



USS Midway Historical Overview

The USS Midway was the longest-serving aircraft carrier in the 20th century. Named after the climatic Battle of Midway of June 1942, Midway was built in only 17 months, but missed World War II by one week when commissioned on September 10, 1945. Midway was the first in a three-ship class of large carriers that featured an armored flight deck and a powerful air group of 120 planes.

From the beginning of its service, the Midway played key roles in the Cold War. In 1946 it became the first American carrier to operate in the midwinter sub-Arctic, developing new flight deck procedures. The following year Midway became the only ship to launch a captured German V-2 rocket. The trial's success became the dawn of naval missile warfare. Just two years after that, Midway sent a large patrol plane aloft to demonstrate that atomic bombs could be delivered by a carrier.

Midway served with the Atlantic Fleet for ten years, making seven deployments to European waters, patrolling "the soft underbelly" of NATO. A round-the-world cruise took Midway to the west coast in 1955, where it was rebuilt with an angled deck to improve jet operations.

Midway's first combat deployment came in 1965 flying strikes against North Vietnam. Midway aircraft shot down three MiGs, including the first air kill of the war. However, 17 Midway aircraft were lost to enemy fire during this cruise. In 1966 Midway was decommissioned for a four-year overhaul.

Over a chaotic two day period during the fall of Saigon in April 1975, Midway was a floating base for large Air Force helicopters which evacuated more than 3,000 desperate refugees during Operation Frequent Wind.

As potential threats to the Arabian oil supply grew, and to relieve strain on U. S.-based carriers, Midway transferred to Yokosuka, Japan, making it the first American carrier home ported abroad.

In 1990 Midway deployed to the Arabian Gulf in response to the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait. In the ensuing Operation Desert Storm, Midway served as the flagship for naval air forces in the Gulf and launched more than 3,000 combat missions with no losses. Its final mission was the evacuation of civilian personnel from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines after the 20th century's largest eruption of nearby Mount Pinatubo.

On April 11, 1992 the Midway was decommissioned in San Diego and remained in storage in Bremerton, Washington until 2003 when it was donated to the 501(c)3 nonprofit San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum organization. It opened as the USS Midway Museum in June 2004.