



Photograph of Tone-class cruiser during Battle off Samar, 25 October 1944. National Archives reference number 80-G-287537. This photograph has been widely published, but to this author's knowledge was first correctly identified by Naval Historical Center. This photograph, usually anonymously captioned as a Tone-class cruiser, is indeed the Chikuma. The marked foreshortening of the fantail, corresponding with Chikuma's damage that morning, provides confirmation. If you look closely you can see the jagged edges of damage and just discern the sag of the stern. Time is uncertain, but subsequent to her 0853 torpedo hit and prior to 1100 apparently.

Solving Some Mysteries of Leyte Gulf: Fate of the *Chikuma* and *Chokai*

By Anthony P. Tully

AT THE Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944, a number of Japanese vessels met ends that are obscure, or in some cases entirely unknown. Chief among these are the heavy cruisers *Chikuma* and *Chokai*, and the destroyers *Fujinami*, *Nowaki*, and *Shiranuhi*. In the course of research on a larger work of the Imperial Japanese Navy it has become clear that this is due to the absence of action reports or even survivors from the ships involved. Hence, the post-war obscurity. The ambiguity is compounded by the relative overlooking that there *is* mystery in some of the losses. Now, with careful sifting of the slender clues of signals and orders exchanged between ships, and close scrutiny of the available U.S. attack photographs, it has been possible to shed much more

light. This article does not claim to have conclusively solved all of the mysteries cited above, but seeks to demonstrate that the fates of the heavy cruisers *Chikuma* and *Chokai* can be reconstructed.

The fate of the heavy cruiser *Chikuma* will be considered first. It is generally known that on 25 October 1944, during the surface Battle off Samar, that the *Chikuma* received at 0853 an air torpedo hit that knocked out her rudder. She fell out of the pursuit, and moved off. The destroyer *Nowaki* was dispatched to guard her. However, neither was ever seen by the Japanese again. The Detailed Action Report of Cruiser Division Seven (to which *Chikuma* belonged) concludes:

"... At 1110 *Nowaki* was ordered to proceed to

Chikuma and screen her, but the subsequent fate of both ships is unknown. It is believed that all hands met a heroic end."

From the Japanese side, then, no further information is available on time and manner of loss. The question can only be settled by careful sifting of scant signal clues and study of U.S. Navy attack reports and photographs. An important attempt to do so has already been made.

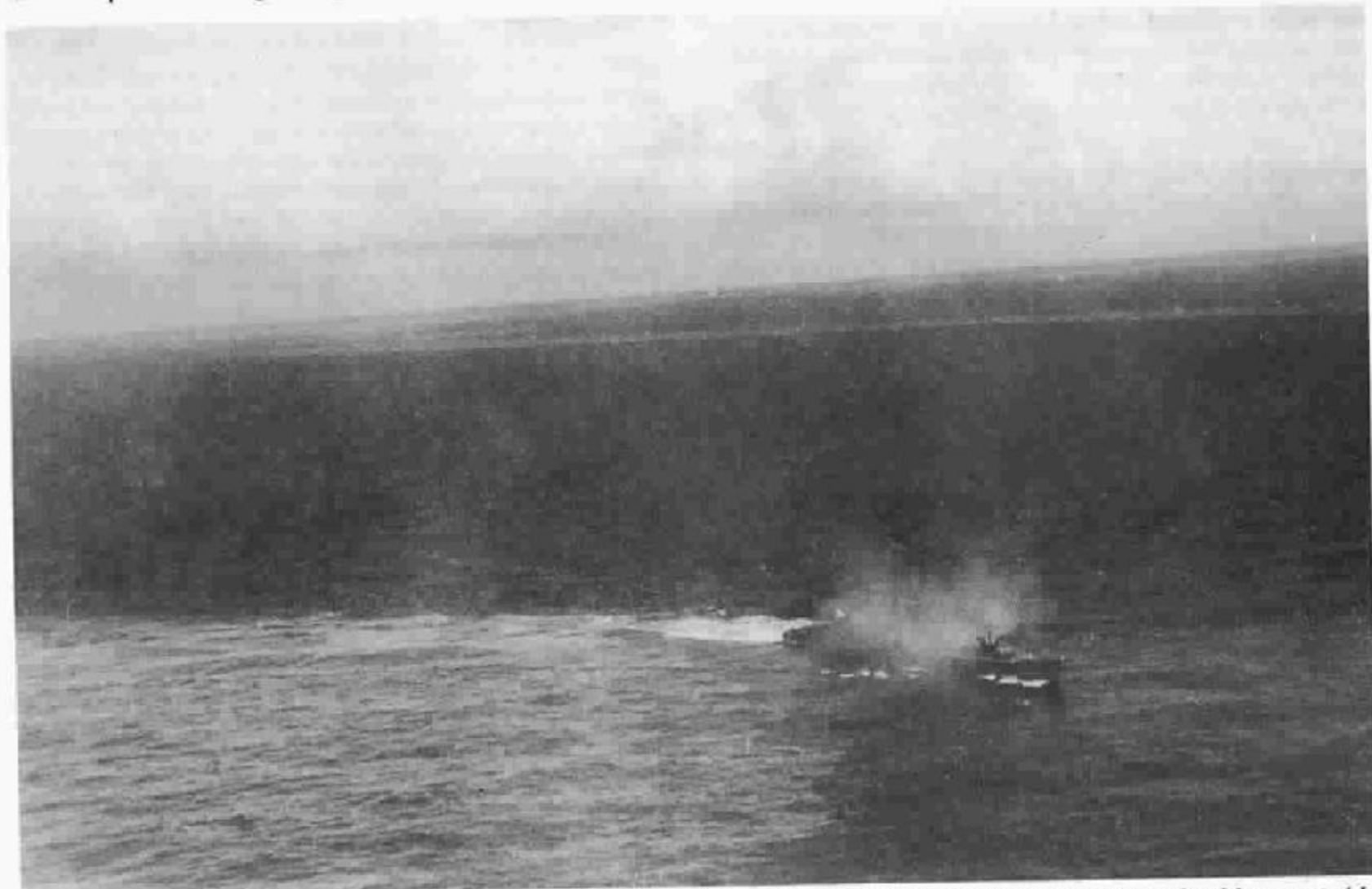
In *Little Giants*, his excellent 1987 book on American escort carriers, author William T. Y'Blood suggested that a Japanese cruiser reported sunk at 1415 by planes from *Ommamey Bay* had in fact been the *Chikuma*.¹ This was in a position well north of that given by S. E. Morison and other accepted histories. Upon reading this, this writer was immediately struck by the clarity of the hypothesis, since it had already been realized that given the toughness of Japanese ships it was highly unlikely that the single torpedo hit of 0853 had done for *Chikuma*. Mr. Y'Blood's choice was one of three 'Tone-class' attacks later in the day that the present author had suspected was the true sinking event. It was resolved to see if this hypothesis could be verified.

It is the author's opinion that Mr. Y'Blood's important claim can now be demonstrated as fact and take its place among accepted naval history on the

subject. Further, it has proven possible to show that though Mr. Y'Blood is correct, he did not quite find the full story. To the best of my knowledge, that appears here for the first time. Careful analysis of reports and photos now allow a fairly complete reconstruction of the sad story of *Chikuma*'s last battle.

At 0850 hours *Chikuma* and *Tone*'s Crdiv 7 was furiously engaged in running gunfire pursuit of the fleeing escort carriers of Taffy 3. Following close behind were the *Haguro* and *Chokai* of Crdiv 5. At this moment all four heavy cruisers were attacked by American aircraft armed with torpedoes and bombs. Within ten decisive minutes, the tenor of battle had changed, with *Chikuma* and *Chokai* both knocked out of the battle. Crdiv 7 War Diary reports what happened to *Chikuma* as observed from *Tone*. The *Chikuma* was caught in an 'anvil' attack by four torpedo planes attacking from both sides. The cruiser evaded to starboard, but was struck by a torpedo on the port quarter at 0853 and:

"... there was a burst of flame and simultaneously a column of water almost as high as the length of the ship shot up into the air. The [*Chikuma*'s] after deck single mount machine gun and other gear were seen blown into the air. The after half of the after deck was apparently heavily damaged, and *settled in the water* [*italics mine*], but the ship continued to move



One of two photographs of *Tone*-class cruiser taken from Kitkun Bay's VC-5 just after having torpedoed her port side at 1100 25 October. Though dark and grainy, it is clear enough to confirm that it is a *Tone*-class, and has a damaged and sagging fantail, which identifies her as *Chikuma*. (*Tone* didn't suffer such severe damage, and her bomb damage aft came later in the day in any case). As asserted in the text, since *Chikuma* is unnavigable when next sighted this appears to be the attack that halted her. (National Archives #80-G-287472).



This rare and important photograph is one of three very similar ones included in Ommaney Bay VC-75 Air Combat Action Report No. 51, 25 October 1944. Taken at about 1415 it shows the target cruiser from the starboard beam after the attacking aircraft have passed over the target. She has just been torpedoed in the port side, and is bleeding oil and already starting to list. She is clearly revealed as a Tone-class cruiser, just as claimed by length due to the sagging fantail. This damage helps confirm this is indeed the *Chikuma* and not sister-ship *Tone*, and answers the riddle of her fate. Within fifteen minutes she had capsized and sunk by the stern. (Author's collection).

at slow speed and her guns kept on firing . . . no marked external damage other than the stern was observed."²

The *Chikuma* hauled out of the battle, flying a 'rudder disabled' signal. The 'settled' stern is important, for when translation is checked, what it means is that the fantail was *sagging, cracked*, not simply that the cruiser was down by the stern. Any doubt on this point is easily settled by photographs, as will be seen. Following this hit, the *Chikuma* loses touch with the main body of Kurita's force. However, her radio continues to function and provides valuable additional information for what followed.

At 0907 *Yamato* heard from *Chikuma* that she had received a torpedo hit making her unnavigable. Moments later, at 0920 the *Yamato* received a rarely quoted, but important amplification from *Chikuma*: "One propeller; speed 18 knots; unable to steer."³

This signal, and an important vertical photograph, allow us to reconstruct the nature of the primary initial damage to the *Chikuma*. [Photo on p.248] At 0853 the torpedo hit on the port quarter not only knocked out the rudder, but in point of fact actually severed the stern, chopping it off in damage similar to that suffered by the *Takao* on 23 October. Crudiv7 War Diary clearly states this and the fact is proven by the vertical photograph⁴ that shows a *Tone*-class cruiser with a clearly amputated fantail, but still underway and circling. The *Chikuma*'s signal to *Yamato* enables

us to add the detail that she was reduced to one screw (probably the outboard starboard one) and speed cut to 18 knots. This seems to be the extent of the initial damage. It is clear that apart from being unable to steer, it is likely that the *Chikuma*'s buoyancy was unimpaired and she was in no danger of sinking.

Finally, at 0940, Crudiv 7 Action Report notes receiving a message from the crippled *Chikuma*. "Our 0925 position YA-KA-SE-36 [11-25N, 126-48E] bearing 52 degrees True, 64 miles from Suluan Light."⁵ A follow-up signal stated that her maximum speed was 9 knots, and requested instructions for heading. The *Chikuma* was clearly in distress, and getting further away from the fleet each moment. Now they had a position and help could be sent. It is notable that the position given, even allowing for some error, is well north and further east than the usual scuttling or crippling position (11-21'N, 126-12'E) given for the *Chikuma*. This important clue places her closer to Mr. Y'Blood's ultimate position, albeit still considerably to the south. Kurita probably received this update around 1000, but was delayed by a major air-raid that among other things crippled a third cruiser, the *Suzuya*. After this, the *Chikuma* fell silent. Nothing more was heard from her.

At length however, at 1110 the destroyer *Nowaki* (Cdr. Moriya Setsuji) was dispatched to find the cruiser and assist her, *Yamato* stating that *Chikuma*'s position at 1110 was bearing 85 degrees, 125 miles, from Tacloban.⁶ Though nothing more was ever heard from either the destroyer or the cruiser, the likelihood is that she located the *Chikuma* with little difficulty and assumed screening position by noon. However, by this time, the *Chikuma* had received further damage and was now dead in the water. Can it be determined which American strike was responsible? I believe it can.

Though the possibility exists that *Chikuma* had been hit again since 0853 and prior to 1100, it appears the decisive damage was inflicted at the latter time. At 1105 a flight of five TBFs led by Lt. J. F. Kalb from *Kitkun Bay* came upon the wounded *Chikuma*. Passing over a 'battleship' and 'cruiser' dead in the water (*Chokai* and *Fujinami*?), they selected a circling cruiser as a liver target that 'needed more'. Lt. Kalb and his wingman Curtis dropped on the starboard side, while Lts Andrews and Buttle dropped two torpedoes on the port side. Caught between wakes on both sides, the cruiser skipper judged Kalb's the more dangerous, and she swung painfully to starboard in an attempt to comb the wakes. The cruiser successfully avoided these, but sure enough, stumbled squarely into the path of the other two. Both torpedoes hit the port side amidships, one under the bridge, the other the mainmast. These must have flooded the port machinery rooms, for Kalb saw the Japanese cruiser immediately lose speed, and smoking heavily on the port side. Apparently to finish her off, a lone Avenger commenced a run on the crippled cruiser. The cruiser's guns still had fight however, and to Kalb's horror he saw the plane hit and burst

into a fireball that plunged into the sea. He saw no parachutes open.⁷

Although this cruiser is unidentified in *Kitkun Bay's* action report and subsequent histories, the identification as the *Chikuma* herself and not the *Tone* is readily possible. This is because photographs [Photo CHIK-B] were taken that not only confirm the target was a *Tone*-class cruiser, but show it with a sagging stern.⁸ Hence, this vessel is almost certainly the *Chikuma*. The 'continual circling' of the target prior to the attack only reinforces this statement. In any case, after two observed hits the target was observed to be smoking very heavily and to come to a dead halt with a list to port. There seems little doubt that this was the attack that aborted any hopes of escape *Chikuma* had; it flooded the engine rooms and stopped the cruiser. Captain Norimitsu and his crew must have spent the next hours in quiet trepidation—*Chikuma* was now a sitting duck for whoever next happened to come along.

That wait proved to be more than three hours, during which Captain Norimitsu's crew must have struggled with typical energy and heroism to get back underway and save their ship. Sometime around noon the *Nowaki* may have arrived, raising hopes. However, shortly after 1400 time ran out for the *Chikuma*. The third and final phase came with the arrival of three planes from *Ommaney Bay* led by Lt.Cdr. A. W. Smith.

Soon after 1400, Smith's radioman A. R. Zubik reported a blip on his radar. Descending through the clouds, the three planes burst into clear sky to see a cruiser dead in the water, with a destroyer 1,000 yards astern and a BB visible in the far distance off the port quarter. Surely, this was *Chikuma* with *Nowaki* now on the scene. She had been dead in the water since 1110 and the attack of the *Kitkun Bay's* planes, and was now a sitting duck. It was almost like a training session for the three Avenger pilots, as they banked around and made their run in from the port side against light defensive fire, a textbook execution. Captain Norimitsu could do nothing to avoid disaster as the three torpedoes splashed into the water scarcely 1,000 yards away. They ran hot and true. All three reportedly hit the cruiser, just forward of amidships. With a great issuing of smoke, her forward fire-room open to sea, the target at once took on an increasing list to port. Three crucial photographs were taken just after the run.⁹

It is these photographs which remove all doubt and decisively settle the issue. The clearest one is published here for possibly the first time.[CHIK-C] A *Tone*-class cruiser is unmistakably the target, already displaying a list to port as a large oil slick spreads out like a blood stain. Most important, the stern is clearly amputated, foreshortened. This proves the target is *Chikuma*, and not one of the many attacks *Tone* also suffered and survived. Further, all three aircrews reported and witnessed that the target cruiser capsized to port and sank stern first within ten minutes of the attack. The destroyer standing by was seen to be moving up as the victors departed the battle

site. Therefore, unless one chooses to dispute the witness's explicit statements that the target sank, there seems no doubt that T. Y'Blood's hypothesis is correct. This attack by *Ommaney Bay* torpedo planes at 1415 hours 25 October 1944 sank the *Chikuma* in position 11-52'N, 126-36'E.

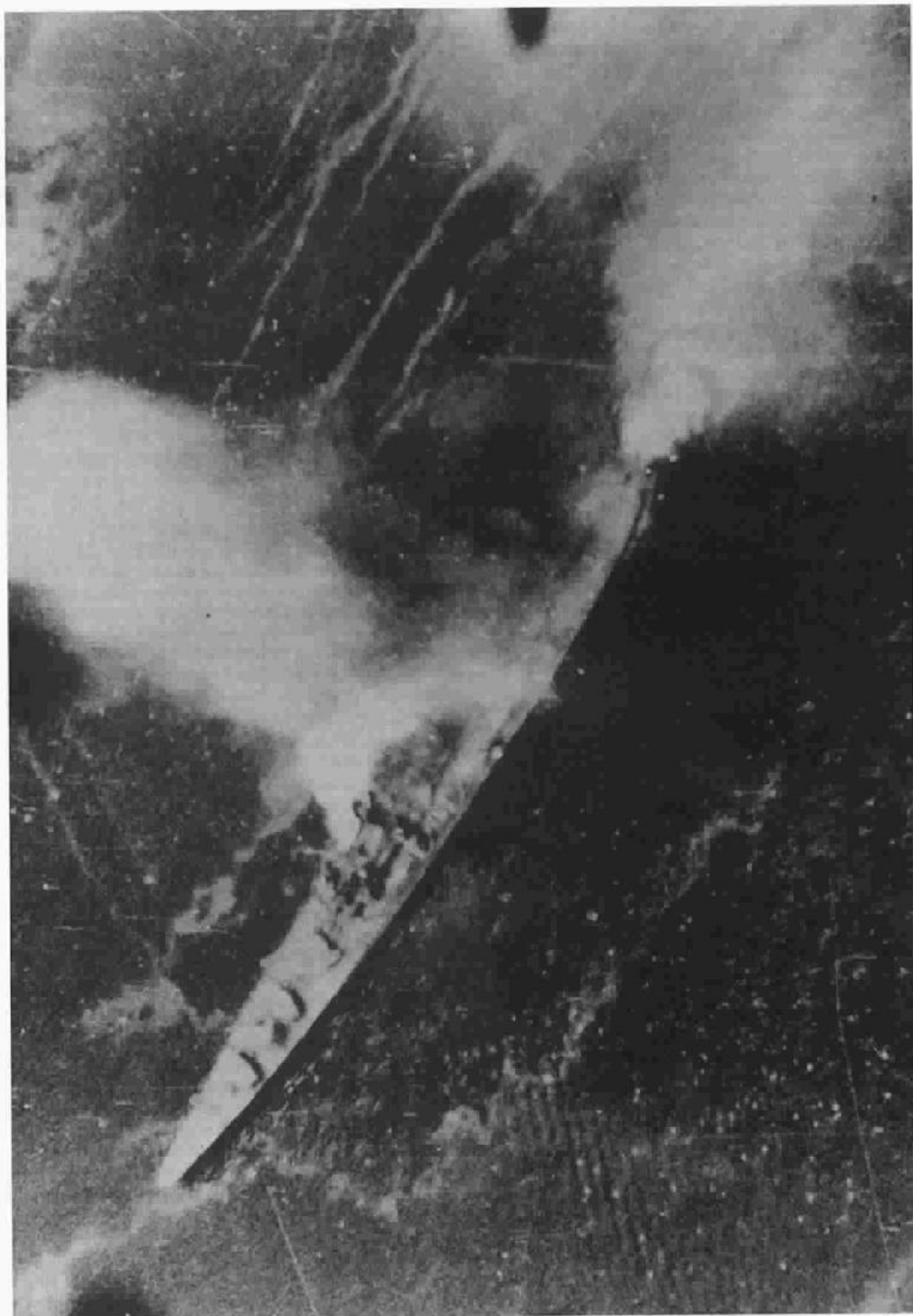
The *Chikuma's* story does not end there. After the cruiser went down at 1430 it remained for Commander Moriya's *Nowaki* to conduct the painful business of searching for and rescuing survivors in the heavy swells. In his prior argument, T. Y'Blood devotes some time to an interesting analysis of the time frame between *Nowaki's* alleged scuttling of the *Chikuma* and the destroyer's eventual fiery destruction off San Bernardino. He uses this to help demonstrate that the rescue operations must have commenced later in the day than previously implied. This is correct, but a potentially more useful direct analogy can be made. This is the case of the sinking of the heavy cruiser *Suzuya*.

Like *Chikuma* (and *Chokai*) the *Suzuya* suffered severe damage by 1100 that rendered her unnavigable and had a single destroyer assigned to her as guardian and rescuer. Fortunately, in this case the escort, *Okinami*, survived, and so did the *Suzuya* survivors and a detailed account. At 1322, the burning cruiser turned onto her starboard side and sank without *Okinami* having to resort to scuttling. Rescue operations of survivors commenced immediately, but was hampered and slowed by the same swells and wide drifting of survivors that hampered the rescue of the *Johnston's*, *Hoel's* and other American survivors. Air attacks also drove the *Okinami* away at times.¹⁰ It may be conjectured that *Nowaki* encountered similar hardships in her rescue efforts. This made recovery difficult and time-consuming.

So time-consuming in fact, that far to the north, Kurita (who was now headed for San Bernardino Strait) lost patience. Concerned by the delay of the rescue destroyers rejoining him, Kurita issued an order at 1700 for the rescue destroyers to rejoin.¹¹ However, *Okinami's* skipper ignored this and persisted for nearly an hour more to finish the rescue. Finally before 1800 the *Okinami* started northward for San Bernardino Strait with 415 survivors of *Suzuya*, including Captain Teraoka Masao, aboard.¹²

Nowaki didn't immediately follow. If the above reconstruction is correct, the *Chikuma* sank exactly an hour later than the *Suzuya*, and the *Nowaki's* activities may be roughly calculated assuming a similar rescue interval. Like *Okinami*, Commander Moriya Setsuji of *Nowaki* may have received Kurita's recall order, but like the former, probably procrastinated. This solicitude is commendable, but Commander Moriya would have been well-advised to have joined *Okinami*. As it was, he can be expected to have started north after *Okinami*, an hour, perhaps a half-hour behind the former. *Okinami* passed through San Bernardino at 0030 26 October. This would put *Nowaki* arriving at San Bernardino Strait about 0100.

It is there at San Bernardino Strait that *Chikuma's* tragedy reaches its climax and the mystery was born.



The Chikuma under attack by SBD aircraft from aircraft carrier Saratoga (CV-3) in Simpson's Harbor, Rabaul, during 0820 to 0845 on 5 November 1943. Official USN Photograph (National Archives) BuAer 89107, print courtesy Mr. Don S. Montgomery, USN(Retd.). The cruiser received several near misses from bombs and incurred some superficial hull damage in this attack, but survived to fight another day.

For just at this time Halsey's TF 34 was arriving there in a belated attempt to block Kurita's escape. At 0054 Halsey's cruisers opened fire on a lone straggler they had been tracking. It was the luckless *Nowaki*. She burst into flames and was rapidly pounded to scrap by a deluge of shells; the slaughter on her packed decks must have been terrible. The hapless destroyer was then finished off by torpedoes. At 0135 *Nowaki* sank blazing in the dark night, taking with her Commander Moriya, his entire crew, and all the unhappy *Chikuma* survivors with her—a total of some 1,400 men—to an anonymous grave.¹³ With them perished the story of those ships brave last battle, apart from the bare outline resurrected in these pages.

Two other Japanese heavy cruisers perished in the battle off Samar; the *Suzuya* and the *Chokai*. The *Suzuya*'s Action Report has survived, and her fate is known, but the case of the heavy cruiser *Chokai* is one similar to *Chikuma*'s. However, it does not appear to have been fully recognized as such. That is to say, the fate of the *Chokai* has been obscured by a failure to realize there is nearly as much mystery about her loss as that of the *Chikuma*'s.

To date, most accounts say *Chokai* was knocked out by combined shell-fire and air bombing, and then "scuttled" by *Fujinami*. However, the time of this scuttling is never mentioned and thus presumably not available (this is *not* the case). This is compounded by the reference in Morison's volume which says: "*Haguro*'s track chart traces *Chokai*'s slow retirement to 0930, when she disappears below the waves."¹⁴ In the examination that follows, this statement will be shown to be erroneous. Nevertheless, after 1100 hours 25 October 1944, it is clear that the Japanese records have very little definite to say about *Chokai*'s fate. Crudiv 5 War Diary has no details to report. The fact is (apart from one signal discussed below), the time of her final demise is *unknown*. This silence also implies there were no survivors to complete the story.

Direct testimony from Japanese records and witnesses regarding the *Chokai* is startlingly scant. Startling, for unlike *Chikuma*, this paucity does not seem to have been much noticed by historians of either side.¹⁵ This is apparently partly due to the shake-up in assignments that took place on 23 October 1944. That morning Crudiv 4, of which *Chokai* was a part, suffered a devastating loss to submarine attacks by *USS Darter* and *USS Dace*, Kurita's own flagship *Atago* and the *Maya* were sunk, and the *Takao* badly damaged and forced to retire. This left only *Chokai* of Crudiv 4, so the "orphan" cruiser was re-assigned to join *Myoko* and *Haguro* in Crudiv 5. The following day, however, the *Myoko* too, was crippled by air torpedo attack and forced to turn back. That left *Haguro* and *Chokai* as a two-member patchwork Cruiser Division Five. In this manner both participated in the surface battle against the escort carriers off Samar on 25 October 1944.

The *Haguro*'s Detailed Action Report describes the encounter and engagement off Samar in terse, but exciting detail. Making a much better start than Crudiv 7, *Haguro* and *Chokai*'s Crudiv 5 opens fire

at 0705, five minutes earlier than the *Kumano*, *Suzuya*, *Chikuma*, and *Tone*. The "jeep carriers" of Taffy 3 immediately put about, while their outnumbered screen heroically arrived to prevent total disaster. The battle expands, with *Haguro* and *Chokai* closing the range steadily. Nothing definite regarding *Chokai* is reported during the phase from 0700-0830 apart from a occasional message from her reporting air attack or enemy ships burning. The decisive moment for both Crudiv 5 and Crudiv 7 comes at 0849.

At 0849 *Haguro*'s Action Report records that she and *Chokai* swung to course 250 to close the range. As a result the *Chikuma* and *Tone* are ahead off *Haguro*'s port bow, while the *Chokai* has pulled abeam of *Haguro* to port. All four cruisers are "closing 3 carriers 40 degrees to starboard which are laying smoke." At 0851, the *Haguro* observes: "*Chokai* under concentrated shell-fire from enemy main strength, received hits on starboard side midships."

The results of this laconical note take on a surprising character when one reads the next entry, for 0859: "*Chokai* signalled. 'Engines out of commission'."¹⁶ The *Haguro* track chart shows *Chokai* sheering out of formation sharply to port, crawling away to the east. Ugaki's Diary also mention the misfortune that befell the *Chokai* and the time given, 0850, nearly exactly agrees with that of the *Haguro*'s report for the decisive moment of injury. Ugaki has this to say on the subject:

"*Haguro* and *Chokai* of the Fifth Heavy Cruiser Division followed the enemy and maneuvered well. But unfortunately *Chokai* received a hit in the center part of the rudder at 0850, and it induced the explosion of a shell. As a result, she dropped back and had to be scuttled after transferring her crews."¹⁷

At 0850 the *Chokai* had been in action, vigorously pursuing and engaging both distant escort carriers and nipping escorts. Ten minutes later—after receiving direct shell hits—she was going dead in the water. Although most accounts credit air attack with inflicting the vital damage, both the *Haguro*'s Action report and signal, and Ugaki's entry seem to indicate it was the surface gunfire that initially made *Chokai* unnavigable. What happened?

Unfortunately the paucity of records provide no clear answer. For 5-inch shell fire to inflict such damage however, the best guess is that *Chokai* suffered some damage to her uptakes or boilers. A likely cause is that *Chokai*'s torpedo tubes, primed for action, had exploded. The *Suzuya* was to suffer just such an induced explosion at 1050 that same day, completely wrecking and stopping the vessel. As *Chokai* had not undergone modernization, she was less resistant than her sisters. The *Haguro* note of "hits on starboard side amidships" would agree perfectly with a strike on the torpedo tubes, or wrecking of the uptakes. All Japanese records on *Chokai* mention an "induced explosion".

Additionally, the Ugaki note is interesting in that it records rudder damage in *Chokai* and this is nowhere implied in the other scant records. Nor has he

confused her with *Chikuma*, for he accurately records the latter's own rudder damage a little further on. It may be a translation problem, but as to how a hit on "center part" of the rudder can "induce the explosion of a shell" and what it really is implying is best left to technical experts. Suffice it to say that the evidence appears conclusive that by 0900 *Chokai* had both lost propulsive power and suffered damage to her rudder. The cumulative effect rendered her un-navigable.

Further irony comes from the fact that U.S. Navy records give every reason to believe that the major culprit was the spirited gunfire of the little destroyer escort *Samuel B. Roberts*, which reported inflicting noticeable and cumulative shell damage on a Japanese cruiser at precisely this time, in coordination with supporting gunfire from escort carriers *White Plains* and *Kalinin Bay*. If this is so, it was one of those unique events where two opposing vessels disabled each other, for the *Samuel B. Roberts* was reduced to a foundering cripple that was finished off by the *Kongo* at 0912.¹⁸

By 0900 then, Crudiv 5 had been halved, and *Haguro* was again an orphan. The *Chokai* was out of the battle, dead in the water or nearly so, staggering to the east, with rudder and engine damage of unknown severity. Apparently she immediately suffered further damage, for Morison reports that five planes from *Kitkun Bay* led by Cdr. R. L. Fowler, armed with bombs, attacked the cruiser column at about 0905. The fliers reported seeing the unfortunate *Gambier Bay* just disappearing as they commenced their attack, thus fixing the time about 0910. Diving out of the sun on the unengaged port bow, Fowler selected the cruiser "next to the lead ship and firing continuously". The report describes a devastating attack:

"We caught the second heavy cruiser (*Mogami* class) in column completely by surprise as we received absolutely no anti-aircraft fire. . . . We completed all dives in about 35 seconds, scoring five hits amidships on the stack, one hit and two near-misses on the stern and three hits on the bow. . . ." As Commander Fowler watched, ". . . a heavy internal explosion almost immediately followed the bomb blasts. She made a sharp turn to starboard and began to smoke and explode violently. In about five minutes she had sunk completely."¹⁹

It is an open question as to whether this is truly *Chokai*, as has invariably been asserted. The vessel appears to be still in action and underway. Both the attack report and the accompanying sketch show a *Tone/Mogami* type cruiser. Whatever it was, it certainly didn't "blow up and sink within five minutes." All Japanese ships are accounted for up to 1000 hours. Nonetheless, it does not detract from the brilliance of Fowler's attack and there is reason to believe that the cruiser is in fact, the *Chokai* as always attested. This is because Japanese battle summaries all specifically state that *Chokai* suffered bomb damage from air attack in combination with surface gunfire. There also is specific proof of bomb damage. At 0918 the *Yamato* logged this message from *Chokai*: "Di-

rect bomb hit in forward machinery [engine] room. Attempting to repair same."²⁰

Although brief, this signal from *Chokai* both confirms the basic fact of air attack damage as well, and gives what may be a more accurate indication of the time of Fowler's attack. Possibly the events were nearly simultaneous. At any rate, it can be safely assumed that between 0905 and 0915 Fowler's (or another?) group made its devastating attack on *Chokai*. Whatever the precise nature of the engine damage prior, these bomb hits put the forward engine room out of commission. Shortly after, if Fowler and Morison are to be taken at face value, at 0930 the *Chokai* "disappears below the waves."

However, this statement can be demonstrated as manifestly in error. Various Japanese vessels report sighting the *Chokai* later than 0930. The *Yahagi*, southbound at 0933, reports sighting *Chokai* "90 degrees to port" and flashed her identification as a precaution.²¹ More explicitly, the Detailed Action Report of heavy cruiser *Tone* states that as *Haguro* and *Tone* are north-bound after the 0930 break-off from battle, they sighted the wallowing *Chokai*: "0955 Sight *CHOKAI* bearing 070 degrees [starboard from the track chart] 7,000 meters, becoming un-navigable."

Communication signals and orders within Kurita's First Striking Force are also suggestive of a vessel which has not sunk, but is crippled and in need of aid. At 0957, perhaps in response to *Tone*'s sighting, *Yamato* orders destroyer *Fujinami* (Cdr. Matsuzaki Tatsuji) to go to *Chokai*'s assistance. Seven minutes later ComDesRon 2, VAdm Hayakawa Mikio in *No-shiro* amplifies this at 1004 by assigning the *Fujinami* to *Chokai* until otherwise ordered.²² Yet, after 1000 positive information from the Japanese side regarding *Chokai* dries up. With one crucial exception, no further signal records explicitly regarding her have been found.

At this point it is helpful to note the tone of log entries regarding the *Chokai*, as opposed to that of the *Chikuma*. The *Chikuma*'s fate has been reconstructed above; but also, it was pointed out that as far as the Japanese were concerned, the *Nowaki* and *Chikuma* had vanished with no other word. In other words, after *Nowaki* proceeded to *Chikuma*'s aid both vessels were never heard from again. That this *wasn't* the case with *Chokai* is suggested by the log entries of the First Diversion Attack Force.

The first states "the *Kumano* and *Hayashimo* proceeded independently; the *Suzuya*'s crew was transferred to the *Okinami* and the *Chokai*'s crew to the *Fujinami*. All proceeded towards San Bernardino Straits, selecting a route hugging the coast of Samar in doing so. The *Nowaki* was sent to the aid of the *Chikuma* and has not been heard from since."

This battle summary was written late on the 25th or early 26th. The *Chikuma* is clearly treated as an absolute mystery, but that *Fujinami* ultimately transferred *Chokai*'s crew is stated with as much confidence as the demonstrable case of *Okinami* and *Suzuya*. It transpires that Kurita retained contact with

Fujinami. Otherwise, one would expect it to be referred to in the same terms as the missing *Chikuma*. In fact, at 0400 26 October, *Fujinami* sent the following message to Kurita:

"By 2140 the previous day [25 Oct] this vessel and *Chokai* had reached approximate position 11-35' North, 126°5 East. However, at this time, *Chokai* fully lost the ability to navigate and the situation became hopeless. Therefore *Fujinami* had transferred the crew and scuttled the cruiser with torpedoes, and is now proceeding toward Coron."²³

Although not precisely explicit, this fascinating message indicates that *Chokai* remained afloat as late as 2140 hours 25 October, and only then did *Fujinami* scuttle her. Moreover, it contains a seed of real drama—*Chokai* had managed to restore some power, and with *Fujinami* had embarked on a gallant but doomed crawl to safety, only for engines to fail where hearts had persevered—not unlike the heroic *Mogami* this same morning. All this is to say that it appears that *Chokai*, like *Suzuya*, was severely damaged but remained afloat with a destroyer assigned as shepherd through the early afternoon. For the same reason as *Nowaki*, the *Fujinami*'s failure to rejoin Kurita before it entered San Bernardino Strait is also suggestive of a later rescue than an earlier one. In other words, when all the available written evidence is reviewed, it can be established that not only did the *Chokai* not sink at 0930, but there is little reference to suggest she did so before early evening. Unlike *Chikuma*, there does not appear to be a specific instance where a vessel photographed by U. S. aircraft or claimed sunk can be identified as the cruiser. However, there exists important clues that confirm the implication of the *Fujinami*'s signal.

Until now, there has been a tendency to not explore the repeated and attested accounts by *Gambier Bay* and other U.S. Navy survivors who reported seeing a crippled Japanese man-of-war—either a battleship or cruiser—immobilized some miles away from them. Some of the observers imply that this cripple was to be seen right up to the time of sunset, a destroyer standing by. The question is—assuming the report is not mistaken—what warship was it? If the above reconstruction is accurate, it cannot be *Chikuma*, for she had gone down by 1430 in a position much more distant. Nor can it be *Suzuya*, which had sunk at 1322. No other Japanese warship was unnavigable at this time except *Chokai*. More telling, the cripple was reported to have a superstructure and two-stack profile suggesting a *Kongo*-class battleship.²⁴ This can easily apply to the *Chokai*, but is hard to square with *Chikuma*. Once the past misleading references regarding *Chokai* are set aside, it becomes clear that she can indeed be placed in this position and time frame. Finally, this derelict was observed to have later got underway and begun slowly moving away. This is an interesting affirmation of the Japanese record stating that *Chokai* regained power for a time.²⁵

The pieces of the puzzle now fit neatly into place. The clear statement of the *Fujinami* signal of 0400

26th is that *Chokai* was scuttled at or after 2140 hours, and the American survivor reports help remove any doubt of the Japanese record that she was still afloat to 1830 hours or later. However, at 1917 hours Kurita issued a command ordering all "damaged units to make every possible effort to proceed alone but where this is impossible for it to be disposed of and its crew transferred to the designated screening vessel which is to then proceed to Coron."²⁶ This sealed the fate of the *Chokai*. Captain Ariga Kosaku and *Fujinami*'s Commander Matsuzaki must have struggled all day in an unsung and gallant—but ultimately futile—effort to save *Chokai*. That the cruiser was not scuttled till a further 2½ hours later than Kurita's order suggests that only after the final engine failed did Captain Ariga fully abandon her. Once the transfer of the last survivors was completed, Commander Matsuzaki sank the *Chokai* with torpedoes.

What of the destroyer assigned to guard *Chokai* the *Fujinami*? If the above reconstruction is correct, Commander Matsuzaki tarried even longer than *Okinami* and *Nowaki* in his mission of mercy. The cruiser may be presumed as having been scuttled or foundered by 2200. Like *Okinami* and *Nowaki* before her, the *Fujinami*—decks jammed with survivors—then proceeded for San Bernardino Strait. Here arises a fascinating oversight in the written history. It is usually assumed that the unfortunate *Nowaki* was the last Japanese vessel to transit San Bernardino Strait. However, it appears that *Fujinami* made the passage after *Nowaki*'s destruction, and after TF 34 vacated the area! Moreover, just possibly the *Chokai* herself might have done so—if her engines had been equal to her captain's heart. Though by some miracle *Fujinami* avoided *Nowaki*'s fate, something later went wrong.²⁷ The lack of Japanese writings on *Chokai*'s fate suggest that like *Chikuma*, ultimately there were no survivors. What happened?

After *Fujinami* left the site of *Chokai*'s sinking, loaded with her survivors, she herself steamed into obscurity. An obscurity illuminated only by fleeting glimpses before her own destruction, supposedly on 27 October some 48 hours later. She had suffered some damage from near-misses in the Sibuyan Sea. It appears these holed the starboard bow and cut speed, but *Fujinami* was otherwise operational. According to the BBK volume on Leyte, "contact with *Fujinami* was lost" after the 0400 signal on 26 October and "subsequent movements unclear." Even so, all accounts and ship histories categorically state that the *Fujinami* was sunk with her crew and *Chokai*'s by air attack a full day later on 27 October after having been ordered to proceed to the grounded destroyer *Hayashimo*'s assistance.

Though some evidence indicates that *Fujinami* did reach Coron the night of the 26/27th, it does raise the question as to why the survivors of *Chokai* were not off-loaded at that time.²⁸ If such an opportunity was neglected, it was an irresponsible decision that cost the lives of *Chokai*'s survivors. However, the evidence can also fit a scenario where *Fujinami* was diverted to *Hayashimo*'s aide by wireless order be-

fore reaching Coron; obeyed, only to suffer disaster. I hope to demonstrate elsewhere and soon that the fate of the *Fujinami* herself is not at all as clear as is usually represented, but that must come at another time. For now, it appears the true final fates of the *Chikuma* and *Chokai* can now at last be set forth.

Endnotes and Citations

¹ Y'Blood, William T. *The Little Giants: U.S. escort carriers against Japan*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987, pp 222-224.

² Crdiv 7 Detailed Action Report, 22-28 October 1944. (WDC 161005). Translated reports stored in the Operational Archives of the Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

³ First Diversion Attack Force Battle Summary excerpts (WDC 161641). Operational Archives.

⁴ Photograph (CHIK-A, on page 248), National Archives reference number 80-G-287537.

⁵ Translation of position grid provided in English translation of Cmdiv 7 Action Report, on file at the Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

⁶ Crdiv 7 Detailed Action Report.

⁷ *Kitkun Bay* VC-5 Air Combat Action Report No. 57, 25 October 1944. The report includes a broadside diagram of a *Tone*/*Mogami*-class cruiser with two 'Xs' marked indicating the observed torpedo hits, one under the bridge, the second just abaft the funnel.

⁸ Photograph (CHIK-B, on page 249). There are two similar photographs in the National Archives, both archived and numbered 80-G-287472 and 80-G-287473. Unfortunately the pictures are so dark and grainy that only in a full size print is the cruiser clearly discernible. However the photographs are clear enough to confirm that it is a *Tone*-class, and has a damaged and sagging fantail. Since *Chikuma* is unrecognizable when next sighted this appears to be the attack that halted her.

⁹ *Omaney Bay* VC-75 Air Combat Action Report No. 51, 25 October 1944. Included with the report are three photographs, all shot off the starboard beam after the attacking aircraft has passed over the target. All three are similar, and the best and clearest is reproduced here. Clearly shown is a *Tone*-class cruiser, just as claimed by VC-68, and comparisons with other profiles of the vessel clearly reveal the foreshortened length due to the broken stern. This important photograph helps confirm this is indeed the *Chikuma* and not sister-ship *Tone*.

¹⁰ *Okinami* War Diary, 24-27 October 1944.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Times and rescued from Crdiv 7 Detailed Action Report, quoting *Okinami* signals. Despite the existence of a translated *Suzuya* Detailed Action Report, much unnecessary confusion has surrounded her own loss. Morison marks an asterisk indicating that Captain Teraoka Masao perished with *Suzuya*, but *Okinami* specifically states that he is among the rescued. Dull, *The Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy*, pp 326, lists three torpedo hits, but *Suzuya* AR states these to be bombs, while torpedoes are nowhere mentioned in the records.

¹³ The estimate is arrived at by taking sister-ship *Tone*'s wartime complement of 76 officers and 1,059 petty officers and men as listed in her October 1944 War Diary. This was then added to the average wartime complement of 15 officers and 290 men of the *Kagero*-class destroyers to represent *Nowaki*'s complement for a total of 1,440.

¹⁴ Morison, Samuel Eliot. *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. XII, *Leyte*. Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1949-1962. 1988 edition, pp 284-285.

¹⁵ An important exception is Dr. E. Lacroix, who in his articles "On the Development of the 'A' Class Cruisers in the Imperial Japanese Navy" Part IV, *Warship International* No. 3, 1983 states: "*Fujinami* was sunk with all hands south of Sibuyan Island at dawn on October 27 . . . Thus little is known about *Chokai*'s final moments beyond the messages she sent before her end." (p261) This statement confirms that like *Chikuma* the *Chokai*'s rescuer

was sunk with all the rescued aboard.

¹⁶ *Haguro* Detailed Action Report No. 3, 25-26 October 1944.

¹⁷ Chihaya, Masatake, and Goldstein Donald M., and Katherine V. Dillon. *Fading Victory: The Diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991, p. 494.

¹⁸ Roscoe, Theodore. *United States Destroyer Operations in World War II*. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1953, pp 428-429.

¹⁹ *Kitkun Bay* VC-5 Air Combat Action Report No. 56, 25 October 1944. The report notes that the attack was made from 30 degrees off the port bow and includes a rough pencil diagram but no photographs.

²⁰ In the First Diversion Attack Force Battle Summary (WDC 161641) excerpt as published in U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific). *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946. P. 304, this signal is confusingly translated as: "bomb-hit on forward aircraft. Attempting to repair same." Yet the *Chokai* has no forward and aft catapults—they are parallel—and repairing such would seem of low priority. However, when the original microfilm Japanese is checked, the meaning is found to more properly read "bomb hit in forward machinery room. Currently trying to repair." As can be seen, the phrase leaves open whether it refers to boiler or engine room proper, though the latter is more likely. My translator has checked this and assures me this is the meaning.

²¹ *Yahagi* Detailed Action Report, 22-28 October 1944.

²² *Noshiro* Detailed Action Report, 23-26 October 1944.

²³ Boeichio Boei Kenshugyo. [Japan National Institute for Defense Studies]. *Senshi sosho* [Official History]. Vol. 56: *Kaigun shogo sakusen* [Sho naval operations]. Tokyo: Asagumo shimbunsha, 1972, pp 355-356.

²⁴ Ross, Al. *The Escort Carrier Gambier Bay*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993, gives useful and interesting examples from *Gambier Bay*'s survivors and Action Report. Noteworthy in this context is the nearness of the *Fujinami*'s announced scuttling position of *Chokai* to the sinking position given for the *Gambier Bay*. Both of these are considerably to the east of the traditional scuttling site of the *Chokai*.

²⁵ Action Report of destroyer *Okinami*, loaded with survivors of *Suzuya* and on a due north course states that at 1828 hours "sight ship silhouettes, apparently friendly cruisers, bearing 280 degrees." This may well be *Chokai* and *Fujinami*, still slowly crawling north. Otherwise, the *Akishimo* and *Hayashimo* known to be about an hour ahead of *Okinami*.

²⁶ First Diversion Attack Force Battle Summary excerpts (WDC 161641).

²⁷ As related, the *Nowaki* was intercepted just east of San Bernardino Strait and sunk by gunfire and torpedoes of TF34's cruisers and destroyers at 0110-0135 hours 26 October 1944. The *Fujinami*'s signal does not indicate when she transited San Bernardino Strait herself, but it was right before or right after this dangerous period of time. What is known is that she had not overtaken and rejoined I-YB by 0400 26 October.

²⁸ *Fujinami* Tabular Record of Movement indicates an arrival at Coron around midnight of 26/27 October 1944. Due to the imprecise nature of the TROMs it is difficult to determine whether this indicates actual arrival or intended landfall.

Exploring Some Mysteries of Leyte Gulf: The Fate of the Chikuma and Chokai

ADDENDUM

At the time of writing, Eric Lacroix and Linton Wells II's monumental work *Japanese Cruisers of the Pa-*

cific War had not yet been published. It is now available and is a priceless and comprehensive reference for the design and operational history of WW II heavy and light cruisers of the Imperial Japanese Navy. One of the strong merits of the book is the publication of rare photographs and painstaking translation of action reports and accounts. As a result the historical record on the cruisers has been immeasurably enlarged and enriched. It is rather impossible to speak too highly of this work, with its use and integration of primary Japanese source material, complete operational careers, and abundant plans and photographs. Nonetheless, regarding the specific fates of both the *Chokai* and *Chikuma* in general, nothing has appeared that would substantially augment or change the conclusions this author has reached in the preceding writing.

Bearing in mind that the book was sent to press before this writing the text regarding the two cruisers can be misleading. As far as the *Chokai* is concerned, no photographs or reports are presented differing from what was known prior, and the apparent true scuttling time of 2140 is not mentioned. Regarding the *Chikuma*, both the text and illustrations have rather more to say. After the *Chikuma* is hit at 0854 the *Nowaki* is "ordered to assist her, took off her crew, and sank her with a spread of Type 93 61-cm torpedoes at about 1100 at approximately 11-18'N, 126-20'E." Though uncertainties remain, what seems certain is that the *Chikuma* was not scuttled at any time around 1100, but sunk three hours later at the very earliest. Further, there is good reason to believe that U.S. Navy aircraft—not the *Nowaki*—delivered the coup-de-grace. Though the eyewitness reports from the *Ommaney Bay* might be questioned, the photograph proves it is the *Chikuma*. It might also be mentioned that *Nowaki* sent no confirmation of scuttling message to Kurita as the *Fujinami* did—but this is an argument from silence and does not explain the lack of any messages.

The captions of the photographs deserve comment. On page 534 appears the vertical-shot of the *Chikuma* referenced by the present writer also above. Ironically the apparent damage to the stern is noted, but not accepted as such, for the caption says: "appears to have had her stern blown off, but neither the *Tone* or *Chikuma* reported such damage." The text speculates on what might account for the appearance of such damage; however, the *Tone*'s action report observed *Chikuma*'s stern sagging and subsequent photographs in the day confirm that the damage to *Chikuma*'s stern was pronounced and readily visible. Yet without the additional evidence collation of these photographs provides, the caption's conclusion is both understandable and possibly inevitable.

It is a second photograph on the same page as the former that merits further analysis and discussion. On page 534 appears a photograph taken by a plane from the *USS Kitkun Bay*. It shows a cruiser identified as the *Chikuma* dead in the water with a destroyer standing by. According to the caption, it is not believed to have been published before. This is almost

certainly the case, and this unpublished photograph forms a valuable link in the record. Unfortunately, the action report time of the photograph is not given, but there seems little doubt that it is indeed the *Chikuma*—not only does the profile suggest a *Tone*-class, but also there is clear indication of the tell-tale amputation of the stern cited repeatedly above. As for the destroyer, it is almost certainly the *Nowaki* as proposed. Given the facts cited earlier, it is possible to narrow the time frame of the photograph to between 1100 and 1500. It was taken after the second torpedo attack that brought the *Chikuma* to a halt about 1110, and prior to her final destruction. The main value of the print is to remove almost any remaining doubt that the *Nowaki* had indeed arrived on the scene and was present for rescue operations as previous assumptions have indicated. Further, if it was taken later than 1430 it advances the hour of *Chikuma*'s final sinking, and possibly alters the agent to be credited. The one definitive fact that appears clearly established and unchanged is that the *Chikuma* sank no earlier than 1400 hours 25 October 1944 and that she was struck in two separate attacks, and possibly more. It is to be hoped that more such photographs and reports such as the ones published here and the one found by Lacroix and Wells are discovered, for such possibly exist of *Chokai* to prove additional damage as they do to *Chikuma*. In this way we may fill in the remaining gaps of the last hours of the *Chikuma* and *Chokai*.

Anthony P. Tully
1998

The Survivor of the *Chikuma*

Notes compiled by C. Wright based on research by
Capt. Toshio Tamura JMSDF(Retd.)

Information on the fate of the *Chikuma*'s personnel can be derived from the book *Kuchikukan Nowaki Monogatari*, written by Kiyoo Satoh, former navigating officer of *Nowaki*.¹ Mr. Satoh was reassigned from the ship and detached on 22 September 1944, about a month before the ship's loss. Mr. Satoh reports that one man survived from *Chikuma*, the gunnery petty officer Mr. Yoshiaki Hayashi. Mr. Hayashi was from Toyama Prefecture, where he had been an elementary school teacher, and had served only a short time on active duty. Aboard *Chikuma*, he was assigned to No. 4 20-cm gm (turret). Mr. Satoh interviewed Mr. Hayashi in researching the *Nowaki*'s career.¹

Mr. Hayashi recounted the tale of the vessel's loss to the ships crewmembers' families after returning home. Paraphrased, his story was as follows:

"*Chikuma* was inclined remarkably and the sea water almost reached the deck on the port side. Enemy air attacks continued. At the time that I engaged with

¹ Capt. Tamura subsequently corresponded. It is unknown if Mr. Hayashi is still alive.

a 13-mm single anti-aircraft gun, the order to abandon ship was given."

"During the battle that morning, most of the crews of all the 12.7-cm anti-aircraft guns and machine guns were killed or wounded. As time passed, the commanding officer and other personnel went down with the ship."

"About 100 members of the crew got into the water, with only one Lt. Junior grade, a machinery duty officer, present. They awaited rescue but no ship appeared and it became dark. Drifting during the night, a call "ship, rescuing our [people]" was heard, and the survivors swam toward it. One destroyer appeared at full speed."

"At first, I swam with all my power to be with the crew. But I thought better of it on the way but gave up swimming because when I entered the Navy I had prepared for death. Thus, I was satisfied to die here. So I stopped swimming at full speed and turned to the opposite side and swam slowly."

"I can't understand why I took such a strange action, having just seen the rescue ship, destroyer *Nowaki*, which saved about 120 to 130 crew members. The destroyer departed and vanished beyond the horizon."

Mr. Hayashi then tried to allow himself to die, but failed. The U.S. Navy rescued him, reportedly after drifting for three days, and he was put in a prisoner-of-war camp on Leyte Island. He returned to Japan after the war's end.

Mr. Hayashi's account differs from the evidence

gleaned from U.S. Navy action reports, placing a destroyer on scene at the time the cruiser sank. Thus, the reader is left to judge what to think about this event, with little hope of finding other authoritative new sources at this late date.

¹This book was published recently by Kohjinsha in Japan. He also published a memorial book on the destroyer in 1987.

Author's Comments on Capt. Tamura's Report

... Mr. Hayashi's account contains important clues and confirmations. He mentions a list to port, and confirms that Captain Norimitsu went down with the *Chikuma*, and was not even among the survivors rescued in the short term. He indeed also appears to confirm that *Nowaki* returned to the rescue site about sunset... What is striking is the relatively few numbers of survivors that went into the water to be picked up—Mr. Hayashi says little more than 100, and further amplifies this by indicating that only one officer (other than himself), a Lt. Junior Grade from the machinery personnel, was among the survivors. This... [is consistent with] a rapid capsizing. This has obvious bearing on the ultimate casualty toll when *Nowaki* was sunk...

Mr. Hayashi... gives no details of damage or time of day of the attacks received, but when his account is meshed with the evidence from the U.S. action reports, an almost tangible picture is restored to the record... (A.P.T., 7 April 2000.)



Captain's Scrapbook



A potential museum ship lost. The British sloop Chrysanthemum awaiting demolition at the Rochester breaking yard of Caravel Maritime on 1 May 1994. Photographed by Mr. G. J. Prosser, copyright. The ship served for many years as a drill ship for the London Section, Royal Navy Reserve. Efforts to establish a museum sponsor failed.