

Leyte gulf



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Battle of Leyte gulf was known historically as one of the most decisive battles won by the U. S army in their attempt to regain control of the Philippine Islands during the second world war. This was the battle which made it possible for the renowned General Douglas MacArthur to make good on his promise to the Filipino people that “ he is going to return” to free them from the cruelty of the Japanese.

The four-day battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944 marked the eclipse of Imperial Japanese naval power, the last sortie in force of the Imperial Navy, and the largest naval battle ever fought on the face of the earth.

Obviously this armed confrontation between the U. S forces and the Japanese Imperial army was an offshoot of an even greater war; the second World War, which was undoubtedly the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. It is still as of the present, the most destructive war that ever took place. The Carnage wrought on this war dwarfs any known casualties the world has ever known when it comes to wars that historically took place. This war utilized technology in all aspects of weaponry and battle tactics.

Battles were fought on land, on sea, and in the air for a period of approximately six years. This great war still continues to rouse the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as bring fresh recollections of the devastation to both the victorious and vanquished forces who fought on that war. The intervention of the Americans in the second world war took place on the month of December 1941. The Japanese succeeded to demolish Pearl Harbor, which was then known as the greatest naval base in the Asia pacific region.

The Japanese used stealth and treachery to succeed in this endeavor. Within hours of the destruction of the United States Battle Fleet at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese forces began their assault on the Philippine islands. 5 months later on the month of April 1942, the Fil-American fortress in the Bataan Peninsula fell, and with it the majority of the combined Fil-American forces were captured and incarcerated by the Japanese Imperial army. Two and a half years after the fall of Bataan Allied forces began the reconquest of the Philippines with major landings on Leyte.

Four months prior to the Leyte landings - at the Battle of the Philippine Sea - the Japanese Imperial Navy made a desperate attempt to defeat the US fleet with carrier-borne aircraft. Needless to say, the Japanese army was dealt a major blow when they lost nearly 200 of their aircrafts in one afternoon and lost nearly 500 carriers and land-based aircrafts in two days. The Superiority of the equipment used by the American forces caused the massacre of the Japanese forces.

As a result of the destruction of their aircrafts and carriers, which at the start of the Pacific war was the most feared of units, and usually at the frontlines of the Japanese offensive, the Japanese airforce amounted to nothing more but decoys in the Leyte campaign, and the task of making the real attacks on the Allied invasion fleet was of necessity left to the Japanese Imperial army's battleships and heavy cruiser forces, which were still largely intact, and to what land-based support the Japanese army could still muster.

II. Strategies involved in The Battle of Leyte Gulf After the decisive battle of the Philippine sea, the U. S forces were contemplating as to what course of action should be taken. In the end two factions were opposing each other as

to what strategy should be employed to regain control over the Philippine islands. One of these faction, was composed of the Navy, led by Admirals Nimitz and King, wanted to take Formosa by using the “ island-hopping strategy”.

They believe that in order to neutralize the Japanese Army garrison by air blockade, they must secure the island of Formosa, this island is located strategically along the seaways from the Dutch East Indies to Japan, and as such would serve as the perfect base for the “ economic strangulation” of Japan. The said Island would also be ideal to serve as base for the impending final attack on Japanese Territory. On the opposing side was General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of the South-west Pacific Forces. Surprisingly, He believed that military reasons alone should not control the pace of the action.

It is of common knowledge that his stand was also based on political considerations. He wanted to regain control of the Philippines because of the following reasons: The first reason being given was that he wanted to fulfill his promise to the Filipino people that “ he shall return” to liberate them from the cruelty of the Japanese. The second reason being given is because of his conviction that leaving the Philippines in Japanese hands would be an “ irreversible loss” of American prestige in Asiatic eyes. In his plea to President Roosevelt, he reiterated that the U.

S could not afford to ignore the political implications of its military planning. A return to the Philippines involved a compelling political dimension that did not apply to Formosa. The Philippine Islands had been a colony of the United States since 1898, and the inherent politico-military responsibilities arising

from that relationship could not be taken lightly. It was on those grounds that General MacArthur and others insisted that the United States had a moral obligation to liberate the Republic from the cruelty of the Japanese as soon as possible. The faction led by General MacArthur eventually won out.

The decision as to what course of action would be prioritized was made by President Roosevelt himself. He was convinced by General MacArthur that it is America's moral obligation to liberate the Republic's 16 million citizens from harsh Japanese occupation as soon as possible (it is also probable that he did this because of political reasons). As a result, by the summer of 1944, the American forces succeeded in fighting their way across the Pacific on two lines of attack to reach a point 300 miles southeast of Mindanao, the southernmost island in the Philippines.

In the Central Pacific, forces under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commanding the Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean areas, had island-hopped through the Gilberts, the Marshalls, and the Carolines. More than 1, 000 miles to the south, Allied forces under General Douglas MacArthur, commanding the Southwest Pacific area, had blocked the Japanese thrust toward Australia, and then recaptured the Solomons and New Guinea and many of its outlying islands, isolating the huge Japanese base at Rabaul. The American invasion was concentrated mainly on Leyte Gulf, in the central Philippines.

Earlier plans had called for an invasion of the southern island of Mindanao as the next stepping stone in the successful "island-hopping" campaign employed to date by the two fleets in the Pacific - the Third Fleet under Admiral Nimitz, and the Seventh Fleet under General MacArthur. But, with the apparent collapse of the Japanese fleet and air power, the plan to invade

the central Philippines was advanced two months from December to October of 1944. The Seventh Fleet, under MacArthur would conduct the actual invasion.

It must be noted that there was no overall naval commander during the Leyte campaign, which almost inevitably led to great confusion in the forthcoming battle, and in the event nearly led to a strategic disaster for the Allies. Fortunately for them, it was destined that the allied forces triumph over their adversaries. The War between the United States and Japan was constantly shifting in momentum. It was noted that during the latter part of 1944, it was becoming apparent to Japan that highly desperate measures had to be imposed if they are to stem the massive onslaught of the U.

S Forces. The strength of Japan's archenemy in the Pacific has been growing at a steadily alarming rate, different by far from the forces it had decisively routed during the treacherous bombing of Pearl Harbor and its successful conquest of the Philippine Islands. It is becoming frequent that nearly every time the Japanese Navy came to blows with the United States Navy in a fleet action, the Japanese Navy took a terrible beating. Most of the Japanese navy had been based at Brunei on the island of Borneo, close to its oil supply.

Unfortunately for them the remnant of the fuel was all but exhausted, leaving them only unrefined oil, which could barely be utilized in their warship boilers. To make matters worse the Air Force of the Imperial Japanese Navy was all but obliterated, too. After the Battle of the Philippine Sea (a. k. a " The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" by American pilots because of the apparent target shooting practice which ensued. The target being

Japanese aircraft) Japan lost the majority of her Air force and had only as a remainder, a handful of planes, and even fewer pilots to fly them.

Because of this, her carriers were largely useless for any practical duty. Except, perhaps, to serve as decoys to lure away the American forces in minor and major engagements. The Japanese Army knew in their hearts that if they lose or relinquish their hold on the Philippine islands there is a very huge possibility that they may also lose the war. This instinctive assessment of what might take place if they lose their foothold on the Philippines spurred them to conduct some desperate counter measures against their enemy.

They therefore drew up a plan which risked their remaining surface forces, but offered them a slim chance of destroying the American invasion fleet and isolating the Allied ground forces on Leyte. Like many previous Japanese operational plans it depended on the use of a decoy force. The Japanese was ready to play its cards to the hilt with the full realization that the ensuing result could either be victory, or the destruction or incapacitation of the Japanese Navy. Nothing was held back, as there was everything to gain and substantially nothing to lose (since they are losing anyway) .

The Japanese knew that If this mission failed, the war would be lost. The plan that was conceptualized was nothing short of brilliant if things turned out as they have calculated. Unfortunately for their cause, an accident saved the day for the U. S forces. The plan was that Admiral Ozawa was to sail in from the North East with his " bait" of four aircraft carriers, and the two hybrid battleship-carriers Ise and Hyuga featuring four battleship turrets forward, and small flight decks aft. But, for this mission, they would carry no aircraft at all, as none were available.

Even the large fleet carriers were not carrying a full complement of planes. At this stage of the war, the Japanese have already lost most of their trained pilots which forced them to depend on untrained aircrew to fill up the gaps. The said units were therefore selected along with a dozen ships to play the role of decoy. The decoys were assigned to draw the main American force, with the intent of having two powerful battleships penetrate and then stealthily attack the American invasion forces in the Leyte Gulf.

The southern and weaker of these battleship forces, commanded by Rear Admiral Nishimura, would penetrate through Surigao Strait just south of Leyte. The more powerful of the two battleship forces, the Central Force under the command of Vice Admiral Kurita, containing five battleships including the giant Yamato and Musashi (the largest warships in the world), 10 heavy and 2 light cruisers, and 15 destroyers, would penetrate through San Bernadino Strait, sail down the coast of Samar, and fall on the American invasion fleet from the north-east.

The forces which were supposed to counter the Japanese naval maneuvers were led by Admiral William Halsey. Admiral Halsey was a war veteran who hated the Japanese with an intensity almost akin to loathing. According to some of his subordinates Halsey was nothing sort of the extraordinary, and is definitely not known to be an intellectual. His leadership was often successful because he had the talent to choose good staff, who apparently analyzes and decides things that needs to be done, which was done quite often. It was noted that he seldom overruled their suggestions.

It was also noted that while he always acts like a true professional and exacts professional performance from all subordinates, he had this

charismatic effect on them which was like being touched by a magic wand. Anyone so touched was determined to excel. " This characteristic along with his inherent loathing of the Japanese forces made him a very controversial figure on this armed struggle. This personality of Admiral Halsey explains a lot concerning all of his decisions which could have caused the momentum to shift from the U. S forces to the Japanese forces.

As a counter measure against the Japanese, Admiral Halsey ordered 2 minor fleets to steam north at 25 knots. He ordered the dispatched units to join Sherman's Group and attack Ozawa. By midnight the dispatched units, including Admiral Lee in Washington and Admiral Halsey in New Jersey with all their battleships and cruisers, were tearing north. Halsey incorrectly assumed that Kurita's Center Force is not a serious menace. This proved to be costly error as may be gleaned from the engagement which later took place. He ordered Admiral Kinkaid to attack any major enemy naval force approaching from the north.

Unknown to him, they are actually playing to the tune the Japanese forces are playing. Admiral Halsey regarded the Japanese carriers as the main threat which must be annihilated to secure victory for the U. S forces. His strategy was to focus his three available carrier groups, with all their accompanying vessels in destroying Admiral Ozawa's ships. In his eagerness and haste to act on this supposed war strategy, Halsey took no steps to protect Seventh Fleet from the Centre Force. The third Fleet left San Bernadino Strait entirely unguarded. This was a major blunder which could have caused them to lose the battle.

It was even said that “ not so much as a picket destroyer was left”. It appears that he also did not take the necessary precautions to safeguard their forces if by chance a blunder was committed. This was evidenced by the fact that he neglected to even inform Kinkaid that the Strait was Not now being covered by the Third Fleet - instead the Seventh Fleet commander had to rely on an intercepted signal from Halsey to his task group commanders, which indicated that the Third Fleet commander was going north with the three carrier groups to strike the enemy’s Northern Forces.

It was very fortunate indeed that the Seventh Fleet had intercepted an earlier radio signal from Halsey which outlined a plan to form Task Force 34 - a very powerful surface force built around the Third Fleet's fast battleships, this was commanded by Vice Admiral Willis Lee. If this accident did not occur, the casualties on the American side would have been astronomical. When Halsey's 2022 message was received, Kinkaid and his staff, assumed that the " three groups" referred to were the carrier groups of Third Fleet, and that Task Force 34 had been left behind to guard San Bernadino Strait.

The funny thing was that Task Force 34 had not yet been formed, and all the ships which it was expected to contain were heading northwards with the American carriers. Meanwhile the Seventh Fleet, unconcerned about any threat from its northern quarter, and feeling fully confident that the Centre Force would be dealt with by Halsey and the Third Fleet, continued with its preparations to meet the Japanese Southern Force in Surigao Strait.

It was historically recounted that Admiral Ozawa steamed down from the north, presenting what was hoped to be the irresistible targets of Japanese flat tops (including the Zuikaku - the last remaining veteran of the Pearl

Harbor raid.) Meanwhile, the surface units of the Japanese Navy would sneak in from the west under the command of Admiral Kurita, and attempt to spring a deadly trap on the Seventh Fleet.

A small force consisting of the battleships Fuso and Yamashiro and supported by the heavy cruiser Mogami and four destroyers would sneak through the Surigao Strait, preceded by three more cruisers and four destroyers sailing in from Japanese home waters. But the main force of the attack was to come from another direction. The said units sailed from Brunei, all in all it was a substantial force composed of five battleships (including the aforementioned Yamato and Musashi) twelve cruisers and fifteen destroyers.

It was supposed to sneak through San Bernardino Strait, loop around the island of Samar, and smash the Americans through it's blind spot. The actual conflict as envisioned by the Japanese would have " the hammer and anvil" attack which would " sandwich" the American forces with attacks from both the Northern and Southern directions, the Seventh Fleet would have nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide. The impending approach of the Japanese surface vessels was revealed subsequently when the American forces sank two enemy cruisers.

The next day, Seventh Fleet units attempted to block the southern approaches to Leyte while Third Fleet aircraft began attacking the main surface task force. The Aircraft units saw the four enemy units which acted as decoys. Admiral Halsey took his Third Fleet carriers and battleships in hot pursuit of the decoys, which made it possible for the two Japanese surface task forces, to move towards the Leyte Gulf without being harassed by any Air force unit. As expected by the Japanese, the Seventh Fleet battleships

sank or turned back units of the smaller Japanese attack force which acted as decoys.

Unbeknownst to them, the second and larger task force, which included the super battleships Yamato and Musashi, successfully moved through the San Bernardino Strait, then south along the east coast of Samar Island, northeast of Leyte, to within range of the soft support shipping which was being handled by General MacArthur. This sudden attack by the Japanese forces was due to Admiral Halsey's plan to dispose of the Japanese carriers, which he sees as the principal threat to the Leyte campaign.. His dash north, to get to Admiral Ozawa's carrier fleet, left the critical passage of San Bernadino uncovered.

the battle unfortunately did not go as Halsey had planned. Although his fleet sank the four carriers of Ozawa (which were decoys), it missed the two battleships, and a major part of the escort units. Admiral Kurita's Center Force has managed to slip by, and attacked Kinkaid's forces which were covering escort carrier force " Taffy 3". If Kincaid did not accidentally intercept and misinterpreted Admiral Halsey's command by escorting General MacArthur's carrier, things would have gone ill for the Philippine conquest and the American cause as a whole.

To give credit to Admiral Halsey, he managed to turn his forces around to the aid of Admiral Kinkaid's forces, Halsey has sunk four carriers, a super battleship, and several smaller ships. He had lost the Light Carrier Princeton, and jeopardized the invasion beaches. Halsey was responsible for destroying the Japanese fleet, which included carriers but was not restricted to them. Halsey failed to see which force was more dangerous, and paid the price.

The casualties suffered by the American forces because of this blunder amounted to 898 dead soldiers and 913 wounded. In addition to the human casualties the U.

S Navy lost six warships. The Japanese lost an estimated 80, 000 combat ready troops in their failed defense of Leyte. Their losses at Leyte were heavy, with the army losing four divisions and several separate combat units, while the navy lost 26 major warships and 46 large transports and merchantmen in the campaign. On the morning of 25 October, after two and one half hours of desperate fighting by light U. S. Navy escorts, the Japanese battle fleet mysteriously broke off the engagement and withdrew from the gulf, thereby leaving unexploited the opportunity presented by the Third Fleet's departure.

To the north, the Third Fleet caught up with the Japanese carriers and sank all four of them. These encounters, later known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf, represented the largest naval battle in the Pacific. Americans and Japanese came away from the battle of Leyte Gulf with extremely divergent views of what had occurred. These different assessments provoked planning revisions which completely changed the character and duration of the battle for Leyte. The Americans believed they had dealt the IJN a severe blow; events later proved them correct.

But in the immediate aftermath of the sea battle, Japanese commanders believed they had ruined the American carrier force. In fact, they had sunk only one light and two escort carriers and three destroyers. Nevertheless, convinced that they had won a major naval victory and bolstered by reports of air victories in the ten days before A-day, Southern Army resolved to fight

the decisive battle on Leyte. III. Conclusion The Battle of Leyte Gulf was instrumental in the American conquest of the Philippine Islands. If the U.

S forces proceeded to immediately invade the island of Luzon, the casualties might have been heavier considering that the Japanese forces in that region was estimated to number 250, 000 troops. The Battle of Leyte Gulf was indeed a decisive battle considering that it was instrumental for the destruction of the once powerful Japanese Imperial Navy. As a result of devastating blow death to the Japanese Navy, it never ventured out again in force to challenge the superior and overwhelmingly powerful American Navy.

This battle also introduced the terrifying method used by the Japanese pilots to the western mind, the kamikaze tactic, which undoubtedly revolutionized the concept of patriotism and sacrifice among soldiers. As a whole, the Japanese decision to stake everything on the battle for Leyte only hastened their final collapse as they lacked the ability to coordinate the mass of air, ground and naval forces that they committed to the struggle, which led to the emergence of the U. S as a power to reckon with up to the present times.

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