



# Battle for the South Pacific

May - July 1942

an  
**UNCOMMON VALOR**

Allied After Action Report  
Scenario 17

**GAME OPTIONS:**

Fog of War: ON

Japanese Sub Doctrine: HISTORICAL

Replacement Rate: VERY VARIABLE

Japanese Commitment: 100%

Allied Commitment: 100%

Game Version: v2.30

# May 1942



## **Opening Moves:**

Task Force (TF) 203 consisting of 2CA's, 1CL, 2DD's sails from Brisbane to Townsville where it will operate from. The 8th PRS, consisting of photo-reconnaissance P-38's, is transferred from Townsville to Cooktown in the north. All B-17E's stationed in Rockhampton (four squadrons in all) are transferred to Cooktown. All fighter squadrons at Port Moresby are standing down for the day due to forecasted thunderstorms. Eight (out of sixteen) RAAF Hudson bombers, however, are ordered to conduct naval searches immediately despite the weather.

At Noumea, TF201 (carriers *Lexington*, *Yorktown* and her escorts) will sortie tomorrow, taking up a position east of the Santa Cruz Islands in case the Japanese make a move toward Lunga and Tulagi. Her replenishment ships (TF202, consisting of an AO and DD) will follow TF201.

## **1 May**

### **Thunderstorms**

A large Japanese strike force from Rabaul, consisting of 27 Zeros and 35 Nells, bombs the airfield at Port Moresby despite the bad weather. No CAP is over the field but six Nells are damaged by anti-aircraft fire. No aircraft were lost on the airfield, but 14 men were killed. The airstrip is cratered with 11 hits and 3 hits strike airbase facilities. The Nell bombers attacked at 6,000 feet.

LCDR B. Dwight of 3/VCS-4 is killed in an operational accident.

Three U.S. submarines are vectored to take up positions around Shortland and the Slot to lie in wait for anticipated arrivals of Japanese ships in the expected move toward the Solomons.

Half of the 35th and 36th fighter squadrons (P-39) at Port Moresby are placed on CAP at 10,000 feet. Army A-24 Dauntless dive bombers are set for ground attack.

TF201 sorties northward to take up position east of the Santa Cruz Islands.

Recon reports of Lae from 8th PRS : 1 infantry division, 2 AA divisions, 1 Coastal Gun Battalion, 1 Engineer Battalion.

## **2 May**

### **Overcast**

Twelve B-17E's bomb the Japanese 15th Coastal Gun Battalion at Lae. Two B-17's are damaged by AA fire. The strike force reports killing 63 men (though the number is probably not nearly that high.)

Again, a Rabaul based Japanese strike force of 27 Zeros and 13 Bettys bomb the airfield at Port Moresby at 6,000 feet. This time, 18 P-39's are over the field to meet the attackers. In the air battle, one Zero is destroyed along with five Betty bombers. Eight other Bettys are damaged. Only one P-39 was destroyed with six being

damaged. The star pilot of this intercept was 1 Lt. G. Gholson of the 36th FS, who single-handedly brought down four Japanese aircraft, making him an instant ace. He is awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions on this day. Eight Bettys eventually break through the CAP and bomb the airfield but only strike the runway twice.

### **3 May** **Thunderstorms**

With the poor weather, all squadrons stand down except for RAAF Hudson's which continue to search the sea areas around New Guinea. Nevertheless, a break in the weather allows Port Moresby to be bombed again...from *carrier-based* aircraft. Forty-four Kates escorted by eight Zeros swoop in at 5,000 feet and plaster the field with 15 hits (two or three hits strike the port as well). A couple of hits strike the airbase facilities and one hits the airbase supply. Fifty-five men are killed and an AA gun is lost.

Later a follow up raid from Rabaul, consisting of 13 Nells escorted by 27 Zeros, adds to the destruction. Eight hits are scored on the runway, two hits on airbase facilities, and 25 more men are killed.

With this unexpected appearance of Japanese carrier airpower, TF201 speeds west with TF202 close behind. It will take approximately two days to reach the battle area. All aircraft at Port Moresby will fly CAP tomorrow regardless of weather. Japanese ships are beginning to cluster around Gili Gili and Buna. RAAF Hudson's report both groups consist of transports and small capital ships. TF203 immediately sorties from Townsville.

### **4 May** **Partly Cloudy**

A Rabaul based strike again makes it way toward Port Moresby's airfield. The 24 Zeros and 22 Nells (6K feet) are met in the sky by 22 P-39's and 3 P-40 Kittyhawk's. Unfortunately, the P-39's cannot duplicate their incredible success of two days prior. Three P-39's are destroyed and two damaged with one P-40 destroyed and the other two damaged. None of the Japanese planes are shot down by the CAP. Only four Nells are damaged by AA fire. Still, the raid was disrupted enough that the damage could have been worse: only one hit was scored on the runway and one hit on airbase facilities.

The Japanese carrier task force continues heading eastward along the northern coast of New Guinea and sends out 18 Kates (5K) with 8 Zero escorts to bomb Allied held (but unoccupied) Gili Gili. Two hits are scored on the port supplies.

It is clear that New Guinea is the target of the next Japanese offensive and not the Solomons. TF203 is ordered to attempt a night raid against ships unloading at Gili Gili. So far it has remained undetected in the Coral Sea.

### **5 May** **Thunderstorms**

A U.S. submarine slipping into the Gili Gili shallows at night looses a torpedo at a transport identified as the *Koei Maru*. The torpedo misses. But TF203 is on its way.

TF203 manages to slip to within 6,000 yards of the numerous Japanese warships clustering around Gili Gili. The cruiser *Chicago* draws first blood striking a large transport with her main guns. Soon, return fire from the escorting destroyer *Mutsuki* smacks the cruiser *Australia*. A brief fire-counter fire battle ensues during which the *Mutsuki* manages to slam two torpedoes into the *Chicago*. Despite the initial success of the lone destroyer, however, Allied superior numbers begin to tell as the light cruiser *Hobart* finds the range and pummels *Mutsuki* with 37 shell hits. The destroyer *Farragut* also manages to slam two of her torpedoes into the crippled destroyer as well. Finally, the *Mutsuki* sinks under the tremendous pounding leaving the small Allied surface force to feast on the now defenseless transport force.

A patrol craft (*Nikkai Maru*) is sent to the bottom with 14 hits. A large transport (AP, *China Maru*) is battered severely with 22 shell hits and left on fire. A final transport (AP, *Chowa Maru*) is left on fire with four hits. For this take, the cruiser *Chicago* is on fire with two torpedo hits and the *Australia* has taken three shell hits. The TF203 commander estimates that 235 Japanese men and 3 guns were lost in the night action. The *Chicago* breaks off from the task force and begins limping home alone with the remainder of TF203 outpacing her rapidly.

Three B-17's bomb a transport (AP, *Akibasan Maru*) near Basilaki Island at 6,000 feet. No hits are scored.

The bombing continues at Moresby. A large Japanese carrier strike force, consisting of 45 Kates, 40 Vals and 9 Zeros, plaster the airfield again...this time with deadly accuracy. Three aircraft are destroyed on the ground and four damaged. Ninety-four men are killed and another gun lost. No less than 42 hits are made on the runway, 3 hits on the airbase supply, and 9 hits on airbase facilities. The runway is horribly damaged and in dire need of repair.

A submarine attack near Gili Gili is made by S-37 but she is spotted before firing her torpedoes.

Despite the majority of Japanese shipping scared off by TF203's night attack, at least 1,200 troops and 6 guns land on Gili Gili capturing it.

## **6 May Overcast**

Fifteen B-17's attack 1DD, 2PG, 1 AP off the coast of Buna at 6,000 feet. The pilots claim one bomb hit on PG *Seikai Maru*, leaving it on fire. Regardless of the true nature of the damage, over 800 Japanese troops and 6 guns land on Buna to capture it.

Port Moresby runway damage is very high (70). Planes are in danger of wrecking if they take off or land...if they can take off at all. TF201, fortunately, is closing in on New Guinea. Already, SBD scouts from the *Lexington* have identified small clusters of ship contacts that continue to flee from Gili Gili. So far, the task force has not been spotted by the Japanese. The Japanese carrier task force have not moved from their position off the coast of northern New Guinea, a position about 33 miles east of Dobadura. The weather forecast for tomorrow is for clear skies. *Lexington* and *Yorktown* flight crews spend a restless night anticipating a big fight with the Japanese tomorrow.

## **7 May Clear**

U.S. submarine S-40 torpedoes transport *Azumasan Maru* 120 miles northeast of Gili Gili.

33 miles E of Dobadura: U.S. submarines have finally located the Japanese carrier task force and some of her contents have been revealed. Submarine S-41 gets the cruiser *Haguro* in her sights, fires, and misses. She then turns her attention to the carrier *Shokaku* and the destroyer *Yugure*. None of these torpedo attacks succeed.

TF201 arrives on station 132 miles southeast of Gili Gili. Soon, the two carrier forces finally spot one another. The Japanese carrier task force immediately moves to put some distance between the American carriers and themselves. Regardless, the Americans get first crack at the Japanese.

TF *Shokaku*: A large American strike force of 59 Dauntless dive-bombers escorted by 10 F4F-3 Wildcats approaches the enemy carriers. Thirty Zeros fly CAP over the force. The Wildcats knock two Zeros out of the sky immediately but soon the tables turn. Two Wildcats are destroyed and one damaged. Four of the SBD's are destroyed by the Zeros and two damaged.

The Japanese carrier force is now confirmed to contain two fleet carriers (*Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*) and one light carrier (*Shoho*). Another cruiser in the task force is identified as the *Myoko*. Diving down on the Japanese task force, the SBD's are heavily mauled by Japanese AA fire. Ten SBD's are destroyed with another thirty-two damaged (total SBD count: 14 destroyed and 36 damaged). However, two 1,000 lb. bomb hits are reported on the *Zuikaku* both penetrating the flight deck. One of the bombs manages to knock out one of the *Zuikaku*'s AA gun mounts as well. The carrier is left on fire.

Buna: Ten B-17's (6K) bomb the destroyer *Oite* but no hits are reported. Three B-17's are damaged.

TF201: The Japanese carrier task force counter-attacks with 9 Zeros, 22 Vals and 27 Kates. They are met in the air by 18 Wildcats flying CAP. During the fight only one Zero is destroyed but the Japanese attack bombers are badly mauled. Combat reports indicated 11 Vals destroyed and 9 damaged; 18 Kates destroyed and 11 damaged. Only one Wildcat was lost in the battle. Still, the remaining Japanese planes manage to inflict some damage on TF201. The cruiser *Minneapolis* is struck by two bombs and is left on fire while the *Lexington* is struck by a torpedo.

TF201: A follow-up Japanese strike heads for the American carriers, this time with no Zero escort. The raid is made up of 21 Vals and 20 Kates. The American carriers manage to put up 17 Wildcats for defense. The Wildcats immediately begin shooting Val dive-bombers out of the sky. Five Vals are destroyed outright with two damaged. The assault on the Vals is so swift that the remaining dive-bombers break off and return to



their carriers. The Kate torpedo bombers, however, are made of sterner stuff. The Wildcat's concentration on the Vals allows the deadly Kates to slip by most of the American CAP. Only two are shot down by the fighters. Only one Wildcat was damaged in the exchange. Lt. W. Leonard of VF-42 is credited with kill number three.

The remaining 19 Kates head for the *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. Four more Kates are destroyed by AA and eleven more are damaged but the *Yorktown* succumbs to two damaging torpedo hits and is set aflame. The damage is serious enough that all of *Yorktown*'s aircraft are transferred to Port Moresby with one group of fighters (7 Wildcats) landing on the *Lexington* along with a contingent of SBD's.

Later, remaining Japanese carrier elements launch a strike against Port Moresby consisting of 27 Zeros and 19 Vals. Port Moresby, despite the damage to the runway, desperately puts up 17 P-39's and 3 P-40's. Despite losing five P-39's destroyed and some elements breaking off in the face of superior numbers, the remainder of the Allied fighters manage to destroy 2 Vals which was enough to send the remainder of the bombers breaking off for their home carriers. No damage was done to Port Moresby on this raid...

...until attack aircraft from Rabaul spoiled the party. Twenty-seven Zeros escorting thirteen Nells arrived over Port Moresby soon after the Japanese carrier raid had left. With the damage to Port Moresby's airfield already critical, only 4 P-39s and 3 P-40s were able to make it aloft. Losses for the Americans could have been much worse: one P-39 was destroyed and one was damaged. The Allies shot down one Nell and damaged two others. Sixteen men were killed on the ground and another gun was lost. The runway suffered four more hits and airfield facilities suffered another hit as well.

B-17's continue to harass the ships landing troops and supplies in Buna. Nine B-17's reported one patrol craft was hit (*Seikai Maru*) and was left on fire, heavily damaged. A transport was also reported hit and left burning (*Mogamigawa Maru*). One B-17 was damaged by AA fire.

*Lexington*'s damage is repaired completely...zero damage. Possibly only a glancing blow from that Japanese torpedo? *Yorktown* damage is not too bad though there is some floatation damage. She breaks off from TF201 with a destroyer as escort and begins making her way to the nearest port, Cairns. The cruiser *Chicago* has docked at Townsville harbor where her floatation damage can hopefully be negated. She will then sail to Noumea and then on to Pearl Harbor for repairs. The total tally of operational *Yorktown* aircraft on Port Moresby are 10 SBD's and 8 F4Fs. Airfield damage is still very high. The first resupply convoy is formed in Brisbane (3 AK's) and will begin forcing supplies through to Port Moresby

## 9 May

### Thunderstorms

Only one Japanese raid from Rabaul today consisting of 8 Nells (6K) escorted by 37 Zeros. Port Moresby only manages to put up a pitiful force of 6 P-39s for defense. Between the Allied fighters and Port Moresby's AA fire only 5 Nells are damaged while 2 P-39s are destroyed. Two hits are scored on the runway.

Recon at Gili Gili reveals a large Japanese presence: 2 ENG, 1AA, 1HQ, 1INF. The totals add up to about 2,800 men and 6 guns. TF203 (minus the cruiser *Chicago*) is ordered to sail and bombard Gili Gili's port in a night raid. The three transports of TF207 left Brisbane yesterday to resupply Port Moresby. They have orders not to retreat under enemy fire.

## 11 May

### Overcast

Submarine S-37 manages to slam a fish into the *Shokaku* off the northern New Guinea coast and sets her afire. Unbelievably, the Japanese have *still* failed to move from their position 66 miles southeast of Dobadura despite the presence of U.S. submarines in the area and the reported torpedoing of the *Shoho* yesterday. Apparently the Gili Gili invasion is very important to them.

The air assault on Port Moresby continues with Rabaul based aircraft scoring five more runway hits on the airfield. The raid consisted of 14 Nells (6K) and 25 Zeros. All Port Moresby squadrons were ordered to stand down for the day owing to runway damage, fatigue and wavering morale.

TF201, now containing the lone carrier *Lexington* and her escorts, will refuel and then head north toward Gili Gili as soon as possible.

B-17 bombers are back in action after a couple of days rest. Their priority are ground targets. The P-38

recon units are ordered to recon Buna. TF201 is having some trouble refueling because TF202 keeps retreating to Noumea when the refueling point is reached. The TF commander has been reprimanded and has promised not to do it again. *Yorktown* is two days from Cairns. Floation damage had increased the day before, but seems to have stabilized now. System damage, however, has gone higher (54).

### **12 May** **Overcast**

Nine Betty bombers (6K) from Rabaul stage a night raid on Port Moresby, causing one hit on the runway. TF203 speeds into the Gili Gili area during the night and bombards the port. Two hits are reported on the port and one hit on the port supply.

When daylight breaks, 12 B-17s (6K) bomb the Japanese 2nd Coastal Gun Battalion at Lae. AA fire is intense and 7 bombers are damaged. The flight reports that 10 troops were killed on the ground. Later, Rabaul raiders bomb Port Moresby scoring one hit on the runway. The raid consisted of 13 Nells (6K) escorted by 25 Zeros. Two Nells were damaged by AA as there was no CAP above the field. However, the engineers at Moresby have been able to repair the field enough to allow air ops to begin again, though the field is by no means safe. The detachment from the *Yorktown* (10 SBD's and 8 F4Fs) are ordered to stand down for now.

Recon reports of Buna reveal that only one infantry division has landed there consisting of 1060 troops and 5 guns. *Yorktown* is almost to Cairns now with floatation damage dropping slightly from yesterday. Another small resupply TF (3 AK's) is formed in Brisbane and will head to Port Moresby as soon as supplies are loaded. All RAAF Hudson's from Port Moresby are ordered to begin naval searches again since the runway is now operating (barely). There have been no recons from Moresby for the past two days.

### **13 May** **Partly Cloudy**

Rabaul raiders once again make their way to Port Moresby. Nineteen Nell bombers escorted by seventeen Zeros are met by seven P-39s and three P-40s. One Nell is damaged by the Allied CAP...and the entire complement of Nells break off! Port Moresby is saved from further bombing at least for today. The damaged Nell is reported destroyed on the way back to Rabaul because the RAAF P-40 squadron commander is credited for the kill, making this one his second.

The 1st New Zealand Defense Battalion arrives in Noumea.

### **14 May** **Overcast**

*Yorktown* arrives in Cairns and immediately docks. The Wildcat complement at Moresby will take to the skies today...all eight fighters will fly CAP. The Wildcats decide to vector over the arriving supply task force that arrived from Brisbane. TF201 finally refuels (though with only one oiler in TF202 the pickings are slim) and begins heading north.

Despite the Allied posturing, the Japanese decide to take the day off and no raids are mounted. It does appear that the Japanese have finally decided to pull their forces away from the northern New Guinea coast, especially their carriers. If submarine reports are correct, then two of the three Japanese carriers have holes below the waterline forcing them to withdraw. With *Zuikaku* already damaged with bomb hits from the May 7 attack, it may very well be that for the moment all Japanese carriers have been neutralized.

### **15 May** **Partly Cloudy**

The SBD's at Port Moresby are set to port attack. Hopefully raids will be mounted on Gili Gili's port today. One of the transports in Port Moresby's harbor is spotted by a Japanese reconnaissance plane. They now know ships are unloading there. An attack is expected soon.

Hudson recon reports reveal that a large transport force (at least 5 AP's) is anchored at Gili Gili harbor. Now in range, the *Lexington* launches a strike against these newly discovered targets. Twenty-nine SBD's escorted by nineteen Wildcats begin picking the defenseless transports apart. Four of the five transports are hit with the transport *Oigawa Maru* getting the worst of it with five 1,000 pound bomb hits. She, along with

three other transports, is left burning. Only one SBD was damaged.

Meanwhile, after a days rest, Rabaul raiders are back over Port Moresby, but this time they go for the newly arrived transports from Brisbane. The Japanese send over 9 Nells escorted by 27 Zeros. Moresby is able to put up 11 P-39s and 3 P-40s. However, the almost daily grind of large Japanese raids are beginning to take their toll on the hapless P-39s and their pilots. One P-39 is destroyed outright by a Zero which is enough to send the remaining Airacobras packing. One other P-39 was damaged. The nine Nell bombers drop to 200 feet and manage to slam a torpedo into one transport, the *Murada*.

TF201 launches another raid but this time toward a small task force of two cruisers sitting about 33 miles east of Misima Island northeast of the American position. Six SBD's and ten Wildcats arrive over the cruisers and two bombs are planted on the Japanese cruiser *Kako* leaving her on fire with heavy damage. (The other cruiser was the *Furutaka*.)

*Lexington* turns her attention back to the Gili Gili transports after this slap at the cruiser force and continues decimating Japanese merchant ships. Seventeen unescorted SBD's plant three hits on one transport, two on a second, and hit the already damaged *Oigawa Maru* with two more 1,000 pound bombs. The *Oigawa Maru* is sent to the bottom after this pounding. The remaining four transports are now reported on fire, most with heavy damage. The only ship untouched by the attacks so far is a minesweeper that accompanies the transport fleet.

While the slaughter of transports continues off Gili Gili, the skies over Port Moresby continue to be a desperate fight. Rabaul sends over 22 Nells escorted by 24 Zeros all heading for the three supply ships in Moresby harbor. Thirteen P-39s and five P-40 are put up to protect the transports. The Allied flyers manage to destroy one Zero and damage a Nell, but once again as soon as one of the P-39s is shot out of the sky a large portion of the P-39s break off and run. (One other P-39 was damaged). The Nells drop to 200 feet and manage to slam two more torpedoes into the already stricken *Murada*. She eventually succumbs to the damage and sinks. Fortunately, the two remaining transports are nearly unloaded.

With the Japanese Gili Gili convoy battered and now being run off, TF201 decides to pursue the fleeing transports to allow the shorter ranged Devastator torpedo bombers to get in the fight.

## **16 May Clear**

The 36th fighter squadron (P-39) has had enough. With their morale critically low, they are transferred to Townsville to rest and recuperate. No. 76 Squadron (RAAF) has been transferred into Moresby with their 18 P-40s. After a days rest to recover from the long flight, they will be put into the air tomorrow. Hopefully some fresh pilots and aircraft will help the struggle in the Port Moresby skies.

In perfect transport busting weather, 7 SBD's along with 7 Wildcat escorts attack the remnants of the Gili Gili supply task force. One SBD is damaged but in return one bomb hit is recorded on the minesweeper M21 leaving it heavily damaged and on fire and one bomb hit is scored on the transport *Shinkoku Maru* leaving it on fire as well.

The U.S. Navy returns again to the transport force this time with bomb-carrying Devastators in tow. The strike force is composed of 13 Devastators, 20 SBD's and 12 Wildcats. Five bomb hits are scored on one transport (*Meiten Maru*), three on another. The minesweeper is observed still smoldering after its earlier pounding. A fourth transport is left undamaged.

The lopsided battle continues. Twelve SBD's arrive on the scene and plant two more bomb hits on the *Meiten Maru* along with two more hits on the minesweeper.

One final attack is made as 13 Devastators (this time with torpedoes), 13 SBD's and 18 Wildcats rain destruction down on the remaining Japanese transports. A Devastator manages to ram a torpedo into the side of one transport (*Yamakuni Maru*) while another transport (*Unkai Maru* #3) is shaken by two 1,000 pound bomb hits. Both ships are left on fire. Two other transports are spotted but not attacked. Reports from the flight crews are that they were seen heavily damaged.

By the end of the day minesweeper M21 and transport *Yamakuni Maru* are sunk.

## **17 May Thunderstorms**

TF201 is ordered to Cooktown to refuel but there is a possibility that it will run out of fuel before they arrive

in port. Such was the price for pressing attacks on the fleeing Japanese transports the day before.

TF202 is ordered to Cooktown to take on more fuel supplies for TF201.

All floatation damage for the cruiser *Chicago* has been repaired. She will head to Noumea and then on to Pearl for repairs.

Port Moresby F4F's and P-40's (of No. 76 Squadron) fly cover over a resupply task force which should be done offloading their cargo by tonight.

Three PG's from Noumea are sent to investigate a sub contact off the western coast of the island.

Fourteen Betty bombers from Rabaul stage a night raid on Port Moresby. One P-39 was destroyed on the ground and two Bettys damaged by AA fire. Two hits were scored on the runway and two on the airbase.

The three PG's from Noumea reach the supposed enemy submarine area. Japanese sub I-28 slams two torpedoes into PG *Tui*, heavily damaging her and leaving the ship afire. Apparently there *was* a submarine there. She sinks during the night.

A Rabaul based air raid containing 16 Zeros and 17 Nells heads for Port Moresby. However, Port Moresby CAP is flying cover over the transport fleet unloading supplies. As a result, they are nowhere to be found when the Japanese strike targets at the Port Moresby airfield. Fortunately, no serious damage was reported after the raid. One Nell was damaged by AA fire.

A Japanese radio intercept confirms that *Unaki Maru* #3 has indeed sunk.

The 118th Base Force arrives in Brisbane during the night.

## **18 May**

### **Rain**

Believing that the rain will keep the Japanese grounded for the day, all CAP over Moresby is cancelled. An unescorted Rabaul raid consisting of 13 Nells and 12 Bettys manages to find a gap in the clouds and begins attacking the now defenseless transports who have just begun their trek back to Brisbane. The AK *Rhesus* is hit hard with three torpedoes, the AK *Mildura* with two hits, and AK *Barwon* is struck by one torpedo. *Mildura* and *Rhesus* are left heavily damaged and burning. After this dastardly (and brilliant) attack, the air commander at Moresby vows that from now on, regardless of the weather, aircraft will fly CAP over transports.

## **19 May**

### **Clear**

*Yorktown*'s floatation damaged has been negated and she is now beginning the long trek to Noumea. TF201 will make Cairns port today where it will refuel. Marine fighter squadron VMF-212 arrives in Noumea.

The day starts off with 9 B-17E's (6K) attacking the Japanese 47th field AA Battalion at Gili Gili. There were no B-17 losses or damage. The strike force reported that 13 Japanese troops were killed.

Later, 14 of the now orphaned SBD's from *Yorktown* fly from Moresby and attack the port at Buna, causing no damage. There were no losses or damage to the strike force.

One of the transports bombed by the Japanese yesterday is listing badly.

## **20 May**

### **Thunderstorms**

The *Lexington* task force sorties from Cairns fully fueled. A few ships of TF201 (1 cruiser, 2 destroyers) have been detached and sent to Townsville to join with TF203, making it a larger surface force.

A U.S. submarine (S-41) spots a lone Japanese transport (*Enju Maru*) and slams a single torpedo into the ship, causing heavy damage. It appeared that the transport was making its way back to Rabaul.

TF201 is back in action again, sending over 6 Wildcats and 28 SBD's to bomb the port at Gili Gili. The Allied strike loses no aircraft. Two hits are scored on the port and one on the port supply. Five Japanese were reported killed.

## **21 May**

### **Rain**

Due to Gili Gili being blanketed in bad weather, TF201 changes her target priority and strikes the port at



Buna. Seven F4Fs escort twenty-six SBD's which deliver two hits on the port and one hit on the port supply.

Rabaul raids begin again, as 15 Zeros escort 12 Nells and 17 Bettys over Moresby. Due to the rain, all Allied CAP is grounded. Fortunately in the bad weather, only one hit was scored on the runway which is quickly repaired.

During the night the escort carrier *Long Island* arrives in Noumea. Thirteen more Hudson bombers from the RNZAF arrive in Noumea as well.

## **22 May**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Submarine S-47, patrolling near the Shortland Islands, rams two torpedoes into the Japanese minesweeper *Rokko Maru*, leaving the craft on fire.

Nine B-17s (6K) strike the Maizuru 2nd Coastal Gun Battalion stationed at Lae. Four B-17s were damaged by AA fire. The flight reported that 52 of the enemy were killed on the ground.

TF201 sends 14 unescorted SBD's to Buna to attack the port facilities there. For no losses to the attackers, one hit was scored on the port supply. Later, the *Lexington* switches back to Gili Gili harbor sending in 27 SBD's and 10 Devastators escorted by 10 F4Fs. Two dive-bombers were damaged by AA fire. One hit apiece was scored on the port and supply, with 26 men reported killed in the attack.

All airworthy fighters flew CAP over Moresby this day, but not one raid from Rabaul was mounted. Frustrating in the least.

## **24 May**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Submarine S-47, still patrolling the Shortland Islands, manages to strike another minesweeper (*Tama Maru*) with a torpedo, leaving her on fire and damaged.

B-17's again return to strike the Maizuru 2nd Coastal Gun Battalion at Lae. Four Fortresses were damaged by AA fire and 27 men were reported killed on the ground.

TF201 continues pummeling Gili Gili port, launching a raid consisting of 28 SBD's, 12 Devastators, and 10 Wildcats. Two hits were scored on the port and one on the port supply, killing 44 men. One SBD was damaged.

A much smaller Port Moresby CAP flying cover over another newly arrived resupply transport force meets another large raid from Rabaul this day. Ten P-40s and six Wildcats intercept 12 Nells escorted by massive Zero fighter cover...51 fighters in all! Despite the stacked odds, one Zero was destroyed and a few Nells damaged. Allied losses in the air totaled one Wildcat and one P-40 destroyed with two Wildcats damaged along with one P-40. The 12 Nells make it through the fighter screen and manage to slip one torpedo into the side of transport *Westralia* leaving her on fire. A second transport, the *Orungal*, was attacked but not struck by torpedoes.

With the Japanese overloading their strikes with Zero escorts, it will become even more difficult for the Port Moresby air defenders to stop enemy bombers, no matter how few in number those bombers are.

## **25 May**

### **Thunderstorms**

There were no raids on either side today.

A small force of minesweepers is being sent north from Brisbane to attempt to mine the sea approaches to Gili Gili. The three-ship force with "hop" northward from port to port along the Australian coast and eventually land in Port Moresby where it will operate from.

*For the remainder of the month of May, action on both sides was subdued. With most of Japanese carrier assets neutralized for the foreseeable short term, most attacks came from Rabaul as Japanese air power continued to strike on an almost daily basis at Port Moresby. The Lexington task force was withdrawn to Brisbane where she will eventually make her way to Noumea and join with the carrier Hornet due to arrive in less than nine days. While in port, the Lexington will also replenish her depleted aircraft and receive the newer model of Wildcat fighter, the F4F-4.*

*An invasion of Iraw is scheduled and will land on the beaches by the end of the month with a base force and the*

*Americal Division in tow. When the airfield is completed, Marine fighter squadron VMF-212 will be flown in where they will become the vanguard force of a small contingent of fighters and bombers that will fly cover and strike missions for future Allied invasion forces landing on Lunga and Tulagi as well as providing cover for their own resupply transports...in essence, operating as a "fixed" aircraft carrier. It will also hopefully force the Japanese to overstretch their forces thus making it easier to chip away at their strength.*

## June 1942



*The beginning of June starts as the month of May ended. Both sides continue to shift forces around and await the flow of ships, planes, and men into the theatre. The Japanese did try to force a contingent of transports through to Gili Gili around 3 June, but the combination of SBD's flying from Port Moresby and another fast night attack by TF203 blunted the reinforcement effort, though it is not clear as to how much. The lone, smoking transport that TF203 intercepted during the night of 4 June was a troop transport and was sunk by 27 shell hits, sending over 600 troops and 22 guns to the bottom. The drain of transports, supplies, and men on Gili Gili must be causing some serious headaches for the Japanese High Command. But the Japanese were about to change tactics in the struggle to keep Gili Gili supplied.*

*The carrier Hornet arrived in Noumea and immediately began her trek towards Irau, where the Lexington force is stationed about 66 miles south of San Cristobal. They remained on station until the Irau airfield was completed. Marine squadron VMF-212 (already stationed at Espiritu Santo) was flown in shortly afterwards. Already resupply convoys are unloading their supplies on the Irau beaches. A replenishment task force of four oilers was formed in Noumea and has sortied northward to rendezvous with TF201. The Lexington and Hornet will remain in the area until the Americal Division can be taken off Irau and sent back to Noumea for rest and refit, leaving the base force, along with the Marine flyers, as the sole occupier of the island. More planes are planning to be transferred to Irau as soon as possible to assist in the defense.*

*The Kanga Force in New Guinea is given orders to march to Marilinan and set up a new defensive position. This is also done in the hopes of spooking the Japanese, making them fearful of a possible move toward Salamaua and Lae. Also, another AA regiment will be sent to Moresby to assist in air defense. A policy of "only fly CAP above transports" will be instituted at Port Moresby by the end of the month. Thoughts are forming of simply swamping Port Moresby with fighters no matter how outclassed they are. Sheer numbers may be enough to, if nothing else, cause the Japanese flying from Rabaul a few headaches.*

*A report from Pearl Harbor indicates that the Yorktown has made port and will be in dry dock for a minimum of four and a half months.*

### 15 June

#### Clear

*A Japanese strike on Moresby airfield by 9 Nells escorted by 54 Zeros causes slight damage. Four hits are scored on the runway and one hit on the airbase. One Nell was damaged by AA fire. All Allied fighters were grounded for the day in order to rest and repair.*

## 16 June

### Clear

Twenty Port Moresby based B-25's (6k) attack the port at Gili Gili suffering no losses or damage. An estimated 37 Japanese were killed in the raid.

Six B-17's (6k) bomb Japanese ground troops at Lae with two B-17's being damaged. Seventeen men of the 15th Coastal Gun Battalion were killed.

Port Moresby is hit again by a Japanese raid from Rabaul consisting of 23 Bettys and 26 Zeros. Six hits were scored on the runway and five hits on the airbase. Two Bettys were damaged by AA fire.

## 17 June

### Partly Cloudy

During the early morning darkness near Kavieng, the submarine SS *Greenling* surfaces and scores six hits on a Japanese barge with its 40mm deck gun leaving the vessel heavily damaged and on fire.

As daylight breaks, 13 Dauntless dive-bombers from Moresby attack transports off of Gili Gili. The transport *Toa Maru* is hit by four 500lb. bombs and is set aflame, heavily damaged. The *Argentina Maru* is also hit by a bomb and begins to burn. There were no losses to the strike force and all SBD's return safely.

With yesterday's raid on Moresby containing fewer escort fighters and more bombers, Allied fighters take to the skies in the hopes of "evening" the odds. As expected, Rabaul raiders make an appearance but the strike is heavily escorted by 53 Zeros with 6 Nells making up the remainder. Against this armada, Moresby manages to put up 17 P-40s and 2 Wildcats. After a couple of days rest, however, the Allies finally manage to take down a few of the pesky Zeros. Two Zeros were destroyed by the CAP and a high ranking Japanese pilot, Commander Y. Kozono of F1/Tainan Daitai is killed. But in return the experienced Japanese flyers knock down 6 P-40s and damage another. The Nells manage to score a hit on the runway with one of the bombers damaged by AA fire.

The 13 Moresby SBD's return to Gili Gili and continue harassing Japanese transports. An untouched transport from the previous raid, the *Aki Maru*, is struck by two bombs and left burning. Another attack was made on the still smoldering *Argentina Maru* but no hits are scored. Once again, the SBD's return with no losses or damage.

## 18 June

### Clear

A squadron on P-400s arrives at Irau to reinforce the Marine squadron there. Transports continue unloading more supplies but with no port present the process is slow.

Over the past couple of days, Hudson scouts flying out of Moresby have made numerous surface contacts north of New Guinea. Small transport task forces, barge traffic, and the occasional surface force have been spotted around New Britain, New Ireland and on the northern New Guinea coast.

One of the B-25 squadrons stationed at Moresby is set to naval attack at 1,000 feet. This was done in order to supplement the SBD's in their strikes off the coast of Gili Gili.

TF201 is refueling 100 miles SE of San Cristobal.

TF203 sortied yesterday and will once again attempt a nighttime surface action against the Gili Gili transports.

Submarine S-38 attacks the Japanese destroyer *Minegumo* at Shortland Island and misses. While taking evasive action after the attack, the sub was able to spot at least four more destroyers in the area. It is possible the Japanese may be planning a trip down the Slot very soon.

Twelve B-17's bomb the 15th Coastal Gun Battalion at Lae once again. The strike reported that 78 men were killed and on one gun was destroyed. Five Fortresses were damaged in the raid by AA fire.

A large Japanese air strike is intercepted over Moresby. The Japanese send 17 Bettys escorted by 49 Zeros. The Allies manage to put up 14 P-40's for defense. During the fight, two Zeros were destroyed along with four P-40's. One P-40 was damaged. The Betty bombers encounter significant AA fire and five of their number are damaged. Despite the large numbers of Japanese planes, no significant damage was caused.

Fifteen B-25's (1k) and 4 SBD's from Moresby fly northward and attack a small Japanese transport fleet near Umboi Island. Despite numerous near misses and lots of water thrown up by bombs, only one hit was scored

on the *Arimasan Maru*. The two other transports in the force were left intact. There were no losses by the strike force.

Later, three B-25's (1k) from Moresby fly northward again but this time target another small transport force near Meteiai. All three bombers missed their intended target, the *Keizan Maru* and fly back to Moresby with no losses or damage.

## 19 June

### Partly Cloudy

Off the western coast of Noumea, a lone Japanese sub continues to be spotted with annoying frequency. During the night the sub-chaser task force consisting of six SC's sorties is sent to hunt for the lone ship. Japanese submarine I-21 however, manages to avoid the ships and torpedo SC 641, sinking it.

At about the same time several hundred miles to the west, TF203 slips into Gili Gili her crews expecting to meet up with more defenseless transports. However, the Japanese have gotten smart and instead the task force meets up with a rather large Japanese surface combat force consisting of 5 CA, 1 CL, and 4 DD. A little surprised but undaunted, TF203 (consisting of 2 CA, 1 CL, 5 DD) maneuvers into firing position and succeeds in getting the range before the Japanese are able to respond. At 6000 yards, TF203 scores a few hits: 2 on the cruiser *Kumano*, 2 on the destroyer *Makigumo* and 1 on the cruiser *Haguro*. After this brief engagement, TF203 and the Japanese force break off, but only to regroup.

The two forces, now fully aware of one another, begin maneuvering yet again. Allied radar picks up the force about 9000 yards out. At about the same time, Japanese lookouts spot TF203. The two forces settle in about 6000 yards from each other and begin the fight anew.

The battle blazes back and forth for about 8-10 minutes with shells arching through the air, Japanese torpedoes striking home, and numerous near misses drenching the deck crews of both forces. When the smoke finally clears and both forces break off for the last time, several ships limp away with damage but no ships are sunk. **Japanese results:** CA *Makigumo*, 3 hits, on fire; CL *Natori*, 3 hits; CA *Haguro*, 2 hits; CA *Chokai*, 2 hits; DD *Tanikaze*, 1 hit, on fire; CA *Myoko*, 1 hit. **TF203 results:** CA *Astoria*, 4 hits, 2 torpedo hits, on fire; DD *Dewey*, 2 hits, on fire; CL *Hobart*, 1 hit.

The cruiser *Astoria* and the destroyer *Dewey* break off from TF203 and make their way back to port under their own power. *Astoria* has some floatation damage (32) but is expected to make port.

## 20 June

### Partly Cloudy

With TF203 damaged and now less effective, *Lexington* and *Hornet* begin sailing westward to take up position south of Gili Gili in order to launch strikes at the new Japanese threat. With the *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* arriving in Noumea in about 3 days and with no immediate threat present at Irau, CINCPAC believes TF201 is needed at Gili Gili as soon as possible.

At Noumea, the escort carrier *Long Island* (with two destroyers as escort) will finally be put to use as she is tasked with taking the remnants of *Yorktown's* air group (7 Wildcats and 10 SBD's) to Port Moresby for reinforcement.

Meanwhile, Port Moresby raids continue as 22 Bettys and 26 Zeros are met by 6 P-40's and 2 Wildcats. One Zero is destroyed as well as two P-40's. The Tainan Air Group at Rabaul continue to mount their scores as more and more Allied fighters are shot out of the skies. Fortunately, no significant damage was caused by the Betty bombers.

## 21 June

### Overcast

Near Gili Gili, the Japanese once again send in their surface force to deflect any night attacks from TF203 on their vulnerable transports. Submarine S-41, who has been lying in wait for many days, looses a torpedo at the Japanese light cruiser *Tenryu* but misses. Unfortunately, the sub is spotted by the destroyer *Akebono* and split open by three depth charge explosions. All hands, including S-41's commander, are lost.

During the day, no further attacks are mounted by either side. However, Hudson scouts and coastwatchers report numerous contacts around Gili Gili including destroyers and cruisers.

All of TF203 ships make port. The *Astoria* and the *Dewey* will be sent to Pearl for repairs as soon as floatation



tion damage is negated.

TF201 was spotted by a Mavis flying boat along with two oilers of the replenishment force sailing due south of her position. It is very likely that the element of surprise is now lost and that the Japanese surface forces and transports may pull out of Gili Gili.

## **22 June**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Six Betty bombers stage a night attack on Port Moresby. No damage was done to the field and no Bettys were lost.

Now in position about 130 miles south of Gili Gili, TF201 begins launching air strikes at the Japanese ships in Gili Gili port. The first carrier aircraft to appear over the Japanese stronghold are 10 Dauntless escorted by 43 F4F-4 Wildcats. The dive bombers plant five 1,000lb. bombs on the *Argentina Maru* setting her aflame and damaging her severely. Ten Japanese troops were reported killed. The strike force suffers no losses in the attack.

Soon after, 28 SBD's and 30 torpedo laden Devastators attack three other transports. The *Kinryu Maru* is hit by a bomb heavily damaging the ship. The *Teia Maru* is also struck by a bomb and a torpedo leaving the ship in flames. The *Teizu Maru* is hit the worst with 2 bomb hits and 3 torpedo hits. The ship begins to list as fires spread over her hull. Again, there were no losses to the strike force.

Adding to TF201's firepower, 11 SBD's from Moresby fly a sortie and add to the destruction. The *Tei Maru* is hit again by three 500lb. bombs while the *Kinryu Maru* is hit by another bomb. The SBD's suffered no losses in the attack.

The last air attack of the day was also the largest coordinated strike on the transport force. TF201 sends over 23 Wildcats, 40 SBD's and 27 Devastators. *Teia Maru* is once again attacked as two torpedoes slam into her hull causing explosions below the waterline. The *Kinryu Maru* is blasted with 7 bomb hits causing serious damage and starting more fires.

Much farther north submarine S-44 torpedoes transport *Azumasan Maru* about 130 miles south of Truk (the same ship that was torpedoed by submarine S-40 near Gili Gili on May 7). The ship is left heavily damaged and burning.

## **23 June**

### **Partly Cloudy**

*Enterprise* and *Saratoga* have arrived in Noumea. They are immediately formed into a task force (TF205) and ordered to steam north toward San Cristobal and cover the eventual withdrawal of the Americal Division on Irua. As soon as the transports there are finished offloading their supplies, the division will board and head back to Noumea for a few days after which they will spearhead the occupation of Lunga hopefully no later than the first week of July. A replenishment task force of four oilers will follow TF205 as soon as the fuel is loaded.

Two fresh fighter squadrons are being sent to Moresby as there is a resupply convoy en route from Brisbane. The 35th squadron (P-39) is heading back along with a squadron of P-400's. Though these fighters are outclassed by the Zero, their presence in numbers will hopefully, if nothing else, lower the morale of the Japanese fighters and bombers from Rabaul and make them less effective. The two B-25 squadrons will be temporarily withdrawn to Cooktown in order to make room for the fighters.

*Long Island* has arrived on station south of New Guinea.

During the night, Japanese submarine I-176 slams a torpedo into SC 638 off the west coast of Noumea. The ship explodes and sinks.

TF201 launches a large force at ships in Gili Gili port consisting of 43 SBD's, 29 TBD's and 43 Wildcats. For no losses, the strike manages to plant 3 bombs on the *Argentina Maru* leaving her burning and damaged.

At the same time, the *Long Island* launches six of her SBD's to attack *Argentina Maru*. They score no hits as the ship is blanketed in smoke and fire making bombing difficult. There were no losses on the strike.

Rabaul fighters and bombers strike Moresby. Thirty-nine Zeros escort nineteen Bettys scoring a hit on the runway. Two Bettys were damaged by AA fire.

Two more strikes were made on the *Argentina Maru* by TF201 and *Long Island* but they were unable to see

the craft due to thick smoke. All strikes returned without dropping their ordnance.

Submarine S-38 was struck by two depth charges from the Japanese destroyer *Numakaze* near Shortland Island.

## **24 June**

### **Clear**

Three fresh fighter squadrons have arrived at Moresby (one P-39, two P-400). The support services are strained with so many fighters crowding the runways. The base engineers continue to work on making the airfield larger but estimated time for completion will be at least two weeks...longer if bombing becomes more frequent by the Japanese.

Since the Noumea sub-chasers are failing at their assigned tasks, all Noumea-based PBV's and B-17's are put on an anti-submarine warfare footing. A squadron of Hudson bombers will provide naval searches around the island.

TF201 moves northeast during the night and is now 66 miles southeast of Gili Gili. Japanese surface contacts were reported by coastwatchers at Gili Gili. They may be forcing supplies through in night runs via cruisers, destroyers.

*Long Island* begins the transfer of planes to Port Moresby.

The day starts off with 24 Bettys escorted by 27 Zeros bombing Moresby, destroying a P-39 on the ground. Seven hits were scored on the runway and one hit on the airbase. With so many fighters clustered on the field, it is amazing more damage wasn't done. Four Bettys were damaged by AA fire.

TF201 launches a strike on a surface contact 33 miles north of Darubia. The 30 SBD's, 12 Devastators, and 14 Wildcats maul the three Japanese transports that make up the force. *Shirogane Maru* is hit with a torpedo and five bombs, *Sangetsu Maru* is hit with four bombs and *Tsunushima Maru* is hit with one 1,000lb. bomb. An estimated 246 Japanese troops were lost.

Later, TF201 returns to the devastation with 30 SBD's, 14 TBD's and 22 Wildcats. For no losses, the strike manages to hit all three transports again. *Shirogane Maru* is hit with two bombs and a torpedo; *Sangetsu Maru* is hit with a bomb; and *Tsunushima Maru* is hit with a bomb and a torpedo. An estimated 146 Japanese troops were lost in this attack, bringing the total lost for the day to 392.

During the night, *Shirogane Maru* sank as the remnants of the task force attempted to pick up survivors.

## **25 June**

### **Thunderstorms**

*Long Island* is on her way back to Noumea.

PBV's from Efate Port Vila are dropping supplies on the beaches of Siodjuru, a spit of land just to the east of the large island of Malaita in the Solomons. An AV is enroute from Noumea. A seaplane base is to be established here.

TF201 moves 150 miles south to refuel.

The SS *Greenling* attacks a Japanese transport near Meteiai but fails to score a hit.

Forty-four Dauntless dive-bombers from TF201 attack the port at Gili Gili damaging the port and killing 26 Japanese.

Nine Port Moresby based SBD's attack the 85th Naval Garrison Unit at Buna. No damage was done and no losses were reported.

The Kanga Force, after a long and tiring march, attacked Marilinan today with 1392 troops and 9 guns. There was no resistance (as expected) and the base was taken with no casualties.

## **26 June**

### **Rain**

No. 36 squadron RAAF (P-40) is now in Brisbane for R&R. Morale is still high in the squadron but replacements are needed.

The 104th AA regiment is now loading onto transports at Cairns. The loading should take about two days at the most.

The only attack for the day came from 9 SBD's from Moresby that attacked the Kure 3rd Special Naval Landing Force at Gili Gili killing ten men.

## **27 June**

### **Thunderstorms**

Due to the bad weather, all Moresby aircraft are grounded for the day. However, the Japanese manage to navigate through the storms with a massive strike force consisting of 24 Nells, 21 Bettys and 52 Zeros. One P-400 is destroyed on the ground along with a Hudson bomber. Three other aircraft were damaged. Eleven hits are scored on the runway and the airbase is hit with five bombs. For all of this, only 2 Nells were damaged by AA fire.

Port Moresby's SBD's were not touched, however, and they defy the Rabaul attack by launching 17 dive-bombers to attack the port at Buna which is slightly damaged.

Three transports arrive at Moresby during the afternoon and are set upon by 16 Bettys escorted by 62 Zeros. Providence had a hand in the attack as the Bettys were armed with bombs instead of torpedoes causing no damage to the ships.

## **28 June**

### **Rain**

With the miserable weather continuing, the only combat report was SS *Greenling* attacking transport *Hino Maru* #3 west of Rabaul. No hits were scored.

All Port Moresby fighters were up today in the rain protecting the transports. They will be up again tomorrow as well.

Over the past couple of days, the air in the South Pacific has been crawling with Japanese snoopers. Many flying boat contacts have been made with one contact as far south as Efate Port Vila.

## **29 June**

### **Overcast**

During the evening about 120 miles out of Noumea, the returning *Long Island* is attacked by Japanese sub I-176 but is not damaged.

As daylight breaks, TF201 is back in action blasting the port at Gili Gili. Forty-three SBD's, twenty-nine Devastators and twenty-four Wildcats damage the port and supply killing 57 troops. One SBD was damaged in the attack.

One of *Long Island's* escorting destroyers, the *Swanson*, manages to drop a depth charge on Japanese submarine I-26, sinking her. At last, one of the annoying Japanese subs stationed around Noumea has finally been destroyed.

Another day of massive CAP over Moresby and still the Japanese have failed to show. Frustrating.

The seaplane base east of Malaita has been set up and is now flying PBY's on naval searches.

## **30 June**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Due to mounting fatigue, all Moresby squadrons are reluctantly grounded except for one squadron of P-400's left airborne to hopefully deflect any Japanese air attacks.

A heart-stopping moment southeast of Gili Gili. Japanese sub I-169 manages to get the carrier *Lexington* in her sights and fires a torpedo. Fortunately, the fish misses the carrier.

Again, Port Moresby demonstrates why it is a thorn in the side of the Japanese as 17 SBD's take off to attack a transport spotted 33 miles north-northeast of Finschafen. The troop carrier *Asahisan Maru* is blasted with seven 1,000lb. bombs leaving her heavily damaged and burning. An estimated 134 Japanese troops were lost.

The same 17 SBD's launch an attack against the port at Buna later in the day, damaging the port and the supplies there.

Finally, the Rabaul raiders make their appearance as 21 Bettys escorted by 51 Zeros attack the ships in Port Moresby unloading supplies. Only 18 outclassed P-400's are aloft to meet the armada. But the squadron manages to hold ranks as two P-400's are destroyed in the vicious dogfight with the Zeros. Some elements manage to slip through the escorts and attack the Betty bombers. One P-400 manages to damage one of the

craft which is enough to spook the entire flight of Bettys sending them scrambling for home! No damage was done to the airfield in the attack.

On the final attack of the day, TF201 launches a strike against the port at Gili Gili. A force of 56 SBD's, 28 TBD's and 24 Wildcats damages the port and supplies killing 39 men. One SBD was damaged by AA fire.

# July 1942



*The pace is beginning to pick up in the South Pacific and the tension is mounting on both sides. It has been over a month since any Japanese carriers have been seen on the seas and the time is fast approaching for the "Midway" carriers to be committed. It appears that the fleet carrier odds are somewhat even for the moment though the Japanese do have a higher number of escort carriers. There is a lot of activity around the Shortland Islands and CINPAC believes an attack down the Slot is only a matter of time. Could July be a month of great carrier battles?*

*The port at Gili Gili is in shambles according to recon flights out of Cooktown. Port Moresby's air defense squadrons continue to take a pounding but their mere presence is enough to deny Japan victory in New Guinea. It seems clear that Moresby will win the struggle for New Guinea by simply remaining in existence.*

*One thing is going very well for the Allies. The Japanese have lost a lot of transports either sunk or so heavily damaged that they surely must be out of the fight for a long time. Their troop losses at sea have also been quite high (if battle reports are accurate). And all of this thanks in no small part to 17 Yorktown Dauntless dive-bombers.*

## **1 July Overcast**

During the early morning darkness, SS *Greenling* finally manages to strike a transport, the *Atlantic Maru*, setting her afire about 99 miles northeast of Rabaul. It is estimated that 22 men were lost in the attack.

Daylight finally brings a report of Japanese fleet carriers operating near the Solomons. U.S. sub *Tautog* operating in the Solomons for almost four weeks spots the carrier *Akagi* 33 miles southeast of Lambeti and manages to slam a fish into the carrier setting her on fire! The cruiser *Tone* and destroyer *Oshio* were also spotted as *Tautog* dove to escape any depth charge attacks.

Meanwhile farther west 17 SBD's from Moresby launch an attack against three transports 33 miles east of Finschafen. The *Naniwa Maru* is hit with seven bombs, the *Tokyo Maru* is hit with three bombs and the *Kenshin Maru* is hit with one. It is estimated that 196 troops and 2 guns were lost in the attack.

At Port Moresby, the transports carrying the 104th AA regiment has arrived. However, due to a serious snafu, there are only 11 P-400's flying cover over the ships as it was expected the transports would not arrive until tomorrow. These 11 aircraft meet 31 Zeros escorting 16 torpedo carrying Nell bombers aimed right for the transports. One P-400 is destroyed and some elements break off but the remainder manage to destroy one Nell and damage another before the fight breaks up. Dropping in at 200 feet, the remaining Nells manage to slam two torpedoes into the *Manoora* and one into the *John Penn*.

TF201 launches 56 SBD's, 29 TBD's and 24 Wildcats at Gili Gili port. The strike was highly effective as the



port was hit yet again and the port supply was struck with three hits. One SBD was damaged by AA fire. The strike reported that 115 troops were killed in the raid.

Later in the day, the Japanese carriers traveling down the Slot launch an attack on unoccupied Lunga with 38 Vals and 16 Kates. There were no losses to the strike force. TF205 is still stationed east of San Cristobal covering the agonizingly slow loading of the Americal Division off of Irau.

The 17 SBD's from Port Moresby again fly to the burning task force east of Finschafen and continue the attack. The *Tokyo Maru* is targeted by the strike force and seven 1,000lb. bombs crash into her hull, leaving her on fire and heavily damaged. It is estimated that 63 men and 5 guns were lost.

Rabaul raiders again attempt to attack the transports in Port Moresby harbor. The 11 P-400's meet 64 Zeros escorting 10 Nells. The fight goes poorly for the Allies this time as one P-400 is destroyed which send the remainder of the force scattering. The Nells slam two more torpedoes into the *Manoora* starting more fires and causing the ship to list. *Manoora* eventually slips under the waves and is lost.

The last attack of the day is a sad one. The Japanese destroyer *Maikaze* manages to intercept SS *Tautog* in the Slot (the same ship that torpedoed the *Akagi* earlier in the day) and manages to sink her with a depth charge. All hands are lost.

An intercepted Japanese report indicates that the *Naniwa Maru* has sunk 33 miles east of Finschafen.

## 2 July

### Thunderstorms

Lunga is too far for the P-400's stationed at Irau to fly long range CAP so the Marine squadron will have to pull the duty alone. The P-400's will fly cover over the transports loading the Americal Division.

All aircraft at Moresby are ordered into the air today despite the weather. In another stroke of Providence, the transport that was sunk yesterday by Nell bombers was empty. There were no troop losses.

TF205 has moved to a point just south of Russell Island in order to intercept any moves down the Slot by Japanese carriers.

Submarine S-39 patrolling in the same area where *Tautog* was the day before reports torpedoing the cruiser *Nachi* leaving her on fire. However, four destroyers pounce on the sub and sink her with six depth charges. The sacrifices of the "Silent Service" are becoming too much to bear. There are now no U.S. subs operating in the Solomons.

TF201 continues to pound Gili Gili port. A strike force of 56 SBD's, 14 Devastators and 24 Wildcats cause more damage to the facility, killing 65 Japanese troops in the process. One SBD was damaged in the raid.

By the end of the day, the news around the Solomons grows worse. Recons report *two* Japanese carrier task forces operating in the Slot comprising an estimated four aircraft carriers and their escorts. The *Saratoga* and *Hornet* are ordered back to their position east of San Cristobal immediately until TF201 can arrive to reinforce. The Japanese carriers have temporarily pulled back to just north of Choiseul Island.

## 3 July

### Partly Cloudy

As the cruiser *Astoria* and destroyer *Dewey* (from TF203) close in on Noumea, Japanese sub I-24 hits the damaged cruiser with two torpedoes leaving her on fire. *Astoria* slows to a crawl continuing to limp to port.

A small Japanese carrier strike force attacks the *Saratoga* as she speeds back towards San Cristobal. Eight Zeros escort fifteen Kates on the strike. TF201 puts up 28 Wildcats for defense containing a mixture of F4F-3's and F4F-4's. Despite the 3-to-1 advantage in fighters, the U.S. Navy only manages to shoot down one Zero while losing three of their own number. Lt. Commander J. Gray of VF-6 bails out and is rescued. The fifteen bomb-laden Kates attack the *Saratoga* but nine of them are shot out of the sky by AA fire. The remainder suffer damage of various types. Not one hit was scored on the *Saratoga*.

Over Port Moresby, the Rabaul raiders make another appearance. Thirty-nine Zeros escort fifteen Betty bombers. This time, however, the Allies meet the attack in strength as 28 P-400's, 20 P-39's and 6 Wildcats take to the air. Fighters swarm all over the sky as dogfights erupt willy-nilly. One Zero is destroyed along with two Bettys. Five more Bettys are damaged by Allied fighters. For this tally, the Allies come up short as two Wildcats, two P-400's and two P-39's are destroyed. Five other fighters are damaged. The remaining Betty bombers manage to bomb the field scoring 4 hits on the runway, 1 hit on the airbase supply and 1 hit

on the airbase. The loss ratio was one-sided but at least the Moresby defenders were able to bloody the nose of the Rabaul raiders. PO1 S. Ishii of F2/Tainan Daitai is credited with kill number three.

Japanese carriers launch an unescorted attack against the Irau airfield with 23 Vals and 3 Kates. The 17 P-400's flying cover above the transports vector in on the attack and jump the bombers. When one of the Vals is destroyed the remaining dive-bombers scatter and head back to their carriers! The remaining three Kates bomb the field but cause no damage. Unfortunately, the Marine air complement was grounded for the day as the long range CAP they flew yesterday over Lunga was very tiring. If the Marines had been in the air today who knows how bad the losses would have been for the Japanese.

#### 4 July

##### Partly Cloudy

The loading of the Armerical Division is nearly complete. All fighters stationed at Irau are ordered to fly cover for the transports today.

TF205 is now southeast of San Cristobal with TF201 steaming quickly towards her.

The runway at Moresby is slightly damaged (7) but all fighters are airborne today.

The 104th AA Regiment has finally unloaded at Port Moresby.

American Independence Day starts off badly. The *Astoria* is spotted by Japanese sub I-158 about 99 miles west of Noumea. With the serious damage she incurred from the previous sub attack a few days ago, she is nothing but a floating target. The sub slams three torpedoes into her hull, fatally wounding the ship. *Astoria* is sunk.

The day's luck continues its downward spiral. TF201's commander reacts impetuously and changes course during the night making flank speed toward the reported Japanese carriers in the Slot. Without the support of TF205 far to the east, she launches an uncoordinated strike at the surface contacts. The first U.S. aircraft to arrive over the Japanese carriers are 27 SBD's of Scouting 2. They are met in the air by 44 Zeros flying CAP. In the melee, 8 Dauntless are destroyed with 4 Zeros damaged. As the remainder of the attack force lines up over the fleet carrier *Akagi* and the light carrier *Zuiho*, Japanese AA fire take out another 5 SBD's with 12 more suffering damage. The dive bombers do manage to plant a bomb on the deck of the *Akagi* before returning home. The commander of Scouting 2, LtCdr. R. Dixon, was lost in the attack.

The remainder of the strike force makes its appearance a few minutes later, this time in better shape. The 31 SBD's of the strike are escorted by 19 F4F-4's. Forty-four Zeros are in the air to meet them. The Wildcats manage to shoot down one Zero while losing two of their own number. However, some elements break through the small Wildcat escort screen destroying 5 SBD's and damaging 5 more. The remainder pounce on the Japanese carriers, with the *Hiryu* now reported as sailing in the task force. The *Akagi* suffers another bomb hit and the *Hiryu* receives two leaving her on fire and damaged. Japanese AA fire is still quite deadly as 6 more SBD's are destroyed and 11 damaged.

But this small victory vanishes all too soon. Japanese aircraft now appear over TF201 and begin their attack. To make matters worse, only 7 Wildcats are in the air to stop the Japanese strike containing 13 Zeros, 22 Vals and 21 Kates. The Wildcats lose one of their number and fail to knock down any Japanese aircraft. The task force does have a nasty complement of AA and take a heavy toll on the attackers. Five Vals are destroyed with seventeen damaged. Eight Kates are destroyed with ten others damaged. Despite this, the *Lexington* is hit with two bombs and a torpedo with the *Hornet* taking two 60kg. bombs on her deck leaving her on fire. The cruiser *New Orleans* is also hit with two bombs and a torpedo.

The Japanese continue to come. Another strike containing 9 Zeros, 19 Vals and 13 Kates approaches TF201. This time, there is no CAP to intercept them. Concentrated AA fire from TF201 shoots down 4 Vals and 2 Kates with 9 Vals and Kates damaged. But the "Lady Lex" is hit hard with three bombs and four torpedoes setting her afire and causing serious flooding.

The Japanese return again to TF201 this time concentrating on the *Hornet*. The 10 Zeros, 24 Vals and 16 Kates meet no resistance from Allied CAP but do run into another wall of AA fire. Eleven Vals are destroyed along with six Kates. Another seven Kates are damaged. The *Hornet* is hit with two more bombs and a torpedo starting more fires.

At Port Moresby, things are not quite as serious for the Allies. The Rabaul strike headed for Moresby today (38 Zeros, 13 Nells, 14 Bettys) was intercepted by a wall of Allied aircraft: 26 P-400's, 17 P-39's and 7 Wildcats.

The Moresby defenders bloodied the strike, shooting down 4 Zeros, 2 Nells and 2 Bettys. A large portion of the Betty bombers turned back after this attack, leaving only 3 Bettys in the strike. The Japanese meted out their own punishment on the Allies, shooting down 2 Wildcats, 4 P-400's and 2 P-39's while damaging 6 more aircraft of various types. The raid bombed the field hitting the runway 3 times. Six bombers were damaged by AA fire. While the raid seemed fairly successful on paper, the morale hit the P-39 and P-400 squadrons took was debilitating. Already, two high-morale RAAF P-40 squadrons (35th, 36th) are making their way northward from Brisbane to relieve these battered squadrons.

Later in the day, the action shifted back to the Solomons as the remaining Japanese carriers launched one more strike against the battered *Hornet*. Ten Zeros escorted eight Vals and eight Kates towards TF201 (now minus the *Lexington* as she has broken off). One Val was destroyed by AA fire while two Vals were damaged along with three Kates. Again, the *Hornet* was damaged by the dive bombers receiving three hits and starting fires again. The cruiser *Canberra* was the target of the Kate bombers as she was rocked with two torpedo hits and left burning.

Two more Japanese carrier strikes were launched at the end of the day, both looking for the damaged *Lexington*. A small strike of three Vals searched the suspected area but found nothing. The second raid came from carrier planes flying from the Shortland Islands (obviously from one of the stricken Japanese carriers) composed of 28 aircraft but they also failed in finding the *Lexington*.

They had searched in vain. The *Lexington* had been sunk.

## 5 July Thunderstorms

Task Force 205 is presently just south of Russell Island. The Japanese are still 66 miles north of Santa Isabel. For their own safety, the Irau transports are ordered back to Noumea with what men they have. *Saratoga* is ordered to fly long range CAP over the *Hornet* in order to cover her withdrawal out of the combat area. The *Hornet*, while hit many times, only has light flooding and a handful of fires. System damage is high (49) and will probably go higher. She is well protected by the remainder of the screening force which will escort her back to Noumea.

Despite orders, TF205 has rushed at flank speed towards the remnants of the Japanese carriers! They begin launching strikes from their position north of Lunga, the first strike being an unescorted flight of 17 SBD's. The Dauntless are intercepted by 28 Zeros flying CAP over the carriers *Soryu* and *Junyo*. Between the Zeros and the AA fire, 7 SBD's are destroyed with the remainder damaged. The bombers manage to hit the cruiser *Chikuma* leaving her on fire.

Following on the tail of this unsuccessful strike are 29 more unescorted Dauntless dive bombers. They are also intercepted by 28 Zeros and 5 SBD's are shot down immediately. The rest manage to break through and line up on the carrier *Soryu*. Four more SBD's are destroyed by AA fire and seventeen others are damaged. However, the strike manages to plant two 1,000 pounders into the *Soryu* with one bomb causing a fuel storage explosion in the bowels of the ship.

The third strike approaches the second Japanese carrier force a bit west of the *Soryu*. Eleven Wildcats escort three SBD's and are intercepted by thirteen Zeros. The Japanese manage to shoot down one of the SBD's but there were no losses in fighters for either side. The other two SBD's were damaged by AA fire while bombing the light carrier *Zuiho* which was not hit.

Farther west, the Moresby based SBD's continue to wreak havoc on vulnerable Japanese transports north of New Guinea. Seventeen SBD's attack a four transport task force near Finschafen planting six hits on the *Koyo Maru*, one on *Tatsuwa Maru* and one on *Katsuragisan Maru* leaving all the craft on fire. An estimated 80 Japanese troops and one gun was lost in the attack.

Over the Solomons, the Japanese counter-attack TF205 with 9 Zeros, 11 Vals and 11 Kates. This time, the task force has 27 Wildcats up to meet the attacking force. Three Vals and two Kates were shot down by the Wildcats while they lost two of their number with two others damaged. Two more Vals and eight Kates were shot down by AA fire (five other aircraft were damaged) but the *Enterprise* was hit by three bombs (two 500lb. and one 120lb.) setting her on fire and sending her system damage skyrocketing.

The final Japanese attack of the day was by 8 Zeros and 6 Kates. Heading towards TF205 they were intercepted by 23 Wildcats. One Zero was shot down as well as one Kate bomber. The remainder of the force

attacked the burning *Enterprise* but did no damage. Four more Kates were destroyed and one damaged by AA fire. LtCdr. F. Matsuba of CII-3 Daitai was killed in this attack. LtJG H. Packard of VF-6 was credited with the kill which was his second.

Out of the four carriers the U.S. Navy had two days ago only the *Saratoga* has escaped damage but she will also need to return to Noumea (after refueling) in order to replenish her aircraft. While the strikes made by the U.S. Navy were haphazard, reckless and uncoordinated they did seem to drive away the Japanese from the Solomons. But with no Japanese carriers sunk its only a matter of time before they make an appearance again. The same can be said of the U.S. Navy as well as they have only lost one carrier while the others are damaged but salvageable.

Over a dozen Navy SBD's, the remnants from the *Lexington*, are now operating off of Irau (the airfield is size two now) and will do so for the foreseeable future.

## **6 July**

### **Thunderstorms**

Revenge.

The large destroyer force formed in Noumea to deal with Japanese subs has finally borne fruit. The destroyers *Meredith*, *Wilkes* and *Stockton* pounced on Japanese sub I-21 smashing her with seven depth charge hits. (I-21 had already sunk a sub chaser on June 19).

At Port Moresby, the 17 SBD's again attack the (now) five transport force they attacked yesterday off Finschafen. *Tosei Maru* was hit three times; *Katsuragisan Maru* was hit two more times; *Chihaya Maru* was hit twice; and *Tatsuwa Maru* was hit once. The *Koyo Maru* was seen still burning from the previous days attack. All transports were left burning. An estimated 22 Japanese were killed.

The Rabaul raiders manage to slip through the thunderstorms with 24 Zeros and 14 Bettys. There was no CAP above Moresby due to the shifting of squadrons in and out of the field. The runway was hit four times and the airbase once.

## **7 July**

### **Overcast**

The *Kenshin Maru* has sunk just southeast of Rabaul according to intelligence reports.

Off Noumea, Japanese sub I-158 rams a torpedo into the destroyer *Sims* setting her afire. *Sims* was *Lexington's* escorting destroyer and was returning to Noumea on her own after the carrier sank.

Sixteen Dauntless from Moresby (now merged into one unit, 1/VB-5) attack more Japanese transports off of Gili Gili. *Kaisho Maru* is hit with four bombs and *Kaika Maru* is hit with two. Approximately 68 Japanese troops were lost in the attack. One SBD was damaged.

Later in the day, 13 SBD's return to Gili Gili and strike a separate transport force off the coast. The *Montevideo Maru* and the *Oyo Maru* are both hit with one bomb apiece leaving both ships burning.

## **8 July**

### **Rain**

One cruiser, one light cruiser and four destroyers are formed from the remnants of TF203 (now called TF222) and set sail from Townsville. They head to Gili Gili to pick off any surviving transports of yesterdays attack. There does not seem to be any Japanese capital ships in the area.

Fifteen SBD's from Moresby head to Gili Gili and continue hammering transports. For no losses, the strike plants four 500 pounders into *Oyo Maru* setting new fires and heavily damaging her. An estimated 57 Japanese were lost.

The final attack of the day was once again from Moresby dive bombers. Fifteen SBD's return to Gili Gili and blast *Oyo Maru* with five bomb hits with one bomb causing massive explosive damage to the ship. The *Montevideo Maru* is also hit with a single bomb. More Japanese troops are killed, 159 according to follow up reports. *Oyo Maru* succumbs to the punishment and sinks in the shallows.

## **9 July**

### **Rain**

The *Hornet*, along with her escorting destroyer, has finally made port at Noumea. As soon as the carriers



flooding has been negated she will make the trip back to Pearl. Meanwhile, near San Cristobal, TF205 slowly makes it way southward. The *Enterprise* along with a couple of destroyers is broken off from the main task force and begins heading back to Noumea alone, leaving the intact *Saratoga* and her escorts to do battle. *Saratoga* sails due east to a point just south of Santa Cruz to await the transports loading a Marine infantry regiment and a Marine engineer regiment at Noumea. The time has come to take advantage of the weakened Japanese and take Lunga while the enemy seems to be preoccupied with New Guinea. *Saratoga's* trip to Noumea for aircraft replenishment will have to wait.

TF222 slips into Gili Gili during the night and comes upon a lone transport, the *Hakonesan Maru*. After 44 shell hits the transport is sent to the bottom. Score one.

Continuing to cruise along Gili Gili, TF222 comes upon another transport, the *Hakuyo Maru*. The Japanese transport is taken by surprise as the commander of TF222 manages to cross the 'T', pounding the transport with 25 shell hits and a torpedo. *Hakuyo Maru* is sunk along with an estimated 423 men and 14 guns. Score two.

The last ship to receive fire from TF222 is the burning transport *Montevideo Maru*. It only takes 14 shell hits to sink the damaged ship along with no less than 825 Japanese troops. Her job done, TF222 speeds back into the night her deck crews hearing the sounds of Japanese troops crying out in the surf as she pulls away. Score three.

TF222 didn't even get its paint scratched.

Near Noumea, the Japanese sub I-3 manages to torpedo one of the destroyers of the Noumea sub chaser task force. The *Hughes* is heavily damaged and left burning.

As day dawns over the South Pacific, 12 SBD's from Moresby fly to Buna and attack the port facilities there, scoring a hit on the port supply.

The Rabaul raiders are back over Moresby sending over 16 Bettys escorted by 54 Zeros. There was no CAP to meet the attackers. The airbase and runway receive one hit apiece while 2 Bettys were damaged by AA fire.

At the end of the day, intelligence receives word that both the *Kaisho Maru* and *Katsuragisan Maru* both sank as they were making their way to Rabaul for repairs. The days tally of shipping losses was totally one-sided against the Japanese. Five transports were sunk and nearly 1,250 troops lost. What does the Japanese High Command hope to gain by holding on to Gili Gili at such a frightful cost in shipping?

## **10 July**

### **Overcast**

The only attack of the day came from Cooktown, where 9 B-25's and 9 B-17's bombed the 144th Regiment at Gili Gili. For no losses to themselves, the strike claims to have killed 60 men on the ground.

## **11 July**

### **Clear**

Twenty-nine Cooktown based bombers return to Gili Gili and attack the 47th Field AA Battalion reportedly killing 115 men on the ground. There were no losses to the 20 B-25's and 9 B-17's that took part in the attack.

Later, 16 SBD's from Moresby attacked the port at Buna scoring a hit on the port supply while suffering no losses to themselves.

The only hair-raising attack of the day came from Rabaul as 47 Zeros escorted 12 Bettys to Moresby. Instead of attacking the resupply transports in port they concentrated on the airfield scoring two hits on the runway and one hit on the airbase. AA fire damaged eight of the Japanese bombers. Apparently the enemy was unaware of the ships in the harbor.

## **12 July**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Fifteen B-25's and nine B-17's attacked the 229th Regiment on Gili Gili today killing a reported 63 men on the ground.

The Port Moresby SBD's again fly to Buna and attack the port hitting the port supply. All sixteen dive bombers returned with no damage.

**13 July**

**Partly Cloudy**

The Marines left for Lunga this morning, four transports in all. The *Enterprise* is about three days from Noumea.

Port Moresby launches its 16 SBD's to a far away Japanese task force steaming off of Sag Sag near the western tip of New Britain. The dive bombers line up on a small surface force consisting of 3 destroyers and 1 light cruiser and the destroyer *Arashi* is hit by a bomb and begins to burn. One SBD is destroyed by AA fire and seven others are damaged. A reported 18 Japanese troops were killed in the attack. The Japanese are moving more troops around via capital ships.

No sooner have the SBD's landed than they are sent out again. Nine Dauntless arrive over the surface force at Sag Sag and manage to plant a bomb on another destroyer, the *Oyashio*. The *Arashi* is seen still burning from the attack earlier in the day. Twelve Japanese troops are reported killed in the attack. All of the SBD's receive damage from AA fire. Arriving back at base, one of the damaged SBD's flips over on its back while attempting to land and LTJG E. Hurner is killed.

The last battle of the day is the largest one. The Japanese have finally spotted the three transports unloading supplies at Port Moresby and this time the Rabaul raiders target them. The Moresby defenders are ready as they put up 22 P-40's and 3 F4F-3 Wildcats. But this strike contains a massive Zero escort. No less than 74 Zeros escort a measly 3 Betty bombers. Despite the odds, the Australian flown P-40's tear into the massive air armada and wind up shooting down three Zeros. The defenders get the short end of the stick as they lose 6 P-40's and 3 Wildcats (one P-40 was damaged). LCDR C. Fenton of VF-42 bails out wounded and is rescued. The three Betty bombers drop to 200 feet and slam a torpedo into the transport *Wanganella* setting her on fire. Returning Allied pilots report observing markings on the Japanese fighters that identify them as former carrier squadrons.

**14 July**

**Clear**

Despite the clear weather, only one attack was mounted today. Eighteen B-25's and nine B-17's attacked the 85th Naval Garrison at Buna killing 41 men.

Radio intercepts report that an AG has sunk near New Britain. A Hudson bomber out of Moresby was given credit for the sinking.

*Saratoga* has refueled and is moving toward Lunga to cover the Marines as they make their way to the island. Marine dive bombers have arrived at Noumea and will be sent to Irau immediately.

**15 July**

**Thunderstorms**

There was no activity on either side except for ship movements and resupply. There are still lots of contacts around New Britain and New Ireland consisting of small ships and transports of all sizes.

*Enterprise* arrives at Noumea during the night. The *Hornet* was sent to Pearl Harbor yesterday.

VMSB-232 arrives at Irau today, sixteen operational aircraft in all. The Marines should start their landing on the night of the 16th. *Saratoga* is still closing in on her position south of Lunga and will provide CAP over the Marine transports as will the Marine Wildcats on Irau. It doesn't appear that any of the ships have been spotted by Japanese scout planes as of yet. All task forces are aware that some carrier aircraft are stationed at Shortland Island and will most likely be used (as well as Rabaul aircraft) to oppose the landing.

The 2 cruisers and 2 destroyers sent to Townsville have joined with TF222 and has been renamed TF220.

After the Moresby based SBD attacks on 15 July, there are only three Dauntless operational. The morale of the pilots is critically low as well so the squadron will stand down for a few days to repair aircraft and give the boys a rest. They have earned it.

**16 July**

**Overcast**

An early morning report indicates that the *Tosei Maru* has sunk just west of Kavieng.

The day starts out with 8 B-25's attacking the 16th Regiment at Gasmata. There were no losses on either

side.

The Marines are now landing at Lunga and the Japanese strike with a vengeance. A huge attack wave from Rabaul consisting of 69 Zeros, 22 Nells and 10 Bettys arrive over the defenseless transports. They are met in the sky by 25 *Saratoga* Wildcats and 4 Marine fighters. A dogfight erupts as three Zeros are destroyed, three Nells and one Betty damaged. But the *Saratoga* Wildcats of VF-2 don't have the stomach for a fight. When one of the Wildcats is destroyed the entire squadron breaks and runs, leaving the flight of Marines to duke it out alone...and they do. The Marines lose two of their number before heading back to base.

The massive bomber force now dives on the defenseless transports. All four transports are hit with *Esperance Bay* receiving two torpedo strikes. Seventy-seven Marines were killed in the attack. Fortunately, only two of the four transports are actually carrying men while the other two carry supplies.

## **17 July**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Preliminary reports indicate that both the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* will not see action again for at least six months.

Six destroyers based at Luganville are rushed to Lunga to offer AA support to the Marine transports. The fighters alone just aren't cutting it. The task force makes flank speed and arrives at Lunga during the early morning hours.

The first attack of the day comes from 8 B-25's from Cooktown. They head to Madang and bomb the 41st Regiment killing 8 men.

The Rabaul raiders return to attack the Marine transports. Again, *Saratoga* puts up 24 Wildcats while the Marine flyers at Irau only manage to put up 3. The Japanese strike consists of only 4 Zeros and 10 Bettys. The defenders manage to destroy a Zero but again as soon as the *Saratoga* loses a Wildcat, the entire squadron breaks off. Fortunately, the screen of six destroyers manages to do what the fighters have failed at...shooting down bombers. Two Bettys are destroyed by AA fire and five are damaged. Not one ship is struck by an enemy torpedo. But the day is still young.

Another attack is made from Rabaul, this time by 60 Zeros escorting 7 Nells. Nineteen Wildcats are in the air to meet the attack but their presence is hardly felt as only two Zeros are destroyed. One Wildcat is damaged in the attack (of course, VF-2 breaks and runs away). The Nell bombers skim the waves and make for the transport *Kanimbla*. She is hit by two torpedoes and set on fire. Two Nells were damaged by AA fire from the destroyers.

It is shameful. All fighters are ordered grounded due to the ineffectiveness of the air defense. The Marines flyers cannot be blamed for their poor performance as they are operating much farther from base than they would like. There is no excuse for VF-2 (their morale is terribly low, however). *Saratoga* is ordered to pull back to a point south of Irau and allow the destroyers to knock down aircraft.

## **18 July**

### **Thunderstorms**

An early morning attack on the 41st Regiment at Madang is made by 9 B-25's. There were no losses to either side. A separate attack is made on the 29th Regiment at Buna by 12 B-25's and 9 B-17's. The strike reported 37 Japanese killed on the ground.

Thanks to the bad weather, only one strike was made on the Marine transports. Rabaul based aircraft (80 Zeros and 18 Nells) manage to torpedo the *Esperance Bay* setting her on fire. Fortunately she was carrying no troops, only a few supplies. Other attacks were made on the destroyers *Worden* and *Cushing* but were ineffective. Four Nells were shot down and eleven damaged by AA fire. The destroyer gunners did a good job today.

## **19 July**

### **Rain**

*Saratoga* is now stationed south of Irau. The 1st Marine Regiment and 17th Marine Engineer Regiment now occupy Lunga. All ships except for the stricken and horribly flooded AP *Kanimbla* are ordered to temporarily retreat to south of Nevea, Santa Cruz. There are enough supplies unloaded on Lunga for only a few days

however. More will be needed soon. Fortunately, there are five supply laden transports of the east coast of Irau waiting for the green light to go in. A lone transport is on its way to Irau to take the remainder of the Americal Division off the island.

TF220, now consisting of 3 CA's, 1 CL, 6 DD's, heads into Gili Gili harbor at night and comes upon four troop laden Japanese destroyers. TF220 manages to close to 4,000 yards and begins hammering at the Japanese task force. The destroyer *Natsugumo* is hit 22 times from all manner of guns and is left heavily damaged and burning fiercely. The destroyer *Satsuki* is hit by a torpedo and two shell hits and sinks immediately taking many troops with her. The last destroyer to receive damage was the *Kamikaze* with two shell hits. For all of this, the cruiser *Pensacola* and destroyer *Morris* receive a shell hit apiece. *Pensacola's* shell hit didn't penetrate her armor so the hit only caused slight damage while the hit on *Morris* leaves her burning. As TF220 begins to put some distance between themselves and the Japanese, the *Natsugumo* succumbs to her damage and sinks as well. Over 185 Japanese troops and 6 guns were estimated lost in the attack. TF220 bombards the port for good measure hitting the port twice. Twelve more men are killed in the bombardment.

As dawn breaks over the Solomons, Allied aircraft spot a Japanese task force containing two light carriers heading down the Slot fast. Unbelievably, the *Saratoga* makes flank speed toward the contact taking up a position south of Russell Island, well within range of not only the carriers but Rabaul, Shortland and just about every other land based Japanese aircraft in the South Pacific! Many prayers are offered up from the *Saratoga's* task force.

The first strike goes well enough for the Allies as 20 Wildcats escort 14 SBD's and 12 torpedo laden Devastators. The Japanese have 16 Zeros waiting for the Americans but this time *Saratoga's* fighter squadron manages to stay and fight. One Zero is destroyed but only one SBD and two TBD's are shot down by the enemy. Three Wildcats are also shot down during the fight, but the attack planes make it through mostly intact. The Allied aircraft line up over the light carrier *Zuiho* and the carrier *Junyo* and begin their attack. *Zuiho* takes a 1,000 pounder through her flight deck and a torpedo while the *Junyo* is hit by four bombs and two torpedoes. Both ships are left burning. Japanese AA fire manages to destroy four more Devastators and damage 13 other aircraft of various types.

That was the high point. The Japanese counterattack was swift and deadly. The Japanese carriers manage to get their strikes off just as the Americans appear overhead. A strike force of 19 Zeros, 19 Vals and 11 Kates are met in the air by 8 Wildcats. One Zero is damaged but as soon as one of the Wildcats is destroyed the rest break off. The Japanese attack planes line up on the *Saratoga* and begin their attack. AA fire is vicious however as 6 Vals and 1 Kate are destroyed with 14 Vals and 10 Kates damaged. Two bombs hit *Sara* but they are small 120 lb. bombs and do not penetrate the flight deck. However, a lone torpedo does find its mark and the ship is set aflame.

The Japanese send over their attack aircraft from the Shortland Islands, 17 Val dive bombers. One Wildcat is in the air to meet the attack but is ineffective. The AA fire from the screen around *Saratoga* does all the damage as 6 Vals are destroyed and the remainder damaged. Two bomb hits are scored on *Sara* and this time they are big 500 pounders. The flight deck is penetrated and more fires are started.

The Rabaul raiders get into the fight as 10 Zeros escorting 16 Bettys make their appearance. They rush past the lone Wildcat in the air and set their sights on the *Saratoga* and the light AA cruiser *Atlanta*. Five Bettys are destroyed and the rest damaged. No damage was done to the *Sara* in this attack as most bombers concentrated on the light cruiser.

The Japanese keep coming. Nine Zeros and eleven Kates from Shortland Island slam two more torpedoes into the *Saratoga* causing an ammo storage explosion below deck. Thirteen Kates are damaged by AA fire. After this attack, the *Saratoga* transfers her remaining aircraft to Irau (17 SBD's and 7 Wildcats).

The final attack of the day comes from 8 Betty bombers from Rabaul. No hits are scored and all Bettys receive damage from AA fire. By the end of the day, *Saratoga* is barely afloat with severe damage all around. Her floatation damage is at 89 and she may not survive the night. But *Saratoga* gave as good as she got. Both Japanese carriers were hit and surely must be limping out of the combat area.

## 20 July

### Rain

During the night in the pouring rain, proud lady *Sara* slips beneath the water. Also the transport at Lunga,



the *Kanimbla*, finally sinks but not before she unloads more precious supplies to the Marines there.

Also during the night near Noumea, the six destroyers of the Noumea sub chaser force spot a sub identified as I-3 but fail to find her as she successfully evades detection.

During daylight, four B-25's from Moresby bomb the 10th Ind Engineer Regiment at Madang. Neither side suffered casualties. A second strike from Cooktown, this time containing 6 B-25's and 9 B-17's, bombs the 85th Naval Garrison Unit at Buna. Ten men were reported killed on the ground.

The Moresby SBD's (10 in all) finally take to the air again and fly far north to Saidor where a small transport force is located. The *Tama Maru* suffers three bomb hits and the *Hiyoshi Maru* one. Both ships are damaged heavily and left burning. One SBD was damaged.

Another SBD attack on Saidor is mounted at the end of the day as nine Dauntless score one hit apiece on the *Taian Maru* and *Sakido Maru*. Both ships are left burning. One SBD was damaged.

All in all, it was a sad day for the U.S. Navy as another fleet carrier is sent to the bottom by Japanese forces. The only remaining carrier yet to be utilized is the *Wasp* which is still at Pearl Harbor. It is unknown when CINCPAC will release her to the South Pacific but the hopes are it will be soon.

## **21 July**

### **Overcast**

The Japanese send down the Tokyo Express during the night (contents as yet unknown) and pound Lunga striking the port and port supply twice. Eleven Marines were killed.

During the day, 9 B-25's bomb the 41st Regiment on Madang. Neither side suffers any losses.

The last attack of the day is from submarine S-46 operating southwest of Kavieng. The commander spots an enemy ship but fails to score a hit.

## **22 July**

### **Clear**

During the night the Tokyo Express makes another bombardment run at Lunga, scoring two hits on both the port and port supplies. Five more Marines were killed in the attack. The ships are operating out of Shortland Island.

Six B-25's attack the 41st Regiment at Madang for the second day and this time 17 troops are reported killed on the ground.

Seventeen level bombers from Cooktown (8 B-25's and 9 B-17's) attack the 29th Regiment at Buna killing 4 men.

The Rabaul raiders attack Moresby with another "baited" attack. A massive wave of Zeros, 82 in all, escort 3 Betty bombers heading for the small supply transport force in port. The Allies put up 18 P-39's, 15 P-40's and 2 Wildcats for defense. For two Zeros destroyed and one damaged the Zero pilots mete out a severe beating to the Allied pilots. Eleven P-39's and ten P-40's are destroyed with 2 others damaged. The good news...not one Allied fighter broke off in the face of such overwhelming numbers and losses. Those Aussie P-40 pilots are as brave as they are insane. All three bombers were damaged by AA fire. The transport *John Penn* was attacked but not hit. The Allies are living for the day when they will be able to blast Rabaul into so much dust.

## **23 July**

### **Clear**

Two Allied task forces containing three destroyers and one supply transport are formed in the cluster of ships south of San Cristobal and will return to Lunga one at a time to unload supplies. Will the destroyer screen be enough to fight off Japanese planes?

During the night, TF220 approaches Gili Gili and comes upon the transport *Tamashima Maru*. The cruisers *Australia*, *Pensacola* and *Northampton* do all the work smashing the ship with 27 hits at a range of 7,000 yards. After sinking the transport the port is bombarded scoring two hits on the port and two on the supply. Twelve Japanese were lost in the attack.

Daylight brings an attack on the 10th Ind Engineer Regiment at Madang by 6 B-25's. Neither side suffered any losses.

Rabaul now sends its fighters and bombers to attack the ships offloading supplies at Lunga. The strike of

64 Zeros, 5 Nells and 6 Bettys hits the transport *Largs Bay* with two torpedoes and the destroyer *Arunta* with one. The destroyer *Conyngham* was attacked but not damaged. All six Bettys and two Nells were damaged by AA fire.

An intelligence report indicates the *Tama Maru*, bombed July 20, has sunk about 66 miles north of Sag Sag.

## **24 July**

### **Thunderstorms**

A squadron of C-47's (No. 33, RAAF) is moved to Luganville from Brisbane in order to mount supply runs to Lunga as soon as the airfield at Lunga is ready. The seaplane base at Siodjuru is to be moved further up the Slot to Sepi, a stretch of beach off the eastern tip of Santa Isabel. PBY supply drops on the beach are already in progress. TF220 is immediately ordered back to Gili Gili to bombard the port again, then back to Townsville for refueling.

During the darkened dawn hours of July 24 submarine S-43 torpedoes transport *Fujisan Maru* 66 miles northwest of Kavieng setting her on fire.

Thunderstorms were widespread during the day and only one attack was made. Nine B-25's and six B-17's bombed the Kure 3rd SNLF at Gili Gili, killing two men on the ground.

## **25 July**

### **Partly Cloudy**

Eight B-25's from Moresby attack the 41st Regiment on Madang inflicting no losses to the troops on the ground.

Eleven Port Moresby Dauntless take to the air and head for a small transport force off the coast of Lae. The *Tatsuho Maru* is hit with five bombs and the *Sanko Maru* is hit with one. The *Tatsuho Maru* is left heavily damaged and burning.

Continuing to give Moresby a respite, Rabaul raiders consisting of 25 Zeros and 18 Nells attack the Marines at Lunga. Fortunately, they cause no significant damage to troops or materiel.

The last attack of the day was made by the eleven Dauntless of Port Moresby as they head back to Lae. Three transports are hit with the *Ryuko Maru* receiving the most punishment with two bomb hits. All three ships were left burning. All SBD's return safely and with no damage.

A report at the end of the day indicates that AG359 has sunk, the credit once again going to Hudson patrol bombers flying out of Port Moresby.

## **26 July**

### **Clear**

The 151st Base Force is being loaded at Noumea and will head to Lunga shortly. Three destroyers will escort the lone transport.

Eight B-25's head to Madang and once again target the 41st Regiment. The strike report indicated that an estimated 31 Japanese were killed in the raid.

The eleven SBD's from Moresby head toward Gili Gili this day to attack transports off the coast. The *Azuma Maru* is hit with 3 bombs and the *Kaiko Maru* with 1. Both ships are left burning.

The SBD's launch an afternoon strike, this time against targets 33 miles south-southeast of Finschafen. The transport *Sanko Maru* is struck by two bombs and the *Sado Maru* by one. It is curious as to why the Port Moresby commander decided to launch strikes so far north when there have been numerous transport sightings near Gili Gili for the past three days.

## **27 July**

### **Thunderstorms**

Out of the cluster of ships near San Cristobal, two supply carrying AP's and five destroyers join into a task force and head for Lunga to drop off supplies. It is hoped the anti-aircraft screen of destroyers will hold off Japanese bombers long enough to allow the unloading of these much needed supplies.

The last of the Americal Division has been loaded and is heading back to Noumea.

The battleship *North Carolina* majestically steams into Noumea harbor with much fanfare.

The Japanese send over the Rabaul raiders to bomb Lunga and the Marines. The 27 Zeros and 13 Nells cause no significant damage as there is really nothing to bomb at the moment. The Marine engineers are doing their best to get an airfield operational as soon as possible.

The only other attack of the day was from the eleven SBD's from Moresby. They head north to Finschafen to strike more transports there. Both the *Meiyo Maru* and *Mito Maru* are hit with two bombs apiece and are left on fire. An estimated 64 Japanese were killed in the attack.

## **28 July**

### **Thunderstorms**

Submarine S-46, operating in the Bismark Sea, attacks the transport *Kaito Maru* but fails to damage it.

TF220 bombards Gili Gili during the night striking the port once and killing 10 Japanese. While the bombardment was successful, it was hoped that a few Japanese surface vessels would be close by for TF220 to do battle with.

Another submarine attack, this time about 123 miles northeast of Gili Gili, is mounted by submarine S-44 on the transport *Akibasan Maru*. Unfortunately, the attack fails and the ship escapes.

As daylight breaks, the five destroyers and two transports have made their way to Lunga and begin unloading supplies. The Rabaul raiders mount one of their largest air assaults yet on these ships, consisting of 84 Zeros, 34 Nells, and 20 Bettys. The five destroyers providing anti-aircraft defense are completely overwhelmed. Though one Nell is destroyed and 15 other bombers are damaged, the Japanese mete out some serious punishment. The destroyer *Dale* is hit with three torpedoes and is sunk. The transport *Ormsby* is also hit by three torpedoes and sunk. Two other ships, the destroyer *Cushing* and the transport *Moreton Bay*, are hit with a single torpedo and left burning. It is clear that holding on to Lunga will be a long hard fight for the Allies.

## **29 July**

### **Overcast**

During the early morning darkness, coastwatchers all along the Solomons report a surface force heading down the Slot towards Lunga. Eventually the Japanese task force is revealed as she steams into the Lunga area. The force is a tremendous surface combat fleet consisting of seven destroyers, a light cruiser, a heavy cruiser and none other than the battleship *Yamato*. They head directly for the remaining destroyers and transport of the Lunga resupply force and systematically start to destroy it. The four destroyers of the screening force rush into the large Japanese force bravely but are no match for the large guns of *Yamato*. The destroyer *Conyngham* is blown to pieces with 115 shell hits and a torpedo. The destroyer *Cushing* is hit 17 times and also sinks. The destroyer *Hull* receives 35 shell hits and a torpedo and eventually sinks after the Tokyo Express retires. Finally, the destroyer *Worden* is sunk by 18 shell hits and two torpedoes. But the Navy got its licks in as well. The cruiser *Furutaka* was hit 8 times; the light cruiser *Tama* was hit 7 times; the destroyer *Akigumo* was hit three times and was set aflame; and the destroyers *Minegumo* and *Suzukaze* were hit with one shell apiece. The transport *Moreton Bay*, all that remained of the original seven ship force, was not touched in the attack. In one last act of defiance, the Japanese bombard Lunga as they retire striking the port five times and the port supply six times. A dark defeat for the U.S. Navy.

In the Bismark Sea, submarine S-46 lines up the transport *Kasuga Maru* in her sights and sets it aflame with a torpedo strike causing heavy damage.

During the day, the Japanese send the Rabaul raiders over to bomb Lunga. The 18 Zeros and 15 Nells cause no significant damage and all attack aircraft return safely.

## **30 July**

### **Partly Cloudy**

The brass at CINCPAC are furious. A priority order is issued stating that the battleship *North Carolina* and "a proper but substantial screening force" is to head to Lunga and intercept all further raids made by the Tokyo Express. Another small destroyer/transport force will be moved in to unload supplies (to be used as bait) and TF227 (as the *North Carolina* force is to be named) will sail in during the night to fight off any Japanese surface forces that make an appearance. TF227 is formed and consists of 1BB, 3CA's, 3CL's and

6DD's, a total of 13 ships. They set sail immediately for the rendezvous point south of San Cristobal.

Ninety-nine miles southwest of Kavieng, submarine S-46 slams a torpedo into the Japanese oiler *Naruto*.

During the dawn hours, 12 B-25's from Moresby escorted by 6 P-40's attack the 229th Regiment at Gili Gili. A reported 24 men were killed on the ground and all aircraft returned safely and undamaged.

Rabaul sends an attack force composed of 49 Zeros and 15 Nells to bomb the port at Lunga. The force manages to score a hit on the port and return to Rabaul unscathed.

### 31 July

#### Thunderstorms

The PBY base at Sepi is now operational, a patrol base well within search range of Shortland Island.

The only attack of the day comes from the eleven SBD's from Port Moresby. The dive bombers attack a transport force near Saidor hitting the *Zukai Maru* with 4 bombs, the *Kembu Maru* with 2 and the *Hokuyo Maru* with 1. All ships are left burning. The ships were reported to be carrying Japanese troops and an estimated 21 men and 2 guns were lost.

Thanks to the PBY pilots flying out of their new seaplane anchorage at Sepi, a Japanese task force reportedly consisting of one battleship and five destroyers was spotted 33 miles northwest of Vella Lavella. It is expected that these ships will be heading down the Slot soon to bombard Lunga. If all goes to plan, TF227 will be waiting for them.



*Thus ends the first three months of the war in the South Pacific.*

*The following is a smattering of statistics gathered so far:*

#### SCORE:

ALLIED SHIPS SUNK: 27 (946 points)

JAPANESE SHIPS SUNK: 50 (364 points)

#### CAPITAL SHIPS SUNK:

ALLIED: 2 FLEET CARRIERS, 1 HEAVY CRUISER, 5 DESTROYERS, 4 SUBS, (1 PATROL CRAFT)

JAPANESE: 3 DESTROYERS, 1 SUB, (5 MINESWEEPERS, 5 PATROL CRAFT)

*The rest of the Japanese ships sunk? Transports. Lots of them. The tally for Japanese transports lost is 37. A statistic even more telling is that 31 of these were sunk by 500 and 1,000 pound bombs, a clear statement on how deadly effective the orphaned Yorktown dive bomber squadron has become in their three months flying out of Port Moresby (though TF201 sunk a few as well). The commander of the Yorktown squadron has a 91 leadership rating.*

*The plan for the next three months: Start becoming more aggressive. Troops are beginning to flood into Noumea and Brisbane. Having them sit there and rot isn't doing any good. The carrier Wasp is still sitting in Pearl Harbor and it is still unknown when CINPAC will release her. It is possible that an attack on Gili Gili may be mounted at some point in the next three months as more battleships are heading into the theatre, perfect ships for softening resistance on potential landing sites. TF227 will also be used to harass Shortland Island from time to time, bombarding the port and airfields there during night runs. Rabaul is still a major problem due to the hefty numbers of Zeros stationed there. Allied fighter intercepts of the Rabaul raiders are basically ineffective. Until better fighters and pilots are brought into the fight, it will most likely remain a major problem.*