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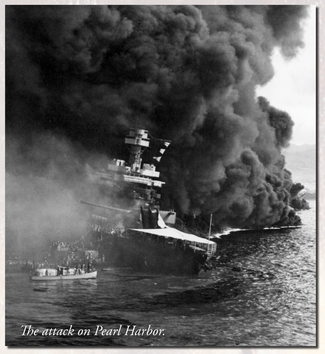
BATTLE OF MIDWAY

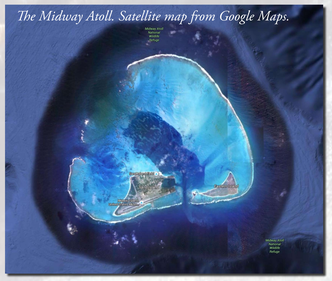
U.S. Involvement in World War II


The attack on Pearl Harbor.

World War II began on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The U.S. remained neutral until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The Japanese employed six carriers to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor; however, none of the U.S. carriers were present at Pearl Harbor during the assault.

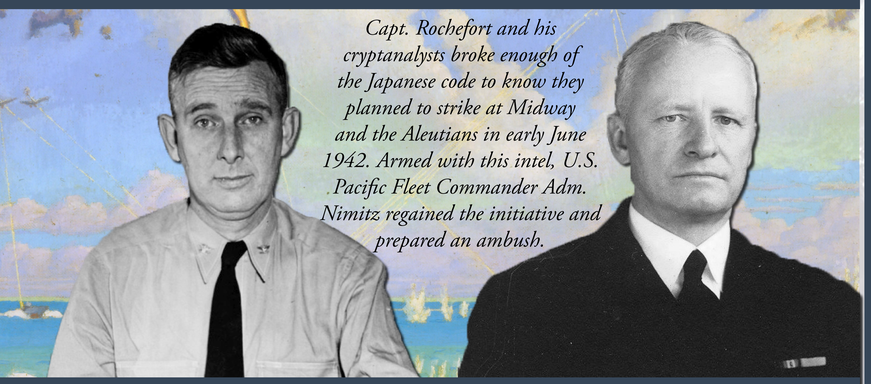
PEARL HARBOR: BY THE NUMBERS

KILLED IN ACTION	TOTAL LOSS SHIPS	RETURNED TO SERVICE	CARRIERS LOST
2,008 U.S. NAVY 218 U.S. ARMY 109 U.S. MARINES 68 CIVILIANS	3 USS ARIZONA (BB 39) USS OKLAHOMA (BB 37) USS UTAH (AG 16)	17 5 SHIPS SUNK, RAISED, AND REPAIRED 12 SHIPS DAMAGED AND REPAIRED OR REBUILT	0 NONE OF THE SEVEN U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIERS WERE AT PEARL HARBOR DURING THE ASSAULT.


The Midway Atoll. Satellite map from Google Maps.

The U.S. declared war against Japan on December 8, 1941. After several months of expansion, the Japanese Combined Fleet turned its sights on Midway, a small Pacific-based atoll, which then served as a U.S. sentry to Hawaii, refueling station, and landing point. The Japanese plan assumed the Pacific Fleet would arrive too late to defend Midway, but U.S. forces were waiting for them at "Point Luck."

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEL



Capt. Rochefort and his cryptanalysts broke enough of the Japanese code to know they planned to strike at Midway and the Aleutians in early June 1942. Armed with this intel, U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Adm. Nimitz regained the initiative and prepared an ambush.

CAPT. JOSEPH J. ROCHEFORT
U.S. CRYPTANALYST

ADM. CHESTER W. NIMITZ
PACIFIC FLEET COMMANDER

Battle of Midway: The Turning Point

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS JUNE 4, 1942

- **0700** *Enterprise* and *Hornet* begin launching
- **0838** *Yorktown* launches
- **1020** *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* torpedo squadrons attack.
- ★ **1022-1026** *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* dive bombers attack and hit *Akagi*, *Kaga*, and *Soryu*.
- **1208** Japanese dive bombers attack *Yorktown*.
- **1441** Torpedo planes attack *Yorktown*.
- **1445** *Yorktown* hit.
- **1455** *Yorktown* abandons ship.
- **1500** B-17s take off from Midway.
- **1810** Two B-17s attack BB and damaged CV.
- **1830** Six B-17s attack damaged CV and DD.

SBD Dauntless Dive Bombers from USS Hornet.

U.S. and Japanese armed forces fought during the Battle of Midway, June 3-7, 1942 at and near the Midway Atoll in the central Pacific Ocean.

Painting by Griffith Baily Coale, 1942.

The victory at Midway represents a strategic turning point for the U.S. in Japan's war in the Pacific. Before the battle, Japan possessed naval superiority over the U.S. Afterward, opposing fleets were balanced and the U.S. soon took the offensive.

A representation by Bel Geddes showing the attack on Hiryu.

As a result of the battle on June 4th, the Japanese carriers Akagi, Kaga, and Soryu were hit and sank. The Japanese carrier Hiryu escaped the initial attack, but U.S. dive bombers found, bombed, and sank her.

BATTLE OF MIDWAY: SUMMARY OF LOSSES

CARRIERS	1	4
AIRCRAFT	150	256
MEN	307	2,204

Midway was a great success in U.S. Navy history. The only strategic regret might have been failing to locate and attack Hiryu before its aircraft struck Yorktown.

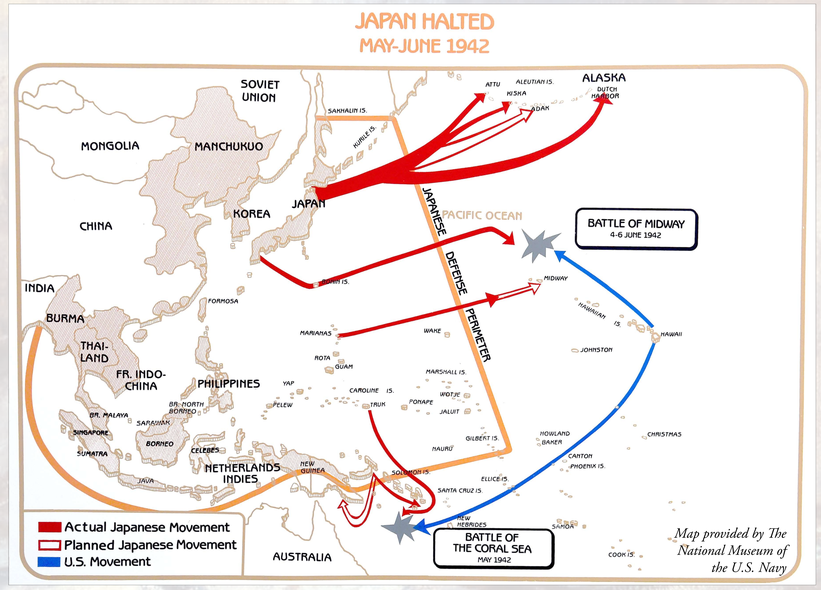
USS Yorktown sinking during the Battle of Midway.

Victory at Midway: Impact on World War II

A representation by Bel Geddes showing action during the Battle of Midway.

The Battle of Midway marked a technical revolution in displacing gunnery with naval carrier airpower as a primary means of delivering ordnance.

Prior to the Battle of Midway, the Japanese conquered several territories and expanded their resources in the Far East and South Pacific. By early May, the Japanese had an extensive defensive perimeter.



Map provided by The National Museum of the U.S. Navy

RESULTS OF THE VICTORY AT MIDWAY

- Japanese expansion halted, securing a central-Pacific guard post for Allied forces.
- Japanese losses at Midway made it possible for America's Navy to eventually reclaim maritime superiority in the Pacific theater.
- Naval Aviation proved to be a viable and necessary capability to win wars.
- Our Sailors' strength and resilience at Midway were a perfect illustration of the fighting spirit of America's Navy today.