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ROOSEVELT'S STRATEGIC DILEMMA

The news of Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945 had stirred a flicker of optimism in the Berlin bunker. Hitler had sustained his spirits during the last year of the war by two beliefs: that his secret weapons would break the will of the British; and that the contradictions of an alliance between a decadent capitalist republic, a moribund empire and a Marxist dictatorship must inevitably lead to the disintegration of that alliance. By March 1945, when his V-2 had been driven beyond the last sites from which Britain could be hit, he knew that his secret weapons had failed. Thereafter he clung all the more desperately to the hope of dissension among the Allies. Goebbels, the political philosopher of his court, had explained to some intimates in early April how such a falling-out might occur. According to the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, he had 'developed his thesis that, for reasons of Historical Necessity and Justice, a change of fortune was inevitable, like the Miracle of the House of Brandenburg in the Seven Years War.' When Frederick the Great of Prussia faced defeat by the combined armies of Russia, Austria and France in the Seven Years War, the tsarina Elisabeth had unexpectedly died, to be succeeded by a tsar who was Frederick's admirer; the alliance then collapsed and Frederick's Prussia survived. In April 1945, on hearing the news of the President's passing, Goebbels exclaimed, 'the tsarina is dead', and telephoned Hitler 'in an ecstasy' to 'congratulate' him. 'It is the turning-point,' he said, 'it is written in the stars.'

Previous page: *US Marines in the hellish landscape of Iwo Jima, a speck in the Pacific defended to the death by a Japanese garrison of 23,000 men.*

Hitler himself was briefly moved to share Goebbels's euphoria. Throughout the latter years of the war he had come to identify closely with Frederick the Great and was even ready to believe that the evolution of his fortunes might mirror those of the Prussian king. He was particularly ready to believe that Roosevelt's death would produce the disabling crack in the alliance that he predicted, since one of his fundamental misappreciations was that the American people were unwarlike and had been drawn into the conflict by the machinations of their President. 'The arch-culprit for this war', he had told a Spanish diplomat in August 1941, 'is Roosevelt, with his freemasons, Jews and general Jewish-Bolshevism.' He said, whether he believed it or not, that he had proof of Roosevelt's 'Jewish ancestry'. He was certainly obsessed by the number of Jews in American government, including Henry Morgenthau, the Secretary of the Treasury, whose plan to reduce defeated Germany to a nation of cultivators and pastoralists had been leaked and republished in the German press in September 1944, to the great benefit of Goebbels's propaganda for a 'total war' effort.

Hitler's understanding of America's commitment to the war was almost exactly contrary to the truth. Isolationism was certainly a powerful force in American politics before December 1941, while America's parents remained naturally reluctant to see their sons depart to a foreign war up to the moment of Pearl Harbor. Few Americans, however, objected to the measures of rearmament enacted in 1940, which doubled the size of the fleet, allocated funds for an air force of 7800 combat aircraft – three times the size of the Luftwaffe – and increased the size of the army from 200,000 to one million men, to be raised by conscription. When war came, moreover, the nation reacted enthusiastically. The sense of being 'out of things' had waxed powerfully in the United States during the eighteen months of the Blitz and the Battle of the Atlantic: so too had hostility to Hitler, as a paradigm of everything against which American civilisation stood. As in Europe in 1914, the coming of war was ultimately almost a relief, since Americans had been oppressed by indecision and inactivity and were untainted by any fear of defeat.

Roosevelt too saw Hitler as a tyrant and a malefactor. However, Hitler's belief that Roosevelt dragged his people to war reluctantly behind him is at variance with the facts; more accurately, the facts of Roosevelt's war policy, in the months before Pearl Harbor, defy objective arrangement or analysis. Roosevelt's attitude to United States entry into the Second World War remains profoundly ambiguous, as do the aims and objectives of his war-making in the three and a half years in which he acted as commander-in-chief of the United States forces.

Roosevelt is by far the most enigmatic of the major figures of 1939–45. Stalin, though devious, double-dealing and treacherous in his methods, steadfastly pursued a quite limited set of aims: while determined to sustain his position as head of government, party and army, whoever he had to dismiss or even kill to maintain his power, he wanted, first, to save the Soviet Union from defeat, second, to expel the Wehrmacht from Soviet territory and, third, to extract the largest possible benefit – territorial, diplomatic, military

and economic – from the Red Army's eventual victory. Hitler, however mysterious the workings of his psyche, also held to a clear-cut if wildly over-ambitious strategy: he wanted revenge for Versailles, then German mastery of the continent, followed by the subjugation of Russia and the eventual exclusion of the Anglo-Saxon powers from any influence in European affairs. Churchill was transparently a patriot, a romantic and an imperialist: victory was his first and last desire; only secondarily did he consider how victory might be gained in a way that secured British interests in Europe and the survival of the British Empire overseas. His 'naturally open and unsuspecting nature', as his wife described it, automatically revealed his motives to all who treated with him during the war. Captious and contrary though he often was, he had no capacity for sustained dissimulation, grasped eagerly at the semblance of generosity in the statements of others and was as powerfully swayed as his listeners by the force and nobility of his own oratory.

Roosevelt too was a magnificent speaker; his range, indeed, was far greater than Churchill's, for he was the master of not only the high-flown set-piece – his proclamation of the 'Four Freedoms' to Congress in January 1941, for example, or his 'Day of Infamy' speech after Pearl Harbor – but also the intimate radio appeal to families and individuals in his 'fireside chats', a medium of political communication which he himself invented, the *ad hominem* stump speech of the political campaign, subtly varied from place to place and audience to audience, the disingenuously frank news conference, the personal telephone call, above all the face-to-face conversation, flattering, funny, discursive, beguiling and ultimately almost wholly baffling to the interlocutor who sat mesmerised by the flow of words. Roosevelt was a magician with words. According to his biographer James McGregor Burns, he sent visitors away from the Oval Office entranced by his 'expansiveness, openness, geniality'; but they rarely took back with them any answer to the problems or questions they had brought. For Roosevelt talked perhaps above all 'to find bearings and moorings in his own experiences and recollections'. Roosevelt had dozens of attitudes and a few deeply held values, which were precisely those of Americans of his class and time: he believed in human dignity and freedom, in economic opportunity, in political compromise, he felt deeply for the hardships of the poor, and he detested recourse to violence; but he had few policies, either for peace or for war, while war itself he found utterly distasteful.

Hence his profoundly ambiguous attitude towards American involvement. Churchill had sustained his own spirits during the darkest hours of 1940 and 1941 by the belief that the New World would eventually come forth to redress the balance of the Old. Roosevelt had given him every reason to believe that such would be the outcome. He had erected an American armed neutrality against the Axis almost from the moment of Hitler's opening of the war, selling arms to Britain and France which would certainly have been refused to Germany, then authorising unrestricted 'cash and carry' arms shipments and progressively extending American protection to Britain-bound convoys in the Atlantic. He first defined a neutrality zone which effectively denied the U-boats access to American waters, then in

April 1941 extended the zone to the mid-ocean line and allowed American warships to act as convoy escorts, while in July he dispatched American Marines to replace British troops in the garrison of Iceland, which Britain had summarily occupied after the fall of Denmark in 1940. On 11 March 1941 Congress, at his persuasion, passed the Lend-Lease Act, which effectively allowed Britain to borrow war supplies from the United States against the promise of later repayment; in February he had sponsored Anglo-American staff talks in Washington (the ABC-1 conference) which agreed on most of the strategic fundamentals, including 'Germany First', which would in practice be implemented after December.

By every outward sign, therefore, Churchill had reason to believe that the President was leading his nation to intervention on Britain's side; certainly Hitler was acutely aware of that danger and laid his U-boat commanders under strict orders not to provoke the Americans in any way at all – even after Roosevelt authorised the freezing of all German assets in the United States in June 1941. Churchill, in his private conversations with the President on the transatlantic scrambler telephone (erratically intercepted by the Germans), was given even more strongly to understand the warmth of the President's commitment, while from the Placentia Bay meeting of August 1941 he brought back the agreement that the United States Navy would protect all ships in a convoy which included one American ship, in effect a means of defying Dönitz to sink an American warship. On his return from Placentia Bay, Churchill told the war cabinet that Roosevelt was 'obviously determined that they should come in'; his concluding message had been that 'he would wage war but not declare it, and that he would become more and more provocative'. If the Germans 'did not like it', Roosevelt said, 'they could attack American forces.'

Churchill's Chiefs of Staff were more suspicious and formed a different impression. A staff officer, Ian Jacob, noted in his diary that the United States Navy 'seem to think that the war can be won by our simply not losing it at sea', and that the army 'sees no prospect of being able to do anything for a year or two'. He observed that not 'a single American officer had shown the slightest keenness to be in the war on our side. They are a charming lot of individuals but they appear to be living in a different world from ourselves.' Moreover, when on 31 October the Germans committed the ultimate provocation by sinking the destroyer USS *Reuben James* in the Atlantic with the loss of 115 American lives, Roosevelt chose not to regard it as a *casus belli* – though it was a far more flagrant act of aggression than, for example, the 'Gulf of Tonkin' incident used by President Johnson to authorise American military intervention in Vietnam in 1964.

Roosevelt's inaction over the sinking of the *Reuben James* may be taken as the key to the 'strategic enigma' he remained during 1941, as his biographer James MacGregor Burns has characterised him.

Roosevelt was following a simple policy: all aid to Britain short of war. This policy was part of a long heritage of Anglo-American friendship; it was a practical way of blocking Hitler's aspirations in the west; it could easily be implemented by two

nations used to working with one another; it suited Roosevelt's temperament, met the needs and pressures of the British, and was achieving a momentum of its own. But it was not a grand strategy . . . it did not emerge from clear-cut confrontation of political and military alternatives. . . . Above all this strategy was a negative one in that it could achieve its full effect – that is, joint military and political action with Britain – only if the Axis took action that would force the United States into war. It was a strategy neither of war nor of peace, but a strategy to take effect (aside from war supply to Britain and a few defensive actions in the Atlantic) only in the event of war. . . . [Roosevelt] was still waiting for a major provocation from Hitler even while recognising that it might not come at all. Above all, he was trusting to luck, to his long-tested flair for timing. . . . He had no plans. 'I am waiting to be pushed into the situation,' he told Morgenthau in May – and clearly it had to be a strong shove.

Trusting to luck and waiting to be shoved were to characterise Roosevelt's conduct as commander-in-chief from Pearl Harbor almost to the very end of his life. Revisionist historians have argued that he was playing a deep game both before the United States entry into the war and during the years thereafter: that he saw in Britain's isolation and desperate need for arms on any terms a means of liquidating her overseas investments (as they were indeed liquidated by 'cash and carry' sales), and thus of reducing the mistress of the world's greatest empire – an institution he disliked as strongly as he did industrial trusts and financial cartels within his own country – to a state where she could not resist American pressure to divest herself of her colonies. This is surely to endow Roosevelt with a Machiavellianism he did not possess. War, Machiavelli said, is the only proper study for a prince; and Roosevelt was indeed princely in a distinctively Renaissance style, transacting much of his business through a court favourite, Harry Hopkins, permitting no official – not even the implacable Marshall – to establish himself as indispensable to him, dispensing charm and empty flattery with lordly largesse, operating a political oubliette for those who incurred his displeasure, maintaining a private country palace as a refuge from the heats and longueurs of Washington (no Camp David for FDR), even formally maintaining a mistress in the White House and treating his cousin-wife of thirty years as the honoured spouse of a dynastic marriage of convenience. None the less Roosevelt was not Machiavellian in strategy, for the simple reason that the wealth, power and ethos of the New World had liberated its rulers from the Old World's narrow needs to dissemble and traduce. The United States had been founded on the principle of 'no entangling alliances'; it had grown up to riches which absolved it from the temptation to pursue cheap and temporary advantages over weaker states.

As a result, Roosevelt was able to hold aloof from the business of directing war, an activity alien to his temperament. Such an aloofness was not granted to any of the other leaders. Churchill, of course, revelled in high command, dedicated his days (and nights) to

war-making, had rooms, suites, even whole houses adapted to his needs as a wartime Prime Minister, preferred his 'siren suit' to any other garb (though he also kept handy his uniforms of an honorary air commodore and an honorary colonel of the Cinque Ports Battalion), demanded a constant diet of Ultra intelligence intercepts and lived in hour-to-hour intimacy with his military advisers. Hitler turned himself into a military hermit after the opening of Barbarossa, seeing few but his generals, even though he found their company grating. Stalin's wartime routine conformed strangely in pattern to Hitler's – secretive, nocturnal, troglodyte. Roosevelt scarcely altered his pattern of life at all after Pearl Harbor. Unthreatened by air attack, he continued to live at the White House, occasionally vacationing at Hyde Park, and there pursued a timetable that drove the methodical and purposeful almost to distraction. Marshall's day was measured to the minute: his only relaxation was to visit his wife in his official quarters for lunch, which was served as he stepped on to the veranda from his staff car. Roosevelt lunched off a tray brought into the Oval Office, did not begin work until ten in the morning and took few telephone calls at night. According to Burns, there were a few fixed points in his week:

He saw the congressional Big Four – the Vice-President, the Speaker and the majority leader of each chamber – on Monday or Tuesday; met with the press on Tuesday afternoons and Friday mornings; and presided over a Cabinet meeting on Friday afternoons. [Otherwise] there seemed to be no pattern at all in the way that Roosevelt did his work. Sometimes he hurried through appointments on crucial matters and dawdled during lesser ones. He ignored most letters altogether. . . . He took many phone calls, refused others, saw inconsequential and dull people, and ignored others of apparently greater political or intellectual weight – all according to some mystifying structure of priorities known to no one, perhaps not even to himself.

This pattern, or lack of it, persisted from 7 December 1941 to 12 April 1945. Unlike Churchill, who was constantly on the move – to Paris (before the fall of France), to Cairo, to Moscow, to Athens (where he spent Christmas Day 1944 while the sound of gunfire between British troops and ELAS rebels rocked the city), to Rome, Naples, Normandy, the Rhine – Roosevelt travelled little. His mobility was, of course, limited by his physical disability, which was the result of poliomyelitis and which a discreet press disguised from its readership almost completely. Nevertheless he travelled when he chose, but during the war his travels took him only to Casablanca in January 1943, Quebec twice (August 1943 and September 1944), Cairo and Tehran at the end of 1944 and Yalta, in the Russian Crimea, in February 1945. He saw nothing of the war at first hand, no bombed cities, no troops at the front, no prisoners, no after-effects of battle, and probably did not choose to; he directed American strategy as he had directed the New Deal – by lofty rhetoric and by rare but decisive strikes at the conjunctions of power.

There were effectively four decisive actions in all. The first was his endorsement of

the 'Germany First' decision, advanced by Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, in November 1940, adopted by the Anglo-American ABC-1 conference of February–March 1941, agreed with Churchill at Placentia Bay in August, but enshrined as national policy only after Pearl Harbor, when Roosevelt, who might with his political heart so easily have yielded to the popular demand for vengeance on Japan, let his strategic head dictate that the greater should be beaten before the lesser enemy. The second was his settlement of the dispute between Marshall and the British in London in July 1942 on terms which authorised the Torch landing in North Africa, with all the dubious consequences that flowed from that expedition. The third was his insistence on the proclamation of 'unconditional surrender' at Casablanca in January 1943, a high-minded re-echoing of the terms on which the United States had conducted its war against the Confederacy. The last was his decision to distance himself from Churchill at the Yalta conference in February 1945 and deal directly with Stalin on the future of Europe.

There had been anticipations of Roosevelt's Yalta initiative both at Placentia Bay, when Churchill had reluctantly accepted the more liberalising provisions of the Atlantic Charter – which in effect committed the British Empire to granting independence to its colonies – and at the Cairo conference, where Roosevelt had shown a typically 'China lobby' over-tenderness to Chiang Kai-shek. At Cairo the British had been persuaded to surrender their historic rights of extraterritoriality in China as a token of commitment to their belief in the nominal equality of Chiang's leadership with that of the Western democracies.

Chiang Kai-shek was to let Roosevelt down. Contrary to the President's expectations, he neither went through the motions to reform China's political and economic structures – how could he have done, a realist might have asked, with the more productive half of his country in the hands of the enemy? – nor utilised American aid and American advice, supplied so liberally first by Stilwell and then, after Chiang had tired of Stilwell's lecturing, by Wedemeyer, to maximise China's fighting power.

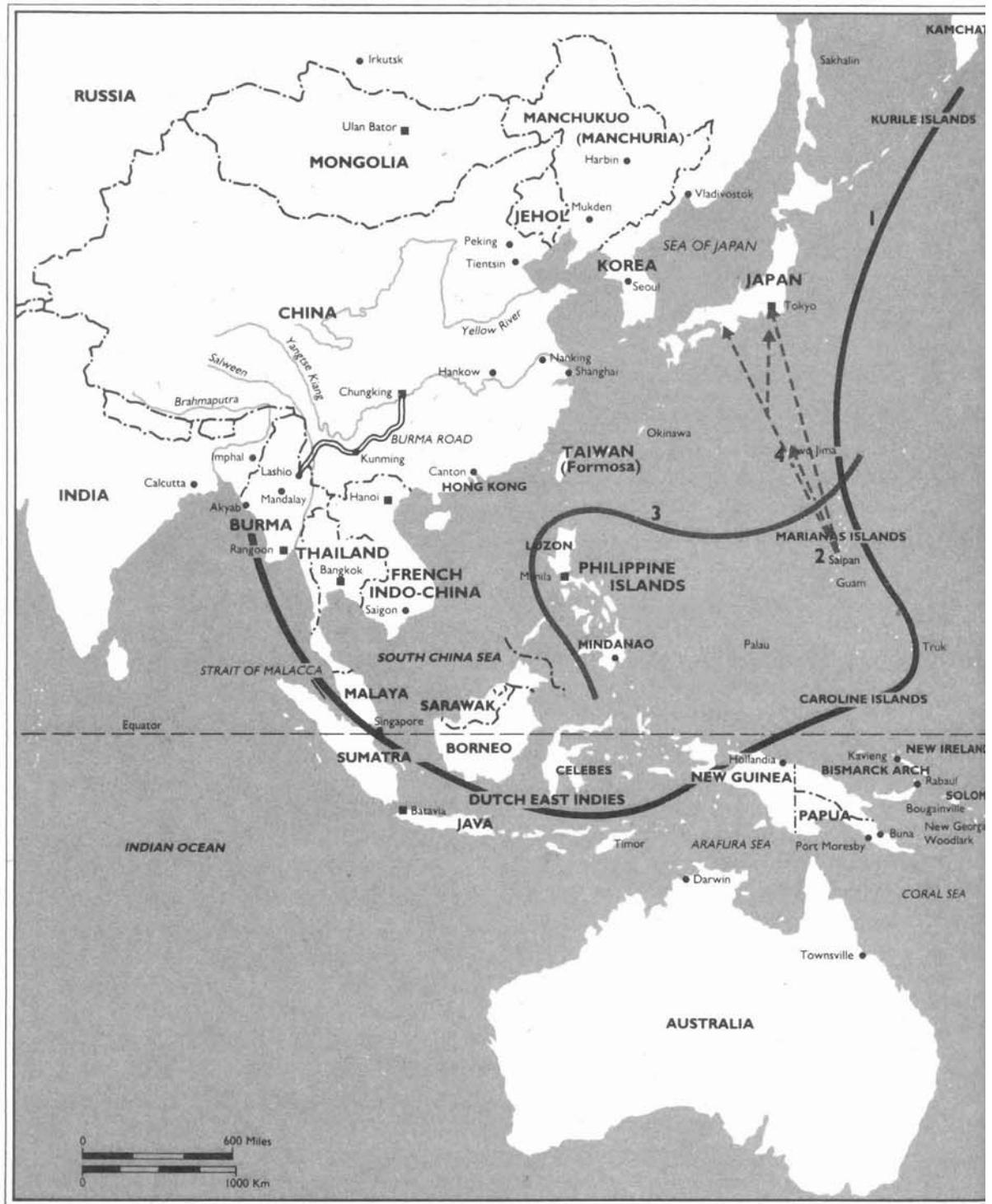
By the time of Yalta, therefore, Roosevelt had privately written off Chiang; for form's sake, China was elevated to permanent membership of the Security Council of the United Nations Organisation, whose institution and structure was decided at Yalta, but Chiang was accorded no fruits of the victory he had done so little to advance, certainly not the annexation of Indo-China he had been offered at Cairo. Poland too was written off at Yalta, though it had fought every day of the war since 1 September 1939, maintaining an army in exile which stood fourth in size among those opposed to the Wehrmacht, after the Russian, American and British; its eastern provinces, over-generously delimited in 1920, were permanently transferred to Russia at Yalta, though this Roosevelt–Stalin deal was an act less of political treachery than of political reality, since the Red Army already occupied the whole of Poland's territory.

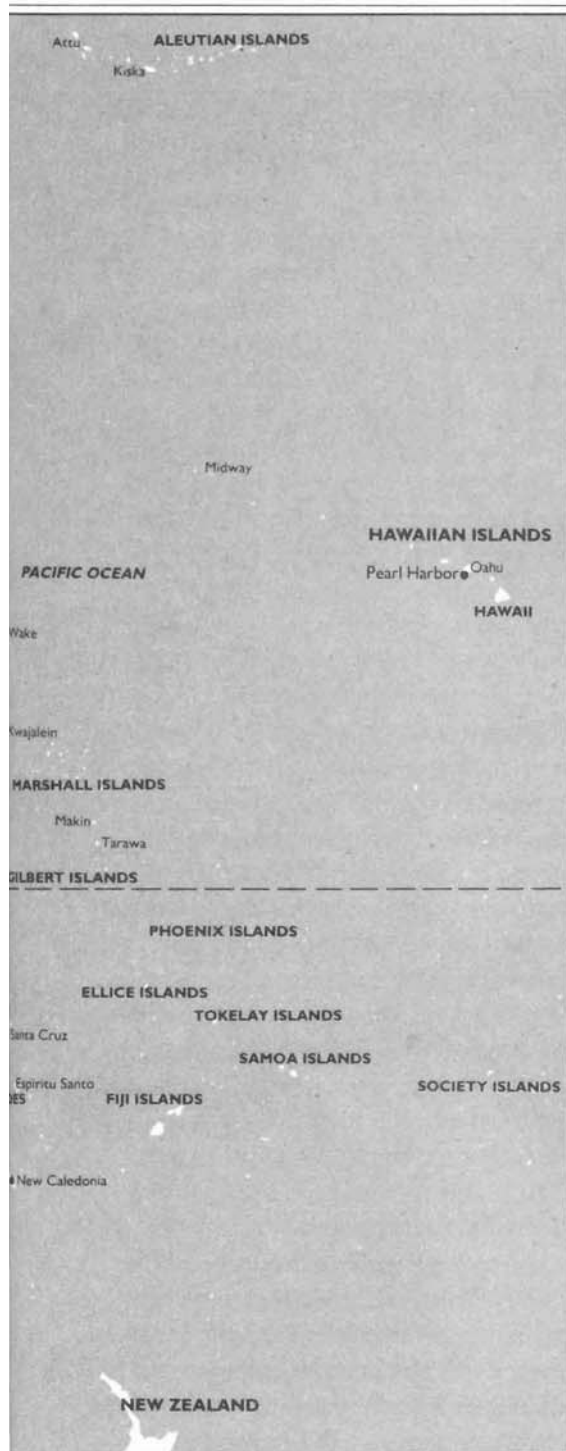
However, the most important of all decisions taken at Yalta, agreed directly between Roosevelt and Stalin, concerned the future conduct of the war in the Pacific. Roosevelt's willingness to barter away the future of Poland and to finalise a division of Germany which



The Big Three at Yalta, February 1945, where the shape of postwar eastern and central Europe was decided.

accorded the Soviet Union an over-generous allocation of occupation territory was ultimately determined by his anxiety to engage the Red Army in the battle to defeat Japan. At the time of Yalta, the United States had neither yet assured itself that its nuclear-research programme would result in the successful test explosion of an atomic bomb nor advanced its forces to a point from which the land invasion of Japan might be undertaken. The amphibious assault on Iwo Jima was in preparation but had not been launched; the devastating fire-bombing of Japan had not begun. The Red Army's commitment in Europe, on the other hand, was clearly almost at an end, and from western Russia the Trans-Siberian railway led directly to the border of Manchuria, where in 1904–5 Tsar Nicholas II's army had suffered a humiliating defeat. The opportunity to avenge it stood high on the list of Stalin's wartime priorities. When he might take the opportunity, however, was what pre-occupied the American President. To ensure that he did so later rather than sooner motivated almost all Roosevelt's initiatives at Yalta. The price he paid in the end was to discredit Churchill in the eyes of their joint Polish allies, to concede Russia rights over territory in sovereign China which were not America's to grant, but ultimately to assure that the re-possession of Japan's conquests in the Pacific would not be bought at the cost of American lives alone. To a nation which had watched the heroic advance of the United States Navy, Marine Corps and MacArthur's army divisions from New Guinea to the Philippines, the diplomatic price paid at Yalta – when the cost to a distant European state's territory and to Britain's good name was balanced against further American casualties – seemed a small one to pay.





THE PACIFIC, NOVEMBER 1944

Key

1 Japanese minimum defence area concept, September 1943

2 The capture of the Marianas chain gave the Americans a springboard 1500 miles south of Tokyo from which launch the B-29 bombers of the newly formed XXI Bomber Command. Virtually immune from large-scale Japanese counter-attack and on a direct supply route from the United States, these islands provided the bases for a concerted bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands, which began on 24 November 1944 when 111 B-29s took off to raid the Musashi aero-engine plant outside Tokyo

3 Extent of Allied advance, March 1945

4 Japanese forward air defence base at Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima lies about 700 miles south of Tokyo. This eight-square-mile island of sulphuric sand and volcanic ash was the site of Japanese radar stations which warned of the approach of the B-29 bomber streams, which regularly flew right over it on their way to and from Japan. Fighters flew from its two airstrips to deliver harassing strikes against the American airfields on Saipan in the Marianas. The capture of Iwo Jima offered US forces the prospect of a base near Japan which could provide fighter support and emergency landing facilities for Marianas-based aircraft on bombing runs to Tokyo. Its proximity to the Japanese home islands would make its capture both a moral and strategic victory. However, it was honeycombed with elaborate fortifications manned by 23,000 troops under the command of General Kuribayashi

30 JAPAN'S DEFEAT IN THE SOUTH

In the six months of 'running wild' between Pearl Harbor and the expulsion of the British from Burma between December 1941 and May 1942, the Japanese had succeeded in what five other imperial powers – the Spanish, Dutch, British, French and Russians – had previously attempted but failed to achieve: to make themselves masters of all the lands surrounding the seas of China and to link their conquests to a strong central position. Indeed, if China is included among the powers with imperial ambitions in the western Pacific, Japan had exceeded even her achievement. The Chinese had never established more than cultural dominance over Vietnam, and their power had failed altogether to penetrate the rest of Indo-China, the East Indies, Malaya or Burma. In mid-1942 the Japanese had conquered all those lands, were preparing to establish puppet regimes in most of them, were also the overlords of thousands of islands which were *terrae incognitae* in Peking, and had joined their maritime and peripheral annexations to the broad swathes of mainland territory in Manchuria and China which they had seized since 1931.

In crude territorial terms the extent of Japanese power even in mid-1944 was one and a half times greater than the area Hitler had controlled at the high tide of his conquests in 1942 – 6 million against 4 million square miles. However, Hitler held down his empire by brute force of manpower, deploying over 300 German and satellite divisions at the battlefield and in the occupied lands. Japan, by contrast, deployed an army only one-sixth the size, with only eleven divisions available for mobile operations. The rest were committed to the interminable, enervating and (apparently) ultimately irresolvable war

against Chiang Kai-shek in the Chinese hinterland. This state of affairs left Japan in a fundamentally unbalanced strategic position. Though the map represented her situation as strong, since she occupied that 'central position' in the theatre of war which all military theorists have argued is the most desirable to hold, logistics pointed to a different conclusion. Intercommunication between many of the Japanese strongholds, particularly southern China, Indo-China and Burma, had always been difficult if not impossible by land because of the mountain chains which define their frontiers. Intercommunication by sea was wearisome and increasingly perilous because of the bold and effective depredations of the American submarine captains. Intercommunication between the Pacific and East Indian islands was menaced both by submarines and by American airpower, land- or carrier-based. Finally the Japanese army in China itself was effectively immobilised by the size of the country, its units committed to pacification or occupation – in which they were assisted by thousands of so-called 'puppet' Chinese troops belonging to the bogus government of Wang Ching-wei, set up in 1939 – and only rarely freed to undertake offensive operations against the Chinese armies proper.

Those armies belonged to two hostile camps, the army of the legitimate Kuomintang government commanded by Chiang Kai-shek, and the communist army of Mao Zedong. By a pre-war truce they had agreed to fight the Japanese instead of each other, but the truce was often broken, while the communist army was certainly more interested in letting Chiang's troops exhaust themselves in battle with the foreign enemy than in helping them to victory. Their actions were quite uncoordinated, in any case, for Mao's base was in the distant north-west, around Yen-an in the great bend of the Yellow River beyond the Wall where rivals to the central government had traditionally established themselves, while Chiang had been driven into the deep south, around his emergency capital of Chungking, 500 miles away. Between the two seethed the remnants of the warlord armies which had carved out their territories after the collapse of the empire in 1911; the Japanese made accommodations with them and also recruited from them puppet troops.

To both the warlord and puppet armies Chiang's was militarily superior – but only barely so. In 1943 it was theoretically 324 divisions strong and therefore the largest army in the world, but in reality it consisted of only twenty-three properly equipped divisions, and those were small ones of only 10,000 men. For their equipment and supplies, moreover, they depended entirely on the Americans, who in turn depended upon the British to provide them with facilities to fly transport aircraft from India into southern China over 'the Hump', the mountain chain 14,000 feet high between Bengal in India and the province of Szechuan. These supplies had previously been delivered via the 'Burma Road' from Mandalay; but since the fall of Burma to the Japanese in May 1942 that route was closed. Chiang was dependent on the Americans not only for armament and subsistence but also for training and air support – provided by the few dozen aircraft of General Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers, originally the 'American Volunteer Group' of pilots and machines supplied to China by the United States in 1941. He was, moreover, dependent on

the Americans for his armies' cutting edge, since the most effective element in his command was the American brigade-size 5307th Provisional Regiment, to become famous as Merrill's Marauders. The man he had accepted as his nominal chief of staff, 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell, displayed an impatience with the Chinese that was exceeded in degree only by his rudeness towards the British with whom he was co-operating.

The Japanese army in China, twenty-five divisions strong, was so successful in keeping Mao pinned in his 'liberated area' of the north-west and Chiang backed against the mountains of Burma in the south that for the first two and a half years of the Second World War in the East it was not under an obligation to mount mobile operations. It already controlled the most productive parts of the country, Manchuria and the valleys of the Yellow and Yangtse rivers, as well as enclaves around the ports of the south, Foochow, Amoy, Hong Kong and Canton, together with the key island of Hainan in the South China Sea. It was taking what it wanted from China, particularly rice, coal, metals and Manchurian industrial goods, was scarcely discommoded either by 'resistance' – from which any sensible Chinese held aloof – or by the operations of Chiang's and Mao's armies and, above all, continued to exercise by its presence in the country all the advantages of occupying the strategic 'central position'.

— The Ichi-Go and U-Go offensives —

The Pacific Fleet's sudden advance into the central Pacific dissipated Japanese complacency. Nimitz's thrust was aimed like an arrow at the heart of Japan's central position. Ultimately it threatened their control of the South China Sea – the Pacific 'Mediterranean' which washes the shores of China, Thailand, Malaya, the East Indies, Formosa and the Philippines – and that control was essential to Japan's maintenance of its empire in the 'Southern Area'. On 25 January 1944, therefore, imperial headquarters in Tokyo issued orders to General Iwane Matsui, the chief of staff in China, to undertake a large-scale offensive. The last offensive in China had occurred in the spring of 1943, when the North China Army had cleared the area west of Peking in Shansi and Hopei provinces. Now the plan was to occupy more territory in the south, with the object of both opening a direct north-south rail route between Peking and Nanking and clearing the south of American airfields in Chiang's area, from which Chennault's air force, which had reached a strength of 340 aircraft including strategic bombers, was harassing the Japanese Expeditionary Army throughout China.

This Ichi-Go offensive was to open on 17 April 1944. Earlier in the year an associated offensive, U-Go, had opened in Burma. Curiously the two Japanese plans were not co-ordinated in time, objectives or aims – except in the general and favoured Japanese aim of confronting the enemy with a complexity of thrusts – whereas the Allied campaigns in southern China and Burma did in fact interconnect. For one thing, Chiang's armies based on Chungking were dependent on supply via the 'Hump route'; secondly, Chinese troops,

effectively commanded by Stilwell, were operating in southern China with the object of reopening the Burma Road; and, thirdly, Chinese troops were being trained in India as a means to improving the quality of Chiang's army. Nevertheless imperial headquarters did not order General Renya Mutaguchi, commanding the Fifteenth Army in Burma, to make an attack up the Burma Road to lend assistance to the Ichi-Go offensive. Instead it directed him to undertake nothing less than a full-scale invasion of India, in an entirely different direction.

U-Go was an operation to which Mutaguchi was wholeheartedly committed. Between November 1942 and February 1943 his predecessor, Iida, had successfully turned back a British offensive into Burma down the Arakan coast on the Bay of Bengal. A subsequent irregular operation, mounted by the long-range penetration Chindit forces led by their creator, the messianic Orde Wingate, had also been defeated between February and April 1943. However, Mutaguchi had been rightly impressed by the success of Wingate's troops in penetrating the Japanese front on the mountainous and roadless terrain of the Indo-Burmese frontier. He feared that where Wingate's tiny penetration force had marched larger Allied armies might follow. He also saw that Wingate's route was one his own hardy soldiers could take in the opposite direction, as the best means of defending Burma, interrupting the Allied efforts to reopen the Burma Road (on which American engineers were working from a roadhead in India at Ledo), quashing Stilwell's increasingly intrusive thrusts from southern China, and so indirectly assisting Ichi-Go in China proper.

Mutaguchi's offensive spirit was justified by the principle that the best form of defence is attack. South-East Asia Command, which had come into existence on 15 November 1943 with the dynamic Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten at its head, was indeed planning offensives of its own designed to re-establish Allied power in Burma. Among the operations planned was another offensive in the Arakan, a major offensive across the Indo-Burmese border from Assam to the river Chindwin, gateway to the Burmese central plains, two Chinese offensives into north-eastern Burma from the province of Yunnan, one of which was to be mounted by Stilwell's Chinese troops with the support of Merrill's Marauders, the other to be a Chindit operation into the Japanese rear at Myitkyina, at which Merrill's Marauders were going to strike.

Mutaguchi's operation was therefore not merely an offensive; it was also a pre-emptive attack. For this operation the whole Burma Area Army, commanded by General Count Terauchi, had been reinforced, in part with troops from Thailand, in part with the 1st Division of the Indian National Army, raised by Subhas Chandra Bose from 40,000 of the 45,000 Indians captured in Malaya and Singapore who had shown themselves sympathetic to his cause. However, Mutaguchi's spoiling attack was itself preceded by another one, for in November 1943 the British had resumed their attempt to penetrate the steamy Arakan. On 4 February, therefore, the Japanese 55th Division was launched into the British lines in the Arakan, with a mission to disrupt the advance. Only with the greatest

difficulty was the 55th Division dispersed and driven back to its departure point at the end of the month. Meanwhile the Japanese 18th Division was dealing harshly with Stilwell's advance towards Myitkyina, behind which Wingate's second Chindit expedition was due to descend by glider in March.

It was in a highly disturbed northern Burma, therefore, that Mutaguchi opened his U-Go offensive on 6 March, when his three divisions crossed the Chindwin river to invade India, the 31st heading for Kohima, the 15th and 33rd for Imphal.

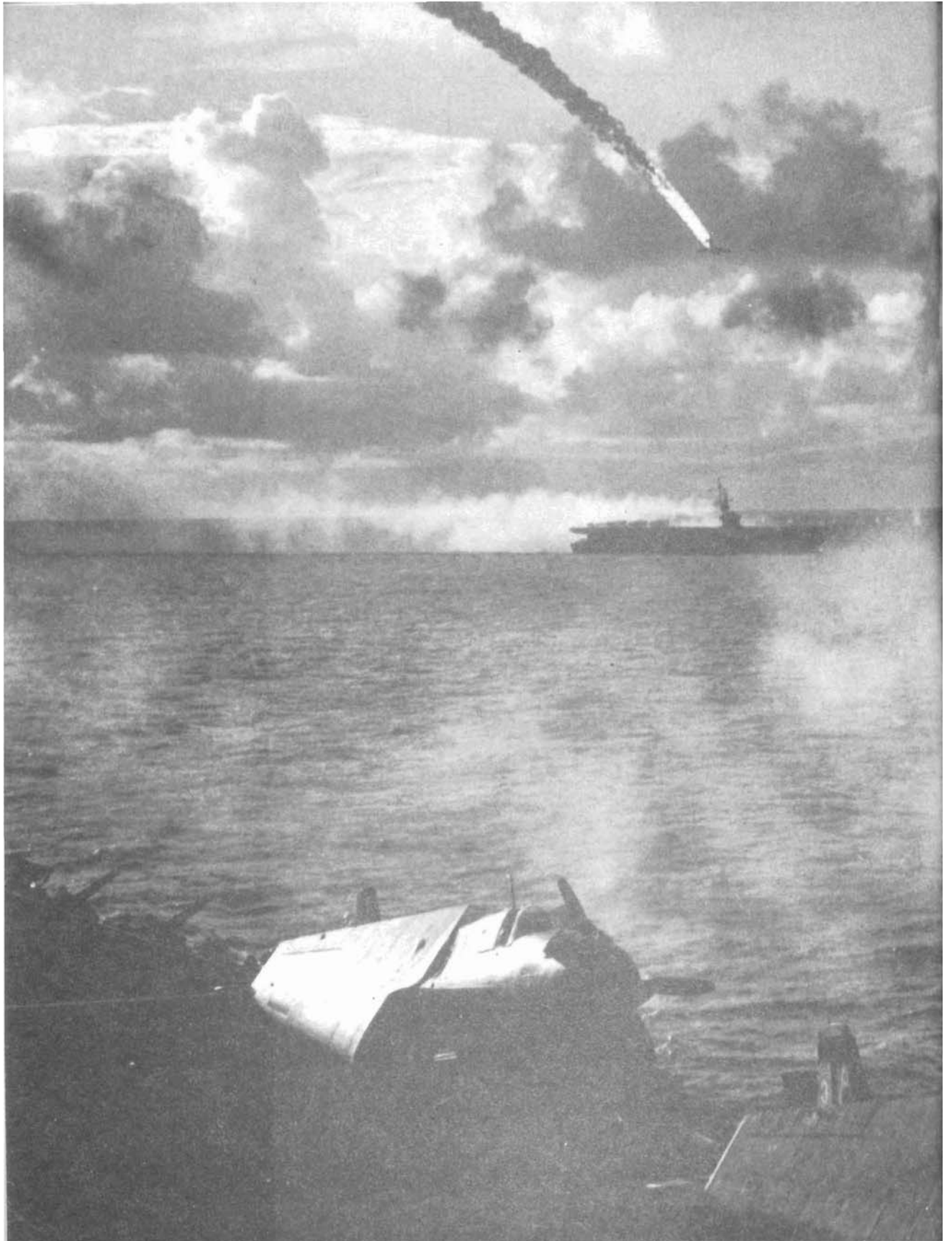
These tiny places in the high hills of Assam had been centres of the tea-growing industry before the war. They provided no facilities for the basing of the large British-Indian army which now occupied the front and were poorly connected by road to the rest of India. Moreover, General William Slim, commanding the British Fourteenth Army, was preparing to go over to the offensive and was not in a position to receive attack. The Fourteenth Army, under his inspired leadership, had been transformed from the low state it had reached after the agonising retreat from Burma in the spring of 1942 and the humiliating withdrawal from the Arakan eight months later. It had not yet, however, fought a full-scale battle against Japanese troops at the peak of their aggression.

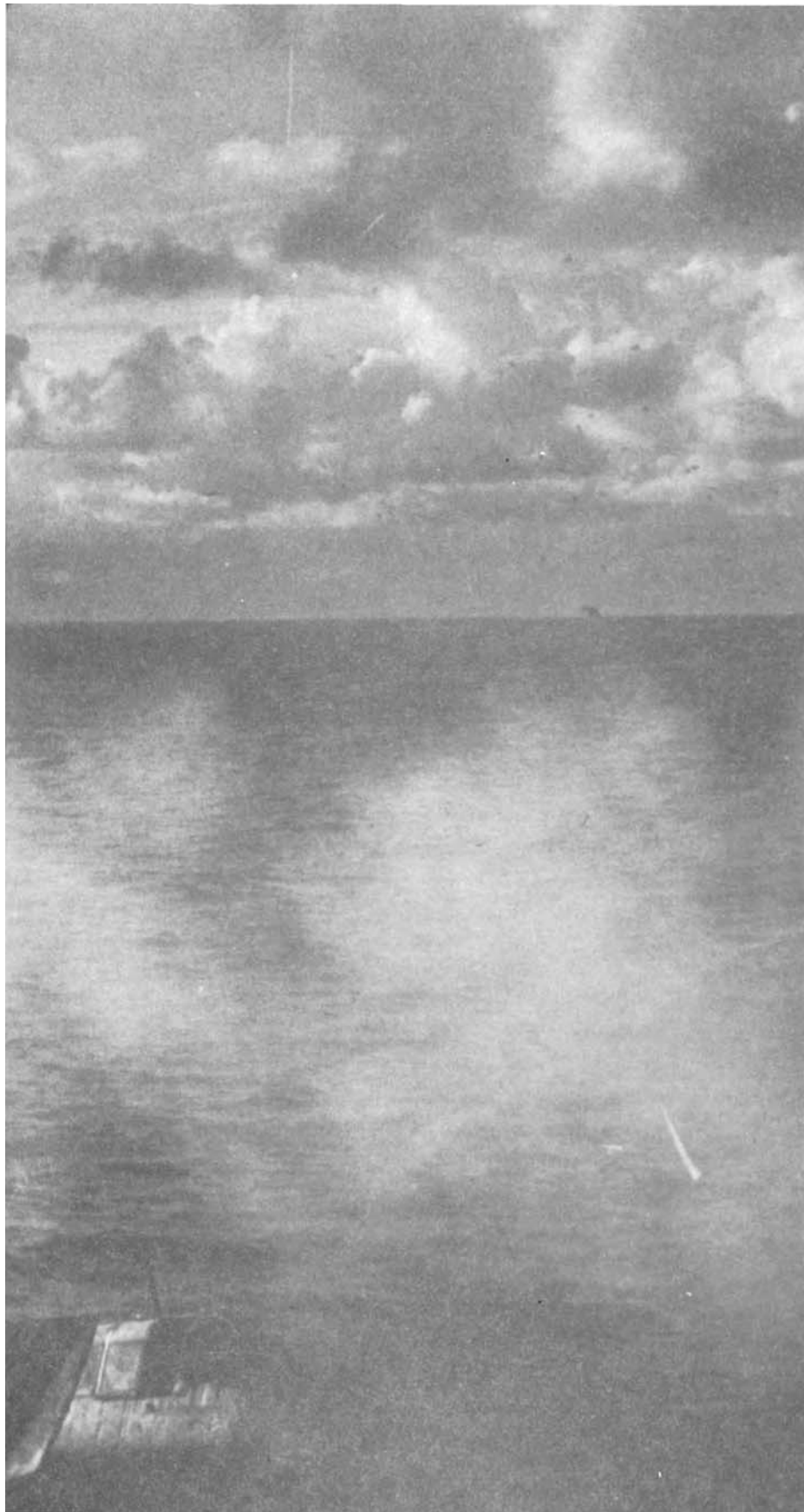
Slim had nevertheless scented a Japanese offensive in the offing and was not wholly surprised by it. He therefore persuaded Mountbatten to coax sufficient air transport out of the Americans to fly the 5th Indian Division, one of the most experienced in the British-Indian forces, up from the Arakan front between 19 and 29 March, and he himself sent forward supplies and reinforcements from the resources he had been gathering for his own offensive to the defenders on the border. He also gave his subordinate commanders strict instructions not to withdraw without permission from higher authority. Since the British defenders stood fast at the key points on the mountainous Indo-Burmese frontier, without attempting to defend its whole length, the Japanese succeeded in their object of encircling Imphal and Kohima, but could not take possession of the frontier roads that lead down into the Indian plain. Kohima was surrounded on 4 April, Imphal the following day. The fighting that ensued was among the most bitter of the war, as the two sides battled it out often at ranges no wider than the tennis court of the district commissioner's abandoned residence which formed part of no man's land on Kohima ridge. The British were supplied by airlift erratically at Kohima, rather more regularly at Imphal. The Japanese were not supplied at all; diseased and emaciated, they persisted in their attacks even after the coming of the monsoon. On 22 June, however, after over eighty days of siege, Imphal was relieved, and four days later Mutaguchi was forced to suggest to Terauchi that the Fifteenth Army ought now to retreat. In early July imperial headquarters gave its approval, and the survivors struggled off down roads liquefied by the tropical rains to cross the river Chindwin and return to the Burmese plains. Only 20,000 of the 85,000 who had begun the invasion of India remained standing; over half the casualties had succumbed to disease. The 1st Division of the Indian National Army, mistrusted as turncoats and therefore mistreated by the Japanese commanders, had ceased to exist.



Indian troops at Imphal-Kohima, a decisive Allied victory which saw the destruction of General Mutaguchi's Japanese Fifteenth Army.

The focus of the fighting in Burma now shifted to the north-eastern front, where the Japanese were holding their own with tenacity against both Stilwell and the Chindits; Slim meanwhile began to prepare the Fourteenth Army for its delayed offensive across the Chindwin to recover Mandalay and Rangoon. However, with the defeat of Mutaguchi's U-Go offensive, Burma itself ceased to be a major preoccupation of imperial headquarters. Though the Ichi-Go offensive was proceeding satisfactorily in southern China – so much so that the American government had begun to entertain fears of Chiang Kai-shek's imminent collapse – the situation in the southern and (more critically) central Pacific continued to worsen. In New Guinea, the fall of the Vogelkop peninsula in July was followed by the capture of the island of Morotai, midway between New Guinea and the southern Philippines island of Mindanao, on 15 September; the fall of Guam and Saipan was followed, also on 15 September, by the invasion of Peleliu; in the Palau islands, the closest





A Japanese aircraft falls blazing from the sky in the fight for the Marianas chain. The capture of the Marianas, in June-August 1944, provided bases from which Allied naval and air forces could cut the lines of communication to Japan's southern empire and launch a sustained bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands by B-29 Superfortresses of XXI Bomber Command. The bombing campaign began on 24 November 1944 when 111 B-29s took off from Saipan to attack the Musashi aero-engine plant on the outskirts of Tokyo.

point to the Philippines the Americans had yet reached on the central Pacific front. The invasion of the Philippines, which gave access to China, Indo-China and Japan itself, was now at hand.

— *A timetable for the Leyte landings* —

The extent and rapidity of MacArthur's and Nimitz's success had, however, so surprised the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their planners in Washington that the exact nature of the invasion was now once again a matter for debate. As in the European theatre, where in 1943 the chiefs of staff to the Supreme Allied Commander Designate had laid down a timetable for the advance to the German border which the actual pace of events then overtook with unanticipated speed, all sorts of operations which had once seemed important now faded into insignificance. In Europe events had made irrelevant the capture of the Atlantic ports, as points of supply from the United States for an American army fighting in central France, as well as the invasion of southern France. In the Pacific it was the capture of ports on the south China coast to supply Chennault's air bases, the invasion of Formosa and the occupation of the southern Philippines island of Mindanao that lost their significance. Two of these projects cancelled themselves. The success of Ichi-Go in southern China had led to the loss of most of Chennault's airfields near the coast, thereby making the capture of nearby ports irrelevant; and the invasion of Formosa, an island twice the size of Hawaii and defended by the highest sea cliffs in the world, was calculated to require so many troops that it could not be undertaken until the war in Europe was over. The attack on Mindanao was abandoned on 13 September after Halsey's carriers encountered only light resistance in the area. He urged instead that a landing be made first in Leyte, in the centre of the archipelago, and that the troops proceed thereafter to the northernmost island, Luzon, in December, two months ahead of schedule. As this timetable suited MacArthur, who thought the approach of the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral King, over-ponderous, it carried his support. The debate had run between president, Joint Chiefs of Staff and operational commanders since 26 July; it was ended on 15 September, when the joint chiefs authorised MacArthur to begin landings on Leyte on 20 October.

The Japanese in the Philippines were ill prepared to withstand invasion. Indeed, the Japanese forces as a whole were now suffering the consequences of their own earlier success. Having passed what Clausewitz calls 'the culminating point of the offensive', they found themselves in possession of more territory than they could closely defend and were confronted by an enemy who was on the rampage and whose resources were growing by the month. Though the manpower available to the US Army in the Pacific and to the Marine Corps was limited by the demands of the war in Europe, the USAAF had been acquiring more and better aircraft throughout 1944, particularly the B-29 Superfortress, which had the range to bomb the Japanese home islands from the old bases in southern

China and the new bases on Saipan. The United States Navy, whose particular theatre was the Pacific, enjoyed almost an embarrassment of riches; it had new battleships, cruisers and destroyers, fast attack transports, landing craft large and small, but above all new carriers: twenty-one Essex-class carriers had come into service since 1941 or were about to do so, and the total carrier fleet provided flight-deck space for over 3000 aircraft, an embarked naval air force three times the size of the Japanese at its largest.

Japan, by contrast, had already passed the high point of its war production. Its army had been fully mobilised since 1937 and was stuck at a size of about fifty divisions. Its navy had been continuously in action since 1941, had suffered heavy losses and could not make them good from the output of its shipyards. Only five fleet aircraft carriers were launched between 1941 and 1944. Losses in Japan's merchant fleet were far higher and threatened the collapse of the Japanese system. Because Japan could not feed itself or supply its own raw material needs, free use of the western Pacific seas was essential to the running of its economy; it was also necessary to the sustenance, reinforcement and movement of garrisons within the Southern Area. During 1942 American submarines had sunk 180 Japanese merchant ships, totalling 725,000 tons deadweight, of which 635,000 tons was replaced by new building; the tanker tonnage actually increased. In 1944, however, because the skill of American submarine captains had increased and they were operating from bases much further forward in New Guinea, the Admiralties and the Marianas, the total of sinkings increased to 600, or 2.7 million tons, more than had been sunk in the years 1942 and 1943 combined. By the end of 1944 half Japan's merchant fleet and two-thirds of her tankers had been destroyed, the flow of oil from the East Indies had almost stopped, and the level of imports to the home islands had fallen by 40 per cent.

The destruction of the merchant fleet obliged the navy to use destroyers instead of merchantmen to ship and provision units, and this seriously impeded the movement of troops between threatened spots, thus affecting Japan's defence of the Philippines. Imperial headquarters had correctly divined that the Americans planned to invade first the southernmost island of Mindanao, from New Guinea, and then the northernmost island of Luzon, as a stepping-stone to Japan; but they had not anticipated that the Americans would change their plan in the light of events. In consequence, Leyte was left even more weakly garrisoned than Mindanao. Although on 20 October 1944 there were 270,000 Japanese troops in the Philippines, Tomoyoku Yamashita, the conqueror of Singapore and commander of the Northern Area, had only the weak 16th Division on Leyte itself. With only 16,000 men, it was no match for the four divisions of General Walter Krueger's Sixth Army, which began to go ashore in Leyte Gulf that morning.

Although the Japanese army was unprepared for the Leyte landing, the Japanese navy was not. It was now divided into two halves, the remaining carriers and their escorts being kept in home waters, the battleships – of which there were still nine, including the *Yamato* and *Musashi*, the largest in the world, of 70,000 tons and mounting 18-inch guns – lying at Lingga Roads, near Singapore, to be near their supply of East Indies oil which could not be

shipped to the home islands. Both sections of the fleet had sensibly held back from involvement in the latest of the American island landing operations, the descent on Peleliu in the Palaus on 15 September – an uncancelled operation of the original central Pacific strategy which had lost its point (though it inflicted agony on the veteran 1st Marine Division). The home fleet did not evade involvement in the pre-Leyte air offensives on Formosa, Okinawa and Luzon, during which the American Third Fleet destroyed over 500 Japanese carrier- and land-based aircraft between 10 and 17 October; but Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's carrier force risked none of its ships, while the bulk of the Combined Fleet at Lingga remained intact.

It was in these circumstances that imperial headquarters decided to launch a decisive naval offensive, codenamed Sho-1, against the American Third and Seventh Fleets covering the Leyte landings. Of great complexity, as large Japanese offensives always were, in essence it was diversionary: Ozawa's carriers, brought down from Japan's Inland Sea, were to lure Halsey's Third Fleet away from the Leyte beaches; then the battleships and heavy cruisers, divided into the 1st and 2nd Attack Forces and Force C, were to attack the transports and landing craft in Leyte Gulf and destroy them. The 1st Attack Force was to approach through the San Bernardino Strait to the north of Leyte, the 2nd Attack Force and Force C through the Surigao Strait to the south.

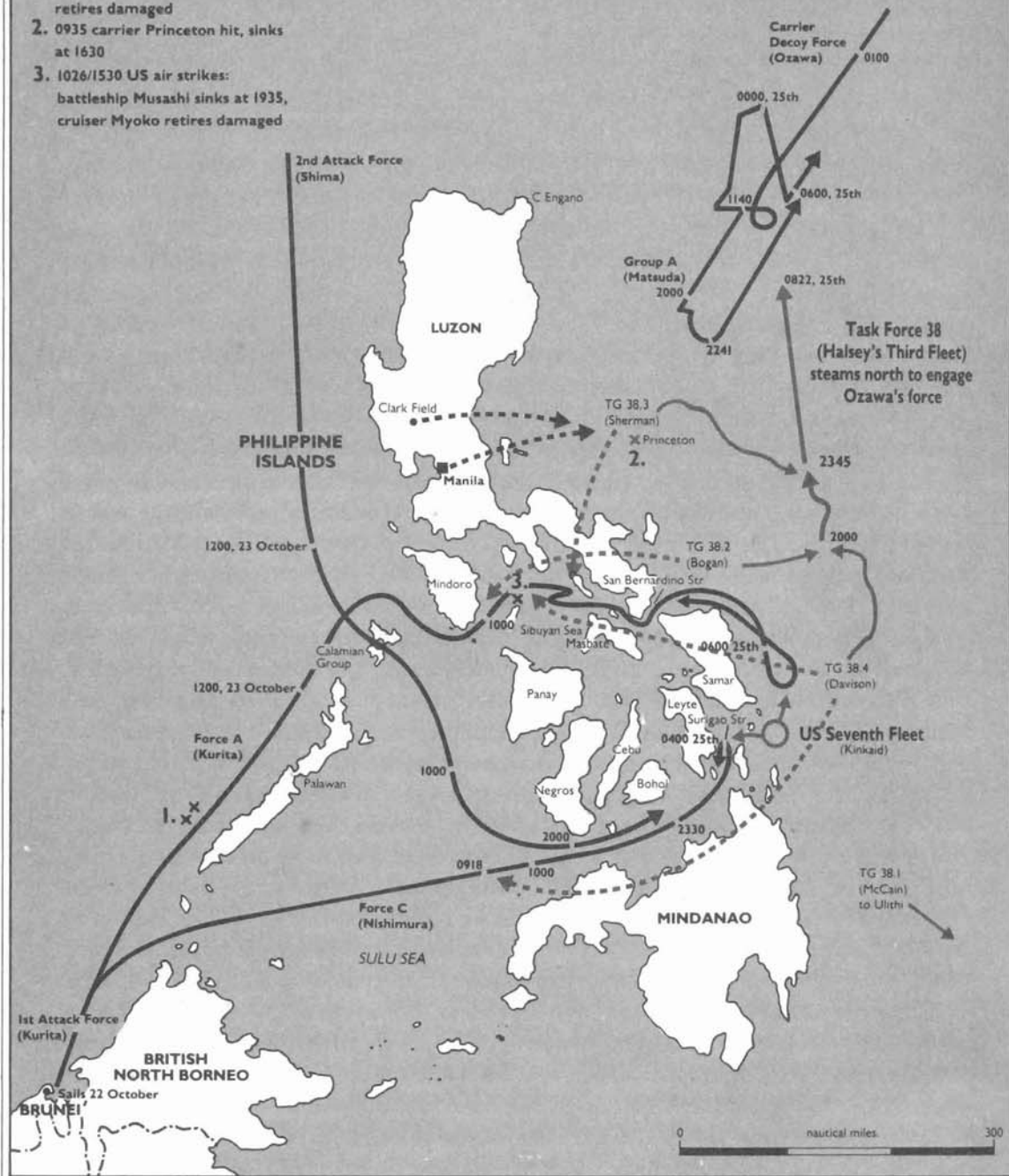
What followed was the largest naval battle in history, larger even than Jutland, but, like Jutland, confused by misreportings and misunderstandings. First into the fray was Vice-Admiral Takeo Kurita's 1st Attack Force, which had sailed from Lingga. It was intercepted and damaged by American submarines en route but reached the western approaches to the San Bernardino Strait on 24 October. The land-based aircraft which supported it inflicted heavy damage on one of the American carriers from Halsey's Third Fleet, USS *Princeton*, which eventually sank, but they lost more heavily themselves against the American Hellcat fighters; and as the day developed American torpedo-bombers took Kurita's own battleships under attack. During the afternoon the *Musashi* suffered nineteen torpedo hits, more even than its enormous bulk could absorb, and at 7.35 in the evening rolled over and sank. Kurita decided he could not risk *Yamato*, his two other battleships and his ten heavy cruisers in the confined waters of the San Bernardino Strait, without the assurance of support from Ozawa's carriers (of which he had heard nothing), and so turned back to retreat to Lingga.

At the moment he did so, however, the Sho-1 plan was on the point of success, for Halsey in the Third Fleet's flagship *New Jersey*, stationed off the southern tip of Luzon, had just received news that Ozawa's carriers had been sighted 150 miles to the north. Halsey had been offended by whispered allegations that he had let the Japanese escape too easily in the Battle of the Philippines Sea the previous June, and he was determined to make

The Battle of Leyte Gulf, 23-25 October 1944, at which the reformed Japanese carrier fleet was broken on the anvil of American air power.

LEYTE GULF

1. 0632, 23 October US submarines sink cruisers Atago and Maya, Takao retires damaged
2. 0935 carrier Princeton hit, sinks at 1630
3. 1026/1530 US air strikes: battleship Musashi sinks at 1935, cruiser Myoko retires damaged



Ozawa fight. He therefore extemporised plans to leave behind part of his force, designated Task Force 34, to guard the San Bernardino Strait while he raced his heavy units northward to seek and destroy the Japanese carriers.

Two changes of mind now supervened to alter the course of the battle. The first was Kurita's. Shamed by urgings from the Combined Fleet that he was shrinking from the chance of victory, he reversed course to pass through the San Bernardino Strait after all on the night of 24/25 October and sailed onward towards Leyte Gulf. The second was Halsey's. Excited by reports of how vulnerable Ozawa's carriers were, he decided not to leave any part of his force to guard the San Bernardino Strait but to take those ships which would have formed Task Force 34 with him northward to attack them.

Sho-1 was suddenly after all on the point of success. Kurita's 1st Attack Force was about to appear off Leyte Gulf, where the landing force was protected only by a fragile fleet of destroyers and escort carriers. Vice-Admiral Kiyohide Shima's 2nd Attack Force and Vice-Admiral Shoji Nishimura's Force C were meanwhile heading for the Surigao Strait to take the Leyte landing force in the rear from the south. While Halsey proceeded northwards to a putative encounter with the Japanese carriers, unknown to him the American invasion of Leyte was threatened with disaster.

All that stood between the two advancing Japanese forces and disaster were three tiny escort carriers in the San Bernardino Strait and Admiral Oldendorf's six battleships in the Surigao Strait. Oldendorf's battleships were a spectre from the past, since all predated the Second World War and five had been raised from the bottom of Pearl Harbor. In the intervening years, however, they had been refurbished and re-equipped, particularly with modern radar. In the darkness of the night of 24/25 October, the images of Nishimura's ships appeared distinct on Oldendorf's radar screens. His destroyers crippled the battleship *Fuso* as it approached; his own battleship salvoes then finished her off and sank the other Japanese battleship *Yamashiro* as well. The survivors of Force C beat a retreat, not alerting the 2nd Attack Force as it passed them to the danger that lurked in the Surigao Strait. It too suffered damage, hastily reversed course and followed in Nishimura's wake.

The Battle of the Surigao Strait was a lucky escape for the Americans. The second round in the San Bernardino Strait promised not to be. Kurita's 1st Attack Force greatly outgunned any American force which stood between it and the landing fleet, while the United States Navy's heavy metal was far away. As Halsey cruised in search of Ozawa, he was pursued by messages which included the notorious 'Where is Task Force 34 the whole world wonders'; the last four words were a misunderstood piece of security padding, but to Halsey they were eternally galling. In the meantime Kurita had fallen among the landing fleet's protecting warships. Those he found first were a puny group of five escort carriers, converted merchant ships with little speed and few aircraft, which were equipped for anti-submarine rather than torpedo strikes. The five nevertheless rose to the occasion with aplomb and superb bravery. While Admiral Clifton Sprague manoeuvred Task Force 3 at all available speed to escape 16- and 18-inch salvoes, his pilots flew off their



The escort carrier USS St Lô takes a direct hit from a Japanese kamikaze aircraft at Leyte Gulf, 25 October 1944. She sank less than an hour later.

aircraft to launch anti-submarine bombs at the battleships. One of the carriers, *Gambier Bay*, was hit and left on fire. The rest, to which another group of 'baby flattops' from Task Force 2 lent assistance, managed to cover their retreat by air strikes and torpedo attacks launched by their own escorting destroyers. In the face of this Tom Thumb defiance, and dispirited by the non-appearance of Ozawa's carriers, Kurita decided to break off action and retreat through the San Bernardino Strait. It was 10.30 on the morning of 25 October.

To the south, Oldendorf's battleships were steaming to the rescue from the Surigao Strait but were still three hours away; to the north, Halsey had reversed course from his pursuit of Ozawa but would take even longer to reach the scene. Halsey's aircraft had nevertheless taken their toll. In an early-morning strike they left the light carriers *Chitose* and *Zuiho* sinking. A second strike destroyed *Chiyoda* and Ozawa's flagship *Zuikaku*, a veteran of Pearl Harbor; though they had come to the battle with only 180 aircraft embarked, their loss virtually completed the extinction of the great Japanese naval air force. To their loss, moreover, had to be added that of three battleships, six heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and ten destroyers, in total a quarter of the losses the Imperial Japanese Navy had suffered since Pearl Harbor.

Leyte Gulf was therefore not only the largest but also one of the most decisive battles of naval history, even though for the Americans it had been a close-run thing. The battle for Leyte itself was a more long-drawn-out affair. The Japanese, recognising that their hold on the Philippines stood or fell by the defence of Leyte, rushed in reinforcements by

destroyer from elsewhere in the islands – the 8th, 26th, 30th and 102nd Divisions, as well as the elite 1st Division from the dwindling general reserve in China. The Americans too reinforced the four divisions with which they had made their initial landing, so that by November they deployed six of their own – the 1st Cavalry, 7th, 11th Airborne, 24th, 32nd, 77th and 96th Divisions. Fighting during the next month was bitter, and on 6 December the Japanese launched a counter-attack to take the main American airfield complex on Leyte. When the attack failed, the campaign for the island was effectively at a close. It had cost the Japanese 70,000 and the Americans 15,500 losses.

On 9 January 1945 Krueger's Sixth Army moved from Leyte – and the nearby islands of Mindoro and Samar, which had also been cleared – to invade Luzon, where the Philippines capital, Manila, was located. In the far south the Australian First Army was mopping up Japanese resistance in New Guinea, New Britain and Bougainville. In Burma, while Slim's Fourteenth Army opened its offensive into the plains of Burma by its capture of Kalewa on the Chindwin on 2 December, Chiang's troops, with American assistance, were also making progress on the north-eastern front. They were no longer commanded by the vitriolic Stilwell, who had definitively fallen out in turn with the British, the Chinese and ultimately President Roosevelt. After Stilwell's removal on 18 October, his role was divided between Generals Albert C. Wedemeyer, the architect of the American 'Victory Plan' of 1941, and Daniel Sultan. The former had taken over as the American commander in China; the latter now commanded Merrill's Marauders (renamed Mars Force) and the Indian-trained Chinese forces in Burma.

In China, Chiang's armies, strengthened by two Indian-trained divisions brought from Burma, at last managed to halt the Ichi-Go offensive at Kweiyang, after it had threatened to drive a corridor from the Japanese-held coastal areas to Chiang's capital at Chungking itself. Ichi-Go had achieved a subsidiary object in opening a continuous corridor from northern Indo-China to Peking, but it had not brought about the destruction of Chiang's army. Indeed, in January 1945 the best of his troops (under Sultan's command) finally succeeded in breaking across the mountainous north of Burma through Myitkyina, which Stilwell had taken in August, to join up with the so-called Y-Force of Chiang's China forces advancing from Yunnan. On 27 January the two reopened the Burma Road, thus assuring a direct source of land supply from the Anglo-American base in India to the Kuomintang heartland around Chungking. The Japanese nevertheless remained the dominant force in southern China. British strength was aligned towards the plains of Burma, into which the Fourteenth Army was making its advance, and neither Wedemeyer's, Sultan's nor even Chiang's troops were powerful enough to stem any determined Japanese operation south of the Yangtse. In the spring of 1945, as in every year since 1941, the future of the war in China was closely bound to the outcome of the main battle between the Imperial Japanese and United States Navies' fleets and their amphibious forces in western Pacific waters.