

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 457

“I Have Returned”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Two and a half years after he was ordered to abandon the Philippine Islands, Douglas MacArthur fulfilled his famous pledge.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 457. I Have Returned.

Back in episode 437, I described to you the meeting in Hawaii between President Roosevelt, General MacArthur, and Admiral Nimitz over what the next step in the Pacific War ought to be, now that Saipan had been taken and secured. Nimitz wanted to go on to Taiwan, while MacArthur was insistent that the US was duty-bound to liberate the Philippines. MacArthur was able to persuade Roosevelt, and maybe Nimitz as well, that the next operation should be to retake the Philippines. The tentative date set for the invasion was December 20, 1944.

In Japan, the fall of Saipan had triggered the fall of the Tōjō government. For more than two years, that government had refused to acknowledge to the Japanese people that the war was not going well, even though that was becoming increasingly obvious. After the fall of Saipan, something snapped in Japanese politics. It was no longer possible to accept the government's optimism. You can tell your people comforting lies. You can even choose to believe them. But the Americans overrunning Saipan and breaching what was supposed to be Japan's last line of defense was a bracing dose of reality. You can't refuse to admit the existence of an enemy army on your doorstep.

Until now, the story of the American war in the Pacific has been the story of two rivals: General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz. In some sense they were proxies for the larger rivalry between the US Army and the US Navy. They conducted separate campaigns, Nimitz in the Central Pacific, MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific, and often bickered over allocation of resources.

This time was different. This time, MacArthur's force and Nimitz's fleet would not be rivals, each trying to prove their strategy was superior. They would be full partners. MacArthur would be in overall command, with Nimitz providing heavy naval support. The invasion of the Philippines would require assembling land, air, and sea forces in numbers greater than anything the US had yet attempted in the Pacific. Japan would be facing one of the largest naval forces ever assembled: eight fleet carriers, eight light carriers, eighteen escort carriers, twelve battleships, 24 cruisers, and over a hundred destroyers.

In fairness, I should note that these figures also include some Australian vessels.

The Japanese military were aware that the numbers were against them. They realized the Americans were likely to strike in the Philippines next. And they calculated, correctly, that the loss of the Philippines would mean losing the war. The Imperial Navy had suffered serious losses in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, but Japan still had a Navy. The Philippines could be reinforced with as many soldiers and aircraft as Japan could muster.

The Japanese gave their defensive plans the optimistic codename *Shō-Gō*, which means "Operation Victory." Most of Operation Victory planning centered on the Philippines, but the Navy also drew up contingency plans in the event the Americans struck Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands, or the Kurile Islands. These various plans would be designated *Shō-Gō-1*, *Shō-Gō-2*, and so on.

The basic principle of each plan was the same. Wherever the Americans struck, the Japanese response would be by air and by sea. Japan would rely on land-based aircraft to neutralize American carrier air strength and destroy any approaching invasion force. What remained of the Combined Fleet would try one last time to achieve Japan's longstanding goal of luring the superior American fleet into an ambush.

Most Japanese Army officers had faith in their air power, but not General Kuroda Shigenori, overall commander of ground forces in the Philippines, who disagreed. He warned his superiors in Tokyo that the concept of air power in the islands holding the Americans at bay was sound, but, as he put it, you can't fight a war with concepts. He told them, "Words will not sink American ships and that becomes clear when you compare our aircraft with theirs."

In defending the Philippines, the Japanese faced the same problems the Americans had in 1942. How do you defend every stretch of coastline on every one of 7,000 islands? The staff officers of the Southern Army, the Imperial Army force tasked with defending the archipelago, wanted to distribute their forces across the islands and be ready to launch a counterattack as soon as the Americans landed, wherever that may be.

The Army General Staff in Tokyo disagreed. In their view, there were only three islands in the archipelago that mattered. There was Luzon, in the north, the largest island and home to half the

Philippine population. There was Mindanao in the south, the second-largest island, and there was Leyte, in the middle.

Why Leyte? Leyte is not the third-largest island, as you might suspect. Nearby Samar is the third-largest; Leyte is only the eighth largest. But Leyte is an obvious choice for an amphibious landing. It lies on the eastern side of the archipelago, near the middle. Mindanao is just a short distance away to the south, and Samar lies within spitting distance to the north. Best of all, from an invader's point of view, are the open waters to the east of Leyte, called the Leyte Gulf. Here the water is deep, which allows large ships to get in close, and the island's shore lacks the coral reefs that have fouled up previous American amphibious assaults.

Nimitz's first step in the plan to retake the Philippines was an air strike against Palau. The Palau Islands are a chain of some 300 islands that made up the western end of the Caroline Islands, which had been administered by Japan since their seizure from Germany during the last war. The Japanese had used Palau as a forward base from which to strike at the Philippines in 1942. Now, in 1944, the islands lay along the route MacArthur's forces would have to take during their approach to the Philippines, which meant the island group had to be taken by amphibious assault, which in turn meant the Japanese air units stationed in the islands had to be dealt with first.

From September 6-8, planes from US Navy Task Force 38, Admiral Mark Mitscher commanding, bombed the islands. You may remember Mitscher from the days when he was captain of USS *Hornet*, when that carrier launched the bombers that executed the Doolittle Raid of 1942. Mitscher was largely responsible for developing the US Navy's doctrine for the use of aircraft carrier task forces during the war. Mitscher believed that the best defense of a carrier task force is the carriers' own planes, and that the ideal number of carriers in a task force was four, escorted by 6-8 support ships and as many as 24 destroyers. These support ships would provide additional anti-aircraft fire when the task force was attacked by enemy planes. The destroyers would also be useful in defending the carriers against enemy submarines and in picking up downed aircrew from the water. The four carriers would sail in close formation in the center of the task force, while the other ships would form a circle around them.

After the raid on Palau, Mitscher moved on to Mindanao, attacking it on September 9-10. The idea behind these raids was to neutralize Japanese land-based air power, the very force the Japanese were counting on to defend the Philippines. American carrier planes would target Japanese airfields. If the Japanese planes stayed on the ground, they would be destroyed. If they took off to defend the airbase against the American attack, US Hellcat fighters would hunt them down and shoot them down.

As Mitscher's task force was bombing Mindanao, Japanese commanders in Manila received two reports from Mindanao describing US Marines and amphibious tanks landing on the south coast of the island. Here was the invasion the Japanese had anticipated. Operation Victory was put into effect. Land and air forces from the Philippines and New Guinea were ordered to Mindanao. The

main Japanese fleet, based at Brunei on Borneo so as to be close to its fuel supply, set sail to intercept the Americans.

It was all a big mistake. Nervous Japanese naval observers on the south coast of Mindanao had in fact observed choppy seas and mistook the wave caps for approaching amphibious landing craft.

Mitscher's Task Force 38 next proceeded north along the eastern side of the Philippines, attacking Japanese planes and airfields with abandon. Japanese losses were heavy; American losses insignificant. Mitscher was then ordered to turn his force south, to the island of Morotai. Morotai was part of the Dutch East Indies and lies about 400 miles, or 600 kilometers, south of the Philippines. Mitscher was sent to Morotai because MacArthur's forces would soon invade the island, as a stepping stone between New Guinea and the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Mitscher's superior, Admiral William Halsey, commander of the US Third Fleet, studied Mitscher's reports of American successes in the Philippines and got to thinking. If Japanese air defenses in the Philippines are this bad, why are we waiting until December to invade?

He weighed his next move carefully. His superiors surely knew better than he the overall strategic picture in the Pacific. Was he being presumptuous? On the other hand, if he was right, it could mean ending the war earlier and saving countless lives.

That made it worth the attempt. He summoned his staff secretary, Commander Harold Stassen. You might recognize that name. Harold Stassen had been the Republican Governor of Minnesota and a key supporter of Wendell Willkie in 1940. He resigned the office of governor in 1943, just months after being elected to a third term, to join the US Navy, where he was assigned to Halsey. Halsey ordered Stassen to send an urgent message to Chester Nimitz in Pearl Harbor.

Nimitz punted the decision to the top: to Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, who were meeting in Québec at the time. They both liked the idea, but agreed it would require the consent of Douglas MacArthur, since MacArthur, not Nimitz, had been made overall commander of the Philippine invasion. Retaking the Philippines had been at the top of MacArthur's agenda since the day he left. Surely he should have the final word.

MacArthur was at that moment aboard the cruiser USS *Nashville*, and that ship was running under radio silence, as MacArthur was leading an invasion force *en route* to seize Morotai.

So the query was redirected to MacArthur's headquarters on New Guinea and to his chief of staff. When the message containing the question reached his desk, I imagine his first reaction was, "Are you kidding me?" Of course MacArthur wants a landing in the Philippines ASAP. He had no hesitation in replying to the President and the Prime Minister in Québec that yes, absolutely for sure General MacArthur would support bringing up the date of the invasion and suggested October 20 as a reasonable target date.

MacArthur's force landed on Morotai on September 15, and seized the island with little trouble from a small and undersupplied Japanese garrison. On that same day, US Marines assaulted two islands in the Palaus: Peleliu and Angaur. In these landings, the Marines used the same tactics in that had become standard in the Pacific Theater, but the Japanese had changed their defensive tactics. Instead of charging immediately at the enemy beachhead, as had been the preferred Japanese approach during previous landings, which subjected the Japanese troops to heavy Allied naval bombardment, this time Japanese commanders ordered a defense in depth. Instead of suicide charges, Japanese soldiers would prepare a system of bunkers and fortified positions in the interior of the island, hunker down, and force the Americans to come to them.

The new Japanese tactics succeeded in their aim, of forcing the Americans into a protracted and costly battle of attrition. The Marine commander predicted the islands would be secured within four days. In fact, it took more than two months and cost some 2,000 Americans killed and 8,500 wounded. The Japanese lost their entire garrison of 12,000.

This invasion was the bloodiest one yet for the Americans, who suffered more than twice as many deaths as at the battle known as "Bloody" Tarawa. As was the case at Tarawa, the action was controversial back home in the United States, where the public questioned whether these small islands no one had ever heard of until now were worth the cost of capturing them.

This action is also notable as one of the first in which US air forces dropped a new incendiary weapon on Japanese positions. It was called *napalm* and was developed in 1942 at Harvard University. Napalm is essentially jellied gasoline. The advantages of gelling liquid gasoline are that it is more easily and accurately applied to its targets, and that it sticks, both to buildings and to people. Nasty stuff.

Mitscher's Task Force 38, the force that had been striking airfields in the Philippines, was present at Morotai to support MacArthur's invasion. Following the landing at Morotai, Task Force 38 turned north again and headed back to the Philippines, this time toward Luzon, the largest and most heavily defended of the islands. On September 21 and 22, Mitscher's carrier air groups made a daring—maybe I should say brazen—series of raids on what used to be American airfields around Manila, wrecking the landing strips and destroying 200 Japanese warplanes on the ground. Other attacks damaged cargo ships in Manila harbor.

The Americans lost 15 planes. Mitscher brought his task force to within 40 miles of the Japanese-controlled island, an act that would have been suicidal two years ago, and yet no Japanese plane got anywhere near them.

I should pause here to discuss why air combat between Japanese and American fighters had become so lopsided. One reason was that the new American Hellcat fighter was superior in most respects to the Japanese Zero, which had changed little since 1940. The more important reason was the heavy losses of fighters and pilots the Japanese suffered during the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Japanese factories had replaced most of the lost planes, but as we've seen, pilots

are not so easy to replace. The Japanese fighter pilots of late 1944 were a pale imitation of their veteran predecessors who had fought so skillfully at Pearl Harbor and Midway.

If there was any doubt on the American side that the Philippines were ripe for an invasion, the ease with which Mitscher's task force took down Japanese air defenses dispelled it. And in Tokyo, if there was any doubt that the next American target was the Philippines, Mitscher's air attacks on Luzon dispelled *that*. The commander of ground forces in the Philippines, General Kuroda, who had questioned the claim that Japanese air power alone could hold the Americans at bay, was relieved of his command. Because he spent too much of his time in the Philippines playing golf rather than attending to his duties, according to the official explanation. More likely, it was because his superiors in Tokyo found his lack of faith in Japanese air power disturbing. More likely still, it was because Kuroda had been close to Tōjō, and Tōjō was definitely out of favor.

Kuroda's replacement was General Yamashita Tomoyuki, the commander who had led the Japanese Army's brilliant campaign in Malaya and its capture of Singapore. Yamashita arrived at his new command in Manila on October 6. Publicly, he told his troops that the fate of Japan rested on their shoulders and that each of them had a responsibility to fight with the utmost determination. If they did, he assured them, Japan would win in the end.

That's what he said publicly. Privately, he told his staff that the defense of the Philippines would be another Battle of Minatogawa. In that battle, fought in 1336, forces loyal to the Emperor were crushed by a samurai army twice their size. Though the Imperial forces were defeated, the battle went down in Japanese history as an inspirational tale of loyalty to the Emperor in the face of overwhelming odds. Which is all well and good if your goal is to inspire posterity, but the bottom line here was that Yamashita was saying in a euphemistic way that they were screwed.

The island of Leyte itself was home to about a million Filipinos, mostly farmers, many of whom were supporting an active guerilla force which operated in the mountains on the island. The guerillas most valuable contribution was the information on Japanese forces and their dispositions that they radioed to MacArthur. Leyte was garrisoned by the 20,000 soldiers of the Japanese 16th Division. The 16th had been part of the initial landings on Luzon back in December 1941. It had been part of the advance on Manila and had fought at Bataan. But that was a long time ago. In 1944, the veterans of those battles were gone, transferred to other units. The 16th was now composed mostly of older conscripts who had never seen combat.

At Hollandia, on New Guinea, the Americans were assembling their forces for the pending invasion: assault ships and landing craft carrying over 150,000 US soldiers and Marines, escorted by the US Seventh Fleet.

As the invasion force was preparing to set sail, Admiral Mitscher and his Task Force 38, having returned to base and resupplied, were sent farther north to disrupt Japanese air units that might otherwise reinforce the Philippines once the invasion began. Coincidentally, Imperial Navy

commander-in-chief Toyoda Soemu, had begun an inspection tour at this same time, intended to raise morale and confidence among Japanese forces designated to participate in Operation Victory.

On October 10, Task Force 38 hit Okinawa, the southernmost of the Ryukyu Islands, destroying several cargo ships and a hundred Japanese warplanes. Admiral Toyoda was on Taiwan at the time, the last leg of his tour, and was planning to return to Japan that same day, but had to cancel his trip when the news came that a large American naval air force stood between him and the Home Islands.

The US attack on Okinawa muddled the picture for Japanese commanders, as they interpreted it as the likely prelude to an assault on Taiwan. The general staff in Tokyo activated *Shō-Gō-1* and *Shō-Gō-2*, putting air forces on alert both in the Philippines and on Taiwan. Hundreds of Japanese aircraft were redeployed from China and Japan to bases on Okinawa and in the Ryukus in preparation for the expected American invasion.

There was no American invasion of Taiwan in the works, but there was Mitscher and Task Force 38, who were now under orders to sail southwest and attack Taiwan. On the night of October 11, a Japanese reconnaissance plane equipped with radar detected Task Force 38 approaching. Japanese commanders on Taiwan guessed the Americans would be launching another of their air strikes at dawn on the 12th.

When dawn came, the American task force first sent out Hellcat fighters to search for enemy planes. The Hellcats were detected and intercepted over Taiwan by Japanese Zeroes and anti-aircraft fire from the ground. For the first time, Task Force 38 was striking a target that was on alert and ready for them.

But the superiority of US pilots and planes still won the day. In the combat that followed, the Americans shot down 50 Japanese Zeroes, while losing nine of their own planes. Three of the nine American pilots shot down landed safely in the sea and were recovered by US submarines.

Hundreds of aircraft based on nearby islands or on Japanese carriers attacked Task Force 38 that day and into the night, but did minimal damage to the American ships.

The Japanese tried again the next day, with greater success. A Japanese torpedo bomber attempting to attack one of the American carriers missed, but his torpedo struck the American cruiser, USS *Canberra*, which was taken back to base under tow by USS *Wichita*. And by the way, if *Canberra* sounds like a strange name for a US Navy warship, understand that this *Canberra* was named after the Australian cruiser HMAS *Canberra*, which was sunk in 1942 during the naval battles around Guadalcanal.

The towing of *Canberra*, and then USS *Houston*, hit by a Japanese torpedo bomber, slowed the task force. Halsey ordered more air strikes against bases on Taiwan to cover their withdrawal.

By the end of the engagements over Taiwan, the Japanese had lost around 450 planes to the Americans' 89. A total of 4 US ships were damaged by Japanese air attacks, but none were sunk or scuttled. It was by any reasonable measure a convincing Japanese defeat, but the inexperienced and excitable Japanese pilots (the ones who survived, that is) returned with overblown claims of sinking numerous American ships and forcing the Third Fleet to withdraw. Senior commanders on Taiwan and in Tokyo, including Navy chief Admiral Toyoda, saw no reason to question these claims and publicly announced that 11 enemy carriers, two battleships, and several smaller ships had been sunk, with large numbers of other vessels damaged.

Third Fleet commander Admiral Halsey sent a sarcastic radio message to Nimitz mocking the Japanese claims: "The Third Fleet's sunken and damaged ships have been salvaged and repaired and are retiring at high speed toward the enemy." What he meant by that last bit was that Third Fleet was proceeding to its next assignment, to provide air cover for the invasion of Leyte.

[music: Felipe, "Lupang Hinirang."]

The name Manuel Quezon should be familiar to long-time listeners. Quezon was a Filipino attorney and politician who had played an important role in the Philippine independence movement. Following the creation of the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935, Quezon was elected President in the country's first nationwide election. He was then reelected in November 1941, less than a month before the Pearl Harbor attack.

Following the Japanese occupation, Quezon led a Philippine government-in-exile in the US. He suffered from tuberculosis during most of this time, and the disease eventually took his life in August 1944. He was 65 years old. His successor, Vice President Sergio Osmeño, succeeded him as President. In October 1944, Osmeño was in the Pacific with Douglas MacArthur, both of them eagerly awaiting their return to the islands.

There was a risk in moving the invasion date up to October: typhoon season, and indeed a typhoon struck the Philippines in mid-October, but it was already moving on as the invasion date grew near, while the occasional sightings of American ships near the Philippines were dismissed by Japanese commanders. These must be more cases of mistaken identification. How would the Americans dare to send the tattered remnants of their fleet to the Philippines, just after suffering their greatest naval defeat of the war, a defeat worse than at Pearl Harbor?

On October 17, during a driving rain in the aftermath of the typhoon, a handful of American ships, led by two light cruisers, shelled the tiny island of Suluan at the entrance to Leyte Gulf. After a brief bombardment, a battalion of US Army Rangers landed on the island and seized the lighthouse, killing or driving off the 32-member Japanese garrison. They were looking for a map of Japanese mines in the entrance to the gulf, but didn't find one. No matter. The Americans had mine sweepers.

One soldier in the garrison managed to get out a radio report before the Americans captured the lighthouse. He incorrectly reported two battleships and two light carriers were involved in the operation. Admiral Toyoda, the Imperial Navy chief, took the report at face value and ordered all Japanese warships to head for the Philippines to take part in Operation Victory, and perhaps the Navy's last chance at that decisive battle they'd been looking for.

Army commanders in the Philippines took the opposite view. They remembered how whitecaps off the coast of Mindanao had been reported as an American invasion by excitable observers and guessed something similar was going on here. Another false alarm.

Except on Leyte itself, where the commander of the 16th Division, General Makino, took the report seriously and, against the advice of his staff, put his division on alert.

The weather improved on the morning of the 18th, although the day began with a heavy fog. That's why one of Makino's staff officers, who had taken a plane over the gulf at dawn to size up the situation for himself, was unable to see US Rangers landing on the island of Homonhon. There was no Japanese garrison present; the Rangers were there to set up a navigation light that would aid the approaching fleet in navigating the entrance to Leyte Gulf. On the other side of the channel, more Rangers were setting up a similar beacon at Desolation Point, the northern tip of the island of Dinagat.

The staff officer reported back to Makino that he had seen nothing amiss. I should mention that the general sent this officer to fly over the gulf and see for himself because the recent typhoon had downed most of the telephone lines on the island, and Makino was having difficulty contacting many of his own units, so he had little choice but to accept what his staff officer was telling him. They speculated that the American ships sighted earlier had merely been blown off course by the typhoon.

But in Tokyo, Admiral Toyoda was still taking that report seriously. He ordered *Shō-Gō-1* set into motion. That's the plan that assumed an invasion of the Philippines.

Recall that the main Japanese battle fleet was at this moment based at Brunei, close to the oil refineries of Borneo that were their fuel source. Operation Victory called for this force to divide into two groups, each of which would thread its way through the Philippine archipelago. On October 25, the two forces would enter Leyte Gulf simultaneously from the north and from the south and attack and destroy the invasion force's cargo ships and troop ships, leaving the invaders isolated, out of supply, and trapped on Leyte Island.

At the same time, a third force, led by *Zuikaku*, Japan's only remaining fleet carrier, plus three light carriers, two battleships, and support ships, began their own journey south from Kyushu along the eastern side of the Philippine archipelago, toward the US Third Fleet. But this third force, this carrier force, was a bluff. The four Japanese carriers barely had a hundred airplanes among them, the sad survivors of the air battle over Taiwan. Their mission was to make an

appearance, look threatening, then withdraw to the north, and hopefully lure most of the US Third Fleet into pursuit, especially the American carriers, and clear the way for the real attack force, coming in from Borneo.

Even as these Japanese naval forces left their home bases to begin their journeys toward the Philippines, an American naval force led by the battleship USS *Pennsylvania* entered Leyte Gulf and began shelling Japanese defensive positions on the island's east coast. Meanwhile, in the waters south of the Philippines, the main US invasion force was assembling: over 400 transports escorted by more than 150 warships. Behind them, some 200 cargo ships carrying two million tons of supplies: everything the soldiers could use, from artillery shells to bags of candy. These supplies, drawn from supply stores in nine different locations in the Pacific, were calculated to be sufficient to keep the Leyte invasion force fighting for the first month, with 300,000 tons of supplies to be delivered every month afterward. This was warfare American style, drawing on the nation's enormous production capacity and a huge and complex logistical system to get it all quickly to where it was needed.

In the vanguard of the invasion fleet were more battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. On October 19, they entered Leyte Gulf and added their firepower to the bombardment. American carrier planes attacked every Japanese air base in the region. That night, the invasion force itself gathered at a point east of Leyte Gulf and began the journey toward their landing sites.

The next morning, October 20, was A-Day. That's the label MacArthur gave it, since "D-Day" was now universally understood to mean the June 6 Normandy invasion. At first light of dawn, with the rising sun at their backs, they approached the beaches as the big naval guns opened up on the island once again.

Ten o'clock was H-Hour, and by the time the assault troops neared the beach, they gaped at the sprawling wasteland that had been a rich green jungle yesterday.

Four divisions stormed beaches up and down Leyte. On one beach, among the first to land was a two-man team, one American soldier and one Filipino soldier, who came ashore together and planted the flags of their respective homelands on Philippine soil.

Douglas MacArthur watched the invasion from the bridge of USS *Nashville*. At two in the afternoon, he changed into a fresh uniform, donned sunglasses, and climbed into a barge full of American and Filipino officers and journalists. Soon they picked up President Osmeña, who had initially balked at participating, irked at being asked to play second fiddle to MacArthur. But Osmeña eventually agreed, grudgingly. But now that the moment was here, it was hard for him or for anyone on that barge not to be excited. The phrases "We're back," and "I can hardly believe it," echoed back and forth among the group.

The barge approached the shore. Lacking a landing boat, MacArthur put on his sunglasses, debarked into knee-high surf, and waded ashore, corncob pipe clenched between his teeth. He

had inadvertently stumbled into the perfect photo op. Osmeña followed, struggling to keep up with the long-legged general.

Nearby, two US soldiers were firing into the jungle, their backs to the sea. One of them turned and said, “Hey, there’s General MacArthur.”

Not looking away from his duties, the other replied, “Yeah, and I suppose he’s got Eleanor Roosevelt with him.”

MacArthur, addressing Osmeña as “Mr. President,” vowed to turn over the civilian administration of Leyte as soon as US troops took the provincial capital of Tacloban. Osmeña replied, “I am ready.”

Soon MacArthur was on the radio, addressing the people of the Philippines. Inevitably, he opened with the words, “People of the Philippines, I have returned.”

A few miles north, US soldiers reached the outskirts of Tacloban. They attempted to set up a defensive line, but were overwhelmed by a mob of grateful Filipinos. By nightfall, the Americans held a beachhead on Leyte about five miles wide and a mile deep. Exactly 49 Americans were killed in the first day’s fighting.

In Tokyo, the Army leadership ordered all Army units in the Philippines to converge on Leyte and drive the Americans back. The Americans took Tacloban on the second day and turned it over to the Philippine government.

We’ll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I’d like to thank Stephane and Drew for their kind donations, and thank you to David for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Stephane, Drew, and David help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you’d like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you’ll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we keep our focus on the Pacific Theater. Remember that the Japanese Navy still has three forces approaching Leyte Gulf. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In today's episode I alluded to the fact that there were ships from the Royal Australian Navy involved in the invasion of Leyte, so I thought I should say a little more about them.

It was the US Seventh Fleet that escorted the transports to Leyte and assisted in the invasion, while the US Third Fleet was launching carrier air attacks on Japanese airfields in the region.

There were thirteen Australian ships attached to the US Seventh Fleet during this operation. Three of them were converted civilian ships that were used to carry supply and one Royal Navy fleet tanker, HMS *Bishopdale*, which was serving with the RAN at the time. There were also three Australian landing ships involved in the invasion, two of which were passenger liners converted to military use.

As far as actual warships, there was a small Australian motor launch, too small to have a name, just a number. There was one frigate, HMAS *Gascoyne*, There were two destroyers, HMAS *Arunta* and *Warramunga*, and two heavy cruisers, HMAS *Australia* and HMAS *Shropshire*.

A word about these last two ships. *Shropshire* began as a Royal Navy cruiser. After the Australian cruiser HMAS *Canberra* was scuttled in Ironbottom Sound during the Battle of Savo Island, off Guadalcanal in 1942, the British Royal Navy transferred to Australia a sister ship, *Shropshire*, named after a county in England.

Initially, *Shropshire* was to be renamed *Canberra*, but then US President Franklin Roosevelt decided to honor the lost Australian cruiser by naming a new US Navy cruiser USS *Canberra*. This created a protocol dilemma for the Australian Navy. On the one hand, Navy policy forbade giving any Australian Navy ship the same name as a US Navy ship, for the obvious reason that it was likely to cause confusion if the two ships were involved in the same operation.

On the other hand, Canberra is the name of the Australian capital. Clearly Australia had a better claim to the name. On the other hand, the American ship was named *Canberra* in honor of an Australian ship, the name selected by the US President himself, so protesting the name or asking that it be changed would likely be interpreted in America as a snub.

On the other hand, some of the citizens of Shropshire, England wanted the ship's original name kept, in recognition of its links to Shropshire. Also, it was the first Royal Navy ship, and so far still the only, to be named after Shropshire.

I said it was a dilemma. The Australian Navy chose to retain the ship's name and it served as HMAS *Shropshire*.

As for HMAS *Australia*, early in the war it was made flagship of the ANZAC Squadron, which also included two destroyers from New Zealand and a few US cruisers and destroyers. Early in the morning of October 21, 1944, the day after the initial landings at Leyte, a damaged Japanese

dive bomber crashed into the *Australia*, damaging the ship and killing thirty aboard, including the captain.

Eyewitnesses to the crash differed in their interpretations. Some thought the crash was an accident; others believed the Japanese pilot had deliberately crashed his plane into the cruiser. The Royal Australian Navy accepts the second interpretation and claims the *Australia* as the first Allied ship struck by a kamikaze attack.

And in fairness I should also note the presence of one Royal Navy warship in the Seventh Fleet, HMS *Ariadne*, a minelayer, which served with the Seventh Fleet from January 1944 through the end of the war.

[music: Closing War Theme]