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COMMAND & CONTROL "LITTLE BEAVERS" STYLE
ARLEIGH BURKE IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS CAMPAIGN

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in
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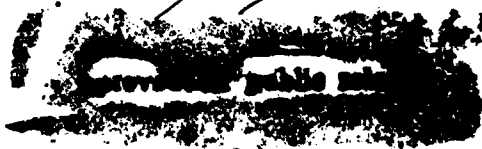Military Operations.

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World War II command and control systems were more rudimentary than those we have today. Additionally, operational naval commanders as late as 1943 based their doctrine on pre-war perceptions of war at sea. The result was a series of defeats in the waters around Guadalcanal and in the Slot. As commanders tried to reassess their tactics and operations, attempting to shift the tide of battle in the Solomon Islands, Commodore Arleigh A. Burke assumed his first wartime command. As a commander of destroyer divisions and squadrons, Burke developed and implemented an aggressive fighting doctrine that changed the operational employment of destroyers in battle. Stressing unity of command, surprise, and delegation of authority, Burke's doctrine lead to significant successes in surface engagements in the South
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World War II command and control systems were more rudimentary than those we have today. Additionally, operational naval commanders as late as 1943 based their doctrine on pre-war perceptions of war at sea. The result was a series of defeats in the waters around Guadalcanal and in the Slot. As commanders tried to reassess their tactics and operations, attempting to shift the tide of battle in the Solomon Islands, Commodore Arleigh A. Burke assumed his first wartime command. As a commander of destroyer divisions and squadrons, Burke developed and implemented an aggressive fighting doctrine that changed the operational employment of destroyers in battle. Stressing unity of command, surprise, and delegation of authority, Burke's doctrine lead to significant successes in surface engagments in the South Pacific. Arleigh Burke is not only a great historical sea story, but provides an example of successful command and control in combat situations while utilizing minimal technological systems.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> ". . . the very first thing you should do when you see
> a tradition is to ask what relevance it may have
> today, to query it, to ask why, to wonder whether the
> good reasons of two centuries ago still apply now."[1]

Fifty years ago Captain Arleigh A. Burke led the "Little
Beavers" of Destroyer Squadron Twenty-three (DESRON 23) through
some of the most successful naval surface engagements in the
South Pacific. As history and legend merge, he is considered by
many as the quintessential surface warfare officer. Is he
deserving of such praise? Was the success of DESRON 23 due to
exceptional leadership and combat skills of Commodore Burke or
was he merely the right man in the right place at the right
time?

There is a general consensus among historians that the
Battle of Midway on 4-6 June 1942 was a culminating point in the
Pacific war. Thus, the balance of the war was merely a matter
of gradually forcing the Japanese back toward their homeland
until they had suffered enough to capitulate. These opinions
and statements obfuscate the tenacity of the Japanese during
this fighting withdrawal as well as the ferocity and deadliness
of the three years of war yet to come. Although the United
States was winning the war, there were still operations and

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battles in which the Japanese demonstrated superior operational and tactical skill, resulting in heavy losses for the Americans.

The U.S. Navy initially suffered significant losses in surface actions[2] in the South Pacific, specifically during the early phases of the Solomon Islands Campaign. Upon assuming command of a destroyer division in this theater of operations, Commander Arleigh A. Burke instituted innovative fighting doctrine in an attempt to improve the utilization and combat success of the destroyers. In essence, he was more than just the commander who happened to be on the scene when the Japanese began to withdraw; Commodore Burke[3] was a key player in developing fighting doctrine that actively pushed the Japanese back.

Most of the narratives of DESRON 23's actions during Burke's tenure concentrate on the tactical aspects of the battles. Although the fighting doctrine that he developed and utilized focused primarily on the tactical employment of destroyers in a task force, Commodore Burke's success also rested heavily on his ability to control the ships under his command during the heat of battle. Since "the problem of commanding and controlling armed forces, and of instituting effective communications with and within them, is as old as war itself,"[4] Burke's ability to deal with this problem in a naval task force is as pertinent today as it was then.
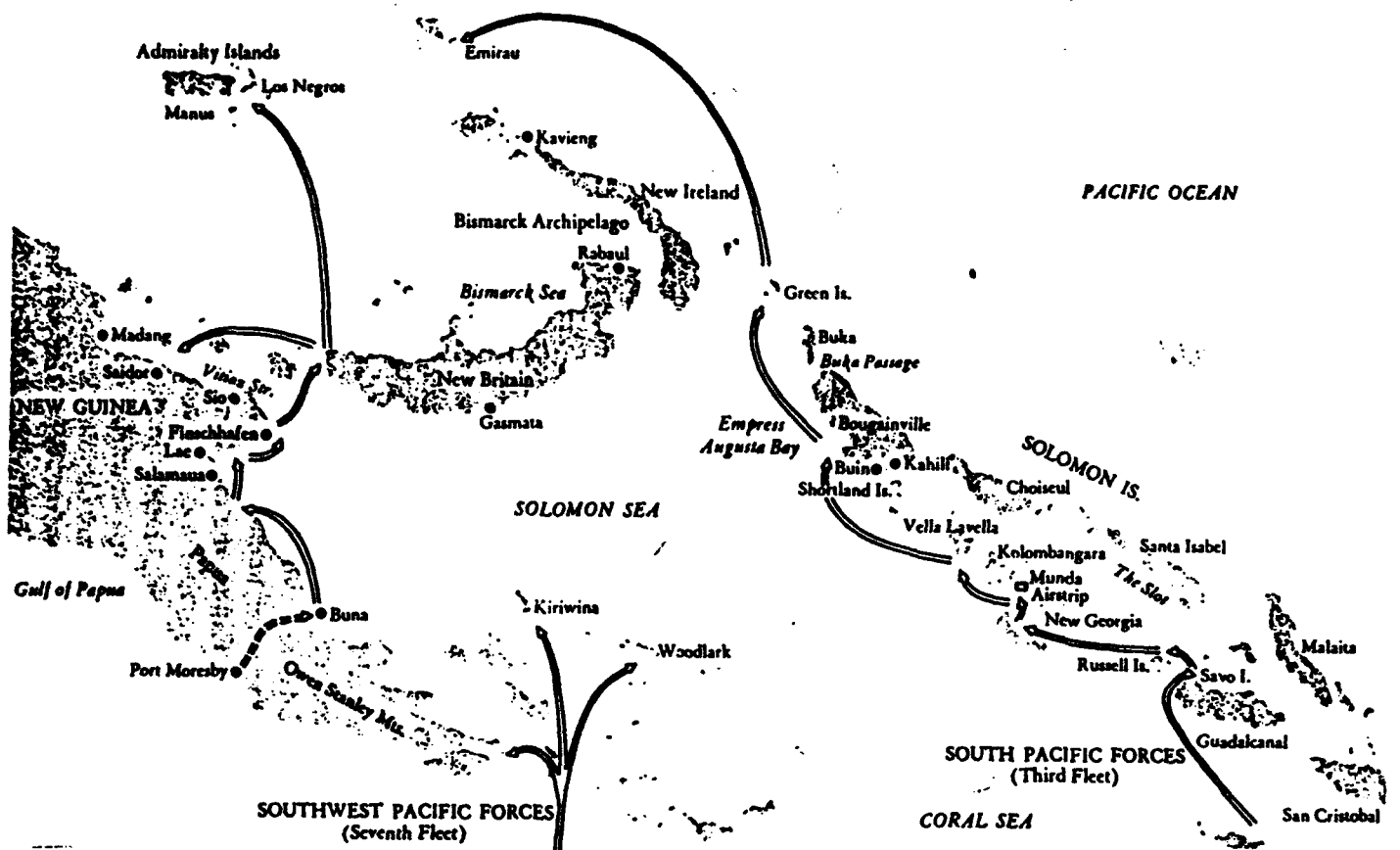
CHAPTER II

THE SOUTH PACIFIC THEATER 1941-1943

Part of the Japanese strategic concept in World War II was to maintain a defensive ring around their homeland as well as access to vital resources in Indonesia and Indochina. Key to this defensive ring was a series of forward bases on islands ringing the Pacific basin. These bases enabled the Japanese to use air power against approaching enemy fleets and aircraft. To consolidate their position throughout the Pacific following their successful attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese constructed forward operating bases on a large number of islands. Thier main base in the South Pacific area was at Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, which supported other island bases by both land based aircraft and surface ships. From their forward bases the Japanese were able to threaten the lines of communication between the United States and Australia as well as protect their own interests by increasing the buffer zone between themselves and the United States.

The U.S. efforts during the same period were aimed at protecting those lines of communication threatened by the Japanese and begin offensive operations to remove the enemy from island bases, pushing them back to Japan. Just as the Japanese needed forward bases to attain their strategic goals, the U.S. also needed forward bases to support its forces and protect its logistic lines. Land-based air power was already recognized as

FIGURE 1

AREA OF OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

Source: Potter, p. 80.

a predominant force and bases were required to support operational and strategic missions against the Japanese.

Early in the war the United States was at a distinct disadvantage with respect to its forces in terms of both numbers and level of training. Even so, these forces were able to successfully check the Japanese advance in the battles of Coral Sea and Midway. Following these successful operations, the effort to slowly push the Japanese from their gains had begun.

On 7 August 1942 the U.S. Marines landed on Tulagi and Guadalcanal. These operations met initial success before the Japanese realized the level of effort being exerted against them and took steps to counter the threat. Specifically, a long-term operation of resupplying and reinforcing Guadalcanal at night by Japanese surface vessels coming down "The Slot"[5] from Bougainville and Rabaul. As the Americans tried to interdict this resupply effort the Japanese won a series of spectacular night battles against the U.S. Navy, delivering a serious blow to both U.S. confidence and affecting the combat efforts on Guadalcanal.

Operationally, the Japanese were fighting a more effective war at sea than the Americans. "Off Guadalcanal the U.S. Navy were [sic] learning . . . that superior technology and an ever-improving logistical supply of weaponry were not enough against a skillful, trained and determined enemy."[6] The Americans trained for and anticipated a daylight battle between capital ships. Pre-war exercise operational plans were built around the tactic of a naval line of battle attempting to cross the enemy's "T" in a classic Tsushima-like battle.

The Japanese, on the other hand, knew their navy was technologically inferior to the United States' and planned their operations around this limitation. Specifically, they planned and executed many of their operations at night. "Night action was part of Japan's prewar recipe of equalizers designed to whittle down the U.S. fleet before a conclusive battle line

engagement."[7]   Tactically, the difference between the Japanese

and Americans in the early phases of the Solomons Campaign is

best outlined by Captain Hughes:

> The Japanese did well in the early battles
> (August 1942 to July 1943) despite their handicaps.
> This was because:
> --- The United States failed to grasp that the
>   killing weapon was the torpedo.
> ---- The United States had no tactics suitable
>   for night battle at close quarters.
> ---- The United States was slow to learn.
>   Because of the rapid turnover of tactical
>   leaders, the *pace* of the battles overwhelmed
>   the Americans.
> ---- Above all, the United States did not exploit
>   its potentially decisive radar advantage--
>   the edge in first detection and tracking
>   that surface-search radar gave and in
>   targeting that fire-control radar gave.
>   While not all ships had both advantages from
>   the start, the radar equipment there was
>   should have been better utilized.
>
> From the outset the Japanese tactics were usually to
> approach in short, multiple columns, get all ships
> into action at once, and maneuver in defense against
> torpedoes. Sometimes destroyers would be positioned
> ahead as pickets to avoid ambush. On detecting an
> enemy force, they would close, pivot, fire torpedoes,
> and turn away. Sometimes they would not fire their
> guns at all.
> The U.S. tactic was to use a long, single,
> tightly space column. The navy expected and achieved
> first detection and tried to position its column so
> that all guns would bear across the enemy's axis of
> approach, crossing his T. . . . if the enemy held to
> a steady column, the battle would be settled by guns
> before torpedoes entered the picture.[8]

To interdict the Japanese operations, the United States

conducted a campaign comprised of a series of operations in the

waters off Guadalcanal.   Typically, a line of four to five

cruisers would steam into the restricted waters of the Slot as

darkness fell, accompanied by a small destroyer force, half in the van and half to the rear. The first ship gaining radar contact on the enemy was to report it to the task force commander. Upon his order, the lead destroyers would fire a pattern of torpedoes at the enemy and then retire, to stand clear of the cruisers' target line. After the torpedoes made contact, surprising the enemy and creating confusion, the cruisers would open up with large caliber guns and destroy the remaining Japanese force. In theory, torpedoes were insufficient to sink enemy ships in and of themselves, requiring big guns to complete the job. This planning concept included many current operational tenets, including concentration of force (mass), objective (the enemy surface vessels), offensive, surprise, unity of command and simplicity. In practice, the plan was not sufficient to gain the objective. In several cases, the on-scene commander forfeited the advantage of surprise by delaying the initial attack until he has confirmed his intelligence. This problem evolved from a lack of confidence in the information that early radar sets were providing as opposed to unavailability of the intelligence data.

Additionally, the operational plan was developed around the concept of the supremacy of guns over torpedoes. Essentially, the destroyers were often delayed as the big gun cruisers moved closer to the enemy, even when they were in position to conduct effective torpedo attacks. This tactic caused the operational commander to relinquish the element of surprise provided by

early detection by radar. Similarly, the Americans experienced disastrous results with such a delay.

Another major flaw in the plan involved the establishment of a centralized command structure by the task force commander. In almost every case where the lead destroyers reported initial contact with the enemy, they were correct in their evaluation that it was the enemy. However, the destroyer squadron and division commanders did not have the authority to independently take action against the enemy. Requiring these intermediate commanders to first request and then await permission prior to engaging the enemy often left them either out of position when permission was eventually granted or, more serious, receiving permission after the Japanese had already counter-detected the U.S. force.

The results of the manner in which this interdiction operation was conducted were a series of lost battles including the loss of large numbers of ships and men. Many historians attribute these losses to timid or overcautious commanders; men who were unwilling to accept a risk to press the enemy. It can be argued that in this early phase of the war these commanders were protecting scarce combat resources unless they had overwhelming evidence that they would victorious. The argument as to whether the commanders at this period were too timid or whether they were wisely avoiding a decisive loss is moot. With a half-hearted approach to engaging the enemy in the Solomon Islands waters the results were evident; the U.S. was losing

large numbers of men and ships while simultaneously failing to
achieve the operational objective of interdicting the Japanese
resupply of Guadalcanal. Even with a change of area commander
in 1942 to the more aggressive Vice Admiral Halsey, the U.S.
Navy had difficulties in countering the Japanese effort:

> Even after the Americans had shifted to the offensive,
> their naval forces in the night Battle of Tassafaronga
> suffered another ignominious defeat, though this time
> it was the enemy who was taken unaware. A squadron of
> Japanese destroyers, recovering from surprise, fired
> a spread of torpedoes that sank an American heavy
> cruiser and severely damaged three others, and all but
> one of the enemy destroyers got away unscathed.'

CHAPTER III

COMMAND AND CONTROL ISSUES

With the technological innovations in the intervening fifty years, today's command and control systems are radically different from their World War II counterparts. Radar was in its infancy; most ships had radar repeaters in the Combat Information Center (CIC) but did not have one on the bridge. Ships had few voice radio circuits.[10] Message traffic was generally transmitted via high frequency (HF) and all coded messages were encrypted by hand with the aid of an encryption machine. These systems were much more susceptible to equipment failure and severe atmospheric degradation than modern solid-state, satellite-supported systems.

In addition, the intelligence collection and dissemination capabilities were significantly less capable than today's. The information collected through MAGIC, the breaking of the Japanese codes, was closely held at high levels to prevent disclosure of the source of our information. Thus, this vital intelligence was used for strategic and broad operational planning, but was denied to the level of destroyer squadron commander.

In the war against the Japanese, the Pacific area was divided into five major commands. These five commands and the senior commanders were, the North Pacific Area (Admiral Nimitz), the Central Pacific Area (Admiral Nimitz), the South Pacific

Area (Vice Admiral Ghormley, then Vice Admiral Halsey), the Southwest Pacific Area (General MacArthur), and the South-East Asia Command (Admiral Mountbatten, RN).[11] General MacArthur, Admiral Mountbatten and Admiral Nimitz were responsible for the developing strategic and operational plans within their areas of responsibility. In the Southwest Pacific Area, the commander worked for the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, Admiral Nimitz. The strategic plans developed by the area commanders were to support the grand strategy promulgated by the Combined Chiefs of Staff of the Allied Powers and, as such, were subject to review and approval of the Combined Chiefs.

Within their strategic plans, these commanders developed operational plans, assigning operational commanders to carry them out. These operational commanders utilized forces assigned to them to fully develop the plans and carry out the operations. These commanders were also joint and combined commanders, in that they controlled all the employment of all U.S. and Allied forces in their areas of responsibility. In reality, there were major hurdles to real jointness, and service parochialism became apparent in both the forces assigned to the area commanders and the primacy of the forces in the operational planning. Thus, in the South Pacific Area, Guadalcanal became primarily a U.S. Marine Corps operation and the interdiction of the Japanese became a U.S. Navy operation with minimal assistance from Army Air Forces. However, in the Southwest Pacific Area the U.S. Army was the primary land force with the Army Air Forces the

predominant air support.

In the South Pacific Area the first Commander in Chief was Vice Admiral Ghormely. It was under his command that the initial assaults on Guadalcanal and Tulagi were conducted as well as the initial attempts at interdicting the Japanese resupply efforts. Ghormely was given the majority of the blame for the problems in the South Pacific campaign, resulting in his relief by Halsey in October 1942. However, in the employment and operational control of the destroyer forces in the theater, there was little change due to the change of commanders.

In employing the tactics outlined in chapter two, the United States failed to maintain a unity of command. Ships were a scarce resource and were needed for many tasks in the area, including escort duties, transfer of personnel and supplies, and the interdiction operation. Therefore, on any given night, the ships assigned to patrol the Slot were rarely the same ships from the previous night.

Second, as previously discussed, task force commanders lost the element of surprise by maintaining a tight centralized control over forces, failing to use radar information in a timely manner, and believing in the primacy of large guns over torpedoes in close-quarter nighttime surface engagements. Ultimately, they hampered the combat effectiveness of their own forces with a cumbersome command and control structure.

CHAPTER IV

BURKE'S FIGHTING DOCTRINE

> If it will help kill Japs--it's important.
> If it will not help kill Japs--it's not important.
> Keep your ship trained for battle!
> Keep your material ready for battle!
> Keep your boss informed concerning your readiness for
> battle!
>
> DESRON 23 fighting doctrine[12]

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, then Commander Burke was stationed at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. Like many of his contemporaries, in similar jobs, he exerted considerable effort for reassignment to an operational billet; he wanted to get to the war. His chance finally came in early 1943 with orders to command Destroyer Division 43 (DESDIV 43) in the South Pacific area. While still in Washington, he had been studying the dismal after action reports of surface battles to this point.

> . . . I decided that the best thing I could do was acquire all action reports on preceding battles, study them, and see if I could figure out how the battles had been fought. I also wanted to find out whether or not anybody had made mistakes, so that I would not repeat those same errors.[13]

Commodore Burke identified several problems that he felt led to ineffective use of screening destroyers and ultimately contributed to the naval defeats. Some of these problems were tactical in nature. Others, of an operational nature, highlighted deficiencies in command and control. Prominent

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among these problems were the lack of unity of the command structure and the lack of standardized doctrine for destroyer employment.

Doctrine was easier for a Division Commander to solve than the unity of command problem. With ship assignments being made almost on a daily basis, and the shifting composition of the force patrolling the Slot, destroyers in the area had yet to train and fight in their administrative groupings of divisions and squadrons. Even if a commander had developed fighting doctrine, there were few opportunities to train and fight with it.

Commodore Burke lobbied hard to consolidate his division with little initial success. "I thought that sooner or later somebody was going to need a trained division, a division trained as a team that knew and trusted each other."[14] With much perseverance and badgering of Halsey's staff, he eventually assembled his entire division. Among the destroyer division and squadron commanders in the Pacific theater, Burke was probably the first one since the Pearl Harbor attack to see all the ships under his command in one place at one time.

In developing fighting doctrine, Commodore Burke stressed several concepts, foremost which were simplicity, surprise, and delegation of authority. First, doctrine had to be simple enough that a subordinate commander could react quickly and properly: "There is no time in battle to give orders. People must know what they do before they go into battle.

Consequently, the doctrine must be simple so that they will remember it under very adverse conditions."[15]

Burke's next belief was surprise. Although the element of surprise is a tactical consideration, Burke had to consider several factors in its implementation. These factors included how to control a number of ships, typically in the dark, how to find the enemy, and how to engage the enemy prior to counter-detection.

> The longer the time between the sighting and the attack, the greater the probability of the enemy exercising the initiative.
>
> If orders were to be given over TBS or other radio circuit or by visual it is probable that the enemy would know at once that there was a task force in his vicinity and he might be able to interpret the orders given. If the contact was a long range radar contact, directional visual signals were apt to be more secure than the TBS.
>
> In view of these possibilities we thought that the best possibility of obtaining surprise was by an immediate attack . . .[16]

Surprise was such a vital aspect of Burke's vision that he was willing to forego control systems available to him to ensure his chances of success. It takes an iron will in a commander to sail into battle with the means available to direct the actions of subordinates and purposely choose not to use it.

> The delegation of authority is always hard and under such circumstances as a battle when such delegation of authority may result in disastrous consequences if a subordinate commander makes an error, it required more than is usually meant by confidence. It required faith.

. . . the subordinates have neither the knowledge nor the information that is available in the flagship; yet . . . successful action results from the exercise of initiative by well-indoctrinated subordinates.

. . . the problem resolved itself into teaching the subordinate to react and act in situations similar to the way the Task Force commander would in the same situations.[17]

Burke believed in decentralized control in combat and requested the authority from his task force commander to take independent action at his discretion. He also expected his subordinate commanders to take independent action, within the guidelines of the tactical portion of his fighting doctrine, to engage the enemy without soliciting guidance. Additionally, Burke did not trust that he would always voice communications available, although he did use it to give orders during battle.

Communications channels are always crowded in action, we have found that out, if a destroyer commander adds his request to the crowded circuit he doesn't help the situation.
It would be difficult to get quick communication in battle and delays might be fatal. It is probably that the enemy is manning our circuits, just as we man theirs. . .[18]

Communication problems were not limited to overcrowded circuits. One of the constant problems listed in after action reports is the unreliability of radio circuits.[19] Thus, Burke relied on his subordinate commanders' initiative to engage the enemy independently, without orders, to ensure mission success.

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CHAPTER V

DOCTRINE IN PRACTICE

Developing doctrine was easy. Implementing doctrine, even for an operational commander, involves many more hurdles. As Burke was developing and refining his doctrine, he was usually a subordinate commander working for the operational commander. As such, not only did he have to indoctrinate and train his subordinate ship captains in the doctrine, he had to convince his immediate superior to allow him to use it in combat. It was not until the Battle of Cape St. George, in November 1943, that he was an independent operational commander able to fully demonstrate his complete doctrine.

As Commander, DESDIV 43, Burke operated under Rear Admiral Merrill, the task force commander. With the changing composition of destroyers under him, Burke was unable to fully implement the doctrine he had been developing. However, he was able to participate in some lower intensity confrontations with the enemy, learning some important lessons as well as getting over the personal hurdle of his first combat actions against the enemy.

Burke performed a post-mortem analysis of every action he or his ships participated in, recognizing those things that went right but concentrating on what went wrong. "The Captains of the 43rd Division and I started to study the battle, to determine what was wrong, what we did wrong and what could be

done better in the next battle."[20] Thus, began the process of reassessing and developing better doctrine. Burke was not only critical of his captains, the operational plan, and the utilization of forces, but of his own personal performance as well.[21]

Burke was blessed by a sympathetic commander in RADM Merrill. The Admiral saw the benefit in many of the points Burke was trying to implement in his doctrine and permitted Burke the time to train DESDIV 43 in it, and use it in actual combat. Much of this training and reassessment was conducted during the July and August, of 1943, as Burke's division conducted "Slot duty."

> We were all very pleased with the Slot duty and, because we knew it was going to be arduous, we tried to get as much information as we could before we took it over. The runs up the Slot had only been going on for a few weeks--that is the runs between New Georgia and Santa Isabel and Choiseul Islands.[22]

As Commander, Destroyers Slot (ComDesSlot, or CTG 31.2), Burke developed a tactical doctrine that he felt would lead to victory against an opposing Japanese surface group. Unfortunately, he was not afforded the opportunity to test his doctrine as he wished prior to turning over CTG 31.2 to Commodore Moosbrugger and proceeding to Espiritu to take command of Destroyer Squadron 12. However, within a week of relieving Burke, Commodore Moosbrugger won fame against the Japanese in the Battle of Vella Lavella, using Burke's doctrine as a guide. Commodore Burke knew that his doctrine worked, but was

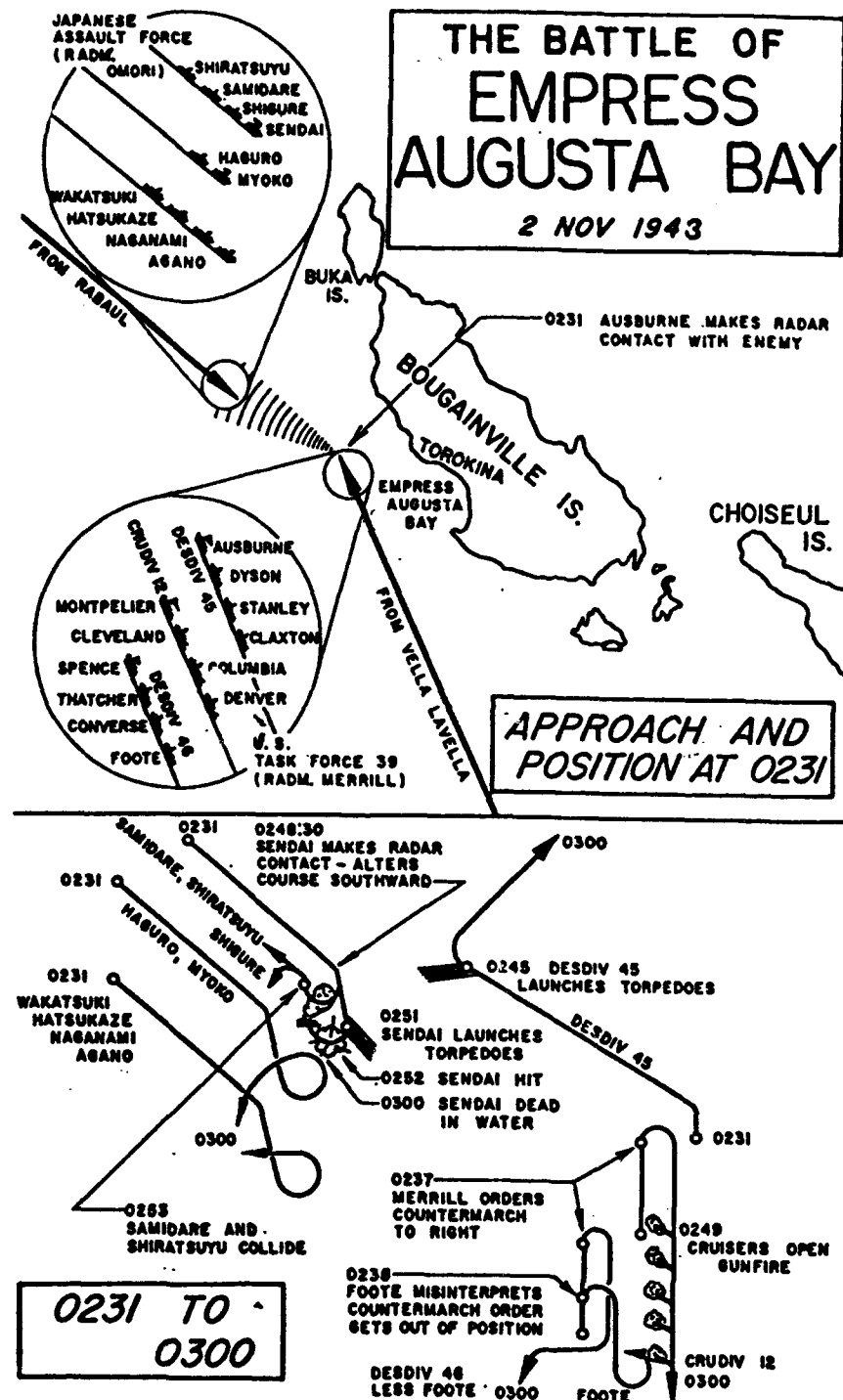disappointed in that he was not able to personally demonstrate it.[23]

Commodore Burke commanded DESRON 12 for about two months during which he engaged in some minor skirmishes with the Japanese, but did not participate in any major action. Finally, on October 23, 1843, he assumed command of DESRON 23 where he was to fully implement his fighting doctrine. As the leader of the "Little Beavers," Burke demonstrated the full scope of his leadership abilities.

Destroyer Squadron 23 was comprised of two divisions, DESDIV 45, which Burke concurrently wore the hat as division commander, and DESDIV 46, under the command of Commander Bernard Austin. In his first week as COMDESRON 23, Burke had all the ships of DESDIV 45 together, but DESDIV 46 was engaged in other assignments. Thus, he was able to indoctrinate half his subordinate commanders in his doctrine prior to their first engagement with the enemy. This is important in analyzing the problems that occurred in the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, in which the entire squadron participated, on November 2, 1943.[24]

In the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay, Task Force 39, under the command of RADM Merrill and comprised of DESRON 23 and Cruiser Division 12 (CRUDIV 12), engaged a Japanese assault force of cruisers and destroyers attempting to interdict the American landings on Bougainville Island. DESDIV 45, with Commodore Burke in his flagship, the USS CHARLES AUSBURNE, was in the van, CRUDIV 12, with RADM MERRILL in his flagship,
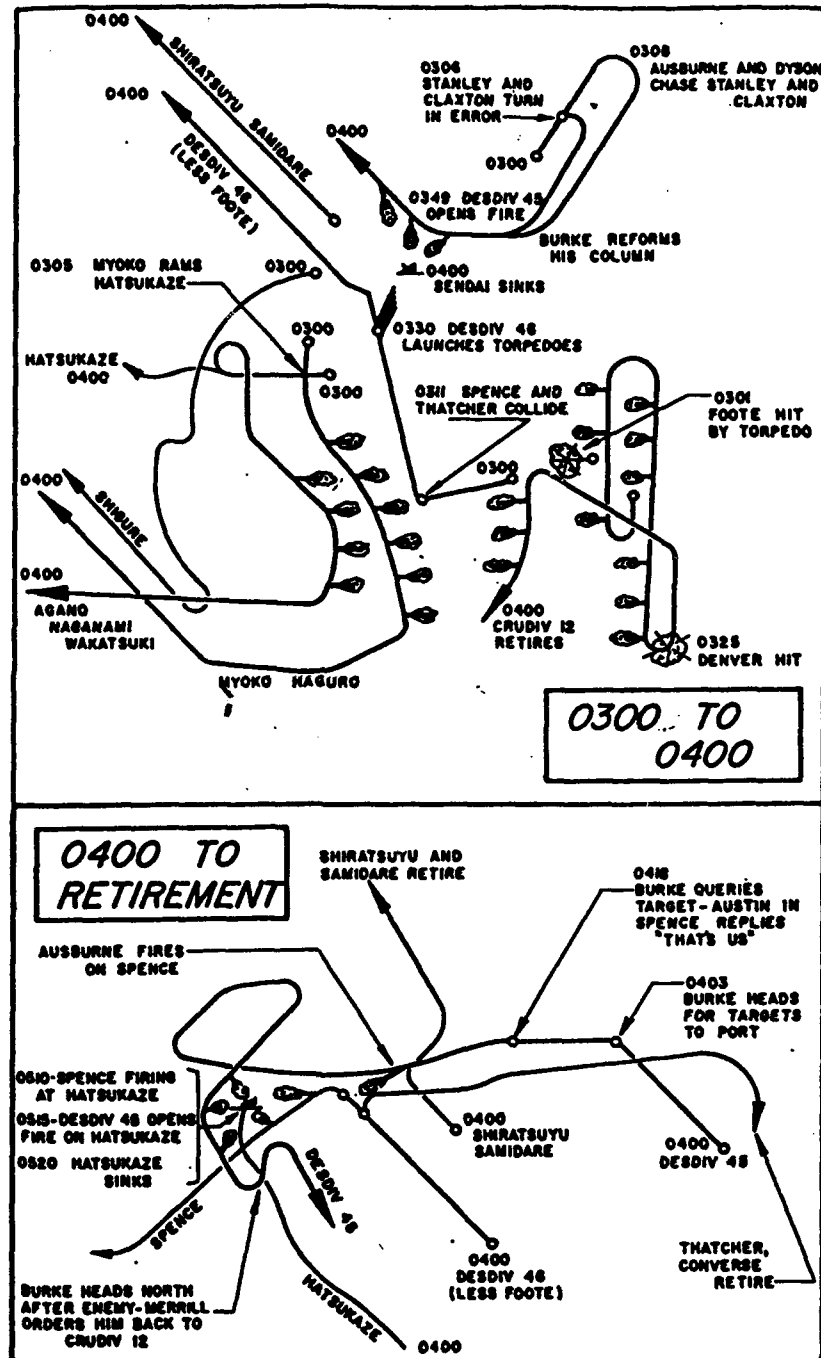
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FIGURE 2

THE BATTLE OF EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY
APPROACH TO 0300

Source: Jones, p. 222.

FIGURE 3

THE BATTLE OF EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY
0300 TO RETIREMENT

Source: Jones, p. 223.

USS MONTPELIER, was in the center, and DESDIV 46 brought up the rear. DESDIV 46 joined the task force just as it was departing for the combat zone and this was the first time that Commodore Burke had seen this half of his squadron. There was absolutely no time to even meet the captains of these ships, much less provide them his doctrine or train in it, prior to going into combat.

At the start of the battle, Burke's van destroyers first detected the enemy and he aggressively initiated a torpedo attack on a column of Japanese ships. This was in accordance with his doctrine, with the /closest division initiating the attack and the second division providing support. However, his supporting division, the newly arrived DESDIV 46, experienced some confusion. As a result of misread signals, two ships collided. Then, DESDIV 45 inadvertently opened fire on ships of DESDIV 46. Although the battle was a victory for the U.S. fleet, and some of the success is attributed to the offensive use of Burke's destroyers, there were still some major command and control hurdles to clear.
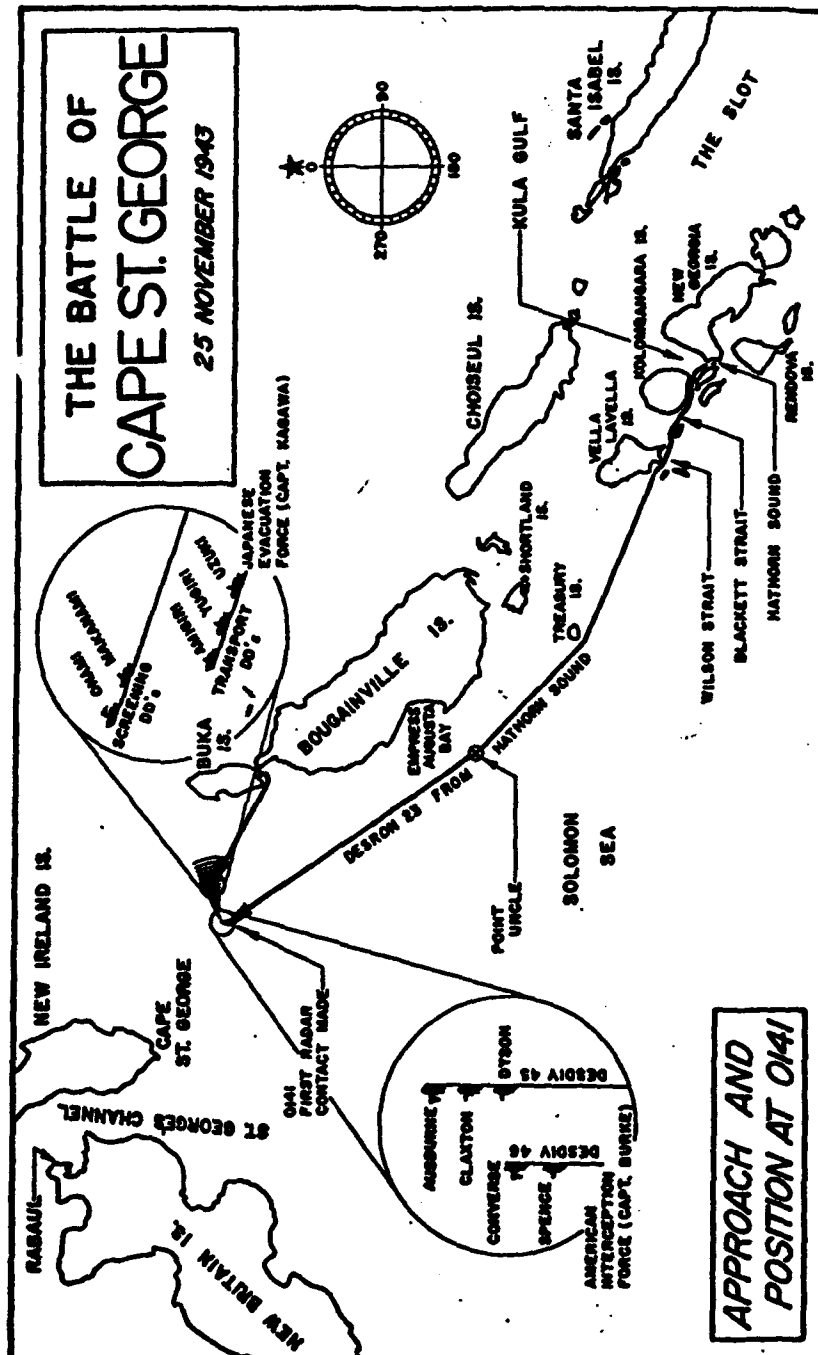
Arleigh Burke wanted to ensure that his forces never made the same mistake twice. He knew that if his destroyers were to prove themselves an effective combat force, they had to avoid the mistakes of Empress Augusta Bay. He had to teach his destroyer captains how to anticipate each other's actions as well as they could predict the enemy's. Perhaps no trait of Burke's was as impressive as his ability to knit his subordinate

commanders together as an effective fighting team. He relied heavily on face to face meetings with his commanders. "During the time that we were in prot . . . daily we held a destroyer conference. The captains came over with their key personnel every day. We gave them all the information that we had, they cracked loose with everything they had."[25] Burke also socialized with his commanders, continuing to discuss and refine the tactical doctrine in a more relaxed atmosphere. The result was a group of commanders that understood doctrine, understood the desires of their Commodore, understood each other, and trusted each other. Not since the time of Lord Nelson and his "Band of Brothers" had there been such a tight-knit group of Navy field commanders.

Everything Burke was trying to accomplish finally came together in the Battle of Cape St. George. In this night engagement during the night of November 24-25, 1943, DESRON 23 independently attacked a Japanese destroyer force, sinking three Japanese ships and damaging one with no losses or personnel casualties for the U.S. The effectiveness of both Burke's leadership and doctrine is apparent in that this battle occurred less than one month from when he assumed command of the squadron.

The battle resulted from the U.S. attempt to interdict the Japanese lines of communication supporting the Bougainville campaign. Nightly, the Japanese were ferrying personnel between their base at Rabaul and Buka Island, off the north coast of

FIGURE 4

THE BATTLE OF CAPE ST. GEORGE
APPROACH AND POSITIONS AT INITIAL RADAR CONTACT

Source: Jones, p. 252.

FIGURE 5

THE BATTLE OF CAPE ST. GEORGE
INITIAL RADAR CONTACT TO RETIREMENT

Source: Jones, p. 253.

Bougainville. These transfers were conducted using destroyer transports and naturally had to cross the gap between Cape St. George and Buka Island (figure 3). VADM Halsey had intelligence indicating a transfer of important personnel would occur during the evening of November 24-25, and directed DESRON 23 to stop it. As previously noted, the fact of the personnel transfer was forwarded to Commodore Burke, but he had to accept it at face value; the DESRON commander did not have the need to know the source or the level of accuracy of the information coming from the South Pacific area commander. In what is now a famous operational order, VADM Halsey directed:

> Thirty-one knot Burke get athwart the Buka-Rabaul evacuation line about 35 miles west of Buka. If no enemy contacts by 0300 Love (Zone -11), 25th, come south to refuel same place. If enemy contacted you know what to do. CTF 33 get this word to your B24's, Black Cats. Add a night fighter for Burke from 0330 to sunrise and give him day air cover.[26]

For a man who believed in decentralized control from above, these were perfect orders:

> Our orders were very elastic as Admiral Halsey's orders usually are. They were good. They gave us the leeway to do what was necessary and yet gave us enough information so that we knew everything that we had to know. We were not tied down to specific things except to attack.[27]

DESRON 23 completed refueling at Hathorn Sound, off Rendova Island, and proceeded northwest, passing south of Bougainville, and entering the Buka-Rabaul line shortly before 0130 on the 25th. "There was no information as to the exact strength of the

enemy in Rabaul nor the number or types of vessels which the Japs would probably use to evacuate their technical aviation personnel from Bougainville."[28] The squadron would rely on standard doctrine for the operation.

> There wasn't time to hold a conference. There was too much hurry. The captains had to work as much as they possibly could to get their ships out quickly. Therefore, I gave the plans to the squadron via TBS, requested comments. There were none. We proceeded.[29]

Radar contact was made with the enemy at 0141, less than fifteen minutes after the squadron had entered their patrol area.[30] The initial contact was on two destroyers in column, which later proved to be the escorts for transports with the technical personnel embarked. Burke and his force were unaware of the presence of the transports when they engaged the escorts. Turning the toward the escorts, in accordance with doctrine, DESDIV 45 automatically became the primary attack group with DESDIV 46 in support. At 0156, DESDIV 45 fired a salvo of torpedoes and turned right to avoid possible counter battery. The torpedo attacks took the Japanese by surprise and hit both escorting ships. One ship sank almost immediately and the second was seriously damaged.

As the ship's maneuvered, Burke's radar operators detected the second group of three ships. These three immediately turned away from the Americans in an attempt to reach the safety of Rabaul. As DESDIV 45 began a stern chase, DESDIV 46 proceeded to sink the crippled destroyer with gunfire before joining the

chase. The "Little Beavers" were able to sink one of the escaping transports and damage a second before being forced to break off the engagement around 0300. Except for an engineering casualty to one ship that occurred before the battle, DESRON 23 was unscathed.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The lessons that one gleans from Arleigh Burke's command of DESRON 23 seem almost common place. They stress clear concise doctrine, unity of command, training, reassessing one's own performance, and teamwork. Although these are not new lessons, they are worthy of repeating. However, there are other lessons that can also be learned from Burke's example.

Commodore Burke used standardized doctrine to maintain control in an era of less reliable communications. With well-developed and realistic doctrine, the operational commander can more comfortably use a decentralized command structure. With good doctrine, subordinate commanders have the flexibility to use their initiative to compensate for an ever-changing combat situation and the fog of war. However, there are pitfalls. If doctrine is too rigid, there is a risk of greater confusion if a commander deviates from it. This happened to DESDIV 46 in the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay and the results included ship collisions and blue on blue engagements. It is a tribute to Commodore Burke and his subordinate commanders that they were able to stay engaged with the enemy and be victorious at the same time.

But what operational lessons can carry forward to today's operations? Communications today are much more numerous, secure and reliable. Intelligence information is both greater and

often more accurate. Operational commanders have the ability to instantaneously communicate and direct subordinates from hundreds of miles away. Technology is different. Force structure is different. Joint and combined warfare concepts and interrelationships have also changed.

The lessons of Commodore Burke and DESRON 23 are more than just sea stories. Although his operational art and his command and control abilities are not new concepts, Arleigh Burke demonstrated that these elements can work. Often, what we say about operational concepts in the classroom and how we apply these concepts in training exercises is at odds with how we operate in real crisis and combat situations. The lessons Arleigh Burke teaches us can be applied as follows:

1. Use of Doctrine
2. Use of Decentralized Control
3. Operational Control with Limited
     Communications
4. Assessing the Enemy
5. Assessing your Allies

Some would think that Burke's lessons would include the ability to command and control forces if we lose the communication systems through which we exercise that control. Although this is a valid consideration, I believe that the threats we envision in the post-Cold War world do not possess the ability to interdict our command and control systems one hundred percent. However, if this were a threat, the use of standard doctrine is the key in ensuring we can continue sustained combat operations in the face of reduced or absent

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communications systems.

Use of standard doctrine has wider application, though, and
ties in with the issue of decentralized control. "Fight as you
train and train as you fight" is an old military maxim.
However, no matter how often we make this statement, it is
frequently violated. We train to standard doctrine. We train
to decentralized control. We train commanders to be independent
and take the initiative based on operation orders and the rules
of engagement. Yet, when the real world contingency occurs, we
usually end up with greater centralized control and typically
originating high in the chain of command. This commander didn't
participate in the training exercises and often makes changes in
procedure. There are times where circumstances require
flexibility in doctrine. There are just as many times that ad
hoc changes to doctrine are unnecessary and create confusion.
Arleigh Burke's operations in the South Pacific demonstrated
that decentralized operations can be successfully carried out
without the operational commander losing control of his forces.
He developed sound doctrine. He developed flexible doctrine.
He trained to doctrine and he fought according to doctrine. The
system can work if it is trained for and applied properly.

Finally, the historical study of a commander such as Burke
can address the twin issues of assessing enemy and allied
capabilities. Few countries in the world have militaries that
are as technologically advanced, well-equipped and well-trained
as the United States. There are navies today which operate at

the same level of command and control as the U.S. Navy did in World War II. There may not be many Arleigh Burkes commanding forces among our potential enemies, but an understanding and comparison of their technological limitations compared to our own can be vital in combat situations.

More important are the forces we may be fighting alongside as members of a coalition. It is sobering when one discovers allies in NATO who are operating at a World War II technological level.[31] The implications are enormous for an operational commander when he must decide between the political football of relegating such forces to a backwater area, providing advanced technology to an ally to fully incorporate them into operations (which may not be allowed by higher authority), or altering usage of U.S. command and control systems to accommodate the lowest common denominator. Understanding how a master of lower technology command and control, such as Burke, was able to utilize his command can help today's operational commander effective employ combined forces.

APPENDIX I

DESTROYER SQUADRON 23
Captain Arleigh A. Burke

DESTROYER DIVISION 45
Captain Arleigh A. Burke

USS CHARLES AUSBURNE	CDR Luther K. Reynolds
USS CLAXTON	CDR Herald F. Stout
USS DYSON	CDR Roy A. Gano
*USS STANLY	CDR Robert W. Canvenagh

DESTROYER DIVISION 46
Commander Bernard L. Austin

USS CONVERSE	CDR DeWitt C. E. Hamberger
USS SPENCE	CDR Henry J. Armstrong
*USS FOOTE	CDR Alston Ramsay
*USS THATCHER	CDR L. Ralph Lampman

*Not present at the Battle of Cape St. George

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used throughout the paper are a combination of those used during World War II and those in common use today. World War II abbreviations are taken from the Office of Naval History's Glossary of U.S. Naval Abbreviations, which was published specifically "for the benefit of naval personnel, officials, and scholars who may have occasion to consult correspondence, reports and historical narratives in whcih such abbreviations occur."

CDR	Commander (rank)
CIC	combat information center
ComDesSlot	Commander, Destroyers Slot
CTF	Commander, Task Force
CTG	Commander, Task Group
DESDIV	destroyer division
DESRON	destroyer squadron
HF	high frequency (radio)
RADM	rear admiral
RN	Royal Navy
TBL	radio transmitter (HF)
TBS	"Talk-Between-Ships"; VHF shipborne radio equipment of medium power, used for ships tactically maneuvering
VADM	vice admiral
VHF	very high frequency (radio)

NOTES

1.   Woodward, p. 27.

2.   Surface actions are those that involve significant numbers of ships on both sides. Although aircraft may be employed by either side in these engagements, the preponderance of the action is conducted by surface vessels such as patrol boats, destroyers, cruisers and battleships.

3.   Several terms are used for Burke's title throughout this paper.   In 1943, when he assumed command of DESDIV 43, Burke held the rank of Commander. He was promoted to Captain shortly before he took command of DESRON 12 and later DESRON 23. Although the one star rank of Commodore was instituted for part of World War II, Commodore was still an honorary title for a non-flag rank officer in command of two or more ships. Thus, the title of Commodore is used throughout the paper and the rank titles of Commander and Captain are used appropriately depending on Burke's status at the time.

4.   Van Creveld, p. 1.

5.   The Slot was the body of water leading from Bougainville toward Guadalcanal. Specifically, it is the area bordered by the Vella Lavella-New Georgia to the south and Choiseul-Santa Isabel on the north, leading toward Savo Island and Guadalcanal.

6.   Winton, p. 76.

7.   Hughes, p. 117.

8.   Ibid, pp. 118-119.

9.   Potter, p. 63.

10.   The voice circuits in major use were TBS ("Talk-Between-Ships"; very high frequency (VHF) shipborne radio equipment of medium power, used for ships tactically maneuvering) and TBL (a high frequency (HF) radio circuit. Glossary of U.S. Naval Abbreviations, p. 74.

11.   Winton, pp. 4-5.

12.   Potter, pp. 90-91.

13.   Burke, film number 411, p. 2.

14.   Ibid., p. 3.

15.   Burke, film number 411-1, p. 13.

16. Burke, film number 411, p. 6.

17. Ibid., p. 11.

18. Ibid., p. 11.

19. Navy Department, <u>Battle Experience: Battle off Cape St.</u> <u>George New Ireland . . . .</u>, pp. 68-17, 68-19, 68-23, and 68-25.

20. Burke, film number 411, p. 6.

21. Following his very first action against the Japanese, Burke noted in his oral history, ". . . it did not sit very easily on my conscience that I had spoiled WALLER's chances of a good torpedo attack by trying to make sure that it was actually a ship [WALLER's radar contact]." Burke, film number 411, p. 5.

22. Burke, film number 411, p. 14.

23. Ibid., p. 19.

24. The Battle of Empress Augusta Bay is drawn from: Burke, film number 411-1, pp. 5-11; Jones, pp. 212-237; <u>Battle Experience:</u> <u>Naval Operations South . . . .</u>, pp. 66-1 to 66-76; Potter, pp. 93-98; and Roscoe, pp. 243-247.

25. Burke, film number 411-1, p. 14.

26. Navy Department, <u>Battle Experience: Battle off Cape St.</u> <u>George New Ireland . . . .</u>, pp. 68-2 to 68-3.

27. Burke, film number 411-1, p. 16.

28. Burke, film number 411-2, p. 2.

29. Ibid., p. 3.

30. This account of the battle is compiled from Burke, film number 411-2, Jones, Morison, Navy Dept, Potter and Roscoe.

31. During a 1993 deployment to the Mediterranean, U.S. ships operating with NATO's Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (SNFM) were cautioned about being too agile with communications requirements since the Greek ship operating with SNFM still changed radio frequencies by physically replacing crystals in their transmitters.

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