

# HALSEY'S TYPHOONS



Wrecked hospital tents on a flooded field in New Caledonia after a typhoon. (The National WWII Museum, 2010.087.019)

The United States entered World War II after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941. At that time, Hawaii was not a state but a US territory. The same day Pearl Harbor was attacked, the Japanese began an attack on the Philippines, another US territory. In mid-1942, the Japanese pushed the United States out of the Philippines and retained control of the islands for most of World War II.

In December 1944, three years into the war, the United States was trying hard to take the Philippines back from Japan. Admiral Halsey, who was in charge of a fleet of ships about 300 miles east of the islands, commanded 13 aircraft carriers and about 65 other ships. From off the coast, these ships and carriers were launching air raids against Japanese bases in the Philippines. On December 17, many of the ships were set to refill their fuel tanks, but as they began to get their fuel, they encountered high winds and large waves. Because they were light with nearly empty fuel tanks, many of the smaller ships were pushed around by this bad weather.

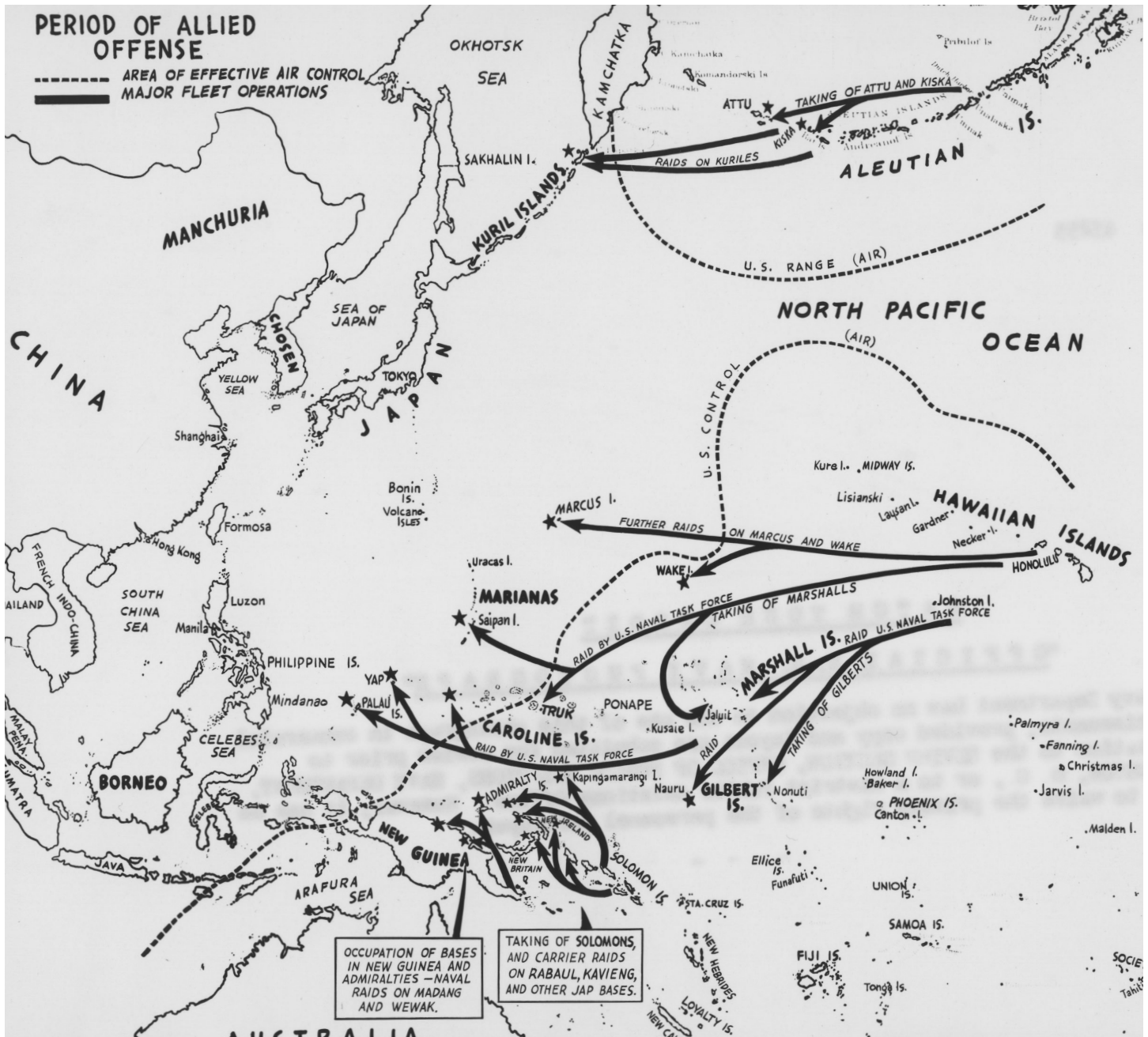
Halsey, after receiving a forecast telling him that Typhoon Cobra was approaching, ordered his ships to maintain their positions in formation. A typhoon is a dangerous tropical weather system—for example, hurricanes are typhoons. Halsey's order would prove to be a mistake. Winds reached 140 miles per hour. By the end of the next day, three ships had been sunk, and one aircraft carrier was on fire. In total, 790 Americans died in the storm, and 100 aircraft were lost or destroyed. Another nine ships were damaged. The effects of

Typhoon Cobra slowed US Navy efforts but eventually the fleet recovered and regained control of the Philippines.

Amazingly, Admiral Halsey was in command of many of the same ships when another typhoon, Connie, struck off the coast of Okinawa in June 1945. This storm was stronger, but much smaller in size. This time, though no ships were lost, another 100 aircraft were lost or damaged, and five sailors and one officer were killed.

Today with satellites around the Earth and weather radar monitoring its surface, storms can be spotted and tracked much better than they were 70 years ago. Weather forecasters now have computers that can predict where storms will develop and how they will move. These same forecasters also know much more about the effects of cyclones, typhoons, and hurricanes. Populations are much better prepared for weather events than they were in the past.

**How do you think technological advances made during World War II impacted the ability of forecasters to predict typhoons in later decades?**



An official US Navy map of the Western Pacific. (*The National WWII Museum, 2011.102.437*)

**Do you think Naval commanders would give different orders to their fleets in the path of oncoming typhoons today? What do you think they would do differently?**