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THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY: A STUDY IN COMMAND.

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THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY: A STUDY IN COMMAND

by
Robert Elmer Barde

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of the University of Maryland in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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APPROVAL SHEET

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ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: The Battle of Midway: A Study in Command

Robert Elmer Barde, Doctor of Philosophy, 1971

Dissertation directed by: Professor Gordon W. Prange

Less than six months after the Japanese surprise aerial attack on the naval bastion at Pearl Harbor, the United States scored a resounding victory that has been termed as the turning point of the war in the Pacific. On 4 June 1942 carrier-based naval aircraft destroyed four of the six fleet carriers that Japan had used to launch her attack on Hawaii. Before the battle was over on 6 June, yet another ship, a powerful heavy cruiser would succumb to the aerial onslaught of the carrier-based bombers.

Few battles in modern times have offered such an opportunity to analyze the burden and responsibilities of command. Each side demonstrated the positive traits of leadership and each was guilty of serious breaches in duties of command. For the Japanese, Midway represented the beginning of their second phase operations, one that contemplated cutting the Solomons, isolating Australia, and perhaps assaulting Hawaii. Midway introduced a supremely confident Goliath sailing from Japan to capture an island smaller than Tokyo itself.

Taking the Island of Midway was to be but the bait for an even more important event - the destruction of the U. S. Pacific Fleet. The Japanese, though, failed to recognize the ability and determination of their adversary. They did not realize that their movements were daily re-

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ported to Admiral Nimitz in Pearl Harbor through a superior intelligence system that was able to crack the Japanese naval code. The advanced information enabled the American commander to position his only three carriers on the flank of the approaching Japanese. Then at just the proper moment the U. S. ships launched a heavy concentration of aircraft. Many were destroyed as they attacked the Japanese, but others arrived unseen and dropped their bombs on the enemy carriers. The decisions reached during these crucial moments had momentous affects on the ultimate outcome of the battle.

Through superior command decisions, Admirals Nimitz, Spruance, and Fletcher turned the tide of Japanese offensive power. By the same token, junior officers like McClusky, Leslie, and the torpedo squadron leaders - Waldron, Lindsey, and Massey - carried the weight of command and exerted it in the fullest sense of the word. Their inspiring leadership and determination made the Battle of Midway an emphatic American victory when the preponderance of Japanese naval and air power indicated that events should have gone otherwise.

In contrast the Japanese from Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, and Admiral Nagumo, commander of Japan's carrier striking force, to those lower leadership echelons failed to exhibit the same mature and sound judgment prior to and during the Battle of Midway as did their American counterparts. Their faulty command decisions were largely responsible for their defeat in this crucial naval engagement.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Most accounts of the Battle of Midway are based on the brief, impersonal, and frequently incomplete, official after-action reports prepared by nameless individuals busy with the planning and conduct of forthcoming operations. In filling many of the voids of the official narratives, the author is indebted first and foremost to the numerous participants. Without hesitation, they took their valuable time to answer countless questions, both oral and written, on various aspects of the battle in which they played so vital a role.

To the President of the United States Naval War College who kindly permitted the reproduction of the included charts, the writer wishes to express his gratitude.

The author is also indebted to Professor Gordon W. Prange, not only for his many suggestions and skillful guidance, but also for permission to use selected personal papers, including the diary of Rear Admiral Matome Ugaki and interviews with Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher and Captain Joseph J. Rochefort.

Finally, a very special word of thanks is due my wife, Cynthia Grant Barde, for her encouragement and for her cheerful willingness to become both listener and critic on the events and decisions associated with this crucial sea engagement of World War II in the Pacific.

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CHAPTER I

UNDISPUTED POWER

The Fourth of June 1942 dawned on an Allied world in the throes of continuous defeat. For nearly three years its very foundations had been staggered by one Axis victory after another, climaxing in the never to be forgotten Sunday morning of 7 December 1941. Nor had the new year shown evidence of improving the situation confronting the battered defenders of freedom. As the days of spring warmed at the approach of summer so did the prospects of victories for the Axis Powers. On the Russian front the vaunted military power of Hitler's Wehrmacht, although stunned by the frigid cold of winter and stymied by the morass of the spring thaw, readied for a dash to the Caspian Sea and the invaluable oil fields of Baku. To the south of Europe's soft underbelly, a wily Erwin Rommel prepared to hurl his Afrika Korps across Egypt's sandy wastes and capture that treasured link between east and west, the Suez Canal.

As the sun broke that June morning it was on an Atlantic Ocean claiming the torpedo-blasted hulls of merchant ships and tankers at a rate faster than Allied shipyards could replace. A harried Franklin Delano Roosevelt was desperately trying to harness the energies of the sleeping giant over which he presided to accelerate the production of guns, tanks and equipment of war for the thousands of men donning the uniforms of military service. In the Pacific, Hawaii stood alone,

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America's island bastion and protector. Gone were the outlying bulwarks of Wake, Guam and the Philippines. Nearly 5000 miles of enemy controlled waters separated the Hawaiian Islands from General Douglas MacArthur's puny and ill-equipped force in Australia. In essence, it was an Allied world tottering on the edge of defeat.

This was the stage set for the Battle of Midway. To comprehend fully the significance of Midway it is necessary to understand the situation and conditions under which it was fought. While the entire area of the war is an important consideration, the events centering around the Hawaiian Islands are the key to Midway.

On 7 December 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and the other military establishments on Oahu in the most devastating naval air strike in the history of warfare. With startling suddenness, 353 planes disrupted the Sunday morning peace with a superbly executed torpedo and bombing attack. In less than two hours, 2403 American sailors, soldiers and marines were dead, 188 aircraft lay as smoke-scarred skeletons on Oahu's airfields and the widely heralded goliath of seapower, the U. S. battleship, rested in varying degrees of destruction on Pearl Harbor's muddy bottom.[1] The offensive might of the United States in the Pacific, the force that later was to project American seapower to the homewaters of Japan was for an indeterminate time incapable of taking to the open seas, of even moving at all. Of eight

[1] John Toland, But Not In Shame (New York: The New American Library of World Literature Inc., 1962), p. 55.

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battleships that lined the quays of Pearl Harbor's Ford Island, none had escaped damage and none was capable of fighting after the Japanese attack.

For six months the Japanese Navy sailed the vast Pacific with reckless impunity. Their submarines conducted surprise, but ineffective, attacks on the western coast of the United States while the powerful surface ships aided in the capture of those areas rich in resources that form the East Indies. With frightening rapidity Guam was captured to be followed by the determinedly defended Wake Island. Then in a steady procession the Japanese Army, strongly supported by the air and surface might of the Navy, captured the Philippines, Malaya, and its key fortress of Singapore, and the Netherlands Indies. Darwin in northern Australia shuddered from bombs dropped by the aircraft from the navy carriers. A short time later the military installations of Colombo and Trincomalee on Ceylon received the same type of attack. From the Indian Ocean to the coast of California, the Japanese sailed the seas in utter contempt of the U. S. Navy and brazenly dared it to come out and fight.

With the Western Pacific firmly under their domination, the Japanese decided to expand their control by capturing the tiny island of Midway. The atoll, little larger than Tokyo's Hibiya Park, was but a means to an end in the development of Japanese naval strategy. It was to be the bait for a much greater prize, the destruction of a reconstituted U. S. Pacific Fleet. Nevertheless, despite a numerical

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superiority that approached the overwhelming, and regardless of all plans, the Japanese suffered an irrevocable defeat.[1] Dawn on that memorable Thursday, 4 June 1942, found a supremely confident Japanese naval force. Sunset of the same day silhouetted a resoundingly defeated armada, not particularly in number of ships but in the vital balance of both offensive and defensive striking power. Of even greater importance was the emphatic victory produced for the Allies, the first decisive one in a thousand days of war. Midway was the turning point in the Pacific and probably in the entire U. S. effort of World War II. There would be other battles fought over larger areas, with more men, better ships and faster planes, but none would have a greater impact on the two opposing sides.

Japan with an extremely larger number of ships stood ready to destroy the hastily gathered and less powerful U. S. Fleet. If successful, the door was open to the isolation of Hawaii and even perhaps to its capture. For the U. S. to lose the Battle of Midway meant continuing the war against Japan from, not Hawaii but the west coast. The task was going to be formidable enough, and to be pushed back 2200 miles further from Japan, with the very real threat of having west coast cities under air attack, stood to make it just that much more difficult. Should the Japanese win at Midway, by decisively defeating their enemy's naval forces, there would be a greater probability that the U. S. might consider the prospects of a long and costly war and be willing to enter

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[1] U. S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Pacific, No. 378, Interrogation of Adm Soemu Toyoda, Chief, Naval General Staff.

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a negotiated peace that would leave Japan with the vast resources for which she had battled the first six months of the war.

Unlike many navy battles, Midway stands out as a study in command. Almost any engagement can be broken down to a study of leadership or command, but in the Battle of Midway command decisions largely dominated the outcome. Amid the general confusion that still surrounds details of this battle certain features stand out in bold relief. The battle was fought almost in its entirety by naval aviation veterans of Japan on the one hand and a new, trained but not battle tested fighting group from the United States on the other. Thousands of men were within a hundred miles of each other, but only a few actually saw the foe. With such separation, strong and dynamic leadership was required at all levels. From the senior commanders, through the chain of command to the commander of an airplane section, the naval action demanded the assumption of command responsibilities in the fullest sense of the word. When this was demonstrated in a positive sense, under the most adverse conditions, the result was a clear and decisive victory for an inferior naval force against an adversary who entered the arena of conflict firmly convinced that nothing could stop him.

The battle provided other unusual aspects related to the study of command, including whether a naval commander, responsible for employment of over a hundred ships, can in modern warfare effectively control that force while he himself is at sea. Closely related to the

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subject of command and control is the degree of initiative and responsibility that may be given to an immediate subordinate on the staff as well as that allowed to subordinate commanders miles away. Midway forced the issues to be met for it was not the classic naval battle with the commander on the bridge directing the maneuvers of his forces and the firing of the main batteries and torpedoes. Also, the battle introduced in its fullest light a new star, the aircraft carrier. While the Battle of the Coral Sea may properly be classified as the first naval battle between carriers, it was in reality a stumbling affair, poorly executed and with few of the advantages and limitations of carrier warfare in evidence. The carrier changed naval warfare as nothing else had done since the introduction of the steam engine and the iron hull. Under the new concept, the commander could bring his forces to the area; he could plan their employment but once committed he could do little to influence the tactical situation of the battle. The on-the-scene decisions had to be delegated to a junior commander, who might have been a rear admiral commanding a task force; a lieutenant commander heading a submarine or a carrier aircraft squadron or a brand new, young officer flying a single plane. The supreme commander had a new weapon in the carrier whose main battery, the plane, could fire 150 to 200 miles with devastating accuracy but which was not subject to the absolute control of the commander.[1]

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[1] LCdr John A. Collet, "The Aircraft Carrier - The Backbone of Aero-Sea Warfare," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, LXVIII (December, 1942), 1742.

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Command in its broadest sense is synonymous with leadership. The development of leadership differed widely between the Anglo-Saxon and the Oriental and that partially explains why certain actions were taken or why no action was taken at all when to all appearances one or more courses were clearly indicated. The study of command is an examination of the individual. This naval encounter was a classic example of command at all levels. With surface forces separated by hundreds of miles, commanders were forced to place the destructive means of war into the hands of young men some of whom were knowledgeable, brave and audacious and others who failed to live up to the minimum standards expected of a commander. The commanders themselves were frequently placed in positions where the true temper of their character manifested itself.

Midway for the Japanese actually commenced with their attack on Pearl Harbor. In following months victory followed victory; the continued steaming of its fleet units and the rapid accession of valuable areas all put a strain on ships and men and contributed to the ultimate Japanese defeat in the Central Pacific. The December attack on Pearl Harbor had been the consummation of months of detailed planning and intelligence gathering, of table maneuvers and carefully camouflaged exercises aimed at eliminating every flaw while still keeping all but a privileged few in ignorance of the real attack and target. Problems that were deemed insolvable were resolved with alacrity. Although U. S. naval officers had war-gamed exactly such a surprise

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attack on Pearl Harbor as was executed by the Japanese, it was practiced thousands of miles away in the academic halls of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. The element of surprise, the direction of attack and even the timing of a Sunday morning were all envisioned by the Navy students.[1] What escaped all was the extent of the operation; the employment of fast battleships, mobile logistic support forces and six powerful, fleet size aircraft carriers whose planes acted as a single, integrated air force. A single carrier raiding the islands or even two striking at the same time was a recognized possibility, but to take six carriers and weld the torpedo planes, divebombers and fighters into one mighty air striking power exceeded all estimation of capabilities given to the Japanese and was far beyond the concept of employment of our own carrier forces.

Much credit for the Japanese success at Pearl Harbor must be given to Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. As Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet he was the most important officer in the naval structure. While others technically outranked him, he was commander of the ships and airplanes of the navy, the operating force. In Admiral Yamamoto the Japanese had an outstandingly well qualified leader. Born of humble parents in the small west Honshu village of Kushigun Sonshomura, he was given the surname Isoruku, the Japanese for fifty-six, the age of his school-master father when he, the

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[1] Interview with RADM Logan C. Ramsey, USN (Ret) conducted at The Chetwynds, Rosemont, Pennsylvania on 1 July 1966.

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seventh child and fifth son, was born. Eta Jima provided all the rigors of a service school and duty on the cruiser NISSHIN as she accompanied the MIKASA, flagship of Admiral Togo, during the 1905 Battle of Tsushima Straits, developed the character and professional ability of Admiral Yamamoto. The battle also left him minus the tips of two fingers of his left hand as a result of a shell explosion.[1] Tours in the United States as a student at Harvard, and as Naval Attache from 1925-27, aided him in recognizing the industrial potential of Japan's most likely foe. Admiral Yamamoto's career followed the usual pattern of a naval career officer with a mixture of duty at sea and ashore.

His selection to flag rank in 1929 enabled him to be a member of the Japanese delegation attending the 1930 London Naval Disarmament Conference. On his return home and after a brief stint in the headquarters activity of naval aviation, he assumed command of Carrier Division 1. The eight months that were spent aboard the carrier left a lasting impression of the potential of naval aviation and provided him with first hand experience in carrier operations. While his contemporaries were espousing the virtues of the battleship, the speed and maneuverability of the destroyer or the long cruising range of the new submarines, Admiral Yamamoto was busy listening to the pleas of aviation enthusiasts, trying and testing their ideas and supporting the need for more naval aviation. On leaving the carrier

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[1] John D. Potter, Yamamoto, The Man Who Menaced America (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 11.

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division in 1934 he was promoted to Vice Admiral and assigned to the Naval General Staff, an ideal place for pushing adoption of some of the tested and proven aspects of naval aviation. He was smart, alert and enthusiastic regarding the Navy and was under no illusions concerning the outcome of a war between the United States and Japan. Wartime propagandists pictured him as a man stating he would dictate peace terms in the White House at the very time when he was writing his friend and classmate, Admiral Teikichi Hori that the Pearl Harbor attack placed him in a position of "having made a decision diametrically opposed to my own personal opinion."[1] He was not opposed to attacking Pearl Harbor, but of going to war with the United States. In enjoying such a strong position in the navy, it is remarkable that he was at the same time able to remain free from the internal bickering and political fighting that threatened to destroy Japanese military hierarchy in the years immediately preceding the war. His pro-British sympathies nearly led to his assassination in July 1939 while serving as Vice Minister of the Navy.[2] When in mid-August 1939 Admiral Yamamoto broke his flag in NAGATO as Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet, he assumed the Imperial Japanese Navy's most responsible position with a reputation untarnished and free of political obligations, and with an admiration from within the fleet that bordered on veneration.

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[1] James A. Field, Jr., "Admiral Yamamoto," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXV(October, 1949), 1112.

[2] Robert J. C. Butow, Tojo and the Coming of the War (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 129n.

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Second to Admiral Yamamoto in popularity and esteem throughout Japan, at the time of the Battle of Midway, was Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo. Commander of the Mobile Force or, as it was also known, the First Air Fleet or the First Carrier Striking Force. It was Admiral Nagumo who commanded the mighty force that left fog-shrouded Hitokappu Bay in the northern Kuriles, transitted the lonely expanse of the storm-battered north Pacific and then headed south for a surprise attack on Oahu. Nor did his success end with the two air attacks on Hawaiian military installations. The six carriers headed west in anticipation of supporting the Japanese army in its conquest of the Philippines, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. On the way from the Hawaiian area, Admiral Nagumo detached a part of his fleet carrier strength, the SORYU and HIRYU of the second carrier division, to support the Japanese assault on Wake Island. The remainder of the Mobile Force, instead of heading for the South China Sea, returned to a Japan drunk with the success of the Pearl Harbor attack.[1] Few stopped to analyze the results of the air attack and only the wisest noted that none of the American carriers had been attacked. Notwithstanding the lack of contact with the American carriers, the Nagumo force headed south soon after the beginning of the new year. By 5 January the carriers were again standing out of Hashirajima anchorage, bound for a brief pause at the naval bastion of Truk then

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[1]Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya, Midway - The Battle That Doomed Japan (Annapolis, Md.: U. S. Naval Institute, 1955), p. 36.

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on to Rabaul, Kavieng on New Ireland, and New Guinea's northern cities of Lae and Salamaua. After supporting the landings on these islands, the force again returned to Truk. In early February, the Mobile Force prepared to sortie for the Celebes Islands only to be delayed by a report of the first U. S. carrier raid, an attack on the Marshalls. After a fruitless search, the four carriers, SORYU and HIRYU having replaced the SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU, once more headed south and west, not for the Celebes, but for Australia's exposed northwest coast.

On 19 February, 188 planes under Commander Mitsuo Fuchida launched from a position 220 miles north-northwest of Darwin, the capital of Australia's Northern Territory Province. The combination of fighters, divebombers and level bombers made fast work of the installations, defenses and harbor facilities as well as destroying eleven ships. Once more the carrier force replenished, this time at Staring Bay on the Island of Celebes' south coast, before joining with other Japanese forces to support the 3 March landing on Java.[1] With the area between the home islands and northern Australia firmly under their control the Japanese next moved their carrier force, once again totaling six, into the Indian Ocean.

Under Fuchida's able leadership, a balanced force of 180 planes was launched for an early Sunday morning attack. This time the sleepy colonial capital of Colombo, Ceylon, shook with the explosions of

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[1] Ibid, p. 40.

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Japanese aerial bombs. On the advice of his air officer, Admiral Nagumo did not commit all his planes to the Colombo attack. The decision irritated the pilots left behind who feared they would miss the excitment.[1] Before the morning was over, a second group under Lieutenant Commander Takashige Egusa, found and attacked the two British cruisers DORSETSHIRE and CORNWALL. Without fighter defense and woefully weak in antiaircraft guns, the two warships could do little more than maneuver at high speed, a pitifully weak defense against torpedo and divebomber attack. In short order both ships were on their way to the bottom. Four days later on 9 April, Fuchida carried out a second attack on Ceylon. This time the target was the port city of Trincomalee on the island's northeast coast. Unlike the Colombo attack, Hawker Hurricane fighters were waiting for the Japanese, but the Zeroes made fast work of the slower British fighter. Before Fuchida was back aboard the AKAGI, Egusa was on his way to follow up a scout plane report of two British ships. In a skillfully coordinated fifteen minute attack, the Japanese sank the aircraft carrier HERMES and her escorting destroyer VAMPIRE.[2]

The loss of the British carrier marked the end of the Mobile Force in the Indian Ocean. Four months of nearly continuous

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[1] Minoru Genda, "A Record of Air Destruction," The True Story of the Pacific War, Vol II: Midway to Retreat from Guadalcanal ed. Masanori Ito (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Sha., 1960), p. 79.

[2] Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol IV: The Hinge of Fate (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), p. 180.

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operations were taking toll even on the Japanese. There had been personnel losses which, while not high in numbers, included several skilled individuals. Among those lost were pilots, gunners, and radiomen. Equally important was the prolonged use of machinery and electronic equipment. Some had received proper maintenance, but the remainder had been in continual use or was located in areas inaccessible while the ship was underway. Tired though they may have been, the Nagumo forces, from the commander to the lowest seaman, were elated with their unparalleled success; and they had every right to be. Nowhere had their attacks been beaten off. The speed with which the four British warships had been destroyed led some to believe that there was no defense againstthe air attack of a large carrier force. In the few instances where opposition was encountered it had been quickly dispatched by the fighter defense. It was not unreasonable, therefore, for the Nagumo force, which in the past four months had sailed more than 50,000 miles, to return to the Inland Sea with an air of unconquerability. By 23 April, the entire force, less Carrier Division 5, was at home ports where the ships and men that sailed them were warmly hailed as heroes.

A contributing factor to the cockiness and matter of fact attitude of many Japanese naval officers was the plaudits accorded them by the newspapers from one end of the Island Empire to the other. The laurels heaped on the military commenced with the news of Pearl Harbor and gained momentum in the ensuing months. With so large a percentage of the population aware of the esteemed position of the

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Army and Navy, it was not long before the men in uniform were toasted and feted in all parts of Nippon. For many the exhilarating period led them to relax and to forget the thorough planning and preparation that had characterized the opening scenes of the war. By the time the forces were ready to deploy to Midway, the press had built a picture of an infallible Japanese fighting machine combating an enemy that could do nothing correctly and who allegedly lacked the courage to do it even if he knew how.

The day that the Mobile Force sortied from its Japanese base was also Navy Day. While the press may have been unduly laudatory on this auspicious occasion, the tenor of their remarks was similar to ones made in the preceding months. The English edition of the Japan Times and Advertiser remarked beneath its banner headlines on the front page that "this year, Navy Day is not a day of mere remembrance, not a mere reminder; it is a day of fulfillment. The Japanese Navy has not only duplicated the exploits of 37 years ago, but it has repeated it [sic] time and again and in an unbelievably greater scale . . . Navy Day this year is the climax for which all Navy Days of past years have been in preparation. This is the moment of fulfillment."

The paper then echoed the Government's line by noting that "Today, Britain's control over the seas has vanished, thanks to the work of the German and Italian submarines and more to the work of the Japanese Navy." The article then continued, "Britain's auxiliary, the United States, has likewise had her navy practically destroyed by the

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Japanese Navy. As a result, Japan stands today as the premier naval Power of the world. It may well presage the rise of Japan in the future history of the world to a position comparable to that which Britain has occupied in the past."[1]

The Japanese language Nichi Nichi featured an article by retired Vice Admiral Ichiro Sato. He compared the will of the individual fighting man, stating that there was no fighting spirit in the American soldier. His worthy opponent, the Japanese soldier or sailor was prepared "to give up one's life in order to crush the enemy."[2]

Although Admiral Sato was grossly unjust to many an American serviceman, his remark on the acceptance of a Japanese warrior to die for his country's cause was no idle boast. This willingness to die, regardless of the status of a particular campaign, typified the Japanese. It formed the basis of the Banzai charges, of the refusal to surrender when all hope was lost and it became the focal point of the Kamikaze pilot. The genesis of this goes deep into Japanese history and the Oriental philosophy on life itself.

In Japan a person entered the world with obligations that could never be satisfied. On was the Japanese expression for the debt whose limitless payments were referred to as gimu. The on owed to the family was known as ko. Of even greater importance was the responsibility

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[1] Japan Times and Advertiser, May 27, 1942, p. 1.

[2] Nichi Nichi (Tokyo, Japan), May 27, 1942, p. 1.

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to the Emperor, the chu. From the time he was old enough to comprehend, the Japanese child learned of the "inviolability" of the Emperor. He was placed on a pedestal that was untouchable. He was a symbol, a super-religious object commanding loyalty far greater than that accorded the flag.[1] There was no analogous comparison in Western society, even the Monarch of the British Empire. It was commonly understood that the wishes of the Emperor were expressed through intermediaries, but the accomplishment of these was a matter of direct spiritual relationship between the subject and his ruler. Thus, if the soldier had been directed to fight to the death he knew that this was the will of the Emperor and he must fill it without question.

The Japanese also lived under a different code of honor than his adversary. The American would fight until the odds were hopeless. He then considered it honorable to surrender. This was not the procedure in Japan for honor was closely associated with fighting to the death. To surrender was to be disgraced. The captive was "dead" to his former life and could not hold his head up again in Japan. The position of honor, perhaps more than anything else, explains why so few Japanese surrendered during the war. There were examples of men afloat in the open seas refusing rescue, even shooting themselves, to avoid capture.[2]

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[1]Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1946), p. 117.

[2]Captain Tameichi Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain (New York: Ballentine Books, 1961), p. 299.

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While honor and death had been deeply embedded in the Japanese, militarists lost no effort in exploiting them. Frequent references to the code of the Samurai and his willingness to die for his Shogun was used to encourage men to uphold the proper picture of Japan. Even Admiral Yamamoto related the responsibility for defending the home islands, not to the country, but to the person of the Emperor. The considerations of chu and the Japanese code of honor were to weigh heavily on many of the officers responsible for planning and executing the Midway operation. Valuable and experienced leaders were to be lost at Midway because of their sense of honor and their personal feeling of having, by the disaster inflicted upon their command, failed to uphold their obligation to the Emperor. Japan would suffer for the loss of this leadership, but this aspect was apparently never seriously considered.

The high esteem with which the Imperial Japanese Navy was held was well deserved. In a hundred days, the submarines, ships, airplanes and men of Japan had hurled that nation's military might across the vast expanse of the Pacific and into the Indian Ocean. Her fighting forces had sped down the littoral of the Asian continent, captured the treasures of the Indies and attacked the harbors and cities of Australia. The crackle of Japanese guns had been heard from Madagascar's Diego Suarez to California's San Diego and across the seas, continents and islands that intervened. The Rising Sun was at its zenith.

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CHAPTER II

ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO INSISTS ON MIDWAY

The return of the Nagumo forces signaled the termination of the first phase operations. In the five months since Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had severely damaged the Hawaiian military facilities; captured the Philippines, except for Corregidor; overwhelmed the British defenders at Hong Kong, Singapore and the Malay Peninsula and destroyed or captured the Dutch forces defending Java, Sumatra, Borneo and the islands forming the Netherlands Indies. With these territories under their control, the Japanese had unlimited access to the raw materials so vital for the national economy not to mention its war machine. Above all, they could be assured an adequate supply of oil for their war needs.

Long before the end of the first phase operations, military planners turned their thoughts to follow-on operations. The success of the first phase indicated, as early as the end of 1941, that they would be completed by the end of March. The second phase of operations seemed to offer a wide range of opportunities. Everywhere the Allies were on the defensive and in all directions that the Japanese had moved their progress had been virtually unimpeded.

The formulation of Japanese strategy, like that of the United States, rested with the highest military authorities. In Japan, Imperial

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General Headquarters bore the responsibility for the successful prosecution of the war. Unlike the U. S. Combined Chiefs of Staff, the Imperial General Staff was jointly functioning in name only. In actual performance each service did its strategic planning unilaterally. Only with great effort was joint, coordinated planning made effective. For the Navy, the strategic planning responsibility was a function of the Naval General Staff, operating under Admiral Osami Nagano in his capacity as Chief, Naval General Staff. This Headquarters, located in Tokyo, did in fact develop much of the strategic planning, but did not, however, do all of it.

Unlike the United States Navy, the Japanese Navy's operating force, Combined Fleet, also did a significant amount of the strategic planning. As an example, the Pearl Harbor attack was planned not at the Naval General Staff, but 350 miles away, at Hashirajima. The personal reputation of Admiral Yamamoto was an important factor in passing on a Combined Fleet plan. So stubborn had been the opposition of the Naval General Staff to the Pearl Harbor attack, that Admiral Yamamoto had threatened to resign if it were not accepted.

Shortly after the beginning of 1942, Admiral Yamamoto asked his Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Matome Ugaki, to have the staff initiate studies directed toward second phase operations. At the same time, Admiral Nagano directed his deputy, Vice Admiral Seiichi Ito, to have the Naval General Staff examine the concept of second phase operations. In their early stages, the studies were made separately by Combined Fleet and the Naval General Staff without any particular cooperation

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or coordination.

Admiral Ugaki gathered his key staff officers into his cabin on the battleship NAGATO and provided them with the commander's guidance for second phase operations.[1] Surprisingly, this was a study of Indian Ocean operations. While Admiral Nagumo's attacks about the Ceylon area were still three months away, they bore no direct association with the proposed second phase Indian Ocean operations. The movement toward the west was designed to destroy British influence in that area. For years there had been a strong insurgent movement within India aimed at establishing independence from British rule. A joint operation by the Japanese Army and Navy could assist the independence movement and at the same time destroy British predominance and power in that part of the world. There were, the planners believed, strong fringe benefits from such an operation. There were indications that the attacks would aid Germany in her fight against Russia and might even go so far as to enable a union of troops of the two Axis powers.

The details of the vast operations were fraught with difficulties, foremost of which was the distance involved from Japan or like supporting bases. Commander Yasuji Watanabe, the staff logistics officer, developed the plan and with the assistance of Captain Kameto Kuroshima conducted table maneuvers on the Indian Ocean operation. These were

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[1] Diary of RADM Matome Ugaki, IJN, 5 January 1942 (English translation rights owned by Dr. Gordon W. Prange; published in Japanese under the title Senso Roku in 1956).

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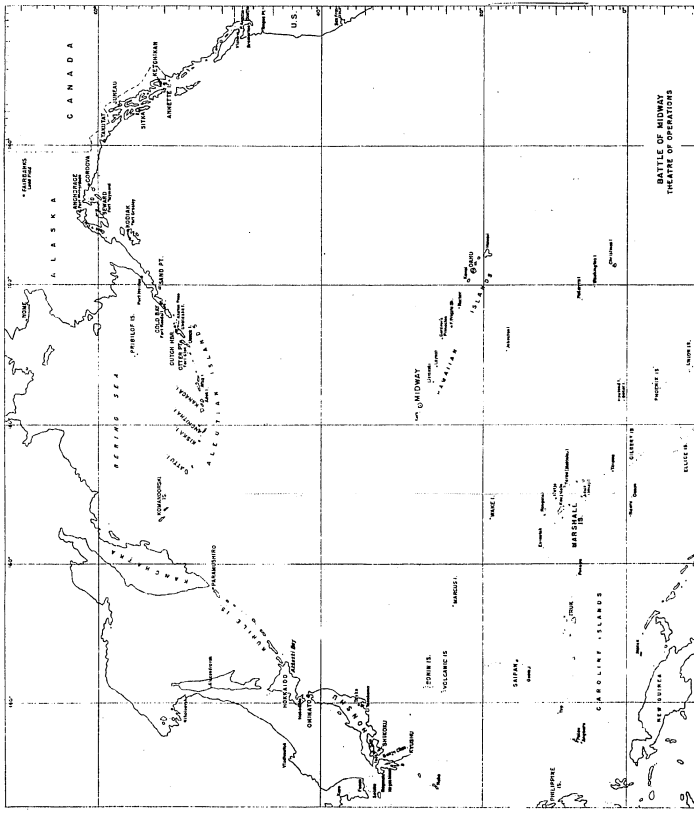

Theater of Operations

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held on the new flagship YAMATO between 20 and 22 February 1942.[1] The maneuvers were attended by members of the Army General Staff as well as Prince Hikada representing the Imperial family. No visible opposition was evidenced to Watanabe's plan, but on his return to Tokyo the Army submitted their opposition to the Navy operation. Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Hideki Tojo disapproved the scheme reasoning that the costs would be prohibitive for the advantages gained.

Even before disapproval of the Indian Ocean plan, Admiral Ugaki directed Kuroshima and Watanabe to study other areas for future operations. The two staff officers now studied the possibility of capturing Hawaii. The study was not as thorough as their previous effort but the reasoning behind it was one that would control actions of Combined Fleet in the months to come. Soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, Combined Fleet realized that, as gratifying as the attack results had been, the United States Pacific Fleet had not been decisively beaten. At least three carriers, even after the reported sinking of the LEXINGTON[2] on 11 January, were still operating in the Pacific. As long as this force survived it constituted a real threat to the Japanese Navy, the newly conquered territories, and even to the main islands of Japan. Watanabe reasoned that an attack on Hawaii would force the U. S. Navy to fight in its defense. On closer examination it was estimated that at

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[1] Interview with Capt Yasuji Watanabe, formerly IJN, conducted at Sanno Hotel, Tokyo, Japan on 3 and 4 February 1966. Watanabe was the senior surviving officer of Combined Fleet Staff.

[2] The ship damaged in the submarine attack was not the LEXINGTON but her sister carrier, the SARATOGA.

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least four divisions would be required to occupy Hawaii. The Army could not free a force of this size and even had they been available, there were not enough transports to move this large force over such a great distance.[1] By early March, any Japanese plan for the seizure of Hawaii had, at least for the time, been abandoned.

A third plan was considered briefly, one which even today seems far removed from direct Navy responsibility. The two services would cooperate in extending the China War inland by capturing Chungking. With its capture and the killing of Chiang Kai-shek, the Japanese hoped to close the China Incident and free the Army forces committed to that part of the Asian mainland. Once more, forces required exceeded capabilities. Under closer scrutiny it was estimated that 4,000 trucks would be required, to say nothing of the other equipment and supplies needed for so large an undertaking.[2] The plan was submitted to the Naval General Staff which quickly turned it down. With Premier Tojo's insistence on keeping the cost of the war down, the Army also vetoed further consideration of the Chungking plan.

Time was rapidly running out on first phase operations when Admiral Ugaki sent for the two officers charged with planning. He carefully reviewed with Kuroshima and Watanabe the earlier plans and their reasons for being turned down. Finally, he directed the two to prepare a plan that could be executed by the Navy alone. Additional

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[1] Interview with RADM Kameto Kuroshima, formerly IJN, conducted at the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan, 28 November 1963. Hereinafter referred to as Kuroshima Interview.

[2] Watanabe Interview.

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guidance from Admiral Yamamoto included both the strategical and tactical development of the plan. Once more the commander provided the broad guide lines so essential to thorough and expeditious planning. Admiral Yamamoto told the two officers to develop a plan centering on the capture of Midway Island, the prime purpose being to bring on a decisive naval engagement between the two naval forces.[1]

The decision to concentrate planning on Midway was based upon a number of factors. Although Japan had been highly successful in the first phase of operations, certain additional objectives were required to insure the desired measure of security and protection of the home islands. The bases were also thought necessary for the unhindered development of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Midway fell into this category, as a needed buffer. The U. S. carrier raids, while primarily of nuisance value, had set the alert mind of Admiral Yamamoto in motion. So far the American carriers had struck only Japanese occupied areas such as the Marshalls, Wake and Marcus Islands. The great expanse between Midway in the Central Pacific and the Aleutians to the north offered a wide open area for American task forces to approach the Japanese home islands. If Midway could be captured and turned into an unsinkable carrier, then long range, land-based reconnaissance and patrol planes might extend surveillance north from Midway for hundreds of miles. In effect, these patrol planes would reduce avenues of approach to Japan now scantilly watched.

[1] Admiral Ugaki Diary, 14 January 1942.

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The main considerations in seizing Midway, however, and one which never changed in importance with the Commander of Combined Fleet, was the long sought decisive sea battle between the two opposing naval forces.

Admiral Yamamoto had frequently commented on the need to defeat decisively the U. S. Pacific Fleet before Japan could be assured of retaining her new territories.[1] Pre-war Japanese strategy had envisaged an enemy approaching the island nation from the remote east. When close to Japan, the fleet would engage the invaders in a classic sea battle similar to Jutland. However, as the Pacific Fleet had been sufficiently damaged at Pearl Harbor, Admiral Yamamoto thought that it would not venture west until it had been reinforced by either Atlantic Fleet units, new construction, or both. The longer Japan waited for the decisive battle, the stronger would be the enemy. Thus, the selection of Midway as the first target of second phase operations was predicated on the expectation that this would be the most likely threat to bring out the American forces. By utilizing Midway, Combined Fleet sought to battle the American fleet, but should the U. S. forces avoid battle, then Japan would still be able to seize an island important to her outer security. This was the conclusion reached by the two planning officers. It was accepted by the Chief of Staff and enthusiastically approved by Admiral Yamamoto.

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[1] James A. Field, Jr. "Admiral Yamamoto," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXV (October, 1949), 1110.

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Throughout most of March, the staff of Combined Fleet developed the detailed plans for the Midway operation. It studied the operation from the force requirement point of view; considered probable opposition strength and examined the forces available for its own use. The staff was small, totaling only fourteen officers, who were still busy conducting first phase operations while planning for Midway. Admiral Ugaki had been careful in selecting his Plans Officer. In Watanabe he had not only a logistics officer, but one experienced in gunnery and in Marine Corps matters as well. Nor did the Chief of Staff ignore his responsibility of supervising the staff and encouraging free and open discussion of differing points of view. One particular item was the degree of dispersion desired and required by the force. Watanabe favored wide dispersion, with a concentration of forces at the proper time and place. Commander Akira Sasaki, the Air Officer, argued that the greater the diversion of Japanese Fleet units the less effective would be the air defense available to these forces.[1] Sasaki was also opposed to including the Aleutians in the campaign, basing his objections on the diversion of and wide separation of participating forces.

Planning for Midway included an amphibious landing, requiring the coordination of both air and naval gunfire support for the landing force. From an analysis of the objective, and relying heavily on his

[1] Watanabe Interview. Sasaki's argument was tactically sound. The surface ships were capable of high speed steaming, strong surface gunfire and torpedo delivery. However, none was equipped with radar and the guns assigned exclusively to antiaircraft defense, as well as those of a dual purpose, had primitive fire control equipment for aerial targets.

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knowledge gained while teaching at Yokosuka's gunnery school, Watanabe determined that two Special Naval Landing Forces would be required to capture Midway after it had been softened from the air and by ships' guns. A Special Naval Landing Force was a Navy organization built along the lines of the U. S. Marine Corps. It was composed of Navy personnel selected for this specialized type of duty. The enlisted men were trained at Yokosuka, the huge naval base forty miles south of Tokyo, while the naval officers attached received special training at Army schools. The units carried the designation of the home naval base, such as the First Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force. The force had about 1,200 men, having its own vehicles, small tanks, machine guns and three-inch howitzers. The Kure and Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Forces were assigned to capture Midway.[1]

To move the landing force from the transports to shore, the Navy would rely on the standard barge or "Daihatsu." These diesel powered ramped craft could carry 100 men and the twenty foot width and sixty foot length assured a shallow enough draft to bring them close to shore so the troops could wade the final distance. The barges were carried on the transports and lowered by boom on arrival in the objective area. Personnel were loaded by use of the accommodation ladder and also nets slung over the ship's side.

The naval task organization planned by Combined Fleet would represent the largest assembly of naval combatant power ever to sail

[1] Samuel E. Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950), p. 89.

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under the flag of Japan. The striking power would be centered around the six carriers of the Mobile Force. Then there would be the Invasion Force and the Main Body. These were the forces initially programmed to seize the island and, hopefully, later battle the U. S. Pacific Fleet. As mentioned before, strategic planning was done by both Combined Fleet and the Naval General Staff. While the YAMATO hummed with the planning of Combined Fleet for the capture of Midway, the same problem was under study in Tokyo.

Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome headed the Naval General Staff's First Section, the one charged with operations and strategic planning. The First Section was divided into the Dire Section, devoted to long range plans; a training and readiness section and one for current operations. Captain Sadatoshi Tomioka headed the current operations section. There were few better qualified professionally than this intelligent, forty-five year old naval officer. A graduate of Eta Jima in the class of 1917, Tomioka came from an old naval family. His grandfather helped construct the Kugawa Navy while his father, Vice Admiral Sadayesu Tomioka, had been Chief of Operations in Tokyo during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Tomioka, who in 1930 received a sword from the Emperor for being the number one graduate at the Naval War College, came to the Current Operations Section in 1940 after two and a half years as Senior Staff Officer of Second Fleet. He was charged with developing second phase operations for the Naval General Staff. His two most important assistants were Commander Yuji Yamamoto, son-in-law of Admiral Teijiro Toyoda, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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in the Prince Konoye Cabinet, and a fellow classmate of Yuji Yamamoto, Commander Kazunari Miyo.[1] Yamamoto was no relation to the Admiral commanding aboard the YAMATO.

Like Combined Fleet, the Naval General Staff planners looked for an operation that could be executed without any assistance from Army. This was the main reason for discarding the plan for landing in Australia. And like Admiral Yamamoto the Naval General Staff was anxious to develop a decisive fleet engagement. The two planning agencies differed in principle on how to assure that the U. S. fleet units would fight on terms favorable to Japan. From their studies, Tomioka, Yamamoto, and Miyo concluded that second phase operations should be toward severing the United States - Hawaii lines of communications to Australia. They believed that this sea route was so vital to the United States that should it be severed there would be no recourse but for the United States to fight to reopen it. To accomplish this the Naval General Staff wanted to capture New Caledonia, Samoa and the Fijis. As an initial step in this direction, orders were sent out directing the capture of Tulagi and the establishment of an air base on nearby Guadalcanal Island. Tulagi would be used primarily as a seaplane base.

The concept envisaged by the Naval General Staff offered several advantages. The point at which the sea route was to be cut was a

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[1] Interview with RADM Sadatoshi Tomioka, formerly IJN, conducted at the Sanno Hotel, Tokyo, Japan on 6 May 1966.

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relatively short distance from numerous islands which either had now or could quickly develop airstrips, making them "unsinkable carriers."[1] The area of operation would be one favorable to Japan for shore-based aircraft, with ranges exceeding those of the carrier planes available, while the U. S. would not have them. Then, too, Truk, Kavieng and Rabaul were bases that could support the Japanese forces. And the transitting between them and the Fijis would be relatively protected by the islands that bordered that body of water that was soon to become known as the Slot. Finally, while Japan would enjoy short hauls from close-by support bases, the U. S. would be fighting far from its bases, in Australia or the Hawaiian Islands. Although the Naval General Staff developed the plan, it did not direct Combined Fleet to execute it or to even consider the tactical aspects of it.[2]

Admiral Yamamoto was not one to wait for instructions. Putting his blessings on the Midway plan he sent his assistant, Watanabe, to Tokyo to present it to the Naval General Staff and receive approval. Flying from Hashirajima to Yokosuka's Oppama airfield and then taking the electric commuter to Tokyo's Shimbashi station, the tall, thin and energetic planner made his way to the two story brick structure in Hibiya and climbed to the second floor offices of Current Operations. It was 5 April 1942 in Tokyo. Watanabe outlined the plans developed

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[1] Interview with Capt Kazunari Miyo, formerly IJN, conducted at the Sanno Hotel, Tokyo, Japan on 6 May 1966. Hereinafter referred to as Miyo Interview.

[2] Tomioka Interview. However, both Kuroshima and Watanabe were aware of the plan even though it was never presented to Combined Fleet.

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at Combined Fleet for the capture of Midway. Tomioka, Miyo and Yuji Yamamoto listened as the details of the operation were unfolded. Suddenly, Miyo shot out a stream of questions that immediately indicated his disapproval of the plan. How could the island be held, once captured, against an American counterattack? Would the surveillance of the North Pacific approaches to Japan be effective? What if the Pacific Fleet failed to appear? Would not the use of six fleet carriers be wasted in capturing a near valueless island? To each question, Watanabe had a carefully prepared reply. The discussions became heated as Miyo pointed out the weaknesses of the plan. In one respect Miyo enjoyed an advantage over the other planners: he was a naval aviation pilot. A short, thin man, with teeth heavily filled with gold, he was one of Japan's most capable airmen. He had, years before, executed the first night carrier landing by bringing his plane aboard the small carrier HOSHO.[1] Surprisingly, Miyo was the only aviator on the Tokyo staff and because of this his word carried extra weight when he spoke of aviation matters. Miyo was particularly opposed to the aerial reconnaissance part planned by Combined Fleet. He pointed out that long-range reconnaissance aircraft could cover the line between Midway and the Aleutians by flying half the distance from each base. While this might look good on a chart, in practice it meant that the most distant point of flight was under surveillance for the

[1] Interview with Masanori Odagiri, former Captain IJN, conducted at the Historical Section, Japanese Self Defense Bureau, Tokyo, Japan on 28 January 1966.

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shortest time and that with bad weather, American forces could easily evade the reconnaissance aircraft. Furthermore, Midway was too close to Hawaii to be safe from B-17 attacks and would at all times be under the threat of submarines suddenly surfacing and firing at the island as well as interdicting a long and open supply line.[1] Tomioka joined in criticizing the Combined Fleet plan, stressing that it would be conducted in an area more favorable to the Pacific Fleet than to the Japanese forces.

Although Watanabe had presented the Combined Fleet plan in a capable manner, and had foreseen the questions of the Naval General Staff, he could also comprehend that continued discussion between himself and the Tokyo office would settle nothing. Regardless of how much he believed in it, the final decision rested with Admiral Nagano, Chief of the Naval General Staff. Watanabe asked for a recess in the discussion that would enable him to receive additional instructions from the Hashirajima Headquarters. He phoned directly to Admiral Yamamoto explaining to the Commander the impasse that had been reached between the two commands. Watanabe suggested a compromise but this was unthinkable to Yamamoto. He reaffirmed his earlier position saying:

> "The success of our entire strategy in the Pacific will be determined by whether we succeed in destroying the United States Fleet, particularly its carrier task forces. By launching the proposed operations against Midway we can succeed in drawing out the enemy's carrier strength and destroying it in decisive battle. If the enemy should avoid our challenge

[1] Miyo Interview.

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we shall still have an important gain as we will have advanced our defensive perimeter to Midway and the Western Aleutians without obstruction."[1]

By now Admiral Fukudome, who had commanded the NAGATO when Admiral Yamamoto assumed command of Combined Fleet in 1939 and who later served as his Chief of Staff, had been brought into the discussion.[2] He was well aware of the adamant nature of Admiral Yamamoto once he set his mind to something. Had he not battled the Naval General Staff for approval of the Pearl Harbor attack and, once authorized, had it not been brilliantly carried off? With reluctance Admiral Fukudome recommended to Admiral Nagano that the Navy General Staff approve the Midway plan.[3] In return for the approval, Combined Fleet agreed to include the concurrent capture of the Aleutians and later seizing of the Fijis as a part of second phase operations. Both Tomioka and Miyo were disappointed at the decision, the latter so much so that he "dropped tears" when he heard the decision.[4]

Two weeks after the 5 April struggle for adoption of the plan, nearly all opposition vanished. On 18 April, Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle led a flight of sixteen B-25 Army bombers from the deck

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[1] Potter, Yamamoto, The Man Who Menaced America, p. 151.

[2] Hiroyuki Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto (Tokyo: Shincho-Shan, Inc., 1965), p. 267.

[3] United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Pacific. Hereinafter referred to as USSBS. No. 503, Interrogation of VADM (then RADM) Shigeru Fukedome, Chief, First Section, Naval General Staff.

[4] Miyo Interview.

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of the aircraft carrier HORNET. Thirteen of the planes headed toward Tokyo while the others turned south toward Nagoya, Osaka and Kobe. Undetected by the Japanese defenses, each plane dropped its stick of four bombs and continued on its westerly heading. Outwardly, the raid caused no panic and the damage was so slight that the Japanese made the pun "Not Doolittle, but do little."[1] Within the higher echelons of command, though, it had a profound effect. These were not carrier aircraft so the attack must have originated from shore bases, the closest of which was Midway. Yuji Yamamoto told his lovely wife, Makiki, that this was only the beginning of the raids and that he wanted her to arrange to move the family to the safety of Yamanashi Prefecture.[2] Admiral Yamamoto was also concerned over the attack, writing to his Geisha, Michi Niwa, on 29 April that "I regret very much that Tokyo was air raided."[3]

The Army, which had scrupulously withheld supporting the Navy during planning operations, insisted, as a result of the Doolittle Raid, that they be included in the Midway Operation. One of the Army's most elite regiments, commanded by Colonel Kiyano Ichiki, whose name was given to the unit, was assigned to the operation. Ichiki had an outstanding record. His command of battalions in China had established his

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 270.

[2] Interview with Mrs. Makiko Yamamoto, widow of RADM Yuji Yamamoto, conducted at the American Embassy Annex, Tokyo, Japan on 6 May 1966. Yuji Yamamoto was lost at sea when the YAMATO was sunk by U. S. carrier aircraft on 7 April 1945.

[3] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 271.

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reputation as a brave and resolute officer and as an expert in infantry tactics.

The latter days of April were ones of furious planning at both Hashirajima and Tokyo. The responsibility for preventing repetitions of the Doolittle Raid rested heavily on Admiral Yamamoto. On returning to the YAMATO after a second trip to Tokyo in late April, Watanabe was ordered to set the attack on Midway for the earliest possible date. Admiral Fukudome had recommended a date in late June or early July,[1] a date that would allow time for more thorough preparations for the landing and enable some of the ships that were to participate to repair damaged equipment and load supplies. Admiral Yamamoto, after studying the recommendations for a later attack, ordered that the landing be conducted no later than 7 June. In a meeting with his staff he frankly stated that the longer the attack was delayed the greater would be the opposition from the U. S. Pacific Fleet. Nothing had been heard of the enemy, except for a few carrier raids, so it must be assumed that some ships damaged at Pearl Harbor had been repaired and that at least some of the ships formerly operating in the Atlantic had been shifted to the Pacific.[2] In both of these assumptions the Japanese commander was correct.

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[1] USSBS No. 503, Interrogation of VADM (then RADM) Shigeru Fukudome, Chief, First Section, Naval General Staff.

[2] The most important changes were YORKTOWN and HORNET moving into the Pacific. In addition, the battleships COLORADO and NEW MEXICO had been shifted to the San Francisco area.

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The decision to set 7 June as the final date stemmed from the phase of the moon. For years prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the Japanese had secretly trained in executing high speed night maneuvers at sea. Their optics were equal to that of any country and the highly propagandized tale that the Japanese had weak eyes was utterly false. Nevertheless, there was a period during the month when the moon would be especially favorable for night movements. For June, the last day was the seventh. At this time the moon, in its last quarter, would offer sufficient light to allow friendly forces to steam safely and still give a degree of concealment not offered by a brighter moon. The primary consideration for moonlight was given to the warships, but it also affected the landing force. Although the exact time of H-hour was never established, it was to have been early in the morning with the initial assault troops wading ashore under the waning light of a quarter moon.[1]

The date being set, the next order of business was determining the size of the force. As finally decided, Midway would be the direct concern of three surface forces.[2] The Landing Force would be a part of the Midway Invasion Force under the overall command of Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo who flew his three star flag from the truck of the heavy cruiser ATAGO, flagship of Second Fleet. The Invasion Force main

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[1] Watanabe Interview.

[2] The initial composition of Japanese naval forces, including the shore based aircraft is contained in Combined Fleet Operation Order No. 14. A more accessible document containing the final assigned forces is shown in Fuchida, . Midway - The Battle That Doomed Japan, Appendix II, pp 251-260. A summarized version is contained in Appendix A.

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body included Cruiser Divisions 4 and 5, totaling four heavy cruisers, and Battleship Division 3, the KONGO and HIEI. In addition there was the Screen Group; Carrier Group, the light carrier ZUIHO with her twelve Zero fighters and twelve torpedo bombers; a Supply Group of four oilers and a repair ship; Transport Group of sixteen ships with its escort of ten destroyers and the light cruiser JINTSU; Seaplane Tender Group; Minesweeper Group which would precede the Invasion Force and, finally, the Close Support Group. The last-named was composed of two destroyers, a fast oiler and four heavy cruisers whose firepower, size and speed made them more like battlecruisers. The Close Support Group was under command of Rear Admiral Takeo Kurita, a name that would be known to many later for his actions in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944.

The big guns of the Japanese were concentrated in the Main Force. Both the Main Force and Battleship Division One were under the personal command of Admiral Yamamoto. The offensive punch was carried in three goliaths, the NAGATO, former flagship of Combined Fleet, the MITSU, and the even larger and newer YAMATO whose nine 18.2 inch guns, nested in turrets of three.[1] The YAMATO, named for the province of Japan's ancient capital city, Nara,[2] was the most powerful ship afloat. She exceeded in size and speed the German battleships TIRPITZ and BISMARCK and our later sixteen-inch IOWA class battleships. To

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[1] United States Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas "Weekly Intelligence," Vol I: No. 15 (October 20, 1944), p. 6.

[2] Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, p. 26.

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balance this force, Combined Fleet added the light carrier HOSHO, two seaplane tenders and a screen of eight destroyers guided and controlled by the light cruiser SENDAI, flagship of Rear Admiral Shintaro Hashimoto's Destroyer Squadron Three. Under the plan, the Main Force would trail the others so as to be in a position to support either the Midway Invasion Force or the Mobile Force.

Of the three forces, initially assigned to Midway, the one with the greatest balance of offensive power was the Mobile Force. In nearly all respects this was the same force that had made the attack on Pearl Harbor. Once more Admiral Nagumo would lead the six carriers, AKAGI, KAGA, HIRYU, SORYU, SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU. To give added protection and support, Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe commanded Cruiser Division 8, TONE and CHIKUMA, and the second section of Battleship Division 3, HARUNA and KIRISHIMA. The screen, light cruiser NAGARA and eleven destroyers, completed the force except for the Supply Group of five oilers and the protecting destroyer AKIGUMO. The Mobile Force was to arrive in the vicinity of Midway in advance of the Invasion Force, starting their attack on the island early in the morning of 5 June, Tokyo time. By the time the Invasion Force was ready to land its assault units, the carrier aircraft would have wiped out Midway's air elements; destroyed any coast artillery guns that might endanger the transports and so shock and shatter the morale of the defenders that the two Special Naval Landing Force units would have no trouble coming ashore.[1] While this was the mission of the Mobile Force

[1] Watanabe Interview.

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it also had another assignment, one of locating and attacking any U. S. fleet units that might venture out to counter the Japanese attack on Midway. The carrier aircraft should be enough to do the job, but if not, then the support and screen groups were to hold the enemy fleet until the Main Force arrived with the huge guns of the YAMATO and her accompanying battleships.

When the Naval General Staff agreed to Admiral Yamamoto's plan for Midway, it was stipulated that seizure of key areas in the Aleutians would also be a part of the same operation. Unlike Midway, which could serve as an advanced base for surveillance flights over the main Hawaiian Islands, the Aleutians offered no offensive consideration for the Japanese. In the hands of the United States they stood as potential bases for long range air attack on Japan proper. Thus, capture of the Aleutians became a defensive objective. To assure rapid seizure of the two objectives, Attu and Kiska, Combined Fleet developed a force similar to that attacking Midway, although significantly weaker in carrier strength. The Main Body of the Northern Force was under Vice Admiral Moshiro Hosogaya and consisted of the heavy cruiser NACHI, two destroyers and five service ships.[1] The Second Carrier Striking Force centered around the light carriers RYUJO and JUNYO, supported by a pair of heavy cruisers and three destroyers. The Attu

[1] Detailed listing contained in "The Battle of Midway (including the Aleutian Phase), Strategical and Tactical Analysis," Naval War College, 1948, p. 32. NavPers 91067. Hereinafter referred to as Naval War College Analysis on Battle of Midway.

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Invasion Force consisted of the light cruiser ABUKUMA, three destroyers, a minelayer and a transport. The Invasion Force destined for Kiska was essentially the same except for an additional cruiser and transport.

There was one final force in the initial detailed planning, the Guard Force under Vice Admiral Shiro Takasu. Consisting of four battleships, two light cruisers and twelve destroyers, the Guard Force had a mission of screening the Aleutian forces and also providing final backup for the Midway forces.

By early May two additional forces were added, these being the Advance Force composed of submarines from the Sixth Fleet, and the Shore Based Air Force. The latter provided long range reconnaissance from Wake, Kwajalein in the Marshalls and from Jaluit. The two forces were to work together in one of the most important intelligence gathering aspects of the entire operation. Prior to World War II, normal commercial intercourse with Honolulu and the surrounding areas, had given the Japanese a great deal of information. As soon as the two countries were at war this stopped. As the need for a new method for gathering intelligence became greater, the Naval General Staff turned to its solitary pilot, Commander Miyo. After careful study Miyo concluded that the thirty-ton Kawanishi Type-2 flying boat could do the job if some help were available.[1] The range of the huge plane, nearly

[1] Miyo Interview. During the interview Miyo mentioned a number of events for which he claimed responsibility. These were confirmed by his superior, Tomioka, in a subsequent interview.

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4,000 miles, would not allow it to fly from either Wake or Wotje to Hawaii and return. If, on the other hand, the seaplane could set down in a sheltered area and refuel enroute to Hawaii, the trip could be made. This was tried on 4 March when two of the Kawanishi planes landed in the lagoon at uninhabited French Frigate shoals, about midway between Hawaii and Midway. Waiting for the two planes was a pair of submarines carrying aviation gas. The planes refueled and took off for Hawaii where they ineffectively bombed Pearl Harbor and Honolulu prior to flying non-stop from Oahu to Wotje.[1] Miyo had designated the refueling mission as Operation K.

To partially satisfy the urgent need for current intelligence, Miyo recommended that the two Kawanishi planes be again employed in flying over Oahu. The second Operation K called for the two planes to depart from Wotje at midnight on 29 May and to arrive at French Frigate shoals at 1730 the next day.[2] In addition to the three submarines assigned to refuel the seaplanes, three more were used in a supporting role. One was stationed between Wotje and French Frigate shoals as a radio picket ship. A second was lying submerged off Oahu's Keahole Point in case of a mishap to the planes and the final craft was eighty miles to the south of Oahu as a picket and weather vessel. The primary purpose of this second flight was to determine the presence of the U. S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor and its composition.

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan. p. 88.

[2] USSBS No. 466, Interrogation of Capt Yasuo Fujimori, Commanding Officer, I-121.

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Responsibility for the second Operation K fell upon Vice Admiral Nishizo Tsukahara's Shore Based Air Force. In addition, the 24th Flying Squadron from the Marshalls and the 26th Flying Squadron from Marcus offered protection to elements of the Midway Invasion Force until the ships moved out of range.[1]

Between 1 and 5 May the YAMATO was the scene of the most extensive table maneuvers since the start of the war. From all parts of the Empire, key naval officers came to Hashirajima to fight the Midway and Aleutian operations to the throw of dice. From far off Kwajalein came members of the staff of Vice Admiral Teruhisa Konatsu, commander of the submarines that together formed the Sixth Fleet. Admiral Kondo and his subordinate commanders also were present. Among them was Captain Ko Nagasawa, Chief of Staff of Cruiser Division 5 - Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi. Nagasawa vividly recalls the different atmosphere between the war games before the war and the ones conducted for Midway. In the latter, nearly all the commanders had returned from active combat that had been successful beyond their fondest expectations. The general tenor of the war games, or table maneuvers, was one of "This is a necessary drill, but don't worry we'll take care of anything that comes along."[2] This feeling of cockiness was shown most in the Mobile Force of Admiral

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[1] USSBS No. 252, Interrogation of Capt Yasumi Toyama, Chief of Staff, Destroyer Squadron 2.

[2] Interview with RADM Ko Nagasawa, JMSDF (ret), formerly IJN, conducted at the Sanno Hotel, Tokyo, Japan on 4 February 1966.

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Nagumo. The Commander's attitude was one of bored indifference and it permeated throughout his staff.

The war games conducted in YAMATO were a device peculiar to the service. Many of the cabins and offices of the great battleship were used to represent some particular unit of the attacking force. Inside each assigned space was the Chief of Staff, Operations Officer or some other responsible representative of the force concerned. Throughout the table maneuvers this officer performed as though he stood on the bridge of his flagship. Runners substituted for radios in sending and receiving tactical messages between superior, adjacent and subordinate echelons. Once assembled, the Chief Umpire initiated the games so as to follow the general scenario of the operations plan. Forces were sailed as they would be for the real thing. Even the planned air attacks against Midway were war gamed. When it was necessary to assess the damage on the enemy a clever resort to rolling dice was used. Enemy losses to attacking Japanese and the converse were determined by the the throw of the dice. The dice could roll either for or against the friendly forces and Admiral Ugaki as Chief Umpire was not one to have the plan he had supervised interrupted by chance. On one occasion enemy land-based aircraft attacked the Mobile Force and the cast of the dice indicated that nine enemy hits had been sufficient to sink two carriers.[1] Admiral Ugaki stepped in and ruled only one carrier sunk and even this subsequently returned to life as the battle problem continued.

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan. p. 96.

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A silent, but by no means casual, observer to the war games was Admiral Yamamoto. On conclusion of the games, a critique followed in which the commander raised several pointed questions on the forthcoming operations. The entire gaming had been so favorable to the Japanese forces that Yamamoto asked what would happen if the Nagumo force should be attacked by U. S. carrier aircraft while the Japanese carrier planes were away bombing Midway. The brilliant Commander Minoru Genda, air officer of the Mobile Force and the individual responsible more than anyone else for the Pearl Harbor planning, stepped forward replying, "We are strong enough. If attack should come our defensive power is enough to shake them off."[1] In Japanese the term used was Gaishu Isshoku, interpreted as "one touch of the armored sleeve of the First Air Fleet and the enemy planes would be destroyed." For all his respect for Genda the answer was unconvincing to Admiral Yamamoto. Turning to Admiral Nagumo he admonished him on such thinking, concluding with the verbal directive that at all times at least one half of the level bombers were to be armed with torpedoes. There was no misunderstanding of the directive on the part of those within hearing. So explicit was it that Kuroshima saw no reason to confirm it in writing.[2] As will be seen later, the failure of the Mobile Force to adhere to this verbal order was to contribute to the Japanese defeat more perhaps than any single event.

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[1] Watanabe Interview.

[2] Kuroshima Interview.

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The war games brought out other problems. One of these was the degree of divergency in the attacking forces. The Invasion Force was to sortie from Saipan, while its support units would come from Japan. The Mobile Force would start from Japan but be 300 to 500 miles ahead of the Main Force. And the Guard Force of Admiral Takasu, steaming midway between the Aleutian and Midway forces was over 700 miles from either one. The theory of military diversion and conversion has both its dangers and rewards. By spreading the forces you may well deny the enemy the opportunity to determine the size of your force. It also allows a maneuver element which is not engaged, and, therefore, able to assist where needed. In the Midway operation the Main Force could reinforce either the Mobile Force or the Invasion Force. At least in theory it could. In practice the distance between forces was too great. Even at thirty knots, it would take ten hours of steaming to close the Mobile Force and for the Guard Force the time was even greater. On paper there was mutual support; in practice it was impossible.

The submarines had been added to the operation belatedly and in haste. As so often happens, the combination was to prove another major contributing factor to the Midway disaster. The underseas craft came under the command of Sixth Fleet, but their presence in the Midway operation brought them from all over the Pacific. The general plan of employment for the Japanese boats was one of establishing three cordon lines.[1] Line A ran north-south centering on 167° W,

[1] Combined Fleet Operations Order No. 14.

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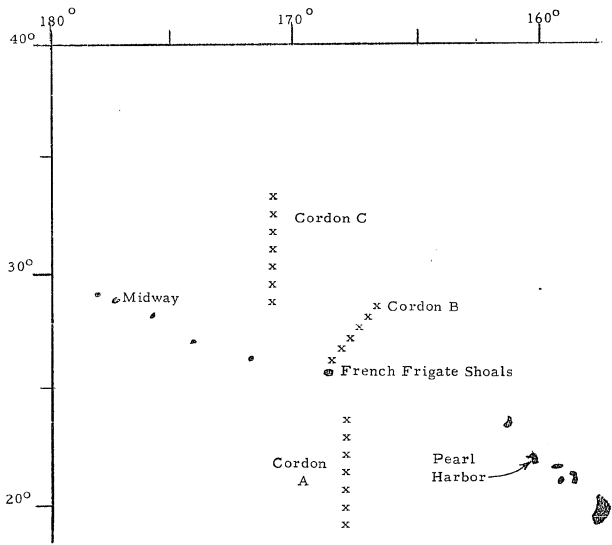

SUBMARINE CORDONS

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a location extending south from French Frigate shoals. Cordon B ran northeast from French Frigate shoals and the last, line C, started slightly south of Midway and about 500 miles east and ran due north nearly 600 miles. Submarine Squadron 3, consisting of five large I Class boats was assigned to Cordon A; Squadron 5's eight submarines were assigned Line B and the final barrier was three craft of SubRon 1. All submarines were to be on their assigned stations by 2 June. A careful study shows that to the south of a line between Midway and Pearl Harbor Cordon A was to scout for the approach of U. S. surface units from Pearl and attack them if the opportunity presented itself. Line B did the same job for forces that might be transiting north of the imaginary Midway-Pearl Harbor line. The final line C would protect the Mobile Force from an American end run to the north and then west. The three submarines assigned to support the second Operation K were to scout after the refueling mission had been completed. In all nineteen submarines had direct roles in the battle with all but three[1] capable of conducting a torpedo attack.

The conclusion of the initial war games coincided with the opening movements of the Battle of the Coral Sea, an operation included in neither first nor second phase plans but a vital part of the strategic objectives of Japan. The target for Operation MO, as the Japanese designated it, was an amphibious assault and seizure of the Port Moresby complex on New Guinea's south-east coast. The capture of this key city,

[1] The quantity of aviation gas and oil required to refuel the two planes made it necessary for the supporting submarines to leave behind their torpedoes.

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with its nearby airfield, would greatly endanger General MacArthur's position in Australia. The Army's Southern Detachment, escorted by Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Inouye's Fourth Fleet, would be the landing force. The Navy forces were some currently operating in that area and others that were supplied by Combined Fleet, the foremost being the two fleet carriers, SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU with escorts, that were detached as the Mobile Force headed home from the Indian Ocean.

United States intelligence garnered sufficient information to be forewarned of the operation and to allow the commander to position an inferior force to counter the Japanese. Two U. S. Task Forces, an organization at the time of a carrier, a few cruisers and a destroyer screen, moved into the Coral Sea in early May. Task Force 11, Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, included the carrier LEXINGTON. The senior flag officer, Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, flew his flag from YORKTOWN as commander Task Force 17. After preliminary skirmishing in the first few days of May, during which time the Japanese lost the light carrier SHOHO to naval carrier aircraft attacks and the U. S. lost the oiler NEOSHO and her escort SIMS, the two forces met on 8 May.[1] It was not an engagement in the traditional sense of naval warfare, for no warship fired at another of the opposing side.

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[1] This account of the Battle of the Coral Sea is necessarily brief, An additional summary from the American point of view is in the following chapter. A detailed account is "The Battle of the Coral Sea, Strategical and Tactical Analysis," Naval War College, 1947, NavPers 91050.

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Rather, the events of the day marked the first battle conducted strictly by carrier aircraft. When the smoke had cleared from exploding bombs and bubbling torpedoes the results were clear and emphatic. The Americans had lost one of their precious carriers, the LEXINGTON, and had suffered considerable damage to the YORKTOWN. The Japanese had lost only the small SHOHO, but SHOKAKU was damaged by bombs and ZUIKAKU had many losses in her air group. The results as they affected Japanese preparations for Midway were the loss of both the SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU for the operation. From a tactical sense the battle may be termed a standoff but from the strategic point of view it was a major Allied triumph. The Japanese landing force had been turned back without being able to land at Port Moresby.

Regardless of the damages in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese at both Combined Fleet and the Naval General Staff saw no reason for cancelling or postponing the Midway operation. Japanese pilots were positive that both U. S. carriers had been sunk. With the losses they believed that the United States had suffered in the Coral Sea, the Japanese estimated that the Americans would have not more than three carriers available. They believed there would more likely be only two and most probably one, a fair balance for four Japanese fleet carriers. Accordingly, neither the SHOKAKU nor the ZUIKAKU participated in the Midway action although had the need been apparent the air group from the damaged SHOKAKU could readily have replaced or been used to augment the understrength air group of the ZUIKAKU. The consensus was that neither carrier was essential to keep the battle odds

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heavily weighted in favor of the Japanese.[1]

The Mobile Force had returned to Japan from the Indian Ocean by 23 April. Hardly a month remained to prepare for an operation which was to be larger than Pearl Harbor. The complexity of the operation required the most careful coordination between ships, landing force and air units. Admiral Nagumo was briefed on the plans for the forthcoming operation immediately upon his arrival at Hashirajima. While he voiced his objections to the short time in port for his ships and aircraft squadrons, he displayed outwardly little of the hesitation and doubts that surrounded him while preparing for the Pearl Harbor attack.[2]

The return to Japan was vitally needed for both ships and crews. While few leaves could be granted the morale factor for crew members who had been gone for four months was significant. On approaching the homeland, the air groups flew to Kyushu, the AKAGI's planes going to Kagoshima while Kanoya received the KAGA's. Tomitaka housed the planes of the HIRYU, and the SORYU group went to Kasanohara. The bomber leaders had initial refresher training at Iwakuni prior to returning to their squadrons for integrated training.[3] While there were no

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[1] Kiroshima Interview.

[2] Watanabe Interview.

[3] "The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway," ONI Review, II (May, 1947), 8. Hereinafter referred to as ONI Review. This issue of the Office of Naval Intelligence monthly publication was entirely devoted to the translated report of the Mobile Force. Not all parts of the Action Report were located after the war. Those found present a minute by minute chronology of the events of most significant days.

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major incidents, the short time available permitted the new pilots to progress little beyond the basic stage of squadron operations. Carrier qualification was assigned to KAGA, to which Admiral Nagumo transferred his flag during early May. The other three carriers entered repair facilities for long overdue maintenance. With but one carrier operating, the new fliers were barely able to qualify in landing and take off and the experienced pilots were allowed only one chance to practice dusk landings. The level of combat readiness was evaluated by a group of referees from the Yokosuka Air Group, leading to the comment that it was almost a mystery how men with such poor ability could have done so well in earlier action.[1] The divebomber pilots were little better and the time spent in flying from the bases to the decommissioned battleship SETTSU, serving as a target ship, allowed but one flight a day. The pilots from the four carriers were not the only ones to suffer from lack of adequate time for training. The shortage of time hindered the training of Destroyer Squadron 10. Some ships conducted antiaircraft operations and others worked on antisubmarine warfare but the squadron never exercised as a unit.

During the month long period Admiral Nagumo was at Naikai Seibu on the Western Inland Sea.[2] He was needed there to coordinate the training of his Mobile Force. Furthermore, he was also not especially

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[1] Ibid. The report of the referees compares the poor ability during training to the brilliant results of Coral Sea. Actually, none of the four carriers being observed participated in the Coral Sea.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

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welcomed at Combined Fleet. Admiral Nagumo was a recognized torpedo expert and by early 1941 was sufficiently senior to be given command of the Mobile Force. During the raid on Pearl Harbor, his staff urged another attack on the naval base. The unimaginative officer vetoed the recommendation as being beyond the strict limits of his instructions. His failure to press an advantage gave credence to the rumors circulating within naval circles that he lacked ability and guts to do the job. As active campaigning progressed there was increasing evidence that Admiral Yamamoto should not retain this officer in so important a command position. At least one member of the staff of Combined Fleet recommended his removal to which Yamamoto replied "The replacement of Nagumo will be the same as killing him. It would be the same thing as asking him to commit hara-kiri."[1] The senior officer, however, was caught in a dilemma. The press and public of Japan recognized the Commander of the Mobile Force as a popular hero, a reflection on his successive chain of victories during the early part of the war. It was not possible to replace a commander under such circumstances, for even should Yamamoto recommend it, the Naval General Staff and Admiral Nagano could not and would not approve it.[2]

Regardless of the strings tied to the senior Admiral, the junior was under no delusions regarding his position in the naval operating force. He had occasion to voice his feelings to a close friend during

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[1] Kiroshima Interview.

[2] Watanabe Interview.

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a wedding in Tokyo in mid-May. Admiral Nagumo travelled to the capital to attend the marriage ceremony of the daughter of Shingo Ishikawa, Director of the Second Section of the Naval General Staff. The next day the two naval officers dined together. During the meal Ishikawa stated his concern over Midway and asked that Nagumo tell Admiral Yamamoto to stop it. The Mobile Force commander expressed his own concern but said that his superior "spoke ill of me" for not ordering pursuit in the case of Hawaii and that if he opposed Midway he would be called a coward. He told his friend Ishikawa that "I would rather go to Midway and die than be branded as a coward."[1]

The December attack had been prepared in the utmost secrecy and only the most responsible officers were informed of the forthcoming operation. By the time of Midway, the uninterrupted chain of victories had caused a relaxation in security measures. Messages flashed from one unit to another announcing where mail should be sent. The loading of cold weather clothing in southern Japanese ports just as summer approached indicated an unusual operation in the offing. On the evening of 20 January 1942, the submarine I-124 had been sunk off Port Darwin in a combined attack by one U. S. destroyer and three Australian corvettes. The event would have been a routine occurence had not the craft come to rest in shallow waters. U. S. Navy divers, supported by a destroyer tender, entered the sunken vessel and located several code books which

[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 278.

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enabled cryptoanalysts to refine their work in monitoring Japanese naval radio transmissions.[1]

Colonel Ichiki was one of the many visitors who streamed aboard YAMATO for final conferences. On 18 May, the dapper Army commander, replete with sword, gloves and puttees discussed the approaching operation with Admiral Ugaki and other staff officers.[2] Final details were resolved regarding the landing plan, naval gunfire support and the actual assault of the defended beaches. Two days later the Army and Navy units, as well as a construction battalion, sailed from Japan for their staging base in the Marianas.

On 25 May, two days after the YAMATO returned from the Kure shipyard, a final table maneuver was conducted in the flagship. The maneuver was not as extensive as the one earlier in the month for some of the units were already underway. The single day exercise was closer to a final brief on the operation rather than a war-game. As always there were some last minute changes such as the HARUNA being switched with the HIEI.[3] The major preparations, though, were complete and 5,000 troops, nearly 300 aircraft and over 100 ships stood ready to assault Midway and destroy any force that might try to

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[1] Ibid., p. 276.

[2] Admiral Ugaki Diary, 18 May 1942. Also, Samuel B. Griffith, II, The Battle For Guadalcanal (New York: Ballentine Books, 1963), p. 41.

[3] USSBS No. 46, Interrogation of Cdr H. Sekino, Communications Officer, Staff, 6th Cruiser Squadron.

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intercede. The long recognized concept of Yogeki Sakusen, drawing U. S. Fleet westward and into a decisive battle, was underway.

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CHAPTER III

THREE TO FIGHT

For half a day the giant four engine clipper had droned on ceaselessly westward. Then almost imperceptibly there was a lessening of the engines and the highwinged flying boat gradually started losing altitude. Soon the browned fields of Lanakai, patterned with an abundant growth of pineapple, could be seen beneath the right side while to the left the towering height of Maui's Haleakala was barely discernible in the distance. Ahead lay the familiar silhouette of Hawaii's most populated island, Oahu. Koko Head, Diamond Head, Waikiki, the Aloha Tower all passed by as the plane continued to lose height. As the aircraft made a slow, sweeping turn around the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, a khaki-clad naval officer peered through the porthole with more attention than given by any casual sightseer. The alert gentleman whose eyes were taking in all below was the newly appointed commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. The date was Christmas Day, 1941; the hour 0730. Smoothly, the big plane touched its bottom to the still oily waters of Pearl Harbor. As she slowed and commenced the turn toward the ramp, there were everywhere in evidence reminders of the havoc of that Sunday three weeks ago. The grotesque superstructure of the ARIZONA rose above the waters at the northern end of Ford Island's battleship row. Ahead

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of her WEST VIRGINIA rested on the harbor's muddy bottom, the same that kept OKLAHOMA from turning full turtle. In the large dry dock next to 1010 pier were the blackened remains of the destroyers CASSIN and DOWNES while nearby was the bowless SHAW.

If anything was needed to impress the quiet-spoken commander with the burden of his responsibilities, a searching look at the Hawaii naval base provided the stimulant. The reception he received on arriving confirmed his estimate of his new command. Vice Admiral William S. Pye, since 17 December serving as Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, greeted Admiral Nimitz and his flag secretary in a manner clearly illustrative of the morale and mood of many. The situation that faced the new commander was one not only of rebuilding a fleet, but of raising the morale of the men who manned it, particularly those who directed it. On Christmas Day the morale of the officers and men of the Headquarters, Pacific Fleet was at its lowest ebb. The losses of personnel, many shipmates of long years, and the destruction of the battleships were blows difficult to overcome. Two days earlier, the twenty-third, the one immediate ray of light had been turned out when it was decided to cancel plans to relieve the gallant Marines defending Wake. It was a difficult decision that Admiral Pye faced, to risk his forces in providing temporary relief to Wake or saving them for perhaps more favorable undertakings. Some members viewed his decision in a different light, feeling that Admiral Pye may have been a splendid peacetime officer, but in wartime he did not possess the

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finely honed edge of a fighting man.[1]

The appointment of Admiral Nimitz to the senior naval post in the Pacific came as a surprise to many. In the pre-war Navy he was not well known even within his own service. Those that did meet and serve with him came to respect his judgment and professional ability.[2] He was born in Texas and came close to entering West Point rather than Annapolis. Following his graduation from the Naval Academy, Nimitz served at sea, initially as an unrestricted surface officer and later as a qualified submarine officer. During World War I, as Chief Engineer of the MAUMEE, he pioneered underway refueling, the technique that allowed a ship to come alongside an oiler that was underway and receive a full load of oil. His ship handling experience sent him to the SOUTH CAROLINA in 1919 as executive officer and a year later to the cruiser CHICAGO as commanding officer. His final command of a ship was the AUGUSTA. The heavy cruiser was a favorite of President Roosevelt and brought the two commanders into frequent discussion. After selection to flag rank in 1938 he became Commander, Cruiser Division 2 where he again directed work on underway refueling. A year later he assumed command of Battleship Division 1. His selection to his new command, one in which he passed over many seniors, ended his duty as Chief, Bureau of Navigation. As competent as he was in bringing a ship up a twisting

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[1] Interview with Capt Walter "J." East, USN (Ret) conducted at 545 J Avenue, Coronado, California on 14 May 1966.

[2] Fletcher Pratt, "Nimitz and his Admirals," Harpers, CXC (February, 1945). 210.

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channel or alongside a pier, Admiral Nimitz was better known as an organizer whose knowledge of human nature and keen judgment could get the most out of men. Moreover, he possessed the ability for making prompt and firm decisions.

For five days Admiral Nimitz examined the damage at Pearl Harbor conferred with his staff and with the other component commanders on Oahu. Then on the last day of 1941 he assumed command. The staff, he announced at the first meeting, would remain unchanged and would become his. Furthermore, he emphasized the complete trust and confidence he had in each. In talking to his Task Force commanders, when they infrequently entered Pearl and by showing a deep interest in all aspects of his command, he quickly restored confidence to a shattered Fleet. To at least one Admiral the takeover was "like being in a stuffy room and having someone open a window and let a breath of fresh air in."[1]

Prior to leaving Washington for the Pacific, Admiral Nimitz had received careful directions from Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, and newly appointed Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King. In effect it was simply to hold the line Midway-Samoa-Fiji-Brisbane "at all costs." The assignment might be developed to one of protecting the Central Pacific area of Midway, Johnston and Hawaii and at the same time insuring that the sea routes between Australia and the United States remained open. In the strategic sense both sides recognized the value

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[1] Interview with ADM Raymond A. Spruance, USN (Ret) conducted at Pebble Beach, California on 25 May 1966. Spruance arrived in the Pacific shortly before Pearl Harbor. On 17 September 1941, he became Commander, Cruiser Division 5 in NORTHAMPTON.

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of these two areas and the Japanese made a reasonable assumption that should either area be attacked the United States would be forced to fight to retain control of them.

Under tall, thin Rear Admiral Milo F. Draemel, Chief of Staff at CINCPAC, plans were developed on how to hold the two areas. Admiral Draemel, who had relieved Rear Admiral William W. "Poco" Smith, after having commanded Destroyer Flotilla 2, was a welcomed addition to the staff. His deep husky voice gave emphasis to the professionalism he so obviously possessed. His first tactical problem had been the planned expedition to relieve Wake. Staff estimates had not been sufficient to allow Admiral Pye to reach a decision so the Chief of Staff sent a PBY flying boat to the island for a firsthand report. It was not encouraging. Colonel Walter L. J. Bayler[1] set forth the plight of the defending Marines, sailors and civilians. Bayler had fought on Wake, but was ordered to leave on 21 December with the departing PBY. A relief would be at best a temporary measure and, with the Japanese controlling the seas, one without resupply assurances. It was an important decision, negative, and contrary to the desires of all, but one which had to be made if the Midway, Johnston, Hawaii triangle was to be held.

In January 1942 the Pacific Fleet was divided into three Task Forces. Rear Admiral Wilson Brown flew his flag from the carrier LEXINGTON. Her sister ship SARATOGA carried Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher.

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[1] LTC Walter L. J. Bayler, USMC, Last Man Off Wake Island, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943) contains a vivid picture of Bayler's departure, flight and briefing at Pearl Harbor.

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The third carrier, ENTERPRISE, was the flagship of Vice Admiral William F. Halsey. Surrounding each carrier was an assortment of light and heavy cruisers and destroyers which provided both the anti-aircraft and the antisubmarine screen. The employment of these carrier task forces became the primary concern of both Admiral Nimitz and his Chief of Staff. With only three aircraft carriers in the Pacific they had to be used with the utmost care for they were the offensive power of the United States in that part of the world. The loss of one would jeopardize our position and yet they could not be locked within secure waters simply to preserve them. Nevertheless, there continued to be the necessity of letting the Japanese know that there was in fact another navy contesting their control of the Pacific. It was decided, particularly at the urging of Admiral King, to employ the carriers in counterstrike operations. These plans were temporarily set aside when on 11 January the SARATOGA was struck by a submarine fired torpedo 500 miles southwest of Oahu.[1] The ship did not sink, but she would be out of action for a prolonged period. Her loss was partially offset by the transfer of YORKTOWN from the Atlantic into the Pacific. By the end of January, the carriers were ready to strike their first target, the Marshalls and Gilberts.

On 1 February carrier planes from ENTERPRISE struck Wotje, Maloelap and Kwajalein. The YORKTOWN was hitting the Gilberts at the same time. The surface units of Admiral Halsey's Task Force 8 split.

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[1] Samuel E. Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Vol III: The Rising Sun in the Pacific (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1951), p. 260.

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Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance with NORTHAMPTON and SALT LAKE CITY and a destroyer bombarded Wotje. The CHESTER and a pair of destroyers delivered their broadsides on Maloelap. This was the first American offensive effort of the war and it was conducted under the close supervision of the Navy's most fighting Admiral, "Bull" Halsey. His type of Admiral was desperately needed in those lean days of 1942 for he was one who wanted to fight. He was never renowned for his ability to think, but he did have forethought enough to surround himself with an excellent staff. No one ever referred to Halsy as a fine shiphandler nor as a great flyer for he was neither. But as an Admiral he could maneuver ships and direct air operations and nobody ever mentioned that he lacked guts. For nine hours he sailed his ENTERPRISE and her escorts in the restricted waters off Wotje.

The raid damaged facilities on the islands, sunk a couple of small ships and damaged four others, including the light cruiser KATORI, and destroyed a number of planes. More important, it provided the first combat action for the ENTERPRISE air group, the one that was destined to perform an outstanding role in the Battle of Midway. In their eagerness to attack, the SBD's of Lieutenant Commander Hal Hopping's Scouting Squadron 6 arrived over their objective twenty-two minutes before sunrise. With insufficient light to illuminate the targets there was no choice but to wait. The attack itself was enthusiastically delivered but poorly executed as Hopping led them in a long shallow dive. It was a trick he had seen the Japanese use as his squadron flew into Ford Island on the morning of 7 December. The situation in the Marshalls was

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different for Japanese aircraft and antiaircraft gunners were alert. Hopping was one of the first to crash. Never again did the divebombers use the shallow dive.[1] The nine torpedo planes under Lieutenant Lance E. Massey, followed the SBD's and dropped their torpedoes at ships anchored in the harbor. With skill Massey brought all nine TBD's back to the carrier with nothing worse than a few holes from small arms fire.[2]

The joy of returning from a successful raid was tempered by the realities of war. It was the beginning of three years of the same - the casualties, the ones who wouldn't be back in the ready room to recount the flight, the attack itself and the evasive maneuvers. The casualties meant a wingman gone, the loss of a section or division leader, the death of a roommate. It also left unanswered the question of who was next. Casualties are not unique to carrier aviation, but the type of flying performed gave an unusual perspective to the subject. This was most noticeable in the scouting squadrons. Each carrier had an eighteen plane squadron of SBD's whose primary purpose was to act as the eyes of the carrier. This was accomplished by single plane flights 200 miles from the carrier and return. The hops were long, but more important there was the known fact that if you became lost or disabled you were on your own. Bound by strict radio silence, the scout could not cry out for assistance regardless of the problem, nor did the carrier transmit

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[1] Interview with Cdr Cleo J. Dobson, USN (Ret) conducted at 1383 Helix View Drive, El Cajon, California, on 12 May 1966. Dobson was following Hopping's lead on both 7 December and 1 February.

[2] Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson, USN. "I Fly For Vengeance," The Saturday Evening Post, CCXV (October 17, 1942), 43.

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a call that could be used as a homer. Between the scouting hops and carrier raids the attrition was significant. As an example, Scouting Squadron 6 lost nine pilots in the first two and a half months of the war, exclusive of the Pearl Harbor attack. As one pilot remarked "from that figure we can expect only about two and a half months left and by God I don't like it."[1]

The loss of trained carrier pilots was a continual problem of command for not only did it affect the morale of the remainder, but it meant the loss of a skilled crew that had been trained as a team among themselves and within the squadron and air group as well. To offset any degradation in squadron capability required considerable effort and leadership. Each commander had his own techniques. Since there were frequently more pilots than planes, the commander insured a pilot took his turn regardless of the status of his aircraft, flying when necessary a plane other than that usually assigned. There were also diversionary features that hopefully would detract from the more serious business. Both Hopping and his successor, Lieutenant Wilmer E. Gallaher, made a contest of landing. The squadron would join up on returning from a hop, make the carrier break and land. The challenge was to land a plane as close to the one ahead without getting a wave off. If the plane was too close to the preceding one, he would be waved off for a fouled deck. If he stretched his interval too much he was out of contention. The prize might be no more than the fifty cents each pilot tossed in the

[1] Diary of Cdr Cleo J. Dobson, USN (Ret), 24 February 1942.

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pot, but the discussions afterwards would go on for hours. Equally important, the landing interval contest improved the training of the squadron and aided the ship in expediting recovery operations.

From Kwajalein Admiral Halsey took his force back to Pearl for replenishment and receipt of a few new planes and pilots in preparation for the next raid. At 0500 on 24 February, in a driving rain, the ENTERPRISE loosed thirty-seven SBD's, nine TBD's and six fighters in an attack on Wake Island. Although supported by surface bombardment, the results were insignificant and of little value other than morale. Six days later the same force penetrated to within 900 miles of Japan to raid Marcus Island. Again the damage was slight, but the very fact that carriers were striking the Japanese held islands was sufficient to cause concern to the Naval General Staff in Tokyo. [1]

The last two raids were hard ones for Gallaher's Scouting Six as the steady attrition of pilots continued. Lieutenant Perry Teaff, taking off for Wake, lost control of his Dauntless as he cleared the bow ramp and spun in off the port side. Although a destroyer quickly picked him up, his radioman was lost and Teaff suffered an injury requiring the removal of his right eye. By the time the divebombers returned from Wake a second plane was missing, hit by antiaircraft fire and plummeting into the sea in flames. The Marcus raid lost still another Scout when Lieutenant (j. g.) Hart D. Hilton's SBD caught fire after being hit

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[1] Capt Gilven M. Slonim, USN, "A Flagship View of Command Decisions," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXIV (April, 1958), 82.

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by antiaircraft fire. In this case Hilton was able to crash land his damaged plane on the water. Both he and his radioman, Jack Leaming, climbed into their two-man rubber boat, but whether they were rescued or killed by the Japanese[1] was a thought that ran through the minds of many as the ENTERPRISE turned tail and headed back toward Pearl.

The strain of attack and surveillance flights on VS-6 had reached a point where command action was required or the squadron would be unable to fulfill its mission. As difficult and nerve wracking as the past weeks operations had been on the pilots, the ones to reflect the greatest strain were the gunners who manned the rear seats.[2] Their casualties had been greater than those of the pilots and they were always dependent upon the pilot's skill in navigation to bring them back to the ship. When the ENTERPRISE entered Pearl Harbor on March 9, Admiral Halsey quickly initiated relief for the tired scouting squadron. The squadron moved across the island to Kaneohe where they had a brief opportunity to rest, refit and train new personnel.

While the ENTERPRISE had been striking in the Central Pacific,

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[1] Both Hilton and Leaming were carried as missing in action. Hilton's wife, Gloria, was notified of his status as was Leaming's mother. On 16 June 1942 the International Red Cross advised the Navy Department that both men were prisoners of war in Japan. Hilton was confined to the stockade at Zentzuji while Leaming was in an area for enlisted personnel near Osaka. He remained there until his release on 3 October 1945. Hilton was subsequently transferred to Rokuroshi, where on 8 September 1945 he was turned over to Allied authorities. Information on the two fliers verified from U. S. Navy casualty cards and Japanese POW records on file at Bureau Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.

[2] Interview with RADM W. E. Gallaher, USN (Ret) conducted at 5205 Bangor Drive, Kensington, Maryland on 30 June 1966.

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both the LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN moved south to strike Japanese occupied areas south of the Equator. On 10 March the two carriers launched 104 planes against Lae and Salamaua on New Guinea's northern coast. Transitting the 15,000 foot Owen Stanley Mountains, the carrier planes surprised the Japanese, sinking a converted light cruiser, a transport and a large minesweeper.

During the early months of 1942 naval planners in Washington developed a combination Army-Navy team to carry the air war to Japan itself. The HORNET, which was still finishing its shakedown in the Atlantic when bombs fell on Oahu, transitted the Panama Canal, stopped briefly at San Diego and continued to the new Naval Air Station at Alameda, California. On 1 April 1942, B-25's belonging to the Army Air Corps, and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle, were loaded aboard. Sailing the following day, the HORNET steamed west for its 13 April rendezvous with the ENTERPRISE and her escorts, designated now as Task Force 16. The mission of the fixed-wing, twin-engined Mitchells was to bomb Japan and continue to friendly fields in China. Ploughing through heavy seas, the force was sighted by Japanese fishing boats, acting as pickets, 150 miles east of the intended launch position. As a result, Admiral Halsy was faced with the unpleasant decision of cancelling the mission; delaying the launch until the planned position had been reached or executing a launch as soon as the planes could be readied. A hurried staff conference, chiefed by Captain Miles S. Browning and concurred in by Doolittle, recommended an immediate launch. The commander approved. The take off was a touchy operation,

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as a forty-knot gale buffeted the ships, but all sixteen planes got off safely, made the island of Honshu, dropped their bombs and continued on toward China.[1] As mentioned previously, the raid caused little damage, but proved a great morale booster to our country.

The two carriers did not linger in their exposed position. Admiral Halsey ordered the picket boats destroyed. As Task Force 16 headed toward Pearl Harbor at twenty-five knots, the HORNET was busy taking pieces of planes out of the rafters. One of the problems facing Captain Marc A. Mitscher when he prepared to load the B-25's was what to do with his own seventy-eight naval airplanes. Since the flight deck was needed by the Doolittle planes, the navy planes were stored on the hangar deck, parts of them that is. The remainder were disassembled and stored in every available space. Wings, rudders, elevators, and propellers were hoisted to the rafters above the hangar deck. For thirty-six hours after the launch of the Army planes, the entire air group, officers as well as enlisted, worked to reassemble the dismantled planes.[2] On 25 April the two carriers entered Pearl Harbor. Five days later they were steaming south at twenty-five knots having, during the time in port, reembarked Gallaher's rested VS-6 in place of VB-3.

The orders that sent Task Force 16 dashing to the south were the

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[1] Wesley Frank Craven and James Cate (eds.), The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol I: Plans and Early Operations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 441.

[2] Interview with Capt Edgar E. Stebbins, USN, conducted at COMFAIRALAMEDA, NAS, Alameda, California on 25 May 1966. Stebbins was the Maintenance Officer of VS-8.

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product of one of the most closely guarded secrets of the war - intelligence of Japanese naval operations. The United States naval forces in the Hawaiian area were divided into two major commands. Admiral Nimitz was Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, abbreviated as CINCPAC. From his camouflaged-painted, concrete building in the submarine base part of the Pearl Harbor complex he commanded the fighting forces, the ships, men and planes. To support CINCPAC was the primary duty of Rear Admiral Claude C. Bloch, Commandant of the 14th Naval District. His headquarters was a close resemblance to CINCPAC's but located about a mile away near the huge 1010 dry-dock that had held the PENNSYLVANIA when the Japanese attacked. Admiral Bloch's support ranged from providing bullets and beans to hospital services. It also included intelligence.

In the basement of Headquarters, 14th Naval District, commonly referred to as the "Black Chamber," was the Intelligence Center for the Pacific. The exact extent of its duties and how these were performed remain, even today, a closely guarded secret. Nevertheless, a good deal has been learned about the vital service performed by this small group of dedicated personnel. Commander Joseph J. Rochefort headed the combat intelligence center, a unit that had been analyzing, and in some instances actually reading the Japanese fleet radio traffic. Rochefort was regarded as one of the Navy's most competent cryptanalysts. He had been in the business for over twenty years and had spent three years in Japan as a language officer. In mid-June 1941

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Rochefort took over the Hawaii station named Hypo.[1] Prior to Pearl Harbor a second station at Cavite in the Philippines had worked on fleet transmissions in conjunction with the Hawaii station.

The job of the cryptanalysts is difficult and demanding and one requiring great dedication to duty. Sometimes it is possible to have a part or an entire code to assist in analyzing radio traffic. The analyzation of message traffic is the cryptographers work. In any naval organization there are a number of radio circuits, some being ship to ship; ship to shore or plane to ship or shore. Some nets are command or tactical nets while others are administrative type. For a major fleet there might be as many as 200 circuits. Obviously, a cryptanalyst cannot monitor all circuits so he must select ones he considers to be the most rewarding. With patience he can learn certain call signs or the "signatures" of individual senders. From experience he learns that certain types of ships, and even specific vessels, operate together.

The skill of the analysts in Hawaii, the Cavite station having been lost with the fall of the Philippines, was such that by March 1942 they knew the location of most Japanese warships to within 300 or 400 miles.[2] This was accomplished by partially knowing the code; partially by call signs and signatures and partly by direction finding equipment in Hawaii that was complimented by a companion station in Australia and others

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[1] Interview with Capt Joseph J. Rochefort, USN (Ret) conducted at Redondo Beach, California on 26 August 1964. Rochefort's organization did not directly concern itself with either "Magic" or "Purple" the terms used for the broken diplomatic code.

[2] Ibid.

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at Dutch Harbor, Alaska, Samoa and Midway.[1] From the direction finding stations it was possible to develop a bearing to the transmitter and with more than one direction finding station to develop a fix where two or more bearings crossed. Matching time of transmission with the message copied at the Aiea radio receiving station allowed the crypt-analysts to piece together the movements of Japanese fleet units.

The copied message was then brought to Rochefort's office for analyzing the content. This was the most difficult task, for it was complicated and required an intimate knowledge of the Japanese naval organization and a great amount of experience in how the Japanese employed their forces. Rochefort had men who possessed these qualities, primarily navy chief petty officers and specialized enlisted personnel. His organization, during the spring of 1942, numbered about ten officers and twenty men. Tommy Dyer was one of the key cryptanalysts who lived his business working at time for days without sleep and only a few pills to keep him going. Joe Finnigan had studied Japanese and had the reputation of being a top translator for the unit. A former University of Hawaii mathematics professor, Jasper Holmes, used his exact science to keep the movements of Japanese fleet units current.[2] From the combination of direction

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[1] Roberta Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 31.

[2] Holmes graduated 158 in the 1922 Class at the Naval Academy. His high standing allowed him to enter the submarine service. A promising career was cut short when he was forced to retire for physical reasons in 1936. His mathematical ability, combined with his naval experience made him a valuable addition to Rochefort's small unit. Holmes is Dean Emeritus of the University of Hawaii, School of Engineering.

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finding equipment, examination of ships' plots and interpreting all or parts of messages, the intelligence center could state what certain Japanese forces were doing and, based on past activity, what they might do in the immediate future. In other words, Rochefort could present an intelligence estimate of the situation. This was done daily and copies of this estimate were sent to major commands including CINCPAC.

The Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet did not have a large intelligence staff. Until after Midway the intelligence personnel were included in the operations and plans branch of the staff. Commander Edwin T. Layton served as Fleet Intelligence Officer. It was in this office that Rochefort's estimates were evaluated with current operations. In addition valuable reports from patrolling submarines supplemented the information furnished by Rochefort. The intelligence production effort was not complete, nor was it entirely accurate. For example, in December 1941, only ten per cent of the intercepted naval traffic was decoded and understood.[1] Even then some information might be misinterpreted. Just before the Pearl Harbor attack, Rochefort lost contact with the six Japanese carriers. He could only assume that they were in home ports where land lines had replaced radio transmissions. When a transmission was intercepted from a destroyer in the Japanese Mandates, the intelligence center assumed that at least one of the six carriers was also in the area for a Japanese carrier habitually had assigned the same destroyer, acting as plane guard.[2] For an unknown

[1] Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision, p. 31.

[2] ibid., p. 32.

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reason, Combined Fleet had dispatched the destroyer to the Mandates and designated a new plane guard destroyer.

The information that sortied with Admiral Halsey's Task Force 16 from Pearl Harbor on 30 April was the work of Rochefort's intelligence center. They had picked up a concentration of Japanese warships and transports in the New Britain and New Ireland areas. Long range aerial reconnaissance from Australia and New Guinea confirmed the build up. As early as 20 April CINCPAC was aware of the Japanese plans to capture Port Moresby and extend their control of the southern Solomons by occupying Tulagi. Moreover, the intelligence center concluded that the light carrier SHOHO would escort the transports and that a carrier division would be part of the Striking Force protecting the slower ships carrying the landing forces.[1] Additional information indicated that the Japanese movements would start about 3 May. Although forthcoming Japanese activity fell clearly in the area of responsibility assigned by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to General Douglas MacArthur, CINCPAC still retained responsibility for naval operations throughout the Pacific. Thus, the naval aspect of the early May movement rested with Admiral Nimitz.

By 20 April CINCPAC had developed requirements on his forces that rapidly exceeded their capability. Already there were indications that the Japanese were planning a major operation in the Central Pacific. Could CINCPAC send forces 3500 miles away to combat a movement on

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[1] "The Battle of the Coral Sea, Strategical and Tactical Analysis," U. S. Naval War College, 1947. p. 21. NavPers 91050.

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Port Moresby? This was a staff responsibility of the Operations Branch of CINCPAC, headed by extremely capable Captain Charles Horatio McMorris. This native of Alabama, a 1912 graduate of the Naval Academy, was far from the picture of a typical naval officer. His spindley legs supported a dumpy body upon which was perched a mammoth head while a pock-marked face served to accentuate the careless manner in which he dressed. To his juniors he was known as "The Phantom of Notre Dame."[1] Regardless of his personal appearance, "Soc" McMorris had no peer when it came to his duties as Operations Officer.

Forces, time and distance were factors that were to plague CINCPAC throughout 1942. McMorris and his assistants in "OPS" quickly recommended positioning the two carriers already operating south of the equator into the Coral Sea. Here it was hoped that Task Force 17, with YORKTOWN operating under Admiral Fletcher and Task Force 11, the LEXINGTON carrying Admiral Fitch, would be placed in a position to hit the oncoming Japanese from the flank. Admiral Fletcher as the senior would run the show or, in naval terminology, would be Officer in Tactical Command (OTC). General MacArthur's naval forces were as thin as his ground and air components, but they too were placed under Admiral Fletcher's operational control. Task Force 44, Rear Admiral J. C. Crace, RN, included three cruisers and two destroyers flying either the U. S. or Australian ensigns. Assigning Admiral Pye's Task Force 1, composed entirely of battleships, was briefly considered but their location

[1] Rochefort Interview.

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and distance from Coral Sea as well as the speed limitation of the big-gun ships quickly ruled them out.[1] A look at the charts showed that Admiral Halsey's Task Force 16 could never transit the distance in time to be in the Coral Sea by 3 May, the date which CINCPAC estimated that the Japanese would start their movements. Should the Japanese be delayed, however, the two carriers of Task Force 16 might be the extra offensive power so badly needed. The high-speed steaming of the two carriers, together with their cruiser/destroyer screen enabled the force to cross the equator on 5 May, but events in the Coral Sea were not to await the arrival of Task Force 16.

On 3 May, the Japanese occupied Tulagi Harbor, evacuated two days earlier by the Australian garrison, and commenced developing a seaplane base. The following day, 4 May, Captain Elliott Buckmaster turned his YORKTOWN into the wind and launched forty-six planes to strike the newly occupied Japanese base. The attack damaged the enemy facilities and the destroyer KIKUZUKI and sunk two small minesweepers. A second and third attack from YORKTOWN added to the earlier damage on Tulagi and concluded the opening skirmish of the Coral Sea. The next two days passed with little action between the two forces. Suddenly on 7 May at 0930, the oiler NEOSHO and her escorting destroyer SIMS were attacked by Japanese carrier planes. More attacks followed as divebombers and horizontal bombers combined to send both ships to the bottom. Meanwhile to the north, YORKTOWN's search planes found the Japanese

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[1] Morison, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 15.

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Covering Group, erroneously reporting that it included two carriers. By 1030 YORKTOWN and LEXINGTON had ninty-three planes headed for the reported enemy position 160 miles away. The two carrier air groups, acting independently, located the SHOHO, a former submarine tender that had been converted into a light carrier.[1] Under their violent attacks the carrier stopped dead in the water, burst into flames and sank five minutes later.

The events which were to have such important affects on Midway took place on 8 May. Both sides concentrated their offensive striking power in their two fleet carriers. The Japanese carriers SHOKAKU and ZUIKAKU had been located by 0930. Admiral Fletcher launched air strikes from his two carriers. The YORKTOWN group found the SHOKAKU and in a combined attack the thirty-nine torpedo and dive-bomber aircraft scored two hits on the Japanese carrier.[2] Neither hit was fatal, but the flight deck was so damaged that the Japanese carrier could not launch aircraft. The LEXINGTON attack group became separated, failed to find the enemy initially because of an inaccurate position report and wound up making a haphazard attack on the ZUIKAKU, partially hidden by a rain squall, and the damaged SHOKAKU. No hits were

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[1] Potter, Yamamoto, The Man Who Menaced America, p. 160. In the interrogation of Commander H. Sekino, Staff Communications Office, 6th Cruiser Squadron, he stated that about nine bombs and four torpedoes struck the SHOHO. The first hit jammed her rudder and five minutes after the attack she capsized with the loss of over 500 of her 1200 man complement. USSBS No. 46.

[2] "The Battle of the Coral Sea, Strategical and Tactical Analysis," U. S. Naval War College, 1947, p. 85. NavPers 91050.

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scored on ZUIKAKU and only one bomb struck her sister ship.

The Japanese had been up early that morning, too. By 0824 Admiral Fletcher's two carriers had been sighted and their position radioed to the anxiously waiting Admiral Chuichi Hara. He immediately launched a balanced force of seventy planes from his two flattops. Five minutes before eleven, Task Force 17 radar picked up the incoming attack while still seventy miles distant. Despite adequate warning the fighter defense, understrength to begin with, was not ready for the attack. Too few fighters were in the air and too many of these were low on fuel while others on deck were not ready to launch. Against light air opposition and heavy but inaccurate antiaircraft gunfire, the attacking Japanese had little trouble. The torpedo planes split so as to come in on either bow of the LEXINGTON. Holding their torpedoes until only a thousand yards away, the twenty Japanese torpedo planes scored two hits only moments before a pair of bombs rocked the big carrier topside. Other planes ignored LEXINGTON in deference to the more maneuverable YORKTOWN. The skill of the Japanese torpedo pilots was missing against the newer carrier. Torpedoes dropped off only one bow were easily evaded. Nor were the divebombers much more successful as eighteen of the lethal eggs headed toward the wildy maneuvering, thirty-knot YORKTOWN. Most landed close along the starboard side, but delayed fuzes allowed the carrier to clear before they exploded and to escape damage other than a few sprung plates. Only one 800-pound bomb found its mark, penetrating seven decks before exploding. Damage control parties quickly quelched the fire, repaired disrupted communication

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wires and plastered a plate over the gaping wound in the wooden flight deck. Flight operations remained unimpaired.[1]

For almost two hours after receiving her attack the same could be said for LEXINGTON. Damage control parties made temporary repairs and, steaming twenty-five knots, she was soon busily engaged in air operations. Suddenly at 1247 a violent explosion from escaping gas fumes, ignited by a small electric motor, rocked the ship. Repair parties again headed into the damaged, smoke filled parts of the ship. This time small, new explosions, fed by gasoline were more than the crew could handle. Air operations continued for almost two more hours. Then at 1445 the ship was shaken by a second major internal explosion that wrecked the ventilating system and soon brought the carrier to a standstill. Fires raged out of control and with warheads on the hangar deck and the magazines in danger of blowing the ship to pieces, Captain Frederick C. "Ted" Sherman gave the order to abandon ship. No man was lost going over the side and LEXINGTON planes waiting to land were taken aboard the smaller YORKTOWN. At 2000, having taken torpedoes from her escort, the PHELPS, the LEXINGTON settled in a 2400 fathom deep with 216 men of her gallant crew aboard.

YORKTOWN received many of the survivors either directly or by transfer from destroyers. Eventually, the figure reached 2735. Planes landing aboard the YORKTOWN so taxed the limited storage space that

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[1] USS YORKTOWN Bomb Damage, May 8, 1942, Coral Sea, War Damage Report No. 23, Bureau of Ships, Navy Department, 28 November 1942. So rapid was the repair to the flight deck that the carrier was able to recover all her planes without alteration to the flight schedule.

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those damaged in earlier action were jettisoned over the side. Admiral Fletcher headed his force toward Tongatabu where the LEXINGTON survivors were off-loaded. While enroute inspectors made a careful examination of the damage to YORKTOWN. It was more than initially believed and while it would not impair her ability to fight, the damage did weaken her structually. By the time the ship reached Tongatabu the extent of damage was accurately known. As orders had been received to proceed immediately to Pearl, Buckmaster radioed the Hawaii Navy shipyard the details of the damage his ship had sustained.

The Battle of the Coral Sea had ended at night on 8 May with the retirement of the opposing forces. It was not the precise battle that had been hoped for by each side and throughout there had been errors made at all levels of command that threatened to scuttle the fine leadership of others. Both commanders had been unduly cautious at times and recklessly careless at others. The United States had lost one of its largest carriers, one of the four in the entire Pacific. In addition personnel losses included one of the navy's most promising leaders, Commander William B. Ault. For four years he had been a leading basketball player at the Naval Academy and this same inspiring leadership had been exhibited throughout his naval career. As commander of the LEXINGTON air group he had led the attack on the Japanese carriers, had been wounded and perhaps because of loss of compass, could not find his way home. Although in touch by radio with the Task Force he was unable to climb his damaged SBD to a height that would allow the

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ship's radar to find him and direct him to the ship.[1]

The Japanese had also lost a carrier, but it was a light one carrying only twenty-one planes compared with the seventy-two of the LEXINGTON. The SHOKAKU's damage was more than thought initially. In fact on her return to Truk she nearly capsized.[2] The ZUIKAKU retired undamaged, but her air group had been rendered ineffective by heavy losses. On 8 May alone the ZUIKAKU lost forty-three of the sixty-three planes she normally carried. The damage to one carrier and to the air group of the other kept both out of the Battle of Midway. Had one or both of them been present, the addition of their planes might have caused a different ending to the June fight in the Central Pacific. From the tactical viewpoint the Coral Sea battle must be given to the Japanese, but from the strategic side it was an Allied victory. The Japanese transports had retired toward Rabaul and although Tulagi remained in Japanese hands, the seaborne invasion of Port Moresby was once and forever turned back.

Throughout the preliminary battle days of Coral Sea, Task Force 16 continued its southern movement. By crossing the international dateline the logs showed no entries for 8 May. A two day earlier departure from Hawaii would have brought them into battle. As it was their arrival was too late. The force remained in the area sufficiently long for the ENTERPRISE to fly off a Marine squadron to reinforce New

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[1] Interview with RADM Murr E. Arnold, USN (Ret) conducted at 740 J Aveune, Coronado, California on 16 May 1966. Arnold was the Air Officer on the YORKTOWN. He had intermittent radio communications with Ault, who was a close personal friend, until the pilot went down.

[2] Watanabe Interview.

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Caledonia's air defense. The two carriers and escorts lingered in the southern area until it became certain that Admiral Inouye did not intend immediate offensive action and until it became necessary to rush them back to Pearl Harbor in preparation for Midway. The stay of the HORNET and ENTERPRISE was just long enough to allow a snooping Japanese aircraft to report their presence.[1] With the reported certain sinking of two carriers in the Coral Sea, identified by the Japanese as SARATOGA and an ENTERPRISE class, and the presence of two more in southern latitudes, the Japanese assessed the Central Pacific as being nearly free of aircraft carriers that could thwart their Midway ambitions.[2]

On 15 May Task Force 16 departed the New Caledonia area and headed north. Although no enemy action had occurred, the ENTERPRISE air group continued to be badgered with bad luck. A fighter had crashed coming aboard on the fifth. While the pilot had been saved the plane burst into flames as it slithered up the deck and was a total loss. The two carriers alternated daily flight requirements. On 13 May misfortune struck again when two pilots on separate scouting hops failed to return. One from Scouting SIX announced he was landing on the water, but nothing was heard from SBD, 6-B-16, of Bombing SIX. Two days later was a "Red" letter casualty day as five planes were lost. Ensign William R. Pittman of Scouting SIX, rambled down the deck and tried to get airborne

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[1] Spruance Interview. Task Force 16 had picked up an unidentified aircraft on their radar. Fighters, launched in pursuit, identified the plane as a flying boat, but clouds allowed the plane to escape.

[2] Morison, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 62.

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without sufficient wind. Failing to gain flying speed he crashed off the bow. Even though his plane was lost, Pittman and his gunner were rescued. Soon thereafter a fighter missed all of the nine arresting wires, bolted the barrier, badly damaged a parked fighter and killed an aircraft handler. Early in the afternoon Ensign Holt flying a F4F crashed just forward of the ship. The final mishap took Ensign Heifert's Wildcat fighter into the barrier. As the force recrossed the dateline and neared Hawaii, Ensign William P. West, launching with too little wind across the deck, went into a spin and fell into the water. West got out of his sinking plane, his head popped up moments before a wave washed over pilot and plane. As shipmates watched helplessly from the passing carrier, West[1] sank from sight. The same was repeated four days later when Lieutenant (jg) Gale Herman banked his fighter too sharply on clearing the ship and it stalled and crashed into the sea. The ever present plane guard destroyer turned on flank speed but before it could reach the injured pilot he sank beneath the surface. The miseries of war, the loss of friends and the demands of flying under nearly all possible conditions had been made vividly clear and yet in another ten days many more would be missing.

Both the ENTERPRISE and the HORNET entered Pearl Harbor on

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[1] The loss of "Willie" West hit the members of VS-6 particularly hard. He had been an experienced member of the squadron and he was one of the few whose wife lived in Hawaii. It fell upon his shipmates, Dobson, Edwin J. Kroeger and Ward Powell, to console the distraught Nancy and assist her in leaving Oahu. The Commanding Officer of VS-6 found himself too busily involved to attend to this important function of command. (Dobson Diary, 26 May 1942.)

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26 May and tied up to the quay at Ford Island. As usual, the air groups of the two carriers had launched while at sea, landing at 'Ewa, Ford Island and Kaneohe. The arrival of Task Force 16 was the occasion of furious activities in preparation for imminent departure. While the force had been south, even before it had departed in fact, events were building up for a struggle destined to contest the control of the Central Pacific and ultimately Hawaii itself. The initial Operation K, discussed earlier, alerted CINCPAC to Japan's continuing interest in Hawaii. It was, however, through Rochefort's intelligence center that most of the information was gleaned. Actually, their work on ascertaining the Japanese What?, When?, Where? was more complete for Coral Sea than for Midway. With the scattered bits of information that trickled into the underground center, Rochefort and his assistants compiled a dozier that pointed squarely at the Hawaiian chain. The precise date was uncertain as was the exact target. Consistently, the Japanese referred to their target as AF. The question before those in the Black Chamber was the precise meaning of AF, Midway or Oahu. With the passed-on information, Admiral King and his intelligence staff, headed by Commander Laurance F. Safford, believed the target to be Oahu. Rochefort who by early May was in almost daily conference with Layton and frequently with Admiral Nimitz was unsure. Finally, he suggested to the Fleet commander that they use the cable to instruct Midway to send out a clear message announcing that their supply of water had run low. The Owada communications station near the Heirinji Temple in Saitama Prefecture was the Japanese Navy's leading facility for

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intercepting enemy transmissions. It immediately sent an encrypted message to fleet units informing them that water was in short supply at AF.[1] The Aiea station on Oahu intercepted this message; the information was good and CINCPAC could be all but certain that Midway was the intended objective.

The willingness of Admiral Nimitz to try the "Water" message reflects one of his strong points, his ability to understand intelligence and the proper application of it to fleet operations. As he told Rochefort during one of their meetings, "You are supposed to tell us what the Japanese are going to do and I will then decide whether it is good or bad and act accordingly."[2] Too many commanders are prone to commit their forces on what they think the enemy will do rather than employ them on the basis of what the opposing force can do. It is a conflict of intentions versus capabilities. Although the objective was known to Admiral Nimitz the date of the attack was not. Only as the time approached was intelligence able to revise their estimates from the last of May to the very early days of June. The intelligence was so complete that the carrier aircraft squadrons committed to attack the Japanese knew the planned employment of the major forces - that the Aleutians would be a feint, the invasion troops would be approaching from the west and the mighty carrier

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 277. Saitama Prefecture lies approximately sixty miles northwest of Tokyo.

[2] Rochefort Interview. Rochefort conferred with Layton daily and briefed Admiral Nimitz several times a week, the frequency depending on the urgency of events.

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force would come in from the northwest. Not every ship was known, but when the Task Force next sortied it carried the names of most of the major Japanese ships. Pilots from the carriers knew that they could expect to find the AKAGI, KAGA, HIRYU, SORYU and possibly ZUIKAKU. In addition they were told that the battleship YAMATO, KONGO, HIEI, KIRISHIMA and HARUNA would accompany the carriers. Even some of the screen ships - ARASHIO, KUROSHIO, HATAZUKE, ASAGUMO and others - were identified.[1]

Along with briefing Task Force 16 on the intelligence picture came a much more difficult decision. When the ENTERPRISE tied up at Ford Island, the first man off was Admiral Halsey. He immediately took his barge the short distance to the submarine base and reported to Admiral Nimitz. He was a sick man, with a skin irritation caused by the hot weather of the tropics and the tensions of six months of operations and responsibilities. Immediately, the two senior Admirals and the Chief of Staff, Admiral Draemel, conferred regarding a relief. Admiral Pye was the next senior, but he was on the west coast and beyond that there were certain reservations on his qualifications. He was a battleship admiral and a stranger to carrier operations. Admiral Halsey suggested

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[1] Interview with Capt Robert E. Laub, USN (Ret) conducted at 19153 Marilla, North Ridge, California on 13 May 1966, Laub's torpedo plane was one of four that returned to the ENTERPRISE. Realizing that the days of the TBD were all but over, Laub retained his plotting board for posterity. The board, a slide out type, was pulled from the instrument panel to a position over the stick. The board used by Laub on 4 June 1942 is still complete with the pencilled names of the ships he expected to encounter. Some navigational information was erased to be replaced with the aids used on 6 June. Otherwise, Laub still retains his original board - shown to the writer during the interview.

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his senior subordinate and commander of his cruisers, Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. The Fleet commander knew him well, realized that he was a non flyer but was equally aware of his outstanding ability. He quickly accepted the recommendation.[1]

While all this going on Admiral Spruance was busy making his own way to CINCPAC. The NORTHAMPTON was hardly secured to her buoy when the cruiser commander was on his way to the ENTERPRISE to follow his usual procedure of calling on Admiral Halsey. Informed by the officer of the deck of the senior's absence, Spruance headed to Admiral Nimitz's headquarters, arriving just in time to be told that he would command Task Force 16 during the Midway Operations and that he would then relieve Admiral Draemel as Chief of Staff.[2] Admiral Halsey, acting on doctor's orders, left at once for the mainland.

The new commander of the two carrier force bore little resemblance to Admiral Halsey. He was slight and quiet, presenting a picture of a dignified school teacher rather than that of a military commander. Unlike "Bull" Halsey, he was not a naval aviator nor had he ever served on a carrier but Admiral Spruance was as intelligent and as professionally well rounded as any officer in the service. Since his 1906 graduation from Annapolis, he had served at sea in the normal assignments of a surface officer. Before Halsey entered the flight training course for

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[1] Interview with ADM Chester W. Nimitz, USN conducted at Quarters No. 1, Treasure Island, California on 14 October 1965.

[2] Spruance Interview and interview with BGEN Julian P. Brown, USMC (Ret) conducted at Fitzwilliam, N. H. on 27 June 1966.

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senior officers, the two had served together on destroyers. As a student, he so impressed the faculty of the Naval War College that subsequently he was twice assigned to the school as an instructor, once in 1931 and again in 1935. In 1938 he assumed command of the 33,000-ton battleship MISSISSIPPI. Soon after his selection to flag rank he headed for Hawaii where in September 1941 he raised his two star blue personal flag as Commander, Cruiser Division FIVE. Much has been written[1] concerning Admiral Spruance with references to him as a cold insensitive, human machine. He never attracted followers as did Admiral Halsey but as Admiral Nimitz remarked years later "It was a great day for the Navy when Bill Halsey had to enter the hospital."[2] Spruance's sharp piercing blue eyes and his thin serious face were outward reflections of a keen mind. He could receive the problem, cut away the frills and examine it in cold, mathematical terms. Later at Midway he would refuse a squadron commander's request to return and refuel and, knowing full well that the planes would run out of gas before coming home, order him to attack. The situation demanded this type of leader. Few Navy officers are known for their enthusiasm for walking. Spruance was an exception. For years he had used the walking periods to discuss subjects with his staff or personnel from other units. After duty as Chief of Staff, at

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[1] Admiral Spruance, like his close associate, Nimitz, has steadfastly refused to write an autobiography. The only known biography is Vice Admiral E. P. Forrestel, USN (Ret), Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, USN (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966).

[2] Nimitz Interview. So close did the association between Nimitz and Spruance become that plans have been completed for Spruance to be buried beside Nimitz at the Presidio National Cemetery.

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CINCPAC, he would once more fly his flag, this time as Commander of the mighty Fifth Fleet. Following the war, duty as President of the Naval War College and United States' Ambassador to the Philippines would round out a life devoted to serving his country.

The day after the arrival of Task Force 16, Admiral Fletcher, aboard the damaged YORKTOWN steamed up the narrow, twisting channel that separates Pearl Harbor from the open sea. On hand to greet "Waltzing Matilda" as she entered the huge drydock were over 1400 men. Before the keel and bilge blocks had been placed against her and the dock pumped dry, machinists, electricians, shipfitters, welders, shipwrights and steamfitters were deep inside the carrier, tearing and cutting away her injuries. Patternmakers fashioned templates and rushed them to machine shops near the drydock. There skilled craftsmen turned out new parts. The strict blackout failed to slow the furious pace. Before long the steady staccato of the rivetter could be heard as new plates, stanchions, stringers and frames were secured in place. Side plates sprung from near misses were examined and sprung or popped rivets replaced. Electricians restrung the many damaged cables, checking each to insure a completed circuit. In less than forty-eight hours, water gushed into the drydock in preparation for refloating the carrier. With hundreds of technicians and repairmen still aboard, tugs warped the YORKTOWN out of the drydock and over to the Ford Island quay for reprovisioning.[1] Initial repair estimates had run as high as 90 days. With careful plans,

[1] Interview with VADM Elliott Buckmaster, USN (Ret) conducted at 1414 Sixth Street, Coronado, California on 14 March 1966.

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an ample supply of American skill and outstanding cooperation between civilian workers and the ship's company, the repairs had been accomplished in less than two days. The rapid and thorough repair of the YORKTOWN remains a testimonial of American determination and ability and is a dramatic comparison to the SHOKAKU which required three months in the Kure shipyard for repairs but slightly more serious.

While workers were making the YORKTOWN seaworthy Admirals Fletcher and Spruance and selected members of their staffs, were receiving briefings at CINCPAC. Actually, Spruance received his first detailed briefing as soon as he was given command. This was presented by Admiral Nimitz, the Chief of Staff and McMorris as well as Layton. As the two Task Force commanders received the latest picture, there was little cause for joy. With each day it seemed that the Japanese force was growing in size. Both commanders realized how very inferior were their resources when pictured against the Japanese.[1] The one hope of the underdogs was achieving surprise. Layton in his intelligence briefings indicated that there was some chance of surprising the Japanese. All recent intercepts showed the Japanese as believing the American carrier force to be clear of the Hawaiian area. As the hours passed the two staffs, along with that of CINCPAC, developed their battle plans.[2]

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[1] Interview with ADM Frank Jack Fletcher, USN (Ret) conducted at "Araby" near La Plata, Maryland on 17 September 1966.

[2] This was under the direction of Chief of Staff, CINCPAC, RADM Draemel and included the Task Force commanders, their intelligence officers and the operations officers. The operations officers spent

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Commander Rochefort's intelligence summary, agreed to by Layton, clearly established the diversionary aspects of the Aleutians. Nevertheless, Admiral Nimitz could not ignore the movements in the Northern Pacific. Regardless of the strategic value of the Alaskan islands, they represented U. S. territory. Should they be lost Admiral Nimitz would be faced with political and propaganda condemnations out of all proportion with the value of the land lost. There was no choice but to send at least a token force to the northern latitudes..

As finally settled, Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, steamed north to take command of Task Force 8, consisting of three light cruisers and a pair of heavies; a dozen destroyers, mainly old four stacker; six submarines and a varied assortment of oilers, gunboats and cutters. There was no carrier available and although army air force shore based units were assigned to support, Task Force 8 was woefully lacking in air defense, Offensive air power did not exist for "Fuzzy" Theobald's force. To this day it remains a question what effectiveness Task Force 8 might have had in an engagement with Admiral Hosogaya's more powerful force and the striking power of RYUJO and JUNYO with their ninety aircraft. Whether their assignment to Task Force 16 and 17 would have contributed more to the American victory is problematical. As will be discussed later, the additional destroyers assigned to Task Force 8 could have been gainfully employed at Midway and might have affected the

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a prolonged period in trying to reach agreement on the best position for the two task forces. Capt McMorris from CINCPAC; Cdr Buracker from TF 16 and Cdr Schindler from TF 17 were the three operations officers.

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commander's decision making process in the later stages of the battle.

The aircraft carrier was the most needed ship for Midway. The size of the airfield on the island of Midway limited the number of aircraft that could be assigned to the outpost. There was also the continued danger of surprise submarine attacks that could destroy the exposed planes. The carrier was an entirely different method of operation. Her high speed and relatively large storage facilities allowed her to move anywhere on the sea. Within twenty-four hours steaming she could move 600 miles. She was fast, elusive and like a fighter could throw a powerful punch. Like the pugilist with the glass jaw, though, the carrier could be easily damaged.

The United States had entered the war with seven modern carriers and the old, converted LANGLEY destined to see the early days of the war as an aircraft ferry before being sunk on 26 February 1942[1] while approaching Tjilatjap in the Netherlands Indies. Two battlecruiser hulls, immobilized by the 1920 Naval Disarmament Conference, eventually had become the SARATOGA and the LEXINGTON, being commissioned in 1927. By 1934, the RANGER, first ship built from keel up as an aircraft carrier, had joined the fleet. Then in progression YORKTOWN, ENTERPRISE, WASP and HORNET took their places in the growing carrier family. On 7 December 1941, SARATOGA, LEXINGTON and ENTERPRISE were part of Admiral Kimmel's Pacific Fleet. By the time of Midway, LEXINGTON had been sunk and

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[1] Toland, But Not In Shame, p. 253.

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SARATOGA had nearly completed, at Bremerton, Washington Naval Shipyard, repairs to the torpedo damage and an extensive modernization program that, among other things, gave her radar. WASP was engaged in shuttling Spitfires from England to a launch point west of Malta. RANGER was fully committed to providing aerial cover to the steady stream of convoys crossing the Atlantic. Of the available carriers, Admiral Nimitz had three that could fight and, should the battle be delayed, he might have a fourth in SARATOGA. Nor could he assign any fast battleships to the two task forces. As was the case during Coral Sea, the few stationed on the west coast were so slow that they were unable to keep up with the carrier. To have employed them separately, would have required a screen of destroyers, a critically short item in the May 1942 Pacific Fleet inventory.

Battleships only six months before had been touted as the backbone of the fleet, but now they were unable to put to sea as part of it. The same was not true of the undersea service. CINCPAC designated Rear Admiral Robert H. English, Commander Submarines, Pacific, as Task Force 7. His submarines were flung from Pearl Harbor to the most distant reaches of the Pacific. Some were too far away to be used in the forthcoming battle and at least two were undergoing repair at Pearl Harbor. The SILVERSIDES maintained a guard at one of the entrances to the Inland Sea.[1] Every submarine that could reach the Midway area by 3 June was assigned a position.[2] In all nineteen submarines

[1] USS SILVERSIDES War Diary, May 1942.

[2] CINCPAC OPLAN 29-42 of May 27, 1942, p. 6.

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participated in the defense and for the first time in naval history operated as a tactical element of the surface force.

The GRENADIER was well underway for her second war patrol when she was directed to reverse course and take a position on the southern end of an arc 200 miles west of Midway. To the north would be DOLPHIN and GATO. Six more submarines were positioned in an arc fifty miles closer to Midway, starting due north of the island and extending counterclockwise to a point west southwest of the island. In this group were TAMBOR, TROUT, GREYLING, NAUTILUS, GROUPER and GUDGEON. The final three of the twelve submarines forming Task Group 7.1 were widely spread. CUTTLEFISH patrolled 700 miles to the west while CACHALOT and FLYING FISH had stations fifty miles north of Midway.

Although Admiral Nimitz had hopes that his Striking Force could hold the Japanese Mobile Force, he had still to plan for a retreat. As a deterrent to pursuit, should this unhappy event be necessary, three submarines were positioned where friendly forces could retire over them. NARWHAL, PLUNGER and TRIGGER, forming Task Group 7.2 or the Support Group, were positioned northeast of Midway.[1] Intelligence indicated Midway as the main objective, but Oahu might also be attacked or raided. Admittedly, too few in number for the task, TARPON, PIKE, FINBACK and GROWLER, comprising the Oahu Patrol, Task Group 7.3, were stationed 300 miles north of Oahu.[2]

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[1] Ibid, p. 7

[2] CINCPAC OPLAN 28-42 of May 21, 1942.

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The surface forces of CINCPAC, with the exception of the battleships and a few screening ships, were all committed to the two carrier task forces. Admiral Fletcher as the senior would be Officer in Tactical Command. Admiral Nimitz had few personal instructions to give to his two commanders. The three of them had served together at different times throughout their long service careers. The grey haired commander did take time to philosophize on the subject of command. As the supreme commander with the final responsibility, he had the obligation of providing his tactical commanders with all of the information he had and with the means at his disposal.[1] The actual work was to be performed by the tactical commanders with the greatest freedom of action. It was a basic policy that Admiral Nimitz followed throughout the war with but one exception. In October 1944 he discreetly questioned Admiral Halsey's employment of the forces assigned him when he sent his celebrated message "All the world wonders where is the Third Fleet?"[2]

On 28 May Task Force 16 slipped its lines and stood out for the battle area. Two days later, Admiral Fletcher in YORKTOWN and the other elements forming Task Force 17 followed. Two competent commanders were steaming out with an inferior force bent on stopping a juggernaught. The situation had been correctly analyzed as "most serious."[3]

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[1] Nimitz Interview.

[2] Ibid.

[3] CINCPAC Action Report to COMINCH on Battle of Midway, dated 28 June 1942, p. 3. Hereinafter referred to as CINCPAC Action Report.

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CHAPTER IV

A SENTRY IS ARMED AND READIED

A large, pale tan visored helmet hid the full thatch of grey hair indicating the age of a slightly stooped and round shouldered Texan. Two men, of comparable height, quickly followed his gaze as he pointed to different features on the near treeless area before them. In many respects the scene was one of a Texas rancher making a routine inspection of his domain with his two respected foremen answering his queries. The questions were carefully phrased indicating a keen general knowledge and asking only for answers to specific details. The meeting was not in the Lone Star State but on a coral atoll covered with sand and brush. The questioner did not own the land but had a very personal interest in every aspect of it for as CINCPAC the responsibility for it was his. On 2 May, the eve of the Battle of the Coral Sea, Admiral Nimitz paid his first visit to Midway Island.[1] It was not an affair with bands and honor guard but a real honest to goodness working inspection. The two men responding to the numerous queries were Commander Cyril T. Simard the Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Midway Island and the Commanding Officer of the 6th Marine Defense Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Harold D. Shannon.

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[1] LTC Robert D. Heinl, Jr. USMC, Marines At Midway (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 22.

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While the PBY flight represented Admiral Nimitz's first visit to Midway, this outpost of the Hawaiian chain had held a prolonged interest for some Americans, especially those wearing the uniform of the United States Navy. Midway was not much when measured in terms of square footage. Like so many tropical islands it consisted of a coral reef enclosing a lagoon that included mostly foul ground. Unlike the larger atolls in the Marshalls, Midway measured only six miles in diameter with two areas sufficiently clear of the water to be called islands. Both were located on the southern portion of the atoll, with Sand Island situated on the west side of Brooks Channel while Eastern Island formed the right flank of the principal entrance into the calm waters of the lagoon.

The usual fair maidens and waving palm trees associated with tropical islands were absent at Midway. The area was naturally uninhabited and void of any growth higher than the scaevola bush which covered the island above the coral sands of the beaches. This was the picture that Captain N. D. Brooks, the American master of the Hawaiian bark GAMBRIA, saw as he sailed into the lagoon and claimed the atoll for the United States on 9 July 1859. Eight years later the USS LACKAWANA formally established the claim upon the orders of the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles.[1] Although in 1869, money was appropriated and work undertaken to deepen the shallow channel to the wide, placid lagoon, the work was left unfinished.

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[1] Homer G. Votaw, "Midway - The North Pacific's Tiny Pet," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, LXVI (November, 1940), 1601.

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Not until 1903 was there renewed interest in Midway and then it was by a business concern, the Pacific Commercial Cable Company. By June of that year, however, President Theodore Roosevelt had directed the Navy to establish control over the island. Construction of the cable station, a lighthouse on Sand Island and the setting of mooring buoys all combined to give Midway a permanency as a U. S. possession.[1] Sand Island housed a small community of cable employees and a Marine Security Guard. In reality it was a lonely and near forgotten outpost where ships occasionally called and where at least one foundered on the surf-breaking reef.

Like the battle to be fought in its defense, the airplane became in time the instrument that focussed attention on the island. By 1935 commercial aviation was extending its overseas routes with Pan American Airways pioneering seaplane service to the Orient. On 6 June 1935 the first trans-Pacific passenger carrying clipper touched the placid lagoon waters and taxied to the newly constructed seaplane ramp on Sand Island.[2] In an era when night flights over water were unknown, passengers were offered the comfort of the island's small and modern hotel. From then until the outbreak of the war, Midway had at least two weekly visits from the four engined planes.

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[1] L. S. Shelmidine, "History of Midway Islands," American Neptune, VIII (July, 1948), 179-195 provides a good history of the discovery and development of the island.

[2] "History of Midway Island" dated 10 September 1945, p. 34 (copy in the files of the Historical Archives, Headquarters Marine Corps).

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Not all the renewed interest in Midway stemmed from private, profit-making concerns. Since the end of World War I a new and very naval conscious nation had upset the delicate balance of power in the Orient and threatened to spread it eastward. The modern discovery of Japan had occurred only six years before Brooks sighted Midway. By 1918 Japan had emerged as a world power and with her 1931 expansion into China and her announced decision in 1934 to be no longer bound by the Naval Limitations Treaty, the complexion of diplomatic and military affairs in the Pacific had changed markedly.

Although slow in gaining momentum, strategists started paying increased attention to Midway whose key location, 1135 miles west northwest of Pearl Harbor, offered so many advantages to whomever possessed it. The island had been used for small scale amphibious maneuvers and a Navy oiler had been infrequently located there to refuel destroyers. But in a military sense Midway, like larger Wake Island and Guam, remained unarmed. Midway is a natural projection of the Hawaiian chain and its strategic location points squarely at the Land of the Rising Sun. As a submarine base it would mean a week less sailing time to and from the patrol areas, or to put it another way, it meant that a submarine could stay on station a week longer. In addition, as a seaplane base Midway would serve ideally for extending the surveillance and early warning coverage of the main Hawaiian Islands.

The group of senior naval officers, under Rear Admiral Arthur J. Hepburn, recognized the potential value of Midway and the fundamental necessity to retain it under U. S. control. The 27 December 1938

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report to Congress, that bore the name of the senior member, contained the work of six months of investigations on numerous advanced naval bases, extending from Alaska to Panama and from the Atlantic to the Western Pacific.[1] For Midway, the Hepburn Report recommended the construction of a Naval Air Station on uninhabited Eastern Island of a size that could accommodate one patrol squadron on a permanent basis and a second one for brief periods. In addition the report urged that facilities be constructed of a size capable of refitting two divisions of submarines. The Hepburn Report emphasized the value of Midway when it declared that from the strategic point of view, it stood second in importance only to Pearl Harbor.

Congress recognized the need for haste by quickly appropriating the necessary funds. By the end of 1941, Eastern Island had been transformed into an important air station at a cost of more than $20,000,000.[2] The island, only slightly over a mile long, supported three intersecting coral base runways, the longest one of 5300 feet being capable of handling any aircraft then flying or on the drawing boards. Beside the runways, limited repair and maintenance facilities took shape, as did a power house, fuel farms and a messhall. When Commander Simard raised the commissioning pennant on 18 August

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[1] The Hepburn Report is properly labelled House Document No. 65, 76th Congress, 1st Session, "Report on the Need of Additional Naval Bases to Defend the Coast of the United States, its Territories and Possessions."

[2] Building the Navy's Bases in World War II, Vol I (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 84.

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1941, signifying the presence of a Naval Air Station, a great step had been taken.

Much still remained to be done in making Midway a complete base. Sand Island, whose two and a half mile length also contained the island's highest mark of thirty-nine feet, proved the logical place for emplanting that new technical device of electronic development - radar. Pan American's seaplane ramps were improved and a hangar constructed nearby. The major gasoline storage area was on Sand Island. The uncompleted channel, named in honor of the American who claimed for his country this lonely island, was dredged by Army Engineers, the task being completed by 1938.

Marines of the 3d Defense Battalion under Captain Samuel G. Taxis arrived on 14 February 1940 to provide the first air and seacoast defense weapons. With the arrival of the entire battalion Midway had a limited seacoast defense from three batteries of five inch guns while an equal number of three-inch antiaircraft guns provided the sky defense.[1] It was not much against either a modern warplane or a first rate warship. Understanding the lack of long range guns, the Commandant of the 14th Naval District was able to round up four naval guns, originally cast for a warship, that had been scrapped under terms of the Naval Limitations Treaty.[2] The seven-inch guns greatly increased the range, a pair being planted on each island and manned by Marines.

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[1] Colonel Samuel G. Taxis, USMC official reply to CMC dated 18 August 1947 (in the files of the Historical Archives, Headquarters Marine Corps).

[2] Major General Commandant letter of 12 September 1941 to Brigadier General Charles F. B. Price, USMC.

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At the same time that Simard was placing the Air Station into operation, Colonel Shannon was landing his 6th Defense Battalion in relief of the 3d. Shannon brought with him a new and not completely trained unit. What it lacked in formal training was more than offset by spirit and the forceful leadership of Shannon. He was an old hand at fighting having had his initial baptism to fire during the famed attack of the Fourth Brigade of Marines against the heavily defended Belleau Woods. From the World War I battles in France, Shannon moved on to fighting the elusive guerrilla in Haiti and soon thereafter to seeking the notorious Sandino and his gang of bandits that stalked the isolated areas of Nicaragua. The terrain of Midway differed from the gentle rolling farmland of the Valley of the Marne and the dense jungle growth of Nicaragua, but the qualities of leadership Shannon had shown as a lieutenant in France and as a captain in the Central American republics were clearly evident on Midway. He had a job to do and, although the means to do it were inadequate, he would do all he could to fulfill the mission assigned. As one seasoned private of the battalion recalls:

> "The Old Man worked us until I thought I would drop from fatigue. As soon as one thing was done he had a new job waiting. I now realize that his relentless drive, as much as anything else, insured our being ready for the Japanese."[1]

Shannon had brought the ground element of the air-ground defense team but despite the availability of the airfield, Midway did not have either an air attack capability or a fighter defense force. The long

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[1] Interview with Major John H. Miniclier, USMC conducted at MCS, Quantico, Virginia on 21 February 1957.

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years of peace, an economy minded government, and an isolationist public combined to keep military preparedness below even the minimum acceptable standards. The war in Europe, by now well into its second year, brought pleas for American materials of war, particularly airplanes. As a result, the Pacific became an area of secondary concern, regardless of militant-minded Japan. For places like Midway this meant a lack of men and equipment. Not until 19 November 1941 did Midway start to receive its first land-based air elements. Even then only the ground units of Marine Scout-Bombing Squadron 231 (VMSB-231), under Second Lieutenant Loren D. Everton, arrived. The eighteen obsolescent, fabric covered SB2U-3's had been loaded on the LEXINGTON in preparation for launching them to Midway during the morning of 7 December. In fact, two patrol planes from Midway had been scheduled to rendezvous with the Marine planes and lead them to their new home.

The planes didn't arrive as scheduled for soon after 0600 a cryptic radio message announced that Pearl Harbor, and other bases on Oahu, were under Japanese air attack. The island's sailors and marines went to General Quarters and stood ready to repel any enemy attack with the meager means at their disposal. The LEXINGTON was diverted from the Midway area and ordered to search southwest of Oahu.[1] VMSB-231 remained on board the LEXINGTON until 10 December when they flew

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[1] LTC Frank O. Hough, Major Verle E. Ludwig, Mr. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., History of U. S. Marine Corps Operations in World War II, Vol I: Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 79.

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off, not to Midway, but to Oahu's Ewa airfield.

Japan had concentrated her attack on Oahu with Midway receiving but scarce attention. At 2135 on 7 December, the sleek destroyers SAZANAMI and USHIO steamed back and forth off the southern portion of the island and fired at the principle island facilities.[1] Midway, though, had been blacked out since early November and censorship had been in effect since the 13th of November.[2] The firing was not prolonged nor was it especially effective. The exploding shells damaged the powerhouse, parachute loft and an unfinished radio transmitter, set fire to the roof of a seaplane hangar and destroyed a command post.[3]

The night of 7 December, and the days immediately following, would have been the best days for Japan to attack Midway. The 819 Marines of the 6th Defense Battalion would have fought to defend the island but without any real hope of success.[4] On islands like Tarawa and those of the Marshalls, Japan had built large pillboxes of coconut logs, concrete and steel, but on Midway the Marines had only open foxholes. A heavy naval gunfire concentration, accompanied by bombing attacks from carrier aircraft, and the Japanese could easily have taken the island.

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[1] Morison, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 73.

[2] War Diary, U. S. Naval Air Station, Midway, November 1941.

[3] A single round entered the air vent of the powerhouse, exploding inside and injuring First Lieutenant George H. Cannon who refused evacuation until communications from the command post had been re-established. For his heroic work, Cannon was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the first Marine to receive the award in World War II.

[4] Muster rolls, 6th Defense Battalion show 30 officers and 789 enlisted.

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Unlike Wake Island, which on 23 November received a squadron of Marine Wildcat fighters, Midway's sole defense was an understrength and under-equipped battalion of Marines. Little assistance could have been received from the island's other personnel who included men from the cable stations, Pan American Airways, naval administrative personnel and a group of unruly and obnoxious civilian construction workers. The contract workers were such a disorderly group that Shannon had half a dozen of them confined to the brig within twenty-four hours.[1]

Midway was not attacked again during those crucial December days and within the limited means available, CINCPAC strengthened the defenses of this strategic outpost. Major Clarence J. Campbell, Jr. commanded the flight of SB2U's that flew from Hickam to Midway on 17 December. The event marked the longest massed single engine flight on record,[2] but to the ground defenders on Midway, who stood atop their gun emplacements to wave and cheer the landing airmen, it represented the arrival of the missing half of the air-ground team. Two additional batteries of the 4th Defense Battalion brought both three inch and seven inch guns to Midway. The Marine planes of VMSB-231 had the double mission of being the island's attacking force as well as its air defense. The ancient Vindicators were capable of filling neither of these tasks against a modern enemy.

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[1] "History of Midway Island," p. 44.

[2] Robert Sherrod, History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), p. 52.

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The Brewster Buffaloes of VMF-221, that landed on Christmas Day, were only slightly more capable of providing fighter defense than the Vindicators. Major Verne J. McCaul's Brewsters had been loading onto the SARATOGA at San Diego when the bombs started falling on Pearl Harbor. McCaul landed the planes six days later at Ewa, after having been launched from the SARATOGA and following a memorable aerial inspection of the devastation around the Hawaiian naval base.[1] The planes were soon reloaded onto the SARATOGA, destined for Wake Island as a part of the relief expedition. When the island fell on 23 December, VMF-221 was ordered to Midway. The squadron's ground personnel, Battery B of the 4th Defense Battalion, new radar equipment and a large amount of defense material arrived the following day. This, however, was to be the extent of reinforcement of Midway until the period immediately prior to the battle.

In the intervening five months there was little that could be done aside from improving what the island had. Aerial patrols protected the island from dawn until dark while lookouts scanned the waters for the telltale periscope of enemy submarines. Guns were crewed and ready

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[1] Interview with Colonel John F. Carey, USMC (Ret) conducted at Vertol Company, Philadelphia on 1 July 1966. Colonel Carey reflected on the sobering effect the widespread destruction had on all members of the squadron. The F2A's had been assigned to VMF-221 after the squadron received the newer F4F Wildcat. The F2A's had shown a tendency for buckling the main gear if not landed perfectly on the carriers. As a result, the Bureau of Aeronautics, which controls planes for both Navy and Marine squadrons, made a hasty switch, the Navy receiving the newer F4F.

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for firing at a moment's notice and both at morning and evening twilight all hands went to General Quarters.

When a Japanese submarine surfaced at evening twilight on 25 January, the standing operating procedure paid immediate dividends. While everyone was at his GQ station the submarine suddenly broke the water and commenced indiscriminately firing at the island. Captain Jean H. Buckner's Battery D on Sand Island immediately returned the fire, expending twenty-four rounds and causing the underwater craft to dive.[1] Two weeks later, on 8 February, a second submarine surfaced only 1000 yards off of Sand Island. Captain Loren A. Fraser's Battery A had rounds on the way so rapidly that the enemy submarine had time to fire only three rounds before diving.[2] No damage was done to the submarine and it may well have been the same boat that surfaced two days later at sunset. The submarine could only fire two rounds, both of which landed harmlessly in the lagoon, before First Lieutenant John F. Carey and Second Lieutenant Philip R. White, flying the evening submarine patrol, spotted the boat. The two planes dropped their 100-pound bombs close to the craft and guns of Midway went into action as the submarine dove in haste.[3]

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[1] Hough, Ludwig, Shaw, Vol I: Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, p. 217.

[2] CO, 6th Defense Battalion letter of 8 February 1942 to Commandant, 14th Naval District.

[3] CO VMF-221 action report of 11 February 1942 to Commanding Officer, MAG-21. Marine Air Group 21 still retained administrative control over VMF-221 while operational control rested with the Marine Aviation Detachment, Midway. Complete control of VMF-221 passed to MAG-22 on 1 March 1942.

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The island remained free of surface attack until the early part of June. In the air, the new radar set on Sand Island picked up an unidentified contact at 1030 on 10 March. Four fighters under Captain Robert M. Haynes were vectored toward what proved to be a Kawanishi 97 "Mavis" flying boat cruising at 10,000 feet.[1] Without difficulty the four-engined plane was shot down.

Aerial development became the focal point of activities on the island. On 9 January, Lieutenant Colonel William J. Wallace arrived as commanding officer of the Marine Aviation Detachment, a unit that was designated as Marine Air Group 22 on 1 March. Wallace left the island for Ewa on 20 April but Lieutenant Colonel Ira L. Kimes, who took his place, continued much of Wallace's work. The continual expansion of Marine aviation both helped and hindered air operations on Midway. The expansion allowed certain airmen to leave the island and gain promotion. John L. Smith, who had been with the squadron for over two years and who later won the Medal of Honor at Guadalcanal while shooting down twenty-five planes, left Midway shortly before the battle. The departure of the experienced pilots and the arrival of new ones hindered developing teams within the squadrons. One of the senior officers later claimed this as a blessing in disguise.[2] He reasoned that even the experienced officers would have been no match for the Zeroes. So, while

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[1] VMF-221 History (in the files of the Historical Archives, Headquarters Marine Corps). Although all four fliers fired on the enemy, Captain James L. Neefus is credited with the kill, a feat which earned him the Navy Cross.

[2] Interview with GEN Verne J. McCaul, USMC (Ret) conducted at 1458 Marritt Drive, El Cajon, California on 1 June 1966.

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the loss of life was regrettable, the seasoned officers who missed Midway, but were at Guadalcanal, may have been one of the key reasons for tipping the air war in the Solomons against Japan.

When Admiral Nimitz made his sudden inspection of Midway on 2 May he dug into every aspect of the island's ability to defend itself. He asked both Simard and Shannon what they needed to hold the island against a major enemy attack. More important, Nimitz gained first hand knowledge of the area. While he did not tell the two officers that the island was the likely target of the next Japanese strike, his presence indicated a sincere concern for its defensive capabilities. Or departing he promised the two commanders all the help he could spare.

Within a week men, materials and equipment were on the way. Elements of the 3d Defense Battalion returned to the lonely island, including three three inch antiaircraft batteries, an eight gun thirty-seven millimeter battery and an eighteen gun twenty millimeter battery. Marines who could and would welcome tangling with any Japanese landing force arrived in the form of two rifle companies from the 2d Marine Raider Battalion.[1] The two companies were an elite group, carefully selected, of the most undisciplined, ill-uniformed and blood-thirsty men ever to wear the Marine uniform. The snap and sparkle so characteristic of a Marine organization was utterly lacking, but the will and the ability to kill the enemy had more than taken their place.

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[1]Muster rolls, 2d Marine Raider Battalion, May 1942. Captain Donald H. Hastie commanded Company C on Sand Island while First Lieutenant John Apergis' Company D was stationed on Eastern Island.

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On 14 May the group in Rochefort's Black Chamber had produced a sufficient amount of intelligence so that Admiral Nimitz, in conjunction with the Commanding General of the Army Department, declared a state of "Fleet Opposed Invasion." Concurrent with the announcement, CINCPAC "spot" promoted his two commanders on Midway, Simard to Captain and Shannon to Colonel. In addition, he told the two, over the cable that linked the isolated island, that he expected the Japanese to arrive by 28 May and that he would have still more help on the way.

The first increment of the new assistance arrived on Midway on 25 May when the light cruiser ST. LOUIS brought the elements of the 3d Defense Battalion and the two Raider companies. One company of Raiders was placed on each island. The real highlight was the arrival of the converted freightcar ferry, KITTYHAWK, on 26 May with more antiaircraft guns and new aircraft. Sixteen SBD's joined VMSB-241 and seven F4F's were added to VMF-221's force of slow, low altitude Brewsters. Pilots skilled in these new aircraft did not accompany the planes so it became incumbent upon Kimes and his two squadron commanders to take the pilots they had and make the most of the situation. Major Floyd B. Parks, the leader of VMF-221, was able to find pilots who had previously flown the F4F, but Major Lofton R. Henderson was not so fortunate. The large influx of new pilots without experience in the SBD forced him to adopt measures which reduced the effectiveness of the plane and the method of attack.

The KITTYHAWK also unloaded a relatively large amount of defense material and five light tanks. There was help coming from a direction

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that neither CINCPAC nor Midway had anticipated. A naval ammunition ship made a short stop at Midway on its way to Corregidor.[1] Her cargo included explosives that ranged from small arms ammunition and dynamite to the mammoth eight inch mortar rounds for Corregidor's Geary Battery. Shortly before the ship was due to sail, Corregidor capitulated. After the usual amount of red tape to gain the necessary permission, the Marines at Midway were authorized to unload all of the explosives they could use.

For the Marine infantry, one of the most essential items for preparing a defensive position was the land mine, both personnel and antitank. Higher priorities elsewhere had denied any mines to the island.[2] With characteristic ingenuity, makeshift mines were devised. Sealed sewer pipes were filled with either TNT or dynamite and placed off shore in the most likely areas of approach. Metal ammunition boxes and empty fuel drums were loaded with explosives and quantities of twenty-penny nails. The TNT was wired for detonation by an electrical spark as were some of the sunken dynamite charges. Others were affixed with a bulls-eye on the landward side to enable marksmen to detonate the charges by rifle fire. Discarded whiskey bottles were fashioned into Molotov cocktails and stored at every fighting position. Emergency rations, water and ammunition were stored at supply points

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[1] LTC Robert C. McGlashan letter to CMC of 12 August 1947 (in the files of the Historical Archives, Headquarters Marine Corps).

[2] Heinl, Marines at Midway, p. 24.

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throughout the two islands.[1] Barbed wire, both in concertina form and as a double apron, was strung along the beaches and immediately off shore. Although the ground defenses are never completed, there is always the need for another string of barbed wire or refreshing the camouflage on a position or relaying a gun for a better field of fire, the end of May brought the defensive positions to a degree of readiness that allowed target practice. The live shooting was a welcomed break from the endless hours of gun drill and according to one officer, proved invaluable in giving personnel confidence and the feeling of being part of the team.

Shortly before 25 May, Admiral Nimitz was able to inform Simard that the Japanese attack on Midway had been set back from 28 May to the first week in June. He also told the island commander that he was increasing the Midway air strength with special attention to long range surveillance aircraft. Throughout the early months of 1942, Midway had had a part of a patrol squadron of PBY's that flew the regular searches. As late as 22 May there had been only four PBY's but in the next week the planes started arriving in force. By 31 May there were twenty-four Catalinas based at Midway and the number increased to thirty by 3 June.[2]

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[1] Interview with LTC John F. Miniclier, USMC conducted at MCB, Camp Pendleton, California on 2 April 1966. Miniclier was a private acting as a squad leader during much of this preparatory period. His impression that the battalion would have given a good fight to any Japanese attack runs counter to that held by General Verne J. McCaul, USMC (Ret), the Executive Officer of MAG-22. McCaul, who had conferred extensively with Major Walter L. J. Bayler, USMC, the last man to leave Wake Island, believed that Midway was to be sacrificed much like Wake had been.

[2] War Diary, Patrol Wing Two, June 1942. The PBY's by 2 June

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To allow greater search from Midway, Admiral Nimitz assigned PBY's to Johnston Island. Located 820 miles south southeast of Midway, the Catalinas would search to the south of Midway. More PBY's searched from Hawaii to the north. Thus, the search area for Midway's reconnaissance planes was restricted to the sector between 200° and 020°.

To provide a long-range attack capability seventeen Army B-17's were based on Eastern. They arrived the end of May and were present throughout the battle. The four-engined Flying Fortresses could carry a heavy load of bombs an extended distance. Like so many units assigned to the Pacific area during this period of the war, the men who manned the giant bombers were fresh out of school. Whether it was the pilot, gunner, engineer or bombardier/navigator the individual was inexperienced in the skills of his specialty. The same prevailed for the four B-26's that arrived on 30 May. The twin-engined attack bombers had been rigged for carrying an externally slung torpedo. It was a jury rigged affair conjured up by the Army fliers of the 69th Medium Bombardment Group with technical assistance from aerial torpedo experts at the Navy's Ford Island air station.[1] There had been time for dummy runs around Oahu, but none of the four air crews had ever dropped a

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were from four squadrons: VP-23 (16); VP-24 (2); VP-44 (11); VP-51 (2). In addition other planes, because of overcrowding at Midway, were positioned at Barking Sands, approximately 100 miles southeast of Midway.

[1]Vern Haugland, The AAF Against Japan (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 81. PBY's carried the torpedoes from Pearl to Midway where they were affixed to the B-26 Marauders.

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real torpedo before they arrived on Midway.

The final torpedo attacking unit to be based on Midway arrived at Eastern Island under even more unusual circumstances than the Army planes. The HORNET had been based at Norfolk, Virginia from the beginning of the war until early February. When the carrier was ordered to the Pacific, Torpedo Squadron Eight was nearly ready to pick up its new TBF aircraft to replace the obsolescent TBD Devastators.[1] Time did not permit this so the squadron commander split his abnormally large contingent of pilots and gunners. Most of the more experienced he kept with him on the carrier. The remainder flew to the Grumman Aircraft factory on Long Island where they awaited delivery of the new TBF's. The process was slow, but as each plane was turned over to the Navy, an aircrew was waiting. Familiarization flights were conducted from the Naval Air Station at Quonset Point, Rhode Island and included a single drop of a torpedo without warhead.[2]

In Washington, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, ordered the new planes flown to the west coast where in early May the KITTYHAWK carried the nineteen TBF's to Pearl Harbor. The planes arrived at Ford Island on 24 May in a completely disassembled condition.

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[1] Lt H. H. Ferrier, USN, "Torpedo Squadron Eight, the Other Chapter," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, XC (October, 1964), 73.

[2] Interview with Capt Albert K. Earnest, USN, CO USS ESTES conducted on board on 28 April 1966. The TBF later became known as the Avenger, a name given in honor of the heroic sacrifices of the torpedo pilots and gunners who died at Midway. The Avenger and modifications to the basic torpedo plane remained in the Navy inventory until the waning days of the Korean War. Although not designed for the purpose, the Avenger evacuated many wounded and/or frostbitten Marines from the epic breakout from the Choisin Reservoir in November 1950.

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Spare parts could not be shifted to the HORNET and the planes assembled and test flown in time to replace the TBD's already on the carrier. Six could be readied in time to add to Midway's torpedo attacking capability. The detachment under Lieutenant Langdon K. Fieberling, the squadron's material officer, took off from Ford Island early on the morning of 1 June on the eight-hour flight to Midway. Additional gas tanks replaced the torpedoes for the long overwater flight and two ensigns from Patrol Wing Two were assigned as navigators. The arrival of the TBF's brought the number of planes on Midway to a total of 118.

So many planes on Eastern's short and narrow runways, even though most of the PBY's used the seaplane facilities on Sand Island, severely taxed all aspects of the small air station. Sufficient revetments did not exist for all planes, although more were continually being constructed, and the shop areas and refueling pits were not designed to accommodate the varied type of aircraft that had been brought to the island. Filling the hungry aircraft with gas was probably the singularly most difficult job to be performed. It was a bothersome task under all circumstances, but when a sailor inadvertently closed the wrong electrical switch in the fuel storage area and exploded demolitions that had been readied in case the island was overrun, the chore became near impossible. Over 400, 000 gallons of gas went up in flames and smoke and, equally as important, all the high speed refueling pumps were also lost.[1] Thereafter, all refueling had to be done with hand pumps and from fifty-five gallon drums.

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[1] Morison, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions. p. 78.

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Flying was curtailed to only surveillance flights and the local antisubmarine patrols.

Control of the numerous types of aircraft from the several services required careful coordination. Although Simard was a naval aviator, his hands were full with running affairs at Midway. Admiral Nimitz recognized the problem and directed his Chief of Staff to dispatch a competent officer to run the air show on Midway. A quick scan of senior officers in the area and Admiral Draemel had his man, Commander Logan C. Ramsey,[1] the operations officer of Rear Admiral Patrick N. Bellinger's Patrol Wing Two. Ramsey had been a student at the Naval War College while Admiral Draemel was assigned there as an instructor. The senior officer remembered Ramsey's fine performance during the war games of a Japanese attack on Midway. Furthermore, this veteran aviator had been brought up on search planes, having flown them since 1921, even before he operated carrier-based land planes from the LANGLEY, SARATOGA and LEXINGTON. In addition, Ramsey was experienced in working with the Army reconnaissance planes on Hawaii as they came, for search purposes, under Patrol Wing Two.

On 28 May Ramsey was ordered from his Ford Island office across the harbor to CINCPAC Headquarters in the Submarine Base. Before he was fully aware of just why he was there, the six foot, 195-pound flier was ushered into Admiral Nimitz's office. With the senior staff officers occasionally joining, Nimitz briefed Ramsey on what was expected from

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[1] Interview with RADM Milo F. Draemel, USN (Ret) conducted at Wynnwood Plaza Apartments, Wynnwood, Pennsylvania on 1 July 1966.

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the Japanese and what his role was to be on Midway.[1] Primarily, Ramsey was to run the air show while Simard attended to the logistics and administrative support on Midway. The briefing lasted several hours as every known aspect of the operation was disclosed to Ramsey. The attitude of CINCPAC was not one of pessimism, as it had been immediately after Pearl Harbor. Officers at the senior headquarters recognized, however, that their means were far inferior to what the Japanese would hurl against them. All U. S. forces must be carefully employed and alert to avoid surprise from the Japanese. Admiral Nimitz recognized that the battle would be a touch and go affair and he was enough of a practical commander to realize that despite all his efforts the island might still be lost. He, therefore, confided to Ramsey that if this proved to be the case, he should "get all of the heavy stuff out."[2] This applied to the PBY's and B-17's which could fly to Hawaii without special preparations.

Ramsey, with two staff officers, left the following day for Midway on a PBY so heavily loaded that it almost failed to lift from the restricted seaplane lanes of Pearl Harbor. On Midway Ramsey moved his office into a bunker on Sand Island, near to but not with Simard, that had direct communications to Kimes on Eastern Island, the radar sight and the cable terminal to Pearl.

Admiral Nimitz had ordered Ramsey to bring out the PBY's and

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[1] Ramsey Interview.

[2] Ibid.

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B-17's should the island be overrun. He also directed other action which clearly shows his practical mind. While he thought that he could hold Midway, he also wanted additional troops available to retake the island, or, if impractical, to be used in increasing the defensive capabilities of the Hawaiian Islands. On 26 May Admiral Nimitz sent a message to the Chief of Naval Operations and to the Commandant of the Marine Corps asking for their assistance in readying a counter amphibious force.[1] Regimental Combat Team Two (a part of the Second Marine Division) plus two antiaircraft platoons and an antitank platoon were alerted to embark on the PRESIDENT HAYES on forty-eight hours notice.

For those at CINCPAC who knew the size and the scope of the Japanese operations, the thought of defeat had dreadful implications. While Admiral Draemel never confided his concern over the loss of Midway to his staff, it was certainly in his thoughts. Midway was essential for the defense of Oahu. Should Midway be lost and the fleet units defending it be destroyed, the Japanese might be able to gain a toe hold on Oahu or Kauai or at least blockade and isolate the area. The war might even have to slip back with the west coast as the main line of defense. Such thoughts were slight comfort for the officers and men who had their families present. Lieutenant (jg) Walter "J." East, an assistant communications officer at CINCPAC, was in the unenviable position of knowing what was in the offing and being unable to tell his wife about it.

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[1] CINCPAC message 252349Z May 1942 to CMC, COMINCH, COMPHIBFOR. RCT-2, commonly called Second Marines, was the only organized amphibious force on the west coast. Elements of the First Marine Division were already enroute or ashore on New Zealand or Samoa.

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East carried many of the most restricted Top Secret messages to Admiral Nimitz. As the size of the Japanese force developed with increasing clarity, East urged his wife to take an earlier passage to the mainland.[1] Since he could not tell her why she should hurry her departure, Joan East won out and spent the early June days in blessed ignorance of the great battle taking place a thousand miles away.

The same degree of security and cautiousness did not prevail in Japan. Many Japanese, both in and out of the naval service, were privy to the Midway operation when there was no real need to know of it. The long string of early successes had made many Japanese careless and the season of the year, too, seemed to invite loose conversation and a lack of concern over a war that was going Japan's way. May is a month of festivities in Japan which was hardly dampened by the shortages and necessities of war. The Imperial Order, or Kaikairei, ordering the Midway Operation was issued on Boys' Day, the fifth of May. Boys' Day is the culmination of a week of gaiety identified to outsiders primarily by the colorful paper carps that fly over each house having a son. There is one carp for each male descendant. The following week is known as Golden Week, an occasion in which national and religious holidays run one behind the other.

Even Admiral Yamamoto fell into the prevailing laxity of the moment. Soon after the middle of May, during a period when the YAMATO was in the shipyard at Kure undergoing minor repairs and taking on supplies,

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[1] East Interview.

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Admiral Yamamoto met his beloved geisha. Chiyoko arrived at the Kure Station where the four star admiral, wearing a sack coat, glasses and a health masuku was waiting. By jinirikisha the two went to the nearby Kikukawa Inn where they spent several days.[1] After her return to Tokyo, Chiyoko received a letter from her lover which said that he would be leaving on the 29th and that he would "command the whole fleet for three weeks at sea."

The careless attitude that prevailed in Japanese naval circles did not apparently reach the eager ears of Rochefort and his intelligence gathering stations. Even the submarine SILVERSIDES failed to spot the Mobile Force as it sortied from the narrow and heavily mined waters of Bungo Channel, that body of water separating Kyushu from Shikoku.

Navy Day, 27 May, was a bright one with the sun shining on the forest of masts anchored in Hashirajima Bay. Ashore, the cherry blossoms had long gone by and in their place the lush green of newly sprouted leaves reached down to the shoreline that nearly surrounded the bay. Little coal burning yellow boats scurried about the harbor carrying last minute dispatches and secret orders. From the starboard signal arm of the AKAGI, a pennant, fluttering lazily in the light morning breeze, told other ships of the Mobile Force to prepare to weigh anchor. Navy Day in Japan commemorated the smashing victory of Admiral Togo's forces over the Russian Fleet in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905.

At 0600 the prep pennant was two blocked and smartly dropped. The

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 278.

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light cruiser NAGARA was first to weigh anchor as the harbor echoed to the sound of heavy anchor links dragging through the hawseholes of the twenty-one ships comprising the Mobile Force.[1] Spirits were high as the crews manned the rails and looked at the fading homeland. Farmers were busy toiling in the fields cultivating the new year's crop. Astern, beyond the white foaming wake, could be seen the industrial haze of the busy city of Hiroshima. Occasionally, someone would nod toward the distant Shikoku Island and mention a few words asking for assistance and good sailing from the Kompira Shrine. A replica of this Shinto Shrine, that served as the safekeeper of seamen, was located on each warship. Crewmen would seek out the small shrine, particularly during times of tension and danger, and ask for spiritual blessing. The small ones, set between two electric candles, were copied from the large shrine situated on a hill above Naikai on the northeast corner of Shikoku.[2] For hundreds of years, long before there was such a thing as an Imperial Navy, the Kompira Shrine had provided safety for fishermen.

Passage through the familiar Bungo Channel was easily completed by noon and soon the signal post carried instructions to secure the special sea detail and set the regular underway watch. As the ships caught the gentle swells of the Pacific the NAGARA's signal bridge was busy flashing messages to her destroyers to form an antisubmarine screen around

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[1] ONI Review, p. 9. Directions for the sortie and initial movement were contained in Mobile Force Secret Operation Order No. 35.

[2] Interview with LCdr Hiromitsu Koyanagi, JMSDF. The shrine can still be seen above Naikai and replicas remain a part of each ship in the present Japanese Navy.

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the major ships. In the center of the force steamed the four carriers. AKAGI and KAGA, both converted battlecruisers like our own LEXINGTON and SARATOGA, formed Carrier Division One under the direct command of Admiral Nagumo. To port were the newer and smaller HIRYU and SORYU, the former flying the personal flag of Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi. Carrier Division Two sailed under an officer that many considered the most capable in the Navy.[1] A classmate of Admiral Ugaki while at Etajima, Yamaguchi later received additional academic training at Princeton. Although not a flier, his appreciation of the role of naval aviation in modern warfare made him the favorite of all pilots.

The initial misfortune to the Mobile Force occurred the first night at sea. Commander Mitsuo Fuchida had felt ill during most of the period ashore but had attributed it to an old ulcer. Now in his cabin, sharp pains brought the AKAGI's surgeon who diagnosed it as an appendicitis.[2] An operation was necessary at once. It was a bitter blow for the intelligent, capable and energetic Fuchida who had repeatedly demonstrated his leadership in commanding the multi-carrier force air groups that

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[1] USSBS No. 65, Interrogation of Captain Yasuji Watanabe, IJN. Gunnery Officer, Combined Fleet.

[2] Discussion with Capt Mitsuo Fuchida, formerly IJN, conducted at the Southern Baptist Church, National City, California on 6 June 1965. Fuchida delivered the sermon on this particular Sunday, he being a guest lecturer. While the text of the sermon was on his conversion to Christianity he devoted considerable time on the background that led him to make this decision. During the sermon, and in speaking to him later, he remarked on his appendicitis and how this indirectly saved his life during the Battle of Midway. Fuchida's point was that this occurrence was one more step in his developing belief that someone other than the Emperor was looking out for him.

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had carried the war to the far reaches of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. He had commanded at Pearl Harbor, Rabaul, Darwin, Java and the attacks on Ceylon. Others could lead in his place, but few had his wealth of experience and fewer still could get the results he had from the temperamental airmen.

The eastward course of the Mobile Force brought it steadily into an area of forbidding weather. Rain and fog restricted visibility and cut off all air operations. While it made navigation difficult it also kept the ships hidden from U. S. air observation. On board the ships spirits remained high in spite of the weather and officers and men settled down to the normal routine at sea. This was particularly the case among the airmen who were confined to the carriers with the poor weather.

The air group on the KAGA was representative of the other carriers as well. The pilots spent considerable time in the single ready room located just below the flight deck and under the island structure. The airmen studied publications and played games to while away the hours. Others frequented the wardroom near the stern of the carrier and between the flight and hangar decks. The day's main meal was served at noon and contrary to what might be expected the menu featured European or Western fares rather than a Japanese diet and it was customarily eaten with knife and fork rather than the more familiar ohashi.[1]

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[1] Miyo Interview. While Miyo was not aboard the KAGA on her fateful voyage, he had many months aboard her as well as other carriers of the Japanese Navy. One of his comments was to the effect that the early hour of dinner allowed too much time for drinking during the evening which required a late evening snack to assure being able to fly the next day in a reasonably sober condition.

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Unlike American warships, which were dry, the Japanese Navy allowed the men beer, and on special occasions sake, while the officers enjoyed western type whiskies as well. The evening meal was served early, at 1630, in order to allow proper time for bathing. Showers were unknown on Japanese warships and in their place men used the standard bath and tub. Seniors entered first to wet, soap, rinse and then soak in the tub of steaming hot water. Juniors followed according to rank in using the same water.

Throughout 31 May and 1 June, the Mobile Force refueled. Upon completion of refueling, Admiral Nagumo's ships entered a thick fog bank that continued to protect them from outside observation until the morning of 4 June.[1] By 3 June the fog was so dense that signal flags and blinking lights could not be used between ships. Since a change of course had to be executed at 1330, Admiral Nagumo had no choice but to use a low powered radio transmission to effect the change. Fortunately, it was not picked up by the Americans, although Admiral Yamamoto did intercept the message even though he was some 500 miles away. The final night, 3 June, the waters were calm and although other elements of the Japanese Fleet had been discovered, the Mobile Force's twenty-four knot approach remained undetected. There were false alarms late at night when anxious lookouts confused stars for enemy planes, but in other respects the Mobile Force was ready for the big events of 4 June.

Before the Mobile Force ever departed from Japan, Ramsey had

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[1] ONI Review, p. 9.

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worked out the requirements for patrol planes from Midway to spot the approaching enemy.[1] He figured that for a carrier to launch a dawn attack on Midway it must be within 200 miles of the island. With this premise, Ramsey next computed the distance which an enemy carrier steaming at twenty-seven knots could make during the hours of darkness. In rough figures this turned out to be 300 miles. Thus, if Midway patrol planes were to detect the Japanese before they were in range to launch their aircraft they had to be discovered at least 500 miles from Midway on the day prior to launching aircraft to attack the island. Since his planes could fly further than the 500 mile radius, Ramsey prescribed one of 700 miles. At that distance a daylight bombing attack could be carried out by Flying Fortresses based on Midway with the Japanese being unable to retaliate. To provide positive lateral coverage each PBY was assigned an 8° sector. Altogether Ramsey employed twenty-four planes in long-range reconnaissance with the carrier forces taking up the search in the sector northeast of Midway. The primary consideration in Ramsey's planning was to insure that should the Japanese bomb Midway all planes would have adequate time for take off.

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[1] Commander Patrol Wing Two letter of 23 May 1942 to CINCPAC on the Employment of Aircraft in connection with enemy attack on Midway. This letter was obviously prepared before Ramsey's departure to Midway on 29 May. In talking with Ramsey he stated that only upon reporting to Admiral Nimitz on 28 May did he learn of the impending Japanese attack. In this his memory may have been correct and the letter referred to above merely a planning document composed in response to a CINCPAC requirement. The 23 May letter, in the final paragraph, notes that even if discovered the island had no means of long-range attack. B-17's started arriving on Midway shortly thereafter.

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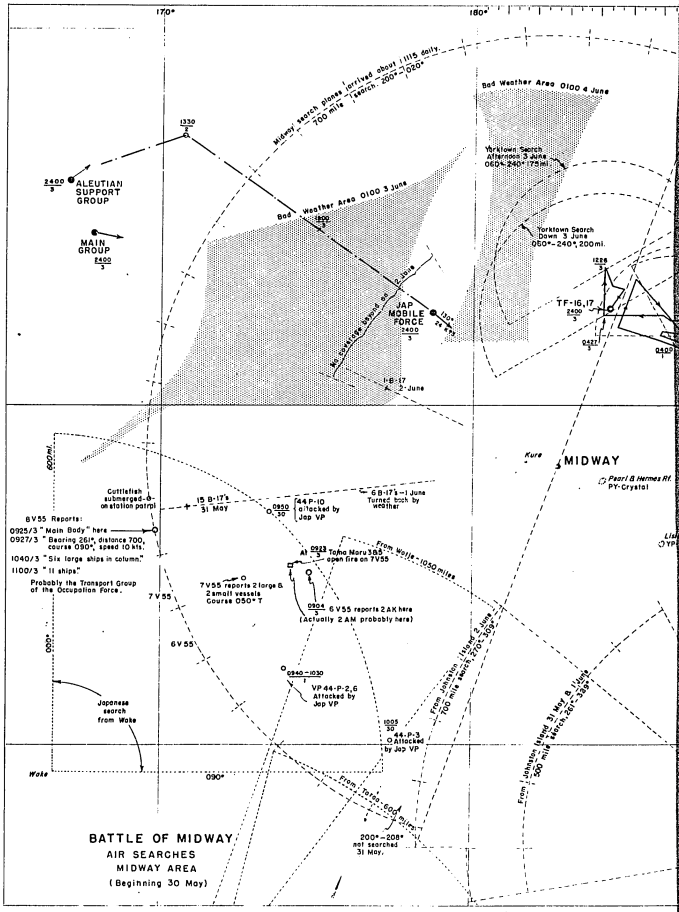

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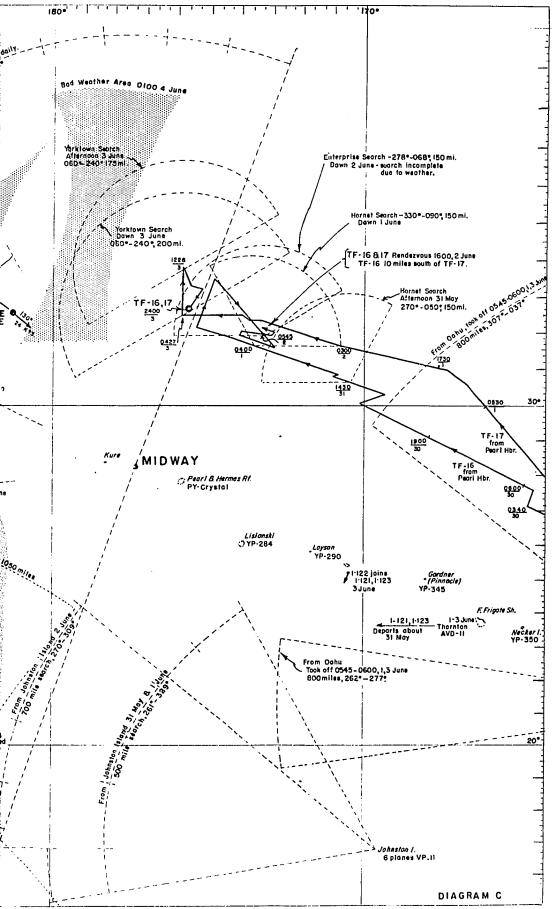

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Beginning late in May, Catalinas lifted off the lagoon while it was still dark and started the long monotonous flights. At 100 miles an hour the 700 mile search meant about fifteen hours in the air. Those flights to the northwest of Midway frequently ran into bad weather and would have to turn around before reaching their maximum range. This was the case on the five days immediately preceding the battle. Aircraft searching to the west constantly ran the risk of being surprised by enemy planes from Wake Island that were bent on doing their own reconnaissance. Minneapolis-born Lieutenant Forest Roby battled a twin-engined bomber while on a search and suceeded in driving the faster plane away.[1] CINCPAC thought that the Japanese might approach from the west and as early as 31 May, Midway based B-17's were ordered to reconnoiter and attack. Fifteen planes took off and reached a point 700 miles from Midway without sighting a thing. On their return the planes became lost and were finally brought to Midway by a combination of radar and radio direction bearings.[2] The fifteenth plane landed four and a half hours after it had been anticipated.

Had the planes been flying the same route on 3 June they would have seen the sight that would have swung them into instant action. At 0843, Ensign Charles R. Eaton made the first sighting when he reported

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[1] Frank D. Morris, "Four Fliers From Midway," Colliers, CX (July 25, 1942), 26.

[2] Cdr Logan C. Ramsey report to CINCPAC of 15 June 1942 on Air Operations of Midway Defense Forces during Battle of Midway May 30, 1942 to June 6, 1942. Hereinafter referred to as Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report.

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"investigating suspicious vessel." At 0904 he amplified his initial radio message with "two Japanese cargo vessels sighted bearing 247°, distance 470 miles. Fired on by AA."[1] The news of the sighting was sent by cable to CINCPAC where the announcement served to confirm the intelligence story. Eaton had not sighted cargo vessels but two ships of the Minesweeper Group. The sighting complemented the recently received news that Dutch Harbor, Alaska was under aerial attack.

In the operations center on Sand Island, the news of Eaton's discovery was still being transmitted to CINCPAC when a new report arrived that erased any doubt as to the extent of Japanese intentions. Ensign Jack Reid[2] had been in the air for over six hours, flying his PBY with its ten man crew on a course aimed toward Wake Island. He had reached the limit of his assigned search and was ready to turn on his cross leg sector of the search. About this time his navigator, Ensign Robert Swan, recommended an additional ten minutes on the original course. Hopefully, they would be able to meet a Japanese patrol plane from Wake and fire a few of the new, blue incendiary rounds they had begged from the Air Corps.[3] Soon after turning,

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[1] War Diary, Patrol Squadron Twenty-Four, June 1942. Eaton, flying in 44-P-5 was actually a member of VP-44 flying under the operational control of VP-24. Reid, who discovered the larger force, has been generally credited with being the pilot who first sighted the Japanese, but his report was received at 0925 or twenty-one minutes after Eaton's.

[2] For many years Reid has gone by the first name of Jack. His given name is Jewell Hamon, the same as appears on the citation for the Distinguished Flying Cross, awarded to Reid for the 3 June flight.

[3] Undated letter, circa January, 1967, from Mr. Robert Swan to author.

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Reid saw some specks on the horizon which he initially thought was dirt on the windshield. Ensign Gerald Hardeman, the co-pilot, shouted "My God, aren't those ships on the horizon, I believe we have hit the jackpot."[1] Ensign John Gammel, another co-pilot and bowgunner, confirmed the sighting with binoculars.

Ensign Reid brought his plane closer to the water to a position where he could pop up for inspection and then drop back to avoid detection. With skill Reid maneuvered the plane from east to north and ultimately west of the Japanese. From astern of the enemy ships he could check their progress as they sailed east toward Midway. Reid's situation was a dangerous one for if the Japanese saw him there was almost no chance of escaping a pursuing aircraft. For over an hour the PBY tracked the Japanese, flying away periodically to send reports on the composition, speed and track of the enemy. Reid took every precaution to remain unseen, fearful that the Zero seaplane fighters would be dispatched if his plane were seen. Some of his messages were not received at Midway, most likely due to the plane's low altitude when transmitting, but others afforded Simard and Ramsey with a good idea of the size of the force. Reid reported that the force was composed of a carrier, two cruisers and destroyers. In all probability, this was the Transport Group with a tanker being mistakenly identified as a carrier. Fourteen and a half hours after take off, Reid's PBY, nearly out of gas, landed at Midway where debriefing of the crew developed

[1] Letter from Capt Jack Reid, USN (Ret) to the author of 10 December 1966.

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additional information for the island's defenders.

The willingness of this officer to persevere in his search assignment at great risk to his plane, crew and himself is a good example of small unit leadership. Reid was young and not particularly experienced in PBY operations, but he quickly sized up the situation. He knew that more than a position report was required on this first contact. While the composition of the Japanese force was not especially accurate, doubtless because of the distance from which it was observed, the course, speed and initial position were correct.

Ramsey did nor rush headlong into sending a force to attack the enemy. They were a long way off and, when Reid amplified his earlier report stating that there were eleven ships on course 090° at a speed of nineteen knots, Ramsey knew there was still lots of time to strike. Besides, the intelligence he had been furnished indicated that the attack was most likely to come from the northwest. Since his patrol planes in that sector had not reported, he held his B-17's, except for one, in reserve. The solitary B-17, with a naval observer aboard, was sent west to relieve Reid and to continue tracking the Transport Group. Unfortunately, the Fortress failed to find the ships, although it did find and report another group. When it became apparent that the carrier force was not likely to pop out from under the weather front that lay 400 miles northwest of Midway, Ramsey ordered nine B-17's under Lieutenant Colonel Walter C. Sweeney to attack the transports.[1] Four

[1] Ramsey Interview. On 3 June there were seventeen B-17's on Midway. Nine attacked the transports; the remainder were held in reserve.

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hours after their 1230 take off the planes were dropping thirty-six bombs weighing 600-pounds apiece from altitudes of 8000, 10,000 and 12,000 feet. The elated airmen reported five sure hits, one probable and four near misses when actually no hits had been made.

Aware that the Army fliers had not stopped the Transport Group, Ramsey undertook a new and untried method to disrupt the Japanese. Lieutenant William L. "Red" Richards had a PBY-5A sitting on the runway at Eastern. The "5A's" were a new breed of Catalina that could perform as an amphibian. It was no faster than the earlier seaplane and was still referred to as the "winged whale," but the new planes had a capability far beyond the older version. They could carry a single torpedo and Richard's plane had been one of the first of its kind to have radar installed. During the afternoon three more 5A's arrived from Pearl giving Midway a total of four. Ramsey and Richards, both Annapolis graduates, put their heads together and came up with a daring plan for a night torpedo attack.[1]

The four planes flew off at 2115 in search of an enemy that was nearly 500 miles away. Enroute navigators took star fixes to check their progress and position. Then at a few minutes past midnight Richards saw a "blip" on his radar screen indicating a ship to port. A series of turns failed to find the vessel visually and succeeded in losing two of the Catalinas. Richards continued his search until 0115 when a radar

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[1] The official report of this flight is contained in Lt W. L. Richards report of 18 June 1942 to ComPatWing Two on Night Torpedo Attack of 3-4 June 1942. A more popular version, with some inaccuracies, is Morris, "Four Fliers From Midway."

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return showed about ten ships some twelve miles to port. From 3000 feet and seven miles distance Richards caught visual sight of the columns and started his let down. With the two engines throttled back, Richards made an almost silent approach as he headed toward the large ship that brought up the rear of the nearest column. The run was from abeam the ship as she stood silhouetted in the moonlight. When he was skimming along at 100 feet above the surface, he added power, made a final alignment and "pickled" his torpedo. Richards' retirement was in a climbing turn to the right that allowed his waist gunners to see the flames that erupted as the torpedo exploded in the AKEBONO MARU. The damage was not serious, although twenty-three men were killed or wounded, and the oiler was able to retain her position in the formation of ships.[1] Lieutenant (jg) Douglas C. Davis was following Richards when, finding that he was not properly set to drop his torpedo, he decided to come around again. When he did he found an alert enemy, firing at his approach and turning to dodge the torpedo he dropped. Ensign Gaylord D. "Dagwood" Propst had become separated from Richards during the first contact. On his own he found the ships and attacked next to the last ship in the nearer column. Although this third plane to make the attack claimed a hit, the existing Japanese records show only the one

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[1] USSBS No. 252, Interrogation of Captain Yasumi Toyama, IJN, Chief of Staff, Destroyer Squadron Two in JINTSU. The diagram included in the interrogation shows the AKEBONO MARU as the next to last transport in the left column while Morison, Vol IV, p. 99 shows the oiler as the final ship in the left column. The difference is immaterial to the fact that this was the only ship struck.

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ship damaged. Of course, it is entirely possible that the hit was made by Propst and that Richards' torpedo failed to find its mark. The fourth plane, piloted by Ensign Allan Rothenberg, missed sighting the enemy entirely.

To locate and attack the Japanese had been difficult tasks requiring a considerable amount of effort. By the time the planes were nearing Midway the crews were physically exhausted and the planes had precious few gallons of gas remaining. Richards landed at Laysan Island, to the southeast of Midway, at 1045 with less than fifty gallons. Davis had arrived earlier at the same spot with between ten and twenty gallons left while Rothenberg arrived soon after Richards with only ten gallons. Propst had seen the column of smoke rising from Midway and, knowing the base to be under attack, he headed toward one of the emergency seaplane bases lying to the southeast of Midway. Enroute he ran out of gas near Lisianski, one of a number of uninhabited atolls, and landed his seaplane on the open sea. An unusually hard landing popped rivets, wrinkled the hull and cracked the starboard wing. Hard work by the nine man crew in plugging rivet holes with pencils and bailing with steel helmets kept the damaged plane afloat.[1] Propst gathered his confidential material and weighted it for throwing overboard should the Japanese appear. Like other airmen down at sea, they did not know who held Midway, the United States or Japan. It was with relief that Propst and the other eight men saw a PBY circling their position late on 6 June.

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[1] Morris, "Four Fliers From Midway," p. 26.

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At 1830 Ensign Harvey Lampshire taxied up close to the downed plane and waited while Propst and crew paddled their rubber boats to the rescue plane. Only when safely aboard did they learn who held the islands.

The four planes had participated in the opening round of the battle. Regardless, all were destined to sit out the events of the following two days. On Midway, though, the 3632 men stood in grim readiness for the battle that many realized might determine the length of the war. There was no particular fear nor was there indication of overconfidence. Every man was determined to do his duty and to exact the highest possible toll on the attackers.

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CHAPTER V

MIDWAY MEETS THE CHALLENGE

As the Japanese pilots aboard the four big carriers received their final briefing on the Midway attack and ate their special breakfast of sekihan - rice with small red beans - the defenders of the island were springing to life. On Eastern Island, Major Verne J. McCaul swung his tired legs from his musty smelling cot onto the sand floor. His cubicle was in a corner of the large command bunker, a scooped out hole in the sand, covered with redwood logs, sand bags and more loose sand. The bunker was the command post of Lieutenant Colonel Ira L. Kimes, skipper of Marine Air Group 22. McCaul, who had more time on Midway than any other flier, was Kimes' executive officer as well as his operations officer. All the previous day he had spent planning and conferring with squadron commanders, the island air operations officer, Commander Logan C. Ramsey, and with the island commander, Captain Cyril T. Simard and his Marine ground defense commander, Colonel Harold Shannon. The separation of the island commander and his air adviser from the field where all the land based aircraft were located thrust the burden of employing them onto Kimes and his small air group staff.

The previous night Kimes, McCaul and Major Floyd B. Parks discussed how they would commit the fighters in air defense of the

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island. "Red" Parks had recently stepped up from being second in command in VMF-221 to relieve McCaul as commanding officer. None of his pilots had been in combat before and to make matters more difficult the squadron did not all have the same type of aircraft. The problem was one of how best to employ the squadron, considering the aircraft and the degree of experience of the pilots. As finally settled, the squadron was split into two parts. The first would have three divisions of aircraft to include Parks' first division of four F2A's; the fourth, also four F2A's under Captain Robert E. Curtin and the fifth, led by Captain John F. Carey, would be entirely F4F's, six of them. This would provide a total of fourteen fighters to meet the expected attack. Since the Marines could not be sure that the Japanese would venture all their effort in one attack, they planned on a reserve to be used either to reinforce the first group or to be employed against a second attack. The second section split the remaining ten F2A's into two equal divisions, the second led by Captain Daniel J. Hennessy and the third division to fly on Captain Kirk Armistead.[1] It was nearly midnight when the meeting adjourned and McCaul lay down to sleep.

Reveille on Midway was at 0300 on 4 June. An hour later McCaul was watching the Marine fighter planes rumble down Midway's darkened runway and disappear into the night. As Carey's six plane division circled overhead providing the covering patrol, eleven Catalina's rose

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[1] Preliminary Report of Marine Aircraft Group Twenty-Two on Battle of Midway, dated 8 June 1942, p. 1. Hereinafter referred to as MAG-22 Report.

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from the lagoon's placid waters. Fully aware of his limited patrolling capability, Ramsey had cut the length of the search from the previously normal 700 miles to 420 miles.[1] Immediately behind the seaplanes came the sixteen B-17's with orders to seek out and bomb the transports of the Invasion Force approaching from the west. By 0430 all of the big planes, save one B-17 with only three engines working, had left Eastern Island. On the departure of the large planes, pilots manned the other assorted aircraft rimming the field. The engines were started and warmed, as had been the practice for the past few days, in preparation for immediate take-off. As no Japanese had been reported by 0500, the engines were shut down, pilots returned to the flight shacks and plane handlers topped off the fuel tanks. Shortly thereafter, Carey brought his patrolling fighters back for refueling. Two Wildcats, under Captain Francis P. McCarthy, failed to land, as their radios missed the message ordering them down. As Carey's division taxied to the revetments for refueling, his wingman, Second Lieutenant Walter W. Swansberger, allowed his plane to slip off the wooden tracks and bury its landing gear in the soft sand. The six F4F's assigned to Carey had suddenly shrunk to three. All was quiet on Midway at 0515 as pilot, marine and sailor waited in nervous expectation.

Then at 0545, Lieutenant Howard P. Ady and his co-pilot, Lieutenant (jg) Maurice "Snuffy" Smith, still outward bound on their patrol flight, sighted a Japanese observation plane headed toward Midway. In an

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[1] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 5.

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adjacent sector Lieutenant (jg) William A. Chase was piloting his PBY through the scattered clouds when his observer, Ensign W. C. Corbett, spotted two groups of forty-five planes heading in the opposite direction. Chase snapped on his radio transmitter and announced in plain English, "Many planes heading Midway, bearing 320°, distance 150."[1] The message turned the island into a beehive of activity. McCaul checked the operator of the Marine SC270 radar for sightings; he reported nothing but this was not unusual for the obsolescent machine. The large Navy radar on Sand Island was equally unproductive. The Marine major didn't wait, but ordered all planes aloft.[2] By 0556 Parks' first section was airborne and climbing for altitude as they headed northwest. The second section was right behind. Lieutenant Fieberling had heard the news of the approaching enemy planes while sitting with McCaul in the air operations bunker. He quickly coralled the crews of his other five planes and headed toward the TBF's. The engines had no sooner been turned over than a Marine orderly arrived, leaped upon the wing and gave Fieberling the bearing to the Japanese carriers and orders to attack them.

Soon after sighting the single plane, Ady and Smith found a hole in the cloud cover that gave them a glimpse of the Mobile Force below. To the two the peek was "like watching the curtain rise on the Biggest Show on Earth."[3] The look was short but enough to disclose, as they reported

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[1] War Diary, U. S. Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942. Chase's flight indicated as 3V58; Ady as 4V58. Also, see Honolulu Advertiser, 17 June 1942, p. 2.

[2] McCaul Interview.

[3] Morison, Vol IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 103.

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at 0552, "two carriers and main body ships, carriers in front, course 135, speed 25."[1] Unfortunately, the position of the carriers was not given. Although not essential to Midway forces, it was vital to the U. S. carrier task forces lying off to the east. For McCaul, he had all the information he needed, for if Japanese carrier planes were on their way, and the carriers were still heading toward Midway, his planes could reach the Mobile Force. Fieberling was rolling moments after the messenger left his plane; behind him was Army Air Corps Captain James F. Collins, Jr., with his four B-26's; then Major Lofton R. Henderson and the SBD's and bringing up the rear Major Benjamin W. Norris with his twelve SB2U's.

The island's radar detected the approaching Japanese while they were still ninety-three miles away. By the time the air raid alarm sounded at 0555, Parks and his fighters were out of sight of Midway. The friendly planes had barely cleared the island when at 0605 McCarthy and his wingman, Second Lieutenant Albert L. Corry, called the field to announce that they were short of fuel. McCaul informed them of the imminent attack, directed them to expedite landing and to refuel and take off at once.

By 0616 Parks was at 14,000 feet when he saw the enemy approaching 2000 feet below him. Carey spied them at the same time, and being ahead of Parks, gave the Tally Ho followed by "Hawks at Angels 12, supported by fighters."[2] At the same time Hennessy was directed by

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[1] War Diary, U. S. Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942.

[2] Statement of Capt Kirk Armistead, USMC, dated 4 June 1942. All

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Midway to take his section of VMF-221 and join Parks.

Carey, without a wingman, had taken off in his F4F, followed by Captain Marion E. Carl and his wingman, Second Lieutenant Clayton M. Canfield. As they started to climb, Carl dropped back, and fearing engine trouble he motioned Canfield to join up on Carey. As the two forces approached, Carey could count the planes in their tight Vee of Vees. Equally important he noted that the fighters were slightly behind and above the Japanese planes. This was his chance to make a fast pass at the bombers before he would have to tangle with the Zeroes. With Canfield on his tail, Carey kicked his Wildcat around and pushed down on the stick, at the same time he eased it to the side. Smoothly the plane responded to the roll over. As he bore down, gaining the needed speed, the lead plane fell squarely in his gunsight. On rolling out a bullet cracked his windshield and "sobered him in a hurry."[1] Carey continued to press his attack with the leader blowing up in front of him. Canfield, meanwhile, paralleled Carey, firing at and exploding the No. 3 plane in the No. 3 section. Carey continued his pass through the formation and pulled the stick back and kicked the rudder bar into a tight skidding turn that sent him after the end of the Japanese bomber formation. He never made it. As he angled toward the enemy planes he was hit in both legs by fire from a rear seat gunner in one of the bombers. The pain was severe and the damaged legs prevented his

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statements noted on the following pages of this chapter are in the files of the Historical Archives, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D. C.

[1] Carey Interview.

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using his rudder properly. With Canfield following, Carey headed toward the field, hiding in clouds along the way to evade any pursuing Zeroes. Twice he nearly passed out from the pain. By the time he arrived over Midway he had the landing gear down but as he touched the runway he felt control of the plane being lost. Both tires had been punctured and without strength in his lower legs, Carey could not correct the plane or use the brakes.[1] It soon slithered off the runway and crashed into a revetment. It was none too soon, for hardly had he been made comfortable than the bombs began falling. As he lay there, unable to move, Carey had a view of the attacking planes and the antiaircraft defense. Frequently, he noted how the gunners were not leading the Japanese planes enough.[2]

Canfield was more fortunate than Carey. As the two dove away from the Japanese, Canfield sensed the trouble Carey was having; closed up to verify it, and soon took over the lead, landing ahead of Carey. His Wildcat had been damaged in the brief encounter. It was impossible to lower the flaps and as he started rolling down the runway the landing gear collapsed and the plane skidded to the side of the strip. Canfield leaped from the plane into a shallow trench just as the Japanese attack

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[1] Statement of 2d Lt Clayton M. Canfield, USMCR, dated 6 June 1942.

[2] Carey Interview. After the attack Carey was examined by a doctor on Eastern Island. His condition was so serious that he was transferred to Sand Island where the station hospital was located. After a careful examination by the island surgeon he was told that he would never walk again. That night a Marine R4D flew Carey and Merrill to Pearl Harbor and hospitalization there as well as in the United States. Carey retired in 1964, after a full service career in which he commanded squadrons in Korea and a Marine Air Group (Helicopter) in Vietnam.

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commenced. After the attack he examined his damaged plane. He had been lucky. There were hits on the right elevator, left wing and flap, a twenty millimeter cannon hole ahead of the tail wheel, smaller ones in the tail wheel and the right side of the hood.[1]

For a while Marion Carl thought he would be forced to drop out as his engine continued to sputter. Suddenly it returned to life with a steady hum. Carl saw the Japanese about the time that Carey did but instead of following his division leader, he delayed his turn so he could tangle with the fighters that were slightly to the rear. The lone pilot made a high speed pass at the thirty-six fighters, getting none in his dive and in turn picking up a few on his tail. Unable to out-maneuver them he headed straight down at full throttle until at only 3000 feet the Japanese fighters gave up the chase. Once more Carl climbed to 20,000 feet and moved in toward the island. On nearing Midway he noticed three Zeroes making a wide circle. Diving his plane and cutting close on the circle, Carl overtook one of the Zero fighters, gave him a long burst until he fell off on one wing and started streaming smoke and then tried to evade the other two. The only recourse was for Carl to climb for a cloud. One Zero gave up as he entered the cloud but the second continued to gain on the Wildcat. As Carl emerged into the sunlight his little fighter shook as the Japanese took range. The Marine fighter pilot could not outrun the Zero, but by hurriedly cutting off the throttle and going into a violent skid he allowed the faster plane to overrun him. For a moment the

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[1] Statement of 2d Lt Clayton M. Canfield, USMCR, dated 6 June 1942.

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Japanese passed through his gunsight, but it was too brief for a shot. Soon thereafter the attack was over and Carl received orders to land.[1]

McCarthy and Corry took off late, after refueling from their morning patrol. Being behind the others the pair never had a chance to gain the altitude so essential for their slow airplane. At 8,000 feet they were jumped by eight Zero fighters, probably those stirred up by Carl's earlier attack. McCarthy shot one down almost at once before he was himself shot down. Corry maneuvered to escape the pursuing fighters and was momentarily successful. In the short respite he fired a burst at a retreating bomber, which had already added its havoc to Midway, causing it to roll over and crash into the ocean.[2] Four planes had fallen to VMF-221's five Wildcats at a cost of one pilot killed, another badly wounded and three aircraft destroyed. The loss among the F2A's was even greater.

The plan to use two sections went by the way when Hennessy was vectored out to support Parks. Of the eight originally assigned to the first and fourth divisions only two pilots survived. Captain Herbert T. Merrill managed to fly his damaged Brewster toward Midway and parachute into the lagoon. Merrill had stayed with his plane so long that he suffered severe burns about the face, neck and hands.[3] The other

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[1] Statement of Capt Marion E. Carl, USMC, dated 6 June 1942.

[2] Statement of 2d Lt Albert L. Corry, USMCR, dated 6 June 1942.

[3] Carey Interview. Merrill was evacuated that night, 4 June, to Pearl and spent a long period in the hospital recovering. As a form of limited duty he was sent to Johnston Island where he was lost while flying in a tropical thunderstorm.

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survivor, flying wing on Curtin, was Second Lieutenant Darrell D. Irwin. With his division leader he had followed Parks and his group in a diving pass from 16,500 feet. No damage was noted on his initial pass and as he climbed to make a second, having in the meantime lost Curtin, he noticed a fighter closing in rapidly. At full throttle the F2A was being rapidly overtaken by the faster Zero. Irwin pushed the stick over and dove for Eastern Island. The Zero continued in pursuit with its guns shooting away most of Irwin's left aileron. As he leveled out at 500 feet a second Zero joined the first. Irwin could feel the slugs hitting his slow fighter. Occasionally one would hit the armor plate in back of his seat. When he remembered it was only shoulder high, he ducked his head far into the cockpit whenever a Zero was making a firing run. Irwin had little choice of what to do next; it was to jump from the frying pan into the fire. With the fighters still in pursuit he brought his Brewster onto the field just as the Japanese started their bombing attack.[1] His plane was damaged beyond repair, but Irwin escaped to the protection of a shallow trench beside the runway.

Captain Hennessy, executive officer of VMF-221, had led the second group of Brewsters. By the time the Japanese formation came into view the Marines had climbed to 17,000 feet. Captain Philip R. White flew with Hennessy as his group of Brewsters, using the speed gained in their dive from above the Japanese, passed through the oncoming attackers. Armistead's group of five F2A's, which had been joined

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[1] Statement of 2d Lt Darrel D. Irwin, USMCR, dated 6 June 1942.

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by Swansberger's F4F, made a head on approach from above on the fourth division of Japanese planes. Two of the nine enemy planes were hit sufficiently to cause them to break their tight formation. It was to be the only run by this group of Brewsters. As Armistead led his planes in a climb toward a second run, three Zeroes quickly closed the distance. A kick over into a violent split S did not prevent Armistead from being hit, his plane taking a cannon shell in the right wing gun, another in the right wing root tank and a third in the top left side of the engine cowling. For good measure, the Japanese machine gun tore into his left aileron, mangling the tab, and causing the plane to corkscrew while diving. A low altitude evasion maneuver freed Armistead from the Zero and, soon after the bombers had dropped their explosives, he brought his damaged Brewster to the field.[1] Captain Charles M. Kunz with the third section of Armistead's division, attacked the fifth division of Japanese bombers. Accompanied by his wingman, Second Lieutenant Martin E. Mohannah, he made a high speed overhead approach, that set one of the Japanese bombers on fire. Kunz did not have a chance to make a second run. Japanese fighters got his wingman and chased Kunz right down to the water, creased his skull with a glancing bullet and drove him south of the island. With radio gone and hydraulic system out, Kunz landed his badly mauled Brewster as soon as the attack was over.[2]

The Marine fighter defense had been courageously undertaken and

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[1] Statement of Capt Kirk Armistead, USMC, dated 4 June 1942.

[2] Statement of Capt Charles M. Kunz, USMC, dated 4 June 1942.

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aggressively fought. The squadron had not stopped the Japanese attack, but they had destroyed a number of aircraft both before and after they dropped their bombs. While the action report considers forty to fifty planes lost, less than twenty appears to be a more reasonable figure.[1] The losses were nearly as bad for Marine fighters. Altogether fourteen pilots were lost, including Major Parks. Of those whose planes could not make it back to Midway only Merrill was rescued. The F2A had proved to be hopelessly outclassed by the Zero as had the new Wildcat. By the time the first bomb struck Midway, VMF-221 had ceased to be an effective fighting force.

When the newly installed radar on Sand Island, one of the very few providing height, range and bearing, picked up Lieutenant Joichi Tomonaga's attack group, it was still over ninety miles away. The advanced warning gave the Marine defense battalion forty-five minutes to ready their weapons. By 0635 the Japanese attack group had pushed through the Marine fighter defense to the northwest of the island and commenced their attack on Sand and Eastern Islands. Although 108 planes had been allocated to the strike, one of the HIRYU's nine fighters was forced to return after reaching the halfway point because of engine trouble.[2] The loss was insignificant when pitted against the weaker defense of Midway.

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[1] MAG-22 Report, p. 3.

[2] "The Midway Operation," Extract Translation from Document No. 160985 - MC397.901, p. 21. A copy available in the Office of Naval History, Washington, D. C.

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The HIRYU's eighteen level bombers had been assigned as targets the installations on Sand Island and the neutralization of the antiaircraft fire. The SORYU's equal number of bombers had the same mission on Eastern Island. The AKAGI divebombers were assigned to attack the hangar and airfield installation on Eastern Island while the eighteen divebombers from the KAGA were to attack the seaplane hangars and facilities on Sand Island.[1] The level bombers initiated their attack with a run from east to west, from out of the sun. The 800-kilogram bombs had barely exploded when Lieutenant Shoishi Ogawa gave the signal splitting the divebomber group from the two carriers. The antiaircraft defensive fire was heavy but not particularly accurate. Before a bomb could be dropped one of the level bombers was hit by gunfire, started to burn and fell out of formation.[2] The work of the bombers was quick and precise, indicative of the combat experience of Japan's airmen. Carey had been impressed with the speed with which the Japanese had filled in the lead spot vacated when his initial run set the flight leader on fire.

In twenty minutes the attack was over and Tomonaga's planes were winging their way back to the Mobile Force. With the nearly complete destruction of the fighter force defending the island, SORYU's Lieutenant Masaharu Suganami, a veteran of the Pearl Harbor attack and other Japanese carrier strikes, ordered his Zeroes to strafe the island.

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[1] ONI Review, pp. 46-47.

[2] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 5.

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Free of opposition, except for light ground fire, the Japanese fighters flew over the installations at roof top level. Some concentrated on the B-17 that had been unable to take off, setting it afire. The more brazen pilots showed their contempt for the defenders by executing slow rolls as they pulled up from the island. One almost touched his wheels to the runway. When a Marine fighter tried to close on the Zero, the faster plane got away and another Zero caught the Marine plane and shot it down, scattering parts of the aircraft along the runway.[1]

As the roar of planes fell away, Midway defenders crawled out of their protective cover and started taking stock of what was left. The attack had lasted but a few minutes but in that time the Japanese had done extensive damage. On Sand Island the Navy laundry had taken a direct hit; three fuel oil storage tanks had been set afire; the galley and messhall damaged; the unoccupied brig demolished and the hangar for repairing the seaplanes completely burned. The gas system, previously in poor working order, was further damaged to where all patrol planes had to be refueled from drummed fuel.[2]

The situation on Eastern Island was hardly better. Bombs had left craters in one of the runways, destroyed the powerhouse and sent pots and pans from the Marine messhall flying in all directions. Four VMF-221 ordnance men working in a rearming pit had been killed when a bomb landed squarely in the middle of their working area.[3] The

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[1] MAG-22 Report, p. 2.

[2] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 2.

[3] MAG-22 Report, p. 2.

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damage of most concern was the destruction of the filling lines that carried gas from the dock area to the fuel farm. A hasty examination revealed that the pipes could not be readily repaired. To keep the planes refueled, it became necessary for Sand Island to send more than 3000 drums of fuel to its sister island, a transfer requiring large working parties laboring around the clock.[1]

The casualties had been amazingly light. Foxholes, slit trenches and an occasional sand covered, wooden bunker gave protection to nearly everyone. There were less than twenty killed on the ground and about twice as many wounded. The spiralling cloud of dust and burning oil made the situation appear worse than it actually was, but proved providential in aiding some of the returning pilots in finding their way back to Midway.

Tomonaga surveyed the islands before leaving and through the smoke and dust he could see that Midway was not knocked out. There were a few craters in the runway, but they could be repaired in short order. While his fighters had virtually wiped out the American fighter force, the attack planes had escaped. Only the one B-17 had been destroyed and none of the PBY's had been located. As long as these long range planes existed they posed a threat to the Mobile Force and its support of the amphibious landing that was to follow. With this in mind, Tomonaga radioed the Mobile Force at 0700 that "there is need for a second attack

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[1] CO U. S. Naval Air Station, Midway Island report of 18 June 1942 to CINCPAC, p. 2. to enclosure C.

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wave."[1] The message had hardly reached the bridge of the AKAGI when a second followed. This was from the KAGA flight leader, Ogawa, who reported "Sand Island bombed and great results obtained."[2] Removed from the scene the two conflicting messages merely compounded the confusion of the Mobile Force commander.

When the fighters had lifted off Eastern's duty runway, Lieutenant Fieberling's six new TBF's were right behind. Orders were to seek out the Japanese carriers and attack. Fieberling knew he would have no fighter protection for everyone was needed to defend the island. To increase the gravity of the situation all the attack aircraft - TBF, SBD, SB2U and B-26 - were proceeding as if the others were not present. The differences in speed and altitude would mean separate attacks and the opportunity for the Zeroes defending the carriers to concentrate on each attacking group separately. Fieberling knew there were few torpedo planes to stop the attack. With his six and the four under Collins there were only ten. He had heard reports that there might be a U. S. carrier or two in the vicinity, but he understood they were to defend Oahu.[3] The air defense of Midway, and its offensive air power as well, rested with the planes clustered around the runway on Eastern Island. With his second section leader, Ensign Oswald J. Gaynier, Fieberling discussed

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[1] ONI Review, p. 17.

[2] Ibid.

[3] The account of the Midway Detachment of VT-8 is based on (1) Lieutenant Harold H. Ferrier, USN, "Torpedo Squadron Eight, The Other Chapter," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, XC (October 1964), 72-76; (2) Earnest Interview.

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how he would attack the enemy carriers. If there should be only one carrier he could readily split into two sections with a section making an attack from off either bow. In this way, regardless of how the ship maneuvered, one section's torpedoes should hammer home. The trouble was, all intelligence indicated more than one carrier so instead of using the standard method of attack, Fieberling told his pilots to attack the carrier presenting the best possible target; to hold dropping their torpedoes until the last moment to reduce the carrier's chance to evade; and to be alert to radio or hand signals from him regarding the target.

The TBF's picked up their course of 320° and started to climb. As they passed through 4,000 feet Jay D. Manning, AMM 3/c, Ensign Earnest's turret gunner, caught sight of the Japanese flight inbound to attack Midway. While watching the large formation, his attention was detracted by a Zero passing. The Japanese fighter pilot did not bother to fire on the torpedo planes and the meeting was so fleeting that Manning had no chance to fire either. On reaching 7,000 feet the six planes leveled off. Horizontal visibility was perfect and the cloud coverage below, about forty percent, was thin enough to present no problem in seeing any ship on the surface. Behind both Fieberling and Gaynier sat two volunteer navigators, Ensigns Jack W. Wilkie and Joseph M. Hissen, from a patrol squadron. Both had asked to accompany Fieberling's outfit. About an hour after take off, they sighted what they believed to be a transport, but which in all probability was the destroyer ARASHI which had dropped behind to depth charge the submarine NAUTILUS.

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A few minutes later and the entire Japanese Mobile Force hove into view. For the four ensigns piloting the Grummans this marked the first time that they had seen a fleet and, as chance would have it, the ships were Japanese. Immediately, the six planes started losing altitude as they glided toward their desired height of 200 feet. The new TBF's, unlike the TBD's on the flattops, carried their single torpedo internally, and because of design improvements could drop it from 200 feet at 200 knots air speed. Before reaching the screen, they opened bombay doors to insure being able to drop should they have a hydraulic failure. The open doors cut the speed still further. On leveling off the Zeroes suddenly jumped the six attackers. There appeared to be so many that they actually got into the way of each other. Earnest's turret gunner, Manning, fired only a few short bursts with his machinegun before he was killed and his gun put out of action. The tunnel gunner and radioman, Harold H. Ferrier, AMR 3/c, looked to see why Manning was not firing and saw his slumped and lifeless body. In a split second this eighteen year old sailor became a scared and yet matured old man. On the next fighter pass, the hydraulic system was shot up and Ferrier wounded in the wrist. A second fighter let fly with a burst of machinegun fire, one round grazing the gunner's scalp and knocking him unconscious. Up front Earnest was having his hands full. He could not maneuver his plane as he tried to line up his approach for the torpedo run. He could hear the slugs hitting the armor plate at his back and feel the wing shutter from high explosive rounds. For a brief moment a plane from the second section came alongside but before Earnest could figure what the pilot wanted the

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Virginian's TBF was hit badly. Earnest felt the flow of warm blood from his neck where a bullet had grazed by. The elevator failed to respond to his pressure on the stick indicating damage to either the elevator or to the cables that controlled it. Attacking the distant carrier was out of the question. Earnest kicked the rudder and pointed his plane toward a cruiser that had been off to the left. Wasting no time he lined up on the cruiser, dropped his torpedo from too great a range, and waited for the impact of the water. Instinctively his left hand dropped down by his seat and found the trim tab. As he always did on landing, he started rolling it back. Amazingly, the nose of the plane started to lift; he had control, such as it was, in his trim tab. Delicately manipulating the trim tab he at the same time added power and the plane started to climb. Two Zeroes hung on his tail as he twisted his way through the screen of ships. They hit his plane repeatedly and, defenseless from the rear, all he could do was to turn his Grumman either way to ruin the fighters' runs. Soon after clearing the screen, the Zeroes gave up either being called back to counter another attack or for want of ammunition. Perhaps there was a third reason the Japanese gave up on the one remaining TBF. With all of the wild maneuvering, Earnest had cleared the Japanese Mobile Force but in the direction opposite from Midway. In other words, the Japanese were between him and his base.

With the departure of the Zeroes, Earnest took stock of things. He had no communications with either man in the rear so could only assume that they were dead. He had no idea how badly he had been wounded but the profusion of blood indicated that it might be serious. And his airplane?

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The electrical system was out, just like the hydraulic system. The bombbay doors would have to remain open. The compass located in the tail or the wires that sent the information to the remote unit on the instrument panel had been broken. He had no airspeed indicator and his gas gauge failed to show how much fuel remained. But Earnest was alive and his engine was purring as sweetly as it had the day he first stepped into the plane. There was no chance to return to Midway over or through the Mobile Force, so the young ensign, guiding on the sun, headed south. When he thought he was past the Japanese ships and somewhere close to the same latitude of Midway he turned east. Using only his trim tab for vertical control, he had climbed the plane to 5,000 feet. Not long after turning east he spotted planes heading away from where he thought Midway should be. By now the cloud coverage hid the water below. Just about the time Earnest was considering letting down before he ran out of gas, he spied a column of smoke rising above the clouds. He glided down below the clouds, trying to find the source of the smoke, and as he broke out Kure Island lay beneath him. He knew where he was. Ferrier had by this time regained consciousness and moved up to the seat immediately behind Earnest.

Upon approaching Midway, the pilot made his required recognition turns, hoping they were the right ones, and prepared to land. At the downwind end of the runway someone was anxiously sending him the standard wave off signal. He ignored the signal and with no flaps, one wheel down and bombbays open, and only the trim tab and throttle for control, he nursed his injured plane onto the field. The plane caromed

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into a ground loop, as the wing touched the surface, and came to a dusty stop. The two wounded survivors of the Midway Detachment of VT-8 stepped out.

Earnest made his report to Colonel Kimes and learned that his neck injury was nothing serious. His plane was a total loss, but as it was the only one to have been in and survived a combat hop it was later returned to Ford Island where Grumman technical experts could examine it. No damage had been done to the Japanese and none had been claimed. Earnest volunteered to fly with the Marines the next day but as the Leathernecks had more pilots than planes there was no need. He and Ferrier remained on the island for several more days, hoping that among those rescued in the days after the battle some might be from VT-8. Finally, he turned to the sad task of inventorying the possessions of his missing shipmates and preparing them for delivery to the next of kin.

The four B-26's of the Sixty-Ninth Bombing Squadron, each with a torpedo slung on the outside of its belly, took off at 0625, or slightly after the TBF's.[1] The planes proceeded independently, failing to see the inbound flight of Japanese planes. An hour and ten minutes from Midway the B-26's sighted the Mobile Force and started descending to their attack elevation of 200 feet. Before reaching it they were attacked by Zeroes even though Captain Collins made his approach from the west. Just as he passed by the outer screen of warships, he saw the six TBF's of Fieberling making their attack. They were approaching the Japanese

[1] The account of the B-26's is based on statements of Capt James F. Collins, Jr. and 1st Lt James P. Muri, both dated 6 June 1942.

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from Collins right or from the south. As he leveled off at 200 feet, Collins lost two of his planes, only First Lieutenant James P. Muri staying with him. Bullets were consistently striking the two remaining planes. Once more Collins banked to the right, saw the carrier ahead and dropped his torpedo while about 800 yards off the starboard bow. Although the twin engine planes each had three gunners to help defend the plane, continual power failures and jammings of turret, guns and the ammunition pull-through mechanism made them as defenseless as the TBF's. Both Collins and Muri dropped their torpedoes from 200 feet while making 210 miles an hour. They then added power and climbed for the nearest clouds that were about 2,000 feet above. The Zeroes pursued well beyond the limits of the Mobile Force but eventually gave up. The two Army planes were left free to stagger back to Midway. All three of Muri's gunners were wounded and a number of rounds had penetrated his gas tanks. At 0915 the two planes were back on Midway.[1] They had failed to hit the Mobile Force and the two B-26's could not be flown again without extensive repairs.

The ten planes carrying torpedoes were the first to attack the Mobile Force. Only three returned and none had scored a hit. The AKAGI had first seen the attackers at 0705 when low on the horizon.[2] At least some

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[1] War Diary, Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942. Pilots of the planes, like the TBF's, were ordered not to land but to bail out. With wounded aboard, the plane commanders chose to ignore the directive and landed anyway.

[2] Movements and superficial damage to the AKAGI are shown in detail in ONI Review, p. 17.

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of the torpedo planes intended the AKAGI to be the target for she had to turn to starboard to evade one and to port to miss a second. A third aimed at her detonated before reaching the carrier. The only physical damage inflicted on the carrier by the torpedo planes was a strafing run on the flagship. This seriously injured two men manning an antiaircraft gun and put the revolving mechanism out of action for half an hour.

Major Henderson had divided his bombing squadron into three groups. He had nine SBD's as did Captain Marshall A. Tyler while Major Benjamin W. Norris had all twelve of the SB2U's. On 4 June when the airraid alert was sounded only sixteen of the SBD's could get into the air. They took off commencing about 0610 but, being interposed with the torpedo planes, did not all get airborne until just before the Japanese started attacking the field. All of the Marine bombers rendezvoused at Point Affirm, an imaginary location twenty miles east of Midway.[1] As Captain Tyler was unable to get his plane in the air, Henderson took all sixteen SBD's under his control. Shortly after arriving at Point Affirm both Henderson and Norris were given the course and direction to the Mobile Force and ordered to attack. By 0650 the two units of VMSB-241, each on its own, were pointed toward the enemy force.

Henderson climbed his SBD's to 9,000 feet. At 0755 the Mobile Force could be seen in the distance ahead and Henderson commenced his let down. Because of the inexperience of his pilots he planned to use a steep glide bombing attack, with a low altitude release, in favor of the

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[1] CO. VMSB-241 action report of 12 June 1942 to CO, MAG-22. Capt M. A. Tyler, USMC, assumed command on the death of Major Henderson.

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more accurate, but also more difficult, divebombing method. Before he could enter the protective cloud layer, Zeroes pounced on the Dauntlesses. The experienced fighter plane pilots concentrated on the leader and it soon paid off as Henderson's plane burst into flames and fell out of formation. Captain Elmer G. Glidden, Jr., leader of the second division, took over Henderson's empty spot as the planes entered the clouds. The bottoms of the clouds were lower than the 4000 feet where Henderson had planned to start his glide bombing run. Glidden finally broke through the overcast at 2000 feet to find a carrier almost under him.[1] The altitude was too low and the target too close for a proper glide bombing attack and both antiaircraft fire and Zeroes compounded the problems. Glidden, nevertheless, whipped his Dauntless around to attack the carrier, as the remainder of the squadron followed at five second intervals. The intended target was Admiral Yamaguichi's flagship, the HIRYU.[2] Although the Marines effectively bracketed the ship

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[1] Statement of Capt Elmer G. Glidden, Jr., USMCR, dated 7 June 1942.

[2] ONI Review, p. 57. Several postwar accounts of the Battle of Midway state that the Marines struck the carrier AKAGI. Two of these are Heinl's, Marines at Midway and J. Bryan, III, "Never a Battle Like Midway," The Saturday Evening Post, March 26, 1949. Others which stated that the HIRYU was the intended target are Morison, Vol IV Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions and Robert Sherrod, History of Marine Aviation in World War II. All are in agreement that the Marines scored nothing better than near misses.

USSBS No. 23 quotes Capt Taijiro Aoki of the AKAGI as saying the ship's first damage occurred as a result of two bombs from divebombers. The ONI Review indicated that other ships of the Mobile Force thought that the AKAGI had been hit at 0810.

The preponderance of evidence shows that the AKAGI was not hit until some time after the Marine attack. RADM Ryunosuke Kusaka, the Mobile Force Chief of Staff, states in USSBS No. 530 that no bombs hit

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there were no direct hits. The nearest bomb landed fifty meters off either bow of the HIRYU. Since at least First Lieutenant Daniel Iverson dove on a carrier different from that attacked by Glidden it appears that the SBD element of the squadron divided its effort.

The retirement from the Mobile Force was made skimming the waves with each man for himself. Zeroes pursued the attackers for as far as forty miles, undoubtedly shooting down a number of the slower planes. Glidden was joined shortly before sighting Midway by Captain Richard E. Fleming. Iverson's plane was hit repeatedly by antiaircraft and fighter fire, severing his throat mike cord, destroying his air speed indicator and knocking out the hydraulic system. Eventually, he abandoned the low level retirement in favor of the clouds, reaching Midway with only a few gallons of gas remaining. After executing a skillful one wheel landing the lieutenant climbed out to examine his plane. In all, there were over 210 bullet and shrapnel holes in the Dauntless.[1] Second Lieutenant Harold G. Schlendering was not so fortunate. His battered dive-bomber nearly made it back, but during his approach on Midway he could no longer control its flight. He hit the parachute, landing eight miles west of Sand Island where he was quickly picked up by a Navy PT boat.[2]

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the AKAGI until 1026. Cdr Fuchida, also aboard the AKAGI, confirms this. In USSBS No. 11 Capt Susumu Kawaguchi, flight officer of the HIRYU, stated that divebombers attacked his carrier at 0810 but caused no damage other than by strafing. First Lieutenant Robert J. Bear mentions strafing a carrier in his action report.

[1] CO, VMSB-241 action report of 12 June 1942 to CO, MAG-22. Also, statement of 1st Lt Daniel Iverson, USMC, dated 7 June 1942.

[2] CO, VMSB-241 action report of 12 June 1942 to CO, MAG-22.

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Captain Richard L. Blain and his gunner, Private First Class Gordon R. McFeely, landed on the water before they sighted Midway. Their plane sank at once but not before they released the liferaft.[1] In the water Blain pulled the lanyard to inflate the raft only to find that a bullet had punctured one cell. The partially inflated raft held the two men both of whom became seasick as they rode the gentle, undulating swells. A parachute was used as a sail, but even the light breeze caught the silk and caused the raft to swamp. Darkness found the two men miserable from seasickness and cold from being continually wet. The following morning Blain and McFeely were sufficiently acclimated that they could keep down the malted milk tablets provided in the box of emergency rations. Their spirits rose in mid-morning when a PBY circled them and indicated that help was on the way. A second Catalina appeared about two hours later but even with flares fired by Blain the plane could not locate them. Toward dark the two saw masts on the horizon, but the ships sailed on without seeing them. Even a submarine which passed not far from the two men did not see their flares.

During the second night the two Marines heard a plane passing overhead. They fired a flare and the aircraft circled in search of them. When the plane failed to see them, despite another flare, it continued on its course. Early on 6 June the airmen heard and soon saw a PBY passing about eight miles from their location. Blain fired his last flare which was sighted by the rear gunner in the Catalina. Like a graceful bird, the

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[1] Honolulu Advertiser, 25 June 1942, p. 4.

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seaplane circled toward them, landed on the calm sea and took the two aboard. It made no difference to either Marine that he spent the remainder of the day on an extended search, a flight which found oil slicks and wreckage, but no other survivors. Blain and McFeely had drifted from the scene of the crash just north of Midway to a spot over 100 miles west of the island.[1]

Second Lieutenant Thomas F. Moore, Jr., picked up a new wingman as he left the Mobile Force – a Japanese Zero. Moore's rear gunner had been wounded and his fifty caliber machinegun had jammed to the extent that he was unable to clear it. The Zero was apparently in the same fix, but the pilot seemed to nourish the hope that the jam might yet clear. Moore still had his fixed, forward firing thirty caliber guns available, but every time he turned into the Zero, the enemy fighter would nimbly take up a position on the opposite wing. This continued until Moore entered the clouds.[2] Only eight of the sixteen planes returned to base; two pilots were rescued and six, together with their gunners, were lost forever. Although the Dauntless group claimed three hits on a carrier there had in fact been none.

Twelve Vindicators under Major Norris formed at 13,000 feet over Point Affirm. As they were considerably slower than the SBD's they had been instructed to conduct their attack independently of Henderson's

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[1] MAG-22 Report, p. 2.

[2] Statement of 2d Lt T. F. Moore, Jr., USMC, dated 7 June 1942. Also, Capt Tom Moore, USMC, "I Divebombed a Jap Carrier," Colliers, CXI (April 10, 1943), 38.

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Dauntlesses. The unit orbited its station while Midway was under attack. At 0710 the planes received a radio message to attack the enemy carriers. By this time Captain Bruce Prosser's plane had lost the cowling on the left side forcing him to return to base and leaving only eleven planes. An hour and fifteen minutes later, at 0825, Norris sighted the Mobile Force and prepared to attack. Once more Admiral Nagumo's fighters were alert, hitting the Marines as they sought protection in the clouds. Norris soon realized his planes would never make a penetration strike to the carrier. By radio he directed them to follow him in attacking a battleship which was closer to them. While Japanese records do not specifically identify the ship, all indications point to the HARUNA.[1] Once again the low altitude break out from the clouds gave the pilots only a few moments to get ready for their drop. To compound the problem, a determined antiaircraft defense buffeted the planes and made accurate bombing impossible. Norris and his wingman, Second Lieutenant Kenneth O. Campion had no trouble dropping their bombs, but Second Lieutenant George T. Lumpkin in the following plane could not get his bomb to release. He ultimately carried it all the way back to Midway. Campion escaped from the immediate area of his target, but enroute to Midway he was lost, falling prey to either an enemy fighter or to the damage his plane had sustained while attacking. Second Lieutenant Allan H. Ringblom, one of the new pilots, dropped his bomb and made

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[1] USSBS No. 11, Interrogation of Capt Susumu Kawaguchi, Air Officer, HIRYU, states bombs landed close astern to HARUNA. Also, USSBS No. 39, Interrogation of Capt H. Ohara, Executive Officer, SORYU.

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a retirement virtually free of pursuers. His unfamiliarity with the area brought him over Kure Island whereupon he continued south instead of east. By 1030 he realized he was well beyond Midway. He reversed his course and sighted Midway at 1100, but ran out of gas before he could land. Ringblom landed in the water a mile and a half from shore and was picked up by a PT boat.[1] Second Lieutenant Daniel L. Cummings also ran out of gas and was forced to ditch. His plane sank almost at once, giving him just enough time to verify that his gunner was dead. The same torpedo boat that had already rescued Merrill and Schlendering picked up Cummings.[2]

The Marine morning attack of 4 June was complete with the return of Major Norris' unit, or what was left of it. None of the sixteen SBD's or eleven SB2U's scored a hit or even damaged the Mobile Force other than by strafing. The torpedo planes had been equally unsuccessful. Midway had one more offensive element, the Flying Fortresses. The sixteen B-17's had taken off prior to 0430 with orders to strike the Invasion Force. At 0600, shortly after learning the Mobile Force position, Captain Simard ordered Lieutenant Colonel Walter C. Sweeny to shift from the troopships to the newly discovered carriers. The change of target did not surprise the Army officer for the previous night he, Kimes and McCaul, together with Logan Ramsey, had discussed just such a situation. The B-17's arrived over the Mobile Force at 0810. Divided into three sections, the planes commenced their pattern bombing on the

[1] Statement of 2d Lt Allan H. Ringblom, USMCR, dated 7 June 1942.

[2] Statement of 2d Lt Daniel L. Cummings, USMCR, dated 7 June 1942.

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Japanese, 23,000 feet below. Some bombs splashed near the HIRYU, but the SORYU was apparently the primary target for beginning at 0819 they dropped all about her.[1] Each plane carried 500-pound bombs. The planes were subjected to inaccurate antiaircraft fire and occasional passes by fighters, but the combination of the multiple gun turrets and the extreme elevation kept the Zeroes below. The official report claimed hits on two carriers as well as several near misses. Sweeney stated that he and his pilots were sold on the principle of high altitude pattern bombing.[2] Not until after the war was it learned that a fifty meter miss was the closest the big bombers had come.

The air attack on Midway was over and most of Midway's offensive power had been either destroyed or damaged so extensively as to render it inoperable for the next few days. All the TBF's and B-26's were out of the picture. The situation at VMF-221 was hardly better. Kirk Armistead was acting as squadron commander, but as he reported to Kimes, he had one F2A and one F4F in combat condition and another F4F whose wheels would not retract. Of the twenty-four planes that had taken off shortly before six o'clock, twenty-one had been either shot down or damaged badly. At 1100, when all the Marine attack planes that could be expected had returned, only three SBD's and eight SB2U's remained fit to fly. For the direct results attained the sacrifice had been fearful. Even worse, the power of the Mobile Force remained

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[1] ONI Review, p. 19.

[2] 431st Bombardment Squadron report on Combat Operations, Midway Area, 3-4 June 1942, dated 7 June 1942, p. 2.

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unimpaired. The aerial onslaught against the installations on Midway had been bravely contested but barely dented.[1] For those on the island the situation was precarious. They knew of the approaching Invasion Force and they carried battle scars from the Mobile Force. A few B-17's, a reinforced battalion of Marines, and somewhere to the northeast two, perhaps three, carriers remained to continue the struggle for control of the Central Pacific.

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[1] MAG-22 Report states "a growing opinion that the Japs lost 40 to 50 aircraft to VMF-221 action alone," p. 3. Logan Ramsey in his report to CINCPAC gives a figure of 34 destroyed and 17 damaged, p. 8. The ONI Review reveals a Japanese loss of 11, including two which became inoperational, pp. 45-48. As used in the Japanese context, the word "inoperational" means loss rather than damage. Fuchida, Midway the Battle That Doomed Japan states that the loss was only six, p. 156.

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CHAPTER VI

AND IN THEIR DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED

After learning of the Japanese Mobile Force position, Task Force 16 had bent on twenty-five knots on a course of 240 degrees to close the distance between the two forces. For over an hour Admiral Spruance continued in a southwesterly direction. By 0700, though, he could no longer delay in recovering his initial combat air patrol. To do this meant turning into the wind by switching to course 135, or parallel to the last reported heading of the enemy carriers. It was at this time that Admiral Spruance was faced with making one of his key command decisions. By 0700 he figured he had closed to within 155 miles of the enemy.[1] To relieve the combat air patrol would require respotting the deck to launch the fresh fighters and to recover the ones already aloft. Respotting was in itself a time consuming operation, moving the planes located aft to the forward part of the ship and then, after recovery of the fighters, returning the planes to their original positions so they could take off. There also existed the good possibility that the carrier planes, if launched at the right moment, could catch the enemy ships at their most vulnerable time - with planes positioned forward while recovering the Midway attack group. The two senior aviators on the Staff, Captain Miles S. Browning and Commander William H.

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[1] Battle of Midway (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 20.

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Buracker, did some rapid figuring and based on their own knowledge of carrier operations concluded that the Japanese would have recovered their Midway group shortly after 0900, provided of course, that the Mobile Force remained on its course of 135 degrees. Spruance would have preferred waiting until the distance between the two forces had narrowed, thereby allowing his own aircraft to attack at less than maximum range.

Regardless of the extreme distance for the attacking aircraft, Admiral Spruance elected to commence his attack. It was a wise decision. Even more fortunate was the determination to launch all of the aircraft he could. From the HORNET the attack group would consist of fifteen torpedo bombers under Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron; thirty-five bombers directly controlled by the air group commander, Commander Stanhope C. Ring, and ten fighters headed by Lieutenant Commander Samuel G. Mitchell, the squadron commander. On the ENTERPRISE, Lieutenant Commander Clarence Wade McClusky, the Air Group Commander, would lead the thirty-three divebombers; Lieutenant Commander Eugene E. Lindsey would take his fourteen torpedo bombers and Lieutenant James S. Gray headed the ten fighters assigned as escort. The only planes retained by either carrier were the fighters to be used as combat air patrol. On the HORNET this totaled seventeen while the ENTERPRISE kept twenty-one in the air overhead or in ready launch position.

Soon after seven Admiral Spruance ordered the signal bridge to run up the Foxtrot pennant and at the same time blinker lights signalled

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HORNET to launch. At 0706 the relieving combat air patrol rolled down the deck and into the clear blue sky. In order came Gallaher's Scouting Six, Best's Bombing Six, torpedo planes and finally the accompanying fighters. The same order of launch prevailed on the HORNET. The carrier role in the Battle of Midway, the one destined to change the course of the war in the Pacific, was underway. The involvement of three carriers and twelve separate squadrons together with different targets and take off times makes the recounting of the action of the squadrons difficult and frequently confusing. Since most of the carrier torpedo planes were the initial carrier-based planes to arrive and attack the Mobile Force their activities will be discussed first.

A small detachment of the HORNET's torpedo squadron had been based on Midway under Lieutenant Fieberling and another detachment headed by Lieutenant Harold H. Larsen was at Ford Island assembling the new TBF's. The main part of the squadron, though, was on the HORNET under Waldron, a tall, tough, taskmaster from Fort Pierre, South Dakota. Waldron had entered naval aviation soon after graduating from the Academy in 1924. His specialty was and always had been torpedo bombers. In the fall of 1941 Waldron organized VT-8 in preparation for going aboard the newly commissioned HORNET. Initially his squadron trained in SBN's a plane of 1932 vintage that had long ago become obsolete.[1]

The task of whipping a squadron into shape was a demanding one

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[1] Sidney L. James, "Torpedo Squadron 8," Life, XIII (August 31, 1942), 71.

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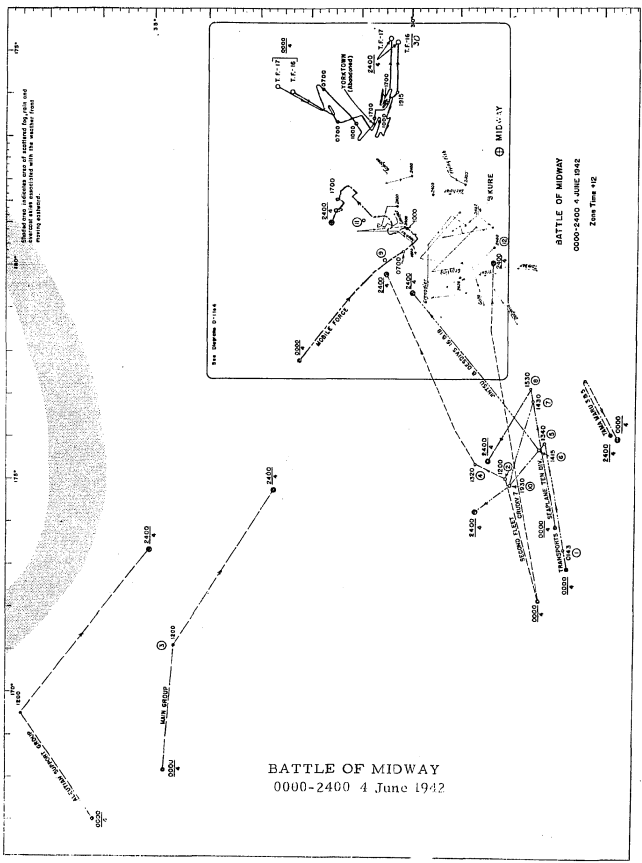
BATTLE OF MIDWAY
0000-2400 4 June 1942
MIDWAY
BATTLE OF MIDWAY
0000-2400 4 JUNE 1942
Zone Time +12
MAIN STRIKE
TASK GROUP 16.2
TASK GROUP 16.1
TASK GROUP 16.5
TASK GROUP 16.3
TASK GROUP 16.4
TASK GROUP 16.6
TASK GROUP 16.7
TASK GROUP 16.8
TASK GROUP 16.9
TASK GROUP 16.10
TASK GROUP 16.11
TASK GROUP 16.12
TASK GROUP 16.13
TASK GROUP 16.14
TASK GROUP 16.15
TASK GROUP 16.16
TASK GROUP 16.17
TASK GROUP 16.18
TASK GROUP 16.19
TASK GROUP 16.20
TASK GROUP 16.21
TASK GROUP 16.22
TASK GROUP

for no longer was it made up of Academy officers. Although there was a sprinkling of them in VT-8 the majority had entered the service through the Naval Aviation Cadet Training program, and came from every part of the country. The pilots included Ensign Grant W. Teats from Sheridan, Oregon who had been a top trackman at Oregon State and had seen many a lumbercamp in the Northwest. He answered most frequently to "Teatso." From a New York State insurance office came Ensign Harold J. Ellison while William W. Abercrombie, also an Ensign, knew the workings of Kansas City's meat packing plants from first hand experience. William R. Evans of Indianapolis had interrupted his Harvard Law School studies to join the Navy. His serious manner aptly fitted the sobriquet "The Squire." The Army had missed George H. Gay when he failed to pass his Schneider test, but six months later the Texas A&M student was on his way to Pensacola. The older officers were Lieutenants James C. Owens, Jr. the son of a Los Angeles lumber dealer and Raymond A. Moore, a former Navy enlisted man who had finished Annapolis.[1]

The pilots and crewmen were present, but Waldron was the leader and it was his drive and command presence that made the squadron. During the early days after the squadron was commissioned he made them fly four hours in the morning and as many after lunch and included homework besides. While he demanded a lot, Waldron knew how to treat his men. By the time he hammered a point to where they were ready to rebel, he would change the pace and invite them to an informal party

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[1]Alexander R. Griffin, A Ship to Remember, The Saga of the HORNET(New York: Howell Soskin, 1943), pp. 37-39.

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hosted by himself and his wife, Adelaide, where he briefly became a fellow human being, an older counselor, but not the hard driving commander. In VT-8 a chaplain or junior officer was never assigned as morale officer for Waldron was the commanding officer and the morale of his squadron was his personal responsibility, one that could not and would not be delegated.

The period since coming aboard the HORNET on the 28th of May had been time Waldron used in refreshing his squadron. The pilots had worked so many problems on their plotting boards that they could mentally picture the track that their torpedo would make regardless of the angle fired. During the evening of 3 June he assembled the squadron in the ready room just beneath HORNET's flight deck. Quietly he told them that "the approaching battle will be the biggest of the war and may well be the turning point."[1] He reviewed the attack plans for the next day, cautioned them to tidy up their personal affairs and to write to their families, just in case some did not return. On concluding the meeting, he handed each pilot a copy of his attack plan to which was appended:

> "Just a word to let you know I feel we are ready. We have had a very short time to train and we have worked under the most severe difficulties. But we have truly done the best humanly possible. I actually believe that under the conditions we are the best in the world. My greatest hope is that we encounter a favorable tactical situation, but if we don't, and the worst comes to the worst, I want each of us to do his utmost to destroy our enemies. If there is only one plane left to make a final run in I want that man to go in and get a hit. May God be with all of us. Good luck, happy landings and give 'em hell."[2]

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[1] Lieutenant Frederick Mears, USNR, Carrier Combat (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1944), p. 46.

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On conclusion of the evening briefing members of the squadron filed out and headed for the cabins or compartments. Waldron, before retiring, wrote to his wife, Adelaide, a warm personal letter almost indicative of a premonition of what would happen on the following day. In "Teatso's" room there was a short poker game while nearby Ensign William W. Creamer of Riverside, California applied the final touches to a Koa-wood fruit bowl. "Tex" Gay spent a few extra minutes in the ready room reproducing the navigational charts for the morning hop.[1]

Reveille had sounded on the HORNET at 0330. The pilots had ambled into the ready room, checked the teletype board for current activity and copied down such vital information as the wind, ship's position, nearest land and visibility. Soon after daybreak the squadron went to breakfast and had just completed eating when the public address system announced the locating of the Mobile Force. A final briefing and they climbed the remaining level to the flight deck and their planes.

On departing the HORNET, Waldron took up a southwest heading at 300 feet and arranged his squadron in two divisions - the first having four sections of two and the second division formed in two, two plane sections and one of three. An hour out Waldron indicated an enemy plane which, as it did not attack, was probably a scout plane from either a Japanese cruiser or battleship. Soon therafter, Teats ran into trouble as his TBD began spurting oil that covered his windshield. He opened

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[2]Thaddeus V. Tuleja, Climax at Midway (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), p. 124.

[1]Sidney L. James, "Torpedo Squadron 8," p. 74.

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the canopy to wipe off the oil and in doing so triggered his guns, sending a short burst past Abercrombie in front. After nearly two hours flying the squadron sighted two columns of smoke and, making a slight correction to head for them, came in sight of the Japanese fleet. Waldron's guess, mentioned casually to Gay before take off, that the Japanese might have reversed course had proved to be the case.[1] The Mobile Force was indeed heading away from Midway. Waldron broke radio silence to let the U. S. Task Force know the position and composition of the enemy, but with low elevation and nearly 200 miles distance, the message never reached Admiral Spruance nor was the message picked up by anyone else.[2]

Soon the fifteen Devastators were approaching the outer screen as Waldron led them toward the nearest and largest of the three carriers visible. Waiting Zeroes jumped them and as they pressed on the antiaircraft fires of the screen joined the defense. The fire from the Japanese

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[1] From an interview with Lieutenant George S. Gay, USNR, conducted at the Main Navy Building, Washington, D. C. by Lieutenant Porter on 23 October 1943. Copy in office of Naval History, Washington, D. C. Waldron was so sure of where the Japanese would be found that he told his pilots "not to worry about navigation but to follow him as he knew where he was going."

[2] There is a report that on sighting the Mobile Force Waldron realized that if he then attacked he would not have enough gas to return to the HORNET. He is alleged to have radioed to CTF-16 asking for permission to return to the carrier, refuel and attack later (Fletcher Pratt, "Spruance, Picture of the Admiral," Harpers, CXCI (August, 1946), 147). The author asked Admiral Spruance about this point and his answer was evasive to the point that he might have so answered, "Attack at Once." However, his operations officer, Captain W. H. Buracker, and his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel J. P. Brown, USMC, both of whom were in flag plot at the time do not recall any message along these lines. Neither does the story fit the character of Waldron.

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ships and Zeroes was so fierce that Waldron was forced to shift his attack from the southernmost carrier to the one in the center.[1] Two planes crashed before Waldron's was hit. Gay, flying anchor man, saw the commander's plane burst into flames as the left gas tank exploded and as he passed over him, he could see Waldron stand up and try to get out of the flaming cockpit. Before long only three planes, closed in a tight formation, remained and then in an instant two were gone; "Tex" Gay was alone. Moments later his gunner and radio man announced that he had been hit and as Gay turned around to look at the slumped, lifeless Bob Huntington, (Robert K., ARM 3/C) his upper left arm captured a spent round. The carrier before Gay started to turn to starboard but the young ensign changed his course, too, tried to drop his torpedo electrically and finally yanked the manual release. As he roared over the carrier, four Zeroes closed in behind and opened fire. An explosive bullet hit his rudder pedal and seared his left leg. Despite fragments imbedded in his left hand Gay was able to stall his plane into a landing that tore the left wing from the fuselage.[2]

The plane sank at once, but Gay was able to free himself, inflate his life jacket and float to the surface. A black rubber seat cushion and a bag containing his rubber liferaft floated nearby and helped keep him afloat. At the same time the seat concealed him from enemy view.

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[1] Statement of Ensign G. H. Gay, USNR, taken while hospitalized in Pearl Harbor and submitted to COMINCH by CINCPAC on 11 June 1942.

[2] Ibid.

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The battle moved on to the north of Gay, but not so far that he could not witness the divebomber attack that followed. Just before dark, alone and several miles removed from the nearest Japanese, he inflated his liferaft. During his lonely vigil, he could see lights to the north from either the flaming carrier AKAGI, to be discussed later, or search lights from rescue ships. Shortly before dawn he felt a succession of three tremendous explosions. Soon thereafter a PBY sighted him and six hours later rescued the sole survivor of the thirty officers and men of Torpedo Squadron Eight. The carrier that Gay had tried to attack was probably the SORYU for in his report he remarked that two larger carriers were nearby. The attack of Torpedo Eight was first sighted by the Mobile Force at 0918, coming in from slightly south of east at a distance estimated to be 20,000 meters.[1]

Captain Marc A. Mitscher, commanding the HORNET was impressed by the grim determination of Waldron and his pilots to "press home an attack against all obstacles"[2] and the British Prime Minister was moved to tears when he learned of the sacrifice of VT-8.[3]

The second torpedo squadron to leave Task Force 16 was Lindsey's fourteen planes. Unlike Waldron's squadron, VT-6 or parts of it had been flying in the Pacific since the opening night of the war. In fact,

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[1] ONI Review p. 20. From the AKAGI it was possible to see Carrier Division Two under attack.

[2] CO, USS HORNET Report of Action 4-6 June 1942 to CINCPAC, dated 13 June 1942, enclosure (C). Hereinafter referred to as HORNET Action Report.

[3] Sidney L. James, "Torpedo Squadron 8," p. 71.

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all of VT-6 had spent the early evening hours of 7 December searching for the Japanese, had been directed to land on Oahu and when they learned that all navigational aids had been turned off, wisely elected to return to the carrier and face the night carrier landing in preference to one at Ford Island. In the Marshall Islands raid on 1 February their torpedoes had blasted into the hulls of ships lying at anchor in the sheltered lagoon. Later at Wake and Marcus, the Devastators had been employed as level bombers. On 18 February the TBD's augmented the SBD's in scouting and when bad weather hid the ship, Lieutenant (j. g.) John T. Eversole and his crewman were forced to land for want of gas. The pair spent a cold night in a rubber boat. The following morning nineteen Dauntlesses searched for the two men. Both Ensign Campbell and Lieutenant (j. g.) Cleo J. Dobson spotted the pair and shortly therafter a destroyer picked them up and returned the two to the ENTERPRISE.[1]

Torpedo Six launched with only fourteen planes, its fifteenth having belonged to Lindsey. As the air group flew aboard on 28 May, Lindsey came up the groove, too slow and too low. His Devastator hit the stern ramp, shearing off the left wing, and skidded up the deck before rolling over the port side by the after five inch guns. The plane guard destroyer MONAGHAN plucked the three battered and bruised airmen[2] from the water and highlined them to the ENTERPRISE. They were hospitalized in the ship's sickbay and for a while it was believed that Lindsey had a

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[1] Dobson Diary.

[2] The bombardier, Chief Schafer and radioman/gunner C. T. Grenat were shaken and wet, but otherwise none the worse.

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broken back. Two days later the squadron commander was able to move about but as the air group commander, McClusky, recalls, "On 4 June there was no rhyme or reason for Lindsey to have made the flight."[1] His face was heavily bruised, so badly that he could not wear his goggles over his eyes. When querried on whether he should go, Lindsey quietly replied, "This is what I have been trained to do."[2]

As on the HORNET, reveille sounded at 0330 on the ENTERPRISE. The Task Force commander was insuring that, should one of the submarines of Task Force Seven sight the Mobile Force during the hours of darkness, the American carriers were ready to execute an attack that would strike the Japanese at dawn. Douglas M. Cossitt, ARM 3/C, a gunner with VT-6 vividly remembers making his way to the galley and being served baked beans for breakfast. The Oakland, California sailor could not eat the beans but later that day and in the ones to follow he would have been willing to give almost anything for a plate of beans.

Between breakfast and the order to man their planes, the crew members checked each plane carefully. They examined the twin thirty caliber guns as well as the emergency equipment. The Devastator carried a seat in the middle that was occupied only when a bombardier would lie prone for a level bombing mission. Soon after the war started this area had been armor plated. When on a torpedo dropping assignment,

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[1] Interview with RADM Clarence Wade McClusky, USN (Ret) conducted at 1826 Circle Road, Ruxton, Maryland on 30 June 1966.

[2] Commander Edward P. Stafford, USN, The Big E, The Story of the USS ENTERPRISE (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 78. Also, McClusky Interview.

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it proved an ideal place to store the rubber raft and emergency rations, especially with the added protection of the armor plate that might keep the liferaft free of bullet holes.

Prior to leaving, Lindsey conferred with Gray who would head the fighter escort. His ten Wildcats were to be the escort for the slow torpedo planes. To insure they would be in the best position to support them, Gray wanted his fighters at 20,000 feet. He told Lindsey he would watch him and if he was attacked he would use the speed gained during his dive from altitude to fight off the attackers. It made sense except for one thing. Lindsey would fly below the scattered cloud layer while Gray would be above. As events turned out, Gray, instead of trailing Lindsey, followed the torpedo planes of Waldron who didn't know he had such an escort and would have been unable to call him down as the radios of the two squadrons were not on the same frequency.

Lindsey would lead the first section while Lieutenant Arthur V. Ely, the executive officer, would lead the second division. Each division had seven planes as they started their climb to 2000 feet or just under the layer of broken clouds. The flight was uneventful as the Devastators crawled along at ninety knots. The plan of attack was simple and standard procedure. On sighting the enemy, Lindsey would go into a steep glide until he leveled off at 100 feet, selecting his target on the way down and signaling to Ely the carrier to be attacked. The planes would be in a Vee formation, speed 100 knots. Any faster or higher and the torpedo would porpoise. There was no aiming device that could correct for speed and deflection of the target, only experience could insure accuracy. Lindsey's

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squadron had that, the newest member having more than 2500 hours of flying with most of it in torpedo planes.

It was nearly 0945 when the Mobile Force appeared over the horizon and Lindsey started his letdown. The outer screen extended nearly fifteen miles in diameter. Within the broad circle was a smaller one about seven miles across and composed primarily of the light and heavy cruisers and the fast battleships. Spread within the center were three carriers (a fourth, the HIRYU, was to the north and apparently not seen by VT-6). This is the scene that confronted Lindsey and the other thirteen pilots of Torpedo Six as they reached the point where the squadron split into two divisions. Before crossing the outer screen, the nearer ships fired colored shells as a signal of the new menace.[1] Zeroes came in on the planes, frequently employing the scissors maneuver with a plane astern on either side. The split was made as they passed the outer screen. Lindsey had his target selected.

Blinker lights from the screen had flashed the news of Lindsey's approach to the AKAGI while the Devastators were still fifty kilometers away. The time was 0949. Between then and 1000 the CHIKUMA commenced two runs for laying smoke as both she and the TONE opened fire, with their main batteries supplementing the smaller caliber weapons. The big eight inch guns were reasonably effective against low flying torpedo planes. With skill they could be ricochetted off the water and exploded in the air. If nothing else, the geyser they formed attracted

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[1] Letter from LCdr Stephen B. Smith, USN (Ret) to author of 3 February 1967.

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the torpedo pilot's attention and, if low enough, might force him to alter course. At 0958 Lindsey's planes were nearing their intended target, the carrier KAGA, and shortly after the hour the torpedoes fell loose from their harnesses and were on their way. The carrier, skillfully handled by Captain Jisaku Okada, maneuvered to parallel the course of the approaching torpedoes.[1] There is strong evidence to support the thesis that Torpedo Six attacked more than one carrier. Since Ely's division had a more circuitous route after the squadron split, it may well have attacked the AKAGI, the time being about 1010, according to the records of the flagship.[2]

Passing inside the protective screen of the Mobile Force did not stop Zeroes from attacking Torpedo Six, the fighters braving the anti-aircraft fire of their own ships. Even before dropping his torpedo Lindsey had radioed to Gray for help from his fighters.[3] The slaughter of VT-8 was being repeated with the planes of the ENTERPRISE. The plane to starboard of Machinist Albert W. Winchell blew up in a blinding flash as a twenty millimeter shell found the torpedo warhead.[4] Lieutenant (jg) Robert E. Laub was too busy lining up his plane on the target to notice any other planes in Ely's division. He could see that none of the carriers had been hit. He held his torpedo until 800 yards from

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[1] Acting CO, VT-6 report of "Torpedo Plane Operations in the Air Battle of Midway, June 4, 1942," to CINCPAC dated 21 June 1942.

[2] ONI Review, p. 22.

[3] Smith letter of 3 February 1967.

[4] Letter from Douglas M. Cossitt to the author of 21 July 1966.

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target when he pushed the electric release button on top of his stick and felt the lightened load of his aircraft. As he maneuvered his plane out of the task force a single fighter made one pass at him that caused little damage. Later, as he cleared the Mobile Force, he saw a pair of F4F's speed past him at a higher altitude. In a final backward glance at the Mobile Force he could see three carriers burning. The time that Laub dropped his torpedo must have been between 1010 and 1015. The rest of his flight was uneventful and he landed aboard the ENTERPRISE with gas to spare. His plane suffered little damage and neither he nor his gunner were wounded. Three other TBD's made it back to the ship, including one so badly damaged it was jettisoned over the side as being beyond repair.[1]

The plane that had been so badly damaged was flown by Chief Machinist Stephen B. Smith. He, along with his roommate Winchell, had gone to the VT-6 ready room about 0430. Lindsey conducted the briefing, emphasizing the importance of the enemy carriers. He also explained that planes from Fighting Six would fly cover for the slow torpedo planes. As Smith approached the Mobile Force he was flying wing on Lieutenant Patrick J. Riley, the section leader immediately to the right of Lindsey. Riley ran into two Zeroes coming head-on. As the first fired at Riley he returned the fusilade, allowing the nose of his Devastator to rise as he followed the Zero passing above him. The companion enemy plane was just sufficiently behind to enable its pilot to pour a withering burst into

[1]Interview with Capt R. E. Laub, USN (Ret) conducted at 19153 Marilla, North Ridge, California on 13 May 1966.

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the unprotected belly of Riley's plane.[1] Flames broke out in the TBD and Smith could see the plane fall off to one side and head toward the water. Just beyond Riley's flaming plane Smith caught sight of Lindsey's craft hitting the water.

There was still a considerable distance to the Japanese carrier enabling Zeroes to make high speed runs at Smith. In the rear, his gunner fired frequent bursts which had little effect on the Zeroes as their bullets consistently hit the plane. Twice the armored seat behind Smith resounded to the ring of an enemy bullet and glancing to his right he could see gas sloshing on the wing. A round came through the canopy, grazing his shoulder and smashing into the instrument panel and destroying his compass. As Smith recalls, "There didn't seem to be a chance of getting out alive." So Smith dropped even closer to the water and continued on toward the carrier. The ship appeared to be in a left turn as Smith pulled up and maneuvered his plane to put his speed, altitude, attitude and sight in perfect position for dropping. The torpedo fell away and McCoy, glancing at the white wake, reported the torpedo on course. Whether the carrier avoided the torpedo or whether it failed to explode or passed under the ship, it is now known that Smith did not damage the carrier.

The return to the ENTERPRISE was virtually free of pursuing fighters although he had to fly around the entire Mobile Force after winding up on the side away from Task Force 16. The Japanese had already done their damage to Smith's plane. With the compass out Smith

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[1] Smith letter of 3 February 1967.

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had to resort to a method of flying a heading that he had learned early in his career as a naval aviator. On the way from his carrier to the Japanese, Smith had made a careful note of the direction of the wind and the small, infrequent white caps he spied. The relationship of these was of course, with regard to his own direction of flight. Now, without a compass, his best means of ascertaining direction was to fly the reciprocal course, with the direction of the wind providing the basic data. Fortunately for Smith the wind held steady throughout the morning so that he had little trouble finding the American ships.

As he sighted the carriers he headed toward the nearest one. Not until he came very close to the carrier did he notice her antiaircraft guns firing. Smith understood that the ship, obviously the YORKTOWN, was under attack so he headed for a more distant one that turned out to be the ENTERPRISE. The challenging light caused Smith to make the proper tight right turn following which he received a green blinker telling him that he was cleared to land. As he approached the landing pattern McCoy called from the rear that they were under attack. A VF-6 fighter on combat air patrol had not received information that Smith had been identified as friendly. As a result slugs from six guns were creeping toward the stern of the Devastator. The fighter pilot had opened fire too soon and his shots, falling behind Smith, gave the harried torpedo pilot time to maneuver his plane out of the way.

Smith was the first plane of VT-6 to return. He made a routine, but rapid, landing and hurried to the bridge to report. He reported to Admiral Spruance that on his circuitous path around the Mobile Force,

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he had seen two carriers in flames and that a third one was billowing jet black smoke. Soon thereafter Laub, Ensign Edward Heck, Jr. and Ensign Irving H. McPherson landed. Metalsmiths carefully examined Smith's plane and, although it might possibly have been salvaged, it was jettisoned the following day. His Devastator, 6-T-11, had sixty-eight holes in it.[1]

To pilot Winchell and his gunner Cossitt the day was the beginning of an ordeal. Winchell dropped his torpedo at the intended target but at a range greater than that recommended. It had not been as he had planned but it had been a decision that had to be made on the spot. He could drop his torpedo at this time or he could break off his run and try a second time. The gunfire from the Zeroes, steadily eating away at his plane, indicated the folly of trying again. The turn away from the target and the retirement were not free from fighters, but the Zeroes did not pursue the Navy planes for any appreciable distance. Certainly they did not persist in the chase as they had done earlier in the day when the planes from Midway Island attacked.

Without a friendly plane in sight, Winchell set course for the ENTERPRISE and tried to gain altitude.[2] With height he would try to

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[1] Smith returned to the United States following Midway but after a year at Ft. Lauderdale Naval Air Station he was able to return to the Pacific. Captain Dixie Keifer, who had been executive officer of the YORKTOWN, had Smith assigned to his carrier, the TICONDEROGA. Supposedly too old to fly, Smith succeeded in talking his way into four more torpedo attacks against Japanese shipping in the Western Pacific. While none received the concentration of fire as VT-6 did at Midway, casualties continued high among this group of fliers. Smith, however, escaped unscathed and ended the war as a Lieutenant with the coveted Navy Cross for Midway and four Distinguished Flying Crosses as well as a well deserved nickname of "Rabbit-foot."

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home in on the carrier with his direction finder. Quickly it became evident that the Devastator would never make it. Gas streamed out of the non-selfsealing tanks, the plane vibrated so badly that it made control difficult, and the engine produced even less power than normal. A thousand feet was the highest it would go and Winchell knew that even that could not be held. He told the youthful Cossitt to prepare for a water landing, a directive that set the gunner to throwing over the radio receiver and direction finder to insure access to the emergency equipment. The landing was near perfect as the plane skimmed across a few waves and nosed in. The two men jumped out, throwing the liferaft and emergency rations, as well as their parachutes, ahead of them. As the plane started to settle, Winchell reached back inside to grab the first aid kit.

The pilot had a nasty cut on his face, a combination of shrapnel and hitting the gunsight on landing. No less than eighteen pieces of shell fragments had splattered along the legs and the left arm and wrist of Cossitt. Nor was the gunner sure that these were the only places where he had been wounded. His seat was so sore he could not sit on it. As they settled into the raft Winchell examined his companion's tender spot and found nothing worse than a black and blue mark. An inspection of the parachute worn by Cossitt, which while in the air had doubled as a seat cushion, revealed a three by five inch piece of shrapnel that had entered the plane from the bottom, passed through the metal seat and

[2]Cossitt letter of 21 July 1966 containing a detailed report of the strike and the seventeen days spent in the raft, as can be best remembered after twenty-four years.

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lodged in the chute. For the two the Battle of Midway was over and they now had to sit out rescue and hope that it would be by the friendly side.

The days passed without incident. They used parachutes for protection against the sun. As the prevailing winds blew toward Wake, the chutes doubled as sails whenever the Kona winds to the northeast were blowing. In rough weather they served as a sea anchor preventing drift and increasing stability. They soon learned that the presence of small fish meant the absence of sharks and that they could lower themselves into the cooling water in safety. Sharks were a continual problem as they tangled in the parachute anchor and sought to upset the raft. The aluminum oars helped fight them off as did Winchell's eight inch Bowie knife. When he wounded one the others destroyed it in a wild melee.

Infrequently they heard planes in the distance but none came close enough to discover them. Winchell would shake his fist at them and yell "All right, you bastards, see if I ever buy you a drink at the O Club." It wasn't really funny, but it was a break in the monotonous routine and one that helped them keep from giving up.

Around the twelfth day they spotted a submarine in the distance. With great effort Cossitt held the pilot so he could wave and attract the crew's attention. Finally, the submarine sighted them and headed toward the liferaft. Rescue was at hand! The elation soon gave way to fear as they recognized the boat as Japanese. The ship circled them while an officer and eight to ten armed men came out on deck. Surely they would be shot or at best made prisoners, but after examining them the submarine sailed away. The two airmen were in such poor condition

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that the Japanese commander evidently did not desire to take them aboard as prisoners and believed they were not worth the ammunition to shoot. Their other visitor lasted longer. For days an albatross had flown around them, occasionally settling in the water. At times he would make his way right alongside the raft. With rations long run out, Cossitt hit the bird on the head with an oar, the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner notwithstanding, and Winchell grabbed him and slit his throat. Despite an eight foot wing span, the body was only the size of a chicken. tasted of fish, and was so tough that they could not chew the raw meat.

Until the last two days showers had kept them supplied with water but, as they could not store any quantity, they had exhausted their supply as the sun broke on a clear 21st of June. They drew up the parachutes for protection and although their hopes of being saved had dwindled, they talked briefly of what they would do when rescued. And then at the same time they heard the unmistakable sound of an airplane which to their trained ears had the familiar drumming of a PBY. Although the plane zoomed over them at 100 feet, dropping a smoke bomb to mark the spot and show the wind, the two men could barely see it through their sunburned and blistered eyelids. Soon Lieutenant (jg) John E. White and his crew delicately lifted the two men into the amphibian and had the two on their way to the hospital at Midway.[1] Only then did they first learn the results of

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[1] Letter from LCdr J. E. White, USN (Ret) of 4 May 1967. White had arrived on Midway on 10 June to help search for survivors. On 21 June, White was returning from his search that took him 500 miles from Midway when his co-pilot, Warrant Officer Voorhees, spotted the orange liferaft. White dropped to 100 feet to circle the raft. When he saw one of the occupants move and wave, he sent a message requesting permission

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the battle. Cossitt weighed 119 pounds instead of his usual 185 and Winchell was down to 112. For seventeen days they had struggled to stay alive, had drifted over 150 miles northwest of their landing spot and proved to be the final men rescued from the battle.[1]

Lieutenant Commander Lance E. "Lem" Massey, commander of the third torpedo squadron was also the most experienced in combat operations. Massey had reported to Torpedo Squadron Six on 26 October 1941 as executive officer. He had flown on all of the early wartime combat hops, leading the one on Kwajalein and participating in those on Wake and Marcus. The torpedo attack in the Marshalls marked the first ever launched from the air by the U. S. Navy.[2] On 17 April, the Watertown, New York pilot took command of Torpedo Squadron Three.

In the brief time remaining before the Battle of Midway, Massey trained his squadron at Kaneohe's Naval Air Station on windward Oahu. The results of long hours of flying and many hours of skull sessions, as he gave them the benefits of his own combat experience, began to show. Torpedo Three was a combat-ready organization. When the YORKTOWN returned from the Coral Sea and VT-3 replaced Torpedo Five, Massey

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to land. Twenty minutes later the island responded with approval to land. Winchell and Cossitt were so weak that White ordered his men to inflate one of the Catalina's liferafts and assist in bringing the pair to the plane. While crewmen held them in their bunks, White made the take off. Enroute Winchell and Cossitt sucked on bread that had been soaked in tomato juice. Five hours later, or near 1800 Midway time, the two airmen were tenderly lifted into an ambulance that had awaited their arrival on Eastern.

[1] War Diary, Patrol Squadron 24, June 1942.

[2] Caption attached to Massey's picture in 6T2, Bureau No. 0343

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questioned squadron skipper Lieutenant Commander Joe Taylor on the techniques he had used against the SHOHO and SHOKAKU. One thing stood out above all others. The slow Devastators were dead ducks for enemy fighters. If they were to have any chance of surviving a fighter escort was essential. It so happened that a new fighter squadron was also going aboard the YORKTOWN. While awaiting the arrival of the carrier, VF-3 was also undergoing advanced training at Kaneohe. Both squadrons would replace the two similar squadrons returning from the Coral Sea on the YORKTOWN. VT-5 and VF-42 had been hit hard by casualties and their personnel and equipment, at sea continuously since 16 February, required rest and reorganization.[1] The escorted torpedo attack plan was carefully worked out between Massey and Lieutenant Commander John S. Thach, commander of Fighting Three.

Task Force 17 had remained north and slightly east of Admiral Spruance's group. When word was received as to the location of the Mobile Force, Fletcher told his fellow commander, at 0607, to "Proceed southwesterly and attack enemy carriers as soon as definitely located. I will follow as soon as planes recovered."[2] The YORKTOWN's closing of the distance to the Japanese force was delayed while it recovered the ten SBD's of Scouting Five. These had been launched at 0430 to search

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and dated 11 June 1942. Picture retained by widow, Mrs. Majorie Massey, Coronado, California.

[1]Interview with Capt Harry B. Gibbs, USN conducted at U. S. Naval Air Station, Washington, D. C. on 1 March 1967.

[2]War Diary, Task Force 16 for June 1942, p. 5.

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the area from northwest to east northeast of the Task Forces. In addition, the initial reports had been incomplete for only two carriers had been reported whereas intelligence believed four and possibly five would be involved. Admiral Fletcher was aware that every flyable attack plane from Task Force 16 was participating. Only the YORKTOWN's two divebomber and one torpedo squadrons remained uncommitted. Although the returning Scouts brought no reports of new sightings, Fletcher decided to launch a strike employing one squadron of divebombers and Massey's torpedo squadron. The decision to attack was delayed for almost an hour after Task Force 16 had launched its strike.

The delay in launching the YORKTOWN air group was a matter of serious concern to the men destined to man the planes. Crewmen who gathered around the large main hatch leading to the flight deck grumbled that they would miss the strike. They were afraid that the other carriers would end the battle before they could leave the YORKTOWN. They cursed their bad luck, made wisecracks, and kidded one another about their misfortunes. Some of their banter ran: "Someday one of my kids or grandkids is going to ask me: Daddy, what did you do in the Battle of Midway? And I'll have to say that I was in the Carrier Air Group which was held in reserve."[1] Thus, the decision to launch brought an enthusiastic response from the waiting airmen.

At 0845 the YORKTOWN launched her attack group of seventeen

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[1] Letter from LTC Lloyd F. Childers, USMC to the author of 30 November 1966.

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SBD's, twelve torpedo planes and six fighters.[1] The Devastators rolled off the deck, taking up a heading of 240° for an enemy estimated to be 156 miles away. In accordance with the standard torpedo doctrine the squadron divided into two sections, Massey taking one and Lieutenant Patrick H. Hart, executive officer, leading the other. The flight was much like that of the other two torpedo squadrons as Massey kept his planes just under the canopy of clouds. An hour out and he dropped down to 1500 feet. In another thirty minutes he had the Mobile Force in sight and he had six fighters with him to help.

Prior to taking off Thach and Massey along with the Air Officer, Commander Murr E. Arnold, addressed the problem of fighter support. Arnold and the Air Group Commander, Lieutenant Commander Oscar Pederson, who ran the ship's fighter director, needed a certain number of fighters to defend the carrier. Only six could be spared to accompany Massey. The proper positioning of the six planes was critical, particularly in view of the cloud layer at 2500 feet. To do a good job the Wildcat fighters needed speed and this could be obtained only through diving. Their plan was to jump the Zeroes from above if the enemy fighters started after the torpedo planes. Thach assigned a pair of fighters to duty as low coverage at a height of 2500 feet or just beneath the clouds while the other four, including himself, remained above at 5000 feet. Radio silence was to be maintained until attacked when the

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[1] USS YORKTOWN Report of Action of June 4, 1942 and June 6, 1942, undated, p. 9. Hereinafter referred to as YORKTOWN Action Report.

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local fighter net could be used to call down the high coverage fighters.[1]

On sighting the Mobile Force Massey immediately started his let-down to the proper torpedo dropping height and looked for a target. Four loomed in sight and the one nearest was apart from the others as though forming the extreme point of a diamond formation. The other three lay perhaps ten miles to the south. Massey headed for the HIRYU, Admiral Yamaguchi's flagship. While still ten miles from the outer screen the Japanese fired two antiaircraft bursts into the sky, an obvious signal to alert the force to the newest threat. Almost at once eighteen to twenty Zero fighters came roaring at Massey's lumbering TBD's, unmaneuverable at anytime, but even more like sitting ducks with the weight of the Mark 13 torpedoes underneath them. The Zeroes wasted no time in concentrating on the leader. Before the squadron ever crossed the outer screen Massey's plane was aflame. Too low to use a parachute, the squadron commander had to leave his inferno-like cockpit. As his wingman passed over him, he saw Massey standing on the right wing stub of his plane, the last view of him alive.[2] Massey's gunner a Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate was still busily firing his machine gun as the Devastator hurtled into the calm sea.[3] Chief Aviation Pilot Wilhelm G. Esders, one of the most experienced torpedo plane pilots in the Navy, moved into Massey's vacant spot and led the five plane

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[1] Letter from ADM J. S. Thach, USN of 26 November 1965.

[2] Letter from Cdr W. G. Esders, USN (Ret) to the author of 10 October 1966.

[3] Childers letter of 30 November 1966.

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division against the HIRYU, Esders saw nothing of Hart's division and, with Zeroes all around, he was busy enough managing his own plane.

The six planes of VF-3 helped but they were no match for the numerous Zeroes. Ensign Daniel C. Sheedy and Machinist Thomas R. Cheek were providing the low coverage. The Zeroes jumped at the same time they struck Massey's planes. In seconds the fighters were involved in individual dogfights that took them from the surface of the water through the clouds above. Thach and his wing man, Ensign R. A. M. Dibb, as well as the second section's Lieutenant (jg) Brainard T. Macomber and Ensign Edward Bassett, sped down on the Japanese fighters. As Thach recalled, "It was like being inside a beehive."[1] The team of Thach-Dibb worked with perfection. As "Ram" Dibb called over his radio "There's a Zero on my tail," he swung his plane around so Thach could shoot the pursuing enemy. The technique was one that Thach had drilled into his pilots during their training at Kaneohe. By crossing your tail on your wingman you continually provide him with a chance to fire on any pursuer. The same thing works in reverse for clearing the wingman. It is a threading process that later during the war became known as the "Thach Weave."

A torpedo plane rear seat gunner shot down one Zero and each of the VF-3 fighters claimed one of its opposite number.[2] Early in the fight the Japanese hit Basset and he went down to the sea in flames. They also shot up Sheedy's plane, but the young ensign coaxed his Wildcat to a crash landing

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[1] Lieutenant Commander J. S. Thach, USN, "Red Rain of Battle," Colliers, CX (December 12, 1942), 17.

[2] YORKTOWN Action Report, p. 12.

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aboard the HORNET. The other four fighters, with barely enough fuel to return, managed to break off the one sided fight and limp back to the YORKTOWN. Thach's own plane had a hole in the oil pan that allowed the heavy liquid to spread throughout the cockpit. When Thach landed his plane it was still running smoothly but the oil was gone.[1]

Massey never reached a position from whence he could drop his torpedo and neither did six others of VT-3. Only five of the remainder were able to launch their torpedoes and four of them were shot down. Machinist Harry L. Corl passed through the Japanese destroyer screen and headed toward his intended target. Enemy fighters damaged his plane badly, so much so that the elevator controls were unable to keep the nose up. To prevent crashing he jettisoned his torpedo earlier than he had intended.[2] Without looking to see where his missile was heading, Corl set course for the YORKTOWN.

After Corl dropped his torpedo from his damaged aircraft he made a low level retirement to the East. While a few planes returned from the Mobile Force with little interference from the Japanese Zeroes, Corl was not so fortunate. A Zero tried a 180° flatside approach until Aviation Radioman Third Class Lloyd F. Childers, manning the rear guns,

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[1] J. S. Thach, "Red Rain of Battle," p. 44.

[2] Childers letter of 30 November 1966. The account that follows is based on this letter as Childers is the only one still alive. Upon recovering from his wounds, Childers entered flight training and was commissioned a Marine Second Lieutenant upon completion of the course. He flew in the Korean War and was a helicopter squadron commander in Viethem before retiring on 1 February 1967.

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started hitting the Zero whereupon it broke away. A second fighter approached along the blind spot immediately in line with the rudder. The plane was not firing and Childers concluded that the Japanese was trying to destroy their rudder with his propeller. When the enemy pilot slipped momentarily to the side, Childers opened fire and forced the plane to turn away.

Any respite was brief for a pair of Zeroes started working on the TBD with grim determination. As one came in from one quadrant, a second would make a run from the opposite side. Childers could fire in only one direction at a given moment. On one of the aft high side runs he caught two bullets in his left thigh which were not serious but a short time later during another high side approach a bullet struck his right ankle and broke both bones. Corl was busy trying to evade the planes and fire his own machinegun whenever possible.

Childers, wounded and battling approaching planes, had another shock in store for him. Corl called to tell him that he thought they were going to have to ditch. The engine and throttle linkage had been damaged. Regardless of how he set the throttle the plane would not respond properly. Finally, Corl developed a setting that allowed the plane to fly -after a fashion. By this time the Zeroes had turned away, luckily for Childers whose guns were repeatedly jamming. His efforts to tune the ZB homing equipment were fruitless as the set had been shattered by bullets. Esders joined up briefly during which time Esders and Childers hand tapped in morse code their respective situations. Corl couldn't increase speed and Esders wanted to get his injured

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gunner medical attention. Without further delay Esders added throttle and pulled ahead.

Corl kept his wounded Devastator running and by dead reckoning brought her to the YORKTOWN. When he saw his carrier under attack, there was no choice but to continue toward Task Force 16. Corl made his approach on the ENTERPRISE but as he set up his pattern he realized that he did not have the throttle control necessary to bring the plane aboard the carrier. Instead he landed abeam the lead destroyer, the MONAGHAN. The bullet-riddled plane sank so rapidly that there was no time to pull out the liferaft. The two airmen had but a short time to float in their lifejacket before the destroyer's boat came alongside of them. Corl insisted that they rescue the injured Childers first.

Smart planning by Lieutenant Commander John P. Burford, Captain of the MONAGHAN, insured that a doctor was assigned to the boat. Lieutenant A. B. Hendricks (MC) administered artificial respiration to Childers who had been rescued floating face down, and he gave first aid to halt the flow of blood from his wounds. Safely aboard the warship, Hendricks operated on Childers wounds. Medical attention had come none too soon for Hendricks stated that without it Childers would have died in less than an hour.

Rugged Machinist Corl had brought his damaged plane and wounded gunner back to where the latter could be saved. True, his torpedo failed to damage the Japanese carrier, but in this experienced torpedo pilot rests one of Midway's excellent example of small unit leadership. Corl was an old-timer among the pilots, one who was disliked by many of his

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contemporaries and evaded by the gunners who might be assigned to fly with him. Childers disliked him personally and on more than one occasion they nearly came to blows. Regardless of personal feelings the young Childers could recognize that Corl was "one of the best pilots in the squadron." When the chips were down, Childers wanted his life in Corl's capable hands. Corl had not failed.[1]

Bill Esders, who had taken Massey's place, had led Corl toward the HIRYU. With his gunner, Aviation Radioman Second Class Mike Brazier, wounded but still firing away, Esders brought his torpedo plane into a position about 800 yards off the carrier's starboard bow. He could clearly see the clustered planes on the after end of the flight deck. She was ready to launch.[2]

The electric switch on the stick responded to the pressure of Esder's thumb and he could feel his plane become lighter as his torpedo sped its way. He was only twenty feet above the water as he "pickled" his "fish." Esders didn't look to see if his torpedo found its mark for the Zeroes didn't give him a chance. HIRYU's Captain Tameo Kaku barked the command of hard right rudder and the torpedo passed harmlessly by. The time of the attack was very close to 1030.[3] Esders continued his flight towards

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[1] Less than three months later Corl was caught by a group of Zeroes as he flew an ENTERPRISE Avenger against an enemy cruiser in the eastern Solomons. His wingman last saw him ducking into a cloud in an effort to escape.

[2] Letter from Cdr W. G. Esders, USN (Ret) to the author of 9 June 1966.

[3] Central Intelligence Group Document No. 160985-B of 5 May 1947. A translation from HIRYU action report establishes the time as 1030 and

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the YORKTOWN but, as happened to Winchell of VT-6, his wounded plane could not make it. Just as he sighted the carrier his plane faltered and he headed for a landing in the sea. The Devastator stayed afloat sufficiently long to allow him to inflate the two man rubber liferaft, throw in the emergency rations and help Brazier out of the plane and into the raft. The gunner was obviously near death. Both of his legs had been hit by twenty millimeter explosive rounds and there were numerous wounds on other parts of the body that bore the imprint of small arms fire. As they awaited rescue they talked of the attack, the squadron, the YORKTOWN and shipmates, the Navy and of home - and then there was silence. Brazier was dead.

Esders looked up to see a pair of SBD's circling over him. While one remained the other, piloted by Lieutenant Commander Maxwell F. Leslie, flew over to the destroyer HAMMANN and dropped a message on its narrow forecastle telling of the downed airmen. After rescuing the pilot and gunner of a ditched ENTERPRISE plane the HAMMANN headed for Esders. In short order the destroyer had the pilot and his dead gunner aboard. Esders was treated for the wound along the top of his head, apparently caused by a bullet, and soon became a spectator to the second Japanese attack on the YORKTOWN. He spent the night on the HAMMANN, along with eighty-seven survivors of the YORKTOWN,

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notes that one of the "five single engine torpedo planes" was downed by machinegun fire. Morison, Vol IV, p. 120, claims Massey's target was SORYU. In the light of the HIRYU report as well as Esders personal observations that three carriers were afire as he made his attack on the undamaged one, the author accepts HIRYU as Massey's target.

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transferring to the heavy cruiser PORTLAND on the following day.[1]

One other aspect of the gallant effort of Torpedo Three deserves mention. Ten of the twelve planes had crashed within close proximity to the Mobile Force. At least one of the ten pilots was able to survive the crash. The destroyer ARASHI was heading toward the already damaged AKAGI when the officer of the deck noticed a man swimming in the water. The destroyer hove to while a boat was lowered and sent to pick him up. The swimmer turned out to be an ensign from Torpedo Three. He was brought to the forecastle of the destroyer, made to sit on the deck and was interrogated by the only officer on the destroyer who had a working knowledge of English. Whether under duress or as promised treatment for the burns on his hands, arms and face, the officer divulged information of inestimable value to the Japanese. The interrogation was accomplished by written questions and responses as the Japanese officer did not have an oral ability with the language. By 1300 Captain Kosaku Ariga, the Commander of Destroyer Division 4, who was embarked in the ARASHI, was able to send a message to the Mobile Force, Admiral Yamamoto with the Main Body, and to Admiral Kondo with the Invasion Force, that told the entire composition of the U. S. naval forces that had attacked the three Japanese carriers.[2] Granted, the three carriers had already been severely damaged, but the information was of

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[1] CO, USS HAMMANN Action Report of 4-6 June 1942 to CINCPAC, dated 16 June 1942, p. 2. Hereinafter referred to as HAMMANN Action Report. As HAMMANN's log was lost in the sinking of the destroyer, the report was compiled from memory by her Captain, Commander Arnold E. True, USN, and is therefore lacking many details usually found, i.e., time, exact location, disposition.

[2] ONI Review, p. 27.

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tremendous value in allowing Yamamoto and the other subordinate commanders to determine what their future course of action should be. Had this information not been so readily disclosed it is entirely possible that the Japanese might well have continued their offensive plans and the American attackers might have scored even greater damage than they actually did. Soon after he divulged the information, the Japanese killed the officer.[1] The details of the officer's rescue, his interrogation and the method used to kill him were the subject of a war crimes investigation the details of which are contained in Appendix C.

The three torpedo squadrons had sent forty-one slow and antiquated Devastator torpedo bombers against the strongest Japanese naval force ever assembled. Their flying coffins had been knocked from the sky and regardless of the demonstrated dedication and skill, not a plane had been able to damage the enemy. In turn only four battered planes had struggled back to the American force, the other thirty-seven being spread upon the 150 miles of open sea that separated friend from foe. The men were highly motivated and with commanders like Waldron, Lindsey and Massey, ably led. The personal example of the commanders could not have been higher and, like Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, the courageous attack of the torpedo planes will always be remembered when one discusses the Battle of Midway. Their direct contribution to the victory of Midway was lost in the clatter of machineguns and aerial cannons and the rending of metal and limb hitting the immovable strength of the sea. Indirectly

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[1] The pilot was on the ship approximately seven hours.

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though, the sacrifice of the torpedo squadrons was to contribute mightily to the final victory.

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CHAPTER VII

INDECISION IN COMMAND

From the Japanese point of view, the start of events on the fourth of June gave every indication that the battle would be successful. As the carriers maneuvered in preparation for launching their attack planes a mood of optimism permeated everyone. Admiral Nagumo had slept little that night and his Chief of Staff, Admiral Kusaka, never left the bridge.[1] While the former carried the responsibility for the Mobile Force, the conduct of air operations rested upon the shoulders of Commander Minoru Genda, the staff air officer. Genda, the officer who had so brilliantly and thoroughly planned the attack of the six carriers on Pearl Harbor was standing beside his commander awaiting the launch. All members of the staff were more assured with the talented air officer present. Soon after leaving Hashirajima, Genda had been struck down with a heavy cold. Actually, it was the fast pace of the previous year exacting its retribution. The flag surgeon examined Genda and immediately ordered him below to the carrier's sick bay. He spent four days there before he could persuade the doctor to allow him to return to his post on the bridge.

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[1] Ryunosuke Kusaka, Combined Fleet, Reminiscences of Former Chief of Staff Kusaka, trans. Kakeo Rackley (Tokyo: Mainichi Newspaper Co., 1952), p. 79.

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The planes that were launched at 0430 were an evenly balanced assortment of fighters, divebombers, and level bombers. A total of 108 planes, as has been pointed out earlier, left the carriers and streaked toward Midway. While these fighting planes comprised a major part of the planes of the Mobile Force, they did not constitute the entire air picture. The attack was necessary to destroy the defenses on Midway and a search was just as essential to keep the Mobile Force from being surprised. The details of planning this search had been left almost entirely to Genda.[1]

The degree to which Genda was entrusted with the planning and the manner in which his recommendations were accepted were a matter of serious concern to Genda. At one stage in his career his staff work had been thoroughly scrutinized and he himself subjected to a searching inquiry. This had been the situation when he presented his initial staff study on the Pearl Harbor attack to his superior, Admiral Takijiro Onishi.[2] Since Pearl Harbor, however, Nagumo and Kusaka were approving Genda's recommendations almost without examining them. In a sense Genda might have been satisfied that this was the case, but in reality he was too smart an officer not to appreciate the fact that he also made mistakes.

The value of an adequate and timely search is difficult to overemphasize. Early discovery of the enemy forewarns the commander of

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[1] Toland, But Not in Shame, p. 407.

[2] Gordon W. Prange, "Tora, Tora, Tora!" Reader's Digest, LXXXIII (October, 1963), p. 260.

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the presence of a hostile force and, hopefully, enables him to deliver the initial blow. Because of the importance attached to early detection of the enemy, both the United States and the Japanese had developed the single phase and the two phase search. The difference between the two was that the latter required a plane to be at the furthest limit of the search at the time a second plane on the same search sector was leaving the force. Under this procedure, and assuming that the second plane was leaving at dawn, the entire sector could be visually surveyed in a minimum time. On the other hand, if only the single phase was used the plane would leave the force at dawn, or shortly before, fly its outward leg, make a cross leg of about sixty miles and then head back. Should the enemy force be along the line of the return leg, it might not be discovered by the search plane until as much as two to three hours after take off.

The value of a two phase search was well known to Genda but he had to weigh other factors as well. Foremost, was that the two phase search required twice as many planes. It also meant two launching times for the search aircraft and ultimately two periods of recovery. After evaluating the intelligence available, Genda decided on the single phase search. It had been used on earlier carrier strikes, notably in the Indian Ocean, and had provided sufficient early warning for the Mobile Force.[1]

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[1]While the single phase search gave warning during the Indian Ocean operation, the enemy (British) forces located were incapable of mounting an aerial attack. Had there been a carrier with its air group embarked, it is entirely possible that the time of discovery might not have been until after the enemy carrier-based planes were heading toward the Japanese.

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Seven planes were assigned to perform the single phase search over an area extending clockwise from 020° to 180°. Since discovery in the extreme northern part of the search sector was unlikely, a float plane from the HARUNA was assigned to fly a distance of 150 miles on a course of 31°. On reaching its outer limit, the plane would make a left turn for the sixty mile cross leg before returning to the battleship.[1] At the other end of the fan-like search pattern, an aircraft from the AKAGI and a companion from the KAGA would search to a distance of 300 miles. The area to be covered lay to the west and southwest of Midway.

The two heavy cruisers TONE and CHIKUMA were each to supply two float planes to search a distance of 300 miles. Admiral Abe's flagship TONE would cover the area between a line extending east from the Mobile Force and the island of Midway that bore 135° from the Japanese. The CHIKUMA was assigned the quadrant east to northeast of the Mobile Force.

No sooner had the flashing exhausts of Tomonaga's planes disappeared than signals from the flagship sped the search planes on their way. The two carrier planes and three of the five float planes took off as scheduled. The second CHIKUMA plane took off five minutes later on a search that would take it slightly north of east of the Mobile Force. The TONE's plane for search area number four failed to take off as scheduled. The cause, never completely explained, for the delayed launching was allegedly caused by a faulty catapult. It was more than thirty minutes late

[1] The distance of a cross leg was dependent upon the extent of visibility. On 4 June this ranged to approximately thirty miles. The fan under surveillance was 120 miles. The sixty mile cross leg insured that area between outbound and inbound legs was visually covered.

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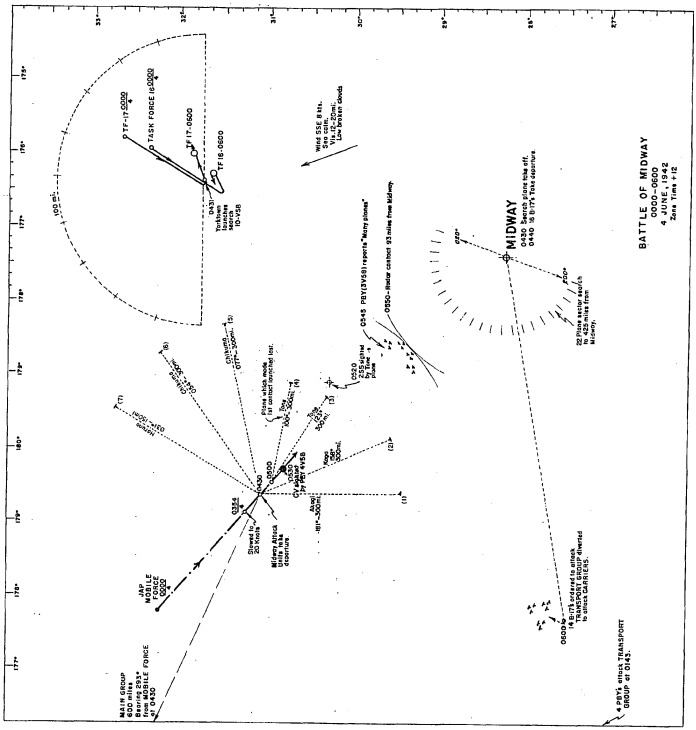
BATTLE OF MIDWAY
0000–0600
4 JUNE, 1942
Area I and II
MIDWAY
0440 Sighted returning ac.
0510 Sights Task elements
0545 PBY(VP51) reports "Many planes"
0550—Radar contact 93 miles from Midway
0630 Sights Task elements
0700
0800
JAP MOBILE FORCE 0000
MAIN GROUP 0000 Course 090 Speed 15 kts
0430 Launches search
0450 Launches search
0500 Launches search
0530 Launches search
0600 Launches search
0600 14 CVs ordered to attack. Two battleships ordered to attack CARRIERS.
4 PBYs attack TRANSPORT GROUP at 0142.
Strikes Midway 0630
Strikes Midway 0700
Strikes Midway 0800
Strikes Midway 0930
Strikes Midway 1000
Strikes Midway 1030
Strikes Midway 1100
Strikes Midway 1130
Strikes Midway 1200
Strikes Midway 1230
Strikes Midway 1300
Strikes Midway 1330
Strikes Midway 1400
Strikes Midway 1430
Strikes Midway 1500
Strikes Midway

leaving the carrier.[1] The late departure of this single airplane was to have catastrophic consequences for the Mobile Force.

An hour after leaving the Mobile Force, the TONE plane on number four search radioed that he could see two enemy submarines on the surface at a distance of eighty miles from the Mobile Force. These were undoubtedly the GROUPER and GUDGEON, the two easternmost submarines on the outer U. S. arc. The discovery of two surfaced American submarines did not unduly surprise the Japanese commander. Radio intelligence gathering stations in Japan and on the occupied islands had intercepted transmissions from the submarines. The underwater craft, although not known by name, had already been geographically fixed and the information radioed from the Naval General Staff in Tokyo to the commander at sea.[2]

Ten minutes after sighting the submarines, the pilot warned Admiral Nagumo of Waldron's approach, stating "fifteen enemy planes are heading for you."[3] These bits of information were received on the AKAGI without undue alarm. Afterall, the Japanese knew of the events of 3 June; they had seen Ady's Catalina earlier that morning and within minutes they were maneuvering to repel Fieberling's attack of the Midway based torpedo planes.

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[1] ONI Review, p. 16.

[2] Extract translation from Document #160985 - MC 397.901, Midway Operation of CV AKAGI, p. 4. Copy of document in the Office of Naval History and in the files of the author.

[3] ONI Review, p. 16.

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While Tomonaga was winging his way toward Midway and the search planes were seeking to ascertain the presence of United States naval forces, the four Japanese carriers were alive with preparations for the second wave, the remaining attack planes of the Mobile Force. As directed by Admiral Yamamoto during the war games at Hashirajima, the second wave was armed in preparation for an attack on an enemy task force. Each of the eighteen divebombers from the HIRYU and SORYU carried a 500-pound bomb fused for a four second delayed detonation, just long enough to penetrate the carrier's thin flight deck. An equal number of torpedo bombers were in launch positions on the AKAGI and KAGA by 0530. Each carrier was tasked to provide nine Zeroes as escorts. Each segment of the 108 planes would be commanded by the Mobile Force's expert in his field.

Lieutenant Commander Shigeharu Murata, a wiry, quick-witted extrovert would command the torpedo-laden "Kate's." Fuchida had singled out Murata to command the torpedo planes for the Pearl Harbor attack. When new tactics were required to assure a successful drop in the shallow waters of the Hawaii naval base, Murata helped develop them.[1] And when Fuchida told him his run must not be over fifty feet above the water, Murata accepted it without question and ordered his men to fly even lower. The divebomber aircraft, "Val's," from the two smaller carriers would be under the direction of Lieutenant Commander Takashige Egusa of the SORYU. He had led the eighty divebombers

[1] Prange, "Tora, Tora, Tora!", October, p. 280.

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of the second wave during the Pearl Harbor raid. Zero escorts would be under Lieutenant Commander Shigeru Itaya of the AKAGI. His forty-three fighters had escorted the first wave at Pearl and had added their sting to the event by strafing facilities near the naval base and shooting down any aircraft that rose to oppose them.[1] Genda had saved his best leaders for what he considered the major task, attacking the U. S. fleet.

The second wave stood ready to attack any surface force that might be located when at 0700 Admiral Nagumo received his initial message from Tomonaga telling of the need for a second attack on Midway. His search planes had been aloft for over two hours without sighting an enemy. This was not unusual as he did not expect to see one anyway. In response to Tomonanga's message Nagumo made a quick evaluation of the situation as he saw it at 0700. He had been discovered by land-based, as opposed to carrier-based, planes. Tomonaga's strike had apparently not destroyed these aircraft nor had they sufficiently damaged their base of operations. More than seventy planes capable of unleashing another fearful attack against Midway waited on his four carriers. Moreover, if Tomonaga had missed the majority of Midway attack planes, a second wave should be able to catch them on the runways while refueling. Disregarding the instructions issued by Admiral Yamamoto, the Mobile Force commander directed, at 0715, that "planes in second attack wave

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[1] Fuchida, Midway - The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 27. Itaya survived Midway, but on 24 July 1944 he was shot down over the bleak Kuriles by Japanese army pilots when he was mistaken for the enemy. Egusa fell in flames on 16 June 1944 as he led a formation seeking to destroy the amphibious shipping unloading soldiers and Marines at Saipan.

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stand by to carry out attack today. Re-equip yourselves with bombs."[1]

Plane handlers on the four carriers responded instantly to the new order. Crewmen moved the aircraft from the flight deck to the hangar deck below. They took torpedoes from those on the AKAGI and KAGA and laid them aside on the hangar deck. In their place ordnancemen hastily rigged bombs just removed from the ship's magazines. On the smaller carriers, other men replaced the heavy-skinned bombs with thin-shelled, instantaneous bombs designed for surface destruction. The work was well along when another message from the TONE's tardy search plane jolted those on the bridge. At 0728 the pilot radioed that he had sighted "what appears to be ten enemy surface ships, in position bearing ten degrees, distance 240 miles from Midway. Course 150°, speed over 20 knots."[2]

The message electrified those on the bridge of the AKAGI. For here stood an enemy force where none was believed to be. By the time signalmen had decoded the message and it reached the worrisome Admiral Nagumo, many of the second attack wave had had their ordnance changed to facilitate an additional strike on Midway. Quickly, the air staff ordered further changes stopped. Those not already armed with a land bomb were to leave their loads as originally planned. At the same time Nagumo messaged the TONE search plane to "ascertain ship types and maintain contact." The plane reported at 0758 that the ships were headed away from the Japanese. There was further relief on the part of the Japanese when the float plane's pilot reported that the ships were

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[1] ONI Review, p. 17. [2] Ibid., p. 18.

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equally divided between cruisers and destroyers. While this message, received on the AKAGI at 0809, allayed the apprehension of the Japanese over the newly discovered force, the initial attacks from Midway were already an item of concern for Nagumo and his subordinate commanders.

As the four carriers turned to evade the torpedo planes, divebombers and Flying Fortresses from Midway, the dogged TONE pilot sent an amplifying report that completely changed the complexion of the picture presented to those on the flag bridge of the AKAGI. At 0820 the Chief of Staff received a radio message announcing that the enemy was accompanied by "what appears to be a carrier."[1] Prior to this latest news the enemy force had been one located nearly 200 miles from the Japanese. The ships that had composed it were ones that could do no harm until they came into range close enough to use their main batteries. With a carrier an entirely new situation had been introduced. The big guns had just increased their range, so to speak, from eleven miles to more than twenty times the distance. A cruiser could fire 23,000 yards but a carrier could hurl its destructive power at least the range of its aircraft and further if the commander was willing to sacrifice their return. Every effort must be made to attack the U. S. carrier at the earliest moment less the initiative be lost.

Plane handlers and ordnancemen once more returned to the laborious task of removing the land type ordnance in favor of naval type.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 19.

[2] Although the weight of bombs was nearly equal, those intended for land use were designed for extensive fragmentation. The bomb employed

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Divebombers were again configured to carry the 250-kilogram missile. Time raced along as the men sweated, cursed and strained to ready the aircraft. The precious moments lost in rearming could not be regained and the delay only served to cause new problems to the vacillating staff and its commander on the AKAGI. Tomonaga's strike, many of them damaged, was approaching the Mobile Force. Fuel was running low and their recovery could not be long delayed.

Once again Admiral Nagumo was confronted with an extremely important decision. He could delay the recovery of the planes until after launching the second wave. To decide on such a procedure would undoubtedly mean the loss of a number of planes for want of fuel. Furthermore, delaying recovery of the planes would mean the loss of many of the skilled pilots who flew them. The alternative to a delayed recovery would be to take the planes of Tomonaga's group aboard at once. Then, as soon as the aircraft could be readied and respotted on the flight deck, a second attack would be launched, this one aimed at the surface force. Only after disposing of the enemy task force could Tomonaga's recommendation of a second attack on Midway be pursued. It was not an easy decision to make and undoubtedly Nagumo relied heavily on the advice of his air officer, Commander Genda.

The hard, professional character of Genda momentarily deserted him as he watched his compatriots approaching the Mobile Force. The

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against a warship needed strength to penetrate the warship's deck armor. To use land bombs against a modern warship would cause superficial damage to the superstructure but could scarcely be expected to put it out of action.

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men in the air were pilots with whom he had lived. They had flown together, worked with one another and drunk from the same cup. To Genda the present danger did not seem so great that time could not be spared to recover these valuable airmen and then strike the enemy. This was his recommendation to his commander and one that was accepted without reservation. At 0837, the carriers started receiving the aircraft and by 0915 only the combat air patrol remained aloft.[1]

Years after the Battle of Midway, Genda would reflect on the situation when he recommended that the carrier's first wave be recovered prior to launching the second wave. "They were shipmates whom I myself trained before we sailed to Hawaii," he recalled.[2] "My affection for them prevented me from sending them into the sea. I took them aboard, but it was a mistake, . . . I was absolutely wrong in having paid so much respect to the lives of soldiers under my cognizance."[3] But was Genda really wrong in recommending that this wave be recovered at once. Nearly a hundred planes of the Mobile Force were aloft under command of Tomonaga. If those aircraft were lost the ability of the Japanese to hurl their vaunted aerial power across the sea would be seriously curtailed. Had the American divebombers arrived fifteen

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[1] WDC #160985 is the primary source for recovery operations. While not explicit, it states the planes were "landed on carrier" commencing at 0825 and all planes recovered at 0910. For a ship as experienced as the AKAGI, this appears to be an inordinately long time to recover aircraft. The only possible excuse is that during part of this period the carrier was under attack.

[2] Genda, "A Record of Air Destruction," p. 81.

[3] Ibid. Also, Toland, But Not In Shame, p. 428.

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minutes later than they did Genda's decision would have been heralded as another sign of greatness in this gifted aviator. This did not happen, and while Genda's reputation remained untarnished, his own personal misgivings over the event continued.[1]

Far from the Mobile Force, the TONE's float plane pilot had reached the limit of his fuel range. If he were to return to his cruiser he would have to head back. This was his message at 0834. Admiral Abe ordered the CHIKUMA to have one of her planes take off to relieve the TONE's. At the same time he told the distant pilot to remain within sight of the American ships and to "go on the air with transmitter for DF purposes."[2] The plane from the CHIKUMA was on its way by 0855, the same time that Admiral Nagumo ordered the Mobile Force to change course to the north after recovering the first wave. His secret message #336 to Admiral Yamamoto told the commander aboard the YAMATO the composition of the enemy force, a fact already known by Combined Fleet from intercepted messages from the TONE search plane, and that "we are heading for it."

Just prior to completing the recovery of the first wave, the Mobile Force received its initial torpedo attack from a submarine. The

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[1] Minoru Genda ended the war as a naval Captain. Upon re-establishment of flying service, Genda once more became associated with aviation. He retired as a four star general after serving as Chief of Staff of the Japanese Air Defense Force. He is presently a member of the Japanese Parliament.

[2] Even before the CHIKUMA float plane could take off the SORYU launched a Type B special long range reconnaissance plane. The aircraft left the carrier at 0830 and by 1010 the pilot could see the American task force. WDC #160985, p. 19.

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NAUTILUS, cruising at periscope depth, had sighted the Mobile Force at 0910. Soon thereafter the American underwater craft was attacked by one of the float planes on antisubmarine patrol. The NAUTILUS shuttered under two depth charging attacks of five and six explosives each.[1] Equally significant, the destroyer ARASHI dropped behind, as the Mobile Force headed north, to track the submarine and keep it fully submerged as prevention from its pursuing the Japanese.

For over an hour Admiral Nagumo's attack planes, the torpedo-carrying aircraft and divebombers, remained on the four carriers as men furiously readied them to strike the Americans. When Waldron's and Lindsey's torpedo squadrons attacked the Japanese the Zeroes, enough for any force to contend with, were the only planes ready to take to the air. Had Admiral Nagumo heeded completely the instructions of his superior, to retain half of his aircraft in readiness for a naval aerial attack, there would have been no delay in executing a strike against the enemy force. The Japanese commander had allowed his judgment to be influenced by what he thought his enemy would do rather than what the adversary could do. It was a case of relying on intentions rather than capabilities. As militarily unacceptable as the decision may be, Admiral Nagumo came within minutes of getting away without being penalized for his error in command judgment.

The announcement of Tomonaga's attack on Midway reached the AKAGI at nearly the same moment that Task Force 16 launched its major attack. One of the officers on the HORNET, whose normal duties

[1] USS NAUTILUS, War Diary, June, 1942, p. 1.

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as flight deck officer would have made him extremely busy at this time, was fully occupied in a different part of the ship. Lieutenant Stephen Jurika, Jr., naval academy class of 1933, was listening to the transmissions of the Japanese. Jurika was one of the few Japanese linguists in the Pacific Fleet. His year of study in Japan, completed in November 1940, gave him an excellent command of the language. While much of the Japanese radio traffic was in code,[1] Jurika could report certain events to his commanding officer.

Air operations for the strike on the Japanese Mobile Force had commenced at 0706 on 4 June for the two carriers of Admiral Spruance's Task Force. The relieving combat air patrol of eight fighters were the first planes to leave the flight deck of the HORNET as she steamed at twenty-five knots on a course of 120°. Next came the divebombers under the air group commander, Commander Stanhope C. Ring. Scouting Squadron Eight, Lieutenant Commander Walter J. Rodee, Commanding, was the first squadron off, his sixteen Dauntlesses launching one behind the other. Each plane carried a 500-pound bomb. Ring's own plane followed as he positioned himself between the Scouts and the thirteen Dauntlesses of Lieutenant Commander Robert R. Johnson's Bombing Squadron Eight. The launch was a time consuming operation. Rodee had led off and continued on a course paralleling the HORNET for seven minutes before making a 180° turn that brought him back over the carrier. As succeeding

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[1] Interview with Captain Stephen Jurika, Jr., USN (Ret) conducted by telephone to his home at 565 Oakfield Lane, Menlo Park, California on 20 May 1966.

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pilots took off they followed the same procedure, but made their turn a bit earlier, until all planes of the squadron had joined on the leader in a single formation. The same technique was followed for Johnson's unit.

The HORNET plan of action had been for a coordinated divebomber and torpedo attack, but a combination of factors was to deny this highly desirable method of striking the enemy. The primary cause was the rapidly increasing cloud layer. The cumulus clouds hung from 2000 to 2500 feet above the water with tops breaking the 4000 foot level. During the hour required to launch the air group, a slight overcast sky had rapidly clouded until at 0806, when the air group departed the HORNET, the sky all around the horizon was filled with heavy clouds.[1]

With Waldron's fifteen torpedo bombers flying at 1500 feet, the Devastator pilots soon lost visual contact with Ring and the divebombers as the air group commander climbed to 20,000 feet. Ring positioned his own aircraft between the two squadrons, Rodee on the right and Johnson on the left. As they took a heading of 240°, Ring formed the group into sections on a scouting line. Each section of two planes was to keep in visual contact with the adjacent ones while Ring in the middle flew the desired course and speed. The procedure was standard for the scouting missions. If a section located the enemy or was attacked, the planes were to go into an orbit while the remainder of the air group formed on them either for mutual protection or to prepare to attack the sighted surface units.[2]

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[1] Naval War College Analysis on Battle of Midway, p. 126.

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For all the divebomber pilots this was to be their initial baptism of fire. Ring had nearly missed the sortie from Pearl because of engine trouble. The air group was to fly from Ewa to the HORNET after the carrier left Pearl. The Dauntlesses were airborne with one exception, the aircraft flown by Ring. Fouled plugs prevented the Douglas from checking out. Soon after take off Lieutenant Gus Widhelm noticed that Ring was missing. On returning to Ewa, he learned the plight of the group commander and offered him the use of his own plane. In turn Widhelm, thinking that he would have to miss the action, caught sight of a Devastator from the carrier. He hailed "Tex" Gay who carried him to the carrier as the third person in the torpedo plane.[1]

The formation prescribed by Ring was similar to a group marching on line. To keep the line properly dressed meant a continual adjustment of the throttle. A little throttle to catch up and then an easing off to fall back. Regardless of how smart a well dressed line might appear, it was not a wise formation to adhere to when the primary concern of all was whether there would be enough gas. Every change of throttle meant a difference in fuel consumption. As the flight officer of VS-8 recalled, "gas consumption was terrific using these wasteful procedures."[2] The doctrine was not unusual at this stage of the war. Pre-war training had

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[2]Letter from RADM Walter F. Rodee, USN (Ret) to the author of 18 October 1966.

[1]Griffin, A Ship to Remember, The Saga of the HORNET, p. 97.

[2]Letter from Capt James E. Vose, USN (Ret) to the author of 9 January 1967.

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stressed such methods and a ragged scouting line was as likely to count against attaining the coveted squadron "E" for efficiency as failing to find the target.

Unlike the other two carriers, the HORNET had assigned ten fighters to escort the divebombers. The decision to place them with the divebombers rather than with the torpedo planes had been made the previous day and not without some warm discussions. The squadron commanders and their operations officers had met with the group commander, the air officer and Captain Mitscher to determine the initial employment of Mitchell's squadron of Wildcats. Only ten could be spared to accompany the strike aircraft. Mitchell and his operations officer, Lieutenant Stanley E. Ruehlow, recommended that the fighters be assigned to escort the slow torpedo planes. Against their suggestions and that of the air group commander, Captain Mitscher directed that the fighters escort the divebombers.[1] In the light of events, Mitscher's decision is questionable. When, however, the situation preceding the battle is placed in proper perspective, his choice seems far more logical. Unfortunately, there were not enough fighters to escort both the divebombers and the torpedo planes and to split the ten would have reduced their effectiveness considerably. It was also not wise to assign the unit a dual mission of covering both divebombers and torpedo planes. The recent action in the Coral Sea had clearly shown that the Japanese feared the divebomber for its deadly

[1]Interview with Capt S. E. Ruehlow, USN(Ret) conducted at 140 Maiden Lane, Oakland, California on 25 May 1966.

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accuracy.[1] They had insured that a large number of fighters were assigned as high altitude combat air patrol. As a result, the attacking divebombers from the YORKTOWN and the LEXINGTON had suffered heavy losses while the torpedo planes got off comparatively light.[2] Mitscher was relying on past battle experience and, while unfortunate for both VT-8 and the fighters, was not incorrect in his decision.

"Pat"Mitchell placed his fighters just above and behind Ring's divebombers. At 22,000 feet he could observe the SBD's and come to their aid if attacked. Ruehlow and Ensign Charles M. "Tex" Kelly, as they approached the expected location of the enemy, moved in close to Ring to provide direct protection to the leader.

Originally, the Japanese had been estimated as being 155 miles distant from Task Force 16. An hour of flight operations increased the distance to where 175 miles separated the two forces, at least according to Ring's estimate. On reaching the expected contact position, the air group commander could see no signs of the enemy. While the cloud coverage had become less dense there than near the American forces, it still blanketed about fifty percent of the surface area. On reaching the anticipated point of interception and finding no enemy, the standard doctrine was to employ an expanding square.[3] The procedure was to

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[1] USSBS No. 53, interrogation of Capt M. Yamaoku, IJN, Operations Officer, Fifth Air Flotilla (ZUIKAKU).

[2] "The Battle of the Coral Sea, a Strategical and Tactical Analysis," U. S. Naval War College, 1947, NavPers 91050, p. 87. The analysis concludes that in the attack on the SHOKAKU the LEXINGTON lost three SBD's and one VT aircraft while YORKTOWN lost four SBD's and no VT aircraft.

[3] Current Tactical Orders, Aircraft Carriers, USF 77A, p. 28.

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continue on for the limit of visibility from the anticipated point of interception, about twenty-five miles; execute a turn to the right and fly the same distance; then a turn to the reverse of the original course for twice the distance; followed by a right turn. Again double the line of sight distance would be flown prior to executing a right turn and once more flying a double visibility distance, at the end of which, no target having been found, the search would terminate. The search was a maneuver forming a hollow square that, with the visibility present on 4 June, formed sides of fifty miles in length. When the limit of observation is added, the square suddenly increases to 100 miles. The technique was especially effective for locating large forces whose exact speed might be unknown or whose initial position might have been inaccurately reported.

While the expanding square procedure was standard doctrine, Ring chose to ignore it. He did continue on his original course, proceeding about an additional fifty miles beyond the anticipated point of interception, according to Rodee's navigational calculations.[1] When he had reached a position 225 miles from his departure point over the HORNET, Ring turned his formation to the left in a wide circling turn that brought them closer to Midway and on a course heading toward the carrier. The reasoning of the air group commander has never been satisfactorily solved and was not uncovered prior to his death on 25 May 1963. Nor were his thoughts ever confided to the two squadron commanders that

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[1]RADM W. F. Rodee letter.

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were with him. There are several possible explanations for his action. To begin with, the reports of the Mobile Force were fragments that had been intercepted in the HORNET's radio central over four hours earlier. The bearing of the Mobile Force and its course and speed had been reported by the PBY as had the observation of the many planes sighted 180 miles from Midway. In the intervening hours neither Midway, its attacking planes, nor Waldron and his Torpedo Eight provided the HORNET group commander, or anyone else, a correct position of the Mobile Force. A second factor is that of drift. Without navigational aids, Ring could only estimate his position by dead reckoning, a method that does not properly consider drift. With the knowledge of surface winds it was possible to compute the drift, but this might be widely divergent from the winds encountered at 20,000 feet. As a result a significant error was not at all unlikely. Ring may also have thought that the Mobile Force, having lost the element of surprise in attacking Midway, had changed course to the southwest with the idea of rendezvousing with Admiral Kondo's warships and transports approaching from the west.

What the HORNET's air group commander had failed to consider was the action of the Mobile Force since first reported. The time of Ring's launch, radio silence by the HORNET and the differences of frequencies between his planes and those from Midway attacking the Japanese, combined to keep him ignorant of the attacks that were going on while he was looking for the enemy carriers. His experiences in air operations, though, should have indicated to him that its planes might

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have been recovered and the course altered to effect a retirement. Regardless of the thoughts that passed through his mind, Ring failed to find the Japanese. Thirty-four bombers and ten fighters had, on completing their reverse of course reached a critical point. They were running out of fuel.

There was no choice but to split the attack group and try to reach a base from which to refuel. Rodee, his Mark VI plotting board a mass of dots and lines as he figured course and distance against remaining fuel, concluded that his squadron could make the HORNET. Along with Ring, the seventeen planes of Scouting Eight headed for the "Horny Maru" as their home was affectionately called. Tagging along were three more Dauntlesses of Bombing Eight. The flight back was routine. As the planes passed north of the island, the column of smoke from the morning attack could be seen off to the right. The YE homer in the back of Rodee's plane picked up the directional letter signal from the HORNET. On approaching the carrier, the planes dropped their bombs, lowered flaps and gear and landed without incident around 1300. All planes in this group had ample gas to get aboard.[1]

The remaining Dauntlesses, under Johnson, realized they would never make it back to their carrier. Instead, the thirteen planes headed for Midway. Realizing that he was not certain of the recognition turns in effect at Midway, Johnson decided to drop his bombs on the reef as

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[1] Ibid. Also, Stebbins Interview.

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an indication of the planes being friendly.[1] The airraid siren had already sounded on Midway as the island's radar picked up the incoming flight. Johnson's friendly gesture was taken by some on Midway as an enemy attempt to open a channel in the reef.[2] Nervous gunners let loose at the approaching bombers but by 1105 the last one had been recognized as friendly and allowed to land on Eastern. To some still fighting the fires and repairing the damage on Eastern Island, the arrival of Bombing Eight was the first indication that American carriers were in the area.[3]

Not all of Johnson's planes reached the safety of Midway. Ensign Troy Guillory, the squadron's assistant engineering officer, jettisoned his 1000-pound bomb before making a water landing many miles from Midway.[4] Neither Guillory nor his gunner, Aviation Radioman Third Class Jim Cotrell, were injured. They had ample time to inflate their rubber life raft before the Dauntless went down. Seven and a half hours later a PBY piloted by Ensign Lowe picked up the two and landed them on the lagoon at Midway. As Guillory recalls, it was an eerie sight, landing on the dark water and seeing some of the buildings and hangars still aflame. Ensign T. J. Wood almost made it before running out of

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[1] Capt J. E. Vose letter. Johnson made the proper recognition turns. On the even numbered days of the month the signal was a left turn with two significant dips of the wing to be included.

[2] Ramsey Interview.

[3] Earnest Interview.

[4] Letter from Capt T. N. Guillory, USN (Ret) to the author of 27 April 1967.

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fuel. He landed within sight of the island and so short was his time before rescue, that he was able to greet his squadron mates on Eastern Island while their planes were being refueled.

Those planes of VB-8 that made approaches to Midway received an unexpected greeting when Marines opened fire on them. The case of mistaken identity was corrected before any planes were shot down but not before a number had been hit. Lieutenant John J. Lynch, the squadron material officer, landed with several holes in the after part of his plane's fuselage.[1]

On the ground on Eastern, Johnson's squadron refueled and rearmed, an operation that took over two hours. Lynch had an opportunity to listen to Captains Kirk Armistead and Charles Kunz describe the uneven battle their fighters had fought. It was a small reunion for Kunz and Lynch for the latter had administered the final flight examination to Kunz when he obtained his civilian pilot license after finishing college. Armed and readied the Dauntlesses from the HORNET took to the air and searched to the north for the Mobile Force. Unable to locate the Japanese and with fuel running low for a second time, VB-8 headed back to the HORNET where the divebombers landed at 1527.[2]

The ten fighters had been even less successful in returning to base. They had been retained with the divebombers until the group split. By then it was too late for the remaining fuel to carry them to the HORNET.

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[1] Interview with RADM John J. Lynch, USN conducted at Headquarters, Strike Force, Naples, Italy on 1 June 1967.

[2] HORNET Action Report, p. 3.

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The two escorts, Ruehlow and Kelly, rejoined the remainder of the fighters. Ruehlow was plagued by radio problems as his primary fighter net could neither transmit nor receive. He could, nonetheless, pick up the HORNET's directional homer signals. Aware of this, Mitchell motioned Ruehlow to take over the lead of the ten Wildcats. All planes had set their gas mixture to the most economical setting. To the right, as had been the case with Rodee, the towering column of smoke was clearly discernible. Surprisingly, the thought never entered Ruehlow's mind to make for the island and refuel. To him the smoke merely indicated the damage of a previous attack and that a second could be expected at any time. Twice Ruehlow noticed Kelly straggle behind only to catch up. On the third glance he was gone for good. The same thing happened to the others until only the three senior officers remained, Mitchell, Ruehlow and Lieutenant (jg) Richard Gray.[1] The three started a gradual letdown. Mitchell ran out of gas during the descent, but still made a good power off landing on the water. Gray and Ruehlow both landed nearby while still under power.

The planes had hardly come to rest when the three were scrambling out onto the wing. Mitchell's plane sank so rapidly he had no time to retrieve either his one man liferaft or his emergency rations. Ruehlow was more fortunate, as his Wildcat floated a bit longer. A sticking slipknot delayed his grabbing the liferaft and the time lost in freeing the rope prevented him from reaching behind the cockpit for the small

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[1] Ruehlow Interview.

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package containing the emergency rations and equipment. Gray's plane remained afloat long enough for him to secure both items, the liferaft and the emergency package. To compound Ruehlow's troubles, he had hit his nose on the gunsight and, while not too serious, the wound bled profusely.

The three pilots landed within calling distance of each other and were soon together. Mitchell had only his lifevest so a plan to use the two liferafts was quickly devised. One pilot would occupy a single liferaft while the other two would share the remaining one. The man alone had a chance to sleep and relax. For the other two it was a task of keeping the liferaft from swamping. Unlike the two-man rafts of the attack planes, the fighters' were for one man. The three had landed just northeast of Midway. They had come down so close to the island that they were able to see the B-17's as they circled in the landing pattern. The rafts did not drift toward the island, but to the northeast. The first night they caught the sound of the motor torpedo boats as the swift, wooden craft searched for the Japanese. The following day a destroyer could be seen hull down on the horizon and PBY's, five abreast, passed over them in search of downed airmen.

By the following morning all were hungry enough to share Gray's emergency rations. There was not much. Four cans of Pemican, a concentrate, and two bottles of milk tablets plus two canteens of water had to be shared by three. Careful rationing carried them through their adventure. The days were hot and the sun burned them badly. At night the cold winds penetrated to the bones and only aggravated the discomfort

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of being continually wet. The two sharing the raft had to turn it over everytime it filled with water, and this meant getting into the water.

During the second night the trio survived a crisis that threatened all. Long after dark, Gray, alone in his raft, felt the rubber craft hit a glancing blow. It was enough to awaken him and cause him to call out to the others. Moments later Mitchell and Ruehlow also felt a bump which was soon followed by a more severe one that tossed both the flyers into the darkened water. As he braced for the impact, Ruehlow's right hand came down on top of the dorsal fin of the shark causing all of the trouble. The sharp edge cut him between the right thumb and index finger (a scar still remains). More immediate, the second pass of the shark had cut the thin rubber skin of one of the air compartments in the liferaft. The shark, probably bent on chasing a school of fish, disappeared amid the confusion. Ruehlow hopped into Gray's boat and Mitchell tried to hold onto the damaged liferaft. Later that night the damaged raft was tied to the good one, forming for Mitchell a semi-raft on which he could place his body while hanging his legs over the side. With daylight, Ruehlow opened the emergency repair kit and patched the hole sufficiently to permit the damaged compartment to hold air with only occasional pumping. Two nights later they caught their first fresh water during a heavy downpour. By deflating a lifejacket it was possible to bend the rubber and make a funnel that poured the fresh water into the empty canteens.

Four days and twenty hours after they crashed, the three wet and sun blistered naval officers were helped into a PBY piloted by Lieutenant

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(jg) Frank Fisler. The plane had passed over them on its return to Midway after an unsuccessful search for survivors. When well beyond them, an observer in the rear thought he saw something on the water and asked Fisler to turn about. Fisler, who had already on an earlier flight rescued a crew from one of the B-17's, complied. The point of rescue was close to where the three had started their flight of 4 June, or 180 miles northeast of Midway.

Both Admiral Nagumo and Ring had missed their opportunities to strike the enemy. The warships of the Mobile Force had for over two hours evaded repeated attacks by numerous aircraft from Midway as well as from the carriers steaming northeast of the island. As one after another the American planes succumbed to the intensive fire of the Zeroes and the antiaircraft guns of the ships, a feeling prevailed that once more the Nagumo Force was engaged in a routine operation[1] and that the enemy was incapable of containing its offensive power. Losses on the strike against Midway had been light in comparison to the total force involved. At 1000, the time when the second American torpedo squadron - Lindsey's VT-6 - was being destroyed by the Japanese fighters, Admiral Nagumo was keenly aware that in another thirty minutes he would have over half his attack planes winging east toward the enemy carrier. The power of the Mobile Force appeared to be indestructible.

In this study the primary purpose is to analyze the decisions

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[1] Letter from Capt Mitsuo Fuchida to author of 7 July 1965.

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of commanders. During the early morning hours of 4 June, two commanders had demonstrated weaknesses in command. Admiral Nagumo had been thoroughly impressed with the importance of destroying an enemy naval force. This was the primary reason for his being at Midway. Yet at the very time when he should have been able to send a major strike against the enemy force, he found himself in a position where this task had to be delayed. In other words, Admiral Yamamoto had specifically ordered his carrier force commander to retain half his strength as a quick reaction force and Nagumo had seen fit, without consulting his superior, to disregard these instructions.

The responsibilities and results of Ring's leadership are more difficult to evaluate. He was in a far more subordinate command assignment than the Japanese commander. Indirectly, his poor search procedure may have contributed to the later success of the divebombing squadrons from the other two carriers. If Ring had located the Japanese with little or no loss of time in searching, he would have commenced his attack either with or ahead of the torpedo planes under Waldron. If this had been the case, the Japanese combat air patrol would have remained alert to the dangers of high altitude attack. Instead, Ring turned away from the Japanese and for the next half hour the scene of the conflict before the Mobile Force was at mast-top level.

Ring's mistakes were numerous. His air group was slow in forming and in departing from the HORNET. He allowed his fighters to remain with him far longer than it was safe for them. His insistence on a parade formation that wasted valuable fuel, while not increasing

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the effectiveness of the search was inexcusable. Moreover, he allowed his air group to scatter without any explicit instructions from the commander. These criticisms of Ring's leadership are, of course, evaluated in the light of a calm detachment far removed from the scene of conflict. The situation that prevailed that night of 4 June on the HORNET was hardly different.[1] The air group was bitterly disappointed and rightly or not the men placed the blame for failing to find the enemy squarely on Ring. Although he would lead his air group throughout the battle it was apparent to all that Ring had lost the confidence of those he led.

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[1] Stebbins Interview. Also, interview with Capt A. J. Brassfield, USN, conducted at Bureau of Naval Personnel, Washington, D. C. on 6 November 1966. Brassfield remarked that after the air group returned to Ewa no one would associate with the air group commander, particularly during social times at the Club. While this may be overly harsh, the evidence is strong that Ring had completely lost the respect of the men he commanded.

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CHAPTER VIII

A DECISION WITH DECISIVE RESULTS

Long before the sun peeked over the horizon on that memorable fourth of June, the flight deck of the ENTERPRISE had become a colorful scene of its own. The men who would fly the blue aircraft were still in the depths of the ship. Others, though, scurried about the breezy deck in a variety of colored helmets and shirts. Men in brown clambered over the planes carrying out their duties as plane captains. Those wearing dark blue were busily engaged in moving the planes as they respotted them for launch. Highly skilled ordnancemen inspected torpedoes, bombs, and machine guns, their bright red tops setting them apart from the others. At intervals near the catwalks, pairs of green shirted sailors indicated the presence of fueling stations. They stood ready to drag a hose to any aircraft that needed "topping off." Close to the island structure was a group of men dressed in pale yellow. At the moment their duties were minimal but when the signal was executed to launch aircraft, their work would not allow a moment's rest. Some would direct pilots to start engines, unfold wings, and taxi to the proper position. Others like the flight deck officer, would signal the pilot to "wind up" and when that proper moment arrived his arm would drop smartly toward the bow. Then, and only then, would the pilot release his hold on the brakes. With engines roaring, the din on the deck was fearful. Teamwork and signals

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insured success and smooth operation. The blending of the colors, as men hastened to their work, was comparable to the integration of musicians in a symphony orchestra. Mistakes on a carrier meant more than a sour note; they were identified with poor launch and recovery techniques, and with safety. The skilled team could launch a plane every twenty seconds and recover in even less time. The ENTERPRISE was favored with a highly qualified group of flight deck personnel.

The pilots of Scouting Six and Bombing Six of the ENTERPRISE had left the wardroom after their 0330 breakfast and made their way to the island structure of the carrier and their squadron ready rooms. By 0600 they knew that the Japanese carriers had been located. To some it seemed like the unfolding of a movie of which they had previously attended the preview. This was particularly the case with Lieutenant Richard H. Best, skipper of Bombing Six.[1] Admiral Spruance had called together the key personnel soon after the air group had been recovered on sortieing from Pearl. At that time Admiral Spruance and his intelligence officer, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Julian P. Brown, briefed the ENTERPRISE officers on the enemy situation. From what was known, CINCPAC believed that a force was approaching Midway from the west; the Aleutians were a diversion that would precede the main effort on Midway and that the Japanese carrier force would approach the island from the northwest. Now at 0600, Best could see the entire operation unfolding. The day before the transports had been sighted far to the west and, at the same time,

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[1] Interview with LCdr R. H. Best, USN (Ret) conducted at 218 21st Street, Santa Monica, California on 15 May 1966.

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Admiral Theobald had reported the opening attacks on the Aleutians. Lieutenant Ady's message on the Japanese carriers merely continued and confirmed the developing intelligence picture.

There were two false alarms for the pilots to man their planes, but before they could get buckled into their seats, the 1MC - bullhorn - carried the orders to return to the ready room.[1] Shortly before 0700 the air officer again ordered "pilots man your planes." This time there was no standdown. As the ENTERPRISE turned her nose into the slight southeast wind, the flight deck officer was "winding up" the initial fighter of the relieving combat air patrol. Movements of the black and white checkered flag directed the pilot to add power as he stood on his brakes, then as the flag dropped the Wildcat started trundling toward the bow. In the few hundred feet that separated the island structure from the bow, the plane gently lifted from the deck, executed a slight turn to the right to keep its slipstream from coming down the deck, and commenced climbing. In less than five minutes the eight relieving Wildcats sped on their way.

Close behind the fighters roared Lieutenant Wilmer E. Gallaher's fourteen SBD's of Scouting Six. Actually, Earl Gallaher had hoped to have a few more planes, but one was down for mechanical reasons; the air group commander had syphoned off another as well as two more to fly wing on him.[2] Gallaher's 6-S-1 was the first SBD off, carrying a

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[1] McClusky Interview.

[2] CO, VS-6 report of action June 4-6, 1942 to CO, USS ENTERPRISE, dated 21 June 1942, p. 2. Hereinafter referred to as Scouting Squadron Six Action Report.

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single 500-pound bomb with two 100-pound bombs slung on either side. The closely stacked planes, occupying the after half of the flight deck, as well as the moderate across-the-deck wind restricted the bomb load the early launched planes could carry. As more space became available the Dauntlesses had a greater distance in which to gain flying speed. The last two planes of VS-6 were able to take off with the single 1000-pound bomb, hung externally between the wheels.[1]

Wade McClusky, the air group commander, followed Gallaher's squadron, along with his two wingmen, Ensigns William R. Pittman and Richard A. Jaccard. McClusky was an old hand to the ENTERPRISE but new to his job as commander of all the carrier's planes. He joined the ship as commander of Fighting Six in June 1940. It was not until 15 March 1942, soon after the attack on Marcus, that he moved up to air group commander. With experience in F4F's, the short stocky, native of Buffalo grabbed a few hours familiarization flying in SBD's. He knew the plane and how to take it off and bring it aboard, but by no stretch of the imagination was he an accomplished divebomber pilot. He had never dropped a bomb from a Dauntless and yet his leadership and appreciation of the situation on that morning of 4 June were to be a major factor in the American victory at Midway.

What McClusky might have lacked in knowledge of the SBD was more than offset by Dick Best of VB-6. The East Orange, New Jersey pilot had ample experience in carrier operations. His youthful look, the

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[1] CO, USS ENTERPRISE report of Battle of Midway Island, June 4-6, 1942 to CINCPAC, dated 8 June 1942, p. 2. Hereinafter referred to as ENTERPRISE Action Report.

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crew cut, and twinkling blue eyes made him appear like a young college student rather than a combat experienced squadron leader. Best led his fifteen SBD's. In all his days of carrier operations he had never been spotted so far aft for take off. The breeze was slight, the bomb a big 1000-pound, and he had a full load of gas. His starting point was near No. 3 elevator. Shortly after passing the island structure the plane was airborne. With all SBD's in the air, a total of thirty-two, McClusky circled the carrier awaiting instructions. Finally at 0745, the carrier flashed a message to proceed on assigned mission. The SBD's started their climb to 20,000 feet on a heading of 231°, McClusky and his escorts flew in the center with Gallaher's three divisions stepped down and to the left while Best's three divisions formed on the right. From the fragments of information received prior to launch, McClusky estimated the distance to the anticipated point of interception as 142 miles.[1] By 0920 he had reached the spot where the Japanese should be. The sea beneath him was empty and far off to the left he could barely see the water shoaling, an indication that Midway was not too distant. Still farther off some pilots on the left could see the column of smoke rising from the bomb-damaged island.

This was the time for one of the most important decisions a commander can be called upon to make. There were several alternatives open to McClusky. He could orbit the area in hopes that the Japanese would show, or he could move toward Midway in search of the enemy. Then

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[1] McClusky Interview.

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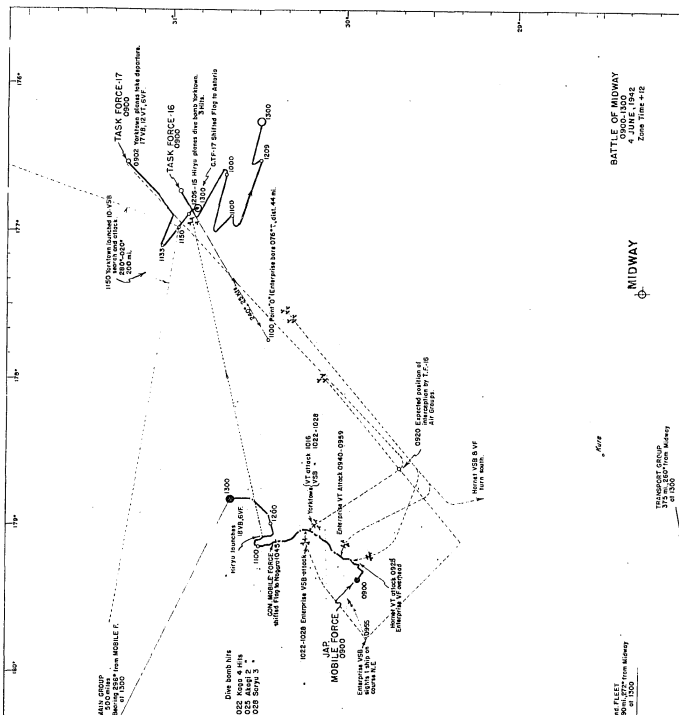

MORNING CARRIER ACTION

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again he might return to his carrier or he could try the doctrine of the expanding square. Whatever he decided it had to be soon for his planes had orbited over the ENTERPRISE far too long awaiting instructions. Fuel remaining was already an item of concern. McClusky quickly made his estimate of the situation, concluding that the Japanese might be more to the west than initially reported.[1] A quick computation on his plotting board and McClusky changed his course to 240°. His plan was to continue an additional thirty-five miles at which time he would turn northwest to parallel the reported course of the Japanese. He could, with fuel remaining, stay on this course for only fifteen minutes after which time he would return to the carrier. It was not a doctrine search using the expanding square for his planes no longer had the fuel to fly the square and still return to the ENTERPRISE. His decision to search what amounted to a parallelogram has been properly termed "the most important decision of the battle."[2]

The divebombers completed their initial leg and had been heading northwest, or parallel to the reported course of the Mobile Force, for about seven minutes when McClusky saw a wake far below and slightly ahead. Grabbing his binnoculars, he peered through them to see that a destroyer proceeding at high speed was causing the wake. While unknown to McClusky at the time, this was the destroyer ARASHI, which at 0910

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[1] Ibid.

[2] CINCPAC report on Battle of Midway to Commander-in-Chief (COMINCH) of 28 June 1942, p. 11. Hereinafter referred to as CINCPAC Action Report.

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commenced a depth charge attack on the submarine NAUTILUS.[1] The attack, lasting about fifteen minutes, left the ARASHI behind the northward moving Mobile Force. Her broad wake indicated to McClusky that she was trying to overhaul the main body of ships. He changed his heading to conform to that of the destroyer, moving from northwest to north. Ten minutes later the Japanese, spread out in an enormous formation, came into view. Although flying nearby, Best failed to see the destroyer, but noticed about 3000 feet above him a B-17 heading toward Midway. When McClusky changed his course Best thought he had also seen the Flying Fortress and concluded that it was coming from an attack on the Japanese carriers.

Just as the Mobile Force came in sight and while still a good twenty-five miles from its nearest ship, problems arose within the air group that threatened its ability to attack and ultimately caused confusion as the force split to strike the enemy carriers. The gunner in Lieutenant (jg) Edwin J. Kroeger's plane had run out of oxygen. As the plane was flying wing on Best, Kroeger was able to signal his problems. To Best this meant either allowing Kroeger to drop out or taking the squadron to a lower altitude where the requirement for oxygen would not be as great. Since he wanted all the 1000-pound bombs he could get, Best decided to take his squadron down to 15,000 feet. To confirm that this altitude was safe without use of a mask, Best took off his own face piece.[2]

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[1] CO, USS NAUTILUS patrol report to COMSUBDIV 41, dated 7 June 1942, p. 2.

[2] Best Interview.

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The second casualty was in Ensign Tony F. Schneider's Dauntless in the second division of Bombing Six.[1] His plane had been behaving poorly and, with the super charger on for the high altitude, Schneider could see that his fuel consumption was far more than normal. When he first saw the Mobile Force he thought it was his own Task Force 16, but the presence of battleships corrected that impression. Just before the group crossed the outer edge of the Japanese screen, his supply of gas gave out. There was now no choice but to turn south and head for a deadstick landing on the water. During his letdown he could see his squadron mates attacking the Japanese. The landing, while out of sight of the Japanese, was a smooth one. The only casualty was Schneider's gunner, ARM2/C G. L. Holden, who failed to heed his pilot's instructions to jettison the twin, thirty caliber free guns. The guns broke loose on landing and hit the gunner in the head. Schneider had time to inflate his raft, throw in the emergency rations and haul out the unconscious Holden before the plane sank. The two men spent three days in their raft, signal flares and sun mirrors failing to attract searching planes. On the third day, about noon, a PBY piloted by Lieutenant (jg) August A. Barthes rescued the two and returned them to Midway.

The second wingman in the section with Schneider was not so fortunate. Ensign Eugene A. Greene, who had been less than two months in the squadron, was forced to leave the attack group before the Mobile Force came in sight. The cause of his dropping out was never

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[1] Letter from Capt T. F. Schneider, USN to the author of 31 May 1966.

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ascertained for no one ever saw Greene and his gunner again.[1]

High in the sky, McClusky swept in over the Mobile Force without a sign of opposition and as he did confusion set in within his air group. Best had dropped to 15,000 feet and positioned his squadron slightly ahead of the air group commander. Best heard nothing on his radio and, resorting to doctrine, elected to attack the more distant of the closest two carriers, the one to the left. Gallaher, who was trailing above and behind him, Best assumed, would attack the nearer carrier. The skipper of Bombing Six, however, did not know that McClusky had directed otherwise. By radio he told Gallaher to attack the left or more distant carrier and for Best to hit the right one. Best, in ignorance of the radio message, set up to strike the left carrier and radioed McClusky that he was attacking according to doctrine. He split his divisions, the first attacking straight in while the second attacked from the left and the third from the right. With skill the planes would drop on the carrier at the proper interval, but the split provided an anvil effect and broke up any concentration of antiaircraft fires. Just as Best started to lead his first division down, McClusky came hurtling past him. There was nothing for Best to do but break off his dive and try to reposition his following planes to attack the other carrier.

McClusky had quickly sized up the situation that existed over the Mobile Force and after telling the two squadrons which carrier to attack,

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[1] Ibid. Also, CO, VB-6 tactical organization, dated 1 June 1942. The report shows time in squadron and pencilled remarks on whether personnel were lost, recovered, etc., after the battle.

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he had radioed to Gallaher, "Earl, follow me." McClusky, followed by Pittman and Jaccard and all of Scouting Six, dove on the KAGA. The dive started close to 1020. At 1024, as the AKAGI maneuvered to evade torpedo planes, she saw fires break out on the KAGA as the planes of Scouting Six found their mark.[1] The first three planes dropped their bombs close to the carrier but failed to damage it. Gallaher, an old pro at divebombing, could plainly see the huge red circle on the KAGA's dull yellow flight deck. Planes were stacked aft in preparation for take off. It was the carrier's most defenseless moment as she held steady into the wind awaiting the launch. But they would never leave her deck. At 2500 feet Gallaher released his bomb, pulled out at less than 1000 feet and then "hung" his lightened plane to see his bomb drop. It was the very thing Gallaher had hammered his pilots not to do, for his plane stood there waiting to be hit by antiaircraft fire. But luck was with him and the look was worth the risk. His bomb landed on the starboard side aft of the KAGA, squarely among the packed planes.[2] The remainder of the squadron followed Gallaher. There were more hits and near misses but it is not possible to say which pilot hit or missed. Ensign John Q. Roberts was close behind Gallaher, either next or separated by one. Roberts was a poor pilot and had pleaded with Gallaher to be included on the flight. In all seriousness, he told Gallaher, "I'll see that my

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[1] ONI Review, p. 23.

[2] Interview with RADM W. E. Gallaher, USN (Ret) conducted at 5205 Bangor Drive, Kensington, Maryland on 30 June 1966.

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bomb gets aboard if I have to take it aboard!"[1] The plane following Robert's saw him disappear in the smoke coming up from the ship, the last time anyone ever saw him. While Japanese records make no mention of a plane crashing onto the carrier, Roberts may well have released his bomb at an altitude so low he could not escape.

Four bombs landed directly on the KAGA. In addition to Gallaher's, three more fell on the forward part of the ship. The one nearest the island struck a small gasoline truck. The flaming debris shattered the bridge immediately above, killing Captain Jisaku Okada and several others about him. Another bomb crashed through the forward elevator and exploded among the fully fueled and armed planes on the hangar deck.[2] Commander Takahisa Amagai, the air officer, took over command of the furiously burning carrier. Damage control parties responded without command and battled to control the fires that raged from stem to stern. The carelessness and haste of earlier hours soon caused havoc. The land bombs laid aside in favor of torpedoes exploded on the hangar deck where they had been temporarily placed. Flames hit the ventilating system, blowing out the boilers and cutting off all power. The heat on the decks became so intense that sailors with tennis shoes could not walk on them. Without water pressure and light for illuminating the darkened passages, there was little that Amagai and the other survivors could do. By 1400 the giant carrier was dead in the water, continually

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[1] Ibid.

[2] USSBS No. 6, Interrogation of Captain Takahisa Amagai, Air Officer on the KAGA.

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rocked by internal explosions that erupted into colorful spires of flames and bilious clouds of smoke.

As the carrier stood still the submarine NAUTILUS, still doggedly pursuing after her unsuccessful morning attack, moved in to finish off the KAGA. The NAUTILUS had sighted the flattop just before noon while it was still eight miles away. Carefully maneuvering his underseas craft, Lieutenant Commander William H. Brockman brought it at periscope depth to within 2700 yards of the KAGA. He could see men on the forward anchor deck trying to get a line to a cruiser to tow the carrier.[1] With his own batteries nearly run down, Brockman had to decide on whether to attack the carrier or the cruiser. One was badly damaged, the other unharmed. Brockman recognized the value of the carrier and at 1359 fired a spread of three torpedoes. Officers in the conning tower claimed the torpedoes ran true and that red flames appeared along the forward half of the ship as a result of the "fish" hitting home.[2] This does not agree with what Amagai saw at the same time. In the early afternoon he saw three torpedoes heading toward his carrier. Two went wide of the intended mark and the third hit the carrier a glancing blow. The torpedo did not explode, but instead, broke in half. The warhead sank to the bottom and the remainder acted as a float for survivors of the KAGA.[3] The difference between the two accounts are

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[1] NAUTILUS patrol report, p. 3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Fuchida. Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 185. Until 1955 it was generally accepted that the NAUTILUS had administered the

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difficult to explain, except that battle observations are usually made under less than ideal conditions. It is entirely possible that an induced explosion occurred on the KAGA at near the same moment as the torpedoes were due to detonate. Regardless of Brockman's report, it seems more prudent to accept the report of Amagai, if for no other reason than that he was 2700 yards closer to the scene.

Throughout the afternoon fires raged within the KAGA. At 1640 the situation was hopeless. Amagai signaled for the destroyers HAGIKAZE and MAIKAZE to move alongside and take off survivors and the Emperor's portrait. At 1925, just nine hours after the first bombs found their mark, the gutted carrier, jarred by two tremendous explosions, slipped beneath the waves. Over 800 men and all her remaining planes, save six fighters on combat air patrol at the moment of bombing, went down with the fire-ravaged carrier.[1]

The confusion that occurred above the carrier before she was attacked caused Best's second division, under Lieutenant Joe R. Penland, to follow Gallaher's squadron.[2] With the loss of Greene and Schneider, Penland

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"coup de grace" to the SORYU. This was based upon the War Patrol Report of the submarine. This stated that after 1400 the ship launched her torpedoes at a "SORYU-class carrier." The editors of Midway made a study of the incident. They found nothing on a submarine attack on the SORYU. However, the destroyer HAGIKAZE carried out a depth charge attack on a submarine while standing by the KAGA. The action chart of the Mobile Force shows that at 1410 the "KAGA attacked by enemy submarine with torpedoes," but sustained no damage. Commander Amagai substantiated this part of the report.

[1] ONI Review, p. 71.

[2] Interview with Capt Joe R. Penland, USN (Ret) conducted at 1887 Galway Place, El Cajon, California on 18 May 1966.

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had only himself and two others in his division. The rest of Bombing Six broke off their initial dive, actually some had not started, and prepared to attack the near carrier. Best hurried to ready his dive, rolling in perhaps two minutes after McClusky. There was no fighter opposition and the first few planes in the dive encountered very little antiaircraft fire. Best, regardless of his rushing, pushed over into the best dive of his career, and next to the last. The dive was nearly vertical, with the brakes on the trailing edge of the wings slowing his speed and giving him stability. Only his aileron corrected his dive. His experience had taught him that use of the rudder bar would throw his bomb off trajectory. At 3500 feet, he eased back slightly on the stick to reduce his angle of dive to 70°. Then at 2500 feet he pushed the button on his stick, electrically releasing the bomb. While still peering through the gunsight at the deck of the carrier, Best saw a plane in the act of taking off. For a brief moment his thoughts turned to the dream of every divebomber pilot, to shoot down an enemy plane with the forward firing guns. There were other things to do, however, that quickly drew his attention away from the enemy plane. Best pulled out at somewhere between 1500 and 1000 feet and like Gallaher hung his plane so he could see his bomb hit.

The bomb, fused with 1/100 second delay to allow a four foot penetration of the flight deck, exploded amongst the readied planes of the AKAGI positioned near the after elevator. Although planes immediately following barely missed the carrier, a later plane of Bombing Six placed a second bomb on the deck near the forward elevator.[1] Just as happened

[1] ONI Review, p. 55. Also, USSBS No. 23, Interrogation of Captain

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with the KAGA, flames among the parked planes spread to others. Damaged valves prevented proper control procedures. Gas at fueling stations ignited, and the bombs and torpedoes on planes readied on both the flight and hangar decks merely added to the havoc. Power failures and severing of electrical and radio cables isolated the ship and prevented Admiral Nagumo from exercising tactical control.

The bombs had struck the flagship about 1025. Fire reached the area of the bridge by 1045. The Chief of Staff, Admiral Kusaka, urged the commander to transfer to another ship from which he could direct his force. Admiral Nagumo was stunned by the startling change of events and only after considerable urging did he consent to transfer his flag. By then even the ladders to the bridge were aflame. At 1046 the staff of the Mobile Force slid down a knotted rope onto the destroyer NOWAKE for further transfer to the cruiser NAGARA.[1] Captain Taijiro Aoki continued to direct the damage control efforts on the AKAGI. These will be discussed in more detail later.

Bombing Six had started the attack with fifteen planes. Two had been lost before the attack started and Penland led three more against the KAGA. At least some of the five planes from the third division also attacked the KAGA. Lieutenant (jg) John J. Van Buren followed Penland's division and Ensign George H. Goldsmith was right behind Van Buren. Goldsmith recalls the incident and is positive that the carrier, starting

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Taijiro Aoki, Commanding Officer, AKAGI.

[1] Walton Robinson, "AKAGI, Famous Japanese Carrier," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXIV (May, 1948), 591.

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a hard right turn as he attacked her, had her island structure on the right or starboard side.[1]

The attack by the ENTERPRISE divebombers had been delivered with suddeness and accuracy. As they sought to leave the Mobile Force and return to Task Force 16, they could see the fires and smoke from the two burning carriers. McClusky, after dropping his bomb, continued to retire to the north at low level. He experienced little trouble in clearing the screen and changing course toward his carrier. Without warning, tracers suddenly appeared just ahead of his wing and he looked up to see two Zeroes after him. For perhaps seven minutes the three planes fought a running battle. As a former fighter pilot, McClusky knew what to expect from his highly maneuverable opponents. When he thought they were ready to fire at him, he would kick the plane to the side to spoil their run.

McClusky thought he might have troubles protecting the rear of his plane. His regular gunner, a Chief O'brien, had tripped on a hatch and broken his glasses. The replacement, W. G. Chochalousek, was on his first flight. As the Zeroes approached he fired the twin machine-guns, damaging the tail of his own plane in his enthusiasm but destroying a Zero on about the fifth pass of the enemy fighter. With the loss of his partner, the remaining Zero left. McClusky was free to make his way home with nothing worse than a few machinegun and twenty millimeter holes in his plane.

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[1] Letter from Cdr G. H. Goldsmith, USN to the author of 24 February 1967. The AKAGI's island structure was on the port side.

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As he approached Point Option, that projected point where he hoped to find his carrier, he saw only empty sea. Without a homer, McClusky broke radio silence to call Task Force 16. In the clear he asked Lieutenant Leonard "Ham" Dow, the staff communications officer if Point Option had been changed. Dow replied that a new Point Option had been established since leaving the ship one unknown to the pilots and one sixty miles further from the Mobile Force. McClusky flew the additional distance and, with only five gallons of gas remaining, prepared to land aboard the carrier. At the last moment he recognized the ship as the YORKTOWN. Taking a chance with so little fuel, but wishing to report to Admiral Spruance, McClusky pulled up his gear and headed for his own ship which he could see a few miles away. His approach was straight in and as he caught sight of the LSO (Landing Signal Officer) he could see him executing the wave off signal. For the pilot there was no choice, there was not enough gas to be certain of another pass. He had to land. No records have been found to show the precise time of landing but it was, according to McClusky's memory, moments before the attack on the YORKTOWN or about 1205.

Gallaher's retirement after dropping his bomb was similar to McClusky's. He maneuvered at a height of less than fifty feet toward the southern edge of the screen. Only antiaircraft fire hindered his withdrawal. Ensign Reid W. Stone joined up with Gallaher before passing through the outer screen, after which the two turned east. Nearing Point Option they climbed to 5000 feet and turned on their YEZB homer. This directional radio equipment received from the carrier a specific

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letter, one for each fifteen degrees. If the pilot was able to receive the letter, he could use his code board to determine the direction to the carrier. Gallaher and Stone had no trouble in doing this. They landed one behind the other with so little gas that between them they could not fill a five gallon can.[1]

Not all of Scouting Six was so fortunate. Ensign John R. McCarthy joined up with Lieutenant Charles R. Ware, the squadron flight officer, and two other planes from Ware's division. When they failed to find the carrier at Point Option, McCarthy climbed to a height that would allow his homer to receive a signal from the ENTERPRISE. On receiving it, he dropped down to notify Ware and the others of the carrier's direction, but he could not find them. After a brief search, cut short by his own lack of fuel, McCarthy headed for the ENTERPRISE. As he came within sight of the Task Force, his Dauntless coughed briefly and then stopped altogether for want of fuel. A dead stick landing brought him close enough to the task force that a destroyer was able to rescue him and his gunner that same afternoon.

Nearly the same thing happened to Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson, Gallaher's executive officer and leader of the second division. As he came in sight of the Mobile Force, Dickinson could see two long, narrow rectangles, the flight decks of the carriers. Then separated from the first pair he spied a third carrier and finally a fourth flattop.[2]

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[1] Gallaher Interview.

[2] Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson, USN, The Flying Guns (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 150.

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In the brief moments before starting his dive he compared the profile of the ships below with those of the scale models he had seen on his ship. The most distant he identified as HIRYU. Her sister ship SORYU was close to the two larger carriers. In the air above them only the American divebombers circled the sky. As Gallaher started his dive, Dickinson kicked his rudders back and forth as a signal for his division to attack. He pulled up the nose of his Dauntless, allowing the air speed to fall off, popped the divebrakes, and pushed the stick forward to enter his dive.

Below Dickinson the great red circle on the KAGA, bordered in white, raced at him like a speeding express. He could see that she was committed to a single course at better than thirty knots as she prepared to launch aircraft. As he came down from the port quarter, he observed the eight planes from his group diving ahead of him. To this veteran pilot, who had felt the power of Japanese guns when he was shot from the sky that Sunday morning at Pearl Harbor, the target was utterly satisfying. He could see the bombs of McClusky and his wingmen splash close to the carrier. On approaching the drop point he glued his eye to the long, tubular gunsight. Just as he was to drop the bomb, he saw through his sight another bomb rip open the flight deck.[1] Like so many of the earlier planes, Dickinson nearly stalled his aircraft after dropping the bomb and pulling out to see the result of his dive. It was near perfect, landing close to the island.

There was little time to ogle the sight for Zeroes were already

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[1] Ibid., p. 155.

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heading his way. His only thought now was to escape. As he pushed the throttle forward and lowered the nose to gain air speed, he reached low in the cockpit for the lever to close his divebrakes. A Zero made a run on him only to break off when his gunner delivered a telling burst. Next came the struggle to pass through the antiaircraft fire of the screen. Maneuvering left and right, up and down, Dickinson kept the Japanese gunners guessing. For some unaccountable reason it seemed to be taking him eons to clear the Mobile Force. A glance at the air speed indicator told why. Instead of registering 220 to 250 knots the needle was hovering at 95 knots. With beads of perspiration forming on his forehead, the shaken pilot checked his cockpit. A glance at the dive-brake handle showed that instead of closing his divebrakes he had lowered his landing gear. With brakes open and gear down, the plane was moving slowly along. He immediately raised both levers and picked up normal air speed. Dickinson's final sight of the Mobile Force was one of three carriers afire and smoke and water geysers, which he mistook for hits, rising from two other warships.

The gasoline gauges became Dickinson's primary concern. A quick review of distance flown, and indicated fuel remaining led him to believe he could make the ENTERPRISE. That was before the right tank, which he was using, gave out completely when it still registered seventeen gallons. As he switched to the remaining fuel in his other tank, he wondered how accurately it registered. For another five minutes he continued on with mixture of gas and air at the thinnest setting. About this time, some fifty miles from the ENTERPRISE, he was joined by

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Lieutenant Norman West of Scouting Six.[1] When less than twenty miles from the carrier, Dickinson maneuvered to pass in front of the ship. As he did so, the engine sputtered. He grabbed his microphone to announce his predicament, then with the engine still running he made a power-on landing in the water. Like so many others the sudden stop from touching the water at eighty miles an hour threw Dickinson against the gunsight and cut his forehead. But both pilot and gunner scrambled onto the wing and, with a destroyer in sight and heading toward them, jumped into the water without saving the liferaft and emergency rations.

The lines of the destroyer looked familiar to the pilot floating in his Mae West. Then, as the ship closed the distance and he could see the hull number painted on her side, he knew why. The destroyer was none other than the PHELPS, flagship of Destroyer Squadron One, and the very warship on which Dickinson had served for two years and four months before going to flight training. The excitment of Dickinson was no greater than that registered by some of the old hands aboard when they recognized the swimmer as one of their former shipmates. A cargo net, life rings and outstretched hands all assisted the two in coming aboard as the destroyer drew along side. The time of the rescue was 1141.[2] Dry clothes, medical treatment for their slight injuries and a stiff slug of medicinal spirits, revived both men. Their active partipation in the Battle of Midway was over, but in a few moments they

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[1] Lieutenant Clarence E. Dickinson, USN, "I Fly For Vengeance," The Saturday Evening Post, CCXV (October 31, 1942), 59-60 for an account of the time spent on the raft and for the rescue by the PHELPS.

[2] War Diary, USS PHELPS, 4 June 1942.

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were to become spectators to the first Japanese attack on the American carrier force.

Lieutenant Joe R. Penland, the operations officer of VB-6, knew, perhaps more than any other in the squadron save the commander, the enormous gains and losses at stake on the outcome of the battle. His job before the launch, had been to brief the squadron on all aspects of the operation. Of course, Penland's most important concern was the planned employment of the squadron.[1] Best, whom Penland considered the best divebomber pilot in the fleet, furnished the guidance. He also learned that no pilots were to be switched. If a plane was not up to flying, the pilot would have to stay behind. Only the squadron commander was allowed, should his plane be unable to take off, to use the plane of another. There seemed every indication that the initial attack would require a flight approaching maximum range. Penland ordered all non-essential material and equipment removed from the planes. Among the items to come out were the first aid kits and four of the six oxygen cylinders.

As noted earlier, Penland had not followed Best in his dive on the AKAGI. At one time in his dive he could see all the planes of the air group commander and VS-6 diving ahead of him. His pullout at 1500 feet was near perfect except for trouble in closing his flaps. The flaps held back his speed and allowed a Zero to overtake him in less time than normal. Even ducking into a cloud did not lose his pursuer, now

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[1] Penland Interview for the details of the crash landing and the time in the liferaft and rescue.

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joined by a second. Penland might well have been shot down within the immediate area of the Mobile Force if the Japanese fighters had not broken off to attack Massey's incoming flight of YORKTOWN torpedo bombers. Penland could see the Devastators approaching off to the left side of his plane. His own aircraft, though, was giving him troubles. Before the Zeroes left him they had made several runs that poured bullets into his Dauntless, particularly along the wing surfaces. His primary concern was the scant supply of gas remaining in the two tanks.

The fuel left was enough to take Penland about twenty-five miles from the Mobile Force. When he was still over 100 miles from Point Option, the Curtis engine gave a series of coughs, followed by silence. The deadstick landing threw Penland's head against the gunsight, causing a cut above the eye. Both the pilot and the gunner, H. F. Heard, ARM 2/c, were able to evacuate the plane in seconds. The latter hopped onto the port wing, inflated the liferaft, and stepped in without even getting his feet wet. Penland reached back into the cockpit to recover some equipment, The delay was just long enough to prevent his making the liferaft. He wound up swimming in the Pacific until Heard could get him aboard the rubber float. His discomfort from a wet flight suit was short-lived. On doffing his suit, the gunner gave Penland one of the four he had been wearing on the flight.

The two airmen set up housekeeping with emergency supplies and started paddling toward Midway. They removed their shoes to avoid damage to the thin rubber skin that kept them separated from the water beneath them. The dark brown leather flight jackets partially protected them

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from the chilling breeze that came up after the sun went down. Heard had helped paddle, but the continued bobbing of the raft made him sea-sick.[1] Late the next morning they heard planes and in the early afternoon they could see masts hull down on the horizon. Both men grabbed the aluminum oars. As they paddled the aluminum reflected the sunlight, the flash attracting a lookout on one of the cruisers of Task Force 16. Not long thereafter a destroyer moved over to rescue Penland and Heard. The pilot was hardly the picture of the natty naval aviator that adorned the pre-war recruiting poster. His injured eye was black and swollen; dried salt spray streaked his jacket and his deep, close cut brown hair accentuated the normal dark skin, tinted red by continued exposure to wind and sun. As he came up the cargo net, and stepped onto the deck his brown eyes registered relief and surprise. Standing at the rail of the destroyer was his fellow shipmate, Dickinson. The PHELPS had picked the two men up at 1450 on 5 June or twenty-eight hours after their Dauntless landed in the water.[2]

Both Dickinson and Penland were certain that their 1000-pound bombs found the intended target. Ensign Thomas W. Ramsay who followed Penland in diving had watched his own bomb fall and he knew it missed the carrier.[3] Ramsay had no trouble in escaping fighters and antiaircraft

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[1]Dickinson, The Flying Guns, p. 184.

[2]War Diary, USS PHELPS, 5 June 1942. The position of rescue is given as 29-39.2N; 178-51.2W. This is about sixty-five miles southeast of where the KAGA went down the previous evening.

[3]CO, VB-6 action report of June 4-6, 1942 to CO, USS ENTERPRISE, dated 10 June 1942, p. 3. Hereinafter referred to as Bombing Squadron Six Action Report. Ramsay went on to fly again during World War II but

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fire of the Mobile Force. He was not long out of sight of the enemy when his Dauntless ran out of fuel and he had to land on the water. Both Ramsay and his gunner, Sherman L. Duncan, AMM 2/c, got into their liferaft without injuries.[1] For six days they drifted without being sighted. The boat eventually moved in close to Midway but instead of paddling toward the island, Ramsay kept the craft heading out to sea. He was uncertain as to whether the Japanese might not have captured the island. On the sixth day a PBY sighted the raft and rescued the pair. The feat was routine except for one aspect. When Ramsay made his way to the cockpit of the PBY to thank the pilot he found a familiar face. Ramsay was looking at a schoolmate from Biloxi that he hadn't seen since high school days, Lieutenant (jg) August A. Barthes.[2]

Van Buren, who led the third division of VB-6, did not return from the attack. His loss was one of the greatest as far as Dick Best was concerned. Van Buren was a product of the naval aviation cadet program and, while in training, Best had been able to view the fledgling pilot from Mukwonago, Wisconsin. He liked what he saw. Best saw him most at Pensacola while on the football field. He recalls that "Van was a fine football player, a great left handed passer who never became excited in a crisis."[3] When Van Buren joined VB-6 he soon acquired a reputation

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was killed on 25 June 1948.

[1] While Duncan survived the Battle of Midway, he was killed on 26 April 1945.

[2] Honolulu Advertiser, June 17, 1942, p. 2. Barthes had himself been rescued some months earlier when he was forced down while participating in the defense of the Netherlands Indies.

[3]

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as an excellent pilot and a squadron mate that you wanted with you. Although he was not senior enough to warrant leading a division, Best did not hesitate to move others aside so Van Buren could take the third division on the important 4 June attack. "Van was somewhat sloppy but completely unexcitable, a money player," was the way Best evaluated him. Van Buren made his drop and cleared the Mobile Force without damage to his plane. As he headed toward Point Option, he saw Penland's plane setting down on the water.[1] He circled until assured that Penland and Heard were in their liferaft, then headed toward the ENTERPRISE. That was the last ever seen of John Van Buren.[2]

Best had cleared from his dive at 1000 feet and rapidly added throttle to get him near the base of the clouds. Still flying wing on him were Kroeger and Lieutenant (jg) William E. Roberts. Four Zeroes headed toward them but passed underneath, intent on the torpedo planes that Best could see heading toward the Japanese warships. A float plane from one of the cruisers or battleships made a half-hearted run on them but turned away when met with fire.[3] The three planes headed toward Point Option. On approaching the imaginary point, Best turned on his homer and located the ENTERPRISE. Both Kroeger and Best landed aboard the flagship of the task force, the latter with thirty to thirty-five

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[1] Penland Interview. Penland saw the plane's identification number.

[2] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, enclosure (A). His gunner, Aviation Radioman First Class H. W. Nelson was also lost.

[3] Best Interview. The Japanese had a Zero type seaplane but these were used with a seaplane tender and not assigned to cruisers and battleships.

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gallons of gas remaining.

Roberts' fuel gauges registered empty before he ever sighted a friendly carrier. Thus, when the YORKTOWN offered a closer landing site than his own ship, he brought his damaged Dauntless aboard Admiral Fletcher's flagship.[1] His plane had just been cleared from the arresting gear when he noticed another Bombing Six aircraft in the groove. The pilot turned out to be Goldsmith from Van Buren's third division. Like Roberts, he was so low on fuel that he elected not to chance trying to fly the few extra miles to the ENTERPRISE.[2] Before either pilot could recount his strike on the Mobile Force, the YORKTOWN itself was under attack. Roberts and Goldsmith remained on the carrier until later that afternoon when, with the ship's crew, they abandoned ship. For the two pilots and their gunners it had been a full day.

On arriving aboard the ENTERPRISE, McClusky and each of the returning squadron commanders reported the attack to Admiral Spruance and his staff in flag plot. McClusky was the first to return. Taking his plotting board with him he climbed the ladder to flag plot. He briefed both Spruance and his staff on his actions and what he had seen. All listened attentively, the Admiral thinking and measuring reports and resources, Browning asking questions on conditions over the target, distance, location and enemy opposition. Close by, Operations Officer, Commander William H. Buracker, himself a naval aviator, was making

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[1] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, p. 3.

[2] Goldsmith letter.

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copious notes. Already thoughts were passing through his mind on mounting a second attack to get the last Japanese carrier. At the time he was too busy for reflective thinking, but before the day was out he would give "Wade McClusky more than any other individual the major credit for the success at Midway.[1]

McClusky had completed his report when Commander Walter F. Boone, prospective Executive Officer of the ENTERPRISE, exclaimed "My God, Mac, you've been shot." Boone had noticed blood running down the pilot's left hand and dripping onto the metal deck. McClusky was taken below to sickbay. The corpsman who tried to prepare him for the surgeon ran into stubborn opposition when he tried to cut the leather flight jacket. The pilot said the jacket had seen him safely back and he would not have it destroyed, wound or not.[2] The injury proved to be minor, a small caliber round embedded in the upper arm as well as pieces of shrapnel. It was enough to ground McClusky for the remainder of the battle.

Gallaher and Best made their reports to flag plot, adding little that had not been already presented by McClusky. Then the two went below to their respective squadron ready rooms to see what remained of their personnel. As the time passed by it was finally recognized that gas had run out and all that were coming back were aboard. They added up the totals. The losses were grim and although great success had been

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[1] Letter from RADM W. H. Buracker, USN (Ret) to the author of 28 October 1966.

[2] McClusky Interview.

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attained neither squadron was sufficiently strong in personnel and aircraft to be counted as effective.

Including the air group commander's plane, VS-6 had launched seventeen planes. Eight of the planes failed to return. Both Dickinson and his wingman McCarthy were subsequently recovered; the other six were lost forever. The situation was nearly the same with Bombing Six. Fifteen planes had taken off, two of which had dropped out and made water landings before striking the Japanese. Only five planes returned to the ENTERPRISE and one of these, piloted by Lieutenant (jg) Edward L. Anderson, was so badly damaged that it could not be repaired for subsequent attacks of the battle.[1] Five of the ten planes lost were never heard nor seen again.

Lieutenant Gray had brought his fighters back ahead of the dive-bombers and torpedo planes. None had fired a single gun nor engaged the enemy in any sense. Alone among the air group of the ENTERPRISE, the fighters had failed to live up to expectations.

There was no elation on board the ENTERPRISE at this time. Pilots and commanders were satisfied with the results of the attack, but the losses offset any joy in the strike. Besides, all were busy preparing for the next attack. The returning planes were no sooner free of the arresting wire than flight deck handlers were commanding the pilot to taxi to an elevator in preparation of striking the plane below to the hangar deck. There metalsmiths repaired the skin and airframe from damages by

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[1] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, p. 4.

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enemy fire. New oxygen bottles were installed, radios checked and repaired, guns reloaded, new bombs affixed and all planes refueled. It was hard going and it demanded teamwork. Dick Best thought it took too long, but when you have a healthy enemy carrier ready to attack momentarily, any delay can be considered as excessive.[1] While the crews readied the planes, pilots and gunners ate lunch. For the pilots it was coffee and sandwiches in the ready rooms, while they mapped out details for the next strike. The day had started early and many hours had passed, but for the men of the "Big E" the fourth of June was far from ended.

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[1] Best Interview. While the aircraft were being readied, the carrier landed Bombing Three from the YORKTOWN. The need to service these additional planes and the requirement to assign crews to do the job may have caused some delay.

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CHAPTER IX

FRANK JACK FLETCHER DOESN'T WAIT

While Task Force 16 was busily engaged in launching every available divebomber and torpedo plane, the YORKTOWN was preparing to recover the ten SBD's that had been launched at 0430 as scouts. Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher ran Task Force 17 and, as the senior officer present, he had the responsibility for both Task Forces. Unfortunately, he did not have on his staff a single naval aviator. As he was not one himself, he frequently called on Commander Murr E. Arnold, the ship's air officer, for matters involving aviation.

Prior to the battle Admiral Fletcher had been given responsibility for guarding the section in the quadrant northeast from Midway.[1] His concern was not only a Japanese carrier thrust from the northwest of Midway, but the distinct possibility that the enemy might also maneuver to hit Midway from the northeast. In determining the type of search he should employ, Fletcher computed the maximum distance from which carrier aircraft could strike Midway and return. This he figured to be about 250 miles. During the night Fletcher positioned his two task forces so that by 0430 they were 200 miles north northeast of Midway. As the YORKTOWN was the duty carrier, the morning search would be performed by the experienced Scouting Squadron Five. Actually, this was

[1] CINCPAC Operations Plan 29-42, Serial 0114W of 27 May 1942, p. 6.

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not VS-5 at all, but to prevent having two bombing squadrons on the same ship, Lieutenant Wallace C. Short's Bombing Five had been given a temporary Scouting designation.[1] Both Arnold and Fletcher knew Short and his pilots from previous association with them at the Coral Sea and earlier. VS-5 was an experienced unit that could be counted on to do a good job.

Short led the ten planes that took off at 0430. The scouting flight was shorter than usual, being limited to 100 miles. The search was over the area of a half circle extending north from the YORKTOWN's position and to the east and west. The scouts had not completed their outward leg when the radio crackled with the initial contact reports on the Mobile Force. Bound by radio silence, Admiral Fletcher could not tell his scouts the news. Besides, he would not have changed their mission if he could have reached them. The patrol plane reports mentioned two carriers and CINCPAC had told the two task force commanders that there were intelligence reports indicating the presence of four and possibly five carriers. The questions that ran through the commander's mind were - are these all of the carriers; are there more with them or are there others nearby, capable of supporting an attack on Midway? Since the exact location of the two sighted carriers was not given, Fletcher could only approximate their position. By 0607 he had firmed up enough of his plan to direct Task Force 16 to "proceed southwest and attack enemy carriers when definitely located."

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[1] Interview with RADM Wallace C. Short, USN (Ret) conducted at the Botel, Jack London Square, Oakland, California on 25 May 1966.

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Task Force 17 turned to a heading of 080° and started recovering her search group. While she was on this heading she also launched her relieving combat air patrol and recovered the initial one. The easterly course of the carrier, during air operations, opened the distance between Task Force 17 and the Japanese. The last of the search planes was safely aboard at 0630. They had seen nothing during their flight. As soon as they were aboard, the YORKTOWN headed toward the Japanese at twenty-five knots. With his entire air group aboard, Admiral Fletcher was faced with making an important decision. He could launch a maximum strike, reinforcing the planes from Task Force 16 or he could withhold his force until the situation had further developed. In the Coral Sea, the Admiral had had some unpleasant experiences with aircraft reconnaissance reports. He had committed his air group against three reported carriers only to learn that a single light carrier had been seen. The two others that had in reality not been seen, nearly caught the American task force off balance.[1]

For two hours Commander Task Force 17 kept his planes in a ready to launch position. Arnold and Lieutenant Commander Maxwell F. Leslie were in frequent discussions with Admiral Fletcher concerning the advisability of attacking. Finally at 0830 it was decided to launch the torpedo squadron, six fighters and all seventeen divebombers of Leslie's Bombing Squadron Three. The relieving combat patrol was first off, followed by Massey's twelve Devastators. The range to the

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[1] "The Battle of the Coral Sea, Strategical and Tactical Analysis," Naval War College, 1947, NavPers 91050, p. 55.

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enemy was estimated to be so great that Massey turned left off the bow, rather than the standard right turn, so he would not have so far to go.[1]

Leslie led his squadron off the carrier, each plane carrying a 1000-pound bomb. Lieutenant (jg) Paul A. Holmberg who was on his first combat hop was positioned to take off after the squadron commander. Holmberg was close behind Leslie as he rolled down the flight deck and this combined with making a left hand turn off the deck, put Holmberg squarely in Leslie's slipstream. He almost failed to gain flying speed and as he passed the forward end of the flight deck his left wing dipped and brushed the gutter.[2] He eased the stick forward, pushing the plane toward the water and hopefully, away from the area of turbulence. Thoughts of crashing and failure on his first real mission sped through the mind of this 1939 naval academy graduate. His presence of mind, though, had done the trick and the Dauntless soon started to respond as it should.

Arnold had planned for a coordinated attack with torpedo and dive-bomber hitting the enemy at the same time. Since the SBD's were faster, Leslie was directed to orbit over the carrier until Massey was fifteen minutes ahead.[3] At 0906 he departed from over the carrier and commenced climbing to 15,000 feet. The visibility above the scattered

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[1] Interview with RADM Paul A. Holmberg, USN conducted at the Naval Air Station, North Island, California on 3 June 1966.

[2] Ibid.

[3] CO, VB-3 Action Report of 4 June 1942 to Commander YORKTOWN Air Group, dated 7 June 1942 and signed by M. F. Leslie, p. 1. Hereinafter referred to as Bombing Squadron Three Action Report.

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layer of clouds was perfect. Forty minutes later he overtook VT-3 and the six fighters accompanying the squadron. Thereafter, Leslie continued to "S" turn in order not to get ahead of the slower planes. At the same time he climbed to 20,000 feet in preparation for the attack. The new position soon caused him to lose sight of Massey among the clouds below.[1]

Leslie by this time was beset with his own personal misfortune. Soon after reaching the 20,000 foot level, he had signaled the squadron to arm their bombs. A new arming system had only recently been installed in the SBD, allowing the pilot to arm manually or electrically. Leslie pushed the electric arming switch and as he did so his bomb released from the aircraft.[2] The same thing happened to three other planes of the squadron and prompted Leslie to break radio silence and warn the remainder to arm their bomb with the manual mechanism. Thus, before they ever sighted the Japanese the fighting power of VB-3 had been reduced from seventeen to thirteen planes. Leslie's wingman, "Lefty" Holmberg, had seen the bomb fall away and he could see Leslie berating himself over his misfortunes.[3]

The morning flight of VB-3 was the culmination of months of training.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Acting CO, VB-3 Action Report to CO, USS ENTERPRISE dated 10 June 1942, and signed by D. W. Shumway, p. 2. Actually both action reports from VB-3 used the designation Commanding Officer. To keep accounts straight only Leslie's will be referred to as CO and Shumway's as Acting, which in fact he was.

[3] Holmberg Interview.

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The squadron had formed in San Diego as part of the SARATOGA air group. When the carrier was torpedoed by a submarine in January 1942, her air group was put ashore in Hawaii. In the weeks that followed, experienced personnel were sent as replacements to other carrier squadrons. In their places, Leslie received a large number of new pilots fresh out of advanced flight training. Active operations aboard a carrier, as mentioned earlier, occurred when Bombing Three took the place of Scouting Six on the ENTERPRISE during the Doolittle Raid. In fact, one of the squadron planes had discovered the Japanese fishing boat acting as picket.[1] While in Hawaii the squadron had trained at Kaneohe on the windward side of Oahu. All personnel made daily flights that included diving on a towed sled off Kaneohe Bay. Live ordnance was scarce, so miniature bombs weighing only a pound or two were used. A cartridge would detonate on impact and release a small cloud of smoke. Infrequently, they were able to drop 500-pound bombs filled with water. Regardless of the lack of training aids available, "Pop" Leslie trained his men hard and thoroughly. In each pilot he instilled a will to excel. Recalling those days, Rear Admiral Paul A. Holmberg evaluated Leslie as a commander who fostered "great pride in his squadron and its ability to carry out any assigned mission."[2] They flew aboard the YORKTOWN to replace the battle tested Scouting Five and, although without combat experience, Leslie and his men gave every

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[1]Interview with RADM Maxwell F. Leslie, USN (Ret) conducted at 218 E Street, Coronado, California on 25 July 1965.

[2]Holmberg Interview.

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indication of an extremely capable organization.

On nearing the anticipated point of interception, Leslie saw nothing but empty sea. Just as he was about to institute a search, his gunner, W. E. Gallagher, ARM 1/c, caught sight of ship wakes some miles ahead and slightly to the right. Leslie turned to head toward the enemy, at the same time asking Massey in code if he had seen the enemy.[1] When he failed to hear from Torpedo Three, Leslie brought his own squadron down to 16,000 feet, picking up speed and prepared to attack the enemy. Below him he could pick up many of the enemy warships as their wakes broke the quiet seas. Three carriers, zig-zagging and going at high speed, could be seen in the center. Being the senior officer from the YORKTOWN, Leslie radioed Short of Scouting Five to attack the carrier to the westward. When he received no reply, Leslie was not unduly surprised. It was not until many hours later, however, that he learned that Short's squadron had been held back.[2] He immediately tried to reach Massey as well as Thach with the fighters of VF-3. To all transmissions there was no response.

The coordinated attack, so highly desired, no longer seemed possible. Leslie also realized that his favorable position over the carriers would not last for long. He maneuvered his squadron to attack from out of the sun, making his entry into the dive on a southeast to northwest heading. At 1023 he pushed over in his dive with Holmberg following

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[1] Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 2.

[2] Leslie Interview.

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immediately behind. Leslie held his dive until those following had had an adequate chance to fall in line. When assured of this he made a radical maneuver that took him out of the dive and left Holmberg as the leading pilot.

For the big, dark haired, six foot Holmberg it was the chance of a lifetime. Three years earlier he had been placing the gold striped shoulder boards on his shoulders at Annapolis. He was only a few months out of flight training and this was the second time in his career he had ever dropped a live bomb.[1] His dive was perfect; the type that every pilot seeks. He initially lined up on the carrier by looking over the cowling, then, heading from stern to bow, he shifted to his long telescopic sight. The red circle provided the ideal aiming point. This time he held his release until less than 2000 feet separated bomb and target. As he pushed the button he could see the bright flashes of anti-aircraft guns firing and his plane shook as rounds exploded nearby. The shells, though, failed to upset his dive and his pull out at 500 feet was unopposed. As he looked back, his Dauntless was down to fifty feet, he could see the carrier a mass of flames, spouting brilliant patterns of red, blue, green and yellow. Induced explosions added to the display and following Dauntlesses insured that the colorful fireworks of death and disaster continued.

The carrier that had been singled out for this attack was the SORYU, flagship of Carrier Division Two during the Pearl Harbor attack. The

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[1] The entire paragraph is from the interview with Rear Admiral Holmberg.

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first bomb landed at 1025. A minute later a second bomb hit and at 1028 a third staggered the already mortally wounded carrier.[1] The first bomb landed squarely amidship between number one and two elevators. A second bomb penetrated the flight deck just in front of the forward elevator and exploded in the hangar deck. The final bomb hit forward of number three elevator or centered among the tightly packed airplanes, armed, fueled and ready for take off.[2] By 1030 induced explosions from the bomb storage and torpedo storage rooms,[3] from ready antiaircraft ammunition and from gasoline tanks turned the carrier into an inferno. The giant doors on the hangar deck melted and warped from the intense heat. At 1040 the ventilating system had been ruptured bringing both ship's engines to a standstill.

Everywhere there was blinding, eye-smarting smoke. Secondary explosions sent metal debris across the flight and hangar decks with speed as deadly as any bullet. Splinters cut fire fighters down as they tried to control the blazes. The odor of burning paint failed to counter the sweetish smell of cooking human flesh. Men, badly burned by the exploding gas, screamed in agony. Others lay on the decks unable to move away from the approaching flames. Cries of pain pierced the air as the wounded became human torches. Collapsing, they joined other

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[1] ONI Review, p. 13.

[2] USSBS No. 165, Interrogation of Capt Hisashi Ohara, Executive Officer of the SORYU.

[3] These are readying rooms, sometimes referred to as breakout rooms, and not to be confused with the magazines.

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charred and mutilated corpses strewn about the deck. Plane handlers and pilots, the latter already strapped into their aircraft in anticipation of take off, were among the early casualties as the planes started a destructive series of detonations. Wounded men were carried to the relative safety of the anchor deck, below and forward of the flight deck. Doctors and corpsman tended the injured without regard for their own safety. Working in blinding smoke, gasping for breath and continually exposed to new explosions, the medical personnel gave pain killing shots to the badly injured, applied dressings and tourniquets to others. Men beyond saving had to be passed by in the need of saving those who might live to fight again. Fires raging in the passageways and ladderways made the sick bay untenable. Bamboo stretchers were taken from overhead storage positions at battle dressing stations and used to carry wounded to the forward part of the ship.

Up on the bridge Captain Ryusaku Yanagimoto tried to direct the fire fighters. Runners sped to damage control parties with orders to fight a particular conflagration, reestablish communications or provide water or power. The after steering room could no more control the movement of the SORYU than could the bridge. When it became obvious that the carrier was beyond saving, Yanagimoto moved to the signal tower near the bridge and pleaded for his men to seek shelter and safety. He himself steadfastly refused all efforts to rescue him.[1] By 1045 the order was given to abandon ship. Before many could leave the stricken

[1] ONI Review, p. 13.

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vessel, an internal explosion of great force shook the SORYU and hurled many, including Commander Hisashi Ohara, the executive officer, into the sea.

As the destroyers moved in to take off the wounded stretcher cases, the popular Captain could still be seen on the open bridge. Between the crackle of the flames, he could be heard shouting words of encouragement to his men as well as repeated cries of "Banzai." When it became certain that he was not intending to leave his command post, a rescue party was hurriedly formed to return to the SORYU and insure that the respected and capable Yanagimoto be brought to safety. Chief Petty Officer Abe, renowned throughout the fleet as a former wrestling champion, was charged with bringing the Captain to safety, by force if necessary. Abe made his way up the Jacobs ladder hanging from the forecastle; then aft along the starboard side of the flight deck, past the charred and hideously broken bodies of shipmates, to the island structure and the bridge. He approached the senior officer, saluted and said, "Captain, I have come to take you to safety. The men are waiting for you. Please accompany me to the destroyer, sir."[1] Yanagimoto continued his gaze toward the bow of the burning carrier, standing motionless and giving no indication of having heard Abe. Only when the petty officer started toward him to carry him forcibly to safety did Yanagimoto turn. No words were spoken between the two, but when their eyes met the rigid discipline of the Imperial Japanese Navy was conveyed from senior to junior. For in the

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[1] Potter, Yamamoto, The Man Who Menaced America, p. 225.

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piercing brown eyes there was clearly expressed the sole desire to be left alone to die with the ship he had commanded. Abe understood and with tears in his own eyes, he saluted, left the bridge and made his way to the debarkation station. As he left the bridge he could hear the Captain quietly singing Kimigayo, the Japanese national anthem.[1]

In the early evening the fires aboard the SORYU died down somewhat. The air officer formed a new fire fighting detail to reboard the carrier, but at 1913 the SORYU started settling rapidly. Soon after sinking a great underwater explosion sped her to a 2600 fathom deep. The destroyers HAMAKAZE and ISONAMI had rescued many men, but Captain Yanagimoto and over 700 others went down with the ship.

The ENTERPRISE air group had sent its divebombers against the KAGA and AKAGI at 1024 and 1025. Without the slightest bit of preplanned coordination a third squadron had attacked the SORYU a minute later. For over three hours planes from both Midway and the carriers had sought to destroy the Japanese carriers. All had been unsuccessful and had in turn suffered crippling losses. Their sacrifices had not been in vain for the repeated attacks had upset the Mobile Force, committed its combat air patrol and, with the three torpedo squadron attacks brought the Zeroes down from over the carriers to just above the water.

The attack on the SORYU had come not a moment too soon. Holmberg had led the attack. One of the planes following saw Holmberg's bomb explode near the island structure. As it burst, it blew an enemy plane

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 188.

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over the side, just as it was rolling down the deck to gain flying speed.[1] It is not known which of the other twelve planes scored hits on the SORYU. By the time the third division dived the carrier was already a mass of flames. Both Ensigns Robert M. Elder and Bunyan R. "Randy" Cooner shifted their attack to the destroyer acting as plane guard, scoring near misses. Two other planes in the rear of the formation likewise shifted their efforts to a nearby battleship,[2] claiming a hit but actually registering close misses. The last plane to enter the dive was Leslie's. Without a bomb the best he could deliver was the fire of his forward firing machine-guns. Once more, bad luck followed the commander as his guns jammed after firing only a few rounds.[3]

The squadron headed toward the YORKTOWN's Point Option as soon as bombs had been dropped. Holmberg led the way, maneuvering to evade the antiaircraft fire. At the time he was having more troubles than just evading the enemy. The entire forward part of the cockpit was covered with oil. Holmberg had the slick fluid over him and many of the gauges on the instrument panel were covered with it.[4] A call over

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[1] Acting Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 2. Shumway's report claims five direct hits and three near misses. From the Japanese side it has been learned that only three bombs struck the ship but were more than enough to do the job.

[2] Ibid., p. 3. These were piloted by Ensign J. S. Butler and Lieutenant (jg) O. B. Wiseman who were lost in the attack on the HIRYU later that afternoon.

[3] Leslie Interview. The pilot was also plagued with a fogging gunsight brought on by the sudden temperature change during the dive.

[4] Holmberg Interview.

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the intercom to La Plant, his gunner, told him to check his instruments. If all were functioning properly, the fluid was from the hydraulic system. This proved to be the case and eliminated the fear of a frozen engine and a water landing far from the carrier. About the time that Holmberg concluded his situation was not unduly serious, he received a radio call to slow down. Shortly thereafter, the operations officer, Lieutenant Harold S. Bottomley, Jr., joined up and Leslie was close behind. Before they were halfway home all seventeen planes had taken squadron formation.

Bombing Three had been launched nearly an hour after the ENTERPRISE aircraft. By good fortune Leslie had not had to spend time and fuel searching for the enemy. Thus, as he started home, fuel was not the overriding concern that it was with McClusky and his pilots. There was also a second reason that made the return flight more routine. Prior to launching, the air officer had spoken to the squadron commanders regarding Point Option. Admiral Fletcher had hoped to advance it at a twenty-five knot rate on a course of 240°. Arnold, experienced from years of carrier duty, warned the departing fliers that a twelve knot rate of advance was more realistic.[1] When Leslie turned on his homer, the signal from the YORKTOWN indicated she had made Point Option at a rate just under twelve knots.

The approach to the carrier was normal as the squadron flew up the starboard side until a quarter of a mile ahead. Then the break that

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[1] Interview with RADM Murr E. Arnold, USN (Ret) conducted at 740 J Avenue, Coronado, California on 16 May 1966.

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took Leslie across the bow and onto the downwind leg, gear and flaps down. The landing signal officer instead of giving him an "up" was ordering a wave off. Holmberg, following behind Leslie, prepared to land but also received the same signal. As he added throttle and passed over the deck, one of the port five-inch guns opened fire with a roar. At the same time the squadron was told to form a combat air patrol to repel an enemy attack. Bombing Three climbed for altitude, but before they could position themselves, the ships of Task Force 17 and the fighters from the YORKTOWN combined to attack the incoming enemy planes. The details of the Japanese strike on the YORKTOWN will be presented in the following chapter.

Leslie and Holmberg, the latter unable to raise one wheel because of loss of hydraulic pressure, became separated from the rest of the squadron. Under the executive officer, Lieutenant David W. Shumway, the fifteen planes remaining orbited until after the attack and then headed for a familiar sight, the carrier ENTERPRISE. Before they could land, friendly fighters mistook them for Japanese and at least a few Dauntlesses were on the receiving end of fire from American fighters.[1] Fortunately, the hits were not serious and all planes landed safely on the ENTERPRISE.

While the YORKTOWN battled the attackers, Leslie and Holmberg circled on the edge of the Task Force, spectators to the grand show. As the attack made it impossible for them to land, they started to search for American planes that might have had to ditch on returning from the

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[1] Acting Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 3.

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Mobile Force. The first plane they sighted was one belonging to VT-3. The flotation devices that had been installed in the wings kept the plane afloat. Below them, the pilots could see two figures in the liferaft floating near the plane. Leslie signaled Holmberg to circle the downed plane while he sought help from a destroyer not far away. With great skill Leslie brought his SBD over the narrow forecastle of the destroyer and dropped a message near number one mount.[1] The ship was the HAMMANN which, as noted earlier, soon had Chief Esders and his dead gunner aboard.

The two pilots kept orbiting Task Force 17 in expectation of landing aboard the YORKTOWN. Finally, Holmberg whose fuel consumption was greater with a wheel down, indicated he had to land for want of gas. His landing on the water was skillfully executed despite the wheel suspended below the wing. Perhaps it even served a good purpose for the plane angled to the side when the wheel slowed its progress and Holmberg was propelled to the side of the cockpit, winding up as one of the few to escape injury from the gunsight. The aircraft came to rest near the port side of the ASTORIA. The pilot and gunner hastened to evacuate the plane. They had no sooner climbed into their liferaft than the rubber boat sank. It had been thoroughly sieved by small arms fire and shrapnel during the dive. The stay in the water was brief as the ASTORIA had a motor launch in the water and heading their way in practically no time at all.

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[1] HAMMANN Action Report, p. 2.

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Leslie had only waited long enough to see that Holmberg was safe before he, too, brought his plane alongside the heavy cruiser. While Rear Admiral William W. Smith watched the pilot hang his plane above the water as though it was a seaplane, Leslie gradually eased off the power and made a perfect water landing.[1] The squadron commander had assured that Gallagher, his gunner, had jettisoned his machineguns prior to landing. The moment of landing was fortunate for as the plane touched the water, Admiral Fletcher was climbing up the accommodation ladder of the ASTORIA after having transferred from the YORKTOWN. The launch quickly cast off and rescued the two downed airmen, moments after their plane went under. The heavy cruiser was just getting underway as they crossed the quarterdeck.[2]

Thus ended the morning attacks on the Mobile Force. Leslie had been in the air five hours and twenty-five minutes. Unlike the divebombing squadrons from the ENTERPRISE, every Dauntless from Bombing Three returned to the vicinity of the carrier without difficulty. Leslie, himself was not attacked before, during or after his dive.[3] All fifteen planes, Leslie and Holmberg landing in the water, landed safely on the ENTERPRISE where their presence partially offset the morning losses of that carrier.

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[1]Vice Admiral William Ward Smith, Midway, Turning Point of the Pacific (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966), p. 117. Smith remarks that the ditching was so professionally done that he would not have been surprised when the two pilots reported to the bridge to hear the senior say, "Sir, I have delivered the mail."

[2]Leslie Interview.

[3]Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 5.

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While Bombing Three was attacking the enemy, the YORKTOWN had sought to close the distance to the Mobile Force. Until 1133 Captain Buckmaster kept the ship on a course of 225° and doing a healthy twenty-five knots. Throughout this period Admiral Fletcher was busily trying to figure out what the Japanese were doing. His only report, one intercepted from the PBY's, was hours old. At 1000 Lieutenant James S. Gray of Fighting Six radioed that he had to return for lack of fuel. Although the message was directed to the ENTERPRISE it was also picked up by the YORKTOWN. Gray also included a report on the composition of the Japanese, stating that there were two carriers, two battleships and eight destroyers. Gray, who it will be remembered, mistakenly flew highcover for Waldron's Torpedo Eight, radioed that "there is no combat patrol over the enemy fleet. We have been flying over the enemy fleet for the past hour."[1] While this was extremely important information, it was incomplete and lacking the location and current movement of the enemy. It is difficult to understand how a man with Gray's training and experience could have been so oblivious to the needs of the commanders for current intelligence.

To provide more up to date information, Admiral Fletcher ordered ten SBD's from Scouting Five to search the sector from north to west of the Task Force.[2] The planes were to cover the sector from 280° to 020° to a distance of 200 miles. This was a very fortuitous decision

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[1] Commander Cruiser Division Six Action Report for 4 June 1942, p. 3.

[2] Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet report on Battle of Midway to CINCPAC, dated 14 June 1942.

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and one that must have been undertaken with some second thoughts. At 1130 the divebombers of the HORNET were unreported. His own VB-3 and the Dauntlesses of the ENTERPRISE had completed the attack. Whether Fletcher knew this is uncertain, but even if he had, there was no way of determining how many of these planes would return nor when they would be prepared to attack again. Should he, in the meantime, locate the undamaged enemy, his offensive airpower consisted of eight of the ten SBD's of VS-5 that had returned from the early morning search. Of nearly 100 offensive planes available at 0700, Fletcher was now down to eight at 1130.

The launch of the scouts coincided with the relief of the combat air patrol and the recovery of the fighter element that had escorted VT-3. Fearful that the Japanese had located and were preparing to attack his force, Admiral Fletcher doubled his combat air patrol from six to twelve. The air operations were swiftly executed, an indication of the high degree of efficiency in the Air Department of the YORKTOWN. In twenty-two minutes the carrier recovered ten planes and launched twenty-two. By 1155 the fighters were aboard and Leslie's victorious squadron, already picked up on radar, was expected momentarily.

Meanwhile to the west, the early morning events of the Mobile Force had suddenly turned for the worse. In three minutes three fleet carriers, moments from launching their own attack planes, had sustained bomb damage that put them out of action for at least the remainder of the day. The damage to the AKAGI was so great that Admiral Nagumo was unable to determine what was occurring to the remainder of his force. He and

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his staff had seen bombs hit the KAGA, but the extent of damage was unknown. On the flagship, damage control parties activated the carbon dioxide fire fighting apparatus[1] and for a while it appeared that the fires might soon be brought under control. Approaching torpedo planes, evidently a division of Massey's squadron, forced the carrier into a maximum turn that caused the fires to spread. Still, at 1036, her engineering department, despite a damaged starboard, aft engine, could provide sufficient power for her to operate at cruising speed. The success did not last long for at 1042 all engines had stopped. The flames that forced Nagumo to quit the bridge came not from the initial bomb damage, but from induced explosions. A fighter that had been readied for take off exploded from the heat and spewed flaming debris and gasoline onto the bridge.

The evacuation of Admiral Nagumo, while lacking dignity, was not difficult and most of his staff had little trouble in following. One exception was the Chief of Staff, Ryunosuke Kusaka. With all the passageways in flames and filled with smoke, the only available means of leaving was through an open window on the bridge. Outside the window each man grasped a rope and went hand over hand to the flight deck below. Kusaka's extra weight caught up with him when he was halfway down the rope. Unable to hang on longer, he fell to the smoldering deck with a crunching thud.[2] Both ankles were injured in the fall and one shoe flew off and

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[1] ONI Review, p. 23.

[2] Kusaka, Combined Fleet, p. 87.

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landed some distance away. As he lay in pain he pondered hobbling over to where the shoe lay. Figuring that he would be burned trying to recover it, Kusaka elected instead to take a final look at the carrier. He climbed to the searchlight tower railing, grasping the metal rungs sufficiently long enough to burn his hands badly. Satisfied that he could do no more he started forward to the anchor deck. His trip was more like an infantryman's adventure into No Man's Land than across the deck of a modern aircraft carrier. Kusaka limped forward, burning his right foot on the smoldering deck, evading areas in flames, dodging the fallen bodies of crewmen, and successfully missing the machinegun bullets, shrapnel and debris that hurtled through the air with each new explosion.

The departure of Mitsuo Fuchida from the flagship was a different story. Early that morning he had pleaded with the ship's surgeon for permission to come from sickbay to the flight deck to watch his men depart for the strike on Midway. He belonged in bed for he was recovering from an appendectomy, but by superhuman efforts he slowly climbed the seven decks. On departing each of the attacking pilots shook hands with the commander and he in turn wished them well. When the planes returned Fuchida was in primary flight, just above the flight deck and near the bridge. He was still there when the American carrier planes attacked. In the ensuing confusion he was momentarily forgotten. After Nagumo and his staff left the bridge, Fuchida remained there with Captain Aoki, the navigator and the ship's air officer. With considerable help Fuchida managed to climb through a window on the bridge and slide down a smoldering rope to the gun deck below. Further movement was

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blocked by fire and a red hot ladder. Suddenly an explosion hurled him into the air. He landed on the flight deck, breaking both ankles. Crews on [illegible] him to the anchor deck where he was strapped into a bamboo stretcher and lowered to a boat for transfer to the NAGARA.[1] Little did Fuchida realize at the time that his climbing to the flight deck to see his pilots take off was to save his life. Of thirty-two men who had been in the sickbay of the AKAGI only Fuchida, the pilot who had led the Japanese planes in attacking Pearl Harbor, survived.[2]

When flames broke out on the AKAGI, it became obvious that Admiral Nagumo could no longer exercise tactical command. Automatically, this responsibility passed to Rear Admiral Abe on the TONE. His message at 1050 notified Admirals Yamamoto and Kondo that "Fires are raging aboard KAGA, SORYU and AKAGI resulting from attacks carried out by enemy land-based and carrier-based planes."[3] He also announced that the HIRYU was to engage the enemy carriers during which time the Mobile Force would continue retiring to the North. Admiral Abe next sent off a radio message to the HIRYU directing her to attack the enemy carriers. The alert Admiral Yamaguchi had, on his own, decided to do just that. At 1050 planes were rolling down the flight

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 181.

[2] Sermon delivered by Mitsuo Fuchida at the Southern Baptist Church in National City, California on 6 June 1965. Fuchida converted to Christianity after World War II. He now resides near Osaka, Japan and is a frequent speaker for religious organizations on his conversion. The story of his conversion is in itself a subject for a separate study.

[3] ONI Review, p. 23.

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deck of the one carrier still in operation.

The bridge of the flagship YAMATO at sunrise on 4 June had been the scene of calm assurance as Admiral Yamamoto and his staff listened for news of the Mobile Force. The fog was thick about the Main Force until the sun had risen and burned it off. The flagship monitored the message from TONE's plane saying he had seen an enemy flying boat. Later messages reached the YAMATO as the tactical situation confronting the Mobile Force continued to develop. The TONE plane reported the fifteen planes approaching the Nagumo ships but Admiral Yamamoto did not appear unduly disturbed. Both Tomonaga's message concerning a second strike on Midway and Egusa's report of the great results obtained on Sand Island left the commander unaffected.

At 0728 when the TONE's aircraft on the number four search line fired in a message saying he could see ten enemy surface ships bearing 10° at a distance of 240 miles from Midway,[1] the atmosphere aboard the YAMATO changed. Questions raced through the minds of Admiral Yamamoto and his staff as they wondered how the Mobile Force would react to this news. The relief was only temporary when the plane soon reported the ships were equally divided between cruisers and destroyers. At 0820 the pilot added that "the enemy is accompanied by what appears to be a carrier."[2] Bound by radio silence, the commander could not ask Admiral Nagumo what he was doing about this new threat to his force.

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[1] This placed the American ships about 170 miles from the Mobile Force.

[2] ONI Review, p. 19.

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Initially it was assumed that Admiral Nagumo had his second wave readied for any surface force that might be located. These were the instructions that Admiral Yamamoto had given during the war game critique a month earlier. Commander Yoshitake Miwa, from the operations staff, raised the question, "Hasn't the second attack wave already been launched for another strike at Midway?"[1] The question struck the staff like a bomb, for it was an idea that had passed through the minds of all but no one had really voiced his thoughts. Admiral Yamamoto turned to Kiroshima and asked: "Do you think we ought to order Nagumo to attack the U. S. carrier force at once?"[2] Before Kuroshima could reply his superior remarked, "I think we had better order Nagumo to attack at once." Kuroshima reminded Yamamoto that "Nagumo has prepared half of his aircraft to attack the U. S. carrier force and maybe Nagumo is already preparing his attack." As a result of Kuroshima's remarks a message was not sent out. Actually, whether it was transmitted or not mattered little for the decision to take the torpedoes off the planes had been initiated at 0717.[3]

The next two hours were apprehensive ones on the YAMATO. Reports came in from both the TONE plane and the Mobile Force updating the situation. At 0855 the flagship had Admiral Nagumo's

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 207.

[2] Kuroshima Interview. In the postwar accounts of World War II battles, it has been customary for senior Japanese officers to assume responsibility for losses. This was the case with Kuroshima who blamed the Midway disaster on his failure to send a message to the Mobile Force.

[3] ONI Review, p. 17.

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message saying he was heading toward the enemy. But no word reached Admiral Yamamoto that the Japanese carrier planes were on their way.

Then at 1050 Chief Signal Officer, Commander Yushiro Wada called Watanabe aside and showed him the startling message -"AKAGI Kasai!" - the flagship is on fire. At almost the same moment another message came up the voice tube announcing the same fate of the KAGA and SORYU. Taking a few steps from the operations room onto the flag bridge he approached Admiral Yamamoto and told him the sad news.[1] The commander groaned at the report and gazed at the forecastle and the sea beyond, too stunned to speak. In the operations room the staff turned to preparations to assist the Mobile Force. No one knew how serious were the fires and all hoped that they might be brought under control.

Blinker lights from the YAMATO ordered the Main Force ships to break off refueling and to set a course of 120° and twenty knots. The big guns of the Japanese Navy were heading toward the Mobile Force. By 1220 Admiral Yamamoto had decided what to do with his widely scattered forces. His message, operation order #155, stated that the Main Force would close on Admiral Nagumo; the Midway Invasion Force was to split, the transports and their escorts retiring to the northwest, the remainder to continue toward Midway. Submarine squadrons three and five would deploy on cordon line C, a location passing near the reported position of the American carrier force. Finally, Admiral Kakuta's Second Carrier Striking Force was ordered from the northern area to

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[1] Watanabe Interview.

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reinforce Admiral Nagumo.[1] The attack on Midway was still to be carried out, after first destroying the enemy ships.

The operations order had barely been released when further disquieting news reached the YAMATO. At 1300 Commander Destroyer Squadron Four, as already related, reported the results of his interrogation of the YORKTOWN torpedo pilot. The United States Navy had, in addition to the YORKTOWN, the ENTERPRISE and the HORNET. The course of the battle had suddenly reversed. At breakfast all on the YAMATO had been supremely confident of the ability of the Mobile Force to carry off the attack on Midway and take care of any enemy ships that might dare show themselves. Now in the early afternoon fires were raging on three of the four carriers and the enemy had three first line carriers ready and waiting to continue the fight. In addition, he also had on the island of Midway an undetermined number of heavy bombers which could be reinforced by still more from Oahu. These facts must have been considered by Admiral Yamamoto. They were not pleasant ones, but they had to be faced.

In the next few hours he wrestled with the strategic situation confronting him. At 1310 he ordered postponement of the Aleutian operation. Simultaneously, on Kuroshima's recommendation, he directed Admiral Kondo to detach a portion of his force to shell and destroy the air base at Midway.[2] The one bright spot, in the otherwise dismal situation,

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[1] ONI Review, p. 26.

[2] Combined Fleet Secret Dispatch No. 295 containing Fleet Dispatch Operations Order No. 15.

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was the HIRYU. Being to the north of the other three carriers she had escaped detection by the American divebomber pilots until after they had dropped their bombs. Her presence was known and reported to Admirals Fletcher and Spruance but before they could do anything about it, the aggressive Admiral Yamaguchi had already acted.

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CHAPTER X

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

When the three squadrons from the two American task forces dived on the AKAGI, KAGA and SORYU, the planes of the four carriers of the Mobile Force had been only minutes away from launching. Admiral Nagumo had earlier directed his four carriers to rearm and refuel their planes in preparation for striking the enemy fleet. While the planes were being readied the Mobile Force had headed on a northerly course. As most of the early attacks had approached from the south, the three southernmost carriers had been forced to maneuver radically to evade the Marine and Air Corps attacks as well as those by the torpedo bombers. This resulted in the HIRYU being as much as ten miles further north than the rest of the Mobile Force. Because of this she had escaped early detection by the divebombers of the ENTERPRISE and YORKTOWN.

The rearming on the HIRYU had progressed rapidly. When Admiral Abe radioed Commander Carrier Division Two, at 1050, to "Attack the enemy carriers," Admiral Yamaguchi could reply by blinker light that "All our planes are taking off now for the purpose of destroying the enemy carriers."[1]

In comparison with earlier strikes of the Mobile Force, the planes taking off to attack the American carriers were neither numerous nor

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[1] ONI Review, p. 24.

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well balanced. Time was the key to the operation and the sensible Admiral Yamaguchi recognized that it was better to send a small, hastily organized force than to wait until it was too late to send a larger one. The HIRYU had started the day with twenty-one fighters and a like number of torpedo bombers and "Val" divebombers. Some planes had been lost during the attack on Midway andothers, although they returned to the carrier, were damaged and in need of repair. The recovery of the first wave, the one that made the attack on Midway, also limited the number of planes that could be launched quickly in a second attack. Unlike an airfield, the carrier must place its aircraft in one of two places. They can be spotted on the flight deck or on the hangar deck. The latter is too small to house all the planes and leave the flight deck free. The former requires respotting the planes. Any of the second wave planes of the HIRYU that were ready to take off had to be taken below to the hangar deck or moved all the way forward on the flight deck to permit landing of the planes returning from Midway. Respotting is a complicated and time-consuming business and goes far toward explaining why the HIRYU could launch only eighteen divebombers and six fighters against the forces under Admiral Fletcher.

Lieutenant Michio Kobayashi, commander of the divebombers on the carrier, was placed in command of the entire strike. The planes climbed for altitude as they departed the HIRYU and turned east toward the enemy they estimated to be only 125 miles away. At 18,000 feet Kobayashi levelled off and signaled his pilots to keep a lookout for planes

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below.[1] Before long a group of American aircraft were sighted flying below the scattered clouds. Kobayashi made a slight correction to conform to the heading of the planes he was overtaking. After a few minutes, the ships of Task Force 17 came into view some twenty-five miles away. The Japanese Lieutenant motioned his planes to get ready to attack. As he checked over his group he noticed two fighters missing. Glancing below he could see them in pursuit of the enemy carrier planes. Kobayashi had little time to reflect on his wayward pair of Zeroes for fighters with a different marking were streaking toward him.

During the time that Kobayashi and his group were flying toward Task Force 17, the YORKTOWN had been busily engaged in refueling the fighters that had landed. In addition she had recovered Ensigns Roberts and Goldsmith from the ENTERPRISE air group when those officers selected the safety of the YORKTOWN in preference to stretching their gas to the ENTERPRISE. At 1159, the combat information center advised flag plot and Captain Buckmaster on the bridge that a radar contact showed an incoming group of enemy planes on a bearing of 250° at a distance of forty-six miles.[2]

In the next few moments the YORKTOWN and her escorts became the scene of feverish activity. Signal halyards carried the pennants directing the force to assume the standard Victor formation against air attack. The heavy cruisers PORTLAND and ASTORIA rang up thirty

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 191.

[2] Naval War College Analysis on Battle of Midway, p. 137.

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knots and positioned themselves off the starboard and port bow, respectively, of the carrier. Three thousand yards away from the flagship, the sleek destroyers MORRIS, HAMMANN, RUSSELL, HUGHES and ANDERSON took up the outer screen. The carrier increased speed to more than thirty knots in preparation for high speed maneuvers. In the fighter director, Lieutenant Commander Oscar Pederson, the air group commander, was directing his combat air patrol toward the approaching enemy. His twelve Wildcats were on their way, but what else could he provide in defense. A radio call to the fighter director of Task Force 16 brought six of the sixteen combat air patrol planes under Pederson's control.[1]

Machinist Oscar W. Myers was a member of the ship's air department who was assigned duty as the fuel officer. His job was to refuel the planes and to be certain that the gas used was uncontaminated. Myers, after months of combat, concluded that the high octane gasoline made the YORKTOWN as potential a powder keg as any ammunition ship. He had seen the LEXINGTON go down and knew its sinking had been largely caused by the explosion of gasoline vapors. As the carrier headed toward Pearl from the Coral Sea, the ingenious Myers devised a simple procedure for pushing gasoline back down into the fuel storage tanks. Before the Japanese planes were within sight, Myers had purged all gasoline fueling lines by replacing the gasoline with CO_2. Not only

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[1] Commander Task Force 16 report of Battle of Midway to CINCPAC, dated 16 June 1942, p. 3. Hereinafter referred to as Commander Task Force 16 Action Report.

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had the gas been returned to the storage tanks, but even there a blanket of CO_2 kept the gas from vaporizing.[1] The unique system undoubtedly kept the YORKTOWN from catching fire. Later in the war, the system, still further refined, became standard on all carriers.

The attacking Japanese planes were intercepted by elements of the combat air patrol while still ten miles from the carrier. As they continued in toward the YORKTOWN, Wildcats strove to destroy the Vals, and Zeroes sought to keep them away. It was a wild melee with the more numerous Wildcats getting the upper hand. In the excitment and confusion of the moment, no one could say for certain how many Japanese were shot down. The best estimates seem to indicate that ten of the divebombers were destroyed before they were able to drop their lethal load. The remainder made their dive on the carrier.

At 1205 the veteran flattop shuttered as a bomb exploded abaft the center of Number Two elevator on the starboard side. A second bomb went right through the flight deck and exploded in the stack. The final bomb to strike the carrier passed through the forward elevator and continued to the fourth deck before exploding. The planes that dropped their bombs on the carrier did not get away unscathed. Both the combat air patrol and antiaircraft fire sought the enemy. Three more divebombers crashed. Only one third of the planes returned to the carrier, one landing in the water within the screen but short of the HIRYU. Five of the

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[1] Recommendation for Navy Cross for Oscar W. Myers contained in CO, USS YORKTOWN letter to CINCPAC, undated, serial CV5/P15-2/MM/00, p. 12.

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returning planes were divebombers and three were Zeroes.[1] Kobayashi, the veteran of Pearl Harbor and the other exciting strikes of the Nagumo Force, was not one of those to return.

The YORKTOWN had been rocked by three solid hits, none of which were fatal or even seriously damaging. That more bombs did not strike the carrier can be attributed to the outstanding performance of the combat air patrol. Lieutenant (jg) Arthur J. Brassfield was the leader of one of the six plane divisions just launched. His division had not completely formed when Pederson radioed him of the approaching Japanese. Climbing at 2000 feet a minute, Art Brassfield headed for Kobayashi's flight alone. About ten miles from the carrier he spotted a pair of Wildcats but instructions to join him went unheeded.[2] By now Brassfield could see the Japanese 2000 feet above him. As he started after them four YORKTOWN fighters came hurtling into the Japanese force from above. Brassfield made a head on run on one enemy plane and may have damaged it, he could not be sure. On approaching the carrier, the Japanese divebombers split into smaller groups in preparation for delivering their anvil attack on the YORKTOWN.

Three planes approached the carrier in a loose A, B, C formation. Only Brassfield was near them. What the Japanese did not know was that the Browning, Missouri pilot, who had taught Americanism in high

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[1] The Midway Operation, CVL HIRYU, translation WDC 160985, p. 25. The report states thirteen divebombers and three fighters were lost.

[2] Interview with Capt A. J. Brassfield, USN conducted at the Naval Annex, Arlington, Virginia on 30 October 1966.

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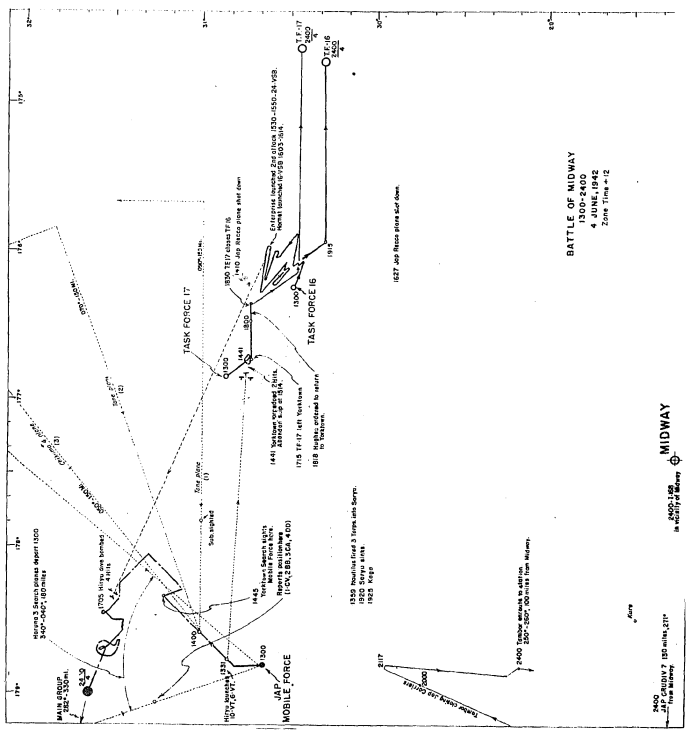

AFTERNOON CARRIER ATTACKS

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school prior to going to Pensacola, had only a month before bagged a pair of Japanese planes in the space of a few minutes.[1] In the Coral Sea battle, Brassfield had knocked down a four-engine patrol plane on 5 May. Then on 8 May, in the fight between the carriers, he had destroyed a fighter and a bomber. Now alone and unable to wait for help, he kicked his fighter around for a run on the three bombers. Brassfield singled out the leader. His dive put him on the enemy's port bow. When the planes turned toward him, Brassfield waited until only 300 yards separated him and then pushed his thumb against the trigger atop the stick. Instantly, the six guns in the wings rattled the fighter. Ahead the slugs tore into the Japanese leader, the moderately long burst sending him down in flames. A violent wingover to the left and the fighter pilot had the second Japanese bomber ready for a full deflection shot. At 150 yards he gave him a short burst. The enemy plane blew up before him with such force that his own plane shook from the concussion.[2] The third divebomber sought safety in a small cloud, but before he could reach it Brassfield had a no-deflection burst pouring into him. Within moments the pilot's third victim was on his way to a watery grave.

Brassfield's wingman during the early combat air patrol flight was Ensign Harry B. Gibbs. They had landed to refuel and scrambled from the ready room when word was received of the approaching Japanese

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[1] Morning News, Enid, Oklahoma, 19 July 1942, p. 1.

[2] A. J. Brassfield, USN, VF-42 Report of Action, June 4, 1942 (Original in hands of A. J. Brassfield). The report, although there is no indication to this effect, was submitted to CO, VF-3.

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planes. Somehow Gibbs failed to join Brassfield, but he did find another member of the squadron, Lieutenant (jg) Elbert S. "Doc" McCuskey.[1] The two tangled with the Japanese in a brief and violent encounter. Gibbs singled out a Val and gave chase. As he closed on the Japanese he eased off on the throttle and gave his target a long burst of machinegun fire. Almost at once the enemy plane broke into flames and fell off on a wing as it started toward the water. As soon as Gibbs was convinced that the Japanese was sure to crash, he started back toward the YORKTOWN. Enroute he sighted another divebomber and took after it. This time only a single gun responded to his trigger. Gibbs could see his tracers entering the plane but before he could destroy the aircraft the enemy pilot entered the concealment of a nearby cloud. With all ammunition expended from the one functioning gun, Gibbs, along with Brassfield, McCuskey and Ensign W. S. Woolen, headed for the ENTERPRISE.

The scene on the YORKTOWN was one of organized confusion. Commander Clarence E. Aldrich directed the fire fighters and repairmen from his post at Damage Control Central. When their response was not fast enough for his demands, he personnally led a group of fire fighters in battling the blaze caused by the last bomb to strike the ship.[2] The situation was potentially dangerous for the fire was close to one of ship's forward magazines. The sprinking system flooded the magazine

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[1] Interview with Capt Harry B. Gibbs, USN, conducted at U. S. Naval Air Facility, Washington, D. C. on 1 March 1967.

[2] Recommendation for Navy Cross for Commander C. E. Aldrich contained in CO, USS YORKTOWN letter to CINCPAC, undated, serial CV5/P15-2/MM/00, p. 5.

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and fire hoses, axes and hard work extinguished the blaze that centered in a rag storage area above the magazines.

The first bomb had produced a gaping ten foot square hole in the center of the flight deck. Damage control parties brought heavy timbers and bracing to the damaged area. In twenty-five minutes the highly skilled carpenters had the flight deck ready for aircraft operations.[1]

The greatest damage had been caused by a bomb dropped from one of Kobayashi's divebombers approaching from off the port beam. Gunners manning the watercooled, thirty caliber machineguns positioned along the YORKTOWN's port catwalks had thrown up a veritable wall of steel. The bomb, nevertheless, hit the carrier just to starboard of the center line of the island structure. The delayed action fuse allowed it to pass through the flight deck, the VS-5 ready room, the executive officer's cabin and finally detonated it in the stack. For Lieutenant (jg) Charlie N. "Tex" Conaster it was a good thing the bomb carried a delayed fuse. Conaster had only shortly before returned from the morning search. His duties as the flight scheduling officer had kept him busy in the Scouting Five ready room. The bomb passed through the room, hitting the coffee maker and throwing the liquid about the squadron area, but otherwise doing no damage.[2]

When the bomb exploded in the stack the shock waves did considerable

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[1] YORKTOWN Action Report, p. 3. All U. S. carriers had wooden flight decks with the armor being three decks below on the hangar deck.

[2] Interview with Capt C. N. Conaster, USN, conducted at U. S. Naval Air Station, North Island, California on 11 May 1966.

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damage. There was a general flaking of paint and a huge cloud of soot. The most significant effect was that the heavy pressures blew out the fires in all six boilers. The bomb ruptured the uptakes from boilers one, two and three, the last two being completely disabled. The loss of boiler pressure and steam cut the YORKTOWN's speed from over thirty knots to six and in a few moments to zero. The mighty carrier was dead in the water, an easy victim for a follow-up attack or a lurking submarine.

The men of "Waltzing Matilda" had not been resting during the 101 consecutive days she had recently spent at sea. Idle periods had been interspersed with endless drills. A number of these simulated engineering casualties, including just such damages as had occurred. Lieutenant Commander John F. Delaney, the engineering officer, directed his men in repairing the damages to the engineering plant. Temporary repairs were made to the boiler uptakes. Members of the engineering department hastily donned gas masks and entered the gas-filled boiler rooms to rekindle the fires. The crew of boiler room Number One was particularly effective. Under the leadership of Water Tenderman First Class Charles Kliensmith, the crew made hurried repairs and had sufficient steam from the heat of two burners to operate the ship's auxiliary power system.[1] The work was performed at great personal risk from the heat of the spaces, the imminence of explosion and the stifling fumes of the area. Kliensmith was lost in the second attack on the carrier, but during the brief period between the two, his inspiring courage and

[1] Recommendation for Navy Cross for C. Kliensmith, WT 1/c contained in CO, USS YORKTOWN letter to CINCPAC, undated serial CV5/P15-2/MM/00, p. 14.

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professional leadership of the six men under him was an important factor in insuring that the YORKTOWN could again get underway.

But the carrier was still dead in the water at 1220. Through Herculean efforts of Kliensmith and others in the engineering department, the carrier was forging ahead a little more than one hour later. It was only at five knots, but as steam pressure increased and more repairs were completed her headway rapidly accelerated to fifteeen and ultimately to nineteen knots at 1437.

When Kobayashi's bombers struck the YORKTOWN the damage and clouds of smoke had set off a series of happenings some of which were comical, others deadly serious but all reflecting examples of effective leadership. Commander Irving D. Wiltsie, the ship's navigator, was having a busy time maintaining the carrier's position. He had been on the the signal bridge, with sextant, shooting the noon position. He immediately went to the charthouse, aft of the bridge, and computed the position. Too busy to leave the area, a steward brought him a sardine sandwich and coffee which he was consuming when the bombs struck.[1] Admiral Spruance had witnessed the attack and ordered additional antiaircraft support to Task Force 17. At 1235 the heavy cruisers PENSACOLA and VINCENNES and the destroyers BENHAM and BALCH were ordered to report to admiral Fletcher's control.[2] An hour later the four ships

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[1] St. Louis Post Dispatch, 17 September 1942, p. 2.

[2] Commander Task Force 16 War Diary, June 1942. In the ENTERPRISE Action Report, p. 3, Admiral Spruance mentions that the YORKTOWN was so far northwest of Task Force 16 as to be nearly out of sight. Spruance did not again see the YORKTOWN until after her abandonment.

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were in position around the YORKTOWN. The two carriers of Task Force 16, refueled and rearmed the fighters of VF-3 and at 1237 the ENTERPRISE started recovering the planes of Bombing Three.[1] As the YORKTOWN built up speed, it became evident that it would not be long before air operations could be undertaken. The ten flyable fighters still aboard were rearmed and readied for refueling.

Damage to the YORKTOWN and her inability to maneuver as well as her inoperative radar, made it necessary for Admiral Fletcher to shift his flagship. The ASTORIA lowered a boat at 1313 that made the starboard side of the carrier. Manila lines were dangled over the side and the small staff clambered down from the upper deck of the carrier. The long, hand-over-hand descent was difficult for all. When Admiral Fletcher threw a leg over the side and prepared to descend he had some second thoughts. Turning to the boatswain mate supervising, he said, "I'm too damn old for this sort of thing; better lower me."[2] A bowline was secured around the Iowan and a pair of sturdy seamen lowered him into the waiting boat.

Above the ENTERPRISE flight deck, in flag plot, staff officers were discussing what next to do. Browning felt that the carrier that had attacked the YORKTOWN had been the undamaged one seen by McClusky's pilots as they departed the Mobile Force. In this assumption the Chief of Staff was correct. His desire to launch an immediate attack on the

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[1] ENTERPRISE Action Report, p. 3.

[2] Tuleja, Climax at Midway, p. 159. Fletcher was fifty-four years old.

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fourth carrier was delayed by two events. The striking planes were themselves not ready to attack and Admiral Spruance wanted a position report on the HIRYU from the scouts that were presently flying about the area of her suspected position.

Before a decision could be made by the American Admiral the resourceful Admiral Yamaguchi again seized the initiative and readied a second attack. By now the available aircraft on the HIRYU had been drastically reduced. The remaining planes of Kobayashi's flight had not yet returned. As a result, the greatest number that could be readied was ten torpedo planes and six fighters.[1] Not all of these belonged to the HIRYU, a torpedo plane originally from the AKAGI and two of the fighters from the KAGA augmented the HIRYU's aircraft. Unable to land on their own damaged carriers, the three planes had sought the HIRYU.[2] Lieutenant Tomonaga, who had led the strike on Midway, volunteered to lead the planes that departed from the HIRYU at 1331. The distance between the two forces had closed significantly, now only ninety miles of open sea separating the two. For Tomonaga, the afternoon flight was one which he knew would be his last. His plane had returned from Midway with its left wing tank damaged by antiaircraft fire. When the American ships had been reported and an attack against them appeared imminent, Tomonaga ordered his plane readied. Flight crews refueled the

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[1] ONI Review, pp. 48-49.

[2] Ibid., p. 7. No mention is made of other aircraft from the three damaged carriers joining the HIRYU. However, some of the two dozen planes on combat air patrol at the time the American divebombers struck the three ships must have landed on the HIRYU.

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one good tank. Fellow pilots offered their planes, but Tomonaga refused.[1] Everyone knew that Tomonaga did not have enough gas to attack the enemy and return.

The new threat to the embattled YORKTOWN was picked up on the ship's radar, which had been restored with the return of electrical power, while still forty miles away. The six planes of VF-3 that were on combat air patrol were vectored toward the target. Eight more fighters, some only partially refueled, were launched from the carrier. Additional fighters joined from Task Force 16. Once more the Americans, enjoying superiority, dived on the approaching Japanese. The fighting was fierce and at close quarters with the guns of the screen joining in with their protective fire. As the torpedo planes dropped near the water, the cruisers tried tactics worked out by the colorful Admiral "Poco" Smith. They hurled their main batteries into the defense, using the eight-inch rounds to throw up geysers of water in front of the low-flying planes.[2] Just when the Japanese planes were destroyed is impossible to determine. Only five torpedo planes and three fighters made it back to the vicinity of the HIRYU and the plane from the AKAGI still carried its torpedo.[3]

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 193. Tomonaga was a recent addition to the Mobile Force. The action at Midway was his first in World War II although he had established an enviable record in China.

[2] Morison, Vol. IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 135.

[3] ONI Review, p. 7. In the Action Report of the HIRYU, WDC 160985, the crew member of the last plane in the second division or Shotai, said he saw Tomonaga's plane hit by defensive fire after dropping its torpedo. The special marking on the command plane's rudder was distinguishable as Tomonaga, his plane afire, attempted to crash his plane into the YORKTOWN's bridge.

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Others were lost before or after dropping their torpedoes.

On the YORKTOWN one of the first fighter pilots to scramble off was Ensign Milton Tootle, IV of St. Joseph, Missouri. The twenty-two year old son of a bank president had been aboard the carrier for only five days. Earlier that morning, Tootle had flown wing on Aviation Pilot Doyle Barnes and had landed shortly before the initial attack on the YORKTOWN. He remained aboard the carrier during the Japanese divebombing attack. When he climbed into his fighter it had not yet been refueled from the morning flight. Taking off, he banked to the left and, flying through his own friendly antiaircraft fire, he soon met an incoming torpedo plane. Tootle whipped his Wildcat onto the bomber's tail and, with his six machineguns blazing away, rode the plane to within a thousand yards of the YORKTOWN.[1] Before the pilot could drop the torpedo Tootle had his first victory as the "Betty," smoke trailing behind, plunged into the sea. Tootle's elation was short-lived. The enemy plane had no sooner disappeared than his own plane felt the impact of an exploding shell. Smoke filled the cockpit and from the cowling Tootle could see flames. Being less than 100 feet above the water, he added throttle and climbed to 1500 feet. When the little fighter was in level trim, Tootle climbed onto the wing and parachuted to the water below. His liferaft was carried behind the cockpit in a location that made it impossible for Tootle to reach it before jumping. The boyish, crewcut flyer landed within the screen of friendly ships. His Mae West lifejacket kept him afloat throughout the

[1] Honolulu Advertiser, 13 June 1942, p. 8.

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torpedo attack and until the destroyer ANDERSON could pick him from the sea.[1] The entire flight had lasted less than five minutes.

The YORKTOWN fighter pilots that had landed on the ENTERPRISE after the first Japanese attack were ready to defend their ship a second time. Brassfield's plane had been struck below, but Gibbs, Woolen and McCuskey were launched to attack the torpedo planes. Gibbs and Woolen teamed up to make a run on the Betty's. Gibbs recalled that his plane had never gone faster as he dived on the Japanese.[2] Then he suddenly felt an unusual response in his rudder and saw bullet holes in the wing. A hasty glance around told him a Zero was on his tail. The Wildcat groaned under the strain of the violent maneuver to evade the Zero. The American was momentarily successful but before he could locate the torpedo planes for a second attack, a Zero fired a burst into the engine of his plane. The cockpit filled with smoke as the aircraft lost power. The thick black smoke trailing behind apparently convinced the Zero pilot that Gibbs was through. Gibbs headed toward the YORKTOWN until his oiless engine froze.

Before crashing, the pilot fired his Very pistol then tossed the weapon out the open cockpit. On landing Gibbs started swimming away from the plane but second thoughts brought him back for the liferaft stored in the turtleback behind the cockpit. As he pulled the lanyard to inflate his raft the plane nosed over and sank. The liferaft had been struck by

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[1] Letter from Mr. Milton Tootle, Jr., President, American National Bank, St. Joseph, Missouri to author of 9 November 1966.

[2] Gibbs Interview.

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bullets. By using his legs to squeeze the compartments Gibbs reduced the loss of air to where frequent pumping maintained the raft's buoyancy. An SBD returning from the scouting flight spotted the brightly-colored raft and sought to direct a destroyer to the rescue. The pilot could not relocate the raft and Gibbs, now without a flare pistol, could not help. All he could do was watch the ships sail away.

Five Japanese planes succeeded in reaching a position within 500 yards of the YORKTOWN. They dropped four torpedoes, two of which the carrier evaded, but two more found their mark. At 1443 a torpedo hit the portside of the YORKTOWN near amidship and almost at the same time a second one exploded only a few frames forward on the same side. The explosions ripped open the side and punctured the portside fuel tanks. Firerooms two, six and eight were flooded as well as the forward generator room. The loss of steam interrupted electric power. The emergency generator failed when the control board shorted and prevented the electrical power from being shifted. The rudder jammed at fifteen degrees left and as the ship slowed to a stop, she took a noticeable list. Almost at once it went to seventeen degrees and within seventeen minutes after the explosion the list was twenty-three degrees.[1] This increased to twenty-six and there appeared to be every indication that the ship would heel even more.

On the bridge, Captain Buckmaster was confronted with the need for making one of the most difficult decisions ever to rest upon the shoulders

[1] USS YORKTOWN-Loss in Action, Midway, June 4, 1942, War Damage Report No. 25 of 9 March 1943, p. 8.

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of a commanding officer. For a third time within less than a month his ship had received major damage. Twice she had been repaired, but this time the damage had caused a serious list. The YORKTOWN was dead in the water, a helpless derelict. She had less than half a dozen planes on board and in any case would be unable to receive or launch any for some time to come. In other words, at the moment, the YORKTOWN was worthless as an aircraft carrier. Nevertheless, on board were nearly 3000 men, the majority of whom were highly skilled in critical occupations. With the speed in which the list had increased, there appeared to be every indication that this would continue to a point where she would capsize. To get the men off required time which, as the water poured into the gaping wound, was rapidly running out. There was no haste on Buckmaster's part in arriving at his decision; he talked it over with Commander Dixie Keifer, the executive officer, and with Arnold. The risk of keeping the crew aboard until it might be too late to leave was, in Buckmaster's mind, too great.[1] At 1500 he ordered Abandon Ship.

The raising of the blue and white flag on the signal halyards initiated an orderly rescue operation. The destroyers BALCH, BENHAM, RUSSELL and ANDERSON moved in close to the YORKTOWN to take off personnel. Other ships remained in position to detect any submarine that might try to penetrate the screen and attack the YORKTOWN. Members of the air group with planes still aboard stood by their aircraft awaiting instructions

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[1] Interview with VADM Elliott Buckmaster, USN (Ret) conducted at 1414 Sixth Street, Coronado, California on 14 March 1966.

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to leave the ship. When the enemy torpedo planes left the scene, "Tex" Conaster and two others sought to fly off three of the six SBD's of VS-5 that were fueled and ready.[1] This request was turned down because of the slight wind coming down the flight deck and because it was believed that the other carriers were filled with planes. As a result, the pilots and their crewmen took the rubber rafts from their planes, inflated them and tossed them into the water. Departure from the ship was by knotted ropes. Conaster and his gunner were barely aboard their life raft when they spied two hysterical colored mess stewards only a short distance away. They paddled to them and exchanged places, the stewards becoming calm and sensible after entering the raft.

Although the sea was thickly covered with fuel oil, the water was smooth with only a gentle swell. Some men made light of their situation, singing tunes as they awaited rescue from their twelve men, cork rafts.[2] Another member of the mess force, a cook named T. L. J. Saxon of Columbia, Mississippi, saved his pet white rabbit. While the carrier was in Honolulu, Saxon had carefully smuggled the rabbit aboard by placing it in his gas mask bag.[3] Dixie Keifer was one of the last to leave the carrier. As the ship's executive officer, he had been directing the abandon ship operation. One of his last endeavors was assisting in lowering a man over the side. The individual was afraid to use the

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[1] Conaster Interview.

[2] Story of Petty Officer Harvey Wilder, Atlanta Journal, 16 September 1942, p. 4.

[3] San Francisco Examiner, 17 September 1942, p. 4.

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the knotted rope, so Keifer tied a bowline around him and started paying out the line. When the man was over half the distance to the water, Keifer lost control of the line. It sped through his hands causing painful burns on the palms. When it came time for Keifer to go over the side, he found that his hands could not hold onto the line. He fell perhaps thirty feet, hitting the canting side of the ship such a blow that he broke both ankles.[1]

The last man to leave the YORKTOWN, or so he thought, was Captain Buckmaster. The carrier had been his home for over a year. He had sailed her across the submarine-infested Atlantic before the war, carried her planes from the shores of Australia through the isolated island chain to Hawaii and had, throughout the day, fought in defense of an island that few Americans knew existed. His ship appeared doomed and, like the loss of a good wife, was irreplaceable. There would be other carriers to come along, but none quite the same as "Waltzing Matilda." Buckmaster could not dwell on sentiment for there was not time to be lost. Like the others, the Commanding Officer went hand over hand down the knotted line. He had barely reached the water when he noticed that his steward was hysterical in his fear of the water. Buckmaster swam to him and dragged the frightened Filipino boy to a raft, insuring that the lad was on the raft before he himself consented to climbing aboard.[2]

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[1] Buckmaster Interview.

[2] Time, September 28, 1942, p. 11. Censorship on wartime ship losses had kept the news on the sinking of the YORKTOWN from the public for over three months.

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The rescue operations were practically in full swing when at 1514 the ASTORIA's signal bridge carried the message: "stand by to repel air attack."[1] The BALCH and RUSSELL moved away from the stricken carrier as the unidentified aircraft continued onward. When the planes came within range, the antiaircraft screen opened fire. Before any of the ships could get the range, the planes were identified as friendly. They were the aircraft of the HORNET's Bombing Eight returning to the the carrier from the island of Midway after their unsuccessful search for the Japanese carriers. The destroyers returned to their task of taking survivors aboard. The BALCH's motor whaleboat did yeoman work in towing the rafts to the destroyer's side where the men could clamber aboard. Men from the BALCH leaped into the water taking with them life rings with lines attached. Men in the water grasped the lines or rings and were pulled to the ship's side by men on the BALCH. The life-saving work continued until 1700 when Commander Task Force 17 signaled "Cease present exercise."[2] By this time the little ship had more than twice its own complement. Altogether 544 YORKTOWN officers and men were on the BALCH. They spent a crowded night on the destroyer, but at 0610 the following morning, highline operations shifted nearly all of the YORKTOWN personnel to the PORTLAND. A few, forty-three officers and men, were later transferred to the ASTORIA.

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[1] War Diary, USS BALCH, June 1942, p. 9.

[2] Commander Task Group 17.4 (Destroyer Squadron Six) report to Commander Task Force 17, dated June 12, 1942, p. 2. Men rescued totalled 2280 - BALCH (544); BENHAM (738); RUSSELL (494); ANDERSON (204); MORRIS (193); HAMMANN (83); HUGHES (24).

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The experiences of the BENHAM were much the same except she crowded twenty officers and 718 men onto her decks. As soon as rescue operations were completed, Lieutenant Commander Joseph M. Worthington, captain of the BENHAM, headed for the PORTLAND to transfer his overload. A line had been passed to the forecastle of the cruiser when unidentified planes were reported approaching. The planes turned out to be friendly, but before this was known the BENHAM broke away from the cruiser. With darkness at hand, the survivors spent the night on the destroyer, transferring to the larger ships the following day. The RUSSELL rescued 494 personnel while the ANDERSON came away with 204. When it became apparent that the BALCH and BENHAM had all they could handle, the MORRIS stood in to pick up 193. The HAMMANN followed and rescued eighty-three while the HUGHES took aboard twenty-four. Among those saved by the HAMMANN was Captain Buckmaster.[1]

The MORRIS saved one officer whose distinguishing accent and uniform identified him as being in the Royal Navy. Commander Michael B. Laing had only recently been assigned to CINCPAC after duty on the North Atlantic Patrol and as executive officer of the large carrier, HMS FURIOUS. He had prevailed on Admiral Nimitz to allow him to sail with the YORKTOWN as an observer.[2] Laing had seen the torpedoes head for the carrier and he was near Buckmaster when the Captain made the decision to abandon ship. After a brief stay on the MORRIS, Laing was

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[1] HAMMANN Action Report, p. 3.

[2] Letter from Capt M. B. Laing, RN (Ret) to the author of 6 December 1966.

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transferred to the ASTORIA by highline. When the battle-hardened Englishman reached the deck of the eight-inch gun cruiser, he was queried regarding his thoughts on the battle. With typical succinctness Laing replied, "Noisy wasn't it?"[1]

Nothing had been heard from the ten planes of Scouting Five that had been launched at 1150. Because of the narrow search area, the ten planes had doubled up, each search having two planes assigned. Both Task Forces were anxiously awaiting word from the planes. It came at 1445 from Lieutenant Samuel Adams, the squadron's operations officer. Adams had gone out on his search leg for 200 miles, then a left turn to a line running 280° from the YORKTOWN's position. Halfway back he saw off to his right a carrier, two battleships, three heavy cruisers and four destroyers. Adams had trouble sending his voice radio report for he was busily engaged in shaking off one of the HIRYU's Zeroes.[2] Since the HIRYU was on a northward course, there is strong reason to believe that Adams would not have seen the ships if he had flown the 280° course on the way out. The HIRYU at 1300 was on a bearing of approximately 265° from Task Force 17. Adams followed his voice transmission with a dot and dash key report, giving the enemy position as 31-15N, 179-05W.

Admiral Fletcher, with his carrier threatening to capsize, could do nothing to take advantage of the report, but Admiral Spruance could. He

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[1]Interview with RADM H. M. Johnson, USN (Ret) conducted at 625 G Avenue, Coronado, California on 26 May 1966. Johnson was a Lieutenant (jg) at the time assigned to Admiral Smith's staff as the Communications Officer.

[2]Short Interview. Also, YORKTOWN Action Report, p. 12.

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had a conglomerate force of divebombers and each one carried either a 500-pound or 1000-pound bomb. According to Adam's report only 110 miles separated the two forces. Actually, his positioning of the Japanese was slightly in error, undoubtedly caused by his ignorance of the direction and strength of the winds he had been encountering. The HIRYU was at the time less than 100 miles from Task Force 16.

McClusky, with a wounded arm, could not lead the afternoon strike. Command passed to the next senior officer, Lieutenant Gallaher of Scouting Six. Five other planes of his squadron would also take part. Best and three others from Bombing Six stood ready to go. The remainder of the strike aircraft were those of the recently landed Bombing Three, fourteen of its fifteen planes taking part under Lieutenant Shumway. Only Ensign Robert M. Elder's plane could not be readied in time.[1]

The planes commenced taking off at 1530. By 1550 all twenty-four planes were heading west and climbing for altitude. Actually, one more plane had launched but soon after leaving the carrier Lieutenant (jg) John N. West of VS-6 was forced to turn back.[2] On nearing the reported location of the carrier, the attacking pilots could see the results of their morning's work. At 1645 they could make out the ships reported by Adams, although they were still thirty miles away. To the left and south of them were three destroyers heading toward three columns of smoke

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[1] Acting Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 4.

[2] Scouting Squadron Six Action Report, p. 6. Only seven of the nine planes of VS-6 that made the morning attack could be repaired and readied in time to strike the HIRYU.

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still farther toward the south.[1]

After sighting the carrier, Gallaher took the group to 19,000 feet and to the southwest of the Japanese, a location that would bring his dive from out of the sun. This time the Zeroes were alert to what was going on above their force. At least four enemy fighters were after the Dauntlesses before they ever reached the push over point. Gallaher, sizing up the situation, radioed Best to follow him as he dived on the HIRYU. Shumway's group, fifteen planes including Ensign S. C. Hogan, Jr. attached from Bombing Six, was told to strike one of the battleships. This order to take on a battleship rather than the undamaged HIRYU must be questioned. Although Gallaher knew that his ten planes could do the work, there was no positive assurance that they would be able to deliver their bombs on the target, particularly with fighters already claiming their attention. The value of the carrier was of such transcending importance that every conceivable resource at his command should have been employed to insure its complete destruction. Earlier in the day, planes had broken off from attacking a damaged carrier to deliver their bombs against a battleship. Even this must be questioned. In the instant case, Gallaher was directing a division of his force when the primary target had not been damaged.

Gallaher pushed his sturdy divebomber over and aimed at the bright red circle on the HIRYU's washed-out yellow deck. The time was 1705. The ship was at high speed and heading west. The carrier's crew, tired

[1] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, p. 5.

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from the long hours of tension-gripped labor, had paused to eat their evening fare of sweet rice balls.[1] Spotted number one for take off was the special long-range reconnaissance plane from the SORYU. Admiral Yamaguchi had ordered the plane to make another surveillance flight about the American forces. By now, with reports from survivors of Kobayashi's and Tomonaga's flights, he was convinced that two of the three American carriers had been put out of action. Grim as the picture might have appeared to the Japanese, the afternoon events seemed to have partially restored the balance of power. At 1615 Yamaguchi reported that Kobayashi's strike damaged two carriers,[2] and less than an hour later he again informed his superiors that the second attack under Tomonaga left an ENTERPRISE class carrier burning.[3] From the Japanese point of view, this meant that each side had not more than a single carrier remaining in operation. Behind Admiral Yamaguchi though, were the ZUIHO and HOSHO, available by daylight the next morning, and the larger RYUJO and JUNYO coming from the north. With this support and the possibility of a night battle, the fundamental objective of destroying the Pacific Fleet might yet be attained.

Admiral Yamaguchi was not one to wait for tomorrow when action could be taken today. While his resources were slim, he did not hesitate

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 197.

[2] ONI Review, p. 31. There is nothing to support damage claims on a second carrier. The report of the HIRYU claiming the carrier and a SAN FRANCISCO class cruiser seems more logical. Why the difference is unexplained.

[3] ONI Review, p. 32.

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to issue instructions for the remaining planes, five divebombers, six torpedo planes and six fighters to take off at 1800. The time selected would bring the planes over the American ships in the waning moments of evening twilight. Hopefully, they would receive some protection from fighters and antiaircraft fire by the slim light.[1] Time, though, was running out on the "Flying Dragon."

Signal guns from the nearby CHIKUMA warned of the new threat. Gunners on the HIRYU sprang to their positions. Instantly the flight deck was framed in a ring of sparkling red flashes, accentuated by the waning light. Captain Kaku ordered full left rudder and the carrier heeled over as she sought her new course. The turn caught Gallaher as he was ready to release his bomb. Already a Zero, passing so close he could almost touch his undercarriage, had upset his dive. Gallaher did not believe a carrier could turn so fast. His dive was so close to the release point that he could not make a normal correction for the sudden turn. Instead, he endeavored to "throw" his bomb, an action that left the explosive about fifty meters astern of the carrier.[2] Gallaher's wingman, Stone, was no more successful in dropping his bomb than his commander.

Shumway witnessed the near misses of the first two planes and without further word put his planes into a dive on the carrier. It is an excellent example of the type of leadership exhibited by the upstate New Yorker from Syracuse. He had not waited for instructions to change

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Gallaher Interview.

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target, but had simply made a hasty estimate of the situation, one which said that all the planes in the dive might miss the carrier and that he had better be there to back up Gallaher.

The unit to drop the first bomb on the HIRYU is uncertain. It may have been the later planes of Scouting Six. Most probably it was Bombing Three, at least Shumway claimed this to be the case. Regardless of which unit owned the bombs, four of them struck in rapid succession. All hit in the forward part of the ship near the bridge.[1] The first bomb took the forward elevator and stood it on end, completely blocking the view from the bridge toward the bow. Concussions shattered all windows on the bridge and in the island structure. Fires spread below deck and to the planes on the after portion of the flight deck. Passageways to the engine rooms were blocked by fire and debris from continuing explosions. Captain Kaku was caught in a dilemma on the bridge as events continued to occur over which he had no control. Aircraft from other units, besides the ENTERPRISE, attacked the Japanese ships. High speed maneuvering was essential to avoid more bombs striking the carrier. At the same time, the thirty knot speed fanned the flames and spread them to almost every exposed portion of the ship.

The last carrier unit to dive on the HIRYU was Bombing Six. The three planes of Best's unit made their attack with Zeroes blazing away at them throughout their dive. Best believed one of the three planes

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[1] USSBS No. 11, Interrogation of Captain Susumu Kawaguichi, Air Officer on the HIRYU. Kawaguichi states that there were six hits; ONI Review shows four, p. 57.

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scored a hit.[1] Ensign Frederick T. Weber was having more than his share of enemy fighters. On the morning flight, Weber had straggled and a Japanese float plane nearly shot him down. While in the squadron ready room, Weber confided to Best that he had learned his lesson on straggling. Nonetheless, the inexperienced pilot rolled into his dive over the HIRYU a bit late and as he plunged toward the carrier a Zero fishtailed from side to side firing at the Dauntless. Weber released his bomb but never came out of his dive.[2]

Although Shumway had ordered his squadron to attack the HIRYU two planes in the last section adhered to their original instructions and struck at the battleship. Whether they failed to receive Shumway's directive or whether they decided that the HIRYU was already fatally damaged is unknown. The two pilots aimed at the HARUNA and although they claimed a hit and a near miss,[3] the "charmed" battlewagon escaped with nothing worse than two non-damaging near misses.[4]

The planes of the ENTERPRISE, having completed their attack streaked for home. Two pilots never made it. Lieutenant (jg) Osborne B. Wiseman and Ensign John C. Butler had been with Leslie on the morning strike. Both were believed to have dropped their bombs on the

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[1] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, p. 5.

[2] Best Interview. His gunner, J. F. Murray, ACRM, observed Weber's dive and subsequent crash.

[3] Acting Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 5. The two pilots were Ensigns R. K. Campbell and R. H. Benson.

[4] ONI Review, p. 58.

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HIRYU, but pursuing Zeroes were able to shoot them down. Shumway had his own experiences with the enemy fighters. Three of them pursued him and, while he lost two in the clouds, the third fighter continued to fire into his slower Dauntless. The plane was hit in the right main tank, as well as the elevator, landing and dive flaps on the same side, and in the baggage compartment. Gunner R. E. Coons, ARM 1/c, was wounded by the exploding fire.[1] Both Ensign Bunyan R. Cooner and his gunner, C. R. Bassett, AOM 2/c experienced the same problems of attack, the Zero destroying the plane's radio transmitter and wounding both men. Two more planes from VB-3 were damaged by fighters. Except for Wiseman and Butler all planes of VB-3 returned to the carrier shortly after 1800.

Gallaher's planes had no difficulty in reaching the carrier, but the squadron commander was in agony by the time he was ready to enter the landing pattern. His last minute decision to "throw" his bomb at the HIRYU had injured his back. His wingman landed with the other planes, but Gallaher circled over the carrier trying to bend enough to reach the handle that would lower his tailhook. Realizing that should he land in the water he would be unable to get out, Gallaher made himself reach for the lever.[2] His approach to the carrier was poor, but he caught the wire coming aboard. Dr. Hightower, the flight surgeon saw him taxiing up the deck. So concerned was the medical officer with the lack of color in Gallaher's face that he raced to the plane. Before the

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[1] Acting Bombing Squadron Three Action Report, p. 5.

[2] Gallaher Interview.

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pilot had cut the engine, the doctor and a corpsman were on the wing. The injury was sufficiently serious that Gallaher had to be lifted from the plane and removed temporarily from flight status.

Lieutenant Best headed south as he left the HIRYU, passing close to the three columns of smoke before turning east. His circuitous route brought him back so late the combat air patrol thought he was an enemy plane. His approach to the ENTERPRISE was from the starboard beam. Contrary to all established procedures, Best made a left hand turn and a right hand approach to the carrier. Like the professional he so completely demonstrated he was, Best brought his Dauntless up the groove, keeping an alert eye on the paddles held by Lieutenant Robbin Lindsey. Then came the cut and Best caught number one wire, safely aboard, his 330th and last carrier landing.[1]

The HORNET had been directed to launch her divebombers at the same time as the ENTERPRISE. Although a bit slower, sixteen planes, half armed with 1000-pound bombs and the remainder with 500-pound

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[1] Best Interview. During the morning attack Best, like the others, had used his oxygen at high altitude. The first few sniffs were caustic soda fumes from an improperly functioning bottle. Although his oxygen system worked correctly thereafter, damage had been done to his lungs. He flew the attack on the HIRYU but next morning he was a sick man coughing blood. He was placed in isolation by the flight surgeon who suspected a latent case of TB. On returning to Pearl, Best was transferred to the mainland and eventually to Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver, Colorado. Two years later he was retired from the Navy for TB. Best won his battle with the disease and is today as healthy as anyone his age. For the Navy the loss of Dick Best was a great one for his type of leadership was of a caliber that is always in great demand. As Commander George H. Goldsmith recalled, "He had all the classic traits that have been enumerated when leadership qualities are listed. Of all the C. O.'s that I have had, I remember Dick Best as my #1."

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bombs, left the carrier at 1612. When the seven planes of VB-8 and eight of VS-8, one had returned to the HORNET because of engine trouble sighted the HIRYU at 1712, she was burning throughout her entire length.[1] Since she was no longer a profitable target, the planes dived on the heavy cruiser TONE. Miraculously, the bombs hit just ahead and astern of the warship, the closest being fifty meters.[2] The HORNET planes were in their dive when Flying Fortresses, some of which were from Midway, attacked the same ship. Their bombs, dropped from high altitude, sped past the pilots of the carrier divebombers just as they pushed over in their dive.[3] It was the first they knew of the presence of the big planes. Right behind the first group of Flying Fortresses came six more under Major G. A. Blakey. These had been enroute from Molokai to Midway when they were diverted to attack the Mobile Force. There was no coordination between the units. The first group of four-engined planes had attacked from 20,000 feet and the second from 3600. Neither force was successful in striking a Japanese ship. The HORNET group returned to the ship without loss by 1859. The Fortresses continued on to Midway where they landed just before dark, claiming a hit on the enemy.

The daylight air attacks of 4 June were over and only a single night strike remained. Soon after the attacks on the HIRYU, a PBY reported that the three burning carriers were screened by two cruisers (actually

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[1] War Diary, Bombing Squadron Eight, June 1942.

[2] ONI Review, p. 59.

[3] Stebbins Interview.

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two destroyers) and four destroyers, all of which were undamaged.[1] Captain Simard called for his most ready force, the battered pilots and planes of VMSB-241. The destruction from the morning attack was all too fresh in the mind of Major Benjamin W. Norris. Asked for his recommendation, the acting squadron commander suggested a night attack. At 1905, Norris with six SB2U's and Captain Marshall A. Tyler with five SBD's, took off from Midway.[2] The early evening hours before the moon came up were pitch black and rain squalls added to restricting the visibility. By the time the Marines reached the vicinity of the damaged carriers two of them, KAGA and SORYU, had sunk. Flames on the AKAGI and the farther away HIRYU were not bright enough for the airmen to see. Tyler turned his Dauntlesses about and arrived at Midway as scheduled. Norris' unit became separated and found Midway individually. Searchlights from the Sixth Marine Defense Battalion were lighted and oil fires on Sand Island flared to lead the pilots to the tiny island. Norris never made it and Captain Sumner H. Whitten nearly missed.

Whitten became separated from the others when at 2135 they reached the reported position of the Japanese and completed their initial search. He tried to climb above the overcast but found that his turn and bank indicator had jammed and his radio was inoperative. He tried the expanding square, without success, before heading toward Midway. His

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[1] War Diary, U. S. Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942. Time of report by flight IV58 was 1745.

[2] MAG-22 Report, p. 4.

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course of 152° took him over what he recognized as Pearl and Hermes reefs. A change to 260° for twenty-five minutes failed to find Midway. By now he was four minutes into his reserve tank, and heading back toward the two reefs. Suddenly, his gunner shouted he could see lights astern of them.[1] At 0145 the thoroughly frightened aviator returned to Eastern Island with less then thirty minutes fuel remaining.[2]

Midway used its one remaining force to attack the carriers. At 1920, nine motor torpedo boats cut across the lagoon and through the channel in the reef. Ahead of them stood 180 miles of open seas. On passing abeam of Kure Island, two more boats joined the force.[3] The speedy PT boats were no more successful in finding the enemy in the dark than were the Marine pilots. With the coming of daylight Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron One commenced its return to Midway.[4]

As darkness fell over the calm waters of the Central Pacific, decisive events on this memorable day in both American and Japanese history came to an end. There were a number of hours remaining in the day, but these were for the leaders to use in evaluating the events that had taken place and to plan for the tomorrow. It had been the day of the airplane and of the brave and determined men who manned them. They had fought with all they had and they had paid dearly for what they

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[1] Statement of Capt S. H. Whitten, USMC, dated 7 June 1942.

[2] MAG-22 Report, p. 4.

[3] War Diary, U. S. Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942.

[4] Commander, Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron One Action Report, Battle of Midway, Serial 003 of 9 June 1942, p. 2.

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had won. On the American side the results were well worth the sacrifices for all four of Japan's mighty carriers had been struck from the roster of enemy warships. The airmen, up since 0300, could rest in the comfort of a performance, if not precisely executed, at least thoroughly carried out. They had been there to destroy the carriers and this they had emphatically accomplished.

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CHAPTER XI

A GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

The damage to the carriers, caused by the afternoon air attacks, affected the plans of action on both sides. In the early afternoon Admiral Yamamoto had been pessimistic over the situation confronting the Mobile Force. Although he had directed Admiral Kondo to send his four fast heavy cruisers with escorting destroyers to bombard the island, he had turned the transports away from their course toward the objective island. When he received information from Commander Carrier Division Two that two of the enemy carriers had been damaged, the balance of power seemed once more to shift to the side of Japan. A CHIKUMA search plane radioed at 1733 that it could see the enemy force and that it was withdrawing eastward.[1] Since only 100 miles separated the battleships and cruisers of the Mobile Force from the enemy, the chance for a night naval battle seemed extremely promising.

All thoughts of occupying Midway were dashed when Admiral Nagumo fired a message saying "HIRYU hit by bombs and set afire, 1730."[2] The message reached the flag operations office in the pagoda mast of the YAMATO at 1755. Like the earlier message reporting damage to the

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[1] ONI Review, p. 33. The CHIKUMA plane sent this important message but at 1810 the combat air patrol of the ENTERPRISE destroyed the snooping seaplane (War Diary, USS ENTERPRISE, June 1942).

[2] Commander Mobile Force message #147 to Combined Fleet, Second Fleet and Commander Carrier Division Four (RYUJO and JUNYO).

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AKAGI, KAGA and SORYU, the announcement shocked the staff and deepened the gloom. For a while it looked like the day might yet be won, but when the disastrous news on the HIRYU became known, all realized that the situation was lost.[1] Or was it? The possibility of a night battle kept coming up. The Japanese favored fighting at night for they were good at it and they knew they were. The carriers of the Mobile Force might be out of action, but not the big guns of the ships under Admirals Yamamoto, Nagumo and Kondo, all of which were converging to become a single entity. Their broadsides could destroy any ship in the American force. Perhaps the enemy, tasting the fruits of victory, might grow careless and head west during the night. If so, the surface power of the HARUNA and KIRISHIMA, as well as the other ships, would be there to destroy them.

At 1915, less than an hour after sunset, the Commander-in-Chief of Combined Fleet sent the following message as his secret dispatch order #158:

> "1. The enemy fleet, which has practically been destroyed, is retiring to the east.
> 2. Combined Fleet units in the vicinity are preparing to pursue the remnants and at the same time to occupy AF (Midway).
> 3. The Main Body is scheduled to reach position 32°08'N, 175°45'E at 0300 on the 5th. Course 090°; speed 20 knots.
> 4. The Mobile Force, Invasion Force (less CruDiv 7) and Advance Force will attack the enemy."[2]

At first glance the message appears as a meaningless attempt to bolster

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 213.

[2] ONI Review, p. 35.

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the collapsing morale of the Japanese. Surely, it could hardly be stated that the American fleet was practically destroyed for at that time only two carriers had been damaged, at least that is what Admiral Yamaguchi reported to Combined Fleet. Throughout the afternoon scouting planes from the battleships and cruisers had been active in reporting on the U. S. carrier forces.[1] This was especially the case of the CHIKUMA's plane #2. At 1819, the pilot reported sighting an additional carrier and a few minutes later announced that he could see three cruisers that he placed 105 miles from his take off point.

The CHIKUMA plane had no sooner radioed that low fuel necessitated his breaking off contact than the CHIKUMA sent a blinker message to Commander Cruiser Division Eight stating that the plane had sighted four carriers, six cruisers and fifteen destroyers as well as a listing carrier. Why this completely inaccurate report remains a mystery. Perhaps transmission difficulties allowed for the figure of five carriers whereas only three had been sighted. The scout had apparently been doing a good job of analyzing and reporting the enemy force until this message. The degree of credibility given to the report is also unknown, but from subsequent actions by Admiral Nagumo he may well have placed a degree of reliance in this report of five carriers. Admiral Yamamoto was evidently not aware of this message as it was sent by flashing light within the Mobile Force rather than by radio. His decision, then, to

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[1] War Diary, Commander Cruiser Division Six (Commander Cruisers, Task Force 16) June 1942 (Special Section titled "Notes Taken During Action this Date, 4 June 1942"), p. 3. Also, CINCPAC Action Report, p. 15 which specifically mentions three snoopers during the late after-

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rendezvous his ships around the Mobile Force must be understood in his hopes of bringing on a night surface battle between the two sides. This was a logical decision for with the hours of darkness remaining he could explore the engagement possibility thoroughly. If he found his enemy, the odds would be heavily in his favor with his battleships and a greater number of destroyers. On the other hand, if he could not find his enemy by 0300, he had enough hours of darkness remaining to put sufficient distance between himself and the enemy to be relatively free from air attack in the morning. Two other items may have influenced Admiral Yamamoto's decision. Near the Mobile Force, and uncomfortably close to the U. S. force, four damaged Japanese carriers were still afloat. The presence of additional Japanese forces would insure their protection from the enemy and might facilitate placing them under tow. From earlier reports, Admiral Yamamoto believed that two American carriers had been damaged. These might be open to capture by the Japanese or at least sunk for certain.

Throughout the day, Combined Fleet had been keeping a careful plot on the submarines of the Advance Force. Among those operating near Midway was Lieutenant Commander Yahachi Tanabe's I-168. His submarine had been assigned to scout the area south of Midway. At 2030 Admiral Yamamoto ordered Tanabe to conduct harrassing and interdiction fires on Midway until 0200. That was the time when Admiral Kurita's Cruiser Division 7 was expected to complete its high speed run and relieve him. Tanabe moved his underwater craft to the south side of the island. Distance and caution kept him out of position until 0130

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when he surfaced and opened fire with his four-inch deck guns. Six rounds sped toward the island but without control or observation they were ineffective.[1] Marines of the Sixth Defense Battalion kindled searchlights and had their guns firing within minutes. Too hot for survival, Tanabe crash dived the I-168 as three rounds bracketted the submarine.[2] Midway had sustained her last hostile fire of the battle. Tanabe's submarine, however, was far from finished. With the coming of daylight he received his second direct assignment from the Commander of Combined Fleet. The new directive ordered him to move north northeast of Midway and locate and sink any damaged enemy ships, particularly carriers.

The plans for a night battle stemmed partially from Japanese hopes of saving their four damaged carriers. Any plans for recovering the SORYU were dashed when the destroyer HAMAKAZE radioed that the "Blue Dragon" had sunk.[3] Almost simultaneously, a message informed the Commander that the KAGA had also slipped beneath the waves.

Periodic reports on the AKAGI indicated that there appeared to be some prospects of saving the carrier. Men who went aboard the ship found fires on the flight and hangar decks dying down. Their efforts to reach the engineering spaces were, however, without success. When the engineering officer reported that there were no hopes that the carrier could operate under her own power, Captain Aoki decided to have

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[1] War Diary, Sixth Fleet, Midway Operations, WDC 160268.

[2] Tuleja, Climax At Midway, p. 190.

[3] ONI Review, p. 35.

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all hands abandon ship. At the same time, 1920, he asked permission to scuttle the carrier by having a destroyer torpedo her. Before receiving a reply Aoki ordered the men still aboard the AKAGI to the destroyers ARASHI and NOWAKE. Ultimately, 500 men boarded the former, while the NOWAKE provided a temporary home for 200 more.[1] The request of the captain of the flagship to scuttle the carrier required the personal approval of Admiral Yamamoto. Since the possibility of capture was remote, at least as long as Admiral Nagumo was in the area and Admiral Kondo heading for it, Admiral Yamamoto ordered the destruction of the famed AKAGI held in abeyance. The carrier had a special place in Japanese naval circles for she was the largest flattop afloat. More important, her name was directly associated with Japan's early victories during first phase operations.

Throughout the early evening hours, Admiral Yamamoto received a variety of conflicting reports concerning both his own forces and those of the enemy. For a short period of time it appeared that damage to the HIRYU was not severe and that, while lacking planes to fight, she might make it back to Japan. From the guarding destroyer MAKIGUMO, Captain Fujita could message as late as 2100, that the carrier was able to attain twenty-eight knots. Later the destroyer YUGUMO, aided by the CHIKUMA, moved in to fight the fires on the HIRYU.[2] Hoses were passed to the carrier and it seemed as if the fires could be contained.

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[1] Interrogation of Lt Takashi Morioshi, Executive Officer, ARASHI, during War Crimes investigation at Fukuoka, Japan, 15 October 1947.

[2] ONI Review, p. 37.

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Shortly before midnight, however, a series of explosions spread flames to almost every part of the ship. Communications were cut between the bridge and the engine room and the ship was no longer responsive to the helm. The time had arrived when the carrier must be left to the sea.

The crew of the HIRYU was summoned to the area near the island structure. Commander Takashi Kanoe, the executive officer, received the muster report as flames gave an eerie illumination to the scene. Then Captain Kaku stood on a can of hard tack and addressed the men who had served him so faithfully. He concluded his remarks with "You have fought well. I appreciate it very much. I regret very much that the situation is as such, but we must fight a long war. I hope you survive and build a strong navy with this battle as a lesson."[1] The popular and revered Admiral Yamaguchi followed Kaku to the stand. His talk was brief, saying that "I have nothing more to add to what the captain has said. Let's bow in the direction of Japan and give three cheers for his Majesty." The crew responded with three cheers of "Long Live His Majesty" after which they lowered the battle ensign to the solemn notes of the only surviving trumpeter. Then they transferred the Emperor's portrait to the MAKIGUMO as exhausted men watched with bare heads bowed.

Departure from the carrier was orderly and not without sadness. To some the carrier had been their only home in the Navy. Others had been aboard the HIRYU since she first hoisted her commissioning pennant. Officers moved toward the Admiral and Captain asking them to

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 287. The scenes on the HIRYU's flight deck during the carrier's final hours are taken from this popular biography.

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let them assist their departing the carrier. Both replied that they were to remain aboard. Chief Paymaster Masahoru Asakawa requested the Captain's permission to return below to recover a considerable sum of money in the safe. Kaku, realizing the risk in entering the darkened passages, told him to "Leave it there. We need some money for the ferryman of the Styx."[1] As Admiral Yamaguchi started to climb to the bridge his flag lieutenant, Seiroku Ito, asked for a keepsake. The Admiral turned and tossed Ito his cap. Today it is a memento that Yamaguchi's wife Takako still keeps.

At 0510 on 5 June the destroyer MAKIGUMO moved in close to the listing carrier and torpedoed her. Long before the powerful oxygen propelled torpedoes slammed into the blackened steel hull of the HIRYU, Admiral Yamamoto had issued new orders destined to change the Midway operations. Dividers and parallel rulers ticked off positions on the charts showing the American and Japanese forces with relation to the island of Midway. The worsening tactical situation was apparent to everyone in the operations room, even to the lowliest orderly.[2] Admiral Kurita's heavy cruisers could never make it to Midway and return without risking daylight attacks from the planes stationed on the island. Even should he destroy these during his bombardment, more were likely to appear from Hawaii and from the undamaged American carriers. Daylight would catch the cruisers without their own air cover. By 0200 the same situation applied to both Admiral Kondo's ships and those of the Mobile Force.

[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 287.

[2] "Yamamoto's Yeoman's Story." This unpublished account is contained in the Historical Files, Office of Naval History in translated form.

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If they remained around the damaged AKAGI and HIRYU they were sure to be attacked the next morning and this time there would be no Zeroes to defend them. Despite earlier optimism no American units had been located during the first hours of darkness. If the Japanese did not now turn around, the enemy carrier aircraft would catch them with the coming of dawn.[1] Every Japanese was keenly aware of what the results had been to the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE when they had been caught under similar circumstances.

Reluctantly, Admiral Yamamoto released the message, Combined Fleet Dispatch Operation Order #161, that cancelled the occupation of Midway and directed ships to move northwest in preparation for refueling the following day.[2] The time was 0255, less than twenty-four hours after the Mobile Force had launched its planes to attack Midway. Two hours later he approved Aoki's request for torpedoing the AKAGI. Commander Magotaro Koga, captain of NOWAKE moved the destroyers of his division in close to the AKAGI. The four destroyers loosed their new Type-93 torpedoes at the Japanese carrier and seven minutes later, the mighty flagship, the pride of the carrier force, the ship whose planes had carried the devastation of war from Pearl Harbor to Trincomalee, slipped beneath the seas. Koga stood on the open bridge of his ship watching the

[1] Watanabe Interview. Ugaki had temporarily taken over the role of planning. Yamamoto apparently remained nearby on the bridge.

[2] Operation Order #161: "1. Occupation of AF (Midway) is cancelled. 2. The Main Unit will assemble the Occupation Force and the First Mobile Force (less the HIRYU and her escorts), and will carry out refueling operations during the morning of 7 June in position 33N, 170E. 3. The Screening Force, HIRYU and her escorts, and the NISSHIN will proceed to the above position. 4. The Landing Force will proceed westward, out of Midway's air range."

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carrier settle. His torpedoes were the first he ever ordered fired at a warship.[1] Regretfully, that target flew the same flag as the ship he commanded. The early streaks of coming daylight could just be discerned in the east when the AKAGI, still carrying 263 of her crew, gave an emphatic rumble as she headed toward a final resting place near the KAGA and SORYU.

The conflicting reports that filtered into the YAMATO made a sound decision extremely difficult for Admiral Yamamoto. The same thing was happening to his adversary, Admiral Fletcher, the American officer in tactical command. With the loss of the YORKTOWN as an operational carrier, Fletcher became a commander without the means of carrying out his tactics. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that his response to Admiral Spruance's message "Have you any instructions for future operations?" was "Negative, will conform to your movements."[2] Spruance had the planes and the staff to run the show. Fletcher wisely saw that there was no point in superimposing another command above that possessing the means to carry on the fight.

The situation confronting Admiral Spruance at dark on 4 June was as vexatious as that of his adversary. He had two good carriers whose air groups, despite augmentation from the YORKTOWN, were below normal strength. For the present, though, his planes were worthless in the dark that surrounded him. Returning flyers and his own intelligence reports told him that the Japanese in the Mobile Force had battleships

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 288.

[2] War Diary, Commander Cruisers, Task Force 17, June 1942.

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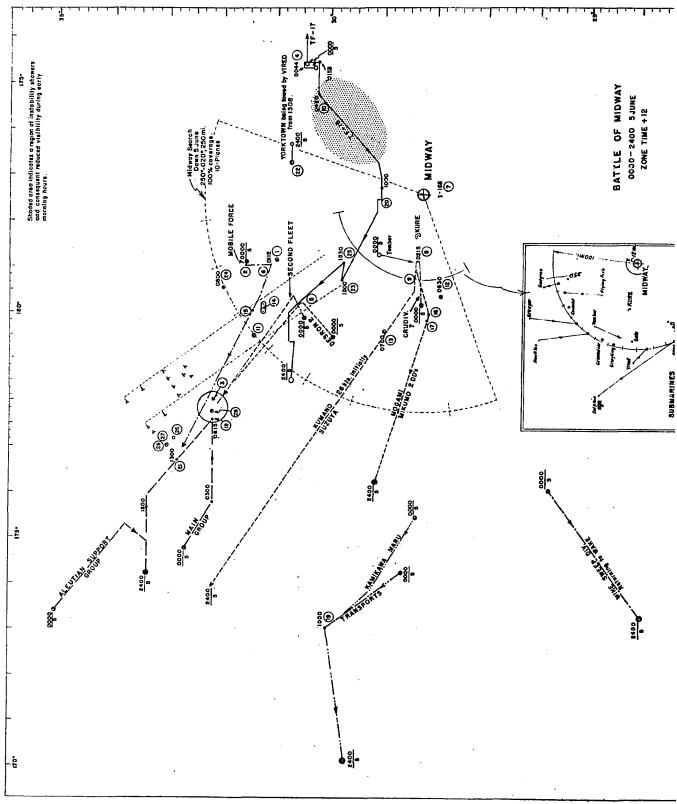

EVENTS OF 5 JUNE

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and powerful cruisers. Equally important, Spruance was aware of and a respector of Japanese night tactics, especially the ability of their destroyers to maneuver at high speed and move in close for torpedo attacks.[1] His own force was hastily organized and ill-trained in combined, coordinated night surface tactics. Despite having the advantage of radar, that indispensible electronic development that Japanese ships would not have installed for another three months, Admiral Spruance wanted nothing more than to avoid a night attack. His ships were thin-skinned and no match for the fourteen inch guns of the HARUNA and KIRISHIMA. He had to be sure, then, that his ships would not run into the Japanese during the night. The easiest thing to do would be to turn tail and head east, away from the enemy but two things prevented such a decision. The American Admiral wanted his ships in a position at daylight that would allow him to take tactical advantage of the planes he had aboard the ENTERPRISE and the HORNET.[2] A position within 200 miles range was necessary, but a shorter distance was preferred. His second item of concern was the protection of Midway. He wanted his force within a supporting distance of the island. If the Japanese should pursue their plans of occupation, it was essential to employ all American aircraft that could be brought to the area. They would be needed to stop the amphibious landing and destroy the transports and supply vessels supporting them.

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[1] Spruance Interview. Spruance acknowledged that the Japanese held a decided edge on U. S. forces in the ability to attack under darkness.

[2] Task Force 16 Action Report, p. 3. Also, a personal letter from Commander Task Force 16 to CINCPAC dated 13 June 1942.

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One other factor complicated the decision making process of Admiral Spruance. The YORKTOWN was still afloat, an abandoned hulk, but ultimately of great value to whichever side possessed her. Her list had steadied at about twenty-four degrees and she seemed to be maintaining a steady trim.[1] Admiral Fletcher partially settled the status of the carrier by ordering the HUGHES to ". . . Standby YORKTOWN. Do not permit anyone to board her. Sink her if necessary to prevent capture, or if serious fires develop."[2] By 1900 the destroyer was circling the carrier.

Since he considered that any movement to the west might run into an ambush during the night, Admiral Spruance decided to continue on his eastward heading. Already a new matter was influencing his tactical dispositions, the state of fuel in his destroyers. Their small storage capacity and the high consumption during fast carrier movements and antiaircraft defense maneuvers, demanded economical steaming during the night and an early underway replenishment. Soon after the HUGHES joined the YORKTOWN, Task Force 16 set speed fifteen on course 090°. The commander of Task Force 17 followed on a parallel course that placed him slightly behind and north of the larger task force.

The decision of Admiral Spruance to retire to the eastward has been the subject of continued discussions. In the light of post war evidence,

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[1] CO, USS HUGHES report to CINCPAC on operations in connection with the USS YORKTOWN from time of abandonment until sinking, dated 11 June 1942. Hereinafter referred to as HUGHES Action Report.

[2] Naval War College Analysis on Battle of Midway, p. 126.

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it has been enthusiastically supported as being correct. By midnight the two American task forces were 190 miles from Midway on a bearing of 050°. At this time Task Force 16 turned due north while Admiral Fletcher, his ships heavily loaded with YORKTOWN survivors, continued eastward. Spruance planned to steam north for an hour and then head west so as to arrive at a daylight position from which he could either defend Midway, or attack the Mobile Force.[1]

The force was hardly on its northern heading when radar picked up a contact on a bearing of 322° at a distance of 28,000 yards.[2] This was the most logical area for the Japanese to make their approach and the distance between the two forces was well within the range of the main batteries of the Japanese cruisers and battleships. Admiral Spruance did not wait to find out the cause of the contact. He turned to his original course of 090° and dispatched the destroyer ELLET to investigate. The contact turned out to be false, but the unscheduled night movements of Task Force 16 were to have adverse effects on events during the coming day. The American ships steamed east for eighteen minutes before heading south for an hour. It was not until 0200 that Spruance pointed his bows to the west. At 0430 he rang up twenty-five knots and altered course to 230° to close on Midway and, hopefully, the Japanese.

The sudden change of Task Force 16's course from west to southwest stemmed from a report of the submarine TAMBOR. Her initial

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[1] Spruance Interview. Spruance was still concerned over the fate of the HIRYU and about the presence of a fifth carrier. Intelligence indicated that the Mobile Force would have either four or five carriers.

[2] War Diary, Commander Task Force 16, June 1942, p. 9.

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message was one announcing that many unidentified ships were ninety miles west of Midway.[1] Admiral Spruance interpreted this as the ships of the landing force making their approach to Midway.[2] His course change would bring Task Force 16 closer to the island and to the Japanese west of it.

Daylight brought no solution to the decisions facing Admiral Spruance. The weather was poor for long range searching and, the fewer number of aircraft on the carriers reduced the capability to scout and attack. While carrier planes were confined to the decks, patrol planes from Midway were busy scouting the area. Their reports soon reached Midway and flag plot on the ENTERPRISE. Both the TAMBOR and a PBY, piloted by Lieutenant (jg) Norman K. Brady of Patrol Squadron Twenty-three, reported at 0617 that two battleships were heading west, doing fifteen knots and 125 miles from Midway.[3] Half an hour later another flight, piloted by Lieutenant (jg) P. M. Fisler, reported two cruisers on a bearing of 274°, distance 174 miles from Midway and heading northwest at twenty knots. At 0719 still another PBY, flight 7V55, reported five ships bearing 325°, distance 200 miles from Midway, heading northwest at fifteen knots. The most interesting report came from patrol flight 6V55. Two reports, one at 0800 and another at 0820 reported two battleships, three heavy cruisers and destroyers screening a

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[1] War Diary, USS TAMBOR, June 1942.

[2] Task Force 16 Action Report, p. 4.

[3] War Diary, Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942.

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burning carrier. The ships were 240 miles from Midway on a bearing of 324° and turning over twelve knots while making their way to the northwest. A final patrol flight, 8V55, reported a carrier bearing 335° at a distance of 250 miles from Midway on a course of 246°.

Four profitable targets were suddenly available to Admiral Spruance who by now was ninety miles north-northeast of Midway.[1] The decision now facing the commander was which one to choose. Those to the west of the island were the closer; the more distant ones the most profitable for each contained a carrier. Completely understanding and appreciating the potential of the carrier, Spruance elected to pursue the more distant targets.[2] The brief reports from the patrol planes fitted his own knowledge of events. He assumed the burning carrier to be the HIRYU and he thought that the report of the other carrier might be the suspected fifth flattop that intelligence seemed to believe might be participating. Throughout the morning hours Task Force 16 bent on speed trying to overhaul the retreating Japanese. Unbeknown to Spruance, events had occurred during the night to the west of Midway that were ultimately to involve the aircraft of his two carriers and which at the moment bore directly on the first two reports he had received.

In the early afternoon of 4 June, Admiral Yamamoto had ordered a section of the Invasion Force to bombard the island of Midway. When he received the message, Rear Admiral Takeo Kurita's Cruiser Division

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[1] Task Force 16 Action Report, p. 4.

[2] Spruance Interview.

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7 was 400 miles from Midway.[1] Even at thirty knots the four big ships had a long run ahead of them. The ships selected for the difficult assignment were four of the largest and most heavily armed cruisers afloat - the KUMANO, SUZUYA, MIKUMA and MOGAMI. Each could do better than thirty-two knots and their ten barrels of eight-inch size made a total of forty guns capable of tearing apart beach defenses and other installations on the island. Antisubmarine protection was assigned to Destroyer Division Eight, the ARASHIO and ASASHIO.

The six ships broke off from the rest of the Invasion Force and started their high speed run. The game destroyers could not stand the prolonged pace, falling behind and finally dropping out of sight.[2] The four cruisers had been steaming at high speed for more than ten hours when at twenty minutes after midnight, Combined Fleet cancelled the mission.

The ill fortune that wrecked three carriers at almost the same moment continued to plague the Japanese. The message cancelling the shelling of Midway, and clearly intended for Cruiser Division 7 was erroneously addressed to Commander, Cruiser Division 8, Rear Admiral Abe in the TONE. The confusing messages, Dispatches #303 and #304

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[1] Nagasawa Interview. This officer was the Chief of Staff of Cruiser Division Five which was part of Admiral Kondo's Second Fleet. Nagasawa, although his cruiser division was not taking part, was well aware of the position of Admiral Kurita's four cruisers, the distance, and the time it would take them to reach Midway. Bound by radio silence, the Invasion Force had not furnished Combined Fleet with a current position report which would have shown them farther west of Midway than was believed by those on the YAMATO.

[2] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. 220.

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eventually reached the KUMANO, Admiral Kurita's flagship.[1] With the delay, it was not until 0200 that he ordered his ships turned to the northwest. By this time the four ships had closed to within ninety miles of the island. In less than three hours he would have been able to deliver his withering broadsides at Midway. The damage from the forty guns would have been frightful and all the more important if he could have caught the island's planes on the ground. B-17's, PBY's and the remaining Marine aircraft would have been easy targets for the heavy cruisers, but, as will be seen, this is just why Captain Simard launched his planes in pre-dawn darkness.[2] For Admiral Kurita to have continued would have entailed the risk of being attacked by American aircraft with the coming of dawn, but the damage that could have been inflicted on the island was a matter not to be dismissed lightly. Two years later Admiral Kurita would not hesitate to make such a risky attack. His bold dash through San Bernardino Straits in the Philippines and his attack, without air cover, on the escort carrier group of the Seventh Fleet would stand as WorldWar II's last major naval battle.[3] In 1942 the situation was not so desperate as in 1944 and Admiral Yamamoto wanted his four battle cruisers to be free to fight again. What he could not have foreseen at the time he cancelled the bombardment mission was that one cruiser would be lost and a second heavily damaged.

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[1] ONI Review, p. 41.

[2] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 7.

[3] Admiral Kurita's surprise attack on the escort carriers is vividly told by Wilfred P. Deac, "The Battle Off Samar," American Heritage, XVIII (December, 1966), 20.

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The four cruisers had scarcely turned away from their Midway bound course than the flagship KUMANO sighted a surfaced submarine. The submarine was the TAMBOR which had earlier detected the ships on an easterly course and had unaccountably failed to report this to either Midway or CINCPAC. Perhaps the submarine was fearful of disclosing its own position by transmitting the information. When Admiral Kurita learned of the lurking submarine, he ordered all ships to execute an emergency turn to port.[1] The SUZUYA received the signal and passed it on to the following MIKUMA. The three cruisers executed the turn but the MOGAMI which was last in line did not. The cruiser continued onward, her bow plunging into the port quarter of the MIKUMA with the tortuous sounds of grinding and twisting steel giving way reluctantly. The MOGAMI's twenty-eight knot speed at the time of the collision caused serious damage to herself and her sister ship. The MOGAMI lost her bow forward of her first turret, a factor that made it difficult to steer properly.[2] The watertight bulkheads that held back the seas that sought to rush through the tangled steel enabled the ship to float but her speed was reduced to less than twelve knots. In addition her ability to maneuver was seriously restricted. The MIKUMA's damage did not significantly affect her speed but the collision sliced a hole in one of the main fuel storage tanks on the port side. Black fuel oil poured out of the gaping wound, leaving a visible trail on the surface of the water.

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[1] USSBS No. 295, Interrogation of LCdr Nishikawa, Gunnery Officer on the MOGAMI.

[2] USSBS No. 46, Interrogation of Cdr H. Sekino, Communications Officer, Staff Sixth Cruiser Squadron.

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Admiral Kurita made a quick estimate of the situation. Two of his cruisers were unscathed as were the two destroyers which by this time had managed to catch up. Despite the serious damages to the MIKUMA and MOGAMI the prospects were good that the two could be patched up to fight again. To provide additional antisubmarine and antiaircraft protection, he directed the two destroyers to standby the stricken cruisers. Admiral Kurita moved off with the KUMANO and SUZUYA to rejoin the Main Body to the northwest. Captain Shakao Sakiyama, upon the departure of Admiral Kurita, became the tactical commander of the four ships and ordered them to proceed west at twelve knots.

It will be recalled that the destroyer HUGHES had been instructed to standby the abandoned YORKTOWN as darkness descended on 4 June. The destroyer spent a calm and uneventful night patrolling about the carrier. The coming daylight found a somewhat surprised destroyer crew as the men sighted machinegun bullets splashing along the port side of the carrier. The HUGHES moved in close and spotted a man waving frantically from the hangar deck. Lieutenant Commander Donald J. Ramsey, skipper of the HUGHES, stopped and lowered a motor whaleboat which returned with Seaman Second Class Norman M. Pichette, a gunner on one of the stern twenty millimeter mounts, who had been wounded during the initial attack by bomb fragments from a near miss. He had been taken to sick bay for treatment of the wounds in his abdomen.[1]

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[1] HUGHES Action Report, p. 1. Pichette was placed in the Captain's cabin next to the wardroom where, despite the efforts of the ship's doctor, he died that night.

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Overlooked when the carrier was abandoned and with no response to his calls Pichette made his way through the passages from sick bay to the hangar deck. On sighting the HUGHES, he had fired a machinegun to attract attention. Once aboard the destroyer, Pichette was examained by the ship's doctor who diagnosed the injury as critical. The spunky seaman told the doctor that a second wounded man was still in the YORKTOWN's sick bay. Once more the boat journeyed to the listing carrier where a search located George K. Weise, Seaman 1/c, who was suffering from a fractured skull as well as other injuries. Weise was delivered to the destroyer whereupon a third search was made of the flattop. Although no more survivors were located, the search party did return with several cryptographic devices as well as code books and other classified documents.

While the motor whaleboat was secured alongside the carrier, the HUGHES moved off to investigate repeated flashings seen in the distance. The mysterious objects turned out to be the aluminum paddles handled by Ensign Harry B. Gibbs whose VF-3 Wildcat had been shot down during the second attack on the YORKTOWN.[1] Gibbs had climbed into his damaged liferaft and by a combination of squeezing the leaking air compartment shut with his knees and frequently using the air pump, he had survived the night. Seeing the YORKTOWN afloat the next morning he started paddling kayak style toward the carrier he estimated to be six miles away. Gibbs saw the HUGHES long before the ship saw him. His

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[1] Ibid. Also, Gibbs Interview. The pilot was in his raft about twenty hours before rescue.

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yelling and waving, even attaching his scarf to a paddle, failed to attract the ship. He did find a sound but oil covered raft like his and switched to it. When the destroyer spotted him in mid-morning and moved alongside, Gibbs grabbed a line thrown from the forecastle. As he looked up he was staring into the barrel of a tommy-gun. The crew was taking no chances on the identification of the survivor. It was with relief that the pilot heard a YORKTOWN crewman call out "Don't shoot! That's Mr. Gibbs." A shower, food and a good stiff shot of medicinal brandy and Gibbs was sound asleep.

Ramsey had no sooner recovered his motor whaleboat than the fleet minesweeper VIREO hove into view. From his earlier boarding parties, the destroyer commander had learned that the YORKTOWN did not appear to be sinking and that the smoke spiralling from the ship came from a small fire confined to the bottom of the forward elevator shaft. After the two commanding officers discussed the situation and decided the carrier might be towed, Ramsey put a working party aboard the ship to assist in rigging the towline. The work was slow, in the absence of the regularly assigned crew, and it was not until 1436 that the VIREO had the carrier in tow.[1] Ramsey reported the status of affairs to his superiors and suggested that efforts be made to improve the stability of the carrier. In the meantime he put a jettison party aboard which worked steadily, until its withdrawl at 1930, in tossing loose gear over the side. From the U. S. point of view it was extremely unfortunate that some sort

[1] HUGHES Action Report, p. 2.

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of working crew was not sent aboard at first light on 5 June. As it was, only a token effort was made to improve the riding condition of the carrier. Late on 5 June plans were completed to put a selected salvage crew aboard the following day, but in the interim this valuable ship, so essential to the basic projection of American seapower, remained a helpless derelict. The responsibility of this indecision rests squarely with the Task Force Commander Frank Jack Fletcher. Throughout 4 June he had performed magnificently as the officer in tactical command. When the YORKTOWN was left behind, the alert mind of Admiral Fletcher seemed to have remained on the scene as well. Had prompt salvage efforts been instituted on 5 June, the ill fortune of the YORKTOWN on the following day might have been avoided.

Throughout the day the HUGHES guarded her valuable prize. Soon after the VIREO started towing, the destroyer GWIN arrived on the scene. She had left Pearl Harbor late with orders to join Task Force 16, but while enroute CINCPAC had directed her to the YORKTOWN. Later in the day the MONOGHAN arrived and joined the other two destroyers in providing antisubmarine protection.

Meanwhile on Midway the new day commenced with an atmosphere entirely different from that of the previous day. On 4 June all hands clearly understood the immensity of the Japanese effort. A day later it was equally apparent that, while the danger of landings might still prevail, the enemy had suffered a severe defeat in the loss or damage of his four carriers. Commander Ramsey, running the island's air operations, sought to repeat the night attack that the patrol planes had

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conducted against the Invasion Force. Slightly after midnight two patrol planes armed with torpedoes headed toward the suspected area of the transports.[1] Even with radar to guide them, the Catalina's were unable to find a target. When the submarine I-168 shelled the island, Ramsey thought it was a diversionary effort in support of the main landing. Not until early morning patrol planes reported the Japanese in retreat did Ramsey conclude that the amphibious operation was cancelled. He then considered that the submarine shelling was by a commander "who didn't get the word."[2]

The report from the TAMBOR, announcing that many unidentified ships were operating to the west of Midway, triggered a major reconnaissance effort by all patrol planes. The B-17's were also put into the air prior to dawn to insure that they were airborne during the most likely time of attack and to make them more responsive to attack targets when located. Initially the Flying Forts were directed to attack the force sighted by the TAMBOR but a small weather front passing through the area about 0615 obscured the ships. The big four-engined planes were told to return to an orbit position over Kure Island and await further developments.

Other planes were more successful in locating the Japanese ships. As previously noted, the 0630 report from a patrol plane announced that two battleships were only 125 miles west of Midway. A few minutes later the pilot amplified his initial message by stating that the two ships

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[1] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

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were damaged and that one was streaming oil. Here, within easy striking range, was a profitable target for the air arm of Midway. Ramsey called to the Air Operations Center on Eastern Island and asked Kimes what he had available. The not overly encouraging reply was six SBD's and a like number of the older SB2U's. The twelve planes were in the air by 0700 with each one carrying a 500-pound bomb.[1] Captain Marshall A. Tyler led the Dauntlesses which arrived over the two ships at 0800. Without enemy air opposition the approach was routine, their attack commencing with a dive from 10,000 feet. The Japanese aboard the ships were ready for the Marines with a heavy concentration of antiaircraft fire. All planes dropped their bombs and succeeded in returning to Midway except for one piloted by Captain Richard E. Fleming. Although the defensive fire from the ships was heavy, the only effect was to upset the aim of the pilots and prevent their bombs from being dropped on the intended target. Fleming, who had been on both hops the previous day, led the ancient Vindicators in a glide bombing run starting at 4000 feet. Japanese gunners, alert to the attack, concentrated their fire on the leader. Before he reached the bomb release point the fabric covered plane was in flames. Aware that his end was at hand, Fleming held the plane in a steady glide toward the MIKUMA. With a sickening thud the plane hit the after turret of the cruiser. Apparently Fleming had already released his bomb, but the flames from his wrecked aircraft started fires and further reduced the damaged ship's speed.[2] The following planes, all

[1] MAG-22 Report, p. 4.

[2] USSBS No. 295, Interrogation of Cdr Otamichi Shibata, navigator of the SUZUYA.

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Vindicators, were no more successful in bombing the MIKUMA than their leader had been, the nearest hit being about 200 meters astern.

The Marines were hardly out of sight of the Japanese ships than the eight B-17's, which had earlier left their orbit over Kure Island, arrived on the scene and commenced their familiar high altitude pattern bombing. The planes which were divided into four plane elements dropped thirty-nine bombs each weighing 500-pounds. Despite their damaged condition and restricted maneuverability, the Japanese warships evaded all bombs. The flight leader, however, claimed one hit, two probable hits and seven near misses.[1]

On Midway the absence of Japanese air and surface attacks did not allow the defenders to relax. Marines from the Raiders joined in helping to ready the aircraft for further attacks. It will be recalled that Eastern's main fuel system had been damaged by bombs during the air attack. The only remaining way to fuel the planes was from fifty-five gallon drums and hand pumps. During the night of 4/5 June Marines assisted in pumping 45,000 gallons into the fuel-hungry planes. It was a formidable task. Ramsey had learned nothing new from the returning B-17's, the patrol planes still on surveillance flights or from the task force. Not wishing to delay longer, he launched seven B-17's to attack the burning carrier and to insure positive identification, a naval observer was assigned to the flight.

The naval officer in the lead B-17 was none other than Ensign Troy

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[1]Hq, Seventh Air Force letter of 17 July 1942 on Operational Report on Air Force Employment at Midway, p. 31.

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Guillory from the HORNET.[1] It will be recalled that the naval pilot had ditched short of Midway when his Dauntless ran out of fuel. The PBY which made the rescue deposited him on Sand Island where Guillory found a foxhole and curled up for some overdue sleep. About 0200 Captain Simard's orderly awoke the pilot and led him to the island command center. Simard said that it was essential to assist the Army fliers in identifying any ships they might spot. Guillory made the trip by boat to Eastern where he reported to Captain Riding in the lead airplane. The planes flew out 400 miles without seeing a Japanese ship. On their way home they spied a lone destroyer, which they mistook for a cruiser, and attacked it at 1635. The bombing run from 16,000 feet enabled the TANIKAZE to evade all fifty-six 500-pound bombs.[2]

Two hours after departure of the seven B-17's five more took off. This group also failed to find the burning carrier or her escorting warships although they did discover the TANIKAZE. It was nearly dark when they commenced their attack from 11,000 feet. The waning light made it impossible to observe the results, but from post-war analysis it is known that all bombs missed the maneuvering destroyer. The B-17's were in for trouble as only three managed to return to Midway. One ran out of gas and landed at sea so near to Midway that all but one of its crew was rescued the following day. The other B-17 made the horrible mistake of dropping its bombbay tanks on the TANIKAZE, either with or in

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[1] Guillory letter of 14 May 1967.

[2] ONI Review, pp. 55-61

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place of its bombs.[1] The plane, flight 5V93, was never heard of again.

The center of all the afternoon attention was a destroyer that had earlier in the day been sent back to investigate an unusual report. Just before daylight the destroyer MAKIGUMO fired a spread of torpedoes into the abandoned HIRYU. The carrier started to settle as ships of the Mobile Force circled nearby. This is probably the sight seen by PBY flight 6V55 and reported at 0800 and this may have been the Catalina detected by the Mobile Force at this time. Fearing a continuation of the daylight attacks of the previous day, and seeing the HIRYU starting her final plunge, the Mobile Force set off to join the Main Body. A short time after departure of the Mobile Force a plane from the light carrier HOSHO spotted the HIRYU smoking and still afloat and reported her presence. Admiral Yamamoto, learning that his one remaining carrier was still afloat when he thought that it had been scuttled, querried his Mobile Force Commander: "Has the HIRYU sunk? Advise of developments and position."[2] As Admiral Nagumo was uncertain of the fate of his last remaining carrier, he sent a plane from the NAGARA and the destroyer TANIKAZE to investigate the report of the HOSHO aircraft. By the time they reached the scene the carrier had slipped beneath the surface. Thus, it was the TANIKAZE, left behind and seeking to catch up with the Main Body, that provided the afternoon target.

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[1] War Diary, Naval Air Station Midway, June 1942, p. 9. Also, CINCPAC Action Report, p. 19.

[2] ONI Review, p. 41. This is Combined Fleet Secret Message #310.

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Task Force 16, with only a twelve plane combat air patrol aloft, continued to steam steadily west during the morning. Shortly before 1100 a cruiser scout plane spotted a PBY down on the water and the destroyer MONOGHAN was directed to rescue the personnel. The aircraft crew was taken aboard but it was not until the destroyer had left the plane behind that it was discovered that the highly classified bombsight had been inadvertently left aboard. The MONAGHAN had no choice but to turn about and make a second approach on the seaplane. Since the MONAGHAN had dropped behind the task force, Admiral Spruance ordered Lieutenant Commander William P. Burford to take his destroyer back to the vicinity of the YORKTOWN and operate under the control of the senior officer present.[1]

In the afternoon the weather cleared slightly and Admiral Spruance had to decide where to make his attack. Although there were two good targets available, the Commander elected to combine all his air strength in a single attack on the reported burning carrier. While no new reports were received during the afternoon, B-17's could be seen overhead as they flew from Midway toward the target. With daylight hours rapidly running out, Spruance decided to make a major strike on the largest reported concentration of Japanese forces, that to the northwest and supposedly containing the burning carrier.

The staff had been busily plotting the distance between the carriers

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[1] War Diary, Commander Task Force 16, June 1942, p. 10. The small quantity of fuel remaining on the destroyer was a contributing factor in detaching her.

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and the suspected location of the Japanese. They knew that the flight would be near the maximum range of the Dauntlesses. Nevertheless, the instructions issued ordered that the planes be armed with 1000-pound bombs. Although grounded by his wound, McClusky was keenly interested in the air group he commanded and the demands levied upon it. He had made his own computations on the proposed flight and concluded that the planes would have to fly 270 miles. The search of the previous day was still fresh in his mind, particularly the inaccurate information provided to him and the loss of pilots, whose planes had run out of fuel, because faulty intelligence had caused extensive searching. After checking with Shumway and Short to verify his calculation, he climbed the three decks to flag plot and presented his case to Chief of Staff Browning. He asked for an hour delay in launching and that the planes carry only a 500-pound bomb.[1] The delay would allow the task force to close the distance and the lighter bomb insured a lower consumption of fuel. Browning refused. McClusky persisted in his effort by asking if the Chief of Staff had ever flown an SBD. When Browning said that he had, McClusky then inquired if it had been with a 1000-pound bomb. Browning said he had not. Although a brilliant man, the Chief of Staff was equally stubborn, the result being a refusal to alter either the time of launch or the load.

From the side of the small room, Admiral Spruance had been outwardly busy checking the plots of his staff. At the same time he was quietly listening and observing the discussion which, by this time, had

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[1] McClusky Interview.

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become quite heated. He was in a different and very difficult position as a surface officer running an air war. Browning was his primary assistant, his right hand, and a man with years of experience in almost every phase of aviation. On the other hand, the stocky, red-faced McClusky had presented a sound argument with reasoning that even a surface, "black shoe," officer could understand with abundant clarity. Spruance stepped up to the chart covered table in the center of the room and, without a word to Browning or anyone else on his staff, said to McClusky, "I'll do whatever the pilots want." The planes took off with the lighter bombs an hour later. The tempermental Browning, startled that his chief should have failed to support him, left the headquarters cabin in a huff, and headed to his room located immediately below. There the pouting Chief of Staff remained until Julian Brown, the Marine officer and close friend of Browning, finally went to the naval officer's cabin and persuaded him to resume his duties.[1]

While the spirited discussion had been going on aboard the ENTERPRISE, Commander Apollo Soucek, air officer on the HORNET, was having an equally busy time. He had been bitterly disappointed in his carrier air group's performance the previous day. Waldron had led his men well, but the employment of the divebombers was another story. Few officers of his rank and experience were more esteemed than "Sockem" Soucek. He was a rugged individual with high cheekbones

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[1] Brown Interview. During the interview Brown evaluated the Chief of Staff as "a brilliant officer with a great command of the English language and how to use it. But he was a very difficult person. Tempermental. Halsey was the only one who could handle him."

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separated by a broad nose flattened by the many brawls and scrapes he had jumped into since old enough to walk. Soucek wasn't all brawn though. In the late 1920's, Soucek, assisted by his naval officer brother Zeus, had been one of the pioneers in high altitude research, the results of which enabled the Bureau of Aeronautics to standardize experimental devices and insure their being on planes just like those whose readying he was supervising. His altitude record breaking flight to 43,160 feet in "Apache" was one that stood for two years.[1] By the time that Soucek came aboard the HORNET he had an enviable reputation. As one contemporary declared in all seriousness, "he was a man who could walk on water."[2] Under his dynamic leadership, the HORNET was ready to launch before her sister carrier.

The sun was already well past its zenith when Commander Ring turned up his Dauntless for take off. The carrier, unlike the previous day, steamed steadily on course as the wind held from out of the northwest. Ten more SBD's armed with 500-pound bombs followed Ring as he left the carrier at 1530 and started climbing to 18,000 feet. The planes were from Bombing Eight. Flying wing on the air group commander was Ensign Benjamin Tappan. An hour away from their carrier, the Dauntlesses passed under the five B-17's returning from striking the TANIKAZE.[3] Ring sighted the destroyer at 1715 but his target

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[1] Lieutenant Moriece Gleason, USN, "How Soucek Broke the Record," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXIV (April, 1958), 38.

[2] Best Interview.

[3] War Diary, Bombing Squadron Eight, June 1942.

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was supposedly to include two battleships, a carrier, two heavy cruisers and five destroyers. The planes droned on toward a setting sun that made observation difficult. When the aircraft reached a point 315 miles from their launch position and no other ships had been sighted there was no choice but to turn around. Once more they encountered the TANIKAZE.

Tappan sighted the destroyer and signalled her presence to the air group commander. Ring, for some unknown reason did not desire to attack the ship, but this did not prevent others from dropping their bombs. Nine planes dived and missed. The tenth, flown by Ben Tappan, broke away from Ring and rolled into a belated dive. It was 1810, an hour sufficiently late to emphasize the flash of each antiaircraft gun firing. Tappan was behind the others in his dive and caught the full impact of defensive fires. Part way down a round exploded near by with shrapnel striking the cowling and closing the air intake. Without air the engine died.[1] Tappan in the haste of diving had failed to switch his engine to low blower. After the engine quit, the propeller started to "windmill," causing a backfire that finally reopened the damaged air intake. On switching to low blower the engine once more responded to the throttle. The confusion in the dive upset Tappan's aim and his bomb dropped astern of the ship.

The planes rejoined after their dives and headed toward the HORNET. By the time they arrived, the darkness of night had set in completely.

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[1] Taped interview with Capt Benjamin Tappan, USN of 31 October 1966.

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The return also coincided with that of another group from the HORNET. Lieutenant Commander Rodee of VS-8 led nine planes from his squadron plus five from Johnson's Bombing Eight on a strike against the same target as had been assigned to Ring.[1] The decision not to send all the SBD's together was Soucek's. Fighters to be launched for combat air patrol and the planes under Ring filled the flight deck. To bring Rodee's planes from the hangar deck and launch them would have required the already airborne Ring group to circle the carrier. Since fuel was going to be precious enough without spending it flying circles around the carrier, Soucek sent them on their way.

The planes of Rodee's were even less successful than Ring's for they failed to spot the TANIKAZE either coming or going and the larger force eluded them as well. Furthermore, on the way back to the HORNET, five of the VB-8 planes became separated and located the carrier only with the greatest of difficulty. Rodee's group arrived over Task Force 16 at about the same time as Ring's and was nearly as low in remaining fuel.

The aircraft from the ENTERPRISE heading for the same initial targets as the HORNET's was a composite of four squadrons totalling thirty-two planes. Of the group, ten were VB-3, seven VS-6; six of

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[1] Rodee letter. Although the HORNET's action report states 500-pound bombs were carried, Rodee claims 1000-pounders were used. This failure to follow the 500-pound bomb instructions is one of the specific items that provoked Admiral Spruance relative to the HORNET's performance. He believed that they were forced to return earlier than might be reasonably expected because of high fuel consumption with the heavier load (Spruance interview). Rodee classified the strike as "futile" in his letter to the author.

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VB-6 and nine of VS-5.[1] All came under Lieutenant Wallace C. Short, the senior officer and skipper of VS-5. The planes of VS-5 had been on the 4 June afternoon search that located the HIRYU. On returning they found the YORKTOWN abandoned and as a result had landed on the ENTERPRISE. Short put sixteen Dauntlesses on a scouting line, hoping they would detect the Japanese, while the rest he held behind in an immediate attack position. The weather was not designed to assist the searchers as a heavy overcast prevailed about 13,000 feet and below it there was a thick haze. When Short failed to find his target by 1730 he called in his scouts and prepared to return to the carrier. At this time a radio report from Ring's group was intercepted. With no better target in prospect, Short led his planes toward the TANIKAZE which they sighted at 1750. The destroyer, increasing her speed to better than thirty knots, again evaded all bombs from the thirty-two planes. Her antiaircraft fire was heavy and the lateness of the day made it difficult for the pilots to see the target. Besides, she did not have the appeal of the carriers for her potential power was not as great. The attacks were not prosecuted with the same degree of resoluteness as those on Japan's four carriers.

Only one of the planes failed to leave the target area. This was the Dauntless flown by Lieutenant Adams of Scouting Five, the same one who had done such a superlative job of locating, reporting and tracking the

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[1] CO, VS-5 report of action 4-6 June 1942 to CO, USS ENTERPRISE, dated 7 June 1942, p. 2. Hereinafter referred to as Scouting Squadron Five Action Report.

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HIRYU the previous afternoon. Adams was hit in his dive and never pulled out. The loss was a great one for VS-5 for "Red" Adams had been active as the operations officer ever since the YORKTOWN joined the Pacific Fleet.

Radar on the flagship picked up the returning ENTERPRISE aircraft about the time the HORNET's planes were close enough to land. Once again Admiral Spruance was confronted with making an important decision. In a few minutes more than fifty planes, all of them low on gas, would be seeking the dimly lit decks of two aircraft carriers, big in comparison with a destroyer, but mere specks in daylight when seen upon the sea from above, and completely invisible at night. Landing on a blacked-out carrier was not new to the older pilots, but in the planes approaching Task Force 16, the preponderance of pilots were new ones fresh out of flight training. Many had never landed on a carrier at night and others had not even tried a simulated night carrier landing ashore. Furthermore, the planes aloft represented nearly the entire remaining striking power of the Pacific Fleet. Without them, the offensive power of Task Force 16 was nearly zero and would be until replacement aircraft and pilots could be obtained after returning to Pearl Harbor. These were some of the thoughts that raced through the mind of Spruance. His operations officer, the steady and reliable Buracker, reiterated the difficulty the pilots would have in coming aboard.

The solution was simple if it were not wartime. This was war, though, and any illumination, even a tiny opened port, could be seen for miles at sea. Admiral Spruance had to weigh the value of his returning

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pilots and aircraft against the even greater importance of preserving his carrier against possible submarine attack. The action required was not to be taken lightly for the risks were great. Regardless of this, the analysis was hastily made and the decision quick in coming. Throughout the force the word spread, "Light Up!"

Running lights were turned on and illumination along the carrier decks was brightened. Searchlights pointed their narrow beams into the blackened sky directly above the two carriers. The HORNET's group broke first with nearly all planes making their parent carrier. Some, fearing their fuel would not last moved over to the ENTERPRISE. Three Dauntlesses landed aboard the flagship and the fourth, piloted by Lieutenant Ray Davis, was in the groove when his engine sputtered to a stop.[1] Another 500 feet and he would have been safely aboard. Instead he pancaked his plane into the sea in the carrier's wake. He and his gunner were kept in the glare of the searchlight from the ever-present plane guard destroyer ALWYN until they were picked up ten minutes later.[2] Returning ENTERPRISE planes were even more successful, all

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[1] Dobson Interview. Dobson was with Lt. Robin Lindsey in the Landing Signal Officer's cage during the entire night recovery operation. When Lindsey figured he had more planes aboard than he had launched he directed Dobson to find out if they were all U. S.

[2] Letter from Capt Ray Davis, USN (Ret) to the author of 5 January 1967. Davis, who was the flight officer of VS-8, recalls that he was so close to landing on the carrier that he had to turn away when his engine stopped to keep from hitting the stern of the ENTERPRISE. With his wheels down the plane flipped onto its back as it touched the water. Homemade chest straps prevented injury, but Davis and his gunner, Radioman First Class Philips, took turns diving in search of the other. No life rafts were used.

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of them landing safely aboard although one found the HORNET rather than its own carrier.

The importance of the decision made by Admiral Spruance is difficult to assess with the passage of so many years. When viewed in the perspective of the period and of the very area in which it was made, a better appreciation can be obtained. The ships were not attacked by submarines and the planes and men did return. He had taken a risk and got away with it. He had methodically examined both sides of the issue and reached a decision on what was to be done. For a number of returning pilots the lighting of the ship was not the action of a cool, inhuman machine, but of a man vitally concerned with both the welfare of his men and their ability to perform their mission the following day. The events of that night were not lost on one other commander, the Captain of the HORNET. He had witnessed the morale of the returning pilots and was keenly aware of the impact that the lighting up had on them. Two years later as Commander of Task Force 58, operating under Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet, "Pete" Mitscher would give the same order to aid pilots returning from the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" and receive from them their everlasting respect and thanks.

The returning carrier pilots could shed no light on the status of the Japanese carrier that had been reported burning earlier in the day. Reconnaissance patrols from Midway had been no more successful. As a result, Admiral Spruance was unable to determine the situation prevailing within the Japanese fleet with regards to its carrier strength. He felt confident that three had been lost, but of the fourth and fifth

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flattop he was uncertain.

The Battle of Midway would be two weeks old before CINCPAC learned the fate of the HIRYU, and then only by a most fortunate and unusual set of circumstances. On 14 June, Ensign Jack L. Poteat was piloting his Catalina some 400 miles west of Midway. The weather was poor and Poteat was ready to turn around when a member of the crew suddenly spotted a lifeboat while peering out of the starboard blister.[1] He dropped down to inspect the craft, saw there were men in it, and then zoomed past. He banked the plane to turn around for another look, but by then the weather had completely hidden the craft.[2] The report Poteat made on returning to Midway was enough to cause Captain Simard to dispatch the seaplane tender BALLARD for a closer inspection. Late the following day the tender located the boat.

The lifeboat was from the carrier HIRYU and contained four officers and thirty-one men.[3] Four more had been aboard initially but had died at sea and one more was destined to die on the tender. All were from

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[1] War Diary, Patrol Squadron Twenty-Four, June 14, 1942, p. 5.

[2] Letter from Capt Jack L. Poteat, USN (Ret) to the author of 31 May 1967. The weather in which the lifeboat lay hidden was a tropical front that forced the pilot onto instruments. All aboard the PBY thought the lifeboat contained American survivors. As a result the plane searched the area for three hours until lack of fuel forced its return. Poteat and his crew managed to save a B-17 and crew as they approached Midway. The Flying Fortress had become lost but saw the PBY and followed the Catalina to Midway. The bomber landed and as it taxied two of the engines quit for want of fuel.

[3] CINCPAC letter of 28 June 1942 to Office of Naval Intelligence on Interrogation of Japanese Prisoners rescued off Midway on 19 June 1942.

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the engineering department of the carrier, Commander Eiso being the engineering officer. When bombs struck their carrier they had continued their duties deep in the bowels of the ship. Eventually contact between the engineers and the bridge was lost. This did not cause undue alarm, but later smoke made the area untenable. With great effort the men broke out of their four engine rooms and headed topside. Just before this they heard an explosion in another part of the ship which they took for a second air attack, but which seems more likely to have been the torpedoes from the MAKIGUMO.

The men climbed through the burned out interior of the carrier to the flight deck only to find it abandoned and no ships in sight. They were upset to think that their captain had left them behind. Since the carrier was listing and starting to settle, the men wasted little time in examination prior to quitting her. Evidently no signs were visible of the presence of Admiral Yamaguchi and Captain Kaku. Whether they were on the bridge or in the cabins, alive or dead, is unknown. Of more immediate interest was a lifeboat floating close by. The men went over the side, some jumping, and climbed into the boat. Within a short time the HIRYU went down and the men were left to themselves. The lifeboat was equipped with hard tack, tallow, water and beer. Commander Eiso then ordered course set for Wake Island, about 900 miles away.

When the BALLARD picked the men up they offered no resistance and willingly talked of past events. The Japanese happenings of 4 June were freely discussed, although by their very location the men had seen little. Still, the information provided was of great intelligence value.

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The interrogators also learned that while in the boat, Commander Eiso had consumed more than his share of the beer and that disgruntled sailors were secretly talking of tossing him overboard.[1]

On the ENTERPRISE, the last plane had no sooner been recovered than night sailing orders were placed in effect. Like the previous day, Admiral Spruance wanted to be close enough to the Japanese forces to hit them at daylight, but sufficiently separated to preclude a night surface attack. During the day, it became perfectly clear that responsibility for defending Midway was no longer his primary concern. The Japanese were in full retreat. Unlike the previous day, though, his contacts were old, the most recent being more than ten hours ago. He was unsure whether the Japanese would continue to retire toward the northwest or shift to the west to head toward Japan.[2] He also knew that slightly south of west were two cruisers limping toward the home island. With these factors influencing his decision he ordered a westerly heading of 263° with a speed of fifteen knots. The economical speed was dictated by his desire not to overrun his enemy during the night and by the situation prevailing on his destroyers. Fuel reports from his escorting "Greyhounds" showed that the precious black oil in their tanks was reaching the critical stage. The final instructions to the air groups were for early morning searches. Admiral Spruance had his adversary on the run and he wanted to make the most of the situation. In two days of

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Spruance Interview.

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fighting and maneuvering the smaller American force had shifted from a purely defensive unit to the role of a cautious killer seeking out an elusive and respected prey.

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CHAPTER XII

WITH BATTLE FLAGS FLYING

The operations room on the YAMATO was high in the pagoda-shaped mast and directly beneath the fighter director at its peak. The room was small with a low rectangular table occupying the center and cushioned benches stretching along the sides and across the ends. Overhead a plethora of electrical cables and radio lines gave an awesome aspect to the dimly lighted headquarters of Combined Fleet. Staff officers, haggard from being on duty almost without rest for the past two days, poured over the charts spread on the table. Along the bulkheads were more charts, graphs, status boards and availability figures but they were lost in the dull light whose rays concentrated on the central table. The air was foul with the smell of smoke and sweating bodies for the ventilating system could not replace the air cut off by the blacked out ports. At the head of the table Kuroshima, smoking incessantly and interrupting his comments with repeated and prolonged coughs, discussed the situation confronting the Japanese at dark on 5 June.

Throughout the day the widely spread forces had rendezvoused on the YAMATO. The advanced units of Admiral Kondo's Invasion Force arrived early in the morning of 5 June; the Mobile Force several hours later, and after dark the much attacked but still unscathed TANIKAZE joined the others.

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Various plans were offered for continuing the battle already lost. One of these envisioned the use of all planes available to Admiral Yamamoto in making a final determined attack.[1] In quantity this plan seemed to offer some advantages. Admittedly, all of the aircraft on the four carriers had been lost, but each cruiser and battleship had four or five fast seaplanes, less what had been lost to U. S. carrier aircraft during their scouting missions. In addition, the light carrier ZUIHO had twelve fighters and twelve torpedo bombers and the HOSHO had at least eight bombers and a limited number of fighters. In the Transport Group the aircraft tender CHITOSE had twenty fighters and attack seaplanes, while her companion the KAMIKAWA MARU had a dozen. With the Americans approaching nearer to Wake, the Japanese also had a chance to employ shore based aviation of the Twenty-Fourth Air Flotilla. The plan was born out of desperation and, while the ship-based planes totalling about 100 might succeed in damaging one or both of the U. S. carriers, the odds were against success. The facts had to be faced. Japan had lost her four carriers and the best course of action was to fall back out of danger and regroup for a more favorable opportunity.

Two widely separated events prevented Admiral Yamamoto from withdrawing all of his forces to the west. After initially suspending the Aleutian operations, he had directed that it be carried out.[2] Since he

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[1] Watanabe Interview. Although Watanabe is not positive who offered the proposal, the disadvantages were immediately apparent to Commander Sasaki, the Air Officer and to Admiral Ugaki, the Chief of Staff.

[2] Combined Fleet Dispatch Operations Order #157 contained in ONI Review, p. 33.

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had more ships than he could employ profitably, he detached Cruiser Division Eight and parts of Destroyer Squadron Ten and the ZUIHO to the Northern Force. This was done at 1500 on 5 June, but not until the ships concerned had filled their tanks from the oiler GENYO MARU. To the south, the two damaged cruisers and their accompanying destroyers were still heading westward, trying to evade the Americans, and reach the protection of shore based aircraft from Wake Island. With regard to this force there was little Admiral Yamamoto could do aside from watching its progress. To have detached his own ships, without sufficient air cover, would have been inviting attack from both the American carrier aircraft and the long range planes based on Midway. So for the present, he allowed the four ships to fend for themselves.

Meanwhile on the ENTERPRISE, the staff officers of Admiral Spruance were just as tired, their nerves just as jangled and eyes equally bloodshot as their counterparts on the YAMATO. And in the blackened out operations room or flagplot, the rancid air, poor light, and heaviness of smoke were the same. The difference stemmed from the Japanese trying to extricate the remnants of a force while the Americans, knowing their opponent was in retreat, cautiously followed. The long-range search planes from Midway had given strong evidence, in their being unable to find the major Japanese forces, that Admiral Yamamoto had not dallied in beating a hasty retreat toward Japan.

Without damaged warships to slow his progress, there seemed to be little chance for Task Force 16 to overtake Admiral Yamamoto. Admiral Spruance reached this conclusion when his carrier planes were

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unable to find the Japanese during their late afternoon strike on 5 June. Since no Japanese carrier based aircraft had been sighted, he concluded that either there was never a fifth carrier or if it had been present it had escaped unscathed and was withdrawing with a speed at least equal to his. At 2400 on 5 June Task Force 16 was 225 miles from Midway on a bearing of 305°. At this same moment, although it was unknown to Spruance, the Main Body and the Second Fleet, plus elements of the Mobile Force, were 300 miles ahead. The MIKUMA and MOGAMI, however, were slightly over 100 miles away at this moment and incapable of steaming more than fifteen knots.

Reveille on the ENTERPRISE sounded at 0300 on 6 June. Tired pilots tumbled out of their bunks, made their way to the wardroom for breakfast, then to their squadron ready rooms for briefings on the early morning search. As the first streaks of morning twilight hung over the carrier's wake, eighteen SBD's, each armed with a 500-pound bomb, took their position beside the island structure and then one by one sped down the deck and into the still dark western sky. The plan was to search the area in front of Task Force 16 for a distance of 200 miles. The sector to be searched extended from 180° through 360°.[1] Admiral Spruance insisted that his planes be well beyond radar's surface range before daylight.

At 0645, Ensign William D. Carter of Westmoreland, Tennessee, an attack pilot from Bombing Eight who had spent the night on the ENTERPRISE, located the damaged cruisers.[2] The report was by voice radio

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[1] War Diary, Commander Task Force 16, June 1942, p. 11.

[2] War Diary, Bombing Squadron Eight, June 1942.

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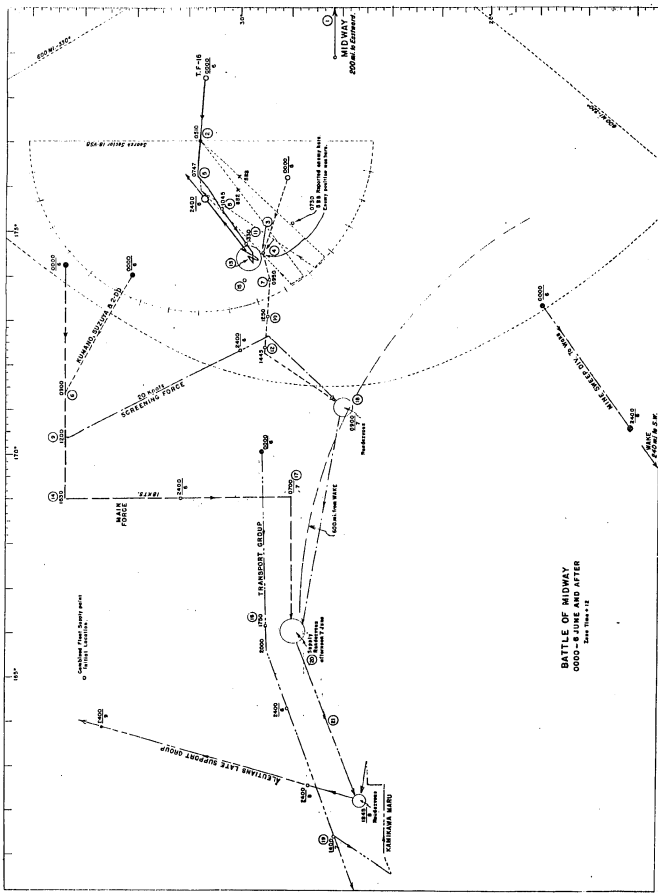
MIDWAY
BATTLE OF MIDWAY
0000-4 JUNE AND AFTER
MAIN FORCE
TRANSPORT GROUP
SCREENING FORCE
NEUTRAL LAKE SUPPORT GROUP
NEUTRAL LAKE
MIDWAY ISLAND
Midway Island
Sand Island
Eastern Island
Gooney Bird Is.
Pan American Airways Base
Seaplane anchorage
Coaling Pier
Radio Station
Seaplane ramp

and as it came into the radio room of the carrier it was enough to alert all hands. For the message announced that there was a carrier and five destroyers only 128 miles from Task Force 16. Once more the need to attack the enemy first became the matter of utmost concern for Admiral Spruance. He ordered the HORNET to ready her planes and he instructed McClusky to prepare the remainder of the attack aircraft aboard the flagship. The planes of the HORNET were already on their way when Admiral Spruance learned that the enemy force did not include a carrier. Here is what happened.

When Carter saw the enemy force he instructed his crewman, Aviation Radioman First Class C. L. Moore, to report one BB, one CA and three DD. The gunner mistook the "BB" for battleship as "CV" for carrier, or at least that is the way the report was received in radio central on the carrier.[1] Why five ships were reported when in fact only four were present is unknown. The correct type of ships was not known until Carter returned to the HORNET and reported the classification of the five ships he had seen. Although the presence of a Japanese flattop was eliminated by a message from the HORNET to the ENTERPRISE, Admiral Spruance by now thought that he had an additional enemy force to be attacked. A second HORNET plane which had also spent the night on the ENTERPRISE, was equally successful in locating the Japanese. This unidentified pilot was unable to radio his findings but on returning he reported by message drop that two cruisers and two destroyers had

[1] HORNET Action Report, p. 5.

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been seen 133 miles from the ENTERPRISE but on a bearing that placed them to the north of the other group. In plotting the two contacts, the charts showed them to be over fifty miles apart and caused Admiral Spruance to believe throughout the day that he had two separate enemy forces. To keep track of these forces he ordered the cruisers to launch their planes. Both the NEW ORLEANS and the MINNEAPOLIS dispatched two planes that scouted the sector 209°-269° to a distance of 150 miles from the ENTERPRISE.

The erroneous report of a second enemy force was not known to Admiral Spruance when the HORNET;s group passed over on its way to the attack. There were twenty-six Dauntlesses escorted by eight Wildcats.[1] With the short distances between the two forces it was not long before the HORNET planes had their targets in sight. With a clear day and in the absence of air opposition, Commander Ring was able to maneuver his planes so their attack could commence with a dive from out of the sun. The planes pushed over from 15,000 feet, with the Japanese throwing up a heavy concentration of antiaircraft fire.

The planes dropped eighteen 1000-pound bombs and eight 500-pound bombs on what they claimed to be a battleship, cruiser, and one of the destroyers. Returning pilots claimed that the battleship, which was probably the MIKUMA, was hit by two large size bombs and a single small one as well as two near misses.[2] The other large ship, the MOGAMI,

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[1] Ring's group consisted of his own and thirteen others of VS-8 and twelve planes from VB-8.

[2] HORNET Action Report. The report specifically mentions hits on

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was struck by two of the big bombs and the destroyer was believed hit on the stern. The attack was sudden and concentrated. The planes suffered little damage except for one from Scouting Eight. This Dauntless suffered a direct hit and was seen to crash into the sea. They concentrated their efforts on the two destroyers with particular emphasis on the bridge and other areas of the superstructure. By 1030 the HORNET planes had all returned, save the one.

Planes were landing on the HORNET at the same time others were taking off from the ENTERPRISE. Lieutenant Short commanded the thirty-one SBD's that took departure at 1045.[1] Each plane had a 1000-pound bomb snuggled beneath the fuselage and like the other group, Wildcats were going along as escorts, twelve of them. Short was told to attack the same target as had Ring, but before he had sighted the ships he was ordered to search and attack a battleship believed to be forty miles ahead.[2] Where this report came from is unknown, but his efforts to locate the battleship consumed a considerable amount of time.

Enroute Short also learned that he would have some added help in his attack. By strenuous efforts, VT-6 had been able to repair and patch their three remaining torpedo planes. This time, though, Admiral

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a battleship (thought to be of the KIRISHIMA class) although the War Diary of VB-8 notes this as two heavy cruisers and three destroyers. In the group's second attack only four ships are reported as being observed. The HORNET Action Report states "2 CA's and 2 DD's" leading one to believe that the ship actually believed that it attacked two separate groups, one bearing 235° from the carrier while the other bore 264°.

[1] Composed as follows: VS-6 nine; VB-6 five; VB-3 ten; VS-5 seven.

[2] Scouting Squadron Five Action Report, p. 2.

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Spruance called the officer-in-charge to the bridge for special instructions before launching. Lieutenant Laub reported to the Commander and was told to make an attack only if conditions were extremely favorable.[1] If the ships were putting up an antiaircraft defense of any magnitude he was not to attack. The instructions were implicit and allowed Laub no room for free interpretation.

By noon Short could see the MOGAMI and the MIKUMA ahead and slightly to the south of him but he continued on searching for the reported battleship. When these efforts produced nothing he returned to his earlier sighting. From 21,000 feet and out of the sun, the veteran Short, as he had done at Coral Sea and the earlier days of Midway, led his planes into the antiaircraft fire of the four ships. It was strong but not as bad as when the HORNET planes attacked. One reason for the weaker antiaircraft fire was that Short sent his fighters on a strafing sweep of the destroyers at the very time when he was due to roll in. Of all the attacks during the Battle of Midway, this is the only one believed to have been coordinated beyond the squadron level. While the fighters and divebombers worked in harmony, the bug-a-boo of communications prevented the torpedo planes from striking at the same time. As a result, Laub did not attack. Altogether thirty-one of the big bombs struck on or near the four ships with the two cruisers being the center of attention. The MIKUMA was hit many times and left dead in the water.[2]

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[1] Laub Interview.

[2] Scouting Squadron Six Action Report, p. 6.

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The MOGAMI was struck twice, suffering over a hundred casualties when one of the bombs hit amidships and the other landed just forward of the bridge. The destroyer ARASHIO tried to move in close to the MIKUMA and assist in fire fighting, but the intense heat of the flames prevented her from doing so. All of the planes returned to Task Force 16 where they landed at 1425, three winding up on the HORNET.

The American commander had an important target under attack and he was making every effort to insure that it was severly damaged if not destroyed. The HORNET, in less than three hours after recovering its first attack group, had a second one of twenty-four planes underway. The planes started leaving the carrier at 1345 and this time each one carried a 1000-pound bomb. By now the distance between the two forces was only ninety miles. With the clear visibility it was possible for pilots to see their base and target at the same time.

Ring again led what was to be the final air attack of the Battle of Midway. By 1445 he was diving on a much battered enemy. The antiaircraft fire was not strong and as before fighters worked with the dive-bombers. They strafed the destroyers in order to keep down the anti-aircraft fires. Although one of his planes had to abort, the other twenty-three planes plummeted on the hapless ships with telling effect. The MOGAMI shuttered under the impact of a half ton of high explosives while the brunt of the attack was born by the already badly battered MIKUMA. Six bombs raked the length of the once proud warship and opened holes in her watertight bulkheads and spread flame and havoc everywhere. From the Japanese point of view one of the tragedies was

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a near miss on the destroyer ARASHIO.[1] The blast from the bomb blew many survivors from the MIKUMA off the fantail, killed a number of others and severely wounded the Commander of Destroyer Division Eight, Commander Ogawa.[2] The other destroyer, ASASHIO, was slightly more fortunate, with only twenty-two men being killed. In this final attack, the Captain of the MIKUMA, Shakao Sakiyama was badly wounded. He continued to command his ship until shortly before she went down. At that time a destroyer rescued him and delivered him to the SUSUYA where he died in the ship's sickbay on 13 June. Although the near miss on the ARASHIO caused little structural damage, many highly skilled seamen were lost.[3] All planes returned safely to the HORNET by 1528.

Once more the scene must shift to the flag plot of Task Force 16. One search and three attack groups had flown from the two carriers since early dawn. Three hours of daylight remained and as yet none the Japanese ships had sunk. Why then, under such circumstances, did Admiral Spruance not initiate one final attack or better yet, why did he not add on speed and attack the battered Japanese during the night or at first light on 7 June. This has been one of the criticisms levelled at

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[1] Rodee letter in which Rodee remarks that his bomb landed either on one of the ships or between them. Japanese records states that about half of the MIKUMA survivors on the destroyer were lost.

[2] USSBS No. 295, Interrogation of Cdr Otakichi Shibata, navigator of the SUZUYA.

[3] USSBS No. 407, Interrogation of RADM Akira Soji, Commanding Officer of the MOGAMI. Soji states that the ARASHIO was hit by a single bomb. The ONI Review report on the battle does not show this. Questioning Admiral Nagasawa and Captain Watanabe revealed that the destroyer escaped serious damage although personnel congregated on the open fantail suffered heavily.

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the American commander by persons unfamiliar with the situation at the moment of decision. Before noon, Spruance had detached the destroyers MAURY and WORDEN for a necessary fueling rendezvous with the oiler CIMARRON.[1] With the departure of these two destroyers he had only four remaining to guard two carriers. His cruisers, and there were six of them, could provide antiaircraft defense, but they were in no sense designed to act as big destroyers. They were not as fast or responsive to quick maneuvers and above all they lacked the sonar equipment so necessary for detecting submarines. A second factor was that with each hour he was coming just so much closer to Wake Island and the range of its shore-based aircraft. In fact, had the Japanese been ready to resort to one-way missions, he was already well in range. The final consideration was the status of his personnel, particularly the pilots. The strain of the past few days had been severe on the fliers and the men who rigged the airplanes, fueled and armed them and handled them on the flight decks. These, then, were the factors that influenced against another attack.

Throughout the day, Admiral Spruance had received a steady stream of conflicting reports on the nature of the target of the attacking planes. Many pilots reported one or both of the larger ships as battleships. Some had even claimed that one was the YAMATO. The Admiral's intelligence officer, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Julian P. Brown, was equally confused on the type of ship they had been attacking. Brown

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[1] War Diary, Commander Task Force 16, June 1942, p. 12.

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decided that the only way to settle the matter was to send out a photo plane. Spruance readily agreed to the proposal with the result that one movie photographer and one still man were sent in separate planes. The two SBD's left the ENTERPRISE at 1553.

Lieutenant (jg) Edwin J. Kroeger of Bombing Six flew Mr. A. D. Brick of Fox Movietone News for the movie photography of the damaged Japanese cruisers.[1] Kroeger had been on all the flights of the previous days. The second plane was piloted by Lieutenant (jg) Cleo J. Dobson, the assistant landing signal officer of the ENTERPRISE. Dobson was a former member of VS-6 with many hours in an SBD while flying the long scouting hops. His passsenger was the ship's senior photographer. One of the pictures taken by him has become a famous portrayal of the battle. From low level and close aboard, the photographer was able to capture the great destruction that had wrecked the MIKUMA. Her after turret was out of position and immovable; a torpedo tube drooped over the port side; she was down at the head; smoke hung over her superstructure and numerous men were struggling in the water. On returning to the carrier, Kroeger was forced to take one of his infrequent wave offs, Dobson landing first. He had no sooner taxied forward and folded the wings when an orderly was beside the cockpit telling him that Admiral Spruance wanted to see him. As he entered the flag area, Spruance eagerly asked "Did you see it? What kind is it?" Dobson, his easy Oklahoma drawl belieing the keen knowledge of naval aviation he possessed, replied, "Sir, I don't

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[1] Bombing Squadron Six Action Report, p. 7.

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know, but it was a hell of a big one."[1] The casual reply provoked Spruance and his temper was not soothed when Kroeger, stepping in a few moments later, replied he didn't know either for he had forgotten to take his ship recognition cards. Fortunately for the two officers, the photographer announced that he had taken some good pictures and would have prints ready shortly.

Dobson's actions had not pleased Admiral Spruance and he had not hesitated to inform the junior officer of this fact. The picture presented is one of a scatter brained young man. Less than an hour later, Dobson confided to his diary one of the most remarkable passages that can depict the mind of a warrior. In recounting the trip, Dobson states that he arrived over the cruiser and found it in a very poor condition:

> "It was burning badly, most of people had abanded (sic) it. About 400 to 500 sailors were in the water all around the ship. We took some very close & good pictures & if possible will try to get a copy of them. Before I took off I though (sic) if I saw anyone in the water I would strafe them as the japs did with the LANGLEY (sic LEXINGTON) in the Coral Sea. After flying over those poor devils in the water I was chicken hearted & couldn't make myself open up on them. I flew about 100 feet from the ship & could see lots of bodies lying on the deck lots more were lying on the stern of the ship & they didn't even move. They were probably injured. 5 lifeboats were about 300 yards from the sinking CA but they were empty. They proably (sic) got aboard one of the other ships. 2DD and 1CA were about 30 miles west of the burning ship trying to get away. Went over to get pictures of them but they started shooting at us so we didn't get very close to them. Boy I sure would hate to be in the shoes of those fellows in the water. I shouldn't feel sorry for them because I might be in their shoes some day. I pray to God that I'm not."[2]

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[1] Dobson Interview.

[2] Dobson Diary. The diary was not written for publication nor has it been released outside the family until this occasion.

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For Task Force 16, the Battle of Midway was over. At 1907, the ships altered course to 050° and headed for a fueling rendezvous with the oilers CIMARRON and GUADALUPE. Men continued to work on the bridge and crewmen readied the planes just in case, but to everyone it was common knowledge that the fight was finished. Pilots, held in check by the tension of the battle, settled back and relaxed. From the myriad of vents and compartments that abound the area of the ship known as "officers country" came bottles of "tension reliever" on a ship that was "dry" except for medicinal spirits. Dobson was there, in fact the party was in his room. So was Robbin Lindsey, the senior LSO who, along with Dobson, had nursed so many of the planes aboard. William R. Pittman, who months earlier had crashed while taking off without enough wind was one of the partiers, too. The most colorful one present was Lieutenant (jg) Elbert S. McCuskey, an orphan of VF-3 from the YORKTOWN. Scotty McCuskey was the typical fighter pilot, aggressive and competent and utterly fearless. His nickname of "Go Get'em" had been earned when he barrelled into a group that outnumbered him several times. McCuskey worked hard and he partied the same way. Late that night two fellow officers forcefully held McCuskey under a cold shower before leading him to his cabin.[1] In a sense the evening of 6 June was an occasion for celebration.

Although Navy ships and planes had turned away from the Japanese, seventeen B-17's were ordered by Captain Simard to take off from Midway

[1]Dobson Interview.

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and bomb the stricken warships. The Fortresses left the island at 1045 and, after an unsuccessful search for the ships, headed back toward their base. Enroute they spied what they believed to be one of the damaged cruisers. Pattern bombing produced, for the ten planes making the attack, highly satisfactory results as the ship disappeared in fifteen seconds.[1] The planes on a bearing of 262° and a distance of 400 miles from Midway had indeed discovered a combatant vessel. Their heavy bombs, plummeting through the sky like small darts, had forced the U. S. submarine GRAYLING to make an emergency dive to escape damage.[2]

The same elation on the ships of Task Force 16 did not prevail on the ships surrounding the YORKTOWN. Throughout 5 June the abandoned YORKTOWN had wallowed as a lucrative target for any lurking submarine. The HUGHES guarded the carrier and her sonar gear anxiously sought any submarine trying to approach the ship. The truth of the matter, though, was that any submarine commander worth the stripes that gave him command could have worked his way to a firing position without detection. With the MONAGHAN and GWIN arriving the antisubmarine protection approached a realistic quantity.

The radar screen in CIC (Combat Information Center) on the HUGHES showed a blip bearing 295° at a distance of twenty miles. The time was 0836 on 5 June or precisely the moment that one of the CHIKUMA scout

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[1] CINCPAC Action Report, p. 21.

[2] Air Operations, Midway Defense Forces Report, p. 8.

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planes was sending a message saying that he could see "an enemy YORKTOWN class carrier listing to starboard and drifting in position bearing 111°, distance 240 miles from my take off point. One destroyer is in the vicinity."[1] The message was picked up by the YAMATO which sent immediate instructions to Tanabe to take his I-168 submarine to the reported position of the carrier and sink her.

The captain of the HUGHES noticed that the YORKTOWN, while moving at about three knots, was riding easily. To improve her towing quality, Ramsey recommended that a jettison party be placed on the carrier. It was 1730 before the men reached the YORKTOWN. For the next two hours they threw loose gear over the side and cut away the anchors to help buoy the ship's bow. On returning to the HUGHES, a message was sent to Admiral Fletcher reporting the carrier's condition and recommending a salvage party be put aboard to assist in bringing the carrier to port. The VIREO, a minesweeper that was not designed for heavy towing, was having difficulty in towing the listing carrier.[2] Admiral Nimitz knew that this would be the case, but the VIREO was the nearest available ship. At the time he ordered the minesweeper to the scene he also dispatched two fleet tugs, the NAVAJO and SEMINOLE, to bring the carrier to Pearl.

On learning that his ship was still afloat, Buckmaster urged Admiral Fletcher to let him take a salvage party back to the YORKTOWN. The request was readily approved. Buckmaster, and a few officers of the

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[1] ONI Review, p. 41.

[2] War Diary, USS VIREO, June 1942.

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YORKTOWN, spent valuable time in selecting members of the salvage party.[1] There was no dearth of volunteers, but Buckmaster needed skilled men who could work in the ship without supervision, under unsatisfactory conditions and without the aid of blueprints. His selection of personnel was complicated by the random rescue of crewmen and their subsequent transfer from the destroyers to the cruisers. When finally formed there were twenty-nine officers and one hundred forty-one men in the salvage party.

The destroyer HAMMANN came alongside the ASTORIA and received some of the party. Following this she went alongside the PORTLAND where the remainder of the salvage party boarded. As men came aboard, others, picked up the previous afternoon and not needed to return to the YORKTOWN, were transferred to the cruiser. All the while the cruiser was pumping black fuel oil into the HAMMANN. The operations required most of the afternoon so that it was not until 0200 the following day that the HAMMANN, accompanied by the BALCH and BENHAM, reached the abandoned carrier.[2]

The new arrivals joined the circling screen until daylight at which time the HAMMANN went close aboard the carrier and transferred the salvage party. At 0600 Buckmaster directed Commander Arnold E. True

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[1] During the 14 March 1966 interview with VADM Elliott Buckmaster, the Admiral mentioned on at least three occasions the difficulties he had in determining the team to return to the carrier. With obvious pride, he stated everyone wanted to go back. Time was lost in selecting the crew because even the ships on which they rode did not know for certain whom they carried.

[2] HUGHES Action Report, p. 3.

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to move his ship in close on the starboard bow and provide fire hoses and electrical power. The HAMMANN, unable to maintain a steady position, finally moored to the carrier, her side resting against splinter mattresses and large fenders to keep her off the larger ship's bilge keel.

For six hours men on both ships worked in readying the YORKTOWN for the expected arrival of the fleet tugs. Hoses from the HAMMANN provided both water and foamite to battle the still smoldering fire near the forward elevator. Another pumped salt water for counterflooding and a suction hose removed oil from the carrier's port tanks to correct her list.[1] Topside, salvage workers pushed the planes still aboard over the side. The gunnery department personnel readied the small weapons for possible air attacks while another detail succeeded in dumping one five-inch gun over the side and making a second ready for jettisoning.[2] The destroyer provided food and hot coffee to all hands. By noon considerable progress had been made, the list decreasing by two to three degrees.

While the two American ships had nestled together still another visitor had arrived on the scene. With uncanny navigation, Tanabe had brought his submarine to the vicinity of the YORKTOWN by dawn on 6 June, only a couple of hours after the HAMMANN arrived. Peering through powerful binnoculars, a lookout spotted the carrier at 0530 while still some eleven miles away. Tanabe made a quick survey of the scene

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[1] HAMMANN Action Report, p. 4.

[2] CO, USS YORKTOWN war damage report to Chief, Bureau of Ships, undated but prior to 18 June 1942, p. 8. Buckmaster also conducted burial services for those who had died two days before.

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before him, noting the listing carrier and the five destroyers circling about her.[1] Then he took his submarine below the surface.

His approach was a long and slow one, taking infinite care to insure that his presence was not detected by the American destroyers. Most of the time Tanabe kept his ship ninety feet below the surface and turning over three knots. Occasionally, he would raise her to sixty feet and take a quick sighting, never more than five seconds, to insure his approach was aimed straight for the carrier's beam. Not until after 1100 was he able to assure himself that the I-168 was safely inside the screen of circling destroyers. Time had passed slowly for all hands in the cramped, foul smelling spaces of the submarine. The Chief Electrical Officer, Lieutenant Gunichi Mochizuki, spent much of his spare time praying and asking for extra indulgence from the gods.

There were few better qualified to command a submarine in this dangerous and important mission than Tanabe. A graduate of Etajima in the class of 1928, the short and wiry officer had been in submarines for more than eight years. When Japan entered the war his duty as commanding officer of the RO-59 relegated him to the Inland Sea and the lusterless chore of training officers and men for the undersea fleet. In January, Tanabe took over the I-168. His first real assignment had been as one of the thirteen submarines assigned to the Advance Force. By 31 May the ship was scouting Kure Island and sending back reports concerning

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[1]Yahachi Tanabe, formerly Lieutenant Commander, Imperial Japanese Navy, with Joseph D. Harrington, "I Sank the YORKTOWN," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, LXXXIX (May, 1963), 61.

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future use as a seaplane and submarine base.[1]

Patience and skill are virtues for any member of the Dolphin Club and Yahachi Tanabe had plenty of both. Inside the screen, he carefully raised his periscope and in a bold moment noted two destroyers only 1000 yards away. Then as he swung the periscope it suddenly filled with the great hulk of the YORKTOWN. The range was less than 600 yards, a distance making it impossible to miss - except for one thing. The I-168 was so close that, from her sixty foot firing depth, her torpedoes might not have time to stabilize at their normal running depth.[2] This was nineteen feet so if the torpedoes had not stabilized they might well pass under the carrier. There was no choice, if he wanted a sure shot, but to maneuver into a new firing position that would allow sufficient range. Cautiously Tanabe eased his submarine into a gentle right hand circle. Only careful navigation would bring him to the proper position of about 1500 yards abeam the carrier.

Sound operators tried to pick up the destroyers familiar "pinging" as the submarine moved along its self-imposed circle. They could detect the noise of the screws but the sonar's electronic emissions escaped them. Unable to hear the familiar sonar sound, the Japanese sailors asked, in stifled voices, if the Americans had not stopped for lunch.

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[1] Tanabe's observations of Kure Island were thorough and his reporting complete. In his Secret Dispatch No. 12, he commented on the lack of enemy ships or patrol vessels; absence of mines; no light at night and the visibility and status of the sea. Details contained in "Records of the Converted Seaplane Tender KAMIKAWA MARU," WDC 160682, p. 3.

[2] Tanabe, "I Sank the YORKTOWN," p. 62.

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Ensign Watanabe rechecked his torpedo firing panel to insure that the four forward tubes were ready. Tanabe's plan of attack was simple, but slightly unusual. Against his large, nearly stationary target he would fire four of his old style, 446-pound warhead torpedoes. He wished he had the big Model 95's, the submarine configured adaptation of the oxygen propelled M-93 "Long Lance" that carried nearly a half ton of high explosives in the warhead.[1] To make up for the smaller torpedoes, Tanabe decided to fire two at once, instead of the usual spread of four, and follow them with a second pair using the same firing data.

The next time Tanabe poked his periscope into the air he was back on his original approach course with the YORKTOWN only 1200 yards away. Tanabe barked commands for a minor adjustment, then the electrifying command - Fire One! Fire Two! The first two hadn't cleared their tubes when Tanabe ordered the following pair to be fired. Since the compressed air wakes would identify his position anyway, Tanabe kept his periscope fixed on his target. In less than a minute the concussion from the explosions gently jarred the I-168, hardly more, really, than the enthusiastic "Banzais" raised by his own crew. Time did not permit Tanabe to continue looking at his target. He immediately ordered a dive to 200 feet and, then to the surprise of his navigator, he headed the submarine to a hiding position directly under the carrier.[2]

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[1] The oxygen torpedo was not new to the Japanese Navy, it having been developed in 1933 by Rear Admiral Kaneji Kishimoto and Captain Toshihide Asakuma of the Kure Torpedo Institute. The torpedo was much faster and had a greater range, in addition to the size of its explosive warhead, than did U. S. torpedoes (Hara, Japanese Destroyer Captain, pp. 37-38).

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It was a shrewd plan for had he reached the YORKTOWN he would have been safe from depth charging and might have been able to escape under cover of darkness or fire his remaining torpedoes at the destroyers. The destroyers never gave him a chance to reach a position beneath the carrier as depth charges forced the I-168 away from the area of the YORKTOWN. For the next two hours, more than sixty depth charges sought to destroy the submarine. The last two exploded dangerously close, putting out all lights, warping both outer and inner doors of No. One torpedo tube and causing a chlorine leak from batteries in the forward battery room. The praying Mochizuki sprung into action, grabbing the ten gas masks assigned to the 104 man crew, and led a team into the fume-filled room, closing the hatch behind him. In the next hour the damaged batteries were disconnected, leaks plugged and the warped inner door shored against the sea. The situation had become critical and had the American destroyers persisted Tanabe would have been forced to surface. He had anticipated this fate and had already issued the armory's five pistols and ten rifles to his most qualified seamen.

Bill Burford, leaning on the splinter shield of the open bridge of the MONOGHAN saw the four torpedo tracks heading toward the HAMMANN and YORKTOWN. Burford leaped to the TBS (Talk Between Ships), pressing the switch to give the alarm. Burford was used to surprise situations. His little MONAGHAN already had the distinction of ramming a submarine inside Pearl Harbor on that bloody Sunday in December. He

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[2]Tanabe,"I Sank the YORKTOWN," p. 63.

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had felt no remorse on that occasion when he depth charged the midget submarine. As he watched the torpedoes heading straight for the target, however, he felt completely unable to cope with the situation. "It was a horrifying sight . . . and there was nothing I could do about it except hope and pray for the U. S. officers and men about to be blown up."[1]

The TBS message reached the bridge of the HAMMANN at the same time a lookout shouted a warning ot "torpedoes on the starboard beam." General Quarters was sounded at once. The Gunnery Officer, Lieutenant (jg) Charles C. Hartigan, Jr., atop the ship's director, sighted the wakes 600 yards away. He yelled to Willie Virgil Allison, GM 3/c, to open fire on them with the twenty millimeter gun beside him. As Allison swung into action, Roy T. Nelson, SMM 2/c, gunner on the after gun was already firing.[2] Neither gun was successful in detonating the approaching torpedoes. Captain True, on sighting the tracks, immediately ordered emergency reverse on the inboard engine. Before the engines could be made to respond, the torpedoes had reached their targets. At 1336 three of the four found their mark.

The first torpedo passed under the HAMMANN, near No. Two mount, or just forward of the bridge, and slammed into the soft underside of the YORKTOWN. The second torpedo pierced the thin skin of the

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[1] Interview with RADM William P. Burford, USN (Ret) conducted at Borrego Springs, California on 18 August 1965.

[2] Acting Executive Officer, USS HAMMANN Action Report to CO, USS HAMMANN, dated 16 June 1942, p. 1. The Acting Executive Officer was Lieutenant (jg) Hartigan, the regular gunnery officer. The assigned executive officer died in the explosion occuring after the ship was abandoned.

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HAMMANN and exploded in No. Two fireroom.[1] One of the remaining torpedoes followed the first one into the side of the YORKTOWN while the fourth evidently passed under both ships.

The explosion in and near the HAMMANN did frightful damage to the ship. Concussion from the first YORKTOWN hit blew her away from the carrier and parted all lines and hoses. The explosion in her fireroom apparently broke the ship's back, survivors later reporting that there was a pronounced sag in the vicinity of the fireroom. The forward bulkhead on the forward engine room was destroyed, opening the inside of the ship to the sea. Only the quick sounding of General Quarters prevented more men from being trapped inside the ship. The explosion threw up a huge pile of debris, as well as water and human bodies, some of which fell back onto the destroyer and carrier.

The Captain had been slammed against a desk in the pilot house by the force of the blast. The blow knocked out his wind and, as he learned later, broke a rib. Seeing water already across the main deck amidships, Hartigan ordered "All Hands Abandon Ship." True, the Executive Officer and Hartigan climbed down from the bridge to the forecastle deck just as water passed over it. The three swam clear of the sinking ship. The elapsed time had been between three and five minutes from explosion to sinking. In that brief time all but about twelve to fifteen of the HAMMANN's complement had been able to leave the ship.[2] Many of them were on the

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[1] HAMMANN Action Report, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

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hastily launched liferafts, but a number of others were still in the water.

About a minute after the ship went down a tremendous underwater explosion hurled many men into the air. A large part of the destroyer's crew was killed in the blast and others, injured by it, died aboard the BENHAM after rescue.[1] Hartigan managed to swim to a line dangling from the YORKTOWN. Later on he was picked up by the HAMMANN's gig and attended by the destroyer's doctor, Lieutenant (jg) J. H. Peterson. True, who became separated from his two officers, escaped injury from the underwater explosion and managed to rescue two men who were floating nearby. Three hours after his ship had gone down, True, heavily covered with oil and still determinedly clinging to his two crewmen, was picked up by the BALCH.[2] The captain was semi-conscious and the two men he was supporting were dead. So ultimately were eighty-five other members of the ship, including twenty-six of the one hundred and sixty-six survivors picked up by the BENHAM. A third of the HAMMANN's complement was lost.

That a greater loss of life did not occur may be attributed to the heroic efforts of Torpedoman First Class Berlyn M. Kimbrell, who remained on the stern of the ship checking that the safety forks were in all the depth charges. In addition, he made men put on lifejackets before

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[1] War Diary, USS BENHAM, June 1942. The destroyer rescued three officers and 163 enlisted and recovered the bodies of sixteen others. In addition the BENHAM took aboard the twenty-two members of the YORKTOWN salvage party.

[2] War Diary, USS BALCH, June 1942, p. 4 of the 6 June entry. The two men were George Wilson Kapp, Jr. and Robert John Ballard.

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he ordered them over the side. Kimbrell was lost when the ship went down, undoubtedly a casualty of the underwater explosion, but his devotion to duty insured that the blast after the ship went down did not come from the depth charges. What caused it is still unknown, the concensus among the survivors leads to the conclusion that the initial explosion had set one of the HAMMANN's own torpedoes to running hot.

The two torpedoes that slammed into the center of the YORKTOWN could be felt from foremast to keel. In fact, the foremast whipped so violently that sheared rivets flew through the air like bullets.[1] Men in the salvage party were thrown against bulkheads and blown overboard. The after elevator was bodily lifted from its centered position on the flight deck and carried away by the force of the concussion.[2] Watertight doors, strained and warped by the previous attack of Tomonaga's torpedo planes, gave way, water cascading into the abandoned compartments. The holes in her starboard side flooded that side of the ship and corrected the carrier's list. At 1410 the VIREO cut the main towline and moved in alongside the carrier's starboard side to take off the salvage party as well as wounded.[3] Further work on the YORKTOWN was suspended until the following day when the fleet tugs would be available for towing and providing power to the carrier. Despite two new torpedo hits, the

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[1] CO, USS YORKTOWN war damage report to Chief, Bureau of Ships, p. 9.

[2] YORKTOWN Action Report, p. 3.

[3] War Diary, USS VIREO, June 1942. Three wounded were removed and five minutes after leaving the YORKTOWN, the minesweeper picked up three bodies floating near the carrier including those of an ensign and a lieutenant.

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YORKTOWN still appeared to be only slightly damaged when the sun set on 6 June.

It was with the waning rays of evening twilight that the three tracking destroyers finally sighted the I-168. Tanabe had, with battery power exhausted, brought his damaged submarine to the surface. The GWIN, MONAGHAN, and HUGHES, which had spent the afternoon hunting for the illusive submarine, finally sighted her at 1845 at a distance of nearly eight miles.[1] The Japanese ship appeared to be smoking, but this could easily have been from her diesel engines running full speed as she headed southwest at fourteen knots. The destroyers gave chase as Tanabe, trying to charge his craft's batteries, ran away. Slowly, the three destroyers closed the gap holding their fire until they could come within effective range. A submarine is a small target under any condition and even more difficult to hit when both ships are maneuvering radically at high speed. To swing abeam for a broadside meant that the destroyer must lose range to the fleeing enemy. To compound the difficulties of the situation, the wily Tanabe ordered his crew to make smoke, thus reducing the visibility in an already poorly lit hour.

The three destroyers opened fire at 6500 yards with the MONAGHAN firing star shells to provide brief illumination over the enemy. The firing was not impressive except in its volume. Finally, as the ships started ranging dangerously close to the submarine, Tanabe asked his

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[1] HUGHES Action Report, p. 4. Pilot Gibbs, who was standing on the bridge, was one of the first to see the submarine, asking if the object was "a ship coming over the horizon."

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men below if they had sufficient air and power for a brief period of underwater operations.[1] When a "Yes, Sir" came up, he ordered the I-168 down below. The destroyers passed over the submerged submarine, but once more their sensing equipment failed to detect the I-168. A few depth charges were dropped randomly but did no damage. At 2245 the three American ships left the area and returned to patrolling about the YORKTOWN.

Tanabe brought his submarine to the surface shortly after the destroyers left. Additional repairs were made as he headed the I-168 to the north and then west toward Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island. In the days that followed all hands listened carefully for any reports on the loss of the YORKTOWN. American sources provided none, but a Japanese report announced that the I-168 had torpedoed the carrier and that she had gone down the following morning. When the I-168 reached Kure, the pier was lined with a great crowd, musical units and high civic dignitaries. A special report was rendered to the Emperor and Tanabe was hailed as a hero. The acclaim was justified for Tanabe had performed a highly dangerous feat. But those who cheered the deeds of the I-168 did not know, as did Tanabe, that the sinking of the YORKTOWN was but slight revenge for the four carriers that Japan had lost.

Buckmaster and his salvage party spent the night on the VIREO where they made their plans to return to the carrier the following morning. Standing close by the abandoned ship, lookouts on the VIREO could hear

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[1] Tanabe, "I Sank the YORKTOWN," p. 65.

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occasional rumblings as bulkheads gave way. At 0330 on 7 June they could see that the list on the carrier had increased. A little more than an hour later, at 0501 to be exact, the YORKTOWN, with all her battle flags flying, turned over and sank in a 3000 fathom deep.[1] As the famed carrier started her death moments, circling ships half-masted their colors and crewmen stood at attention with heads bared. From the porthole of the Gunnery Officer's cabin on the MONAGHAN, a young man gazed intently at the YORKTOWN's final performance. Two corpsmen held the injured Lloyd Childers so he could see his ship make her final plunge.[2] The YORKTOWN had been his only ship so it was with sadness that he watched her disappear. He also wondered if she carried with her, his younger brother whom he had last seen as he left the carrier on 4 June.

For the U. S. forces, the Battle of Midway was over. Ships were refueled and some started toward the Aleutian area. The PORTLAND, MORRIS and RUSSELL rendezvoused with the submarine tender FULTON which Admiral Nimitz had sent from Pearl Harbor to take the YORKTOWN survivors. As the FULTON steamed along at eight knots the cruiser came up on her port side whereupon five trolleys and whips were rigged between the two ships. At 1411 the men, two to a coal bag, started transferring to the FULTON.[3] The RUSSELL came along the tender's starboard side, and lines were passed in preparation for transfer, but

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[1] YORKTOWN Action Report, p. 8.

[2] Childer's letter. His brother was rescued by BALCH.

[3] War Diary, USS FULTON, June 1942.

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before this could be accomplished the destroyer ALLEN reported a sound contact. It was by now 1930 and all survivors from the PORTLAND had already been passed to the FULTON. Later that evening those remaining on the destroyers were shifted by boat so that at 2245 the tender had 101 officers and 1790 YORKTOWN survivors aboard. Other ships rendezvoused with the SARATOGA. On 10 June the HORNET received ten torpedo planes and nine Dauntlesses, while the ENTERPRISE took aboard five TBF's and twice as many SBD's. The movement to the Aleutians was cancelled by CINCPAC and Task Force 16 and 17 returned to Pearl Harbor. The former arrived at 1330 on 13June just five hours after Admiral Fletcher's force had passed the antisubmarine gates.

For the Japanese, the extrication from Midway area was more difficult. Captain Akira Soji, captain of the MOGAMI, found himself in a most difficult situation after the HORNET planes had delivered the third and final attack on the stricken warships. Soji's own ship continued to stay afloat only by the almost superhuman efforts of his damage control parties. Her No. Five turret was a grotesque mass of twisted steel from the bomb that had penetrated the turret during the day's first attack. The two destroyers, although suffering only superficial damage, were burdened with survivors from the MIKUMA. Messages from the MIKUMA indicated to Soji that the ship was doomed with no possibility of her being saved. Still, this constant companion of his own warship flew the ensign of the Imperial Japanese Navy and it grieved him to think of leaving her still afloat while he quit the scene. To linger in the area was to invite additional air attacks on his three ships and even more dangerous, to

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expose them to possible surface attack from the cruisers and destroyers of the American force. With reluctance, Soji made the only decision he tactically could. He ordered the three ships to leave the MIKUMA to her fate and set course toward Wake Island and the Marianas. Throughout the remainder of the day the MOGAMI, ARASHIO and ASASHIO plodded toward the setting sun at a steady fourteen knots. Later, course was shifted toward the Japanese naval bastion of Truk where the limping MOGAMI received temporary repairs that allowed her to reach Kure. Even with modern equipment and the latest technology it was over a year before the MOGAMI quit the Kure shipyard and rejoined the active fleet.

The MIKUMA was indeed but a short space of time away from her end. The three attacks she had sustained during the day had been severe. There had been hits on the bridge, forecastle and amidships. The forward main batteries were out of commission and ready antiaircraft ammunition had exploded when a bomb burst near the bridge. The flames and explosions amidships had detonated several of the MIKUMA's own torpedoes and spread fire throughout the central part of the ship.[1] Neither destroyer could come alongside to assist in fire fighting because of the intense heat. When Soji pulled the other three ships away, over 100 men were struggling in the water for survival. Nineteen succeeded in climbing aboard a raft from where they watched the MIKUMA roll over and sink shortly before sunset. Three days later when the submarine

[1] CINCPAC report on Interrogation of Japanese Prisoners taken on 9 June 1942 to Office of Naval Intelligence, dated 21 June 1942.

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TROUT came on the scene only Chief Radioman Katsuichi Yoshida and Fireman Kemichi Ishikawa were still alive.[1] Upon interrogation, the latter provided many useful bits of intelligence information on the MIKUMA, the Midway plans and of how the Japanese homefront was finding wartime life.[2]

Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi's Cruiser Division Five became the center of a hastily created Diversion Force. The new unit, consisting of the heavy cruisers HAGURO and MYOKO and the nine ships of Destroyer Squadron Four, was to lure the Americans into a trap. Admiral Yamamoto based his operations on the premise that the Americans would be attracted to the area northeast of Wake Island by a large number of false radio messages, transmitted by the Diversion Force. In the area would be several submarines as well as planes of the Base Air Force at Wake.[3] Neither Admiral Takagi nor his Chief of Staff, Captain Ko Nagasawa, understood fully why the Japanese surface ships had been left in such an exposed position. They both felt that the U. S. carrier planes would find them and attack before either the submarines or the shore based aircraft located the American carriers.[4] The Diversion Force remained in position until 13 June when it was dissolved without having sighted the enemy.

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[1] Log of USS TROUT, 9 June 1942.

[2] CINCPAC report on Interrogation of Japanese Prisoners taken on 9 June 1942 to Office of Naval Intelligence, dated 21 June 1942.

[3] Extract from War Diaries of 24th Air Flotilla, May-July 1942, CIG 96417.

[4] Nagasawa Interview.

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Even before leaving Japan there had been reports that Admiral Yamamoto was not feeling well. This was occasionally evident during the trip towards Midway, but on the whole he gave every indication of a man ready for a major sea battle. In the catastrophic hours following the loss of the four carriers, it was Admiral Yamamoto who maintained the realistic thinking of Combined Fleet, assisted as always by Admiral Ugaki. When nerveous staff officers wondered how they would ever explain the defeat to the Emperor, the four-starred commander told them not to worry for the responsibility was his alone. He would apologize to His Majesty.[1] With the dispositions of 6 June completed - the detaching of ships for the Aleutian area and the Diversion Force - Admiral Yamamoto retired to his cabin and remained there until 10 June. It was rumored that he had roundworms, but a case of ulcers or hypertension seems more logical.

While the staff of Combined Fleet sought to share the responsibility that Admiral Yamamoto assumed, the staff of the Mobile Force was recommending that Admiral Nagumo take a different type of responsibility. During the withdrawal, Senior Staff Officer Oishi asked Kusaka to "suggest to the commander to take his responsibility for the lost battle."[2] The staff prepared to follow their defeated leader in accomplishing the time-honored act. Kusaka, always the pragmatist, would not hear of it and instead lectured the staff officer on Japan's need for the talent and

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[1] Agawa, Isoroku Yamamoto, p. 288.

[2] Kusaka, Combined Fleet, p. 91.

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experience of those serving with the Mobile Force. When Kusaka reported the scene to Nagumo, the latter agreed with reluctance to continue on and not to take his life.[1]

On 10 June Admiral Yamamoto ordered the NAGARA to come alongside and highline Admiral Nagumo, his Chief of Staff, Kusaka, the Operations Officer, Captain Oishi and Genda, the Mobile Force's Air Officer, over to the flagship. Nagumo pleaded illness and did not visit the YAMATO. Kusaka, Oishi and Genda described the fateful moments of the Mobile Force while Admiral Yamamoto listened in silence.[2] And then it was the Commander's turn to speak. In a fifteen minute uninterrupted tongue lashing the thoroughly aroused Yamamoto censured the entire Mobile Force for its unsatisfactory performance. The primary point in his peroration was the failure of the Mobile Force to maintain the immediate attacking force he had ordered. This had been a specific item in the critique during the May table maneuvers. At that time he had verbally stated that half of the attack planes would be held in reserve for striking any enemy force that might suddenly appear. With the decision to rearm for a second attack on Midway, the Mobile Force had lost much

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[1] Nagumo remained at sea after Midway and commanded major fleet units in the savage battles for control of the seas around the Solomons. After loss of these vital islands, Nagumo became island commander on Saipan. In the final days of the Saipan campaign in July 1944, Nagumo committed hara kiri.

[2] The meeting between Admiral Yamamoto and members of the Mobile Force was held in the Admiral's cabin located on the main deck of the YAMATO. When queried during the interview, Captain Watanabe stated that both he and Admiral Ugaki were present. Watanabe's diary shows the date as 10 June although Fuchida states this occurred on 8 June. Kusaka's Combined Fleet, p. 91, claims that he was alone with Yamamoto.

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of its immediate offensive capability and had flagrantly disobeyed the verbal orders of the Commander of Combined Fleet. For this action Admiral Nagumo as the Mobile Force commander must bear the responsibility. Nevertheless, the decision making process and the recommendations for such a course of action rests squarely on the air officer, Minoru Genda. The session ended, the thoroughly chastised Mobile Force staff officers returned to their temporary flagship.

The defeat at Midway was so great that enroute it was decided the Japanese public must not learn of the calamity. Ships were to return to their homeports, but crew members were sworn to secrecy on the operation. As quickly as possible ships would be sent to the Southern Area so that the chances of sailors making unintentional slips would be reduced to a minimum. Mitsuo Fuchida, who would have commanded the air strike on Midway except for a sudden case of appendicitis, was transferred to the hospital ship HIKAWA MARU, along with the other wounded.[1] The ship tied up at the Yokosuka Naval Base and after dark the wounded were secretly moved to the base hospital. There, within sight of the concrete-encased MIKASA, the symbol of Japan's emergence as a world naval power, the gallant wounded of the Midway operation were kept in isolation, virtual prisoners in a country for which many of their comrades had laid down their lives.

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[1] Fuchida, Midway-The Battle That Doomed Japan, p. xiv.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE TURNING POINT

The Battle of Midway has been characterized as one of intelligence.[1] In many respects this is true. During the course of the war there would be larger battles but none where the knowledge of what the enemy was planning to do was known as completely by the U. S. Forces as the Battle of Midway. The timely information provided by Commander Rochefort and his men in the Black Chamber and its accuracy cannot be overestimated. While it was not complete, it was sufficient to allow Admiral Nimitz to act upon the information received. And this in itself is one of the key items of command analysis. Intelligence alone can never win a battle. Only the willingness to accept or reject knowledge of the enemy and his plans and then to act accordingly can influence the outcome of the contest. In the Battle of Midway, Nimitz concluded from intelligence at hand that the Aleutian threat was only a diversion and that the seizure of Midway was the real objective of the Japanese.

Any study of the battle of June 1942 must include an examination of the original concept of the Japanese. The later, in-house controversy over whether the Naval General Staff's desire of an attack on the Solomons should have prevailed or whether the plans of Admiral Yamamoto for his

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[1] Morison, Vol. IV: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, p. 158.

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Midway thrust was to have the prime consideration will remain unanswered. It should be remembered, however, that if the Naval General Staff had prevailed over an earlier decision, the Pearl Harbor surprise attack would never have been made. There were several positive facets in any operation aimed at the seizure of the Solomons and the Fiji Island bases, such as proximity to Japanese installations, remoteness of the area from U. S. facilities and the unsinkable airbases the Japanese would possess for cutting the shipping lines of communication. Whether the U. S. would have fought to preserve its line of communication with Australia cannot be stated with assurance today. From all indications, there would have been little choice but to give battle, regardless of the disadvantage of the area. Thus, the merit in the arguments of the Naval General Staff is not to be discounted lightly.

While the Solomons and Fijis were thousands of miles from both Japan and Hawaii, Midway Island was in a different situation. In seeking its capture, Admiral Yamamoto rightly concluded that the United States Pacific Fleet must come to its defense. In Japanese hands, Midway would be an unacceptable risk for the safety of Hawaii. Every effort would have to be exerted to keep the atoll in possession of the United States. Although the capture of Midway was to be the bait to bring out the American fleet, the Japanese also wanted the island as a buffer outpost in their outer perimeter. The desirability of holding the island was given increased emphasis with the Doolittle Raid of 18 April 1942.[1] Even when it was

[1] Fletcher Pratt, The Battles That Changed History (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), p. 296.

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learned that the captured airmen had flown from the carrier HORNET, the Japanese believed that possession of Midway would have allowed them to detect the approach of the carrier force in time to warn the home islands.

In post-battle analysis, especially in articles and books written after the war, the Japanese have pointed toward the lack of time in preparing for the operation.[1] There is no doubt that the Mobile Force had been subjected to a demanding five months of operation. The ships should have been allowed greater time for maintenance and the air groups needed the extra time to improve their integrated operations, especially since many new pilots replaced the experienced ones that had been lost. Did this, however, bear directly on the Japanese disaster at Midway? Would three more weeks preparation in Japan have enabled the Mobile Force to perform better? Perhaps to a limited degree, but hardly to an extent where it can be shown that this additional time would have produced a Japanese victory.

In only one area can a sound argument be presented for delay. The two carriers that participated in the Coral Sea operation might have been reshuffled to allow the air group from the SHOKAKU to operate from the undamaged ZUIKAKU. When the two carriers returned to Japan from the Coral Sea, evidently no serious thought was given to such a shift. The reported destruction of the American carriers, combined with the over-confident attitude then prevalent in the Japanese Navy, led commanders

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[1] Kusaka, Combined Fleet, p. 71.

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to believe that four carriers were more than enough.

This confidence within Combined Fleet allowed that command to accept the extension of the original Midway plan by adding an Aleutian diversion. The attacks in the north could have been executed at any other time, either before or after the main operation. As a diversion, the Aleutian effort was too close in time to the planned attack on Midway. Nothing less than a week before the main thrust was acceptable for a diversion in the Northern Pacific. Had Admiral Nimitz not been aware of the Japanese plans and had he swallowed the bait of the diversion, the enemy would have found the Americans at sea and close to Midway when the Mobile Force made its first attack. The two light carriers assigned to the Northern Force would then have been more properly utilized as support for the main attack on Midway.

One of the most important aspects of the Battle of Midway is the manner in which Admiral Nimitz made the greatest use of the limited forces under his operational control. He rejected the idea of employing battleships for Midway, dispatched his older warships to the Aleutians and herded his available air, surface and underwater forces toward the threatened island. That some of these forces did not perform as well as might have been expected is no reflection upon CINCPAC's concept of employment. The failures were primarily attributable to new and inexperienced men. Nimitz paid no heed to the uniform worn by a particular unit. If the unit was capable of fulfilling a mission then it had a role in the defense of Midway. Marine, Navy and Army Air Corps units worked together, smoothly, even if not too effectively, on Midway.[1]

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From all indications there was no service bickering nor jealousy on the island. For instance, Marines helped fuel and rearm Flying Fortresses because their assistance would reduce the turn-around time.

The can-do attitude was evident in all areas on Midway, at Pearl, and aboard the ships at sea. The repair of the damaged YORKTOWN is a perfect example of what man can do when the chips are down. The willingness of the pilots on Midway to battle superior Japanese aircraft is but another illustration of the character of the American as a fighter. The men who fought for control of the skies knew what was at stake for themselves, their service and their country. Few have expressed it better than Lieutenant (jg) Perry Teaff in a letter to Lieutenant Gallaher, his squadron commander in VS-6, written from a mainland hospital:

> "I thought I wanted a rest but now I know that a month off is long enough. One thing that makes me feel that way is the attitude of all the people back here, especially officers and men who have not had the opportunity for service in the combat areas. They seem eager to get into it and treat anyone who has seen a little action with great deference; and those who have had duty over there now are heroes to everyone back here. When I look around and see how the civilian and military interests alike are behind your efforts, I am truly sorry that I am not still with you. I mention this only because I did not have this feeling while I was out there. I considered fighting purely a professional duty, but now I know it is much more than that. Everything we have back here is worth any sacrifice that is necessary for us to keep it. I'm telling you this because you may want to pass it on to some of the boys who now feel as I did. If they don't have any strong feelings about the matter, all they need to do is talk to some of the people on the home front (How well they'd like to!). I know it is easy for me to shout fighting enthusiasm from a nice safe hospital on the mainland, but I am sincere. I wish I could come back."[1]

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[1] "The Navy and the Navy," Fortune IX (August, 1942), 68.

[1] Plan of the Day, U. S. S. ENTERPRISE, 27 May 1942.

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The Principles of War have an important role in any examination of a study in command. Whatever principle was observed or ignored invariably reflected on the performance of an individual in a command position during wartime. For the Battle of Midway it is difficult to examine the principles at the subordinate level, but at the senior command echelon there is ample evidence.

Japan allowed more than one "Objective" to influence her offensive actions. When Combined Fleet planned the capture of Midway but at the same time recognized the destruction of the Pacific Fleet as the primary purpose of the operation, the commander split his objectives and burdened his subordinates with the responsibility of determining which had the higher priority at any given moment. Admiral Nimitz had but one objective -- turning back the Japanese from Midway.

Both sides abided by the principle of the "Offensive." Japan was the real offensive force and in her initial planning, movement and battle she followed the basic lines of the offensive. However, where unforeseen events occurred the offensive was dropped or pursued with indecision. All of the U. S. Navy task forces at sea, and the forces on Midway, made sound application of the maxim that the best defense is a strong offense.

When the principle of "Mass" is considered it is evident that the Japanese allowed the mere number of ships to mislead them in their planning. Quantity of ships is not alone sufficient to produce mass. What is essential is bringing together the proper balance of forces at the correct moment. By placing the main body so far behind the Mobile

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Force, Admiral Yamamoto insured that it was responsive to nothing. It could support neither the Mobile Force nor the Invasion Force and it was too far south to influence the Northern Force. The same was true of Admiral Takasu's Guard Force. On the other hand Admiral Nimitz concentrated everything he possessed that was capable of affecting the outcome of the battle.

Japan had moved eastward to "Surprise" the defenders of Midway. As events turned out it was the Japanese who were surprised in almost every aspect of the operation. They were surprised when Tomonaga's force found Midway with few planes on the ground and even more so when the TONE search plane discovered an American carrier force where it was not expected. American intelligence information prior to the battle played a tremendous part in keeping the American forces from being surprised. The Japanese, although lacking radar, could have taken additional steps to keep from being surprised. The major failure in Japan's efforts to avoid being surprised is its failure to institute a two phase search. This, however, is only one part. The submarines were late arriving at their cordon positions[1] and the second Operations K was a failure because the Japanese failed to plan a flexible operation that would have permitted refueling at another location than French Frigate Shoals.[2]

While it is necessary to avoid being surprised it is equally essential

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[1] Samuel E. Morison, "Six Minutes that Changed the World," American Heritage, XIV (February, 1963), 103.

[2] Forrestel, Admiral Spruance, p. 41.

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to have sufficient "Security" to prevent damage from that surprising force as well as enable one to destroy it. The security of the Mobile Force rested on the combat air patrol from the four carriers. In terms of numbers the combat air patrol appears to have been adequate but the control of the fighter aircraft does not indicate any degree of centralization. The records of the Mobile Force do not reflect whether the Zeroes were controlled in a fighter director central or by each carrier. Regardless of how it was done, the security was sufficiently weak to allow all planes to become engaged at low altitudes. As a result, McClusky and Leslie and the pilots that followed them arrived over the Mobile Force without a Zero obstructing their approach. This was not the case when the YORKTOWN was attacked nor when Task Force 16 delivered its aerial assault on the HIRYU. Although the combat air patrol was alerted to each threat, the divebombers and torpedo planes were able to press home their attack with some of the planes getting through the fighter and antiaircraft defenses.

There is no question that when Admiral Yamamoto burdened the Mobile Force with supporting the landing on Midway as well as attacking any U. S. Naval force that might appear, Admiral Nagumo's ability to "Maneuver" was severely restricted. But this in itself does not constitute a violation of the principle of maneuver. What the Japanese did do was to restrict their forces to a fixed timetable that did not allow freedom of action or freedom of maneuver. The Main Body and the Guard Force, while theoretically able to maneuver in response to any enemy situation, were actually positioned so far to the rear that any

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maneuvering would have been lost in the passage of time. Contrasted to the Japanese lack is the maneuver tactics as applied by Admirals Fletcher and Spruance. Initially, Fletcher insured that he was sufficiently close to Midway to assist in protecting it but also in a position to strike the enemy carrier force as it approached Midway. Subsequently, Spruance applied the same criteria and, when he determined that the Japanese were retreating from Midway, he pursued them with all of the strength at his command.

It seems almost foolish to compare the two forces with regard to the principle of "Economy of Force." The Japanese came with nearly every ship in the Navy. Admiral Nimitz had less than a quarter as many. While the odds may have been better than four to one in favor of the Japanese, the real offensive power of the Island Empire was far less. Even more dramatic was the small size of the force that could battle the U. S. in a confrontation. With all the power at his command, Admiral Yamamoto had allowed much of it to be positioned in locations where it was incapable of rendering support to anyone. He did not utilize fully the forces he had available. Admiral Nimitz used everything at hand that would assist in accomplishing the mission. The battleships he rejected and the necessity of sending a token force to the Aleutians was dictated by political demands even more than the military need. Nimitz made the best application of what he had; Yamamoto did not.

From the command aspect, the decision of the Commander of Combined Fleet to put to sea personally raises several questions. What could he expect to gain by being at sea while a considerable distance from the

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enemy? Could he have achieved more by being with the Mobile Force? Would he have been able to exert greater command guidance by being ashore as did his counterpart? Bound by radio silence throughout much of the battle, the Japanese commander became a part-time listener to the battle going on ahead of him. Only when it was too late did he break radio silence and start directing his far-flung subordinates. Nimitz was in a peculiarly favored position. One subordinate, Simard on Midway, could be in constant telephonic communication with him. It was a two way situation whereas the early information concerning Task Forces 16 and 17 could be sent by CINCPAC although the ships at sea were bound by radio silence from transmitting to CINCPAC.

The action of the U. S. carrier air groups is almost as varied as is that of the two opposing commanders. Throughout the battle there was never a sign of a real coordinated attack. Losses were undoubtedly higher because the commander did not or could not coordinate their attacks. Each torpedo squadron attacked individually and without regard for the divebombers above. McClusky and Leslie attacked separate ships at almost the same time, but it was not so planned. Although completely uncoordinated, the attack was timed to a highly desirable degree. Even more appalling was the lack of coordination between forces on the island and those at sea. Many airmen on the island did not know that carriers were present to help them and those at sea had no idea of what was ashore. The lack of coordination is a reflection on primitive communications at that time of the war. A year later the technique was vastly improved. This, though, was mid-1942 and the American forces

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were bitterly engaged in a struggle for survival.

Two decisions, and there were many others, may be said to hold the key to the American victory. When Admiral Nagumo decided to recover the planes of his first strike and rearm them, even with the confirmed presence of an enemy carrier force, before continuing the attack, he made a decision that more than any other assured the Japanese defeat at Midway.[1] Nagumo placed his forces in a position where they were unable to react with the speed needed in carrier warfare. He ordered his flight decks filled and his carriers placed in a situation where they were incapable of offensive action. Wade McClusky also made a key decision, whose weight it is almost impossible to overemphasize. His decision to search away from Midway, on the basis that the Japanese might not have made good their earlier course and speed, was courageous to say the least. McClusky fully realized how serious the fuel situation was with his planes. He accepted the risk of planes being lost for the larger reward of finding and attacking the enemy. There was no council of war on what he should do. The decision was his and his alone.

For Japan the heavy loss of the skilled airmen was to be felt throughout the remainder of the war. So, too, would be the attrition of the aviation mechanics, ordnancemen and metalsmiths that went down with the four carriers. The sinking of the four fleet carriers and the loss of nearly 300 planes constituted a disaster of the first magnitude.[2]

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[1] "Historical Notes," Time, June 10, 1942, p. 29.

[2] Saburo Hayashi and Alvin D. Cook, Kogun - The Japanese Army in the Pacific War (Quantico, Va: Marine Corps Association, 1959), p. 56.

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Granted, in terms of percentage of the fleet, four ships less was not much, but the war in the Pacific was fought and eventually won with aircraft carriers. Japan was unable to harness her industrial machine to a point where she could compete with the United States. Time was against the Empire. When four carriers were lost in the first six months of the war, the odds on the eventual outcome shifted against Japan. Without the carriers the complexion of future operations was changed. Had Japan been victorious she might have isolated Hawaii with her carriers and subjected the cities of the west coast to heavy carrier raids. The planes of six carriers, striking a city such as San Francisco, would have had a major impact. But Japan was not victorious and with the loss of superior airpower she reverted to the defensive. The struggles for the Solomons and the other Pacific islands were ones of Japan trying to thwart an American victory.

News of the victory at Midway had an exhilarating effect on the American homefront. The Navy's success in the early days of June provided the one bright spot in an otherwise dismal war picture.[1] The final outcome of the war was not changed by the Battle of Midway, but the speed in which its termination was brought about was most certainly influenced by the three day battle. Both the HORNET and the ENTERPRISE subsequently supported the American push up the Solomon chain. The HORNET, in fact, was lost during the struggle in the South Pacific. Three of the heavy cruisers, the VINCENNES, ASTORIA and NORTH-

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[1] "Jap Shellacking Thrills U. S. After Six Months of Glum News," Newsweek, June 15, 1942, p. 17.

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AMPTON, as well as the antiaircraft cruiser ATLANTA, went down near the scene of the HORNET sinking.

During the course of the war in the Pacific there were many more naval battles some of which were larger in terms of opposing ships, men and guns. Midway, however, remains as the battle that halted decisively the thrust of Japanese seapower. At Midway, as in all other battles, it was men with their great capacity for valor and self-sacrifice that shaped the victory. The pilots of the divebombers suffered losses exceeded only by those who flew the slow, vulnerable torpedo planes. The men knew the odds at stake but they were bound and determined to insure that, if humanly possible, the Japanese should be beaten. When the four carriers had been set ablaze one flier aboard the ENTERPRISE could remark truthfully, "All in all we have won the biggest naval engagement in the world. The Japs were taken by surprise and had hell beat out of them."[1] With admirable foresight he predicted that the Battle of Midway would be "the turning point of the war."

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[1]Dobson Diary, 4 June 1942.

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APPENDIX A

JAPANESE TASK ORGANIZATION

Combined Fleet (ADM Yamamoto)

Main Force (ADM Yamamoto)

Battleship Group (Bat Div 1)
YAMATO, NAGATO, MUTSU

Carrier Group
HOSHO (CVL), YUKAZE (DD)

Screen (Des Ron 3)
SENDAI (CL)
Des Div 11
FUBUKI, SHIRAYUKI, HATSUYUKI, MURAKUMO
Des Div 19
ISONAMI, URANAMI, SHIKINAMI, AYANAMI

1st Supply Unit
NARUTO, TOEI MARU (Oilers)

Guard Force (VADM Takasu)

Battleship Group (Bat Div 2)
HYUGA, ISE, FUSO, YAMASHIRO

Screen (Under Cru Div 9)
KITAKAMI (CL), OI (CL)
Des Div 20
ASAGIRI, YUGIRI, SHIRAKUMO, AMAGIRI
Des Div 24
UNIKAZE, YAMAKAZE, KAWAKAZE, SUZUKASE
Des Div 27
ARIAKE, YUGURE, SHIGURE, SHIRATSUYU

2nd Supply Unit
SAN CLEMENTE MARU, TOA MARU (Oilers)

Mobile Force (VADM Nagumo)

Carrier Group
Car Div 1
AKAGI (CV), 21 VF, 21 TB, 21 VB
KAGA (CV), 21 VF, 30 TB, 21 VB

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Car Div 2
HIRYU (CV), 21 VF, 21 TB, 21 VB
SORYU (CV), 21 VF, 21 TB, 21 VB

Support Group
Cru Div 8
TONE (CA), CHIKUMA (CA)
Bat Div 3 (2d Section)
HARUNA, KIRISHIMA

Screen
NAGARA (CL)
Des Div 4
NOWAKI, ARASHI, HAGIKAZE, MAIKAZE
Des Div 10
KAZAGUMO, YUGUMO, MAKIGUMO
Des Div 17
URAKAZE, ISOKAZE, TANIKAZE, HAMAKAZE

Supply Group
KYOKUTO MARU, SHINKOKU MARU, TOHO MARU, NIPPON MARU, KOKUYO MARU (Oilers, AKIGUMO (DD))

Midway Occupation Force (VADM Kondo)

Invasion Force Main Body
Cru Div 4
ATAGO (CA), CHOKAI (CA)
Cru Div 5
MYOKO (CA), HAGURO (CA)
Bat Div 3 (Less 2d Section)
KONGO, HIEI

Screen (Des Ron 4)
YURA (CL)
Des Div 2
MURASAME, SAMIDARE, HARUSAME, YUDACHI
Des Div 9
ASAGUMO, MINEGUMO, NATSUGUMO

Carrier Group
ZUIHO (CVL), MIKAZUKI (DD)

Supply Group
SATA, TSURUMI, GENYO MARU, KENYO MARU (Oilers)
AKASHI (Repair Ship)

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Close Support Group
Cru Div 7
KUMANO (CA), SUZUYA (CA), MIKUMA (CA), MOGAMI (CA)
Des Div 3
ASASHIO, ARASHIO

Transport Group
KIYOZUMI MARU, ZENYO MARU, No. 2 TOA MARU, ARGENTINA MARU, BRAZIL MARU, AZUMA MARU, KEIYO MARU, GOSHU MARU, KANO MARU, HOKURIKU MARU, KIRISHIMA MARU, NANKAI MARU, AKEBONO MARU (Oiler)

Escort
Des Ron 2
JINTSU (CL)
Des Div 15
KUROSHIO, OYASHIO
Des Div 16
YUKIKAZE, AMATSUKAZE, TOKITSUKAZE, HATSUKAZE
Des Div 18
SHIRANUHI, KASUMI, ARARE, KAGERO

Seaplane Tender Group
CHITOSE, KAMIKAWA MARU
HAYASHIO (DD)

Minesweeper Group
TAMA MARU No. 3, TAMA MARU No. 5, SHONAN MARU No. 7
SHONAN MARU No. 8
Subchasers Nos. 16, 17, 18
SOYA (Supply Ship)
MEIYO MARU, YAMAFUKU MARU (Cargo Ships)

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APPENDIX B

UNITED STATES TASK ORGANIZATION

Pacific Fleet (ADM Nimitz)

Task Force 17 (RADM Fletcher)

Task Group 17.5
YORKTOWN (CV), 25 VF, 13 VTB, 36 VSB

Task Group 17.2
ASTORIA (CA), PORTLAND (CA)

Task Group 17.4 (Destroyers)
HAMMANN, NORRIS, RUSSELL, ANDERSON, HUGHES

Task Force 16 (RADM Spruance)

Task Group 16.5
ENTERPRISE (CV), 27 VF, 14 VTB, 38 VSB
HORNET (CV), 27 VF, 15 VTB, 37 VSB

Task Group 16.2
PENSACOLA (CA), NORTHAMPTON (CA), VINCENNES (CA), MINNEAPOLIS (CA), NEW ORLEANS (CA), ATLANTA (CLAA)

Task Force 7 (RADM English)

Task Group 7.1
CUTTLEFISH, DOLPHIN, GATO, GRAYLING, GROUPER, GUDGEON, TROUT, NAUTILUS, TAMBOR, GRENADIER, FLYING FISH, CACHALOT

Task Group 7.2
NARWHAL, PLUNGER, TRIGGER

Task Group 7.3
TARPON, PIKE, FINBACK, GROWLER

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APPENDIX C

MIDWAY WAR CRIMES

It was nearly five years after the Battle of Midway before any American realized that war crimes had been perpetrated on two of the Japanese ships belonging to Admiral Nagumo's Mobile Force. While the information disclosed may not have been germane to the leadership aspects of Midway, it still has a proper place in any complete recounting of the battle.

During late 1946 and early 1947, a team of officers and highly specialized civilians from the Office of Naval Intelligence interrogated senior Japanese naval officers on their role during World War II. One important bit of information gleaned from the project was the presence of the action report of the Mobile Force in one of the numerous boxes of untranslated documents in the Federal Records Office in Alexandria, Virginia. Translators went to work on the action report of the Mobile Force, the final product being "The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway." This appeared in the May 1947 issue of the ONI Review. Two paragraphs received special attention from the reviewers. One mentioned the name of a torpedo pilot rescued by the destroyer ARASHI. The other told of the information furnished by an ENTERPRISE dive-bomber pilot and his gunner to personnel on the destroyer MAKIGUMO.

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The names of the three Americans were contained in the report and upon checking the list of personnel who were prisoners of war in Japan, it became apparent that none of the three captives reached Japan. The Navy Department requested [1] that the Supreme Commander Allied Powers, the occupation headquarters in Japan, investigate what had happened on board the two destroyers during the battle and in the days immediately thereafter. Should sufficient evidence be found to warrant prosecution, the parties responsible for the crimes were to be brought to trial before the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. The Japanese authorities cooperated fully in locating personnel who had been on the destroyers during the period involved.

By interviewing a total of sixteen members from the MAKIGUMO, the team of investigators learned the circumstances of how the men came to be aboard the destroyer, their treatment and disposition. They were unable to learn with certainty who actually killed them although they could affix the responsibility for it upon the commanding officer. From the crew members they learned that during the late afternoon of 4 June the temporary flagship NAGARA sighted an object, reddish in color, floating on the water. A message directed the MAKIGUMO to investigate the object. [2] If it held Japanese they were to be rescued. If on the other

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[1] Navy Department letter of 13 March 1947. The items concerning the MAKIGUMO investigation are contained in files 67-182 and 331 of the World War II reference branch, National Archives and Records Service, King and Union Streets, Alexandria, Virginia

[2] Interrogation of Takashi Moroishi, lieutenant, executive officer, at Fukuoka, Japan on 15 October 1947. Also, Kenichi Tanaka, lieutenant, gunnery officer, at Osaka, Japan on 10 August 1948.

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hand the men were Americans they were to "interrogate the prisoners to ascertain the enemy's situation and then dispose of them (shobun) suitably."[1]

The destroyer maneuvered alongside the liferaft, identified the occupants as Americans and brought them onto the forward part of the ship. The two men, one wearing a leather flight jacket, were uninjured, other than abrasions on the forehead. The time of rescue was approximately 1630 or shortly before the planes of Task Force 16 attacked the lone remaining operational carrier, the HIRYU. While evidence does not directly support the conclusion, it is believed that the MAKIGUMO was sailing from the area where the three carriers had been set afire toward the HIRYU, or to the north.

Initial interrogation disclosed that the taller of the two was Ensign Able[2] and the shorter was Aviation Machinist Mate Second Class Bravo from Scouting Squadron 6 on the ENTERPRISE. Surgeon Lieutenant (jg) Ichiro Takano treated the two men for their injuries after which they were confined to the after bathroom on the main deck. A guard was placed on the area. The interrogation of both Able and Bravo was done by Finance Lieutenant Ryokichi Katsumata,[3] the only officer with a fluency in English.

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[1] Letter from Captain Shigeo Hirayama, JMSDF to author of 10 June 1966. Also, interrogation of Shigeo Hirayma, lieutenant (jg) navigator/communication officer at Tokyo on 9 June 1948.

[2] The names of both men are known to the writer, but rather than use them only the phonetic Able and Bravo will be employed.

[3] Interrogation of Tsneyo Namba, lieutenant, chief engineer at Fukuoka, Japan on 23 October 1947.

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Soon after the pair was brought aboard, the MAKIGUMO was busily committed to repelling the air attacks on the HIRYU and her escorts. Later that night the destroyer stood alongside the carrier and removed part of her crew. About 0500 on 5 June she fired a pair of torpedoes into the derelict carrier then joined the NAGARA and others for a rendezvous with the YAMATO. About three days after taking aboard the HIRYU's crew, they were transferred to the KIRISHIMA. During these first two or three days the prisoners were infrequently interrogated.

The questioning was pursued by Katsumata with Lieutenant Takashi Moroishi, the executive officer, frequently present. When the prisoners failed to answer a question to which it was believed they had the answer, Katsumata would take a dagger from his hip and threaten them.[1] As a result the Japanese obtained the following information from Able and Bravo:

"Defense of Midway

1. About 5000 Marines. No army troops.
2. About 150 planes
   Fighters (Grummans and Buffaloes) 50
   Bombers (B-18's) 50
   Flying Boats (Consolidated PBY's) 30
3. There are gun emplacements along the entire perimeter of the island. Guns are 20mm, 30mm and 5" of which the 20mm's are the most numerous.
4. There are 5 torpedo boats in the harbor.
5. The air field on EASTERN Island is situated at the northern tip and is built in a triangular shape. Runways are 200 feet wide and 3000 feet long.
6. Flying boats carry out air patrols to a distance of 700 miles each morning and evening. They are out for 14 hours each.

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[1] Interrogation of Takeshiko Suzuki, petty officer 1/c, at Osaka, Japan on 5 September 1947. Suzuki witnessed the interrogation held on deck but could not understand any English.

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Midway has never been used as a carrier base.
The ALABAMA has apparently recently been commissioned.
The U. S. apparently does not announce losses of her carriers.
Douglas SBD's are used for patrol planes as well as divebombers."[1]

From all indications neither prisoner was mistreated. They became objects of curiosity for the crew who willingly shared their cigarettes with them. Able showed pictures of his wife to those interested. Ensign Koju Kanechiku recalled that he had asked them what they wanted to eat. The response was milk, peas and potatoes, along with cigarettes. The problem of what to do with the men weighed heavily on Captain Isamu Fujita and on more than one occasion he brought the subject up for general discussion in the wardroom. Fujita did not want them killed by pistol or sword for he believed the spilling of blood would bring bad luck to his ship.[2] Whether Fujita decided the measure finally adopted or whether it was a result of concensus is unknown. But as the ship turned north toward the Aleutians, Fujita ordered that the prisoner be "disposed of." At noon mess for the crew, volunteers were sought as executioners. When no one stepped forward, they were again encouraged with a promise of the watches, rings and cigarette lighters of the prisoners. One of the lighters, taken from Able, was especially appealing and bore the inscription, "To my Matchless Husband."[3] Even with the

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[1]Enclosure (1) to Navy Department letter of 13 March 1947. The information pertaining to Midway was amazingly accurate. Apparently neither man disclosed information on the two U. S. Task Forces.

[2]Interrogation of Koju Kanechiku, ensign, assistant communications officer, at Fukuoka, Japan on 29 October 1947.

[3]Interrogation of Tsneyo Namba. Yoshio Saito, machinist mate, supplied information on the quest for volunteers.

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added inducement, there were no volunteers.

In the latter part of the afternoon, the two prisoners were bound and blindfolded. To each limb was lashed a five gallon kerosene can filled with water to act as a sinker. The sense of what was to come brought many crewmen to the scene.[1] Fujita saw what was happening, shouted to the men to disband and, when they failed to obey, ordered all hands below. The prisoners were freed and returned to their bathroom cell.

That night between 2200 and 0200 Able and Bravo were once more taken onto the deck and prepared for execution. It is believed three men from the Gunnery Department participated in this preparation. Petty Officers Sato, Kanda and Nakasawa probably readied them with Nakasawa actually throwing them overboard. The date of execution has never been precisely established but it was evidently four to six days after they were rescued.

The interrogators were consistently stymied in their efforts to determine responsibility. Fujita died on 3 November 1942 in the South Pacific. The Doctor, Takano, was killed in action on 21 January 1945 in the "Inner South Seas." Katsumata also died during the war, although the date and location were never established. While Moroishi remained as a prime suspect, he being the executive officer, he steadfastly denied

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[1] Nearly all interrogated were aware of the method used to kill the prisoners. Minoru Kurihara, senior petty officer, gunnery department, viewed the afternoon preparations, or so he said at Sapporo, Japan on 11 September 1947. He also fixed the time of executions, saying he was informed of them on coming on watch at 0200.

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knowledge of the execution. Sato, Kanda and Nakasawa were all killed during the war, the first two when the MAKIGUMO sank after striking a mine near Guadalcanal on 1 February 1943. In the absence of specific evidence no member of the crew was ever brought to trial.

The second incident concerning a war crime occurred on board the destroyer ARASHI. The 2000-ton destroyer was the flagship of Captain Kasaku Ariga, Commander of Destroyer Division Four. It will be recalled that as the Mobile Force continued toward Midway, after launching its 108 plane strike, it encountered the ineffective efforts of the submarine NAUTILUS. When the Mobile Force nearly reversed its course and started heading north, or away from Midway, the ARASHI fell behind to prosecute the hunt for the submarine. As she steamed back and forth over the suspected position of the American submarine she could see the remainder of the Mobile Force disappear over the horizon. When the hunt for the NAUTILUS was terminated, the ARASHI gave chase to the Mobile Force. It was the wake from this speeding ship that guided McClusky and his aircraft from the ENTERPRISE to the ships of the Mobile Force.

While heading toward the Mobile Force, observers on the ARASHI spotted a man swimming in the water.[1] The officer of the deck was Lieutenant (jg) Yukito Honda who was also the ship's navigator. Commander Yasumasa Watanabe, captain of the destroyer, ordered that the

[1] Interrogation of Tadao Otaguro, lieutenant, chief engineer, at Fukuoka, Japan on 16 December 1947. Otaguro stated the swimmer was sighted at 1800 but this must be in error as the message announcing the information developed by the American was transmitted at 1300.

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swimmer be rescued. The ship hove to while a boat was lowered and rowed to the swimmer.[1] On returning the boat made the port brow, beneath the bridge, where the rescued man was taken aboard and made to sit on the deck.[2] It was obvious to all who viewed him that he was an American airman.

Lieutenant Kiyosumi Tanikawa, the torpedo officer, was the only Japanese aboard the destroyer with any knowledge of English. Watanabe ordered him to place the American on the open deck next to the bridge and interrogate him. While the ARASHI resumed speed and course toward the Mobile Force, Tanikawa approached the airman who was still sitting on the steel deck. The Japanese officer's knowledge of English was so limited that he was forced to write the questions on paper and submit them to the American for answering.[3] In little time the prisoner had written answers to Tanikawa's questions. He was Ensign Charles[4] from the torpedo squadron on the YORKTOWN. He was twenty-three years old and came from Chicago. Both Watanabe

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[1] Interrogation of Kumiharo Saito, leading seaman, sonar operator, at Tokyo on 20 May 1948 during which he revealed that he had helped launch the boat that was used in the rescue.

[2] Interrogation of Kiyosumi Tanakawa, lieutenant, torpedo officer, at Fukuoka, Japan on 15 December 1947.

[3] Ibid. The slow process of writing and answering consumed about an hour and a half altogether. Tanikawa said the replies were freely given. Testimony revealed that Tanikawa stood so close to the captive and moved his sword in such a manner as to indicate that his questioning was under duress.

[4] Charles is not the pilot's real name but is used like the pseudonym for the two taken aboard the MAKIGUMO.

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and Ariga posed the questions to Tanikawa, who was standing in front of the prisoner, and he handed the written paper to the pilot for reply. Tanikawa held a sword in his hand for effect.

The Japanese who gazed at Charles saw a tall, slender pilot with reddish-brown hair. He had minor burns on his hands, face and arms, apparently incurred during the final moments of his Devastator flight and he was tired from swimming. Surgeon Lieutenant Katsukichi Ishizaka examined the pilot's injuries. Under postwar interrogation, the medical officer could not recall tending the burns, but stated that Charles "was well treated. He was given a blanket, food and milk to drink, the same as the Japanese wounded."[1]

In any attempt to reconstruct what occurred on the ARASHI, the most significant missing link is that of precise time. From a knowledge of related events, it appears as though Charles was rescued about 1100. VT-3 did not make its attack until after 1015 and it is probable that Charles flew his damaged plane south from the Mobile Force. Since it was stated that he had been swimming for sometime, it is evident that he did not see the ARASHI when he crashed. In other words, his sighting by the ship was sheer chance. From interrogation of witnesses it can be concluded that at the time of rescue the destroyer was not yet within sight of the Mobile Force. However, after the initial interrogation of Charles, the ARASHI came upon the scene of the three burning

[1] Interrogation of Katsukichi Ishizaka, surgeon lieutenant, at Tokyo on 2 December 1947. The medical officer, a graduate of Tohoku Imperial University, reported that the pilot "appeared to be all right except that he was tired since he had been swimming for a long time."

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carriers. Watanabe was ordered to maneuver his ship into the immediate vicinity of the burning carrier between 1200 and 1300. It is necessary to attempt to reconstruct the time lapse in order to comprehend what next followed.

After initial interrogation, Charles was further questioned by Tanikawa. It was a slow process and by now both parties could see the damaged carriers. When Tanikawa inquired about the composition of the American force that had wrought this destruction, Charles revealed the following:

"1. Carriers involved are the YORKTOWN, ENTERPRISE and HORNET. In addition, 6 cruisers and about 10 destroyers.

2. YORKTOWN, accompanied by 2 cruisers and 3 destroyers, acting independently of the others.

3. Sortied from Pearl Harbor during the morning of 31 May arriving in the vicinity of Midway about 1 June. Patrolling along a north-south course ever since.

4. There were no capital ships in Pearl Harbor up to 31 May. Prisoner had been training at base and was not cognizant of capital ship movements."[1]

Soon after this second period of questioning, Charles was taken from the bridge area and confined in number five crews quarters near the stern of the ship. Charles remained in his restricted area while the crew of the ARASHI tried to assist damage control efforts on the AKAGI. Before sunset that night, 4 June, Charles was brought on deck and taken to the extreme stern of the ship, the fantail.[2] He was made

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[1] Destroyer Division Secret Dispatch #10, radioed to Combined Fleet, Second Fleet and the Mobile Force at 1300. ONI Review, p. 27.

[2] Interrogation of Shosaku Oshima, senior petty officer, gunnery department, at Tokyo on 7 June 1948. Oshima heard the pilot was

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to face aft. As he gazed at the ship's wake, he was executed. Again the exact time and method remain unknown. Charles was killed for no better reason than he was in the way and would be a nuissance in the future.

During the war crimes investigation, conducted more than five years after the event, there were conflicting reports on the method used to kill the officer. Tanikawa said he was killed by a sword swung at the back of his neck.[1] The navigator, Honda, stated he did not see the ensign but heard that he had been shot.[2] The account given the greatest credibility by the interrogators was that Charles had been killed by the swing of an axe. This was brought out during the questioning of Second Class Petty Officer Shigetoshi Kuramochi.[3] At Midway he was a telegraph key operator assigned to the communications center near the bridge. He was able to identify the photograph of Charles, stating it was similar to one a crewman of the ARASHI had shown soon after the pilot had been killed. The picture possessed by the Japanese named Ken Sato had Charles standing beside an attractive girl. Kuramochi claimed he did not witness the execution but had been told by Sato that

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killed by a blow on the head from an anchor chain hammer.

[1] Tanikawa interrogation of 12 April 1948.

[2] Interrogation of Yukito Honda, lieutenant, navigator, at Tokyo on 9 March 1948. Honda had been officer of the deck when the pilot was rescued. He was on the bridge preparing to relieve Matsuura when Sato reported that the pilot had been killed. Sato remained on the bridge and when Honda asked how the American had been killed, Sato said he had been shot.

[3] Interrogation of Shigetoshi Kuramochi, petty officer second class, communications department, at Tokyo on 26 February and 10 June 1948.

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he knew that Charles had been killed.

Sato was interrogated by Captain Norman S. Tracy in the Legal Office of the Meiji Building in Tokyo on 9 and 12 July 1948. Sato readily admitted to being told to execute Charles. He said the order came directly from Watanabe to Sato as he was the leading petty officer, or sennin gocho. When Sato said that he could not carry out such an order, Watanabe told him to get the job done, regardless of the method. Sato passed the order on to Fukuichi Yumoto. Approximately twenty to thirty minutes later Yumoto reported that Charles had been killed. Sato related this to Watanabe on the bridge and to Lieutenant (jg) Tsutome Matusuura who was the officer of the deck at the time.

Kuramochi said that Sato told him how the pilot had died.[1] He reported that Kohachi Kondo had actually killed the man by using a heavy fire and battle damage axe. Sato further disclosed that the pilot had been in great pain after being struck, although he was not decapitated. He "grabbed the rail chain and hung onto it for a while before he fell into the ocean." Sato denied knowledge of the pilot's possessions - the picture, pen and wallet - which Kuramochi had shown to him. Upon interrogation on 15 July 1948 Sato admitted knowledge of these items saying they had been placed in his quarters shortly after Charles died and that they disappeared soon thereafter.

The account of the execution received additional confirmation when leading seaman Minoru Kiuchi told a story almost identical to Kuramochi's.

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[1] Ibid.

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When it came time for the interrogators to fix responsibility for the act their reasoning followed a path not unlike that of the MAKIGUMO affair. And like the companion case the guilty parties and main supporting witnesses and accomplices were all dead. Senior Petty Officer Yumoto was killed on 7 August 1943, the day after Kondo met his end. Matsuura took his own life on the last day of the war. Watanabe lost his life on 18 December 1943 and Ariga was killed on 7 April 1945. The ARASHI was sunk on 6 August 1943 during the Battle of Vella Gulf, taking with her many of the records that might have shed greater light on the affair.

One part of the ARASHI story remains unanswered and peculiarly suspicious. The questioning had been done by Tanikawa, the torpedo officer. Yumoto who ordered Kondo to kill Charles, Kondo who supposedly swung the axe and Sato were all members of the torpedo division. During the interrogations, 15 December 1947, 9 and 12 April 1948, Tanikawa maintained that he was too busy rescuing survivors of the AKAGI to pay attention to what had happened to the prisoner. As plausible as it may sound, it is an extremely incompetent naval officer who does not know of the shipboard activities of his men. Tanikawa is today a captain in the Personnel Office of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, a position attesting to his professional competence. His reply to this writer's queries was much like his answers to the war crimes interrogators - he could not remember.[1] Despite the fact that thirty

[1] Letter from Capt Kiyosumi Tanikawa, JMSDF to author of 18 December 1966.

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members of the crew were interrogated no one was ever brought to trial for the war crime death of Ensign Charles.

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EVENTS OF 5 JUNE

(Chart on page 335)

(1)		Commander Second Fleet planned to pass through this position at 0300, June 5th, with the night attack force while searching to the east.
(2)	0010 (about)	Commander Mobile Force turned south to participate in the expected night action.
(3)	0015	CinC Combined Fleet directed a rendezvous of the fleet at 0900 in this position. This cancelled the night attack arrangements.
(4)	0044	Task Force 16 makes surface radar contact and turns to east.
(5)	0100 (about)	Second Fleet and Desron 2 alter course to 305° (T) to proceed to the Combined Fleet 0900 rendezvous position.
(6)	0111	Mobile Force alters course to northwestward to proceed to the Combined Fleet 0900 rendezvous.
(7)	0130	Japanese Submarine I-168 shells Midway.
(8)	0215	TAMBOR sights Crudiv 7 and accompanying destroyers and makes flash contact report. MOGAMI collides with MIKUMA when squadron makes emergency turn to the left. Crudiv 7 commences to retire to the west.
(9)	0400 (about)	KUMANO, SUZUYA, and two destroyers increase speed and alter course to join with the Combined Fleet.
(10)	0420	Task Force 16 receives information of TAMBOR contact report and alters course to close on Midway.
(11)	0510	Japanese claim the HIRYU was scuttled in this position. Later information from a Japanese search plane made them doubt this.
(12)	0630	Midway patrol plane 2V55 sighted MOGAMI and MIKUMA trailing oil, and reported them to be two battleships in this position.

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(13) 0700 Midway patrol plane 4V58 sighted and reported two cruisers (KUMANO and SUZUYA) in this location on course 310° (T), speed 20 knots.

(14) and (15) Two Midway patrol planes 6V55 and 7V55 reported contacts with Japanese ships at 0719, 0735, and 0800 in these positions. One of these planes reported a burning carrier screened by cruisers and destroyers, with two battleships well ahead on course 310° (T), speed 20 knots. This must have been the Mobile Force with the burning carrier HIRYU.

(16) 0805 Twelve VB of Marine Air Group 22 commence dive bombing attack out of the sun on MOGAMI and MIKUMA. One plane dove into the after turret of the MIKUMA, causing large fires.

(17) 0830 Eight B-17's make horizontal bombing attack on MOGAMI and MIKUMA immediately following dive bombing attack. The Japanese do not see them until after bombs are dropped.

(18) 0815 Position of Main Force. Main Force and Occupation Force rendezvoused here and steamed on course 310°, speed about 12 knots. Desron 2 joined from astern at 1155. Remnants of Mobile Force joined from astern at about 1300.

(19) 1000 Rendezvous position of Transport Group and KAMIKAWA MARU.

(20) 1036 DD PHELPS reported submarine contact. Task Force 16 made emergency turn to the right.

(21) 1300 Mobile Force joined Main Force.

(22) 1308 Tug VIREO commences towing YORKTOWN on course 100° (T), destination Pearl Harbor.

(23) 1500 Task Force 16 commenced launching, search and attack. Group objective--one burning CV, two BB, three CA, and four DD reported at 0800 to be in position marked (24) on diagram.

(24) One burning CV, two BB, three CA, and four DD reported in Lat. 32° N., Long 179°-32' W. at 0800 on course 310°, speed 12 knots.

(25) 1530 Sixteen ENTERPRISE search planes depart ahead of attack group on a scouting line about 30 miles long to search for objective described in note (23).

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(26) 1636 Seven B-17's while returning from search for the burning CV, two BB, three CA, and four DD's came upon the destroyer TANIKAZE and attacked, dropping fifty-six 500-pound bombs.

(27) 1830 ENTERPRISE and HORNET air attack groups attack single Japanese destroyer in this position. (TANIKAZE)

(28) 1845 Midway patrol plane 2V56 reported being attacked by Japanese fighting planes bearing 313° (T), distant 350 miles from Midway. This report was later corrected to scouting planes instead of fighters.

(29) 1845 Five B-17's searching for the Mobile Force came upon the destroyer TANIKAZE and attacked, dropping twenty-three bombs.

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FINAL FORCE MOVEMENTS

(Chart on page 371)

(1) 0433/6 Midway patrol planes took off to search sector 220-330° (T) for 600 miles, designated coverage 100%.

(2) 0500 Task Force 16 launched eighteen VSB including three HORNET aircraft to search sector 180-360° to the west, distant 200 miles. Search departed at 0510.

(3) 0645 Search plane 8-B-2 reported one CV and five DD in Lat. 29°-33' N., Long. 174°-30' E., course 270. On landing the pilot corrected this report to one BB, one CA, three DD.

(4) 0730 Search plane 8-B-8 reported two CA, two DD in Lat. 28°-55' N., Long. 175°-10' E (Position appears to be in error by about 52 miles) on course 215° (T), speed 15 knots. Both contact reports are of the same group of ships.

(5) 0757 HORNET attack group of twenty-six VSB and eight VF were launched.

(6) 0900 KUMANO, SUZUYA, and two escorting destroyers join CinC Combined Fleet.

(7) 0950 HORNET attack group commenced attack on two CA's and DD's bearing 235° (T), distant 142 miles from 0815 position of HORNET.

(8) 1045 ENTERPRISE attack group of thirty-one VSB, three VT and twelve VF were launched with instructions to search to westward of the ships attacked by the HORNET air group and attack a second group of ships thought to be there.

(9) 1200 Screening Force comprised of seven cruisers and eight destroyers proceed at 20 knots to aid the MOGAMI Group.

(10) 1250 After searching ahead of the two CA's and two DD's for thirty miles under excellent visibility conditions with no further sightings, the ENTERPRISE air group returned and attacked those ships.

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(11) 1330 HORNET attack group of twenty-four VSB were launched for the final attack of the day.

(12) 1445 HORNET group commenced attack on the two CA and two DD.

(13) 1553 Task Force 16 launched a photographic flight of two VSB to photograph the attacked ships. These aircraft were recovered at 1907.

(14) 1630 CinC Combined Fleet turned south with Main Force and Second Fleet.

(15) 1640 Six B-17's attacked ship on surface in about this position believed to be a cruiser, and reported that it sank in 15 seconds. This was the submarine GRAYLING which crash dived and avoided damage.

(16) 1750/6 Commander Seaplane Groups breaks Transport Group into three units, according to their top speed capability, and directs them to make maximum speed to westward.

(17) 0700/7 CinC Combined Fleet alters course to west toward fueling rendezvous.

(18) 0900 Screening Force joins MOGAMI and two destroyers ARASHIO and ASASHIO. MIKUMA sank at an undisclosed time during the preceding night.

(19) 1400 KAMIKAWA MARU and partol boat escort depart to rendezvous with Aleutians Late Support Group for duty with Northern Force.

(20) Rendezvous of Combined Fleet and its detachment, the Screening Force, with the Supply Group occurred in about Lat. 29°N., Long. 166°E. during afternoon of June 7th.

(21) CinC Combined Fleet detached Aleutians Late Support Group to rendezvous with KAMIKAWA MARU and thereafter to proceed to the Aleutians Area to join Northern Force.

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"YORKTOWN Survivors," no serial but under a letter of transmittal dated 29 June 1943 from Commander, Air Group Three to CINCPAC, copy in Office of Naval History.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews reflect the name, rank, service and duty assignment at time of the battle.

Arnold, Murr, E., Cdr, USN, Air Officer on YORKTOWN.

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Best, Richard H., Lt, USN, Commanding Officer, Bombing Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Brassfield, Arthur J., Lt (jg), USNR, Fighting Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Brown, Julian P., LtCol, USMC, Intelligence Officer, Staff, Commander Task Force Sixteen.

Buckmaster, Elliott, Capt, USN, Commanding Officer of YORKTOWN.

Burford, William P., LCdr, USN, Commanding Officer of MONAGHAN.

Carey, John F., Capt, USMC, Operations Officer, Marine Fighter Squadron 221 on Midway Island.

Conaster, Charlie N., Lt (jg), USNR, Scheduling Officer, Scouting Squadron Five on YORKTOWN.

Dobson, Cleo J., Lt (jg), USNR, Assistant Landing Signal Officer on ENTERPRISE.

Draemel, Milo F., RADM, USN, Chief of Staff, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific.

Earnest, Albert K., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Torpedo Squadron Eight assigned to Midway Island.

East, Walter "J.", Lt (jg), USN, Communications Watch Officer, Staff, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific.

Fletcher, Frank Jack, RADM, USN, Commander Task Force Seventeen.

Fuchida, Mitsuo, Cdr, IJN, Commander Air Group on AKAGI.

Gallaher, Wilmer E., Lt, USN, Commanding Officer, Scouting Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Gibbs, Harry B., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Fighting Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Holmberg, Paul A., Lt (jg), USN, Pilot, Bombing Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Johnson, H. M., Lt, USN, Assistant Communications Officer, Staff, Cruisers, Task Force Seventeen.

Kuroshima, Kameto, Capt, IJN, Operations Officer, Combined Fleet.

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Laub, Robert E., Lt (jg), USNR, Pilot, Torpedo Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Leslie, Maxwell F., LCdr, USN, Commanding Officer, Bombing Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Lynch, John J., Lt, USN, Material Officer, Bombing Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Massey, Mrs. Marjorie, widow of LCdr Lance E. Massey, USN, Commanding Officer, Torpedo Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

McCaul, Verne J., Maj, USMC, Executive Officer, Marine Air Group Twenty-Two on Midway Island.

McClusky, Clarence W., LCdr, USN, Commander, Air Group Six on ENTERPRISE.

Miyo, Kazunari, Cdr, IJN, Air Officer, Staff, Naval General Staff.

Nagasawa, Ko, Capt, IJN, Chief of Staff, Cruiser Division Five.

Nimitz, Chester W., ADM, USN, Commander in Chief, Pacific.

Penland, Joe R., Lt, USN, Operations Officer, Bombing Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Ramsey, Logan C., Cdr., USN, Air Operations Officer, Midway Island.

Rochefort, Joseph J., Cdr., USN, Intelligence Officer, Fourteenth Naval District.

Ruehlow, Stanley E., Lt, USN, Air Operations Officer, Fighting Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Short, Wallace C., Lt, USN, Commanding Officer, Scouting Squadron Five on YORKTOWN.

Spruance, Raymond A., RADM, USN, Commander Task Force Sixteen.

Stebbins, Edgar E., Lt, USN, Material Officer, Scouting Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Tappan, Benjamin, Ens, USNR, Pilot, Scouting Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Tomioka, Sadatoshi, Capt, IJN, Operations Division, First Section, Naval General Staff.

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Watanabe, Yasuji, Cdr, IJN, Logistics Officer and Plans Officer, Staff, Commander Combined Fleet.

Yamamoto, Makiko, widow of Yuji Yamamoto, Cdr, IJN, Staff Officer, First Section, Naval General Staff.

PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Buracker, William H., Cdr, USN, Operations Officer, Task Force Sixteen.

Childers, Lloyd F., Aviation Radioman Third Class, USNR, gunner with Torpedo Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Cossitt, Douglas M., Aviation Radioman Third Class, USNR, gunner with Torpedo Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Davis, Ray, Lt, USN, Flight Officer, Bombing Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Esders, Wilhelm G., Chief Aviation Pilot, USN, Pilot, Torpedo Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Fuchida, Mitsuo, Cdr, IJN, Commander Air Group on AKAGI.

Goldsmith, George H., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Bombing Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Guillory, Troy T., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Bombing Squadron Eight on HORNET.

Hirayama, Shigeo, Lt (jg), IJN, navigator of MAKIGUMO.

Jurika, Stephen Jr., Lt, USN, Flight Deck Officer on the HORNET.

Laing, M. B., Cdr, RN, Royal Navy Liaison Officer to Commander-in-Chief Pacific but on board YORKTOWN.

Poteat, Jack L., Lt (jg), USNR, Pilot, Patrol Squadron Forty-Four on Midway Island.

Reid, Jack, Ens, USNR, Pilot, Patrol Squadron Twenty-Four on Midway Island.

Rodee, Walter F., LCdr, USN, Commanding Officer, Scouting Squadron Eight on HORNET.

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Schneider, Tony F., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Bombing Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Smith, Stephen B., Chief Machinist, USN, Pilot, Torpedo Squadron Six on ENTERPRISE.

Swan, Robert, Ens, USNR, Navigator, Patrol Squadron Twenty-Four on Midway Island.

Thach, John S., LCdr, USN, Commanding Officer, Fighting Squadron Three.

Tootle, Milton, Jr., Ens, USNR, Pilot, Fighting Squadron Three on YORKTOWN.

Vose, James E., Lt, USN, Flight Officer, Bombing Squadron Eight on HORNET.

White, John E., Lt (jg), USNR, Pilot, Patrol Squadron Twenty-Four on Midway Island.

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VITA

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Date of birth: March 3, 1925

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Collegiate institutions attended	Dates	Degree	Date of Degree
Cornell University	1943 - 1945	None	
University of Maryland	1951 - 1953	B. S.	June 1953
University of Maryland	1954 - 1957	M. A.	August 1957
University of Maryland	1959 - 1971	Ph. D.	June 1971

Major: American History.

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Publications: History of Marine Corps Competitive Marksmanship. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961.

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