

THE BATTLE OF FRIDAY THE 13TH

THE NAVAL BATTLES FOR GUADALCANAL WERE FIERCE AND BOTH SIDES SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES BUT WHEN IT WAS ALL SAID AND DONE, THESE SIGNIFICANT ENGAGEMENTS WERE A MAJOR DEFEAT FOR THE JAPANESE AND THE VITAL HENDERSON FIELD WOULD REMAIN FIRMLY IN AMERICAN CONTROL

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Map illustrating the action of 12/13 November 1942.



Jacket patch for "Lucky 13."



The battles that took place in the sound between Guadalcanal and Tulagi after midnight on the night of 12/13 November 1942 and on 14/15 November are known by multiple names. In his *History of US Naval Operations in World War II*, Rear Admiral Samuel

Eliot Morison refers to them as the "Naval Battle of Guadalcanal," with Part One on 12/13 November and Part Two on 14/15 November. Other works call the engagements the First Night Battle of Guadalcanal (which is confusing since Savo Island and Cape Esperance

were also night battles off Guadalcanal). Yet other sources refer to the Third and Fourth Battles of Savo Island, and Japanese sources refer to the Third and Fourth Battles of the Solomon Sea. Regardless, these two battles were the decisive engagements of the Guadalcanal

campaign that turned the tide in American favor.

This time, US naval intelligence and code breakers provided extensive warning of the timing and force composition of the next major Japanese push to reinforce and retake Guadalcanal, occupied by US Marines since 7 August (and since October, by some US Army troops as well). Following the disastrous failure

by Japanese army forces to penetrate the American perimeter and retake Henderson Field in late October, the Japanese high command determined that yet another major reinforcement attempt take place, although the Japanese army still grossly underestimated the number of American troops on Guadalcanal and how much force would be needed to evict them. As for the Japanese navy, coming

off their costly "victory" in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto (commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet) determined that there was a narrow window to conduct a major reinforcement effort while there were no operational US carriers in the region.

Yamamoto believed the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) and USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) had been sunk, but *Enterprise* was only badly

On 13 November 1942, the USS *Fletcher* (DD-445) tempted fate in the waters off Guadalcanal by being the 13th in a line of 13 ships while having a hull number that added up to 13 and a commanding officer who was USNA Class of 1913. After the decisive battle, the destroyer earned the nickname "Lucky 13."