

The Battle of Midway - III

Lead: In the late spring of 1942, two great armadas met off the Midway Islands.

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

Content: Isoroku Yamamoto opposed the war with America. He had served as Naval Attaché at the Japanese Embassy in Washington and knew first-hand how lethal was the power of the giant American democracy once awakened. However, when the decision to go to war was made he insisted that Japan's only

hope for victory was a surprise attack which would cripple U.S. forces in the Pacific. Pearl Harbor proved him right but he had missed the American aircraft carriers on December 7th, because they were at sea on maneuvers. Yamamoto was back in the Central Pacific in late May 1942 to take out those carriers and to establish an early warning picket line anchored by the two tiny Midway Islands at the tip of the Hawaiian archipelago 1300 miles northeast of Honolulu.

Chester William Nimitz was elevated to commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet in the wake of the Pearl Harbor disaster. His task at Midway was to thwart Yamamoto's forces, and for that he relied on superior

intelligence information. U.S. code breakers had broken the Japanese naval code and were able to read over eighty percent of the enemy radio traffic. Those messages revealed Yamamoto's intent - a triple strike, north to the Aleutian Islands off Alaska, an eastward invasion of Midway itself, and with the bulk of his forces, a carrier feint from the northwest designed to draw the U.S. carriers out and with his superior number of submarines, ships and aircraft, destroy them. To counter this Nimitz sent his three carrier groups northeast of the island to prepare a ambush on the Japanese left flank.

In the early morning hours of June 4, 1942 the Japanese launched an air

attack against Midway Island. The planes returned and were about to launch again when torpedo bombers from the U.S. carriers, *Enterprise*, *Yorktown* and *Hornet* made their appearance over the Japanese decks littered with aviation fuel and bombs ready for loading. The American torpedo bombers were almost wiped out by Japanese fighters, but their sacrifice drew the Zeros down toward the sea and they were not able to regain altitude quick enough to meet another wave of American planes, this time dive-bombers. In five minutes three Japanese carriers were on their way to the bottom and a fourth was mortally wounded.

Midway was the turning point in the Pacific war. With the loss of nearly two-thirds of its fleet carriers, Japan was unable to mount an effective offense for the rest of the war and the aircraft carrier proved itself once again to be the most powerful strategic weapon in the Navy's arsenal.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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