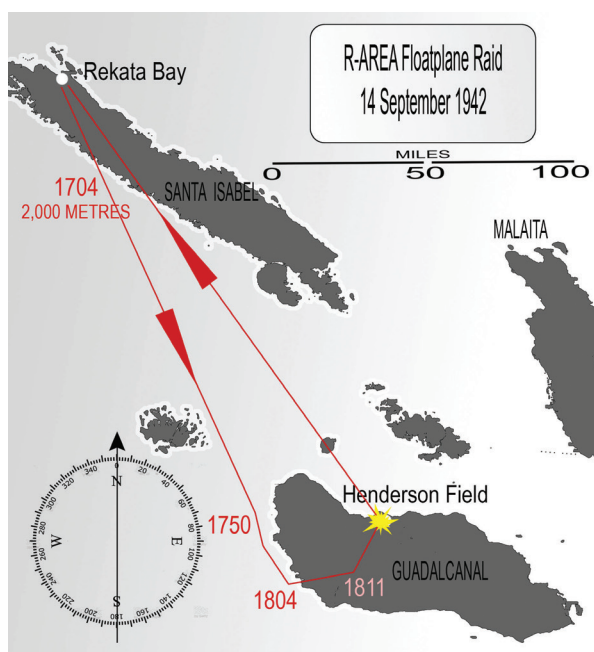




An F1M2 Pete floatplane in the Shortland Islands. Using the forward base at Rekata Bay, nineteen R-Area Air Force Petes attacked Henderson Field on 14 September.



A map showing the 14 September Henderson Field raid by a mix of R-Area Air Force Petes and Rufes.

carriers, following the report by Lieutenant (jg) Mizukura Kiyoshi's No. 14 *Ku Emily W-46* the previous day. Neither had 11th Air Fleet searches found anything. This was certainly not for want of effort; ten Mavis flying boats were airborne on 14 September: four from No. 14 *Ku* and six from the Toko *Ku*, all flying missions of ten to twelve hours duration.

Because of this failure, Yamamoto ordered the ships in his vanguard to reverse course. This change was noted by Hoffman, but his report was not immediately received by Noyes due to Japanese jamming. Hence the VS-72 SBDs searched to a distance of 280 miles but found no trace of the enemy ships. It was later calculated that they missed them by only 50 miles. Subsequently the carrier planes all landed back aboard the *Wasp* and *Hornet* soon after 1700.³

However, a striking force of fourteen 11th BG B-17s launched from Espiritu Santo at 1230 had better luck. Seven Fortresses from three different squadrons found enemy ships which they bombed from 10,000 feet through heavy anti-aircraft fire. A total of 25 x 500-pound bombs were dropped, with the heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Kumano* suffering slight damage from near-misses.

During this attack Lieutenant Hugh W Owens, flying B-17E 41-2527, was hit in the No. 4 engine by anti-aircraft fire. During the return flight to Espiritu Santo, Owens lagged behind the others and apparently got lost. The 26th BS Fortress and its crew of nine were never seen again.⁴

The aerial action was not over for 14 September as a substantial R-Area Air Force strike group had departed the Shortlands at 1300. This comprised nineteen F1M Petes each armed with a pair of 60-kilogram bombs. These were drawn from the air groups of four different seaplane tenders: the *Chitose* (8 Petes), *Sanyo Maru* (4), *Sanuki Maru* (5) and *Kamikawa Maru* (2).

³ If the strike had succeeded Noyes would have effectively revealed his position. In response Nagumo's carriers would have likely moved south, setting the stage for an intriguing carrier duel the following day.

⁴ The following day 69th BS B-26s searched to the northwest of Efate to a distance of 200 miles but no trace of the B-17 was found.