

"THE GREAT PACIFIC WAR"

IMAGINARY CONFLICT, DESCRIBED BY EXPERT IN 1925, NOW PROVES PROPHETIC

by HECTOR BYWATER

Until his death in 1940, Hector Bywater, foremost English naval authority, was concerned with the possibility of an American-Japanese war. In 1925, while naval correspondent for the London *Daily News* and *Observer*, he wrote *The Great Pacific War* (Houghton Mifflin, \$2.50). In this classic work he described an imaginary conflict between the U. S. and Japan starting in 1931. Based on his intimate knowledge of the Pacific, he plotted the detailed course of the imaginary struggle in terms of the actual warships then available on both sides. Now real war has begun. Although Bywater did not envisage the predominating part that is played by planes in a modern sea war (nor the U. S. A. engaged in a two-ocean war), his 16-year-old naval classic is the most current book of the week.

Bywater's imaginary war began after the Japanese treacherously blocked the Panama Canal by blowing up a freighter in Culebra Cut. The early rounds went to the Japs. In a month they crushed the U. S. Asiatic squadron, seized the Philippines and Guam. Seaplanes, launched from a Japanese steamer disguised as British merchantman, bombed San Francisco and Los Angeles. Submarines raided

the West Coast and laid mines outside Pearl Harbor and San Diego.

Having lost its bases in the western Pacific, it now took the U. S. two years, according to Bywater, to crush Japan. America's first job was to win bases in the central and western Pacific. An expedition against the Bonin Islands, 600 miles from Japan, failed, but U. S. landings succeeded at Truk and Angaur Islands in the mid-Pacific.

These bases enabled the U. S. Fleet to return to the distant Pacific. The final job was to crush the Japanese Fleet, based on Manila. As Japan had been losing island outposts to the U. S., its Fleet had orders to keep more islands from falling into American hands. Knowing this, the U. S. shammed an attack on the Japanese island of Yap in the hope of drawing the enemy fleet out. This sham attack was carried out by one real U. S. battleship and eight dummy battleships—converted steamers with turrets and cage masts of wood—which resembled actual American battleships. Meanwhile the real U. S. Fleet steamed unobserved around Yap and came up behind the Japanese Fleet that was racing toward Yap (*see diagram on pp. 76 and 77*). Resulting battle, as described by Bywater, is condensed by LIFE below.

For the American naval command it now remained only to make the last and decisive move in their well-conceived plan of campaign. Now that the Japanese fleet was known to be at Manila, no time was lost in pressing matters to a conclusion. Admiral Hiraga's presence there was taken as evidence of Japan's determination to fight a general action rather than submit to the loss of further territories in the South Seas. And so the obvious method of tempting him out was adopted: namely, the dispatch of an expedition to Yap, which lay some 300 miles to the northeast of Angaur. Once more the squadron of imitation battleships was allotted a highly important role. This time, however, they were to be joined by a real battleship, the *Florida*, for an object that will duly transpire. Twelve of the freight steamers which had taken part in the feigned attack on Guam were also to be employed again in the guise of "transports."

The expedition was to sail for Yap and so maneuver as to suggest that a landing was about to be attempted. The port was to be shelled by the *Florida's* 12-in. battery, aided by the light guns with which her make-believe consorts had been equipped for the sake of appearance. If the fire was returned at least one of the false battleships was to simulate damage. The sham attack was to be continued for several hours, and at a suitable opportunity three of the "transports" would move in as though about to disembark troops.

In the meantime news of the attack would promptly reach Japanese headquarters at Manila, for Yap possessed a high-powered radio plant with which the Americans had studiously refrained from interfering. Further, it was prob-

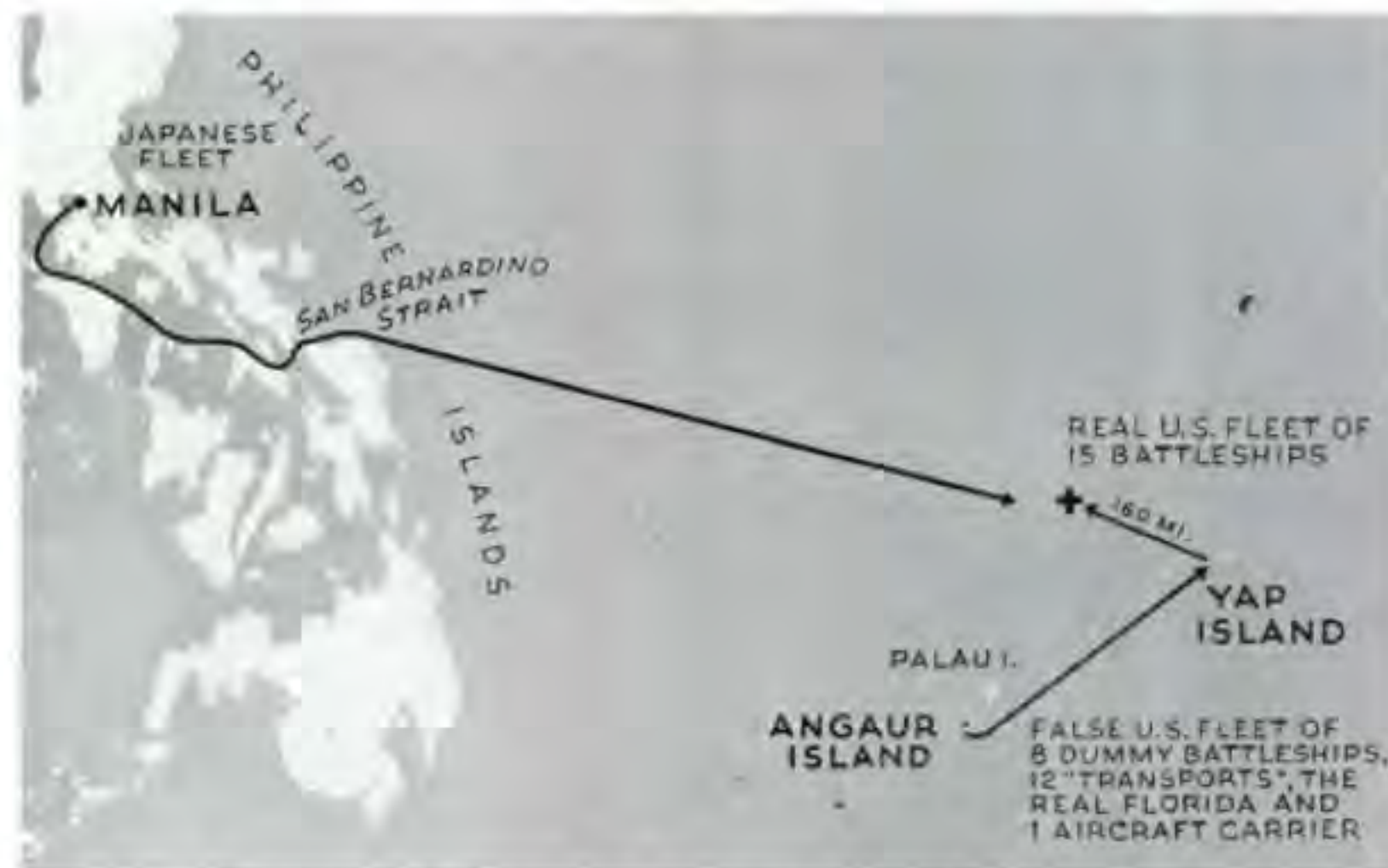
able that the expedition would have been sighted and reported by Japanese scouts while on its way to the island. There was scarcely any doubt that the Japanese battle fleet would hasten at full speed to the relief of Yap. They might suspect a stratagem, it was true, but, having no means of verifying that suspicion, they would almost certainly elect to take the risk.

All initial dispositions having been made, the Yap expeditionary force, commanded by Rear Admiral Hubbard, sailed from Angaur on Nov. 17. At the same moment Admiral Templeton, a hundred miles to the east, was preparing to take the real U. S. fleet to an appointed position near Yap. Admiral Hubbard held on toward the northeast until early on the morning of Nov. 18, when Yap came within sight. Leaving his "transports" astern, in charge of half the destroyers, Admiral Hubbard steamed slowly past the harbor and opened with his 12-in. guns. A battery ashore began a slow but well-directed fire. The

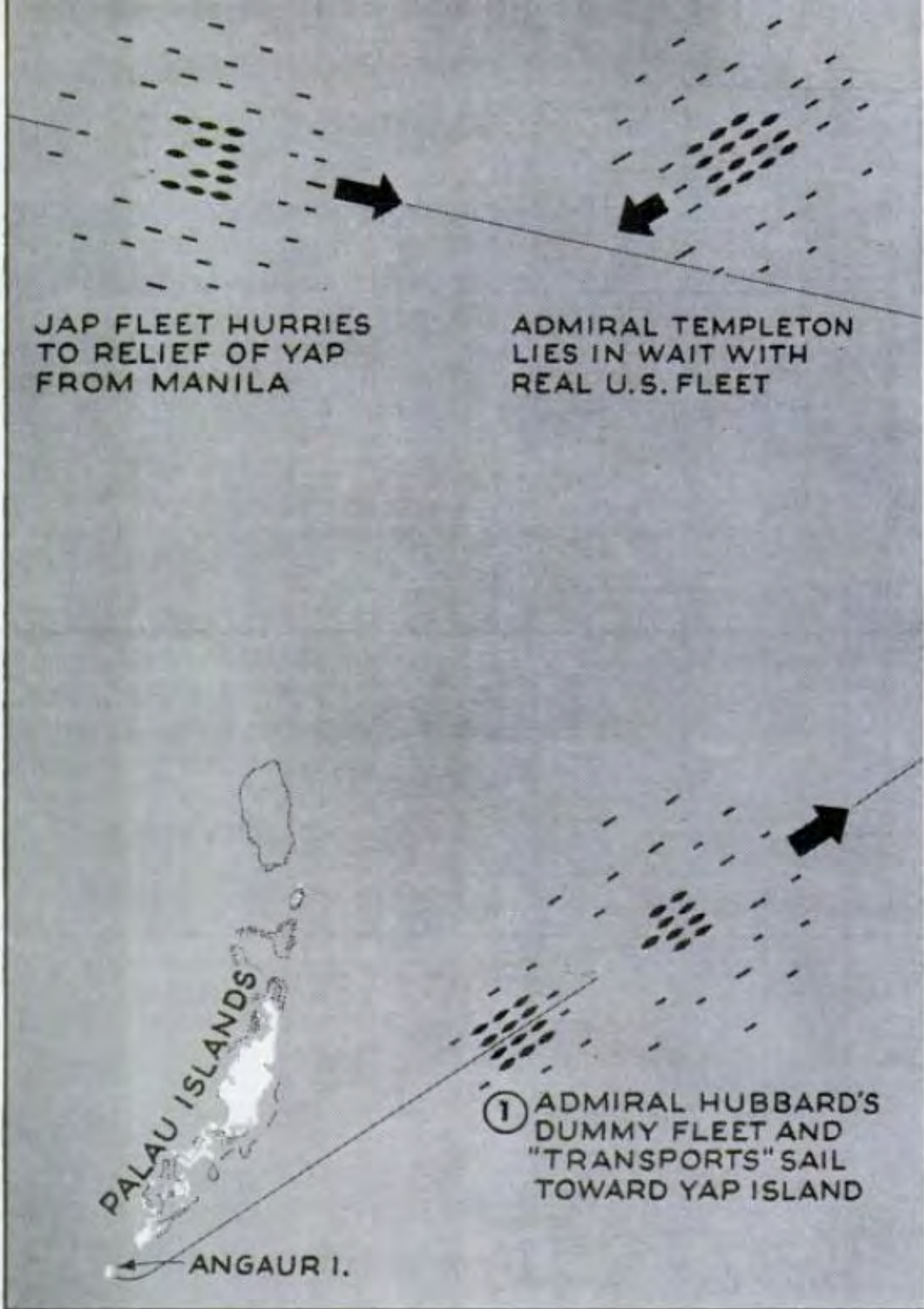
shore battery continued to fire at intervals all day and succeeded in hitting three of the dummy battleships—one of which, as prearranged, left the line and steamed slowly out to sea. The fact that yet another enemy battleship had been disabled was doubtless communicated immediately to Admiral Hiraga, who had already left Manila to rescue Yap. His confidence in a coming victory must have soared.

Sixty hours had now passed since the expedition had left Angaur, and, presuming the Japanese commander in chief to have heard from his scouts very soon after its departure, he might now be only five or six hours away. There was consequently not much time to spare. The dummy battleships and transports were ordered to return to Angaur. Thus at 9:15 p.m. the *Florida* parted from her consorts and, shortly after midnight, joined the real U. S. fleet lurking out of sight 100 miles west of Yap. Her arrival brought Admiral Templeton up to his full strength of 16 battleships.

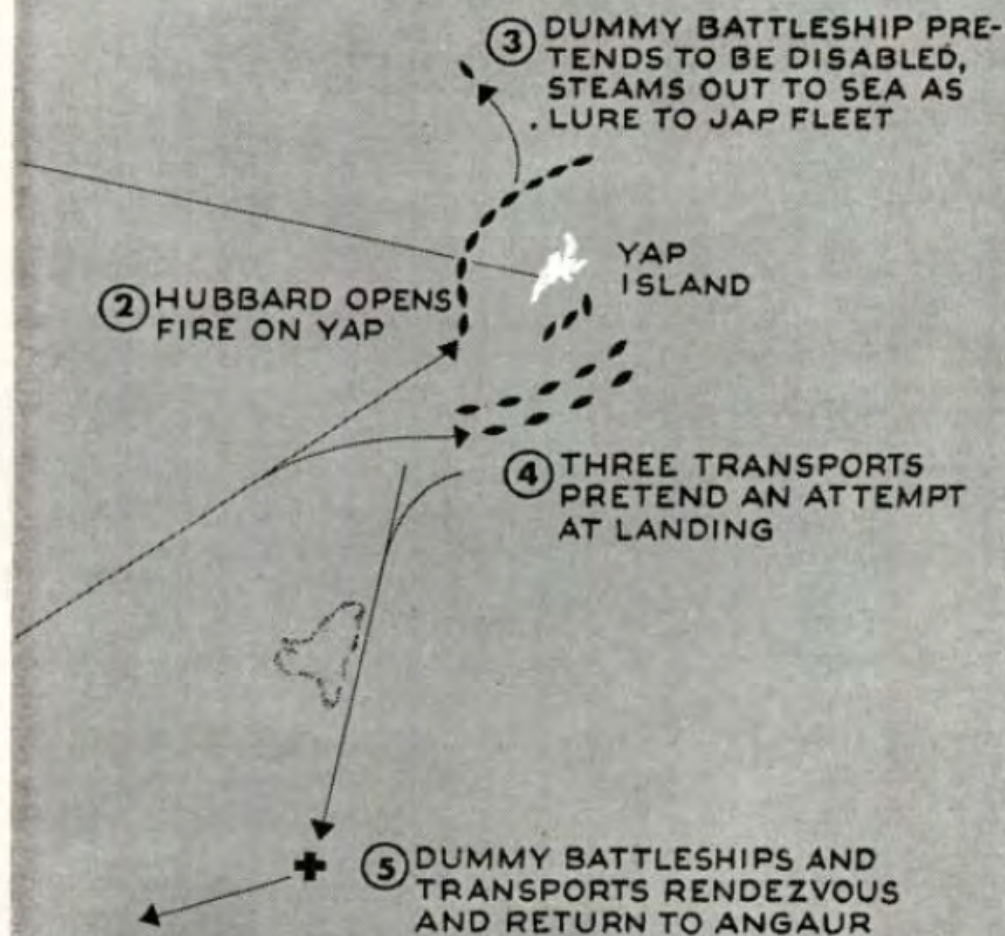
The rival fleets were now drawing together west of Yap at a collective speed of 40 knots. The air scouts on each side were speedily in touch, and the action began—as it had often been predicted the next great naval battle would begin—by a violent and reciprocal air offensive. Less than half the American machines were able to break through the Japanese aerial cordon but still the indomitable American pilots held on, and were almost within range of the Japanese fleet when six Japanese machines crossed in front of them at lightning speed, leaving a thick curtain of yellowish vapor in their wake as they passed. The American fliers were instantly conscious of a choking sensation.



U. S. WON DECISIVE SEA BATTLE OF IMAGINATIVE WAR BY TRAPPING JAPS OFF YAP



American victory at Yap depended on a ruse. U. S. Fleet of dummy ships pretended to attack Yap, thus drawing Japanese Fleet from Manila to Yap's rescue. Dummy fleet



then retired. Meanwhile the real U. S. Fleet, waiting unobserved northwest of Yap, cut south and getting between the Japanese Fleet and Manila brought the Japs to action.

Through some culpable oversight they had not been equipped with gas masks. All but two of the planes dived headlong into the sea, their pilots having been disabled by the noxious fumes. The occupants of the remaining two machines, which had passed through the gas screen before it had properly developed, got but a whiff of the poison, and though deadly sick were able to carry on. The torpedo plane was just about to release its weapon when apparently it was hit by a shell and blown to pieces. The bomber got one hit on a cruiser and was then shot down.

While this raid was in progress, the Japanese had launched a similar offensive against the American fleet. They blew a hole in the *Pennsylvania's* upper deck and gassed 80 men in the *Texas*, but all but seven of the machines were brought down. At 4:30 p.m. the advanced cruiser screens were in contact and hard fighting at once developed. The *Hartford*, *Olympia* and *Portland* all sustained damage and heavy casualties, but they had the satisfaction of seeing an enemy cruiser, the *Asbigara*, blow up and sink. As the outposts thus tested each other's mettle, the heavy squadrons were drawing rapidly within gun range.

The battle lines open fire

At 5:25 p.m. the *Colorado* opened with a two-gun salvo, the shots pitching slightly ahead of and over the leading Japanese ship. Sights having been adjusted, the *Colorado*, *Maryland* and *West Virginia* began firing full salvos, and at each discharge 24 tons of steel went roaring toward the enemy. Fire was now switched onto the second vessel, either the *Nagato* or the *Kaga*, two hits being recorded in the eighth salvo. Though the *Nagato* was struck but twice, she seemed to be severely damaged forward, and temporarily dropped out of the line. One 16-in. shell hit the *Mutsu*, wrecking her second turret and putting the guns out of action.

Every minute more of the American battleships were coming up to join in the terrible drumfire that was now smiting both the center and rear of the Japanese fleet.

At this, the fiercest stage of the action, many noteworthy episodes occurred. Five Japanese battle cruisers had not hitherto been closely engaged, as except for the *Akagi* their armor protection was too light to withstand severe pounding, and Admiral Hiraga had therefore held them in reserve, to await an opportunity favorable for their intervention. But his position was becoming so desperate that he re-

solved to take a bold step. At 5:40 p.m., therefore, he made certain signals to Vice Admiral Wada, whose five magnificent battle cruisers at once raced eastward at full speed, just beyond range of the American guns. On the way they fell in with the American Fourth Cruiser Division, which was covering the left flank of the battle fleet against destroyer attack. The Japanese were swift to seize the chance thus presented. A burst of fire came from the *Akagi's* huge 16-in. guns, promptly echoed by the 14-in. batteries of her consorts, and in less than a minute the cruiser *Troy* was a shattered wreck. The *Cleveland* also got her death wound and both the *Denver* and *Wilmington* were hit.

Even as the sound of this heavy cannonade far astern warned Admiral Templeton that something was amiss, his air scouts notified him of a new development. Having disposed of the Fourth Cruiser Division, Admiral Wada held on his northerly course for another five minutes and then swung sharp to the westward, his five battle cruisers, thanks to their much greater speed, now drawing parallel with the rear of the American line, consisting of the Fourth Battleship Division. Hit a dozen times by 16-in. and 14-in. shell, the *Wyoming* was leaking badly and had lost way. Her foremast and both funnels were gone, the stern group of turrets was disabled, and water was entering the starboard engine room through a hit below the waterline. Still worse was the plight of the *Florida*. One of the first shells from the *Akagi* had struck the conning tower, killing Admiral Hubbard and most of his staff. The ship was thus temporarily out of control, and, before she could be steadied on her course, she was hit by three full salvos.

Then an amazing thing happened. One, or perhaps two, of her after magazines must have exploded, for the whole stern section of the ship blew up, and those who were watching expected every instant to see her go to the bottom. But although practically one-third of her hull had been blown away, the battleship still kept afloat, and afloat she remained when the enemy passed on to seek other prey. Not until half an hour later did the *Florida* take her final plunge.

Before the *Florida* and *Wyoming* were battered into silence, their guns had done good work, inflicting heavy punishment upon the *Akagi* and the *Haruna*. The *Haruna* had a big hole just forward of the bow turret, and steaming as she was at 29 knots a great deal of water from the bow wave poured through this rent. Very soon she was perceptibly down by the head and it became necessary to slacken speed.

It was at this juncture that Admiral Wada tried to disengage his squadron, relying on his great speed to do this without difficulty. But the *Haruna* had now dropped to 22 knots. As more water entered

her bows she slowed to 18 knots and then to 16. The Americans, observing the *Haruna's* crippled condition, were plying her with shell. Riddled with shell, waterlogged and unmanageable, the *Haruna* was clearly doomed, and now American airplanes were winging down to finish her off.

While the action so far had surpassed in fury every other sea fight of modern times, the issue still hung in the balance. During the heaviest phase of the cannonade against the Japanese center, the *Hiuga* had been hit repeatedly, and but for Admiral Wada's timely intervention both this ship and the *Ise* would probably have been destroyed. As it was, the *Hiuga* had half her guns out of action and 3,000 tons of water in her hull. The *Ise* could still use most of her armament but was terribly battered, and with her rudders disabled was compelled to maneuver by means of her screws.

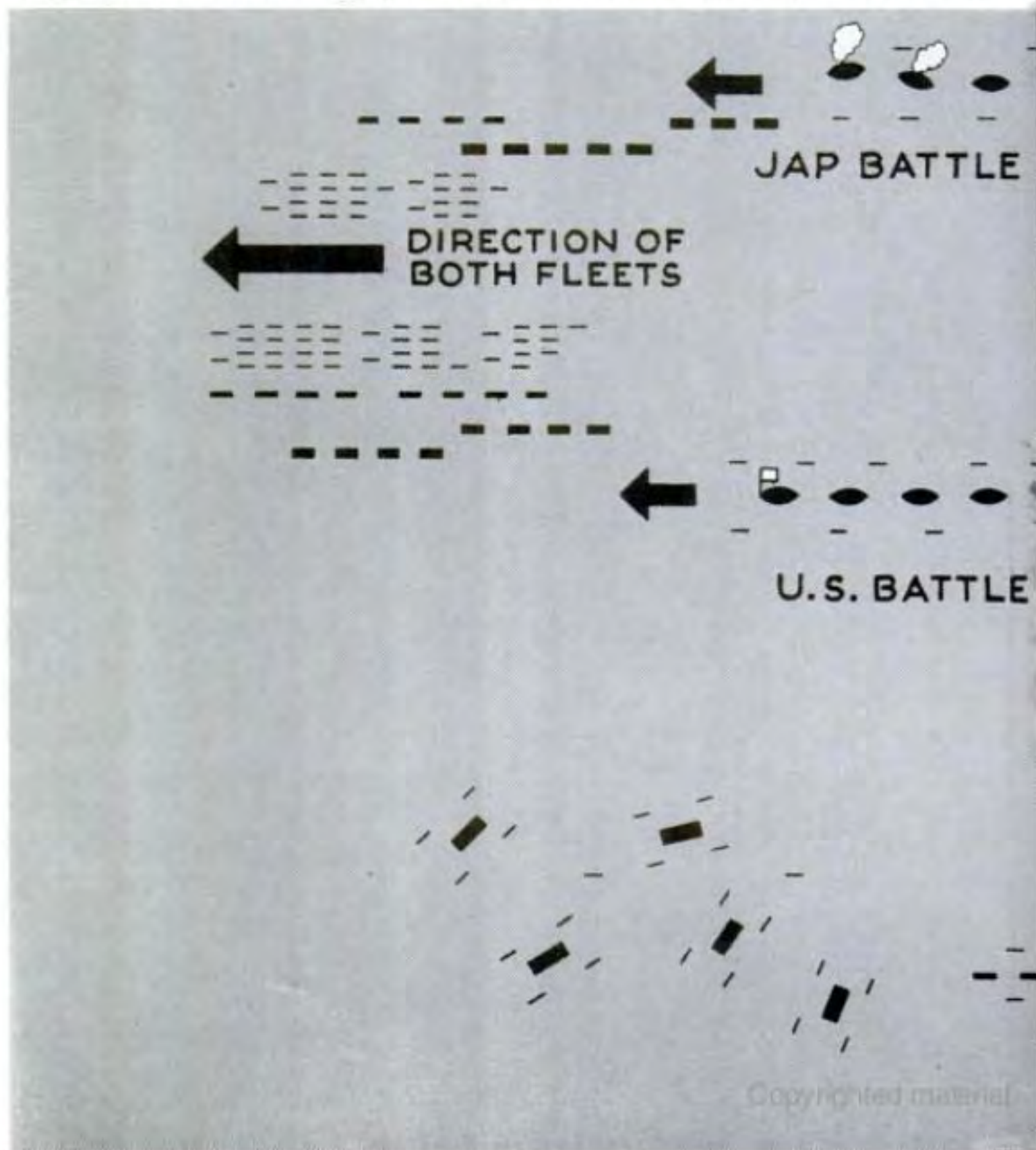
It was now 7 p.m. Taking advantage of the diversion created by his battle cruisers, Admiral Hiraga steamed at his utmost speed toward the northwest. Admiral Templeton, realizing that the last chance of getting in a decisive blow was slipping away, pressed forward with twelve battleships at a speed of 20 knots. At 8 p.m. the Admiral opened with all guns on the Japanese battleships, which immediately replied. At this comparatively short range hitting began almost at once, and there were moments when the leading Japanese battleship *Kaga* seemed to be spouting flame at every seam, so continuous were the shell bursts on her sides and decks. The *Kaga's* end came in one mighty volcanic eruption that shook the heavens, lighting up the whole sea with the glare of noonday. Then all was darkness again, and though American destroyers dashed to the spot on an errand of mercy, they found no trace of ship or crew.

It was now the turn of the *Mutsu*. Her strange behavior has been best described by Commander Elmer of the *Tennessee*:

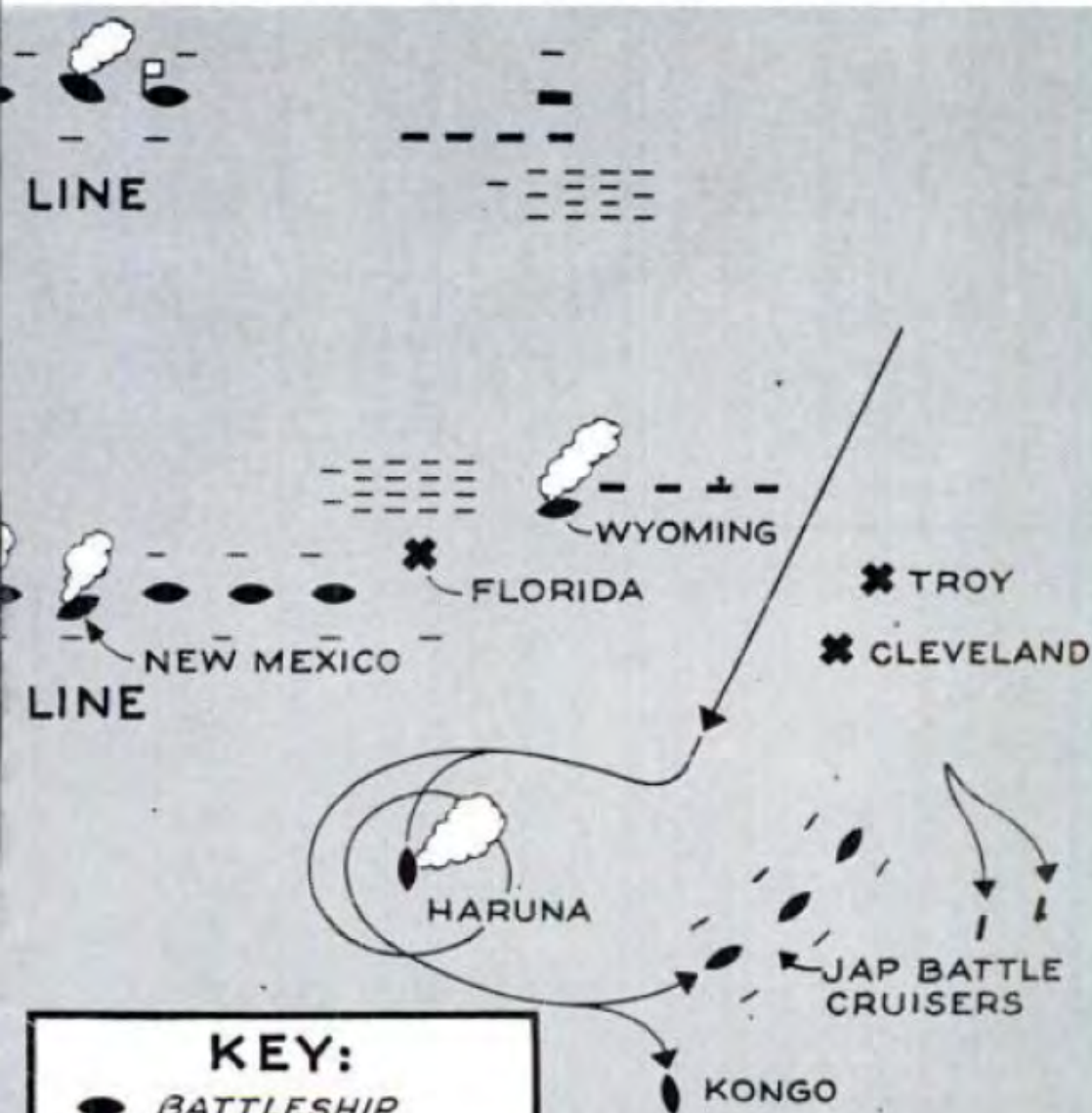
"Suddenly our spotters reported the *Mutsu* to have turned eight points to the right, which meant that she was coming straight at us . . . To my astonishment she came steadily on, and though her head had pointed first to our van, the progressive advance of our line was such that if she held on her present course she would intersect our division just astern of the *Tennessee*. Could it be that her officers, believing themselves doomed, had decided to commit hara-kiri on the grand scale? As the range closed to 12,000, then to 11,000, and even to 10,000 yd., we fired and fired till the guns grew hot and the paint on their chases rose up in blisters. But though the target was now so conspicuous, and coming nearer every moment, I am afraid the unusual sight of a big battleship charging headlong at us upset the nerves of the gunners, not only in our ship, but in the whole fleet, for I observed that many of the salvos were going wide. The *Mutsu* herself shot with wonderful accuracy from her six remaining guns.

"But as she came nearer and yet nearer, I could see her, as it were, disintegrating under the rain of sledge-hammer blows. Our shells seemed to be tearing through the ship from end to end. Still the *Mutsu* came on. But now her bows were so deep in the water that

In imaginary fight to the death the opposing battleships, screened by cruisers and destroyers, shell each other along a parallel course. Aircraft carriers follow behind or to



one side (*left*). Five Japanese battle cruisers (*right*) dash behind the U. S. battle line, sink *Troy*, *Cleveland* and *Florida* and damage *Wyoming* before *Haruna* and *Kongo* are disabled.



KEY:

- BATTLESHIP
- AIRCRAFT CARRIER
- HEAVY CRUISER
- LIGHT CRUISER
- DESTROYER
- ✖ SUNK

shells began to smash through the forecastle deck and plunge into the machinery. At 8:40 p.m., the range being then down to 7,000 yd., the Japanese battleship had stopped and was drifting broadside on to us. We gave her two more salvos and when last I saw her she was heeling over at 35°, clearly on the point of sinking."

Plight of the flagship

It was now close on 9 p.m. If in this running fight the Japanese had lost two of their finest battleships, they had succeeded in inflicting heavy damage on their pursuers. The flagship *West Virginia*, hit a dozen times by 16-in. shell at close range, was making water rapidly. Two turrets were disabled, and there were more than 400 casualties, including the commander in chief, who had been knocked senseless by a splinter of steel. Only by getting all the pumps to work could the flow of water into the forward compartments be checked. The *Colorado*, also, had ceased to be effective and had fallen miles astern. The *Maryland* was intact so far as fighting equipment went, but many of her executives had been killed. Few of the remaining ships had escaped hits of a more or less serious character, and barely half a dozen were in a condition to maintain their full speed. At this juncture the Japanese played their last card. Just as the leading American ships had reopened on the *Nagato*, a swarm of destroyers bore down upon them in two columns, to port and starboard respectively. They were immediately fired on by the battleships and cruisers, but the rush was not stopped until they had got within range. Admiral McArthur turned his line toward the approaching torpedoes, most of which passed harmlessly through; but the cruisers *Albany* and *Portland* and one battleship were hit. Then the Japanese destroyers found themselves assailed by a squadron of American boats, and those that broke away from the deadly grapple had to steam back through waters that were lashed into foam by the tempest of shell. Forty boats began the attack, and 18 returned.

If the battle had been rather less decisive than had been hoped for, it had certainly eliminated the Japanese fleet as a commanding factor in the situation—at least for some months to come. With a much smaller force at their disposal, the Japanese had sustained by far the heavier loss. Out of a total of twelve capital ships, no fewer than five had been accounted for—*Kaga*, *Mutsu*, *Kongo*, *Haruna* and *Kirishima*. Losses among the cruisers and destroyers had also been severe. As an effective unit the Japanese battle fleet had ceased to exist. On the American side only two big ships had gone—*Florida* and *Wyoming*, neither of the most powerful type. Fourteen battleships survived, with two in reserve in the U. S. Consequently, when its wounds had been healed, the American fleet could take the sea with a strength of 16 battleships. Three cruisers had been sunk, together with 23 destroyers, but these gaps would speedily be filled by new craft approaching completion. The United States had at length gained command of the sea in the main theater of war. It only remained to exploit this advantage by putting such pressure on Japan as would compel her to yield to the inevitable.