

The War-Changing Battle

“They had no right to win. Yet they did, and in doing so they changed the course of a war...even against the greatest of odds, there is something in the human spirit—a magic blend of skill, faith, and valor—that can lift men from certain defeat to incredible victory” (Principi). This quote about the Battle of Midway by Walter Lord is encribed on the World War II memorial in Washington D.C. The Battle of Midway was a decisive battle in World War II where the United States defended against the Japanese Empire. It was held at Midway Atoll, a series of islands 1300 miles northeast of Hawaii. The Battle of Midway was one of the most critical turning points in the war, showed how important codebreaking was in warfare, heavily affected both Japanese and American morale, and makes a substantial impact on us today.

Japan ended up choosing Midway as a great battle spot for one main reason. Since they were not able to capture Pearl Harbor in December 1941, they chose Midway as an optimal battle area to be a base for attacking Pearl Harbor again (National). If they captured Pearl Harbor, almost all American military presence in the Pacific would be stopped. It would practically win Japan the war if they could capture these two island chains.

United States (US) cryptanalysts uncovered Japan’s plan, eventually leading to an American victory in the battle. Japan had made a brilliant plan to capture Midway Atoll. They would attack the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, diverting the US military, then they would capture Midway with little resistance (History). They were sure that their plan was completely sound. What they did not know was that the Americans had figured out their plan. Based on a weather report in the Midway area by the Japanese, the US determined that the Japanese code for Midway was AF. Then the US intercepted a message mentioning an attack on AF (Pruitt). To

make sure they were defending the right area, they set up a trap. They sent a submarine to tell personnel to inform Pearl Harbor that the salt water evaporators had broken down at Midway. Just two days afterwards, they intercepted a Japanese message that AF was running out of fresh drinking water (History). The US had deciphered Japan's plan. When Japan attacked the Aleutians, the US did not divert the Midway troops there. Instead, they defended Midway, preparing for the attack.

The battle began on June 4, 1942. After the attack on the Aleutians, a group of B-17 bombers flew to attack the first Japanese invasion group sent to Midway, which they wrongly assumed was the main fleet. This was the first military engagement in the battle. The next day, more B-17s were sent to the fleet (History). However, both of these attacks were unsuccessful. Meanwhile, 108 Japanese aircraft were sent for a direct attack on Midway, inflicting catastrophic damage. Shortly after, the US attacked the Japanese, which was also unsuccessful. When a Japanese scout plane spotted a US fleet just east of Midway, the Japanese fleet diverted their attack force there. Meanwhile, the US sent torpedo bombers to attack the ships. The Japanese "Zero" planes were able to shoot almost all of them down. Just an hour later, another wave of bombers struck, setting three of the four Japanese carriers ablaze. The final carrier, *Hiryu*, sent two waves of attacks to the US aircraft carrier Yorktown. On June 7, the Yorktown began to sink (The World War II Book 164).

Luckily, many soldiers were saved from sinking along with the USS Yorktown. Orders were received from Admiral Raymond A. Spruance to reinforce the carrier, which was under heavy Japanese attack (Worthington). They arrived too late. The Yorktown was already sinking, so they decided to save as many soldiers as possible. Some ships helped soldiers drowning in the

Pacific, while others dispatched lifeboats for the ones still on Yorktown. In total, two thousand soldiers were saved, while only about three hundred died (Sloan).

Finally, the bombers diverted their attention to *Hiryu*, and eventually sank it. All four Japanese carriers were lost. About three thousand Japanese soldiers were killed in the fighting, as opposed to only about 350 US soldiers (History). The US had won the Battle of Midway.

The Battle of Midway was a crucial turning point in World War II. It halted the offense of the Japanese Empire, letting the US invade the Pacific. However, if Japan had won the battle, they would have likely captured Pearl Harbor. Their next step would probably have been to invade the now vulnerable US west coast, eventually winning the war.

The Battle of Midway heavily affected the morale of both US and Japanese troops. The US was elated and their morale boosted, while Japan was crushed, along with their dreams of winning the war against the US (History). The most important lesson we can learn from the Battle of Midway is about codebreaking. Without the codebreakers, the US would have lost the battle and the war. Controlling the intelligence area is important for all kinds of war, just like it turned out to be in Midway.

The Battle of Midway heavily affects our lives today. Without the battle, the US would be much weaker or under Japanese and Nazi influence. Our lives today would be very different. America would not be a very free nation and would likely not be a great power.

The Battle of Midway was probably the most decisive battle in World War II. It led the way for codebreaking to become an important aspect of warfare. The morale of both armies was heavily affected, leading to the US having even more of an advantage the rest of the war. It was the biggest turning point on the Pacific front. We can thank the brave soldiers who fought at

Midway for our freedom. The Battle of Midway was one of the most important battles in the history of America.

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