2005

Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm's Way

Douglas Vaughn Smith
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

CARRIER BATTLES: COMMAND DECISION IN HARM'S WAY

By
DOUGLAS VAUGHN SMITH

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of History,
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2005
The members of the Committee approve the

Dissertation of Douglas Vaughn Smith defended on

27 June 2005.

_____________________________________
James Pickett Jones
Professor Directing Dissertation

_____________________________________
William J. Tatum
Outside Committee Member

_____________________________________
Jonathan Grant
Committee Member

_____________________________________
Donald D. Horward
Committee Member

_____________________________________
James Sickinger
Committee Member

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
This work is dedicated to Professor Timothy H. Jackson, sailor, scholar, mentor, friend and to Professor James Pickett Jones, from whom I have learned so much.
I wish to thank Professor Timothy H. Jackson, Director, College of Distance Education, U.S. Naval War College, for his faith in me and his continuing support, without which this dissertation would not have been possible. I also wish to thank Professor James Pickett Jones of the Florida State University History Department who has encouraged and mentored me for almost a decade. Professor of Strategy and Policy and my Deputy at the Naval War College Stanley D.M. Carpenter also deserves my most grateful acknowledgement for taking on the responsibilities of my job as well as his own for over a year in order to allow me to complete this project. A fellow product of the Florida State University Department of History, Stan’s constant encouragement provided a source of inspiration for reaching my academic goal. So too do I wish to thank Professor L.W. Wildemann, Deputy Director of the College of Distance Education at the War College, for his encouragement and sacrificing his own progress toward his Doctorate to allow me the opportunity to complete requirements for mine. I would be remiss if I did not include Professor Charles C. Chadbourn III, Director of Washington, D.C., Programs and the Non-resident Masters’ Degree Program, for his friendship and advice along the way. I owe deep respect and gratitude to Professor Hal Blanton, Associate Chairman of the Naval War College Department of Joint Military Operations at the Naval Postgraduate School Detachment in Monterey, California, who, besides providing every sort of help to me along the way, taught me French enabling me to fulfill that language requirement for Doctoral Candidacy.

I also wish to thank those who provided the intellectual basis for this project. Mr. Gary A. LaValley, Archivist of the Nimitz Library at the United States Naval Academy, was of great help in providing source material on the education of Officers at the Academy in the inter-War period. Mrs. Alice K. Juda, Reference Librarian at the Naval War College, found material I’m convinced no one else could find by doggedly pursuing any lead she could uncover. Moreover, Mrs. Juda provided daily encouragement for me to complete this project without which my enthusiasm could have easily vanished. I owe her a great debt of thanks. Likewise, Mr. Dennis J. Zambrotta, Library Technician at the War College, spent countless hours locating and retrieving microfilm from the College’s microfilm library. His attention to my every request was essential to this project.

Dr. Evelyn Cherpak, Naval War College Archivist, was a font of knowledge on every document in her archival holdings. Dr. Cherpak not only helped me conceptualize this project, but uncovered a vast array of original source material for it. Ms. Gigi Davis, Head of the Naval War College Graphic Arts Department, gave life to this project through her suggestions and personal attention to the graphics included here. Mr. Jason Peters, assigned by Ms. Davis exclusively to support this project, is a credit to
his profession. Without both of them this project would lack the critical spatial orientation required in any consideration of military or naval history.

I also wish to thank Professors Donald D. Horward, Jonathan Grant and James Sickinger whose mentoring and encouragement as members of my Dissertation Committee have been so instrumental in focusing this project and guiding it toward completion. I will be forever in their debt.

Perhaps most of all I owe my lasting gratitude to Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder of the War College Joint Military Operations Department. I’m convinced that he knows more about the Battle of Midway than any man alive, and his careful consideration of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher and his contribution to the Navy’s success in the Pacific Theater has earned him the nickname of “Frank Jack Snyder.” Editor Emeritus Frank Uhlig of the Naval War College Review has also provided insights invaluable to this project. Likewise, author John B. Lundstrom has added his considerable insight whenever requested for the first six chapters of this dissertation. Mr. Daniel Martinez, Historian and Archivist of the *U.S.S. Arizona* Memorial has also provided information and insights critical to this study. Professors Charles S. Thomas II of Georgia Southern University and John H. Maurer, Chairman of the Strategy and Policy Department at the Naval War College, both friends and respected colleagues, have provided both encouragement and valuable insights on all aspects of World War II. Professor Brad Lee of the War College, a respected expert on Japan and World War II, has also infused valuable insights in this project. To each of these powerful intellects I will be forever grateful.

Perhaps most of all I owe my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Debbie Perry, Graduate Assistant for the Florida State University Department of History. Like every graduate student in History before me, I could not have gotten this far without her.

To my wonderful bride, Paulette, I owe more than I can ever repay. She has put up with me for a decade and run every sort of errand necessary to my studies. Her help on this manuscript has been crucial to its completion. Her advice and counsel have enlivened this project and she shares in any success I may have achieved in it.

Others who have provided help along the way but who are not named here are gratefully acknowledged. I owe you all so very much.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .................................................................................................. Page x
List of Figures .................................................................................................. Page xi
Abstract ......................................................................................................... Page xiv

1. Introduction ................................................................................................ Page 1
   What Created Success? ............................................................................. Page 3
   Strategic Culture ..................................................................................... Page 4
   Relevance of the Study ............................................................................ Page 5

2. Preparing for War: Naval Education Between the World Wars ............... Page 6
   Introduction ............................................................................................. Page 6
   Studying "The Right Stuff" ...................................................................... Page 9
   Study, Gaming and Wartime Reality ....................................................... Page 10
   The Naval Air Debate ............................................................................. Page 12
   The Carrier Debate ................................................................................ Page 24
   The Debate Over Doctrine ..................................................................... Page 27
   War Plans ............................................................................................... Page 34
   Implications for the War against Japan ................................................ Page 36
   Preparing for War ................................................................................. Page 36
   The United States Naval Academy and Strategic Culture ................. Page 37
   “Everybody Works But John Paul Jones” ............................................. Page 39
   Sound Military Decision ....................................................................... Page 41
   Strategic Culture in the Wartime Navy ............................................... Page 46
   Conclusion ............................................................................................. Page 48

3. The Battle of the Coral Sea ....................................................................... Page 50
   Japanese Opening Moves and Plans ..................................................... Page 51
   Japan’s Forces in the Pacific Area .......................................................... Page 56
   The Situation in the Pacific in the Summer of 1942 ............................... Page 58
   Japanese Plans and Preparations ........................................................... Page 64
   The United States Plan ......................................................................... Page 67
   Operational imperatives ......................................................................... Page 67
   The Tulagi Invasion ............................................................................... Page 68
   Prelude to the Main Action .................................................................. Page 76
   The Main Action .................................................................................... Page 80
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Bombs Expended by *U.S.S. Saratoga* and
*U.S.S. Lexington* .................................................................................................. Page 29

Table 2: Japanese Number of Aircraft Assigned to its Ten Active
Carriers................................................................................................................... Page 97

Table 3: Japanese Force Locations approaching Midway ....................... Page 119

Table 4: Japanese Estimate of U.S. Navy Ships Around Midway ............ Page 126

Table 5: American Surface Units Actually Around Midway ................. Page 126

Table 6: Nimitz’ Estimate and Actual Number of Japanese
Ships Present At Midway .................................................................................. Page 133

Table 7: Naval Forces at the Battle of Midway on
4 June 1942 ......................................................................................................... Page 136

Table 8: Total Number of Japanese Planes Destroyed in the
Battle of Santa Cruz............................................................................................ Page 265
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: *U.S.S. Arizona* .................................................................................................................. Page 6

Figure 2: *U.S.S. Lexington* off Diamondhead in Hawaii Later sunk at Coral Sea.......................................................... Page 50

Figure 3: Admiral Husband E. Kimmel’s Plan for Great Pacific Offensive ........ Page 53

Figure 4: Chart of the Coral Sea and Vicinity .................................................................................. Page 69

Figure 5: Aircraft Speed (Japan and United States) ................................................................... Page 74

Figure 6: Aircraft Ranges (Japan and United States) ................................................................ Page 74

Figure 7: Chart of Coral Sea Opposing Force Movements ............................................................... Page 77

Figure 8: Another Look at the Developing Action May Help to Follow the Emerging Events .................. Page 82

Figure 9: Aircraft (by type) Aboard U.S. and Japanese Carriers............................................ Page 86

Figure 10: Aerial View of Midway Island With the Runway on Eastern Island in the Foreground .......................................................... Page 106

Figure 11: Carriers of the Japanese *kido butai* .................................................................. Page 125

Figure 12: U.S. and Japanese Force Movements Converging on Midway Island ......................................................... Page 132

Figure 13: U.S. and Japanese Force Movements Converging on Midway Island (revisited) ............................................... Page 135

Figure 14: Japanese Aircraft (by type) on Carriers at Midway ........................................ Page 152

Figure 15: Aircraft Assigned to Attack Midway Island by VADM Nagumo ........ Page 153

Figure 16: Nagumo’s Search for the American Carriers ......................................................... Page 154

Figure 17: Aerial View of Midway Island with the Runway on Eastern Island in the Foreground and Sand Island to the Rear ......................................................... Page 159

Figure 18: Midway Island Air Strikes (and U.S. Carrier Torpedo Squadron Strikes) .......................................................... Page 162

Figure 19: Launching Points for American Carriers in the Battle of Midway .......... Page 165

Figure 20: Diagram of Torpedo Squadrons 8 and 6 Attacks ............................................ Page 175
Figure 43: The Japanese Defense of Okinawa................................................. Page 310

Figure 44: “Estimate of the Situation” BLUE [U.S.] – ORANGE [Japan]
1923.................................................................................................................. Page 317
This dissertation considers the transformation of the United States Navy from a defensive-minded coastal defense navy during the first century of this nation’s history into an offensive-mindset, risk taking navy in the very early stages of World War II. More precisely, since none of the most significant leaders of the U.S. Navy in World War II were commissioned prior to the Spanish-American War and none participated in any significant offensive operations in the First World War, this dissertation examines the premise that education, rather than experience in battle, accounts for that transformation. In evaluating this thesis this dissertation examines the five carrier battles of the Second World War to determine the extent to which the inter-war education of the major operational commanders translated into their decision processes, and the extent to which their interaction during their educational experiences transformed them from risk-adverse to risk-accepting in their operational concepts. Thus the title for the dissertation is: *Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm’s Way*.

Almost all of the top-level leaders of the U.S. Navy in World War II had two things in common. They invariably graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy from 1904 through 1912, and from the U.S. Naval War College from 1923 through 1937. Thus none had any experience in the Spanish-American War, and, due primarily to lack of many opportunities for offensive action in the First World War, few had any real experience of consequence in that war either. The question that obviously springs to mind, then, is how did these top naval leaders, brought up in the culture of a Navy that had been developed as a coastal defense Service during the first hundred years of its existence, develop a risk-taking, offensive attitude without any real opportunity to refine the skills necessary for offensive operations save in the classroom? That has become the central theme around which this dissertation has been structured.

In the formative stages of their education at the Naval Academy something profoundly influenced the Midshipmen in inculcating a long-term commitment to naval service. Though several formative events surround their socialization in the military, one in particular seems to stand out. That would be the realization of the position of the United States as a player on the world stage emanating from President Theodore Roosevelt’s ordering of the “Great White Fleet” around the world in a cruise that marked the emergence of the United States in global politics. That event solidified in the Annapolis Midshipmen the realization of the role the U.S. Navy would of necessity play as America emerged from a survival instinct for isolation from European and world involvements to active participation in world affairs. Moreover, fortified by the naval theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan, the Officer candidates at Annapolis realized the geo-strategic implications of that participation. Of necessity, the U.S. Navy would spearhead U.S. global involvement, and by virtue of
their eminent commissioning and potential for leadership positions in that Navy, their own destinies would be tied to that of United States global engagement.

Several authors have speculated as to what accounts for the success of the U.S. Navy in World War II -- and particularly in the early stages of that war. Luck, naval war gaming at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, breaking of Japanese naval codes, and Divine Intervention have all been postulated as credible rationale for that success. Though all of these were important -- none can adequately account for the aggressive, risk-accepting decisions that the top U.S. Naval operational leaders were able to embrace. The institutionalized naval educational process stands out as enabling in their relationship to decisive decision and action and fundamental understanding among the leaders interacting in combat of what they could expect from those fighting with them. Foremost among these is the so-called “Green Hornet,” -- so named because of the color of its binding, which provided an extremely concise and rote method for approaching and analyzing a problem and formulating a sound course of action appropriate to the situation at hand. Hence the actual title of the “Green Hornet,” -- Sound Military Decision.

The main thesis explored in this dissertation is that education rather than experience best accounts for U.S. Navy success in operations in World War II, and that Sound Military Decision can be appropriately established as the main element of that education which produced the success enjoyed.

This thesis is evaluated by analyzing the naval decision process in the five carrier battles of the Second World War: The Battle of the Coral Sea; The Battle of Midway; The Battle of the Eastern Solomons; The Battle of Santa Cruz; and The Battle of the Philippine Sea.

The institutions of higher education of the various Services today have deviated significantly and unacceptably from the successful approach they maintained during the inter-War period. Today’s education for Officers is very descriptive with respect to theory, operational art, doctrine, technology, techniques and tactics, as opposed to a much more proscription and interactive (among students) approach employed between the World Wars. It is hoped that the research completed for this study might be a catalyst for consideration of a return to an approach to education that will more fully capture the essentials of confidence-building between and among students and promote unconventional thinking (in the current parlance, thinking “outside the box”) that can refine approaches to warfare before rather than in the midst of battle.

From a historical standpoint, this study is unlike any done previously in terms of both scope and methodology. Experienced editors of naval publications indicate that no one has previously published a book which covers all five carrier battles of the Second World War. All five carrier battles have been mentioned in books, but only briefly attendant to campaigns taking place on land. In terms of methodology, dissection of the naval decision process in battle in relation to specific educational objectives previously instilled in the naval leadership, this study is believed to be applicationally unique. Thus this study has been conducted in

xv
appreciation of the possibility of making a unique scholarly contribution to the field of Military History, and also Military Education.
I INTRODUCTION

There were five carrier battles in World War II. There will be no more. Technology -- the advent of precision-guided missiles, nuclear weapons, high-yield conventional weapons, and above all exceptionally accurate target locating and delivery systems -- and its mating to an operational concept for its use have combined with an increasingly integrated global economy to obviate the likelihood of future manpower-intensive conventional warfare in the open-ocean. None-the-less, warfare today, however defined, retains the same inherent decision processes that determined the outcomes of the past battles -- including the carrier battles of the Second World War. Men make decisions in war, and while technology has tremendously hastened the rapidity of the decision process during combat, the way in which that process is refined and optimized is the key to military success. It is the purpose here to examine the manner in which the United States Navy produced warriors capable of maintaining an offensive mindset and making correct decisions in harm’s way at sea in World War II. As they were key to the successful matching of strategy to achievement of political objectives in the naval arena in that war, the vehicle to evaluate the decisions made will be the five carrier battles: Coral Sea, Midway, the Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz, and the Philippine Sea.

History generally equates to telling a story -- describing what happened, who was involved, and often analyzing the significance of courses of action and events. Seldom do historians consider the anatomy of the decision process that led to those actions and events. Yet as regards Military History, as a branch of the wider field of historical enquiry, decisions are precisely the key to the interaction at arms between hostile nations and societies. Thus evaluation of the process by which decisions are reached in battle becomes all important in its study. Moreover, since combat is an interactive process, the relative capacity of the combatants correctly to formulate decisions becomes a deciding factor in the relations among nations.

It is the purpose here to consider the Command Decisions made by the United States Navy’s top leadership in World War II as a means of establishing the utility of their preparation for making such decisions in refining their profession of arms for and
during combat. In retrospect, the victory of the United States over Japan in the Second World War would tend to validate the adequacy of that preparation. However, scholars have ascribed alternatively luck, good intelligence and the personal characteristics of the Navy’s leaders as reasons for World War II victory in the Pacific. Thus outcomes will be evaluated in areas enumerated below to determine their likely genesis as it relates to the decision processes of those who commanded during the five carrier battles of the war. Specifically, decisions will be evaluated as they relate to:

1. The Commander’s estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions he would be required to make.
2. The Commander’s demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously his decision in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and his flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required.
3. The command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle.
4. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events.
5. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively.
6. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination.
7. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action, and
8. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements.

One through three and six above particularly reflect the tenets advanced in *Sound Military Decision* as key to arriving at an most advantageous understanding of the
circumstances under which combat at sea will take place and arriving at a sound decision as to how to conduct the ensuing battle. To the extent possible, the factors responsible for either success or failure in the Command Decision process will be evaluated as a means of identifying the appropriateness of institutional development of the Navy’s top leadership in preparing those in command positions for war at sea. In particular, scrutiny will be applied to the educational and operational experience of the considered commanders as a basis for their Command Decisions. As will be discussed below, the relative lack of experience of virtually all of the U.S. Navy’s operational commanders in World War II will bear particular scrutiny, as will the adequacy of the Navy’s educational system to compensate for that lack of experience. The nature of officer education in the Navy will thus be evaluated to elicit areas of utility and misdirection as the war played out from 1942 through 1944. It is hoped that through this process those of the eight evaluation criteria offered above most responsible for success or failure will be highlighted.

**What Created Success?**

Various scholars have ascribed the U.S. naval successes in the Pacific Theater in World War II to luck or good intelligence. Certainly a strong case could be made for either of these given the enemy advantage in relative force levels in several of the battles and the exceptional code-breaking efforts of members of the U.S. Naval Intelligence Service. Most of all, however, since war is an interactive endeavor, the outcomes of the five Pacific carrier battles can be attributed to the relative merit of decisions taken by the opposing commanders. But the success of U.S. commanders in making appropriate and timely decisions at sea in World War II is also a function of the correct or erroneous decisions and actions taken and executed by their Japanese counterparts.

The Japanese naval leadership had considerable combat experience even before the decision was taken to attack the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. Japan’s aircraft carrier commanders -- and particularly Admiral Chuichi Nagumo who commanded all major carrier operations, including the six-carrier attack on Pearl Harbor, prior to U.S. Fleet opposition which started with the Battle of the Coral Sea -- had considerably more operational experience in a combat environment than any Admiral the United States could muster to oppose them. In fact, the first carrier commander of the U.S. Pacific
Fleet to see action, and the senior commander in the first three of the five Pacific carrier battles, Radm. Frank Jack Fletcher, was not even an aviator and thus lacked conceptual insight into air battle, out of sight of the carrier that launched the attack and in an extra dimension as compared to battle on the ocean’s surface. Nor had he seen any opposing surface naval action while in command of a Navy fighting vessel, though he had won the Medal of Honor for service as a Lieutenant during the United States’ occupation of Vera Cruz and the Navy Cross for service in European Waters in 1918. This imbalance in relative combat experience, coupled with superior Japanese numerical advantage, an aviation complement with considerable combat experience and aircraft newer and more technologically advanced than anything in the American arsenal, should have given the Japanese a decided advantage in the combat situations they were to encounter. The American Admirals had merely pondered in the classroom and on the gaming board situations that their Japanese adversaries had experienced in real life.

Such is so often the case in the real world. History, unfortunately, has not often been kind in battle to those who lack experience, who have inferior weaponry and outdated tactics, or who are numerically inferior. Thus the success of the U.S. Navy in the Pacific in World War II can be seen as an anomaly of some proportion. It is the purpose here to examine that anomaly to determine what created success in situations ripe for disaster.

While such historical enquiry may well have no future predictive value, it is hoped that methodologies of educating Officers to create an analytical and decisive mindset may emerge that can compensate for inadequate experience in the most deadly of human endeavors.

**Strategic Culture**

Combat commanders often develop a style and a way of looking at war that is, in a sense, a product of their civic and military acculturation. For instance, the U.S. military has had several “defining moments” in its history. Leading up to the Second World War these include the War for American Independence, the U.S. Civil War, and the First World War. These in combination produced an attitude toward war “peculiar” to the American situation. Americans tend to look at war as a failure of diplomacy, rather than as a continuation of policy by other means as it was regarded by the theorist of land
warfare, Carl von Clausewitz. Americans abhor loss of life. Hence we attempt to compensate for men in battle through superior technology and logistics. Americans are driven by “moral” causes -- hence “the war to end slavery” and “the war to end all wars.” And, perhaps most of all, Americans’ approach to war can be characterized as “wargasm,” the desire to right a wrong swiftly and at as little human cost as possible and then to get back to the normalcy of civilian life as quickly as possible. It is within this culture that the U.S. Navy’s top leadership came to command in World War II. Such strategic culture bodes well for decisiveness and aggressiveness in waging war. What remains is the catalyst for decisive action to be inculcated in naval (and military) leadership. This study will examine how the U.S. Navy approached the development of such a catalyst and how it institutionalized it in its leadership cadre during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

Relevance of the Study

While the technologies of war have changed, its fundamental elements have not. Preparation for war short of actual engagement in it will remain the norm rather than the exception. The study that follows intends to accomplish four things. First, it will employ critical analysis of the decision process during five key naval battles of the Second World War. Second, it will provide what is believed to be the only single-source history of all five carrier battles of the Second World War. Third, through evaluation of the decision processes of the commanders concerned, it will attempt to identify the inter-War educational system -- and particularly Sound Military Decision -- as the cornerstone of success in those battles. Finally, it will evaluate the institutionalization of the educational processes that led to success in harm’s way at sea in World War II as a model for future education of naval Officers in time of peace.
Figure 1: U.S.S. Arizona

This photo and the following caption appeared in the 1941 Army/Navy football program, page 181, on November 29, 1941, just nine days before the attack on Pearl Harbor:

"A bow on view of the U. S. S. Arizona as she plows into a huge swell. It is significant that despite the claims of air enthusiasts no battleship has yet been sunk by bombs."\(^1\)

II PREPARING FOR WAR: NAVAL EDUCATION BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

Introduction

Navy 14 - Army 6. This victory on 29 November 1941 was Navy's last before a resounding and unexpected defeat only nine days later. The attack on the Navy's Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 demonstrated conclusively that bombs -- and aerial-launched torpedoes -- could indeed sink battleships, as eight in all were either lost

\(^1\) Army-Navy Game football program dtd 29 November 1941, p. 181. Records of the U.S. Naval Academy Archives.
or severely damaged. This was despite claims to the contrary by members of the “gun club” or “battleship Navy” such as those advocating battleship survivability, and thus superiority, over aviation destructive potential in the blatant advertisement above. Moreover, the Japanese attack established beyond doubt that the mainstream thinking within the Navy’s top leadership, that naval aviation was an adjunct to battle fleet operations rather than an integral part of its offensive lethality, was seriously in error. Having made such a monumental error in judgment, it remained to be tested what strengths of insight and decision that same leadership group could throw against Japan in a war of unlimited political objective and military commitment. Some among them saw

---

2 Obviously the position taken in the football program above failed to take into account the lesson learned by the Italian Navy on 11 November 1940 -- almost a year to the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor -- when three battleships and one cruiser were disabled at anchor by British air attack in the harbor of Taranto, their main naval base located on the heel of Italy.

3 Storry, Richard. *The Double Patriots: A Study of Japanese Nationalism*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1957, Appendix II, pp. 317-319. This Appendix represents the “Land Disposal Plan in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere…December, 1941, Ministry of War, Research Section” and was reproduced there from International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Exhibit 1334, transcript pp. 11969-73. According to Storry, “The scope of the proposed New Order – or ‘Co-Prosperity Sphere’ as it came to be called – has already been suggested … but it is not perhaps generally realised [Sic] how ambitious were the plans for future expansion of Japanese power.

Certain countries in Asia – such a Burma and the Malay States – were to be organized [Sic] as independent monarchies. Australia, New Zealand and Ceylon were to be incorporated in the Japanese Empire under Governors-General. There were, also, to be Governors-General of Alaska (including the Yukon district of Canada, Alberta, British Columbia and the State of Washington), and of Central America (not including Mexico, but embracing the other Latin American republics in that area as well as the British, French and Dutch West Indies). It was appreciated that such spoils could hardly be
hope borne of confidence in their preparation to fight and win a war contested in open ocean areas and inland seas.

Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz wrote in a letter dated 19 September 1965 to Vice Admiral Charles Melson, then President of the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, that “The enemy of our games [at the War College] was always Japan and the courses were so thorough that after the start of WW II – nothing that happened in the Pacific was strange or unexpected…” This chapter examines the veracity of Admiral Nimitz’ statement by evaluating the adequacy of the flagship U.S. Navy educational institutions -- the United States Naval Academy and the United States Naval War College -- in preparing the Navy for combat in World War II. Specifically, how naval “lessons” from the First World War were treated and how the curricula were structured will be examined to consider their adequacy and impact in transforming a predominantly defensive navy into a well-honed organization with an offensive mindset capable of

---

4 Nimitz, Chester W., Fleet Admiral, United States Navy. Letter to Vice Admiral Charles Melson, President of the United States Naval War College, dated 19 September 1965 on display in McCarty – Little Hall at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island.
conducting operations in both inshore and open ocean areas. Of equal importance to intellectual preparation for war was the attitude of the naval leadership in the interwar years toward the nature of the “next war.” This attitude was sure to manifest itself in Navy doctrine, which has recently been equated to “technology, and an intent for its use.” Together education, proper understanding and use of lessons from recent past wars, adaptation of new technologies to offensive lethality and ship survivability, doctrine establishing new warfare concepts and war gaming to validate them dominated the professional preparation of the Navy Officer corps. Navy leadership’s attitudes toward future war structured the debates inherent in all of them. While Fleet Admiral Nimitz’ statement above speaks strongly of the proper intellectual preparation for World War II at the Naval War College, it also implies that the Navy was being properly structured in the interwar period with respect to the kind of war it was likely to fight in the near future, the doctrine it would require to fight that war, and the implements of war it deemed necessary to succeed against a capable and motivated adversary. Inherent in all of that, since war is above all an interactive process, is the assumption of a likely enemy. All concerned got that right in selecting Japan.

**Studying “The Right Stuff”**

Admiral Nimitz continued in the letter mentioned above to indicate that “Each student was required to plan logistic effort for an advance across the Pacific – and we were well prepared for the fantastic logistic efforts required to support the operations of the war…” and that “One of my classmates [both in the Naval War College (NWC) Class of 1923 and United States Naval Academy (USNA) Class of 1905] Captain R.C. MacFall … devised the circular tactical formations used so successfully during WW II.”

---

5 This inquiry considers the naval lessons of the First World War, their study and incorporation into the curricula at the United States Naval Academy and the United States Naval War College, and the adequacy of those curricula in preparing the naval leadership for war at sea in the Second World War. In that study, the adequacy of the institutionalized naval educational experience will be evaluated through consideration of the five carrier battles of World War II.

Fleet Admiral Nimitz went on to say that “I credit the Naval War College for such success I achieved in strategy and tactics both in peace & war.” Admiral Nimitz’ ringing endorsement of his pre-war educational experience was most assuredly validated by his performance in the Pacific during the Second World War. Yet the realities of that war indicate that his assessment of the naval pre-war educational effort -- as it applied to the Navy in general -- could not have been farther from the truth. Although the focus on Japan as a primary threat and the elements of course composition, which stressed analysis of the situation and sound decision processes, were sufficient to produce a professionally-grounded Officer cadre with a superbly analytical and adaptable group mindset, the most forward-looking elements of technology and doctrine were conspicuously absent from naval education of the interwar period. What was evident in the Navy’s Officer leadership during World War II, however, was an offensive orientation of ecumenical proportion borne of a distinct strategic culture ingrained in the leadership cadre of the Navy from their first days in Annapolis. That leadership cadre had studied the “wrong stuff,” but in precisely the right way.

**Study, Gaming and Wartime Reality**

The U.S. Navy was, indeed, unprepared for the type of war it was to experience in the Second World War. It took the Allies some time to relearn the importance of convoying ships on the logistic train following the sea routes across the Atlantic. Expectations in the Navy were for a battleship war akin to that experienced in the First World War, as institutionalized in the major war game of the interwar period conducted at the Naval War College, the Battle of Sable Island (essentially a replay of the Battle of Jutland, another important element of study and critique, with east and west inverted, off Nova Scotia, and the United States arrayed against Britain). In that part of the War College curriculum, the utility of the aircraft carrier as other than a scouting platform was completely neglected. Other major elements of the curriculum centered on the Battle of

---

7 Ibid., p. 3.

8 Battle of Sable Island Manuscript, Serial No. 71, dated October-November 1923. United States Naval War College Archives (hereafter referred to as “USNWCA”) Record Group (RG) 14/15, 128 pages plus accompanying diagrams.
Jutland as well. *Jutland Decisions* (88 pages), by Captain William Glassford, received substantial classroom attention after 1930. *Jutland* (41 pages), based on the eye-witness account of Vice Admiral Sir Matthew R. Best, R.N., a member of Admiral Jellicoe’s Fleet Flagship staff during the battle, entered the curriculum in 1936. Thus offensive carrier interactions were relegated in importance to the study of gun platform battles bereft of radar or reconnaissance aircraft fixing of enemy units. Though there were other games conducted at the Naval War College which explored the use of naval air assets and aircraft carriers, even before the latter were introduced into the Fleet in late 1924 with the commissioning of *U.S.S. Langley*, particularly those games conducted under Rear Admiral William S. Sims while he was President of the College from April 1919 to October 1922, the emphasis on the battleship as demonstrated in the Battle of Sable Island series of games was clear through the late 1930s. Only gradually, starting with Sims’ Presidency and experiencing ebbs and advances under succeeding Presidents, did acceptance of naval aviation in an offensive role gain gradual acceptance.

There were, of course, major advocates of air warfare in the Navy at the time, including Admirals William A. Moffett, the first Chief of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, which was created on 10 August 1921, John H. Towers, who became Naval Aviator number three in an attempt to refine the precision of battleship targeting and gunnery by aviation spotting of enemy targets, and William F. Halsey, who qualified as a Naval Aviator at an advanced age. Perhaps the most vocal early proponent of the aircraft carrier was Captain Washington Irving Chambers, who while assigned as chief aviation advisor to the Secretary of the Navy served for a period under Acting Secretary Franklin D. Roosevelt. That Chambers never made Admiral speaks volumes about the battleship predilection of the Navy’s top leaders. Even Halsey was less than totally enthusiastic regarding the offensive potential of the carrier. On his qualification as a pilot in 1935 at the age of fifty-two and taking command of the carrier *Saratoga* Halsey declared “…I

---

regarded the privilege of commanding the *Sara,* merely as a pleasant bonus."\(^{10}\) Battleship Admirals, members of the so-called “Gun Club” or “Black Shoe Navy,” held firmly that cruisers and destroyers could not be spared from “the main formation” to protect carriers in an offensive role -- carriers should have a scouting-observation function, remaining the “eyes of the Fleet.”\(^{11}\) This bias in the senior Navy hierarchy was reflected in the War College course of study.

**The Naval Air Debate**

Pivotal to the way in which the Navy approached future war at sea was the debate that raged during the 1920s and 1930s within the Service’s hierarchy over the role of naval aviation. Oddly, that debate is perhaps best summed up by the charges leveled by Colonel William “Billy” Mitchell -- a distinguished Officer and combat veteran in the First World War of the Army Air Service who had risen to the rank of Brigadier General during the First World War and become one of the leading spokesmen for military aviation -- in September of 1925 against the Navy Department and War Department. Of the eight specifications leveled against Colonel Mitchell in the Court Martial proceedings against him as a consequence of his charges, the first was the most serious and set the terms of reference for the other seven:

**Specification 1:** In that Colonel William Mitchell, Air Service, did, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, on or about the fifth day of September, 1925, conduct himself to the prejudice of good order and military discipline and in a way to bring discredit upon the military service [Sic] by making, uttering and publishing to Harry McCleary, A.H. Yeager, Kenneth McCalla and to the Associated Press, a news gathering and news promulgating agency, and in the *San Antonio Express,* a public journal, and in divers [Sic] other public journals of the United States, a statement which in its entirety reads in substance as follows:\(^{12}\) (Text of Colonel


\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 13.

Mitchell’s statement is summarized below. For entire text and remaining specifications in the Court Martial proceedings against Colonel Mitchell, see Appendix B)

Colonel Mitchell indicates that his statement is his opinion and it is particularly critical of the Navy for its handling of aviation matters. He brings as evidence the deaths of two aviators at the annual Army and Navy air races as a result of the shifting of the races between the two Services each year for “propaganda purposes” rather than “service” and those competing having to fly “old crates,” “dilapidated racing airplanes” built for the race two years previous and rendered unfit and unsafe for racing, rather than new aircraft for which ample funding was available. He also singles out the Navy for loss over land of the airship Shenandoah and with it the Navy’s most experienced airship Captain, “going west on a propaganda mission…over mountains,” which he maintains is totally inappropriate for a Navy air asset.13

Colonel Mitchell further decries the Navy’s conception of a war in the Pacific, and specifically its recent “great Pacific naval maneuvers – the main features of [which] were the assembling of a fleet of some 148 surface vessels in the Pacific, the parade up our Pacific coast and entrance into San Francisco Harbor and then the trip to Honolulu”14 as the operational objective of the maneuvers. Mitchell challenges the concept of a march across the Pacific to secure Hawaii from foreign occupation, through mines off

---

13 Ibid., pp. 3-8.
14 Ibid., p. 4. Here Colonel Mitchell is undoubtedly referring to the Fleet Problem V of March 1925. The U.S. Navy conducted a series of 21 Fleet Problems from February of 1923 through April of 1940. The 22nd Fleet Problem was subsequently cancelled due to the conditions of general war on the European Continent. A complete listing and abbreviated description of these Fleet Problems is contained in **Records Relating to United States Navy Fleet Problems I to XXII 1923-1941**, National Archives Microfilm Publications, National Archives and Records Service General Services Administration, Washington: 1975. This series of Fleet Problems will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
San Francisco Harbor and submarine operating areas en-route the objective area, for the antiquated ships that composed the operational force, and for attempting with three airplanes to demonstrate the ability to fly non-stop from California to Hawaii which resulted in the loss of the entire five-man crew of the only aircraft making it even a reasonable distance from takeoff.  

“…These accidents are the direct result of the incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense by the navy [Sic] and war [Sic] departments. In their attempts to keep down the development of aviation into an independent department, separate from the army [Sic] and navy [Sic] and handled by aeronautical experts, and to maintain the existing systems, they have gone to the utmost lengths to carry their point. All aviation policies, schemes and systems are dictated by the non-flying officers of the army [Sic] or navy [Sic] who know practically nothing about it. The lives of the airmen are being used merely as pawns in their hands.”

Mitchell goes on to say that “…Officers and agents sent by the war [Sic] and navy [Sic] departments to Congress have almost always given incomplete, misleading or false information about aeronautics, which either they knew to be false when given or was the result of such gross ignorance of the question that they should not be allowed to appear before a legislative body.”

The conduct of affairs by these two departments, as far as aviation is concerned, has been so disgusting in the last few years as to make any self-respecting person ashamed of the cloth he wears. Were it not for the great patriotism of our air officers and their absolute confidence in the institutions of the United States, knowing that sooner or later existing conditions would be changed, I doubt if one of them would remain with the Colors – certainly not, if he were a real man.

Such a direct and flagrant attack on the highest levels of leadership of the Army and Navy by one considered perhaps the most experienced combat aviator of the nation -- and the obvious consequences for its exponent for initiating such an attack -- certainly give credence to Colonel Mitchell’s charges.

---

15 Ibid., pp. 4-6.
16 Ibid., p. 2.
17 Ibid., p. 2.
18 Ibid., p. 3.
Specifically, with respect of the utility of aircraft against surface combatants, Colonel Mitchell attacks the Navy’s decision to forestall congressionally authorized and funded tests of aircraft in the “…aerial bombardment of battleships and shipping board vessels while under their own steam and moving, so as to set at rest any doubt of aircraft’s ability to destroy and sink any seacraft which floats on the water.” Here he maintains that “…Steam was gotten up by the navy … to deprecate the value of air power and show the value of the surface vessels and battleships…” In discussing both the Navy’s failure to allow bombing tests on underway combatant ships and its previously discussed Pacific campaign exercise against the Hawaiian islands in 1924, Mitchell opines that “If any ship of the fleet survived the [mines outside San Francisco Harbor and the] submarine attacks, crossed the sea and came within hundreds of miles of the hostile coast, they would be sent to the bottom forthwith, by aircraft. If the Pacific maneuvers showed anything conclusively, it was that aircraft acting from land bases can destroy any surface fleet coming within its radius of operations. This already had been amply proved by our bombardment tests in 1921.”

Here Colonel Mitchell was referring to the bombing tests conducted between 21 June and 21 July of 1921 as a result of the momentum he personally generated to “prove” that aircraft could sink ships at sea. In October of the previous year the Navy had started bombing tests of its own on obsolete ships anchored in the Chesapeake Bay, and, though the tests were conducted in secrecy, photographs of the damage to the decommissioned battleship Indiana were smuggled to the London Illustrated News where they were

---

19 Ibid., p.4.
20 Ibid.
21 It is indeed ironic that Grand Joint Exercise Number Four of February 1932 would evaluate a land-based attack on Rear Admiral Harry E. Yarnell’s carrier force north-east of Hawaii as having done that with aircraft claimed by Admiral Yarnell as destroyed on the deck in a previous raid from his carriers during that exercise. Grand Joint Exercise Number Four will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.
22 Ibid., p. 5.
published in December of 1920.\textsuperscript{23} This gave then Brigadier General Mitchell just the opportunity he wanted. He pressed openly and publicly, as well as when called to testify before Congress, for Army participation in a series of similar bombing tests to be conducted against Navy ships.\textsuperscript{24} Ultimately Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels agreed, and the tests were conducted, culminating with the sinking of the interned German dreadnaught \textit{Ostfriesland}.\textsuperscript{25} The outcome of the tests had several consequences unanticipated by Brigadier General Mitchell. On 12 July 1921 Congress created a Bureau of Aeronautics for the Navy, thus strengthening the institutional independence of naval aviation which in large part negated Mitchell’s overriding objective of creation of a single aviation Service supporting both the Army and Navy.\textsuperscript{26} Ultimately the Joint Board of the Army and Navy, under the chairmanship of General John J. Pershing, accepted the Navy’s view of the implications of the bombing tests, that carrier aviation and other uses of aviation assets at sea should enjoy greater support and funding, which directly opposed Mitchell’s position that the success of the bombing tests demonstrated conclusively that surface fleets were obsolete.\textsuperscript{27} Mitchell remained undeterred in his effort to convince appropriate leaders of the vulnerability of Navy ships to aerial attack. His attack in September of 1925 on the Navy’s handling of aircraft and those who flew them had evolved into one over safety, administration and reasonability of force structure.

\textsuperscript{23} Hone, Thomas C., Norman Friedman and Mark D. Mandeles. \textit{American and British Aircraft Carrier Development 1919-1941}. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999, pp. 28-29. It should be noted that this book is an indispensable asset to anyone looking for a comprehensive examination of the history of development of naval aviation and/or of the maturation of concepts for the employment of and designs of aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy. It covers in great depth the controversy over the role of aviation assets in the Navy and should be viewed as a companion to this chapter.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., P. 29.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Colonel Mitchell’s specific objection to the Navy’s handling of air power is best summed up below:

The navy [Sic], to maintain its position, keeps asking for more aircraft, which it cannot use legally, because the legal defense of the land is entrusted to armies. In spite of the legal restrictions, however, but to keep control of aviation and not let it get away, the navy [Sic] department continually gets more money from congress [Sic] by its Washington lobby so as to keep the political support of the aircraft manufacturers and, possibly, some others interested in them. This year, the navy’s [Sic] estimate for the aircraft amounts to $37,360,248. They only have one aircraft carrier, the Langley, which can go about half as fast as a battleship, and which is an obsolete collier. It can hold 36 small airplanes. They are building two aircraft carriers [the Lexington and the Saratoga] which can hold 60 to 70 planes. These are practically obsolete before they are completed.

Where is the thirty-seven million for aircraft going? It is going into land aircraft which have nothing to do with the navy’s [Sic] operation on the seas and which will be used as a political lever for the maintenance of their existing systems.

The War department, that now is entrusted by law with the serial defense over the land areas of the United States and its possessions, including the protection of navy [Sic] yards, asks for $24,582,000. Consider how foolish it is. The navy [Sic], an organization charged with going to sea and which must operate from surface vessels, which as a matter of fact are practically obsolete now, and which will afford no real protection to the country in case of an air attack, asking for two-thirds more than the army [Sic] does, which acts from land bases and is specifically charged with the defense of the land areas. The amount allotted to the navy [Sic] for new aircraft is three times as much as the army [Sic].”28 [It should be noted that as early as April of 1917 the Navy had fifty-four aircraft, and by November of 1918 it had 2,107 aircraft – yet the Navy’s first carrier, the experimental USS Langley, was not commissioned until late 1924.]29

Author of the award-winning book, War Plan Orange, Edward S. Miller, maintains that congressional funding for Navy aircraft and building rates most correctly indicate the Navy’s proactive position on incorporation of air assets into Fleet operations during this

Colonel Mitchell’s statement above tends to contradict that contention by reinforcing that, though the Navy was highly involved in the procurement of aircraft, it was fixated on land-based air operations and lacked a concrete plan for employing its air assets in operations with Fleet units. The Navy’s aircraft carrier building and commissioning plan, discussed later, tends to support Colonel Mitchell’s analysis of the situation.

But was Colonel Mitchell’s contention that the Navy Department was “incompetent, criminally negligent and almost treasonable in its administration” of the national defense credible, or merely the futile outcry of a disenfranchised aviation proponent? Perhaps the best answer comes from the testimony, elicited by Colonel Mitchell’s military defense attorney, of Rear Admiral William Sowden Sims, U.S.N. (Retired), the Navy’s most highly-placed operational leader in World War I and a highly-respected and knowledgeable advocate of the Navy’s role and mission in this nation’s global involvement. A 1880 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Admiral Sims reached the rank of Admiral in 1918 and reverted to the rank of Rear Admiral at the close of the First World War. Admiral Sims served in the Atlantic, Pacific, and in the China Station where he was for a time on the staff of the Commander in Chief and was a naval attaché in St. Petersburg, Russia and in Paris. He was from 1907-1908 one of President Theodore Roosevelt’s aides, and commanded the Battleship Minnesota from 1911-

---

30 Miller, Edward S. Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Navy policy on aircraft carriers, aircraft, and their roles in naval combat in the 1920s and 1930s held in Luce Hall, Room 123, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 4 December 2003.


32 Ibid., part 1097-1098.
After attending the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, he commanded the Atlantic Fleet Torpedo Flotilla from 1913-1915, the Battleship *Nevada* from 1915-1916, and in 1917 received orders to be President of the Naval War College.\(^{34}\) “…A month or two before the war broke out, 1917, until the end of the war [he] was in command of the United States Naval forces operating in European waters.”\(^{35}\) On returning from World War I and reverting to the peacetime rank of Rear Admiral, Sims became President of the Naval War College until his retirement in October of 1922.\(^{36}\) Admiral Sims declined the Distinguished Service Medal from the United States government for his wartime service. Though the reason remains largely conjecture, Sims felt that receiving a medal of such importance without significant involvement in battle would demean the medal he received. Perhaps more importantly, Sims was known to have a running feud over Navy policy with the Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels. Accepting a medal from someone he openly detested, no matter how well deserved, would be unconscionable. But Sims did accept the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George from Great Britain in 1918, and was made a Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor in France in 1919, a Grand Cordon, First Class, in the Order of the Rising Sun of Japan in 1920, a Grand Cordon of the Order of Leopold by Belgium, also in 1920, and a Grand Officer of the Crown of Italy in 1921.\(^{37}\) His honors from colleges and universities included Yale (1919), Harvard (1920), Columbia (1920), Pennsylvania (1920), University of California (1923), Wesleyan (1923), Tufts (1919), Williams (1920), Juanita (1919), Stevens Institute (1921), and Union College (1922), and Cambridge, England (1921), McGill’s (1922) and Queens (1922) of Canada.\(^{38}\) Admiral Sims had also served as a member of the nation’s General Board while President of the Naval War College. All things

\(^{33}\) Ibid., part 1098.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., part 1098-1099.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., part 1099.
considered, he was in an excellent position to critique the Navy’s situation as a naval power, and of aviation’s role in that equation.

Under questioning, Admiral Sims, stating that “As [he] under[stood] it, the Navy Department ha[d] not any defined policy [as regards how the Navy handles aircraft] … going along from day to day, more or less in a higgledy-piggledy way,”\textsuperscript{39} indicated that if you got into contact with an enemy who has more airplanes than you at sea, he will “drive down your airplanes until he gets command over your fleet, and then it is a question as to whether the airplanes that command the water over the fleet can destroy the ships or not … [i]n the Navy Department they tell you that they can.”\textsuperscript{40} He went on to say that “…It seems to me it is perfectly absurd to take any different attitude, in view of the experiments that have been carried out on modern battleships, how easily they are sunk with bombs that are dropped on board of them, or alongside, and it seems to me it is entirely inevitable that any ship at all is at the mercy of airplanes or bombing planes that command the air over it.”\textsuperscript{41} Admiral Sims stressed the importance of having more or at least approximately the same number of aircraft carriers (or other combatants) as any potential adversary, stating that as an objective over any conceptualization of a “balanced fleet” which was a meaningless term unless postulated against a specific opponent with an identifiable force structure.\textsuperscript{42}

Admiral Sims went on to state that, for instance, Britain had constructed “two or three” aircraft carriers after the war, and had another near completion, which were of the shape and hull of a battle-cruiser, longer and narrower than a battleship, and capable of a speed of 30-odd knots.\textsuperscript{43} Thus they would be able to keep up with battleships and battle cruisers and act as integral parts of the battle fleet, unlike the \textit{USS Langley}, which could only do 14 knots.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., part 1103.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., part 1102.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., part 1100-1102.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., part 1101.
In all his testimony, Admiral Sims -- a battleship commander without any personal military aviation experience -- came across as a staunch supporter and advocate of naval aviation. When asked what he considered “the backbone of the fleet?” he responded:

The backbone of the fleet is of course the group of capital ships, but it depends on what those capital ships are. It seems to me that in view of the power of the plane used and the battleship, when he commands the air over it, it is a foregone conclusion that if the battleship should meet an airplane carrier at sea, the two of them alone, the battleship carrying no plane except a couple of spotting planes, the airplane carrier would command the air over the battleship, and we would have a reproduction of one of the bombings off the coast [i.e., the bombings conducted from 21 June to 21 July, 1921, mentioned on page 10 above]. In other words, there would not be any hope at all for the battleship because the airplane carrier would stay out of range of the guns. So therefore it seems to me that the battleship of the future is the airplane carrier.\(^{44}\)

When questioned about the vulnerability or likelihood of success of a surface fleet against well-organized air forces operating from a land base, Admiral Sims’ answer was similar:

I do not see why it could not… . A land force that has more planes than can be brought on the decks of the ships of the attacking force can get control of the air and it seems to me absurd that the attacking fleet can remain within the radius of action of those planes and, for that reason, if the United States has a certain amount of air force on its coast that can be concentrated at a point of attack, it need fear nothing about what has been called the simon-pure naval operation we read about in history, because they can not bring as many planes against you on the decks of ships as can be assembled on land.\(^{45}\)

Admiral Sims was consistent throughout his testimony in establishing himself as a strong proponent of aircraft in an offensive military role -- both from land bases and from carriers designed to accommodate them. His message was clear. Aircraft in larger numbers over fleet units -- including battleships -- could “force down” the aircraft of their opponent and destroy the ships below. His position sums up that of the Officers of the navy who advocated concentration on the aircraft carrier as the principal capital ship of

\(^{44}\) Ibid., part 1106.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., part 1110.
the near-term and future navy, that aircraft would replace surface ship gunnery as the main offensive weapons in the fleet’s arsenal.

Yet in every debate there is another side. Such was the case when Rear Admiral William V. Pratt, U.S. Navy, then serving as President of the Naval War College and later to become Chief of Naval Operations, was called to the stand. Admiral Pratt had risen to the rank of Rear Admiral through perhaps less glamorous, but none the less distinguished, assignments than his predecessor as War College President, Admiral Sims. Pratt stood out in a variety of assignments for the first part of his career, and was rewarded with a tour of duty as a member of the staff at the Naval War College. After that he went to sea as Chief of Staff for Admiral Sims, as Captain of the U.S.S. Birmingham, a light cruiser, while commanding the destroyer force of the Atlantic Fleet. The Admiral then served sequentially in the Office of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C., in the Canal Zone orchestrating defense of the Panama Canal, and then at the Army War College during the early stages of the First World War where he ultimately rose to the position of Aide for Operations. In August of 1917 Admiral Pratt was made Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, serving under Admiral William S. Benson, where he was assigned for the rest of the war. In February of 1919 he assumed battleship command of USS New York, after which he was appointed Commander of the Destroyer Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, where he commanded all destroyers in Pacific waters. In 1921 Admiral Pratt was ordered again to Washington, where he became a

47 Ibid., part 2570-2571.
48 Ibid., part 2571.
49 Ibid.
member of the General Board.\textsuperscript{50} During that assignment he was additionally tasked to provide data and analytical material and to serve as a technical advisor for the Conference on Limitation of Naval Armament, together with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt and Admiral Robert E. Coontz.\textsuperscript{51} In 1923 he again received command afloat, and then assumed his position as President of the Naval War College on September 5, 1925. During his time with the General Board Admiral Pratt was party to development of most of the important directives for structuring and administering the Navy, and it was this period that was of most interest to Council for the Prosecution.

When asked specifically if U.S. Navy policy regarding air forces afloat showed that the Navy Department fully realized its responsibility with respect to national defense, Admiral Pratt answered “...I think the general policy is perfectly sound.”\textsuperscript{52} Like Sims, Admiral Pratt’s position regarding the relative merits of the battleship and aircraft carrier were quite clear. When asked “What do you consider the main part of the fleet?” Admiral Pratt answered “Well, I consider the battleship is the backbone of the fleet.”\textsuperscript{53} And, when asked “Is there any other element in the Navy at the present time that tends to take the place of the battleship, in your opinion?” he responded “No; I do not think there is anything [that] [Sic] can take its place.”\textsuperscript{54} Finally when asked if he would tell the Court what he thought the relationship between the battleship and airplane should be in the fleet, he opined “I consider the airplane [is] one of the most valuable adjuncts to the fleet which we have had for a very long time and an extremely useful weapon.”\textsuperscript{55}

Thus the testimony offered by Admirals Sims and Pratt -- both knowledgeable and responsible men with considerable experience equally in conducting and observing operations and in the classroom at the Naval War College -- chose diametrically opposed positions on the relative merits of the battleship and the aircraft carrier with respect to the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., part 2573.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., part 2584.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., part 2585.
composition of the United States Fleet. So too were their contemporaries divided as regards the merits of carrier aviation. Admirals Sims’ and Pratt’s well-considered positions, which, as Presidents of the Naval War College they translated into the areas of curriculum emphasis there, reflect the mood of the times which prevailed in both the Navy and the Aviation Service of the Army. Not surprisingly, their positions reflect a similar controversy which was taking place within the nation’s political and diplomatic services.

The Carrier Debate

The Treaty of Naval Limitations -- emanating from the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 -- was ratified by the U.S. Senate on 20 March 1922. Five major technological advancements had dominated war at sea in the First World War: radio communications, the submarine, steam turbines, the dreadnought battleship, and the airplane. The lethality that these technological advances had enabled were necessary to curtail in the view of the Conference attendees. In the process of accomplishing that, the U.S. Navy’s way of looking at its future force structure -- including the numbers of and role of naval aviation assets including aircraft carriers -- was fundamentally altered. The treaty imposed both quantitative and qualitative limits on Navy carriers, setting an overall carrier tonnage of 135,000 gross tons, from which the U.S.S. Langley (CV-1) was excluded owing to her agreed status as an experimental ship unable to sustain movement with the Fleet. No new-construction carrier could exceed 27,000 tons, and not more than 3,000 tons could be added to that during modernization. The building program that followed as authorized by Congress included the conversion of cruiser hulls for...

---

58 Ibid., p. 30.
59 Ibid.
construction of two “33,000-ton carriers,” the *U.S.S. Lexington* and the *U.S.S. Saratoga*. When built, these ships were actually closer to 36,000 gross tons, and the British took exception to the U.S. claim of 33,000 tons, to no avail. However, the construction of these two aircraft carriers created yet another debate centered on building options within the constraint on tonnage imposed by the Washington Conference.

Of a total of 135,000 allowable tons for construction of aircraft carriers under the Treaty of Naval Limitations, the United States had committed to 66,000 tons for *Lexington* and *Saratoga*. That left a total of 69,000 tons with which to complete the remainder of carriers to be employed with the Fleet. Noting that treaty limitations permitted no carrier of new hull-up construction above 27,000 gross tons, construction of two such carriers would “eat up” 54,000 tons of that remaining available under the treaty, leaving only 15,000 for a possible fifth fleet carrier. Amid evidence from war gaming conducted by the Navy at the Naval War College -- primarily under the Presidency of Rear Admiral William Sowden Sims -- many within the Navy strongly believed that smaller carriers, which would enable the launching of more aircraft in shorter periods of time, an advantage critical in battle, were what the Navy needed. Thus, even before the *Saratoga* and *Lexington* were launched, on the 7th of April and the 3rd of October 1925, respectively, there was a constituency for scrapping them in favor of more numerous smaller carriers.

Of note, the Japanese carrier building program that was paralleling U.S. construction took a somewhat more balanced approach. The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) ship *Kaga*, built on a battleship hull of 39,000 designed tons under the 1917 “Eight Four” Fleet Law, was launched on the 17th of November 1925 as a carrier of 26,900 gross tons, and was capable of carrying 60 aircraft, though her normal observed load of aircraft was around half that. Her sister ship *Akagi*, built on a battle cruiser hull of 42,000 designed tons also laid down under the 1917 “Eight Four” Fleet Law, was launched on 22 April 1925 as a carrier of 26,900 gross tons, with a smaller maximum load of 50

---


61 Ibid., p. 295.
A smaller carrier of just under 7,500 tons and capable of carrying between 20 and 26 aircraft, the “Hosyo” [Sic – “Hosho”] was launched in November of 1921 and this trend was followed by construction of the Ryuzyo, of just over 7,000 tons and carrying around 24 aircraft, in April of 1931.

Thus the Japanese embarked on a construction program for carriers that included a combination of those that very nearly approached the tonnage allowed by the Washington Naval Conference, but supplemented by smaller carriers that could enable the time-critical launching of requisite offensive aviation assets as deemed necessary by their American counterparts in war games conducted under Admiral Sims in the early 1920s. This combination of platforms enabled the prospect for air superiority in battle without broaching the upper limit of overall carrier tonnage allowed under the terms of the Washington Conference.

The United States Navy, on the other hand, remained undecided on what size of carrier best suited the needs of the Fleet. Inhibiting design considerations was a conservative estimate of the likely near-term enhancements to aircraft performance such as speed, climb, power and maneuverability. In December of 1926 the Navy generated a report synthesizing the opinions of the bureaus of Aeronautics and Construction and Repair recommending construction of carriers of 23,000 tons with speeds of 23 knots but delayed construction of an initial purpose-built carrier pending fleet exercises with Saratoga and Lexington. Unfortunately, those carriers were not ready to join in fleet exercises until Fleet Problem IX was conducted off Panama in late January of 1929.

Thus the first U.S. aircraft carrier to be designed from the hull up -- the U.S.S. Ranger (CV-4) -- was not scheduled for completion until May of 1934. Commissioned in June of 1934, Ranger was the only carrier other than Saratoga and Lexington to operate with

---

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., pp. 296 and 294.
65 Ibid., p. 48.
the Fleet until *U.S.S. Yorktown* and *U.S.S. Enterprise* were commissioned in late 1934.\(^6^7\) Designed for only 13,800 tons and launched at 14,500 tons as a design compromise, she proved to be too small to support the type of operations evolving in fleet doctrine. Thus the Navy was faced with determining the best use for carriers and their capabilities in various roles with three carriers ill-suited from a design perspective throughout most of the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, most senior Officers in command of Fleet units gradually accepted the offensive potential of the carrier and its air wing. This did not, however, dispel the notion that the battleship remained the cornerstone of Fleet offensive might. Thus even as the Second World War approached, the Battle of Jutland remained a fundamental consideration in the education of Officers preparing for war at the Naval War College.

**The Debate Over Doctrine**

Between February of 1923 and April of 1940 the U.S. Navy conducted 21 Fleet Problems or exercises.\(^6^8\) A 22\(^{nd}\) Fleet Problem scheduled for January 1941 was cancelled due to the outbreak of war in Europe. These were the vehicle for refining operational skills and for testing new technologies and ideas to enhance Fleet combat effectiveness. What emanated from these Fleet Problems was doctrine -- the way in which the Navy would use new technologies in its operations and tactics to achieve a warfare requirement. At the forefront of consideration was the way in which naval aviation would be incorporated in battlefleet doctrine. Endemic to many in leadership positions in the U.S. Navy, however, was the firmly-held opinion that the battleship remained the “cornerstone of the Navy,” and that the proper roles for carrier aviation were scouting for the Fleet, gunfire spotting for battleship main batteries, and employment against

---

\(^6^7\) Hone, Op. Cit., p. 53.

\(^6^8\) Rhodes, James B., Archivist of the United States. *Records Relating to United States Navy Fleet Problems I to XXII 1923-1941*. National Archives No. 1 (NA-1), Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Record Group 38; General Records of the Department of the Navy Record Group 80; and Records of Naval Operating Forces Record Group 313.
submarines. This predilection may well have caused an unfair inhibition of carrier air potential in the exercises conducted.

In addition to the Fleet Exercises, and usually immediately following one, the Navy also took part in “Grand Joint Exercises” with the Army and, on occasion, the Marine Corps. Such an exercise -- Grand Joint Exercise Number Four -- was conducted in February of 1932, in the aftermath of Japanese annexation of Manchuria in autumn of 1931. In this exercise, which commenced on 1 February, Rear Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, who had been the first Commanding Officer of \textit{U.S.S. Saratoga} when she was commissioned in 1927, launched a surprise attack on Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands from a position to the north-east of that island. His operational objective was as follows:

> The BLUE Commander [Rear Admiral Harry E. Yarnell] is ordered to recapture and hold OAHU and occupy such other islands as may be necessary to reestablish our control of the HAWAIIAN AREA. To accomplish this task he has available the BLUE Battle Force plus an Expeditionary Force, approximately two divisions, one of Army and one of Marine Corps Troops.\(^6^9\)

A summary of the situation relating to that objective was:

> A powerful BLACK Atlantic Fleet, concentrated to cover the movement of large BLACK Army forces overseas for invasion of the BLUE Atlantic Coast, has been decisively defeated. BLACK naval power in the Atlantic has been reduced to a definite inferiority. The remnants of the BLACK Fleet and the BLACK overseas expedition have retired to Eastern Atlantic Bases.

> The Black naval forces which participated in the capture of OAHU withdrew from that vicinity, leaving a garrison of approximately eighteen thousand troops of all arms, coast defenses in good condition, some fifteen submarines, a small mine squadron and a military air force component.

No information exists as to the location or strength of any remaining BLACK naval forces in the Pacific. BLUE’s naval superiority is such as to make reasonably certain no naval interference outside of local units, with the operations against OAHU. 70

Admiral Yarnell, having had experience as Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Saratoga and taking advantage of the prevailing weather in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands, launched his raid on Oahu under conditions of almost complete surprise. He attacked on Sunday morning, 7 February 1932.

In summary, Raid Plan No. One, initiated at 0540, 7 February, from a point forty miles of KAHUKU, was executed with 150 airplanes [from a total embarked aircraft inventory of 171 airplanes]. All aircraft returned to carriers, the operations being carried out in the face of overcast and squally weather, rough seas and high wind. The constructive opposition was slight. Carriers were notably vulnerable to submarine attack during launching and recovery phases due to high surface wind requiring slow speed (six to ten knots) on part of carriers. … 71

Admiral Yarnell’s report of Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 indicates that bombs were expended as follows on prescribed targets on the island of Oahu:

**Table 1: Bombs Expended on U.S.S. Saratoga and U.S.S. Lexington**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Bombs</th>
<th>Target Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S.S. Saratoga</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF One-B</td>
<td>36 bombs</td>
<td>Eighteen on Hangars. Eighteen on anti-aircraft batteries at WHEELER FIELD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF Two-B</td>
<td>28 bombs</td>
<td>Hangars at LUKE FIELD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF Five-B</td>
<td>44 bombs</td>
<td>Hangar at WHEELER FIELD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF Six-B</td>
<td>30 bombs</td>
<td>Twenty-four on hangars at LUKE FIELD. Six on one plane near hangars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS Two-B</td>
<td>18 bombs</td>
<td>On eight bombardment planes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 bombs</td>
<td>At RODGERS AIRPORT. 72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
71 Ibid., pp. 3 and 7.
72 Ibid., p. 7.
Several hours after the launch, at 0720, a submarine was sighted on the port quarter of *U.S.S. Saratoga* at 2800 yards, with umpires assessing nineteen percent damage to that carrier. Similarly, as the last planes from her “attack” on military targets in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor were returning onboard, four torpedoes were launched against *U.S.S. Lexington* [by submarine S-42 involved in the exercise] at a range of about 1800 yards on her starboard beam, with “no damage” assessed by umpires. Thus both the *Saratoga* and *Lexington* had successfully launched and recovered their aircraft and launched a nearly unopposed raid on a plan devised by then Captain John Towers.

According to historian Brian M. Linn in his award-winning book, *Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902-1940*, “Hawaii’s vulnerability to carrier raids had been graphically illustrated in 1932, when, during Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 the invading side’s two aircraft carriers delivered a strong attack at dawn on Sunday, 7 February. The aggressors were credited with destroying several defending airplanes on the ground and with seizing temporary control of the air over Oahu.” Dr. Linn explains, however, that the purpose of the exercise was for the blue force, commanded by Rear

---

73 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
74 Ibid., p. 5.
75 Ibid.
Admiral Yarnell, to take and hold territory on Oahu, and that their mission thus negated by their very purpose significant destruction of the airfields and infrastructure on that island that they were subsequently going to try to take for their own use.\textsuperscript{77} While this is indeed a plausible and reasonable explanation for the umpires’ failure to credit the Yarnell raid with the extensive damage that was claimed by the Admiral, it contradicts the mainstream interpretation of the events.

According to historian Clark G. Reynolds,

The Army minimized the extent of the damage in the sneak attack, claimed its planes had critically damaged the carriers, and protested the legality of attacking on Sunday (!). When the umpires and admirals [Sic] agreed with the minimal damage estimate to Pearl Harbor, [Captain John] Towers protested violently, so much so that he was reprimanded. Still, the message was clear enough for those who cared to read it. …The fact that Japan nearly duplicated this attack on Pearl on Sunday morning, 7 December 1941, was no accident. Early in the 1950s Towers dined in Tokyo with a Japanese vice admiral [Sic] who had participated in the planning. “He told me they simply took a page out of our own book!”\textsuperscript{78}

Admiral Yarnell, though less adamant, protested the umpires’ decision to allow “destruction” of \textit{U.S.S. Saratoga} in the exercise by a Black force bombing squadron attacked in detail by four Blue fighter squadrons:

On Wednesday, 10 February, 1932, after learning the Blue Force Commander’s intention to conduct his demonstration, Raid Plan No. Four was executed, with some slight change in objectives. Heavy losses resulted both to the enemy and to \textbf{this force} [emphasis mine], largely through the application of damage rules in a manner not foreseen by us. An enemy bombing squadron, though it was attacked first by three BLUE fighting Squadrons, simultaneously, and then by a single fighting squadron, was allowed, under the rules as applied by the Chief Umpires, sufficient strength to carry out a bombing attack on SARATOGA and LEXINGTON, and awarded a hit with a 1000 lb. bomb on the SARATOGA placing the flight

\textsuperscript{77} Linn, Brian M.  Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 held in Luce Ha., Room 123, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 17 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{78} Reynolds, Clark G. \textit{Admiral John H. Towers: The Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy}. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, pp. 237-238.
This rebuttal to the findings of the exercise umpires refers to the attack and constructive damage to the *Saratoga* by Black aircraft that were attacked both on the ground and three days later in the air by Blue carrier aircraft which resulted in an outcome quite unfavorable as an indicator of the Navy’s attitude to carrier survivability while attempting to attack a set of targets ashore -- a clear signal of the Navy’s overall attitude toward the utility of carriers in the attack role.

Similarly, Thomas Fleming points out with respect to the carrier raid of 7 February:

> The Black commanders put up a vigorous defense – after the fact. They persuaded the umpires to rule that 45 of Yarnell’s planes had been hit by antiaircraft fire. They also pointed out that their battleships were at sea when Yarnell attacked and insisted that in a real war they would have soon caught up with his carriers and massacred them with their long-range guns.\(^{80}\)

Fleming goes on to point out that the Japanese Navy War College circulated a paper entitled “Study of Strategy and Tactics in Operations Against the United States in 1936” that stated “…In case the enemy’s main fleet is berthed at Pearl Harbor, the idea should be to open hostilities by surprise attack from the air.”\(^{81}\) He also points out that, between 1936 and 1940, the U.S. Navy laid the keels for twelve battleships, but only a single aircraft carrier.\(^{82}\) While the lessons of Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 were unheeded by many in leadership positions in the U.S. Navy, the Japanese saw fit to draw conclusions from their adversary’s fleet exercise that proved most costly to the U.S. cause. So also did the Japanese send then Lieutenant Commander Minoru Genda\(^{83}\), their primary

\(^{79}\) Yarnell, H.E. FIRST ENDORSEMENT on Umpire Reports, Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 dtd Feb. 16, 1932, p. 1. USNWCA:RG-8, Box 61, Folder 3.


\(^{81}\) Ibid.

\(^{82}\) Ibid.

\(^{83}\) The Japanese traditionally refer to their own with surname first, followed by given name. To conform to the reverse method of stating names used in the United States and
planner of naval air operations, to view the aftermath results of British sinking of three Italian battleships and one cruiser at their base at Taranto by air attack, which occurred on 11 November 1940, yet another indication of their appreciation for the offensive potential of a carrier air strike under proper circumstances.

It deserves mention that, despite a dedicated search at nine major archives and a national electronic search of libraries and archives, it was impossible to locate or access copies of the Umpires’ Reports for Grand Joint Exercise No. 4. One can only suspect the possible motive for the “disappearance” of the Reports as an attempt by the Navy to withhold from public scrutiny any potential for disagreement with the “official” position of limited viability of attack of land targets by carrier-launched aircraft and susceptibility of carriers to attack by land-based aircraft, submarines and battleships while entering their launch envelopes. Dr. Albert A. Nofi, who is completing a manuscript for publication on the Fleet Exercises from 1923 through 1940 and the associated Grand Joint Exercises, indicates a similar skepticism regarding the motives of the umpires in most western nations, this order will be reversed to give Japanese given names first followed by surnames throughout this text.


85 Insight provided by Mr. Daniel Martinez, Historian of the *U.S.S. Arizona* Memorial, while lecturing to Elective course of Douglas V. Smith entitled “World War II in the Pacific Theater,” in Chairman’s Classroom, Connolly Hall, U.S. Naval War College, Thursday 11 March 2004.

86 The Archives searched include: National Archives No. 1, Washington, D.C.; National Archives No. 2, College Park, MD; U. S. Naval War College Archives; U.S. Naval Academy Archives; U.S. Army War College Archives; U. S. Marine Corps Archives, Gray Library, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA; U.S. Naval Historical Center Archives, Washington, D.C.; American Historical Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming; Hoover Institute Library and Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA; and a national electronic search of libraries and archives conducted by the Research Librarians of the Naval War College.
denying reasonable damage from the Blue Force raid, as well as the subsequent allowed success of Black Force air and submarine attacks against *Saratoga* and *Lexington*. He too has been unable to locate the official umpires reports of the exercise, but ascribes as a cause the lack of attention to record keeping in general during that period rather than any more sinister motive. Nonetheless, Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 represents a failure of considerable proportion, whether through an honest misinterpretation of the likely success of carrier-based aircraft attacks on military land targets or through an official Navy attempt to structure outcomes of the exercise to conform to the predispositions of that Service’s senior leaders regarding the place of the battleship as the main offensive weapon of the Fleet. Attendant with that failure was an introduced ambiguity on the way in which the carrier and its air wing were handled in the curriculum and war gaming effort at the Naval War College.

**War Plans**

War planning for a war with Japan through the period from 1897-1941 was institutionalized in War Plan Orange. While the nuances of that plan, from its inception through the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 go far beyond the limitations of these pages, an outstanding detailing of the plan is provided by Mr. Edward S. Miller in *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945*. In that volume Miller postulates two schools of strategic thought within the Navy -- the “thrusters,” who advocated a dash across the Pacific Ocean to “save” the Philippines as a base of forward operations, and the “cautionaries,” who understood the difficulties to be encountered in such a huge undertaking and supported a more gradual drive to that objective, fully realizing the likelihood that the Philippine garrisons could not hold out

---

**Note**

87 Nofi, Albert A., Ph.D., Senior Analyst, Center for Naval Analyses. Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 of 1-12 February, 1932, and United States Navy Fleet Problems I through XXII conducted between 1923 and 1941 in Sims Hall, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 1 September 2004.
until the Fleet could reach and support them. Once again the relative importance of carrier air power was a critical component of the debate.

“In the 1920s aircraft carrier strikes on Japan were … pondered, but the planners considered them blows unsuitable for economic warfare and better concentrated against naval bases such as Yokosuka and Kure, preferably as surprise raids early in the war.”

In 1928 the Joint Board “…reckoned [that] … Blue would have to rely on outnumbered carrier planes since its seaplanes would be outclassed … Rear Admiral William A. Moffett of the Bureau of Aeronautics considered the air complement too weak unless augmented by “temporary” carriers. Some army [Sic] planners wondered if Blue had enough aviation ‘to go over at all.’” But as the capabilities of carriers became more apparent over time, “…Studies in the 1930s indicated that a lesser fleet, perhaps of two-thirds the opponent’s strength, could win a sea-air battle. Victory in the future engagements would depend on striking first and thus on intelligence from long-range scouting aircraft.”

Thus, amidst differing institutional prejudices concerning the relative merits of battleships and aircraft carriers as the fundamental offensive weapon of the Navy, the course of study, war gaming, and operational and tactical consideration of doctrine for the use of carriers in battle by the Officers assigned at the Naval War College continued in support of the planning effort. With only U.S.S. Saratoga, Lexington, and Ranger available in the Fleet inventory before Yorktown and Enterprise were completed in 1938, the flexibility of that group in considering new and audacious uses for air assets was quite limited.

88 Miller, Edward S. War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1991. This award-winning documentary of the Navy’s planning effort for a drive across the Pacific to defeat Japan is an indispensable companion to this study.

89 Ibid., p. 164.

90 Ibid., p. 142.

91 Ibid., p. 175.

Implications for the War against Japan

Thus the United States prepared for war in the Pacific institutionalizing in the Navy strategic culture a reliance on capital ship engagement akin to that theorized by another War College icon -- Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan -- without fully appreciating the importance of the carrier as a primary element of offensive warfare. Moreover, the U.S. Navy expected a day gunnery war. What actually took place, particularly in the War’s early stages, was in large respect a night torpedo war. How, then, could the man best placed to evaluate the utility of naval preparation for World War II -- Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz -- be so convinced that “…nothing that happened in the Pacific was strange or unexpected…?” The answer lies not in what was studied, but how it was studied.

Preparing for War

Experience is an essential ingredient in the conduct of war. History is replete with examples that demonstrate the importance of experience in combat from the chronicles of Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War to the present. Yet few societies in history since 431 B.C. have been immersed in conflict to the extent of the Classical Greeks. In fact, many nations face the prospect of war without any significant recent opportunity for experience in how to conduct it. Such to large extent was the case with the United States Navy in the period leading up to the Second World War.

Prior to the Second World War the United States Navy, though extremely important to the nation’s emancipation from British rule and in defense of homeland security and national interests during the century that followed, was fundamentally defensive in character. During most of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the U.S. Civil War, the Navy was predominantly employed in coastal defense and commerce protection roles. Virtually all officers who held major commands during the Second World War entered service after the offensive action of the Spanish-American War.

93 Hanson, Victor Davis. The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1989, p. 31. Here the author points out that in the fifth and fourth centuries, battle occurred in the Greek world nearly two out of every three years.
Even during the First World War, which resulted in significant naval expansion, the Navy’s role fell short of being accurately characterized as offensive in nature. Moreover, practically none of the major naval players in World War II saw significant action during that war. How, then, could such a navy hope to engage against and prevail over foes with much more recent and extensive offensive experience, particularly against the Japanese, who could boast a warrior tradition -- albeit almost exclusively on land -- without significant blemish for the previous 700 years, and an offensive-minded Mahanian naval doctrine of their own?

In the case of the United States Navy during the interwar period the answer, of necessity, was education and training. Yet meaningful training could only emanate from an educated assessment of the likely circumstances of a future war. Thus education of the Navy -- and particularly of its senior leadership and Officer corps -- was the essential ingredient in any hope of preparing the Navy adequately for the type of conflict that was becoming increasingly likely in the period after the Japanese military established dominion over Manchuria in 1931.

**The United States Naval Academy and Strategic Culture**

Academic emphasis at the Naval Academy changed very little from the time Fleet Admiral Nimitz entered as a *Plebe* in 1901 until the eve of the Second World War. In 1939, the “evolved” curriculum centered on Marine Engineering; Seamanship and Navigation; English, History and Government; Electrical Engineering; Ordnance and Gunnery; Languages; and Hygiene. Several aspects of the Naval Academy curriculum stand out.

---

94 This insight was provided by Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder, Capt. USN (Ret.) based on research he has conducted on World War I activities of subsequent Naval War College graduates.

95 United States Naval Academy Memorandum from Captain W.W. Smith, U.S. Navy, Mathematics Department, to The Superintendent, Subject: Survey of the Curriculum of the United States Naval Academy, dated 1 April 1939, p. 1. Document provided by Mr. Gary LeValley, Archivist, U.S. Naval Academy library.
First, according to Captain W.W. Smith, who was charged to examine the adequacy of the Naval Academy curriculum in early 1939, “The curriculum [was] designed to accomplish our objective … basic Service requirements. … The course content and the method of instruction [were] so planned that midshipmen [would] retain as much as possible of the material offered in the four-year Naval Academy course and graduate with a clear perspective, equipped with a ‘set of useful tools.’ To accomplish this the course must have depth. Emphasis must be placed upon clear thinking, not on memorization.” Captain Smith was sure that best results could be achieved by “…covering less ground and by covering that ground more thoroughly, concentrating upon fundamentals rather than upon details.”[emphasis added by Captain Smith] Thus the Naval Academy emphasis was on thorough immersion in professional fundamentals and fostering of a clear, analytical mental acuity.

Captain Smith postulated that “The Naval Academy [faculty was] fortunate in having a high turnover in officer personnel. The annual replacement of approximately forty percent of the officer instructors by officers direct from the Fleet enable[d] the professional departments to keep in close touch with Service requirements and make frequent changes in curriculum to conform with modern practice and new developments in naval science.” It is interesting that Captain Smith considered a high turnover of Officer instructors a good thing. His conclusion indicates that conformation with new developments in the Fleet was more important, in the view of the Academy leadership, than academic proficiency. Thus, by extension, the curriculum was by design practical and highly reactive to “developments in naval science” in the Fleet rather than purely academic as late as 1939.

Civilian instructors at Annapolis were essentially equal in number relative to their Officer counterparts. Their qualifications, however, were impeccable. Of the pool of available civilian educators, a highly select and credentialed group of around seventy usually applied for vacant Academy positions. Approximately eight of these would be

---

96 Ibid., p. 2.
97 Ibid., p. 3.
98 Ibid., p. 5.
competitively tested through written examination in Annapolis, with one or two emerging as certified for employment having also met with appropriate standards of personality and fitness before an Examining Committee.\textsuperscript{99} Thus highly-qualified civilian Professors or Instructors comprised from 50–65 percent of the teaching faculty, depending on department.\textsuperscript{100}

Yet the Naval Academy curriculum centered on professional fundamentals rather than strategic concepts and creation of an offensive mindset. What resulted was, aside from graduates with a “clear perspective, equipped with a set of useful tools,” a group of quality Officers imbued with a deep sense of national destiny and convinced of the leading, offensively capable, role the Navy would play in realizing that destiny.\textsuperscript{101} Throughout their careers this cadre would interact, both operationally and in intellectual pursuits, to create and refine a sense of mission supporting their collective ethos\textsuperscript{102} and producing a strategic culture focused on offensive naval operations in distant waters.

What, then, produced this refined sense of mission, and the operational orientation to support it? Several formative events occurred during the Naval Academy days of the top Navy leaders in World War II.

\textbf{“Everybody Works But John Paul Jones”}

Thus starts a turn-of-the-century ditty commemorating the temporary resting place of the icon of United States offensive naval action beneath the steps of Bancroft Hall, home of the Brigade of Midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy. “Ceremonies [were] held on April 24 [1906], marking the removal of the body of Admiral John Paul Jones from the temporary tomb in which it was placed on July 24, 1905, to the niche in the memorial room of Bancroft Hall … According to the program

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
issued [that day], President [Theodore] Roosevelt, Secretary of the Navy [Charles J.] Bonaparte and a party of diplomats [arrived] in Annapolis from Washington shortly after noon … The President and his party … The brigade of midshipmen, the battalion of marines [Sic] … [took] part in the ceremonies.”

President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt imbued the qualities of masculine virtue admired by the young men in attendance. The “Rough Rider,” the “Hero of San Juan Hill,” hunter, marksman and adventurer -- outgoing and perceived as fearless in all his endeavors -- this magnificent overachiever could not have helped but invigorate the men of Annapolis. John Paul Jones likewise re-energized the Brigade. “I have not yet begun to fight,” captured the spirit of this master of fighting sail. In combination these two great symbols of America’s fighting spirit surely energized the members of the Brigade of Midshipmen and gave them pause to contemplate their own role in the destiny of their nation.

Not too long thereafter, in 1907, President Roosevelt lent another hand in molding the outlook of the men of Annapolis. A “paralyzing” disagreement had arisen between the Army and the Navy over whether to fortify Subic Bay in the Philippines, or Manila, as the Army wished. The impasse prevented effective action of any kind, resulting in no fortified naval base west of Pearl Harbor. Deliberations in mid-1907 regarding the Philippines and U.S. posture in the Western Pacific led to the recommendation that the American battlefleet might cruise there as a means of impressing Japan with American naval might. On 16 December 1907 the sixteen battleships of the “Great White Fleet,” commanded by Roosevelt’s hand-picked Rear Admiral “Fighting Bob” Evans, steamed out of Hampton Roads, rounded Cape Horn, passed through San Francisco, made port visits in New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines and Japan before passing through the

---


105 Ibid.
Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean on its 46,000 mile successful journey.\textsuperscript{106} According to Historian Kenneth J. Hagan, “Eighty years later the cruise remained synonymous with Teddy Roosevelt’s naval policy.”\textsuperscript{107} This monumental demonstration of naval power certainly influenced the aspiring officers of the Brigade of Midshipmen like no other event in U.S. naval history. The United States had laid down her marker as a nation with global reach and had established beyond doubt that her interests would henceforth not be confined to the North American hemisphere. Moreover, they -- those naval cadets by the Severn -- were going to be part of it. This nation’s destiny and their own were, for better or for worse, intrinsically linked. And by his act of defiance of Congress in sending a fleet on a global circumnavigation to demonstrate U.S. naval power without funding authorization for the entire trip, President Roosevelt empowered the American people in support of that destiny. So also had then Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, who articulated the advantages of a powerful fleet that could secure “command of the sea” as demonstrated in historical precedent. Mahan was not just a naval theorist and author, but a publicist and a powerful advocate of a great navy for the United States.

For three hundred years the British had presided over “pax Britannia,” and for almost another hundred years the Dutch before them. They had created empires of wealth based on trade, and had placed themselves in a position to influence and shape events in Europe and beyond. The British Navy was indeed her sword \textit{Excalibur}, and Mahan articulated an appreciation for that fact which enabled her status among nations. But the sword had passed. \textit{“American Excalibur”} was soon to be in the hands of the brightest and most capable among those men attending the United States Naval Academy at the start of the twentieth century imbued with “a clear perspective, equipped with a set of useful tools.”

\textbf{Sound Military Decision}

If the Naval Academy created a cadre of young men dedicated to naval service with a common vision of national greatness underpinning their view of the mission of the

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
U.S. Navy, the Naval War College transformed them into an elite intellectual leadership capable of unitary concepts of action and acceptance of calculated risk.\textsuperscript{108} The key to this transformation was the honing of an analytical mindset capable of reacting to rapidly changing circumstances and formulating sound military decisions. Indeed, the ability to enhance students’ capacities for arrival at sound military decisions was the fundamental strength of the War College experience.

A good idea of the trends in educational philosophy at the Naval War College can be gained from the commencement and graduation speeches of some of the Presidents of that institution.\textsuperscript{109} As early as 1919, Rear Admiral William S. Sims, President of the Naval War College, stated in his Graduation Address that the primary mission of the War College was “the development of principles, and training in the application of these principles to practical situations. …It has been the object of the college not only to develop and define the principles of naval warfare, but to indicate the methods by which these principles may be applied with maximum success.”\textsuperscript{110} He related in his Commencement Address to the Class of 1920 that students “will gradually acquire confidence in [their] ability to estimate a situation correctly, reach a logical decision, and write orders that will insure the mission being carried out successfully.”\textsuperscript{111} Admiral Sims also indicated that:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{108} It is interesting to note that, during the entire period between the World Wars, the Naval War College Faculty was composed entirely of serving military Officers, save for a single academician in the Department of Intelligence from 1933-1945.
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Kennedy, John Gerald. \textit{United States Naval War College, 1919-1941: An Institutional Response to Naval Preparedness}. USNWCA, 1975. Unpublished manuscript. This manuscript provides an excellent narrative of the development of and changes in the curriculum at the Naval War College during the inter-war period, as well as of the imprint made by each President of the War College during that period.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Sims, William S. RADM, USN. Graduation Address, 22 May 1919. USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Sims, William S. RADM, USN. Commencement Address, 2 June 1919. USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 4.
\end{itemize}
… the Service would be greatly benefited if all of our officers could take the course. As this is manifestly impracticable, it follows that if the whole commissioned personnel of the Navy is ever to acquire a working knowledge of the principles and practice of naval warfare, it must be through the efforts and influence of the college graduates exerted upon the personnel under their command.  

Thus Sims reemphasized the importance of a document that had been used at the War College since 1910 -- Sound Military Decision, or the so-called “Green Hornet” emanating from the color of its cover. Starting in 1910 as Estimate of the Situation, this key guide to analysis of military operations evolved over time into Sound Military Decision. War College President, Rear Admiral Austin M. Knight, summed up the importance of this document, discussed below, quite well in 1913: “The [Estimate] is not for the purpose of justifying a decision previously arrived at, … [it] is a reasoned solution of a problem where each step in the process approaches a decision, [which] without those steps could be arrived at by accident only.”

In his opening remarks to the Class of 1922, Rear Admiral C. P. Plunkett, Admiral Sims’ Chief of Staff, stressed the importance of early familiarization with three pamphlets critical to the War College curriculum: Training for Higher Command; Estimate of the Situation; and The Formulation of Orders. Admiral Plunkett continued, saying that “The Estimate of the Situation must be kept at hand, and constantly referred to, to inculcate an orderly process of reasoning.” He reiterated that “Policy, Strategy and Tactics” remained supremely important to the curriculum, but added “Logistics and Command” to that list. Plunkett also discussed “chart

---

112 Ibid., p. 3.
115 Ibid., p. 2.
116 Ibid.
maneuvers” and “the tactical game” as methods of refining students’ analytical abilities, adding that “The playing of a bad solution may be more illuminating than the playing of a good one. One learns much by exposition of mistakes.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.}

In 1927 Rear Admiral W.V. Pratt extolled as a requirement for exercise of “supreme command” the “knowledge of … fundamental principles, based upon a background of sound practical experience.”\footnote{Pratt, W.V., RADM, USN. Graduation Address, 27 May 1927. USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 12.} He went further to express the criticality of the War College course of instruction in refining the “traditions and foundations” imparted at the Naval Academy and the “broad perspective” gained through experience in the Fleet.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 1-7.}

Rear Admiral Harris Laning, the President of the Naval War College in 1930, reflected the increasing concern of the times in emphasizing that the College was “in a better position than any other part of the Navy to reach sound decisions … as to how to organize, employ, and operate … ships in war.”\footnote{Laning, Harris, RADM, USN. Opening Address to the Classes of 1931, delivered 2 July 1930, p. 2.} This President again stressed that “It is through … war games, conducted in miniature where he can see the whole picture, that the student learns how to apply to actual war situations the principles he has learned through his study. … [T]his institution is also a research laboratory of a very high type. Here we can try out, test, and weigh almost any idea that has to do with naval war operations.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 1.}

Again in 1933 the War College Acting Chief of Staff, Captain S. C. Rowan, stressed the importance of war gaming and the “Green Hornet.”

In casting about for a practical means of avoiding the errors of the Civil War, attention was drawn to the methods of the Prussian Army so successful in the War of 1866 and 1870, methods having their roots in the teachings of Scharnhorst and the writings of von Clausewitz after the Prussian defeats in the Napoleonic Wars, but deriving more directly from

\footnote{Ibid., p. 4.} \footnote{Pratt, W.V., RADM, USN. Graduation Address, 27 May 1927. USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 12.} \footnote{Ibid., pp. 1-7.} \footnote{Laning, Harris, RADM, USN. Opening Address to the Classes of 1931, delivered 2 July 1930, p. 2.} \footnote{Ibid., p. 1.}
the older von Moltke’s school for staff officers. The success of those methods made an impression on a small group of American officers and specifically the German forms of orders appealed to them as filling a long felt need in the American Navy. Suffice to say from these origins evolved, among the many pamphlets of the War College, the *Estimate of the Situation* and the *Order Form*, which are merely means of arriving at a logical plan for a naval operation and embodying the plan in a clearly written order. 122

When coupled with offensive Mahanian theory centered on decisive battle between opposing battle fleets and the prevailing military search for restoration of maneuver and offensive action on the field of battle emanating from the First World War, this fascination with the cult of the offensive associated with the Wars of German Unification underpins the offensive mindset which permeated the Naval War College course of study.

Even on the eve of the Second World War, Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus, after reluctantly accepting a shortening of the course to five month, noted to the Graduating Class of 1941 that “the number of officers who pass through the College during the coming year will be more than four times the number of those who received their diplomas today.” 123 He further noted that the graduates were “[s]chooled in the fundamentals of the warfare of today [and] they are prepared to apply them in terms of modern techniques. They go to join those other graduates of this College who, in this hour of need, are to be found in all the highest command positions, afloat and ashore, which it is the providence of the Navy to fill.” 124

Thus resoundingly throughout the period between the World Wars the importance of gaming, flexibility, and sound military decision properly conveyed to subordinates were emphasized and reemphasized as the essential ingredients for the Navy’s Officers in

---

122 Rowan, S.C., Captain, USN.  Opening Address to the Classes of 1934, delivered 1 July 1933, p. 4.
123 Kalbfus, Edward Clifford, ADM, USN.  Graduation Address to the Class of 1941. USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 1.
124 Ibid., p.6.
command and senior leadership positions to excel in war. *Sound Military Decision* stressed factors as “Universal Determinants in War”\(^{125}\) including:

(a) The nature of the appropriate **Effect Desired**,

(b) The **Means Available and Opposed**, 

(c) The **Characteristics of the Theater of Operations**, and

(d) The **Consequences as to Costs**.\(^{126}\)

Also stressed were the **physical objectives** involved, the **relative positions** utilized, the **apportionment of fighting strength**, and the provision for **freedom of action** with regard for **Suitability** with respect to the desired effect, **Feasibility** by reason of means available and opposed and **Acceptability** as a factor of consequences and costs.\(^{127}\)

Thus a pattern of logical analytical thought was stressed which was developed by contemplation of courses of naval action within the context of likely future war and scrutinized, debated and refined through wargaming. The War College in the interwar period was all about decision making in battle. Aside from an aggressive group mentality of Officer alumni of the Naval War College, what resulted was an understanding among those who would shortly become the leaders of the Navy regarding appropriateness of certain actions under given circumstances in a future engagement. *Sound Military Decision* became a process of mental acuity imbued in graduates irrespective of the shortcomings of the Naval War College curriculum, such as the ambiguity over the importance of carrier aviation in battle, mentioned above.

**Strategic Culture in the Wartime Navy**

From the outset of their careers, a highly-select group entered the Naval Academy at approximately the same time, developed a cultural bias centered on the expectation of national greatness borne of extra-hemispheric involvement and a group sense of the Navy’s role in securing national policy, and reinforced in their proclivity for offensive naval action by long-term mutual interaction and professional education. What emerged

---


\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., pp. 38-39.
from the Naval War College was the same group of men with a warrior mentality and a firm expectation of the professional competence and analytical mindset of their wartime counterparts which would lead to decisive action through a sound decision process. Moreover, this expectation was only reinforced by their War College experience, irrespective of its intellectual focus.

Proof of this “cradle to grave” strategic culture can be found in the roles of prominent Naval Academy and Naval War College graduates in World War II. Little needs to be said of the role Fleet Admiral Nimitz played in that conflict. His classmate, R.C. MacFall (USNA’05/USNWC’23)\textsuperscript{128}, mentioned earlier, was credited by Admiral Nimitz with devising the circular tactics that proved so successful during the War. Admiral Harold R. Stark (USNA’03/USNWC’23) -- later Chief of Naval Operations from 1939 to 1942 -- was also a member of that class. Admiral Charles M. “Savvy” Cooke (USNA’10/USNWC’34) went on to become, in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, the most brilliant Navy Planner of the Second World War. Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King (USNA’01/USNWC’33) was hugely instrumental in all aspects of strategic prioritization and planning during the War, and was the primary advocate of modifying the “Europe First” strategy at the War’s outset in favor of simultaneous offensives against both Germany and Japan. Another member of Admiral King’s War College Class was Fleet Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey (USNA’04/USNWC’33), while Admiral Raymond A. Spruance (USNA’07/USNWC’27) had gone on to become Head of the Correspondence Course section of the War College during that same year. In tandem, Halsey and Spruance rotated as planners and executors of the Navy’s drive across the Pacific aimed at Japan.

\textsuperscript{128} Register of the Alumni, Graduates and Former Naval Cadets and Midshipmen, United States Naval Academy Alumni Association, Inc., 1845-1985. The Association, publishers, 1985 edition. Also, The Register, manuscript listing of U.S. Naval War College Faculty and graduates, Provided by Dr. Evelyn Cherpak, Archivist, U.S. Naval War College. Please note that all listings of graduation dates from the Naval Academy and Naval War College are drawn from these two publications.
Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher (USNA’06/USNWC’30) commanded the Carrier Task Forces which forestalled and decimated the Japanese *kido butai*, or Fast Carrier Group, in the battles of the Coral Sea, Midway and the Eastern Solomons -- three of the five carrier battles of the Pacific War. Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid (USNA’08/USNWC’30) and Admiral Spruance commanded during the other two, the Battles of Santa Cruz and the Philippine Sea. Admiral Richmond K. Turner (USNA’08/USNWC’36) was equally important in orchestrating the vital amphibious operations across the Pacific.

Other prominent commanders during World War II include: Admiral John S. McCain (USNA’06/USNWC’34); Admiral John H. Towers (USNA’06/USNWC’34); and a host of others. In all, the U.S. Naval Academy produced 215 Admirals in the decade between 1901 and 1910. Another 37 Admirals came out of the Naval Academy Class of 1911, as well as 36 Admirals and one Marine Corps General from the class of 1912. Yet the largest class in this entire period was 208 in 1907, with classes averaging just over 100. Even an Academy drop-out, Henry Latrobe Roosevelt (class of 1901), son of President Theodore Roosevelt, later became Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

**Conclusion**

To what extent, and why, was this cadre of offensively minded Officers adequate as a core of naval leadership? In 1945, Reserve Naval Officers numbered 270,893 out of 317,316 Officers in the United States Navy -- or 85.4 percent of the Officer Corps.\(^{129}\) None of these were Naval Academy graduates, and the first Reserve Officers who saw service in the War entered the Naval War College with the Class of 1942.\(^ {130}\) It is thus no coincidence that the overwhelming majority of senior Officers in critical wartime billets during World War II were graduates of both Annapolis and Newport. While the specifics of their education -- particularly at the Naval War College -- may not have precisely mirrored the type of war they were about to fight, their ability to hone and reinforce their warrior mentality and create an offensive strategic and operational spirit in a hither-to coastal defense Navy clearly emanated from their shared operational and intellectual

\(^{129}\) *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy – Fiscal Year 1946*, pp. 23 and 27.

\(^{130}\) Nimitz, C.W, FADM, USN. Address of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation to the graduating class, December 2, 1941, USNWCA:RG-14/15, p. 3.
experiences. Life-long association and career interaction, a shared ethos centered on national greatness and the Navy’s role in achieving it, and the analytical and offensive-minded decision process imbued in *Sound Military Decision* prepared the senior Officers of the United States Navy well for combat in World War II in spite of studying “the wrong stuff.”
III THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA

South of the Louisiades and east of Australia there lies an expanse of water known as the Coral Sea. For ten days in the summer of 1942 it became one of the most important places on earth.

The world was at war and in the last four months things had only gotten worse. Japan, already entrenched in Manchuria and China, had steam rolled across Southeast Asia and was threatening Australia. Without Australia, the United States, crippled at Pearl Harbor, had little hope of containing Japanese imperialism. Yet America was in no position to go on the offensive. She could only wait for the next Japanese move and react as best she could.

---

1 Archival photographic image provided by Mr. Daniel A. Martinez, Historian of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial.
That move came in early May. Intoxicated by her recent successes, many in the Japanese hierarchy sought further conquest. That conquest had to be stopped. The question was where? That became clear in late March and early April. U.S. Navy codebreakers had been hard at work since 1938 deciphering the complex JN-25 naval code. Indications of a Japanese move against Port Moresby emerged as early as 25 March with orders instructing air commanders to strike "RZP" with geographic designators "RQZ" and the codename "MO." Subsequent intercepted transmissions equated "MO" more firmly with Port Moresby. What follows is an analysis of the battle that was soon to take place in the Coral Sea, reasons for its outcome, and an evaluation of the operational commanders’ adherence to the eight tenets of a “Sound Military Decision” offered in Chapter I.

Japanese Opening Moves and Plans

On 28 November 1941, the day before the Army-Navy football game, then Vice Admiral (VADM) William F. “Bull” Halsey sailed from Pearl Harbor in his flagship, U.S.S. Enterprise, to deliver twelve Marine F4F-3 Wildcat fighter aircraft of VMF-211 to Wake Island in anticipation of a possible Japanese move to the east against the United

---

2 JN-25, unlike the Magic diplomatic code which needed the "Purple" sixteen-selector (electronic pathway) or later "Jade" twenty-selector transmission units akin to the German Enigma machine for encryption and decryption, required use of two books: a code book (with less than 33,333 entries) to convert words or letters to five-number groups, and a related cipher book (of 100,000 five-number groups arranged in a random sequence). For encryption, each code group was then added to the next cipher group in sequence. No machine was used. (Insights here provided by Prof. Emeritus Frank Snyder of the United States Naval War College in a letter responding to the author, Herman Wouk, concerning his presentation on the Battle of Midway given on its Fiftieth Anniversary in Newport, Rhode Island).

States. U.S.S. Lexington, under the command of Rear Admiral John H. Newton, was to leave seven days later on 5 December from Pearl on a similar mission to reinforce Midway Island with eighteen Vought SB2U-3 Vindicator scout bombers from VMSB-231. On his departure from Pearl Harbor Admiral Halsey set Battle Order Number One -- and thus became the first commander to assume a war condition on a U.S. Navy ship in the Pacific Theater in World War II.

He did this, oddly enough, with full knowledge that Admiral Harold R. Stark, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), had not included Hawaii in his advisory to Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet, and others warning that war was imminent in the Pacific.

Admiral Kimmel thus saw fit to concentrate on his own plan for victory over the Japanese in the event of war. He planned in great detail for a force under the operational command of Vice Admiral “Bull” Halsey to lure the Imperial Combined Fleet out into an area west of Midway Island, where after refueling at Truk Island, it would be engaged under conditions of surprise and “decisively” defeated on or about sixteen days after the commencement of hostilities. Admiral Kimmel’s plan is depicted in the chart on the following page. In order to minimize time of use of the engines on his fleet of 84 seaplanes, Kimmel elected to conserve their flight time for readiness to execute his plan by refraining from using them to scout in the vicinity of Hawaii in early December 1941. Thus Admiral Stark’s warning of imminent hostilities was not enough to convince Kimmel that defense of Pearl Harbor and U.S. Army assets on Hawaii was of higher strategic priority than conserving assets, including seaplanes for adequate aerial search, for his planned offensive. Inadvertently, Admiral Stark had aided in convincing Admiral Kimmel that his estimate of the situation was correct.

5 Ibid., p.9.
6 Interview of Capt. James Granson Daniels, USN (Ret.), participant as fighter pilot in all carrier battles of World War II except the Battle of Midway, 18 February 2002, Honolulu, Hawaii.
Oddly enough, when war seemed increasingly likely with Japan, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked the CNO, Admiral Stark, whether to send Admiral Ernest J. King to the Pacific and move Admiral Kimmel to the Atlantic. Stark replied that there was no reason to switch their commands. One can only imagine the “what ifs” had Admiral Stark recommended the alternative assignments.

There was a reason that Admiral Stark had left Hawaii off his list of likely targets of Japanese aggression. Indications were that Japan would attempt to secure her sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and gain access to the oil resources of the Dutch and/or British to her south as a necessary prelude to any move to her east against the United

---

7 Image provided by Mr. Edward S. Miller from his PowerPoint slides for lecture “War Plan Orange” given on 2 December 2004 to Douglas V. Smith’s Elective Seminar on World War II in the Pacific Theater, U.S. Naval War College, room C-322B.
States. Thus the Philippine Islands, laying astride her SLOCs in the South China Sea and with U.S. B-17 and B-18 bomber aircraft capable of reaching Tokyo and threatening Emperor Hirohito in residence there, seemed the most likely target for initial Japanese aggression. Moreover, Japanese naval capabilities were interpreted in the United States as inadequate simultaneously to attack both south and east. It was concluded that, with only six large carriers available, all would have to be used by the Japanese in any contemplated move against Pearl Harbor.\(^8\) With more pressing need for two or more of her carriers nearer to home, such an attack was viewed by naval analysts as too risky for the Japanese to conduct. Also, the shallow waters of Pearl Harbor would make aerial torpedo attack impossible in the estimation of U.S. intelligence experts. Recent Japanese adaptations to two of her weapons systems, however, enabled the Imperial Japanese Navy to overcome its limitations and strike suddenly and unexpectedly as it had against the Russians at Port Arthur in 1904.

In the month and a half before 7 December 1941 the Japanese made two technological breakthroughs. First, they engineered the mating of drop tanks to their Zero aircraft, enabling them to accompany the bombers that could now be used against the Dutch and British oil holdings in Southeast Asia. Second, and only in the nick of time in the close proximity to the anticipated operation, they fitted their 18-inch aerial torpedoes with wooden stabilizer planes which limited the depth to which they dove sufficiently to enable their use in Pearl Harbor. Even Vice Admiral Halsey had considered such an attack extremely unlikely. His main concern was that the Japanese might be inclined to operate as far to the east as Wake Island, which too seemed unlikely.

Admiral Halsey was due back to Pearl Harbor in the late evening hours of 6 December 1941. Fortunately, he and the Enterprise group were slowed by a winter storm. On hearing of the Japanese attack on Pearl the next morning, on 7 December near

---

\(^8\) It should be noted that, at this time, U.S. Navy operational commanders and analysts believed that the Imperial Japanese Navy would operate carriers in groups not exceeding two as was the custom in the U.S. Navy. The Japanese grouping of as many as six carriers in a single group, as was the case in their attack on Pearl Harbor, came as something of a surprise.
dusk he “bingoed” seven aircraft that had been airborne from his carrier at the time to land at Ford Island. In the frenzy that followed the two-wave Japanese attack only one of those aircraft -- piloted by Lieutenant Junior Grade James Granson Daniels -- arrived without being shot down by friendly fire. What was left of the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor was two old battleships, the *U.S.S. Maryland* and the *U.S.S. Tennessee* that could in the not too distant future make way under steam, and a third, *U.S.S. Pennsylvania*, that could be repaired. Of the eight battleships struck by the Japanese that day, the other five had been destroyed or were beyond immediate repair. The Navy could not count on another battleship to operate offensively in the central Pacific until the arrival of *U.S.S. North Carolina* in June of 1942. Through luck the *Enterprise* and *Lexington* had been at sea delivering aircraft to Wake and Midway Islands. *U.S.S. Saratoga*, thought by the Japanese to be the *Lexington* and to have been sunk rather than just severely damaged, was soon to be torpedoed on 11 January 1942, in waters north of Hawaii and would return to San Diego for repairs which would take her out of the war for four months and eleven days. So the United States began the war in the Pacific without the battleships that were the backbone of naval planning for War Plan Orange -- the U. S. advance across the Pacific toward the Japanese homeland and the ultimate defeat of Japan. Admiral Husband Kimmel’s plan for a “decisive” victory over the Japanese, with a carrier Task Force under the command of VADM “Bull” Halsey lying in wait for the advance of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto’s Combined Fleet was no longer a possibility.

Those members of the “gun club” or “battleship Navy” who had advanced the battleship as the cornerstone of naval might and the carrier as a useful adjunct to it were further devastated by not only the attack on Pearl Harbor but the sinking of the *H.M.S. Repulse* and *H.M.S. Prince of Wales* in route to Singapore on 10 December 1941 by Japanese Nell and Betty bombers with torpedoes, the former while maneuvering at battle speed. They were thus forced to change their thinking drastically and embrace the carrier as the sole surviving centerpiece of offensive naval lethality with which to contest the Imperial Japanese Navy.

---

But what moves could be expected from the Japanese next? There were, as it turned out, three phases in Japan’s plans. In the first phase the Japanese naval planners sought to destroy the carriers and battleships, and as many other large combatants as possible, at Pearl Harbor. They also determined to take Wake Island, Guam and the Gilberts, thus cutting the U.S. line of communications to the Philippines. Hong Kong and Thailand would be overrun as a prelude for moves against Burma and Malaya. Then Malaya, British Borneo (for oil) and Sarawak would be taken. In the second phase of operations the Japanese planned on taking the rest of Malaya and Singapore, southern Burma, the northern islands of the Netherlands East Indies, and the Bismarck Islands. Finally, in the third phase, they planned to take the rest of the Netherlands East Indies to consolidate the oil resources there, as well as the rest of Burma.

Japan’s timetable for conquest was astonishingly aggressive. Her rate of progress was for the most part even more astonishing. She planned to take the Philippines in 50 days. Though General Douglas MacArthur and his air component commander, Major General Lewis H. Brereton, were initially taken by surprise they managed to defend Bataan until 9 April 1942. Corregidor fell on 7 May 1942 during the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the rest of the Philippines capitulated only three days later. Thus the Japanese actually took 155 days to wrest control of the Philippines -- or roughly three times as long as they had anticipated. But the Japanese advance was much more rapid elsewhere. They had envisioned taking Malaya and Singapore in 100 days. Singapore actually fell on 15 February, a full month earlier than expected. Similarly, the Japanese allowed 150 days for the conquest of the Netherlands East Indies. The Dutch holdings fell on 9 March 1942, only two months after the first landings. Thus, even though their success in destroying the U.S. Fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor had been evaluated as marginal due to the absence of the U.S. carriers at the time of the attack, the overall military success achieved by the Japanese gave rise to euphoria in both the ranks and the top leadership.

**Japan’s Forces in the Pacific Area**

At the outset of her conquests, Japan had a total of 51 Infantry Divisions at her disposal. None of her armored divisions were ready yet for use. She had allocated only ten divisions for her new Southern Army, which moved forward with unanticipated
success. She had 13 divisions in China, and 23 divisions in Manchuria. The rest of Japan’s Army Divisions were in Japan, Korea and on Formosa.

Japan’s Combined Fleet was composed of four main task forces. The Main Body consisted of six battleships, two light cruisers (cruisers with six-inch or lesser caliber guns) and eight destroyers. This Main Body was stationed in home waters under the personal command of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet. The Mobile Force, or kido butai, consisted of six large carriers (the Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, Shokaku, and Zuikaku -- of which the latter two had newly-formed air wings which they would not embark until November of 1941), two battleships, two heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, nine destroyers and 30 submarines. It was commanded by Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo and was used initially in attacking Pearl Harbor, and thereafter against Rabaul, Darwin and Ceylon. The South Sea Force consisted of four heavy cruiser, three light cruisers, twelve destroyers and nine submarines. Commanded by Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue, Commander Fourth Fleet/South Seas Forces, this force was used initially against Wake Island, Guam and the Gilberts. Finally, the Southern Force, consisting of two battleships, twelve heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, two light carriers (Zuiho and Taiyo), 52 destroyers and 18 submarines under the command of Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, provided escort and cover for the landings in Thailand, Malaya, the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies.

Japan’s naval aviation was divided into the 1st and 11th Air Fleets. First Air Fleet was carrier based. Eleventh Air Fleet was land-based and consisted of approximately 300 aircraft on Formosa arrayed against the Philippines and approximately another 200 aircraft in Indochina arrayed against Thailand, Malaya and Burma.

Though Japan made tremendous initial advances as outlined above, those army units allocated in support of naval operations were not her best. The best troops Japan could muster were employed in Manchuria and China. Moreover, only eleven divisions (ten at the outset) were allocated against Japan’s southern and eastern enemies. This should bring into serious question Japan’s strategic thinking when one ponders her grandiose expansionist plans to include areas in North America and as far east as the Caribbean enumerated in Appendix A as “Land Disposal Plan in the Greater East Asia...
Co-Prosperity Sphere” (I.M.T.F.E. Exhibit 1334. Transcript, pp. 11969-73), December, 1941, Ministry of War, Research Section.

The Situation in the Pacific in the Summer of 1942

During the winter and spring of 1942 the Japanese had conquered the Philippines, the Netherlands East Indies, Malaya, and most of Burma (the latter now Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar, respectively), Wake, Guam, Rabaul, Hong Kong and Singapore. They had done so in roughly half the time and much more easily than expected. With the sinking of the *H.M.S. Repulse* and *H.M.S. Prince of Wales*, there were no allied capital ships in the Western Pacific to contest the Imperial Japanese Navy. The non-aggression pact signed by the Japanese and Soviets in April of 1941 had ensured that Japan would not have to face a two-front war in a naval sense. While the Japanese had planned to establish a defensive perimeter to protect their gains to the east in the Pacific, the success of both their operations on land and at sea encouraged some among them to consider additional options. Three main naval options emerged:

1) moving west to India in order to knock that country out of the war, link up with German forces, and threaten essential British petroleum resources in Persia;

2) moving south to or toward Australia to sever Allied Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and prevent American reinforcement of the southwest Pacific, thus denying any viable ability to stage a major offensive against the Japanese mainland or resource area;

3) moving east, to the Hawaiian Islands. Though much has been made of this last option, and Japanese plans have been uncovered for it, it was not realistic. With only 38 amphibious ships available, of which only 34 were operational at the time, the Japanese could not have hoped to invade the "armed camp" that Hawaii now represented -- especially over an expanse of 3,650 nautical miles from Hashirashima (the Japanese Inland Sea).¹⁰

¹⁰ Insights here were provided by Vice Admiral (then Captain) Yoji Koda* of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force. VADM Koda was assigned as a student in the Naval Command College of the United States Naval War College in 1992 where he was my student in a seminar on World War II in the Pacific Theater. A naval scholar who
Each of the strategic approaches had its own constituency within the Japanese Navy, as well as within the more politically powerful Japanese Army, which had a land orientation (Manchuria and China). The Naval General Staff initially advocated a move to the west. This concept, however, proved untenable when the Headquarters received a copy of the new Tripartite Axis Military Agreement on 19 January 1942, which, though it made passing reference to Germany's advance eastward and Japan's advance westward, said nothing at all with regard to future joint offensive effort. It was also abundantly clear that the Army did not want to commit forces for a move southward, and would have no part of an attempt to invade Australia. Thus the thrust eastward, toward Midway Island, advocated by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto and Combined Fleet, gained additional support. Still wanting to move southward to cut off Allied SLOCs and fearful that an advance east taking Midway Island could not be sustained logistically, the Naval General Staff continued planning for occupation of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands -- with future occupation of Samoa and Fiji contemplated. Thus the advocacy for future strategic moves sorted out as follows:

had several previous tours in the United States, VADM Koda was every bit as much my teacher as student. He provided insightful commentary and analysis after every seminar session, and many of his insights will be included later in this and other chapters. VADM Koda also pointed out that all Japanese naval conquests and garrison activities were accomplished with only eleven divisions. Given the Japanese Army's requirement for 36 divisions in Manchuria and China and the rest of her 50-51 divisions in Korea, on Formosa, in the Philippines and southern resource area or in Japan, and traditional fears of the Soviets after the debacle at Nomanhan in August of 1938 where the Soviets and Japanese clashed at the Corps level along the Mongolian front, invasion of Hawaii was merely an exercise in planning. (*Note: All Japanese names throughout have been "Americanized" with surname last and given name first).

1) Invade Australia -- Capt. Morisada Tomioka (Director of the Naval General Staff)
   a) Rejected by the Army section of the General Staff.
   b) Cited reason was "lack of logistics."

2) Invade Ceylon -- Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki (Chief of Staff, Combined Fleet)
   a) Rejected by the Army section of the General Staff.
   b) First Air Fleet subsequently conducted air raids on Ceylon against Colombo and Trincomalee, the two British naval bases on the island. Of the five battleships and three carriers stationed there by the British, but at sea in anticipation of the Japanese attack, the heavy cruisers *H.M.S. Cornwall* and *H.M.S. Dorsetshire*, the light carrier *H.M.S. Hermes*, and a destroyer escort accompanying her were sunk by Japanese carrier aircraft. Oddly, unlike other Japanese carrier operations before and to follow, the five carriers of the *kido butai* that conducted this raid were protected by four accompanying battleships, two heavy and one light cruiser, and eight destroyers. This precaution was not adhered to in subsequent major carrier operations, much to the chagrin of the naval hierarchy.

3) Coral Sea/Port Moresby Operation -- Capt. Tomioka (Second choice after invasion of Australia)
   a) Conducted.
   b) Leads to loss of two largest carriers of the First Air Fleet for eight weeks (First Air Fleet loses one-half of its aircraft capability for the Midway operation).

4) Invade Midway Island -- Admiral Yamamoto (Commander-in-Chief, Combined Fleet) This move would extend Japan’s defensive perimeter to the east, but Admiral Yamamoto’s ulterior motive was to lure out the U.S. Navy’s operational carriers to engage them in a decisive Mahanian battle and finish the incomplete business he started at Pearl Harbor.
   a) Conducted.
   b) Leads to loss of four of Japan's six large carriers from First Air Fleet.

5) Defensive Barrier -- Rear Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka (Chief of Staff, First Air Fleet)
a) Rejected by naval section of the General Staff.

b) Rationale: it did not address pressures emanating from the United Nations declaration of 1 January 1942 calling for nations forcibly to eject Japan from her recent conquests.

c) Also rejected because the First Air Fleet was held in disrepute by the Combined Fleet Staff.\(^{12}\)

Ultimately the decision clarified. Many historians attribute this directly to the "Doolittle Raid" which was launched by the United States over Tokyo on 18 April, 1942. However, the decision was actually taken almost two weeks earlier.

It was on April 2 that [Yasuji] Watanabe went to Tokyo bearing the Combined Fleet’s more or less completed plan for the MI (Midway) and AL (Aleutians) operations. Once more, the Naval General Staff showed extremely strong opposition to the plan. ... On April 5, in the operations room at the Naval General Staff, the results of [a] study [on the feasibility of the Midway and Aleutians plans] gave rise to another heated argument in the presence of Vice-Chief [of the Naval General Staff, Vice Admiral Seiichi] Ito. Vice Admiral [Shigeru] Fukudome [Chief of the First Division of the Naval General Staff] turned to Ito. “If the C. in C.’s so set on it, shall we leave it to him?” … Chief of the Naval General Staff [Admiral Osami] Nagano had no objections.\(^{13}\)

Acceptance of Admiral Yamamoto’s plan for increasing Japan’s defensive perimeter to the east and using Midway Island as a forward base for reconnaissance and early air attack is confirmed by Chief of Staff, Combined Fleet, Vice Admiral Matome Ugake’s personal diary entry of Sunday, 5 April 1942: “Staff Officer Watanabe has been in Tokyo to consult with the high command on the second stage operations plan. And he telephoned back that the Naval General Staff seemed to have reluctantly agreed to it.”\(^{14}\)


This was the Midway plan. As in the case of Pearl Harbor, the Naval General Staff caved in when Yamamoto exercised a bit of genteel blackmail, hinting he might resign if he did not get his way.\footnote{Prang, Gordon. \textit{Miracle at Midway}. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982, pp. 22-23.} The “Doolittle” raid certainly hardened Adm. Yamamoto in his resolve to attack to the east to take Midway Island. Convinced that he had failed in his duty to protect the Emperor under all circumstances, Admiral Yamamoto increased his advocacy for a move toward Midway to expand the Japanese defensive perimeter and prevent a recurrence. Embedded in his motive was an expectation that the U.S. Pacific Fleet would have to defend Midway, thus enabling the Imperial Japanese Navy to engage an inferior numerical force in a great Mahanian battle akin to that of the Straits of Tsushima in the Russo-Japanese War. Adm. Yamamoto was the only serving Officer in the Japanese Navy who had participated in the Russo-Japanese War, yet he had not shared in any of the naval engagements that had brought glory to that navy in this war. Perhaps his personal motives for the move against Midway clouded his judgment. Nonetheless, his power and personality had prevailed. The decision was taken reluctantly at Naval General Staff Headquarters to press forward with both the Coral Sea/Port Moresby operations and those aimed at Midway, the latter on a compressed timetable.

For the Allies, the situation in the Pacific could not have been much worse. With MacArthur's expulsion from the Philippines all hope of the "thrusters"\footnote{Miller, Edward. S. \textit{War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945}, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991). Miller chronicles the vicissitudes in planning between the "thrusters” who wanted to defend the Philippines at the outset of any war with Japan and the "cautionaries" who favored a more gradual island-hopping approach to victory in the Pacific in World War II.} went dormant. Maintaining SLOCs with Australia was second only in strategic importance to defense of the mainland and Hawaii. Relative naval strength after Pearl Harbor certainly favored the Japanese.
In late December of 1941 the Japanese had ten carriers, six large and four small (including one escort carrier), and eleven battleships.\textsuperscript{17} An additional light fleet carrier -- \textit{Shoho} -- which was later to appear at Coral Sea, was launched in January 1942. In comparison, after loss of or severe damage to eight battleships at Pearl Harbor the United States had only three of eight existing carriers (\textit{Lexington, Saratoga,} and \textit{Enterprise}) operational in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{18} Of the twelve battleships remaining in the U.S. arsenal, most were required in the Atlantic theater. In fact, when the battle actually took place only seven heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and thirteen destroyers were available to support the two American carriers.\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Saratoga} was torpedoed on 11 January 1942 by a Japanese submarine and underwent repair in Puget Sound, keeping her out of action between 11 January and 22 May.\textsuperscript{20} She only reached Hawaii on 6 June -- far too late to help at Coral Sea. \textit{Yorktown}, which had been transferred to the Atlantic Fleet in April of 1941 when war appeared eminent in accordance with provisions of Rainbow 5, and desperately needed a yard period after extensive service in the North Atlantic, was transferred back from the Atlantic when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. She became Flagship of Task Force 17 on New Year's Eve and de facto became a replacement for \textit{Saratoga}. The newly-constructed \textit{Hornet} was still in the Atlantic embarking her air wing and would not be operational, let alone available, for several months. At best, only defensive operations

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 171-172. Please note that all figures for both Japanese and U.S. fleets here are taken from this source.
\textsuperscript{19} Bates, Richard W., Radm., U.S. Navy (Ret.). \textit{The Battle of the Coral Sea, May 1 to May 11 Inclusive, 1942, Strategical and Tactical Analysis}, (Unpublished Manuscript prepared for the Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1947, now held by the Defense Documentation Center, Defense Logistics Agency, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia, and at other authorized military installations), Appendix 2, p. -v-.
could be realistically expected until newly constructed units entered Fleet service in late 1943. This made U.S. planning, of necessity, reactive rather than proactive.

**Japanese Plans and Preparations**

The Japanese had two main purposes in extending their defensive perimeter to the south. First, they wanted to provide added protection for their new forward base at Rabaul, to which they had just moved from Truk. Second, they knew the importance of severing the Allied SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia. If the initial drive through New Guinea (taking Port Moresby) and the Solomons was successful, the Japanese planned to advance into New Caledonia, Samoa and the Fiji Islands. To do this they attempted to adapt their naval doctrine to a concept of land warfare that would become characteristic of their operations in later battles such as Midway and Leyte Gulf.

Japanese naval doctrine was Mahanian in nature. They sought a decisive battle which would be waged on advantageous terms created by attrition of the enemy en route to the area of operations. This would be accomplished by placing submarine barriers in the enemy’s path and attacking units with land-based aircraft with the objective of destroying roughly fifty percent of the enemy’s forces prior to battle. There was at the time a “universally” accepted principle that naval forces were reduced in combat efficiency ten percent for every thousand miles they were operating from their nearest base with support infrastructure. Thus the Japanese expectation was that the U.S. Pacific Fleet would be reduced in efficiency by at least another thirty percent due to distance from Pearl Harbor if engaged according to their doctrine. Above all, the primary engagement would take place with forces massed under an umbrella of land-based air support.

Of even greater significance, the Japanese Navy relied on applying tactical lessons of prior land battles, particularly the Battle of Cannae in the Second Punic War,

---


22 VADM Yoji Koda, Op. Cit. in note 10, provides these insights on Japanese naval doctrine in World War II.
rather than sea battles to their operational concepts. At Cannae, Hannibal presented a weak center. When his center collapsed, he enveloped the Romans on both flanks and won a resounding victory with a force of approximately 37,000 against a vastly superior Roman force of around 70,000. Applied at sea, such a scheme would require concerted operations by several separate forces constrained to a rigid timetable. Such a timetable assumed success and even opposition in all areas and was thus as unlikely to succeed in concept as it proved in actual application. The Japanese naval hierarchy simply “scripted” outcomes devoid of realistic consideration of the complexities of maneuver at sea. As has been the case so often in history, the application of land warfare concepts to operations at sea usually breeds disaster.

Thus the Japanese set out to occupy the island of Tulagi in the eastern Solomons as a diversionary measure and advance base for staging air patrols, with the main objective -- seizure of Port Moresby in New Guinea -- to take place six days later. The two fast carriers assigned to the operation -- Shokaku and Zuikaku -- had the additional responsibility of striking any U.S. or Australian naval forces that might show up in the area to prevent successful completion of the operation. Japanese intelligence, prejudiced by stereotypes of previous U.S. Navy operations in the area, underestimated opposing force levels. They also expected the U.S. Task Force(s) to enter the Coral Sea from the east and structured their air search plan accordingly. Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, the American commander, confounded his Japanese opponents by entering the area of operations from the southeast.

The Japanese were organized into five groups.23 The Tulagi Invasion Force was to proceed to take its objective on 3 May. The Port Moresby Invasion Force was to remain at anchor in Rabaul until six days after Tulagi was occupied. The Covering Force for both those operations (four heavy cruisers, a destroyer and the small carrier Shoho) was to proceed to a position 150 nautical miles west of Tulagi and south of New Georgia Island. A Support Force (two light cruisers, some gunboats, minesweepers and auxiliaries) was to take station in the same area about 60 nautical miles west of the

---

Covering Force. The two fast carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, commanded by Rear Admiral Tadaichi Hara and on loan from the *kido butai*\(^{24}\), with a screen of two heavy cruisers and six destroyers, was initially about 630 nautical miles northwest of Tulagi proceeding on a southeasterly course. It was to enter the Coral Sea and attack any carriers or other Allied combatants or shipping that might be encountered. It was to do this, however, via a track east of the Solomon Islands, and was additionally tasked to conduct an air strike against the northern extremities of the Australian continent to eliminate or reduce land-based air opposition to the landings at Port Moresby.\(^{25}\) Six submarines were also tasked to provide reconnaissance and sink any Allied ships in the area. All the units in the Japanese force were to be covered by land-based aircraft, which would also scout to a range of 650 miles (in the case of the flying boats).

As was their habit, the Japanese “scripted” the encounter to follow. Except for one brief occasion of an air strike on Lae, American carriers had always operated alone in the Coral Sea. Thus the Japanese predicated their operational planning on the assumption that they would be up against a single U.S. carrier. That assumption was to prove costly.

Moreover, in accordance with their doctrine of conservation of air assets for rapid launch of superior numbers in the strike role, the Japanese relied exclusively on cruiser or battleship launched and land-based aircraft for search missions. This reliance on assets external to the carriers for search and location of enemy units introduced a divergence of intent and interest in the search process, as well as a barrier to accurate transmission of and authentication of the correctness of locating information passed to the carriers. Since none of the Japanese ships or aircraft had radar, however, and since forward bases for staging reconnaissance missions were inadequate, except for Tulagi, to cover the

\(^{24}\) The *kido butai*, or “mobile force,” was the striking group of large carriers in Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo’s Third Fleet (normally employed in the central Pacific).

southern and eastern areas of the Coral Sea in which *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* would have to operate, the Striking Force rendered itself needlessly vulnerable.

Thus the Japanese plan called for a concerted strike or “double envelopment” of what turned out to be two U.S. carriers by widely separated forces which had no common established time frame to mass for the attack. Their scripting of expected U.S. operational patterns in the Coral Sea area caused them to formulate an air-search plan that was not optimized to locate those carriers early and strike before their U.S. opponents were in close enough range to strike. Moreover, the requirement for radio silence to maintain the security of the force compounded the difficulty of executing the Japanese plan.

**The United States Plan**

The U.S. plan, in contrast, was quite simple. The strategic objective was to turn back the Japanese onslaught and maintain the necessary SLOCs to Australia to enable a build-up of U.S. forces there and give time for the nation’s industrial base to build the ships and other equipment and Armed Services to train the men necessary to go on the offensive against Japan. The two American carriers, *Lexington* and *Yorktown*, and their supporting ships, were to conduct a raiding action. Their mission was to stop the Port Moresby invasion. Secondary to that mission, they were to sink as many Japanese carriers and combatant ships as could be safely accomplished. Since the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* represented half the operational carriers in the Pacific, their preservation was of utmost strategic importance. They would be hazarded only to accomplish the primary mission.

**Operational Imperatives**

As stressed in the interwar curriculum at the Naval War College, there were five general imperatives advanced as key to carrier task force success:

1. Defend the task force, and particularly the carriers.
2. Keep the task force or group together for mutual protection and support. It should be noted, however, that doctrine at the time of the Coral Sea battle was for separation of the carriers to enable optimum use of cloud cover for reduced possibility of detection by aircraft. This necessitated halving of the few destroyers available at the time to support two carrier groups and thus
required rapid repositioning of the destroyers to new stations when each
carrier maneuvered or came into the wind to launch aircraft. This in turn
produced half the fire power for anti-air naval gun defense and greatly opened
the carriers to attack by submarine, particularly during destroyer maneuver
while repositioning. Thus establishment of groups of carriers in a single Task
Force would be directed as the learning curve advanced as the war went along.

3. Locate the enemy’s carriers.
4. Launch the strike first against the enemy.
5. Maintain radio silence to avoid detection.

Complicating the decision process, several of these become mutually exclusive in battle.
This complicates a commander’s decision process greatly. The Battle of the Coral Sea
hinged on the respective commanders’ ability to prioritize and adhere to these
imperatives.

The Tulagi Invasion

On 3 May 1942 the Japanese seized Tulagi. The Australians, yielding to a
superior force, had departed the day before. The Japanese did not appear to have realized
the importance of Tulagi to the Allied Commander, Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher,
who had been alerted to its seizure late that evening by Commander, Southwest Pacific
Forces, (General Douglas MacArthur’s) reconnaissance personnel.\textsuperscript{26} Air searches from
the Island would seriously impede the Allied freedom of action in the Coral Sea, and thus
Tulagi became a target for the American carriers -- even at the expense of giving away
their presence and approximate location in the area.\textsuperscript{27} The chart below will give a spatial
orientation to the operations about to be described and critiqued:


\textsuperscript{27} Op. Cit., p. 17.
Admiral Fletcher, having been told that refueling operations by the other carrier enroute to join his Task Force, *Lexington*, would not be completed until noon on 4 May, decided to attack the Japanese force which had landed on Tulagi at 1100 on 3 May as soon as he could close within striking range of the island -- about 100 miles. Rear Admiral Fletcher appears to have felt that his strength was adequate in relation to the Japanese force on Tulagi even without the *Lexington* Task Force which was not available due to refueling operations (his own Task Force 17 having completed fueling operations on 2 May), which he was led to believe by Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch were still going on and would not be complete until noon on 4 May, thus necessitating separation of the carriers, and that he had been reported by a submarine which had been spotted by a *Yorktown* scout only 32 miles to the north. Therefore, he chose to take the first action as

---

28 Image provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department
soon as he had closed Tulagi sufficiently since his freedom of action and the security of his force would be jeopardized unless he struck immediately.\textsuperscript{31}

Admiral Fletcher commenced his air search of the area at 0631, just after first light. By 0701 on 4 May the heavy cruisers in Task Force 17’s screen, Astoria, Chester and Portland, had launched an inner air patrol against submarines. At the same time the Yorktown launched her first attack group of twelve torpedo planes, 13 scout planes and 28 dive bombers, protected by only four fighters as it was hoped to catch the Japanese by surprise and practically no air opposition was expected.\textsuperscript{32} Fletcher maintained a combat air patrol of six planes which were launched in three cycles so that air cover of the Task Force was maintained through the day.\textsuperscript{33} The remaining fighters, only 12 of which were carried aboard Yorktown, were retained for the defense of the Task Force.\textsuperscript{34}

Unwisely, no Strike Group Commander was appointed because the Air Group Commander was retained aboard Yorktown as Fighter Director Officer.\textsuperscript{35} Thus each squadron attacked at Tulagi with little or no coordination, particularly with the attacks of other squadrons. The air operation lacked an overall commander to reconnoiter and prioritize the objectives of the attack in the target area, to assign targets to the squadrons and the stipulate the order of attacks, and to observe and report the results of the overall attack. Historian and author John B. Lunsdtrom notes that the lack of ability of the U.S. carrier squadrons to coordinate their attacks was in marked contrast to the well-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Fletcher, CTF-17 letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, Op. Cit., p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Bates, \textit{The Battle of the Coral Sea}, Op. Cit., p. 34.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 35.
\end{itemize}
considered and organized attacks of the Japanese and continued through much of the war -- and was particularly evident at Coral Sea and in the Battle of Midway.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Yorktown’s} second attack group was launched against Tulagi between 1036 and 1120 and was comprised of eleven torpedo planes and 27 dive bombers.\textsuperscript{37} The attacks by this group were not coordinated either. The \textit{Yorktown} launched her third attack group at 1400. This consisted of 21 dive bombers.\textsuperscript{38} At 1632 this attack group returned, thus completing air operations against Tulagi. The overall results were disappointing. Torpedoes were dropped at ranges of up to 3,000 yards. To the green pilots of the \textit{Yorktown} Air Group the anti-aircraft fire appeared worse than it really was. The second attack group expended thirteen 1000-lb. bombs and eleven torpedoes on a mine layer, but the mine layer was still operable after the attack. Thirteen 1000-lb. general purpose bombs were expended by Bombing Squadron Five on three gunboats.\textsuperscript{39} There were better targets for this type of bomb in the Tulagi area, however, so optimum use of ordnance was not made. Proper reconnaissance by a Strike Group Commander could have pointed them out, but none was assigned.

The evaluation of the damage inflicted from pilots’ reports after the battle indicated to the Commanding Officer of the \textit{Yorktown} that one light cruiser (CL) had been beached and sunk, that two destroyers (DDs), one cargo ship (AK) and four gunboats were sunk, and that one heavy cruiser (CA) or aircraft tender (conflicting statements made it impossible to identify) were severely damaged, with one cargo ship, various small craft destroyed and five single float seaplanes shot down.\textsuperscript{40} In reality, as confirmed by Japanese sources available after the war, the ships that were actually lost were one old destroyer, the \textit{Kikizuiki}, two special duty mine sweepers and one converted


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Fletcher, CTF-17 letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, Op. Cit., p. 3.
mine sweeper. Three additional ships were reported damaged by the pilots of the Yorktown and these included the old destroyer Yuzuki, the mine layer, Okinoshima, and one small patrol craft. The Yorktown pilots reported five single-boat enemy float planes destroyed and this coincided with the Japanese post-war records.41

The Tulagi operation was also disappointing in terms of the ratio of ordnance expended to results obtained.42 Admiral Chester Nimitz, the commander of the Coral Sea operations at the strategic level as Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT), stated on reconstruction of these events that the performance of the Yorktown Air Group demonstrated laudable willingness and effort to keep after the enemy, but there was a real need for target practice at every opportunity.43 He thus instituted procedures to improve the targeting and accuracy of attacks of the Pacific Fleet carriers whenever possible, making good use of the available feedback from the Coral Sea experience with little time lag in disseminating lessons learned to the Fleet.

The attack on Tulagi was successful, but Admiral Fletcher nearly fell into a trap because of his relatively weak force. He gave away the approximate location of his force to achieve a secondary objective to the primacy of maintaining Allied control of Port Moresby. The Japanese did not realize and exploit the favorable military situation they were creating for themselves. This may well have been because of the weather in the area. A moderate cold front had created a 100-mile line of bad weather south and southwest of Guadalcanal. Tulagi itself, however, was in clear weather. The cloud bank that had developed was a barrier to Japanese scout planes, yet it was not too low for American planes returning to their carrier base -- hence it was practically ideal for launching a strike and Task Force 17 profited fully in terms of both achieving initial surprise and masking of its returning strike aircraft. The launching position for the first strike was thus optimally chosen. During the day it would be necessary to work north and then back south to maintain 100 miles between the Task Force and Tulagi, and the southeast winds would be helpful since the carriers had to turn into the wind to recover

42 Ibid., p. 38.
43 Ibid., p. 39.
aircraft and would thus be heading away from the unlocated Japanese carriers.\textsuperscript{44} Also, if
the Japanese were not caught by surprise and launched a strong counter-strike the
southeast wind would facilitate successful retirement. The Rennel Islands might have
offered some interference to early withdrawal but bad weather significantly reduced the
possibility of early discovery by enemy search planes and thus decreased the risk
involved in the operation.\textsuperscript{45}

While the attack was to prove successful even though huge amounts of ordnance
were needlessly expended on minor targets, Fletcher’s inability to mass his force which
thus became more vulnerable resulted from erroneous information from Rear Admiral
Aubrey W. Fitch, Commander of Task Force 11, aboard \textit{Lexington}. In reality, Task
Force 11’s refueling was completed by 1310 on 3 May, nearly a full day earlier than
projected. Fitch apparently made no attempt to signal Fletcher, by detached destroyer
signal lights or by air drop, of this change and was thus almost 250 nautical miles to the
south of Task Force 11 during the action.\textsuperscript{46} Consequently, Fletcher pressed the Tulagi
attack without his full resources.

Thus the Japanese were repelled from Tulagi by air attacks from \textit{Yorktown} which
commenced with the first launch at 0631 on 4 May and ended when the last planes landed
at 1632. Rear Admiral Hara’s Striking Force was still too far (roughly 600 nautical
miles) away to give battle. Please note the two graphs below and on the following page.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p. 34.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., p. 33.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Figure 5: Aircraft Speed (Japan and the United States)
Graph Provided by U.S. Naval War College Graphic Arts Department.

Figure 6: Aircraft Ranges (Japan and the United States)
Graph Provided by U.S. Naval War College Graphic Arts Department.
The first indicates that the relative speeds of Japanese and U.S. aircraft were roughly equal. The second graph, however, demonstrates that the ranges for important classes of aircraft were significantly longer for the Japanese. Striking range is normally limited by the least distance any aircraft in the strike can cover. Moreover, carrier strikes generally mustered at a point near their carrier(s) so that fighter cover could be provided for the entire group en route, limiting the range of the strike to that of the shortest range aircraft included. Therefore, since the Devastator torpedo bomber, an integral part of any strike, had a range of only about 420 nautical miles, a U.S. strike could only be realistically flown out to about 150 miles since time would be needed first to effect the rendezvous of the strike aircraft and then to locate the enemy force precisely. The Japanese, on the other hand, could fly strikes out to about 260 miles, giving them a 100-mile advantage over their U.S. adversaries.\footnote{Lundstrom, Op. Cit. (lecture), insights provided on the relative ranges achievable for U.S. and Japanese carrier air strikes.} Exploitation of this advantage, however, could only be achieved if Japanese area search plans were optimally devised, which they characteristically were not. Thus the Japanese squandered a decisive operational edge, due primarily, it appears, to their failure to grasp the significance of the better operational characteristics of their aircraft. Their failure adequately to search the Coral Sea area with carrier aircraft denied the Japanese a significant tactical advantage.

Of note, Fletcher launched the three attacks on Tulagi without fighter protection, save four fighters for the first of three attack waves. With only 12 fighters aboard \textit{Yorktown}, he elected to retain them all to defend his carrier. Noting the lack of U.S. strategic naval assets -- and carrier assets in particular -- in the Pacific, this defensive measure was a wise decision. Fletcher recommended with the utmost of urgency after the battle that all carrier air wings be upgraded to at least 27 fighters so that compromises in protecting a force and protecting a strike would no longer be required in every instance.
Prelude to the Main Action

Considering the setback at Tulagi as a minor inconvenience, the Japanese pressed on toward their major objective at Port Moresby. The Invasion Force had left Rabaul on 4 May. Best Japanese intelligence indicated the presence of a single U.S. carrier, as anticipated, in opposition. Moreover, the Task Force 17 attacks on Tulagi had given some indication of the likely location of that carrier, as evidenced by the shooting down of a Japanese four-engine flying boat on 5 May by a Yorktown plane and sighting of a Japanese submarine heading toward the now combined Task Force 17 (combined TF 17, TF 11 and TF 44, a command of cruisers and supporting destroyers under Rear Admiral John G. Crace, RN) once they had rendezvoused that morning.48 Plans for the Japanese were going about as expected. The situation was soon to change.

It may be helpful in following the discussion hereafter to refer to the chart on the following page.49 Please note the proximity of opposing forces, and the broken red line indicating operations in company of the Yorktown and Lexington. Japanese forces and force movements are indicated in blue.

---

49 The chart, depicting the tracks of the various forces engaged in the Battle of the Coral Sea, was created by the Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Prof. Emeritus Frank Snyder of the United States Naval War College for a presentation he gave on “The Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway” to a series of classes on “World War II in the Pacific Theater” offered by Douglas V. Smith as EL-576.
For two days after the American attack on Tulagi both the Japanese and U.S. forces in the area tried to locate each other. Rear Admiral Hara’s Striking Force proceeded east of the Solomon Islands on a southeasterly course to enter the Coral Sea from the east, rather than from the north through the Jomard Passage as expected by Rear Admiral Fletcher. False and misleading contact reports were thus generated during this period which confounded the decision-making process of both Fletcher and Hara. Fletcher’s Task Force 17 rendezvoused as scheduled with Fitch’s Task Force 11 at 0816 on the 5th of May appreciably increasing the security of both forces. That morning a Yorktown scout plane had shot down a Japanese seaplane in the vicinity of Task Force 17 and a Japanese submarine had been spotted at about the same time inbound to the force.

---

50 Graphic provided by Naval War College Graphic Arts Department.
and about 150 nautical miles distant, but was later lost, giving Fletcher every reason to believe (albeit erroneously as post-war records were to reveal) that his carriers had been located.\textsuperscript{51}

They were located by the Japanese on the morning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} of May, however, as two opposing aircraft sighted each other, but the Japanese report was of only a single carrier and a battleship, thus the composition of Task Force 17 was underestimated.\textsuperscript{52} Early the same morning, after heading northward during the night to close the invasion force in preparation for his attack, Fletcher issued his Operation Order 2-42 which combined Task Force 17, Task Force 11 and Task Force 44 (a cruiser force commanded by Rear Admiral J.G. Crace, R.N.) into a single operational unit -- an expanded Task Force 17.\textsuperscript{53} Operation Order 2-42 directed destruction of “...enemy ships, shipping, and aircraft at favorable opportunities in order to assist in checking further advances by the enemy in the New Guinea-Solomon area,”\textsuperscript{54} and not destruction of the Japanese carriers as a primary objective, in the area in clear keeping with the strategic necessity established by Admiral Nimitz for his force. A confluence of Antarctic polar and tropical air provided cloud cover and concealment for the American carriers as they readied for action. Unfortunately, Rear Admiral Fletcher’s directed air search plan supporting his Operation Order was inadequate in its northeastern most extremes to locate the main opposing Japanese forces.\textsuperscript{55} Observing radio silence, he did not coordinate a required search with Commander, Southwest Pacific Area to rectify this problem.\textsuperscript{56}

With expectations based on intelligence and land-based air searches that the Japanese would attempt to take Port Moresby on 6 or 7 May, Admiral Fletcher moved

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Ibid., p. 45.
\item[53] Ibid., p. 43.
\item[54] Ibid., p. 43.
\item[55] Ibid., pp. 44-45.
\item[56] Ibid., p. 45.
\end{footnotes}
Task Force 17 toward the Jomard Passage in wait. He detached his only oiler, *Neosho* and the destroyer *Sims* to a rendezvous area that was safe from the expected action. The morning of 7 May, Fletcher sent out search planes to a distance of 250 nautical miles (the most critical east-northeast sector was terminated at 165 miles due to weather) which generated no contacts. He then detached Crace’s cruisers and supporting destroyers (Task Group 17.3) to intercept the Port Moresby Invasion Force, which had been reported by land-based Army Air Corps planes as passing through the Jomard Passage en route to their objective at Port Moresby. Fletcher was astute in aggressively pursuing his main mission of stopping the Port Moresby invasion, but sending Crace out without air cover, particularly during daylight, was extremely risky. Crace’s force was attacked repeatedly -- by U.S. Army Air Corps aircraft which misidentified the American ships as well as by the Japanese -- but received almost no damage. These attacks highlight the problem created by Task Force 17 operating in General Douglas MacArthur’s area of responsibility. Mission priorities sometimes conflicted for the two commanders and the use of different grids for reporting of enemy contacts gave rise to potential for misunderstanding of enemy contact locations. Though Crace’s force never engaged the enemy, it did diminish Japanese land-based air reconnaissance which could have located Task Force 17 by forcing searches in another area as well as for the carriers.

The Fleet oiler *Neosho* and accompanying destroyer *Sims*, both detached to the southwest of the American carriers away from expected enemy action, were harassed by Japanese planes, but without success. Fletcher never received confirmation of a Japanese

---

58 Ibid., p. 2.
60 Bates, Ibid., p. 54.
carrier strike on these units, leaving him in a quandary over whether to counter attack. Had the position of *Neosho* and *Sims* been plotted out, it would have been obvious that they were out of range of the Japanese land-based aircraft staging from Rabaul. Thus their attackers were, by elimination, carrier-based.\(^{61}\) Such information would have aided Fletcher greatly in narrowing down the location of the Japanese carriers, but the types of aircraft making the raid were never passed to him.

**The Main Action**

At 0815 on 7 May *Yorktown’s* scouts reported two carriers and four cruisers over 200 nautical miles away at latitude 10 degrees 03 minutes south; longitude 152 degrees 27 minutes east, heading 140 degrees true at 18-20 knots.\(^{62}\) This was the report Fletcher was waiting for, and it ostensibly gave him the opportunity to carry out his strategic mission since carriers would be essential to maintaining air defense against Allied planes from Australia if the Japanese could make a lodgment at Port Moresby. Without such air cover, attainment and sustainment of the Japanese objective would be futile. Ultimately, however, the contact was to prove about 35 miles south-southeast of the reported position, a good thing since the initial contact was well outside attack parameters for the American carrier aircraft, and with only one carrier (*Shoho*) instead of two. Fletcher waited to close the contacts and launched strikes from *Lexington* at 0926 (28 bombers,\(^{63}\) twelve torpedo planes and ten fighters\(^{64}\) -- along with the Air Group Commander to direct

---

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 55.

\(^{63}\) These were all SBD-2 or 3 aircraft, which composed the Bombing and Scouting Squadrons aboard U.S. carriers. Though there was such a differentiation between squadrons, all pilots flew essentially the same planes and were equally trained for the dive-bombing mission. Through practice, the Scouting Squadron was tasked with the bulk of the scouting missions, and was sometimes used at lower levels as defense against incoming torpedo planes.

the attack and three additional scout bombers), only eleven minutes after the launch order was given, and Yorktown at 0944 (25 bombers, ten torpedo planes and eight fighters) in accordance with accepted practice at that time.\textsuperscript{65} The interval between sighting and launch enabled closure of the contacts to within 160 miles\textsuperscript{66} -- just at the edge of strike range, another good decision by Admiral Fletcher. When the reporting pilot landed, however, not only was his positioning data off, but he had improperly encoded the type of contacts.\textsuperscript{67} He had really seen two heavy cruisers and two destroyers. Thus Fletcher's attack groups -- the first U.S. carrier attack ever launched against an opposing naval force with 93 aircraft in all but with only 18 fighters (not enough) in company -- had been sent out on a false mission. Admiral Fletcher had adhered to the doctrine established at the Naval War College in wargames to launch the first strike, but his operational intelligence had betrayed him.

Fletcher now had to decide whether to recall his strike or let it continue toward targets of lesser strategic and tactical importance when three unlocated Japanese carriers were known to be in the area. To his credit, he pressed forward the attack. To attempt to land aircraft with armed weapons on his carriers would be foolhardy. To have them dump their weapons loads before landing would render them useless until they could be rearmed. They would thus become an obstruction to defensive actions by cluttering the flight deck. With sufficient fighter aircraft onboard his carriers and in airborne defensive areas (14 fighters and two scout bombers to defend against incoming torpedo planes), Fletcher was putting his force at risk only until the targets were reached and for the

\textsuperscript{1-2. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A39, first frame 41078. (Previously CLASSIFIED document).}
\textsuperscript{65} Bates, \textit{The Battle of The Coral Sea}, Ibid.
duration of the attack. Moreover, if the Japanese carriers were actually located before his strike had expended its weapons load, he retained the option of vectoring the strike to the more important targets -- an option he would lose if he directed the strike aircraft to return to their carriers.

Figure 8: Another Look at the Developing Action May Help to Follow the Emerging Events.\(^{68}\)

At 1022 he received a message from COMSOWESPC, General Douglas MacArthur’s command, that an Army B-17 had sighted a carrier, 16 assorted warships and ten transports heading toward Port Moresby around 35 miles south-southeast of his own pilot’s reported sighting.\(^{69}\) In the battle that followed, the small Japanese carrier Shoho (believed at the time to be either the Ryukaku or the Koryu, but admittedly “not corresponding to any of the Japanese carriers for which we have silhouettes”)\(^{70}\) was sunk,

\(^{68}\) Op. Cit. note 47.


having been hit by multiple bombs and torpedoes, but no other Japanese ships were even
damaged. Pilots of Scouting Squadron 2 (VS-2) reported one hit on Shoho’s stern about
50 feet from the ramp and one about two-thirds aft on the center of the flight deck, and
those of Bombing Squadron 2 (VB-2) one about two-thirds aft on the starboard side of
the flight deck, another on the flight deck amidships, one aft on the port side of the flight
deck, and two more amidships about halfway aft and on the near starboard side aft, all
with either 500 or 1,000 lb. bombs. Japanese post-war records show that all six fighters
that Shoho was able to get airborne landed at Deboyne Island and their pilots were
recovered, though their planes were destroyed. Given the amount of ordnance
expended on the Shoho, and that only one light cruiser in company with her was hit, this
encounter highlights the thinking of carrier aviators to focus on the opposing carrier
force, even when sinking other ships might do more to ensure completion of the mission.
The outcome of this attack was significant. Only 204 of Shoho’s crew of around 800
were taken aboard Japanese ships in the area. More important to the American war
effort, Shoho’s entire Air Group of 18 aircraft -- four Claude and eight Zero fighter
aircraft and six Kate bombers -- were lost in the action. So too were as many as six
carrier-trained pilots who were even harder to replace than their planes.

As Vice Admiral (then Captain) Yoji Koda of the Japanese Maritime Self-
Defense Force (JMSDF) points out, Japan was hit particularly hard by the Great

---

71 Sherman, *CTF-11 War Diary*, Commander Officer, U.S.S. Lexington letter to
74 Lundstrom, John B. *The First Team: Pacific Naval Air Combat from Pearl Harbor to
Midway*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984, Table of Japanese Carrier Plane
Strength, p. 188.
75 Ibid., p. 205 and Hata, Ikuhiko and Yasuho Izawa. *Japanese Naval Aces and Fighter
given are a compromise between figures provided in these two sources.
Depression of 1929. Her answer was in part to “de-mechanize” in order to keep more of her citizens productively employed in the work force. Consequently, Japan had a far greater problem in training her pilots. Where virtually every young man in the United States had driven a car or tractor, most of their Japanese counterparts had never driven, and many had never even seen a machine of any kind. Thus young pilots in training had to start in many cases by being told “this is a machine, and this is how you turn it on.” Though the Japanese, to their credit, ultimately produced the very best pilots in the world at the time, it took them as much as three years and four months (three years being the norm) to complete the training cycle for every pilot. Thus their inability quickly to replace lost pilots was a major obstacle to continued operational readiness in the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Vice Admiral Koda offers another important insight on the limitation of a sufficient aviation leadership cadre in the Officer Corps of the Imperial Japanese Navy. In the years leading up to their attack on Pearl Harbor the Japanese Naval Academy graduated and commissioned around 100 Officers per year. Of these, slightly over 30 were destined for aviation service. So, unlike the U.S. Navy, leadership positions in Japanese aviation squadrons aboard aircraft carriers were filled in part by enlisted personnel. However, when attrition set in over time, the impact was most pronounced in its effect on experienced leadership. This problem was exacerbated in that, again unlike the U.S. Navy where the most successful pilots in combat were often sent Stateside for periods to recruit more pilots and/or serve as instructors to pass along insights on Japanese aircraft characteristics and pilot tactics, the best Japanese pilots remained in the front lines. Though this did make for a highly capable and aeronautically superior carrier squadron environment, it also exposed Japan’s best pilots to tremendous stress and great risk of being killed in action. It also removed the possibility of conveying combat experience to pilots in training, thus decreasing Japanese pilot skill in both embarked

---

77 Ibid.
units and replacement pilots as the war went on. Thus, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the Japanese loss of pilots and aircraft even before and counting those aboard Shoho, placed Japanese carrier aviation on a slippery slide toward ultimate defeat of her Navy.

Much like the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War which after the fall of the rail hub of Chattanooga in November of 1863 could not use interior lines to transport troops to meet superior Union numbers where needed, the Japanese would reach a point after which they could no longer field offensive carrier lethality to withstand the production of fast carriers, well-trained pilots and capable aircraft fielded by the United States starting in the summer of 1943. The Japanese had placed themselves in a position where their geo-strategic advantage of interior lines with fast-moving carriers could compensate for greater American numbers of ships would erode rapidly should their offensive capacity fall below some critical level.

Returning to the duel in the Coral Sea, due to impending darkness and the probable presence of Carrier Division Five (Shokaku and Zuikaku), Fletcher did not fly additional strikes against the remaining Japanese targets. Late that evening, Lexington got radar contact on what was believed to be a returning Japanese carrier strike. That information was not relayed to Fletcher until two and a half hours later, and with such an ambiguous situation since the planes could have covered a lot of ground returning to their carriers from the time they were sighted Fletcher chose not to react.

The Japanese Striking Force, inexplicably, had received no useful locating information on the American carriers despite numerous opportunities since Yorktown struck Tulagi on 4 May. Estimating the carriers to be to the south, Hara altered course to position himself between the objective and the threat and deal with them before supporting the invasion of Port Moresby. Since the American carriers had not been located by land aircraft, Hara had uncharacteristically to use his own carrier planes to extend the search to the south. At 0736 on 7 May he received word of contact on “the Allied Task Force.”

---

At 0859 on 7 May, just minutes after Admiral Fletcher had launched his strike against what he thought to be the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, the *Neosho* and *Sims* came under attack by a single reconnaissance plane, which made no hits. An hour later, the initial group of torpedo planes, realizing that no carriers were present, refrained from expending their torpedoes on lesser-value targets and departed. Just after 1000 the first attack occurred, and at 1131 a second wave struck with more success. Also reacting to erroneous scout plane information indicating the presence of U.S. carriers, Admiral Hara had launched a strike of 78 aircraft\(^81\) almost simultaneously with that launched from the American carriers.\(^82\) *Sims* was sunk by the second wave, and *Neosho* received seven bomb hits, eight near misses, and a plane she shot down crashed on her deck. In all, the Japanese had lost six planes in this attack.\(^83\) After four days adrift, she was located by the destroyer *Henley*. Her crew was taken off, and *Neosho* was sunk by *Henley* with two torpedoes.

\[\text{Figure 9: Aircraft (by type) Aboard U.S. and Japanese Carriers}\]

---

\(^81\) Nine Zero fighters, 13 Kate torpedo planes and 19 Val dive bombers from *Shokaku* and Nine Zeros, eleven Kates and 17 Vals from *Zuikaku*.


\(^83\) Ibid., pp. 65-66.
The graphic presentation above provides relative strength of carrier-based aircraft, not including losses in battle, during the main action from 4 through 11 May, 1942.\(^8^4\)

At 2300 on 7 May, Vice Admiral Inouye, Commander 4\(^{th}\) Fleet, canceled contemplated night action after the sinking of Shoho. He also delayed the invasion of Port Moresby for two days until the American carriers could be dealt with.\(^8^5\) The Invasion Force retired to the north.\(^8^6\) When battle was ultimately joined, the sides were about even. The U.S. had one more heavy cruiser and destroyer than the Japanese, who outnumbered the Americans in remaining planes 122 to 121.\(^8^7\)

Commander, Striking Fleet’s information, however, credited the U.S. force with one battleship, two heavy cruisers and five destroyers, but the force actually had no battleships, four heavy cruisers instead of two, and seven destroyers instead of five. Commander, Task Force 17’s estimate was more accurate, being in error by an underestimate of three destroyers. Estimates of these relative strengths were important to the commanders in evaluating the feasibility and acceptability of potential courses of action.

As dawn broke on 8 May the opposing forces were within striking distance of each other. They reported sightings at virtually the same time. The edge now lay with the Japanese, however, since they were operating under the cloud cover enjoyed by the U.S. carriers the previous day, while Task Force 17 was operating in clear weather. At 0805 Lexington gained radar contact on an unidentified plane to the north-northwest inside 20 nautical miles. While unable to intercept it, a Japanese radio transmission was monitored only six minutes after the plane departed the vicinity. Three minutes prior to interception of that transmission, a Lexington scout plane radioed contact on “two

---

\(^8^4\) This graphic has been derived from information in: JANE’s Fighting Ships of World War II (forward by Antony Preston), (New York/Avenel, New Jersey: Crescent Book, 1946/1947; published in the U.S. in 1989 and reprinted in 1992); and Bates, The Battle of the Coral Sea, p. 81.


\(^8^6\) Fitch, CTF-11 War Diary, CTG-17.5 letter to CTF 17, Op. Cit., p.2.

carriers; four heavy cruisers; and three destroyers” at 028 degrees true bearing and 170 nautical miles from Task Force 17. Both commanders had to assume that their locations had been compromised.

Shortly after the initial contact report, Commander Scouting Squadron Two (off *Lexington*), who had been searching an adjacent track, corrected that position on re-verification. His position, provided over an hour later after the air strike had already been launched, was roughly 40 nautical miles north and just west of that initially given. This both complicated the ability of the strike aircraft to locate the Japanese force and limited their time over target.

Interestingly, in anticipation of the first carrier battle in history where an entire engagement would be fought without forces ever being in sight of one another, Rear Admiral Fletcher, a cruiser commander by background, intended to transfer tactical command of his carriers to Rear Admiral Fitch, an aviator. Admiral Fitch was not informed of this decision, however, until just hours before the action of 8 May, and no mention of this change in operational responsibilities is made in the pertinent Operation Order. Given the importance of such a responsibility, more lead time for Fitch to prepare a plan of action would have been advisable.

At 0838, 52 minutes before receiving the revised Japanese position, Commander Air (Fitch) directed both *Lexington* and *Yorktown* to launch their Air Groups. Eighty-two planes took off between 0900 and 0925. In the interval, at 0907, Admiral Fletcher gave Rear Admiral Fitch, Commander Air, tactical command of both American carriers in order to reduce signaling between carriers and to allow him complete freedom of action

---


90 Commander Task Force 17 Operation Order No. 2-42, dated 1 May 1942, para. 3(e)(2), p. 4.

for his carriers and air groups.\textsuperscript{92} This was a particularly generous decision as it meant sharing his place in history for the first ever carrier versus carrier battle. The \textit{Yorktown}’s aircraft were the first to reach the Japanese carriers. They attacked \textit{Shokaku} as the \textit{Zuikaku} was going under low-lying clouds in a rain squall. A total of three torpedo hits, six direct bomb hits, and several near misses were claimed.\textsuperscript{93} Fires forward to port and amidships to starboard were reported. Forty minutes after the initial attack, \textit{Lexington}’s Air Group, which had trouble locating the Japanese, commenced its strike. As was the U.S. custom, the dive and scout bombers struck first, followed almost simultaneously by the torpedo planes. This was intended to force the opposing fighter protection high to counter the incoming bombers so that the low level torpedo planes would encounter less resistance. Five torpedo and two bomb hits were claimed as were hits on the \textit{Zuikaku}. Information from Japanese sources shows conclusively, however, that \textit{Shokaku} was the only Japanese carrier damaged, receiving three bomb hits.\textsuperscript{94} While U.S. claims can not be substantiated, in all likelihood the first two bombs on \textit{Shokaku}, which caused her fires, were delivered by \textit{Yorktown} aircraft, while the last was dropped from a \textit{Lexington} plane. Competent observers indicate that the bulk of the \textit{Lexington} attack may have been directed against the \textit{Zuikaku} during a short emergence from cloud cover.\textsuperscript{95} Subsequent to sustaining damage, \textit{Shokaku} was able to recover, but not launch aircraft.

Task Force 17 then braced for the inevitable counter attack, having been alerted at 0832 by an intercepted enemy radio transmission giving the position, course and speed of

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 86.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{United States Strategic Bombing Survey}, Naval Analysis Division: Interrogation of Captain Watanabe, Imperial Japanese Navy, Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet Log – Coral Sea Action, 8 May 1942, p. 539.
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{United States Strategic Bombing Survey}, Interrogation of Captain Yamaoka, Imperial Japanese Navy Operations Officer, Staff, 5\textsuperscript{th} Air Flotilla, (Naval Analysis Interrogation of Japanese Officials: Volume I – Interrogation, Naval No. 10), p. 53.
the U.S. force. The enemy struck at 1118. U.S. fighter control was poor, and the Japanese neared weapon release point without much resistance. That is a bit surprising in that the Japanese were detected by radar (only the U.S. carriers had radar of all the combatants in the battle) at 70 nautical miles and they proceeded inbound for their attack on a constant bearing. In close, the Japanese split into three groups with the dive bombers in the center surrounded by two groups of torpedo planes. The attack group consisted of 20 fighters; 70 attack planes and ten scout planes. The *Yorktown* was attacked slightly before the *Lexington*, first by torpedo planes and then by dive bombers.

Skillful ship handling allowed *Yorktown* to evade all but one dive bomber. The Japanese failed to bracket her bow, thus enabling *Yorktown* to turn away from the torpedo attacks. Now alerted, her fighters were successful in splashing a large number of the bombers before they launched their weapons. At 1127, however, *Yorktown* received her only bomb hit. A 500 lb. semi armor-piercing bomb penetrated to her third deck before exploding in an aviation stores room. The 12-inch diameter hole left by the bomb in the flight deck was soon repaired without disruption to flight operations.

*Lexington* was not as lucky. She sustained two torpedo hits and two bomb hits. Despite a six to seven degree list caused by the torpedoes, she was still able to make way with no reduction of her combat efficiency. The overall damage to the two carriers is quite remarkable given attack by 70 Japanese planes, all with experienced combat pilots. Both the fighters and the scout planes that, by necessity (due to lack of sufficient fighters and as a counter to the Japanese torpedo planes), were thrown to the carriers’ defense acquitted themselves professionally and heroically.

Though attacked, the cruisers and destroyers supporting the U.S. carrier were unscratched. The Japanese nonetheless believed that they had sunk both the *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. 

---


98 Fitch, *CTF-11 War Diary*, CTG-17.5 letter to CTF 17, Op. Cit., p.3


100 Fitch, *CTF-11 War Diary*, CTG-17.5 letter to CTF 17, Op. Cit., p.3
and Lexington (which their intelligence had led them to believe was Saratoga), as well as a battleship and cruiser.\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, the U.S. Task Force 17 commanders reported that their anti-aircraft fire and fighter/scout-bomber Combat Air Patrol had splashed many more Japanese planes than they actually had. In all they claimed 27 Japanese fighters, 15 dive bombers and 31 torpedo planes (including 15 fighters and six dive bombers claimed in the Shoho strike) -- 73 in total -- were destroyed.\textsuperscript{102} In reality, 92 Japanese planes from Shokaku and Zuikaku were recovered or accounted for after the action out of an initial complement of 122.\textsuperscript{103} The excess in error, 45 -- or one and a half times again the actual loss by the Japanese -- attest to the unreliability of pilot reports (including contact locations and numbers and types of ships sighted) inherent in battle. The reliability of pilot generated intelligence was questionable throughout the war, a factor of incalculable significance in compounding the difficulty of the decision process for all commanders at sea.

During the attack the American carriers became separated by six miles -- as did the Japanese carriers by twelve miles under similar circumstances. Some, such as fighter Squadron Leader John S. “Jimmy” Thach, later to accuse Admiral Fletcher of a similar “blunder” at Midway resulting in the loss of Yorktown\textsuperscript{104}, blamed the lack of mutual support between the carriers for the ultimate loss of Lexington. In retrospect, separation of carriers under enemy attack -- given the level of sophistication prior to actually experiencing combat -- was beyond the control of the respective commanders.

While actual damage to Lexington was initially considered relatively minor, and she continued to launch and recover aircraft, her fate was yet to be realized. At 1247, an hour and fifteen minutes after sustaining her last bomb hit, a severe internal explosion occurred. This was believed after the fact to have been caused by ignition of seeping

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 99.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
aviation fuel into a space secured for water tight integrity with machinery still running.\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Lexington} gradually regained headway and fires were brought under control when a second explosion took place an hour later. Fires quickly spread and by 1707 her crew was directed by her Commanding Officer to abandon ship.\textsuperscript{106} Eighteen operational planes were transferred to \textit{Yorktown} before she lost way, but 35 went down with her.\textsuperscript{107} Of a crew of 2,952, all were saved except for 26 Officers and 190 men.\textsuperscript{108} The destroyer \textit{Phelps} was detailed to sink the \textit{Lexington} with torpedoes. Her Captain, Frederick C. Sherman, claimed one carrier (\textit{Shoho}), another (\textit{Shokaku}) probably sunk by \textit{Lexington} and \textit{Yorktown} aircraft in combination, four Zero fighter aircraft shot down and another two “probables,” one Type 97 fighter destroyed by ship anti-aircraft (AA) fire and another two splashed by \textit{Lexington}’s fighters while attacking the \textit{Shokaku}, and one three-place seaplane probably shot down during the action.\textsuperscript{109} The gallant crew of \textit{U.S.S. Lexington} had acquitted themselves well!

At this point, the U.S. still had 49 available aircraft aboard \textit{Yorktown} for a second strike against the Japanese, but only seven aerial torpedoes remaining.\textsuperscript{110} With the \textit{Shokaku} unable to launch aircraft, \textit{Zuikaku} had only 13 planes\textsuperscript{111} (unknown to the U.S.) ready for launch by 9 May, the rest either severely battle damaged or pushed over the side to recover \textit{Shokaku}’s returning strike aircraft.\textsuperscript{112} The decision not to launch a second attack, however, was made for another reason.

At 1422 Admiral Fitch relayed his strong indications, based on reports by one of his pilots, that an additional carrier had joined the Japanese force. This report was in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{106}] Bates, \textit{The Battle of the Coral Sea}, p. 102.
\item[\textsuperscript{107}] Fitch, \textit{CTF-11 War Diary}, CTG-17.5 ltr to CTF 17, Op. Cit., p.5.
\item[\textsuperscript{109}] Ibid., p. 13.
\item[\textsuperscript{111}] Ibid., p. 100.
\item[\textsuperscript{112}] Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
error in that the pilot really detected the Zuikaku. Thus Fletcher, thinking he was opposed by two undamaged Japanese carriers, retired with his force to the south in preparation for renewed attacks the next day.\textsuperscript{113}

COMSOWES\textsuperscript{PAC} land-based aircraft were requested for follow-on attacks, but they were unable to locate the Japanese. So, on the afternoon of 8 May, Commander Task Force 17 received a dispatch from CINCPACFLT, Admiral Chester Nimitz, to retire from the Coral Sea.\textsuperscript{114} With confirming reports by 80 percent of their returning pilots, the Japanese assumed they had sunk both U.S. carriers. When this was reported to Commander 4\textsuperscript{th} Fleet (Vice Admiral Narimi Inoue), the overall commander of the operation, the Port Moresby invasion was initially postponed for two days and then cancelled. Shokaku had already been ordered by Hara to proceed north to Truk for repairs. Zuikaku remained in the area on a southeasterly course trying to locate the remaining American forces until the early hours of 11 May, but was then directed to retire to Rabaul. There she was to make ready for impending operations against Midway Island.\textsuperscript{115}

Commander 4\textsuperscript{th} Fleet’s rationale for this decision remains to conjecture. Noting the lack of operational aircraft aboard Zuikaku, and accepting the report of destruction of both U.S. carriers, he probably realized that not enough carrier aircraft were left to support the Invasion Force. Canceling the invasion was thus the only alternative considering the dominance of Allied land-based air power in the vicinity. Detection of two additional U.S. carriers (Task Force 16 commanded by Vice Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey) in the area as directed by Admiral Nimitz bearing 098 degrees at 445 nautical miles from Tulagi certainly contributed to his decision.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 101.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 103.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., pp. 105, 107-108.
Coral Sea in Retrospect/Conclusions

If victory at sea was based alone on ships sunk and damaged, and temporary control of the action in areas of vital national or military concern, then Coral Sea would necessarily be classed a Japanese victory. Certainly, given U.S. carriers available in the Pacific at the time, the loss of *Lexington* and serious damage to *Yorktown* were a more severe blow to the United States than the loss to Japan of *Shoho* and major damage to *Shokaku*. Yet more important things were at stake. The mission of the U.S. carriers was to maintain the SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia by stopping the Port Moresby invasion. That mission was accomplished. But the consequence of accomplishing that mission was far greater than merely maintaining U.S. SLOCs from Hawaii to Australia and thus preserving strategic options for an offensive directed at the Japanese home islands.

As discussed above, Admiral Yamamoto had, by early April of 1942, a plan to lure out and destroy the remaining three or four American carriers in the vicinity of Midway Island. As part of that plan Midway Island would be captured and the defensive barrier around the Japanese home islands expanded by over 1,000 miles. But Yamamoto undoubtedly had an offensive strategic objective in mind as well. Editor Emeritus of the *Naval War College Review* Frank Uhlig postulates that Yamamoto felt that, if necessary, Japan could invade and conquer Hawaii, as unlikely as that seems in fact since by mid-1942 Hawaii had become an armed camp and Japan lacked requisite amphibious ships to stage an invasion.\(^{117}\) Yamamoto, in Professor Uhlig’s opinion, reasoned that when the Americans were shoved back another thousand miles to Hawaii, and if necessary another two thousand miles to the West Coast through naval dominance of that sea frontier, with their lines of communications with the East Coast via the Panama Canal severed and commerce subject to attack by Hawaii-based Japanese submarines and surface naval forces, they would finally have to negotiate peace with Japan.\(^ {118}\) If indeed such a scenario was plausible, or even if Yamamoto was successful only in destroying the majority of remaining U.S. carriers in the Pacific and extending Japan’s defense

\(^ {117}\) Please see explanatory note for option three on page 11.

perimeter, the Japanese strategic objectives in the southwest Pacific would have been achieved de facto. Thus, in Uhlig’s words, “In his decision, fortunately for the Americans, Yamamoto [made] success in a more important campaign [Midway] hostage to success in a less important one [Port Moresby].”119

One must, considering the stakes, thus qualify the Battle of the Coral Sea as a Japanese tactical victory and a United States strategic victory. With the loss of the carrier *Shoho* and the demonstration of the U.S. as a clear menace to their installations and naval units and activities in the Coral Sea area the Japanese temporarily gave up their expedition against Port Moresby. Though they tried again twice that summer to take the port city, General Mac Arthur’s Australian forces were able to foil both attempts.120 The Japanese never again -- particularly after their loss at Midway -- threatened expansion to the southeast of Guadalcanal. The effect of the Coral Sea operations thus had an important bearing on ultimate victory in the Pacific. The decisions of both the strategic level commander, Admiral Chester Nimitz (CINCPACFLT), and the operational level commander, Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher (CTF-17) at this critical stage in the Pacific Campaign were key to the achievement of U.S. national political objectives.

In joining such a battle as that in the Coral Sea, several key aspects of the operational commander’s decision process should be kept in mind. The first is that the commander at sea must balance three separate, and generally conflicting, objectives:

1) To carry out the mission successfully.
2) To destroy as much of the enemy fleet as possible, and
3) To avoid being sunk, so as to be able to fight another day.

He must also be aware, as was later seen by Admiral “Bull” Halsey at Leyte Gulf, that destroying the enemy fleet may well take second priority to carrying out the mission successfully.

In addition, there are three universal tactical decisions that commanders must make about how to apportion the efforts of their forces:

1) For offense,
2) For defense, and
3) For finding out what is going on.

To the extent that certain ships and aircraft can be used for only one of the above (offense, defense or scouting), the apportionment is simple. But naval forces are notoriously multi-purposed, so allocation of forces is necessarily difficult. These concepts will be examined below.

Certainly many operational and tactical lesions were learned at Coral Sea. Prime among them were to optimize your tactical advantage by using land-based support to maximum benefit and the haziness of intelligence supplied by pilots. Perhaps more attention should have been paid to massing forces -- particularly on the part of the Japanese. Also, both sides could have inflicted more damage to the operational objectives of the other if targets other than carriers had been dealt with more effectively.

Yet the prime lesson is perhaps the way to deal with operational success. Even sinking *Lexington*, the Japanese had to forfeit their goal of severing Allied SLOCs. In tactical defeat, the Americans achieved their strategic objectives. Perhaps Carl von Clausewitz said it best, “War is merely a continuation of policy by other means.”\(^{121}\) The strategic, and thus the political, objectives must remain the prize in battle -- on land or at sea.

Of perhaps greater overall significance to the outcome of the war against Japan was the attrition of pilots and aircraft exacted upon the Japanese. A case has been made above for the length of time required to train a Japanese pilot and the paucity of Officers with aviation experience in the ranks of Japanese carrier aviation. Of the 105 aircraft confirmed lost by the Japanese at Coral Sea, 90 were carrier planes.\(^{122}\) The toll on pilots, and especially those in leadership positions, during the Battle of the Coral Sea was significant, given the relatively few pilots trained by Japan who were carrier qualified. It was estimated by the Japanese that they needed at least 3,500 for the 3,029 aircraft in their first-line Striking Forces (1\(^{st}\) and 11\(^{th}\) Air Fleets) and second-line Striking Forces

---


(Naval Stations). Drawing from the methodology of Masatake Okumiya, who was Air Staff Officer of the 11th Combined Air Flotilla and in charge of pilot training when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had the following number of aircraft assigned to its ten active carriers:

**Table 2: Japanese Number of Aircraft Assigned to its Ten Active Carriers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carrier</th>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akagi</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/18 Type 99 VB/27 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaga</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/18 Type 99 VB/27 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soryu</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/18 Type 99 VB/18 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiryu</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/18 Type 99 VB/18 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryujo</td>
<td>40&lt;sup&gt;125&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(22 Type 96 VF/18 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuikaku</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/27 Type 99 VB/27 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shokaku</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>(18 Type Zero VF/27 Type 99 VB/27 Type 97 VCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosho</td>
<td>26&lt;sup&gt;126&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koryu</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>(30-40 as per <em>Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941</em>)&lt;sup&gt;127&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 48 and 51. Please note that numbers for the Hosho, Koryu and Shoho (which was completed later) are derived from other sources.

<sup>125</sup> It should be noted that *Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941* lists Ryujo as capable of embarking around 24 aircraft (McMurtrie, Francis E., Ed. *Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942, pp. 293-296). Thus her actual complement, according to this informed Japanese source, was 14 aircraft in excess of that expected by western observers. This was typical of underestimates for all Japanese carrier classes by *Jane’s*.

<sup>126</sup> McMurtrie, Francis E., Ed. *Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942, p. 296. As in the previous note, the number of aircraft aboard Hosho could have been as high as 40.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 293. *Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941* lists Koryu as carrying between 30 and 40 aircraft. However, Koryu was of the same class, displacement and length as the two
Considering that Japan felt she needed a minimum of 3,500 qualified pilots to fly her 3,029 naval aircraft at the war’s outset\textsuperscript{129}, or 115.55 percent of aircraft total, it could by extension be expected that she had only slightly more than 608 fully-trained pilots to man the 526 aircraft assigned aboard carriers of the First Air Fleet. One should then note that, including the 29 carrier planes lost by the Japanese during their two-wave attack on Pearl Harbor, 17 more in the attacks of the British holdings at and around Colombo and Trincomalee on Ceylon, and another ten to twelve in their attacks and operations in the Southern Resource Area, a total of at least 56 planes had been lost. This was not bad considering the Japanese had sunk or disabled nine battleships, including those at Pearl Harbor where a total of 27 ships had been damaged and \textit{H.M.S. Prince of Wales} which had been sunk by land-based aircraft, the battle cruiser \textit{H.M.S. Repulse}, again by land-based aircraft, the heavy cruisers \textit{H.M.S. Cornwall} and \textit{H.M.S. Dorsetshire}, the British aircraft carrier \textit{H.M.S. Hermes}, as well as well over 300 aircraft in the air and on the ground. But when you add the additional 105 carrier aircraft lost by the Japanese at Coral Sea (by way of contrast, the U.S. lost 81 carrier aircraft at Coral Sea, including the 35 that went down with \textit{Lexington})\textsuperscript{130}, the over 160 carrier aircraft already lost of the 526 initially assigned aboard Japan’s ten active aircraft carriers was an astounding 32.86 percent of her total carrier compliment. While many of the pilots Japan needed so badly had survived, it could be safely estimated that she already had experienced losses of slightly over ten percent of her carrier-qualified pilot cadre. Moreover, this loss had been experienced primarily in a single surface action against a numerically inferior force. The worst was yet to come.

\begin{table}[h!]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lc}
\textit{Shoho} & 28\textsuperscript{128} \\
\hline
Total & 526 \\
\end{tabular}
\caption{Table 2: Continued}
\end{table}

\begin{flushright}
other carriers of the \textit{Soryu} class, \textit{Soryu} and \textit{Hiryu}, and both are credited by Okumiya, Masatake and Jiro Horikoshi in \textit{Zero!} as having 54 aircraft embarked.
\end{flushright}


\textsuperscript{129} Okumiya, Op. Cit., p. 54.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., Appendix II, p. vii.
The performance in command of Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Commander Task Force 17, will now be considered with respect to the methodology set up in Chapter I to evaluate his adherence to the precepts of *Sound Military Decision* imparted during his educational tour of duty at the United States Naval War College. Specifically, his decisions will be evaluated as they relate to:

1. His estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions he would be required to make. In this area Admiral Fletcher deserves high marks -- perhaps a strong “A-.” His mission, as conveyed by his senior in the chain of command, Admiral Nimitz, was to deny the Japanese plan to create a barrier to American SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia by foreclosing Japan’s attempt to take Port Moresby. Ancillary to that objective, Fletcher was tasked to destroy as many Japanese ships and aircraft as he could without unduly risking his carriers. Admiral Fletcher accomplished both aspects of his mission -- but maintained his primary emphasis on stopping the Port Moresby invasion throughout. He should, however, have placed more emphasis on destroying ships other than carriers as this would over time produce a greater synergetic decline of the Japanese war effort. Fletcher deserves high marks for his performance of his assigned strategic role, though, as well as for his decision to preserve one of only three remaining strategic assets -- *U.S.S. Yorktown* -- in the Pacific arsenal once *U.S.S. Lexington* had been sunk.

2. His demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously his decision in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and his flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required. Fletcher undoubtedly formulated an aggressive and purposeful course of action, but his communication of the plan of action -- particularly of his intent to have Rear Admiral Aubrey Fitch control aviation actions -- was conveyed too late for Fitch to formulate a detailed plan of his own for this critical aspect of the mission. Fitch was thus forced to react to Japanese moves to a far greater extent than was necessary, which could have been costly and certainly increased the risk to the force. Also, coordination with COMSOWESPAC was less than optimal in both conveying
requirements for areas to be searched to locate Japanese units and in providing locating information and ship types in order to direct land-based aircraft attacks on maritime units. Of course, the requirement for radio silence to remain undetected by the enemy, especially before his presence in the Coral Sea became known by his attack on Japanese units at Tulagi, mitigates this lack of communication of necessary directives. Fletcher’s overall grade in this area would be a weak “B.”

9. The command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle. This was an especially strong point for Task Force 17, particularly in comparison with the bifurcated command arrangements adhered to by the Japanese with five separate major fleet units, and land-based air assets, all under a commander ashore. Except for the lack of coordination with COMSOWESPAC, in whose Area of Responsibility (AOR) Fletcher was operating, mentioned in 2. above, the direct and concise chain of command in place for the U.S. Navy was appropriate and used to best advantage. The credit here should be shared by Admiral Nimitz, who directed and established those command arrangements to which Admiral Fletcher reacted decisively and flexibly. To both, “A.”

10. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events. Admiral Fletcher not only adhered to established operational and tactical doctrines, but showed the moral courage to in essence formulate doctrine where none was in place. He doggedly adhered to the principle of launching his strike first once the enemy had been located. Moreover, when confronted by a situation where he found out the information he had been passed was incorrect and that the large Japanese carriers that were his main targets were not present, he resisted the temptation to recall the strike and pressed forward the attack -- establishing doctrine in the process. There were, however, numerous instances in the Battle of the Coral Sea where Fletcher adhered to doctrine that proved unwise, particularly that which established that his carriers were to be separated to enhance their survivability. Fletcher was a very
strong proponent of operating his carriers in groups to provide mutual air support, simplify his strike planning profile of aircraft, and multiply the anti-air and anti-submarine effectiveness of his screening cruisers and destroyers (which were in short supply and had to be spread thin to support independent carrier operations). Though he and Admiral Nimitz invariably instituted modifications to doctrine which corrected shortcomings and practices shown not to work during the battle, Fletcher obeyed Nimitz’ order to operate separately in the Battle of Midway against his better judgment. For this Fletcher should not be criticized. Considering he was not an aviator himself, he deserves a strong “A” in this important area.

11. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively. This was another strong suit for Fletcher. He passed the responsibility for orchestrating the air defense and offensive to his junior, Admiral Fitch, since he was as an aviator and thus more qualified. This must have been a very difficult decision for any senior to make. He also tasked Admiral Crace, RN, to detach cruisers and destroyers to attack the Port Moresby Invasion Force, thus increasing the risk from opposing air or submarine attack in order to optimize his potential for carrying out his mission. The fact that this was overly risky during daylight, and that Crace never got through to his target notwithstanding, Fletcher accepted the responsibility for decreasing the security of his force as an acceptable tradeoff in optimizing his chance of mission accomplishment. Good leadership, but perhaps bad judgment -- another “A-.”

12. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination. From start through attack to withdrawal, the foregoing discussion should establish this unequivocally in Fletcher’s decision process and performance -- “A+.”

13. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action. Admiral Fletcher entered the Coral Sea from the south and thus remained
undetected in any useful sense by the Japanese until he had launched his attack against the Shokaku and Zuikaku. He attacked the Japanese at Tulagi, giving away his general location to negate extended-range Japanese air searches that would give away his specific location. He launched first whenever the situation arose, doggedly adhering to doctrine emanating from Naval War College wargames which had established the enhanced probability of success in attacks when doing so. He also had the good judgment and intestinal fortitude to press through the attack when, as was so often the case, his pilot-generated intelligence proved incorrect while the strike was en route to its intended target. He also increased the probability of achieving his main strategic objective by detaching a surface action group to attack the Port Moresby Invasion Force. While perhaps falling short of brilliant, Admiral Fletcher’s ability to consider many things in exquisite detail and balance his responsibility for seeking out his foe, protecting his own force, and pressing home his attack against the Japanese until his main objective was achieved with all elements of his force informed of his intent and with no ambiguities in his directives deserves a strong “A.”

14. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements. One need only look at the way Fletcher and his subordinates captured, in clear, concise and simple to understand terms, the many important lessons generated form the first naval battle in history where no ship in either force either saw or fired on an enemy ship to appreciate his mastery of informing those later to be “in harm’s way.” Admiral Nimitz similarly forwarded Task Force 17 action reports to those in his command immediately, enhancing battle posture. Especially since this was the first ever carrier to carrier naval battle, and since lessons were transmitted to and acted on by other fleet units and commanders within days, Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher gets another “A+” here.

From the analysis presented above, it is beginning to appear that at least one senior Navy leader indeed learned something of importance in the inter-war period.

In a recent article in the Naval War College Review, entitled “Midway: Sheer Luck or Better Doctrine?” by Thomas Wildenberg, the author defines doctrine as “…the
fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions.”\textsuperscript{131} He postulates that elements of U.S. Navy doctrine including those below gave the U.S. a decided advantage over the Japanese in the Battle of Midway, and, by extension, other battles of the Pacific war as well:\textsuperscript{132}

1. The need for quick location of enemy carriers so that strikes aimed at their flight decks can be launched first and the concomitant importance of carrier-based scouting assets.

2. The importance of U.S. predisposition toward bombers instead of torpedo planes on carriers to prevent an opponent from launching due to flight deck vice waterline damage.

3. The advantage of the flight “deck park” which enabled carrying of more aircraft on U.S. carriers than Japanese carriers of approximately equal displacement.

4. The great advantage of U.S. indigenous carrier aircraft for search as opposed to Japanese reliance primarily on battleship and cruiser aircraft for that purpose.

5. The relative strike advantage of the Japanese “box” tactical carrier formation and its defensive weaknesses; and the huge advantage operating carriers in groups gave the Japanese in coordinating strikes composed of torpedo planes, bombers and supporting fighters.

While Wildenberg makes a good case for the importance of doctrine, events at Coral Sea fail to support his findings.

Both Japan and the United States adhered to doctrine based on getting the most aircraft airborne in the shortest time, and attacking first. Inherent in this was the need to locate the enemy before he located you. However, while almost all of Wildenberg’s important elements of doctrine are derived directly from those universally held objectives, achieving them didn’t necessarily equate to success against the enemy. Even with a quarter of both embarked air wings composed of search aircraft, the U.S. was not


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
guaranteed of locating the Japanese carriers first. Pilot errors on both sides introduced ambiguities where “first strikes” were launched against other than the desired targets. Though they severely limited the range of a strike and required far too much time to muster over the carrier(s) and near the target to produce a coordinated high- (dive bombers) and low-altitude attack, the U.S. torpedo planes were a hindrance not because of doctrine, but more precisely because of their antiquated speed and range characteristics. Moreover, while Wildenberg advocates the fifty-percent bomber carrier load, the lack of fighter aircraft -- remembering the need to balance attack, defense and scouting discussed above -- was probably the greatest single lesson learned from the Coral Sea engagements. The absolute need for more fighters on U.S. carriers, resulting in a fifty-percent increase from the twelve on Yorktown\textsuperscript{133} and 20 on Lexington\textsuperscript{134} to 27 on all U.S. carriers by the time of the Battle of Midway only a month later, highlights the importance of “hedging” against the ambiguities and fallacies of pre-war doctrine critical to decisions concerning that balance. Indeed, Frank Jack Fletcher from the Battle of the Coral Sea on was at the forefront of those advocating multiple carrier formations for greater synergistic force protection. At Midway, though, he complied with Admiral Nimitz’ direct order to operate his carrier groups independently.\textsuperscript{135}

In his letter of 27 May 1942 to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet (Admiral King), via the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet (Admiral Nimitz), Admiral Fletcher twice justified after the event his critical decisions on how to fight his carriers by relating his decision process to his “estimate of the situation.”\textsuperscript{136} In the first instance,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} Bates, \textit{Battle of the Coral Sea}, Op. Cit., p. 81.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Lundstrom, Op. Cit. (lecture) in note 36.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Fletcher, CTF-17 letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, Op. Cit., pp. 6 (para. 19) and 9 (para. 26).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Fletcher decided not to launch a second attack once the *Shoho* and a light cruiser had been sunk since other suitable targets were lacking and his mission priority was to move west to position for attack on the expected passage of the Port Moresby Invasion Force and possibly a supporting carrier through the Jomard Passage. In the second case, the idea of making another air attack on the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* was rejected since *Yorktown* had only eight fighters, twelve bombers and eight torpedo planes (with only seven remaining torpedoes) still serviceable. A surface attack option was also rejected because it would likely be located and subjected to a strong Japanese carrier air attack before dark set in.

As discussed in Chapter II, “The Commander’s Estimate of the Situation” was an integral part of *Sound Military Decision* -- which was constantly used in conjunction with all aspects of the education of Officers including Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher at the Naval War College. It was, in fact, an imbedded and required part of the wargaming effort that went on in Newport upon which the doctrine that Thomas Wildenberg credits for U.S. success in the Battle of Midway was based. Though that doctrine proved somewhat ill-advised and ineffectual at Coral Sea as discussed above, the “sound military decisions” made by Fletcher there reinforce the importance of *Sound Military Decision* in the professional upbringing of Officers of the U.S. Navy in World War II.

---

137 Ibid., p. 6, para. 19.
139 Ibid.
Shacked up in Shanghai when the war broke out -- stop me if you’ve heard this story before.

Anonymous

IV THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

Opening Phases

In all of history the Gods of War have sought a clash of Titans -- a cataclysmic battle to decide the fate of nations and determine the course of history. In June of 1941 they got their wish.

As the four carriers of the kido butai bore down on Midway Island there was no doubt of the victory that would follow. The battle had been gamed repeatedly with the same

---

1 Archival photographic image, circa 1941, provided by Mr. Daniel A. Martinez, Historian of the U.S.S. Arizona Memorial.

2 The kido butai, or "mobile force," was the striking group of large carriers in Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo's Third Fleet. (*Note: All Japanese names herein have been “Americanized” with surname last and given name first)
outcome -- at worst one carrier lost. The Imperial Fleet was ready and the plan of attack was thought to be sound. Yet battles must be won through clash of arms, not war games. As the Japanese were soon to learn, the outcome was anything but assured. The fate of the kido butai was one of defeat on such a scale that many have referred to it as the most "decisive"3 rout in recorded naval history. What follows is an analysis of that defeat, the decisions that contributed to it, and the reasons for it.

The Japanese Navy, born of the inability to consolidate gains from the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 due to lack of requisite naval strength, had developed a tradition based on Mahanian concepts of warfare at sea. The big or "decisive" battle was to be waged with the victor assured of command of the sea. Naval doctrine emanating from this tradition centered on attrition -- roughly fifty percent -- of the enemy prior to actual engagement. This attrition would be achieved by placing submarine barriers in the enemy's path and attacking units with land-based aircraft. Above all, the primary engagement would take place with forces massed under an umbrella of land-based air support.4 In combination, it was believed that such a plan enacted against an equal or inferior force would result in resounding success. Yet at Midway the Japanese violated the very fundamentals of their own doctrine. Their forces were not massed and the battle took place outside of land-based air support. Though victory could yet have been achieved, several other factors -- in

3 The term "decisive" is illusory at best. Herein it is meant to indicate the creation of a situation after which the possibility of ultimate victory, save by the intervention of some type of radical technology such as the use of atomic weapons, is unachievable.
4 Insights for Japanese naval doctrine in World War II were provided by Vice Admiral (then Captain) Yoji Koda of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force. VADM Koda was assigned as a student in the Naval Command College at the United States Naval War College in 1992 where he was my student in a seminar on World War II in the Pacific Theater. A naval scholar who had several previous tours in the United States, VADM Koda was every bit as much a teacher as a student. He provided insightful commentary and analysis after every seminar session, and many of his insights will be included later in this and other chapters.
combination -- rendered the Japanese situation hopeless. But before those factors are considered it is necessary to examine the circumstances under which the battle took place.

**The Situation in the Pacific in the Late Spring of 1942**

During the winter and spring of 1942 the Japanese consolidated their gains in East Asia. While they had planned to establish a defensive perimeter to protect their gains, their success in doing so had been stifled to the south by Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Unable to provide what in their view was sufficient air power to protect their landing force while it attempted to take Port Moresby, the Japanese had called off that operation. Thus -- at least for the time being -- the SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia were safe. The best way to sever those SLOCs, and to have a free reign to do as she might in the maritime regions of her Pacific domain, was to eliminate the U.S. carriers -- the last strategic assets this country had in the Pacific that could thwart Japanese intensions.

In late April of 1942 the Japanese had ten carriers and eleven battleships.\(^5\) They had lost the light carrier *Shoho* at in the Coral Sea battle, but were able to add an additional light fleet carrier *Hosyo* [Hosho] which was launched in January 1942.\(^6\) However, Fletcher’s victory in that battle in a strategic sense had a major component almost as important in the long run as keeping the SLOCs open to Australia. The attack he had pressed against the Japanese carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* had reduced their air wings to the point where neither could be arrayed against the U.S. in the envisioned battle against the Americans near Midway Island. As events will show, this lack of additional carrier air assets to launch an attack against the American carriers at the critical moment may well have been decisive in the Battle of Midway’s outcome.

In comparison, after loss of the *U.S.S. Lexington* at Coral Sea and the severe damage to *Yorktown* received there, the United States had only three of her seven remaining carriers

---


in operational status in the Pacific.\(^7\) The odds could have been even worse at Midway if Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C., had imposed his will on Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. Admiral King wanted the Yorktown, which was badly damaged, to go directly to Puget Sound for repairs.\(^8\) Admiral Nimitz, citing lack of sufficient fuel aboard the Yorktown for a voyage of that length, convinced Admiral King that the best course of action was to vector Yorktown to Pearl Harbor initially until the extent of her damage could be evaluated.\(^9\) Once in Pearl Harbor, it was determined that Yorktown would need a minimum of a month and a half to repair her. Through unbelievable determination and effort, she was given temporary repairs in only 72 hours, and was able to follow U.S.S. Enterprise and Hornet, under the command of Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance, to the north-west of Midway. As a result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, moreover, when the battle actually took place only seven heavy cruisers and one light cruiser were available to support the American carrier groups.\(^10\)

\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 171-172. Please note that all figures for both Japanese and U.S. fleets here are taken from this reference.

\(^8\) Lundstrom, John B., author of The First Team and The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign. Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding the research on National Archives No. 2, CINCPAC Secret and Confidential Message File, Record Group 313, he has completed for his forthcoming book on Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher and his decisions at the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and the Eastern Solomons, via phone on Friday, 19 November 2004.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Bates, Richard W. Radm., U.S. Navy (Ret.). The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942: Strategical and Tactical Analysis. Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Bureau of Naval Personnel, now held by the Defense Documentation Center, Defense Logistics Agency, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia, and at other military installations, 1948, p. 81. This study, commissioned after World War II by the U.S. Navy, makes use of formerly classified and unclassified sources of both the United States and Japan, as well as interviews with the participants wherever possible, and is the most definitive and exhaustive study on the
U.S.S. Saratoga was torpedoed in late December by a Japanese submarine and underwent repair in Puget Sound between 11 January and 22 May 1942. Once Saratoga's repairs had been completed she began training on the West Coast and was further delayed while waiting for escort units. She finally left Bremerton and Puget Sound on 22 May via San Diego. There she picked up aircraft and supplies. Leaving San Diego on 1 June 1942, Saratoga did not reach Pearl Harbor until 6 June -- too late to take part in the battle of Midway. U.S.S. Yorktown was transferred from the Atlantic as previously planned before the Japanese submarine’s attack on Saratoga and became Flagship of Task Force 17 on New Year's Eve. This was indeed fortuitous as Yorktown represented much greater flexibility than Saratoga with respect to the number and types of aircraft that could be taken onboard, and this played out to significant advantage in the Battle of Midway. At best, however, only defensive operations could be realistically expected until new construction units entered Fleet service in late 1943. This made U.S. planning to this point in the war, of necessity, reactive rather than proactive in nature.

The Commander and his Opponent

The Officer in operational command, or “tactical command” as was the term in use at the time of the battle, for the Battle of Midway on the United States side was Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher. Fletcher, nicknamed “Fletch” or “Flap Jack,” was “... A strenuous son of the Middle West. … Proud of Iowa’s corn and hogs. …”

Battles of Midway available. It is drawn on from substantially as an original source document by such eminent and seminal works as the fifteen volume set entitled History of United States Naval Operations in World War II by the noted historian Samuel Eliot Morison which remains so popular that it is now in reprint 56 years after its initial publication.

Marshalltown, Iowa, on 29 April 1885, Fletcher was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy from his native state in 1902, and graduated on 13 February 1906, after which he served for two years at sea as was then required by law.\textsuperscript{14} After that, he was commissioned an Ensign on 26 June 1908 while aboard \textit{U.S.S. Eagle}.\textsuperscript{15} Fletcher was promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade on 31 July 1911\textsuperscript{16} and received his commission in the Regular Navy on 5 March 1912, only six years after leaving Annapolis.\textsuperscript{17} Only two years later then Lieutenant Fletcher was to distinguish himself in action during the United States’ occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, when President Woodrow Wilson backed Venustiano Carranza when General Victoriano Huerta, who had overthrown the regime of President Francisco Madero by assassination, refused to step down.\textsuperscript{18}

Fletcher received a commendation for operations conducted while under the command of his uncle, Rear Admiral Frank Friday Fletcher:

…Lieutenant Fletcher was in charge of the “Esperanza” [a merchant ship commandeered for the operation] and succeeded in getting on board over

\textbf{Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,} Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,} Biographical Sketch, Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{15} Bureau of Navigation letter No. 6132-1 of 13 February 1908. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,} Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{16} Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department letter No. 6132-17 of 31 July 1911. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,} Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{17} Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department letter No. 6132-23 of 6 March 1912. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,} Correspondence File, Box 1, Folder 6, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

three hundred fifty refugees[,] many of them after the conflict had commenced. This ship was under fire being struck more than thirty times, but he succeeded in getting all the refugees placed in safety. Later he was placed in charge of the train conveying refugees under a flag of truce. This was hazardous as it was believed the track [was] mined, and a small error in dealing with the Mexican guard of soldiers might readily have caused a conflict, such a conflict at one time being narrowly averted. It was greatly due to his efforts in establishing friendly relations with the Mexican officers that so many refugees succeeded in reaching Vera Cruz from the interior.\textsuperscript{19}

Lieutenant Fletcher’s contribution to the important operations in the occupation of Vera Cruz ultimately were rewarded with this nation’s top military honor -- the Medal of Honor, “…as a recognition of the distinguished service rendered by [Fletcher] in the line of [his] profession, upon the occasion of the seizure of Vera Cruz, Mexico, April 21\textsuperscript{st} and 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1914, as recited in detail in Navy Department General Order No. 177…”\textsuperscript{20}

After serving as Aide and Flag Lieutenant on the staff of Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet aboard the flagships \textit{U.S.S. New York} and \textit{U.S.S. Wyoming} from July 1914, Fletcher petitioned Admiral Cameron Merae Winslow who was “…to command a brigade of the division which Colonel Roosevelt hopes to take to France…” in April of 1917 “…to serve in [his] command.”\textsuperscript{21} Ultimately Fletcher was transferred from \textit{U.S.S. Allen}, the first ship to which he was assigned in European waters, to take command of \textit{U.S.S. Benham} under Chief of Staff, Destroyer Flotillas, “…as relief of Commander William F. Halsey

\textsuperscript{19} Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Navy Department letter of Commendation dated 12 June 1914 to Lieutenant F.J. Fletcher via Commander-in-Chief, ATLANTIC FLEET. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection}, Correspondence File 1914, Box 1, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{20} Eberle, E.W. [Secretary of the Navy]. Navy Department letter of 19 January 1916 to Lieutenant Frank J. Fletcher; subject: Medal of Honor. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection}, Correspondence File 1915-1916, Box 1, Folder 8, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

\textsuperscript{21} F.J.F. letter from \textit{U.S.S. Kearsage} to Admiral Winslow dated April 18, 1917. \textit{Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection}, Correspondence File 1915-1916, Box 1, Folder 8, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.
U.S.N." Only two months later Fletcher was given a temporary appointment to the rank of Commander, effective 1 July 1918. Though there is no record of distinguished action in battle, Fletcher’s papers having for the most part been lost when *U.S.S. Yorktown* was sunk during the Battle of Midway, then Commander Fletcher was awarded the Navy Cross -- one of the highest medals awarded by the U.S. Navy -- as per the citation:

For distinguished service in the line of [your] profession as Commanding Officer of the *U.S.S. Benham* engaged in the important, exacting and hazardous duty of patrolling the waters infested with enemy submarines and mines, in escorting and protecting vitally important convoys, and in offensive and defensive action, vigorously and unremittingly prosecuted, against all forms of enemy naval activity.

As with so many promising Officers of this period, this award was intended in all likelihood to mark Fletcher as a man of great potential destined for successive assignments of greater importance rather than for any specific distinguishing act or acts.

---


23 Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Navy Department letter to Commander Frank J. Fletcher serial N-32/FJS-LL dated October 29, 1918. *Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection*, Correspondence File 1918-1920, Box 1, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


25 Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Secretary of the Navy citation on behalf of the President awarding the Navy Cross to Commander Frank J. Fletcher, U.S.N. for service in the World War dated 11 November 1920. *Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection*, Correspondence File 1918-1920, Box 1, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.
Reporting for duty at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., from March 1925 to August 1927 after his return from European waters, Commander Fletcher soon after commenced the intellectual part of his professional military education. In July of 1924 he was certified as completing the Naval War College Correspondence Course by Rear Admiral C.S. Williams, that institution’s President. Subsequently assigned as Executive Officer of the battleship U.S.S. Colorado, Commander Fletcher requested aviation training which was denied on account of his not being found physically qualified. Fletcher had complained as a Midshipman of problems with his eyesight, but had been found to have no detectible problem with his vision by Naval Academy doctors. He had petitioned for a “second opinion” by outside physicians, but his request had been denied. Thus the commander of the Carrier Task Forces in three of the five carrier battles of history was to come to that leadership position without the benefit of first-hand experience as an aviator.

Thereafter Fletcher petitioned for and was granted assignment to the U.S. Naval War College, to commence on 1 July of 1929. On successful completion of his tour at the

26 Williams, C.S., President, U.S. Naval War College. Naval War College, Newport, RI, letter serial 444 Cl-ma dated 18 July 1924. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1924-1926, Box 1, Folder 12, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

27 Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery letter to Commander Frank Jack Fletcher dated 13 March 1928. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1927-1928, Box 1, Folder 13, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

28 Commander Frank Jack Fletcher, U.S. Navy letter from San Diego, Calif., dated 11 October 1928. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1927-1928, Box 1, Folder 13, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

War College in early 1930, where one of his classmates was Commander Thomas C. Kinkaid, Fletcher was assigned for duty under instruction to the U.S. Army War College -- a normal progression for those earmarked for continued demanding duty and positions of greater authority and responsibility. Fletcher’s next assignment was as Chief or Staff for Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Asiatic Fleet aboard the flagship *U.S.S. Houston* from August 1931 through the summer of 1933, and that was followed by duty from November 1933 through May 1936 as Aide to the Secretary of the Navy, Claude A. Swanson. While in this position, Fletcher was given a temporary assignment starting in April of 1935 as an observer and advisor for Fleet Problem XVI with Commander Battleships, Scouting Force.

Fletcher assumed command of the battleship *U.S.S. New Mexico*, flagship of Battleship Division Three, Battle Force, in June 1936, where he served through December of 1937. He was then assigned as a Member of the Naval Examining Board, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., from June 1938 through September of 1939. His follow-on assignment was again in Washington as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, where he was still serving when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Such an assignment as this and his previous tour at the Washington Navy Yard was to work to his disadvantage with later Chief of Naval Operations Ernest J. King, who viewed those who he considered prone to accepting comfortable positions in Washington as “fixers.”

---

30 *The Register*, manuscript listing of U.S. Naval War College Faculty and graduates, Provided by Dr. Evelyn Cherpak, Archivist, U.S. Naval War College’ p. 39.


33 **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1935-1936, Box 1, Folder 17, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.
Fletcher quickly returned to sea when war broke out assigned as Commander, Scouting Force, with additional duty as Commander Cruiser Division Four, which he assumed on 31 December 1941. On 29 April of that year Fletcher -- already promoted to Captain in August of 1930\(^{34}\), he was now, since his selection in December of 1938, a Rear Admiral -- was designated Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet, with the additional responsibility of Commander, Cruiser Division Four. It was in this command position that he saw action in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May and the Battle of Midway in June, 1942.\(^{35}\)

While Fletcher was the only Flag or General officer on active duty who had been awarded both the Medal of Honor and the Navy Cross when the World War II started,\(^{36}\) he by no means had extensive combat experience. His only real test under fire was at Vera Cruz in 1914. Moreover, though he was an experienced cruiser and battleship man he was not an aviator. Certainly his experience in carrier battle at Coral Sea had made him the only American so equipped for the next encounter with the Japanese, but his knowledge was less than a month old when he was ordered to engage near Midway. Consequently he had little time to absorb his recent unique experience. Fletcher sailed into harm’s way a relative novice in the art of carrier warfare.

By contrast his adversary, Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, had led the *kido butai* on every Japanese carrier strike except Coral Sea. Though not nearly as much is known about this hardened war veteran, it is safe to say that he was an extremely competent officer who had risen through the ranks through determination and demonstrated sound judgment. Not noted for his flamboyance or aggressive nature, Nagumo had reached the pinnacle of


\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 3.

Japanese offensive command more by promotion of the most senior, as was the custom in the Japanese Navy, than by any combination of acts which stood him apart from other officers who were his contemporaries.

Nagumo had been severely criticized in naval circles for not launching a third attack wave against Pearl Harbor, but retiring instead in fear of being located and attacked in surprise by the as yet undetected U.S. carriers known to be in the vicinity. His actions had resulted in his being labeled as too conservative -- something far removed from the *samurai* spirit imbued in all Japanese warriors. Thus, in all probability, Nagumo’s actions in the Battle of Midway were influenced by his perception of the expectations of both those above him and those he led. His judgment was subject to considerations of criticism he might receive if he failed to uphold the traditions of the Japanese Navy established in the Battle of Tsushima in the Russo-Japanese War.

Nagumo’s junior and Commander of Carrier Division II under his direct command, Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi, on the other hand, was generally considered the “rising star” of the Japanese Navy. He had in many respects paralleled the career of Commander Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, including his stint as a Naval Attaché in Washington, and was expected to achieve similar success through the rest of his career. Above all, Yamaguchi was considered a consummate warrior -- aggressive in both outlook and action. Having such a shadow at Midway to offer recommendations and stand ready to critique any lack of aggressiveness on Nagumo’s part placed Nagumo in a particularly delicate position with respect to the decisions he was likely to make.

**Japanese Preparations**

In reality, Japan's preparations for the Midway engagement were flawed. The plan drawn up by Combined Fleet Headquarters had two central objectives. The first and more limited objective was to seize Midway as an advance air base for early detection of American warships operating west of the Hawaiian Islands. The second and much more important objective was to draw out the remaining carriers of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and to
engage and destroy them in the decisive battle that had become the cornerstone of Japanese naval doctrine.\textsuperscript{37}

Altogether, the Combined Fleet intended on employing over 200 ships, including transports and auxiliaries, and approximately 700 planes in the Midway operation.\textsuperscript{38} The ship count included eleven battleships; eight carriers; 22 cruisers; 65 destroyers; and 21 submarines.\textsuperscript{39} These were to be divided into a Main Force, composed mostly of battleships and commanded by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto; a Carrier Striking Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo; a Midway Island Invasion Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo; a Northern Force assigned to occupy islands in the U.S. Aleutian chain, commanded by Vice Admiral Moshiro Hosogaya; and an Advance Submarine Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Teruhisa Komatsu. Additionally, shore-based aircraft were to be commanded by Vice Admiral Nishizo Tsukahara. Yamamoto's Main Force; Vice Admiral Shiro Takasu's Aleutian Guard (Screening) Force; Nagumo's First Carrier Striking Force; Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta's Second Carrier Striking Force; Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta's Second Carrier Striking Force (Aleutians -- under

\textsuperscript{37} Fuchida, Mitsuo and Masatake Okumiya, (edited by Clarke H. Kawakami and Roger Pineau), \textit{Midway: The Battle That Doomed Japan, The Japanese Navy's Story}, (Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Maryland, 1955 and 1992), p. 105. This book, which first appeared in its Japanese version in 1951, was the first to chronicle the magnitude of the defeat suffered at Midway by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Mitsuo Fuchida, flight leader of the attack on Pearl Harbor and every other carrier operation conducted by the \textit{kido butai} prior to Midway, was the Senior Air Wing Commander aboard the carrier \textit{Akagi} (Vadm. Cuichi Nagumo, Commander of the First Striking Force's Flagship) during the battle. His manuscript, which was edited to produce \textit{Midway}, was prepared primarily from the Top Secret debrief and reconstruction of the actual events which Fuchida was commissioned to prepare after the Midway operation and which "appeared in his foot locker after the War."

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 107.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
Nagumo); and Komatsu's forces were those primarily relied upon to crush the U.S. fleet.\textsuperscript{40} These were to be arrayed as follows:\textsuperscript{41}

**Table 3: Japanese Force Locations Approaching Midway**

Yamamoto Force: 600 miles northwest of Midway  
Takasu Force: 500 miles north of Yamamoto Force  
Nagumo Force: 300 miles east of Yamamoto Force  
Kakuta Force: 300 miles east of Takasu Force  

Submarine Forces: To establish three cordon lines by 2 June, N\textsuperscript{42} minus 5 [2 June 1942], disposed as follows, in order to detect the approach of enemy forces:

Cordon "A" (Submarine Squadron 3) between lat. 19 degrees 30 minutes N and 23 degrees 30 minutes N, on long. 167 degrees W.  
Cordon "B" (Submarine Squadron 5) between lat. 29 degrees 30 minutes N, long. 164 degrees 30 minutes W, and lat. 26 degrees 10 minutes N, long. 167 degrees W.  
Cordon "C" (I-9, I-15, I-17 of Submarine Squadron 1) between lat. 49 degrees N, long. 166 degrees W, and lat. 51 degrees N, long. 166 degrees W.\textsuperscript{43}

By any standard, this Japanese plan was complex. This complexity was compounded by the compression of time to prepare for its execution. On 1 May 1942 Combined Fleet Headquarters initiated a four-day series of war games designed to test the operational plan. Conducted under the direction of Combined Fleet Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki, the games were attended by most of the commanders who would

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 114.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p. 114. Projected force relationships are presented here to provide a picture of the difficulty in coordinating an operation of this magnitude from such dispersed locations. This theme will be considered later in the text as a contributing factor in the Japanese defeat.  
\textsuperscript{42} "D" (as in D-day) in U.S. parlance.  
take part in the operation. All details of the plan were carried out without the slightest difficulty, owing in considerable measure to Admiral Ugaki's frequent intervention to set aside the rulings of the umpires. On the 6th of May -- only 34 days before the date set for the actual operation, and with only four days of gaming and two additional days of briefing conferences and discussions -- commanders were dispersed to their units. Notwithstanding the constancy of operations that had preceded the games and the ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea (7-8 May) which would modify the plan for Midway significantly by rendering the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* -- both assumed available in the wargames and included in Japanese plans for the battle -- unavailable for the operation, the amount of preparation time both ashore and afloat was insufficient for an undertaking of this magnitude and complexity. Only "scripting" of the likely situation and actions of the U.S. Fleet and recent past successes gave rise to unbridled optimism.

**Decisions vs. Intelligence**

Samuel Eliot Morison and others, including John Prados, have characterized the United States victory at Midway as "a victory of intelligence." Surely intelligence did give the U.S. a significant edge in preparing for the battle. The celebrated test by which U.S. Navy codebreakers induced the Japanese to indicate that "AF" was low on water after ensuring their interception of U.S. transmissions which equated the same problem with Midway Island certainly gave valuable insight into the specific plans of the Japanese intercepted in subsequent transmissions. This was particularly important in that the volume of Japanese message traffic and an incomplete deciphering of the Japanese JN-25 naval code resulted in decoding of only ten percent of all JN-25 message traffic by May of 1944.

---

44 Ibid., p. 124.
45 Aside from three bomb hits sustained by *Shokaku*, the air wings of both *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* were diminished to the point that both carriers required eight weeks in the Inland Sea to make required repairs and reconstitute their air wings.
46 JN-25, unlike the Magic diplomatic code which needed the "Purple" sixteen-selector (electronic pathway) or later "Jade" twenty-selector transmission units akin to the German Enigma machine for encryption and decryption, required the use of two books: a code book (with less than 33,333 entries) used to convert words or letters to five-number
Fortunately, the high volume of Japanese message traffic after the Battle of the Coral Sea (indications of a Japanese effort against Port Moresby had also emerged as early as 25 March with orders instructing air commanders to strike "RZP" and with geographic designators including "RQZ" and the codename "MO") had given the codebreakers the opportunity to break down additional JN-25 number groups. Perhaps more fortuitously, the Japanese, probably because of contemplated actions against Port Moresby, chose not to exacerbate circumstances by changing their naval codes as scheduled on 1 May. Instead, that change did not take place until midnight on 25 May. That certainly made more possible the "AF" intelligence coup.

Yet intelligence alone tells only part of the story. American historians tend to categorize victory in military encounters as a product of some major single factor. However, it is the decisions men make -- in battle as in life -- that shape their destinies. Surely intelligence alone can not explain the victory of the 25 U.S. ships and 227 carrier aircraft and 110 Midway-based aircraft involved in the Battle of Midway against a Japanese armada of over 200 ships and 700 aircraft. What follows is an analysis of the key decisions in that Battle.

How the Plans Played Out

The pattern for the Battle of Midway, in many respects, was strikingly similar to that of the Battle of the Coral Sea a month earlier. In both battles the Japanese approached the

code groups, and a related cipher book (of 100,000 five-number code groups arranged in a random sequence). For encryption, each code group was then added to the next cipher group in sequence. No machine was involved. (Insights here provided by Prof. Emeritus Frank Snyder of the United States Naval War College in a letter responding to the author, Herman Wouk, concerning his presentation on the Battle of Midway given on its Fiftieth Anniversary in Newport, Rhode Island).

48 Ibid., p. 300.
49 Ibid., p. 316.
50 Ibid., p. 320.
area of operations in widely separated groups and sought to draw the U.S. carrier forces into a disadvantageous position where they could destroy them. In both actions secondary operations took place -- at Tulagi in the Coral Sea and in the Aleutians at Midway. Weather was also an important factor in both operations.

The Japanese undoubtedly expected their operations in the Coral Sea to be successful. On 5 May Imperial Headquarters issued the orders for the Midway and Aleutian operations despite the fact that Tulagi, in the Solomon Islands chain and almost due north of Guadalcanal Island, had been attacked by carrier aircraft and the capture of Port Moresby had been seriously jeopardized by the presence of a U.S. carrier force.51 After the Battle of the Coral Sea the Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, issued the order for the operations at Midway on 12 May. On 18 May Imperial Headquarters issued orders for the occupation of New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa.52 Believing that they had sunk both the Saratoga, which they had mistaken for the Lexington which they had actually sunk at Coral Sea, and the Yorktown, the Japanese evidently considered their enterprise in the Coral Sea advantageous even though it became necessary to abandon the attack on Port Moresby when two carriers (TF 16 commanded by Vice Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey) were spotted bearing 098 degrees at 445 nautical miles from Tulagi.53 Halsey was returning from launching the “Doolittle Raid” on Tokyo and was dispatched to assist Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea. Fortunately, excellent U.S. intelligence on Japanese movements allowed recall of all American carriers to the Hawaiian area which made them available for the Midway action.

As the Japanese approached Midway, the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC), Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, instituted 700 mile patrol plane searches in the western semicircle from Midway and recalled his three carriers to Hawaii. While he remained in Hawaii, his opposite, Admiral Yamamoto, embarked aboard the battleship Yamato with the Main Force. This was subsequently to prove limiting with respect to his ability to communicate with his carrier forces and provide direction during the battle.

52 Bates, Ibid.
53 Bates, Ibid.
On arrival at Pearl Harbor, Rear Admiral Fletcher’s carrier, *Yorktown*, was estimated to need a month and a half for repairs to damage sustained at Coral Sea. Nimitz ordered the work completed in 72 hours and, amazingly, *Yorktown* became operational in that short time. The U.S. plan called for countering the Japanese carrier forces northwest of Midway and Halsey’s Task Force 16 was to be dispatched immediately, with Fletcher to catch up when repairs to *Yorktown* were complete. Both Task Forces were to rendezvous at a pre-designated point -- appropriately named by Admiral Nimitz as “Point Luck.” Unfortunately, Halsey was overcome by an attack of dermatitis and missed the greatest carrier battle in history because of a severe itch. His command went to the cruiser commander in his Task Force, Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. Thus Spruance was placed in the position of having to coordinate with what was generally held as the best U.S. carrier air staff in the Pacific for only a brief period before engaging the Japanese force.

For the Japanese, the two carrier groups were to make the initial blow on Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians on 3 June as a supplementary measure and on Midway on 4 June by the *kido butai* as the main blow. It is now time to concentrate on the operations around Midway.

**Prelude to Action in the Aleutians and at Midway**

The Battle of Midway took place from June 3rd to June 6th, 1942. Its consequences arguably make it one of the most important naval battles in history. This clash among two great navies was decided entirely by air power. No surface gunnery action took place at any time during the battle, and in fact no opposing ships came within sight of each other. In the Battle of Midway the Japanese repeated the pattern of the previous month in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Once again applying land tactics to battle at sea, they approached in widely separated and non-supporting groups seeking to draw out the U.S. forces in the area and included an operation of less strategic importance akin to that aimed at Tulagi during Coral Sea, but this time targeting the Aleutian Islands.

The Doolittle raid on Tokyo of 18 April 1942, discussed in Chapter III, strongly influenced the Japanese in condensing their timetable for execution of the MORYALMI
(Port Moresby, Ocean-Nauru (RY) [islands of Ocean and Nauru]⁵⁴, Aleutians, Midway) plans. The Japanese High Command responded by accelerating their advance into the Solomons and New Guinea. Further advances were planned to include New Caledonia, the Fiji Islands and Samoa, these to be followed by the capture of the geographically strategic Island of Midway and the occupation of the Aleutians. Many of these objectives had been set forth in previous plans, but the Battle of the Coral Sea had checked the Japanese advance southward by sea. The advance to the eastward was then ordered by Imperial Headquarters. Thus the lines of American communications would be cut, the areas west of Pearl Harbor would be mined, and the balance of naval power in the Pacific would be for the time being more favorable to the Japanese.

The Japanese Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, felt that as a result of Pearl Harbor and Coral Sea the American Fleet was temporarily inferior, but that American industrial potential made a fleet action imperative on the part of Japan. The approaches to Japan must be strengthened. By departing from the established naval policy of holding their fleet in Japanese controlled waters and threatening something Americans prized the Americans might feel compelled to commit their weaker forces and thus be brought to a vulnerable position. By offering irresistible “bait,” Yamamoto hoped to bring off a decisive battle near Midway. Preceding the Midway attack by one day there was to be reconnaissance in force against Dutch Harbor which was to be struck a paralyzing blow to cover the seizure of Adak, Kiska and Attu Islands. This move would act as a complement to, rather than merely a diversion from, the main objective of taking Midway. Kiska and Midway could then be used as bases for barrier patrols to detect any surprise American penetration toward the Japanese home islands, and as staging points for air reconnaissance to the east and attack by aviation assets on U.S. and allied shipping, as well as for surface ship and submarine action in the sea frontier clear to the west coast of the continental United States.

Information Available to the Japanese Commander

Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, Commander Striking Force, believed, based on available intelligence when he sailed from Hiroshima Bay toward Midway under conditions of radio silence, that there would not be any powerful American units, including carriers, in the vicinity of Midway Island. Though Admiral Yamamoto had better intelligence, he failed to share it with Nagumo, believing that radio silence was imperative to prevent U.S. advantage by detection of his Main Body or Nagumo’s Striking Force. This highlights a major flaw in the Japanese organization for the Midway operation. Unlike his American counterpart, Admiral Chester Nimitz, who was stationed ashore and could communicate readily with his operational commander, Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Yamamoto saw fit to embark aboard his Flagship in the Main Body of the attacking force. As a consequence, Yamamoto, the strategic commander, was of necessity unable adequately to communicate with his main offensive units -- the four carriers of Nagumo’s kido butai.

Figure 11: Carriers of the Japanese kido butai

Thus Nagumo believed that the Americans patrolled west and south of Midway at a radius of 500 miles but were not as likely to be in the area to the north-west of Midway.

---

55 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder for use in his presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission. Please note that carriers in yellow were present at the Battle of Midway and that asterisks indicate those carriers with islands on their port sides.
from which he intended to approach. Frequently experienced bad weather in this area might also serve to conceal his approach. He correctly estimated the defenses of Midway to be strong and that submarines operated in the area. He believed that Midway had two squadrons of flying reconnaissance boats, one squadron of Army bombers, one squadron of fighters and that this air strength could be doubled in an emergency. This was an excellent estimate of the situation, except, of course, for the likely area in which the U.S. carriers would be operating.

Table 4: Japanese Estimate of U.S. Navy Ships Around Midway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPANESE ESTIMATE</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Defenses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance Flying Boat Squadrons</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Bomber Squadrons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighter Squadrons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Japanese Commander’s estimate of the U.S. surface units in the Hawaiian area included:

Table 5: American Surface Units Actually Around Midway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHIP TYPE</th>
<th>Japanese Estimate</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Carriers</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special (Light) Carriers</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battleships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Cruisers</td>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Cruisers</td>
<td>3 to 4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


57 Ibid., p. 6-7.
Vice Admiral Nagumo, Commander of the First Carrier Striking Force and in direct command of Carrier Division I in his flagship *Akagi*, estimated that there would be two to three U.S. carriers -- a good estimate as there were actually three. He also estimated that the U.S. would have two to three light carriers, and two battleships, but there were none included in either Task Force arrayed against the Japanese. He estimated only four to five heavy cruisers, when actually there were seven, three to four light cruisers when there was only one, and four very light cruisers, of which none were present. His estimate of 30 destroyers was correct, but at the time of the battle only 14 were in the Midway area. His estimate of 25 submarines was correct. Thus the Japanese Commander, Striking Force’s estimates -- on which the very favorable outcomes of Japanese war games, which actually lasted only four days, in the six weeks leading to their attack on Midway were predicated -- were essentially correct. The question remains how the outcome of the actual battle could be so far removed from the expectations those war games engendered?

The Japanese Commander of the Aleutian forces, Vice Admiral Moshiro Hosegawa, believed that at Dutch Harbor there were considerable military installations and patrol craft, but he felt it could be captured easily. He also assumed that Kiska and Attu had military installations and patrol craft. He estimated that normally there were 20 patrol planes and ten fighters at Dutch Harbor, that two squadrons of patrol plans were at Kodiak, and that one squadron was stationed at Sitka. This was indeed a reasonable estimate. However, his failure to obtain intelligence on the construction of the new Army

---


59 Ibid., pp. 120-128.

60 Ibid., p. 124.
Air Field at Ft. Glenn on Umnak Island had an adverse affect on the conduct of his operations.

**Japanese Force Deployments**

All the Japanese Fleet, including the naval air fleet but excepting the China Seas Fleet, were under the command of Commander-in-Chief Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. For the Midway operation the Combined Fleet was organized into five coordinated Task Forces: the Striking Force of fast carriers (*kido butai*), the Main Force, the Midway Island Invasion and Occupation Force, a Northern Force, and a Submarine Force. Additionally, all of these were to be supported by land-based air forces. The strength of these Task Forces was as follows:

1) The First Carrier Striking Force consisted of four first-line carriers, the *Kaga*, *Akagi* of Carrier Division I, and the *Soryu*, and *Hiryu* of Carrier Division II, Commanded by the aggressive and fast-rising Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi embarked in his flagship *Hiryu*, carrying a total of 234 aircraft. These were screened by two fast but lightly-armored battleships, the *Haruna* and *Kirishima* which possessed high speed and light armor. Additional screening ships included two heavy cruisers, the *Tone* and the *Chikuma*, one light cruiser the *Nagara*, and eleven destroyers. The force was self-supporting and accompanied by its own supply ships. This powerful offensive force was designed to meet any U.S. threat -- but in spite of the lesson which should have been learned as a result of the Battle of the Coral Sea the Japanese did not include more ships

---

61 Ibid.

62 Bates, *The Battle of Midway*, Op. Cit., p. 82. It should be noted that such credible sources as Fuchida, Op. Cit., list the number of Japanese aircraft aboard the four carriers of the Mobile force as 261 (p. 108). Other sources use this number as well. Bates, however, is used here as his study had access to all-source classified Japanese records immediately after the war. The discrepancy between these two numbers probably reflects the near certainty that the Japanese had more planes embarked than were mechanically able to fly. Thus the 234 number likely refers to operable aircraft and the 261 number to total aircraft onboard.

for anti-aircraft fire. Nor did they mass naval surface ships in a single group as they had successfully in their raid on Colombo. The compelling lesson of the Coral Sea for the Japanese had thus been lost on them.

2) The Main Force was composed of one aircraft carrier, the *Hosho* (with eight Type 97 torpedo bombers); seven battleships, the *Nagato*, the *Mutsu*, the *Ise*, the 65,000 ton *Yamato* (Admiral Yamamoto’s Flagship), the *Hyuga*, the *Fuso* and the *Yamashiro*; two light cruisers, the *Kitakami* and the *Oi*; twelve destroyers; and four supply ships.\(^6^4\) This powerful surface force should have been able to defeat the U.S. Task Forces in the Midway area if Admiral Yamamoto had arrayed it against them, particularly if the engagement was made under conditions of darkness which would negate American air power. In combination with the four operable carriers of the *kido butai*, it would have been nearly invincible if properly deployed. Such was not to be the case.

3) The Midway Invasion and Occupation Force consisted of five groups; the Second Fleet Group of two battleships, the *Kongo* and the *Hiei*; four heavy cruisers, the *Atago*, the *Chokai*, *Haguro* and *Myoko*; one light cruiser, the *Yura*; eight destroyers; and three supply ships.\(^6^5\) The Transport Group totaled twelve transports and supply ships and a Close Screen with the light cruiser *Jintsu*, ten destroyers and three patrol boats.\(^6^6\) The Close Support Group included four heavy cruisers, the *Kumano*, the *Suzuya*, *Mogami* and *Mikuma*, screened by two destroyers; the Seaplane Tender Group and the Minesweeper Group.\(^6^7\)

4) The Advanced Submarine Force.

5) The Northern Force designed to capture certain Aleutian Islands which was composed of three groups:

\(\text{a) The Second Carrier Striking Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, which included the light carrier *Ryuyo* (16 fighters and 21 torpedo planes embarked) and the carrier *Junyo* (24 fighters and 21 dive bombers}

\(^{6^4}\) Ibid., pp. 107-108.
\(^{6^5}\) Ibid., p. 109.
\(^{6^6}\) Ibid.
\(^{6^7}\) Ibid.
embarked), two heavy cruisers, the Takao and the Maya, three destroyers and a single oiler. 68

b) The Kiska Occupation Group which was composed of two light cruisers, the Kiso and the Tama, 69 five destroyers, two auxiliary cruisers, two transports carrying 1,250 troops for the landing, three gun boats and eight submarine chasers.

c) The Adak-Attu Occupation Group which included a light cruiser, the Abukuma, four destroyers, a transport with 1,250 troops, 70 a minelayer, and one auxiliary seaplane carrier.

The Japanese forces proceeded toward their destination more or less independently. The Mobile Force left Hiroshima Bay 26 May. 71 At a point 450 nautical miles southeast of Tokyo it rendezvoused with its supply units. On 3 June it was 600 nautical miles northwest of Midway. 72 The Main Force also departed Hiroshima Bay 26 May. 73 On 3 June the Main Force divided into two groups -- the Main Group and the Aleutian Support Group which headed toward the Aleutians. 74 The Midway Occupation Force left Japanese waters in widely separated groups. The Minesweeper Group departed Saipan on 25 May for Midway via Wake Island. The Transport Group, the Seaplane Tender Group and the Coast Support Group left the Saipan-Guam area on 27 and 28 May. 75 The Second Fleet Group left Japan at 0700 on 28 May as well. 76 This group took position on the left flank of the Transport Group, seldom closer than 50 miles. The Northern Force left Japanese waters in three separate groups. The Second Carrier

68 Ibid., p. 10.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 22.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 23.
Striking Force left Honshu Bay on 25 May and headed for a point 400 nautical miles from Dutch Harbor. The Kiska Occupation Group left Ominato on 27 May for Paramushiro To and from there departed for Kiska Island on 1 June. The Adak-Attu Occupation Group left Ominato on 28 May for Aleutian waters.\(^{77}\)

Thus the Japanese had set in motion a plan of attack on two widely-separated outposts, with an ultimate objective of luring out, locating and engaging a group of U.S. carriers somewhere in between. With over 200 ships at sea simultaneously, theirs was to be the largest single naval operation in history. The complexity of that operation, requiring the various commanders’ simultaneous estimates of the situation and decisions reasoned according to them, was contingent solely on a series of wargames from 1-4 May, which some were not even able to attend due to the action in the Coral Sea, and during which the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, whose Air Wings were depleted at Coral Sea rendering them unavailable for the Midway operation, were integral to the contemplated action.

The wide dispersion of the Japanese Task Forces and their approaches to their objective areas, as well as the U.S. Strike Force and its route to the battle area can be seen on the chart on the following page. Please note that Admiral Nimitz, so as to allow his carriers the ability to either move to the north should the main thrust of the Japanese attack be against the Aleutians or to retreat to the east if their situation became untenable, placed them in such a way that the Japanese carrier force would of necessity be between them and Midway Island. This created a problem for the Japanese in both the search plan they would need to establish and in prioritizing between Midway and the American carriers for their strikes.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., p. 24-25.
The Japanese plan for the Midway operation appears to have been reasonably sound, other than the wide separation of the principal forces which squandered their numerical advantage. The Main Force could not support the Striking Force or the Occupation Force unless they retired to the area of the Main Force, which was 600 nautical miles west of the Striking Force and an equal distance to the northwest of the Occupation Force. The deployment of the Northern Force was, never-the-less, well planned. The raid on Dutch Harbor did succeed in furnishing a diversion for the Midway operation in addition to its primary objective of taking a staging base for air surveillance and air, ship and submarine attacks on U.S. shipping in the area.

---

78 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder for his presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
Information Available to the American Commander

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC), was directed on 3 April 1942 to assume command of all the armed forces in the Pacific Ocean Area. Early in May intelligence reached Admiral Nimitz that caused him to believe the Japanese planned an invasion thrust at Midway and the Aleutians early in June. This information was remarkably complete. In an intelligence coup of great significance, the garrison on Midway Island was directed to broadcast in the clear (uncoded) that Midway was running low on water. Consequently, decryption of Japanese JN-25 naval codes related that “AF” was running low on water -- and subsequent intercepted transmissions provided details of impending Japanese moves against her.\(^79\)

Admiral Nimitz not only considered that he knew of the projected operations but also he had quite comprehensive information on the strength of Japanese forces involved, their general direction of approach, and the approximate date on which each phase of the operation was to be launched. From this information Nimitz was able to make this estimate of the Japanese combatant ships to be used in the Midway action. Let us compare Nimitz’ estimate with the number of Japanese ships that were actually present:

**Table 6: Nimitz’ Estimate and Actual Number of Japanese Ships Present at Midway**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPANESE SHIPS(^80)</th>
<th>AMERICAN ESTIMATE</th>
<th>ACTUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battleships</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carriers</td>
<td>4 or 5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Carriers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Cruisers</td>
<td>8 or 9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Cruisers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroyers</td>
<td>16 to 24</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarines</td>
<td>8 to 12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The estimate of carriers, heavy cruisers, and submarines was reasonably correct. But his estimate of the number of Japanese battleships, light cruisers and destroyers was seriously in error.

The Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station, Midway Island, Captain Cyril T. Simard, expected that the Japanese carriers would not launch their planes at a distance greater than 200 miles. In this estimate Simard displayed an excellent knowledge of and appreciation for Japanese carrier aircraft capabilities. Simard therefore placed in operation a 22-plane search with PBYs to a distance of 700 miles. These searches were augmented by an 800-mile search from Oahu and a 700-mile search from Johnston Island to cover probable approaches to Pearl Harbor. Captain Simard also knew that ordinarily an area of reduced visibility could be expected about 300 to 400 miles to the northwest of Midway. He felt that the Japanese Commander, after leaving bad weather, would wait for dawn to fix his position before launching planes. Since dawn was about 0415, the Japanese might be expected to strike Midway at around 0600. The Japanese actually struck at 0635 on 4 June. Thus Simard’s estimate of the situation optimized Midway Island’s readiness to meet the expected attack.

Admiral Nimitz’ Commander in Aleutian waters, Rear Admiral Robert H. Theobald (Commander Task Force 8 – Commander North Pacific Force), had received intelligence on 28 May that the Japanese had one Task Group detailed for the capture of Kiska and another for Attu. He feared, however, that this information was a deception to draw U.S. naval forces westward so the Japanese could move in behind them. He estimated that the most probably area of a Japanese landing would be the Unnaic Island, Dutch Harbor, Cold Bay area and decide to defend there. His freedom of action was apparently seriously affected as he was forced to rely on land-based aircraft for the

---


82 Ibid., p. 3.
essential protection of his ships. His airplanes were limited in number. Also, there were no airfields west of Ft. Glenn (Otter Point) on Umnac Island.

Figure 12: U.S. and Japanese Force Movements Converging on Midway Island

In addition, the distances between his naval surface forces and the bases from which his supporting aircraft operated (please note chart above) plus the almost total lack of darkness in a military sense, which darkness would have substantially improved his ability to move without detection, all complicated his problem. Theobald’s overall plan for the defense of Alaska appears to have been sound, but his means available to resist the Japanese were not adequate.

In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and Coral Sea, the advisability of sending surface forces to the Aleutians presented Admiral Nimitz with a difficult decision. Nimitz believed that Midway was the primary objective and that he should maintain strength there. But the Aleutians were the gateway to Alaska and were American soil. If they were seized, American morale would suffer as a developing threat to the west coast of the United States might be perceived. Corregidor in the Philippines had fallen only three

83 Op. Cit. in note 73.
weeks before, so any further blow to American morale would come at the worst possible time. To his credit, this was a chance that Nimitz was willing to take.

Thus the forces that the Japanese and Americans had arrayed against each other were as indicated below:\(^{84}\)

Table 7: Naval Forces at the Battle of Midway on 4 June 1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAVAL FORCES AT THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY ON 4 JUNE 1942:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Japanese Carriers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>First Carrier Striking Force:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akagi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Force (First Fleet):</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Midway Force:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuiho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL CARRIERS: 6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **United States Carriers**                           |
| *Task Force-16:*                                     |
| Enterprise   |                                             |
| Hornet       |                                             |
| **Task Force-17**                                   |
| **TOTAL CARRIERS: 3**                                |

Table 7: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Carrier Striking Force Aircraft:</th>
<th>Task Force-16 Aircraft:</th>
<th>Task Force-17 Aircraft:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akagi:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enterprise:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hornet:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
<td>27 Fighters</td>
<td>27 Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
<td>37 Dive Bombers</td>
<td>35 Dive Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>21 Torpedo Bombers</strong></td>
<td><strong>14 Torpedo Bombers</strong></td>
<td>15 Torpedo Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hiryu:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Torpedo Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Torpedo Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kaga:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Torpedo Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 Torpedo Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soryu:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Zero Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Dive Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Torpedo Bombers</td>
<td></td>
<td>21 Torpedo Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL AIRCRAFT: 261</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL AIRCRAFT: 234</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL AIRCRAFT: 221</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL OPERATIONAL AIRCRAFT: 228</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main Force:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Midway Atoll Aircraft:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hosho:</strong></td>
<td><strong>U.S. Marine Corps</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Torpedo Bombers</td>
<td>VMF-221: 27 Fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Midway Force:</strong></td>
<td>VMMSB-241: 27 Dive Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zuiho:</strong></td>
<td><strong>U.S. Navy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Zero Fighters</td>
<td>6 Torpedo Bombers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Torpedo Bombers</td>
<td>22 Patrol Planes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL AIRCRAFT: 32**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Japanese Battleships</strong></th>
<th><strong>United States Battleships</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuso</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haruna</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hiei</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hyuga</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hiei</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kongo</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kirishima</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leyellista</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mutsu</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nagashio</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nagato</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>None</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL BATTLESHIPS: 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Japanese Cruisers</strong></th>
<th><strong>United States Cruisers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atago</strong></td>
<td>Astoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chikuma</strong></td>
<td>New Orleans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chokai</strong></td>
<td>Portland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haguro</strong></td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jintsu</strong></td>
<td>Northampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kumano</strong></td>
<td>Vincennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mogami</strong></td>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Myoko</strong></td>
<td>Pensacola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nagara</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oi</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sendai</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suzuya</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yura</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL CRUISERS: 16**

**TOTAL CRUISERS: 8**
Table 7: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese Destroyers</th>
<th>United States Destroyers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akigumo</td>
<td>Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amagiri</td>
<td>Aylwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amatsukaze</td>
<td>Balch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arare</td>
<td>Benham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arashi</td>
<td>Conyngham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arashio</td>
<td>Kagero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariake</td>
<td>Kuroshio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asagiri</td>
<td>Maikaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asagumo</td>
<td>Makigumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asashio</td>
<td>Mikazuki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayanami</td>
<td>Minegumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fubuki</td>
<td>Murakumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hagikaze</td>
<td>Murasame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamakaze</td>
<td>Natsugumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harusame</td>
<td>Nowaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatsukaze</td>
<td>Oyashio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatsuyuki</td>
<td>Samidare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayashio</td>
<td>Shigure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yudachi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yukaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yukikaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yugiri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yugumo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yugure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL DESTROYERS: 54

TOTAL DESTROYERS: 14
Table 7: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese Submarines</th>
<th>United States Submarines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-9</td>
<td>Cachalot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-15</td>
<td>Grenadier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-17</td>
<td>Pike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-19</td>
<td>Cuttlefish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-25</td>
<td>Grouper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-26</td>
<td>Plunger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-121</td>
<td>Dolphin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-122</td>
<td>Growler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-123</td>
<td>Tambor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-156</td>
<td>Finback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-157</td>
<td>Gudgeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-158</td>
<td>Tarpon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-159</td>
<td>Flying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-162</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-164</td>
<td>Nautilus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-165</td>
<td>Gato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-166</td>
<td>Narwhal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-168</td>
<td>Trout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-169</td>
<td>Grayling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-171</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-174</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL SUBMARINES: 22

TOTAL SUBMARINES: 19

American Command Relations

On 12 May 1942 the Commander in Chief U. S. Fleet (COMINCH), Admiral Ernest J. King, and Chief of Staff U. S. Army, General George C. Marshall, informed all subordinates that area boundaries should in no way restrict operations, aiding the common cause against the Japanese. This was intended to avoid the Area of Responsibility (AOR) boundary restraints resulting in lack of a coordinated effort inherent in the Coral Sea action. On 14 May a state of “Fleet Opposed Invasion” in the Hawaiian coastal and sea frontiers was declared. This conveyed to the commanders in the Pacific that the primary responsibility to oppose the invasion was given to the Navy, with unity of command vested in CINCPAC, Admiral Chester Nimitz. Land forces, including those assigned for that purpose by the Navy, would remain under the operational command of the Army to repel invasion. On 21 May, Admiral King declared

---

86 Ibid.
a prospective state of “Fleet Opposed Invasion” in the Aleutians. At the same time Admiral Nimitz formed Task Force Eight, the Northern Pacific Force, under command of Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, U.S. Navy, to oppose any advance of the enemy in the Aleutians -- Alaskan area. Commander of Task Force Eight (Theobald) designated the Naval Air Detachment Alaskan -- Aleutian area as Task Group 8.1 under command of Capt. L. E. Gehres, U.S. Navy, and the 11th Air Force as the Air Striking Group (Task Group 8.3) under the command of Brigadier General S.B. Butler, U.S. Army. This was not in accordance with the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive that in order to obtain unified air operations Commander Alaskan Army Air was to command all Army and Navy Air Groups in Alaska. By this division of command, unity of command of all air forces in Alaska ceased to exist.

Task Force One, which was composed of the old battleships, was located at San Francisco. It took no active part in the battle, primarily because of lack of screening units for anti-air and anti-submarine protection and lack of speed to keep up with the carriers should withdrawal from the Midway area become necessary. Commander of Task Force 11, Rear Admiral Aubrey Fitch in the cruiser Chester, was anchored at San Diego on 3 June having arrived from Tangatibo two days earlier. Unfortunately, Fitch and his Task Force, built around the repaired carrier Saratoga, did not arrive in theater in time for the battle. Task Group 11.1, which included the carrier Saratoga, the cruiser San Diego, and four destroyers was en route to Pearl Harbor on 1 June under the command of Capt. D.C. Ramsey, U.S. Navy, in the carrier Saratoga. Task Force 7, the submarine force, was divided into Task Group 7.1, the Midway patrol of twelve submarines, Task Group 7.2, the support patrol of three submarines, and Task Group 7.3, the Oahu patrol of

---

87 Ibid., p. 40.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., p. 62 and 65.
90 Ibid., p. 40.
four submarines, and six submarines were detached to support Task Force 8 in the Aleutians. Commander Task Force 7 was Rear Admiral Robert H. English, U.S. Navy. He stationed his submarines on three arcs (twelve submarines), one each at 200, 150 and 50 miles from Midway in sectors from 240-360 degrees true, as well as on a line (three submarines) from 045-225 degrees true with its closest point to Midway at 425 miles. English did this because CINCPAC’s intelligence pointed to a Japanese attack through the northwest quadrant, and the second group of subs would be needed to support carrier operations, which might result in a forced retirement through their area.

Task Force 16, under the command of Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, had been recently recalled to Pearl Harbor from the South Pacific area. Task Force 16 consisted of two first-line carriers, the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, five heavy cruisers for screen including the *Vincennes*, *New Orleans*, *Minneapolis*, *Pensacola*, and *Northampton*, one light cruiser, the *Atlanta*, and nine destroyers, the *Phelps*, *Balch*, *Ellet*, *Maury*, *Monaghan*, *Worden*, *Aylwyn*, *Benham*, and *Conyngham*. Rear Admiral Spruance assumed command of Task Force 16 as the hand-picked replacement for ailing Vice Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey.

Task Force 17, under the Command of Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, with the carrier *Yorktown*, damaged in the battle of the Coral Sea, arrived in Pearl Harbor on 27 May. The rapidity of emergency repairs allowed Task Force 17 to sortie three days later. Task Force 17 included the *Yorktown*; a screen of two heavy cruisers, the *Astoria* and *Portland*, and five destroyers, the *Russell*, *Hughes*, *Morris*, *Anderson*, and *Hammann*.

Task Force 16 departed from Pearl Harbor 28 May. Task Force 17 followed on 30 May. Task Force 17 rendezvoused with Task Force 16 on 2 June near dusk at Point Luck, so designated, appropriately, by Admiral Nimitz, and Admiral Fletcher assumed

---

92 Ibid., p. 66.


94 Ibid., p. 81
command. On 3 June the two Task Forces, now under the overall operational command of Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, who was the senior Task Force Commander, were 320 nautical miles from Midway. The two Task Forces, on Nimitz’ orders which were reluctantly executed by Fletcher, operated independently. It was then believed that a one carrier Task Group could maneuver better under air attack and avoid collision, a doctrine emanating from war gaming conducted at the Naval War College. Fletcher knew from Coral Sea, however, that the combined screening units -- now insufficient in numbers to support multiple independent carriers -- could when combined provide a much safer anti-aircraft firing posture than with the carriers operating independently. Probably due to Yorktown’s bomb damage and the resulting reduced efficiency in air operations, Fletcher chose not to challenge Nimitz’ instructions.

There are indications that Admiral Fletcher wanted to operate his carriers in close proximity. However, in the lessons learned he submitted to Admiral Nimitz after the Battle of the Coral Sea he probably provided the best rationale for purposefully operating Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 independently rather than in close proximity. Responding to a letter from Samuel Eliot Morison questioning Fletcher on who set “Point Option” for aircrews on launching the first U.S. strike against the Japanese carriers at Midway (Admiral Spruance maintained in a previous letter to Morison that “…he [Spruance] did not set Point “Option” except for his own carriers … and was not O.T.C. [Officer in Tactical Command] until after Yorktown had been abandoned and [Fletcher] [had] sent him the signal at about 1820 ‘Will conform to your movements.’…”),


97 Morison, Samuel Eliot. Letter to Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, USN (Ret.) dated 22 November 1947, p. 1. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence
Fletcher provided his rationale for the command arrangement he adopted. “Spruance is right. Whey the *Yorktown* Task Force arrived on the eve of the battle I Automatically [Sic.] assumed command of all the task forces. However, due to the lack of time for drill, conferences, preparation of plans, organization, et cetera, the clumsy and illogical method [of exercising command] was adopted of leaving Spruance in command of his two task forces while I retained immediate command of the *Yorktown* task force and the whole tactical command.”

Professor Emeritus and Captain, U.S. Navy (Retired) Frank Snyder maintains, and there is full agreement here, that the single most critical decision taken before or during the Battle of Midway was for Fletcher to go against his instincts and operate Task Force 17 independently of his own Task Force 16. While, as maintained by the aviator Jimmy Thach in his Oral History, this may have contributed to the loss of *Yorktown*, it provided the flexibility to strike the Japanese carriers while maintaining a reserve strike capacity aboard *Yorktown*, thus hedging against possible ambiguity in the initial locating information on the Japanese carriers. It also facilitated a Combat Air Patrol posture that optimized the overall protection of the American combatants, and ultimately compounded the Japanese problem in determining exactly how many carriers opposed them. This, in turn, made survival of both *Enterprise* and *Hornet* much more achievable.

This Striking Force, Task Force 16 and Task Force 17, was the only real opposition to the Japanese seizure of Midway. Its Air Groups were well trained although the *Hornet* crew lacked combat experience in the Pacific. Admiral Nimitz as CINCPAC

---


placed this Striking Force where he could either out-flank the expected Japanese Forces or transfer it to the Aleutians in response to a concerted Japanese offensive in that theater alone. COMINCH, Admiral King, directed Admiral Nimitz to oppose the Japanese forces by attrition tactics only and not to unduly risk carriers and cruisers. In compliance Admiral Nimitz directed his Striking Force commanders to be governed by the principle of calculated risk, the avoidance of exposure to attack by superior forces without good prospect of inflicting greater damage to the enemy.

**Aleutian Phase of the Operation**

The first strike by the Japanese came on 3 June against Dutch Harbor and consisted of two sorties of aircraft, the first launched from 165 miles south. The first air attack resulted in minimal damage to the military outpost there, but one of the three fighters and nine bombers involved in the raid was lost along with its pilot who suffered a broken neck while crash landing.\(^{100}\) A second attack was conducted the same day against American destroyers in Makushin Bay, on Unalaska Island near Dutch Harbor, which had been sighted on the return from the first strike, but weather obscured their targets. On their way back two Army P-40 aircraft shot two more Japanese planes down and another two were damaged beyond repair.\(^{101}\) Unfortunately, the first attacks only set the stage for an all-out offensive the next day.\(^{102}\)

Early on 4 June the Japanese unleashed nearly simultaneous air attacks against both Midway and Dutch Harbor. Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald (USNA’07/USNWC’30&’35), the Commander of Task Force 8 charged with the defense of Alaska from attack from the sea -- and twice a graduate of the Naval War College, first as a Commander in the Senior Class of 1930 and again as a Captain with the Advanced Class of 1935\(^{103}\) -- estimated the relative weaknesses of his situation quite well preceding

---


the Japanese attacks. He was well equipped to do this having served in the War Plans
directorate in Washington in the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{104} Theobald was convinced that the
Japanese would most likely attempt a landing in the Umnak – Dutch Harbor – Cold Bay
area, with an ultimate objective of Kodiak – Kenai.\textsuperscript{105} He therefore structured his plan of
action around the former area. He stationed a group of ten destroyers in Makushin Bay
on Unalaska Island that could be used as an attack force, and directed a group of four
cruisers with a four-destroyer screen to take station in the southern approaches to Kodiak
Island.\textsuperscript{106} He had fighter aircraft at Fort Glenn for the immediate defense of Dutch
Harbor, but his main line of defense was two groups of land-based bombers based at Fort
Glenn on Umnak Island and at Fort Randall on Cold Bay.\textsuperscript{107}

Here lay the problem with Theobald’s plan, and he knew it. The conditions of
almost constant daylight in the northern latitudes where he had to defend made stealthy
movement and concealment of his resources almost impossible. Far more important,
Theobald’s surface units had to rely exclusively on land-based air support which was
located at significant distances from the ships they would have to defend. Fighter aircraft
were few, and the radius of ships’ action would be limited significantly in an attack role
if they were to be supported by fighters. The utility of Army Air Corps bombing against
ships at sea, moreover, had been demonstrated at Coral Sea as minimal at best. This lack
of sufficient and capable aircraft for the role they would be used in was compounded by
their distance from the ships they would have to support.

To give some idea of Theobald’s problem, while Attu, the western most island in
the Alaskan chain, was only 650 miles from the Japanese air and naval base at
Paramushiro in the Kuriles, it was 725 miles from Attu to Dutch Harbor and from there

\textsuperscript{105} Bates, \textit{The Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 73; and Morrison, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
another 1,158 miles to Juneau, the Alaskan capital. Theobald petitioned COMINCH, Admiral King, for more and better-suited naval air assets with which both to search for the Japanese and defend on 24 May, but the best King could do was to provide him with additional search aircraft from the West Coast of the continental United States -- and they were released for Theobald’s employment on 7 June, well too late to be of use.

Theobald’s plans, unfortunately, were rendered totally inadequate as the Japanese chose to employ two light carriers, *Ryujo* and *Junyo*, first to do as much damage as possible to Dutch Harbor, and second to make landings on Attu and Kiska and support an advance party at Adak. They attacked at on 4 June at 1600, after Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, commander of the Second Carrier Striking Force, had cancelled a strike against Adak ordered by Admiral Yamamoto due to its obscuration by fog, the *Ryujo* and *Junyo* launched a strike of seventeen bombers and fifteen fighters against Dutch Harbor. This attack was more successful, destroying four new 6,666-barrel full fuel tanks and significantly damaging the hospital and a beached barracks ship. This time visibility allowed one of *Junyo*’s returning planes to see the newly-constructed U.S. airfield at Otter Point on Umnak Island from which they had been attacked by P-40s the previous morning. Until this point the Japanese had been unaware of the existence of this base.

Around the time of the launch, Kakuta’s force was ordered south by Admiral Yamamoto to rendezvous with Nagumo’s force, for reasons that will be discussed below, and further operations for the 4th of June were curtailed. At 1930, however, Yamamoto changed his mind and “temporarily postponed” that order, indicating to Kakuta that the occupation of the Western Aleutians must go on as planned.

After rejoining Vice Admiral Moshiro Hosogaya’s Northern Force Main Body, Kakuta’s carriers supported the impending landings on American soil. Rear Admiral Sentaro Omori, Commander of the Adak-Attu Occupation Force, landed his 1,200 troops at Holtz Bay on Attu and marched overland to their objective, losing their way in the process. Their occupation was complete in three days, having overcome the 39 Aleutes --

---

fifteen of them children -- and two American missionaries at Chichagof enroute and taking them prisoner. The Kiska occupation force also landed on 7 June and was opposed only by ten members of the U.S. weather station there. They met no meaningful resistance. The planned occupation of Adak was cancelled, probably since it was only 350 miles from the newly discovered U.S. air base on Umnak Island.

Thus the Japanese had gained a foothold on U.S. soil, and they would soon develop an air base on Kiska Island. Yet this face-saving conquest fell far short of extending the Japanese defensive barrier 1,000 miles to the east. Attu and Kiska would provide at best an outpost to detect any U.S. surface ship movement from the north-east toward Japan. The islands would prove difficult to supply, and would be of no use whatsoever in staging any meaningful attacks against the United States.

Admiral Nimitz contemplated forming a new task force comprised of U.S.S. Enterprise, U.S.S. Hornet and U.S.S Saratoga, the latter having returned to Hawaii from the mainland, but decided against this move when the limited extent of the Japanese operations became clear. It was definitely a good decision as Admiral Yamamoto had in the mean time augmented Vice Admiral Hosogaya’s force with the fleet carrier Zuikaku and the light carrier Zuiho. The U.S. did fly periodic bomber attacks against the Japanese outposts, but did little to deter the Japanese from maintaining their hold on them. In the week following the Japanese landings, both PBYs and Army Air Force bombers attempted to locate and sink ships of Admiral Hosogaya’s force, but without avail. As noted by Samuel Eliot Morison “…during the entire course of the war no Japanese carrier (so far as I can discover) was hit by a PBY, a B-26 or a B-17.” There was little reason to hope that they would do better in the cold and bad weather of the Aleutian chain.

**Midway Island Preliminary Action**

First contact with the Japanese was made at 0904 on 3 June when a Midway search plane reported two Japanese cargo vessels bearing 247 degrees true at 470.
miles. At 0925 the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station Midway, Captain Cyril T. Simard, received a report from another search plane “Main body, distance 700 miles, bearing 262 degrees true, six large ships in column....” At 1100 this report was amplified to indicate the presence of eleven ships, course 090 degrees true, speed 19 knots. This contact was on the Transport Group of the Occupation Force. Six B17s took off from Midway at 1200 to attack the Transport Group. At 1640 they reported “Attacking target.” Twenty-four six-hundred pound bombs were dropped. Though the flight leader claimed hits on one battleship and a near miss on another, no hits were actually made in this high level bombing on maneuvering targets, but the attack on the Transport Group caused the two Japanese commanders of the carrier groups, Vice Admiral Nagumo and Rear Admiral Yamaguchi, to make critical decisions regarding the number of fighter aircraft employed for defense and for escort and protection of their attacking Air Groups. At 2115 a second attack was launched from Midway. This attack group consisted of four radar-equipped PBY 5A airplanes each armed with one torpedo.

During this time Task Force 16 maintained station about ten miles south of Task Force 17 approximately 300 miles from Midway. Admiral Fletcher, Commander

---


116 Ibid.


118 Simard, Op. Cit., p 2. This group of ships is referred to by Capt. Simard as “Main Body” in his Diary.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.


122 Simard, Diary, Op Cit., p. 2.
Striking Force who was also Commander Task Force 17 embarked in the *Yorktown*, also received the two contact reports on the Japanese ship groups. Estimating the situation with regard to strategic and operational priorities, he decided these contacts were not important enough to expose his own position.\(^{123}\) Fletcher was waiting for the Japanese carriers to be located. He launched an afternoon search without result. At 2400 on 3 June the U.S. Striking Force was approximately 270 miles north of Midway. All submarines excepting *Cuttlefish*, which was closing Midway, were in readiness for contact with the enemy. The Japanese Striking Force of four carriers had not been sighted on the 3\(^{rd}\) of June.

**Naval Air Station Midway 4 June Operations**

At 0207 June 4\(^{th}\) the four Catalina PBYs that had departed Midway to attack the Transport Group of the Japanese Occupation Force which was sighted and reported at 0925 made contact with that force 500 nautical miles, bearing 260 from Midway.\(^{124}\) This group of ships had covered 200 nautical miles since first sighted and was now on the same approximate course, 080 degrees true at 13 knots. Three of the four attacked at 0143, but made only one torpedo hit on a tanker and returned to Midway without damage.\(^{125}\) This attack demonstrated for the first time the practicability of using long-range shore-based aircraft equipped with radar to deliver unsupported night torpedo attacks or low altitude bombing attacks against ships.

At 0520 a Midway PBY reported “Aircraft sighted.”\(^{126}\) At 0545 the same plane reported a carrier, distant 180 from Midway -- the most important contact of the battle.\(^{127}\) Then in plain English from PBY 3V58 came the feared message, “Many planes heading

---


\(^{126}\) Ibid., p. 110.

Midway, IMI Midway [repeat Midway], bearing 320, distant 150.\textsuperscript{128} The air raid sirens sounded and all operable planes began to take off. All planes were directed to attack the Japanese carriers except fighter planes, 23 in all, which were ordered to defend Midway and were airborne by 0600.\textsuperscript{129} The fighter director broke the fighters into two groups. They discovered the Japanese bombers in three rigid “vee” formations escorted by 36 fighters.\textsuperscript{130} The Americans were outnumbered and out maneuvered by the superior Japanese Zero fighters. All the Marine pilots were awed by the performance of this Japanese fighter claiming it had 20% more speed, climb, and maneuverability than their own F4F-3 Wildcats.\textsuperscript{131} The Marine fighters claimed that they destroyed 23 bombers and eight fighters -- a huge claim against a foe compared to which they were at such admitted disadvantage.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{Nagumo’s Attack on Midway}

Turning back the clock just a bit, at break of dawn, 0430 on 4 June, at 240 miles from Midway the Mobile Force attack group of 36 fighters, 36 bombers, and 36 torpedo planes -- a total of 108 planes -- departed for Midway.\textsuperscript{133} The Commander allotted about fifty percent of his carrier-based planes to this attack (108 of the 234 aircraft that were embarked and mechanically sound for flight) keeping a second striking group in standby conditions for use against surface ships. The two graphs below show the number of each type of aircraft embarked on the Japanese carriers and the way in which Admiral Nagumo elected to use them in his first and contemplated second strike against Midway Island. Please note in the second graphic that Nagumo assigned roughly half the fighter aircraft

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Simard, Op. Cit., \textit{Diary}, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Bates, \textit{The Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., pp. 110-111.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 111.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Nagumo, \textit{The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 10. It should be noted that the time of 0130 given in the text is Tokyo time and has been corrected above to local time. All times hereafter from this source will likewise be changed to reflect local time.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
from each of his carriers for each strike, but all of *Akagi* and *Kaga*’s bombers and all of *Hiryu* and *Soryu*’s torpedo planes to the first strike, and the reverse for the second strike. This was indeed an odd combination, and it reduced Nagumo’s flexibility considerably during the battle.

![JAPANESE AIRCRAFT](image)

*Figure 14: Aircraft, by Type, Available Aboard Japanese Carriers at Midway*

---

134 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
Although Admiral Nagumo thought there were no American surface forces with carriers as a nucleus in the area he did not trust his information fully. Immediately after his attack groups had departed he sent out seven search planes. The seven-plane search was not sufficiently dense to ensure the detection of any enemy forces beyond 150 miles from the Mobile Force and therefore was not adequate.

Using carrier aircraft to augment the search (Nagumo used only two) would have further reduced the number of bombers readily available to attack -- should a U.S. carrier force be located -- since all Japanese bombers were either in the air, most having already expended their ordnance, or were embarked with bombs configured for use against land targets for the second contemplated attack on Midway Island. Yet such a move would have appreciably increased the likelihood of the survival of the Japanese carrier force.

---

135 Ibid.
Nor did Nagumo fly a second cycle of search planes -- and this was a serious and perhaps fatal mistake. Nagumo had a decided advantage in range for his search aircraft as compared to his U.S. counterparts, except, of course, for the flying-boats from Midway Island, from which he could maintain necessary separation. Exploitation of this advantage would have given him as much as a 100 nautical mile strike range advantage as well, if the U.S. carriers were located on the outer edge of the search pattern. Failure to take full advantage of the design characteristics of his embarked search (including

---

136 Graphic provided by Mr. Jason Peters of the Naval War College Graphic Arts Department.
those on attached cruisers) and attack aircraft was an unconscionable mistake by Admiral Nagumo, regardless of the absence of intelligence indicating presence of U.S. carriers in his vicinity.

The planes mentioned above did not depart promptly. The plane from the cruiser Tone on number four search line delayed launching by 30 minutes. This late launching was also one of the causes of the Japanese failure at Midway. Early contact in carrier operations is highly important. Apparently Admiral Nagumo did not wish his search planes sighted before his attack groups struck a surprise blow at Midway. Though his decision did involve a trade-off between remaining covert and early location of any U.S. carriers that might have been in the area, the conservative choice for stealth was definitely not worth the huge strike distance advantage Nagumo would have had if a properly constructed dual-cycle search had located the U.S. carriers before they located him.

At 0552 4V58, a flying boat from Midway, reported “two carriers and main body ships, carriers in front, course 135, speed 25.” This American PBY was reporting the position of Mobile Force to Midway. At 0619 the Japanese air attack approaching Midway on course 255 degrees true was intercepted by American Marine fighters. At 0635 the Japanese air raid on Midway started. After shooting down most of the American planes the Japanese bombed Eastern and Sand Islands reducing Midway’s effectiveness as a base. The Americans on Midway claimed ten Japanese bombers destroyed and four damaged, as well as four fighters shot down and two damaged at a loss of 15 out of 22 Marines planes shot down; the Japanese reported only six total planes lost. The Japanese also claimed that they had shot down or destroyed on the deck 41 American fighters, one bomber and one float-reconnaissance plane. At 0645

---

137 Simard, Diary, Op. Cit, p.3.
140 Ibid., p. 4.
142 Ibid.
the Flight Officer in Command of the Japanese Midway strike, Lieutenant Joichi Tomonaga, reported “We have completed our attack and are homeward bound.” At 0700 he reported “There is necessity for carrying out a second attack wave.” At 0710, only ten minutes later and coincidental with the bomber attack on the Japanese carriers from Midway validating the need for a second attack, the American carriers Enterprise and Hornet started launching their aircraft to attack the Japanese Mobile Force. Nagumo, of course, was not aware of this.

The call by Tomonaga placed Admiral Nagumo in the position of having to make a decision that affected the outcome of the entire battle. He had been advised that another attack was required on Midway. His search planes -- now 200 to 250 miles away -- had not reported any enemy contact. Half of the planes remaining on his four carriers were standing by armed with torpedoes ready to attack enemy surface forces. His first attack wave on Midway would soon return and require rearming and refueling. Since there were evidently no American surface forces in the area, Nagumo concluded that it would be wise to attack Midway again. At 0715 he gave the order “Planes in second attack wave stand by to carry out attack today. Re-equip yourself with bombs.” This decision to change the load of the 93 planes Nagumo had in readiness for attack on U.S. carrier forces to bombs configured for a second strike on Midway was most unfortunate for the Japanese. All carriers were placed in a state of non-readiness for instant action.

At 0728, 13 minutes after the rearming order, Nagumo received a message from the Tone plane (Tone 4) which had been launched a half-hour late “Ten enemy surface ships, in position bearing 240 miles from Midway, course 150 true, speed over 20

143 Ibid., p. 11.
144 Fletcher, Frank Jack, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy. Commander, Cruisers, Pacific Fleet letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, Subject: Battle of Midway, dated 14 June 1942, p. 1. (Previously CLASSIFIED document) Please note that all times have been corrected to local time in the vicinity of the action. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A55, first frame 41571. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)
knots.”

This was the first news of an American surface force. At 0745 Nagumo sent out to his command, “Prepare to carry out attacks on enemy fleet units. Leave torpedoes on the attack planes which have not as yet been changed to bombs.”

But Admiral Nagumo could not launch an immediate attack because of the rearming order. To Tone search plane number Four he sent “Ascertain types of ships and maintain contact.”

Here was a situation that challenged his basic plan. The Japanese situation required immediate action should there be carriers with the force.

At 0755 the Mobile force was attacked for the second time by 16 scout bombers from Midway and again at 0810 by 14 B17s. The Japanese recorded that no hits were made. Admiral Nagumo was thus forced to make the most fateful decisions of the battle while under almost constant attack.

“The enemy is accompanied by what appears to be a carrier” was received from Tone 4 at 0820, and, on getting amplifying information, Admiral Nagumo advised Admiral Yamamoto of the presence of “…the enemy composed of one carrier, five cruisers and five destroyers … bearing 010 degrees, distance 240 miles from Midway” and that the Mobile Force was heading for it.

At 0824 a submarine was sighted. This was the U.S.S. Nautilus.

At 0827 a fourth attack was made by eleven Marine scout bombers, but once again no hits made.

Admiral Nagumo landed the last of his Midway strike aircraft at 0918, changed course to close the enemy, and went to battle speed.

Why this delay of one hour and fifty minutes after the original contact? The answer appears to be that Nagumo realized an all-out air strike for hitting the first blow against the U.S. carriers was vitally urgent but between 0705 and 0830 his Mobile Force

---

146 Ibid., p. 24.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., p. 11-12.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., p. 92.
was under attack by Midway planes. Between 0738 and 0918 he was recovering planes of the Midway strike. They were low on fuel. They had to be stuck below, in accordance with Japanese doctrine and carrier construction.\textsuperscript{153} Planes for the next attack had to be brought up and spotted on deck. This took time -- especially when under attack.

Much has been made of the timeline for Admiral Nagumo’s decisions regarding the immediacy of the requirement to strike the reported U.S. carrier. Many historians contend that it was Nagumo’s being caught with the airplanes he had ordered configured for a second strike against Midway Island -- and his resultant inability to have them change their ordnance loads to be more appropriately suited for the anti-carrier mission -- that was the critical lapse in his decision process resulting in the loss of all four of his carriers. Others, such as author Dallas Isom, make an excellent case that changing aircraft ordnance loads from torpedoes to bombs took much longer than anyone in the West has recognized, and that consequently Nagumo has been unfairly criticized for lack of good judgment when he was more the victim of circumstances beyond his control than a flawed commander who lacked resolve.\textsuperscript{154} It is the opinion here that Nagumo’s failure was to fail miserably in his attention to retaining enough fighter aircraft to defend his carriers against a possible U.S. attack sortie -- let alone accompany and protect a strike of his own against the U.S. carriers that opposed him. Certainly Rear Admiral Yamaguchi, his second as Commander of Carrier Division II in \textit{Hiryu} and an officer of flair and decision widely appreciated for his \textit{samurai} spirit, recommended to Nagumo in the strongest terms that a strike against what was believed to be a single U.S. carrier should be launched immediately and without fighter escort if necessary. Perhaps Frank Snyder has evaluated Nagumo’s failure best when he says “I’m convinced that Admiral Nagumo just wasn’t about to take advice from a ‘Plebe’ Admiral!” Such arrogance and intransigence on Nagumo’s part, under fire, makes a lot of sense.


In any case, though roundly considered the fatal decision by the Japanese in the battle, getting caught with aircraft on deck and rearming in reality did very little to ensure the destruction of the *kido butai*. Regardless of the many books written dissecting the time line for Nagumo’s decisions during the critical rearming phase, the fact remains that the U.S. strike against the carriers had already been launched, commencing at 0701 from *Enterprise* and *Hornet*. Regardless of the exact time Nagumo became aware of the presence of a U.S. carrier or of what was taking place on the decks of his carriers, the U.S. air strikes against him had already been set in motion. The best the Japanese could have hoped for was destruction of all three American carriers that would ultimately be revealed -- in which worst-case scenario for the United States all aircraft involved in the strike against the Japanese Mobile Force would have to land at Midway or ditch at sea if they ran out of fuel. Though this would have seriously affected the strategic balance of naval power in the Pacific until many more U.S. carriers started to join the Fleet in summer of 1943, the outcome of the Battle of Midway for the Japanese -- and its overall strategic consequences including loss of critical aircraft and irreplaceable pilots -- would have remained essentially the same.

![Figure 17: Aerial View of Midway Island with the Runway on Eastern Island in the Foreground and Sand Island to the Rear.](image)

---

155 Archival photographic image, circa 1941, provided by Mr. Daniel A. Martinez, Historian of the *U.S.S. Arizona* Memorial.
Prior to these attacks, Captain Simard at Midway had prepared for the expected bombardment. He had cleared his airfield. His battle stations were manned. At 0632 the first bomb fell on Eastern Island. Thirteen more bombs followed. Others hit Sand Island where the command center of Commanding Officer Naval Air Station was located. The island defense batteries and motor torpedo boats gallantly attempted to repel the attack but between 21 and 27 Japanese bombers and 36 fighter planes got through.\footnote{Bates, \textit{The Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 111.} The power house on Eastern Island was demolished cutting electrical supply. Gas lines from the main gasoline storage area were broken. Direct hits were made on one rearming pit, the Marine command post, and the mess hall on Eastern Island. There were numerous casualties to ground personnel. Captain Simard, with only three operable fighters to defend Midway and feeling he would be bombarded by surface vessels at sunset, decided to evacuate all remaining search planes and all personnel not considered essential to the continued operation of the Naval Air Station.\footnote{Ibid., p. 117.}

At 0706 the Japanese carrier group sighted the first two attack groups from Midway;\footnote{Nagumo, \textit{The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 13.} four B26s and six torpedo bombers, each armed with a torpedo.\footnote{Bates, \textit{The Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 89.} Approaching at a low altitude they failed to hit any Japanese ships. Each ship maneuvered individually. Anti-aircraft fire knocked down seven of the ten American torpedo planes.\footnote{Ibid.} Though not yet known to Admiral Nagumo, Commander of the Japanese Mobile Force, at the same time Task Force 16 was at a position bearing 065 degrees true and 175 nautical miles from the Mobile Force and had begun launching a strike from the \textit{Enterprise} and \textit{Hornet}.\footnote{Ibid., p. 88.}

The six Navy torpedo planes from Midway ran into the vanguard of Japanese fighters attacking Midway, climbed to 4,000 feet above the cloud level and escaped. On reaching the Mobile Force they dived through the clouds for the carriers. Five of the six
were shot down.\textsuperscript{162} The B26 group consisting of four planes sighted the Mobile Force about the same time. Two B26s, the others having been shot down, released torpedoes at a carrier without hits. Only two of the four returned to Midway and they were badly shot up. This was the first time in history that Army planes attacked war ships with torpedoes.\textsuperscript{163}

The leader of the Marine dive bomber group, Major Lofton R. Henderson,\textsuperscript{164} divided his 28 planes into two groups. When he sighted the Mobile Force he decided on a glide-bombing attack because of the obsolescence of some of his planes and lack of dive bomb training. No hits were scored. Twelve of the bombers failed to return.\textsuperscript{165} The B17s that had been instructed to attack the Occupation Force were ordered to alter their course for the enemy carriers. They attacked from 20,000 to 23,000 feet. The Japanese recorded no hits on the B-17s, which likewise made no hits on any of the Japanese ships.\textsuperscript{166} In these morning air attacks from Midway there was no fighter support and attacks were uncoordinated with no Air Group Strike Commander assigned. Yet the attacks from Midway were critical to the U.S. cause even though they made no hits on the Japanese Mobile Force.

As seen in the graphic below, the five separate and uncoordinated attacks from aircraft from Midway Island put the Japanese Mobile Force constantly in harm’s way. They represented, however ineffectual their bombing, a threat with which Admiral Nagumo had to contend. They also caused Nagumo to allocate his scarce remaining aircraft, having already committed 108 to the attack on Midway, to defend his four carriers. At this point Nagumo had only three ship-based fighters and 18 attack planes aboard his flagship \textit{Akagi}, three fighters and 27 attack planes aboard \textit{Kaga}, three fighters

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 112.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Major Lofton R. Henderson was shot down and killed in this attack. On 8 August, 1942, Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift named the field taken by his Marines “Henderson Field” in Honor of him.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Ibid., pp. 112-114.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Ibid., p. 114.
\end{itemize}
and 18 bombers aboard *Hiryu*, and three fighters and 18 bombers on *Soryu*\(^{167}\). This further reduced his options for an adequate search to find the U.S. carrier force and for constituting a strike once it had been located. With only twelve fighter aircraft remaining onboard his carriers he simply did not have enough to provide either protection for his four carriers or to send a strike group against the U.S. carriers -- and certainly not for both. As contended in chapter III, decisions on these allocations were to prove the critical element of the battle.

![Figure 18: Midway Island Air Strikes (and U.S. Carrier Torpedo Squadron Strikes)](image)

**Midway Carrier Action of 4 June 1942**

A comparison of the forces at Midway is quite revealing. The Japanese had the greater number of carriers, four to three; the Japanese had two fast battleships, with 16 fourteen-inch guns; the Americans had more cruisers, eight to three; they had more destroyers, 14 to twelve; more submarines, 19 to 15; the Japanese had a greater number

---


\(^{168}\) Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
of units with 6” guns; both sides had insufficient anti-aircraft heavy machine guns; the Japanese had 234 carrier based planes (108 of which had been launched in the 0430 attack on Midway Island), the Americans 227, though American fighters and torpedo planes were of inferior design; the Americans had a greater number of planes embarked on cruisers, 28 to 14; the Americans had 110 land-based aircraft for search, reconnaissance, and attack while the Japanese had none except the limited land-based search and reconnaissance from Wake Island. The Americans had a higher Task Force speed capability whereas the Japanese had a more balanced fast Carrier Task Force and a more balanced air striking force. The American planes were not homogenous as to speed and range -- a very decided weakness -- while the Japanese had a more homogenous design of planes permitting their tactical employment as one unit. The American torpedo planes were slow. The American fighter performance was inferior. The Japanese had no self-sealing fuel tanks and less aircraft armor. American torpedo characteristics were poor. The Americans possessed shipboard radar -- giving them an important advantage in locating incoming hostile aircraft and vectoring their limited Combat Air Patrol fighters to appropriate locations -- the Japanese did not. The Americans had fighter direction using radar and automatic homing equipment on carriers. The Americans had the advantage of being nearer to a major fleet base and logistics support.

The Americans occupied a flanking position, which enabled withdrawal if required and placed the Japanese between American carriers and Midway Island, essentially giving the enemy a fourth, and critically placed, “carrier” with which to deal. This compounded the Japanese decision-making process greatly as they had not only to defend on two flanks simultaneously, but to prioritize their attacks against multiple targets located in opposite directions. The Americans also had superior intelligence and surprise. Yet they were at a disadvantage in their failure to concentrate anti-aircraft and fighter defense due to separation of their two Carrier Task Forces. The independent American Task Forces (TF-16 and TF-17) operated under different sets of cruising instructions. These Task Forces had not operated together prior to this time, unlike the Japanese kido butai which had operated as a unit in every important operation since Pearl Harbor. Moreover, the Commander of Task Force 16, Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance, was a cruiser commander without aviation experience who had just replaced Vice
Admiral William F. Halsey and thus had to interact with an air staff mutually unsure of the expectations and preferred operational methods of each other. The *Hornet* Air Group was new and lacked previous battle experience -- a significant and soon to be demonstrated shortcoming. The *Yorktown* Air Group was a composite group from three carriers (*Yorktown, Lexington and Saratoga*, which had left most of its Air Wing in Hawaii while undergoing repairs in Puget Sound) and had never operated as a unit while the Japanese pilots had more combat experience. The results of these asymmetries would be telling, as events would show. The outcome would hinge on the respective abilities of the commanders to make decisions optimizing their respective strengths and minimizing their vulnerabilities.

**Clash of Titans**

Rear Admiral Fletcher felt that the enemy carrier force would come from the northwest and attack Midway about dawn on 4 June. His selected 0430 position for launching would place him on the eastern flank of the enemy’s daylight launching position. Fletcher hoped to avoid detection until after the Japanese attack groups had been committed to Midway. He would strike before they could return to refuel and rearm.

Fletcher, however, recognized that should the enemy advance on Midway from the north or east it would remove him from their flank. He would be between the enemy and Midway and open to initial attack. After he joined Task Force 17 with Task Force 16 at “Point Luck” on 2 June at Latitude 32-04 degrees North and Longitude 172-45 degrees West, Fletcher directed his Striking Force to proceed to a point 200 miles north of Midway, with Task Force 16 operating ten miles south of Task Force 17, in anticipation of action.\(^{169}\) When in position on 4 June 1942 he decided on a dawn search from the *Yorktown* in the northern semicircle to a radius of 100 miles and launched a Combat Air

---

Patrol. This radius, added to his Task Forces’ distance from Midway, would cover the attack radius of the Japanese planes. He also decided to maintain the Enterprise and Hornet in standby condition, pilots in ready rooms and planes spotted on deck for immediate launching.

Figure 19: Launching Points for American Carriers in the Battle of Midway

---

170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Graphic provided by Mr. Jason Peters of the Naval War College Graphic Arts Department.
At 0534 on 4 June the carrier *Enterprise* copied a transmission from a Midway search aircraft “enemy carriers.” At 0545 Rear Admiral Spruance, Commander Task Force 16, intercepted a report to Midway from a patrol plane stating “Many planes heading Midway bearing 320, distance 150.” At 0552 “Two carriers and battleships bearing 320 degrees, distance 180 nautical miles [from Midway], course 135 degrees, speed 25 knots.” At 0600 Admiral Spruance began to turn to the west in anticipation of attack orders. Seven minutes later Admiral Fletcher directed Admiral Spruance to “proceed to the southwest and attack enemy carriers when definitely located.” The caveat Fletcher attached to this order surely emanated from his experience with flawed reconnaissance aircraft intelligence reports at Coral Sea.

At 0614 Spruance changed course to 240 degrees true and headed for the enemy contact at 25 knots. His combat patrol was overhead and his Air Groups were ready for take off. Commander Task Force 16 was now faced with a vital decision. His information indicated that the enemy was located at 247 degrees true, distance 175 miles. Should he launch now at the extreme range of his torpedo planes or should he wait for a shortened range and more information? In delay he might lose the advantage of striking the enemy first. Another consideration reinforced by the events of the Coral Sea weighed heavy on Spruance’s mind: Was the reported position of the enemy carriers correct? Would the Japanese attack on Midway be diverted against him? Was his presence known to the enemy? Would his Attack Groups when launched break radio silence? Spruance, having estimated the situation and weighed his options, took the calculated risk and delayed launching. This was a courageous decision and paid off handsomely.

---


174 Ibid.


176 Distances based on plotting of carriers’ positions.
At 0700 without further verification but fairly confident of the location of the enemy carriers as reported by the Midway search planes, Spruance estimated their location at approximately 155 nautical miles distant. Actually the reported position was in error. The Japanese were 40 miles northwest of their reported position. Admiral Spruance had separated his Task Force into two Task Groups to operate individually in case of air attacks. Captain Mark A. Mitscher commanded the second Task Group in Task Force Sixteen aboard *U.S.S. Hornet*. Mindful of the Coral Sea experience, rather than have his Task Force break apart under attack, Spruance separated them before attack. He started launching from both the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet* at 0706 and Spruance set as their “Point Option” course for recovery 240 degrees true, speed 25 knots.

The *Enterprise* dive bombers were the first to depart. Since there was a delay with the torpedo planes and their accompanying fighters, Spruance ordered the *Enterprise* dive bombers to proceed on the mission assigned unescorted by fighter aircraft. The *Enterprise* dive bombers thus departed at 0752 on a heading of 231 degrees true. This move is open to question as it prevented coordinated bombing and torpedo attacks, which was accepted doctrine at the time. It is possible that Admiral Spruance realized that the Japanese Midway Attack Group was soon due back at the Mobile Force and would be refueled, rearmed, and launched again. He wanted to catch as many Japanese planes on deck as possible. Once again Spruance took a calculated risk to optimize his chance of

178 Captain Mark Mitscher had been selected for Rear Admiral, and his relief as captain of *Hornet* was already onboard when Mitscher was ordered to Midway. In that he was heading for a new assignment, he was probably aware that this could well be his only opportunity to make his mark in combat.
catching the Japanese Air Wings in the process of rearming on deck. In his After Action Report Admiral Fletcher would highlight the importance of hitting the opposing Japanese carriers while their planes were on the deck rather than just hitting the carrier’s deck irrespective of the deck load.\textsuperscript{181}

The \textit{Enterprise} torpedo squadron (VT-6), noting that the \textit{Enterprise} fighter squadron (VF-6) did not join in formation with them, decided to proceed independently and departed at 0806.\textsuperscript{182} The \textit{Enterprise} fighters inadvertently joined with the torpedo planes of the \textit{Hornet} (VT-8) Air Group, which also departed at 0806.\textsuperscript{183} The planes had no markings, identification was difficult, and they were launched at the same time. Thus the \textit{Hornet} Air Group was escorted by her own fighters and also by those of the \textit{Enterprise}. Since bombers must gain altitude and torpedo planes then could not climb over 10,000 feet when armed with torpedoes, the groups unfortunately became separated. If these groups could have proceeded together, the dive bombers of both carriers might have been combined into one attack group and the torpedo planes into another with a fighter escort available for each group.

Admiral Fletcher at 0645 recovered the \textit{Yorktown} dawn search planes with no enemy contact.\textsuperscript{184} He then changed course to 225 degrees true, speed 25 knots, to close the enemy. Fletcher now realized that he had to make an important decision. He believed from available intelligence, based in part on his own pilots’ reports from the


\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{184} Fletcher, Frank Jack, Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet 14 June 1942 letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, Subject: Battle of Midway, Op. Cit., p. 1. It should be noted that Rear Admiral Fletcher switched from using his Commander Task Force Sixteen designation to Commander, Cruisers, U.S. Pacific Fleet on moving his Flag to \textit{USS Astoria} when \textit{Yorktown} was abandoned.
Coral Sea action, that there were four or five carriers in the Japanese force. Only two had been located. This caused erroneous decisions to be made relating to the Hornet attack groups that will be discussed later. Attack against these two carriers was now imminent by aircraft from Task Force 16. Should he reinforce that attack or wait for information as to other possible enemy carriers? Fletcher decided to withhold launching. He may have remembered his experience in the Coral Sea where the Japanese nearly surprised him. And although he may have felt it is generally best to throw all available force at the enemy, as established during wargames at the Naval War College, in this case he refrained from doing so. However, after a time he realized that to leave the flight decks of two or three enemy carriers undamaged was to invite destruction of his own force. Therefore, at 0838 with no further enemy contacts reported, he decided to reinforce the Air Groups of Task Force 16 by launching half of his bombers and all of his torpedo planes with fighter support. He directed that the remaining bombers be brought from the hanger deck and readied for attack on additional carriers should they be discovered. This decision to withhold part of his forces was similar to that of Commander Mobile Force, Admiral Nagumo, during his first attack wave on Midway Island. The critical element of this decision, however, had been taken before the battle. On Fletcher’s recommendation in his After Action Report from the Battle of the Coral Sea the Midway carriers’ fighter complement had been increased from 15-17 (32 total on two carriers) to 27 on each carrier, making the allocation decision between defense and strike much easier. This factor alone probably enabled successful defense of Task Force 16 during the battle.

\[185\] Ibid., pp. 1-2.


\[187\] Sherman, Frederick C. Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Lexington letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet dated May 15, 1942, p. 12, Recommendations, paragraph 31-3. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A55, first frame 41571. (Previously CLASSIFIED document) This recommendation was subsequently endorsed most strongly by Rear Admiral Fletcher.
Operations of the *Hornet* Air Group on 4 June

The Attack Groups of each carrier will now be considered separately. On their way to attack the enemy, the *Hornet* bombing (VB-8) and scouting (VS-8) squadrons flew at 20,000 feet with their own fighters and those of the *Enterprise* in close proximity. The torpedo squadron (VT-8) flew at 1,500 feet, beneath the cloud level. Visual contact between them was lost. At 0920 Commander Torpedo Squadron 8, Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron, sighted the Japanese carriers to the northwest.\(^{188}\) He did not report this. Torpedo Squadron 8 headed for the southernmost carrier but was met by the full fury of the Japanese Zeros drawn down to 1,500 feet from their higher level Combat Air Patrol stations. All 15 of the slow, cumbersome torpedo planes were shot down.\(^{189}\) The only survivor, Ensign George H. Gay, launched his torpedo before going down. Ensign Gay survived by shrewdly keeping the seat cushion from his plane over his head while he watched the Japanese carriers steam by without being detected.

Meanwhile, Commander Fighter Squadron 6, Lieutenant James S. Gray, Jr., of the *Enterprise*, was circling at a high altitude. Clouds prevented sight of the fate of Torpedo Squadron 8. He had pre-arranged with his own Torpedo Squadron 6 that he would respond to a radio call for help. Apparently he had heard no call for help. Still believing he would find enemy fighters at high altitude, he wished to keep an altitude advantage. Presumably, he also believed that by drawing out and engaging the enemy fighters at altitude he would de facto accomplish his primary mission of protecting his torpedo planes and in addition afford protection to his bombers. He reported the composition of the enemy force as two carriers, two battleships and eight destroyers on a course to the north and that there appeared to be no combat air patrol.\(^{190}\) When he ran short of fuel he returned to the *Enterprise* without taking part in the action.

Returning to 0920, Torpedo Squadron 8 off *Hornet* sighted the Japanese carriers, but the Commander of the *Hornet* Air Group, Commander Stanhope C. Ring, with the dive bombers and Fighter Squadron 8 failed to see them. He was now well aware of the


\(^{189}\) Ibid., p. 128.

\(^{190}\) Ibid.
fact that he had reached the estimated point of interception. He was faced with the serious problem of finding the enemy. Unfortunately the reasons for his subsequent actions remain unknown and therefore the following analysis is based on the doctrine in force at the time and conjecture. There were several possibilities. One was that the reported enemy position was in error; a second is that enemy estimated course and speed was incorrect; a third is that his own navigation was off because of the effect of drift. Historians John Lundstrom and Frank Snyder are convinced that Commander Ring had been briefed by Captain Mitscher that the Japanese would be operating in two separated groups of carriers, as was the accepted practice in the U.S. Navy at the time, and that the second group would be operating at some distance -- probably around 20 nautical miles -- behind the first. Thus Ring had been directed to proceed directly to the second expected group of carriers. When they weren’t sighted, Ring probably turned toward his expected position for the two carriers that had actually been located. In any of these events, the prescribed procedure was to fly an expanding square. Instead he headed south assuming that direction was as logical as any. This decision is questionable. Ring did not allow for the enemy slowing to launch and recover planes or to avoid air attacks. He thereby failed to locate the enemy. Some of his planes reached Midway and some were forced down at sea -- fifteen ultimately returned to *Hornet*. Ring appropriately earned his place in history as the “dildoni,” in the Italian parlance, of the Midway campaign.

**Operations of the Enterprise Air Group on 4 June**

Lieutenant Commander Eugene E. Lindsey, Commander Torpedo Squadron 6 of the *Enterprise*, sighted the enemy at 0930. Without waiting for the dive bombers, which by doctrine were supposed to precede him, he attacked. He divided his squadron into two formations for a coordinated approach. The squadron made no hits.

---

191 Ibid., p. 129.
192 Conversations of Douglas V. Smith with John B. Lundstrom and Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder conducted at the Reading Room in Newport, Rhode Island, on Thursday, 13 January 2005.
194 Ibid.
five Japanese fighters attacked repeatedly. Ten of the fourteen torpedo planes were shot down.\textsuperscript{195} These attacks by the \textit{Hornet} and \textit{Enterprise} torpedo planes were unsuccessful, but they drew the Japanese fighters from high to low altitudes permitting the successful bombing attacks that followed. They also caused the Japanese Zero fighters to burn enough fuel to prevent their return to altitude to engage the U.S. bombers. Once in their dive, the Dauntlesses were virtually unstoppable.

When the \textit{Enterprise} Dauntless dive bombers reached the expected interception point Lieutenant Commander Clarence McClusky, the Air Group Commander, discovered no enemy fighter aircraft in the vicinity. McClusky reasoned that the assumed enemy carrier speed of advance could not exceed 20 knots because the carriers would have to maneuver to recover their Air Groups as well as to avoid the attacking planes from Midway. He therefore concluded that the Japanese must be to the north and flew an expanding square, as prescribed by existing doctrine. On turning for the third leg of the square he sighted a destroyer below him heading northeast at high speed. This was the \textit{Arashi} which had paused to drop a depth charge on the U.S. submarine \textit{Nautilus}.
\textsuperscript{196} A few minutes later at 1005 the Mobile Force was sighted and the problem was over. McClusky’s were the most important decisions made by an airborne tactical commander in the Battle of Midway. He approached at 19,000 feet noting four carriers. He decided to lead his 16 scout bombers against the carrier ahead and to his left, \textit{Kaga}, and directed the 15 dive bombers of VB-6, Lieutenant R. H. Best commanding, to strike the carrier to their right, \textit{Akagi}. Each squadron divided into sections of three attack divisions of “vees” and columns. This was to protect against fighters until the push-over point. The Air Group Commander, McClusky, turned toward his target, split his flaps and entered his dive. Successive planes of the first division of dive bombers repeated the maneuver. There was no fighter opposition, little anti-aircraft fire, and the attack was a surprise. The carrier \textit{Akagi} was launching planes and when hit burst into flames.\textsuperscript{197} The

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., p. 131.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., p. 132.
\textsuperscript{197} Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet [Admiral King] letter, Subject: Battle of Midway, dated June
second squadron composed of scout bombers armed with the lighter 500 lb. bombs attacked the second carrier, *Kaga*, scoring several hits. They were aided by the second division of dive bombers and in combination set the *Kaga* afire. The third division of dive bombers attacked both carriers. The *Enterprise* bombers retired at low levels through gaps in the Japanese screening force. They departed toward Midway to deceive the enemy, then turned toward Point Option, their designated rendezvous point for landing on *Enterprise*. Eighteen bombers failed to return to the *Enterprise*, but four of these landed on the *Yorktown*. Some landed in the water because Task Force 16 could not close Point Option, the predicted position of the carrier on their return. In reality Task Force 16 was about 60 miles northeast of its intended position on account of having to reverse its expected course of 240 degrees true into the diminishing wind to launch aircraft. Wade McClusky landed after doing a circular search with only two gallons of aviation gasoline left in his tanks. Four to seven of planes of his squadron were among those lost due to fuel exhaustion.

Why Admiral Spruance failed to inform his returning groups that he was not at Point Option is not clear. The Commander of Task Force 16, in establishing Point Option, should have taken into consideration all of the factors relating to the criticality of taking aboard his returning aircraft. In this case these factors did not change during the period of the preceding air action. Thus Spruance’s failure either to be at the prescribed rendezvous point or inform his air crews that the point had been changed is inexcusable.


198 Nimitz, Ibid. Spruance, Ibid.

199 Nimitz, Ibid. Spruance, Ibid.

200 Nimitz, Ibid. Spruance, Ibid.


Operations of the Yorktown Air Group on 4 June

The Yorktown Air Group had departed Task Force 17 at 0906 with orders to turn north if it failed to locate the enemy at the presumed interception point. At about 1000 Lieutenant Commander Lance E. Massey, Commander Torpedo Squadron 3 (off Saratoga while she underwent repairs at Puget Sound), sighted the Mobile Force. As he approached he was immediately attacked by enemy fighters. Yorktown’s Fighter Squadron 3 (also off Saratoga and enlarging Yorktown’s fighter complement as recommended by Admiral Fletcher after the Battle of the Coral Sea) tried to defend the torpedo planes but soon became separated. Of the twelve torpedo planes only two returned to their carrier. No hits were scored. The Yorktown bombing squadron (VB-5), which left one hour and 20 minutes behind the Enterprise dive bombers, by strange coincidence sighted the enemy at the same time. The presence of each was unknown to the other. Fortuitously, the Commander of the Yorktown Squadron, Lieutenant Commander Max F. Leslie, selected one of the carriers, Soryu, not attacked by the two Enterprise Squadrons. Thirteen of his 17 planes dropped 1000-lb. bombs. Several hits were made by the first planes which soon wrapped the carrier in smoke and flames.

Two planes attacked a nearby battleship and two a cruiser. No hits were made. All planes returned to the vicinity of Yorktown. Before they could land at 1159, while fueling fighters of the combat air patrol, the Yorktown radar spotted incoming enemy planes bearing 250 degrees true, distance 46 miles. The fueling was immediately discontinued.

Recapping the Action

At the time the last Midway planes were recovered aboard the four Japanese carriers, 15 torpedo planes were sighted. This was Torpedo Squadron 8 of the Hornet. All ships opened fire and additional fighters were launched. All 15 American planes were destroyed. A few minutes later Torpedo Squadron 6 off Enterprise attacked

203 Ibid., p. 133.
204 Ibid., pp. 133-134.
205 Ibid., p. 135.
206 Ibid.
and lost ten out of 14 planes. This attack had barely been beaten off when the *Yorktown* Torpedo Squadron attacked. They lost ten of their twelve planes.

![Figure 20: Diagram of Torpedo Squadrons 8 and 6 Attacks](image)

All these attacks made no hits but aided greatly to the final result. All fighter cover had been drawn to low levels and anti-aircraft activity was being directed toward the low-level attacks. This enabled the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* dive bombers to approach undetected and unopposed by fighters. At 1024 the *Kaga* was attacked by nine dive bombers of Scouting Squadron 6 which made four hits; at 1025 the *Soryu* recorded being attacked by twelve dive bombers (from *Yorktown*) which made three hits; at 1026 the *Akagi* was struck by three dive bombers from *Enterprise*’ Bombing Squadron 6 which made two hits. In less than two minutes the *kido butai* was reduced to three burning hulks with a single operational carrier -- *Hiryu* -- still engaged in the action. While Admiral *Nagumo* transferred from the burning *Akagi* to the light cruiser *Nagara*, Commander Cruiser Division 8, Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe, assumed tactical command. He notified Commander in Chief Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, and retired the one operating carrier, the *Hiryu*, to the north. At 1050 he ordered her to attack the enemy

---

207 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
carrier(s). At 1058 the *Hiryu* completed launching 18 bombers and six fighters to attack the single American carrier reported by *Tone 4*.

**The Inevitable Japanese Counter-Attack**

Drawing on the cause of the sinking of *U.S.S. Lexington* at Coral Sea, fuel lines on the *Yorktown* were drained and filled with CO2. Gas tanks were also surrounded with CO2. It was believed at the time that this prevented gas fires. The combined Combat Air Patrol of Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 was 28 planes, with 12 of those off *Yorktown* and eight each off *Enterprise* and *Hornet*. The *Yorktown* fighters had been launched so recently that they were still organizing their station assignments when their ship first picked up incoming Japanese planes at 1152 bearing 275 degrees true, distant 32 miles. The weather was excellent, and *Hornet’s* captain, Mark Mitscher, reports *Yorktown* as being just on the edge of sight on the horizon. The 18 Japanese dive bombers accompanied by 18 fighters off *Hiryu* that attacked *Yorktown* at 1207 were broken into small groups by the intercepting fighters and by the circular anti-aircraft disposition. Most of the Japanese planes were shot down, but about eight bombers succeeded in attacking *Yorktown*. Three bomb hits were made causing *Yorktown* to go

---


dead in the water and the flames from the island structure that resulted made the communication office and Flag Plot untenable.\textsuperscript{213} At 1313 Admiral Fletcher and his staff, desperately in need of the ability to communicate, transferred from the \textit{Yorktown} to the cruiser \textit{Astoria}.

At 1324 two cruisers, the \textit{Pensacola} and \textit{Vincennes}, and two destroyers, the \textit{Benham} and \textit{Balch}, from Task Force 16 joined Task Force 17 to assist the \textit{Yorktown}. At 1421 the \textit{Yorktown} was able to increase speed to 15 knots. She commenced fueling her fighters when at 1432 radar picked up another enemy Air Group. This group was the second strike launched by the \textit{Hiryu} at 1331 -- ten torpedo planes escorted by six fighters.\textsuperscript{214} The \textit{Yorktown} was caught launching her fighters. All destroyers and cruisers formed in a single circle, probably the first time such a formation was used. Despite maneuvering and fairly effective anti-aircraft fire, the \textit{Yorktown} was hit on the port side by two torpedoes, the rudder jammed, and the ship became dead in the water and started listing to port, ultimately to twenty-seven degrees.\textsuperscript{215}

At 1445 a \textit{Yorktown} scout reported a carrier, two battleships, three cruisers, and four destroyers. This was part of the Mobile Force. The Commanding Officer of the \textit{Yorktown}, Captain Elliott Buckmaster, now faced a serious decision. His ship was listing heavily, his power lost, auxiliary power was unusable and an enemy Carrier Force was

\textsuperscript{213} Fletcher, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} Nagumo, \textit{The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway}, Op. Cit., p. 12. It should be noted that Admiral Nagumo lists the correct composition of the strike as four fighters and nine torpedo planes from the \textit{Hiryu} supplemented by two fighters from the \textit{Kaga} and one torpedo plane from the \textit{Akagi}.
only 110 miles away. He decided to abandon ship two and a half hours later.\textsuperscript{216} This decision is open to question based on a proper analysis of the situation at the time. The value of a carrier was of paramount importance to the United States in mid-1942, demanding all efforts to save it. It would have been wise to have removed all but those required in salvage operations and to have done all humanly possible to bring \textit{Yorktown’s} fires under control and tow her back to Hawaii.

A little earlier at 1200 Commander Second Fleet, Vice Admiral Kondo, had informed Admiral Yamamoto that he was heading for the Mobile Force. This was on Admiral Kondo’s own initiative. Admiral Yamamoto supported this decision demonstrating his agreement with Kondo’s decision. At 1210 Yamamoto received the encouraging news that the \textit{Hiryu} attack group was attacking an enemy carrier. Only one carrier had been reported and now it was being bombed. This turned out to be the \textit{Yorktown}. It was not until \textit{Hiryu}’s second strike an hour and 28 minutes later that the Japanese became aware of the \textit{Enterprise} and \textit{Hornet}.

Admiral Yamamoto now conducted an estimate of the situation of his own and weighed his strengths and weaknesses. He was still, based on available intelligence and contact reports, superior in surface ships. Most of his air strength was destroyed but apparently so was the enemy’s. He decided to seize Midway according to plan. At 1225 aboard the \textit{Nagara} and evidently suffering from shock, Admiral Nagumo signaled his command that he expected momentary encounter with the enemy and would destroy it by daylight action. At around 1230 the \textit{Soryu’s} high speed experimental reconnaissance plane returned to \textit{Hiryu} when its own carrier was seen on fire. The pilot, who was having radio problems and was unable to report while airborne, reported that the enemy force had three carriers -- \textit{Enterprise}, \textit{Hornet} and \textit{Yorktown}.\textsuperscript{217} Also, a downed American pilot now held as prisoner, an Ensign from the \textit{Yorktown} taken by Destroyer Division 5, had revealed (under torture) that the American carriers were the \textit{Hornet} and \textit{Enterprise}, escorted by six cruisers and ten destroyers, and the \textit{Yorktown} with two cruisers and three destroyers. There were no capital ships left in Pearl Harbor.

\textsuperscript{216} Fletcher, Ibid. Buckmaster, Ibid., pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{217} Fuchida, Op. Cit., p. 228.
This was information of extreme importance. Admiral Yamamoto, learning his enemy was on general westerly courses, felt decisive action was imminent. This should be fought by his entire fleet. He prepared for night action and made his first modification in his basic plan. He cancelled temporarily the Midway and Aleutian operations. He ordered the Second Mobile Task Group of the Aleutians operation (AL) with carriers *Ryuho* and *Junyo* to join Commander Second Fleet, Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo. This with *Hosho* of his main force and *Hiryu* of the Mobile Force would give him four carriers. Meanwhile in carrying out Admiral Yamamoto’s orders to prepare for action against the enemy, his Main Group was heading toward the Mobile Force. The Aleutian Support Group had changed course to rejoin the Main Force as well. Cruiser Division 7, at high speed, was approaching Midway to bombard the shore installations during the night. Transports and seaplane tenders were retiring northwest. Submarines were tasked to make immediate contact with and attack the enemy.\(^{218}\) At 1331 the *Hiryu* launched her second air attack of 16 aircraft against the *Yorktown* and two other carriers now known to be operating with her.\(^{219}\) This strike included ten torpedo planes, including one from *Akagi*, and six fighters, including two from *Kaga*.\(^{220}\) Since the *Yorktown* was making 17 knots with her fires under control the Japanese were not sure they had hit the same carrier in both attacks. They lost five torpedo planes and three fighters, but made two hits.\(^{221}\)

**Death of the Kido Butai**

At 1558 a PBY reported three burning ships plus two cruisers bearing 320 at 170 nautical miles from Midway.\(^{222}\) The four operational B17s still on the island were ordered to attack these burning ships. Also six B17s arriving from Pearl Harbor turned and attacked at the same time. The Japanese avoided all these high-level strikes by short turns at high speed, even complete circles. Captain Simard at 1745 received an amplified

\(^{218}\) Ibid., p. 248.
report. “The three burning ships are Japanese carriers.” He ordered Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 241 to make a night attack. This attack group could not locate the targets due to darkness and overcast and returned to Midway without expending weapons. The Soryu had sunk at 1920 having been torpedoed by U.S.S. Nautilus (at 1359) and the attack resulted in the Nautilus being subjected to heavy depth charge attacks. At the same time that the Soryu was being torpedoed the Grouper, which was in the vicinity, was not as effective as the Nautilus. Although her commander sighted smoke from two burning ships at a distance of ten to twelve miles, he did not develop these contacts because of enemy depth charges and because he feared an enemy ship might sink him. The Kaga sank at 1925 as a result of internal explosions. The Akagi, whose situation was seen as “hopeless” at 1630 on 4 June, was finally scuttled at 0200 on 6 June on Admiral Nagumo’s orders.

Meanwhile, in Task Force 16, Enterprise launched a second attack group of 24 dive bombers, 14 of these being Yorktown planes that had flown aboard when their own carrier was torpedoed, and Hornet launched 16 Dauntless dive bombers. They were unescorted. They attacked independently on enemy dispositions which were exactly as reported by the Yorktown planes. Admiral Nagumo in taking all precautions for the protection of the Hiryu had ordered an unusually broad disposition of screening units. At 1705 planes from the Hornet and Enterprise caught the Hiryu by surprise, scoring four hits. Surprisingly, only six to twelve Japanese fighters were airborne to meet the U.S. strike -- a clear indication of the extent of Japanese plane losses from the day’s

223 Ibid., p. 6.
228 Ibid.
fighting. At 1730 the *Hornet* scout bombers, finding the *Hiryu* in flames, dropped 14 bombs on a nearby battleship and cruiser, claiming three hits on the former and two on the latter. In reality they had expended their ordnance without a single hit.

At 1712 Admiral Fletcher in the cruiser *Astoria* decided to depart company with the *Yorktown* and join Task Force 16. His decision is questionable in view of the situation at the time. Fletcher’s main strength, Task Force 16, was well to the east. The enemy might attack at any time during the remaining daylight or attempt to destroy the *Yorktown* during the night. Fletcher’s Task Force 17 forces were weak. Four destroyers were crowded with survivors -- about 2,300 in all. He thought the best decision was to retire -- to transfer the survivors to the cruiser *Portland* during the night which was then to head for Pearl Harbor -- to have the *Vincennes* and *Pensacola* rejoin Task Force 16 and to return with the remainder of Task Force 17 to the *Yorktown* the next morning. This was probably a bad decision. Several weeks after the battle CINCPAC, Admiral Nimitz, instructed: “In the event a ship receives such severe battle damage that abandonment may be a possibility, a skeletonized crew to affect rescue of the ship shall be ready either to remain aboard or to be placed in an attendant vessel.”

At 1800 Admiral Fletcher, realizing he could not permit the *Yorktown* to fall into Japanese hands, directed the destroyer *Hughes* to return and stand by with instructions to sink the carrier to prevent capture or if serious fires developed.

About this time Admiral Yamamoto decided to combine his forces and, when joined by the *Ryujo* and *Junyo* of Admiral Kakuta’s Second Carrier Striking Force from the Aleutian operation with their 40 fighters, 21 dive bombers and 21 torpedo planes, 236

---

230 Ibid.
233 Ibid., p. 141.
235 Ibid., p. 142.
strike what remained of the American force in a night action.\textsuperscript{237} While sending this dispatch he heard that the Hiryu was burning fiercely. But at 1915 he directed his command “The enemy fleet, which has been practically destroyed, is retiring to the east. Combined Fleet units in the vicinity are preparing to pursue the remnants and occupy Midway.”\textsuperscript{238} This remarkable message shows considerable confusion by Admiral Yamamoto as to the authenticity of information available to him and an under-estimation of the American commander opposing him. But Admiral Yamamoto evidently was determined to seize the advantage during the night knowing that to abandon the offensive state of mind is to forswear victory.

At 1816 Admiral Fletcher aboard the Astoria received a dispatch from Admiral Spruance reporting the attack on the fourth Japanese carrier, Hiryu, and asking for instructions for future operations. Fletcher replied “Negative. Will conform to your movements.” Fletcher decided at that point to have Spruance assume responsibilities as Officer in Tactical Command.\textsuperscript{239} Fletcher would follow the movements of Task Force 16 with the remainder of Task Force 17. By 1912 all planes had been recovered and surface forces had rejoined. Admiral Spruance, now de facto in operational command, considered what he should do. He realized that the enemy Mobile Force at 1700 was about 130 miles to the west-northwest with two battleships, three heavy cruisers, and four destroyers of which some probably had slight damage.\textsuperscript{240} They could reach the present location of Task Force 16 by midnight. There was a possibility of another carrier in the area as well, based on initial intelligence of the possibility of four or five carriers.\textsuperscript{241} Knowing the Japanese, Spruance reasoned that to save face they would not retire without seeking night action or a landing operation at Midway. He concluded that a move westward during early night hours might run into an ambush. At 1915 he decided to head

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., pp. 243-249.
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., pp. 142-143.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., p. 143.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
east, setting a course of 090 degrees true, speed 15 knots. He would still be in range to support Midway Island, if necessary.

At about the same time Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, the Japanese Commander Second Fleet embarked aboard the cruiser *Atago*, received orders that the Second Fleet, the Mobile Force, and Submarine Force were immediately to contact and attack the enemy.\footnote{Morison, Op. Cit., p. 139.} In the light of Japanese plans for night action Spruance’s decision to move east was correct. At midnight Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 were 190 miles from Midway, bearing 050 degrees true.\footnote{Bates, *The Battle of Midway*, Op. Cit., p. 144.}

**Japan’s Contemplated Night Action**

At 2130 Admiral Yamamoto received from Admiral Nagumo a confusing dispatch “Total strength of enemy five carriers, six heavy cruisers, 15 destroyers steaming westward.”\footnote{Nagumo, *The Japanese Story of the Battle of Midway*, Op. Cit., p. 17. Fuchida, Op. Cit., p. 149.} At 2250 he received another dispatch from Nagumo “The enemy still has four carriers, six cruisers, and 15 destroyers which are at present steaming westward. All the carriers of our force have become in-operational [Sic.].”\footnote{Nagumo, Ibid.} At 2255 Admiral Yamamoto ordered “Commander Second Fleet will take command of the Mobile Force.” Yamamoto had evidently planned to employ the Mobile Force as a striking force. Now -- with no operational carriers in the Mobile Force -- it became a surface force which should possibly be attached to some other commander. The logical commander was Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, Commander Second Fleet. Possibly he was also influenced by the fact that Nagumo, judging by his reports, was not in an offensive frame of mind. Vice Admiral Kondo, expecting encounter with the enemy after 2200, then planned this disposition: “The Mobile Force will turn about and participate in Second Fleet’s night engagement; such disposition from right to left will be DesRon 2,
CruDiv 5, CruDiv 4 and DesRon 4, with BatDiv 3 ten kilometers behind CruDiv 4, all on course 065 at speed 24 knots.\textsuperscript{246}

These are the forces that would have been engaged had both Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 combined for night action. The U.S. force included two carriers, seven heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and 14 destroyers. The Japanese would have opposed them with four battleships, six heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and 19 destroyers. The Japanese would have had greater fire power and full freedom of action. The Americans would have been forced to remain near their carriers or retire them at high speed on first radar contact. This battle is what the Japanese desired and it might have happened had the Americans continued westward. Rear Admiral Spruance decided otherwise. Success here would have given the Japanese command of the sea at Midway, but the Japanese were not to achieve this success as Admiral Ray Spruance retired to the east.

Admiral Yamamoto, finally convinced of the futility of his position, reversed his earlier decision and decided not to cancel the Aleutian operation.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{Spruance’s Movements on 5 June 1942\textsuperscript{247}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{246} Nagumo, Ibid., p. 60.
Operations of 5 June

On the day following the carrier battle the bulk of the Japanese ships were to the northwest of Midway and moving in a generally westward direction. Admiral Spruance, reversing his course of the previous night, gave chase and launched an afternoon strike. The Japanese, unfortunately, were beyond the range of the American planes at that point and the strike returned without success. During the night, two Japanese cruisers – the *Mikuma* and the *Mogami* – had collided while trying to avoid the submarine *U.S.S. Tambor*. When Spruance became aware of their situation, and since the augmented Main Body of Admiral Yamamoto’s force was confirmed to be out of range, Spruance wisely attacked these two ships.

![Figure 22: Spruance’s Movements on 6 June 1942](image)

Operations of 6 June

Admiral Spruance continued his searches for the crippled and retiring cruisers *Magami* and *Mikuma*. He launched three strikes against them once they were located.

---

247 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.

248 Ibid.
As a result, the *Mikuma* was sunk.\(^{249}\) Wishing to avoid contact under conditions of surprise, Spruance then turned away from the area to avoid the Japanese Main Body.

![Figure 23: Spruance’s Movements on 7 June 1942\(^{250}\)](image)

**Operations of 7 June**

Admiral Yamamoto, realizing that there was nothing left to gain, departed the Midway area to the west. Admiral Spruance departed the area to the northwest. The Battle of Midway had concluded.

---


\(^{250}\) Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
Figure 24: Comparison of U.S. and Japanese Losses in the Battle of Midway

The Japanese had lost four carriers, the U.S. one, but almost all of the Japanese planes in the battle were lost when their carriers went down. Most of the U.S. planes that were lost, on the other hand, were either shot down by Zeros or were ditched at sea after running out of fuel on their extended attack sorties. In all, just fewer than 4,000 men were killed in the Midway action. Many of them went down with their ships.

Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
“GREATEST GENERATION”?  

• 20s – PILOTS/GUNNERS  
• ~40 – ACFT SQDN CDRS  
• ~40 – DESTROYER COs  
• 50s – CARRIER COs  
ADМИRALS

Figure 25: Three Generations of America’s “Greatest”\textsuperscript{252}

The television anchorman, Tom Brokaw, has written a book about those Americans who fought so gallantly in World War II entitled \textit{The Greatest Generation}. In reality, however, there were three generations of Americans who served so well at Midway. The pilots and gunners, both of the aircraft and in the ships, were in their twenties. The Commanding Officers of the destroyers and aircraft squadrons were all about forty years of age. The Commanding Officers of the carriers and cruisers and the Flag Officers were in their fifties. Thus these three generations of Americans all did their part in achieving a magnificent and strategically critical victory.\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{252} Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.

\textsuperscript{253} Insights for this section were provided by Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder in his presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.
Midway in Retrospect/Conclusions

Overcome by fire and explosions, the last ship of the kido butai to fight at Midway, the carrier Hiryu, was abandoned and scuttled by torpedo from the destroyer Makigumo. To the bottom with Hiryu went her captain, Tomeo Kaki, and the Commander of the Second Carrier Division -- Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi, the ascending star of the Imperial Japanese Navy. As he waived his cap to his men on the destroyers Kazagumo and Makigumo he faced his fate in “complete composure.” How prophetic that vision must have been. As the cornerstone of the offensive might of the Japanese Navy went to the bottom, utterly destroyed, so did her favorite son. In addition to observing the honorable tradition of joining the fate of his ship, Yamaguchi might well have realized, even this early in the war -- speculation of course -- that Japan’s hopes of victory against a determined United States had vanished. It was 0510 on Friday, 5 June 1942.

Ninety men who fought in the Battle of Midway have ships named after them. Men like Chester W. Nimitz, Frank Jack Fletcher, Raymond Spruance, Mark Mitscher, Wade McClusky, Jimmy Thach and even Ensign Stephen W. Groves, a fighter pilot on Hornet, were honored by their country for their heroism in this historic battle.

So too was Henderson Field on Guadalcanal that was so essential to further success in the war effort named after Major Lofton Henderson, USMC, who led the Marine bomber raid against the Japanese carriers from Midway Island. But for what reason were these gallant men so honored?

The strategic consequences of the Japanese Navy’s operational defeat in the waters north of Midway Island were profound and lasting. Though the Japanese would continue to try and extend their defensive barrier to the southeast from their primary naval base at Rabaul in hopes of severing U.S. communications with Australia, their ability to prevail would now be fought on at least equal terms by the Americans. Moreover, even naval parity could be expected to last only until the industrial might of the United States came into full potential. But to be a “decisive victory” for the U.S. Japan had to be placed in a situation from which it could not recover. Though the loss of

255 Graphic provided by United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder’s presentation on the Battle of Midway, and used with his permission.

four of six carriers was devastating, the loss of the aircraft aboard those carriers -- and the precious pilots who were the best and most experienced in the Japanese Navy -- was awesome by comparison.

A credible Japanese source -- Mitsuo Fuchida, a graduate in the 1924 class of the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy, Air Group Commander for Admiral Nagumo’s Flagship Akagi during the Battle of Midway, and flight leader of every kido butai air strike up to that battle where he was grounded with an appendicitis attack -- attests to the loss of 332 planes by the Japanese Navy.\(^\text{257}\) Among those he lists six aircraft lost in the Midway air strike; twelve fighters lost of the Combat Air Patrol for the carriers; 24 lost in the attacks on the U.S. carriers; 280 planes that went down with the kido butai; and ten seaplanes from screening battleships and cruisers.\(^\text{258}\) To that can be added at least five planes (and one pilot) acknowledged as lost in the Aleutian Islands operation. That marks an astounding total of 337 aircraft lost in a single unsuccessful operation. While Fuchida notes that those carrier planes in excess of those embarked as part of the operational carrier air wings are accounted for as fighter aircraft of the Midway Expeditionary Force that were being ferried to Midway in the carriers, 61 in all, the loss of carrier aircraft alone still stands at an astounding 261.

Drawing on numbers of aircraft Japan had at the start of the war from chapter III, around 561 for the entire First Air Fleet, the Japanese Navy had lost 46.5 percent of its planes in a single day. Add to this the 56 planes or so lost around Colombo and Trincomalee on Ceylon and in operations in the Southern Resource Area and the 90 aircraft lost in the Battle of the Coral Sea (427 total carrier aircraft), and the Japanese Navy had lost at least 76.1 percent of its initial inventory of carrier aircraft. Aircraft production rate comparisons need not be introduced to demonstrate that First Air Fleet was in rapid decline relative to near-term U.S. fleet aircraft inventories. The Japanese Navy could simply not sustain offensive naval operations in the future against their American adversaries. Now it was the Japanese -- rather than the U.S. -- Navy that

\(^{257}\) Fuchida, Op. Cit., p. 289. Biographical information was taken from the cover jacket of this volume.

\(^{258}\) Ibid.
would be forced to react to their opponent strategically if trends continued. Any contemplated strategic initiative that required air support would further hazard their effort in the war.

Yet aircraft loses could, on the margin, be compensated for. Loss of pilots could not. Though pilot losses are much harder to estimate than plane losses since many of the pilots aboard the Japanese carriers were picked up or transferred to other ships in the vicinity, Ikuhiko Hata and Yasuho Izawa list by name 13 fighter pilots killed in action during the Battle of Midway of the 79 fighter pilots they list as killed in all actions including Pearl Harbor and thereafter. Using the methodology of chapter III, of the 97 fighter pilots expected to be aboard the Japanese carriers for the 84 operational fighters embarked, that would account for a 13.4 percent loss. By extension, of the 84 dive bombers and 93 torpedo planes embarked in an operational status on the Japanese carriers, using the same pilot-to-plane ratio as in chapter III would give you a total of around 204 pilots assigned to fly this complement of planes. Using the same 13.4 percent lost in combat ratio as for fighter pilots, another 27 pilots could have been reasonably expected to have perished. Since the Zero aircraft was acknowledged superior to anything in the U.S. inventory by American pilots, the Japanese pilots were considerably more experienced, and the Japanese dive bombers and torpedo planes were shot down at a considerably higher rate -- 24 to 12 -- while vulnerable during their attack runs, this number could be as high as 50 additional pilots lost. Taking only the lower numbers, however, at least 40 Japanese pilots were lost at Midway and in the Aleutians.

From the total expected pilots assigned to carriers by the Japanese Navy at the war’s outset -- 608 or so -- Midway operational losses accounted for at least seven percent of that number. Considering that 79 fighter pilots alone had been lost since Pearl Harbor, and given the greater number of bomber and torpedo plane pilots assigned to

261 Ibid.
carriers -- over twice as many -- losses in excess of 237 total carrier pilots could have easily occurred. Thus the Japanese had in all probability already lost 39 percent of their irreplaceable pilots, and probably a lot more. Given that 18 of the fighter pilots and at least 36 of the other pilots were officers, 54 of the 237 pilots -- or 17 percent -- likely to have been lost were of the leadership cadre. This also was to prove telling as the war went on.

The performance in command of not only Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Commander Striking Force and Commander Task Force 17, but also Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet and Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance, Commander Task Force 16 who assumed the additional responsibility as acting Commander Striking Force when directed by Fletcher, will now be considered with respect to the methodology set up in Chapter I to evaluate his adherence to the precepts of Sound Military Decision imparted during his educational tour of duty at the United States Naval War College. Specifically, his decisions will be evaluated as they relate to:

1. Their estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions they would be required to make. In this area all three commanders deserve a strong “A.” One could even make a case that Admiral Nimitz deserves an “A+,” especially since he risked all in believing the intelligence information provided for him. Such willingness to accept great risk based primarily on intelligence provided by his staff is a characteristic uncommon to American naval commanders. To his credit, Nimitz not only trusted the intelligence estimate provided for him, but he “hedged” against any shortcomings it may have had and increased the flexibility of his situation by directing his carrier commanders to base their operations in an area north-northeast of Midway Island where they could be arrayed against the Japanese either near Midway or in the Aleutians, as necessary, and where they would be likely to “flank” the Japanese carriers should they attack Midway initially. This was a masterful stroke by Admiral Nimitz that was executed superbly by Rear Admiral Fletcher.

So also was Admiral Nimitz’ direction to Fletcher to operate the two American Task Forces independently. While this decision was in keeping with U.S. doctrine, it violated the experience gained at Coral Sea. It also violated the long-held Navy principle of Unity of Command, even though Admiral Fletcher, as the senior commander assigned,
maintained ultimate command authority. Owing to *Yorktown’s* required repairs for the damage she sustained at Coral Sea, and to the sudden replacement of Admiral Halsey with Admiral Spruance due to the former’s medical condition, pre-battle coordination between the two Task Forces was simply out of the question. Thus Nimitz minimized the potential for working at cross-purposes and in the process increased the lethal potential and survivability of all three carriers under his strategic direction.

Likewise, Admiral Fletcher appropriately grasped the likely employment of the Japanese carriers against Midway Island. He thereby placed himself in a position to outflank his opponent and catch him with a significant portion of his aircraft irreversibly employed against a target from which they could not possibly be diverted to threaten his carriers. This demonstrated an excellent grasp of the geo-strategic situation.

Perhaps one criticism is in order. As a precursor to the anticipated action, as well as once contact had been gained on the Japanese carriers by Midway scout planes, inadequate attention was given, primarily by Nimitz but also by Fletcher and certainly by Captain Simard on Midway Island, to providing constantly updated information on the location and movements of the Japanese carriers. This almost caused the failure of the entire Midway operation as the carrier strike aircraft managed to locate the Japanese carriers almost by accident and as their fuel was nearly exhausted, assuming they wanted to return to their carriers. It should be added that, in all other respects, Captain Simard, the commander of Naval Air Station Midway, correctly and astutely estimated the situation and positioned his command to optimally search, locate and attack the Japanese as well as defend against attack.

2. The commanders’ demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously his decision in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and his flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required. Fletcher once again formulated an aggressive and purposeful course of action, which he conveyed adequately to Admiral Spruance. His decision to adhere to Admiral Nimitz’ order to operate the carrier Task Forces independently was also sound. Fletcher’s decision to launch only *Enterprise* and *Hornet* aircraft in his initial sortie against the Japanese due to possible misidentification of the presence of carriers among the ships sighted and/or positional errors in the pilot’s
reporting of the contacts was exceptionally astute. Fletcher thus maintained his options should errors in the pilots’ reports misdirect his initial attack or additional carriers expected to be in the area be located. He also maximized his potential for defense of his carriers.

Spruance’s most important decision -- to turn east and away from a potential night action against a much superior Japanese surface force -- was well-reasoned and sound. Thus these commanders deserve high marks for their major decisions. Fletcher’s failure to ensure constant tracking of the Japanese carriers once they were located by Midway aircraft, a lapse in directing and ensuring surveillance, and his lack of understanding the importance of all efforts to save *Yorktown* in view of its strategic importance to the war effort notwithstanding, both commanders deserve a solid “A” in this important area.

3. Were the command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle?

Once again, considering their lack of ability to coordinate their actions before the battle, separation and independence of action for Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 was a splendid arrangement for this engagement. However, passing by Admiral Fletcher of de facto command to Admiral Spruance once he had transferred his Flag to *Astoria* was a questionable decision. Passing responsibility for the operation to a junior who was a non-aviator -- a cruiser commander without previous carrier battle experience even though Spruance had by far the most qualified carrier staff -- was an unnecessarily risky decision that worked out well. Also, Rear Admiral Theobald’s arrangement of command for aviation units in the Alaskan theater contravened unity of command and good judgment. Also, Captain Simard on Midway Island was left essentially outside the command loop. A “B” here seems appropriate.

4. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events.

Though Admiral Fletcher adhered to the accepted doctrine of separation of U.S. carriers to increase their independence of action under attack, this went against his experience at Coral Sea. Normally this would indicate a weakness in his decision
process. However, for the reasons he provided to Samuel Eliot Morison enumerated above, this adherence to questionable doctrine was unquestionably the right decision. Moreover, Fletcher optimized his allocation of aircraft for search, strike and defense, and minimized risk by withholding *Yorktown*’s aircraft from the initial strike long enough to ensure the accuracy of the information he had received on the location and composition of the Japanese force. In doing this he adhered doggedly to Admiral Nimitz’ instructions to “be governed by the principle of calculated risk, the avoidance of exposure to attack by superior forces without good prospect of inflicting greater damage to the enemy.” A strong “A” should be assigned in this area.

5. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively. As demonstrated above, all major commanders involved in the Battle of Midway had an excellent appreciation of mission requirements. This was true of Admiral Theobald, even though he lacked the resources to carry out his assigned mission in Alaska, and it was particularly true of Captain Simard on Midway Island, save for providing continuous updates on the location and movement of the Japanese carriers once they were located.

Perhaps most important, Admiral Fletcher in particular and other commanders to a lesser extent placed great trust in the knowledge and instincts of their subordinates. Fletcher refrained from giving Admiral Spruance, a cruiser commander, more frequent and numerous directives than were absolutely needed. When he decided that he was no longer in a position best to direct the actions of his Striking Force, he unhesitatingly passed authority for completion of the operation to Spruance -- and then refrained from second-guessing Spruance and inserting himself in tactical command once this decision was made. All units of Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 worked smoothly together through the entire battle. Considering the lack of pre-execution coordination for such a major naval engagement, as well as the overwhelming eight to one disadvantage in ship numbers when compared to the Japanese, such a high degree of mutual understanding and confidence up and down the chain of command was remarkable. Perhaps an “A+” is warranted here.

One must also ask what engendered such a degree of like thinking and mutual confidence. Certainly Fletcher was aware of Raymond Spruance’s reputation for
prudence and confident action. He surely was also aware that Spruance had been both a student and an instructor at the Naval War College. Thus Fletcher had every reason to appreciate Spruance’s fundamental basing in Navy doctrine and expect his adherence to *Sound Military Decision*.

6. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination. From start to attack to withdrawal, the foregoing discussion should establish this unequivocally in Fletcher’s decision process and performance -- “A+.”

7. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action. Here Admiral Nimitz deserves most of the credit. He used his available intelligence wisely and positioned his carriers against a vastly superior force in a way that would optimize their chance of success. His instructions on calculated risk conveyed appropriately the relative importance of the immediate strategic situation to the overall and longer term strategic outcome of the war against Japan. Similarly, Admiral Fletcher approached the Japanese in a way that would at once maximize his opportunity for a successful attack leading to destruction of the Japanese carrier force, while simultaneously enabling an avenue of escape should unacceptable risk to his carriers develop. The plan he executed, developed in a compressed time frame, was brilliant. At the risk of losing grading credibility -- “A+.”

8. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements. As for the Coral Sea engagement, the After Action Reports and lessons learned for the Battle of Midway were complete, well thought out, and timely. This was another strong area attended to in a useful and methodical way. Only inclusion of a more comprehensive consideration of Japanese mistakes and emerging patterns of operation could have improved the various commanders’ performance in this area. An “A-“ is warranted here.

History can hardly deny the success achieved by the U.S. Navy in the Battle of Midway. However, there were flaws in the conduct of that action. Chief among them was the haphazard series of carrier strikes conducted against the Japanese that resulted in sinking of the *Akagi*, *Kaga* and *Soryu*. The success of those attacks can be attributed
more to luck than good planning or proper execution of doctrine. Yet, by comparison, the decision processes employed by Admirals Nagumo and Yamamoto were flawed in the extreme. Numerical advantage and aircraft design superiority -- two major factors that should have worked to the Japanese advantage -- were incompetently squandered. When other inappropriate decisions discussed above are considered, one can not help but see the advantage the American commanders had in fighting a compliant foe. Another insurmountable advantage came from Admiral Yamamoto’s pursuit of the Port Moresby operation resulting in the loss of the carriers Shokaku and Zuikaku for the more important operation at Midway. Thus, in combination, the techniques of Sound Military Decision employed by officers of the United States Pacific Fleet since Pearl Harbor had evened the naval balance of power in that theater and rolled the Japanese offensive onslaught back on its heels. For the first time since 8 December 1941 things were looking up for the American people and the military effort they had arrayed against Japan.
V The Fight for Guadalcanal: the Battle of the Eastern Solomons

“Thick fog.” So starts the Chief of Staff for Combined Fleet, Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki’s diary entry for Friday, 5 June 1942.² Never in the history of the Imperial Japanese Navy had an officer’s diary started a day more appropriately.

¹ Image provided by Mr. Edward S. Miller from his PowerPoint slides for lecture “War Plan Orange” given on 2 December 2004 to Douglas V. Smith’s Elective Seminar on World War II in the Pacific Theater, U.S. Naval War College, room C-322B.
Midway fell on Ugaki with the impact of an avalanche. The Japanese were not totally unrealistic, and understood that their plan to seize American territory and lure out the U.S. Fleet posed certain dangers. They could have accepted the loss of a ship or two, but to lose four carriers with all their aircraft plus a heavy cruiser was almost beyond comprehension.

Along with the psychological shock of decisively losing a battle the Japanese had fully expected to win, and the consequent loss of ships and lives, Ugaki experienced deep personal sorrow when an academy classmate, one of his closest friends and colleagues, Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi, chose to go down with his flagship, the CV *Hiryu*. Ugaki [was] torn between his grief at this loss and his pride in Yamaguchi’s nobility, as he saw it, in thus fulfilling his command responsibility.²

The Battle of Midway was a crushing blow for the Japanese. They had no choice but to regroup and rethink their strategy. In a very real sense the “fog of war” had set in just as Baron Carl von Clausewitz had remonstrated in his treatise *On War*. Analysis and evaluation, followed by an estimate of the situation were in order. Admiral Ugaki had the responsibility for analysis of Fleet engagements, so that Admiral Yamamoto and his staff might “profit from the experience.”³

Admiral Ugaki’s “lessons learned” from the Midway debacle are logical, but also somewhat surprising. Both Ugaki and the Combined Fleet Staff were concerned that the U.S. was able, through intelligence gathered, to be in a geographically commanding position in relation to Japanese units in the vicinity of Midway -- especially when the U.S. had relatively few carriers and Dutch Harbor and the Aleutian Island chain were so obviously threatened. Having explored several possibilities, they came to the mutual agreement that ship sightings by U.S. submarines was the most logical answer. Never in Admiral Ugaki’s diary is the possibility of compromise of the Japanese Navy’s JN-25

---


³ Ibid., p. 133.

⁴ Ibid.
codes even mentioned until well after the event -- 30 July.\(^5\) Thus the Japanese appear to have failed to explore an area of huge vulnerability that would continue to hound them throughout the war.

Ugaki also reasoned -- and convinced others including Admiral Yamamoto -- that over-concentration of carriers was a primary cause of the Midway disaster. Suggesting that this was like “offering many eggs in one basket,” the Chief of Staff, Combined Fleet reasoned that the Japanese Navy should break with its previous, and for the most part successful, doctrine of concentrating carriers in a single group. Instead two air fleets or task forces were needed so that from four to as many as six carriers could be used in two geographically separated but mutually supporting groups.\(^6\)

Another finding was that measures needed to be taken to reduce vulnerability from attack by the enemy while Japanese carriers were launching against another target in an area different from that from which the enemy attack was launched. Admiral Ugaki showed some concern that the First Air Fleet Staff had not taken adequate measures to address this vulnerability. Lack of adequate air search on “flanks” was determined to be a shortcoming, but no concrete proposal to remedy this problem was offered.\(^7\)

Finally, Ugaki postulated that “the front area of our invasion plan was expanded too widely.”\(^8\) This had prevented concentration of forces for a night engagement after the four carriers of the kido butai had been sunk. The Fourth Carrier Division of the northern force involved in the Aleutian operations was too far away to join in the action.\(^9\) However, shortening the distance between major groups of ships rather than concentration of them in a single or several closely-grouped Task Forces was accepted as the answer.\(^10\)

\(^5\) Ibid., pp. 139-142 and 174.
\(^6\) Ibid., pp. 144-145.
\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 140-141.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 144.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 144-145.
Having considered the causes for the defeat at Midway, Admiral Ugaki and the Combined Fleet Staff by 18 July 1942, only two weeks after that disaster, decided on their future “requirements” and on future near-term Japanese strategy:

1. Increased supply of aircraft.
2. New inventions [unspecified] and supply of weapons.
3. Future policy of directing the war (execution of operations against India).\(^{11}\)

Thus, rather than conducting a detailed strategic reappraisal, Combined Fleet merely accepted that mistakes had been made at Midway, vowed to eliminate those mistakes in the future, and decided to continue with a strategy intending to link up with their German allies in the Indian Ocean. The code name for that objective was “Operation Orient.” Though Operation Orient was an ongoing effort, Japan had already come to the decision that its feasibility was in question. The whole concept had suffered a major setback when, on 19 January 1942, Combined Fleet Headquarters had received a copy of the new Tripartite Axis military agreement.\(^{12}\) That agreement, although making a passing reference to Germany’s advance eastward in the Caucasus, said nothing at all with regard to a future mutual offensive effort by Japan and Germany.\(^{13}\) To further scuttle this operational option, the Japanese Army had shown a latent disinclination to support it. By 30 July, Admiral Ugaki had become convinced that the Army would probably go along with a planned move against India to knock out the crown jewel in the British Empire and in the process deny Persian Gulf oil to the British Navy -- but not until 1943.\(^{14}\)

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 172.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
**Strategic Reappraisal**

Unlike Vice Admiral Ugaki and the Combined Fleet Staff, Admiral Nimitz in Hawaii decided in the process of conducting a strategic reappraisal that American options were limited until additional carriers and other needed ships started to arrive in summer of 1943, but that going on the offensive in a limited and calculated way was now a possibility. In viewing the situation in the Pacific he saw certain Japanese vulnerabilities that had recently started to emerge. Always wary of Japanese capabilities as well as their intentions, Nimitz pressed forward Pacific Fleet planning aimed at countering the most likely Japanese naval moves, but hedging against some unlikely and potential catastrophic event.

Looking to his west, Nimitz saw that Japan’s potential for a renewed offensive to take Midway Island was not good. Surely the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* still remained available for such an undertaking, along with around 144 aircraft embarked on them. Yet the nominal aircraft loads for the four carriers lost by the Japanese at Midway was at least 234, based on pre-war estimates and observations, and, even if augmented by other light carriers (CLs)\(^{15}\) in her inventory to bring the aircraft available up to or over that number, it was unlikely that the Japanese would risk the very viability of their Navy on such a risky endeavor. In the North Pacific, a renewed thrust into Alaska remained a possibility, but Japan’s demonstrated limited objectives there when she pressed her hand at Midway indicated strongly a disinclination to try to exploit this region of great distances and hostile weather.

Moreover, Japan had to have used a considerable amount of her limited petroleum resources to array her vast armada for the Midway and Aleutian Islands offensives. Her

\(^{15}\) It is worth noting that during the Second World War Fleet Carriers (CV) normally carried between 90 and 100 planes; Light Carriers (CVL or CL) normally carried from 45 to 50 planes; and Escort Carriers (CVE) usually carried from 23 to 28 planes. The United States, unlike the Japanese who followed British carrier design parameters and hangared their aircraft below decks, used the “deck park” method of carrying planes on deck and using space below decks for repairs, etc. Thus U.S. carriers were often prone to carry more aircraft than their displacement would lead one to estimate.
Army, with its distinctively continental focus, needed petroleum to sustain its gains in Southeast Asia and press its advances into China. Her domestic situation, including both her economy and her production of implements of war, also called for petroleum resources. The necessary oil for these needs lay in adequate amounts and within reasonable distances only in the former Dutch, and to a lesser extent British, holdings in the maritime regions of Southeast Asia -- known to the Japanese as the “Southern Resource Area.”

Along with this Nimitz was acutely aware of U.S. pre-war planning for a possible war with Japan. War Plan Orange had been formulated and refined repeatedly since 1907 and its implications were clear. The road to Japan, where a final settlement of the war could only be reached, was through the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Caroline Islands, the Marianas Islands and the Volcano Islands. This “island hopping,” as it was to become known, had one vital component -- access for movement of men and materials to and through Australia. Japan’s defense of her gains in the Southern Resource Area and America’s road to Tokyo converged at a place in the Solomon Islands known as Guadalcanal. On 7 August 1942 the United States First Marine Division hit the beaches there.

This operation, however, was not one taken without controversy. General Douglas MacArthur proposed an offensive of his own on 8 June. Tasked with the primary responsibility of holding the eastern approaches to New Guinea and the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) to Australia, MacArthur advocated a surprise amphibious landing on Rabaul, the primary Japanese naval base in the area on New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago.16 This proposal was viewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff with favor as the first opportunity to go on the offensive against Japan since the demoralizing loss of the American foothold in the Philippines. Wary about placing naval forces under the command of an Army General who might well squander scarce assets, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet (CominCh)

recommended a less risky alternative of taking Tulagi in the Solomon Islands chain.\textsuperscript{17} Suspecting from intelligence that the Japanese were re-enforcing Rabaul and the Southern Resource Area, King pressed for an early offensive.\textsuperscript{18} This option supported well Admiral Nimitz’ concern for maintaining the SLOCs with Australia.

\textbf{The Fight for Guadalcanal}

Landing simultaneously on Guadalcanal and the nearby island of Tulagi, the Marines drove the Japanese into the jungle. For the Japanese this was an unacceptable turn of events. Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, the newly-installed Commander of the Japanese Eighth Fleet at Rabaul, Japan’s main naval base in the South Pacific 600 miles to the north northwest, responded quickly and with vigor. It would not be until 14 November 1942 that the Japanese would taste ultimate defeat of their attempt to re-take Guadalcanal that the U.S. enclave there and the important Henderson Field from which staged the CACTUS Air Force would be secure. The losses suffered there in what historian John Lundstrom has rightly called “the Naval Battle for Guadalcanal”\textsuperscript{19} by the Japanese Navy -- and particularly the aircraft of the First Air Fleet aboard her carriers -- have rightly been cited by Lundstrom and several other authorities on World War II as even more decisive with respect to the war in the Pacific than the resounding U.S. victory at Midway. What follows is a consideration of the Naval Battle for Guadalcanal, the two carrier battles that were an integral part of it (the Battle of Santa Cruz will be covered in the next chapter), and the decisions that contributed to the outcomes of those battles.

\textbf{Choosing a Commander}

On 19 June Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley assumed duties as Commander South Pacific Area (COMSOPAC) under Admiral Chester Nimitz. Nimitz informed Ghormley that two two-carrier Task Forces would rotate patrolling in his area of responsibility, and that there would be four-day overlap periods in their rotational schedule. During this period, Nimitz advised Ghormley, offensive operations against the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Japanese might be contemplated. Yet to be decided was who would be placed in command of these operations if they were directed.

Five days later Commander-in-Chief U.S. Fleet, Admiral King in Washington, directed that these two-carrier task forces be placed on 12-hour alert. Admiral Nimitz had four carriers available for the impending tasking. *U.S.S. Saratoga*, Flagship of Vice Admiral “Bull” Halsey’s Task Force 11, was enroute to Midway Island to deliver aircraft. *U.S.S. Enterprise*, Flagship of Task Force 16; *U.S.S. Hornet*, Flagship of Task Force 17 and *U.S.S. Wasp* (CV-7), about to be transferred from the Atlantic early in July and Flagship of Task Force 18, were also available. Aboard *Wasp* as Commander of Task Force 18 was Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes, the senior commander after Halsey, who was still hospitalized with dermatitis. Graduating with Frank Jack Fletcher in the Naval Academy class of 1906, Noyes was just three lineal numbers senior to Fletcher. Academics do count! Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance was tasked to assume duties as Chief of Staff for CINCPAC, Admiral Nimitz.

Initially, Vice Admiral Ghormley was ordered by Admiral King to assume personal command of the operation in his theater, “Operation Shoestring” as it came to be called because of the deficiencies in ships, aircraft and equipment to support the struggle for Guadalcanal. Admiral Nimitz, however, wanted a combat-tested commander for the operation and on 21 June recommended to Admiral King that Fletcher be promoted to Vice Admiral and placed in command of the force detailed for the South Pacific. Having commanded Task Forces 16 and 17 in the Battle of the Coral Sea as well as

---

20 Ibid., p. 5.
21 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
24 Ibid.
having had command during the action at Midway, Fletcher not only had more combat experience in command than any other eligible commander in the Pacific, he also had intimate knowledge of the geography and command relationships in the area.

Nimitz pushed for Fletcher’s promotion and assignment when he met with King in person on 4 July in San Francisco, and continued his advocacy as late as 14 July when the Task Forces were all at sea and preparing to rendezvous north of the Fiji Islands for the operation. Nimitz had to overcome a big obstacle in King, who was anything but an admirer of Fletcher. Aside from being perceived by King as a “fixer” for his repeat tours in Washington, King held Fletcher as “timid” and more concerned with fueling -- considered by some done unnecessarily in his relief attempt of Wake Island and in the early stages of the Coral Sea operation which separated Rear Admiral Aubrey Fitch and the Lexington Task Force from him. Moreover, Fletcher had done the unthinkable in losing two carriers in action. King gave no sanction to commanders who lost carriers, no matter how strategically important the victories they achieved. Above all, one of the carriers lost was King’s beloved Lexington, of which he had been the second Commanding Officer.

Nonetheless, Admiral King did succumb to Admiral Nimitz’ logic, and Frank Jack Fletcher was promoted to Vice Admiral, retroactive to 26 June when the recommendation had finally been forwarded to President Roosevelt from the Navy Department. Fletcher was designated Commander Expeditionary Force, and his classmate, Rear Admiral Noyes, was designated as Commander Carrier Aircraft of the Expeditionary Force. In the most unusual of circumstances, Fletcher, as Commander Task Force 61, commanded the Expeditionary Force, and his Air Support Force commander, Admiral Noyes, as Commander Task Group 61.1, became his immediate subordinate. As Task Element commanders under the command of Admiral Noyes came Commander Task Force 11 in Saratoga, Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, as well as Noyes himself as Commander Task Force 18 in Wasp, and Rear Admiral Thomas C.

26 Ibid., p. 294.
27 Ibid.
Kinkaid, Fletcher’s classmate in the Naval War College class of 1930, as Commander Task Force 16 in *Enterprise*. Thus Fletcher was assigned as a Task Element Commander under a subordinate in his own chain of command. The Amphibious Force Commander, designated Commander Task Group 61.2, was Rear Admiral Turner, and all of these were organized under Vice Admiral Ghormley, COMSOPAC. Arriving to assume command enroute to the theater of operations, now Vice Admiral Fletcher gave directions to his subordinates in his Operation Order for “Watchtower,” the code name selected for the Solomon Islands operations.

**The Battle of Savo Island**

When the Marines hit the beach in the Solomon Islands on the early morning of 7 August 1942 the Japanese defends on Guadalcanal apparently believed it was only a raid and retired into the hills. Terrain prevented withdrawal on Tulagi and the smaller surrounding islands. Strong resistance prevented the Marines from securing their positions until the evening of 8 August. Two air attacks on the 7th and another on the 8th by the Japanese delayed offloading of the transports and cargo vessels. Having lost 20 of their 99 embarked fighter aircraft in the action, recently promoted Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher requested permission to retire the carriers *Saratoga*, his new Flagship, *Enterprise* and *Wasp*, along with their screening units, from the area. The protraction of the landing placed the First Marine Division in a particularly precarious position. If the Japanese could prevent the landing of supplies and equipment the Marines would be fighting both those Japanese on the islands and those on the beaches behind them. The initiative would pass to the Japanese.

---

28 Ibid., pp. 292-294.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa, Commander of the Japanese Eighth Fleet at Rabaul, responded quickly with the ships that were readily available. At 1800 on 8 August Rear Admiral Richmond K. “Terrible” Turner received notice of a broadcast from Melbourne that a Japanese force of three cruisers, three destroyers, and two gunboats or seaplane tenders only about 300 miles away off the east coast of Bougainville were headed 120 degrees true at 15 knots.\textsuperscript{32} Since amphibious landings were somewhat new to the United States Navy, only a few having taken place in the American hemisphere with little or no active resistance, it was felt at the time that the logical commanders for such operations would be those involved in the war planning process. Admiral Turner had distinguished himself as a war planner, and thus got the assignment. Noting the danger to his landing force, Turner decided to withdraw his force on the morning of 9 August. In all there were 24 transport ships in Turner’s Task Force 14. Nineteen of these were anchored at or near Guadalcanal and the other five were at Tulagi.\textsuperscript{33} It was the responsibility of Rear Admiral V.A.C. Crutchley, Royal Navy, aboard his Flagship \textit{H.M.A.S. Australia}, to screen the landing operations with two light cruisers, the \textit{U.S.S. San Juan} and the Royal Australian Navy’s \textit{Hobart}, and two destroyers. Three additional heavy cruisers, the \textit{Vincennes}, \textit{Astoria} and \textit{Quincy}, and two destroyers were stationed to the east of Savo Island and the area south of the island was patrolled by two more heavy cruisers, the \textit{U.S.S. Chicago} and \textit{H.M.A.S. Canberra} screened by two destroyers.\textsuperscript{34} Two additional destroyers were placed, one on each side of Savo Island, to provide early-warning radar picket duty. The disposition of the U.S. ships in the area and the tracks taken by the attacking Japanese Task Force on the night of 8-9 August is depicted below:

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., pp. 1-2. It should be noted that observers dispute Admiral Turner’s recollection of when he first became aware of the Japanese force of ships, indicating that this actually took place earlier in the day.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 2.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp. 2-3.
Admiral Mikawa attacked in the early morning hours of 9 August with seven cruisers, one destroyer, and at least one submarine under conditions of almost total surprise. The attack occurred about an hour and a half after the first in a series of aircraft, assumed to be Japanese, had been detected by radar. Unfortunately, this information was not passed with adequate assurance that appropriate individuals in the U.S. chain of command were alert to a Japanese presence. The first real awareness of trouble came when enemy ships appeared without warning around the southern tip of Savo Island. Rushing to meet the attack, the cruisers Chicago, Canberra, Quincy and Vincennes were destroyed. In less than half an hour the attack was over and the Japanese force passed east of Savo Island and out to sea. In that short interval they crossed ahead of the U.S. southern cruiser group, putting the Canberra completely out of action in less than two minutes of a ten-minute engagement and damaging the Chicago, then crossed astern of

---

35 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
the northern cruiser group, battering them so badly that all three sank -- the *Vincennes* and *Quincy* within an hour of the attack.\textsuperscript{36} Inexplicably, Mikawa failed press home his advantage by destroying the now helpless transports. This might have been because of a brief and mostly ineffectual air attack on the transports during the surface action. However, the Japanese propensity to overlook “unmanly” targets such as non-warships, no matter how essential they were to the operation, was repeated again at Leyte Gulf in 1944.

In all, the U.S and Australia lost four heavy cruisers and a destroyer along with 1,270 officers and men killed and 709 wounded.\textsuperscript{37} The Japanese accomplished this -- and totally disrupted the Solomon Islands landings -- at the cost of only 35 men killed and 57 wounded.\textsuperscript{38} At the end of the day of 9 August the 6,100 Marines who were to land on Tulagi were left with 39,000 rations, three million rounds of .30-caliber ammunition, and 30,000 rounds of .45-caliber ammunition. Those 10,900 Marines on Guadalcanal were left with 567,000 rations and six million rounds each of .30-caliber and .45-caliber ammunition.\textsuperscript{39}

This sudden and complete victory for the Japanese would mark the first of a series of attempts to dislodge the U.S. Marine Corps from Guadalcanal. The area in which the five U.S. and Australian ships had been sunk was dubbed “Iron Bottom Sound” as a result of the many warships that had sunk there. Whoever controlled Guadalcanal would with its aircraft based on Henderson Field control the SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia. To the Japanese, control of Guadalcanal was essential to survival. To the Americans, control of Guadalcanal was an enabling step for eventually dictating peace terms in Tokyo. What follows is a consideration of the carrier battles that were such an important part of the ongoing struggle for control of Guadalcanal and its valuable and geo-strategically important airport -- Henderson Field.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

Where is Task Force 61 -- All the World Wonders?\textsuperscript{40}

Generations of Marines, even those born well after the end of World War II, ask this question – “where was Frank Jack Fletcher when we needed him most?” Most Marines hold him in contempt for “letting them hang out to dry” both by failing to relieve them during their courageous defense of Wake Island at the start of the war and on the beaches and in the jungles of Guadalcanal and the surrounding islands. But was Fletcher really the one to blame for this?

Certainly Vice Admiral George C. Dyer makes a case for Fletcher’s culpability in his book, \textit{The Amphibians Came to Conquer}. He lays the blame directly on Fletcher in an unequivocal way:

During the main conference [aboard Fletcher’s Flagship, \textit{U.S.S. Saratoga}, near Koro Island about 100 miles south of Suva, Fiji Islands, on 26 July 1942], the most important decision announced by Vice Admiral Fletcher was that the carrier task groups built around the \textit{Enterprise}, flagship of Rear Admiral Thomas G. Kinkaid; the \textit{Wasp}, flagship of Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes; and the \textit{Saratoga}, flagship of Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, would not be held in a position where they could support the Tulagi-Guadalcanal landings for more than two days; that is, no later than the morning of Sunday, 9 August 1942.

It is easy to say (but not yet proven) that this decision allowed the Japanese Navy to make an unhampered and largely undiscovered run at our seaborne forces gathered north of Guadalcanal Island the night of 8 August 1942. But there is no question that the carrier task force withdrawal provided the Japanese an unpunished retirement after their glorious victory at Savo Island.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} This title is a parody on the question asked of Admiral “Bull” Halsey by a radio operator when he left the Leyte Gulf naval battle in an attempt to engage and destroy Admiral Ozawa’s carriers. The “All the World Wonders” part of the message transmitted to Halsey was added to Admiral Nimitz’ query to confuse any Japanese parties who might have decoded the message. It so inflamed Halsey that he reconsidered his aggressive course of action against the carriers.

Surely a good number of other historians such as Samuel Eliot Morison, Commodore (later Rear Admiral) Richard Bates, commissioned in 1946 by Admiral Raymond Spruance, President of the Naval War College, to “study and evaluate” the naval battles of World War II, John Keegan, and Richard B. Frank, author of the highly-regarded *Guadalcanal*, who “concluded that Fletcher, rightly or wrongly, placed the preservation of his carriers ahead of everything else” have had little good to say about Fletcher’s contribution to the war effort.42

So, too, has Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley been roundly criticized. But even Ghormley has been “rehabilitated.” In his 1963 book on Guadalcanal, Marine Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith “showed remarkable sympathy for him.”43 Even Morison said in 1949 that “Admiral Ghormley did as well as anyone could have done … he was a victim of circumstances.”44 But General Griffith has been less forgiving to Fletcher: “Haul Ass’ Fletcher, that’s what we used to call him. Why, that was his best maneuver. He could break all records getting away from something he didn’t like” and “There wasn’t much left of old ‘Haul Ass’ when Sam Morison got through with him.”45

Other more recent authors, including John Lundstrom and Marvin Butcher, have been more balanced in their treatment of Fletcher. It should be considered, in his defense, that there was no real precedent for the opposed conditions -- particularly with air power -- that Fletcher was to encounter. Also, Fletcher made it clear that he was going to depart the area of Guadalcanal on the morning of 9 August at the pre-execution planning conference. If Admiral Turner or anyone else present had strong objections to

43 Ibid., p. 16.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., pp. 16 and 17.
that course of action, approved tacitly by Admiral Ghormley, they should have demanded a reversal of the decision before authorizing the plan for the operation. There is no record or indication that they did this, but even so Major General Alexander Vandegrift, who commanded the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal, decried Fletcher for “running away twelve hours earlier than he had already threatened during our unpleasant meeting.” Also, Turner’s Operation Plan called for withdrawal of the American Amphibious Force incrementally. He expected to release all but five cargo ships and his screening units on the night of D+1, August 8th.

Morison held Fletcher accountable for being fixated with topping off the fuel of his force. Records indicate that the average fuel on board for all 13 of Fletcher’s destroyers at noon on 8 August was 45.3 percent. Morison assumed that fleet oilers were waiting close to Guadalcanal to refuel Task Force 61. In reality, there were none of the three in the western Pacific area within 1,000 miles of the action. Thus, as attested by six of the seven of Fletcher’s destroyer commanders at Guadalcanal in 1776 to Professor Lloyd Graybar, refueling was “necessary and wise.”

Moreover, Fletcher’s carrier-embarked fighters had taken a real beating on 7 and 8 August. Just before sunset on 8 August, Fletcher had radioed to Admiral Ghormley, with Admiral Turner is an information addee:

Total fighter strength reduced from 99 to 78.
In view of large number of enemy torpedo and bomber planes in area recommend immediate withdrawal of carriers.
Request you send tankers immediately to rendezvous decided by you as fuel is running low.

Moreover, as events were to show, there was a serious submarine menace in the area, of which Admiral Fletcher was acutely aware. The U.S.S. Wasp, detached to refuel with her
screening units, was torpedoed and sunk in the aftermath of the Battle of the Eastern Solomons on 15 September when two torpedoes of a six-torpedo salvo by the Japanese submarine I-19 struck her with devastating effect. Luckily, her planes were able to be flown off and reached Esperitu Santo safely. They were, for the most part, embarked aboard Enterprise when she returned from repairs at Pearl Harbor during the Battle of Santa Cruz. So also was Fletcher’s Flagship, U.S.S. Saratoga, temporarily taken out of the war when torpedoed on 31 August by I-26 between San Cristobal and the Santa Cruz Islands while conducting morning flight operations. Thus Fletcher, having cited very real concerns for the security of the only strategic assets, save the soon to arrive carrier Hornet, received permission from Admiral Ghormley, COMSOWESPAC, to depart the area -- with Turner’s full knowledge, and without Turner’s objection.

While Marvin Butcher in his essay “Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, Pioneer Warrior or Gross Sinner?” comes down forcefully on the side of “Pioneer Warrior,” John Lundstrom has uncovered perhaps the most powerful and unbiased source to vindicate Frank Fletcher from culpability for the U.S. disaster in the battle of Savo Island. From a source he has uncovered Lundstrom quotes Colonel (later Major General) Melvin J. Maas, a Reserve officer in the Marine Corps attached to Fletcher’s staff for the Guadalcanal action and also a serving Congressman -- the ranking Republican on the House Naval Affairs Committee while serving under Fletcher -- as having written that Fletcher “should be commended for his judgment, courage, and tactical farsightedness” for his decisions during the Marine landings on Guadalcanal. Maas cites ten considerations supporting Fletcher’s decision to withdraw. In late August of 1942, while

53 Ibid., pp. 220-229.
54 Ibid., p. 171.
the battles of Savo Island and The Eastern Solomons were still fresh in his mind he wrote:


Though most historians have judged Fletcher harshly for his actions at Guadalcanal on 7-9 August 1942, it would appear that at least one senior Marine in a position to know thought he did the right thing.

**The Battle of the Eastern Solomons**

A slackening of the action followed the Battle of Savo Island. For the next several weeks the Japanese concentrated on preventing reinforcement and supply of the Marines already ashore. While this was going on, a buildup of Japanese naval units at their main base in the Southern Resource Area at Rabaul on New Britain was taking place.

From the Japanese night attack on 9 August through 23 August Japanese cruisers and destroyers bombarded American positions practically every night with relative impunity.58

Operating in the close waters between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, these enemy ships would have been good targets for carrier planes and surface ships, in both of which [the U.S.] were superior numerically for a time. However, in order that our carriers’ presence might be concealed from the enemy, [Task Force 61] operated … well to the south of Guadalcanal, out of range of hostile search planes.59

The resulting lack of opposition gave the Japanese the opportunity they needed to seriously impede our logistics flow and enabled them to bring powerful naval units into the area to contest the U.S. presence in the Solomons. By 23 August, the local naval

---

57 Ibid., p. 35.


59 Ibid.
superiority America had enjoyed had vanished as aerial reconnaissance indicated the Japanese now had three or four aircraft carriers in the vicinity and as many as two battleships and seven to fifteen cruisers to contest for control of the area.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 49-50.}

The U.S. still had the carriers \textit{Enterprise}, \textit{Saratoga} and \textit{Wasp} available to challenge a Japanese move to the south, as well as a battleship, five heavy and one light cruiser, and 18 destroyers.\footnote{Ibid., p. 50.} The primary responsibility of these units was to support the Guadalcanal-Tulagi buildup and maintain the lines of communications between Australia and the Solomons. As a secondary mission, Admiral Fletcher was tasked by Admiral Nimitz to destroy enemy forces encountered in the area, but again with the caveat of “calculated risk” limiting action to circumstances favorable to the survivability of his carriers. An additional carrier Task Force built around the carrier \textit{Hornet} was dispatched from Pearl Harbor on 17 August when intelligence indicated that action with the Japanese was imminent.\footnote{Ibid.} Unfortunately, the \textit{Hornet} group arrived on 29 August, too late to take part in the action.\footnote{Ibid.}

On Guadalcanal, Henderson Field had not yet been fully developed by the U.S. Marines. This would take another ten days. About 20 fighters and a dozen scout bombers were already stationed there, and more would come as soon as the field could accommodate them. Rear Admiral John S. McCain commanded naval patrol planes in the area as Commander Air Forces, South Pacific, and had 39 PBYs and 30 B-17s at his disposal to support the effort against the Japanese. His aircraft searched the area daily in anticipation of the next Japanese attempt to dislodge the Marines from Guadalcanal.\footnote{Ibid.} In the mean time, Task Force 61 waited in readiness about 100-150 nautical miles southeast of Guadalcanal.

Wanting to operate with a full range of options and always concerned with keeping his carriers and screening units topped off with fuel, and as yet unaware of any
concerted movement by the Japanese against Guadalcanal, Admiral Fletcher unfortunately detached Admiral Noyes and his Wasp Task Force about dusk on 23 August to refuel near Espiritu Santo -- taking his 26 fighters, 26 dive bombers and eleven torpedo planes with him. That unfortunate move put the U.S. at a relative disadvantage as the Japanese began their move south.

The first indication of a Japanese move was the sighting of several transport ships 250 nautical miles north of Tulagi on 23 August. Those ships, however, were still out of attack range of Admiral Fletcher’s carrier aircraft as the U.S. carriers were still operating to the southeast of Guadalcanal. Though two Japanese submarines likely to be screening units for a larger force were sighted heading in a generally southerly direction on that same day, no particular intelligence indication was made of the sightings.

Subsequently COMAIRSOPAC aircraft provided a contact report on the enemy occupation force. Admiral Fletcher launched an attack from his own carrier, Saratoga, shortly after 1500 consisting of 31 dive bombers armed with 1,000-lb bombs and six torpedo planes. It was later learned that the group of ships that had been attacked had changed course to the northwest about two hours before the attack was launched. This placed the Japanese force beyond the attack range of Task Force 61’s aircraft. Due to the distance from the reported position of the Japanese ships at which the rest of the strike aircraft had been launched not all the planes could make it back to their carrier. With the exception of a single torpedo plane that had returned to Saratoga, they landed at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, where they spent the night. A Marine strike group had been launched to attack the same Japanese force just prior to Saratoga’s strike, but likewise was unable to locate their targets since they also had not received a report of the force’s change of course.

---


66 Ibid., p, 52.

67 Ibid.
On the morning of 24 August the *Saratoga*’s planes were supposed to rendezvous with her at 0800. That plan was modified by the Air Group Commander, who decided to delay the return to *Saratoga* until completion of a morning search plan by Marine aircraft from Guadalcanal. When the search proved negative, the *Saratoga* group of aircraft, minus two dive bombers that had to return to the island with mechanical problems, returned to their carrier. There they were quickly re-fueled and re-armed as a Japanese carrier had been located by a carrier search plane at around 0900 and an attack sortie was about to be launched.

**Carrier Battle of 24 August 1942**

On the morning of 24 August a long-range land-based search plane sighted a Japanese force consisting of one carrier, in all likelihood the *Ryujo*, two cruisers and one destroyer at latitude 04 degrees 40 minutes south, longitude 161 degrees 15 minutes east on a course of 180 degrees true at 0935, but no speed was given. This contact was copied by personnel aboard *Enterprise* at 1015 and passed immediately to Admiral Fletcher aboard *Saratoga*. This contact placed the Japanese force outside the attack radius of Task Force 61 bearing 343 degrees true at 281 nautical miles. Thus Fletcher launched a morning search in the northern semi-circle to a distance of 200 nautical miles. Unfortunately, during the period that the search was conducted the *Ryujo* group was 50-100 nautical miles to the north of the planes conducting the search at the limit of their endurance, so they turned back without contact. The requirement to turn to the southeast into the wind to launch and recover aircraft frequently made it hard for the U.S. carriers to close enemy targets.

---


71 Ibid.
As early as 1100 and thereafter, Task Force 61 was periodically approached by Japanese search planes, and four of these were shot down by carrier Combat Air Patrol fighters.\(^{72}\) Thus both the Americans and the Japanese knew of the locations of at least a part of their enemy’s fleet. The advantage would lie with the force that was able most precisely to position their opponent and launch their aircraft first. Not wanting to be on the defensive at the outset, Admiral Fletcher had *Enterprise* launch 22 bombers and seven torpedo planes commencing at 1300 to conduct a search out to 250 nautical miles from his carriers. At 1410 contact was gained on the Japanese carrier *Ryujo*, one cruiser and three destroyers bearing 317 degrees true from Task Force 61 at a distance of 198 nautical miles.\(^{73}\) Due to use of the same radio circuit to direct the Combat Air Patrol fighters, the contact wasn’t copied by the *Enterprise* communications group until 1518, and it wasn’t passed to Admiral Fletcher on *Saratoga* until 1530. Immediately Fletcher authorized Admiral Kinkaid to launch an attack, if he was satisfied of the accuracy of the locating information.\(^{74}\)

In the interval, at 1430, the *Enterprise* search plan revealed two additional carriers, four heavy cruisers, six light cruisers and eight destroyers bearing 340 degrees true at 198 nautical miles from the American force. The two large carriers known to be in the area were the *Shokaku* and the *Zuikaku*, commanded by Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo. No report of this contact was received by either U.S. carrier until *Saratoga* first copied a transmission stating that two Japanese carriers had been attacked unsuccessfully at 1525.\(^{75}\)

Though no mention is made of it in the Commanding Officer of U.S.S. *Enterprise*’s Report of Action and only passing comment of it is made in Admiral Nimitz’ similar report to Admiral King, the Commander of the *Enterprise* Air Group indicates in his Report of Action that two pilots of Bombing Squadron Six off *Enterprise* attacked one of the two large carriers. That carrier was maneuvering radically and was

\(^{72}\) Ibid.  
\(^{73}\) Ibid.  
\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. 7.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
believed to have sustained no damage by two near misses. The pilots’ on-scene report of this bombing was not acknowledged by the Enterprise.

In the meantime, at 1440, four heavy cruisers and three to five destroyers on a bearing of 347 degrees true at 225 nautical miles from Task Force 61 were reported. Thus the Japanese force was spread out on an arc 60 to 80 miles wide, centered at about 162 degrees east longitude, and moving south toward Guadalcanal Island. Two Bombing Squadron Six pilots bombed the largest cruiser in this Japanese formation, but again achieved only two near misses.

At 1330, two hours after having been recovered back aboard Saratoga from Henderson Field, the planes of the 23 August search were launched again -- this time in a strike against the Ryujo -- but to her position as passed in the morning at 0935 by land-based search planes as the Enterprise search location was not as yet known. Enroute to where they believed the Ryujo to be, the Air Group Commander leading the strike intercepted a report from an airborne search plane indicating that the Ryujo group was 75 nautical miles northeast of the position reported by the Enterprise search planes. This sighting and a claim by the Army that their B-17s had made bomb hits on a small carrier in the same vicinity four hours after this contact was passed, after the Saratoga’s Air Group had probably already sunk the Ryujo, gives credence to the possibility that another small carrier was operating in the area as well, bringing the total number of Japanese

79 Ibid.
carriers to four. Not finding a Japanese force at this newly-reported position, the *Enterprise* Air Group Commander altered course to the southwest toward the initial contact location and sighted the *Ryujo* group.\textsuperscript{80} Saratoga’s group of 29 dive bombers, armed with 1,000-lb bombs, and eight torpedo planes found their objective anyway and at 1530 commenced their attack. It was a well-coordinated attack launched with deadly accuracy. Four of the dive bombers -- all piloted by veterans of the Midway battle -- scored hits on the Japanese carrier. As the Dauntlesses departed the Devastator torpedo planes commenced their attack. They scored one “sure” and one probable hit, and one torpedo that missed the *Ryujo* hit and sank an accompanying destroyer.\textsuperscript{81} On their return to the *Saratoga*, the Dauntlesses encountered seven Japanese dive bombers, divided into two groups, and shot down four.\textsuperscript{82} Unfortunately, as they would soon learn, these Japanese planes were returning from attacking the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. Thus the attacks by the U.S. and Japanese on the carrier groups opposing them had been, for all intents and purposes, nearly simultaneous.

A chart of the action and the movements of the U.S. and Japanese main forces during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons is provided on the next page for a better spatial orientation of the battle:

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 56.


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS
August 23–25, 1942

THE BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS
August 23–25, 1942

Figure 29: U.S. and Japanese Force Movements in The Battle of the Eastern Solomons

At about the same time as the U.S. attack on the Ryujo Japanese planes were picked up on radar by the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. At 1632 a large number of unidentified aircraft were detected inbound to the force bearing 320 degrees true at 88 nautical miles at an estimated altitude of 12,000 feet. At the time there were 25 *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* fighters airborne in the Combat Air Patrol and another 20 on deck awaiting launch on *Saratoga*. The radar echo immediately faded and wasn’t picked up again for 17 minutes. As a precaution, *Saratoga* was asked to launch additional fighters. She did this, bringing the total in the air to 38.

Contact on the inbound Japanese air raid was regained at 1649 on a bearing of 340 degrees true at 44 nautical miles by *Enterprise*. The first sighting by the Combat Air Patrol was at 33 miles on a bearing of 300 degrees true from *Enterprise*. Confusion ensued as the U.S. fighter pilots filled the air waves with unnecessary chatter, and this greatly diminished the ability of the Fighter Director Officer to vector his planes where needed. While the battle over Task Force 61 was starting, *Saratoga* launched still more fighters, bringing the total airborne to oppose the Japanese attack to 53.

The Japanese dive bombing attack on the *Enterprise*, which had launched all its ready aircraft and was now making 27 knots and conducting radical maneuvers, did not start until 1711. Between 20 and 40 bombers were estimated to be in the Japanese attack group, and they were met immediately by the *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* fighters. Their altitude was revised to be closer to 16,000 feet. Diving at 70 degrees attack angle, the Japanese pilots released their bombs at 2,000 to 1,500 feet. With aircraft coming in at intervals of about seven seconds, the attack lasted for four minutes, interrupted by two respites of 20-30 seconds. *Saratoga*, which was distant some ten to fifteen miles on the disengaged side, was not attacked by the Japanese. None of the Japanese torpedo planes

---

84 Ibid., p. 3.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 4.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
reached their objective as they were intercepted and either shot down or driven off approximately 60 miles from Enterprise.\(^8^9\)

In all, including dive bombers, torpedo planes and their fighter escorts, the Japanese were estimated to have launched about 75 planes in the attack. Since Ryujo was thought to be capable of carrying only about 40 aircraft, this was a clear indication that the attack included planes from the Shokaku and/or Zuikaku, and possibly the Ryujo as well.\(^9^0\) The length of time the Ryujo strike aircraft would have had to be in the air when they were encountered by U.S. strike aircraft on their return from sinking the Ryujo -- over three hours -- indicates that the Ryujo strike was in all probability against Guadalcanal, and not the U.S. carriers. Since an attack on Guadalcanal did take place at approximately the same time as that on Enterprise, that seems almost certain.

At least 20 bombs were released in the vicinity of Enterprise.\(^9^1\) Enterprise sustained three direct hits and three near misses, one of the hits inflicted substantial damage and another superficial damage.\(^9^2\) One bomb hit the starboard corner of number three elevator, passed through several decks, and exploded, causing extensive damage on several levels of the ship, as well as bulging the deck plates and shattering the wooden flight deck. Another large bomb landed on the starboard side and exploded in the gun galley between the flight deck and the near inboard bulkhead, causing many fatalities and heavy damage and buckling the flight deck forward. A third bomb exploded as it hit and before penetrating the flight deck\(^9^3\), again on the starboard side but a bit forward of the

\(^8^9\) Ibid., p. 5.

\(^9^0\) It should be noted that \textit{Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941} lists Ryujo as capable of embarking around 24 aircraft (McMurtrie, Francis E., Ed. \textit{Jane’s Fighting Ships 1941}. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942, pp. 293-296). Thus her actual complement, according to this informed Japanese source, was 14 aircraft in excess of that expected by western observers. This was typical of underestimates for all Japanese carrier classes by \textit{Jane’s}.

\(^9^1\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^9^2\) Ibid., pp. 6-7.

\(^9^3\) Ibid., pp. 7-10.
second hit, and this damaged number two elevator. The closest near miss started gasoline fires and damaged No. 1 and No. 2 arresting wires.

By 1649, even with this damage, the fires on Enterprise were brought under control and she was steaming at 24 knots and landing aircraft. The bomb that hit the gun galley, however, inflicted the damage of most immediate concern as it caused loss of steering control at 1850, just after sunset, with the rudder jammed at 22 degrees when the ship was still making 24 knots. Though speed was reduced after a near collision with the destroyer Balch, fear of vulnerability to a submarine attack was greatly increased since only about ten knots could be maintained safely until secondary steering could be established about a half hour later.

During this time the new battleship North Carolina, which had arrived as America’s first new-construction major fleet unit at Pearl Harbor in early June, acquitted herself well giving anti-aircraft gunfire support. This was true for all Enterprise screening units. Though as many as 16 Japanese dive bombers and eleven level bombers attempted to hit North Carolina, her fire was so intense that only three got through to deliver near misses.94 Firing her twenty five-inch, four quadruple 1.1-inch mounts, forty 20-mm. and 26 .50-caliber machine guns, she appeared to be in flames amidships due to the amount of fire she was delivering. In all, she claimed seven Japanese planes splashed.95

Some Enterprise aircraft were able to land aboard her, but others returning from the unsuccessful strike on Ryujo, which they could not locate because of darkness, landed either aboard Saratoga or at Henderson Field.96 In all, the Enterprise Air Group claimed to have splashed 29 Japanese aircraft, and another 24 were claimed shot down by the anti-aircraft fire of the Enterprise, North Carolina, Portland and Atlanta.97 Some of these, however, might have been claimed by more than one ship in that they were fired at simultaneously. Another 18 Japanese aircraft were claimed shot down by the Saratoga’s

95 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
96 Ibid., p. 6.
97 Ibid., p. 12.
fighters, which brought the total to just over 70. This large number of Japanese planes lost came at a high price. Two officers and 72 enlisted men were killed aboard *Enterprise* and another 6 officers and 89 men were wounded. Fortunately, only four fighters, four dive bombers and two torpedo planes from that ship were either missing, made water landings, or were damaged severely rendering them beyond repair. Two fighter and one bomber crews were missing at sea and presumed lost. 

**Retirement from the Area and Aftermath**

When the fighting had ceased and all aircrews in the water in the immediate vicinity had been recovered Admiral Fletcher had the *Saratoga* and *Enterprise* Task Groups retire to the south-southeast. Here he intended to have them re-fuel, to detach the *Enterprise* group to return for repairs at Pearl Harbor, and to rejoin the action with *U.S.S. Wasp*, which was returning from refueling. Action was expected as the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* with their reduced air contingents were still in the area. Such was not to be the case.

Fletcher’s forces rendezvoused with the oilers *Cimarron* and *Platte* at 0800 on 25 August at 13 degrees and four minutes south latitude and 164 degrees 3 minutes and 30 seconds east longitude. *Enterprise* was detached along with the cruiser *Portland* and the destroyers *Balch*, *Maury*, *Benham* and *Ellet* to proceed via Tongatubu to Pearl Harbor for repairs as anticipated. The rest of the ships in company headed north to rejoin the action. On their way, the destroyers *Patterson* and *Monsen* sighted and sank a Japanese submarine with depth charges. Two other Japanese submarines were sighted during the day and one was sunk by a direct bomb hit from a Scouting Squadron Five aircraft off *Saratoga*.

---

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 11.
100 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
The Japanese had had enough. Their last gasp was felt when they struck Henderson Field, mostly with land-based heavy bombers, at noon on 25 August. Four men were killed, five wounded, but little other damage was done.  

This was a lucky break as *U.S.S. Wasp* was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine on 15 September, *Saratoga* having already been torpedoed and returned to Pearl Harbor for repairs on 31 August.

**The Battle of the Eastern Solomons in Retrospect**

In Admiral Nimitz’ own words:

On 23 to 25 August, U.S. Naval Forces in the Southern Pacific, supported by Marine aircraft from the new field at Guadalcanal, and Army aircraft operation from the new field at Espiritu Santo, successfully turned back a large scale Japanese attempt to recapture Guadalcanal-Tulagi. This major victory, second only to Midway in forces involved, permitted continued consolidation of our position in the Solomons.  

“Air losses decided the issue, and the Japanese, all but stripped of carrier aircraft support, broke of the fight although their powerful surface force was still largely intact.”

Including “probables,” Fighting Squadron Six aboard *Enterprise* shot down twelve Aichi type-99 dive bombers, ten Zero fighters, and three Mitsubishi type-97 torpedo planes.  

Fighting Squadron Five claimed 14 dive bombers and three Zeros.  

At the outset the Japanese outnumbered their American counterparts in aircraft by an estimated 177 to 153. By the end of the action the Japanese had lost almost two carrier groups plus 21 land-based or *Ryujo* launched aircraft downed by Marine fighters on Guadalcanal, for a

---

107 Ibid., p. 63.
108 Ibid.
grand total of about 90 aircraft. The Japanese Navy rolled further down the slippery slope toward impotency of the *kido butai*.

**Conclusions**

Let us turn now to an evaluation of the commanders with respect to the criteria offered in Chapter I.

1. Their estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions they would be required to make.

This is a very difficult area to assess. Admiral Nimitz demonstrated an excellent grasp of the situation in first determining that the opportunity existed for the United States to go on the offensive in a limited way after the Battle of Midway and second in realizing that the most experienced carrier Admiral available -- Frank Jack Fletcher -- should be placed in command of the offensive instrument to do that. Also, in demanding of Admiral King that Fletcher be promoted to Vice Admiral so that he could be selected to command over the more senior Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes and then being persistent enough to convince a skeptical King that his was the right decision, Admiral Nimitz showed real strength of character and excellent insight. However, failing to place Fletcher in a position where he could bring his air power into use should the Japanese try to re-establish their control of Guadalcanal once the U.S. Marines had landed there shows serious signs of not fully appreciating the dynamics of an amphibious landing and build-up on the beach.

This is not to criticize Nimitz -- or Frank Jack Fletcher for that matter -- for their failure to keep the American carriers in the vicinity of the beachhead until all the transports and supply ships had been offloaded. That, in view of accurate information now available on the extent of aircraft losses and fuel situation of the screening units concerned, should be viewed as the proper course of action given a detailed estimate of the situation, not withstanding the almost universal criticism of historians of the 1940s and 1950s. The real criticism should have been for failing to ensure an adequate search of the area between Rabaul and Guadalcanal by land-based aircraft. Above all the commander of all land-based Navy search assets, Rear Admiral John S. McCain, should

---

bear the responsibility for adequate coverage of that important area. As Commander Task Force 63, McCain was Commander Aircraft Southern Pacific Forces and had responsibility for Aircraft Temporarily Attached as well.\footnote{Dyer, \textit{The Amphibians Came to Conquer}, Op. Cit., p. 292} In all, around 635 aircraft were available for the Watchtower operation.\footnote{Ibid., p. 297.} This included those aircraft of the United States Navy, Marine Corps, Army Air Force, Australian Air Force, and the New Zealand Air Force.\footnote{Ibid.} Of these 635 aircraft, 238 were Navy aircraft on the carriers \textit{Saratoga, Enterprise} and \textit{Wasp}, and were thus under the control of Commander Task Group 61.6, Rear Admiral Leigh Noyes.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 297-298.} Forty-three more were embarked in the heavy combatant ships of the amphibious force, Task Group 61.2, under the command of Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner.\footnote{Ibid., p. 298.} The remainder, 290 land and water-based aircraft, were under Admiral McCain’s control.\footnote{Ibid.} While some of these were in rear areas of the South Pacific theater, McCain had 27 B-17s, 10 B-26s, and 38 Army Air Force P-39s in the Guadalcanal-Tulagi area during the amphibious landing phase of the operation; six Hudsons from the New Zealand Air Force; 24 Marine SBD scout bombers at Efate, New Hebrides; 22 PBY seaplanes and three scouting planes operating from seaplane tenders -- a total of 145 planes with which to provide reconnaissance for the operation.\footnote{Ibid.} McCain’s failure to warn all concerned of the night attack in the Battle of Savo Island, as well as provide continuous tracking information on the Japanese carrier groups once they were located in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons was a clear failure of his responsibility to the success of the Guadalcanal operation. Thus McCain deserves failing marks for not ensuring an adequate area search to detect the Japanese cruiser and destroyer group that raided near Savo Island on 9 August 1942 and for not ensuring the continuous tracking of the Japanese carriers heading south
on 23-24 August. The latter in all probability accounts for the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* not being struck while the opportunity existed on the 24th. However, McCain’s search plan did uncover the *Ryujo* group, and that mitigates against accountability for total failure in his primary area of responsibility. Let us give McCain a “D” for his efforts.

Admiral Nimitz, on the other hand, did an outstanding job of realizing and ensuring that the most experienced officer of proven decision capacity was given the responsibility for his carrier groups in the South Pacific. He deserves a high mark for that. Responsibility for adequate search in the Rabaul-Guadalcanal area, however, was ultimately Nimitz’. He as well as Admiral McCain, did poorly in this vital area. Also, noting that Admiral Fletcher was probably correct in detaching the *Wasp* Task Force to refuel, the lack of one or more oilers in the vicinity of the carriers was a serious oversight. This important aspect of the entire operation’s success was again the responsibility of Admiral Nimitz. While it should be noted that the number of oilers was inadequate for operations in such distant areas, something Nimitz could do nothing about, he still failed to provide the necessary flexibility for his operating units that their tasking required. Admiral Nimitz thus had his carriers right where they were needed when they were needed, but failed to support them with land-based air surveillance and readily available fueling capacity -- a “B-” effort at best.

Rear Admiral Ghormley is culpable for these shortcomings as well. Having just arrived in theater, however, there was little he could do to correct these shortcomings. In fairness, an “Incomplete” should be assigned.

Now let us consider Frank Jack Fletcher. Fletcher won an important victory in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons that further eroded the Japanese Navy’s ability to go on the offensive. He was not made aware of a Japanese force movement toward the Guadalcanal landing area, nor was he requested to respond with carrier air once the attack around Savo Island started. In that it was a night attack, there was little that he could have done to prevent it. All that was realistically possible was to respond with an air strike after the damage to the American cruisers and destroyers had already been done. Even that would have been problematical in hours of darkness. On the other hand, Fletcher’s failure to attack the group of two large Japanese carriers that had been reported to him remains a mystery. Circumstances after the Battle of the Eastern Solomons which
prevented him from explaining this aside, it can only be surmised that Fletcher understood the futility of launching such a strike with darkness imposing its veil before the carriers could be located. It was his intention to return to the area on 25 August, most likely to seek out and destroy the Shokaku and Zuikaku. The damage done to U.S.S. Enterprise negated that option. Fletcher made an excellent decision in withholding sufficient aircraft for a second strike, either on the Ryuyo group, if needed, or on the Shokaku/Zuikaku group if its position was firmly established. He apportioned his aircraft among search, strike and defense of his carriers expertly. When the fighting was done, in Admiral Nimitz’ own words, the result of the engagement of 24 August was strongly in favor of the United States. And, while U.S.S. Wasp was most unfortunately sunk by submarine attack on her return from refueling, that event could not have been reasonably anticipated by Fletcher. Thus he escaped the battle having inflicted considerable damage on Japan’s operational objective of re-taking Guadalcanal, along with her air base which commanded the SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia, without the loss of a carrier actually engaged in the action. On balance, Fletcher deserves a weak “B+.”

Last, but worthy of comment, is Rear Admiral Turner. While, as John Lundstrom emphatically points out, Turner had every opportunity to weigh in against the departure of Fletcher’s carriers less than two full days into the amphibious operation, he refrained from doing so. Moreover, he didn’t use his own aircraft frequently enough or in any concerted plan in the search phase or ensure that Admiral McCain’s air search of the Rabaul-Guadalcanal area was adequate during a period when Japanese naval action to prevent the landing was not only likely but highly probable. Once he failed to request carrier support when the Japanese attacked on 9 August, or in pursuit in the aftermath of the battle, Turner did everything in his power to shift the blame to Vice Admiral Fletcher. Turner worked hard for an “F” and deserves it.

2. The commanders’ demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously his decision in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and his flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required.

Admiral Nimitz demonstrated great initiative in setting in motion the events that allowed the Navy to take advantage of the great victory at Midway and go on the offensive. Though his organizational arrangement for the operations to wrest Guadalcanal from Japanese control was poor, with Rear Admiral Noyes at once operating as a subordinate to the carrier Task Force Commander, Vice Admiral Fletcher, but Fletcher in turn reporting to Noyes as Commander of the Saratoga Task Force, Nimitz understood that all those involved would work through their situation toward the common goal. All concerned under Admiral Nimitz fully understood and appreciated their operational tasking, and channels were maintained open to modify that tasking due to such events as the incapacitation of Enterprise and the subsequent loss of Wasp. Give Nimitz an “A” in this important area.

Likewise, Admiral Fletcher made abundantly clear what was required by his subordinates and what could be expected of him in the pre-operation briefings and thereafter. His movements away from Guadalcanal shortly after the amphibious landing were with the full knowledge and approval of Admiral Ghormley, Commander Southwest Pacific Area. Here Fletcher deserves at least an “A-.”

For his inexplicable failure to intercede in the events of the early morning of 9 August, his failure to request support from Fletcher’s carrier groups, and for his indecision on when to move his transports and supply ships away from their endangered positions near Guadalcanal and Tulagi -- even in the aftermath of the Battle of Savo Island -- Turner deserves another “F.” An officer of his experience, with a planning background, should have done much better.

3. The command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle.

For all concerned here, as discussed in this section above, near-failing grades are warranted. To Nimitz, Ghormley, Fletcher, McCain and Turner, a solid “D” is assigned.
4. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events.

It should be noted in this area that, after the Battle of Midway, many of the pilots in that engagement and Coral Sea were allowed to take leave.\footnote{Lundstrom, \textit{The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign}, Op. Cit., pp. 1-2.} This necessitated putting less experienced and non-combat hardened pilots into the breach at a critical juncture in the Pacific war. They acquitted themselves nicely, indicating that they were well led. Though adherence to doctrine, as amended by experience at Coral Sea and Midway, by the higher levels of command is difficult to evaluate during the battles of Savo Island and the Eastern Solomons, no major deviations can be readily identified from historical records now available. It should also be noted that Admiral Fletcher balance his requirements for search, strike and defense particularly well, was responsible for fighter complements of his carriers being expanded first at Midway and again prior to the August engagements, and that he moved aggressively to strike the \textit{Ryujo} before encountering a Japanese strike, while maintaining a second-strike capacity of his own. There seems no reason to assign less than an “A” to all concerned, and particularly to Fletcher.

5. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively. As demonstrated above, all major commanders involved in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons had an excellent understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination. The same can not be said for the support phase for the amphibious assault on Guadalcanal and her surrounding islands. For this shortcoming, most historians and Marines assign culpability to Frank Jack “Haul-Ass” Fletcher. An objective review of the facts, however, points the finger at least as convincingly at Richmond Kelly Turner. For Fletcher, a “C-“ for lack of support of the amphibious operation and an “A-“ for the
carrier battle with the Japanese Navy is reluctantly given. For Turner, a grade of “D” for his overall conduct of the amphibious operation seems appropriate.

6. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination.

Unquestionably, the taking of Guadalcanal, with its geo-strategically critical position astride the Allied SLOCs, was the strategic issue in both of these battles. Nimitz certainly understood this -- “A.” Turner seems to have understood this as well, but he failed to take the steps necessary to ensure success in the amphibious assault, landing, and during the build-up phase on Guadalcanal -- a weak “C-.” Fletcher had a responsibility to preserve the only strategic assets the United States had in the Pacific theater, his carriers. He certainly understood this, but, after losing a carrier each at Coral Sea and Midway, his caution may have overruled his responsibility for the security of the Guadalcanal operation -- another “C-,” but one on sounder ground than that assigned to Turner.

7. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action.

None of the commanders involved seems to have stood out for his audacity or brilliance. Nimitz and Fletcher did solid jobs. Ghormley’s, Turner’s and McCain’s efforts were lackluster by comparison. For the former, “B+,” and for the latter, “D.”

8. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements.

One needs only to view the almost thirteen pages of recommendations of Captain A.C. Davis, the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise during this critical period, to appreciate the exhaustive attempt to let other commanders profit quickly from his experiences in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons.\footnote{Davis, A. C. Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Enterprise letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific fleet dated September 5, 1942, Op. Cit., pp. 13-25.} Other After Action Reports follow this pattern. Admiral Fletcher chose merely to endorse these recommendations without
adding any of his own.\textsuperscript{121} The fact that he was able to disseminate lengthy and detailed reports from the commanders of the \textit{U.S.S. Enterprise}, \textit{U.S.S. Saratoga}, \textit{U.S.S. Atlanta}, \textit{U.S.S. Minneapolis} and Commander, Destroyer Division 22 -- all within two days of the action -- attests to the effort to let others profit from Task Force 61’s experience in combat as fully and rapidly as possible. Well done! -- “A+.”

\textbf{Epitaph}

That this would be Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher’s final battle was not immediately certain after the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. What can be reasonably established is that -- at Coral Sea, Midway and the Eastern Solomons -- this cruiser Admiral with no aviation training acquitted himself and his forces admirably in the war against Japan. In every instance he employed the provisions of \textit{Sound Military Decision} to achieve his assigned strategic objective through a proper, detailed, and often time constrained Commander’s Estimate of the Situation. While his actions could be attributed variously to luck, personal intelligence and capacity for reasoned decision while under fire, or the incompetence of his adversary, these factors do not adequately support the consistency of his decision process in a naval context. Fletcher approached each situation as had been inculcated in him during his days at the Naval War College, and expected those serving under him and with whom he interacted to do likewise. His success in the first three carrier battles of World War II and recorded history, to paraphrase a British aphorism of the time relating to their school at Eaton, was won “on the playing fields of Newport.”

Figure 30: Douglas SBD Dauntless Dive Bomber

“We got ourselves another war. A gut-bustin’ Mother-lovin’ Navy War.”

Commander Paul Eddington to Captain Rock Torrey

World War II Movie “In Harm’s Way”

VI THE BATTLE OF SANTA CRUZ

The Battle for Guadalcanal

After their losses at Midway and in the Eastern Solomons, one might have expected the Japanese to rethink their commitment to wresting control of Guadalcanal from the United States. Such was not to be the case. By day the Japanese land forces left on that island contested fiercely with the United States Marines. By night the Japanese bombarded Henderson Field in naval gunnery raids and attempted to reinforce and re-supply their troops holding on there. This was possible because they had, for the time being, re-established naval parity in the area with the sinking of *U.S.S. Wasp* and

---

1 Naval War College archival photograph.
significant damage to *U.S.S. North Carolina* (32 by 15 foot torpedo hole in her hull) on 15 September and heavy damage inflicted on *U.S.S. Saratoga* on 31 August.²

The Japanese wasted little time after the Battle of Santa Cruz in pressing their claim on Guadalcanal. They attacked just before midnight on 11 October 1942 intent on shelling Henderson Field while a second group of two seaplane tenders and seven destroyers in advance of the main force offloaded troops, howitzers, field guns and an anti-aircraft gun on Guadalcanal.³ The main force of three heavy cruisers and two destroyers under the command of Rear Admiral Aritomo Goto rounded Savo Island from the west and headed into what became known after the Battle of Savo Island as “Iron Bottom Sound.” Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, Commander, South Pacific Area (COMSOPAC) was ready for them. He had waiting in their path a group of two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and five destroyers under the command of Rear Admiral Norman Scott, Commander Task Force 64.⁴

Admiral Scott, accepting his mission which had an implied requirement for development of a cruiser and destroyer doctrine for night surface action, had a thorough but uncomplicated plan for engaging the Japanese who had already sunk eight Allied cruisers and three destroyers without losing a single ship in night battles.⁵ Instead of assigning several groups to patrol areas or conduct picket duty as Rear Admiral V.A.C. Crutchley, Royal Navy, had done in the Battle of Savo Island, Scott stationed his ships in line-abreast facing the entrance to the sound. His intent was to “cap the ‘T’,” as was done by the British in the Battle of Jutland in the First World War. This would allow his ships to bring maximum fire power -- with both guns and torpedoes -- to bear on the Japanese, whose warships would be illuminated by his destroyers which would be stationed in the van and at the rear of his cruisers.

---
⁴ Ibid., pp. 293-295.
⁵ Ibid., p. 293.
Unfortunately for Admiral Scott, he chose as his flagship the heavy cruiser *San Francisco* which had the worst radar suite of any of his cruisers. Not trusting his radar when *San Francisco* first picked up the advancing Japanese at 2325, Scott executed a 180-degree turn to better triangulate their position. In the process two of his destroyers fell out of formation and wound up between the opposing forces when firing started.

Scott indeed crossed the “T” enabling heavy fire -- especially from his two light cruisers with six-inch guns, the *Boise* and *Helena* -- and caught the Japanese by surprise. Admiral Gotto, aboard his flagship *Aoba*, was mortally wounded in the early stages of the battle. The cruiser *Furutaka* rushed to station between the *Aoba* and the American force, was engulfed in fire by the six-inch guns of the light cruisers and sunk. So too was the Japanese destroyer *Fubuki*. The Japanese hastily retreated to the north to their base at Rabaul. By midnight Admiral Scott ordered pursuit of the Japanese to continue the attack and sink the crippled enemy ships, but at 0245 he broke off his pursuit of the three remaining Japanese warships and what is now known as the Battle of Cape Esperance was over.

The Japanese had lost one heavy cruiser, three destroyers and at least 565 men, of them 111 off *Fubuki* taken prisoner. They were, however, successful in offloading the troops and guns that were brought by the Reinforcement Group, much to the chagrin of the Marines on Guadalcanal.

Though the Japanese raid on Guadalcanal and Henderson Field was forestalled, this victory came at a heavy price. The destroyer *Duncan*, caught between the U.S. and Japanese cruisers when firing started, engaged the Japanese with torpedoes. She was hit repeatedly by both Japanese and U.S. fire and was sunk. The light cruiser *Boise* had been severely damaged as well by two eight-inch shells that detonated ammunition in her two forward turrets, and the destroyer *Farenholt* received some damage. Thus three of Scott’s eight ships were lost to the war effort at a particularly critical time.

---

6 Ibid., p. 294.
7 Ibid., p. 302-303.
8 Ibid., p. 309.
9 Ibid., p. 312.
The results of this surface action made it clear to the Japanese that more powerful action would have to be initiated if they were to regain Guadalcanal. The question was whether Admiral Yamamoto was willing to risk his remaining carriers in order to sever the SLOCs between Hawaii and Australia? The answer was to come in only two weeks.

**Prelude to The Battle of Santa Cruz**

Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, having commanded the *kido butai* during its attack on Pearl Harbor, its raid on Ceylon, and in every carrier battle of World War II except Coral Sea, seemed the logical choice to settle the issue of control of Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands chain. His experience notwithstanding, however, Nagumo had fared badly in his last two commands at Midway and the Eastern Solomons.

The picture was not as clear on the American side. After having command in the first three carrier battles of the war, Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher was sent stateside for some well-deserved leave after his flagship, *Saratoga*, was torpedoed on 31 August. Fletcher, in the damaged *Saratoga*, reached Tongatabu on 6 September — only three days after the crippled *Enterprise* had left for Hawaii — and sailed six days later to reach Pearl Harbor on 21 September. 10 Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (CominCh) had Fletcher come to Washington from his home “Araby,” a 366-acre dairy farm near La Plata, Maryland, where he had spent his time on leave, for a period of debriefings. After that, King assigned Fletcher as Commandant of the Thirteenth Naval District in Seattle and Commander Northwestern Sea Frontier on 18 November 1942. 11 Almost a year later, in October 1943, Fletcher was relieved of his responsibilities as Commandant of the Thirteenth Naval District, but continued in his position as Commander, Northwestern Sea Frontier, again under Admiral Chester Nimitz, and tasked with planning and executing attacks on the Kurile Islands and with the occupation of northern Japan. 12 On 15 April of 1944 that position was abolished and Fletcher became

---


11 Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Biographical Sketch, p. 3., Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

12 Ibid.
Commander of the newly established Alaskan Sea Frontier in Adak, Alaska, with additional duty as Commander North Pacific Force and North Pacific Ocean Area. In this capacity “…It was revealed in July 1945, that a Task Force under his overall command had made the first penetration through the Kurile Islands into the Sea of Okhtosk on March 3 and 4, 1945, and the same Task Force on February 4, 1944 bombarded Paramushira in the first sea bombardment of the Kuriles.” Fletcher was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his actions at Coral Sea and Midway, the battle in which “…the Japanese suffered the first decisive defeat in three hundred and fifty years, restoring the balance of naval power in the Pacific.” Fletcher went on to become Chairman of the General Board in Washington, retired on 1 May 1947 and died on 25 April 1973.

With the most experienced carrier commander out of theater on leave, the question of who would command was paramount as intelligence indicated an impending Japanese offensive to re-take Guadalcanal. The Japanese had intensified their attacks in the Solomons throughout August, especially after the U.S. victory in the Battle of Cape Esperance on the night of 11-12 October. Only two nights later a powerful Japanese force consisting of two battleships, one light cruiser and eight destroyers bombarded the Marine aircraft on Guadalcanal at Henderson Field for an hour and twenty minutes,

---

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 4.
17 Nimitz, Chester W., Admiral, U.S. Navy. Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet [Admiral King], Subject: Solomon Islands Campaign, Battle of Santa Cruz – 26 October 1941, dated January 6, 1943, Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 45530, p. 4. (Previously CLASSIFIED document) Please note that in this and all other official correspondence relating to this period of the war Guadalcanal was referred to by its assigned code word, “Cactus,” and Esperitu Santo by its assigned code word, “Button.” These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the text that follows.
destroying or damaging a large number of planes. Numerous Japanese air attacks also caused some damage, but of the total of around 600 planes making these attacks from 1-27 October approximately 200 were shot down -- captured Japanese records attesting to between one-half and two-thirds of that number. In a pre-dawn landing west of Kokumbona on 15 October the Japanese were able to land much equipment and around 10,000 troops from six transports and cargo vessels supported by a heavy cruiser, two light cruisers and four destroyers. Additional reinforcements and supplies were landed thereafter, but in lesser quantities. All indications pointed to a full-scale Japanese assault on Henderson Field in the near future.

In the midst of this Admiral Nimitz in Hawaii was getting the impression that Vice Admiral Ghormley had already accepted the likelihood of the Japanese retaking Guadalcanal. On the evening of 15 October Nimitz read a message from Ghormley declaring his forces “totally inadequate” to meet and repel the expected Japanese attack. Nimitz quickly decided to replace Ghormley and obtained Admiral King’s permission to replace him with Vice Admiral William F. Halsey as COMSOPAC. Learning of his new assignment when he touched down in Noumea harbor three days later, Halsey blurted out “Jesus Christ and General Jackson! This is the hottest potato they ever handed me!” Halsey was right.

After the damage and losses inflicted by the Japanese in August the only U.S. aircraft carrier in the South Pacific was U.S.S. Hornet with Rear Admiral George D. Murray embarked as Commander Task Force 17. In the Hornet Task Force were the

---

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 It should be noted that at this point in the war phonetic Task Force identifiers based on the first letter of the last name of the Task Force Commander were used in message traffic and radio transmissions to maintain security. The appropriate numerical identifiers will be used here throughout to maintain a proper convention.
heavy cruisers *Northampton* and *Pensacola* along with the anti-aircraft light cruisers *Juneau* and *San Diego* and a screen of destroyers.\(^{24}\) The only active battleship in the South Pacific was *U.S.S. Washington*.\(^{25}\) The only other ships available in the theater for COMSOPAC, Vice Admiral Halsey, were those that survived the Battle of Cape Esperance, save for a few destroyers protecting the supply ships being sent to Guadalcanal from Espiritu Santo.\(^{26}\)

**Evidence of a Japanese Offensive**

After the American victory in the Battle of Cape Esperance on 11-12 August the Japanese intensified their attacks on the Solomons and increased their efforts to reinforce and re-supply their troops on Guadalcanal as discussed above. Air surveillance by U.S. aircraft operationally assigned to Rear Admiral John S. McCain, Commander, Aircraft, Southwest Pacific Area staging from Espiritu Santo and other nearby locations revealed a substantial number of ships assembling in the Rabaul-Kavieng and Shortland Island region.\(^{27}\)

---

\(^{24}\) Poor, Henry V. Ensign, USNR, Henry V. Mustin, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR, and Colin G. Jamison, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR. *The Battles of Cape Esperance 11 October 1942 and Santa Cruz Islands 26 October 1942*. Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1943 (Republished in 1994), Combat Narratives Series, Solomon Islands campaign, 4-5, p. 31.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid. It should be remembered that *Salt Lake City*, *Boise* and *Farenholt* had received heavy damage and the destroyer *Duncan* had been sunk during the Battle of Cape Esperance.

\(^{27}\) Rabaul was the Japanese advanced area naval base, with about 90,000 men stationed there, at the northeast corner of New Britain Island, just east of the Huon Peninsula on New Guinea. Kavieng is about 120 nautical miles north and west of Rabaul on the northwest corner of New Ireland Island in the upper Solomons, and Shortland Island is in the Solomons just south of the southeast corner of Bouganville Island and about 270 nautical miles southeast of Rabaul.
areas.\textsuperscript{28} Japanese submarine activity intensified in an effort to interdict the U.S. supply lines from Esperitu Santo to Guadalcanal, and indications of a concentration of submarines in the area were present and noted. All signs pointed toward a major Japanese land offensive on Guadalcanal in the near future -- with 23 October established as the most likely date for its start.\textsuperscript{29} The first step for the Japanese would be to capture Henderson Field. This would allow them to bring in supply ships for their troops and aircraft from their carriers that could be staged from Henderson Field. In combination with the carrier and battleship striking force that was assembling in the area around Rabaul, any American force in the area could be attacked and destroyed. Only a tremendous defense put up by the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Marines, along with their reinforcements from the 164\textsuperscript{th} U.S. Army Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division that landed on 13 October, forced the Japanese to postpone their planned offensive.\textsuperscript{30}

The first major attack by the Japanese had come earlier, on 12 September. The 6,000 troops they had stationed on Guadalcanal attacked on the high ground they held along what would subsequently be known as “Bloody Ridge” in an attempt to move north toward Henderson Field. The Marines were ready for them, holding through the night in what sometimes became hand-to-hand combat, then making good use of 105-mm. howitzers and machine guns in the morning. In all the Japanese lost 1,500 men compared to 40 killed and 103 wounded on the U.S. side.

This crushing defeat, with a quarter of their men killed on Guadalcanal, made the Japanese realize that they would need to reinforce quickly or the island would be lost. By mid-October the Japanese had increased their strength on Guadalcanal to 22,000 men -- mostly fresh troops from New Guinea -- as compared to 23,000 exhausted and malaria-infected U.S. troops opposing them. The Japanese plan was to launch their offensive on 23 October, expecting air support from Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo’s carrier force moving down “The Slot” from Rabaul.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., pp. 4-5.
From the observed evidence and intelligence from decoded Japanese JN-25 naval messages, Admiral Nimitz was convinced of the impending Japanese major joint Navy and land force assault soon to be launched against American positions on Guadalcanal. He therefore pushed hard for completion of the extensive repairs to *U.S.S. Enterprise* taking place in Pearl Harbor. Once again the construction crews in Hawaii came through. Not enough can be said in praise of these fine workers whose efforts before the Battle of Midway and the Battle of Santa Cruz were essential to the success achieved by the United States Navy.

*Enterprise*, which had been under repair at Pearl Harbor for battle damage received in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in August, was intended to rendezvous with Admiral Halsey, who was on an aerial reconnaissance mission in the Solomon Islands, at which time he would resume command of Task Force 16 aboard his old

---

31 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
Flagship. When Admiral Nimitz relieved the defeatist Vice Admiral Ghormley and replaced him with Halsey, Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, who was tasked to deliver *Enterprise* to Halsey in the Solomons, remained as Commander of Task Force 16. With her repairs complete, *Enterprise* proceeded at high speed from the yard with the battleship *South Dakota* and her screen of destroyers to join with the *Hornet* carrier group and joined Task Force 17 at 1500 on 24 October at latitude 13 degrees and 45 minutes South and longitude 171 degrees and 30 minutes East -- just in the nick of time to contest the Japanese Joint Force assault on Guadalcanal.  

**The Battle of Santa Cruz**

With the *Enterprise* (CV-6) and the *Hornet* (CV-8) Task Forces (TF-16 and TF-17, respectively) now joined, Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, as the senior officer embarked took command of the combined Task Force 61. *Hornet* operated close to *Enterprise*, about five miles to the south. In company they set course to sweep the area north of the Santa Cruz Islands to interdict Japanese ships passing down The Slot from Rabaul toward Guadalcanal. “The mission of the force was to support Guadalcanal against an expected large scale attack and occupation, and to destroy any enemy surface forces taking part in this attack.”

In addition to the aircraft embarked on the two U.S. carriers, Admiral McCain as Commander Air Force, South Pacific, had 65 patrol aircraft and heavy land-based bombers at his disposal and Major General Roy S. Geiger’s 1st Marine Air Wing on Guadalcanal had 23 fighters, 16 bombers and one torpedo plane ready for action on 26 October.

---

35 Ibid.
October. The latter were unable to fly on 25 October due to heavy rains that made the runway incapable of launching aircraft. The runway had dried sufficiently by 26 October for use by the Marine Air Wing.

At 1250 on 25 October a search plane from Esperitu Santo radioed a contact report indicating that two Japanese carriers and accompanying escorts were at 8 degrees 51 minutes South latitude and 164 degrees and 30 minutes East longitude, heading 145 degrees true at 25 knots. At that time Task Force 61 was 360 nautical miles from the reported contact at 10 degrees and 4 minutes South latitude and 170 degrees and 18 minutes East longitude, on a course of 295 degrees true and speed of 22 knots. Admiral Kincaid altered course to close the Japanese carrier force and launched a search and attack group from Enterprise at 1430 that included twelve scout bombers to search the area in a sector from 280 degrees true to 010 degrees true. The Hornet Air Group remained in a ready status to launch when contact with the Japanese force was firmly established.

Fifty minutes later, in expectation of contact and wanting to strike the Japanese first, Admiral Kinkaid launched an attack group of twelve dive bombers and six torpedo planes escorted by eleven fighters. Neither the search group nor the attack group located the Japanese since they had reversed course to the north. Due to the over-aggressiveness of the Attack Group Commander, who went out to the 200 nautical mile limit of the search and then continued to search for an additional 80 miles, seven planes and one pilot were lost at sea during the night landings when they returned. Aside from

37 Ibid.
39 Mason, Ibid.
the needless loss of life, this came as a significant blow at a critical time in the engagement. It should be noted that loss of these planes was mitigated by extra aircraft aboard *Enterprise* that had “bingoed”\(^{41}\) to her or Henderson Field when *U.S.S. Wasp* had been sunk in the aftermath of the Battle of the Eastern Solomons.\(^{42}\)

The Japanese were ready to strike and had gotten their major fleet units underway from Rabaul and some 40 ships underway from the Shortland Islands during the night of 24-25 October.\(^ {43}\) This force included many transport and supply ships to support operations on Guadalcanal, but also at least three carriers to strike any U.S. surface and air forces that might contest Japanese intentions. As had become their custom, the Japanese split their ships into at least three main groups.\(^ {44}\)

---

\(^{41}\) “Bingoed” is a term used for brevity in the military when an aircraft that is low on fuel or has a mechanical problem or a physical problem with its pilot or a member of its crew lands at abase nearer than its home base or intended destination. As used here it denotes those of *Wasp*’s aircraft that were forced to land elsewhere when their carrier was in flames and sinking.

\(^{42}\) Interview of Capt. James Granson Daniels, USN (Ret.), participant as fighter pilot in all carrier battles of World War II except the Battle of Midway, 18 February 2002, Honolulu, Hawaii.


\(^{44}\) Ibid.
Meanwhile, ground operations on Guadalcanal were intensified by the Japanese. A heavy artillery bombardment of U.S. positions was conducted on 23 October. This was followed by a sizeable Japanese attack along the Matanikau River, with a force crossing it with tanks and massed infantry. Repeated attacks on the Matanikau River and elsewhere continued unabated through the 24th. This onslaught was supported on 25 October by cruiser and destroyer fire during daylight hours, followed that night by a breakthrough of American lines and heavy hand-to-hand fighting. The U.S. Marine and Army troops fought well, and this Japanese onslaught was driven back, but with heavy U.S. losses. The situation for the U.S. forces on Guadalcanal was at best tenuous, and heavy rains during the night made Henderson Field unserviceable, at least for the present.

---

45 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
thus preventing the use of American land-based air assets against any landing the Japanese were able to make.

During the night of 25-26 October Task Force 61 closed the enemy. At 0110 one of Admiral McCain’s land-based search planes radioed that the Japanese had been located at 7 degrees 14 minutes South latitude, 164 degrees 15 minutes East longitude, about 300 nautical miles from Task Force 61. At dawn *U.S.S. Hornet*, the “duty carrier,” had a Combat Air Patrol of fighters overhead and at 0600 *U.S.S. Enterprise* launched a sixteen-plane search group to cover the sector 235-345 degrees true to a distance of 200 nautical miles. Just after that launch, at 0612, Admiral Kinkaid

---

46 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.


48 Poor, Henry V. Ensign, USNR, Henry V. Mustin, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR, and Colin G. Jamison, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR. *The Battles of Cape Esperance* 11
received a report that a patrol plane from Esperitu Santo had located a Japanese force that included the carrier Zuiho. Unfortunately, the sighting of Zuiho had actually taken place much earlier -- at 0410 -- and her location had been sent as 7 degrees 55 minutes South latitude, 164 degrees 15 minutes East longitude, only 200 nautical miles from Task Force 61 and on a southerly course at 15 knots. Somehow transmission of this vital information to Admiral Kinkaid had been delayed for almost two hours. Thus Kinkaid had launched 16 SBD-3 dive bombers needlessly, and this diminished his ability to constitute an attack group at the earliest possible time and thus preempt the possibility of being hit first by the Japanese.

Six search aircraft were assigned in pairs to the sector 235-282 degrees true, and ten more to the sector 282-345 degrees true. The planes flying in the sub-sector 268-288 degrees true sighted a Japanese force that they identified as two battleships, one heavy cruiser and seven destroyers. Not noting any carriers, the crews continued their search to the designated 200 nautical miles and then returned to Enterprise at 1031 after re-establishing the position of the battleship force they had located. The crews had seen a Mitsubichi Type 97 single-engine torpedo bomber flying toward Task Force 61 on their outbound leg and another heading back toward the Japanese force on their return leg but failed to report either sighting.

The crews searching the 298-314 degrees true sector had better luck. They reported at 0750 sighting both Shokaku and Zuikaku at 7 degrees 5 minutes South latitude and 163 degrees 38 minutes East longitude with their decks empty. After being attacked

---

October 1942 and Santa Cruz Islands 26 October 1942. Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1943 (Republished in 1994), Combat Narratives Series, Solomon Islands campaign, 4-5, p. 36.

49 Ibid., p. 35.
50 Ibid., p. 36.
51 Ibid., p. 41.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
by Japanese Zero fighters and shooting two down, the search planes broke off their contact and returned to Enterprise.\footnote{Ibid., p. 42.}

Another pair of aircraft assigned to the 330-345 degree true sub-sector copied the 0750 report on the Japanese carriers that had been sighted and departed their track to attack. At 0830 after traversing more than 100 nautical miles they attacked the Shokaku, which was actually in company with the Zuiho and not the misidentified Zuikaku, and delivered two 500-lb bombs to her stern.\footnote{Ibid.} It seems that the Shokaku, Zuikaku, Zuiho and the converted carrier Hayataka had been changing their positions frequently to confuse the U.S. pilots searching for them and at no time in this battle were any three of these carriers seen in company.\footnote{Ibid., footnote 7, p. 36.} Zuiho was also attacked and badly hurt, but not crippled.\footnote{Ibid., p. 43.}

Enterprise received two transmissions from her search aircraft during this period. The first, received at 0730, was on the contact with the battleship group sighted at 0717. The second, received at 0750, was the one Admiral Kinkaid had been waiting for -- the Japanese carriers had been located. The Shokaku and what was believed to be the Zuikaku were 200 nautical miles from Task Force 61 on a bearing of 300 degrees true, course 330 and speed 15 knots. Word was also received that two of the Enterprise search planes had hit Shokaku with 500-lb bombs.\footnote{Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet letter dated January 6, 1942, Op. Cit., p. 7. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)} At 0822 a transmission was received from an Enterprise search plane on the attack frequency that a large Japanese force which did not include any aircraft carriers had been sighted.\footnote{Mason, Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Hornet letter dated October 30, 1942, Op. Cit., p. 2. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)} Admiral Kinkaid immediately ordered an attack launched from Hornet and ten minutes later a first-wave strike force of 15 dive bombers with 1,000-lb bombs, six torpedo planes and eight fighters started taking

\footnote{54 Ibid., p. 42.}
\footnote{55 Ibid.}
\footnote{56 Ibid., footnote 7, p. 36.}
\footnote{57 Ibid., p. 43.}
A second attack wave of nine dive bombers with 1,000-lb bombs, nine torpedo planes with four 500-lb bombs each and seven fighters was immediately brought on deck and was in the air by 0910. The *Hornet* Air Group Commander accompanied the second attack wave. Fifteen fighters were maintained continuously for defensive purposes over Task Force 17, the *Hornet* group. Just eight minutes later, concurrent with the end of the launch of a new Combat Air Patrol at 0918, *Hornet* got a radio report from one of her outgoing strikes that two large groups of Japanese carrier planes were headed for Task Force 61.

The situation was beginning to look a lot like the Battle of Midway. As Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Forces, Admiral Halsey, was to observe in his final Report of Action on the Battle of Santa Cruz of 20 November 1942, “…narratives and plots of participating units in this action will spotlight the startling similarity in the situation and developments to those existing at Midway on 4 June, 1942. Analysis and conclusions from the action on 26 October should be compared and studied side by side with the Midway engagement.” In both these battles the Japanese objective was to wrest control of an island of major strategic importance from the United States. In both cases the Japanese approached the area in multiple separate groups of warships. In both battles the Japanese had to make hard decisions regarding apportionment of carrier aircraft for search, strike and defense. Guadalcanal, like Midway, presented the Japanese

---

60 Ibid., p. 3.

61 While it seems odd that “VT” (torpedo planes) would be loaded with bombs, this is a verbatim entry in the After Action Report of the Commanding Officer, *U.S.S. Enterprise*, Ibid., p. 3, para. 7.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

with essentially an additional carrier with whose aircraft they had to contend (albeit in this case only after Henderson Field dried out sufficiently during the day on 26 October). In both encounters U.S. and Japanese air strikes against their opponents’ carriers would be in the air simultaneously. And in both carrier battles the opposing commanders would have hard choices to make following their initial successes with a debilitating strike or strikes at a time when survival of their own force was in jeopardy.

The U.S. Carrier Strike

The first wave of the Hornet strike took off with orders to bomb the Japanese carrier task force bearing 300 degrees true at a distance of 190 nautical miles. At 1015 the group flew over and sighted a large cruiser force, but, since it contained no carriers, they continued their search. While passing over what turned out to be an advanced force the Hornet strike wave was attacked by nine Zero fighters and lost its own fighter escort in the action, and the Scouting Squadron Seven Commander, Lieutenant Commander William J. Widhelm, was shot down. Lieutenant James E. Vose, Commanding Officer of Bombing Squadron Eight, assumed command of the strike. They were continually under attack by Japanese fighters from that point on.

At 1030 the Hornet strike wave located the Japanese carrier force constructed around one large carrier “…with a distinctly pronounced island, which looked fully as large as our Saratoga class, also one converted CV.” The attack and counter-attack profiles are as indicated below:

---

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 2.
An attack was launched within ten minutes and eleven of the 15 planes in the U.S. strike group dropped their bombs. Four direct hits with 1,000-lb bombs were claimed on the large Japanese carrier, which had a single Zero fighter on a “…flight deck extending the complete length of the ship, and painted brick red in color.” This carrier was later confirmed to be the *Shokaku*. Sections of the *Shokaku*’s flight deck were seen to fly into the air and she was sighted on fire and smoking twenty minutes after the U.S. attack.

The *Hornet*’s torpedo planes, seeing the *Shokaku* in flames, attacked the accompanying heavy cruiser *Chikuma*, scoring two hits. *Hornet*’s second wave strike group torpedo planes scored hits on a *Nachi* class heavy cruiser and a *Tone* class cruiser. It appears

---

68 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.


72 Nimitz, Ibid.
that Zuikaku was not in company with Shokaku and Zuiho during the U.S. attacks and thus escaped the engagement without damage.

The Japanese Strikes

From a captured document it is known that a Japanese search plane sighted Task Force 61 at 0750 -- the precise time when an Enterprise search plane radioed that the Japanese carriers had been located -- and as a result the Japanese launched an attack group prior to 0826. Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo was able to launch immediately due to the longer strike range of his aircraft, and because of the more precise target locating and identifying information passed by his search aircraft. At this time Task Force 61 was at 8 degrees and 25 minutes South latitude and 166 degrees and 45 minutes East longitude. Fighters from this first Japanese attack group engaged the Enterprise attack group that had been launched from 0847 to 0902 and shot down two dive bombers and two fighters, damaging two other dive bombers and two fighters sufficiently to cause them to return to Enterprise.

Hornet’s outgoing strike planes had reported two large groups of Japanese planes that included about 24 dive bombers and accompanying Zero fighters while enroute to their strike. The inbound Japanese strike had been picked up on radar bearing 280 degrees true at 60 miles at about the same time. Luckily, Task force 16 was operating eight to ten miles to the northeast of Task Force 17 at that time and was concealed by rain squalls, making a sighting by the Japanese initially problematic. Hornet had fifteen recently-launched fighters stationed in her Combat Air Patrol at the time, and they engaged the inbound Japanese strike aircraft, shooting down several before they reached their attack positions.

---

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
By 1002 *Hornet* was closing the *Enterprise* group as ordered and her radar held the Japanese strike group at about 20-30 miles from the ship, approaching from 230 degrees true.\(^{79}\) Her fighters were engaging the inbound Japanese strike and she was stationed about midway between that action and *Enterprise*, and thus braced to take the first blow.\(^{80}\) Task Force 16 was in a circular group with a spacing of 2,000 yards between ships to provide an optimum anti-aircraft posture, and radically maneuvering at 28 knots.\(^{81}\)

At 1010 the Japanese attack began with *Hornet* as its initial target. It was well-coordinated with both dive bombers and torpedo planes -- about 15 and 12 respectively -- involved. Two minutes into their attack two near misses exploded on the starboard side abreast the bridge. A minute later a Japanese bomber dived vertically into *Hornet* intent on hitting the bridge or the stack.\(^{82}\) He glanced off the stack and hit the flight deck amid ship. The plane appeared to be armed with one 500-lb and two 100-lb bombs, one of the latter of which demolished the signal bridge and part of the stack, killing seven sailors and starting a blazing inferno. The plane itself and one of its bombs hit the flight deck and exploded, creating a large hole and continuing to the number two Ready Room


\(^{80}\) Ibid., pp. 3-4.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{82}\) This was not a *kamikaze* attack as that program had not yet been initiated by the Japanese. Rather, this was in all likelihood a pilot whose plane had sustained significant damage from U.S. anti-aircraft guns that he realized he would not be able to return to his ship safely. Akin to the Japanese human-wave suicide tactics that were so often seen in the Pacific island-hopping campaign, it was not uncommon for “doomed” Japanese pilots to ride their aircraft clear to their intended target to ensure maximum damage. In fact, there is at least one report of a pilot attempting to do this as early in the war as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor of 7 December 1941.
below, where it started another large fire. Luckily, the 500-lb bomb was a dud, but it still produced a significant hazard until the fires could be put out.\textsuperscript{83}

Only two minutes later and only three minutes into the attack, at 1015, *Hornet* was rocked by the force of two torpedoes that struck in quick succession, only 20 seconds apart, near the engineering spaces. The engine room and two forward fire rooms were flooded and all propulsion and communication power was lost. *Hornet* took on a ten and a half degree list to starboard, which ultimately righted to seven to eight degrees. Compounding *Hornet*'s situation was the loss of all fire-main pressure, making firefighting with only portable “handy-billies” and by bucket brigade much less effective.\textsuperscript{84} Of the 20 planes reported by *Pensacola* to have attacked *Hornet*, over half were shot down prior to releasing their torpedoes.\textsuperscript{85}

At the same time as the two torpedoes struck *Hornet* she was rocked by two more 500-lb bomb hits. The first struck aft, penetrating four decks before exploding. The other exploded while hitting the flight deck just forward of it and killed 30 men instantly in the hangar and nearby gun batteries. Yet another bomb hit farther forward, piercing *Hornet* to explode on the third or fourth deck near the messing compartment. Now coasting to a dead stop in the water, *Hornet*'s woes were not over.\textsuperscript{86}

Five minutes into the attack an unarmed Japanese torpedo plane deliberately dived into *Hornet* from dead ahead.\textsuperscript{87} Miscalculating his approach, he came in in a

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{86} Mason, Commanding Officer, U.S.S. *Hornet* letter dated October 30, 1942, Op. Cit., pp. 4-5. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)

\textsuperscript{87} Dieing in battle was thought by many Japanese to assure them of a special and hallowed place in the after-life. Thus sacrifice of life to assure success in battle was not uncommon for the bravest warriors among them. This attack resembles the bravery demonstrated by the U.S. torpedo squadrons in the Battle of Midway where several of the
shallow dive and impacted the port forward gun mount, exploding just outboard of the number one elevator shaft and starting another huge fire. The plane’s engine stopped in the Junior Officer bunk room on the second deck below the flight deck and the plane went into the elevator pit. Aside from another torpedo which was evaded and exploded astern on the starboard side as Hornet was at full right rudder when she lost power, the Japanese attack was over.\textsuperscript{88}

By 1025, only ten minutes after the Japanese attack started, there were blazing fires on Hornet’s signal bridge, at several places on her flight deck, in her number two Ready Room, in the Chief Petty Officers’ quarters, in the general storeroom, forward messing compartment, the 02 deck on the port side, in the number one elevator pit, in the hangar deck amidships, and on the hangar deck aft in two places. The destroyers Morris and Russell, and later the Mustin as well, were called alongside to pass over hoses and help fight the fires.\textsuperscript{89} Directions were passed to prepare to abandon ship and the heavy cruiser Northampton was made ready to tow Hornet if her fires could be brought under control. Admiral Murray, Commander Task Force 17, transferred his flag to U.S.S. Pensacola.\textsuperscript{90}

By 1540 all seriously wounded men, around 75, were transferred to other ships, along with about 800 non-essential personnel, and faint hopes of saving Hornet were reviving. She was under tow by Northampton and moving at about three knots. At 1555 word was received on the Voice Warning Net, a battery-operated tactical broadcasting system, and by flag hoist that another Japanese strike was inbound. At 1620 four to six Japanese torpedo planes struck. As they approached from a shallow glide from starboard, Northampton cast off her tow lines and started evasive maneuvers. Two of the Japanese torpedo planes took her as their target, but missed. The rest of the torpedo planes attacked Hornet -- a virtual sitting duck. At 1623 a fateful torpedo hit Hornet on her

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 6.
starboard side near frame 100. She began taking on water and her list quickly reached 14 ½ degrees. Captain C.P. Mason, Hornet’s skipper, ordered the ship abandoned. Only the Navigator, Tactical Officer and Gunnery Control Group remained onboard.91

The expected dive bomber attack came at 1640. Though the five planes in this attack wave made no hits on the defenseless carrier, one near miss shook Hornet violently. Her list progressed to 20 degrees, but her guns continued to fire to the very last. Six Japanese horizontal bombers dropped their loads on Hornet through an obscuring layer of clouds. The Navigator and Tactical Officer, now on the flight deck, saw one bomb strike the starboard corner of the flight deck. The others, probably armor-piercing bombs, landed in a group so small that they appeared to make a single splash. In combination, though they constituted a near miss, their impact was about as damaging as a torpedo hit. Captain Mason was the last to leave the ship, going over the side at 1727. At 1802, when the crew was safely away from Hornet, she received another hit from one of four dive bombers making a final attack run. By order of the Task Force Commander, Admiral Murray, the destroyers Anderson and Mustin fired nine torpedoes and 300 rounds of five inch ammunition into Hornet to complete her destruction.92 By 2136 she was ablaze with a fire that could be seen for over 20 miles. Anderson and Mustin departed the area with Hornet still afloat when a Japanese submarine was reported in the area a short time later.93 During the early action the destroyer Porter had also been torpedoed by a submarine while trying to rescue a downed pilot, making the immediate threat quite serious.94

91 Ibid., p. 7.
92 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
93 CTF 17 (Rear Admiral Murray) message of 260507Z42 to CTG 17.4 directing “As soon as all personnel are picked up torpedo Hornet,” with CTG 17.4’s response to CTF 16 and CTF 17 reporting on completion of tasking, Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 43846, p. 1. (Previously CLASSIFIED Document)
94 Kinkaid, T. C., Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy. Commander Task Force Sixty-One letter to Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet Serial 0077 (no date given), Subject: Report of Carrier Action North of the Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October 1942, Naval War College
While *Hornet* was being attacked, *Enterprise* concealed herself in a rain squall. She recovered her search group between 1031 and 1048 and found that they had shot down seven Japanese Zeros and a torpedo bomber.\(^{95}\) Unfortunately, *Enterprise* was spotted by one or more of the Japanese planes attacking *Hornet* and at 1027 a voice transmission passed her presence and location to an inbound strike group.\(^{96}\)

By 1100 a great number of Japanese planes began to appear on radar. At 1115 Task Force 16 was attacked by an estimated 42 dive bombers.\(^ {97}\) The first group of 24 dive bombers attacked *Enterprise*. Seven were shot down while making their attack runs.\(^ {98}\) One bomb hit the forward port corner of the flight deck and a second bomb hit the centerline of the ship just aft of the number one elevator. The fires started by these two bombs were quickly extinguished. Then at about 1135 about 17 torpedo planes and at 1222 an additional 28 dive bombers attacked Task Force 16. Of these roughly 87 Japanese strike planes 25 were confirmed as shot down and another 23 probably splashed by anti-aircraft fire alone.\(^ {99}\) Fifteen of the torpedo planes commenced their attack on *Enterprise*. Maneuvering at 28 knots, *Enterprise* managed to avoid all nine torpedoes.

---

Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 44248, p. 5. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)


\(^{96}\) Ibid.


Lieutenant James Granson Daniels III relates that the Japanese Kates that bombed *Enterprise* came right up her stern. Daniels had been a pilot in Fighting Ten aboard *Enterprise* since he received orders to join her in September of 1939. He had been with Admiral Halsey when *Enterprise* delivered aircraft to Wake Island, and was “bingoed” to Pearl Harbor on the evening of 7 September 1941. He won the first Distinguished Flying Cross awarded in World War II for his action in the First Battle of the Marshall Islands on 1 February 1942, where he was credited with shooting down one and a half Kate bombers. Granson got another kill credited at Santa Cruz. He was the Landing Signals Officer (LSO) aboard *Enterprise*, responsible for landing all aircraft when they returned from their missions. At the time *Enterprise* had 82 aircraft aboard -- about ten more than normal -- and Daniels had landed the first 72 of them. Lieutenant Robin Scott Lindsey,
who would receive the Silver Star for his Santa Cruz service, landed the last ten. When
one bomb hit Enterprise near her elevator and another by her screws, she was “lifted out
of the water.” Daniels jumped into the cockpit of one of two SBDs parked on her stern
and opened fire on the incoming Japanese Kates -- and actually shot one down. He was
given credit for the kill just as he would have been if he had accomplished it in the
F4F3A Wildcat fighter aircraft he was assigned to fly at the time.\textsuperscript{104}

Daniels also recounts that during the battle several planes from Enterprise were
forced to “bingo” to Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. The senior pilot, on landing asked
to see the Commanding Officer of the Marines there. He was taken to a Marine Major
who was awakened from his sleep on the wing of an airplane. The Enterprise pilot
saluted and offered that -- if the Marines would be so kind as to provide their Navy
compatriots with fuel for their airplanes -- they would rejoin the battle in whatever
capacity the Major would direct. To this the Marine answered something like “…The
only tasking I have for you is to get the hell off my airfield!” So much for cooperation in
joint operations between the Navy and Marine Corps!\textsuperscript{105}

After the last attack, Enterprise resumed landing aircraft. Several made water
landings due to running out of fuel. With the exception of a single attack plane at 1109
that missed her mark, Hornet was not the subject of any more Japanese attacks during the
period they concentrated on Enterprise.

\textsuperscript{104} Interview of Capt. James Granson Daniels, USN (Ret.), participant as fighter pilot in
all carrier battles of World War II except the Battle of Midway, 18 February 2002,
Honolulu, Hawaii. It should be noted that Captain Daniels, who was the last surviving
pilot from both the battle of the Eastern Solomons and Santa Cruz, died in 2003. He
related in this interview that the normal Air Group of Enterprise was 18 fighters, 18 dive
bombers, 18 scout bombers and 18 torpedo planes -- for a total of 72 aircraft. The ten
extra planes aboard Enterprise were the result of the sinking of U.S.S. Wasp just after the
Battle of the Eastern Solomons.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid. In this story Captain Daniels offered that the Marine Major was the legendary
“Pappy Boyington.” No attempt has been made here to authenticate Major Boyington’s
presence on Guadalcanal at this point in the war.
Japanese air reconnaissance sighted Task Force 64, built around the remnants of the Battle of Cape Esperance, positioned as directed by Admiral Halsey south southeast of Guadalcanal. Considering that this surface force would attempt to cover *U.S.S. Hornet* from a surface attack, Admiral Yamamoto directed a night cruiser-destroyer attack before Task Force 64 could get into position to defend *Hornet*. The Japanese raiding force was to be supported by a strong battleship force. Indications of the likelihood of such an attack played strongly in Admiral Murray’s decision to sink *Hornet* by friendly fire while the rest of Task Force 17 retired to the southeast. Unknown to the remaining ships in Task Force 17, two heavy and one light cruisers and eight destroyers were within 40 nautical miles and closing on them as they retired. The Japanese, however, broke off their chase at midnight.  

While Task Force 16 and Task Force 17 retired independently to a pre-arranged fueling area 185 nautical miles southeast of Espiritu Santo, the Japanese continued to search for them. The Japanese Striking Force, minus several carriers hit hard in the battle, returned to their striking position northwest of Guadalcanal to continue their support for their land offensive on that island. That offensive, sometimes fought in hand-to-hand combat, failed miserably by the morning of 27 October. Late in the day on the 27th with their operational objective denied, their carriers damaged and carrier aircraft depleted, Admiral Kondo’s force and the two groups of ships supporting it were ordered to retire.  

The battle for Guadalcanal was to continue, but in reality any hope of Japanese victory ended with the Battle of Santa Cruz.

**Results of the Battle**

In all, about 65 aircraft attacked Task Force 17 and *Hornet*. Of these and their additional supporting fighters, only about 49 survived engagements with the Combat Air Patrol of Task Force 61. Around 80 planes and their supporting fighters attacked *Enterprise* and Task Force 16. Of these 15 were estimated to have been destroyed by

---

107 Ibid., p. 12.
The new F4F3As that had entered the fleet inventory were proving their worth against their Japanese adversaries, and particularly against the vaunted Japanese Zero fighter. Admiral Nimitz estimated that as many as 200 Japanese aircraft had engaged in the series of strikes sent by Admiral Kondo against his two carriers and their supporting warships -- or roughly the total air strength expected to be carried aboard four Japanese carriers at this point in the war. The relatively few aircraft used by the Japanese in their late afternoon attacks on *Hornet* was seen by Admiral Nimitz as a likely indication that they had few bombers and torpedo planes left with which to attack.\(^{109}\)

The total number of Japanese planes destroyed in the Battle of Santa Cruz was as follows:\(^{110}\)

**Table 8: Total Number of Japanese Planes Destroyed in the Battle of Santa Cruz**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CERTAIN</th>
<th>PROBABLE</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VF-10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB-10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS-10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT-10</td>
<td>2(^{108})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VF-72</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB-8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS-8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT-6</td>
<td>0(^{109})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) Ibid.

\(^{110}\) Ibid. The table produced here is taken verbatim from that provided by Admiral Kinkaid in his report of the battle to Admiral Nimitz.
Table 8: Continued

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TF-16 AA</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TF-17 AA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>23 (?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These claims are summed up in Admiral Kinkaid’s words:

> It is probable that the air groups of four carriers, (SHOKAKU, ZUIKAKU, ZUIHO and HAYATAKA) about 170 or 180 enemy planes, engaged in this attack. Of these, about 133 actually came within striking range of ENTERPRISE and HORNET. The HORNET was attacked by 49 planes, the ENTERPRISE by 84. Some of the planes shot down were hit by our fighters in the enemy surface ship area. Others were downed before and after attacks on our carriers.¹¹¹

The destruction of Japanese naval aviation could not have been more complete. In the words of Admiral Nimitz:

> This battle cost us the lives of many gallant men, many planes, and two ships that could ill be spared. Despite the loss of about three carrier air groups and damage to a number of ships, the enemy retired with all his ships. We nevertheless turned back the Japanese again in their offensive to regain Guadalcanal, and shattered their carrier air strength on the eve of the critical days of mid-November.¹¹²

Still, Saratoga was in Pearl Harbor undergoing repairs and Enterprise was out of action in Noumea for repairs to the bomb damage she sustained. The main problem in getting Enterprise back in action was removing the bulge in the forward sections of her hangar deck and getting her number one elevator operating again. Admiral Halsey gave weak assurances to Admiral Nimitz in early November that he could have Enterprise back on line by 21 November.¹¹³ The Japanese would have the upper hand in the interim.

¹¹¹ Kinkaid, Commander Task Force Sixty-One letter to Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet Serial 0077 (no date given), Enclosure (B), Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 44248, p. 1. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)


What follows is a recounting of those November days.

**Continued Surface Action in the Solomons**

Just half a month after the Japanese ground offensive on Guadalcanal had been crushed by the Marines and Army and naval offensive had been stifled in the Battle of Santa Cruz, on 13 November, the Japanese launched another attack. Increasingly aware that the U.S. had more troops on Guadalcanal than initially realized, and that they would not be able to retake the island unless they could neutralize American air power from Henderson Field, the Japanese once again assembled a powerful force built around two battleships -- the *Kirishima* and the *Hiei*. In company with them were a light cruiser and ten destroyers. All were under the command of Rear Admiral Hiroaki Abe.114 The American situation was desperate as only two heavy cruisers, the *San Francisco* and the *Portland*, three light cruisers, the *Atlanta*, *Juneau* and *Helena*, and eight destroyers all under the command of Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan, were available to oppose them.115 Should the Japanese succeed in their objective of destroying all U.S. aircraft on Guadalcanal, a large group of supply ships was enroute awaiting the opportunity to re-supply and re-enforce the Japanese garrison there.

Firing started at point-blank range at 0148. Admiral Callaghan had attempted to cross the Japanese “T” but had misjudged the course and speed of the Japanese ships and wound up on a nearly parallel course. Moreover, Callaghan, who was killed in the battle, had failed to comprehend the strength of the Japanese force. He paid for his errors dearly.

The *U.S.S. Atlanta* was sunk, and all four of Callaghan’s other cruisers were heavily damaged. Also four American destroyers were sunk and another heavily damaged. The Japanese had two destroyers sunk during the battle and three more damaged. At about 0200 Admiral Abe called off his bombardment mission against Henderson Field.116

---

115 Ibid., pp. 434-435.
The big loss for the Japanese in this engagement was the battleship *Hiei*, Admiral Abe’s flagship. *Hiei* was so well armored that she was impervious to broadside gun fire. Her topside compartments and superstructure, however, were considerably more vulnerable. In her duel with *San Francisco*, she took a hit aft from an 8-inch shell that jammed her rudder and flooded her steering machinery compartment. *Hiei* continued to fight, but soon found herself un-maneuverable and reduced to five knots. The next morning Marine SBDs from VMSB-142 and VMSB-131 from Henderson Field and B-17s from the 11th Bombardment Group pounded away at *Hiei*, still very near to Iron Bottom Sound, while she was struggling to return to Rabaul. Shortly after Admiral Abe ordered her abandoned, *Hiei* was struck by two more torpedo planes. At least 300 of her crew had been killed before she sank.118

Though victory could be claimed by the United States in the strategic sense in that the intended neutralization of Henderson Field and re-supply of Japanese forces on Guadalcanal had been denied, the outcome of the First Naval Battle of Guadalcanal was less clear in the broader sense. Since the *North Carolina* had been torpedoed along with the *Saratoga* on 31 August, the newly-constructed *U.S.S. North Dakota* -- which would soon pick up the nickname “Battleship X” since she kept reappearing unexpectedly when the Japanese thought they had sunk her due to repair in U.S. floating dry docks in the area -- and *U.S.S. Washington* were the only American battleships in the South Pacific theater. With the recent sinking of four heavy and one light cruisers and damage to three heavy and three light cruisers in Iron Bottom Sound during the battles of Savo Island, Cape Esperance and in this battle Admiral Halsey was quickly running out of ships to oppose any future Japanese attempt to control the Solomons.

The Americans did not have long to wait. Only one day after the disastrous losses of Friday the 13th, the *South Dakota* and *Washington*, commanded by Rear Admiral Willis A. Lee, and four accompanying destroyers arrived in Iron Bottom Sound. The next day, only two days after their frustrated but damaging foray into the Sound, the

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., pp. 454-455.
Japanese struck again. The action that ensued just before and during the early morning hours of 15 November is as depicted next:

Figure 35: First and Second Naval Battles of Guadalcanal, 13 and 14-15 November 1942

The Japanese had returned to finish their incomplete business from the 11th. Their force consisted of the battleship *Kirishima*, undamaged in the previous battle, two each of heavy and light cruisers, and nine destroyers. They were commanded by the very capable Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo who, inexplicably, failed to include the available battleships *Kongo* and *Haruna* in his force.

The Japanese force rounded Savo Island to its west, with several destroyers stationed to its east to ensure the American force was contained. At 2316 on 14

---

119 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.


121 Ibid., pp. 462-463.
November, Admiral Lee, who had spotted the Kondo’s approaching ships, opened fire.\textsuperscript{122} \textit{South Dakota} lost electrical power several times during the fight and took numerous hits on her superstructure from just about every ship in the Japanese force. Her hull was unscathed, however, as she was equipped to withstand 14-inch shells. Though hit by 27 of them she was never close to sinking.\textsuperscript{123} Meanwhile, \textit{Washington} closed to within 8,400 yards of \textit{Kirishima} and pounded her with nine 16-inch shells and a barrage of smaller caliber fire.\textsuperscript{124} By ten minutes after midnight she was headed for the bottom. \textit{Washington} then turned her fire on the destroyer \textit{Ayanami}, sinking her too before maneuvering rapidly away from the action to avoid Japanese torpedo attacks. The tide had shifted. In just two days the Japanese had lost two battleships, one heavy cruiser and three destroyers, eleven transport ships and over 5,000 troops they hoped to land on Guadalcanal. In addition to the damage sustained by \textit{South Dakota} the United States had three destroyers -- the \textit{Benham}, \textit{Preston} and \textit{Walke} -- sunk and another heavily damaged in the Second Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. Only one major surface battle, on 30 November 1942, would be launched by the Japanese before they decided that Guadalcanal’s fate was now clearly in the hands of the Americans and abandoned their attempts to retake the island.

The Battle of Tassafaronga was the last attempt to relieve the Japanese garrison on Guadalcanal by surface action devoid of carrier support. Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka led a force of eight destroyers to provide supplies for them.\textsuperscript{125} Four U.S. heavy cruisers, one light cruiser and four destroyers were lying in wait in Iron Bottom Sound. Though all but two of Tanaka’s destroyers had their torpedoes offloaded to make room for additional stores, they proved more than enough to contend with when they sighted the American warships and launched their torpedoes. All four U.S. heavy cruisers took hits, and \textit{U.S.S. Northampton} was sunk. The \textit{Minneapolis}, \textit{New Orleans} and \textit{Pensacola} were all heavily damaged. Only one Japanese destroyer, the \textit{Takanami}, was sunk by American

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 475. \\
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 480. \\
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 481. \\
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 505.
\end{flushleft}
gunfire which came much too late. The Japanese destroyers, moreover, succeeded in offloading their supply barrels before retiring. Supplies carried by the Reinforcement Unit, however, were not delivered. Admiral Halsey had thus prevented the Japanese from significantly reinforcing their troops on Guadalcanal and had thus risked a force in night action and constricted waters -- contrary to everything he had learned at the Naval War College -- but achieved his strategic objective. Though vastly superior in torpedo action and superior in night gunnery, the Japanese henceforth lacked the resolve to continue their efforts to wrest Guadalcanal from the Americans. The Naval Battles of the Solomon Islands were over.

Battle of Santa Cruz in Retrospect/Conclusions

Let us turn once again to an evaluation of the commanders.

1. Their estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions they would be required to make. It would seem that all commanders, including the “defeatist” Vice Admiral Ghormley, acutely appreciated the importance of preventing the Japanese from re-taking Guadalcanal and severing American Sea Lines of Communications with Australia. Admiral Nimitz demonstrated outstanding judgment under the most time-compressed and difficult of circumstances. Not only did he correctly evaluate the strategic significance of the intelligence provided him to speed up the extensive repairs needed by U.S.S. Enterprise to ready her in time for the impending Japanese moves against the Solomon Islands on land and by sea, but he had the good sense and confidence in Vice Admiral Halsey to task him to relieve Ghormley just hours before the Japanese onslaught was expected to occur.

Admiral Nimitz took this risk knowing full well that his Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force (Commander Task Force 61), Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, had only been intended to take Enterprise to the South Pacific where Halsey was to have taken command. Moreover, Rear Admiral George C. Murray, now Commander Task Force 17 aboard Hornet, while an aviator (Aviator no. 22 in 1915) was Enterprise’s Captain during the early raids on Midway and had only been promoted to Rear Admiral shortly before assuming his command on 30 July 1942 -- just days before the Battle of...
While Halsey was a proven veteran, Kinkaid had considerable carrier experience and Murray had weathered the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, their lack of time for pre-battle planning and coordination and operations with less than totally familiar subordinates and crews exacerbated any shortcomings in command relationships that might have come to light during the impending battle. Thus the simple command structure Nimitz imposed for the impending Guadalcanal action was particularly useful considering the new faces charged with countering the Japanese.

Both Admiral Nimitz and Admiral Halsey deserve high marks for selecting a proper course of action given their detailed estimates of the situation. Considering their situation, an “A+” is deserved by both.

The only real criticism that might be levied is for failing to ensure continuous tracking once the Japanese carriers had been located in search of the area between Rabaul and Guadalcanal by land-based aircraft. Commander Aircraft Southern Pacific Forces, Rear Admiral John S. McCain, should have ensured that measures were taken to pass continuous tracking information on Japanese carrier movements -- particularly since his failure to do this in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons proved so costly. McCain deserves better than the failing marks assigned for that battle, particularly considering the success of his search plan on the day before and morning of the Battle of Santa Cruz. But, while he had improved procedures in this important area, as acknowledged later by Admiral Nimitz, he failed miserably to keep the U.S. carrier Task Force Commanders adequately informed from that point on. Overall a weak “C-“ is warranted.

2. The commanders’ demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously their decisions in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and their flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required.

Admiral Nimitz demonstrated great insight and initiative in setting in motion the events that put two Carrier Battle Groups in opposition to the Japanese attack on Guadalcanal. Moreover, Nimitz realized at this early stage in the Pacific War the importance of supporting operations ashore through employment of, and in this case

---

battle by, Navy units at sea. “Jointness” in this sense was not something that had been consciously ingrained in Navy leadership. Halsey in this instance mirrored Nimitz’ approach. To both a well deserved “A.”

Admiral Kinkaid applied the lessons of the Navy’s previous carrier battles well. His decision to continue the search he had launched on the morning of 26 October instead of recalling the much-needed dive bombers in it has been questioned by some, but revealing his position could have cost more. His planes were appropriately armed with bombs and could attack any appropriate target -- in this case a Japanese carrier as opportunities to strike other targets were appropriately resisted -- so this decision gave Kinkaid a weak but possibly important first-strike ability. Operating his carriers somewhat independently, though he advised against it in his After Action Report, probably saved Enterprise by allowing her through luck to conceal herself in a rain squall when the Japanese attacked. This same action, however, may have contributed significantly to the extent of damage to and sinking of Hornet. Nonetheless, decisions of this type have to be made. It is unfair to judge a commander after the fact for consequences of his adherence to existing doctrine. On balance, an “A-“ would seem an appropriate grade for Kinkaid.

3. The command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle.

For all concerned here, as discussed in section 1. above, top grades are warranted. To Nimitz, Halsey and Kinkaid, solid “As” are assigned.

4. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events.

In every instance Admiral Kinkaid and his subordinates adhered to existing doctrine -- for better or for worse. “A” is the only appropriate grade. Admiral McCain failed not in adherence to doctrine in directing his land-based aircraft search of The Slot, but, rather, for not generating doctrine that would have assured continuous tracking information was gotten and passed to all appropriate commanders once initial location of the Japanese carriers or supporting surface groups was established. In this area he did a good job initially, but his follow-up was lousy. A grade of “C” would seem appropriate
as he did aid in Admiral Kinkaid’s ability to locate the Japanese carriers, but he could have done a lot more to ensure that every carrier airplane had a chance to put a bomb or torpedo on target.

5. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively. As demonstrated above, all major commanders involved in the Battle of Santa Cruz had an excellent understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving operational and strategic objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination. This was so despite all of them being new to their command positions and to the theater. A solid “A” is warranted for all.

6. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination.

Unquestionably, the holding of Guadalcanal, with its geo-strategically critical position astride the Allied SLOCs, was the strategic issue in all of these battles. Nimitz certainly understood this -- “A.” So also did Halsey, Kinkaid and Murray -- “As” here too.

7. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action.

All of the commanders involved seem to have stood out for their audacity and brilliance, McCain possibly excepted. Nimitz and Halsey did solid jobs. Kinkaid and Murray did excellent jobs under the circumstances. McCain’s efforts were lackluster by comparison. For the former, “A” and for the last, another “C.”

8. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements.

The Battle of Santa Cruz is without question the best-documented of the four carrier battles in World War II in the Pacific Theater in 1942. The close proximity of the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, understandably made such extensive analytical documentation difficult. So too did the loss of the Striking Group Commander’s flagship, Yorktown, with much of the battle’s documentation in the latter battle.
Likewise, Vice Admiral Fletcher’s flagship, *Saratoga*, having been torpedoed after the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, his departure on leave with expected return to command her and subsequent reassignment all conspired to limit after-action analysis. Those considerations notwithstanding, a commendable job was done for those battles anyway. That done for the Battle of Santa Cruz was superb.

Admiral Nimitz, in his final report to Admiral King in Washington, includes 33 separate comments and conclusions from this battle.\(^\text{127}\) This was accomplished during a particularly busy time when the U.S. had only one operational carrier and fewer battleships, cruisers and destroyers than were minimally required to contest further Japanese moves to take Guadalcanal or pursue strategic objectives elsewhere. The additional directives and recommendations to the Fleet marked a superior effort by all concerned. Well done! -- “A+.”

VII  BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINE SEA

Japan’s “Absolute National Defense Line”

Admiral Yamamoto had promised eighteen months. His promise extended to 7 June 1943. If Japan could not compel the United States to agree to terminate the war with Japan by that approximate date, he maintained, the industrial might of America would overwhelm the Imperial Japanese Navy laying open the path to the Japanese home islands. Those in powerful positions in Japan failed to heed Yamamoto’s warning. They would soon after Yamamoto’s deadline see the error in their judgment.

Not much later than eighteen months into the war -- early on the morning of 30 September 1943 -- Emperor Hirohito met with Premier and War Minister Hideki Tojo, President of the Privy Council Yoshimichi Hara, Admiral Osami Nagaro, Chief of the Navy General Staff, and Vice Admiral Mineichi Koga, Commander in Chief of the
Imperial Japanese Combined Fleet.\textsuperscript{1} Their purpose was grim. They had gathered to see what strategic options were open to Japan in the Pacific Theater given her reverses of the previous year. Drawing on the Clausewitzian notion that the defensive is the stronger form of warfare, they reached agreement that Japan’s best hope in dealing with the United States -- at least for the time being -- was to consolidate her defense perimeter and concentrate on islands that could be reached from the Japanese home islands either directly, or by stops on islands along the way, by air. Such a strategy would, it was hoped, give Japan time to build more carriers. In the mean time, lacking the strategic mobility that carriers offered, the Eleventh Air Fleet could destroy any major American naval force attempting to array carrier aviation against those areas inside the “Black Line of Defense” that would constitute Japan’s “Absolute National Defense Line.”\textsuperscript{2} Ultimately, it was postulated, the plan they devised would enable them to regain the initiative and return to the offensive.

The “Black Line of Defense” drawn on the chart that day ran from northern Japan north through the Kurile Islands to the southern tip of Sakhalin Island, then from north to south through the Nampo Shoto -- islands east and south of Honshu -- the Bonin, Volcano, and Marianas Islands, thence east beyond Truk in the Carolines, southwest across western New Guinea, and then westerly to the Timor Sea and beyond.\textsuperscript{3} From those islands and others lying in between, the Japanese could rely on that part of their naval doctrine that they had failed to follow at Midway. They would force the United States to pass through submarine cordons and islands from which they could stage land-based aircraft in the hopes of destroying roughly fifty-percent of all warships attempting to pass before engaging with ships of the Imperial Navy. The key would be to ensure that no U.S. carriers -- and the lethal offensive capability that they represented -- passed beyond the Black Line they drew on the chart of the Pacific Ocean. Ultimately, should


\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p. 1-3.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., pp. 1-2.
such a strategy prove successful, more planes and carriers could be built and the offensive regained. Should the Americans break through, it would spell disaster for not only Japan’s main strategic objectives in Asia, but in all likelihood for Japan herself. Each man, to the last, would be required to fight, and if necessary die, to preserve Japan’s “Absolute National Defense Line.”

![Map of the Pacific Theater](image)

**Figure 37: Japan’s “Absolute National Defense Line”**

---

4 Graphic provided by Mr. Jason Peters of the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
SLOCs to Victory Secured

After the Battle of Santa Cruz the United States was left with only the badly damaged *Enterprise* as the single offensive strategic asset in the Pacific. The British “loaned” their carrier *H.M.S. Victorious* to the U.S. for duty in the Pacific, but she didn’t arrive in Norfolk until January 1943 and wasn’t ready for active service in the Pacific until May. *Saratoga* was expected back in the act by about 10 November 1942, and actually did rejoin the action when, along with *Victorious*, she participated in supporting the invasion of New Georgia between 20 and 24 July 1943.\(^5\) The Japanese still had both the *Shokaku*, now also damaged and out of action temporarily, and the *Zuikaku* as well as the fleet carriers *Junyo* and *Hiyo* available with which to contest Guadalcanal and the Solomons. But Santa Cruz had left *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* without viable air wings. So also had the air combat over and around Guadalcanal seriously reduced Japanese air strength. In aerial combat between 7 August and 15 November VF-5, VF-6, VF-71, VF-72 and VF-10 had claimed shooting down 193 Japanese aircraft, including 54 fighters, 62 dive bombers and 15 torpedo planes. Their actual combat score was more like 102 total planes including 25 fighters, 32 dive bombers and 7 torpedo planes, with as many as 20 medium bombers.\(^6\) Having lost so many carrier and land-based aircraft already, the Japanese were not inclined to contest further the outcome in this area of vital strategic importance.

At no time from the U.S. invasion of Guadalcanal on 7 August had more than 11,000 American Marines and soldiers been stationed on it. By 23 October, in anticipation of the major Japanese offensive mentioned in the last chapter, that number rose to around 23,000. Opposing them were approximately 22,000 Japanese troops brought in for their third major thrust to re-take the island.\(^7\) That number was to grow by about 3,000 through early December. On the U.S. side, where Admiral Nimitz was still


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 528.

\(^7\) For a comprehensive treatment of the battles of the Tenaru River and Bloody Ridge see Potter, *Sea Power: A Naval History*, Chapter 37: Guadalcanal.
unaware of Japanese intentions, a major effort was made to secure the island. In December, General Vandegrift and his 1st Marine Division were relieved by Major General Alexander M. Patch, USA, who took command of the Guadalcanal garrison that, including a newly-arrived Army division, now stood at Corps strength of 50,000. Patch too was as yet unaware that the Japanese had already conceded Guadalcanal.\(^8\)

General Patch launched an immediate offensive. His plan was to push west on Guadalcanal from Henderson Field, land fresh troops west of Cape Esperance, and catch the Japanese in a pincers move. While Patch’s Marines and Army troops made good progress to their west, however, the Japanese had other plans than to be caught in his pincers. Admiral Kondo -- who still had the carriers Zuikaku, Junyo and Hiyo available to do battle -- once again made use of Combined Fleet in a move south from the major Imperial Navy base 560 miles away at Rabaul. Admiral Halsey quickly responded by sending two fleet and two escort carriers, and a total of five task forces which included three battleships, from Esperitu Santo, the most forward Allied naval base and also 560 nautical miles from Guadalcanal, to greet Kondo’s force. But Kondo was not about to risk the few carriers he had left. His move south was a feint to enable swift destroyers to slip in and evacuate the 12,000 remaining Japanese troops on Guadalcanal. During Kondo’s diversion no fleet action occurred, but the cruiser U.S.S. Chicago was sunk by torpedo planes staging from the new Japanese airfield on New Georgia.\(^9\)

Patch’s pincers made contact on 9 February 1943, but the Japanese he hoped to trap were gone. In three high-speed night runs the Japanese had spirited them away avoiding their fifth defeat in major land offensives on Guadalcanal. The Japanese chose not to use their carriers in battle again until mid-1944.\(^10\) Thus in the four carrier battles of 1942 and the combined Marine – Army action on Guadalcanal, the United States had rendered the kido butai impotent and secured the vital sea lines of communication between Hawaii and Australia. Once the tremendous warship building programs that

---


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Congress had set in motion started sending much-needed capital ships to the Pacific War Plan Orange could, for the first time since Pearl Harbor, be launched against Japan.

MacArthur on a Roll

General Douglas MacArthur was busy while the Americans were tightening their grip on Guadalcanal. A thousand miles to the west his Australian troops were on the heels of the retreating Japanese over the Owen Stanley Mountains route while his American troops took a less direct trail across them or were flown in to air fields on the north coast of New Guinea. MacArthur’s intent was to have his forces converge on Buna in mid-November in much the same way that General Patch had invested the Japanese troops he expected to be near Cape Esperance, but MacArthur’s advance had to be undertaken through dense jungle against a well-prepared defensive perimeter.11

Unlike the Solomon Islands campaign, that against Buna and Papua on New Guinea never involved major fleet units. Uncharted waters and the proximity to enemy air fields prevented both the Americans and Japanese from hazarding major ships. Re-supply on both sides by sea, however, was essential.12

MacArthur’s force ultimately reached almost 30,000 divided equally between Australian and American troops. The Japanese, with only around 12,000 troops who were ravaged by disease and near starvation, collapsed under the pressure of MacArthur’s advance in late January of 1943. The costs for the Allies were high -- the 3,095 killed was nearly twice those lost on Guadalcanal.13 With Guadalcanal in the Solomons and Papua and Buna in northern New Guinea secure, a strategic re-appraisal was due on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the U.S. Pacific campaign. At first the logical next step was generally agreed to be taking Rabaul to deny the Japanese their southern naval staging base. Other viable options soon emerged.

The U.S. Debate on Strategy

While the offensives to re-take Guadalcanal and Papua/Buna were in action, the leaders of the Grand Alliance were actively discussing and making strategy.

11 Ibid., p. 708.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
At the Casablanca Conference of January 1943 they had allocated a greater percentage of men and material to the Pacific than to the Atlantic and Europe to take advantage of the successful offensives there, and because the American industrial machine had produced more assets than originally anticipated. At the Washington Conference in May of 1943 the Allies agreed to entrust the conduct of the Pacific War to the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and accepted in principle the Joint Chiefs’ strategic plan to defeat Japan. In essence, the Joint Chiefs’ plan was to defeat the Japanese by blockading their home islands, especially by cutting off access to the oil they controlled in the East Indies; bombing Japanese cities; and invading Japan’s home islands if necessary.14

In order to accomplish this strategy all lines of the Allied advance would converge on Hong Kong in order to provide a base on the Chinese coast for sequential operations. The British, with American assistance, would invade Burma and re-open the Burma Road in order to provide supplies to General Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Army so that they could converge on Hong Kong and the Chinese coast from the west. The British Fleet in the Indian Ocean would fight their way through the Straits of Malacca to join General MacArthur’s Southwest Pacific forces for a combined force offensive aimed at liberating the Philippines and investing Hong Kong with amphibious units. Most important, Admiral Nimitz’ Pacific Fleet would unleash the War Plan Orange offensive as planned before the war through the Marshall and Caroline Island chains to converge with MacArthur’s British and American forces on the Chinese coast and to take Japanese held islands so that U.S. Army Air Corps bombers could reach their targets in the Japanese home islands.15

The British and Chinese, however, proved to be not up to the task. The British were unable sufficiently to disengage in the Mediterranean to free up enough forces to carry out their agreed part in the plan. The Chinese, likewise, were tied down by a major offensive in China which prevented their participation -- not to mention Chiang Kai-shek’s maddening behavior which made him a less than reliable ally. The offensive

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 711.
against Japan would be an American show, with as much help as her Australian, New Zealand and Canadian allies could muster.\textsuperscript{16}

The initiatives directed by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff included, in order of priority:

1. A drive through the Central Pacific advancing westward from Pearl Harbor.
2. South Pacific and Southwest Pacific forces to cooperate in a drive on Rabaul. Southwest Pacific forces then to press on westward along the north coast of New Guinea.
3. North Pacific forces to eject the Japanese from the Aleutians.\textsuperscript{17}
4. In addition to the first major offensive, in terms of men and materials, and the other two limited offensives, intensification of submarine attacks on Japanese naval forces and SLOCs was to be raised in priority.

**Executing the Combined Chiefs’ Strategy**

First on the list of objectives, due to U.S. public concerns over Japanese holding American territory, was to retake Kiska and Attu Islands in the Alaskan Aleutian chain. Thomas C. Kinkaid, still a Rear Admiral, had taken over command in that area in January of 1943. He elected to bypass Kiska and take the more distant Attu first. The U.S. 7\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division first landed 3,000 troops in a pincers movement on the island, but unexpected Japanese moves and ineffective U.S. naval gunfire required ultimately that 11,000 troops be employed. The landings took place on 7 May, and by the end of May Attu had been reclaimed at the cost of 600 Americans killed in action and 1,200 more wounded. Of the Japanese garrison of just over 2,600, all were killed or committed suicide in human-wave attacks except 28 who were taken prisoner. Kiska was then assaulted by a much larger force of 34,500, including 5,300 Canadians, as well as battleships, cruisers and bombers. When the forces landed on 15 August, however, they

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
met no resistance. The Japanese had spirited away a force twice as large as that on Attu three weeks before. Both Attu and Kiska were back in American hands.\textsuperscript{18}

Next on the agenda was a drive through the Central Solomons and along the north coast of New Guinea aimed at capturing the major southernmost Japanese naval base at Rabaul on the northeast corner of New Britain Island. After a large Japanese naval force was defeated by American land-based air attack, Admiral Yamamoto decided foolishly to launch an all-out air offensive against American forces in the area.

Yamamoto called up 200 carrier planes of the Imperial Third Fleet to add to the 100 planes he already had in the area. While these did destroy several ships and 25 Allied aircraft, the Japanese lost 40 planes and many of their remaining first-line carrier pilots. This was a disaster from which their limited pilot training programs could not hope to recover.\textsuperscript{19}

On 16 April 1943 the strategic direction of the Pacific War was to take a fateful turn for the Japanese. Acting on decoded JN-25 naval code intelligence, Admiral Nimitz was sure that Admiral Yamamoto, his opposite, was making an inspection tour of the Japanese bases around Rabaul and authorized Vice Admiral Halsey to activate “Operation Vengeance” which aimed to destroy Yamamoto’s plane while attempting to land on southern Bougainville. Halsey was instructed to conduct such operations as would not compromise our intelligence gathering capability with respect to the Japanese naval codes. He sent seventeen P-38 aircraft with drop tanks from Henderson field, and they disposed of the two Japanese bombers -- the second carried Vice Admiral Ugaki, Admiral Yamamoto’s Chief of Staff, who survived the crash of his aircraft at sea -- and their accompanying fighters. Yamamoto was succeeded by the less capable and much more conservative Admiral Mineichi Koga, his hand-picked successor. Koga lacked Yamamoto’s strategic genius, as events were to reveal.\textsuperscript{20} Koga in mid-June sent 24 Japanese bombers and 70 accompanying Zero fighters to strike transports in Iron Bottom

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 714-715.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 717.
Sound. Only one of the 94 Japanese planes was not shot down, and only six U.S. fighters were lost.\textsuperscript{21} Japan’s aircraft and pilot losses were mounting quickly.

**Central Solomons and New Britain: The Second Phase**

The American Joint Chiefs of Staff issued their orders for the second phase of the South Pacific campaign in late March of 1943. General MacArthur was to proceed along the north coast of New Guinea and invade New Britain, and Admiral Halsey was to push north in the Central Solomons with the ultimate objective of taking and establishing airfields on Bougainville to strike Rabaul.\textsuperscript{22}

By the end of June the Allies had enlarged Henderson Field for Army Air Corps bomber staging and had three fighter aircraft runways adjacent to the main air strip and a second and larger bomber base five miles away, named Carney Field. They also had in the new Air Command Solomons (AIRSOL) contingent 213 fighters, 72 heavy bombers and 170 light bombers at this complex on Guadalcanal. So also did MacArthur’s Fifth Air Force have 220 fighters, 80 heavy and 100 medium and light bombers stationed at several airfields on the east coast of New Guinea.\textsuperscript{23}

While MacArthur’s forces moved forward and prepared to invest New Britain, Halsey’s troops moved through the islands of the Central Solomons as depicted on the chart below:

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
On 30 June he landed troops on Rendova Island south of the important Japanese airfield at Munda on northwestern New Georgia and began shelling the field. Five days later he landed another force on the north end of New Georgia and closed in on the heavily entrenched and fortified Japanese contingent. Once it was in American hands, Halsey bypassed the large and dug-in Japanese force protecting the Vilna air strip on Kolombangara Island to the northwest of New Georgia and landed troops on Vella Lavella Island on 15 August. Unlike land operations where it is almost always inadvisable to bypass an outpost and leave a major force to your rear, Halsey’s naval forces were able to isolate the Japanese on Kolombangara and exact a slow death through inability to reinforce and re-supply. Rear Admirals Frederick Moosbrugger and Arleigh Burke, a destroyer commander, made names for themselves in their actions with the Japanese during this campaign. Unfortunately, Halsey’s blockade was not tight enough

24 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
to isolate Kolombangara and prevent the Japanese from extracting by night around three-quarters of the roughly 12,400 troops there.\textsuperscript{25} In the fiasco destroyer Battle of Vella Gulf just east of Vella Lavella on 6-7 August 1943 the U.S. lost the destroyer \textit{Chevalier} to a Japanese Long Lance Torpedo. Two other U.S. destroyers were heavily damaged and a Japanese destroyer sunk. The only real significance of this battle was that it would be the last naval battle the Japanese were to win in World War II.\textsuperscript{26}

**Numbered Fleets**

It should be noted that at about this point in the war Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief U.S. Naval Forces, in Washington realized that the scope and increasing intensity of combat operations made the makeshift Task Force numbering system then in use obsolete. At the start of the war the Navy used its old system of assigning numbers to a particular Task Force Commander, and that number would be assigned wherever and whenever that commander was the senior officer assigned to oversee the operation. After the Battle of Midway, in order to preserve security associated with the assignment of commands, a system was devised in the Pacific where Task Forces would be identified by a phonetic letter identifier associated with the first letter of the Task Force Commander’s last name. That system quickly showed its limitations. In March of 1943 Admiral King therefore inaugurated system of using numbers to identify Fleets and Task Forces instead.

Under this system all seagoing commands in the Atlantic and Mediterranean would be assigned even-number identifiers, and all those in the Pacific odd-numbered identifiers. Those ships in the Central Pacific would become the U.S. Fifth Fleet. Those in the South Pacific under Admiral Halsey’s command would become the U.S. Third Fleet. Navy units operating in the Southwest Pacific in support of General Douglas MacArthur would be assigned to the U.S. Seventh Fleet. Their first commander was to be Vice Admiral Arthur S. Carpenter. Amphibious and other Task Forces would similarly assume a designator with the first digit corresponding to their Fleet and a second digit which could be referenced to the particular group of ships assigned for an


\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 722.
operation. The next level of command subordinate to a Task Force Commander would be a Task Group Command and would be identified by a number after a decimal point. A Task Unit would receive another number after a second decimal point, and the same convention would be used for a Task Element or Task Unit, the last and smallest command designated under King’s system.27

**Operation “Elkton” and the Dual Advance on Rabaul**

He next phase in the U.S. drive to take Rabaul was to be a dual advance through the Solomons and New Guinea. In the Solomons, Admiral Halsey would use AIRSOL aircraft and units of his Third Fleet to springboard his Marines and Army forces toward their objective. Along the north coast of New Guinea General MacArthur would do the same by conducting sequential amphibious landings under the cover of land-based aircraft while his combined forces moved in the ships on loan from Admiral Nimitz to his Seventh Fleet and under cover of the gunships and escort carriers at his disposal. The Japanese would counter this by drawing on their Imperial Army troops and land-based aircraft to defend Rabaul from MacArthur’s forces while the Imperial Navy would, with assistance from the Japanese Army, guard the approaches to Rabaul from the Central Solomons.28 As discussed above, this campaign was well underway. The next step for the Navy would be against Bougainville, and for MacArthur’s combined force against Salamaua and Lae, gateway to New Guinea’s Huong Peninsula adjacent to New Britain -- but first he would have to take the stronghold of Buna.

Learning from his past experience at Munda and on Vella Lavella, Halsey decided to bypass the Japanese force concentrations on Bougainville and invade half way up the island at the more weakly defended Cape Torokina in Empress Augusta Bay.29 By building air strips there he could threaten Rabaul and force the Japanese to go on the offensive in an attempt to extract his forces from their defensive positions. Lead elements of the force of 34,000 Marines of the 3rd Marine Division and Army troops of the 37th Infantry Division allocated for this operation hit their assigned beachhead at

---

27 Ibid., p. 712.
28 Ibid., p. 715.
29 Ibid., p. 722.
dawn on 1 November. The Japanese countered by sending a hastily organized cruiser and destroyer force down from Rabaul to break up the landings by sinking the American troop transports. Task Force 39, already exhausted from the fast pace of recent operations, was all that Admiral Halsey had to stop them. This force, commanded by Rear Admiral Stanton Merrill, was the principle U.S. surface force in the entire South Pacific. Halsey chose to risk it in what became the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay in the early morning hours of 2 November 1943. Demonstrating new and daring tactics during this battle, Arleigh Burke brought his force of destroyers alongside the Japanese battle line for a high-speed torpedo run. Also maneuvering adroitly, Admiral Merrill used the superior firing rate of his cruisers’ less powerful 6-inch guns to get inside the range of his Japanese opponent and do maximum damage. Though execution on the U.S. side was less than perfect, Rear Admiral Sentaro Omori, the Japanese commander, lost the light cruiser *Sendai* and the bow of his destroyer *Myoko* was ripped off during the fracas. That was enough for Omori; he departed leaving the American transports untouched. It took the First Marine Amphibious Corps another month to stabilize its expanding defensive perimeter, but Halsey now had a fighter and bomber strip within 220 nautical miles of Rabaul. His preparatory task was now nearing completion.30

Meanwhile, General MacArthur was moving up the northern coast of New Guinea. As early as 30 June he had begun putting troops on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands off the Papuan Peninsula and at Nassau Bay, just 17 miles southeast of the Japanese stronghold at Salamaua. MacArthur made a diversionary attack on Salamaua, then bypassed it. The Japanese there were cut off from reinforcement and re-supply unless they drew from Lae. That was just what MacArthur wanted. He bypassed Salamaua and landed a force to take Lae, which was pounded into submission by U.S. destroyers’ fire. MacArthur’s next move was to take Finschhafen 82 miles up the coast, which he did on 2 October. MacArthur then moved to complete his conquest of the Huon Peninsula and move further up the New Guinea coast. The rapidity of MacArthur’s

---

30 Ibid., pp. 722-728.
advance, in contrast to his protracted struggle to take Buna, was enabled in part by the amphibious capability provided by the U.S. Navy.\(^{31}\)

So complete was the cooperation between Admiral Halsey and General MacArthur that the code name for their operations was set at “Elkton” in commemoration of the small and then famous town in Maryland renowned for the quick marriages that took place there.\(^{32}\) Theirs was Joint cooperation at its best.

**Bypassing Rabaul**

In August of 1943 at the Quebec Conference the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved Admiral King’s plan to bypass Rabaul and neutralize it with air power and by denying its 90,000 Japanese inhabitants reinforcement or re-supply by sea. MacArthur’s next objective was to make a leap of 400 miles up the coast of New Guinea to Hollandia - code named Operation Reckless for the audacity of such a move, but the shortest route to his promised return to the Philippines. As a good Army man, he didn’t want Rabaul on his rear however well neutralized. He thus in mid-December gained a foothold on New Britain from which the 1\(^{st}\) Marine Division stormed ashore on 26 December. The “boxing-in” of Japanese forces at Rabaul was complete by mid-March and MacArthur was free to advance on Hollandia. Halsey was ordered to Pearl Harbor to assume a command afloat.\(^{33}\)

**The Two-Pronged Strategy**

Early in 1943 General MacArthur laid before the Joint Chiefs of Staff his plan for an axis of advance on what he called the New Guinea – Mindanao Axis. With new ships expected soon enabling execution of the extensive pre-war planning in War Plan Orange, Admiral Nimitz advanced the Navy’s plan for an island-hopping campaign across the Pacific aimed directly at Tokyo. For months after Admiral King brought this plan up at the Casablanca Conference in January of 1943 the Joint Chiefs considered and debated the merits of these two divergent viewpoints. The British at that Conference took the stand that advancing along two separate lines in the Pacific was sure to reduce the scale

---

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 729.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 731.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., pp. 729-731.
of any cross-Channel operation in Europe. Yet such an operation would not be possible for some time and sufficient resources had been produced in America to make both Pacific options simultaneously possible.\(^{34}\)

At the Washington Conference in May the initial drives by MacArthur and Halsey had been authorized after the Japanese were ejected from the Aleutians. Now in October a firm decision needed to be made. The Joint Chiefs were divided. At first General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold sided with General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, backing MacArthur’s plan. Ultimately, however, when it became clear that the Navy could take the Marianas availing the Army Air Corps of bases to bomb Japan with their new B-29s, General Arnold swung around to the Navy position. Even though General MacArthur then assured Arnold that a high priority for his plan would be to take coastal areas of China from which Arnold could stage his B-29s, the prospect of being subordinated to the senior MacArthur was not appealing to the Army Air Corps Commander. Thus Arnold threw his weight behind the Navy plan.

Ultimately both MacArthur’s and Nimitz’ plans were authorized – with the Navy advance to take priority. On 16 November at 0330 the Marines of the 2\(^{nd}\) Division launched Operation Galvanic by storming toward their beachheads on Makin and Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. Thus started the amphibious campaign through the central Pacific leading to the Marianas. The path of that advance is as depicted below:

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p. 736.
Operation Forager and the Battle for the Marianas

The culmination of the campaign through the central Pacific was as yet seven months away. D-day for the assault on Saipan was set for 15 June 1944. Guam was to be attacked three days later. Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner’s Northern Attack Group included the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Marines and the 27\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division. Turner was first to take Saipan, and when that task had been successfully completed, move on to take Tinian with the same force. Rear Admiral Richard L. Conolly and his Southern Attack Group, from his anchorage at Eniwetok, were to move west north-west and seize Guam. To do this he had the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Marine Division, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Provisional Marine Brigade, a Corps of

\textsuperscript{35} Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
artillery, and the 77th Infantry Division. All of these were under the command of Major General Roy S. Geiger, USMC. In all, the American assault force numbered 127,571 men. Their task from Admiral Nimitz was to “capture, occupy and defend the Marianas.” Having accomplished that, the long-range bombing of the Japanese home islands with B-29s could begin.  

The thrust of Operation Forager and contemplated follow-on moves is as depicted on the following page:

Figure 40: Admiral Nimitz’ Prong of the Two-Pronged Strategy from the Marshalls to the Marianas

---


37 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, Commander U.S. Fifth Fleet, awaited the action aboard his flagship, *U.S.S. Indianapolis*, a proper place for the venerated cruiser man, at anchor at Majuro in the Marshalls. Likewise, Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, Commander of the powerful Task Force 58, was at anchor at Majuro in his flagship, *Lexington II*. Task Force 58 was powerful indeed. It was built around seven heavy “fast carriers,” and eight light carriers. These fifteen carriers carried 954 planes including 488 fighters, of which 42 were night fighters, 210 dive bombers, 191 torpedo planes and 65 floatplanes. Screening this massive juggernaut of air power were seven newly-constructed fast battleships, three heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, four anti-aircraft cruisers and 58 destroyers -- 93 ships in all. To get to the Marines and Army troops investing the Japanese strongholds on Saipan, Tinian and Guam Combined Fleet would have to go through Spruance’s and Mitscher’s armada.

Spruance and Mitscher left Majuro on 6 June 1944, the same day the Allies sent five divisions across the English Channel to establish a foothold in Europe in Normandy. Their intent was to launch Operation Forager against the three Japanese strongholds simultaneously on 12 June, and to support the capture, occupation and defense of Saipan. Admiral Mitscher convinced Admiral Spruance, without much effort, to launch the first strikes a day early, on the afternoon of 11 June. At 1302, when Task Force 58 was within 200 nautical miles of Guam and 225 nautical miles of Saipan, Mitscher launched his first wave of 225 planes, mostly fighters with a few torpedo planes, against Guam, Saipan and Tinian simultaneously. The Japanese air defenses were weak on the

---


Marianas as pilots and aircraft had been transferred to the New Guinea area since the Japanese Navy Staff and the Combined Fleet Staff expected the next American naval action to be directed toward Biak in support of General MacArthur’s effort to break that stronghold. Of the few planes Admiral Koga, Commander Combined Fleet, had in the Marianas to contest the strikes 81 Zeros that Vice Admiral Kakuji Kakuta sent up were shot down, and 29 other Japanese planes were destroyed on the deck and another 24 damaged. Thirteen additional Zeros were probably splashed, but could not be verified. Only eleven Hellcats were lost, and five of their pilots were recovered. Owing to Admiral Koga’s use of carrier planes in trying to maintain Japan’s hold on the northeastern half of New Guinea and the Central Solomons and the attrition exacted by AIRSOL and the Fifth Air Force there, there were neither enough pilots or planes adequately to defend the Marianas. Moreover, in order to meet minimum needs the Japanese had rushed their new pilots into combat with only about six months of training. They were hardly a match for the more experienced and numerous Americans they faced.

Expecting first that the attack was a diversion for the expected offensive against Biak and second that the Americans would hit their southern bastion at Guam first in any attack on the Marianas, the Japanese were caught completely by surprise. Mitscher’s carriers launched strikes from first light to sunset -- 171 sorties from his flagship *Lexington II* alone on 12 June -- and battered the Japanese for the next four days. So likewise did Vice Admiral William A. “Ching” Lee, Jr.’s Battle Line, Task Group 58.7’s new fast battleships *Alabama, Indiana, Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Dakota* and *Washington*, along with his four heavy cruisers and 14 destroyers give the Japanese a pounding on Saipan and Tinian. On 14 June Admiral Jesse Oldendorf’s pre-WW II battleships further pulverized the islands from close range. U.S. destroyers pounded the Japanese during the night to keep their heads down and U.S. submarines struck at any

---

42 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
Japanese destroyer that moved, causing the prospect of their removal to the west to evaporate. As D-day approached, Admiral Spruance stationed men-of-war on virtually every compass point around Saipan and Tinian. He also had two Carrier Task Groups launch strikes against Iwo Jima, Chichi Jima and Haha Jima some 600-700 miles away to ensure they didn’t add to the now almost non-existent Japanese air his landing forces were likely to face.

On 15 June the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Marines Divisions, well out of sight from shore, prepared to hit the beach between Afetna Point and Agingan Point on the west coast of Saipan. While Admiral Turner’s Task Force 51 waited with them over the horizon \textit{U.S.S. Colorado} steamed ahead and troops were lowered into LCIs from cargo nets over the side of transports accompanying her. The LCIs headed toward the beach only to meet heavy fire that broke them repeatedly into seeming confusion. When the third “attempt” to reform the landing craft failed, the would-be invasion force re-embarked their Marines in their transports and, with \textit{Colorado}, steamed back out to sea. The elated Japanese commander of Saipan, General Yoshitsugu Saito, proclaimed immediate victory and sent a highly exaggerated report to Japan that the Americans had been driven off with heavy personnel casualties, one battleship sunk, several carriers damaged, and over 140 planes shot down. The failed landing, however, had been a ruse -- a staged event to lure out the Japanese Fleet.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 78-79.}

In response to the U.S. deception the Japanese launched Operation A-GO. Their plan was to trap the U.S. Fifth Fleet between their remaining carriers and the islands of the Marianas, pounding it by air from two directions. Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, commanding the mobile carrier force from his base at Singapore, received orders to launch Operation A-GO from Admiral Soemu Toyoda, who had assumed the position of Commander in Chief, Combined Fleet, when Admiral Koga’s plane was lost in a storm on 8 March that also forced Koga’s Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudome, to ditch off Cebu where he was captured by Filipino guerrillas.\footnote{Costello, \textit{The Pacific War 1941-1945}, p. 473.}
The plan was for Admiral Ozawa to slip out from his anchorage at Guimaras, slip through the Guimaras Strait and the Visayan Sea and rendezvous with Admiral Ugaki and several groups of supply and replenishment ships in the Philippine Sea on 16 June under conditions of surprise.\textsuperscript{47} Less than two hours after Admiral Ozawa received the execute order, at 0542, U.S. warships appeared on the horizon and took their firing positions off Saipan’s beaches. Soon the Marines were again headed for eleven designated beach landing areas -- this time for real. When they reached the reef the Japanese defenders opened up on them from pre-determined flanking positions. Though the fighting was intense, 8,000 Marines of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Divisions were on shore by 0900. By the end of the day all 20,000 Marines detailed to take Saipan were landed. Already they had taken ten percent casualties.\textsuperscript{48}

On 15 June Admiral Ozawa’s Mobile Fleet, with carriers, battleships and their screening cruisers and destroyers, emerged from the San Bernardino Strait, about 1,260 nautical miles from Saipan. The Japanese trap was set in motion. But the American submarine \textit{SS Flying Fish}, almost out of fuel and awaiting her relief, was at the right spot to see them. Her skipper, Commander R.D. Riser, was unable to count the ships without revealing his position, but as soon as they passed he radioed the news that the huge Japanese force had cleared the Strait heading east northeast and making 20 knots.\textsuperscript{49} That night another U.S. submarine, \textit{SS Seahorse}, sighted warships 200 nautical miles east of the Surigao Strait and 300 nautical miles south of the San Bernardino Strait. The skipper reported this force, which were Admiral Ugaki’s ships moving out from Batjan, as on a northeast course at a speed of 16.5 knots.\textsuperscript{50} Because of Japanese radio jamming in his area, Admiral Spruance didn’t get this new intelligence information until 0400 on 16 June. Though Spruance would have enjoyed the news earlier, its delay really didn’t matter. Spruance estimated that Ozawa’s carriers could be in position to strike as early as

\textsuperscript{47} Lockwood, \textit{The Battle of the Philippine Sea}, Op. Cit., p. 79.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., pp. 80-81.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 82.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 82.
the final hours of 17 June, but that he would be ready to strike the U.S. force not later than some time on 19 June. He would be ready.

The final pieces began to fall into place when S.S. Cavalla, enroute to relieve S.S. Flying Fish which had first located the Japanese carrier force passing through the San Bernardino Strait, while following several Japanese oilers it came across earlier in the day, got radar contact on a much larger group of ships. The Cavalla submerged and her crew counted propeller sounds, estimating that 15 warships had passed. When Admiral Spruance received Cavalla’s report, based on the course and speed passed he reckoned that Vice Admiral Ozawa’s force would be in position to strike in 24 hours.51

Readying for the Duel

![Figure 41: Admiral Spruance’s Battle Formation](image-url)

51 Ibid., p. 87.

52 Graphic provided by Mr. Jason Peters of the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.
Admiral Spruance formed his force into what could be accurately called an “F” that was oriented from north to south, and inverted so that the horizontal prongs of the “F” were pointing to the west. At the base of the “F” was Rear Admiral Alfred E. Montgomery’s (USNA’12) Task Group 58.2 with the new Fleet Carriers Bunker Hill and Wasp II, two light carriers and a screen of two light cruisers, two light anti-aircraft cruisers, and twelve destroyers. Admiral Montgomery’s Task Force was formed in a circle with a four-mile radius. Immediately north of Admiral Montgomery’s force was Admiral John W. Reeves’ (USNA’11) Task Group 58.3 which included the Fleet Carriers Enterprise and Lexington II, two light carriers, the heavy cruiser Indianapolis, three light cruisers, one light anti-aircraft cruiser and thirteen destroyers. Embarked aboard Indianapolis was Commander Fifth Fleet, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance (USNA‘07/USNWC‘27). Aboard Lexington II was Admiral Marc A. Mitscher (USNA’10), Commander of Task Force 58 for Admiral Spruance. Like Admiral Montgomery’s and the other two carrier Battle Groups, Reeves’ Task Group 58.3 was formed on a four-mile radius circle. Immediately above this formidable Task Group was Task Group 58.1 commanded by Rear Admiral Joseph M.J. “Jocko” Clark (USNA’18). It was composed of the Fleet Carriers Hornet II, Yorktown II, two light carriers, and a screen of three heavy cruisers, a single anti-aircraft cruiser and fourteen destroyers.

Admiral Clark in all likelihood assumed this position at the top of the “F” and farthest away from the expected Japanese line of advance as he returned early from the raid Admiral Spruance sent him on to destroy the aircraft on or staging from and runways of the Volcano Islands. Admiral Clark had arrived earlier than expected on the evening of 15 June while there was still plenty of light to launch his strikes. He launched strikes from all seven carriers assigned for this mission in his Task Group. Clark’s pilots struck again the next day as a nascent typhoon subsided long enough for them to take the Japanese by complete surprise. The first day they splashed 10-12 Zero fighters and destroyed another 28 planes on the deck. On the 16th they destroyed another 60 planes on the fields they bombed, along with the fuel dumps and runways they cratered. The

---

Volcano Islands would not serve as a “shuttle bombing” stop for any aircraft the Japanese could muster to send into the fray from the home islands.54

On the northwestern prong of Spruance’s “F” formation was Rear Admiral William K. Harrill’s (USNA’14) Task Group 58.4 which had been part of Admiral Clark’s striking force for the Volcano Islands. Much like the others it was composed of the Fleet Carrier Essex and light carriers Langley and Cowpens, three light cruisers, one anti-aircraft cruiser and fourteen destroyers.55

Last and of great importance was Vice Admiral “Ching” Lee’s group of new fast battleships. Lee was stationed with Alabama, Indiana his flagship, Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Dakota and Washington, three light cruisers and fourteen destroyers in a six-mile radius formation.56 Thus Lee’s Task Group 58.7 formed a “gun line” through which any Japanese planes seeking to destroy U.S. carriers would likely have to pass. Spruance had stationed his force to provide defense in depth. Behind it he had another battleship “gun line” in line formation poised between Task Force 58 and Saipan. Should any aircraft get past his armada, the battleships would stop them from hitting the Marines, and the reserve force Army 27th Division that had not been landed.

Adding to Spruance’s defensive scheme was an “invisible trap” of four submarines placed 500 nautical miles to the west of Saipan by Rear Admiral Charles A. Lockwood, Commander Submarines Pacific (COMSUBPAC). Stationed in a 60 nautical mile box along the expected path of the two main Japanese Task Forces, they awaited their chance to lay waste to anything that passed. Their orders were to “shoot on sight.”57 With the exception of being engaged enroute to the battle site by U.S. land-based air from the Marianas, which had not yet been occupied, the Japanese were about to take a taste of their own doctrine -- doctrine that they had failed to follow resulting in disaster in the Battle of Midway.

54 Ibid., p. 83.
55 Ibid., pp. 85 and 64.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 87.
The only question now was what the Japanese would do next? Would the two main Task Forces of Admirals Ozawa and Ugaki form into a single force and strike directly? Or would the Japanese employ a “ching” and a “chee” -- a normal and an irregular force so that one could hold the Americans in place while the other invested Spruance’s Task Forces from the flank or rear? If the Japanese attacked at their earliest opportunity, they would be at the limit of their air-striking range and would, of necessity, have in all probability to be in a single grouping of warships. Such an attack could, based on the intelligence passed by U.S. submarines, come as soon as late in the day on 17 June. If the Japanese failed to strike until later, the possibility that they had assumed the same multiple-grouping of ships that they had used at Midway, the Eastern Solomons and Santa Cruz existed. It was Spruance’s challenge to be ready for anything his Japanese adversaries threw against him.

Opposing Fifth Fleet were Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita’s three battleships, five cruisers and ten destroyers, supported by three light carriers. Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa’s remaining two Fleet Carrier Divisions consisting of six carriers -- with 430 warplanes embarked -- two battleships, eight cruisers and fifteen destroyers represented the main Japanese Striking Force. The two Japanese Admirals were outnumbered fifteen carriers to nine, and 996 planes to 430. Moreover, excepting the word they got from the Commander of their Saipan garrison that four American carriers had been “damaged,” they had every reason to be aware that they were seriously outnumbered in every category of ship and aircraft. The success of the Japanese plan rested with the surprise they hoped to achieve by slipping undetected into the Philippine Sea and the availability of aircraft staged from rear-area bases that would “island hop” to their launching points for repeated sorties against the Americans. Early detection by U.S. submarines took away the first key element of the Japanese plan. With Spruance’s raid on the Volcano Islands, Admiral “Jocko” Clark had negated any chance of this critical second aspect of the Japanese operational plan from happening. Yet the Japanese still had one last advantage -- superiority in the distance they could launch an air strike -- that still might even the odds. To exploit this advantage, however, they would have to get

---

58 Ibid., p. 91.
through the submarine kill zone, gun line, screening units and Combat Air Patrol that Admiral Spruance had waiting for them.

**Battle of the Philippine Sea**

Spruance’s plan was simple. He would fly a search out to 300 nautical miles and then, if the Japanese were not located, sail his force southwest toward the expected Japanese line of advance during the night. The next morning he would reverse his course to get closer to Saipan and to make sure that no Japanese force got in behind him and between him and Saipan. The scheduled amphibious operation to take Guam was postponed.

Admiral Mitscher, anxious to get at the Japanese, contacted Spruance by line-of-sight tactical radio and tried to persuade him to press on to the southwest and engage the Japanese at the earliest opportunity. Spruance, committed to his main objective of ensuring the success of Admiral Turner’s amphibious assault on Saipan, resisted Mitscher’s advice. Probably considered in his decision was that radio operators aboard *U.S.S. Indianapolis*, Spruance’s flagship, had copied a message from COMSUBPAC in Hawaii to *S.S. Stingray* asking her to repeat a garbled message she had sent earlier. Since *Stingray* was one of the four submarines Admiral Lockwood had in waiting for the Japanese, the assumption made was that she had sighted the Japanese force at about 150 nautical miles from Task Force 58 -- or only half the expected distance based on the earlier sightings by *S.S. Flying Fish* and *S.S. Cavalla*. In fact *Stingray* was reporting a fire in her superstructure, but the damage was done. Now believing that the Japanese were considerably closer than originally expected, Spruance informed Mitscher that his desire to steam toward them starting an hour after midnight would open the possibility of a second Japanese force slipping in behind Task Force 58 during the night and disrupting the main objective of taking Saipan, Tinian and Guam to stage B-29 bombing runs on Japan.\(^59\)

The Japanese Mobile Force, after refueling at sea on 16 and 17 June, divided into two major components. In the van was Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita with his three light carriers, three battleships, five cruisers and ten destroyers. Following Kurita about 100

\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 88.
nautical miles to his southwest was Admiral Ozawa with his six carriers, two battleships, eight cruisers and fifteen destroyers. During the early morning hours of 19 June, Kurita’s air search revealed the basic location of Task Force 58. At 0830 Admiral Ozawa, acting on this information, launched his first attack wave of 45 dive bombers with 500-lb bombs, eight torpedo planes and 16 Zero fighters.\(^{60}\) Task force 58 was still on a southwesterly course and had not located the Japanese within the limits of the 300 nautical mile search pattern they were flying. Thus the Japanese got off the first blow while still out of the attack range of Fifth Fleet.

This strike range advantage lay with the Japanese not because of better aircraft design, but because they had chosen a trade-off unacceptable to American strategic culture. Japanese planes lacked armor, bullet-proof windscreens and redundant systems that protected pilots. In the trade-off for greater maneuverability and range, the Japanese had sacrificed pilot safety. Over the long term this was to wreak havoc with Japanese naval aviation as trained and experienced pilots were even harder to replace than planes. In the war of attrition that World War II in the Pacific Theater had become, events from Coral Sea to the Philippine Sea had taken their cumulative toll on Japan’s ability to wage war.

Near day break on 19 June 1944 a Japanese plane dropped a bomb unsuccessfully near the destroyer Stockham in Admiral Lee’s Task Group 58.7. Another was reported to be over Guam, which, since it had not yet been assaulted, provided a potential “shuttle-bombing” runway for the Japanese. The fight was on. F6F-3 Hellcats were launched and found 30 Zeros and five bombers to contest. This was the first of a good number of dogfights over Guam that day.\(^{61}\)

While still making 24 knots to westward to get the Japanese within striking range of about 200 nautical miles Admiral Spruance’s force got radar contact on approaching bogies. The time was 1000. Though the wind was at his back and the distance to the new contacts was only 150 nautical miles, Admiral Mitscher, in tactical command of all aviation assets, decided to continue to close the enemy. After twenty minutes Mitscher

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p. 91.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 92.
turned about into the wind and began to launch. His new Hellcats quickly rose to 25,000 feet altitude, giving them a significant tactical advantage over the Japanese. In the first half hour 27 fighters and torpedo planes had been splashed. Then at 1140 a second and larger wave of 47 Zero fighters and 61 dive bombers and torpedo planes arrived from Ozawa’s carriers.  

When what remained of Ozawa’s aircraft returned those wanting to land on his flagship, *Taiho*, they were in for a surprise. Their mother ship was aflame and billowing smoke, requiring them to land on other of Ozawa’s carriers. *Taiho*, a 31,000 ton carrier, was struck by the last of six torpedoes fired from about 1,500 yards at a speed of 27 knots by *S.S. Albacore*, one of Admiral Lockwood’s subs lying in wait. Another torpedo would have hit if a Japanese pilot had not spotted it and become his nation’s first *Kamikaze* by diving his plane into it to save *Taiho*. His sacrifice was in vain as while *Albacore* dived to escape, *Taiho* burned out of control.

At about noon a third wave of 40 fighters and seven torpedo planes hit Task Force 58. Seven were shot down and the rest were driven off back to their carriers. At 1306 a fourth wave of 40 Japanese fighters, 36 dive bombers and nine torpedo planes struck the American force. This group split in two with six dive bombers attacking Task Group 58.3 and achieving little damage. Of the 40 Val dive bombers that tried to land on Guam,

---

62 Ibid., p. 93.
63 King, Ernest J., Fleet Admiral, U.S. Navy. *U.S. Navy at War 1941-1945*. Washington: United States Navy Department, 1946, p. 234. *Taiho* had been commissioned by the Japanese only in March of 1944. She is listed as having been sunk on 19 June 1944 off Yap by a U.S. submarine. Thus the one of the two newest Japanese carriers had been sunk only one month after her commissioning. That the *Unryu*, also commissioned in March of 1944, would be sunk on the same day in the East China Sea by another U.S. submarine was beyond the comprehension of anyone in the Imperial Japanese Navy. This was made even more serious for the Japanese in that their most combat tested carrier throughout the war, *Shokaku*, was also sunk on 19 June 1944, again off Yap by a U.S. submarine.
nineteen were able to land but were out of commission thereafter with damage and the rest were splashed by Hellcats. The “Marianas Turkey Shoot” was underway.

The surviving planes returning from Shokaku’s fourth wave were as surprised as their compatriots from Taiho when they returned to find their 30,000 ton carrier in flames. This time the S.S. Cavalla, which had reported the passing of the Japanese Fleet two days earlier but resisted the temptation to launch her fish to preserve the secrecy of the intelligence she provided, was the culprit. Again, one of only four U.S. submarines in the box created by Admiral Lockwood hit her mark. Three of the six torpedoes she launched -- the last two while diving to avoid destruction -- hit their mark. Of the 105 depth charges Cavalla’s crew counted, nearly half were close aboard. Cavalla survived, Shokaku sank.

It should be noted that the U.S. submarine offensive against the Japanese had just started. The success of this offensive should rightfully give it the status of a “third prong” of the two-pronged strategy employed against the Japanese in the Pacific.

The battle was developing to this point as presented in the graphic on the following page:

---


65 The Battle of the Philippine Sea is alternatively called the Marianas Turkey Shoot for the over 400 Japanese aircraft shot out of the air by Task Force 58 that day of 19 June 1944.

The Marianas Turkey Shoot

Admiral Ozawa had launched his first attack wave against Task Force 58 at about 0900. He had 222 fighter aircraft, 113 dive bombers and 95 torpedo planes -- a total of 430 warplanes -- on his six carriers to throw against the Americans. By noon Ozawa had lost two of his Fleet Carriers and his aircraft losses were mounting. For the Americans the fun had just begun.

Stories of individual heroism and masterful airmanship are numerous in this battle. One flyer, Ensign Wilbur B. Webb of U.S.S. Hornet II’s VF-2 was credited with six “kills” in only a matter of minutes. His F6F-3 Hellcat caught up with a group of six

---

67 Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.

Zero fighters in the pattern attempting to land at Guam Airfield and got in behind them. He approached and fired on every one from the rear until all six flamed to earth.\(^6^9\) To recount even a few such stories, however, would fail to capture the magnitude of the U.S. triumph in the air that day. Perhaps the recounting of the Marianas Turkey Shoot by the Captain of Admiral Mitscher’s flagship, \textit{U.S.S. Lexington II}, would serve better to do that.

At 0130 on 19 June 1944 a PBY search plane made radar contact with the Japanese Fleet at 13 degrees 20 minutes North latitude and 137 degrees East longitude. Due to communication difficulties, no report was received of this sighting by Admiral Spruance until eight hours later. Therefore, at 0530 \textit{U.S.S. Lexington II} launched nine torpedo planes and 5 Hellcats to search in five sectors between 205 and 325 degrees true from the ship. At the time no contact was generated as the Japanese Fleet was still 360 nautical miles away. These planes shot down three Japanese torpedo planes, two dive bombers and a single reconnaissance plane, however, so Admirals Spruance and Mitscher knew that the Japanese were close to attack range.\(^7^0\)

At 0700 fighters from \textit{U.S.S. Belleau Wood} reported enemy planes taking off from Guam. Air combat ensued periodically for the next three hours. At 1001 a “large group of bogies” was sighted and confirmed as 140 nautical miles on a bearing of 245 degrees true from Task Force 58. Task Force aircraft were recalled from Guam and at 1023 \textit{Lexington II} launched 13 fighters and 17 dive bombers as the reported bogies continued to close. At 1032 a “tallyho” was received when the Japanese strike was visually sighted, and another “tallyho” came from a \textit{Lexington II} plane ten minutes later. The Japanese got in as close as 20 nautical miles from Task Force 58 before it was fully engaged.\(^7^1\)

At 1107 a second large group of Japanese planes was sighted, estimated at between 50 and 70, at 290 degrees true and 115 nautical miles. This second-wave strike

\(^{6^9}\) Ibid., p. 106.


\(^{7^1}\) Ibid., p. 9.
was intercepted at 40 nautical miles. At 1142 another group of Japanese torpedo planes were closing fast bearing 265 degrees true and again were intercepted at 40 nautical miles. At 1146 and 1153 *Lexington II* gunners opened fire on several planes diving on *U.S.S. Princeton*. These planes missed their mark, and were of the few Japanese planes that got close to ships of the Task Force that day.\(^72\)

It was apparent that TF 58 was being attacked by succeeding waves of carrier planes. From 1200 until 1500 groups of bogies were detected and intercepted with deadly regularity. No further enemy planes penetrated the screen, and on most occasions interception was effected 40 to 50 miles from the force. At 1500 the *U.S.S. Lexington* landed all but six interceptors. Between 1023 and 1500 the 30 VF of VF-16, which were launched as interceptors shot down 13 Judys [dive bombers], 8 Zekes [fighter aircraft], 3 Jills [torpedo planes] and 2 Kates [dive bombers], and probably shot down 2 Zekes and 1 Judy. At 1400 a search group consisting of 8 VT and 5 VF was launched to search sector 225º to 270º true for 325 miles from Latitude 14º 04’N, Longitude 144º 19’E. Again no surface craft were seen, but 5 Zekes, 2 Jills and 1 Judy were shot down, 1 Zeke probably shot down and several Zekes damaged.\(^73\)

The total score for the *Lexington* Air Group for 19 June was 45 Japanese aircraft shot down, four more probably shot down, one damaged in the air, two destroyed on the ground, one probably destroyed on the ground and ten damaged on the ground.\(^74\) Air Group Sixteen off *Lexington II* had shot down a total of 143 Japanese planes during the Battle of the Philippine Sea and other expeditions, a huge total for a single carrier.\(^75\) Air Groups of the fifteen carriers of Task Force 58 shot down “over 400 enemy planes” on 19 June alone -- the largest total in any single day in history.\(^76\) When the smoke had cleared Task Force 58 fighters and other planes had downed 366 enemy aircraft, with 19 more shot down by Battle Force gunners and 17 destroyed on the deck on Guam.\(^77\) Moreover, the resounding victory was won at a comparatively small cost of 27 pilots dead or

\(^{72}\) Ibid.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 10.

\(^{74}\) Ibid.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.

\(^{76}\) Ibid.

missing and 29 American planes lost. While the precise reason this battle became known as The Marianas Turkey Shoot is not known, an appropriate myth survived the battle. It was impuned by many who took part in the destruction of the First Air Fleet that one pilot from the deep South remarked to his Plane Captain when he landed from a mission “Boy, this sure makes me homesick. Its just like an ol’-fashioned turkey shoot.”

During this entire engagement no surface units were struck by U.S. aircraft. The carriers of Task Force 58 had repeatedly to turn to the east into the wind and as a result were unable to close on the Japanese carriers to their southwest. It was estimated that from the first sighting of the Japanese Striking Force by a PBY and that reported by the submarine *Cavalla* when she torpedoed the *Shokaku* the force had traveled eastward about 240 nautical miles. During that same period, as a result of needing to turn into the wind to launch aircraft, Task Force 58 had only averaged about 17 knots to the west. Searches in the late evening of 19 June failed to locate any Japanese naval units suitable for attacking.

On the Japanese side, even with the loss of two carriers and the 3,000 men aboard them, hopes of ultimate victory remained unrealistically high. Admiral Ozawa had every intention of resuming the battle the next day. Ozawa believed that most of his missing planes had landed on Guam or other air strips in the area and would be available for strikes. He also still counted on land-based aircraft shuttled from the Japanese home islands. Perhaps most telling was his reliance on the intelligence provided by his pilots.

Japanese pilots reported on 19 June that they had sunk four Task Force 58 carriers, and that six more were “blazing like bonfires.” These reports, of course, were untrue. Yet Ozawa determined that the attack should be resumed after his ships were refueled. The huge losses of his aircraft did not sink in until a fleet-wide radio inventory that night revealed that of his 430 original aircraft, he had only 100 that were still capable of going into battle. At 1615 on 20 June Ozawa got word from Admiral Kurita that his

---

78 Ibid., p. 106.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., p. 109.
force had been spotted by an American search plane.\footnote{Ibid.} He decided to retire to the west, his own command post after Taiho sank the day before (the heavy cruiser Haguro) heading for Okinawa -- a Japanese bastion that would not fall until 22 June 1945 with the loss of 107,539 soldiers, 16 warships and over 800 more planes.\footnote{Costello, \textit{The Pacific War 1941-1945}, p. 578. For a most complete consideration of the amphibious operations of the United States Marine Corps and Army in the Pacific War, as well as the Japanese defenses against their assaults, please see Gatchel, Theodore L., Col., USMC (Ret.), \textit{At the Water’s Edge}, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure43.png}
\caption{The Japanese Defense of Okinawa\footnote{Graphic provided by the United States Naval War College Graphic Arts Department for Professor Frank W. Snider for use in Douglas V. Smith’s Elective course on World War II in the Pacific Theater.}}
\end{figure}
Mopping Up

While Ozawa had had enough, Spruance and Mitscher had not. Throughout the night of 19 June they pursued the Japanese. Though both searches that night and a limited number of searches the next day were conducted, they failed to uncover the Japanese Fleet’s location. Then at 1542 on 20 June a garbled message came in form one of the search planes giving the impression that the Japanese carriers had at last been sighted. A little later -- at 1605 -- a more intelligible report placed the Japanese 275 nautical miles to the northwest. This report was corrected ten minutes later to 370 nautical miles, but by then, since Admiral Mitscher had readied a strike based on the 1542 presumed sighting, 85 fighters, 77 dive bombers and 54 torpedo planes were already aloft. The 740 nautical mile round trip for these planes was too far even with drop tanks. Yet Mitscher, anxious to finish the Japanese off, determined that he could reduce that distance by 75 to 100 miles by steaming “Bendix”\(^84\). He accepted the risk of losing many aircraft and pilots and boldly let the strike he had launched continue.\(^85\)

When they approached their target they found that the Japanese Fleet was divided into three groups. The northern group included one fleet carrier of the *Zuikaku* Class, around ten heavy and light cruisers, and from 14 to 16 destroyers. The southern group was comprised of three Fleet Oilers, three CAs and a destroyer. The western group was of five battleships, two fleet carriers of the *Hitaka* Class, two escort carriers of the *Ryuho* Class, several heavy cruisers and four destroyers. The decision of the Air Group Commander was to attack the two nearest groups: those being the southern and western groups.\(^86\)

\(^84\) The maker of the instrument with which desired ship speed from the bridge to the engine room is made by the Bendix corporation, and that logo is placed where the top speed possible of a ship can be indicated as that desired. Hence the term “all ahead Bendix” is synonymous with “full speed ahead.”


By sunset most of the U.S. planes had left the area, but not before doing their damage. Listed as sunk were the carrier Hiyo and the Fleet Oilers Genyo Maru and Seiyo Maru. Zuikaku in the northern group was listed as damaged, as were Junyo and Ryuho of the western group, as well as the heavy cruisers Chiyoda and Maya, the battleship Haruna, and the Fleet Oiler Hayasui.\(^7\) It was also estimated that 22 Japanese fighter aircraft of the 75 they were able to launch to counter the attack had been splashed in the encounter. In all, the 100 operational carrier aircraft that the Japanese had available after the Marianas Turkey Shoot were reduced to under 50. Of the nine aircraft carriers the Japanese had when the Battle of the Philippine Sea started, only two remained seaworthy. The Imperial Japanese Navy that once dominated the Western Pacific now lacked the air cover and striking power to assume an offensive posture.\(^8\)

But the cost for the U.S. was high. On returning to their carriers after dark and nearing fuel exhaustion, the American pilots were glad to see that Admiral Mitscher had “turned on the lights” for them. Unfortunately, 38 pilots and aircrewmen were lost in the strike and of the 216 planes launched by Task Force 58 carriers only 116 landed safely.\(^9\)

**Finishing the Job in the Marianas**

By 9 June the Marines and their Army 77\(^{th}\) Infantry Division comrades had done their job on Saipan. At a cost of 3,000 killed in action and another 13,000 wounded they had secured the first base that could bring B-29 bombers within range of Tokyo.\(^0\) Tinian and Guam were next to be secured.

Only two weeks after concluding the bloody fighting for Saipan, the Marines of the 2\(^{nd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) Marine Divisions hit the beaches of Tinian, four miles to the south. In only a week they secured control of Tinian with only 400 casualties. Marine General Holland M. “Howling Mad” Smith later called this “the perfect amphibious operation of the Pacific War.”\(^1\)

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 124.
\(^8\) Lockwood, Ibid., p. 124.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 123.
\(^0\) Costello, *The Pacific War 1941-1945*, p. 484.
\(^1\) Ibid., p. 485.
Retaking Guam some 130 nautical miles to the southwest of Tinian would be another matter. There were no suitable beaches for an amphibious assault on the 30 mile long island, and its central mountain ridges made perfect defensive positions. The first step was to “soften up” the Japanese garrisons on Guam with two weeks of battleship and smaller unit gunfire -- the most for any operation in the Pacific in World War II. When the Marines of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Divisions stormed ashore at Agat Beach on 21 July they were greeted by a “Welcome Marines” notice left by Navy underwater demolition teams. The 77\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division landed five miles to the north on the other side of Apra Harbor. After five grueling days the two forces linked together and confined most of the Japanese defenders to the narrow Orote Peninsula.\footnote{Ibid.}

Unable to break out, the Japanese launched wave after wave of suicide attacks. On 10 August, a little over two weeks after the initial U.S. assault, the Japanese made their last stand. Over 1,500 Americans and 3,500 Japanese lost their lives in the struggle for Guam. Though the end of organized resistance was achieved, mopping-up actions were required well into 1945.\footnote{Ibid., p. 486.} In fact, the last Japanese soldier didn’t come out of hiding to surrender until 1972.\footnote{At the time of his surrender the author happened to be on Guam while flying aerial surveillance missions in the area with the U.S. Navy.}

At long last the Nimitz prong of the two-pronged strategy had paid dividends. The United States, two years after the Japanese had raised their flag on Guam and secured with it their largest base in the Pacific, had regained this valuable stretch of real estate. Once the Seabees had finished improving the runways, U.S. B-29s could start their assault on the Japanese home islands. The beginning of the end was at hand for the Japanese.

Oddly, virtually no one in the Japanese government realized the proximity of downfall until the fall of Saipan. Even then only a few among them fully grasped the gravity of the situation to the east. During 1944 they had launched the \textit{ichi go} offensive on the Asian mainland -- in part to counter their inability to transport resources from their
“Southern Resource Area” to the Japanese home islands due to the success of the U.S. submarine offensive against their shipping -- and had achieved some of their greatest success in the war. With a distinctly continental focus to their overall policy objectives and strategy, the Japanese leadership was lulled into a sense of great achievement in their primary area of concern. When Saipan fell, for the first time a sense of desperation set in. Just as Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto had warned -- Japan was indeed vulnerable from the east.

When the true extent of the Japanese losses in the Battle of the Philippine Sea/Marianas Turkey Shoot sunk in, Admiral Ozawa offered his resignation. It was not accepted. It was not long, however, until his star began to be eclipsed by that of Admiral Takeo Kurita.

In addition to the strategic advantage of being able to start the bombing of Japan, the demise of Japanese carrier aviation on 19 and 21 June 1944 opened the door to operations including General Douglas MacArthur’s return to the Philippines.

**Conclusions**

There is no real point in evaluating in detail the decisions of the various commanders for their efforts during the Battle of the Philippine Sea by the criteria used in chapters III through VII. By now they were “graduate students.” Moreover, they were graduate students with a large number of the most sophisticated “toys” on the planet. While the Japanese had somehow managed to bring together nine carriers with Air Wings composed of flyers most of whom had no more than 60 hours of training and experience, the United States could field fifteen carriers -- seven of them of the new and powerful *Essex* class -- and experienced pilots virtually all of whom had a minimum of 300 hours in the cockpit. Also, where the Japanese Zero fighter was clearly superior to anything the U.S. could put in the air in the early stages of the war, the new F6F-3 Hellcat was more than a match for it. The Zero could, of course, turn quicker and maneuver better than the Hellcat since it lacked the weight of the armor on the U.S. plane. But the Hellcat, aside from having better survivability, had a tremendous power advantage over the Zero. It could also climb higher, allowing it to pounce in an accelerating dive on any Zero below. Further, it could out-accelerate the Zero in level...
flight, thus making it extremely hard to hit from behind. In combination, the U.S. had an advantage in both man and machine.

Yet there are several decisions that do stand out as outstanding in their own right. First, Admiral Spruance, when he knew from submarine locating information the direction and likely time of approach of the Japanese Fleet, never strayed from his primary responsibility to ensure the success of the amphibious assaults on Saipan, Tinian and Guam. Spruance, who had been exposed to Sound Military Decision at the Naval War College overrode Admiral Mitscher, who had not, when he decided to keep Task Force 58 near enough to the Marianas so as not to allow a Japanese force to slip in behind him and his main objectives. While some have criticized Spruance for lacking Mitscher’s aggressiveness and losing the opportunity to sink all of the remaining Japanese carriers in the battle, his decision was the correct one. While as “graduate students” who had a huge numerical superiority in ships and airplanes and were the product of a steep learning curve in combat most of the commanders in the Battle of the Philippine Sea deserve the expected graduate grade of “B+”, Spruance clearly deserves a strong “A” for every aspect of his performance and all of his decisions in this battle. So too should Rear Admiral Charles Lockwood, Commander Submarines Pacific, deserve an “A” for his foresightedness in placing four submarines in the area of most likely operation of the Japanese carriers. His far sightedness resulted in a loss for the Japanese in carriers almost as devastatingly complete as the total destruction of their Carrier Air Wings in the Marianas Turkey Shoot.

For the rest of those concerned the expected minimum graduate student grade at this point of the war -- “B+” -- is assigned. Only Admiral Mitscher, whose recommendation to close the Japanese during the early hours of 19 June would have resulted in a more complete victory but could have resulted in disaster is not withstanding, might deserve better. His decision to press the attack he had in the air on 21 June was courageous, if costly. So too was his order to “turn on the lights” for returning aircraft the right and courageous thing to do.

No victory in naval history was more complete than the Battle of the Philippine Sea and the Marianas Turkey Shoot. So ended the five carrier battles of the Second World War. Though Admiral “Bull” Halsey chased and sank several Japanese carriers
during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the inability of those carriers to launch aircraft to contest the outcome disallows that episode as a true carrier battle. In each of the five carrier battles of World War II the United States won a strategic -- if not operational or tactical -- victory. As with all the rest, the decisions of the commanders in the Battle of the Philippine Sea measured up well when evaluated in the eight areas postulated in chapter I as indicative of the tenets of *Sound Military Decision.*
VIII CONCLUSIONS

The United States entered World War II deficient in numbers of ships, quality of naval aircraft, and experience in war. Though the Japanese had opposed the Washington Treaty of Naval Limitations of 1922, during the late 1920s and early 1930s it was in reality the most one-sided agreement in their favor that their leadership could have hoped for, and the basis for their rise to world power status and dominance in Asia and the western Pacific. If they had more closely analyzed their situation the Japanese would

---

1 Image provided by Mr. Edward S. Miller from his PowerPoint slides for lecture “War Plan Orange” given on 2 December 2004 to Douglas V. Smith’s Elective Seminar on World War II in the Pacific Theater, U.S. Naval War College, room C-322B.
have necessarily come to the conclusion that the United States, unconstrained by her treaty commitments, could have easily built three to five times as many ships of war as could Japan based on the relative state of their economies and their industrial capacities. Moreover, with the U.S. constrained by her treaty commitments, the Japanese were not faced with the hard decisions a naval arms race would have entailed. Thus the Japanese were free to apply their fiscal and intellectual resources to providing the most technologically advanced and operationally experienced navy in the world. Unfortunately for the Japanese, they lacked the foresight to provide the intellectual refinement of their officer corps and the quantitative training necessary to compete with the United States Navy over the long term.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor they had already set in motion the industrial machine that would quickly allow the United States to catch up and surpass Japan in all meaningful comparisons of naval might. Yet, at the war’s outset, Japan held a quantitative and qualitative naval advantage -- exacerbated by the U.S. losses at Pearl Harbor -- that forced the United States to make up for its disadvantages by superiority in some important area. In the war at sea that decided the outcome of World War II between the United States and Japan the main “equalizer,” particularly from December 1941 through about November of 1943, was the quality and consistency of leadership in the United States Navy.

Faced by circumstances with a need to react to Japanese strategy, and usually outnumbered and qualitatively inferior in ships and aircraft design, the U.S. Navy invariably found a way to go on the offensive successfully. Throughout 1942 the essential element of U.S. success in the Pacific Theater was achieving the strategic objective in the four carrier battles that diminished Japan’s naval advantage, stopped the expansion of Japanese hegemony, maintained the sea lines of communication with Australia, and opened the door for not one but two axes of offensive to terminate the war on terms favorable to the United States and its allies. In each of those battles the outcome rested on a few key decisions. Invariably and with few exceptions the decisions made in the heat of battle were suitable with respect to the nature of the effect desired, the means available and opposed to achieve that effect, the characteristics of the theater of
operations, and the consequences of achieving the effect desired as to cost. These were the criteria established as critical in the decision making process at the Naval War College in *Sound Military Decision* in the period between the First and Second World Wars.

It would be preposterous to say that education supplanted experience as the main source of a solid decision process that led to success in the Pacific in World War II. It would be even more preposterous to advance the notion that a single part of that educational experience stands out as the absolutely essential element of it -- or would it be? The evaluation of the decision process for the commanders in the five carrier battles discussed above would tend to reinforce that adherence to the tenets of one major contributor to their education -- *Sound Military Decision* -- was universally present and indeed important to their reaction to stressful and demanding battle conditions.

It is interesting that the primary pre-war planning document for a war between the United States and Japan, approved by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert E. Coontz, in 1923, was titled the “Estimate of the Situation – Blue - Orange.” Equally interesting is the official title given to his diary for the Pacific war that has become known as the “Gray Book” by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet -- “The Running Estimate of the Situation for the Pacific War.” The term “estimate of the situation” also appears repeatedly in many of the Battle Reports of the commanders involved in the carrier battles discussed above. That term, “estimate of the situation,” is the fundamental underpinning of *Sound Military Decision,* which was used in conjunction with virtually every medium of instruction at the Naval War College in the period between the two World Wars. It was thus ingrained in every officer in a key decision position through November of 1943, and in most of them thereafter until the end of the War.

---

Naval Education Between the World Wars

Perhaps the best description of the education received by Navy officers in the period between the two World Wars is that given by Admiral William Sowden Sims in his testimony in the “Billy” Mitchell trial. When asked “Will you tell the court, in a general way, about the Naval War College?” Admiral Sims replied:

The Naval War College has been established now for approximately 25 or 30 years and, until comparatively recently, it has been there against the opposition of the senior officers of the Service. That has lessened to a considerable extent now. The Navy War College ought not to have been a college at all, because it is not at all in the nature of a college. It is a building with 75 to 100 officers from the fleet, officers of very considerable experience, are ordered, figuratively, to sit around a table and discuss how our fleet would best be handled in case we have war with one of our possible enemies. It is a band of practical officers working out how it should be done. Moreover, having worked out what they believe the tactic ought to be, they are tested out on a game board in a room as big as this floor, divided into little squares, and the fleets are represented with small models. They have chart maneuvers that precede this and tactical maneuvers and given a indication of what it means [Sic.]. It is very interesting to see a fine officer come there with 25 years experience, with a good reputation in the Navy, but not a student in any sense --- to see him start in with the maneuvers and see the lack of knowledge he has of the proper tactics and strategy, because there is no place in the Navy where it is taught except in the War College, and then to see the man develop through years in the practice … .

…I wish you had the opportunity of seeing these commanders that I had on one occasion where a demonstration was given for the benefit of a couple of Senators where a decision had to be made, and where one commander made his decision in 20 seconds and the other one in 45 seconds, when modern fleets come together a decision has to be made like that, as was demonstrated in the Jutland battle. A delay of five minutes might be entirely fatal. The object of the War College is to fit officers for high command, and the reason we people who have been interested in the War College all of these years is that although they support the War College and give it lip service, they have never used its products in the selection of the three chief officers of the Navy, the commander-in-chief of the fleet, the chief of naval operations, and the superintendent of the Naval Academy, and that is the matter with the Navy Department today. 3

---

When asked further “Should these three key positions be occupied by men who have
gone through the War College” Sims replied:

As Admiral Mahan said, one of the first functions of the War College is not
only to train officers, but to find out who ought to be selected as commander-
in-chief and chief of operations.\(^4\)

Has that ever been done?

No; never.\(^5\)

What effect has this action had on the efficiency and morale of the Service?

All history shows that it has had a bad effect on the morale of the Service.\(^6\)

In the testimony cited above one of the nation’s top naval officers, a learned man
of great experience who had commanded all U.S. Navy units and operations in World
War I, attested powerfully to the importance of the educational experience at the United
States Naval War College received by officers who would go on to command men and
warships at sea. Central and critical to that educational experience was the document
used to structure officers’ critical analytical abilities in formulating optimum courses of
action in a variety of challenging and constantly evolving situations -- *Sound Military
Decision*.

Throughout the discussion of perhaps the most important strategic determinates of
World War II in the Pacific Theater -- the five great carrier battles -- eight criteria have
been applied that, in combination, reflect the adherence of the major commanders
involved in their decision process to the methodologies and tenets of *Sound Military
Decision*.

\(^{1925, \text{Volume 12, 168771, Alexander H. Galt Official Reporter, 715 Woodward
Building, Washington, D.C. College Park, MD: National Archives No. II, Box No. 9214-2,
section 1018-1147, parts 1112-1113.}}\)

\(^4\) Ibid., part 1114.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.
Decision, and to the most fundamental aspect of the decision process therein, the Commander’s Estimate of the Situation. A review of these criteria is in order.

1. The Commander’s estimate of the situation and grasp of the strategic and operational significance of decisions he would be required to make.

In every instance virtually all of the commanders involved deserved and received high marks in this area. Without question this was a strong point for those in the highest echelons of strategic and operational command, from Washington to the far reaches of the Pacific theater. Without a firm grasp of strategic priorities Fleet units would have invariably been put into situations of high risk and perhaps squandered needlessly. Unlike the Japanese, even when assets were tight, U.S. Navy commanders placed groups of ships in the right place, at the right time, and accepted considerable but calculated risk to achieve the necessary strategic outcome.

2. The Commander’s demonstrated ability to formulate a course of action, ability to convey concisely and unambiguously his decision in mission orders to subordinate commanders, and his flexibility in modifying those orders through strategic and/or operational reappraisal when and if required.

In this area too all the commanders involved in the decisive carrier battles of the Pacific War did extremely well. Moreover, they did well often under “ad hoc” situations where preparation times were negligible and assets had to be hastily and incompletely repaired and rushed into battle to provide even a chance of victory. In many of the instances considered, the commanders involved had no prior battle experience together, nor any opportunity to meet in conference to consider their options. Then what accounts for their high degree of integration and coordinated action? Unless one attributes their synergistic efforts to luck or divine intervention, it can only be surmised that their condominium of actions resulted from adherence to a mutually expected method of arriving at their decisions. Once again, the methodology common to their approach to the same basic situation was inherent in their mutual inter-War experience with Sound Military Decision.

3. The command arrangements, chain of command established and appropriate communications procedures put into effect to facilitate the exercise of command in battle.
With the exception of the command arrangements for the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, which was put in place hastily and had as its prime motivator deference to rank when Frank Jack Fletcher had only days before been promoted to Vice Admiral ahead of an officer who was previously three lineal numbers his senior, this was another strong area. In not one of the five carrier battles did command arrangements significantly impair the proper relationship of subordinates to their commanders, or inhibit the freedom of action of subordinates in achieving their operational and strategic objectives.

4. Adherence to operational and tactical doctrines (where appropriate) and procedures as established prior to engagement of forces, and the appropriateness of deviations from the same when warranted by events.

Even given the extensive interactions between experienced officers with considerable time in service, and the war games and other methods used to refine their mutually agreed solutions to naval operational and tactical problems at the War College, the doctrines they developed there were often found to be imperfect in real battle situations. Two things, however, should be considered when evaluating the efficacy of those flawed doctrines. First, they gave a basis for initial action, no matter how flawed, and they served as a benchmark for evaluation essential to the subsequent development of sound doctrines. An “ad hoc” starting point would have done neither. Second, the assimilation of flawed doctrine gave a basis for understanding in detail why that doctrine was flawed, and what needed to be done to make it evolve into sound doctrine. When one commander weighed in with lessons learned from a battle, mutual awareness of existing doctrine could lead to appreciation of its deficiencies by U.S. naval commanders as a group and then rapid modifications to reach a consensus on a better way of approaching a given situation could be accomplished.

Examples of both useful doctrine and identification of flaws in existing doctrine abound in the carrier battles of World War II. So too do the rapid identification of both doctrinal strengths and weaknesses in the After Action Reports of the commanders involved. For once in its history, the U.S. Navy doggedly adhered to doctrine when appropriate and quickly learned to deviate from it when necessary.

5. Appreciation of mission requirements by subordinate commanders and appropriateness of complementary actions to engage the enemy more effectively.
Though there were several exceptions, this was an area of general strength overall. Two major exceptions bear note. First, and the more minor of the two, was the passing of responsibility for conducting air operations from the overall commander to a major subordinate when the former was a non-aviator and the latter an aviator. This was an understandable anomaly in normal command relationships that was subsequently rectified when adequate numbers of aviators gained the experience necessary to assume overall command. Second, and a more constant and avoidable problem, was the failure of naval commanders of land-based aircraft adequately to search areas of expected Japanese naval operations, and inability to ensure that near-continuous positioning information was generated and passed to concerned force commanders. Though search, tracking and reporting of Japanese naval locations and movements did improve over the course of the war, this was a serious problem that introduced much unnecessary risk during strategically critical battles.

6. Understanding of the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving this nation’s political objectives and concomitant appreciation for appropriate risk and determination of appropriate circumstances for battle termination.

Here Admiral Chester Nimitz excelled beyond any reasonable expectation. All but the last of the five carrier battles of World War II were near-run events. In all of the first four the United States was at a numerical disadvantage. All five were critical and essential to U.S. strategy to defeat Japan. Admiral Nimitz, best of all the Navy commanders in World War II, showed an appreciation of the existing strategic situation and accepted the risks -- often great -- that had to be taken to achieve the nation’s immediate and long-term political objectives. Nimitz initiated or accepted naval engagements only when and where they were needed. When faced with challenged strategic objectives in several areas of the Pacific simultaneously, he invariably estimated the situation correctly and came up with a proper response. No officer comes to mind who more consistently adhered to this element of Sound Military Decision than Nimitz.

So too did Nimitz know when to terminate an engagement once the strategic objective had been secured to preserve his scarce assets. He showed great restraint by resisting the temptation to pursue the enemy and administer a more complete drubbing at Midway, Santa Cruz and the Philippine Sea. In every case his evaluation of the situation
revealed that the costs could well exceed the benefits of continued action, and he acted accordingly.

Of course it was Nimitz’ job to understand the engagement’s importance within the wider context of achieving U.S. political objectives, appreciating appropriate risk and determining appropriate circumstances for battle termination in the Pacific Theater. In doing this he uniformly conveyed to his subordinates an urgency and appreciation for the consequences of their engagements. Nimitz showed great appreciation for the relationship between what was going on on land and sea, as during the naval campaign for Guadalcanal, and was not hesitant to change important commanders close to an expected battle when necessary as he did with Admiral Halsey, Commander South Pacific Area, just before the Battle of Santa Cruz. This important aspect of Sound Military Decision was a definite strong point for the naval leadership in the Pacific, and Admiral Nimitz in particular.

7. Audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan of action.

The action plan for the Battle of Midway stands out as an exclamation point for audacity and brilliance in conceptualizing, articulating and executing a plan. Throwing a three-carrier force with the primary subordinate commander (Spruance) thrust quickly and unexpectedly into his command position and a carrier needing months of repair but getting only 72 hours of it against an armada of over 200 Japanese ships certainly represents audacity. So too does accepting available intelligence as accurate in taking such a risk. Placing that force so as to flank the kido butai by inserting it between the available U.S. carriers and Midway Island so that quick and vital choices on employment of Japanese air assets would have to be made, and made correctly, represents brilliance.

Understanding the importance of maintaining the U.S. sea lines of communications early in the war and sending two carrier groups to the Coral Sea also represents brilliance. So too does Admiral Raymond Spruance’s impenetrable formation at the Battle of the Philippine Sea and his appreciation of the primacy of taking Saipan, Tinian and Guam to the destruction of the opposing Japanese Fleet.

While the Battles of the Eastern Solomons and Santa Cruz were more reactive to Japanese strategic initiatives, and thus less likely to be conducted in accordance with an
audacious or brilliant prior plan, it would be correct to say that those engagements were also conducted with a degree of audacity and brilliance.

Thus, to a measured extent, the naval leaders involved did quite well in this area too.

8. Capturing elements of learning and rapidly passing them along to the advantage of those commanding in subsequent engagements.

The Battle of the Coral Sea ended on 11 May and the Battle of Midway started on 3 June. In this short period of time, and as a result of lessons learned provided in the After Action Report of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher after Coral Sea, the Air Wings of the carriers at Midway were increased from 18 to 27 fighter aircraft. This factor enabled victory at Midway. Without it there is no doubt that the outcome would have been different. This attests strongly to the rapidity of feedback on and action taken as a result of the lessons learned in a previous battle.

One can not help be impressed with the quality and completeness of the lessons learned provided in the After Action Reports of the commanders at all levels of every carrier battle of the Pacific War. Likewise, one can easily see that the actions taken to resolve deficiencies in doctrine, materials of war and ship design paid huge dividends in warship lethality and survivability and lives spared in subsequent actions. This was uniformly a strong point from top to bottom in the Navy’s leadership in the Pacific.

Sound Military Decision, Good Decisions and the Defeat of Japan

The proof of any position is, as they say, “in the pudding.” In establishing the relationships first between the education officers received in the inter-War period and the quality of their decisions in battle during World War II in the Pacific Theater, and second between those decisions and the strategic outcomes they achieved, the totality of the results achieved is the surest measure available. Perhaps the best statement on which to measure those linkages comes from a speech given by Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher during Navy Day celebrations at Des Moines, Iowa, on 27 October 1946:

… What, then, prompted [Japan’s] surrender? Was it the atomic bombs or was it Russian entry into war? **Neither!** Japan who had so easily started the war in December 1941 was desperately striving for a way to quit before the Berlin conference, before either of the events mentioned. Never in any period had a nation so powerfully armed so abjectly surrendered. I will tell you why. Her navy was sunk! Her raw materials were exhausted. Her fuel
oil and fuel products were gone. Her soldiers and her people were hungry. Her war industries were shattered. Her supply lines were completely cut. Atom bomb or no atom bomb, her surrender was inevitable. Russian entry into the war did not shorten it one day. Control of the sea was ours! In all of recorded history, whenever or wherever great nations bounded by the seas have fought, control of those seas has become the dominant factor in deciding the issue. How was the extraordinary accomplishment achieved? In early December 1941 Senior American Naval Officers in the Pacific were gravely concerned because the balance of naval strength in the Pacific lay with the Japanese. After that fateful event of 7 December the preponderance favoring the enemy was tremendous.

Now statistics are usually dull as dish water, but let me give you a few as to what happened to the Japanese Navy that are dynamic. It was not a force or a fleet that was defeated, or damaged, or even sunk. It was the whole Navy that was sunk, a Navy that at the outset was third strongest in the world and more powerful than all the forces we could then muster in the Pacific. Give your attention to these figures: Of 12 battleships, 11 were sunk, 1 was heavily damaged and inoperative. Of 26 aircraft carriers, 21 were sunk, 5 were damaged in varying degrees, none were operable. Of 43 cruisers, 38 were sunk, 2 were heavily damaged and out of action in Singapore, the remaining 3 were out of action in Japan. All, I repeat all of the foregoing damage was inflicted by the aircraft, submarines and surface ships of the American Navy, except 2 cruisers sunk by British ships and 1 by our own army [Sic.] aircraft. But that is not all. Japan had 179 destroyers. 135 were sunk -- 121 of them by your Navy, 14 by army [Sic.] aircraft. Only two of the 44 that remained afloat were fully operable. She had 193 submarines, 129 were sunk. As to the remaining 64, damage, lack of spare parts, destruction of repair facilities, lack of fuel, made only a handful operable. Of her merchant marine, our submarines alone had sent 1042 ships of 4,779,000 tons to the bottom. Navy and Army aircraft and surface vessels -- ships and planes of our Allies -- and mines disposed of another 2,800,000 tons. Very very few ships over 1,000 tons remained to move troops or munitions or to bring to Japan vitally essential food, fuel and raw materials. Remember it was our seapower that brought Japan to her knees. When she surrendered she still had a large army [Sic.] intact and a substantial air force, both more than double the forces she had on December 7, 1941. Our enemy had seen his fleet destroyed, his sea lanes cut off, many of his islands captured or neutralized and his vital supply forces eliminated -- all by our control of the sea -- on it, under it and over it.7

---

Fletcher’s speech accurately reflects the totality of the victory the U.S. Navy achieved against the Imperial Japanese Navy in World War II. In his speech, Fletcher mentions how important education and training were to achieving victory -- but in the enlisted ranks. So too was education important in the officer ranks.

**Contemporary Relevance**

In Admiral Sims’ testimony, cited above, he talks about the rapidity with which information has to be evaluated and a decision reached in battle. Sims testified in 1925. Today, with long-range sensors and highly accurate missiles, and with supersonic aircraft and enormously lethal ship and land-launched projectiles, quick and correct decisions are perhaps even more critical to battle at sea than in Sims’ era. In fact, the relatively new discipline of Information Warfare attests to the currency of Sims’ position. Though rote in their presentation, the tenets of *Sound Military Decision* too still apply exactly to the high-paced warfare likely to be encountered by the U.S. Navy.

But what about the importance of education for the officers of the Navy and Marine Corps? True, most have recent experience in battle. But the degree of their success is likely to decrease the likelihood of more combat in the foreseeable future. Thus, just as between the two World Wars, education in lieu of opportunity for first-hand experience is sure to be a necessary component of future success in war. Moreover, to a greater degree than ever war will be conducted in the future in a Joint environment. Thus interaction and contemplation of solutions to warfare problems that could be encountered by members of all the Armed Services is critical to success in future wars. The quality of that education, one can only hope, will be on the level of that provided to the leaders of the United States Navy prior to their command of men and ships in the Pacific in World War II.

The numbers of ships sunk by the U.S. Navy and other Services and by Allies in World War II is confirmed by: King, Ernest J., Fleet Admiral, U.S. Navy, *U.S. Navy at War 1941-1945*, Washington: Unites States Navy Department, 1946, Appendix A, pp. 233-251, with one exception. The Fleet Carrier *Kasagi* was under camouflage at Sasebo, fitting out, and had not yet been commissioned when the War ended.
Yet one can not help but be skeptical. Admiral Sims stated in his testimony that “…Until comparatively recently [the Naval War College had] been there against the opposition of the senior officers of the Service…” There are many, particularly in Newport, who would echo that sentiment even today. Why? Admiral Sims also stated that the three top leaders in the Navy -- the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet (now Combatant Commanders) and the Superintendent of the Naval Academy -- should all be graduates of the Naval War College, which had never happened. Today neither the Chief of Naval Operations nor any of the Navy’s Combatant Commanders are graduates of any War College. This has been the case, with a few noted exceptions, over more that the past decade. At present, only the Superintendent of the Naval Academy is a product of the Naval War College, and then as its President and not as a student. Is it any wonder that the importance of refining analytical abilities, decision processes and operational and tactical concepts receives little attention when almost none of those leading the Navy are products of an educational experience that, in Sims’ words, “…there is no place in the Navy where it is taught except the War College?”

Moreover, the Naval War College has evolved its curriculum to be much more descriptive and less proscriptive than in the inter-War period. While “The Commander’s Estimate of the Situation” is still held as central to Operational Art at sea, operations and tactics are now more often described than developed by the students and faculty at Newport. Success in “sinking the Japanese Navy” in World War II was a product of both adherence to the decision processes put forward in *Sound Military Decision* and the working through of difficult problems at sea before they occurred in development of strategic, operational, tactical and doctrinal concepts in the classrooms and on the game floor at the War College in Newport. Focusing on such basics can and will serve the U.S. Navy well in the future.

*Sound Military Decision*

Decisions count. Refinement of the decision process is difficult without immersion in the situations like those in which the actual decision will be made. A case has been made above that this is possible, and that it was achieved with important results in World War II in the Pacific Theater. While no two people will agree with the grades
assigned to the naval commanders above, the fact remains that they achieved an unprecedented degree of success. Superior capacity for waging war was not achieved until 1944. Thus much of this success resulted from something other than a miss-match in hardware and technology. It is hoped that the value of a professional education -- and in particular the relevance of *Sound Military Decision* to that education -- has been established as at least reason in part for that success. It is also hoped that future generations of Navy, Marine, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard officers profit from access to a similar educational experience in their profession of arms.
APPENDIX A

PLANS FOR THE NEW ORDER
IN EAST ASIA AND THE SOUTH SEAS

"Land Disposal Plan in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" (I.M.T.F.E. Exhibit 1334. Transcript, pp. 11969-73), December, 1941. Ministry of War, Research Section

1. Regions to be under the jurisdiction of the Government-General of Formosa:

- Hong Kong
- Macao (to be purchased)
- The Philippine Islands
- Paracel Islands
- Hainan Island (to be purchased from China)

2. To be administered by the South Seas Government Office:

- Guam
- Nauru
- Ocean Island
- Gilbert Islands
- Wake

3. The Melanesia Region Government-General or South Pacific Government-General (provisional titles):

---

New Guinea (the British and Australian mandated territories east of Long 141°E.)
The Admiralty Archipelago
New Britain, New Ireland and the islands in the vicinity
The Solomons
Santa Cruz Archipelago
Ellice Islands
Fiji Islands
New Hebrides
New Caledonia
Loyalty Island
Chesterfield Island

4. Eastern Pacific Government-General:
   Hawaii
   Howland, Baker and Phoenix Islands. Rain Islands
   Marquesas and Tuamotu Islands. Society Islands
   Cook and Austral Islands
   Somoa
   Tonga

5. The Australian Government-General:

   The whole of Australia, and Tasmania


   The North and South Islands of New Zealand
   Macquarie Island
The sea, south of the Tropic of Capricorn and east of Long. 160° E., as far as the S. Pole region

7. The Ceylon Government-General:

Ceylon; and India lying south of the following boundary: from the west coast on the Northern frontier of Portuguese Goa, thence to the north of Dharwar and Bellary and to the River Penner, and along the north bank of the Penner to The east coast at Nellore

Laccadive Islands
Maldives Islands
Chagos Islands
Seychelles
Mauritius

8. Alaska Government-General:

Alaska
The Yukon Province, and the land between that Province and the Mackenzie River
Alberta
British Columbia
The State of Washington

9. The Government-General of Central America:

Guatemala
San Salvador
Honduras
British Honduras
Nicaragua
Costa Rica
Panama
Columbia, and the Maracaibo district of Venezuela
Ecuador
Cuba
Haiti
Dominica
Jamaica
Bahamas

The future of Trinidad, British and Dutch Guiana and British and French possessions:

The Leeward Islands to be decided by agreement between Japan and Germany after the war

10. In the event of her declaring war on Japan, Mexico to cede territory east of Long. 95° 30’. Should Peru join in the war against Japan it must cede territory north of Lat. 10°; and if Chile enters the war it shall cede the nitre zone north of Lat. 24°

Independent States

1. The East Indies Kingdom:

All Dutch possessions in the E. Indies
British Borneo, Labuan, Sarawak, Brunei
Cocos
Christmas Island
Andamans
Nicobars
Portuguese Timor (to be purchased)
2. The Kingdom of Burma:

    British Burma and Assam, together with part of Bengal between the Ganges and Brahmaputra

3. The Malay Kingdom

4. The Kingdom of Thailand

5. The Kingdom of Cambodia:

    Cambodia and French Cochin China

6. The Kingdom of Annam

    Annam, Laos and Tongking
APPENDIX B

UNITED STATES

WAR DEPARTMENT

In the Office of the Judge Advocate General

Washington, D. C.

Jan. 20, 1926

Military Justice
Abbott – ijh
C. M. No. 168771

UNITED STATES ) ) DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
 ) ) Trial by G. C. M., convened at Washington, D.
 ) ) October 28, 1925. To be suspended from
 C., ) ) rank,
Colonel WILLIAM MITCHELL, ) ) command and duty, with forfeiture of all pay
Air Service. ) ) and allowances, for five (5) years.

____________________________

OPINION of the BOARD OF REVIEW,
TAYLOR, ABBOTT and KORN, Judge Advocates.

____________________________

1. The record of trial in the case of the officer named above has been examined by the board of Review, and the Board submits this, its opinion, to The Judge Advocate General.

2. The accused was tried upon the following charge and specifications:
   
   **CHARGE:** Violation of the 96th Article of War.
   
   **Specification 1:** In that Colonel William Mitchell, Air Services, did, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, on or about the fifth day of September, 1925, conduct himself to the prejudice of good order and military discipline and in a way to bring discredit upon the military service by making, uttering and publishing to Harry McCleary, A. H. Yeager, Kenneth McCalla and to the Associated Press, a news gathering and news promulgating agency, and in the San Antonio Express, a public journal, and in divers other public journals of the United States, a statement which in its entirety reads in substance as follows:

   “I have been asked from all parts of the country to give my opinion of the reasons for the frightful aeronautical accidents and loss of life, equipment and treasure that has occurred during the last few days. This statement therefore is given out publicly by me after mature deliberation and after a sufficient time has elapsed since the terrible accidents to our naval aircraft, to find out something about what happened.”

   “My opinion is as follows:”

   “These accidents are the direct result of the incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense by the navy and war departments. In their attempts to keep down the development of aviation into an independent department, separate from the army and navy and handled by aeronautical experts, and to maintain the existing systems, they have gone to the utmost lengths to carry their point. All aviation policies, schemes and systems are dictated by the non-flying officers of the army or navy who know
practically nothing about it. The lives of the airmen are being used merely as
pawns in their hands.”

“The great Congress of the United States, that makes laws for the
organization and use of our air, land and water forces, is treated by these two
departments as if it were an organization created for their benefit, to which
evidence of any kind, whether true or not, can be given without restraint. Officers
and agents sent by the war and navy departments to Congress have almost always
given incomplete, misleading or false information about aeronautics, which either
they knew to be false when given or was the result of such gross ignorance of the
question that they should not be allowed to appear before a legislative body.”

“The airmen themselves are bluffed and bulldozed so that they dare not
tell the truth in the majority of cases, knowing full well that if they do, they will
be deprived of their future career, sent to the most out-of-the-way places to
prevent their telling the truth and deprived of any chance for advancement unless
they subscribe to the dictates of their non-flying bureaucratic superiors. These
either distort facts or openly tell falsehoods about aviation to the people and to the
Congress.”

“Both the war and navy departments maintain public propaganda agencies
which are supposed to publish truthful facts about our national defense to the
American people. These departments, remember, are supported by the taxes of
the people and were created for the purpose of protecting us from invasion from
abroad and from domestic disturbances from within. What has actually happened
in these departments is that they have formed a sort of a union to perpetuate their
own existence, largely irrespective of the public welfare – and acting, as we might
say about a commercial organization that had entire control of a public necessity,
‘as an illegal combination in restraint of trade.”
“The conduct of affairs by these two departments, as far as aviation is concerned, has been so disgusting in the last few years as to make any self-respecting person ashamed of the cloth he wears. Were it not for the great patriotism of our air officers and their absolute confidence in the institutions of the United States, knowing that sooner or later existing conditions would be changed, I doubt if one of them would remain with the Colors – certainly not, if he were a real man.”

“The story is a long one, beginning practically with the inception of aviation in this country, so I shall mention only a few things in connection with the disgraceful performances which have occurred this summer.”

“Seeing no progress in our efforts, which had been continued for years, to convince or even seriously interest the governing bodies of the war and navy departments to better our aeronautical condition, we were stirred to further action by the killing of Lieut. Pierson and Capt. Skeel in the dilapidated racing airplanes, during last October’s air meet. This was caused by an arrangement between the navy and army, that the navy should take the racers one year and the army should take them the next year, thereby equalizing propaganda, not service. Instead of building new airplanes, our men were given the old crates to fly at those terrific speeds. Of course, they came to pieces as they were designed only for one race two years before. This was done in spite of the fact that we had sufficient money to build new ships according to entirely advanced patterns and new safety factors. We, in the air fraternity, then and there decided to put the issue squarely up to Congress and the people. We received an immediate response from the people and the Congress, because they saw the right of our proposition, which was to make a single department of national defense with sub-secretaries for the land, the air and the water, each to have an equal voice in our national defense system. The general scheme, by the way, has been adopted by practically every civilized country in the world. Had this measure reached the floor of the House of Representatives last winter, it probably would have passed by a large majority.”
“Congress also provided that not less than $50,000 out of monies already appropriated, could be spent for the aerial bombardment of battleships and shipping board vessels while under their own steam and moving, so as to set at rest any doubt of aircraft’s ability to destroy and sink any seacraft which floats on the water.”

“It was evident then that the American people were awakening to the necessity for a change and that if this change were to be prevented by the war and navy departments, that they must act at once. What was the result? Steam was gotten up by the navy on the one hand to disprove and deprecate the value of air power and show the value of the surface vessels and battleships, and on the part of the army to fool the public as to the value of anti-aircraft, cannon and machine guns. Any operations by the air service to sink the ships, as provided for by the law of the land, were stopped. Now, what have the army and navy done to show that the existing obsolete systems should be maintained?”

“First, the great Pacific naval maneuvers – the main features of these were the assembling of a fleet of some 148 surface vessels in the Pacific, the parade up our Pacific coast and entrance into San Francisco Harbor and then the trip to Honolulu. Press representatives and congressional committees galore were handled, fed and entertained according to the good old navy’s propaganda system. It was heralded that the navy had taken the Hawaiian Islands. Now, let us see what actually would have happened had there been war. Suppose that we had been at war with a Pacific power and this fleet of surface vessels had been in San Francisco Harbor. Instantly the Pacific power’s submarines would have planted all entrances to the harbor with mines, would have covered all the approaches with these death-dealing engines. If the surface vessels ever got through these, the whole Pacific Ocean would be districted off into squares and to each of these districts submarines would be assigned for the purpose of tracking the surface ships and attacking them. These ships would be under constant attack by gun fire from the submarines, that can carry any size
cannon and use projectiles containing gas, high explosives or armor piercing, they use under-water torpedoes which not only will hit the side of the ships but will hit their bottoms, and can produce gas clouds which will completely envelop any fleet.”

“If any vessels of the fleet survived the submarine attacks, crossed the sea and came within hundreds of miles of the hostile coast, they would be sent to the bottom forthwith, by aircraft. If the Pacific maneuvers showed anything conclusively, it was that aircraft acting from land bases can destroy any surface fleet coming within its radius of operations. This already had been amply proved by our bombardment tests in 1921. As far as Honolulu is concerned, it is not a position of decisive influence in the control of the Pacific. Its value consists in being an excellent submarine base to act against hostile surface seacraft and submarines. The control position of the Pacific is our own territory of Alaska and the peninsula of Kamchatka opposite. It is reported that from fifty million to eighty million dollars has been spent just for this Pacific parade of our navy – more properly, the vessels belonging to the United States, because in fact it is not a navy in the modern conception of the term. What would this amount, applied to the development of airplanes and submarines, have meant?”

“Next, to get publicity and make a noise about what it was doing with aircraft, this so-called Hawaiian flight was arranged for. Even if it had been made successfully to Honolulu it would have meant little, either commercially or strategically, compared to what a flight to Europe or Asia would. Three airplanes were built to participate in it. These showed nothing novel in design and were untried for this kind of work. One never got away from the Pacific Coast, another flew a few miles out and was forced to land in the water, and one was lost on account of being out of gas, somewhere on the high seas. Patrol vessels were stationed every 200 miles, a distance entirely too far apart for an experimental flight of this kind, with such primitive flying machines as the PN-9s are. Double or triple this number of vessels should have been there. In fact, the whole Pacific
fused should have been employed there, instead of joy-riding around the Antipodes. As it was, when these slow-moving airplanes, going about 75 miles an hour, were first sighted from the destroyers, the destroyers should have steamed out full speed in the direction the airplane was going. This would not only indicate the proper course to the plane, but would place the destroyer closer to it in case of accident. As the airplanes were only moving at about 75 miles an hour, a destroyer could have been speeded up to within 50 miles of that speed. Why, if they expected to run short of fuel, as indeed they might, did they not make arrangements for refueling the airplane while it was in the air, by another airplane, as we have repeatedly done? Why did they carry a crew of five, when the weight of two men in fuel might have carried the ship through?”

“What happened to this really good-for-nothing big, lumbering flying boat, when its brave navigators began to run short of gas, over a heavy sea? The probability is that they held her up as long as they could. As they neared the water, caught by a sudden gust, she might have been thrown into a stall and spun down and gone straight under the waves. We hope that some passing fisherman may have picked them up as our Lieut. Wade was picked up in the North Sea. Our navy did not find him either; all they did was to smash his plane when it was turned over to them by the fisherman. After all, the Hawaiian Islands are not a vital area with our present methods of national defense.”

“Then, the disaster to the Shenandoah – killing Capt. Lansdowne, the last of our really experienced airship captains, a splendid man, with his companions, following in the wake of Capt. Mabry and Capt. Maxfield, our airship commanders who have gone before.”

“I do not know exactly what happened to the poor Shenandoah. She was an experimental ship, built in this country. I believe she was about 50 per cent overweight in her structure. She had broken away from her mooring mast – an inefficient way of handling airships, anyway – last spring, and her whole structure
was badly strained. I believe that the number of valves in the gas bags containing the helium had been diminished so as to save helium gas, which is expensive in money, but which made the ship more dangerous to the crew. The Shenandoah was going West on a propaganda mission for the navy department to offset the adverse publicity caused by the failures in the Pacific and the Arctic. Note: Propaganda and not service is the keynote in these undertakings.”

“What business has the navy over the mountains, anyway? Their mission is out in the water not only out in the water but under the water, out of sight, away from the land – that is why we have the navy.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Battle Reports and Combat Narratives


____________. *The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942: Strategical and Tactical Analysis*. Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1948, now held by the Defense Documentation Center, Defense Logistics Agency, Cameron Station, Alexandria, Virginia, and at other military installations. (Previously CLASSIFIED document). This study, commissioned after World War II by the U.S. Navy, makes use of formerly classified and unclassified sources of both the United States and Japan, as well as interviews with the participants wherever possible, and is the most definitive and exhaustive study on the Battle of Midway available. It is drawn on from substantially as an original source document by such eminent and seminal works as the fifteen volume set entitled *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* by the noted historian Samuel Eliot Morison which remains so popular that it is now in reprint 46 years after its initial publication.


**Books**


Gatchel, Theodore L., Col., USMC (Ret.), *At the Water's Edge,* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996, 266 pages.


351
The Navy Department: Duties and Functions of its Bureaus.  Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Academy, 1913, 163 pages.


Poor, Henry V. Ensign, USNR, Henry V. Mustin, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR, and Colin G. Jamison, Lieutenant Junior Grade, USNR. *The Battles of Cape Esperance 11 October 1942 and Santa Cruz Islands 26 October 1942.* Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1943 (Republished in 1994), Combat Narratives Series, Solomon Islands campaign, 4-5, 80 pages.


Schreiber, Gerhard, Bernd Stegemann and Detlef Vogel. Edited by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History), Freiburg im


Archival Documents


Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery letter to Commander Frank Jack Fletcher dated 13 March 1928. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1927-1928, Box 1, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Navy Department letter of Commendation dated 12 June 1914 to Lieutenant F.J. Fletcher via Commander-in-Chief, ATLANTIC FLEET. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1914, Box 1, Folder 7, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Navy Department letter to Commander Frank J. Fletcher serial N-32/FJS-LL dated October 29, 1918. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1918-1920, Box 1, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Daniels, Josephus [Secretary of the Navy]. Secretary of the Navy citation on behalf of the President awarding the Navy Cross to Commander Frank J. Fletcher, U.S.N. for service in the World War dated 11 November 1920. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1918-1920, Box 1, Folder 9, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


**Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Biographical Sketch, Box 1, Folder 2, Bibliographical File, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


**Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Correspondence File 1935-1936, Box 1, Folder 17, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Leigh, R.H. Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation letter serial Nav-31-R of 2 January 1929. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1930-1932, Box 1, Folder 15, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Leigh, R.H. Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation letter serial Nav-3-P dated 21 February 1930. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1930-1932, Box 1, Folder 15, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


Williams, C.S., President, U.S. Naval War College. Naval War College, Newport, RI, letter serial 444 Cl-ma dated 18 July 1924. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Correspondence File 1924-1926, Box 1, Folder 12, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Government Records/Documents

Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy – Fiscal Year 1946.

Army-Navy Game football program dated 29 November 1941, p. 181. Records of the U.S. Naval Academy Archives.

Campaign Plan for Operations of the Pacific Ocean Areas, 1944 GRANITE. Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, 13 January 1944.


Knox, Frank, Secretary of the Navy. Board to Study the Methods of Educating Naval Officers, designation of Rear Admiral William S. Pye as President, 3 Mar 1944. USNWCA: RG – 28.


Stearns, Robert L., Chairman; Dwight D. Eisenhower, General of the Army, Vice Chairman; James P. Baxter, Frederick A. Middlebush, George D. Stoddard, Edward L. Moreland, Bryant El Moore, Major General, USA, James L. Holloway, Rear Admiral, and David M. Schlatter, Major General, USAD, members. *A Report And Recommendation To The Secretary of Defense by the Service Academy Board.* Department of Defense, January 1950. USNAA.


Watters, James E., CDR, USNR; Walt Johnson, CDE, USNR; and Mel Chaloupka, CAPT, USNR (LCDR Christopher Haskell, USNR, ed.). *U.S. Naval Reserve: The first 75 Years.* Newport, RI: United States Naval War College Center for Naval Warfare Studies, Advanced Concepts Department, 30 September 1992.

Yarnell, H.E.  FIRST ENDORSEMENT on Umpire Reports, Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 dtd Feb. 16, 1932.  USNWCA:RG-8, Box 61, Folder 3.

**Interviews**

Daniels, James Granson, Capt., USN (Ret.), participant as fighter pilot in all carrier battles of World War II except the Battle of Midway, 18 February 2002, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Linn, Brian M.  Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 held in Luce Hall, Room 123, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 17 June 2004.

Lundstrom, John B., author of *The First Team* and *The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign*.  Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding the research on National Archives No. 2, CINCPAC Secret and Confidential Message File, Record Group 313, he has completed for his forthcoming book on Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher and his decisions at the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and the Eastern Solomons, via phone on Friday, 19 November 2004.

__________, and Professor Emeritus Frank Snyder. Conversations with Douglas V. Smith conducted at the Reading Room in Newport, Rhode Island, on Thursday, 13 January 2005.

Miller, Edward S.  Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Navy policy on aircraft carriers, aircraft, and their roles in naval combat in the 1920s and 1930s held in Luce Hall, Room 123, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 4 December 2003.

Nofi, Albert A., Ph.D., Senior Analyst, Center for Naval Analyses.  Conversations with Douglas V. Smith regarding Grand Joint Exercise No. 4 of 1-12 February, 1932, and United States Navy Fleet Problems I through XXII conducted between 1923 and 1941 in Sims Hall, at the Naval War College on Thursday, 1 September 2004.

**Journal Articles**


**Lectures**


**Letters**


Morison, Samuel Eliot. Letter to Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher USN (Ret.) “Araby” La Plata, Md., dated 22 November 1947 requesting clarification from Admiral Fletcher on whether he or Admiral Spruance was in Command (O.T.C. -- Officer in Tactical Command) at the Battle of Midway on 4 June 1942 as elucidation for publication of *The History of United States Naval Operations in World War II.* **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection,** Box 1, Folder 26, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.

Nimitz, Chester W., Fleet Admiral, United States Navy. Letter to Vice Admiral Charles Melson, President of the United States Naval War College, dated 19 September 1965 on display in McCarty – Little Hall at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island.

Sims, WM.S., Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy. Letter from President, U.S. Naval War College to Mr. Frederic W. Wile concerning the relative merits of battleships and aircraft carriers in battle. 77 Rhode Island Avenue, Newport Rhode Island, October 16, 1924. USNWCA: MS – Item 240.


**Microfilm**
The Battle of the Coral Sea


**The Battle of Midway**


Simard, Cyril T. Capt. USN. Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station Midway Island letter to Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, Report of Engagement with the Enemy, Battle of Midway, 30 May to 7 June 1942, dated 18 June 1942, *Diary*. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A55, first frame 41571. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)

Spruance, Commander Task Force Sixteen 16 June 1942 letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Subject: Battle of Midway; forwarding of reports. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A55, first frame 41571. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)

**The Battle of the Eastern Solomons**


**The Battle of Santa Cruz**


___________. Commander Task Force Sixty-One letter to Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet Serial 0077 (no date given), Subject: Report of Carrier Action North of the Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October 1942. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 44248. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)


___________. Commander Task Force Seventeen letter to The Secretary of the Navy dated 12 November 1942, Subj: Final Report of Action Santa Cruz Islands, October 26, 1942. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A9, starting frame 79537. (Previously CLASSIFIED document)

CTF 17 (Rear Admiral Murray) message of 260507Z42 to CTG 17.4 directing “As soon as all personnel are picked up torpedo Hornet,” with CTG 17.4’s response to CTF 16 and CTF 17 reporting on completion of tasking. Naval War College Microfilm Collection reel A193, starting frame 43846. (Previously CLASSIFIED Document)

___________. Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, letter to Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet [Admiral King], Subject: Solomon Islands Campaign, Battle
The Battle of the Philippine Sea


Newspaper Articles


“Capt. Fletcher Swanson’s Aide.” Source and date unknown. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


“Fletcher, Coral Sea Commander, Named To Be Vice Admiral.” Source and date unknown. **Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection**, Box 3, News Scrapbook Folder, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.
“Frank Jack Fletcher “06.” Obituary, source and date unknown. Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming.


Oral Histories


Speeches

Best, The Honorable Sir Matthew Robert, Vice Admiral, K.C.B., D.S.O., RN., Commander-in-Chief American and West Indies Station, and Flag Captain H.P. Boxer, RN, Commanding H.M.S. York, and Commander A.B. Fanshawe, R.N., Executive Officer of H.M.S. York “Jutland.” Restricted: Not to pass out of the custody of


__________. Address by the President of the U.S. Naval War College to the Graduating Classes of 1941. Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 1941. USNWCA: RG – 16.


Laning, Harris, RADM, USN. Opening Address Before the Staff and Classes of 1931. United States Naval War College: Newport, RI., delivered 2 July 1930, USNWCA: RG – 16.


Nimitz, C.W, Fleet Admiral, USN. Address of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation to the graduating class, December 2, 1941, USNWCA: RG-16.

Plunkett, C.P., Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy. Address of the President of the Naval War College opening the course for the class of July, 1921, Naval War College, 1 July 1921. Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1 July 1921, 6 Pages. USNWCA: RG – 16.

Pratt, W.V., Radm. Extracts from the Address of the President of the Naval War College to the Graduating Class entitled “The Three Phases of a Naval Career: Some reflections of an Older Officer.” Naval War College, Newport, RI, 27 May 1927, 13 pages. USNWCA: RG – 16.

Pye, William S., Radm. Address of the President of the Naval War College to Student Officers of Phase I of the Army-Navy Staff College Course at the Naval War College. Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 1 August, 1942. USNWCA: RG – 16.


Rowan, S.C., Captain, USN. Opening Address to the Classes of 1934, delivered 1 July 1933, USNWCA: RG – 16.

Sims, W.S., Rear Admiral. Graduation Address delivered by the President, Naval War College, 22 May 1919, 25 pages. USNWCA: RG – 16.

__________. Address delivered by the President, Naval War College, Opening the Course for the Class commencing the course in June of 1919. Newport, RI: United States Naval War College, 2 June 1919. USNWCA: RG – 16.

__________. Address delivered by the President, Naval War College, Opening the Course for the Class of December, 1919. Newport, RI: Naval War College, @ December 1919, 38 pages. USNWCA: RG – 16.

__________. Graduation Address, 22 May 1919. USNWCA: RG – 16.

__________. Commencement Address, 2 June 1919. USNWCA: RG-16.


Unpublished Manuscripts

Battle of Sable Island Manuscript, Serial No. 71, dated October-November 1923. United States Naval War College Archives (hereafter referred to as “USNWCA”) Record Group (RG) 14/15, 128 pages plus accompanying diagrams.


Department of Advanced Research, June 1975, 376 pages. This manuscript provides an excellent narrative of the development of and changes in the curriculum at the Naval War College during the inter-war period, as well as of the imprint made by each President of the War College during that period.


__________. “The Knox-King-Pye Board.” Newport, RI: Naval War College, date unknown, 8 pages.


War Game Reports

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Douglas V. Smith was born on 17 September 1948 in Washington, D.C. He is a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Class of 1970, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Naval Engineering. After completing Naval Flight Officer training in Pensacola, Florida, in 1971, he served as a Tactical Coordinator and Mission Commander in P-3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft for the rest of his career. A graduate of every degree-granting institution of the U.S. Navy, he graduated with a Master of Arts Degree in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School in 1981 and a Master of Arts Degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the United States Naval War College in 1993, from which institution he is a graduate “With Highest Distinction.”

During his Navy career Douglas was assigned as Head, Plans Branch, War Plans, for Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe, and U.S. Commander, Eastern Atlantic, as well as Long-Range Planner for both. In that assignment he was responsible for all conventional force war plans for the Navy and Marine Corps in Europe. Following that assignment, he served as a Military Professor on the Strategy and Policy Faculty of the United States Naval War College. In both these assignments he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his accomplishments.

Following his Navy service, from which he retired as a Commander, he became an Adjunct Professor for the Naval War College in Jacksonville, FL. He commenced his studies leading to a Doctorate in Military History at the Florida State University in January of 1996.

Douglas Smith was hired as an Associate Professor of Strategy and Policy and Head of the Strategy and Policy Division for the Naval War College College of Distance Education in January of 1997. Promoted to the academic rank of Full Professor in May of 2002, he continues in that position to supervise seven Historians who offer courses on Strategy and Policy to approximately 1,250 students each year. In January of 2003 Professor Smith took on the additional responsibilities of Deputy Associate Dean of Academics for Electives and Directed Research at the War College.