

CHAPTER 17

LEYTE

ON 26th September TF.33, the force intended for the invasion of Yap, arrived at Eniwetok, something more than half-way along the road from Pearl Harbour to the objective. Since it left Hawaii, the decision had been reached by the Allied High Command to cancel the Yap operation and to utilise TF.33 "in its entirety of both assault shipping and troops" at Leyte. In consequence, TF.33—soon to become TF.79—instead of proceeding onwards to Yap, sailed for Manus, where it arrived on 3rd and 4th October in two groups, one of transports and one of L.S.T's. The period at Manus was spent in upkeep of vessels, preparation of final plans, and furnishing recreation for the troops and ships' companies who, by the time they reached Leyte, would have been in crowded conditions on board for five weeks. On 11th October the L.S.T. convoy sailed for the Philippines. The transport convoy followed on the 14th.

Also at Manus during this period were *Australia*, *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, of TF.74. After the Morotai operation the Task Force spent some days at Mios Wundi. While there, on 25th September, Captain C. A. G. Nichols, R.N., assumed command of *Shropshire* vice Captain Showers, who returned to Australia to take up the appointment of 2nd Naval Member of the Naval Board in succession to Captain Moore. As part of Berkey's TF.75 the force left Mios Wundi on 27th September and reached Manus on the 29th.

While at Manus, where the time was occupied in exercising, *Australia* was boarded by Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes,¹ who was on a tour of inspection. On 11th October the four Australian ships and U.S.S. *Beale*, now forming Task Unit 77.3.2, departed Manus as part of Rear-Admiral Berkey's TG.77.3. Hollandia was reached at noon next day.

The day TG.77.3 reached Hollandia there sailed thence TG.78.4, "Dinagat Force". Its eight destroyer transports and miscellaneous craft lifted the 6th Ranger Battalion, whose task was to eliminate enemy installations on Dinagat, Calicoan, Suluan and Homonhon Islands at the entrance to Leyte Gulf. There sailed with it from Hollandia Commander Loud's TG.77.5, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, including *Gascoyne* (Commander Read). First of the Australian Navy's frigates, *Gascoyne* commissioned on 18th November 1943. Until the end of May 1944 *Gascoyne* was employed on escort and routine duties in eastern Australian and New Guinea waters. June and July were spent in Sydney refitting. August and September were again spent in routine duties in New Guinea waters, and on 1st October, in Hollandia, Commander Hunt joined the ship as Commander TG.70.5 Afloat, on her being assigned to hydrographic

¹ Admiral of Fleet Lord Keyes, GCB, KCVO, CMG, DSO; RN. Director of Combined Ops 1940-41. B. 1872. Died 26 Dec 1945.

work. H.M.A.S. *Warrego*, which had been at Morotai with the Northern Hydrographical Unit of Seventh Fleet and was now about to go to Sydney for refit, arrived at Hollandia on 2nd October and transferred hydrographical gear and personnel to *Gascoyne*.

Another Australian ship with the Hydrographical Unit was *HDML1074* (Lieut-Commander Robertson²) which Hunt sailed from Hollandia on 6th October to join the Manus L.S.T. convoy of TF.79 which, as stated above, left the Admiralties on the 11th. "This day" (11th October), wrote Captain Ray Tarbuck, U.S.N., an observer who was with VII Amphibious Force in Barbey's flagship *Blue Ridge*,³ "there were 331 ships in [Humboldt Bay] harbour, varying in size from rocket boats to five thousand man troopers. A few Australian and Norwegian ships were present." The "few Australian" ships included *Manoora*, *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* which had been together there since 1st October. The days preceding departure were spent in overhauling gear and embarking troops and supplies, and on the 10th the three ships, and H.M.S. *Ariadne*, led by Rear-Admiral Struble in his flagship *Hughes*, carried out a full-scale landing rehearsal at Tanahmerah Bay.

On the 12th more Australian ships arrived—those of Berkey's TG.77.3—and next day, which was to belie the old sea superstition about sailing on a Friday, there were 471 ships in port. This number was decreased at intervals during the day as groups sailed. At 2 p.m. Barbey's flagship *Blue Ridge* weighed, and Tarbuck recorded that "one hundred and eighteen (118) other ships also got under way, many loaded with troops starting a thirteen hundred mile, seven day voyage. It is Friday the 13th. By sundown convoy is formed and we are darkening ship." The three Australian L.S.I's weighed at 3 p.m. Half an hour later Berkey's TG.77.3 sailed and formed cruising disposition as Close Support and Covering Group to the convoy.

The voyage of the Northern Attack Force to Leyte was without undue incident, and "excellent weather with smooth to slight seas and light variable winds was experienced throughout the whole voyage. Speeds of seven to nine knots were maintained."⁴ The size of the convoy was lifted with the joining of III Amphibious Force transports convoy from Manus on 15th October, and Captain Tarbuck commented in his report:

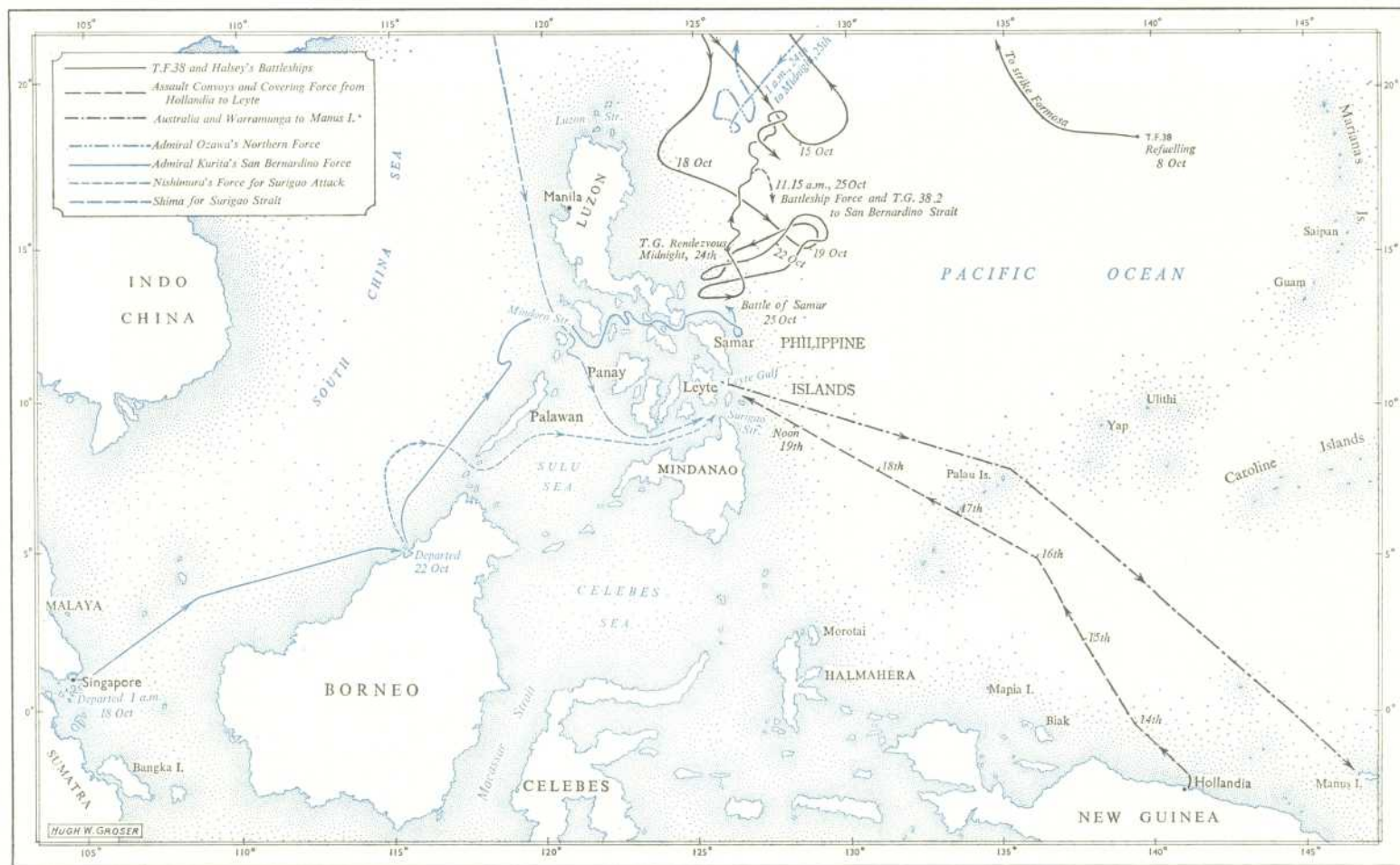
No one could see this great panorama of ships without realising the impotence of any great army engaged in oceanic warfare without control of the sea and air. It has taken thirty-four months of work and patience to build and prepare the combatant and amphibious shipping which enables us to sail to the Philippines today. Practically none of these ships was in existence at the time of the siege of Corregidor.⁵

² Lt-Cdr S. W. S. Robertson, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Winter* and *HDML1074* (in comd 1944-45). Of Melbourne; b. Sale, Vic, 8 Feb 1902.

³ *Blue Ridge*, US amphibious force command ship (1943), 7,431 tons.

⁴ *Manoora's* report.

⁵ Commander Bunyan, in *Kanimbla*, recorded on 15th October that with the joining of the Manus contingent "the Task Force now consisted of the following ships: USS *Blue Ridge*, flagship, in position ahead, followed by the transports *Fayette*, *Ormsby*, *Leedstown*, *Titania*, *Hercules*, *Epping Forest*, *Carter Hall*, *Du Page*, *Fuller*, *Elmore*, *Wayne*, *Aquarius*, *John Loud*, *Gunston Hall*, *Manoora*, *Kanimbla*, and *Westralia*. Astern of the transports were 11 PCs, two SCs, 45



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That day, too, Tarbuck recorded that word was received in the convoy that the American cruisers *Houston*⁶ and *Canberra* had been torpedoed and were under tow. "Apparently an enemy striking force is at sea, for Admiral Halsey informs us that he was deploying the Third Fleet for action and that no further support for the Leyte operation could be expected until the situation clears." The mishaps to the two cruisers were incurred in a series of massive air strikes carried out on the Formosa area by TF.38 from 10th to 14th October inclusive. These destroyed over 500 Japanese aircraft, sank 26 ships each of more than 500 tons and aggregating some 71,000 tons, plus a number of smaller vessels, and caused great destruction of ammunition dumps, hangars, barracks and industrial plants. Third Fleet suffered *Canberra* and *Houston* both hit and badly crippled by aerial torpedoes in Japanese land-based air attacks. Both ships sustained heavy casualties, but by a fine feat of salvage both were towed safely to Ulithi, whence they later reached the United States by way of Manus and Pearl Harbour.

Tarbuck's reference to "an enemy striking force" was apparently to Vice-Admiral Shima's Second Striking Force. Japanese aviators had sent in such optimistic reports of the success of their attacks on TF.38 that the Japanese were deluded into believing that *Houston* and *Canberra* represented the remnants of that force. Shima sortied from the Inland Sea in the hope of sinking crippled carriers, and Halsey's deployment of Third Fleet was such as to encourage Shima to enter a trap. But Shima became suspicious when he was attacked by two carrier-borne aircraft on the morning of 16th October, and reversed course. The soundness of his decision was confirmed that afternoon by a signal from Admiral Fukudome advising him that "more than six carriers" were still operating east of Formosa. TF.38, in operations against Formosa and other targets in the six days 11th to 16th October, lost 89 aircraft—76 of them in combat—with 64 pilots and crewmen.

Not all the ships of the American assault convoys bound for Leyte experienced the "excellent weather with smooth to slight seas and light variable winds" enjoyed by the main convoy. TG.77.5, the Minesweeping and Hydrographic Group, some distance ahead with the Dinagat Force, was "apparently on the front quadrant of a typhoon, which was proceeding in a westerly direction at a slightly greater speed than the convoy".⁷ This resulted in heavy weather from the west with driving rain squalls and visibility at times "zero", which were contributory factors to a mishap to *HDML1074*. The Dinagat Group met three fleet tankers and the Manus slow convoy during the night of the 14th, and commenced fuelling. It was reported on the morning of the 15th that in the bad weather

LCIs, 84 LSTs, 9 LSMs, 40 XAKs. HMA Ships *Australia* and *Shropshire* off the port bow with USS *Boise* and *Phoenix* off the starboard bow formed part of the escort. The destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, US destroyers *Schroeder*, *Murray*, *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Dashiell*, *Hutchins*, *John Rodgers*, *Harrison*, *McKee*, *Russell*, *Killen*, *Daly*, *Bache* and *Beale* were stationed [in circular formation] as destroyer screen."

⁶ *Houston*, US cruiser (1943), 10,000 tons, twelve 6-in and twelve 5-in guns, three aircraft, 32½ kts.

⁷ *Gascoyne*, Letter of Proceedings.

HDML1074 had dropped astern of the Manus convoy and was no longer in company. She was subsequently located some 26 miles astern of the convoy and taken in tow by the minelayer U.S.S. *Preble*⁸ of TG.77.5. It transpired that at 4 a.m. on the morning of the 16th, "in visibility zero with driving rain", *HDML1074* had been challenged by light by an unknown ship—presumed to be one of the tanker escorts—which, receiving an indecipherable reply from the wildly moving H.D.M.L., attempted to ram. This was partially avoided by the H.D.M.L., which suffered considerable bow damage. On ascertaining that the H.D.M.L. was not sinking, the stranger, at her victim's request, reported to CTG.77.5, who sent *Preble* to her assistance; and *HDML1074* carried on successfully to Leyte. Of her, Hunt said in his report:

The performance of *HDML1074* in steaming some 3,000 miles of open sea from Morotai Island, Halmaheras, to Leyte Gulf via Hollandia and Manus, with breaks of 48 hours at Hollandia and 24 hours at Manus only, during which time the ship's company were employed embarking stores, fuel, etc., and in weathering a typhoon after having been in collision, reflects great credit on the Commanding Officer and all concerned.

On 16th and 17th October the cruisers of TG.77.3 fuelled the destroyers, and while *Shropshire* was fuelling *Warramunga* on the 17th advantage was taken to transfer Lieut-Commander Alliston from the cruiser to the destroyer to relieve Mackinnon—who was seriously ill—in command. A diarist in *Shropshire*⁹ recorded the incident:

An interesting happening occurred whilst one of the destroyers was being oiled by us. It appears that the Commanding Officer of this destroyer had become extremely ill and was physically incapable of continuing in active command. One of the senior officers of my ship had an impressive record as a destroyer captain on other stations, and it was decided to transfer him to the command of the destroyer immediately—much to his joy! So, during the course of the fuelling operation, he was transferred from one ship to the other as they steamed alongside, and the destroyer received its skipper in one of the most novel ways on record . . . per bosun's chair . . . and the sick officer was sent to us in the same way.¹

When this was going on, the main convoy was south-west of the Palau Islands, some 500 miles from Leyte Gulf. Dinagat Attack Force was at that time making the entrance to the gulf. Four hours later, at noon on the 17th, *Gascoyne* and the rest of TG.77.5 made the entrance to the gulf, the weather with them being still bad, "wind Force 10-11 in gusts W.S.W., visibility zero". About 4 p.m. the wind commenced to back and conditions immediately improved, so that by daylight on the 18th the sea was smooth, the wind light, and the sky clearing.

There were widely separated happenings on this morning of 17th October. At 6.50 a.m. the Dinagat Attack Force was sighted by Japanese lookouts on Suluan Island. The garrison commander there promptly notified Admiral Toyoda. He, at 8.9 a.m., issued the alert for SHO-GO

⁸ *Preble*, US minelayer (conv. 1937), 1,190 tons, three 3-in guns, 30 kts.

⁹ Ldg Writer J. Yeomans, S5294.

¹ It will be recalled that Alliston was captain of HMS *Javelin* which endeavoured to succour *Nestor* when that ship was crippled by air attack in the Mediterranean, and which eventually removed *Nestor's* company and sank the ship on 16th June 1942.

(SHO-1, the Philippines battle plan). Nine minutes earlier U.S.S. *Denver*, of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf's Fire Support Unit South, opened fire on Suluan Island—first ship to open fire in the assault on the Philippine Islands. And about that time in the Indian Ocean, 1,800 miles due west from Leyte, bombs from aircraft of the Eastern Fleet carriers *Indomitable* and *Victorious* struck Japanese shipping and harbour and airfield installations at Nancowry, in the Nicobar Islands.

This Eastern Fleet operation (MILLET) was carried out as a diversion, at the request of Admiral King. Two Australian ships, the destroyers *Quiberon* (Commander W. H. Harrington) and *Norman* (Commander Buchanan), participated. The object of the operation was to cause the Japanese to expect a landing, and the selected targets were chosen with this in mind. The Force—Force 63—under the orders of Vice-Admiral Eastern Fleet, Vice-Admiral Power, left Trincomalee on the morning of 15th October. It was organised in three groups: (1) *Renown* (Flag) and destroyers *Quilliam*, *Queenborough* and *Quiberon*; (2) *London*, *Cumberland*, *Suffolk*, and destroyers *Relentless*, *Raider*, *Norman*, and *Van Galen*; (3) *Indomitable*, *Victorious*, *Phoebe*, and destroyers *Whelp*, *Wakeful*, *Wessex* and *Wager*.²

At 6 a.m. on the 17th, when about 17 miles S.S.E. of Car Nicobar, the carriers parted company for their flying-off position, and half an hour later began flying off aircraft. Surprise was achieved, and aircraft were over the target area for several minutes before anti-aircraft fire materialised. Bombing was accurate, and the *Ishikari Maru*, only sizeable ship in the harbour, was sunk by a direct hit. The surface bombardment began at 8 a.m., when Group 2 opened fire on targets in the Malacca area. Eight minutes later Group 1 began bombarding in the Car Nicobar area. That night *London*, *Norman* and *Van Galen*, detached from Group 2, carried out a bombardment of Car Nicobar before withdrawing to Trincomalee. A second bombardment of Car Nicobar was carried out on the 18th by *Renown*, *Suffolk*, *Raider*, *Quilliam* and *Queenborough*.

The operation failed in its objective of diverting the Japanese from the Pacific. It inflicted some damage, and cost the Japanese seven aircraft (shot down when they attempted a raid on the Eastern Fleet on the 19th in the only reaction to the raid). The Eastern Fleet lost six air crew and eight aircraft—but gained in morale as a result of the raid.

The Japanese stake in the Pacific was too big for any Indian Ocean inducement to divert them. Having given the SHO-GO alert, Toyoda waited only for certainty that Leyte was the American target, and at 11.10 a.m. on 18th October he gave the "Execute" order. Meanwhile Kurita's First Striking Force left Lingga Roads at 1 a.m. on the 18th for Brunei in North Borneo; and on 20th October—the invaders' "A-day" at Leyte—Admiral Ozawa's Main Body, the Northern Force, got under way in two sections from Kure and Beppu in the Inland Sea, rendezvoused in Bungo Strait,

² HMS's *Whelp*, *Wakeful*, *Wessex*, *Wager*, destroyers (1943), 1,710 tons, four 4.7-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 34 kts.

and emerged thence into the open ocean that evening. The counter moves to the invasion were initiated.

II

In Leyte Gulf preparations were being made for the arrival of the invasion fleet. In the afternoon of the 17th, minesweepers located fields and swept mines. At 7 a.m. on the 18th *Gascoyne* entered the gulf and proceeded up the swept channel to San Pedro Bay, where, with YMS393,³ she commenced buoing the shoals. The two ships were unsuccessfully bombed by a Japanese aircraft in the evening dusk. That day the island objectives of the Dinagat Attack Force were secured with the unopposed occupation of the last on the list, Homonhon. Next day, the 19th, Seventh Fleet suffered its first casualty in the Leyte operation when the destroyer *Ross*,⁴ covering the minesweepers, herself struck two mines. She had 23 men killed and was put out of the fight. At noon on the 19th *Gascoyne* completed the buoing. She and the Y.M.S. had placed 23 dan and drum buoys. Admiral Oldendorf's bombardment group of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, which entered the gulf in the evening of the 18th, commenced their bombardments of the landing beach areas between 8.30 and 9 a.m. on the 19th, the Southern Unit at Dulag, and Weyler's Northern Unit at Tacloban. Bombardments, and work by underwater demolition teams, continued throughout the day, during which twelve of Rear-Admiral Sprague's escort carriers (the other six were providing air cover for the convoys) continued the task they had commenced on the 18th of neutralising Japanese airfields in the Visayas and Mindanao. At this time Halsey was holding most of TF.38 north-east of Luzon in the hope that the Japanese Fleet would still come out to sink the Third Fleet "remnants", and consequently the pre-landing aerial bombardment task devolved upon Sprague.

At noon on the 19th H.M.A.S. *Australia*, with the approaching assault convoy, was in position 9 degrees 42 minutes North, 127 degrees 16 minutes East, 130 miles south-east of Leyte Gulf. For some time the convoy had been within easy range of enemy reconnaissance aircraft from Mindanao, but none was detected, "and we were apparently not sighted". In *Shropshire* the diarist recorded that

"Just-in-case" kits were packed into convenient bags by most men and these contained motley items that had been received from home—condensed milk, barley sugar, processed chocolate, biscuits, raisins, etc. Into this kit also went as a rule a wallet, bankbook, photo of his beloved and, in the case of the Casanovas, the much prized "address book".

In *Manoora* action stations were closed up at midnight on the 19th. The Assistant Director of Intelligence on MacArthur's staff (Lieutenant Bullock⁵) who had manoeuvred a passage in her as observer found that

³ YMS393, US motor minesweeper, 207 tons, one 3-in gun, 13 kts.

⁴ *Ross*, US destroyer (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

⁵ Lt H. W. Bullock, RANVR. NLO Vila 1941-42, Asst Director (Int) GHQ, SWPA 1943-45. Aust High Commissioner in Tanzania since 1966. Public servant; of Sydney; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 10 Feb 1916.

a certain amount of natural nervous tension became apparent. Everyone expecting something but not knowing how much, and it did not help any to know that we were carrying approximately 400 tons of ammunition and petrol in the forward hold.

In Barbey's flagship, *Blue Ridge*, Mindanao was sighted broad on the port bow at 6 p.m. on the 19th, and Tarbuck recorded that

Protestant and Catholic evening prayers were broadcast over the public announcing system. This apparently helped some people, but to others acted as a depressment. Some men whom I queried said it gave them a lift, many said that they felt they were being administered last rites. Obviously if prayer is necessary before going into action, it should be private. At least from a military viewpoint, prayer forced upon some men by loud speakers has a bad psychological effect.

In the late afternoon of the 19th, ships streamed paravanes. During the night *Shropshire* picked up a mine in her port paravane, and, as Midshipman Francis recorded: "Our interest was in a trailing wake slightly astern of the port P/V. At 0600 [20th October] a mine was reported in the wake, and fifteen minutes later course was altered to port to clear the port P/V. Another mine, with its horns clearly visible, could be seen floating close down the port side."

Earlier, at 2 a.m. on the 20th, the Panaon Attack Group detached from the main force, and as dawn broke proceeded down the swept channel through Surigao Strait, with Dinagat Island to port and a mist-shrouded Leyte to starboard. Rear-Admiral Struble's flagship *Hughes* led the way, followed by H.M.S. *Ariadne* and H.M.A. Ships *Manoora*, *Kanimbla* and *Westralia*, two P.C's and some L.C.I's. The ships were screened by American destroyers *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Schroeder* and *Dashiell*.⁶

Dawn broke fine and clear, with light airs and very smooth sea. At 7.15 a.m. one lone Japanese fighter aircraft appeared, dropped one bomb which fell harmlessly well astern of the convoy, and made off to the south-west. The transports arrived in the inner transport area at 8.45 a.m., and boats were lowered and troops began disembarking. Word was received that there were no Japanese on Panaon Island or on the extreme south end of Leyte Island, and the scheduled bombardment was cancelled. At 9.26 all troops were disembarked, and the three Australian L.S.I's moved closer in to discharge cargo, and anchored just after 10 a.m. in 40 fathoms, 800 yards from the nearest beach and 1,500 yards from Green 1 landing beach. All assault waves landed on time, and the beach was found to be excellent for landing craft.

No enemy interference was experienced throughout the whole operation of discharging troops and cargo. Aircraft from Admiral Sprague's escort carriers patrolled overhead all day, and the ships were surrounded by canoes filled with Filipinos. "Food, cigarettes and clothing were handed out to these people," recorded Cousin in *Manoora*, "whose gratitude at deliverance from the Japanese was most sincere and moving. This day was a real 'red letter day' in their lives."

⁶ *Ringgold*, *Sigsbee*, *Schroeder*, *Dashiell*, US destroyers (1942-43), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

Discharge of cargo was completed soon after 4 p.m., and at 5.51 *Manoora*—Senior Officer—weighed anchor and proceeded in formation with *Westralia* and *Kanimbla* and destroyer escort. At intervals during the next hour ships of the convoy drove off a solitary Japanese aircraft—possibly the same one attacking from different directions—which was unable to get in close enough to attack, and the ships, led by Struble in *Hughes*, made their way through the straits unharmed. During the night 15 attack transports (A.P.A.'s) from Barbey's Northern Attack Force joined the Panaon Group, and at dawn on the 21st the convoy of 18 transports, escorted by five American destroyers, proceeded for Hollandia. The three Australian ships anchored in Humboldt Bay just after 10 a.m. on 25th October. In commenting on the operation, Commander Cousin commended those in the three ships "for their excellent performance", and remarked in his report regarding *Manoora*:

The whole operation of landing assault troops and cargo was performed to schedule. The cargo was discharged at a high rate, averaging 90 tons per hour, working three hatches into nothing larger than L.C.M's and L.C.V.P's. This is considered the maximum possible, and great credit is due to the Landing Ship Detachment of the Australian Imperial Force and Lieutenant R. F. Jelley,⁷ A.I.F., the Officer in Charge of the stevedoring on board.

A message to each of the three ships from Admiral Barbey, CTG.78.3, recorded his satisfaction in the words: "The smart performance of your ships today was most gratifying. Officers and men did a splendid job. The Attack Group Commander expresses his appreciation."

III

While the Panaon operation was carried out quietly and peacefully, much noise characterised the landings in Leyte Gulf, where battleship, cruiser, destroyer and aerial bombardments provided the heavy thunder to the continuous roar of the rocket explosions on the beaches. *Gascoyne* and *HDML1074* greeted A-day at anchor in the vicinity of Mariquitdaquit Island, which lies six miles off the Leyte beaches just midway between the northern and southern landing beaches, so that their companies had a grandstand view of the early proceedings, with the procession of Fechteler's ships for the Beach White landings passing to the east of Mariquitdaquit Island and that of Barbey's for Beach Red passing to the west of the island.

"A-day, 20th October, dawned bright and clear," recorded Hunt in his Letter of Proceedings:

From early dawn when the battleships of the bombardment groups followed by the heavy US and RAN cruisers, and numerous destroyers, moved in, until well towards H-hour, 1000, there was a steady procession of ships past us to their anchorages off the White and Red Beaches between San Ricardo and Palo, Leyte. . . . The preliminary bombardment of the beaches just prior to the first wave landing was most impressive, although I understand that immediately the first wave landed on White Beach they were greeted by a Filipino woman and her children who had been living in a grass hut some hundred yards from the water's edge.

⁷ Lt R. F. Jelley, TX1904. HQ 3 Aust Water Transport Gp; 1 Aust Landing Ship Detachment, RAE. Manufacturer's representative; of Sandy Bay, Tas; b. Wellington, NZ, 17 Jul 1910.

This last-mentioned incident may have been due to the fact that in contrast to conditions at Red Beach, Admiral Fechteler's San Ricardo Group's landings on White Beach were virtually unopposed. At Red Beach the L.S.T's which, owing to the flat beach were unable to approach near enough to the shore to discharge, came under mortar fire, and three were hit. In *Blue Ridge*, Tarbuck watched *West Virginia*, at 7.50 a.m., firing her main battery at Red Beach with spotting planes circling overhead. *Blue Ridge* was manoeuvring into the control anchorage just north of Mariquit-daquit Island, and Tarbuck recorded

gray smoke plumes rising from the shore and shell splashes rising between the ships and the shore. Battleship *Mississippi* is now working on the northern beaches. She is joined by *Maryland* whose fire has apparently caused a large shore explosion. . . . Battleships move close inshore and continue their constant thunder. Helldivers and Avengers [dive-bombing aircraft] from our escort carriers are heading towards the shore. Landing craft are swimming out of the LSD's. AKA's are hoisting out trucks, amphibious tractors and field guns. Anchored off Red Beach. Bombardment still in progress. HMAS *Australia* opened fire. The Hydrographic Unit has planted red and black buoys on shoal spots.

At 9.10 Tarbuck observed that hundreds of small boats were headed towards the beaches, flanked by rocket boats and destroyers. The first wave was going in. At 9.58 "thousands of rockets hit the beach with the rumble of an earthquake. It is impossible to distinguish one explosion from another. It is just a roar."

Shropshire's diarist found "the thunderous rumble of these rockets was unbelievable, and resembled perhaps what a machine gun firing 5-inch or 6-inch shells would sound like".

Australia and *Shropshire* passed through the battleship line and opened fire on their assigned targets promptly at the scheduled hour of 9 a.m., as did *Phoenix* and *Boise*. Twenty-five minutes later the destroyers joined in. After the landing at 10 a.m. *Shropshire*, *Arunta* and *Warramunga* were assigned set target areas while the other cruisers and destroyers engaged targets of opportunity and answered calls for fire. Intermittent bombardments were carried out all day, with occasional interludes. *Shropshire's* company "were pleasantly surprised during the afternoon to hear the pipe Cooks of Action Messes muster at the canteen for issue of gophers [the sailors' lolly water or soft drink]. Apparently some kindly soul, rumoured to be the padre, had shouted for the Ship's Company."

In the afternoon of A-day, 20th October, General MacArthur—who, with some members of his staff had sailed up from Hollandia in the cruiser *Nashville*—landed at Beach Red in the northern area. He stepped from a barge knee-deep into the water off the beach, waded ashore, and after inspecting the damage done by the bombardment, made a brief speech beginning with the words: "People of the Philippines, I have returned." It was the fulfilment of the promise he made two-and-a-half years earlier at Terowie, South Australia, on 20th March 1942, soon after his arrival

in Australia from Corregidor and Bataan, when he told newspapermen from Adelaide: "You can say I came out of Bataan and I shall return."⁸

By evening of the 20th, when the Australian cruisers and destroyers took up positions in the Fire Support Area assigned by Admiral Berkeley, the transports of Barbey's Northern Attack Force had completed unloading. Those at Beach Red landed 6,750 tons of supplies, those at Beach White 4,500 tons. Total figures for the day, including cargoes of 11 L.S.T's on Beach Red and of 14 L.S.T's on Beach White, were 18,150 troops and 13,500 tons of supplies. On shore the army attained its objectives. And Admiral Barbey's three groups—Panaon, Palo, and San Ricardo—had successfully carried out their mission for the day.

While they were doing so, Admiral Wilkinson's TF.79 was equally successful at the southern—Dulag—beaches. The combined Task Force, which had proceeded as one unit after the junction of the Hollandia and Manus groups on 15th October, broke up into its various components on arrival at the gulf. Transports of TF.79 were in their transport areas between 8 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. on the 20th. Landings followed an intensive bombardment by battleships *Tennessee*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*, cruisers and destroyers, and the initial advance of the troops inland was rapid. Assault waves and reserve battalions were landed in the morning, and in the afternoon general unloading began. This was slowed—so that less was landed than anticipated—by some enemy mortar fire which scored hits on beached L.S.T's. Assault tonnage landed on the 20th totalled 6,314 tons, of which 1,441 tons was from L.S.T's.

In the afternoon Seventh Fleet suffered its second Leyte casualty when the cruiser *Honolulu*, one of the ships of Oldendorf's Fire Support Unit South, was torpedoed by a Japanese torpedo bomber which made a surprise attack. *Honolulu*, standing by to deliver call fire after completing her bombardment schedule at noon, was swinging ship with the engines when the aircraft dropped its torpedo. *Honolulu* went full astern but time was insufficient and the torpedo struck on the port side just forward of the bridge. It tore a large jagged hole in the ship's side, killed 60 officers and men, and did considerable destruction on board. The ship was saved, but was out of the fight.

By nightfall on A-day, the Southern Attack Force controlled the coast of Leyte over the three-mile stretch from the Liberanan River just north of Beach Orange, to the mouth of the Marabang River, south of Beach Yellow; and XXIV Corps was ready to convert the amphibious phase into a land campaign.

IV

Trafalgar Day, 21st October, dawned badly for the Royal Australian Navy at Leyte. The Japanese made every use of the half light of dawn and dusk for air attack, and, at 6 a.m. this day, *Shropshire* engaged a dive

⁸ In a statement he made on that occasion, MacArthur said: "The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines, and to proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organising the American offensive against the Japanese. A primary purpose of this is the relief of the Philippines. I came through, and I shall return."

bomber which made a sudden appearance between her and *Australia*, lying a short distance away inshore of *Shropshire*. The aircraft dived at *Shropshire* but was apparently put off by the heavy barrage which that ship put up. It pulled out of its dive and flew very close off *Shropshire*'s starboard quarter at a height of about 50 feet, and losing altitude. It came under fire from the after Bofors gun, and observers in *Shropshire* claimed that the aircraft was hit, and that one of its wheels dipped in the water. It retired to the westward, but "it then turned east again and, although under heavy fire, passed up the port side of *Australia* and crashed into the foremast at 0605".⁹ *Australia* was thus the first Allied ship to be hit by a suicide aircraft.¹⁰

An observer in *Australia* said that

the plane, a Val [Aichi 99, Navy single engine dive bomber] was one of a small group which had appeared out of the dark of a western land horizon in the first light of dawn. All were engaged briefly as they flew overhead, and were lost in the half light. Our Val was next seen diving at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees from almost directly astern and at a visibility range of perhaps 2,000 yards. Because of the stern approach the 8-barrelled pom-poms would not bear, although one of them managed to jump the safety training stops and get away a few rounds at an angle of sight of about 45 degrees or above. Apart from this fire, two single 40-mm using eye shooting, and two single 20s with Mark XIV sights, engaged the enemy with no appreciable result, although the pilot's aim was slightly upset, so that he hit the foremast with his wing root and went on over the side, instead of falling on board and adding to the fires.

The resulting fierce petrol fires in the Air Defence position and directors, and the small explosions on the compass platform, probably caused by cannon shell from the aircraft, seriously damaged gunnery and radar equipment in the vicinity and killed or injured the majority of the bridge and control personnel. The loss of so many skilled personnel made the ship virtually useless as a fighting unit, and, whilst repairs were being effected, new crews had to be trained. There seems little evidence that this plane carried a bomb, although it may have been dropped on another target before we were attacked.

This observer remarked that though at the time there were people who believed that the aircraft crashed on *Australia* by mistake, "among those of us who saw the incident, there was no doubt as to the pilot's suicidal intentions".

Another observer in *Australia*, a communication number on the ship's starboard Pom-Pom phones,¹ confirms the impression that there was no doubt as to the suicidal intent of the Japanese pilot.

Of a sudden I heard somebody shout and looking up I saw the first plane pulling out of his dive with machine-guns blazing out of the wings. He was so low I saw his bomb released and instinctively ducked. The bomb landed ten feet from the bows and never exploded. By this time all hands were at their guns.

⁹ Squadron Report, 30th September to 31st October 1944.

¹⁰ According to the American Naval Historian, isolated instances of Japanese pilots crashing aircraft on ships when bombs missed or the aircraft was badly damaged had been observed since 1942, and the attack on *Australia* was in this category, and was not an organised Kamikaze attack. The Kamikaze—"Heavenly Wind"—sacrificial crashing as definite tactics was first used four days after the *Australia* attack in the attacks on escort carriers *Santee* and *Suwannee* on 25th October. (Morison, Vol XII, pp. 148 (footnote) and 166.)

¹ AB R. W. Edmonds, PA4078.

As the second plane came in he strafed us with both machine-gun and cannon and we opened fire. Our gun hit him once and set the plane on fire—this was at 90 degrees starboard. He still came on and by the time he reached 135 degrees starboard the fire had gone out. All this time we were firing into him. He turned over our stern and came straight down for us. We (the Pom-Pom) again poured shells into him and then the whole plane became a mass of flames, but he came straight on at us with all machine-guns blazing and released an anti-personnel bomb (spattering shrapnel in all directions) and then crashed into the forebridge. The other plane was also shot down by the Pom-Pom. Another was downed by the 4-inch. *Shropshire* says we shot down four, but no gun claims a fourth.

In *Shropshire*, Midshipman Francis recorded that

Australia at this time was lying stopped in a position somewhat closer to the shore. The visibility had slightly improved and I could see a Val diving in for an attack. The angle of the dive was about 45 degrees. The next minute there was a livid flash in the vicinity of the 273 [radar] and DCT [Director Control Tower] which were just a mass of flame. There were several small fires alongside in the water. The situation was obscure at first but the correct assumption was that the Val had hit and bent part of the mast, knocked out the 273 tower and damaged the DCT. The Captain and Navigator were killed, the Commodore severely wounded, with seven more fatal casualties and another 75 suffering from burns of various degree.

Some *Shropshire* observers thought that the aircraft which first attacked them was not the one which subsequently attacked *Australia*, and Captain Tarbuck in *Blue Ridge* thought three were involved in the attack on the Australian flagship. He recorded:

Three enemy planes strafe HMAS *Australia* within a few hundred yards of this ship. Two are shot down but the third one dives into her foremast. Her bridge structure is ablaze and the sheerlegs of her mast are broken. Our doctor returns on board with the information that Commodore Collins has been wounded and the ship's captain killed.

Captain Nichols in *Shropshire* who, with Collins out of action, assumed the duties of CTU.77.3.2 and CTF.74, stated that only one aircraft was involved:

During the dawn stand-to a low flying aircraft approached from the land between *Australia* and *Shropshire*. It was taken under fire and retired to the westward. Observers in *Shropshire* report that the aircraft was hit and touched the water but recovered. It then turned east again and although under heavy fire, passed up the port side of *Australia*, and crashed into the foremast at 0605. There was a large explosion and an intense fire was started in the Air Defence position and bridge. Type 273 Radar Hut and lantern fell on to the compass platform, both H.A. Directors and D.C.T. were put out of action, and the port strut of the foremast was broken. The fire was brought under control very quickly and by 0635 the large quantity of wreckage on the compass platform and A.D.P. had been cleared away. Commodore J. A. Collins suffered burns and wounds; Captain E. F. V. Dechaineux and Commander J. F. Rayment² were mortally wounded. As far as is known at present the following casualties were sustained: killed or died of wounds, 3 officers, 3 ratings, 4 unidentified; wounded, 16 officers, 49 ratings.

These preliminary figures did not show the full extent of the casualties.

² Cdr J. F. Rayment, DSC; RAN. HMAS *Australia* 1918, 1939-44. Of Cremorne, NSW; b. Leichhardt, NSW, 20 Aug 1900. Died of wounds 21 Oct 1944.

Thirty officers and men were killed or died of wounds³ and 64 officers and men were wounded, 26 seriously.

A first report of the damage suffered by *Australia* was made to Vice-Admiral Kinkaid, Rear-Admiral Barbey and Rear-Admiral Berkey, and Commander Wright assumed command of *Australia*, and the ship's emergency conning position took over. The Staff Officer (Operations) and Commodore's Staff transferred to *Shropshire*. At 11 a.m. *Australia*, screened by *Warramunga*, was ordered by Kinkaid to join the damaged *Honolulu* in the Southern Transport Area off Dulag, and at 1.14 p.m. the three ships sailed for Kossol Passage, Palau Islands—the destroyer screen being supplemented during the afternoon by American destroyer *Richard P. Leary*.⁴ The force cleared Leyte Gulf at 8 p.m. on the 21st, and entered Kossol at 10 a.m. on the 24th. That afternoon *Australia* and *Warramunga* sailed for Manus, which was reached in the early morning of 27th October. *Australia*'s wounded were landed at Kossol Roads and at Manus for hospital treatment. At Manus, Captain Armstrong—formerly N.O.I.C. New Guinea—assumed command of *Australia*, and on 28th October the ship sailed for Espiritu Santo, where repairs were effected with such dispatch that by 28th November she was ready to sail to rejoin the Task Group.

During the next two or three days consolidation and build-up progressed in the Leyte operation. *Shropshire* and *Arunta* stood by in the fire support area "D", south of Beach Red, to answer calls for fire during the daylight hours, and at night patrolled to the eastward of the transport area. On the 21st Dulag and Palo were occupied, and that afternoon Tacloban fell to the invaders, and Lieut-General F. C. Sibert, U.S. Army, commanding X Corps, relieved Barbey of command of the northern operations. In the forenoon of the 23rd, at the municipal building in Tacloban, General MacArthur—who was accompanied by President Sergio Osmena of the Philippines—broadcast an address setting up the Free Philippines Civil Government, with Osmena as its legal president under the supreme authority of the United States. The national flag of the Philippine Commonwealth (made for the occasion by the sailmaker's mate of U.S.S. *Nashville*) was hoisted together with the colours of the United States.

On the 24th, when 144,800 Americans and 244,440 tons of supplies had been landed on Leyte, the Japanese made the heaviest air raids so far attempted in their opposition to the Leyte attack. It was estimated

³ Those killed or died of wounds were: *Officers*—Captain Dechaineux, RAN; Commander Rayment, RAN; Lieut-Commander H. B. Gerrett, RAN; Lieutenants G. J. Greig, RAN, H. B. Bayley, RANR and I. M. Jones, RANVR(NZ); Sub-Lieutenant I. K. Debenham, RANR. *Ratings*—Able Seaman M. Buckland, PM6014; Ldg Seaman R. J. Cornish, 23732; Able Seaman H. P. Eller, 14621; Able Seaman J. N. Erwin, S6904; Able Seaman G. K. Fenton, H2118; Able Seaman E. S. Fontaine, PM4828; Able Seaman V. L. Hansen, S7238; Able Seaman J. W. Hocking, PM6289; Ordinary Seaman R. Hocking, PA4406; Ordinary Seaman R. S. Hookins, PM7168; Chief Petty Officer G. F. Hutchinson, 13263; Able Seaman R. Irvine, S8206; Able Seaman A. R. Maunsell, S5801; Able Seaman F. G. Miller, 18125; Able Seaman R. J. Parkinson, PM2686; Able Seaman F. P. Perrin, 14288; Leading Seaman D. Pittendrigh, F3746; Ordinary Seaman C. P. Potter, PM7170; Able Seaman N. A. Rattray, 24493; Ordinary Seaman R. H. Sharpe, F5175; Able Seaman F. F. Spurr, S6949; Able Seaman R. M. Steele, PA2854; Able Seaman F. G. Stephenson, B3634.

⁴ *Richard P. Leary*, US destroyer (1944), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

in *Shropshire* that about 80 to 100 aircraft approached from the north-westward, but only 20 or 30 penetrated to the transport area, and eight of these were seen to be shot down by defending fighters. In *Blue Ridge* Tarbuck watched

eight to ten enemy bombers fly over dropping two bombs between *Blue Ridge* and *Shropshire*, no hits. . . . Enemy dive bombers launch an attack on the starboard bow. . . . *Shropshire* and a destroyer commence firing, and the aircraft are turning away. Fighter pilots can be heard "tally-hoing" the enemy. Three planes fall burning, one crashed on shore. One LCI bursts into flames from a hit of suicide plane crash. One Liberty ship is hit by a bomb. There is too much smoke to identify ships now, and the burning oil smoke of the LCI rises 5,000 feet, flames about 200 feet.

That afternoon reports of the sighting of a Japanese task force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers in the eastern Sulu Sea indicated that an attempt might be made to force Surigao Strait from the south. Kinkaid ordered the Bombardment and Fire Support Group (TG.77.2) and Berkey's Close Covering Group (TG.77.3) to cover the southern entrance of Surigao Strait and to destroy any enemy ships attempting to force an entrance. Thirty P.T. boats were also assigned to the task.

The possibility of a Japanese attempt to outflank the invasion forces by a thrust through Surigao Strait had been foreseen before the invasion. A South-West Pacific Headquarters staff study, "Japanese Fleet Possibilities, King-Two Operation"⁵ of 4th October stressed the likelihood. The study detailed the components of the Japanese Fleet, split into two major parts of the carrier forces, which "can be dismissed as kept out of KING-TWO operation by the U.S. 3rd Fleet", and "Jutland-organised task forces comprising four fast battleships, two slow battleships, 12 heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and 27 destroyers". This "Jutland-organised" group said the study, was divided into a *1st Diversion Attack Force* of seven heavy and one light cruiser and 12 destroyers; and a *2nd Diversion Attack Force* of four fast battleships, five heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, 15 destroyers, with a replenishment group escort of two slow battleships and two older cruisers.

It was in the *1st Diversion Attack Force*, said the study, where lay the surface danger to the KING-TWO amphibious forces:

It is a typical Tokyo Express based at Brunei Bay, at present out of range of land-based and sea-borne air, but within striking distance of the landing force area. . . . That force already has received a directive to attack the invasion force at night. Since the KING-TWO landing is a frontal attack, four divisions abreast, the Surigao Strait when unsecured presents an exposed flank. If our bombardment forces retire to seaward at night Surigao Strait becomes an open back door. It must be assumed therefore that the Japanese *2nd Diversion Attack Force* (battleships) will attempt to create diversions which are calculated to draw off our slow battleships, and our cruisers and destroyers, from screening positions in the vicinity of Surigao Strait.

⁵ Signed by Captain Ray Tarbuck as the senior naval adviser permanently attached to General Headquarters, and chairman of the committee which drafted the original and first revision of the KING-TWO plan.

The study concluded that an enemy night striking force was poised to attack KING-TWO through Surigao Strait, that the strait should be forced and secured by the Americans as soon as they had secured control of the air, and that surface forces superior to the enemy's *1st Diversion Attack Force* should be maintained within intercepting distance of that force regardless of larger fleet movements.

The study was a sound appreciation of what could happen, and a close approximation of what did happen. In the event it was wrong in dismissing the Japanese carrier force as "kept out of KING-TWO operations by the U.S. 3rd Fleet". As a powerful air striking force it was kept out of KING-TWO by its lack of aircraft and of adequately trained air crews. But, in Ozawa's Northern Force, it was represented at Leyte by the "decoy" force which, with its threat of air attack, seduced Halsey with his Third Fleet carriers and battleships away from Leyte Gulf, to leave that open to a combined attack by both the *1st* and *2nd Japanese Diversion Attack Forces*.

As stated above, on 15th October Halsey informed MacArthur that he was deploying Third Fleet for action (to the north of the Philippines) and that no further support for the Leyte operation could be expected until the situation cleared. This signal caused concern in South-West Pacific Headquarters (where MacArthur was about to embark in *Nashville* for Leyte) and in the evening of the 15th MacArthur sent a signal to Nimitz at Pearl Harbour suggesting that consideration be given to the thought that the *2nd Diversion Attack Force* might be the bulk of enemy surface strength in the South China Sea—Singapore area, consisting of 6 battleships, 12 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers and 20 destroyers, representing practically all of the enemy's available surface strength. General Headquarters also suggested that this force would sortie through San Bernardino Strait or Surigao Strait. G.H.Q. warned Pacific Fleet that the left flank at Leyte was unguarded, and that should the Japanese battle line appear there when Third Fleet was beyond intercepting distance, the result would be disastrous.

An Australian naval officer played a part in the originating of this signal. Pay-Lieutenant Connor⁶ was Naval Staff Officer (Intelligence), Combined Operations Intelligence Centre at MacArthur's headquarters. His special duty was the collation, appreciation and interpretation of Intelligence of Japanese naval dispositions, regarding which he, over a period of months, made a daily personal report to MacArthur. It was found that interpretation of identical Intelligence available to Pearl Harbour and to G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. often differed, and that while Pearl Harbour believed that the greater proportion of Japanese naval strength was in northern waters, G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. believed that it was at Singapore. This difference in assessment now obtruded itself at a crucial moment. Connor felt so strongly about the Halsey signal, that he sent a memo to General Sutherland stressing the evidence that the major Japanese force was in southern waters, and

⁶ Lt-Cdr G. J. Connor, VRD; RANVR. NSO(Int), COIC 1940-41, GHQ SWPA 1942-45. Stock and share broker; of Melbourne; b. Clifton Hill, Vic, 21 Jan 1913.

that the menace it presented necessitated the availability of Third Fleet if it were adequately to be controlled. He recalled after the war:

I remember the incident vividly because of the urgency for some action, particularly in view of General MacArthur's leaving that night for Leyte. I sent my memo to General Sutherland that evening. After dinner I was called to GHQ, verbally to expand the argument in the memo. This I did to General MacArthur and General Sutherland, after which General MacArthur dictated the signal to Pacific Fleet.

It is difficult to reconcile this with the statements that G.H.Q., S.W.P.A. anticipated but slight possibility of strong Japanese naval reaction to the landings. The American naval historian remarks that

on A-day itself General MacArthur's headquarters issued a broadsheet headed "Enemy Capabilities of Naval Reaction to Allied Landings on the Philippines", in which it was confidently stated that an approach of the Japanese Fleet through Surigao or San Bernardino Straits would be "impracticable because of navigational hazards and the lack of manoeuvring space". On A-day plus 1, the South-West Pacific Intelligence Summary announced that there was "no apparent intent" of the Japanese Navy "to interfere with our Leyte landings". And Admiral Kinkaid, from his flagship in Leyte Gulf during the small hours of 23 October, sent out a dispatch stating that he regarded the approach of Japanese warships to Coron Bay as the beginning of "Tokyo Express" runs, and that there was a possibility of enemy carrier planes operating from west of Palawan.⁷

It is equally difficult to reconcile the above with the fact that CTF.77, Kinkaid, had, in the words of CTG.77.2, Oldendorf, "clearly visualised the enemy capabilities", and took steps to counter them. In his report of the Battle of Surigao Strait, Oldendorf wrote:

For a number of days prior to this action many reports had been received concerning the movement of Japanese surface forces. It was understood that the Japanese were putting into effect a plan for the relief of the Philippines and that enemy surface forces were probably about to attack our forces in Leyte Gulf. Mindful of the Japanese activities in the Visayan area, Commander Task Group 77.2 had decided on 22nd October that it would be wise to take precautionary dispositions in the vicinity of Leyte Gulf with particular emphasis on Surigao Strait, south, and had issued a directive to his forces directing them to take stations with light forces initially located on an east-west line four miles east of Taytay Point, on course east, speed 5 knots, and with heavy forces plus destroyer screen located to the northward in area Drum south of latitude 10 degrees 46 mins north. The directive for Task Group 77.2 to remain in an area of latitude 10 degrees 46 mins north had come originally from Commander Task Force 77, who had evidently clearly visualised the enemy capabilities.⁸

V

It will be recalled that in the preliminaries to the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, the American submarines played an important part both in reconnaissance and in action, while the Japanese submarines failed to achieve anything. So it was in the battle for Leyte. With the mission of

⁷ Morison, Vol XII, p. 72.

⁸ Oldendorf, Preliminary Action Report for Battle of Surigao Strait. Dated 2 Nov 1944. Filed 7th Fleet A16-3(2) SWPA ops 1-5 Nov 1944.

intercepting the invaders before they reached their target, fifteen Japanese submarines were stationed off the Leyte area—but not until 24th October. They had only one success, the sinking by *I 45* of the American destroyer escort *Eversole*⁹ on 29th October. As at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the American submarines, both in reconnaissance and action, had notable achievements. And again it was they that gave the first definite Intelligence of the movements of the main Japanese forces.

Some 40 American submarines operated in the western Pacific at this period. Concentrated in the area between Japan and the Philippines were 26 boats of Submarines Pacific Fleet, under the command of Vice-Admiral Lockwood, and operating from Pearl Harbour. At strategic points in the South-West Pacific were 14 boats of Submarines South-West Pacific under the command of Rear-Admiral Christie, and based on Brisbane and Fremantle. Four were in the Palawan Passage area, and others were west of northern Palawan, off Brunei Bay, at the north end of Macassar Strait, the inner end of Surigao Strait, off Manila, and along the north-west coast of Luzon.

On 1st October two of the Fremantle-based boats, *Darter*¹ and *Dace*, left Mios Wundi for a patrol of Palawan Passage, the 25-mile-wide channel between Palawan Island and unsurveyed Dangerous Ground to the westward. Palawan, a long, narrow island, stretches its 250 miles of length north-east from the northern point of Borneo—from which it is separated by Balabac Strait—to Coron Island, betwixt which and Mindoro Island, farther to the north-east, is Mindoro Strait. The two submarines were in company off the southern entrance to Palawan Passage in the night of 22nd-23rd October.

Kurita's First Attack Force consisting of battleships *Yamato*, *Musashi*, *Nagato*, *Kongo*, *Haruna*, *Yamashiro* (flag of Vice-Admiral Nishimura) and *Fuso*; heavy cruisers *Atago* (flag of Vice-Admiral Kurita), *Takao*, *Maya*, *Chokai*, *Myoko*, *Haguro*, *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma*, *Tone*, and *Mogami*; light cruisers *Noshiro* and *Yahagi*, and 19 destroyers, arrived at Brunei from Lingga Roads on 20th October. Here, Kurita detached the Southern Attack Force under Nishimura. It consisted of battleships *Yamashiro* and *Fuso*; heavy cruiser *Mogami*; and destroyers *Michishio*, *Yamagumo*, *Asagumo* and *Shigure*. The two forces left Brunei on the 22nd. Nishimura, after a diversion to the northward to avoid suspected submarines, made through Balabac Strait into the Sulu Sea on his way to Surigao Strait. Kurita, with the main body, steered north-east through Palawan Passage, making for the central Philippines and San Bernardino Strait. The two forces had an appointment in Leyte Gulf on the 25th. It was not to be kept.

At 6 a.m. on 23rd October Kurita's Centre Force, in two groups separated by some 6,000 yards, was well in Palawan Passage. The force was cruising in line ahead in two columns, disposed abeam to starboard, steering

⁹ *Eversole*, US destroyer escort (1944), 1,350 tons, two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts. Sunk off Leyte 29 Oct 1944.

¹ *Darter*, US submarine (1943), 1,526 tons, one gun (3- to 5-in), ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 20 kts. Ran ashore, and abandoned 24 Oct 1944.

north-easterly at 16 knots and zigzagging. In the leading group *Atago* led the port column, followed by *Takao*, *Chokai*, and *Nagato*. In the second group the port column was continued in the order *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Haruna*. *Myoko* led the starboard column, followed by *Haguro*, *Maya*, *Yamato*, *Musashi*, and, in the second group, *Tone*, *Chikuma*, and *Kongo*. The light cruisers and destroyers screened on the outside of each column, and three destroyers were in column between the two main columns. But Kurita had neglected to station destroyers ahead of his disposition. This was a costly omission, since *Darter* and *Dace*, which had contacted the force soon after one o'clock that morning and had hastened at 19 knots throughout the night to get into position for attack, were now some 20,000 yards dead ahead, undetected.

At 6.32 a.m., when the Japanese had just completed a turn to port, *Darter* fired her bow torpedoes at *Atago* at a range of only 980 yards, and a minute later attacked *Takao* with her stern tubes. Hit by four torpedoes, *Atago* sank at 6.53 with the loss of 360 officers and men. Kurita and his staff were taken off by the destroyer *Kishinami* (2,100 tons) and later in the day transferred to *Yamato*. *Takao*, hit by two torpedoes, had her rudder and two propellers blown off, and three boiler rooms flooded. She remained afloat, but had to return to Brunei. About ten minutes after *Darter's* attack, *Dace*, from a position broad on the port bow of the starboard column, secured four torpedo hits on the third ship in the column, heavy cruiser *Maya*, which sank almost immediately.²

The two submarines survived depth-charge attacks by the escorting Japanese destroyers, but at 1.5 a.m. on the 24th, when they were manoeuvring in company to make another attack on Kurita's force, *Darter* ran ashore on Bombay Shoal, a coral reef on the China side of the passage. After unavailing efforts to get her off, she was abandoned. *Dace*, with her company swelled to a total of 155 officers and men with the addition of *Darter's* complement, returned to Fremantle.

This notable success against Kurita's force paved the way for another, since the signal which *Darter* sent to Admiral Christie at the time of her attack on *Atago*, was relayed by Christie to Admiral Halsey at 6.20 that morning, and gave the Americans the first definite information they had about the Japanese fleet's position. Halsey at once disposed his carrier groups to strike against this threat; and meanwhile other enemy reports arrived. During the night of the 23rd-24th the American carrier Task Groups 38.2, 38.3 and 38.4, which had been operating about 260 miles north-east of Samar, were called in toward the coast. They were disposed with Rear-Admiral F. P. Sherman's TG.38.3 northernmost, east of Luzon; Rear-Admiral G. F. Bogan's TG.38.2 off San Bernardino Strait; and Rear-Admiral Davison's TG.38.4 off Leyte Gulf. At daybreak on the 24th the carriers launched search teams, and at 8.12 a.m. an aircraft from

² Thus were accounted for, within a period of minutes on the morning of 23rd October 1944, three cruisers, *Atago*, *Takao*, and *Maya*, of Admiral Kondo's force which sank HMAS *Yarra* on the morning of 4th March 1942. (See *Royal Australian Navy, 1939-1942*, pp. 629-32.)

Intrepid in TG.38.2, sighted Kurita, then rounding the southern cape of Mindoro and entering the Sibuyan Sea. At 9.5 a.m. aircraft from *Enterprise* and *Franklin*³ of TG.38.4 sighted Nishimura in the Sulu Sea, about 50 miles W.S.W. of the southernmost point of Negros Island. And at 11.55 a.m. a U.S. Army Air Force bomber picked up Shima's force of heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Ashigara*, and light cruiser *Abukuma* and four destroyers, some 75 miles north-west of where Nishimura was sighted.⁴ Only Ozawa's Northern Force, making down from Japan and then some 200 miles due east of Luzon's Cape Engano, was not so far located.

Halsey intercepted the Kurita sighting report and at 8.27 a.m. ordered Sherman and Davison to concentrate on Bogan's TG.38.2 off San Bernardino Strait (where his own flagship, *New Jersey*, was operating) and launch strikes. Davison did so, but about the time of Kurita's sighting heavy air attacks by Japanese land-based carrier aircraft, and later by aircraft from Ozawa's still undetected Northern Force, developed on Sherman's TG.38.3. At 9.39 a.m. the carrier *Princeton*⁵ was hit by one bomb from a solitary dive bomber. It started a small fire on the hangar deck. The fire soon became a major conflagration, with explosions spreading it mortally. Vice-Admiral Mitscher ordered TG.38.3 to remain with the stricken ship. Throughout the day the efforts—by her own company and those of succouring ships of the task group—to save her continued, but about 3.30 p.m. on the 24th her after magazine exploded, blowing off her stern and turning the upper deck of the cruiser *Birmingham*—then alongside her—into a shambles. The weather was deteriorating, and at 5.50 p.m., on instructions from Mitscher, *Princeton* was sunk by torpedoes and gunfire.

Meanwhile, throughout the day between 10.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m., aircraft from Bogan's and Davison's groups battered Kurita's force as it crossed the Sibuyan Sea, with Sherman's aircraft joining in from 11 a.m. Kurita had negligible air cover, since Admiral Fukudome felt that the best protection he could give with his Luzon-based aircraft was in attacking the American carriers, but the American fliers had to face intense anti-aircraft fire. The principal loss suffered by the Japanese in these attacks was that of the giant battleship *Musashi*. In the first attack, about 10.30 a.m. on the 24th, she was hit on the starboard side by three torpedoes, and about twenty minutes later suffered another five torpedo hits on the port side. From about 1 p.m. she fell astern of the main disposition, and suffered more hits in the afternoon. In all, she was hit by about 30 bombs and 26 torpedoes. An attempt was made to beach her on the north coast of Sibuyan Island, but about 7.30 p.m. the giant capsized to port and sank—with the loss of more than 1,000 of her company of 2,200. Heavy cruiser

³ *Intrepid*, *Franklin*, US aircraft carriers (1943-44), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

⁴ Shima had been reported, then west of Luzon, the previous morning, by submarine *Bream*. He called in at Coron Bay to refuel, and sailed thence early on the 24th.

⁵ *Princeton*, US aircraft carrier (1943), 11,000 tons, eighteen 40-mm guns, 33 aircraft, 32 kts. Sunk off Philippines, 24 Oct 1944.

Myoko was also knocked out of the fight, and had to return to Singapore; and *Yamato*, cruiser *Yahagi*, and destroyer *Kiyoshima* suffered bomb damage. But Kurita, after a brief reversal of course in the late afternoon to avoid air attack, pushed on towards his objective. So did Nishimura. He was attacked by aircraft from *Enterprise* of Davison's group at 9.5 a.m., when south of Negros Island, but suffered only minor damage.

While Kurita and Nishimura were making their separate ways towards Leyte Gulf, Ozawa's Northern Force continued its efforts to attract Halsey away from the Leyte Gulf area. When Fukudome's land-based aircraft located Sherman's TG.38.3 in the early morning of the 24th, the sighting was passed to Ozawa, then some 240 miles to the NNE of the American force, which Ozawa's search aircraft sighted at 11.15 bearing 120 degrees distance 180 miles. Half an hour later Ozawa sent off a strike of 76 aircraft to attack Sherman. Many of these were shot down, 15 or 20 made emergency landings on Luzon, and only 29 returned to Ozawa. The appearance of these carrier-borne aircraft from a sector roughly between north and north-east of Sherman suggested that a Japanese carrier force might be there. Sherman was instructed by Mitscher to launch a search, and at 4.40 p.m. on the 24th Ozawa—who meantime had been steering a box course to maintain his general geographical position—was reported, 190 miles NNE of TG.38.3.

This discovery of the Japanese carrier force placed the onus of a heavy decision on Admiral Halsey. His reaction to the sighting, coupled with the information he had received about Kurita's and Nishimura's forces, the American naval historian suggested, "can best be stated in the words of his own dispatch to Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur at about 2200 October 25, after the battle was over". In this dispatch Halsey said:

Searches by my carrier planes revealed the presence of the Northern carrier force on the afternoon of 24 October, which completed the picture of all enemy naval forces. As it seemed childish to me to guard statically San Bernardino Strait, I concentrated TF38 during the night and steamed north to attack the Northern Force at dawn. I believed that the Center Force had been so heavily damaged in the Sibuyan Sea that it could no longer be considered a serious menace to Seventh Fleet.⁶

Halsey thus fell for the Ozawa bait, and at 8.22 p.m. on the 24th ordered the three carrier groups to steam north and attack Ozawa. Meanwhile the fourth air group of TF.38, Vice-Admiral McCain's TG.38.1, which was returning from Ulithi where it had been to replenish, was ordered to join the others. By midnight on the 24th, Halsey himself in *New Jersey*, with the three fast carrier groups and all their battleships and cruisers, was proceeding north at 16 knots, leaving unguarded San Bernardino Strait whence Kurita, with his still powerful fleet, was just about to emerge, while away to the southwards Nishimura was driving northwards through Surigao Strait towards the Seventh Fleet forces there disposed to bar his passage.

⁶ Morison, Vol XII, p. 193.

VI

At midnight on 24th October 1944, the Allied and Japanese naval forces in the Philippines were widely spread, with all the potentials for three separate battles. Farthest north, in an area about 200 miles SE by E of Luzon's Cape Engano, was Ozawa's force of *CarDiv Three*—one fleet carrier and 3 light carriers with a total of 29 aircraft; 2 converted battleship carriers with no aircraft; 3 light cruisers and 9 destroyers. Northbound, south of Ozawa some 180 miles, was Halsey with Third Fleet's three fast carrier task groups of a total of 5 fleet carriers and 5 light carriers, 6 battleships, 2 heavy and 6 light cruisers, and 41 destroyers. Some 150 miles south-west of Halsey, Kurita, with 4 battleships, including the giant *Yamato*, 6 heavy and 2 light cruisers, and 15 destroyers, was just emerging from San Bernardino Strait. Around 150 miles from Kurita, off the east coast of Samar Island, were the northernmost ships (TU.77.4.3) of TG.77.4, Rear-Admiral Thomas Sprague's Escort Carrier Group, whose 16 escort carriers, with their screens totalling 9 destroyers and 12 destroyer escorts, were disposed in three groups some 50 miles apart off Samar, off Leyte Gulf, and off Mindanao. Their primary task was to provide air support for the amphibious forces, and maintain anti-submarine patrols. Each carrier was armed with one 5-inch gun, and carried 12 to 18 "Wildcat" fighter aircraft and 12 torpedo bombers. And beyond these northern escort carriers, some 100 miles farther south and west, was Leyte Gulf, with a rich harvest for the reaping⁷ if the approaching Japanese could get in among it. And, 90 miles or so south of that harvest field, also bound for it to share in the reaping, Nishimura's force of 2 battleships, one heavy cruiser and 4 destroyers, off Bohol Island, was approaching Surigao Strait unaware that waiting for him at its northern gateway was the Seventh Fleet Fire Support Unit and Close Covering Force—a stopper in the bottleneck which was to bar his passage and substitute an appointment with death for that he had in Leyte Gulf with Kurita.

VII

The battle which resulted from the barring of Nishimura's passage through Surigao Strait was the first of the three to be fought. On 22nd October Rear-Admiral Oldendorf, CTG.77.2, directed his forces to take precautionary dispositions in the vicinity of Leyte Gulf to the south of latitude 10 degrees 46 minutes north, as instructed by Kinkaid, with particular emphasis on Surigao Strait. When the TG.38.4 aircraft sighted Nishimura off Negros on the 24th, Kinkaid, at 3.13 p.m. that day, directed Oldendorf to prepare for a night engagement, and to take under his command TG.77.3 in addition to TG.77.2 for this action. Because of his preoccupation with the possibility of a Japanese attack through Surigao

⁷ There were in San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, 28 Liberty ships, the three amphibious force flagships—*Blue Ridge*, *Fremont*, and *Hughes*, and USS *Nashville* with General MacArthur on board. They were screened by destroyer escorts and patrol craft. At 3 p.m. on 24th October, Tarbuck, in *Blue Ridge*, recorded that "a quick count showed 141 ships in the Gulf, LCI's or larger".

Strait, Oldendorf had already formulated his battle plan. This—covering a Japanese entrance both to Surigao Strait south (between Leyte and Dinagat) and Surigao Strait east (between Hibuson Island and Dinagat)—was speedily drawn up.

The Allied forces were disposed in the northern part of Surigao Strait to avoid the restricted waters farther south, and were deployed at about latitude 10 degrees 30 minutes north, in a rough crescent concave to the southward. The battle line was composed of *Mississippi* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Weyler), *West Virginia*, *Maryland*, *Tennessee*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*, with screen of six destroyers. It was to steam east and west at five knots along a line of about eleven miles, reversing course at each end. The flank forces maintained station on the battle line. The left flank—the stronger of the two because of the increased danger from Surigao Strait east—was composed of *Louisville* (Oldendorf's Flagship), *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, *Denver*, *Columbia*, and nine destroyers. The right flank was of *Phoenix* (Flag of Rear-Admiral Berkey), *Boise*, H.M.A.S. *Shropshire*, and six destroyers, including H.M.A.S. *Arunta*. An additional five destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 54, which was on station patrolling across Surigao Strait south, reported to Oldendorf, and moved into position on the right flank. During the afternoon of the 24th, Oldendorf held a conference with Weyler and Berkey in *Louisville*, and details of the battle plan—in which they enthusiastically concurred—were settled. Because of shortage of ammunition, and the necessity for a high percentage of hits and high fire effect by the battleships, it was decided that their range should be between 17,000 and 20,000 yards.

Disposed down the Strait and into the Mindanao Sea were 39 P.T. boats of Seventh Fleet's Torpedo Boat Squadrons. They patrolled and watched the southern approaches of Surigao Strait, from the southernmost line through the Mindanao Sea from Bohol Island to Kamigin Island, up the approaches to the vicinity of Leyte's south-eastern bulge. It was from the P.T. boats that the first sightings were made of the approaching Japanese that night, and the first attacks on the enemy were made.

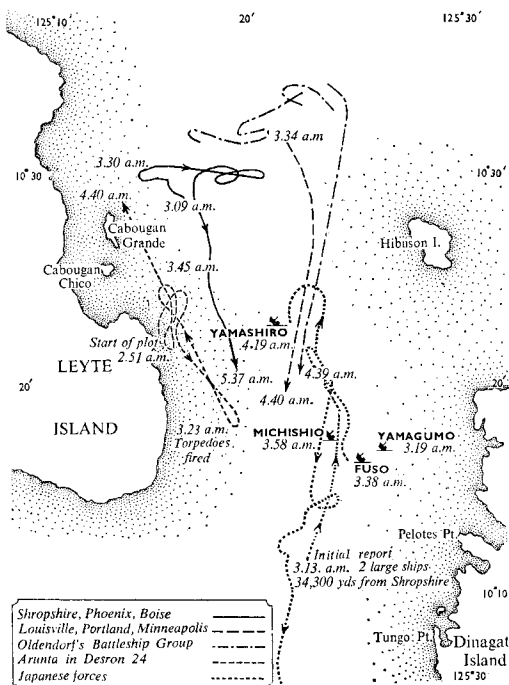
At 9.5 a.m. on the 24th the TG.38.4 aircraft sighted and attacked Nishimura in the Sulu Sea off Negros Island. That was the last definite news of him received by Oldendorf until half an hour after midnight that night. At 10.36 p.m. on the 24th, *PT131*, of the southernmost group of P.T. boats, picked up Nishimura's flag group on radar between Bohol and Kamigin Islands. It consisted of the two battleships and *Shigure*, since an hour and a half earlier Nishimura had detached *Mogami* and the other three destroyers to reconnoitre ahead. They did so as far as Panaon Island, and rejoined Nishimura at 11.30 p.m. *PT131*'s section of three boats attacked, but were unable to get within torpedo range. Taken under gunfire by *Shigure*, they suffered casualties, and had radio apparatus knocked out so that they were unable to get the sighting report away. It was eventually relayed by *PT127* of Section 2 of the P.T.'s, and reached Oldendorf at 12.26 a.m. on 25th October. Nishimura was proceeding at 18

knots, and on the reconnaissance group rejoining he formed his battle line in line ahead, in the order *Michishio*, *Asagumo*, *Yamagumo*, *Shigure*, *Yamashiro*, *Fuso*, *Mogami*. Some 30 miles astern of him was Shima (who, it will be recalled, was sighted by an American Army Air Force bomber at 11.55 a.m. on the 24th about 120 miles west of Negros) with his two heavy and one light cruisers and four destroyers.

The night was clear and dark. There was no wind. The sea was flat calm with no swell. Visibility at the American line of battle was two to three miles without night glasses, but was almost zero against the land. At seven minutes past midnight the moon set. As the battle line and its flanking forces steamed slowly east and west across the Strait—there 12 miles wide—reports of the advancing Japanese followed that of *PT127*, marking their progress up the Strait. In succession the P.T. boat sections attacked, reported, were illuminated by Japanese searchlights and were targets for enemy gunfire (gun flashes from Nishimura's ships were seen by those in Shima's group following up astern). The last P.T. boat attack on Nishimura was delivered at 2.13 a.m. on the 25th. At 2.25 a.m. he was reported as midway between Dinagat and Panaon Islands, towards the last named's northern end; and the five destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 54 (Captain J. G. Coward, U.S.N.) moved in to attack.

At about this time Shima was off the southern end of Panaon Island, pursuing his course astern of the main body. The tide was running north, and he was set too close to the shore and had to alter course to the eastward. When he resumed his original course he assumed battle disposition with his fleet in column in the order *Nachi*, *Ashigara*, *Abukuma*, and the four destroyers.

For half an hour or so after the attack on him at 2.13 a.m., Nishimura had a peaceful time. Then, at 2.56 a.m., lookouts in *Shigure* reported three ships distant 4.3 miles. They were destroyers of Coward's Squadron



Battle of Surigao Strait, 25th October 1944

54 which, in two groups, three on the eastern side of the Strait and two on the western, were speeding south at 20 knots to the attack. At about 3 a.m. the eastern group attacked, and fired a total of 27 torpedoes at ranges of 8,000 to 9,000 yards. The three destroyers swung hard to port under fire from *Yamashiro* and Japanese destroyers, and retired N.N.E. at 35 knots unharmed. As a result of this attack, battleship *Fuso* was hit by a torpedo, and slowed down and sheered out of column. She blew up at 3.38 a.m., and the two halves later sank. Ten minutes after this attack, the two destroyers of the western group fired torpedoes—a total of 20—with further disastrous results for the Japanese. Three of Nishimura's destroyers, *Yamagumo*, *Michishio*, and *Asagumo*, were hit. *Yamagumo* blew up and sank. ("0320-ComDesRon 54 reported scoring a hit and big flare on one ship. Flare and explosion seen by flagship", Oldendorf recorded in his "Preliminary Action Report", dated 2nd November 1944.) *Michishio*, crippled, remained afloat but was sunk about half an hour later in another destroyer attack. *Asagumo*, with her bows blown off, retired, to be sunk four hours later by American cruisers and destroyers in a one-sided gun duel. *Yamashiro* also sustained a torpedo hit in this attack by the western group of Destroyer Squadron 54, but it failed to stop her.

While the torpedoes from Coward's western group were still on the way to their targets, another destroyer attack was in the making. At 3 a.m. Rear-Admiral Berkey directed his right flank destroyers of Desron 24, to attack. They steamed south in two sections: *Hutchins* (Captain McManes, U.S.N.), *Daly* and *Bache*; and H.M.A.S. *Arunta* (Commander Buchanan, R.A.N., O.T.C.), *Killen* and *Beale*. The two groups separated at 3.10 a.m. McManes was inshore, to the west of Buchanan, who received the order to attack with torpedoes at 3.11 a.m. Since the torpedo attacks were not being supported by gunfire, Buchanan intended to reach a firing position between 6,000 and 7,000 yards on the port bow of the approaching Japanese. The approach course was SE by S, speed 25 knots. The destroyers commenced making smoke just before firing torpedoes. At 3.19 the Japanese fired starshell, and in the expectation that since he was not being engaged, a heavy column of fire would follow, Buchanan gave the order to fire torpedoes at 3.20 at a range of 7,200 yards. At 3.23 *Arunta* fired her outfit of four torpedoes at the enemy column. Her Medical Officer, Surgeon-Lieutenant Shane Watson, told of this in a diary he kept at the time:

We turned and fired our torpedoes into the darkness (being, it is believed, not more than a mile away from the enemy's destroyer screen, with which the battleships apparently at one time confused us). I was standing just abaft our tubes on port side as the torpedoes were fired and saw them all enter the water, saw through glasses two tracks in the correct general direction. We turned into our own smoke and retired at speed. I watched through glasses out astern for hits as we swung in and out of the smoke. When I saw three orange flashes in the distance well spaced and at fair time intervals I could not say if they were the correct striking time for our torpedoes. On the way out I saw another destroyer on our port quarter turn and

fire torpedoes and turn into his smoke. We picked up our two destroyers, who had fired five each and retired.

Two minutes after *Arunta* fired, *Killen* and *Beale* loosed off their torpedoes, five each. One British report records that "according to statements of Japanese prisoners of war this attack would seem to have been the most damaging of all". But apparently only one hit was secured, by *Killen* on *Yamashiro*, which "slowed her temporarily to five knots but did not stop her".⁸

McManes' section of Desron 24 continued south at 25 knots, reversed course, and fired 15 torpedoes at the Japanese between 3.29 a.m. and 3.36 a.m., and four minutes later opened gunfire on two damaged Japanese destroyers, *Michishio* and *Asagumo*, which were trying to retire. Hearing the gunfire, Buchanan, who had turned north after his torpedo attack, turned south again in support. Meanwhile McManes was preparing to press his attack again with torpedoes, but Admiral Berkeley at 3.49 ordered him to retire lest he fouled the range of the battleships and cruisers, now about to open fire. *Hutchins*, however, just managed to launch five torpedoes, and these hit and sank *Michishio*.

Meanwhile, at 3.30 a.m., Nishimura, then some ten miles north of the scene of the depletion of his force and apparently unaware of the loss of *Fuso*, sent his last message, to Admirals Kurita and Shima:

Urgent Battle Report No. 2. Enemy torpedo boats and destroyers present on both sides of northern entrance to Surigao Strait. Two of our destroyers torpedoed and drifting. *Yamashiro* sustained one torpedo hit but no impediment to battle cruising.

His three remaining ships were still pressing northwards. At 3.50 a.m. *Yamashiro* was some 28,000 yards from the American battle line, with *Mogami* and *Shigure* on her starboard quarter. At 3.51 they opened fire on ships to the northward. These were the nine destroyers of Destroyer Squadron 56 (Captain R. N. Smoot, U.S.N.) whom Oldendorf had ordered to attack at 3.35, and to "get the big ones". Their attack was delivered in three sections, each of three destroyers, in the middle of the gun duel which now developed between the main forces. At 3.50 a.m. Oldendorf ordered all ships to open fire, with the enemy 15,600 yards from the Flagship, *Louisville*. The battleships and cruisers did so at 3.53—though *Shropshire*, with her opening salvo at 3.56, was a little late owing to radar limitations. Between 3.56 and 4.10 a.m. she fired thirty-two 8-inch broadsides of eight guns at the primary target "believed to be a battleship. It is thought that the firing was accurate and hits were obtained."⁹

⁸ Morison, Vol XII, p. 218.

⁹ In his report, Captain Nichols said of *Shropshire*'s gunnery: "A very high rate of fire was attained in rapid salvos, as many as eight broadsides in two minutes being fired. This rate exceeds anything they have ever attained before and reflects great credit on the turret crews." *Shropshire*'s turrets had been in service for 16 years, and she had fired 2,396 rounds of 8-inch shells since December 1943.

Of *Shropshire's* firing, Midshipman Francis recorded in his diary:

Phoenix and *Boise*, the two cruisers nearest to us, opened fire slightly before we did at 0356. Each with fifteen 6-inch guns they pushed out an almost continuous line of tracer shells which arched up, fell, and disappeared into the ruddy glow of a Japanese battleship on fire. This was our target which had been moving at 19 knots but was now stopped. The opening range at 0356 was 15,300. When the cease fire was given we had fired 214 shells in 32 broadsides, the last range being 12,700. The analysis showed 10 straddles. In some 16 minutes that had passed like a split second, a major surface action that had been anticipated and exercised for just on a year had been fought.

The cruiser's gunnery officer, Lieut-Commander Bracegirdle,¹ remarked in his report that

the U.S. Ships were all using a flashless propellant, and when our first 8-inch broadside fired the flash was terrific. I consider that the Japanese ships fired several salvos in our direction, at our flash, mistaking us for a capital ship. About 4 to 6 salvos were heard to pass fairly close to us but I personally did not notice them.

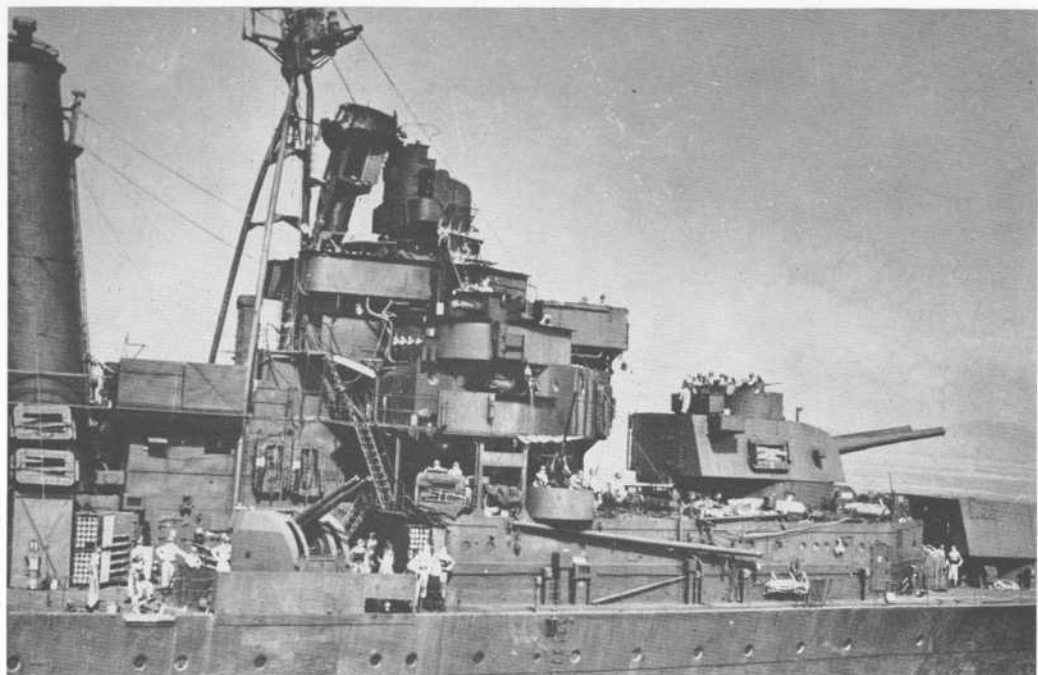
Of the rapidity of the American cruisers' 6-inch gun fire, Bracegirdle commented that "the entire effect was as if all cruisers were using long-range 40-mm Bofors. The enemy must have been simply appalled by this drenching fire which was being most accurately poured onto them." The flash of *Shropshire's* discharges was hampering to her exposed personnel, and Bracegirdle recommended the fitting of main armament fire gongs in Torpedo Conning Position, Emergency Conning Position, Air Defence Position, and Flag Deck, "so that exposed personnel may have a chance to shut their eyes. I was caught out on three occasions and of course was completely blinded."

The volume of Allied fire was irresistible. *Yamashiro* and *Mogami* were the targets for "every size of projectile from 6-inch through 16-inch" which poured into them. They gamely returned fire, but scored no hits except on the destroyer *Albert W. Grant*² of Desron 56. *Grant* was in Smoot's own section of the squadron, last of the three sections to attack. As they were about to do so from dead ahead of the advancing Japanese, *Yamashiro*, suffering heavily from the American gunfire, slowed down and turned from a northerly to a westerly course. Smoot's destroyers turned to starboard to a parallel westerly course, and at 4.4 a.m. launched torpedoes, scoring at least one hit on the battleship. They were heavily attacked by Japanese gunfire, and Smoot ordered them to retire, which they did to the northward. As they did so, *Grant*, the rear ship, received hits from both enemy and "friendly" shells, and suffered 128 casualties, 34 of them fatal. The ship, though crippled, was saved.

Caught as he was between two fires, Smoot was impressed by the "devastating accuracy" of the gunfire of the Allied cruisers: "The arched line of tracers in the darkness looked like a continual stream of lighted

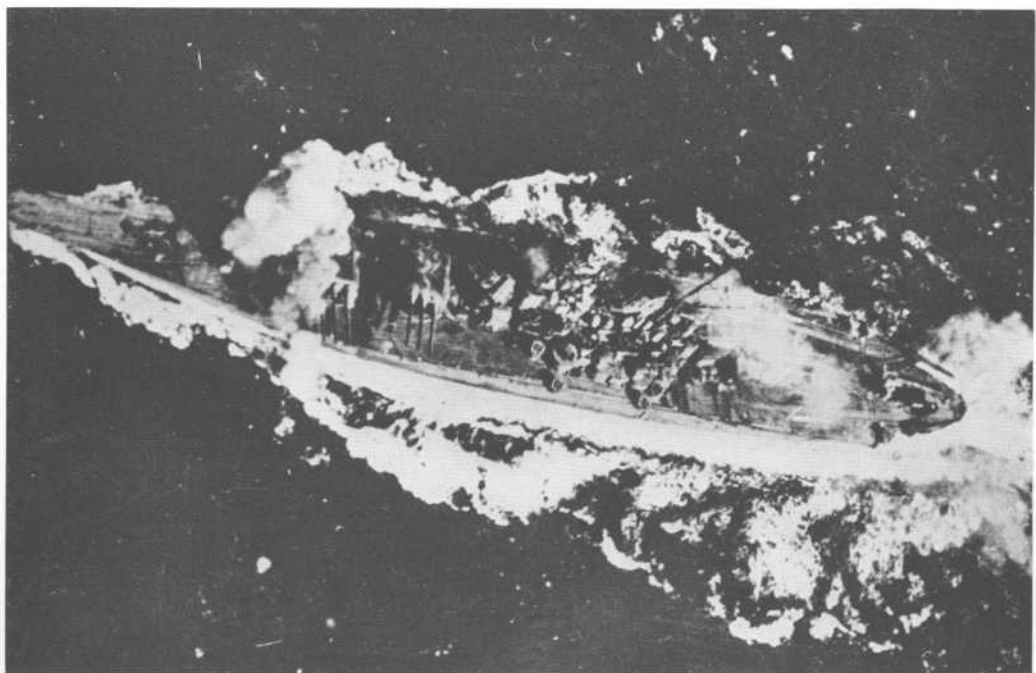
¹ Cdr W. S. Bracegirdle, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Perth* 1939-41, *Shropshire* 1942-45. HMAS *Bataan* Korea 1952-53. B. Newcastle, NSW, 22 Dec 1911.

² *Albert W. Grant*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.



(U.S. Bureau of Aeronautics)

Damage to *Australia's* foremast, control position and bridge, 21st October 1944.



(U.S. Navy)

The Japanese battleship *Yamato* under air attack, 24th October 1944.



(U.S. Navy)

Battle of the Philippine Sea, 25th October 1944. Escort carrier *St Lo*, in foreground, and companion ships make smoke against Kurita's Japanese force.



(U.S. Navy)

Japanese shells fall among Rear-Admiral Sprague's escort carriers in the Philippine Sea battle, 25th October 1944.

railroad cars going over a hill," he recorded in his action report. And there were other Americans—distant from the scene in which Smoot occupied a central position—interested in this gunfire. "About four o'clock in the morning," Captain Tarbuck, on board *Blue Ridge* in San Pedro Bay, recorded in his Observer's Report, "the Admiral's orderly called me to the flag bridge from where could be seen 14-inch and 16-inch gun flashes to the southward." A few minutes later at 4.15 a.m., he recorded that "Admiral Kinkaid sent a radio to Admiral Halsey: 'Are fast battleships guarding San Bernardino Strait?' The answer was negative."

Actually this negative answer from Halsey was not received by Kinkaid until three hours after his question. By that time Kurita, by appearing unexpectedly off Samar with his powerful force of battleships and cruisers, had told him in unmistakable terms that San Bernardino Strait had been left unguarded.

Meanwhile, in Surigao Strait, there was a brief interlude at 4.9 a.m. when, learning of the plight of Smoot's section of Desron 56, Oldendorf ordered all ships to cease fire to give the destroyers time to retire. *Yamashiro*, steering westerly, turned another 90 degrees to port and began to retire southward at 15 knots. But at 4.19 a.m. she capsized and sank, carrying with her Nishimura and most of her crew. *Mogami*, on fire, was also retiring to the southward. A direct hit on her bridge killed all there, including her commanding officer, and other hits slowed her almost to a stop.

At this time Shima, with a depleted Second Striking Force, was just entering the battle area. He was deprived of *Abukuma*, which was torpedoed at 3.25 a.m. off Panaon Island just after he assumed battle formation. The cruiser's speed was reduced to 10 knots, and she fell behind. Shima, steering due north, proceeded at 28 knots. At 4.10 he passed the burning *Fuso* and damaged destroyers. A dense smoke screen lay ahead, and at 4.24 Shima ordered both cruisers to attack with torpedoes targets which had been detected on *Nachi*'s radar screen. This was just as they came in sight of another burning ship, *Mogami*. Shima's ships swung to starboard to launch their torpedoes, and as she turned away after delivering her attack, *Nachi* collided with the unfortunate *Mogami*. *Nachi*'s stern was badly damaged and her speed reduced to 18 knots. Shima decided to retire. He recalled his destroyers, which had been sent on to attack with torpedoes, and headed south at *Nachi*'s best speed, with *Mogami* and *Shigure* in company, and picking up *Abukuma* on the way.

The Allies had won the battle of Surigao Strait. There remained the task of accounting for such surviving enemy ships as was possible. At 4.38 Oldendorf notified the P.T. boats in the southern reaches of the Strait and its approaches that friendly cruisers and destroyers were coming south. A minute earlier he had warned *Arunta*—away to the south—"Stay out of the middle of channel. Keep near to land. You'll get sunk."³ The left flank

* *Shropshire*'s log of signals received during the battle.

cruisers began pursuit at 4.32 a.m. Berkey's right flank force at 4.48 "changed course to 180 degrees to parallel the left flank force and support as necessary. The right flank force followed down and watched the left flank force issue the coup-de-grace to damaged enemy ships." At about 5.30 *Louisville*, *Portland* and *Denver* inflicted several more hits on *Mogami*, which was "burning like a city block", but which still lived. *Denver* and *Columbia* helped two destroyers to sink *Asagumo* at 7.21.

The rest of the remnants of the Japanese Southern Force made good their escape from Surigao Strait, but for some of them it was only a brief postponement of the end. *Mogami* was first to go, torpedoed by destroyer *Akebono* after aircraft from the American aircraft carriers had battered her to a standstill in the Mindanao Sea west of the Surigao Peninsula at 9.40 a.m. *Abukuma* was next, sunk by American Army Air Force bombers south-west of Negros at 12.42, on 27th October. And on 5th November *Nachi* was sunk in Manila Bay by TF.38 dive bombers and torpedo bombers. By then, *Shigure*, sole survivor of Nishimura's force, and *Ashigara* and the four destroyers of Shima's force, were all that still lived to tell the tale from the Japanese side of the Battle of Surigao Strait, last of the "Battle Line" actions in the history of sea warfare.

It is perhaps not inappropriate, in discussing this last example in practice of a British invention—that of Battle Line as a tactical device for naval combat⁴—to mention the major part played in the action by another invention in which the British were first in the field in developing operational efficiency—radar.⁵ This was a decisive weapon for the Allies at Surigao Strait. When *West Virginia* opened fire for the Battle Line at 3.53 a.m., she did so in full radar control. She, and *Tennessee* and *California*, equipped with the newest fire control radar, were responsible for most of the Battle Line action. When Smoot, in *Newcomb*,⁶ led the third section of Desron 56 to attack *Yamashiro*, she conducted the attack entirely by radar control, and scored a torpedo hit on the battleship. And in his report of the action, Admiral Berkey commented that "Radar again proved its great value, both in fire control and in detection and plotting of enemy vessels. . . . It was evident from the enemy's use of searchlights and starshells and from the fact that only one of our destroyers was hit that his fire control and surface search radar were not effective, either because of design or operation, or because our air strike and torpedo attacks managed to disable it. It appears improbable that the enemy would have stood on if he knew by means of his radar that so many ships were between him

⁴ In the reign of James I, when Raleigh ordered the Royal Navy to abandon attempts to board, as the main objective, in favour of the whole fleet following the admiral, vice-admiral, or other leading ship within musket shot of the enemy. Raleigh's Orders to the Fleet of 1617, in J. S. Corbett (editor), *Fighting Instructions 1530-1816* (Navy Records Society, 1905), p. 34. Quoted by Morison, Vol XII, pp. 240-1.

⁵ In radar (1939) "we had turned our discoveries to practical effect, and woven all into our general air defence system. In this we led the world, and it was operational efficiency rather than novelty of equipment that was the British achievement." Churchill, Vol I (1948), p. 122. "In the autumn of 1938 this all-important invention was still in its infancy at sea. I seem to remember that only two ships, the *Rodney* and the cruiser *Sheffield*, had been fitted and were trying it out with most promising results." Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 196.

⁶ *Newcomb*, US destroyer (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

and his destination, unless his orders were to do as much damage as possible prior to being sunk."

VIII

As stated above, at 4.15 a.m. on 25th October, during "the unearthly silence that followed the check fire" in Surigao Strait, and which reigned while *Yamashiro* took her plunge to the bottom, Admiral Kinkaid, in Leyte Gulf, signalled to Admiral Halsey: "Are fast battleships guarding San Bernardino Strait?" He had reason for his question, and reason for the concern which prompted it. In the afternoon of the 24th he intercepted a signal addressed by Halsey to all Third Fleet subordinate commands, stating that a force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers was being formed as Task Force 34. At 8.24 p.m. on the 24th, Halsey advised Kinkaid by signal that Kurita's Centre Force, then in the Sibuyan Sea off the north-west tip of Masbate Island, was making for San Bernardino Strait at 12 knots, and that he himself was "proceeding north with three groups to attack the enemy carrier force" (Ozawa), which Mitscher had reported from his aircraft sightings. From this Kinkaid assumed that Halsey was going north with his air groups, but that TF.34—the fast battleships—was left to guard San Bernardino Strait. With the whole of his surface forces engaged in battle in Surigao Strait, Kinkaid wanted to make certain that his escort carriers, and Leyte Gulf, would be protected as he had assumed in his operation plan: "Any major enemy naval force approaching from the north will be intercepted and attacked by Third Fleet covering force."⁷

But his assumption that TF.34 had been formed and left to watch San Bernardino Strait was wrong. Halsey's signal was a "Battle Plan", which said that TF.34 "will be formed". And it was—at 2.40 a.m. on 25th October, in accordance with Halsey's plan for the forthcoming engagement with Ozawa's force, when Third Fleet was 200 miles NE by N of San Bernardino Strait, with TF.34 in the van, steaming north at 25 knots.

There were now two enemy naval forces approaching from the north—Kurita's powerful surface force, unsighted since 11.20 p.m. on the 24th and now well out into the Philippine Sea, bound south off the coast of Samar for Leyte Gulf; and Ozawa's weak group of wing-clipped carriers off Luzon's Cape Engano. Unfortunately Halsey transposed their respective strengths, and assumed that Ozawa was the more powerful and dangerous enemy, and that Kurita was "so heavily damaged" that he could no longer be considered "a serious menace to Seventh Fleet". In consequence he took all of Third Fleet, fast battleships, cruisers, and carriers, to the north to attack Ozawa, and left wide open the door at San Bernardino Strait.

At 4.30 a.m. on the 25th, as Oldendorf's cruisers commenced the pursuit of the retiring enemy remnants in Surigao Strait, Rear-Admiral Stump, commanding the centre group of escort carriers (TU.77.4.2) off the entrance to Leyte Gulf, received a signal from CTG.77.4, Rear-Admiral

⁷ CTF77 Op Plan 13-44, Appendix 2, Annex E. Quoted by Morison in Vol XII, p. 193.

Thomas Sprague, commanding the escort carriers, to launch daybreak searches. The other two groups were spaced 40 miles or so to the north (Rear-Admiral Clifton Sprague, TU.77.4.3) and 90 miles south (Rear-Admiral Thomas Sprague, TU.77.4.1) of him. There were 16 escort carriers in the three groups, each group with destroyer and destroyer escort screen. In this pre-dawn hour, in an atmosphere of peace and security, the three groups steamed shorewards from their night operating areas in the offing, and began flying off aircraft on routine missions.

At 6.45 a.m. lookouts in the northernmost TU.77.4.3 sighted anti-aircraft fire to the northwestward. A minute later the escort carrier *Fanshaw Bay* made an unidentified surface contact on her radar screen. And a minute later again the pilot of an anti-submarine patrol plane from Stump's *Kadashan Bay* encountered "four Japanese battleships, eight cruisers, and a number of destroyers" 20 miles north of TU.77.4.3. Eleven minutes later still, TU.77.4.3 was under fire from Kurita's ships, hull down over the northern horizon above which their masts were now visible. The wind was north-easterly, 10 knots, with intermittent squalls and rain showers.

At the time the antagonists made contact TU.77.4.3, of six escort carriers, *Fanshaw Bay* (Flag), *St Lo*, *Kalinin Bay*, *White Plains*, *Kitkun Bay* and *Gambier Bay*,⁸ was in circular formation, diameter 5,000 yards, within a screen of three destroyers and four destroyer escorts 3,500 yards farther out. Kurita's Centre Force of battleships *Yamato*, *Nagato*, *Haruna*, *Kongo*; heavy cruisers *Chokai*, *Haguro*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma*, *Kumano* and *Tone*; light cruisers *Noshiro* and *Yahagi*, and eleven destroyers, was changing into circular formation.

When the Japanese were reported, Clifton Sprague ordered all available aircraft to be launched to attack, after which they were to go to Tacloban airfield to re-arm and refuel. He increased to full speed (17 to 19 knots); and ordered every ship to make smoke, which lay low in the hot and humid air. At 6.55 a.m. he steered due east, a course which was near enough to the eye of the wind to permit launching, while taking him away from the approaching enemy. He broadcast an enemy report at 7.5 a.m. and asked for help.

Kurita, who was steering S.S.W. when he sighted the American ships, altered course to E.S.E. to get the weather gauge of the carriers and prevent their launching and recovering aircraft. He ordered "General Attack", with the result that no battle line was formed. "His ships, following the whims of their commanding officers, were committed piece-meal and so defeated."⁹

"Further course changes [by TU.77.4.3] were initiated from time to time," says the American naval historian in his description of the Battle off Samar,¹ "aimed to edge around the rim of a wide circle to the south-

⁸ *Fanshaw Bay*, *Kadashan Bay*, *St Lo*, *Kalinin Bay*, *White Plains*, *Kitkun Bay*, *Gambier Bay*, US escort carriers (1943), 7,800 tons, one 5-in gun, 28 aircraft, 19 kts. *Gambier Bay* and *St Lo* sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

⁹ Morison, Vol XII, p. 250.

¹ Morison, Vol XII, pp. 250-1.

west. Sprague's purpose was to avoid encirclement by the enemy and to meet Oldendorf, whom he hoped to see coming out to help. The Battle off Samar was a running fight around the edge of a partly opened fishhook, whose curve was 20 miles in diameter."

In the event, Oldendorf did not sortie from Surigao Strait until about noon on the 25th, by which time the Battle off Samar was over, and Kurita was well on his way towards San Bernardino Strait after breaking off the action around 9.30 a.m. The news of the Japanese attack was received by Kinkaid at 7.4 a.m., when Captain Tarbuck, on board *Blue Ridge* in Leyte Gulf, recorded that TU.77.4.3 reported that a group of cruisers had appeared on their port quarter and had them under fire.

It now becomes apparent that an extremely critical situation exists. The enemy's *Second Diversion Attack Force* has sortied into the Pacific Ocean through San Bernardino Strait under cover of darkness to attack our escort carriers, convoys, and Leyte Gulf shipping. . . . The enemy battle line, only two or three hours steaming distance from this anchorage, can outrun and outshoot anything in this area, their minimum ship speed is 25 knots and their two newest battleships are suspected of carrying 18" guns.

At 7.39 Kinkaid sent Halsey the fourth of a series of messages (the first telling of Kurita's attack was sent at 7.7 a.m.): "Fast battleships are urgently needed at Leyte Gulf." Four minutes earlier *Shropshire*, then with the forces chasing the remnants of retiring Japanese south through Surigao Strait, received the news of the attack on TU.77.4.3:

It was evident that this force had passed through San Bernardino Strait during the night and were attempting an assault on Leyte Gulf from the eastward. Our force therefore broke off the action in progress and proceeded at high speed to the northward to defend the eastern entrance of Surigao Strait. At 10.15, in accordance with orders received from CTF.77, a striking force consisting of *Tennessee*, *Pennsylvania*, *California*, *Louisville*, *Portland*, *Minneapolis*, *Shropshire*, and 13 U.S. destroyers was formed under the command of Rear-Admiral Oldendorf in *Louisville*. This force sortied at about 1200 to attack the enemy but at 1345 orders were received to patrol to the eastward of the entrance.²

It was within a few minutes of the sighting by TU.77.4.3 of Kurita's masts over the northern horizon that—at 7.10 a.m., 250 miles to the northward—a combat air patrol launched from the Third Fleet carriers sighted Ozawa's Northern Force. Within three-quarters of an hour the aircraft of Mitscher's first strike were over the Japanese, and it was about then that the first of the urgent calls for help reached Halsey from the area whence Ozawa had seduced him. His response, at 8.48 a.m., was to order McCain's carrier force, TG.38.1, comprising five carriers, *Wasp*, *Hornet*, *Hancock*,³ *Cowpens* and *Monterey*,⁴ then fuelling in position about 357 miles E.N.E. of San Bernardino Strait, "to proceed at best possible speed"

² But by 1200 it was two-and-a-half hours since Kurita had broken off action in the Battle off Samar at 9.25. And it is doubtful what help Oldendorf could have given even if he had moved to do so as soon as he heard at 7.35 of Kurita's attack. For he was then 65 miles—three hours steaming—from where Kurita turned away at 9.25.

³ *Hornet*, *Hancock*, US aircraft carriers (1943-44), 27,100 tons, twelve 5-in guns, 103 aircraft, 33 kts.

⁴ *Cowpens*, *Monterey*, US light aircraft carriers (1943), 11,000 tons, eighteen 40-mm guns, 33 aircraft, 32 kts.

to strike Kurita. This was approximately the time of Mitscher's preliminary report, at 8.50 a.m., of the first air strike on Ozawa, which resulted in the sinking of light carrier *Chitose* and the destroyer *Akitsuki*, and the crippling of *Zuikaku*. The time coincided, too, with that of the first loss suffered by the antagonists off Samar, where Clifton Sprague's TU.77.4.3 was putting up a gallant and effective fight with the five-inch guns of the carriers, and with destroyer and air attacks against his powerful adversary, ably supported by the aircraft of Stump's TU.77.4.2 and Thomas Sprague's TU.77.4.1 to the south of him. The Japanese heavy cruiser *Kumano* had her bow blown off by a torpedo from destroyer *Johnston* at 7.27 a.m., and *Chikuma*, victim of both destroyers and aircraft, sank at 8.53 a.m., two minutes before the American destroyer *Hoel*⁵ went down after suffering 40 hits by 5-inch, 8-inch and 14-inch shells.

In all, in these three battles of 25th October, from the time of the sinking of Japanese destroyer *Yamagumo* at 3.20 a.m. in Surigao Strait, until that of Japanese aircraft carrier *Chiyoda* at 4.30 p.m. off Cape Engano, nineteen ships were sunk,⁶ fourteen of them Japanese, that number being made up of six ships in Nishimura's Southern Force, five in Ozawa's Northern Force, and three in Kurita's Centre Force. All five of the American ships were in Clifton Sprague's TU.77.4.3. These figures would have been different but for the actions of Halsey on the one side and of Kurita on the other. Through his wrong conclusion that Kurita was a spent force, and his consequent decision to take his battleships north to help to deal with Ozawa, Halsey lost the opportunity to destroy Centre Force as it emerged from San Bernardino Strait. With his tardy detachment at 10.55 p.m. of TF.34 to return to the aid of the escort carriers as the result of repeated calls for help—and a signal from Nimitz at Pearl Harbour—he was too late to intercept Kurita before Centre Force retired through San Bernardino Strait between 10 p.m. and midnight on the 25th, and also lost the opportunity to obliterate Ozawa's Northern Force. He thus fell between two stools.

Kurita, for his part, fell a victim to the inadequacies of Japanese Intelligence, and his own consequent indecisions. When he sighted Clifton Sprague's escort carriers in the early morning of the 25th, he had had no intelligence since the previous day of the position of the Third Fleet carriers, which he had then learned were east of Luzon. Identification at a distance, especially when hampered by smoke and passing rain squalls, is never easy, and Kurita thought the carriers sighted might be those of TF.38. His Chief of Staff's estimate of the sightings was "one or two battleships, four or five fleet carriers, and 'at least' ten heavy cruisers".⁷

⁵ *Johnston*, *Hoel*, US destroyers (1943), 2,050 tons, five 5-in guns, ten 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

⁶ Japanese naval losses were: two battleships, *Fuso* and *Yamashiro*; one carrier, *Zuikaku* and three light carriers, *Zuiho*, *Chitose* and *Chiyoda*; four heavy cruisers, *Chikuma*, *Chokai*, *Suzuya* and *Mogami*; four destroyers, *Akitsuki*, *Yamagumo*, *Michishio* and *Asagumo*. American losses were two escort carriers, *Gambier Bay* and *St Lo*; and destroyers *Hoel*, *Samuel B. Roberts* and *Johnston*.

⁷ Morison, Vol XII, p. 248.

He was thus uneasy. He had suffered severely through air attack in the last two days, and with no air cover and only a few float planes on his battleships, was chary of the carriers. His "General Attack" order resulted in his force becoming strung out and split up into separated groups, and the tenacious and resolute attacks of Clifton Sprague's destroyers, and the air attacks by aircraft from all three of the escort carrier groups and from land-based aircraft, caused disconcertingly heavy damage. As stated above, the action off Samar "was a running fight around the edge of a partly opened fishhook, whose curve was 20 miles in diameter". Clifton Sprague's aim was to avoid encirclement, and to make as much southing as possible to get within such shelter as Oldendorf could afford. With smoke, with destroyer attacks which forced evasive action and consequent confusion on the Japanese, and with air attacks which inflicted damage and losses, he strove to harass and obstruct the powerful adversary dogging him and attacking him with gunfire from either quarter. First blood came to the Americans with the sinking of heavy cruiser *Chikuma* at 8.53. Within the next quarter hour Sprague's force lost destroyer *Hoel* and carrier *Gambier Bay*. It was shortly after this last-named sank, at 9.7 a.m., that the Japanese delivered a destroyer torpedo attack which was thwarted by the American destroyer *Johnston*. She was sunk by the concentrated gunfire of the Japanese squadron she engaged on her own, but it was the deciding incident for Kurita, who had been so impeded by Clifton Sprague's destroyer attacks that he lost tactical control of his force and had to break off, turn north, and regroup. At 9.11 he issued the order to break off action: "Rendezvous, my course north, speed 20." He left two more heavy cruisers crippled, and both sank, *Chokai* at 9.30 a.m., and *Suzuya* at 1.22 p.m. For three hours after breaking off action he manoeuvred around in and to the north of the battle area, and at 1.10 p.m. was only a few miles on the Samar side of where the battle had begun. He then definitely withdrew toward San Bernardino Strait.

Meanwhile Clifton Sprague's force had suffered more losses. Destroyer *Samuel B. Roberts*⁸ had sunk at 10.5 a.m., and at 11.25 a.m. the carrier *St Lo*, blazing from stem to stern, foundered under a cloud of dense smoke, victim of a *Kamikaze* attack by land-based Japanese aircraft, in which *Kalinin Bay* received a crash dive on her flight deck which damaged it badly and started fires, and *White Plains* and *Kitkun Bay* were near-missed. Earlier, the first *Kamikaze* attacks were delivered on TU.77.4.1 when, at 7.40 a.m., Thomas Sprague's force was surprised by six Japanese aircraft from Davao. The escort carrier *Santee* was crash-dived by an aircraft which smashed through the flight deck and caused fires and 43 casualties, 16 fatal. *Suwannee* was also a victim of a *Kamikaze* attack which did considerable damage, but no more ships were lost in this action.

Up north, where Halsey and his battleships and carriers were hastening to engage Ozawa's force by gunfire in addition to the air strikes already

⁸ *Samuel B. Roberts*, US destroyer escort (1944), 1,350 tons, two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 24 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

in progress, the Japanese suffered more losses. In the second strike, at 9.45 a.m., *Chiyoda* was crippled and set on fire. She was sunk by American cruisers about 5 p.m. Halsey was suffering his own bombardments at this time, in the form of requests for help from Kinkaid and Clifton Sprague. These signals were heard by others, and Tarbuck, in *Blue Ridge*, recorded that

radio dispatches from our beleaguered forces are pathetic and unbelievable. . . . People here feel that the Third Fleet battleships are chasing a secondary force, leaving us at the mercy of the enemy's main body. If our analysis is faulty it is because we are the ones who are trapped in Leyte Gulf. As soon as the Jap finishes off our defenceless CVEs, we're next, and I mean today.

Away in Pearl Harbour, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet, Nimitz, heard the calls for help and was evidently concerned. His question to Halsey, at 10 a.m.: "Where is TF.34?", added to the earlier appeals, caused Halsey, at 10.55 a.m. to send the battleships south, together with the three carriers of TG.38.2. But by then the Battle off Samar was over, and he was too late to intercept Kurita. The Japanese admiral broke off the action off Samar in time to save a "fleet in being", which, though incapable of offensive action, was a cause of worry to Seventh Fleet planning and operations officers in the months ahead. And, as Kurita escaped extinction in the south, so did Ozawa in the north. He suffered the loss of four carriers—*Zuikaku*, badly hit again in the American third air strike, sank at 2.14 p.m., and *Zuiho*, victim of the fourth strike, sank at 3.26. And, during the evening he lost destroyer *Hatsutsuki* to cruiser gunfire and light cruiser *Tama*⁹ to a submarine's torpedo. But the two converted battleships, *Hyuga* and *Ise*, light cruisers *Oyodo* and *Isuzu*, and seven destroyers survived 25th October, the day which destroyed the Imperial Japanese Navy as an offensive force, and cost the American Navy more than 2,000 casualties, including 1,169 killed and missing. No battle casualties for the Japanese Navy in the Leyte operations were ever compiled.

IX

The Battle for Leyte Gulf decided the fate of the Philippines, but the Leyte campaign did not end on 25th October 1944. The Japanese held Ormoc, on the west side of the island, and they had landed 45,000 troops there, more than double the number on Leyte when the Americans landed. From the American viewpoint the tactical situation at Leyte was serious at 1st November. The Japanese had regained strength in the air, and with bombing and *Kamikaze* attacks they made the situation in Leyte Gulf hazardous. Support had to come from TF.38, and as a result, air strikes which had been planned on the Japanese Home Islands before the end of the year had to be postponed. *Shropshire* and *Arunta* tasted something of the conditions in Leyte Gulf, as did also *Gascoyne*, busy there on hydrographic work. The Australian cruiser and destroyer formed part of

⁹ *Tama*, Japanese light cruiser (1920), 5,700 tons, seven 5.5-in guns, eight 21-in torpedo tubes, 33 kts. Sunk in Battle of Leyte Gulf, 25 Oct 1944.

TG.77.1, which evolved from a reorganisation of Seventh Fleet on 29th October. All ships which could be spared went to Ulithi for refreshment. Admiral Weyler remained as S.O.P.A. Leyte Gulf, in command of TG.77.1, comprising the battleships *Mississippi*, *California*, *Pennsylvania*; cruisers *Shropshire*, *Phoenix*, *Nashville* and *Boise*; and 13 destroyers, including *Arunta*.

The Task Group had the task of protecting the Gulf, and patrolled the entrance nightly. Its ships were often under air and *Kamikaze* attack. In a particularly heated period on 1st November one *Kamikaze*, driven off from *Shropshire* by her anti-aircraft fire, attempted to crash-dive the destroyer *Claxton*¹ and, though it near missed, damaged her severely. The same day a *Kamikaze* crashed the destroyer *Abner Read*, and a few minutes later the destroyer rolled over and sank. The American destroyer, in her death throes, caused *Shropshire* to take emergency action to avoid being torpedoed. *Abner Read*'s torpedoes were trained in the cruiser's direction, and by some means or other were fired. The torpedo tracks were seen early, and an emergency turn of 90 degrees to port enabled *Shropshire* to avoid them. "H.M.A.S. *Arunta*," recorded Buchanan in his "Report of Proceedings" for November, "contributed her share to the heavy concentration of fire that destroyed an enemy aircraft soon after *Abner Read* was hit. . . . For the remainder of our stay in Leyte Gulf no day passed without several Bogies and Bandits and the consequent air alerts."

And in *Gascoyne*, Commander Read, in his "Proceedings for the Month of October", remarked that

since arrival in Leyte Gulf, 39 Japanese air raids have taken place in the vicinity of this ship. During these raids four ships have been seen to be hit, in each case by a disabled aircraft, and 30 aircraft have been shot down in sight. Of the bombs dropped, four were within 200 yards of this ship. The only damage received was the whaler's falls stranded and one man injured in the leg from other ships' shells bursting overhead.

There were some more R.A.N. ships at Leyte in November. On the 4th the Survey Group was added to with the arrival of H.M.A.S. *Benalla* (Lieut-Commander Gale²) from Hollandia; and on the 12th *Warramunga* arrived and joined TG.77.1. She had on board eagerly awaited mail for ships of the force, and on receiving permission to distribute it "the following signal was made to *Shropshire*: 'Intend to visit you first.' The prompt and understandable reply to this was: 'Shall open fire if you don't.'"

Until 16th November, when Rear-Admiral Weyler was relieved by Rear-Admiral T. D. Ruddock, U.S.N., as commander of Allied Naval Forces operating in defence of the Leyte Gulf, *Shropshire* and *Arunta* remained there with TG.77.1. That afternoon, in company with *Mississippi*, *Phoenix*, *Boise*, *Nashville* and four American destroyers, they left for Manus, where they arrived on the 21st. *Warramunga* remained at Leyte until the 25th,

¹ *Claxton*, US destroyer (1919), 1,060 tons, four 4-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts.

² Cdr D'A. T. Gale, DSC; RAN. HMAS's *Adelaide*, *Moresby*, *Bungaree*; comd HMAS's *Benalla* 1944-45 and *Moresby* 1945-46. B. Orange, NSW, 27 Jul 1911.

when she sailed with U.S. Ships *Pennsylvania* and *H. L. Edwards* (7,176 tons) and reached Manus on the 29th.

There the Australian ships comprising Task Group 74.1 remained until 26th December—with occasional hours at sea for exercises—when they left for Kossol Roads, on the first stage of their next important mission in the Philippines, the invasion of Luzon. When the Task Group sailed from Manus it was restored to its original strength, for on 4th December *Australia*, the damage she suffered at Leyte made good, arrived at Manus from Espiritu Santo. And the force was again under the command of a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College. At Manus on 9th December, Commodore Farncomb, who had been recalled from service with the Royal Navy when Commodore Collins was injured in the Trafalgar Day attack, hoisted his pendant as Commodore Commanding the Australian Squadron and Commander Task Group 74.1.

The Australian ships received complimentary signals from General MacArthur, and Admirals Kinkaid, Oldendorf, Berkey and Weyler, for their work in the Leyte campaign, with particular reference to *Shropshire's* efficiency in radar reporting. The American destroyer *Ammen* referred in a signal to

the superb Radar telling performed so steadily and reliably by the *Shropshire* during the operations against the enemy just completed. The information supplied by Porthole [*Shropshire's* communications designation] was of inestimable value in maintaining the *Ammen* alert and ready to deal properly with the Nips at all times.

And, in a letter to Captain Nichols, Admiral Weyler remarked that:

Commander Task Group 77.1 concurs that *Shropshire's* performance in radar telling was outstanding and takes this opportunity to congratulate her Commanding Officer and all officers and men who contributed thereto. As a matter of fact *Shropshire's* excellent performance in subject matter has heretofore been attested to in reports submitted to Superior Command.

Of the conditions during the campaign, Captain Nichols wrote in his report:

The period of the current operations has been a trying one for the ships' companies. During the week commencing dawn 20th October *Shropshire's* ship's company were at their action stations for 146 hours out of the total of 168. During the following week they spent a total of 98 hours at their action stations. The overall percentage of time spent at action stations to total time over these two weeks was 72.6 per cent. I have little doubt that *Arunta's* ship's company has put in very similar hours.

Buchanan had his own remarks to make about *Arunta*. In his "Report of Proceedings" for October he commented:

The end of this month marks the end of 12 months since *Arunta* sailed from Brisbane for Milne Bay. The ship has visited Sydney twice—once for 21 and once for 17 days—a total of 38 days. The remainder of the time has been spent in the tropical waters of New Guinea, and now, of the Philippines. Owing to the danger of tropical diseases ashore, the complete lack of facilities, and the ship usually being at short notice, officers and men have remained on board throughout this

period. That is they have been shut up in a crowded steel box in conditions of tropical heat for almost a year. I emphasise these conditions because they represent, I believe, a fine instance of the uncomplaining staying power of both officers and men.

The supply of fresh vegetables was a problem, and Nichols, as Senior Officer Commanding Australian Squadron, made representations to the Naval Board regarding this. It was—he remarked in his report—hoped that ample fresh vegetables would be available on the return to Manus (after the Leyte operation) “after our long period without them, but only sufficient for three meals in each ship were received”. And on 10th December he sent a signal to the relevant authorities—repeated to the Naval Board—“Request information when supplies of fresh vegetables may be expected, observing that last issue in *Shropshire* was made on 18 October. *Arunta* has reported one case of scurvy which is considered due to lack of fresh vegetables and has now sailed for forward areas with no fresh vegetables.”

There were, however, oases in the culinary desert, and these flowered on Christmas Day. This was, by the exigencies of the times, a moveable feast in the Australian ships. *Shropshire*, for instance, observed it on 17th December, and Midshipman Francis recorded that “with an excellent meal of roast turkey and plum pudding most enjoyed a very excellent day”. That was in Seadler Harbour, where *Warramunga* also celebrated Christmas, but on 21st December. *Shropshire*’s chaplain conducted a choral service on the destroyer’s forecastle, followed by a Communion Service. Before dinner, Alliston and his officers went the rounds on the mess-decks “which, in accordance with tradition, were excellently decorated. The prevailing motif was palm fronds and beer bottles.” The Victualling Stores Issuing Ship *Merkur* had arrived, and Alliston recorded that the standard of the Christmas fare she brought “was excellent. The turkeys in particular were of first class quality.³ . . . Altogether, Christmas Day 1944, was an outstanding day for all hands, the fact that it was so I consider to be a great tribute to the ship’s company spirit and morale—much was made out of very little.”

By way of contrast, *Gascoyne*, celebrating her Christmas on 25th December in Guiuan Harbour, south-east Samar, had a busy, if fruitful time. Throughout the first half of November she was at Leyte Gulf on survey work. But on the 17th she sailed for Manus for stores and recreation, and remained there until 16th December, when she left for Leyte, reached on the 21st. While at Manus, Read relinquished command of *Gascoyne* on proceeding to Sydney to join H.M.A.S. *Whyalla*, and Hunt assumed command temporarily until Lieutenant Peel⁴ arrived on 4th December. When *Gascoyne* returned to Leyte the San Pedro survey had just been completed, and Hunt was charged with the survey of Guiuan Harbour,

³ *Warramunga*’s Christmas menu was: Breakfast—Fresh fruit, tea and coffee, cereal, fried eggs and bacon; Dinner—Roast turkey and ham, beans and peas, plum pudding and brandy sauce, fruit trifle and jelly, nuts and beer; Tea—Christmas cake, nuts, iced fruit juice; Supper—Giblet soup, cold roast pork and ham, potato salad and mayonnaise, iced fruit juice.

⁴ Capt E. J. Peel, DSC; RAN. HMAS’s *Canberra*, *Vendetta*, *Vampire*, *Australia*; comd HMAS’s *Kalgoorlie* 1944, *Gascoyne* 1944-46. B. Folkestone, England, 30 Nov 1916.

where it was proposed to establish an American naval repair base. The ship arrived at Guiuan from Leyte Gulf on 24th December, and anchored at 4 p.m. off shore "in the vicinity of five liberties [Liberty ships], the Dutch transport *Sommelsdijk* (7,900 tons), and several lesser craft".

Next day Christmas dinner was celebrated in *Gascoyne* at midday, and at 7.46 p.m.:

Nippon's Christmas present was received when *Sommelsdijk* was torpedoed by aerial torpedo in number one lower hold port, immediately catching fire, the cargo being general stores, and logistic supplies for the 1,300 C.B. Naval Troops carried on board. This ship was anchored about 1½ miles to the north-west of us, several reefs intervening. The visibility was poor, no moon and occasional heavy rain squalls and it was not until 8.35 p.m. when a signal was received from the Dutchman that it was appreciated that anything untoward had happened, the torpedoing occurring on the side away from us.⁵

From then on events moved rapidly. *Gascoyne*, which was at four hours' notice for steam, "immediately carried out a crash light up, steam being on main engines 12 minutes from orders being received, with second boiler connected from cold 20 minutes from orders". By 9.5 p.m. *Gascoyne* had secured alongside *Sommelsdijk*—which was well ablaze forward in both numbers one and two lower holds—and the frigate's Engineer Officer, Engineer-Lieutenant Corrighan,⁶ boarded the Dutchman with his damage control parties and took charge of the fire fighting operations. About 10.30 p.m., when it appeared that there was danger of losing *Sommelsdijk*, *Gascoyne* disembarked that ship's 1,300 troops, some of whom were transferred to the American *Buttonwood* (935 tons); but *Gascoyne*, "for the space of approximately one hour, had some 1,000 men between decks, including approximately 70 walking casualties". By about 2 a.m. Corrighan was able to report that danger of the fire spreading further was over; and by 6 a.m. all fires were out. Peel, in his report, said:

It is a matter of pride to record that all fire fighting in *Sommelsdijk* was carried out by the Engineroom Department of *Gascoyne*, supervised by our Engineer Officer. It should be noted that on relief from Boiler-room and Engine-room Watchkeeping duties, ratings immediately joined the fire parties to replace their reliefs, this over a period of nine hours alongside.

HDML1074 was also present—and helpful—on this occasion; and on 30th December the Guiuan survey "as it stood in its infancy" was handed over to her commanding officer, Lieut-Commander Robertson. At daylight next morning *Gascoyne* sailed for San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, to prepare for the next operation at Luzon.

Reference has been made above to the Japanese holding Ormoc on the west side of Leyte. By the beginning of December the Americans had cleared the enemy from most of the eastern half of the island, and on 30th November it was decided to postpone a proposed landing on Mindoro

⁵ Hunt's (CTG.70.5 Afloat in HMAS *Gascoyne*) Letter of Proceedings for December 1944.

⁶ Engr Lt-Cdr M. Corrighan, MBE, DSC; RANR. HMAS's *Ballarat* and *Gascoyne*. Of Sydney; b. Mosman, NSW, 26 Sep 1902.

Island—projected for 5th December—and, instead, to land the American 77th Division, less one regimental combat team, in Ormoc Bay, between three and four miles south-east of Ormoc, on 7th December. The Ormoc assault convoy, in which there was no combatant ship larger than a destroyer nor troop carrier larger than a destroyer transport, left Dulag, Leyte Gulf, at 1.30 p.m. on 6th December. Just after 7 a.m. on the 7th—the way having been prepared by a destroyers' bombardment—the first wave of landing craft reached the beach at the objective. By 9.30 a.m. two full regimental combat teams were ashore.

The American landing coincided with a Japanese reinforcement which, in the enemy's eighth "Tokyo Express" run since the American invasion, landed 4,000 troops. The Japanese convoy was attacked by Marine aircraft from Tacloban as it entered San Isidro Bay, some 18 miles north of Ormoc, and five ships were sunk. The American turn came an hour later when a heavy and determined Japanese air attack by torpedo and *Kamikaze* aircraft caused the loss of destroyers *Mahan* and *Ward*,⁷ and severely damaged *Liddle*⁸ and *Lamson*. But the landing was successful, and General Krueger, Commanding General at Leyte, later commented: "The landing of the 77th Division near Ormoc, serving to split the enemy forces and to separate them from their supply base, proved to be the decisive action of the Leyte operation."⁹

The Mindoro landing, postponed from 5th December, was carried out on the 15th. The Visayan Attack Force, as it was designated, was under the command of Rear-Admiral Struble in *Nashville*, with eight destroyer transports and a number of landing craft, minesweepers, and other small vessels, with twelve escorting destroyers. There was a group of 23 P.T's. And a Heavy Covering and Carrier Group of battleships, cruisers, escort carriers and destroyers, under Rear-Admiral Ruddock, operated in the Sulu Sea in support. Among the auxiliary vessels employed in this operation were two Australian ships—the tug *Reserve* and the oiler *Bishopdale*.

There were not more than 500 Japanese troops on Mindoro, but the enemy, who had early Intelligence of the passage of the assault convoy, had powerful defences in the shape of air strikes from airfields in Luzon and the Visayas. The first air attack, just before 3 p.m. on 13th December, as Struble's convoy was about to round the southern cape of Negros into the Sulu Sea, was by *Kamikaze* bombers. One of them crash-dived *Nashville*, inflicted heavy damage which put the cruiser out of the fight, and killed or mortally wounded 133 officers and men. In later attacks that day the destroyer *Haraden* in Ruddock's force was crash-dived, and suffered heavy damage. She was sent back to Leyte with 14 dead and 24 wounded. In attacks on 14th December the Japanese were largely ineffectual, though they did damage *Bishopdale*.

⁷ *Ward*, US destroyer transport (1918—conv. to APD), 1,060 tons, six 3-in guns, six 21-in torpedo tubes, 35 kts. Sunk off Leyte, 7 Dec 1944.

⁸ *Liddle*, US fast transport (1943), 1,400 tons, three 3-in or two 5-in guns, three 21-in torpedo tubes, 23 kts.

⁹ Quoted in Morison, Vol XII, p. 385.

That night the assault force reached its destination, at the south-west corner of Mindoro, where the primary objective was the establishment of a perimeter embracing the village of San Jose, and to begin airstrip construction. Landing began at 7.30 a.m. after a brief bombardment by destroyers. There was no opposition on shore. The invaders were, however, subjected to air attacks which, over the days, did a fair amount of damage to the ships of the landing force and of reinforcement convoys; and in the night 26th-27th December a Japanese surface force comprising heavy cruiser *Ashigara*, light cruiser *Oyodo*, and six destroyers, carried out a bombardment of San Jose village and airfield, and the American landing beach. The Japanese force did not go scathless, since it lost destroyer *Kiyoshima* to a P.T. boat's torpedo.

On 2nd January 1945, the Americans occupied the adjacent island of Marinduque, commanding the eastern approach to Verde Island Passage between Mindoro and Luzon. By 30th January there was no enemy force capable of organised action on Mindoro, and three American air strips were completed on the island. Mindoro was to help the forthcoming Lingayen Gulf landings with air support from these strips, and to prove a useful staging and assembly point for future operations.

Organised Japanese resistance ceased on 20th December on Leyte, but mopping up continued for nearly five months. By 2nd January 1945 a total of 60,809 unburied enemy dead had been counted, and 434 prisoners taken; by 8th May a further 25,000 had been killed or captured.