

Coming Together: Operational Art in the Guadalcanal Campaign, October 1942-February 1943

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Coming Together: Operational Art in the Guadalcanal Campaign, October 1942-February 1943,
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The United States struggled against Japan in the Guadalcanal campaign for seven months early in the Second World War. The struggle included major engagements that spanned air, land, and sea that started as a minor step and became a contest of national wills at the edge of the Earth. Most studies chronicle the campaign's many tactical engagements and mythical personalities. This monograph examines how Admiral William Halsey as the South Pacific Theater Commander conducted a maritime campaign through the lens of operational art. This study conducted a structured, focused comparison the Guadalcanal Campaign for use with other similarly structured studies. Seven questions related to operational art guided the collection of evidence. These questions tested four hypotheses aimed at providing validity to the thesis. These hypotheses focused on determining the commander's understanding of the political objectives and operational environment, the arrangement and sequencing of operations, and the supporting command and control structure. The empirical evidence examined supported this monograph's thesis that that the commanders created novel solutions to the operational problems they faced in the Guadalcanal campaign by employing the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art to link the strategic and tactical framework of the operational environment. They used operational art to arrange and sequence tactical activities that created relative advantages and led to the defeat of the Japanese strategy.

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Abbreviations

CAM	Combined Army Marine
COMAIRSOPAC	Commander of Air Forces South Pacific Theater
COMSOPAC	Commander of South Pacific Theater
DOD	Department of Defense
HQ	Headquarters
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LSCO	Large Scale Combat Operations
LTG	Lieutenant General
MG	Major General
NDS	National Defense Strategy
SLOC	Sea line of communication
SOPAC	South Pacific Theater
SOS	Services of Supply
ULO	Unified Land Operations

Introduction

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) described the strategic environment as a return to long-term inter-state strategic competition.¹ It said that the United States' competitive edge had faded since the end of the Cold War and that Russia and China closed the technological superiority gaps. The United States holds power projection and economic potential as advantages, but competitors contest American security interests.² The Department of Defense (DOD) has adapted since publishing the 2018 NDS by undertaking expensive and large-scale modernization efforts, however inter-state strategic competition requires more than just new technologies. Specifically, the Army must consider new applications of operational art thinking.

The Army's current concepts for the application of operational art root in the Cold War. These concepts were apt for the challenges present in central Europe in the 1980s but are no longer suited for the contemporary operational environment (OE). Although Russia is the current pacing threat for the DOD, China is on track to overtake them in the mid-2020s.³ The Pacific theater presents many different challenges as a primarily maritime domain, with few partners that have land borders, with greater logistical demands, and with greater austerity in general. Additionally, the scale is different. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century the Army adapted to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq by expanding the roles and responsibilities of division headquarters and providing them with interchangeable modular brigade combat teams. However, inter-state competition increases the need for larger organizations and led the Army to shift from counterinsurgency to large-scale combat operations (LSCO). So, operational art is still conceptually relevant, but its application must be recontextualized for the Pacific theater.

¹ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 1.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid.

Earlier concepts and applications of operational art focused primarily on land-dominated theaters. The Army generated a theoretical doctrine in 2018 to adapt for the new challenges presented by the emergence of new domains.⁴ But what should influence the development of the Army's multi-domain operations doctrine? The South Pacific Theater of the Second World War contains relevant history to consider. Specifically, the Guadalcanal campaign offers insight on the challenges associated with planning and executing campaigns in conditions like the contemporary operational environment. This study should inform the creation of the new doctrine and fulfill the intent of the 2018 NDS in being, "strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable."⁵

Given the challenges presented by the OE, what are the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art that allowed Admiral Halsey and other operational commanders at the field army and theater level to develop the Guadalcanal campaign that achieved the political objectives? Doctrinally, operational art is the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgement—to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, and means.⁶ However, doctrine has limited utility for understanding how to apply operational art. No prescriptive answers exist for how to arrange operations to achieve political objectives. Clausewitz theorized that the character of war may change over time, but the nature endures.⁷ With this in mind, analysis of the Guadalcanal campaign provides utility to understanding how operational art applies to campaigning. The thesis of this study is that the commanders created novel solutions to the operational problems

⁴ US Department of the Army, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (United States Army, 2018), 5.

⁵ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America*, 5.

⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), xii.

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Indexed Edition. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 86.

they faced in the Guadalcanal campaign by employing the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art to link the strategic and tactical framework of the operational environment. They used operational art to arrange and sequence tactical activities that created relative advantages and led to the defeat of the Japanese strategy.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the American commanders during the Guadalcanal campaign considering operational art and to show how they developed the novel solutions to their operational challenges. It provides a lens to consider how the commanders approached campaigning in a maritime theater and on operational art at the theater level command. These analyses may inform the develop of future doctrine relevant to the Pacific Theater and LSCO.

The study was significant because it analyzed the logic the theater level commanders used in campaigning guided by the concept of operational art. It described how they used the concept versus what or why. Earlier studies focused analyses of operational art in campaigns that occurred primarily on land. The campaign required joint coordination and characterizes the challenges of the contemporary operational environment and the threats posed in the Pacific Theater. This study showed how commanders considered operational art to plan and execute campaigns while faced by a determined adversary.

Definition of Terms

Three doctrinal terms support this study's investigation of operational art. A position of relative advantage is a location or the establishment of a favorable condition within the area of operations that provides the commander with temporary freedom of action to enhance combat power over an enemy or influence the enemy to accept risk and move to a position of disadvantage.⁸ Creating multiple dilemmas of the enemy is the application of capabilities in a

⁸ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 4–5.

complementary and reinforcing fashion that creates more problems than the enemy commander can hope to solve, which erodes both enemy effectiveness and the will to fight.⁹ Distribute operations are a coherent system of spatially and temporally extended relational movements and distributed battles, whether actual or threatened, that seek to seize, retain, or deny freedom of action.¹⁰ These concepts were relevant to studying operational art during the Guadalcanal campaign.

The operational level of war conceptually appeared during the nineteenth century. James Schneider offered that the operational level of war emerged first in the American Civil War and that operational art is the creative use of distributed operations for the purposes of strategy.¹¹ This study used the lens of operational art to determine how American commanders created novel solutions to the operational challenges they faced during the Guadalcanal campaign.

This study tested four hypotheses to determine how American commanders created novel solutions to operational problems they faced during the Guadalcanal campaign. First, if the commander understands the political objectives of friendly and enemy forces, then they can better arrange operations to achieve positions of relative advantage. Second, if the commander arranges and sequences operations across multiple domains, then they can create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit adversary operations. Third, if the commander understands the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then he can dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and pre-empting enemy decisions. Fourth, if a joint force has a synchronized and flexible command and control structure, then commanders can effectively integrate multiple efforts for a common purpose. Research questions mentioned later guided the hypotheses testing.

⁹ US Army, ADP 3-0, 3-11.

¹⁰ James J. Schneider, *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art*, Theoretical Paper 4 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Presidio Press, 1994), 58.

¹¹ Ibid.

Some factors limited this study. First it relied on one in-depth case study to draw its conclusions. The Guadalcanal campaign was successful and therefore biases the historical interpretations of the American actions as positive and the Japanese actions as negative. This study tries to overcome this bias by recognizing that ambiguity pervades historical analysis, and that correlation does not imply causation.¹² Second, this study relied on a mix of primary and secondary sources. This was necessary though because the concept of operational art continued to develop after the Second World War. Third, this study focused primarily on the actions of American commanders and generally lacks enemy perspectives.

This study's delimitations pertain to the scale, scope, space, and time evaluated. It focused on the actions and thoughts related to the planning and execution of the Guadalcanal campaign by American operational level commanders from late-1942 to early 1943. This focus is purposeful because it reveals the cognitive abilities and linkages necessary for campaigning in a maritime operational environment.

This study relies on key assumptions. First, evidence that operational art exists in the Guadalcanal campaign. Second, Admiral Halsey conceptualized the campaign in its entirety. Third, the study of operational art has applications for the field army and theater level commander.

This study contains six parts. This first part comprised of the background of the study and introductory material. The second part reviews literature pertinent to operational art. The third part covers case study methodology. The fourth part is a review of the Guadalcanal campaign. The fifth part consists of answers to the research questions. The sixth and last section consists of findings and analyses and conclusions.

¹² John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 92.

Literature Review

This section considered the broader theory of operational art to inform the analysis of the Guadalcanal campaign. Multiple perspectives influence the concept of operational art and how commanders should solve operational problems. This section reviews relevant theory, doctrinal concepts, and sources used in this study.

Georgii Isserson theorized the concept of operational art in the interwar period after the First World War. Battlefield width and depth increased, operational offense lacked capability, and destruction of the enemy in a single battle became unachievable. Isserson conceptualized deep operations to overcome these challenges.¹³ He wrote, “Modern deep operational deployments require a series of uninterrupted operational efforts that merge into a single whole.”¹⁴ He envisioned combined arms forces echeloned across an enemy’s frontage in corresponding depth. At the outset of action, these offensive forces would attack, penetrate along the frontage, and allow a shock force to defeat the enemy from front to rear.¹⁵ Furthermore, the concept required the operational artist to use available resources to attack the enemy throughout the entire depth of their defense simultaneously.¹⁶ These concepts meant to solve uniquely Russian challenges ultimately informed the broader concept of operational art, but this study considers operational art at sea as well.

Admiral Wylie wrote in the mid-twentieth century about military strategy as a theory. He outlined sequential and cumulative operational patterns of strategies.¹⁷ Sequential approaches

¹³ G. S. Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, trans. Bruce Menning, Revised and expanded second edition. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, US Army Combined Arms Center, 2013), 14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 65–66.

¹⁶ Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii*, First. (Great Britain: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1987), 253–254.

¹⁷ J. C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*, Classics of Sea Power (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 23.

consist of discrete steps that build towards a clear objective, whereas cumulative approaches consist of less perceptible effects that may accumulate to have a critical effect.¹⁸ He wrote that neither was mutually exclusive and that when conducted concurrently, they contributed to overall success citing the American campaign in the Pacific Theater of World War Two as an example. Other American theories of operational art from the late twentieth century deserve consideration.

James Schneider theorized that the conditions for the operational level of war emerged during the American Civil War. He described operational art as the planning, execution, and sustainment of temporally and spatially distributed maneuvers and battles, all viewed as an organic whole.¹⁹ Distributed operations achieve the purpose of freedom of action, which a commander uses to destroy the enemy's will by disaggregating and overwhelming them.²⁰ He identified conditions necessary for the operational level of war most notably: continuous logistics, instantaneous command and control, durable formations, and a distributed enemy.²¹ Schneider concluded that the aim of destruction expanded beyond military forces to include the enemy's capacity to wage war throughout his strategic depth.²²

Shimon Naveh conceptualized war as an interaction of systems. He described the operational level of war as one that existed within a hierarchy of the military system. In this concept, the strategic aim directs the purpose of military operations and manifests itself as the brain, which as a cognitive compass provides logic and creativity; the heart, which provides life to translate the strategic aim into concrete objectives; and the self-regulating agency, which maintains equilibrium towards the aim against internal and external pressures.²³ In war, two

¹⁸ Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 24.

¹⁹ Schneider, *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art*, 28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 59–61.

²² *Ibid.*, 61.

²³ Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, Cummings Center Series (Portland: Frank Cass, 1997), 14–16.

combatting systems attempt to disrupt the other by creating operational shock, while also preserving their own linkages.²⁴ Inflicting operational shock on the enemy enables a commander to achieve their overall aim.

The most relevant aspects of these theories in relation to this study involve the conceptual dimension. Theoretically the operational level of war exists in a hierarchy between the strategic and tactical levels. Each theory recognized that the operational artist integrates a directed purpose with available resources to perform actions. To do that, the artist must visualize the military realm as a system within a broader national system, understanding themselves, the enemy, and the environment. Specifically, these theories addressed the spatial, temporal, and cognitive factors that influence the development of solutions to operational challenges.

Consideration of the following terms and concepts aid a commander in how to apply operational art to generate solutions. This study concerns exploration of the underlying theories provide insight for practical applications.

Simultaneity is the extension of related and mutually supporting tasks at the same time across multiple locations and domains.²⁵ Simultaneity occurs in execution, and operational level commands leverage specific capabilities to achieve it. However, Isserson described it as the concurrent neutralization of the enemy's entire tactical depth and emphasized that commanders must seek to establish the greatest possible contact area with the enemy force.²⁶ A commander seeks simultaneity to inflict operational shock upon the enemy. Shock occurs as result of the disintegration of the linkages in the enemy's operational system.²⁷

²⁴ Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 17.

²⁵ US Army, ADP 3-0, paras. 3–67.

²⁶ Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshal Tukhachevskii*, 34.

²⁷ Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 16.

Depth is the extension of operations in time, space, or purpose to achieve definitive results.²⁸ Commanders consider depth to engage the entirety of an enemy force, rather than just the forces in contact. Commands establish a framework to classify the operational environment by space, purpose, and effort. Commanders seek to engage the enemy in depth by creatively employing capabilities. Isserson conceptualized that the breakthrough into the enemy's depths was vital for turning tactical victories into operational ones.²⁹

Synchronization is the arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce relative combat power at a decisive place and time.³⁰ This differs from simultaneity in that synchronization occurs in planning. Operational level commands use synchronization to organize capabilities to achieve certain purposes at decisive points, and manifests often as lines of operations and efforts. Schneider's description of the distributed operation guided by an operational vision support the contemporary doctrinal term. Wylie's sequential and cumulative patterns of operations also provide theoretical support.

The Multi-domain Operations concept envisions that during armed conflict it will use the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework to achieve strategic objectives. The theory entails that the joint force defeats aggression by optimizing effects from across multiple domains at decisive spaces to penetrate the enemy's strategic and operational anti-access and area denial systems, disintegrate the components of the enemy's military system, and exploit freedom of maneuver necessary to achieve strategic and operational objectives that create conditions favorable to a political outcome.³¹ Naveh's system and Schneider's freedom of action theories

²⁸ US Army, ADP 3-0, paras. 3–68.

²⁹ Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, 65.

³⁰ US Army, ADP 3-0, paras. 3–70.

³¹ US Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, viii.

support the concept of the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework. The following section provides an overview of recent perspectives of the Guadalcanal campaign.

Many have written about the Guadalcanal campaign. Admiral Halsey's reflective notes offered insight about his thoughts on the campaign. LTG Harmon's memorandum described in detail how the Army contributed to the Guadalcanal and organized to meet operational challenges. Frank's, Toll's, Prados', and Wheeler's works provided narrative accounts of the Guadalcanal and provided evidence that generally supported this study's thesis.

This section offered cognitive frameworks to consider within this study. The theoretical framework reviewed the theory of operational art and relied on the theories from Isserson, Wylie, Schneider, and Naveh. The terms and concepts of simultaneity, depth, arrangement, and the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework emerged relevant to the thesis. The empirical framework reviewed revealed that the broader field of sources on the topic generally supported the thesis.

Methodology

This study tested hypotheses about how field army and theater level commanders use operational art to create novel solutions to challenges. Structured, focused comparison guided analysis of the case study. This study used four hypotheses to evaluate the thesis. Research questions provided evidence to validate the hypothesis testing. Lastly, this section includes a description of data collection methods.

This study used the structured, focused comparison method to support the thesis. The method allows researchers to study a single case study for broader application, most notably in the social science fields.³² Structured entails that general questions reflect the research objective,

³² Alexander L George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: John F. Kennedy School of Government, 2005), 67.

which enables systematic comparison of findings between similarly studied cases.³³ The focused aspect delimits the study by concentrating on evidence and concepts relevant to the research objective.³⁴ Adherence to the structured, focused comparison method permits the evaluation of the Guadalcanal campaign in relation to other campaigns. Current operational commanders face similar challenges to the ones faced by Admiral Halsey. Analysis of the campaign offered insights pertinent for campaigning in similar situations.

The first hypothesis is if the commander understands the political objectives of friendly and enemy forces, then they can better arrange operations to achieve positions of relative advantage. Naveh's theories about how aims determine a commander's conduct of operations support this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis is if the commander arranges and sequences operations across multiple domains, then they can create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit adversary operations. Wylie's theories concerning sequential and cumulative operations aided in validating this hypothesis.

The third hypothesis is if the commander understands the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then they can dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and pre-empting enemy decisions. Isserson's theories about planning in depth offered a relevant framework to consider this hypothesis. The logistical difficulties in simply getting to Guadalcanal required the commanders to expand their temporal and physical horizons. Command decisions throughout the campaign support this hypothesis' legitimacy.

The fourth hypothesis is if a joint force has a synchronized and flexible command structure, then commanders can effectively integrate multiple efforts for a common purpose.

³³ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

Schneider's theories about the command and control requirements to campaign at the operational level support this hypothesis. American military leaders were convinced after the Guadalcanal campaign of the efficacy of joint operations. Evidence supporting these hypotheses came from answering specific research questions.

The following questions support the first hypothesis. What were the commanders' understanding of the political objective and strategy and how the military objectives support them? How did Admiral Halsey and the other operational level commanders understand the operational environment? How did the commander arrange and sequence operations to create multiple dilemmas and gain positions of relative advantage?

The following questions pertain to the second hypothesis. What risks and assumptions were identified and how were they prioritized? How did the commander arrange and sequence operations to create multiple dilemmas and gain positions of relative advantage? How did Admiral Halsey and the other commander use the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework to defeat Japanese forces?

The next questions aid the third hypothesis. How did Admiral Halsey and the other operational commanders understand how the Japanese would fight? Does evidence suggest that the American operations disrupted the enemy's decision-making?

These remaining questions related to the fourth hypothesis. What risks and assumptions were identified and how were they prioritized? Does evidence suggest that the American operations disrupted the enemy's decision-making? How did Admiral Halsey visualize the command and control of the components from the Services?

Data for this study came from a mix of sources. Collection focused on analysis of the Guadalcanal campaign from the theater level, specifically from the time Admiral Halsey took command in late October 1942 until the beginning of February 1943 when the Japanese departed from the island. Primary sources offered relevant analysis of the campaign shortly after it

occurred. Secondary sources provided wider perspectives of the campaign. Lastly, frameworks from the doctrinal works aided in describing the campaign in contemporary terms.

Case Study

Japanese forces continued offensive operations following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Despite the threat posed by the Japanese in the Pacific Theater, the US prioritized resources for the European theater. Japanese forces advanced south to the Solomon Islands in March 1942 to isolate Australia and New Zealand.³⁵ The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) envisioned a campaign to preserve the sea line of communication (SLOC) with Australia in July 1942.³⁶

The JCS divided the Pacific Theater into the Southwest Pacific Area and the Pacific Ocean Areas commanded by Admiral Nimitz. Admiral Nimitz' command consisted of the Northern, Central, and South Pacific Ocean Areas, the last of which Admiral Ghormley commanded. Within the South Pacific Area, Lieutenant General (LTG) Harmon commanded Army forces, Rear Admiral Turner commanded the amphibious forces, and Major General (MG) Vandegrift commanded Marine forces.³⁷ On August 7, 1942 the First Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal. On August 9, 1942, Imperial Navy forces tactically defeated American naval forces in the battle of Savo Island that left the First Marine Division tenuously positioned and led the Japanese to believe that they delivered a decisive defeat. The Marines defended their lodgment and constructed Henderson airfield.³⁸ From 22 to 25 August, Japanese and American aircraft carriers fought for control of the sea around Guadalcanal during the Battle of the Eastern

³⁵ John F. Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 1995), 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁷ William Frederick Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," September 1944, 2, William Frederick Halsey Papers, 1907-1959.

³⁸ Ian W. Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2015), 71.

Solomons. This action yielded a tactical and operational victory for the Americans because it established control of the sea in daylight hours and permitted the logistical support of land forces on Guadalcanal.³⁹ However, Japanese naval forces continued to provide logistical support to its land forces on the island at night via the Tokyo Express.⁴⁰ Following the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, Imperial Army forces attempted to disable Henderson Field but failed. American land forces lacked troop strength for an offensive nor could they capitalize on the sea battle's results. This allowed the Japanese to recover and prepare for another offensive action in October 1942.

The Imperial Army command committed more troops to Guadalcanal. The Tokyo Express could not deliver artillery or other supplies needed to sustain the army though. The Imperial HQ coordinated the delivery of troops with a naval attack on Henderson Field. Japanese submarine forces sank an aircraft carrier. Admiral Ghormley recognized the build-up and prepared to hold-off the Japanese offensive. In the night of 11-12 October, American naval forces attacked a Japanese naval force bombarding Henderson Field and forced their withdrawal in the Battle of Cape Esperance.⁴¹ Japanese land-based aircraft attacked Henderson Field shortly afterward. Damage to the airfield limited American air operations.⁴² The combined naval and air operations allowed the Japanese to land more troops on Guadalcanal. Admiral Nimitz relieved Admiral Ghormley and replaced him with Admiral William Halsey on October 18.⁴³ The Imperial Army attacked on October 23 and culminated by October 25. American forces

³⁹ Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 83.

⁴⁰ The Tokyo Express was the name given by American forces at Guadalcanal to Japanese supply and troop reinforcement efforts by nocturnal sea operations. Typically Japanese destroyers would attempt to deliver troops and supplies undetected by American naval forces. The destroyers were ill suited for the mission, but the Japanese Navy conducted the inefficient and risky operations until the end of the campaign in February 1943. *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴¹ John Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴³ Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," 4.

successfully defended suffering few casualties while inflicting heavy losses.⁴⁴ A Japanese naval force entered the area near the Santa Cruz Islands seeking to support the ground operation the evening of October 25. The Japanese force inflicted significant damage to the American fleet, notably sinking and disabling all its aircraft carriers.⁴⁵ Despite the victory, the Japanese force retrograded with Henderson Field still in American possession having suffered significant damage to its own aircraft carriers and the loss of many irreplaceable pilots.⁴⁶ The October Japanese counteroffensive failed.

Guadalcanal received renewed attention afterwards. President Roosevelt directed the JCS to win in the South Pacific, despite the European prioritization.⁴⁷ Admiral Halsey prepared by requesting more forces and priority for ship repairs.⁴⁸ The Japanese felt that decision was within their grasp and prepared for a renewed offensive. However, this time the fleet lacked aircraft carriers.⁴⁹ Admiral Halsey anticipated this engagement and coordinated naval and land-based air actions against the Japanese. The Americans prevailed in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal in mid-November. This action ended the Japanese November offensive, established American control of the sea and air, and isolated the remaining Japanese on Guadalcanal.⁵⁰ The First Marine Division undertook some offensive actions that expanded the perimeter around Henderson Field, but lacked troop strength to displace defending Japanese forces from the island.⁵¹ The Tokyo Express continued to provide limited supplies to the Japanese ground forces. On the evening of November 30, a naval force attempting to deliver supplies and troops dealt American naval forces a tactical

⁴⁴ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 166.

⁴⁵ Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun*, 157.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 169.

⁴⁷ Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun*, 160.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁹ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 179.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 188–189.

⁵¹ Joseph Wheelan, *Midnight in the Pacific: Guadalcanal* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2017), 208.

defeat during the battle of Tassafarnonga.⁵² This engagement marked the last major naval engagement of the campaign and the halt of Japanese attempts to establish control of the sea.⁵³

Admiral Halsey directed LTG Harmon to conduct a land campaign on Guadalcanal in December 1942. LTG Harmon remained the army component commander for the South Pacific and designated MG Patch to lead the newly established XIV Corps.⁵⁴ XIV Corps consisted of the Americal and 25th Army Divisions and the Second Marine Division. The air forces and logistical services were merged among the branches.⁵⁵ Elements of the *Seventeenth Army* remained on the island but weakened each day. MG Patch waited for the 25th Infantry Division to arrive and in the interim launched a limited offensive in mid-December to seize the Japanese position on Mount Austen that overlooked the American perimeter.⁵⁶ The attacks highlighted the difficult fighting to come.

XIV Corps received its full complement of troops at the beginning of January 1942. MG Patch attacked southward and westward.⁵⁷ Difficult terrain, warm weather, and determined enemy resistance made the fighting slow and methodical. These attacks were meant to improve the American defensive position on the island before Japanese reinforcements could arrive. However, at this point the Americans did not know that the Japanese had no intention of reinforcing Guadalcanal.⁵⁸ As American forces seized their objectives, Japanese forces secretly consolidated for evacuation. American intelligence indicated that the Japanese prepared for another attack to reinforce Guadalcanal, yet the Tokyo Express made several runs in first week of

⁵² Wheelan, *Midnight in the Pacific: Guadalcanal*, 255.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁴ M. F. Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific* (Washington, DC: United States Army, 1944), 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁶ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 233.

⁵⁷ Wheelan, *Midnight in the Pacific: Guadalcanal*, 276.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

February to remove all the remaining troops.⁵⁹ On February 9, MG Patch reported that Guadalcanal was clear.

What were the commanders' understanding of the political objectives and strategies and how did the military objectives support them?

American and Japanese political objectives, strategies, military objectives changed throughout the campaign. Neither belligerent set-out intending to spend the amount of time or resources there that they did. Rather, a cycle emerged where one side's actions drew the other in more and the other responded with renewed effort. Results of battles forced political leaders to reevaluate their intentions. These alterations changed how the commanders understood their objectives and how they connected actions to achieve them.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese advanced across the southwest Pacific region towards the Indian Ocean and east across the central Pacific. However, the Imperial Army and Navy leadership disagreed on the purposes of the war against the Allies. The Imperial Army sought to expand its hold westward in China and to prepare for war against the Soviets, while the Imperial Navy generally sought to secure Japan's eastern flank and set favorable conditions for a negotiated peace settlement with the United States.⁶⁰ The competition undermined the formulation of clear political objectives or purposeful strategy. Admiral Inoue working on behalf of the naval theater commander, Admiral Yamamoto, envisioned the Japanese expansion into the Solomon Islands to secure their larger base at Rabaul, to contest the SLOC between the United States and Australia.⁶¹ The Imperial Navy selected Guadalcanal because it was within mutually

⁵⁹ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 336.

⁶⁰ Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 19.

⁶¹ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 4.

supporting range of other land-based aircraft in the region.⁶² American leaders created their political objective in response to the Japanese.

The US deviated significantly from its prewar plans in the Pacific. The “Germany First” strategy that de-prioritized actions in the Pacific Theater.⁶³ However, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral King advocated that the United States could still undertake limited offensives to oppose Japanese actions. Army Chief of Staff General Marshall agreed, but the two disagreed on what to do. Eventually, President Roosevelt directed the JCS to defend the SLOC with Australia.⁶⁴ From there, the JCS adopted a plan developed to seize the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area.⁶⁵ The seizure of Guadalcanal became an objective.

The American landings surprised the Japanese. At first the Japanese Army tried to expel the landing force from the island, while the Imperial Navy sought to destroy the amphibious force. Failures strengthened their resolve and convinced leadership in the Imperial HQ that Guadalcanal had become the decisive point of the war.⁶⁶ It seemed to them that defeat of the Americans at Guadalcanal could achieve their political objective. Thereafter, the Imperial HQ realigned their strategy and military objectives. The Imperial HQ directed Admiral Yamamoto in September 1942 to defeat the Americans at Guadalcanal.⁶⁷ In the operation he developed, the Army would execute the decisive operation of capturing the American airfield and the Navy would provide support to them.⁶⁸ This operation took place in mid-October and nearly succeeded against the American forces which had less lucid aims.

⁶² Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 21.

⁶³ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 17.

⁶⁶ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 252.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 267.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 268.

After the landings in August, Admiral Ghormley's military objectives generally supported the broader campaign's goals, but not in strengthening his position on Guadalcanal. Whereas the Japanese increased efforts, Admiral Ghormley dissipated his forces to surrounding islands. LTG Harmon recommended to strengthen the defense of Henderson Field but Admiral Ghormley demurred.⁶⁹ The following Japanese counter-offensive changed his mind. News of the deteriorating situation reached President Roosevelt and he clarified the political objective for the campaign. Admiral Nimitz replaced Admiral Ghormley with Admiral Halsey on October 18.⁷⁰ Halsey quickly demonstrated a clear understanding of the campaign's aims and adjusted the operational approach accordingly.

The actions of October solidified the political objectives of both belligerents. Again, the Imperial HQ directed Admiral Yamamoto to undertake an offensive in November.⁷¹ After the counter-offensive in November failed, the Japanese adjusted their strategy to the shaping threat in New Guinea.⁷² Admiral Halsey conceived that the Japanese naval threat was temporarily removed and directed LTG Harmon to eliminate the Japanese land-forces.⁷³ Thereafter, Admiral Halsey's military objectives clearly supported the strategy in the broader campaign and the accomplishment of the American political objective.

How did Admiral Halsey and the other operational level commanders understand the operational environment?

Admiral Halsey understood the operational environment of the Guadalcanal campaign as a part of a greater whole. He was experienced in the theater, but by the time he took command of South Pacific Theater (SOPAC), the Guadalcanal campaign was already two-and-a-half months

⁶⁹ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 293.

⁷⁰ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 170.

⁷¹ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 405.

⁷² Ibid., 498–499.

⁷³ Ibid., 8.

underway. He visualized the terrain, the Japanese, and his force relatively to contextualize the operational environment.

The South Pacific Theater presented significant challenges. The Solomon Islands laid at the extent of each country's operational reach. Distance, transit time, and transit capacity and capability heavily influenced operations and risk calculations. The campaign challenged existing operational doctrines by involving the simultaneous coordination of joint efforts. Evidence suggests that Admiral Halsey understood most of these factors. He conceived of the Pacific Theater from the battlefield and back to the United States and that attrition's effects lingered. The decision by the JCS to prioritize resources for the theater enabled Admiral Halsey's operational tempo to increase beginning in December. He also conceived of joint naval, air, and land efforts.⁷⁴ His understanding of the environment helped him to conceptualize the enemy prudently.

Admiral Halsey assessed the Japanese in the Solomon Islands area primarily based on their actions prior to his taking command and reflect that he held an unclear picture of the enemy. The Japanese faced a situation like the American one, albeit with shorter distances. The Allies correctly believed that the Japanese intended to cut the line of communication to Australia.⁷⁵ Repeated attempts to dislodge the Americans on Guadalcanal led Admiral Halsey to believe that the Japanese were willing to commit significant resources to accomplish their objectives. Estimates of the Japanese intentions remained opaque throughout the campaign. American intelligence provided some warnings about troop concentrations at Rabaul prior to counteroffensive in November but were misled by a Japanese deception operation that cloaked the evacuation in February 1943.⁷⁶ Admiral Halsey understood that the Tokyo Express sustained the ground forces on Guadalcanal and he used this information to position his fleet prior to the

⁷⁴ Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific*, 9.

⁷⁵ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 4.

⁷⁶ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 535.

Naval Battle of Guadalcanal.⁷⁷ Ultimately Admiral Halsey directed XIV Corps to clear Japanese from Guadalcanal because of his air and naval forces' inability to halt Japanese resupply efforts.⁷⁸ Faced with an unclear picture of the Japanese, Admiral Halsey chose to improve his understanding through action.

Admiral Halsey knew that his superiors expected him to regain the initiative.⁷⁹ The same problems that confronted Ghormley faced Halsey though. He understood that he needed to keep Guadalcanal, defeat Japanese air and naval forces, and prepare for follow-on campaigns. Halsey knew the value of Guadalcanal itself and chose to reinforce the First Marine Division to defend against Japanese attacks.⁸⁰ These forces came from other islands in the theater that Ghormley had prioritized. Lacking enough forces or resources, he also knew that he needed to increase the efficiency of what was available to him. This led him to task organize his forces from each of the Services into singular commands.⁸¹ His clear assessment of American capabilities and shortcomings enabled him to conceptualize a path to victory.

Admiral Halsey's understanding of the operational environment enabled him to develop a campaign. This visualization process facilitated his understanding of situation and allowed him to make decisions about what to do.

How did Admiral Halsey and the other operational commanders understand the Japanese would fight?

Admiral Halsey anticipated that the Japanese would concentrate all their efforts on Guadalcanal. He thought that they would continue to fight as they had. However, the Japanese

⁷⁷ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 180.

⁷⁸ Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," 6.

⁷⁹ James M. Steele, *Command Summary of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN*, vol. 2, Nimitz "Graybook" (Newport, RI: US Naval War College, 2013), 36.

⁸⁰ Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific*, 6.

⁸¹ Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," 5.

altered their approach after the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal and the Americans did not recognize the change. This implied that Admiral Halsey initially understood how the Japanese would fight, but not later in the campaign.

Before the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal Admiral Halsey assessed that the Japanese considered Guadalcanal as decisive. He believed that the Japanese would continue fighting as they had from August to October. He said, “The situation presented was one of air and surface superiority fluctuating between our own force and the Japanese.”⁸² Admiral Nimitz told Halsey when he took command that the Japanese were preparing to establish air and naval superiority simultaneously with a ground offensive to neutralize the airfield on Guadalcanal.⁸³ From this Admiral Halsey concluded that the Japanese were less concerned with rest of the theater. He also surmised that increasing American commitment to the campaign would correspond to an increase in Japanese resolve.⁸⁴ This proved true in the October and November naval battles. The unfavorable results of these battles eliminated the Japanese will for more naval offensives. However, the American commanders misjudged the implications of the battles believing that future Japanese offensives were on the horizon.

Admiral Halsey believed in the continued Japanese commitment to the conquest of Guadalcanal until February 1943. This belief endured as the result of Japanese deception efforts. The Japanese Imperial HQ remained undecided about what to do in the South Pacific until January 1943.⁸⁵ Only threats to Rabaul after American successes in New Guinea solidified their decision to withdraw from Guadalcanal. However, the concentration of troops around Rabaul in December and January led American intelligence to conclude that the Japanese were preparing to

⁸² Halsey, “South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account,” 5.

⁸³ Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun*, 126.

⁸⁴ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 145.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 535.

reinforce Guadalcanal and that another naval offensive was coming.⁸⁶ It convinced MG Patch that XIV Corps should use a deliberate tempo.⁸⁷ Up to this point of the war, the Japanese had been successful with their land campaigns, and Halsey found it unlikely that the Japanese would abandon the island. These misperceptions skewed Admiral Halsey's understanding of Japanese intentions from November 1942 to the end of the campaign.

Admiral Halsey's overall understanding of how the Japanese would fight the Guadalcanal campaign was partially correct. His initial assessment of the enemy was accurate, but it did not change. Tactically, this benefitted the Japanese as they evacuated remnants of their land forces. However, operationally and strategically the results favored the Americans. Halsey did not change his assessment of the enemy because no evidence existed to convince him otherwise. If the Japanese had more naval forces available, they likely would have remained committed to their initial strategy. Furthermore, his misunderstanding of the enemy did not impede the accomplishment of his objectives.

What risks and assumptions were identified and how were they prioritized?

Admiral Halsey considered the Guadalcanal campaign decisive to the broader South Pacific Theater campaign. The operation started as the first of many leading northwards, but Japanese commitment to the campaign increased the relative value to the Americans. Halsey understood this and considered risk relative to the campaign's objectives. Key risk management decisions occurred three times over the course of the campaign.

Upon taking command, Admiral Halsey made decisions that risked the survival of his force to reduce the risk of the Guadalcanal campaign's failure. Nimitz advised Halsey that the Japanese were on the verge of launching another offensive on Guadalcanal.⁸⁸ To prevent the loss

⁸⁶ Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun*, 211.

⁸⁷ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 597.

⁸⁸ Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 146.

of the airfield, Admiral Halsey directed MG Vandegrift to defend.⁸⁹ Halsey also concentrated his naval forces in the vicinity of the island to contest any Japanese naval actions. These decisions increased the likelihood that he would retain the airfield but exposed the First Marine Division to attrition and his naval force to the larger incoming Japanese fleet. The Battle for the Santa Cruz Islands ended favorable for the Japanese, but the Americans remained intact.⁹⁰ Halsey made a similar decision during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal and inflicted significant losses on Japanese naval forces.⁹¹ The decisions to defend in air, on land, and at sea resulted in the transfer of operational initiative to the Americans.

Admiral Halsey made several key decisions in November and December 1942 that reduced the risk to his forces. After defeat in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the Japanese reduced the overall probability that the American campaign would fail by choosing to curtail their efforts. However, this was transparent to the COMSOPAC. The battle resulted in American air and naval superiority and thereby reduced the risk to Henderson Field. Reinforcements began to arrive in December 1942 that relieved the First Marine Division.⁹² However, a land offensive had to wait until December.

In January and February 1943 Admiral Halsey considered the risk to the land campaign's success low. He focused his attention on the next operation and preventing the loss of air and naval superiority. His misunderstanding of the Japanese intent led his forces to miss an opportunity to eliminate the remnants of the *Seventeenth Army*.⁹³ MG Patch planned for a methodical clearance of the island.⁹⁴ The Japanese demonstrated a fierce willingness to fight to

⁸⁹ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 171.

⁹⁰ Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 155.

⁹¹ Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," 6.

⁹² Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 210.

⁹³ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 597.

⁹⁴ Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific*, 8.

the death while defending their positions. The American units replaced daring with firepower at the sake of time. Again, the sentiment among the American commands was that the Japanese intended to renew their offensive efforts. The probability that they would evacuate seemed low. Therefore, MG Patch did not sense the limited window of opportunity available to destroy the remaining Japanese forces.⁹⁵ This had little bearing on the campaign's operational success though.

Analysis of Admiral Halsey's decisions suggest that he understood and managed risk throughout the Guadalcanal campaign. At first, he sought to reduce to the risk to the campaign's success defending Guadalcanal. Then in November he balanced the risk to his land forces by maintaining air and naval superiority over the Japanese and reinforcing his land forces. After success seemed certain, Halsey focused his attention on the broader South Pacific campaign and XIV Corps missed a tactical opportunity to eliminate the remaining Japanese forces. Halsey's decisions effectively managed the risk relative to the Guadalcanal campaign's objectives.

How were operations arranged and sequenced to create multiple dilemmas and gain positions of relative advantage to disrupt Japanese decision making during the Guadalcanal campaign?

Admiral Halsey arranged and sequenced operations in a complimentary manner that presented multiple dilemmas, gained positions of relative advantage, and disrupted Japanese decision making. These operations gave the Japanese more problems than they could solve, caused them to accept risk, and act from positions of disadvantage, which resulted in their attrition and culmination. Admiral Halsey decided to return to the offense shortly after taking command.⁹⁶ This provided initiative for the American forces to regain control of the situation and caused the Japanese to further commit to the campaign. American tactical victories in November

⁹⁵ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 338.

⁹⁶ Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun*, 161.

1942 attrited Japanese forces and compounded the dilemmas of air superiority, sustaining land forces, and sea control. Correspondingly, they provided relative advantages to the American forces and enabled their freedom of action. The deliberate tempo of operations during the land campaigns in December and January on Guadalcanal weakened Japanese forces and reduced their available options. Admiral Halsey and his subordinate commanders methodically denied freedom of action to the Japanese throughout the campaign.

Admiral Halsey took command of SOPAC at a tenuous time and his early decisions regained control of the situation. Japanese forces had freedom of action and he had few options. The latest Japanese attacks sought to capture Henderson Field. It created the greatest dilemma to the Japanese and Admiral Halsey understood its importance. Land-based aircraft contested for air and sea control, supported ground operations, provided flexibility by reducing the risk to American naval forces, and disrupted Japanese sustainment efforts. The campaign would fail without these capabilities. This reasoning also explains why he placed his naval forces near the Santa Cruz Islands.⁹⁷ Halsey needed the Navy to reduce the pressure of the Japanese Navy on Henderson Field. These decisions enabled the successful defense of Henderson Field and reinforced the dilemmas to the Japanese. Furthermore, underestimations of American troop and naval strength at Guadalcanal resulted in incremental allocations of forces to the campaign and suggests why the Japanese never committed enough troops to overwhelm the First Marine Division.⁹⁸ By the end of October 1942, Halsey ended the crisis and regained some operational control that enabled his future operations.

Both the Imperial HQ and Admiral Halsey understood that the Guadalcanal campaign's result depended on which side held air superiority and sea control. Admiral Halsey understood

⁹⁷ Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 146.

⁹⁸ William Frederick Halsey, "Solomon Islands Campaign, 1942-1943," n.d., 2, William Frederick Halsey Papers, 1907-1959.

the vitalness of these conditions and deliberately sought engagements with Japanese air and naval forces. He first did this during the Battle for the Santa Cruz Islands.⁹⁹ The Imperial HQ launched another offensive in November, but faced the same dilemmas present in October. They incurred irreplaceable air losses and were unwilling to risk losing more aircraft carriers.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, American air forces prevented the resupply of the *Seventeenth Army* forces. This precarious situation caused Admiral Yamamoto to prioritize resupply to those forces over the destruction of the American fleet.¹⁰¹ The following American victory of the Naval Battle for Guadalcanal decided sea control and air superiority for the rest of the campaign. This occurred in addition to the loss of a division's worth of troops on land. The victory provided the Americans with the relative advantages of freedom of action for the land forces on Guadalcanal and consistent logistical support. The same factors were dilemmas to the Japanese.

Admiral Halsey directed LTG Harmon to clear remaining Japanese from Guadalcanal in November 1942. The Imperial HQ could not afford to commit anymore despite the desire to prevail in the campaign. Therefore, they elected to continue an economy of force logistical support operation until they could gather enough forces for another offensive.¹⁰² The Japanese continued incurring shipping, air, and troop losses, and in January 1943 decided that they could no longer continue. There were too many problems to solve.

Admiral Halsey succeeded in the Guadalcanal campaign by arranging and sequencing operations that overwhelmed the Japanese. He attributed the success partly due to repeated Japanese underestimations.¹⁰³ Prior to his arrival, the Americans did not have the resources nor the unity of purpose to act within the windows of opportunity when they held relative advantages.

⁹⁹ Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 166.

¹⁰⁰ Frank, *Guadalcanal*, 408–409.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 535.

¹⁰³ Halsey, "Solomon Islands Campaign, 1942-1943," 2.

The Japanese overcame their early dilemmas and decided to commit more forces because the risks were low. However, after Admiral Halsey took command, he regained control of the situation by arranging operations to halt Japanese offensive efforts. Afterwards he sought deliberate battles with the Japanese for air and naval superiority. Sequencing these operations in this manner provided him with relative advantages that enabled the land campaign and presented the Japanese with insurmountable dilemmas. Eventually the Japanese decided to concede the campaign as their strategic situation deteriorated.

How did Admiral Halsey visualize command and control of the components from the Services?

Admiral Halsey visualized his forces as the South Pacific Fighting Team unified by a single purpose. JCS Directive 263/2/D codified the unified command at the outset of the campaign, but Admiral Halsey maximized its full potential.¹⁰⁴ Defeat of the Japanese provided a unified purpose and no single Service's interests overly influenced the campaign.¹⁰⁵ Admiral Halsey consolidated commands and task organized his force. This was an innovative approach that increased the efficiency of his force and allowed him to overcome the campaign's operational challenges.

Admiral Halsey stressed unity of command within the SOPAC. This reduced Service parochialism and increased the force's effectiveness.¹⁰⁶ Halsey stated, "I insisted that each commander of a task force must have full authority over all components of his force, regardless of Service or nationality. I believe the wholehearted efforts of all hands to create one "South Pacific Fighting Team" proved key to success in overcoming many obstacles in the conduct of

¹⁰⁴ Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Halsey, "South Pacific Campaign, Halsey's Narrative Account," 4.

later operations.”¹⁰⁷ This enabled subordinate commanders and ensured that individual Service objectives nested with the theater commander’s objectives. It also allowed his task force commanders to learn from each other and merge knowledge and experience.¹⁰⁸ This cognitive approach allowed he and other commanders to adopt novel solutions.

The OE and the scarcity of resources led Admiral Halsey to combine some of his commands by function and domain. Sea operations remained under control of the Navy, but air, land, logistical operations became joint where a single commander had authority over all the elements within the sub-command. At the outset of the campaign, Admiral Ghormley found it necessary to combine the efforts of each Service’s air forces to maximize the efficiency of air operations.¹⁰⁹ Consolidating command of the air forces under the Commander of Air South Pacific (COMAIRSOPAC) eliminated unneeded redundancy and gaps that kept the Japanese under continual aerial engagement.¹¹⁰ However, the structure was flexible and the Army eventually created the 13th Air Force to specifically support land operations later in the campaign.¹¹¹ In addition to administrative control of Army forces in the theater, LTG Harmon gained tactical control.¹¹² The Army established XIV Corps and LTG Harmon delegated operations on Guadalcanal to MG Patch.¹¹³ XIV Corps consisted of Army and Marine units and MG Patch had authority over both. Lastly, LTG Harmon oversaw the creation of joint theater services of supply (SOS).¹¹⁴ At the outset of the command, each individual Service’s logistical

¹⁰⁷ Halsey, “South Pacific Campaign, Halsey’s Narrative Account,” 5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁹ Harmon, *The Army in the South Pacific*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 8.

¹¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

arms provided to its elements. However, this limited logistical capacity and SOPAC needed a new way to sustain itself. These actions improved SOPAC's efficiency.

Admiral Halsey attributed the Guadalcanal campaign's success to his team's united effort. Unity of command led to a joint minded approach to solving operational problems. This allowed SOPAC's subordinate commands to combine and work more efficiently. The structure provided flexibility because Admiral Halsey could concentrate his forces as he did when he first took command or decentralize operations as he did with the land campaign. The structure provided the command and control framework for how all the Services would work together until the end of the war.

How did Admiral Halsey and the other commands use the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework to defeat the Japanese forces?

The penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework offers a lens to methodically analyze how Admiral Halsey approached defeating Japanese forces. The framework did not exist at the time, but it offers a way consider how the American forces overcame the operational problems. The Japanese established defensive depth via occupation of island chains across the Pacific Theater. Both the South Pacific and Southwest Pacific Theater commanders had the military objective to prepare for offensive operations in early 1942.¹¹⁵ SOPAC conducted the Solomon Islands campaign as a penetration of the Japanese strategic defense. The SOPAC leaders developed solutions as they went and Admiral Turner said of Guadalcanal, "Cactus is the amphibious school."¹¹⁶ The following analyzes the penetrate, disintegrate, and penetrate framework as it applies to how the Guadalcanal campaign was assembled.

¹¹⁵ Miller, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Cactus was the classified name for Guadalcanal. Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, 126.

SOPAC amphibious forces successfully penetrated the Japanese defense with a surprise landing onto Guadalcanal. The landings achieved success because American forces maneuvered from strategic and operational distances and established lines of operations.¹¹⁷ However, the Japanese recovered and reacted quickly with counterattacks that stalled American progress. The campaign nearly failed in the penetration phase.¹¹⁸ On Guadalcanal itself, the Marines contested Japanese maneuver forces and established Henderson Field as an aerial base of operations. Admiral Halsey's assumption of command coincided with the end of the penetration phase.

Admiral Halsey's desire to return to the offense enabled his force's focus to transition to the disintegrating phase in November 1942. Air and naval superiority allowed the Americans to protect their own forces while disrupting Japanese operations and logistics. However, these conditions were temporary and never achieved full neutralization of the Japanese naval and air forces. SOPAC set the conditions in decisive spaces by ensuring that the First Marine Division could defend Henderson Field, by conducting aerial operations from land and sea, and by loitering a protective fleet in the vicinity of Guadalcanal.¹¹⁹ The theater command also conducted operational maneuver by bringing XIV Corps' forces to Guadalcanal in preparation for exploitation.

SOPAC achieved its operational objectives by clearing the Japanese force from Guadalcanal and by being prepared to conduct additional offensive operations. SOPAC enabled exploitation by maintaining air and naval superiority around the island.¹²⁰ XIV Corps executed the exploitation phase on land by maneuvering and isolating the remaining Japanese forces.¹²¹ In delegating these responsibilities, Admiral Halsey and LTG Harmon refocused their attention on

¹¹⁷ US Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1-, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, 32.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

accomplishing the next set of operational objectives. After Japanese forces escaped from the island, XIV Corps prepared for the next step in the South Pacific campaign.

SOPAC's operations during the Guadalcanal campaign supported the accomplishment of its strategic objectives. The campaign provided a deliberate method for how to execute amphibious operations that generally fit the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework. The campaign represented a strategic penetration of the Japanese defensive island belt. Admiral Halsey took command of SOPAC after the penetration occurred and the transition to offensive operations at sea and in the air enabled the disintegration phase. The command leveraged joint forces to establish conditions that enabled XIV Corps' freedom of action on Guadalcanal during the exploitation phase. The coordination among the Services within SOPAC allowed Admiral Halsey to arrange and sequence efforts that ultimately defeated the Japanese forces.

Findings and Analysis

Evidence from the research generally supported that SOPAC commanders used operational art to arrange and sequence operations to defeat the Japanese during the Guadalcanal campaign. Findings based on the empirical evidence offered broad answers to the research questions. Analysis of the findings determined whether or not the evidence supported, did not support, or partially supported the hypotheses. These determinations provided validity to the thesis that the commanders developed a novel approach using operational art to solve the problems they faced.

Consideration of the Guadalcanal campaign as an operational approach offers a narrative synthesis of the answers to the questions that guided this paper's research. With an operational approach, a commander understands their current state, their desired endstate, and the steps

necessary to get from the current to the end state.¹²² Admiral Halsey understood that the Guadalcanal campaign was vital to the accomplishment of the military objectives. He also understood the Japanese commitment to the campaign and that American efforts would invigorate strong reactions. Admiral Halsey knew the challenges associated with operating in the South Pacific Theater, limitations of his own forces, and that the Japanese intended to accomplish their objectives through offensive operations. Knowledge of the OE allowed him to manage risk deliberately by regaining initiative through action. Admiral Halsey combined sequential and cumulative operational patterns to methodically overwhelm the Japanese. A flexible and unified command and control structure enabled his forces to achieve unity of effort. He sequenced gaining air and naval superiority to enable a land campaign on Guadalcanal. The clearance of remaining Japanese forces completed the transition to the campaign's desired end state. These findings support the following analyses.

The first hypothesis was if the commander understands the political objectives of friendly and enemy forces then they can better arrange operations to achieve positions of relative advantage. The empirical evidence supports the validity of this hypothesis. Admiral Halsey understood that the Guadalcanal campaign was decisive to the American and Japanese strategies. He arranged a mix of sequential and cumulative operations that provided his forces with positions of relative advantage. Sequentially his forces disrupted and eventually defeated Japanese naval and air operations that seized initiative from them. Cumulatively this attrited the *Seventeenth Army* on Guadalcanal over time by denying it sustainment. The Americans achieved their political objectives by leveraging these relative advantages.

The second hypothesis was if the commander arranges and sequences operations across multiple domains, then they can create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate, and

¹²² US Army, ADP 3-0, paras 2-3-2-4.

exploit adversary operations. The empirical evidence supported the validity of this hypothesis. The challenges of the operational environment caused Admiral Halsey to realize that no single Service could accomplish the campaign's military objectives. He therefore needed to arrange and sequence mutually supportive operations in air, on land, and at sea. His decision to defend the lodgment and Henderson Field in November 1942 presented the Japanese with dilemmas in all three domains. The Americans worsened the dilemmas for the Japanese with air and naval superiority that disintegrated their joint efforts to support land forces on Guadalcanal. These conditions enabled XIV Corps to exploit the opportunity with freedom of action and isolate the remnants of *Seventeenth Army*. Admiral Halsey's operations presented more problems than the Japanese could solve.

The third hypothesis was if the commander understands the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then he can dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and preempting enemy decisions. The empirical evidence provides a mixed outcome to the validity of this hypothesis because evidence only partially supports it. Admiral Halsey and the other SOPAC commanders understood the Japanese operational logic through the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. American air and naval forces achieved general success interdicting the resupply and reinforcement efforts of the Tokyo Express. However, after the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal the Japanese logic changed and the American command did not perceive it. As a result, the Japanese were successful in deceiving the Americans to believe that they were preparing for another offensive while concealing that their objectives with campaign had changed. Therefore, Admiral Halsey could not preempt Japanese decisions after the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal because his understanding of them did not match their logic anymore.

The fourth hypothesis was if a joint force commander has a synchronized and flexible command and control structure, then the commander can effectively integrate multiple efforts for common purpose. The empirical evidence supports the validity of this hypothesis. Challenges

presented by the operational environment caused Admiral Halsey to think of his forces not as individual Service components, but as a singular South Pacific Fighting Force. The resulting command and control structure was guided by the principle of unity of command, which enabled both unity of effort and flexibility. Throughout the campaign the Americans acted as a joint force and integrated separate efforts to defeat the Japanese.

This section presented this study's findings and analysis. The findings demonstrated how Admiral Halsey connected the situation when he took command to the campaign's conclusion through deliberate actions. The analysis section included explanation of how the evidence supported three of this study's hypotheses and provided a mixed outcome to one. As a result, these analyses generally supported this study's thesis.

Conclusion

Study of operations in the South Pacific Theater during the Second World War revealed the role of the US Army campaign in a maritime domain. This study looked to answer what are the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art that allowed commanders at the field army and theater level to develop campaigns to achieve political objectives? Evaluation of Admiral William Halsey and his subordinate commanders during Guadalcanal campaign from October 1942 to February 1943 provided empirical evidence to answer the primary research question. Structured focused comparison methodology guided this study's research and enabled assessment of the thesis.

Admiral Halsey and his subordinate commanders created novel solutions to the operational problems they faced in the Guadalcanal Campaign by employing characteristics, concepts, and attributes of operational art to link the tactical and strategic framework of the operational environment. They arranged and sequenced tactical activities that created relative advantages and led to the defeat of the Japanese strategy. This study drew from a mix of sources to answer seven research questions. Evidence supported the validity of three hypotheses and

provided a mixed outcome to one. Consideration of how the campaign was unfolding before Admiral Halsey took command suggests that his arrangement and sequencing of operations thereafter led to the defeat of the Japanese strategy. SOPAC forces worked well as a joint team and achieved success through actions that enabled one another. Japanese forces could not match the efforts and were overwhelmed by the American actions during the campaign.

This study's findings offer implications for practice. First it presents a case study in the application of operational art at the theater level. American military operations in the twenty-first century primarily involved echelons below division and did not involve large-scale combat operations. Admiral Halsey and his commanders learned on the job how to conduct joint operations. Their actions serve as an example of how to develop a campaign plan while already in execution. The second implication for practice is that leaders, planners, professional military education institutions, and doctrine writers should consider the campaign from the operational level. The Guadalcanal campaign unfolded over seven months and involved many engagements. Yet it was just the first of many campaigns on the way to victory in the Pacific Theater. The campaign offers other opportunities for more exploration.

Future research recommendations to expand the understanding of operational art through the use of this campaign include the following: How did the component commanders, like LTG Harmon, coordinate actions throughout the campaign? How did they plan for follow-on operations during the Guadalcanal campaign? What do Japanese sources say about how their operations were affected by American actions? Why did the Japanese forces not organize operations more jointly? Answers to these questions could provide additional understanding about operational art during the campaign.

The legacy of the Guadalcanal campaign invokes pride in the American military tradition. However, its outcome in October 1942 was far from assured. The leadership of Admiral Halsey, joint efforts of the Services, and successful outcome of iterative actions led to the defeat of the opposing Japanese forces at the operational level. What if the Japanese had prevailed in the

Guadalcanal campaign? And what would have caused the Americans to lose? The answers to these questions reveal the importance of the operational level thinking that Admiral Halsey and his subordinate commanders employed. The American commanders applied aspects of operational art in a campaign that defeated the Japanese forces. The Guadalcanal campaign therefore offers the modern US Army precedent to consider how to campaign in the Pacific Theater.

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