



Battle of Midway: American & Japanese Military Perspectives

Author: Franky Ortega, USS Midway Museum Curriculum Consultant

Essential Questions: To what extent was the Battle of Midway considered the greatest naval battle in modern history? What evidence exists to corroborate or counter this claim? In what way did the Pacific Ocean come to represent a war zone? Which account of the battle do you find the most convincing and objective? Explain.

Time: 120 minutes.

Lesson Directions:

- 1) The teacher will review lesson requirements on pages 1-2.
 - 2) The teacher will provide students transcribed or original primary source documents on the Battle of Midway as provided. Primary Source A and B are for a two-hour class, include C for added rigor or an extension activity.
 - 3) Students will answer questions on *Primary Source Student Handouts*.
 - 4) The teacher may assign the short-essay prompt as an assessment.
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Primary Source Introduction: **Battle of Midway- American & Japanese Military Perspectives**

Objective: To study primary source documents on the Battle of Midway to determine to what extent it was considered the greatest naval battle in modern history.

Background: The Battle of Midway is considered by many naval historians to be the greatest naval battle in modern history. After the attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Japanese Empire went on the offensive, taking possession of a vast swath of territories across the Pacific. By the spring of 1942, their next mission was to capture Midway, a key strategic point between the Japanese Empire and the American West Coast. Code-breaking and intercepted messages would prove instrumental in alerting the American military of an impending strike and place the aircraft carrier at the center of the Pacific Theater for the rest of the war.

Source: <http://www.abmc.gov/Midway>

“File of memoranda and reports related to the Battle of Midway. Compiled in this item are summaries of intelligence reports on Japanese activities prior to the Battle of Midway. Also, a compilation of all radio message traffic

between Midway and Pearl Harbor related to the battle are present as well as translations of Japanese dispatches during the battle. Also included are after action summaries on the value of radio intelligence during the battle, an analysis of fighter and bomber tactics, and a post war collection of notes concerning the battle.”

Source:<https://digitalarchive.pacificwarmuseum.org/digital/collection/p16769coll3/id/4/>

Extension Short-Essay Prompt: To what extent was the Battle of Midway considered the greatest naval battle in modern history? What evidence exists to corroborate or counter this claim? In what way did the Pacific Ocean come to represent a war zone? Which account of the battle do you find the most convincing and objective? Explain.

See: Winston Churchill had said of the Battle of Midway, "this memorable American victory was of cardinal importance, not only to the United States but to the whole Allied cause...At one stroke, the dominant position of Japan in the Pacific was reversed."

It is important that you use evidence taken directly from any of the primary source documents provided or you may use information on the Battle of Midway found at: http://www.midway42.org/about_BOM.aspx

Online Resources:

1. National Museum of the Pacific War Digital Archive:
<https://digitalarchive.pacificwarmuseum.org/digital/collection/p16769coll3/id/4/>
2. Midway Monument: <http://www.abmc.gov/Midway>
3. The Battle of Midway Roundtable:
http://www.midway42.org/about_BOM.aspx

Primary Source A: Battle of Midway- Japanese Military Report
Striking Force Battle Report for June 5

Note: The following information is a translation of a top secret encoded and enciphered Japanese military report detailing the Battle of Midway as the events unfolded. This copy was sent to the U.S. Navy Department and has been both transcribed for ease of use and in their original reproduced form.

“Part I. Carried out air attack on Midway as scheduled. Shot down about 30 enemy planes and although inflicted considerable damage to equipment, details are not clear. Even after the attack it seemed that the enemy was able to use this air field.

Part II. From 0400(AM) – 0730(AM) more than 100 enemy planes attacked, among which more than 50 were shot down. Even though we avoided all the torpedoes, because of the attack of the [shipboard bombers](#) we received many direct hits. As it was impossible to continue the battle because of fires, I gave the order to retreat and with 6 destroyers [define] in company shifted flag to the [Nagara](#).

With the remainder of this force, proceeded towards the enemy striking force and attacked. An aircraft carrier of the Hornet class received considerable damage with two torpedo hits.

At 1430, because of an extremely serious attack by enemy shipboard bombers, we sustained great damage. It was a terrific battle. The air attacks continued in succession until 1600.

Part III. After retiring to the North West we turned to attack... The enemies main force consisted of 3 Hornet type aircraft carriers (one of which was [listing](#), burning, and drifting), 2 aircraft carriers of uncertain type, 6 heavy [cruisers](#) and a number of destroyers.

Part IV. Although the fire of the Hiryu has [slackened](#) a bit, she lies in the enemies track and the fire cannot be brought under control. If it were possible to put out the fire, she might be able to get under way. She is under escort of two destroyers and retiring to the northwest.

The Soryu sank and the Kaga also sank. The Akagi is burning fiercely and it is not expected to be brought under control. Getting underway is impossible...”

J.J. Rochefort.

Source: Translations of Japanese Dispatches regarding the Battle of Midway, 5 June to 17 June 1942.

From the U.S. Navy’s “File of Memoranda and Reports Relating to The Battle of Midway”, declassified June 5, 1985, pp 120-121.

Translation of a Japanese Dispatch regarding the Battle of Midway. June 5-17, 1942.

STRIKING FORCE BATTLE REPORT.

NUMBER ONE. PART I.

JUNE 5, CARRIED OUT AIR ATTACK ON MIDWAY AS SCHEDULED.
SHOT DOWN ABOUT 30 ENEMY PLANES AND ALTHOUGH INFLECTED
CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT, DETAILS ARE NOT

CLEAR. EVEN AFTER THE ATTACK IT SEEMED THAT THE ENEMY
WAS ABLE TO USE THE AIR FIELD.

PART II.

FROM 0400 - 0730 MORE THAN 100 ENEMY PLANES ATTACKED,
AMONG WHICH MORE THAN 50 WERE SHOT DOWN. EVEN THOUGH
WE AVOIDED ALL THE TORPEDOES, BECAUSE OF THE ATTACK
OF THE SHIPBOARD BOMBERS WE RECEIVED MANY DIRECT
HITS. AS IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTINUE THE BATTLE
BECAUSE OF FIRES, I GAVE THE ORDER TO RETREAT AND WITH 6
DESTROYERS IN COMPANY SHIFTED FLAG TO THE NAGARA.
WITH THE REMAINDER OF THIS FORCE, PROCEEDED TOWARDS THE
ENEMY STRIKING FORCE AND ATTACKED. AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER
OF THE HORNET CLASS RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE WITH 2
TORPEDO HITS.

AT 1430, BECAUSE OF AN EXTREMELY SERIOUS ATTACK BY
ENEMY SHIPBOARD BOMBERS, WE SUSTAINED GREAT DAMAGE.
IT WAS A TERRIFIC BATTLE. THE AIR ATTACKS CONTINUED
IN SUCCESSION UNTIL ABOUT 1600.

PART III.

AFTER RETIRING TO THE NORTH WEST WE TURNED TO ATTACK.
THIS FORCES 1800 POSITION WAS _____ course 320°—
(30-50N, 179-50W)

SPEED 20 KNOTS.

THE ENEMIES MAIN FORCE CONSISTED OF 3 HORNET TYPE AIR-
CRAFT CARRIERS (ONE OF WHICH WAS LISTING, BURNING, AND
DRIFTING) 2 AIRCRAFT CARRIERS OF UNCERTAIN TYPE, 6 HEAVY
CRUISERS AND A NUMBER OF DESTROYERS.

1500 POSITION OF 10 SHIPS _____ - COURSE 280 -
(30-55 N; 176-05W)

SPEED 24 KNOTS.

PART IV.

ALTHOUGH THE FIRE ON THE HIRYU HAS SLACKENED A BIT,
SHE LIES IN THE ENEMIES TRACK AND THE FIRE CANNOT BE
BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL. IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO PUT
OUT THE FIRE, SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET UNDERWAY. SHE
IS UNDER ESCORT OF TWO DESTROYERS AND RETIRING TO THE
NORTHWEST.

THE SORYU SANK AND THE KAGA ALSO SANK. THE AKAGI IS
BURNING FIERCELY AND IT IS NOT EXPECTED TO BE BROUGHT
UNDER CONTROL. GETTING UNDERWAY IS IMPOSSIBLE. SHE
IS AT APPROXIMATE POSITION _____ UNDER ESCORT OF
(30-40N; 178-50W)
TWO DESTROYERS. FROM ENCRYPTED TRAFFIC

Name: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT HANDOUT A

Primary Source A Questions:

1. Does your source provide the perspective of the Japanese, American or both? Provide evidence to support your claim.
2. Is there anything discussed in the document that you already knew? If so, explain.
3. What specific event(s) are described?
4. When do the detailed event(s) occur?
5. What did you find the most surprising? Explain.
6. Predict a possible future outcome for the Akagi ship.
7. To what extent was the Battle of Midway considered the greatest naval battle in modern history? What evidence exists in this document to corroborate or counter this claim?

Primary Source B: **Battle of Midway- American Military Report**

Brief summary of the Battle

This summary is from information derived from U.S. Sources.

- 3 June: Jap ships sighted, 700-470 miles from Midway.
Carriers were not sighted.
9 B-17s and 4 PBYS attacked the ships—damage not confirmed.
- 4 June: 0552: 2 enemy carriers sighted.
0630: Midway attacked by carrier planes.
0700-0830: Midway planes attacked 3 Jap carriers.
0930-1030: U.S. carrier planes attacked 4 Jap carriers.
AKAGI, KAGA, SORYU set on fire and ultimately destroyed.
HIRYU withdrew and was undamaged.
1455: YORKTOWN had been attacked and was abandoned.
1700: HIRYU again attacked, left burning fiercely.
- 5 June: U.S. forces followed conservative policy and did not chase the Jap fleet. Weather was poor. Situation was not clear—still waiting to sight the fifth carrier.
- 6 June: Our planes searched for Jap fleet.
Sank MIKUMA—CA.
The Jap Fleet had withdrawn so far westward, our Task Force was forced to retire.
YORKTOWN, abandoned on 4 June, was being prepared for towing to Pearl Harbor for repairs. It was attacked by 2 torpedoes from Jap sub. The explosion caused the HAMMAND-DD to explode and sink.
Torpedo attack at 1335.
HAMMAND sank at 1339.
- 7 June: At 0501 YORKTOWN, “Turned over on her port side and sank in about 3,000 fathoms of water with all her battle flags flying.”

Source: Notes on the Battle of Midway, Compiled June, 1946. American perspective From the U.S. Navy’s “File of Memoranda and Reports Relating to The Battle of Midway”, declassified June 5, 1985, pp 240.

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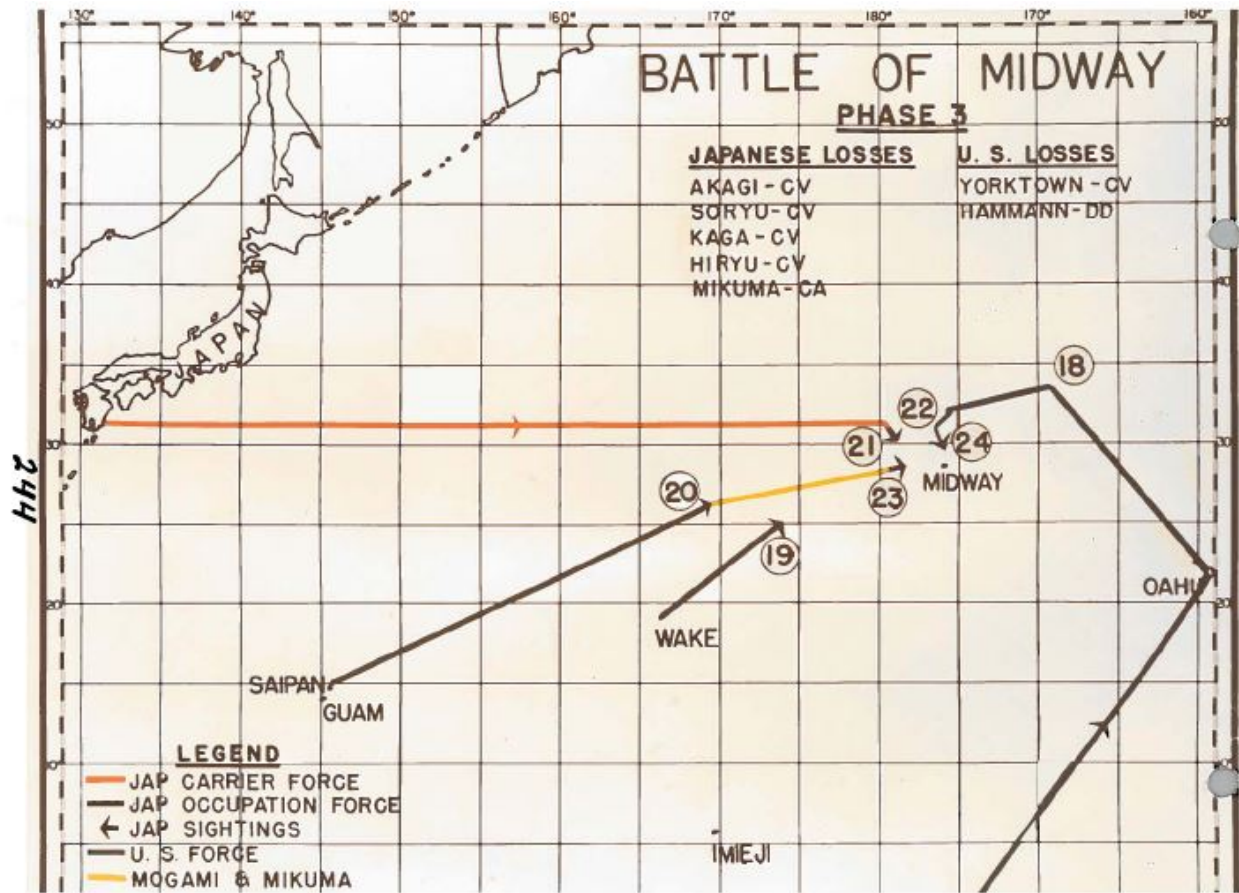
Name: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT HANDOUT B

Primary Source B Questions:

1. Does your source provide the perspective of the Japanese, American or both? Provide evidence to support your claim.
2. Is there anything discussed in this document that is similar to primary source A? If so, explain.
3. What new event(s) are described in this document that is left out of primary source A?
4. What timeframe is covered in this document compared to primary source A?
5. What did you find the most surprising? Explain.
6. Assess the outcome of the battle. Who do you believe won? Explain.
7. To what extent was the Battle of Midway considered the greatest naval battle in modern history? What evidence exists in this document to support or counter this claim?

Primary Source C: Battle of Midway Map
Notes on the Battle of Midway Map



DD= Destroyer CV=Aircraft Carrier CA= Heavy Cruiser

Background: This map represents the events of the battle as found in U.S. reports and translated Japanese messages. Although the Japanese messages were not deciphered until months later, they do provide clarification to conflicting reports coming from American sources.

Source: Map on the Battle of Midway. Based on American and Japanese intelligence. From the U.S. Navy's "File of Memoranda and Reports Relating to The Battle of Midway", declassified June 5, 1985, pp 245.

PHASE 3

This Phase consists of U.S. reports and Jap messages which were translated several months after the battle. The code, which the Japanese had put into effect on 28 May, was not broken in time to be of aid during the fighting. However, the lateness of translation did not reduce the importance of these messages in the evaluation of Jap losses, and in the clarification of conflicting reports received about the battle.

- (18). 2 June 1530: Rendezvous of U.S. Carriers, YORKTOWN, ENTERPRISE, and HORNET (with their escorts) at 32-04 N., 172-45 W. (350 miles northeast of Midway).

These carriers had arrived at Pearl Harbor, from the South Pacific, on 26-27 May.

During the night of 3-4 June they moved southwest to within 200 miles of Midway.

3 June 0904: Midway plane sighted "2 Jap cargo vessels bearing 247° from Midway distance 470 miles."

3 June 0925: Another Midway plane sighted "Main body bearing 261°, distance 700 miles, 6 large ships in column". These same ships again sighted at 1100. However, this was not the main body of the OCCUPATION FORCE.

4 June 0630: Midway bombed by Jap Carrier planes.

At 0550, "many planes heading Midway, bearing 320°, distance 150," had been reported by a U.S. plane.

At 0552, "2 carriers and main body of ships, carriers in front course 135° speed 25, on bearing from Midway 320°, distance 180 miles" had been reported by U.S. plane.

• , (22) . 4 June: Carrier Diane warfare.

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0700-1030: Jap carriers were first attacked by planes from Midway, and then by our carrier planes.

1455: YORKTOWN was abandoned after a severe attack by planes from the Jap_ carrier HIRYU.

1700: U.S. planed attacked HIRYU. It was left burning fiercely

Jap message of 5 June(-9 time).

From: STRIKING FORCE (Battle Report).

"June 5, carried out air attack on Midway as scheduled. Shot down about 30 enemy planes and although inflicted considerable damage to equipment, details not clear. Even after the attack it seemed that the enemy was able to use the air field. From 0400-0730 more than 100 enemy planes attacked, among which more than 50 were shot down. Even though we avoided all the torpedoes, because of the attack of the shipboard bombers we received many direct hits. As it was impossible to continue the battle because of fires, I gave the order to retreat and with 6 DDs in company shifted Flag to the NAGARA.

With the remainder of this force, proceeded towards the enemy-Striking Force and attacked. An aircraft carrier of the HORNET class received considerable damage with 2 torpedo hits. At 1430, because of an extremely serious attack by enemy shipboard bombers, we sustained great damage. It was a terrific battle. The air attacks continued in succession until about 1600.

After retiring to the northwest we turned to attack. This forces 1800 position was (30-50 N., 179-50W.) course 320° - speed 20 knots.

The enemies main force consisted of 3 HORNET type aircraft, carriers (one of which was listing, burning, and drifting), 2 aircraft carriers of uncertain type, 6 heavy cruisers and a number of destroyers.

1500 position of 10 ships 30-55 N., 176-05 W.) course 280° - speed 24 knots

Although the fire on the HIRYU has slackened a bit, she lies in the enemies track and the fire cannot be brought under control. If it were possible to put out the fire, she might be able to get underway, She is under escort of two DDs and retiring to the northwest.

The SORYU sank and the KAGA also sank. The AKAGI is burning fiercely and it is not expected to be brought under control. Getting underway is impossible. She is at approximate position(30-40 N., 178-50 W.) under escort of 2 DDs."

Message of 5 June(-9 time).
From: Comdr STRIKING FORCE
"HIRYU hit by bombs on fire." .*

Message at 060820(-9 time), Midway time
was 051100:
"According to reconnaissance by HOSHO planes at 0420 the HIRYU
was burning in position (32-10 N., 178-50 E.). A
number of survivors were on deck.

Message of 080450(-9 time), Midway time
was 070700:
According to the HOSHO planes the HIRYU is drifting at position
(32-05 N., 178-50 E.). Her subsequent condition is requested,
as it is desired to dispose of her with a submarine of the
ADVANCE FORCE if it becomes necessary."

• (23). 5-6 June: U.S. carrier plane attacks on JAP cruisers,

050217: U.S. sub TAMBOR reported "Many unidentified
ships 90 miles west of Midway."

050400: Message of 060100(-9 time).
From: Flag CRUDIV 7
To: MOGAMI, MIKUMA.

"A submarine submerged 45° 8 kilometers from the KUMANO."

050500: Message of 060200(-9 time).
From: Flag 2ND FLEET
To: OCCUPATION FORCE.

"Cancel Midway Occupation."

050600: U.S. sub TAMBOR sent following:
"2 MOGAMI type cruisers bearing 272°, 115 miles from Midway,
course 270°."

050800: Message of 060500(-9 time).
From: MIKUMA.
"8 enemy bombers attacking, we are *firing*. Position
(28-10N., 179-50 W.)."

050905: Message of 060605(-9 time).
From: MIKUMA,
"MOGAMI is receiving a series of bombing attacks. Add one plane
shot down, no damage."

051900: Message of 061610(-9 time).
From: Flag 2ND FLEET.
ESCORT FORCE. and OCCUPATION FORCE continue westward
until further orders."

061005: Message of 070705(-9-tima).
From: MIKUMA,
"We are being attacked by enemy carrier planes."
NOTE* MIKUMA, sank following this
attack.

● (24) . 6-7 June: Sinking of the YORKTOWN and
HAMMANN.

061335: YORKTOWN-CV, and HAMMANN-DD were
torpedoed by Jap sub.
HAMMANN sank within 3 or 4 minutes.
070330: YORKTOWN sank.

Source: Notes on the Battle of Midway, Compiled June, 1946. American perspective. From the U.S. Navy's "File of Memoranda and Reports Relating to The Battle of Midway", declassified June 5, 1985, pp 245, 259-262.

Name: _____ Date: _____

STUDENT HANDOUT C

Primary Source C Questions:

1. Does your source provide the perspective of the Japanese, American or both? Provide evidence to support your claim.
2. Is there anything discussed in this document that is similar to primary source A and B? If so, explain.
3. What new event(s) are described in this document that is left out of primary source A and B?
4. What timeframe is covered in this document compared to primary source A and B?
5. What did you find the most surprising? Explain.
6. Assess the outcome of the battle. Who do you believe won? Did your thoughts change after reading this document compared to primary source B? Explain.
7. To what extent was the Battle of Midway considered the greatest naval battle in modern history? What evidence exists in this document to support or counter this claim?