Carrier vs carrier: American sailors' perspectives of the Pacific War

by

Allison Taylor

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Marjorie Galelli

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Dedication

To the men whose stories and experiences inspired this work.

1. Introduction

Ralf Conlee felt closest to war on June 4, 1942, during the Battle of Midway. After abandoning the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), he floated in a life raft, comforting a severely injured young seaman who would unfortunately bleed to death before rescue arrived. Aboard the rescue destroyer, Conlee noticed his wristwatch had stopped from water damage, frozen just after 3 o'clock- the moment he had jumped into the sea. He kept the broken watch as a reminder of his fallen shipmates and his carrier that was lost at Midway.[1]

The Pacific Theater of World War Two was the first time nations witnessed two aircraft carriers go head to head in battle. The United States and Japan were the two main opposing naval forces in the Pacific. Both nations had built their fleets' combat power around the aircraft carrier. The United States and Japan would engage in five different carrier vs. carrier engagements between 1942-1944. The US and Japanese fleets were also the only two navies to use the aircraft carrie as their main naval weapon in World War Two. In the interwar era the aircraft carrier was the newest naval technology. The carrier demonstrated the power of naval aviation through the ship's ability to project air power hundreds of miles to attack enemy ships, shifting naval doctrine from a battleship-centric focus toward carrier-driven task forces. Both scholars and non-academics are familiar with the stories of the great admirals like Chester Nimitz, William Halsey, and Raymond Spruance. However, who were the men that operated the American carriers in battle? Ralf Conlee was one of many who filled the ranks of the United States aircraft carriers during the Pacific War. Among the excitement of admirals making life or death decisions mid

[1] Ralf Burton Conlee, interviewed by Al Fritsch, 22 August, 2015, Ralf Burton Conlee Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

battle and torpedoes sinking carriers, it becomes easy to forget about the sailors and pilots in the background of the narrative who were also charting through new waters, learning what it meant to fight in a carrier engagement.

The five battles include: The Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942), the Battle of Midway (June 1942), the Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands (August 1942), the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands (October 1942), and the last and largest carrier vs. carrier engagement was the Battle of the Philippine Sea (June 1944). Other than in the Pacific Theater, there were no other carrier on carrier engagements in World War Two, making these battles distinctly unique.[2] The United States ships are classified based on their hull identification, aircraft carriers were designated CV for "carrier vessel." In the fall of 1941, on the eve of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States possessed eight aircraft carriers. They included the USS *Langley* (CV-1), USS *Lexington* (CV-2), USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), USS *Ranger* (CV-4), USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), USS *Hornet* (CV-8), and the USS *Wasp* (CV-7). However the *Langley* and *Ranger* were not deployed in the Pacific along side the other US carriers due to their restraints in speed and size.

Aircraft carriers served as mobile seagoing airbases, and they revolutionized naval warfare by allowing a fleet to project air power far from land. Naval warfare no longer relied on large caliber gun-based surface battles, but introduced new aviation-based form of combat. These ships became the primary offensive naval weapons for both the United States and Japanese in the Pacific. Aircraft carriers had originally been pioneered by Great Britain in 1918 with the commissioning of the HMS *Argus*. Throughout the interwar period aircraft carriers evolved into

[2] However, the British aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* was sunk off the coast of Ceylon in April 1942 by Japanese carrier-based dive bombers during the Indian Ocean Raid.

the leading naval technology and altered how a future conflict in the Pacific would be fought. On April 21, 1920, General Order 529 signed by Navy secretary Josephus Daniel's, reclassified the USS *Jupiter* as CV-1 and gave the ship a new name, *Langley.* On March 20th, 1922, the United States commissioned the USS *Langley* (CV-1) as the nation's first aircraft carrier. All of the United States' early doctrinal concepts surrounding aircraft carriers, was based off of early tests conducted aboard the *Langley*. Everything the United States Navy knew about the deployment of aircraft carriers at the start of the war in the Pacific; like aircraft take off and landings, task force formations, and anti-aircraft protection was developed in the interwar years, starting with the Langley. The United States' War Plan ORANGE, envisioned that a future conflict with Japan would require eight carriers and the War Plans Division recommend the conversion of two battle-cruiser hulls into carriers, leading to the construction of the *Lexington* and *Saratoga*.[3]

The aircraft carrier has several distinct characteristics. There is a long and flat flight deck that flares out and dominates the top deck of the ship. The flight deck is the most distinctive characteristic of a carrier, giving them the nickname "flattops." The superstructure, a small centralized "island," is located on the starboard (right) side of the flight deck, housing the bridge, Combat Information Center (CIC), and control tower.[4] Below decks is a large hangar bay where aircraft are stored and maintained. The aircraft are moved from the hanger to the flight deck by large elevators. On the flight deck carriers are armed with several 40mm, 20mm, and larger 5-inch gun mounts that vary by ship.

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[3] David F. Winkler, *America's First Aircraft Carrier: USS Langley and the Dawn of U.S. Naval Aviation*, (Naval institute Press, 2024), 44-47, 60.

[4] In the earliest classes of US aircraft carriers the CIC was located in the island structure. However, later in 1943 aboard the new Essex class carriers the CIC was relocated to the gallery deck below the flight deck adjacent to the island; Andrew Faltum, *The Essex Aircraft Carriers,* (Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America Inc, 1996), 19.

John Keegan was a British military historian who, in his work *The Face of Battle* (1976), challenged traditional military history by portraying a realistic, first hand account of battle that moved away from the traditional approach of focusing on military strategy and narratives centered around the leadership and decisions of generals. To Keegan, battle is a human experience, and the examination of how the mechanics and logistics of the battlefield affected soldiers is important. In *The Price of Admiralty* (1988), Keegan further developed the human element of warfare, arguing that the evolution of naval warfare has been shaped as much by the social and human experiences of sailors as by technological change. Keegan specifically analyzed aircraft carriers and the Battle of Midway, demonstrating that although the carrier represented the newest development in naval technology and contributed to a major American victory, the human cost; measured in the loss of life and the psychological toll on sailors, remained high. Keegan's works came at a time when the term "new military history" was on the rise. "New military history" arose to highlight the shift of military historians away from narratives focused on leadership and troop movements. As stated by American military historians Tami Davis Biddle and Robert Citino in a Society for Military History White Paper, "The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy," the term has become outdated. "New military history" is simply what military history is today: broad-based, inclusive, and written from a wide range of perspectives.[5]

Military historians today include the human element of war in their works. Craig Symonds, Professor Emeritus at the United States Naval Academy in his book *The Battle of*

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[5] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme*, (The Viking Press, 1976); John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare,* (The Viking Press, 1988); Tami Davis Biddle and Robert M. Citino, *The Role of Military History in the Contemporary Academy*, (Society for Military History, 2018), 2.

Midway (2011) retells the famous battle by focusing on the men who made the victory possible. Symonds's analysis on the backgrounds, personalities, and the thought processes of the admirals and commanders demonstrating a human side to the strategies and operations in the early years of the Pacific War. British journalist and historian, Max Hastings in his book *Inferno: The World at War 1939-1945* (2012) focused on the initial experiences rather than military strategy in World War Two. In Hastings's work he focused on the events of the war and how they appeared to the people experiencing them. He draws from the experiences of soldiers and civilians. *Inferno* brings an intimate connection to the well known events that occurred in World War Two. Symonds's and Hastings's works add the human perspective to a already well known historical era.[6]

The differences in veteran memories of a particular battle are vital to understanding military history because they provide a multilevel, human perspective that official records often lack. Conflicting accounts of one battle or type of battle reveals the personalized nature of war. Analyzing how a sailor bonded with his crewmen and how they fought together through traumatic experiences leads to a more nuanced operational narrative. Official records (action reports, official narratives, command decisions, etc.) focus on strategy and outcomes on a macro level. Veteran accounts, in contrast, offer intimate details like personnel experiences and sensory details of combat (sounds, smells, and chaos). Disparities between the official narrative and personal memories can highlight gaps that do not necessarily question the "top-down" interpretations but underscore the difference between an admiral's order in battle and real-world execution by sailors or pilots.

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[6] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway*, (Oxford, 2011); Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World at War 1939-1945*, (Vintage, 2012).

A sailor's carrier assignment changed how he viewed and depicted the war in the Pacific. Carrier assignments depicted not only when sailors would first experience battle, but also which battles veterans deemed worth sharing. Memories that stood out to the men who fought in the Pacific were heavily weighted by whether or not a sailor had lost their carrier or escaped battle unharmed, and consequently this affected how the sailor viewed the war. Whether by random designation or a sailor trying to choose his own carrier, his ship assignment was a story of fate. Each sailor's assignment tied him to the legacy of one of the United States' carriers, which changed how a sailor came to view and depict the war in the Pacific. Each carrier participated in different events and battles throughout the war, which in turn created different carrier experiences for each crew. I argue that comparing and contrasting the experiences of the sailors and pilots from United States aircrafts carriers during World War Two reveals the human side of carrier warfare, demonstrating not only how they viewed the battles and their larger role in the war, but also how many of the carrier crew members, both sailors and pilots, felt conflicting emotions about the outcomes of these battles, which is not apparent when viewed from the perspective of the carrier admirals.

My sources come from four different archives and special collections. Through the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, I used several different official military records. In Record Group 38 located at NARA I used action reports, war diaries, damage reports, and command files from several of the different aircraft carriers that were present at the five carrier battles in the Pacific. Official military papers can be incomplete for many reasons, in the case of my research many of the ships I studied were sunk in battle, and in some cases their official papers were lost. Action reports could have originated

from the specific vessel or via the naval task force that it belonged to. One obstacle I ran into was that there is no action report from the USS *Lexington* (CV-2) from the battle of the Coral Sea. In this case, I supplemented this gap with sources such as the Coral Sea's official battle narrative from the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC). Apart from official military records, I also accessed limited interviews from the Oral History collection at NARA.

It was a challenge to obtain sources that captured the enlisted sailors who served as flight deck crew, gunners, aircrew squadrons, pilots, and any other positions that made it possible for a carrier to operate in battle. Ideally historians would use diaries, letters, journals, and any other correspondence of sailors. In the case of my project, the availability of sources such as these was limited. There are two reasons why this was a challenge. First, my research is focused specifically on junior ranking sailors, who were not only aboard a United States carrier, but who were aboard the ship during one of the five carrier battles (sailors were not trained for assignment to a specific vessel and it was very common for men to serve aboard multiple carriers). This narrow focus made sources very limited. Second, the USS *Lexington*, USS *Yorktown*, and the USS *Hornet* were three of the main ships studied, and all three were sunk during the war. When abandoning ship sailors left behind their personal belongings, and many personal papers did not survive. Through all of my research I managed to locate one diary, that was partially legible. To overcome the lack of available paper correspondence, I shifted the heart of my project to post-war oral history interviews.

The oral histories employed are from the National Museum of the Pacific War, Oral History Collection and the Veterans History Project from the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The interviews are all VHS or cassette recordings and those from the

Pacific War Museum all included attached transcripts. The majority of the veterans were interviewed during the early 2000s and 2010's. The interviews are fifty-plus years removed from the war and the veterans interviewed were in their later 80s to early 90s. Unlike diaries or letters, these oral histories can bring about doubt of the interviewed veterans' memory. Veterans' memories can be unconsciously influenced by popular culture like films or narratives. Trauma and stress can affect veterans' ability to recall memories that occurred decades earlier. Oral histories are the heart of my study, but the interviews are juxtaposed with the use of official military records and secondary sources to prove their legitimacy.

There is an abundance of scholarly works that focus on the United States' use of the aircraft carrier in the Pacific war. The early historiography focuses on the rise of the aircraft carrier as the dominant naval power and the vessel's strategic use in naval warfare. One of the earliest works of United States naval history was Samuel Elliot Morison's *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*. The fifteen-volume series is recognized as the United States Navy's unofficial history for World War Two. The carrier battles were detailed in perspective of the larger war. Morison was commissioned to write his series during the war by President Roosevelt. The majority of his experiences were from the battleship, which is reflected in his work.[7]

The first scholarly works to be presented on carrier warfare were by retired naval officers from the Pacific. Frederick Sherman served as a commander of two carrier task forces, Carrier Division 2 and Task Group 38.3. He authored *Combat Command: The American Aircraft Carriers in the Pacific War* (1950). He uses his own experience and scholarly research to analyze

[7] Samuel Elliot Morrison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II,* (Little, Brown & Company, 1947-1962).

the United States Navy's success in the Pacific, which he concludes could not have been done without the carrier. *The Great Sea War: The Story of Naval Action in World War II* (1960) by E.B. Potter (US naval officer) and Chester Nimitz (Commander of the Pacific Fleet) stressed the importance of sea power in World War Two. E.B. Potter and Nimitz similarly concluded that the carrier was the decisive element for achieving control of the Pacific; highlighting naval aviation as the main offensive weapon capable of striking the Japanese target.[8]

The most pivotal work over carrier warfare was published in the late 1960s by Clark Reynolds. *Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy* (1968) was critical in analyzing the development and formation of the United States' Fast Carriers Task Force. The book focused on Nimitz's decision to form fast carrier groups and how the advice from air admirals shaped his choices. The first carrier admirals had two different backgrounds. The "black shoe" carrier admirals refers to the surface officers, who were not naval aviators, distinguished by the black shoes in their uniforms. In contrast, "brown shoe" admirals were naval personnel from the aviation branch, distinguished by wearing brown shoes. Up to this point, previous works had focused on the carriers through the perspective of "black shoe" admirals, over "brown shoe" naval aviators. Reynolds examined the structure of Nimitz's task forces and dives into the background of the commanding officers that affected the United States strategy in the Pacific. James and William Belote's book *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces During World War II* (1975) provides a comparative analyses of Japan's and the United States' challenges to strategy, technology, and

[8] Sherman, Frederick, *Combat Command: The American Aircraft Carriers in the Pacific War,* (Dutton, 1950). E.B.; Potter and Chester Nimitz, *The Great Sea War: The Story of Naval Action in World War II*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1960).

tactics during carrier battles. It closely analyzes the development of both nations' carrier doctrine in comparison to each other.[9]

Scholarship in the 1980s-1990s focused on new technologies and how they effected World War Two. *Wings of the Navy: Flying Allied Carrier Aircraft of World War Two* (1980) by Eric Brown, specifically focused on how the evolution of American carrier aircraft improved carrier operations in the Pacific. Edward Miller in his book *War Plan ORANGE: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (1991), he argued the endless variations and reviews of War Plan ORANGE shaped the Navy's thinking on how to wage a future war against Japan. Miller focused on the evolution of naval doctrine, specifically how it was effected by new military technology like the aircraft carrier. *Military innovation in the Interwar Period* (1996) edited by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, was a study of the major military innovations in the interwar period of the future main powers of World War Two. The work is a collection of essays by leading historians who compare how innovation occurred and its strategic and operational performance in the war. The aircraft carrier is highlighted for making the war in the Pacific possible, by providing the United States airbases in a conflict where friendly land bases were few.[10]

Pushing into the twenty-first century, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (2005) by Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, used Japanese sources to break the perviously American-centric hold over the Midway narrative. Through the Japanese perspective,

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[9] Clark Reynolds, *The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy*, (McGraw Hill, 1968); James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces in World War II*, (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975).

[10] Captain Eric Brown, *Wings of the Navy: Flying Allied Carrier Aircraft of World War Two,* (Janes Publishing Incorporated, 1980); Edward S. Miller, *War Plan ORANGE: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945*, (Naval Institute Press, 1991); Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Parshall and Tully revealed that the United States Navy did not face overwhelming odds at Midway and that the main reason for the Japanese defeat was due to the lack of a planned counterattack.[11]

Further into the early 2000s, the historiography of carrier warfare began to go in many different directions. In the 2006 many works were focused on leadership of the carrier admirals. Douglas Smith in his book *Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm's Way* (2006) argued that the *Sound Military Decision* text from the Naval War College during the interwar years shaped how American admirals approached the carrier battles in the Pacific. In the same year John Lundstorm published *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal*. Lundstorm comes to defend Admiral Fletcher, whose leadership he believed had been under attack for many decades under writers like Samuel Elliot Morrison. Lundstorm set the precedent for how Fletcher would be viewed in future works.[12]

Beginning in the 2010s to the present, works on carrier warfare have been largely related to strategy and logistics with several prominent works appearing in the past two decades. *The Battle of Midway* (2011) by Craig Symonds argued against the "luck narrative" surrounding the battle of Midway. Through his detailed analyses, he addressed that it was more than just luck that played in the American victory. Symonds gives credit not only to the decisions of the carriers' leadership, but he is also one of the first historians to address the role of the American code breakers, specifically Commander Joe Rochefort. Robert Stern's *Knifes Edge: South Pacific*

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[11] Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway*, (Potomac Books, 2005).

[12] Douglas Smith, *Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm's Way*, (Naval Institute Press, 2006); John Lundstorm, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal*, (Naval Institute Press, 2006).

Carrier Battles from the Eastern Solomons to Santa Cruz (2023) challenged the importance of the Battle of Midway in the historiography of the carrier battles. Through a detailed operational history Stern argued the Battles of the Eastern Solomon Islands and Santa Cruz were the deciding battles of which navy would dominate the Pacific. However, at the close of 1942 neither the Japanese nor the United States managed to gain dominance in the Pacific. The United States was left in a fragile state with the USS *Enterprise* being the only operational carrier in the Pacific until the arrival of the USS *Saratoga*.[13]

Sustaining the Carrier War: The Development of US Naval Air Power to the Pacific (2023), by Stan Fisher, was the first comprehensive study on the importance of aircraft maintenance and the aircraft technician. Fisher's book provided the missing link to understand how the United States was able to sustain its carriers throughout the war; the key focuses on logistic factors that had significant influence on operational outcomes in conjunction with actual combat. One of the newest works in the field of carrier warfare is Evan Mawdsley's *Supremacy at Sea: Task Force 58 and the Central Pacific Victory* (2024). Mawdsley analyzed a period of the American carrier fleet's history that is lesser known. 1943 marked a long lull in major naval engagements as both the United States and Imperial Japanese navies attempted to rebuild and reorganize from the major losses in the South Pacific in 1942. Mawdsley work adds to the previous arguments of Reynolds and the Belotes answering how Nimitz was able to transition

[13] Craig Symonds, *The Battle Midway*, (Oxford, 2011); Robert Stern, *Knife's Edge: South Pacific Carrier Battles From the Eastern Solomons to Santa Cruz*, (Naval Institute Press, 2023).

into late 1943 and successfully implement his famous "island hopping" campaign in the Central Pacific.[14]

Works that address the human element of carrier warfare in the Pacific are very few. Of the few works that do exist, they are broken into two groups and scattered throughout the historiography. The first group are scholarly works that focus on one particular ship and crew. The most notable are *The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise* (1962) by Edward P. Stafford which detailed the history of the USS *Enterprise* which was present for every carrier battle from the Battle of Midway all the way to the Battle of the Philippine Sea. *That Gallant Ship: USS Yorktown CV-5* (1985) by Robert Cressman analyzed the history of the USS *Yorktown* from its commissioning in 1936 to its sinking at Midway in 1942. A more recent work was the *Enterprise: America's Fightingest Ship and the Men Who Helped Win World War II* (2012) by Barrett Tillman. These narratives give insights to the unique contributions of each of the ships to the war in the Pacific. These works are heavily focused on perceiving the legacy of the ships, and less about the interpreting the experiences of the crew. They portray the legacy of the ships as larger than the men who operated them.[15]

The second group of works use first-hand perspective of survivors of carrier battles. However, these works are few and focused on the more popular carrier battle at Midway. These works are *No Higher Honor: The U.S.S. Yorktown at the Battle of Midway* (1999) by Jeff Nesmith and *No Right to Win: A Continuing Dialogue with Veterans of the Battle of Midway*

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[14] Stan Fisher, *Sustaining the Carrier War: The Development of US Naval Air Power to the Pacific*, (Naval Institute Press, 2023); Evan Mawdsley, *Supremacy at Sea: Task Force 58 and the Central Pacific Victory*, (Yale University Press, 2024).

[15] Edward P. Stafford, *The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise,* (Random House, 1962); Robert Cressman, *That Gallant Ship: USS Yorktown CV-5*, (Pictorial Histories Publishing Co, 1985); Barrett Tillman, *Enterprise: America's Fightingest Ship and the Men who Helped Win World War II*, (Simon & Schuster, 2012).

(2006) by Ronald W. Russell. Nesmith holds no higher argument and works as a piece to commemorate those who were involved at Midway. Russell's work is very similar, but aimed to give more complexity to how the United States managed to achieve victory at Midway.[16] Viewing all the carrier battles together through the perspective of seaman has had very little coverage. The majority of the works either center around popular memory of carrier battles like Midway, or they use the perspectives of sailors to add a human element to their work, but do not truly dive into how men aboard carriers have conflicting experiences, and what this tells historians about carrier warfare.

To understand the experiences of seamen in carrier battles, you have to first understand their backgrounds. One important piece of information is: what brought these men to join the navy? There is not one singular answer to this question. Each sailor entered the navy for his own reason. Some reasons were predictable like jobs were scarce because of the Great Depression or some felt a patriotic duty to join the military due to the feeling of an impending war in Europe and the Pacific. The majority of interviews used for my research are of young white men between the ages of 17-25. The men were from poor urban areas or small towns across the United States. Many were drawn to naval service because it appeared to promise excitement, and this was appealing to young men freshly out of high school or men trying to chart a course in life. There is not one set background to represent all the sailors aboard the US carriers. The I ones selected represent the majority, but each sailor's interview was unique.

Robert Gardner from Detroit, Michigan remembered saving aluminum to turn in for money, because his family was struggling through the Depression. Fresh out of high school at the

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[16] Jeff Nesmith, *No Higher Honor: The U.S.S. Yorktown at the Battle of Midway*, (Longstreet, 1999); Ronald W. Russell, *No Right to Win: A Continuing Dialogue with Veterans of the Battle of Midway*, (iUniverse, 2006).

age of seventeen Gardner knew he needed a trade to make himself valuable in the workforce. One of the best ways to learn a trade for free, while also being paid, was through military service. Gardner joined the navy and was sworn in on December 4th 1940. Men like Joe Miles volunteered for the navy through propaganda pieces. Similar to today, the navy handed out pamphlets to schools with slogans stating "Join the navy and see the world!" Gardner and Miles choices to join the navy represent that some joined because they needed to and for others the decision was more of a leisurely one.[17]

Not all who joined the navy saw it as a calling or that they had a choice. In times of war the draft always plays a part in inducing men in for military service. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Robert Olson was called to be drafted into the army. In fear of being sent to the frontlines in Europe, Olson requested to enlist in the navy. Budget cuts due to the Great Depression reduced the navy and other branches of the United States military. Olson recalled that at the start of the war the navy was in desperate need of men, and his training was cut from six weeks to three. L.V. Walls, like other men, saw that war was looming over the nation and chose to enlist in military service so he could have a choice of branch. Walls chose the navy, thinking that if he was going to go to war, he might as well enjoy his service while doing it. Elias Spiak was older than most of his fellow crewmen. Joining the navy right out of high school in 1936, Spiak debated leaving the navy and doing something else with his life. After the United States' declaration of war in 1941, Spiak remained in the navy until the end of the war. Spiak was not thrilled about having his choice to leave taken away, but he tried to make the best of the

[17] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Joe Q. Miles, interviewed by Richard Marlowe, 14 May, 2004, Joe Q. Miles Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

situation. His pre-war service in the navy thus far had been around the mainland United States aboard the battleship USS Utah, but at the start of the war he was transferred to the USS *Lexington.* Spiak remembered he was thrilled on his first trip to Pearl Harbor, throwing coins at swimmers in the water, having no idea what the war had in store for him.[18]

Some of the interviewed sailors were barely old enough to call themselves "men." The excitement of sea life attracted many boys as well. At the age of seventeen a man could join the navy with parental permission, however many boys at the time would forge papers to lie about their age. John Underwood recalled from his high school days hearing stories of a friend who had joined the navy. Underwood was inspired by the stories and experiences of his friend who was aboard a battleship, the USS *Pennsylvania*. In his younger years Underwood admitted he had got himself in trouble with the law smuggling alcohol across state lines during Prohibition. At the age of fifteen, he convinced his parents to sign his enlistment papers stating he was seventeen, and he joined the navy in October 1941. Underwood's parents were hopeful that the navy would keep their son out of trouble, maybe even teach him to grow up. Little did they know their son would be forced to grow up fast. Underwood would be assigned to the USS *Yorktown*, and experience the not so exciting realities of war, as the ship went down at the Battle of Midway.[19]

It is also important to examine the backgrounds of the ensign pilots whose experiences, while not the primary focus of my work, nonetheless played a significant role in the carrier

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[18] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; L.V. Walls, interviewed by Candice Crone, 15 August, 2009, L.V. Walls Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Elias Steve Spiak, interviewed by William P. Brough, May 2003, Elias Steve Spiak Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[19] John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

battles. The pilots aboard carriers were a separated group, but they still interacted with the sailors. Many sailors held pilots in high regard and saw that it was the pilots who deserved the true credit for carrying out the battle. Like the sailors, the interviews of the pilots were all of white men. There are several differences in the backgrounds of the pilots and crewmen. The ages of the pilots ranged from 21-30, with the majority being 25 or older. The great majority of the pilots also joined the navy in the early to mid 1930s or had attended college before their service, which was rarely seen in interviews of the seaman. Just like the interviews with sailors, there is no set background for pilots either. Each pilot's interview that is singled out represents the majority, but that is not to say that each interview is not unique on its own.

Lewis Hopkins attended an eleven-year school and graduated in 1935 at the age of fifteen. After high school, Hopkins attended Berry College in Rome, Georgia and graduated in 1939 at nineteen years old. Hopkins worked his way through college paying a little under $200 dollars and obtained a degree in chemistry. Hopkins had no idea what he wanted to do after graduation and ultimately got a job in Atlanta working in the catalogue department of Sears and Roebuck. In 1940 Hopkins was working for a junior sales business, when he saw an advertisement for the World's Fair in New York, and he desperately wanted to attend. Hopkins did not have the money to make the trip to New York, but he continued reading to see that the Atlanta Navy Reserve Unit was going to be in attendance. Hopkins stated, "A light bulb went off in my head and I said, I'm going out and joining the navy reserve." In a sad twist of events Hopkins never made it to New York, and during a brief stop in Charleston, he discovered that the Atlanta reserve was called to active duty. With a college education Hopkins was given the opportunity to attend flight school. After completing his training in September 1941, Hopkins

was eventually assigned to the USS *Enterprise* as part of the SBD Dauntless dive bombers squadron (VB-6).[20]

Other pilots who joined the navy did not have as ironic of a story that brought them into the service. James Doyle had been taught how to fly by one of his father's friends who operated crop dusters. Having no money for college due to the Depression, Doyle enlisted in the navy in the latter half of 1939. Having knowledge on how to fly Doyle was sent to flight school and there he learned how to fly the "navy way." Doyle learned how to operate the navy's fighter plane, the Grumman F4F Wildcat, and was assigned to Squadron Two (VS-2) aboard the USS *Lexington*. Jack Kleiss passed his naval academy exam before he even finished high school in Coffeyville, Kansas. Kleiss had the opportunity to attend Kansas University through a scholarship, but he could see the signs of the upcoming war and chose the Naval Academy instead. After flight school Kleiss was assigned to the USS *Enterprise* in Scouting Six (VS-6).[21]

Ships are operated by people and it is the sailors and pilots with all their different backgrounds, that built the environment aboard aircraft carriers. Where each carrier had a different set of challenges and experiences throughout the war, the environments of the ships were similar from carrier to carrier. Carlyle Herring and Lloyd Howser were both aboard the USS *Enterprise*. Herring described the crew as "tight knit," and explained he could leave his pocketbook laying on his bunk without worrying that it would be stolen. Howser expressed how

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[20] The layout of the different type of carrier squadrons and their designations will be discussed in chapter two "Carrier Crews in Crisis: USS *Lexington* (CV-2) and the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) from Coral Sea to Midway" on pages 31-32. Lewis Hopkins, interviewed by Floyd C. Cox, 15 January, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[21] James Doyle, interviewed by Catherine Elliott, 29 October, 2008, James Doyle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Jack Kleiss, interviewed by Chuck Nichols and Becky Lindig, 29 September, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

men aboard the carrier were typically in high spirits due to the fact they were treated nicely by carrier life, especially by the food. Carrier food typically consisted of fresh baked bread, cakes, pies, and pancakes with syrup. “They even had a mechanical cow aboard the thing, and we had our own ice cream,” Howser recalled.[22] Overall the mood of the carriers, especially during times before war, tended to be positive. James Hinkle who was aboard the USS *Lexington* recalled that the majority of the seamen level crew were eighteen or nineteen years old. They were teenagers fresh out of their childhood, the “old men” of the ship were barely in their thirties. Hinkle remembered the mood of the *Lexington* crew tended to always be high spirited and positive.[23]

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 is a significant moment in United States history for the Pacific War. For many sailors and pilots who fought in the Pacific, this is the moment they defined as the starting point of their journey through World War Two. Sailors were scattered throughout the world on the day of the attack. Some were present at Pearl Harbor, others were at sea or stationed on the east coast. Doyle was asleep in his hangar at Ford Island Naval station the morning of the 7th and he woke up to “real life death and struggle.” Doyle was training to fly as a photography mate at Pearl Harbor and ran outside and took pictures of the scene. He recalled the Japanese shot at everything that moved. The air was filled with the smell of burning bodies mixed with tar and oil. Doyle recalled “there was chaos for hours into the night, men were shooting at everything that moved, they were so spooked.”[24]

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[22] Carlyle Herring, interviewed by Doug Wright, date unknown, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Lloyd Howser, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 28 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[23] James E. Hinkle, interviewed by Evan Shannon and Jason Lee, 30 April, 2015, James E. Hinkle Interview, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[24] James Doyle, interviewed by Catherine Elliott, 29 October, 2008, James Doyle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Others like Gardner were more fortunate. Having been assigned to the *Lexington* Gardner had left Pearl Harbor several days before the attack on December 7th. The officers of the *Lexington* were getting full reports from Honolulu of the attack, however the crew was kept mostly in the dark. Gardner remembered being ordered to stay alert for Japanese aircraft, but little information about the attack on Pearl Harbor or war with Japan filtered down to the crew. Men like Sam Laser were halfway across the world aboard the *Yorktown*, which was docked in Norfolk, Virginia, when he heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. "Well I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was; country boy from Arkansas, I'd never seen an ocean, never seen a ship," said Laser. Joe Miles was on leave in Norfolk, when he was quickly called back to the *Yorktown* after the attack due to the assurance the United States would be going to war within the next few hours. Miles summarized the attitudes of the crew and stated, "we was all young and crazy at the time and wanted to get in it."[25]

[25] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Sam Laser, interviewed by Kenneth W. Thompson and Kathy Matras, 14 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

2. Carrier Crews in Crisis: USS *Lexington* (CV-2) and the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) from Coral Sea to Midway

Robert Daniels walked across the flight deck of the USS *Yorktown* to his station at the 20mm magazine. He and the rest of the crew manning one of many of the *Yorktown's* anti-aircraft weapons were breathing a sigh of relief. Their ship had just sustained three bomb hits by Japanese dive bombers at the Battle of Midway. However, Daniels reassured himself that if the old *Yorktown* could survive serious damage at the battle of the Coral Sea, then Midway would be no different. Daniels recalled that even in war there are humorous events. While sitting with his buddies after what would be only the first attack of the day, one of his friends was sitting on the rim of a bucket and playing with the 20mm cardboard shell casings, by sticking one on each finger. Suddenly, the alarm came for a second incoming attack. Daniels remembers seeing his friend get stuck, butt first, in the bucket and struggling to rip the cardboard tubes off his fingers. It took Daniels and a couple of other sailors to pull his buddy out of the bucket. Daniels and his friends were laughing just moments before the Japanese were hammering down on the crew of the *Yorktown.*[26]

Leading up to Battle

The United States declared war on Japan the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 8th, 1941. Among all the chaos of war, ordinary sailors were making their way through training and awaited their ship's assignment. Where some men were assigned to a carrier through random designation, others would take fate into their own hands to obtain a spot. Sailors who

[26] Robert Daniels, interviewed by Robert Grinslade, 1970, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg TX.

were already assigned to their ship anxiously awaited the chance to strike back at the Japanese after their surprise attack at Pearl. The USS *Lexington* (CV-2) in Task Force 11 (TF 11) and USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) in Task Force 17 (TF 17), would be the key players in combating the Japanese Combined Fleet's carrier task force, known as the Kidō Butai (mobile force), during the first two carrier battles of the war in the Pacific, in the Coral Sea and off Midway Island. Men like Robert Gardner knew the importance of the carriers to win the war in the Pacific. Gardner was a fireman second class aboard the Lexington. Gardner recalled that after Pearl Harbor the navy learned very quickly that the aircraft carrier was going to be the main fighting force in the Pacific after the sinking and damaging of the Pacific Fleet's battleships at Pearl Harbor. None of the US carriers were present at Pearl the day of the attack due to pre planned missions and maintenance schedules.[27] The ultimate loss of the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* by early summer 1942 led sailors to believe they had failed their mission in the Pacific. To the sailors their carrier was not just important strategically; they shared a special connection to their ship not only as their workplace, but their home. During battle they fought to save their ship and a legacy that they had became a part of.[28]

The United States prosecuted the war against Japan in adherence with the prewar strategy known as War Plan ORANGE, a plan it had developed and refined over the previous 35 years in anticipation of a future conflict. The Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 capped the Japanese battleship tonnage to 60 percent of both US and Great Britains totals, expressed as a ration of

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[27] On December 7th, 1941, the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) and USS *Lexington* (CV-2) were transporting aircraft, while the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) and USS *Hornet* (CV-8) were based at Norfolk Virginia. The USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) was undergoing maintenance in San Diego, California. Lastly the USS *Wasp* (CV-7) was conducting patrols in the Caribbean.

[28] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

5:5:3. The battleship program was down sized, but aircraft carrier and submarines were not included. The geography of the Pacific Ocean was the main factor that formed American strategy for war with the Japanese. Over four thousand miles of ocean separated Hawaii from Japan. Before World War Two the United States held territories in Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, American Samoa, and Wake Island. Each territory held strategic, commercial, and refueling purposes. At the Washington Naval Conference the United States agreed not to fortify the nations bases in the Western Pacific. However, the treaty did not prohibit mobile facilities at out lying islands like Pearl Harbor. By 1940 President Roosevelt ordered most of the American fleet to Pearl Harbor as a signal to deter Japanese aggression towards US and European colonies in the Pacific and Asia.[29]

The United States Navy needed the aircraft carrier to wage war in the Pacific. Developments of new technology throughout the interwar period, specifically the aircraft carrier, aided the United States war planners and their strategies. Advancements in at sea refueling in the interwar years transformed carriers from coastal defense assets into long-range striking forces. American military planners knew that in a potential war with Japan, friendly airfields would be few. Without local land-based air support from allied bases, the United States Navy would have to take its own. Aircraft carriers allowed the United States to wage war without relying on land air bases. Basing was critical for both sides. Japan controlled the Mandate Islands in the Marianas, Carolines, and Palaus; all of which could be rapidly militarized in the event of war. In

[29] Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942,* (W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 2012), 83; Edward S. Miller, *War Plan ORANGE: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945*, (Naval Institute Press, 1991), 1-4, 49-50.

1941 the United States Army Air Corps was superior to Japan's in terms of numbers. However, Japan's total number of carriers numbered 11 to the United States' six.[30]

Japan relied on the carrier to wage an offensive campaign through the Pacific. The attack on Pearl Harbor was the subset to a entire Japanese offensive that was conducted simultaneously in the Pacific. The Japanese's oceanic blitzkrieg resulted in the capture of many valuable allied territories. Japan seized the United States territories of Guam, Wake Island, and the Philippines, along with other British and Dutch possessions in the Central Pacific and Southeast Asia. By the end of December, the Pacific had become dominated by a hostile enemy force. Few Allied military bases remained for the United States and its new wartime allies, aside from a few in the South Pacific and Australia.[31]

President Roosevelt made two crucial decisions for American naval leadership in December 1941. The first was appointing Admiral Ernest J. King as the Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet (COMINCH). The position was initially abbreviated as CINCUS, which King hated because it sounded to much like "sinkus" and had it substituted to COMINCH. Second, Admiral Chester Nimitz was to be appointed Commander in Chief in the Pacific (CinCPac), relieving the former Admiral Kimmel of his duties. Among the Allied nations the United States was given primacy in the Pacific; which put King and Nimitz in control of devising the strategy in the Pacific. Shortly after taking command, King reminded Nimitz that his primary task was to protect the Hawaiian Islands including Midway. In the beginning months of the war

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[30] Williamson Murray and Allan Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 203; James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces During World War II,* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 28.

[31] John T. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis: The Pacific War, 1937-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 34-57.

till after the Battle of Midway the United States was on the defensive. It was especially important to keep the shipping lanes between the United States and Australia open.[32]

Other than the U-boat war in the Atlantic, King's full focus, with Nimitz's, was on the Pacific. From late 1941 into early 1942 Nimitz and other senior commanding naval officers organized the carriers into separate task forces, each with their own screen of cruisers and destroyers. Each task force was built around the aircraft carrier as the center and heart of the force. At the beginning of the war US TF's were built around one carrier. Later in the war the United States would transition to larger TF built around multiple carriers. Robert Gardner was part of TF 11, which was comprised of the *Lexington* at the center. Battle cruisers, heavy and light, were in the front and behind the carrier, with destroyers positioned around the ring as well. The task force's defensive ring was positioned several miles from the center carrier to provide it protection. Whenever the task force would change direction, it was important that all the ships stayed in the same defense circle around the carrier. As Gardner recalled, it was quite a dance to choreograph.[33]

A sailor's assignment to a ship to most is seen as an insignificant event. To officials in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, each sailor was nothing more than a name on a sheet. The United States Navy's main priority was filling the crews of the ships to prepare for war as quickly and efficiently as possible. To the sailor however, a ship assignment was a pivotal moment in his naval career. This marked the time when he had become fully integrated into the navy and was

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[32] Thomas B. Buell, *Master of the Sea: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Earnest J. King*, (Little Brown & Company, 1980), 138-139; E.B. Potter, *Nimitz*, (Naval Institute Press, 1976), 33.

[33] E.B. Potter, *Nimitz*, (Naval Institute Press, 1976), 33; Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

now a fully functioning part of the war effort against the Japanese. The eagerness and excitement of boarding the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* also signified the beginning of an adventure. Most sailors had never left their hometowns prior to joining the military, and once abroad the carriers they headed off to see the world.

James Hinkle finished radio school in Alameda, California shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Many sailors after basic training for the navy had the option to take specialized exams for further training; Hinkle qualified for radio school. From Alameda, Hinkle was transferred to Honolulu, Hawaii. Upon his arrival, he could still see the harbor smoking from the attack and could still smell the scent of oil and bodies in the air. Having qualifications to use a radio, Hinkle was assigned to the *Lexington's* air department, specifically Torpedo Squadron 2 (VT-2). Hinkle had no special preference on where he was assigned, but he was excited to find himself aboard a carrier. He stated "the *Lexington* was a beautiful ship, being right out of high school and so young, it was more like a game to me." In VT-2, Hinkle was a radio man in the Devastator. The Devastators' range was not spectacular; they could fly about 435miles round trip when fully loaded with a torpedo. The Japanese B5N "Kate" torpedo bombers were far superior and could fly at a faster speed and longer range. However, in 1941, Hinkle was unaware of the aviation challenges that awaited the United States in the coming confrontations with the Japanese. Hinkle remembered his first concern was learning how to fight. Hinkle's first time taking off from a carrier was for target practice. His gun was loaded with ammunition covered in

slow drying paint to mark the practice hits. The first day of shooting Hinkle never actually achieved a hit.[34]

Where Hinkle's placement to the *Lexington* was by random assignment, Robert Carl Olson found his way by "a funny story of fate." After shipping out to Hawaii, he was not immediately assigned to a ship. Upon his arrival to Pearl Harbor in March 1941, the navy's carriers were out in the Pacific looking for the Japanese fleet and conducting raids in the Central Pacific. As a result, most sailors who arrived at Pearl Harbor in the early spring were put to work doing miscellaneous tasks until the carrier task forces arrived back in port. Olson found himself working at an ammunition dump while waiting for the carriers to return. He was eagerly awaiting his ship assignment, as he grew restless with his work at the ammunition dump. When the fleet came back to port, *Lexington* needed twelve seamen for her crew.[35] The *Lexington* and *Yorktown* crews had been rapidly filled through the months of January and February. When they left for their first combat missions in the Pacific, their crews were at full capacity. A yeoman came to the oil section of the ammunition dump where Olson was stationed, and there were exactly twelve men present. They were all immediately sent to grab their seabags and report to the *Lexington* for boarding. Olson was in pure awe of the massive carrier. The carrier was almost one thousand feet long and was the biggest ship in the fleet.[36]

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[34] Thomas Wildenberg, *Destined for Glory: Dive Bombing, Midway, and the Evolution of Carrier* Airpower, (Naval Institute Press, 1998), 157; James Hinkle, interviewed by Theodore Harbison Gardner, 1 June, 2012, James Hinkle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[35] There was no specific reason for why the *Lexington* had twelve open positions. The most common reason for openings on any US naval vessel was due to death or casualties in battle or sailors being transferred to other ships.

[36] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

The formation of the crew of the *Yorktown* followed a similar story. One sailor's story that stands out among all the rest is that of John Crawford Jr. Crawford's father was a superintendent of a textile mill in New Hampshire. Unlike the previously described sailors growing up in poor families in the Depression, Crawford's family had money. Crawford was given a better quality of education, that later helped him rise through the ranks in the navy. Crawford attended a prestigious local preparatory high school, and upon graduating he went straight to the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Graduating in the Annapolis class of 1942, Crawfords class was expedited due to the United States being actively at war. Crawford was originally set to report to the battleship USS *Oklahoma*, but the ship was sunk during the attack. Instead of waiting around Hawaii for another ship assignment, Crawford took a three-month course at MIT in Massachusetts to study radar, as he knew that the navy badly needed radar officers.[37]

Crawford eventually arrived at Pearl in early May 1942 with orders to the *Yorktown*. The ship was not in port upon his arrival but was on her return voyage from the Battle of the Coral Sea. Crawford was made what was referred to in the navy as a "gofer" whose job was to aid the flag lieutenant (a personal aid to an admiral). His tasks mainly consisted of sorting the mail each day and waiting for the return of the *Yorktown*. Once the ship arrived, Crawford was more than excited to finally be able to join the crew. Crawford brought his order to his flag lieutenant asking to be detached, but to Crawford's dismay, the flag lieutenant brushed him off. The lieutenant assured Crawford that the *Yorktown* had sustained considerable damage from the Coral Sea battle and would be in port for at least a few months (it was not known yet, but Nimitz had

[37] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

given forty-eight hours for the *Yorktown* to be repaired for the upcoming battle of Midway). The following day Crawford remembered meeting with several of his friends who were stationed aboard the *Yorktown*. Crawford was warned that if he was not aboard the ship by midnight, he would be left behind. At this time there was a great deal of conversation amongst the crew that the navy was planning something big against the Japanese. At this point Crawford became desperate to make it abroad his ship. Although Crawford did not know what the mission of the *Yorktown* would be, like many other sailors he was driven by one motive, which was to join the fight against Japan. For a sailor to join the fight, he had to be aboard a ship. [38]

Crawford explained that he used special measures to go above the flag lieutenant and take his papers to the Chief of Staff of the 14th Naval District, Captain Earl. Once he reached Captain Earl's quarters, he was informed that the captain was out to the movies; however, this did not deter Crawford from his mission. Crawford went straight to the movies and asked that the captain be pulled out to speak with him. Crawford explained that the captain was furious, and it took several minutes of convincing and following Earl around his office before he finally signed his orders, and Crawford was free to report to *Yorktown*. Years later, Crawford still remembered the warning Earl gave him before he left his office "you're heading for trouble." At the time, Crawford took the meaning of his words as nothing but a verbal warning from an older superior. Crawford had little idea that the next time he saw the captain, he would have participated in one of the most famous naval battles in American history. Finally, Crawford was able to set foot

[38] Ibid.

aboard the *Yorktown* at 10pm that night; the ship would leave in the early morning hours the next day.[39]

Strategically, in 1942, US carriers were used on the defensive. Preserving the imaginary "Malay Barrier" (which extended through Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, and Northern Australia) was the primary Allied defensive plan to reinforce the Central and South Pacific. The Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway were both defensive ambushes by the Pacific Fleet against the Combined Fleet. In the Coral Sea, the United States Navy ambushed the Japanese carrier force's amphibious operation at Port Moresby. At the Battle of Midway the ambush was aimed at the Japanese main carrier force. Before these two engagements American defensive strategy used carriers in conducting naval and air raids against Japanese targets in the Central Pacific. The carrier was still an unproven American weapon system at the beginning of the war, and these early carrier raids represented the first time the American carriers were used in combat.[40]

The crews of the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* were well-prepared and ready for their first engagement in the Coral Sea. Admiral Yamamoto, commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet, planned to invade Port Moresby by sea and destroy any American naval response to the Japanese threat. Yamamoto was anxious for a decisive battle between the two opposing fleets. A Japanese victory at Port Moresby would endanger United States-Australian supply lines and provide the Japanese a base to invade Australia. The carriers were the key means available to stop the

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Thomas C. Hone, *Replacing Battleships with Aircraft Carriers in the Pacific in World War II*, (Naval War College Review, 2013) 3; Brian Lane Herder, *Early Pacific Raids 1942: The American Carriers Strike* Back, (Osprey, 2023) 6-23.

Japanese offensive in the South Pacific, and Nimitz sent out TF 11 under the command of Rear Admiral Aubrey Fitch and TF 17 under Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher. According to Joe Q. Miles who was aboard the *Yorktown*, the crew was excited for the battle. This was where carrier life changed, Miles recalled, from now on the carriers went from raids and patrols to actually fighting the Japanese fleet in battle.[41]

The Battle of the Coral Sea

The battle of the Coral Sea began on May 4th, 1942, and ended with the main carrier battle on May 8th. The battle was a race between Admiral Fletcher and Japanese Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi, commander of the Japanese main carrier force, to strike the first blow. The two navies spent the first days of the battle searching for each other. The initial clashes and sightings of the enemy fleet around Tulagi and Misima during the period from the 4th to the 7th eventually led to the main battle on the 8th of May. This examination of the battle is specifically focused on the period of May 7th and 8th. The battle of the Coral Sea consisted of the United States TF 17 and TF 11 under the command of Admiral Fletcher.[42]

The air battle is a essential part to carrier warfare. The American aircraft carrier, like its Japanese counterparts, relied on numerous types of aircraft. In the case of American vessels there were three distinct types of combat aircraft. The SBD Douglas Dauntless, manned by a pilot and rearward-facing gunner/radioman, made up half of the carrier air groups, divided into squadrons. First were the "bomber squadrons," their missions consisted of diving on the Japanese target and

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[41] Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945)*, (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 116-117; John B. Lundstorm, *The First South Pacific Campaign: Pacific Fleet Strategy December 1941-June* 1942, (Naval Institute Press, 1976). 83; Joe Q. Miles, interviewed by Richard F. Marlowe, 14 May, 2004, Joe Q. Miles Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[42] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of the Coral Sea*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 1; Clark Reynolds, *The Fast Carriers: The Forging of the Air Navy,* (Reprint: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 24.

releasing bombs at low altitude. Bombers' designation was V followed by B (VB) then the hull number of the carrier. For example, the *Yorktown's* (CV-5) dive bombers were designated VB-5. Second was the "scouting squadrons" who operated as the eyes of the fleet and would be sent out first to locate the enemy. The scouting squadrons designation was V followed by S (VS). Lastly, in addition to bombing and scouting was the torpedo squadrons. The plane was a TBD-1 Douglas Devastator and consisted of a crew of three; a pilot, gunner/radioman, and a middle seat with a bombardier/navigator. The designation of the Devastators was V followed by T (VT).[43]

As the first naval battle fought completely by aircraft carriers, where the two sides never saw each other, the events of May 7th can be characterized by confusion and scouting failures leading to misidentified targets. Both forces made mistakes on May 7th, however each side sunk enemy ships. The air groups from the Japanese Carrier Division five under the command of Rear Admiral Tadaichi Hara, were the first to make contact with American ships. Due to the pressure to find the American task forces, the Japanese striking group were too quick to notify Hara they had located an American carrier. Once the mistake was realized, Hara had to make a quick decision on whether to strike or call the air groups back. Time was ticking for both the fuel levels of the pilots' aircraft and the risk of losing the two targets. Even though an oiler and destroyer are deemed secondary targets, Hara made the call for the two ships to be sunk. The Japanese sunk the oiler USS *Neosho* and the destroyer the USS *Sims*.[44]

The American Fleet would also have success the first day of battle by sinking the Japanese light carrier the *Shoho*. Early in the morning on of May 7th, Admiral Fletcher launched

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[43] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway,* (Oxford, 2011), 52-57.

[44] Michal A. Piegzik, *Gamble in the Coral Sea: Japan's Offensive, the Carrier Battle, and the Road to* Midway, (Naval Institute Press, 2025), 126-128.

scouting missions to find the Japanese fleet. They mistakenly reported spotting "two carriers and four heavy cruisers," which should have been reported as "two heavy cruisers and two destroyers." However, W.L. Hamilton, in a scouting plane from the *Lexington* reported sighting the Japanese light carrier the *Shoho* and a few cruisers and destroyers leading to a attack by the combined air groups of the *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. The *Shoho* was part of the Japanese covering force under the command of Rear Admiral Aritomo Goto. Like the Japanese the American pilot's anticipation grew as they came closer to the enemy formation, and identifying the ships was very difficult, but the American pilots were successful in noticing the small island structure on the starboard side of the *Shoho*.[45]

This was the first time the pilots of the American carriers had worked together in a coordinated air attack on an enemy carrier. Naval historian Robert Stern drew attention to the controversy surrounding the attack on the *Shoho,* specifically the overwhelming amount of force used in the attack. The first group to attack and inflict two bomb hits was the *Lexington's* air group, consisting of VB-2 and VT-2, under the command of Lieutenant Commander W.L. Hamilton. The *Lexington's* attack was stated to have left the *Shoho* with uncontrollable flooding and rapidly losing power. However, VS-5 from the *Yorktown* led by Lieutenant Commander William Burch came upon *Shoho* and saw that the carrier was turning into the wind to launch its aircraft. It is important to note that pilots in the Pacific tended to see the same event differently,

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[45] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 40; Robert C. Stern, *Scratch One Flattop: The First Carrier Air Campaign and the Battle of the Coral* Sea, (Indiana University Press, 2019), 167-169.

especially in the midst of battle. It is generally accepted that the attacks of the *Lexington* left the carrier severely damaged and the *Yorktown* groups landed the fatal blow to finish off the *Shoho*.[46]

On the morning of May 8th, 1942, the battle of the Coral Sea reached its climax. Both Fletcher and Takagi sent scouts to locate their opponents. The opening scene of the battle was a race between the two forces to see who could locate and attack the other first. Fletchers' primary objective was to locate the Japanese striking force, consisting of the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*. At approximately 8:30am, two important pieces of information reached Fletcher. At 8:38am the first general location of the Japanese striking force was identified and the *Lexington* intercepted a Japanese search plane report revealing the location of the American carrier. Time was now of the essence and immediately after receiving the general location of the Japanese carriers, Fletcher ordered both the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* to launch their airstrikes. At 9:30am, a refined location of the Japanese striking force was reported; the enemy force was forty-five miles north of the American carriers.[47] The *Yorktown* air groups would be the first to encounter the Japanese carriers a little before 11am. At 10:57am when all the *Yorktown* planes were in position, Lieutenant Commander Joe Taylor of VT-5 led an attack on the *Shokaku.*

Before the attack of VT-5 the Japanese carriers launched their combat air patrol. While VT-5 made its attack, Willard Glidewell, a radio man second class aboard Commander Burch's aircraft in VS-5, was fighting off the *Shokaku's* air patrol. Glidewell recalled that the Japanese were ready for them when they arrived. The first Japanese fighter fish tailed in and began to attack Burch and Glidewell. Glidewell remembered that he was shooting a single barrel 30

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[46] Ibid, 176-177.

[47] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988) 46-49.

caliber machine gun, and he was trained to shoot in "sharp bursts" of around 8-10 shots. A .30-caliber fired about 1200 rounds per minute, and Glidewell had six cans of 100,000 rounds located behind his seat. Glidewell said when the Japanese pilot "put his nose on us, I let him have it." Glidewell shot several bursts, and the enemy plane passed over his plane's tail, at which point it exploded, giving Glidewell credit for a kill.[48]

Another Japanese plane came in to attack Glidewell and Burch. While recollecting the final plane's attack, Glidewell drew attention to his skill as a pilot stating "I don't brag about it, but I was an expert gunner." The Japanese plane caught Glidewell with a brand new can of ammo. It only took him five to six seconds to change cans. Glidewell said with his gun ready for action, the enemy plane came in like the first, with his nose on Glidewell and shooting at him. Glidewell was able to successfully shoot down a second Japanese plane. The Japanese pilot leaned off and circled down toward the water. Glidewell recalled that after the final attack, Burch headed off to the edge of the squadron's screen. While checking the plane for damage, Glidewell found that the plane's left rudder control wire had been shot away and there was a basketball size hole in the vertical stabilizer that controls the direction of the plane. From this point, Burch decided it was time to head back to the *Lexingiotn*. Luckily for Glidwell, Burch was an excellent pilot and was able to fly the plane back to the carrier despite the severe damage.[49]

During the morning action VS-5 shot down four Japanese fighters and VB-5 shot down seven. The torpedo attack by VT-5 on the *Shokaku* either missed or failed to explode; however,

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[48] Ibid, 46-49; Willard E. Glidewell, interviewed by Bill Miller, 13 February, 2006, Willard E. Glidewell Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[49] Willard E. Glidewell, interviewed by Bill Miller, 13 February, 2006, Willard E. Glidewell Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

two bomb hits damaged the flight deck, leaving the ship unable to launch aircraft, though it could still recover them. The *Shokaku* was eventually sent back to Japan for repairs. The air groups of the *Lexington* arrived shortly after the *Yorktown's* and had much less success, landing only one hit on the *Shokaku.* Still the morning events were just the beginning of the battle. The Americans succeeded in locating and attacking the Japanese carriers first, but the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* air groups had not sunk or destroyed either Japanese carrier. The peak of the battle would come shortly after noon when the Japanese attacked both the *Lexington* and *Yorktown.* While many of the pilots' accounts of battle were optimistic, the sailors would have a much bleaker view of the battle. The role of the pilots at the carrier battles was mainly offensive and they carried out the direct attacks on the Japanese. The US carrier crews were the essential support and structure that kept the planes flying and maintaining the function of the carrier. Sailors saw themselves as the defender whose job was to protect and in some cases, save their carriers in battle, a task that would prove to be a struggle in the coming moments of battle.[50]

The incoming attack was of no surprise to the United States' task forces. Radar was critical in providing early warning of incoming enemy aircraft. The Navy's CXAM radar system, which first came into use in the Navy in 1940, allowed incoming Japanese attacks to be detected when they reached within seventy miles of the task force. When the *Lexington* first detected enemy aircraft both US carriers launched relief combat air patrols, but with little effect to deter the oncoming aircrafts. The first attack was made on the *Lexington* at 11:18am by the Japanese torpedo bombers. Robert Olson, who ironically had joined the navy believing the army to be

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[50] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of the Coral Sea*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 22; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 50.

more dangerous, described the opening images of the battle. Olson was a deck hand, and his average days' work, which consisted of completing miscellaneous jobs on deck, was rather uneventful, but was dramatically changed when he was called to his battle station. Olson was a loader on one of the *Lexington's* twenty-millimeter cannon. As a loader, Olson hooked up large ammo drums on the barrel of the gun, which held about 50 rounds. Olson worked alongside three other men to operate the gun (the gunner, operator, and gun captain). He played a small part in the carrier's anti-aircraft guns that stood as the last resort defense.[51]

When describing the scene of the attack, Olson recalled that TF 11 was in battle formation. The *Lexington* was flanked on all sides by cruisers and destroyers. An important aspect of battle according to Olson was that the Japanese torpedo planes were only after the aircraft carriers. This was a true reality for many sailors like Olson. The aircraft carrier was what made warfare possible in the Pacific, which made all other ships secondary targets. Olson recalled that when Japanese torpedo planes came in for their attack, "they would come over the top of the cruisers and hitch over the top and drop their torpedo." This was important because Olson explained that, during the battle, after the torpedo was dropped, the *Lexington* and cruisers would get caught in each other's crossfire. This was because the *Lexington* and the other ships in the task force were shooting at the same plane. Olson said it was all very confusing when the Japanese torpedo planes were moving fast and shooting their own weapons. One of the cruisers shot through one of the *Lexington's* stacks. As a loader, Olson was in the "gun tub" where the

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[51] Lars Celander, *How Carriers Fought: Carrier Operations in World War* II, (Casemate, 2018), 66; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 53; Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

ammo was stored. The gun tub had thick walls so bullets could not penetrate through. However, Olson remembered the bullets were still flying all around him, and it was a terrifying sight. Olson had no ear plugs which meant that on top of all the confusion from the overlapping crossfire of the task force, it was also very loud.[52]

Olson described the scene of battle as being "super busy," with the gunner constantly shooting and the Japanese pilots were visible in their cockpits as they flew by. On top of all the chaos of the attack, before the battle Olson had to put on what he referred to as "flash proof clothes." Olson described them as a cover up, with a hood, impregnated with a material that would resist the flash from bomb a impact, and the wave of heat that came from the flash. Any exposed flesh would get burned. The only exposed parts of Olson's body were his eyes, nose, and mouth. As one could imagine this clothing was constricting in battle, however, the flash proof clothing proved highly important as the attack continued to unfold. At 11:20am the *Lexington* was hit by a torpedo on her port (left) side, quickly followed by a second on the same side. Meanwhile, a dive bombing attack that developed during the torpedo action also resulted in two bomb hits, one on the port side of the *Lexington's* main deck and another on the smokestack structure. The blast from the bomb sucked the air out of sailors' lungs, and fires began to burn all over, Olson recalled. The *Lexington* recorded a heavy list (tilt) to port by the time the enemy attack ended by 11:33am. The battle to save *Lexington*, however, had just begun.[53]

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[52] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[53] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942-August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 55; NARA RG38, WWII War Dairies, Box 1073, *U.S.S. Lexington War Diary for period 1 April 1942 to 8 May 1942*.

Simultaneously, the *Yorktown* came under attack by Japanese aircraft. The action over the *Yorktown* began at 11:18am, with an attack of Japanese torpedo planes and dive bombers following shortly thereafter. The *Yorktown* successfully maneuvered to evade the Japanese torpedoes, but her luck ran out and at 11:24am when the dive bombing attack commenced and resulted in the first hit on the flight deck, forward of the number two elevator. L.V. Walls recalled that the bomb struck thirty yards away from where he was stationed. The bomb went down through the number three ready room, the hanger deck, the second deck, and finally the third deck. Walls stated "the tremendous heat from the explosion force bellied the bulkheads outward; rivets flew out of their sealing like bullets being fired from a gun. The armor deck was ripped into a wavy pattern with dips and rose like a roller coaster. Many of our crew were wounded or killed." The armored deck Walls refers to was the armored hanger deck, considered the main deck of the carrier and is located right under the flight deck.[54]

Directly above the spot where the bomb exploded, James Edward Patterson stood on the second deck of the Yorktown. Patterson remembered seeing the bomb and quickly closing the hatch that led down to the third deck, shortly before the bomb exploded. After the explosion Patterson quickly reopened the hatch and was one of the first men to make it into the compartment. Patterson described the room as full of smoke, but he and a couple other crew members were able to save around seven men, who were all severely burnt. He recalled the bomb killed around 43 men. Patterson explained that he was only able to survive the explosion because a five-hundred-pound bulkhead (a vertical wall that divided the ships' decks) that was

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[54] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *Action Report: USS Yorktown and Yorktown Air Group on 8 May 1942*; L.V. Walls, interviewed by Candice Crone, 15 August, 2009, L.V. Walls Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

about a half inch thick steel separated him from the explosion. The bomb started a fire on deck three, but the crew was able to get the fire under control. The *Yorktown* only sustained one direct hit; however, the ship sustained more damage from several close near misses and shrapnel.[55]

Sam Laser, who began the war, not even knowing where Pearl Harbor was, was now well acquainted with war. The bomb hit had caused structural damage to the *Yorktown* with approximately 55 men killed according to Laser. He recalled his experience in the mess hall after the battle. Dinner that night aboard the *Yorktown* was crackers and cold salmon. While dinner was being served, 50 or so bodies were stretched out across the tables of the mess hall. "The dead coming out of their eyes and mouths, noses, their ears, some of them were burned beyond recognition" Laser said. Many of the bodies were from the compartment on deck three, where the initial explosion took place. For years after the battle, Laser wouldn't be able to eat salmon without bringing back visions of stretched out burnt bodies.[56]

Following the Battle of the Coral Sea, the *Yorktown* began to make its way back to Pearl Harbor for repairs. The *Lexington* on the other hand, would not be so lucky. The final hours of the *Lexington* were experienced by many. The crew's stories begin to overlap as they recount the same event, highlighting how quickly unfolding and unexpected events can be remembered differently. Each sailor's experience also gives the complete picture of the eventual sinking of the *Lexington*. Carriers are massive ships, making it unavoidable to hear the same story from several different perspectives in order to understand the *Lexington's* final hours from the perspective of

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[55] James Edward Patterson, interviewed by Anastasia Vellas, 22 November, 2004, James Edward Patterson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[56] Sam Laser, interviewed by Kenneth W. Thompson and Kathy Matras, 14 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

her crew. Analyzing the same story from the perspectives of several different sailors, is necessary for a "bottom up" historical analysis. The time from the end of the Japanese attack to the eventual call for abandon ship is a timeline littered by several different key events. Each sailor's experience is unique and adds a small piece to a complicated picture. Sailors who fought the *Lexington's* fires were more informed about when the carrier was no longer able to be saved, whereas sailors on the flight deck was unaware of the ship's condition below deck. Another example is that sailors on the flight deck had a easier route to abandon ship, while those below the flight deck had to crawl their way out.

The *Lexington* began to fill with water from the damage caused by the two torpedo hits. As the ship took on more water, she began to list to the port side. If the ship continued to take on more water, the list could become serious enough to risk capsizing. Olson knew right away when the *Lexington* was hit by a torpedo "The whole ship shuttered and gave off a large explosion; you could feel the whole ship beginning to lean," he said. Olsen then described the process in which the crew tried to save the ship. He recalled that the crew had a list of every compartment that had filled with water. Olson explained how the crew began pumping out water on the port side and opened the sea tanks on the starboard side, filling them with water so they could balance the ship (known as "taking on ballast"). Olson did not fear that the ship would go down. "Our ship had a watertight integrity," Olson explained. Each compartment of the ship was built into smaller compartments with watertight hatch doors. Through the whole experience Olson never felt scared: "I suppose if you were by yourself, you would be afraid, but there is safety in numbers,

and nobody had the time to be scared. You really haven't got the time to do anything but your job."[57]

For about an hour after the attack it appeared the *Lexington* would overcome the damages. The combined bomb and torpedo attack lasted around seven to eight minutes. There was an internal explosion on deck level three, just forward of the elevator, at around 12:47pm, with an intensity greater than the previous torpedo explosions. Elias Spiak aboard the *Lexington* was stationed at the throttle position, controlling the movements of the ship. Spiak's position was in the engine room in the stern below the water line. His job consisted of stopping, reversing, or adding speed to the *Lexington*. Spiak remembered that when the first bomb hit it felt like a sharp jolt. After two torpedoes and two bomb hits, the *Lexington* could still maintain a speed of 24 knots. This was good since, according to Spiak, carriers typically averaged around thirty knots. According to the war diary of the *Lexington,* by 12:23pm, all the fires were reported out, but events took a turn for the worst after a heavy explosion occurred in the bomb elevator less than a half-hour after all fires were extinguished. The situation began to quickly deteriorate as fires spread through the ship. The crew, no longer able to control the fire, was the first indicator that the *Lexington* was in an extremely dangerous situation.[58]

It is easy to imagine that panic or chaos must have taken hold of the crew, but Robert Gardner recalled that for the almost two hours that as the *Lexington* operated after the attack "everything seemed normal." He recalled that the kitchen crew was preparing snacks and passing

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[57] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[58] NARA RG38, Entry UD-09D 19: Box 493, *Preliminary Report: Loss of the U.S.S. Lexington May 8, 1942 Coral Sea*; Elias Steve Spiak, interviewed by William P. Brough, May 2003, Elias Steve Spiak Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; NARA RG38, WWII War Dairies, Box 1073, *U.S.S. Lexington War Diary for period 1 April 1942 to 8 May 1942*.

out sandwiches. Gardner was part of the repair party at his duty station located two decks below the hanger deck. He remembered standing around because there was nothing going on. Things changed when all of a sudden there was a big loud explosion. The large explosion took place one deck above Gardner, and was caused by a fuel leak obtained by damage from the torpedo or bomb explosions.[59]

Olson recalled the same large explosion as Gardener. While all of the large fires had been extinguished, smaller fires continued to burn throughout the ship. The bombs had broken the *Lexington's* high octane gasoline lines used to fuel the aircraft. The octane gasoline lines made it possible for the fire to burn in one area and then spread to another. The fire made its way down to the *Lexington's* torpedo warhead room. James Hinkle further explained that the fire easily spread from one compartment to another due to the multiple coats of paint on the ship. As the paint burned, it fueled the fire, and Hinkle recalled between the paint and gasoline leaks the fire easily made its way to the torpedo warhead room. Olson explained that torpedoes are not kept aboard the carrier all assembled; the head of the torpedo is put on in the torpedoes' warhead room. The final explosion reported being in the same rooms elevator.[60]

As the *Lexingtons* situation grew worse, the crew of the carrier began to make their way topside. Gardener was making his way up and when he made it to the hanger deck, he could see fire starting to burn toward the forward elevator. Gardner recalled seeing wounded men close to the fire and dragging them away. The men's burnt flesh stuck to Gardners hands and peeled off

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[59] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[60] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

the injured men. Gardener remembered having a sick feeling in his stomach and feeling very sorry for his fellow injured crew mates, and he said, “Seeing the mangled bodies was my first real impression of the war.”

Lieutenant J.F. Roach was a junior medial officer aboard the *Lexington*. Roach was working at his dressing station when he was called to the hanger deck where there were many wounded. Roach and a corpsman left for the hanger deck, but they met many obstacles. Roach recalled that some of the compartments had been struck and either wholly or partially flooded with oil and water, which meant that they were forced to take a more complex route. Roach explained how one of the compartments, shrouded in semi-darkness, was also filled with smoke. Once on the hanger deck, Roach saw an explosion and a fire down in the main control, and men were being brought to the hanger deck. Roach remembered that many of the men were already dead, others were in a severe state, and some were only minorly injured. “Working in the hangar deck was extremely difficult, due to lack of light and very heavy, rather acid smoke. It was impossible to breathe there without a gas mask,” said Roach. He recalled that the wounded were quickly evacuated from the forward end of the hanger deck and taken to the stern of the ship. As he was leaving the hangar deck for the last time the entire forward end of the deck was in flames. The smoke was so heavy that he could not see more than a foot in front of himself, even with a flashlight.[61]

Roach made it to the flight deck around 2pm. The *Lexington* began to go rapidly downhill. Between 2pm and 3pm, both navigational compasses stopped working; the ships' radar

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[61] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11: Box 24, *Lt. J.F. Roach Medical Corps, United States Navy U.S.S. Lexington*, April 29, 1943.

went out of commission, and several internal explosions led to the lights of the ship to flicker. During this time the *Lexington* had turned into the wind to continue to recover her aircraft. James Doyle, who was part of VS-2 as a first class photography mate, recalled that on his flight back to the *Lexington,* he could see that the carrier was on fire, but since he did not want to go into the water, he had no choice but to land his plane on the *Lexington's* burning deck. Many of *Lexington's* planes diverted and landed aboard the *Yorktown* as the *Lexington's* situation became too severe to recover additional aircraft.[62]

For two more hours the crew of the *Lexington* continued to fight the fires. Admiral Fletcher ordered three destroyers to assist in putting out the fires of the *Lexington.* Fletcher also began to divide TF 17 into two groups; one ready for combat and the other to continue assisting the *Lexington* in case the Admiral Aubrey Fitch decided to abandon ship. Officers in charge of the *Lexington's* engineers, fire crews, and repairs crews were in constant communication, reporting the condition of the ship to Captain Sherman on the bridge. The bridge served as the carrier's nerve center and was where its captain and senior officers were located. The men aboard the ship were in a continues battle fighting not only fires, but also to save their fellow crew mates. After a second large explosion in the forward fire room, Commander "Heine" Junkers, the ship's damage control officer, reported to Captain Sherman that *Lexington's* boilers were inoperable, men were dying, and the fires were out of control. Many men reluctantly began to accept the fact that the ship could not be saved. In war a ship is seen by the enemy as a target to be destroyed. To a sailor aboard a sinking ship, the loss is more than just a vessel, it is a living

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[62] NARA RG38, WWII War Dairies, Box 1073, *U.S.S. Lexington War Diary for period 1 April 1942 to 8 May 1942*; James Doyle, interviewed by Catherine Elliott, 29 October, 2008, James Doyle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

entity to which they have become emotionally bound. Sailors aboard *Lexington* were not only left without a floating ship in the middle of the ocean, but also without the place many had began to consider home. At 5:07pm, Admiral Fitch ordered "All hands abandon ship."[63]

There was no right way to abandon a ship. In training, sailors were taught how to lower themselves into the water by using lines that were thrown over the sides of the vessel. While many men lowered themselves into the water using such lines, others would jump the fifty or so feet straight into the ocean. Hinkle and a couple of other crew members took a life raft out of one of the *Lexington's* planes and planned to use it to make their way over to the destroyers that would pick the men of the *Lexington* out of the water. Hinkle recalled the waves were so high the raft kept drifting back toward the ship, and finally the men said, "the hell with this." While floating in the water waiting to be rescued, Hinkle said he did not remember being scared, and stated, "I believe I was so young at the time I didn't really know what was going on and that made the event a whole different experience for me."[64]

Uniquely for the *Lexington,* amongst the sadness and chaos of abandoning the ship, the crew was given the chance for free ice cream. One man recalled watching sailors take all the ice cream out of the store and putting it on the deck. Men came by and grabbed some ice cream so it would not go to waste. Spiak recalled that even before orders were given to abandon ship, he knew it was inevitable, because, according to him, there was no way the mess deck crew were giving out free ice cream if they did not know that the ship was sinking. Spiak was thankful for

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[63] John B. Lundstrom, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal,* (Naval Institute Press, 2006), 196-198; Phil Keith, *Stay the Rising Sun: The True Story of the USS Lexington, Her Valiant Crew, and Changing the Course of World War II*, (Quarto Publishing, 2015), 183; NARA RG38, WW2 Command Files, Entry UD-09D 19: Box 493, *USS Lexington Quartermasters Log Book*.

[64] James Hinkle, interviewed by Theodore Harbison Gardner, 1 June, 2012, James Hinkle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

his ice cream. Once in the water he remembered he swam for fifteen straight minutes to get away from the *Lexington,* so he would not be sucked under the water when she went down, and yet he was still within kicking distance of the ship. Spiak was in the water for more than three hours before he was picked up by the destroyer, USS *Hammond*.[65]

Doyle, who had landed his plane on the *Lexington's* burning deck, did not manage to escape going in the water that day. Doyle remembered many men had horrible burns on their hands from climbing down the ropes, but he recalled that he did not use a rope, choosing to jump feet first into the water. Jumping almost 50 feet, Doyle thought he would never resurface again. Once in the water, he noted that he made his way over to a raft and held onto the side. Rafts were reserved for the severely injured, and all able-bodied men were to float in the water. Doyle could vividly recall one of the wounded men in the raft. His body was covered in blisters from burns. When the sea water hit the man's skin, he screamed in pain. Doyle said he was later picked up by the cruiser, USS *Minneapolis*, and he never learned whether the man lived or died.[66]

Olson's experience of abandoning ship were more realistic to what most men would experience. Olson said that when the time came to abandon the ship, he and other crew members tied a line around their gun mount and tied a knot every two feet and threw the line over the side of the ship. The line was about 15 feet above the water, and Olson remembered he felt slightly nervous about letting go. Sharks were a concern for sailors when floating in the water. Olson recalled that under normal circumstances the *Lexington* would grind its garbage and throw it over

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[65] Fred Pearse Keegan, interviewed by David Edwards, 12 November, 2008, Fred Pearse Keegan Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Elias Steve Spiak, interviewed by William P. Brough, May 2003, Elias Steve Spiak Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[66] James Doyle, interviewed by Catherine Elliott, 29 October, 2008, James Doyle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

the side, and Olson would watch the sharks eat it. Olson assured himself that the noise from the battle and the amount of oil in the water was enough to deter the sharks away. Once in the water, sailors often had to float for hours. Olson remembered he was covered in crude oil: "It was like black tar all over my face and hair and everything." Olson swam for at least two hours, never stopping, trying to swim away from the carrier. He swallowed a lot of oil and salt water from the waves. Once Olson was retrieved from the water, he remembered he was given clean clothes, coffee, and a sandwich, but since he had not eaten all day, it did not take long for him to heave up the mixture of food, salt water, and oil in his stomach.[67]

Gardner had made his way into water by using one of the lines that was over the side of the ship. He recalled that it was a very calm day and he and the men were drifting in the water against the *Lexington*. There were several rafts nearby, and Gardner spotted uninjured men in them. He took it upon himself to drag the uninjured off the rafts to make room for those who truly needed it. Gardner recalled how he climbed back up the netting onto the *Lexington* to see if there was more room on the other side of the ship. While on deck, Gardner stopped to grab himself a scoop of ice cream before lowering himself back down into the water on the opposite side of the ship. Even so, Gardner said he still had little luck finding a raft to hold onto or a close by destroyer. Ultimately, Gardner claimed that he ended up crossing back over the ship a second time to get back into the water on his original side. Gardner's decision to climb back aboard the *Lexington* and return to his original side is not the typical procedure for abandoning ship. However, in proceeding stories, when examining the carrier battles from the ship's crew's perspective, there are several odd recollections that go unnoticed. Gardner's experience reveals

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[67] Robert Carl Olson, interviewed by Craig Burns and Jessica Olson, 19 September, 2009, Robert Carl Olson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

that events like the abandoning of a ship were not always executed according to training. There were many individual choices that shaped events. Gardner recalled that once he was back to his original side it was not long before he was picked up by the USS *Hammond*. Gardner noted that he was so exhausted from floating in the water for more than two hours that he struggled to get aboard the destroyer. Once aboard, he walked to the nearest bunk room, where he dropped down and fell asleep.[68]

After the *Lexington* was abandoned, it was still on an even keel with a small list to port. A destroyer was then ordered to sink the ship with torpedoes. Two hits were made on the port side, with one to follow on the starboard side. The ship finally sank a little before 8pm that night. A preliminary check determined that 26 officers and 190 men were lost from the *Lexington's* total crew of 2,951. The *Lexington,* known as the "Queen of the Flattops," was once a fighting force of the United States Navy. She became the first American carrier to be lost during World War Two.[69] The loss of the first US carrier affected how many sailors viewed the outcome of the battle. Alvin Kious, who was aboard the *Lexington*, recalled that many men from the crew did not see the how the Coral Sea battle had saved Australia from Japan. Admiral Yamamoto called off the Japanese operation to capture Port Moresby after the engagement. Kious drew attention that it was not until after the war that he realized that his ship may have been lost, but the United States managed to defend Australia from the Japanese. If the Japanese were to occupy Port Moresby, it would have placed them within distance to conduct air raids over northern Australia.

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[68] Robert L. Gardner, interviewed by Jeffrey Meek, 28 January, 2008, Robert L. Gardner Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[69] The USS *Langley* (CV-1) had previously been sunk in the Java Sea on February 27, 1942. However by 1942 the *Langley* was no longer used as a full-purpose carrier by the United States Navy. For this reason the USS *Lexington* (CV-2) is generally acknowledged as the first carrier lost in the Pacific War; David F. Winkler, *America's First Aircraft Carrier: USS Langley and the Dawn of U.S. Naval Aviation,* (Naval Institute Press, 2024), 284-289.

Sailors believed themselves to be the defenders of their carrier in battle. For this reason, sailors like Alvin Kious did not see the positive side of how his service in the Battle of the Coral Sea had a larger effect on the wars trajectory. The crew of the *Lexington* lost their carrier and this was a huge blow to their morale.[70]

The morale aboard the *Yorktown* was also very low due to the loss of the *Lexington*. The *Yorktown,* however, had its own issues, being severely damaged. Norman Jeansonne recalled that *Yorktown's* crew thought that the United States had lost the battle. Her captain, Elliott Buckmaster, announced over the intercom the sinking of the *Lexington*, and Jeansonne remembered even after Buckmaster ended his announcement with the final damages to the Japanese carriers, particularly the sinking of the *Shoho* and the damages to the *Shokaku,* did not help lift the men's spirits. However, Jeansonne said that as the crew got closer to Pearl Harbor, morale began to pick back up again. The crew of the *Yorktown* had managed to save their carrier in the midst of battle. As the ship drew closer to Pearl Harbor and the prospect of brief relief from life at sea approached, many aboard the *Yorktown* began to regain their positive spirits.[71]

The *Yorktown* had spent 104 days of continuous action at sea from early February until its return to Pearl Harbor after the battle of the Coral Sea. L.V. Walls addressed that it was common for ships to refuel at sea, take mail, and have limited supplies. The fifteen-year-old Underwood, who was aboard the *Yorktown,* had a special role in what was referred to by the crew as the "Yorktown Jamboree." The ship was running on reserves to feed the sailors, and there were only

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[70] NARA RG38, Entry UD-09D 19: Box 493, *Preliminary Report: Loss of the U.S.S. Lexington May 8, 1942 Coral* Sea; NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of the Coral Sea*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943); Alvin W. Kious, interviewed by William P. Brough, 8 March, 2003, Alvin W. Kious Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[71] Norman Joseph Jeansonne, interviewed by John H. Bordelon, 10 March, 2011, Norman Joseph Jeansonne Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

six steaks left aboard. Underwood recalled that these steaks were so important that they were guarded by the ship's marine detachment. The ship had a large parade and raffled off the steaks. Underwood remembered he was the one to do the drawing. "It was a big deal with a hot band and everything on the hanger deck," Underwood described. He said he was sitting on a fancy table dressed up as a girl with "boobs and all" and as he served the last T-bone steaks aboard the ship. The *Yorktown's* crew had bonded from its shared experiences at sea together for over one hundred days. As the war in the Pacific waged on, the pressure on American sailors to protect their carrier at all costs, combined with the close connection each crew member had with each other, made future blows to the US fleet, all the more devastating.[72]

The Battle of Midway

Operation MI, was the Japanese plan to attack and occupy Midway. Operation MI originated from Admiral Yamamoto's objective to take out the American carriers that were not present at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. Lieutenant Jimmy Doolittle's successful raid on Tokyo was not a direct origin of the Midway battle, but it proved the US carriers made direct attacks to the Japanese mainland possible. Japan knew that it was unattainable to defeat the United States Navy by bringing them to surrender. Japan's goal was to demonstrate that it equally impossible to conquer the Japanese Fleet. A negotiated settlement was the only possible outcome where Japan could argue to keep their Southeast Asian conquests. Japan believed a

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[72] L.V. Walls, interviewed by Candice Crone, 15 August, 2009, L.V. Walls Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

decisive battle that decimated the US Fleet would bring the Untied States to the negotiation table.[73]

Sailors aboard the *Yorktown* were unaware of what the future held for them in late May 1942. Many of the crew were low in spirits after losing the *Lexington* and suffering critical bomb damage to their own ship. Amid the despair, the *Yorktown* sailors and those across the task force noticed signs that something big was going to happen, and soon. The early signs of the United States's plan to ambush the Japanese at Midway were first noticed by the pilots. Although they did not know exactly what was going to happen, they knew it was something important. Lewis Hopkins was a part of VB-6 aboard the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6). The *Enterprise* and the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) in TF 16 missed the battle of the Coral Sea.[74] The carriers' air groups would play a crucial part in the Battle of Midway.

Hopkins recalled that as the *Enterprise* was making its journey back to Pearl after the battle of the Coral Sea, the radios were taken out of all the aircraft, so the pilots could not make transmissions while in-flight. This way the Japanese could not intercept American communications and find the TF's location. Hopkins recalled it was comical because if the pilots needed to communicate with the ship during scouting missions, they would have to drop an item similar to a bean bag onto the ships' deck containing a message. "It wasn't easy by the way," said Hopkins. He explained that the Dauntless bombers flew a lot faster than the ship was moving. So you had to drop the bean bag before you got to the ship, in order to have it land on the deck. The deck crew had to be on high alert too, as they would be seriously injured if they got struck by a

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[73] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway,* (Oxford, 2011), 88-90, 131.

[74] The *Enterprise* and *Hornet* were still returning from Japan after the Doolittle Raid on April 18, 1942. The Doolittle Raid will be discussed further in chapter three "Survival and Loss at Guadalcanal: The Crews of the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) and the USS *Hornet* (CV-8)" on pages 81-83.

flying bean bag. Having no radio was an inconvenience for pilots, but the change in routine was a big give away that something was going on, although they did not know what. As Hopkins stated, "we didn't know anything about what was going on but obviously you could sense something." He and fellow pilots aboard the *Enterprise* came to the conclusion that the United States wanted Japan to believe the US task forces were still in the South Pacific.[75]

Midway, although tiny, was crucially important to the United States because it was located only about 1,100 miles Northwest of the Hawaiian Islands. Midway's isolation made it important to the American defense line. PBY Catalina seaplanes could conduct thousand mile searches from the atoll. Submarines were also able to conduct patrols all the way to Japan's shores from Midway's lagoons. Most importantly the airfield on the eastern island allowed for bombers and fighters to protect the northern approach to Hawaii. King and Nimitz both knew the importance of the Midway-Hawaii line. Midway was of great value to the United States and Yamamoto knew a threat to the atoll would bring the US carriers to defend it, creating the decisive battle to bring the Americans to the negotiating table.[76]

The inclination that something big was brewing was correct. American code breakers, particularly Lieutenant Commander Jospeh Rochefort, in "Station Hypo" at Pearl Harbor, were crucial in revealing Admiral Yamamoto's plans to attack and capture the Midway Atoll. The codebreakers at Hypo worked by intercepting Japanese radio messages and deciphering their complex code. Rochefort had become convinced that the Japanese's new offensive target was Midway, through their frequent use of the term "AF" in their signals traffic. The Japanese Navy

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[75] Lewis Hopkins, interviewed by Floyd C. Cox, 15 January, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[76] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway*, (Oxford, 2011), 102.

used a system of geographical designations in their signal traffic. They would use a two letter code to designate a specific geographical area. Using the Japanese geographical designator, "A" stood for "American possession" and it was clear to Rochefort "AF" must have an airfield and had to be close to Hawaii. The Midway location was confirmed when a fake message about a water shortage was sent from Midway without encryption, and the Japanese reported "AF" was short on water, confirming the location.[77]

The Japanese had two objectives in this new campaign. One was to seize Midway as an advance air base to facilitate early detection of enemy carrier forces, and second, to draw out what was left of the United States Pacific fleet in a decisive engagement. There was significant risk to the Pacific Fleet by basing its plans on the intelligence provided by Hypo. If the intelligence was incorrect, Nimitz's carriers might be drawn into a trap. Prewar doctrine emphasized the use of multiple factors of strength; Nimitz exploited this concept and packed the area around Midway with forces that could seek out and attack the Japanese. These forces consisted mainly of aircraft, ships, and submarines. Nimitz planned for the most powerful blows in the battle to come from TF 16.[78] Nimitz was prepared to ambush the Kidō Butai with just two of his own carriers. Nimitz attempted to mitigate risk by preparing for a variety of contingencies. One, the Pacific Fleet amphibious force was put on a 48 hour notice, should the Japanese take the atoll. Two, the three thousand defenders of Midway, under the leadership of Colonel Harold

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[77] Ibid, 182-185.

[78] Nimitz and his staffs planning for the upcoming battle at Midway was done before the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) had returned to Pearl Harbor after the Battle of the Coral Sea. For this reason Nimitz was not aware of the full extent of the carriers damage; Trent Hone, *Mastering the Art of Command: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and Victory in the Pacific,* (Naval Institute Press, 2022), 86.

Shannon, were readied to defend the atoll. Lastly, TF 8 was created by Nimitz to protect the American assets in the Aleutians.[79]

The head of the Pacific Fleet coming down to personally inspect the *Yorktown* caught the eye of Dale Cooper. Cooper was a quartermaster aboard the *Yorktown*. Quartermasters were stationed at the helm on the bridge, which was exciting for Cooper because he could "see all the action." Cooper's job consisted of steering, maintaining charts, keeping the deck logs, and assisting the officers on the bridge. Hearing that the ship had to be repaired in a short time frame, was a key indicator to Cooper that he and the rest of the *Yorktown* crew were going to be a part of something important. Coopers station as a quartermaster was important because even though he was kept in the dark like the average enlisted sailor, he witnessed more of the major activities abroad the ship, to be able to filter down information to the rest of the crew.[80]

The *Yorktown* sustained large amounts of damage from the battle of the Coral Sea. The carrier was damaged by one direct bomb hit and two near misses. Damage consisted of the following: damage to the shell and port side of the ship from a near miss, structural damage to the flight deck from a direct hit, damage caused from the direct hits blast, and miscellaneous damage from splinters and fragments from the direct hit and near miss explosions. Despite estimations indicating it would take months for the *Yorktown* to be repaired, Nimitz gave the shipyard workers 48 hours. The around-the-clock-efforts of the Pearl Harbor shipyard workers got her repaired for sea duty within Nimitz's tight time frame. Ralf Conlee, an ensign aboard the

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[79] David C. Evans, *The Japanese Navy in World War II; In the Words of Former Japanese Naval* Officers, (Naval Institute Press, second edition 2017), 121; Trent Hone, *Mastering the Art of Command: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and Victory in the Pacific,* (Naval Institute Press, 2022), 85-87.

[80] Dale Cooper, interviewed by Steve Seiji Sumii, 11 February, 2014, Dale C. Cooper Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Yorktown, recalled the last night that she was in port at Pearl. Conlee was the officer on the deck that night. He saw a shipyard worker looking up at the airplanes inside of the *Yorktown*, and he was the last man to leave for the night. Conlee approached the man and asked if he could be of assistance. The man replied, "no, this is my favorite ship, and I feel like I am looking at her for the last time." Conlee never learned who the man was, but his statement hung over Conlee as the *Yorktown* made her voyage to confront the Japanese at Midway.[81]

During the journey to the battle zone the crews of the *Yorktown, Enterprise* and *Hornet* were informed of their situation. Many were apprehensive of the battle to come, especially the pilots. Ensign John Crawford, who had fought his way to be aboard the *Yorktown*, remembered being gathered in the war room on their way to Midway. Listening to the presentation of the Japanese plans to take Midway and destroy the United States fleet was very sobering. He recalled the room was especially tense as the executive officer detailed that three American carriers were going to go up against the full Kidō Butai consisting of six Japanese carriers (four of them being large carriers). Crawford did not know what to make of the presentation. Crawford recalled that he was impressed by how much intelligence they possessed; however, he was skeptical that the *Yorktown's* aerial torpedoes would be able to offset the effects of the superior Japanese ones. The Japanese arial torpedo Type 91 had a stronger body shell than the American

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[81] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *War Damage Report: U.S.S. Yorktown Bomb Damage May 8, 1942 Coral Sea*; Ralf Burton Conlee, interviewed by Al Fritsch, 22 August, 2015, Ralf Burton Conlee Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

counterpart and could survive entering the water at 350 knots, while the American arial torpedo, the Mark 13, proved delicate and could be easily damaged once they hit the water.[82]

The first sighting report of the Japanese Fleet came from Ensign Charles R. Eaton, who was flying a PBY Catalina seaplane at 9am on June 3rd. Fletcher used Eaton's sighting to position the US task forces for the ensuing battle that began on June 4, 1942. TF 16, comprised of the *Enterprise* and *Hornet,* and TF 17, built around the repaired *Yorktown,* were three hundred miles northeast of Midway, some four hundred miles south of the Japanese carrier force. The first option for overall tactical commander at Midway was Admiral William Halsey, commander of TF 16. However, a severe case of shingles hospitalized Halsey. Although heavily criticized for his actions in the Coral Sea by King, Nimitz placed Admiral Fletcher as overall commander since Fletcher was the only admiral with carrier-on-carrier battle experience. With Fletcher as commander of TF 17 and overall tactical commander, Admiral Raymond Spruance replaced Halsey as commander of TF 16. On the side of the Japanese Admiral Yamamoto of the combined fleet would be present aboard a destroyer, far from the battle zone. Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, would command the main carrier force in the Kidō Butai.[83]

The battle officially began when the Japanese carriers launched their air groups to attack Midway. The early attacks led to only slight damage to its facilities. The carrier portion of the

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[82] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Mark R. Peattie, *Sunburst: The Rise of the Japanese Naval Air Power, 1909*-1941, (Naval Institute Press, 2001), 35-39; Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway,* (Oxford, 2011), 54-57.

[83] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway,* (Oxford, 2011), 212; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 101; John B. Lundstorm, *Black Shoe Carrier Admiral: Frank Jack Fletcher at Coral Sea, Midway, and Guadalcanal*, (Naval Institute Press, 2006), 224-226.

battle began when the air groups of the American carriers were launched early in the morning on the fourth. The US carriers launched their air groups from "Point Luck." Point Luck was where Rochefort and the code breakers predicted that the Pacific Fleet would be located on the flank of the Kidō Butai, allowing for an ambush. Crawford knew from his pre-battle brief that four of the Japanese large carriers would be located a point northeast of the Midway atoll. At 7am the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* launched their aircraft, followed by the *Yorktown* at 8:38am; neither group included their assigned torpedo squadrons. Hopkins recalled his experience in the ready room of VB-6 on the *Enterprise*. VB-6 was the squadron commanded by the famous Lieutenant Commander Dick Best, who would score two separate hits on two Japanese carriers. Hopkins stated that "he [Best] was a wonderful guy and a great leader, who took all of us under his wing."[84]

Looking back on the morning of the battle, Hopkins recalled that the air group was awake by 1am. He described the pilots in the ready room as concerned: "There was a lot of small talk, obviously just marginal conversation. Occasionally, there would be some real significant conversation going on but it was kind of a nervous waiting situation." Best was a role model that Hopkins remembered helped motivate him through the morning. Hopkins said at 7am "pilots man the planes," was called called over the intercom. Hopkins described how quickly the crew of the carrier changes from doing various jobs on deck until the moment the announcement is called for the pilots to take off. "It just becomes a beehive of activity" Hopkins recalled, everyone was either checking aircraft or preparing the carrier deck for takeoff. He described the

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[84] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Lewis Hopkins, interviewed by Floyd C. Cox, 15 January, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

scene as a "ballet," with planes circling while others lifted into the air, creating a second inner circle. It was like a string of planes coming around as each plane is going up, Hopkins explained.[85]

It is important to note the state of the *Yorktown* air groups after the Battle of the Coral Sea. The *Yorktown* squadrons, especially VS-5 (the scouting squadron of Willard Glidewell) had been severely depleted after the Coral Sea battle. The air groups could not go to battle as they were and had to be patched back together with pilots and planes from other carriers. For the *Yorktown* to regain her full strength again, replacement pilots were pulled from the USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) while she was undergoing repairs. The Bombing Squadron, VB-3, replaced *Yorktown's* VS-5. The *Saratoga* Torpedo Squadron, VT-3, also replaced *Yorktown's* VT-5. Glidewell and the rest of VS-5 were sent ashore at Pearl Harbor. *Yorktown's* VB-5 had no replacement and would be renamed "VS-5" for the Midway battle. The change in air groups made for a confusing situation for the *Yorktown* squadrons, who also harbored resentment for the breaking up of key portions of the air group. While sailors formed close bonds with their fellow crew members, pilots did the same with their fellow pilots. The pilots carried out the attacks of the battle together, which made for sore situations when squadrons were separated.[86]

The most well-known portion of the battle of Midway is the morning attacks of the dive bombers from the *Yorktown* and *Enterprise.* But before diving into the most famous scene of the battle, it is vital to look at what made the strikes on the Japanese carrier possible. By 8:40am, the torpedo squadrons from all three American carriers had been launched. VT-8 from the *Hornet*

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[85] Lewis Hopkins, interviewed by Floyd C. Cox, 15 January, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[86] Ronald Russell, *No Right to Win,* (iUniverse, 2006), 65-68.

was the most important in leading to the success of the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* dive bombers. All except for one pilot, Ensign George Gay, would be wiped out during their morning attack on the fourth. The commander of the squadron was Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron. Waldron and VT-8 sighted the Kidō Butai, which consisted of 21 ships, including four large carriers. Almost immediately, the squadron was sighted by the Japanese combat air patrol, and VT-8 went into battle with a total of 15 planes, outnumbered by at least three to one. Lieutenant Gay recalled that Midway was the first time he had ever taken off from a carrier with a torpedo. He remembered that the squadron followed commander Waldron without hesitation, and he would do it all over again even knowing the outcome of the battle. Although proving futile, the attacks of VT-8 and the other torpedo squadrons sealed the fate of the Japanese carriers. In Gay's retelling of the battle, it was due to VT-8 that the Japanese fighter cover was pulled away from the fleet. The Japanese carrier had no fighter cover, which then allowed the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* dive bombers to attack with little resistance.[87]

American naval historian Craig Symonds notes that the actions and quick thinking of two individuals led to the peak of the battle. The first was made by Lieutenant Commander William Brockman, commander of the US submarine *Nautilus*, and the second was by Lieutenant Commander Clarence McClusky, the commander of the *Enterprise* air group. Brockman encountered the Japanese battleship *Kirishima*, the cruiser *Nagara*, and two destroyers operating as the advance screen of the Japanese fleet. Brockman made the decision to attempt to torpedo the battleship. Brockman's aims to hit the battleship were unsuccessful. However, when the

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[87] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of Midway*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 21; Thomas C. Hone, *The Battle of Midway,* (Naval Institute Press, 2013), 93-95; NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry P 11: Box 10, *Lieutenant George Gay, Torpedo Squadron 8, Midway, Solomons, Munda,* 12 October 1943.

Japanese battleship changed course to get away from the American sub, the destroyer the *Arashi* stayed back to sink the *Nautilus.* The *Arashi,* after giving up its attack on the *Nautilus,* would return to catch up with the rest of the Kidō Butai. The air groups of the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* had been in the air for a little under an hour and when they arrived to Point Luck, they did not see the Japanese fleet, while they were getting dangerously low on fuel to complete their mission. However Commander McClusky made the important decision to turn northward, which was when he spotted the *Arashi,* leading him and the rest of the American air groups directly to the entire Japanese fleet, including the carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, and *Hiryu*.[88]

Within ten minutes, the course of the Pacific War would be changed. At 10:26am, the dive bombers from squadrons VS-6 and VB-6 attacked and sank two Japanese carriers. The *Kaga* received four bomb hits by VS-6. The first bomb to penetrate the deck was dropped by Lieutenant W.E. Gallaher, followed shortly by three more hits from the rest of the squadron. The *Akagi* received three bomb hits by VB-6, one of them dropped by Best. Almost simultaneously, as the *Enterprise* dive bombers were attacking their two carriers, Lieutenant Commander M.F. Leslie led VB-3 from the *Yorktown* to dive on a third Japanese carrier the *Soryu*. Leslie and the rest of VB-3 landed three successful hits on the *Soryu*.[89]

The sinking of the Japanese carriers was an event remembered vividly by pilots Lewis Hopkins, Jack Kleiss, and Fred Bergeron. Hopkins recalled that while flying along with VB-6 that he began feeling nervous. The squadron had reached the area where the Japanese fleet was supposed to be, but they were not present. Hopkins noted that this was a dangerous situation

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[88] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of* Midway, (Oxford, 2011), 288-301.

[89] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Four: Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions May 1942- August 1942*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1988),121-131.

because the squadron was as far out as they could be to have enough fuel to make it back to their carrier. When McClusky spotted the lone Japanese destroyer, Hopkins felt a mixture of relief and excitement. When he recalled seeing the Japanese fleet, Hopkins stated "you can be impressed with an image and I remember seeing the Jap fleet, I am sitting here today, and I can see the fleet as clear as I saw it then. It was something else and I was very impressed." Upon diving on the *Akagi,* Hopkins remembered the squadron experienced no resistance, and the Japanese did not see them coming. Hopkins was twelfth in line to begin his dive, and he did not manage to sustain a hit. The hard part of the flight, Hopkins recalled, was pulling out of the dive and immediately encountering a flight of Japanese Zeros. On his journey back to the carrier, several pilots in VB-6 ran out of fuel, forcing them to ditch in the sea; as each pilot ditched, Hopkins noted their position (in hopes that they could later be rescued). Hopkins managed to make it back to the *Enterprise.* They had lost a total of five planes. Hopkins recalled struggling with survivors' guilt and understanding why he and not someone else had returned. Hopkins summed up that he was lucky and stated, "you cannot say that there wasn't luck, and whether God was involved is a subject of a lot of discussion, but certainly there was luck and lots of hard work."[90]

Jack Kleiss, who was now a long way from Kansas, was also a pilot in VB-6. Kleiss remembered that before the squadron broke into their dive that they separated into two groups; McClusky led one group, while Best led the other. Kleiss was in Best's group (Kleiss made no mention of Hopkins) and managed to land one hit on the *Akagi*. Kleiss recalled seeing the red circle national insignia at the forefront of the ship, and dropping his bomb to land right on top of it. When he turned around, Kleiss could see the whole ship was in flames. Kleiss recalled seeing

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[90] Lewis Hopkins, interviewed by Floyd C. Cox, 15 January, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

the *Kaga* and *Akagi* right after the attack and described them as looking like a haystack on fire. Kleiss like Hopkins was lucky and managed to make it back to the *Enterprise*. Looking back, Kleiss's excitement from battle quickly faded. By the time he had landed back on his carrier the Japanese had already landed several hits on the *Yorktown*.[91]

Fred Bergeron had experienced warfare with the Japanese well before Midway. Bergeron joined the navy at seventeen and went to radio school. He was assigned to the VB-3, aboard the *Saratoga,* as a gunner and radio man. Bergeron emphasized that if it was not for the fact that his own ship was torpedoed off the coast of Pearl Harbor, he would have never been a part of the relief squadron for the *Yorktown* and witnessed the sinking of the *Soryu*. Bergeron, as the tail gunner, was facing backwards and remembered right before the pilot went into his dive on the *Soryu.* He could see loads of anti-aircraft fire and black smoke everywhere. Mid-dive, he was watching the Japanese fighters fishtailing behind his plane to line up a shot, and suddenly he was hit in the back of the head. Believing that he had been shot, Bergeron reached around, and to his relief, found that it was the pilot's helmet and goggles that had fallen off his head. Bergeron remembered his plane dropped its bomb and thinking it was quite a sight flying across the water and looking back at the Japanese fighters chasing him. At the time of the attack, Bergeron did not know if his bomb had hit the carrier. Bergeron recalled that upon his return they had landed aboard the *Enterprise* instead of his carrier, the *Yorktown.* On VB-3's return to the *Yorktown* they were radioed to stay clear of the carrier because an incoming attack had been detected.[92]

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[91] Jack Kleiss, interviewed by Chuck Nichols and Becky Lindig, 29 September, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[92] Fred Bergeron, interviewed by Darlene Smith, 29 April, 2004, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; NARA RG38,WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *USS Yorktown 18 June 1942: Report of Action for June 4 1942, and June 6th, 1942*.

Historians Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, whose research specializes in the Imperial Japanese Navy, explained that the technical design and operational procedures of the Japanese Navy's carriers, combined with poor damage control, were key factors in the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* pilots' success in mortally damaging three carriers. First Parshall and Tully counter the long held belief that the Japanese carries decks were packed full of aircraft. In actuality the *Akagi, Kaga,* and *Soryu* deckcs were mostly clear. The lethal damage was caused because the striker aircraft were re-arming and refueling in the enclosed hangar decks. Unlike American carriers with open hangers, the Japanese hangers were fully closed. The aircraft were refueled and armed in the hangar deck. This design magnified the explosions and caused the fire to spread quickly. The spread of fire was also made worse by the amount of flammable goods like paper, clothing, and wooden warship furniture. The Japanese carriers also had dual hanger decks (American carriers only had one) meaning that they had to reduce weight on the topside, and to do so they did not have an armored flight deck. After the attack many in the hanger decks were killed and those who were left to fight the fire were in a state of shock. Lastly, the Japanese fleet operated in one large task force which contributed to the simultaneous destruction of three carriers, because all three ships were caught together. The Japanese carrier the *Hiryu* was the one carrier left untouched by the American air groups that morning. The *Hiryu* launched planes for a counter strike on the American fleet.[93]

At 11:52am the *Yorktown's* radar picked up many unidentified planes and, by 12:14pm, the carrier sustained three bomb hits; which caused the loss of power and radar. Crawford recalled that during the attack he was in general quarters. Crawford noted that the Japanese dive

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[93] Jonathan B. Parshall and Anthony P. Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway,* (Potomac Books), 229-231, 244-263.

bomber attack was over very quickly, but in that short time they managed to create a lot of damage by landing three hits. According to Crawford one bomb went down into the decks below, but the crew was quick to put out the fire. The second bomb was the worst. This bomb went through the deck near the island and exploded near the boiler uptakes, which put out the fire in the boilers, which made the *Yorktown* dead in the water. The last bomb went through the deck near the anti-aircraft mounts number three and four, and killed large portions of the men who were manning the guns. Being an ensign, Crawford said he had an advantage to find out sooner the damage of the ship. However, Crawford was surprised by the organization and discipline of the crew to save the *Yorktown*. "Everyman was operating in such a disciplined manner you would have thought nothing had happened," he said.[94]

Unlike Crawford, other sailors had only vivid memories of certain portions of the attack. Piecing together several sailors' fragmented memories is another way to grasp the full picture of the attack. Sam Laser, a veteran from the Coral Sea, was not new to carrier battles. Laser was a yeoman second class working under the gunnery officer on the port side of the ship. Laser recalled that his ordinary tasks of keeping roll, rates, and rank of the crew was dramatically changed once battle stations were called. During the attack on the *Yorktown,* Laser manned a gun on the port side of the ship. He remembered most vividly the third bomb, and he recalled it coming down the starboard side of the ship. Laser stated, "I saw the thing coming, I even thought

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[94] NARA RG30, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *USS Yorktown Action Report 18 June 1942: Loss of USS Yorktown 7 June 1942*; John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

I saw my name on it and wondered how the Japanese knew my name." Laser did not truly believe he would be able to live through a second encounter with the Japanese.[95]

Harold Davies operated one of the *Yorktown's* 1.1-inch 75 caliber guns that took around 13 men to operate. There were four loaders, four second loaders, a pointer, a trainer who moved the gun from right to left, a gunner's mate to be sure the weapon fired, an officer, and a second-class boat mate. Davies was a pointer, and it was his job to fire the gun. He was stationed on gun mount three, located just after the stack on the bridge. The *Yorktown* had a total of four 1.1-inch 75 caliber gun mounts. Davies recalled that while fighting at Midway, five of the 13 men were killed by explosions from the direct hits from Japanese dive bombers. All the other men were injured except for Davies, who continued to fire his gun even after the men on his mound were killed or wounded. When looking back on the attack, Davies said he felt guilty that he could not help his fellow crew members, but through his training, sailors were taught to never leave their battle station; so he kept on fighting.[96]

Fifteen-year-old Underwood was part of the damage control crew and was one first to make it to gun mount three. Underwood recalled that the bomb had done a lot of damage. "They had the fire crew and the fellows that were sitting there on those 1.1's. Their bodies were just sheared off over the tops of the armor plating of their seats," he said. Underwood recalled the entire scene was horrific and just continued to get worse. One of the flight deck's landing cables had snapped, and Underwood remembered a couple guys were on the catwalk when it snapped,

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[95] Sam Laser, interviewed by Kenneth W. Thompson and Kathy Matras, 14 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[96] Harold Orland Davies, interviewed by Arthur Hoff, 11 November, 2012, Harold Orlando Davies Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

almost cutting them in two. Underwood believed it was one of the ugliest scenes at Midway. Descriptions like Underwood's and Davies' are often left out of the battle narrative. The two sailors' accounts do not explain the origins of the battle or justifications for certain military actions. However, these view points are essential to understanding the background events that affect the larger events of the battle. Sailors having to adapt and take the place of fallen crew mates in the middle of an attack affected the course of the battle, even if only on the smallest scale. After the attack, the *Yorktown's* crew was quick to get to work repairing the damage. The crew is often praised for their repair efforts, but what is often overlooked are the conditions under which the repairs were made. They had just gone through the chaos of an attack, and the first step was to clean up the damage which largely consisted of removing bodies and body parts. Most sailors were bribed by corpsmen with candy and alcohol to help clean up their dead crew mates. The recovering of the dead was a vital step in the crew's attempts to save the ship. After the dead were removed, repairs quickly began to restore five of the ship's six boilers, to get *Yorktown* back in the fight by gaining speed to recover and launch aircraft.[97]

In the midst of battle, it was nearly impossible for the crew to know exactly which bomb had hit first, what they had damaged, and how many casualties there were. The first bomb blew a ten-foot hole in the flight deck and killed several men on the number three and four 1.1-gun mounts, which Davis experienced. The second bomb struck the port side, went through the flight deck, and exploded above the third deck level. It was the second bomb that stopped the *Yorktown* dead in the water. The third and final bomb, which Laser experienced firsthand, struck the

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[97] John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Pat Frank and Jospeh Harrington, *Rendezvous at Midway: U.S.S. Yorktown and the Japanese Carrier* Fleet, (The John Day Company, 1967), 130-131, 198.

starboard side of the ship and penetrated all the way to the fourth deck before it exploded. Repairs to the *Yorktown* were made very quickly, including getting the hole in the flight decking covered in less than a half hour. As noticed by Crawford, the crew was calm and collected as if they went about their work, just as their training had instructed them. This was not the first time the crew of the *Yorktown* had to repair their ship mid-battle. The Battle of the Coral Sea had provided the crew with critical and hard-won knowledge. However, the fight was not over for the *Yorktown.* About three hours later, the torpedo bombers from the last Japanese carrier, afloat, the *Hiryu,* would attack the ship, achieving two hits. The crew of the *Yorktown* would soon learn the same lessons as those aboard the *Lexington;* bombs hits can be recovered from, but torpedoes were often fatal to a carrier.[98]

At 2:27pm, the *Yorktown's* radar picked up a large group of Japanese planes, and then, at 2:45pm the *Yorktown* sustained two torpedo hits, causing her to list some 26 degrees to port. Laser was operating a machine gun at the time of the torpedo plane attack. Laser recalled that from his battle station, he was able to shoot down four of the incoming torpedo bombers, but it was not enough to protect the ship. Laser remembered that he had no idea that torpedoes were that powerful. When the *Yorktown* was struck by the first torpedo, Laser said the whole ship lifted out of the water. Laser stated "when they [torpedoes] hit, it's all over, we lost all our power, and we could do nothing. The ship gradually slowed till its dead in the water, and we had to

[98] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of Midway* , (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 29.

abandon ship." Laser explained that if it was not for the previous dive-bombing attacks, the *Yorktown* would have probably never been hit by the torpedoes.[99]

Like for Laser, a torpedo hit was an entirely new experience for Crawford. In his imagination, Crawford recalled that he did not think a torpedo hit would be much different than a bomb, but he soon came to find out it was very different. "It was if one took a ruler, a fairly stiff ruler, by the hand at both ends and flexed it back and forth," described Crawford. He said it looked as if the ship's hull sagged and rose again. Because the ship very quickly began to take on water, the ship took a 26 degrees list to port. Crawford recalled that he was truly scarred because a list of 26 degrees was almost enough to fully capsize the *Yorktown.*[100]

Ralf Conlee was stationed below decks, below the water line in the damage control center of one of the ship's boiler rooms. He recalled the last moments of the *Yorktown* before he abandoned ship when he was operating the emergency pumps, that shifted incoming water from one side of the ship to the other in order to right the ship. Conlee was sitting next to the "oil king," who was the officer responsible for managing and distributing fuel and lubricants throughout the ship. Conlee and the "oil king's" job was to keep the ship on an even keel. Once the auxiliary pump failed Conlee, using the ships telephone, reported to the captain that he had no way to correct the list.[101]

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[99] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *USS Yorktown Action Report 18 June 1942: Loss of USS Yorktown 7 June 1942*; Sam Laser, interviewed by Kenneth W. Thompson and Kathy Matras, 14 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[100] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[101] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

All lights aboard the *Yorktown* were disabled, steam pressure was lost, the left rudder was jammed, and the ship was steadily increasing its list to port. The list was impossible to correct, and the threat of capsizing became more serious. Captain Buckmaster reported the situation to Admiral Fletcher (who had transferred his flag to the cruiser USS *Astoria* after the bombing attack) and gave the order to abandon ship at 5:02pm. The events that followed were very similar to what happened on the *Lexington;* the crew of the *Yorktown* began to make their way into the water. Once the command to abandon ship was given, Crawford recalled that as an ensign he did not want to appear in too much of a hurry in front of the crew, however he was very much in a hurry. Once in the water Crawford was covered in thick oil and remembered thinking to himself, "this is a great situation, four years in the naval academy to go out like this." While he was contemplating how his own demise would occur, a destroyer came alongside the group of men Crawford was floating with and pulled him aboard.[102]

Underwood was with a squadron crew when the order to abandon ship was received. One of the squadron members did not have a life jacket so Underwood gave him his own. Underwood recalled that he was a good swimmer and was not afraid of jumping in the water. When abandoning ship sailors were trained to leave behind all of their personal belongings. However, as Underwood later remembered, at 15 he was young and stupid. He went back to retrieve his belongings in his locker below the flight deck. Explaining that he had his watch and poker winnings down there, and there was no way he was leaving them behind. While heading back through the hanger deck, Underwood found another life jacket and he even grabbed a leather

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[102] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box 1535, *USS Yorktown Action Report 18 June 1942: Loss of USS Yorktown 7 June 1942*; John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

helmet with goggles to keep the water out of his eyes. Once he lowered himself in the water, Underwood remembered swimming for around 45 minutes before being picked up by a destroyer. Underwood could not recall which destroyer picked him up, but the crew was helpful in finding him clean clothes and a bunk to sleep in.[103]

Norman Jospeh Jeansonne, who had worked as the storekeeper abroad the *Yorktown* during the battle, remembered wandering around the flight deck looking for a life jacket. He looked around the flight deck when he found a group of dead sailors with life jackets; Jeansonne remembered that he decided that if worse came to worse he would take one. While continuing his search, he came across one of his friends named Hansel leaning against the island of the ship. Jeansonne described Hansel being as white as a ghost and holding his stomach. Jeansonne then recalled that two corpsmen came up and asked Jeansonne where his life jacket was. He replied he did not have one. Jeansonne was given Hansel's life jacket since, according to the two corpsmen, “he would not be needing it anymore.” Like most men, Jeansonne was in the water for about an hour before he was picked up by a destroyer. He recalled how his hands were burnt from the attack and then sliding down the ropes into the ocean. Corpsmen on the destroyer treated and wrapped his hands with a special oil. Jeansonne recalled that right before he fell asleep a sailor came by and helped him wash the black oil off his face and hands.[104]

While the *Yorktown* was undergoing the Japanese torpedo attack, her revenge was already in motion in the form of the air groups from the *Enterprise*. At 3:30pm, the *Enterprise* began

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[103] John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[104] Norman Joseph Jeansonne, interviewed by John H. Bordelon, 10 March, 2011, Norman Joseph Jeansonne Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

launching an attack group of 24 scout bombers, 14 of which were originally from the *Yorktown,* and at 4:50pm this force sighted the portion of the Japanese fleet that included the remaining carrier, *Hiryu*. Kleiss recalled that the second go around was not as nice as the first. There had been no fighter opposition in the morning, but Kleiss described he had to do some "wild tricks" to avoid enemy aircraft before beginning his dive this time around. Kleiss recalled that within minutes the *Hiryu* was in flames. Six direct hits were made on *Hiryu*, one of them taken in by Commander Best, thus, crediting him with two hits on two different enemy carriers. Upon hearing that all four large Japanese carriers had been sunk, Yamamoto called off the operation, by breaking contact and retiring the Japanese Fleet Westward. In sinking four of the Japanese carriers the air groups of TF 16 and TF 17 had changed the course of the war in the Pacific.[105]

On June 6th the *Yorktown* finally met her fate, but not from her damages sustained in battle. A skeleton crew made up of volunteers returned to conduct a salvaging mission. The destroyer USS *Hammond* carried the skeleton crew to the wreckage and tethered itself to the carrier. William Fentress, who was part of the skeleton crew, recalled there was lots of talk about trying to tow the *Yorktown* back to Pearl Harbor. He remembered that his job consisted of transferring records and other important documents to the *Hammond.* The salvage party removed weight from the port side and began pumping water to counter the flooding. The crew made some progress countering the flooding and reducing the *Yorktown's* list by 2 degrees. However, at 3:36pm, four torpedoes from a Japanese submarine were sighted heading toward the carrier and destroyer. James Patterson recalled he was helping jump lines across the two ships when he

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[105] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of Midway*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 32; Jack Kleiss, interviewed by Chuck Nichols and Becky Lindig, 29 September, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Japanese Navy,* (Kodansha International, 1979), 320-322.

looked out and saw four torpedoes heading for the two ships. Patterson remembered hanging from the lines between the carrier and the destroyer. He recalled a fear of dropping into the water and being crushed between the two ships. Ultimately, Patterson and Fentress both managed to escape a second time from a Japanese attack to the *Yorktown*.[106]

The salvage party abandoned their mission shortly before dark on June 6th, and at 5:30am on June 7th, 1942, the *Yorktown* finally capsized to her port side and sank. The sinking of the *Yorktown* resulted in the deaths of 92 officers and 215 men. Once he had returned to Pearl Harbor, Patterson recalled it was several months before he was allowed to discuss the loss of the *Yorktown*. Patterson remembered many people badgering him for news of the ship, and he told a lie that the navy was looking for ways to repair the carrier. It was not announced by the Navy, to the public, that the *Yorktown* had been lost until early fall, Patterson recalled images of the damaged *Yorktown* were published in many magazines in the fall of 1942. The announcing of the sinking of the *Yorktown* was held up for two reasons; one, the United States did not want to give the Japanese intelligence concerning the navies losses and two, to protect the fragile moral of the American people. The Navy released the sinking of the *Yorktown* on September 16, 1942, and it later became known to history as one of the best kept naval secrets.[107]

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[106] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1535, *U.S.S. Yorktown Loss in Action: Midway June 4-7, 1942,* 9 March, 1943; William Fentress, interviewed by Sarah March, 8 June, 2015, William Fentress Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; James Edward Patterson, interviewed by Anastasia Vellas, 22 November, 2004, James Edward Patterson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Jeff Nesmith, *No Higher Honor: The USS Yorktown at the Battle of Midway,* (Longstreet, 1999), 254.

[107] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1535, *U.S.S. Yorktown Loss in Action: Midway June 4-7, 1942,* 9 March, 1943; NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battle of Midway*, (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 55; James Edward Patterson, interviewed by Anastasia Vellas, 22 November, 2004, James Edward Patterson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Jeff Nesmith, *No Higher Honor: The USS Yorktown at the Battle of Midway,* (Longstreet, 1999), 235.

Crawford's journey aboard the *Yorktown* was brought full circle. After returning to Pearl Harbor following the Battle of Midway, Crawford went once again looking for Captain Earl, whom he had dragged away from his movie only a few weeks prior to secure his position aboard the *Yorktown*. Crawford recalled that once he was given permission to see Earl, the first thing he said to him was "Captain your absolutely right, you said I was heading for trouble and I certainly was." Crawford had a similar experience as Patterson, he and other *Yorktown* survivors were kept "in hiding" until the announcement of the ship's sinking. Crawford said that now he had earned "buddy status" with Earl, and he became one of the only people Crawford could share his story of Midway with. According to Crawford, Earl gladly listened to his stories and wished he could have been there himself.[108]

For some sailors the Battle of Midway would be the last carrier battle they would see for the entirety of the war; making his only point of reference a carrier battle where the United States lost a carrier. For example, John Crawford was sent to the Atlantic theater, as the Navy was in need of experienced naval officers as the Allies were preparing for Operation Torch in Africa. Some sailors were lucky enough to be assigned to training positions that would keep them away from the battle for the rest of the war. James Hinkle was sent to Miami, Florida, to work as a training officer at the Naval Air Station. While some men like John Underwood were stationed working in the office of Admiral Forrest Sherman in Pearl Harbor. Underwood would not go to sea for the rest of the war. These men would not have the opportunity to go into battle to avenge their ships, leaving them with a negative view of the Pacific, demonstrating how a sailor could

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[108] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

lose everything in minutes. The stories of the crews of the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* in the following months at Guadalcanal, shows a different perspective of carriers in the Pacific.[109]

[109] John W. Crawford Jr, interviewed by Juan Pablo Pitarque, 19 August 2017, John W. Crawford Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; James Hinkle, interviewed by Theodore Harbison Gardner, 1 June, 2012, James Hinkle Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

3. Survival and Loss at Guadalcanal: The Crews of the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) and the USS *Hornet* (CV-8)

Robert Hamlin aboard the *Enterprise*, had never experienced an attack by the Japanese. At the Battle of Midway, his carrier had escaped unharmed. However, on August 24, 1942, during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, Hamlin and the rest of the *Enterprise* crew were in for a rude awakening. Hamlin was in the middle of a card game below the hangar deck, when all hell broke loose. Japanese dive bombers attacked the *Enterprise,* achieving the first bomb hits on the carrier during the war. He recalled that he had barely recovered from the shock of the first bomb when a second came crashing through the carrier. The second bomb exploded on deck below Hamlin; he sustained shrapnel wounds to his head, arms, legs, and severe burns to his face. After loosing consciousness, when he came to, he found himself in the dark and disoriented; the only source of light coming from the fires started by the bomb impact. Hamlin had to crawl over bodies, not knowing if they were dead or alive to escape. Once free from danger, corpsmen tended to Hamlin, and gave him medicine that knocked him out until the next day.[110]

Leading up to the Battle

The second phase of the Pacific War started after the Battle of Midway. Sean Judge, a former US Air Force officer who researched the concept of strategic initiative for his dissertation from Ohio State University, argued that before the summer of 1942 the Japanese held the strategic initiative in the Pacific, and the United States' success at Midway altered the initiative, putting it in dispute. The Battle of Midway took the strategic initiative away from Japan;

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[110] Robert Hamlin, interviewed by Ed Metzler and Kathy Matras, September 21, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

however, the United States fleet did not yet dominate the Japanese Navy. Instead, the two fleets were now roughly equal, and the struggle became one over which side would seize the initiative. After the Battle of Midway the Japanese looked to stabilize their previous conquests in New Guinea and the Solomons, while the United States planned to harness their advantage from the victory at Midway. Admiral King and Admiral Nimitz gained the opportunity to shift from a defensive to offensive strategy. Characterized by King as the "offensive-Defensive." Moving forward in the Pacific, the United States would capture enemy territory, establish a defense, and move on to the next enemy possession. The first objective was in the Solomon Islands, specifically on Guadalcanal. The United States Marines, with the support of the navy, invaded Guadalcanal on August 7th, 1942, during Operation Watchtower.[111]

The United States' main objective during the initial invasion was to deny the Japanese the use of the island by seizing Japanese bases at Tulagi and an airfield that was being built at the time of the invasion.[112] Once the airfield was secured, US forces renamed the air strip to Henderson Field; its capture secured the Americans a friendly air base in the south and further protected the Australian supply line. However, the Japanese had no intention of allowing the Americans to retain Henderson Field and began a concerted effort to force them off Guadalcanal. The Japanese went to extreme lengths to remove the US forces. The Japanese employed endless air raids on American troops at Guadalcanal. Japanese aircraft were sent from Rabaul to attack during the day, with naval bombardment at night. Most of the naval engagements around Guadalcanal were fought at night between cruisers and destroyers because US occupation of

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[111] Sean M. Judge, *The Turn of the Tide in the Pacific War: Strategic Initiative, Intelligence, and Command, 1941-1943,* (University Press of Kansas, 2018), 148-150; John T. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis: The Pacific War, 1937-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 72-78.

[112] Tulagi was a small island located directly north of Guadalcanal.

Henderson Field made the Japanese fleet vulnerable during the day. While the United States commanded the skies and sea in day light, the Japanese attacked Allied supply ships at night.[113]

US carriers were used to cover the invasion forces around Guadalcanal. Admiral Fletcher who commanded the American carriers during Operation Watchtower, was suppose to provide carrier support for six days after the initial invasion on August 7th. However on August 8th, Fletcher requested to withdraw the carrier TFs four days early. Fletcher claimed his F4F Wildcat fighter force had been dwindled from two days of fighting, his ships' fuel reserves were low, and the presence of Japanese submarine torpedoes posed a high threat to his carriers. Fletcher's request to withdraw was granted by Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley, Commander of the South Pacific Area. The withdraw of the carriers sparked lots of controversy over how to employ the US TFs in the Solomons. Due to Japanese night attacks, US carriers were often deployed as a defensive screening force to protect US ships from a distance, instead of being used for the American offensive.[114]

The USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) and the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) were the main carriers during the Guadalcanal campaign. In the first two carrier battles the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* operated with TF 16 at Midway. Before the Guadalcanal landings, the navy reorganized its carrier forces into one single multi-carrier task force, TF 61, under the command of Admiral Fletcher. TF 61 reflected the shift to offensive operations in the South Pacific. The carriers' new organization allowed Fletcher to have close coordination between the US carriers covering American forces on Guadalcanal and the other transport ships around the island. TF 61 was comprised of four

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[113] John T. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis: The Pacific War, 1937-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 72-78; Mark Stille, *The Naval Battles for Guadalcanal 1942: clash for Supremacy in the Pacific,* (Osprey, 2013), 19; James D. Hornfischer, *Neptune's Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal,* (Bantam Books, 2011), 105-106, 124-126.

[114] James D. Hornfischer, *Neptune's Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal,* (Bantam Books, 2011), 51-52.

subordinate task forces: TF 11, TF 16, TF 17, and TF 18. The *Enterprise* (TF 16) and *Hornet* (TF 17) operated alongside TF 11 built around the USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), and TF 18 around the USS *Wasp* (CV-7). During the struggle to seize and retain Guadalcanal, while the airfield remained unfinished, carriers provided critical air support. Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, aboard the *Enterprise,* recalled Guadalcanal and the participation of the American carriers. He noted that the carrier launched air patrols that operated over the landing forces throughout the first day of the operation on August 7, 1942. In the beginning of the landings, the carriers played a minor role, but the need for carrier aircraft support quickly rose. It was important for the *Enterprise* to stay within sight of Guadalcanal, operating alongside the shore. The carrier provided air support for the amphibious assault and protected the landing forces from Japanese air attacks.[115]

The crews of the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* had similar prewar experiences. Robert Hamlin had plans to go to college and become a lawyer, however, after December 7, 1941, everything changed. Hamlin's father was friends with several navy recruiters and convinced him that the navy was the best option. After training, Hamlin entered the Navy as a third class-mate and was excited to learn he was assigned to the *Enterprise* in 1942, just before Midway. Hamlin, who had never seen an aircraft carrier, recalled that when he first saw *Enterprise*, "she was a big aircraft carrier and looked really good to me, I mean really good." Walking up the gang plank to board the *Enterprise* was an experience he would remember forever, especially for someone who had never been around the navy before.[116]

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[115] Thomas C. Hone, *Replacing Battleships with Aircraft Carriers in the Pacific in World War II,* (Naval War College Review, 2013), 4; NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

[116] Robert Hamlin, interviewed by Ed Metzler and Kathy Matras, September 21, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Howard Snell, also assigned to the *Enterprise,* joined the navy in April 1941 right after he graduated from high school. Snell recalled that his high school history teacher was a Nazi sympathizer, who believed Hitler to be the greatest man in the world. Snell explained that he openly disagreed with his teacher in class and left to join the navy as soon as he could. However, Snell was not aware that he did not have a say as to which theater of war he would be assigned. He eventually came to the conclusion that whether he was in the Pacific or in the Atlantic he would be doing his part for the war effort. Like Hamlin, Snell knew very little about aircraft carriers. Snell explained that when he was told the *Enterprise* was a carrier; it still gave him no clue as to what that would entail. Before boarding the ship, Snell gathered small pieces of information about what a carrier was. The most important thing he learned was that carriers were very large ships and the navy used them to fly planes from the middle of the ocean.[117]

A ship assignment dictated the journey and experiences of each sailor or pilot. Those who were aboard the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* were set on a tragic path. The crew of the *Enterprise,* meanwhile, did not know they had become a part of a ship what would have a grand legacy by the end of the war. The *Enterprise* was the sixth US ship to hold the name and would be honored as the only carrier to fight through the entirety of the Pacific War.[118] Ivan Alexander Booke gambled with his fate in the navy. Booke explained he had arrived in Pearl Harbor just a few days after the attack with the buddies he had made during basic training. All of Booke's friends were assigned to the *Lexington*, while he was given orders to the *Enterprise*. Booke remembered

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[117] Howard Snell, interviewed by Jordan White, 11 June, 2008, Howard Snell Collection, , Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[118] NARA RG38, WWII Command Files Individual Ships Enterprise, Entry UD-09D 19, Box: 480, *Enterprise CV-6 History*.

that while he was waiting for the *Enterprise* to return to port at Pearl, he fought to change his assignment to the *Lexington*. Booke was lucky that his wish to change carriers was not granted.[119]

To understand the morale and spirits of the *Enterprise* and Hornet in the fall of 1942, it is necessary to look back to an earlier moment before Guadalcanal. The first months of the war were filled with uncertainty, and the events of the early carrier raids not only prepared the carrier crews for battle but gave them hope and glimpses of success. The Doolittle Raid, in April 1942, made a profound impact on the crews of the *Enterprise* and *Hornet*. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the American people, and specifically naval personal in the Pacific, needed a morale boost in the dreary first months of the war. Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle U.S. Army Air Corps, led a flight of sixteen B-25 bombers off the *Hornet* and successfully made the first American strike against the Japanese homeland, creating a much-needed uplift in the United States. The *Lexington's* seamen had a similar experience on February 20th, 1942, when TF 11 and TF 17 were conducting raids off of the Japanese-held base of Rabaul, in the South Pacific. The crew witnessed firsthand Lieutenant Edwards "Butch" O'Hare become the first navy ace of the war, by shooting down five Japanese fighters while defending the carrier. As described by one of the *Lexington's* crew member, Gustave Sembritzky he and others on the flight deck felt inspired and encouraged to take back the Pacific from Japan.[120]

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[119] Ivan Alexander Booke, interviewed by Michael Coen, 27 September, 2008, Ivan Alexander Booke Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[120] Gustave A. Sembritzky, interviewed by Andrew Ferriere, Evan Roberts, and Virginia Roberts, 12 July, 2002, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg TX.

The memories of O'Hare's epic flight eventually faded as the crew of the *Lexington* was completely broken up after the ships sinking. The crews of the *Enterprise* and particularly the *Hornet* carried their inspirations from the Doolittle Raid on April 18th, 1942, with them throughout the entirety of the war. As stated in chapter one, men enlisting in the Navy were eager to get revenge on the Japanese for Pearl Harbor. The Doolittle Raid did little damage to Tokyo, but it boosted the spirits and moral of the United States Navy, most specifically those aboard the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* who brought the Army bombers within 600 miles of Japan. Chester Zieneski who was a seaman aboard the *Hornet,* recalled his first great experience of the war was carrying Doolittle's planes to Japan, and remembered it was a phenomenal experience. He was proud of the Doolittle's bombers, and of himself and his crew for helping to make the raid possible.[121]

The Doolittle Raid was not only a moral-boosting experience for sailors in TF 16. The raid also had a unintended and often unnoticed effects. The simple factor of fate was the main determinant of which carrier a sailor was assigned to and what battles a sailor partook in. TF 16 was called by Nimitz to assist the *Yorktown* and *Lexington* in the Battle of the Coral Sea; however, they did not arrive in time for the action due to the TF returning from Japan. Not only did the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* seaman begin their Pacific War experience with the excitement of the Doolittle Raid, but they also missed the first carrier battle and, by default, one of the first defeats of the American Fleet. This is not to say that the men who made up TF 16 did not later hear of the battle's results, but there is a clear difference between a sailor hearing about a defeat and actively participating in it. A sailor's one goal in battle is to protect his carrier; for men

[121] Chester Zieneski, interviewed by Stephen Eales, 8 May, 2009, Chester Zieneski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

aboard the *Lexington* and *Yorktown,* they had failed this task. While the Battle of the Coral Sea was a defeat for the United States Navy as a whole, for a sailor who heard the news aboard his still afloat carrier, the defeat was not experienced as harshly.

The Battle of Midway was not regarded as highly significant by many within TF 16. Robert Hamlin's biggest recollection of the battle was "not getting hit." Hamlin operated a five-inch, 38 caliber gun aboard the *Enterprise*. His recollection of his first "real" encounter with the Japanese was different than those aboard the *Yorktown*. Hamlin remembered that the Japanese fired a torpedo at the *Enterprise*, but the ship was able to successfully maneuver away from it. Hamlin stated that the battle of Midway was not really an out of the ordinary event. The crew had been in a high stress situation during Doolittle Raid and other early carrier raids, and this battle felt more like practice. The pilots of the *Enterprise* recognized Midway as a huge success and a turning point, due to their contribution in sinking three of the four Japanese carriers. However, for the sailors aboard the ship, their real experience of war would not come until the battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands in August 1942.[122]

Those aboard the *Hornet* had similar experiences, while a few seamen recalled the tragic story of VT-8, but were still thankful for an uneventful experience. Leroy Baird and a fellow seaman, Richard Nowatzki, witnessed a plane crash aboard the *Hornet*. Nowatzki recalled that one of the *Hornet's* planes crash-landed and killed five men, including a Lieutenant named Royal Rodney Ingersoll, whose father worked right below Admiral King as the Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet. Baird's recollection provides further details: the plane crashed into a machine gun, and shrapnel from the gun hit Lieutenant Ingersoll who was on the catwalk. Nowatzki and Baird

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[122] Robert Hamilin, interviewed by Ed Metzler and Kathy Matras, 21 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

both considered themselves fortunate to have participated in one of the most famous carrier battles of the Pacific and to have emerged from it with little to no damage.[123]

The crews of the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* were well informed of their future endeavors in the South Pacific. Nowatzki recalled that after the United States had halted the Japanese expansion, they began to focus on defending the territory they had. Nowatzki remembered conversations about the Japanese building an airfield on an island called Guadalcanal that would pose a threat to the United States' communications with Australia. W.W. Norberg, aboard the *Enterprise,* recalled that there was a lull in combat operations between Midway in early June and July 1942 when the carrier was making its way to the Solomons. He remembered being happy for the change in scenery and the pick up in of activity again aboard ship. Many men did not know much about the geography of the Pacific. Although the destinations for the American offensive in the Solomons were not a secret to them, many sailors knew little about their next objective beyond the fact that it was a distant island called Guadalcanal. Norberg stated "none of us had ever heard of that place before, so we were quite excited about it."[124]

Carrier life was not the most comfortable while in the vicinity of Guadalcanal and the other surrounding islands. Chester Zienseksi who was aboard the *Hornet* described how, unlike the modern-day ships in the navy, World War Two carriers had no air conditioning. When cruising in the South Pacific below deck or even during battle it would get hot and stuffy fast. Zienseksi was fortunate to be part of one of the carrier's air squadrons, giving him the advantage

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[123] LeRoy Baird, interviewed by Jeffrey L. Meek, 31 October, 2011, Leroy Baird Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[124] Ibid; W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

of being on the flight deck where he could obtain some fresh air. Once activity in Guadalcanal began to heat up, information to the crew ceased. The American offensive in the South Pacific was fast-paced. Curby Lee Smith, a seaman on the *Hornet,* recalled after a while that the crew had no idea where they actually were. Smith did a lot of guess work to figure out what the mission was. As the Pacific War progressed, however, the battles fought on land and at sea grew increasingly deadly. Smith explained sailors became more apprehensive and nervous for upcoming engagements and, when considering their destination, recalled that "you just didn't want to think about it."[125]

The Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands

American forces landed on the Solomon Islands of Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida on August 7th. Meeting little resistance in the initial landings on Guadalcanal, Marines secured the uncompleted Japanese airfield. However, very soon after the landings, the Japanese mounted a fierce resistance against the occupation of the rest of the island and actively tried to eject the Americans from the island. The early Japanese naval victory at the Battle of Savo Island on August 8th, 1942, briefly recovered the initiative for Japan. Leaders in Tokyo believed that if they retained control of the surrounding waters, they could defeat the Americans by the end of August. This resulted in Japanese counter-landings on the island on August 18th, part of an overall counter offensive against the US forces on August 24, 1942, code named Operation KA.[126]

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[125] Chester Zieneski, interviewed by Stephen Eales, 23 January, 2005, Chester Zieneski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Curby Lee Smith, interviewed by Donald O. Patterson, 14 June, 2009, Curby Lee Smith Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[126] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Five: The Struggle for Guadalcanal August 1942- February 1943*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 79-82.

The Japanese combined forces at the Eastern Solomons consisted of Admiral Yamamoto leading the Japanese Combined Fleet. The Japanese carrier striking forces, once again, led by Admiral Nagumo, consisted of the carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku,* supported by cruisers and destroyers. What would be called by the Japanese Navy the "Detached Force," was led by Admiral Hara built around the light carrier *Ryujo*. The American carrier forces were reorganized after Midway. In August 1942 the United States had three carrier groups operating in the South Pacific: TF 11, built around the USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), commanded by Admiral Fletcher; TF 16, built around the *Enterprise,* commanded by Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, and TF 18, built around the *Wasp* (CV-7), commanded by Admiral Leigh Noyes. All three carriers operated within their own carrier task force as well as the larger Task Force 61, under the command of Admiral Fletcher. The *Wasp* was detached from TF 61 before the battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands to refuel. The carrier battle against the Japanese would thus be fought with the *Saratoga* and *Enterprise*.[127]

Both the American and Japanese Navy's made decisions on August 23rd that affected the carrier battle on the next day. Yamamoto sent out Admiral Hara's Detached Force, consisting of the heavy cruiser *Tone*, light carrier *Ryujo*, and several destroyers, south of the Kidō Butai in the direction of Guadalcanal. Hara was under orders that, if no enemy carriers were found, he was to bomb the newly christened Henderson Field and then withdraw. On the American side the *Saratoga's* air groups were delayed on the morning of the 24th, due to her search mission's aircraft having to retire to Guadalcanal after failing to locate the Japanese carriers the day before. On the morning of August 24, six PBY Catalina flying boats were dispatched from the American

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[127] Ibid, 84-87.

tender ship the USS *Mackinac*; all six located the enemy. The reports of the PBYs strongly influenced Fletcher's course of action. More contact reports of the enemy's situation filtered in at 9:35am from the scouting squadrons of the *Enterprise*. The *Enterprise* groups reported a very accurate sighting one Japanese carrier, two heavy cruisers, and one destroyer. However, Fletcher was not satisfied with the information and held the *Saratoga* strike group at the ready. At 12:10pm, Fletcher ordered the *Enterprise* to conduct a second search and committed scouting squadrons from the *Saratoga* as well. Fletcher was reluctant to attack due to his previous mistake during the Battle of the Coral Sea, where the small Japanese carrier *Shoho* was attacked before later American squadrons discovered the two larger Japanese carriers.[128]

At 3:10pm, another report of the location of a group of Japanese cruisers, destroyers, and other ships was received by the *Enterprise*. This message was followed by another report at 3:48pm of the location of the Japanese light carrier *Ryujo*, heavy cruiser and three destroyers. The carrier *Ryujo* was actually spotted at 2:40pm, but the report was delayed in reaching the *Enterprise*. The Japanese large carriers *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* were located later, but word did not reach the *Enterprise* until 6:40pm that evening. Due to a Japanese attack on the *Enterprise*, the report of the location of the large Japanese carriers was also delayed in reaching the US squadrons.[129] In the meantime, *Enterprise* search planes from VB-6 who had spotted the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* attacked and landed a single bomb hit on the *Shokaku*. Fletcher's battle plan was to attack the lone carrier *Ryujo.* VT-3 from the *Saratoga* landed four bombs on the deck of the light

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[128] John B. Lundstorm, *The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942,* (Naval Institute Press, 1994), 109-113; NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battles of Savo Island 9 August 1942 and the Eastern Solomons 23-25 August 1942,* (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 43.

[129] The attack on the *Enterprise* overlapped the American air groups strikes on the Japanese fleet and will be discussed later in the chapter.

carrier *Ryujo*. The scouting groups then returned to their respective carriers with a message from the *Enterprise* for her squadrons to stay clear of the carrier. While the US carrier squadrons were attacking the Japanese fleet, the Japanese attacks on the American fleet had commenced.[130]

The *Saratoga* striking group was launched at 2:35pm to attack the *Ryujo*. The air group consisted of thirty dive bombers and eight torpedo planes (from VS-3, VB-3, and VT-8). The attack commenced at 4:20pm, and the *Ryujo* was already smoking heavily from the previous attack by the scouting squadrons. VS-3 attacked first, landing two hits down the side of the *Ryujo*. Then, VB-3 attacked, landing three direct hits. VT-8 then attacked and launched three torpedoes at the carrier, one of which hit the target, fatally damaging the *Ryujo*. The attack group then returned to the *Saratoga.* The attack groups of the *Enterprise* meanwhile did not find the *Ryujo* or any other Japanese ships. While the *Saratoga* air groups were attacking the *Ryujo* Admiral Nagumo planned his strike on the American carriers. A Japanese sea plane from the heavy cruiser *Chikuma*, spotted TF 61. The report from the sea plane was sent to the *Shokaku* and Nagumo had the location of TF 61 by 2:25pm. While the *Saratoga* strike groups were heading toward the *Ryujo,* an integrated flight group from both *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* was heading for the American carriers. The *Enterprise* was spotted by the Japanese attack planes a little before 5pm.[131]

The Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands was a turning point for the crew of the *Enterprise*. Having missed the first carrier battle and escaped the second without damage, it was

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[130] Ibid, 115-116; Ibid, 43-44.

[131] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: The Battles of Savo Island 9 August 1942 and the Eastern Solomons 23-25 August 1942,* (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 44-46; John B. Lundstorm, *The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat from August to November 1942,* (Naval Institute Press, 1994), 123-124.

now the *Enterprise's* time to face the Japanese. The war in the Pacific grew more deadly as the United States pushed towards Japan. The naval battles of Guadalcanal were some of the deadliest of the war, which had an negative impact on the crew of the *Enterprise*. More sailors at Guadalcanal expressed feeling scared in battle in comparison to their predecessors aboard the *Lexington* and *Yorktown*. Howard Snell recalled being terrified when he felt the jolt of the first bomb hit the deck of the *Enterprise*. As part of his carrier's repair crew, Snell, working in one of the ship's repair parties, described that he had to turn toward the danger and fight the fires on the ship. He described how he had to wear a gas mask and make his way through the smoke and flames, while simultaneously looking for bodies. Lawrence Warren also recalled the fear among the gun mount crews. Warren remembered that he relied heavily on his training, but his training did not truly prepare him for what to expect in a real battle. Looking back, Warren saw that the majority of his useful training occurred in an active battle. Warren explained that during the first attack by the Japanese the gun loader in front of him froze, and he had to shove him out of the way to continue fighting.[132]

Al Stremel and Harry Lyons both worked in fire room eight of the *Enterprise.*[133] The boiler room was the compartment of the carrier that produced the steam that propelled the ship through the water. This location of a ship was usually the hottest, noisiest, and presented the most dangerous working conditions. Stremel described that during battle men in the boiler room were secured there, because it was very easy for fire to spread to the boiler room. Having never been hit at Midway, Stremel and others in fire room eight had never experienced these

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[132] Howard Snell, interviewed by Jordan White, 11 June, 2008, Howard Snell Collection, , Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Lawrence Warren, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 17 April, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[133] Note that the boiler room and fire room referred to the same location and were used interchangeably.

conditions. He recalled it was unbelievably hot, with temperatures around 150 degrees, and he was locked in the boiler room for the eight hours of the battle. Lyons explained that he had one of the most intense jobs. Working in front of the boiler, Lyons had to pull a burner out of the boiler and clean it with steam as the *Enterprise* changed speed. The cleaning was needed to remove unburned fuel and oil residue, which was critical to prevent build-up, allowing the carrier to maintain its speed. The entire time at work, he could smell straight oil and heat. The men in the boiler rooms took salt pills to keep up with the massive amounts of sweat their bodies expelled.[134]

Lieutenant Merton Lindsey worked aboard the *Enterprise* as the carrier's landing signal officer. A landing signal officer was responsible for the recovery of an carrier's aircraft. The *Enterprise* scouting squadrons that had been launched that morning were making their way back to the carrier and were ready to land. Lindsey had made his way to his position on the flight deck in preparation for landing what were expected to be the *Enterprise's* aircraft. Lindsey recalled that aircraft formed into a landing circle which was a visual indication for the landing officer to take his position, but as he glanced up to the landing circle he instead saw a Japanese dive bomber pulling out of his dive after releasing his bomb. Lindsey described the scene explaining that "it seemed like planes were on fire blazing past us trying to crash into the ship, bombs were bursting all over, and the ship was shaking from stem to stern like it was alive." [135]

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[134] Al Stremel, interviewed by Michael Franklin, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Harry Lyons, interviewed by Pete Jensen, 21 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[135] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

It was 5:11pm when the Japanese dive bombers began their attack on the *Enterprise*. The first bomb to hit the carrier was a rude awaking for the crew. The *Enterprise's* lucky streak finally ran out, and the realities of the war in the Pacific were now clear to the crew. The first bomb penetrated the flight deck and detonated above the Group III gun gallery (right below the hangar deck). The explosion caused many casualties, including several men in damage control. W.W. Norberg stated that he was close friends with one of the men killed in damage control, Paul Miller. Norberg and Miller were in the middle of a game of checkers when all sailors were called to their battle stations and they promised each other they would finish the game after the attack since they were in the middle of an intense tournament. The next morning, alone, Norberg folded up the checkerboard, and decided he would wait until after the war was over to play in more checker tournaments.[136]

The Japanese attacks on the *Enterprise* came in short second intervals and lasted for approximately four minutes. The carrier rapidly maneuvered to escape being hit by the Japanese dive bombers. Some of the *Enterprise's* returning aircraft were diverted to the *Saratoga,* which was not yet under attack. During the quick assault, the Japanese torpedo bombers achieved no hits, but the dive bombers planted three bombs on the *Enterprise's* starboard side. The first bomb penetrated the flight deck, detonating between the second and third decks. It was followed by a

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[136] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: Report of Participation in Battle of the Eastern Solomons 24 August 1942,* 5 September, 1942; NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: War Damage Report*, 5 September, 1942; W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

second bomb going through the flight deck and detonating below the hangar deck. The third bomb instantly exploded upon impact on the flight deck and, penetrated the hangar deck.[137]

Norberg was topside after the first bomb hit, when he looked up at the sky and saw an enemy plane. He recalled, "I saw this little pill drop out of the plane and soon it became bigger and bigger, and I decided it was time for me to get inside." Norberg recalled hitting the flight deck as the third bomb exploded near the gun mounts on the starboard side of the ship. Ivan Booke was assigned to the gun crew at mount two, near the site of the third explosion. Booke's job was to grab empty ammunition cases and put them in a tub. When there was a lull in the battle, he would throw the cases over the side of the ship. Booke recalled that the Battle of the Eastern Solomons was bad; he was catching hot shells when he felt the *Enterprise* shudder. Gun mounts five and seven had been hit from bomb explosions and the entire crew at each mount had been killed. Booke explained that he volunteered to go back and retrieve the burnt bodies from the damaged gun mounts and helped sew the canvas body bags with weights to be thrown over the side of the carrier following the battle.[138]

The *Enterprise's* crew completed two major tasks after the attack. First, was to repair the flight deck and second, to put out the fires across the carrier caused by the bomb detonations. Lindsey recalled himself and others on the flight deck dragging out hoses into the gun gallery to fight the fires. He recalled that the heat was insane, and he was nervous that the ammunition would explode at any moment from such extreme conditions. Lindsey stated, "the first thing I

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[137] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: Report of Participation in Battle of the Eastern Solomons 24 August 1942,* 5 September, 1942; NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: War Damage Report*, 5 September, 1942.

[138] W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Ivan Alexander Booke, interviewed by Michael Coen, 27 September, 2008, Ivan Alexander Booke Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

knew was I was looking down and found myself halfway up to my knees in some fellow's stomach and his guts were spread all over the place." By the time the fire was put out, and the smoke had cleared, Lindsey recalled looking where the crew had been using the hose, and four feet in front of him in the side of the ship was a large, jagged hole. Had Lindsey moved any farther forward he would have found himself falling overboard. There was a horrible mess left behind in the gun gallery. Lindsey explained that the dead sailors were left there until the next day when the bodies were identified. Lindsey detailed it was a particularly unpleasant scene walking planes to the hangar deck and seeing the mangled and burnt bodies. The most unsettling part according to him was that the corpses were naked from the explosions, and did not even have their identification tags.[139]

Despite high casualties and the holes in the flight deck, at 6:16pm the *Enterprise* was making 24 knots, and the flight deck was repaired and ready to receive aircraft again. However, the *Enterprise* was not in the clear yet. At 6:50pm, damage from the third bomb strike caused the exhaust ventilator trunk to the engine room to break, which led to water and smoke pouring into the engine room, the steering motors breaking down, and the grinding of the electrical control panel. The *Enterprise's* rudder was jammed, and the ship continued to move at 24 knots in the direction of the port bow, cruising in circles. This was an extremely dangerous situation for the *Enterprise* because the carrier ran the risk of hitting other ships in TF 16, specifically, the *Enterprise* was on a collision course with the USS destroyer *Balch*. Admiral Kinkaid called for the blue and yellow flag signaling the carrier was out of commission, to be flown. The engine crew cut the steam to the turbines, and the *Balch* managed to slide under the *Enterprise's* bow,

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[139] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

barely clearing the carrier. As if almost colliding with another ship was not enough danger, the *Enterprise's* radar picked up a second incoming Japanese attack. Fortunately, the second attack never managed to locate the *Enterprise* or the *Saratoga*.[140]

As darkness began to fall, the carriers' air groups began to return to their ships, racing the fading daylight in an effort to avoid attempting night landings. Admiral Fletcher chose to not engage the Japanese fleet that night and retired the task forces for the evening. The destroyer *Grayson,* remained in the area to rescue pilots whose planes did not have enough fuel to make it back to their carriers. The Japanese attempted to exploit the damaged *Enterprise* and sent out a second strike. However, the Japanese pilots spotted only the *Grayson*, which the Japanese did not engage, having decided that they had ventured as far south as possible. The following day, August 25th, there was no air action, only opposing cruiser and battleship scout planes searching for enemy ships without success. The *Enterprise* survived the Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands but was severely damaged and had lost around 74 members of her crew. The following day on the twenty-fifth, Norberg recalled the *Enterprise* held a burial service for those lost during the battle. Norberg described the scene as a sad and solemn occasion, with the ships band playing "Nearer My God to Thee" and the Navy Hymn. The bodies were slipped over the side of the carrier, which was followed by the playing of taps. The *Enterprise* then traveled back to Pearl Harbor to undergo repairs.[141]

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[140] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: Report of Participation in Battle of the Eastern Solomons 24 August 1942,* 5 September, 1942; Edward P. Stafford, *The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise,* (Naval Institute Press, 1988), 160-161; NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

[141] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Five: The Struggle for Guadalcanal August 1942- February 1943*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 102-103; W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Japanese submarines were a threat to the United States Navy throughout the campaign in the Solomons. Shortly after the Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands, the *Saratoga* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on August 31, 1942, and sent back to the west coast to undergo repairs. The USS *Wasp* was sunk on September 15, 1942, after being struck by a Japanese submarine torpedo, while supporting the Allied forces near Guadalcanal. The surrounding American carriers witnessed the *Wasp's* sinking, and the task forces quickly vacated the area. Albert Dimminger aboard the *Hornet* recalled hearing the *Wasp* blowing her horn as he watched the approaching torpedo. Soon after the strike, Dimminger said the *Hornet* and the rest of the task force did not stick around, and he would not know for several days that the carrier had been sunk. With the loss of the *Wasp,* American naval forces in the South Pacific reached a low. Three of the original six carriers had been sunk. Nimitz and other US naval leaders remained optimistic that the United States would be able to hold on long enough until its greater industrial output achieved the capacity to construct more aircraft carriers and overwhelm the Japanese.[142]

The crew of the *Hornet* believed that their carrier now held a special purpose in the South Pacific. While the *Wasp* had been sunk and both the *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* were undergoing repairs, the *Hornet* was the only operational carrier in the South Pacific. Baird and Nowatzki both recalled that the *Hornet* was by herself for around 90 days. For the months that the *Hornet* was alone in the Pacific, Baird and Nowatzki both felt a sense of duty and importance in the carrier's support to the United States' military actions on the island of Guadalcanal. The

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[142] Albert Dimminger, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 5 July, 2006, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Robert Stern, *Knife's Edge: South Pacific Carrier Battles From the Eastern Solomon to Santa Cruz,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 145.

Enterprise would not be back in action until October 1942, shortly before the next carrier battle.[143]

The Battle of Santa Cruz

The roots of the Battle of Santa Cruz originated from Japan's continued struggle to reconquer Guadalcanal. The Japanese planned a coordinated air-sea-land battle, involving a ground assault by the army, supported by naval bombardment, and finally a major fleet battle to defeat US naval forces. This plan ended in failure due to the poor coordination and tough American resistance. The Japanese Navy had an understanding that the army would seize Henderson Field by October 25th, 1942. The first assault by the Japanese army did not expect counter fire from the Americans and ended in failure. Yamamoto heard of the army's failure and signaled for the Combined Fleet to head south to destroy the US naval forces in the Solomons. Yamamoto took a great risk by having his fleet approach the island in the broad daylight, leading to the fourth carrier vs. carrier clash between the United States and Japanese forces at Santa Cruz.[144]

Admiral Halsey was appointed the Commander of the South Pacific Area (COMSOPAC) in early October 1942. Halsey also served as commander of TF 61.[145] During the Battle of Santa Cruz, TF 61 consisted of Kinkaid's TF 16, with *Enterprise,* and TF 17 under Rear Admiral George D. Murray, with the *Hornet*. Meanwhile Admiral Nagumo commanded the main carrier

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[143] Leroy Baird, interviewed by Jeffrey L. Meek, 31 October, 2011, Leroy Baird Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[144] Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 226-227.

[145] Admiral Fletcher had been removed as a carrier commander in September 1942 by Admiral King. Fletcher's non-aggressive tactics and cautious approach in battle frustrated King, leading to his ultimate removal.

force with *Shokaku*, *Zuikaku*, and the light carrier *Zuiho,* and the Advanced Force under Rear Admiral Kakuta Kakuji, including the carriers *Junyo* and *Hiro*.[146] The Japanese Combined Fleet had been operating in the eastern Solomon Islands (the Santa Cuz islands make up the eastern portion of the Solomon Islands). After receiving intelligence on the location and movement of the Japanese fleet, Halsey gave orders on October 25 for TF 61 to sweep north of the Santa Cruz Islands, then change course to the southwest in order to intercept the Japanese fleet.[147]

On the first day of the battle, October 25, the American carriers intercepted the Japanese forces, by using PBY scouting aircraft. However, when spotted by the PBYs, the Japanese forces were too far away for an immediate strike. During the night of the 25th, both fleets maneuvered into position to launch air strikes the following day. Lindsey, aboard the *Enterprise,* recalled the night of the 25th was a mess for the carrier's air groups. Lindsey described that they were given a report stating a Japanese carrier was 250 miles away. The carriers' air groups were launched, however, the squadrons traveled too far, at too high of an altitude, to have enough fuel to make it back to the *Enterprise* and before dark. Night landings aboard carriers were extremely risky because not many pilots were trained in night landings and it also risked revealing the location of the fleet. Lindsey recalled that every plane in the air was practically out of gas, and he was given orders by Captain Osborne Bennett to land only the fighters, which made no sense because the fighter aircraft had the most remaining fuel. Lindsey disobeyed orders and landed planes other than fighters. "I just hate to wave off anybody at night that is making a good approach, I caught hell for it, so I finally landed nothing but fighters," he explained. Lindsey watched as planes

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[146] Mark Stille, *Santa Cruz 1942: Carrier Duel in the South Pacific,* (Osprey, 2012), 14, 32-34.

[147] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Five: The Struggle for Guadalcanal August 1942- February 1943*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 203.

landed in the water all around the *Enterprise*. One pilot ignored Lindsey's wave off signal and landed anyway. The aircraft crashed into the island structure, causing a delay in landing operations. The *Enterprise* lost several airplanes in the water that night, and there was no way for the carrier to replace any of its aircraft before the next day.[148]

Before sunrise at his headquarters in New Caledonia, Halsey went through dispatches and operation charts and sent out three words to TF 61 "Attack Repeat Attack," and as the sun rose at 5:23am, the attack between the carriers was on.[149] Due to heavy losses in previous battles, the carriers' air squadrons were not all organized and designated by the carrier's hull number as in previous battles. New squadrons were trained and independently assigned to carriers. The Hornet launched two separate waves of attacks. The first wave took off at 8:30am, consisting of Bomber and Scouting Squadron Eight (VB-8 and VS-8), Torpedo Squadron Six (VT-6), and lastly Fighting Squadron 72 (VF-72). The second wave took off at 9:15am and consisted of nine scout/ dive bombers, nine torpedo bombers, and seven fighter escorts. The *Hornet's* second wave was a mix of aircraft but was launched to maximize the American air groups' combat power. The *Enterprise* launched her attack groups at 9:00am consisting of Bombing Squadron 10 (VB-10), Torpedo Squadron 10 (VT-10), and Fighting Squadron 10 (VF-10). The American and Japanese almost simultaneously found each other's fleet and even passed each other in the sky.[150]

Upon reaching the Japanese fleet, Zeros attacked the *Enterprise* fighters and torpedo planes. Thomas Nelson was a radio operator in VT-10, a new squadron that had just been

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[148] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

[149] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II Volume Five: The Struggle for Guadalcanal August 1942- February 1943*, (Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 204-207.

[150] NHHC, *Combat Narrative: Solomon Islands Campaign,* (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 38.

assigned to the *Enterprise* nine days before Santa Cruz. While flying toward the Japanese, Nelson remembered he saw a flash out of the corner of his eye and, before he knew it, the *Enterprise* groups were under attack by Zeros. Nelson was firing his machine gun when his plane got hit and the aircraft began to quiver, making its way toward the water. Nelson was already wearing his parachute but he was rather annoyed because he took the time to call for the pilot, only to find out he had already jumped. There were three men inside the Dauntless torpedo planes, and Nelson recalled the third gunner was struggling to put on his parachute. Nelson tried to help the man, but was told, that he needed to bail out now. Nelson reluctantly jumped from the plane, but the third man never made it out.

After bailing out, Nelson explained that he was knocked out by the strings of his parachute and awoke to Zeros flying all around him. Nelson recalled playing dead in the water, with his parachute on top of him, for the entire day. He remembered how the water calmed after the battle was over, and his mind began playing tricks on him. By sunrise the next day, October 27th, Nelson was severely dehydrated, and saw something on the horizon. To Nelson's excitement and dismay, it was a Japanese cruiser. The cruiser picked Nelson out of the water and the Japanese gave him fresh clothes and tea. Nelson recalled that he learned quickly that lying and pretending to give the Japanese vital information was the only way he would live. The Japanese, seemed happy to listen to Nelson's rambling on about how successful the Japanese

attack was at Pearl Harbor. Once satisfied with Nelson's "insightful information," the Japanese locked him away and he remained a POW for the rest of the war.[151]

The rest of the American carrier air squadrons sighted the Japanese fleet, but their attacks to sink any of the Japanese carriers failed. These failures was due to issues in communications between squadrons and poor fighter escort coverage, the 75 planes that were launched by TF 61 failed to achieve successful results. At 10:15am, VT-6 from the *Hornet's* first wave reached the Japanese fleet but sighted only several cruisers and destroyers. Continuing their search finding no better target, VT-6 secured three torpedo hits on the Japanese heavy cruiser, the *Nachi*. VB-8 and VS-8 located the Japanese main force at 10:30am and landed four bomb hits on the carrier *Shokaku*, but did not sink the carrier. Following at 10:40am, the *Enterprise* squadrons spotted the enemy force, but like VT-6 they sighted no carriers. VF-10 and VT-10 attacked and damaged a Japanese battleship, and the search planes (part of the scouting squadrons) attacked and damaged a small Japanese carrier the *Zuiho.* At the same time as the *Enterprise* groups, the second *Hornet* wave located enemy ships, damaging a heavy cruiser, two light cruisers, and a destroyer. The *Hornet* air groups, upon returning to their carrier found that she was under a heavy enemy attack and were redirected to land aboard the *Enterprise.*[152]

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[151] Nelson recalled that the decent treatment he received aboard the Japanese cruiser was very different then when he arrived in Truk and was taken to a POW camp up in the hills of the island. Here Nelson received little food, slept on a dirt floor in a small cell, and was harshly interrogated every day. Eventually Nelson was transported to a POW camp on mainland Japan. Toward the end of the war Nelson experienced first hand the United States fire bombing of Japanese cities. Through the Red Cross Nelson was reunited with his family at the end of the war in September 1945; Thomas C. Nelson, interviewed by Gary D. Rhay, 25 March, 2004, Thomas C. Nelson Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[152] John B. Lundstorm, *The First Team and the Guadalcanal Campaign: Naval Fighter Combat From August to November 1942,* (Naval Institute Press, 1994), 383; NHHC, *Combat Narrative: Solomon Islands Campaign,* (Office of Naval Intelligence, 1943), 39-43.

At Santa Cruz, the *Hornet* experienced one of the worst attacks on any American aircraft carriers in the Pacific. The attack itself was quick, however, the *Hornet* did not sustain only bomb and torpedoes hits as two Japanese aircraft crashed into the carrier, an incident that had not been seen before in carrier warfare. Fear is a natural emotion felt by any sailor in battle. Crews of US carriers had previously learned what to expect in battle. Japanese pilots flying their planes into carries was unexpected and more sailors recalled feeling afraid in battle. Particularly for those abroad the *Hornet* who had not participated in a carrier engagement since Midway, the intense attack to their carrier was similar to experiencing battle for the first time. The *Hornet's* radar picked up incoming Japanese dive and torpedo bombers from the Japanese main carrier force, and at 10:10am, a coordinated attack from several directions commenced.[153] This was the first significant naval engagement for the *Hornet* since her participation in the Battle of Midway. In the eyes of the *Hornet's* crew, their carrier was a special target for the Japanese. Leroy Baird who had been aboard the *Hornet* since the carrier's commissioning, recalled that the ship was not spotted at Midway, and this was the Japanese's chance to take their revenge for the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo.[154]

From his position at gun mount five, Richard Nowatzki recalled looking up only to see an incoming aircraft that was not one of the *Hornet's* planes, but a Japanese dive bomber. Nowatzki detailed that the Japanese dive bomber came in carrying a bomb and blazing its machine guns directly toward Nowatzki. He screamed at the gun captain to fire his gun at the

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[153] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942.

[154] Leroy Baird, interviewed by Jeffrey L. Meek, 31 October, 2011, Leroy Baird Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

incoming plane, and as the gun swung around Nowatzki remembered it saved him from being hit by the bullets. The Japanese dive bomber dropped its bomb, and it landed right next to gun mount five. Nowatzki felt a sharp pain in his right thigh and he was afraid to look down. After hearing many horror stories of war, Nowatzki remembered he feared he had lost his leg. To his relief he saw that there was only a foot long piece of scorched wood from the flight deck stuck in his leg. Compared to the fate of many other seamen manning a gun mount, it was minor. Nowatzki pulled the wood out and continued to fight. About this time, Nowatzki recalled he could see the incoming Japanese torpedo planes. Curby Lee Smith, who manned one the *Hornet's* small machine guns, detailed that he and other crew members had begun to pick up the sequence of the enemy air attacks. He stated he was in quite a daze all day after the first initial attack, and he had to rely on his training of what to expect next. Smith detailed that the first wave of Japanese planes were the fighters, and this was when seaman should expect a shower of bullets aimed to destroy the anti-aircraft guns. The second wave was made up of dive bombers and Smith recalled the attack was always concluded by the Japanese torpedo planes.[155]

At 10:13am, a Japanese dive bomber with three bombs, crashed into the flight deck near the island. The crash demolished the signal bridge and part of the island structure of the carrier. Jospeh Jaggard recalled he had recently been upgraded before the battle and moved from working on the flight deck to working as a telephone and radar operator. Jaggard's position was located behind the bridge, and if it was not for the fact that he was not on watch the day of the battle he would have been among those who were killed by the Japanese dive bombers crash.

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[155] Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Curby Lee Smith, interviewed by Donald O. Patterson, 14 June, 2009, Curby Lee Smith Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Instead, Jaggard recalled he spent the battle fighting fires around the island structure and assisting in carrying injured men on stretchers. The three bombs located on the Japanese plane caused tremendous damage. The first bomb exploded near the single bridge causing the majority of the damage to the island. The second bomb exploded after piercing the flight deck, causing a large fire down below decks in the pilot ready room number two.[156]

Lastly, the third bomb was a dud and landed in the passageway leading to ready room number two. Ronald Veltman, a seaman first-class, recalled his battle station was between the flight deck and hangar deck, near ready room number two. He worked in the intelligence section of the carrier known as the Carrier Intelligence Center. Here the men worked on mission planning and briefing/debriefing the pilot squadrons, which is why the center was located near the ready rooms. Veltman recalled that while at his battle station he heard the announcement "stand by for air attack," and took cover while simultaneously hearing a large explosion on the other side of the bulkhead he was lying next to. Veltman stated, "the door to the ready room flew open and flames were shooting out, and there was a 500 pound bomb on the other side of the compartment, and I was relieved to find that it was a dud." If this bomb had gone off Veltman would have been instantly killed.[157]

Baird recalled having very little time to consider the crash by the Japanese dive bomber. Baird remembered the crash as similar to being hit by a bomb. Baird stated "I really didn't care

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[156] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942; Jospeh F. Jaggard, interviewed by Matthew K. Fash, Jospeh F. Jaggard Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[157] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942; Ronald Veltman, interviewed by Kathy Matras, 1992, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

about it," his main concern was the Japanese torpedo planes.[158] This being the fourth carrier vs carrier battle many sailors, like those abroad the *Hornet*, had come to learn that the real danger to a carrier was the torpedoes. At 10:15am, the Japanese torpedo planes attacked the *Hornet*, landing two torpedo hits on the starboard side. Immediately, several compartments, including the fire rooms and the forward engine room, began to flood. The *Hornet* lost all power and communication, leaving her dead in the water. The ship had an immediate list of ten degrees to starboard, which the crew slowly corrected to seven to eight degrees.[159] Nowatzki at gun mount five recalled he watched the torpedo bombers come in low for their attack, and saw that all the *Hornet's* guns were focused on the torpedo planes because they could do worse damage than the bombers. From his gun mount, Nowatzki noticed the carrier shook like a rag doll and began to list after the torpedoes struck the ship.[160]

At the same time as the torpedo attack, the *Hornet* sustained two bomb hits. One penetrated all the way to the fourth deck where it exploded, and the second exploded upon contact with the flight deck. Although several seamen were killed or injured, the bomb hits went almost unnoticed as they occurred at the same time as the torpedo hits. Lieutenant Claude Morrison, who was the Communications Watch Officer aboard the *Hornet,* recalled that these two bombs disabled the ship's radar, meaning the radar operators could no longer see any of the

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[158] Leroy Baird, interviewed by Jeffrey L. Meek, 31 October, 2011, Leroy Baird Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[159] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942.

[160] Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

incoming aircraft.[161] A third bomb hit the carrier and exploded on the fourth deck. After two torpedoes, three bombs, and one plane crash (carrying two bombs and resulted in an additional two hits) the attack on the *Hornet* was still not over.[162]

At 10:17am, an unarmed torpedo plane made a deliberate dive into the ship and crashed into the forward port gun gallery, starting a large fire in the number one elevator shaft. Japanese pilots intentionally crashing planes into American ships was an entirely new experience for sailors. Japanese suicide planes, the Kamikazes, did not become a routine occurrence until late-1944, during the American landings at Leyte, in the Philippines. However, the two crashes into the *Hornet* are examples of the Japanese using the tactic well before then. The sailors who witnessed the crashes, and the action reports from the *Hornet,* all describe the pilots as intentionally flying into the carrier, insisting that these were not accidental crashes.[163]

Nowatzki detailed that, up until this point, when enemy planes had dropped their bomb/ torpedo, they were no longer a threat, and those operating the guns focused their attention on other threats. However, starting at Santa Cruz this fact proved no longer correct. According to Nowatzki, the reason why the torpedo plane crashed into the *Hornet* was because, it had just dropped its torpedo and missed. Nowatzki and other crewmen concluded that the reason why the pilot dived into the *Hornet* was to make up for his failure. Even those sailors aboard the *Enterprise* witnessed the Japanese suicide planes. Alvin Serpa had his first carrier battle

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[161] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11 Box: 20, *Lt. Claude O Morrison*, 29 April, 1944.

[162] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942.

[163] Ibid; John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945,* (Random House, 1970), 568.

experience at Santa Cruz. Serpa recalled that the suicide planes were the scariest thing he had encountered so far in the war. Serpa's location was on the bridge, the Japanese pilot's primary target. For this reason, Serpa had a whole new reason to feel uneasy during battle, as though bombs and torpedoes were not enough of a threat already. Carrier battles in the Pacific evolved based on knew tactics and technology as well as by what to expect in battle. Sailors in the Pacific only had their experiences from basic training and previous battle experiences to fall back on. When the unexpected occurred sailors had to be quick and ready to react and fix any situation so their carrier could continue on in battle.[164]

The *Enterprise* did not escape the battle without experiencing her own confrontation with the Japanese, although in comparison to the *Hornet,* the attack on the *Enterprise* was light. Lieutenant Lindsey recalled watching the attack of the *Hornet* from the *Enterprise*. Lindsey saw the bomber crash into the signal bridge of the carrier, causing a huge explosion. The last recollection that Lindsey had of the *Hornet* was seeing her dead in the water, but by then he stated that *Enterprise* was "catching our own share of hell." Serpa usually spent his days working with the chief executive officer, updating the ship's war log. However, once battle stations were called, Serpa was in charge with assisting in keeping the detailed account of the battle itself. At Santa Cruz, Serpa remembered he was in the mess hall when battle stations were called, and he only had thirty seconds to run from the mess hall all the way to the bridge on the flight deck.

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[164] Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Alvin Serpa, interviewed by Stephen B. Lacey, 13 March, 2004, Alvin Serpa Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

While he was leaving the mess hall pots and pans were flying everywhere as men manned their battle stations.[165]

At 11:15am, the *Enterprise* was hit by two bombs on the forward part of the ship and several near misses. The first attack ended by 11:25am. Lindsey recalled that the Japanese dive bombers made a very poor attack, as they came in very shallow dives and had poor accuracy. Many of the Japanese pilots were warded off by the *Enterprise's* anti-aircraft guns and did not even try to drop their bombs. Unlike with *Hornet,* the Japanese dive bomber attack failed and none of the dive bombers attempted to crash into the carrier. The first bomb pierced the flight deck twenty feet from the bow end of the carrier. One of the *Enterprise's* aircraft caught fire and was pushed over the side, and a second one was blown over by the blast. Lloyd Howser had been stationed at gun mount four in previous battles, but now he manned one of the gun mounts near the bow. Howser recalled the first bomb went down right behind him, but miraculously, instead of going straight down and exploding, the bomb went through the ship at an angel and passed out through the hull into the water. Howser described that the bomb expelled in front of the *Enterprise*, and the ship moved over the bomb right as it detonated and propelled the ship straight up.[166]

The second bomb hit the flight deck ten feet behind the forward elevator, causing a large explosion in the hangar deck with many casualties. In the *Enterprise* action report, there is a

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[165] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943; Alvin Serpa, interviewed by Stephen B. Lacey, 13 March, 2004, Alvin Serpa Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[166] NARA RG38, World War Two War Diaries, Box: 841, *USS Enterprise: For Period December 1941-March 1942;* NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943; Lloyd Howser, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 28 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

discrepancy about whether the second bomb broke into two sections when it crashed into the hangar deck because there were two separate holes.[167] But according to Marvin Johnston, an electrician mate assigned to repair party two, confirmed that the second bomb did break in two, the bomb had skipped through the forward elevator, breaking into two. He was in a compartment right below the hangar deck, and half of the bomb exploded in the same compartment as him. There were around 50 men in repair two, and only three made it out alive. Johnston and another young seaman were in the officers' quarters which protected them from the blast. However, a bomb piece did wound Johnston in the knee, leaving a three to four inch rip where it went through.[168]

During battle, those aboard the carriers had to not only work quickly to repair the ship, but they also had to be adaptive to continue to fight. Robert Hamlin's battle station at Santa Cruz was at the ammunition hoist, just outside of the warrant officers' mess room. The hoist was used to send the ammunition for the five-inch guns from the armory room, up to the hangar deck, where Hamlin would transfer it off the hoist and onto another hoist to send it up to the flight deck. Hamlin explained that the hoists were staggered, so if the *Enterprise* was hit, one hoist would not fall all the way down into the armory room. When the first bomb hit the hoist on the hangar deck, it was knocked out by the blast. Hamlin described how he and the other men in his

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[167] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: The Battle of Santa Cruz, October 26, 1942,* 10 November, 1942.

[168] Marvin Johnston, interviewed by Ralph Ingram, 16 June, 1988, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

group had to adapt and began to manually walk the ammunition across the hanger deck and up a ladder to the flight deck to continue arming the five-inch guns.[169]

Losing a carrier was a huge blow to either side's offensive, however the sinking of a carrier often led to the salvaging operations of the sinking carrier's planes to be overlooked. As the conditions of the *Hornet* worsened, the prime concern of the *Enterprise* was the recovering the *Hornet's* aircraft. Preserving as many aircraft as possible was critical when a carrier was in fear of being lost. The action report of the *Enterprise* detailed how the carrier landed planes indiscriminately from both carriers until the deck could hold no more.[170] Lindsey as the signal officer of the *Enterprise* was the key player in saving the *Hornets* incoming squadrons, and his perspectives gives us an insider's view into the recovery that the action report omitted.

Lindsey described the *Enterprise's* hangar deck was filled; he was parking planes clear to the back barriers and was given permission to continue to land planes. The *Enterprise* having aircraft all the way to the barriers, Lindsey explained, meant there was no way to stop a crash from poor landings on the pilot's part or poor signals on his, which could have led to considerable damage. Lindsey recalled he received instructions to put up the red flag, signaling that no more aircraft could be landed; however, like the night before Lindsey could not see any good reason to not continue to take a chance and land aircraft. After landing six more planes, Lindsey recalled crew members were screaming at him "that's all, knock it off brother!," but he continued to land aircraft. Lindsey later admitted his actions were stupid and he endangered

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[169] Robert Hamlin, interviewed by Ed Metzler and Kathy Matras, September 21, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[170] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 967, *USS Enterprise: The Battle of Santa Cruz, October 26, 1942,* 10 November, 1942.

many men by disobeying orders. If one plane had missed the landing wire it would have shot straight to into the elevator. However, the Air Officer and others were quite impressed with Lindsey's skill. The Air Officer even said, "leave the kid alone he's hot!" Lindsey landed fourteen more planes on the number one and two wires without damage, before the *Enterprise* turned out of the wind and it was no longer possible to land aircraft. But at that point, due to Lindsey there was no more room anyway![171]

Back on the *Hornet,* the USS *Northampton,* a heavy cruiser, came into position to tow the carrier. At 12:24pm, Admiral Murray transferred his flag to the heavy cruiser *Pensacola*. The call for abandoning ship had not yet been given and the crews worked to attach tow lines from the *Hornet* to the *Northampton,* and moving all seriously injured men to the destroyers of TF 17. A second wave of trouble came for the *Hornet* at 4:23pm when a second group of Japanese torpedo bombers attacked. The *Northampton* was able to outmaneuver the Japanese, but the *Hornet* received a third torpedo hit on the starboard side and the carrier reached a 14 and a half degree list. Orders were given to be ready for the call to abandon ship.[172]

The crew of the *Hornet* demonstrated relentless determination to continue to fight and to save their ship. After many hits, even sailors with severe injuries refused to leave their battle stations, and others risked their lives putting out the fires. The chaplain of the *Hornet* summarized the scene and stated that there weren't a few outstanding heroes, but it was the entire

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[171] NARA RG38, World War II Oral Histories and Interviews 1942-1946, Entry 11, Box: 17, *Lieutenant Robin Merton Lindsey, USN Aircraft Carrier Enterprise in Southwest Pacific,* 17 September, 1943.

[172] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942.

ship's company expressing a heroic spirit.[173] The spirit of the crew did not waiver and carried on when the official order was given to abandon ship. Jaggard was in doubt that the *Hornet* should even be abandoned and recalled that nobody aboard the carrier wanted to leave.[174] However, orders were given for all personnel except for the Gunnery Control Group, navigator, and the tactical officer to abandon ship shortly after the third torpedo hit.[175]

Men like Nowatzki, who was part of the gun crew, could not immediately abandon ship. Nowatzki had never truly believed in God, and as many men prayed to God to get them through, he did not think his prayers would hold any power. He believed God would know he was not a believer. However, in the thick of battle, while lying on the deck, Nowatzki thought to himself, "if there is really a power that controls these things, just get me out of here alive, just this one battle." He recalled asking for a sign to know his message had been heard, and no sooner had he had this thought that a fellow sailor came and tapped him on the shoulder. The sailor was severely injured and explained to Nowatzki that he had a letter that he hoped would make it back home to his mother and asked Nowatzki if he would be the one to deliver it. Nowatzki took the sailor's letter as his sign from God that he had to make it out alive. When the rest of the *Hornet's* personnel was called to abandon ship, Nowatzki made it off the *Hornet* alive and, for the rest of the war, never asked for another favor.[176]

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[173] Robert H. Freeman, *Requiem for a Fleet: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal August 1942-February 1943,* (Shellback Press, 1984), 87.

[174] Jospeh F. Jaggard, interviewed by Matthew K. Fash, Jospeh F. Jaggard Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[175] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *Report of Action, October 26, 1942, and Subsequent Loss of U.S.S. Hornet (Battle of Santa Cruz Islands),* 30 October, 1942.

[176] Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

At proximally 4:50pm, the ship was abandoned off the port side, due to an 18 degree list to starboard. Destroyers from TF 17 began picking up survivors.[177] Smith, who was also one of the last men off the *Hornet,* recalled that once he had made it in the water he began to get nervous that he would have to spend the night there. Smith explained he had put himself in a predicament by removing his shoes before getting in the water, between his white socks and light skin sharks kept circling around him because he practically shined in the water. Smith said he struggled to swim and stay above the surface, and like many survivors before him, he kept ingesting salt water and oil. To his relief, Smith was eventually picked up by the destroyer *Anderson* before nightfall. While abroad the, *Anderson* Smith had to walk barefoot on the ship's hot metal deck, and he did not get to shower for twelve days.[178]

An experience that was not new knowledge to sailors and unmentioned by survivors of previous battles, many sailor's from the *Hornet* at Santa Cruz provided detailed accounts of the shock waves felt while floating in the ocean. After safely entering the water, Veltman floated with one of the friends he made aboard the ship. Veltman recalled explaining to his friend that it was important to float horizontally in the water, not vertically. Veltman described that when a bomb was dropped in the water or if the sinking ship had internal explosions, it would send vertical shock waves through the water. If a sailor floated in a vertical position, these shock waves would force water up a man's rectum and through his intestines, Veltman recalled that this had been one of the more prominent points he and other sailors had learned in training camp.

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[177] NARA RG38, WWII Command Files Individual Ships, Entry UD-09D 19, Box: 486A, *Hornet Quartermaster's Notebook*.

[178] Curby Lee Smith, interviewed by Donald O. Patterson, 14 June, 2009, Curby Lee Smith Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Nowatzki recalled he and a fellow sailor from gun mount five were floating together away from the *Hornet* when an explosion from the carrier sent shock waves through the water. Nowatzki explained that the ocean had huge swells that day, and he was on the low end of one of the swells, so he could not see the carrier. When the shock waves hit Nowatzki and his fellow crew mate, they were caught by surprise. It felt like a firm and painful squeeze that lasted for maybe two seconds. He recalled it had been enough to give him lasting damage to his back for years to come.[179]

Albert Dimminger described that even after he made it aboard the destroyer *Russell*, the fighting and death still did not cease. Dimminger recalled that he had no sooner made it aboard the destroyer when Japanese aircraft flew overhead strafing those on deck. Dimminger watched as a chief petty officer of his gun division was shot in the buttocks and died right in front of him. The destroyers were packed full of men, and it made for extremely uncomfortable sleeping quarters, which was especially inconvenient for survivors of the *Hornet* who were exhausted from the battle. Dimminger recalled he slept underneath one of the Russell's gun mounts. It was a rainy night and it was cold between the wind and the rain. Dimminger eventually moved to the engine room and slept on a grate, and although still uncomfortable, it was much warmer.[180]

That night, at around 7:05pm, the destroyers *Mustin* and *Anderson* returned to the *Hornet* to sink her. The previous attempt by the USS *Northampton* to attach a tow-line to the carrier had been unsuccessful. The amount of damage sustained to the *Hornet* was excessive and the fact

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[179] Ronald Veltman, interviewed by Kathy Matras, 1992, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Richard J. Nowatski, interviewed by Marilyn A. Pahr and Nancy Sandborn, 14 January, 2019, Richard J. Nowatski Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[180] Albert Dimminger, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 5 July, 2006, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

that the carrier had not sunk by the evening of the 25th was impressive. However, to keep the ship from falling into the hands of the Japanese, nine torpedoes were launched into the port side of the *Hornet*. Not all of the torpedoes detonated and additional rounds from the five-inch gun mounts aboard the destroyers were also fired onto the ship. At 9:40pm, the *Hornet* was burning and slowly sinking into the ocean, taking approximately 140 of her crew down with her.[181]

The Battle of Santa Cruz was a tactical victory for the Japanese, having come out of the battle with two intact aircraft carriers. The Japanese lost 99 of 202 carrier aircraft and a large number of the nation's most experienced pilots, while the *Enterprise* emerged from the battle with an almost fully intact air group. The Japanese would only be able to muster half of their normal air groups for their carriers. In addition, in the perspective of the larger Guadalcanal campaign, the Japanese failed to exploit their carrier advantage. Admiral Yamamoto's plans lacked arrangements to exploit success. The Japanese fleet withdrew to its base at Truk and failed to fuel the fleet and set objectives. Instead, memorial services were held for the dead. The aftermath of the Battle of Santa Cruz was a prime time for the Japanese to sever the communication lines between the United States and Australia (as was their goal before Midway), but they failed to do so. The Japanese ultimately fell into a war of attrition on Guadalcanal, which ended in their defeat in February 1943.[182]

The loss of the *Hornet* had a unique effect on her crew. It would be thought that, like the sailors aboard the *Lexington* and *Yorktown*, those aboard the *Hornet* would have been

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[181] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1038, *USS Hornet: War Damage Report,* 8 July, 1943.

[182] Robert C. Stern, *Knife's Edge: South Pacific Carrier Battles From the Eastern Solomons to Santa Cruz,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 272-274; John Prados, *Islands of Destiny: The Solomons Campaign and the Eclipse of the Rising Sun,* (Penguin, 2012), 161-163.

disappointed by the loss of their carrier and, by extension, developed more negative views of the war. However, this was not the case. The difference with the *Hornet's* crew was a combination of their experiences leading up to the Battle of Santa Cruz and what they did afterward. The *Hornet* had witnessed the success and potential of the American carriers during the Raid on Tokyo and at Midway. Additionally, when the *Enterprise* was undergoing repairs after the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, the *Hornet* served as the only carrier providing protection in the Pacific. The pre-Santa Cruz experiences alone had already created a high sense of morale that was not easily broken. The biggest factor, however, was that the majority of those aboard the *Hornet* were reassigned to another carrier, giving them the opportunity to avenge the loss of their ship. Many of the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* sailors did not see another carrier battle, which solidified their more sobering views of the war. W.W. Norberg, who had been a sailor aboard the *Hornet* and was assigned to the *Enterprise* after the Battle of Santa Cruz, stated that he was glad he was given the opportunity to rejoin the fight and carry on the legacy of a second carrier.[183]

Nimitz and the US Pacific carriers were in a precarious position for a second time. The sinking of the *Hornet,* and the fact that the *Saratoga* would not return to the South Pacific until early November 1942, left the *Enterprise* as the only US carrier in the Pacific. As a result, the *Enterprise* was not docked for a full repair for over six months after the Battle of Santa Cruz. Instead, Nimitz had the carrier's damage addressed by a repair vessel USS *Vestal*. Robert Hamlin explained that the Japanese believed they had sunk the *Enterprise,* however, this was clearly not the case and even after sustaining severe damage in battle the carrier continued to support the American naval operations in the South Pacific. For this reason, the *Enterprise* crew called their

[183] W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

carrier the "Galloping Ghost." American sailors held superstitions about the *Enterprise* following Santa Cruz. Alvin Serpa recalled when speaking with other carrier crews, "nobody wanted to operate with the Enterprise, because two other carriers were sunk while in operation with her."[184]

The crew of the *Enterprise* was well informed of the American carrier situation in the Pacific. Roger Goff recalled that "we were losing carriers faster than we were building them." This was especially true in the first half of the war. The United States' building and commissioning of the new Essex class carriers in 1943 would save the Navy in the eyes of many of the sailors. Starting in 1943, the United States received a major new wave of aircraft carries in the Pacific. Six new carriers were commissioned in 1943, and seven more followed in 1944. The arrival of the new carries shifted the balance of naval power in the Pacific and led to the development of a Task Force 58 that would be commanded by Admiral Marc Mitscher.[185]

The *Enterprise* still remained a fighting symbol for the United States Navy. A Navy Department press release that came out the Friday following Santa Cruz boasted "the 'Big E' is still on the loose." The release went on to discuss the *Enterprise's* victories throughout the Pacific. The biggest highlight of the release stated "The 'Big E' was out again in two weeks. She was put to seas to help repel another major Japanese attempt to recapture Guadalcanal while squadrons of 'seabees' were still abroad repairing the damage she suffered at Santa Cruz." The *Enterprise* was seen as a force to be reckoned with. Lawrence Warren believed that it was the

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[184] Robert C. Stern, *Knife's Edge: South Pacific Carrier Battles From the Eastern Solomons to Santa Cruz,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 275-276; Robert Hamlin, interviewed by Ed Metzler and Kathy Matras, September 21, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Alvin Serpa, interviewed by Stephen B. Lacey, 13 March, 2004, Alvin Serpa Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

[185] Roger Goff, interviewed by Peg Van Meter, 11 May, 2002, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Andrew Faltum, *The Essex Aircraft Carriers,* (The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1996), 28-29.

strong morale of her crew that kept the *Enterprise* from sinking. Warren believed the teamwork to maneuver the ship when under attack and the crew's abilities to quickly contain and repair damages kept the *Enterprise* from sinking. The *Enterprise* would come to hold a unique spot in the history of aircraft carriers in the Pacific. She would become the first aircraft carrier to win the Presidential Unit Citation for her service period between December 7, 1941- November 15, 1942. At the end of the war the *Enterprise* was the most decorated warship in the history of the United States Navy, carrying on a legacy as a carrier built, crewed, and trained as a fighting force against the Japanese.[186]

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[186] NARA RG38, WWII Command Files Individual Ships, Entry UD-09D 19, Box: 480, *Enterprise Press* Release; Lawrence Warren, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 17 April, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; NARA RG38, WWII Command Files Individual Ships Enterprise, Entry UD-09D 19, Box: 480, *Enterprise CV-6 History;* Edward P. Stafford, *The Big E: The Story of the USS Enterprise,* (Naval Institute Press, 1988), 539.

4. Above the Fleet: US Navy Pilots in the Battle of the Philippine Sea

Victory had been won on the first day of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, June 19, 1944. Lieutenant Alexander Vraciu was in the ready room of the USS *Lexington* (CV-16), after Task Force 58 endured repeated attacks by the Japanese fleet's air arm and managed to repel them all. The ready rooms and wardrooms were buzzing with fighter pilots' recounting the day's attacks. Vraciu was listening to one of his squadron buddies named, Zeigel Neff, nicknamed "Ziggy," telling a story about his hunting experience back in Missouri, and how the American fighter pilots' interception of the Japanese planes "had been just like an old-time turkey shoot." Vraciu did not give much thought to Ziggy's comparison. However, the Lieutenant Commander Paul Bowie of VF-16, overheard the story and shared it with the intelligence officers who were trying to compile the total scores of the day among all the excitement.[187] It was at this moment that the greatest naval-air battle in history earned the nickname the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot."[188]

Leading Up to the Battle

After the Battle of Santa Cruz, in October 1942, over a year and a half passed before the United States and Japan engaged in another carrier battle. During the lull, the United States Navy made many changes to the American fleet and its carriers. First, the United States Navy commissioned the new Essex class aircraft carriers. Second, US carrier doctrine was again reevaluated and led to the formation of Task Force 58. The Essex class carriers and the formation

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[187] Like all other squadron designations fighter squadrons began with the letter "V" followed by "F," the designation for fighter. VF was then followed by the carrier's hull number. In this case VF-16 was the fighter squadron of the USS *Lexington* (CV-16). The Layout of the different type of carrier squadrons and their designations was discussed on pages 31-32 in chapter two "Carrier Crews in Crisis: USS *Lexington* (CV-2) and the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) from Coral Sea to Midway."

[188] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Barrett Tillman, *Clash of the Carriers: The True Story of the Marians Turkey Shoot of World War II,* (NAL Caliber, 2005), 194-196.

of TF 58, marked the start of the American naval supremacy in the Pacific, being made up of sixteen heavy and light aircraft carriers.

In 1940, prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War, the United States Navy called for the rapid expansion of its naval forces. The USS *Essex* (CV-9) was the first of the Essex class carriers to be ordered, and it became clear due to the events in Europe and Asia in 1940, that many more would be needed. The "Two Ocean Navy" Act of June 1940 called for three more Essex carriers, CVs 10-12, to be built. As World War Two in Europe progressed, the American Navy's call for carriers extended to include CVs 13-19 in May 1940, and CVs 20-21 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. By August 1942, construction of the first thirteen carriers had been completed (but not yet commissioned and sent to the Pacific) and under the second war program that same August, the navy ordered ten more carriers (CVs 31-40). By June 1943, under the Fiscal Year 1944 program, the navy ordered three more Essex carries CVs 45-47. Out of the twenty-six carriers that were requested by Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, and approved by congress, twenty-four were completed. The lead ship in the class, the *Essex,* arrived in the Pacific in May 1943, the rest following in the subsequent months.[189]

The new carriers came with their own sets of challenges. The Essex class carriers were designed to carry more aircraft than the previous carriers, in part thanks to the development of folding wings on new aircraft. As the number of aircraft carriers and aircraft produced by the United States rose, the Navy needed a system to properly maintain the Pacific Fleet's growing air power. The Naval Aviation Technical Training Command (NATTC) was essential in the Navy's efforts to efficiently supply and maintain the Pacific Fleet's air power. The NATTC was rapidly

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[189] Andrew Faltum, *The Essex Aircraft Carriers,* (The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1996), 26-27.

developed due to the growing Pacific Fleet and tasked with supplying a steady stream of trained maintainers. One-third of enlisted personnel on the new carriers were there to support air operations. Managing a labor force of this size, while navigating the challenges of a new carrier environment was difficult. Carrier commanders found the most efficient way to accomplish this task was to divide labor. On the first American carrier, the Lexington and Yorktown classes, the ship operations were separated from the aviation operations. However, in 1943 aboard the Essex class carries the air department, which conducted the aviation operations became its own special unit, divided into five smaller subcategories (the subcategories were V 1-5). Of the new subcategories V-3, the maintenance division was one of the most important. V-3 conducted their work at night inspecting, repairing, and readying the carrier's aircraft for the next day's operations.[190]

As the United States Navy was growing in strength, Japan looked for ways to quickly build up its carrier air power. On June 30, 1942, Chief of Staff Nagumo signed Navy Secret Document No. 191, authorizing twenty new carriers. Because of a lag in Japanese carrier construction programs, only one Japanese carrier would be completed by 1944. Through military intelligence and the monitoring of US industrial production capacity, Japan's naval staff knew the United States was bound to have several Essex class ships in its service. The only practical step for Nagumo was to authorize more Japanese ships to be converted into aircraft carriers. Several groups of ships were set to begin conversion in 1943. The fast seaplane tenders *Chitose* and *Chiyoda* (CVL's), three liners the *Argentina Maru*, *Brazil Maru*, and the former German ship *Scharnhorst,* were removed from transport service and converted into escort carriers (CVEs).

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[190] Stan Fisher, *Sustaining the Carrier War: The Development of U.S. Naval Air Power to the Pacific,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 112-152.

Battleships *Isa* and *Hyuga* were also converted to carriers. Counting newly authorized fleet carriers and conversions, the Japanese post-Midway building program totaled 33 ships. However, Japan lacked the resources to carry out the program, and through 1942 into the first half of 1943, only one fleet carrier, the *Taiho,* and the converted CVLs *Ryuho*, *Chitose*, and *Chiyoda* were completed.[191]

Japan's 1943 plan was to build as many planes and train as many ground and air crews as possible. A critical problem for Japan was training enough pilots to man the carrier aircraft. A short-term solution was to reduce pilot training programs by cutting the two-month basic education course before flight training. The Japanese began the war with a group of highly skilled and intensively trained pilots. Early in the war flight training for Japanese pilots was two or three years. Japanese leaders valued the quality of their pilots over the quantity. Training for non-specialist mechanics was reduced to five months, allowing just enough time for new enlistees to learn basic tasks like fueling aircraft and changing spark plugs. The reduction in training programs resulted in poorly skilled and inexperienced pilots and mechanics. To achieve maximum production, Japan continued producing the proven Zeros (fighter), Vals (dive bomber), and Kate (torpedo bomber), with little to no change in design.[192]

At the beginning of the war, Japan had clear superiority over the United States in pilot training. However, the United States Naval pilot training program, based on the Aviation Cadet system introduced in the 1930s, was expanded to supply adequate numbers of pilots. Preflight

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[191] James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces During World War II*, (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 175.

[192] Craig Symonds, *The Battle of Midway,* (Oxford, 2011), 41-42; James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces During World War II*, (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 176.

centers with a capacity of 9,350 trainees and many new primary and basic flying schools were added. Typical cadets went through primary training, then intermediate training, and finally advanced flight school at Pensacola, Florida, or Corpus Christi, Texas, finishing with carrier qualification. In comparison, Japan's naval flying training program was too slow to realize the enormous demand for pilots and did not expand its training facilities. When the full impact of the losses of pilots during the Guadalcanal Campaign began to be felt, it was too late. All the staff could do was hastily recruit new pilots and overload existing facilities. By mid-1943, Japan was short of both pilots and technicians, clearly having lost the "training war."[193]

The growing strength of the United States Pacific Fleet was a major reason why the Central Pacific offensive became possible. The time from the winter through summer of 1943 marked a lull in the Pacific War, and Admirals King and Nimitz used this time to refine the strategic plan for the next series of campaigns against the Japanese after the American success in the Solomons. A strategic meeting of the Allied forces in Washington, D.C. called the Trident Conference, met in May 1943. During this conference, the U.S Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a key planning document, "Strategic Plan for the Defeat of Japan." The plan concluded that the defeat of Japan would be brought about by a blockade of the Japanese Home Islands, aerial bombardment of Japan's industrial capacity, and finally an invasion. This plan was made possible by what is known today as the "island hopping campaign."[194] Both General MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific Area and Nimitz in the Central Pacific advanced toward Mindanao the

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[193] Ibid, 178-179.

[194] E.B. Potter, *Nimitz,* (Naval Institute Press, 1976), 240-241.

southernmost island of the Philippines. Both Nimitz's and MacArthur's drives would correlate in a two-pronged island-hopping advance toward Japan.[195]

Now it was up to Nimitz and King to decide where to strike first in the Central Pacific.[196] The Central Pacific drive needed to be spearheaded and supported by carrier-based air power, which allowed the United States to effectively "leap" across the Pacific, thus by-passing strong enemy positions. The strategy also required the Japanese to defend each position attacked by the Navy. This effectively spread the Japanese fleet across the Pacific while it was already weakened from its losses during the Solomons campaign and its pivotable air and sea battles. On November 20th, 1943, during Operation GALVANIC, American forces invaded the Gilbert Islands. This operation marked the beginning of Nimitz's island-hopping campaign and was a high stakes gamble for both the course of the war and American carrier operations in the Pacific. Because it was the first major amphibious assault in the Central Pacific, the operation tested new tactics against fortified Japanese bases. During GALVANIC, the new Essex class carriers spearheaded out not only the new strategy for the Pacific, but also implemented radical changes in carrier doctrine.[197]

On June 10, 1943, what was known as PAC-10 was adopted as the new doctrine for the Pacific Fleet. In carrier operations, it emphasized flexibility and demanded the concentration of

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[195] General MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific Area controlled the majority of land based air forces. Admiral Nimitz in the Central Pacific controlled the majority of naval forces, including all the aircraft carriers and battleships; John T. Kuehn, *Strategy in Crisis: The Pacific War, 1937-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 2023), 92.

[196] The Central Pacific was the shortest route to Japan and was a core piece of the pre-war ORANGE plans. The geography of the central Pacific favored the United States in relative distance, force deployments, and sequence of operations; Edward S. Miller, *War Plan ORANGE: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 1991), 187.

[197] Ibid, 241-243; Trent Hone, *Mastering the Art of Command: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and Victory in the Pacific,* (Naval Institute Press, 2022), 209-212.

carriers and its supporting screens in one force of multiple subordinate task forces. Unlike the multi-carrier task forces of the 1942 carrier battles, PAC-10 allowed commanders to decide whether to separate or remain concentrated for naval operations. The concept of flexibility was a large part of the future formation of Task Force 58. The flexibility in PAC-10 improved communications between carriers, leading to more decisive actions in battle. Lastly, PAC-10 moved carriers beyond serving in "duty" roles when supporting amphibious landings and instead maximized the use of the carriers' total air support in amphibious attacks. The rapid increase in carriers in the Pacific included the new Independence class light carriers (CVL) and escort carriers (CVE), which were comprised of several different classes. In the new fleet doctrine, the escort carriers provided full-time air support in amphibious operations, which allowed the Essex class carriers to focus on preparing objectives to push further into Japanese territory. The United States Navy formed Task Force 50, under the command of Admiral Charles A. Pownall in August 1943. TF 50 provided critical air support during Operation GALVANIC and proved the flexibility of the new carrier doctrine to be widely successful.[198]

To consolidate the rapidly growing carrier strength of the Pacific Fleet and employ lessons learned from GALVANIC, Nimitz reorganized TF 50 into Task Force 58, the Fast Carrier Task Force in November 1943. Whereas TF 50 provided direct support to amphibious operations, TF 58's primary mission was to serve as an offensive force across the Pacific. TF 58 followed PAC-10 doctrine and was divided into several task groups (TG). Predominantly, TF 58 had four task groups that mutually supported one another, or the individual TGs were dispatched to execute separate operations. TF 58's four TGs were 58.1, 58.2, 58.3, 58.4. Nimitz and King

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[198] Clark Reynolds, *The Fast Carriers: Forging of an Air Navy,* (Naval Institute Press, 1968), 72-75, 80-82.

selected Admiral Marc Mitscher to lead the Fast Carrier Task Force. Mitscher was chosen due to his work in integrating the Army, Navy, Marine, and New Zealand air units into one cohesive unit in Guadalcanal, and (to Mitscher's fortune) his immediate availability. He was also one of the most senior aviators in the Navy and had commanded the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) during the Doolittle Raid and Midway, which further demonstrated that Mitscher had extensive experience beyond his work on Guadalcanal. Mitscher deployed TF 58, designated missions, and set the policies for the TG commanders. The commanders under Mitscher were Rear Admiral John Reeves (58.1), Rear Admiral Alfred Montgomery (58.2), Rear Admiral Ted Sherman (58.3), and Rear Admiral Samuel Ginder (58.4). Mitscher answered to Admiral Spruance, who directed the entire fleet in accordance with the Central Pacific strategy. Spruance's orders, meanwhile, came straight from Nimitz.[199]

The aircraft carriers for the entirety of the war remained the main target for attacking enemy air groups. As a result, many of the sailors aboard the carries came to view themselves personally as a target of the Japanese. During the previous four carrier battles the United States was either fighting a superior Japanese fleet (Coral Sea and Midway) or was battling Japanese forces on a near equal playing field (Eastern Solomons and Santa Cruz). However, as the Pacific Fleet became stronger with the arrival of new ships, the Navy did not lose another carrier in the Pacific for the duration of the war.[200]

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[199] Evan Mawdsley, *Supremacy at Sea: Task Force 58 and the Central Pacific Victory,* (Yale University Press, 2024), 5-29; Theodore Taylor, *The Magnificent Mitscher,* (W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1954), 169-173.

[200] This does not include the sinking of the Independence class carrier USS *Princeton* (CVL-23), at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The battle of Leyte Gulf will not be discussed in this thesis.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea, on June 19-20, 1944, was not only the last carrier vs carrier battle of World War Two, but also the largest carrier engagement in the Pacific. By the end of the battle, the Japanese navy suffered a catastrophic defeat losing three carriers and hundreds of irreplaceable pilots and aircraft. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was a part of a larger naval campaign known as the Mariana Islands Campaign. Securing the Mariana Islands was an important part of Admiral King and Nimitz's drive through the Central Pacific. If the United States controlled the Marianas, specifically Saipan, Guam, and Tinian, the American control of the air and sea around the islands could be used effectively to server trade in the Sea of Japan. Most importantly, the United States would have a forward staging spot that would allow it to jump directly toward Japan's mainland.[201]

Robert de Jong, a sailor aboard the USS *Lexington* (CV-16), described the Battle of the Philippine Sea as completely different from all the other carrier battles, because almost no Japanese planes made it through the American defensive screen.[202] The burden and heavy action of the battle was left to the pilots and, for this reason, the battle must be viewed almost entirely from their perspective. A pilot and sailor are both attached to a carrier; however, their perspective of the battle is radically different. A sailor is tied to his carrier, and the only enemy action he witnessed is what he could see from his ship. In most cases, we only see the action if the carrier is attacked. The pilots, however, were the ones who carried out the main action of the battle. Since little to no damage was done to TF 58 during the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the present

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[201] Phillips Payson O'Brien, *How the War Was Won,* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 392.

[202] Robert de Jong, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 15 April, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

analysis of the battle will be centered on the planes and their pilots, rather than the scenes taking place on the carriers.

TF 58 had 15 aircraft carries, making it difficult to convey the experiences of each carrier's air group.[203] This chapter specifically focuses on the new USS *Lexington* (CV-16) and USS *Bunker Hill* (CV-17). Just like sailors, pilots also had training and early experiences that they built upon as they progressed through the war. It was inconsistent whether the crew of a carrier had seen battle; however, at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, most pilots had some level of prior combat experience. Lieutenant Thomas DuPree began his journey as a pilot aboard the old *Wasp* (CV-7) in its bombing squadron. DuPree recalled that while he was in Norfolk waiting for the *Wasp* to arrive in port in 1941, he enrolled in an advanced carrier training group. In this group, DuPree practiced dive-bombing maneuvers and, most importantly, learned to land and take off from a carrier. DuPree recalled that landing aboard a carrier was rather intimidating, and he was always pretty scared until he got the hang of it. Pilots first practiced landing with a signal officer on land, then once a pilot was deemed ready, he would take off from a carrier. DuPree explained that he did two practice approaches on his first carrier takeoff and on the third he landed. The most prevalent memory he had of his first carrier landing was how quickly the event happened. At one moment he was approaching and then he was on the deck of the carrier. After the sinking of the *Wasp* at the Battle of Santa Cruz, DuPree transitioned from dive-bombers to fighters and was assigned to the new *Lexington*.[204]

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[203] TF 58's specific break down: six Essex class carries, one Yorktown class carrier, and eight lights carriers (CVL); Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 412-414.

[204] Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Norman Sterrie also started out the war as a dive-bomber pilot. Sterrie was part of VB-2 aboard the original *Lexington* at the Battle of the Coral Sea, and took part in damaging the Japanese carrier *Shokaku*. Sterrie explained that many people did not realize that there is not a lot of excitement that comes out of hitting enemy ships. Sterrie stated: "who knows who hit what because you dropped your bomb and got the hell out of there." The acknowledgement of who achieved a hit was more for publication in press released to the public by the Navy. After the Battle of the Coral Sea, Sterrie did not see another carrier battle until the Philippine Sea. After the *Lexington* was sunk in 1942, Sterrie spent the time between 1942-1944 serving in air groups in New Caledonia in support of operations in the Solomons. When the new Essex class carrier was commissioned in the Pacific, Sterrie and other pilots in New Caledonia were reassigned to the new *Lexington* (CV-16) in VT-16. Sterrie recalled he felt a sense of pride being able to fly in the new *Lexington's* air group, especially since the ship was given the name out of respect for the original carrier lost in the Coral Sea.[205]

The manufacturing ability to produce new and improved technology by the United States had positive influences on every man's experience in the Pacific War. While sailors were impressed by the new Essex carrier, pilots like Sterrie noticed a clear improvement in the American combat aircraft. As new carriers were brought to the Pacific from 1943-1944, air squadrons received the new Navy aircraft. Sterrie recalled that the new Grumman Hellcat fighter planes were much faster than the older Grumman Wildcat. Apart from the planes' general faster speeds, the Hellcat was able to climb in altitude quicker, had more firepower, and stronger armor protection. The strengths of the Hellcat gave the US pilots advantages in speed and diving

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[205] Norman Sterrie, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 20 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

capabilities compared to the Japanese fighter aircraft. The fighter planes were not the only aircraft to be improved. The Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber, which had similar deficiencies in speed to the Wildcat, was replaced by the Curtiss SB2C Helldiver. The Navy had hoped the Helldiver would be ready in December 1941, before the war. The Curtiss outshone the Douglas, being able to carry twice the bomb load, fly at faster speeds, and reach longer ranges. The combination of the new Essex class carriers and the new Hellcat and Helldiver aircraft in 1943, lifted the spirits of the United States naval personnel. Sterrie recalled he felt more confident when flying in the new Hellcat fighters. Historians note that new naval technology in 1943 further enhanced the United States' superiority over Japan. But how the technology gave sailors and pilots a boost of confidence and a sense that the United States could be victorious over Japan has not been included in historical narratives.[206]

The first time pilots in TF 58 saw action together was during Operation FLINTLOCK. FLINTLOCK was the United States' invasion of the Marshall Islands on January 31, 1944, and the operation was successful by taking the Kwajalein Atoll. The operation was quick and only lasted from January through February 1944. Successfully securing the Marshall Islands enabled the acceleration of Nimitz's Central Pacific advance. Nimitz and TF 58 moved the United States' offensive toward the Mariana Islands. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was a result of the US invasion of the Marianas during Operation FORAGER when the United States planned to

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[206] Ibid; Captain Eric Brown, *Wings of the Navy: Flying Allied Carrier Aircraft of World War Two,* (Janes Publishing Incorporated, 1980), 167-165; Barrett Tillman, *The Dauntless Dive Bomber of World War Two,* (Naval Institute Press, 1976) 11.

capture the islands of Saipan, Tinin, and Guam. Operation Forager began on July 15, 1944, with the opening of the assault on Saipan.[207]

The forces for the D-Day landing in the Marianas were broken into two attack forces, attacking as near-simultaneous assaults on Saipan and Guam. TF 58's main mission was to attack and destroy enemy ships, planes, troops, and protect the invasion forces. When Admiral Ozawa (who had replaced Admiral Nagumo shortly after the Battle of Santa Cruz) received the first reports of TF 58's strikes on the Marianas, he waited for a report of the estimated location and objectives of the American fleet. The defense of Saipan was of high importance to the Japanese. If Saipan were to fall to the United States, mainland Japan would be subject to attacks from American long-range bombers. After confirmation that the Americans had invaded Saipan and of the fleets' general location, the Japanese Mobile Fleet located in Tawi Tawi, the southwestern tip of the Philippines, raised the anchor of the Mobile Fleet and headed for TF 58.[208]

Day One: June 19th, 1944

The Battle of the Philippine Sea was a two-day battle from June 19 to June 20, 1944. Due to depleted naval strength, the Japanese pre-war plan, where they had the choice of where to fight a decisive battle against the United States Fleet, was no longer possible. Now, the decisive battle had to be fought where the opportunity presented itself and Ozawa found the opportunity in the Philippine Sea. The Japanese fought the battle of the Philippine Sea under the directives of Operation A-GO. Under A-GO, Japan planned to lure the American fleet into a trap near the Marianas, where both Japanese land-based and carrier aircraft could be used to attack the

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[207] William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea,* (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 30-34.

[208] Ibid, 30-34 63-34.

American forces. In the Marianas, the Mobile Fleet counted on land-based air support from Guam, Yap, and Rota, while the Americans would be dependent on carrier aircraft alone. The Japanese relied on land-based airfield in Guam and other Mariana Islands for more than just their aircraft. Shuttle-bombing was a Japanese tactical plan to use land-based airfields on Guam and other surrounding islands to extend the range of the Mobile Fleet. Japanese aircraft would be launched from carriers, attack the American carriers, and rearm/refuel on Guam to strike again. In theory, the Japanese Navy planned that when the US Fleet attacked the Marians, land-based aircraft would strike first, after which the American carriers would be lured into the areas where the Mobile Fleet could defeat them.[209]

During the night of June 18-19, Ozawa broke radio silence to coordinate the next day's attack between Japanese land-based aircraft set to attack Guam and the Japanese Combined Fleets aircraft who were to attack the US fleet. Ozawa's message, which was supposed to lead to a coordinated attack, proved counterproductive as an American land station in Hawaii intercepted the message and radioed it to Mitscher. American intelligence had truly become a force to be reckoned with. Thanks to the interception of Ozawa's message and American submarines tracking the Ozawa's ships, the United States was well informed about the approximate location of the Japanese fleet.[210]

Mitscher asked Spruance to move TF 58 west on the night of June 18 to launch a surprise attack on the morning of the 19th, but Spruance denied his request, fearing a Japanese trap that

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[209] William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea,* (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 15-16; Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 303.

[210] Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 303-307; John Prados, *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II,* (Random House, 1995), 272-274.

would leave the Saipan expeditionary force exposed. Mitscher initially chose to fight a defensive battle where the Japanese had the initiative. However, this did not pose a problem for TF 58, with its superiority in aircraft and carriers. There were fifteen American carriers to the Japanese nine. TF 58 dominated not only in carrier numbers, but also in naval technology like radar and fighter pilot performance. The morning of the opening day of the battle, June 19, there was an unusual tension in the air as TF 58 searched the ocean to locate the Japanese fleet. Since the American landings on Saipan, the Japanese had made efforts to increase their air strength on the neighboring islands, but these had also already been decimated by previous American carrier strikes from June 11-18. The enemy fleet had not been located in the morning searches. US submarines had played a major role in sighting and reporting the position of Ozawa's fleet.[211] Spruance ordered Mitscher for TF 58's air groups were to perform more carrier strikes on Guam and Rota. Mitscher was cautious about sending his task force's aircraft to bomb land targets, knowing that there was a high probability of a Japanese attack.[212]

The battle opened at 5:50am when a Japanese scout plane was shot down over Guam. American radar played a crucial role in alerting both Spruance and Mitscher of the incoming attacks. The radar picked up incoming Japanese planes approaching Guam and Mitscher launched aircraft to meet the Japanese attack. At 6:30am, the combat air patrol from the USS *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) was flying over Guam and Mitscher's incoming planes and wound up in a swarm of Japanese land-based aircraft. Mitscher immediately sent support from the carriers

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[211] The US submarine *Albacore* eluded Ozawa's screen and torpedoed the Japanese carrier *Taiho* at 9:10am on June 19th, 1944; Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945),* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 307-308.

[212] John Prados, *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II,* (Random House, 1995), 272-274; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 257-263.

USS *Cabot* (CVL-28), USS *Yorktown* (CV-10), and USS *Hornet.* However, once the support arrived, the Japanese aircraft were gone, having either withdrawn or been shot down. A little before 10am, Ozawa launched his attack on TF 58 by sending 16 fighters, 45 fighters carrying bombs, and eight torpedo planes in the direction of the American fleet.[213] Again, American radar picked up the incoming Japanese attack and Mitscher ordered every available aircraft he had into the air to meet the incoming Japanese.[214]

Lieutenant Thomas Dupree, who had previously flown from the original *Hornet,* which had been sunk at the Battle of Santa Cruz, recalled that the Battle of the Philippine Sea was like no other battle he experienced. This was largely due to the American ability to intercept and decrypt Japanese messages. The United States had originally broken the Japanese code at the Battle of Midway. However, the Japanese frequently updated their codes, and it took the United States until 1944 to work out the complications in the intelligence system, build the necessary infrastructure, and overcome the constant code changes. By June 1944, Dupree explained that the United States was "reading the Japanese's mail" and they did not even know it. He stated that the commanding admirals of TF 58 knew the Japanese's exact plan. According to Dupree, the Japanese planned to launch their carrier air groups, hit the American carriers, and land on Guam to refuel and rearm, before hitting the US fleet a second time and then returning to their own

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[213] Admiral Ozawa's first raid was exceptionally small. Ozawa had counted on the support of Japanese land aircraft that was based on Guam, Saipan and Tinian, which was to make up for the disparity in numbers of his first raid; Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945),* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 307-308.

[214] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 257-263; Paul Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941-1945,* (Naval Institute Press, 1978), 303-307.

carriers. Dupree recalled that he was highly impressed with the Navy's intelligence and believed this was the reason TF 58's pilots achieved such tremendous success.[215]

The improvement of fighter aircraft at the battle of the Philippine Sea was an advantage for TF 58. Along with improved aircraft, flight formations were also changed. Fighters usually flew in sections of four and to increase the fighter pilots' upward visibility, the fighter pilots switched from flying in "stepped down" V formations to "stepped up" formations. Stepped up formations positioned the wingmen higher in altitude than the lead aircraft. When flying in a stepped down formation, the trailing aircraft would get caught in the lead plane's turbulence. Switching formations enhanced the formations' mutual defense, thanks to greater situational awareness and faster reaction times. The new formation proved to be highly effective at the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Sterrie, aboard the *Lexington,* was flying in the carrier's torpedo and bomber squadrons and was given strict directions that this battle was to be an all-fighter show. Carrier groups usually launched attacks against the Japanese fleet, however the first day of the battle was different, because the Japanese fleet had not yet been located and all designated fighters were directed toward the incoming Japanese attack. Sterrie recalled that he took off and remained ten miles from the ship with strict orders to "just stay out of the way."[216]

Ozawa launched a total of four raids on the first day of battle. The first raid consisted of 69 Japanese planes that took off at 8:30am. At 10:10am, Mitscher ordered TF 58 to prepare to launch every available fighter plane, and by 10:23am, air squadrons were in the air, ready to

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[215] Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[216] William Wolf, *Victory Roll! The American Fighter Pilot and Aircraft in World War II,* (Schiffer Military History, 2001), 70-71; Norman Sterrie, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 20 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

intercept Japanese aircraft.[217] At 10:36am, Mitscher signaled for all ships to expect repeated attacks and to keep fighters available. Sterrie remembered that Mitscher ordered all bombers and torpedo planes to stay east, making room for the fighters to land, refuel, rearm, and take off again. After the battle, a *Life Magazine* photographer, after the battle, recalled that he had taken a picture of Mitscher in his swivel chair shortly after the fighters had been called to take off after the first Japanese raid. Mitscher, who was never known to raise his voice, shouted at the photographer, "Are you excited?" The man was only able to respond back with a meek "I guess so." The Japanese raid began to close in on the *Lexington* before her squadrons were completely launched.[218]

Alexander Vraciu was the leader of VF-16 aboard the *Lexington,* and recalled that many mistakes were made that morning while trying to get the fighters in the air as quickly as possible. Vraciu explained that he had already taken off from the *Lexington* when he was given a signal from his wing man. The carrier squadrons were still under orders to maintain radio silence, so Vraciu and the rest of those in his squadron were communicating through hand signals. Vraciu explained that his wing man kept pointing down at his wing. Vraciu stated "I thought he had spotted the enemy, so I tapped my head and gave the signal for him to take the lead." And yet,

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[217] The the exact numbers of how many American aircraft were launched from TF 58 on June 19th 1944, fluctuates. However, Historian William T. Y'Blood in his book *Red Sun Setting,* records 413 American aircraft; William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea,* (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 228.

[218] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 265-268; Theodore Taylor, *The Magnificent Mitscher,* (W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1954), 225-226.

each time he would give his wing man the motion to take the lead, he would shake his head and continue to point down at Vraciu's wing.[219]

Eventually Vraciu became frustrated and shrugged off his wing man's signal. He would later learn that during takeoff the "red barrels" on his wing were still up. As it happens, the wings of the newer Grumman Hellcat folded and required a safety pin that looked like a red barrel to lock them into place for flight. Only after landing did Vraciu learn that he had flown the entire battle with one of his wings locked into place. This was why his wing man kept pointing to his aircrafts wing. Vraciu admitted he was in such a hurry to take off that morning that he had never looked in his mirror to see if the locks were in place. Looking back, Vraciu did not know how he did not lose the one wing that was not latched while in battle, because for most pilots a mistake like this would have been a deadly situation.[220]

Once in the air, the *Lexington* air groups were accompanied by aircraft from the carriers *Essex, Cowpens* (CVL-25), *Bunker Hill, Princeton* (CVL-23), and the still ever resilient *Enterprise*. The official "tallyho" was given by Vraciu to the *Lexington* fighters at 10:42am. At this time 42 of the 69 Japanese planes were shot down in the first raid. By 10:57am, word was received back to the *Lexington* that the first attack had been broken up, but this was only the beginning. The second Japanese raid was larger than the first and included 128 aircraft launched at 8:56am. Out of the 128 planes some turned back to the fleet due to engine troubles, and others

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[219] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[220] Ibid.

were shot down by anti-aircraft fire. A total of 119 Japanese planes continued to make their way to TF 58, and were picked up on the *Lexington's* radar at 11:07am.[221]

Vraciu had more than just trouble with his wings that day. Something had also gone wrong with his engine, and he now had a film of oil across his windshield. While heading toward the location of the incoming aircraft, Vraciu recalled doing a "spot gaze" and noticing three aircraft below the squadron coming in his direction. After tallying the three planes, Vraciu looked up again and this time saw a group of 50 to 60 planes. At this point, Vraciu's adrenaline really began to kick in as he quickly tallied the Japanese numbers and ordered the squadron to come in on the Japanese for a "high side run." VF-16 was flying about 2000 feet above the Japanese planes, and a high side run was the perfect combat maneuver to attack a lower-flying enemy. It was meant to leverage the attackers' energy advantage while minimizing their exposure to the target's guns, like a hit and run tactic. Vraciu recalled, that right before diving on the Japanese, that he had thought to himself that this may be a once in a lifetime fighter pilot's dream. Due to his restricted visibility though, Vraciu almost collided with another American fighter. He hated to miss a pass, however he decided that "there were enough cookies on the plate for everyone."[222]

Vraciu took his plane down underneath the formation to get a better look at his targets. By this point, Vraciu recalled that he had a great deal of oil smeared across his windshield, which meant that he would have to get in close proximity to hit his targets. Vraciu described hitting one

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[221] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 268-269; NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1147, *Action Report USS Lexington CV-16: Covers activity while operating in Task Group 58.3*, 30 June, 1944.

[222] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Ray E. Boomhower, *Fighter Pilot: The World War II Career of Alex Vraciu,* (Indiana Historical Society Press, 2010), 104-107.

of the Japanese plane's fuel tanks and watching the plane burn as it headed toward the water. Flying around the outer edge of the formation, Vraciu picked off several Japanese fighters, making room for the other American fighters to go after the Japanese squadron leader. In hindsight, Vraciu recalled that he felt a little bit sorry for the men in the planes he was shooting down, but only for a split second. As the battle raged, a group of Japanese planes from the second raid began to get close to TF 58's outer screen and "flak," that is, dust from the five inch guns, began to block Vraciu's view.[223]

At 11:42am, a group of Japanese torpedo planes closed in on the *Lexington*. At 11:45, 20 planes from raid two broke through the defense screen, and the *Lexington* launched 14 of its fighters. At 11:58am, the *Lexington* and other ships in TG 58.3 opened fire on the incoming Japanese aircraft. This was the most exciting action that the sailors aboard the *Lexington* witnessed during the first day of the battle. No damage was received by *Lexington.* Other carriers sustained more damage and deaths due to the Japanese aircraft that broke fighter and anti aircraft screen, but the damage from the second Japanese raid was still minor compared to bomb and torpedo hits sustained by US carriers in previous battles, as evidence by the *Lexington's* dull war diary (in comparison to those of carriers involved in previous battles). Various takeoff and landing times were recorded, but no other drama than the attack from raid two.[224]

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[223] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[224] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1147, *Action Report USS Lexington CV-16: Covers activity while operating in Task Group 58.3*, 30 June, 1944; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 270; NARA RG38, World War II War Diaries, Box: 1073, *USS Lexington CV-16 War Diary: Periods 17th February-November 1943.*

While the *Lexington* was fending off attacks from the Japanese, Vraciu was still shooting down Japanese aircraft. Vraciu recalled that he shot down a rear plane and then was able to quickly shoot down the next one that was in front of him. Vraciu chased one of the Japanese fighters low enough that it was shot down by ant-aircraft fire from a nearby American destroyer. Ozawa's second raid was the most important of the day and earned the battle its nickname as the "Great Mariana's Turkey Shoot." TF 58 shot down 97 of 119 Japanese aircraft, six of which were credited to Vraciu, making him a naval ace. Vraciu recalled that the battle against the second raid lasted only eight minutes. George Kirk, a fighter in VF-8 from the *Bunker Hill,* likewise recalled that at one moment he was flying and all of a sudden there were planes from sea level all the way up to two or three thousand feet off the ground. Kirk went after one Japanese plane, successfully shooting it down and then suddenly the fighting was over. Vraciu fortunately made it back to the *Lexington.* Not only was Vraciu now a naval ace, but later after the battle he became the "poster child" of the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot." After Vraciu landed back on the *Lexington,* he would famously hold up six figures, showing the number of Japanese planes he had shot down. This photo is one of the most popular pictures from the Battle of the Philippine Sea.[225]

Kirk would not be as lucky as Vraciu. Kirk's division leader, Lieutenant Ron Hoel, left the battle early. Kirk recalled that Hoel did not give previous warning to the squadron, before he turned around and headed back to the fleet. On Kirk's way back, he did not have enough fuel to make it to the carrier and had to ditch in the water. At the time, the navy was experimenting with

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[225] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; George Kirk, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Francisca Montgomery, 29 December, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Ray E. Boomhower, *Fighter Pilot: The World War II Career of Alex Vraciu,* (Indiana Historical Society Press, 2010), 108-109.

new anti-G suits, meant to prevent pilots from losing consciousness from G-forces. Kirk described the new suits, as "cumbersome, heavy, and uncomfortable pieces of clothing." Kirk tried to avoid wearing them because they made him feel claustrophobic when inside the cockpit of his aircraft. However, on June 19th, Kirk was wearing his G-suit. While his plane was diving into the water, Kirk took the time to take off the anti-G suit and redress himself, all while still hooked into his seat. Luckily, after crashing into the Philippine Sea, Kirk only floated for a few hours before being picked up by a US cruiser.[226]

The Japanese launched two more raids on the US Fleet that day. Raid three consisted of 42 aircraft, launched between 10am-10:15am. The raid was divided into two groups while in flight. One half of the raid was unable to locate the American carriers, and while the other half-sighted American battleships to attack, they were intercepted by planes from the *Hornet* and *Yorktown*. Raid three was a not as eventful as the first two raids and resulted in the loss of only seven Japanese aircraft. Ozawa's fourth and final raid consisted of 82 planes, launched between 11am-11:30am. Raid four was also split into two groups. The first group attacked the carriers *Bunker Hill* and the new *Wasp,* inflicting only minor damage. The second group could not locate TF 58 and made the decision to land and refuel on Guam; they were intercepted by planes from the *Cowpens*, *Essex*, and *Hornet*. Seventy-three Japanese aircraft were lost in the fourth raid. During Ozawa's raids, planes from the *Lexington* patrolled over Guam to prevent the Japanese from launching land-based strikes and aircraft from several US carriers bombed the Japanese airfield on Guam throughout the day of the 19th. The American bombardment caused further issues during the second half of the Japanese fourth raid, as the aircraft that managed to escape

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[226] George Kirk, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Francisca Montgomery, 29 December, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

being shot down but had nowhere to land per the plan. Dupree recalled that his only job for the day was to drop bombs up and down Guam's airfield and then to remain over the area to patrol for any further action.[227]

Meanwhile, during the second and third raids, two Japanese carriers, the *Shokaku* and *Taiho*, were sunk by United States submarines. At 12:20pm, four torpedoes hit the side of the *Shokaku* from the US submarine *Cavalla,* under the command of Herman Kossler. The carrier burst into flames, the bow of the ship began to sink, and the carrier was soon considered lost. Half an hour after the *Shokaku* was exploded, the *Taiho* (Ozawa's flagship) was hit by one torpedo from the US submarine *Albacore,* under the command of Alvin Blached. Ozawa wanted to go down with his flagship but was eventually persuaded by his staff to abandon the carrier. Ozawa, his staff, and a portrait of the emperor transferred to a destroyer. There Ozawa faced many issues in trying to communicate with the rest of his fleet, due to the destroyer being poorly equipped as a flagship.[228]

By 3pm, all the *Lexington's* aircraft had landed. The pilots of the *Lexington* were responsible for shooting down 29 of the Japanese planes that day. The Japanese threw 373 planes at TF 58 and lost about 243 aircraft. Adding the 50 lost from the Guam raids and others lost before reaching the carriers, the Japanese losses totaled 315 planes. Mitscher's TF 58 lost a total of 23 planes to the Japanese, another six were damaged and deemed nonoperational. An additional 22 planes were lost in the sinking of the Japanese carriers *Shokaku* and *Taiho*. The first

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[227] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 271-274; Barrett Tillman, *Clash of the Carriers: The True Story of the Marianas Turkey Shoot of World War II,* (NAL Caliber, 2005), 175-177; Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX..

[228] William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea,* (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 128-129.

day of battle had almost continuous action by Japanese raids over TF 58 and Guam. The lopsided victory was deemed by historians like William T. Y'Blood, the greatest carrier battle of the war, and one of the greatest in history.[229]

As darkness fell on the 19th, many of the pilots spent the evening celebrating their victory. Mitscher's chief of staff, Commander Arleigh Burke, on his flagship, *Bunker Hill,* spent the night preparing to continue the battle on the following day. Burke stated, "we on Admiral Mitscher's staff were keen that the Japanese would try to withdraw their surface forces without further damage so that those ships could be made ready to fight again." The two fleets became further separated at dusk on the 19th, and Burke recalled he and the rest of the staff believed the Japanese would try to put as much distance between the US forces and the Japanese forces that night. They knew that if TF 58 did not strike the Japanese fleet the next day, Ozawa would be able to escape.[230]

While Mitscher and his staff stressed the importance of closing the gap between TF 58 and the Japanese fleet, Admiral Spruance had a different idea. Mitscher reported to Spruance in his action report on the 19th, that "the enemy had escaped." Spruance had already been lucky that Mitscher's superior aviators were able to overcome the four Japanese attacks. Concerned that the Japanese would try to lure TF 58 away from the Marianas, to then be able to attack the American expeditionary force off Saipan, Spruance was hesitant as what to do for preparation for the next days battle. The night of the 19th Spruance debated whether to close the gap between the

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[229] NARA RG38, WWII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1147, *Action Report USS Lexington CV-16: Covers activity while operating in Task Group 58.3*, 30 June, 1944; William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine Sea,* (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 138.

[230] Arleigh Burke, interviewed by The National Museum of the Pacific War, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

American carrier and the Japanese fleet, or to keep TF 58 close to Saipan. By staying close to the Marianas, the US fleet was too far east to attack the retreating Japanese carriers, and Mitscher struggled the next day, June 20th to locate them.[231]

Day Two: June 20th, 1944

From the night of June 19, into the morning of the 20th, Mitscher and his staff frantically searched for the Japanese Mobile Fleet's new location. Spruance sent a message to Mitscher, ordering an attack on the Japanese on June 20th if the enemy's position was known. TF 58 was steaming ahead at 24 knots to close the distance with Ozawa's fleet. The first morning search was launched at 5:30am but it was unable to locate the enemy. A second group of scouting aircraft was also unsuccessful in locating the Japanese. Vraciu recalled that the Japanese vessels were purposefully staying out of range of the US fleet. The multiple squadrons of US aircraft sent out to locate the Japanese came back with no location for the Japanese Fleet. The only information Mitscher had on the Mobile Fleet's location was from the sightings on the 19th by the American submarines, and Ozawa was observing strict radio silence.[232]

Burke recalled that the first half of the second day of the Battle of the Philippine Sea consisted only of TF 58 chasing the Japanese to get within range. There was a large area to be covered by TF 58 and the TF steamed ahead at the highest speed possible. Burke and the rest of Mitscher's staff were holding onto the hope that if the TF's planes would sight the Japanese fleet close enough that an attack could be launched, but a serious problem was arising for TF 58 and

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[231] Thomas Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance,* (Naval Institute Press, 1987), 300-302.

[232] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 284-285; Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

its pilots. If the Mobile Fleet was located too late in the day, the pilots would have to risk a night landing, which the majority of pilots were not trained to do. Secondly, if the Japanese fleet was too far out of range, the aircraft would not have enough fuel to make it to their target and back home again. Burke recalled that when the Japanese had still not been located by noon, it became clear that if they were found at all, they would be near the maximum range of the TF 58's aircraft. There was a long period of waiting and hoping that the Japanese fleet would be sighted and they would be within range. Looking back, Burke recalled that the waiting game was the most frustrating part of the battle.[233]

Ozawa transferred his flag to the carrier *Zuikaku* by day two of the battle. Now, with improved communications, Ozawa learned that he only had 100 operational aircraft. Ozawa made the decision to post-pone a second day's strike on the American fleet, until the next day (June 21st). While Ozawa was handling the crisis of the Japanese aircraft shortage, TF 58 finally located the enemy after a search, launched by *Enterprise* at 1:30pm, spotted the enemy at 3:40pm. By 2:30pm, the *Enterprise* had launched 12 aircraft for a search the span of 325 miles. The pilot to first spot the Japanese was Lieutenant R.S. Nelson, thus becoming the first carrier pilot to sight a Japanese ship in two days. At 3:48pm, more aircraft from the *Enterprise* search group radioed back with the location of the Mobile Fleet.[234]

The Japanese fleet was approximately 350 miles west of TF 58. Burke explained that in the late afternoon, when they received the location of the enemy fleet, all they could do was look

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[233] Arleigh Burke, interviewed by The National Museum of the Pacific War, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[234] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 289-290; NARA RG38, World War II War Diaries, Box:841, *USS Enterprise CV-6: For Period December 1941- March 1942*, 11 July, 1942.

at possible ways to extend the range of the air groups and send that information down to the pilots. Burke stated that the staff knew that they would be sending "those wonderful and dedicated pilots" on a mission at the maximum aircraft range. The decision was Mitscher's and, according to Burke, it was a matter of weighing the importance of sinking Japanese carriers against the danger of losing a large number of American pilots. Mitscher was almost guaranteed heavy losses from the aircraft running out of gas. Every second of debate and contemplation brought darkness closer. After a half hour of conferring with Burke and other senior staff members, Mitscher gave the orders to launch the planes.[235]

In a situation that was less than ideal for any carrier pilot, the pilots of TF 58 held no reservations toward their mission. Jack Glass, a member of the *Enterprise's* bombing squadrons, recalled that neither he nor other pilots aboard the *Enterprise* had any objections to flying the mission in the dark. The pilots still wanted to get the Japanese carriers more than anything. The men were aware that if Mitscher waited until the next day it would be too late to catch Ozawa. The pilots had been waiting all day for the last piece of missing information on their charter board: the enemy's position, course, and speed. Many pilots were confused when they penciled in the Japanese position outside the perimeters of their navigation circle, but although many questioned the decision and were uneasy about the danger and distance, pilots were still ready

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[235] Arleigh Burke, interviewed by The National Museum of the Pacific War, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Theodore Taylor, *The Magnificent Mitscher*, (W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1954), 232.

and eager to take off. The mission would later become famously known as the "mission beyond darkness."[236]

At 4:10pm, Mitscher gave the order for pilots to man their aircraft. Pilots ran across the deck faster and more frantically than ever before. A full-deck load of aircraft was launched into the air, that is to say 85 fighters, 77 dive bombers, 54 torpedo bombers in total from all fifteen American carriers. Ralph Weymouth, who was a member of the *Lexington's* bombing squadron, recalled that all the air squadrons were given the Japanese carriers as their primary objective. Weymouth explained that pilots were to hit their targets and waste no time returning home. Aircraft carriers had to face into the wind to launch their aircraft. On June 20th, TF 58's carriers had to turn to the east, the opposite direction of the Japanese, in order to launch aircraft, extending the gap between the TF 58 aircraft to their target. John Szymanski, a sailor aboard the *Hornet,* recalled that after the launching of the air groups, each of the TGs turned and headed in the direction of the Japanese fleet to shorten the distance the returning planes would have to cover to get back to their carriers. Szymanski explained that the carriers were moving so fast, that the battleships were struggling to keep up.[237]

Many of the official records and secondary sources jumped from the takeoff of the air groups to the attack on the Japanese fleet; however, Dupree, a pilot from the *Lexington* noted that many accounts are missing the last-minute message of a new position for the Japanese fleet.

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[236] Commander J. Bryan III later authored the book *Mission Beyond Darkness,* which coined the mission's famous name; Jack Glass, interviewed by Pete Jensen, 21 September, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Lt. Comdr. J. Bryan III and Philip Reed, *Mission Beyond Darkness,* (Duell, Solan, and Pearce, 1945), 13-26.

[237] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 291-292; Ralf Weymouth, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 6 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; John Szymanski, interviewed by Chuck Nichols and Lindig Becky, 7 September, 2001, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Dupree recalled that he was already in his plane getting ready to take off when a sailor came out to each plane with a message titled "new position of the Jap fleet!" The Japanese fleet's new position was now 60 miles further west than they had been when the flight commanders were determining whether the Japanese were within range. Once Dupree and the rest of the squadron took off, the squadrons ran into a second problem; the first position they were given were the Mobile Fleet's oilers; the carriers were another 75 miles further west than was anticipated. As Dupree explained, the first contact with the Japanese consisted of six oilers. The carriers were further west, cruising in three groups: Ozawa's flagship the *Zuikaku*, the carriers *Chitose*, *Zuiho,* and *Chiyoda,* and the carriers *Junyo, Hiyo*, and *Ryuho*. Air groups from the *Wasp* first concentrated on the tankers, managing to critically damage two.[238]

Meanwhile, Ozawa was able to get 75 planes airborne to meet the 216 incoming American aircraft. On his way to the Japanese fleet, Vraciu was flying with nine other fighters. Vraciu flew at the bottom of the formation, with three fighters above him as cover, when they came across a large cloud formation and his upper cover became separated from the formation. According to Vraciu, it was right about this time that the *Lexington* fighters encountered the Japanese combat air patrol, and all the sudden they were surrounded by Japanese fighters. Not only had Vraciu lost his cover, but he also had lost his number three man (the second lead fighter) in the clouds."We were doing the thatch weave and trying to protect each other," Vraciu stated.[239] The fighters' number one priority was to keep the Japanese planes away from the

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[238] Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 292-295.

[239] The "Thatch Weave" was a defensive aerial combat tactic where two or more aircraft fly a coordinated regularly intersecting path to protect one another.

bombers, so that they could make it through to the Mobile Fleet to line up their attack. To escape the Japanese, Vraciu explained the fighters performed a "dive out," a high-speed maneuver that was too fast for the Japanese Zero to keep up. However, before escaping the Japanese, Vraciu recalled that he lost his wing man, Ensign Homer "Brock" Brockmeyer. Vraciu was able to avenge Brock, but his vengeance gave him little satisfaction.[240]

The exact ship that each pilot recounted attacking was hazy. Some of the action reports, like that of the *Lexington,* erroneously list enemy carriers that were not actually sunk. American claims of hits simply did not line up. For example, there were claims of the sinking Japanese destroyers, but no destroyers were hit. After the battle, leaders of the air groups, like Commander J.M Peters from the *Yorktown,* were skeptical of the number of claimed attacks. Peters later stated that pilots' observations were unreliable, but this did not dims their confidence in the battle's outcome; they remained satisfied after learning which ships had actually been hit or sunk. At 6:45pm, the *Lexington* air groups recorded finding the Japanese fleet, containing carriers, as well as several destroyers and cruisers. Four Avenger torpedo bombers from the *Belleau Wood,* led by Lieutenant George B. Brown, with company from the *Enterprise* and *Lexington* carriers, attacked the Japanese carrier *Hiyo*. Four of the *Belleau Wood* torpedo planes dropped torpedoes successfully, making two hits. Fire spread rapidly over the ship. Three

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[240] Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 294; Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

explosions followed most likely caused by the *Enterprise* and *Lexington's* dive bombers, which scored several hits. The *Hiyo* would be abandoned and later sank by her escorts.[241]

Eugene Conklin, a member of VB-16, recalled the attack on the *Hiyo*. The air groups were well-experienced at this point, attacking an enemy carrier had become part of their routine. The attack began by staffing the targets, the fighters suppressed anti-aircraft fire, which served to protect the bombers during their attack runs. The dive bombers followed the torpedo planes to go in for an attack. Conklin explained that, because dive bombers could dive straight down, they were not easy targets compared to the torpedo planes. By this point Conklin and most of the pilots had been practicing their craft the whole war, and Conklin recalled they were "pretty darn accurate and skilled at it now." However, it was still difficult to tell exactly what they had hit. Conklin followed the procedures and dove down below 1000 feet, released his bomb, and pulled up. Once he was sure he was clear after his attack, Conklin recalled turning around to evaluate the damage, but he was not really sure if he had hit the *Hiyo*. Conklin observed the Japanese carrier burning and concluded the attack had been a success.[242]

Warren McCellan, who was a part of the VT-16, recalled watching the bombs dropped on the *Zuikaku* (which he had mistaken for the carrier's sister ship the *Shokaku*). McClellan and VT-16 were flying to another group of Japanese ships when five Japanese fighters came out from underneath the squadron. The Japanese planes began to pursue VT-16. McCellan described that

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[241] William T. Y'Blood, *Red Sun Setting: The Battle of the Philippine* Sea, (Naval Institute Press, 1981), 161; NARA RG38, WII Action and Operational Reports, Box: 1147, *USS Lexington CV-16 Forwarding of Aircraft Action Reports of Commanding Officer of Carrier Air Group 16*, 6 July, 1944; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 295-297; NARA RG38, WWII Acton and Operational Reports, Box: 969, *USS Enterprise CV-6 Action Report- Operations from 6-29 June 1944,* 3 July 1944.

[242] Eugene Conklin, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 17 March, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

one of the Japanese planes went underneath him, without him noticing, and began shooting up at his plane. One of the bullets hit a hydraulic line in the plane's cockpit, and the cock-pit burst into flames. McCellan believed that the flames came through the fill pipe, which carried the gasoline to the main gas tank, causing it to blow up. While abandoning his plane, McCellan got scorched by the fire on his left arm and tried to yell loud enough to alert the rest of the crew aboard. By the time McCellan hit the water, it was already dark. McCellan and the other two members of his crew spent the night floating and watching American planes ditch into the sea. They even observed the Japanese carrier *Hiyo* cruise by with an extreme list. McCellan had an uncomfortable evening in the ocean, where he recalled getting sea sick multiple times and attempting to sleep on his life jacket. McCellan and his crew were rescued the next day, when Mitscher sent destroyers from TF 58 to look for and rescue downed pilots.[243]

Dupree, from the *Lexington,* had just completed his dive on a Japanese carrier when he was attacked by Japanese fighters. It was almost dusk and Dupree was trying to reunite with his group, but the enemy that was attacking him made it particularly difficult. Dupree stated, "I had no way of getting out of it, because he was a lot faster than me." Dupree put his plane in a slight run and with a little bit of skid and the fighter missed him.[244] The Japanese pilot came back around again for Dupree, but this time Dupree took another skid in the opposite direction of the enemy plane and it missed Dupree again. At the very end the Japanese fighter came head on, and Dupree said, "this was the safest position having a bullet proof windshield." The Japanese plane

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[243] Warren McCellan, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 19 March, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[244] The aircraft's nose points toward the inside of the turn, but the plane is moving toward the outside of the turn.

pulled out at the last second and missed Dupree by what seemed to be inches. Dupree was then finally able to outmaneuver and lose the Japanese fighter.[245]

Commander J.D. Arnold, from the *Hornets* air group, noticed many pilots concentrated on the light carriers, so Arnold attacked the heavy carrier *Zuikaku* with assistance from planes from the *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. Several bombs hit the Ozawa's flag ship, but, the fires were controlled, and the carrier did not sink. The Japanese carrier *Chiyoda* was also recorded as having multiple successful bomb hits. The Japanese carriers *Zuikaku* and *Chiyoda* were struck by bombs with no serious damage, the carrier *Hiyo* was sunk, two tankers were sunk, and a handful of cruisers and battleships were damaged. The American pilots destroyed 92 percent of Ozawa's carrier planes and 72 percent of his float boats. Despite the lack of coordination and pressure experienced by the American pilots, the mission during the initial attack was successful, but the pilots' greatest challenge was just beginning.[246]

Pilots on the return flight home to their carrier were worried about if they would be able to make it back to TF 58. The fighters' fuel was not as big of a concern because the majority had "belly-tanks" of fuel, but the bombers and torpedo planes did not. "Belly-tanks" was used to describe the auxiliary fuel tanks carried by the American fighters, that significantly extended the aircraft's fuel range. Sterrie recalled flying home in a loose formation so that they were not "jockeying" the throttle the whole time, which helped conserve fuel. "Jockeying" the throttle was when pilots manually adjusted the engine controls and aircraft altitude to maximize range. Pilots

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[245] Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[246] John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945,* (Random House, 1970), 502-503; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 297-299.

kept together with various aircraft they met along the route home. The air waves were flooded with the voices of confused and worried pilots who reported their location once they had run out of fuel and began to ditch in the water. Many were completely lost in the darkness. TF 58 was spread out over hundreds of miles of ocean. Each pilot had to find one of the fifteen carriers in the dark, and then land without crashing. This was a task that was extremely difficult even in daylight.[247]

On his way home, Vraciu rendezvoused with a torpedo plane that was flying low to the water. Vraciu recalled that the torpedo pilot hand signaled to him asking about his fuel level, and he answered back that he was good. The torpedo pilot signaled back that his own fuel level was very low, shaking his head to indicate that he did not have enough fuel to make it. Vraciu remembered the pilot saluted as he headed for the water, never learning what became of the pilot and the crew. The entirety of the return flight, Vraciu heard conversations over the radio about pilots' fuel levels, many of them debating whether to ditch in the water. Vraciu stated "it got so bad I just shut the radio off." For Ralph Weymouth from VB-16 too, it was agonizing to listen to the radio. Weymouth stated, "I just couldn't stand hearing these guys saying, 'how much gas have you got left?' or 'I'm going in shortly, I've got two minutes left.'"[248]

Burke, the rest of the staff, and Mitscher, back on the *Bunker Hill,* were debating what to do to save their pilots. Mitscher spent the whole mission out on the bridge wing, even eating his

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[247] Norman Sterrie, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 20 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Lt. Comdr. J. Bryan III and Philip Reed, *Mission Beyond Darkness*, (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1945), 61-69.

[248] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Ralph Weymouth, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 6 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

dinner from a tray; every minute before dark he checked the sun's position and his watch. Mitscher potentially faced the worst disaster in naval-aviation history. Japanese submarines were a continuous threat to the task force. Burke stated, "if they'd [Japanese] had the submarines we expected they did, they would place the submarines to the west position off Guam, and if we approached them those submarines would attack." As aircraft returned to TF 58, they flew around the TF in confusion, not able to see where to land. According to Burke it was finally decided by Mitscher and his staff that even with the threat of submarines, they had to do everything possible to save as many pilots as they could. At 8:45pm Mitscher gave the orders for TF 58 to "turn on the lights."[249]

When the lights of TF 58 came on, Burke recalled it seemed as if all heaven opened up. Vertical lights were all over; all the ships' lights were on to help the pilots land. Burke stated, "I don't know what the pilots must have felt when they saw those lights; they didn't know about them ahead of time." The night of the second day of the battle of the Philippine Sea was full of emotion. Pilots and sailors alike awaited to witness what they anticipated to be a disaster. The pilots' return flight home was a mission with little hope, and they knew that they would need a miracle to save them. Mitscher's decision was the miracle that all in TF 58 hoped for. John Szymanski, aboard the *Hornet,* stated "that was one night I am not ashamed to admit that I cried

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[249] Theodore Taylor, *The Magnificent Mitscher,* (W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1954), 233-234; Samual Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II: New Guinea and the Marianas Volume Eight,* (Little Brown & Company, 1989), 302; Arleigh Burke, interviewed by The National Museum of the Pacific War, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

for the pilots when I saw them coming back to land. Some landed short; some of them landed on other aircraft carriers, while others landed where they could."[250]

Szymanski's description showed that even though Mitscher's decision prevented the second day of the battle from ending in a complete disaster, the night was still full of chaos. Weymouth, Conklin, and Vraciu recalled the scene that played in front of them as they returned to the *Lexington*. "We got back to the carriers, and it was kind of a mess. Everything was lit up, with search lights pointed in the water where some planes had already gone down" Weymouth later explained. Even though pilots were instructed to land on any carrier, Weymouth noted many still looked for their own carrier. Similarly, Conklin stated that "we started home in a state of great confusion having just carried out a vigorous attack." As Conklin arrived back home, it was completely black all around except for the lights of the task force. There was no way of determining which carrier was which. Conklin explained that the instructions the pilots had received were very vague, ordering pilots to land on any carrier, "so that is what we attempted to do." Mitscher's decision to turn on the lights saved many lives, however many planes still did not make it. Among the confusion when returning to the task force many planes barely missed their mark to land and ditched in the ocean.[251]

Turning on the carrier lights also had negative outcomes. Vraciu explained that "even with the lights on it was still a struggle for planes to land. Pilots were trying to land on

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[250] Arleigh Burke, interviewed by The National Museum of the Pacific War, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; John Szymanski, interviewed by Chuck Nichols and Lindig Becky, 7 September, 2001, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[251] Ralf Weymouth, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 6 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Eugene Conklin, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 17 March, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

destroyers, and the lights in some areas were blinding." Vraciu found the *Lexington* by locating the *Enterprise*; he recognized the Big E's wider stack, and Vraciu knew that the *Lexington* was the next one up. Vraciu explained he circled his carrier for a long time waiting to see if any of the rest of his squadron had returned, and once he realized they had not, Vraciu landed. On the first attempt to land Vraciu was waved off due to a crashed dive bomber on the flight deck, but he was cleared for his second attempt. Vraciu learned later that the crashed dive bomber's flaps had been damaged in battle, which meant that when he had been given the signal to go around, the plane could not slow down and crashed through the barrier killing many men. The *Lexington* completed its night landings by 10pm. The *Lexington* had landed 22 of her own planes and 14 from other carriers in TF 58. Meanwhile, the *Enterprise* landed 25 planes from six different carriers.[252]

The flight home for TF 58's pilots had turned into a nightmare. Out of the 216 planes that were launched, only 116 returned and 38 flight personnel were killed or missing. When the sun rose on the 21st of June, TF 58 was in disarray and ships were scattered over the ocean. Ships were searching for survivors and carriers launched aircraft to send every pilot back to their designated carrier. Criticism of the victory of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, was not directed toward Mitscher, but the Fifth Fleet's commander, Admiral Spruance. Spruance's battle plan was to destroy the Japanese fleet and protect the expeditionary force off Saipan and Mitscher's authority was constrained by this plan. Spruance's battle plan did not account for the possibility that the enemy might avoid fleet action by limiting its attack to long range carrier strikes, which

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[252] Alexander Vraciu, interviewed by Bruce Petty and Robert Grinslade, 11 July, 2000, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; NARA RG38, World War II War Diaries, Box: 1073, *USS Lexington CV-16 War Diary: Periods 17th February- November 1943*; NARA RG38, World War II War Diaries, Box:841, *USS Enterprise CV-6: For Period December 1941- March 1942*, 11 July, 1942.

was beyond the shorter combat radiuses of the American carrier planes. Many like commander J.J. Clark (TG 58.1) and Admiral Montgomery (TG 58.2) questioned Spruance's non-aviator background and his high authority over the fast carriers.[253]

George Kirk who had fought in the "Great Marians Turkey Shoot" the previous day, did not participate in the mission on 20th.[254] He recalled similar events aboard the *Bunker Hill* as were seen on the *Lexington*: "I missed out on this part, but I'm not unhappy though, that was a terrible, terrible night." During the peak time of landing aircraft, Kirk recalled a plane that came into land and crashed right into the barrier. Kirk explained that everybody had rushed to clear the deck, even the air officer ran to help. Everyone was under a severe time constraint, as planes were within minutes, if not seconds, of running out of gas. To quickly remove the plane from the deck, the cables were cut, and the plane shoved over the side. Kirk recalled that as they were about shove the plane over the side, a second aircraft came in and crashed into the first plane, causing a large fire and killing several personnel. It took almost thirty minutes, Kirk explained, to clean up the mess, and by then the landings were over.[255]

The day's events took a large mental toll on the American carrier pilots. Sterrie who had landed two hits that day, recalled having little excitement about it. He went to bed that night, knowing that one of his planes had been shot down and three more were missing. The next day, when the US carriers were reassembling their planes, Sterrie learned that two of his fellow pilots

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[253] Charles A. Lockwood and Hans Christian Adamson, *Battles of the Philippine Sea,* (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 123; John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945,* (Random House, 1970), 503-504; Thomas Buell, *The Quit Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance,* (Naval Institute Press, 1987), 287-288, 299.

[254] His division leader was shot down and resulted in his division being scrubbed.

[255] George Kirk, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Francisca Montgomery, 29 December, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

had ditched into the water and were retrieved by a TF ship, and that the third pilot had landed aboard one of TF 58's light carriers. McCellan, who had crashed in the middle of the Japanese fleet, recalled that he was grateful for Mitscher. The saving of pilots was a new procedure; beforehand, admirals were much more cautious about rescue missions for pilots. McCellan and his crew were floating in a highly dangerous position, however Mitscher still sent out ships to the previous location of the Japanese fleet and retrieved several pilots, including McCellan, who stated "he was a pilot, and he knew what pilots went through."[256]

The Japanese fleet was spotted retreating northwest. Spruance and Mitscher initially reorganized TF 58 to go after it, but when the Japanese fleet was spotted beyond range of an attack, TF 58 turned east toward Saipan instead. The last carrier vs carrier battle of the Pacific War had come to an end. The United States had achieved a crushing victory. Ozawa's carrier force had been critically mauled, losing three carries and two damaged. Japan no longer had enough aircraft to fully protect its fleet, and surface forces could not function without offensive and defensive air cover. The Japanese fleet had been permanently damaged and failed to recover for the rest of the war. The Japanese defeat at sea also doomed the defense of Marianas. On June 22, 1944, the American expeditionary force began its offensive through the island of Saipan in the North, and by June 25th, the island fell to the US forces.[257]

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[256] Norman Sterrie, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 20 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Warren McCellan, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 19 March, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

[257] Charles A. Lockwood and Hans Christian Adamson, *Battles of the Philippine Sea,* (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967), 123-124; John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945,* (Random House, 1970), 504-506; Thomas Buell, *The Quit Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance,* (Naval Institute Press, 1987), 299-300.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea was the last carrier battle and took place at the height of the United States' naval power in the Pacific. The progression of the United States' offensive in the Pacific affected not just how men viewed the war, but from which perspective the battle could be viewed. Direct combat in the first four carrier battles was experienced by the carriers' pilots attacking the Japanese fleet and by the sailors of the carriers who defended their ships against enemy aircraft. Both experiences were intimate and personal, even though they lasted only minutes. However, in this last carrier battle, the level of direct combat witnessed by the sailors dramatically decreased. This left many sailors who were present at the battle with little or nothing to say about their experiences, other than that they were present. Most sailors recalled they were impressed by the United States' naval power and many Sailors' views of the war were not dramatically altered by the massive American victory.

The two defining moments of the Philippine Sea carrier battle were the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" on June 19th and the "Mission Beyond Darkness" on June 20th. Not only the success, but the fear and the burden caused by these two distinguishing moments was experienced almost exclusively by pilots. Regardless of the stakes, men like Alexander Vraciu (*Lexington*) and Jack Glass (*Enterprise*) had no objections to either day's missions. Even on the second day, when the Japanese fleet was barely within range and chances of survival was limited due to the risk of night landings, TF 58's pilots still carried out their missions. Although no American carriers were lost during battle, the loss of almost half of the 216 planes sent out from TF 58, and 38 pilots, had similar if not identical effects on the pilots as the loss of a carrier on a sailor. Where sailors were bonded together by their ships, pilots were bonded together with the members of their squadrons. Where sailors expressed little to no emotion toward the United States victory in the

Philippine Sea, the loss of around thirty three aircrew members created a bittersweet victory for TF 58's carrier pilots.

5. Conclusion

The Japanese loss in the Battle of the Philippine Sea permanently destroyed the Japanese carrier-based naval airpower and marked the end of the war for Japan, The United States' larger effort to take the Mariana Islands (Saipan, Guam, and Tinian) in the summer of 1944 was successful, which provided the necessary airfield for B-29 bombers to devastate Japan's home Islands and continued to sever crucial Japanese supply lines. Through the remainder of the war, the United States continued to push through the Central Pacific, moving ever closer to mainland Japan. The battles of Iwo Jima (February 1945) and Okinawa (April-June 1945), accelerated the United States air war against the Japanese home islands and further constricted Japan's supply routes. Okinawa then brought Nimitz and General McArther to the outskirts of mainland Japan. The war in the Pacific was brought to a end by President Truman's decision to drop two nuclear bombs on Japanese cities: Hiroshima on August 6th 1945 and Nagasaki August 9th, 1945, which led to Japan's surrender five days later. The war in the Pacific officially came to an end on the deck of the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2nd 1945.[258]

Before World War Two, the sailors and pilots who manned US carriers were ordinary Americans. When the war ended, they parked their aircraft and left their carriers to return back to the lives they had left behind.[259] John Underwood was 15 during the attack on the *Yorktown* (CV-5) at the Battle of Midway. He did not go back to sea after Midway but spent the rest of the

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[258] Phillips Payson B'Brien, *How the War Was Won,* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 383-386; Thomas W. Zeiler, *Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II,* (Scholarly Resources Inc., 2004), 151-190.

[259] None of the veterans in the oral history interviews used for this work eluded to any significant troubles to converting back to civilian life. However, this is not to assume or portray that many soldiers and sailors returning home form World War Two did not struggle when returning back to a normal civilian life.

war working in the office of Admiral Forrest Sherman in Hawaii. In 1945, Underwood was still only 19 years old. After getting married and having one son, Underwood went back to school thanks to the GI Bill. According to him, between rising a family, working nights, and going to school, his experiences from the Pacific were never at the forefront of his mind. After receiving a degree in aviation Underwood worked as a airline pilot for over ten years, before joining the fire department, where he eventually retired. Similarly, pilot Norman Sterrie from the *Lexington* (CV-16) did not participate in another battle after the Philippine Sea. Working in the Naval Air Station at Alameda, in San Francisco, California, Sterrie ended his World War Two career preparing and equipping carrier squadrons for future engagements.[260] When Sterrie left the navy in 1945, he attended medical school at the University of Minnesota through the GI Bill. Sterrie was a member of the university' first post war class in 1949. First Sterrie worked as a pediatrician and later became an allergist, before he retired.[261]

W.W. Norberg lost his first carrier, the *Hornet* (CV-8), at the Battle of Santa Cruz. However, Norberg rejoined the fight at sea aboard the *Enterprise* (CV-6) and fought along side her crew till the end of the war in 1945. Being able to carry on the legacy of a second carrier after the loss of the *Hornet* brought Norberg closure after the Battle of Santa Cruz. Norberg began the war as a seaman second class and worked his way up to end the war as a chief yeomen in the captains office on the *Enterprise*. He was offered to continue his naval career after World War Two, but turned down the offer and left the navy. Norberg felt that it was a honor to have

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[260] Alameda was a major aircraft overhaul depot and a home port for carriers traveling state side.

[261] John Underwood, interviewed by Richard Misenhimer and Lesle W. Dial, 8 February, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Norman Sterrie, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 20 July, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

served his country and to have played a minor role in some of the most prevalent historical events of the Pacific War.[262]

No one mans' experience in the Pacific War was the same. Whether stationed at a gun mount on a US carrier or flying a SBD Dauntless dive bombers over the Japanese fleet, each mans perspective and experiences detailed the overshadowed "background" events of each carrier battle in the Pacific. How the orders from the admirals were carried out and an aircraft carrier was kept operational in an attack was by the work of the sailors in the background of the battle. It is not enough to simply understand which United States and Japanese carriers were sunk and what decisions were made by Admirals like Nimitz, Fletcher, or Mitscher. To truly understand the events of the carrier battles an analysis of the perspectives and experiences of the carrier crews and pilots is essential. These men were the ones who defended, repaired, and looked after their carriers. Sailors and pilots played a major role in bringing about the United States' naval domination in the Pacific and the defeat of the Japanese.

Sailors' connections to their fellow crew members and ships also played a large part in building their perceptions of the war. Alvin Kious aboard the USS *Lexington* (CV-2) in the Battle of the Coral Sea and Norman Jeansonne aboard the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) who both lost their carriers and crew in the first two carrier battles had a negative out look on the war. Where in comparison W.W. Norberg aboard the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) who did not experience defeat in the first carrier battles still had a positive outlook on the war's progression, after losing his carrier in the Battle of Santa Cruz. Finally Lieutenant Thomas Dupree's confidence at the Battle of the

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[262] W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Philippine Sea due to the United States' carrier and technological superiority confirms a sailor's or pilot's view of the war was determined by their experiences in battle.[263]

At the start of the Pacific War to the first carrier battle in the Coral Sea, the United States Navy and Japanese Navy were continuously learning what it meant to fight a naval battle using carriers. Seaman and pilots who fought in the first two carrier battles in the Coral Sea and at Midway were entering into the unknown. Through the progression of the war the United States Navy adopted improved carrier doctrine and advanced its technology, like radar and the new Essex class carriers. For this reason none of the five carrier battles in the Pacific were the exact same. The effects of the new naval developments trickled all the way down from the United States Navy's high command to the individual men of the crew. These affects shaped how the sailor perceived the battle and their larger part in the war.

My work adds not only a human component to carrier warfare, but it also highlights that viewing the five carrier vs carrier battles from the strategic and tactical viewpoints of the admirals, causes the conflicted emotions of the ship's crew and its effects on their views of the war to be overlooked. The Battle of the Coral Sea although a Japanese tactical victory, was a strategic one for the United States leading to an American victory at Midway. But how the loss of the *Lexington* and *Yorktown* lead to negative and conflicted views of the war is not discussed and historians overlook how an entire group of seaman and pilots had negative assumptions about the war to come.

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[263] Alvin W. Kious, interviewed by William P. Brough, 8 March, 2003, Alvin W. Kious Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; Norman Joseph Jeansonne, interviewed by John H. Bordelon, 10 March, 2011, Norman Joseph Jeansonne Collection, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress, Washington DC; W.W. Norberg, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 30 July, 2011, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX; Thomas E. DuPree, interviewed by Mike Zambrano, 5 June, 2007, The Portal to Texas History: Oral Histories, National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, TX.

Building on the events of the first six months of the war, the *Enterprise* and *Hornet* began the American offensive in the Solomons with high morale. But their positive perspective was not because of the Midway victory, but rather because during the first part of the war, their carries were never attacked. After facing hardships throughout the American offensive in the Solomons, the sailors aboard the *Enterprise* and *Hornet,* each faced a period alone in the South Pacific. However, instead of having largely negative emotions after the damaging of the *Enterprise* and sinking of the Hornet, most sailors felt a sense of duty and pride about their larger role in carrying on the American offensive in the Pacific.

Finally, while strategic and tactical analyses of the war view the Battle of the Philippine Sea as the pinnacle point where the Japanese fleet was severely damaged and could not be repaired, the United States naval supremacy in the Pacific is evident due to the lack of sailors aboard US carriers experiencing battle. However, when viewed from the perspective of the pilots of TF 58 who had to carry out the attack against the Japanese fleet, it was not as evident, as it was to the admirals and sailors, that the war was won. TF 58's pilots' experiences in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, demonstrated that even in the final months, when it may have been apparent to the American admirals that victory was within grasp, this was not as clear to the carrier pilots, who unlike their sailor counter parts, were still experiencing intense fighting and attacks in battle.

During the 1920s through the 1930s the United States developed a deeper understanding of what an aircraft carrier was and how it operated, including the fundamental processes that enabled aircraft to take off from and land on its deck. The Pacific Theater of World War Two was where not only the United States, but also Japan, learned the true capabilities of carriers in war.

The Battle of the Coral Sea, the Battle of Midway, the Battle of the Eastern Solomon Islands, the Battle of Santa Cruz, and the Battle of the Philippine Sea are not just five battles. These carrier engagements are the only time in history that the world had seen two global powers go head to head using aircraft carriers. At the end of the war, Japan's naval fleet was decimated. Even though the United States was not the only nation to possess carriers, at the end of the Second World War, the US fleet dominated the seas with the greatest number of carriers.

The sailors aboard the United States aircraft carriers were some of the only men in the world to have real experience fighting in a carrier vs carrier battle. This analysis has only added half of the human element to the carrier battles. The Japanese sailors and pilots have their own stories and experiences. While it is easy to forget the American sailors who operated the carriers, it is also overlooked by historians that behind the words "Japanese pilot" or "Japanese carrier" there is another group of men with similar experiences, and yet different perspectives. The United States began the war in the Pacific with six carriers, fighting to take the initiative from the Japanese who had a superior fleet of ten carriers. The US sailors and pilots began the war on the losing side and fought their way in battle to defeat Japan. This is the main timeline that shaped American sailors' perspectives. However, half of the story has been left untold. What was it like to be a Japanese sailor or pilot who started a war as the dominate force in the Pacific and ended the conflict without an operable navy?

The same question that was asked at the beginning of this analysis should be asked again, but this time for the Japanese. Who were the ordinary Japanese sailors and men who carried out the great battle plans of Admirals Yamamoto, Nagumo, and Ozawa? When comparing and contrasting the experiences of each Japanese seaman during the carrier battles, did their carrier

assignment affect their thoughts of the war's progression as it did for the United States' navy men? Japanese and American sailors would most likely have similar experiences of what it was like to be abroad a carrier when it was torpedoed or actively sinking. However the Japanese would certainly have a entirely different perspective to their larger part in the war. Factors like the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Japan's initial blitzkrieg through the Pacific, and Japanese culture will paint an entirely different picture of the war. This thesis is restrained from pursing this angle due to two main factors. One, I do not have the space adequately portray the perspectives of both American and Japanese sailors in one study. Second, the time required to locate and analyze Japanese sources was not easily accessible. This leaves a "bottom-up" Japanese perspective on the carrier battles of the Pacific War open for scholars to research.

Analyses of warfare from the view point of the lowest ranking solider, seaman, or pilot portrays a side of war that is often overlooked. In a world with rapidly advancing military technology like nuclear weapons and drones, it becomes even more important to emphasize the human element of warfare. Aircraft carriers are still a symbol of strength, even in modern day navies, and they require a crew of nearly 5000 naval personal to operate. Even in an age when technology appears to be taking the place of man, the strongest naval vessel is dependent on people to operate. The United States has continued to develop its aircraft carriers since the end of World War Two. The first nuclear powered carrier was the USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65) and was commissioned in 1961. Most recently the USS *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78) was commissioned by President Donald Trump and is the world's largest ever aircraft carrier. The United States carrier doctrine and strategy has continued to develop from the Korean War to Vietnam, and throughout

the Cold War. Today's naval personnel have never experienced a true carrier vs. carrier battle, but their experiences and knowledge will be passed down to future carrier crews.[264]

The number of World War Two veterans is rapidly decreasing. The youngest of the World War Two veterans is around 100. I hope to further historians' and average individuals knowledge of the Pacific War and aircraft carriers, along with commemorating those who fought in the Pacific. The overwhelming majority of the sailors within my analysis are no longer with us. Through breaking down and analyzing the sailors' and pilots' stories I hope to have conveyed how their part in the Pacific War was more than just an experience. Their journeys through the war were marked by challenges like the loss of fellow seamen, pilots, and their ships. But many, like W.W. Norberg, were honored to be of service. Regardless of which war or the type of battle, military history is one sided without the inclusion of the stories of the men who made the battles possible.[265] The five carrier battles of the Pacific Theater of World War Two were not only contests of strategy, but were deeply human experiences that were shaped by the men who operated the US carriers in battle.

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[264] Historians like William Murray, Allan R. Millett, Clark Reynolds, Lars Celander, and Phillips Payson O'Brien center their works around technology. As their research had furthered present-day historian's understanding of the war, they lack an analyses of the men who operated the technology making the war possible.

[265] Other World War Two historians who include the human element of war include Craig Symonds, Max Hastings, Margaret MacMillan, Rob Citino, and Michael Neiberg.

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