BATTLE AT MIDWAY Essay, Research Paper

Battle at Midway

( June 4-6 1942 )

I know that the Battle at Midway was a important battle in World War II. It was

about who controlled the Pacific and if the Japanese could truly be defeated. I want to

know what planes were used, how the Japanese were defeated, in detail not just say that

they were caught off guard. The sources that I’ve already looked at are: Victory at Sea

(video), V is for Victory (video), conversation between Father and Grandfather. I plan to

use the following resources: World at War: Battle at Midway (book) , Miracle at

Midway(book), and the 1997 World Book Encyclopedia.

The Battle at Midway occured when Japan sent a large fleet of ships to capture

Midway Island. Midway Island is at the western tip of the Hawaiian chain. The United

States managed to break the Japanese Naval code. When the U. S. intercepted a

transmission made by the Japanese it said that they were going to attack AF. The U.S. had

three targets in mind Coney Island, Midway Island, or Hawaii. They were pretty sure it

was not Coney Island, but the U. S. was expecting an attack on Oahu. So, they had the

commander at Midway send a open message saying that they were out of water. Two days

later the U.S. intercepted a Japanese message headed for Tokyo saying “AF is out of

water”. The commander of the Japanese fleet, Vice Admiral Nagumo, didn’t know that the

American fleet were on their way to Midway too. The American fleet was headed by Rear

Admiral Raymond Spruance. This fleet consisted of the: USS Enterprise (carrier), USS

Hornet (carrier), six cruisers, and eleven destroyers. Two days after Admiral Spruance set

sail, Rear Admiral F.J. Fletcher left with two more cruisers and six destroyers. This set the

stage for one of the most important battles in World War II. Nagumo kept thinking along

the lines of , we’re gonna hit them with every thing we’ve got and they’ll never know what

hit them.

When the Japanese fleet neared its target, word had spread quickly that the attack

was about to begin. There was a sudden roar of noise as Zero’s and dive-bombers rolled

into position for take off on the deck of the Japanese carrier. When the signal was given

they would launch nine Zero’s and eighteen dive-bombers from one carrier. It took only 15

minutes to clear the decks of all four Japanese carriers. These planes were headed toward

Midway Island.

The next order that came was to launch the reconnaissance planes who were to fan

out to the east and southeast to assure there were no American fleets. They launched five

planes with no trouble, but the sixth had catapult trouble and had to be relaunched. When

Nagumo asked how long of a delay that was, the response was 30 minutes. Admiral

Nagumo’s response was “It’s good the American Fleet is still in Hawaii or that delay could

have been costly”. But little did he know that that mistake was costly for if that plane had

left on time it would of surely spotted the American fleet and the Battle at Midway would

of changed direction. But Nagumo was still certain that the American fleet was still many

miles away.

On Midway, Lieutenant Howard Ady was taking off to scout the ocean for enemy

ships in his Catalina search plane. When it was time, Lt. Ady lowered his altitude. When

he cleared the clouds, he was stunned to see the largest mass of ships that he had ever

seen! He then quickly pulled back up into the clouds where he would be safe and radioed

“enemy carriers”. The next time he descended he came up low behind them. The fleet

consisted of 2 carriers and several more ships in formation battleships.

About 25 minutes after Lt. Ady spotted the radar at Midway showed blimps. Two

minutes later the Midway Islands filled with air raid sirens and warnings that repeated over

and over. The soldiers that were station there were stationed at Midway started

scrambling every which way. Some went to their airplanes that were waiting on the

runways for them and others to battle stations. These planes included 6 Navy Avenger

torpedo planes,4 Army Marauders.The ten aircraft were to intercept the Japanese Zeros

that were headed for Midway.

The Marine pilots complained about the Brewster Buffalo and the Gruman

Wildcats that they had to fly. As they were taking off, one of the pilots said “these tin cans

actually got off the ground” this message must have distracted some of the pilots because

the next thing they knew they were in a swarm of Japasnese Zeros. Fifteen U.S. planes

went down.

The next thing to happen was the first attack of Japanese dive-bombers on Midway

Island. Anti-aircraft guns fired but the dive-bombers kept coming and coming. Even

though Midway Island was covered with smoke and flames from the bombing, that didn’t

stop the U.S., they were still launching planes from runways. The American planes that

had taken off from Midway had spotted the Japanese fleet. Four Marauders and six

Avengers started the attack, but they were meet by the Zeros that were left to guard the

fleet. Three planes were blasted right out of the sky, and four more hit by anti-aircraft

guns aboard the carriers and battleships. Three planes made it through the hail of gun fire

and swept down toward the deck of the Akagi to unload their payload of bombs and

torpedos. The Akagi moved to avoid the bombs and succeeded none of the bonbs or

torpedos hit.

Right after this attack Admiral Nagumo received a message saying that the

American fleet had been spotted 240 miles north from Midway heading toward the battle.

Admiral Nagumo refused to believed the message and ordered for the ships to be

identified. When the message came back it said that the fleet consisted of five destroyers

and 5 curisers. Without a break he heard the sound of plane engines and sure enough there

was a squadron of B-17’s, 15 planes to be exact. They were unloading their bombs from

20,000 feet. too high to be shot down by anti-aircraft guns. A safe place to unload bombs,

but not a single one hit its target of a Japanese ship.

The Japanese ordered all planes back to refuel. One American pilot said “Its a

shame to just let sit there like that”. Admiral Spruance shared the same thoughts. He

ordered all available aircraft to be launched. A few hours later even more planes were

launched. The Japanese ships had changed direction and only one squadron went a

different direction and was right the Japanese fleet was there. Right as they arrived they

were meet by about 30 Zeros. Only one plane made it through the attack. As it made it’s

way toward the ships it was suddenly joined by more planes. They all missed their targets ,

but on the second pass they hit a ship a the planes explode. This was when the Japanese

relised that they weren’t going to get tha U.S. in to a ground attack.

The Japanese lost just about all of their ships. Afraid that two of the badly

damaged ships the Akagi and the Hiryu would be captured and put into a musuem in San

Fansico the Japanese scuttled the Akagi on June 5 at about 0500. The

Makigumotorpedoed the Hiryu at about 0510, but didn’t sink until 0900. The U. S. lost

only one ship, the USS Yorktown (carrier). On June 7 while being towed back to Pearal

Harbor a Japanese submarine sunk it at about 0458. The U.S. had won the Battle at

Midway and controled the Pacicfic. The Japanese Navy had lost 2 of their 4 aircraft

carriers and were on their way into total defeat. (Note: On June 18,1942 the USS

Ballard saved 35 surviving crew members of the Hiryu.)

The Battle at Midway

(June 4-6 1942)

By,

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1. World at War: Battle at Midway, G.C. Skipper,Chicago Childerns Press, 1980

Used the whole book

2. Miracle at Midway, Gordon W. Prange with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V.

Dillon, McGraw Hill Book Company, 1982, pages 437-445 Chronolgy.