

WHY THE ALLIES WON BIG AT MIDWAY:

©Dr. John Freedman 2026

Allied forces dealt the previously invincible Imperial Japanese Navy a decisive and permanent blow in the Battle of Midway on the morning on June 4, 1942. Although the stage was set for an Allied victory at Midway a month prior in the Battle of the Coral Sea May 4-8, 1942, when Allied forces held off the Japanese attack on Port Moresby, New Guinea, Midway was the first definitive Allied victory and is often designated as 'the turning point' of the war in the Pacific. Below is a summary of the 3 critical factors that explain the Allies' largely surprising victory and Japan's humiliating loss at Midway.

1. ALLIED SUPERIOR INTELLIGENCE - Codebreakers determined that the Japanese attack in the Aleutians was diversionary and the primary target of Japanese attack was going to be Midway. This allowed for a carefully prepared ambush of the Japanese carriers off of Midway.

2. JAPANESE STRATEGIC ERRORS (DUE TO 'VICTORY DISEASE' OVERCONFIDENCE)

- **YAMAMOTO UNDERESTIMATED AMERICAN NAVAL POWER AND DETERMINATION**
The Japanese arrogantly and wrongly considered the US Navy demoralized and weakened. He also wrongly expected that *Yorktown* would not be ready to fight at Midway after sustaining heavy damage in the Battle of the Coral Sea 1 month earlier - rapid repair and deployment of *Yorktown* at Midway even in its less-than-perfect state gave the USN 3 rather than 2 carriers at Midway (vs. Japan's 4 - all of which were sunk at Midway) and *Yorktown* played a decisive role in the Allied victory.
- **JAPANESE UNWISELY SPLIT THEIR FORCES WITH A DIVERSIONARY ATTACK IN ALEUTIANS**
(a sizeable fleet of light carriers (*Ryūjō* and *Jun'yō*), destroyers, cruisers and submarines was deployed in the Aleutians campaign and could have and should have been deployed to protect the *Kido Butai* strike force led by *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Sōryū*, and *Hiryū* at Midway. (Additionally, as above, Allied codebreakers knew the Aleutians attack on Attu and Kiska was diversionary).
- **JAPANESE PERFECTIONISM** - IMPRACTICALLY AND UNWISELY DID NOT DEPLOY carriers *Shōkaku* (damaged in the Battle of the Coral Sea and undergoing full repair instead of only necessary repair as *Yorktown* did) and *Zuikaku* (undergoing full aircraft and pilot repletion although it could have sailed with less than a full complement). *Yorktown* played a key role in the Japanese defeat. Had *Shōkaku* and *Zuikaku* participated at Midway, the outcome might have been different.
- **JAPANESE PRACTICE OF RE-FUELING PLANES EN MASSE IN VERY CLOSE PROXIMITY TO EACH OTHER IN ONBOARD HANGARS** - This rendered the entire Japanese air complement extremely vulnerable en masse during the re-fueling/re-arming time window (see below)

3. ALLIED LUCK - By luck rather than skill, the Allies had **PERFECT TIMING on the morning of June 4, 1942**. U.S. aircraft caught all 4 Japanese carriers as they were re-fueling and arming their planes en masse, resulting in massive aircraft loss.

WHAT ABOUT ALLIED SUPERIOR DEPLOYMENT OF RADAR TECHNOLOGY?

While Allied deployment of radar became increasingly refined and useful from the Battle of the Coral Sea onward (after failing miserably at Pearl Harbor due to human error), radar was not a decisive factor at Midway. Rather it was some of the factors above, especially intelligence, that played the key role in determining Japanese carrier locations and successfully attacking. Radar would play an increasingly larger role as the war progressed. Radar was indeed a decisive factor in two later major Allied victories: the naval Battle of Guadalcanal in November 1942, and the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944.