

THE BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF



WWW.BATAANLEGACY.ORG



Gen. MacArthur, Oct. 20, 1944

The long-awaited return of General Douglas MacArthur on the shores of Leyte on October 20, 1944, was followed by the largest naval battle in history. The Battle of Leyte Gulf was a series of four battles in the Sibuyan Sea, Surigao Strait, Samar and Cape Engaño which covered 100,000 square miles.



Leyte Landing

Vice-Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, who reported to General MacArthur, commandeered the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet and naval units from Royal Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, which transported around 200,000 soldiers to the shores of Leyte. Admiral William Halsey, who reported to Admiral Chester Nimitz, commandeered the Third Fleet which covered and supported the landing. The lack of a unified command structure almost resulted in a strategic disaster.



VADM Kinkaid



ADM Halsey



VADM Kurita

With the Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) devastating defeat in the Battle of Philippine Sea in June 1944, which depleted its fuel supply, air support and combat efficiency, only the Second Fleet under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita, was available to bear the brunt of the next battle for its survival. It received orders during the early morning of October 21, 1944, to head to Leyte Gulf to implement Operation *Sho-Go* (Victory). Center or First Striking



ADM Ozawa

Force under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita departed Brunei on October 22 through the Palawan passage; the Southern Force under Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura and the Second Strike Force under Vice Admiral Kiyohida Shima departed Brunei through the Sulu Sea and San Bernardino Strait to approach Leyte from the East. The Northern or Mobile Strike Force under Admiral Jizaburo Ozawa departed from the north.

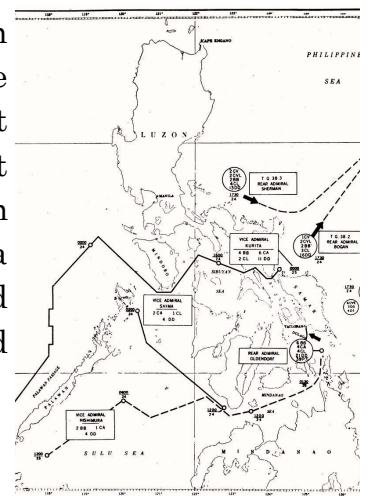
The prelude to the battles took place on October 23 off the Palawan Passage when U.S. submarines Darter and Dace detected Kurita's Center Force. On October 24 at 05:24, Darter fired six torpedoes which hit Kurita's flagship, the *Atago*, sinking it within eighteen minutes with heavy casualties. Kurita was rescued by one of the IJN's destroyers and transferred his flag to the *Yamato* and proceeded to Sibuyan Sea.



USS Darter SS-227



USS Dace SS-247



Battle of Leyte Gulf

Battle of Sibuyan Sea – October 24, 1944



Battleship Musashi

At 08:00 on October 24, Kurita's Center Force was spotted entering Sibuyan Sea (bounded by the islands of Panay, Masbate, Mindoro). A Japanese aircraft bombed the U.S. light carrier USS Princeton at 09:38 causing a severe fire. At 15:23, as the light cruiser Birmingham came alongside the Princeton to assist with the firefighting, there was an enormous explosion on the Princeton which severely damaged the Birmingham, killing 233 and wounding 426. Battleships *Nagato*, *Yamato* and *Musashi* were hit by torpedoes and bombs including relentless attacks from aircraft of the 3rd Fleet. Kurita lacked the air cover necessary to fend off the attacks so he reversed course undetected at 15:30 and headed for the San Bernadino Strait. The *Musashi*, one of the largest battleships ever built, finally sank at 19:00 taking 1,100 sailors with her.

Battle of Surigao Strait – October 24 to 25, 1944



RADM Jesse Oldendorf

Kurita was ordered by Chief of Staff Admiral Toyoda to detach seven ships and place them under the command of Nishimura's Southern Force which traversed the Surigao Strait towards the Leyte Beaches. Without Nishimura's knowledge, Shima's Second Strike Force received orders from the HQ Chief of Staff to reinforce the Southern Force. There was no coordination or radio communication between the two. Awaiting them was the Fire Support and Bombardment Group under Rear Admiral Jesse Oldendorf who



RADM Shima

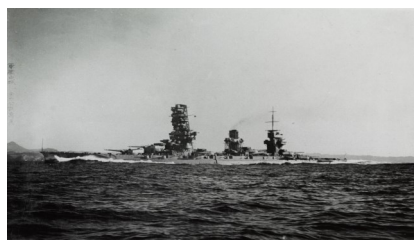
positioned 40 ships on both sides of the strait. Nishimura plowed headlong at full speed into the battle line exposing his ships to torpedo attacks and massive gunfire. The fight was over in an hour and a half and Nishimura was killed on board his flagship Yamashiro. Upon entering the strait, Shima saw the burning and sinking ships and immediately retreated southward. Tragically, the *Albert Grant* was caught in the crossfire which killed 34 and wounded many others.



RADM Nishimura



USS Albert Grant DD-64



USS Johnston DD-557



Filipinos Aiding PT Boat

Battle off Samar – October 25, 1944

Halsey believed that Ozawa's Northern Force was the main threat so he headed north at 23:45 on October 24, leaving the San Bernardino Strait unguarded, allowing the remains of Kurita's Center Force to slip through. As it turned out, the Northern Force, with only 110 aircraft and minimal crew, served as a bait to lure away Halsey's 3rd Fleet, exposing the Leyte Gulf beachhead. Only the 7th Fleet's Taffy 3 under Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague (6 small escort carriers, 3 destroyers and 4 destroyer escorts), the escort carrier unit in north Samar, stood in the way of Kurita's more formidable Center Force (4 battleships, 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers and 11 destroyers). Taffy 3's David against Center Force's Goliath.



RADM Sprague



Smoke Screen from Taffy 3 Ships

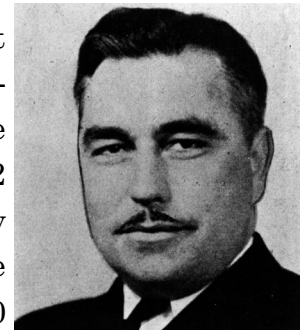
Kurita's Center Force was detected by Taffy 3 at 06:37 on October 25, 1944. Moments later, the pagoda-like masts were on the horizon. Kinkaid immediately messaged Halsey for assistance but his requests remained unanswered. Sprague ordered his ships to lay down heavy black funnel smoke for cover and to launch all available planes from the 6 escort carriers. The 7 destroyer and destroyer escorts fired most of their torpedo magazines in two attacks starting at 07:16, while they zig-zagged from the pursuing Japanese cruisers and dodged behind the smoke screen. Despite

massive ship damage, Taffy 3 continued their aggressive attacks aided by their aircraft and those from Taffy 2, 25 nautical miles to the south. But the tin can ships could not survive the high explosive shells from the 14-



USS Samuel Roberts DE-413

inch guns of the Japanese battleships. The Hoel died in the water at 08:30 killing 252 of its crew while escort carrier Gambier Bay started sinking at 08:40 killing 128. The Samuel Roberts was abandoned at 09:10 killing 183. The heavily damaged Johnston was abandoned at 09:50 taking Commander



CMDR Ernest Evans

Ernest Evans and 182 of its crew. Kurita thought he was

fighting a bigger enemy and with fuel running out, he decided to halt the pursuit at around 09:10. But a lethal Japanese weapon was about

to be launched - the kamikaze plane which dove into the St. Lo, sinking it at 11:30, taking 95 of its crew.



Rescue of Taffy 3 Survivors



Explosion of USS St. Lo CVE-63



Burial-USS Kalanin Bay CVE-68

The Battle of Cape Engaño – October 25 to 26, 1944

The Battle of Cape Engaño took place between October 25 and 26. Part of IJN's Northern Force under Ozawa consisted of four aircraft carriers, one of which took part in the Pearl Harbor Attack, the Zuikaku. At 07:30 on the 25th, Halsey's 3rd Fleet launched their first strike. Several requests from Kinkaid and Sprague remained unanswered until 10:00, when Nimitz sent an order to head south. Halsey was forced to send part of TF 34 south, including his own flagship New Jersey. The heavy bombardment destroyed the carrier Zuikaku, sinking it at 14:14, taking Rear Admiral Kaizuka Takeo and 842 of its crew.



Crew of Aircraft Carrier Zuikaku salute the Japanese flag while sinking

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PICTURES:

Mrs. Jessie Huberty

Naval History & Heritage Command

National Archives

U.S. Naval Institute

WW2 Database

Article written by Cecilia I. Gaerlan

Executive Director, Bataan Legacy Historical Society

Support from the following:

Donors of Bataan Legacy Historical Society

Consuelo Hall McHugh & Family

The Joseph & Mercedes McMicking Foundation

SUPPORT BATAAN LEGACY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A 501(c)(3) Organization

WWW.BATAANLEGACY.ORG

