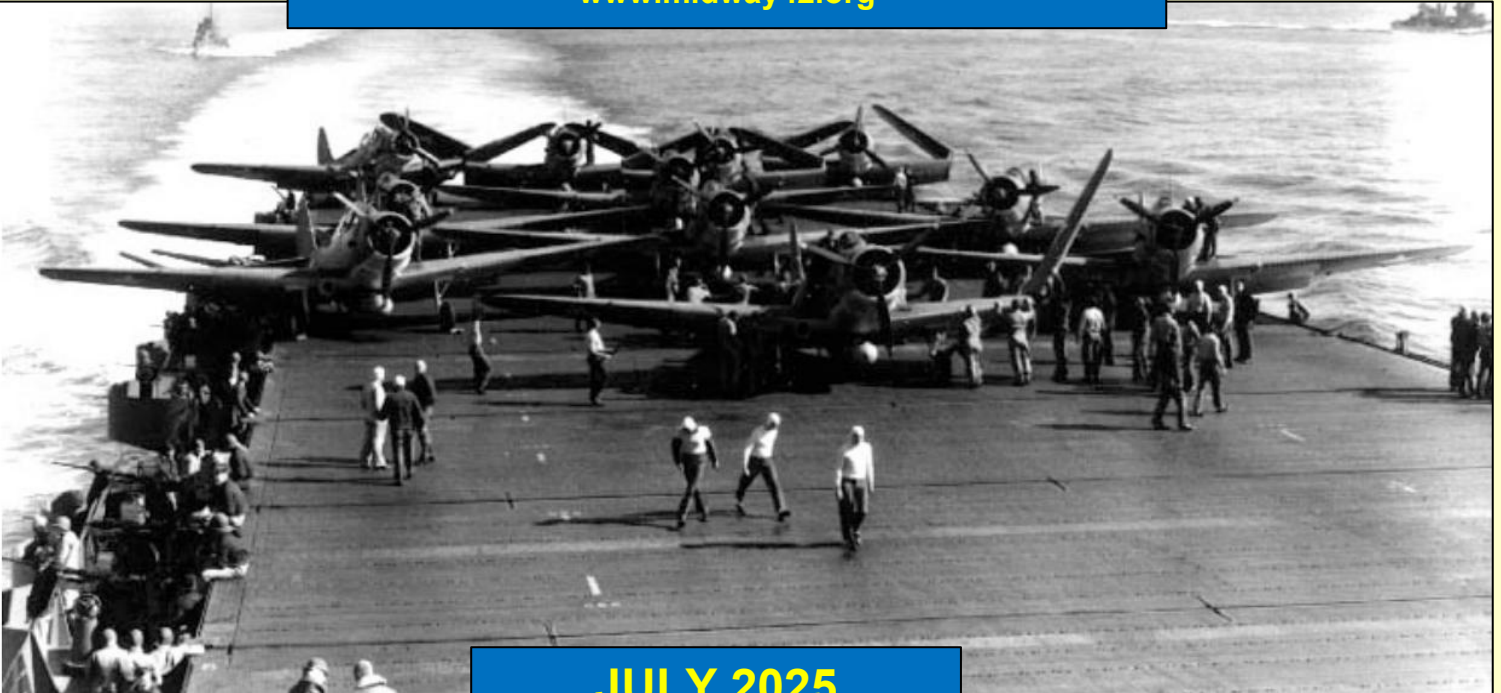


The Roundtable Forum

official newsletter of the
Battle of Midway Roundtable

www.midway42.org

**OUR 28th YEAR
ON THE INTERNET**



JULY 2025

~ INTRODUCTION ~

In the May newsletter, Tom Rychlik raised the possibility that Joseph Rochefort's involuntary removal from Station HYPO may have led to avoidable losses in the Pacific war due to degraded intel capability. In June, Don Boyer countered that intel expertise at HYPO was sustained and even improved over time because Rochefort's team of codebreaking experts was still in place in his absence. That exchange prompted a detailed response from Rochefort biographer Elliot Carlson, whom we can rely upon for the authoritative last word on that subject, and we have it here.

But there's also a whole lot more in this month's issue, starting with a couple of vintage BOM vet video interviews, conducted on Midway, that we haven't previously seen on the Roundtable. Webmaster Thom Walla and I hope you enjoy this month's offerings and will look forward to your comments.

—Ron Russell
28 June 2025

~ AROUND THE TABLE ~

READERS' TOPICS IN THIS ISSUE:

1. BOM veteran interview videos from 1999
2. Rochefort and Nimitz
3. Another myth of Midway
4. *Enterprise* SBD found aboard *Yorktown*
5. Aircraft salvage from USS *Lexington*?
6. 50th anniversary of the USS *Yorktown* Club

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1. BOM VETERAN INTERVIEW VIDEOS FROM 1999

9 May 2025

From: Chuck Wohlrab
Virginia

These videos were recorded by a scuba diver in 1999. He was going to Midway to do a couple of videos about diving around the atoll, but decided to interview some of the veterans.

The first video is an interview of Dick Best. He talks torpedoes and training torpedo bomber pilots before the war, dive bombing and how it felt to make a dive bombing attack. He credited the victory to the code-breaking and intelligence personnel. Very interesting interview. First time I've seen this video. [Click here](#).

The second video interviews other pilots, LCDR Lee McLeary and LCDR Bill Cullen who were PBY Pilots at Midway. Ensign Lee McLeary, of VP-44, was navigator aboard the only PBY to be shot down during the battle. It was shot down by seaplane "fighters," probably F1M Petes. Ensign Bill Cullen, of VP23, was the navigator of the plane who picked up McLeary's surviving crew members. Some really good stories. [Click here](#).

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2. ROCHEFORT AND NIMITZ (See the [May](#) and [June](#) newsletters)

Elliot Carlson's special article on this subject is attached below, at the end of the newsletter. Meanwhile, Don Boyer has submitted this brief follow-up to his message in the June issue, and he makes a couple of key points.

3 May 2025

From: Don Boyer
Hawaii

I was just re-reading Holmes' *Double Edged Secrets*, and I actually think the organization got better, but that just had to do with the fact that they acquired a lot of highly qualified people from all aspects of the intelligence spectrum. It would have evolved the same had Rochefort remained there, so that's not really a big point.

By the end of the war, according to Richard Franks in *Downfall*, we were reading everything the Japanese had almost in real time and sometimes faster than the recipients got it. The one exception remained the admirals' code, which was no longer used by that time. I'm surprised we didn't tap into their phone system!

* * * * *

3. ANOTHER MYTH OF MIDWAY

One of the assumed outcomes from the U.S. losing at Midway would be a threat to the shipping route from the U.S. to Australia, due to the Japanese creating major bases in the Solomons and beyond. But could they actually do it?

11 May 2025

From: Scott Kozell
Virginia

Here is another issue related to Midway that I have never seen properly addressed; maybe one of the myths of Midway: "the Japanese wanted to advance thru the Solomons, to take Fiji and Samoa, to cut the lifeline between Australia and the U.S."

It is about 8,000 miles from Los Angeles to the east coast of Australia. If the Japanese had taken the Solomon Islands, a slight dogleg with about 9,000 miles total would still provide shipping access between the U.S. and Australia, and not within range of Japanese aircraft.

The notion about “severing the lifeline” was not true. Inconvenient and unacceptable? Yes, but it could be dealt with in the interim until the Solomons are retaken.

Parshall & Tully make the case that the IJN extending to Fiji and Samoa or beyond would have been nearly infeasible considering supply chain issues and garrisons and air forces.

Liberty ships, the mass-produced cargo vessels of World War II, had an impressive range of 20,000 nautical miles. These ships were designed for long-haul missions, ensuring vital supplies reached Allied forces across the globe.

I am not suggesting that it would not have been a major problem, just that it would *not* have severed Australia from the U.S.

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4. *ENTERPRISE* SBD FOUND ABOARD *YORKTOWN*

Here’s solid confirmation regarding an *Enterprise* Dauntless spotted aboard the *Yorktown* during the recent undersea exploration. See the [June](#) newsletter.

25 May 2025

From: George Kernahan
England

Concerning Wilbur Roberts and his SBD, 6-B-5, mentioned in the latest newsletter, his own account of his Midway experiences appeared in the Summer 2009 issue of the Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society. It confirms that he landed back aboard *Yorktown* and his aircraft was still aboard at the time of her sinking. His last contact with 6-B-5 was when he went down to the hangar deck to retrieve her life raft before abandoning ship. He recalls that she was full of shrapnel holes following a bomb hit on the flight deck.

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5. AIRCRAFT SALVAGE FROM USS *LEXINGTON*?

25 May 2025
From: Bill Longton
Florida

I watched the entire video of the NOAA's exploration of the USS *Yorktown*. What a truly wonderful job. However, watching the video causes me to wonder about the status of the recovery efforts to salvage multiple TBD Devastator torpedo planes of VT-2 from the wreck of the USS *Lexington* (CV-2). Has anyone heard of any progress, because I certainly haven't. Thanks for any help.

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6. 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE USS *YORKTOWN* CLUB

31 May 2025
From: Warren Heller
North Carolina

The 50th anniversary reunion of the *Yorktown* CV-5 Commemorative Association (Club) was held Thursday through Sunday, May 15 - 18 at the Holiday Inn Downtown in Mobile, Alabama. Of the 76 members nationwide, 15 attended. The club's one surviving crewman, Coral Sea and Midway veteran Robert Taylor, 101 years old and living in Florida, was not able to join us.

We held a business meeting at which existing officers were reconfirmed to remain at their present posts, the club's financial situation was reviewed, and the dates for the next reunion were established to be April 9 - 12, 2026 with a backup date of April 16 - 19, to be held in Corpus Christi, Texas.

On Friday we were provided a guided tour through the National Museum of Naval Aviation at nearby NAS Pensacola by Bob Delaney, a retired USN aviator, and Rick Carraway, past president of the Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors organization. In the evening, many of us enjoyed a sunset dinner cruise on the *Perdido Queen* riverboat.

Saturday's activities included tours of the World War II battleship USS *Alabama*, the submarine USS *Drum*, and the associated aviation museum. On Saturday evening we held the club's traditional banquet at which guest speakers included Mr. Layton Little, Director of Government Affairs of the Mobile Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Rick Carraway, a docent at the National Museum of Naval Aviation.

On Sunday morning, the annual memorial breakfast was held at which "the bell was rung" for crewmen known to have passed away recently or whom we recently learned about. These were: Julian E. Hodges, F3C–September 5, 2024 and Wilburn C. Wright, EM1C–August 18, 1998. The meeting was adjourned with a wish for favorable winds and fair seas for everyone.

Sincere thanks to Warren for this fine report on the CV-5 club, with which the Roundtable has always had an important connection. Over the years, its members—veterans of the ship and their families—have helped us a great deal in uncovering BOM vet information that can't be found otherwise. Their annual convention is always a grand affair and open to all with a *Yorktown* interest.



Now hear this!

NEWS AND INFO IN THIS ISSUE:

- 83rd BOM anniversary at the Naval Memorial
- Major supplement to the June newsletter
- Website additions and changes
- Special attachment: "Rocheft, King, and HYPO after Midway" by Carlson

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83rd BOM ANNIVERSARY AT THE NAVAL MEMORIAL

Any fading of enthusiasm for BOM anniversary observances, as related in the June newsletter was not present at the Naval Memorial in Washington, D.C. on June 4th. The Navy Department put on a fine formal ceremony at the Lone Sailor statue, which included an excellent speech by CNO Admiral James Kilby. He got all of the important points exactly right, even leading off with special praise for Joseph Rocheft for having the courage bypass his chain of command and

interface directly with Layton and CINCPAC. That key detail which helped to win the battle is almost never included in any sort of Midway commemoration.

The event was a feast for the eyes and ears, and we got to watch it live on the Internet. If you missed it, the recording is available online, [click here](#) then click the white “play” arrow at the left, under the opening photo. The run time is about 35 minutes.



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MAJOR SUPPLEMENT TO THE JUNE NEWSLETTER

For everyone receiving our regular email announcements, you're aware of the passing of the last BOM vet who personally participated with us online over the years: Marine Colonel John Miniclier, at the age of 103. The timing prevented us from including a proper tribute for John in either the June newsletter or this one, so we posted a special supplement to the June issue for that purpose. If you haven't seen it, please join the Roundtable in saluting a very special Midway vet by having a look now: [click here](#), or copy and paste this URL into your browser:

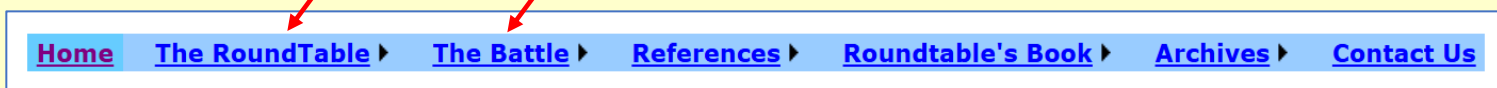
<http://midway42.org/Backissues/2025/Files/2025-06%20Supplement.pdf>

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WEBSITE ADDITIONS AND CHANGES

Mike Rogers, who has provided us with some of the remarkable writings of VT-8 pilot William Evans (see the [February](#) newsletter) found a couple of unique artifacts among the Evans family's archives: two old-school dime comic books from 1943, in good condition, and oddly enough, focused on VT-8 at the BOM. Webmaster Thom Walla has posted them on our website for you, and you can find those interesting relics [here](#). Alternately, get them from our home page: on the top toolbar, click *The RoundTable*, then *Special Features*. On the list that opens, click "9. The BOM in the Comics." They are uniquely fascinating.

There are two other changes in the *Special Features* menu. First, the former no. 9 entry, "USS Yorktown Muster Lists" had been relocated under *The Battle* on the top toolbar. And the former no. 10 article, "The Weisheit Transcripts: Decoding the Flight to Nowhere" is also found under *The Battle*:



If any of the above is confusing or doesn't work for you, be sure to let us know so we can fix it. But it all should be very ordinary in any browser by starting at our home page, www.midway42.org.

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SPECIAL ATTACHMENT TO THE ROUNDTABLE FORUM

Ed. note: We are very grateful to Elliott Carlson for the following contribution to our newsletter, a well researched and well written piece of history that he easily could have sold as a magazine article or included as a chapter in his next book. It's unusually long, but I urge you not to skip it. To help with that, I've edited the text a little for length and inserted subheads and photos for easier reading.

If you've read *Joe Rochefort's War*, you'll also want to read its author's new contribution here, and if you haven't, it's still a fine treatment of a primary topic on the Roundtable. Carlson provides authoritative answers to two questions: (1) could Nimitz have influenced King to retain Rochefort at HYPO? And (2), was HYPO's efficiency degraded by his involuntary replacement? —RR

ROCHEFORT, KING, and HYPO AFTER MIDWAY

by Elliot Carlson
28 April 2025

A Letter to CINCPAC

On 22 October 1942, Joe Rochefort received orders to report to Main Navy in Washington, by the next available plane, for “temporary additional duty.” Rochefort didn’t buy that for a minute. He knew there would be nothing “temporary” about this duty; he grasped instantly that his career as officer in charge of Station HYPO at Pearl Harbor was over. Nobody would believe him. Not his immediate superior, Rear Admiral David W. Bagley, commandant of the 14th Naval District. Not his best friend at HYPO, Jasper Holmes. Not Pacific Fleet Commander Chester W. Nimitz.



COMINCH Adm. King

Nimitz didn’t learn Rochefort’s fate officially until 3 November, when he got a letter from U.S. Fleet Commander Ernest J. King. Dated 28 October, the letter had been sent by regular mail; clearly, King wasn’t in any hurry to explain things. If the letter appeared routine, the news was anything but. To Nimitz it was outrageous, and disturbing. The portrait of Rochefort that emerged from King’s prose was hardly recognizable. According to King, Rochefort was part of a culture of “petty jealousy and bickering” that was weakening coordination between the Washington and Honolulu radio intelligence units.

What King said next left Nimitz seething: Vice Admiral F. J. Horne, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, had installed a new officer (William B. Goggins) as officer in charge of Station HYPO, without telling Nimitz. Goggins was already sitting in Rochefort’s chair, in HYPO’s fabled basement. Responding to King through a letter to Horne, Nimitz told King he hadn’t liked the way Rochefort’s removal had been handled, or the fact that he, Nimitz, hadn’t been consulted. He had more to say. “I have no information other than what you have furnished, of bickerings between the Washington and Pearl Harbor RI units,” he wrote King, “but I observed enough out here to know that Rochefort’s sin was probably one of doing too much rather than too little—a hard thing for which to condemn a man.”



Frederick J. Horne

[*Ed. note:* RI = Radio Intelligence.]

King never answered Nimitz. Rochefort’s fate had been decided well before November. Nimitz and Horne exchanged a few more letters but by the end of November such notes were an exercise in futility. By December Nimitz dropped

the matter, figuring correctly that he had pushed the irascible King about as far he could be pushed. He wasn't going to strain his already complicated relationship with his touchy boss for a lost cause.

A Powerful Conspiracy

Was Rochefort a lost cause? Could Nimitz have done more to save Rochefort's job? That would have been hard, probably impossible, given the strong, almost ludicrous anti-Rochefort sentiment that pervaded key sectors of Navy intelligence and operations. What Nimitz didn't know, but what Rochefort had intuited, was that for months the HYPO OIC had been the target of a virulent campaign intended to oust him from his slot and replace him with someone more agreeable to OP-20-G. Nor could Nimitz have known that this effort was aided and abetted by two members of King's personal staff, Horne and King's chief of staff, Russell Willson.



Russell Willson

Willson and Rochefort had served together, in 1936, aboard the *Pennsylvania*; the two disliked each other. Willson viewed Rochefort as lacking in merit since he had started out as an enlisted man; Rochefort thought Willson was a stuffed shirt.



John Redman

As luck would have it, King asked Willson to review the merits of the Bagley-Nimitz recommendation that Rochefort receive a Distinguished Service Medal for his critical contribution to America's stunning victory at Midway. Willson relished the project. He consulted with OP-20-G, headed by a very bitter Rochefort adversary, John Redman. Redman wanted Rochefort out of HYPO. He didn't like the fact that Rochefort gave CINCPAC priority in reporting HYPO's intel estimates. Redman didn't like Rochefort's obstreperous insistence that the Imperial Navy intended to attack Midway, rather than somewhere else, as OP-20-G believed; HYPO's estimate proved correct. Willson submitted to King a twisted report on Rochefort, dooming his chances for a DSM.

The anti-Rochefort push gained steam when Joe Redman, commanding the communication office to which his brother John reported, joined the campaign. In a 20 June memo to Horne, who supervised communications as part of King's leadership team, Joe Redman wrote that Pearl Harbor's RI operation was faltering under weak leadership. He wrote that HYPO was "in the hands of an ex-Japanese language student (a commander)," overlooking the fact that Rochefort had been a pioneer in shaping the Navy's codebreaking program. He called for Rochefort to be replaced by a "senior officer trained in radio intelligence" rather than one whose background is the Japanese language.



Joseph Redman

Whether Horne, let alone King, believed any of this is hard to imagine, but Horne threw his support behind the home team. He helped choreograph a variety of intricate steps that led to the expulsion of Rochefort as HYPO's OIC. First, he had John Redman relinquish his post as OIC of OP-20-G; he then had John rotated to the Pacific Fleet to serve as Nimitz's communications officer (whether Nimitz saw Redman coming is unclear). Without Nimitz's permission, Redman used CINCPAC's personal call sign to communicate secretly with his associates at OP-20-G. One of his October messages: "Get Rid of Rochefort!" Second, he arranged for Goggins, briefly with OP-20-G, to be transferred to Pearl Harbor to await developments. When Rochefort departed Hawaii for Washington, on 25 October, orders were cut for Goggins to step in. Around 28 October Goggins introduced himself to a bewildered and demoralized HYPO team.

Who should get the blame for all this? It's hard to overlook the hovering presence of COMINCH. "By no means did King fire Rochefort, as was rumored in the hazy recollections of OP-20-G axe grinders," writes Naval War College historian David Kohnen, in his recent blockbuster on King, *King's Navy* (Schiffer Military History, 2024). That may be true in a purely technical sense, but King acquiesced in the machinations of OP-20-G, and, as Kohnen notes, he empowered Willson and Horne to break up the communication and intelligence fiefdoms at Main Navy. "Rochefort became an innocent victim in the bureaucratic infighting," he writes. Possibly, but it seems to this writer that King's fingerprints were all over the plan to oust Rochefort.

The people who had real leverage with King could probably be counted on the fingers of one hand; Nimitz wouldn't have been one of them. Nimitz and King had their ups and downs, but the CINCPAC commander never enjoyed strong leverage with COMINCH. True, Nimitz was popular in the Navy and, after the Battle of Midway, rightfully celebrated in the country; his fleet had just won a great victory. This didn't cut any ice with King. Nimitz wasn't a conquering hero in the eyes of King; that's not the way his mind worked.

COMINCH respected Nimitz and valued him as a problem solver, King scholars agree. Still, they point out, King had serious concerns about Nimitz; he worried that Nimitz was too lenient, too easy-going, and too soft-hearted with subordinates. King also regarded Nimitz as indecisive at critical moments and, at times, insufficiently aggressive against the Japanese. So exasperated was King that by early 1943, writes King expert Robert Love, he considered sending his trusted assistant, Admiral Charles "Savvy" Cooke, to Pearl Harbor as deputy commander-in-chief—a move that almost certainly would have led Nimitz to resign as CINCPAC. Outstanding as Nimitz is seen today in nearly every category of leadership, and deservedly so, he often fell short in the eyes of his demanding boss. He never gained the clout with King that would have been required to save Rochefort.

HYPO under Goggins



William Goggins

When Commander William B. Goggins showed up at Station HYPO's famed basement, around 28 October 1942, to take over as officer in charge of that unit, he received a chilly reception. The officers and men didn't know Goggins; they didn't know why he was there, and they wondered what had happened to their old boss, the sharp, sometimes sardonic officer who for many riveting months, brilliantly and valorously, held that position, leading them up to and through the Battle of Midway, and to whom they remained fiercely loyal: Joe Rochefort.

The HYPO team was bewildered. The first reaction of Rochefort's best friend at HYPO, Jasper Holmes, was disbelief. He couldn't believe Washington would send a stranger to Pearl Harbor to relieve Rochefort. Nor could Rochefort's lead cryptanalyst at HYPO, Tommy Dyer. He and others heard rumors of some kind of Navy Department plot against Rochefort. Basement dwellers viewed Goggins warily. Dyer later remembered treating Goggins for weeks with "minimum politeness." Goggins was in limbo. Morale in the basement plummeted.

So did HYPO's effectiveness, at least for a time. According to Dyer, it wasn't so much Rochefort's leadership that was missed—everyone pretty much knew what to do. He was missed in an area where Joe Redman deemed him lacking; to quote from *Joe Rochefort's War*, p. 414: "his all-around prowess in every aspect of communications intelligence, from cryptanalysis and communications to translating and analysis." "We were bound to suffer to some extent," Dyer said. "No one could step into his shoes." Was not disaster sure to follow?

There is an assertion in the May Roundtable Forum that men and ships were lost and operations were affected by degraded intel without Rochefort's leadership. That's a disservice to the officers and men of HYPO, and to Goggins. True, Goggins was no Rochefort; he couldn't step into his predecessor's shoes. He had no experience in cryptanalysis and couldn't speak Japanese. But he wasn't an OP-20-G puppet; he had compiled a worthy Navy record. He had been severely wounded months earlier while serving as executive officer of the cruiser *Marblehead* (CL-12) in the Java Sea. He was recalled to Washington and, through a process peculiar to the Navy, transferred to OP-20-G. He was told to familiarize himself with the world of codebreaking.

Goggins had strengths, not the least of which was his strong background in the technology of radio communications. He also was known to be "a good executive-type officer," in the words of Admiral Horne. He gradually managed to

gain the confidence of the HYPO team. He was aided in this effort by Rochefort, who, in a 16 November 1942 letter to Jasper Holmes, asked his former colleagues to give their new OIC the benefit of the doubt. Addressing the officers and men of HYPO, Rochefort said: "I hope you will be as loyal to Goggins as you have been to me."

They were. Rochefort's core team stayed together throughout the war; inspired by Rochefort's example, they performed at the same high level they had under their former boss. They were consummate professionals, and they had a war to fight. If there was ever any doubt about that, it was erased in April 1943 when one of Rochefort's linguists, Alva "Red" Lasswell, helped decrypt the coded itinerary of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Lasswell's work led to one of the iconic moments of the Pacific War: the shootdown of Yamamoto over Bougainville in New Guinea on 18 April 1943. It should go without saying that Station HYPO would have been better off with Rochefort than without him; any organization would be. But to say that HYPO's Intel was degraded because of his absence is a gross misjudgment. From all the evidence, Rochefort remained proud of the way his former officers and men acquitted themselves during the war. They remained as sharp as ever.

References consulted:

David Kohnen, *King's Navy*

Craig Symonds, *Nimitz at War*

Thomas Buell, *Master of Sea Power*

Robert Love, Jr., "Ernest Joseph King" in *The Chiefs of Naval Operations*

That's it for the month of July. As always, your messages or inquiries concerning this newsletter, our website, or anything related to the BOM are welcome and encouraged, and anything you send will get a reply. Send to:

midwayroundtable@gmail.com

Best regards,

—Ron Russell, newsletter editor (temporary)

—Thom Walla, webmaster and chief editor

