
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

25th Anniversary

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Welcome to the May meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight is the final session of our 25th year, we close with John Wukovits, author of *American Commando* and *Pacific Alamo*, discussing the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He will be joined by veterans of the battle.

On two previous occasions this year (February and March 22) we have discussed the conflict over the Philippines. We learned about the demise of the 27th Bombardment Group and the defeat of the American forces in May of 1942, and the strategic problems the Japanese faced when instigating the Pacific War. The Japanese had hoped to fight a war of attrition with the United States, to make victory so painful that the Americans would eventually give up and negotiate a peace settlement. The war of attrition would also manifest itself at the tactical level for the Japanese; first, on land with the cave fighting on Peleliu, and second, the *kamikaze* tactics at sea.

Since the final surrender of the Philippines by American forces in May 1942 there was a determined strategy to fulfill General Douglas MacArthur's promise to return. The Battle of Leyte Gulf would mark the beginning of that return. Instead of attacking Luzon or the Bataan Peninsula directly, planners decided to invade one of the smaller islands.

This invasion marked the confluence of two Pacific drives. MacArthur would control the ground fighting, and his air commander, General George Kenney, would be responsible for the land-based air operations. Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet would provide landing support while Admiral William "Bull" Halsey's Third Fleet carriers and newer battleships (Task Force 34) would provide long distance cover. In early October 1944, Halsey's ships moved between the Philippines and Formosa and a large air battle took place that destroyed much of the Japanese land based and naval air in the area.

While the Americans prepared for invasions, so too did the Japanese prepare for a decisive battle. The Japanese strategy was to move four separate task forces against the Americans. First, the few remaining carriers would sortie from the Home

Islands to draw the American carriers away from the landings. Second, the Japanese surface fleet with its super battleships would move through the San Bernadino Strait, and attack the landing forces. Third, a smaller task force would move through the Surigao Strait, and another small force of destroyers and cruisers from the Home Islands would also move through Surigao Strait, both to attack the beachhead. Overall, the Japanese plan almost succeeded.

MacArthur launched the invasion of Leyte on October 20, 1944. The Sixth Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, struck the northeast coast of Leyte. The 6th Ranger Battalion cleared several islands; the X Corps (1st Cavalry and the 24th Infantry Division (ID)) landed near the Palo River while the XXIV Corps (96th ID and the 7th ID) landed 10 miles to the south. They were met by moderate resistance from the Japanese as the American troops fought their way inward.

On the morning of the 24th Japanese aircraft based in the Philippines found Halsey's fleet and launched a series of attacks. The Americans were able to destroy most of the attackers but one Japanese aircraft broke through and hit the carrier *USS Princeton*, which had to be scuttled.

Halsey's aircraft found the Japanese battle fleet west of the San Bernadino Strait and sank the battleship *Musashi* and Admiral Kurita Takeo turned back. Satisfied that Kurita's forces were taken care of, Halsey moved north and took with him all the carriers and fast battleships leaving nothing behind to guard the San Bernadino Strait and did not inform other naval commanders.

As Halsey did this, the Japanese High Command communicated their displeasure to Kurita about his retreat and he headed back through the San Bernadino Strait that were now unguarded. The first contact between the surface fleets in the Battle of Leyte Gulf was on the night of October 24th and 25th in the Surigao Strait. Two Japanese task forces entered the strait separately, but the US Seventh Fleets battleships sank all of them except one destroyer. Then shortly after dawn on the 25th, American escort carriers supporting the landing off Leyte spotted Kurita's force of heavy cruisers and battleships. Kurita passed through the San Bernadino Strait and turned south and only a few American destroyers and escort carriers stood in his way. The weaker

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American forces attacked the Japanese fleet and even sank three heavy cruisers. If the Japanese had been able to keep moving the Americans would not have been able to stop them, but under continuous attack from the air, and crippled from the pounding of the previous days, Kurita turned back. Halsey's failure to communicate clearly with Kincaid and Nimitz (in Hawaii), and his failure to use Task Force 34 effectively to assist 7th Fleet later caused considerable damage to Halsey's reputation.

The first *kamikaze* attacks occurred during the naval battle of Leyte Gulf. Novice Japanese pilots did not need to master air-to-air tactics or even how to do carrier landings since their sole purpose was to crash into US Navy ships. The suicidal pilots managed to damage some American ships and did sink the escort carrier *St. Lo*. Japanese leadership hoped that this last gasp of the attrition strategy could turn the war to their advantage. The effect of the *kamikaze* pilots, at first, surprised American commanders but did not alter the outcome.

The battle of Leyte Gulf marked the end of the Imperial Japanese Navy as a fighting force. Its remaining assets would be reserved for defense of the Home Islands. Their naval and air losses, combined with the loss of 5 infantry divisions doomed their hold on the Philippines.

Further Reading:

John Wukovits, *Admiral "Bull" Halsey: The Life and Wars of the Navy's Most Controversial Commander* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

John Wukovits, *American Commando: Evans Carlson, His World War II Marine Raiders and America's First Special Forces Mission* (New York: NAL Trade, 2010).

C. Vann Woodward and Even Thomas, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf: The Incredible Story of World War II's Largest Naval Battle* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing 2007).

Kenneth Friedman, *Afternoon of the Rising Sun: The Battle of Leyte Gulf* (New York: Presidio Press, 2001).

Thomas J. Cutler, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf: 23-26 October 1944* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - May 15, 2012 Guerrilla Warfare in the Western Theater www.tccwrt.com - 612-724-3849

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - May 21, 2012 "Civil War on the Great Lakes"- Steve Anderson - 715-386-1268

Rochester WWII History Round Table – May 14, 2012 Pacific Submarine War, 507-280-9970; www.w2roundtable-rochester.org

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium April 2013, <http://www.tccwrt.com/symposium.html> or tccwrt@yahoo.com

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

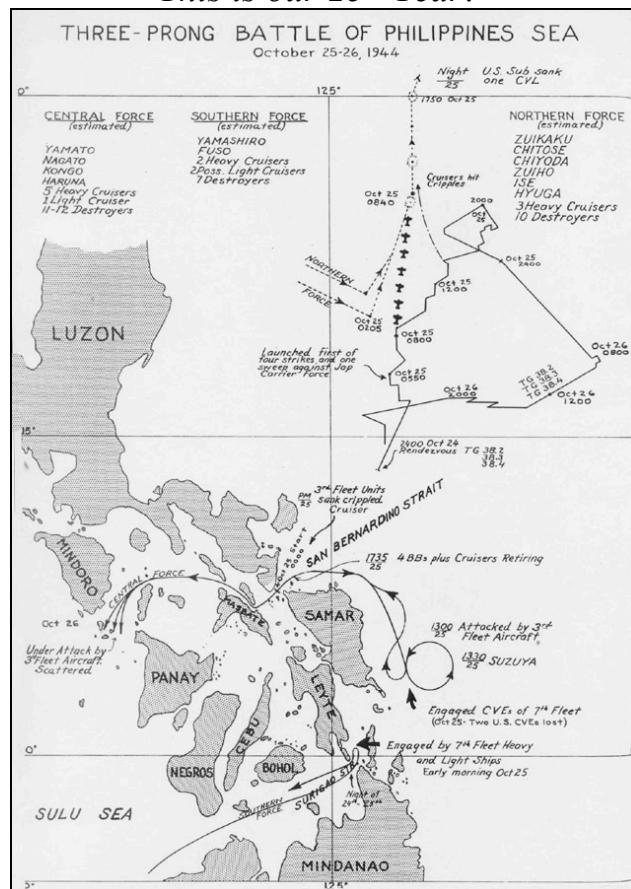
Air Show - Eden Prairie - July, 14-15, 2012; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org or Bill at 952-201-8400
Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.com

Round Table Schedule 2012-2013

- 13 Sept. Market Garden
 - 11 Oct. Holocaust
 - 25 Oct. Vietnam Emerges from WW2
 - 8 Nov. Interviews of Nazi Leaders
 - 13 Dec. Relief of Bastogne
- 2013**
- 10 Jan. Eastern Front
 - 14 Feb. Military Intelligence Language Sch.
 - 14 Mar. Mistakes in the German Retreat
 - 28 Mar. WW2 in the Middle East
 - 11 Apr. The Ruhr Pocket
 - 9 May Malmedy

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton coldpatton@yahoo.com

This is our 25th Year!



Comparative Strength and Losses, Battle of Leyte Gulf

Initial Strength	U.S.	IJN
Large Carriers	8	1
Small Carriers	24	3
Aircraft emb.	1712	117
Battleships	12	9
Cruisers	24	20
Destroyers	141	34
Lost:	U.S.	IJN
Large Carriers	0	1
Small Carriers	3	3
Battleships	0	3
Cruisers	0	10
Destroyers	2	11
Dest. Escort	1	0

If you liked tonight's program, view our prior programs: [Return to the Philippines \(Feb. 2011\)](#); [Battle of Leyte Gulf \(Jan. 2001\)](#); or [Battle of the Philippine Sea \(Feb., 2000\)](#). You may order these tonight for delivery next month by seeing Rob at the desk, or online at: www.barros.us/online-store.cfm or contact Rob at (763) 639-3399

