

Volume 3

Number 151

The Battle of Midway - II

Lead: Samuel Johnson, the author of the first great English Dictionary once said, “the prospect of hanging clears the mind, wonderfully.” In the early summer of 1942 with two great armadas converging on Midway Island, the mind of the Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was very clear.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Since civilian Eugene Ely first flew an airplane off a specially constructed platform on the USS *Birmingham* in November 1910,

aircraft carriers played an increasingly important role in strategic planning. If there were any lingering doubts as to the value of the aircraft carrier, these doubts departed with the Japanese dive bombers leaving Hawaii on December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack was very destructive but it failed to take out the greatest prize of all. The three aircraft carriers assigned to the U.S. Pacific fleet were out at sea when Pearl Harbor was pulverized. In the early summer of 1942, a fleet under Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto returned to the Central Pacific to provoke a battle which he was confident he could win, take out those carriers, and establish an early warning line using the Midway Islands as an anchor.

Chester Nimitz was just as determined to stop him, but it wasn't going to be easy. U.S. codebreakers had cracked the Japanese naval code. They knew that Yamamoto was on the way and that his force on paper at least seemed overwhelming. The Japanese outnumbered American ships and submarines by nearly two to one, and in carriers Yamamoto enjoyed an eight to three advantage, but he made the terrible mistake of dividing his forces. He sent a carrier group to take the Aleutian Islands and split-off the Midway invasion carrier force so that it could not support the main carrier group which was converging on Midway from the

northwest. This reduced the Japanese to only a four to three advantage.

Forewarned Nimitz positioned his carriers to the northeast of the island and laid a trap into which the Japanese fell. Next time: Nimitz and Yamamoto prove the worth of the aircraft carrier at the Battle of Midway.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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