

CHAPTER 5

13 NOVEMBER: NAVAL BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL II

As noted in the previous chapter, the *Enterprise* was still under repair at Noumea when the unfolding emergency warranted Halsey to put her on notice to sail. The carrier departed just after midday on 11 November, and after exiting Noumea harbour the *Enterprise* air group flew aboard from Tontouta. The group was at full strength in fighters and dive-bombers: VF-10 operated 38 F4Fs, while VS-10 had sixteen SBDs and VB-10 fifteen SBDs. There was a slight shortfall in VT-10 TBFs, with only eight available plus the air group commander's plane.

Sailing with *Enterprise* were the battleships *South Dakota* and *Washington*, two cruisers and eight destroyers. Together these warships formed Task Force 16 under the command of Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, as detailed in the table below:

Task Force 16 Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid	
Carrier	<i>Enterprise</i>
Battleships	<i>South Dakota, Washington</i>
Cruisers	<i>Northampton, San Diego</i>
Destroyers	<i>Hughes, Anderson, Mustin, Russell, Walke, Morris, Clark, Benham</i>

Enterprise had sailed with repair parties aboard still working. Although the air group was just about at full strength, air operations could not be undertaken at full efficiency as the front elevator was still not operational. If it could not be repaired a back-up plan was to send part of the air group ashore, particularly the larger TBFs that took up the most space, were cumbersome to handle and needed the longest deck runway to take-off.

During 11-12 November TF-16 headed northwest from New Caledonia, and then north towards the Solomons. On the evening of 12 November Kinkaid received the sighting report from Cactus Air Force of two small carriers and two destroyers only 150 miles from Henderson Field. Although the report of "carriers" was erroneous, it was clear that Japanese ships were closing on Guadalcanal and Kinkaid hastened northwards. At dawn on 13 November, TF-16 was about 270 miles directly south of Guadalcanal, and almost within range to launch air strikes if required. That morning TF-16 was strengthened by *Pensacola*, *Gwin* and *Preston* that Halsey had earlier released from duty with Turner's TF-67.

For those ashore at Lunga it was clear that a major naval engagement had taken place in the early hours of 13 November, and from 0500 three SBDs took off to get a clear picture of events and to track damaged American ships. Leading this mission was the commanding officer of VMSB-132, Major Joseph Sailer. Approximately ten miles southeast of Savo Island they found *Atlanta* dead in the water with men on deck and being abandoned, *Portland* was down by