



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Battle of Midway Remarks
Midway Atoll
Admiral Cecil D. Haney
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As prepared for delivery**

Aloha and thanks Robyn for that kind introduction and thanks to you and your team for all the work you do to preserve the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, the Battle of Midway National Memorial and more as I learn about your expanse of responsibilities.

It is fantastic that we could all be here today for the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway; knowing that this is not an easy journey to make for most. I would like to thank all the participants for their work in making this remarkable ceremony possible.

Distinguished guests, veterans, families of veterans, friends and especially the veterans of the Battle of Midway, welcome! It's my honor to be here this morning and to have the opportunity to reflect and celebrate on the accomplishments of those brave men who fought and won the Battle of Midway.

Seventy years ago today, the scene from where we are gathered was very different. From where you are seated, here on Sand Island, you would see raging fires and columns of smoke. Just a few hours ago Japanese airplanes had bombed the island's oil tanks, seaplane hangar, and other buildings. If you were to look out at Eastern Island you would see columns of smoke rising from buildings there also. Although 70 years ago, given this battle's significance, historians are still writing about it, military planners are still studying it, and we cherish the opportunity to commemorate it.

After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the damage to our nation was more than the physical loss of a large part of our Naval Fleet, it was also psychological. Our nation struggled to rebuild and prepare for the war against a powerful and triumphant enemy. During the six months after Pearl Harbor, we were defeated in most engagements though encouraged by the Battle of Coral Sea and the Doolittle Raid.

In early 1942 the Japanese were planning an additional operation that sought to completely eliminate the United States as a strategic power in the Pacific. They hoped that another demoralizing loss would force America to admit defeat in the Pacific War. Their plan was to take the islands of Midway in an effort to extend their defensive perimeter around their homeland and lure the remaining U.S. aircraft carriers into a trap.

Japanese forces, widely dispersed for deception, consisted of four aircraft carriers, seven battleships and numerous escort ships, submarines and aircraft. All told, 185 ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy bore down on Midway. They approached with confidence in their hearts and certain victory on their minds.

What they got was something quite different.

Between the 4th and 7th of June, 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy was defeated and unsuccessful in their attack against Midway. The victory inflicted irreparable damage on the Japanese Fleet and turned the tide of the war. Historian John Keegan called it “the most stunning and decisive blow in the history of naval warfare.” So, why against all odds did we win the Battle of Midway?

It wasn't won because of our advanced technology or equipment. It wasn't won due to the greater size or strength of our force as the Japanese ships outnumbered and out classed ours. We didn't win this victory due to our superior combat experience or training, because in the air many of our aircrews were flying their first combat missions against the most experienced Japanese pilots that they had.

So why did we win the Battle of Midway?

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor caused outrage across the nation. The Japanese had awoken the sleeping giant. Americans filled with an uncommon sense of patriotism saw that our nation was in peril, and unhesitatingly volunteered to don the cloth of our nation and go into harm's way to fight. Across the nation, men and women went to war, whether they were using a rivet gun in airplane factories, welding decking together in the shipyards or carrying a rifle into combat. The nation was unified in its effort and everyone wanted to do their part. We won the Battle of Midway because of who we are as a determined people and what together we can do as a nation.

As a result, we were able to generate success in operational intelligence synthesis, were able to use surprise to our favor, aggregate the necessary forces in a timely manner, and effectively use our joint military forces, including superior leaders and the brave and courageous Sailors, Marines and Soldiers operating on or at sea near Midway.

After the attack at Pearl Harbor codebreakers worked diligently to find a way to break the Japanese Operational Code called JN25; this was a slow and tedious evolution. Leaders such as Joe Rochefort, Edwin Layton, Jasper Holmes and others in the Intelligence and Cryptological community worked diligently to study and ultimately break the Japanese code.

This past weekend, we were able to have 92-year-old Admiral Mac Showers come to Hawaii from Arlington, Va., to provide us the firsthand knowledge of how this was achieved. Admiral Showers served in the distinguished Combat Intelligence Unit called “Station Hypo” that figured out the Japanese were after Midway this time, despite others who thought Hawaii or the West Coast might be the next Japanese target.

He explained how their team intercepted 500-1000 Japanese radio messages per day in May 1942 and deciphered and translated roughly 25 percent, an astonishing feat that enabled intelligence analysts to conclude Midway was the Japanese target. This was done without the computers we are so used to using today. This knowledge was invaluable and played a

critical role in allowing Admiral Nimitz, the commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, to know the Japanese intentions and employ his forces accordingly.

Their efforts became what we now call Operational Intelligence. By fusing together intelligence into the operations by providing more than just data, but the necessary enemy insights to leadership in order to promote timely and effective decision making.

Also shipyard repair capability played an impacting role in the Battle of Midway. The carrier *Yorktown* had been badly damaged in the Battle of Coral Sea. It was believed that it would take months to complete the repairs, but when challenged by Admiral Nimitz, the industrious men and women at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard worked around the clock and had her fit for battle in only three days.

Because of their efforts, the U.S. Navy was able to put to sea a total of three aircraft carriers instead of the two the Japanese had expected. Since the Japanese did not expect any U.S. carriers to be in the vicinity of Midway, this provided significant surprise as a warfighting advantage to Admiral Nimitz's outgunned forces.

The Battle of Midway was a joint effort proving that each of the three services could integrate to fight together. Midway Island was strengthened in preparation for the attack with as many aircraft from Oahu as it could take. On the eve of battle the runways on these islands were packed with long-range Navy and Army aircraft and a Marine Air Group. During the battle, these airplanes played a key role in pressing the attack on the enemy. To this day, the legacy of these joint operations lives on in today's Joint Military approach to modern day conflicts.

Our military leaders had the vision and forethought necessary to develop the war plans, to put them in to action and give our fighting men the opportunity to fight and win. These were not the days of email or Skype, the relaying of information was difficult and took time. Once the battle started, it was very difficult to change a plan and communicate it.

Admiral Nimitz, who knew of the Japanese intentions, took a calculated risk against the odds by leveraging on surprise and assembled all the forces he had at his disposal to allow Admirals Jack Fletcher and Raymond Spruance, his task force commanders, to take the fight to the enemy.

Seventy years ago, we saw some of the greatest examples of bravery as planes from Midway took off and their gallant aircrews sacrificed all for their nation. Since there were no satellites or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, they were valuable scouts to inform the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to find the enemy. Many of these aircrews were the first to fight and they were among the first to perish. Very few of those who flew from Midway made it back that day. For example, Major Lofton Henderson led his inexperienced Dauntless Marine Scout Bomber Squadron (VMSB-241) into the battle. He was the first Marine to die in the battle.

From the flight decks of *Yorktown*, *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, airplanes took to the sky. In their attempts to penetrate the Japanese defenses around the carriers and drive home their torpedo and bomb attacks, entire squadrons were lost. But through their persistent efforts, they were able to catch the Japanese carriers at a vulnerable time and were able to make good their attacks. These brave aviators took the fight to the enemy against the odds demonstrating the American will to fight with tenacity.

With a significantly smaller force consisting of only three aircraft carriers and a total of 28 ships, the United States prevailed against the odds, fought at a terrible cost, and ultimately won the victory.

When it was over, the Japanese lost four aircraft carriers, one cruiser, 248 aircraft and 3,057 lives. This included trained pilots and trained aircraft mechanics whose technical expertise could not be easily replaced.

America also lost that day, including one aircraft carrier, one destroyer, 150 aircraft and 307 lives.

Admiral Nimitz once said: “Our armament must be adequate to the needs, but our faith is not primarily in these machines of defense but in ourselves. ... I have always been optimistic regarding the eventual result of the war. Having seen the people on the spot, I have every reason to continue my optimism.”

These victories were won by the fighting spirit and determination of those brave men who fought in those battles. Each of them was valiant in their effort, brave in their deeds and gallant in their action. They were called the greatest generation for a reason, and today I'm so pleased to have two of these great Americans with us here today.

I would like to recognize Colonel John Miniclier and Sergeant Edgar Fox for being here today and of course for being here 70 years ago. These two men were members of the Marine 6th Defense Battalion, stationed here on the islands, ready to fight the Japanese invasion force. Each of them has their own unique story of their experience and I want to share their story with you now.

John Miniclier arrived on Midway in September 1941 and was here during the attack on Midway on December 7th, 1941. Frequently the Japanese attack on Midway in December is overshadowed by the Pearl Harbor attack. Two Imperial Japanese destroyers bombed this island (Sand Island), destroying several buildings.

During the Battle of Midway, Colonel Miniclier who as a private first class, was on a 30-foot wooden watch tower, which was the control for the searchlight. He watched as our planes raced down the runway on their way into the fight. Some of them were interceptors headed out to receive incoming enemy planes, others were bombers headed out to engage enemy ships.

From his vantage point he was able to count the incoming enemy planes as they began to attack the airfields. He watched helplessly as one of our planes was shot down by the enemy. The pilot bailed out and the Japanese planes machine gunned him.

Sergeant Ed Fox, I had the opportunity to read your story in the book, “No Right To Win.” Edgar Fox found himself in a bunker manning a machine gun on the southeastern side of Sand Island when the bombs started falling. In true Marine Corps fashion he stated in the book: “Fall back and retreat was not in our training manual. Nor did we train for such an event. Our order of battle was ‘deny the enemy the ground in front of you.’”

Later he went on to say: “Had the enemy gained the island, where would we go? We would stay and fight, doing what we had been trained for. We would have held the ground we were assigned to protect, at a terrible loss. I just pray that I would have been as brave as the Navy and Marine airmen who attacked the carriers that day and did not return.”

I suspect that if the time had come for you to fight the enemy trying to make it ashore here at Midway, each of you, and every other Marine on these islands, would have made the Japanese pay dearly for their efforts.

I truly thank both of you, as well as all those who could not be here today, for your efforts and for your sacrifice.

To the audience, if you get a chance today, don’t pass up an opportunity to meet these great American heroes. How about another round of applause?

As we remember those who fought to win the day at the Battle of Midway, consider for a moment their heroism, commitment and devotion to duty. Our U.S. military personnel of today have inherited a rich legacy from the generations of warfighters that are our forefathers. Our nation has a long-standing tradition of calling on the best our nation has to offer and taking the fight to the enemy. The courage, valor and innovation of our people continue to be the key to the Navy’s success and success of our Joint Forces. Any nation, or group, that conspires to do harm to the United States of America would be well advised to consider this.

Today the world has benefited from the actions of those brave men who sacrificed so much 70 years ago. The Battle of Midway was the turning point of the war and began the American campaign to victory. The U.S. fought throughout the Pacific and our brave fighting men sacrificed their all to fight and win victory over the enemy. I ask today that we continue to perpetuate the memory of the Battle of Midway.

We have set deep roots here in the Pacific, planted by the sacrifice of the brave men of the United States Armed Forces. Our hard fought victory helped pave the way for peace and prosperity in the Pacific. Once bitter enemies, the U.S. and Japan are now as allies and partners committed to stability throughout the Pacific.

As the Armed Forces of the United States draw down our Middle East presence and our national strategy shifts focus on a rebalance to the Pacific, the United States Navy will continue to play a dominant role in shaping the maritime security environment.

We are a maritime nation and our security and prosperity will always be tied to the sea. We are committed to freedom of global trade for all and we will continue to maintain a purposeful forward presence to ensure free and unfettered access to the global maritime commons.

As I close, I am reminded of a quote from a man I used to work for, Admiral Gary Roughead; he was the chief of naval operations. He said: “We’re the strongest and most capable navy in the world. Midway taught us that it takes more than advanced technology and excellent training to win a war. ... Those are vital, but without our people, their passion, and will to win we cannot achieve success. ... People make us a great navy and Midway is a reminder to never forget it.”

Today, just as 70 years ago, we are still a great navy because of the dedicated Sailors, civilians and families that make up the team. A team that I am proud to lead and serve with here in the Pacific, that will guarantee our purposeful presence for the next 70 years and then some, being mindful of the lessons from the Battle of Midway.

May God continue to bless our United States Navy, our grateful nation, and all those who serve. Mahalo.