



BATTLE OFF SAMAR

HOW THE SHIPS AND SAILORS IN THE 13 SHIPS OF TAFFY 3 WOULD
TAKE ON THE MIGHT OF THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY
BY CARSTEN FRIES

On 15 October 1944, the Japanese Imperial Navy's First Mobile Fleet launched Operation *Shō*, a last-ditch attempt to engage Allied naval forces off Leyte in the central Philippines decisively. Following the 24 October Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, the powerful Japanese First Diversion Attack Force ("Center Force") appeared to be retiring westward. However, the task force ultimately resumed its eastward passage,

broke out of the San Bernardino Strait north of Samar early the following day, and headed southward toward Leyte Gulf. The Japanese Northern Force, a carrier task force, had drawn Adm. William F. Halsey's 3rd Fleet to the north. The heavy forces of V/Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid's 7th Fleet were engaged to the south of Leyte Gulf. This left only three 7th Fleet escort carrier (CVE) task units on the northern flank

of the Leyte operational area, where they had been providing close air support and an ASW screen for the amphibious landings. Just after sunrise on 25 October, R/Adm. Clifton A. F. Sprague's TG 77.4.3—call sign "Taffy 3"—the northwesterly-most task unit, made up of six small escort carriers, three destroyers, and four destroyer escorts, was stunned to confront four Japanese battleships (among them *Yamato* with

Watercolor by Cmdr. Dwight Shepler titled *Battle off Samar* (see "Invasion" elsewhere in this issue for more of the talent artist's work) depicts the counterattack by the escort carrier group's screen. Ships present are (left to right) IJN battleships *Nagato*, *Haruna*, and *Yamato*, with salvo from *Yamato* landing in center; USS *Heerman* (DD-532), USS *Hoel* (DD-533) sinking; Japanese cruisers *Tone* and *Chikuma*.