

The Roundtable Forum

official newsletter of the
Battle of Midway Roundtable

www.midway42.org



~ INTRODUCTION ~

Welcome to our third “revised” newsletter, cobbled together by two editors struggling with limited resources and separated by about 1500 miles. Isn’t 21st century technology amazing? Anyway, here we go for November.

This issue includes a contribution from aviation author Barrett Tillman suggesting that the much-maligned TBD Devastator deserves more respect than it usually gets. Tom Rychlik provides more re his ongoing campaign to upgrade the combat awards for Midway’s three torpedo squadron commanders, and Don Boyer reminds us that the problems with the Navy’s aerial and submarine torpedoes had nothing to do with how they were being used in combat. Along that line, Tom Wildenburg points out that the Navy’s Bureau of Ordnance had “improved” the Mod 1 torpedo over the Mod 0, which was probably not their best upgrade. Finally, we have an update on Thom Walla and the sad news that we expected concerning Ed Fox. Thom and I hope you enjoy our efforts this month and, as always, invite your comments pro or con.

—Ron Russell

~ AROUND THE TABLE ~

MEMBERS' TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE:

1. Message from our webmaster
2. The Navy's troublesome torpedoes
3. In defense of the TBD
4. Medal of Honor for VT commanders
5. Political correctness and the Battle of Midway
6. USS *Hornet* (CV-8) full deck log

* * * * *

1. MESSAGE FROM OUR WEBMASTER

Ed. note: our webmaster and chief editor Thom Walla is continuing to recover from a mild stroke that put a temporary stop to some of his mobility, including typing. But he's in pretty good shape otherwise, and offers the following message to our members and readers that I've prepared at his direction.

16 October 2024
From: Thom Walla
(Editor/webmaster, BOMRT)
Nebraska

Thanks to everyone for all the nice messages. I'm doing well. I can walk with a cane, balance is good, therapy is working to bring back strength and abilities each day. My left arm and hand are moving a bit better, but I still have to type with one hand.

I have an appointment set up at Nebraska Med Center in November. They are really good. I hope to get back at least to 90-95%. Current neurologist that tested me when I was diagnosed says I have an excellent chance to do that or better.

At the beginning, the only symptom I had for a day or so was that I couldn't type the "W" on the keyboard with my ring finger, which is why I went in. The good news is that it didn't hit any mental abilities. My speech has already returned to normal. Bottom line, I'm very motivated and hopeful. One day at a time.

Thanks again for the kind words.

—Thom

* * * * *

2. THE NAVY'S TROUBLESOME TORPEDOES

12 October 2024
From: Don Boyer
Hawaii

My sincere regards to Thom and best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery. Also, the current BOM newsletter format is no problem at all for we readers, it's as clear, concise and easy to follow as ever. Keep up the good work.

In regard, generally, to the torpedo issue as it affected the TBDs (and everything else that used them) it was obvious early on that this aerial torpedo worked about as well as the one the submarines were using and, apparently from what I've read, about as well as the one for destroyer use as well. The long litany of failures on the part of the Bureau of Ordnance to fix any of these problems as soon as they became evident is an enormous tragedy that can be laid at the feet of the Newport torpedo station as well as the senior commanders who refused to listen to those "on the front lines," preferring the easy out of blaming the torpedomen and maintenance personnel, or in the case of submarines, inept fire control crews, inept captains, and anything else that came to mind that would deflect the blame from BuOrd and the torpedo bureaucracy while they continued to *not* test every torpedo on into 1943.

Careers and reputations were ruined by this callous disregard for reality on the part of "desk jockeys" in the various bureaus. Admirals Nimitz and King have to shoulder some blame for the submarine issue with torpedoes as well, as they failed to light fires where they were needed early on. What made it worse for the submarine service was that they had clear and compelling evidence of the torpedo failures directly from the enemy in the form of intelligence decryptions of messages reporting prematures, dud hits and running deep under the ships. Intelligence that could not be used as it was derived from Ultra decrypts that BuOrd was not privy to.

I think a lot of the problem in the historical record with "How many hits did we get" or "who hit what" with air-dropped torpedoes can be partly blamed on the enormous number of "prematures" caused by defective exploders, because these types of explosions were very easy to confuse with a direct hit. (Prematures were by no means the only problem, but they were the ones that caused the most confusion in the historical record.) For example, from a submariner's viewpoint, a torpedo explosion right in line with a ship that may even have "rocked the ship" a bit or even caused

some visible damage above water was perceived in most cases as a certain hit, unless you could have observed it from the air, where it would be obvious the torpedo exploded 50 to 100 or more feet shy of the target. So a big plume of water could easily be claimed as a hit when it actually wasn't, especially from the viewpoint of a desperately maneuvering aircraft or submarine trying to get away in one piece.

The amount of pure obdurate stupidity surrounding the saga of trying to get reliable torpedoes to the fleet bordered on the criminal. How many men died trying to deliver a torpedo that didn't work against an enemy target, particularly one that might get really torqued off at being shot at and retaliate very emphatically? So it is not hard at all to see that the conflicting reports of those "who were there" could be so disparate in the actual counting of "hits."

Ed. note: when this subject appeared on the Roundtable many years ago, we learned of an especially tragic submarine loss in 1943. The boat launched multiple torpedoes at a large IJN freighter, all of which were duds or unlikely misses. Having spent its last torpedo, the sub surfaced to attack by cannon fire, but the maru had it outgunned: an 8-inch round hit the base of the conning tower, sinking the sub with all hands. Had just *one* of its torpedoes worked as intended, those 60 Americans would have survived the engagement and possibly the war. Their cruel deaths were entirely and criminally on BuOrd, not the Japanese.

13 October 2024
From: Tom Wildenburg
Arizona

Recollections of events and oral histories can be quite tricky. Such statements frequently contain inaccuracies due to a number of factors including lapses in memory, bias, wistful thinking, or an attempt to increase the individual's standing or accomplishments.

I remember reading a newspaper article about the survivors of the Neosho (sunk during the Battle of the Coral Sea) who claimed they were attacked by twin engine aircraft. This was impossible given that the Japanese did not operate twin engine aircraft from their carriers and there were no other Japanese aircraft in the area.

The exact number of torpedo hits made at Kwajalein will probably never be known for sure. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that at least 2 tankers, a merchantman, and a light cruiser were struck as per the following excerpt from page 89 of Stephen L. Moore's *Pacific Payback: The Carrier Aviators Who Avenged Pearl Harbor at the Battle of Midway*:

(continued on next page)

"The Devastators struck two tankers and one merchant vessel, claiming hits on all three. The final three-plane section, under Lieutenant (jg) Paul 'Pablo' Riley, set their sights on the light cruiser *Katori* as she attempted to escape. Riley and Irvin McPherson released from within a thousand yards, as did the third pilot Ensign Glenn Hodges. McPherson noticed that *Katori* was stopped and down at the stern in shallow water."

Unfortunately, I retrieved this from Google Books and was unable to access the source note.

As for the torpedo attack at Kawajaleian, it was unopposed which made for an easy approach and most likely employed the Mark 13 mod 0 torpedo that had performed well in the pre-war gunnery exercises. See my note on the Mark 13 mod 0 in the [August 2022](#) Forum.

—Tom Wildenburg

* * * * *

3. IN DEFENSE OF THE TBD

12 October 2024
From: Barrett Tillman
Arizona

Thanks to all who continue making the RT possible—legions unborn will praise your names.

Whether to launch the VTs at Midway:

Over the years (okay, decades) I have waged a campaign to rehabilitate the TBD and the F2A, in the Stalinist sense. IMO neither were as poor as internet "wisdom" allows. (VMF-221's fight at Midway was only going to end one way in those tactical circumstances.)

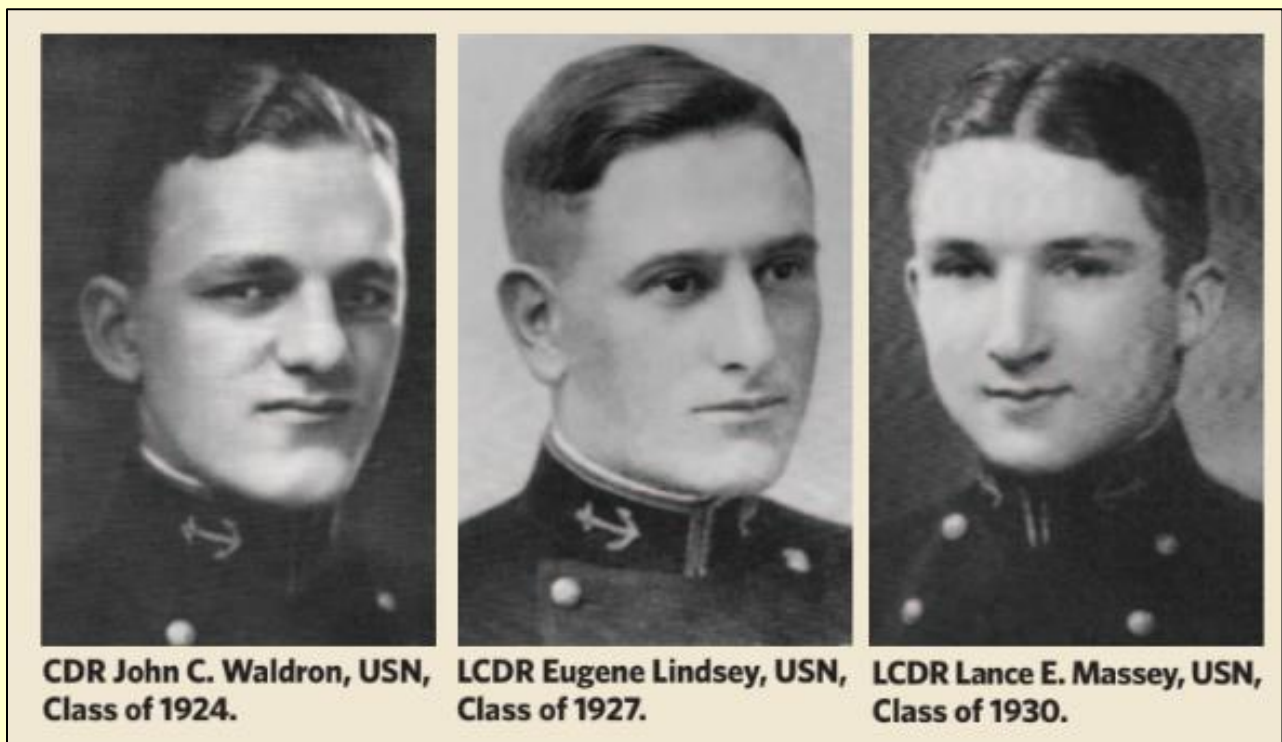
My Y2K Osprey TBD book built on a long Tailhook article when survivors were extant, and I still try educating online mavens: in the six months before Midway, NO TBDs WERE LOST IN FLIGHT TO ENEMY ACTION. I cited a prewar VT-3 assessment cautioning against an unsupported daylight torpedo attack on an alerted enemy task force.

* * * * *

4. MEDAL OF HONOR FOR VT COMMANDERS

Ed. note: in his famous (or infamous) BOM after-action report, Mark Mitscher recommended a posthumous Medal of Honor for Waldron and all of his pilots. That didn't happen but the idea has persisted down through the years, even expanding to the other two VT squadrons or to their commanders.

Roundtable contributor Tom Rychlik might be the most determined and resourceful advocate for the MOH upgrade to ever undertake the challenge. He has spent months and years pursuing every legal avenue to get it done, and continues today with equal fervor. Tom's efforts have been the subject of several past Roundtable articles—see our [October 2023](#) and [February 2024](#) issues for some key examples. He continues here with a message from last August that we were unable to publish until now, followed by a video link to his presentation on the same subject given at a recent meeting of the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association.



U.S. Naval Academy photos of the 3 torpedo squadron commanders at Midway, from an article co-authored by Tom in the July-August issue of *Shipmate*, the magazine of the USNA alumni association.

(continued on next page)

29 August 2024

From: Major Thomas Rychlik, USMC-ret
Virginia

As part of my research to support Medals of Honor for Waldron, Lindsey and Massey, I used information in Stephen Moore's *Pacific Payback* and Peter Smith's *Midway Dauntless Victory* to determine the awards for the attacks on June 4th.

Smith's book contained flight rosters for all the aircraft that attacked that day. Some pilots who took off with these squadrons had to abort before reaching Kido Butai. After subtracting those, I determined that on the morning of June 4, 1942, 136 Navy, Marine Corps, and Army fighters, torpedo, or dive bombers actually attacked the Japanese carrier task force north of Midway. I then conducted a name by name search of every pilot/crewman in the Military Times Hall of Valor and the official US Military Awards for Valor.gov websites. Since many of these men went on to perform additional acts of heroism in the war it was important for me to discriminate between awards they received for Midway and their other awards so I had to read all of their awards.

The Army awarded 28 Distinguished Service Crosses (the Army's equivalent to the Navy Cross) to all 28 crewmembers (both officer and enlisted) of the four B-26s that torpedo attacked Kido Butai that morning. Unlike the Navy that only awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses to the enlisted aircrew, the Army made no distinction for valor whether the crewman was enlisted or officer, pilot or crewmember. I personally find the Navy's policy repugnant as every member of an aircrew faced the same peril, each had to perform his duties, and each generally shared the same fate. If I wasn't four years into trying to get the Navy to properly recognize the torpedo squadron Commanding Officers, I would have already started a movement to try to fix that injustice too.

161 Navy Crosses or Army Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded for actions on the morning of June 4th. 161 Service Crosses minus 28 for the B-26s is 133 Navy Crosses for June 4th but I said 136 aircraft attacked. Subtracting the four Army B26s that is 132 Navy and Marine Corps aircraft and 131 Navy Crosses. The pilot of the 132nd plane was Captain Richard Fleming. Fleming was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for his two sorties on June 4th and his final sortie on June 5th. An additional 12 Navy pilots who did not make contact with KB on the morning of June 4th were awarded the Navy Cross for their actions on later missions during the battle, to include Commander Ring.

Having determined that every [Navy and Marine] pilot who attacked KB on June 4th had either received a Navy Cross or the MOH, I decided not to attempt to quantify the Navy Crosses awarded to the Marines on Midway

for their actions at other times. However, there were several like Major Parks that were awarded Navy Crosses for their actions defending the island against the morning air raid and subsequent attacks on KB and *Mogami/Mikuma*. It's likely that some of the PBY pilots may have received Navy Crosses and some of the B-17 pilots received Distinguished Flying Crosses.

The bottom line is that the battle is renown as the US Navy's greatest naval victory, and despite nearly 200 Navy/Service Crosses awarded, the US Navy awarded no Medals of Honor.

22 October 2024

From: Major Thomas Rychlik, USMC-ret
Virginia

Ron/Thom,

Thom, I hope you are healing and getting stronger every day. Praying for you and your family.

Here is a link [below] to the video of my presentation at the Naval Academy Alumni Association on [October 19th]. I was limited by time and missed a few things but got in most of what I wanted to say. Although my slides showed the correct date of the Doolittle Raid I mis-spoke and said March and my slide on the bomb carrying capabilities of the Val was off. I wore a mic for the video but still the sound is not great. My wife said it sounded better in person. I'd recommend viewers zoom in on the slides and disregard trying to watch the bozo talking.

Tom Rychlik

<https://youtu.be/EQCsVamPI7q?si=1LdXM0ACDNaou7G>

* * * * *

5. POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

Ed. note: we initially experienced "P.C." in relation to the BOM during the 1976 *Midway* movie, with its grossly improbable subplot about a VF-3 pilot and his Nisei girlfriend. The real BOM had no females and almost no ethnic minorities, but that wouldn't sell a lot of theater tickets in the 1970s. As Barrett notes below, it didn't stop there.

12 October 2024
From: Barrett Tillman
(author, *Enterprise, Whirlwind*, et al)
Arizona

Midway night:

I wrote in my CV-6 book [*Enterprise*, 2013], in context of the RN's Trafalgar fight, "Well into the 21st century, Midway represents the pinnacle of achievement for the United States Navy. Nowhere else were the odds so long and the stakes so great, and in 1999 the Navy established Midway Night to commemorate the battle. Yet in 2009 the service had grown so politically correct that the chief of naval operations delivered a Midway speech without once mentioning Japan."

As I recall, the next year [CNO Admiral] Roughead improved by mentioning The "J" Word...once.

Warm regards to all hands,
—Barrett

* * * * *

6. USS *HORNET* (CV-8) FULL DECK LOG

16 October 2024
From: Deron Johnson
Tennessee

I am inquiring to see if it is possible to get a copy of USS *Hornet* deck log for the day of 4 June 1942. The portion available on Midway Roundtable only includes the page with Remarks and does not include the page with course, speed, and visibility.

I have searched through the NWC, National Archives, and Fold3 for this specific page of that day with no success.

I have been working on a book for a couple of years about the reconnaissance at Midway of both USN and IJN forces. My most recent focus has been to gather deck logs/log books of the ships from TF-16 & TF-17 to get a glimpse of where they were that morning and to see what additional

information they may have reported on. I do know a couple of ships reported seeing an enemy floatplane that morning.

I greatly appreciate your assistance.

Thank you,
D Johnson

If anyone can help Mr. Johnson with his request, you can reply to him directly at: vols1138@gmail.com.



Now hear this!

NEWS AND INFO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Midway Marine Ed Fox, 1923-2024
- Editor's Notes

* * * * *

MIDWAY MARINE ED FOX, 1923-2024

I was advised on Monday, October 21st, that former Marine and retired Army sergeant Ed Fox had passed away that morning at the age of 101 years and 9 months, the victim of an appendicitis infection. How ironic that Ed should fall from an ailment normally associated with a much younger person, as he defied convention throughout his final



years by living a life of remarkable high energy and positive spirit that belied his advanced age.

For any of our newer members who might not be aware, Ed joined the Marines in 1941, experienced the entire Battle of Midway on the atoll, and went on to far more horrific experiences on Iwo Jima. After 6 years as a Marine, he continued his career for 19 years in the Army, retiring in 1966 as a sergeant first class (E-7). He was justifiably proud of his Marine Corps service and identified in retirement far more as “Marine” than “soldier.”



Marine Private Fox, 1942



Sergeant First Class Fox, 1964

Ed continued to serve in retirement, and came aboard the Roundtable in its earliest years while volunteering as an instructional aide at Holland Elementary School in his home town of Springfield, Missouri. He made a strong connection with the young students at Holland, and was especially effective at instilling in them some appreciation of special dates on their calendar, like November 11th, December 7th, and Memorial Day (see next page).


Ed was aided in the classroom by Bill Price and the Midway Roundtable, in a campaign for the class to receive picture postcards from all over the world. Ed then used the cards as a teaching tool in geography, showing the state or nation on a wall map where each card originated.



Ed leads Holland Elementary 6th-graders in observing Memorial Day, 2004.

I know that Ed would never welcome the grand memorial tributes that he richly deserves (like you're reading now), so we'll respect that by urging everyone to just watch three short online videos that cover so much more about him. The first is incredibly interesting, telling Ed's personal story from childhood through Iwo Jima—be ready for some surprising revelations.

The second video is about the 80th Midway anniversary in 2022, during which Ed and *Yorktown* vet Julian Hodges represented the Roundtable as well as all BOM veterans at the ceremonies in Hawaii.

The third one is an excellent TV news video from January 2023, covering Ed's 100th birthday. It was a major event in Springfield, with recognition from the mayor and even the state governor. Click the link below or copy and paste it into your browser. Click the white arrow in the middle of  the picture to start the video. There will be a short ad, about 15 seconds. Let it run, and the story will start. You can then click the small double-headed arrow at the lower right to go to full screen. It's very well done.

(Links on next page.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrZkq0S2bTQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA7pyblGna8>

<https://www.ky3.com/2023/01/09/springfield-veteran-ed-fox-turns-100-years-old/>

Thanks very much to IJN aviation author and Roundtable member Ron Werneth for assistance in producing the photos for this article. There are more that we could have used, but we're limited by this format.

While I was very fortunate to include Ed among my closest associates, it's another irony that we never met in person. Our geographic separation plus my occasional health issues required me to forego opportunities where we could have connected, including any of several BOM anniversary events. Our 20+ years of friendship was conducted entirely by email, phone, or online.

In any case, farewell and following seas to one great guy; the best friend I ever had that I never met. Ed, you're in very good company now.

—RR

* * * * *

EDITOR'S NOTES

Memorial services for Ed Fox have not yet been announced. I'll provide those details to all via a special email bulletin as soon as they are known.

Thanks to everyone for your continued interest in and support of the BOMRT. Our next newsletter will come to you a bit later than usual, in mid to late December, due to my move into a brand new house in the next few weeks, with all the disruption that can cause. Those of you who have done it recently know what I mean—especially if you're nowhere near as young as you'd like to be.

So best wishes to all for the holidays and please keep your comments and questions coming. Our email address is: midwayroundtable@gmail.com.

—Ron Russell
Editor pro tem