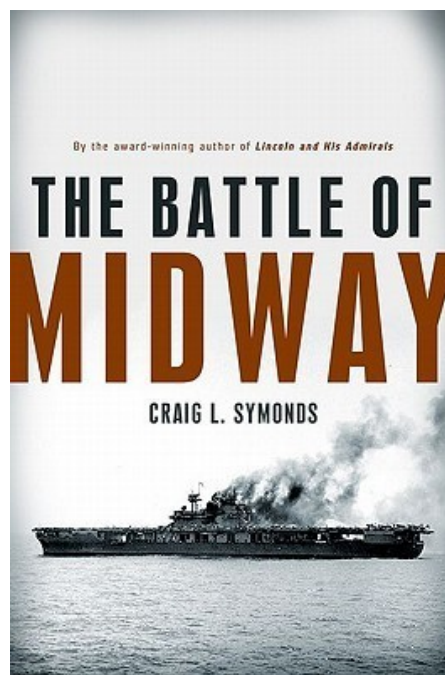




The Battle of Midway

Craig L. Symonds

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There are few moments in American history in which the course of events tipped so suddenly and so dramatically as at the Battle of Midway. At dawn of June 4, 1942, a rampaging Japanese navy ruled the Pacific. By sunset, their vaunted carrier force (the Kido Butai) had been sunk and their grip on the Pacific had been loosened forever.

In this absolutely riveting account of a key moment in the history of World War II, one of America's leading naval historians, Craig L. Symonds paints an unforgettable portrait of ingenuity, courage, and sacrifice. Symonds begins with the arrival of Admiral Chester A. Nimitz at Pearl Harbor after the devastating Japanese attack, and describes the key events leading to the climactic battle, including both Coral Sea--the first battle in history against opposing carrier forces--and Jimmy Doolittle's daring raid of Tokyo. He focuses throughout on the people involved, offering telling portraits of Admirals Nimitz, Halsey, Spruance and numerous other Americans, as well as the leading Japanese figures, including the poker-loving Admiral Yamamoto. Indeed, Symonds sheds much light on the aspects of Japanese culture--such as their single-minded devotion to combat, which led to poorly armored planes and inadequate fire-safety measures on their ships--that contributed to their defeat. The author's account of the battle itself is masterful, weaving together the many disparate threads of attack--attacks which failed in the early going--that ultimately created a five-minute window in which three of the four Japanese carriers were mortally wounded, changing the course of the Pacific war in an eye-blink.

Symonds is the first historian to argue that the victory at Midway was not simply a matter of luck, pointing out that Nimitz had equal forces, superior intelligence, and the element of surprise. Nimitz had a strong hand, Symonds concludes, and he rightly expected to win.

The Battle of Midway Details

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From Reader Review The Battle of Midway for online ebook

Paul says

Very good and easy reading.

I learned at least a couple of things:

1. how long it takes to get everything right. The failure of Hornet's planes was a failure of leadership which was hidden by Mitscher who glossed over his failure by sending to the wrong place, Ring's leadership failure, the failure to file reports by squadron commanders, or disappearance thereof, Waldron's VT8 going off the right way by disobeying Ring's order to follow him, Ring's loss of control -- he got back from the June 4 morning flight all by himself.
 2. how the victory was not so incredible or so much a miracle because of fine intelligence and good orders by Nimitz and Spruance, although luck was still a part of the victory.
-

Ross says

This is a very detailed history of the famous battle that in 2 hours changed the course of WWII. About 1/3 of the book is a blow by blow account of the actual battle and the first 2/3's is a very good history of the key events that led up to the battle. These include the Doolittle raid on Japan and the Battle of the Coral Sea. Midway has long been hailed as a miracle for the U.S. and in the introduction the author suggests that the victory was really not all that surprising. I don't think he makes his case and I believe the judgment that it was a miracle should stand. With these two considerations: First, the U.S. had broken the Japanese naval code, and second, the U.S. had radar and the Japanese did not. Without these two elements we would have been slaughtered. Even with these two enormous advantages our planes and weapons were so poor and our pilots so untrained that we only just managed to sink their carriers. We were so unprepared, of course, because of Roosevelt's pledge to keep America out of the war. In this wicked world if you wish for peace, then prepare for war.

Vern says

Great read, especially if you consider yourself somewhat of a student of the WWII war in the Pacific. If you do, and think you know a lot about the battle of Midway, I will bet you will realized upon finishing this book that you knew about half of what you thought you knew.

The author's writing style also makes this an easy read. Some writer's of military history get so hung up on the various units and sub-units, and unit designations that before long it is hard to remember who did what. I didn't find that a problem with this book.

Russ Smith says

Good account of the Battle of Midway in 1942. The timeline of the battle itself is handled quite well, realizing that it is complicated. Symonds does a good job of providing background, and personality profiles of the primary combatants, a detail I find quite interesting. I also thought that Symonds discussing some of the details about the ships and planes as well as the ordnance was interesting: His explanation of the problems with the Mark 14 torpedo for example. I would have enjoyed a little more of that, but one cannot put everything in one book. Overall, it was a good book.

Don says

The Battle of Midway ended Japan's hopes to force America to negotiate a peace. Next week is the 75th anniversary of this pivotal battle. Symond's book is an excellent, highly readable telling of events from both the strategic and personal level. If for some reason you have not read a book about one of the most important American victories of World War 2, this book would be a good choice.

The story of the fearless American torpedo plane crews who were nearly all wiped out but whose sacrifice contributed immensely to the success of the battle is particularly poignant.

Mac McCormick III says

So many histories of the Battle of Midway consider the US Navy lucky in defeating the Japanese Navy at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Historian and author Craig L. Symonds, in *The Battle of Midway (Pivotal Moments in American History)*, argues that luck wasn't the primary factor in the US victory at Midway. In the process of showing that there was more than just luck involved Symonds shows how the US and Japanese navies came to be in their respective positions, debunks a myth, and casts a shadow on an American carrier aviation hero. He also shows how the Battle of Midway was a pivotal moment in World War II, shaping how the rest of the Pacific War would pan out.

"Certainly chance - or luck - played a role at Midway, but the outcome of the battle was primarily the result of decisions made and actions taken by individuals who found themselves at the nexus of history at a decisive moment. In short, the Battle of Midway is best explained and understood by focusing on the people involved."

Symonds argues that "the Battle of Midway is best explained by focusing on the people involved." He does this by focusing on the command staff of the American and Japanese fleets including Nimitz, Fletcher, Spruance, Mitscher, Yamamoto, Nagumo, and others. He develops the personalities of these leaders before the battle because their personalities played into their decision making. He also looks at how cultural differences between the Americans and Japanese played into their decision making. Additionally, he explores the Pacific War from prior to the war up to the battle itself to show how the fleets came to be in the strategic and tactical positions they were in and how those positions would effect decision making in the battle to come. By focusing on the individuals involved and the path to the battle, Symonds set not only the stage for the battle but the pieces to be involved.

Once he comes to the battle itself, Symonds manages strike an excellent balance between being detailed and capturing the attention of the reader. He goes into great detail about the classes of the ship and the types of planes involved. He also explores the decisions made on both the fleet staff level, ship/air group level, and even down to the squadron level. He gives a blow by blow account of the air strikes on both sides, sometimes down to the level of individual planes and crews. In doing so, he tells how the strikes were either

successes or failures and explains why. It isn't difficult to to lose the attention of the reader, especially one that isn't a military or naval history anorak, when getting into such detail but Symonds did so while still engaging the reader and keeping things interesting.

The Battle of Midway also explores the role of something that, as an amateur radio operator and radio hobbyist, is close to my heart: Communications Intelligence. COMINT played a key role in the Battle of Midway and in some circles a myth has grown up that US Navy code breakers were able to provide the fleet with an order of battle and battle plans that enabled a US victory. Symonds demonstrates that while the code breakers and analysts made a significant contribution to victory they most certainly did not provide a full order of battle and set of battle plans that gave the US fleet leadership a key to certain victory at Midway.

Admiral Marc Mitscher became a hero of American carrier aviation later in World War II via his exploits with the Fast Carrier Task Force but this book casts somewhat of a shadow on Mitscher's actions at Midway while in command of the USS Hornet. Of the three US Navy carriers involved in the battle, Hornet contributed the least as Symonds shows in his account of the battle. The Hornet's squadrons performed poorly due to leadership problems and the after action reports attempted to cover it up. Symonds explores the Hornets actions and attempts to explain what, in the absence of any after actions reports other than Mitschers, may have happened and why. He also confronts the issue of how Admiral Fletcher was moved aside and Admiral Mitscher moved on to further combat command. Personally, I would like to think that Mitscher took Midway as a learning experience in combat command and applied what he learned toward future successes such as the Marianas Turkey Shoot.

"None of this detracts from the crucial contributions of the code breakers, but it does remind us that the subsequent decisions made by the commanders on the scene were more complex and open-ended than might otherwise be assumed. The Battle of Midway was not won by the code breakers alone but by the analysts, the decision makers who trusted them, and finally by the men who drive the ships, manned the guns, and flew the planes at the point of contact. Certainly there is enough glory for all of them."

Symonds makes clear that that while COMINT played a significant role in victory, it was not the key in victory. He shows that decision making was the key role, not just decisions made by American leadership but Japanese leadership as well. He shows that the decisions to made weren't always easy. Sometimes the code breakers and analysts put leadership in the position of making informed decisions but not always. There were times when the decision making process was complex and made with incomplete information and this often where cultural differences and strategic considerations effected tactical decision making. He also gives credit to the men who carried out the plans of the decision makers with the bravery and determination to push the attacks home despite the destruction of entire squadrons (VT-8 for example).

Finally he describes how Midway was a pivotal battle. Through the almost complete destruction of the Japanese Navy's striking force, the US Navy didn't just balance the scales in the Pacific after 6 months of Japanese domination, they tilted the scales in American favor. The Japanese lost four aircraft carriers and squadrons of planes and pilots. They were never able to recover from that loss; the US had the industrial capacity and manpower reserves to replace what they would lose not only at Midway but in the hard slog across the Pacific to come, the Japanese did not. While the were able to make the US pay a heavy price for victory in the Pacific, the Japanese would never be able to stem the tide of the American advance.

While secondary sources were used in writing The Battle of Midway, Symonds made heavy use of both oral histories and interviews in research for the book. No doubt the use of those primary sources helped him explore the role of communications intelligence and tell the detailed story of the carrier strikes in the battle. Simply put this book is well researched and Symonds presents the results of that research in a very interesting, very engaging, and very readable form. Not only that, I consider it a very balanced look at the battle. Symonds grinds no axes, shows no allegiances toward any particular personalities, and points out mistakes where they are made regardless of who made them. If you are a student of World War II or Naval

history I strongly recommend this book.

James Currin says

Although I am an ex-Navy man, I am not a particular student of military history. Even so, I was curious about what happened at Midway and this book satisfied my need to know. There were heroes and remarkable leaders on both sides. What impressed me more than anything, though, was the number of mistakes made by both sides - a fact made obvious by such an accurate and honest after-the-fact account. It was so exciting that I found it hard to put down. Now I'm curious about what a modern picture of naval warfare would look like. This book was so well written that I had no hesitation in giving it a 5 rating.

happy says

This is a good overview of US Naval operations in the Pacific from the time Nimitz takes command of the Pacific Fleet in December of '41 thru the Battle of Midway.

Dr. Symonds does a good job of laying out the problems Nimitz had with both the Japanese and dealing with Adm King and the Washington establishment and how he dealt with them.

I felt the author has a reader friendly writing style and I was never bored or felt that he was overwhelming me with detail. At the same time, he does not gloss over important facts.

As for the tone of the book - It seems that he is trying to make the point that a "miracle" did not happen at Midway. The results of the battle were the result of decisions that were made and actions taken, by both the Americans and the Japanese. In some respects he defends Nagumo's decisions during the battle. He takes the position that Nagumo's decision to rearm his aircraft was logical and flowed from information Nagumo had at the time. In some respects he throws the blame for the disaster onto Yamamoto, both is a strategic and tactical sense.

He also takes a look at how differences in doctrine lead to the way the battle was fought. The fact the Japanese did not move air groups from carrier to carrier lead to the Japanese being down 1 carrier at Midway, while the Americans mixed and matched (the Saratoga's Air Group was embarked on the US carriers - bringing them up to strength)

On the American side, Symonds also offers a defense of the actions of Cmdr Ring (CHAG) who took the Hornet's bombers and fighters on a trip to nowhere (view spoiler)

All in All and excellent look at the battle and the events leading up to it.

One note, Dr. Symonds covers much the same ground as Ian Toll in Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942

J.S. says

In his introduction, Symonds says that prior accounts suppose "that the American victory at Midway was the product of fate, or chance, or luck, or even divine will" (pg 4). Of the many who held beliefs that the Americans were recipients of Divine intervention, he says "they were products of their society" (pg 5). Instead he posits that the outcome was because of the people involved - history as hero-worship, in other words. And while I'd be very hesitant to proclaim God Was at Midway, I couldn't help but be struck by how lucky the Americans were.

Symonds has written an excellent account of the Battle of Midway, a battle which many have credited with turning the tide of the war toward the Allies. He also takes 200 pages to even get around to the actual battle, but in that lengthy build-up he outlines the confrontations that influenced the decision makers and lead to the conditions at Midway. And it's a very enlightening and interesting read, even exciting at times. I've read other accounts, such as the excellent one at the end of Pacific Crucible, but this goes into more detail and fleshes out many of the actual confrontations. And it's almost excruciatingly painful (for an American) to read of how American bombers and torpedo planes were slaughtered without landing a single bomb on Japanese ships. In the end the Americans caught four Japanese carriers at a crucial moment and they were destroyed practically within a few minutes, and the advantage in the Pacific began to shift. A very good read for those who like detailed WW2 history!

Neal says

Excellent military history of the Battle of Midway. Author avoids the trap of taking sides, doesn't call U.S. victory a "miracle," doesn't say we won because of democracy or being braver than the Japanese. Just a straightforward analysis of a military battle in which one side had radar (US), one side had advanced warning of the other side's intentions thanks to code breaking (US), one side was dropping 1,000-pound bombs vs. one side that had 500-pound bombs, etc. Extremely detailed analysis of the key players on both sides, the context in terms of the larger war (for example, the US strategy was that the European theatre took precedence in terms of resources). Lots of vignettes of individual soldiers who flew into certain death. Particularly riveting is a scene in which the Japanese conduct a war game exercise and the Japanese officer assigned to take the American side offers up a scenario in which the US detects the Japanese attack on Midway Island and launches a powerful strike against the Japanese fleet. Of course, the Japanese, after Pearl Harbor, believe the US fleet incapable of such an attack and shrug off this possibility. Their plan is to attack Midway, lure the American fleet from Hawaii into the open ocean and systematically destroy the US fleet. And of course, the Japanese officer predicted exactly what happened.

Brayden Raymond says

this book has revealed to me. that Midway is much more than I thought it to be. This book details the riveting account of the battle incredibly. There is no stone left unturned and hour by hour the chaos of battle unfolds.

This book is specific to a University course I am taking regarding the role of chance within the battle and I have no doubt that I have all I need to thoroughly examine that role through this book.

Jean says

I almost skipped over this book as over the years I have read so many books about the Battle of Midway; I thought to myself do I want to read another book on this subject. I am glad I did decide to read this book as I learned more about the battle from it.

Midway was a pivotal battle of WWII. Symond is a professor emeritus from the U. S. Naval Academy. Many historians including Symonds have compared the Battle of Midway to that of Lord Nelson's win at the Battle of Trafalgar. The comparison is apt as both battles had far-reaching effects on the course of the conflict during which they occurred.

The U.S. Navy was on a defensive position after Pearl Harbor. At the battle of Midway the Japanese lost four of the largest aircraft carriers with their crews and aircraft. The U.S. Navy gained a strategic initiative that it maintained for the rest of the War.

Symond insist that victory was the result of decisions and actions taken by certain individuals. He proceeds during the book to build his case. Symond recounts and explains the events of the battle both from the Japanese and American viewpoint.

Symond also covers the story of the Navy code breakers and how critical that was to the success of the battle as the Navy knew the Japanese intentions. At the end of the book Symonds reviews what happened to each of the key people after the War.

Symond provides a lucid, intensely researched account of the battle of Midway. If you are interested in WWII history this is book you must read. I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. James Lurie narrated the book.

Brian says

The Battle of Midway by Craig Symonds is an excellent addition to the Pivotal Moments in American History series. This book provides a critical look at the time between Pearl Harbor and just after the Battle of Midway where America was finding its way against the combined fleet of the Japanese Navy. The book includes a discussion of Pearl Harbor and its impact on naval operations as well as the Doolittle raid that followed. Some time is spent on the Battle of the Coral Sea as well as the victories of the Japanese navy in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Pacific to Indian Ocean. The books primary focus is on the destruction of the Kido Butai (the combined fleet of carriers) that the Japanese had put into battle. Although outnumbered in carriers the US carriers had some advantages in terms of armor and firefighting systems that would prove important when the Japanese believe they had sunk carriers that could return to active duty quickly. Symonds does an excellent job covering the successes and the failures on both sides of the war at Midway and easily sells the reader that this was the turning point in the Pacific forcing the Japanese onto the defensive. Overall a very well written narrative and one of the best books in the series.

Philip says

"The Battle of Midway" is a great read for naval history aficionados as well as for those who want to learn more about this pivotal battle of World War II but don't know too much about military history, as Symonds is fairly careful to explain the terms he uses which may not be known to the casual reader.

The book begins with the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack in December, 1941, and includes the events (the Battle of the Coral Sea, etc.) that lead up to the Battle of Midway in June, 1942. It is difficult to imagine the psychological shock that Pearl Harbor inflicted on Americans, and how this pervaded the atmosphere at the time. The battle itself is dissected with care, one event after another. Symonds seems particularly interested in documenting a case against those who feel that the U.S. won the Battle of Midway because of luck, and does so convincingly.

Ree Linker says

Disclaimer: I have never found the study of history to be entertaining. Thus I am embarrassingly ignorant about anything historical. I came into this book with no background on the battle of Midway, the war in the Pacific, or, to a large extent, WWII (sad, I know. I'm working on it).

Liked:

- * Symonds does a great job of providing the background and the lead up to the battle itself. So while things didn't really get exciting until about half-way through (the battle of the Coral Sea), it wasn't a torturous slog to get through the information presented before things really got underway. Seriously, this is where most history books lose me. There's so much to explain before you can get to the good stuff that by the time things start to happen I've long since abandoned ship. (nyuk nyuk)
- * The Battle of Midway. Such an amazing, heart-breaking, exciting, aggravating series of events.
- * The utter chaos of sea battles in the time before the technological advantages we take for granted today. It's amazing that enemies ever found each other at sea.
- * Speaking of chaos, the author does an excellent job of showing how small, almost random events can have a huge impact on subsequent events. As a fan of Connie Willis's time travel series, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that Midway is a crisis point, and no fictional future historian is ever going to get anywhere near it.
- * Symonds makes the reader care about the individuals chronicled in the book. This is often painful.

Not so much:

- * Not Symonds' fault, but there are SO MANY people involved in this drama that it was hard for me to keep everybody straight. Fortunately, the book is so well written and the story so exciting that I won't mind re-reading it next year.
- * Probably best read with a map handy. And an atlas of ship types. And plane types. Again, not really a fault of the book, just a necessity of the subject matter.

I would recommend this book to just about anyone, even those who, like me, typically don't enjoy history books.
