

## CHAPTER 12

# 25 AUGUST: THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS III

The night of 24/25 August saw the Japanese continue their pressure against Henderson Field. Late on the afternoon of 24 August four destroyers, the *Isokaze*, *Kawakaze*, *Mutsuki* and *Yayoi*, departed the Shortlands for the run down The Slot to Guadalcanal. After joining with the *Kagero*, they began bombarding Lunga Point just after midnight, continuing for about one hour. No material damage was inflicted but two Marines were killed and three wounded. The Americans correctly estimated five destroyers to be involved, and at 0230 Lieutenant Colonel Richard C Mangrum led three VMSB-232 SBDs to attack them with 500-pound bombs. Two near misses were claimed, and one bomb failed to explode. The SBDs then strafed the destroyers, with slight damage inflicted on the *Kagero*.

At 0340 five floatplanes from Mikawa's Distant Cover force of four heavy cruisers bombed and strafed the Lunga area, but the raid did no damage. Twenty minutes later another trio of SBDs launched to attack the Japanese destroyers. These SBDs were from the USN group that had flown in the previous evening, which had been designated as Flight 300.<sup>1</sup> The destroyers had been withdrawing northward to join Tanaka's convoy and were found in the Indispensable Strait between Guadalcanal and Malaita. A hit was claimed by Ensign Walter Brown from VS-5, but he subsequently became lost and ditched his plane off the coast of Malaita.

Meanwhile PBYs had been aloft during the night searching for the expected incoming Japanese ships. At 0300 a VP-23 PBY discovered a force described as one aircraft carrier, one light cruiser and five destroyers steaming on a slight south westerly course 180 miles north of Guadalcanal. This was Tanaka's troop convoy, although the "aircraft carrier" was a misidentification of one of the three transports.

No Japanese carriers remained in the vicinity of Guadalcanal, as Nagumo had chosen to turn away to the north late the previous day. Mikawa had then ordered Tanaka to postpone the landing, an order which a flustered Tanaka likely expected. However, on hearing reports from Nagumo's flyers that two American carriers had been left burning, Tanaka was once again ordered to proceed to Guadalcanal. This was a foolish move in the absence of air cover.

At Henderson Field, General Vandegrift learned of the sighting report at 0430, and ordered a dawn strike to destroy the aircraft carrier believed bearing down on the Marine's position. This consisted of eight SBDs (five from VMSB-232 and a trio from Flight 300) each carrying a 1,000-pound bomb, escorted by eight F4F-4s from VMF-223, which departed Henderson Field at 0600.

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<sup>1</sup> *Enterprise's* air operations team allocated three-digit sequential flight numbers to each formation. Flight 300 had been allocated to these SBDs when they took off from the carrier the previous afternoon.