



## THE BATTLE FOR MIDWAY ISLAND

Updated 08/15/2012

In the dark days of 1942, the Battle for Midway Island tipped the scales of war in our favor. It was fought with obsolete aircraft at a terrible price, but the flight-crews that won this battle set the standard for future generations in Naval Aviation.



The TBD Devastator, flown by carrier-based torpedo squadrons in the early half of 1942. This *ENTERPRISE* TBD (VT-6) photograph is circa late 1941.

Three Torpedo Squadrons from *YORKTOWN* (VT-3), *ENTERPRISE* (VT-6), and *HORNET* (VT-8), plus aircraft from Midway Island attacked the Japanese carriers without fighter protection on the morning of 4 June 1942, but caused no damage to Japanese ships. These three carrier-based TBD squadrons lost nearly all their aircraft and most of their flight crews to Japanese Zeros and AAA.

The 1942 version of the Mk-13 torpedo, carried by the TBD, required 100-kts and 100-feet at release. (See the GREAT TORPEDO SCANDAL OF WW-II in Delta Pattern.)

Even in 1942, the TBD Devastator was woefully obsolete. It had an 900 HP engine and a combat radius of about 200-miles (with torpedo) at a cruising speed of 110 knots. However, it is unlikely any aircraft could survive in similar circumstances (no fighter cover). Those flight crews must have known there was little chance of success, yet they attacked anyway! There are no words to adequately describe that kind of courage.

Douglas Aircraft Company completed delivery of 130 TBDs to the Navy by late 1939. Some 30 of these crashed prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Of the 45 TBDs launched from the three carriers on 4 June 1942, only three were flyable on 6 June. Only 17 TBDs remained in the Navy, most were aboard *SARATOGA*. These were returned to CONUS for use in training.

### Yet, their sacrifice won the battle!

Without fighter direction, Japanese fighters pilots naturally went after the attacking torpedo aircraft from Midway Island, followed by the carrier-based Devastators. The Japanese ships had to maneuver to avoid the torpedo attacks and B-17 bombing runs, all while launching and recovering defensive fighters. These maneuvers delayed Japanese preparations to attack the American carriers. Shortly, three Japanese carriers, *Soryu*, *Akagi*, and *Kaga*, were left burning by SBD Dauntless squadrons from *ENTERPRISE* and *YORKTOWN* that made unopposed dives and dropped their bombs on Japanese ships whose hangar decks were loaded with aircraft preparing to launch against the American carriers.

Japanese carrier aircraft had poor radio equipment, even worse than American aircraft. At this stage of the war, they had no radar or CIC. Thus, it was difficult to control their fighter aircraft.

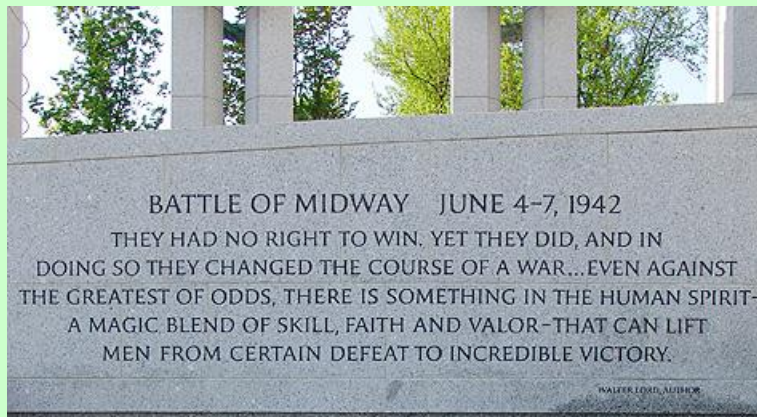
One interesting tactic was the use of colored AAA on different ships, and the firing of AAA or use of smoke to direct the attention of airborne fighters to a specific threat.

Some authors minimized the influence of fighter altitude on the outcome of the battle, claiming the Japanese fighters could easily climb back to altitude in just a few minutes. That is true, but they didn't and they were totally unprepared for the SBDs arrival, at which time it was too late to climb.

Later that day, the fourth Japanese carrier, *Hiryu*, launched planes that found and wounded the partially repaired *YORKTOWN*, while *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* Air Groups were ending *Hiryu*'s usefulness to the

Empire. The Japanese Navy never recovered from the loss of these four ships and their experienced aircrews. The TBD passed into history, but not the heroism of those 67 torpedo squadron crewmen and the crews from Midway Island who died in the service of their country (and the world).

In 1941, the typical carrier Air Group had 36 F4F (VF), 18 TBD (VT), 18 SBD (VB) and 18 SBD (VS). Beginning with Air Group 17 in 1943, the SBD was replaced with the SB2C and the VB and VS squadrons were combined into a single VB squadron with 36 aircraft. Later, all the stiff-wing SBDs were replaced with folding-wing SB2Cs and the number of VB and VT aircraft was decreased while increasing the number of fighters. These new fighters also took on some of the air-to-ground missions..



Midway panel in World War Two Memorial, by Walter Lord

## PRELUDE TO WAR

Mussolini became Prime Minister of Italy in 1922. Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria in 1931. Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933. Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935. In 1936, Hitler violated the Versailles Treaty by moving troops into the Rhineland, a demilitarized zone along the French/German border while our Congress passed the Neutrality Act. Japan invaded eastern portions of China in 1937, and Hitler and Mussolini met for the first time. The Japanese Rape of Nanking began at the end of 1937. Diplomatic words with Hitler and a Japanese embargo failed to stop the tides of war.

As a preview to WW-II, the Spanish Civil War (17 July 1936 to 1 April 1939) had many countries “testing” various weapons and tactics. This war ended with General Francisco Franco becoming dictator, a position he held until his death in 1975.

The decade before Pearl Harbor was shaped by the Great Depression. Nearly everyone suffered to some extent, but the military suffered more than anybody. The number of military personnel, training, weapons, and even tactics were hopelessly inadequate for what was clearly becoming a very hostile world.

On 4 March 1933, **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** stepped into this world chaos as President at the nadir of the Great Depression. During the years before Pearl Harbor, farm prices fell 60% and over two million people were unemployed in the United States.

In 1913, Roosevelt was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy and served through World War I. In 1921, he was paralyzed by polio from the waist down, yet served in the New York State legislature and was Governor of New York from 1929 to 1932.

Despite his paralysis, few people ever saw him in a wheel-chair. He was elected to a second-term in 1936, and a third-term in 1940. He died just a few weeks into his fourth-term in 1945.

Making matters worse, the *American First Movement*, at the time, was a powerful political force focused on keeping us out of another war. They eyed every military appropriation as a prelude to war. This group disbanded on 7 December 1941.

Although **VT-17** history began on 1 January 1943, this prior period affected recruiting and training of personnel. Pearl Harbor and the events of 1942 certainly motivated personnel to join the military and then put extraordinary effort into training for whatever the future might throw at them. However, it was impossible to conduct realistic combat training while flying obsolete aircraft or making carrier landings on a baby flattop cruising in the protected waters of Chesapeake Bay.

1942 was truly another time that tried men’s souls, even when the worst events were censored. On any particular day, there was bad news in the headlines from either the Atlantic or Pacific. For instance, the public heard about only a few of the nearly 1,200 ships (over 6-million tons of shipping) that were lost in the Atlantic during 1942 alone, including 27 escort ships, although 86 German submarines also littered the bottom during this same period. The few bits of good news were often accompanied with terrible losses and more gold-stars appeared in windows across America.

During the course of the war, Tokyo Radio reported the sinking of our ships and eventually the numbers totaled far more ships than we ever commissioned, but there were just enough truthful details to make people worry. The ubiquitous rumor-mill ground out countless stories, especially in California where coastal residents

expected a Japanese battleship bombardment any day, while only a few submarines managed to lob shells ashore with minimal damage.

Even local news was censored, including the reassuring numbers of ships and aircraft being built. In 1943, Japanese pilots were shocked when their fabled Zero suddenly became a second-rate fighter with the introduction of the fabled F4U Corsair and F6F Hellcat into the war. The Japanese were building more ships and better aircraft, but they had no hope of producing the quantity required to make a difference in the outcome of the war.

Throughout the war, the Japanese military tried to keep their own citizens, and even their Emperor, in the dark about Japanese losses. It was easy to explain a few B-25s over Tokyo as a fluke. It was more difficult to isolate the survivors of the Battle of Midway to keep that disaster quiet. During 1943 and 1944, Japanese suffered increasing casualties and growing shortages. Then the massive B-29 raids from Saipan started in November 1944. On 16 February 1945, Task Force 58 showed up on the Japanese door-step with 16 aircraft carriers launching hundreds of aircraft (including VT-17) that roamed at-will over the Japanese home islands. Here was the American Navy – making the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor look like a picnic.

**Editor:** Material for this early period of WW-II was obtained from numerous sources, but three books stand out:

*AND I WAS THERE* by Edwin T. Layton describes radio intelligence before and after Pearl Harbor.

*SHATTERED SWORD* by Parshall and Tully provides incredible details about the Battle of Midway.

*GUADALCANAL* by Richard B. Frank gives the reader everything about that battle, except malaria.

## CHRONOLOGY

### 1939

**Commander-in-Chief = Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

- March Hitler's storm troopers annexed Czechoslovakia.
- August Germany signed a "nonaggression" treaty with the Soviet government.
- September German troops invaded Poland, supported by air strikes, tanks and artillery, creating the word "blitzkrieg" meaning "lightning war." This event is considered the beginning of World War II, at least in Europe.
- 16 October Germany conducted the first air raids against British military targets.

### 1940

**Commander-in-Chief = Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

- April German forces invaded Denmark and Norway.
- 25 April USS *WASP* (CV-7) was commissioned with Captain JOHN W. REEVES Jr. commanding.
- May German forces moved through neutral Holland and Belgium and then into France.
- 22 June France surrendered to the numerically inferior German Army.
- July The United States imposed a partial embargo on shipments of most raw materials to Japan.
- 3 July Eleven ESSEX class carriers were ordered for an average cost under \$70-million. This contract eventually produced 24 Essex-class carriers, with another three partially completed ships scrapped at the end of the war. The last of these proud ships, *USS LEXINGTON*, was finally retired in 1991 after 48-years of service.
- 10 July The Battle of Britain began, lasting until the end of October. Germans date the battle from August and ending in May 1941.
- September Congress passed the Selective Service Act which drafted 900,000 men for one year. An extension of this Act was passed the following year by one vote. New inductees were paid \$31 per month.

### 1941

**Commander-in-Chief = Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

- 28 March *USS YORKTOWN* completed five months operating the CXAM radar. The report stated aircraft were tracked at 100 miles, and included recommendations that friendly aircraft be equipped with electronic IFF (Identification, Friend or Foe).
- 22 April Authorized enlisted strength of regular navy was increased to 232,000, with regular increases throughout the war. In 1945, there were over 3-million enlisted personnel in the Navy. By 1997, the number had dropped to 335,284 and still declining.
- 28 April The keel was laid for *USS ESSEX* (CV-9) and she was commissioned December 31, 1942.
- 2 June *USS LONG ISLAND* (ACV-1), the first escort carrier, was commissioned. She was converted from the cargo ship *Mormacmail* in just 67 days, and later designated CVE-1.
- 12 June **ALL** members of the U.S. Naval Reserve, not in a deferred status, were called to active duty.

- 22 June Ignoring their nonaggression pact, Germany invaded the Soviet Union.
- 24 July The United States imposed nearly a total embargo on shipments to Japan and froze Japanese assets. These actions were an attempt to get Japan to withdraw from China, but Japan could not leave China without losing “face” and, instead, developed war plans to get their raw materials elsewhere.
- 7 August Grumman Aircraft made the first flight of XTBF-1 (BuNo 2539), later named the Avenger.
- 15 September The keel was laid for *USS BUNKER HILL* (CV-17), contracted September 9, 1940 and commissioned 7 December 1942.
- 20 October *USS HORNET* (CV-8) was commissioned with Captain MARC A. MITSCHER in command.



November 1941 view of Ford Island. *USS ENTERPRISE* is moored alongside (bottom)

- 26 November A Six Japanese aircraft carrier task force, sailed from remote Hittokappu Bay in the Kuriles, its departure and course shrouded in secrecy and radio silence.
- 28 November *USS ENTERPRISE* (CV-6) sailed with VMF-211 (F4F) for Wake Island.
- 4 December *ENTERPRISE* completed her mission to Wake Island and shaped a course to return to Pearl Harbor. Weather delayed her arrival until the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>.
- 5 December *USS LEXINGTON* (CV-2) sailed with VMSD-231 (SB2U) for Midway Island.
- The third Pacific carrier, *USS SARATOGA* (CV-3), was in San Diego, but sailed for Pearl Harbor on 8 December.
- 7 December 353 Japanese carrier aircraft, in two strike groups, attacked Pearl Harbor and other Hawaiian military facilities.**

At 0600, the first wave of 183 aircraft were launched from the six Japanese carriers and their surprise attack began at 0753. The second wave of 170 aircraft was launched at 0715 and arrived over Oahu at 0854. The last Japanese aircraft recovered by 1300. By 1330, the Japanese task force was steaming back towards Japan, arriving there on 23 December.

The Japanese attack caused 3,581 civilian and military casualties (dead and wounded), yet individual acts of heroism far exceeded the casualties. About half of these casualties were Navy personnel. Despite this terrible loss and the damage to ships and aircraft, the Japanese failed to destroy the Island’s fuel oil supply, which would have forced the Navy to move back to the West Coast.

Imagine, if you can, the magnitude of damage and casualties had the Japanese attacked at 0600 (local) instead of 0800, or if the Lexington and Enterprise were tied up at Ford Island that Sunday morning.

*ENTERPRISE* search planes (SBDs from VB 6 and VS 6) arrived off Oahu at 0800 as the Japanese attack unfolded. Japanese planes shot down some SBDs, and one was shot down by friendly fire. Another SBD ended up on Kauai where its radio-gunner was drafted into the local Army defense force with his single .30-caliber machine gun.

The first night recovery occurred when *ENTERPRISE* turned on searchlights to aid returning SBDs (VB 6 and VS 6) and TBDs (VT 6) that had launched at dusk in an attempt to find

Japanese ships reported off Oahu. Friendly fire downed four F4Fs (VF 6) trying to land at Ford Island. Other *ENTERPRISE* SBDs made a night landing at Kaneohe, miraculously avoiding automobiles and construction equipment parked to prevent just such an occurrence.

On the western side of the International Date Line, it was 8 December on Wake Island, but Japanese bombers from their Caroline Island bases hit Wake Island. In the Philippines, Japanese attacked seaplanes in the Gulf of Davao on the southern island of Mindanao. At 2130 (local time), two Japanese ships shelled Midway Island, but received some damaging shell fire in return.

8 December President Roosevelt described December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 as “... **a date, which will live in infamy**” and asked Congress to declared war on Japan.

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (in exile) didn't wait to be bombed before declaring war against Japan. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, the Netherlands submarine O-16 damaged a Japanese troop transport. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, the O-16 sank three Japanese troop transports. Unfortunately, while returning to Singapore, the O-16 ran into a minefield and sank with only one survivor.

The Japanese bombed Wake Island again.

10 December Japanese aircraft sank *HMS REPULSE* and *HMS PRINCE OF WALES* off Kuantan, Malaya, while the Cavite Navy Yard near Manila was almost completely destroyed in another attack. Japanese ground units invaded Luzon at three different locations.

Lt C.E. Dickinson of VS-6 attacked the Japanese submarine I-70 near Oahu, the first Japanese submarine destroyed from the air. Lt. Dickinson was shot-down and his gunner/radio operator killed by Japanese aircraft while trying to land at Ford Island on 7 December.

11 December The small American force on Guam surrendered to a Japanese invasion force.

The Marine defenders of Wake Island beat off the first Japanese invasion attempt.

15 December *SARATOGA* arrived in Pearl Harbor, departing the next day to deliver 18 aircraft to Wake Island. She failed to reach Wake in time, but delivered her planes to Midway Island instead and then returned to Pearl Harbor.

16 December *USS YORKTOWN* (CV-5) departed Norfolk, the first major reinforcements dispatched to the Pacific.

The Navy flight training program was expanded again from 800 to 2,500 per month. For comparison, the Navy trained 1,155 new pilots during 1995 (96 per month).

17 December Admiral Husband E. Kimmel (NA 1904) was relieved of duty pending an investigation into the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was never convicted of any wrong-doing, but was clearly the scapegoat and he took early retirement in 1942. Vice Admiral William S. Pye (NA 1901) became the acting commander of the Pacific Fleet.

23 December Wake Island defenders surrendered during the second Japanese assault.

24 December The destroyer *USS DRAYTON* (DD 366) sank a full-sized Japanese submarine, while escorting a convoy near Pearl Harbor.

31 December Admiral Chester W. Nimitz assumed command of Pacific Fleet. He would prove to be the right man at the right place at the right time.

## **1942** **Commander-in-Chief = Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

3 January First production TBF-1 rolled off the Grumman assembly line at Bethpage on Long Island.



Early TBF-1 with a crew of four

- 6 January *YORKTOWN* departed San Diego escorting Marine reinforcements to the Samoan Islands, arriving at Samoa on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and then departed for Pearl Harbor on the 25<sup>th</sup>.
- 7 January Navy's authorized aircraft strength was increased from 15,000 to 27,500. (The Navy had about 4,000 aircraft of all types in 2005.)
- 11 January *SARATOGA* was torpedoed, port side amidships, by a Japanese submarine, 420 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. Temporarily repaired at Pearl Harbor, she steamed to Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for permanent repairs and modernization.
- 12 January Authorized enlisted strength of the U.S. Navy was increased to 500,000. (The Navy had about 377,000 personnel in 2005.)
- 15 January American prisoners, including five Navy nurses, from Guam were transported to Japan in *Argentina Maru*. The nurses were repatriated six months later.
- 23 January Japanese troops landed at Balikpapan, Borneo and occupied Rabaul, New Britain.
- The *USS NECHES* (AO-5) was sunk by a Japanese submarine off the Hawaiian Islands.
- 31 January *HORNET* completed an accelerated shakedown cruise and returned to Norfolk. During this period, VB-8 and VS-8 were still flying SBC-4 biplanes. Two B-25 bombers were hoisted aboard and the ship put to sea on 2 February, launched the two bombers and then returned to Norfolk.



SBC-4 flown by VB-8 and VS-8 until March 1942.

- 1 February Admiral Nimitz ordered the first American air strikes of the war. *YORKTOWN* conducted air strikes against Jaluit, Mili, and Makin Islands while *ENTERPRISE* hit Kwajalein and Maloelap Islands in the Marshal and Gilbert Groups.
- At 0704 (local), over Taroa Island in the Wotje group (then) Lt. Will Rawie of VF-6 bagged the first Japanese aircraft, a Type 96 fighter (Claude), for the United States Navy.
- 14 February *ENTERPRISE* departed Pearl Harbor for strikes against Japanese held Wake Island and returned on the 24<sup>th</sup>.
- 15 February Singapore surrendered to the Japanese.
- 16 February *LEXINGTON*, as part of Task Force Eleven, steamed for an attack on Rabaul, New Britain.
- 20 February *LEXINGTON* was detected and attacked by Japanese twin-engine bombers some 225 miles from Rabaul. Fighters destroyed the first nine, but were out of position for the second nine. A single VF-3 fighter (F4F), flown by Lt. Edward H. "Butch" O'Hare, shot down five of the second group and damaged another, saving *LEXINGTON* from an unpleasant fate. The mission to Rabaul was aborted, while Butch O'Hare became one of the early Medal of Honor recipients of the war.

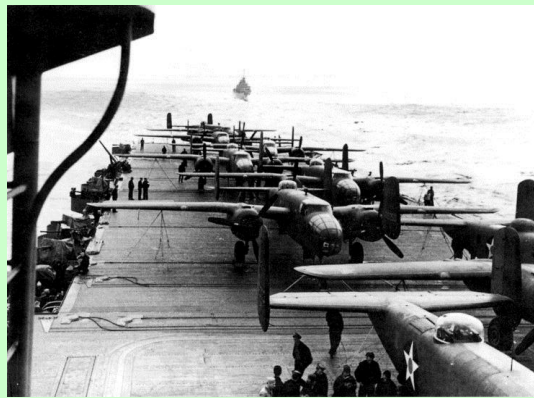
- 23 February A surfaced Japanese submarine shelled an oil refinery at Ellwood, California (near Santa Barbara airport), destroying a pump house.
- 27 February *USS LANGLEY* (AV-3 and ex CV-1), ferrying 32 P-40s for the defense of Java, was bombed and sunk about 75-miles south of Tjilatjap, Java. The ship that became the U.S. Navy's first aircraft carrier was converted to a seaplane tender in 1937.
- 4 March *USS HORNET* set course for the Pacific and arrived at the Panama Canal on 11 March. Then she stopped at San Diego on 20 March. The Air Group received new F4F-4 and SBD-3 aircraft, the latter replacing biplanes, and departed on 23 March for carrier qualifications returning on 27 March. She steamed for San Francisco on 30 March.

VT-8 (*HORNET*) was the first squadron to receive TBF Avengers. Mechanical problems delayed their transition and *HORNET* departed, but left a detachment at NAS Norfolk. This detachment and their planes finally arrived in Pearl Harbor the day after *HORNET* deployed for Pont Luck. Six aircraft were then flown to Midway Island and participated in the strike against the Japanese fleet. Only one badly damaged TBF returned to Midway Island.

Japanese seaplanes bombed Oahu Island with no damage.

*ENTERPRISE* launched an air strike against Marcus Island, 700 miles northwest of Wake Island and 975 miles from Japan.

- 6 March *LEXINGTON* teamed up with *YORKTOWN*, headed for New Guinea in the South Pacific.
- 10 March *YORKTOWN* and *LEXINGTON* launched aircraft against Japanese shipping and installations at Salamaua and Lae on Huon Gulf at the east end of New Guinea. The attacking aircraft staggered over the Owen-Stanley mountains and caught the Japanese completely by surprise.
- YORKTOWN* steamed for Tongatabu Island, departing on 27 April to rejoin *LEXINGTON*. Tongatabu Island is in the Tonga Group, 315 miles south of Samoa.
- 26 March *LEXINGTON* arrived in Pearl Harbor.
- 2 April *HORNET* slipped out of San Francisco Bay with sixteen B-25 Mitchell bombers on her flight deck. She set course to rendezvous with *ENTERPRISE* about 1,000-miles east of Midway Island.



- 8 April *ENTERPRISE* departed Pearl Harbor to rendezvous with *HORNET* and her B-25s.
- 9 April The American and Philippine troops on Bataan were surrendered by General Edward King, USA. The death march began, ending at Camp O'Donnell between 12 and 24 April.
- 15 April *LEXINGTON* departed Pearl Harbor to join *YORKTOWN* for refueling SW of New Hebrides Islands on May 1. The Battle of Coral Sea was about to begin.
- 18 April **Halsey-Doolittle Raid:** *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* approached within 650 miles of Japan. Sixteen B-25s were launched earlier than planned to bomb targets in Japan. Fifteen of the B-25s crashed in occupied China, where brutal reprisals by Japanese against local Chinese ensued. One B-25 landed intact near Vladivostok and the crew was interned by the Soviets.

After bombing Tokyo, AAF Captain York managed to land safely near Vladivostok in the Soviet Union. York and his four crew were interned in the freezing interior for a year and were then moved to a dusty town, called Ashkhabad, on the southern edge of the Great Persian Desert, some 250 miles east of the Caspian Sea, but only about 20 miles from the Persian border (now Iran). They managed to escape across the border to freedom in May 1943, but were still a long way from anywhere.

While the material damage inflicted by the bombers was small, with only four 500-lb bombs per plane, the psychological effect of an air raid on the Japanese capital was great – our first really good news of the war.

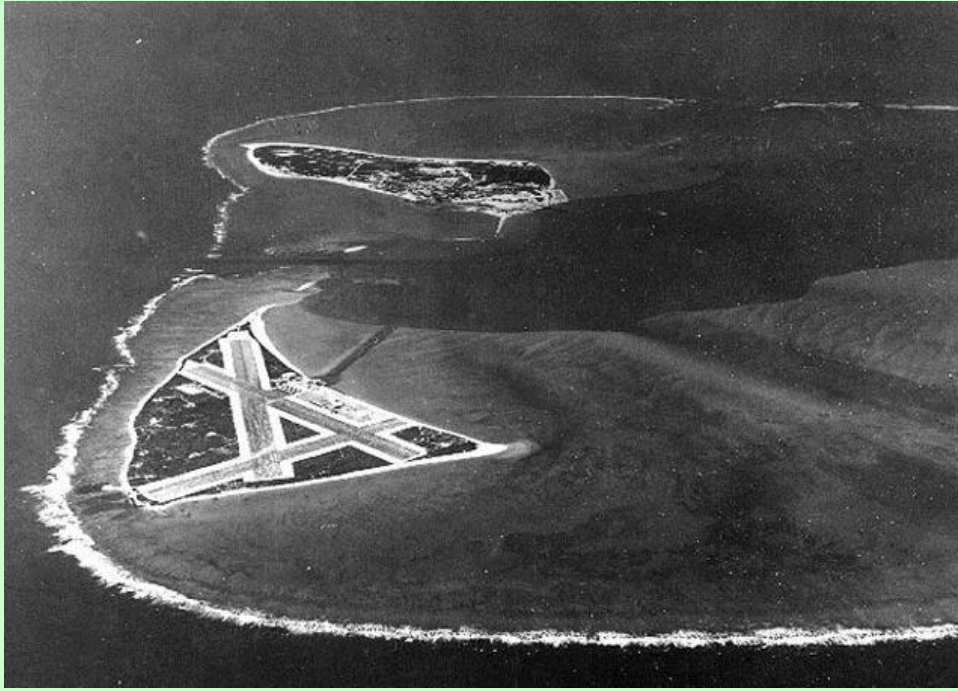
To protect the names of the participating ships, President Roosevelt told reporters the B-25s came from Shangri-La, which was a fictitious place described in the 1933 novel “Lost Horizons” by James Hilton.

The presidential retreat at Camp David was named Shangri-La in 1942, and the name passed to a new Essex-Class carrier on 15 September 1944.

- 25 April *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* arrived in Pearl Harbor. Both ships departed for Coral Sea on 30 April.
- 27 April HYPO, the radio intelligence unit in Hawaii was reading about 20% of the intercepted Japanese traffic in the JN-25B cipher. One such intercept revealed the Japanese were interested in maps of the Aleutian Islands. Similar messages during early May indicated the Japanese were planning something big, something related to AF – Midway Island. By the end of May, HYPO had pieced together most of the Japanese schedule and Order-of-Battle.
- 4-8 May **Battle of the Coral Sea.** The Japanese sent an invasion force and three carriers to take Port Moresby on New Guinea, just 450 miles from the Australian coastal City of Cairns. This action would endanger Australia and the vital sea-lanes to the United States.
- 3 May The Japanese captured Tulagi Island, a natural harbor north of Guadalcanal.
- 4 May *YORKTOWN* conducted strikes against Tulagi, sinking cargo ships and a destroyer. These attacks alerted the Japanese to the presence of an American carrier in the area.
- 6 May Troops on Corregidor were surrendered, by General Wainwright.
- 7 May At 0810, the Japanese launched 78 aircraft to a reported American carrier which was actually the oiler *USS NEOSHO* (AO-23) and destroyer *USS SIMS* (DD-409). *NEOSHO* drifted for three days before the 123 survivors were taken off by *USS HENLY* (DD-391) and *NEOSHO* was scuttled.
- At 0840, the *LEXINGTON* and *YORKTOWN* launched 100 aircraft to destroy the Japanese light carrier *Shoho*. Ensign Walt Hass, of VF-42, became the first Navy pilot to bag a Japanese A6M2 Type Zero (ZEKE).
- Japanese attempted to find U.S. force in the waning daylight, but ran afoul of an American fighter patrol, losing several aircraft in the process.
- 8 May At 0915, the Japanese launched an attack on the American carriers. *LEXINGTON* and *YORKTOWN* launched a strike against the Japanese carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* about the same time. SBDs damaged *Shokaku*, forcing her retirement. *Zuikaku* hid under a rain shower and avoided damage. Damage to *Shokaku*, and *Zuikaku*'s air group losses, prevented the use of those two carriers for several weeks. The two American torpedo squadrons launched their torpedoes, but either missed or the torpedoes were defective.
- Meanwhile, Japanese planes attacked and five torpedoes damaged *LEXINGTON*, followed by three bomb hits, while *YORKTOWN* took one bomb hit. However, *LEXINGTON* was further damaged when gasoline vapors were ignited; triggering massive explosions that led to her abandonment and the Navy's oldest carrier was scuttled.
- YORKTOWN* steamed to Pearl Harbor for repairs, but only two days were allowed. With leaky hull plates, she still had to defend Midway Island.
- 13 May Bureau of Navigation was renamed Bureau of Naval Personnel.
- 21 May Admiral Robert Theobald (NA 1907), departed for Aleutian waters in command of Task Force 8, composed of five cruisers, ten destroyers, and six submarines. Armed with intercepted intelligence of Japanese intentions, Theobald ignored this intelligence and developed his own plan to defend Alaska which proved ineffective. He was relieved in January 1943 and served as Commandant of the First Naval District until October 1944, and retired in February 1945.
- 26 May *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* returned to Pearl Harbor after arriving in the South Pacific too late to assist during the Battle of Coral Sea.
- 27 May Japanese forces headed for Midway Island under radio silence. The First Mobile Force (carriers) departed Japanese home waters.



- 28 May Admiral Nimitz had two ships in the South Pacific transmit bogus communications to simulate carrier operations. Meanwhile, the three American carriers were prepared for battle as the Japanese shifted to the new JN-25C code books.
- 28 May TF-16, formed around *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET*, departed Pearl Harbor for a position northeast of Midway called Point Luck.
- 30 May TF-17, formed around *YORKTOWN*, departed Pearl Harbor to join TF 16 at Point Luck, some 350 miles northeast of Midway Island.



Midway Atoll, with Sand Island above and the airfield on Eastern Island below.

- 31 May Japanese midget submarines raid Sidney Harbor, Australia.
- 2 June The three carriers arrived at Point Luck before Japanese submarines arrived in position to detect their movement from Pearl Harbor. Admiral Nimitz also deployed 25 fleet submarines around Midway Island.
- 3 June Aircraft based at Midway Island located and attacked Japanese transports of the Combined Fleet about 600-miles west of Midway Island.
- 4 June The **Battle of Midway** began at 0534 (local time) as search planes reported a Japanese carrier strike group inbound to Midway Island and all aircraft at Midway were scrambled. At 0603, a PBY provided an exact position for the Japanese carriers, about 175 miles from the American fleet. At 0630, Japanese planes from the four Japanese carriers bombed Midway Island installations.

The Japanese fleet actually had six carriers. The 7,470-ton *Hosho*, commissioned in 1922, carried 8 bombers to scout for the Main Force (battleships) commanded by Admiral Yamamoto. The 14,200-ton *Zuiho*, commissioned in 1940, carried 24 aircraft with the Invasion Force commanded by Admiral Kondo. There were also two seaplane tenders with 32 aircraft destined for Kure Atoll, about 56-miles west of Midway Island.

At 0700, the first Midway strike aircraft (TBF and B-26) made unsuccessful torpedo attacks on Japanese carriers. At 0715, Admiral Nagumo ordered a second strike on Midway Island. At 0728, he was informed of ten American ships 235 miles northeast of Midway Island. At 0745, Admiral Nagumo reversed himself and ordered torpedoes and armor-piercing bombs loaded for a strike against ships.

Six of the 21 VT-8 detachment Avengers were flown to Midway Island. These aircraft, along with four AAF B-26 Marauders, launched from Midway Island on the morning of 4 June. Five TBF and two B-26 aircraft were shot down either before or after launching torpedoes, none of which hit. The three returning aircraft were all damaged.

Ensign Earnest, flying the only surviving TBF, made a wheels-up landing at Midway, his turret-gunner was dead, his radio operator was wounded, and his TBF was suitable only for parts. The Martin B-26 first flew in February 1941. It was slightly larger than the B-25 and similar in size except for a single tail, and powered by twin R-2800 engines.

At 0800, the second Midway strike group (SBD) unsuccessfully attacked the Japanese carrier *Hiryu*. This was followed by high-altitude horizontal bombing runs by fourteen B-17s against *Hiryu* and *Soryu*, also without success. Finally, eleven Marine Vindicators (SB2U) unsuccessfully attacked the Japanese battleship *Haruna*.

At 0820, a Japanese scout plane reported one American carrier sighted. At 0837, the Japanese began recovering their Midway strike group, which was completed at 0918. The Japanese carriers turned north to close on the American fleet and prepared to launch a strike at 1030.

At 0700, the American carriers began launching aircraft. At 0920, VT-8 (*HORNET*) found and attacked the Japanese carriers, but all 15 aircraft were shot down with one survivor.

At 0925, VT-6 (*ENTERPRISE*) attacked the Japanese carriers. These torpedo attacks were also ineffective and nearly all the TBDs were shot down. However, these two attacks delayed the Japanese preparations for launching a strike against the American carriers and pulled down the Japanese fighters from altitude.

The Japanese had nearly an hour between the attacks by VT-8 and VT-6 and the arrival of the SBDs and VT-3. However, before the hangar deck strike aircraft could be brought to the flight deck, their fighters had to recover, refuel and launch again.

At 1022, SBDs from VB-6 and VS-6 (*ENTERPRISE*) made unopposed dives against *Kaga* and *Akagi* with devastating results. At the same time, VT-3 (*YORKTOWN*) launched an unsuccessful torpedo attack against *Soryu*, which was also attacked at 1028 by VB-3 SBDs. As the surviving American planes left, three of the Japanese carriers were burning and mortally damaged.

A quirk of fate was the attack on *Akagi* by Lt. Richard Best of VS-6. Most of his VS-6 pilots followed LCDR McClusky and VB-6 diving on *Kaga*. Lt. Best and two wingman pulled away and maneuvered to dive on *Akagi*, making one direct hit and two near-misses with 1000-lb bombs. It appears that Lt. Best's bomb penetrated the flight deck and exploded on the upper hangar deck amidst a dozen or so armed and fueled aircraft.

Meanwhile, CDR Stanhope Ring (NA 1923), the *Hornet's* Air Group Commander, led his 44 F4F and SBD aircraft too far north and missed the Japanese fleet completely. While returning to *HORNET*, all 10 of his escorting fighters and 5 SBD were lost due to fuel starvation, without dropping a single bomb on the Japanese fleet.

At 1050, Admiral Yamamoto was informed that three of his carriers were on fire.

Admiral Nagumo moved his flag to the cruiser *Nagara*, and ordered a surface action against the American carriers, but an hour later he decided against the idea. At 1445, *Nagara* was steaming with *Hiryu*.

Escaping destruction, *Hiryu* launched a bomber strike at 1040 and a torpedo strike at 1245. At 1132, the first *Hiryu* strike group was detected by *YORKTOWN* at 32 miles. Fighters splashed 11 Japanese dive-bombers, but the remaining 7 managed to temporarily disable *YORKTOWN*. At 1430, the second *Hiryu* strike group was detected at 40 miles, and managed to put two torpedoes in *YORKTOWN*, causing a 26° list to port.

The time delay between these two strikes confused the Japanese into thinking that two American carriers had been sunk. The damage from the Japanese bombers was quickly repaired and *Yorktown* was conducting flight operations when the Japanese torpedo strike group arrived. Still, *YORKTOWN* survived the torpedo attack and was preparing to be towed to Pearl Harbor.

At 1600, *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* launched strikes against *Hiryu*, located 100 miles to the southwest. At 1703, the *ENTERPRISE* strike group (with some *YORKTOWN* SBDs) inflicted mortal damage upon *Hiryu* as she was launching a reconnaissance aircraft. The *Hiryu* was burning when the *HORNET* bombers arrived, so they attacked other ships.

At 1915, Admiral Yamamoto gave orders for a night surface attack against the American carriers, which were steaming eastward, and were soon out of reach.

5 June *Hiryu* was abandoned at 0230 and scuttled at 0510. Actually, she remained afloat until 0820. A few engine-room survivors were picked up by an American ship. *Akagi* was also abandoned but remained afloat. She was ordered scuttled at 0250.

Admiral Yamamoto ordered a general withdrawal at 0255.

By morning, TF-16 was steaming westward to pursue the remnants of the Japanese fleet. Efforts to salvage *YORKTOWN* continued.

The repaired and modernized *SARATOGA* arrived in Pearl Harbor, loaded with replacement aircraft.

6 June Battle of Midway concluded as planes from *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* attacked the retiring Japanese force, sinking the heavy cruiser *Mikuma* and putting *Mogami* in a shipyard for a year. These strikes also damaged destroyers *Asashio* and *Arashio*.

Meanwhile, a Japanese submarine interrupted salvage operations and doomed *YORKTOWN*. Torpedoes also sank the destroyer *HAMMANN* (DD-412) while she was alongside the five-year old *YORKTOWN*.

*USS WASP* (CV-7) departed Norfolk, and arrived in San Diego on 1 July. *Wasp* operated in the Atlantic and Mediterranean during the previous six months before joining the Pacific Fleet.

7 June Submarine tender *USS FULTON* (AS-11) and other ships rescued *YORKTOWN* survivors as she sank from heavy damage incurred on 4 and 6 June.

The headlines of the Sunday 7 June Chicago Tribune boldly announced:

**JAP FLEET SMASHED BY U.S. 2 CARRIERS SUNK AT MIDWAY. NAVY HAD WORD OF JAP PLAN TO STRIKE AT SEA. KNEW DUTCH HARBOR WAS A FEINT.**

Other papers picked up the story, but apparently the Japanese did not. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox got the papers to drop coverage of this story by war correspondent Stanley Johnson, who had been aboard *LEXINGTON* at Coral Sea. Johnson was shown a copy of the classified CINCPAC's bulletin of 31 May by his roommate, the *LEX*'s XO, while the survivors were on board the cruiser *USS CHESTER* headed back to the West Coast. However, Johnson had never been asked to sign a security pledge and reported the story when he arrived state-side. Neither Johnson nor the Tribune were ever charged with anything (except stupidity), but the *LEX* XO served in backwater jobs for the rest of the war.

8 June *SARATOGA* delivered replacement aircraft to Midway.

13 June *HORNET* and *ENTERPRISE* returned to Pearl Harbor for repairs and upkeep.

*Editor: There has been considerable debate amongst scholars over the importance of the Battle of Midway. Some say it was the turning point of the war. Others say it just shortened the war by a few months or a year. As an eleven year old at the time, I remember my father smiled for the first time in some months as he heard the news report. That smile established the importance of the battle for me. It also put me on a course to join the Navy six years later.*

20/21 June Japanese submarine shelled Estevan Point, on the west coast of Vancouver Island and Fort Stevens, Oregon at the entrance to the Columbia River.

30 June Captain Marc A. Mitcher (NA 1910) was relieved as commanding officer of *HORNET*, and ordered to command Patrol Wing Two based in Hawaii. CDR Stanhope V. Ring was relieved as CHAG and ordered to Pat Wing Two as operations officer.

18 July *WASP* arrived in Nukualofa, Tongatabu for a three-day engine repair.

30 July Women's Naval Reserve (WAVES) was established.

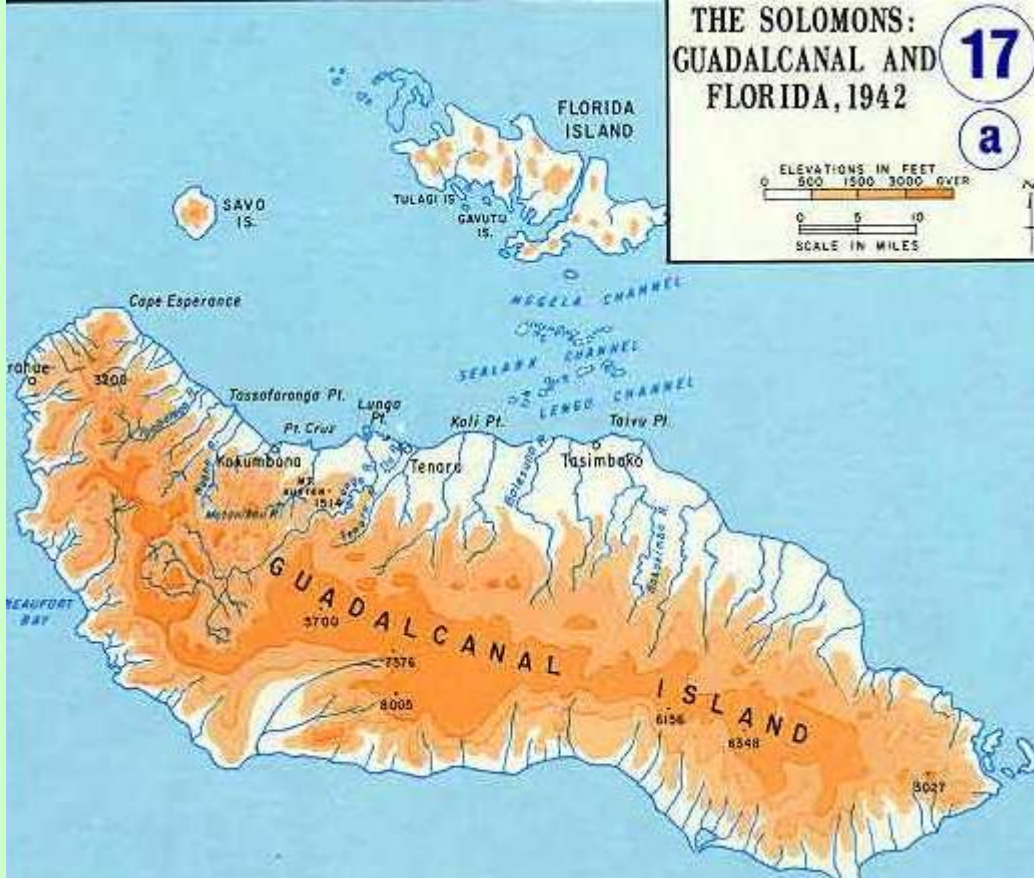
7 August **Operation WATCHTOWER:** 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division landed on **Florida, Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and Guadalcanal**, in the first American land offensive in the Pacific theater. The objective was the nearly completed Japanese airfield (originally 197' x 2,624') near Lunga Point, later named for Major Lofton Henderson, who died at the Battle of Midway. The landing at Guadalcanal was unopposed, but stiff opposition on the other islands.

*WASP* torpedo bombers attacked Japanese positions on Makambo Island and near the town of Saspi on Tulagi Island.

*ENTERPRISE* supported the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landing and defense of Guadalcanal.

An Australian Coast Watcher broadcast "twenty-seven bombers heading yours." Fighters from *WASP* and *ENTERPRISE* climbed to meet them and shot-down fourteen. The Japanese sent three more such flights, none doing much damage. However, the unloading of transports was delayed each time.

Meanwhile, the Japanese dispatched seven cruisers and escorting destroyers under Admiral Mikawa. This fleet was spotted several times as it steamed 560 miles towards Guadalcanal, but each report failed to reach someone who could do anything.



US Marines took the unfinished Japanese airfield (near Lunga Point) on Guadalcanal and the Florida Islands in August 1942.

8 August Vice Admiral Frank Fletcher departed with his carriers from the Guadalcanal area early, leaving Admiral Richmond Turner's invasion transports and General Alexander Vandegrift's Marines without air support.

Recently promoted, Fletcher was accused of getting "cold feet." Although not charged with anything, he was sent to command the 13<sup>th</sup> Naval District and the Northwest Command.

After sunset, the Allied cruiser force began patrolling what was to become known as Iron Bottom Sound (most of that iron turned out to be ours). Admiral Turner called a midnight conference with Vandegrift and Admiral Crutchley (RAN). As this meeting was about to begin, so did the **Battle of Savo Island**.

9 August A Japanese force of 7 cruisers and 1 destroyer, under Admiral Mikawa, approached west of Savo Island under cover of darkness and launched float planes.

At 0143 (local time), the destroyer *PATTERSON* broadcast; "Warning! Warning! Strange ships entering the harbor!" At which time the night sky was illuminated by flares from the float planes.

*HMAS CANBERRA* was hit by two torpedoes and a salvo of 24 eight-inch shells. She was scuttled early the next morning.

Next, *USS CHICAGO* was hit by a torpedo that blew off her bow as eight-inch shells put her out of action and she wobbled off to the west. The next morning, *CHICAGO* limped off towards Australia for repairs.

Then *USS ASTORIA* was caught in a searchlight and a salvo of shells landed off the port bow. The Gunnery Officer asked permission to fire, but the Captain was asleep in his quarters. He fired anyway. The Captain, now wide awake called for a cease-fire. As they argued, *ASTORIA* was hit with multiple shells. Shortly after noon she heeled over and sank.

*USS QUINCY* was then caught in a searchlight as her crew rushed to battle stations. She began sinking after being hit by numerous eight-inch shells, but her last salvo hit Admiral Mikawa's flagship *Chokai*, destroying the chartroom. Mikawa then had to worry about leading his fleet aground.

*USS VINCENNES* was illuminated by three Japanese cruisers. The second salvo caught her amidships. Just as the Captain turned eastward, she was hit by two torpedoes. She was doomed, but took another sixty hits and another torpedo before sinking.

As the Japanese fleet rounded Savo Island, the destroyer *RALPH TALBOT* came under fire. She launched four torpedoes and returned fire, but she was soon burning and listing 20°. However, a rain shower intervened and probably saved the ship from destruction.

About 0230, Mikawa decided to withdraw without attacking the defenseless transports. Further delays would put him within aircraft range at sunrise. He was unaware the American carriers had already departed. The Japanese called the battle a victory. The Americans knew it had been a disaster, but the Marines were still on Guadalcanal.

Near sunset, Admiral Turner also departed with his transports half unloaded. To this day Marines remember being left on that beach with so little. Fortunately, the Japanese had left them with enough rice and sake to last until the transports returned.

10 August Some retribution occurred at 0910, as the submarine S-44 fired four torpedoes at the Japanese cruiser *Kako*, returning to Kavieng after the Savo Island Battle. Three torpedoes hit and she sank five minutes later.

17 August *HORNET* departed Pearl Harbor for Guadalcanal, but missed the Battle of the Eastern Solomons.



USS *LONG ISLAND* with aircraft, and stores for the South Pacific, circa May 1943

20 August Thirty-one Marine pilots (VMF-223 and VMSB-232) got their first catapult shot from the deck of USS Long Island, some 190 miles SE from Guadalcanal, off San Cristobal Island. The Mud Marines gave them a joyful welcome as these first planes touched down on Henderson Field. *LONG ISLAND* then returned to carrier qualification duties off San Diego.

24 August **Battle of the Eastern Solomons** began as TF 61, supported by USMC and USAAF planes from Henderson Field (Cactus Air Force) turned back a major Japanese attempt to recapture Guadalcanal and Tulagi. *ENTERPRISE* was damaged by a Japanese dive-bomber. *SARATOGA* aircraft (VT 8, VB 3, and VS 3) sank the light-carrier *Ryujō* and damaged the seaplane carrier *Chitose*.

Torpedo 8 detachment and the few TBD survivors of Midway quickly reformed. VT-8 deployed with *SARATOGA*, VT-3 boarded *ENTERPRISE*, VT-6 deployed with *HORNET*, while VT-7 stayed with *WASP*. All these pilots and crews had less-than two months to learn the quirks of the TBF Avenger and carqual before departing Pearl Harbor.

After *SARATOGA* was torpedoed on 31 August, her Air Group was briefly shore-based before joining Cactus Air Force on 13 September. By 15 October, VT-8 had ZERO flyable aircraft and slim hope of getting any. Personnel were flown out over the next month and VT-8 was disbanded. Similarly, VT-6 was disbanded after *HORNET* was sunk.

25 August The Japanese attempted a troop landing at Milne Bay, at the eastern tip of New Guinea. By 16 September, two Australian brigades had defeated the Japanese. The Japanese troops intended to take Port Moresby were instead sent to displace the Marines from Guadalcanal.

31 August *SARATOGA* was torpedoed a second time, 260-miles SE of Guadalcanal. She was temporarily repaired at Tongatabu Harbor and completed repairs in Pearl Harbor.

9 September A reconnaissance seaplane from the Japanese submarine I-25 dropped incendiary bombs near Mount Emily, 10 miles NE of Brookings, Oregon, but failed to start a forest fire.

10 September *ENTERPRISE* was back in Pearl Harbor for more repairs.

15 September *WASP* was severely damaged by three torpedoes from a Japanese submarine while covering a reinforcement convoy from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal. Irreparably damaged and consumed by gasoline fires, the 19-month old *WASP* was scuttled.

Captain Forrest P. Sherman (NA 1918) assumed command of *WASP* in May 1942. After his ship was sunk he served on Admiral Nimitz's staff for the remainder of the war. He became CNO in October 1949 after the "revolt of the admirals" and died unexpectedly while on an inspection tour in July 1951. The new airfield at NAS Pensacola was named in his honor.

- 8 October The Army's 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment boarded two transports at Nouema and sortied the next morning with a five ship escort – destination Guadalcanal, arriving on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>.
- 9/10 October Admiral Norman Scott maneuvered near Rennell Island with four cruisers and five destroyers, awaiting word on Japanese ship movements.
- 11 October The Tokyo Express consisted of the seaplane carriers *Nisshin* and *Chitose* with six destroyers, five of which embarked deck-loads of troops. In addition, Admiral Goto, with three cruisers and two destroyers, planned to bombard Henderson Field while the reinforcement group unloaded.

Based on search plane sightings of the reinforcement group, Admiral Scott rounded the northwest tip of Guadalcanal, headed for what would become known as the Battle of Cape Esperance at 2200. The reinforcement group was already unloading off Tassafaronga and spotted by one of Admiral Scott's seaplanes at 2250.

Cape Esperance is the northwest tip of Guadalcanal, with Savo Island about 9-miles to the northeast. The Japanese had their headquarters near the village of Marovovo, about 5-miles to the southwest.

At 2308, Admiral Scott, in *SAN FRANCISCO* with only *SC* radar, turned his column of ships to 050°, and then reversed course at 2333. By luck, this new course maneuvered his ships to cross the "T" of the Japanese bombardment group. At 2325, *HELENA*'s SG radar had detected surface vessels, but failed to report these contacts until 2342. At 2344, *BOISE*'s SG radar reported five bogies, but failed to clarify the bearing as relative or true which raised the possibility of a third group of ships.

The metric-wave *SC* radar had relatively short range with only an A-scope display. The newer centimetric-wave *SG* radar had better range and an easy to read PPI display. Thus, Admiral Scott might have eliminated confusion and friendly fire had he hoisted his flag in *HELENA* or *BOISE*. However, radar was new at the time and few senior officers had the opportunity to gain experience with this highly classified device.

Meanwhile, destroyers *DUNCAN*, followed by *LAFHEY*, charged the Japanese formation. *DUNCAN* attempted a torpedo launch on *Furutaka*, but was hit with friendly fire, jamming her rudder, and she looped her way out of the battle area.

At 2345, *SAN FRANCISCO*'s fire control radar finally located an unidentified target, but didn't fire. At 2346, *HELENA*'s main battery opened fire, which hit the Japanese flagship *Aoba* and mortally wounding Admiral Goto. The destroyer *Fubuki* was caught in a searchlight beam and promptly sunk by *BOISE* and *SAN FRANCISCO*.

At 2347, Admiral Scott ordered a cease fire over friendly-fire concerns. Firing slowed, but never stopped. At 2351, Admiral Scott ordered firing to resume, just as a torpedo or a salvo of shells hit *Furutaka*, which eventually sunk her.

- 12 October At midnight, Admiral Scott changed course to the west to pursue the enemy.
- At 0009, a Japanese salvo from *Kinugasa* straddled *SAN FRANCISCO*, but then shifted fire to *BOISE*. The first shell jammed *BOISE*'s #1 barbette, while the second exploded in the main magazine. The Captain turned his ship out of column and increased speed, causing the next salvo to land short. The crew got the fire out by 0240 and rejoined the Task Group at 0305 making 20 knots.
- At 0016, Admiral Scott changed course to the northwest. Firing slowed and finally ceased at 0020 while Scott elected to retire by changing course to the southwest. *DUNCAN*, however, was in a bad way and abandoned by 0200. She finally sank at noon about 6-miles north of Savo Island. The reinforcement group finished unloading and cleared the battle area unmolested.
- Seriously damaged, *Aoba* managed to join *Kinugasa* retiring to the north. *Furutaka* lost power about 0050 from progressive flooding. She sank at 0228 about 22-miles from Savo Island.

- 13 October 170 miles from Guadalcanal, aircraft from Henderson Field attacked the reinforcement group, sinking two destroyers.
- The 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Army's Americal Division landed at Guadalcanal to reinforce the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division.
- 18 October Vice Admiral W. F. Halsey relieved his Naval Academy classmate Vice Admiral R. L. Ghormley as Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force.

26 October

**Battle of Santa Cruz Islands** began as *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* engaged a numerically superior Japanese force. Although the Japanese Navy achieved a tactical victory, the failure of their simultaneous land offensive on Guadalcanal prevented them from exploiting this advantage. The dwindling number of Japanese planes failed to eliminate Cactus Air Force while fuel shortages compelled the Japanese Combined Fleet to retire to Truk Lagoon. Americans controlled the skies above the sea routes around Guadalcanal.

*ENTERPRISE* SBDs (VS-10) damaged the light carrier *Zuiho*. *HORNET* SBDs (VB 8 and VS 8) damaged the fleet carrier *Shokaku*. *HORNET* TBFs (VT 6) damaged the heavy cruiser *Chikuma*.

This modest victory did not come cheap. Both *ENTERPRISE* and *HORNET* were damaged, the latter fatally. The attempt to scuttle the one-year old *HORNET* failed.

27 October

*HORNET*, burning, listing and abandoned, was sunk by Japanese destroyers.

30 October

*ENTERPRISE* headed for Noumea for repairs.

8 November

The Allies invaded North Africa. Participants in Operation TORCH included USS *RANGER* and the escort carriers *SANTEE*, *SANGAMON*, *SUWANNE*, and *CHENANGO*. Afterwards, *RANGER* and *SANTEE* remained in the Atlantic theater, while the other three escort carriers steamed for the Pacific.

LCDR John Thomas BLACKBURN was the CO of VGF-29 in *SANTEE* during Operation TORCH. His short combat tour included a 3-day cruise in a one-man life-raft. *SANTEE* returned to Norfolk in time for Blackburn to take command of VF-17 on 1 January 1943.

11 November

The partially repaired *ENTERPRISE* steamed for Guadalcanal. Aircraft from *ENTERPRISE* and Henderson Field repeatedly attacked a Japanese reinforcement convoy.

Casablanca surrendered to United States forces. Allied-French armistice was signed. United States Operating Base, Oran was established.

12 November

Six American cruisers and thirteen destroyers, under Admirals Daniel Callaghan and Norman Scott, escorted a flotilla of transports and supply ships to Guadalcanal. After unloading, the supply ships and transports steamed southward, escorted by one cruiser and five destroyers.

Admirals Callaghan and Scott were classmates at the Naval Academy, Class of 1911. Admiral Callaghan was 15-days senior and was put in charge, although Admiral Scott had more experience in South Pacific waters. However, neither man had much experience with radar.

Meanwhile, a Japanese fleet that included two battleships steamed towards Guadalcanal intent on bombarding Henderson Field into oblivion.

After nightfall, Admiral Callaghan began to patrol Iron Bottom Sound, waiting for the Japanese fleet to arrive.

13 November

It was Friday, and the Japanese ships were detected on radar at 0124 (local time). However, Admiral Callaghan waited until 0145 to order “standby to open fire.” The brief night surface engagement that followed cost the Americans dearly. The cruiser *ATLANTA* was hit, killing Admiral Scott and most of his staff. Moments later, the cruiser *SAN FRANCISCO* was hit, killing Admiral Callaghan and most his staff and the ship’s bridge crew, while putting the ship temporarily out of action.

The cruiser *JUNEAU* was hit by a destroyer’s torpedo and was nearly dead in the water. Limping south, she became the target for a Japanese submarine. A witness said “*JUEANU* didn’t sink – she blew up with all the fury of an erupting volcano.” Only ten of the crew survived. The five Sullivan brothers died with the rest of her crew.

However, the battle wasn’t entirely one-sided. The Japanese battleship *Hiei* was damaged and had a jammed rudder. At sunrise, she was only 30-miles from Henderson Field, where the Cactus Air Force, reinforced by *ENTERPRISE* aircraft, found her and shuttle-bombed her all day long. After dusk, her crew was removed by Japanese destroyers and she was scuttled – the first Japanese battleship sunk during the war.



SBD glide-bombing with dive-flaps open

That night, Henderson Field was bombarded by two Japanese cruisers and some destroyers.

Meanwhile, a second Japanese fleet was underway, escorting massive reinforcements to Guadalcanal. Also steaming for Iron Bottom Sound was Admiral Willis Lee, with two battleships and four escorting destroyers.

Cactus Air Force search planes spotted the Japanese fleet shortly after dawn. Eleven transports carried 13,000 men, escorted by eleven destroyers. By nightfall, seven of the transports and a cruiser had been sunk. However, most of the Japanese troops were recovered by the destroyers, sans weapons and supplies, and continued towards Guadalcanal.

Admiral Lee's ships had also been spotted by the Japanese search planes, but his battleships were reported as cruisers. Apparently, the Japanese believed the Americans couldn't possibly have any battleships in action so soon after Pearl Harbor.

Admiral Lee's force entered Iron Bottom Sound after dark. At 2300, the SG radar aboard Lee's flagship *WASHINGTON* spotted the Japanese ships. The Japanese cruiser *Sandai* was chased off into a smoke screen. However, three of Lee's destroyers were sinking or sunk.

Meanwhile, *SOUTH DAKOTA* had a power failure and was being shelled by the Japanese battleship *Kirishima* and her escorting cruisers. *WASHINGTON* opened fire and soon had *Kirishima* burning from stem to stern. *SOUTH DAKOTA* then restored her power and the two battlewagons turned their attention to the Japanese cruisers. *Kirishima* sank a few hours later.

14 November Admiral Tanaka, in charge of the Tokyo Express, had been waiting for the shelling to cease before unloading his ships. As the remaining Japanese warships turned-tail for Rabaul, Admiral Tanaka ordered his four remaining transports to beach themselves at the west end of Guadalcanal, while his overloaded destroyers also steamed for Rabaul.

At sunrise, the Cactus Air Force went to work again, this time near Cape Esperance. The four transports were destroyed along with most of their critical supplies and heavy equipment. This final act put new meaning to the Japanese name for Guadalcanal – Starvation Island.

16 November *ENTERPRISE* again headed for Nouema for more repairs as the Japanese decided to cut their losses at Guadalcanal.

Meanwhile on New Guinea, even closer to Rabaul, Australian troops pushed the Japanese north over the Owen Stanley Mountains and the Army's 32<sup>nd</sup> Division began landings near Buna on the north coast.

27 November The French fleet at Toulon was scuttled to prevent their use by Germans forces occupying France.

30 November Admiral Carleton Wright planned to arrive off Tassafaronga at 2300 to intercept a Japanese reinforcement convoy reportedly composed of six transports escorted by eight destroyers, and commanded by Admiral Tanaka in *Naganami*.

Tassafaronga Point is a beach area roughly halfway between the Marines at Lunga Point and the Japanese headquarters near Cape Esperance. Its importance to the Japanese was a place to beach supplies in floating drums, carried by destroyers, in support of the ongoing ground battle about eight-miles further east, near Point Cruz.



At 2140, the Japanese ships passed through Indispensable Strait, near Florida Island, and headed towards Savo Island. At the same time, Admiral Wright's ships steamed through the Lengo Channel off the north shore of Guadalcanal.

At 2240, Tanaka turned his ships eastward into the passage south of Savo Island on a course to parallel the Guadalcanal coastline. Five minutes later, Wright's ships exited the Lengo Channel heading westward.

At 2306, *USS MINNEAPOLIS*, Wright's flagship, had SG radar contact on two targets at 23,000 yards (11.5 miles) that soon increased to seven or eight targets.

At 2312, the leading Japanese destroyer *Takanami* warned of possible enemy ships, and this was amplified by other Japanese ships. At 2316, Tanaka ordered "All ships attack."

At 2315, the lead American destroyer *USS FLETCHER* requested permission to fire torpedoes. Wright, however, delayed granting permission until 2320, followed by an order to open fire. *MINNEAPOLIS* fired her first salvo at 2321, and by 2325 all American ships were firing.

*Takanami* took the brunt of American shells and she was wrapped in flames while gliding to a stop. She was abandoned at 0130 and sank about 0137. Only 33 of her crew reached Guadalcanal alive. Meanwhile, Captain Sato in *Oyashio*, led his four destroyers stealthily along the coastline. Once behind the American column, Sato reversed course, increased speed and began firing torpedoes. In the ten minutes after 2323, the Japanese launched 44 Long Lance torpedoes.

At 2337, *MINNEAPOLIS* took two of those torpedoes, yet her main battery fired twice more before electrical power failed. Captain Rosendahl initially pointed her towards Guadalcanal until her condition stabilized, but later got her safely berthed at Sasapi.

Seconds later, *NEW ORLEANS* took a torpedo that severed the ship forward of turret two. She struggled to Tulagi, using the destroyer *MAURAY* alongside for ground tackle.

At 2339, *PENSACOLA* caught a torpedo abreast the mainmast. She lost power and steerage to the bridge, and soon had a 13° list to port. Her 8-inch shells cooked off one-by-one as the destroyer *PERKINS* came alongside to help fight the fires. At 0344, *PENSACOLA* also found refuge in Tulagi harbor.

Admiral Tisdale in *HONOLULU* failed to find a target. Just after midnight, Admiral Wright notified Tisdale to take charge.

*NORTHAMPTON* was the last cruiser in the American column. Her fire-control radar latched onto a target, but her 8-inch shells most likely only contributed to the destruction of *Takanami*. At 2348, lookouts spotted two torpedoes. The first hit abreast the after engine room and the second 40-feet further aft. Three of the four shafts ceased turning and the ship took a 10° port list. By 0115 the list had increased to 23° and her one shaft stopped. At 0130, Japanese shore batteries were dropping shells just 1000-yards shy of the ship. Everyone except a salvage crew was ordered off and 20 minutes later, *FLETCHER* and *DRAYTON* arrived to pickup survivors. Water pressure failed at 0200 and the list increased to 35° as Captain Kitts ordered the ship abandoned. At 0304, she rolled bottom up and sank by the stern.

This naval disaster caused recriminations up and down the chain-of-command, yet the Marines still held Henderson Field and the Japanese effort to supply their starving troops failed again.

- 7 December *USS BUNKER HILL* was christened by Mrs. Donald Boynton of Illinois.
- 12 December Scientists at the University of Chicago started the first controlled nuclear reaction.
- December *SARATOGA* headed for New Caledonia to launch air strikes against Munda in the Solomons.
- 31 December The Japanese Emperor approved a plan to evacuate and abandon Guadalcanal.

1942 ended with only *SARATOGA* and damaged *ENTERPRISE* holding the line in the Pacific, although the escort carriers *USS COPAHEE*, *NASSAU*, and *ALTANAGA* were training Escort Scouting squadrons (VGS), just in case.

The new year began with news that the Army and Marines on Guadalcanal were on the offensive, moving westward along the north coast. Finally, on 7 February 1943, the Japanese evacuated the last of their 12,000 surviving troops. They left more-than 24,000 dead on Guadalcanal, not counting those killed in naval and air battles.

There was little doubt about the future after the Battle for Guadalcanal. Production at American factories and shipyards were already outpacing anything the Japanese could build. The war would end in just 32 months, although military experts figured on another four to five years. Only the Japanese were confused.

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