

The next engagement took place from 23 to 25 August when two U. S. Task Forces built around the SARITOLA and the ENTERPRISE met and severely damaged a strong enemy task force in the Eastern Solomons. All but stripped of their carrier support in the action, the Japanese broke off the fight although their powerful surface forces were still largely intact.

After this, no major action took place in the South Pacific area for about six weeks, but during that time the Navy had to keep supply lines open to Guadalcanal. Japanese submarines and air forces were active and there were numerous scattered actions which cost us the WAMP, as the result of being torpedoed by an enemy submarine, five destroyers and several other ships damaged. It was during this period that nightly runs by the Japanese between Bougainville and Guadalcanal, known as the "Tokyo Express", became famous and very troublesome.

The reinforcement and supply of our Marine forces on Guadalcanal had become a necessity. The battles of Cape Esperance on 11 October and Santa Cruz Islands on 26 October were fought as a result of our attempts to prevent the Japanese from landing further reinforcements at Guadalcanal and to make possible the reinforcement of our Marines there.

Early in the morning of 26 October 1942, our patrol planes made contact with three enemy forces, including three carriers. During the furious engagement which ensued, the HORNET suffered a bomb hit and was set afire by an enemy bomber which dived into her stack. The fires were extinguished but she then took two hits from Japanese torpedo planes, three more bomb hits and another suicide plane crash which started more fires. Of 27 attacking aircraft 26 were shot down by AA fire, but the attack which lasted 11 minutes left the HORNET dead in the water with many fires on board and with a decided list. The HORNET was taken in tow by the WASHINGTON but, in the afternoon, she was again attacked by torpedoes and dive bombers and had to be abandoned and sunk by our forces.

Our losses in the Battle of Santa Cruz Island consisted of the HORNET, the destroyer PORTER and 74 aircraft. The ENTERPRISE, the new battleship SOUTH DAKOTA, known as "BATTLESHIP X", the light cruiser SAN JUAN and the Destroyer SMITH all received hits.

We sank no enemy vessels in the engagement and our carrier strength was perilously low, but two enemy carriers had been put out of action and four Japanese air groups had been cut to pieces.

The Battle of Guadalcanal found us with two new battleships, four heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, three AA light cruisers and 22 destroyers. The damaged ENTERPRISE was not ready for action and we were outnumbered in land-based aircraft. On the other hand, the Japanese had concentrated surface forces in the Rabaul-Buin area estimated at two carriers, four battleships, five heavy cruisers, about 30 destroyers and a large number of transports.

While landing supplies and reinforcements on Guadalcanal on 11 and 12 November, during which time our forces were under heavy attack from Japanese aircraft, our scouts located strong enemy forces, disposed in three groups, bearing down on Guadalcanal from the Northwest.

Our transport group was escorted clear of the area and shortly thereafter on 13 November, our Force of five cruisers, 8 destroyers, on a dark, moonless night, nearly collided with the Japanese force before a gun was fired.

The action began when the Japanese illuminated our ships with searchlights and both sides opened fire at close range.

The ensuing action, which lasted 24 minutes, was one of the most furious sea battles ever fought. The Battle of Guadalcanal continued in a series of fierce engagements over a 3 day period, ending on 15 November. Although we sustained heavy losses in ships and personnel, including Rear Admiral Callaghan and Admiral Casian Young of the S.S. PRINCIPAL, the Battle of Guadalcanal was a decisive victory for the American Navy and our position in the Southern Solomons was not again seriously threatened by the Japanese.