

Funafuti – The Midway of the South Pacific

Background

It is winter of 1942 in a Pacific Theater Campaign game. The fighting has been pretty fierce, and both Japan and the U.S. have lost a fair number of light ships and some carriers. The major battles have been around the Ellice Islands.

Japan controls Niutao. The US controls Funafuti and Niulakita and has just built a port in Funafuti. Funafuti is defended with 2 1-2 infantry and a marine along with a mixture of AAF and NAS, some inverted and some not.

Japan flies 3 AAF and a NAS to Niutao and counter-airs Funafuti. After the smoke clears, the U.S. has 1 Search AAS and 1 Attack AAS uninverted along with a stack of inverted air.

Japan then launches an invasion of Funafuti. They invade with 3 TFs which contain nearly their entire navy along with 3 marines, and a 2-2 and a 1-2 infantry.

The U.S. intercepts with every available task force they have – a British task force in Townsville and three U.S. task forces in Noumea, Suva, and Pago Pago.

Both sides have two subs in the area, and they also join in.

Note that Japan has an Air Defense result and an ADRM of 3. The U.S. has both an ADRM and NDRM of 3.

Invasion Forces

Japan is invading with the following forces. The exact details of the task forces aren't known to the U.S. player, although he knows which naval units are involved in the mission.

The two Japanese subs were actually on patrol and counter-intercepted to join the fight.

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|  |              |
| <p>Other Forces</p> |   |

Note: The Japanese TF2 is actually not legal. Japan forgot about the updated 20.162F, and the U.S. didn't catch it either.

20.162 A TF marker, if available, may be placed on the board to represent a naval force, subject to the following:

...

F. For each fast carrier factor in a TF, that TF must also contain at least one fast fleet factor (EXCEPTION: Japan's Pearl Harbor strike force - 51.12).

Interception

The base interception is nine dice – 2 dice for an activity carrying cargo, 3 dice for three Japanese task forces, 3 dice for three factors defending against an invasion, and 1 die for the Search AAS

The TFs in Noumea, Suva, and Pago Pago all intercept easily.

The U.S. plays a Wild MAGIC card as a Strategic card and does a MAGIC interception with the British task force in Townsville. Japan counters this with a Strategic card of their own. Since the British task force is slow, they only get eight dice and need to roll a ‘27’ or better. They roll a ‘32’ and succeed in their interception.

The U.S. intercepts with the following forces. The exact details of the task forces aren’t known to the Japanese player, although he also knows which naval units are involved in the interception.

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|---|--|
|  1TF |        |
|  2TF |            |
|  4TF |     |
|  1TF |       |
| Other Forces |     Funafuti Funafuti |

Naval Combat - Setup

Both sides have battleship forces that are looking to close as well as carrier forces looking to make air strikes but avoid fleet combat, and Japan also has an invasion force they want to protect. So the naval forces are spread out through the possible combat groups.

| Naval Combat Chart | | | | |
|---|-------|---------------|--------|---|
| Axis | | Combat Groups | Allies | |
| Hidden | Found | | Found | Hidden |
|  CG1 | | 1 | |  CG1 |
| | | 2 | |  CG2 |
| | | 3 | | |
| | | 4 | |  CG4 |
|  CG5 | | 5 | |  CG5 |
|  CG6 | | 6 | | |

Naval Combat – Round 1

Japan does not attack the 2 land-based AAS on Funafuti.

For search, the U.S. has four dice (1 active combat group, 2 carrier combat groups, 1 search AAS) and rolls ‘6’, ‘1’, ‘4’, and ‘5’. Japan has three dice (1 active combat group, 2 carrier combat groups) and rolls ‘2’, ‘4’, and ‘4’.

| Naval Combat Chart | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|---|---|
| Axis | | Combat Groups | Allies | |
| Hidden | Found | | Found | Hidden |
|  |  | 1 | |  |
| | | 2 |  |  |
| | | 3 | | |
|  | | 4 |  |   |
|  |  | 5 | |  |
|  |  | 6 | | |

All of the Japanese combat groups are found.

- CG1 is revealed to be fast with no carriers
- CG5 is revealed to be slow with four carriers
- CG6 is revealed to be slow with two carriers and cargo

Two of the U.S. / British combat groups are found.

- CG2 is revealed to be slow with no carriers
- CG4 is revealed to be slow with two carriers

Because both sides found at least one combat group, no surprise air strikes are possible.

Japan makes an air strike on CG4 with 9 eNAS and 3 NAS. It is the British force. Japan blows through the 1 NAS on CAP and the Air Defense of 3, and destroys the combat group. Japan sinks the *Courageous* (CVL), *Ark Royal* (CVL), and *Warspite* (BB3). The *Royal Sovereign* (BB3) is damaged but escapes.

The U.S. makes an air strike on CG6 with 9 NAS, 1 Attack AAS, and 2 British NAS. Japan has 2 eNAS on CAP. The carriers are the primary target, and the *Kaga* (CV) and *Hiyo* (CVL) are sunk. A cruiser is also damaged.

Now the two active combat groups square off. They are very similar, with both sides having five battleships. The U.S. plays a Tactical MAGIC card, which ends up making a significant difference. There are no choices for targets – both sides just line up and shoot. The U.S. does one point of damage to each Japanese battleship and damages a cruiser. Japan does 2 points of damage to the *North Carolina* (BB4) and one point to the *Massachusetts* (BB4) and the *Alabama* (BB4). They miss the other two battleships and the lights.

Finally, the U.S. submarines attack. They both fire at the Japanese carrier combat group. The first sub misses the carriers and hits the *Mutsu* (BB4) for two points of damage. The second sub is more accurate, and hits the *Hiryu* (CV) for three points, sinking it.

Japan holds back their submarines; they want a shot at the U.S. carriers.

Round 1 Losses

Japanese losses:

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U.S. and British losses:

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Remaining Forces at the End of Round 1

Japan:

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|  |       |
|  |           |
|  |          |
| <p>Other Forces</p> |   |

US:

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|  |        |
|  |     |
|  |            |
| <p>Other Forces</p> |  <p>Funafuti</p> |

Neither side withdraws, so combat round two starts.

Naval Combat – Round 2

Japan attacks the remaining uninverted AAS (Search) on Funafuti with an eNAS and eliminates it. The eNAS has no chance and is also eliminated.

For search, the U.S. has four dice (2 active combat groups, 1 carrier combat group, 1 previous round of combat) and rolls ‘2’, ‘1’, ‘6’, and ‘2’. Japan has three dice (1 active combat group, 1 carrier combat group, 1 previous round of combat) and rolls ‘1’, ‘5’, and ‘2’.

| Naval Combat Chart | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|---------------|--------|--------|--|
| Axis | | Combat Groups | Allies | | |
| Hidden | Found | | Found | Hidden | |
| | | 1 | | | |
| | | 2 | | | |
| | | 3 | | | |
| | | 4 | | | |
| | | 5 | | | |
| | | 6 | | | |

This time, the Japanese carrier combat group is not found but the other two Japanese combat groups are found.

All of the U.S. combat groups are found.

Because both sides found at least one combat group, no surprise air strikes are possible.

Japan makes an air strike on CG5 with 7 of their 8 remaining eNAS. The U.S. has 4 NAS on CAP, and between CAP and Air Defense they barely stop all of the Japanese air.

The U.S. makes an air strike on CG6 with 6 NAS; they target the light ships. They sink CA2 and DD1, which also eliminates a 1-2.

Now the first two combat groups square off again. The order that the ships line up is again fixed, and the U.S. has an extra CA2 that can fire at anything. The Japanese battleships have to line up as follows:

- *Yamato* (BB5) [1]
- *Musashi* (BB5) [1]

- *Kongo* (BC3) [1]
- *Hiei* (BC3) [1]
- *Haruna* (BC3) [1]

The U.S. battleships have to line up as follows:

- *Washington* (BB4)
- *South Dakota* (BB4)
- *Massachusetts* (BB4) [1]
- *Alabama* (BB4) [1]
- *North Carolina* (BB4) [2]

This is important because the Japanese BB5s have to fire on completely undamaged ships.

Japan rolls poorly, and only does two points of damage on the *South Dakota* (BB4) and the *Washington* (BB4). Their BC3s and remaining DD1 do nothing.

The U.S. sinks the *Hiei* (BC3) and the last DD1, and damage the *Kongo* (BC3) and the *Haruna* (BC3). They also manage to get two more hits on the *Musashi* (up to three hits total).

U.S. CG2 is active this round, and since there is no matching Japanese combat group, it can attack Japanese CG1. It cannot attack any distant combat groups because it is slow, but since Japanese CG1 is down two just the two Japanese BB5s that is okay. They target Japanese CG1.

Japan, realizing that things have gone poorly and it is time to protect the remaining ships, screens the *Musahi* (BB5). The *Yamato* (BB5) takes on the *Nevada* (BB3), the *Arizona* (BB3), the *Pennsylvania* (BB3), and the *Maryland* (BB3) by itself. It inflicts one hit, and barely avoids being damaged as it takes two hits (to three total) and is saved from the third hit by 1 pip on the die roll.

Finally, the Japanese submarines attack now that they have found the U.S. carriers. The U.S. plays an ASW MAGIC card and reveals the destroyers in the combat group. When all of the modifiers are added up, the subs are shooting at -4 even against the carriers. Both subs manage to avoid sinking themselves but do no better than a single hit on the *Lexington* (CV).

Round 2 Losses

Japanese losses:

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|
|  |  <i>Hiei</i> BC 3 |  CA 2 |  DD 1 |  DD 1 |  1-2 |
|  |  <i>Kongo</i> BC 3 |  <i>Haruna</i> BC 3 | | | |
|  |  3-3 | | | | |

U.S. losses:

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Remaining Forces at the End of Round 2

Japan:

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US:

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With both the *Yamato* and the *Musashi* one hit from being damaged and having no more escorts, and the Japanese carrier arm down to 6 eNAS, Japan abandons their invasion and withdraws.

Aftermath

This was a decisive victory for the U.S. Their MAGIC card advantage made a noticeable difference, and Japan's failure to find the U.S. carriers in the first round really hurt them. The fleet combat was interesting; Japan had bad luck but still managed to get both of their BB5s out of the combat without being damaged. The U.S. combat group with four slow BB3s seemed pretty worthless at first and was thrown in because it was "all hands on deck", but they did make a difference.

Even though Japan lost, the British were completely removed as a threat in the Pacific; their only remaining ships are all damaged. Japan will get a resistance point (and possibly two) for the Allied losses and the U.S. will be forced to send some of their BB3s to Europe to replace the British BB3s that aren't available to withdraw.