

# The Roundtable Forum

official newsletter of the  
**Battle of Midway Roundtable**

[www.midway42.org](http://www.midway42.org)



## ~ INTRODUCTION ~

Welcome to our ninth newsletter for 2024 and the second one in a revised format made necessary by the circumstances concerning our editor and webmaster Thom Walla (explained below). We hope everyone has found the new .pdf file easy to open, read, and download if desired. If anyone is experiencing a problem in that regard, please let us know and we'll do our best to resolve it for you.

This month's issue includes an excerpt from the USS *Midway's* newsletter concerning their receipt of Bill Vickrey's BOM files, an interesting dialogue about Dusty Kleiss and the Mark 13 torpedo, and a special article on the 1999 directive by the Chief of Naval Operations concerning an annual celebration of the Battle of Midway. Those observances were carried out with widespread enthusiasm for the first few years, but much less so in recent times. We'll consider why that is so and what, if anything, might be done to reverse the trend.

I've also just received late word concerning a health issue for BOM vet Ed Fox. See the last item below under "Now Hear This."

—RR  
9 October 2024

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**~ AROUND THE TABLE ~**

**MEMBERS' TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE:**

1. Thom Walla update
2. Dusty Kleiss vs. the TBD and the Mark 13 torpedo

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**1. THOM WALLA UPDATE**

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**1 October 2024**  
**From: Zsolt Szalanczi**  
**Germany**

**Dear Thom,**  
**Just really briefly: get well soon! We need you!**  
**All the best wishes from Germany.**  
**—Zsolt**

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**2 October 2024**  
**From: Andries Visser**  
**South Africa**

**Please convey my good wishes to Thom for a speedy recovery. Thanks, Thom, for maintaining the great forum; thanks too Ron for standing in.**

**Kind regards,**  
**—Andries Visser**

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**Thank you Zsolt, Andries, and everyone else who sent Thom messages of good cheer like these; he has seen and sincerely appreciates them all.**

**(continued on next page)**

Early in September, Thom suffered a mild stroke that partially affected his mobility, including the normal use of his left hand. That means that he's unable to do the usual keyboarding necessary for composing our newsletters and responding to your email messages, although he can post a file on the website and forward a message to you that I prepare for him. His prognosis for eventual full recovery is quite good, it will just take some time.

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## 2. DUSTY KLEISS vs. THE TBD AND THE MARK 13 TORPEDO

*Ed. note:* this topic was featured in our [July 2022](#) newsletter. Paul Corio continues the discussion with interesting speculation on what may underlie Dusty's views regarding Halsey, the TBDs, and the Navy's infamous Mark 13 torpedo. The following thread has been edited a little for clarity and length.

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8 August 2024  
From: Paul Corio  
Kentucky

Ron,

As I continue to work on the action novel adaptation of my screenplay "The Charge of the Devastators" I've run into a quandary concerning the facts surrounding the Kwajalein raid of 1 February 1942.

This was the first airborne torpedo attack in US Navy history, when Lem Massey led nine Devastators of VT- 6 in an attack against targets anchored in the lagoon at Kwajalein.

Because Massey is a main character in the screenplay and book and this was a historic action in US Navy history, I gave a detailed account of this raid in both scripts.

In the original version of my script I related that there were seven hits counted by the VT-6 crews. I remember getting very detailed information about this attack from [VT-6 radioman-gunner] Ron Graetz who rode back seat with Severn Rombach during that mission, so I'm assuming I got the seven hits number from him.

I always assumed that since the ships were at anchor, that might have accounted for the extraordinary number of hits that were counted from the highly problematic Mark 13 torpedoes.

But there were many instances where the torpedoes were known to not explode even when they ran accurately, so seven hits still seems high but I

ran with it because to the best of my recollection that's the number Graetz put on it.

It's widely claimed that Massey torpedoed a large transport vessel in the lagoon, sinking it. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions at Kwajalein, and the hit on the transport is usually mentioned in relation to him getting the DFC.

Upon reading Dusty Kleiss' brilliant memoir *Never Call Me a Hero*, he tells an entirely different story about Kwajalein. He reports that his best friend on *Enterprise*, VT-6 pilot Tom Eversole, who was later lost at Midway, told him upon returning from the Kwajalein raid that he did not think there were any hits scored.

I was baffled. How could two men on the same mission report such a variance in the number of hits? Was Graetz' version perhaps more accurate because he was facing backwards and would have been able to see explosions whereas the pilots were focused ahead?

In my extensive additional research to make my book as accurate as possible and particularly to get the story right about the Kwajalein raid, I have found scant evidence of any hits other than the one Massey made.

I recently made contact with the nephew of one of the five surviving BOM pilots of VT-6 who was also on the Kwajalein raid. In his diary he reported that after being dispatched by Massey along with two other pilots to attack a ship fleeing the lagoon, he made an accurate drop that was dead on the ship, but after banking away to make his escape he did not see whether there was an explosion.

In my original script I have this exact description of Massey sending a three-plane section of aircraft to attack the fleeing ship, a description which I'm assuming also came from Ron Graetz.

If you have any further details that would help me clarify what really happened at Kwajalein or if you could point me to anyone with that info, it would be appreciated.

—PC

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[My reply, 9 August 2024]

Paul, [regarding Dusty's version of the Kwajalein raid] I have the same extremely high regard for Dusty as anyone else. But some of his recollections and opinions arising from his Midway and related service have occasionally raised reasonable questions. Most notably are his pronouncements concerning Halsey and whether the TBDs should have been launched (or even carried aboard) at Midway. We

must respect his testimony because he was there and we weren't, but some of what he says just doesn't mesh with other reliable evidence.

So, anything attributed to him regarding the Kwajalein raids should be considered as vulnerable if it doesn't track with the recollections of other primary sources. He may be right, the others may be right; who knows?

—RR

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12 August 2024  
From: Paul Corio  
Kentucky

I appreciate the feedback. You raise some valid questions. My high regard for Dusty is the same as yours, but the things he said regarding the TBDs at Midway definitely raised my eyebrows.

I think a lot of it makes sense if you put it into the context of him trying to cope with losing his best friend Tom Eversole. He spoke at length about how devastating this loss was, particularly after losing so many good friends along the way, including the friend he watched drown when his SBD sank after ditching alongside *Enterprise*.

We can only imagine the helplessness Dusty felt watching that friend's demise and when bidding farewell to Eversole on the morning of June 4th, knowing he'd probably never see him again.

When Eversole didn't return, I speculate that Dusty was looking for someone to blame—as we all often do when tragedies happen that we believe could have been avoided. This could explain why a man who thrice put the weight and fate of the free world on his shoulders and risked his life for its freedom on June 4th would say that the leaders should have held back the Devastators or done anything other than send everything they had to attack the Japanese.

As I play armchair psychologist, I think it's reasonable to assume that as a coping mechanism for his grief, Dusty was inclined to use any means available to justify his belief that the Devastators should not have flown at Midway. This could explain his emphasis on Halsey allegedly stating the TBDs should never again be used in combat, and his claim that they were completely ineffective even against anchored ships at Kwajalein.

Perhaps in citing these two instances to justify the total ineffectiveness of the TBDs and thus the complete futility of their use at Midway, he was able to turn some of his grief into anger which helped him deal with the loss of his best friend.

—PC

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***Now hear this!***

**NEWS AND INFO IN THIS ISSUE:**

- Annual BOM commemorations
- The Bill Vickrey files aboard USS *Midway*
- A detour for Midway Marine Ed Fox
- Editor's Notes

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**ANNUAL BOM COMMEMORATIONS**

In 1999, Admiral Jay Johnson, Chief of Naval Operations, issued a directive requiring the entire Navy Department to formally commemorate the Battle of Midway on its anniversary each year. Here is that original CNO announcement:

**NAVADMIN 164/99  
ADMINISTRATIVE MESSAGE  
ROUTINE  
R 041653Z JUN 99  
FM CNO WASHINGTON DC  
SUBJ/NAVY HERITAGE**

**1. IT IS ONE OF MY GOALS TO HELP PRESERVE OUR RICH NAVAL HERITAGE AND TO BUILD UPON IT. ONE OF THE WAYS TO DO THAT IS TO CELEBRATE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DATES. PART OF THAT IS TO ALSO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED SO PROUDLY AND GAVE SO MUCH TO MAKE OUR NAVY WHAT IT IS TODAY. AFTER CONSIDERABLE DELIBERATION, IT IS APPARENT THAT THE TWO MOST SIGNIFICANT DATES IN OUR NAVAL HISTORY ARE 13 OCTOBER 1775, THE BIRTH OF OUR NAVY, AND 4 JUNE 1942, THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY.**

**2. THESE TWO PROMINENT DAYS WILL HENCEFORTH BE CELEBRATED ANNUALLY AS THE CENTERPIECES OF OUR HERITAGE. DURING THE WEEK OF 13 OCTOBER, ALL COMMANDS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN BIRTHDAY ACTIVITIES SUCH AS BIRTHDAY BALLS AND HISTORICAL SEMINARS TO CELEBRATE THE ORIGIN OF OUR SERVICE. ADDITIONALLY, BEGINNING 4 JUNE 2000, THE 58TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE**

**BATTLE OF MIDWAY, WE WILL INAUGURATE ANNUAL ACTIVITIES COMMEMORATING ONE OF THE MOST DECISIVE SEA BATTLES IN WORLD HISTORY. MIDWAY WAS WON, NOT BY SUPERIOR NUMBERS OR DAUNTING TECHNOLOGY, BUT BY THE COURAGE AND TENACITY OF SAILORS WHO FOUGHT A VICIOUS AIR AND SEA BATTLE AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS. THEIR VICTORY HELPED WIN US THE WORLD WE HAVE TODAY, AND IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT WE REMEMBER IT AND THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN IT. WHILE MOST COMMANDS WILL CELEBRATE 4 JUNE 2000 WITH A DINING IN, COMMANDERS/COMMANDING OFFICERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPAND THE EVENT IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS/COMMANDS AS DESIRED.**

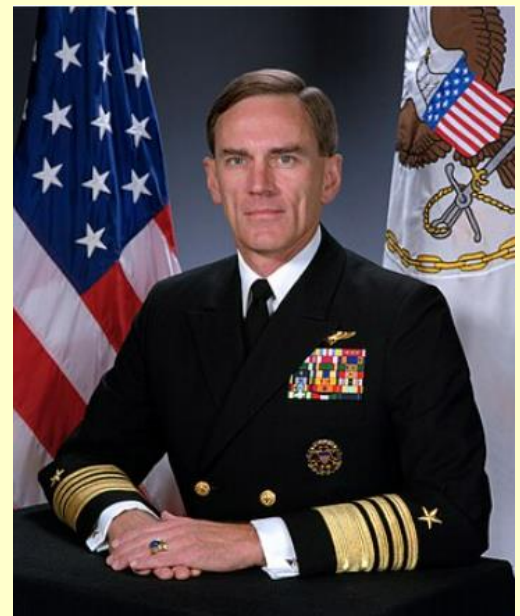
**3. TWICE A YEAR, WE WILL PAUSE AS A NAVY, TO REFLECT UPON OUR PROUD HERITAGE AND TO BUILD IN ALL HANDS A RENEWED AWARENESS OF OUR TRADITION AND HISTORY. THROUGH SUCH REFLECTION, WE WILL HELP DEFINE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR SERVICE TODAY IN DEFENSE OF OUR COUNTRY'S FREEDOM. WE ARE THE CARETAKERS OF A TORCH PASSED ON BY NEARLY TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF NAVAL HEROES. EACH OF US WILL BE ENRICHED BY HONORING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS. I BELIEVE IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT WE TAKE TIME TO PAUSE AND REFLECT FORMALLY UPON OUR PROUD NAVAL HERITAGE.**

**4. RELEASED BY ADM JAY L. JOHNSON, CNO**

**That directive launched widespread annual BOM celebrations among Navy and Marine Corps commands afloat and ashore, large and small, plus related veteran associations like the Navy League, Naval Order, and others. Many of them were *seriously* impressive, such as those conducted in Washington D.C., Jacksonville, San Francisco, and San Diego (aboard the USS *Midway*). In the early years it was normal for several of those celebrations to include numerous BOM veterans as honored guests and the main focus of the event.**

**But time is the enemy of good intentions. As the years rolled by, the celebrations became less grand and less widespread, a problem exacerbated by declining numbers of BOM vets who could attend. The pandemic only made it all worse. While the anniversary is still observed at principal commands like USN headquarters in Washington and aboard the *Midway*, the overall reality bears little resemblance to the enthusiasm that prevailed in earlier years.**

**Can we, as BOMRT members, do anything to reverse the trend? That wouldn't be realistic in most cases, but we do have many retired Navy and Marine officers on our roster (plus a number still on active duty) who still can apply some level of influence among their colleagues in positions of**



**Admiral Jay Johnson, CNO 1996-2000**

responsibility. To them, I'd suggest that you talk it up at every opportunity—the 83rd anniversary will be forthcoming next June; there's no good reason why its observance can't be comparable in scope and frequency to those in the past. Even if you don't have some type of influential connection, let's all do what we can, however little it might be, to help keep Admiral Johnson's directive on the to-do list of the entire Navy and everyone associated with it.

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#### **BILL VICKREY'S FILES NOW A RESOURCE ON USS *MIDWAY***

Bill Vickrey is certainly one of the main reasons the Roundtable has succeeded so well down through the years. He was there at the beginning, when Bill Price starting forwarding email messages to a few others who had a strong BOM focus. Over time, Vickrey amassed a truly enormous collection of references of all kinds about the battle, plus detailed notes from his extensive personal interactions with many Midway veterans. In my book *No Right to Win*, I credited him with having the most comprehensive BOM archive outside of the Navy itself, and I wasn't even sure if *that* limit applied.

With commendable foresight, Bill sought a way for his invaluable resource to be preserved when he could no longer maintain it, and the USS *Midway* museum agreed that it would be a valued and fitting enhancement to its library. Bill's collection was received aboard late last year, as acknowledged in this quote from the ship's newsletter, *The Scuttlebutt*:



Bill Vickrey (1990s)

We recently had two volunteers....join our library team in order to work on our Battle of Midway archives project. Months ago we received the shipment of seventeen banker's boxes of historical research on the Battle of Midway, which had been collected over decades of work by known BOM researcher Bill Vickery. The collection contains much background research as well as personal interviews with all of the surviving Battle of Midway aviators from the 1950's onward....Mr. Vickery's family and our library staff are glad that this valuable research material can be preserved and accessed by future generations.



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## A DETOUR FOR MIDWAY MARINE ED FOX

Just as I was about to finalize this newsletter, I was advised by Ed's local American Legion post that he was recently hospitalized for severe appendicitis! This is obviously a major detour from Ed's current goals, as he had big plans for himself in the near future, speaking before various groups about the sacrifices of WW2 compatriots he knew during the war who didn't make it home.

After a short stay in the E.R., Ed was transferred to a skilled nursing facility where he's now undergoing care. Surgery is unlikely due to his age, but ultimate recovery is still expected. Like Thom Walla, it's just going to take some time.

Email or phone contact with Ed won't be possible for a while, but here's the postal address if anyone might like to send him good wishes by mail:

Edgar R. Fox  
The Manor at Elfindale  
1707 Elfindale St.  
Springfield, MO 65807

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## EDITOR'S NOTES

Thanks to everyone for your understanding as Thom and I are compelled to carry on with the Roundtable during a time of unexpected challenges. Our first issue last month under the revised mode was a learning experience for both of us, but we think we're now "good to go" with the new procedure. In any case, as always, your comments pro or con are very welcome.

Please send in your messages for the November newsletter, and don't hold back if you have something that you think is too basic. We've been doing this for over 25 years, but there have been new members in each of those years who haven't benefitted from all those past discussions. If there's something about the BOM that needs to be explained for you, someone else needs it too.

Finally, note that you can now send email to the Roundtable at either address (Thom's or mine), as they all will come to me. Just click *Reply* on your new issue announcement, or you can draft a new message to the address below.

Best wishes to all until the next issue, which should be out during the first week of November.

—Ron Russell  
midway.rt@gmail.com