

The Roundtable Forum

official newsletter of the
Battle of Midway Roundtable

www.midway42.org



~ INTRODUCTION ~

Welcome to our December newsletter, in which we feature an article on the fine BOM commemorations conducted at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Houston. Also, Major Tom Rychlik chimes in on the continuing saga of the *Hornet* air group's misdirected flight on 4 June '42, and we have an interesting inquiry concerning a radioman-gunner whose claim of service at Midway is, well, *interesting*. Finally, there's a fascinating pilot's-eye view of a ship about to experience a bomb run by an SBD—the question there is, what are the odds that the pilot will score a hit? You can decide and let us know.

—Ron Russell
1 December 2024

~ AROUND THE TABLE ~

MEMBERS' TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE:

1. Our November newsletter
2. Annual BOM commemorations
3. VT-5 veteran in the BOM?
4. What if: the Flight to Nowhere

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1. OUR NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

25 October 2024
From: Bob Grove
Ohio

Well done, indeed. I especially enjoy the links to past issues. Keep up the great work.

—Bob Grove

25 October 2024
From: Warren Heller
North Carolina

Best wishes to you, Ron, for a minimum of hassles with your upcoming move. I am one of those who really appreciates your and Thom's service to keep the BOM website going.

—Warren Heller

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2. ANNUAL BOM COMMEMORATIONS (see the [October newsletter](#))

14 October 2024
From: Brock Howe
Texas

My best wishes to Thom and his recovery. And thanks to you for stepping in to keep the forum going.

In reference to the article about annual commemorations, I wanted to inform you of what we've been doing at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Houston, TX:

I've been a member of the forum for several years and I credit much of my knowledge of the battle to this forum. I was introduced to the forum when I

was honored with being assigned as the Plane Captain of the museum's SBD and it perked my interest in learning more about the aircraft and its historical significance.

I've been spearheading the annual BOM commemorations and leading presentations for the past several years and we've been steadily getting more and more attendance and participation from the public. These commemorations have been general public presentations at the museum and we usually get our relevant Navy aircraft (e.g. SBD and Avenger and a visiting Wildcat) as the backdrop for the presentations which makes it nice when describing the aircraft involved and how they were utilized. These presentations last about 45 minutes as I try to keep them fairly short for the general public attention span.

This past year, I expanded on the presentations and added a historical forum type of presentation which lasts more like 90 minutes and we dive (pardon the pun) into more of the details of the battle. It was an effort to reach out to people that wanted to learn a little more about the battle.



Brock's presentation during the 80th BOM anniversary, 2022

What I could use some help with is getting the word out to folks that would be interested in either the general public presentations or the more detailed historical forum. Could you or the group provide any contacts that I could reach out to and especially those in the Houston area? I would love to have more participation and would love some constructive feedback and suggestions and critique of my presentations.

Unfortunately, we don't do any online versions of these presentations I go to the museum nearly every Saturday so I'd be more than happy to meet anyone there and show them around if they are in the Houston area. So I invite any of the members to come check it out and they are welcome to contact me at brock.howe1966@gmail.com if they'd like a personal tour.

I also do other shorter type presentations (30 minutes) on individual aircraft like our SBD, Corsair, Avenger, B-25 and others throughout the year if folks are interested

PS: I'm starting to work on a presentation of the Battle of Coral Sea that I may roll out this spring on the anniversary.

—Brock Howe

[My reply:] Brock, thanks for your message and contributions for the Roundtable Forum re BOM events at your museum. I'm not sure what we can offer re your request for contact info, since anyone we know in that area is already receiving the newsletter.

One thing I've done in the past with such challenges is go online and look up local veteran associations—make contact with the local post, branch, etc. Maybe you've already done that, but anyway, these come to mind:

- American Legion
- VFW
- Vietnam Veterans Association
- Fleet Reserve Association
- MOAA Houston: <https://moaahoustonarea.org/>
- Marine Corps League, Houston: <https://www.facebook.com/McLemoreDet/>
- Naval Reserve Center Houston: <https://www.facebook.com/NRCHouston/>

You see how it goes. Good luck. —RR

14 October 2024
From: Brock Howe
Texas

Thanks Ron! I've contacted some of those. I'm not a veteran myself but I've worked alongside our VFW before so I'll try them again too. Thanks for putting it out to the group in the future

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3. VT-5 VETERAN IN THE BOM?

29 October 2024
From: Steve Holt
Washington state

I've been researching the WW2 experiences of the father of a friend and have run into a bit of a mystery regarding Midway.

His name was [see note below] and he was a radio operator and gunner in TBDs in Torpedo 5 on the *Yorktown*. A US Navy letter from 1943 says that he served on the *Yorktown* from 7 Dec 1941 until 6 June 1942 and that he took part in the battles over New Guinea, Coral Sea, Tulagi, and Midway.

Then, on 24 June 1942 he was transferred to USS *Enterprise* Torpedo 6 and embarked on the USS *Hornet*. He took part in the battles of Bouganville, Guadalcanal and Santa Cruz. Apparently, he was shot down at Santa Cruz after taking part in sinking an IJN cruiser and was awarded an Air Medal and Purple Heart.

But, by nearly all accounts I can find, VT-5 was off loaded in Hawaii when the *Yorktown* came in for emergency repairs on 30 May 1942, and when they left for Midway 3 days later they had off loaded VT-5 and transferred VT-3 from Saratoga. Some of the original TBDs from VT-5 seem to have gone to Midway.

The mystery is whether he actually was on the *Yorktown* from 30 May to 6 June. He may have stayed in Pearl Harbor and, possibly retrained for TBFs which the *Hornet* had in VT-6. Or he may have actually stayed on *Yorktown* as a fill in for VT-3 and then went to VT-6 after the battle.

Unfortunately, most records focus on the names of the pilots and very few of the other crew members are mentioned by name. I can't find any record in any reference I've found yet that mention him.

Do you have any suggestions as to where to look? I am going to ask his family to request his official records (hoping that they survived the archive's fire) and that might help shed some light on this.

Thanks for any clues you can send my way,

—Steve Holt

(continued on next page)

Ed. note: Steve sent a scan of the letter in question (below). Since the issue here is the official letter and not the veteran himself, I have blocked his identity from online posting. Paragraph #2 caught my attention for its claim of “aerial combat over...Midway.” VT-5 wasn’t present in the BOM, so the subject veteran didn’t engage in aerial combat there, as stated. Neither was he on the *Yorktown* in some other capacity, as he doesn’t appear on any of the CV-5 survivor lists.

Pers-8243A-MCG
311-38-83

20 November 1943

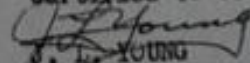
From: Chief of Naval Personnel
To: [REDACTED], ABML, [REDACTED], USN
Via: Commanding Officer,
AEDS, Naval Air Station
Patuxent River, Maryland
Subj: Air Crew Insignia
Ref: (a) BuPers Circ. Ltr. 173-43

1. Authority is hereby granted you to wear the Air Crew Insignia with three (3) stars.
2. Your statement indicates that from 7 December 1941 to 6 June 1942 you were serving in the U.S. S. YORKTOWN AIR GROUP, TORPEDO SQUADRON FIVE, acting in the capacity of Aviation Radioman and Gunner and participating in aerial combat over New Guinea, Coral Sea, Tulagi and Midway. On 24 June 1942 you were transferred to USS ENTERPRISE AIR GROUP, TORPEDO SQUADRON SIX and subsequently embarked on the U.S.S. HORNET. You participated in aerial combat over Bougainville, Guadalcanal and in the battle of Santa Cruz.
3. This letter shall be presented to Ship's Service store selling this insignia as your authority to purchase same.

By direction.

/s/ A. K. PANCAKE
A. K. PANCAKE
ENSIGN, USNB
Records Division

Certified to be a true copy


J. L. YOUNG
LTJG, USN, Head
Decorations Branch
Medals and Awards

I noticed some other minor oddities about the letter, so I sent it to John Lundstrom (*The First Team, Black Shoe Carrier Admiral*) and naval history researcher Jim Sawruk, asking for their opinion of the letter and for any data they might have on the named veteran, an aviation radioman (ARM) in VT-5. John shared my uneasiness about certain aspects of the letter, but Jim had the most compelling data in his archives: VT-5's radiomen and gunners were on Oahu with their squadron during the BOM. The evidence is solid that our subject ARM departed Pearl Harbor on June 7th aboard USS *Saratoga* (CV-3) en route to Midway with replacement TBFs and aircrews destined for the *Enterprise*.

That's consistent with paragraph #2 in the above letter except for the Midway claim. Bottom line, this radioman did not fly a combat mission in the BOM, and that satisfies one of our principal goals on the Roundtable: ensuring that anyone said to be a Battle of Midway veteran was actually there. (If you've read *No Right to Win*, you know of some major examples.)

While that disposed of the letter's Midway claim, it remains curious in other regards—"Midway" is not its only oddity. I'm wondering what our readers notice about it that might raise a question or two. Please send us your observations and questions, and we'll have them in the next newsletter. —RR

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4. WHAT IF: THE FLIGHT TO NOWHERE

Ed. note: this is the second of two contributions sent by Tom Rychlik in August that got delayed by our unfortunate events of September and October. The first of the two, regarding the Medal of Honor for Navy fliers at Midway, appeared in our last newsletter. This one revives one of our most enduring topics—the *Hornet* air group's errant course as the battle began. Tom's message has been edited a little for length and clarity.

29 August 2023

From: Major Tom Rychlik, USMC-ret
Virginia

Thank you for including Chuck Wohlrab's post [in the [July newsletter](#)] on James Hanson's "What if?" video. Many of the video clips were not authentic to the battle and there were errors in some of the slides (one example: the order of battle for Kido Butai). Jonathon Parshall was very gentlemanly by letting the two Brits make some factual errors during the video and not pointing them out.

Several things stood out. On page 174 of *Shattered Sword*, Parshall and Tully summarized their position: "we hew to the interpretation that *Hornet's*

group actually flew almost due west from their launch point and thereby flew north of Nagumo. Why Ring made the decision to take his group west, rather than the southwest toward the location of the initial PBY spotting reports remains unclear.”

Later, on page 206, P&T describe Waldron breaking formation by banking left (only possible if they had flown 265T) and attacking KB from dead ahead. P&T also cite Lundstrom and Cressman for additional support for their scholarship. P&T state KB was on course 070T at that moment, although on page 206 Fuchida (*Midway The Battle That Doomed Japan*) stated they were steady on course 030T to close the American ships. Either way, Waldron is clearly attacking from the northeast not from the south or southeast!

P&T note KB’s swing to port to the west to run away from Torpedo Eight. P&T then describe what Waldron and VT-8 would have seen as stated in “his squadron report.” The footnote for this paragraph says “VT-8 action report, as written by Ens. George Gay” I am unaware of any official VT-8 report...I am aware of Gay’s book, his interview with Lieutenant Porter in 1943, and an article Gay wrote for the Naval Academy Alumni Association *Shipmate* magazine in 1966, but I have never seen an official report written by Gay.



Captain Stanhope Ring, post-war



Captain Mark Mitscher, 1942
with Doolittle airmen

With all this great scholarship and information stemming from Bowen Weisheit's book on what happened to the HAG, the Navy has been reluctant to revise their thinking. The official Navy position has always been that the HAG flew southwest, yet to my Congressional supporters they have stated [the Navy] knew all about Waldron's actions, so nothing we have presented is new to them or even to Nimitz at the time!

Do you see the hypocrisy in that? Although in his [official after-action report to Nimitz] Spruance basically put Mitscher on report as to the accuracy of his Midway report, Nimitz chose not to investigate what Spruance meant or to find out why half of his strike force never found the Japanese.

Unlike King, Nimitz always gave his subordinates the benefit of any doubt, rarely confronting them directly unless necessary. However, Nimitz decided to remove Mitscher's name from his initial list of task force commanders immediately after Midway, sending him ashore to command Patrol Wing II. If Nimitz had investigated, a number of things would have happened, none good for Mitscher, but maybe Waldron's intent to attack the sighted carriers would have been exposed. Some may say Waldron disobeyed orders by leaving the HAG. Waldron was given the positions and the mission to attack the two previously sighted carriers and was never told by Ring or Mitscher why the HAG was going 265T. As far as he was concerned, Ring's questionable navigational skills were the issue and he wasn't going to miss those carriers.

In my opinion, Ring didn't make the decision to fly in a direction clearly away from the Japanese aircraft carriers, he was directed to do that by Mitscher who thought he knew better [how to find] the two missing carriers. In the process, [he] also disobeyed Fletcher's and then Spruance's orders to attack the carriers previously sighted.

Mitscher said his air group departed on 239T. While two of his squadron commanders were MIA, this is not the reason he chose to not attach any of the other squadron reports. Lieutenant Commander Rodee (CO of Scouting Eight) would have said they went 265T if he had had a chance to write a report. The fact that he didn't get a chance says something.

[*Ed. note:* more likely, Rodee wrote the report as required by USN regulations, but it and any other subordinate reports were suppressed by Captain Mitscher.]



Capt. Rodee, post-war

Mitscher did attach a report from Jimmy Thatch's VF-3 but it had nothing to do with what direction the HAG flew. The less paper generated, the less of a chance someone is going to say something that creates a problem. Sometimes, what senior officers *don't* include in their official reports is more important than what they *do* include. Nimitz was

smart enough to know that too, and didn't want to muckrake a huge victory by asking questions.

There is a great discussion in the video on key decisions that could have radically changed the outcome of the battle, such as Nagumo's decisions to rearm his aircraft or wait to launch his strike until after he had recovered the Midway strike, McClusky's decision to do a box search north of the predicted interception point that led him to sight Arashi and follow her to KB, Spruance's decision to retire to the east the evening of the 4th. All great points but I was disappointed that Waldron's decision to depart the HAG wasn't mentioned. Parshall did talk about how VT-3 and VB-3 attacked at the same time McCluskey did but he didn't mention that the *Yorktown* air group would never have spotted KB if they had not seen the smoke generated by Lindsey's attack and that Lindsey wouldn't have found KB if he hadn't spotted the smoke generated by Waldron's attack. Waldron would never have found KB if he had done the easy thing to follow Ring on his flight to nowhere.

The video mentioned how the [Japanese] CAP focused on the torpedo planes and allowed the dive bombers to attack unopposed but didn't mention that Waldron's and Lindsey's attacks forced the Japanese to continuously rearm and refuel the CAP which kept them from moving their strike aircraft to the flight decks and launching a crushing attack on the Americans, winning the battle at one stroke.

The "What if" discussion was very good. The general agreement was that losing the battle would have extended the war into 1946 but we would have still won the war. This discussion borders on whether the BOM was the battle that changed the tide of the war. After reading Henry James' *The Man Who Won World War II*, I am of the opinion that had we lost the BOM we probably would have had to delay our landings in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and France in order to send to the Pacific the resources needed to stabilize things. This would have extended the time for Hitler to develop his wonder weapons.

I agree with Parshall. I think the Marines would have initially held Midway but if the Japanese had sunk the *Yorktown*, *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, the Pacific Fleet would have had a tough time holding it against a second, larger assault backed up by Yamamoto's battleships and carriers. At that point we would only have had *Saratoga* and *Wasp* in the Pacific and it was unlikely we could have kept the supply line to Australia open.

Waldron and Lindsey did not allow the Japanese the ability to attack our carriers. Had the entire HAG found KB it is likely they would have hit at least one carrier at 0920, the rest would have been left for McClusky, Leslie, and Massey. We wouldn't have lost the *Yorktown* or the *Hammann* and the rest of the Japanese attack force would have been easy pickings. Those are some direct "What ifs" to add to the discussion.

Well stated, Tom, although your last paragraph is highly arguable. If “the entire HAG had found KB,” that can only mean they got there with Waldron, which would have thoroughly reshaped the battle’s dynamics for the worse. The details are in my message on this subject in our [July 2020](#) issue. —RR



Now hear this!

NEWS AND INFO IN THIS ISSUE:

- A hit or a miss?
- Editor’s Notes
- TBD launch photo

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A HIT OR A MISS?



Barrett Tillman sent me the above photo, presumably a pilot's view from within a diving SBD. The image came from Hill Goodspeed, editor of *The Hook* (Tailhook Association magazine) without explanation. Barrett and I had the following exchange as to whether this aircraft could possibly hit its target with a bomb. (I'm assuming it's an SBD from the antenna mast to the pilot's left. If anyone believes it's something else, let us know.)

Reminds me that Dick Best said he preferred to dive from the bow "because it forces you to get steep." Certainly the image verifies that wisdom, and prompts all the more admiration for Dick's beam approach to *Akagi*.

—Barrett

As interesting as the view is, if that's supposed to be a bomb run on a ship, I'd say the bomb would impact the sea way behind the target.

—RR

Guess it'd depend on how low the pilot pushed the dive. But in my limited experience, I'd say he's right close to the recommended 1500 ft release...

—Barrett

Right, but he's practically over the ship and the bomb needs to fall for several seconds while the vessel is continuing smartly forward at maybe 30 knots. And assuming the prescribed 70-degree dive, the bomb falls in a trailing arc, not a vertical descent. Miss astern. IMHO.

—RR

Definitely the bomb's "fall line" is a factor. I wondered about ship speed—cannot gauge the wake in that regard. Dad said that ship recognition training included guesstimates by wake but of course that varied according to ship class.

—Barrett

Check. It all depends on whether this is a practice dive on a friendly, or an actual dive in combat. If the latter, then you'd reasonably assume the target is a large destroyer or light cruiser that would be at max speed and maneuvering—not evident in the photo, but a still shot doesn't tell you everything.

Also, I belatedly noticed: the wake only trails the ship by about one and a half times its own length, which works out to 500 – 600 ft. for a WW2 IJN destroyer. That suggests the vessel was virtually dead in the water at the start of the wake, then basically floored it upon sighting dive bombers. That would put its speed, at the moment of the photo, far less than 30 knots. Still, it just seems the bomber is too far ahead of itself to expect a hit.

Now, since I'm only a blackshoe reservist with nothing but airliner flying experience, I have to wonder how our better-qualified aviation veterans on the BOMRT roster see it.

—RR

So, all you warbird pilots and others out there with better credentials than me, will this aircraft's bomb come anywhere near its target below? Please send in your opinions and rationale. There is a link to our email address on the last page .

EDITOR'S NOTES

Re a "politically correct" BOM per Barrett Tillman in the November newsletter, long-time Forum contributor Don Boyer sent a detailed description of his and others' P.C. experiences in modern-day Hawaii, in relation to the USS *Arizona* memorial and other WW2 monuments. Don's message is outside of our scope (Midway) so it's not included here, but suffice to say that any reference to the horrific atrocities of the Imperial Japanese in WW2 is systematically excluded in historical observances in Hawaii. Apparently, with the modern realities of American society plus international relations, that's how it has to be.

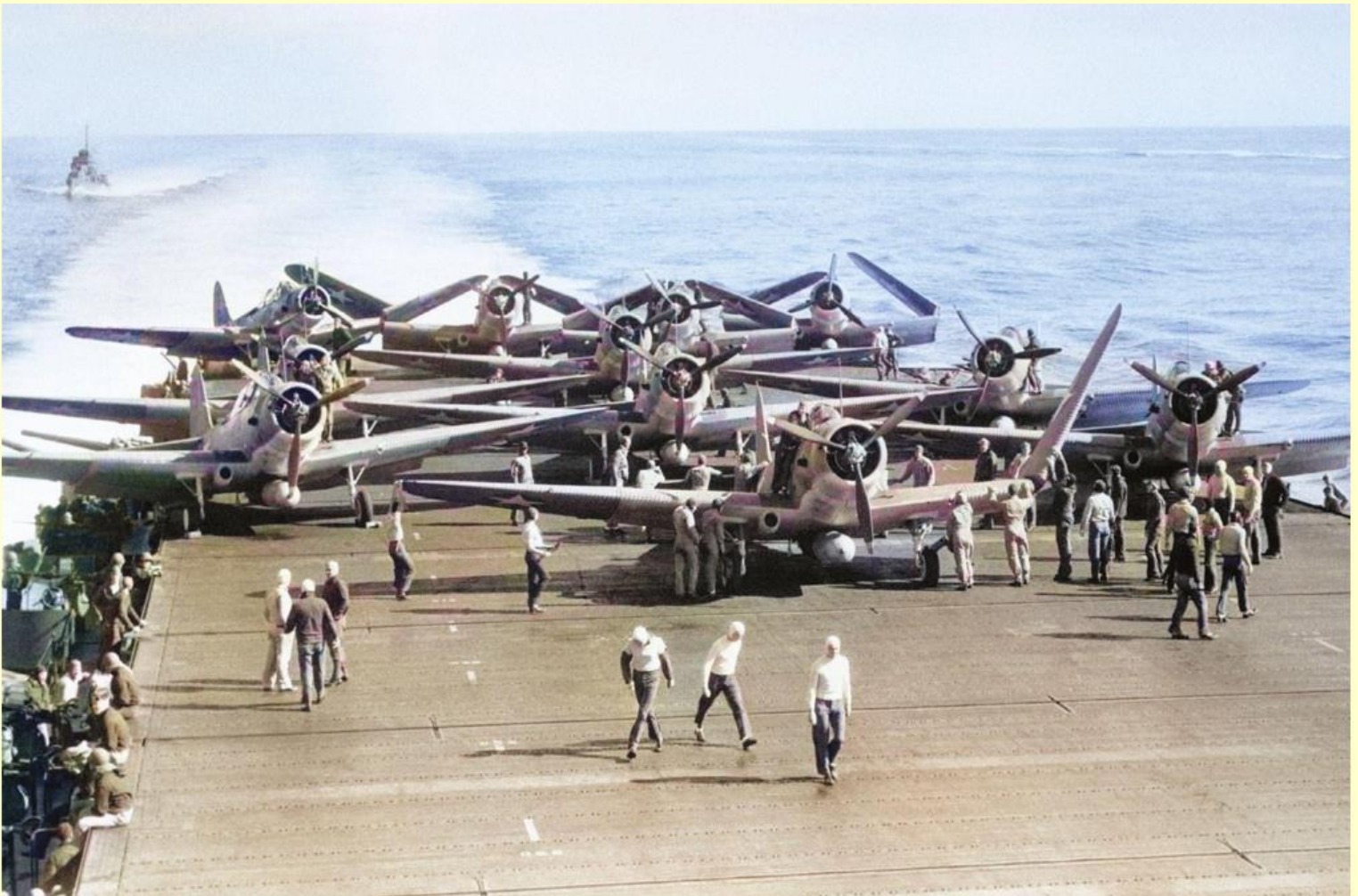
Regarding our webmaster and usual editor Thom Walla, the news is good: he continues to make steady progress in recovering from a stroke in September that interrupted his ability to do much keyboarding or website management. You can expect to see him back at this helm at some future point; it will just take a while.

Finally, here's a photo that I found fascinating—it's the familiar shot of a TBD squadron loaded with torpedoes and about to launch. Thom has used this image for his newsletter banner for years, and I started doing so with the October issue. But this is the first copy of it that I've see *colorized*, and the effect is very dramatic. Enjoy.

Until next time, please send in your comments on the VT-5 veteran letter and the “hit or miss” bomb run challenge, or anything else BOM-related. Our email ID:

midwayroundtable@gmail.com

—Ron Russell



Colorized version of our front page banner photo, found on:

<https://www.magzter.com/stories/Culture/History-of-War/BATTLE-OF-MIDWAY-TURNING-POINT-OF-THE-PACIFIC-WAR>