The Turning Point of the Pacific War: Two Views

The Battle of Midway or the Struggle for Guadalcanal

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Introduction

In a theater as large as the Pacific in a war spanning more than three and one half years it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to find one battle or one campaign that marks the turning point of the conflict. A reasonable claim could be made that Pearl Harbor was a turning point, since it committed Japan to a war against an adversary with vastly superior economic resources, (1) and since it galvanized American public opinion behind the war effort.(2) Some view the invasion of Tarawa in November 1943 as a turning point since it represented the first attack on territory the Japanese held prior to the war and marked "the beginning of a major effort against Japan - the first strategical thrust aimed directly at the heart of the enemy".(3)

Part of the debate over the turning point in the Pacific war depends on the relative weights attributed to the various factors that were essential for conducting operations in the theater. Air, naval, amphibious, ground, and logistical forces were all necessary, as were land bases for both staging forces and as forward areas. From the standpoint of the balance of naval forces the Pearl Harbor attack was of little practical significance since the ships lost, including the ships later repaired, were not of great utility in the campaign. Tarawa produced little in naval casualties for either side,(4) but did strip a forward base away from the Japanese defensive perimeter. By contrast, both Midway and the Guadalcanal campaign produced significant losses in ships, including carriers, the mobile strike forces so prominent in the Pacific war. Without slighting other possible "turning points", the authors will explore the arguments favoring Midway and Guadalcanal as, respectively, the battle or campaign that changed the fortunes of war in the Pacific. Since the Battle of Midway was chronologically prior to the Guadalcanal campaign it will be presented first. After both viewpoints are presented a summary section will conclude the various arguments.

The Battle of Midway - 4 to 6 June 1942

From December 1941 until June 1942 Japanese military forces ran almost unchecked throughout the western and central Pacific Ocean and in the Indian Ocean. The list of victories the Japanese recorded is by any means extremely impressive for a six month period in so vast a theater. Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Wake, Guam, the Dutch East Indies, New Britain, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and other areas all fell to Japanese forces.(5) Including the losses inflicted on the American Navy at Pearl Harbor, the Imperial Navy destroyed four battleships, two aircraft carriers, seven cruisers, 21 destroyers, and many lesser vessels. Many other Allied ships were damaged. Against this impressive score, the Japanese lost one light carrier, the Shoho, six destroyers, and some smaller ships.(6) The comparisons for air and ground forces are nearly as impressive.(7) Only two Allied operations can reasonably be judged effective, the commitment of forces that led to the Battle of the Coral Sea, and Doolittle’s Raid. The former of these checked the Japanese advance in the Coral Sea area, but at the cost of the fleet carrier Lexington.(8) The latter operation, while resulting in minimal losses, was not militarily significant.(9) Up through the Battle of Midway the Allied forces were clearly on the defensive, reacting to Japanese offensive operations. The few offensive operations conducted by the Allies were little more than raids on the perimeter (the exception being the incursion well beyond the Japanese perimeter to launch Doolittle). After Midway, the Japanese were psychologically and militarily on the defensive. From a military standpoint the Japanese Navy was stripped of two-thirds of the fleet carriers that provided the mobile firepower for offensive operations (or for rapid responses to attacks on the perimeter). Perhaps as importantly, the losses at Midway included at least 90 veteran pilots. With Japan training only about 100 carrier pilots per year, this was a significant loss, "the coming months were to reveal that the loss could never be made good and was as serious as that of the destruction of the carriers themselves".(10) Psychologically, it is clear that the loss was shattering. Midway was to be the Mahanian "decisive battle".(11) The capture of Midway, important in closing the western perimeter, was also intended to draw the American carriers to battle. The destruction of the American carrier arm was seen as a necessary step before returning to an offensive designed to isolate Australia, although many in the Imperial Headquarters favored immediate operations that could threaten the Australian supply lines.(12) The “decisive” loss of the battle that was designed to ensure overwhelming (albeit temporary) naval supremacy undoubtedly contributed to the huge impact on Japanese morale. Admiral Uragi, in a diary entry written on 8 June 1942 summarizing the Battle, concluded by writing "Thus the distressing day of 5 June came to an end. Don’t let another day like this come to us during the course of this war! Let this day be the only one of the greatest failure of my life!"(13)

Subsequent to Midway, the Japanese still had powerful surface forces available, but with the lack of carrier support, only a few victories emerged during the remaining three years of war, despite the fact that a substantial portion of the Japanese Navy was still operational even in late 1944. At the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944 the Japanese deployed seven battleships, including the Yamato and Musashi, a fleet carrier, three light carriers, two hybrid battleship/carrier conversions, eleven heavy cruisers, five light cruisers, 23 destroyers, plus other escorts.(14) Further, these victories (such as the Battle of Savo Island in August 1942), were secured during essentially defensive operations. This is almost true by definition, for after Midway
Japanese planning was defensive, no meaningful offensive operations were conducted. This is clearly a fundamental change from the pre-Midway planning, when further offensive operations were being studied.

In the introduction to his book on the Battle of Midway, Walter Lord wrote that the Americans had no right to win. Yet they did, an in doing so they changed the course of a war. More than that, they added a new name - Midway - to that small list that inspires men by shining example. Like Marathon, the Armada, the Marne, a few others, Midway showed that every once in a while 'what must be' need not be at all. Even against the greatest of odds there is something in the human spirit - a magic blend of skill, faith, and valor - that can lift men from certain defeat to incredible victory.(15)

It is difficult to overstate Lord's point, for by nearly any measure the incredible events at Midway spelled the end of Japanese chances for a favorable outcome to the war. Winston Churchill wrote that Midway is "rightly regarded as the turning-point of the war in the Pacific".(16) Of the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway he wrote, "The annals of war at sea present no more intense, heart-shaking shock than these two battles, in which the qualities of the United States Navy and Air Force and the American race shone forth in splendour. . . As the Japanese Fleet withdrew to their far-off home ports their commanders knew not only that their aircraft-carrier struggle was irretrievably broken, but that they were confronted with a will-power and passion in the foe they had challenged worthy of the highest traditions of their Samurai ancestors and backed by a development of power, numbers, and science to which no limit could be set."(17)

The consummate gambler Yamamoto risked his carriers in two major operations, first with the Pearl Harbor strike, and then at Midway. It is interesting to note that the Japanese anticipated the loss of two or more carriers at Pearl Harbor, but lost only 29 carrier aircraft (and the midget submarines that contributed little if anything to the operation), while the success of the Midway operation was taken for granted, but produced losses out of all proportion to the potential gain. The confident attitude about the Midway operation was reflected in the wargaming conducted during the planning. It was in sharp contrast to the rigorous conduct of the Pearl Harbor wargaming. During the Midway simulation the American carriers attacked the main Japanese carrier group while the Japanese planes were on a mission against Midway. Two Japanese carriers were ruled to have been destroyed, but Admiral Ugaki overruled the umpire and declared that only one carrier was destroyed. Later on, even this ship was refloated and participated in post-Midway operations.(18)

Many authors have argued that the struggle for Guadalcanal, from August 1942 to February 1943, marked the turning point in the Pacific theater.(19) There are certainly sound reasons for making this argument. During the campaign the Japanese, for the first time, lost territory. The Navy suffered significant losses, including two battleships (Hiei and Kirishima), a carrier (Ryujo), four cruisers, and thirteen destroyers. Against these losses the Allies lost eight cruisers and fourteen destroyers in surface action, and the carriers Wasp and Hornet. Japanese ground and air forces committed to Guadalcanal also suffered heavy casualties. As a percentage of total Japanese strength the losses in ground forces were not severe, but the air losses came from among the most seasoned of the Japanese groups remaining after Midway and were losses the Japanese were not able to replace.

Despite the difficulties in attempting to weigh the various factors on each side in the respective battles (geographical, material, psychological, etc.), the problems Midway created for the Japanese and the opportunities it presented for the Allies unalterably changed the balance of power in the critical category of fleet aircraft carriers, providing the Americans with offensive options that otherwise would not have occurred nearly as early in the war. Basically, this argument is that in the absence of the victory at Midway, the Allies would have not undertaken an offensive in the Solomons in August 1942.

In April 1942 the United States had three operational carriers in the Pacific. Against this the Japanese had six fleet carriers and five light carriers. The Japanese advance was well supported by land-based air groups, such as the 22nd Naval Air Flotilla, which had easily dispatched the Prince of Wales and Repulse off the coast of Malaysia on 10 December 1941.(20) With the initial objectives of the war essentially secured, the Japanese were working on plans for the next phase of the war.

There was never any doubt that at some point the war would become one of defense. Thus, the plans that were being debated in the spring of 1942 revolved around a theme of how to achieve a position that would force the United States into a costly war of attrition which the Japanese could negotiate to an acceptable conclusion. A strong case was made for immediate operations in the Coral Sea area. Admiral Yamamoto, however, wanted to craft an offensive that would force the American carriers into battle while Japan still held a sizable numeric and qualitative superiority. His choice of Midway was reinforced by the weaknesses in the western perimeter revealed by Doolittle's raid. After the destruction of the American carriers, Yamamoto agreed that a renewed effort would be made to secure a solid position east of Australia. Midway, however, did not provide the outcome Yamamoto anticipated. "Midway was indeed the 'decisive' battle of the war in the Pacific. If it had been won by the Japanese, it is unlikely that it alone would have brought about the defeat of America, but it surely would have prolonged the war. However, Japan's loss of the decisive battle doomed the Japanese Navy and insured the ultimate defeat of Japan, for she could never match the industrial capability of the United States".(21) Psychologically and militarily, the defeat at Midway was, as Fuchida wrote, "the battle that doomed Japan".

The Struggle for Guadalcanal - 7 August 1942 to 9 February 1943

The naval campaign around Guadalcanal was one of the most fierce and lengthy naval campaigns in the history of naval warfare. The campaign lasted for nearly six months and cost thousands of American and Japanese lives. This campaign, from the naval perspective, and indeed from a strategic perspective, was the turning point of World War Two in the Pacific Theater. The experienced and well trained Japanese fleet was still superior to the United States fleet after the Battle of Midway, and was
The Battle at Midway was a tremendous victory for the US Navy, at a critical time. Because of the loss of nearly all of the US battleships at Pearl Harbor on 7 December, the US fleet was forced to rely on its few aircraft carriers as its major instrument of power. The three operational US carriers, escorted by a small number of cruisers and destroyers, sortied to engage the bulk of the Japanese Navy. In the ensuing engagement four Japanese heavy carriers were sunk, with the loss of only one US carrier, the Yorktown. While the sinking of four Japanese carriers was a tremendous blow to the Japanese High Command, and personally to Admiral Yamamoto, it did not make the loss of the war inevitable. In fact, with the exception of the four carriers and one heavy cruiser sunk (Mikuma), the Japanese Combined Fleet was still completely intact. Immediate measures were taken to make good the carrier losses, including converting two old battleships into hybrid carriers. The Japanese even attempted to purchase the German Graf Zeppelin, an uncompleted aircraft carrier.

With the strength available for the Guadalcanal campaign, the Japanese could have reversed the effects of the defeat at Midway. The situation in the southern Solomons, despite the early loss of Henderson Field, offered many advantages for the Japanese, beyond the heavy numerical advantage they held in surface forces. Understanding the basic philosophies of the US and Japanese force structure in the World War Two era can explain much about the outcomes of the various battles around Guadalcanal. Both American and Japanese strategists in the interwar years believed that a conflict between the two would end in a great battle between the two sides using the traditional battleship dominated battle line in an engagement somewhere near the Philippines. American force structure used this theses as the core of a navy that was designed around the large caliber gun. US planners envisioned a battle where US forces could stand off at long range and pound the enemy with the greater numerical advantage given to it by the agreements of various naval treaties. The US forces were determined to fight these actions in the daytime with nearly limitless visibility. US tradition was one of daytime engagements similar to those in the Spanish-American war, as stated by Richard Frank in his work on Guadalcanal: "...unlike the British, [the US] did not extract the conclusion from World War One that a major navy must be prepared equally to fight by night and by day."(2)

The Japanese, in contrast, were forced by treaty limitations to come up with new and innovative means of winning the great battle. Japanese strategists knew that if they fought a Mahanian engagement with the US on American terms, defeat would be the likely result. Therefore they developed a strategy and shaped a fleet that they felt could win on different terms. The Japanese envisioned a group of preliminary encounters before the "great battle" that would attrition the US forces down to a level that could be dealt with by the main battle fleet. These other phases included the distant deployment of submarines against the American capital ships, followed by the use of long range G3M (“Nell”) and G4M (“Betty”) bombers using bombs and torpedoes (these were the plane types involved in the destruction of the Prince of Wales and Repulse). As the American fleet closed, Japanese strategists planned for a series of night attacks, in order to sink more American battle line ships at close range by destroyer and cruiser torpedo attacks. The Japanese regularly practiced these nocturnal engagements in large scale, realistic, night time maneuvers. Japanese reliance on night actions and torpedoes spawned the development of one of the pivotal weapons of World War Two, the Type 93, or "Long Lance" torpedo.

With the major units of the American fleet resting on the bottom of Pearl Harbor, the Philippines in Japanese hands, and with the rise of carrier air power, American strategy changed. Mobile operations against the Japanese perimeter were frequent. When the nearly operational airfield on Guadalcanal was discovered the threat to the Australian supply lines was obvious. An invasion force was quickly assembled to prevent the Japanese from using the field. On 7 August, units of the 1st Marine Division began landing on the beaches of Guadalcanal and the nearby island of Tulagi. Resistance was firm, as if to foreshadow the bitter Marine invasions in the years to come, but the few Japanese defenders were soon defeated by overpowering numbers of Marines, with the US forces capturing Tulagi and securing a perimeter around the nearly completed ex-Japanese airfield on Guadalcanal. The major naval actions that would be fought over the next six months in the waters surrounding Guadalcanal, two daytime carrier battles, and five night surface actions, would center primarily on the efforts to resupply each sides land forces on Guadalcanal. For the US, priority was placed on the resupply of the Marine units occupying the small perimeter around what would soon be named "Henderson Field", and the interdiction of Japanese efforts to supply its forces initially to the east of the US perimeter, and ultimately to the west of the US perimeter. Japanese efforts initially were focused on resupply of their land forces (especially since at first they believed that the US operation was merely a raid and not an invasion (27), but as the dominance of the airpower at Henderson became more apparent, Japanese planning became more and more oriented with the destruction or suppression of the Henderson airstrip, as otherwise US land-based aircraft made supply missions prohibitively expensive.

While Midway was a great American victory, it was not necessarily the true turning point in the war. The American victory at Midway succeeded in sinking four very valuable carriers and killing many elite aircrews, yet it left the rest of the Japanese fleet unscathed. For the entire campaign near Guadalcanal, the Japanese enjoyed a superiority in carrier based aircraft, crew training, and a huge advantage in gunnery and torpedo strength. In fact, the Japanese Navy was far from finished, as most of the battles in the Guadalcanal Campaign start with a Japanese superiority in firepower. To further accent this point, these mismatched orders of battle were possible even considering Yamamoto’s reluctance to commit some of his most powerful forces including the 70,000 ton (as large as a modern American supercarrier) superbattleship Yamato, which sat anchored in Truk harbor almost the entire campaign. The Yamato’s sister ship Musashi along with two older battleships armed with sixteen inch guns also sat out the campaign (the Nagato and sister ship Mutsu). American morale was high after Midway, yet the majority of the US Navy, certainly her surface gunnery forces, were still untested and unsure. Guadalcanal proved that the US Navy could, with losses, take on the Japanese at night fighting. American gunnery and small unit tactics matured and by the end of the campaign proved to be efficient offensive threats, much as Midway proved the effectiveness of US naval
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pilot training programs of the two fleets. Japanese naval pilots were the best that their country had to offer. The Japanese strategy was to train based on the "premise of the invincibility of a refined technique". For example, the class that the future Japanese ace Saburo Saki joined in 1937 was composed of only 70 of the 1,500 applicants.(33) The result of this pre-war hyper-selective processes for pilot selection was, at the time of Pearl Harbor, a group of about 600 elite carrier pilots each with an average of over 800 hours flying time in their aircraft.(34) Many of these pilots were lost in the actions before and during the Battle at Midway. Indeed part of the problem was the aircraft that these pilots were flying. Few historians will question the maneuverability of the A6M "Zero" fighter, yet the aircraft was fragile and prone to be brought down with minimal hits. Japanese design sacrificed those very things, such as self sealing gas tanks, and crew armor, that would protect the pilots she had so carefully invested in. This seemingly obvious disjoint in overall strategy, high quality pilots forced to fly low survivability aircraft, is quite interesting. The Japanese air groups at Santa Cruz contained, "the remaining core of superbly skilled first-line carrier fliers with which Japan had gained her victories in the months after Pearl Harbor, and as a unit they outmatched their American adversaries.”(35) In fact, as early as December 1942 Admiral Matome Ugaki, the Naval Chief of Staff, transcribed part of a report made to him by the former chief of staff of the 11th Air Fleet, a naval air unit: "their [the new pilots] present skill cannot be regarded as more than one-third that of the past. In a newly arrived fighter group, forty-four pilots out of sixty have no experience with the Zero fighter.”(36) It was with

Yamamoto was haunted by two things that kept him from committing his entire force. First, he was haunted by the results of Midway, where he had lost the bulk of the veteran Japanese carrier force, and he was understandably reluctant to repeat his mistake. Second, and more importantly, he was concerned with holding the major part of his force for the "decisive battle", the Mahanian showdown between the two battleship battlelines. This issue weighed heavily on the Imperial Staff as well, as in late November an Imperial Navy delegation sent to review the results of the "Tokyo Express" found that due to destroyer loses the navy would soon not have enough destroyers to fight the "great decisive battle".(29) In fact, the Americans were determined to stay on Guadalcanal, and hence the Japanese were fighting the Great Battle, yet Yamamoto failed to realize it. Had Yamamoto committed his forces in a more concentrated way, he may have been able to support the Army on Guadalcanal better, and/or destroy more of the US fleet. Even with his hesitant commitment, he succeeded in whittling the US carrier force in the Pacific down twice during the campaign to only one operational carrier.

The cost over the six months of the campaign was high for both sides. The following tables list the total campaign losses on both sides,(30) the number in parenthesis is the number of ships of that type that were commissioned during the campaign in the United States and Japan. The results show the Allied productive superiority.(31)

The campaign that surrounded Guadalcanal was one of the most fiercely fought battles in history, certainly in naval history. Allied command decisions made Guadalcanal the turning point in the war in the Pacific, and through sacrifice and determination they achieved just that. Japanese forces that were deployed were as resolute and determined as any force in history, yet despite their bravery and sacrifice, they failed. This failure rested primarily on a flawed strategic view, and not on the losses from Midway. During the struggle for Guadalcanal the Japanese missed both the opportunity to inflict a serious defeat on the American Navy (tied to Guadalcanal by the need to supply the Marines), and the chance to avenge Midway. By the end of the Guadalcanal campaign the Japanese still had significant naval forces, but with the incredible productive capacity of US industry (as reflected in the charts above), the relative edge the Japanese held was not only checked, but was decisively reversed.

Conclusion

The debate over the turning point in the Pacific war, Midway or Guadalcanal, involves many factors that are difficult to weigh. For example, against the Japanese naval losses in the Solomons, the losses at Midway were four carriers and one cruiser (Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, and Mikumo). In tonnage, the losses from the Guadalcanal fighting were approximately 129,600 tons, compared to 119,100 at Midway.(32) However, a tonnage comparison is perhaps misleading because of the high value of the carriers. Of course, the Japanese sustained no material losses in land-based aircraft or ground forces in the Midway operation. Again, in material terms, the Allied losses during the fighting over Guadalcanal are considerably greater than the losses at Midway.

The loss at Midway prevented the Japanese from securing the island, although bases were established in the Aleutians as a part of the operation. The failure to take Midway left part of the perimeter open, but it is not clear that a garrison could have been maintained so close to Hawaii, so perhaps a base at Midway would have been a moot undertaking, abandoned because of logistical problems. Guadalcanal, on the contrary, was to serve as a major forward base (Henderson Field was started by the Japanese, the construction of the airfield was a major factor in the Allied decision to invade. It is interesting to note that the field was named after a Marine pilot killed at Midway). The location threatened the supply routes to Australia and provided a good flank for operations in the Coral Sea. The loss of Guadalcanal forced the Japanese to rely on the base at Rabaul on New Britain, since there were no major bases elsewhere in the Solomons. Obviously, the Allied occupation of Guadalcanal turned the tables as Allied air forces were in a position to interdict Japanese naval forces in the southern Solomons.

Several references have been made to the industrial advantage the US possessed. The Japanese were quite cognizant of this, and planned for a quick war. This is reflected in the differences in the pilot training programs of the two fleets. Japanese naval pilots were the best that their country had to offer. The Japanese strategy was to train based on the "premise of the invincibility of a refined technique". For example, the class that the future Japanese ace Saburo Saki joined in 1937 was composed of only 70 of the 1,500 applicants.(33) The result of this pre-war hyper-selective processes for pilot selection was, at the time of Pearl Harbor, a group of about 600 elite carrier pilots each with an average of over 800 hours flying time in their aircraft.(34) Many of these pilots were lost in the actions before and during the Battle at Midway. Indeed part of the problem was the aircraft that these pilots were flying. Few historians will question the maneuverability of the A6M "Zero" fighter, yet the aircraft was fragile and prone to be brought down with minimal hits. Japanese design sacrificed those very things, such as self sealing gas tanks, and crew armor, that would protect the pilots she had so carefully invested in. This seemingly obvious disjoint in overall strategy, high quality pilots forced to fly low survivability aircraft, is quite interesting. The Japanese air groups at Santa Cruz contained, "the remaining core of superbly skilled first-line carrier fliers with which Japan had gained her victories in the months after Pearl Harbor, and as a unit they outmatched their American adversaries.”(35) In fact, as early as December 1942 Admiral Matome Ugaki, the Naval Chief of Staff, transcribed part of a report made to him by the former chief of staff of the 11th Air Fleet, a naval air unit: "their [the new pilots] present skill cannot be regarded as more than one-third that of the past. In a newly arrived fighter group, forty-four pilots out of sixty have no experience with the Zero fighter.”(36) It was with
these new pilots, and without the old elite core, that the Imperial Navy would lose the War in the Pacific. American pilots on the other hand, flew aircraft with an entirely different principle of design. The F4F Wildcat is an excellent example. This aircraft was slower and had a slower climb rate than its Japanese counterpart, but was much more likely to absorb damage and return its pilot to his base, or at least allow a safe bail-out.(37) American training programs were also drastically different than those of the Japanese. For instance, Air Group 10 of the Enterprise represented the first of the wartime air groups formed by taking a core of combat veterans and grafting them to new recruits. As the war continued, American industry turned out many exceptional aircraft, any of which were more than a match for the best Japan had to offer. When combined with the US superiority in numbers, and then in training, the air war was bound to go against Japan. Both at Midway and at Guadalcanal the Japanese lost irreplaceable pilots. In the former case it was in an effort to secure a decisive battle, and in the latter it resulted from a piece-meal commitment that failed to recognize that the decisive campaign was in progress. Probably neither Midway nor Guadalcanal were solely responsible for the shattering of Japanese air power, but certainly both were significant contributors.

Of the many methods of measuring the turning point of the war, surface warships, aircraft carriers, pilots, territory, the psychological impact of victory and defeat, none allow a tidy balance sheet to be drawn up for Midway and Guadalcanal. The arguments presented for each side offer compelling evidence, but are not final or definitive. Perhaps the last word should go to a veteran of the Pacific War, Japanese Captain Tamagawa. He noted that "there were many famous battles in the war - Saipan, Leyte, Okinawa, etc. But after the war we (the professional military) talked only about two, Midway and Guadalcanal".(38)

**Bibliography**


Toshiyuki Yokoi, "Thoughts on Japan's Naval Defeat", in Evans, The Japanese Navy in World War II.

Total Allied Losses Guadalcanal Campaign

615 Aircraft
2 Carriers (1 fleet, 1 light)
0 Battleships (1)
6 Heavy Cruisers (0)
2 Light Cruisers (4)
14 Destroyers (62)
0 Submarines (18)
4 Transport Ships
1,769 men Army and Marine Corps
4,911 men Navy
420 Aircrew

In 1942 the US produced 49,445 aircraft.

Total Japanese Losses Guadalcanal Campaign

683 Aircraft
1 Light Carrier (0)
2 Battleships (0)
3 Heavy Cruisers (0)
1 Light Cruiser (1)
13 Destroyers (7)
6 Submarines (14)
14 Transport Ships
25,600 men Imperial Army
3,543 men Imperial Navy
1,200 Aircrew

In 1942 Japan produced 8,861 aircraft.

Footnotes


2 Gordon Prange wrote: "The tremendous gamble paid off with Japan's greatest victory of World War II... but its triumph was only temporary... As the initial shock and gloom wore off, the American public began to realize that the Pearl Harbor attack had been by no means an unmitigated disaster... Before the Pacific war ended, all but three of [the battleships that were]
Japan's victims had been renovated and helped harass the Axis to final defeat. Of infinitely more value than the repair of shattered ships was the welding together of the American people into a mighty spear and shield of determination. No more did Americans ask whose fight it was or question what they should do about it. Thus, in a very special way Pearl Harbor became the turning point of the world struggle. At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 737 and 738.


4 The escort carrier Liscome Bay was sunk by the Japanese submarine I-175 on 24 November 1943 during the Tarawa action. Ibid., pp. 187 and 188.

5 Toshikazu Ohmae wrote: "After crippling the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces moved rapidly into the southwest Pacific to occupy key British, Dutch, and American territory. A desperate attempt by Allied naval forces to check the Japanese advance was foiled between 27 February and 1 March 1942 in the Battle of the Java Sea, which virtually eliminated Allied sea power in that area and left the Netherlands East Indies open for invasion. Japan stood on the verge of complete success in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Her objectives for the "first stage" of the war - occupation of those areas and the establishment of a defensive perimeter behind which to await the capitulation of her enemies - were largely achieved." in "Japanese Operations in the Indian Ocean", in David C. Evans, editor, The Japanese Navy in World War II: In the Words of Former Japanese Naval Officers, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1986), p. 105.

6 The Allied losses were battleships Arizona, Oklahoma, Prince of Wales, and Repulse, air craft carriers Hermes and Lexington, and the cruisers Cornwall, Dorsetshire, Java, De Ruyter, Houston, Perth, and Exeter. See, among many sources, David Brown, Warship Losses of World War Two, (Annapolis, Maryland: aval Institute Press, 1995), pp. 53 to 63.

7 As an example, during the Malayan campaign total Japanese casualties were less than 9,700 while British and Commonwealth casualties, including about 130,000 prisoners of war, totaled more than 138,000. Masanobu Tsuji, Japan's Greatest Victory, Britain's Worst Defeat, (New York, New York: Sarpedon Publishers, 1993), pp. 220 and 271.

8 Although two Japanese fleet carriers were damaged. "The Japanese Navy took its time about repairing Shokaku and Zuikaku, with the result that these two great carriers, less than a year old, could not join their comrades [at the Battle of Midway] where their presence might have turned the tide of battle". Gordon W. Prange, Miracle at Midway, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 45.

9 The Doolittle Raid was, however, influential in Japanese strategic planning. "The greatest importance of the Doolittle raid lay in its immediate effect on the controversy still going on over the Combined Fleet plan for an assault on Midway. Although the Naval General Staff on 5 April had reluctantly agreed to the operation in principle, the time of execution and other vital points were still in dispute when Colonel Doolittle’s raiders successfully unloaded their bombs on Tokyo and other Japanese cities". Mitsuo Fuchida and Masatake Okumiya, Midway: The Battle that Doomed Japan, (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1958), p. 72.

10 Keegan, The Price of Admiralty, p. 246. Keegan notes that by mid 1944 the Japanese had less than 1,000 carrier pilots while the Americans had more than 3,000. Ibid., p. 248. Fuchida commented on the destruction of the core of the Japanese carrier air groups: "Another important cause of Japan’s defeat was what may be called the “crack-man policy” of the Navy Air Force. Under this policy all our best pilots were assigned to and kept on combat duty with the carrier air groups. Opponents of the policy contended that this was shortsighted and that some of the best and most experienced flyers should be sent to naval air stations as instructors to impart their wisdom and battle experience to fledgling students. But the crack-man policy had worked so successfully at Pearl Harbor and in the Indian Ocean that, if any, pilots from the carriers were transferred to duty as instructors. As a result, there was no reserve of able pilots available to fill the ranks left vacant by losses in the Battle of the Coral Sea... Thus, the battle [of Midway] was fought with at least one valuable (or even vital) carrier fewer than their might have been but for the shortsightedness of our leaders, who failed to realize that aerial warfare is a battle of attrition and that a strictly limited number of even the most skillful pilots could not possibly win out over an unlimited number of able pilots." Midway, pp. 207 and 208.

Inoue Shigeyoshi, chief of the Navy Aeronautics Department prior to World War II, had advocated a significant increase in the pilot training program. He predicted that without this and other measures the United States would defeat Japan. Agawa, The Reluctant Admiral, p. 225.

11 Mahanian in the sense of a decisive engagement with the American carriers. Mahan, of course, envisioned a decisive engagement between battlelines.

12 On 5 January 1942 "Yamamoto’s staff officers were ordered to start studying the second stage of operations". Agawa, The Reluctant Admiral, p. 293.

Admiral Ugaki wrote, on 5 January 1942, "We shall be able to finish first-stage operations by the middle of March, as far as the invasion operation is concerned [Java]. What are we going to do after that? Advance to Australia, to India, attack Hawaii, or destroy the Soviet Union at an opportune moment according to their actions? In any case, we must establish our plans by the end of February". Matome Ugaki, Fading Victory, translated by Masatake Chihaya, edited by Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, with a Forward by Gordon W. Prange, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), p. 68. See also Fuchida, Midway, pp. 54 to 66.
13 Ugaki, Fading Victory, p. 152.
17 Ibid., p. 254.
18 Prange, Miracle at Midway, pp. 35 and 36.
26 The Long Lance was 29' 4" in length, 24" in diameter, weighted 6,100 pounds, had a top speed of 48 knots, and delivered a 1,100 pound warhead. It had a maximum range in excess of 40,000 yards. Edwyn Gray, The Devil's Device: Robert Whitehead and the History of the Torpedo, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991), p. 268.
28 Yamamoto did consider sending the Yamato into battle, but decided not to, at least partially because she was several knots slower than the Kongo class battleships. Frank, Guadalcanal, p. 316. Interestingly, Admiral Halsey, cognizant of the threat of torpedo attacks, dispatched the new battleships South Dakota and Washington for night action off Guadalcanal. These ships were comparable in speed to the ships that Yamamoto declined to commit. "Yamamoto simply did not wish to risk his carriers and other major warships by using the Combined Fleet in an assault on [Guadalcanal] . . . Such an assault might well have succeeded; but ever since August 1942, battles involving elements of the Combined Fleet had always resulted in serious losses for the Japanese Navy, particularly among its destroyers. The bold Admiral Yamamoto of 7 December 1941 had become a more cautious leader. Nevertheless, he was still hoping for a decisive naval battle, and that battle could have been fought around Guadalcanal; then if the naval battle had been won, the land battle could also have been won. But Yamamoto apparently never saw Guadalcanal as the place for the kind of decisive battle he envisioned". Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, pp. 242 to 247.
29 Frank, Guadalcanal, p. 521.
30 Ibid., pp. 598 to 618.
31 Ibid., p. 615.
32 All tonnage figures are standard tonnage and are taken from Jentschura, et. al., Warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy. By comparison, the Allied losses at Midway and during the Guadalcanal fighting were, respectively, 21,300 (standard) tons, and 134,000 tons. These figures are from Jane's Fighting Ships, 1944 - 1945, (New York, New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1971).
33 Saburo Saki, Samurai, (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 28 to 34; also see Frank, Guadalcanal, p. 67.
34 Frank, Guadalcanal, p.611.

35 Ibid., p.373.

36 Ugaki, Fading Victory, p. 317.

37 Since most of the air combat during the Guadalcanal campaign was near Guadalcanal, this was very important practically, since it meant that US pilots that could parachute from a crippled plane were far more likely to be rescued and return to service than their Japanese counterparts.

38 Frank, Guadalcanal, pp. 617 and 618.