

TOP TEN INVITATIONAL (2015-17) John Pack (IJN, -7.5 POC bid) vs. Darren Kilfara (USN) *USN writeup*

My game with John was really rather weird. John's IJN made a three-area attack on T2, with Yokusuka SNLF in the Coral Sea to set up a New Hebrides invasion, but I managed to control USM-Marshalls-Marianas (my lone LBA sank Sasebo SNLF there) to prevent any raiders from reaching HI on T3 *and* divide the Japanese fleet in two. Never seen that before.



Situation after T2 Raiders plus I-boat placement

IJN Comments: While I've played this opening from time to time, Darren is the first to respond in this way. Normally, I consider the LBA in the Marianas as a gift, since it takes it out of the key Allied Home Areas and makes a Full Court Press offensive possible. However, in this case, since the LBA beats the odds to save the Philippines, it looks brilliant for the USN. Where Darren's real brilliance shows through is the combination of the USM and Marshalls move. This should always set up the Marshalls block (3 CV to 1 LBA). In retrospect, my I-Boat should have gone to the Marshalls.

Where this move is scary for the USN is in the U.S. Mandate, since a few lucky sixes on an initial day round can leave the IJN with day superiority. Even Darren's surface forces were subject to a meat grinder there – unable to run vs. superior IJN surface and only one LBA in the skies (not enough to get the IJN to retreat). Nine Allied ships went down!

Interestingly, it's the three USN CV in Australia that force the heavy commitment to Indonesia. That probably doomed this attack against a superb opponent like Darren. The fact that only two USN CV were lost ultimately proved decisive.

USN Report: Then on T3, we had battles in 10 different areas - not including USM, where I let his 3 LBA go unopposed - as I played the POC game; the IJN fleet decimated the Brits in a Day/Night action in Indo, but I broke control and sank Kure SNLF, so when my lone LBA in the Marianas sank Kaga, I actually flipped control of Saipan on T3!

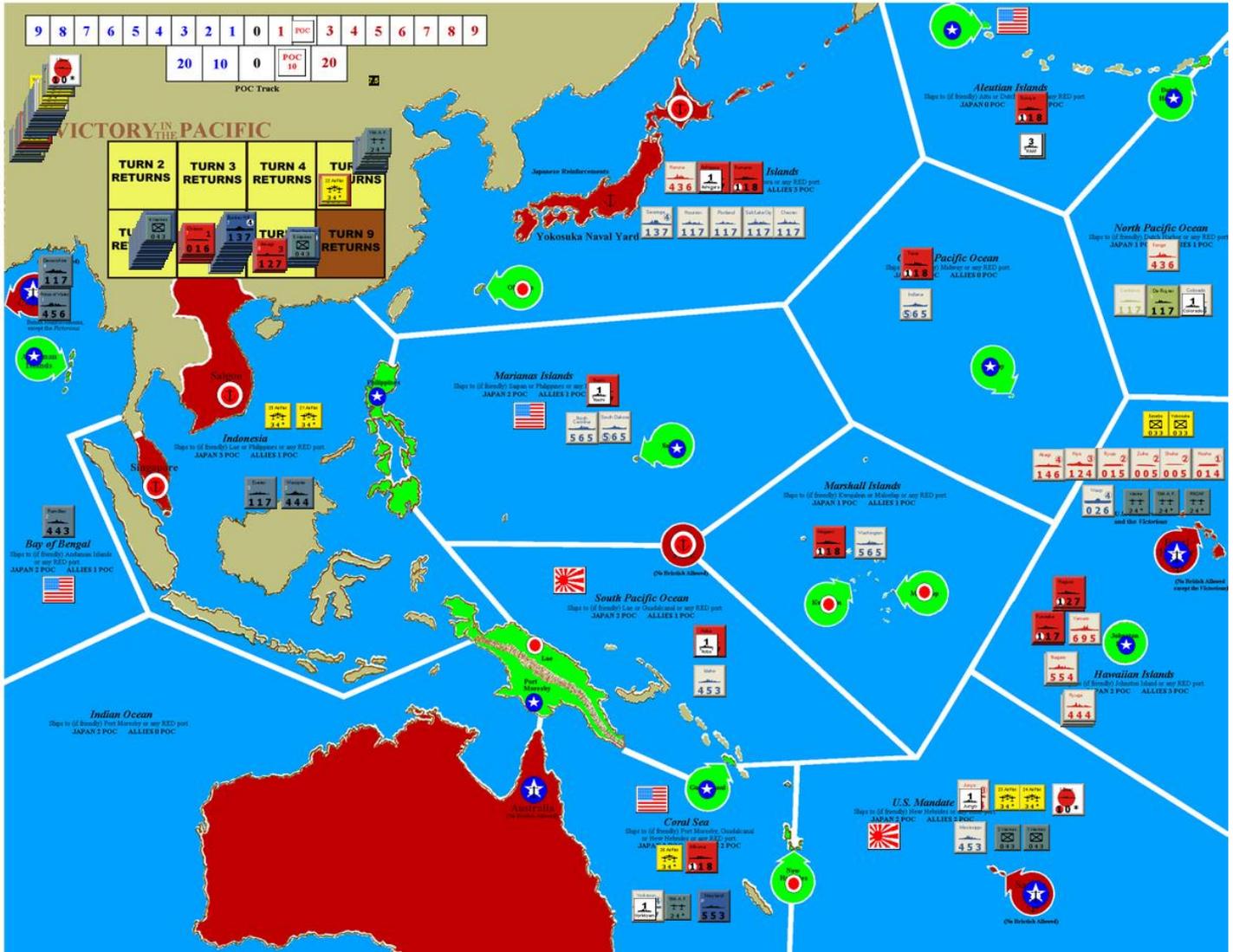


Situation after T3 Raiders plus I-boat placement

IJN Comments: My biggest mistake on this move was not putting 2-3 more CAs as patrollers in Indonesia. The biggest disaster was my inability to land my NLF on the Philippines as the British became heroes – damaging my fleet far more than I’d hoped. I needed some heroics from my Coral Sea forces to isolation the USM from Australia, but I didn’t get them.

USN Report: I ended T3 with only 4 USN CAs left (plus Canberra/DeRuyter), but POC stood at only +4.5 for Japan after the bid...ought to be a cakewalk, right?

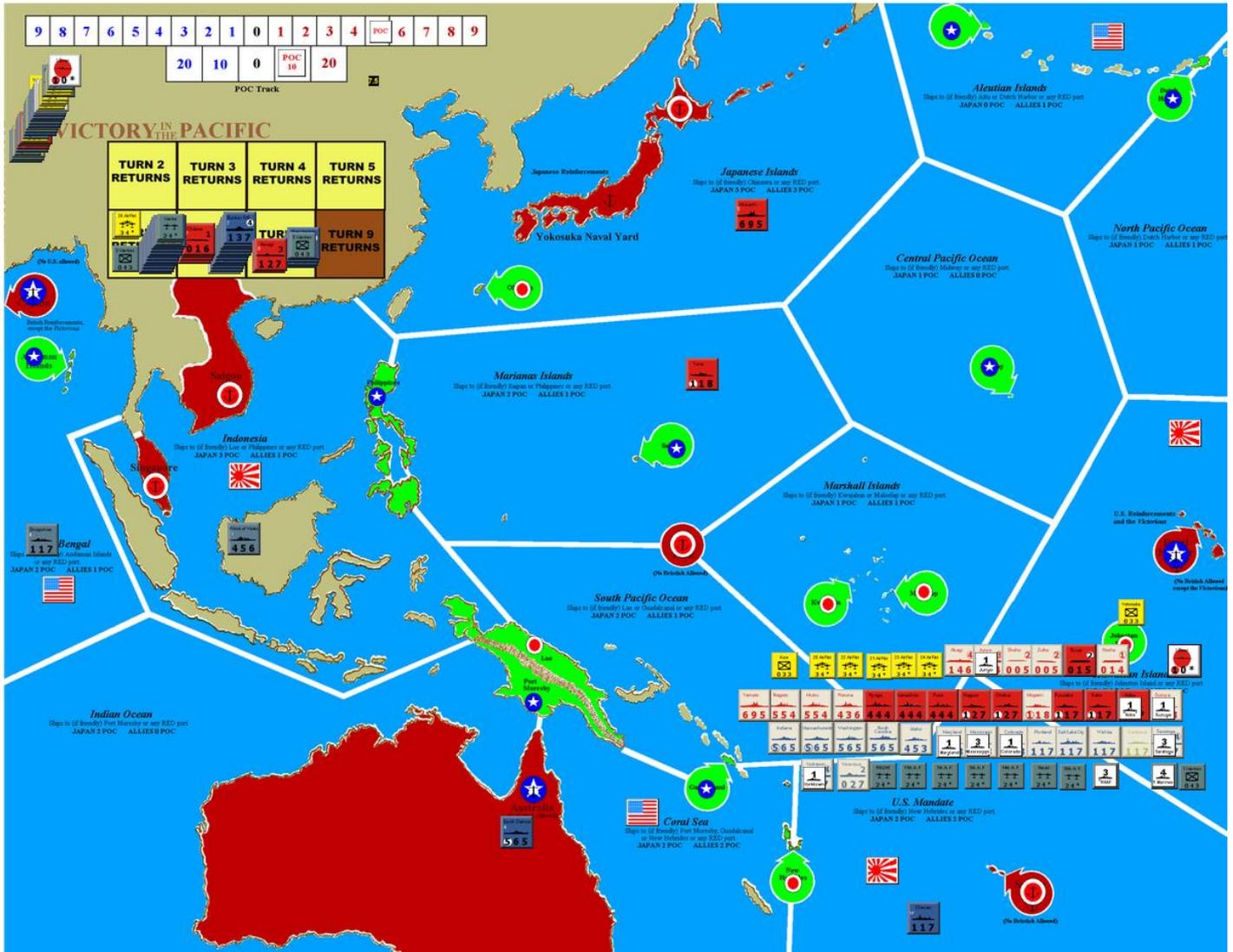
Well, no, actually: I butchered T4, allowing John to invade Johnston Island and control HI (with only four surface patrollers) and also take Samoa, with Junyo + 2 LBA on their own turning aside my two Marines. I had 5 LBA available but used only three of them in HI, my only excuse being that I didn't actually realise how strong my position was and played the POC game again - 11 areas were contested on T4! - without seeing the KO possibility coming. Of course, it didn't help that when Saratoga and a CA pursued Haruna in JI, John got Night (with no flag) and removed the CA, so I kept chasing and got Saratoga crippled in another Night action!



Situation after T4 Raiders plus I-boat placement

IJN Comments: I felt my situation was desperate, so I went all-out for the Knock Out. The only thing that could have gone better on Turn 4 would have been to kill all three LBA in the Hawaiians and the LBA in the Coral Sea. Only got two of them. I just got downright lucky in the Japanese Islands (even though I could have use those night actions earlier). This turn I finally get the USN CV attrition I've needed – and take Darren down to one operational deck.

USN Report: John gained only 3 POC on T4, so it really was a case of the battle for HI - the only area contested on T5 - deciding the game: after T5 raiders, there were lone Brits in BoB and Indo, lone IJN ships in JI and Marianas, lone USN ships in USM and Australia (failed an SR to HI), and everyone else in HI.



Situation after T5 Raiders plus I-boat placement – battle in the Hawaiians expanded for clarity!

John had a 1-ship surface overlap, with me sailing the crippled Saratoga as a surface ship; by Day, I had 8 LBA (1 damaged) plus Yorktown (1d) and Victorious, and John had 5 LBA and 6 carriers with 14 factors of airstrikes. (We also each had two marines, with one of his SNLF already in Johnston from T4.) Rounds 1 and 2 were Night; the overlapping Yamato completely whiffed on her 12 dice between the two rounds, but on the flip side, after removing 7 of John's 8 surface patrols, my last 10 dice against the crippled Aoba between R2 and the Night half of R3 all whiffed, leaving one surface patroller left after all of my surface ships had been chased away. Meanwhile, after three Day rounds John was well in front, as I had only 2 LBA left (1 damaged) against his 2 LBA (1 damaged) plus Zuiho and Hosho; with 9 dice against 4, I saw the writing on the wall. But in the next round I sank his undamaged LBA and he only dinged my undamaged LBA, and then in the next two rounds I killed the remaining LBA and then finally dispatched Aoba in succession without John getting any more hits, so that was that. Final POC count after T5: +13 before the bid, +5.5 after it.

IJN Endgame Comments: We fought a Turn-7 or Turn-8 style knock-down, drag-out battle on Turn 5 that decided the game for Darren's USN (barely).

Here's the ending fleets: Japanese end with 6 BB, 4 CA, 2 CV, 3 CVL, and no LBA. The US ends with 7 BB, 1 CA, 0 CV, and 2 damaged LBA. The British end with the Prince of Wales. And there are a lot of damage markers on those!

The USN win was set up by Yamato's whiff against the USN CV and Victorious in night actions TWICE in a row, and the Victorious removing the patrolling Ryujo the next round. However, it was simply an error on my part to put any ships outside of the Hawaiians (which could have extended my surface wrap). I should also have patrolled with 3-4 additional ships (including another CVL). More surface patrollers would not have altered the battle (most likely), but they'd have allowed the final conflict to continue another round and possibly dispatched the USN surface units earlier. And who knows, maybe I'd have removed Vicky in the first round?

The USN wins by virtue of holding onto Pearl (avoiding a Turn 5 KO) and holding the Philippines, Saipan, Midway, Attu, Dutch Harbor, and Guadalcanal. In fact, Lae, Singapore, New Hebrides, Johnston Island, and Samoa were Japan's only conquests in the game over five turns! I got thoroughly whupped! Congratulations to Darren!