

Battle of midway

War



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The Battle of Midway, which took place in the Pacific from June 4-7, 1942, is considered to be the most decisive battle between the American and the Japanese naval forces during the Second World War. The stunning defeat suffered by the Japanese Navy resulted to the loss of four of its large carriers and effectively loosened Japan's stranglehold over the Pacific region. This development enabled the Allied Forces to seize the initiative in the region (Naval Historical Center 2005).

The decision to attack and capture Midway was part of the Japanese campaign in the region which started in December 1941 with the outbreak of the war in the Pacific, the purpose of which was to seize American, British, and Dutch territories located in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Naval Historical Center 2005). Japan first surprised the American Fleet which was stationed at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Then on December 10, the Japanese forces occupied Guam. Wake was the next to fall, on December 23, 1941. On February 15, 1942, Singapore also fell to Japanese hands (Geocities.

com). Then the Japanese also seized Malaysia, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and other groups of islands located in the western and central Pacific. It was only the first phase of the Japanese campaign in Asia and the Pacific and it was easily completed without much opposition from the surprised Allies by March 1942 (Naval Historical Center 2005). On January 23, 1942, the second phase of the Japanese campaign was planned by order of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters. Its objective was to effectively isolate India and Australia from the war.

For this phase to be completed, the Japanese forces planned to launch offensives aimed at capturing vital bases located in the Solomon Islands and Papua-New Guinea. Their intention was to utilize these bases to support their planned campaign against Samoa, Fiji, and New Caledonia. During the first half of March, after successfully occupying the northern coast of Papua-New Guinea, the next objective of the Japanese forces was to seize Port Moresby which was nearer Australia, being situated in the southern coast.

Their plan was to launch an amphibious assault in order to capture the Port (Naval Historical Center 2005). At the outset, however, phase two of the plan of the Japanese Imperial Headquarters which was to occupy the islands of Fiji and Samoa was opposed by the Commander-in-Chief of Japan's Combined Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, who believed that the two islands were not strategic enough to merit Japan's attention and resources. Instead of Samoa and Fiji, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku wanted to seize the island of Midway located in the Central Pacific.

Although the General Staff of the Japanese Armed Forces was inclined to decide in his favor, the plan of attack which was presented by his staff did not prove plausible enough for the General Staff, thereby eliciting objections from some of its members. Because of these objections, Admiral Yamamoto threatened to resign his commission if his plan was not approved (Microworks. net). However, Yamamoto's plan suddenly became acceptable to the General Staff after the Imperial Japanese Navy, whose primary task was to protect the Home Islands, suffered what was considered to be its most humiliating defeat of the war.

The date was April 18, 1942 and the occasion was the attack on several Japanese cities and towns, including Tokyo and Yokosuka, which was carried out by “ eighteen B-25 Mitchell medium bombers” which took off from the U. S. carrier Hornet. Although the bombers, which were commanded by Lt. -Col. James H. Doolittle, were not able to inflict considerable damage, the attack left the Japanese in fear of similar occurrences in the future which might result to the Emperor’s palace being hit.

The attack also demoralized the members of the Japanese Armed Forces. Because of this, Admiral Yamamoto’s threat of resignation was treated seriously and his plan of attacking Midway was accepted in full by the General Staff (Microworks. net). Admiral Yamamoto’s plan, as presented and approved by the Naval General Staff for implementation on May 5, would involve the whole Combined Fleet. It consisted of “ seven battleships, ten carriers, some two dozen cruisers, and more than seventy destroyers” which, at the time, were distributed among six fleets.

According to Yamamoto’s plan, he would lead the “ main body” of the force which would consist of three of Japan’s most powerful battleships: the Nagato, Yamato, and Mutsu. Hosho, a light carrier with eight attack planes on board for anti-submarine duties, would be supporting the three battleships. Several destroyers would serve as a screening force for the “ main body” (Microworks. net). The second element would be the “ Aleutians Strike Force” under Vice-Admiral Hosogaya Moshiro. It was composed of the light carrier Ryujo and Junyo, a cruise liner which was converted into a carrier.

This force, which also included the battleships Hyuga, Yamashiro, Fuso, and Ise, would be protected by a number of destroyers and cruisers. Another element of the Combined Fleet, the Second Fleet, was commanded by Admiral Kondo Nobutake. Aside from the battleships Haruna and Kongo, Admiral Kondo Nobutake, whose primary responsibility was to provide protection for Rear-Admiral Tanaka Raizo's "Invasion Force," also had at his disposal the light carrier Zuiho and a big complement of cruisers and destroyers (Microworks. net).

The pride of the Combined Fleet was, however, Vice-Admiral Nagumo Chuichi's "First Air Fleet." According to historians, this fleet was already known to sow fear among the enemy ranks because of its role in the attack of Pearl Harbor and in every major operation since conducted by the Japanese Navy. This imposing force consisted of two heavy cruisers, two battleships, and a squadron of destroyers (Microworks. net). However, what really made this fleet a force to reckon with were the Japanese Navy's six heavy carriers, namely: Akagi, Soryu, Kaga, Hiryu, Zuikaku, and Shokaku.

For this particular mission, however, the carriers Zuikaky and Shokaku could not participate in the action because of the heavy damage which they suffered during the earlier "Battle of the Coral Sea" (Geocities. com). The plan called for a diversionary attack against the Dutch Harbor facilities of the United States Navy in the Aleutian Islands so that the American forces, especially their carriers, would be forced to leave the vicinity of Midway in order to defend Alaska.

This diversionary attack would be conducted by the "Aleutians Strike Force" under Vice-Admiral Hosogaya Moshio. After luring the Americans away, the <https://assignbuster.com/battle-of-midway/>

planes from the carriers of the Combined Fleet would conduct an air strike against the American defenses in Midway. At the same time, the forces of the Combined Fleet would prepare to ambush the American ships once they go back to defend Midway. After sinking the American ships, the Japanese, using their seaplanes, would immediately occupy some parts of Aleutian Islands such as Kiska and Attu, including Kure Island, and Midway itself.

Admiral Yamamoto also wanted to decimate the American naval forces by putting in place a submarine cordon near the islands of Hawaii so that a weaker American fleet would make contact with his “ main body. ” This plan was approved by the Naval General Staff under the leadership of Admiral Nagano (Microworks. net). Historical observers, however, noted two significant defects in Admiral Yamamoto’s plan. The first defect was his failure to appreciate the true worth of the aircraft carrier in the conduct of naval operations.

He did not realize that his carriers could be devastating without getting dangerously near the enemy ships by simply dispatching their aircraft complement. Since he was not convinced of the carrier’s importance, Yamamoto considered his battleships to be more valuable than the carriers relegating the latter to a supporting status. In addition, because of the slowness of his big battleships, the other ships which composed the Combined Fleet were forced to keep pace, effectively affecting their maneuverability (History Learning Site 2009).

The other, more significant and consequently more fatal, defect of Yamamoto’s plan was the fact that his diversionary attack against the American facilities in the Aleutian islands was bound to fail because the

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Americans were already aware of it and in fact, knew that his real objective was Midway. Because of this knowledge, American ships were not lured to the defense of Alaska and instead waited to ambush Admiral Yamamoto's fleet (History Learning Site 2009).

The Americans knew of Yamamoto's plan to attack Midway through two naval intelligence stations. One was operating out of Melbourne, Australia while the other was based at Pearl Harbor. These intelligence facilities were able to intercept radio communications which helped them not only to pinpoint the locations of the major fleets of the Japanese navy but also to study their operational patterns. Based on these, the Americans were able to predict the future operations of the Japanese forces (Naval Historical Center 2005).

As early as May 25, the Americans were already aware of Yamamoto's intentions and prepared accordingly. Their three carriers which were at sea at the time were immediately ordered to return to Pearl Harbor. The carriers USS Hornet and USS Enterprise which comprised Task Force 16 (TF 16) arrived on May 26. USS Enterprise of Task Force 17, on the other hand, came back on May 27. However, since it suffered major damage during the "Battle of the Coral Sea," USS Yorktown had to undergo urgent repair to prepare it for another battle.

The repair that was supposed to be completed in three months was rushed in only three days to enable the carrier to participate in the "Battle of Midway" (Geocities. com). Meanwhile, over in Midway, the Americans scrambled to strengthen their defenses. Six brand-new "Avenger" torpedo planes which missed their mother carrier (USS Hornet) were deployed to Midway. Then <https://assignbuster.com/battle-of-midway/>

seven F4F-3 and another twenty F2A-3 Marine fighter planes were also added to Midway defense, in addition to 27 dive-bombers, 23 army bomber planes, and 32 reconnaissance planes (Geocities.

com). On May 29, TF 16 under the overall command of Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance sailed out of Pearl Harbor to prepare for the battle. It was composed of the carriers Enterprise and Hornet, with a screening force composed of four heavy cruisers (Minneapolis, Pensacola, New Orleans, and Northampton), two light cruisers (Vincennes and Atlanta), and a total of nine destroyers. On the other hand, TF 17, which was under the command of Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, was not able to sail until after the completion of the repair of USS Yorktown on May 30.

The screening force of TF 17 was composed of Portland, which was a heavy cruiser, a light cruiser (Astoria), and six destroyers. The mission of TFs 16 and 17 was to lie in wait for the Japanese naval fleet (Geocities. com). The diversionary attack on Dutch Harbor was launched by the “Aleutians Strike Force” under Vice-Admiral Hosogaya Moshiro at 0243 hours on June 3. The attacking force consisted of a total of 35 planes: twelve dive-bombers and six Zero fighter planes from the light carrier Junyo and eleven torpedo bombers and six Zero fighters from the light carrier Ryujo.

Although the Americans defended with heavy anti-aircraft fire, the Japanese attackers were able to kill more than twenty American sailors and soldiers in the course of shooting up their army barracks, a radio station, and a tank farm. The “Aleutians Strike Force,” however, did not succeed in its actual mission which was to lure the American naval forces present in the area away from Midway. What happened was that one Zero fighter plane which

made an emergency landing was later recovered by Americans who later discovered the one weakness of the plane: “ a very light armor protection.

” This weakness was later exploited by the Americans to defeat the Zeros which earlier terrorized the skies over the Pacific (Geocities. com). Meanwhile, the attack on Midway took place early morning of June 4 – the first day of the Battle of Midway. A total of 108 planes took part in the first attack. Thirty-six were fighter planes (nine each from the four carriers) while the remaining 72 were bombers. The other Japanese bombers were kept in reserve in the four carriers just in case a second attack would be needed or if American ships showed up.

While the attack on Midway was ongoing, the Japanese fleet also dispatched three reconnaissance planes to search around in case American naval fleets showed up to intervene. At almost the same time, the American defenders in Midway launched six “ Wildcat” fighters to patrol the skies and 11 reconnaissance planes to search for the Japanese fleet. Two of the reconnaissance planes of the Americans spotted the Japanese fleet at around 0530 hours and 0552 hours, respectively. By 0600 hours, Midway dispatched all of its bombers to launch an attack against the Japanese carriers.

The Americans, however, were almost annihilated by the anti-aircraft guns of the carriers and the more superior Zero fighters of the Japanese (Geocities. com). In the end, the Americans were aided by their more superior intelligence. While the Japanese reconnaissance planes finally spotted the American fleet, they were not able to identify the kinds of ships composing the American fleet. In other words, the Japanese commanders did not know whether carriers were part of them. In contrast, the Americans knew with

certainty that the four heavy carriers of the Imperial Japanese Navy were in the Japanese fleet.

In the final analysis, the defeat of the Japanese came as a result of their indecision whether to arm their planes with bombs for the Midway attack or torpedoes needed to attack the American ships, especially their carriers (Geocities. com). In the absence of an intelligence regarding the composition of the American fleet, Vice-Admiral Nagumo Chuichi, the commander of the “First Air Fleet,” decided to load his planes with bombs so that the second attack on Midway could be launched. He thought that if the American fleet did not have any carrier with it, the attack on Midway should take precedence.

When the report from their reconnaissance planes came in at 0820 hour stating that the American fleet included a carrier, Vice-Admiral Nagumo Chuichi changed his decision and ordered that the bombs be replaced with torpedoes so that an attack against the American fleet could be launched. Unfortunately, he could not immediately dispatch his planes because he still had to wait for the planes from the Midway attack to return safely to the carriers, otherwise all the returning planes would have to ditch because they could not land on the carriers.

This moment of confusion left the Japanese fleet without any aerial defense and allowed the Americans to attack the Japanese carriers. In the end, all four heavy carriers of the Japanese were sunk, while the Americans lost only USS Yorktown. The Japanese never recovered from their loss in the Battle of Midway after which, they lost the supremacy that they were enjoying in the

Pacific and ultimately lost the Pacific War (Geocities. com). Bibliography Geocities. com. “ The Battle of Midway. ” [http://www.](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/8384/midway.html)

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