

MIDWAY - JUNE 1942

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## Outline

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## Midway - June 1942

It was on 26 May 1942 that Japanese task forces gathered for the Midway operation and departed home waters. They firmly believed that their superior numbers would annihilate the American fleet. This belief sailed with Admiral Yamamoto's forces as they steamed into history.

The alteration of Japan's war posture from an offensive thrust to a defensive position remained unheard of until Midway. The victory at Midway cannot reach its full enormity unless the events that lead to it become known. Even while plans unfolded around the attack on Pearl Harbor, bigger plans to widen the war in the Pacific evolved.

Prime Minister Tojo wanted the oil deposits of the Philippines, Java, Hong Kong, the Malay Peninsula, and Southeast Asia (Blair 63). Tojo's plan was for a quick sweep of the region, giving Japan full control of all of the Far East.

A key element of the plan required the destruction of United States, British, and Dutch naval forces in the Pacific. The accomplishment of this task fell on Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Though opposed to widening the war, Yamamoto had orders to come up with a plan. The results of his planning belied the diligence and thoroughness that became his trademarks. Pearl Harbor, though the primary target of his plans, barely overshadowed the destiny that he intended for Midway.

A successful attack on Pearl Harbor swelled Yamamoto's ego with ambition. He pushed the High Command for bolder operations

in the Southwest Pacific. His plans for expansion into the islands northeast of Australia reached realization, though an invasion of Australia itself didn't. Yamamoto strongly contended that securing the island strongholds would sever vital supply links between Australia, Panama, and the United States.

Admiral Yamamoto also proposed to begin invasion plans for Midway simultaneously. This would be a twofold operation with attacks on both the Aleutian Islands and Midway. Yamamoto contended that the capture of Midway would deprive the U.S. of an important forward refueling base. Secondly, it would provide the Japanese with an air base from which they might launch air and submarine attacks against Pearl Harbor (Blair 196).

An attack on the Aleutians would accomplish two missions. One, destroy any air power there and two, provide a diversion for the attack on Midway. The air attack would precede a landing on Attu and Kiska, at the western end of the island chain.

A prime concern of the attack on Midway was the U.S. naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese remained widely dissatisfied with the results of the Pearl Harbor attack. The American carrier force remained intact and a formidable opponent. Yamamoto firmly believed that if they could eliminate the U.S. fleet then perhaps the U.S. would enter a cease-fire. Japan would then consolidate its exploits and conquests in the Pacific and capitalize.

Yamamoto's plan for Midway and the Aleutian Islands met heavy criticism in the higher circles of the Naval General Staff. Japanese forces, continually on the move since November 1941,

show the wear. The planes needed replacing and the ships required drydock and urgent repair. They were already developing plans for the New Guinea-New Caledonia operation and felt that Midway did not present a lucrative target (Prange 22). They argued that Midway was within easy range of Hawaii-based submarines and aircraft. Logistical support of troops on the island would be a nightmare.

If Yamamoto wanted the U.S. fleet drawn out, New Caledonia would be a more valuable asset to do it with. Yamamoto, furious with objections from the High Command, offered them two choices, Midway or his resignation (Blair 196). Tokyo relented; however, a thrust into the Solomon Islands and New Guinea would take precedence.

The Naval General Staff continued to delay in preparation for the attack on Midway. They claimed that needed equipment would not be available for an early June launch date. The Japanese Army Headquarters had its own doubts about the entire campaign. They suspected that the operation would eventually lead to the capture of the Hawaiian Islands. A monumental event in the Pacific War would occur in mid-April 1942, forever quenching any disagreements with Yamamoto.

On 18 April, B-25 medium bombers launched from the aircraft carrier Hornet, made the first U.S. attack on Japan's mainland (Prange 24). Though the bombers did little real damage, the pride of the Japanese government suffered a significant blow. America's daring raid ceased all opposition to the Midway attack. The New Guinea and Solomon Island operations would occur in early

May. Carrier assets, previously tagged for the southern ploys, became earmarked for the Midway operation.

Surprises would occur for the Japanese in their late Spring 1942 campaigns. Unknown to them, the Americans had access to most of their widely used operational code, JN-25 (Blair 67). U.S. Naval intelligence tracked the locations and movements of Japanese warships through a process called Radio Traffic Analysis (Spector 189). Navy analysts did not read the Japanese messages. Instead, they interpreted the location, volume, and pattern of the messages. Interpretations of messages and cryptanalysis (code-breaking) provided invaluable clues about Japan's intentions and activities. Ironically, these same code-breakers were the cause of Yamamoto's death.

Intercepted radio messages warned of the Japanese intentions in the Southwest Pacific. Admiral Nimitz dispatched a carrier force to engage the Japanese vessels in the Coral Sea. Nimitz's intent was a showdown with the Japanese carrier fleet and its destruction. On 5 - 6 May both carrier forces sought each other out. The four-day Battle of the Coral Sea followed and the encounter would prove costly for both sides (Blair 199).

Tactically speaking, the Battle of the Coral Sea was a defeat for the U.S. Navy and the Allies. The defeat was expressed solely in terms of U.S. and Allied warships sunk. The loss to America was a carrier sunk and another sidelined for an indefinite period (Britannica Vol. 3, 619). In a strategic sense however, it won a great victory by stopping a Japanese invasion force for the first time. Aircraft carriers, critically

necessary to guarantee success for Yamamoto in his Midway and Aleutian Island invasions, would be unavailable (Blair 199).

Yamamoto proceeded with his Midway plans and didn't seem disturbed by the events at the Battle of the Coral Sea. A postponement of the Port Moresby, New Guinea operation agitated him but remained unimportant when compared to his other plans. He believed that U.S. losses were greater, and that the remaining carriers could handle the mission. His strategy rested on an obsolete notion that the strength of the fleet lies in the battleship, not the carrier.

The Japanese strategy was very elementary. Japan lined up their enemies and sent their up and coming officers to the United States and Russia. These officers were to become more familiar with how the people of those countries thought and reacted to economic and military problems. Japan considered the United States their number one enemy because of the Pacific fleet stationed in the Hawaiian Islands. Japan sent Admirals Isoroku Yamamoto, Chief of Naval General Staff and Combined Fleet Commander in Chief, and Osmai Nagano to learn all they could in the United States. Sending these officers to those countries in itself proved helpful in the planning of all operations against their future enemy (Fuchida 32-35).

The general strategy of Admiral Kuroshima and Commander Gendia was to destroy the U.S. Navy fleet in the Pacific and take Midway, Johnston Island, Palmyra Island, and then Hawaii itself. This operation was known as "M.I.," the taking of Midway (Fuchida 58 and Hoyt 261). This started the debate between the Japanese

Naval General staff and the Combined Fleet Staff. The Naval General Staff wanted to execute plans for the taking of New Caledonia, Fiji Islands, and the Solomon Islands. Japan felt that if they took these island groups, then the Allied forces would not attack them (Fuchida 58 and Hoyt 261).

As an Axis ally, Japan had to wage war against the combined Pacific forces of the world. These Pacific forces were the two strongest known naval powers of the world, Britain and the United States (Morison 89).

Japan faced an oil embargo before the war. The General Naval Staff knew that it had to have a quick access to oil and other natural resources. Oil was paramount to the strategy of many Japanese campaigns (Fuchida 43).

Admiral Yamamoto agreed with Commander Gendia on a new strategy. This strategy was to draw out the U.S. carriers and then destroy them. The U.S. carriers could cause considerable trouble to the Southern operation. Yamamoto and many of his staff agreed that it was important to draw the U.S. carriers to a confrontation. The Japanese could use their air power and their battleships to destroy them. This idea was the plan for the taking of Midway Island and Kingman's Reef, 960 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor (Coox 138).

The debates at the Japanese Naval General Staff started around 2 April. Commander Tatsukichi Miyo was responsible for naval air units, replacement parts, and aircraft engaged in combat. Miyo started laying down the reason the Midway operation was unfavorable. His first reason was the logistic problem of



sustaining Midway as an air base. Alone, the airfield would be too costly for any length of time. Midway would station the larger aircraft. These aircraft would only be capable of patrolling 600 to 700 miles in any direction of the airfield. Japan used these patrolling flights for attack warnings. They would have to transport fuel for the aircraft by ships, this would be dangerous. His second reason was the lack of intelligence on the whereabouts and the capabilities of the U.S. Naval fleet. This lack of intelligence could hinder the mission. Commander Miyo was so avid to keep this plan from happening that his emotions affected him. He also said that Japanese doctrine was to attack in force not just quality. This would be one of the deciding factors of the Battle of Midway (Fuchida 38).

The Naval General Staff's other argument against the Midway operation was taking the New Caledonia, Fiji, and Solomon Islands. This would likely make Australia feel seriously threatened and would appeal to the U.S. for assistance. They believed that the Americans would do this because their supply routes and air bases in Australia would be lost. Mostly, the Naval General Staff thought the taking of Midway, by threatening Hawaii, would effectively undermine the American will to fight (Zich 2).

On 5 April, Vice Admiral Ito and Rear Admiral Fukudome attended the talks for the Naval General Staff (Fuchida 65). In the middle of the conference, Commander Watanabe called the flag ship Yamato and talked directly to Admiral Yamamoto. Yamamoto told the young commander "The success of Japan's entire strategy

in the Pacific would be decided by the success in destroying the U.S. Fleet, more particularly the carrier task forces." (Fuchida 65) The Naval General Staff's idea was to sever the supply line from the United States and Australia. It would put the entire area under Japanese control. The Japanese thought that the fastest way to draw out the American fleet would be the taking of Midway. Yamamoto thought they could draw out the carriers and destroy them in a deceptive battle using Japanese Midway based bombers, battleships, and carriers. He would not change his mind. Vice Admiral Ito and Rear Admiral Fukudome reluctantly proposed that the Naval General Staff agree with the Midway operation.

In contrast to the strong disagreement from the Naval General Staff, the Army General Staff was without difficulty. The Army agreed to go along with the Midway-Aleutians operation. This was due to the small number of troops that the army would provide to help the Naval special landing forces.

Continuing debates of the details established the attack date. The Naval General Staff disagreed with an early June date and recommended at least a month later. The combined fleet thought that June at full moon was the best time. It was also sure that the Americans did not have enough time to establish a complete defense of both island groups. These debates stopped on 18 April after twenty B-25 bombers bombed the capital city of Tokyo (Morison 158).

The combined fleet requested an early execution of the operation as they had designated. The defeat of the precautions

that the combined fleet had put up against carrier-borne attacks hurt Admiral Yamamoto's pride. He made it quite clear that it should not happen again at any cost. The Naval General Staff completely agreed.

By the end of April, Admiral Yamamoto received a complete plan and accepted it. He then formally gave the plan to the Chief of Naval General Staff, Admiral Nagano, for approval. On 5 May Admiral Nagano, in the name of the Emperor, issued Imperial General Headquarters Navy Order Number 18. The Combined Fleet Commander, with the cooperation of the Army, would carry out the occupation of Midway Island and western parts of the Aleutian Islands (Fuchida 73).

The Army promised to send a reinforced infantry regiment to participate in the landing operation. After the completion of the occupation, the Army would leave the subsequent defense of the Islands to the naval forces. All parties decided on the Midway operation. All that remained was the gathering and organizing of the fleet force. This would be the biggest force in the seventy-year old navy (Zich 48).

The American strategy was a simple one. Admiral Nimitz decided to fight a war of hit and run against the Japanese. He had little hope of success in a massive engagement since his fleet was vastly out numbered in every category. This fighting occurred when it would be in favor of the American fleet.

The breaking of the Japanese Operational Code was the driving factor of the deployment of the American forces to Midway. The lack of superiority made the American Fleet

Commander use economy of force to defeat the Japanese. The three American carriers were massed together so their aircraft could be combined for the attack. However, the carriers were kept separated in order to minimize the combined risk to the U.S. Fleet (Walker 37).

The two task force commanders were Rear Admirals Fletcher and Spruance. Admiral Fletcher, Commander of Task Force 17 on the carrier Yorktown, was the general commander. Task Force 16, commanded by Admiral Spruance, consisted of the carriers Enterprise and Hornet. For a complete listing of the American and Japanese Naval Fleets refer to Figures 1 and 2.

The attack plan was simple. The carriers would attack when Nagumo's first Carrier Striking force was on their eastern flank. Admiral Nimitz's order was "Get the Japanese carriers." (Morison 158)

The two goals of the Japanese were to destroy the remaining American Fleet and to capture Midway Island. Midway was the sentry to Hawaii and control of it meant control of the entire Central Pacific (Walker 1).

The beginning of the battle was a modest one. At 0120, four Midway PBYs (Catalina Flying Boats) armed with torpedoes made an attack on the Japanese invasion force. For a complete graphic description of the Battle for Midway, refer to Figure 3. They scored two hits and only damaged one tanker. The Japanese launched 108 aircraft for their attack on Midway at 0445. The 108 aircraft met six Navy Wildcats and twenty Buffalo aircraft. Within twenty-five minutes, seventeen of the Midway fighters were

shot down. The Japanese only lost three aircraft (Walker 9). The objective of the attack force was to destroy the Midway airfield, which they failed to do. Aircraft from Midway found the Japanese carriers but the Japanese destroyed them. They also failed to inflict any damage to the Japanese invasion fleet.

Following this attack, thirty-six Zero Fighters engaged sixteen Midway Marine SBD Dauntless dive bombers (Walker 10). They shot down eight and again no damage occurred to the invasion fleet. At 0820, a Japanese reconnaissance plane radioed back that he spotted one U.S. carrier. Having already armed the planes for a second attack on Midway, Rear Admiral Nagumo ordered the planes to rearm. The planes took on torpedoes so they could attack the U.S. carrier. They stacked the bombs that they took off the planes in the hanger area rather than in the magazines (Walker 11). This would prove to be an unwise decision.

Rear Admiral Spruance ordered airplanes from his ships to attack the invasion fleet. Sixty-seven dive bombers, twenty-nine torpedo bombers, and twenty fighters took off from the carriers Hornet and Enterprise. The Yorktown launched twelve torpedo bombers, seventeen dive bombers and six fighters two hours later (Walker 12).

Since Admiral Nagumo's fleet turned northeast, forty-five planes from the Hornet were unable to locate the invasion fleet. They landed at Midway to refuel and wait for further orders. The first carrier aircraft to locate the invasion fleet was from the Hornet. Within minutes, fifty Japanese Zero Fighters shot down all fifteen aircraft. Next came the torpedo bombers from the

Enterprise. Only four survived, with no damage to the invasion fleet. The Yorktown aircraft came in next, with the same results. Only three of the thirteen aircraft survived with no hits scored (Walker 14).

Rear Admiral Nagumo began to launch his rearmed aircraft at 1024. The remaining aircraft from the Enterprise took this opportunity to attack. Since the Japanese aircraft were down at sea level after fighting off the previous attacks, the American aircraft went in unmolested. Within minutes, two of the four Japanese carriers took direct hits. The aircraft from the Yorktown scored hits on a third carrier (Walker 14). The carelessly stacked bombs and torpedoes on the Japanese carriers lead to their immediate destruction.

At 1040, aircraft from the remaining Japanese carrier, Hiryu, took off to attack the American fleet (Walker 14). These aircraft followed the returning aircraft from the Yorktown. They attacked and caused severe damage to the Yorktown. A Japanese submarine sunk the Yorktown on 5 June. Of the twenty-four aircraft that the Japanese sent, only five returned to the Hiryu.

At 1530, Rear Admiral Spruance launched his remaining aircraft to sink the Hiryu. The twenty-four aircraft attacked, leaving the carrier on fire and badly damaged. She finally sank on 5 June (Walker 15). At 2130 Rear Admiral Nagumo finally acknowledged defeat and turned the remnants of his fleet to the northwest (Walker 16).

During the night of 4 June, two Japanese heavy cruisers collided during maneuvers trying to avoid the U.S. submarine

Tambor. Rear Admiral Kurita ordered an emergency turn. The Tambor fired torpedoes and hit the cruisers Mogami and Mikuma, detached from the Japanese Invasion Force. The Mogami crumpled her bow and caught fire (Van der Vat 194). At 0350, Admiral Yamamoto finally gave the order to scuttle the carrier Akagi. The Akagi had previously taken two direct hits on 4 June. Yamamoto relayed this order to Admiral Nagumo who relayed it to Captain Ariga. Captain Ariga ordered his four destroyers to fire torpedoes at the ship. All but 263 members of the carrier's crew survived (Fuchida 218).

During the early hours of 5 June, Admiral Nimitz thought that the Japanese might continue the invasion. Yamamoto later concluded that his surviving carriers were not going to engage in a night action. Admiral Yamamoto ordered Operation Midway canceled and the transports headed back to Saipan. Although Japanese ships were pulling out, Yamamoto still tried to lure the American carriers into battle (Blair 245).

The Kaga, which was also hit simultaneously with the Akagi, did not last as long. It received four direct hits at the forward middle and flight decks. Survivors transferred to two destroyers and, at 1925, sank. In this battle the Kaga lost 800 men (D'Albas 129).

At 0700 on 5 June, Midway launched six SBD-2 Dauntless dive bombers and SB2U-3 Vindicator Glide bombers after the Japanese cruisers. The SBD-2s scored no hits. There were several hits on the Mogami by the SB2U-3s. About a half hour later, eight B-17s from Midway bombed the two carriers but scored no hits. Of the

many attacks undertaken on 5 June, the retreating Japanese recorded no damage to their aircraft. Also, bad weather on 5 June prevented the U.S. carriers from locating the retreating forces to the north and west. Although a Marine dive bombing group located the crippled Mogami and inflicted additional damage to it and the Mikuma (Walker 18).

On the morning of 6 June, despite bad weather, search planes from the Enterprise found the retreating Japanese. Admiral Spruance sent three strikes totalling 122 aircraft after them. This continued throughout the morning. It also prevented the Japanese from getting within range of their own aircraft on Wake Island. The Mogami managed to stagger to safety in the Caroline Islands after being hit at least five times. It took two years for the Mogami to recover. Several torpedo hits and bomb strikes finally sank the Mikuma. Twenty six B-17's, launched from Midway, failed to locate the Japanese. The Hornet also launched twenty-six bombers with eight fighter escorts but scored no direct hits on any of the Japanese ships. The intense anti-aircraft fire shot down one of the Hornet's aircraft (Fuchida 228).

Admiral Yamamoto continuously received dismal reports. He decided a different course of action. At 1230 he detached Kondo's Invasion force and Cruiser Division 8 to speed to the rescue of Captain Sakiyama's ill-fated ships. As additional precautions he also turned his own Main Body to follow them southward. Yamamoto believed that if the enemy continued in pursuit, the Kondo force might engage him during the night.



Yamamoto also knew that to defeat the enemy he must eliminate the American air power. To achieve this, Yamamoto could mobilize a total of about 100 planes. To accomplish this, he must lure the American forces within range of the fifty medium bombers based on Wake Island (Fuchida 230).

He actually followed this grand scheme until the next morning. With no enemy in sight and his ships in need of fuel, Yamamoto called off his vain pursuit. He decided to retire toward his homeland (Fuchida 230).

Because of this battle, the Japanese expansion to the east stopped. Midway remained an important American outpost. The Japanese lost four of their finest aircraft carriers. They also lost 250 aircraft and some 100 of their first line pilots. The powerful striking force was no longer. They could no longer achieve their goals (Van der Vat 195).

On 6 June, a flying boat observed the American carrier Yorktown again. Torpedoes split the destroyer Hammann in two, and opened a new gash in the Yorktown's hull. As thousands of tons of water poured in, for the second time in two days the men abandoned the ship. The Yorktown sank shortly before dawn on 7 June. The eventual destruction of this ship was the only Japanese achievement during the Battle of Midway. During the evening of 6 June, the Battle of Midway came to a conclusion as American forces sailed east (Van der Vat 194).

Japan's sole consolation for the defeat lay in the minuscule success of having captured two Aleutian bases. Their northern operation progressed smoothly and led to the occupation of the

islands of Attu and Kiska on 7 June. These unimportant acquisitions were small compensation for the devastating fleet losses suffered to the south (Fuchida 230).

The Battle of Midway was the first decisive defeat suffered by the Japanese Navy in 350 years. It ended a long period of Japanese offensive actions. The naval powers in the Pacific became balanced (Hoyt 261).

Seven months after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese suffered their first major defeat. By losing this battle Japan moved from offense to defense (Walker 19).

There are several reasons for the outcome of the Battle of Midway. One was the superior intelligence information the American forces had. This enables the U.S. to deploy its limited forces through timed attacks and the use of surprise. Earlier, the Americans broke the Japanese radio code and could intercept and read Japanese radio transmissions.

This alone does not explain the reason for the defeat of a superior numerical force by a smaller one. For that, we must look at the mistakes the Japanese forces made. These critical errors are what ended Japanese expansion in the Pacific and led to Allied dominance of the Pacific area.

At the very beginning, the Japanese High Command had very poor intelligence on the American forces in the area. Japan thought the American task force operated around the Solomon Islands. This led the Japanese Naval Command to believe that the American Naval presence around Midway was weak. If this was true, then the Japanese could operate without fear of attack from

the American carrier forces. The reconnaissance conducted by the Japanese for the American fleet was very inadequate. The idea was for submarines and flying boats to watch Pearl Harbor for movement of the Pacific Fleet. The submarines were late in arriving and missed seeing the Pacific Fleet leaving Pearl Harbor two days earlier. When a Japanese refueling submarine sighted enemy warships at the refueling point, they ceased using flying boats.

The Japanese plan of attack had two major aims. The first was to lure what remained of the Pacific Fleet into the open and destroy it. The second was the capture of Midway Island. The plan failed to establish any priority of use for the Japanese carrier aircraft. This led Admiral Nagumo to launch the aircraft from all four carriers against Midway. This left nothing in reserve to defend against attacks from the American carrier aircraft.

Admiral Nagumo did not deploy adequate search planes to search for the Pacific Fleet. When he sighted the American Fleet by search aircraft, Nagumo failed to react with any sense of urgency. The Japanese received orders to rearm their planes with torpedoes which cost them valuable time. Japanese search aircraft reported that the American fleet had at least one carrier with it. On learning this, Nagumo ordered the planes to again rearm with bombs. This delay allowed the American forces to get within range and launch a strike against the Japanese carriers.

The dispersion of the Japanese strike force was so wide that

they couldn't depend on each other for support. Nagumo's carrier force was northwest of Midway while Yamamoto's main force was still 300 miles away. The invasion force was operating south of Midway while the close support group maneuvered in the southwest. This wide dispersion weakened a formidable task force since each group was operating as a single unit.

The Japanese even further weakened themselves by sending a diversionary fleet to invade the Aleutian Islands in the North. This also had a carrier force operating 300 miles in front of a screening force of battleships. Since it was too far away from the battle area, it could not launch it's aircraft to attack the Americans.

With his carrier force destroyed, Admiral Yamamoto tried to reorganize his fleet but knew it was too late. The ships were so dispersed it would be early morning before the Japanese Fleet could get reorganized. By that time, the American carrier force could launch aircraft against the remaining Japanese Fleet. Admiral Yamamoto thought the price was too high and ordered a retreat to the west.

Japan also was behind America in technology. Radar was in use on board the American ships and they used it as early warning against air attack. The Japanese had recently begun experimenting with radar. Only two of their ships had any radar but it was so rudimentary that it was all but useless (Fuchida 281).

Command and Control of forces also lead to the Japanese defeat at Midway. Admiral Yamamoto sailed with his fleet into

battle while the American commander controlled the battle from Pearl Harbor. Because of the strict radio silence imposed by the Japanese, they had to radio the situation back to Japan. The Japanese Naval Headquarters would then relay the information to Admiral Yamamoto aboard his flag ship. The Admiral would make a decision concerning the information and radio the orders back to Japan. The Naval Headquarters would then issue the orders to the appropriate ship at Midway. This placed Yamamoto two or three moves behind the American forces for the entire battle (Fuchida 276). The American forces received their instructions straight from Pearl Harbor with which they could communicate directly.

Japanese arrogance also played a big part in their defeat. They had the attitude that they were invincible and the enemy had no will to resist. This overconfidence became known as "Victory Disease" (Fuchida 283). They never thought that the American forces would attack or were even looking for a fight. All the previous battles the Japanese fought on land and sea had been easy victories. At the Battle of Midway they quickly experienced a cure for the "Victory Disease."

The meaning of Midway could be spelled out in tangibles and intangibles. The tangibles, men and material lost, left no room for doubt about who won this battle. The losses to the United States were: one aircraft carrier, one destroyer, 150 aircraft, and 307 personnel. The Japanese losses were: four aircraft carriers, one cruiser, 322 aircraft, and 3500 personnel. Refer to Table 1 for a listing of American and Japanese losses.

Consider the intangibles or what might have happened but did

not. Had Yamamoto fulfilled his goals of taking Midway and destroying Nimitz's carriers, he would have turned to the Australian campaign. With striking power of the U.S. Pacific fleet out of the running, there would have been precious little to stop him. Had he succeeded in cutting the Australian lifeline, he would isolate MacArthur's forces. He would have total command of the south Pacific and Indian Oceans. And meanwhile, possession of Midway would give Japan the means to harass at least the Hawaiian Islands as well as the West coast of America. The prime strategy - Hitler First - could suffer a devastating setback. Perhaps the ultimate result of the war would be the same, but the cost would be more than one cares to think about.

But it did not happen. At Midway the Japanese lost or left behind a naval air force that had been the terror of the Pacific. This elite and overwhelming force would never again come back and spread destruction and fear. This was the great meaning of Midway.

Tactically, the three American carrier air groups performed raggedly. Yet they won through courage, determination, and quick seizure of opportunities. This had a stimulating effect on the morale of the American fighting forces. The performance of land-based air, on the contrary, lacked experience in bombing and searching. Two squadrons of well-trained scout planes based on Midway, engaged only in finding and tracking enemy ships, accomplished more for the cause than all the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps bombers together.

Midway was a victory of intelligence, bravely and wisely applied. "Had we lacked early information of the Japanese movement, and had we been caught with carrier forces dispersed, . . . the Battle of Midway would have ended differently" said Admiral Nimitz (Prange 391). So, too, it might have ended differently but for the chance that gave Admiral Spruance command over two of the three carriers.

The Japanese knew that they lost. Before the ships reached home, official broadcasters began making the usual claims that most of the U.S. planes and ships were shot down, sunk, or damaged. After muzzling the loudspeakers, word went out from Imperial Headquarters that Midway was taboo (Fuchida 12). It thrust the Japanese war lords back on their heels, caused their ambitious plans canceled, and forced them in a defensive role.

In perhaps one of the greatest naval battle in history, the United States defeated a far superior Japanese naval fleet. This victory by the United States dramatically changed the course of the war in favor of the United States. It stopped what had been a very formidable offensive machine, which had scored many victories since Pearl Harbor. In fact, up too now, the Japanese had not suffered a major defeat in the Pacific. Due to this defeat, the Japanese went from a highly offensive naval force to a defensive one. The loss of their fleet carrier force and experienced air crews gave the United States the advantage. The American Pacific fleet could now deploy four fleet carriers (Refer to Table 1 for a complete listing of Japanese and American losses). Only new construction could raise the Japanese total

above two. Any race for new construction was one American industry was sure to win (Natkiel 81). This ultimately led to their defeat in World War II.

Admiral Spruance summed up the battle like this:

All operations are like a woman going to shop. You must ask these two questions: What is it going to cost you and what is it worth to you? I am satisfied with my purchase at Midway for, if the United States had lost, nothing would have stood between the West Coast and the Japanese Fleet. Yamamoto and his Imperial Navy would have gone on to great triumphs. The admiral respected the fighting qualities of his opponents. The credit must be given to Admiral Nimitz. Not only did he accept the intelligence picture but he acted upon it at once (Prange 391).

The defeat at Midway forced the Japanese to drop their plans for the conquest of Australia and Southeast Asia. The Japanese now must assume the defense of what they now controlled. They never again enjoyed the margin of superiority they had during the first six months of the war. By virtually destroying Japan's carrier air, the U.S. Navy's victory at Midway turned the tide in the Pacific.



AMERICAN NAVAL FORCES  
 Commanded by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz

CARRIER STRIKING FORCE: Commanded by Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher

TASK FORCE 17: Commanded by Rear Admiral Fletcher

CARRIER: *YORKTOWN*, Captain Buckmaster  
 AIR GROUP: Commanded by Lt. Cdr. Oscar Pederson  
     *VF-3* 25 Wildcat F-4 fighter's (Thach)  
     *VB-3* 18 SBD Dauntless dive bombers (Leslie)  
     *VT-3* 13 TBD Devastor torpedo planes (Massey)  
 CRUISERS: *ASTORIA*, *PORTLAND*  
 DESTROYER SCREEN: *MORRIS*, *HAMMJANN*, *HUGHES*, *ANDERSON*, *RUSSELL*

TASK FORCE 16: Commanded by Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance

CARRIER: *ENTERPRISE*, Captain Murray  
 AIR GROUP: Commanded by Lt. Cdr. Clarence McClusky  
     *VF-6* 27 Wildcat F-4 fighters (Gray)  
     *VB-6* 19 SBD Dauntless Dive bombers (Best)  
     *VS-6* 19 SBD Dauntless Dive bombers (Gallaher)  
     *VT-6* 14 TBD Devastor torpedo planes (Lindsey)  
 CARRIER: *HORNET*, Captain Mitscher  
 AIR GROUP: Commanded by Cdr. Stanhope Ring  
     *VF-8* 27 Wildcat F-4 fighters (Mitchell)  
     *VB-8* 19 SBD Dauntless dive bombers (Johnson)  
     *VS-8* 18 SBD Dauntless dive bombers (Rodee)  
     *VT-8* 15 TBD Devastor torpedo planes (Waldron)  
 CRUISERS: *ATLANTA*, *NEW ORLEANS*, *MINNEAPOLIS*, *VINCENNES*,  
*NORTHAMPTON*, *PENSACOLA*  
 DESTROYER SCREEN: *PHELPS*, *WORDEN*, *MONAGHAN*, *AYLWIN*, *GWIN*,  
*BALCH*, *CONYNGHAM*, *BENHAM*, *ELLET*, *MAURY*  
 OILER GROUP: *CIMARRON*, *PLATT* W/DESTROYERS *DEWEY*, *MONSSEN*  
 SUBMARINES: TOTAL OF 15 CONTROLLED BY ADM NIMITZ  
 MIDWAY ISLAND AIR GROUP: Commanded by Cpt Ira Kimes  
     4 B-26 Bombers   19 B-17 Bombers  
     32 PBV Catalinas   6 TBF Buffalo dive bombers

TASK FORCE 8: Commanded by Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald

HEAVY CRUISERS: *INDIANAPOLIS*, *LOUISVILLE*  
 LIGHT CRUISERS: *NASHVILLE*, *ST. LOUIS*, *HONOLULU*  
 DESTROYERS: TOTAL OF 10

Fig. 1 American Forces SOURCE: MIDWAY, Smith 161-163.

JAPANESE COMBINED FLEET  
Commanded by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto

MAIN FORCE: Commanded by Admiral Yamamoto

Main Body: Commanded by Admiral Yamamoto

BATTLESHIP GROUP: *YAMATO, NAGATO, MUTSU*

CARRIER GROUP: *HOSHO, YUKAZE*

SPECIAL FORCE (SEAPLANE CARRIERS): *CHIYODA, NISSHIN*

SCREENING FORCE (DESTROYERS): *SENDAI, FUBUKI, SHIRAYUKI, HATSUYUKI, MURAKUMO, ISONAMI, URANAMI, SHIKINAMI, ANANAMI*

1ST SUPPLY UNIT (OILERS): *NARUTO, TOEI MARU*

GUARD (ALEUTIANS SCREENING) FORCE: Commanded by Vice Admiral Shiro Takasu

BATTLESHIP GROUP: *HYUGA, ISE, FUSO, YAMASHIRO*

SCREENING GROUP (CRUISERS): *KITAKAMI, THER OI (DESTROYERS): ASAGIRI, YUGIRI, SHIRAKUMO, AMAGIRI, UMIKAZE, YAMAKAZE, KAWAKAZE, SUZUKAZE, ARIAKE, YUGURE, SHIGURE, SHIRATSUYU*

2ND SUPPLY UNIT (OILERS): *SAN CLEMENTE MARU, TOA MARU*

FIRST CARRIER STRIKING FORCE: Commanded by Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo

CARRIER GROUP: *AKAGI*

Air Unit: 21 Zeros, 21 Dive Bombers, 21 Torpedo Bombers  
*KAGA*

Air Unit: 21 Zeros, 21 Dive Bombers, 21 Torpedo Bombers  
*HIRYU*

Air Unit: 21 Zeros, 21 Dive Bombers, 21 Torpedo Bombers  
*SORYU*

Air Unit: 21 Zeros, 21 Dive Bombers, 21 Torpedo Bombers

SCREENING GROUP (CRUISERS): *TONE, CHIKUMA, HARUNA, KIRISHIMA (DESTROYERS): NAGARA, NOWAKI, ARASHI, HAGIKAZE, MAIKAZE, KAZAGUMO, YUGUMO, MAKIGUMO, URAKAZE, ISOKAZE, TANIKAZE, HAMAKAZE*

SUPPLY GROUP (OILERS): *KYOKUTO MARU, SHINKOKU MARU, TOHO MARU, NIPPON MARU, KOKUYO MARU*

MIDWAY INVASION FORCE: Commanded by Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo

INVASION FORCE MAIN BODY:

CRUISERS: *ATAGO, CHOKAI, MYOKO, HAGURO*

BATTLESHIPS: *KONGO, HIET*

SCREENING FORCE (DESTROYERS): *YURA, MURASAME, SAMIDARE, HARUSAME, YUDACHI, ASAGUMO, MINEGUMO, NATSUGUMO*

CARRIER GROUP: *ZUIHU (12 Zeros, 12 Torpedo Bombers)*

SUPPLY GROUP (OILERS): *SATA, TSURUMI, GENYO MARU, AKASHI (Repair Ship)*

CLOSE SUPPORT GROUP: (CRUISERS) *KUMANO, SUZUYA, MIKUMA, MOGAMI (DESTROYERS) ASASHIO, ARASHIO, NICHIEI MARU (OILER)*

TRANSPORT GROUP: 16 TROOP CARRIERS

ESCORT GROUP: 11 DESTROYERS and 2 SEAPLANE TENDERS

Fig. 2: Japanese Forces SOURCE: MIDWAY, Smith 164-166.

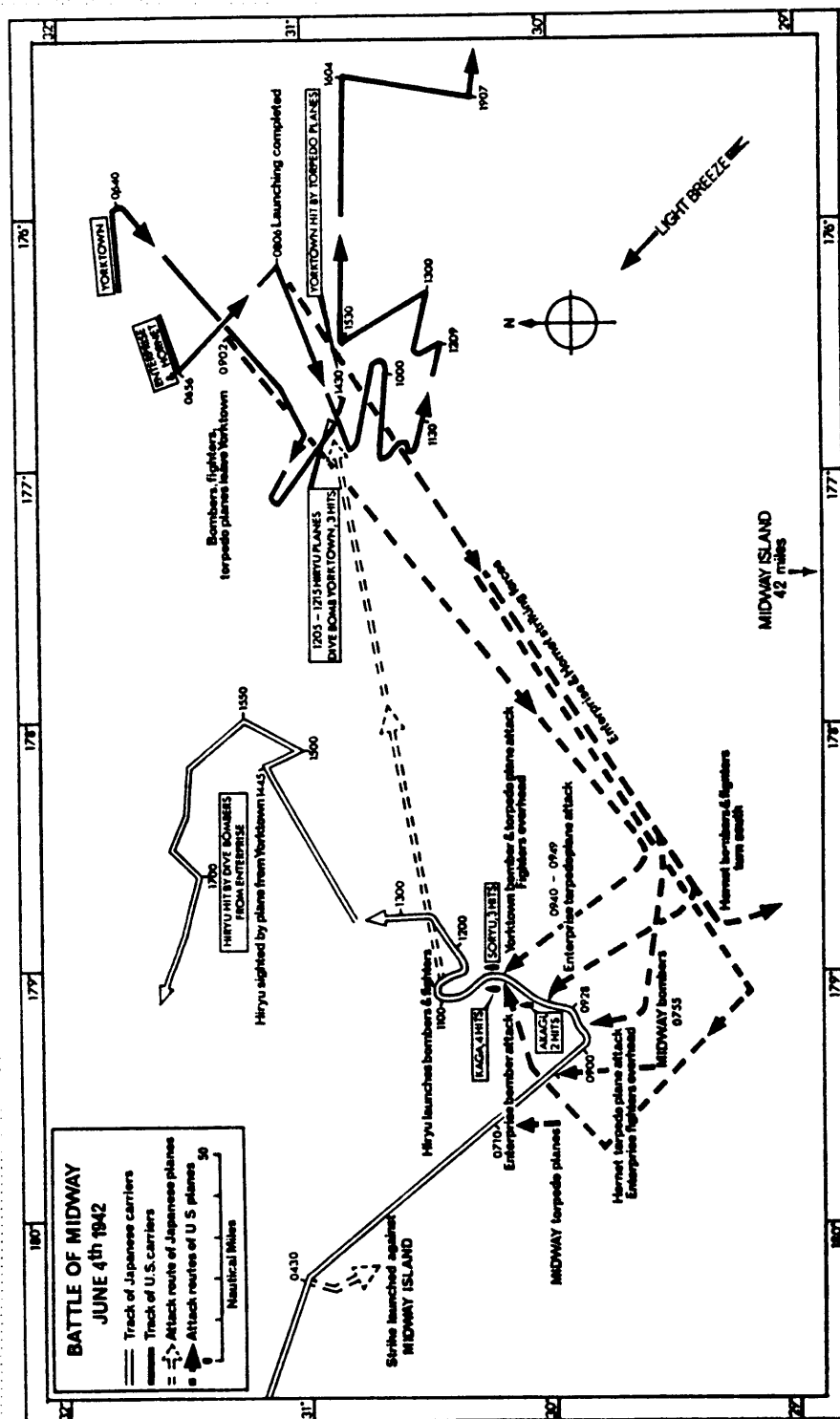


Figure 3. Battle of Midway SOURCE: Creswell 172.

BATTLE OF MIDWAY MEN AND MATERIAL LOST		
	<u>UNITED STATES</u>	<u>JAPAN</u>
CASUALTIES	307	3500
CARRIERS	1	4
CRUISERS	0	1
DESTROYERS	1	0
AIRCRAFT	150	322

Table 1. Men and Material Lost SOURCE: Prange, 391.

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