

## Top Ten Invitational – Darren (USN) vs. Alan (IJN) USN Comments

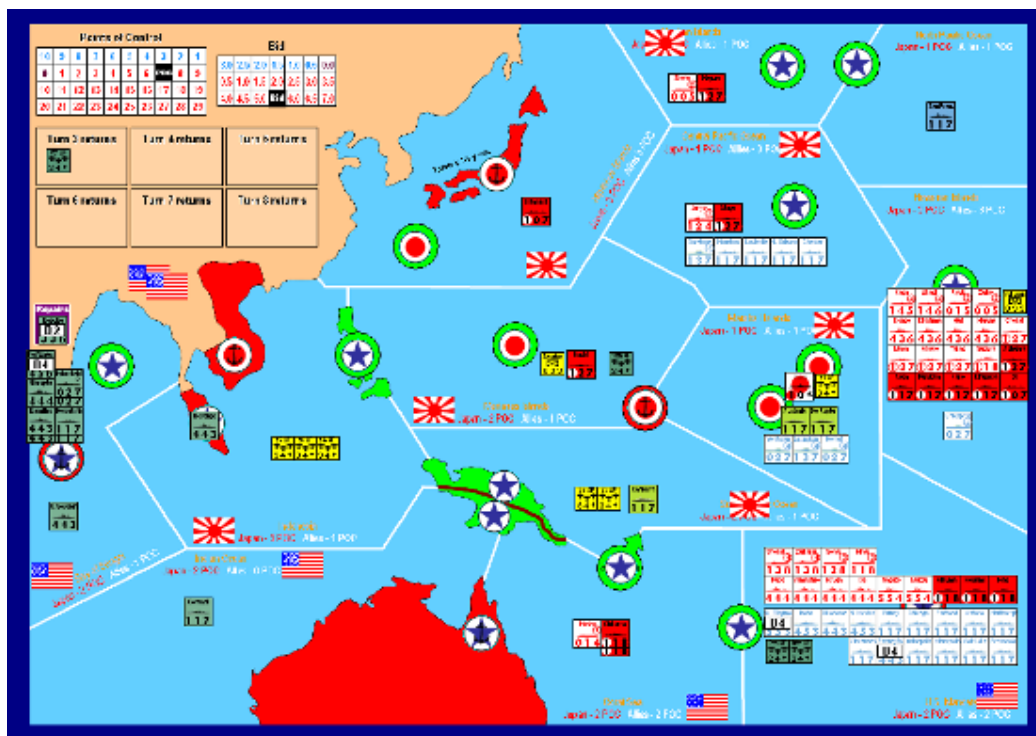
Bid is 5.5 POC for the IJN; options 1 and 2b are in effect.

### Turn 1

IJN Air Raid results are mixed; 3 BBs (1 crippled and 1 damage) plus 2 CAs escape from Pearl, and 5th AF is the only casualty after two rounds of raids in Indonesia. However, a subsequent Day Action in Indo cripples Repulse and heavily damages PoW, while the I-boat sinks Hermes. Only 1 CV makes it to Australia.

### Turn 2

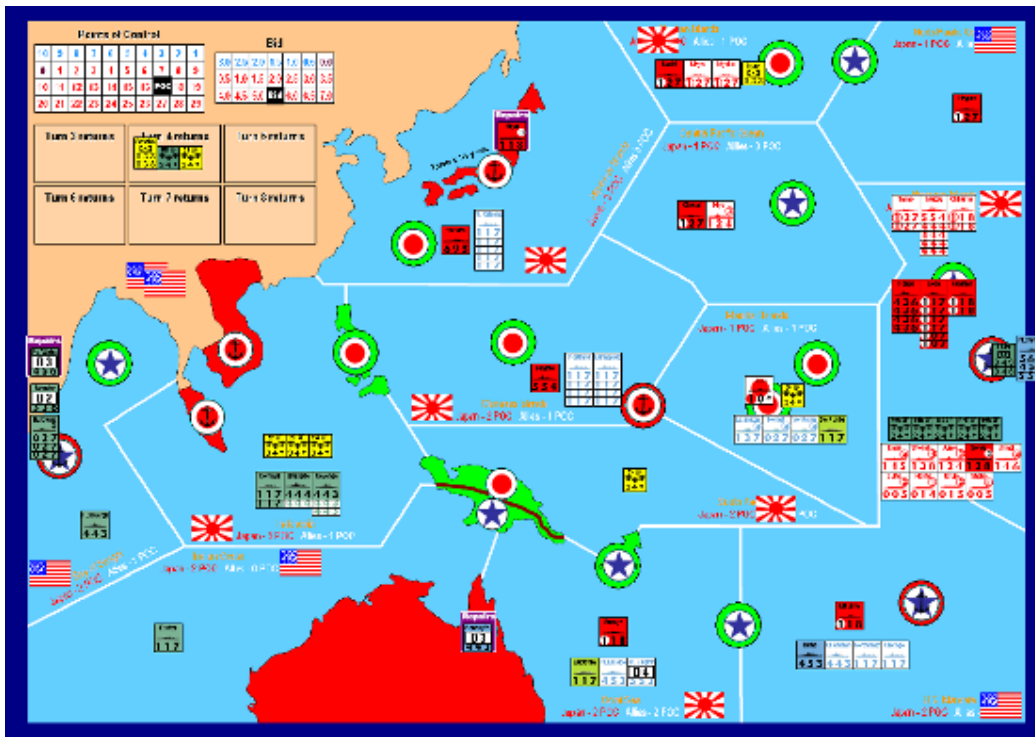
Alan launches a standard two-area attack: 2 CV, 2 CVL, 4 BB and 11 CA in HI, 4 CV, 6 BB and 3 CA in USM. I'm sorely tempted to put all of my eggs in one basket in HI, where I could have a 3-ship overlap in a Night Action, but that's always a dangerous proposition without the flag, so instead I set up a 6-ship overlap in USM (where I have 2 LBA already), look to save Midway with a raider force, and – as there is only 1 LBA in the Marshalls – pursue a Marshalls block with a suicide CV in HI.



I get the Day action I want and sink Yokusuka SNLF in HI, but Alan managed to remove my two patrolling CA in the Marshalls with the I-boat and LBA; he also sinks Saratoga in the CPO (with Junyo only disabled in return). In USM, two pure Day Actions see six USN LBA dice sink Zuikaku, cripple Hiryu and disable Shokaku to hold the area at the cost of only 1 LBA unit shot down. POC goes to +17 before the bid.

### Turn 3

Alan concentrates upon locking up Pearl and Dutch Harbor, so I try to play the POC game, poke another hole in the Marshalls to give myself a chance of saving Midway on T4 (and keeping my CVs alive in the process), and hope my 5 LBA can at least do some damage in HI.



With no IJN LBA in HI, I figure I have a shot of saving Pearl, but my LBA aren't up to the challenge – in two rounds, 4 of the 5 LBA are shot down, and I don't sink a single CV in response (the best I can do is cripple Shokaku and damage Akagi). Post-combat air raids at Pearl sink the 3 BBs, with the two Marines escaping with 4 and 1 damage points, respectively. I accomplish my POC missions elsewhere, but in the Marshalls the dice swing wildly: after a Night action, the I-boat cripples Hornet; then in the first Day round, Enterprise is sunk and the IJN LBA only hit for 3 damage; finally, the LBA disables Lexington, but Lady Lex is at least able to score a hit and shoot down the LBA. So a USN flag flies in the Marshalls, and a complete disaster is averted. Not a good turn in total, though. (POC is now +20 for Alan before the bid.)

#### **Turn 4**

Alan patrols three 118s in USM, so I have to defend Samoa with 2 LBA. I patrol the 2 green CA to the Marshalls, a semi-bluff while hoping to at least secure a base there with my less-damaged Marine. With only 2 CVs and 4 LBA units available (not counting the one remaining RN CV) and 9 IJN decks operational, though, I can't credibly threaten much. I'm reduced to attempting a) a high-speed raid into the CPO, hoping to sneak a Night Action or at least escape with my cruiser force intact after Alan's decks focus on my LBA, b) another POC grab into the Marianas, where the lack of a flag gives me better odds of a Night Action, and c) two high-reward, medium-risk, low odds stabs with my CVs at Alan's LBA in Indo and the Marshalls. I also retain a small chance of saving Guadalcanal, if my LBA in SPO can remove one SNLF and I can get a pure Night Action in the Coral Sea.



Alan delays the Coral Sea combat to try and invade Guadalcanal: in SPO, my LBA unit is crushed, but I do indeed sink Sasebo SNLF; sadly, my hopes are crushed when Alan gets a Day Action in CS and sinks my Marine. I do get a pure Night Action in the Marianas and sink Hiyo before going on to decontrol the area; in the CPO I'm not so lucky, and I flee after my LBA is shot down (and only damages Kaga in return). In Indo, Formidable is also sunk to no effect, but the real turn-up for the books is in the Marshalls, where the first round sees the IJN LBA and I-boat all whiff, and one of the LBA shot down in return. It takes three more rounds, with Wasp disabled and Lexington hit for 2 damage, but the other LBA is finally shot down, and both bases in the Marshalls convert to my control (and the Marine has an advanced base for next turn). POC goes to +26, though, so the +29 bell looks set to be rung on T5; I also have 4 decks available, although only one of them (the damaged Lexington, based in Kwajalein) is able to reach Indo.

### Turn 5

Now things get interesting. Alan defends SPO with lots of ships, HI with 2 LBA, Indo with a single LBA and the Marianas (cleverly) with a single LBA and enough decks + BB to put me off. Having put token patrols in Marianas, HI and Indo, and decided to push my forward Marines toward the Philippines (in the Marianas) instead of Midway, I see myself with two options:

a) I can throw everyone into SPO, where the surface battle would be 20 v 20 and I'm pretty much assured of decontrolling SPO but will likely take significant attrition in doing so; or



But as Alan pointed out in our postgame post-mortem, I completely missed a huge opportunity that the non-parallel resolution of the Indo and Marianas battles presented me – here's Alan:

The most interesting situation was on Turn 5. I believe that by calling Indo before Marianas, I gave you a rare opportunity that you missed.

Normally in these situations it is better for the IJN to call the area in which they have the SNLF first, since if it is disabled, it can protect the base if it lands first but can't convert it if it lands second. However look what happened here. If I had called Marianas first, with the actual dice rolls, you could have landed on Philippines but then my crippled, but un-disabled SNLF could have recaptured it. However since I called Indo first, your surviving Lexington could have air-raided Philippines, destroying my SNLF, and then you could have captured Philippines with your Marine. The game would have been basically over at that point.

But there's more! Suppose that the first round in Marianas had been night and you had taken out all but one of my CVs, and then decided it was worth braving the air raids to base at the Philippines. So you air-raid my SNLF, land your Marine in the Philippines, and then retreat there, and I air-raid you. I have never seen or heard of both sides air-raiding the same base on the same turn in 30+ years of playing this game!

Still, even with that blunder (which I didn't catch until the end of the game), I was now a lot happier with my position after T5 than I had any right to be. After Alan bases all of his slow ships (plus 6 CA) in HI and his fast ships in Truk, I base my 2 remaining CV in Australia along with 2 BB + 8 CA and a Marine, the rest going to Kwajalein or Samoa.

### **Turn 6**

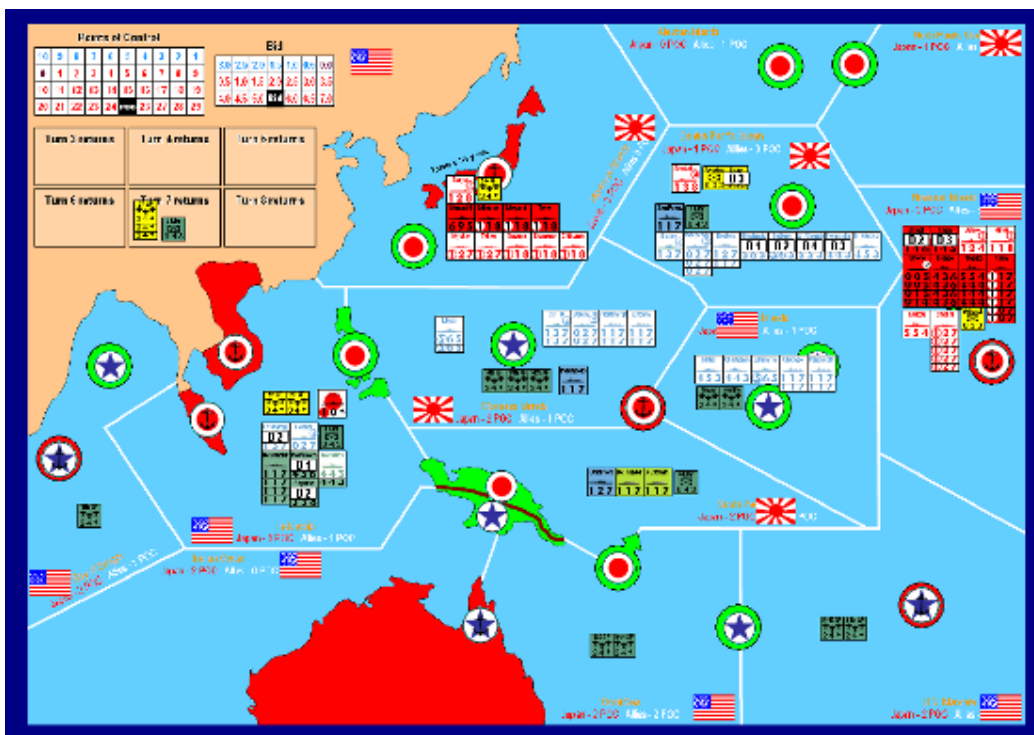
It quickly becomes apparent that Alan has four goals this turn: control HI, JI and Indo, and prevent me from capturing Midway. When I see the size of his patrolling force in HI, I know that the only way for me to control HI this turn is to patrol so many ships that I won't be able to respond to raiding threats elsewhere, so I quickly decide to abandon that hope. Alan winds up putting 2 LBA in Indo, 1 LBA + Soryu + 9 surface ships in JI, Shokaku + 2 SNLF in CPO and everyone else in HI. Here's my exchange with Alan after the game about my raiding decision this turn, with me having noted that he might have chosen to put 3 LBA in Indo and defended JI with 2-3 CV and no LBA:

ALAN: As for your comment that I might have added a third LBA to Indo on Turn 6, I felt I had not even a single additional CV to spare for JI. I believe you had me outgunned in air factors in Hawaii as it was and I was happy to basically put the game on the line with 2 LBA and the I-Boat against two of your CVs, one already with damage.

DARREN: On Turn 6, my mind was really preoccupied by the need to not only win battles and gain POC, but also to base my ships in good positions and open sea lanes for the following turn – my comment re: you locking up Indo on T6 with 3 LBA was with this in mind. As I looked at my raiding options for T6, sure, I could have

thrashed your fleet in HI, but without any Marines or patrollers there, and therefore no way to base ships there at the end of the turn, your locking up Indo would have meant I had no way of getting at JI on T7. Defending JI with 3 CVs plus your other surface raiders would have been enough to turn me off raiding there – with only 2 CVs (one of them at speed 5) capable of reaching JI, and not enough surface ships in Australia to properly escort them, that would have been a fool’s errand. And raiding into HI could have decimated your fleet but at the risk of getting me nowhere on POC and basing options for T7. So that’s why I had to hope against hope that I could punch a hole in Indo and/or convert Midway to open up AI and NPO, all the while hedging my bets by sending enough ships to Saipan and the Marshalls to credibly threaten JI (and still HI as well) with something on T7 if the Indo stab failed.

Here are the dispositions on T6 prior to combat:



In the CPO, Alan got his Day action and sank my Marine; he lost his entire force in response, but still, he’ll have regarded that as a mission accomplished. At least I’d patrolled the area and would thereby give Alan a big basing decision at the end of the turn.

In Indo, in R1 I got a Day/Night Action (as good as pure Day), and Alan again whiffed completely with his 6 LBA dice. In return I shot down one LBA unit, although the I-boat came through one last time for Alan, sinking Lexington. In R2, both sides whiffed, after which I landed my Marine in Lae (in case Hornet was subsequently disabled). In R3, the LBA did indeed disable Hornet, but Hornet scored 2 hits for 7 damage to win the area and convert Saigon and Singapore. Another crucial result for the Allies – POC now down to +21 before the bid (+15.5 after it).

In the end-of-T7 basing, Alan shifted his entire fleet to Pearl; in response, I kept all of my slow ships within range of HI while keeping all of my surviving decks within range of JI. Alan's remaining SNLF was at Johnston; my two Marines were at Lae and Samoa.

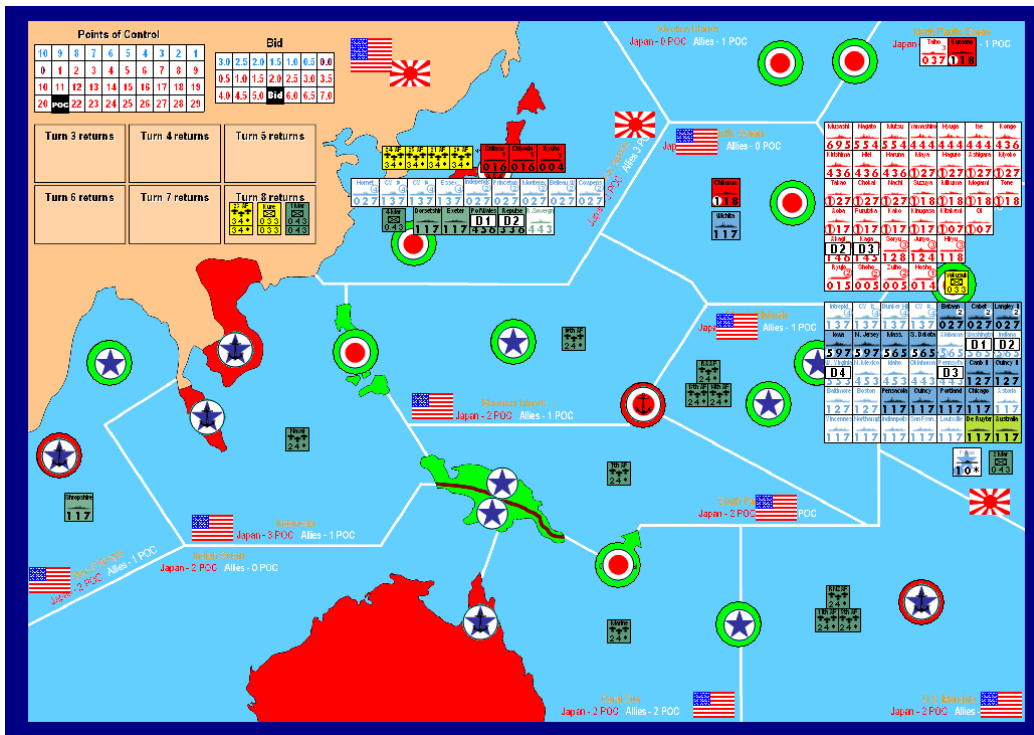
### **Turn 7**

I expected Alan to heavily patrol HI, but he shocked me by patrolling nobody there – just lone 118s in CPO and NPO, and his T7 CVLs in JI (where I knew they would be joined by his four LBA units, and probably Taiho as well). Going into T7, I'd expected to concede HI and go after JI and Midway (while decontrolling AI and NPO and securing Truk); even if I lost in JI, that would leave me needing only to gain 11 POC on T8 to win, very doable with the whole fleet at Truk or Midway and HI cut off from JI from the IJN perspective. Now, though, Alan was trading the 2 HI POC for the likelihood of denying me Midway (and therefore the ability to patrol AI and NPO on T8) and/or raid into the Marshalls or even USM.

After much agonizing, I decided I had to make a strong patrol into HI, sparing only a lone CA to patrol CPO (so as to give me a 21 v 20 surface advantage if it came to that in HI). As expected, this led Alan to raid everyone available into HI, although I hadn't expected him to raid Taiho into NPO instead of JI. I clearly couldn't leave my patrolling force in HI alone to be eviscerated, so this left me with two clear options:

- a) Send everyone to HI and finally decimate the (hitherto mostly unscathed) IJN fleet, with a strong but not certain chance of controlling HI and a small chance of also converting Johnston Island; or
- b) Sending every available deck to JI and everyone else to HI, giving me near parity in HI and a chance (albeit a much smaller one) of controlling the area but also giving me a shot at a 6 POC swing in JI.

After even more agonizing – it really was a coin-flip in my head – I chose the latter option:



Again, here is my postgame with Alan regarding this juncture of the game:

ALAN: The reason I didn't patrol HI is because that would have forced you to make the play you didn't make - conceding JI and smashing my fleet in HI with everything. I thought with your actual move, I had about a 30% chance to win in JI and about a 70% chance to break your control in HI, which would have given me the win if I could hold JI on the last turn. That seemed to be about a 20% combined chance. If you had just whaled on me with everything in HI, unless I got three or four pure nights in a row, I would not only fail to break your patrol but be unable to hold JI on Turn 8. I would need at least one day round to break your control since you had patrolling CVs, and that would have allowed you to bust up my fleet badly.

DARREN: My T7 choice was even more dominated by this thinking [the need to base my ships in good positions for the following turn], although like I said, it really was a coin flip in the end....My decision to max patrol HI was fundamentally a defensive move designed to force your fleet to raid into HI, which meant fewer variables for me to worry about during the raiding phase. Of course, having committed so many patrollers into HI, I more or less had to back them up, which reduced me to two options: raiding everyone into HI, or splitting between HI and JI as I ultimately did. I came very close to choosing the former, but two factors stopped me: a) I wouldn't convert Truk until the end of the turn, which meant I'd have to tip my hand for T8 by choosing to send any disabled slow BBs to Saigon or Samoa, and I thought for sure you would return all of your own disables on T7 to Truk (from which they could rebase to either Pearl or YNY depending upon where my fleet had gone, in an IJN variation on the normal T2 USN "Singapore Sling"!); and b) I was bound to take significant CV losses on T7 in HI regardless, and by not at least going to battle with your LBA in JI on T7 (even if I lost), that would mean I'd have to risk facing 6 LBA in JI on T8, and those 6 LBA potentially could have held JI (or possibly HI) on their

own independent of my surface fleet, which would have been enough to give you the game. I did some trials on the T7 battle in JI, and I think I won less than half of them; that said, those trials also involved your sending Taiho to JI, and I think it was a mistake for you to send it to NPO in defense of a POC I couldn't afford to grab for anyway. Perhaps if I had kept both of my Marines at the start of T7 in Samoa – which I should have done, as securing a base in Okinawa would always be fairly redundant if I went on to control JI anyway – and been able to threaten an immediate invasion of Johnston Island, instead of having to survive with my Marine and at least one carrier until the end of the turn so I could air raid Johnston and sink your SNLF before invading, I might have chosen differently! As it was, I figured I had a good chance of escaping the CV exchange in HI with no more than the Hosho around for Day combat.

In R1, I got a pure Night Action against the flag in JI; although I only removed two of the three IJN CVLs (after some very poor shooting), that raised my odds in JI significantly. However, after the smoke cleared following a Day Action in HI, I'd lost that exchange pretty badly: at the end of R1, only CV18 and the damaged Intrepid remained to face Hiryu, Ryujo, Zuiho and Hosho, with more of my missing decks having been sunk than Alan's. In R2, in HI we sank each of our targets, but with Zuiho and Hosho the only decks left and Alan possessing the flag, the potential for a nightmare scenario of lots of sequential Day Actions remained on the cards.

However, the JI battle swiftly shifted in my favor. Alan's LBA futility crescendoed with another appalling display – two disables and no hits to show from 12 dice, although Ryuho disabled Independence as well. In response, on 24 dice I scored 6 hits with a nice distribution, shooting down two LBA and damaging the other two with 2 and 3 damage, respectively. The writing was on the wall, and two rounds later, I'd shot down the other two LBA (and invaded Okinawa besides) to seal JI – enough to force Alan's resignation, with the POC total down to only +11 in his favor (or +5.5 after the bid) even if he held on in CPO, where Chikuma and Wichita had spent four straight rounds whiffing against each other.

Alan summed everything up by saying, **That was definitely the most exciting game I've played in a long time.** I'd have to agree – I suspect I used more brain cells in this game than most of my other Top 10 games in the current tournament cycle combined!