

The Battles of the Coral Sea & Midway (May-Dec. 1942)

In 1942, Admiral Yamamoto wanted to attack Midway Island, an ***atoll** that was 1,000 miles NW of Pearl Harbor. (**atoll** = coral island consisting of a reef surrounding a lagoon)

The Commander in Chief of the Japanese Navy, ***Admiral Nagano**, wanted to be able to control **Australia**, the most likely place for the Allies to build up men & equipment, before attacking Midway. He planned to capture ***Port Moresby, New Guinea** and ***Tulagi** in the **Solomon Islands**.

Japanese conquest of air bases at Port Moresby would allow them to protect their main naval base in the South Pacific – ***Rabaul, New Britain** and it would also allow them to bomb Northern Australia. The seaplane base at **Tulagi** would allow the Japanese to bomb American ships that came through the Coral Sea, on their way to Australia.

Reorganization of American Naval Command after Pearl Harbor

- Admiral Chester W. Nimitz **replaced** Admiral Husband Kimmel as Commander of the Pacific Fleet
- General George C. Marshall **replaced** General Bernard Short as Army Chief of Staff

Admiral Nimitz** was a quiet, laid back man who was well liked. His first responsibility was to rebuild the morale of the Pacific Fleet. All of the Navy men that had worked for Admiral Kimmel were afraid they would be punished for Pearl Harbor by being reassigned to other military bases. *Nimitz** kept almost all of the members of former Admiral Kimmel's staff. ****He** expressed complete confidence in them! As a result, they became completely loyal to him!

Nimitz' goal was to defend a line that ran from **Midway Island to Australia** against future Japanese attacks.

The Main U.S. Naval Strength was its Aircraft Carriers:

- Saratoga {replaced with the Yorktown in 1942 since the Saratoga was damaged by a Jap sub}
- Lexington
- Enterprise
- Hornet

Cryptanalysts (codebreakers)

{Time-Life "The Rising Sun" Vol. 4}

****Lieutenant Commander Joseph Rochefort** led the 14th Navy's Cryptanalyst Unit at Pearl Harbor. He was an eccentric man who worked in a red smoking jacket and bedroom slippers. His average workday was a 20 hour shift followed by a nap on his office cot. Rochefort worked in a windowless basement, behind a locked steel door.

In 1940, Rochefort helped break ****JN-25**, the Japanese Navy's communications code. He found out the Japanese were going to attack Port Moresby, New Guinea. So, the U.S. sent a navy task force to stop them. This became known as the ***Battle of the Coral Sea**.

In 1942, Rochefort noticed repeated use of the letters ***AF** in Japanese communications. He knew that the Japanese often used two letter codes to represent targets. For example, “**AH**” turned out to be Pearl Harbor!

Rochefort planned a trick to figure out what **AF** stood for. He ordered Midway Island radio operators to broadcast a **fake message** which said that Midway’s water distillation plant was not working. **2 days later, newly deciphered Japanese messages said that “**AF**” was having trouble with its water distillation plant. ******Now they knew that “AF” was Midway Island and that it was the main target of the next Japanese attack!!**

In May of 1942, cryptanalysts discovered **detailed information** about the coming Japanese attacks on **Midway** as well as on **Port Moresby, New Guinea**. All information received from breaking the Japanese Naval Codes was referred to as ***Ultra**.

The Doolittle Raids

At the beginning of 1942, the Allies were suffering defeats everywhere in the Pacific. The only key success was the ****Doolittle Raids (April 18, 1942)** in which **16 Army B-25 bombers** were launched from the aircraft carrier **Hornet** on a mission to bomb Tokyo and several other Japanese cities. B-25 bombers required a longer runway to take off than what a carrier had. Doolittle ordered all weapons removed from the planes to reduce their weight.

The carrier was supposed to get the planes within 400 miles of Japan, but they were spotted by Japanese reconnaissance planes when they were still 700 miles away. Doolittle ordered extra gas cans placed in each plane and ordered them to take off. The goal was to bomb Japan and then make it to China, which was an Allied nation. A few pilots were caught and executed. Many crashed in China and **most escaped**.

****The Doolittle Raid was a psychological victory for America!** It made us feel good about getting payback for the attack on Pearl Harbor, but little damage was done to Japan.

The Battle of the Coral Sea {May 7-8, 1942}

Nimitz sent **Admiral Fletcher** with the **Yorktown and Lexington** aircraft carriers to prevent Japanese conquest of Port Moresby, New Guinea. Fletcher was an experienced navy commander but had **no experience with carriers and aircraft prior to this!** Most American Navy Commanders had no carrier or aircraft experience — carriers were a relatively new weapon!

The Japanese conquered Tulagi (on May 3, 1942) without opposition.

A large Japanese Navy fleet headed south from Rabaul, toward Port Moresby, with the carrier **Shoho**. A second, more powerful Japanese task force, which included the carriers **Zuikaku** and **Shokaku**, came from **Chuuk {Truk}**.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first naval battle in history where opposing ships did not even see each other. ***Carrier based planes did all the damage!**

The Japanese carrier **Shoho** was sunk and the carrier **Shokaku** was severely damaged. Although both sides had about the same damage, the battle was an American victory **since the Japanese were prevented from landing troops at Port Moresby**. More importantly, both surviving Japanese carriers (**Shokaku & Zuikaku**) had to return to Japan for repairs. ****Neither could help with the attack on Midway Island!**

***The Battle of the Coral Sea represented a shift in momentum toward the Allies, in the Pacific War!**

The Battle of Midway

Yamamoto's plan was to attack Midway to cause the U.S. Pacific Fleet to come to the rescue. Then the Japanese could destroy the American Pacific Fleet. Yamamoto felt Japan would not be safe until the U.S. Pacific fleet was destroyed – especially the **aircraft carriers**.

Yamamoto's Plan — tried to accomplish too many goals at once:

- 1) Japan would attack the **Aleutian Islands** of **Attu** and **Kiska** to draw some American ships and planes away from the defense of Midway!
- 2) Yamamoto insisted on Japanese **occupation** of Midway.
- 3) Adm. Nagumo's strike force was split between a) **attacking Midway's land based aircraft** and b) **attacking the U.S. Pacific Fleet**.

After the battle, Yamamoto said the Japanese suffered from **“Victory Disease.”** They were so used to winning that they just assumed they would win!

*Nimitz' forces were significantly weaker than Yamamoto's

<u>Yamamoto (Jap)</u>	<u>Nimitz (U.S.)</u>
4 heavy carriers (Akagi, Kaga, Hiryu, Soryu)	3 carriers
2 Lt. Carriers	8 cruisers
7 battleships	15 destroyers
15 cruisers	
44 destroyers	

Yamamoto's Midway Plan

Yamamoto thought the Japanese would ***SURPRISE** Midway Island and then the Pacific Fleet would come to the rescue after the attack began.

Japanese submarines were positioned just west of **Oahu**. They would warn the Jap fleet when they saw the U.S. Pacific Fleet leave Pearl Harbor. *Japanese subs were slow to get to their position (west of Oahu). By the time they got there, the U.S. Pacific Fleet had already passed by!

****When the Japanese attacked, the U.S. Pacific Fleet was **waiting for them!!****

June 4, 1942 - - Once Nagumo's fleet got within 250 miles of Midway, he began attacking while simultaneously sending **reconnaissance planes** to search for U.S. ships.

By the time Japanese planes spotted the U.S. Pacific Fleet, waves of American ****Douglas Devastator Torpedo Planes** were already attacking the Japanese carriers. *****They did not damage the carriers and were almost all destroyed by Japanese Zeros and antiaircraft fire!!** *****They did disperse the Zeros though!**

*****U.S. dive bombers (**Douglas SBD Dive Bombers - - the most valuable American weapon in the early part of the war with Japan) destroyed the Japanese carriers Soryu, Akagi, and Kaga!!!**
(Because Japanese Zeros were dispersed!)

The surviving Japanese carrier, **Hiryu**, sent planes to attack the **USS Yorktown** (Admiral Fletcher's flagship). The Yorktown was lost.

American dive-bombers then destroyed the Japanese carrier, **Hiryu** ! *****This was the last of the Japanese heavy carriers!**

Once Yamamoto heard about the disastrous defeat, he tried to prepare an attack with battleships from his MAIN NAVAL FLEET. He wanted to attack the Pacific Fleet at night since the Japanese were very good at night attacks.

Amer. Admiral Raymond Spruance, who became Cmdr of the Pacific Fleet when Admiral Fletcher had to abandon the **Yorktown**, refused to risk his carriers and retreated to the East.

Yamamoto's Navy then retreated to the west. Yamamoto's MAIN NAVAL FLEET never fired a shot at the Battle of Midway

*****Midway was the turning point in the Pacific War!**

- a) Restored naval balance in Pacific (after Amer. losses at Pearl). Japan lost 4 carriers, 253 planes, and many skilled pilots.
- b) The Japanese Navy was limited to a defensive role for the rest of the war.

****This crushing defeat was kept secret from the Japanese people!!!**