



# Battle of Midway

## June 4-7, 1942

### Midway: Decisive battle of the Pacific war

Continued from A-1

Akebono Maru. Later that morning, at roughly 6:30 a.m., Aichi D3A ("Val") carrier bombers and Nakajima B5N ("Kate") torpedo planes, supported by numerous fighters ("Zekes"), bombed Midway Island installations. Although defending U.S. Marine Corps Brewster F2A ("Buffalo") and Grumman F4F ("Wildcat") fighters suffered disastrous losses, losing 17 of 26 aloft, the Japanese only inflicted slight damage to the facilities on Midway. Motor Torpedo Boat PT-25 was also damaged by strafing in Midway lagoon.

Over the next two hours, Japanese "Zekes" on Combat Air Patrol (CAP) and anti-aircraft fire from the Japanese fleet annihilated the repeated attacks by the American aircraft from Marine Corps Douglas SBD ("Dauntless") and Vought SB2U ("Vindicator") scout bombers from VMSB-241, Navy Grumman TBF ("Avenger") torpedo bombers from VT-8 detachment, and U. S. Army Air Force torpedo-carrying Martin B-26 ("Marauder") bombers sent out to attack the Japanese carriers. Army Air Force "Flying Fortresses" likewise bombed the Japanese carrier force without success, although without losses to themselves.

Between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m., Douglas TBD ("Devastator") torpedo bombers from VT 3, VT-6, and VT-8 on the three American carriers attacked the Japanese carriers. Although nearly wiped out by the defending Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft fire, they drew off enemy

fighters, leaving the skies open for dive bombers from Enterprise and Yorktown. VB-6 and VS-6 "Dauntlesses" from Enterprise bombed and fatally damaged carriers Kaga and Akagi, while VB-3 "Dauntlesses" from Yorktown bombed and wrecked carrier Soryu. American submarine Nautilus (SS-168) then fired torpedoes at the burning Kaga but her torpedoes did not explode.

At 11 a.m., the one Japanese carrier that escaped destruction that morning, Hiryu, launched "Val" dive bombers that temporarily disabled Yorktown around noon. Three and a half hours later, Hiryu's "Kate" torpedo planes struck a second blow, forcing Yorktown's abandonment. In return, "Dauntlesses" from Enterprise mortally damaged Hiryu in a strike around 5 p.m. that afternoon. The destruction of the Carrier Strike Force compelled Admiral Yamamoto to abandon his Midway invasion plans, and the Japanese Fleet began to retire westward.

During the battle, Japanese destroyers had picked up three U.S. naval aviators from the water. After interrogation, however, all three Americans were murdered. One TBD pilot, Lt. George Gay escaped detection by the Japanese ships and was later rescued by a PBY.

On June 5, TF-16 under command of Rear Adm. Spruance pursued the Japanese fleet westward, while work continued to salvage the damaged Yorktown. Both Akagi and Hiryu, damaged the previous day, were scuttled by Japanese destroyers early on the 5th.

The last air attacks of the battle took place on June 6 when dive bombers from Enterprise and Hornet bombed and sank heavy cruiser Mikuma, and damaged destroyers Asashio and Arashio, as well as the cruiser Mogami. At Adm. Spruance's expressed orders, issued because of the destruction of three torpedo squadrons on June 4, "Devastators" from VT-6 that accompanied the strike did not attack because of the threat to them from surface anti-aircraft fire. After recovering these planes, TF-16 turned eastward and broke off contact with the enemy. COMINT intercepts over the following two days documented the withdrawal of Japanese forces toward Saipan and the Home Islands.

Meanwhile, on the 6th, Japanese submarine I-168 interrupted the U.S. salvage operations, torpedoing Yorktown and torpedoing and sinking destroyer USS Hammann (DD 412). Screening destroyers depth-charged I-168 but the Japanese submarine escaped destruction. Yorktown, suffering from numerous torpedo hits, finally rolled over and sank at dawn on June 7.

Aftermath and Significance of the Battle

On June 9, submarine Trout (SS 202) rescued two survivors from sunken Japanese heavy cruiser Mikuma. Ten days later, on the 19th, seaplane tender (destroyer) USS Ballard (AVD-10) was directed by a PBY to the site where Hiryu crewmen were in the water. The tender rescued 35 Japanese survivors who, as members of the engineering department deep in the ship, had been left for

dead in the abandonment of the carrier. On June 21, a PBY from VP-24 rescued two men from an Enterprise TBD about 360 miles north of Midway. These were the last survivors of the Battle of Midway to be recovered.

Thanks to American signals intelligence, judicious aircraft carrier tactics, and more than a little luck, the U.S. Navy had inflicted a smashing defeat on the Japanese Navy. Although the performance of the three American carrier air groups would later be considered uneven, their pilots and crew had won the day through courage, determination, and heroic sacrifice.

The Japanese lost the four large carriers that had attacked Pearl Harbor, while the Americans only lost one carrier. More importantly, the Japanese lost over one hundred trained pilots, who could not be replaced. Recognizing this defeat for what it was, Admiral Nagumo's Chief of Staff later wrote: "I felt bitter... I felt like swearing."

In a larger strategic sense, the Japanese offensive in the Pacific was derailed and their plans to advance on New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa postponed. The balance of sea power in the Pacific shifted from the Japan to an equity between America and Japan. Soon after the Battle of Midway the U.S. and their allies would take the offensive in the Pacific.

For more information about the Battle of Midway, and other historical Naval battles, check out the Naval Historical Center's web page at <[www.history.navy.mil](http://www.history.navy.mil)>.

### 'Station Hypo' deciphered Japanese code

Compiled by JOCS(SW) Phil Eggman  
NAVY REGION HAWAII

"Station Hypo" takes the surprise out of Midway

The Combat Intelligence Unit at Pearl Harbor, worked around the clock in the basement of the 14th Naval District headquarters building (Building 1), trying to decipher the Japanese Naval Code, JN-25.

Under the command of Cmdr. Joseph P. Rochefort, the unit, commonly known as "Station Hypo", consisted of a group of highly trained professions in mathematics, communications and cryptology who were trying to improve on the 10 percent of broken messages that other Navy codebreakers achieved.

Radio messages were intercepted and deciphered indicating Japanese naval operations to begin in the Coral Sea. Admiral Chester Nimitz based his deployments on the information collected by Rochefort and his men, bringing the Japanese to battle in the Coral Sea.

"Hypo" had landed its first important hit.

However, even while Japanese and American forces were battling for the Coral Sea, Rochefort's men, noticing a substantial increase in Japanese radio traffic, found that a new operation was being planned, an operation combining all fleet units Japan could muster.

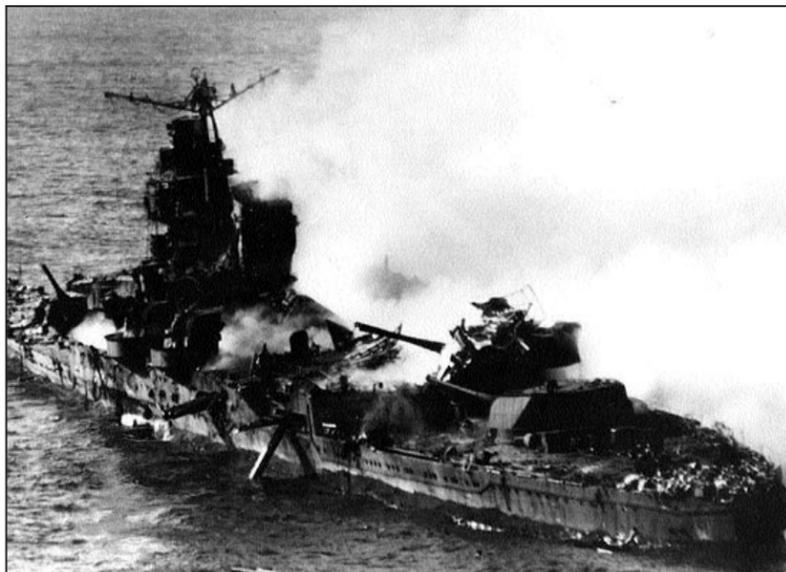
Rochefort's problem was that he had no clues to the target of the operation. His ability to put together the big picture helped convince him that the target, codenamed "AF", must be Midway.

However, he had yet to convince his superiors at Navy Communications in Washington, D.C., namely Cmdr. John Redman. For the latter was convinced that if any target in the Pacific warranted this fleet, it was Hawaii.

Rochefort chose a trick. Using the underwater telephone connection with Midway, he asked that Midway transmit, via uncoded radio traffic, a message saying that the desalination plant was out of order.

The Japanese swallowed the bait.

When Rochefort's men decoded another message shortly thereafter, they were pleased to read that "AF has problems with its de-salting plant".



Japanese heavy cruiser (above) of the Mogame-class on fire after an attack by planes of Task Force 16 during the Battle of Midway.

Ens. George H. Gay (far right) at Pearl Harbor Naval Hospital, with a nurse and a copy of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin newspaper featuring accounts of the battle. He was the only survivor fo the June 4, 1942, Torpedo Squadron (VT-8) TBD Torpedo attack on the Japanese carrier force.

USS Yorktown (CV 5) (right) is hit on the port side, by a Japanese Type 91 aerial torpedo during the mid-afternoon attack by planes from the carrier Hiryu, June 4, 1942.

VT-6 TBDs (bottom right) on USS Enterprise during Battle of Midway.



### U.S. Navy Photos



### Key Facts

- The Battle of Midway is considered the turning point of the war in the Pacific as it tipped the balance of naval power in favor of the United States and its Allies.
- The Japanese had planned to capture Midway Island to use as an advance base and to entrap and destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet.
- The U.S. Pacific Fleet had broken the Imperial Japanese Navy's "JN-25" message code and discovered the plan to attack Midway Island. Admiral Nimitz dispatched three aircraft carriers including USS Yorktown, which had been quickly repaired at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard following the Battle of Coral Sea, May 7 and 8, 1942.
- U.S. carrier aircraft were successful in sinking four Japanese carriers. These same carriers had attacked Pearl Harbor only six months earlier.
- Japanese aircraft heavily damaged USS Yorktown which was sunk on June 7, 1942 by torpedoes from a Japanese submarine.
- After Midway, the Americans and their allies took the offensive. Three years and three months of combat was fought across the Pacific until war ended with the signing of the instrument of surrender aboard USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945.
- From the sacrifices of the Battle of Midway and World War II a new era peace and prosperity was established in the Pacific.