

REMEMBERING THE *TURNING POINT*

THE 80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PIVOTAL BATTLE OF MIDWAY

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PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND

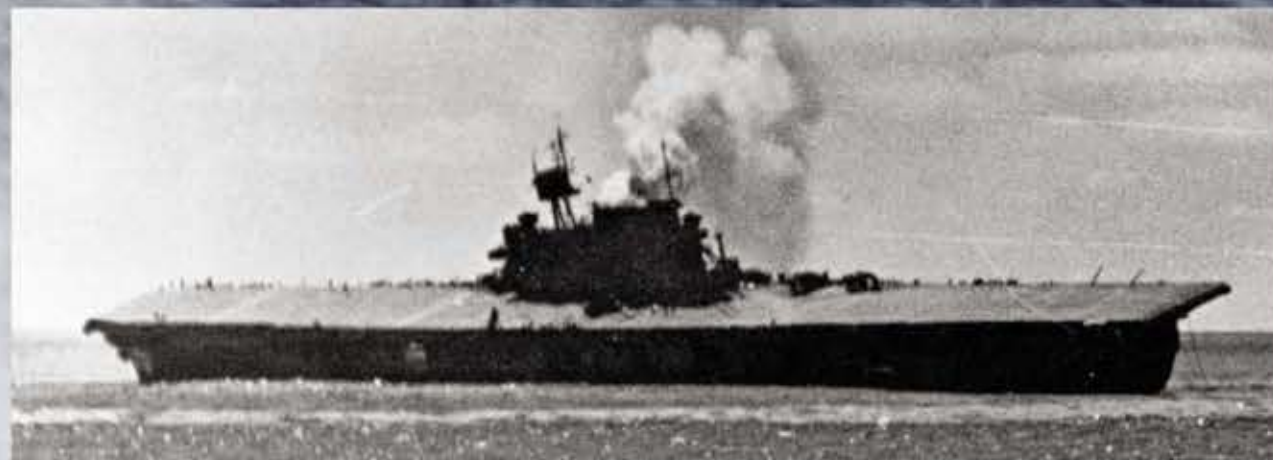
Following the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, the Japanese armed forces conducted military operations against American, British Commonwealth, and Dutch possessions in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. The first phase of these operations, which was the seizure of Malaysia, Singapore, and Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and various island groups in the central and western Pacific, was virtually complete by March 1942. The second phase, initiated by Japanese Imperial Headquarters on 23 January 1942, was designed to isolate and neutralize Australia and India. In the Pacific, this plan envisioned the seizure of bases in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, which

would then be used to support future operations against New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. By early March, with the seizure of Lae and Salamaua, the entire north coast of New Guinea had fallen to Japanese forces, who were planning for an amphibious invasion of Port Moresby.

At this time, two US fleet radio-intercept units were in operation in the Pacific: One in Melbourne, Australia (FRUMEL — Fleet Radio Unit Melbourne) and another at Pearl Harbor (“Hypo” or FRUPAC — Fleet Radio Unit Pacific). A third (“Cast”), at Cavite and then Corregidor in the Philippines, was lost when US forces there surrendered to the Japanese on 6 May. Fortunately, the station’s equipment could be destroyed and its cryptanalysts evacuated to Melbourne.

These facilities intercepted Japanese radio communications and, through traffic analysis and codebreaking, uncovered the location of major fleet units and shore-based air forces. More important, by translating messages and studying operational patterns, Melbourne and Hypo were able to predict future Japanese operations with some degree of certainty. The intelligence centers provided their analysis, through daily COMINT briefings and warning reports, to senior American commanders, including Adm. Ernest J. King, commander-in-chief US Fleet, and Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief Pacific Fleet.

Following an American carrier raids on Japanese shipping at Lae and Salamaua on 10 March, which demonstrated to Adm. Shigeyoshi



USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) dead in the water and listing heavily shortly after being hit by two Japanese Type 91 aerial torpedoes during the afternoon of 4 June. This view was taken prior to the ship's abandonment. Section of catwalk jutting above the flight deck, port side amidships, is directly above where the torpedoes struck the ship's hull.



Burning oil tanks on Sand Island following the Japanese air attack of the morning of 4 June.

The *Hiryu* burning after sunrise on 5 June 1942, just a few hours before slipping under the waves. The destroyed carrier was photographed by an aircraft from the *Hosho*. Of note are the collapsed flight deck at right and that part of the forward elevator is standing upright just in front of the island, where it had been thrown by an explosion on the hangar deck.