



In June of 2022, the Navy Office of Legislative Affairs asked NHHC to provide historical support during a House Armed Services Committee event commemorating the Battle of Midway. Following a speech by Secretary of the Navy Carlos del Toro, Dr. Timothy L. Francis, senior historian, NHHC Histories and Archives Division, made the remarks below. After the ceremony, Dr. Francis received a letter of congratulations from Representative Joe Courtney, ranking member of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces.

Good morning Representatives, Mr. Secretary. As a naval historian, and senior chief in the Navy Reserve, I'm honored to speak today about the Battle of Midway.

Like last year, I am not going to talk much about the battle itself. As we should all know, being good U.S. Navy supporters, the battle was decided in a single day of decisive action, where the central core of the Japanese *Kido Butai*—their elite carrier strike force—was destroyed, with dramatic effects on the course of the Pacific War.

Victory was a combination of many things, from radio traffic and codebreaking work to careful risk analysis and the courage and bravery of Navy pilots, the flight deck crews, and every other Sailor in the U.S. task forces. They all helped win that dramatic victory, and we rightly celebrate their role then and now.

But, commemorations provide us the chance to reflect not only on the past but also about today.

So, how should we think about Midway now; what lessons are there for us to see? Tactically and even operationally, there is little relevance—platform technology and ISR capability alone have changed warfare beyond Yamamoto's or Nimitz' understanding.

Strategically, though, there are clearly lessons.

The first is strategic purpose. In 1942, the Japanese knew they were being out-built by American shipyards—at one point that spring, the U.S. Navy had 11 carriers under construction, while the Japanese were working on one. Just one. Faced with this immense, gathering storm of American industrial might, the Japanese gambled on an extremely high-risk, low-probability plan (as they had in 1904 when they struck the Russian fleet at Port Arthur and again in 1941 at Pearl Harbor) to clear the last U.S. carriers from the Pacific. And, as we know, they failed.

It's unlikely that we'll again face an opponent forced into such poor choices. The Chinese PLAN have studied the battle, have discussed these broader implications, and are determined to avoid them. It's also unlikely that the U.S. will be in a position where we can take the risks that we did at Midway. Nimitz made a calculated risk assessment that paid off, but he, like the Japanese, knew that the American industrial pipeline had not yet hit its full volume. In other words, Nimitz knew that he could ultimately recover any losses, even disastrous ones (such as what happened at Savo Island only months later).

But could the U.S. Navy today take the same risks that it did at Midway? Could a commander today risk and lose two air squadrons as happened with Torpedo 6 and 8? How quickly could we recover from such losses?

I bring this up here because the Navy needs to be ready not only for a high-intensity war at sea, but also for the protracted grind of holding the line until peace can be negotiated. We've seen this problem in Ukraine today, with the difficulties of getting both sides to negotiate, and this would surely occur in a U.S. war against a peer or near-peer adversary.

Congress played the critical role in funding the Navy's expansion before World War II, with the 1934 Vinson-Trammell Act beginning the legislative run-up to war. You can't just throw a switch to build ships, planes, and munitions. Congress plays a just as critical role again today because your funding enables naval shipbuilding and warfighting readiness. This is not just for peacetime operations such as having enough parts and spares for maintenance, but also wartime concerns such as battle-damage repair

and, as Ukraine demonstrates almost every day, plentiful supplies of ordnance. Such planning for a protracted grind is also the best way to mitigate the kind of desperation that led to the loss of the *Kido Butai* 80 years ago.

We celebrate the Battle of Midway for good reason, for it demonstrates Navy core attributes such as courage, initiative, and resilience, values that will be needed in a fight against our current Pacific adversary. The Navy produces the best Sailors and leaders in the world, but it is up to you to give them the best platforms and material to win the wars of the future.