

The Pacific Naval Campaign –1942-45

David Child-Dennis

Part 1

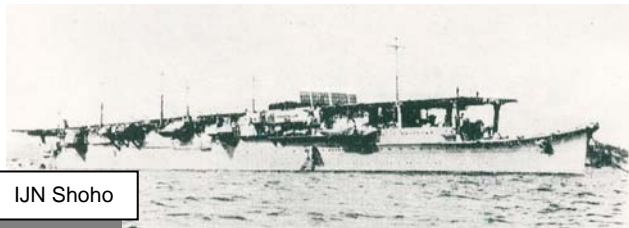
The Battle of the Coral Sea 4th – 8th May 1942

This was to be the first major encounter between the Allied and Imperial Japanese naval forces. It was important for two reasons.

1. It was only the second time in modern history a Western and Asian fleet had contested a major surface action.
2. It was also the first time in history that two fleets had met in battle and not seen each other. The whole action was fought between competing air fleets as opposed to ships.

The Japanese has occupied the island of Truk in the Caroline Island group and built a formidable naval base sitting astride the Central Pacific. This was a direct counter to the American presence on Hawaii at Pearl Harbour and at Midway Atoll 1500 miles to the north-west of Hawaii. In the push south through Indo-China, The Japanese had occupied Rabaul in the New Ireland Group and constructed a heavily fortified naval garrison and harbour. The Allies were therefore forced to make a circuitous approach via Tahiti and Fiji to Australia and New Zealand. The New Hebrides and New Caledonia were hastily occupied by Allied forces in an effort to prevent further Japanese expansion into the South West Pacific, which threatened the North East coast of Australia and New Zealand.

Prior to the opening of hostilities with Japan, the Australians had embarked on a programme of establishing a greater presence in Papua- New Guinea and on the Malayan Peninsula. Accordingly a large air and naval base was built at Port Moresby on the southern coast of PNG to guard the Australian Northern Territory. This relied on Darwin for re-supply and support. Thus the Coral Sea became an important gateway for both Japanese and Allies in the pursuit of their strategic objectives.



The Japanese had determined they would of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Island Group. The Allies only discovered the existence of this base by accident during March 1942. They also attempted to put a

major seaplane base at Tulagi on Florida Island, which is directly opposite the site they chose for their airfield on Guadalcanal. The Allies were determined to remove the Japanese from these locations and occupy them as part of the Allied strategy to re-conquer the Philippines. A major plank of the MacArthur plan for South West Pacific Theatre of Operations.

The Japanese axis of advance into the Coral Sea can only occur from the northern (via Truk) and western (Rabaul) sides of the map.

The Allies are free to arrive from the south west (via the New Hebrides or New Caledonia), from the west (via Townsville in Australia) or from the west(via Darwin in Australia)

Players must remain constantly aware that the Battle of Midway is one month into the future and resources will need to be husbanded for this event. The Japanese Imperial Fleet had already issued orders for the attack on Midway and the occupation of the Aleutian Islands before the Battle of the Coral Sea had commenced. The carriers in particular were expected to support the occupation of Guadalcanal and Tulagi and then return to Japan Home Waters for inclusion in the coming attack on Midway and the Aleutian Islands.

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Order of Battle- Operation 'MO'

Imperial Japanese Navy

Carrier Striking Force (Takagi)

Shokaku 21 A6M2 Zero 21 D3A Val 21 B5N Kate

Zuikaku 21 A6M2 Zero 21 D3A Val 21 B5N Kate

C.A. Myoko, Haguro

Destroyer Div. 7 Ushio, Akebono

Destroyer Div. 27 Ariake, Yugure, Shiratsuyu, Shigure

Oiler. Toho Maru

Tulagi Invasion Force (Shima)

Minelayers. Okinoshima, Koei Maru

Transport. Azumasan Maru

Destroyer Escort. Kikuzuki, Yuzuki.

Port Moresby Invasion Force (Kajioka)

CL Yubari

Destroyer Escort. Oite, Asanagi, Uzuki, Mutzuki, Mochitzuki, Yayoi

Transport Unit. Unknown number of ships.

Support Group. (Marumo)

CL Tenryu, Tatsuta

Kamikawa Maru

Gunboats. Keijo Maru, Seikai Maru, Nikkai Maru

Covering Group (Goto)

CVL Shoho 12 A6M2 Zero 9 B5N Kate

CA. Aoba, Kinugasa, Kako

Destroyer Escort. Sazanami

Submarine Force.

Unknown at this time.

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US and Allied Forces

Task Force 17 (Fletcher)

Task Group 17.2 (Attack Group) (Kinkaid)

CA Minneapolis, New Orleans, Astoria, Chester, Portland.

Destroyer Escort. Phelps, Dewey, Farragut, Aylwin, Monaghan

Task Group 17.3 (Support Group) (Crace)

CA Australia, Hobart, Chicago.

Destroyer Escort. Perkins, Walke

Task Group 17.5 (Carrier Group) (Fitch)

CV Yorktown 21 F4F 38 SBD Dauntless 13 TBD Devastator

CV Lexington 23 F4F 36 SBD Dauntless 12 TBD Devastator

Destroyer Escort. Morris, Anderson, Hammann, Russell

Task Group 17.6 (Fuelling Group) (Phillips)

Oilers. Neosho, Tippecanoe

Destroyer Escort. Sims, Worden

Task Group 17.9 (Search Group) (DeBaun)

Seaplane Tender. Tangier (with 12 PBY-5 Catalina)

Strategic considerations and victory conditions

1. The object of the battle is to remove the opposing carrier forces. Neither side can assure the safety of their ships, or the success of their land operations in the area of the Solomon Islands without establishing air superiority.
2. The loss of a major aircraft carrier (CV) will constitute a tactical loss for your forces.
3. The loss of all aircraft carriers will constitute a strategic loss for your forces.
4. In the event of both forces suffering equal carrier losses the battle will be considered a strategic draw.

How to use the map.

1. Both players will plot a set of courses for their respective forces on a copy of the map.
2. The Japanese player will plot courses for their respective invasion forces to both Tulagi opposite Guadalcanal Island in the 'slot' and Port Moresby, which is near to the label 'Papua – New Guinea' on the map.
3. All other Japanese naval units may be deployed from the northern edge of the map along the line marked 'IJN entry point' to any other place on the map.
4. The Allies must deploy Task Group 17.3 (Support Group) from the Cairns entry point. All other groups may be deployed from either Allied entry point.
5. Sailing course tracks should be drawn on the map at a scale of 500 miles representing 24 hours sailing time. The beginning of each 24hour period commences at 24.00 hours (midnight).
6. Once all the sailing tracks have been entered onto the maps they should be compared and at any point the forces come within 300 miles of each other, players should commence rolling for the possibility of sighting each other by air reconnaissance from first light - beginning 0400 hours.

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7. For this campaign battle, players should disregard the rule covering the direction of spotting, given the limited approach route options the Japanese historically had at the time. Use only the rule covering 'Reconnaissance and air raid track'.
8. Once contact has been made between opposing forces, the tracks are frozen at that point and time. Time may be approximately calculated by using a scale of 21 miles sailed for 1hour sailing time.
9. Players may re-deploy their forces to meet the tactical situation they may find themselves in, once initial contact has been made. It may be easier if players plot their courses using pencil so that any subsequent changes in course can be made after deletion of the original plots after the first point of contact.
10. Movement will remain constant at 500 miles per 24hours. Ships re-deployed to meet the changing tactical situation will require new courses to be plotted and the old courses erased.
11. Un-repaired damages remaining at the end of the battle will require the ship to be returned to repair facilities in Japan or Pearl Harbour. Each damage point will require 1 week of campaign time to repair. Each aircraft counter lost will require 1 week of campaign time to replace.

Good luck!

USS LEXINGTON (CV 2)



