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Japs Haven't Enough Ships Left for Slugging Match

Half to Two-Thirds of Navy Left, but It's Ineffective Now

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 26.—

One-half to two-thirds of the Japanese Imperial Navy is still intact after the defeat of the task force which had the temerity to challenge Adm. Halsey's 3d Fleet in the Philippine area yesterday.

The "rout" which President Roosevelt announced was a paralyzing blow to Japanese sea power but it has not knocked out the enemy's ability to fight at sea.

But it has probably ruled out for all time a knockdown, drag-out fight between Allied and Japanese fleets anywhere in the Pacific—even on the approaches to the Japanese island homeland. The Japs haven't got enough left to attempt a toe-to-toe slugging match with the U. S. forces afloat in the Western Pacific Ocean.

The Japanese had probably 14 capital ships when they went into battle with the Halsey forces in the Philippine area. Regardless of sinkings and damage, there are at least eight, maybe nine, still in service in able, fighting condition.

The Japs, according to all accounts, still have eight or nine or ten large carriers in operation. The loss of 11 cruisers and 17 destroyers undoubtedly weakens the enemy more than the destruction of battle-ships. It is the category of seacraft in which the enemy is weakest.

The relatively low number of such ships in the three attacking fleets is certain indication of the Jap shortage of protective screen vessels.

The Jap strategy was sound on the surface. It was a coordinated operation of the sort they learn in any naval academy from the rule books. They hoped Halsey would bring all his guns and planes to bear on the immediate threat—the force attacking the Central Philippines where our men were landing. It was unfortunate for them they underestimated the power of the Halsey surface forces. He had plenty to take care of, even though he had no land-based aircraft to assist. His carriers, probably an even dozen, nursed enough flying firepower to safeguard both flanks.

Naval observers in Washington are exhilarated by the evident extent of the Japanese defeat but, in true Navy tradition, they are being canny about it. It isn't what we have sunk or disabled, they contend, it's what is left which can still fight.

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Incidentally, they are very unhappy about the unrestrained enthusiasm with which the news has been treated by newsmen and headline writers. It's all very well to be optimistic—there is good reason—but please, for God's sake, don't let's go hog wild and make the people believe that the Grand Fleet of Japan has been destroyed. It hasn't.

These same Navy men are confident, however, that the enemy fleet has diminished as an obstacle to our re-invasion of the Philippines and Formosa—that if it ever goes into frontal action again it will be only in defense of the home islands of the Empire.

If the next step in our amphibious scramble to Tokyo is Formosa, the fleet won't come out and oppose it. If Gen. MacArthur decides the time has come to land his forces on Luzon, where Wainwright surrendered almost three years ago, there will be no great naval concentration to halt the operation.

Never before in the Pacific war have Japanese deficiencies been so evident. The enemy is in possession of excellent air bases from which to launch counterattacks on the U. S. fleet. Whatever he could muster was insufficient to counter the assault of Hellcats, Wildcats, Grummans and Helldivers flying from the decks of our carriers. It is an admission of woeful weakness in the air.

That we could get together a task force—actually, that is what supported our Philippine landings—which could outgun what has been called “a major part of the grand Japanese fleet.” is a revealing symptom.

This was the first time that the Japs have ventured to give battle to the Americans since their disastrous experience off Guadalcanal two years ago. They have held numerous mock battles off the homeland in preparation for yesterday's encounter, however.

The Japs have boasted they had figured out exactly what their fleet would do to Nimitz' fleet if it got within reach. It got within firing range off Formosa and turned tail. Its tentative three-pronged attack on the forces guarding our Philippine beachheads has ended in the “defeat” announced by FDR.

Our own losses will not even necessitate reinforcement from naval units in Southern Pacific waters. Official reports are so definite that they can be counted a bargain price for the damage we inflicted on the fire power of the Japanese.

The “face saving” of the Oriental way of thinking may send the powerful remnant of the Imperial Navy back into action before we re-occupy the Philippines in the opinion of some, but hard-headed Navy men don't think so.

PM