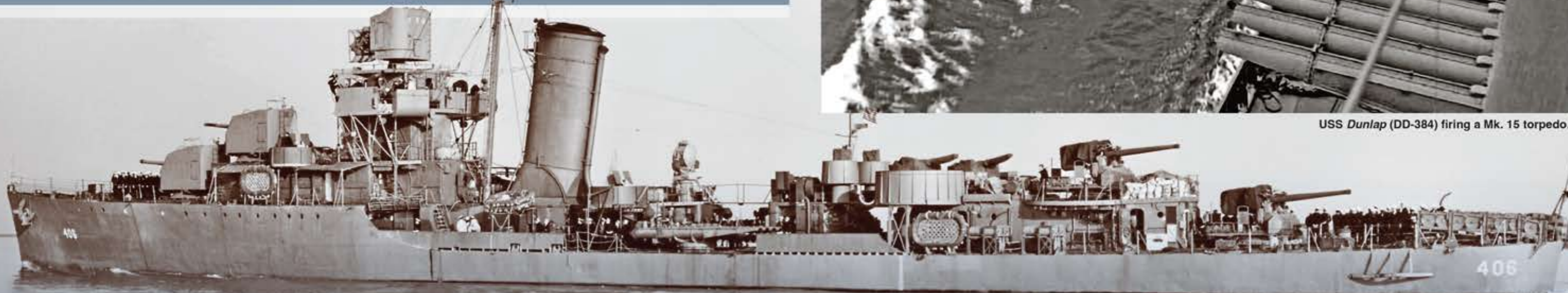


BATTLE OF VELLA GULF



USS Dunlap (DD-384) firing a Mk. 15 torpedo.



AFTER A SERIES OF DEFEATS, THE US NAVY NEEDED A VICTORY. THEY WOULD FIND IT WHEN SIX DESTROYERS UNDERTOOK A NOCTURNAL TORPEDO DUEL WITH THE JAPANESE
BY MEL LINDERMANN

The Japanese had quickly figured out that the American plan of “island-hopping” its way to the Home Islands could be disastrous for Japan. Therefore, it was decided that the ships participating in this type of warfare must be destroyed and that Japanese garrisons be supplied and equipped at all costs. On the night of 12/13 July 1943, what would become known as the Battle of Kolombangara was fought off the northeastern coast of Kolombangara in the Solomon Islands. The battle took place during the early stages of the New Georgia campaign when an Imperial Japanese Navy force, carrying reinforcements south of Villa, Solomon Islands, was

intercepted by a task force of US Navy and New Zealand light cruisers and destroyers. In the ensuing action, the Japanese sank one Allied destroyer and damaged three cruisers but perhaps more importantly they were able to successfully land 1200 infantry troops on the western coast of Kolombangara but lost one light cruiser sunk in the process.

On 30 June 1943, the Allied campaign in New Georgia had begun as part of their advance through the central Solomon Islands on to Rabaul under the guise of Operation *Cartwheel*. In the initial phase, Rendova had been captured to provide a staging point for US forces assigned

to capture the airfield at Munda Point — one of the key objectives of the campaign.

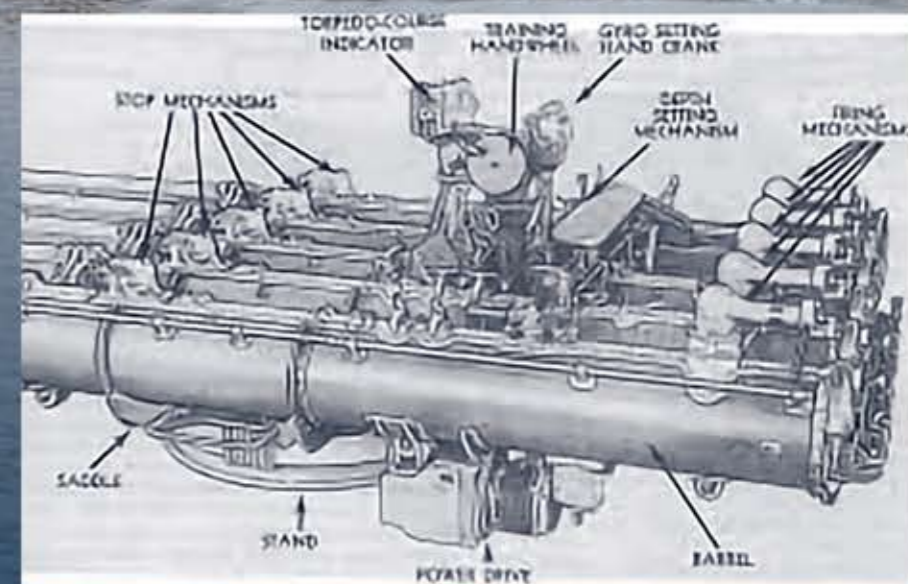
The Marines on Rendova rapidly built artillery emplacements and began shelling Munda airfield. However, the enemy flew numerous sorties to attack these emplacements.

On 2 July, troops of the 43rd Infantry Division landed on New Georgia to attack Munda while three days later a battalion of Marine Raiders and two US Army battalions were landed at Rice Anchorage on New Georgia’s northern shore to seize Bairoko.

Seeing what was happening, the Japanese knew they had to

reinforce New Georgia to shore up the southern flank to their important bases around Rabaul. On the night of 12 July, a Japanese “Tokyo Express” reinforcement force made a run down “The Slot” from Rabaul to land troops at Villa on Kolombangara by way of the Kula Gulf. The force was under the command of R/Adm. Shunji Isake and comprised the light cruiser *Jintsu* with destroyers *Mikazuki*, *Yukikaze*, *Hamakaze*, *Kiyonami*, and *Yugure*. There were 1200 troops aboard the destroyer-transport *Satsuki*, *Minazuki*, *Yunagi*, and *Matsukaze*. The troops would be landed on Kolombangara to reinforce the area as a response to Allied landings on New Georgia.

Allied coastwatchers detected the movement of the enemy ships and Adm. William Halsey ordered a naval task force to intercept them. This became Task Force 18 under the command of R/Adm. Walden L.



Typical destroyer torpedo tube mounting.

Ainsworth and consisted of the light cruisers USS *Honolulu* and USS *St. Louis* and the Royal New Zealand Navy light cruiser HMNZS *Leander*. Into this mix were the destroyers USS

Nicholas, *O'Bannon*, *Taylor*, *Jenkins*, *Radford*, *Ralph Talbot*, *Buchanan*, *Maury*, *Woodworth*, and *Gwin*.

The ships deployed in a single column with five destroyers in the

USS *Stack* would be one of the six American destroyers participating in the Battle of Vella Gulf. She would be one of three still carrying her full pre-war configuration of torpedo tubes.