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THE BATTLE of MIDWAY

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THE Jap had failed to get a foothold on Australia. Strategists reasoned that he would now strike east, at an outpost of the North American continent. Alaska became the No. 1 alert; bombers were flown to Midway; carriers came north; and Admiral Nimitz pushed patrols far out toward the Bonins and Wake.

A navy patrol found the enemy first, in the early hours of June 3. The dark speck of the first enemy column showed up in the moonlit waters west of Midway. Land based bombers thundered out to begin the attack and that afternoon punched through a screen of fighters and antiaircraft to reach the convoy and leave two ships burning. In the north a navy carrier force swung south and raced toward Midway.

Reconnaissance showed a Jap force of about 80 ships approaching Midway. The first fleet, already under attack, was a landing force—troop transports, protecting cruisers and destroyers. From the north in the afternoon came the main attack force with four carriers, battleships, cruisers and destroyers. Each force numbered about 40 ships.

Strategy was determined while our Navy raced south. Because the enemy had so many carriers it was logical to assume that he had planned to attack Midway first by air. During this time the Jap fleet would be without its chief protection. The Navy task force, then, planned to slice between the two Jap fleets and on contact send its planes in a flying leap on the Jap attacking force. Strategically, this should come at the moment the Jap Air Force raided Midway.

After sun-up, on the 4th, halyard flags reported that patrol planes had established contact. At almost the same moment word came in from Midway that the Japs were attacking there.

Now our first carrier turned into the wind to launch her attack group. Quickly the others swung around. The carriers still raced along after the planes had disappeared, men at their posts standing on the alert for planes and submarines.

Under the attack of the land-based planes, the Jap had begun his retreat and only one of the first torpedo squadrons found him. Torpedo 8 reported a force of three carriers and a whole parade of other ships. The squadron radioed its position, attacked, and no more was heard.

Now the planes had found the enemy and attacked. The Navy gambled on a new tactic, using its planes in do-or-die inside blows. In-fighting, it is called in the prize ring. While Army and Navy bombers overhead joined in long-range punches, Navy torpedo planes below dashed in and out at close quarters. The tactic was successful; the Jap directed all his attention to the torpedoes and the bombers above had a field day. Each of the three carriers was hit, and caught fire; two battleships were damaged, one destroyer seemed to explode.

Almost the moment the Navy planes landed on the decks, planes from the fourth Jap carrier attacked. *Yorktown* got it first. Her fighters swung upward amid flashing guns, smoke and ack-ack. The ships of the line turned and twisted. To the men on the ships it seemed that only two of the 18 attackers finally managed to get away.

In the afternoon the fourth carrier was found, bombed and crippled; later a sub put three torpedoes in her hull. Next day, when planes searched for the three carriers first put out of action, they found only huge oil slicks on the water, with men swimming in their midst.

Reconnaissance showed the enemy forces fleeing in disorder, ripped apart and stunned after meeting a force they did not expect. In the north bad weather hid the fleeing Japs. In the waters to the south land-based army and marine planes had continued to engage the transport force and now the enemy, abandoning its cripples, formed several fleeing groups. Flying Fortresses found one group on the 5th and left a cruiser listing and turning. Rushing westward, our carriers found two more groups, one the Jap admiral's. Relays of planes shot out, attacked, scored hits. On the evening of the 6th the task force came within range of Jap land-based bombers, turned and started back.

"Things began to break for us at Midway," Admiral King said later. "We began to get the breaks there." Navy losses were the carrier *Yorktown* and the destroyer *Hammann*. The Japs lost at least four carriers with at least 275 planes; three destroyers, two cruisers and one transport.