

# War in the Pacific

## Defending Australia

### The First Six Months

Chapter 25

1 June 1942...

Carriers Battle off Midway

Japanese Submarines Attack Australia

# Situation report – 1 June 1942

- After 6 months of war the Japanese avalanche has swept away the Western Empires in South East Asia and the forces defending them.
- The Japanese have reached out beyond South East Asia to Hawaii and Ceylon and destroyed major units of American and British naval and air forces.
- Japanese forces have everywhere been tactically superior to the defenders, on land, sea and in the air.
- After the Allied losses the Japanese now also have numerical superiority of naval and air forces in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- The only remaining areas where Japanese and Allied forces are close enough to continue effective operations is on the line Timor - Darwin - Horn Island - Moresby/Lae – Rabaul - Tulagi.

# Timor – Darwin – Moresby - Lae – Rabaul - Tulagi

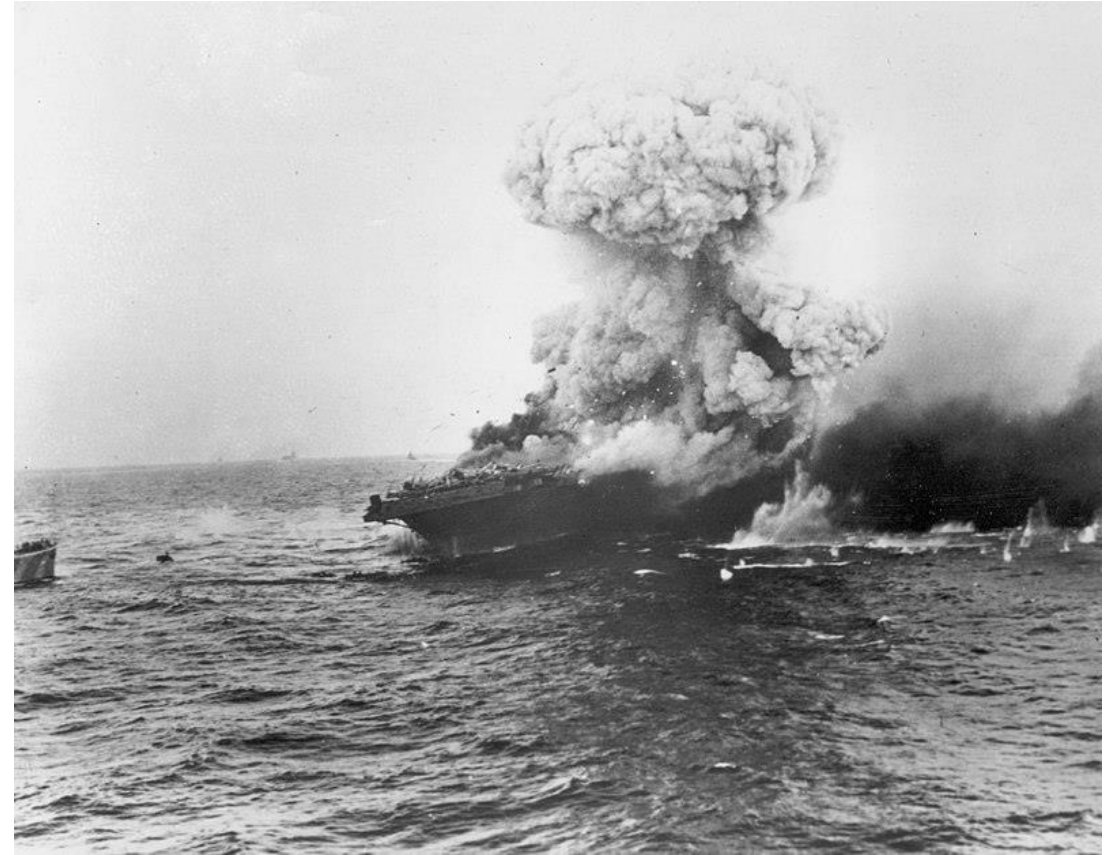


# Situation report – 1 June 1942

- Early in May a Japanese invasion fleet had left Rabaul to capture Port Moresby.
- Forewarned by decoded radio intercepts, Admirals King and Nimitz had positioned two aircraft carrier taskforces in the Coral Sea to resist this thrust.
- Despite the intelligence advantage, the carrier battle had been a draw, with the Japanese demonstrating tactical superiority, particularly in the use of torpedoes. Lexington, the biggest ship in the US Navy, was sunk.
- Following the battle and heroic work by the Pearl Harbour dockyard there are three serviceable American aircraft carriers in the Pacific, the Japanese have at least seven.
- On 24<sup>th</sup> May CinCPac intelligence predicted attacks on the Aleutians on 3 June and Midway on 4 June.
- Nimitz has sent every usable ship he has to defend Midway and every bit of gear he has to the Island.

# Situation report – 1 June 1942

- MacArthur has advised Curtin that
  - "We have . . . in this theatre at the present time all the elements that have produced disaster in the Western Pacific since the beginning of the war."
- The US Navy has left the Coral Sea and is concentrated off Midway
- Australian Intelligence is predicting ongoing Japanese operations in the Solomons and against Port Moresby.
- The air battle continues along the line from Timor to Tulagi with both sides seeking to capture or develop new airbases as well as attacking the enemy's bases.
- Last night there were a number of Japanese submarines in Sydney Harbour. One ship was sunk.



A mushroom cloud rises from a heavy explosion on Lexington,  
8 May 1942.

# 1 June

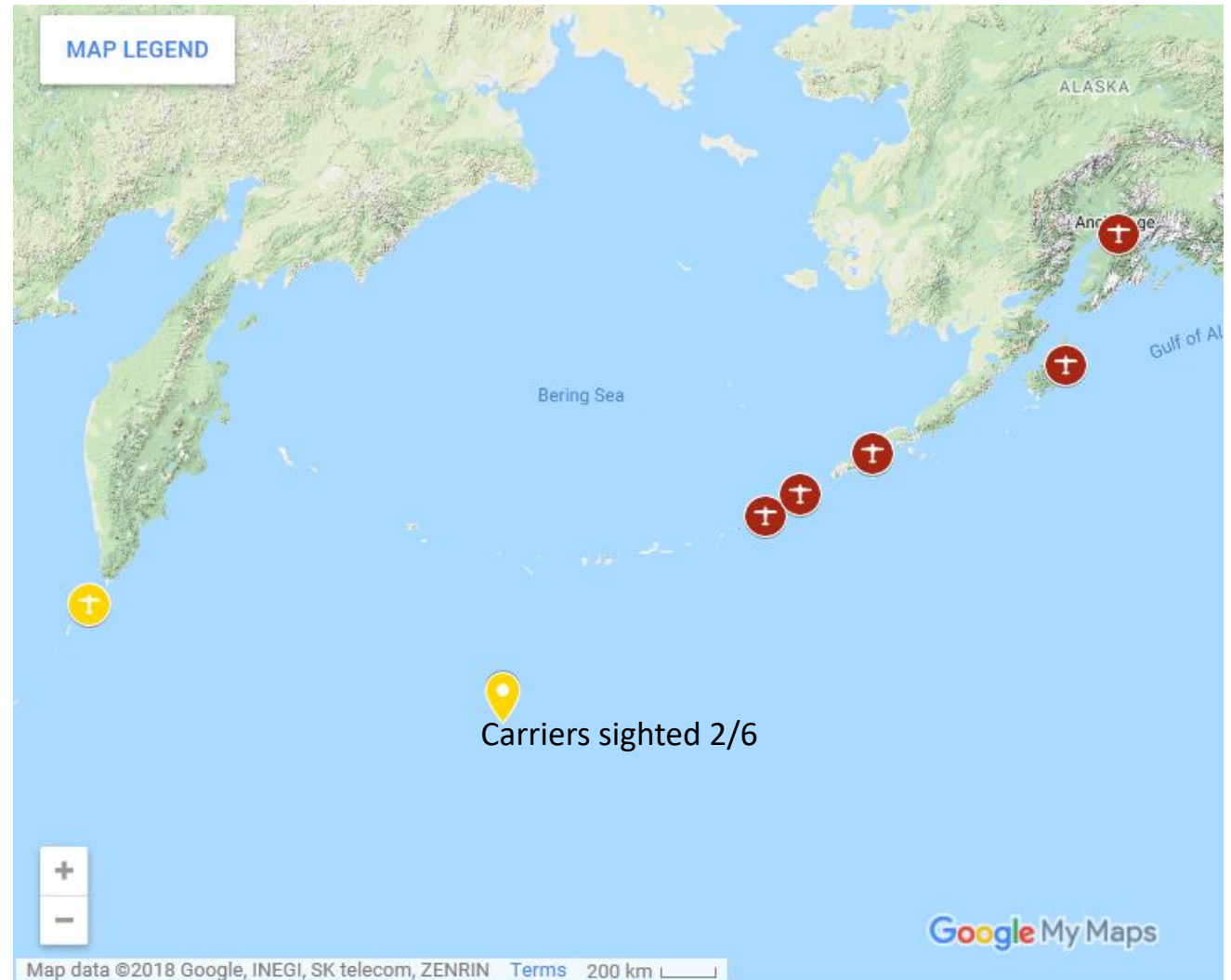
- **Sydney**
- A diver's investigations found a Midget submarine, with her engines still running, lying on the harbour floor.
- **Cairns**
- The outbreak of World War 2 in 1939 increased demand for a suitable road from Cairns to the tableland via Kuranda, as an emergency evacuation route in the event of hostile invasion. This road, which took 18 months to construct with a single bulldozer, opened in June 1942. The fall of Singapore precipitated a mass evacuation of local residents to the south. Many homes were sold cheaply, and the local population declined by nearly 7000 people.
- **New Guinea**
- 18 Betty bombers escorted by 9 Zeros attacked the docks at Port Moresby. More than 30 fighters intercepted at 11.50 and claimed one bomber shot down and six probables. Lts Hosford and Plunkett were listed MIA. Plunkett returned a few days later despite having been savaged by a crocodile while following a stream as the easiest path through the jungle.
- B-17s attack Lae, Salamaua, and Rabaul.
- **Burma**
- 5 HBs attack Rangoon dock and harbor area, claiming 1 tanker sunk and another left listing.

# 1 June - USA

- Fear of attack on the West coast of the US causes the suspension of movement of aircraft and crews from US to UK.
- On Umnak Island, a secret base had been constructed. By the end of March, a 3,000 x 100-foot strip had been usable at Umnak, but it was far from satisfactory. Even in June, when it had reached 5,000 feet, it was unstable, it tossed fighters thirty feet into the air upon impact, and waves in it made its use by B26s exceedingly risky. Yet it did permit fighters to operate.
- The burden of long-range search from Midway rested upon the PBYs and B17s; twelve of the latter covered long arcs extending 800 miles out from Midway on 31 May and 1 June, but they sighted nothing and they could not cover the area lying beyond 300 to 400 miles northwest because of poor visibility. The flight crews were in the air for thirty hours in the two days and the crews had to service their own planes, in co-operation with the Marine ground forces on the island.

## 2 June - Alaska

- A PBY sighted two carriers, reporting them at a point some 400 miles south of Kiska, and all available striking planes were immediately ordered forward to Forts Glenn and Randall. The PBY had been spotted and fighters were sent in pursuit, and the PBY was driven off losing the contact in the fog.





# 2 June

- **New Guinea**

- Two squadrons of the 35<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group arrived in Port Moresby to relieve the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group squadrons. The 40<sup>th</sup> Fighter squadron went to Berry field (formerly 12 Mile) and the 39<sup>th</sup> went to Schwimmer (14 mile)
- B-17's bomb dock and military camp area at Rabaul.

- **India**

- A flight of six Mitchells earmarked for the C.A.T.F. (China Air Task Force) arrived at Dinjan.

- **USA**

- Aircraft and crews of the 97th Bomb Group, then in New England for movement to the UK, are ordered to the West Coast as a defensive measure against attack on US.
- 6 out of 16 B-17s that have been on Detached Service at Midway return to Oahu.

## 3 June – Australian Coast

- At 10.18 p.m. the Australian coastal steamer Age (4,734 tons), bound from Melbourne to Newcastle, reported being under gunfire from a submarine in position 35 miles S.E. of Norah Head.
- An hour and a half later Sydney radio intercepted a signal from the coaster Iron Chieftain (4,812 tons), on passage from Newcastle to Whyalla, reporting that she was torpedoed 27 miles east of Sydney, approximately five miles from where Age was attacked.
- Age, unharmed, reached Newcastle shortly before 1 a.m. on the 4th.
- Iron Chieftain, loaded with coke, and with important material for ships building at Whyalla, sank in about five minutes with the loss of twelve of her company. Twelve survivors, including the chief officer, were taken from a raft at 3.30 a.m. on 4th June by H.M.A.S. Binger.

# 3 June

- **Land**

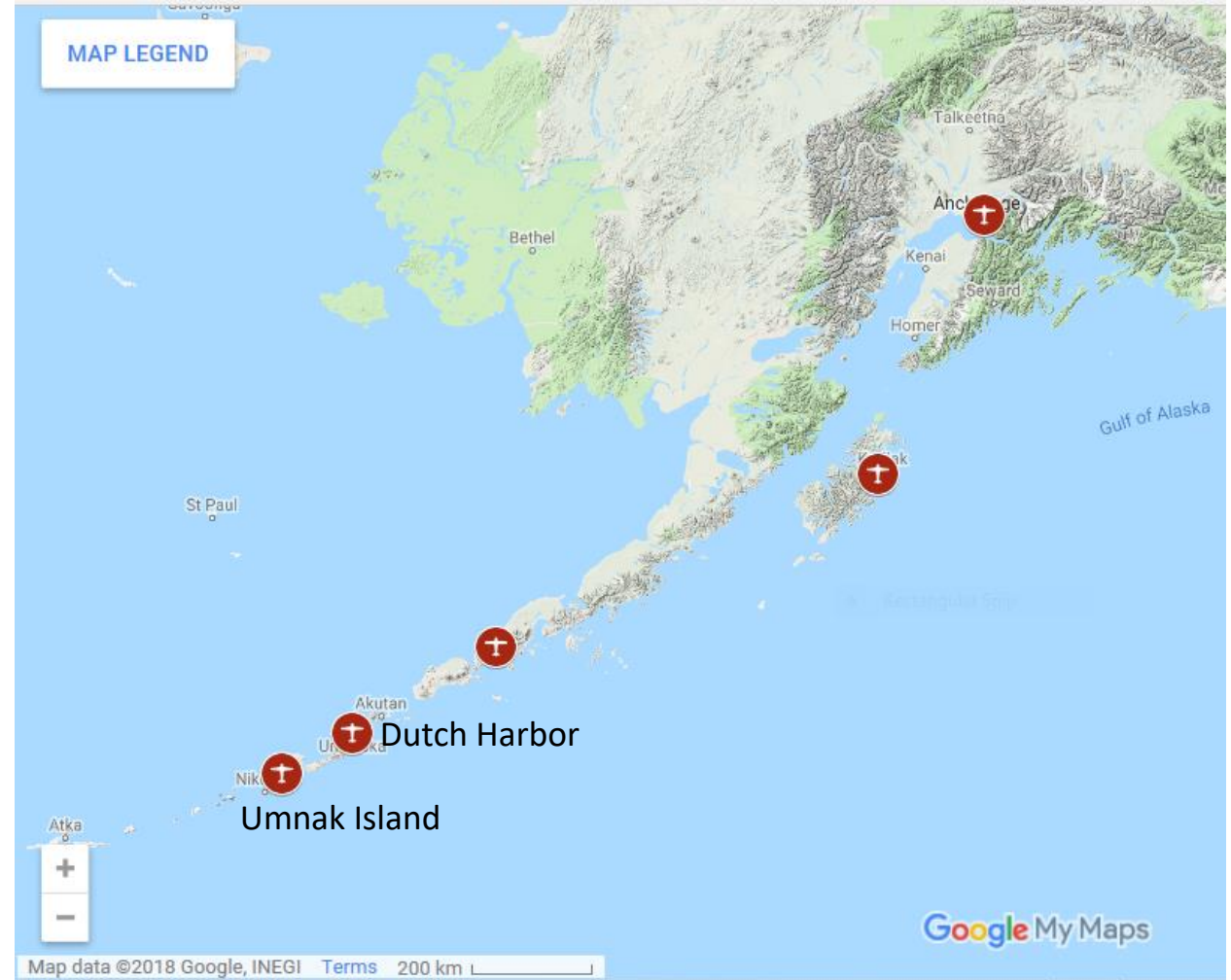
- Orders for the 37th Division USA had been hurriedly changed from New Zealand to Fiji, and early in June the first detachment landed at Suva.
- Blamey suggested to MacArthur that there were two options regarding Timor: the recapture of the island with an overseas expedition; or the withdrawal of the bulk of the Allied forces engaged in guerilla warfare against the Japanese.

- **Air**

- A Japanese aircraft several times circled the bay and Government station at Buna, on the north coast of the "tail" of New Guinea, directly opposite Port Moresby across country.
- B-17s hit wharf, warehouse area, and military camp at Rabaul.
- Some 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group personnel began to rotate back to Townsville after the arrival of the 35<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group.
- The flight of six Mitchells of 11th Bomb Sq USAAF earmarked for the C.A.T.F. left Dinjan early to bomb Lashio on their way to Kunming. The attack was made but only two reached Kunming, one with its radio operator killed by a fighter; three crashed into a mountain in heavy overcast at 10,000 feet and one was abandoned when it ran out of fuel.
- 7 B-17s leave Oahu and fly to Midway.

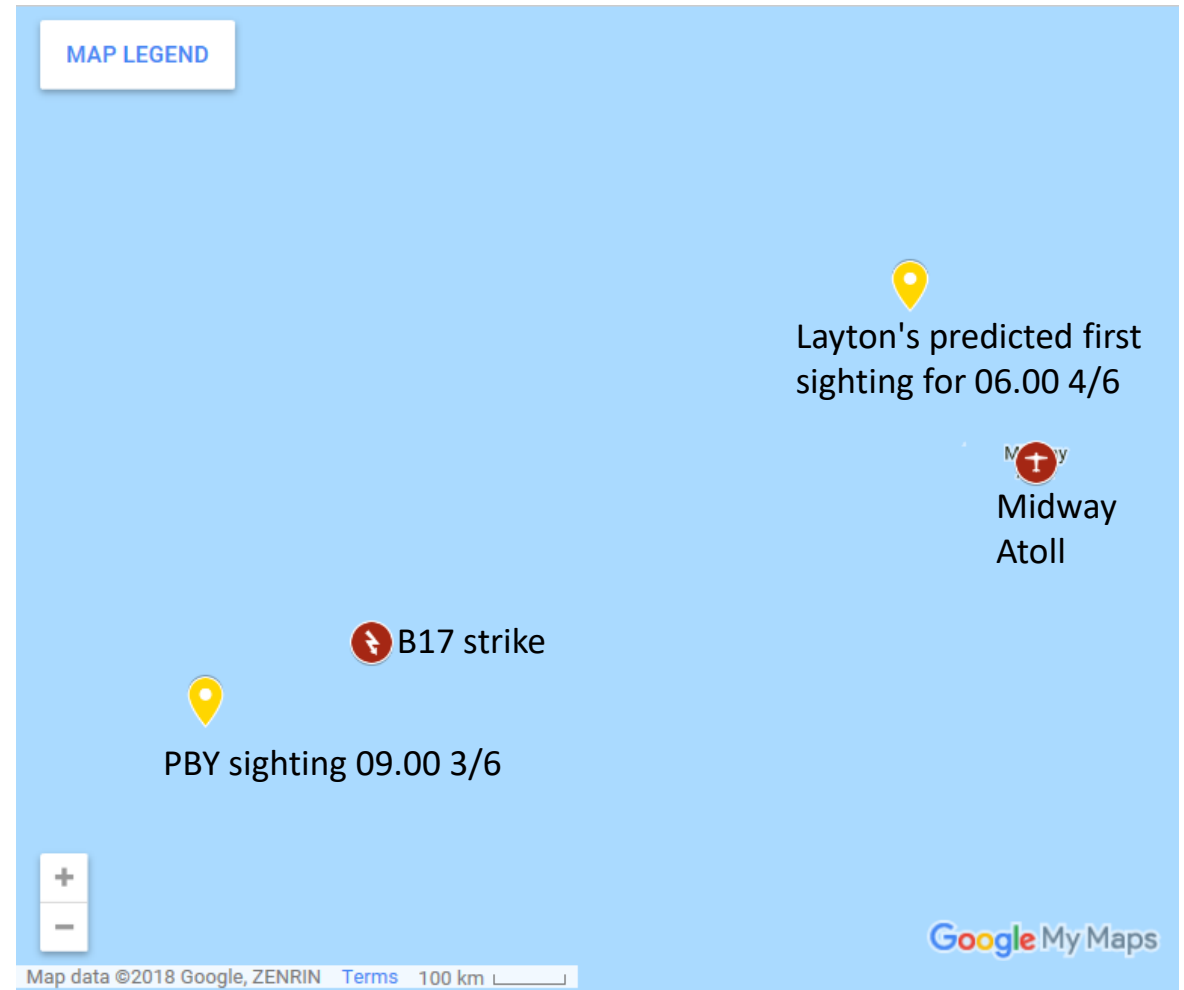
## 3 June - Alaska

- Japanese aircraft raided Fort Mears and the naval installations at Dutch Harbour, Unalaska Island, the main American base in the Aleutian Islands.
  - Fourteen bombers got through thick weather to their target, and for 20 minutes from 6 a.m.
  - inflicted considerable damage to installations, and killed about 25 of the defenders—
  - for the loss of two aircraft.
- On Umnak all the P-40's had been sent up on patrol but they could not find the enemy ships.
  - Two Japanese cruiser seaplanes blundered into the Umnak area apparently unaware of the P40s or of the existence of the Umnak strip.
  - Lt. Murphy and Lt Dixon, on patrol with the 11th Squadron's P40s saw them, pulled out of formation and shot one plane down into the Umnak Pass at the end of the runway.
  - The other fled in damaged condition.



# 3 June - Midway

- At 09.00 a Midway based Catalina sighted eleven ships making 19 knots eastward, then about 700 miles West by South of Midway.
- At 16.24, when the group had reduced the distance to 570 miles, it was attacked, by nine B-17s of the 431st Bombardment Squadron which Captain Simard sent out following the PBY's contact report.
  - The pilots dropped 36 x 600-lb. demolition bombs from 8,000 feet and
  - reported having hit "two battleships or heavy cruisers and two transports" but the attack did not slow the enemy.



# 3 June - Midway

- Admiral Nimitz's orders to his carrier task force commanders were to
  - "inflict maximum damage on enemy by employing strong attrition tactics."
- He added a special Letter of Instruction:
- "In carrying out the task assigned . . . you will be governed by the principle of calculated risk, which you shall interpret to mean
  - the avoidance of exposure of your force to attack by superior enemy forces without good prospect of inflicting, as a result of such exposure, greater damage on the enemy."



## 3 June - Midway

- Each carrier's air group consisted of 36 SBD dive bombers, 15 TBD torpedo bombers and 27 Wildcat fighters.
- The complement of fighters had been increased from 18 to 27 following the introduction of the F4F-4 version of the Wildcat with folding wings.
  - This version had been developed originally for a Royal Navy requirement, vigorously pushed along by Churchill, and was adopted by the USN to increase the complement of fighters that could be carried and in the interest of economies of scale and efficient production.
  - The British had specified six 0.5 inch machine guns, two more than the earlier F4F-3 Wildcat and the number of rounds per gun had been reduced to partially offset the weight of the additional guns.
  - The additional weight of the wing folding mechanism and the additional guns degraded the performance, particularly the rate of climb, which generated considerable unhappiness among the pilots.

# 3 June - Midway



Douglas TBD-1 (Torpedo Bomber) *Devastator* of  
Torpedo Squadron Six (VT-6)  
Max speed 206 mph but limited to 110 knots for  
torpedo dropping



Douglas SBD (Scout Bomber) Dauntless  
Scouting Six (VS-6) and Bombing Six (VB-6)  
Max speed 255 mph



# 3 June - Midway



A U.S. Navy Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat in early 1942.



One of the main features of the F4F-4 were the *Sto-Wing*-design folding wings, a Grumman patented design.

# 3 June - Midway

- Each carrier planned their own air strikes.
- Captain Murray of Enterprise elected to
  - launch the fighters for his CAP and his SBD dive bombers as his first deck load
  - then to bring up and spot ten Wildcats to escort the strike and the fourteen torpedo bombers as the second deck load.
  - The SBDs were to circle until the fighters and torpedo planes had taken off, then all were to depart together.
  - The dive bombers would fly at high altitude and the torpedo planes would fly close to the water but it was hoped that the groups could maintain visual contact and coordinate their attacks.
  - Murray and McClusky, the air group commander, deputed Gray the skipper of Fighting Six to decide how the escort fighters should be deployed.
- Gray consulted one of his pilots, Bill Wileman, who had flown off the Lexington at the Coral Sea. Wileman told him that Zeros could outperform Wildcats, particularly when they had a height advantage, and that the SBDs had suffered high losses but none of the torpedo planes had been lost at the Coral Sea.
  - Gray decided his fighters must approach the target at high altitude to secure the advantage over defending Zeros but
  - he arranged with the skipper of Torpedo Six that if he ran into trouble he was simply to radio "Come on down Jim" and the Wildcats would dive in.

# 3 June - Midway

- On the Hornet, Commander Stanhope Ring, the Air Group Commander, met with Captain Mitscher, Captain Mason, the Air Officer and all four squadron commanders and their deputies to plan the strike.
  - Mitscher had been selected for promotion to Rear Admiral and Mason, his replacement to command Hornet, had come on board at Pearl Harbour, but given the very short turn round, Mitscher had stayed aboard and Mason had not yet taken over.
- At the meeting Waldron, VT-8's skipper, requested close fighter support for his vulnerable TBDs.
  - Ring and the two fighter commanders strongly advised that at least some of the escorting fighters should provide a close escort for the TBDs.
  - Mitscher however was adamant that the fighters should climb to high altitude and stick with the dive bombers.
  - His reasons were similar to those of Gray on the Enterprise, but no contingency plans were made to support the TBDs if they were in trouble.
- The meeting also decided the launch scheme for the strike.
  - The first deck load would be eight CAP fighters followed by the ten escort fighters then all thirty four SBDs.
  - Half the SBDs would carry a 500lb bomb. The other half, spotted further aft, with more deck space for take off would carry a 1,000lb bomb.
  - After the fighters and SBDs had taken off the torpedo planes would be brought up for take off.
  - If time permitted the dive bombers and fighters would circle until the torpedo planes were ready to depart and the two groups hoped to maintain visual contact.
- In explaining the decision about the fighter escort to his squadron, Waldron finished:
  - THEREFORE you pilots and you gunners must be prepared to shoot it out with the Japs.

## 3 June - Midway

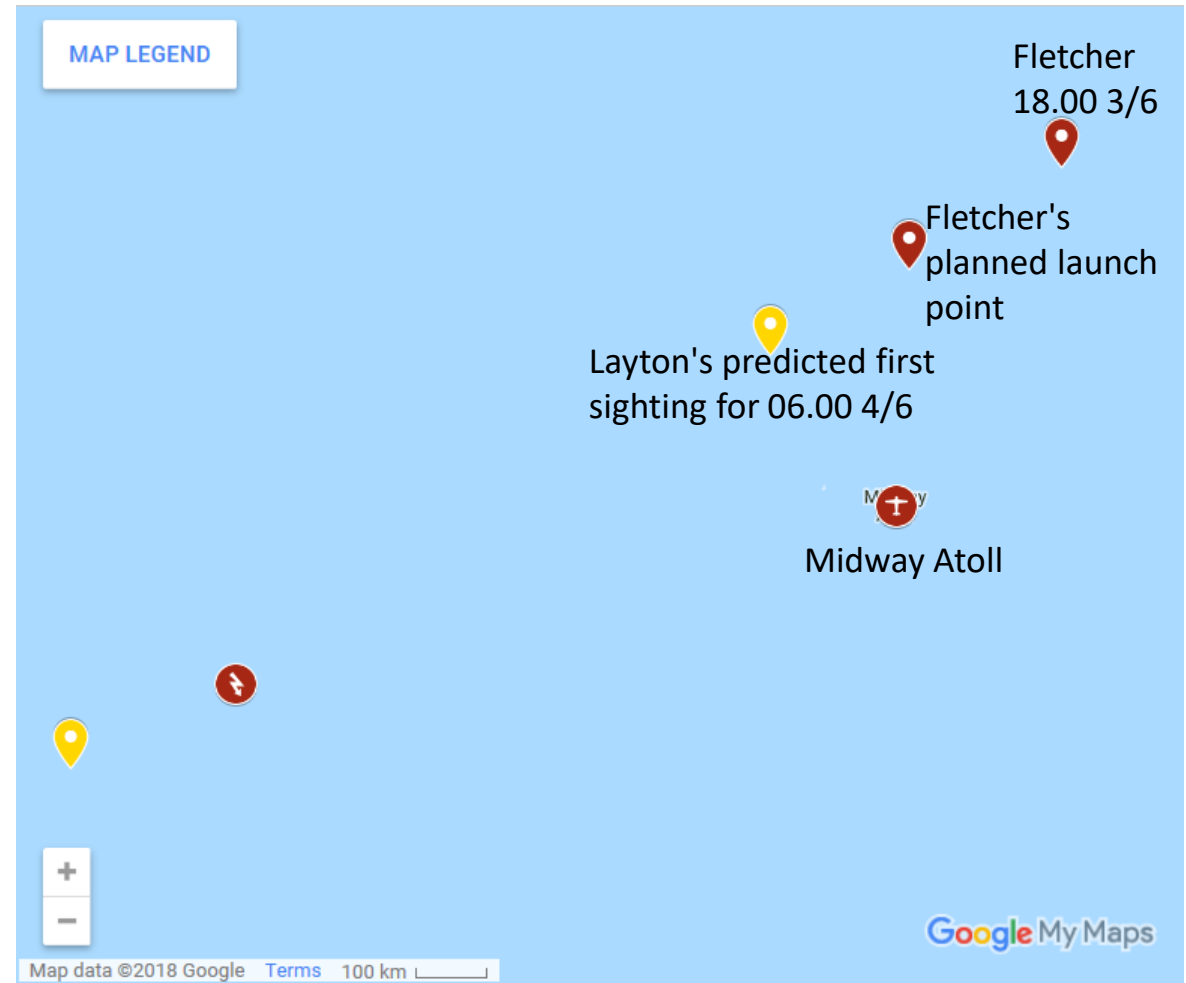
- Fletcher intended to use the Yorktown's air group in a search and support role, whereas Spruance would launch his air groups immediately the enemy carriers were located.
- The Yorktown's commitment to the morning search limited the strength of its strike to one deck load.
  - Captain Buckmaster allowed eight wildcats to escort the strike and
  - Thach, the skipper of VF-3, decided to use them to escort Torpedo Three.



Capt Elliott Buckmaster, CO Yorktown

# 3 June - Midway

- At 6 p.m. on 3rd June, the two American carrier groups were some 300 miles N.N.E. of Midway.
- The sighting of the Japanese transport group had been reported to Rear-Admiral Fletcher as that of the main body of the Japanese fleet. But he relied on his original Intelligence that the enemy carrier force would approach Midway from the north-west to launch an air attack on the island at dawn, 4th June.
- He accordingly altered course to S.W. by S. at 7.50 p.m., so as to be about 200 miles north of Midway, in a position to attack the Japanese carriers while they were themselves striking at Midway.





## 3 June - Midway

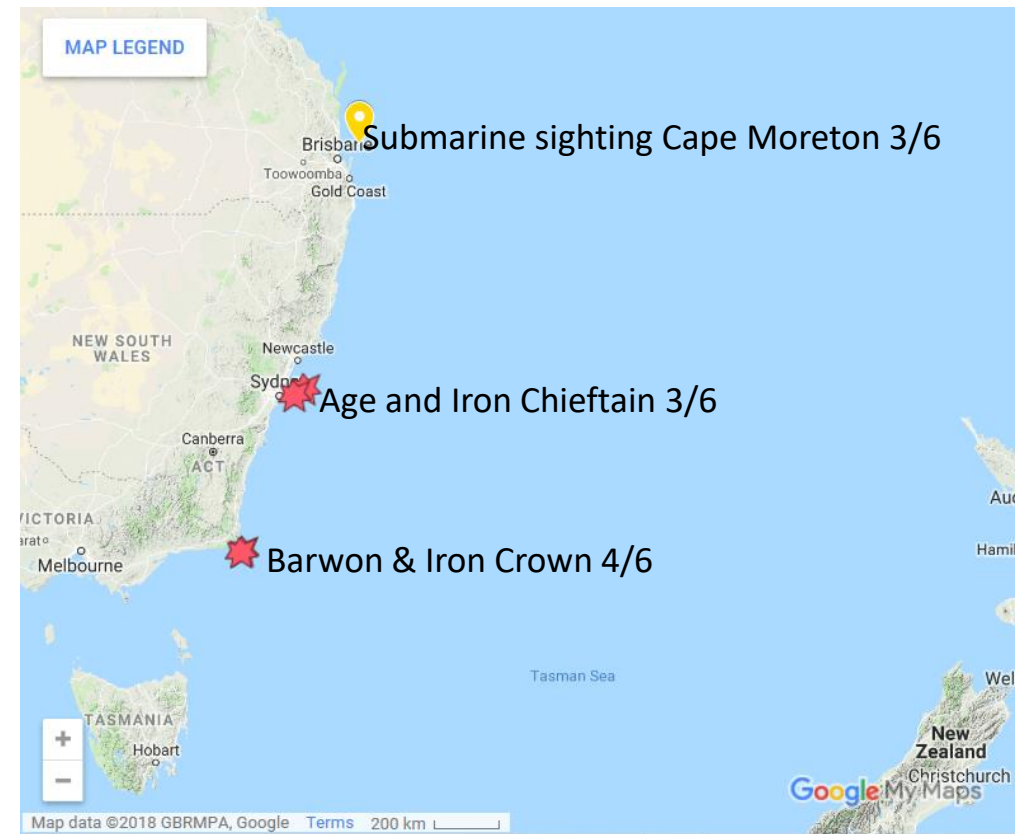
- On the eve of expected battle, Lieutenant Commander Waldron, skipper of Torpedo Eight on Hornet, called his men together and distributed a mimeographed plan of attack. In a message to his squadron appended to the plan he wrote:
- I feel we are all ready. . . I actually believe that under these conditions we are the best in the world. My greatest hope is that we encounter a favourable tactical situation, but if we don't, and the worst comes to the worst, I want each of us to do his utmost to destroy our enemies. If there is only one plane left to make a final run-in, I want that man to go in and get a hit. May God be with us all."



Lt Cdr John Waldron

# 4 June – Australian Coast

- Just before dawn the steamer Barwon (4,240 tons) from Melbourne to Port Kembla, was attacked by gunfire and torpedo in position 33 miles S.S.E. of Gabo Island. She suffered no damage or casualties, though fragments of the torpedo, which exploded close alongside, came on board the ship.
- At 4.45 p.m., off Gabo Island, a Hudson of No. 7 Squadron, from Bairnsdale, on antisubmarine patrol, sighted three merchant ships within a radius of six miles of the position of Barwon's encounter.
- As the aircraft approached, one of these ships was torpedoed and "blew up in front of our eyes".
- Shortly afterwards a submarine surfaced some distance from the vessel and the pilot immediately dived to the attack, dropping two anti-submarine bombs across the conning tower.
- This left only two general-purpose bombs with which to complete the kill and as it would have been courting disaster to release the bombs below 500 feet the captain climbed as quickly as possible to prepare for a second attack.
- In the meantime the submarine succeeded in submerging and could not be located.



The torpedoed ship was the Iron Crown (3,353 tons) en route Whyalla Newcastle. Struck on the port side just abaft the bridge the ship sank within a minute. 37 out of her crew of 42 were lost. The five survivors were picked up two hours later by s.s. Mulbera.

# 4 June – Australia

- **Sydney Harbour**
- After a failed attempt on the 2<sup>nd</sup>
- on 4th June, with the help of sheerlegs and slings, the wreck of the submarine, attacked by *Steady Hour* et al, was warped into shallow water and finally brought on shore.
- Its occupants were found to have died as the result of self-inflicted revolver shots to the head
- **Australian Coast**
- At 7 a.m. the coastal passenger steamer *Canberra* (7,710 tons) reported sighting a "suspicious object probably submarine" off Cape Moreton, Queensland.
- Pending the institution of convoys, the Naval Board suspended merchant ship sailings between Melbourne and Brisbane.

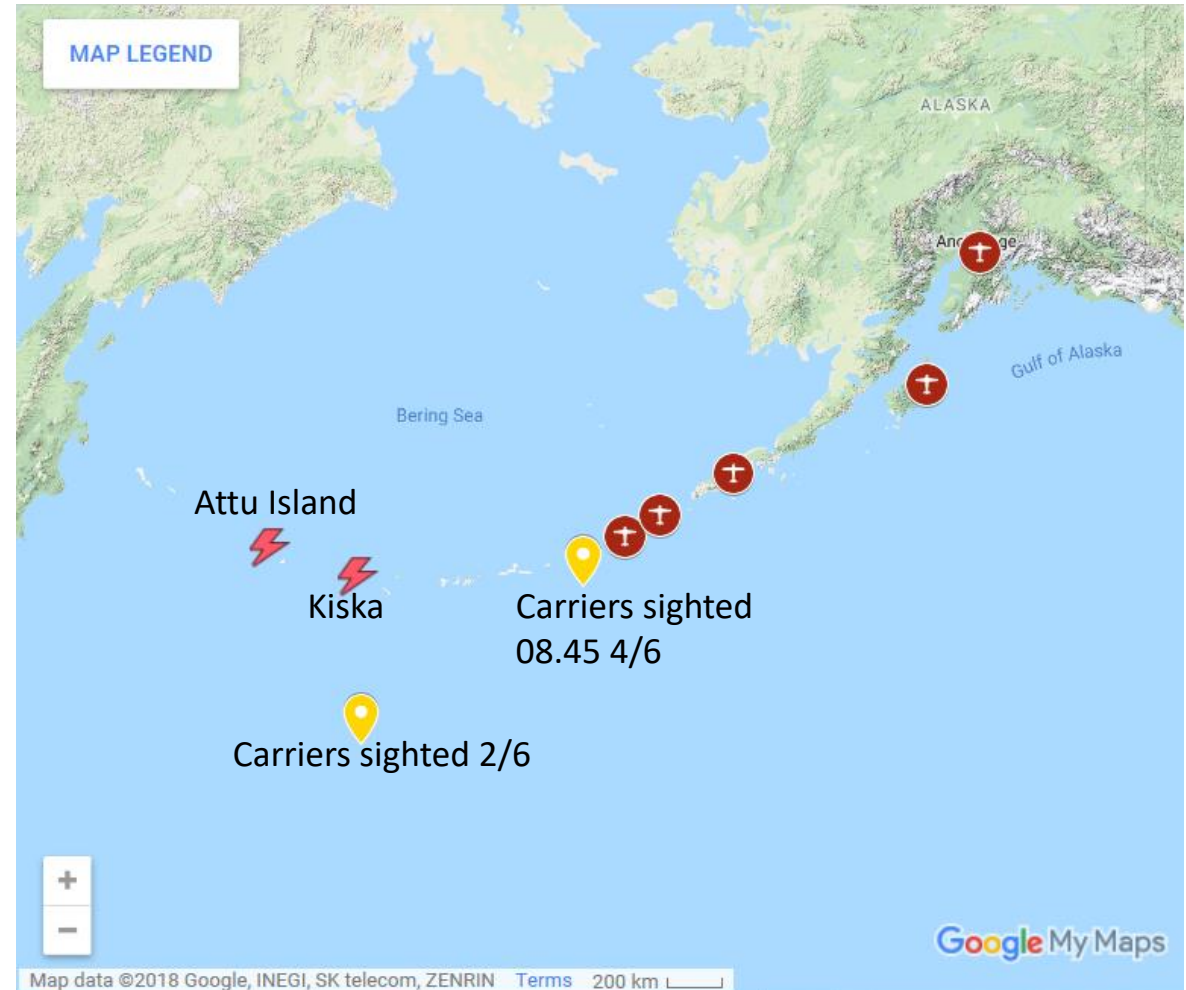


June 4, 1942. A Japanese midget submarine is raised from the bed of Sydney Harbour.



# 4 June

- **Aleutian Islands**
- the Japanese occupied Kiska and Attu Islands in the western Aleutians.
- At 0845 a PBY of Patwing 4, reported sighting three enemy ships, including one or two carriers, at a point approximately 160 miles southwest of Umnak in an area of low ceiling and fog.
- 15 B26s and 8 B17s took off to attack, 6 aircraft found the ships and attacked.
  - No hits were scored.
  - One B17 made a low level attack on a cruiser, which shot it down.
  - One B26 failed to return having been unable to find base due to weather conditions.
- During the afternoon 2 B-17's and 5 B-26's attack the carrier force, and 3 more B-26's strike the cruiser Takao.
  - No hits are scored.
  - 1 B-17 and 1 B-25 fail to return.



# 4 June

- **Aleutian Islands**
- At 18.00 ten fighters swept over the naval air station at Dutch Harbor in a strafing attack, followed by eleven dive bombers, which inflicted considerable damage on fuel installations and on the *Northwestern*, a station ship in use as barracks.
- At 18.21 three more bombers attacked, but without achieving success; and
- at 18.25 five more were overhead, killing four sailors in an AA emplacement.
- While retiring four dive bombers and four fighters were met by eight P-40's of the 11th Fighter Squadron.
  - The action occurred directly over Umnak.
  - Two enemy dive bombers and two fighters were destroyed for the loss of two P40s
  - one of whose pilots, Lt. McIntyre, walked unaided into camp.
- **Air**
- 2 HBs bomb Rangoon, but are attacked by 10 fighters. 1 HB is shot down and the other badly damaged.
- This raid ends 2 months of harassing strikes against Rangoon;
- soon all HBs are grounded by monsoon.

# 4 June - Midway

- During the night four PBY's moved toward the transports, found them by radar at 01:30 on the 4th, put one torpedo into a tanker and strafed the column of transports, causing some casualties. The attack temporarily slowed the oiler.
- At **04.31** Yorktown launched 10 SBDs to search the northern semicircle to a distance of 100 miles and 6 Wildcats of the day's first Combat Air Patrol.
  - The light south easterly breeze meant that the carriers had to steam at high speed on a south easterly course to conduct flight operations, increasing the distance from the enemy.
  - If the enemy was to the north west of Midway as expected he could conduct air operation while still steaming towards the island.
- On the 4th of June PBY's were off early on their searches for the main enemy force, which had not yet been located; B-17's were in the air; B-26's, TBF's, and MAG-22 planes were warmed and ready.
- At **05.45** a patrol plane sighted many planes heading for Midway at a point 150 miles to the north and west.
- Seven minutes later at **05.52**, PBYs sight the enemy's carrier force and broadcast a warning,
  - "Two carriers and battleships, bearing 320 degrees, distance 180, course 135, speed 25."
  - The warning was picked up by the American carriers.
- Nimitz, monitoring the reports at Pearl Harbour, reckoned that Commander Layton's 24<sup>th</sup> May forecast of where and when the enemy would be sighted was 5 degrees, 5 miles and 5 minutes out.

# 4 June - Midway

- Midway was ready.
- The four B-26s led by Capt. Collins, and the six TBF's were off to attack the carriers,
- and the flight of 14 B- 17's already in the air and on its way toward the transports was diverted north against the carriers.
- At **05.55** the 6th Defense Battalion radar logged a report of "many planes," and the Naval Air Station raised similar blips almost simultaneously.
- Air raid sirens began to wail, Condition One was set, and the MAG-22 pilots manned their planes.
- Both squadrons were in the air in less than 10 minutes, VMF-221 heading to intercept the enemy planes
- and VMSB-241 off to rendezvous station 20 miles east where the dive bomber pilots would receive further instructions.



Midway Atoll, Eastern Island is in the foreground, and the larger Sand Island in the background to the west.

# 4 June - Midway

- The reported position was a good one from which to conduct an air strike on Midway.
- At 06.07 Fletcher instructed Spruance, with his two carriers, to "proceed south-westerly and attack enemy carriers when definitely located. I will follow as soon as planes recovered".
- Yorktown had a search mission in the air and held its north easterly course to recover the morning search. Fletcher was concerned that only two carriers had been sighted and held the Yorktown's strike force back in case the Midway search found more carriers.
- The Marine fighters under Major Parks sighted the Zero-escorted dive bombers at 06.16 about 30 miles out from Midway, and Captain Carey, leading one division in a Wildcat, launched the attack from 17,000 feet.
  - The Marine fliers were outnumbered, and they found that the Zero fighters could "fly rings around them."
  - They had time for only one pass at the bombers, and then had to turn their attention to the swarm of Zeros.
  - Only three of the original 12 Marine pilots survived this brawl. It is believed that they splashed a number of the bombers and some of the Zeros.
- Another group of 13 Midway fighters under Captain Armistead came in for an attack against the enemy air formation.
  - Damage inflicted upon the enemy was undetermined, but
  - fewer Marine pilots were lost.
  - The fighter defense of Midway had been expended, and the problem now passed to the antiaircraft guns on the atoll.



# 4 June - Midway

- The first bomb fell on the island about **06.30**. Twenty minutes later the attack was over. It did heavy damage to installations and to the defending aircraft and caused many casualties.
- But aerodrome runways remained usable.
- American estimates were that "at least one third of the attack group never returned" but seventeen American aircraft were shot down.
- Thick black smoke from oil fires billowed up from the islands, and ruptured fuel lines left more than two-thirds of the aviation fuel temporarily unavailable.
- The Marine ground defense force had sustained 24 casualties, and four ordnancemen of VMF-221 had been lost to a direct bomb hit.
- Only two Marine fighters remained airworthy.



CAMOUFLAGED LOOKOUT TOWER AT SAND ISLAND stands amidst the damage caused by Japanese dive bombers which attacked Midway Atoll on 4 June 1942. (USN 17057)

# 4 June - Midway

- Spruance steamed south west to attack the enemy carriers. He intended to hold his planes until he was within 100 miles of the Japanese.
- But when he heard of the strike on Midway, Spruance decided to launch two hours earlier, hoping to catch the Japanese planes back on their carriers rearming for a second attack of the atoll.
- At **06.38** Enterprise signalled to Hornet to launch at 07.00. and send each carrier's air group off in a single formation.
- Captain Mitscher of Hornet convened a quick conference with Commander Ring (CHAG) and the four squadron commanders. They decided to send the Air Group out on 265 degrees.
- At **06.56** The carriers swung to port and steadied up at 28 knots into the gentle south easterly breeze.
- Enterprise and Hornet began launching at about **0700**. The enemy carriers were thought to bear 239 or 240 degrees, distant 155 miles.



Devastators of VT-6 aboard USS *Enterprise* being prepared for take off

# 4 June - Midway

- At **07.05** the B-26s and TBFs sighted the carriers with their supporting heavy ships;
  - they attacked through heavy fighter defense and flak with no fighter support,
  - losing two of the B-26's and five of the new Grumman torpedo planes.
  - Lt. Muri and Captain Collins brought their badly shot-up B26s home to Midway after their attack,
  - but they had scored no hits, nor had the TBFs.
- Henderson's group of 16 SBD-2s climbed to 9,000 feet to locate the enemy carriers, which were then being attacked by the TBFs and the B-26s.
- Flyers of this group sighted the Japanese ships at **07.44**. As the SBDs spiralled down they were set upon by swarms of Zeros flying air cover, which were soon reinforced by more fighters from the carriers below.
- Henderson and several others were shot down (only eight of these planes got. back to Midway) and the strike scored no hits although some were claimed.



# 4 June - Midway

- On board Enterprise the launch of the second deckload of fighters and torpedo aircraft was taking an inexplicably long time.
- Hornet had all her planes aloft while Enterprises second deckload were still on board.
- Spruance judged that the need to throw something at the enemy as soon as possible was greater than the need to coordinate the attack by aircraft of different types and speeds, since neutralizing enemy carriers was the key to the survival of his own task force.
- At 07.45 Enterprise blinkered to McClusky, the Air Group Commander, "Proceed on mission assigned."
- At 07.46 as soon as the last of the torpedo squadron had launched and formed up Ring signalled for the Hornet group to depart.
  - They headed out on the briefed heading of 265 degrees with the dive bombers and fighters climbing to 19,000 feet and Waldron's TBDs cruising at 1,500 feet.
  - Keeping in visual contact because the SBD's rate of advance while climbing was no faster than the TBDs.



Waldron's TBD Devastator taking off from USS Hornet on 4 June 1942.

# 4 June - Midway

- McClusky had carefully plotted his own estimate of where the enemy carriers would be found and come up with a bearing of 231 degrees, distance 142 miles.
- In response to the blinkered order he rounded up his SBDs and departed on 231 degrees at 07.52.
- Fighting Six, Enterprise's fighter squadron had not been briefed on the change in plan.
  - By the time Gray, the skipper, had them formed up, the SBDs, which he was assigned to escort, were out of sight.
  - Gray spotted below a torpedo squadron heading out and moved overhead to cover them while climbing to his assigned altitude.
  - Unbeknownst to Gray the torpedo squadron he was following was not Enterprise's Torpedo Six, with whom he had arranged a contingency plan and communications system but Waldron's Torpedo Eight from Hornet.



C. Wade McClusky, Commander  
Enterprise Air Group

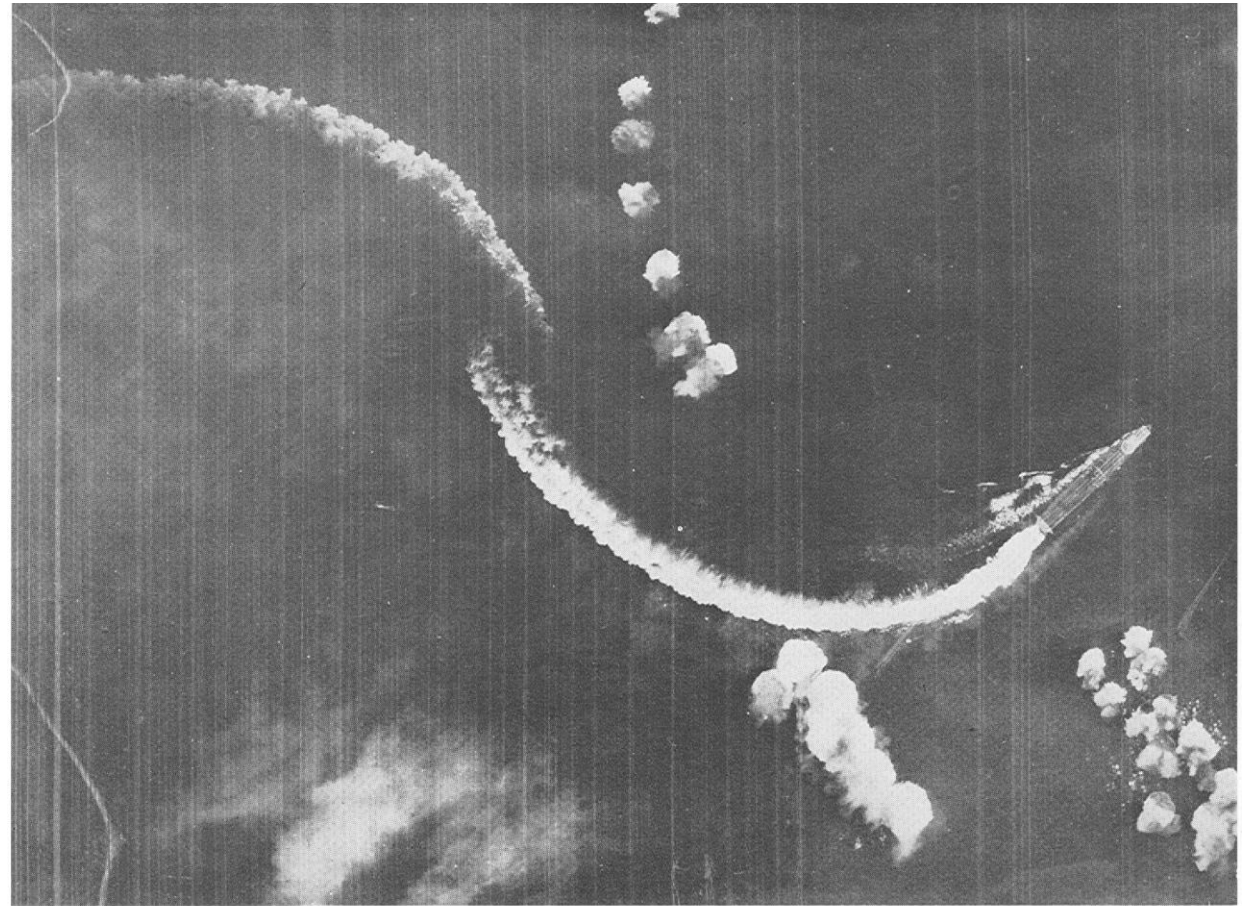
# 4 June - Midway

- Enterprise's Torpedo Six was the last squadron to take off from Task Force 16.
  - The Skipper, Lt Cdr Lindsey, had sustained serious face and chest injuries on the 28<sup>th</sup> May, when his TBD stalled just before landing and hit the water.
  - The battered Lindsey refused to be left behind but had to be helped into his cockpit.
  - The VT-6 TBDs took to the air around 08.00 and made a running rendezvous while departing on a bearing of 240 degrees.
- By now Spruance had launched 116 aircraft—29 torpedo bombers, 67 dive bombers, and 20 fighters—from Hornet and Enterprise. At 08.06 he brought his ships round to 240 degrees to charge towards the enemy at 25 knots.
- At 08.15 Enterprise radar detected a bogey bearing 170 degrees 30 miles out.
  - Almost simultaneously the heavy cruiser Northampton eyeballed the intruder, 185 degrees 30 miles out.
  - The FDO attempted to guide the CAP to intercept but scattered cloud and the confusion caused by giving directions using true rather than magnetic bearings saved the snoopers.



# 4 June - Midway

- The 15 B-17s led by Lieutenant Colonel Sweeney now attacked the Japanese carriers, bombing from 20,000 feet, but again claims of hits were optimistic.
- As these Flying Fortresses pulled away around 08.20, Major Norris came in with his 11 Vindicators which had taken off with Henderson.
- Beset by the Zeros, Norris turned to the closest target and the Marines crowded their ancient planes into a standard glide run almost on top of the Japanese battleship *Haruna* but the attack managed no hits.
- Three Marines were shot down, and the group was credited with splashing two enemy fighters, plus two probables.



JAPANESE CARRIER UNDER ATTACK BY B-17'S, 4 JUNE 1942

# 4 June - Midway

- The US Submarine Nautilus had intercepted the search plane contact report and promptly headed north looking for trouble.
- At **08.00** she found it in the form of a depth charge attack.
- Commander Brockman, the skipper, managed to come up for a look see at **08.20** and found himself surrounded by ships moving at high speed and aiming everything they had, including a battleship's main battery, at his periscope.
- At **08.25** he fired one torpedo at the battleship at a range of 4,500 yards.
  - It missed and
  - he submerged to 150 feet as the depth charge attack began.



US Submarine Nautilus

# 4 June - Midway

- *Yorktown* held back its planes for about two hours;
  - Fletcher considered that his aircraft might be needed against other enemy carriers not yet located, but
  - by **08.38** there had been no further enemy sightings, and he had heard on the fighter direction circuit that Task Force 16 had been spotted by the Japanese
  - so he decided to launch half his dive bombers and all his torpedo planes, along with escorting fighters.
- By shortly after **09.00** the *Yorktown* had 17 SBDs, 12 TBDs, and six F4F-4s in the air, briefed to fly 150 miles on a bearing of 240 degrees then turn north west if the enemy had not been found.
- Fighters, to relieve the CAP, and another squadron of dive bombers were spotted on *Yorktown*'s deck ready for take off to deal with contingencies.



*Yorktown* on the morning of 4 June 1942.



# 4 June - Midway

- Commander Ring led the Hornet strike out on a heading of 265 degrees with the 34 SBDs in a scouting line abreast to increase the area searched.
- After about half an hour Waldron, leading VT-8, in flagrant disregard of orders, broke formation from Ring, swung round to the left and followed a more south westerly heading.
  - Gray and his Wildcats above at 20,000 feet continued to follow Waldron. Waldron had the fighter support he wanted but didn't know it was there.
  - Soon after 09.00 Gray noticed a bank of low cloud ahead of the TBDs then watched them disappear under the whitish mass.
  - Gray never saw them again.
- Then about 09.10 Jack Kelly, leader of Gray's second division radioed "there they are at one o'clock down, skipper."
  - Gray saw ship wakes far off and headed for them, searching for McClusky's dive bombers and Japanese fighters.
- The 10 Wildcat pilots from *Hornet* following Ring, who had been the first planes launched from Hornet, after nearly two hours aloft, found their fuel gauges below half full.
  - Not long after 09.00 Ensign McNerny did something highly unprecedented for a junior pilot. Easing past his section leader, John Magda, he flew up beside the Squadron's CO, Lt Cdr Mitchell, and pointed animatedly to the fuel gauge.
  - Mitchell waved him back into his proper slot in the formation. McNerny dropped back but only for a few minutes.
  - Soon he was back next to the skipper.
  - Mitchell violently gestured for him to get back but McNerny had had enough.
  - He swung round in a wide turn to head away to the east. Magda, his section leader, followed him.
  - Mitchell then gathered the other eight Wildcats turned and headed back east after McNerny and Magda.
  - When they left Ring and the dive bombers they were around 155 miles from their point of departure. They headed back for the task force guided by Zed Baker with throttles set for maximum range.
- At 09.25 Yorktown launched a relief CAP, recovered the first CAP then turned onto 225 degrees at 25 knots towards Task Force 16 then about 15 miles south west.

# 4 June - Midway

- Waldron's squadron sighted the enemy carriers and began their attack at **09:20**.
- Flying at 100 feet and 100 knots, the requirement for launching torpedoes, and without fighter escort, all 15 TBD Devastators of VT-8 were shot down without being able to inflict any damage.
- For a plane to splash while flying at 100 mph so close to the water was like hitting a stone wall.
- Ensign George Gay, was the only survivor of the 30 aircrew of VT-8.
  - Gay pulled the torpedo release 800 yards from a carrier and pulled out ten feet above the carrier's deck, then his left rudder pedal was knocked out by a cannon shell and the plane splashed.
  - His radio man was already dead.
  - Gay, only slightly wounded, managed to reach the surface as the plane sank, and hid under a floating rubber seat cushion to escape the notice of strafing Zeros.
- Gray found neither dive bombers nor Zeros at altitude and could not see any of the TBDs. He tried to contact McClusky but heard only static. He decide to remain at altitude and circled over the enemy fleet.





# 4 June - Midway

- Lindsey's VT-6 from *Enterprise*, last to take off, after the dive bombers and fighters had departed, headed out on 240 degrees and sighted smoke about 30 miles to the north west not long after 09.30.
  - Lindsey turned towards and aimed for the nearest flat top but the rate of closing was agonisingly slow – TBDs doing 100 knots chasing ships doing 30 knots.
  - At 09.40 a cruiser opened fire with its main armament to direct the Zeros of the CAP towards the TBDs.
- Wade McClusky, Enterprise Air Group Commander, leading the two enterprise dive bomber squadrons, reached the area he expected to find the enemy and found only open ocean.
  - He continued on the same course for another 35 miles, passing the safe limit of fuel endurance,
  - then at 09.35 he turned northwards to continue the search.
- Ring kept on going west with the SBDs without finding any trace of the enemy until about 09.40 when he turned south for a few minutes and then turned back east.
  - About this time the group broke up and Ring found himself alone.
- Ring and the 15 SBDs of Scouting Eight separately set course back to the task force guided by Zed Baker.
- The 18 SBDs of Bombing Eight searched south east then split up.
  - Four headed back to the task force and reached base on Hornet.
  - Fourteen headed towards Midway Island.
  - Eleven eventually reached the island, the other three ran out of gas and ditched.

# 4 June - Midway

- At **09.55** McClusky spotted the wake of a destroyer going north east and throwing spray.
  - Assuming she was steaming to rejoin the Japanese carriers McClusky took his course from her.
- Above, Gray's fighters could not see or hear any indication that VT-6 was attacking.
  - They never heard the distress call: "Come on down, Jim."
  - At **09.56** Gray radioed base: "This is Gray. We are over six destroyers, two battleships, two carriers." This was the first contact report that task force 16 had been able to copy.
- While Gray circled, VT-6 braved the fierce fighter defence.
  - Both Lindsey and Ely radioed for fighter support but Gray and his pilots never heard them.
  - The Japanese combat air patrol Zeros made short work of the unescorted, slow, under-armed TBDs.
  - One after another the Devastators hit the sea.
  - Both Lindsey and Ely went down at the head of their men.
  - After **09.58** five or six of the TBDs launched their fish but the attack angles were poor because of adroit Japanese ship handling.
  - Five of the TBDs got clear of the Japanese, the other nine had splashed.
  - One of the survivors later ditched.
  - A few TBDs had managed to get within a few ship-lengths range of their targets before dropping their torpedoes—close enough to be able to strafe the enemy ships and force the Japanese carriers to make sharp evasive maneuvers—but all of their torpedoes either missed or failed to explode.
- At **10.00** Gray radioed again: "This is Gray. We are returning . . . due to lack of gas. We have been flying over the enemy fleet. They have no combat air patrol. . . . Course about north."
- Like the fighter pilots at the Coral Sea he had let the strike planes do the navigating while he watched for zeros. Now he needed the Zed Baker signal to get home and needed to stay high to receive it.

# 4 June - Midway

- Almost exactly according to plan the Yorktown air group closed up during its flight.
- The six Wildcats had caught up with the TBDs they were to escort and
- the dive bomber squadron despite climbing to 15,000 feet were also in sight of the TBDs.
- About half an hour into the flight Max Leslie, the CO of Bombing Three, threw the switch to electrically arm his bomb and was appalled to feel his SBD lurch as the bomb dropped free.
  - Three other pilots also dropped their bombs before the skipper could warn them and tell them to arm their bombs manually.

# 4 June - Midway

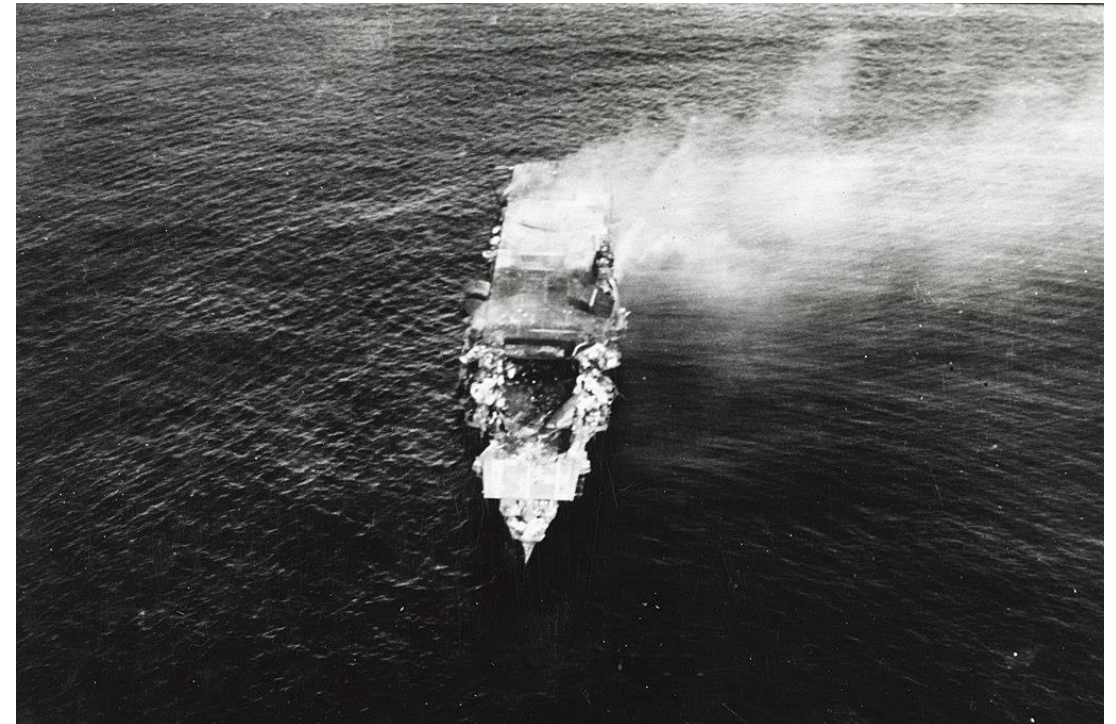
- A few minutes after 10.00 Mitchell's group of Hornet fighters sighted some ship wakes far off to the north.
  - They identified the ships as Japanese and held to their south easterly heading.
  - Not long afterwards the first Wildcat ran out of fuel, slowed, stalled and headed down. The others were still too high to see what happened when it splashed.
- McInerny and Magda, ahead and to the south of the other group, were the next to go.
  - When the fuel gauges showed only a few minutes left they conferred by hand signals and decided to ditch while they still had power. After carefully judging wind and wave conditions they set down not far apart.
  - Leaping out both secured their life rafts from the dorsal fairings.
  - McInerny inflated his liferaft and stepped in only to find that he had forgotten to cut the lanyard that secured it to the sinking wildcat. Both he and the life raft were under water before he managed to break it free. Popping back to the surface he paddled over to join Magda's raft.
- The next to go was Jennings, whose engine quit. Tallman, his wing man, still had power but followed his leader and ditched beside him.
  - Both had time to pop their rubber boats and bring them together. Two more dots on a vast and lonely sea.
  - Furious at the whole situation, Tallman spent the next two hours scribbling his report on the rough fabric of his raft.
- Kelly then ran out of fuel and turned to glide on a reverse course. Talbot followed him down. Kelly's Wildcat ploughed into the waves and sank immediately.
  - Talbot ditched not far away at about 10.30 but escaped the cockpit and launched his raft.
- When the next man ran out of fuel the last two followed him down and all ditched together.
  - Mitchell found his Wildcat sinking beneath him and was lucky to escape. Raftless he bobbed on the sea supported only by his yellow life jacket.
  - Ruehlow gashed his head painfully on the gunsight when ditching but scrambled free and secured his life raft and
  - Dick Gray secured both his raft and his emergency rations. Ruehlow and Gray brought their rafts together and picked up the skipper.

# 4 June - Midway

- At 10.03 Lloyd Childers the rear seat man in Harry Corl's TBD thought he saw a column of smoke.
  - Corl signalled Massey and the skipper brought VT-3 round to a heading of 345 degrees to approach the ships. Thach with the Wildcat escort and Leslie, high above with the dive bombers followed and also sighted the enemy.
- At 10.10, with the TBDs about 14 miles from the nearest carrier, a cruiser in the outer screen opened up with her main battery to alert the Japanese fighters to the new threat.
  - Fighters chasing the remnants of torpedo Six broke off the pursuit to resist the new threat and the carriers began turning north west away from the new wave of Americans.
  - Zeros converged from several locations, most initially attacked the Wildcat escort but there were enough Zeros to pursue VT-3 as well.
- Edgar Basset, a veteran with two confirmed kills at the Coral Sea, the last man in the four Wildcats of the higher escort formation was shot down almost immediately.
  - Basset did not bail out and Thach saw the Wildcat erupt in flames before it hit the sea.
  - The Zeros kept the rest of the escort fully occupied during the approach of VT-3.
  - Thach with the high group claimed three Zeros shot down and Cheek and Sheedy, the close escort, claimed one each but they could not free themselves from the Zeros to go looking for the TBDs.
- More Zeros pursued VT-3. Massey bore in against the carriers and another slaughter ensued. Seven Devastators including Massey's fell in flames.
  - Only five were able to launch torpedoes and three of these were then shot down.
  - Again, no hits.

# 4 June - Midway

- For thirty minutes the Japanese carriers had been manoeuvring to avoid attack by the torpedo bombers.
  - This prevented launching additional fighters to strengthen the CAP.
  - The fighters in the air had been pulled down to low level to attack the torpedo bombers,
  - many must have been low on fuel or ammunition and they had suffered some losses to the Wildcat escorts.
- Immediately after VT-3's attack, three squadrons of SBDs arrived simultaneously. McClusky's squadrons from *Enterprise* from the south west and *Yorktown's* from the northeast.
- The two squadrons from *Enterprise* (VB-6 and VS-6) were running low on fuel because of the time spent looking for the enemy.
- At **10:22**, *Enterprise's* squadrons split up and attacked the two Japanese carriers on the south west of the formation, diving at 70 degrees at about 280 knots. There was no interference from Zeros and little from anti-aircraft guns.
- McClusky and Scouting Six attacked the southernmost carrier, it sustained four or five direct hits, which caused heavy damage and started multiple fires.





# 4 June - Midway

- Lieutenant Clarence Dickinson, part of McClusky's group, reported:
  - “We were coming down in all directions on the port side of the carrier ... I recognized her as the Kaga; and she was enormous ... The target was utterly satisfying ... I saw a bomb hit just behind where I was aiming ... I saw the deck rippling and curling back in all directions exposing a great section of the hangar below ... I saw [my] 500-pound bomb hit right abreast of the [carrier's] island. The two 100-pound bombs struck in the forward area of the parked planes”
- A miscommunication caused both of the squadrons to dive at the Kaga. Recognizing the error, Lieutenant Best and five others from Bombing Six were able to pull out of their dives and, after judging that Kaga was doomed, headed north to attack Akagi, the westernmost carrier.
- At 10.26 only two minutes after she evaded the last of the torpedo bombers Akagi received two direct hits with 1,000 pound bombs.
  - One started fires among the aircraft on deck,
  - the other penetrated the flight deck and exploded among armed and fuelled aircraft in the hangar.
- Simultaneously, Yorktown's VB-3, commanded by Max Leslie, went for the most easterly carrier. Some of Leslie's bombers did not have bombs after the bomb arming accident.
  - Leslie and the others still dove, strafing carrier decks and providing cover for those who had bombs.
  - VB-3 scored at least three hits and ignited fires creating an inferno.
- Within six minutes, Sōryū and Kaga were ablaze from stem to stern, as fires spread through the ships. Akagi, struck by only two bombs, took longer to burn, but the resulting fires quickly expanded and soon she too was being consumed by flames.

# 4 June - Midway

- The dive bombers were harassed by Zeros on their way out of the area and a number were lost for lack of fuel.
- Fletcher decided to use his reserve squadron of SBDs for search, to locate the remaining flat tops or at least clarify the situation, rather than launching another strike.
  - At 11.33 Task force 17 turned into the wind and sent off ten SBDs to search in pairs 200 miles to the north and north west.
  - The seven remaining SBDs were struck below, fuelled and armed, as a reserve strike force.
  - The twelve wildcats which had been held back to escort the second strike were then released to reinforce the CAP.
  - As the strike force were beginning to straggle back to the Yorktown Captain Buckmaster decided to launch those Wildcats now to clear the deck to recover the strike force. The existing CAP could be recovered with the strike force.
- Just before noon three Japanese carriers out of four were out of action and apparently in sinking condition. All three American carriers were undamaged but they had lost 37 torpedo bombers, 16 dive bombers and 15 Wildcats and 11 Hornet dive bombers were stuck on Midway island by its limited refuelling capacity.

# 4 June - Midway

- At **11.55** Yorktown's radar had a contact and the FDO was sending out divisions of the CAP to investigate a contact bearing 255 degrees distant 20 to 25 miles.
- The returning strike were waved away, fuel lines were drained and filled with CO<sub>2</sub>, Yorktown bent on 30.5 knots and maneuvered violently
- Despite being caught at low altitude having just taken off and not having time to form up in Divisions, the Wildcat pilots of the CAP, part of Thach's Fighting Three, guided by Yorktown's FDO Pederson, did themselves proud.
  - They disrupted the attackers' formations and prevented more than half the eighteen dive bombers from attacking the ship by shooting them down or forcing them to jettison their bombs
  - But seven did get through to attack the Yorktown.



The Aichi D3A Type 99 Dive Bomber (Allied reporting name "Val")

# 4 June - Midway

- At **12.09** Yorktown lookouts sighted enemy dive bombers closing from astern and off her starboard quarter.
  - “The attack is coming in, sir,” said Admiral Fletcher’s aide. Frank Jack, looked up, said “Well, I’ve got on my tin hat. I can’t do anything else now.” and turned back to the chart to figure out his next move.
  - The Japanese dispersed to attack from different bearings making it difficult for the gunnery directors to track targets for the 5 inchers,
  - leaving the light AA (1.1 inch, 20mm and .50 calibre) as the mainstay of the defence. They emitted torrents of tracer but the results reinforced their reputation as revenge weapons.
- At **12.11** lookouts saw a dive bomber diving in steeply from astern.
  - As it plummeted below 1,000 feet to release its bomb, concentrated fire from the 1.1 inchers, clustered round the island, chopped the bomber into three large pieces.
  - His bomb fell free of the wreckage and despite tumbling end over end it hit Yorktown abaft the No 2 elevator. It detonated with a large, bright reddish sheet of flame that shot more than sixty feet skyward.
  - The blast swept the aft 1.1 inch mounts and killed or incapacitated most of the crews.
  - It blew a jagged eleven foot hole in the flight deck igniting a dangerous fire in the hangar below.



1.1" mount aboard USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), 1942.



## 4 June - Midway

- Six more attackers hit her with two more bombs, which snuffed out all but one of her boilers and destroyed one anti-aircraft mount. Speed was reduced to six knots and by 12.20 she was stopped.
- The damage and the loss of Yorktown's radar forced Admiral Fletcher to move his command staff to the heavy cruiser Astoria.



Smoke pours from *Yorktown* after being hit in the boilers by Japanese dive bombers at Midway.

# 4 June - Midway

- The last man to return from the strike was Dan Sheedy of Fighting 3. He was one of the pair of Wildcats flying close escort for Torpedo 3. In the onslaught by massed Zeros he had claimed one shot down but then been badly shot up and painfully wounded in the ankle and shoulder and then found himself alone in the sky.
  - He didn't have the height to receive the Zed Baker homing signal so navigated back to where he expected to find Yorktown by dead reckoning.
  - When he thought he was where he expected the ship to be he started a square search, as doctrine required.
  - On the second leg two Wildcats from Hornet's CAP were sent to look him over and he followed them home, very short of fuel.
  - The Hornet's flight deck aft was clear and at 12.29 the wounded Sheedy made his approach.
- As he was about to touch down the Wildcat skidded to the right. The impact of landing collapsed the right gear and when the wingtip slapped the deck all six of the Wildcat's guns cut loose in automatic fire.
  - The Wildcat's tail hook snagged the wire and slewed the aircraft to a stop.
  - Bullets ripped through the rear of the island structure into spectators watching the landing, then penetrated a one inch hardened plate to wreak havoc in Battle II.
  - The toll was five killed (including Lt Ingersoll, son of Admiral Ingersoll, commander of the Atlantic Fleet) and twenty wounded.
  - The flight deck crew helped the wounded pilot out of the cockpit, assessed the battered Wildcat as unserviceable and pushed it over the side.
- Yorktown damage control parties were able to temporarily patch the flight deck and restore power to several boilers by 13.40, allowing her to build up speed towards flight operations.
  - There were eight impatient pilots on board with flyable Wildcats just waiting for gas and wind over the deck.
  - Now the fire danger had abated the fuelling detail started pumping gas while the pilots inspected the repairs to the hole in the flight deck



# 4 June - Midway

- Since his unsuccessful attack on the cruiser screen Brockman in Nautilus had been making best speed on the surface to get back into the fight.
  - At **11.45** he sighted smoke on the horizon.
  - An hour later, after a periscope depth approach, he identified a Soryu class carrier, making two knots on an even keel escorted by two destroyers.
  - The after part of the flight deck had been destroyed but all fires appeared to be under control.
  - Brockman took his time to reach a good firing position undetected and between **13.59 and 14.05** fired three torpedoes from a range of 2,700 yards.
  - All three hit and exploded.
  - A long depth charge attack on Nautilus now began.



Photo # 80-G-20016 LCdr. William R. Brockman, Jr., Nov. 1942

Commander Brockman

# 4 June - Midway

- At **14.30** a second Japanese attack wave, consisting of ten Kate torpedo bombers and six escorting Zeros, found the *Yorktown*.
- Pederson, the FDO, had six Wildcats in the CAP and ordered McCuskey's division out at 10,000 feet.
  - He was assuming the bandits were at high altitude because they had been detected so far out.
  - His other section he vectored out at 7,000 feet.
  - He then requested help from task force 16, but the two groups had drawn 40 miles apart while Yorktown was stopped and Task Force 16 was steaming to conduct flight operations.
- McCuskey's four Wildcats missed the attackers in intermittent cloud, possibly because they were too high, and had to be called back by the FDO.
- The other two Wildcats of the CAP intercepted the attackers and shot down one bomber and damaged another but were then both shot down by the escorting Zeros.



Nakajima B5N2 "Kate" torpedo bomber.

# 4 June - Midway

- On the Yorktown the impending attack forced the air department to shut down the fuel system and send the Wildcats off with whatever they had in the tank after the morning's operations.
- Thach in the first of eight Wildcats was waved off at 14.40. The whole launch took two minutes.
  - During the last few launches Buckmaster was turning to starboard, to avoid torpedo planes charging up his port side, and even the shortest range AA was in action.
  - After take off it was necessary to crank up the landing gear by hand (twenty-eight turns of the handle), charge and test the guns, accelerate to some semblance of combat speed, and pick out a target.
- The Japanese drove in at 200 feet and 200 knots, twice the speed of the American TBDs.
- McCuskey's Division was diving back towards the carrier but got caught up with the Zeros of the escort. Two Zeros were shot down but the defenders were prevented from reaching the bombers.
- The eight wildcats that took off during the attack were pursuing the torpedo planes from the instant they were airborne. Thach, Leonard and Adams attacked the first four bombers and each shot one down although only Leonard prevented his victim from dropping his torpedo.
- Those taking off later had less time, less speed and were less experienced, most took some shots and probably damaged some attackers.
  - Milton Tootle, the least experienced of the group was shot down but bailed out and survived.
  - George Hopper, the last one off, was shot down and killed.

## 4 June - Midway

- Six Kates dropped torpedoes.
- Two torpedoes hit Yorktown at **14.42**. She lost all power and developed a 17 degree list to port.
- At **14.45** Samuel Adams flying one of the SBDs of Yorktown's afternoon search located Hiryū with two battleships, three cruisers and four destroyers steaming north about 110 miles west by north of Yorktown.

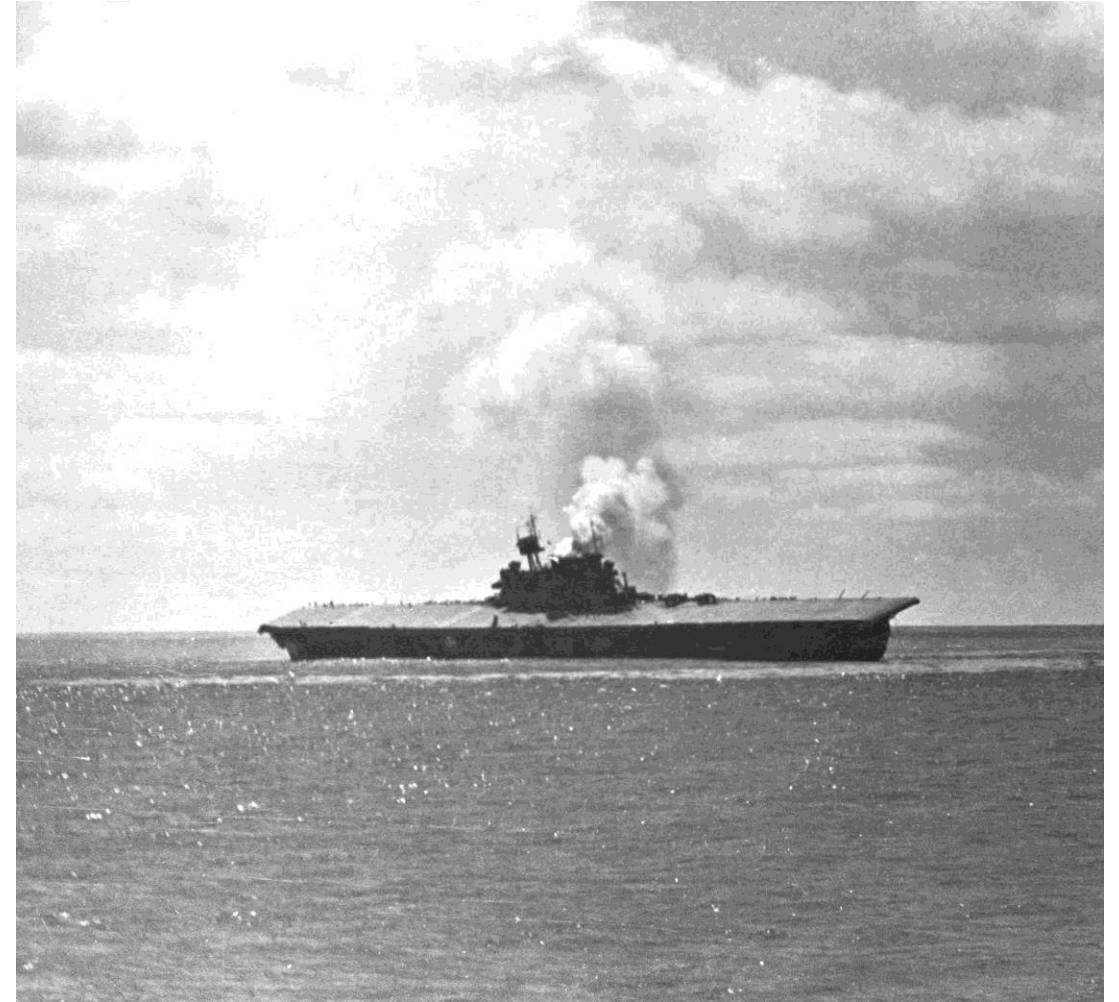


*Yorktown* at the moment of impact of a torpedo



# 4 June - Midway

- In the next 20 minutes Yorktown's list increased to 26 degrees.
- Captain Buckmaster, advised by his damage control officer that counterflooding was impossible without power, and that their watertight integrity had been only half restored by the repairs at Pearl, feared the Yorktown was about to capsize.
- A few minutes before 15.00 he ordered Abandon Ship.
- Four destroyers closed to take the men off or pick them up from the water.
  - The sea was smooth and, although the water was much colder than the Coral Sea it is believed that nobody drowned.



# 4 June - Midway

- At 15.30 *Enterprise* turned into the wind to launch a strike of 24 dive bombers (including 6 SBDs from VS-6, 4 from VB-6, and 14 from *Yorktown's* VB-3). No fighter escort was sent as the task force's depleted fighter squadrons were thought necessary to defend the task force.
- *Nautilus* came up for another look at 16.10 and found the carrier burning along its entire length.
- The SBDs attacked *Hiryū* at 17.00.
  - Despite being defended by a strong cover of more than a dozen Zero fighters, the *Enterprise* and orphaned *Yorktown* SBDs hit her with four bombs leaving her ablaze and unable to operate aircraft.
  - Three more SBDs were lost in this attack.
- *Hornet's* strike, launched late because of a communications error, concentrated on the remaining escort ships, but failed to score any hits.
- Admiral Fletcher, obliged to abandon the derelict *Yorktown*, and feeling he could not adequately command from a cruiser, ceded operational command to Spruance.
- In late afternoon 2 B-17s attack carrier force at 31-40N 179-10W, claiming hits on a battleship and a carrier and 3 airplanes shot down.
- 4 other B-17s claim a hit on heavy cruiser 185 mi from Midway.
- 6 B-17s, en route to Midway from Hawaii, bomb ships 170 mi from Midway, claiming hits on a burning carrier and a destroyer, which is claimed sunk.
- From his low and precarious vantage point Ensign Gay watched the rest of the battle. At dusk he came out from under his floating cushion, inflated his life raft and climbed in.



# 4 June - Midway

- Of the 25 VMF-221 fighters which had gone in against the attacking Japanese planes, only 10 returned, and of this number only two were in shape to leave the ground again.
  - Thirteen Buffaloes
  - and two Wildcats were missing,
  - along with the eleven dive bombers.
- At **17.00** a burning enemy carrier was reported 200 miles northwest of Midway.
- Major Norris prepared VMSB-241's six operational SBDs and five SB2U3s for a night attack.
- The planes took off at **19.00** but could not find the carrier.
  - Major Norris failed to return.
  - The other pilots managed to home by the light of oil fires and the anti-aircraft searchlights which were turned up as beacons.



Vindicator Vought SB2U-3

# 4 June - Midway

- Spruance knew the United States had won a victory, but he was still unsure of what Japanese forces remained and was determined to safeguard both Midway and his carriers.
  - To aid his aviators, who had launched at extreme range, he had continued to close with the Japanese during the day and persisted as night fell.
- Fearing a possible night encounter with Japanese surface forces, and believing the Japanese still intended to invade,
  - Spruance changed course and withdrew to the east to avoid an eastward thrust by Japanese surface forces,
  - turning back west towards the enemy at midnight to be close enough to defend Midway at first light.



# 4 June - Midway



On the evening of 4 June, in Fighting 6's ready room on the Enterprise, Jimmy Thach, the skipper of Fighting Three, drafted a preliminary report on Fighting 3's morning escort mission over the Japanese carriers.

- Versus the Japanese fighters the F4F-4 Wildcat was “pitifully inferior in climb, maneuverability and speed”.
- He concluded his report with a warning.
- “This serious deficiency not only prevents our fighters from properly carrying out an assigned mission but it has a definite and alarming effect on the morale of most of our carrier based fighter pilots. If we expect to keep our carriers afloat we must provide a fighter airplane superior to the Japanese Zero in at least climb and speed, if not maneuverability.”