

Battle for Guadalcanal:

As Viewed from the Perspective of the Concentration of Forces

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1. Introduction

Guadalcanal was an important island for the Americans, since the securing of its airfield would be a necessary first step towards an assault on Rabaul. It was a vital island for the Japanese as well, since its possession, along with a successful assault of Port Moresby, would be necessary for the establishment of a superior strategic position in the Coral Sea area. Which side controlled the island therefore would have a significant impact on both operations and conduct of war in the future. Furthermore, Guadalcanal was roughly equidistant from the nearest major Japanese and American bases, which were Rabaul in the northwest and Espiritu Santo in the southeast, respectively, and which were each approximately 900 kilometers from Guadalcanal. The Japanese and American forces available for contesting the island were also roughly balanced, at least in Japan's estimate of July 1942, with Japan able to pit twelve battleships and six aircraft carriers (four fleet and two light carriers) against the Americans' nine battleships and three aircraft carriers.¹ The capture of Henderson Airfield (which had been called Lunga Airfield by the Japanese) by the U.S. 1st Marine Division at the start of the campaign, and the resulting establishment of a defensive perimeter encompassing the airfield, which admittedly was not completely secure, was, however, a strong point in favor of the Americans.

The ensuing Guadalcanal campaign thus essentially was a fight between the Americans, who tried to hold and expand their perimeter, and the Japanese, who made a series of attacks on the American perimeter. More specifically, the campaign was a contest between the Americans, who endeavored to expand their perimeter to an extent which would enable the prevention of effective Japanese artillery fire against Henderson Airfield, and the Japanese, who not only tried to stop the expansion of the American perimeter, but further wished to secure areas which would enable the Japanese to effectively suppress Henderson with artillery, and hoped to eventually recapture the airfield. In order to wage such a ground campaign, however, both the Japanese and Americans had to ship artillery, tanks, and other heavy weapons, along with ammunition and other supplies for them, by sea from their respective rearward bases. For Japan, this meant the execution of a so-called amphibious operation, and for both the Japanese and Americans, this meant a race to see which side could be the first to concentrate effective combat forces from their respective rearward strongholds. This race to concentrate combat forces via maritime LOCs resulted in naval and air battles for control of the sea and air. Viewed in this light, the race to concentrate combat forces by the Japanese and Americans was

¹ Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya, *Kido Butai* (Mobile Force) (Tokyo: Gakushu Kenkyusha, 2008), pp. 24-25.

the core of the Guadalcanal campaign.

While an extensive range of material has been published on the Guadalcanal campaign, including not only research, but also memoirs, recollections, and “lessons to be learned,” the following two works succinctly analyze the causes of the failure of Japan’s localized operation to recapture the island. First, the *Senshi Soshō Nantō Hōmen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*² analyzes the campaign primarily from an operational and tactical perspective, and points to the failure to gain air supremacy over the Solomon Islands, the piecemeal commitment of forces due to the Japanese Army’s overconfidence in the effectiveness of its own combat forces and underestimation of Allied combat strength, the failure to transport sufficient reinforcements, and the large divergence between the operational guidance of the Japanese Army and Navy. *Shippai no Honshitsu* (The True Nature of Failures)³, meanwhile, argues that the Japanese military could not understand the amphibious operations of the Americans, since the Japanese had themselves hardly studied the question of how to conduct a campaign involving the taking and defending of islands in the Pacific Ocean. In addition, the Japanese had no concept of joint operations. Furthermore, the higher commands of the Japanese had many fundamental problems, such as ignorance or insufficient consideration of logistics and intelligence, and a lack of scientific thought. However, if the essence of the Guadalcanal campaign was a race to build up one’s combat forces, as mentioned above, an analysis of what the Japanese Army and Navy thought about this problem, how they tried to ship heavy combat equipment to Guadalcanal, and how they fought on Guadalcanal may clarify more concrete issues which may better illuminate the essence of the problem.

The Japanese efforts to concentrate and build up their combat forces on Guadalcanal may be summarized as follows. The Japanese made three efforts to send heavy combat equipment on ships to Guadalcanal, which was by then under American control. The first (referred to in this paper as the First Convoy) came in late August, when the second echelon of the Ichiki Detachment was landed on the island. The second (referred to as the Second Convoy in this paper) was made in mid-October, to support the all-out offensive by the 2nd Division. The third and last (referred to as the Third Convoy in this paper) was carried out in mid-November, to support the full-scale attack by the 38th Division. In the meantime, the Americans reinforced their forces on Guadalcanal with the 7th Marine Regiment on September 18, the Army’s 164th Infantry Regiment on October 13, and the 8th Marine Regiment, the 182nd Infantry Regiment, and other forces in early November. An analysis of this race to send convoys of transports, among others, to concentrate and build up one’s forces on Guadalcanal, and of what the Japanese Army and Navy were thinking as they planned and carried out their effort to retake Guadalcanal, may provide a new perspective for thinking about the ground and naval campaigns to control Guadalcanal. Further, such analyses may provide some insight on issues related to the planning and preparing for an amphibious campaign today.

² Boei-cho Boei-kenshusho Senshishitsu (Office of War History, National Defense College, Defense Agency), “*Senshi Soshō Nantō Hōmen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*” (War History Series Naval Operations in the Southeast Area <2>”) (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1975), p. 572.

³ Ryoichi Tobe, Shinichi Kamata, Tomohide Murai, Yoshiya Teramoto, Takao Sugino, and Ikujiro Nonaka, *Shippai no Honshitsu* (The True Nature of Failure) (Tokyo: Chuko Bunko, 1991), pp. 135-138.

This paper shall analyze the issue of how the Japanese concentrated and built up their strength on Guadalcanal, using convoys of transports and within the framework of an amphibious campaign to recapture an island, and from the perspective of the concentration of one's forces. This paper shall further attempt to clarify, from the same perspective, why the Japanese could not retake the island. For that purpose, the three Japanese efforts to send heavy combat equipment to Guadalcanal using convoys of transports, along with the ground and naval battles that resulted, shall be described and analyzed.

2. The American Landing on Guadalcanal and the First Convoy

Immediately after the Americans landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, the Battle of Savo Island (or the First Battle of the Solomon Sea, as the Japanese called it) was fought at sea, and the advance echelon of the Ichiki Detachment attacked the perimeter of the American forces onshore. However, the second echelon of the Ichiki Detachment was still at sea at the time, as it was carried by slow transports. The purpose of the First Convoy was to land this second echelon on Guadalcanal. The First Convoy's efforts to reach Guadalcanal caused the Battle of the Eastern Solomons (named the Second Battle of the Solomon Sea by the Japanese), and consequently, the landing failed. The Kawaguchi Detachment, sent in thereafter, was carried by destroyers (this method was nicknamed "rat transport" by the Japanese) and landed on Guadalcanal, but their night attack against the American positions failed. This failure prompted the Imperial General Headquarters to make serious efforts to recapture Guadalcanal Island. This section discusses the circumstances of the failure of the First Convoy, the subsequent Battle of the Eastern Solomons, and the significance and implications of the attacks by the Ichiki and Kawaguchi Detachments.

(1) The Perimeter of the U.S. Marine Corps

On July 1, an advance party of a Japanese naval airfield construction unit landed on Guadalcanal. They were followed by the main body of the construction unit, which started construction work on the airfield on July 14. The airfield was scheduled to be completed on August 5. In the meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had issued a directive on July 2 to American forces, under the leadership of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander, to occupy the islands of Santa Cruz, Tulagi, and Guadalcanal around August 1. The South Pacific Area (SOPAC) forces, under the command of Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, were put in charge of the operation, and would be supported by the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur.

The forces under Ghormley's command consisted of, aside from the 1st Marine Division, 293 land-based aircraft, three aircraft carriers, one battleship, 14 cruisers, 31 destroyers, 23 transports, and others. Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, the commander of the landing force, was responsible for the capture of Guadalcanal and Tulagi, while the Guadalcanal invasion force was commanded by Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the 1st Marine Division. The land-based air forces under Ghormley's command and the aircraft carriers commanded by Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher provided support for the landing

forces. Turner voiced concern over the landing force, commenting that it “has not been trained for (amphibious) dual battles”⁴ (parentheses added by the author). Nonetheless, it proceeded to Guadalcanal after conducting landing exercises on Koro Island in the Fijis for four days from July 28. The Americans, however, were never confident about the organization they had established for this campaign.

Early in the morning of August 7, the Americans started landing on Guadalcanal, drove back the Japanese there (mainly the airfield construction unit) and occupied the airfield. In response, Imperial General Headquarters ordered the Army’s Ichiki Detachment (commanded by Colonel Kiyonao Ichiki, and consisting of one infantry battalion of the 28th Infantry Regiment, one regimental artillery company, two antitank gun companies, one engineering company, signals and medical units, and others, for a total strength of approximately 2,000) to stand by on Guam (the Detachment was put under 17th Army command on August 10).

On August 9, the 1st Marine Division, commanded by Vandegrift, and whose main strength lay in its two marine regiments, secured a narrow area around Lunga Point, including the airfield, as its perimeter. The American perimeter was established to envelop the plain around Lunga Point, with the airfield at the center and its defensive focus aimed towards the sea. On the shore, artillery was positioned and interweaving fields of fire planned, for the purpose of defeating any Japanese counterattack from the sea. Infantry were posted in foxholes along the American perimeter, and they were backed up by reserves. The 11th Artillery Regiment was positioned on the south side of the airfield, from where it could lay down fire on any point along the American perimeter.⁵ The Americans only held a narrow area, stretching only some 7 kilometers from east to west and some 4 kilometers from south to north, and the perimeter was nowhere near sufficient to ensure the security of the airfield, not only in terms of size but also strength. This was the most that could be held by two Marine infantry regiments, however, and Vandegrift needed reinforcements, weapons, ammunition, various materials, and supplies, among others, in order to establish a fully secure perimeter as quickly as possible.

At Japan’s Imperial General Headquarters, meanwhile, an Army-Navy Central Agreement was finally reached on August 12, under which the Army and the Navy decided for the first time to collaborate to recapture Guadalcanal. The Army’s operational emphasis was still on the 17th Army’s ongoing effort to capture Port Moresby, however, and the Army therefore intended to avoid affecting its Port Moresby campaign by accomplishing the objective of retaking Guadalcanal with a swift and impromptu offensive which would strike before the Americans could solidify their defensive positions.⁶

On the following day, August 13, Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake, the

⁴ George C. Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: The Story of Admiral Richmond K. Turner* (U.S. Government Printing Office), p. 284.

⁵ John Zimmerman, *The Guadalcanal Campaign* (Historical Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1949), pp. 55-57.

⁶ Shinichi Tanaka, “Tanaka Shinichi Chujo Kaisoroku Sonoyon (Senso Dainiki•Daiyonsho)” (Memoirs of Lieutenant General Shinichi Tanaka Volume 4 (The Second Stage of War/Chapter 4)), pp. 184-185, Archives of the Library of the National Institute for Defense Studies (hereafter NIDS Library).

commander of the 17th Army, and Vice Admiral Nishizo Tsukahara, commander-in-chief of the 11th Air Fleet and commanding officer of the Southeast Area Forces, concluded a Local Agreement, under which the Ichiki Detachment and the 5th Special Naval Landing Force of the Yokosuka Naval District (commanded by Captain Yoshimichi Yasuda, and with a strength of 616) would expeditiously recapture Henderson Airfield. The Ichiki Detachment was placed on slow transports, however, which made its timely insertion on Guadalcanal impossible. Under the circumstances, it was decided that a first echelon, consisting of 900 men, including Detachment headquarters and an infantry battalion, along with two infantry guns, would be loaded on six destroyers, which were capable of higher speeds than the transports, and sent quickly to Guadalcanal. They would be followed by a second echelon, consisting of the regimental artillery company, antitank companies and other supporting fire units, along with other supporting units, which would be sent by transports. The first and second echelons departed from Truk on August 16, escorted by the 2nd Destroyer Division, commanded by Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka. The first echelon landed near Taivu Point (some 30 kilometers east of Lunga Point) on the night of August 18, and the second echelon was to rendezvous at sea with the 5th Special Naval Landing Force, which sailed from Guam, after which the combined fleet of three transports would land their forces at Taivu Point on August 22. In order to support these forces, the Combined Fleet designated its 2nd Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, as the Vanguard Force, and its 3rd Fleet, consisting of the three aircraft carriers *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and *Ryujo*, which was commanded by Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, as the Mobile Force, and ordered them to sortie from the Inland Sea with the prime objective of destroying the American task forces and gaining “revenge for the Battle of Midway.”⁷ On the following August 17, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet, also sailed from Hashirajima for Truk. Almost all of the submarines of the 6th Fleet, under the command of Vice Admiral Teruhisa Komatsu, were directed toward the Southeast Area as an Advance Expeditionary Force.⁸ The destroyers with the first echelon of the Ichiki Detachment onboard reached a point offshore of Taivu Point at around 2100 on August 18 as scheduled, and the Detachment finished landing by 2300 without incident. The escorting 2nd Destroyer Division met no resistance.

On August 20, some 30 airplanes of the Marine Corps, transported by the escort carrier *Long Island*, flew into Henderson Airfield. Thereafter, the race was on between Japan and the United States to ferry aircraft to the South Pacific with escort carriers. Furthermore, the 90mm anti-aircraft guns of the 3rd Marine Defense Battalion were placed around Henderson, establishing an anti-aircraft defense net over it.⁹ Henceforth, the Japanese land-based air forces faced an increasingly difficult time over the airfield, remarking that “there is no way of charging into the airspace over the airfield because of the enemy’s relentless wall of anti-aircraft gunfire.” This later caused the Japanese forces to resort to nighttime naval bombardments of

⁷ Matome Ugaki, *Sensoroku Zenpen* (Records of War Weeds Part 1) (Nihon Shuppan Kyodo Kaisha, 1952), p. 154.

⁸ Boei-cho Boei-kenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Soshō Sensuikan Shi* (War History Series History of Submarines) (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1979), p. 180.

⁹ Zimmerman, *Guadalcanal*, p. 63.

the airfield.¹⁰ Vandegrift's beachhead had thus started to establish a powerful defensive fire network.

In the early hours of August 21, the first echelon of the Ichiki Detachment launched an attack from the east bank of the Tenaru River, charging into the east side of the American perimeter. This was the most strongly fortified spot of the American perimeter, and the Ichiki Detachment met with fierce gunfire. Vandegrift was well aware that his mission was to maintain his current troop strength and to hold the airfield, so he did not dare order the Marines to attack outside of the American perimeter while the Japanese attack was underway.

On August 22, the day after the failed assault by the first echelon of the Ichiki Detachment, the three aircraft carriers *Enterprise*, *Saratoga*, and *Wasp* were cruising to the south of Guadalcanal, on Ghormley's orders, and on August 17, the carrier *Hornet* had sailed from Hawaii. At the time, Japan's task forces had reached a point some 600 kilometers north of Guadalcanal, but the Japanese forces were on their guard against aircraft based on Henderson Airfield, which had just been put into operation by the Americans. The Japanese believed that the Midway campaign had ended in defeat because the Japanese had simultaneously pursued the two objectives of capturing Midway and dealing with the American task forces,¹¹ and hoped to avoid a repetition of the same mistake. For this reason, Nagumo divided his three aircraft carriers into two groups. *Ryujo* of the 2nd Carrier Division was to carry out air attacks on Guadalcanal, while *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* would concentrate on attacking the American aircraft carriers. *Ryujo* was sent much closer to Guadalcanal than the main naval forces, and was supposed to act as the "bait" which would lure the American carriers out.¹² Meanwhile, the second echelon of the Ichiki Detachment was scheduled to land on Guadalcanal on the night of August 24.

(2) Failure of the First Convoy and Commencement of Reinforcement and Supply Missions by Destroyers ("Rat Transports")

At the crack of dawn on August 24, the Mobile Force, led by aircraft carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, and the force led by the carrier *Ryujo* began advancing southward towards Guadalcanal. At that time, the two American aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* were some 300 kilometers east of Guadalcanal. The Americans sighted the *Ryujo* first, and this marked the beginning of the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. Nagumo launched his first and second strike forces starting at 1300. The first Japanese strike force was able to hit *Enterprise* with three 250 kilogram bombs. Meanwhile, the American strike force concentrated its attacks on the *Ryujo* and sank it. Rear Admiral Matome Ugaki, chief of staff of the Combined Fleet, urged the task force to take aggressive action, directing it to "pursue the enemy by breaking

¹⁰ Shigeru Fukudome, "Daihonei Kaigunbu Saiko Tosui Kaiso: Shutosite Solomon Sakusen no Shoki oyobi Chuki" (Recollection of the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy of the Imperial Headquarters: Mainly the Initial and Middle Periods of the Solomon Campaign), p. 12, NIDS Archives.

¹¹ Suikoukai, "Moto Kaigun Chujo Kusaka Ryunosuke Danwa Shuroku Sononi" Recorded Discourses of Former Navy Vice Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka), p. 24, NIDS Archives.

¹² Jiro Kimata, *Nihon Kubo Senshi* (War History of Japanese Aircraft Carriers) (Tokyo: Tosho Shuppansha, 1977), p. 319.

through his flight picket line,” but the task force did not heed Ugaki’s order, brushing it aside as a self-righteousness demand made by someone with no knowledge of the difficulties faced by the commanders at the scene of battle.¹³ Ugaki was furious at the seeming passivity of the task force, complaining that “we should have reaped an immeasurable harvest, but Japan lost the *Ryujo* instead, with no major damage inflicted on the enemy. How did this happen?”¹⁴

The convoy of transports continued to head southward on August 24, while the Mobile Force and Vanguard Force continued to engage the enemy, but was being shadowed by American flying boats since dawn. At around 1800, the commander of the 8th Fleet ordered the convoy to temporarily retire to the northwest. Shortly afterward, the Combined Fleet issued an order that “the landing of the Ichiki Detachment will be postponed to August 25, and on August 24, the Combined Fleet will commit all its strength to detect and destroy the enemy task forces and suppress his land-based air forces.”

At 0600 on August 25, the transports once again came within 300 kilometers of Guadalcanal. At that time, American B-17 heavy bombers and carrier bombers that had taken off from Guadalcanal attacked the convoy and its escorting destroyers. The light cruiser *Jintsu* caught fire, and *Kinryu Maru*, a transport, also suffered damage. Rear Admiral Tanaka, the commander of the 2nd Destroyer Division, determined that “the enemy planes clearly flew from Guadalcanal. If we continue advancing, our warships will inevitably be wiped out,” and decided to head back to the Shortland Islands to regroup. The Japanese Mobile and Vanguard Forces had begun moving northwards during the middle of the night of the previous day, in order to get out of the range of American bombers. Since the transports and the supporting fleets were operating independently, the transports found themselves isolated. Ugaki directed the task force to “remain on the battlefield as much as possible,”¹⁵ saying that if “the bulk (of the task force) retreated and left the battlefield to the 11th Air Fleet (11AF) and the 8th Fleet (8F), morale would be lost and an immediate response to the enemy’s actions would be impossible.”

11th Air Fleet headquarters, after consulting with 17th Army headquarters regarding further convoys of transports, cabled Combined Fleet headquarters and asked it to promptly resume troop transports with the cooperation of the carrier-based air forces.¹⁶ The Combined Fleet felt it would be extremely difficult to send troop reinforcements to Guadalcanal with convoys of transports unless the American land-based air forces on Guadalcanal were neutralized, and informed 11th Air Fleet that further transportation of troops would be carried out mainly with destroyers (this method was nicknamed “rat transports” by the Japanese) instead of transports. The Combined Fleet also took a very cautious stance regarding the use of its carrier aircraft to suppress Henderson Airfield on Guadalcanal, saying that “the matter

¹³ Suikoukai, “Kusaka Ryunosuke,” p. 37.

¹⁴ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, pp. 160-162.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁶ Rikusen-shi Kenkyu Fukyukai (Group for Study and Dissemination of History of Land Warfare), *Rikusen-shi Shu 22 Gadarukanaru To Sakusen* (Annals of Land Warfare 22 Guadalcanal Island Campaigns) (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1971), p. 64

is a dilemma which requires caution.”¹⁷ This was because the Combined Fleet, which was planning to take retaliatory action against the American carriers following the failure of the Midway campaign,¹⁸ wanted as much as possible to avoid any involvement in an operation to neutralize the airfield on Guadalcanal.

In the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, the Americans sank the aircraft carrier *Ryujo* and also succeeded in thwarting the objective of the First Convoy. *Enterprise*, which suffered major damage, headed to Hawaii for repairs, requiring service at the naval shipyards there for a month.

At 17th Army headquarters, meanwhile, the prevailing atmosphere was that “it is extremely regrettable that the Combined Fleet, with three aircraft carriers, is ‘incapable of providing support for a landing against the enemy that cannot fly large aircraft from the air base that has yet to be completed.’”¹⁹

(3) Limitations of the “Rat Transports” and Reinforcements by the U.S 7th Marine Regiment and other units

On August 19, the commander of the 17th Army ordered Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi, commander of the 35th Infantry Brigade, to take command of the Kawaguchi Detachment, (consisting of 35th Brigade headquarters, 124th Infantry Regiment, and other units), and to promptly secure Guadalcanal in cooperation with the Navy. Around this time, Imperial General Headquarters still estimated that only 2,000 to 3,000 American troops had landed on Guadalcanal, and thus was optimistic about the planned attack by the Kawaguchi Detachment.²⁰ The first “rat transport” by destroyers, which carried the 2nd Battalion of the Kawaguchi Detachment and the 2nd echelon of the Ichiki Detachment, was scheduled to land these forces on Guadalcanal on August 28, but American aircraft operating from Henderson Field interfered and the troops could not be landed as planned. As a result of this, some in the 17th Army, including the commander himself, began arguing for the outright abandonment of Guadalcanal,²¹ but these arguments faded away after the 11th Destroyer Squadron sortied from the Shortlands and safely delivered, during the night of August 29, the main body of the 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry Regiment, consisting of 450 men, to Taivu Point, followed by the landing of part of the 2nd echelon of the Ichiki Detachment, consisting of 300 men, along with four antitank guns, by the 24th Destroyer Squadron, also at Taivu.

On the night of August 31, the main body of the Kawaguchi Detachment (the 3rd Battalion of the 124th Infantry Regiment, with various other units attached) also successfully waded ashore at Tasimboko, near Taivu Point. Thereafter, the remaining units of the Detachment landed, on September 2, 4, 5, and 7. A total of 5,600 men, Army and Navy combined, had

¹⁷ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 164.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁹ Haruo Konuma, “Ga To ni okeru Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen” (Campaigns of the 17th Army on Guadalcanal Island), pp. 77-78, NIDS Archives.

²⁰ Tanaka, “Tanaka Shinichi Chujo Kaisoroku Sonoyon: Senso Dainiki•Daiyonsho” (Memoirs of Lieutenant General Shinichi Tanaka Volume 4: The Second Stage of War/Chapter 4),” p. 192, NIDS Archives.

²¹ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” p. 83.

been landed on Guadalcanal from August 31 to September 7, on a total of 50 round trips by destroyers (with some destroyers making multiple runs), along with two anti-aircraft guns, four field artillery, six mountain guns (which were the regimental artillery), four antitank guns, and approximately two weeks' rations for the men. The transport capacity per destroyer was 110 men, 0.3 guns (or barrels), and rations for two weeks. As is evident from this calculation, transports were absolutely necessary to carry artillery, armor, and their crews, which were the key elements of the firepower of any ground force. Meanwhile, some 1,000 men of the 2nd Battalion, commanded by Colonel Akinosuke Oka, commander of the 124th Infantry Regiment, had been trying to make their way to Guadalcanal on small ships and barges, and managed to reach a point near Malbobob (some 50 kilometers west of Lunga Point). Attacks by American aircraft and bad weather had whittled down the force enroute, however, and by the time it reached Malbobob, Oka had only one-third of his original force left under his command.

On September 6, Kawaguchi informed 17th Army headquarters of his plan for attack, which was as follows. "The Detachment will launch an attack at 1600 on September 12, with the axis of attack being from the jungles in the south to the airfield in the north, and all of the (enemy's) positions will be overrun by dawn of September 13. The Oka Force (the group that went to Guadalcanal aboard the small ships and barges) will attack from the coastal area in the direction of the west side of the airfield." Kawaguchi further requested that 17th Army ask the Combined Fleet to "refrain from providing supporting naval gunfire while the Detachment is attacking, and to annihilate any American forces trying to flee via the sea."²² 17th Army headquarters notified the Combined Fleet that the all-out attack would be made on September 12.

Combined Fleet headquarters decided to take advantage of this opportunity and drew up a plan to send two transports south as decoys, to lure the two American carriers *Hornet* and *Wasp* (*Saratoga* had been put out of commission for approximately three months after it was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I-26* in late August) to the north, where they would be attacked by three Japanese aircraft carriers.²³ Furthermore, the Combined Fleet decided to spread out most of its submarines to the southeast of San Cristobal Island in order to ambush the enemy's warships, particularly its aircraft carriers, while a number of its submarines would be deployed near the east exit of the Indispensable Straits to detect and attack enemy transports.²⁴

However, the attacks by the Kawaguchi Detachment were put off until September 13, and this compelled the Combined Fleet to cancel its operation which employed the transports as decoys. Kawaguchi finally launched his attack at 2000 on September 13, with the attacking force split into three groups: right, center, and left. The right and left wings of the attack were stopped by the barbed-wire entanglements in front of the American positions. The attacks by the Detachment's central wing was made by two battalions advancing abreast of each other, from the south side of Edson's Ridge (also called Bloody Ridge by the Americans, and "Centipede Heights" by the Japanese), the key point on the south side of the American

²² Rikusenshi Kenkyu Fukyukai, *Rikusenshi Shu* 22, p. 95.

²³ Kimata, *Nihon Kubo Senshi* (War History of Japanese Aircraft Carriers), p. 351.

²⁴ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen* <2>, p. 87.

perimeter which provided a commanding overview of the airfield. The Aoba Battalion (the 2nd Battalion of the 4th Infantry Regiment), which formed the second line of the Japanese attack, leapfrogged the Japanese forces in the forefront of the attack, and its attack carried it past Bloody Ridge to a point just short of the Marine divisional headquarters, to the north of the Heights, where it ran into a ferocious wall of defensive fire from the Americans, which forced the attack to be called off. A paratrooper battalion and raider battalion held the positions opposite from the central wing of the Japanese, and they had taken up their positions only on September 9 to shore up the weak sector on the south side of the perimeter.

Following the failure of the Kawaguchi Detachment's attacks, the 17th Army ordered Kawaguchi to occupy a position to the west of the mouth of the Matanikau River which was located as close as possible to the enemy airfield, which could serve as a base for future offensive operations, and to reconnoiter the enemy's movements and also obstruct the activities of the American air forces at Henderson as much as possible.

On September 15, the Japanese submarine *I-19* sank the American carrier *Wasp*, which was escorting transports carrying the 7th Marine Regiment and other forces. The attack left the Americans with the *Hornet* as the only operating aircraft carrier available for use in operations in the Pacific. In contrast, the Japanese had three carriers (*Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and *Zuiho*) in the seas near the Solomons. At this point, both Ghormley and MacArthur thought the Americans could no longer hold Guadalcanal.²⁵ However, the convoy carrying 4,262 marines of the 7th Marine Regiment, along with tanks, weapons, ammunition, rations, and other items arrived unscathed at Lunga Roads on September 18. In view of these reinforcements and the likelihood of future reinforcement by Army units, Vandegrift began considering a shift from a purely defensive posture to one which would permit more aggressive actions at every opportunity.²⁶ Thereafter, the 7th Marine Regiment was to play an important role.

The transport of the 7th Marine Regiment had been ordered by Ghormley, commander of the South Pacific forces, in response to an urgent request from Vandegrift. Ghormley ordered the American task force, led by the carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet*, to escort the convoy, even though he was aware of the dangers from Japanese warships and submarines.²⁷ After a Japanese scout plane found the American convoy during the morning of September 15, Admiral Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet, ordered the Advance Expeditionary Force to make contact and attack it. Vice Admiral Komatsu, commander of the Advance Expeditionary Force, duly concentrated his submarines at the south exit of the Indispensable Straits in order to ambush the convoy, but failed to make contact. American ships moving to and from Guadalcanal made it a rule to enter Ironbottom Sound only when aircraft based on Henderson could provide sufficient air cover, in other words, after sunrise, and to pull out after sunset, which meant they passed through the Straits during the night. In addition, when the convoy carrying the 7th Regiment passed through the Straits, the weather around the area was very bad, with repeated squalls, which limited the visibility of the Japanese submarines. Any

²⁵ E. B. Potter, translated by Nobuo Akiyama, *Kiru Jappusu* (Kill Japs) (Tokyo: Kojinsha, 1991), p. 262.

²⁶ Zimmerman, *Guadalcanal*, p. 95.

²⁷ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*," p. 125.

sighting of the American convoy by the Japanese subs therefore would have had to have been at close range, at nighttime and in poor weather, and these conditions caused the Japanese to miss an opportunity to attack the convoy.²⁸

On September 5, General Hajime Sugiyama, Chief of the Japanese Army General Staff, reported to the Emperor that “currently, Army operations in the South Pacific have no choice but to assume the defensive in Eastern New Guinea, and to aim the direction of our main operations, using the main strength of the Army, towards the Solomons, centering on Guadalcanal.”²⁹ This was a reaction to the defeat at Milne Bay and the intensifying of Allied counterattacks on the Nankai (or South Seas) Detachment, which was striving to take Port Moresby. The Army had decided to commit the 2nd Infantry Division, which had been scheduled to be committed to the Port Moresby operation, to the Guadalcanal campaign instead, and to speedily resolve the situation on Guadalcanal, which would free the Army from having to deal with a two-front campaign. Following the failure of the Kawaguchi Detachment’s assault, the Army Section of the Imperial General Headquarters, which still had been taking the American counteroffensive on Guadalcanal lightly, thus came to realize its importance for the first time, and hurriedly sent staff officers knowledgeable in naval, aviation, and shipping matters to 17th Army headquarters. The additional staff officers were led by Colonel Haruo Konuma, head of the research group of the Army Section, Imperial General Headquarters, and increased the number of 17th Army’s staff officers from just three to 12.³⁰

Before heading for Rabaul, Konuma was told by senior officers of the Imperial General Headquarters that it would be necessary to coordinate Japanese forces in order to enable Henderson Airfield to be recaptured by orthodox means. He was also asked by Captain Kameto Kuroshima, Senior Staff Officer of the Combined Fleet, that “since artillery attacks on the Lunga airfield are the prerequisites for the large-scale transport of Japanese forces and deterrence of the enemy’s reinforcements, the Army should carry out these (artillery) attacks by all means.”³¹ The fact that the Japanese forces held positions from which they could attack Henderson with artillery meant that the American positions were still insufficient, and Vandegrift had to attack and expand the perimeter to encompass those Japanese positions, in order to secure the airfield. As an interim measure, 17th Army wanted the Kawaguchi Detachment, which had lost the bulk of its strength, to secure an area which could be used as a springboard for the offensive by the 2nd Division, which was about to be committed, but the Kawaguchi Detachment had already been deprived of that capability. Moreover, 17th Army headquarters in Rabaul was not fully capable of determining which area was topographically suitable for such a springboard, in other words, which area was topographically suitable for bringing Henderson under artillery fire.

3. The Second Convoy and the Crucial Battle in the Guadalcanal Campaign

The failure of the Kawaguchi Detachment’s assault prompted the Japanese to seriously commit

²⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁹ Tanaka, “Tanaka Shinichi Chujo Kaisoroku Sonoyon,” p. 231, NIDS Archives.

³⁰ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” pp. 129-130.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

themselves to the campaign to recapture Guadalcanal. Ironically, the retreat of the Kawaguchi Detachment revealed that the highlands in the Matanikau River basin, through which it passed, would be the critical ground for the subsequent battles between the Japanese and Americans. The objective of the transport of forces by the Second Convoy was to transport the heavy fighting forces and equipment which would be needed by the Japanese to make a frontal set-piece attack on the American perimeter, using the Matanikau basin highlands as a springboard. This section describes the processes which led to the decisive ground battle between the Japanese and Americans for the control of Guadalcanal, in other words, the struggle for the Matanikau basin highlands, and the battle for control of the seas around Guadalcanal (the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands (called the Battle of the South Pacific by the Japanese)), and their implications.

(1) The Decision on the Second Convoy and Prerequisites for an Orthodox Attack by the 2nd Division

On September 26, Major Kazuo Etsugu, staff officer of the 17th Army, reported to 17th Army headquarters that “the Japanese forces have advanced to the riverbank of the Matanikau. There is an observation point on the mountain, and we can direct an artillery attack on the airfield.”³² On that day, a battalion of some 300 men of the 7th Marine Regiment crossed the Matanikau River, supported by coastal artillery and heavy weapons, and in coordination with this movement, American units aboard nine boats landed on the west side of Point Cruz, supported by destroyers. This effort was repulsed by the 124th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Oka’s command. This battle provided the Japanese forces with their first victory on Guadalcanal. The American forces had estimated that the Japanese forces were assembled somewhere between the Matanikau River and Kokumbona,³³ and sallied forth from their prepared positions in the perimeter to attack the assembled Japanese forces. The battle was an encounter battle for both sides, fought under fluid conditions, and this enabled the Japanese to achieve their first major victory on Guadalcanal. As a result of this action, the 17th Army clearly recognized that the banks of the Matanikau were a suitable site for locating artillery to shell Henderson, and were crucial areas because they could also be the staging areas from where the 2nd Division could launch its offensive.

At this point, 17th Army headquarters was planning the start of the all-out offensive for around October 20. If the transport of the 2nd Division to Guadalcanal was delayed, the Americans would be able to further strengthen their defenses. 17th Army headquarters therefore felt it would be necessary to make a concentrated effort no later than around October 11 to send the 2nd Division to Guadalcanal, and studied specific ways to accomplish that. Colonel Konuma, who happened to learn of the 17th Army’s report just then, sent Lieutenant Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, another 17th Army staff officer, to Truk the next day, September 27, in order to ask the Combined Fleet to organize a large convoy for the transport of the

³² Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” p. 152.

³³ Zimmerman, *Guadalcanal*, p. 96.

2nd Division.³⁴ In response to the request, the Combined Fleet decided to “send our main forces into action in the seas around the Solomons, to check and destroy the enemy naval and air forces, and at the same time likewise support the transport of the 2nd Division, while a powerful force will directly support the convoy.”³⁵ Combined Fleet headquarters planned to make the effort to transport the 2nd Division a success by bombarding Henderson Airfield with its fast battleships and neutralizing the American aircraft there, an undertaking which had been under study for some time, in addition to bombing Guadalcanal with land-based airplanes and shelling and suppressing Henderson with Army artillery. Since such an undertaking would require the Japanese to maintain a high degree of alertness against action by the American task forces, the Combined Fleet also deployed a supporting force for that purpose.³⁶

On September 28, meanwhile, the 17th Army drafted a plan for attack, estimating that the Americans had about 8,000 men on Guadalcanal (the actual strength was approximately 18,000), along with approximately 30 tanks, 150 artillery pieces, 60 planes, and 20 anti-aircraft guns. The plan of attack called first for the securing of a foothold on the east bank of the Matanikau River, which would serve as the springboard for the attack, to be followed by the shelling of Henderson by a strong portion of the artillery, in order to completely suppress the airfield. Thorough preparations for the attack would be made in conjunction with these efforts, after which the enemy positions, particularly the airfield and artillery emplacements, would be seized in a single stroke. Any remaining American forces on Guadalcanal were then to be wiped out.³⁷ The prerequisites for the 2nd Division’s offensive were the securing of a position on the east bank of the Matanikau River, which would be both the launching point for the attack and the site to locate artillery. This area therefore became the immediate focus of the ground battles on Guadalcanal.

On September 30, Admiral Nimitz inspected Guadalcanal. During his trip, Nimitz met Ghormley, who was worn down by fatigue and anxiety.³⁸ Ghormley had been making strenuous efforts to solve the Americans’ supply problems. On Guadalcanal, meanwhile, Nimitz noted that Vandegrift and his officers still had a strong resolve and firm belief in their ability to hold the perimeter.³⁹ Nimitz also gained firsthand knowledge about the seriousness of SOPAC’s logistical difficulties, and thereafter personally took an active role in addressing these logistical problems.

(2) The Battle on the West Bank of the Matanikau, a Turning Point in the Ground Combat

17th Army headquarters ordered Kawaguchi to “expeditiously capture a base for the offensive on the right bank of the Matanikau River and prepare for the shelling of the airfield by artillery, which shall commence from around October 8.” On September 30, Kawaguchi ordered the

³⁴ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” pp. 151-152.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

³⁶ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, p. 168.

³⁷ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” pp. 154-157.

³⁸ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 262.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 263.

124th Regiment to occupy the vital ground on the right bank of the Matanikau, and on October 3, Colonel Nagaoka, the regimental commander, succeeded in sending one infantry company to the east bank of the Matanikau, on the other side of a log bridge, which then occupied and established positions on the high ground on the east bank at the mouth of the river. Although the position was weak, this meant that the Kawaguchi Detachment had succeeded in preemptively occupying an important area that could influence the operational situation in the future.

On September 29, Lieutenant General Masao Maruyama, commander of the 2nd Division, reported to 17th Army headquarters in Rabaul. Colonel Konuma underscored the importance of the 17th Army's plan for the offensive on Guadalcanal, in particular the shelling of the airfield. However, Maruyama did not show his commitment to the execution of the assault plan, saying that "since it is a most difficult task, it cannot be helped if we could not do it."⁴⁰ Lieutenant General Hyakutake, commander of the 17th Army, ordered Maruyama to promptly proceed to Guadalcanal via "rat transport." According to the Navy's projection, the transport of troops and supplies would be completed via "rat transport" by around October 14, and the planned attacks by the 2nd Division could be launched by around October 20. On October 1, Major General Yumio Nasu, commander of the infantry group of the 2nd Division, landed on Kominbo (some 50 kilometers west of Lunga Point), and was followed by Maruyama, who landed at Tassafaronga (some 30 kilometers west of Lunga Point) on October 3, along with the 29th Infantry Regiment, the 2nd Company of the 21st Heavy Field Artillery Battalion (with four Type 96 150 mm. howitzers), and other units.

On October 4, Maruyama ordered Nasu that "the Nasu Force (4th Infantry Regiment and other units) should occupy the vital line along the right bank of the Matanikau River, deploy artillery, mountain gun, and heavy field artillery units on both banks of the Matanikau River, and begin shelling the Lunga airfield from October 8 (scheduled date) to suppress it." Nasu tried to advance his forces to the east bank of the Matanikau, but was counterattacked by the Americans, and the Japanese and Americans stood facing each other across the Matanikau. Furthermore, on the evening of October 8, American forces under Vandegrift's direct control began their own offensive against the west bank of the Matanikau. Five battalions selected from the 2nd, 5th, and 7th Marine Regiments, strongly supported by artillery, mortar fire, and aircraft, led the assault.⁴¹ Maruyama sent reinforcements to Nasu, but Nasu's forces retreated to the so-called "Hyakutake Plateau," some 4 kilometers west of the Matanikau River. Thus, the Americans completely occupied both the east and west banks of the Matanikau, making it difficult for the Japanese to bring Henderson under attack by artillery firing from the vicinity of the Matanikau.⁴² The 7th Marine Regiment, which had arrived on September 18 in order to reinforce the Americans on Guadalcanal, played a major part in the battle.

Since Lieutenant General Hyakutake was also responsible for the Eastern New Guinea front as 17th Army commander, he left Major General Shuichi Miyazaki, who had newly arrived as 17th Army Chief of Staff, along with several other staff officers, at the rearward

⁴⁰ Konuma, "Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen," p. 163.

⁴¹ Boei-cho Boei-kenshusho Senshishitsu, "*Senshi Sosho Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen <2>* (War History Series Army Operations in the South Pacific <2>)" (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1969), p. 69.

⁴² Rikusenshi Kenkyu Fukuyukai, *Rikusenshi Shu* 22, p. 141.

Army headquarters, located in Rabaul,⁴³ and personally proceeded to Guadalcanal. Hyakutake landed at Tassafaronga on Guadalcanal around 2000 on October 9, accompanied by Colonel Konuma and a number of other officers, and established the 17th Army's Battle Command Post. Before his departure, 17th Army felt that an offensive would be possible if, at the least, the west bank of the Matanikau was secured.⁴⁴ However, the retreat of the 2nd Division's forward units to the so-called "Hyakutake Plateau" west of the Matanikau, which was a development that Hyakutake learned about only upon landing on Guadalcanal, meant that the Japanese had lost both the springboard for the offensive as well as the optimum site for locating the artillery which was supposed to shell the airfield. The securing of the Matanikau River banks, at least the west bank, had been the primary focus of the 17th Army's guidance of operations. Its loss therefore came as a great shock to the command of the 17th Army, just when the planned transport of men and supplies by convoy was about to take place.⁴⁵ At the time, the strength of the 17th Army consisted of the Kawaguchi Detachment, Ichiki Detachment (approximately one infantry battalion), and five infantry battalions of the 2nd Division, while usable supporting weapons included two field and two mountain guns, four 150 mm. howitzers, and one mortar battalion, with a very limited amount of ammunition. As a result, calls for reinforcements by transports grew even stronger.

On October 4, the Combined Fleet issued an overall operational order with the immediate operational objectives being the neutralization of the airfield, rapid transport of men of the 17th Army, obstruction of enemy reinforcements, recapture of Guadalcanal, and action against the enemy fleet. In addition, the convoy was scheduled to land its troops at Tassafaronga during the night of October 14-15. Six high-speed transports (the *Sasago Maru*, *Sakito Maru*, *Sado Maru*, *Kyushu Maru*, *Atagoyama Maru*, and *Nankai Maru*) were selected for the convoy, fitted with additional anti-aircraft guns, and were to carry the main force of the 16th Infantry Regiment, the 230th Infantry Regiment (minus one battalion), one 100 mm. cannon company, one 150 mm. howitzer company, one anti-aircraft battalion, one independent tank company, some quartermaster personnel, the Maizuru Special Naval Landing Forces, ammunition, provisions, fodder, and other items.⁴⁶ At the time, the Combined Fleet also intended in particular to send a support force in order to deal with any enemy fleets, and planned for a fast battleship force to shell Henderson during the night of October 13-14, and for a cruiser force to do the same during the night of October 14-15.

On October 8, the aircraft carrier *Zuiho* entered port at Truk, followed on October 9 by the 2nd Carrier Division, comprised of carriers *Junyo* and *Hiyo* and commanded by Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta. All three carriers were put under the command of the 3rd Fleet. With the five carriers *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho*, *Junyo*, and *Hiyo*, the Combined Fleet gained numerical superiority over the Americans, who had only the two carriers *Hornet* and *Enterprise*. At 1000 on October 11, this supporting force sortied from Truk. Admiral Yamamoto saw them off from

⁴³ Chikuro Yamamoto, *Hyakutake 17 Gun Haiboku no Shinso* (The Truth about the Defeat of Hyakutake's 17th Army) (Chikuro Yamamoto, 1988), p. 52.

⁴⁴ Konuma, "Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen," p. 196.

⁴⁵ Boei-cho, *Minami Taiheiyō Rikugun Sakusen <2>*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

the aft deck of the battleship *Yamato*. Ugaki boasted of this solid lineup, writing in his diary that “if we are less than successful with this lineup, what else could we plan? In other words, we would have to say there is no hope for the Combined Fleet.”⁴⁷ On the morning of October 12, the main units of the convoy sailed from Rabaul, escorted by the 2nd Destroyer Division.

Meanwhile, Hyakutake was considering revisions in his offensive plan, given the loss of the highlands on the west bank of the Matanikau, which he had learned about only upon landing on Guadalcanal, the decline in the 2nd Division’s combat strength, and the situation concerning the seaborne transport of supplies. He then received a report from Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Matsumoto, chief operations staff officer of the 2nd Division, that “since the density of the forests of the mountain terrain is not so great, a flanking operation appears possible.” Following a check of the terrain by Colonel Konuma, Hyakutake decided on October 12 to adopt a “surprise flanking assault using an unsuspected route” instead of the planned “systematic frontal assault.”⁴⁸ In other words, he hoped to cover the loss of the highlands on the west bank of the Matanikau, and the difference in combat strength between the Japanese and Americans, with a flanking attack.⁴⁹ On the preceding day, October 11, he received a report from Colonel Tomojiro Akamatsu, commander of the 4th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment, that “it is possible to shell the airfield by firing the Type 96 150 mm. howitzers at maximum range.” Hyakutake accordingly ordered the shelling of Henderson to start on the evening of October 13, in order to facilitate the landing of the troops by the convoy of fast transports during the night of October 14-15.⁵⁰

(3) The Reinforcement by the U.S. Army 164th Regiment and Failure of the Second Convoy

Since the Americans anticipated a new offensive by the Japanese, a convoy of transports carrying some 6,000 troops of the 164th Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division left Noumea, New Caledonia, for Lunga Roads on October 9. Ghormley ordered the carrier task force led by *Hornet* and the surface task force led by the battleship *Washington* to support the convoy. In particular, Ghormley assigned the cruiser force, commanded by Rear Admiral Norman Scott, the task of protecting “the convoy by taking offensive action” and actively searching for and attacking Japanese warships and landing craft.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the Japanese also required many tanks and heavy weapons for the 2nd Division’s offensive, and, in addition to the transport of troops by the fast convoy, also planned to send heavy weapons (four 150 mm. howitzers, two field guns, tractors, ammunition carriers, and other equipment) using the seaplane tenders *Nisshin* and *Chitose*, which were scheduled to land their cargo during the night of October 11-12. In order to support these transport efforts, the 6th Cruiser Division was ordered to shell Henderson Airfield on the night of October 11.

⁴⁷ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 193.

⁴⁸ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” p. 177.

⁴⁹ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁰ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” pp. 196-198.

⁵¹ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, p. 196.

Upon receiving a report that Japanese ships were sighted some 180 kilometers west of Savo Island, Scott quickly moved his fleet northwards, hoping to meet the Japanese fleet west of Savo Island. When the 6th Cruiser Division, assigned the task of shelling Guadalcanal, made its way to the south side of Savo Island, the two fleets encountered each other, triggering the Battle of Cape Esperance (named the Second Battle of Savo Island by the Japanese). In a battle that raged for about an hour, two Japanese ships were sunk, one was heavily damaged, and another lightly damaged, while one American ship was sunk, two heavily damaged, and one lightly damaged. As a result of the battle, the Japanese Navy realized that night battles against American ships equipped with radar could no longer be fought effectively, and also allowed the U.S. Army's 164th Regiment, which was to play a major role later in stopping the 2nd Division's offensive, to land on Lunga Point on October 13. Meanwhile, the Japanese seaplane tenders *Nisshin* and *Chitose* avoided any sea battles and, at around 2000 on October 11, arrived off Tassafaronga and began unloading their cargoes, completing the offloading and leaving the area by around 2300 the same day.

On October 13, the American 164th Regiment arrived on transports and reinforced the Americans on Guadalcanal as scheduled. The regiment was the first U.S. Army unit that landed on Guadalcanal,⁵² and brought the strength of the American forces there to some 23,000. Regarding this reinforcement, the Japanese land-based air forces in Rabaul received a report from Guadalcanal around 0300 on October 12 that the American fleet, including three battleships, three cruisers, eleven destroyers, and eleven transports had arrived off Lunga, and sent nineteen twin-engined bombers and thirty Zero fighters to Lunga Roads to attack the American ships. Since the attack was made after the American fleet had completed their anti-aircraft defense arrangements, only two Japanese bombers were able to return to Rabaul. They inflicted only limited damage upon the Americans, only hitting the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* with a torpedo (near the aft fire control center), and lightly damaging three transports. In addition, one destroyer was damaged by friendly fire.⁵³

Bolstered by the reinforcements, Vandegrift was able to secure the east bank of the Matanikau with two infantry battalions and one special weapons battalion.⁵⁴ As a result, the American perimeter was expanded and strengthened out to the highlands on the east bank of the Matanikau.

In order to support the Second Convoy, the land-based air forces attacked Guadalcanal on October 13. The Japanese Army also joined the attack, damaging many American planes on the ground. In addition, the battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna* of the 3rd Battleship Division pounded the Americans at night with a total of 920 rounds fired from their 14-inch guns. Henderson became an inferno, which set off countless American bombs and torpedoes and caused near-catastrophic damage. The Japanese attacks destroyed some 40 American planes, caused massive amounts of aviation gasoline to leak out and forced the Americans to temporarily restrict the use of the runway by B-17 bombers.

⁵² Koshin Matsuura, *Konmei no Chie* (The Wisdom of Turmoil) (Tokyo: Joho Center Publishing, 1984), p. 564.

⁵³ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen* <2>, p. 336.

⁵⁴ Boei-cho, *Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen* <2>, p. 90.

With air support provided by the land-based air forces and seaplanes of the Outer South Sea force, the convoy of fast transports doggedly headed for Guadalcanal. On October 14, the convoy underwent four separate attacks from American planes, but incurred little damage. The convoy followed its planned route and arrived offshore of Tassafaronga at around 2200, and started unloading their cargos and troops. In order to support the offloading operation, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, commander of the 8th Fleet, led several destroyers and other ships to Lunga Point and shelled Henderson Airfield. Combat air patrol was provided by seaplanes before dawn, followed by fighters of the 2nd Carrier Division, and then land-based fighters. The transport by the Second Convoy appeared to have succeeded, but American planes launched attacks in two waves from dawn on October 15. First, *Sasago Maru* was hit and burst into flames. *Nankai Maru* completed unloading by around 0700, and left the anchorage under the order of the escort force commander. In the third wave of air raids which took place around 1000, B-17s targeted the transports and destroyers protecting the anchorage, and hit the *Azumayama Maru* with a bomb. The fourth wave of aerial attacks at around 1100 targeted the offloading areas in addition to the Japanese ships. *Kyushu Maru* was hit by a bomb, caught fire, and deliberately beached. In the meantime, the *Sado Maru* succeeded in unloading one company each of 150 mm. howitzers, 100 mm. field guns, and tanks.

Finally at 1200, Rear Admiral Tamotsu Takama, Escort Forces Commander (EFC) and also commander of the 4th Destroyer Division, ordered the transports to evacuate at full speed to the sea north of Savo Island. After 1500, the transports attempted thrice to return to the anchorage, but were repeatedly attacked by American aircraft. Upon receiving a radio message from Major General Shinobu Ito, commander of the First Transport Group, ordering the convoy to “not try to enter port under the bright moonlight, and return to the Shortland Islands,” Takama ordered the convoy to turn around at around 1600 and head for the Shortlands. The Combined Fleet ordered the supporting force to “reverse course and head north” after the 5th Cruiser Division completed its mission of bombarding the airfield. According to Ugaki’s diary, the reasons for the order were given as “despite the lack of major successes, the forces should be satisfied with the achievement of the objective of providing support for the unloading from the transports, and refueling is also necessary,”⁵⁵ but protection by the support force truly came to be required from about that time.

The supplies which had been unloaded by the six transports were piled on the shore. With no trucks and cranes available, the unloaded cargo was left unattended. On the night of October 16, an American destroyer bombarded this cargo from offshore, destroying boxloads of ammunition, rations, and other items on the beach.⁵⁶

On October 15, Ghormley reported to Nimitz that “I am uncertain whether the Marines can hold up on Guadalcanal, because they are under strong pressure from the Japanese.”⁵⁷ At the time, the Americans on Guadalcanal were running extremely short of aviation fuel and bombs. Aircraft and submarines were being used to send small amounts of supplies

⁵⁵ Boei-cho, *Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen <2>*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Kimata, *Nihon Kubo*, p. 362.

⁵⁷ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, p. 253.

to Guadalcanal, but in order to boost this effort, the Americans organized a transport fleet consisting of two transports, one torpedo boat tender, one fleet tugboat, and two destroyers, which left Espiritu Santo. On October 15, however, one destroyer and the tugboat were sunk by Japanese air attacks, and one transport returned to Espiritu Santo after suffering a near miss, and the resupply mission could not be accomplished. On the following day, October 16, the seaplane tender *McFarland*, which was being used to transport supplies along with the destroyers, was heavily damaged by Japanese air attacks. Under the circumstances, Major General Millard Harmon, commanding general of U.S. Army Forces in the South Pacific Area, sent an urgent cable to the chief of the general staff, saying that “Guadalcanal Island cannot be held without a greater degree of support from the Navy.”⁵⁸

Around the same time, the Combined Fleet also continued with further efforts to ship men and supplies to Guadalcanal, employing three cruisers and fifteen destroyers commanded by Vice Admiral Mikawa of the 8th Fleet. The Japanese and Americans were thus engaged in a frantic race to send reinforcements and supplies to Guadalcanal. 17th Army headquarters was jubilant to hear that the convoy of transports had succeeded in landing about 80% of its load. However, a report by Major Etsugu, who made an on-the-scene survey of the offloading areas, revealed that only 10-20% of the ammunition and half of the rations had been unloaded. Since this situation raised concerns that the 2nd Division would not be able to adequately prepare for its offensive, 17th Army asked the Navy for assistance in sending a second convoy of transports with additional ammunition, rations, and other supplies, along with the 228th Infantry Regiment. But the Combined Fleet flatly refused, saying that “the Navy finds it difficult to carry out the transport again before the occupation of the airfield.” The Combined Fleet’s dissatisfaction with the order by Major General Ito, head of the First Transport Group, to the convoy to return to the Shortlands lay behind the refusal.⁵⁹ At this stage, the 2nd Division’s strength on Guadalcanal was approximately 20,000 men, with fifteen 150 mm. howitzers, three 100 mm. field guns, and ten light tanks, among others, although it had only a limited amount of ammunition for its artillery and tanks.

At around this time, Lieutenant General Hyakutake, 17th Army commander, had already ordered the 2nd Division to “prepare by October 20 for an assault by the main forces from the right bank of the ‘Lunga’ River on the enemy in the area of the airfield,” and the 2nd Division began redeploying from around noon on October 16. In addition, the Sumiyoshi Regiment (commanded by Major General Tadashi Sumiyoshi, commander of the Army artillery), which consisted of the 4th Infantry Regiment and the Army artillery, was to launch a diversionary attack on the east bank of the Matanikau.

Learning of the impending major offensive by the Japanese, Nimitz hastened repairs to the *Enterprise*, and ordered the carrier to sortie from Pearl Harbor, along with the battleship *South Dakota*, which had recently joined the Pacific Fleet, and nine destroyers. *Enterprise* and *South Dakota* were newly equipped with the latest 20 mm. cannon and 40 mm. anti-aircraft guns. The American Navy gave high priority to fleet air defense, and began to use its battleships to

⁵⁸ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen* <2>, p. 254.

⁵⁹ Boei-cho, *Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen* <2>, p. 88.

provide anti-aircraft defense for its aircraft carriers. The *South Dakota* was an early example of an American battleship used in this role, and apparently shot down 26 Japanese planes (32 planes claimed unofficially) in a single day during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, which occurred shortly.⁶⁰ In comparison, the Japanese battleship *Yamato*, flagship of the Combined Fleet, remained berthed at Truk, along with the battleship *Mutsu*, and both served as tankers for transports returning from the front lines.⁶¹ In other words, they were effectively idled.

Furthermore, Nimitz dismissed Ghormley and appointed Vice Admiral William F. Halsey as his replacement. Nimitz had concluded that Ghormley was incapable of resolving the various problems faced by the American forces.⁶² On October 23, soon after taking up his new post and with the offensive by the 2nd Division believed to be in the offing, Halsey invited Vandegrift to Noumea for a meeting, which was attended by other senior officers. Vandegrift told Halsey that quick reinforcements of air and ground forces were needed, as most of the Americans' aircraft had been destroyed by air raids and nighttime shelling, and the reinforced Japanese forces were about to outnumber the approximately 22,000 American troops on Guadalcanal, who were exhausted by the fighting and worn out by malaria, lack of food, and nighttime shelling. Halsey promised to support Vandegrift in every way possible.⁶³ On October 24, American President Franklin Roosevelt instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to send reinforcements to Guadalcanal.⁶⁴

The Combined Fleet was at a loss about how to destroy the American fleet. No good ideas emerged, with Ugaki noting in his diary that "we have recently been puzzling over ways to annihilate the enemy fleets, but the staff officers say there are no good ideas."⁶⁵ This was because the Japanese Navy was primarily thinking about an ambush operation, in which the Japanese would lie in wait for the attacking American fleet. This meant that the Americans could choose the time and place of any naval battle, as well as how it would be fought. Around this time, the 17th Army postponed the start of its offensive from October 22 to the 24th, since the 2nd Division was having an extremely difficult time advancing to its jump-off positions. Meanwhile, the Sumiyoshi Regiment, which was planning to mount a diversionary attack on Mount Austen and the east bank of the Matanikau for the benefit of the main Japanese forces, made no progress either, as its tank company was completely destroyed. On October 24, the 2nd Division finally launched its attack. On October 25, the Outer South Sea force started shelling the enemy artillery positions on Lunga Point to support the attack, but suspended the shelling in the evening after receiving a warning from the 17th Army that friendly units were in the vicinity. Upon confirming on October 26 that all of the prongs of the 2nd Division's assault had been stopped in front of the American positions, Hyakutake ordered the offensive to be halted at 0600 on October 26.

⁶⁰ Kimata, *Nihon Kubo*, p. 387.

⁶¹ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 204.

⁶² C. W. Nimitz and E. B. Potter, translated by Yuzuru Sanematsu and Kengo Tominaga, *Nimitz no Taiheiyo Kaisenshi* (Nimitz's History of Pacific War Naval Battles) (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1966), p. 129.

⁶³ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 270.

⁶⁴ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, p. 255.

⁶⁵ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 203.

(4) Naval Battles which were the Turning Point in the Contest for Sea Control (Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands))

Around October 21, the Combined Fleet had a total of four carriers ready for action, since the aircraft carrier *Hiyo* had been sent back to Truk for repairs. *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and *Zuiho* were assigned to the Mobile Force, and *Junyo* was assigned to the Vanguard Force. At this time, the Combined Fleet estimated the overall strength of the U.S. Navy at two to three carriers, two battleships, and six to eight cruisers⁶⁶ (in reality, the Americans had only two carriers in the South Pacific, which were the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*). At around this time, the Combined Fleet had lost track of the American carriers for several days and thought it possible that the Americans would concentrate their remaining carriers and attack the flank of the Japanese task forces from the direction of the Santa Cruz Islands, and issued warnings based on this estimate.⁶⁷ Following the postponement of the 2nd Division's offensive to October 24, however, the Japanese fleet moved toward the north and was cruising outside the range of American aircraft.

On October 24, meanwhile, Halsey ordered Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, who commanded *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, to advance to the area north of the Santa Cruz Islands. This put the American carriers in a position from which they could attack the left flank of the approaching Japanese fleet as it moved southward towards Guadalcanal.⁶⁸ In the evening of October 25, in response to an order from the Combined Fleet to advance southward, Nagumo instructed his task force to head south from its current position, which was 900 kilometers northeast of Guadalcanal.⁶⁹ The Japanese task force thus entered the trap Halsey had laid out, but this also happened to be the tactical disposition of fleets that the Combined Fleet had long hoped for in its operational planning. *Hornet* and *Enterprise* were then some 450 kilometers east of the Santa Cruz Islands. At 1200, an American scout plane found a portion of the Japanese fleet, with two carriers, and Kinkaid realized that the distance between the two carrier forces was closing by some 90 kilometers per hour. The positions of the Japanese and American fleets relative to each other were becoming similar to those of the Battle of Midway. At around 0000 on October 26, an American scout plane discovered the Japanese task force and reported its location, and then, before returning, dropped a bomb which fell between the two Japanese carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*. This surprised Nagumo, who ordered his task force to turn around and move northward.⁷⁰ At the same time, Halsey sent an urgent message to Kinkaid ordering him to "attack."⁷¹ *Enterprise* pursued the Japanese carriers toward the northwest.⁷² Then, around 0500, a Japanese scout plane found the American task force, consisting of one carrier and fifteen other ships. The Japanese and American fleets thus began their naval battle in the South Pacific, north of the Santa Cruz Islands, which was called

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 206.

⁶⁸ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 274.

⁶⁹ Suikoukai, "Kusaka Ryunosuke," p. 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 274.

⁷² Kimata, *Nihon Kubo*, p. 368.

the Battle of the South Pacific by the Japanese, and the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands by the Americans.

Some 20 minutes after Nagumo dispatched his first attack wave at around 0500, Kinkaid also launched an attack against the Japanese fleet. A portion of the Japanese and American aircraft formations actually sighted each other enroute. The Japanese drew first blood, attacking the *Hornet* and leaving it dead in the water. The second wave of Japanese aircraft hit the *Enterprise* with three bombs and severely damaged it, and also damaged the battleship *South Dakota* and light cruiser *San Juan*. On the other hand, American aircraft severely damaged *Zuiho* and directly hit *Shokaku* with four 1,000 pound bombs. The heavy damage incurred by the flagship *Shokaku* made Nagumo very cautious, and he subsequently ordered not only the main task force but also the 2nd Carrier Division to the west in order to distance themselves from the American carriers and then temporarily retreat to the northwest. This forced the third Japanese wave to attack at a very long range, which resulted in pilot fatigue, and also caused the *Enterprise* to leave the combat area.⁷³ Ugaki felt that “the order to both the main task force and 2nd Carrier Division to retreat to the northwest, arising from the bedazzlement caused by the momentary damage, (put us at a) distance of over 300 nautical miles from the enemy, and may cause us to let the enemy get away,” and further wrote that “it would be impossible to absolutely kill the enemy with such a spirit,” and the Combined Fleet issued a strict order to the Japanese task forces to attack the enemy.⁷⁴

The Combined Fleet pinned its hope on the task forces' efforts to search out and destroy any remaining enemy forces. However, Nagumo terminated the battle and brought his task force to the north for refueling at sea after receiving reports that “no American carrier airplanes have made an appearance since the afternoon of October 26. A search in all directions has been conducted since early in the morning of October 27 but has found no signs of the enemy.” Although Combined Fleet headquarters was not happy about Nagumo's decision,⁷⁵ it ultimately came to believe that the Japanese forces had won a major victory over the Americans, estimating that the Japanese task force sent three American carriers, one battleship, two cruisers, and one destroyer to the bottom.⁷⁶ In reality, only *Hornet* had been sunk, and *Enterprise* had been heavily damaged but managed to leave the combat area. The Combined Fleet made the mistake of overestimating the results of the battle. Rear Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka, chief of staff of the Japanese Mobile Force, recalled that “we won a great victory by fully learning from the bitter lessons of the defeat in the Battle of Midway. I feel completely satisfied for the first time in a long time.”⁷⁷ After the defeat in the Battle of Midway, Kusaka, who was then chief of staff of the 1st Air Fleet, had asked Admiral Yamamoto to “make a special consideration and keep Vice Admiral Nagumo and myself in our present posts, and to let us fight a decisive battle in a major arena,”⁷⁸ and Kusaka thought that he had managed to accomplish that objective

⁷³ Ibid., p. 382.

⁷⁴ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 211.

⁷⁵ Suikoukai, “Kusaka Ryunosuke,” p. 47.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

as the chief of staff of the 3rd Air Fleet. Their operational objective converged on avenging the defeat at Midway. The Combined Fleet also suffered heavy damage. Of the four aircraft carriers and a total of 173 planes (61 Type Zero fighters, 63 Type 99 carrier bombers, and 49 Type 97 carrier attack planes) that had been committed to the battle, 69 planes were lost, 23 more had ditched, and 2 carriers and 1 cruiser were moderately damaged.⁷⁹

Admiral Yamamoto reassigned all the remaining carrier planes to the *Junyo* at Truk in preparation for the forthcoming battles on Guadalcanal and to reconstitute Japan's carrier air forces, and sent the ships of the task forces, including the damaged carriers, back to Japan. Subsequently, Nagumo was replaced, and the Japanese carriers remained in Japan for maintenance and the training of aircrews and did not go into battle again until the Battle of the Philippine Sea in 1944. In other words, the Battle of the Santa Cruz forced the Japanese carrier task force to lose its function for the long period of approximately a year and a half, and forced the Combined Fleet to change from an offensive fleet into a defensive fleet. The immediate mission of the fleet was also revised, from the detection and destruction of enemy aircraft carriers to the blocking of American efforts to send reinforcements to Guadalcanal,⁸⁰ and the Combined Fleet never again displayed any major offensive intentions.

4. The Final Offensive Scheme and the Third Convoy

After removing the threat from the Japanese task force in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, the Americans steadily gained control of the seas and air around the Solomons. In contrast, the Japanese found it increasingly difficult even to carry out "rat transports." As a result, the disparity between the combat strengths of the Americans and Japanese increased ever more. Under such circumstances, the Third Convoy was conceived to bring heavy equipment and other items to Guadalcanal in a single concerted effort, in order to enable the Japanese to launch another all-out, frontal assault, this time with the 38th Division. In the process, the 1st and 2nd Naval Battles of Guadalcanal (collectively called the Third Battle of the Solomon Sea by the Japanese) occurred, and ground battles were also fought along the Matanikau River. This section discusses the significance of the Third Convoy and what impact this convoy had on the subsequent battles on Guadalcanal.

(1) The American Offensive and the Revival of the Effort to Transport by Convoy

On October 30, the Americans launched an attack on the highlands on the west bank of the Matanikau with the 5th Marine Regiment, two battalions of the 2nd Marine Regiment, and the 3rd Battalion of the 7th Marine Regiment. The attack was accompanied by tanks and armored cars and was supported by heavy artillery, aerial bombing, and naval gunfire. The 17th Army fought bravely, but lost its springboard for the next offensive on the west bank of the Matanikau, and retreated to the plateau on the west bank of Rove Creek (some 4 kilometers west of the

⁷⁹ Fuchida and Okumiya, *Kido Butai*, p. 115. American sources list the *Shokaku* as "heavily damaged" (for example, Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy 1941-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978), p. 241. The Japanese Navy rated the damage to *Shokaku* as "moderate" because it could still sail under its own power.

⁸⁰ Boei-cho, *Sensuikan Shi*, p. 204.

Matanikau). The Japanese 124th Infantry Regiment held on to its positions on Mount Austen, which was the only position east of the Matanikau that was held by the Japanese. Hyakutake, 17th Army commander, ordered Major General Takeo Ito, commander of the 38th Infantry Group, who arrived on Guadalcanal by destroyer on the night of November 5, to command the main force of the 228th Infantry Regiment, which was already under his control, along with the Sumiyoshi Regiment, and ordered him to secure the positions on Mount Austen, Hill 990 and Hill 903, which could serve as staging points for an offensive, as well as the current positions on the west bank of Rove Creek.

17th Army headquarters believed that the surprise flanking attack by the 2nd Division had been carried out from sheer necessity, and that a new attack needed to be made.⁸¹ As of November 4, the 17th Army was thinking about a new offensive which could be commenced around the end of December, and which would be made by combining the 17th Army's strongest forces and advancing from the direction of the Matanikau. At that point, the Japanese and Americans' logistical situations were as follows. In early November, the Japanese landed some 4,200 troops of the 38th Division, commanded by Lieutenant General Tadayoshi Sano, along with rations, ammunition, and other supplies on Guadalcanal, in four trips made by a total of 20 destroyers. In early November, the Americans also landed fresh troops of the 8th Marine Regiment, the 147th Regiment, artillery units, and other forces, using a total of over 13 transports, and were planning to send a contingent of troops from the 182nd Regiment of the Americal Division as reinforcements on November 12.

The Combined Fleet detected a convoy of transports carrying the 182nd Regiment on November 11, but could not come up with a feasible way to destroy it. Land-based air forces attacked the American convoy with two torpedo bomber squadrons and twenty-nine bombers and fighters. Along with the fact that the American ships had already headed further offshore by the time the Japanese planes attacked, American anti-aircraft fire caused considerable casualties among the Japanese, and little damage could be inflicted on the American convoy. After the Japanese attack ceased, the American convoy returned to the anchorage and resumed unloading.⁸² The Japanese scrambled dive bombers based on Buin, escorted by Zero fighters, each time they obtained information about American convoys approaching Lunga Roads, but these attacks produced almost no results, in part because bad weather often forced the planes to turn back.⁸³ By contrast, partly because the Americans had strengthened their defenses by making more effective use of PT boats, the Japanese found it increasingly difficult even to carry out "rat transports." In a bid to get out of this predicament, the Japanese Army and the Navy decided to send the bulk of their reinforcements for the next offensive in one large convoy, around mid-November, which, if successful, would solve their immediate logistical difficulties in one single blow. The 17th Army decided to bolster its artillery positions, in order to enable it to strengthen the shelling against the airfield. 17th Army also decided to first wipe

⁸¹ Konuma, "Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen," p. 231.

⁸² Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 224.

⁸³ Boei-cho, *Nanto Homen Kaigun Sakusen <2>*, p. 255.

out enemy forces west of the Matanikau River with its main forces. These two operations reflected the lessons learned from 17th Army's experience with the First Convoy, and were scheduled to coincide with the arrival of the 38th Division.⁸⁴ Combined Fleet C-in-C Admiral Yamamoto scheduled the unloading of the transports on Guadalcanal for November 13, with a total of 11 transports participating, and planned for two battleships to shell Henderson on the night of November 12. On November 9, the carrier *Junyo* of the Support Force and the Advance Force left Truk. At that time, the Combined Fleet believed that the American Navy had no operational aircraft carriers available.⁸⁵

In the meantime, the Americans on the west bank of the Matanikau abruptly retreated to the line of the Matanikau, apparently fearing that they might be enflanked by the Japanese 228th Regiment, which had landed on Guadalcanal on November 5. Lieutenant General Sano, commander of the 38th Division, grasped this situation and pursued the Americans, advancing his front to a creek approximately one kilometer west of the Matanikau. Sano decided to secure the area between Mount Austen and the positions on the west bank of the Matanikau, and for this purpose fortified the positions on Mount Austen and ordered his forces to defend their present positions at all cost. The abrupt retreat by the Americans dissipated the crisis on the west bank of the Matanikau, allowing the 17th Army to reoccupy the artillery positions and a springboard for the offensive. For the Americans, the west bank of the Matanikau had been a salient, which had left the forces there overly isolated. The recovery of this area created an opportunity for the Japanese forces to launch a frontal attack by combining their main forces. 17th Army then naturally focused its attention on making the effort to send the 38th Division and other reinforcements by one large convoy a success.

(2) The 1st and 2nd Naval Battles of Guadalcanal and Failure of the Third Convoy

By breaking the Japanese code, the Americans were aware that the Japanese were planning an offensive for mid-November.⁸⁶ Halsey firmly believed that "we must protect our supply line and we need to counterattack against the impending attack by the enemy. Otherwise, our position in the South Pacific would be undermined tremendously."⁸⁷ His belief was strongly shared by his subordinates. A group of 13 cruisers and destroyers under the command of Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan, which helped the convoy carrying the 182nd Regiment and others to land their troops on November 12, were assigned the task of defending Henderson Airfield from the approaching Japanese ships, which intended to shell the airfield. On November 11, Halsey ordered Kinkaid to immediately sortie the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* and the battleship *South Dakota*, both of which were still under repair but battleworthy, albeit barely. When these vessels set sail early in the morning of November 11, 85 repairmen were still aboard the *Enterprise*. While the Japanese required four months and two months to complete repairs to the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuiho*, respectively, the Americans needed only about 20 days to fix

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁸⁵ Fuchida and Okumiya, *Kido Butai*, p. 122.

⁸⁶ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 283.

⁸⁷ Translated by Moriharu Yamaga, *Kingu Gensui no Hokokusho* (Jokan) (Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King (Volume I)) (Tokyo: Kokusai Tokushinsha, 1947), p. 100.

Enterprise and send it back into battle.⁸⁸

The task of *Junyo*, the sole carrier assigned to the Third Convoy, was to remain in the rear of the convoy, and fly anti-submarine patrols and combat air patrols over the convoy for its protection. Rear Admiral Kakuta, commander of the 2nd Carrier Division, was of the view that “this time around, *Junyo* will dare to go much closer to Guadalcanal and fly combat air patrols over the battleships, so I would like the battleships to stay until the next morning, instead of pulling out immediately, and bombard (Henderson) as much as they want.” Combined Fleet headquarters did not agree with Kakuta’s opinion, however, because it felt that “we do not have to go that far, because the Army is pretty much confident that they can recapture the Lunga airfield this time around.”⁸⁹

On the night of November 12, the two Japanese battleships, *Hiei* and *Kirishima*, were about to charge into Lunga Roads from the north of Guadalcanal, escorted by the 10th Cruiser Division and the 4th Destroyer Division. At the same time they rounded Savo Island, the cruisers and destroyers led by Callaghan also sailed into the area, and the Japanese and American fleets ran into each other in the darkness. The 1st Naval Battle of Guadalcanal (the first half of the Third Battle of the Solomon Sea, as it was called by the Japanese) thus erupted. After a fierce melee which lasted 30 minutes, with the ships from both sides intermingled with each other, the battleship *Hiei* was hit by over 50 shells from Callaghan’s ships, and planes from the *Enterprise* relentlessly focused their attacks on *Hiei* the next day, ultimately sinking it. Furthermore, on the night of November 14, the battleship *Kirishima* moved southward toward Guadalcanal in another attempt to bombard Henderson, but was sunk by American battleships. In just three days, the Combined Fleet had lost two battleships.

The convoy of 11 transports carrying ammunition, rations, some 13,000 troops from the 38th Division, and Navy units left the Shortlands and headed southeast on November 12, escorted by 13 destroyers of the 2nd Destroyer Division, commanded by Rear Admiral Tanaka. They were initially scheduled to arrive offshore of Guadalcanal during the night of November 13, but were delayed by one day due to the 1st Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, due to which the convoy temporarily retreated to the north and returned to the Shortlands. At around 1500 on November 13, the Japanese convoy departed from the Shortlands again and sailed southward, but was detected by an American B-17 at a point some 36 kilometers north of New Georgia. Responding to a radio command from Halsey that the primary targets were the Japanese transports, bombers began attacking the convoy.⁹⁰ Planes aboard the *Enterprise* and Marine planes from Guadalcanal were launched one after another. The eleven Japanese transports were hit by five successive waves of bombers from early in the morning. With seven of the ships either sinking or crippled and falling behind, only four transports barely entered Lunga Roads and managed to beach themselves. Of the 10,000 Army troops, only 4,000 landed on Guadalcanal safely, along with 5 tons of supplies, 260 cases of ammunition, and 1,500 bags of rice.⁹¹ Commenting on the destroyed transports in his diary, Rear Admiral

⁸⁸ Kimata, *Nihon Kubo*, p. 410.

⁸⁹ Fuchida and Okumiya, *Kido Butai*, p. 120.

⁹⁰ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 292.

⁹¹ Kimata, *Nihon Kubo*, p. 415.

Ugaki wrote: “It seems that there was not much interest in them because they are not vessels belonging to the Navy.”⁹²

The Combined Fleet had lost battleships in addition to the carriers of its task force, and never again sent any capital ship into the waters around Guadalcanal. The last effort by the Japanese to recapture Guadalcanal thus ended in failure. The Combined Fleet had failed to see the convoy of transports safely to Guadalcanal. 17th Army headquarters felt that the massive damage done to the convoy of transports had determined the fate of Guadalcanal.⁹³

Subsequently, on November 16, Imperial General Headquarters directed the 17th Army to shift from the offensive to the defensive. On November 17, Halsey was promoted to full admiral in recognition of his role in overcoming the crisis and gaining naval and air supremacy in the Solomons. Taking advantage of their control of the seas and air, the Americans sent streams of supplies into Guadalcanal. Ugaki saw “no way out,”⁹⁴ and wrote that “the price the Navy paid in the transport (of reinforcements and supplies) alone, which is not the essential task of warships, amounted to the loss of five destroyers and two submarines, damage to twenty-one other vessels, and the loss of sixteen transports, which combined had a major impact on subsequent naval operations.”⁹⁵ In the campaign to recapture Guadalcanal, the Japanese Army’s losses were some two divisions effectively destroyed, while the Navy’s losses amounted to two battleships, one aircraft carrier, three heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, twelve destroyers, and eight submarines sunk, and twice this number of carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines damaged. The Combined Fleet’s total losses amounted to half of its total strength.⁹⁶ As for the naval air forces, the Navy lost some 250 carrier-based airplanes, which was close to the total carrier-based air strength at the time of Pearl Harbor, along with approximately 600 land-based aircraft,⁹⁷ which were fatal blows to the Combined Fleet.

On December 9, the U.S. 1st Marine Division was replaced by Army units and left Guadalcanal, and Army Major General Alexander Patch replaced Vandegrift as commander of ground forces on Guadalcanal.⁹⁸ The Marine Corps had completed its mission and passed the baton to the Army.

As it turned out, the battles on the ground were repeated battles for the highlands on both banks of the Matanikau River. The area was very important for the Americans as it determined whether the American perimeter would be able to assume its optimum form. The naval battles, meanwhile, were battles for control of the sea, which was needed to ensure the safety of maritime lines of communication to Guadalcanal, and in particular, the turning point of these battles was the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, which caused the Japanese carrier task forces to lose their operational function. The campaign was also a campaign of attrition,

⁹² Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 235.

⁹³ Konuma, “Dai 17 Gun no Sakusen,” p. 266.

⁹⁴ Ugaki, *Sensoroku*, p. 240.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁹⁶ Fuchida and Okumiya, *Kido Butai*, p. 154.

⁹⁷ Etsu Kuwata and Toru Maehar, *Nihon no Senso—Zukai to Deeta* (The Wars of Japan—Illustrations and Data) (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1982), p. 45.

⁹⁸ Potter, *Kiru*, p. 312.

in which the side that could reconstitute its depleted forces and return them to the combat zone first would be the ultimate winner. While Japanese submarines gave priority to attacking American warships, and in particular aircraft carriers, American submarines focused their attacks on the long and deep supply lines from the Japanese home islands to the Solomons. The difference graphically showed itself in the losses caused by submarines between August and November 1942. While Japanese submarines sank one American carrier, one light cruiser and one destroyer, damaged one carrier, one battleship and one heavy cruiser, and sank six transports totaling 17,113 tons, American submarines only sank one Japanese heavy cruiser, but sank as many as 62 transport ships totaling 270,319 tons.⁹⁹

5. Conclusion

As described above, the Japanese and Americans fought a grueling series of battles for control of Guadalcanal Island until around mid-November. In the end, the Americans expanded their perimeter to the highlands on the west bank of the Matanikau River, and continuously resupplied their positions with weapons, ammunition, and supplies, thereby constantly sustaining a degree of combat strength which was superior to the Japanese. The Japanese forces could neither overrun the American positions nor block American resupply efforts. This was the major reason behind the Japanese inability to recapture Guadalcanal. This reveals itself in a number of ways in a reexamination of the history of the campaign.

First, in the campaign for Guadalcanal, the Japanese erred in their response against a powerful enemy that had established a perimeter, albeit imperfectly. Once the adversary had established a perimeter, as was the case of Guadalcanal, the Japanese first should have occupied areas which would have permitted them to block any further expansion of the perimeter. Next, the Japanese should have suppressed the American positions within the perimeter with firepower (artillery and bombs), while securing a staging area from where their main forces, which would be reinforced in the interim, could launch a counteroffensive. After the failure of the Kawaguchi Detachment's offensive, however, the Japanese were unable to decide on the focus of their immediate operations before the Americans did. In other words, the Japanese could not anticipate where their forces should be concentrated, nor could they decide upon the objective and timing of such a concentration of forces. After repulsing the Kawaguchi Detachment's attack, Vandegrift, who was aware that the perimeter was still far from secure, was most concerned about the effective shelling of Henderson Airfield by Japanese artillery sited near the Matanikau River, and the possibility of attacks which used that area as a supporting base. Therefore, 17th Army should have beat the 1st Marine Division to the punch and occupied and secured the banks of the Matanikau together with the Navy. However, the 17th Army came to realize the strategic importance of the area on September 26, only after the 7th Marine Regiment and other American reinforcements had arrived. 17th Army was too late in asking for the second convoy of transports. If the 17th Army had secured the highlands along the Matanikau with artillery, armor, and other forces, it is likely that a decisive ground battle would have been fought in that area which would have had a major

⁹⁹ Boei-cho, *Sensuikan Shi*, p. 217.

impact on the outcome of the campaign.

For its part, the Japanese Navy failed to perform its primary responsibility of delivering without fail the troops and equipment necessary for the counterattacks against the American perimeter. Regarding the Normandy amphibious operation, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote that “The Navy’s task was to enable the Army to cross the English Channel safely, to support the landing in every way, and thereafter ensure the timely arrivals of reinforcements and supplies, regardless of the dangers posed by the enemy and the sea.”¹⁰⁰ The Combined Fleet, in providing support for the convoys which carried Army forces to Guadalcanal, tried to pursue the dual objectives of destroying the American task forces and protecting the convoys. In reality, however, the Combined Fleet’s primary objective remained the destruction of the American task forces, and it never concentrated all or enough of its capabilities in order to protect the convoys. In the end, neither objective was achieved. An amphibious operation, which in the case of the Japanese in the Guadalcanal campaign involved the delivery of so-called heavy units such as artillery and armor to an island under the adversary’s control, was not an easy undertaking which could be done on the side while simultaneously seeking out and trying to destroy the enemy’s carrier task forces.

The next objective the Japanese should have pursued was to isolate Guadalcanal, in other words, secure control of the seas around Guadalcanal, and the sooner the better. The Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands unfolded in a way which was actually long-awaited by the Combined Fleet, which had positioned its fleets to ambush the Americans. However, the Japanese task forces failed to detect and destroy the American task forces, even though the Japanese were superior in terms of strength at the point of battle, and missed the opportunity to seize control of the seas in the area. In the case of the Guadalcanal campaign, this can be largely attributed to the difference in the leadership displayed by the Japanese and American commanders. U.S. Pacific Fleet C-in-C Admiral Nimitz relieved Ghormley, who was pessimistic about the Americans’ ability to hold Guadalcanal, and replaced him with Halsey, who adopted an aggressive offensive stance and fought the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, in which the Japanese task force, which was tactically superior in terms of combat strength, ended up losing its operational function. Halsey then aggressively fought the 1st and 2nd Naval Battles of Guadalcanal, sinking two Japanese battleships and effectively securing local control of the seas for the Americans. On the other hand, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, C-in-C of the Combined Fleet, chose not to question Nagumo’s competence to command carrier task forces, even though problems had repeatedly emerged from the Battle of Midway onwards. Nagumo did give his best effort, but he kept fearing American aircraft, and refused to make an extra commitment, settling instead for small successes. In the end, the concept of “ambush operations” adopted by the Combined Fleet, in which the fleet passively waited for the enemy to attack, failed to secure control of the seas for Japan. Therefore, the Japanese had no choice but to use submarines and aircraft to cope with the American supply convoys, which carried reinforcements to Guadalcanal, the round trips being made along routes where the Americans

¹⁰⁰ Winston Churchill, translated by the Translation Committee of Mainichi Shimbun, *Chaachiru Kaikoroku Dai 20 Kan* (Memoirs of Winston Churchill Volume 20) (Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbun, 1954), p. 158.

securely controlled the skies and seas. Nimitz recalled later that Japan's Combined Fleet should have had the strong determination and energy to seek out and destroy the American fleets in the Coral Sea, thereby isolating Guadalcanal and establishing Japan's control of the seas and air.¹⁰¹

In a campaign for an island occupied by an adversary, and when the combat strengths of both sides are roughly in parity, as was the case of Guadalcanal, the key to victory lies in the ability to successfully conduct amphibious operations. In other words, the ability to concentrate, in terms of time as well as space, superior force in ground battles for the perimeter and naval battles to isolate the island is absolutely vital and will decide the outcome of the campaign.

More fundamentally, looking at the entire combat theater, including Eastern New Guinea, the Japanese forces were compelled to fight a two-front campaign in eastern New Guinea and Guadalcanal, after they decided to retake the latter. This dispersed their combat forces and power. 17th Army headquarters could not proceed to Guadalcanal until October 9, because it was preoccupied with the campaign to capture Port Moresby in Eastern New Guinea. After mid-November, which was also the time the Third Convoy ended in failure, the Nankai Detachment in Eastern New Guinea was pushed back toward Buna by the offensive of Allied forces under the command of General MacArthur. With the lines of communication between Rabaul and Guadalcanal already in a critical state, the strategic focus of the Japanese was gradually shifting to Eastern New Guinea.

¹⁰¹ Nimitz and Potter, *Nimitz*, p. 148.

