

LOST AT MIDWAY

IN THE FIGHT-TO-THE-DEATH BATTLE WITH THE FORCES OF THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY, DESTROYERS SUCH AS THE USS HAMMANN PLAYED A VITAL AND HEROIC ROLE. YET THEIR BRAVERY CAME AT A TERRIBLE PRICE

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EDITOR'S NOTE: USS Hammann, (DD-412) was a Sims-class destroyer named after Ens. Charles Hammann, a Medal of Honor recipient from WWI. The destroyer was launched from the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Company at Kearny, New Jersey, on 4 February 1939 and commissioned on 11 August 1939. She was stationed with the North Atlantic Patrol and within 30 minutes of the attack on Pearl Harbor, she and fellow ships were heading for the USA. By 22 January 1942, she was at Pearl Harbor and joined Task Force 17 for action in the South Pacific. The destroyer would see action during the Battle of the Coral Sea — the first naval engagement fought entirely on both sides between aircraft and ships. Hammann would rescue survivors from the USS Lexington and eventually picked up 500 sailors. Next was the Battle of Midway, and that is where the following events took place. The report was done on 16 June 1942 by Gunnery Officer Lt. (jg) C.C. Hartigan and gives a unique sense of immediacy to the historic battle.

In view of the fact that the Hammann was sunk about 1600 on 6 June 1942, with total loss of all records, this report must be made entirely from memory. Consequently, no record of the ship's track is included and times and locations given are only approximate. However, the Hammann was at all times in company with other vessels and comparison of this report with their records should indicate times and places accurately. The Hammann was operating under Commander Task Force 17 consisting of Yorktown, Astoria, Portland, Morris, Russell, Hammann, Anderson, and Hughes. The destroyers were designated as Task Group 17.4 under administration and tactical command of Commander Destroyer Squadron Two.

USS Hammann off Hawaii during 1941. The Sims-class destroyer had rushed to the Pacific from its base in Iceland following the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

On the night of 3 June, reports were received by radio of scouting plane contact with two AKS accompanied by two small vessels 450 miles west of Midway and a group of eleven or twelve ships containing two or three BBs, two or three CAs, one CV, and destroyers 700 miles west of Midway on course 090, speed 20. Task Force 17 at this time was about 300 miles NNE of Midway. Task Force 16 was in the same area. During the night both task forces moved in a southeasterly direction.

On the morning of 4 June, contact was made by scouts from Midway with another enemy force containing two BBs, two CAs and four CV with destroyers located about 200 miles west of the task forces. Task Force 16 flew off air attack



Ship's patch for USS Hammann.

groups about 0900 (LWT) and Task Force 17 launched air attack groups about 1000. Task Force 17 then took a closing course. The task force took anti-aircraft disposition "V" with the two cruisers 2500 yards on relative bearing 060 and 300 and DDs on relative bearings 020, 120, 180, 240, and 340. Hammann was on 020. About 1300 the first planes of returning attack group approached and two or three fighters landed. At this time the OTC broadcast over TBS that a large group of unidentified planes was approaching from westward, distant 26 miles. Planes in the landing circle were signaled off and preparations made to repel attack.

Fighters (Wildcats) picked up the enemy bombers about five miles out and shot down a large number — eight or ten as a rough estimate. It seems probable that there were 18 planes in the attack group. The remainder came on through and attacked the Yorktown, obtaining two or three hits. This vessel definitely shot down one enemy plane with 20mm fire as he was escaping after dropping his bomb and got probably hits on others. The entire attack lasted only a few minutes. Hammann fired 120 rounds of 5-inch and about 900 rounds of 20mm. Yorktown began smoking heavily and slowed to a stop. DDs and cruisers in screen began circling. This continued for about ten minutes while Yorktown was fighting fire. At this time one of our own bombers returning circled close aboard the Hammann and threw a note on deck stating that one of our torpedo-bombers was down eight miles distant, bearing 240°. Did not take any action as it appeared there were still some unidentified planes in the vicinity and Yorktown required full support. About five minutes later another plane crashed



USS Hammann (DD-412) at the Charleston Navy Yard, South Carolina, after arriving from Iceland and just before she transferred to the Pacific. The destroyer is painted in Measure 12 (modified) camouflage.

in the water about two miles ahead of Hammann. As there were now no further indications of enemy planes in the vicinity, proceeded to pick up pilot and radioman from this plane, slightly injured. Plane proved to be from Enterprise. Upon completion, sighted the rubber boat of the torpedo-bomber previously reported to us about five miles southward and proceeded at 30 knots to pick them up. Pilot was rescued only slightly injured but radioman was dead. Returned at 30 knots and rejoined Yorktown screen. Yorktown shortly increased speed to ten knots and then to 15.

About 1430, enemy planes were reported approaching from the west. Yorktown appeared to have damage well under control, making 15 knots, and launched all fighters on deck. Shortly afterward a group of twelve to 18 torpedo-bombers made a direct attack on Yorktown from her port quarter. Hammann was able to fire a barrage on a line passing just astern of Yorktown to path of incoming planes. It appeared that six or eight enemy planes were shot down during their approach but it could

not be determined by whom. Hammann shifted fire to a plane on Yorktown's bow and definitely shot him down with 5-inch fire. The attack was pressed in to close range and several torpedoes struck the Yorktown. Several more enemy planes were shot down by gunfire at close range after torpedoes were dropped. Hammann shot down two definitely, and possibly three, with 20mm fire as they were retiring.

After the torpedo attack, Yorktown listed heavily and slowed gradually to a stop. Screening vessels formed a circling screen. Three destroyers were ordered to stand by Yorktown. About 1700, Yorktown began abandoning ship. As the first three destroyers began to fill up with survivors, Hughes and then Hammann were ordered by Comdesron Two to leave screen and assist in picking up survivors from the water and life rafts in vicinity of Yorktown. Twice during the rescue operations, unidentified planes were reported in the vicinity but no enemy planes were sighted. Hammann went close astern of Yorktown and picked up the last of the survivors including



Completed in mid-1939, the USS Hammann was one of the Navy's newest warships to be lost in combat. Photographed shortly after completion, she appears to be under tow with a canvas cover over her stack, indicating that she may be en route from the builders for delivery to the Navy. Five tires are hung over her side for use as fenders.