

Force Z

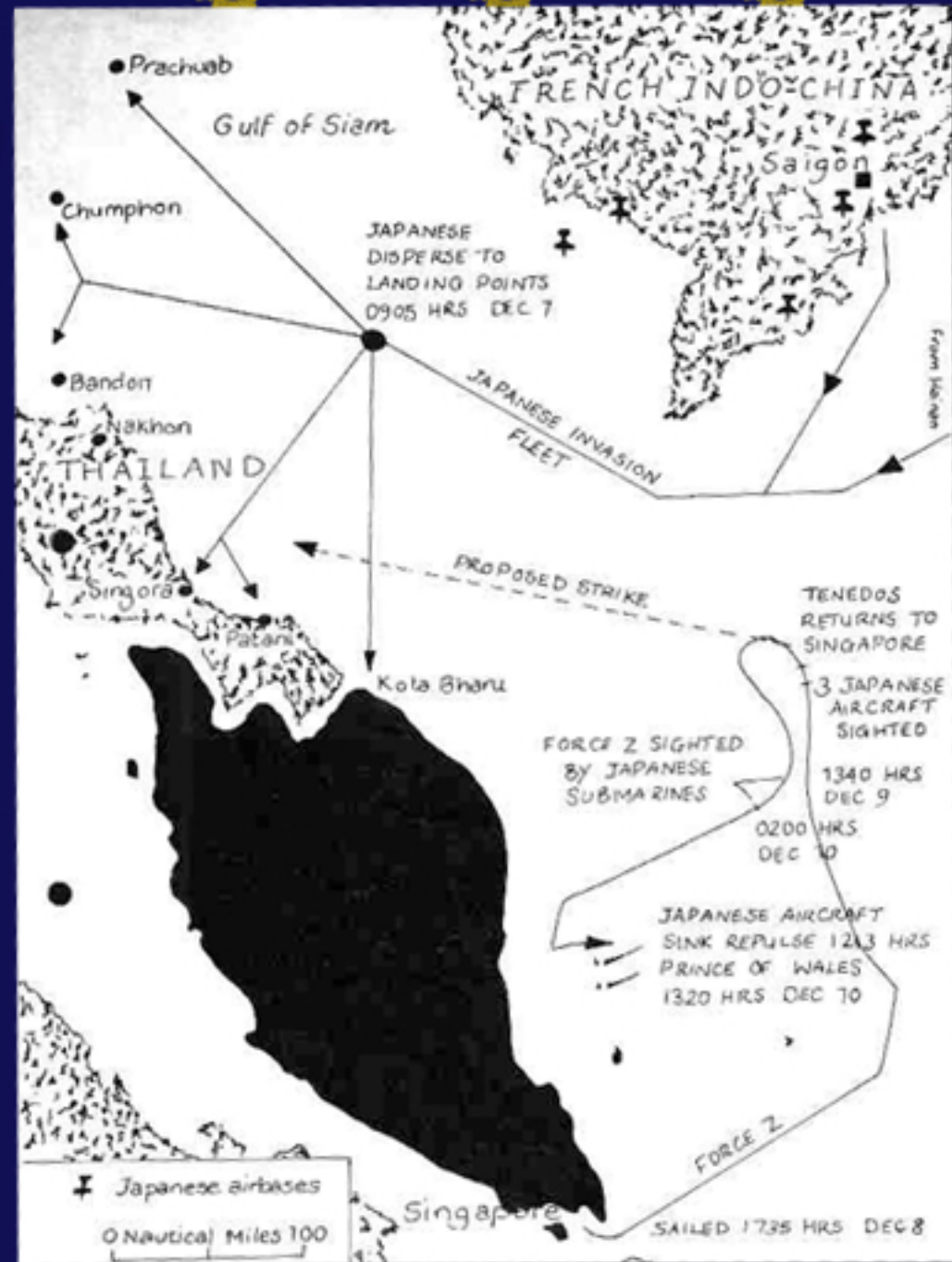
Revamp Works

To control Southeast Asia's resources, Imperial Japan had to neutralize the power of Great Britain. Standing in their way was the impregnable fortress of Singapore. Guarded from the sea by 15" guns, it relied upon its defense to the north from the guns of Admiral Phillips' powerful Force Z, comprised of the battleship *Prince of Wales* and battle cruiser *Repulse*.

In Singapore harbor, they were safe from aerial torpedoes and well-protected by anti-aircraft.

If only they could be lured into the open sea.

On December 8th, they steamed north to intercept a reported Japanese amphibious invasion on the coast of Malaysia far from the umbrella of fighter cover.



Shrouded by rain and clouds, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were deep in the Gulf of Siam when they were sighted by the Japanese submarine *I-56* at 1:45 P.M. on December 9. The radioman on *I-56* tapped out the report, but the static was so bad that although he tried again and again, he couldn't make himself understood. Across the gulf, in Saigon, Rear Admiral Sadaichi Matsunaga of the Navy's 22nd Air Flotilla was sure that the two warships were at their home base. Two reconnaissance planes had just returned from Singapore with pictures of what looked like one of the big ships (it was actually a massive floating dock).

At 3 P.M. a message from *I-56* was at last heard in Saigon: two enemy men-of-war and four destroyers were heading north at 14 knots near Procondor Island. This seemed more logical than the reconnaissance report, and the admiral ordered planes to prepare for attack at sea. While torpedoes were hastily being loaded and unpinned, a large group of curious Army officers arrived. Somehow they had learned that the Navy had tracked down the two British ships. Each plane lifted off to enthusiastic cheers.

By this time three Japanese groups, totaling ninety-six high-level and torpedo bombers, and ten search planes sent out from Saigon before dawn had about given up hope of locating the British. The search planes were in fact on their way home when, through the clouds, one of them sighted two battleships and three destroyers seventy miles southeast of Kuantan. Fifteen minutes later, at 10:30 A.M., radio contact was finally made with the twenty-seven torpedo planes of Kanoya Air Group. Its three squadrons altered course. Lieutenant Haruki Iki, leader of the 3rd Squadron, forgot exhaustion and hunger. His nine-plane squadron held the title of "Champions of the Navy" and he was eager to prove himself in action. In moments he saw, from 10,000 feet, what looked like a British observation plane dodging behind a cloud. The enemy fleet had to be near.

Genzan Air Group got the same message. Lieutenant Sadao Takai, leader of the 2nd Squadron, radioed his men and they all banked north-northwest, followed by the 1st Squadron. Clouds began to pile up but occasionally Takai could see patches of sea. His hands trembled. He had a strange impulse to urinate. He remembered what his commander had told him at takeoff: "Calm down and put your strength in your stomach."

Rising Sun



On the 26,500-ton *Repulse*, CBS correspondent Cecil Brown was taking pictures of a gun crew playing cards. As the ship zig-zagged, he snapped *Prince of Wales* half a mile ahead. At 11:07 A.M. he heard the loudspeaker announce: "Enemy aircraft approaching. Action stations!" Suddenly a file of nine planes loomed to the south. Rooted to the flag deck in fascination, he watched a cloud of fluttering bombs grow larger and larger. There was a dull thud and the ship shuddered. "Fire on the boat deck!" blared the loudspeaker. "Fire below!"

The two squadrons of Genzan Air Group approached and Lieutenant Takai heard his commander order "Assault formation," then, "Go in!" The 1st Squadron swept ahead of Takai in a gradual dive. Takai followed. Where were the enemy fighters? Antiaircraft fire engulfed the 1st Squadron but none was near Takai. Through binoculars he studied a large ship giving off a narrow plume of white smoke. It looked exactly like the battleship *Kongo* and his blood ran cold. He called the observer over the voice tube, who answered shakily, "It looks like our *Kongo* to me, too."

九六式陸上攻撃機



金剛



Takai was down to 1,500 feet before he was certain it was not *Kongo*. He turned into the clouds to confuse the enemy and when he darted into the open again he was less than two miles from his target.

A bugle blew on *Repulse*. "Stand by for barrage!" roared the loudspeaker. Every gun blasted as Takai's nine torpedo planes swooped in. "Look at those yellow bastards come," Brown heard someone mutter. Torpedoes slapped into the sea one by one and swam toward the battle cruiser as if they had eyes, but *Repulse*, despite her twenty-five years, dodged each one with elephantine grace. "Plucky blokes, these Japs," someone else said. "That was as beautiful an attack as ever I expect to see."

Rising Sun



On the bridge Captain William Tennant had just noticed "Not under control" balls hoisted above *Prince of Wales*. He asked the flagship what damage she had suffered but got no answer. She was listing 13 degrees to port and weaving uncertainly at 15 knots. Both port shafts had been knocked out in the first attack and her steering gear wouldn't respond.

Tennant signaled Admiral Phillips, "We have dodged nineteen torpedoes thus far, thanks to Providence," adding that all damage from one bomb hit was under control. No answer. Tennant took it on himself to radio Singapore: ENEMY AIRCRAFT BOMBING. The message was received at 12:04 P.M., and in eleven minutes six clumsy Brewster Buffalo fighters plodded off to the rescue.

Tennant again signaled Phillips. Again no answer. He reduced *Repulse's* speed to 20 knots and moved toward the flagship to offer any assistance. Just then another ominous line of torpedo planes appeared on the horizon.

It was a squadron from the third section, Mihoro Air Group, led by Lieutenant (s.g.) Katsusaku Takahashi. Like Takai, he thought the ships ahead were Japanese—until they fired at him. He dived at the admiral's flag on *Prince of Wales*, but since the ship was turning away, he swung toward *Repulse*, a mile or so to the north. As he lowered to less than 200 feet, followed by his squadron, he estimated the speed of *Repulse* by its wake. He adjusted a simple aiming device in front of him. How could he possibly miss such a long target?

His plane was 2,500 feet from *Repulse*. "Ready," he said. The navigator-bombardier gripped the release. "Fire!" The navigator pulled up. The plane skimmed so low over the battle cruiser that Takahashi could see sailors in white scrambling from his machine-gunners' spray. Once Takahashi began a climbing turn he asked, "Did it drop?"

"No, sir."

"I'll come in again." Takahashi banked to the right and came in from the other side of *Repulse*, but once more the torpedo failed to drop. Doggedly Takahashi circled around for a third try. This time he began jerking up on his own release a mile from the target. As the plane swept over *Repulse*, he and the navigator were still struggling with their releases but to no avail. Their disappointment was bitter. However, the squadron had scored at least one hit. *Repulse* was listing to port.

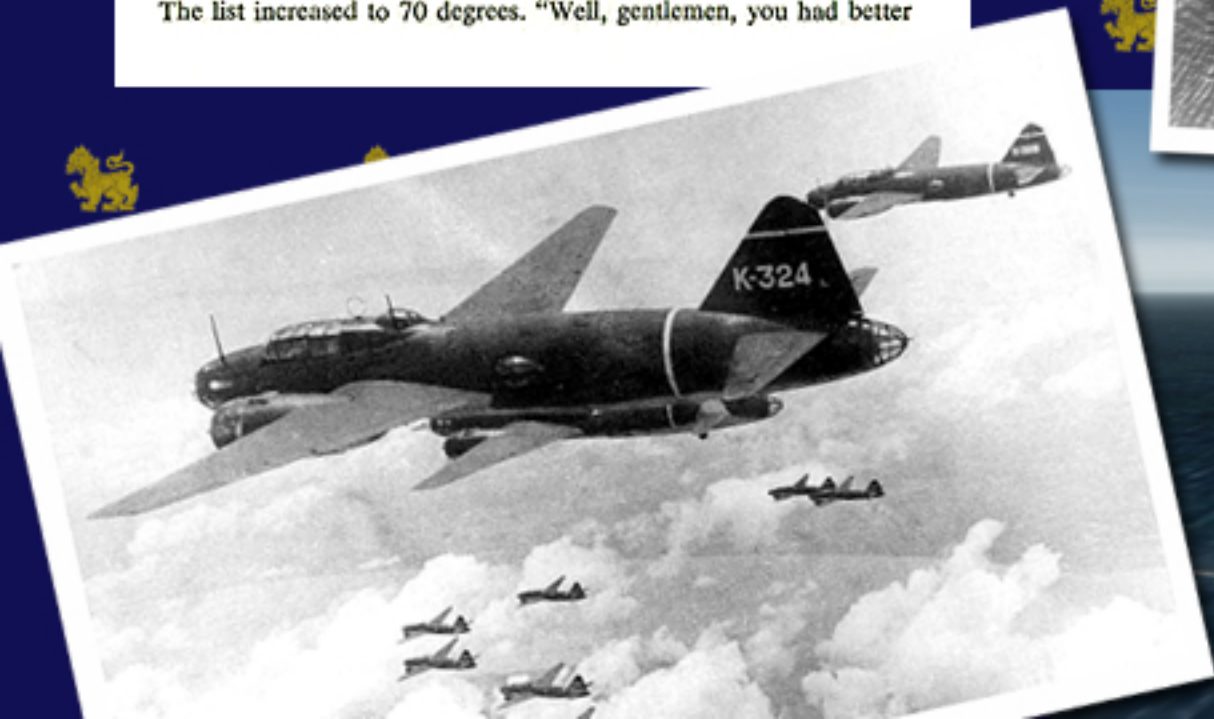
Rising Sun



Lieutenant Iki's nine planes drew near. Iki dropped below the clouds to 1,300 feet. Pompom bursts blossomed on both sides. His instinct was to pull up but he had to get in much closer. He skimmed 125 feet above the water into a wall of fire from *Repulse*. Eighteen hundred feet from the ship he yanked his release. He had her broadside!

Flak peppered his wings as he banked sharply to the left. Momentarily parallel with the ship, he could distinguish sailors in raincoats lying flat on the deck. The plane behind him, piloted by Chief Petty Officer Toshimitsu Momoi, became a ball of fire. The next, First Class Petty Officer Yoshikazu Taue's, exploded and the wreckage pinwheeled clumsily into the sea. At the bow of the battle cruiser, there were two rapid explosions. As Iki climbed to wait for his six remaining planes, he watched another torpedo drive home.

Repulse veered crazily. One torpedo had smashed into the starboard, two into the port. The fourth, Iki's, did the most immediate damage; it hit near the gun room, jamming the rudder. The battle cruiser was doomed and Captain Tennant coolly announced over the loudspeaker, "Prepare to abandon ship." He congratulated the men for fighting the ship so well and added, "God be with you." The list increased to 70 degrees. "Well, gentlemen, you had better



The men formed orderly lines to abandon ship. One young sailor tried to push ahead until a second lieutenant calmly remarked, "Now, now, we are all going the same way too." As the ship took on more and more water, her bow lifted and those still in the superstructure felt giddy from the sway. A man dived from the defense control tower into the sea 170 feet below, but the next one smashed into the deck and a third hurtled into the funnel. At the stern a group of marines jumped off—and were sucked into the churning propellers.

At 12:33 P.M. the battle cruiser rolled over, then with ponderous majesty slid stern first, her bow sticking up "like a church steeple," underplates a gruesome red. From 5,000 feet, Iki looked down incredulous at the bow pointing straight at him. *Repulse* plunged out of sight. It was not possible. Planes couldn't sink a battleship so easily. "*Banzai, banzai!*" he shouted and threw up his hands. The bomber, with no hands on the controls, dipped.

The crew was also shouting in frenzy. They drank a *sake* toast. Below, Iki could make out hundreds of dots in the water. Two destroyers were picking up the survivors. It never occurred to Iki to strafe them. The British had fought gallantly, in the tradition of *bushido*. He had yet to learn that an enemy spared today may kill you tomorrow.

Rising Sun

万歳



Mortally wounded by five torpedoes, *Prince of Wales* was barely under way as nine high-level bombers approached. At 12:44 P.M. bombs careened down. Only one struck home but it staggered the 35,000-ton battleship and she began to founder. Her beams were almost awash. Captain Leach ordered all hands to abandon ship, while he and Admiral Phillips stood together on the bridge and waved to their departing men. "Good-bye," Leach called to them. "Thank you. Good luck. God bless you." At 1:19 the battleship—nicknamed "*H.M.S. Unsinkable*"—keeled heavily over to port like a stricken hippopotamus and within a minute sank from sight, taking with her the little admiral and Captain Leach.

Takahashi, who had failed to release his torpedo, was halfway home. Upon hearing that *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were doomed he felt a strange sympathy—the British Navy was like a big brother. He fought the impulse, but tears blurred his goggles. Lieutenant Iki thought with sadness of Momoi and Taue. He knew his own torpedo had hit *Repulse* first but reported that the initial two hits had been made by his two dead comrades. It was the least thing, the last thing he could do for them. As Iki's squadron landed, exuberant mechanics crowded around each plane. The crews were dragged out, tossed into the air. After he escaped the friendly pummeling, one of Iki's pilots told him, "As we dived for the attack, I didn't want to launch my torpedo. It was such a beautiful ship, such a beautiful ship."

At naval headquarters in Tokyo, the senior officers found it difficult to accept that battleships in the open sea could have been sunk by planes. It meant the end of their concept of naval warfare. The airmen were exultant. What they had been preaching for the past decade was proved. The third and final deterrent to victory in Southeast Asia had been eliminated at the cost of four planes.

The next dawn Iki flew over the graves of *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*. As he skimmed over the sunken ships he dropped bunches of flowers.

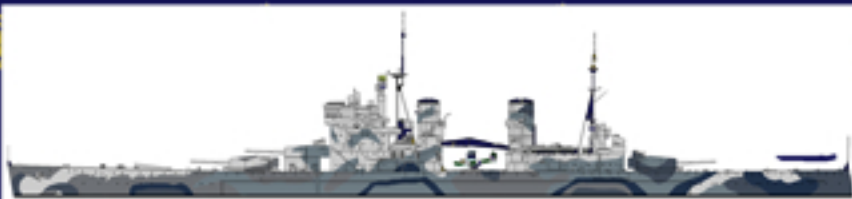


Rising Sun



Rising Sun

旭日旗



We fly three missions in the Naval Battle Off Malaysia, as it is called in Japan, or the Sinking of the Prince of Wales and Repulse, as it is called in the West.

It was a long way from Saigon to the place where the battle occurred. If you wish to fly the whole way, you can. But if you would rather not stare at the ocean for hours, as they did, we have programmed a course that will get you into the area of Force Z.

The first two missions begin in Saigon. Mercifully, the third starts in the air almost at the rendezvous point in the hunt.

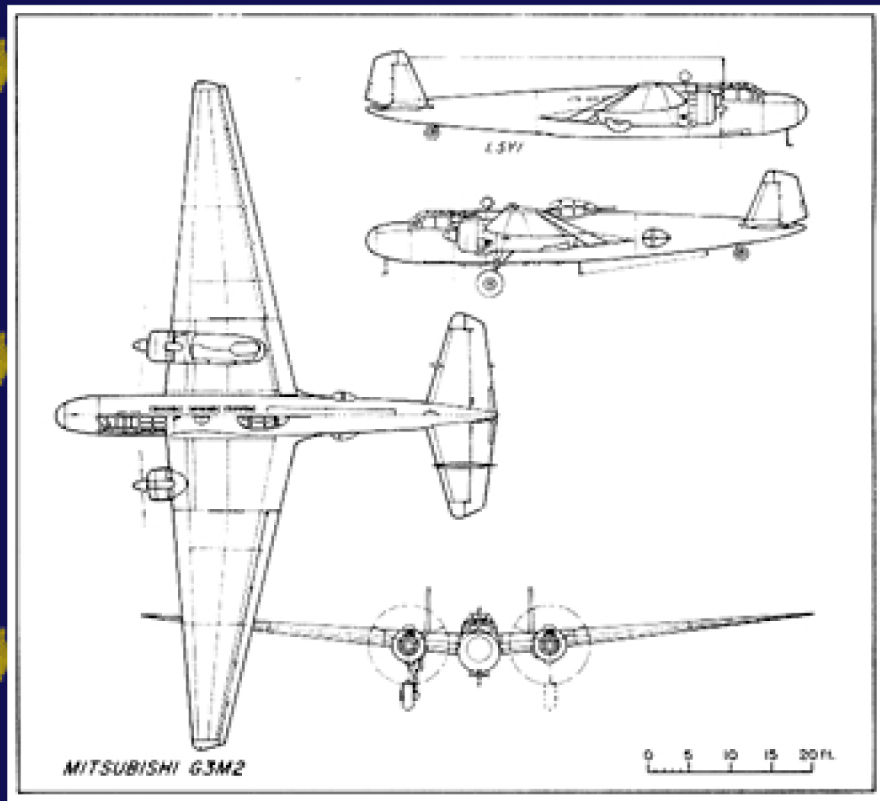
Try to hit the target and have your wingmen hit it also for good measure. The AAA is impressive so do not assume you will make it. Four planes were lost in the attempt in real life. The longer you fly straight and level, the lower your chances of getting home to Saigon.

The parameters for torpedo release are about .3 to .6 nautical miles from the target ship and above 300 feet in altitude.



Rising Sun

旭日旗



411210 Tsutae Murikami: Depart Tan Son Nhut air field near Saigon leading a flight of Mitsubishi G3M2 Rikko's carrying torpedoes for the Gensan Hikotai. Fly the programmed heading to the approximate rendezvous point with the British men-of-war.

Your target is the Prince of Wales. Locate her and then maneuver into position to fire your torpedo between .3NM and .6NM and between 300 and 600 feet off the water. It's a long way for a miss. So concentrate.

As flight lead, you can get your wingmen to attack your indicated target also. Then turn for home and land. It is a long way so flying at X8 is recommended.

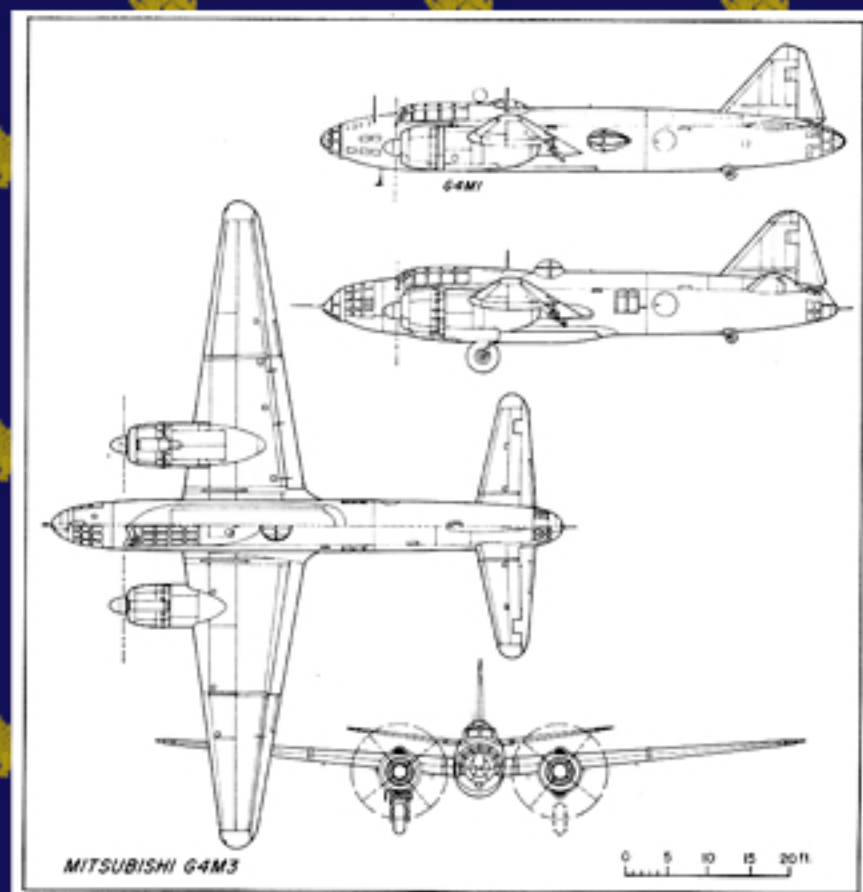
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Rising Sun

旭日旗



411210 Haruki Iki: Again, depart Tan Son Nhut but this time in a G4M1 Isshiki Rikko. Your unit is the Kanoya Kukotai, originally formed in China.

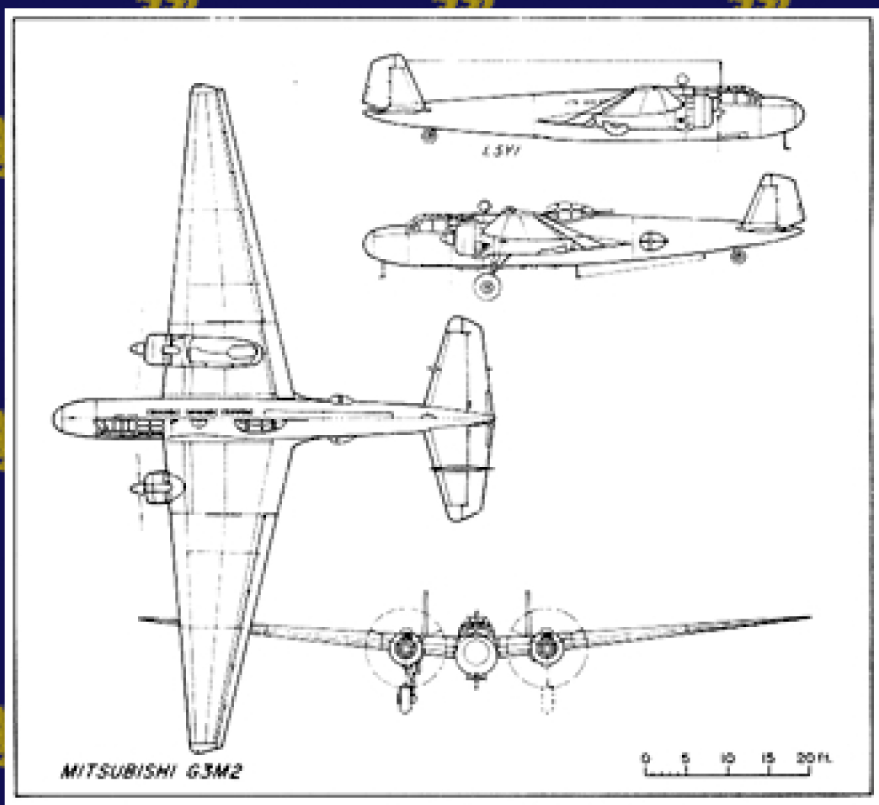
Upon arrival off the coast of Malaysia, you will find the Prince of Wales already listing heavily to port. Your target is the Repulse. Locate her and then maneuver into position to fire your torpedo between .3NM and .6NM and between 300 and 600 feet off the water. It's a long way to fly for a miss. Concentrate.

As flight lead, you can get your wingmen to attack your indicated target also. Then turn for home and land. It is a long way so flying at X8 is recommended.



Rising Sun

旭日旗



411210 Moritaka Higashi: Your mission begins in flight nearing the scene of the naval battle. You are flying a G3M2 for the Mihoro Kukotai, again from Saigon. You will find the *Prince of Wales* listing and on fire. You are to bomb the ship and sink her.

Select bombs. Then put your view onto the cockpit floor. Then Toggle Cockpit (Default NUMPADPERIOD) off. A yellow cross will appear: it is the bombsight. Use it to bomb your targets by leading a little.

As flight lead, you can get your wingmen to attack your indicated target also. Then turn for home and land. It is a long way so flying at X8 is recommended.

Nose door = CTRL-2

Top windows = CTRL-3

