



Mission: History

Studiosum Historiam Praemium Est



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What's this all about?

The Constitution of the Naval Order of the United States tells us "The purpose of this organization shall be to transmit to posterity the glorious names and memories of our great naval commanders, their companion officers, & subordinates in the wars of the United States; to encourage research and publication of literature pertaining to naval history & science; to ensure the preservation of relics, portraits, mementos, documents, rolls & books relating to the Naval Services & its (sic) heroes at all times; & in general to support the well-being of the present officers and enlisted personnel of the Naval Services, & all other military maritime services.

With Mission: History, the San Francisco Commandery is fulfilling its obligation under the Constitution of the Naval Order of the United States.

1898: USS *Maine* Sunk at Havana



1942: Battles of the Java Sea - Japs More than Allies Thought

The word on American street corners was "we'll whip the Japs in six months." The bad news from the Philippines was shrugged off as a matter of unpreparedness. "We were caught napping," was the complaint. "It won't happen again," we promised ourselves.

If we needed any proof that we were in a fight that would last more than six months, the Battles of the Java Sea provided it.

On paper, the Allied surface fleet, called ABDA for its American, British, Dutch, Australian makeup, was a formidable force when compared with that of the Japanese. On paper.

ABDA comprised two heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, 23 destroyers and more than 30 submarines. The Japanese, split into Western, Central and Eastern Forces, countered with five heavy cruisers, five light cruisers, 54 destroyers, no submarines ... and two light carriers.

Airpower, some were to say, was decisive. What was decisive was ABDA was the first attempt at a unified command of four nations speaking two languages, having no common-

ity of naval doctrine and no time for training together. The Japanese had fought and trained together for a decade.

The two fleets came together in four battles: what we call the Battle of the Java Sea on the last two days of February, 1942, preceded by the Battle of Makassar Strait on February 4 and the Battle of Badung Strait on February 19 and 20 and followed by the Battle of Sunda Strait on February 28.

At Makassar Strait, ABDA, with a heavy cruiser, a light cruiser and 6 destroyers, attempted to block a Japanese invasion force headed for Makassar. It was faced by one light cruiser, 16 destroyers and one light carrier. Air attacks drove off the ABDA forces before they could fire a shot. The two heavy ships were damaged, one of them badly. The Japanese lost one airplane.

The Japanese successfully invaded Bali on February 19. As the empty cargo ships were being escorted home by four destroyers, they were attacked first by two light cruisers escorted by two destroyers and again by one light cruiser and four destroyers. The two trailing Jap destroyers drove off both attacks, sustaining light damage. ABDA lost one destroyer sunk and one cruiser was moderately damaged.

The Battle of the Java Sea began as the Japanese mounted an invasion of western Java. ABDA countered with everything it had—two heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and nine destroyers. They should have been the equal of the Japs' two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and 14 destroyers. But ABDA suffered from its inborn lack of cohesiveness and training. The Japanese saw them coming and, with torpedoes and accurate long-range gunfire sank one destroyer and severely damaged the heavy cruiser

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1944: Mitscher Force Destroys Truk Bastion

The lagoon at Truk, a 40-square-mile island group in the eastern Caroline islands, had been the base of the Japanese Combined Fleet since the beginning of the war.

In what Morison called the coming of age of carrier warfare, Marc Mitscher swooped down on Truk on February 17 with eight carriers and six battleships. Though the Jap main force was absent, the remaining surface combatants and transports—and the base—were destroyed.

1945: Iwo Jima – Add This to the Halls Of Montezuma and Shores of Tripoli



Marines on their way to their bloodiest encounter in World War II, with naval bombardment still stirring up the volcanic ash that substituted for dirt on Iwo Jima. At right, the second raising of the Stars and Stripes on Mount Suribachi on 23 Feb, photographed by Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press. The story of the two flag raisings needs no retelling here.



Some more of the 75,000 Marines to land at Iwo Jima pass an LCS (L) on their way to the beach. The three Marine divisions—3rd, 4th and 5th—would take nearly 26,000 casualties in the month ahead. Rifle regiments in the 4th and 5th divisions suffered 75 percent casualties, requiring support personnel to take replacement combat positions. That “Every Marine is a rifleman” was proved at Iwo Jima.

These tracked amphibious craft would soon be bogged down in Iwo’s volcanic ash, where they would be destroyed piecemeal by Japanese anti-tank weapons.

An Infantryman's Nightmare: There's Nowhere to Hide



You hit the dirt and look around. You feel bare-ass naked and realize that all you are is a flat, stationary target. You might as well be an erect moving target, so you get up and push forward. Everybody does.



BELOW: Junk at Beach 3. It could be repaired, but probably won't be. The pipeline is full. Full enough to last the war.



The expert rifleman wasn't much needed at Iwo Jima. The Japanese were so dug in that the only plan possible was a frontal assault with grenades, rocket launchers and flamethrowers. Here, a few Marines in the foreground are helped out by a flame-throwing tank. It took astonishing heroism to knock out some emplacements, and 27 Congressional Medals of Honor were awarded for actions on Iwo Jima. Thirteen posthumously.

End of ABDA Proves a Point

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HMS *Exeter*. And four American destroyers had to be detached for want of fuel. (They didn't return—after filling their bunkers at Surabaya, they headed for Australia.)

The ABDA force, under Rear Admiral K.W.F.M. Doorman, made repeated attempts to attack but was driven off each time, losing another destroyer in the process. At nightfall, the Japanese cruisers attacked with torpedoes, sinking both Dutch light cruisers, *Java* and *de Ruyter*. Doorman perished with his ship. The two remaining ABDA cruisers, USS *Houston* and HMAS *Perth*, fled toward Batavia.

On the 28th, the damaged HMS *Exeter* and four destroyers tried to exit Surabaya but were fallen upon, and summarily dispatched, by patrolling Japanese ships.

Off western Java, also on the 28th, the fleeing *Houston* and *Perth* attempted to escape the carnage through Sunda Strait, and stumbled on a Japanese landing force covered by a widely dispersed force of cruisers and destroyers. The ABDA ships attacked the landing force, which appeared to be protected by a sole destroyer. The other Jap warships came to the rescue, firing some 87 torpedoes. They sank *Houston* and *Perth* along with a minesweeper and transport of their own, and holed three more of their transports.

The Battles of the Java Sea ended allied naval presence in the Southwest Pacific until the United States Navy returned later in the war. The action was under-reported at the time and is under-remembered today because debacles are not cherished moments in history. And debacle it was. The sacrifice of the ABDA fleet delayed the Japanese invasions in Indonesia for only 24 hours.

For the past year, the *Proceedings* of the United States Naval Institute has carried discussions of combined force exercises—without mention of Java Sea.

1915: Churchill Pushes Asquith To Attempt Forcing Dardanelles

The young First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, had in the early days of World War I stampeded the government of Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith into a plan to get at Germany through the back door, by attacking the Kaiser's Turkish allies. But Churchill wasn't the only reason military thoughts turned to the Dardanelles.

On January 2, 1915, the British ambassador at Petrograd, recently renamed from St. Petersburg, had arrived at Whitehall with a plea from Russian Grand Duke Nicholas that military action against the Turks should be undertaken to induce them to withdraw troops from the Caucasus. If the Black Sea were reopened, so much the better. Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener, too, thought of the Dardanelles.

The straits were dominated by the heights of the Gallipoli peninsula, an almost trackless waste. Shore batteries covered the navigable waters, with the most dangerous point 14 miles in from the Aegean. If the straits could be forced, the Sea of Marmara lay beyond and beyond that Constantinople and the Hellespont, the door to the Black Sea. Much of Turkey would lay open to conquest, if the Dardanelles were forced.

Kitchener would not take one soldier from France to mount an assault on Gallipoli, though, and all that were not in France was a single division of troops recently arrived from the Empire and raw troops in training. He did, however, have a commanding general in mind, Sir Ian Hamilton, a writer of elegant prose and less distinguished poetry, but a man of vacillating enthusiasm. Hamilton's soldierly instincts, it was said, were of ardor proportionate to the forces under his command—and estimates of those were changing daily.

In the eastern Mediterranean, the British Vice Admiral Carden had an armada at his disposal in early 1915, including no fewer than eighteen battleships or battle cruisers, ranging from the most modern to very ancient. Hamilton and his army were not yet on the scene and might never be. Perhaps the Dardanelles could be won with naval forces alone.

Thus began on February 19, 1915, a naval venture that turned into a combined forces effort, ending in failure with about 250,000 British, Australian, New Zealand and French casualties. Churchill was driven from office and Asquith was forced to form a coalition government.

At first, things went well for Carden. The forts near the entry to the Dardanelles were effectively pounded by the ships' fire and sailors and marines went ashore to spike the Turkish guns. Farther in, things began well at the narrows when the ships' fire, including that from the 15-inch guns of the *Queen Elizabeth*, silenced the shore batteries, but then disaster struck. Three battleships were sunk in quick succession on a mine field that had been overlooked and the new battle cruiser *Inflexible* was severely damaged, as were the *Suffern* and the French *Gaulois*. Carden had broken down under the strain and was replaced by Vice Admiral de Robeck, who was unwilling to risk further damage.

The naval action at the Dardanelles lasted for a month. Hamilton was eventually given 13 British and Commonwealth divisions and a French Corps, a total that reached about 490,000 men. The land effort on the Gallipoli peninsula eventually turned into a stalemate and the British withdrew on January 10, 1916.

