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Section 2

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27 October

Serial:

MEMORANDUM FOR ADMIRAL WILSON BROWN.

Subject: Material for President's Speech - Naval
Battle off the Philippines.

Enclosure: (A) Narrative.

1. The enclosed information is considered suitable for inclusion in the President's speech.

2. Throughout the account which follows, East longitude dates and times are used. Since there is a 13 hour difference between Washington time and Philippine time, the use of West longitude dates would cause much confusion in following the narrative.

Admiral, U. S. Navy.

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NAVAL BATTLE OFF THE PHILIPPINES

1. The naval background for the sea action that has recently been fought off the Philippines in which we have administered a very severe defeat to the Japanese, started definitely on the 10th of October. On that day carrier aircraft of our Third Fleet struck the Japanese base of Okinawa in the Ryuku Islands. Our same forces made sustained attacks upon Formosa on the 12th and 13th, and on the northern and central areas of the Philippines from the 11th to the 21st.

2. This massive series of air attacks by the Third Fleet covering an area of 1000 miles from north to south and 600 miles from east to west, served as cover to the marshalling and approach of the ground forces of the Southwest Pacific Area to Leyte, our troops being embarked in and escorted by the Seventh Fleet. The attacks of the Third Fleet, assisted by units of the Army Air Forces, were highly successful and resulted in the destruction of about 1230 enemy planes in the air or on the ground, in the sinking of 167 ships and small craft and the probable sinking or damaging of 227 more as well as tremendous damage to Japanese ground installations. The enemy reacted heavily and made many air attacks. In spite of his claims to the contrary he did little damage to our forces. Our losses were less than 100 planes plus two cruisers damaged by aircraft torpedoes. Neither of these vessels has sunk.

3. On the 18th the Seventh Fleet arrived off the entrance to Leyte Gulf and disembarked Army troops which seized two small islands. The main landings on Leyte itself began on the 20th. Meanwhile the Seventh Fleet was pursuing its continuing task of giving gun-fire and air support to the Army, sweeping mines, and disembarking troops and supplies.

4. At about this time groups of Japanese warships were sighted converging on the Philippines from the direction of the Asiatic mainland as well as from the Empire. Air and submarine forces made attacks which damaged or sank a few of these vessels.

5. On the 23rd the situation began to crystallize when a powerful force including battleships, cruisers and destroyers was located in the South China Sea just west of the island of Palawan. Another group was located west of Luzon. These forces were attacked, a cruiser was sunk, and two others and a destroyer were damaged and forced into port.

6. Early in the morning of the 24th we had located two groups of heavy ships forcing their way through the Philippine archipelago.

The southern group, in at least two separate units and variously reported as comprising 2 to 4 battleships, 4 to 8 cruisers and 10 destroyers, was in the Sulu Sea west of Mindanao evidently advancing toward Surigao Strait. This strait lies south of Leyte and separates it from Mindanao. The second group, comprising about four battleships, 8 cruisers and a dozen destroyers was in the Sibuyan Sea just east of Mindoro, evidently bound for San Bernardino Strait which lies between Luzon and Samar. These two straits, Surigao and San Bernardino, are the only passages by which it is practicable for fleets to traverse the Philippines and reach Leyte from the westward. It was notable that there were no carriers with either of these forces.

7. In the mid-afternoon of the 24th, carrier planes of the Third Fleet located the enemy's carrier force, comprising 4 or 5 carriers, 2 to 4 battleships and several cruisers and destroyers about 200 miles NE of Luzon. The 3 main elements of the Jap attack were now located.

8. Throughout the afternoon of the 24th both the Surigao and San Bernardino groups were attacked by planes of the Third and Seventh Fleets. Much damage was done to the San Bernardino force and it was forced to turn westward, though this later proved to be only temporary.

9. The Surigao force continued to advance into the strait. About midnight it was met by the surface forces of the Seventh Fleet ranging from PT boats to battleships, and the enemy summarily disposed of. The next morning eight of the enemy ships, types as yet not definitely established, were seen to sink. It is probable that at least one battleship was also sunk in the night action. This force has evidently ceased to exist as an important factor.

10. Throughout the 25th the Third Fleet was fighting a separate but related action with the enemy carrier force 500 miles to the north, east and northeast of Luzon. At about 11 o'clock our carrier planes exploded and sank one of the enemy's largest carriers and damaged two other carriers and a cruiser so badly that they were dead in the water. This enemy force thereupon began a rapid retreat with the Third Fleet in hot pursuit. At about this time a large force of Jap planes attacked the Third Fleet. 150 of them were shot down but they did manage to break through sufficiently to cause the loss of the light carrier PRINCETON and damage to a cruiser and two destroyers. The Third Fleet continued its pursuit of the enemy ships until evening at which time the Japs were delivered into the hands of waiting submarines. During this phase of the battle some at least of the surface forces got into action, and a light carrier and two cruisers were definitely sunk. In addition a large carrier and two battleships were probably sunk. By the morning of the 26th the scattered remnants of this force had fled north to the latitude of Formosa.

11. A third battle developed on the 25th. The enemy force which had apparently been turned back from the western entrance of

San Bernardino Strait on the afternoon of the 24th, evidently reversed its course and slipped through that strait on the night of the 24th-25th. It appeared about 60 miles northeast of Leyte Gulf at 7:30 A.M. on the 25th. This force was repulsed in a gallant fight by the escort carriers and their attendant destroyers and destroyer escorts of the Seventh Fleet assisted by planes from one of the Groups of the Third Fleet. By noon, at least one of the enemy cruisers had been seen to sink, and a battleship, a cruiser, and a destroyer were dead in the water. Another enemy cruiser was seen in a sinking condition. This enemy group then retired north westward, east of Samar, and retransited San Bernardino Strait during the night. One of its crippled cruisers was sunk by surface forces of the Third Fleet near the strait during the night of 25-26 October. In the course of the day enemy shore based aircraft made several attacks. The escort carriers had to fight them off while simultaneously repulsing the enemy surface forces.

12. This enemy attack on Leyte Gulf caused damage to several of our escort carriers, two of which have been reported sunk. There was also loss and damage among our destroyers and destroyer escort vessels.

13. By the morning of the 26th, the situation was generally as follows: The enemy northern, or carrier, group was defeated with heavy loss and had fled out of range to the northward. The center, or San Bernardino Strait group, had retired westward to the vicinity of Mindoro Island. Its remaining four battleships, six cruisers, and ten destroyers were heavily damaged and were still under attack by planes of the Third Fleet. The southern, or Surigao Strait, group was disintegrated completely and only a few units, which were apparently trying to hide in the passages of the numerous islands, remained in existence.

14. The losses inflicted on the enemy in this series of operations are deemed to be as follows:

In the preparatory Ryuku, Formosa, Philippine strikes -

1230 planes destroyed
414 war and merchant ships sunk or damaged.

In the Sea Battles of the Philippines -

3 to 4 battleships sunk or probably sunk, 6 to 8 damaged.
2 carriers sunk, 1 probably sunk.
4 cruisers sunk, 5 probably sunk, numerous damaged
10 destroyers probably sunk.
At least 200 planes shot down.

15. Based on all available reports, our losses in this series of actions were the PRINCETON, two escort carriers, two destroyers and one destroyer escort sunk.

16. The Third Fleet is commanded by Admiral W.F. HALSEY. The Seventh Fleet, which operates under the operational direction of General MacArthur, is commanded by Vice Admiral T.C. KINKAID. The Seventh Fleet includes ships of the Australian Navy.