

## CHAPTER 8

# 25 OCTOBER: BATTLE OF THE SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS I

The night of 24-25 October finally saw Lieutenant General Hyakutake launch the much-delayed land offensive against the Marine position on Guadalcanal. The bulk of the offensive was launched against Henderson Field's thinly defended southern perimeter by troops who had positioned themselves after difficult inland marches through the jungle. Their intention was to capture the airfield which in turn would enable the IJN relative freedom to operate close to the island. After weeks of preparation, the Japanese expected a quick victory and at 0135 on 25 October Hyakutake sent news to the Combined Fleet of his purported success.

As noted in previous chapters, there was a concentration of IJN warships positioned east of the Solomons ready to exploit the expected victory and destroy the American naval forces operating between Guadalcanal and the New Hebrides. These warships were organised in three formations as detailed in the table below. An advance force under Vice Admiral Kondo Nobutake was based around the carrier *Junyo* (after its sister ship the *Hiyo* had returned to Truk, as noted in Chapter 7). The key formation was the Striking Force under Vice Admiral Nagumo Chuichi which had the three carriers *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku* and *Zuiho*. Operating in close proximity to the Striking Force was Rear Admiral Abe Hirohaki's Vanguard Force of half a dozen battleships and cruisers supported by eight destroyers.

### **Advance Force (Vice Admiral Kondo Nobutake)**

Aircraft carrier	<i>Junyo</i>
Battleships	<i>Kongo, Haruna</i>
Heavy cruisers	<i>Atago, Takao, Maya, Myoko</i>
Light cruiser	<i>Isuzu</i>
-Ten destroyers	

### **Striking Force (Vice Admiral Nagumo Chuichi)**

Aircraft carriers	<i>Shokaku, Zuikaku</i>
Light carrier	<i>Zuiho</i>
Heavy cruiser	<i>Kumano</i>
-Eight destroyers	

### **Vanguard Force (Rear Admiral Abe Hirohaki)**

Battleships	<i>Hiei, Kirishima</i>
Heavy cruisers	<i>Suzuya, Tone, Chikuma</i>
Light cruiser	<i>Nagara</i>
-Eight destroyers	