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U. S. NAVAL AVIATION in the PACIFIC

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THE UNITED STATES OFFENSIVE— TARAWA TO TOKYO

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The offensive against Japan depended upon United States forces supplemented by such units as its Allies could spare from commitments elsewhere. By the autumn of 1943 the United States was able to supply the Pacific theater with sufficient ships, planes, ground forces, and supporting equipment to undertake operations on a large scale.

Except for the Solomons and the Aleutians, where Attu and Kiska had been retaken, the Japanese still held the perimeter which they had staked out in 1942. The weakness in their strategic pattern was the separation of the industrial homeland from sources of raw material and the consequent dependence on water transportation not only to supply wide-flung military and naval units but also to maintain the Empire economy. Shipping and the supply routes presented an inviting objective. The second possibility was a bombing attack on the home industries which could be effectively conducted once strategic islands within range had been captured. Both these objectives could be attained if the United States won control of the sea in the western Pacific. This in turn required the defeat and, if possible, the destruction of the Japanese Navy and the capture by amphibious landings of those bases necessary to the operations of United States air and naval forces. From the Marianas it would be possible to bomb Japan and from the Philippines to sever the route to the Southern Resources Area.

Simultaneous advances were to be conducted by Southwest and Central Pacific forces. Based on Australia, the first was to proceed by a series of amphibious hops along the north coast of New Guinea to Morotai and thence to the Philippines. Except for three of the longer jumps, this campaign did not require carrier aviation and could be conducted by the Army supported by land-based air and relatively light naval forces. The Central Pacific, however, presented the problems of much longer over-water operations starting from the Ellice Islands and proceeding from the Gilberts through the Marshalls and Marianas to the western Carolines from which a long jump could be made to the Philippines in collaboration with the Southwest Pacific forces. Because land-based air cover was impossible to maintain beyond 300 miles from base, carrier aviation necessarily played a major role. As it was expected that the Japanese Fleet would make its main resistance in this area, both carriers and heavy naval units were assigned to the Central Pacific. With the taking of the Philippines, the same forces could be withdrawn and used to move north and west from the Marianas toward the Bonins and Okinawa and finally to prepare an amphibious assault on the Japanese homeland.

The contribution of naval aviation to the Southwest Pacific advance was largely in reconnaissance and antishipping attacks. Marine air units were retained in the northern Solomons and the Admiralties to interdict bypassed enemy garrisons on Bougainville, New Britain, and New Ireland. In the Central Pacific the Navy had available both fast and escort carriers in increasing numbers, its land-based and tender-based squadrons, and Marine garrison air forces. Although the Army Air Forces supplied heavy and medium bombardment groups as needed, the nature of the Central Pacific made the theater primarily a Navy responsibility. With the necessary equipment on hand and assured of a continuing supply of replacements and reinforcements, the United States prepared to launch its drives at the Japanese Empire.

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The summer of 1943 saw the Marine and Army air units in the Solomons and the Fifth Army Air Force in New Guinea engaged in a death struggle with Japanese naval aviation based at Rabaul and Bougainville. Because it was expected that an advance on the Marshalls might be met with opposition of the same intensity and caliber the first steps were cautious. Airfields were constructed at Funafuti, Nanomea, and Nukufetau in the Ellice chain, and Baker Island was developed as a staging base for Army bombers based at Canton. Search and photographic reconnaissance by Navy squadrons and bombing by Army aircraft were initiated against the Gilberts and southern Marshalls. The fast-carrier forces conducted strikes against Marcus in August, Tarawa and Makin in September, and Wake in October. These were in the nature of training and probing operations for the new *Essex*- and *Independence*-class carriers as they arrived in the Pacific. By November four large and five small carriers had been added to the existing force which comprised only the *Enterprise* and *Saratoga,* and a total of eight escort carriers had been assembled. It was now possible for the first major carrier-paced offensive to begin.

The air garrisons in the Gilberts, 100 miles to the north at Mille in the Marshalls, and 500 miles to the west at Nauru were overwhelmed

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by carrier strikes on 19 and 20 November. These were carried out by the 11 fast carriers organized in 4 task groups, the largest carrier force yet assembled by any navy. On 20 November the marines landed on Tarawa, which fell after 2½ days of heavy fighting. The escort carriers and 1 fast-carrier group provided direct support, while other groups covered the approaches. Makin and Apamama were taken with ease and although the Japanese Navy made no effort to contest the landing by surface action, it did launch a series of troublesome and damaging night torpedo attacks by aircraft from Kwajalein. Despite daily bombings and daylight fighter patrols the planes staged through Mille in the evening.

With the Gilberts in friendly hands preparations were made for the assault on the Marshalls. Photographic reconnaissance by a carrier task force on 4 December 1943, confirmed by the pictures later brought back by Navy Liberators, showed that the enemy had fortified Maloelap, Wotje, and Mille in the outer ring of islands but had much less extensive installations on Kwajalein and Eniwetok farther to the west and none at all on Majuro, an atoll with sufficiently large anchorage for the fleet and land space for an airfield. Rather than assault the main Japanese defenses with the resultant heavy casualties as had occurred at Tarawa, Kwajalein, and Majuro became the first objectives in the Marshalls to be followed by landings on Eniwetok.

The operation commenced with an air bombardment by Army, Marine, and Navy units based in the Gilberts. Profiting from the example of the enemy at Pearl Harbor, the fast carriers approached from a direction in which Japanese searches were known to be weak. On 29 January 1944 approximately 700 aircraft struck Kwajalein, Maleolap, and Wotje and by evening there was not a Japanese plane operational east of Eniwetok. The latter was cleaned out the next day. Two landings were made on Kwajalein Atoll, and by 4 February enemy resistance was overcome. In the meantime Majuro had been occupied without opposition. The loss of bases in the Marshalls caused the Japanese to withdraw the First Mobile Fleet from Truk, part to Singapore and the remainder to home waters.

Although it had not been planned to take Eniwetok until May, the speed with which Kwajalein Atoll had fallen was exploited by changing plans on the spot. Uncommitted reserves from that operation landed on Eniwetok on 17 February, and within 6 days the atoll was secure.

Truk was not only the reputed center of Japanese naval strength but was also the base from which air reinforcements could have been flown into the Marshalls. During the capture of Kwajalein and Majuro, night torpedo attacks like those experienced in the Gilberts had been prevented by keeping a combat air patrol over Eniwetok through which enemy planes would have had to stage. When an attack on the latter atoll was scheduled, the time seemed ripe for a raid against Truk itself. Although the nature and extent of the enemy installations had been a carefully guarded secret, Marine photo-Liberators from the Solomons had obtained a few pictures on 4 February which indicated that an air strike would be well within the capabilities of the fast carriers and the targets would be worth the risk. Achieving complete tactical surprise, a force of 5 large and 4 light carriers struck Truk on 16 and 17 February, destroying 26 merchant vessels, 6 warships, and 270 aircraft and inflicting damage on installations. One United States carrier was damaged in a night aerial-torpedo attack and, with 2 other carriers to provide cover, retired to Pearl Harbor.

Success at Truk led to a decision to turn north and investigate Japanese bases in the Marianas. Detected during the approach on 21 February, the six-carrier force fought its way without significant damage through a night-long series of attacks by land-based aircraft and carried out

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the operation as scheduled. The Japanese First Air Fleet, already greatly reduced by actions in the Marshalls and at Truk, lost much of its remaining strength and the first photographs were obtained of installations and beaches in the Marianas.

The Truk and Marianas raids demonstrated the decisive striking and defensive power of the fast-carrier task force. Although tactical surprise was achieved frequently during the war, the Japanese in the Marianas were fully warned by their search planes about 18 hours in advance. The Japanese failure to stop the attack indicated that, concentrated in sufficient numbers and properly handled, carriers could operate against shore-based aircraft even without the element of surprise.

With the development of United States bases in the Marshalls, Palau and adjacent atolls became the only Japanese fleet anchorages in the Central Pacific remaining free from land-based air attack and reconnaissance. To prevent its use during Southwest Pacific operations at Hollandia, Palau was chosen as the next target for the fast carriers. Approaching from the southeast through the Admiralties, the carriers destroyed the Palau air garrison on 30 March and a wave of air reinforcements the following day. A feature of the attack was the first mining by carrier planes, which effectively closed the harbor for a month to 6 weeks. The enemy also lost 104,000 gross tons of war and merchant ships including 6 tankers of 47,000 tons, and 150 aircraft were destroyed. Because complete surprise had not been obtained, 4 war vessels and 15 to 20 merchantmen had escaped on 29 March.

After replenishment the fast-carrier task force went on to cover and support the landings of Southwest Pacific forces at Aitape and Hollandia on the north coast of New Guinea on 21 April 1944. These landings involved bypassing strong enemy positions at Hansa Bay and Wewak in the longest hop yet made by Southwest Pacific forces. Although the Fifth Army Air Force in a series of brilliant operations had destroyed enemy air opposition in New Guinea, it was feared that the Japanese might bring up reinforcements and attack the amphibious force beyond the range at which land-based air could provide continuous cover. The presence of carriers insured carrying out the landings without interference, and because the enemy refused to risk further losses, the carrier planes had little to do.

Returning from Hollandia, the fast carriers struck a second time at Truk on 29 and 30 April. Since there were only a few small craft in the harbor, the attack was directed against shore installations and the remaining air strength. Japanese naval officers later testified that the two carrier strikes effectively destroyed Truk as an air and logistics base, a blow from which subsequent bombardment by Army aircraft from Bougainville and Eniwetok prevented all recovery.

Between 29 January and 30 April 1944, fast-carrier operations not only caused the enemy severe losses in ship and planes, but also provided information about Japanese installations in the Carolines, Palaus, and Marianas. From Eniwetok and other bases in the Marshalls and from South and Southwest Pacific airfields on Bougainville, Green, and Emirau, naval search planes could continue the collection of intelligence and carry on antishipping attacks. Marine garrison air forces effectively neutralized bypassed islands and Army bombers prevented further use of the great base at Truk and raided other installations.

In the meantime the carrier and amphibious forces prepared for landings in the Marianas. In staging planes from the home islands to the South Pacific, the enemy had a choice of going either through Formosa and the Philippines or through the Bonins and Marianas to the Palaus and Carolines. Shipping also proceeded along

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throughout the day until 1823, when a large group of enemy planes was intercepted while preparing to land at Guam. The fighter directors worked efficiently and only a few small, disorganized flights penetrated to the United States forces, scoring a bomb hit on the *South Dakota* and some near misses which caused negligible damage. In return, the enemy lost 385 planes in the air and 17 on the ground.

The defeat of the enemy air force altered the situation so that the planes of the escort carriers were sufficient to protect the amphibious forces. The fast carriers moved west in pursuit of fleeing Japanese naval units. Although United States submarines had already sunk 2 enemy carriers, the main fighting strength of the Japanese Fleet remained. Late in the afternoon of 20 June a strike was launched and caught the enemy at extreme range. In the ensuing attack another carrier and 2 fleet oilers went down and 7 ships were damaged. Even though about 100 planes were lost either in combat or through landing on the water when their fuel ran out, the United States units continued the pursuit during the night and the next day until it became evident that all chance of contact had been lost.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea did not result in the destruction of the enemy fleet, the bulk of which escaped to home waters. It did, however, mean the end of Japanese carrier aviation as an effective fighting force. It never recovered from the loss of trained air groups off Saipan.

The remainder of the Marianas campaign passed off without enemy interference. The fast carriers were rotated by groups for replenishment. Those which remained continued the neutralization of Iwo Jima and gave support to landings on Guam and Tinian. Even before the Marine fighter garrison had assumed control at Guam, the fast carriers went south to photograph and pound installations at Palau and Yap. With a final carrier raid and surface bombardment of the Bonins the participation of the fast carriers ended. From 11 June through 5 August, United States carrier aircraft had shot down 915 enemy planes and destroyed another 306 on the ground. The inner Japanese perimeter had been broken and the primary line of communications with the south severed.

In the summer of 1944 the area separating Central and Southwest Pacific forces was growing smaller. Simultaneous landings at Palau and Morotai in September would bring them within 500 miles of one another and make possible a common advance into the Philippines. The plan for Palau also included the capture of Yap and Ulithi in the western Carolines which would provide safe anchorages for the fleet such as were not available in the Marianas.

Covering and diversionary operations by Central Pacific forces began on 31 August when a fast-carrier group hit the Bonin and Volcano Islands followed by further air strikes and cruiser and destroyer bombardment on 1 and 2 September. In all 54 Japanese aircraft were destroyed. The entire task force then raided Palau and Yap after which 3 task groups went on for a 6-day series of attacks on Mindanao in the Philippines. Because Japanese forces on Mindanao were unexpectedly weak, the planned attacks were cut short on 10 September and the carriers moved north to fuel and prepare for raids on the Visayans in the central Philippines.

Two days of strikes on 12 and 13 September proved much more profitable. Although Japanese air attacks were sporadic and ineffective, considerable opposition was experienced over airfields, and the final score showed over 300 enemy planes destroyed, and 13 large merchant ships, 20 smaller ones, and 35 sampans or barges sunk. On conclusion of these strikes, 1 carrier group went south to cover the landings on Morotai and 1 east to Palau, while the third replenished preparatory to attacks on Luzon.

Landings were made by the marines on 15

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September on Peleliu Island and by the Army on 17 September on Angaur, with direct air support furnished by escort carriers augmented by fast-carrier groups. By 24 September captured airstrips were in use by shore-based Marine aircraft and a heavy-bomber runway was operational by 16 October. Carriers were withdrawn on 1 October. The only enemy air opposition had been harmless, night attacks by a single float plane. Opposition to Southwest Pacific landings at Morotai was light.

From 21 to 24 September the fast-carrier task force returned to the Philippines. Airfields on Luzon and the harbor of Manila were attacked for the first time in almost 3 years of Japanese occupation. After 2 days with excellent results the carriers returned once more to the Visayans. During the month of September, carrier operations in the Philippines destroyed over 800 enemy aircraft and sank over 150 vessels without damage to United States ships and with relatively minor losses in planes. The assault on a land mass defended by hundreds of aircraft dispersed on scores of fields demonstrated on an unprecedented scale the ability of carriers to gain and maintain control of the air and was basic to any plan for invasion.

Because the successes of the fast-carrier strikes and intelligence information indicated the weakness of Japanese forces in the Visayans, it was decided to move against them as rapidly as possible. The plan for the capture of Yap was dropped, and landings in the Leyte-Samar area were scheduled for 20 October 1944 by forces under command of General of the Army MacArthur. The Seventh Fleet, which operated under General MacArthur, was augmented by units from the Pacific theater including amphibious elements, 18 escort carriers, and land- and tender-based patrol planes. The fast-carrier task forces were retained under Pacific Fleet command for covering and supporting the Central Pacific areas and also were assigned missions in full support of the Leyte operations.

Preliminary to the landings, air operations against the Philippines were stepped up. Naval patrol-plane searches from the Southwest Pacific were extended to cover the southern and central Philippines and coordinated searches were made by the Fourteenth Army Air Force based in China. Throughout October the carriers attacked the Ryukyus, Formosa, and the Philippines, destroying another 1,000 aircraft. In the most intense air reaction of the war to date, the Japanese sent 600 sorties against the task force attacking Formosa, but the effectiveness of carrier fighter-plane and antiaircraft defense limited the damage to 2 cruisers which were towed back to base.

Directly supported by aircraft from three divisions of six escort carriers each, the landings commenced with the capture of minor outposts in lower Leyte Gulf on 17 and 18 October. On 20 October the main landings were made on the beaches of upper Leyte Gulf. Although initial ground opposition was relatively light, the enemy committed his entire fleet.

The Japanese converged upon Leyte Gulf from three directions. A southern force, which transited the Sulu Sea, was met and decisively defeated in a night surface engagement in Surigao Strait. Enemy carriers approaching from the north were destroyed by the fast carriers off Cape Engano. Although attacked by air on 24 October as it crossed the Sibuyan Sea, a third enemy force succeeded in passing through San Bernardino Strait and surprised an escort-carrier unit off Samar. Despite superiority in armament and numbers this force was driven off and retired by the route it had come under constant air attack. The failure of the Japanese to carry off a daring maneuver may be attributed to skillful handling of the older battleships and to the efficiency of United States radars that turned the engagement at Surigao into a disaster and also to the enemy's inability

to coordinate land-based air with the movements of his fleet. As a result, the Japanese lost 4 carriers, 3 battleships, 10 cruisers, 9 destroyers, a submarine, and some 370 aircraft compared with the United States losses of a light carrier, 2 escort carriers, 2 destroyers, a destroyer escort, and 99 planes.

With the Battle for Leyte Gulf control of the sea passed completely into the hands of the United States. The Japanese Navy ceased to exist as an effective fighting force. Although at Coral Sea, Midway, and the Philippine Sea contact had been between air components of the respective fleets, the Battle for Leyte Gulf, one of the great naval engagements of history, was a combined air-surface action, which demonstrated the integration and flexibility of the United States naval forces. It was the combination of various agents that brought victory as the following tabulation of enemy losses will show: 13 war vessels were sunk by carrier aircraft alone, 8 by naval surface ships alone, 2 by submarines alone; a cruiser, crippled by surface action, was later sunk by carrier aircraft; a second such cripple sank after repeated heavy attacks by Army B–24s; a carrier, mortally damaged by carrier air attack, was sunk by surface action; and a cruiser damaged by carrier aircraft was sunk by a submarine.

United States battle damage and aircraft losses had forced one of the three escort-carrier units to retire, and a second was badly hurt by suicide attacks. This reduction in air strength at the objective area made it necessary to call in the fast carriers for close support. For the remainder of the month the fast carriers flew fighter sweeps over the Visayans and Luzon. On 27 October, with only one airfield in operation, the Army's Far East Air Forces assumed responsibility for air defense and support of troops in the Leyte-Samar area, and within a few days the remaining carriers withdrew. Because the Japanese were making strenuous efforts to increase their Philippine air strength and on 1 November made strong suicide attacks which sank one destroyer and damaged three others in Leyte Gulf, the Southwest Pacific command immediately requested further assistance from the carrier forces. A long-planned carrier attack on the Empire was abandoned and throughout November the fast carriers continued to strike at Japanese aircraft and shipping in the central Philippines and on Luzon. Over 700 aircraft and 134,000 tons of shipping were destroyed in these attacks.

Although bad weather severely hampered airfield construction, by early December, Army and Marine shore-based squadrons had taken over control of the air around Leyte. With the ground campaign progressing satisfactorily, Southwest Pacific forces prepared to resume their advance by landing on Mindoro Island. Since the invasion fleet would have to move through confined waters within the Philippine Archipelago, where it would be peculiarly vulnerable to enemy air attack, direct coverage was furnished from escort carriers of the Seventh Fleet, which beat off suicide attacks and restricted losses to two LST's sunk and a cruiser and destroyer damaged. To prevent enemy air operations at the source three fast-carrier task groups maintained continuous air patrols over Japanese fields on Luzon. Often referred to as the Navy's rolling blanket, this new technique accounted for 298 enemy planes in three days, three-fourths of them on the ground. A further 45 Japanese aircraft were shot down by the combat patrols of the escort carriers and another 55 were either destroyed by ships' gunfire or expended themselves in suicide dives.

With Mindoro in the hands of United States troops and with the end of organized resistance at Leyte on 20 December, the way was open to commence operations against the important Luzon area, the center of Japanese power in the islands. Army aircraft began a series of strikes

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on the great complex of airfields around Manila and completed the disorganization of Japanese air forces which had been well advanced by over three months of carrier-plane attacks. Already 1,500 enemy planes had been destroyed on the ground in the Philippines and during the three-month period carrier aircraft had accounted for 3,800 Japanese planes in the air and on the ground in the Philippines-Formosa-Ryukyus area.

The climax of the Philippine campaign was the invasion of Lingayen Gulf in western Luzon. The military objectives of the operation were the seizure of the central Luzon plain and the Manila area and the denial to the enemy of the northern entrance to the South China Sea. The reinforced Seventh Fleet was to transport, protect, and land the invasion forces by a route passing west of Luzon through the inland waters of the Philippines. Direct air support was to be provided by escort carriers while the Army Air Forces neutralized Japanese air bases to the south and the fast carriers took care of those in Formosa, the Ryukus, and northern Luzon.

Army heavy bombers began raiding Luzon airfields on 22 December. Navy search planes from Leyte and Mindoro, coordinated with long-range aircraft from China, extended their patrols of the sea approaches to cover all the Philippines and the South China Sea. On 3 January, as mine-sweeping, bombardment, and escort-carrier units started their northward advance through the Sulu Sea, the fast carriers initiated 2 days of strikes against Formosa and the Ryukyus. Despite Japanese efforts at dispersal and camouflage, over 100 aircraft were destroyed, the majority on the ground. Designed to prevent reinforcement of Japanese air power on Luzon, this effort also reduced the number of planes on Formosa which were available for direct attacks on United States forces in Lingayen Gulf. On 4 January 1945, the hoarded remnants of the Philippine air garrison began suicide attacks on the advancing ships, sinking an escort carrier. On the following day Kamikazes caused damage to another escort carrier, 2 cruisers, and a destroyer. To relieve the escort carriers already fully occupied with defense of the amphibious fleet, the Southwest Pacific command requested that the fast carriers operate south of their originally designated area so as to cover the chain of bases centered around Clark Field near Manila. Repeated strikes on 6 and 7 January destroyed over 110 enemy planes and combined with the sweep of land-based planes and the activities of the escort carriers, reduced enemy sorties from about 130 on the sixth to less than half that number on the seventh.

Some aircraft, however, escaped the vigilance of the attacking forces. Since every Japanese plane, except a handful reserved for the evacuation of staff officers, was designated for a suicide mission, the invasion forces were exposed to serious danger. Although Japanese orders directed that Kamikazes concentrate on the transports, actually the combatant ships in Lingayen Gulf received the heaviest damage. The situation appeared so serious that the fast carriers, which had planned to attack Formosa on 7 January, were retained to continue their raids on Luzon. Kamikazes continued to appear in twos and threes for a week or more but they were merely the remnants of the enemy air forces in the Philippines. On 8 January, the Japanese naval air commander had left for Singapore and his staff for Formosa, while the commanding general of the Fourth Air Army retired, without his army, to the hills of Luzon.

The troops went ashore on 9 January. The conquest of the Luzon plain turned out to be easier than expected, and without air support the enemy could put up effective resistance only in mountain areas. When on 17 January the Army Air Forces with which Marine squadrons were operating assumed responsibility for air support, the escort carriers withdrew. Although the Japanese continued to hold out in parts of the Philippines until the end of the war, the principal naval advantages of the reconquest

Bay in Indo-China. Such small vessels as the Japanese tried to slip through after January were effectively checked by the collaboration of submarines and naval land-based patrol planes.

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were gained by mid-January. United States forces not only controlled the sea but had severed the last route to the Southern Resources Area. Between 10 and 19 January the fast carriers were in the South China Sea, and American planes destroyed 57 ships along the coast of Asia, ranging as far south as Camranh

The Philippines campaign revealed the poor state of the Japanese air force. Although production of planes had been increased in 1943 and 1944 so that more aircraft were available than ever before and even though the quality of the planes improved, the ratio of losses in combat mounted higher and higher. All United States aviators agreed on the cause. The Japanese had failed to replace the superb pilots who rode so high in the first year of the war. The enemy's training program had broken down. With adequate numbers of aircraft and poorly trained pilots the Japanese resorted in desperation to Kamikaze, suicide tactics; they turned their aircraft into guided missiles and flew them onto the decks of United States ships. It was an effective, dangerous, but not decisive, maneuver. The percentage of hits did not exceed that achieved by American carrier flyers using conventional bombing methods.

After the conquest of the Marianas in June 1944, Central Pacific forces had turned south to meet Southwest Pacific forces in the Philippines. In February 1945, they were ready again to move north and west in operations preliminary to the invasion of Japan itself. Iwo Jima was selected as the next objective in order to secure a base from which Army fighters could escort B–29 strikes on the Empire and also to stop damaging raids from Iwo against the crowded airfields on Saipan. Preliminary bombings of Iwo and the minor air base at Chichi Jima were conducted by shore-based aircraft from the Marianas. Reinforced by B–29 reconnaissance flights, naval shore-based and tender-based patrol planes extended the air search to the coast of Japan itself. Covering operations for the invasion were begun by the fast carriers on 16 and 17 February when the first carrier raids were made on the Tokyo area of the Japanese home islands. On those two days and again port and defense were furnished by escort carriers with the fast carriers preventing the enemy from bringing up reinforcements. The Marines on shore, however, encountered the most vicious and determined defense of the Pacific war. The Japanese had taken advantage of the natural terrain to build a complete underground defense system much of which defied the most intense air and surface bombardment. In many parts of the island the marines had to dig out and kill the enemy individually. From 19 February to 16 March bitter fighting continued until the Japanese garrison was virtually eliminated.

If the price for Iwo Jima was high, the results were also great. On 8 March, naval patrol planes began to use the island for searches that covered the coast of Japan as far as Tokyo. Army fighter planes from Iwo escorted the B–29's of the Twentieth Air Force on their devastating raids against Japanese industries, and the big bombers used the island as an emergency-landing field. Between March 1945 and the close of the war over 2,400 B–29's put in at Iwo with an incalculable saving in planes and lives. The existence of an emergency field made it possible to reduce the amount of gas carried for reasons of safety and to increase the bomb load. Finally, from Iwo Jima air-sea rescue planes could cover most of the B–29 route from the Marianas to Japan.

The reconquest of the Philippines had permitted the United States to sever the connection with the Southern Resources Area. The Japanese could obtain only a trickle of supplies from on the 25th strong air opposition was encountered despite bad weather. During these raids, 420 Japanese planes were shot down, 228 were destroyed on the ground, and a limited number of sorties were directed against strategic targets such as aircraft-engine plants and airplane factories.

The pattern of attack at Iwo followed that of other amphibious operations. Direct air sup-

the mainland by way of the East China Sea and the Straits of Tsushima. Before an assault on the home islands could be launched, more fleet anchorages, airfields, and staging areas for troops were required. All of these objectives could be satisfied by the occupation of Okinawa in the Ryukyus. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that Central Pacific forces undertake the operation.

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The assault on Okinawa was the largest amphibious operation of the Pacific war. The joint expeditionary force included 1,213 ships, 564 support aircraft based on escort carriers, and 451,866 Army and Marine ground troops. Also available for air support as well as to prevent enemy interference and reinforcement were a fast-carrier force with 82 ships and 919 planes and a British carrier force with 22 ships and 244 planes. For interdiction and neutralization raids against enemy air bases there were the Army's Twentieth and Far East Air Forces.

Preassault operations were initiated by fast-carrier attacks on Kyushu, Shikoku, and western Honshu on 18 and 19 March. Beginning on 23 March, the fast carriers operated continuously for 2½ months in the Okinawa area, providing direct air support and cover for the amphibious forces. These were the longest sustained carrier operations of the war.

Islands in the Kerama Retto, 15 miles to the west of Okinawa, were seized on 26 March in order to provide a protected anchorage and a base for logistic support. From tenders seaplane searches extended far into the Yellow Sea and to the Straits of Tsushima between Korea and Japan. Day and night antisubmarine patrols were flown by patrol and carrier planes completely around the southern Ryukyus where the surface ships were operating. Search aircraft, acting in coordination with submarines, watched the exits from the Inland Sea.

light. Starting on 6 April, the Japanese air forces struck with a fury never before encountered. The scale of effort in suicide missions was the outstanding and most spectacular aspect of the Okinawa operation. During the period from 6 April to 22 June, 10 major, organized Kamikaze attacks were carried out. The relatively short distance from Japanese air bases in Kyushu and Formosa permitted employment by the enemy of planes of all types and pilots of every degree of proficiency. In 896 enemy air raids approximately 4,000 planes were destroyed in combat, of which 1,900 were Kamikazes. Damage to United States forces amounted to 28 ships sunk by air attack of which 26 were by Kamikaze planes, and another 225 damaged, of which 164 were by Kamikazes.

The Japanese Navy made a last, despairing effort. At 1520, 6 April, a force consisting of the battleship *Yamato,* the light cruiser *Yahagi* and eight destroyers sortied from Tokuyama on the Inland Sea with the object of attacking the invasion fleet off Okinawa at daylight on the morning of 8 April. This force was sighted by United States submarines while proceeding south through Bungo Channel during the evening of 6 April. Contact was regained the next morning by naval patrol planes and by air search groups from the fast-carrier force. Commencing at about 1240 a series of coordinated attacks by carrier fighters, dive-bombers, and torpedo

At 0830 on 1 April 1945, the amphibious assault on Okinawa itself began. Landings were made over the western beaches against unexpectedly light opposition, and by noon the two airfields at Yontan and Kadena had been captured. As operations ashore progressed, Japanese resistance increased. On 9 April heavily defended positions to the south were encountered and a long drawn-out battle began.

The expected air reaction was slow to materialize and for the first few days was relatively

planes resulted in the sinking of the *Yamato*, the *Yahagi*, and four destroyers. Suffering varying degrees of damage the remaining destroyers retired to Sasebo.

Heavy air attacks on the amphibious and covering forces continued during April and May, after which they declined rapidly. During this period valuable support was rendered by the Twenty-first Bomber Command and the Far East Air Forces in attacks on air fields in Kyushu and Formosa. In April approximately 40 per-

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Navy, Marine, Army, and British air units all played their appointed roles, underlined an argument going on in Japan itself. The invasion of Okinawa had brought a change of cabinet, and the new prime minister, Admiral Suzuki, was feeling his way toward peace through a difficult domestic situation. It was a case of overruling the military and naval fanatics who had long dominated Japanese policy and precipitated the war in the first place. They desired to continue the struggle to the bitter end on the excuse that some compromise peace might be attained. Otherwise they would drag the country to ruin with themselves. Between 6 and 10 August, two atomic bombs were dropped and Russia entered the war on the side of the Allies. Whether these events determined the Japanese to immediate acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration will probably never be known; they certainly provided a powerful punch line to an already winning argument.

On the morning of 15 August the fast carriers launched their aircraft for raids on the Tokyo area. The first strike had already gone in and the second was approaching the target when word of the Japanese surrender arrived. In a last demonstration of the excellent control maintained over air-borne planes, the second strike was recalled. During the day combat patrols were kept flying. Either out of curiosity or piloted by hotheads who refused to accept the emperor's orders, a few Japanese aircraft approached too close and were shot down "in a friendly fashion," as Admiral Halsey termed it. The war was over.

In the advance across the Central Pacific the carrier task force with its extreme flexibility and mobility had been the dominant factor. It established the conditions under which long-range amphibious advances were possible. It never failed to gain command of the air at the required time and place, successively overwhelming the air garrisons not only of the Japanese perimeter but of the major fortresses of Formosa and the Philippines, and it maintained command of the air until shore-based air forces could be established. This remained true even when the enemy in desperation converted the remnants of his air force into guided missiles. In a naval war conducted across vast stretches of ocean, it destroyed the Japanese carrier air force at Midway and in the Marianas, and the surface fleet in the battle for Leyte Gulf. In an amphibious war where it was necessary to storm the beaches against a well-emplaced and fanatically tenacious enemy, it excelled in the direct support of troops. In a war whose pace was at all times governed by what was logistically possible, the carrier task force was an economical weapon independent of the investments in time, personnel, and priceless shipping space required for construction of airfields and facilities soon to be left far behind the advancing front. Its mobility gave to the attacker the advantages of continuous initiative and surprise. No weapon is equally good at all times or in all places, but for the Pacific war the carrier task force was ideal.

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