

THE PACIFIC AND ADJACENT THEATERS 1942

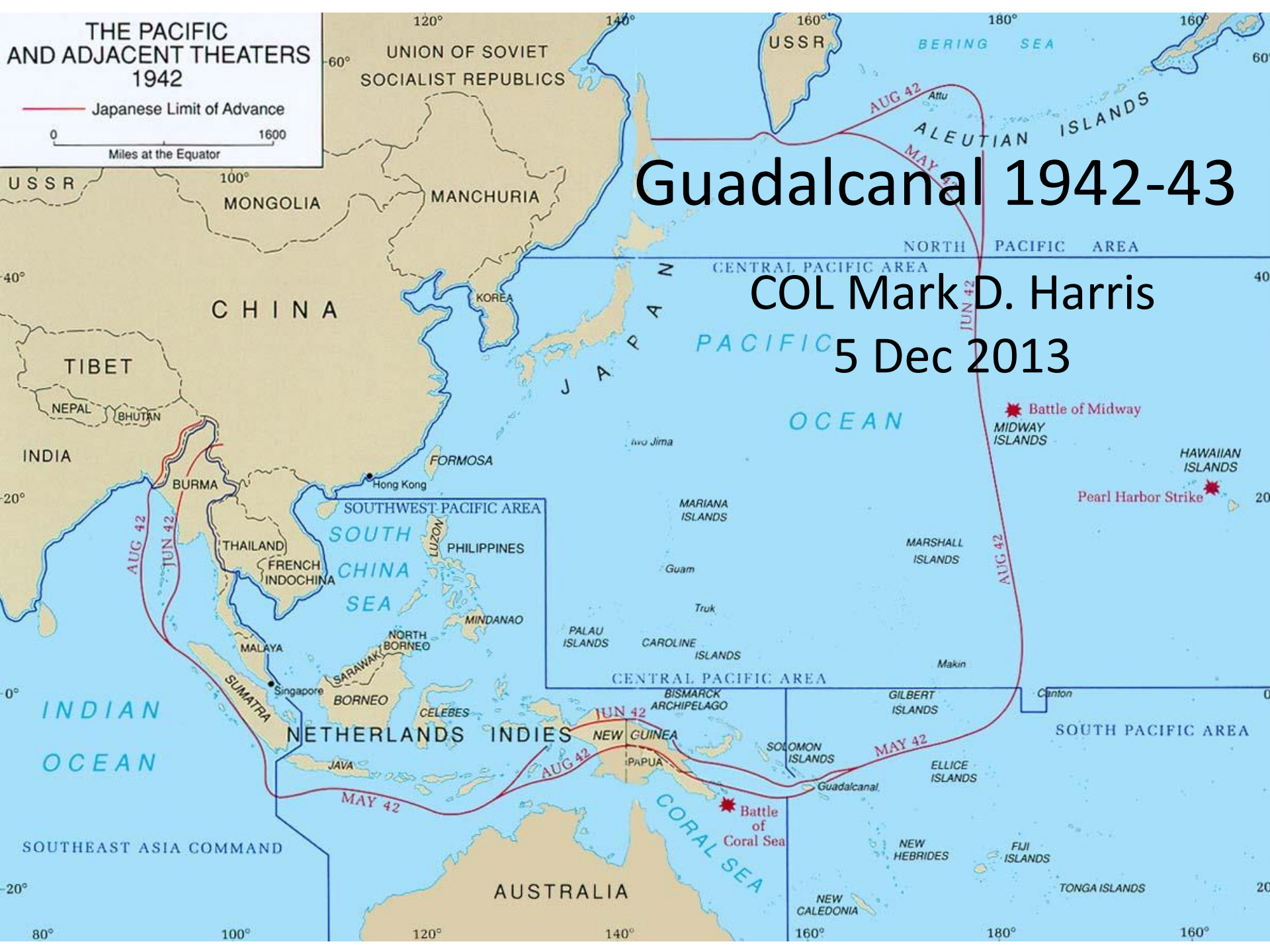
— Japanese Limit of Advance

0 1600
Miles at the Equator

Guadalcanal 1942-43

COL Mark D. Harris

5 Dec 2013



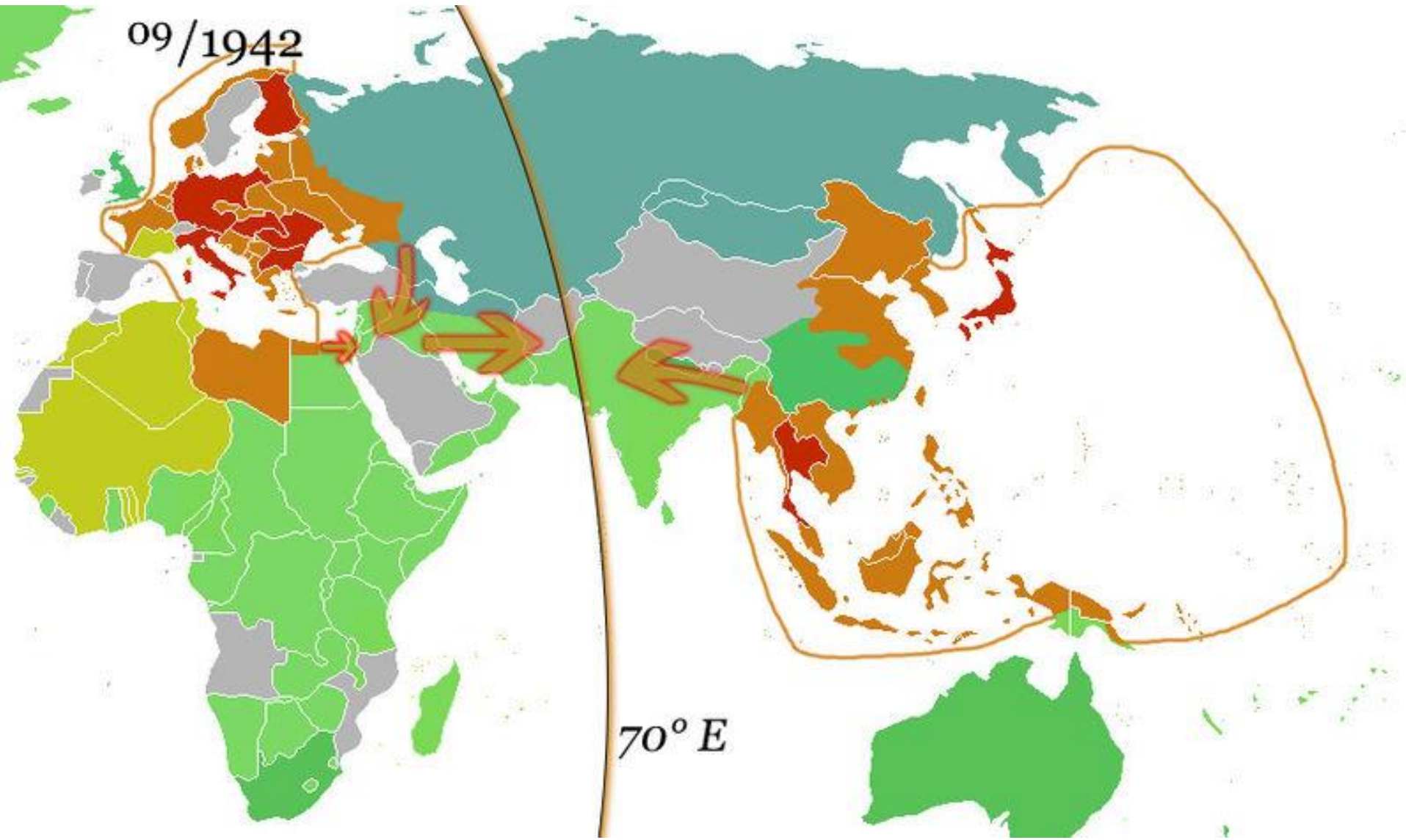
Objectives

- Learn about the Guadalcanal campaign.
- Identify and discuss good and poor decisions and actions made by both sides during the campaign.
- Draw parallels between their experience and modern military experience, especially military medicine.
- Teach others the lessons learned.

Strategic Situation - Allied

- “Germany first” policy – 70% of US resources were against Germany, only 30% against Japan.
- US did not have land, sea or air parity with Japan but was getting close to it.
- US needed to support Australia because they were in danger and because Australia provided a bulwark against Japan in the Pacific.
- Coast watchers in the Solomon Islands provided early notice of Japanese sea and air movements.

Axis Division of the World (as considered in January 1942)

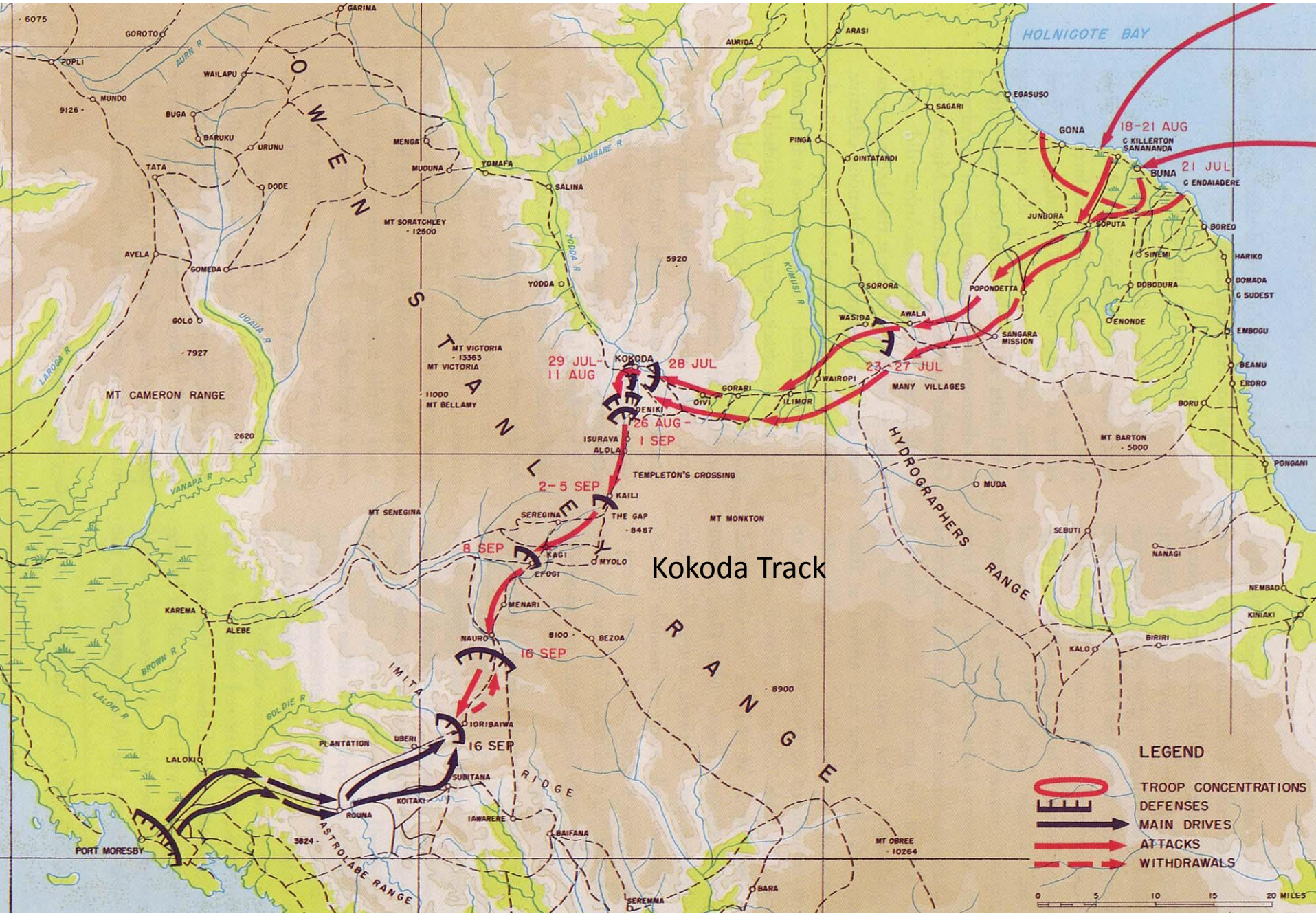


Strategic Situation - Japanese

- Recently lost four carriers at the Battle of Midway, their first major setback of the war.
- Goal was to capture the major allied base at Port Moresby in New Guinea, thereby threatening Australia.
- IJN wanted to occupy Guadalcanal to interdict US delivery of troops and supplies from Hawaii to Australia.
- IJA wanted to concentrate forces for Port Moresby operation.



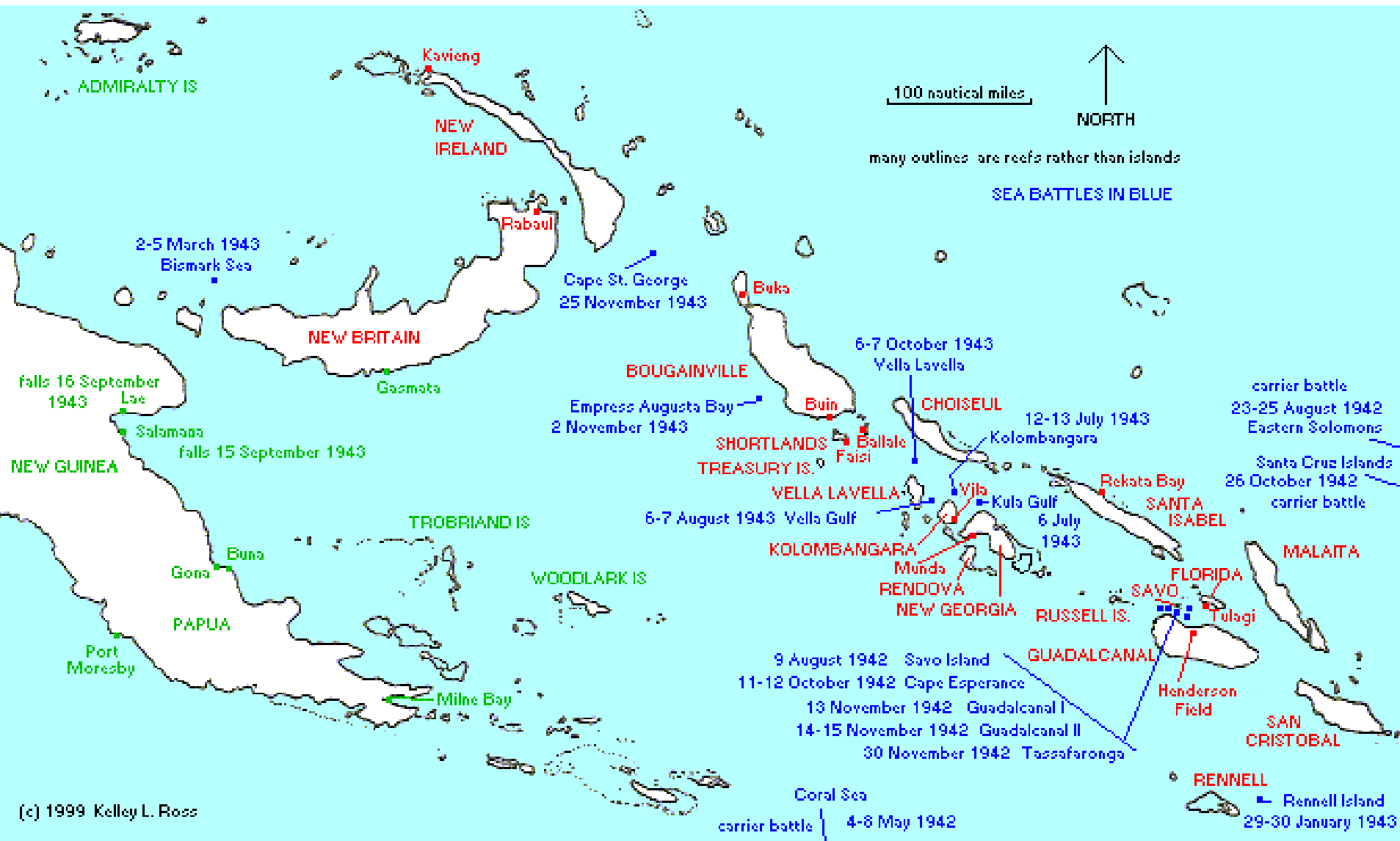
Battle for Port Moresby 1942



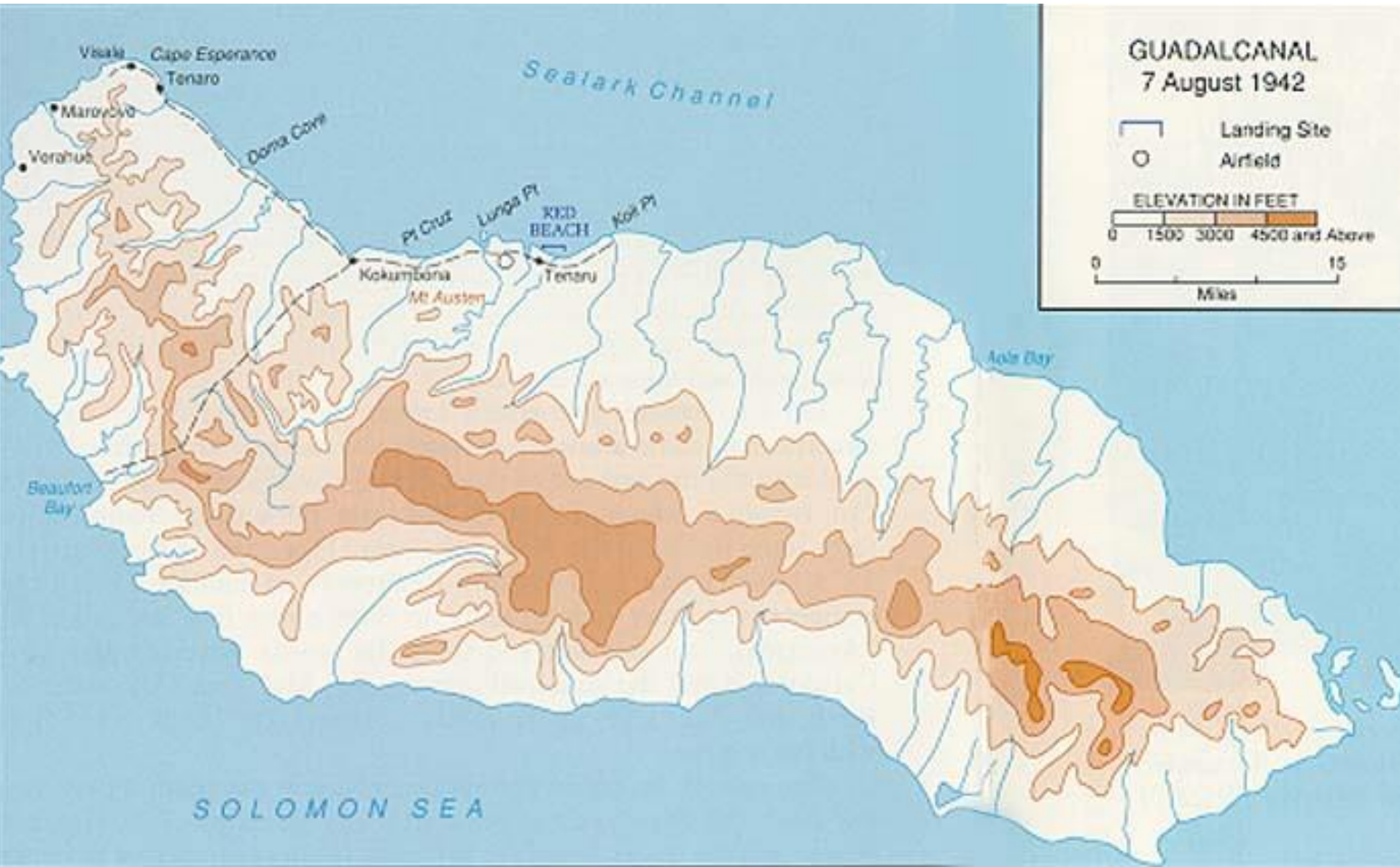
Operational Situation - Guadalcanal

- Island in the Solomon chain 90 miles long and 25 miles wide.
- No natural harbors, and south coast covered by coral reefs so only approach by sea is from the north.
- Topography – mountains to 8000 feet, dormant volcanos, steep ravines, deep streams, and jungle.
- Public Health threats – malaria, dengue, fungal, heat injury.
- British protectorate since 1893
 - Natives generally expected to be friendly.
 - Western missionaries and British political advisors present.

Naval Battles around the Solomons 1942-1943



Guadalcanal on the day of the US Invasion



Japanese Occupation May – July 1942

- Initial landings in May 1942 unopposed.
- Lt. Gen. Harukichi Hyakutake (17th IJA) had 8400 men (2nd Division) in late July.
- Japanese fortified northern plain and prominent terrain features.
- Airfield at Lunga Point not yet usable.
- Japanese did not expect US response.

US Landings 7 Aug 1942

- 1st Marine Division (MG Alexander Vandergrift) numbered over 11,000 Marines
- Landed on Red Beach in Guadalcanal as well as Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo islands.
 - These islands were needed to control sea lanes to Guadalcanal.
- Occupied airfield at Lunga Point, renamed Henderson Field, on 8 Aug.
- First aircraft arrived (19 Wildcat fighters and 12 Dauntless bombers) on 20 August.
 - Dubbed “Cactus Air Force”, they first engaged enemy 21 August.

Battle of Savo Island

8-9 Aug 1942

- IJN (5 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 1 destroyer) attacked USN and RN (6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 15 destroyers) by night.
- IJN trained for night warfare, USN screening destroyers unfamiliar with new radar.
- Allies lost 4 heavy cruisers (1100 men) and IJN had 3 cruisers lightly damaged (58 men dead)

NIGHT DISPOSITION OF SCREENING FORCE

RALPH TALBOT Radar Patrol

BLUE Radar Patrol

SAVO I.

NORTH PATROL FORCE
VINCENNES
ASTORIA
QUINCY
& 2 DDs

SOUTH PATROL FORCE
AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA, CHICAGO & 2 DDs

GUADALCANA I.

BUENA VISTA I.

OLEVEDA I.

SANDFLY PASSAGE

FLORIDA I.

TRINIDAD I.

TULAGI I.

TRANSPORT AREA

SEALARK CHANNEL

SAN JUAN, HOBART, AND 2 DDs

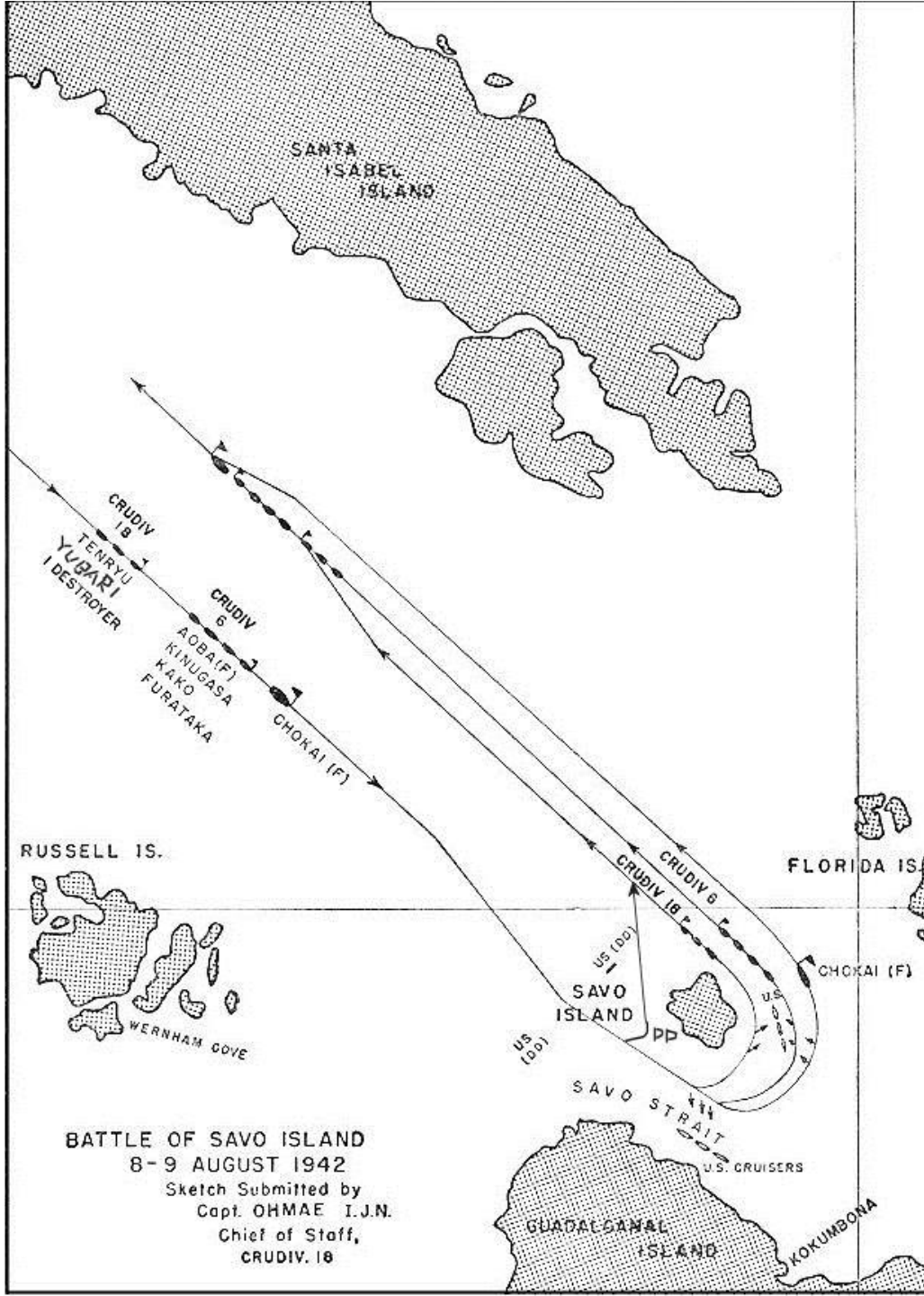
SEALARK CHANNEL

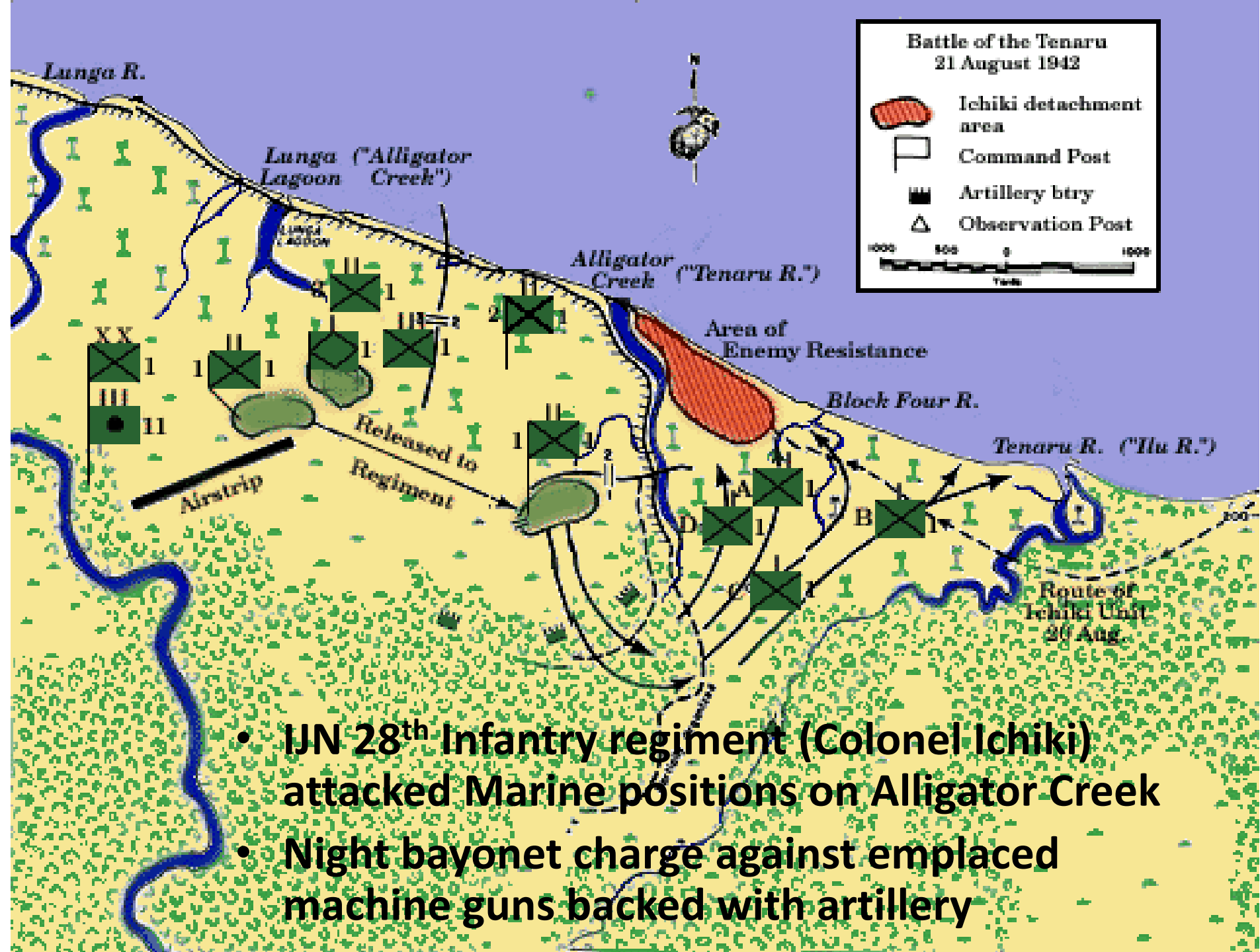
LENGO CHANNEL

TRANSPORT AREA MAJIL
Pt. Cruz
Kakama
Londe Pt.
Londe
KOLU PT.
TERRA



Battle of Savo Island 8-9 Aug 1942





- IJN 28th Infantry regiment (Colonel Ichiki) attacked Marine positions on Alligator Creek
- Night bayonet charge against emplaced machine guns backed with artillery

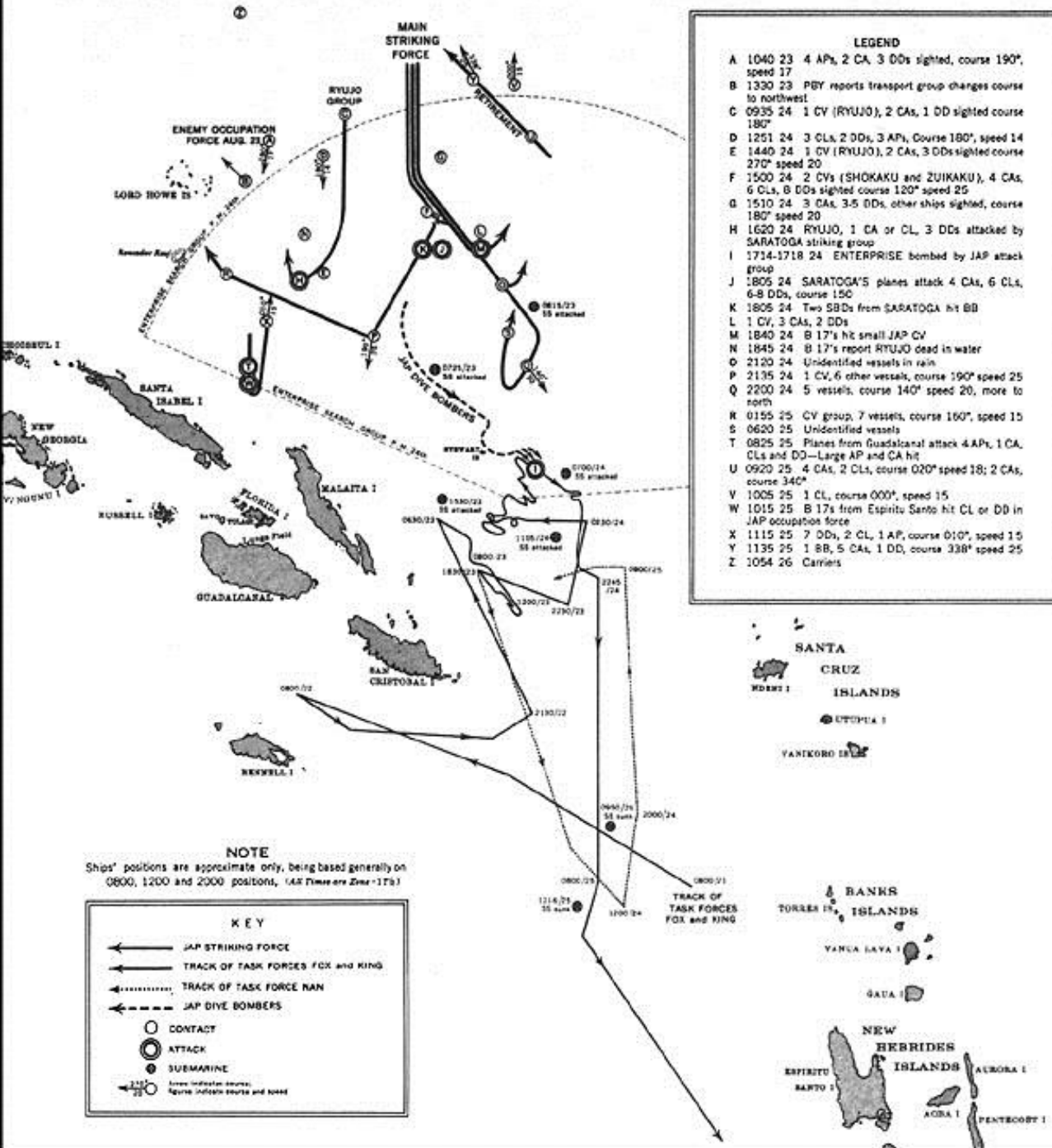
The Air War

- When the first planes landed on 20 August, the US gained local ground based air support.
- Japanese air support was based in Rabaul, over 650 miles to the west.
 - With a cruising speed of 220 mph, Japanese pilots had to fly three hours each way just to get into the battle.
 - If Japanese crews were shot down in the area, they could not expect to be rescued because the Allied airpower prevented Japanese ships from lingering during the day, and downed aviators are very hard to find at night.
 - The logistics tail of the Japanese air campaign was unsustainable.
- The Zero was more maneuverable and had greater range, but was prone to catch fire and explode with any hit.
- The US Wildcat could take more punishment.
- Over time, the US fliers began operating in pairs, negating some of the Japanese advantages in maneuverability.
- As a result, the US won the overall air war of Guadalcanal.

Battle of the Eastern Solomons (24-25 Aug)

- Mission – Japanese wanted to land reinforcements to take Guadalcanal
- Forces
 - USN (2 fleet carriers, 1 battleship, 4 cruisers, 11 destroyers, 176 aircraft)
 - IJN (2 fleet carriers, 1 light carrier, 2 battleships, 16 cruisers, 25 destroyers, 1 seaplane tender, 4 patrol boats, 3 transports, 171–177 aircraft)
 - Diversion force - Rear Admiral Chūichi Hara (with the light carrier Ryūjō, the heavy cruiser Tone and destroyers Amatsukaze and Tokitsukaze) to proceed ahead of the main Japanese force and send an aircraft attack force against Henderson Field at daybreak
- Losses
 - USN - 1 carrier (Enterprise) heavily damaged, 20 aircraft destroyed, 90 killed
 - IJN - 1 light carrier, 1 destroyer, 1 transport sunk, 1 light cruiser, 1 seaplane tender heavily damaged, 75 aircraft destroyed, 290+ killed
- Japanese reinforcements for Guadalcanal could not be landed.

Battle of Eastern Solomons



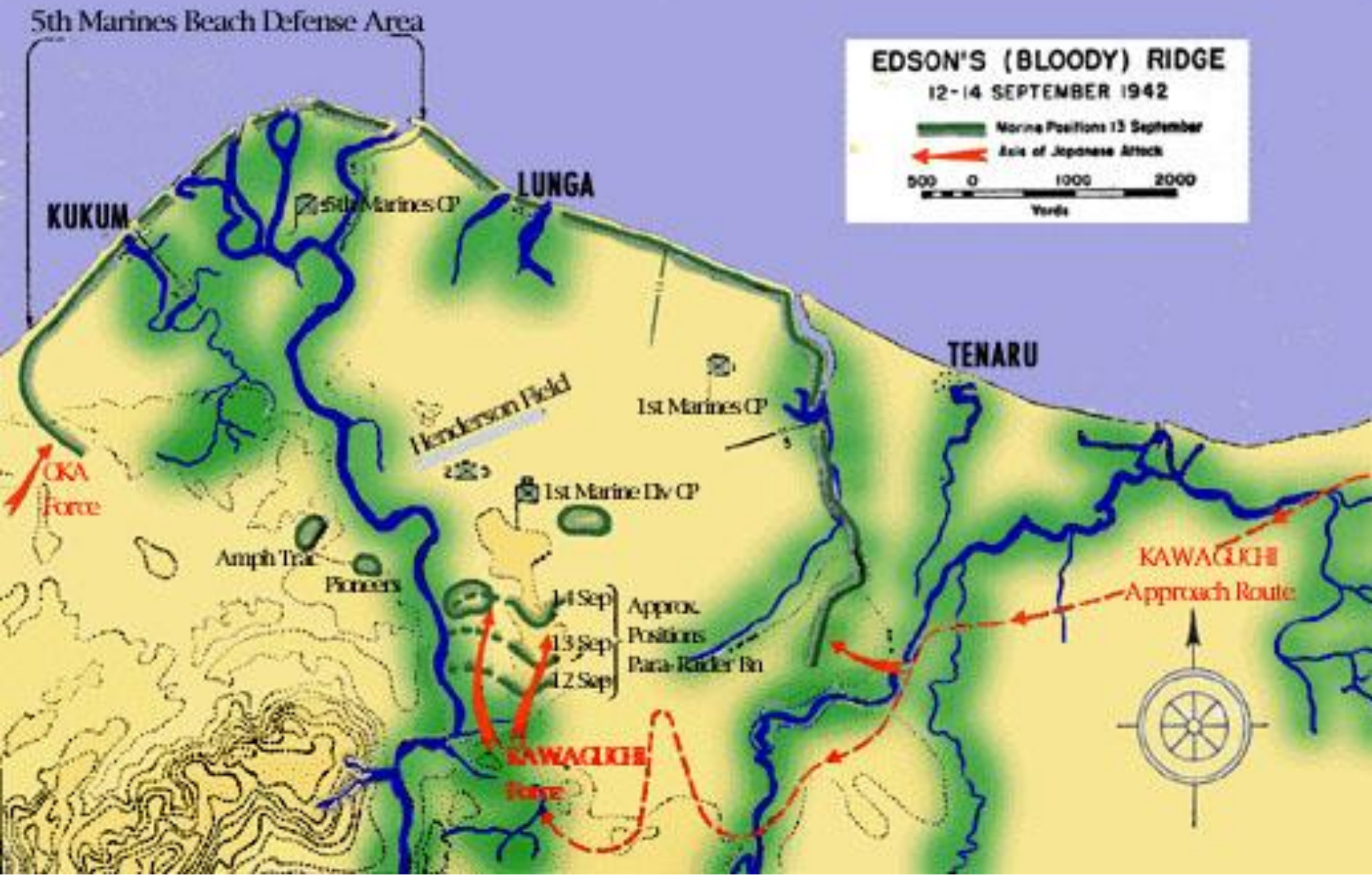
Tokyo Express

- Unable to force reinforcements to Guadalcanal due to the allied victory
- Due to the threat of allied air power at Henderson, Japanese ships had to get to Guadalcanal, offload and get out of range of the American aircraft between dusk and dawn.
- The Japanese loaded men and supplies on destroyers and other fast moving ships from Rabaul.
- They moved the 35th Infantry Brigade under Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi (about 3000) to Guadalcanal.
 - They could not move tanks or other heavy weapons this way
 - They needed transports and they were slow.

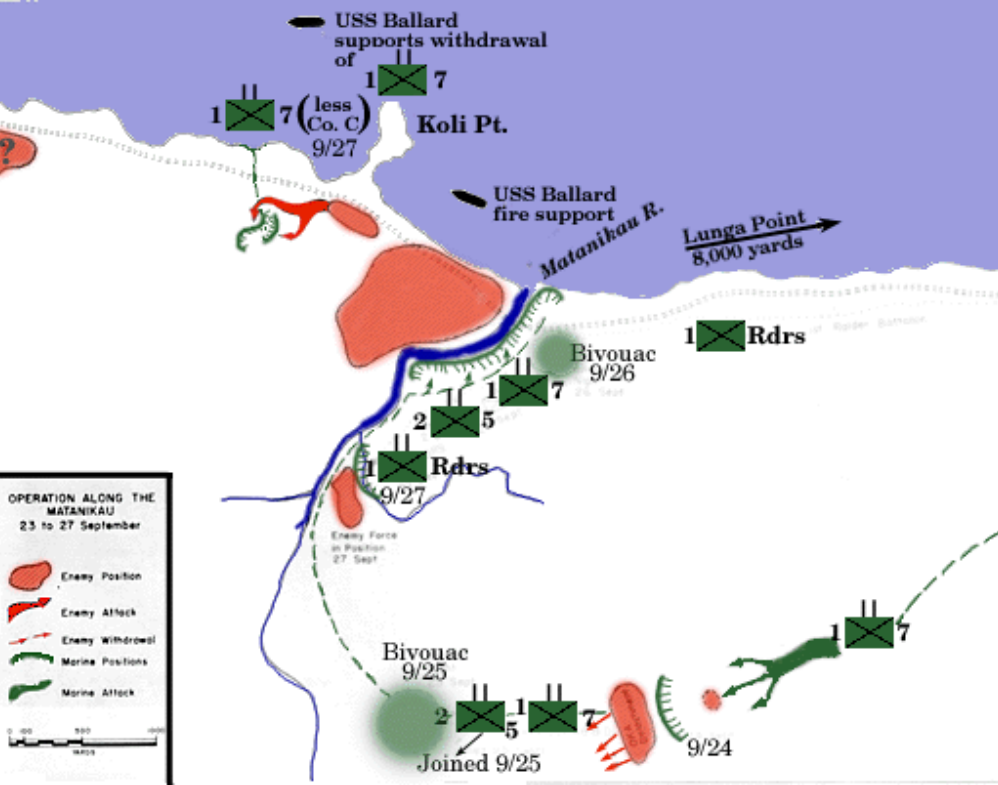
Battle of Edson's Ridge (12-14 Sep)

- Total Forces – USMC 12,500, IJA 6200
- After Ichiki's defeat attacking Marine lines from the east, Kawaguchi's forces (3000) moved through nearly impassable terrain to the south to attack.
 - Oka would launch a supporting attack from the west and the Kuma battalion of Ichiki's old regiment would support from the east.
 - Native scouts kept the Americans well aware of the Japanese movements
- Until 11 Sep, this route, just east of the Lunga River, was nearly undefended.
 - LTC Edson (USMC) had his 830 Marines dig in just south of the 1st Marine command post
 - They were supported by heavy artillery
- Kawaguchi's night attack and the supporting attacks failed.
- Losses – USMC 250, IJA 1200

Battle of Edson's Ridge



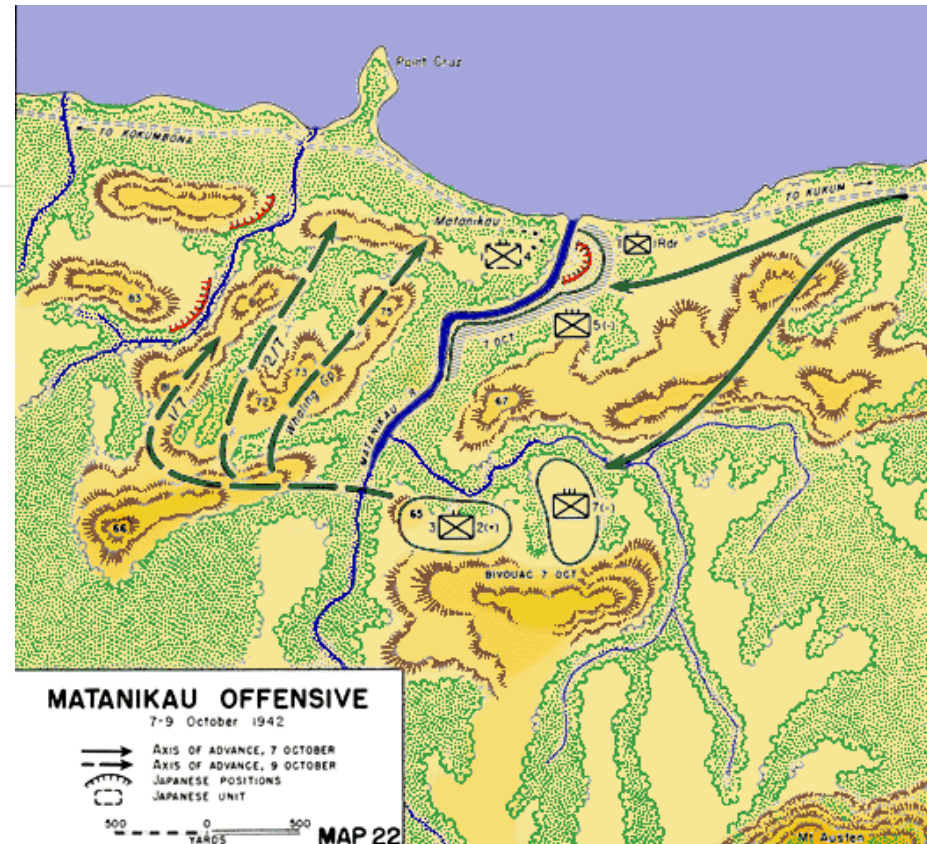
Marine Counterattacks on the Matanikau River (Sep and Oct 1942)



Forces
 USMC – 3000
 IJA – 2000

LTC Chesty Puller (USMC) became famous in these actions

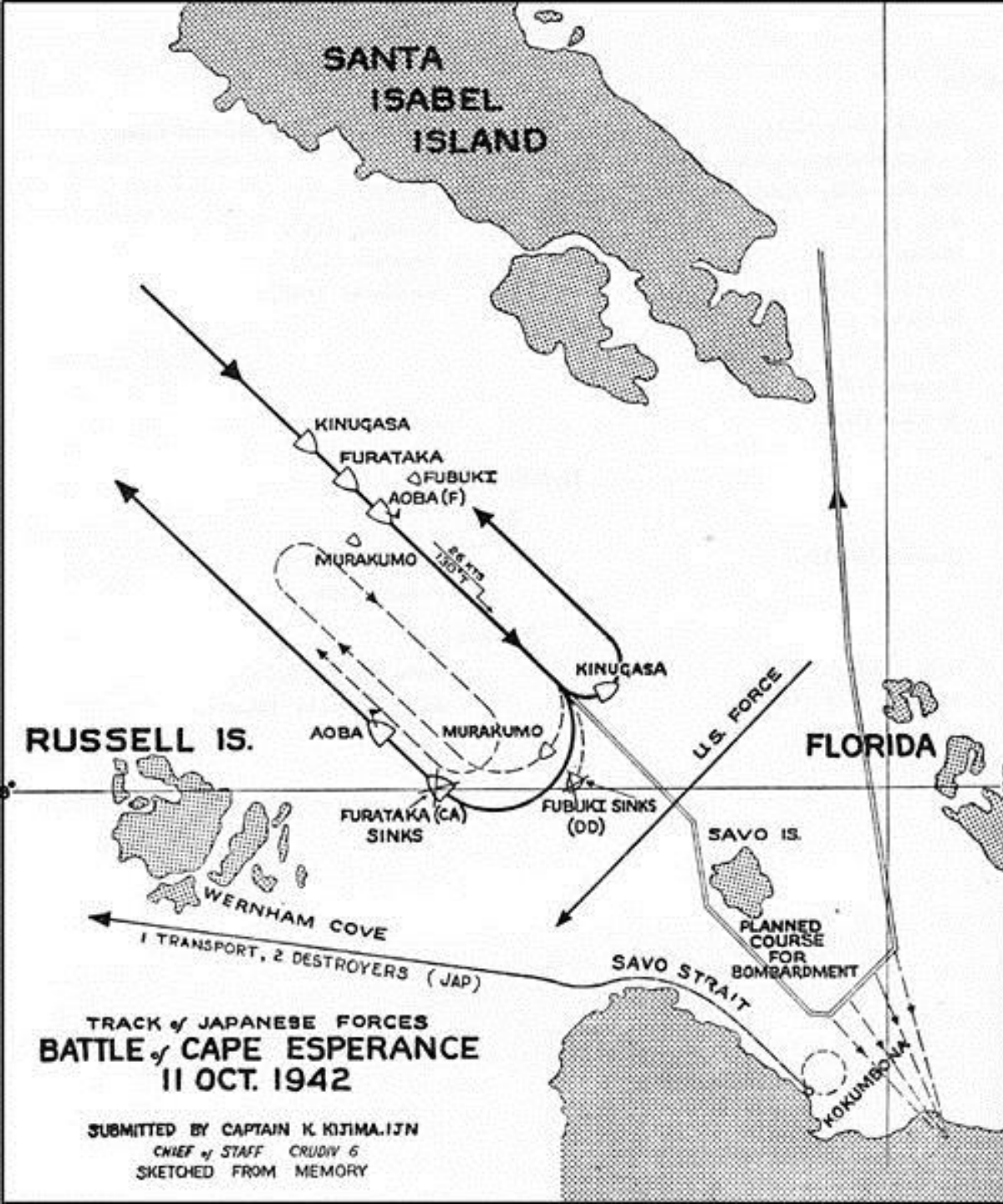
Losses (killed)
 USMC – 156
 IJA - 750



Battle of Cape Esperance (11-12 Oct)

- Mission – Japanese cruiser force was intending to bombard Henderson Field to put it out of action. Other force was to reinforce Guadalcanal.
- After the disaster at Savo Island, USN forces ensured that every crew was proficient with radar. The Japanese ships did not have radar and the night was dark and rainy so they were unaware of the American fleet.
- The US fleet was positioned to “Cross the T” of the advancing Japanese line.
- Despite this advantage, the whole battle was confused, with both sides wondering who they were shooting at
- Forces
 - USN (4 cruisers, 5 destroyers)
 - IJN (3 cruisers, 2 destroyers, also 6 destroyers, 2 seaplane tenders)
- Losses
 - USN - 1 destroyer sunk, 1 cruiser damaged, 1 destroyer damaged, 163 killed
 - IJN - 1 cruiser sunk, 3 destroyers sunk, 1 cruiser damaged, 341–454 killed, 111 captured

Battle of Cape Esperance



Battle of Lunga Point (Henderson Field)

23-26 Oct 1942

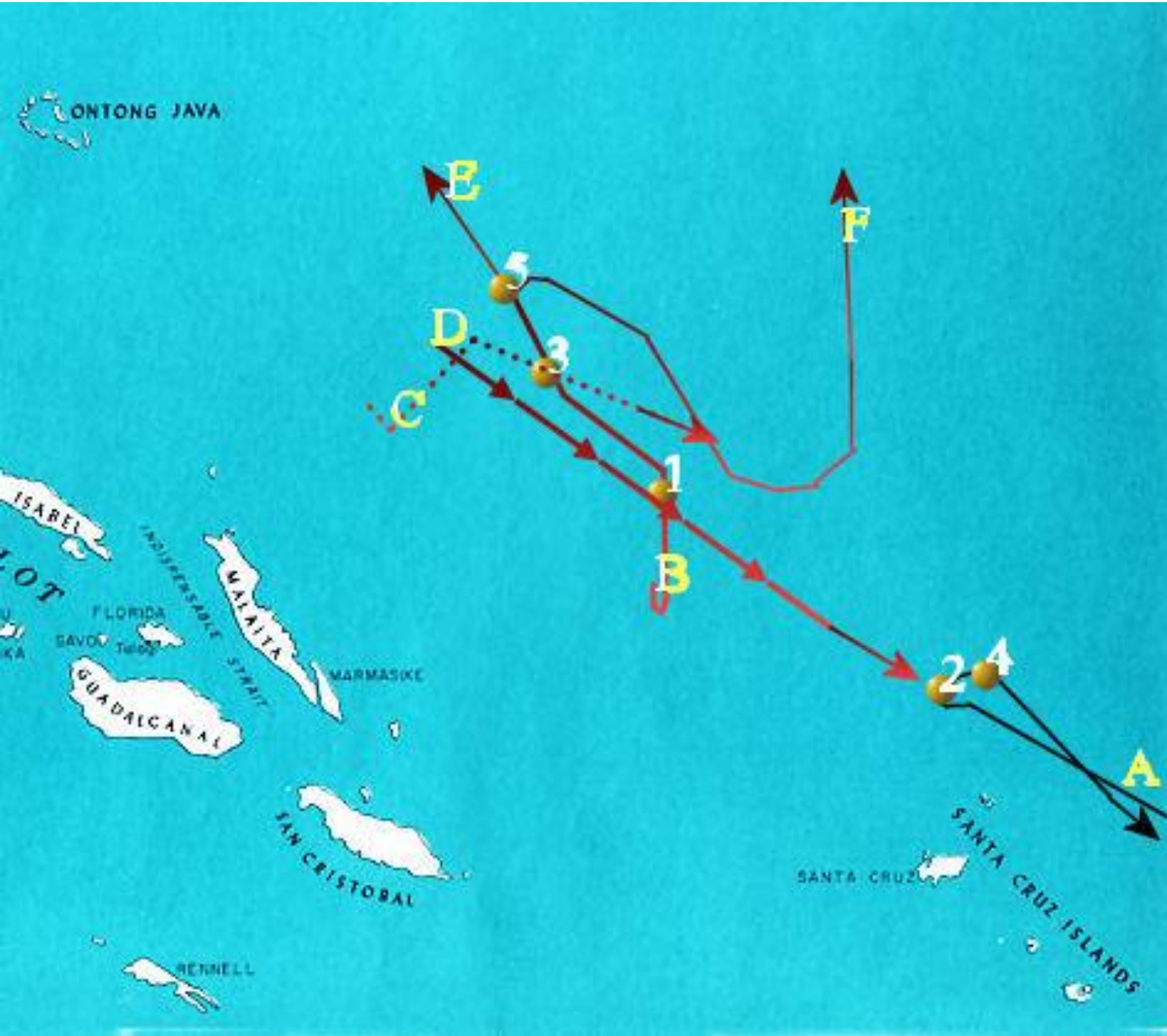
- The first US Army unit on Guadalcanal, the 164th Infantry (2300), landed on 13 October. They occupied the southeastern portion of the line near the Lunga River.
- The Japanese moved the remainder of the 2nd ID and part of the 38th ID from New Guinea to Guadalcanal, about 17,000.
- Total Forces - US – 23,000, IJA – 20,000
- Due to poor communication, the Japanese attack was uncoordinated, with Nakaguma's attack occurring on the 23rd and Hyakutake's attack on the 24th. Oka was not in place and did not attack until the 26th.
- Losses
 - US - 61–86 killed, 1 tugboat, 1 patrol boat sunk, 3 aircraft destroyed
 - IJA - 2,200–3,000 killed, 1 cruiser sunk, 14 aircraft destroyed

Battle of Lunga Point (Henderson Field)



Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands (26 Oct)

- Mission – Japanese wanted to support ground operations on Guadalcanal and destroy relieving US forces
- Forces
 - USN (2 carriers, 1 battleship, 6 cruisers, 14 destroyers, 136 aircraft)
 - IJN (3 fleet carriers, 1 light carrier, 4 battleships, 10 cruisers, 22 destroyers, 199 aircraft)
- Losses
 - USN - 1 carrier sunk (Hornet), 1 destroyer sunk, 1 carrier heavily damaged (Enterprise), 2 destroyers heavily damaged, 81 aircraft destroyed, 266 dead
 - IJN - 1 carrier heavily damaged, 1 light carrier heavily damaged, 1 cruiser heavily damaged, 99 aircraft destroyed, 400–500 dead
 - Japanese reinforcements for Guadalcanal could not be landed.
- Though a Japanese victory if measured by ships sunk, so many irreplaceable aircraft and crews had been lost that the IJN carrier forces withdrew and played no role in the rest of the campaign.
 - The Japanese lost more aircrew at Santa Cruz than they had lost in each of the three previous carrier battles at Coral Sea (90), Midway (110), and Eastern Solomons (61). By the end of the Santa Cruz battle, at least 409 of the 765 elite Japanese carrier aviators who had participated in the Attack on Pearl Harbor were dead.



Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands

November Ground Campaigns

- The US decided to attack
 - Several major Japanese land offensives had failed.
 - It was becoming harder to supply the IJA.
 - US strength, land, sea and air, was growing.
- Battles – Matanikau offensive, Koli point action, Carlson's Patrol
- The Americans inflicted heavy casualties but with IJA reinforcements, the campaign was not decisive.

Naval Battle of Guadalcanal – Nov 13-15

- Mission – Japanese again wanted to support ground operations on Guadalcanal and retake the island. Simultaneously with landing the force they intended to use high explosives to bombard the US land forces.
- Forces
 - USN (1 carrier, 2 battleships, 2 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers, 12 destroyers)
 - IJN (2 battleships, 6 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, 16 destroyers, 11 transports)
- Phase 1 - The US identified the Japanese first on radar, but delayed while trying to get a full tactical picture. The Japanese, better trained in night fighting, recognized the Americans but delayed changing their high explosive shells to armor piercing shells to attack the ships. As a result, both sides starting firing about the same time. The IJN caused more damage, but Admiral Abe broke off the engagement and steamed north. The Cactus Air Force destroyed more of his ships as the sun rose.
- Phase 2 – The Japanese again gained the initial advantage against the USN, only to be set upon by the undetected USS Washington. The Cactus Air Force finished the job.
- Losses
 - USN – First phase (13 Nov): 2 light cruisers, 4 destroyers, Second phase (14/15 Nov): 3 destroyers, Plus (13–15 Nov): 36 aircraft for a total of 1,732 killed
 - IJN -First phase: 1 battleship, 2 destroyers, 7 transports, Second phase: 1 battleship, 1 destroyer, 4 transports (beached first), Plus: 64 aircraft for a total of 1,900 killed
- Result – The last attempt of the Japanese to concentrate enough land power to take Guadalcanal was foiled.





Battle of Tassafaronga (30 Nov 1942)

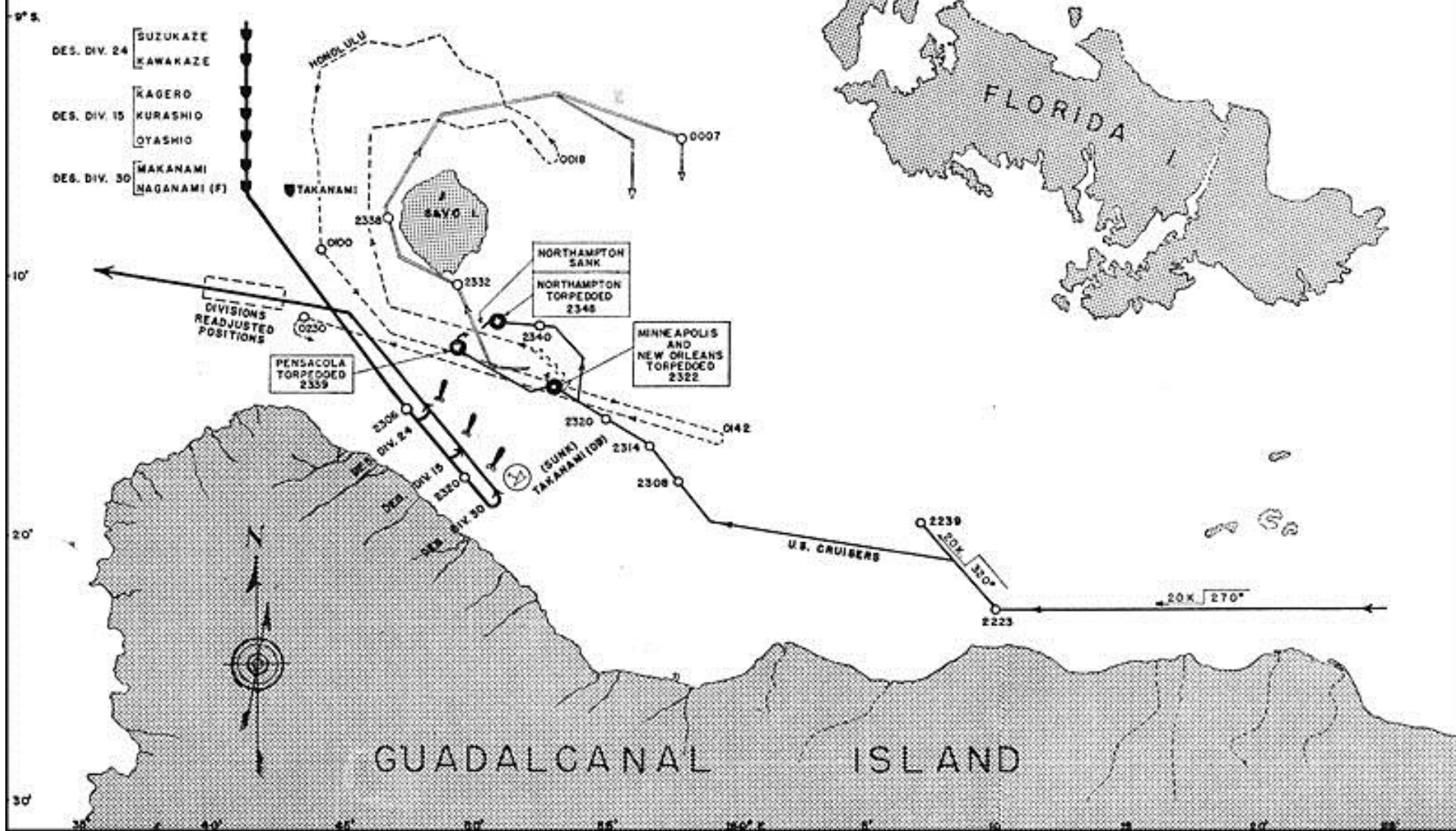
- Mission – The combination of American airpower at Henderson at Patrol Torpedo (PT) boats at Tulagi made it increasingly difficult for Japan to supply the 17th Army on Guadalcanal.
 - A submarine could deliver 20 tons of supplies, enough for one day.
 - The Japanese decided to put supplies into 50 gallon drums, lash them together, and deliver them by destroyer.
- Forces
 - USN (5 heavy cruisers, 4 destroyers)
 - IJN (8 destroyers)
- The American destroyers fired their torpedoes at extreme range and a poor angle, and all 20 missed. The Japanese, firing the superior Long Lance torpedoes and doing so at closer range, hit. The escorting destroyers then sailed all of the way around Savo Island, not returning to the battle until the engagement was over.
- Losses
 - USN – 1 cruiser sunk, 3 cruisers heavily damaged, 395 killed
 - IJN - 1 destroyer sunk, 1,97 killed
- Result
- The USN suffered their third greatest defeat of the war, after Pearl Harbor and Savo Island.
- The Japanese could not resupply their forces on Guadalcanal.

TRACK CHART BATTLE OF TASSAFARONGA

30 NOVEMBER 1942

LEGEND

-  U.S. CRUISERS
-  HONOLULU
-  DD's VAN
-  ENEMY



Japanese Withdrawal Jan-Feb 1943



Lessons Learned

- Mission
- Enemy
- Troops
- Terrain
- Time
- Civilian considerations

References

- Challenge for the Pacific – Guadalcanal, Robert Leckie, 2010
- US Army Center of Military History
- Guadalcanal Campaign, Wikipedia