



The relative positions of the Japanese and American forces on the morning of 26 October, which were now within air strike range of one another. For simplicity only the American search area is shown, but the Japanese search also picked up the TF-61 carriers. Within a short time both forces had launched air strikes. Initially the Advance Force remained undetected by the Americans. The Junyo subsequently turned northeast to join Nagumo's carriers.

Hoffman had pinpointed one of the Japanese carriers at 0310, Kinkaid did not receive this report (rebroadcast by COMAIRSOPAC from the *Curtiss*) until 0412, or just over an hour later.¹ By that time he was launching his dawn patrol of sixteen VB-10 and VS-10 SBDs from the *Enterprise*. These searched sectors to the west to a distance of 200 miles in eight pairs, with each dive bomber lugging a 500-pound bomb. Although some officers urged him to immediately launch the *Hornet's* attack group on a search/strike mission, Kinkaid preferred to wait for results from his dawn search.

As the planes climbed into the lightening predawn sky, they found scattered clouds at 1,300 feet and occasional rain squalls, but then excellent visibility with conditions of "ceiling unlimited". For all participants it was obvious the day would bring a major action.

It did not take long for the opposing forces to spot each other. After flying just 85 miles from the *Enterprise*, the VB-10 pair of SBDs flown by Lieutenant Vivien W Welch and Lieutenant Bruce A McGraw saw an aircraft flying about three miles away on a reciprocal track which they identified as a "Mitsubishi Type 97". Aside from the manufacturer, their assessment was

¹ COMAIRSOPAC and TF-61 were operating in different time zones, one hour apart. Generally, times quoted are those that apply for the units involved. For example, TF-61 used -12 hours and COMAIRSOPAC -11 hours. However, for this chapter times involving TF-61 have been converted to the COMAIRSOPAC time zone.