

World War II  
75th Anniversary Commemorative Series

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COMBAT NARRATIVES

# Battle of Midway

June 3–6, 1942



SAM L. MASSETTE



Naval History and Heritage Command

U.S. Navy



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## Foreword to 75th Anniversary Edition

In commemoration of the 75th anniversary of World War II, Naval History and Heritage Command is reproducing a series of Combat Narratives published by the Office of Naval Intelligence during the early days of the war. This volume focusses on the Battle of Midway, 3–6 June 1942.

On 7 December 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy carried out a devastating surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and on nearby military and naval installations on Oahu with carrier-borne planes. While the Japanese succeed in crippling the battle line, the vital carriers are not present and thus form the basis of powerful and mobile striking forces to take the war to the Japanese.

On 10 March 1942, following a succession of raids on Japanese island bases in the Pacific, 104 planes from the carriers *Lexington* (CV-2) and *Yorktown* (CV-5) fly through the one open pass available in New Guinea's Owen Stanley Mountains to attack a Japanese invasion force off the ports of Lae and Salamaua. Only one aircraft is lost to enemy fire, and Navy planes sink three Japanese ships and damage ten. President Franklin D. Roosevelt calls the raid "the best day's work we've had."

Five weeks later, on 18 April 1942, *Hornet* (CV-8), with *Enterprise* (CV-6) riding shotgun, launches 16 Army Air Force B-25 bombers 650 miles from Japan. They attack targets in Tokyo, Yokosuka, Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagoya. A strike on their home soil, previously unimaginable, convinces the Japanese Naval General Staff that they must attack the forward U.S. base on Midway Island to draw the troublesome U.S. carriers into decisive battle. One often ignored aspect of the action that day is the decimation of the picket line of Japanese patrol craft in the vicinity at the hands of carrier planes from *Enterprise*.

From 4–8 May, at the Battle of the Coral Sea, aircraft from Task Force 17 trade strikes with Japanese forces. The surface ships in both forces never see each other; all attacks are by air. In the end, U.S. naval forces blunt the Japanese advance toward Port Moresby and sink one Japanese carrier, damage a second, and decimate the air group of a third, eliminating three carriers planned for use in the impending attack on Midway. The Japanese believe that they sink *Yorktown* in this battle, adding significant shock to the surprise attack she launches with *Enterprise* and *Hornet* in what became known as the Battle of Midway.

To eliminate the U.S. Navy's carriers, the Japanese target Midway, an atoll that the enemy deems the "Sentry for Pearl Harbor." Unknown to them, however, U.S. Navy code-breakers' efforts have identified the atoll as the object of enemy intentions. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, knowing Midway's centrality in the enemy's strategy, reinforces it while dispatching forces to the Aleutians, the other objective in the Japanese strategy.

The complex Japanese operations involve a veritable armada, but its elements are scattered over a very wide expanse of ocean, making mutual support nearly impossible. By contrast, Nimitz concentrates his forces. With Midway serving as essentially a fourth carrier, Nimitz sends a striking force formed around three carriers under Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher to a position north of Midway. U.S. search planes confirm the Japanese approach on 3 June, but initial attacks on elements of the enemy achieve little.

On the morning of 4 June, planes from four Japanese carriers—all of which were among the ones that had attacked Hawaii six months before—pound Midway. Heroic Marine Corps fighter pilots, some of whom have only recently earned their wings, together with the intense antiaircraft fire, limit the enemy's success. Brave but piecemeal attacks by Midway-based planes throw off the tempo of the Japanese carrier operations

Still later that same morning, torpedo attacks by planes from the undiscovered U.S. carriers are repelled with heavy losses. The providential arrival of the *Yorktown* Air Group and *Enterprise* dive bombers, however, changes the course of battle in five minutes, as U.S. bombs turn three Japanese carriers into floating infernos. Two strikes from the Japanese carrier that survives the initial onslaught damage *Yorktown* and force her abandonment, but planes from *Enterprise* disable that fourth enemy carrier before the afternoon is out.

Action over the next two days claims a Japanese heavy cruiser, while a Japanese submarine sinks a destroyer and further damages *Yorktown*, which sinks on 7 June. The loss of four Japanese carriers prompts the defeated enemy to retire.

Midway is never again seriously threatened. Admiral Nimitz's informed willingness to take a calculated risk changes the complexion of the conflict in the Pacific. Courage, honor, and commitment abound at Midway, as those involved write, in Nimitz's words, "a glorious page in our history."

The admiral further wrote:

Through the skill and devotion to duty of their armed forces of all branches in the Midway area our citizens can now rejoice that a momentous victory is in the making.

It was on a Sunday just six months ago that the Japanese made their peacetime attack on our fleet and army activities on Oahu. At that time they created heavy damage, it is true, but their act aroused the grim determination of our citizenry to avenge such treachery, and it raised, not lowered, the morale of our fighting men.

Pearl Harbor has now been partially avenged. Vengeance will not be complete until Japanese sea power has been reduced to impotence. We have made substantial progress in that direction. Perhaps we will be forgiven if we claim we are about midway to our objective!

## Comments about the 50th Anniversary

*The Battle of Midway* is one of a series of 21 published and 13 unpublished Combat Narratives of specific naval campaigns produced by the Publication Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence during World War II. Selected volumes in this series were republished by the Naval Historical Center as part of the Navy's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World War II. Regrettably, this was not one of them.

The then Director of Naval History Dean C. Allard wrote the following in introducing the reprints:

The Combat Narratives were superseded long ago by accounts such as Samuel Eliot Morrison's *History of the United States Navy Operations in World War II* that could be more comprehensive and accurate because of the abundance of American, Allied, and enemy source materials that became available after 1945. But the Combat Narratives continue to be of interest and value since they demonstrate the perceptions of naval operations during the war itself. Because of the contemporary, immediate view offered by these studies, they are well suited for republications in the 1990s as veterans, historians, and the American public turn their attention once again to a war that engulfed much of the world a half century ago.

The Combat Narrative program originated in a directive issued in February 1942 by Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, that instructed the Office of Naval Intelligence to prepare and disseminate these studies. A small team composed primarily of professionally trained writers and historians produced the narratives. The authors based their accounts on research and analysis of the available primary source material, including action reports and war diaries, augmented by interviews with individual participants. Since the narratives were classified Confidential during the war, only a few thousand copies were published at the time, and their distribution was primarily restricted to commissioned officers in the Navy.





*Copy* N<sup>o</sup> 104

COMBAT NARRATIVES

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# Battle of Midway

June 3–6, 1942

~~U.S. Confidential~~



~~British Secret~~

Office of Naval Intelligence  
U. S. Navy





*COMBAT NARRATIVES*

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*March 13, 1943.*

Combat Narratives are confidential publications issued under a directive of the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, for the information of commissioned officers of the U.S. Navy only.

Information printed herein should be guarded (a) in circulation and by custody measures for confidential publications as set forth in Articles 75½ and 76 of Naval Regulations and (b) in avoiding discussion of this material within the hearing of any but commissioned officers. Combat Narratives are not to be removed from the ship or station for which they are provided. Reproduction of this material in any form is not authorized except by specific approval of the Director of Naval Intelligence.

Officers who have participated in the operations recounted herein are invited to forward to the Director of Naval Intelligence, via their commanding officers, accounts of personal experiences and observations which they esteem to have value for historical and instructional purposes. It is hoped that such contributions will increase the value and render ever more authoritative such new editions of these publications as may be promulgated to the service in the future.

When the copies provided have served their purpose, they may be destroyed by burning. However, reports acknowledging receipt or destruction of these publications need not be made.

/s/ Harold C. Train  
Rear Admiral, U.S.N.,  
*Director of Naval Intelligence.*

# Foreword

*January 8, 1943.*

Combat Narratives have been prepared by the Publications Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence for the information of the officers of the United States Navy.

The data on which these studies are based are those official documents which are suitable for a confidential publication. This material has been collated and presented in chronological order.

In perusing these narratives, the reader should bear in mind that while they recount in considerable detail the engagements in which our forces participated, certain underlying aspects of these operations must be kept in a secret category until after the end of the war.

It should be remembered also that the observations of men in battle are sometimes at variance. As a result, the reports of commanding officers may differ although they participated in the same action and shared a common purpose. In general, Combat Narratives represent a reasoned interpretation of these discrepancies. In those instances where views cannot be reconciled, extracts from the conflicting evidence are reprinted.

Thus, an effort has been made to provide accurate and, within the above-mentioned limitations, complete narratives with charts covering raids, combats, joint operations, and battles in which our Fleets have engaged in the current war. It is hoped that these narratives will afford a clear view of what has occurred, and form a basis for a broader understanding which will result in ever more successful operations.

*/s/ E.J. King*  
ADMIRAL, U.S.N.,  
*Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations.*

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## DESIGNATION OF AIRCRAFT AND SHIPS MENTIONED IN THIS NARRATIVE

### Aircraft symbols:

VF—Fighting.	VP—Patrol.
VB—Bombing.	VT—Torpedo.
VS—Scouting.	VTB—Torpedo Bombing.
VSB—Scout Bombing.	

### Navy aircraft:

F2A-3	Brewster “Buffalo,” single-seat fighter powered by Wright air-cooled engine. A stubby, rugged little monoplane.
F4F-3	Grumman “Wildcat” fighter; a single-seat, low-wing monoplane, powered by P&W air-cooled engine.
F4F-4	A development of the above, with two-speed supercharger and folding wings.
J2F	Grumman amphibian utility plane.
PBY	Consolidated “Catalina” flying boat, used for patrol and scouting; carries a crew of seven, and is powered by two P&W engines.
PBY-5A	Consolidated “Catalina” Amphibian, powered by two P&W engines.
SBD-2	Douglas “Dauntless” carrier scout dive bomber; two-seat, low-wing monoplane with perforated wing flaps, powered by a Wright engine.
SB2U-3	Vought-Sikorsky “Vindicator,” convertible twin-float landplane-seaplane, long-range scout dive bomber; two seats, P&W engine.
SOC	Curtiss Scout observation plane, equipped with floats for catapult launching by cruisers and battleships.
TBD	Douglas “Devastator” torpedo bomber, single air-cooled engine.
TBF	Grumman “Avenger” torpedo bomber, also has a single air-cooled engine, but is larger, more powerful, faster and better armed than the TBD, which it is replacing as

rapidly

as possible. This plane was first used at Midway.

### Army aircraft:

B-17	Boeing “Flying Fortress”; four-engine, long-range, high-altitude, heavy bomber; a low-wing monoplane.
B-17E	Development of the B-17 with slightly different lines and tail turret added.
B-26	Martin medium bomber, a twin-engine, mid-wing monoplane. It has wing flaps, retractable tricycle landing gear, and tail gun.

### Designation of ships:

AK—Cargo vessel.	DD—Destroyer.
AP—Transport.	DL—Destroyer leader.
BB—Battleship.	PY—Yacht.
CA—Heavy cruiser.	YP—District patrol vessel.
CL—Light cruiser.	SS—Submarine.
CV—Aircraft carrier.	



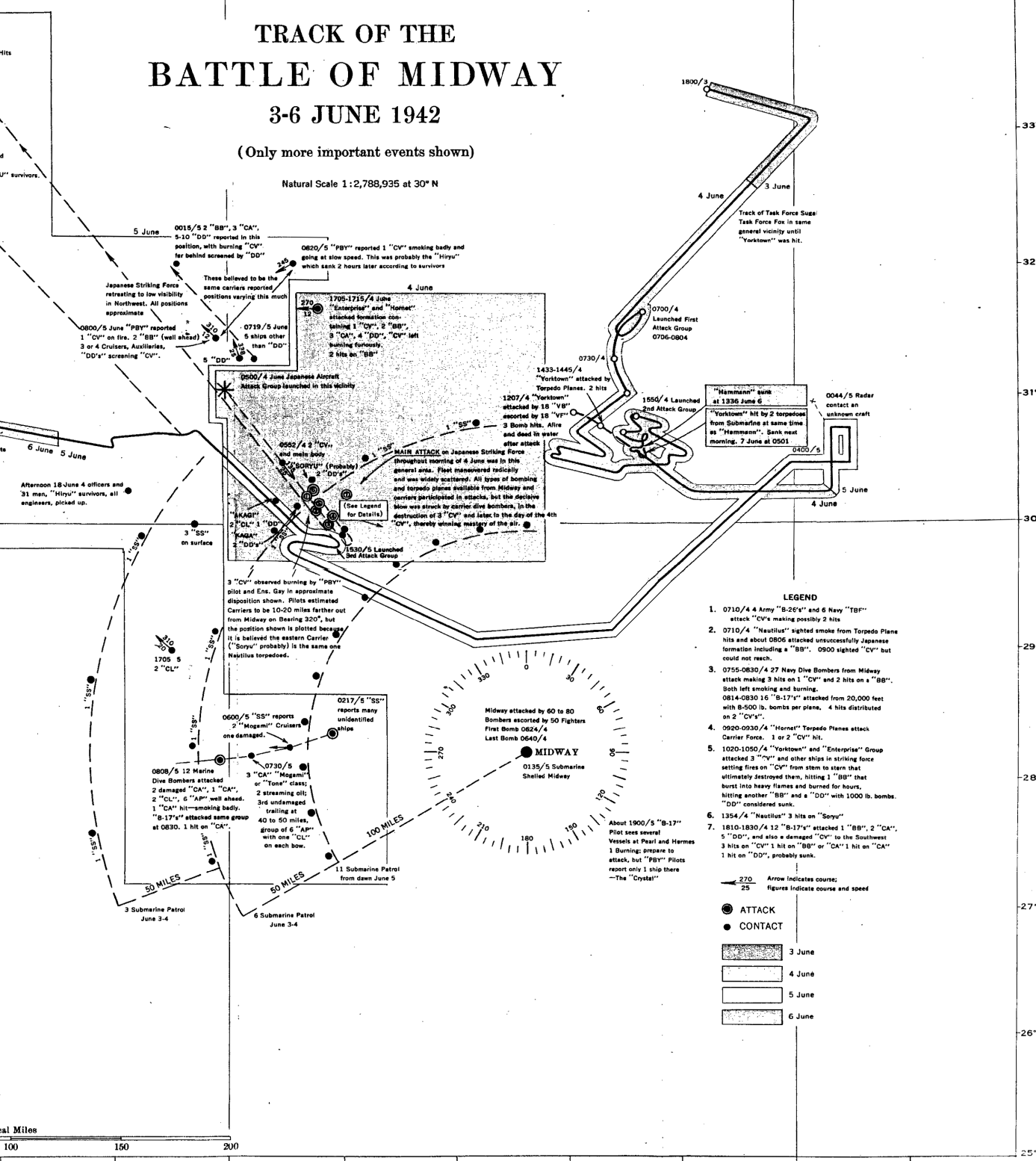
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# TRACK OF THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

## 3-6 JUNE 1942

(Only more important events shown)

Natural Scale 1:2,788,935 at 30° N



- LEGEND**
- 0710/4 4 Army "B-26's" and 6 Navy "TBF" attack "CV's" making possibly 2 hits
  - 0710/4 "Nautilus" sighted smoke from Torpedo Plane hits and about 0805 attacked unsuccessfully Japanese formation including a "BB". 0900 sighted "CV" but could not reach.
  - 0755-0830/4 27 Navy Dive Bombers from Midway attack making 3 hits on 1 "CV" and 2 hits on a "BB". Both left smoking and burning. 0814-0830 16 "B-17's" attacked from 20,000 feet with 8-500 lb. bombs per plane, 4 hits distributed on 2 "CV's".
  - 0900-0930/4 "Hornet" Torpedo Planes attack Carrier Force, 1 or 2 "CV" hit.
  - 1020-1050/4 "Yorktown" and "Enterprise" Group attacked 3 "CV" and other ships in striking force setting fires on "CV" from stern that ultimately destroyed them, hitting 1 "BB" that burst into heavy flames and burned for hours, hitting another "BB" and a "DD" with 1000 lb. bombs. "DD" considered sunk.
  - 1354/4 "Nautilus" 3 hits on "Soryu"
  - 1810-1830/4 12 "B-17's" attacked 1 "BB", 2 "CA", 5 "DD", and also a damaged "CV" to the Southwest 3 hits on "CV", 1 hit on "BB" or "CA", 1 hit on "CA", 1 hit on "DD", probably sunk.

Arrow indicates course; figures indicate course and speed

● ATTACK

● CONTACT

3 June

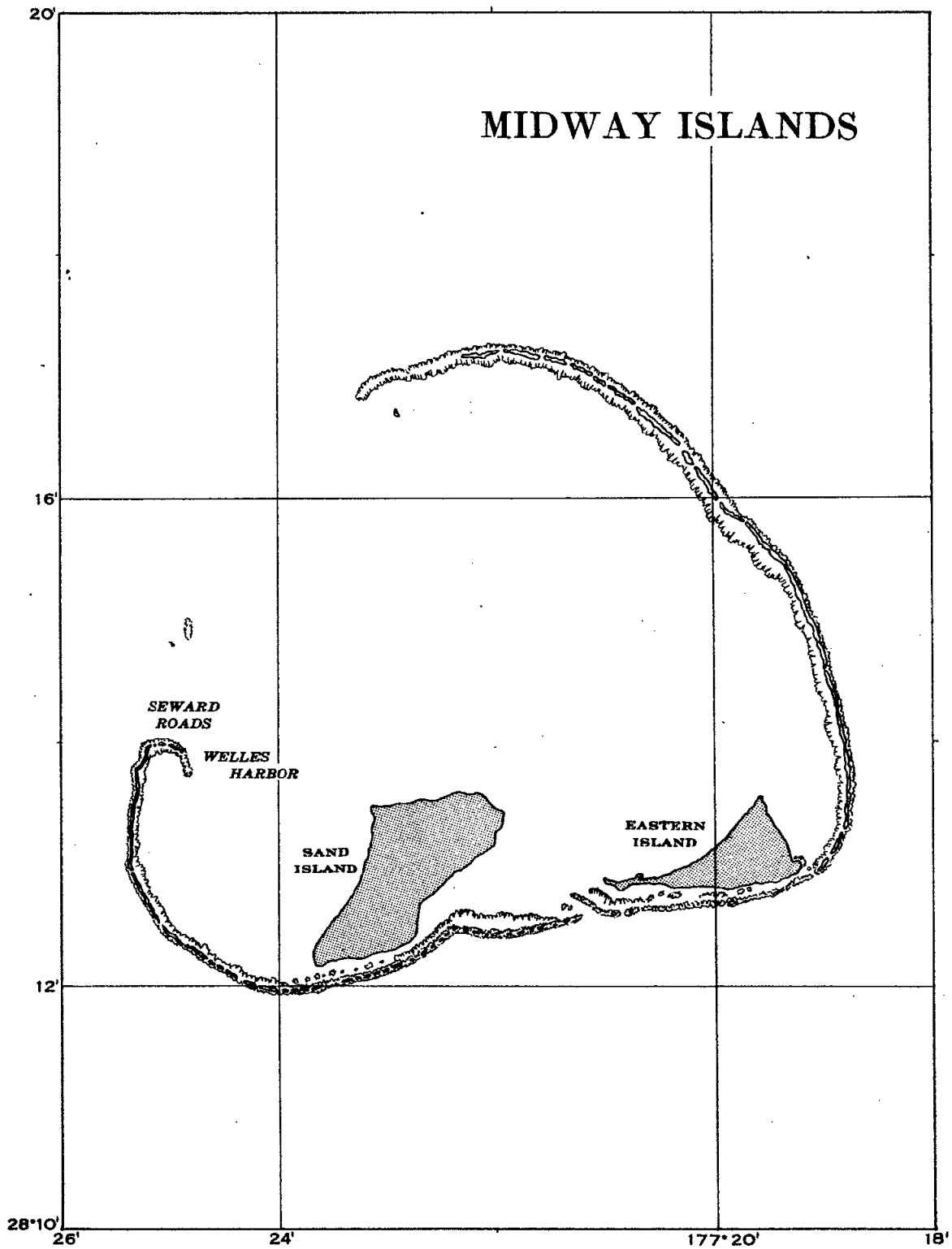
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5 June

6 June

CLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED



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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Midway Islands

# The Battle of Midway

*June 3–6, 1942*

**F**OLLOWING the action in the Coral Sea May 4th-8th, 1942, there was a lull in Japanese operations in the Southwest Pacific. Did it, as was popularly supposed, mean that the enemy had retired for the purpose of reorganizing his forces for an all-out assault on Australia? Or was he preparing to strike in an entirely different direction?

During mid-May, United Nations planes delivered two to three times as many blows against enemy bases in the Solomons and New Guinea as Japanese bombers made on Port Moresby and others of our bases. This husbanding of air strength, together with almost complete absence in southern waters of Japanese men-o'-war except for an occasional submarine, seemed to indicate that the enemy had for the time at least abandoned his designs on Australia and was looking for a more vulnerable point of attack. The enemy, moreover, knew that shortly after the Coral Sea fight most of our available carriers were in the South Pacific. Although the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* had arrived just too late for the battle, they had undoubtedly been sighted by the enemy. He also knew that the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* had been damaged in the fight, even if he was not aware that the former subsequently had been lost. Altogether, this concentration of American naval strength in the South Pacific very probably appealed to the Japanese High Command as offering a most strategic moment for a heavy blow against our positions in the mid-Pacific.

From an analysis of all the reports received before, during, and after the Battle of Midway, it is believed that the Japanese gathered together the following forces for participation in this campaign:

## *Striking Force*

Commander in Chief First Air Fleet (F):

Carrier Division 1:

*Akagi* (F).

*Kaga*.

Carrier Division 2:

*Soryu* (F).

*Hiryu*.

Destroyer Squadron 10:

*Nagara* (F).

12 destroyers.

Battleship Division 3:

*Haruna* (F).

*Kirishima*.

Cruiser Division 8:

*Tone* (F).

*Chikuma*.

## *Support Force*

Cruiser Division 7:

*Mogami* (F).

*Mikuma*.

*Suzuya*

*Kumano*

Battleship Division 3, Second Section:

*Hiyei*.

*Kongo*.

Cruiser Division 4 (part):

1 *Atago* class heavy cruiser.

Carrier Division: 1 aircraft carrier or converted aircraft carrier.	Destroyer Squadron 2 (part) <i>Jintsu</i> 10 destroyers.
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*Occupation Force*

1 <i>Takao</i> class heavy cruiser.	Transport Division (?): 8-12 transports.
1-2 <i>Myoko</i> class heavy cruisers (?).	Transport Divisions: 4-6 cargo ships.
Air Squadron 7: <i>Chitose.</i>	Destroyer Squadron 4: 12 destroyers.
<i>Chiyoda.</i>	
Air Squadron II (?): 2-4 <i>Kamigawa</i> class converted seaplane tenders.	

The situation from the Navy's viewpoint was serious. The principal naval force available on the West Coast consisted of battleships with a light destroyer screen. It was by no means certain that our ships in the South Pacific could be brought north in time to protect Midway. Further-more, permanent repairs to the *Yorktown* would require considerable time and might even necessitate a visit to the mainland. The remaining air groups of both the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* were on the latter carrier urgently requiring reorganization. The entire force had been at sea since the middle of February and was in need of rest. In addition, an attack on our Aleutian bases seemed to be a logical concurrent operation for the Japanese. To meet this particular threat to Alaska five cruisers and four destroyers, all the spare ships within reach, were dispatched to support our forces in the Alaskan area.

It was necessary to mobilize at once the defense of Midway. Task Force SUGAR,<sup>1</sup> which included the carriers *Enterprise* and *Hornet* was immediately ordered north. It arrived at Pearl Harbor May 26th and sailed on the 28th, under the command of Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. Task Force FOX had already been recalled and arrived at Pearl Harbor May 27th. Due to the excellent work of the navy yard, the service force, and the supporting services, it proved possible to restore the *Yorktown* and its planes to fighting condition in 3 days, so that the force was able to sail on the 30th, under the command of Rear Admiral Frank J. Fletcher.

On May 31st, it is interesting to recall in passing, four Japanese midget submarines made a "suicide" attack on the harbor of Sydney, Australia, possibly as a feint to divert attention from the impending blow in the mid-Pacific. The attack on Dutch Harbor and Forts Glenn and Mears in the Aleutians occurred on June 3d. This may have been intended as a diversion for the Midway attack, but more probably was a cover for the Kiska and Attu occupation. Fog obscured the subsequent movements of the enemy in Alaska and handicapped the efforts of our air forces in seeking him out.

The two task forces ordered to engage the more menacing fleet approaching Midway were organized as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers identifying task forces have been omitted from all Combat Narratives in the interest of security. The signal flag names for the first letter of surnames of commanding officers have been substituted for these numbers.



Task Force SUGAR, Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance.

2 aircraft carriers:

*Enterprise* (F), Capt. George D. Murray.

35 VSB, 14 VTB, 27 VF.

*Hornet*, Capt. Marc A. Mitscher.

35 VSB, 14 VTB, 27 VF.

Cruisers, Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid.

5 heavy cruisers:

*Pensacola*,<sup>2</sup> Capt. Frank L. Lowe.

*Northampton*,<sup>2</sup> Capt. William W. Chandler

*Vincennes*,<sup>2</sup> Capt. Frederick L. Riefkhol.

*Minneapolis*,<sup>3</sup> Capt. Frank J. Lowry.

*New Orleans*,<sup>3</sup> Capt. Walter S. De Lany.

1 light cruiser:

*Atlanta*,<sup>3</sup> Capt. Samuel P. Jenkins.

Destroyers, Capt. Alexander R. Early.

9 destroyers:

*Balch*, Lt Comdr. Harold H. Tiemroth.

*Benham*, Lt. Comdr. Joseph M. Worthington.

*Phelps* (F), Lt. Comdr. Edward L. Beck.

*Worden*, Lt. Comdr. William G. Pogue.

*Aylwin*, Lt. Comdr. George R. Phelan.

*Monaghan*, Lt. Comdr. William P. Burford.

*Ellet*, Lt. Comdr. Francis H. Gardner.

*Maury*, Lt. Comdr. Gelzer L. Sims.

*Conyngham*, Lt. Comdr. Henry C. Daniel.

Task Force FOX, Rear Admiral Frank J. Fletcher.

1 aircraft carrier:

*Yorktown* (F): Capt. Elliott Buckmaster.

36 VBS<sup>4</sup>, 12 VTB<sup>5</sup>, 25 VF.

Cruisers, Rear Admiral William W. Smith.

2 heavy cruisers:

*Astoria* (F)<sup>6</sup>, Capt. Francis W. Scanland.

*Portland*, Capt. Lawrence T. Du Bose.

Destroyers, Capt. Gilbert C. Hoover.

5 destroyers:

*Hammann* (F), Commander Arnold E. True.

*Morris*, Commander Harry B. Jarrett.

*Russell*, Lt. Comdr. Glenn R. Hartwig.

*Anderson*, Lt. Comdr. John K. B. Ginder.

*Hughes*, Lt. Comdr. Donald J. Ramsey.

Commander of submarines, United States Pacific Fleet, Rear Admiral Robert H. English.

*Cachalot*

*Grenadier*

*Pompano*

*Cuttlefish*

*Grouper*

*Porpoise*

*Dolphin*

*Growler*

*Tambor*

---

<sup>2</sup> *Enterprise* group.

<sup>3</sup> *Hornet* group.

<sup>4</sup> This scout bombing squadron was composed of: VB-3, 18 SBDs and VS-5, 18 SBDs.

<sup>5</sup> This torpedo squadron was VT-3 ("3" indicates a squadron from the *Saratoga*).

<sup>6</sup> After damage to *Yorktown*, Admiral Fletcher transferred his flag to *Astoria*.

<i>Drum</i>	<i>Gudgeon</i>	<i>Tarpon</i>
<i>Finback</i>	<i>Narwhal</i>	<i>Trigger</i>
<i>Flying Fish</i>	<i>Nautilus</i>	<i>Trout</i>
<i>Gato</i>	<i>Pike</i>	<i>Tuna</i>
<i>Grayling</i>	<i>Plunger</i>	
<i>Greenling</i>	<i>Pollack</i>	

After leaving Pearl Harbor, these two task forces refueled at sea and effected their rendezvous northeast of Midway on June 2d. The combined force then proceeded under the command of Admiral Fletcher to an area of operation north of Midway.

On full consideration, it had been decided not to employ the battleships on the West Coast in defense of Midway. To strike at long range at the enemy carrier force was deemed imperative, and it was therefore thought unwise to divert from the forces supporting our carriers the ships which would be necessary to screen battleships.

Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, believed that the Japanese plans were designed to trap a portion of our fleet. For that reason he directed that only strong attrition tactics be employed, and that our carriers and cruisers not be unduly risked. To understand the Midway Battle, one should remember that our naval forces operated under a conservative policy necessitated by the superiority of the enemy's force, and under the restraint imposed by the defense of a fixed point.

## **PREPARATIONS AT MIDWAY**

Meanwhile, measures had been taken to strengthen the air and ground forces at Midway. The Marine air group was brought up to the following strength:

Marine Aircraft Group 22: Lt. Col. Ira. L. Kimes, U.S.M.C., commanding, and  
Maj. Verne J. McCaul, U.S.M.C., Executive Officer.

Comprising:

Marine Fighting Squadron 221: Maj. Floyd B. Parks, U.S.M.C.,  
21 F2A-3 and 7 F4F-3 planes.

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 240:<sup>7</sup> Maj. Lofton R. Henderson, U.S.M.C.,  
18 SBD-2 and 16 SB2U-3 planes.

This group was supported by six new Navy TBF torpedo planes. It was considered of the utmost importance to discover the enemy as early as possible and to strike at his carriers before they were within range of Midway. Therefore the Midway air force was further strengthened by four Army B-26's fitted for torpedoes and several B-17's, in spite of the difficulty of protecting these aircraft on the ground. Because of the overcrowding of Midway's facilities there was a considerable interchange between that island and Hawaii, so that the number of planes available varied from day to day. On June 3d, the first day of actual contact with the enemy, there were at Midway, in addition to the planes of the Marine air group, the following:

14 PB5Y-5's, 16 PB5Y-5A's, 4 B-26's, 17 B-17's, 6 TBF's, (with 2 PB5Y-5's and 1 B-17 out of  
commission).

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<sup>7</sup> This squadron had only 29 pilots and borrowed 1 from VMF-221, so that it scheduled only 12 of its SB2U-3 planes for the battle.

By provision of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, all Army and Navy aircraft sent to Midway operated under the control of Capt. Cyril T. Simard, Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Midway. To assist in controlling this number of planes, additional radio and communication personnel were sent to Midway. Among these were two experienced Naval Base Air Defense aircraft plotting officers, two Naval Base Air Defense communication watch officers with experience in aircraft codes, and four experienced Naval Base Air Defense radiomen.

The ground force on Midway was raised to a maximum. The Marine Sixth Defense Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Harold D. Shannon, was reinforced by a part of the Second Raider Battalion, which had equipment for meeting a mechanized landing.

In preparation for the attack, ground forces worked day and night strengthening the defenses of the islands. The Coast Artillery group fortified their own positions and aided in the installation of underwater obstacles. Infantry companies assisted by unloading ships, and helped make and plant antitank mines, in addition to doing intensive training and maintaining their regular patrols. Companies "C" and "D" of the Second Raider Battalion laid antitank mines, assisted in beach patrol, the unloading of ships, and in the handling of gasoline drums for refueling the planes. The Antiaircraft and Special Weapons Group of the Third Defense Battalion by strenuous efforts succeeded in having their guns ready for action the day after they arrived, and thereafter worked on emplacements, ammunition stowage, and protection for personnel.

As a result of this cooperation, the islands were almost entirely surrounded by underwater obstacles, with extra precautions at the more likely beaches. Gun crews were generously provided with "Molotov cocktails" (antitank grenades). A large number of water mines had been planted, as well as numerous antipersonnel and antitank mines of both the controlled and contact variety.

One PY boat (U.S.S. *Crystal*) was stationed at Pearl—*Hermes* and 4 YP's (converted tuna fishing boats) were stationed at Lisianski, Gardner's Pinnacles, Laysan, and Necker Islands to make rescues. Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron ONE, consisting of 11 PT boats under the command of Lt. Clinton McKellar, Jr., was dispatched from the Hawaiian Sea Frontier Forces and placed under the direction of the Commanding Officer, Midway. These boats assisted in meeting the enemy air attack on Midway and did excellent work in rescuing airmen down at sea. Had the enemy attempted an actual landing, these boats would doubtless have played an important role.

Finally, 19 submarines were assigned to cover the approaches to Midway on an arc from 240° to 000° T. Six patrolled sectors of the 150-mile circle, three patrolled sectors of the 200-mile circle from Midway, and the remainder were assigned station patrol. All submarines were on station by June 3d.

## **PRELIMINARY AIR PATROLS**

The preliminary patrols and search from Midway were governed by the following considerations: the greatest danger was that our planes might be caught on the ground and destroyed, or the runways and facilities so damaged as to make it impossible for them to get off. It was imperative, therefore,

that the enemy be discovered at the earliest possible moment and his carriers attacked before they had approached within launching distance. It was expected that the carriers would not launch planes at a distance greater than 200 miles. It was necessary, therefore, that each day's search be conducted to such a distance that any enemy force which might be undiscovered just beyond could not approach within 200 miles of Midway before the next day's search. A search to 700 miles seemed adequate to meet these conditions.

However, because an area of poor visibility prevailed 300 to 400 miles to the northwest, it might be impossible to discover enemy carriers the day before they reached attacking range if they approached from that direction. On the other hand, the same bad weather area would also be likely to prevent navigation sufficiently accurate to enable the enemy to launch a night attack. It seemed probable that upon passing from the weather area in the early hours of morning he would wait for dawn to fix his position before launching his planes. This would occur between 0430 and 0500 and Midway could, therefore, expect an attack about 0600. This analysis<sup>8</sup> proved to be accurate, and the first bomb fell on Midway at 0630.

Because of the threat of a dawn attack on Midway, searching planes were sent out as early as possible each day - usually about 0415. To safeguard them from destruction on the ground and to have our striking force instantly available, the B-17's took off immediately afterwards. They remained in the air for about 4 hours, by which time the progress of the search and the reduction of their fuel load made it safe for them to land. The four B-26's, the six TBF's, and other planes remained on the ground but fully alert until the search had reached a distance of 400 miles.

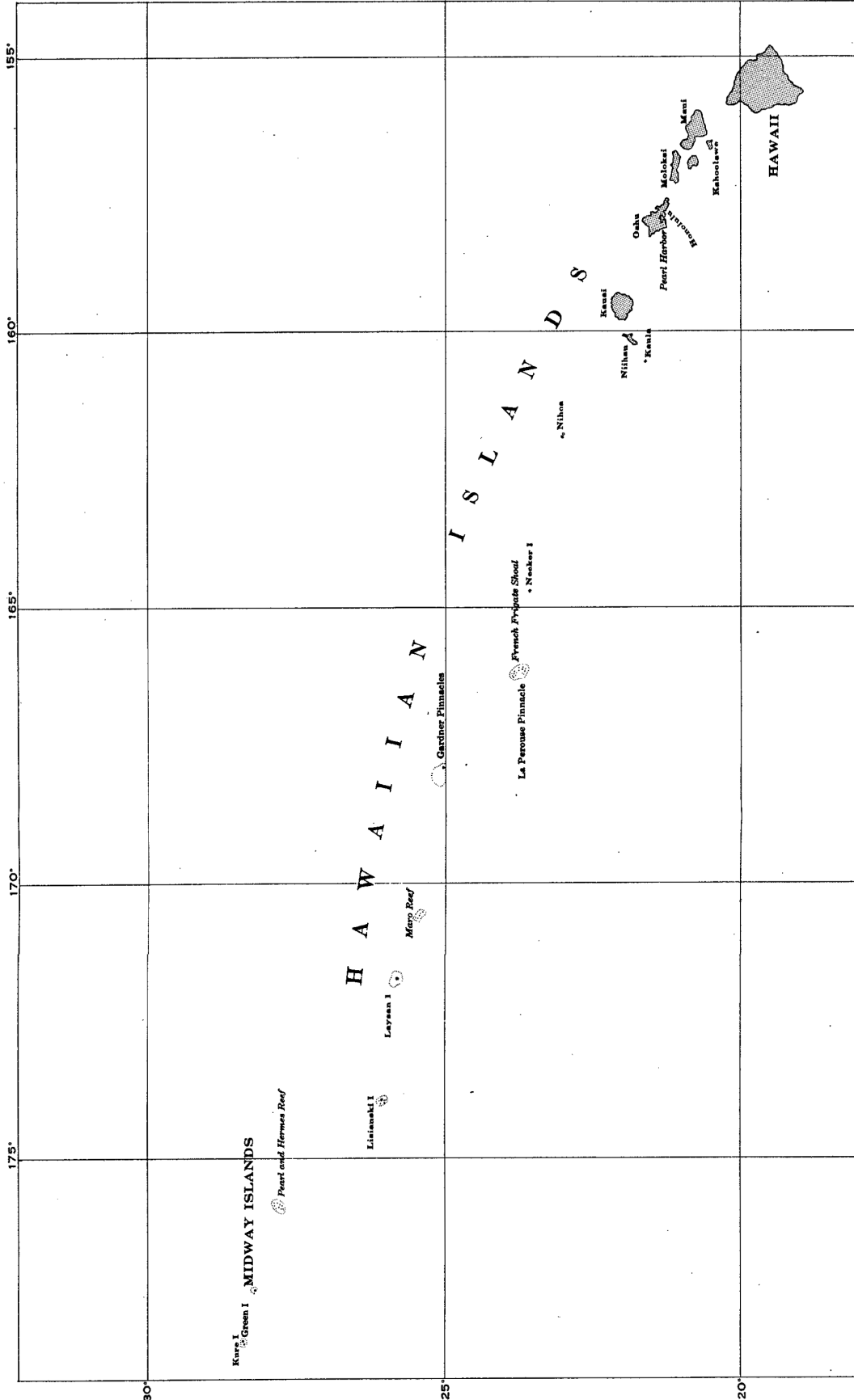
The Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, believed that the enemy planned a rendezvous about 700 miles west of Midway and ordered that this area be searched by B-17's on May 31st and June 1st, if possible. This was done with negative results. On June 2d a B-17 without bombs searched 800 miles to the west without making any contacts. These searches were conducted in part by two groups of six B-17's flown in from Hawaii on May 30th and 31st, respectively. Consequently their crews were in the air about 30 hours in the 2 days before actual combat, and, in addition, serviced their own planes.

On these days PBY's searched to a distance of 700 miles to the north and west. Coverage was excellent except beyond 300 miles to the northwest, where visibility was extremely poor. Two incidents during these days revealed the unsuitability of our PBY's for scouting in areas where air opposition might be encountered. On May 30th contact was made at about 500 miles from Midway with two Japanese patrol planes from Wake. The enemy planes attacked, wounding several men and putting two PBY's out of commission. On June 1st, when a similar contact was made, one of our patrol planes was probably saved by the presence of a second PBY.<sup>9</sup>

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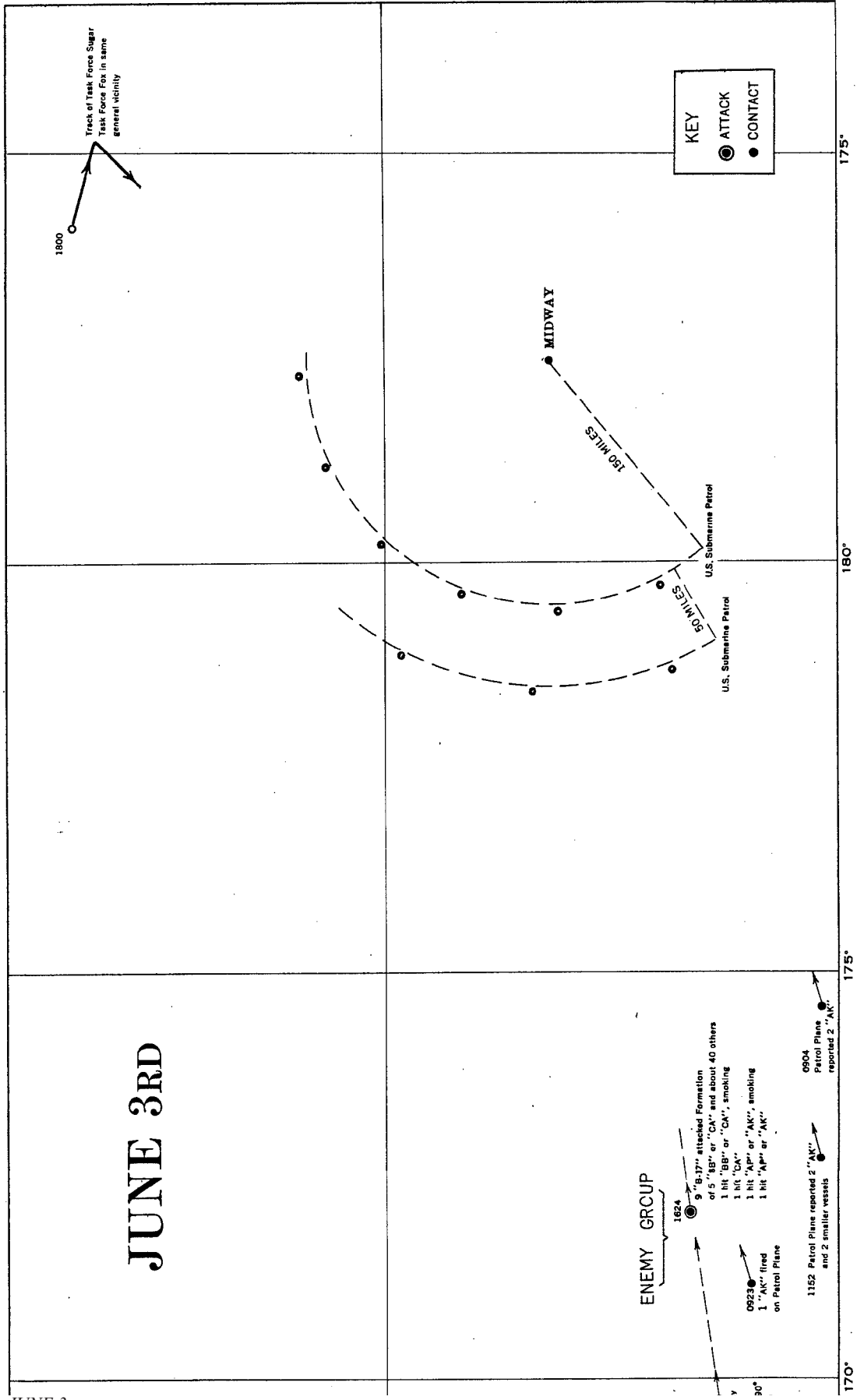
8 This analysis is found in the report of Capt. Logan C. Ramsey, Operations Officer, Naval Air Station, Midway.

9 Faster, better armed types are now being supplied. Also B-17's are being used for scouting wherever practicable.



GPO 510390-O-43 (faces p. 60) **CONFIDENTIAL**

Hawaiian Islands



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CPD 81000-0000 (Form 10)



## FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY, JUNE 3<sup>10</sup>

- 0430 All Midway planes in air.
- 0904 First surface contact of battle.
- 0925 Large group of ships sighted 261° distance 700.
- 1230 B-17's take off.
- 1623 B-17's attack ships on bearing 261°.
- 2115 Four PBY's take off for torpedo attack.
- 0130 (June 4th) PBY's attack.

On June 3d the usual search was made. By 0430 all planes fit for service were in the air. Again coverage was excellent except beyond 400 miles to the north-northwest. At 0904 the first surface contact of the battle was reported by a patrol plane: "Two Japanese cargo vessels sighted bearing 247° from Midway, distance 470 miles. Fired upon by antiaircraft." Shortly afterward, at 0925, another plane reported: "Main body bearing 261°, distance 700 miles, six large ships in column." At 1100 the same plane reported that this force consisted of 11 ships, course 090°, speed 19. Actually, as it later proved, this was not the enemy's "main body," but probably only a portion of his occupation force. Because of its shortage of fuel and the probability that it would only be shot down if it attempted to track the enemy force, the reporting plane was ordered to return to the base. A little later (at 1240) the special long-range B-17 with no bombs took off with a Navy observer on a search of the expected enemy rendezvous at 800 miles and to track the force already discovered. It was thought that a B-17 might be able to take care of itself if attacked by enemy fighters. This plane failed to locate the "main body," but at 1640 reported 2 transports and destroyers, on bearing 261°, distance 700.

Meanwhile, other units of the enemy force had been reported by our patrols. Numerous ships, it was clear, were converging on a rendezvous for an attack on Midway.

The enemy aircraft carriers had not yet been discovered, and, in fact, were not sighted on June 3d. Consequently, the commanding officer of the Midway Defense Forces hesitated to commit his striking force of B-17's until more positive information had been received. Further, the Fortresses had been up 4 hours on their morning precautionary flight and had to be refueled after landing. However, with the receipt at 1100 of the amplified report of the enemy ships on bearing 261°, a force of 9 B-17's with bomb bay gasoline tanks and half a load of bombs (four 600-pound bombs each) was ordered to attack this "main body."

This squadron, piloted by the most experienced of the B-17 pilots, was commanded by Lt. Col. Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., U.S.A. Air Corps. Taking off about 1230, our planes found the enemy at 1623 at a distance of about 570 miles. This force, consisting of 2 or 3 heavy cruisers and about 30 other ships, including destroyers, transports, and cargo vessels, had evidently been moving toward Midway since the morning contact. The attack was made in 3 flights of 3 planes each at 8,000, 10,000, and 12,000 feet respectively. Antiaircraft fire, although consistently behind our planes, was so heavy that it was considered unwise to stay to observe results. However, a heavy cruiser and a transport were reported

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<sup>10</sup> All times given in this narrative are zone plus 12.

to have been hit and a second cruiser was believed hit at the stern.

Before the B-17's returned, a flight of four PBY-5A's, each carrying one MK XIII Mod. I torpedo took off on an historic mission, "the first night torpedo attack by our patrol planes on surface ships." The pilots were volunteers, led by Lt. William L. Richards, Executive Officer of Patrol Squadron FORTY-FOUR. The flight commander's orders were to locate the enemy force sighted that morning on bearing 261° from Midway, deliver a torpedo attack and return to base. Priority of targets was aircraft carriers, battleships, transports. The exact composition of the enemy force was unknown, but it was believed to include a carrier. The B-17's had not yet returned and details of their attack were not known.

The flight left Midway at 2115 on June 3d. The weather was clear, with broken cumulus clouds at 1,000 feet. Some hours later (about 2400 and 0100) the third and fourth planes were lost from the formation in passing through cloud banks, but one of them succeeded in finding the target alone.

At about 0115 on June 4th, radar indicated a group of about 10 ships 10 or 12 miles to the port of this group. As our planes approached, the silhouettes of the enemy ships became visible in the moonlight. There were 10 or more large ones in 2 columns, escorted by 6 destroyers. It was probably the same force the B-17's had attacked several hours before, now only about 500 miles from Midway. Our planes approached without lights from down moon, engines throttled back. The target selected was the largest ship, which was leading the northern column. It had been thought that this might be a carrier, but on the approach it was identified as a transport. The planes glided down to 100 feet and the leader dropped his torpedo at 800 yards, then climbed in a turn over the target. It was thought that an explosion followed. Lt. (j. g.) Daniel C. Davis in the second plane was not satisfied with his approach and withdrew for a second. He dropped his torpedo at 200 yards, but no results were observed. As he opened his throttle to pass over the target, he strafed the ship with .50-calibre machine-gun fire, while the leading ships opened fire on him. Subsequent information indicated that this strafing attack caused several enemy casualties.

Ensign Gaylord D. Propst, piloting the third plane, which had become separated from the leader, found the target visually and came up the moon path to attack a large ship. He believed he saw the flash of a hit as he withdrew, running through anti-aircraft fire. Immediately he was attacked by a single fighter, from which he escaped in the clouds. Ensign Allen Rothenberg, pilot of the fourth plane which had lost the flight earlier, failed to find the enemy force and after contact with an enemy plane was forced by his dwindling gasoline supply to turn back. The results of the mission were indefinite but one or two transports or cargo vessels were possibly damaged.

As the planes returned individually to Midway they were warned by radio that the islands were under attack by air. Course was set for Lisianski. Three of the PBY's landed at Laysan, and Ensign Propst landed at sea near Lisianski out of fuel. On the afternoon before their mission all pilots and crews except the flight leader had flown from Pearl Harbor to Midway, a 10-hour flight. After landing from this all-night mission three crews were delayed on the water all day and all night and flew to Pearl Harbor the following day. Ensign Propst and his crew were down at sea for 53 hours before they were picked up.



*B-17 long range bomber of the type which operated from Midway.*



*B-26 medium bomber. Four of these attacked Japanese carriers on June 4th.*

# JUNE 4TH

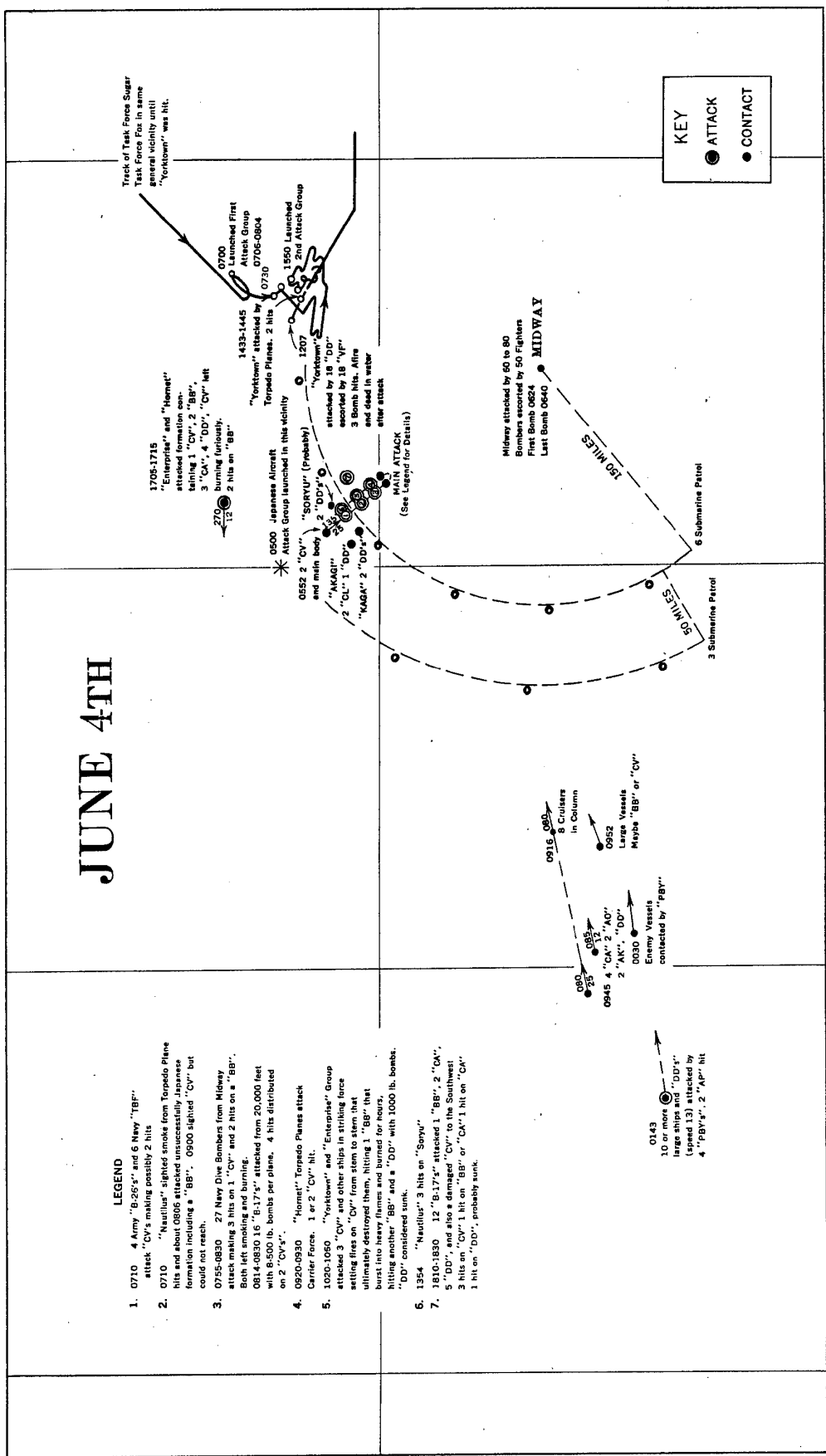
## LEGEND

- 0710 4 Army "B-25's" and 6 Navy "TB's" attack "CV's" making possibly 2 hits
- 0710 "Nautilus" sighted smoke from Torpedo Plane hits and about 0806 attacked unsuccessfully Japanese formation including a "BB", 0900 sighted "CV" but could not reach.
- 0755-0830 27 Navy Dive Bombers from Midway attack making 3 hits on 1 "CV" and 2 hits on a "BB". Both left smoking and burning.  
0814-0830 16 "B-17's" attacked from 20,000 feet with 8-500 lb. bombs per plane. 4 hits distributed on 2 "CV's".
- 0920-0930 "Hornet", Torpedo Planes attack Carrier Force. 1 or 2 "CV" hit.
- 1020-1050 "Yorktown" and "Enterprise" Group attacked 3 "CV" and other ships in striking force settling fires on "CV" from stern that ultimately destroyed them, hitting 1 "BB" that burst into heavy flames and burned for hours, hitting another "BB" and a "DD" with 1000 lb. bombs. "DD" considered sunk.
- 1354 "Nautilus" 3 hits on "Soryu"
- 1810-1830 12 "B-17's" attacked 1 "BB", 2 "CA", 5 "DD", 1 "AP" and a damaged "CV" to the Southwest. 3 hits on "BB" or "CA", 1 hit on "CA", 1 hit on "DD", probably sunk.

- 0143 10 or more large ships and "DD's" (spread 13) attacked by 4 "PB's", 2 "AP" hit

0980 0985 0990 0945 2 "AK", "DD" Enemy Vessels contacted by "PB's"

0916 0945 8 Cruisers In Column 0952 Large Vessels Approx "BB" or "CV"



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## THE ENEMY ATTACK ON MIDWAY, JUNE 4

0415 Search planes take off.  
0545 Patrol plane reports “many planes heading Midway.”  
0552 Two enemy carriers sighted.  
0600 All Midway planes in air.  
0616 Fighter group intercepts enemy bombers.  
630 First bomb falls on Midway.  
0715 Our fighter planes called in.

Our long-range aircraft had struck without appreciably diminishing the enemy’s strength. The Japanese carrier force had not yet been located and was probably approaching from the northwest under cover of the bad weather area. It was expected that it would be in a position to launch an attack on Midway at dawn on June 4th.

Early in the morning of the 4th the search group of PBY’s took off as usual, covered by a Marine fighter patrol. They were ordered to search to 425 miles unless four enemy carriers were discovered earlier, and to report all contacts fully. They were ordered to return to Laysan and Lisianski, as keeping them on the scene of action would be to expose them unnecessarily. In carrying out these orders several were attacked and at least one was shot down in flames.

As soon as the PBY’s were clear, the B-17’s were put into the air. Inasmuch as they would have to remain in the air for at least 4 hours under any circumstances, they were ordered to attack the enemy force to the west, which, it was estimated, were to be found at a distance of about 480 miles. They were warned, however, to expect a change of orders if the enemy carriers should be discovered in the meantime. Finally the four B-26’s, the six TBF’s and the planes of the Marine air group were manned and the engines warmed.

The plan for employment of the Marine air group<sup>11</sup> was as follows: The field was to be cleared of all aircraft as soon as radar reported the approach of enemy planes. The fighting squadron was to be directed by radio to intercept the enemy bombers before they reached Midway. The scout-bombing squadron was to rendezvous 20 miles east of Eastern Island and await instructions, either to attack the enemy carriers if they were located, or to track the enemy aircraft on their return. This plan functioned perfectly.

At 0545 “the most important contact of the battle” was made. A patrol plane reported in plain English (the first use of it in the battle): “Many planes heading Midway, bearing 320, distance 150.” Five minutes later the Midway radar picked up the planes at a distance of 93 miles, altitude about 10,000 feet.

At 0552 came the news which our attack forces had impatiently awaited. A PBY reported two carriers and the main body of ships, carriers in front, course 135°, speed 25, on bearing from Midway 320°,

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<sup>11</sup> Group 22, Second Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force.

distance 180 miles. Shortly afterwards the B-17's, already on their way to attack the enemy forces to the west, were ordered to change their course and make the carriers their targets. Orders were also sent to Capt. James F. Collins, Jr., U.S.A., commander of the B-26's, and to Lt. Langdon K. Fieberling, commander of the TBF's, before their taking off to attack the carriers. The Marine scout bombing squadron, already in the air, was directed to the same target at 0605, and these orders were sent repeatedly during the next hour, as no acknowledgement was received. Events proved, however, that they were received and acted upon at the first transmission.

At 0555 the air-raid alarm was sounded, and by 0600 or shortly after, every plane able to leave the ground, except for one J2F, was in the air. Weather was good and visibility excellent.

Of the Marine fighter group, three sections, consisting of eight F2A's and six F4F's, were vectored out directly toward the approaching enemy bombers. They were soon joined by two planes which had remained in the air since the morning covering patrol. Two sections were vectored out at 310° and told to orbit at 10 miles in order to be ready to meet any enemy planes which might appear from a different quarter. As none appeared, they were soon ordered to join in the interception of the enemy planes already located.

At 0616 the first three fighter sections encountered the enemy planes 30 miles out at 12,000 feet. According to later estimates by our surviving pilots, there were more than 100 enemy planes at this original contact, including 60 to 80 Aichi type 99 Navy bombers and about 50 Zero fighters. The bombers were in a rigid "V" formation, with three divisional "V's" of 9 planes in each formation. The Zero fighters were probably escorting from a lower altitude, as they were not at first seen by our fighters, which attacked from 17,000 feet; but "after the first pass at a bomber there were from 1 to 5 Zero fighters on the tail of each of our fighters....Each pilot made only one or two passes at the bombers and then spent the remainder of the time trying to shake from 1 to 5 Jap fighters off his tail. Most succeeded by using cloud cover, or, in two cases, by leading the Japs into fire from light antiaircraft guns ashore and on PT boats."<sup>12</sup>

Despite the odds against them, our fighters gave an excellent account of themselves. At 0619 a Midway outpost reported "two planes falling in flames" and others followed. Within a few minutes the enemy bombers were near Midway, their formations ragged from losses inflicted by our fighters. As the first formation approached from the northwest, it could be seen that there were only seven planes in each of the two leading V's and six in the trailing V. "D" battery picked up the target at 50,000 yards range at 0622, and others picked it up immediately afterwards. The leader or No. 2 man of the first formation was seen to fall in flames as our gunners found the range.

The first bomb fell on Midway at 0630. In spite of heavy antiaircraft fire, the enemy formations continued their run, dropping their bombs along the north side of Eastern Island, and on Sand Island in the hangar and barracks area and near "D" battery. Scarcely had the high-altitude attack passed when Aichi type 99 dive bombers appeared. The powerhouse on Eastern Island and the oil tanks near the Marine dock on Sand Island were primary targets and were hit. Smoke from the burning oil tanks

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<sup>12</sup> From report of Maj. Verne J. McCaul, U.S.M.C. Group Executive Officer, Aircraft Group 22, Second Marine Aircraft Wing.





*Burning oil tanks on Midway after Japanese raid on June 4th.*



*Interior of one of the Midway hangars after the Japanese raid.*

interfered somewhat with antiaircraft fire. As the dive bombers pulled out over the lagoon, the PT boats opened fire on them with all their guns, and at least one plane crashed some distance beyond. The bombing was over in a few minutes, but a few Zeros remained strafing the field and the batteries.

Perhaps one of the most vivid accounts of the attack is to be found in the chronological record kept by Lt. Col. Harold D. Shannon, commanding officer of the Marine Sixth Defense Battalion, from which the following excerpts are taken:

- 0622 Dog Btry to Bn<sup>13</sup>: “Dog Btry on target, 50,000 yards, 320°”.
- 0625 OP<sup>14</sup> to Bn: “40 or 50 planes on bearing 320°”.
- 0629 Radar to Bn: “Many unidentified planes 8 miles, 330° and 29 miles, 265°”.
- 0630 Bn to Groups: “Open fire when targets are within range”.
- 0630 Radar to Bn: “Many unidentified planes 27 miles, 250°”.
- 0631 OP to Bn: “All AA gun batteries have opened fire”.
- 0632 OP to Bn: “One plane in formation of 20 is on fire”.
- 0632 OP to Bn: “Hangar and runways have been hit several times”.
- 0633 OP to Bn: “Eastern Island has been hit several times”.
- 0635 OP to Bn: “One enemy plane down at north reef. Laundry hit. Hospital and Contractor’s Canteen on fire”.
- 0636 OP to Bn: “Navy J2F is on fire”.
- 0637 Radar to Bn: “Few unidentified planes 20 miles, 245° and 21 miles, 235°. Also 9 miles, 330°”.
- 0638 OP to Bn: “Enemy planes are dive-bombing Eastern Island. All our AA guns are firing”.
- 0640 OP to Bn: “About 30 enemy planes are bombing Eastern Island”.
- 0641 OP to Bn: “Hangar is on fire. One enemy plane has crashed on ramp.”
- 0644 OP to Bn: “Tanks on fire at southwest part of island”.
- 0647 OP to Bn: “Planes coming in toward the island flying low from 200°. Appear to be enemy planes. 2 enemy planes have crashed in water to north”.
- 0648 OP to Bn: “Many enemy planes leaving on bearing 300°”.
- 0648 OP to Bn: “1 enemy plane has crashed on Eastern Island. 1 enemy plane has crashed near C battery.”
- 0650 Dog Btry to Bn: “One casualty in Dog Btry”.
- 0653 Radar to Bn: “Many planes 9 miles, 235° and 27 miles, 315°. Many planes 33 miles, 310°”.
- 0655 OP to Bn: “All enemy planes have left the area”.
- 0656 OP to Bn: “2 friendly planes, fighters, have landed”.

At 0701 two batteries opened fire again for a few seconds on a single plane appearing to the south. By 0715 all enemy planes had left and a message was broadcast: “Fighters land, refuel by division, Fifth division first.” “A pitifully few fighters returned in answer to this message, and it was strongly suspected that there were not more to land.”<sup>15</sup> Of the 27 fighter planes of the Marine air group which intercepted the enemy bombers, 15 were missing and 7 severely damaged.<sup>16</sup> They had, however, inflicted greater damage on the enemy. Known Japanese losses amounted to 43 planes by fighter action alone, exclusive of an unknown number shot down by our missing fliers. Pilots believed that there were at least three 27-plane formations at the beginning of the battle. In view of the relatively small number of bombs which fell on Midway, it is evident that these formations suffered large losses. Our antiaircraft batteries were credited with shooting down 10 planes, and many more were probably

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13 Battalion.

14 Observation post.

15 From the report of Lt. Col. Ira L. Kimes, U.S.M.C., Commanding Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-TWO.

16 Missing in action: 13 F2A-3's and 2 F4F-3's. Severely damaged: 5 F2A-3's, and 2 F4F-3's.

damaged so severely as to be unable to return to their carrier, for our flyers returning from their attack on the carriers reported many enemy planes down in the water.

In spite of their success, our pilots felt very strongly that their planes were inferior in performance to the Zeros. "All VMF pilots of various degrees of experience and capability were awed by the performance of the Zero I Sento K1 fighter, claiming that it has 20 percent more speed, climb, and maneuverability than does the F2A-3 or F4F-3."<sup>17</sup> "No local pilot has yet observed a fighter type aircraft with such versatility....The only way our pilots could shake them off was to dive at speeds better than 400 knots, or to use cloud cover."<sup>18</sup> Many pilots, however, remarked upon the extreme vulnerability of the Zero.

Damage to Midway had been severe. Almost all structures above the ground had been destroyed or badly damaged. The powerhouse had been hit, the hangar destroyed, and perhaps most serious, the gasoline system had been damaged, so that subsequent refueling of planes had to be done by hand. This involved a tremendous amount of labor, and for a while badly handicapped air operation. The Japanese fortunately spared the runways, apparently for their own anticipated use.

In the face of this devastation, however, the defenders of Midway could take comfort in the thought that they were striking back. The last Japanese plane had scarcely left Midway when our flyers opened their attack on the enemy carriers.

## **MIDWAY'S ATTACK ON THE ENEMY CARRIERS, JUNE 4**

- 0705 Four B-26's sight and attack enemy carriers.
- 0705 Six Navy TBF's attack carriers.
- 0755 Marine SBD's make glide-bombing attack.
- 0810 Army B-17's bomb carriers.
- 0820 Marine SBU's attack enemy BB.

The four B-26's and the six TBF's found the enemy force simultaneously on the morning of June 4th. The weather was good with a spotty overcast between 1,000 and 2,300 feet; beneath this, visibility was excellent.

The crews of the B-26's and their commander, Captain Collins, had been standing by their planes since 0315 that morning. At 0600 orders came to warm up the engines. Fifteen minutes later they were ordered to attack the enemy carriers, and shortly afterwards the formation was on its way, each plane armed with a torpedo. The enemy force, consisting of three carriers, one battleship, several cruisers and about six destroyers, was sighted at 0705. As our planes approached from the southeast and maneuvered sharply to pass through the heavy antiaircraft fire thrown up by the vessels, Captain Collins caught sight of the six Navy torpedo planes, which had left Midway a few minutes before his own unit. In passing through the ack-ack the B-26's met six Zero fighters head-on, and dove steeply to avoid their guns. It was probably at this point that the Nos. 2 and 3 planes were lost. Approaching

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17 From the report of Maj. Verne J. McCaul, U.S.M.C. Group Executive Officer, Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-TWO.

18 From the report of Lt. Col. Ira L. Kimes, U.S.M.C., Commanding Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-TWO.

from about 20° on the port bow of the central carrier, Captain Collins in the leading plane released his torpedo at about 800 yards from about 220 feet, as the carrier swung to starboard well in its path. The navigator of the No. 4 plane, slightly below and to the left, saw it running true for the target. This plane, piloted by Lt. James P. Muri, U.S.A. Air Corps, came in close and dropped its torpedo at about 450 yards from 150 feet, and then pulled up over the carrier.

Of the two B-26's lost, one was seen to launch its torpedo and then to strike the flight deck of the carrier and hurtle into the sea. The two remaining planes pulled away at full throttle, attacked by several of the 50 Zeros which swarmed over the enemy ships. Although gunners in both planes had difficulty with their machine guns, they shot down three or four Zeros as they withdrew. There was no opportunity to observe the results of this attack, but the returning pilots believed that the carrier had been damaged by two torpedo hits near the bow. One of the returning B-26's crashed on landing, and both were so badly shot up that they were unfit for duty.

The six Navy TBF planes, commanded by Lt. Fieberling, made a gallant attack at the same time as the B-26's. Of this flight only one badly shot-up plane returned to make a landing with one wheel retracted. Because of the heavy fighter opposition the surviving pilot, Ensign Albert K. Earnest, was not able to observe the results of the attack or to tell what had happened to the others in the unit. It appears that at least two were shot down before launching their torpedoes, but a B-17 pilot on reconnaissance reported seeing one of the remaining torpedo bombing planes score a hit.

At 0755 VMSB-241 began its attack. This squadron was divided into two attack groups: one commanded by Maj. Lofton R. Henderson, with 18 SBD-2 planes, and a second under Maj. Benjamin W. Norris with 12 SB2U-3's. Ten of the pilots had joined the squadron only a week before and there had been very little opportunity for training flights.

Only 3 of the pilots had had experience in SBD-type planes. Because of the inexperience of his pilots, Major Henderson had decided to make a glide-bombing attack, rather than attempt to dive-bomb without training.

Between 0610 and 0620 these units took off, minus 2 SBD's which developed engine trouble and an SB2U-3 which was forced to return when a cowling came loose. The 16 SBD's climbed to 9,000 feet en route to their target. At 0755 the enemy was sighted and our planes made a wide circle at high speed to lose altitude. At once a number of Nakajima 97 and Zero fighters attacked and heavy anti-aircraft fire was opened from below. Rear seat gunners in our planes sent down 4 Japanese fighters in flames and possibly 2 more. As our planes came in for their glide, Major Henderson's ship was hit and it was obvious that he was badly wounded, so Capt. Elmer G. Glidden, Jr., took the lead. The squadron dove through a cloud, emerging to encounter heavy anti-aircraft fire from a large *Kaga*<sup>19</sup> class carrier which was maneuvering violently below. Bombs were released at 500 feet or less. Three direct hits were seen and several near hits. As our planes returned low over the water they could see her smoking badly. Of the 16 SBD's which engaged in this attack, 8 returned to the base, and of these only 6 remained fit for service. Two were seen to go down in flames, and 1 went out of control before reaching Midway. The

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19 Possibly this identification was mistaken. It may have been the *Soryu*.



pilot jumped and was picked up by a PT boat. Another was forced down 100 miles west of Midway, but both pilot and gunner were rescued 2 days later.

The B-17's of Flight 92 were the next to strike. This group of 15 planes was commanded by Lt. Col. Sweeney, U.S.A. Air Corps. Two planes carried eight 600-pound bombs each and the rest eight 500-pound bombs each. These planes had cleared Midway about 0415 shortly after the patrol planes had been sent out. They were proceeding to the west to attack the enemy forces sighted the preceding day when a message was received in plain language telling of the discovery of the enemy carrier force on bearing 325° from Midway.

Climbing to 20,000 feet, the Fortresses changed course to find the carriers. The enemy force was located at 0732, but the carriers, circling under a cloud formation, were not found till 0810. The B-17's had skirted the fleet and approached from the northwest; i. e., from the stern of the targets. They attacked by flights, two elements concentrating on each of two carriers and a single element on a third. Antiaircraft fire was heavy and found the altitude, but was generally behind. The Japanese fighters did not dare press home their attacks, which were ineffectual. The results of this attack were reported to be three hits on two carriers. Probably two of these hits were on the *Soryu*, which may have been the carrier left smoking by the Marine SBD's only a few minutes before.

Scarcely had the B-17's left the scene when the second unit of the Marine group arrived, the 11 SB2U-3's under the command of Major Norris. These sighted the enemy at 0820 and shortly afterwards were engaged by large numbers of enemy fighters. So severe was this opposition that Major Norris decided not to press the search for the carriers, but chose a battleship as his target. A high-speed approach was made at low level through antiaircraft fire and fighter opposition, and bombs were released at very low altitude. Two direct hits were scored and two very near hits. The battleship began to smoke heavily and listed. Two enemy planes were shot down and two more probably destroyed. Two of our planes were forced to land in the water before reaching Midway, but two pilots and a gunner were rescued.

## **OUR CARRIER ATTACK ON THE ENEMY CARRIERS, JUNE 4**

- 0700 *Enterprise* and *Hornet* begin launching.
- 0838 *Yorktown* begins launching.
- 0920 *Hornet's* torpedo squadron attacks.
- 1020 *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* torpedo squadrons attack.
- 1022 *Enterprise* dive bombers attack.
- 1025 *Yorktown* dive bombers attack.
- 1359 *Nautilus* torpedoes *Soryu*.

The situation as the last of the Midway planes withdrew is summed up in the report of Admiral Nimitz: "The Midway forces had struck with full strength, but the Japanese were not as yet checked. About 10 ships had been damaged, of which 1 or 2 AP or AK may have been sunk. But this was hardly an impression on the great force of about 80 ships converging on Midway. Most of Midway's fighters, torpedo planes, and dive bombers—the only types capable of making a high percentage of hits on ships—were gone, and 3 of the Japanese carriers were still either undamaged or insufficiently so to



*TBD: Type of torpedo plane which operated from our carriers.*



*TBF: Six of these attacked from Midway.*

hamper operations. This was the situation when our carrier attack began.”

The two task forces under Admiral Fletcher had made contact at 1530 on June 2d at latitude 32°04' N., longitude 172°45' W., about 350 miles northeast of Midway. That night both moved westward, Task Force SUGAR operating about 10 miles to the south. On the 3d, while our carriers moved northward, messages were received both from Midway and from the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, with information of the enemy force sighted to the west of Midway. It was evident, however, that this was not the enemy's striking force, which was expected from the northwest. While the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* held their planes in readiness as an attack force, the *Yorktown's* planes conducted a search through the sector from 240° to 060°. Rain squalls and low visibility made the search difficult and there were no results.

During the night of June 3d-4th our task forces moved south-southwest to a position about 200 miles north of Midway. It was hoped that they would be able to catch the enemy striking force on the flank when it launched its anticipated attack on the islands. At 0420 on June 4th the *Yorktown* launched a security search of the sector to the north and put a fighter patrol into the air. The *Enterprise*, 5 or 10 miles to the southwest with Task Force SUGAR, took over direction of fighters.

At 0545 the task forces intercepted the Midway patrol plane's report of enemy planes approaching the island and shortly afterwards the report of two enemy carriers and supporting vessels, including battleships, on bearing 320°, 180 miles from Midway. Task Force SUGAR was at once directed to move westward and to launch attacks when it came within range of this force. Because it had planes in the air, and because only two enemy carriers had been reported, the *Yorktown's* planes were temporarily held in reserve.

Task Force SUGAR headed toward the enemy force at 25 knots. By 0700 it was estimated that the Japanese carriers were about 155 miles distant on bearing 239° from the task force, and launching was begun. Unfortunately the wind was light from the southeast, so that our carriers had to turn away from the enemy for launching and for relieving combat patrols. The order of launching was (1) fighters for patrol; (2) dive bombers; (3) torpedo planes; and (4) fighters to accompany the torpedo planes. Deferred departure was used, and the launching required about an hour. The *Hornet* put into the air 35 scout bombers armed with 500-pound bombs, 15 torpedo planes with torpedoes and 10 fighters. The *Enterprise* launched 33 scout bombers, 14 torpedo planes and 10 fighters.

Of the scout bombers, 15 carried one 1,000-pound bomb each, 12 carried one 500- and two 100-pound bombs, and 6 carried one 500-pound bomb each.

Meanwhile, no more enemy carriers had been reported and the danger arose that the *Yorktown* might be caught with her planes on deck. Therefore at about 0840 all the torpedo squadron (12 VTB), half the bomber squadron (17 VSB), and 6 fighters were launched. The 17 remaining scout bombers were held in reserve in the hope that 2 more enemy carriers might be found. Each torpedo plane carried one MK13 torpedo and each bomber one 1,000-pound bomb. The torpedo planes headed for the target at once. The scout bombers were ordered to circle for 12 minutes before proceeding to overtake the torpedo planes. To conserve fuel, the fighters were not launched till 0905. The three squadrons effected

rendezvous at 0945 as they proceeded toward the target, which they found at the same time as did the *Enterprise* group.

Before our carriers had completed launching their planes they were probably sighted by an enemy seaplane. Thus it was essential that our planes reach the enemy carriers before their planes could return from Midway and refuel for a second attack, which would almost certainly be directed at our carriers. It was possibly because of our carriers having been sighted that the Japanese carriers turned northward instead of continuing their course toward Midway.

This reversal of the course of the enemy carriers occurred about an hour after our planes had left the *Hornet* and the *Enterprise*. Our carriers did not break radio silence to inform our pilots of this fact. Consequently, the planes failed to find the enemy. The *Hornet* group commander with his 35 scout bombers and 10 fighters turned to search toward the south and made no contact. All the fighters exhausted their gasoline and landed in the sea before reaching Midway, but 8 pilots were rescued. All but 2 of the dive bombers eventually returned to the *Hornet*. Thirteen reached Midway, where 2 landed in the lagoon. The remaining 11 refueled and returned to the *Hornet*.

The *Hornet's* torpedo squadron, led by Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron, had proceeded at a lower altitude and became separated from the rest of the group, although there were only scattered clouds. This squadron turned north, found the enemy carriers, and launched an attack without support of any kind. When this attack was made, at about 0920, there were four carriers in the group. The *Akagi*, *Kaga*, and *Soryu* were not far apart, the last damaged and smoking. The fourth, the *Hiryu*, was standing off a distance to the north. Another ship, probably the battleship hit by the Marine SBU's an hour earlier, was also damaged and smoking. In the formation were two more battleships, four cruisers, and six destroyers.

As Torpedo EIGHT drove in toward the target it encountered overwhelming fighter opposition. A moment later it ran into a heavy screen of anti-aircraft fire thrown up by the destroyers and cruisers. One by one our planes fell, but those that were left pressed home the attack. It is known<sup>20</sup> that they shot down some Japanese fighters and scored some hits. Of the 15 planes, not one returned from the attack. Only one pilot, Ensign George H. Gay, survived. After attacking and probably scoring a hit on the *Kaga*, he crashed near the *Akagi*. By hiding under a floating seat cushion and refraining from inflating his life raft till after dark, he saved his own life and witnessed the succeeding attacks by our carrier forces.

Ensign Gay had been in the water less than an hour when the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* groups arrived. The *Enterprise* torpedo squadron had been launched at about 0749 and proceeded independently to the target. On the way it lost its fighter escort of 10 F4F-4's, which later joined the *Yorktown's* torpedo squadron, so that the *Enterprise's* Torpedo SIX also launched its attack without protection. At about 1000 it sighted the Japanese force, but the fourth carrier was not visible from the low altitude at which they were flying. At the time of contact, the enemy ships were on a course of 270°, but as our planes appeared they turned to starboard, shifting their course to 000° and, before our planes dropped, to 180°.

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20 From voice intercepts heard by Leroy Quillen, ARM 3c, Bombing Squadron EIGHT.



This maneuver kept our planes on their quarter, forcing them to make a wide circle in their attempt to approach on the beam of the carriers. This prolonged the time of their exposure to antiaircraft and fighter fire. Choosing the carrier to the west as their target, our planes attacked under fire from about 25 fighters and passing through an extremely heavy antiaircraft barrage. Probably the majority of them never had a chance to drop their torpedoes, but the attack is thought to have produced one hit.

At the same time that this was taking place, the *Yorktown's* torpedo squadron was making its attack. The squadron, led by Lt. Comdr. Lance E. Massey, had been launched about 0845. En route to the target it had been overtaken, as planned, by the rest of the *Yorktown* group, and had proceeded at about 1,500 feet, with two fighters 1,000 feet above and four at 5,000-6,000 feet as a further covering force. At about 1000 (approximately the same moment as the *Enterprise* squadron) this squadron sighted enemy ships. While still about 14 miles from their target they were engaged by Zero fighters and dropped to 150 feet to avoid antiaircraft fire.

Our own fighters were able to give them some protection in the early stages of the approach, but were soon engaged by superior numbers and became separated from the torpedo squadron. From a point about a mile east of an enemy carrier the squadron commander turned in for the attack. As he turned he was shot down in flames by an enemy fighter, but the remainder of the squadron pressed on. Six more fell on the way and only five remained to launch their torpedoes. Three more fell a moment later. The attack was, however, effective. The commander of the fighter squadron saw three torpedo hits on the large carrier to the east and one on the smaller carrier near the center of the formation.

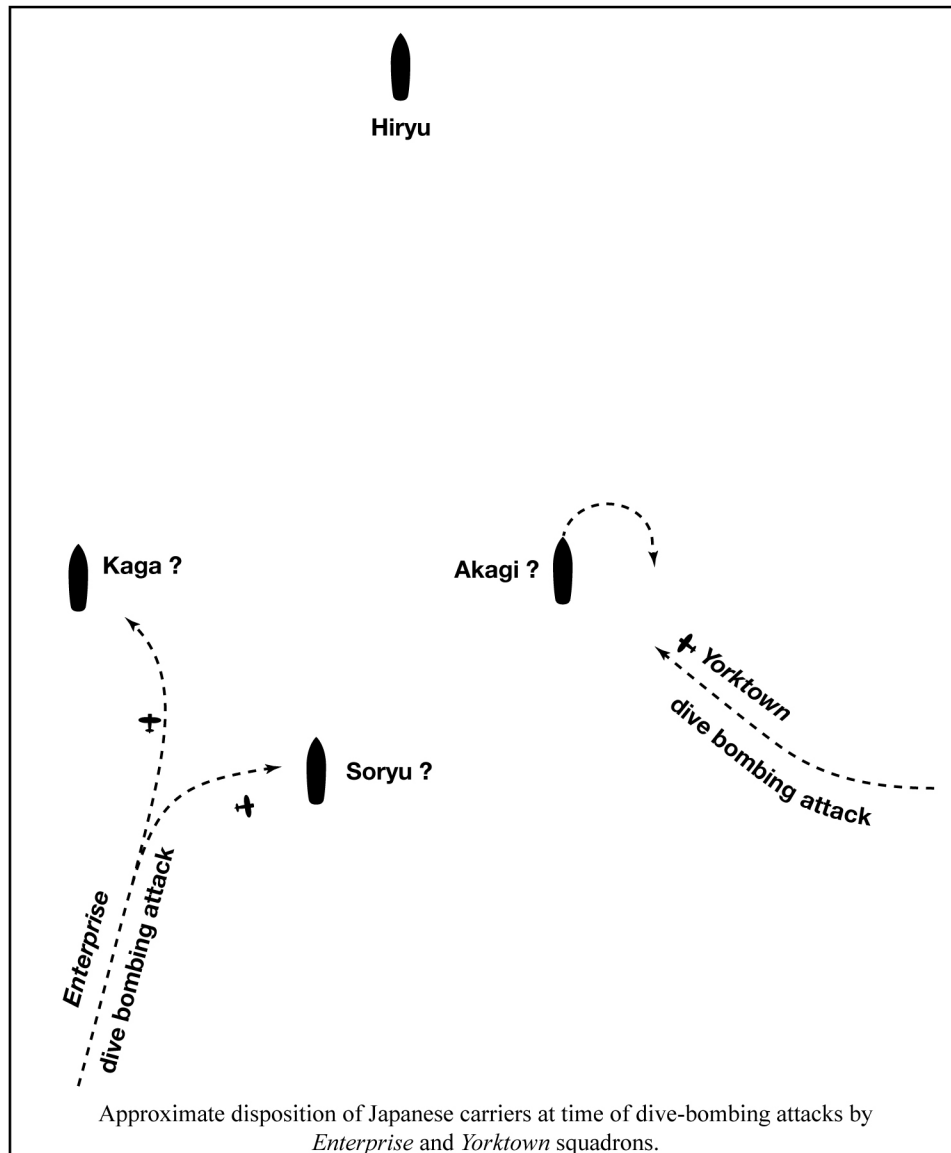
Three enemy carriers had been under torpedo attack, and probably all had been hit. The fourth, a few miles to the north, had escaped for the time being. But our torpedo squadrons had paid heavily. The *Hornet's* VT-8 had been wiped out. Of the 14 planes in the *Enterprise* squadron (VT-6) only 4 returned, and of the *Yorktown's* 12 planes constituting VT-3 only 2 survived the attack.

This sacrifice had, however, two beneficial results. First, the attacks forced the Japanese carriers to maneuver so that they could not launch their own bombers. Secondly, the Japanese, recognizing the greater menace of the torpedo planes, concentrated their fighters on the low-flying VT's so that few were in position to interfere when our dive bombers arrived.

The dive bomber attack was intended to coincide with the torpedo attack, and very nearly did so. Whether the torpedo squadrons would have been spared such severe losses if the dive bombers had come 2 or 3 minutes sooner is an unanswerable question. At any rate, the few surviving torpedo planes were scarcely clear when the dive bombing squadrons from both the *Enterprise* and the *Yorktown* began their attack.

The *Enterprise* air group, like that of the *Hornet*, had failed to find the enemy carriers in the expected position because of their reversal of course. But their group commander, Lt. Comdr. Clarence W. McClusky, Jr., making "the most important decision of the entire action," turned northward. After searching for 45 minutes from an altitude of 19,000 feet, he sighted the Japanese force at 1002. Four carriers were observed, and (both *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* pilots were definite on this point) no damage was visible at the initial contact or during their dive. At 1022 the attack was made by sections on two

of these carriers on the west of the formation. The group commander's section and VS-6, each plane of which was armed with one 500-pound and two 100-pound bombs, took as their target the carrier to the northwest. This ship (probably the *Kaga*) lay on the left as our planes approached from the south. At least eight direct hits were observed. The planes of the first division of VB-6, each armed with one 1,000-pound bomb, took the carrier to the right, which they believed was the *Akagi*, and scored at least three hits. Both carriers burst into flame. The second division, which had temporarily withheld its attack, now dove on the carrier to the left. Several hits with 1,000-pound bombs produced violent explosions. The third division attacked both carriers, scoring further hits.



Antiaircraft fire was light and there was no fighter opposition until after bombs had been dropped because of the preceding torpedo attack, which had drawn down the enemy fighters. As the dive bombers pulled out, however, they were attacked by Zero and Messerschmitt type fighters and were at the same time subjected to concentrated antiaircraft fire from the screening vessels. Of the 33 SBD's, 18 failed to return, but it is thought that most of these were forced down on the water when they ran out of fuel.

At the same moment that the *Enterprise* squadron was attacking the two enemy carriers to the west, the one to the east was under attack by *Yorktown* planes. This squadron (VB-3) consisted of 17 scout bombers, each with one 1,000-pound bomb. It had proceeded with the rest of the *Yorktown* attack group and had sighted the enemy at about 1000. At 1020 it had lost contact with the torpedo squadron, which was then attacking. At 1025 VB-3 was ordered to attack. From about 14,500 feet the bombers opened their dive on a carrier which pilots believed was of the *Akagi* class. The carrier was turning southward into the wind in an attempt to launch her planes. As the first Japanese plane started to take off our first bomb exploded in the midst of the planes assembled on deck, turning the after part of the flight deck into a mass of flames. Five direct hits and three near hits followed as our planes dove from the south on the ships' fore-and-aft line. Four planes of the squadron, seeing the carrier so badly damaged, transferred their attack to a cruiser and a battleship nearby, scoring a hit on the stern and a near hit on each. The battleship was left smoking and the cruiser stopped. There was no fighter opposition until after the dive, and our planes withdrew at high speed low over the water, dodging heavy antiaircraft fire. The entire squadron returned safely to the *Yorktown*.

The fighters which accompanied the *Yorktown* group were too heavily outnumbered to give full protection. They did, however, shoot down six Zeros and possibly a seventh. A torpedo bomber rear gunner was seen to shoot down an eighth. Of the fighters, two planes were lost, one crash-landed on the *Hornet*, and the rest returned to the *Yorktown*.

The results of Midway's and our carriers' attacks of June 4th on the enemy's striking force were as follows:

- 3 carriers: *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu* set on fire and ultimately destroyed.
- 2 battleships: one 1,000-lb. hit, one a mass of flames.
- 1 light cruiser or destroyer: one 1,000-lb. hit, believed destroyer sunk.

The fourth carrier, the *Hiryu* had withdrawn to the north undamaged.

Badly as it had been hit, the *Soryu* survived the bombing to receive its *coup de grace* from a submarine. Our submarines had been notified that morning of the Japanese attack force northwest of Midway, and nine were ordered to close the enemy. The *Grouper* found the enemy force, but did not attack because of plane and depth-bomb attacks. The *Nautilus*,<sup>21</sup> after doggedly trailing a force of enemy battleships and cruisers, made an unsuccessful attack and was heavily depth charged in return. Then at 1029 she sighted columns of smoke on the horizon, coming from the enemy carriers which had just been dive-bombed by our carrier forces. Upon closing, the *Nautilus* encountered the *Soryu*, now on even keel with the hull apparently undamaged. She was smoking, but there were no flames and the fires seemed under control. She was making 2-3 knots, accompanied by two cruisers when the *Nautilus* approached and at 1359 fired three torpedoes into her. The cruisers at once made a heavy depth-charge attack. When this passed the *Nautilus* rose to periscope depth and found the carrier completely aflame and abandoned. She sank at 1840.

The *Yorktown*'s bombers had not been on board long after their return from attacking the enemy

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21 Commanded by Lt. Comdr. William H. Brockman, Jr.

carriers when they were ordered to get clear. The *Yorktown* was about to be attacked. Our planes took off to the eastward and subsequently landed on the *Enterprise*, except for two planes which were forced by lack of fuel to land on the water.

### THE ATTACK ON THE *YORKTOWN*, JUNE 4

0815 Our carriers probably sighted by enemy seaplane.  
1159 *Yorktown* radar detects enemy planes.  
1208 Dive bombers attack *Yorktown*.  
1427 Radar picks up enemy planes.  
1441 Torpedo planes attack *Yorktown*.  
1445 *Yorktown* hit.  
1455 *Yorktown* abandons ship.

It was on the same eventful day, June 4th, that the *Yorktown* suffered the first two of the three attacks which ultimately sent her to the bottom. The first of these was made by dive bombers, the second by torpedo planes.

At 0815 that morning, while our carriers were launching their last planes for the attack on the Japanese striking force, the radar of Task Force SUGAR detected a Japanese twin-float seaplane 36 miles to the south. It is thought that this plane reported the position of our carriers—probably the first intimation the enemy had of their presence.<sup>22</sup> At that time the Japanese bombers were returning from Midway. Undoubtedly the enemy intended to launch a second attack, this time directed at our carriers, as soon as his planes could be refueled and rearmed. But the attack of our torpedo squadrons came just in time to prevent his launching, and our dive bombing attack caught a large number of his planes on deck.

However, one of the enemy carriers, the *Hiryu*, remained undamaged and had withdrawn to the north. It was from this ship that the planes came to attack the *Yorktown*.

At 1130 the *Yorktown* sent out 10 scout bombers, each with one 1,000-pound bomb, to search between 280° and 20° to a distance of 200 miles for the fourth Japanese carrier. Three hours later (1430) while the *Yorktown* was under attack by torpedo planes, a plane of this group discovered the *Hiryu* and made a report which enabled the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet* to attack her.

About the same time that this search group was launched, a combat air patrol of 12 fighters took off. The patrol of 6 planes which was thus relieved, and the surviving 4 fighters of the escort force which had just returned were on deck being refueled when at 1159 radar picked up a large number of planes, estimated at 30 or 40, on bearing 250° at a distance of 46 miles. There seemed to be 5 groups, apparently climbing as they approached.

Immediately refueling operations were suspended. The 16 VSB planes which had recently returned from attacking the Japanese carriers and were still in the landing circle were ordered to clear the ship.

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<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the enemy did not know of the presence of our carriers until we attacked. He was first heard to ask our carriers' position 4 minutes after our planes approached his carriers.



*Direct hit on the Yorktown by Japanese dive bombers on June 4th.*

Fuel lines were drained and CO<sup>2</sup> introduced under pressure. An auxiliary gasoline tank on the stern was dropped overboard.

Our fighters were ordered out in two waves to intercept the approaching planes. At 15 or 20 miles they encountered about 18 single-engine Bakugeki type 99 Navy dive bombers and 18 fighters at 8,000-10,000 feet. So effective were our fighters that only 8 bombers broke through to meet the formidable screen of anti-aircraft fire thrown up by our ships.

When the attack took place the *Yorktown* was accompanied by two cruisers, the *Astoria* and *Portland*, and five destroyers, the *Hammann*, *Morris*, *Russell*, *Anderson*, and *Hughes*, cruising in disposition "Victor".<sup>23</sup> Radius of the screen was one mile, speed 25 knots. The course and axis of the force were 225°, but as the enemy planes came into sight on bearing 255° course was changed to 110°, then to 145°. When at 1206 fire was opened at a range of 9,000 yards the *Portland* on the *Yorktown*'s starboard bow and the *Astoria* on her starboard quarter were near the line of attack and had a clear field of fire.

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<sup>23</sup> Disposition "Victor" is a circular formation for meeting air attack. Each screening vessel is on an assigned true bearing from the carrier at the center. As the carrier maneuvers, the screening vessels conform to maintain their distance and true bearing (though not their relative position) from the carrier.



Since only eight bombers succeeded in evading our fighters, our gunners had to choose individual targets rather than lay a barrage.<sup>24</sup> One plane was shot down soon after coming within range. As the next plane came in and dove to its bomb release point it was cut to pieces by anti-aircraft fire, but its bomb tumbled on the *Yorktown's* deck just abaft the number two elevator. The third plane dove and was hit at the instant its pilot released his bomb, which fell so close astern that fragments wounded gunners on the fantail and started small fires, while pieces of the plane fell in the *Yorktown's* wake. Three planes dove from the port beam and released their bombs before our gunners found them. Two bombs were misses, one wide and one close to starboard, but the third hit the deck on the starboard side and penetrated the uptakes, where it exploded. The plane which dropped it crashed into the sea beside the ship. A seventh plane circled and dove from ahead. The bomb, dropped an instant before the plane was shot down, hit the number one elevator and exploded above the fourth deck, starting a fire. The last plane missed on the starboard beam. Three hits had been made.

It was all over by 1215. Not one of the bombers escaped.<sup>25</sup> The *Yorktown* was smoking heavily and had come to a stop. Her screening vessels circled her at 2,000 yards, zigzagging at high speed. An hour later (1320) they were joined by the *Vincennes*, *Pensacola*, *Benham*, and *Balch* from Task Force SUGAR.

Damage to the *Yorktown* proved not to be serious. The first bomb, mentioned above, blew a hole 10 feet in diameter in the flight deck. It killed and wounded many men on 1.1-inch gun mounts 3 and 4, as well as those on machine guns at the after end of the island and in the hangar. It set fires in planes on the hangar deck, some of which were loaded with torpedoes, but the prompt release of the sprinkler system by Lt. Alberto C. Emerson prevented a serious conflagration.

The second bomb, coming from the port side, went through the flight deck on the starboard side, and, still traveling outward to starboard, penetrated the uptakes, where it exploded just above the third deck level. It was this hit which stopped the *Yorktown*. The concussion extinguished the fires in all boilers except number one. It also wrecked the Executive Officer's office and ignited paint on the stack. It ruptured the uptake from 1, 2, and 3 boilers in the forward fire room and completely disabled boilers 2 and 3. All boiler rooms were filled with smoke, as No. 1 boiler was discharging through the ruptured uptake into the air intake. Steam pressure dropped and the *Yorktown* lost speed. However, the personnel of No. 1 boiler remained at their station despite heavy smoke and gas and kept it going. When the throttle was closed, this single boiler was able to maintain pressure for the auxiliary equipment. The third bomb, probably an 800-pounder, struck on the starboard side and penetrated to the fourth deck, where it exploded and started a fire in a rag stowage space. This was near a 5-inch magazine, which had to be flooded, and near a gasoline tank, which was protected by CO<sup>2</sup>.

Repairs were made quickly. The hole in the flight deck was covered in less than half an hour. By 1340 repairs to the uptakes permitted the other boilers to be cut in, except for Nos. 2 and 3, which were disabled. By 1350 the ship was in condition to do about 20 knots, and fires were sufficiently under control to permit refueling of fighters on deck.

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<sup>24</sup> Reports of the action, while agreeing in essentials, vary considerably in detail. This account depicts the bombing as seen from the *Yorktown*.

<sup>25</sup> According to some reports, one plane may have got away.

Fueling of these planes had just begun when at 1427 the *Pensacola*, which had assumed radar guard after the *Yorktown* was damaged, picked up enemy planes bearing 340°, distance 33 miles. There was already in the air a combat patrol of six *Yorktown* fighters which had rearmed and refueled on board the *Enterprise*. Four of these were vectored out to intercept the enemy, and in a few seconds the other two followed. The first four, flying at 10,000 to 12,000 feet, overran the enemy planes, which were coming in at 5,000 feet, and had to turn back to find them. The other two met the Japanese 10 to 14 miles out.

Meanwhile on the *Yorktown* fueling of the planes on deck was hastily suspended and CO<sup>2</sup> again introduced into the gasoline system. Of the 10 fighters on deck, 8 had sufficient gasoline to go into action. The fourth of these was being launched when the *Yorktown*'s port battery opened fire, and the vessels to starboard of the *Yorktown* had to hold their fire till our own planes got clear.

When this attack developed the *Yorktown* was screened by the two cruisers and five destroyers of Task Force FOX, and by the *Vincennes*, *Pensacola*, *Balch*, and *Benham*, which had been sent from Task Force SUGAR after the first attack on the carrier. This force was in "Victor" formation on course 90°, so that the attack came from port or the port quarter. The *Yorktown*'s speed had been gradually increased to about 20 knots.

The planes which our fighters intercepted at about 12 miles distance proved to be 12 to 16 type 97 Kogekiki (Navy torpedo bombers), escorted by about the same number of fighters. Our fighters shot down 5 to 7 of the torpedo planes before our ships opened fire. About 8 came on, one of which fell soon after coming within range of our anti-aircraft fire.

When fire was opened, the *Pensacola* and *Portland* were on the side of the screen advanced toward the attack. The approaching planes were in two groups. One of five headed to pass astern of the *Pensacola* toward the *Yorktown*, and two or three to pass ahead of her. They had already started their glide when our vessels to port of the *Yorktown* opened fire at 1441 at a range of 12,000 yards. The curtain of fire thrown up by our ships was so heavy that it seemed impossible for a plane to pass through it and survive. Indeed, according to some reports, a few enemy planes circled outside, not daring to come in. Seven or eight, however, came through. As they passed our screening vessels our gunners followed them even though our own ships lay beyond in the line of fire. It seems that only four or five survived long enough to drop their torpedoes. Two of these the *Yorktown* avoided by skillful maneuvering, so that they passed under her bow. Two others, however, could not be avoided, and they caught her amidships on the port side. The two explosions at 1445 were about 30 seconds apart. The planes which scored these hits were shot down either in passing the *Yorktown* or in attempting to pass through the fire of her escorting vessels. It is believed that not one of the attacking squadron returned to its carrier.<sup>26</sup>

By 1447 firing ceased. The *Yorktown*, listing heavily to port, was losing speed and turning in a small circle to port. She stopped and white smoke poured from her stacks. The screening vessels began to circle.

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<sup>26</sup> According to some reports, one or two may have escaped. One was seen leaving with one of our fighters in pursuit.

Inside the *Yorktown* all lights had gone out. The Diesel generators were cut in, but the circuit breakers would not hold and the ship remained in darkness. The list gradually increased to 26°. Without power nothing could be done to correct it. The Commanding Officer and the Damage Control Officer thought it probable that the ship would capsize in a few minutes, and at 1455 orders were given to abandon ship. Inside, men clambered over steeply sloping decks in total darkness to remove the wounded. After an inspection on which no living personnel were found, the Commanding Officer left the ship.

Destroyers closed in to pick up survivors.

#### THE FOURTH JAPANESE CARRIER, JUNE 4

1130 *Yorktown* launches search group.  
1430 Position of *Hiryu* reported.  
1530 *Enterprise* launches 24 VSB.  
1603 *Hornet* launches 16 VSB.  
1705 *Enterprise* squadron attacks CV.  
1730 *Hornet* squadron attacks BB, CA.

Revenge for the *Yorktown* was not long in coming. That forenoon at 1130, shortly before the first attack on her, the *Yorktown* had launched a search group of 10 scout bombers. At about 1430, almost at the moment that the *Yorktown* was undergoing the torpedo attack, Lt. Samuel Adams, reported an enemy force of 1 aircraft carrier, 2 battleships, 3 heavy cruisers and 4 destroyers, course north, speed 20 knots, position, latitude 31°15' N., longitude 179°05' W.

At 1530 the *Enterprise* began launching an attack group of 24 scout bombers, 14 of which were from the *Yorktown*. Of the 24, 11 were armed with one 1,000-pound bomb each and 13 with one 500-pound bomb each. The *Hornet* at 1603 began launching a squadron of 16 scout bombers.

At 1650 the *Enterprise* squadron sighted the enemy force, now on course 280° and well spread out. Off to the south could be seen three columns of smoke marking the three carriers attacked earlier that day. There were only 6 to 12 Zeros to oppose our planes, but they shot down one of our attacking planes before it began its dive, and two as they were pulling out. A few minutes later our planes dove in from the sun from 19,000 feet. Six direct hits were made on the *Hiryu*, which was soon a mass of flames. Others of our bombers gave their attention to a battleship, which they hit twice.

Less than half an hour later the *Hornet* squadron arrived. By this time the carrier was burning so fiercely that it was no longer a useful target, and the attack was diverted to a battleship and a cruiser. Three hits, two of which were by 1,000-pound bombs, were scored on the former, and two 500-pound bomb hits on the cruiser. All planes of the *Hornet* squadron returned from the attack.

With the bombing of the fourth Japanese carrier we had won control of the air; but it was not yet certain whether there was a fifth enemy carrier to be reckoned with.



## THE ATTACKS FROM MIDWAY, JUNE 4

1500 Four B-17's take off.  
1600 Two B-17's take off.  
1610 B-17's from Oahu ordered to target.  
1710 Four B-17's attack CA.  
1810 Two B-17's attack BB and damaged CV.  
1830 Six B-17's attack damaged CV and DD.

Midway had received the first blow of the day, and the battered island was to strike the last. But in the interval were hours of acute anxiety. During the forenoon our patrol planes continued to report enemy vessels. At 0843 a plane reported four cruisers, two cargo ships, two tankers, and many destroyers bearing 265°, distance 400. At 0910 another reported eight cruisers, bearing 265°, distance 320. At 0951 a third reported a large vessel, possibly an aircraft carrier, and a destroyer, bearing 262°, distance 330.

Only fragmentary news of our attack on the enemy carriers had come in. At 0900 Lt. Col. Sweeney had reported that the B-17 attack was completed and one enemy carrier had been damaged. At 0930 the report came that only one TBF and two B-26's had returned. They had launched their torpedoes at carriers but had been unable to observe results. At 0958 the Marine dive bomber group reported two hits on a carrier and one on a battleship. Before noon (1115) there was an air-raid alarm, and the seven B-17's that were fueled and ready for flight took off for Hickam Field. This left only eight on Midway, of which four were immediately fit for service. Later two more were repaired.

In the words of Capt. Logan C. Ramsey, Air Defense Operations Officer, "At this time (early afternoon) things looked very black. While the reports of damage to Japanese carriers are noted as being made earlier, those from the Marine air group were made by voice to Eastern Island and had not been received at the command center. Our estimate at this time was as follows: One Japanese carrier had been damaged by the Army. The losses of the Marine air group were so heavy that it appeared their attack had been broken up before reaching the enemy. The *Yorktown* had been hit...[The enemy forces reported by our patrol planes] were all boring in. Three enemy carriers appeared to be left to deal with Task Force SUGAR...It appeared that it was quite possible we would be under heavy bombardment from surface vessels before sunset." Arrangements had been made to evacuate nonessential personnel and some planes when news of our attacks on the enemy carriers drastically and happily changed the picture.

Refueling and servicing of planes was extremely slow because of damage to the gasoline system and other equipment. This prevented the striking force which remained from making repeated attacks on the enemy during the afternoon. The four serviceable B-17's, commanded by Lt. Col. Sweeney, were ordered at 1500 to attack the enemy convoy approaching on bearing 265°, thought then to be about 265 miles distant. En route to this target orders were received to attack a carrier on bearing 334°, 185 miles distant from Midway. The carrier found in this area was burning and appeared to have been abandoned. A nearby battleship was also burning. Consequently, it was decided to attack a heavy cruiser. They

reported that at least one hit was scored, and the ship was left smoking heavily. A transport was also attacked, with unobserved results.

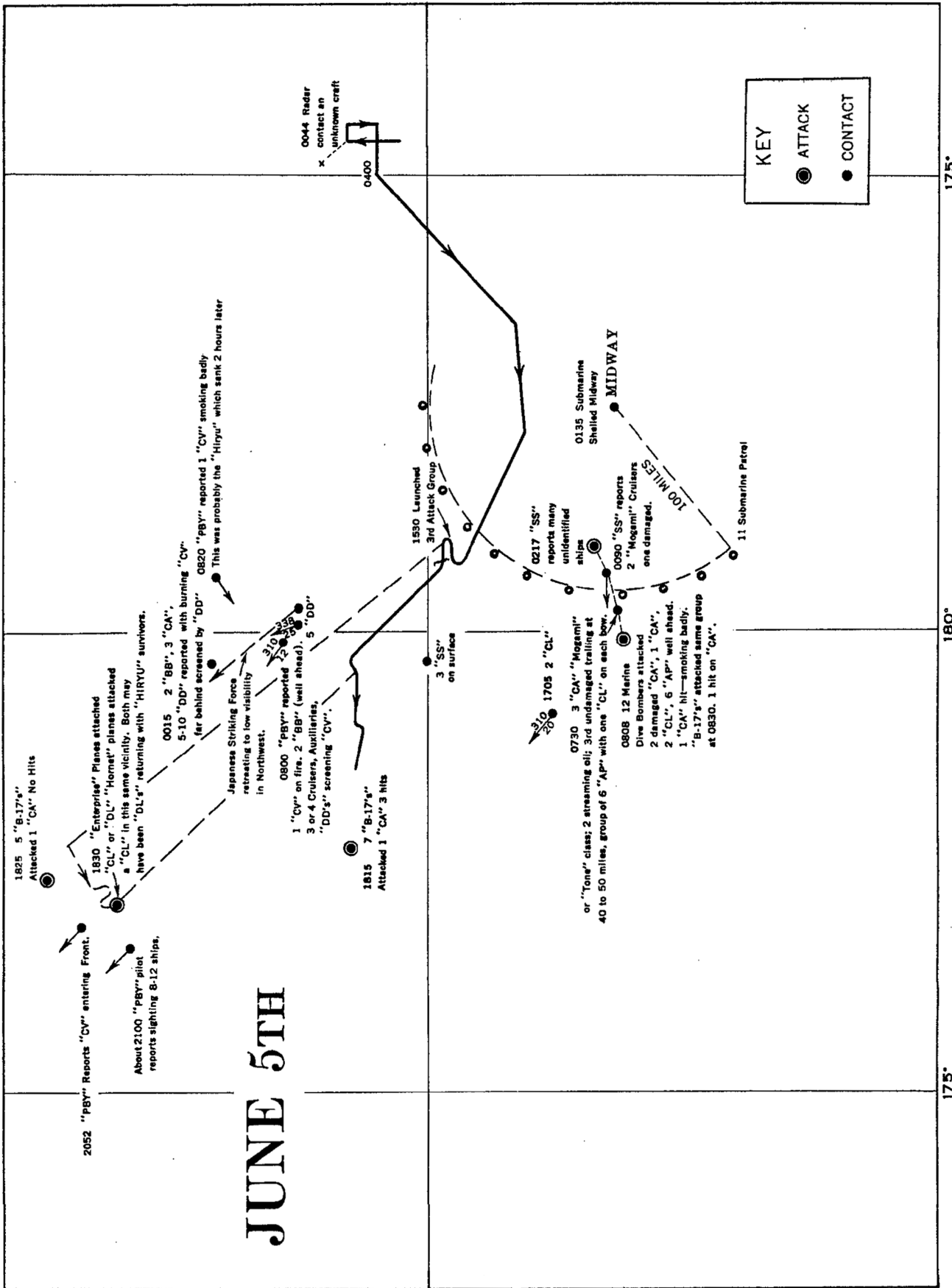
Two B-17's, delayed by engine trouble, took off an hour later under the command of Capt. Carl E. Wuertele, U.S.A. Air Corps. These planes found what was evidently a part of the same enemy force. In view were two damaged carriers, two battleships or heavy cruisers, and six or eight light cruisers or destroyers. Bombing from 9,600 feet, the B-17's reported that they hit a battleship twice and dropped two more bombs on a damaged carrier.

While these two planes were bombing the battleship, six more B-17's were seen below. This squadron, commanded by Maj. George A. Blakey, U.S.A. Air Corps, was en route from Molokai to Midway when it was ordered at 1610 to attack before landing. To save gas, it attacked from its cruising level of 3,600 feet. This was about 1830. Several enemy *Zero* fighters, possibly from the *Hiryu*, were encountered and four were shot down. The Fortresses reported that they scored a hit on a damaged carrier and on a destroyer and strafed the decks of several ships as they passed. They reached Midway after sundown.

Midway made other less successful attempts that evening. When burning enemy carriers were reported bearing 338°, distance 200 at 1700, Major Norris (C.O. VMSB-241) was ordered to attack with all available dive bombers. In order to avoid enemy fighters it was decided to delay the attack until night. Because the B-17's were serviced and fueled first, this squadron was not ready till 1900. Then the six remaining flyable SBD's under Capt. Marshall A. Tyler, USMC, and 5 SBU-3's under Major Norris took off. Rain squalls and clouds were encountered and the enemy force was not found. All planes returned safely except that of Major Norris, which plunged into the sea on the return.

About 1930 the 11 PT boats left Midway to attack the damaged carrier and other Japanese forces in the same locality. Although the squally weather and bad visibility provided excellent conditions for such an attack, it also prevented the finding of the target. Having found nothing before dawn, the PT's returned to Midway on June 5th. In the morning a Japanese scout-observation plane strafed and bombed one of the boats without causing any serious damage.





June 5

## PURSUIT OF THE FLEEING, JUNE 5

### *Task Force SUGAR*

- 0045 Task Force SUGAR changes course to avoid possible contact.
- 0215 Submarine *Tambor* sights ships 90 miles west of Midway.
- 0420 Task Force SUGAR sets course to close Midway.
- 0600 *Tambor* reports (to Midway and Honolulu) 2 *Mogami* type cruisers bearing 272°, 115 miles from Midway, course 270°.
- 0630 Patrol plane reports two battleships (possibly *Mogami* cruisers) damaged and streaming oil, bearing 264°, distance 125 miles, course 268°.
- 0719 Patrol plane reports five ships bearing 325°, distance 200 miles, course 338°.
- 0800 Patrol plane reports two BB, one CV, on fire, three CA bearing 324°, distance 240 miles, course 310°.
- 0820 Patrol plane reports a CV, bearing 335°, distance 250 miles, course 245°.
- 1100 Task Force SUGAR sets course at 300° to close enemy force to northwest.
- 1500 Carriers launch planes.
- 1804 Planes attack a light cruiser or destroyer.

The Battle of Midway was decided on June 4th with the destruction of the enemy's air power. The 2 succeeding days were devoted to destroying as large a part as possible of the fleeing enemy forces. In this endeavor our success was limited. On the 5th our carrier-based planes made only one unimportant contact, and planes from Midway were responsible for the only damage inflicted on the enemy that day.

There were several reasons for the lack of success on the part of our surface forces on the 5th. The necessity for a conservative policy and concern for the defense of Midway were in a sense fundamental. The delay in reports which revealed the true situation was more directly responsible, and finally, generally reduced visibility, particularly to the north where the enemy's striking force was fleeing, prevented the location of some targets.

During the night of June 4th the situation was by no means clear. As noted above, that evening Major Blakey's six B-17's attacking a burning carrier and other Japanese ships at about 1830 had encountered several Zeros. These may have been left in the air from the *Hiryu*, which had been attacked and set afire about an hour and a half earlier, but the possibility of a fifth carrier operating in the vicinity could not be disregarded. Neither was it certain that the loss of their air support would deter the Japanese from attempting a landing on Midway. There were indications that they were still coming, and at 2115 on the 4th our submarines were ordered to form on a circle at radius 100 miles from Midway. They were to arrive on station and dive before dawn.

Task Force FOX moved off to the eastward during the night and did not participate in the action on the 5th. Admiral Fletcher detached the *Hughes* to stand by the damaged *Yorktown*, with orders to prevent anyone from boarding her and to sink her if necessary to prevent her capture or if a serious fire should break out.

Task Force SUGAR moved to the east and then back to the west during the night. At sunset clouds began to gather. After the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* had recovered their planes the force followed an easterly course till 2400, when course was changed to 000°. At 0044 a radar contact caused “some unscheduled movements,” first to the east and then to the south. At 0200 course was altered to 270°. As Admiral Spruance explains in his report, “I did not feel justified in risking a night encounter with possibly superior enemy forces, but on the other hand, I did not want to be too far away from Midway in the morning. I wished to have a position from which either to follow up retreating enemy forces or to break up a landing attack on Midway. At this time the possibility of the enemy having a fifth CV somewhere in the area, possibly with his occupation force or else to the northwestward still existed.”

About 0217 the submarine *Tambor* reported “many unidentified ships” about 90 miles west of Midway. When this report was relayed to our ships, to Admiral Spruance “this looked like a landing, so we took a course somewhat to the northwest of Midway at 25 knots. As the forenoon drew on, reports began to come in which indicated a retreat and not an attack. While I had not believed that the enemy, after losing four carriers and all their planes, would remain in an offensive frame of mind, still that possibility could not be overlooked, especially with the uncertainty about a fifth carrier in the area. The *Tambor*’s report might mean only that the retirement order had been slow in being issued or had failed to reach the ships sighted.” Therefore at 0420 course was set at 230° to close Midway, and speed was increased to 25 knots.<sup>27</sup>

The commander of the *Tambor* at 0215 sighted and reported at once several ships with which he maintained contact till dawn before being able to identify them as hostile. He had been warned that our own ships might cross this area during the night, and his report of “many unidentified ships” was sent in the hope of being informed whether they could be ours. However, as we have seen, this report created the impression that the Japanese were coming in for a landing, and at 0715 a number of our submarines, already brought in to the 100-mile circle from Midway, were ordered in to a radius of 5 miles. As further information came in, this order was modified and the submarines involved formed on a 12-mile arc. With the approach of dawn, the *Tambor* was able to identify a part of the force as two *Mogami* type cruisers, which it reported as bearing 272° from Midway, distance 115 miles, course about 270°. At 0617 it received a receipt for this report from both Midway and Honolulu.

The morning of June 5th was overcast and visibility poor. Six o’clock found Task Force SUGAR on a southwesterly course about 130 miles northeast of Midway.<sup>28</sup> During the next 2½ hours Midway patrol planes reported a series of contacts which indicated that the two main groups of enemy forces were retiring in the directions from which they had come.<sup>29</sup>

The most important of these reports were as follows:

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27 In the early morning of June 5th the Commander of Task Force SUGAR sent the following dispatch: “The Japanese striking force attacked yesterday by TF SUGAR and FOX believed to have comprised four carriers, two battleships, four cruisers, five destroyers. Our attacks left the four carriers severely damaged and burning. At least one battleship and one heavy cruiser were seriously damaged and on fire. Other enemy vessels received undetermined damage. Our plane losses were heavy. Plan now to close Midway to attack enemy force believed 50 miles west of there. Cruisers and destroyers gave splendid support to the superb work of our carriers.”

28 Position lat. 29°50’ N., long. 175°44’ W.

29 Presumably these reports were intercepted by Task Force SUGAR, as similar reports had been on the previous day.

- 0630 2V55 reports two battleships (possibly the *Mogami* cruisers reported by Tambor) bearing 264°, distance 125 miles, course 268°, speed 15.
- 0632 2V55 reports ships damaged, streaming oil.
- 0700 4V51 reports two enemy cruisers, bearing 286°, distance 174, course 310°, speed 20.
- 0719 7V55 reports five ships bearing 325°, distance 200.
- 0735 7V55 reports five ships, course 338°, speed 25, lat. 310°15' N., long. 179°55' W.
- 0800 6V55 reports two battleships and one carrier afire, three heavy cruisers, bearing 324°, distance 240, course 310°, speed 12.
- 0815 6V55 reports cruiser and destroyer screening burning carrier, battleship well ahead.
- 0820 8V55 reports one carrier bearing 335°, distance 250, course 245°.

It appears from these reports that two enemy carriers were still afloat and had escaped to the north. One of these was almost certainly the *Hiryu* which, according to survivors, sank very shortly afterward. It has been suggested that the two reports (that of 6V55 at 0800 and that of 8V55 at 0820) dealt with the same carrier. However, the positions given are some distance apart, and one carrier was reported screened by several ships, while the other was apparently alone.

During the forenoon Task Force SUGAR followed a westerly course to the north of Midway. The only incident was the picking up of the crew of a patrol plane found on the water about 0900 by the *Monaghan*, which was then ordered to join the *Yorktown*.

“As the general situation (and the weather) cleared,” reports Admiral Spruance, “it became evident that a choice of objectives for chase and attack was the next matter for decision. We had reports of two groups, either of which contained good targets. One was to the west of Midway, the other to the northwest. I chose the one to the northwest. It was farther away, but it contained the crippled CV and 2 BB’s, one of them reported damaged.” However, about 500 miles to the northwest of Midway there was known to be a weather front, toward which the remnant of the enemy striking force was retreating. With a full night’s head start, the Japanese had an excellent chance of reaching it.

At 1100 course was changed to 300° to close this Japanese force, and, except for necessary changes when the carriers launched at 1500, this course was maintained till sunset at 1900. Then, shortly after the 180th meridian was crossed, course was altered to the westward.

The chase continued at 25 knots through the afternoon. At 1232 4 PT boats were sighted, returning from their unsuccessful night’s search for the enemy. At 1420 Admiral Spruance received from Admiral Nimitz a contact report of 2 battleships, 3 cruisers, 5 to 10 destroyers, 1 burning carrier and 1 carrier smoking badly in latitude 32° N., longitude 179°32’ E., as of 0800, course 310°, speed 12 knots. At about 1400 a flight of B-17’s passed over. Admiral Spruance signaled his intention of launching an attack about 1500. The planes did not reply, but were heard reporting the position of the Task Force to Midway. Later Admiral Spruance received the “disquieting information” that the B-17’s had failed to find the enemy force. His last report of the enemy’s position was based on a morning contact, and as the afternoon wore on prospects became less and less promising.

At 1500, when the enemy force was estimated to be about 230 miles distant, the *Enterprise* began launching 32 scout-bombers,<sup>30</sup> armed with one 500-pound bomb each. The *Hornet* followed at 1512

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30 From Bombing Squadron THREE, Bombing SIX, Scouting FIVE, and Scouting SIX.



by putting 26 scout bombers into the air. There was a heavy overcast, and visibility was poor. The *Enterprise* group pushed their search to 265 miles without making any contacts. On the return a light cruiser (*Katori* class) was sighted at 1830 and attacked. The cruiser maneuvered at full speed and its anti-aircraft fire was exceptionally heavy. Our planes made several near hits but could claim no direct hits. The *Hornet* group fared no better. After an unsuccessful 315-mile search, they attacked a light cruiser or destroyer at 1804. No hits were observed.

With fuel nearly exhausted by their long search, all planes returned safely except for one which landed out of gas near the *Enterprise*. Personnel were rescued by Aylwin. For most of the pilots this was the first landing on a carrier by night.

Our planes had found no enemy force for 250 miles ahead. Moreover, our task force was approaching the bad weather area into which it was futile to follow the Japanese forces. There remained the chance that the enemy striking force might turn west toward Japan, or southwest to join the transport forces. Admiral Spruance therefore fixed his course at 280° for the night and reduced speed to 15 knots, both to save fuel for the destroyers and to avoid overtaking any enemy battleships in the dark.

### ***Midway planes.***

0130	Midway shelled by submarine.
0415	Patrol planes take off.
0430	B-17's take off.
0630	MAG-22 ordered to attack enemy "battleships" to the west.
0805	MAG-22 attacks one of two <i>Mogami</i> cruisers.
0830	B-17's attack two <i>Mogami</i> class cruisers.
1305	7 B-17's (Flight 92) take off on second mission.
1545	5 B-17's (Flight 93) take off.
1815	Flight 92 attacks a cruiser.
1825	Flight 93 attacks a cruiser.

At Midway on the night of June 4th the same uncertainty as to the enemy's intention prevailed. The probability of a landing attempt seemed greater when at 0130 on the 5th a submarine shelled the island. Our batteries answered and claimed a hit. In the words of Captain Ramsey, "At this time our estimate of the situation was that he (the submarine commander) was following the original plan to create a diversion to cover the attack of a landing party. However, in view of the losses sustained by the Japanese, it was felt, when nothing further developed, that a retreat had been ordered and that the Japanese commander was the proverbial one who didn't get the word."

The night was spent in hard work. The gasoline system had not yet been repaired, and all available men from the Marine air group, Patrol Squadron FORTY-FOUR, and two raider companies worked all night loading 45,000 gallons of gasoline in 55-gallon drums and transferring it by hand pumps to the planes. In addition they hung 85 500-pound bombs.

About midnight two PBY-5A planes, each with a torpedo, were sent to attack the transport group to the west. Presumably they failed to find their target, for none of the available reports mentions them further, except that one requested MO's (radio signals on which they might take bearings) at 0510. At

0130 the submarine shelled Midway without causing any damage. At 0140 four B-17's no longer fit for combat left for Oahu. At 0300 all hands were called to the alert.

Shortly before dawn the search planes took the air. Search was concentrated in the sector 250° to 20° to a distance of 250 miles. Coverage was excellent, and within 2 hours contact reports began to come in.

The 12 remaining B-17's followed the patrol planes into the air at 0430. They were already on a westward course when they were ordered by radio to attack two "battleships" on bearing 270°. At 0615 these B-17's (Flight 92) reported their failure to find the target. They were told to return to Kure and await further orders. As more contact reports came in the B-17's eventually found the two ships, but not before they had already been bombed by the remnants of the Marine dive bombing squadron.

At 0630 the remaining planes of Marine Aircraft Group TWENTY-TWO were ordered to attack two enemy battleships (possibly the *Mogami* class cruisers), one of which was crippled, bearing 268°, distance 170 miles. Only 12 planes were fit for the mission, 6 SBD-2's under the command of Capt. Marshall A. Tyler, and 6 SB2U-3's commanded by Capt. Richard E. Fleming. The plan was for the first group to make a dive bombing attack from 10,000 feet, to be followed by the SBU's in a glide bombing attack from 4,000 feet.

These planes took off at 0700. Weather was clear with scattered clouds at 8,000 feet. After flying about 45 minutes they found an oil slick leading off to the west. Following this for 40 miles they found their targets and attacked at 0805. Captain Tyler's unit was at 10,500 feet and began nosing down to pick up speed when the ships were sighted. Choosing the damaged cruiser as their target, our planes soon met heavy and accurate antiaircraft fire. They had to weave and dodge on their approach, and some were buffeted about by the bursts. As they dropped their bombs several near hits probably inflicted additional damage on the ship, but no direct hits were observed.

The glide-bombing attack followed shortly. Captain Fleming's own section attacked from the stern. As he began his glide his plane was hit and smoke poured from his engine. He held to his glide, however, and released his bomb at 500 feet for a near hit at the stern. At the pull-out his plane burst into flames and he went down.<sup>31</sup> Other planes of the section kept cloud cover as long as possible on their glides.

The second section came in from the sun on the beam of the damaged cruiser. Two near hits were seen off the starboard bow, then a hit on the forward part of the ship. It was left listing and turning in circles to starboard as our planes returned low over the water, followed for some distance by antiaircraft fire. Only Captain Fleming's plane was lost, but two others were damaged by "flak."

Within a few minutes the Japanese cruisers were attacked again, this time by the B-17's commanded by Major Blakey. After some difficulty in finding their target, 8 of the 12 planes which left Midway sighted the Japanese cruisers at 0830. At this time the two ships were 4 or 5 miles apart. As our planes approached they turned to port to head south.

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31 Captain Fleming was the first Marine Corps aviator of this war to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. The medal, awarded posthumously, was presented by President Roosevelt to the flyer's mother on November 24th, 1942.

The first element of four planes took the cruiser to the right; i. e., to the north, coming in at 20,000 feet from the morning sun on a course of 270°. Their pattern of 19 500-pound bombs was well placed, yielding three near hits and two possible hits.

The second element took the ship to the south, also coming in from the sun. Antiaircraft fire was too low to be effective. Most of the pattern of twenty 500-pound demolition bombs fell 100 to 150 feet from the target, but one was seen to strike the stern.

Our Army pilots had little rest. After refueling and rearming, Flight 92, this time with 7 planes, took off again at 1305. Their objective was the two carriers reported to the northwest, distance 400 miles from Midway. As they flew northward visibility diminished and the enemy force was not found. On the return contact was made at 1815 with a large cruiser on a northerly course. The first element of four planes came in at 16,000 feet on a course of 85°, attacking from the ship's port bow. Thirty-two 500-pound demolition bombs fell with two reported hits and three near hits. The second element of three planes attacked from the east on the ship's starboard beam. One plane's bombs would not release. Of the 16 which were dropped, one is reported to have hit the target and one was a near hit. Antiaircraft fire was very light and did no damage.

The last attack of the day from Midway was made by five B-17's (Flight 93) commanded by Capt. Donald E. Ridings, which took off at 1545. Again the objective was the enemy carriers to the northwest. By this time clouds had gathered in the north to a heavy overcast at 12,000 feet, and Flight 93 had no better fortune than Flight 92 in finding their target. Their only contact was a cruiser which they found bearing 325° about 425 miles from Midway and which they attacked at 1825. The ship maneuvered violently and threw up heavy antiaircraft fire, which was ineffective at the 11,000 foot altitude from which our attack was made. Thirty-two bombs were dropped, with 2 near hits, but no direct hits were seen.

On the second run over the target the bomb bay gasoline tank fell with the bombs from Capt. Robert S. Porter's plane,<sup>32</sup> which left the formation. The squadron commander followed him down to render any aid he could, and saw him head for Midway. About 2330 the plane radioed "out of gas and landing" and was not seen afterwards. On the return the planes became separated in the clouds and could not find Midway until guided in by radar. Capt. Glen H. Kramer's plane exhausted its gasoline before reaching the island and landed 50 miles out at sea with the loss of Sgt. F. E. Durrett, radio operator. These two were the only B-17's lost in the entire Midway battle.

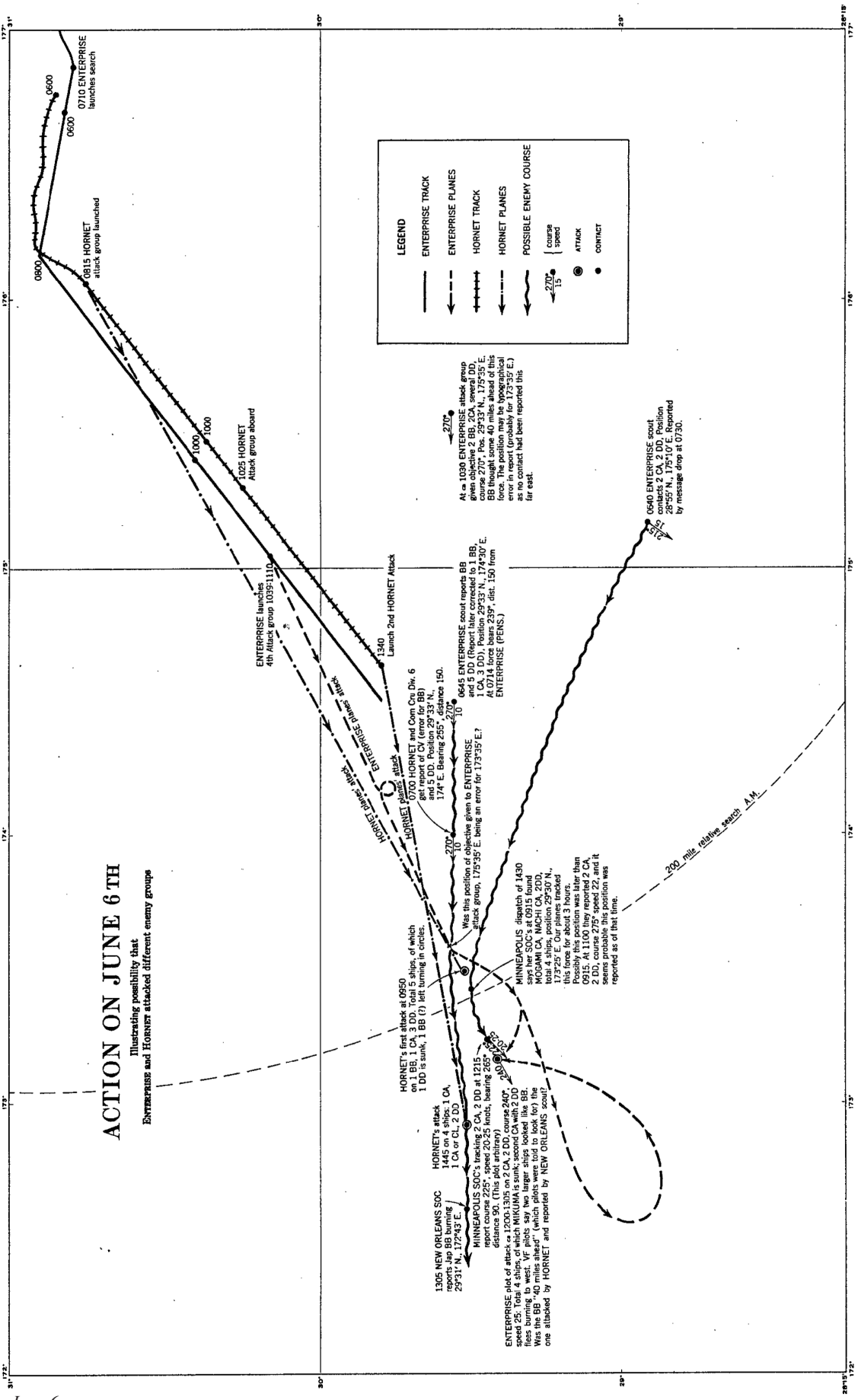
The results of the day's operations were reported as follows:

One heavy cruiser.....	1 hit
One heavy cruiser.....	1 hit
(Both hits may have been on the same cruiser.)	
One large cruiser.....	3 hits

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32 This was the "City of San Francisco," given by citizens of that city.





**ACTION ON JUNE 6TH**  
 Illustrating possibility that  
 ENTERPRISE and HORNET attacked different enemy groups

**LEGEND**

- ENTERPRISE TRACK
- ENTERPRISE PLANES
- HORNET TRACK
- HORNET PLANES
- POSSIBLE ENEMY COURSE
- ATTACK
- CONTACT

CONFIDENTIAL

## LAST CONTACTS, JUNE 6

- 0502 *Enterprise* launches search group.
- 0645 Plane reports enemy force of six ships, latitude 29°33' N., longitude 174°30' E.
- 0730 Plane reports by message drop two CA and two DD, latitude 28°55' N., longitude 175°10' E. (sighted 50 min. earlier).
- 0757 *Hornet* launches first attack group.
- 0950 *Hornet* group attacks.
- 1045 *Enterprise* launches attack group.
- 1150–1300 *Enterprise* group attacks.
- 1330 *Hornet* launches second attack group.
- 1445 *Hornet* group attacks.
- 1553 *Enterprise* launches photographic plane.
- 1640 Midway B-17's fail to find target, bomb submarine.

Through the night of June 5th Task Force SUGAR followed course 280° at a speed of 15 knots.<sup>33</sup> The morning of the 6th dawned clear, with a few light cumulus clouds. The sea was smooth and visibility excellent. A light wind from the southwest enabled our carriers to launch and recover with a minimum of deviation from the course the Task Force was to follow most of the day.

At 0502 the *Enterprise* launched a search group of 18 scout-bombers, each carrying one 500-pound bomb. These were to search to a distance of 200 miles to the west between 180° and 360°. At 0645 one of these planes found an enemy force on course 270°, position latitude 29°33' north, longitude 174°30'<sup>34</sup> east. This force was reported to consist of one battleship and five destroyers, but by a voice error "BB" was misunderstood as "CV", and it was at first reported to Admiral Spruance that the enemy force contained a carrier.<sup>35</sup>

At about 0730 another plane reported by message drop<sup>36</sup> a contact with two heavy cruisers and two destroyers, course 215°, speed 15, at latitude 28°55' N., longitude 175°10' E. This placed the second group about 50 miles southeast of the first. Our Task Force took as its target the group to the north which was not only closer but contained, as it was thought, a battleship.<sup>37</sup> The southern group was left

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33 A *Hornet* dispatch sent to Commander of Cruisers, Task Force SUGAR in the early morning of the 6th reads as follows: "Our air group yesterday (5 June) attacked only a single destroyer. No direct hits were observed. A large oil slick with men in it was seen. It appears that one enemy carrier capable of operating planes remains. Assume we are searching for it at present. Very disturbing to have so little information."

34 Some reports give this as 174°00'.

35 On the pilot's return he dropped a message on the *Enterprise* seemingly correcting the report to "one BB and five DD's," although Captain Mitscher of the *Hornet* writes that the returning pilot "reported correctly 5 BB, 1 CA, 3 DD by message drop and verbally." This is probably correct, as the plane landed on the *Hornet*. Admiral Spruance says that this force was subsequently found to consist of two heavy Cruisers (*Mogami* class), one light cruiser or destroyer, and two destroyers, but this is based on a reconstruction of the action which may be in error. Although minor discrepancies in reports are common, those of our pilots on the 6th contain more contradictions than usual, as will be seen. At 0843 the Commander of Cruisers remarks: "Composition of enemy force is still not clear."

36 When radio silence must be preserved the practice is for planes to return and drop a message to report contacts within 100 miles. A contact at a greater distance is reported when the plane returns from its search. In this case radio silence had already been broken in reporting the first contact.

37 At 0720, before the second contact report had been received, Admiral Kinkaid ordered the *Minneapolis* and *New Orleans* to launch

for attack by long-range planes from Midway.

At Midway the patrol planes took off as usual by 0430 on the morning of the 6th, searching the sector 220° to 330° to a distance of 600 miles. Visibility and coverage were excellent, but apparently the first information received at Midway was at 1030 when CINCPAC relayed to the island the contacts reported by the *Enterprise* scouts.<sup>38</sup>

Several additional B-17's had been sent to Midway on the 5th and 6th, so that 26 were now available. This entire group was dispatched at 1145 to attack the enemy ships at the southern contact. Despite the excellent visibility, none of these planes found the enemy force. At 1640, a flight of 6 B-17's flying at more than 10,000 feet sighted a vessel about 25 miles east of the expected target. Identification of the type was difficult from that height. The first element of 3 planes dropped 4 bombs each, which seemed to hit the target, for it disappeared in 15 seconds.

There was no attack signal and the second element did not attack except that the leader's two wingmen by mistake dropped bombs which fell wide of the now submerged target. Some pilots thought they had sunk a cruiser in 15 seconds.<sup>39</sup> Actually the "ship" was the submarine *Grayling*, which crash dived when the first bombs fell near her bow. Fortunately, she was not damaged. This was the only attack of the day by Midway planes.

Meanwhile, our Task Force had had considerably greater success.<sup>40</sup> At 0757, soon after receipt of the second contact report, the *Hornet* began launching an attack group of 26 scout bombers. Eight fighters were sent too as a precaution against possible air opposition. This group found the enemy force without difficulty. To pilots it appeared to consist of a battleship,<sup>41</sup> a heavy cruiser and three destroyers. Our planes attacked at 0950. The results were:

Two 1,000 pound hits.	\
One 500 pound hit.	on "battleship."
Two 1,000 pound misses within 50 feet.	/
Two 1,000 pound hits on heavy cruiser.	
One 500 pound hit on stern of a destroyer, which sank.	

Since there was no air opposition our fighters occupied themselves by strafing the destroyers, probably

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two SOC's each to locate and track the enemy force and advised that our Task Force would close the enemy reported at lat. 29°33' N., long. 174°30' E. The *Minneapolis* and *New Orleans* each launched two SOC's at 0746.

38 At 1030 Midway received from CINCPAC information fixing position of enemy: One battleship and five destroyers bearing 278°, distance 510, course 270°, speed 10; two heavy cruisers, two destroyers bearing 263°, distance 460, course 215°, speed 15.

39 Others suspected the truth in regard to the type of vessel and its disappearance.

40 The map, p. 43, illustrating the action on the 6th is based on the *Hornet* and *Enterprise* plots, except that *Hornet*'s plot is moved about 35' to the east to accord with the statement that the enemy was only about 110 miles distant at the time of the last attack, and with evidence that the two enemy groups were in proximity about noon. It is not in agreement with the composite chart of the battle which appears at the end of this narrative. The composite arbitrarily transposes positions to accord with the hypothesis that the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* attacked a single enemy force.

41 Pilots returned convinced that their "principal target" was a battleship, probably of the *Kirishima* class, and not a heavy cruiser, but a subsequent *Hornet* dispatch speaks of it as "a BB or possibly a CA." This dispatch also says that one of the ships attacked (apparently this BB or CA) was left turning in uncontrolled circles to the right. At 1305 an SOC from the *New Orleans* reported a battleship burning, position lat. 29°31' N., long. 172°43' E.



causing very heavy casualties. One bombing plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire during the attack, but the rest returned safely to the carrier by 1045. At once they were refueled and rearmed in preparation for a second attack.

This *Hornet* attack was followed by one from the *Enterprise*. Between 1045 and 1115 this carrier put into the air 31 scout bombers with one 1,000-pound bomb each, and 12 fighters for strafing.<sup>42</sup> Soon after these planes were in the air they were instructed by radio to search for a battleship believed to be about 40 miles ahead of the group. They were told further that three torpedo planes were being sent to join them. The force maneuvered to await the torpedo planes, but contact with them was never made, and the torpedo planes did not take part in the attack.<sup>43</sup> At 1200 the attack group passed at high altitude a force consisting of two heavy cruisers and two destroyers.<sup>44</sup> Some planes attacked almost at once, but most of the group continued about 30 miles farther in search of the battleship reported to be ahead of the group. In spite of the excellent visibility no ship was sighted, and our planes returned to attack the main group.<sup>45</sup>

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42 The objective was given as two BB, two CA and several DD at lat. 29°33' N., long. 175°35' E. course 270°, speed 15. Why it was thought at this time that the enemy force was so composed does not appear in the reports. The position appears to be an error for 173°35' E., toward which our planes actually headed.

43 These torpedo planes were ordered to attack only after the bombing attack. After failing to make contact with our bombing planes, they found an enemy ship independently and circled an hour awaiting our bombers which did not appear. Finally lack of fuel forced them to return to the *Enterprise*. This clearly indicates the presence of two enemy groups.

44 This is according to the report of Captain Murray. A separate report of Scouting SIX and Bombing SIX says they found one CA, one CL and two DD's. It will be remembered that the *Hornet* group had sunk one destroyer, reducing the enemy force to four ships. However, it will also be noticed that Captain Murray's description corresponds exactly to that of the group originally sighted to the south. This may be significant in view of the following considerations:

(1) This original "southern group" was not found in the expected position by Midway planes. Assuming that it had changed its course to the northwest sometime after being sighted, it might well have been in the position of the force found by the *Enterprise* attack group.

(2) The *Hornet* and *Enterprise* plots of this action do not agree.

(3) At 1100 a *Minneapolis* SOC reported: "Carrier sunk. Two CA's, two DD's on course 275° speed 22 knots." The report of the carrier may be explained by the fact that at the time the SOC was launched the enemy group was thought to include a carrier. When none was found, the pilots may have assumed that it had been sunk.

Subsequently the *Minneapolis* reported that its two planes had found the enemy at 0915 lat. 29°30' N., long. 173°25' E. Both pilots were quite certain that the four ships were *Mogami* class cruiser, a *Nachi* class cruiser, and two DD's. The only damage apparent was a slight oil leak from one CA and one DD. The pilots approached within 5 miles to make their identification and then circled the enemy group at 25 miles to make certain that there were only four ships. At 1545 all cruiser planes were ordered to return to their ships, but it is not clear whether the *Minneapolis* planes left the enemy force at once, for the report says that at 1215 the force was on a course of 225°. The planes returned to the cruiser at 1320, so that they may have remained tracking the enemy force till 1215. The report also remarks that the planes arrived after the first attack and left before the second.

It is difficult to say which enemy group the pilots were tracking. It is said that they arrived after the (*Hornet's*) first attack, which had sunk a destroyer, leaving two larger vessels and two destroyers; but if it was the group left by the *Hornet*, more damage ought to have been visible. Moreover, the SOC's found the enemy force at 0915, and the *Hornet* attack did not take place till 0950. The position given by the *Minneapolis* pilots is about 50 miles east of the point where the *Hornet* plot places its first attack, and, as may be seen from the accompanying chart makes it appear more probable that this group was the one attacked by the *Enterprise* at noon. The Commander of Cruisers, referring to the *Minneapolis* report, remarks: "This group was attacked by the *Enterprise* Group." But if the *Minneapolis* pilots remained on the scene after the order to return at 1145 they ought to have seen the beginning of the *Enterprise* attack.

45 At 1105 a PBY from Midway reported that it was investigating suspicious vessels bearing 280°, distance 500. At 1145 the same plane reported four unidentified ships being attacked by aircraft, bearing 277°, distance 525, course 200°, speed 30. At 1330 the same PBY reported that the force which it had previously described as an enemy battleship and cruiser was now opposed by friendly cruisers and destroyers, bearing 277°, distance 550. Apparently our plane had sighted both enemy groups and mistook one of them for friendly.



*Japanese Mogami class cruiser left "gutted and abandoned" after attack by our carrier-based planes on June 6th.*

The planes which had first begun the attack had taken as their target the heavy cruiser to the east, probably the *Mikuma*.<sup>46</sup> During this attack the vessels turned to starboard and so were heading north as our other planes approached. These planes came out of the sun from 21,000 feet and dove steeply on the target. Most took the heavy cruiser, but a few chose the "light" cruiser. Antiaircraft fire was heavy, but diminished after the first bomb hit. Altogether, five direct hits were made on the heavy cruiser, with two near hits. Admiral Nimitz writes as follows: "From the stories of survivors of *Mikuma* it appears that the first planes at 1140 hit and disabled the *Mikuma* and the last ones about 1300 finished her off when a bomb amidships detonated her torpedoes. The *Enterprise* group reported one CA as 'dead in the water, burning furiously with heavy explosions,' shattered and abandoned. If they had waited a few minutes their account would have been different. She keeled over and sank very soon after the last hit."<sup>47</sup> During the bombing attack our fighters strafed the destroyers, firing about 4,000 rounds of

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46 To the fighter pilots, who came very low, the two larger vessels appeared to be battleships, a natural mistake for *Mogami* class cruisers.

47 The story of the survivors of the *Mikuma* reads as follows: The first attack on the ship was on June 4th. "The following day the ship received no attacks, but on the 6th about noontime, she was again attacked by two-engine bombers [two-engine is obviously a mistake] and received hits on the fo'cas'le, bridge area and amidships. The hit on the fo'cas'le put the forward guns out of commission. The hit near the bridge area set off some ready service antiaircraft shells, causing considerable damage to bridge structure and personnel. Several torpedoes were exploded amidships by the hit in that vicinity. The ship caught fire and two destroyers tried to come alongside to rescue personnel, but were driven away and forced to abandon the attempt to rescue survivors when attacked by an additional flight of American aircraft. One of these destroyers received a hit on the stern and broke out into flames aft . . . [The prisoner] did not know if this destroyer sank. The *Mikuma* capsized and sank within an hour and a half after initial bombing this date . . ."

It will be noticed that, except for the story of the hit on the destroyer's stern, everything in this account indicates that the *Mikuma* was not bombed by both the *Hornet* and the *Enterprise* groups; i. e., the *Hornet* and the *Enterprise* did not attack the same enemy force. The initial bombing of the *Mikuma* was "about noon," i. e., the very time that the *Enterprise* planes that first abandoned the search for the battleship to the west began their attack. The "additional flight" of planes which drove away the rescuing destroyers are obviously those *Enterprise* planes which pushed their search farther before returning to attack.

Lt. Clarence E. Dickinson, Jr., of the *Enterprise* Scouting SIX describes this action on the 6th as follows: "The next day, the 6th, the *Hornet's* group was launched [and] attacked a big cruiser of the *Mogami* type, which, from the pictures and measurements we feel is probably at least double its listed 8,500 tons . . . Several hits were obtained. Then the *Enterprise* group was launched and found another group, which consisted apparently of another *Mogami* type cruiser, the *Mikuma*, and one other light cruiser and five destroyers." It is interesting that he assumed that our two carriers were attacking different groups, although his account of the composition of the group attacked by the *Enterprise* is probably mistaken.

*Enterprise* pilots upon their return generally believed that they had not attacked the same group attacked by the *Hornet*. The ships attacked by the *Hornet* had been reported moving slowly, while those attacked by the *Enterprise* were steaming at high speed.

.50-caliber ammunition into each. Large pieces of metal flew off, and there were explosions and fires on both.

The “light cruiser” (seemingly the *Mogami*) which had been behind the *Mikuma* also received several hits. When last seen she was smoking heavily but was moving westward at about 10 knots, leaving an oil slick behind her. She was accompanied by the two destroyers.<sup>48</sup>

After the *Enterprise* group returned, the *Hornet* launched its second attack group of the day—and the last of the battle, as it turned out. This group of 24 scout bombers armed with 1,000-pound bombs took off at 1330 to attack the enemy force now 110 miles away on bearing 264° from the *Hornet*. At 1645 this group found and attacked an enemy force which pilots described as consisting of four ships, a heavy cruiser, probably of the *Kinugasa* class, a second cruiser about which there was uncertainty as to whether it was heavy or light, and two destroyers.<sup>49</sup>

At 1325 the *New Orleans* recovered two SOC's. The pilots “reported seeing a CV and one DD sink, several DD's hit. CA still afloat. Reported position about 40 miles south of previously reported position of enemy.” The report appears unreliable, and it is difficult to know what they did see. Judging by the time they were recovered by the cruiser, they must have left the scene of action too early to have seen the results of the *Enterprise* attack. Moreover, the *Enterprise* group did not sink a destroyer and hit several, as there were only two destroyers in the group attacked by the *Enterprise*. Possibly they saw the results of the *Hornet*'s morning attack which did sink a destroyer. But no carrier was bombed or sunk at all, and the *Hornet* seemingly did not sink any large ship which could have been mistaken for a carrier.

There is a further argument supporting this view. On the evidence of a survivor of the *Mikuma*, both the *Mikuma* and the *Mogami* were in the same group. They were sister ships, presumably of the same size and general appearance. Now, while the attack pilots speak of a heavy cruiser and a light, only the *Enterprise* attacked an enemy group which by any report contained two large ships of the same type. It will be remembered that *Enterprise* fighter pilots thought that the two large ships looked like battleships, as *Mogami* class cruisers might very well. On the other hand, the *Hornet* pilots on their first attack thought they found a BB, a CA, and three DD; i.e., the two heavy ships were not of the same class either in the group attacked in the morning or afternoon.

A dispatch by the Commander of Task Force SUGAR at about 1330 remarks on the uncertainty concerning the position of the target and says that a second position has been reported some 40 miles

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Furthermore, the *Hornet* had reported several hits, but the group attacked by the *Enterprise* did not appear to have sustained any important damage.

48 Of this CINCPAC says, “The other CA, apparently the *Mogami*, was also hit but proceeded westward making an oil slick and smoking heavily. Two destroyers accompanied her.” A survivor of the *Mikuma* also confirms the fact that at the time the *Mikuma* sank the *Mogami* was on fire. This is evidence, too, that both ships were in the same group.

49 This could scarcely have been the same group that the *Enterprise* had attacked 3 or 4 hours earlier, for of that group the *Mikuma* had been sunk, leaving only a damaged cruiser (presumably the *Mogami*) and two destroyers. It fits perfectly, however, with the description of the group the *Hornet* had previously attacked. That consisted of a BB, a CA, and three DD's, of which one DD was sunk, leaving two larger ships of slightly different size and two destroyers. This is still further evidence that the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* were not attacking the same enemy group on the 6th and may explain the disagreement in their plots of the action.

southeast of the first. He suggests there may be two groups of targets. Apparently he is referring to the report of the *New Orleans*' scout, made five minutes before.

The results of the attack were reported to be:

- One 1,000-pound hit on the heavy cruiser.
- Six 1,000-pound hits on the second cruiser.
- One 1,000-pound hit on a destroyer.

The direct hit on the heavy cruiser caused very heavy explosions and it was left "completely gutted by fire, personnel abandoning ship."<sup>50</sup> The planes returned to the *Hornet* without loss at 1528.

Shortly afterwards the *Enterprise* launched two scout bombers at 1553 to photograph the damaged ship. These planes returned in a little over 3 hours with the excellent photograph reproduced with this narrative. It has hitherto been assumed that this was the *Mogami*, but if the view advanced in the footnotes is correct it could not be.<sup>51</sup>

Admiral Spruance writes of this as follows. "All through the day there had been no question in our minds that a BB was involved. That evening when questioning the pilots of the two photographic planes, I found one of them quite certain that a CA of the *Mogami* class, and not a BB, was involved. The photographs bore him out. The ship is the same as the one appearing in the 1940 Jane.<sup>52</sup> Everyone who saw this ship says she appeared to be much larger than a CA. From this fact and from her

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50 Of this CINCPAC writes that the *Hornet* group attacked "leaving the *Mogami* gutted and abandoned, and reporting hits on another CA or CL and one hit on a destroyer. A photographic plane, which obtained the pictures accompanying enclosure, while over the *Mogami* hulk about 1730 saw a CL and a destroyer fleeing to the westward."

In these footnotes it has been suggested that the *Hornet* and *Enterprise* were not attacking the same group of enemy ships. It appears that both the *Mikuma* and *Mogami* were in the group attacked by the *Enterprise* at noon and that it was the *Mogami* which fled burning and streaming oil accompanied by two destroyers. If this analysis is correct, the heavy cruiser left gutted and abandoned by the *Hornet*'s second attack was not the *Mogami*, though it may have been of the *Mogami* class.

This would mean, too, that more enemy ships were damaged than was previously supposed. So long as it was believed that both *Hornet* and *Enterprise* were attacking the same group, it was assumed that one attack merely added to the damage already inflicted by the other, and it had to be assumed that the other enemy group escaped without damage when the Midway planes failed to find it. The view here advanced means that both groups came under attack and received serious damage.

51 It seems probable that the ship photographed by the *Enterprise* planes was the cruiser left "gutted and abandoned" by the *Hornet*'s last attack; in fact, that was the only ship left in such a condition. The fact that the pilots of the photographic planes saw a CL and a destroyer fleeing westward confirms this, for there had been a smaller cruiser with the one left dead by the *Hornet*.

But as we have seen, this ship could not have been the *Mogami*, for the *Mogami* had not been in this group, but in the group attacked by the *Enterprise* at noon. Far from being left "gutted and abandoned" she had last been seen shortly after noon, damaged and burning, it is true, but proceeding westward under her own power at 10 knots. She was not, therefore, sunk as reported, but almost certainly returned damaged to Japan. It seems probable, however, that we did sink the ship photographed, which may have been of the same class.

The identification of the hulk photographed as the *Mogami* rested upon the assumption that the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* were attacking the same group. The *Mikuma* was known to have been sunk; therefore, the remaining large ship must (it seemed) necessarily be the *Mogami*. This seemed to be confirmed by the *Mikuma* survivor who said that the photograph could not be the *Mikuma*, which was damaged chiefly in the forward section. This identification collapses, however, if we assume that we have to deal not with one but with two groups of enemy ships.

52 It will be remembered that all four cruisers of the *Mogami* class, the *Mikuma*, *Mogami*, *Suzuya*, and *Kumano*, were in the Japanese supporting force. The fact that this ship was not the *Mogami* does not preclude its being another of the same class. It means merely that we sank not the *Mikuma* and *Mogami*, but the *Mikuma* and another of the same class.

toughness<sup>53</sup> I suspect that her displacement may be considerably in excess of 10,000 tons.<sup>54</sup> She was reported as definitely larger than the other cruiser accompanying her, which may have been a CL or DL . . . I believe the larger ship sank during the night.”<sup>55</sup>

The continued high-speed steaming had reduced fuel in the destroyers to a very low level. The *Maury* and *Worden* had to be detached for a rendezvous with the *Cimmaron* to refuel. This left only four destroyers to accompany two carriers. With Japanese submarines reported in the area it seemed unwise to go farther with such slight protection. A further consideration was that it would be dangerous to come within range of planes based at Wake, where the Japanese were known to have concentrated a large air force which they had expected to transfer to Midway. Consequently, the task force turned about and began to retire to the northeast.

The following day a message from Admiral Spruance summarized the action and added: “Our carrier air groups have done a magnificent job in spite of the heavy losses suffered on Thursday forenoon in the initial attack, which decided the fate of the Battle of Midway. Their follow-up blows on our retreating enemy were carried out with great determination. The Japs’ state of morale at the end of the battle was indicated by abandoning to their fate the crew of the *Mogami* class cruiser when the other ships of that group left without effecting rescue of personnel. The performance of our ships during this period leaves nothing to be desired. Task Forces SUGAR and FOX have again helped to make history. Well done to all hands.”

### END OF THE *YORKTOWN*, JUNE 7

June 5th:	1308	<i>Vireo</i> takes <i>Yorktown</i> in tow.
June 6th:	0200	<i>Hammann</i> , <i>Balch</i> , and <i>Benham</i> join.
	0415	<i>Hammann</i> puts salvage party aboard.
	0600	<i>Hammann</i> ties up alongside <i>Yorktown</i> .
	1335	Torpedo wakes sighted.
	1339	<i>Hammann</i> sinks.
	1845	Submarine sighted on horizon.
June 7th:	0501	<i>Yorktown</i> sinks.

The *Yorktown* had been abandoned on the afternoon of June 4th. That night the *Pensacola* and *Vincennes* departed to rejoin Task Force SUGAR, while Task Force FOX moved off to the eastward, except for the *Hughes*, which was detached to stand guard over the *Yorktown*. The intention was to transfer survivors from the destroyers to the *Portland*, which would then proceed to Pearl Harbor, while the *Astoria* and destroyers would return next morning to salvage the *Yorktown*. These plans were modified by a message from Admiral Nimitz that the *Fulton* had been dispatched to receive survivors.

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53 Her toughness may have been less than the Admiral supposed, since the ship did not take a pounding from both the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, as he imagined, but only from the *Hornet*'s two attacks.

54 Captain Murray of the *Enterprise* goes further: “A close scrutiny of the excellent photographs, the observations of an experienced photographer, and a direct comparison with our 8-inch cruisers, leads to the firm belief that this *Mogami* class heavy cruiser is in reality a battle cruiser of at least 20,000 tons.” It is easy to see why these cruisers were mistaken for battleships by our aviators.

55 There is no definite evidence of her sinking.





*Destroyers standing by the Yorktown as she rides low in the water.*



*Crew on the deck of the damaged Yorktown.*

Captain Buckmaster with 180 key officers and men therefore returned with the *Hammann*, *Balch*, and *Benham* to the *Yorktown*, while the rest of the task force moved on to refuel and subsequently to join the *Saratoga*.

Meanwhile, back at the *Yorktown* on the morning of the 5th the *Hughes* rescued two wounded men who had been overlooked when the darkened ship was abandoned, and also picked up a *Yorktown* fighter pilot who appeared in his rubber boat.

At 1135 the mine sweeper *Vireo* arrived. She had been standing by near Pearl Hermes reef awaiting orders when directed by CINCPAC on the afternoon of the 4th to proceed at once to the damaged *Yorktown*.<sup>56</sup> By 1308 she had the carrier in tow and headed for Pearl Harbor at about 3 knots. The load proved too heavy, however. She was unable to maintain this speed and by the next day was barely able to keep the *Yorktown* on her course. During the afternoon of the 5th the group was joined by the *Gwin*<sup>57</sup> and the *Monaghan*. The former had been en route to join Task Force SUGAR when her orders were modified and she was directed to proceed at 25 knots to join the *Yorktown*. The *Monaghan* had been detached from Task Force SUGAR. The *Gwin* put a salvage party aboard, but it could accomplish little before dusk, when it had to be removed.

At about 0200 on the 6th the *Hammann*, *Balch*, and *Benham* joined the screen circling the *Yorktown*. About 0415, as soon as there was sufficient light, the *Hammann* went alongside and transferred to the carrier a salvage party consisting of Captain Buckmaster, 29 officers and 130 men.

Captain Buckmaster had worked out a careful salvage plan. Fires were to be brought under control. The list was to be reduced by pumping and counterflooding and by cutting away all removable weights from the port side including 5-inch guns and aircraft. The remaining guns were to be made fit for action. The rudder was to be brought amidships to facilitate towing.

At 0600 the *Hammann* was directed to lie off the *Yorktown*'s starboard bow to supply foamite and water to fight the fire and power for operating submersible pumps. It was found impossible for the *Hammann* to lie clear and keep her position accurately, so that she was secured alongside forward on the *Yorktown*'s starboard side.

By afternoon considerable progress had been made. The fire in the rag storeroom had been put out. The water level in the engine room had been reduced somewhat, and in the third deck aft it had been lowered 3 feet. Two starboard fuel tanks had been flooded. One 5-inch gun had been cut loose on the port side and a second was almost ready for dropping. As a result, the list had been reduced some 2°.

At 1335 four torpedo wakes were sighted to starboard of the *Yorktown*. Two destroyers in the screen gave the emergency signal, while the *Yorktown* fired a gun and passed the word "Torpedo Attack!" In the minute which elapsed between the first sighting of the torpedoes and the explosion, the *Hammann* called to general quarters, Gunnery Officer Lt. (j g.) Charles C. Hartigan ordered the forward machine gunner to open fire on the torpedoes in the hope of detonating them before they arrived, the rear

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<sup>56</sup> The *Navajo* and *Seminole* were also dispatched to join the *Yorktown* but did not arrive before she sank.

<sup>57</sup> Under the command of Commander John M. Higgins.



machine gunner also took up the fire, and Captain True signalled full speed astern on the inboard engine in the hope of pulling clear.

The engines were just responding when the torpedoes struck. “The first torpedo appeared to pass under the *Hammann* in the vicinity of No. 2 gun and exploded against the side of the *Yorktown*. The second torpedo struck the *Hammann* in No. 2 fireroom. This torpedo apparently broke the ship’s back, as a pronounced sag was noted in this vicinity. Large quantities of oil, water and debris were blown high into the air, coming down on both the *Hammann* and *Yorktown*.”<sup>58</sup> Many, including Captain True, were temporarily stunned either by the force of the explosion or by being thrown violently against some object. The *Hammann* began to settle rapidly by the head, and the order to abandon ship was given at once.

Two torpedoes hit the *Yorktown* at the turn of her bilge below the island structure, while the fourth passed astern. The shock of the explosion was only slightly less severe than on the *Hammann*. The tripod foremast whipped sharply, shearing the rivets in the starboard leg which flew off like bullets. Overhead fixtures in the hangar crashed to the deck. Landing gear of planes collapsed as the decks heaved upward. Men were thrown against bulkheads or into the water. The hole torn in the *Yorktown*’s side apparently flooded the starboard firerooms, for the list was reduced to 17° and she settled a little.

The *Hammann* disappeared within 3 or 4 minutes of the first explosion, but in this time most of the crew managed to get clear. About a minute after the water closed over her stern there was a tremendous underwater explosion which killed many men and seriously injured more. The cause is unknown. Apparently it was caused either by one of the *Hammann*’s torpedoes (one or two survivors saw one running hot in its tube as the ship sank) or by her depth charges. These had all been set on safe when the *Hammann* first went alongside the *Yorktown*, and had again been checked only about half an hour before the attack. Moreover, B. M. Kimbrel, torpedoman first class, rechecked the depth charges after the torpedo struck, and remained to help stunned shipmates into life jackets and into the water. He probably died in the explosion he had tried to prevent.

Some destroyers rescued survivors from the *Hammann* and *Yorktown*, while others hunted the enemy submarine. The hunt lasted all afternoon with many contacts and depth charge attacks, one of which brought up heavy oil. At about 1845 a submarine surfaced on the horizon. The smoke from its Diesels was seen and the Monaghan and *Hughes* headed for it at full speed. A little later 5-inch gunfire was heard. The search continued several hours with no result except the discovery of an oil slick. It is believed that the submarine escaped with damage.

The *Yorktown* did not sink at once. Because the destroyers were occupied, it was decided not to attempt further salvage till next day. Before the *Vireo* took off those that remained of the salvage party, all watertight closures possible were secured, but many quick-acting doors had been sprung and warped by the explosions and many bulkheads weakened. Probably the pounding of the water broke through the center-line bulkhead, flooding the remaining third and fourth deck spaces amidship on the port side.

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58 Captain True’s description.

At 0330 on June 7th it was noticed that the list was increasing. At 0501 “she turned over on her port side and sank in about 3,000 fathoms of water with all her battle flags flying.”<sup>59</sup>

*Summary of enemy losses in the Battle of Midway*<sup>60</sup>

- A. Four carriers sunk: *Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu*, with the loss of all their planes and many of their personnel. Estimated 275 planes, 2400 men.
- B. Two and probably three battleships damaged, one severely.
- C. Two *Mogami* class heavy cruisers sunk,<sup>61</sup> three or more heavy cruisers damaged, some severely.
- D. One light cruiser damaged.
- E. Three destroyers sunk, a fourth possibly sunk.
- F. Four transport and cargo vessels hit, one or more possibly sunk.
- G. Estimated total number of personnel lost: 4,800.

*Summary of our losses.*

Ships: *Yorktown* and *Hammann* sunk.

Planes: About 150 lost in action or damaged beyond repair.

Personnel: 92 officers and 215 men.

## OBSERVATIONS<sup>62</sup>

Both Admiral Spruance and Admiral Fletcher have pointed out that “in a duel between CV’s the side which is able to strike the first blow against enemy CV’s whose planes are on board wins.” At Midway we won in precisely this manner. We were able to do this because we knew of the enemy’s presence, the approximate composition of his force, and because we had calculated correctly his method of approach. The Battle of Midway was essentially a victory of intelligence.

The Japanese, on the other hand, probably did not know of the presence of our forces until shortly before our carrier planes attacked them. In attempting a surprise attack they were themselves surprised. The placing of our fleet to fall upon the enemy’s flank was a piece of brilliant tactics, skillfully executed. Our single misfortune was the failure to locate and attack the fourth enemy carrier with sufficient promptness, when its presence was suspected. That failure cost us the *Yorktown*.

Midway was a contest of air power. There was no contacts of surface vessels in the entire action. Both Admiral Fletcher and Admiral Spruance were fully aware of the value of surface attacks had circumstances permitted. The reader of this narrative will understand why such attacks were not considered practicable.

Our pursuit of the enemy’s fleeing forces, successful as it was, undoubtedly fell short of what might have

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59 Captain Buckmaster’s description. Her position was lat. 30°46’ N., long. 167°24’ W.

60 Taken from the report of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of United States Pacific Fleet.

61 There is some uncertainty as to whether the second actually sank.

62 These observations are based largely upon those submitted by officers who took part in the engagement, particularly Admiral Fletcher and Admiral Spruance, and the conclusions drawn by Admiral Nimitz.

been achieved had more complete information been promptly available to our task forces. As Admiral Nimitz says, "Early, accurate and continuous information of the enemy is essential for successful attack by carrier groups." Admiral Fletcher says, "Every effort should be made to locate and maintain contact with an enemy force by other than carrier aircraft." Admiral Spruance concurs: "Early and accurate information of movements of an enemy force to be attacked is essential for successful carrier operations."

Our scouts did their duty often at considerable danger to themselves. Several reports were cut short by attacks from enemy planes. Communications were on the whole efficient. All Midway planes and submarines were on a common frequency which our surface vessels could intercept, thus avoiding relays of information. Yet in spite of these precautions there were periods in which our forces were without vital information. As Lt. Comdr. John G. Foster, Jr., Air Operations Officer of the *Hornet* points out, "The lack of information on the enemy's surface forces between 0623 and 1000 [on June 4th] was serious and jeopardized the tactical advantage we enjoyed over the enemy. The delay of the *Enterprise's* air group attack against the enemy carriers and the failure of the *Hornet's* VSB planes to make contact with the enemy can be attributed to this lack of information. Further, the loss of planes from the *Hornet* and *Enterprise* by water landings from lack of fuel can be partly attached to this unfortunate lack of information on the enemy's movements." Lt. Comdr. Foster further points out delays of over 2 hours in forwarding reports of certain important contacts, and remarks that delay in the running of code schedules represents "entirely too great a time lag and indicates that only direct communication is sufficient. This is especially so where aircraft are involved."

One source of difficulty was the unsuitability of the PBY for tracking an enemy force because of its inability to face fighter opposition. Army B-17's seem well adapted for this purpose. Too many of our attacking forces failed to find targets. Had our scouts been able to track, they could have guided these groups to their objectives.

Our fighters proved inferior both in number and in performance to the Japanese Zeros. It has been suggested that the Marine air group operating from Midway should be equipped with Army-type fighters rather than carrier planes. Although the number of fighters on our carriers had been increased before Midway, they were still too few for their duties of combat patrol and escorting attack groups. Many officers believe the proportion of fighters should be increased, or even that some carriers should be equipped with fighters exclusively. It was observed that the greatest danger to attacking planes was not enemy antiaircraft fire, which was comparatively ineffective, but enemy fighter planes. This points the need for greater fighter protection for our attacking groups. This may also require greater range on the part of our fighters. Such protection might have reduced the very heavy losses among our TBD's.

It has been pointed out that they should be replaced by TBF's as soon as possible.

It is agreed that too many hits were required to sink enemy ships. Our fliers needed more effective bombs and torpedoes with heavier war heads. They had no armor-piercing bombs for attacks on armored ships. Fuses were too short, so that our hits frequently caused extensive superficial damage without sinking the targets.

Horizontal bombing did not prove very effective against ships. It is recognized that an “alert skipper” can maneuver from under bombs dropped from a high altitude, and the result, as someone has aptly said, is a series of “near misses.” Dive bombers obtain a very much higher percentage of hits, but destroyers are not profitable targets even for them. However, the strafing of destroyers by our fighters proved damaging.

The operation of two or more carriers together proved of advantage in many ways and saved several planes which might otherwise have been lost.

The scope of this narrative has not permitted the mention of all officers who held important commands during the battle. Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker, U.S.A., Commander of the Army Air Force in Hawaii, was at the scene of action and was lost on June 9th when the long-range bomber in which he was searching for the enemy was forced down at sea. Lt. Gen. Delos C. Emmons, U.S.A., was Commanding General, Hawaiian Department. Maj. Gen. Willis H. Hale, U.S.A., was head of the Bombing Command of the Army Air Force in Hawaii. Brig. Gen. Henry K. Pickett, U.S.M.C., was Commander of the United States Marine Corps forces in the Hawaiian area.

Neither has it been possible to name many of the officers and men who distinguished themselves by their heroism during the battle. The list is a long one. In a sense they were outstanding examples of a spirit manifested by all our men present.

It would be difficult to express this better than has Admiral Nimitz: “The performance of officers and men was of the highest order, not only at Midway and afloat, but equally so among those at Oahu not privileged to be in the front line of battle. I am proud to report that the cooperative devotion to duty of all those involved was so marked that, despite the necessarily decisive part played by our three carriers, this defeat of the Japanese arms and ambitions was truly a victory of the United States’ armed forces and not of the Navy alone.”



### Designations of U.S. Naval Aircraft

<b>Model</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Manufacturer</b>	<b>U.S. name</b>	<b>British name</b>
BD	Bomber	Douglas	--	Boston III Havoc
F2A	Fighter	Brewster	Buffalo	Buffalo
F3A	-do-	-do-	--	
F4F	-do-	Grumman	Wildcat	Marlett, II, IV
F6F	-do-	-do-	Wildcat II	
F7F	-do-	-do-	--	
FG	-do-	Goodyear	Corsair	
FM	-do-	Eastern Aircraft	Wildcat	
F4U	-do-	Vought-Sikorsky	Corsair	
GB	Transport	Beech	--	
GH	-do-	Howard	--	
GK	-do-	Fairchild	--	
HE	Ambulance	Piper	--	
J2F	Utility	Grumman	--	
J4F	-do-	-do-	--	
JRB	Utility, multi-engine	Beech	--	
JRF	-do-	Grumman	--	Goose I
JRK	-do-	Nash-Kelvinator	--	
JR2S	-do-	Vought-Sikorsky	--	
NE	Trainer, primary	Piper	--	
NH	Trainer, advanced	Howard	--	
NP	Trainer, primary	Spartan	--	
NR	-do-	Ryan	--	
N2S	-do-	Stearman (Boeing)	--	
N3N	-do-	Naval Aircraft Factory	--	
OS2N	Observation scout	-do-	Kingfisher	
OS2U	-do-	Vought-Sikorsky	-do-	
PBB	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat	Boeing	Sea Ranger	
PBM	-do-	Martin	Mariner	
PBN	-do-	Naval Aircraft Factory	--	
PBO	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, landplane.	Lockhead	--	Hudson III
PBY	Patrol bomber, 2-engine, boat.	Consolidated	Catalina	Catalina
P4Y	-do-	-do-	--	
PB2M	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, boat.	Martin	Mars	
PB2Y	-do-	Consolidated	Coronado	

PB4Y	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, landplane.	-do-	--	Liberator
PV	Patrol bomber, 4-engine, landplane.	Vega	--	Ventura
R3C	Transport, multi-engine	Curtiss	--	
R3D, R4D, and R5D	-do-	Douglas	--	
R5O	-do-	Lockheed	--	Lodestar
SB2A	Scout bomber	Brewster	Buccaneer	Bermuda
SBC	-do-	Curtiss	Helldiver	Cleveland
SB2C	-do-	-do-	-do-	
SBD	-do-	Douglas	Dauntless	
SB2D	-do-	-do-	--	
SBN	-do-	Naval Aircraft Factory	--	
SB2U	-do-	Vought-Sikorsky	Vindicator	Chesapeake
SNB	Trainer, advanced	Beech	--	
SNC	-do-	Curtiss	--	
SNJ	-do-	North American	--	Harvard, I, II
SNV	-do-	Vultee	--	
SO3C	Scout observation	Curtiss	Seagull	Seamew
SOR	-do-	Ryan	--	
TBD	Torpedo bomber	Douglas	Devastator	
TBF	-do-	Grumman	Avenger	Tarpon
TBM	-do-	Eastern aircraft	--	
TBV	-do-	Vultee	--	



## Symbols of U.S. Navy Ships

AB	Crane ship.	CB	Large cruiser.
ACV	Auxiliary aircraft carrier.	CL	Light cruiser.
AD	Destroyer tender.	CM	Mine layer.
AE	Ammunition ship.	CMc	Coastal mine layer.
AF	Store ship.	CV	Aircraft carrier.
AG	Miscellaneous auxiliary.		
AGC	General communication vessel.	DD	Destroyer.
AGS	Surveying ship.	DE	Destroyer escort vessel.
AH	Hospital ship.	DM	Light mine layer (high speed).
AK	Cargo ship.	DMS	Mine sweeper (high speed).
AKF	Refrigerated cargo ship.		
AKS	General stores issue ship.	IX	Unclassified.
AM	Large mine sweeper.		
AMb	Base mine sweeper.	LCI(L)	Landing craft, infantry (large).
AMc	Coastal mine sweeper.	LCM(2)	50-foot landing craft, mechanized, Mk. II.
AN	Net layer.	LCM(3)	50-foot landing craft, mechanized, Mk. III.
AO	Oiler.	LCP(L)	36-foot landing craft, personnel (large).
AOG	Gasoline tanker.	LCP(R)	36-foot landing craft, Personnel (with ramp).
AP	Transport.	LCR(L)	Landing craft, rubber (large).
APc	Coastal transport.	LCR(S)	Landing craft, rubber (small).
APD	Troop transport (high speed).	LCS(S)	Landing craft, support (small).
APH	Transport for wounded.	LCT(5)	Landing craft, tank, Mk. V.
APR	Rescue transport.	LCV	Landing craft, vehicle.
APS	Auxiliary cargo submarine.	LCVP	Landing craft, vehicle and personnel.
APV	Aircraft transport.	LSD	Landing ship, dock.
AR	Repair ship.	LST	Landing ship, tank.
ARD	Floating drydock.	LVT	Landing vehicle, tracked (unarmored).
ARH	Heavy hull repair ship.	LVT(A)	Landing vehicle, tracked (armored).
ARS	Salvage vessel.		
AS	Submarine tender.	PC	Submarine chaser.
ASR	Submarine rescue vessel.	PE	Eagle boat.
AT	Ocean-going tug.	PG	Gun boat.
ATR	Salvage tug.	PR	River gun boat.
AV	Seaplane tender (large).	PT	Motor torpedo boat.
AVC	Catapult lighter.	PTC	Motor boat submarine chaser.
AVD	Seaplane tender (converted DD).	PY	Yacht.
AVP	Seaplane tender (small).	PYc	Coastal yacht.
BB	Battleship.	RPC	63-foot submarine chaser (Russia).
		RPT	Motor torpedo boat (Russia).
CA	Heavy Cruiser.		

SM	Mine laying submarine.	YMS	Motor mine sweeper.
SS	Submarine.	YMT	Motor tug.
YA	Ash lighter.	YN	Net tender.
YAG	District auxiliary, miscellaneous.	YNg	Gate vessel.
YC	Open lighter.	YNT	Net tender (tug class).
YCF	Car float.	YO	Fuel oil barge.
YCK	Open cargo lighter.	YOG	Gasoline barge.
YCV	Aircraft transportation lighter.	YOS	Oil storage barge.
YD	Floating derick.	YP	District patrol boat.
YDT	Diving tender.	YPD	Floating pile driver.
YF	Covered lighter; range tender; provision store lighter.	YPK	Pontoon stowage barge.
YFB	Ferry boat and launch.	YR	Floating workshop.
YFD	Floating drydock.	YRC	Submarine rescue chamber.
YFT	Torpedo transportation lighter.	YRD	Floating pile driver.
YG	Garbage lighter.	YS	Stevedore barge.
YH	Ambulance boat.	YSD	Seaplane wrecking derrick.
YHB	Houseboat.	YSP	Salvage pontoon.
YHT	Heating scow.	YSR	Sludge removal barge.
YM	Dredge.	YT	Harbor tug.
		YTT	Torpedo testing barge.
		YW	Water barge.

**Note:** Ships carrying prefix symbol B, except BB, and ships shown above with prefix symbol R, represent vessels under construction or conversion and being financed by Lend-Lease appropriations.





**Naval History and Heritage Command**  
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