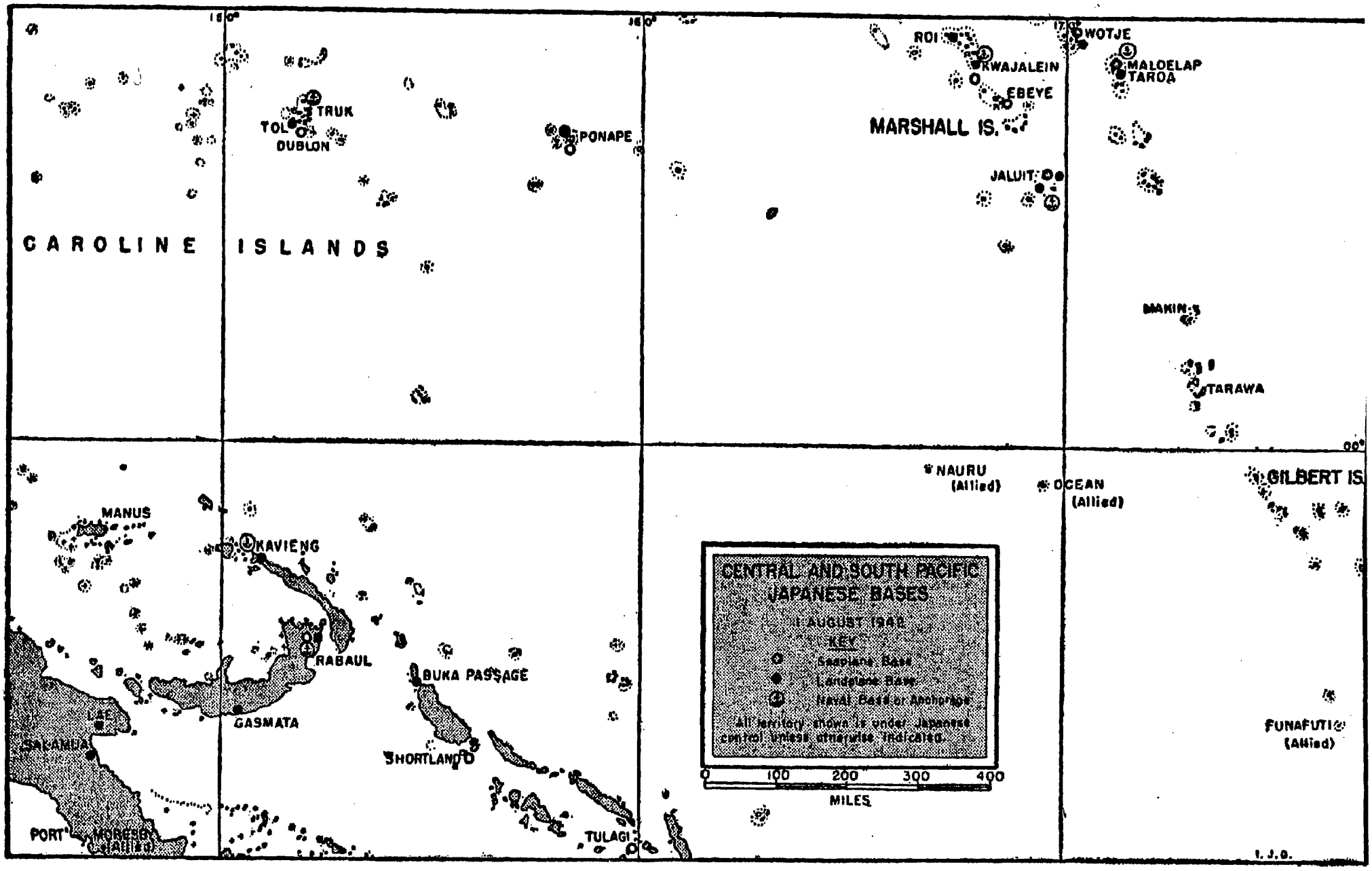
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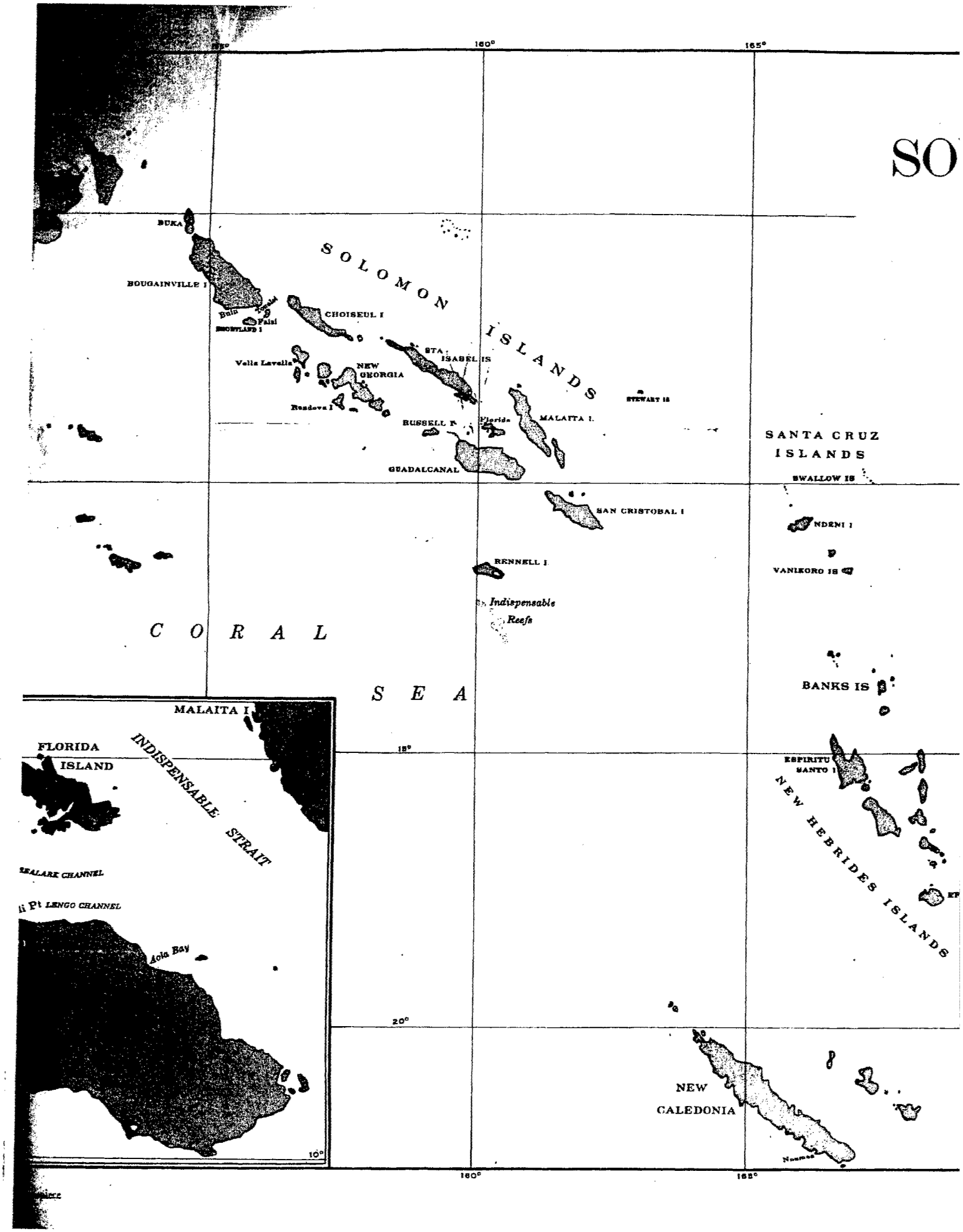
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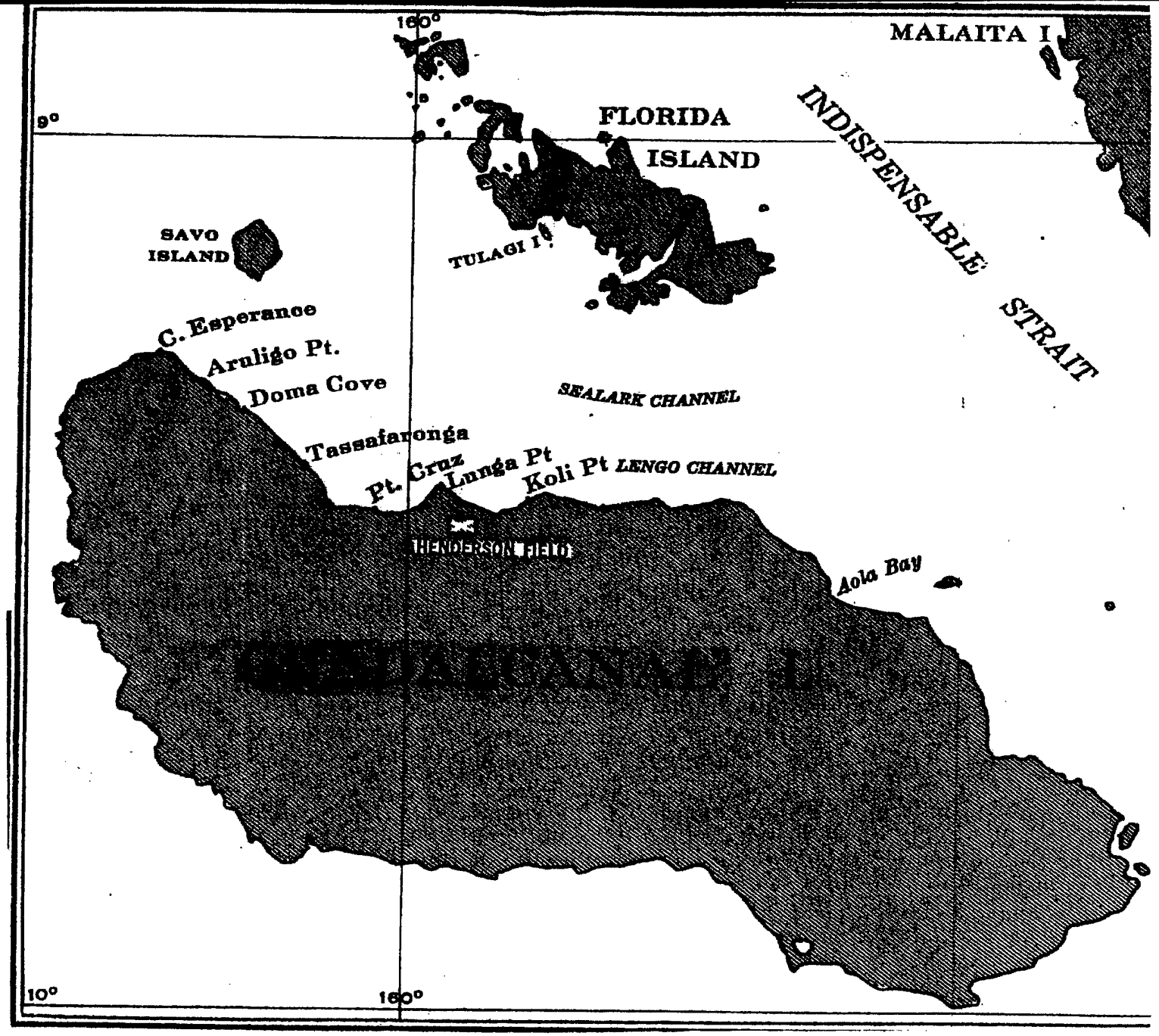
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THE QUESTION

As dawn came to the waters off Guadalcanal, the Marines could see for themselves some of the results from the gunfire and explosions that they had witnessed in the darkness a few hours earlier. Light transformed the flashes and tracers that lit the sky in the early hours of 13 November 1942 into the smoking hulks and slowly moving crippled ships of the remains of a U.S. Navy task force. The Third Battle of Savo Island was over.[1] Of the thirteen ships from Rear Admiral Dan Callaghan's Task Group, six now either rested on or would soon join the other hulks at the bottom of "Iron Bottom Sound." Four others, including the two largest ships in the formation, required repairs of such magnitude that only shipyards in the United States could accomplish. The number of United States sailors killed approached the figures lost to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor nearly a year before and represented nearly forty percent of the U.S. force. Nearly a third of the 700 survivors from the sunken ships that managed to make their way to the island of Guadalcanal that morning were wounded. These numbers reflected the "bar-room brawl" nature of the fight that the United States commander allowed to take place at such close ranges as to make the danger of collisions and the point-blank gunfire between ships from the two enemy forces make a shambles of any tactical formations or controls. As a result, the United States Navy was without a coherent surface strike force of cruisers and destroyers at a vital turning point in the Guadalcanal Campaign.

[1] Surface ship formations of the United States and Japan fought five night naval battles in the waters around Savo Island between August and December 1942. In after action reports of the time, the five were sequentially referred to as the Naval Battles of Savo Island, the first through the fifth. Common titling changed with the publication of Samuel E. Morison's History of Naval Operations. The first became the Battle of Savo Island; the second, The Battle of Cape Esperance; the third, The First Naval Battle of Guadalcanal; the fourth, The Second Naval Battle of Guadalcanal; and the last, The Battle of Tassafaronga.

The largest formation of Imperial Japanese Navy ships to fight a surface engagement in the Solomon Islands had battled Admiral Callaghan's force, which held the same distinction regarding size, and, for the first time, the Japanese committed battleships.[2] Unlike Pearl Harbor or the First Battle of Savo Island, however, the Japanese did not achieve surprise. In fact, Allied coast watchers and American search aircraft tracked Vice Admiral Abe and his force for miles long before they encountered the United States ships. The United States task force, with advanced warning, was in position waiting for the Japanese and established radar contact long before the Japanese had an inkling that the American ships were in the area. It was the Japanese who were surprised, and the primary mission to bombard Henderson Field was interrupted. Yet, in return, Abe's force retired on the morning of the 13th with twelve of his original fourteen ships and having lost not even one-third as many sailors as his opponent. One of his battleships, his flagship, was seriously damaged and wallowing north of Savo Island but in no danger of sinking, and two other destroyers suffered minor damage. While the Japanese force was capable of and, in fact, did return to "Iron Bottom Sound" to fight again, neither Rear Admiral Callaghan, his second-in-command Rear Admiral Norman Scott nor the task group could. It was Admiral William Halsey who wrote the personal letters of condolence to the wives of both Callaghan and Scott, expressing his regret at their deaths while fighting the Japanese off Guadalcanal.[3] Admiral Halsey, as the theater commander for the Southern Pacific, also initiated the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor to both Admirals for their gallant actions.

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[2] Paul Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945). Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press. 1978. p. 240.
[3] Naval Historical Foundation Collection, The Papers of William F. Halsey. Washington, DC: The Library of Congress. Box 13.

The death and heroic portrayal of the United States Commander at the time has left the public historiography understandably, though not necessarily justifiably, silent in its criticism of Rear Admiral Callaghan. The ultimate success of the United States Navy's efforts to defeat the Japanese in two more days of fighting after Callaghan's engagement contributed greatly to the less than thorough public review of the Commanders and their decisions related to 13 November. Yet, the lopsided results against the United States Navy forces involved in this engagement provoked the most lengthy and vehement classified criticisms by the professional officer corps of the Navy over the tactical handling of surface ships throughout the war. The results of the battle bring Callaghan's abilities to successfully lead his force in surface naval combat of the nature he encountered (of which he was far from the first in the war) into question. Yet, as vehement as were the criticisms of the tactical execution, the classified discussions were, for the same reasons as the public historiography, as equally silent regarding Callaghan's fitness for command to begin with.

Success in combat is essential for any military organization. Amongst the myriad factors that determine success, the importance of the leaders and the leaders' decisions is difficult to dismiss as anything but paramount. What has never been professionally examined or historically debated is whether Rear Admiral Callaghan's limited professional experience in the role as a surface ship commander prior to his assumption of command provided him with the ability to be the leader and make the leadership decisions necessary to accomplish successfully the mission during which his force was decimated, and he lost his life. A critical facet of a debate of this nature must also examine the context within which Rear Admiral Callaghan gained command as compared

to other options available to his superior that appointed him, Admiral Halsey. With no desire to demean the conduct that earned him the Medal of Honor but if limitations in Callaghan's abilities were known and other choices were available to Admiral Halsey for the mission, then the decisions of Admiral Halsey that led to Callaghan's command were as equally part of the equation that led to the results faced on the morning of 13 November. The factors that influenced Admiral Halsey to make the less than optimal choice are as equally valuable to examine in retrospect as the performance of Callaghan as the Officer in Tactical Command (OTC).

The responsibility of military leaders is to win in combat. While technology certainly changes rapidly, the metrics and capabilities that determine human performance and success in combat do not. Prediction of a leader's performance once engaged in combat, based upon some of these metrics, is often inaccurate, if not impossible. Yet, choosing the right subordinate for combat is the ultimate responsibility of every military leader. If one subordinate has a greater level of skill, experience or proclivity towards success than another, then above all else, the superior must choose the leader whose capabilities seem to offer the greatest chance of success.

This study evaluates the decisions of several combat leaders as related to the naval engagement on 13 November in an effort to determine why the choices made produced the results they did. The battle will be reviewed to evaluate tactical performance. The metrics of the OTC will be documented in order to evaluate the relative chance of success as compared to several other options available to Halsey as the theater commander and how these metrics determined the outcome of the battle. The impact of the decision will also be reviewed with a final debate about why Callaghan was actually

chosen by Halsey. In combat, the greatest improvements often stem from the most disastrous results. Despite sensitivities surrounding the death of two Flag-rank officers in this engagement, the results demand a review of the leaders and their decisions to determine if the optimum choices were made. The value of any insight into these metrics taken from a study of the leaders and their decisions associated with the First Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, therefore, remain relevant to today's naval service. As with any case study, the end result is the hope that similar challenges faced by a leader of the future may be resolved with a more advantageous result.

THE BACKGROUND

In late spring of 1942, Captain Daniel Callaghan was amongst the rising stars of the United States Navy's war efforts. He returned to the United States, having just given up command of the heavy cruiser San Francisco and the 700 sailors that sailed her[4]. In response to the request by the newly named Commander of the Southern Pacific Area (COMSOPAC) for a Chief of Staff, the Bureau of Personnel gave Admiral Ghormley Callaghan's name as the man for the job. By June 10th, Admiral Ghormley, Captain Callaghan, and the rest of the SOPAC staff established themselves in Jean Batten Place, Auckland, New Zealand and were ready for duty. Soon afterwards, Callaghan received word of his appointment as Rear Admiral (temporary service).[5] Operations moved quickly. Within two months, United States forces executed the first counter attack against the Japanese efforts in the Pacific, landing on Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomon Islands on 7 August 1942.

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[4] Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships; USS San Francisco (CA-38). www.history.navy.mil. March 2004. p.1.
[5] Francis X. Murphy, Fighting Admiral, The Story of Dan Callaghan. p. 164-177.

The initial optimism, however, was soon dashed, and by October, the Southern Pacific Theater was an ugly place to be. Within forty-eight hours of the landings in the Solomons, the United States Navy experienced what many still refer to as the "single greatest defeat" in its history when units of the Imperial Japanese Navy achieved complete tactical surprise and crushed the surface-ship force protecting the landings at the Battle of Savo Island. Additional losses of and damage to ships at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in late August and Japanese submarines placed COMSOPAC in an increasingly precarious position relative to holding the primary objective of Guadalcanal.

At the same time, both Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet (COMINCH) and Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander in Chief Pacific Theater (CINCPAC) began to consider the "possibility of ...Ghormley being unable to stand up physically."[6] By the middle of September, Nimitz as Ghormley's immediate superior, decided he needed to make a visit to the South Pacific to see the situation first hand. After conferences with Ghormley and his staff, Nimitz expressed concern about the abilities of COSOPAC and his staff. "There are quite a few rough spots in the South Pacific set up....and the Japs have not yet been prevented from landing troops on Guadalcanal."[7]

By early October, Nimitz and his staff became more vocally critical of the actions of COMSOPAC and his staff. The CINCPAC war diary entries of early October chastized the staff of SOPAC for being late with Summary of Operations Reports. It was only through CINCPAC Staff's own intercepts that they kept Nimitz informed regarding the situation on Guadalcanal. On 6 October, Nimitz himself was severely critical of Ghormley's geographic placement of Rear Admiral Norman Scott's surface strike group,

[6] The Papers of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN. Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. Box 11, p. 1020.
[7] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p 1079.

Task Force 64, as the reason for the failure to interdict Japanese landings.[8] By the middle of the month, the CINCPAC war diary reflected the inability of Ghormley "to control the sea area in the Guadalcanal area."[9] On the evening of the 15th [October], Admiral Nimitz conferred with members of his staff concerning the relief of Admiral Ghormley. Nimitz and his staff concurred that Admiral Ghormley had not been successful for several reasons and that the critical situation there required a more aggressive commander.[10]

That commander was Vice Admiral William F. Halsey. Halsey had departed Pearl Harbor enroute to Guadalcanal for his own inspection of the area on the same day, yet prior to Nimitz's decision to relieve Ghormley. Halsey was to take command of the carrier task force built around the Enterprise and was unaware of the Nimitz's decision. He needed the trip to become familiar with the demands of operating in the SOPAC Theater. At a stopover on Canton Island, Nimitz reached Halsey and directed him to travel directly to Noumea, New Calodonia, the new location of Ghormley's headquarters. Upon arrival, Halsey was shocked to find a Secret dispatch directing him to relieve Ghormley immediately.[11]

The new COMSOPAC did receive some comforting news. Just a few days earlier, Rear Admiral Norman Scott, at the head of a surface task force, had thrashed a Japanese force in what became known as the Battle of Cape Esperance. Scott completely surprised the Japanese and inflicted a biting, if not decisive, defeat on the naval force trying to reinforce the Japanese on Guadalcanal. It was the first true victory for U.S. Navy forces in surface combat against the Japanese. This "too little to late" good news, however, did

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[8] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1080-1082.
[9] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1093.
[10] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1096.
[11] William F. Halsey and J Bryan III. Admiral Halsey's Story. p. 109-112.

nothing to improve any evaluation of Ghormley and the SOPAC staff. Rear Admiral Callaghan had no future on the staff of Bill Halsey.

In less than two weeks, Halsey directed Callaghan to leave Noumea, fly to Espiritu Santo and take command of what had formerly been Rear Admiral Norman Scott's surface strike group, Task Force 64. In the next twelve days, Callaghan sortied his force twice from the small American base. The second time, after providing security to Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner's force of transports to Guadalcanal, Callaghan linked up with Norman Scott in the evening of the 11th of November in the waters of "Iron Bottom Sound." Scott now commanded a much smaller force of ships and became Callaghan's second in command of the combined force. Less than 24 hours later, this combined force sailed into what would be the last battle for both Callaghan and Scott.

THE BATTLE

The Japanese Perspective

In early November, the Japanese were just as determined to isolate and hold Guadalcanal as the Americans. Between the 2nd and 10th of November, in 65 destroyer and two cruiser loads, the Japanese Navy delivered a large portion of the 38th Division of the Japanese Army. These deliveries increased the size of the Japanese ground force on Guadalcanal since the beginning of September by ten fold and included Lieutenant General Sano, the 38th Division's Commanding General. The Japanese were deadly serious about victory in this go around.[12]

By 9 November, both CINCPAC and COMSOPAC were well aware of the Japanese efforts. All U.S. briefings indicated that within days the major push would

[12] Dull. p. 238.

come. The CINCPAC War Diary pinpointed that the Japanese scheduled the major landing of troops for the night of 13 November (Guadalcanal Local Time).[13] The delivery was to be carried out by eleven high-speed "Maru" transports. Admiral Yamamoto was deeply involved in the planning. Actions to support the landings included bombardments of Henderson Field on Guadalcanal by surface forces on the two nights preceding the landings to neutralize American air interdiction.[14]

The Japanese tactical commander for the bombardment missions was Admiral Hiroke Abe. Unlike Rear Admiral Callaghan, Abe had tremendous operational experience as a formation commander in the waters of the Solomons. His usual title was the Commander of the Vanguard Force of Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's Carrier Strike Force. Embarked aboard his flagship, the battleship Hiei, Abe participated in The Battle of the Eastern Solomons in August and the Battle of Santa Cruz just a few days earlier. In Callaghan's favor, however, Abe's force was as ad hoc, if not more so, than the Americans. Although Abe's core group of ships, battleships Hiei and Kirishima and light cruiser Nagara, steamed together in the previous two battles, only six of the fourteen destroyers with which he sailed toward Guadalcanal had worked with him before.[15] What should have been an even greater advantage was that all the elements of Abe's force had only rendezvoused at 1530 on the afternoon of 12 November, a mere ten hours before combat began.[16]

Until sunset on the 12th, Abe maintained a very accurate intelligence picture for his mission that night. As he was gathering the last of his ships, he believed that "9 U.S.

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[13] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1159.
[14] Dull. p. 238.
[15] Ibid. p. 205-238.
[16] Samuel E. Morison. History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, The Struggle for Guadalcanal, August 1942-February 1943, Volume 5. Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2001. p. 238.

cruisers and 7 destroyers were near Guadalcanal."[17] A scouting plane report at the same time, however, indicated that all the U.S. warships were withdrawing eastward with the American transports.[18] Admiral Abe formed his task force of 2 BBs, 1 CL, and 14 DDs in order to foil Motor Torpedo Boat interference not execute combat against American cruisers and destroyers. Samuel E. Morison accurately concluded that Abe believed the U.S. ships "as usual would be gone with the sun."[19]

Vice Admiral Abe, prior to entering "Iron Bottom Sound", detached three destroyers to guard the strait between the northern end of Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands in order to protect his flank.[20] This was the direction from which Rear Admiral Norman Scott had approached in his victory a month earlier. The remainder of his force encountered some intense tropical weather as they proceeded down "The Slot." Abe ordered two course reversals which disrupted and scattered the Japanese formation somewhat. In general, however, the formation remained constant, with Abe's battleships and the light cruiser in a central column and Abe's flagship in the lead. The destroyers sailed in four groups with a group of two destroyers forward of Abe, two groups of three in column to Abe's port side, and one group of three to Abe's starboard side. It was, by far, the most powerful Japanese surface force to enter these waters, and the crews of the battleships staged anti-personnel, high explosive shells close at hand within their turrets

[17] Ibid. p.238.
[18] C.W. Kilpatrick. The Night Naval Battles in the Solomons. Pompano Beach, FL: Exposition Press of Florida. 1987. p. 83.
[19] Morison. p. 238.
[20] Kilpatrick. p. 87.

rather than anti-ship, armor piercing shells in order to expedite the bombardment of Henderson Field. [21]

Suddenly, at 0142 on 13 November, the lead Japanese destroyer, Yudachi, sighted American warships to her starboard side. Word spread rapidly through the formation and Japanese sailors scrambled to engage in this unexpected combat.[22] Six minutes later, at 0148 and a range of only 3000 yards, and without having yet been fired upon, the lead Japanese ships illuminated their U.S. opponents with searchlights and opened fire first.[23] Japanese destroyers to both sides of Abe's flagship targeted and launched torpedoes at the United States ships caught in the light, in accordance with their standard procedures.[24] Abe's flagship opened fire with the battleship's main battery at ships caught in the arc of her searchlights at the same time. Enemy ships crisscrossed, as initial Japanese barrages began to smash into United States superstructures and hulls. Abe's ships employing searchlights found themselves targets for the concentrated fire of Callaghan's lead ships, but the remainder began effective engagement without revealing themselves by using the already existent illumination and the benefit of "flashless" powder for their guns.[25] At least two American vessels caught Akatsuki, on Abe's starboard side, in a devastating crossfire and sent the ship to the bottom. Abe's flagship, Hiei, received numerous medium-caliber and small-caliber rounds, which prompted the Japanese Admiral to order his battleships to retire north after only a few minutes of battle.[26] Gunfire and torpedo

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[21] Dull. p. 239. The ships were as follows: forward – Yudachi, Harusame; to starboard – Ikazuchi, Inazuma, Akatsuki; to port, lead group – Amatsukaze, Teruzuki, Yukikaze; follow group – Asagumo, Murasame, Samidare.
[22] John L. McCrea, Vice Admiral, USN (Ret). Oral History. Reminiscences of Vice Admiral John L. McCrea, US Navy (Ret). Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute, 1990. p. 239.
[23] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1006.
[24] Dull. p. 238- 241.
[25] Morison. p. 238.
[26] Dull. p. 240.

launches went on for another thirty minutes, by the end of which, Yudachi went dead-in-the-water and became the second Japanese vessel unable to retire from the battle.[27] By 0230, Admiral Abe, unable to accomplish the bombardment faced the challenge of rallying his force and heading for home.

The American Perspective

Although Abe did not know it, the opposing admirals were already dead. The American force that seemed to have nearly every advantage only hours before, was limping battered, beaten and leaderless away from the scene. Callaghan's force had been impressive itself before the battle. With thirteen ships, it too was the largest formation of United States ships that would execute surface combat during the Solomons Campaign. At the commander's disposal and from his own force were two heavy cruisers, San Francisco and Portland, each with eight-inch guns.[28] The light cruiser Helena was the best of the three light cruisers. A veteran of Pearl Harbor and Norman Scott's victory at Cape Esperance, her 15 six-inch guns, although lacking the same penetration power, could exceed the main- battery throw weight of the heavy cruisers per minute.[29] Light cruisers of similar capability would ravage Japanese cruisers and destroyers at Kula Gulf and Empress Augusta Bay within the year and suffer no damage to themselves. Of the

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[27] Dull. p. 240.

[28] San Francisco and Portland. Both were older ships, nearing 10 years, but not as old as the Japanese battleships.

[29] Jane's Fighting Ships of World War II. New York, NY: Crescent Books, 1996. p. 254-279. The broadside throw weight of each heavy cruiser was approximately 2250 pounds. An 8-inch shell weighed in at 250 pounds x 9 guns. At 3-4 rounds per minute, the maximum weight to be fired per minute was 9000 pounds of shells. The 6"/47 guns mounted on the light cruisers had a well documented rate of fire of 10 rounds per minute. At 105 pounds per shell x 15 guns x 10 rounds per minute, Helena could fire nearly eight tons of ordnance per minute, almost twice the heavy cruisers' capability. The Japanese battleships, with a sustained rate of fire of 1-2 rounds per minute, could generate between 5 and 10 tons of ordnance per minute each from their main guns, not necessarily a dominate figure in this engagement.

other two light cruisers, both were similar in type. Designed as anti-aircraft cruisers, the Atlanta and Juneau each mounted 16 five-inch guns. The Atlanta-class ships were light on armor protection but carried 2 to 4 times the firepower of any ship in the Japanese formation save the two battleships.[30] Callaghan's eight destroyers, three of which joined him on the 12th with Norman Scott, were also very capable. There were none of the World War I era "four-pipers" that the Japanese had easily swept aside as a part of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet during engagements in the spring of 1942. Two, the Fletcher and OBannon, were brand new 2200-ton destroyers for which Fletcher was the class namesake and arguably the best destroyers of the war in any navy. The American force was at a disadvantage in numbers (13 US vs. 14 Japanese) and firepower (18 8" and 15 6" vs. 16 14"), but it was no pushover. This was not "David versus Goliath" or the Texans versus Santa Ana at the Alamo. To use a boxing analogy, it was more akin to a light-heavy weight fighting against a heavy weight that barely made weight for his class,[31] but the Americans, as the light heavyweight, had surprise and radar.

As early as 8 November, based upon intercepts, CINCPAC staff felt certain the Japanese would commit a substantial force within the next week, including battleships, to retaking Guadalcanal.[32] The United States reinforcement effort to counter the Japanese began on 9 November with the departure of Rear Admiral Scott at the head of a task group of 4 destroyers from his new flagship Atlanta, escorting three transports from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal. Scott moved his flag from San Francisco to Atlanta only

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[30] Hansgeorg Jentschura, Dieter Jung and Peter Mickel. Warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1869-1945. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 1977. p. 107. Jane's. p. 254. The light cruiser Nagara, with 5 5.5"/50 cal guns available for a broadside, had a throw weight of only a little over 2000 pounds per minute. The Japanese destroyers were significantly less. The Atlanta class light cruisers, with 14 5"/38 cal guns available for a broadside, could fire close to 6000 pounds of ordnance per minute.

[31] The World Boxing Association rates a heavyweight at 200 pounds or more and a light-heavy weight at a maximum of 175 pounds.

[32] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1158.

two weeks before when Callaghan left Halsey's staff and ascended to command of the surface-strike group at Espiritu Santo. Rear Admiral Callaghan departed Espiritu Santo less than 24 hours later, at 0500 on the 10th of November. Initially, Callaghan's Task Group 67.4 was to provide distant cover to Kelly Turner's force of transports that proceeded towards Guadalcanal separately.[33]

As Scott's force arrived at Guadalcanal unmolested and began unloading on the 11th of November, Callaghan rendezvoused with Turner near San Cristobal Island for the final run in to Iron Bottom Sound. Scott and his force remained in the vicinity of Savo Island overnight on the 11th, patrolling, as Callaghan and Turner closed on his position.[34] The second, combined force also arrived unmolested about 24 hours after Scott's initial reinforcement effort. As the daylight hours on the 12th passed, the Japanese were obviously aware of the American reinforcement efforts. Numerous Japanese aircraft attacked through the afternoon. Callaghan's new flagship, San Francisco received damage in the form of a "heavily burning plane" that side swiped the ship from stern to bow and destroyed the aft fire-control radar position but did little to impair the fighting ability.[35]

The United States intelligence assets available painted a very accurate picture of the developing situation. Search planes provided regular reports regarding ship types and numbers at Rabaul and in the Shortlands anchorage at the north end of "The Slot." Brief daily radio reports from the coastwatcher network matched the picture, and radio intercepts, decoded through use of compromised Japanese codes, confirmed the Japanese

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[33] E.B. Potter. Bull Halsey. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 1985. p. 179-180.
[34] Eric Hammel. Guadalcanal, Decision at Sea, The Naval Battle of Guadalcanal November 13-15, 1942. NY, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1988. p. 57-73.
[35] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 980.

efforts.[36] On the afternoon of the 12th, American search planes reported 2 battleships or heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, and 11 destroyers within 250 miles of the American anchorage off Guadalcanal.[37] The normal "scuttlebutt" passed amongst sailors in the force this time was extremely accurate. At the lowest levels, sailors expected the Japanese battleships to come down "The Slot" and that the United States Navy would "contest the passage."[38]

The senior leadership held the same picture as well. Admiral Halsey returned to his headquarters in Noumea on 10 November from his own visit to Guadalcanal. The intelligence updates he received reflected the same estimate of a battleship force headed for Guadalcanal the afternoon of the 12th.[39] Admiral Callaghan and Scott both had access to the decoded Japanese message traffic being intercepted by American radios and forwarded to CINCPAC Headquarters. The turn around time between intercept and decoded intelligence was measured in hours.[40] Admiral Turner, knowing what was in store for the night of 12 November acted decisively to protect the transports and the essential cargo they contained.

Before dark, all the American ships departed the anchorage at Lunga Point. Once clear of "Iron Bottom Sound", Admiral Turner took the transports and a minimum number of escorts and headed south towards Espiritu Santo. Turner, the operational

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[36] Kilpatrick. p. 79.
[37] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1161.
[38] Charles M. Melhorn, Commander USN (Ret), Oral History. Reminiscences of Rear AdmiralKent C. Melhorn, Medical Corps, USN (Ret) and Commander Charles M. Melhorn, USN (Ret). Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press. 1983. p. 93. Ensign Charles M. Melhorn was a U.S. Navy ensign embarked aboard the President Jackson, a transport in Admiral Turner's formation. As the ship was unloading at Lunga Point during the day on 12 November, the belief that a battle would occur that night was the prevalent talk amongst all hands.
[39] Letter VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, dated 17 November 1942. CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 2.
[40] Hammel. p. 56. Lieutenant Stew Murdock, Admiral Scott's Operations Officer, and the only survivor of Scott's staff on board Atlanta, stated the staff had a very clear picture of "the developing Japanese plan…"

commander for the entire reinforcement effort, spoke to Callaghan and Scott simultaneously over the bridge-to-bridge tactical radio circuit (TBS) before the three parted.[41] Callaghan and Scott combined forces under Callaghan's designation of Task Group 67.4 and headed back towards "Iron Bottom Sound." Taking station after dark, Callaghan, now the Officer in Tactical Command (OTC) for the entire force, directed a single column of ships be formed. The thirteen ships of the force aligned with four destroyers leading; followed by Scott's flagship, Atlanta; Callaghan in San Francisco; heavy cruiser Portland; Helena; Juneau and the last four destroyers.

The night was not the worst for steaming in the waters around Guadalcanal. Partly cloudy skies and light winds made the "inky" darkness typical of those waters at night workable, with visibility at between 3000 and 5000 yards and thunderstorms and lightning over the islands. As the formation moved into the sound and prepared for the combat they knew was coming, the sailors moved to their radar screens. The force was well equipped with radar. Every ship had at least one form. Many had several that complimented each other well.

The best for surface search was the SG radar. This was the first model that provided a Planned Position Indicator (screen). The picture provided was a top-down view that reflected actual locations of ships relative to one another. Five American ships had SG: Portland, Helena, Juneau, OBannon, and Fletcher.[42] Relatively less effective was the SC and SC-1 model of search radar. This was the first type of search radar introduced into the United States Navy. The SC sets proved to be extremely effective as air-search

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[41] Ibid. p. 103.

[42] Commander in Chief, United States Fleet. Information Bulletin Number 4, Battle Experience Solomon Islands Action, November 1942. Washington, DC: Navy Department, HQ CINCUS, 25 March 1943. p. 28-61

radar throughout the war and somewhat less effective for surface search, but still a life saver in the hands of a good operator.[43] Additionally, the operator's screen was an "A-scope" that reflected range and bearing to a target but not a relative picture as did the PPI. The remaining 8 ships of the force all carried SC or SC-1.

Every ship also employed fire control radar.[44] The FC of the larger ships and the FD of the anti-aircraft light cruisers and the destroyers had the same characteristics and capabilities in terms of surface contact range and bearing determination. The much more-narrow beam of these radars made precise fire-control solutions attainable, but searching wide areas required a general orientation for bearing from an SG or SC fix to find a target reliably.

By 0100 on 13 November, Rear Admiral Callaghan and his force waited for the Japanese to arrive, in a very controlled formation, steaming west and within hailing distance of the Lunga Point anchorage they had departed just a few hours earlier. At 0124, Helena gained the first radar contact. Two contacts registered on her SG radar PPI to the northwest at 312 True, range 27,000 yards and 310 True, range 32,000 yards. The United States Navy detected Admiral Abe's battleships, screened 5000 yards ahead by destroyers, nearly 15 miles away.[45] Communications over the TBS were good, and the Helena's officers relayed the detection to all U.S. ships within minutes.

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[43] William R. Smedberg III, VAdm USN (Ret), Oral History, Reminiscences of Vice Admiral William R. Smedberg III, USN (Ret). Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 1979. p. 189-220. In the spring of 1942 the destroyer Landsdowne easily navigated through thick fog in Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts through the Cape Cod Canal and up to Casco Bay using only the SC radar to follow the coast line and buoys. In early autumn 1942, during a resupply run to Guadalcanal for 81 mm mortar rounds, the ship detected two Japanese destroyers sailing directly at her. Using only SC radar, the captain navigated between the two ships, all three engulfed in a thunderstorm, without being detected despite being within 1000 yards of both enemy ships.
[44] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-62
[45] Morison. p. 239.

Admiral Callaghan analyzed the report by 0127 and ordered the column to change course directly toward the enemy formation. Using the initial report, other ships trained their radars in the same direction and quickly established contacts of their own. Helena's fire control radar gave the 6" main battery a firing solution within 3-4 minutes at a range of 9 miles.[46] By 0130, the SG radar of both Fletcher and OBannon locked on to the Japanese ships.[47] The Sterett, using only FD fire-control radar, had a target solution on the largest Japanese target (Abe's flagship, the Hiei) by 0134. Admiral Callaghan, without an accurate picture of his own, began calling urgently to Helena and OBannon, for ranges, courses and compositions of enemy formations.[48] Despite now decreasing range and several ships with accurate radar gunnery solutions, the OTC retained authority to commence firing. At 0142, 18 minutes since the first contact, the heavy cruiser Portland had firm radar contacts on the SG and FC systems as well as fire control solutions.[49] Simultaneously, Aaron Ward, with only FD, became the latest of several ships with accurate solutions on Admiral Abe's flagship.[50] In the first twenty minutes of the engagement, the American OTC received numerous and accurate updates; the American ships from end to end of the formation acquired accurate radar fixes and fire-control solutions; and the Japanese ships sailed closer and closer, unaware of the enemy's presence, yet unmolested by his fires.

At the same time, the Commander of Destroyer Division 10 embarked aboard Cushing, the first ship in the formation, reported visual contact with a Japanese destroyer at only 3000 yards. Commander Stokes requested permission to fire torpedoes but missed

[46] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-32.
[47] Hammel. p. 253. COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-48.
[48] Morison. p.240.
[49] COMINCH Bul4. p. 28-23., Hammel. p. 191, Kilpatrick. p. 88.
[50] Hammel. p. 229.

his chance as the enemy ship disappeared into the darkness before any response came.[51] "Everyone in the U.S. column...held ample targets in their sights...,"[52] but not until 0145 did Admiral Callaghan order "Stand By to Open Fire."[53] Despite 21 minutes of prior warning, accurate radar fixes and even visual sightings, Task Group 64.7 was beaten to the punch.

According to American records, at 0150, Japanese searchlights illuminated targets and devastating salvos rained onto the American ships. The American force had run between several elements of Abe's force. Rear Admiral Scott and Atlanta were amongst the first to suffer. The first cruiser in the column and just forward of Callaghan, the Japanese pummeled the ship from different directions. Scott's Operations Officer witnessed rounds smash the chart house and bridge of the cruiser, killing Scott, all the rest of his staff, and 12 of the 15 enlisted sailors on the bridge just as the battle started. Callaghan ordered all ships to open fire, and the Americans, with surprise gone, responded in kind with all they could muster. Atlanta exacted some retribution on a Japanese destroyer now at only 1600 yards. It was Akatsuki, and she became the first Japanese casualty of the night.[54]

Then at 0158, despite the proximity of enemy units, Admiral Callaghan ordered a "cease fire" over the TBS. San Francisco's eighth and ninth salvos appeared to hit a "small cruiser or destroyer" that the OTC believed to be friendly.[55] His instinct for doing so was accurate.Whether it was an appropriate order at the time was debatable. The lull from the American flagship allowed swift retribution from the enemy who was not under

[51] Morison. p. 242.
[52] Hammel. p. 147.
[53] Morison. p. 242.
[54] Hammel. p. 167-168.
[55] Morison. p. 247.

any such firing restriction. Japanese searchlights lit up the San Francisco's superstructure. Numerous large, medium and small caliber rounds tore into the illuminated area.[56]

Only 15 minutes after firing began, the American flagship was only one of 10 ships already rendered combat ineffective. The lead destroyers were barely afloat. Cushing, first in line, was dead-in-the-water from twenty hits of various sizes. Next in column, Laffey, was sinking from a torpedo hit and preparing to abandon ship. Sterett was unable to steer due to gunfire damage. Only OBannon had avoided damage. Atlanta was burning and crippled from multiple gunfire hits, enemy and friendly. Portland, third of the cruisers, took a torpedo hit astern and was also unable to steer. The five rounds that had hit Helena included a 14" round from one of the Japanese battleships. Juneau, behind Helena, was doomed by a broken keel inflicted by a Japanese torpedo.[57] In the second destroyer group following the cruisers, Aaron Ward had been hit 9 times, to include 3 14" rounds. The most devastating was the explosion that consumed Barton, caused the ship to "simply disappear," and peppered Fletcher, nearly half a mile behind, with fragments.[58] Nearly 80 % of the American force was fighting for its survival instead of the enemy. Unfortunately, both American admirals had already lost their fight and were dead.

As mentioned earlier, Admiral Abe, by this time turned his battleships north and began to retire. The remaining American ships moved generally north with the Japanese for another ten to fifteen minutes. Firing from both sides remained intense and included all fashion of weapons available from torpedoes to machine guns because of the extremely short ranges. A second Japanese destroyer suffered sufficient damage to prevent it from retiring. The two remaining undamaged American destroyers in the rear

[56] Hammel. p. 181.
[57] Kilpatrick. p. 93-94.
[58] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-54.

of the formation now took fire. Monssen, 12th in line, suffered from intense gunfire under Japanese searchlights and by 0219 caught fire over nearly the entire length of the ship. Fletcher maneuvered around the wreckage of Barton, past the damaged Aaron Ward and Monssen, and into position to fire torpedoes. All 10 of the destroyer's torpedoes went into the water. Members of the bridge crew recorded that they saw flames and heard booms that matched the torpedo solution. The captain of the Fletcher turned his ship and retired with the only undamaged United States warship. A small fragment hole in the forward stack was the only scar and might as easily have come from the Barton as the enemy.[59] The engagement ended just 60 minutes from Helena's initial radar contact, but Fletcher's limited scar did not reflect the remainder of Task Group 67.4.

The Results

Admiral Halsey's headquarters received their first report at 0428 that morning from the commander of the navy's facilities at Guadalcanal. The partial report told of three destroyers (Cushing, Laffey and Monssen) either already sunk or abandoned and the heavy cruiser Portland severely damaged and unable to retire from the scene of the battle. The light cruiser Atlanta was under tow towards the island of Tulagi across Iron Bottom Sound from Guadalcanal.[60] These were some of the ships visible to the Marines on the beach. Additionally, nearly 700 United States sailors were at Guadalcanal, having been recovered from the waters of the sound, of which over 25% were wounded. After sunrise, Atlanta managed to report before she went down that she had been hit 18 times by 8" inch rounds loaded with green dye. Green was the distinctive color for identifying

[59] Joseph C. Wylie, RAdm, USN (Ret), Oral History. History of the Naval War College, No. 7. Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1985. p. 73-74.
[60] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 980.

the impact of rounds from San Francisco. The Japanese had no eight-inch guns in this engagement.[61]

Captain Gil Hoover, the commanding officer of the Helena, became the OTC for the only six ships that could now make way towards their base at Espiritu Santo. Unbeknownst to anyone outside the formation, the flagship was now commanded by Lieutenant Commander Schonland, as Callaghan, his staff, Commanding Officer Cassin Young and the Executive Officer were all dead. Hoover sent OBannon, to which damage during the battle had knocked out the sonar amongst other systems, independently to radio a more detailed report to Halsey. San Francisco, with the main deck aft awash; Juneau, her keel already broken from battle damage; Helena; and Sterett all limped southeast escorted by the undamaged Fletcher.[62] Before clearing Guadalcanal waters, Juneau, much like Barton earlier that morning, disappeared in a cloud of smoke and fire. An entire twin five-inch mount splashed into Fletcher's wake only 100 yards astern. Hoover, citing submarines as the cause for the explosion, ordered all ships to depart the scene, leaving approximately 100 survivors from the 700-man crew of the anti-aircraft cruiser in the water.[63] Halsey, upon Helena's arrival at SOPAC's headquarters several days later, relieved Hoover for this action.[64]

As the sun rose, aircraft from Henderson Field made their way into the air for routine search patterns. The pilots, unexpectantly, discovered the Hiei only 50 miles north of Guadalcanal. The ship, damaged by the fighting, was in no danger of sinking and

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[61] Kilpatrick. p. 103.
[62] Wylie. p. 78.
[63] Wylie. p. 79.
[64] The relief was somewhat controversial as Hoover cited that he had no ability to counter submarines with the force he commanded. The report of the sinking by Helena, as well as an additional report by a search plane of survivors in the water, was tragically mishandled and nearly all of the survivors in the water also perished. The dead included the five Sullivan Brothers serving by request on the same ship. This loss caused the Department of the Navy to suspend the assignment of siblings to the same ship.

quite salvageable but had difficulty keeping the engines going to leave the area. Three air strikes by 10 o'clock damaged the ship further and ensured the battleship would not return home. The Japanese scuttled their own ship after dark.[65]

By the night of the 13th, Halsey had a remarkably clear picture of the results for both sides from Callaghan's engagement. His own losses solidified. The two anti-aircraft light cruisers, Atlanta and Juneau, were both sunk. Four of Callaghan's eight destroyers were also sunk.[66] San Francisco suffered 45 hits. "Structural damage was extensive...[but] no hits had been received below the waterline."[67] Portland required towing to Sydney, Australia for temporary repairs, but both of Callaghan's heavy cruisers suffered such extensive damage as to require returning to the United States for repairs. Portland was so bad that the ship did not even reach California until March 1943. Two of the remaining four destroyers, Sterett and Aaron Ward, also received extensive enough damage to require Halsey to send both back to the United States for repairs.[68] Halsey knew that only three ships of Callaghan's force of thirteen were in any shape for continued combat in the SOPAC Theater. Helena and OBannon required significant repairs but would be repaired at Noumea. By this time, Halsey knew that both his admirals were dead as well.[69]

The human toll was very slow to come into focus. The publication of Samuel Eliot Morison's history of naval operations nearly a decade after the fight concluded that no accurate tally existed.[70] Part of the reason stemmed from the inclination of naval

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[65] Hammel. p. 331-334.
[66] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1166.
[67] Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. p. 5.
[68] Kilpatrick. p. 103-104.
[69] Nimitz Papers. Box 11. p. 987.
[70] Morison, p. 258.

forces to count losses by ships and not necessarily by personnel. If the ship can continue to fight, then the loss of personnel was regrettable but not threatening to the mission. Part of the reason, however, also stemmed from the reluctance to acknowledge the severity of the casualties incurred in this short engagement. Accurate figures for several of the American ships do exist. For others, such as Barton and Juneau that were destroyed by spectacular explosions, a good estimate can be gleaned by comparing the damage inflicted to the crew size. For three of the damaged ships, Portland, Helena, and Sterett, however, no record of casualty numbers was found. Given the extensive nature of the damage to two of these ships, several dead and wounded must have been incurred. The estimate of dead from the various reports totals over 1000 for the thirty or so minutes of shooting that took place. Another 650-700 died in connection with the loss of the Juneau. In comparison, the total surprise of nearly the entire United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor brought about 2400 dead. The tally of American wounded approached one thousand, to include those that were rescued from the waters of "Iron Bottom Sound" and landed on Guadalcanal.[71] The Japanese dead numbered less than 700, with over half of those stemming from the loss of only the Hiei.[72]

The United States report regarding Japanese ship losses was nearly as accurate as the same report on friendly losses. Soon after the air attacks on Hiei, the Navy commanding officer at Guadalcanal reported "known losses" as two Japanese destroyers sunk, one destroyer severely damaged and beached, and one battleship damaged and sunk

[71] US Casualty figures taken from Morison. p. 243; Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p 981; Dull. p. 242; Kilpatrick. p. 96-98; Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. p. 5.
[72] Japanese Casualty figures from Hammel. p. 342; Dull. p. 241-242.; Kilpatrick. p. 100. The aerial attacks against Hiei on the 13th caused many of these deaths, not the surface engagement.

by aircraft.[73] Other than the "beached" destroyer, this was a remarkably accurate report. Other than the sinking of Hiei, Akatsuki, and Yudachi, only the Amatsukaze suffered any appreciable damage. In the final minutes as both forces sailed northeast, Helena's six-inch fire destroyed the Japanese destroyer's radio room and hydraulic system, killing 43 sailors.[74] This ship along with the other ten remaining of the original fourteen all returned to Rabaul on the 13th of November.

Interestingly, Radio Tokyo was remarkably forthcoming in its broadcast regarding the results of the battle. Within days, the Japanese claimed to have sunk six United States Navy cruisers and one destroyer in the initial surface engagement near Guadalcanal. This was surprisingly conservative for the Japanese, yet almost perfect in numbers if not classification. In return, the broadcast admitted the loss of 2 destroyers, while conceding only the damaging of one battleship but not the sinking.[75] The enemy press reports proved to be more accurate than those of the United States.

Based upon its intelligence estimate, the CINCPAC damage report for the enemy from the surface engagement was significantly greater. In Pearl Harbor, reports listed two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and two more destroyers sunk above and beyond the three ships in the accurate reports from Guadalcanal. An additional battleship, two light cruisers and three destroyers were also evaluated as damaged.[76] Perception, in this case, became reality. Navy Press Communique #194, which became the basis for the newspaper headlines that hit the newsstands in New York and Washington on 17

[73] Nimitz papers. Box 11. p. 987.
[74] Dull. p. 241.
[75] New York Times. Sunday, 15 November 1942. p. 1.
[76] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-60.

November 1942 and much of the historical reputation of Callaghan, reflected the larger and inaccurate number of Japanese losses in surface combat on the 13th of November.[77]

Before the battle, Halsey, in order to support the reinforcement of Guadalcanal, sortied the only other Task Force in his theater on 11 November. Rear Admiral Kincaid, with a still damaged Enterprise; two battleships, Washington and South Dakota; three cruisers; and ten destroyers left Halsey's headquarters at Noumea before Callaghan and Scott engaged. As a result of the surface engagement and based upon air sightings on the 13th, Halsey split off from Task Force 16, Task Force 64 under Rear Admiral Willis Lee with the two battleships and four destroyers.[78]

The losses to Callaghan's Task Group 67.4 meant that the ships belonging to Kincaid and Lee were the only units left to the United States in the SOPAC Theater to counter what was still a tremendous threat from the Japanese. In addition to the still potent force returning from Guadalcanal on the morning of the 13th, the Japanese had three other forces committed to their reinforcement of Guadalcanal. Admiral Mikawa commanded a bombardment force of 6 cruisers and 6 destroyers. Admiral Tanaka commanded the major reinforcement force with the 11 fast Marus escorted by 11 destroyers. Admiral Kondo, with his own force of 3 cruisers and 11 destroyers, would link with the ships previously assigned to Abe to complete the bombardment of Henderson Field.[79]

In Washington, D.C. as reports filtered back, everyone, including the President "hoped that Callaghan's sacrifice had stopped the enemy."[80] Halsey and others in theater

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[77] Washington Post. 17 November 1942. p. 1.
[78] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1159-1163.
[79] Morison. p. 259-262.
[80] Ibid. p. 263.

knew better. Reports indicated more bombardment forces coming down "The Slot" to attack Henderson Field on the night of the 13th. The loss of Callaghan, and more importantly Scott, meant the United States Navy, "after three night battles [in the Solomons], did not have an admiral with night-battle experience."[81] Halsey ordered Task Force 64 to intercept. Rear Admiral Lee was unable to comply as his force was to far away to be there in time.[82]

Franklin Roosevelt heard a few hours later that heavy Japanese surface naval forces bombarded Henderson Field unopposed the night of the 13th. Despite the efforts of Callaghan's force, two Japanese heavy cruisers put over 1000 high-explosive rounds into the Marine airfield, destroying 18 planes and damaging 32 more. When the President's subordinates then reported that the Japanese transports were sailing down "The Slot" equally unopposed by naval surface forces, FDR began to think that Guadalcanal might have to be evacuated.[83] Secretary of the Navy Forrestal recalled that "the tension that I felt at that time was matched only by the tension that pervaded Washington the night before the landing in Normandy."[84]

On the morning of the 14th of November, despite the Japanese bombardment, Henderson Field was operational, barely. The first aircraft could not take off until 1330. Only ten aircraft could get off the ground. Fortunately, search aircraft from Enterprise spotted the transport force before 1000 on the 14th.[85] Combined strikes from the carrier and Henderson Field destroyed seven of the eleven Marus before dark. The remaining

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[81] Kilpatrick. p. 103. The commander of the surface combat forces at the First Battle of Savo Island was Vice Admiral Crutchley of the Royal Navy. There were no USN admirals embarked aboard the surface combatants on 8-9 August 1942.
[82] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1163.
[83] Morison. p. 262-263.
[84] Ibid. p. 263.
[85] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 29-5.

four ran themselves aground at Guadalcanal that night, but additional airstrikes and land-based artillery destroyed much of the desperately needed resupply they carried.

Rear Admiral Lee arrived off Guadalcanal in time to intercept the returning Japanese surface bombardment force that night. Lee handily defeated a force he estimated to contain between 15 and 18 ships, opening fire at 18,500 yards using radar control only.[86] The Japanese force included the returning battleship Kirishima and witnessed her sunk for her trouble. Lee reported to Halsey that "he inflicted considerable damage on the enemy."[87] Halsey was also well aware of the results of the air attacks on the enemy transports and referred to the attacks as "a dive and torpedo bombers paradise."[88] It was the air strikes and the success of Lee that led Halsey to proclaim that the United States had handed the Japanese a "crushing blow."[89] On 17 November, "I [Halsey] felt comparatively assured that after the beating he had taken, the 'monkey' would withdraw."[90]

THE CRITICISMS

The reports to the American public, however, did not accurately reflect the distinction between the questionable results of Callaghan and the undisputed success of aviation against the transports and Lee against the surface force. Through their window on the events, the newspapers and statements by public figures proclaimed a "Smashing Victory"[91] by United States naval forces over the 13th to 15th of November. On the 17th of

[86] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 30-9
[87] Halsey ltr, 17 Nov 1942. p. 3.
[88] Ibid. p. 3.
[89] Ibid. p. 5.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Washington Post. 17 November 1942. p. 1.

November, Navy Communique #194 provided a summary of the three-day battle to the papers. Based upon these inflated numbers, the Washington Post described Callaghan's surface fight as "the greatest surface engagement since the Battle of Jutland."[92] In the page-one story, the Post classified Callaghan's actions as a duplication of "the tactics used by Lord Nelson in winning Trafalgar."[93] Supported by two pictures of Admiral Callaghan on the front page, one with FDR, the article continued by describing Callaghan as "one of the most beloved commanders in the Navy."[94] The American Commander "audaciously" closed to point-blank range and "shattered...the enemy force." [95] The heroic actions of the former naval aide to the President of the United States caused the "loss of his life in the battle" but "broke the back of the entire Jap assault."[96]

The headlines of the New York Times were equally as glowing regarding the results of the surface engagement on the 13th and the impact of Admiral Callaghan. The surface engagement first hit the front page on the 15th of November, less than 72 hours after its conclusion. Callaghan's picture and death announcement followed on the 17th. According to the Times, "air power...was not the dominant factor...The bulk of the destruction was accomplished by gun crews of American warships"[97] under Callaghan. Callaghan's ship sank a Japanese cruiser and a destroyer on its own prior to the Admiral's death in the "slam-bang" fight.[98]

Public statements by high-ranking officials continued the praise. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox commented that Callaghan "met and drove from the field a superior

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[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] New York Times. 17 November 1942. p. 1.
[98] Ibid. p. 3.

force, but employed the most daring type of action to accomplish that result."[99] Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, who rarely spoke on military matters, even commented on the "magnificent military success."[100] President Roosevelt was visibly upset by the death of his "old friend" and led the American public in proclaiming Callaghan as a hero with his statement that "the Admiral did a glorious thing..."[101] In his statements, Halsey reinforced all of these views. In his letter to Nimitz he wrote that Callaghan's battle "will go down as an epic in naval warfare...and saved Cactus [Guadalcanal]...it is my intention to recommend Dan Callaghan for the Medal of Honor."[102]

The public praise for this engagement was very unusual for naval battles at this time in the war and certainly narrowly focused on Callaghan. The results of the First Battle of Savo Island did not become public until the 13th of October, over two months after the defeat. The Navy Department gave justification for the huge delay as security concerns in the SOPAC Theater because of the losses. Yet, Scott's victory at Cape Esperance was almost equally as transparent to the American public. Although Scott's engagement rated brief mention of the front page of the New York Times on 14 October, Scott's name did not appear. Scott had completely surprised the Japanese; killed the task force commander, Admiral Gato; sank two of the five Japanese ships; and severely damaged a third. The Japanese scampered rapidly out of Guadalcanal waters and were unsuccessful in their mission to bombard Henderson Field. In return, Scott lost only one

[99] New York Times. 18 November 1942. p. 8.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Halsey ltr, 17 Nov 1942. p. 1.

of his nine ships.[103] The first victory of an American task force over the Japanese in a surface engagement at night rated little coverage and its commander, none.[104]

The same November front-page headlines that detailed Callaghan's success made no mention of his second in command. Scott's obituary finally appeared in the next day's paper, buried on page 9. The same lack of recognition was true for Admiral Lee. The papers down played his success in crushing the Japanese surface force 48 hours after Callaghan's fight as "sniping around by light stuff."[105] The news made no mention of Lee by name. For the public, Lee's action did not "appreciably change the results as reported."[106]

Halsey quickly initiated his recommendation for the Medal of Honor for Callaghan. As the citation became public knowledge, it perpetuated Callaghan's status in the eye of Americans. Halsey praised his subordinate for "ingenious tactical skill." Without Rear Admiral Callaghan's "superb coordination of units," his task force would not have "routed the powerful invasion fleet" nor "frustrated the formidable Japanese offensive." As far as the public historiography was concerned, in the years following the war, Dan Callaghan had done everything right except die.[107]

In the written history that became the "bible" of a generation of readers regarding the United States Navy in World Ward II, Samuel E. Morison was equally as kind to the now dead OTC on the 13th of November 1942. In Volume 5 of the History of United States Naval Operation in World War II, the author called the losses to each side as

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[103] Morison. p. 157-171.
[104] New York Times. 18 November 1942. p. 9.
[105] New York Times. 17 November 1942. p. 4.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Rear Admiral Dan Callaghan's Medal of Honor citation.

"balanced."[108] Callaghan "saved Henderson Field." In Morison's evaluation, "all mistakes were cancelled out by valor."[109] In the only biography written on Dan Callaghan, Francis Murphy was as equally tender with the memory of this naval officer. The great leader of men was not as proficient with radar as he could have been, but his abilities and experience all contributed to his heroic success in "Iron Bottom Sound." Finally, in two of the few accounts of this engagement in the last 20 years, Eric Hammel held his limited criticism similarly to Callaghan's lack of proficiency with radar,[110] while E.B. Potter referred to the Admiral as possessing "Nelsonian spirit."[111] No debate or criticism of Callaghan's qualifications for command or his tactical handling of his task force came out in any of the public historiography since the fight took place.

In contrast, the classified reports were not as complimentary. Admiral King's office of Commander in Chief United States Fleet (COMINCH) published classified information bulletins soon after the end of the battles around Guadalcanal. The Navy's headquarters distributed the reports to the fleet in an attempt to profit from the successes and mistakes made by those who had already fought the Japanese. These "Battle Experiences" from the first five surface engagements from August to November 1942 arrived at the operating units in March 1943, a scant three months after the last engagement. These volumes remained classified for 30 years, until 1972 (DOUBLE CHECK DATE). Of the four volumes, the criticism of Callaghan's engagement was, by far, the most voluminous. Of the debacle at Savo Island, COMINCH published only 23 pages. Scott's victory at Cape Esperance warranted 36 pages of critiques but included

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[108] Morison. p. 258.
[109] Ibid. p. 258.
[110] Hammel._____
[111] Potter. p. 175.

high spots regarding performance. Callaghan and Task Group 67.4 warranted a huge total of 73 pages of commentary, all admonishments and no accolades.[112] The subsequent defeat of United States Navy cruisers at Tassafaronga on 30 November 1942, another case of the American Navy being caught utterly by surprise and decimated by Japanese torpedoes, was the next most prolific critique but only contained 49 pages.

Admiral King reviewed the publications before release. From his office, the criticisms were many. First, the officer in tactical command "gave up surprise."[113] Additionally, the OTC caused unnecessary confusion by issuing no battle plan. [114] The formation employed did not recognize the different types of ships and "did not appear sound."[115] King could find no reason why Scott, as second in command, was in front of Callaghan as they entered battle. Additionally, United States pre-war doctrine explicitly called for independent torpedo attacks by destroyers prior to gun engagement. In this case, destroyers should have executed coordinated attacks "considering the close range," but the lack of a battle plan "by the OTC resulted in no coordinated destroyer torpedo attack."[116] Finally, while King's office complimented both Cushing and Sterett for aggressive action, a lack of leadership prevented both from more success.[117]

Thirteen of the 73 pages of criticism came directly from Nimitz's comments as CINCPAC. He doubted the simple common sense of allowing the cruisers to engage a Japanese battleship at such close range. Additionally, the confusion that ensued when Callaghan ordered a cease fire and the engagement of friendly units would have been

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[112] COMINCH Buls 2,3,4, and 5.
[113] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-23.
[114] Ibid. p. 28-48
[115] Ibid. p. 28-11,12.
[116] COMINCH Bul 4. p. 28-37.
[117] Ibid. p. 28-19, 44.

eliminated if a "well conceived plan of battle [was] thoroughly disseminated."[118] All indications to CINCPAC were that the OTC had sufficient time to prepare and distribute just such a battle plan. The most critical comment from Nimitz stemmed from the OTC's apparent disregard for Pacific Fleet Tactical Bulletin 57B-42. The "Vee" and "Wedge" formations prescribed for destroyers and night attacks "were not considered."[119]

Despite these forceful classified proclamations about his execution, neither questioned, however, in any documents Callaghan's qualifications or the circumstances that placed him in command. Both COMINCH and CINCPAC were characteristically quiet in reference to Callaghan in public forums. King was not credited with any response to the fight. Nimitz said nothing critical, but said nothing noteworthy either. He did, however, comment widely on the destruction of the transports and the success of Lee's battleships. The former battleship sailor, now CINCPAC, mimicked Lee's proclamation that the battleships had done "severe damage" to the enemy.[120] For Nimitz, a great outcome of Lee's engagement was "our faith in the battleship has been justified."[121] CINCPAC's public opinion of Callaghan, however, was silent, and any statement of the impact of the OTC's engagement was absent. Nimitz, as a commander, rarely said anything derogatory about subordinates. As an optimist, his comments were almost always positive. His absence of any comments about the commander in the first phase of this fight for the survival of Guadalcanal spoke volumes regarding Nimitz's personal evaluation of Callaghan.

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[118] Ibid. p. 28-72.
[119] Ibid. p. 28-70.
[120] New York Times. 17 November 1942. p. 1.
[121] Ibid. p. 6. Washington Post. 17 November 1942. p. 2.

The comments of the senior commanders in the Navy took place after the fact. The "Monday Morning Quarterbacking," while valuable to later commanders as a learning tool, can be too easy to arrive at if nothing prior to the disastrous incident points to the peril that might occur. That was not the case as Task Force 67.4 prepared to enter combat on the 13th of November. Insight into the observations and attitudes of personnel within the formation demonstrated similar criticisms of the OTC prior to "going in harm's way" as those uttered by the higher layers of the chain of command after the fight. These insights give justification to claim that Callaghan's shortcomings were identifiable before the battle.

As Rear Admiral Turner departed the area on the afternoon of the 12th, Callaghan directed the ships under his command to form a single column for the expected engagement. Some within the formation were very uncomfortable with the single column.[122] Although relatively safer for steaming at night, the required intervals between the ships created a slow reacting formation. It was nearly 5 miles between the lead ship and the last in a column of this size. At 20 knots, Fletcher, as the last ship in the column, would only start a maneuver in the column 12 minutes after the lead ship initiated.[123] That night, 12 minutes after the fighting started the battle was almost over.

Equal concern revolved around the lack of orders or guidance from the OTC. The combined formation of ships from Callaghan and Scott were in the waters off Guadalcanal for over 24 hours and expected an engagement. Yet, there was no written battle plan. There was no conference over the bridge-to-bridge circuit to establish a verbal battle plan. To individual ship commanders, the formation had no coherence.

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[122] Wylie. p. 69. Lieutenant Wylie, the XO of Fletcher, could not "figure out any rhyme or reason why we were so formed or allocated."
[123] Kilpatrick. p. 85-88.

Unlike Nelson and his captains at Trafalgar, Task Force 67.4 sailed into battle with "absolutely no clue as to what we were to do if we met the Nips."[124]

Some sailors expressed similar concerns about the OTC himself prior to the battle. Unlike Norman Scott, Callaghan had no combat experience. Scott had had a destroyer sunk underneath him in the North Atlantic in 1918. He fought the Battle of Cape Esperance with "cool, determined courage."[125] Callaghan, on the afternoon of the 12th, paced the flag bridge endlessly. He vocally muttered his reluctance to carry out the orders given. He expressed that a conversation with Halsey regarding the mission was in order, but the timing and proximity of the enemy would not permit a conference of any kind with his superior. On the flag bridge of San Francisco, "..the rattled officers and sailors on duty around him [Callaghan] knew they were in for a rough night."[126]

Rear Admiral Dan Callaghan led a naval task force into battle on the 13th of November 1942 and was defeated by his Japanese opponent. The loss of ships was one sided against the United States. The resultant precarious position due to limited warships that remained available to Halsey meant Guadalcanal might fall. The loss of men was equally bad, and totals approached the disastrous death toll at Pearl Harbor. Callaghan turned the bombardment force back. So did Crutchley at Savo Island in August, while earning the dubious honor of OTC in the "worst defeat in U.S. Navy history." Such a singular achievement called into question whether this alone was enough to declare Callaghan's results responsible for a "Smashing Victory." For fifty years after the fight, the public version of the engagement was inordinately kind to Callaghan. The classified version was professionally critical of the force's execution but did little to pin down any

[124] Wylie. p. 69.
[125] Morison. P. 170.
[126] Hammel. p. 106.

reason why the Admiral did so poorly. The sailors around Callaghan intimated some of their concerns about the individual before they closed for battle, but any shortcomings were outside their ability to fix.

Though never discussed by the chain of command, it is these intimations at the lowest level that bring Rear Admiral Callaghan's abilities to be successful into question. A review of his service in the Navy to that point demonstrated some severe shortcomings that were great contributors to his defeat and death. There is an even more important piece to a discussion of what brings victory to a combatant organization. The criticisms of tactics, though valuable, missed the essential element in any discussion of success for an organization in combat, whether Callaghan should have been in command at all.

The choice of Callaghan was Halsey's and Halsey's alone. Callaghan's limited qualifications were only one part of the decision. Again, the "Monday Morning Quarterbacking" approach can be a useless pursuit by those outside the decision-making loop. To be valuable, viable alternatives must have existed within the scope of time and assets available. If there were no other options, then the choice by Halsey of a Rear Admiral with 30 years of service as a surface ship commander was the logical, rational, and correct choice. If reasonable options were, however, available, then the leadership decision that created the chain of command contributed directly to the result. A review of the options available to Halsey demonstrated that Callaghan was only one of numerous options available and was, by far, not the most qualified.

THE OPTIONS

Halsey's revealed his assessments of his situation in SOPAC in his correspondence with Nimitz throughout his tenure. Their lengthy letters to one another provided personal insight into critical questions about strategy and operations, as well as key personnel decisions. At times, correspondence was so rapid as to provide a two-day turn around for responses.[127] After taking command, Halsey was immediately critical of the centralized control of the theater. He found everything "tied up in a bow knot" because all decisions had to be made by either Ghormley or Callaghan as Chief of Staff.[128] He was also very frustrated that Ghormley allowed himself to be "stiff armed" by the French in Noumea and prevented from moving the large staff into quarters ashore rather than have their performance stifled by remaining aboard the cramped and detrimentally hot flagship in the harbor.[129] Despite his concerns, Halsey was an optimist. He looked for the best in people around him.[130] Despite claims to the contrary, he did not conduct a wholesale dismissal of Ghormley's staff.[131] In fact, Brigadier General Dewitt Peck, USMC, remained on for a considerable period as Halsey's Plans Officer.[132] Halsey, however, was not shy about making command decisions, and despite Nimitz's misgivings, the Chief of Staff job for Halsey would not remain status quo with Callaghan.

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[127] Nimitz forwarded a letter by air to Halsey on 18 Dec 1942. Halsey's response was dated 20 Dec 1942. Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 20 Dec 1942. CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1.

[128] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 1 Jun 1943. CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1

[129] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 31 Oct 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 5. Within 72 hours of assuming command, Halsey took over the French High Commissioner's building and established his headquarters ashore. Nimitz papers. Box 11, p. 1099.

[130] Ltr from Adm C.W. Nimitz to VAdm W.F. Halsey, 11 Nov 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1.

[131] Hammel. p. 38.Eric Hammel claimed "Halsey cleaned house with a fervor." In addition to Peck, Lcdr Lyndon Baines Johnson remained on SOPAC staff as a special assistant. Papers of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, USN. Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 165.

[132] Halsey. p. 123.

On the day Halsey assumed command in SOPAC, Nimitz expressed to him that a Rear Admiral as Chief of Staff was the best choice.[133] Halsey traveled to SOPAC with Captain Miles Browning, his own Chief of Staff from previous assignments. Halsey was extremely comfortable with Browning. He intervened previously at the highest levels on behalf of Browning.[134] Browning had a terrible reputation amongst many of his peers in the Navy.[135] Halsey acknowledged Browning's faults but had full faith and confidence in his current Chief of Staff's ability and withstood pressure from Nimitz for a flag-rank in the position.[136] Despite Browning holding seniority of only a mid-grade Captain, Halsey established immediately that Browning was the new Chief of Staff for SOPAC.[137] Callaghan had to move.

Before COMSOPAC could determine where, he had to understand the situation in his own theater, but he had great cause for optimism. First, Norman Scott's defeat of the Japanese at Cape Esperance proved the Imperial Japanese Navy was not omnipotent. Attitude and confidence in the area rose markedly. Nimitz, simultaneous to Halsey's assumption of command, took steps to increase the priority of SOPAC over ongoing operations in the Aleutian Islands. On 16 October, COMINCH approved Nimitz's request to reduce Task Force 8 cruiser strength from 3 to 2 and replace the 2 cruisers armed with the outstanding 6"/47 caliber radar-directed system that were on hand with two 1920's

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[133] Ltr from Adm C.W. Nimitz to VAdm W.F. Halsey, 18 Oct 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 3.

[134] Halsey Papers. Box 16. In January 1941, Halsey wrote to Rear Admiral John Tower, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, to keep Browning in the job he held at the time.

[135] Hammel. p. 327. Hammel refers to Browning as a "psychotic misanthrope." Nimitz ltr 18 Oct 1942. p. 3-4. A fellow officer physically beat Browning in a confrontation earlier that year for which Nimitz felt him ill suited for the Chief of Staff job and unsuited for promotion.

[136] Halsey ltr, 1 Jun 43. p. 2-3. Halsey indicated to Nimitz that he was "almost superstitious" about retaining Browning. Browning, according to Halsey, had the "uncanny knack of sizing up a situation and coming out with an answer."

[137] Halsey Papers. Box 37. On the U.S. Navy captains lineal list published in June 1942, Browning held a lineal number of 17152, right in the middle of captains.

cruisers, Raleigh and Detroit.[138] The more capable cruisers went to Halsey. The willingness of COMINCH and CINCPAC to shift the best assets to SOPAC was also reflected in the assets Halsey had on hand. Despite the priority conflict with the upcoming TORCH landings in North Africa, Halsey had two of the newest U.S. Navy battleships, Washington and South Dakota, on hand in theater. Three brand new anti-aircraft light cruisers also belonged to the SOPAC area. [139]

Halsey's force experienced a set back a week after his taking command at the Battle of Santa Cruz, especially the loss of one of his two carriers, Hornet. Yet damage to his only remaining carrier, Enterprise, as well as the battleship South Dakota was repairable at Noumea. As he placed Callaghan into command at the end of October, COMSOPAC was confident both big ships would be ready for combat before the predicted Japanese push in mid November. He reported South Dakota "ready to fight" to Nimitz in a letter on 6 November.[140] At the same time, Halsey reported Enterprise as seaworthy and on a 36-hour sailing notice. Incomplete repairs to the forward elevator, however, restricted the size of the air group to only 69 planes.[141]

By this time, Halsey also had a "stable" of combat-tested Rear Admirals on hand commanding formations, all of whom had been operating in the area for several months. As Halsey contemplated Callaghan's future, he knew Scott was embarked aboard San Francisco, his flagship at Cape Esperance. Rear Admiral Lee was aboard Washington as

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[138] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 953, 1094-1102.
[139] Halsey. p. 120.
[140] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 6 Nov 1943, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Cebter, Washington, DC. p. 3. Weapons technicians identified some cracks in several of the South Dakota's main guns during this repair time at Noumea. The cracks required gun replacement for full repair, an evolution that could only be accomplished in the U.S. The same technicians, however, deemed the guns as able to fire if necessary. South Dakota did so without incident during the fight on 15 November.
[141] Ibid. p. 2. The Big "E" was also leaking small amounts of oil from ruptured plates caused by near misses at Santa Cruz. When the carrier did sail, she carried 85 repairmen still on board. Halsey. p. 125.

the battleship division commander for Rear Admiral Thomas Kincaid aboard Enterprise. Additionally, three more surface-ship Rear Admirals flew their flags in the area around Guadalcanal. Rear Admirals Good, Tisdale, and Wright all commanded cruiser formations in SOPAC on 18 October. Finally, Halsey was extremely confident in his intelligence picture. He determined that the Japanese always gave SOPAC at least 48 hours warning. He thought the Japanese might "have superior seapower in the area, but may not know it."[142]

Halsey, unlike with Scott, had no previous personal relationship with Dan Callaghan, He had no special personal insight into his abilities. A review of Callaghan's career, however, provided few operational accolades that suggested he was well suited for the battle into which Halsey directed him. Dan Callaghan graduated with the Class of 1911 from the Naval Academy. Classmates included Norman Scott. By virtue of Callaghan graduating 38th in the class and higher than Scott, he was senior.[143] His date of rank for promotion to Rear Admiral was a mere 24 hours older than Scott's.[144]

Unfortunately, Dan Callaghan was a staff officer. In his 31 years of service, he kept pace with his contemporaries regarding "at sea" time but not experience to command cruisers and destroyers in combat. As was typical for officers of his era, his first 6-7 years of service as a junior officer were spent at sea, primarily aboard the armored cruiser California and the cruiser New Orleans. Of his remaining twelve years of sea time, only six were as a part of a ship's company. All of these were aboard

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[142] Nimitz. Box 11. p. 1152.
[143] Potter. p. 32.
[144] Department of the Navy. Official Biography Rear Admiral Norman Scott. Washington, DC: Navy Biographical Branch, 1961. p. 1. In the first six months of the war, the Navy significantly increased the number of flag officer to provide leadership to the rapidly expanding force. The Department of the Navy promoted Callaghan, Scott, Good, Tisdale, and Wright within a week of one another, starting 10 May 1942.

battleships. The focus of his jobs was narrow. In his ten years of sea time between 1920 and 1938, he spent 80% in billets as a gunnery officer for battleships. In June 1930, he ascended above the level of a ship's company with his assignment to a battleship division staff then subsequently to the battleship force staff and finally the gunnery officer for the entire Fleet.

Callaghan's greatest shortcoming was the lack of command time.[145] In his 31 years since he graduated from the Naval Academy, he accumulated only a paltry 33 months of command time. One of the three years was as the executive officer of the heavy cruiser Portland. During his twelve months as XO, however, the ship spent nearly six in drydock being overhauled. His first command was of the destroyer Truxton for twelve months starting from November 1915. His second did not come for another twenty-five years. In May 1941, Captain Callaghan took command of the heavy cruiser San Francisco. His tenure lasted only ten months until chosen as Ghormley's chief of staff. Although present at Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December, Callaghan's involvement was minimal. San Francisco entered drydock in October for overhaul and had no ammunition on board and no engines mounted when the Japanese attacked.[146]

When directed by Halsey to leave the SOPAC staff and take command, his command experience consisted of 33 months, of which 12 were in drydock and never underway. Prior to May 1941, the last time he stood on the bridge of a ship and conned it at sea was 1928, 13 years before. Up until November 1942, he never commanded a

[145] For the purposes of this study, I have defined "command time" as time spent as either the commanding officer of a ship or the executive officer of a ship. As is the case today, in the absence of the CO, the XO must function in that capacity. Most Navy XO's today are placed aboard ship with the intent of moving up to be the CO.
[146] Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. p. 2-3.

formation of warships at sea.[147] He did not know the doctrine he was expected to employ or the capabilities of his ships to execute that doctrine.

His operational experience during his second command tour was equally limited. Dan Callaghan took command of the San Francisco at Pearl Harbor. In the four months of command before going in to drydock, the ship made one brief cruise to the West Coast but remained in the Hawaii area otherwise.[148] The ship left the drydock at Pearl Harbor in mid-December 1941. A brief sortie as part of Task Force 17 in late December preceded convoy operations to Samoa in January. February brought two attempted raids as a part of Task Force 11, under the command of Rear Admiral Thomas Kincaid, for Captain Callaghan. This limited operational participation came to an end, however, as San Francisco departed the forward areas enroute to the West Coast in March 1942.[149] Then in November 1942 in his new command, unfortunately, Callaghan managed only to direct one bombardment run against the Japanese on Guadalcanal and to make two sweeps around Savo Island after linking up with Scott at dawn on the 12th of November.[150] Additionally, Callaghan was one of the few leaders in the Pacific that was not a graduate of the Naval War College. Despite many opportunities from his assignment as chief of staff, as well as the orientation of prewar academic training, his operational experience of and against the enemy was minimal, and he did not know the waters of the Solomons.

Another shortcoming was despite the importance, he did not know radar either. During his time as Commanding Officer, technicians installed the CXAM "bedspring" radar aboard San Francisco. The immediate predecessor to SC search radar, the

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[147] Murphy. p. 34-177. Morison. p. 236.
[148] Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. p. 2-3.
[149] Ibid. p. 2-3.
[150] Kilpatrick. p. 79.

capabilities of the CXAM were very similar. Yet, ingrained techniques for optical main-gun engagement honed by years of training as a gunnery officer made him suspect of the device. A few false alarms while operating after San Francisco left drydock caused him to mistrust radar.[151] He did not know the tool that could give him the advantage.

The United States Navy, as the war began, was a small organization. As a senior captain in 1941, Dan Callaghan had relatively few peers. The entire regular Navy contained less than 400 captains as the build up for war began. Callaghan lacked many operational and professional qualities as the war broke out but name recognition was not one of them. Even in the relative small organization, Callaghan was extremely well connected.

In 1926, while gunnery officer aboard Mississippi, Callaghan worked directly for Captain Thomas Hart, who would hold four-star rank at the outbreak of the war as the Commander of the Asiatic Fleet. As a lieutenant commander, in 1930, Callaghan worked for Rear Admiral Leigh as a battleship division gunnery officer. As Leigh advanced, he took Callaghan with him. By 1932, Callaghan was Admiral Leigh's gunnery officer for the entire battle fleet and moved again 12 months later to be gunnery officer for the entire fleet.

As happened to many of his peers, the Bureau of Navigation in 1935 let Callaghan know, informally, that duty with the Asiatic Fleet was in his future. Despite great opportunities for command and sea experience, Callaghan did not want duty in the Far East. Unlike his peers, he was comfortable enough with his connections to write directly to Secretary of the Navy Louis Denfield indicating that he would probably appeal directly to Rear Admiral Joseph Taussig against orders to the Asiatic Fleet should they be

[151] Murphy. p. 176-177.

issued. Any further discussion of the Far East disappeared. Instead, he reported to Portland as the XO for 12 months and then joined Rear Admiral Taussig, the commander of the Scouting Force, as his Operations Officer.

Within the year, senior officers in Washington recommended Callaghan directly to Franklin D. Roosevelt to be the President's naval aide. Callaghan spent nearly three years at the side of FDR, a President renowned for his connection to and support of the Navy. During his tenure, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Harold Stark, wrote his fitness report and proclaimed the "Captain Callaghan is worth his weight in gold in his present position."[152] With war clouds looming in May 1941, Callaghan left Washington to take command, for the first time since 1915, of San Francisco.

With Halsey's lack of a personal relationship with Callaghan prior to their meeting in Noumea in October 1942, COMSOPAC's ignorance of Callaghan's familiarity with radar was understandable. Appreciation for command and operational experience, however, was a key to the new commander of the South Pacific and the way he wanted to attack the Japanese. Halsey, again in his correspondence with Nimitz, continually called for officers that he knew were experienced ship commanders. He saw this quality as a key to success. Halsey himself, in his first 30 years of service held no less than 13 billets with command time. As compared to Callaghan's less than three, sixteen of Halsey's first 30 years were in command billets. His two XO jobs were overshadowed by the 11 commanding officer jobs and his fourteen and a half years as a commanding officer of 12 ships and 2 destroyer squadrons. Similarly, the officers Halsey pushed Nimitz to send were of the same ilk.

[152] Potter. p. 117.

Halsey repeatedly asked for Rear Admiral "Pug" Ainsworth. Ainsworth, a Naval War College graduate, fought the Japanese successfully as a cruiser division commander in 1943. Prior to joining Halsey, he racked up nearly nine years of command time, serving as an XO three times and a commanding officer three times. His commands included a destroyer in the Asiatic Fleet and a Destroyer Squadron.[153]

Halsey also lobbied extensively for Rear Admiral "Tip" Merrill. Merrill possessed an even more impressive resume than Ainsworth. Merrill, a member of the Class of 1914 from the Naval Academy, accumulated an incredible seven commands in his first 27 years of service. His over six years of command time included three different destroyer squadrons as well as the battleship Indiana. Merrill, also a graduate of the Naval War College, became the only commander in the South Pacific to beat the Japanese twice at night surface naval combat, and he never lost a ship.[154]

Although not a by-name request from Halsey, Arleigh Burke was also a demonstrative example of the background Halsey knew was important for success. Burke, a member of the Class of 1923, was 12 years junior to Callaghan. When he arrived in SOPAC in the winter of 1942, Burke was just shy of 19 years of service. Yet, he already had more command time than Callaghan had in 31 years. Burke served over two years as the XO of the destroyer Craven and 13 months as the commanding officer of the destroyer Mugford. Neither of his ships spent any time in drydock during his tenure.[155]

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[153] Morison. p. 325.
[154] Morison, Volumes 5 and 6.
[155] Ken Jones. Destroyer Squadron 23: Combat Exploits of Arleigh Burke's Gallant Force. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 1988. p. 113-117.

So, while intimate details of a commander's familiarity with radar may not have been on Halsey's screen as he began his command in SOPAC, command experience certainly was. Knowledge of this characteristic was easily attainable in any interview or discussion. Any officer's record contained the same information. The qualifications of the other flag officer's in Halsey's "stable" showed them to have much better qualifications than Callaghan. With all on hand, Halsey had several very viable choices with which to battle the Japanese in addition to his choice of Callaghan.

Rear Admirals Good, Tisdale and Wright were all classmates from Annapolis in 1912. All had early careers very similar to Callaghan. Good spent his first six years of time as a junior officer at sea. There, any similarity ended. In his 30 years of service, Good served in eight different command billets for a total of nearly eight years. His seven commands included three ships and four formation commands. Good commanded three destroyer squadrons and for the five months before Halsey arrived, he fought Cruiser Division 5 in the South Pacific Theater. Most recently, Good commanded this force of four cruisers during the Battle of the Santa Cruz in late October as a part of Rear Admiral Murray's Task Force 17. Earlier in the war, as the commanding officer of the heavy cruiser New Orleans, Good fought his ship as a part of the Lexington carrier task force at the Battle of Coral Sea in May 1942, earning a letter of commendation.[156] Other operational experience included a raid on the Buni-Farsi Area of the Solomons on 5 October.

His familiarity with the capabilities of radar was evident in the after action reports. Rear Admirals Murray and Good built their deliberate sailing plan around the

[156] Department of the Navy. Official Biography Vice Admiral Howard H. Good. Washington, DC: Navy Biographical Branch, 1964. p. 1-3.

Juneau's SG radar. In the published plan, Juneau led the formation using the SG to guide the formation, allowing maintenance of speeds in excess of 20 knots at night with no concerns for control.[157] Good's date of rank as a Rear Admiral was 14 May 1942 or 4 days junior to Callaghan. In late October 1942, Good suffered from a case of "walking flu." Despite Good's protests, Halsey directed Good to go to Australia to recover just as the intelligence pointed to a build up in the Japanese efforts to retake Guadalcanal.[158]

Rear Admiral Carlton "Boscoe" Wright was a day junior to Good as a Rear Admiral. His experience level was also less, but far superior to Callaghan. Wright was an ordnance expert in the Navy. Although not a War College graduate, he held a Master's degree from George Washington University. His command time included five billets in his 30 years of service. His commands included 13 months as the commanding officer of the heavy cruiser Augusta as well as a year at the helm of a destroyer division in the Battle Force.[159] For the four months preceding Halsey's arrival, he too had been the commander of a cruiser division in SOPAC. Wright commanded the cruisers of Fletcher's Task Force 11 at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in August. For most of September, he commanded Task Force 64. This independent force of cruisers and destroyers operated with Rear Admiral Turner, escorting reinforcement formations from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal on a regular basis.[160] In early October, he commanded the occupation of the island of Funafuti.[161] As Halsey took command, Wright waited aboard

[157] COMINCH Bul 3. p. 19-1, 19-4.
[158] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 6 Nov 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 4.
[159] Department of the Navy. Official Biography Vice Admiral Carleton Herbert Wright. Washington, DC: Navy Biographical Branch, 1957. p. 1-3.
[160] Nimitz Papers. Box 11. p. 868.
[161] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1043-1050.

his flagship, Chester, at Espiritu Santo, with, arguably, the most command time in the face of the enemy of any flag officer in the theater.[162]

Rear Admiral Mahlon Tisdale, with a date of rank of 16 May 1942, was the most junior of the three admirals available to Halsey from the Class of 1912. His lack of relative seniority, however, belied his advantage in command and operational experience over his two classmates. In his first 30 years, Tisdale accumulated a remarkable 13 and one-half years of command time. His four XO jobs tallied nearly five years. The six commands he completed totaled nearly nine years. The commands included a destroyer; a destroyer division; the heavy cruiser Chester; and, for the last five months before Halsey's arrival, the cruisers for Rear Admiral Kincaid's Task Force 16. A Navy Cross recipient from the First World War, Tisdale fought his cruisers at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons under Fletcher and the Battle of Santa Cruz under Kincaid. Upon Halsey's assumption of command, Tisdale, like Wright, waited aboard his flagship, Pensacola, at Espiritu Santo for orders.[163]

Also available to Halsey was Rear Admiral Willis "Ching" Lee. From the Naval Academy Class of 1908 and with a date of rank of 4 November 1941, Lee was junior only to Richmond K. Turner (by 31 days) and Halsey himself in SOPAC. When Halsey took command, Lee, at the head of the battleship division, actually worked for Rear Admiral Thomas Kincaid, his junior by 13 days, out of Noumea. Lee was often cited as one of the best brains in the Navy. A graduate of the Naval War College, his ten years of command time included three tours as the commander of a destroyer, one as the commander of a cruiser, XO of the battleship Pennsylvania, and three months as the

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[162] COMINCH Bul 3. p. 20-5.
[163] Department of the Navy. Official Biography Vice Admiral Mahlon S. Tisdale. Washington, DC: Navy Biographical Branch, 1966. p. 1-3. Murphy. p. 176-177.

commander of the battleships in SOPAC.[164] Although not committed at either Cape Esperance or the Battle of Santa Cruz, Lee commanded a separate formation of battleships, cruisers and destroyers in connection with both fights. For much of the month of October, to include Halsey's direction for Santa Cruz, Lee commanded Task Force 64, which included Boscoe Wright's cruisers and several destroyers and operated to the west of Savo Island.[165] Lee took great advantage of doctrine, radar, and formation command on the 15th of November to smash the Japanese formation. He was, perhaps, the most talented flag officer in Halsey's stable.

The final alternate choice available to Halsey instead of Callaghan was Halsey's old friend, Norman Scott. In the same number of years of service, Scott attained a much more impressive resume of command experience than his classmate, Callaghan. With 9 years of command time, he had only 12 months less than Lee, his senior by four years of service. His command time included over four years on two different cruisers. He also commanded a squadron of patrol boats as a junior officer, a destroyer, and the heavy cruiser Pensacola. Scott was also a Naval War College graduate, Senior Course Class of 1935. His date of rank was only 24 hours junior to Dan Callaghan. When war broke out, Scott was serving in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. His caustic personality and his rantings to go to war combined to get him out of Washington after a brief five months and into command of a cruiser formation in SOPAC. Scott commanded the only one of the three cruiser formations at the Battle of Savo Island in August that was not attacked by the Japanese. Flying his flag from the light cruiser San Juan, his flank security to the east of the anchorage placed his force to far away from the attack to be

[164] James L. Mooney (ed.). Dictionary of American Fighting Ships. Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, Government Printing Office, 1981. Volume 8.
[165] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 947-1100.

involved. He fought again at the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, commanding three cruisers as a part of Task Force 18. On 15 September, while still a part of Task Force 18, Scott took command when Rear Admiral Noyes' flagship, Wasp, sank after being hit by a Japanese submarine torpedo.[166] Finally, Scott was the only flag officer in the theater that had already fought the Japanese in a night surface battle. In fact, Scott was the only Admiral in the entire United States Navy that had fought the Japanese in a night action and won.

For that fight, his preparation was nearly perfect. On 7 October 1942, he sortied with nine ships from Espiritu Santo in order to be in position to intercept Japanese reinforcement attempts by the night of the 9th. He understood his importance as the OTC and held a face-to-face conference with each of his subordinate commanders before moving up "The Slot". He knew the waters around Guadalcanal and his opponent. So, he issued two written battle plans by the 10th of October to reinforce his guidance. The night of the battle, with visibility of about two miles, the weather was almost exactly what he and Callaghan would encounter a month later. The results, though not a decisive victory, caused Nimitz to comment that "careful preparation, seamanship, and gunnery of a high order and resolute and aggressive leadership produced a notable victory."[167] He maneuvered his force so as to "cross the T" of the Japanese. American radar identified Japanese ships at nearly 14 miles. Scott's four cruisers all had radar lock with FC radars before the Japanese ships could be seen with the naked eye. Official reports all complimented the "excellent radar fire control."[168] "It was the first time in the Pacific

[166] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1036.
[167] COMINCH Bul 3. p. 20-29.
[168] Ibid. p. 20-10.

War that American warships emerged as victors from a fight with Japanese surface warships. The Battle of Cape Esperance was a tonic."[169]

Scott's work was not beyond criticism. A last minute reversal of course caused confusion in his formation. Nimitz labeled it a "mischance." Despite sinking two Japanese ships and heavily damaging a third as compared to his own losses of a destroyer and a damaged light cruiser, Scott knew he still needed to fix some challenges. He was not above self criticism and worked tirelessly while still in command of the formation to fix the flaws. Most importantly, he was thoroughly convinced of the efficacy of the SG radar for command and control. Within two weeks of his victory, however, Halsey's assignment of Callaghan as the commander of the cruiser task force in the Solomons obliged Scott to transfer his flag to the light cruiser Atlanta.[170]

The qualifications of the flag officers in Halsey's stable offered COMSOPAC several reasonable and much more appealing choices than Dan Callaghan as the OTC for the predicted night surface engagement on 13 November. The easiest was to keep Norman Scott as the OTC of the formation. Of the thirteen American ships that fought on 13 November, three fought with Scott at Cape Esperance. The formation for both battles was very similar in composition and capability. Scott knew this formation and its limitations. Halsey's need for two formations to cover the movement of two convoys of reinforcing ships to Guadalcanal was attainable using Tisdale, Wright, and even Good (if combat had priority over illness) from their already established flagships at Espiritu Santo to take either one or the other mission as Scott's subordinate. Dan Callaghan, if command

[169] Hammel. p. 37.
[170] Hammel. p. 106-120.

was absolutely necessary, could have stayed at Noumea, taken a cruiser, integrated into Kincaid's carrier task force, and gained experience in the waters of the Solomons.

Another very powerful option was to bring Lee forward early with the battleships. The South Dakota was battle ready by the 6th of November. Halsey, by the 9th, was well aware of the Japanese intention to send battleships into "The Slot." Lee had already commanded a surface strike group in the area at the end of October. In fact, Scott's cruiser group at one point, in addition to "Boscoe" Wright's, had been a part of Lee's group. These two admirals had a well developed understanding of the enemy, the doctrine to employ, the waters around Guadalcanal, and the radar that was the critical tool to gain surprise and achieve superior firepower. A strike group with Lee in command and Scott commanding the cruisers could have provided the escort desired by Halsey and Turner and been a more potent force with an already established level of cohesion and inherent communication that only comes from operating together to take on the expected Japanese surface force.

The final choice, however, was a far cry from the powerful and cohesive tactical force necessary to take on the Japanese in November. On the 6th of November, Halsey described his force reorganization to Nimitz in another lengthy letter. COMSOPAC's final decision as he oriented to counter the coming push was to create only two major task forces in SOPAC. Rear Admiral Thomas Kincaid remained at the helm of Task Force 16, with the Enterprise. Lee and the two battleships stayed imbedded within the carrier task force, and Rear Admirals Tisdale and Wright were available as cruiser division commanders within the same carrier force. Rear Admiral Dan Callaghan now headed Task Force 64, the cruiser strike group for SOPAC in the Solomons. Norman

Scott was available for independent convoy operations but for surface engagements would combine with Callaghan and become second-in-command to his "more senior-ranking" classmate.[171]

THE IMPACT

The impact of Halsey's final choice and Callaghan's move to command was immediate and devastating. Any ability to establish command priorities and command climate was undermined. Prior to Cape Esperance, Scott commanded his formation of cruisers and destroyers for a period of weeks. During the period, Scott established a rigorous schedule of night drills and watch standing to physically prepare the crews of his ships for the greatest threat they would face, the Japanese at night in surface combat. Any progress fell by the way when Norman Scott moved his flag to Atlanta on the 26th of October in anticipation of Callaghan's arrival on the 30th.[172] Not one of the ships in his new formation mounted the critical SG radar. Any lessons learned from his experiences at Cape Esperance were negated by no longer having access to the equipment. Scott's first mission at the head of the new formation came on the 31st of October. Intelligence indicated that Japanese destroyers would attempt landings on the night of the 1st of November. Scott had 12 days of training with his new formation until his death on the 13th. Undoubtedly, he established his priorities, but limited time prevented a recreation of the priorities and climate he had developed prior to Cape Esperance.

Command climate between flag officers must have been less than cheery. All professional officers will take their orders, however disconcerting, and carry them out to

[171] Nimitz Papers. Box 11. p. 1156.
[172] Ibid. Box 11, p. 1105.

the best of their ability. Scott was caustic and not shy expressing his beliefs in his dealings with everyone. To lose the formation he had fought successfully only two weeks before must have been a disappointing event. Shifting his flag from a ship with which he was familiar and had used for an extended period of time must have caused confusion amongst his staff as well as irritate this battle-tested veteran. All but one of Scott's staff perished with him aboard Atlanta. The sole survivor recorded no comments on this point. Any picture of Scott quietly accepting this bitter pill with no caustic comment or frustration toward his successor is difficult to believe regardless of the proximity of the enemy.

The insertion of Callaghan also resulted in absolutely no guidance to the formation for which he was responsible. Unlike Scott, Callaghan held no presail conferences with his commanders prior to departing for Guadalcanal. He issued no written guidance to his unit before it encountered the enemy. Callaghan's staff of 4-5 officers came with him from Ghormley's SOPAC staff. Almost all were communications officer of some kind. Not one was qualified for the critical job of operations officer. Consequently, Commander Rae Arison, San Francisco's navigator also doubled as Callaghan's operations officer.[173] Given his own background and experience and that of his staff, it is no surprise that Callaghan never published written guidance to his force. Yet, that guidance was essential if the formation was to succeed.

Most importantly, Callaghan's assumption of command undermined the most important quality for any organization expected to succeed in combat: Cohesion. To use the sports analogy, no professional football coach would ever change his key players two weeks before the Super Bowl. The leaders that brought success through the regular

[173] Hammel. p. 183.

season and got the team to the final had to be the same ones that would achieve victory. Yet, Callaghan as commander meant no cohesion for the American surface-ship forces that fought on the 13th. It was unrealistic to expect this commander, already disadvantaged by limited command experience and operational shortcomings in his career, to forge his formation into combat effectiveness. With less than a week of underway time between taking command and fighting the enemy, he had to learn the doctrine, understand the capabilities of his ships and people, digest the difficulties of sailing in the waters of the area, and develop the proficiency and trust in radar to be effective. Lee, Scott. Ainsworth, Merrill, and Burke all had months in command of their respective formations before their successes in combat. Callaghan did not have a chance.

Two weeks after Callaghan's death, the same lack of cohesion caused "Boscoe" Wright's defeat at the Battle of Tassafaronga. Rear Admiral Kincaid left SOPAC and Wright took command of Halsey's rebuilt cruiser strike force only 48 hours before fighting the Japanese off Guadalcanal. Even with Tisdale as his second-in-command, these two seasoned warrior lost four cruisers to Admiral Tanaka's destroyers with little to show in return. Wright, as commander, bore the brunt of the criticisms and suffered in the aftermath.[174] Nimitz acknowledged the impact of the short period of command, but both he and Halsey were dissatisfied with Wright and sent him back to Washington.[175]

As Admiral Halsey took command of the Southern Pacific Theater from Ghormley, he knew things had to change to defeat the Japanese and hold Guadalcanal.

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[174] Wayne P. Hughes, Captain, USN (Ret). Fleet Tactics, Theory, and Practice. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press. p. 126.

[175] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, 11 Dec 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 8. Ltr from Adm C.W. Nimitz to VAdm W.F. Halsey, 18 Dec 42, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1-2.

His choices of subordinate leaders were amongst the most important decisions he had. Callaghan, as a review of his career demonstrated, did not possess the metrics from which one would confidently predict success. If the only choice, Halsey's decision made sense. In the face of the other viable options, the superior did not choose the subordinate leader whose metrics seemed to offer the greatest chance of success. The reason for the choice of why Callaghan was in command to begin with is as important as the impact of Callaghan's abilities.

THE REASON

Seniority. The public historiography claims that Callaghan's seniority was the reason why Callaghan was in command. Morison established that Scott's junior date of rank required Callaghan to take command as OTC.[176] As the "bible," Morison's reason was faithfully recounted in the few narratives of the battle that appeared subsequently.[177] Yet, by this time in the war, seniority had been challenged and dismissed operationally and doctrinally as the overriding reason for command.

The history of the United States Navy is replete with periods where the service was mired by reliance upon seniority and not ability as the reason for being in charge.[178] Leaders of the Naval Service were not blind to this shortcoming.[179]To counter this, in July 1942, the Secretary of the Navy authorized officers of junior rank to be placed in

[176] Morison. p. 237.
[177] Kilpatrick, p. 80.
[178] Donald Chisholm. Waiting for Dead Man's Shoes, Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793-1941. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2001.
[179] William S. Sims, Admiral, USN. Promotion By Selection in the Navy, Boston, MA: 1935. Admiral Sims carried the torch for promotion by selection (i.e. competence not seniority) throughout the inter-war period.

command over more senior officers of the same rank.[180] CINCPAC published the Confidential Letter 32-CL-42 on 20 August 1942 and informed all commanders that "Commanders in Chief [had] authority to order in command of Task Forces or Task Groups any officer he desires, regardless of relative rank."[181] Twenty five copies of the confidential letter went to SOPAC. By September, SOPAC organization subordinated Rear Admiral Lee to Rear Admiral Murray in Task Force 17.[182] Lee was again subordinate to an officer of junior rank when Halsey took over in SOPAC as he worked for Rear Admiral Kincaid in Task Force 16.

The directive was not designed only to place aviation admirals in charge of surface officers within carrier task forces. In a letter to Nimitz, Halsey himself was fully intent on placing "Tip" Merrill in command of a formation in SOPAC because of his capabilities, despite Merrill not having even been selected for Rear Admiral at the time.[183] Halsey did the same in December when he placed Rear Admiral Mason in command of a task force that included, his senior, Rear Admiral Harry Hill without even consulting Nimitz. Discarding that Callaghan did not have to be in the Task Force at all, Halsey had the doctrinal authority to place the officer with stronger metrics in command over the more senior yet less qualified classmate. Seniority was not the reason for Callaghan's command.

Not Enough Admirals. Although not discussed in any histories concerning the period, Halsey stated frequently to Nimitz in his early days in SOPAC that he did not have enough flag officers. On the 6th of November he decried the terrible state of officers

[180] Nimitz ltr, 18 Dec 42. p. 2.
[181] Nimitz Papers. Box 15. Halsey Papers.
[182] Nimitz Papers. Box 11, p. 1042.
[183] Ltr from VAdm W.F. Halsey to Adm C.W. Nimitz, Dec 1942, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1.

within his command. He firmly stated to CINCPAC that he was not trying to "pad things" but he simply needed more experienced flag officers. Halsey wrote that his formation of the two primary task forces within SOPAC on the 6th of November included Callaghan at the head of the second because "no one else of flag rank was available to me."[184]

The thorough review of the flag officers within SOPAC at the time demonstrated that many other choices were available. Discounting Good, who protested his directed recovery in Australia vehemently, Halsey still had Lee, Wright, and Tisdale, as well as Scott, in his "stable." As Halsey built his force structure in early November he "owned" a total of only 32 warships in SOPAC.[185] With Kincaid and Turner, both of whom directed warships, as well as Callaghan, Halsey had six admirals. The ratio of one admiral for every five warships was rather enviable considering Navy Commanders as destroyer division commanders were expected to command four ships and Navy Captains as destroyer squadron commanders were expected to command eight.

Even if he didn't have enough flag officers to cover the two main task forces to his liking, Halsey still had the option of inserting other flag officers that he did have into the structure instead of Callaghan, there by avoiding the shortcomings of the former chief of staff and bolstering his formations based upon the inherent metrics of the commanders. He did not. The lack of flag officers was not an adequate reason why Callaghan was in command.

Lee and the Battleship Option. Halsey's own concern about the efficacy of battleships was a possible reason for not considering an initial task force under Lee or a Lee/Scott combination. There was substantial evidence that Halsey was very concerned

[184] Halsey ltr, 6 Nov 42. p. 4.
[185] Halsey. p. 125. 1 carrier, 2 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, and 21 destroyers

about the use of battleships in the waters around Guadalcanal. It was Halsey's intent, early on, to keep only cruisers and destroyers forward at Espiritu Santo and use these units to fight the Japanese in "Iron Bottom Sound."[186] Part of this was logistics and the limitations inherent in the relatively small base at Espiritu Santo. Greater was the fear of losing a battleship to a Japanese submarine. By this time, a second battle fleet was ready at Pearl Harbor, consisting of several of the old, yet very capable, battleships. Halsey wanted nothing to do with these ships.[187] He was equally hesitant with the new "fast" battleships that he did own. Halsey viewed them as a last resort. His organization of a surface strike group centered on Lee that COMSOPAC kept out the fight in October was indicative of this. Given the accuracy of the intelligence and the threat, the slow commitment of the battleships even before Callaghan's fight also supported this evaluation of Halsey's reticence to use of the big-gun ships. The employment of battleships by the destroyerman turned aviator only came when there were no other warships with which to counter the undisputable Japanese threat.

That being the case, the same argument for inserting Callaghan elsewhere in the restricted structure Halsey built still held. If Lee and the battleships were not an option for Halsey at the start, a more appropriate position for Callaghan would have been within Kincaid's formation at Noumea. One of the other "thoroughbreds" in the flag-officer "stable" could have moved to Espiritu before Callaghan was done with his turnover with Miles Browning and helped build a much more cohesive force with Scott minus the turbulence that Callaghan's insertion brought. Battleships and the concerns of

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[186] Halsey ltr, 31 Oct 42. p. 4.
[187] See David Fuquea's "Task Force One, The Wasted Assets of the United States Battleship Fleet" Journal of Military History

COMSOPAC for their integration in to the operational structure were not a reasonable justification for Callaghan's advancement.

Concerns for Scott. Despite his friendship with Scott, Halsey may have harbored unsurfaced concerns about the victor at Cape Esperance. Some critics downplayed the success of Scott's victory and countered that "with U.S. firepower potential and advantage of initiative, it [the Battle of Cape Esperance] should have been an annihilation."[188] There were acknowledged incidents in the battle of friendly fire damaging United States ships.[189] Additionally, Halsey made it clear that from his arrival that he wanted aggressive pursuit of the Japanese. His commanders were to "attack, repeat, attack."[190] During the Battle of Santa Cruz, despite proximity of the enemy, Scott saw no action. This in conjunction with the results of Cape Esperance and Halsey's own recent arrival in the theater may have caused the new COMSOPAC to see Scott as too defensive. Therefore, new blood in the form of Callaghan would have been the thing to spur Scott into more aggressive action.

This too, however, rang hollow. The independent employment of Scott multiple times after he moved to Atlanta showed he still had the full faith and confidence of Halsey. Halsey knew Scott to be of like mind with him, a fighter. Scott's death "was the greatest personal sorrow that beset me [Halsey] in the whole war."[191] Concerns of Halsey for Scott also could not justify Callaghan's placement in command.

THE ANSWER

[188] Hughes. p. 143.
[189] Ibid. p. 122. The destroyers Farenholt and Duncan both suffered 5" and 6" hits to their port sides, the side that never faced the enemy.
[190] Halsey. p. 121.
[191] Halsey. p. 127.

Callaghan's assumption of command stemmed instead from two closely related factors that received very limited documented discussion. The causes that brought disastrous results in combat on the 13th of November as well as the death of Callaghan and Scott met foundational tenets for military leaders. Officers must protect the welfare of their subordinates and the welfare of their service. Halsey's force structure development, with Callaghan commanding one of two task forces, met these tenets.

Give the Man a Chance. Dan Callaghan had been a rising star in the months before Halsey's arrival in SOPAC. The relief of Ghormley from an unsuccessful combat command meant the former COMSOPAC's career was over. He might hold a nominal billet for the war's duration, but any thoughts of more command or advancement ended with the decision of Nimitz and the arrival of Halsey. Being tied so closely to the coattails of his boss and implicated in correspondence by Halsey in the failings in SOPAC, Callaghan too was on the verge of career termination. He did not have undisputed operational success in his wartime command of San Francisco to balance the challenges he encountered in SOPAC. For Callaghan, a successful departure from SOPAC at this time had to "be on his shield not carrying it."[192]

Both Nimitz and Halsey understood concerns of this nature. In letters, the two discussed the impact of relief on careers of subordinates.[193] Both officers remained deeply involved in the assignment of senior officers throughout the war, and both were known as compassionate leaders that always wanted to make sure the subordinate had had adequate opportunity to succeed. Nimitz, especially, was known to wait to relieve

[192] A reference to the Greek approach to desperate battle that fame, honor, and victory came to those carried home dead on their shields not carrying it.
[193] Ltr from Adm C.W. Nimitz to Adm W.F. Halsey, 11 Jul 1943, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1-4.

any officer until "that chance had been given."[194] As Halsey established Miles Browning as the Chief of Staff, the welfare of the subordinate took priority. He did not even have to consider the human metrics. The only choice for Callaghan was a combat command. He had to stay in theater to get his chance. For an officer of Callaghan's connections, it was going to be a good chance.

Politics. The Navy chain of command was not ignorant of political influence. In an organization the size of the inter-war Navy, ascension depended upon association as well as aptitude. Halsey, Nimitz and even King all benefited from some contact in a higher ranking military or political position. Halsey had associated with FDR several times before he became COMSOPAC. He received personal correspondence from the President during his tenure in Noumea.[195] The belief existed that Callaghan's promotion was due to some extent from direct intervention by Roosevelt in the promotion process.[196] Roosevelt was known to have personally changed the results of promotion boards as well as which officer slated to command which ship.[197] Whether passed on overtly or not to Halsey while he deliberated over Callaghan's future does not reside in any correspondence. In discussions between Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox and Admiral Nimitz over Ghormley's relief, however, Knox did intimate that special concern had to be given to "a man in the higher grades who is approaching the apex of his career."[198]

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[194] John T. Mason, Dr. Recollections of the Late Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN As Given By Various Naval Officers. Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute. 1969. p. 20.
[195] Halsey Papers. Box 37.
[196] Murphy. p. 168.
[197] Mason. p. 26-28.
[198] Ltr from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox to Adm C.W. Nimitz, CINCPAC Command File, Operational Archives Branch, Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC. p. 1.

It is difficult to see any choice for Callaghan other than as the OTC for Halsey's cruiser strike force as placating the subtle yet all too real politic undercurrents. Subordination to a more junior officer, regardless of the Secretary of Navy's and CINCPAC's directives that called for assignment by ability not seniority, ran counter to giving Callaghan a chance as well as the political reality. Imbedding the former aide to Roosevelt in a carrier task force, much like what he had done in the early months of the war, while other junior admirals fought the anticipated surface fight also did not fit the undocumented yet implicit political precept. Halsey selected Dan Callaghan by virtue of his desire to see the well-connected subordinate receive a chance to succeed.

Halsey's answer was not without merit. Callaghan had a reputation as a good officer, albeit a staff officer. He had wartime command experience, albeit extremely limited and untested. He held seniority, albeit immaterial within Navy doctrine, within a task force construction for which Lee remained in the carrier task force and a last resort. For the wrong reasons, however, Halsey chose a commander whose metrics did not demonstrate a greater level of skill, experience, or proclivity towards success. Unfortunately, the decision was unbalanced when weighed against two other critical tenets of military leadership, first, evaluating the metrics of the subordinate leaders and choosing the one best qualified for the job and second, placing mission accomplishment (success in combat) above everything else. There was no guarantee that another choice would have fared better than Callaghan, but the right decision for the right reasons was the choice that should have been made.

EPILOGUE

As the Marines watched the smoking hulks in "Iron Bottom Sound" on the morning of the 13th of November, stories from the survivors that came ashore inevitably circulated. As the fighters in the Solomons, up and down the chain, learned of the results of the battle, the deaths of the admirals, and the bombardment that was inbound that night, they must have wondered what went wrong. Yet, the "smashing victory" from the next two-days of battle caused them to forget all these thoughts and bury them away, much as they would try to forget the horror of burying dead sailor's bodies that washed up on shore in the aftermath. The same pattern developed at higher headquarters and at home as press releases and visible public figures proclaimed the inaccurate results of the night fight and the virtue of the dead admiral that directed the fight, forgetting that characteristics of the admiral that fought the fight or the decision that placed him there to begin with. On the 15th of November, Guadalcanal was secure.

As we ponder the future security of the nation and the system of professional education within our armed forces, lessons such as these are worthy of public debate. With no intent to demean the valor of the admiral, the reasons for the actual result must be discerned. Delicate handling of heroic yet deadly actions only produces more dead. The decisions of commanders in battle and the decisions of senior commanders as to who will command in combat are paramount to success and must be objectively, not anecdotally or emotionally, studied and evaluated. All mistakes are not canceled out by valor.

ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECT
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