

## In This Issue

 2 Counter-Punch

 3 Norfolk's Aviators at Midway


 4 War Machines

 6 Book Reviews

*-Destined for Glory: Dive Bombers, the Battle of Midway, and the Evolution of Naval Warfare*

*-Joe Rochefort's War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway*

 8 Jack "Dusty" Kleiss and the Battle of Midway

 12 History from the Cockpit: Reflections of a World War II U.S. Navy Dive Bomber Pilot



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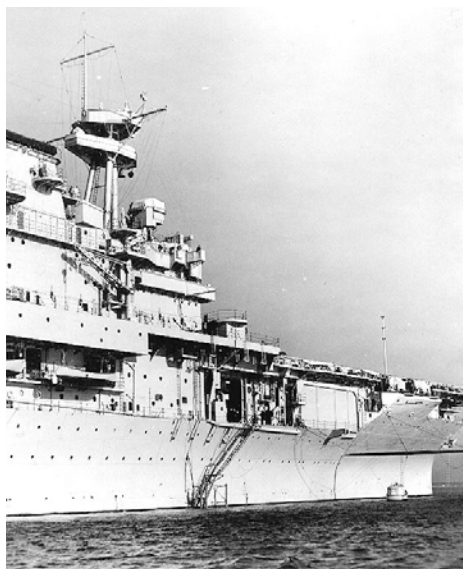
The planes of Torpedo Bomber Squadron Six on the deck of USS Enterprise (CV-6) during the Battle of Midway. (Naval History and Heritage Command image)

## Counter-Punch

### Seventy years later, the Battle of Midway Still Needs to Be Remembered

The U.S. Navy is very busy coordinating commemorative events. It is the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, the 150th anniversary of the Civil War and, lest we forget, the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis. There is also preliminary planning for the 100th anniversary of World War I, which will begin in 2014.

This list contains one event that needs



USS Yorktown (CV-5) in Hampton Roads, 1937 (HRNM image)

to be brought to the forefront: the Battle of Midway. The year 2012 is the 70th anniversary of this decisive battle. The Navy annually commemorates Midway with a major public outreach event coupled with an internal training program for Sailors. These activities honor the sacrifices made by the men fought in the battle and emphasize the engagement's significance in American history.


The victory at Midway cannot be overstated. On June 3, 1942, the United States and its allies in the Pacific were losing badly to the Japanese Empire. The Navy's surface fleet was in shambles; American ground and naval forces were on the verge of surrender at Corregidor; British and Dutch troops surrendered in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Java; and several outlying islands, including Wake, had been lost. Only the hard check given by U.S. Naval forces at the Battle of the Coral Sea slowed the advance.

In the weeks leading up to Midway, the Japanese looked all but invincible. Not only did the Japanese fleet outnumber the opposing American task forces, but having already been at war for five years, it had far more combat experience. It was under these circumstances that the men of the U.S. Navy's Task Force 16 and 17 not only

stopped the Japanese advance, but shifted the momentum of the war.

We should not wait until the 75th anniversary to commemorate the event. The still-living veterans of the Battle of Midway need their stories told soon. With that in mind, this issue of *The Daybook* presents two different views of the battle. The first is the local connection to the event. Though Midway Island is thousands of miles from Hampton Roads, the region was involved in the battle just as much as the facility at Pearl Harbor. Specifically, all of Task Force 16 and 17 carriers and half of the aviation squadrons called Norfolk home before the war.

Additionally, *The Daybook* includes reminiscences from Captain Norman Jack "Dusty" Kleiss, USN (Ret.). The Hampton Roads Naval Museum is privileged to work closely with Captain Kleiss, whose Navy career took him to Norfolk, and to be given access to his personal archives, some of which the reader will see here. This first-hand account has never appeared before in publication.

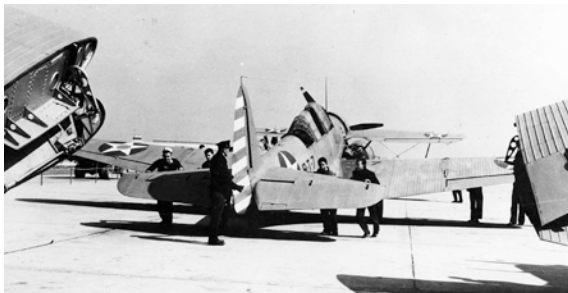
It is because of men like Kleiss that this country remains free from the yoke of tyranny. Let us honor them, never forget them, and be inspired to achieve half of the greatness they have achieved. 





Dauntless dive bombers of Scouting Squadron Eight (VS-8) land on USS Hornet (CV-8) during the Battle of Midway. Commissioned at NAS Norfolk on September 2, 1941, VS-8 trained out of Hampton Roads until Hornet took it to the Pacific in early 1942. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)

## Norfolk's Aviators at Midway



Ground crews at NAS Norfolk push back a Devastator torpedo bomber of the famed Torpedo Bomber Squadron Eight (VT-8), early 1942. This plane and most of the squadron would be lost during the Battle of Midway. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)



Ensign "Art" Brassfield of Fighting Squadron Forty-Two (VF-42) inspects a Wildcat engine onboard USS Yorktown (CV-5), 1941. Commissioned and trained out of NAS Norfolk, VF-42 fought in the Battle of the Coral Sea before being merged with VF-3 for the Battle of Midway. (Naval History and Heritage Command image)



A representative from Torpedo Bomber Squadron Six (VT-6), Fighting Squadron Six (VF-6), and Dive Bomber Squadron Six (VB-6) over Hampton Roads, 1939. Assigned to USS Enterprise (CV-6)'s air group, all three squadrons left with the carrier for the West Coast. VF-6 and VB-6 would later receive Wildcat fighters and Dauntless dive bombers before going into action. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)



Aviators of Fighting Squadron Eight (VF-8) on USS Hornet (CV-8) shortly before the Battle of Midway. Commissioned at NAS Norfolk on September 2, 1941, many of VF-8's pilots had to ditch their aircraft in the water during the battle due to a navigation error. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)



Scouting Squadron Five (VS-5) prepares to launch from Yorktown during the Battle of Midway. VS-5 was commissioned at NAS Norfolk in November 1941. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)

# War Machines

## Foundation for Midway Victory

By Timothy Orr, Ph.D.

Three American aircraft carriers participated in the Battle of Midway: USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), USS *Enterprise* (CV-6), and USS *Hornet* (CV-8). All three vessels were born on the slipways at Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, a company chartered in 1886 that employed more than 31,000 people during the peak years of the Second World War. Although Newport News Shipbuilding constructed a total of forty-nine ships during the war, the three aforementioned carriers emerged as some of the most influential ships of the Pacific Fleet.

The decision to construct these three carriers came as a result of several colliding events. In February 1922, the United States entered into the Five-Power Treaty, an international agreement aimed at limiting the size of the signers' battleship fleets. Although this post-Great War agreement inaugurated a type of naval retrenchment, the treaty offered a chance for the Department of the Navy to experiment with aviation, as it allowed the United States 135,000 tons for additional aircraft carrier construction. At the time, naval aviation remained an unproven quantity. To that point, the Navy possessed only one carrier, and although General William Mitchell

had demonstrated the use of medium-level bombers at sinking immobile battleships at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay in 1921, military strategists did not agree on the future of airpower. Eventually, the United States Navy added three new carriers to its roster of ships; however, two of those, USS *Lexington* (CV-2) and USS *Saratoga* (CV-3), both launched in 1927, were converted battle-cruisers, and the third, USS *Ranger* (CV-4), was a smaller vessel capable of holding only seventy planes.

The inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered a second necessary component for the construction of new carriers. A wealthy New York politico, Roosevelt had served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy under President Woodrow Wilson. An ardent lover of naval history, Roosevelt copiously decorated his mansion in Dutchess County with naval art. Upon taking up the reigns of a nation mired in economic depression, Roosevelt promised his citizens an expansion of public works to the tune of \$238 million. Loyal congressmen granted Roosevelt his wish, and in early June 1933, Roosevelt signed into law the National Industry Recovery Act. One section of that act—Section 202—offered a surprising departure in normal relations between Congress and the President. It authorized Roosevelt to place orders for naval vessels without Congressional approval, a decision that showcased the unbridled faith that Congressional Democrats had in their Commander-in-Chief. Three days after passage of the Recovery Act, Roosevelt put Section 202 to work, issuing Executive Order 6174, which placed an order for more than thirty new ships, including two aircraft carriers. Thus, Roosevelt slyly



Mrs. Lucy Swanson christens the "Big E," the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* (CV-6), October 3, 1936, at Newport News Shipbuilding, just a month after *Yorktown's* launch. (National Archives image)

used New Deal legislation to accomplish two harmonious purposes, both dear to him: putting people to work and expanding the Navy's aviation program.

It took the Navy less than seven weeks to award the contracts for the new vessels. Naturally, Roosevelt hoped to spread the opportunities for shipyard work among the "Big Five," the five largest privately-owned shipyards on the east coast: Newport News; Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation in Quincy, Massachusetts; New York Shipbuilding Corporation in New York City; Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company at Kearney Point, New Jersey; and Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in Chester, Pennsylvania. However, only three of those companies—Newport News, Bethlehem, and Sun—possessed the machinery capable of building an aircraft carrier to the size and specifications envisioned by the Navy. On August 3, 1933, the Navy made its decision about the two carriers, awarding the contract to Newport News Shipbuilding. Favoritism undoubtedly played a role, as the president of Newport News Shipbuilding, sixty-year-



President of Newport News Shipbuilding, Homer Ferguson, and the First Lady, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, prepare to christen Hull Number 336, the aircraft carrier *Yorktown* (CV-5). (HRNM image)





Newport News Shipbuilding workers put the finishing touches on Aircraft Carrier Number Eight, Hornet, June 1941. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)

old Homer Lenoir Ferguson, had graduated from the Naval Academy in 1892. An indefatigable capitalist, Ferguson was already well-known around Washington. He had assumed the presidency of the shipyard when its former chief was killed on the ill-fated *Lusitania* in 1915. During the midst of the Great War, Ferguson had successfully lobbied Congress for appropriations for new housing for his wartime workers.

A shrewd competitor after the war, he lobbied tirelessly to ensure that only Newport News received the tier-one contracts, and amid the shadows of the Great Depression, he vowed that the *Yorktown*-class carrier contracts would make or break his company. Ferguson took the contract despite knowing that his company's facilities were inadequate to handle the mammoth ships. In fact, before starting work on the carriers, Newport News Shipbuilding required \$2,027,653 in improvements, including new buildings, new cranes, new machine tools, new transportation equipment, new welding equipment, and new supplies of gas, steam, and oil.


Workers at Newport News laid the keels of *Yorktown* and *Enterprise* on May

21 and July 16, 1934, respectively. To meet the contract, managers lengthened the work week from thirty-two to forty-four hours. For three-and-one-half years, the employees at Newport News toiled tirelessly to complete the two vessels. When finished, each was 827 feet long, 114 feet wide, and displaced 25,500 tons fully loaded. Each possessed two hydraulic flight deck catapults, one hangar deck catapult, three elevators, nine boilers, and each could hold up to ninety planes and over 2,200 officers and men. *Yorktown* entered the fleet on September 30, 1937, and *Enterprise* followed on May 12, 1938. These two ships did not remain the only representatives of their class for long. On September 9, 1939, when President Roosevelt declared a national emergency on account of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland, the Department of the Navy awarded a third contract to Newport News, this one for *Hornet*. Workers laid the keel on September 25, and on October 20, 1941, that ship joined the fleet.

The creation of these carriers had been no small task, and the Department of the Navy held grand ceremonies to honor the hard work accomplished by the Newport News employees. Eleanor Roosevelt

christened *Yorktown* personally, and the wives of the various Secretaries of the Navy christened *Enterprise* and *Hornet*. When *Enterprise* slid down the slipway on October 3, 1936, Lucy Swanson uttered poignant words that forecast the importance of the *Yorktown*-class. Quoting Shakespeare's *Othello*, Swanson declared, "May she also say with pride, 'I have done the State some service'."

The wartime service of the three ships is well-known. *Yorktown* served admirably at the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, sinking at the end of the latter engagement. *Hornet* earned four battle stars, fighting at Midway and Guadalcanal before sinking at the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands, October 26, 1942. *Enterprise* served at nearly every major confrontation in the Pacific, earning twenty battle stars—more than any other ship in the Second World War—and a Presidential Unit Citation.

The names of the American carriers that fought at Midway are renowned, but it is well to remember that all three of them were born from the hands of the workers at Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, and they comprise part of the rich tapestry of Naval History in Hampton Roads. 

## Book Reviews

### *Destined for Glory: Dive Bombing, Midway, and the Evolution of Carrier Airpower*

By Thomas Wildenberg

Reviewed by Timothy Orr, Ph.D.

In *Destined for Glory: Dive Bombing, Midway, and the Evolution of Carrier Airpower*, Thomas Wildenberg explains the process by which the U.S. Navy developed and perfected the art of dive bombing. Although Wildenberg's analysis focuses on the interwar years, the Battle of Midway serves two purposes: it offers a logical endpoint to his narrative, and it serves as the point of departure for his historical inquiry. Rather than award the American victory in 1942 to "lady luck,"

Thomas Wildenberg, *Destined for Glory: Dive Bombing, Midway, and the Evolution of Carrier Airpower*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998. ISBN 978-1-55750-947-5

as other historians have done, Wildenberg contends that seventeen years of technical, organizational, operational, economic, and political development accounted for the successful deployment of SBD dive bombers on June 4, 1942. As Wildenberg argues, "few realize that the outcome [of the battle] was predetermined years earlier as the Navy sought to integrate the aerial weapon into its war-fighting doctrine."

Wildenberg commences his analysis in 1925, the year that Captain Joseph Reeves took command of the first American aircraft carrier, USS *Langley* (CV-1). Faced with the uncertainties of carrier warfare, Reeves insisted upon implementing various changes to develop a rational combat doctrine for his carrier, which then housed only eight multipurpose fighter planes. Notably, Reeves let his aviators experiment with new tactics, and on October 22, 1926, one squadron of fighter planes, VF-2, led by Lt. Cdr. Frank Wagner, attempted a diving attack against American battleships during a mock battle. Wagner's unexpected experimentation paved the way for more than a decade's worth of headaches as

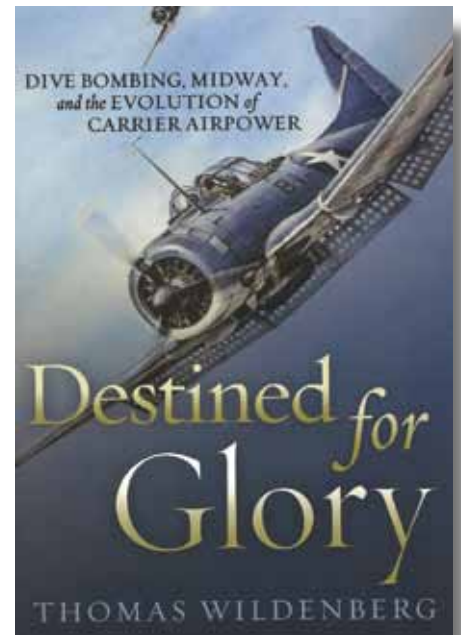
Naval leaders tried to make Wagner's tactics stick.

Wildenberg suggests that the U.S. Navy required every single one of the remaining years prior to World War II to expand its dive bombing program. Resistance from battleship admirals, inept machinery, economic retrenchment, and a general unfamiliarity with the needs of Naval aircraft led to a series of false starts and miscalculations. Wildenberg's analysis largely consists of an examination of each new aircraft delivered to the Navy. The frequent turnover in "state-of-the-art" planes suggests that perfection was a lengthy process and fraught by an unclear "trial-and-error" approach.

The perfection of dive bombing aircraft ran into fewer insoluble problems, but the means of developing a safe and effective dive bomber stymied Naval personnel for over a decade. The first dive bombers proved to be modified fighter planes, but near vertical dives put excessive stress on the wings, causing them to shred or shear off. Publicized crashes of test pilots who died while experimenting with dive bombing put the brakes on the program at various moments. One unfortunate crash of a BM-1 occurred near a schoolyard full of children. Yet, thanks to a legion of firm, outspoken adherents who believed in the future of airpower, dive bombing persisted. In 1930, the Navy received the Boeing XT5M-1, the first plane designed exclusively as a dive bomber.


In April 1939, nine years and a dozen new planes later, the Navy received the Douglas SBD-1, the production model for the Navy's third monoplane dive bomber. With precious few months remaining before the outbreak of war, the pilots of the SBD-2 and SBD-3 trained with their new aircraft rigorously, eventually using them in the opening blows against the Japanese Navy at the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway.

Wildenberg's thesis is hard to refute. Piles of archival paperwork from the various naval bureaus during the interwar years suggest



that missteps, miscalculations, and risky experimentations abounded during this period, but through testing, dive bombing reached perfection. Without such activity during peacetime, the Navy might have been unready to face the Japanese fleet at Midway.

Wildenberg's only flaw is that his book purports to do more. In his introduction, he explains that political and economic factors shaped the development of dive bombing; yet, no discussion of Congressional politics graces his narrative, nor does a discussion of how the Navy awarded contracts for its new equipment. Neither does Wildenberg offer a history of factory labor to explain how these planes were produced. Thus, *Destined for Glory* is a Navy-centric analysis. It offers vivid details to explain what the Navy wanted, and then it says what the Navy did with what it received, but it does no more than that.

Ultimately, the primary argument of *Destined for Glory* is unimpeachable. The sinking of four Japanese carriers at Midway owed something to the strenuous efforts to expand dive bombing during the interwar years. As Wildenberg concludes, "Though the gods of war certainly smiled upon the Navy's airmen that day, I feel strongly that the demise of the Japanese strike force was a direct result of the Navy's efforts to perfect dive bombing as the central component of its aerial doctrine." Thus, the dive bombers at Midway may well have been destined for glory. 



## *Joe Rochefort's War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway*

By Elliot Carlson

Reviewed by Howard Sandefer

Elliot Carlson's book on Joe Rochefort fills a gap in the general knowledge about the career and fate of an enigma of World War II in the Pacific. Rochefort seemingly comes out of nowhere to discover the battle plans of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto just before the Battle of Midway, then fades into obscurity again and is heard from no more. One wonders what happened before Midway and what happened after. What rewards did he receive and how did his life proceed after that

Elliot Carlson. *Joe Rochefort's War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-61251-060-6

seminal event?

There is an old saying, attributed to Otto von Bismarck and others, that, "There is a special providence for drunkards, fools, and the United States of America." The story of the rise and fall of Joseph Rochefort in the U.S. Navy illustrates the validity of the saying. Rochefort was preserved long enough to determine Japanese battle plans for Midway.

Carlson's biography of Rochefort follows his life from birth in 1900 to his death in 1976. He lied about his age to be able to enlist in the Navy in May of 1918 and continued on active duty through the Korean War. He had a central role in three major naval engagements during World War II, yet he was not at sea when they occurred. The most interesting part of his life occurred during the seventeen months spent ashore in command of the Naval Combat Intelligence Unit in Pearl Harbor, usually called Station Hypo. It was named after the direction finding unit in Hawaii, but was expanded to include all the activities of the Unit. The author also fleshes out the art and science of code breaking, which encompassed

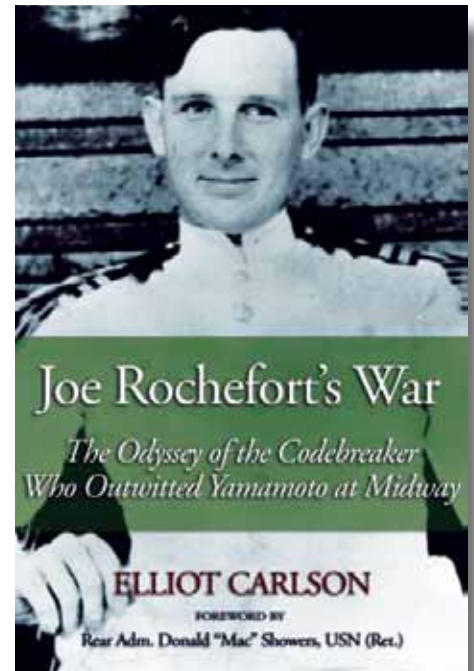
much more than just breaking the enemy's transmissions and providing raw data.

Carlson sketches the outline of the administrative chain of command in naval intelligence gathering in the Pacific Ocean Area, which is necessary to understanding the events of Rochefort's time in command and the aftermath.

What was called code breaking really involved direction finding, traffic analysis, translation, and cryptanalysis. Direction finding was getting a geographic bearing on a transmitter. Traffic analysis involved counting the messages sent to different recipients. Translation was putting Japanese into English, and cryptanalysis was getting into the codes of the enemy. All were helpful in trying to determine enemy intentions, and the author postulates that Rochefort's greatest asset was his ability to bring all elements into one estimate of enemy intentions. Rochefort qualified as a commander of such a unit after three years of language training in Japan and several intelligence assignments at sea in ship's company and on staffs. He also had duty in Washington as part of OP-20, which was responsible for Naval Intelligence.

OP-20 then assigned Rochefort to duty in Pearl Harbor, to which he reported on June 2, 1941. He was immediately involved in trying to track the Japanese fleet, and he recognized the importance of the carriers. His team broke down the organization of the Japanese fleet into the strike group, the bombardment group, and the occupation force. These units' movements tended to indicate some of the intentions of the Japanese.


However, as the author shows, Rochefort's ability ran headlong into the bureaucracy that is the Federal Government. It must be remembered that part of the District of Columbia was built on swampy ground, and undoubtedly this has contributed to some of the miasma making up Potomac Fever. One of the more disturbing symptoms of



the Fever is that there is an unquenchable desire to centralize decision making and administration within the boundaries of the district. OP-20 at the time was infected with the disorder and clashed with Rochefort.

Some conflicts developed over time, including the identity of the Japanese targets labeled "MO" and "AF," which had far reaching results for Rochefort. Differing interpretations by different people are detailed by Carlson, and go a long way toward explaining why Rochefort was relieved of command of Hypo. It also explains why he disappears from view after Midway. Carlson names those behind the plot to remove Rochefort and those who blocked the award of the Distinguished Service Medal.

OP-20 officially relieved Rochefort of his duties on August 22, 1942. After this, there is no record of any admiral going into battle with comparable intelligence on enemy intentions or order of battle. Rochefort was unique, apparently, and was not matched by any others who attempted the same tasks. This was the result of trying to combine everything in Washington and control distribution of intelligence from there. Forgotten was General George S. Patton's dictum that, "Intelligence is like eggs, the fresher the better."

One of the ways the Navy commemorates outstanding naval personnel is by naming a destroyer for them. The level of official distaste for Rochefort is such that, to date, there is no USS *Rochefort*. 

# Jack “Dusty” Kleiss and the Battle of Midway

By Timothy Orr, Ph.D., and Laura Orr

On a wintry day in Coffeyville, Kansas, in January 1922, young Jack Kleiss and a schoolmate decided to pull a prank. While hiding behind the corner of their school building, the two youngsters saw an English teacher approaching the door. Without warning, they tossed two well-aimed snowballs at her. The snowballs struck her squarely, causing her to lose her balance and fall ungracefully, her legs thrashing comically in the air. Jack Kleiss and his school chum had planned to run, but the ludicrous sight of their up-ended teacher caused them to laugh so hard that they forgot to make a break for it. Eventually, the humiliated proctor righted herself, caught the children by the arm, and declared them suspended from first grade for a full week. This childish joke might not merit any historical attention at all, except it showcased two of Jack Kleiss’s best qualities—qualities that would serve him well later in life—boldness and good aim.

Few people know the name Norman Jack “Dusty” Kleiss, but it should not be that way. A humble man, Kleiss spent twenty-eight years in the Navy, retiring as captain, but not before adding immeasurable leadership to the Navy’s knowledge of aviation, dive bombing, and catapult technology. Most importantly, Kleiss served in one of the most talented dive bomber squadrons of the Second World War, VS-6, or “Scouting Squadron Six,” an elite group of pilots and gunners who helped turn the tide at the Battle of Midway.

Jack Kleiss was born on March 7, 1916, to Louis and Lulu Kleiss, residents of Coffeyville, Kansas, a town made famous by its defiant stand against the Dalton Gang in 1892. Kleiss and his two siblings lived a hard-scrabble life, made difficult by harsh economic conditions in the Kansas dustbowl and the untimely passing of their mother to cancer in 1930.

From an early age, Jack Kleiss knew that he wanted to be a pilot. At age fifteen, he

enlisted in the 114th Cavalry, Kansas National Guard. Remembering it, he declared, “Although I liked horses, I was certain airplanes were the wave of the future.” During a mock battle, the Army Air Corps appeared with its biplanes, swooping in and raking the ill-prepared National Guardsmen. As Kleiss peered through the woods to get a better look at one incoming plane, a referee stopped him. He never forgot that moment: “[He] pointed at me and said, ‘You’re dead!’” Young Kleiss vowed never to be caught helpless again. He would fly and do so for the U.S. Navy.

In April 1934, Kleiss mustered out of the Kansas National Guard in order to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, a decision rendered difficult because he had just won a prestigious scholarship to Kansas State.

But Kleiss longed to be a sailor. When he was six-years-old, his favorite suit was a sailor’s outfit. He remembered, “I wore it as often as possible.” Perhaps his mother’s loving words still rang in his head: “When you first wore this suit you looked in the mirror and remarked (hands deep in pockets), ‘Now I’m a real boy, ain’t I mother!’”

At Annapolis, Kleiss donned the cadets’ blue and he began learning the basics of Naval leadership. For Kleiss, being a cadet meant finding answers to problems, even if it meant not “going by the book.” For instance, in the summer of 1937, Midshipman Kleiss joined the crew of the USS *Arkansas* (BB-33) on a practice cruise through Europe, and while on board he improvised an effective means of targeting the ship’s twelve-inch guns. While cruising off Norway, Kleiss noticed that many of the beautiful girls on a nearby beach stripped off their swimwear, thinking there were no men around to see them skinny-dip. Kleiss held mock drills that targeted the nude Norwegian girls, a task that the gun crew enjoyed since the battleship’s massive gun-sight mirrors could zero-in on any object



in lurid detail even if it was a mile away. Naturally, the unorthodox targeting drills suited the lonely sailors. Thanks to the girls, Kleiss recalled, “We made the rating of expert pretty quick.”

Of course, life in the surface Navy was hardly fun and games. Serving on a small ship meant educating the incompetent, policing the criminal, and coping with injustice. After graduating from the Academy in 1938, Ensign Kleiss served on board three surface ships: USS *Vincennes* (CA-44), USS *Goff* (DD-237), and USS *Yarnall* (DD-143). The experiences between them were hardly even. Kleiss won acclaim and respect on *Vincennes*—indeed, he even had opportunities to bring guests on board—but he suffered under martinet commanders in the destroyer fleet. In fact, he joined the crew of *Yarnall* after her commander and officer of the deck faced courts-martial for running the ship aground at Lynnhaven Roads on November 25, 1939. Later on, while on *Yarnall*, Kleiss watched a slow-witted boat captain lower an un-prepped boat. Suddenly a divot broke, dropping the skiff and killing the boat captain. Nevertheless, Kleiss worked tirelessly to train his new sailors, for he believed that war was on the horizon. Often, he wondered whether or not the Navy would be able to handle a global conflict. Shortly after the news of the German invasion of Poland became known, Kleiss



wrote to his girlfriend, cynically appraising Norfolk's Naval Reserve sailors: "We've been playing schoolteacher for the Naval Reserve these last few weeks. They're the lads who go to sea for two weeks each year and sell bonds and hamburgers the rest of the time. Most of the time they keep us busy fishing Oscar, the man-overboard dummy, out of the deep six, and making us teach them how to put out fires that aren't burning. Most of them are good lads, but a few are just on vacation."

Kleiss coped with those two frustrating years in the surface Navy, and in May 1940, he fulfilled his dream to become an aviator. He passed the Navy's strenuous physical examination, received a promotion to Lieutenant (j.g), and began his flight instruction at the naval air station located in Miami. After eleven months of training, he received an assignment to Scouting Squadron Six (VS-6), a dive bomber squadron assigned to USS *Enterprise* (CV-6). Within hours of his assignment, he learned that his squadron would be shipping off to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, home to the U.S. Pacific fleet.

As Kleiss departed in May 1941, he left his heart in California. Back in the spring of 1939, he met Jean Mochon, a brilliant and beautiful stenotypist who worked for Calavo, a farmers' cooperative based in Los Angeles. Smitten by Jean's charms, Kleiss fell deeply in love and he wrote

to her regularly for the next four years. Although life in Depression-era Kansas and the Navy had hardened him, Jean brought out Kleiss's sentimental side. Writing to her from Norfolk in April 1940, Kleiss expressed loving thoughts typical of his letters to her: "Subject: It must be love. Love is something where when you got so much you can't hold any more you feel like you almost hardly ain't got any. Which is decidedly most good because when you get too much of a thing to feel good you feel bad which is not good. But just the same it is a good hurt and is not so bad. . . . Anyhow you ought to be told how nice you are, 'cause it's nice to tell you. The idea is I think you're pretty swell." Mochon returned Kleiss's love in full, but it is clear that the stern realities of war and the yawning agony of separation imposed severe obstacles the two lovers had to surmount. In May 1941, after *Enterprise* left for Hawaii, Mochon wrote about her unhappiness at sacrificing her feelings to the cycles of the Navy. She wrote, "When I think that there may be a possibility of your not getting back to good old USA for a whole year, I can't help but feel a little on the low side. For the first time in my life I'm sure of my own feelings & then something like this has to happen. Maybe if I use a little psychology & think real hard that you'll be back sooner, it'll happen. Anyway, I refuse to harbor the thought



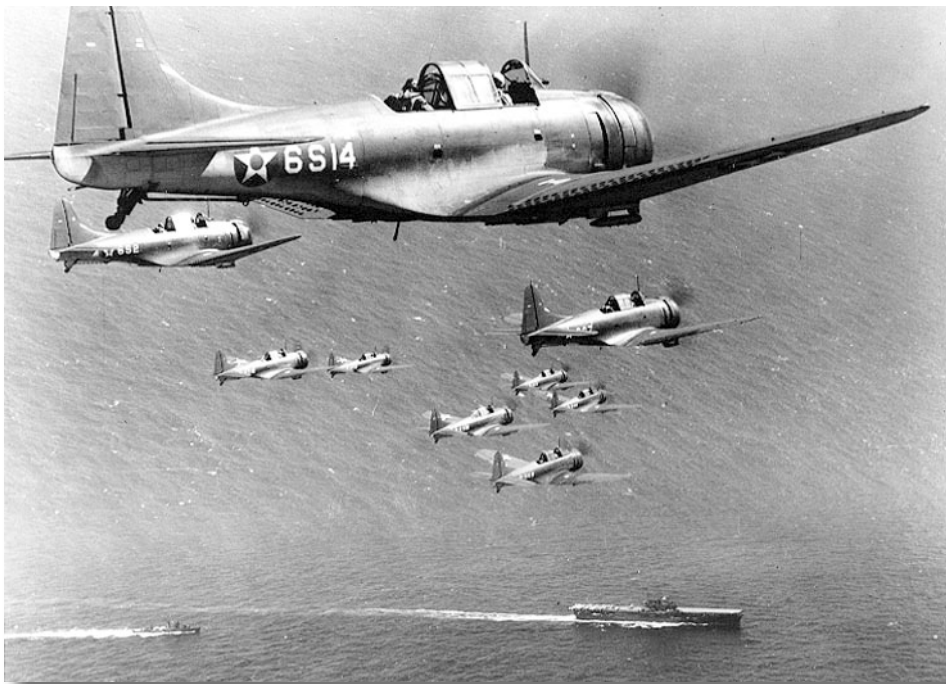
*Six-year-old Jack Kleiss in his favorite sailor outfit. (Image provided by Jack Kleiss)*

that it's going to be a year." In any event, Jack and Jean learned a valuable lesson: if their relationship was to persevere, their love had to transcend distance, war, and the Navy.

Lieutenant Jack Kleiss found life in Scouting Six pleasant, if grueling. He got along with most of the other pilots and he dealt with the breakneck pace of training. Writing to Jean in August 1941, he admitted, "We've been flying so much lately that we've been considering putting coffee pots in the planes and bunks in the ready room."

Even with all the practice and regulations, Kleiss learned that improvisation—that valuable lesson from his Academy days—was still the key to success; in fact, inventiveness earned Kleiss his nickname. In June 1941, while flying over Ewa Field, Kleiss decided to land so his rear seat gunner, Radioman third-class John Snowden, could pack up a tow-sleeve being pulled by his SBD. Kleiss radioed the tower, but received no response. However, he noticed that the green landing light was on.

Thinking he had been given permission to land, his SBD approached the runway, too late to discover that two squadrons of Marine fighter planes had already lined up for their own approach. Kleiss brought his



*VS-6 planes over Enterprise in October 1941. (Naval History and Heritage Command image)*



In 1944, Lieutenant Kleiss (center) received a Presidential Unit Citation for his service at Midway. (Image provided by Jack Kleiss)

airplane to a quick stop and pulled off into a clay field to open the way for the incoming Marines. Little did he realize that the field was not mud, but six inches of dust! The moment his SBD's prop-blast hit the dust, it sent up a mushroom cloud one mile high, preventing the Marines from landing. Kleiss shouted to Snowden to haul in the tow-sleeve, while he dealt with a furious tower control operator. "Unknown dust cloud, who the Hell are you?" After Snowden returned to the rear seat, Kleiss navigated his way back onto the landing strip even as the dusty maelstrom enveloped his plane. With all possible speed, Kleiss took off for the naval air station. Behind him, the furious Marine aviators shouted obscenities into their radios. "Who caused that — dust cloud?" When Kleiss returned to *Enterprise*, he learned that another member of his squadron, Ensign Cleo Dobson, had seen the whole incident. "Welcome aboard, Dusty," Dobson joked. From then on, he became "Dusty" Kleiss.

Training broke up in December 1941 when the event that Kleiss had long expected—the attack on Pearl Harbor—threw the nation into war. For the next three months, Kleiss and his squadron battled the Japanese, fighting above tiny islands in the Central Pacific: the Marshall Islands on February 1, 1942; Wake Island on February

24; and Marcus Island on March 4. These battles led to many close calls and steep dives over enemy ships, all the while dodging anti-aircraft fire and Japanese fighter planes. Censorship prevented Dusty Kleiss from writing the true details to his girlfriend, Jean, but he expressed his opinion that his squadron-mates were the best and bravest in the Navy. "I wish I could tell you some of the places I've been and what we've been doing," he wrote only hours after the Battle of the Marshall Islands. "Someday, perhaps, I can. But just now all I can say is that our men have got more guts and our gunners have a better eye than those of any other country."

More to the point, after these battles Kleiss understood the value of life and love. The risks he had taken as a dive bomber pilot put his relationship with Jean in perspective. On March 3, 1942, the day before his squadron attacked Marcus Island, he wrote: "If anything should ever happen to me my biggest regret would be not getting to see you again. Maybe you could swoop down from Heaven much later—I wouldn't mind waiting—and I could tip toe my way up through Hell—'cause that's where I'm sure to go—and then I could see you again. . . . Night and happy dreams, Jean, and always my last thoughts and words will be to you."

Lieutenant Dusty Kleiss's greatest challenge came on the morning of June 4, 1942, when his squadron accompanied Task Force 16 in search of four Japanese carriers sailing northwest of Midway Island. Kleiss expected a battle that day, but even as he mounted his SBD—Sail Seven—he did not guess that he would play a vital role in helping sink two of those Japanese carriers. Scouting Six launched at 7 o'clock and spent the next five hours in the air. After an exhaustive and perhaps unnecessarily long search that burned up precious fuel, at 10:20 A.M., Scouting Six found itself high above the Japanese fleet. At the word of the air group commander, C. Wade McClusky, thirty SBD dive bombers belonging to Scouting Six and its sister squadron, Bombing Six, nosed over and, plane-by-plane, descended from an altitude of 20,000 feet, bound for the Japanese carriers *Kaga* and *Akagi*. Hurling downward at 240 knots, Dusty Kleiss found himself pointed at *Kaga*. Ahead of him, six other planes dropped their 500-pound bombs. All but one of those bombs missed their target.

As the seconds sped away and the intimidating Japanese carrier loomed larger in his scope—and Kleiss watched miss after miss—his childhood attributes of boldness and good aim kicked in. Similar to when he hurled the snowball at his English teacher, Kleiss now knew what he had to do. He needed to hold onto his bomb as long as possible and aim ahead of the moving ship. This would make sure that his projectile landed on the front part of *Kaga's* flight deck where it could do the most damage. The Rising Sun emblem on the bow made an inviting target. As he told interviewers in 2007, "I aimed for the big red circle at the front, and of course you don't aim where it is, you aim where it is going to be. I wanted to make sure I was going to hit, so I only pulled out of that thing at 1,000 feet, a nine-g pull-out that just barely missed hitting the ocean."

Kleiss's bomb was one of four to strike *Kaga* that morning, sending it to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean along with 811 of its crew. After his epic bulls-eye, Kleiss managed to return to *Enterprise* about one hour later, landing with only three gallons of fuel remaining. Kleiss was one of the lucky ones. Of thirty-two dive bombers launched from *Enterprise* that morning, sixteen did not return. The results of the





A few weeks after Midway, the Navy awarded Kleiss the Navy Cross (left). Back in the States, Dusty reunited with Jean. (Images provided by Jack Kleiss)



morning battle had left three Japanese carriers dead in the water or fast sinking, *Akagi*, *Kaga*, and *Soryu*, but the American fleet still needed to find and destroy the remaining *Hiryu*. In the afternoon, Kleiss accompanied a force of twenty-five other SBD crews on a mission to accomplish that objective. At five o'clock, the dive bomber pilots found the lone carrier, but *Hiryu* presented a tougher target than the carriers they had bombed in the morning. Even though the pilots expertly dived from the sun, *Hiryu* made a sharp turn to port, causing the first two pilots to miss. As Kleiss's plane plummeted toward the evasive carrier, he realized the toughness of his challenge. Now he had to not only hit a moving target, but one in the middle of a turn. Once again, he put boldness and good aim to the test, and he landed a 1,000-pound bomb squarely on the front of the flight deck, tearing an enormous hole in the ship. Kleiss had scored the second of four hits against *Hiryu*, hits that ultimately sent this, the fourth Japanese aircraft carrier in a single day, to the bottom of the ocean along with 385 of its crew.

Kleiss flew on two more missions over the next two days, and on June 6, he made another direct hit, this time on the Japanese cruiser *Mikuma*. He was the only American pilot during the Battle of Midway to score three direct hits. It might be said of him that he was the most indispensable of the American aviators at the battle. Of course, after Kleiss landed for the final time on *Enterprise* on June 6, he cared not one iota for where his bombs had hit or what damage they had done. He cared only that he had survived, and he desired only to

return to his beloved Jean. At noon on June 6, the last day of the battle, he wrote this letter to her:

Noon

6 June 1942

Jean, darling,

*Just have a second to let you know I'm OK but am tired as the dickens. Have been wearing your nice soft sweater and it keeps me warm way up thar' and keeps me safe way down below. If anything should get me now I just want you to know and Dad to know that recently I've had more than my share of luck and that Tojo is most unhappy about it all. Will write again soon as I can find a whole minute all at one time.*

*I love you darling. Don't worry or let anyone else worry about me, and bye for now.*

*Love you lots,*


*Jack.*

The Battle of Midway was Jack "Dusty" Kleiss's last battle. After the victory, the Navy sent him home, first to NAS Norfolk and then to NAS Cecil Field, to train dive bomber pilots. The new generation of fliers—those who would be needed in the years to come—would learn from the best. For his actions at Midway, the Navy awarded Lieutenant Kleiss the Navy Cross. He considered it quite an honor, but it paled in comparison to his true reward. He married Jean Mochon in Las Vegas on July 3, 1942, and he vowed never to be apart from her again. This commenced a lasting sixty-four-year matrimony that ended only in Jean Kleiss's death in 2006. Jack Kleiss

spoke honestly about one of their first photographs as husband and wife, an image that depicted them sharing a kiss: "Who would ever look at a Navy Cross with the most beautiful girl in the world doing her stuff?"

Jack Kleiss spent another twenty years in the Navy. During the postwar years, he served as an instructor at the California Institute of Technology, as a member of the Bureau of Aeronautics, and on the staff of the Atlantic Fleet before retiring as a captain in 1962. He raised five children and now lives in San Antonio, Texas. Dusty Kleiss thinks often about his role in the Battle of Midway. He dislikes being called a hero. In his opinion, he only did what he had trained to do, nothing more.

However, he hopes that Americans might well remember the effective service rendered by the dive bomber pilots. It was they who delivered in the Navy's hour of need, not the admirals. Further, Kleiss recognized the sacrifice of the crew of the TBD torpedo bombers, the planes that attacked the Japanese fleet one hour before the dive bombers. Reminiscing later, he explained, "Our torpedo plane crews should get the real honors. They were flying obsolete planes with the world's worst torpedoes, and knew they wouldn't even be provided with a smoke screen to give any chance of survival. . . . Only a handful of all three squadrons survived. Many of them were seriously wounded. These torpedo plane crews kept the Japanese ships in disarray and kept all their fighters at sea level. . . . Yes, we dive-bombers should go down to the bottom of the honor line."

As the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Midway approaches, Americans might do well to think about how the fate of a nation rested on the shoulders of a small group of naval aviators. After the Battle of Britain, Winston Churchill epically declared, "Never has so much been owed by so many to so few." The same can easily be said of the American pilots at Midway, including Dusty Kleiss, who made audacity and good aim count when it mattered. 



VS-6's insignia

# History from the Cockpit:

Reflections of a World War II U.S. Navy Dive Bomber Pilot

By Captain Jack “Dusty” Kleiss, USN (Ret.)

Ed Heinemann’s dive bomber plane helped tremendously in winning World War II in the Pacific. At the time it was as unique as the first ironclad ship, the CSS *Virginia*, during the Civil War. Back in 1862, iron and steam suddenly replaced wood and sail. In 1942, the Scout Bomber Douglas (SBD) replaced the battleship. In my opinion, we owe everything to Heinemann’s design. His unique hydraulic and electrical innovations made the SBD far better than any other dive bomber—even the German Stuka—which routinely gets praise.

I was among the first pilots to learn to fly the brand new SBD-2s. They were so unique that experienced Pensacola pilots had to read a half-inch-thick booklet covering all the new equipment, and then we had to be blind-folded to identify eighty different controls and instruments. Nothing quite matched the methods it took to learn to fly the SBD-2. All previous planes required only a few minutes of “pointing” from an instructor. The SBD was also a great diver. I remember one day in December 1941 when I had to dive vertically downward through a tiny hole in a dense cloud bank. My plane descended vertically from 20,000 feet with no dive flaps. I did this fast lest that tiny hole close. My speed passed 400 knots and kept increasing, making pullout close to 11g. I was on the verge of blacking out!

But my plane handled it better than I did. A well-made SBD could safely pull 13g with no damage and it had a tremendous range.

## Task Force 16

In early January 1942, *Enterprise* had been active in Samoa and other places to assist landing forces and convoy protection. On February 1, she was enroute to the Marshall Islands with USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), a tanker, and the other ships of Task Force 16. Under Admiral William Halsey’s direction, his aide, Miles Browning, had given a map to the SBD pilots. Squadron leaders then passed on information about all known targets on key islands to each pilot. After the battle, we plotted our actions on these maps and gave them to our squadron commanders to report accurate information.

One key event happened at Kwajalein at the Battle of the Marshall Islands. Ensign Cleo Dobson’s large bomb sank a tanker in the only channel that numerous unarmed ships could have used to exit. Admiral Halsey now had a real test for VT-6, *Enterprise*’s torpedo squadron. It launched nine live torpedoes at those unarmed, stationary ships. Photography showed absolutely NO damage or any indication of detonation. Following this failure, Halsey then used VT-6 planes for scouting purposes only. Absolutely NO record of



Jack “Dusty” Kleiss is shown here in his dress whites wearing the Distinguished Flying Cross. Kleiss served with Scouting Squadron Six during the Battle of Midway and is credited with helping sink two Japanese aircraft carriers. (Image provided by the author)

this failed torpedo attack appeared in any *Enterprise* records. I knew about it because one of my best friends, Tom Eversole, belonged to VT-6.

The main point of all this is to show that Halsey didn’t “go by the book” as demanded by orders from admirals in Washington. He launched no combined attack with all types of planes “flying together and attacking the same target together en masse.” Nor did he implement a joint attack with “two carriers merging planes together like a huge swarm of bees, striking targets at the same time.” Halsey continued to only send out dive bombers in his subsequent attacks on other key Japanese bases, Wake Island and Marcus Island.

## Departing to Pearl Harbor

On June 1, 1942, *Enterprise* left Pearl Harbor. As soon as all Scouting Six planes were safely stowed, our squadron leader, Lt. Earl Gallaher, brought ten of our most trusted pilots into our ready room and locked the door. He said, “You must not give what I say to anyone! There are only two exceptions. Practice with your radioman about how quickly you can signal to him to switch coils for our new YE-ZB [a homing device used by pilots to find their ship], and then you record the distance and course to our carrier, once having switched back to normal radio and gunnery. The second exception is working with maintenance on new changes in our new SBDs, such as YE-ZB and electrical controls. There are NO



Three SBD Dauntless dive bombers from USS *Enterprise* (CV-6)’s Scouting Squadron Six (VS-6) over the Pacific Ocean, 1942. Kleiss flew this type of aircraft during the Battle of Midway. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)





An SBD from VS-6 prepares for takeoff from Enterprise. (National Museum of Naval Aviation image)

other exceptions!”

Then Earl made a picture on our black chalkboard, diagramming the area around Midway. He continued, “Our code breakers have found that four enemy carriers will be HERE at about dawn on June 4.” We learned later that “here” was called “Point Luck.”

After pointing to this area, Earl said, “Our PBVs will search this area and report their exact location. Our SBDs will immediately fly 180 miles from this specific spot to ambush them. By the time we attack them, their fighters will not be present or will have just returned from a Midway attack, and will be almost out of fuel. As usual, after battle, we will make a dog-leg forty miles toward Midway before heading home. Admiral Nimitz is taking control of the entire attack. Only six people in Midway know of our presence; too many others might alert the enemy to our position. Remember! None of what I have told you is to be given to others, not even to our own pilots, the ones not present in this room!”

The old-timers rejoiced when we learned it would be about 180 miles to the ambush. We knew that only SBDs could be used for this plan. Clearly, Nimitz had closely followed Halsey’s successes. One hundred eighty miles was beyond the range of our TBDs and F4Fs. That meant the TBDs would be in the hangar deck, to

be used only for scouting. With their new armor and self-sealing tanks the F4Fs were clearly beyond range. Further, with their serious gun problems, the F4Fs should not have even accompanied the attack. Instead, they should have been used to protect our carriers.

Although we expected the battle to begin on June 4, for the next two days, from dawn to dusk, we were all in the ready rooms, requiring only a few seconds’ notice to hop into our planes. Midday on June 3, we received an Army Air Corps pilot report: “Enemy sighted.” Later, the same pilot reported, “Main body.” A couple of hours later Admiral Nimitz radioed to us, “This is not your target! Be ready for tomorrow!”

### Battle of Midway

I remember the experiences of that fateful day, June 4, 1942, as though they happened yesterday. At 0200 a messenger tapped my arm and said, “It’s time to wake up.” I immediately dressed and headed to the Officer’s Mess.

My bunk was just three feet below the Flight Deck. Years at sea had allowed me to sleep blissfully in a few minutes, maybe hypnotized by the gentle rolling of our wonderful ship. After a luscious, rare meal of steak and eggs, I walked to my stateroom and donned my flight suit, checking each one of its numerous pockets and their contents. The upper left arm pocket had several sharp,

soft pencils to plot information on my clear plastic-covered chart board. My chest pockets, which contained a pencil-sized flashlight and a lipstick-sized container, held my ephedrine and Vaseline. Our flight surgeon gave instructions to each pilot to “take one whiff” of ephedrine before dive bombing if either nostril was not fully open. “Only a clear nasal passage could save your ear drums!” he told us. My leg pockets included a spare flashlight, new batteries, wool cloths to clean unwanted items penciled on the chart board, and another to wipe our windshield.

Now, completely adorned, I walked outside to enter our VS-6 ready room. AGHAST! I passed by TBDs loaded with torpedoes! VB-6 planes each had a 1,000-pound bomb. Our VS-6 planes were each carrying a 500-pound bomb and two 100-pound incendiary bombs. With all three squadrons launching at once, we had only 165 feet for take-off!

There was only one good thing: the weather, a faint wisp of fog. The numerous low clouds were hard to see. Otherwise, total darkness. Japanese scouts would have great difficulty locating us. At 0600 our lookout reported that a Japanese scout had flown directly above us. Apparently he had not seen us due to the low clouds and the mist obscuring his windshield. He continued searching and reported by radio, seeing only a distant destroyer.

I sat down in my chair in the front row of our ready room and opened the locked cabinet underneath, pulling out my chart board to look at the location specified by Nimitz. Then I looked at the latitude and longitude of our present position. Earl Gallaher had on earphones and was printing all important information on the chalkboard behind him. At 0600, we should have launched our SBDs and dive-bombed those four carriers, flying only 120 miles to attack them. But at 0700, the Japanese carriers were 190 miles away and we were still circling, awaiting Admiral Fletcher’s permission to attack.

As *Enterprise’s* SBDs circled, waiting for Admiral Fletcher’s SBDs from *Yorktown* to join us, we realized that the admiral wanted to make a combined attack with torpedo planes, dive bombers, and fighters all arriving at the same place and time. We also realized that he wanted to make a joint attack, for he wanted all planes of both Task Forces to arrive upon

the enemy at exactly the same time. But, at 0930, something had gone wrong. Fletcher's SBDs, those from Task Force 17, had not joined us.

Perhaps it was a communication problem that did not allow Fletcher to gather all his SBDs into a huge swarm. Ordinarily that could have been done in a few minutes. But Admiral Fletcher liked to keep the *Yorktown* twenty miles away from us using a two-second "burst" of information by radio transmission. A whole page of information could be electronically "shortened" in two seconds, and received and expanded by *Enterprise*. There was just one problem—it took a long time to send and decipher that message.

### Empty Ocean

Commander Wade McClusky led our VS-6 and VB-6 planes to his predicted location. Visibility was perfect, but there were no ships in sight. Then I saw the planes belonging to Ensigns Schneider and Greene sit down on the ocean. They had run out of fuel. McClusky made a "box search" to search the area. As the leader of the 2nd Section, I was only a few feet behind McClusky and Gallaher, close enough to see their hand signals and mimic their instructions for other pilots to view and pass along. We had to keep radio silence. All we used were hand signals. For instance, Commander Dick Best, of Bombing Six, held up his oxygen mask, indicating his planes were having oxygen problems, and pointed downward. Then the Bombing Six planes dropped to 15,000 feet, while we from Scouting Six remained at 20,000 feet. At 15,000 feet the pilots could breathe normal air.

A short time later we saw a 30-foot-high plume astern of a destroyer going at full speed, most likely trying to return to his fleet. *Arashi* led us directly to the Japanese fleet.

At 1005 we saw four Japanese carriers on the horizon. The giant *Kaga* was heading directly toward us, and just behind it, a couple miles away, was the other giant, *Akagi*. About ten miles farther was the smaller *Soryu*, and its identical carrier, *Hiryu*, twenty miles away. Wade McClusky immediately radioed, "Enemy sighted!" I marked down my longitude and latitude and recorded the exact time and altitude. I had John Snowden change radio coils, and I recorded the Morse code signal showing

the exact course to *Enterprise* 100 miles away. I also marked my present location. I armed my 500-pound bomb and two 100-pound bombs manually. (We'd been warned not to use the electric buttons.) I made the other dozen changes necessary to take my plane from ordinary to low-level battle condition.

Wade McClusky waggled his wings and, in our Scouting Six planes, we followed him into a dive on *Kaga*, the closest carrier. This was the perfect situation for dive-bombing: no Zeros, no anti-aircraft fire. McClusky and our Scouting Six dive-bombers attacked *Kaga*. Bombing Six planes attacked *Akagi*.

Earl Gallaher scored the first hit on *Kaga*. I watched his 500-pound bomb explode on the first plane starting its takeoff. It was the only plane on *Kaga*'s flight deck. His incendiary bombs also hit the gas tanks beside it. Immediately, the aft-part of the ship was engulfed in a huge mass of flames.

I scored the next hit. My 500-pound bomb and two 100-pound incendiaries landed on the rear edge of the large red circle on the bow of *Kaga*. The bombs set fire to the closely-parked airplanes below deck, filled with gasoline; a huge fire started. (Note: my bombs hit the target at 240 knots, and exploded 1/100th of a second later!) I had dropped my bombs at 1,500 feet, and I pulled out at 9g, just barely skimming above the water.

A Zero came speeding for us. I gave my gunner John Snowden a good angle, and in two seconds, no more Zero! I sped past numerous ships shooting AA fire at

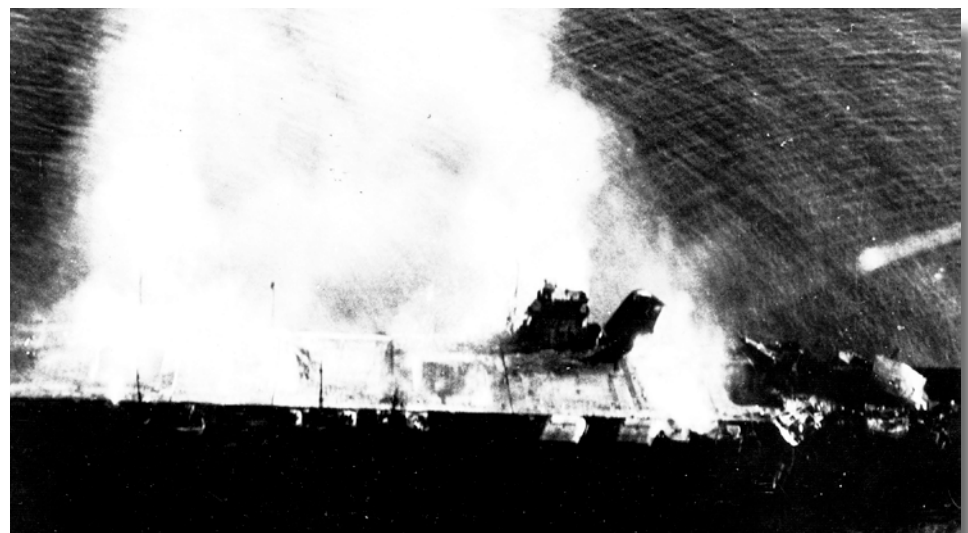
me, so I changed course and altitude every second. I finally made a half circle, heading towards Midway. I looked back and saw three carriers in flames: many bombs from Scouting Six and Bombing Six had hit *Kaga*; three bombs from Bombing Six had hit *Akagi*; and bombs from *Yorktown*'s dive bombers torched *Soryu*. Only *Hiryu*, twenty miles away, was unharmed.

While taking a closer look, I saw a huge object rocket into the air vertically, smoking and burning. It was *Kaga*'s forward elevator. My 100-pound incendiaries had burned down four decks to the Long Lance torpedoes and they had exploded. I then headed on my dog-leg, the forty-mile path to Midway. A fighter approached us. I gave John Snowden another good shot. No Zero.

As I headed to Midway, I climbed gradually to 3,000 feet at 110 knots. That speed, with the fewest possible squirts of gas, gave the most miles per gallon. At the end of forty miles, in the clouds, I saw a Messerschmitt-type plane heading toward me. I headed directly at him. He was probably out of bullets, and ducked away into the clouds. I was high enough to get a YE-ZB heading and the distance to *Enterprise*. I eased down to a low level so I would not be easily seen by enemy fighters.

Not so! A dozen *Hiryu* planes were speeding to attack our carriers. Three Zeros broke off toward me, but suddenly they went back to the pack of *Hiryu* planes. How lucky can a man get!

I passed a VB-6 plane sitting on the water. I saw the crew getting into the rubber raft and recorded their exact position. Later



The 18,000-ton Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu* on fire after being struck several times by dive bombers from *Yorktown* and *Enterprise*. Kleiss was one of the SBD pilots whose bomb struck the carrier. (Naval History and Heritage Command image)



they were picked up. When the *Enterprise* saw our ten planes coming, she turned directly into the wind, knowing how low we were on fuel, and we did not have to make the usual circle. All ten landed safely. Each of us had fewer than ten gallons remaining of the original 310. Wade McClusky landed last, although he was commanding our air group. He had only five gallons of fuel left. He had tangled with Zeros and was shot in the left shoulder. He dashed to the bridge to give a full battle report instead of going to sick bay for a bandage. Eight Scouting Six planes had landed; the other two were from Bombing Six. A number of our other planes had run out of fuel, but they landed safely on their rafts and were picked up.

Even before I could get out of my plane, three ordnance-men dashed under it and held up the three arming wires that proved my bombs were armed to detonate when they hit the enemy ship. They immediately made those wires into the shape of an aircraft, and with a sharp end, bent them so that they could be easily attached to a uniform like a medal. They gave one to each person who had put bombs, gasoline, or other services on my airplane. Of course John Snowden and I also got one.

### Attack on Yorktown

The *Hiryu* dive bombers that had sped parallel to me that morning made serious hits on the *Yorktown*. They made a big hole in the flight deck, caused a fire, and almost brought her motionless. Even before I had landed from my morning attack, the engineers had repaired the *Yorktown*'s boilers and repair crews had covered the huge hole in the flight deck. While all these repairs were in progress, the *Yorktown*'s planes had to land on the *Enterprise*.

After my plane was stowed in the hangar deck, I walked forward to our VS-6 office to give my report, passing by two TBD torpedo planes. They were part of the only four that made it to the *Enterprise*. The rest of the original fourteen torpedo planes were lost in battle. How those two planes could land on board was a mystery. They were shot full of holes and about half of their fuselage skin was missing. Only four aluminum pipes held the tail section of the rest of the plane.

After eating a sandwich and drinking some coffee, I sauntered up to the flight deck while my plane was being fueled and bombs were being installed. Then I saw our



Standing second from the right in the line of officers, Kleiss is wearing his Distinguished Flying Cross that Admiral Chester Nimitz awarded him. Standing in front of Kleiss is Dorie Miller, who is preparing to receive the Navy Cross for his actions during the air raid on Pearl Harbor. (Naval History and Heritage Command image)

F4F planes dash out to attack the *Hiryu*'s torpedo planes heading for the *Yorktown*. It was the carrier closest to them. They thought it to be a different carrier than the one that their dive bombers had set on fire in the morning attack. Most of those *Hiryu* planes were shot down by our fighters. Had more of our F4Fs been able to shoot down those planes, *Yorktown* would have had no damage.

I saw a group of our F4Fs circling near our ship; the leader was trying to tell them that his guns would not work, indicating that they attack two remaining enemy torpedo planes. Our F4Fs had frequent failures with the "trigger motors" that allowed bullets to fly between a swirling propeller. So it was that those last two torpedo planes got through. The torpedo hits were on the other side of the *Yorktown*. Of course there was no "flash," as they exploded when hitting the hulk about thirty feet below the ocean. The *Yorktown* immediately lurched thirty degrees to that side. She was slowing down to a stop.

### Afternoon Attack on Hiryu

At 1730 Earl Gallaher led a group of 24 SBDs to attack a Japanese force. We sighted *Hiryu* at 1850. None of our fighters were with us. We dove downward from about 15,000 feet. We encountered numerous enemy fighters, but they shot down only one of our planes and two of the *Yorktown*'s.

Earl Gallaher's bomb missed because *Hiryu* made a sharp, fast turn to the left, and her captain turned immediately in that

direction when he saw us start our dives. I noticed the *Hiryu*'s quick, sharp turn and I dived to the spot where she would be when my bombs hit. The SBD ahead of me must have done the same, because each of us hit the bow of *Hiryu* at its most vulnerable spot. The flight deck flipped backward like a taco. It was on fire when I last saw it, and so was the hangar deck. Other pilots made additional hits, but soon that enemy carrier was such a mass of flames that most of our SBDs bombed nearby battleships or cruisers. They did little damage because they hit solid steel, and our planes did not have any armor-piercing bombs. Twenty-one of our planes made it home with no problem. All made good landings, although some *Yorktown* pilots had never made a night landing before.

### June 5-6

On the second day of the battle we held the same position as the previous day. We received word that a damaged carrier was supposed to be 250 miles northwest of us. We started our attack mission at 1700 with nine VS-6 planes. Our total attack group included thirty-two SBDs. We had no fighter protection. We formed a twenty-mile-wide scouting line to look for this mystery carrier (and supposedly for two battleships, three cruisers, and four destroyers). We flew on this bearing line for 265 miles without making contact. The weather was foggy and cloudy. We then circled left and found one destroyer. The little devil fired everything he had at us, put



This is a September 17, 1942 cartoon by nationally renowned Richmond Times Dispatch artist Fred Seibel. Notice the bird in the lower right corner. Named "Moses Crow," Seibel placed him in every one of his cartoons. (HRNM image)

on full speed (about 40 knots), zigzagging nicely, and was most difficult to hit. I saw several close misses, but no hits. One of the pilots said he saw a direct hit. Anyhow, some of the plates may have been sprung. One plane, flown by Lt. Adams of VS-5, was shot down.

On June 6, I made a 200-mile relative scouting hop to the northwest in bad weather. We found a heavy cruiser of the *Mogami*-class; it was *Mikuma*, which was speeding at 25 knots. No battleships or other forces were within a 50-mile radius of it. We attacked from 20,000 feet. I was the fourth to dive; I believe I got a hit near the stack, which was blown to pieces.

in Alaska had fled to Japan for safety. Therefore, the *Enterprise* headed south—for home. On June 13 some of our planes landed at Kaneohe.

On June 22 I was detached from *Enterprise*. I headed to San Francisco on a transport. Once there I took the first train to Los Angeles, where my wonderful fiancée, Jean Mochon, met me at the station. We were married the next day. She gave us five healthy, bright, beautiful kids. How much I miss her!

#### In Retrospect

We must forgive Admiral Fletcher for not being at Point Luck at dawn, and then,


(This turned out to be the most vulnerable part of the ship because her deck was covered with armor.) Of our five planes, three made direct hits. As a result, our target, *Mikuma*, was a complete mass of wreckage. We left her dead in the water and burning from stem to stern. Cleo Dobson went to take a picture of *Mikuma* a couple hours later, but all he could find was a huge patch of oil.

#### Returning Home

The next day, June 7, we searched but found nothing. We then headed home. On the ninth, we received word that some Japanese carriers might be attacking Alaska. Our ship dashed northward. It went from warm weather to extremely cold weather. We pilots did not have time to don warm flight suits. By June 11, we learned that the two Japanese carriers

at 0700, sending all six squadrons of SBDs to cruise at 160 knots. The enemy's exact location, course, and speed were known at 0505. Certainly our six-squadron group could have easily scanned that definite area in three twenty-mile formations and then dive-bombed the Japanese carriers as they tried to recover planes returning from Midway. Had Admiral Fletcher needed a morning scouting search, he could have used cruiser airplanes, just as the Japanese had done at 0500 that morning. But remember, Fletcher was exhausted from his Coral Sea battle and his effort to get *Yorktown* repaired for use in battle. He may not have paid close attention to Admiral Nimitz's specific plans.

It would take thousands of words to describe those many brave souls who gave everything for our wonderful country and who gave unbelievable physical strength when needed, such as AMM Floyd Adkins—so tiny he needed help to carry his twin 30-caliber machine gun; yet he had strength enough to lift up that heavy load like a shotgun on his shoulder and shoot down an approaching Zero.

At age ninety-six, I wonder why the Good Lord has spared me, perhaps the last dive bomber pilot alive who bombed a ship in the Battle of Midway. He'd given me everything in this world that anyone could wish for. He'd given me considerable physical strength and endurance. He'd given me the best aviation instructors and the best gunner, John Snowden. He'd also put me in the safest position in battle, not number one, but number four, and not at the really dangerous place—those rear divisions—who encountered more AA fire and ran out of fuel before reaching our *Enterprise*. The only thing I can presume is that He has not yet found me worthy to reach all those other Saints above us. Maybe it's because I cannot help but write down daily events in my diary and retain objects, such as maps, in my possession, all so I can tell relatives of those families who'd lost true heroes about their accomplishments. 



## In Our Next Issue...

-USS *Minnesota* and the Battle of Hampton Roads