

Naval Battle of Guadalcanal

Background. The Battle of Santa Cruz Islands, fought in October 1942, had savaged the Japanese carrier air groups, sunk the *Hornet*, and damaged the *Enterprise*. While the carrier strength of both sides had ebbed, the battle of Guadalcanal continued regardless. Neither side intended it, but the reinforcement efforts of November would trigger the decisive naval clashes to be fought for the island.

The Imperial Japanese Navy was forced to send carriers Shokaku, Zuikaku, and Zuiho back to Japan to rebuild their depleted air groups. Carrier Hiyo, sidelined with an engine breakdown, contributed her depleted air group to the Japanese base at Buin. That left carrier Junyo as the sole functioning IJN carrier in the area.

Without strong carrier support, IJN planning emphasized land-based air and powerful surface units. The Japanese laid on a reinforcement operation for early November, featuring a convoy of eleven transports covered by long range CAP and a battleship bombardment of Henderson Field.

The Americans had their own plans to resupply and reinforce Guadalcanal. More importantly, their code-breaking efforts gave them timely warning of the Japanese plans. While the USN was also low on carrier combat power, with only the damaged *Enterprise* available, the Americans were willing to commit their powerful battleships to the direct support of the island.

Playing Area. The scenarios are played out on a hex grid 30 hexes from north to south and 20 hexes from east to west. A sample of the grid is attached to this scenario description. Truk is in the northwest corner of the area, in hex 0101. Rabaul is in hex 0113. Shortlands/Buin is in hex 0515. Guadalcanal is in hex 1017. Espiritu Santo is in hex 1622. The Santa Cruz Islands are in hex 1618. Noumea is in hex 1630, at the bottom of the playing area. There are minor islands, controlled by Japan, in hexes 0213, 0314, 0414, 0615, 0716, 0816 and 0917. The US controls minor islands in hexes 1118 and 1218 as well as Guadalcanal and Espiritu Santo.

Scenario Special Rule – Weather. Weather was particularly bad during this period, interfering with long range strikes and CAP. Use the following weather tables in place of the normal tables.

Weather in zone is clear:

Die Roll	Result
1-3	Clear
4-5	Cloudy
6	Stormy

Weather in zone is cloudy:

Die Roll	Result
1-2	Clear
3-4	Cloudy
5-6	Stormy

Weather in zone is stormy:

Die Roll	Result
1	Clear
2-4	Cloudy
5-6	Stormy

Initiative. Neither side receives an initiative modifier.

Scenario Length. 20 turns. This scenario covers the period from 9 November through 18 November.

Victory Conditions. Standard victory conditions apply.

Imperial Japanese Navy Order of Battle.

At Truk:

Carriers: Junyo

Battleships: Kongo, Haruna, Hiei, Kirishima

Heavy Cruisers: Tone, Atago, Takao,

Light Cruisers: Nagara, Sendai

Destroyers: Teruzuki, 3 x Fubuki, 1 x Akatsuki, 2 x Kagero, 3 x Shiratsuyu, 1 x Asashio/Hatsuharu

At Rabaul:

Heavy Cruisers: Suzuya, Maya, Chokai, Kinugasa

Light Cruisers: Isuzu, Tenryu

Destroyers: 2 x Asashio, 2 x Yugumo, 2 x Kagero, 1 x Shiratsuyu, 1 x Fubuki/Shiratsuyu, 1 x Mutsuki

Transports: Arizona, Brisbane, Canberra, Hirokawa, Kinugawa, Nagara, Nako, Sado, Shinanogawa, Yamaura, Yamazuki Marus

Submarines: 2 blocks

Air groups:

Junyo: 3 A6M2, 1 D3A2, 1 B5N2

Rabaul: 3 A6M2, 2 A6M3, 4 G4M1

Buin: 1 A6M2, 2 A6M3, 3 D3A2

Imperial Japanese Navy Starting Positions.

- All ships begin at the bases shown. They are all fully fueled. All transports are fully loaded.
- The submarine blocks may start with 4 hexes of Espiritu Santo or Guadalcanal.
- The IJN player may have up to 15 TF blocks on the playing surface. Any number of these may be dummies.

- The IJN player places TFs and submarine blocks on the map before the USN player.

Imperial Japanese Navy Scenario Rules.

1. Junyo. Junyo may strike with her entire air group, without limits.
2. Searching D3A2s. Note that Junyo's D3A2 unit may search.
3. Rabaul CAP. The IJN player must always retain 1 A6M unit at Rabaul as CAP.
4. Rabaul Refueling. TFs containing carriers or battleships may not refuel at Rabaul.
5. At Sea Refueling. The IJN player may designate 1 hex within 6 hexes of Truk as refueling rendezvous.
6. Bombardments. The IJN player may designate 2 battleships to conduct bombardment missions. The IJN player may use the "BOMBARD" counters included with the game to record this.
7. Dummies. The IJN player may have 1 dummy task force composed entirely of dummy ships. The IJN player receives as dummy ships 2 high ♣, 3 ♠, 1 ♥ and 3 ♦.
8. Noumea. No Japanese ship can approach within 7 hexes of Noumea.

United States Navy Order of Battle.

At Espiritu Santo:

Heavy Cruisers: San Francisco, Pensacola, Helena

Light Cruiser: Atlanta

Destroyers: Fletcher, 3 x Bristol, 1 x Mahan

Transports: Betelgeuse, Libra, Zeilin, Kopara

At Noumea:

Carriers: Enterprise

Battleships: Washington, South Dakota

Heavy Cruisers: Portland, Northampton

Light Cruisers: San Diego, Juneau

Destroyers: Clark, 3 x Sims, 1 x Mahan, 1 x Bristol, 1 x Benham

Transports: Crescent City, McCawley, President Adams, President Jackson

Other: 1 x DMS

Submarines: 3 blocks (1 speed 2 and 2 speed 3)

Air groups:

Enterprise: 4 F4F-4, 3 SBD-3, 2 TBF-1

Guadalcanal: 4 F4F-4, 2 SBD-3, 1 P-39/400

Espiritu Santo: 1 F4F-4, 1 F4F-3P, 1 SBD-3, 1 P-39D

Noumea: 1 B-25/26

United States Navy Starting Positions.

- All ships begin in the bases indicated. All are fully fueled. All transports are fully loaded.
- The speed 2 submarine block start within 4 hexes of Rabaul. The speed 3 submarine blocks start within 4 hexes of Truk.
- The USN player can have up to 15 TF blocks on the playing surface. Any number of these may be dummies.
- The USN player places TFs and submarine blocks on the map after the IJN player.

United States Navy Scenario Rules.

1. Carrier Strike Limits. Air strikes from USN carriers are limited in their potential composition. Any P weapon bombing units in excess of 3 launched by a carrier in a single strike must be units with 2P attack strengths.
2. PBY Searches. The PBY search aircraft at Espiritu Santo can search during night turns as if they were day turns. If these search aircraft search during a day turn, they may not search during the following night turn. The USN player may use a "SEARCHED" counter provided with the game to track this. The PBY search aircraft may attack 1 of the spotted ships in each TF they contact at night with a 3L attack. They must roll 1 on D12 to make the attack. Roll for each TF contacted and select any attacked ship randomly, based on the cards dealt during the search. PBYs are not subject to AA or CAP attacks.
3. B-17 Searches. The B-17 search aircraft based on Espiritu Santo may attack 1 of the spotted ships in each TF they contact with a 3H attack. These are the search aircraft with a search radius of 13 hexes. They must roll 1 on D12 to make the attack. Roll for each spotted TF separately and select the attacked ship randomly, based on the cards dealt during the search. B-17s are not subject to AA or CAP attacks.
4. Reinforcements. The following air units arrive at Espiritu Santo on Turn 5: 1 F4F-4, 2 SBD-3, 2 TBF-1, 1 P-38F.

5. Base Transfer. The F4F-4, SBD-3 and P-38F air units at Espiritu Santo may transfer to Guadalcanal and may operate as if originally based there. No more than 2 air units may transfer each day. All Enterprise TBF units may also freely transfer to Guadalcanal and operate as if based there. Units capable of transferring are marked with an *.
6. Radar. All US bases have radar.
7. Bombardment. Guadalcanal may be bombarded. Espiritu Santo may not be bombarded.
8. Dummies. The USN player may have 1 dummy task force composed entirely of dummy ships. The USN player receives as dummy ships one high ♣, 2 low ♣, 2 ♠, 1 ♥ and 3 ♦.
9. Truk. No USN surface ship may approach within 9 hexes of Truk.

Outcome. The USN supply convoys arrived first and managed to unload their supplies despite IJN air strikes. The Japanese battleship bombardment of Henderson Field, planned for the early morning of November 13, was thwarted by the USN convoy escorts. The USN cruiser and destroyer force took heavy losses, but the IJN lost battleship *Hiei* to USN surface forces and air strikes. With Henderson Field in operation, US Marine and Navy aircraft plastered the IJN supply convoy on the 14th. Six of the transports were sunk while a seventh was forced to turn back.

Rebuffed by not defeated, the IJN planned another battleship bombardment for November 15. This time, the USN committed two battleships to stopping the Japanese. And stop them they did, in a night action that crippled battleship *Kirishima*. Four of the transports managed to reach the island, but came under intense air attack and surface bombardment as they tried to unload their cargos. All were beached in the unloading process; few of the supplies reached the Japanese Army forces on Guadalcanal.

Although neither side fully realized it at the time, the USN and the Marine air arm had defeated the last major Japanese attempt to reinforce their forces on Guadalcanal. There was much hard and bloody fighting ahead, but the Japanese supply efforts ongoing would be inadequate to supply their troops with basic needs, let alone build up any offensive power. Japanese defeat on Guadalcanal had become largely a matter of time.

