



U.S. AIR FORCE

Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



After destroying U.S. forces in Hawaii and the Philippines on 7 December 1941, Japan achieved most of its war goals to conquer resource-rich areas in the Pacific. But after the Doolittle raid on their home islands and their defeat in the Coral Sea, the Japanese sought to expand their defensive perimeter, prevent further raids on the home islands and destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet's aircraft carriers. In pursuit of these objectives, the Commander of the Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, led an invasion force to conquer the Midway atoll near the western end of the Hawaiian chain. Supporting the invasion was a strike force led by the same commander that had attacked Oahu on December 7th – Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, and four of the six aircraft carriers from that raid – *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu*. The other two carriers, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, had fought in the Coral Sea and were being repaired and refitted. Japan's ultimate objective was to convince the United States to negotiate an end to the war.

U.S. communications intelligence allowed American commanders to guess what Yamamoto was up to. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the U.S. Pacific Fleet commander, sent the aircraft carriers *Enterprise*, *Hornet* and *Yorktown* to meet the Japanese. *Yorktown* had been badly damaged at the Battle of the Coral Sea, but despite estimates that she would require several months of repairs at Puget Sound, the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard restored *Yorktown* to a battle-ready state in just 72 hours.

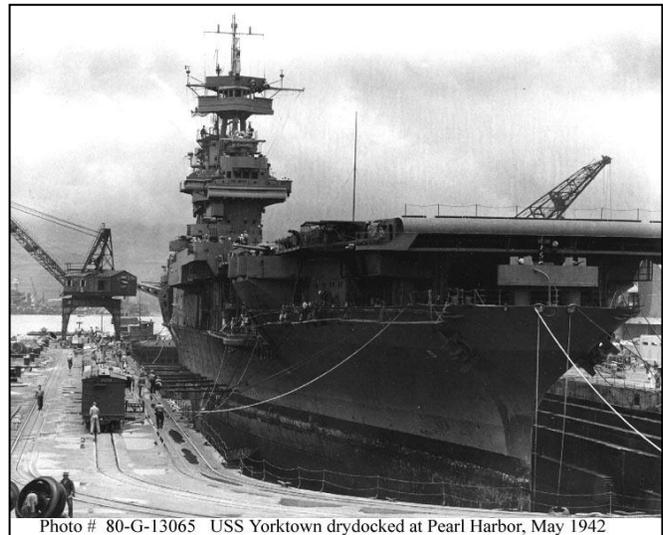


Photo # 80-G-13065 USS Yorktown drydocked at Pearl Harbor, May 1942

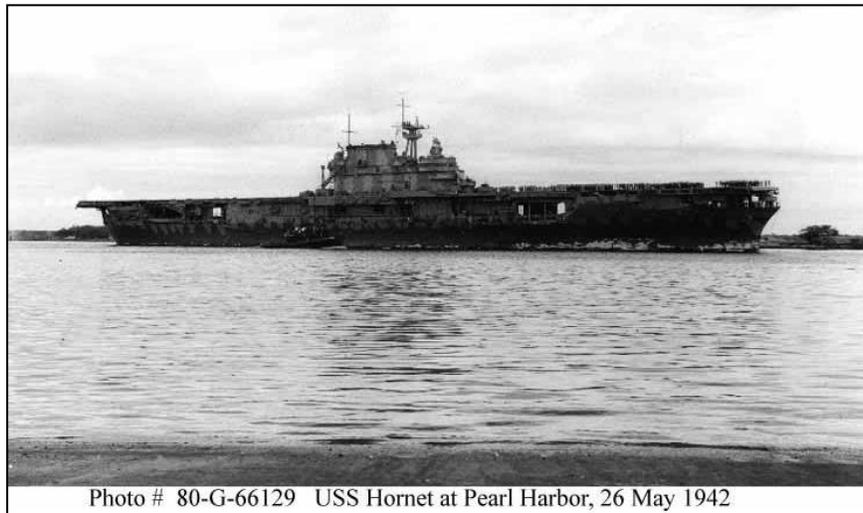


Photo # 80-G-66129 USS Hornet at Pearl Harbor, 26 May 1942



U.S. AIR FORCE

Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



3 June 1942 At 1530, nine B-17s from Midway found the Japanese invasion fleet 570 nautical miles the west of the island. They attacked through heavy anti-aircraft fire but inflicted no damage on the Japanese ships.

4 June 1942

0430 **The four Japanese carriers were 240 miles northwest of Midway.** They began launching 108 planes to attack the U.S. base – 72 bombers escorted by 36 Zeros. Unknown to the Japanese, the three U.S. carriers were cruising 215 miles to the east. Scout planes from both Midway and the U.S. carriers searched along the expected route of the Japanese task force. The Japanese also sent out scout planes as standard operational procedure.



Photo # 80-G-451086 Midway is., with Eastern I. in foreground, Nov. 1941

0530 A seaplane from Midway saw and reported the Japanese aircraft carriers and the incoming Japanese air raid. U.S. radar on Midway also detected the Japanese raiders. **Midway launched aircraft in response:** Navy, Marine and Army Air Forces (AAF) bombers against the Japanese ships and Marine fighters against the incoming raid.

0615 **U.S. Marine fighters met the enemy formation** but were immediately engaged by the escorting Zeros. The Marines suffered great losses and shot down only a few of the bombers. The rest continued the attack against U.S. forces at Midway Atoll.

0630 **The Japanese bombers hit Midway's two inhabited islands,** destroying many facilities. However, the airfield remained operational, so the Japanese aircraft radioed their fleet that another strike would be necessary before Midway could be invaded.



U.S. AIR FORCE

Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



0700 **Ineffective U.S. attack.** Six Navy bombers and four AAF B-26s attacked the Japanese carriers despite intense fighter opposition. These attacks were not coordinated, suffered severe losses and scored no hits on the Japanese ships. Over the next two hours, the **U.S. aircraft carriers launched powerful air forces** to find and attack the Japanese fleet. Three squadrons of torpedo bombers and five squadrons of dive bombers launched from the U.S. carriers, along with escorting fighters. However, the flights were uncoordinated in their searches and their approaches to the Japanese carriers.

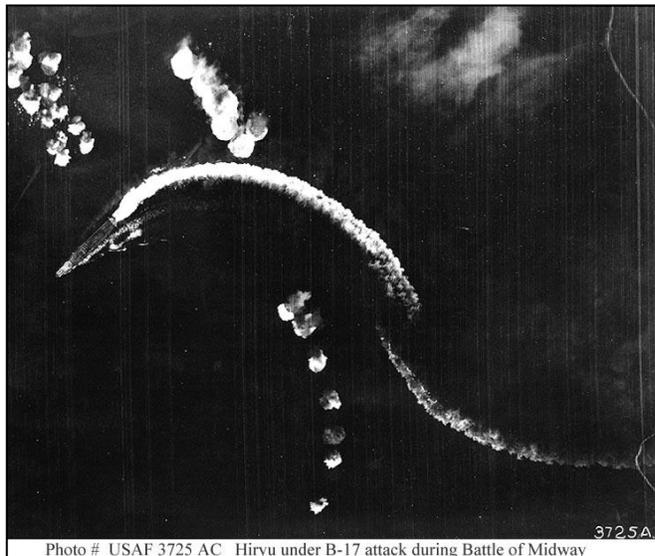


Photo # USAF 3725 AC Hiryu under B-17 attack during Battle of Midway

0755 Marine Corps bombers and AAF B-17s from Midway attacked the Japanese carriers. However, the carriers evaded the trains of bombs and suffered no hits.

Some time later, a **Japanese scout plane spotted the American fleet**, including one of the U.S. carriers. Upon hearing this report, Nagumo, who had been preparing a second strike on Midway, immediately ordered his aircraft to be reloaded with anti-ship weapons while the Midway strike force recovered on his carriers' flight decks.

0915 Nagumo changed course to get his task force closer to the U.S. carriers.

0930 **U.S. Navy torpedo planes** from the *Hornet*, *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* **made a series of attacks on the Japanese carriers.** Only six heavily outnumbered Wildcats were on hand to engage the intercepting Japanese Zero's. The torpedo bombers suffered almost total losses and scored no hits. However, their attacks delayed the Japanese preparations to strike the U.S. carriers and disorganized the defensive fighter screen.



Photo # 80-G-41686 VT-6 TBDs on USS Enterprise, during Battle of Midway



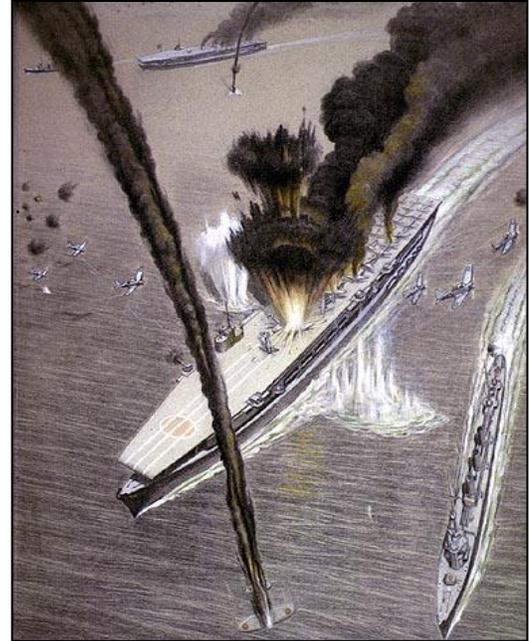
Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



U.S. AIR FORCE

1020 **Three squadrons of U.S. Navy dive bombers**, two from *Enterprise* and one from *Yorktown*, **found Akagi, Kaga and Soryu** – partially by following a Japanese destroyer that was hurrying to rejoin the fleet after driving off an American submarine. (*Hiryu* was a short distance away but hidden by a rain squall.) The Japanese carriers had just finished arming and fueling their aircraft for an attack on the U.S. fleet.

Bombs and fuel lines were exposed on hangar decks, strike aircraft were sitting on the flight decks, and the defending Zeros were low on fuel, ammunition and altitude after finishing off the U.S. torpedo bombers. The U.S. dive bomber squadrons attacked almost simultaneously. In five minutes, all three Japanese carriers were on fire and out of action. Admiral Nagumo was forced to transfer his flag from *Akagi* to the cruiser *Nagara*. By dawn on the following morning, ***Akagi, Kaga and Soryu* had all sunk to the bottom of the Pacific**. No photos but many artworks and dioramas depict this **historic U.S. Navy action of 70 years ago**. At right, “Air Attack on Japanese Carriers” by Griffith Baily Coale from the [U.S. Navy Art Collection](#).



1300 A few hours after the destruction of *Akagi, Kaga and Soryu*, **Japanese aircraft from Hiryu struck back**. *USS Yorktown* was bombed (below, left) and torpedoed (bottom left). Her crew was forced to abandon ship (below, right).

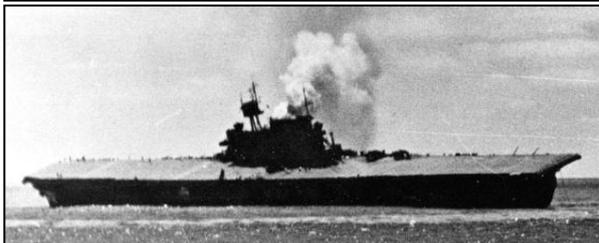


Photo # 80-G-17061 USS Yorktown being abandoned, 4 June 1942



U.S. AIR FORCE

Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



1800 Late in the day, **U.S. Navy dive bombers found and bombed the *Hiryu*.**

The photo at right shows *Hiryu* burning on the morning of 5 June 1942, not long before she sank.

On 6 June, the U.S. Navy was trying to salvage *Yorktown* when she was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. ***Yorktown* sank** early the next morning.

The Battle of Midway was the equalizer in the Pacific war.

Admiral Yamamoto called off the attempt to invade Midway and retreated west. Afterwards, Japan could not match American military resources and initiative, and the United States went on the offensive.



19-20 June 1944 **The Battle of the Philippine Sea** took place as U.S. forces invaded the Mariana Islands, which allowed U.S. Army Air Forces to base heavy bombers within range of Japan itself. It was the last major carrier versus carrier battle of the Pacific War. Japan had not matched U.S. improvements in training, tactics, technology and war production. Nine Japanese aircraft carriers with less than 500 aircraft were augmented by large numbers of land-based aircraft. One of these carriers was the *Shokaku*, which had been part of the Japanese task force that struck Pearl Harbor on 7 Dec 1941. Opposing them were fifteen American carriers and nearly 900 U.S. warplanes. Americans nicknamed the action as the “Great Marianas Turkey



Shoot” due to the disproportionate Japanese aircraft losses. Ultimately, the Japanese Navy lost approximately 600 aircraft and hundreds of pilots in addition to three aircraft carriers. ***Shokaku* sank after torpedo hits from the U.S. submarine *Cavalla* started a chain reaction of fires and explosions.** At left, *Shokaku* sinking from John Hamilton's book "War at Sea." (Source: combinedfleet.com.)

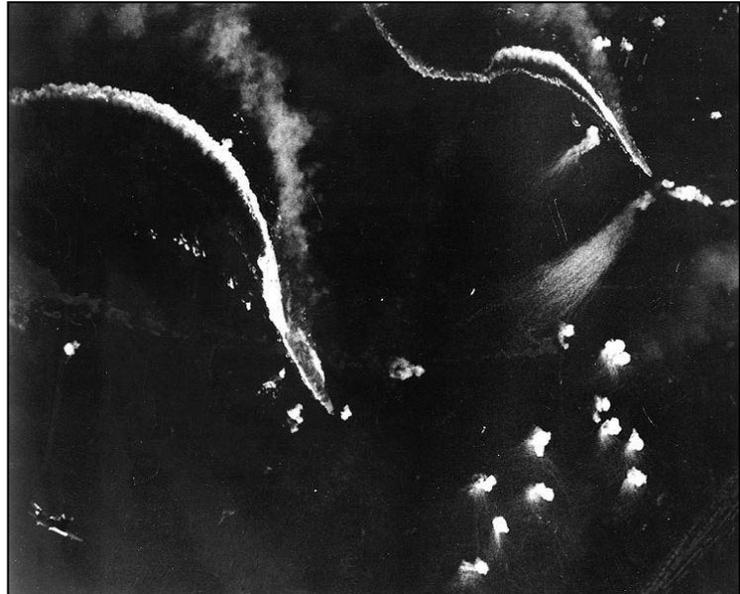


Aftermath of 7 December 1941 – The Battle of Midway, 3-5 June 1942



U.S. AIR FORCE

25 October 1944 In the **Battle of Leyte Gulf**, U.S. forces moved to retake the Philippines and isolate Japan from its conquered territories – including its supply of oil and other war materials. Japan committed much of its remaining naval and air strength to the battle, but Japanese aircraft carriers had lost most of their planes in the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot” and had fewer planes left for self-defense. Leyte Gulf is sometimes called the largest naval battle in history. **The fleet carrier *Zuikaku*, four light carriers and 22 other Japanese warships were sunk** in the battle. In the photo at right, *Zuikaku* (left center) maneuvers while under attack by U.S. Navy dive bombers.



Above, the sinking *Zuikaku* lists heavily to port. Her crew salutes as the Japanese naval ensign is lowered and then gives a last “banzai” cheer. *Zuikaku* was the last surviving carrier from the *Hawaiian Operation* task force that attacked Oahu on 7 December 1941.

Japan was increasingly deprived of resources by U.S. naval and air forces and bombarded by AAF B-29s based in the Marianas. In 1945, U.S. Marine and Army forces captured the Philippines, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and the atomic bombings in August convinced the Japanese to end the war.