

This Day in History... June 7, 1942

Allies Win Battle of Midway

On June 7, 1942, the Allies won the Battle of Midway in the Pacific, turning the tide of the war.

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Japanese began mapping out a plan to take down America's carrier forces. Realizing Pearl Harbor was now too well defended, they set their sights northwest on Midway Island, at the end of the Hawaiian Island chain.

Although they had naval superiority over the US and were essentially able to attack as they pleased, the Doolittle Raids on Tokyo and several other major cities had damaged the Japanese psychologically months earlier.



The Doolittle raid bombed 16 targets, mostly military installations, in six cities.



The US lost the Yorktown and one destroyer while the Japanese lost four aircraft carriers and a heavy cruiser.

The Japanese plan was to disperse their ships around the area, hidden from American view. They hoped to lure US aircraft carriers into a deadly ambush near the Midway atoll and eliminate the US presence in the Pacific Ocean. With that accomplished, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto planned to invade the Atoll's small islands and establish a Japanese air base there. However, Yamamoto's plans were thwarted when the Imperial Navy's JN-25 code was cracked and plans for the raid were discovered in mid-May.

In addition to knowing where and when the attack was planned, American Admiral Chester Nimitz knew the battle order. Another part of the Japanese plan that weighed against them was the fact that the ships were too far dispersed and were never able to aid the ships that were engaged in battle.

Expecting the Japanese to send four or five carriers into battle, Admiral Nimitz ordered every available US flight deck to make its way to Midway. By June 3, 1942, he had three carriers and a total of 124 aircraft ready and waiting for battle. The American forces sent out their first planes at 12:30 p.m. on June 3. Though they dropped bombs on the Japanese ships, they failed to inflict any damage.

The following morning, June 4, 1942, the Americans again sent out planes, this time striking a Japanese oil tanker. The Japanese then retaliated, attacking the island itself.

American torpedo bombers then drew Japanese fighters away from their ships, allowing dive-bombers from the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* to take out three Japanese vessels. The destruction of the fourth Japanese ship later that afternoon forced their retreat. Though they managed to sink the *Yorktown* before dispersing.

The last air attacks of the battle took place on June 6, when Douglas SBD Dauntless dive-bombers from the *Hornet* and *Enterprise* bombed and sunk the Japanese heavy cruiser *Mikuma*. American forces attempted to salvage the *Yorktown* into June 7, but when it was deemed impossible, efforts ended and so did the battle.

The US was able to inflict huge damages against the Japanese Navy, and force its retreat. Three days of intense fighting and lightning raids led to the sinking of four Japanese fleet carriers, and one heavy cruiser. Victory allowed the US to control Midway for the rest of the war. One historian called it "the most stunning and decisive blow in the history of naval warfare."



Chester Nimitz was commander in chief of Pacific Ocean Areas during the battle.

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