

American Strategy in the Pacific after Midway: From Parity to Supremacy

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Historians revel in discussing what they consider to be the decisive turning points of great wars. For the Second World War in the Pacific the identified turning point *for western*, particularly European *historians* is the Battle of Midway in June 1942. After this encounter, so most have reasoned, the course of the Pacific War was determined. Japan was to be crushed, overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of American material. While the time line might have some ambiguity, the end result could not. Even American disasters such as the battle of Savo Island just weeks later, followed by the destruction of two large aircraft carriers in the following months, were mere details on the road to eventual American victory.

The period of this paper, sandwiched between Midway and the other 'decisive' engagement of the Pacific war—the Battle of the Philippine Sea (June 1944), is therefore sometimes seen as one of planning and organization, if relatively little decisive action.. In terms of the area fought over, there is something to this. Until the landings in the Gilberts in late 1943, most fighting in the Pacific occurred in a relatively small area stretching from Guadalcanal to Rabaul. Considering the vast size of the Pacific theatre of operations, the fighting occurred on the very fringes.

Yet, on reflection, it makes little sense to see this period as a whole, because, for the US Navy at least, it was divided into two noticeably distinct campaigning eras; one of parity and the other of a growing supremacy. The period of parity from Midway until the summer of 1943 was actually the most challenging of the entire war. The navy was trying to switch to an offensive posture against the still very powerful Japanese Navy, when it lacked an overall superiority. It certainly couldn't guarantee sea control, or even sea denial in a large area of operations. In fact in certain areas, such as night-fighting ability and torpedo technology, the USN remained decidedly inferior, particularly at the beginning of the period.

On the other hand the second part of this paper, from the spring/summer of 1943, was one of greater ambition. The material of the United States Navy, both in terms of quantity and quality (most famously the Essex Class carriers and new aircraft) was providing it with the ability to contemplate far more aggressive and expansive strategies. To see how late in time the change was, it was not until May of 1943, when the Essex class carrier Bunker Hill was completed that the US

Navy was able to make up the carrier losses it had suffered to that point.¹ Indeed it was not until January of 1944, with the commissioning of the Franklin, that the USN has one more carrier fleet unit (four operating carriers) than it had on December 7th 1941. (see Chart 1)

¹ US fleet carrier losses were: USS Lexington (8 May 1942), USS Yorktown (7 June 1942), USS Wasp (15 September 1942), USS Hornet (26 October 1942). The first eight Essex class carrier entering service went as follows: USS Essex (December 1942), USS Lexington (February 1943), USS Yorktown (April 1943), USS Bunker Hill (May 1943), USS Intrepid (August 1943), USS Wasp (November 1943), USS Hornet (November 1943), USS Franklin (January 1944). For a full list of all American warships lost and built during the Second World War see: *The United States Navy at War, 1941-45: Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King*, (Washington DC, 1946), Third report, Appendices B and C. The complete texts of these reports can also be found online at: <http://www.ibiblio.net/hyperwar/USN/USNatWar/index.html>

The first person to articulate the differences to be expected during these two distinct phases was actually the head of the United States Navy, Admiral Ernest King. In November 1942, whilst King was preparing for the upcoming Casablanca Conference, he was asked to outline how he believed the war would develop. He turned, as many unfortunately tend to do, to a sporting analogy and compared the war to a boxing match.² He portrayed the United States as a boxer who must first withstand the frenzied blows of its opponent before being able to counterattack. As such the war would have four distinct phases.

- 1) The Defensive Phase during which the US would have to cover up and protect itself against Japanese attacks.
- 2) The Defensive-Offensive Phase during which the US would still have to protect itself

² Thomas Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Admiral Ernest J. King* (Boston, 1980), p. 265.

but could start looking for openings to counter.

- 3) The Offensive-Defensive Phase during which the US would still have to counter blows with one hand, but could strike the enemy hard with the other.
- 4) The Offensive Phase during which the US could strike the enemy with all its force.

This analogy obviously pleased King very much, as he used it in 1946 (in his end of war reports) to describe the US Navy's strategy during the Pacific War.³

Instead of providing an extremely brief and thin history of the entire period, in many ways the best way to see how American strategy and tactics evolved is to concentrate on one decision in each. The ones chosen for this paper are very different in their own ways, but both have become major areas of debate for historians and scholars of the Pacific War. The first, which is actually a tactical decision made during combat operations, is Admiral Jack Fletcher's heavily criticized move to withdraw American carriers from the immediate area around Guadalcanal on August 7th 1942. The second, far more importantly in understanding the strategy of victory in the war, are American plans for the two pronged move across the Pacific involving General Douglas MacArthur's drive on the Philippines and Admiral Chester Nimitz's campaign towards the Marianas.

Admiral Fletcher and the Use of Naval Airpower in the Guadalcanal Landings

Of all of the American naval officers who covered themselves in glory during the Battle of Midway, Admiral Fletcher is the one that has fallen the furthest and hardest from his perch.⁴ While Chester Nimitz and Raymond Spruance are still held in the highest regard, Fletcher is now mostly forgotten by the general public and, with a number of notable exceptions, roundly criticized by World War II historians. The reason for these criticisms have almost all swirled around his behaviour whilst in command of the US Navy's carrier strike force off the coast of Guadalcanal during the landings of August 1942.

Certainly Fletcher did seem extremely skittish off Guadalcanal. In command of the American carriers tasked with supporting the Marines when they landed on August 7th, Fletcher seemed eager to pull his force out of harms way, in particular Japanese airpower which had a series of bases heading up the Bismarcks. Desperate to protect what were undoubtedly the most

³ *The United States Navy at War, 1941-45: Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King*, (Washington DC, 1946), p. 39.

⁴ The criticisms of Fletcher have been summarized in a number of places. For instance see: Hary A Gailey, *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay*, (Novato CA, 1995), pp 179-81; H. P Wilmott *The War with Japan: The Period of Balance May 1942-October 1943*, Wilmington DE, 2002, p. 110;

important vessels the United States possessed, he was not even willing to wait for two full days before pulling back to the east, ostensibly for refuelling (though this is still very much a debated point).

By pulling back, Fletcher was in no position to either halt or strike back against the Japanese Navy as it launched its most brilliant tactical strike of the entire war. Admiral Gunichi Mizawa, based in Rabaul and commander of Japanese naval forces in the South Pacific, reacted to the American invasion of Guadalcanal with speed and bravado. Confident in his forces superior night-fighting capabilities, he assembled all available warships, including 5 heavy cruisers, and set-off down the 'Slot' to confront the American invasion force.

The resulting engagement, which the Americans termed the Battle of Savo Island, was a disaster for the United States Navy. When, in the early hours of August 9th 1942 Mikawa's force arrived off the north coast of Guadalcanal, they came across a mixed American and Australian naval force which had no forewarning of their presence. The result was a comprehensive tactical victory, with the Japanese sinking four heavy cruisers; three American (the *Astoria*, *Vincennes* and *Quincy*) and one Australian (the *Canberra*). The Japanese were then able to retire up the Slot unmolested.

The fallout from this engagement was crippling to Fletcher's reputation. The criticisms levelled against him can be summarized in three main points.

- 1) By allowing for the destruction of the cruisers, Fletcher left the Guadalcanal invasion force open for continual Japanese air, sea and land attacks over the coming months.
- 2) Fletcher lied about being out of fuel
- 3) Fletcher allowed Mikawa's force to escape unscathed

These criticisms began almost immediately after the battle and have continued to the present day. The Marines on Guadalcanal saw Fletcher as a timid and typical navy man who valued his ships higher than their soldiers on the ground. Samuel Eliot Morison, the magisterial official American historian of the Second World War, ridiculed Fletcher's caution claiming that he was under no real threat beyond that of sunburn.⁵

In the subsequent decades these criticisms have, if anything, grown stronger. Alan Schom, in a book published in 2004, accuses Fletcher of singlehandedly lengthening the Guadalcanal

⁵ Gerald Astor, *Wings of Gold, The US Naval Air Campaign in World War II*, (New York 2004) p. 118.

campaign by months.⁶ William Bruce Johnson, in a book published in 2006, is even more damning, accusing the American admiral of cowardice.⁷

In the last few years there has been an attempt by a group of Fletcher-defenders, primarily Marvin Butcher and John Lundstrom, to change the tenor of this debate.⁸ They point out the extreme uncertainty under which Fletcher was operating, and the extraordinary pressure he felt as the commander of the United States only surviving carrier strike force. Their exoneration of Fletcher's actions can also be summarized in a number of brief points.

- 1) Because of faulty intelligence, Fletcher received no foreknowledge of Mikawa's movements and would have been unable to protect the cruisers even if his carriers remained much closer to Guadalcanal.
- 2) Fletcher, under Nimitz's direct order, had to protect his carriers above all else, and was simply following orders
- 3) His subsequent actions, particularly during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons (August 24-25, 1942) show that he was no coward and could handle carrier forces with aggression when needed.

This debate between the two visions of Fletcher certainly cannot and will not be settled here. What is interesting is what it says about one's vision of where the USN was at that time, and perhaps a reluctance in some areas to realize that the USN was in a much more precarious state than it would be only a few months later. Knowing that the Essex class carriers were going to come off the line in enormous numbers tends, I think somewhat, to overly empower Fletcher's critics. He was in charge of the most valuable assets of the USN, fighting a fleet about equally as strong, with closer bases of support, doing a task that no one had ever trained much to do before. In a Mahanian-world, he was in an unparalleled position, engaging without intelligence and, crucially, when it was an open question of whether the target involved (Guadalcanal) was actually worth the loss of the carrier strike force.

⁶ Alan Schom, *The Eagle and the Rising Sun: The Japanese-American War 1941-43: Pearl Harbor through Guadalcanal*, (NY, 2004), p. 346.

⁷ William Bruce Johnson, *The Pacific Campaign in World War II: From Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal*, (New York, 2006), pp 192-5.

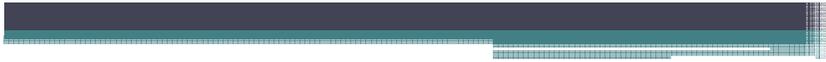
⁸ John B. Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway and Guadalcanal*, Annapolis 2006, pp 381-92; Marvin Butcher, 'Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Pioneer Warrior or Gross Sinner', *Naval War College Review*, Winter 1987. For other less detailed but still firm defenses of Fletcher see: Douglas V. Smith, *Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm's Way*, Annapolis, 2006, pp 163-4; Gerald Astor, *Wings of Gold, The US Naval Air Campaign in World War II*, (New York 2004) pp 118-20

It was American intelligence failures, not Fletcher's actions, which allowed Mikawa to slip undetected into the waters around Guadalcanal. Once there, considering Japanese superior night-fighting capabilities, Mikawa was bound to cause heavy American losses. The charge of cowardice also seems pre-naturally harsh. Fletcher was attempting an action, the support of ground troops with carrier-based airpower, which had not only never been tried previously, it had never been planned for. He was also operating in waters that were the most dangerous the American navy would face in the entire Second World War.

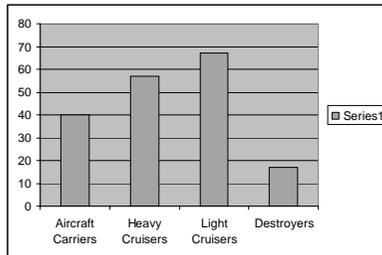
The naval battles off of Guadalcanal were easily the most difficult that the United States Navy would experience during the war. Within three months there were four major naval engagements, Savo Island, the Eastern Solomons, Cape Esperance, Santa Cruz, as well as countless smaller engagements between naval vessels and aircraft. The toll taken on the US Navy was spectacular. Between August 8th and November 15th 1942, the American Navy lost 40% of all the fleet carriers it would lose in the war, 57% of the heavy cruisers, 67% of the light cruisers and a remarkable 17% of the destroyers of the coast of Guadalcanal.⁹ (see chart 2) This last figure is particularly telling. That the United States lost 12 of the 67 destroyers it would lose in the entire war (both Pacific and Atlantic) off the coast of Guadalcanal speaks to the intensity of the combat. This is considerably more than were lost in any other campaign or battle.

⁹ See: *The United States Navy at War, 1941-45: Official Reports by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King*, (Washington DC, 1946), Appendix C. The raw figures are: Aircraft Carriers 2 of 5 (there is an argument that this figure should really be 2 of 4, because the last American aircraft carrier sunk in the war, the USS Princeton, was actually a vessel of an intermediate class, only 15000 tons when fully loaded); Heavy Cruisers 4 of 7; Light Cruisers 2 of 3; Destroyers 12 of 69.

Chart 2



Percentage of all American Naval Losses that were suffered off Guadalcanal August 8-November 15, 1942



That Fletcher was reluctant to leave his carriers exposed in such waters cannot be called cowardice. He was operating in an area where the enemy had access to large land-based air contingents, with limited intelligence (at best) of both enemy capabilities and intelligence. It was a situation not dissimilar to that which faced Admiral Yamamoto during the Midway campaign, when prudence would have been infinitely better for the Japanese than aggression.

This does not, however, let Fletcher completely off the hook. The one real criticism against him that holds force is that he allowed Mikawa's force to escape unscathed. The Japanese force had no carriers of its own to protect itself, and would have been vulnerable whilst returning to base if discovered in time. This lack of a return strike did mean that American forces on Guadalcanal would be subjected to regular night-time naval attack, and extraordinary efforts would have to be made to keep it adequately supplied. However even had Fletcher been in the position to attack Mikawa's force, there was no guarantee that any Japanese vessels would have been sunk, or that Fletcher's carriers would have themselves escaped unscathed. In the Samuel Eliot Morison archives there is a fascinating letter to the historian by Toshikayo Ohmae, an officer who served

with Mikawa during Savo Island.¹⁰ Ohmae recounts the extreme (and extremely successful) measures that Mikawa took not to be discovered as he headed down the Slot. Also, in a 1957 article published in *Proceedings*, Ohmae argued that on the way back up the Slot, Mikawa's force was rather upset that there was no American pursuit. 'The hours passed, and no enemy planes were sighted. There was no indication at all of the enemy carriers whose transmissions we had heard so loud and clear on the previous afternoon. It was reassuring to know that we were not being followed, but our spirits were dampened by the thought that now there would be no chance for our planes to get at the enemy carriers.'¹¹

Whilst not entirely wishing for Fletcher to be exonerated, as Ohmae indicates above, fighting the Japanese off of Guadalcanal was extremely risky for the United States. The American Navy in no way had real naval supremacy, and could not exercise sea denial, let alone sea control. This period of parity was uniquely dangerous because the United States Navy was emerging from its defensive crouch to go on its first offensive. That Fletcher was cautious, is hardly a surprise.

1943—The Decision on where to strike

This subject area chosen for the second part of this paper has partly arisen because of one of the other great debates (or evolutions of opinion) on the American strategy in the Pacific, and that is the reputation of Douglas MacArthur. If Jack Fletcher has suffered a fall in his reputation, MacArthur, some circles, has experienced an epochal collapse. After the Second World War, and the Korean War which witnessed his famous Inchon Landings campaign, MacArthur was widely considered an epochal military hero. In the 1950s even those who detested MacArthur's politics, felt it politic to praise his supposed strategic genius.¹² As late as 1977 MacArthur was being played a biographical film (mostly positively) by Gregory Peck.

In the last few decades, however, this view has been challenged hugely. Ronald Spector, in his excellent one volume history of the war in the Pacific, was one of the most effective MacArthur critics.¹³ The most interesting of these criticisms has to do with the whole thrust of his campaign

¹⁰ Samuel E. Morison Archives, Harvard University, HUG FP (33.41) Box 37. letter from Ohmae to Morison, 27 April 1962.

¹¹ Toshikayo Ohmae, 'The Battle of Savo Island', *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, December 1957, Vol 83, #12, p. 1276.

¹² In the Morison archives is a wonderful clipping of a book review (written by Louis Morton) of a new biography of MacArthur. Though Morton is clearly sceptical of MacArthur, he heaps praise on his military ability. 'Handsome and elegant, brave to the point of foolhardiness, highly intelligent, well read, a brilliant conversationalist and a formidable orator, MacArthur has all the qualities of an inspiring leader. In his own field he is acknowledged as a master, a strategist of the first order, and one of the great generals of our time.' Louis Morton review in *The Reporter*, 4 November 1954; in Morison Archives, HUG FP (33.41) Box 38.

¹³ Ronald Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War against Japan*, (New York, 1985). Spector does a strong job of critiquing whether MacArthur's campaigns were worth the cost, even when successful (see p. 283). He provides ammunition

towards the Philippines. It should not be surprising that in the famous pre-war war plans Orange, the Philippines were viewed as a decisive staging post for operations against Japan. Indeed from the moment Macarthur reached Australia his plan was to advance in an access through New Guinea, to Rabaul and then to the retake Philippines. The question remains, however, once the Second World War in the Pacific developed the way that it did, whether it still made sense to orient strategy towards the recapture of the Philippines.

Many of Macarthur's harshest critics believe that his obsession in retaking Philippines was personal, and that the eventual campaign's cost in men and material was completely unnecessary to defeat Japan. Basically the charge is that Macarthur sacrificed his men's lives to protect his reputation. Willmott believes Macarthur's venality should have lead to his dismissal.¹⁴ While not as harsh as this, Williamson Murray and Allan Millet is their superb history of the Second World War, *A War to be Won*, stress the less flattering elements in his nature.¹⁵

The criticisms of Macarthur have real force, especially when one considers that during the entire time that he was fighting (in his inimitable way) for a return to the Philippines, an alternative strategy was being developed within the United States Navy that would bring victory over Japan much more quickly and with lower costs. The best place to begin this understanding the growth of this policy is in late 1942 and very early 1943, when the Guadalcanal campaign, while not completely finished, was heading towards a successful conclusion. It was at this point that a great deal of effort was put into planning for future campaigns, efforts that were put into greater focus as the USN, particularly in the shape of Admiral Ernest King, the Chief of Naval Operations, who was preparing for a series of exhausting and comprehensive conferences in 1943—Casablanca, Trident, Sextant etc, which determined the priorities and directions of Allied strategy. In the process what we see is King coming to terms with modern warfare and establishing the direction of American strategy in the Pacific. In many ways it is surprising how little has been written about King.¹⁶ Admiral Francis S Low, who served closely with King throughout most of the war, once urged Morison to take up the task of writing the Chief of Naval Operations' biography (Morison declined).¹⁷ However even Low admitted that King was a difficult man to judge because he seldom explained the reasons underlying his decisions.

to show that the reconquest of the Philippines was more difficult because of Macarthur's behavior (see pp. 529-30).

¹⁴ Willmott *The War with Japan*, p. 94.

¹⁵ Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge MA, 2000) pp 181-2.

¹⁶ Considering King's great importance in the Second World War it is interesting to note that there is only one major biography of him and that is now three decades old (though it is a great work). Thomas Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Ernest J. King*, (Boston, 1980).

¹⁷ Morison Archives, HUG FP (33.41) Box 37, Low to Morison, 13 July, 1962.

To begin with what was the vision of the USN at this time? Maybe the best source was a letter sent by Chester Nimitz to King on December 8th, 1942.¹⁸ In this letter Nimitz tried to summarize the lessons learned so far during the fighting in the Pacific, as a way of influencing what the United States would do next. His points, in summary, were as follows:

- 1) The Japanese are the equal of the USA in willingness to fight
- 2) Surface units should be considered of equal ability (though USA fire control radar offers the possibility of a real advantage
- 3) USA airforces are definitely superior in quality, especially with the newer planes just coming off the assembly line.
- 4) USA land forces in Solomons have shown that they are better armed and more adaptable than the Japanese, but he assumes that the Japanese will improve and the USA will need superiority at its points of attack
- 5) USA submarines have proven themselves to be more effective
- 6) USA's greatest inferiority is in the use and performance of torpedoes

Interestingly Nimitz also mentions the 'bypass' notion in this letter, one of the first serious mentions of the policy that would become famous as island hopping.

What is also interesting about American strategic thinking of the time, not only Nimitz in this letter, but King early on, and Macarthur all the time, was its conservative strategic direction. The access of advance towards Japan was extremely cautious, and partly based on prewar planning. As such Rabaul was considered the key and the Philippines a major objective.

This should be no surprise. The growth of the Japanese base at Rabaul was one of the reasons the US Navy thought it imperative to react quickly to Japanese moves to build an airfield on Guadalcanal. However Rabaul is only of decisive importance if the Americans were planning for a slow, methodical means to victory, part of an direction of advance that would lead through the Philippines to China. It was widely believed that fighting the Japanese up the Bismarcks was going to be extremely difficult and assumed to be time consuming. The area was populated by a series of self-supporting Japanese airbases. Even though Guadalcanal was at the extreme limit of Japanese aircraft range, they were able to contest air supremacy over the island for months without relying much at all on carrier aircraft. A repeat of a number of Guadalcanals would have meant large casualties and slow progress.

¹⁸ Edwin P. Hoyt, *How They Won the War in the Pacific: Nimitz and His Admirals* (New York, 1970) p. 191.

And then there was the question of where the 'progress' of the campaign was directed. The main thrust was not directly towards Japan, but actually towards China relying on intermediate, and presumably bloody and time consuming contests in the Philippines and/or even Formosa/Taiwan. It was a conservative and cautious conception of a campaign of overwhelming force. It was also interesting that it was assumed that large facilities would be needed in China to prosecute the war to its final conclusion against Japan. No one can argue that this strategy would not have resulted in the eventual surrender of Japan, though it undoubtedly would have taken longer (without the use of the Atomic Bomb). Macarthur, indeed was never able to wean himself away from this access of advance. For him the move to the Philippines was always the ultimate goal, and for this reason the criticisms that have recently been levelled against him are extremely important.

Why they are particularly forceful is that while Macarthur was clinging to this old notion of an advance, within the Navy, first I would say was Ernest King and then Chester Nimitz who, I would argue, better understood the proper ways to victory and defeat in the Second World War. At this point I will admit my own prejudice about how the Second World War was decided. I believe that airpower, in its production, its use and its destruction, was the key component, both in Europe and Pacific.¹⁹ Airpower was the most expensive part of almost all belligerents economies and it determined the outcome of most campaigns. Only where neither side in a campaign was able to assert clear air superiority would differences in land forces play the crucial role in determining the outcome.

Within the USN it was apparent not long after the Pearl Harbor attacks, that naval airpower would now be decisive. This lesson was only driven home by the results of Midway. However, the question remained as to how to properly apply airpower, both navally and strategically, against Japan. From an airpower point of view there was only one logical place for a direction of advance, towards the Marianas.

This chain of islands, including Saipan, Tinian and Guam, was the key to a modern war against Japan. Perfectly placed, they could interdict sea and air traffic between Japan and its southern possessions. They could deny reinforcement to Rabaul and Truk (which became one of the great obsessions of American naval planners during most of late 1942) and they would allow for the use of strategic airpower against Japan. Even though the B-29 was still in its (extremely expensive) design stage, it was a weapon tailor made for the Marianas, as King realized early on. It was the realization of this that is the most important growth of US naval policy in 1943, and it is

¹⁹ See: Phillips Payson O'Brien, 'East Versus West in the Defeat of Nazi Germany', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 23, #2, (2000), pp 89-113.

one that we can partly document because of the series of grand strategy conferences that the US held with Great Britain, at both the level of high political leadership and the Combined Joint Chiefs of Staff.

At Casablanca, which was held in January of 1943, the USN, represented rather forcefully by Ernest King, presented a Rabaul-China centric policy towards the British. Of course at the time, the real issue was how much effort could be exerted in the Pacific. The British government was loathe that the United States divert any substantial forces towards Japan, believing, not without a little self-interest, in the Germany first policy. Of course this was anathema to the USN, who continued to see the Japanese as its greatest enemy, knowing that the focus on Europe would most likely see it turned into a heavily armed Taxi service operating within guidelines set out by the Royal Navy.

The first decisive sign of real change occurred at the Trident Conference in May of 1943. Again, while the British locked horns with the Americans over Germany first, for the first time the USN presented a coherent and advanced plan for victory over Japan based around the eventual conquest of the Marianas. King talked about how he had to 'educate' the American army, in the person of George Marshall, on this question. On May 21 he also integrated the B-29 into a lucid presentation for the first time. According to his great biographer, King focussed on the Marianas. 'All operations in the Pacific, said King, should be directed toward severing the Japanese lines of communication and recapturing the Philippines. *The Marianas were the key.* With the Marianas in American hands, the enemy sea lines of communications to the Carolines would be severed, and the Americans would be in a central position to strike westward toward the Philippines or China, or northwestward toward Japan.'²⁰

It was obviously an impressive performance, for it won King the tiniest smidgen of acceptance by his greatest critic in the war, Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, the United Kingdom's Chief of the Imperial General Staff. After the war Alanbrooke published his extensive diary covering the entire war. Though he often seems angry at everyone, with the possible exception of Field Marshal Montgomery, King was one of his particular bugbears. He liked to mock King's drinking and belittle what Alanbrooke considered the disjointed nature of his presentations. However even Alanbrooke seemed very pleased by King's presentation on May 21, and accepted it without hesitation or argument. 'Rather an easier day which started with a COS (chiefs of staff) meeting at 9am and followed up with a Combined meeting at 10:30. The work

²⁰ Buell, *Master of Sea Power*, p. 337.

was easier and there was less controversy. We dealt with the Pacific and accepted what was put forward.'²¹

It is interesting to see King as the main driver of this policy. However, he does seem to be the one that pushes the Marianas the first, and the hardest. Up until May 1943 Nimitz seemed most obsessed with taking Truk, in the Caroline Islands, which he considered the 'quiones' of the Japanese strategic defensive network.²² However, after Trident, King flew out to the west coast and met with Nimitz, on May 28th. From that point Nimitz seems to have switched to a focus on the Marianas. The Central Pacific drive, which was now to run in parallel with Macarthur Southern Pacific drive, was to begin in the Gilberts and Marshalls as a way of getting to the Marianas. This was only confirmed in later events such as Quadrant and the Anglo-American Cairo conference in December of 1943.

However, if realizing that the Marianas were the proper direction of the American advance was a triumph of understanding of modern warfare, it was only partial victory. The drive to the Marianas, which was the vital step in winning the war in the Pacific, was only co-equal with Macarthur's drive to the Philippines and/or China. This southern drive, which played only a secondary role in American victory, continued to receive considerable material support until 1944. At times Nimitz had to detach significant force to aid Macarthur's unnecessary efforts. Some of these efforts did seem to trouble him. In the Morison archives is a letter Nimitz wrote to the historian in 1963. It concerns the heavy losses suffered by American forces sent to take Pelieu. This island, which was south of the Marianas, could easily have been bypassed, but Nimitz felt it necessary to commit the 1st Marine Division to seize it, to help protect Macarthur's flank.²³ In doing so he ended up exposing one of the finest fighting units in the US military to extraordinary casualties, leaving it needing months to recuperate.

A complete understanding of modern warfare would have seen Macarthur's southern drive metamorphosize into a clearly secondary operation. In this role it would have undoubtedly been very successful. Macarthur would have made an excellent commander of the kind of phantom army that Patton supposedly controlled in southern England ready to launch at Calais.

²¹ Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (eds), *War Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, 1939-45*, (London, 2001), p. 408.

²² Hoyt, *How the War was Won*, p. 207.

²³ Morison Archives, HUG FP (33.41) Box 37, Nimitz to Morison, 18 April 1963.