

Jap Fleet Mauled In Solomons Battle

U. S. Destroyer Torpedoed and Sunk; Believe Action Between Light Surface Vessels

WASHINGTON, July 6.—(AP)—The Navy reported Tuesday that on the basis of incomplete information United States naval forces apparently had caused the Japanese very heavy damage in the Battle of Kula Gulf.

Details of the action, fought Monday (Solomon Islands time) and apparently all over now, still were lacking, but there was no disposition in authoritative quarters here to consider it as a major encounter with decisive bearing on the Solomons campaign.

The impression prevailed rather that it was an action between fairly light surface forces of cruisers and destroyers. Whether bombing planes participated was not known.

U. S. Destroyer Sunk

A Navy communique said that "sufficient details have not been received to give the results of this engagement, but it is believed that, while some damage was suffered by the United States force, considerable damage was inflicted on the enemy."

At the same time the Navy announced that the United States destroyer Strong was torpedoed and sunk Sunday night while engaged in a previously announced

bombardment of Japanese installations at Vila and Bairoko on Kula Gulf, which lies between New Georgia Island and Kolombangara Island in the Munda air base area.

The naval engagement, first announced Monday night, followed that bombardment.

The 2,100-ton destroyer Strong, commissioned only last year, carried a normal complement of about 250 men. She was an exceptionally large vessel, being in the destroyer leader class. She was commanded by Commander Joseph Harold Wellings, of East Boston, Mass. Whether he survived was not reported nor was any estimate given of the loss of life.

More Battles Seen

The best information obtainable here is that the action is now over but that similar hit and run affairs can be expected in the future to develop in the central Solomons just as they did around Guadalcanal in the southeastern end of the island chain last fall and winter. Sooner or later it is inevitable that larger and larger forces will become engaged in these actions until at last a naval battle of major importance results. Whether this may come about in the central Solomons more quickly than it did around Guadalcanal was a subject of considerable spec-

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Force to checkmate the offensive by fresh raids on Australia, New Guinea and our Solomons holdings have been broken up.

Defeat of the Japanese naval forces left imperiled the most immediate objective of the Solomons operations—the enemy air base of Munda on New Georgia.

Above it, Bairoko anchorage, main source of supply, had been battered by shells of United States warships in a bombardment from Kula Gulf the night before the naval battle. The U. S. destroyer Strong was lost during that action.

Below it, the reinforced American garrison on Rendova has been shelling it from five miles away. And on New Georgia, American forces at Viru harbor are in a position to move overland, having consolidated positions there.

The latest communique said:

"Preliminary dispatches report that our naval surface units intercepted an enemy force of cruisers and destroyers in the Kula Gulf during the night of the warship engagement.

"Details are not yet available and a final assessment cannot be made but it is indicated that six enemy ships probably were sunk and four damaged.

"We lost one cruiser.

"One damaged enemy destroyer, beached near Sambera Harbor, was attacked by our medium dive bombers which scored seven direct hits with 500-pound bombs, resulting in violent explosions and fires."

The Atlanta Journal

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ulation here since the current offensive seems to be developing at a much more rapid pace.

With the loss of the Strong, following by about five days the torpedo-sinking of the troop transport McCawley in the Rendova Island area, the United States Navy has invested a total of about 40 ships in the Solomon Islands' campaign, which began last August 7 and went into a new phase with the invasion of the Munda area June 30.

The Japanese, on the other hand, have lost around 65 to 80 ships, some of those reported as hit having been listed as only probably sunk. Thus the enemy's loss ratio is about two to one comparison with American ship casualties.

What the figures will be in the latest action in Kula Gulf remain to be seen, but it was expected that the proportions of the American victory probably would be substantial in relation to the size of the enemy units involved.

U. S. Warships and Fliers Set Jap Bases Aflame

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS IN AUSTRALIA, July 6.—(AP)—The Solomons area of the Pacific offensive flamed with continued action both on the sea, where American warships daringly moved into Kula Gulf, and in the air over newly seized Rendova Island, the High Command reported Tuesday.

Fires at the enemy air base of Vila, Kilomangara Island, on the west side of Kula Gulf, and at Bairoko Anchorage, New Georgia, on the east side, were set both by the shells of the warships and bombs dropped by Mitchell medium bombers the night of July 4 and in the predawn of July 5. Later, dive-bombers dropped 1,000-pound bombs on Bairoko, which is above the menaced enemy air base of Munda, also in New Georgia.

Over Rendova, which is within artillery shelling distance of Munda, the Japanese sent 40 Zeros Monday in a continued effort to balk expansion of American action in that sector. Outnumbered United States fighter planes shot down two of the Zeros and dispersed the remainder while losing one plane, the pilot of which was saved. The Japanese now have lost 157 planes over Rendova in almost daily sky fights since the island was invaded June 30.

At the other end of the 700-mile arc at Salamaua, New Guinea, the only action reported was bombardment of the Salamaua Airdrome and air attacks on enemy positions between Salamaua and the Nassau Bay area, 12 miles down the coast, where Americans landed last Wednesday.