

Battle off Samar

0645 9 October 1944

Background: The Battle of Leyte was the largest and strangest naval battle of modern times. It was fought between an already defeated Japanese fleet and overwhelmingly dominant American naval forces. It featured not only the last major carrier battle in history, but also the last clash between battleships. While the American had air supremacy throughout the battle, and battered the Japanese ships mercilessly, two of the three major engagements that made up the battle were fought between surface forces. And although the Japanese were hopelessly outnumbered overall, the most riveting clash featured seven American destroyers and destroyer escorts fighting against the most massive Japanese surface forces ever engaged.

The Leyte battle was the outcome of the Japanese mania for the "decisive battle" of naval forces that would arrest the American naval advance towards the Japanese home islands. A previous attempt at a decisive battle at Saipan in June of 1944 had resulted in the savaging of Japanese carrier aviation. The Japanese Navy now turned to its carefully hoarded surface forces, gathering them from far-flung reaches of the Empire and launching towards the American forces invading the Philippine island of Leyte.

The Japanese plan was simple in concept but complicated in execution. The husk of the Japanese carrier forces -- ships without planes -- would be used to draw off the powerful American covering forces away to the north, while Japanese surface forces infiltrated from the west through the Philippine islands and fell on the American transports. The plan called for split-second timing, as Japanese surface forces came together from distant ports to run through the Philippine straits under cover of darkness.

The Japanese plan met with mixed success. Submarine attacks and massive American airstrikes battered the oncoming surface forces. Estimating that the Japanese surface were either in retreat or doomed to failure, Admiral Halsey accepted the Japanese gambit and led the main American striking forces northward to strike the bait carriers. Halsey's estimate was wrong: while one of the main Japanese surface forces was wiped out in a night engagement, Admiral Kurita's powerful Force "A" ran through the unguarded San Bernardino Strait and then, unspotted, moved south along the east coast of Samar island. Dawn found this force only a few hours steaming from the rich prize of the American invasion fleet in Leyte Gulf.

Dawn also found the small escort carriers of the U.S. Seventh Fleet beginning another day of ground support, aerial resupply and CAP missions over the Leyte beachhead. Grouped into three task units code-named Taffy 1, 2 and 3, these 16 carriers were warriors for the working day: small, slow, unarmored and unglamorous, but essential to the work of supporting combat operations ashore. Their escorts consisted solely of destroyers and destroyer escorts, accustomed to anti-submarine and anti-aircraft work. On this day, the Taffies would have another job to do, as Kurita's force was headed directly for Taffy 3. He made contact at 0645.

Forces:

Imperial Japanese Navy: Vice-Admiral Kurita Takeo	Division 1	Yamato Nagato
	Division 2	Kongo Haruna
	Division 3	Kumano Suzuya Chikuma Tone
	Division 4	Haguro Chokai
	Division 5	Yahagi Nowaki
	Division 6	Urakaze Yukikaze Hamakaze Isokaze
	Division 7	Noshiro Shimakaze

	Division 8	Hayashimo Akishimo
	Division 9	Kishinami Okinami Naganami Asashimo
	Division 10	Hamanami Fujinami
	Division 1	Fanshaw Bay St. Lo White Plains Kalinin Bay
	Division 2	Kitkun Bay Gambier Bay
United States Navy Rear Admiral C. A. F. Sprague	Division 3	Hoel Heermann Johnston
	Division 4	Dennis J. C. Butler
	Division 5	Raymond S. B. Roberts

Special Rules:

1. The scenario lasts for 36 turns.
2. If any USN is about to exit the playing surface, the Japanese player instead may opt to shift all ships (and other items on the surface) 15 inches directly away from the edge that the USN ship would have exited. If this results in any ships exiting from any other edge of the playing surface, they are considered out of play.
3. There is a rain squall on the playing surface. It is a circle 6 inches in diameter. For visibility purposes, distance measured through the squall is quadrupled. The squall begins 16 inches south of the north edge and 5 inches west of the east edge.
4. USN Airstrikes. USN airstrikes arrive randomly. Each strike consists of 1 group of 6 FM-2s and 1 group of 6 TBM-1Cs, both arriving in the same turn. A strike arrives on a 1D6 roll of 1-3 at the start of each turn. Roll 1D6 for each TBM-1C group in the strike – on a roll of 1-3, the group is carrying torpedoes, on a roll of 4 or 5, 500lb SAP bombs, on a roll of 6, 500lb HE bombs. All FM-2s are armed with 5 inch rockets. USN aircraft can be repositioned on the playing surface each turn to make dummy attacks. Use numbered or lettered counters to represent air groups, and invert them to disguise armed groups from groups already expended their ordnance. Air groups only appear on the table in the Sighted Ship Torpedo Launch phase (if making or faking a torpedo launch) or the Gunfire Combat phase (for making or faking bomb or rocket attacks). For torpedo attacks, simply place a torpedo marker together with the air group marker within 1 inch of the intended target. The torpedoes attack that turn, regardless of the ending position of the target ship.
5. All Taffy 3 carriers have launched their planes. They can conduct no further air operations during the scenario.
6. Visibility is good, with a spotting base of **30** inches.
7. All USN ships have radars with ranges out to **24** inches.
8. The USN carriers may maneuver in their circular formation without penalty. The formation cannot execute column turns.
9. A ship may fire AA at aircraft attacking it in the phase in which it is being attacked. To fire AA, a ship follows these steps. First, it rolls 1 die for each attacking group, needing a “1” to proceed. Next it rolls 1 die for each 1 rolled, needing to roll less than its AA value to continue. Each successful roll prevents an air group from attacking. It then rolls 1 die for each successful roll after

the previous round. For each 1 rolled, an aircraft group is shot down. Shot down aircraft do not attack.

Set-up:



The USN carriers are equally spaced around a circle 2.5 inches in diameter. The center of the circle is 15 inches from the north edge and 15 inches from the east edge of the playing surface. The formation is steaming on a course of 300 degrees. The USN escorts are on the same course. They may be placed anywhere within 5 inches of the center of the carrier formation.

The Japanese ships are disposed in a series of 6 columns. All are steaming on a course of 180 degrees (due south). The ships leading each of the first 4 columns are disposed on a line running on a bearing of 60-240 degrees. The easternmost column consists of Divisions 5 and 6. To its west is Division 3, then Division 4, then Divisions 7 through 10 in the westernmost column. There is a 6 inch space between each column along the line of bearing. Division 1 is 6 inches north and 3 inches west of Division 4. Division 2 is 6 inches north and 3 inches west of Division 3. The leading ship of Division 5 is 10 inches from the north edge and 42 inches from the east edge. While the ships in each column are steaming due south, they are offset on a line of bearing of 150-330 degrees – that is, the columns are arranged as if each column had been steaming on a course of 150 and then executed a ships right turn to a course of 180.

Victory Conditions:

- a) The Japanese player receives normal victory points for USN ships damaged or sunk and USN planes shot down.
- b) The USN player received double normal victory points for Japanese ships damaged or sunk.

Victory Points Table

	BB/BC	CA	CL/CVE	DD/TB/DE
Sunk	24	12	6	3
2P Hits	16	8	4	2
P Hit	8	4	2	1

The table shows the points received for ships in the condition shown either when the scenario ends or when the ship is withdrawn from the playing surface. 2 points for every carrier air factor lost.

Outcome: Kurita had found Taffy 3, commanded by Clifton Sprague. Kurita thought that he had made contact with fleet carriers and screening cruisers, but came on nonetheless. Sprague knew the odds and made off at best speed, calling for support. While Halsey was too far away to help, the other escort carriers launched airstrikes to assist the embattled Taffy. These, plus hard fighting and selfless sacrifice by Sprague's escorts managed to hold Kurita at bay. When Kurita finally turned away, he had lost Chokai, Chikuma and Suzuya. He succeeded in sinking Gambier Bay, Hoel, Johnston and Roberts before retiring through San Bernardino Strait.

The Americans had fought well against overwhelming odds. Samuel Elliot Morison perhaps best summed up the action in his History of United States Naval Operations in World War II:

“The story of that action, with its dramatic surprise, the quick thinking and resolute decisions of Clifton Sprague; the little screening vessels feeling for each other through rain and smoke and, courting annihilation, making individual attacks on battleships and heavy cruisers; naval aviators making dry runs on enemy ships to divert gunfire from their own; the defiant humor and indomitable courage of bluejackets caught in the ‘ultimate of desperate circumstances,’ will make the fight of the ‘Taffies’ with Kurita forever memorable, forever glorious.”¹

¹ Morison, Samuel Elliot, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: Leyte, June 1944-January 1945, v. xii, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.) 1984.

IJN Ships

Name	Class	Speed	Size	Armor	Batteries	Type	Number
Yamato	BB	3 ½	6/6	-4	Main Secondary Secondary AA	18" 6" 5"	3-5-2 2-3-2 0-6-0 4
Nagato	BB	3	5/6	-3	Main Secondary Secondary AA	16" 5.5" 5"	2-4-2 0-4-0 0-2-0 2
Kongo Haruna	BC	3 ¾	5/6	-2	Main Secondary Secondary AA	14" 6" 5"	2-4-2 0-2-0 0-2-0 2
Kumano Suzuya	CA	4 ¼	3/5	-1	Main Secondary Torpedoes AA	8" 5" 24"	2-5-2 0-2-0 3/3(6) 2
Tone Chikuma	CA	4 ¼	3/5	-1	Main Secondary Torpedoes AA	8" 5" 24"	2-4-0 0-2-0 3/3(6) 2
Haguro	CA	4 ¼	4/5	-1	Main Secondary Torpedoes AA	8" 5" 24"	2-5-2 0-2-0 4/4(8) 2
Chokai	CA	4 ½	4/5	-1	Main Secondary Torpedoes AA	8" 4.7" 24"	2-5-2 0-1-0 4/4(8) 1
Yahagi Noshiro	CL	4 ½	2/4	1	Main Torpedoes AA	6" 24"	2-3-1 4 1
Shi'kaze	DD	5	1/3	1	Main Torpedoes AA	5" 24"	1-2-1 8 1
Nowaki Urakaze Yukikaze Hamakaze Isokaze Hayashimo Akishimo Kishinami Okinami Naganami Asashimo Hamanami Fujinami	DD	4	1/3	1	Main Torpedoes AA	5" 24"	1-2-1 4 1

USN Ships

Name	Class	Speed	Size	Armor	Batteries	Type	Number
Hoel Heermann Johnston	DD	4 ½	1/3	1	Main Torpedoes	5" 21"	2-3-2 5
Dennis Butler Raymond Roberts	DE	3	1/2	2	Main Torpedoes	5" 21"	1-1-1 2
Fanshaw St. Lo White P. Kalinin Kitkun Gambier	CVE	2 ¼	4/5	1	Main	5"	0-0-1

IJN Weapon Table

Weapon	6"	12"	24"	36"	Penetration
18"	3	3	2	1	7
16"	3	2	2	1	6
14"	3	2	2	1	5
8"	4	3	2	1	4
6"	4	2	1		3
5"	5	2			2
4.7"	5	2			2
24" Torp	4	2	1		5

USN Weapon Table

Weapon	6"	12"	24"	36"	Pen
5"	5	2			2
21" Torp	3	1			4

Aircraft

Aircraft	Weapon	To Hit	Penetration	Number
TBM-1C	Torp	3	4	3
	HE Bomb	1	3	12
	SAP Bomb	1	3	12
	Rockets	1	2	6
(Assumes groups of 6 aircraft)				

Damage Tables

-1 to die roll for SAP bomb hits, double armor rating of targets of HE bombs whether positive or negative

USN Damage Notes:

The USN damage control number is 2. M hits result in explosions on a roll of 1 and fires on a roll of 2. S hits result in fires on a roll of 1.

IJN Damage Notes:

The IJN damage control number is 1. M hits result in explosions on a roll of 1 and fires on a roll of 2. S hits result in fires on a roll of 1.