

CHAPTER 4

7 AUGUST: DOG DAY

In the predawn hours of 7 August, code-named Dog Day, the carriers remained southwest of Guadalcanal while Turner's Amphibious Force proceeded up and around the northwest tip of Guadalcanal before splitting into various parts. The fifteen transports of Transport Group X-Ray followed the Guadalcanal shoreline past Lunga Point to their landing area, while the four destroyer transports of Transport Group Yoke headed for Tulagi. Both groups had arrived at their destinations without incident at 0645 and 0630 respectively.

Meanwhile, naval gunfire from the three ships of Fire Support Group Mike engaged targets in the Tulagi area. This followed an earlier bombardment, begun at 0513, by Fire Support Group Love of the Guadalcanal beach landing area, with no response from the enemy.

The carriers were positioned in line abreast about five miles apart. At 0530, from a point 95 miles southwest of Tulagi, they turned into the wind and began launching aircraft for a significant program of air strikes involving 93 aircraft detailed in the table below:

7 August Dawn Airstrikes			
Target: Tulagi		Target: Guadalcanal	
Command plane	1 x TBF-1	Command plane	1 x SBD-3
VF-71	16 x F4F-4	VF-5	12 x F4F-4
VS-71	15 x SBD-3	VS-3 & VB-3	23 x SBD-3
VS-5	9 x SBD-3	VF-6	8 x F4F-4

After an early breakfast held at 0345, the personnel aboard the carriers went to work in what would prove to be an extraordinarily busy day. The initial launches were conducted in darkness with only white taillights illuminated. There was only a hint of light in the distant eastern sky, and no horizon was discernible. With the three carriers in close proximity, there was much confusion as the pilots tried to assemble themselves into formations.

Few of the formations managed to fully form up as intended. Then a dazzling explosion added to the confusion, interpreted by many as the commencement of an enemy air attack. However, it had been caused by a 1,000-pound bomb accidentally jettisoned from one of *Wasp's* departing VS-71 SBDs due to a faulty shackle. Once the explosion was realised for what it was, launching continued apace.

The aviators were helped by clear weather and light from a quarter moon. While Lieutenant Commander Courtney Shands, the commanding officer of VF-71, could only initially assemble eleven of his sixteen F4F-4s, his formation was the first to reach the Tulagi area. Tulagi itself was an island which lay off the southern coast of the much larger Florida Island, while two miles east of