

**Volume 3**

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**The Battle of Midway - I**

**Lead: In the early summer of 1942 United States forces in the Pacific could have been defeated at the distant tip of the Hawaiian archipelago.**

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

**Content: When the last Japanese dive bombers departed through the smoke that billowed from the ruined U.S. Naval Station at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, they left a job undone. While the line of battleships was hard hit and some of vessels such as the *USS Arizona* were lost for good,**

**battleships were headed for a diminished role in strategic military planning. Hickam and Wheeler Air Fields were filled with many burning wrecks, but the aircraft could be easily replaced. Japanese had missed the greatest prize. Three aircraft carriers assigned to the Pacific fleet were absent on that fateful Sunday morning and to the Japanese command these ships remained a deadly threat.**

**In many ways, the Japanese were victims of their own success. Their almost seamless run of victories since early December had given Tokyo a false sense of invulnerability, an overconfidence the navy would later call "victory disease." They were so complacent that they delayed changing**

**the secret naval signal codes from April 1st to June 1st and this enabled the hard working U.S. codebreakers to read as much as 85% of Japanese radio traffic during the crucial days of late May. The Japanese High Command was also divided about how to follow-up on its victories. The Naval General Staff advocated a strike deeper into the Southwestern Pacific to isolate Australia from the United States.**

**However, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was keen to return to the Central Pacific to take out the U.S. carriers he had missed. As the architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Yamamoto had added to his already enormous prestige, and he put**

**it on the line in favor of another thrust toward Hawaii. His argument was strengthened by the April 18th air raid on Tokyo by General Doolittle's B-25s. While this raid did little physical damage, the Japanese were demoralized and realized that future air attacks could be prevented only if they had an outpost in the Central Pacific. In the end the Japanese adopted the worse possible scenario: they attempted both. The thrust toward Australia ended in disaster when it was checked by the U.S. victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 8th which sidelined two Japanese carriers. This meant that Yamamoto's force could would not be overwhelming when he sailed east.**

**Next time: The aircraft carrier comes into its own.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

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