

Battle of Midway Ceremony Stock Speech

Acknowledge introduction and greet audience as appropriate.

Today I am *privileged* to reflect on the Battle of Midway. It is an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate a great American naval victory during the uncertain days of early 1942.

Imperial Japan's war against the United States began with a devastating surprise attack on Oahu on December 7, 1941. The Japanese raid prompted an abrupt revision of the U.S. Pacific war plan. The elimination of the Pacific Fleet's battle line thrust the aircraft carriers, and their attendant cruisers and destroyers, onto center stage.

Within six months of the outbreak of war on December 7, Japanese naval and land forces carried out operations in southeast Asia and in the Pacific on a scale that until then people thought impossible. The rays of the Rising Sun of the Japanese Empire extended some 6,400 miles from east to west, and 5,300 miles from north to south, more than nine times the size of the United States. The enemy had taken the "impregnable" British base at Singapore, had overrun the Netherlands East Indies, had landed in New Guinea, had overcome American-Filipino resistance and taken Bataan and Corregidor (*kə-'re-gə-,dōr*); had landed in the Solomon Islands to threaten Australia; and had overrun Burma and advanced on India.

Japanese aircraft carriers, after the surprise attack on Oahu, took part in other wide-ranging operations, nearly obliterating the port of Darwin, Australia, and racing across the Indian Ocean, pounding Ceylon (*si-'län*) known today as Sri Lanka and sinking British warships. They seemed invincible.

Yet even while those at Pearl Harbor could see the reminders of the devastation of the attack on December 7, others saw different handwriting on the wall: the fast U.S. carrier striking forces that had escaped destruction that morning needed to "be operated boldly and vigorously on the tactical defensive in order to retrieve our initial disaster..." as then Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet Adm. Husband Kimmel said.

While some viewed these events as a seemingly endless litany of disaster, the officers and men of the Pacific Fleet took the war to the enemy, on their own terms – striking fast and hard...

in the Marshall and Gilbert islands...

Off Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands, where Lieutenant Edward H. O'Hare challenged nine enemy bombers headed for the carrier USS Lexington (CV 2) and daringly and skillfully shot down five of the enemy planes saving the carrier from serious damage – for these actions he was awarded the Medal of Honor...

At the Wake and Marcus islands...

And finally in New Guinea, at Lae (*'lä-ā*) and Salamaua (*sä-lä-'maui-ä*), where two carrier air groups flew through a pass among the peaks of the towering Owen Stanley Mountains to sink or damage a dozen enemy ships, inflicting the most damage on the enemy since the war began.

Japanese irritation grew. Then in April 1942, a Pacific Fleet carrier ferried U.S. Army planes to bomb the sacred soil of Japan in the Halsey-Doolittle Raid.

Each sides' aircraft carriers had been unchallenged in early 1942. Each side wanted to draw the other's flattops into a decisive battle and destroy them.

Within weeks of the Halsey-Doolittle raid, the Japanese met defeat in their attempt to capture Port Moresby (*'mörz-bē*) in Papua New Guinea by sea, turning back their transports after the critical Battle of the Coral Sea, where the American carriers had bested the Japanese.

In the hopes of luring the U.S. carriers into a decisive battle, a powerful Japanese fleet led personally by its commander in chief, Admiral Yamamoto, steamed toward Midway, the central Pacific atoll that the Japanese deemed "the sentry for Hawaii."

Admiral Nimitz, who knew of the Japanese plan through the diligent efforts of his code-breakers, took a calculated risk. He reinforced Midway to serve as a virtual fourth carrier, while concentrating his three-carrier striking force to be in position to attack the enemy once land-based planes at Midway sighted them.

Knowing the Japanese plan, however, did not guarantee victory. Still, the early Pacific raids had given the officers and men of the fleet's carriers valuable combat training and Midway airfield served to make the odds even, four carriers versus four. Indeed, given Nimitz' heavy reinforcement of the island, the Japanese aircraft were outnumbered in the fighting that began on June 3.

The next day, June 4, 1942, saw repeated American air attacks against the Japanese carriers. The raids met determined resistance but served to keep the enemy off balance. Finally, the providential arrival of dive bombers from Enterprise and the Yorktown strike group altered the complexion of the Pacific War in scant minutes. U.S. bombs quickly turned three Japanese aircraft carriers into floating infernos. Two strikes from the one Japanese carrier that survived the initial onslaught damaged Yorktown in return, but planes from Enterprise (including some Yorktown orphans) mortally damaged that fourth enemy carrier before the afternoon was out.

The victory at Midway enabled the United States to launch the counter-offensive in the Solomon Islands, culminating in the decisive victory at Guadalcanal by February 1943. Midway proved to

be the pivot point – when the inertia of the Pacific War shifted from the seemingly indomitable Japanese advance to the slow but steady Allied campaigns led by Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur.

Honor, courage and commitment abounded at Midway. Those Sailors, Marines, and Army aviators wrote, in Nimitz's words, "a glorious page in our history."

"We're the strongest and most capable Navy in the world," Admiral Gary Roughead, our Chief of Naval Operations, reminds us, "Midway taught us that it takes more than advanced technology and excellent training to win a war... those are vital, but without our people, their passion, and will to win we cannot achieve success... people make us a great Navy and Midway is a reminder to never forget it."

We salute those warriors of the *Battle of Midway*. We remember their great victory and tremendous sacrifice. We commit to them, to our Midway survivors, to all veterans, and to all Americans our own combat readiness, every day, in defense of our nation.

Words cannot express our nation's gratitude for the extraordinary service of our World War II veterans and those who participated in the Battle of Midway. **[If World War II or Battle of Midway veterans are present]** Please join me in acknowledging these men for what they accomplished for our nation.

God bless these heroes of the Battle of Midway and watch over our Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and Marines who today stand watch, who today stand in harm's way around the world defending our great nation, the United States of America.