



Gooney Gazette II

Friends of Midway Atoll Newsletter



July 2012



Battle of Midway 70th Anniversary Commemoration

Admiral Cecil D. Haney, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said America will continue to commemorate the Battle of Midway "as long as we have a United States Navy." USFWS photo by Pete Leary

Battle of Midway

The Battle of Midway took place from June 4-7, 1942, just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The American military intelligence deciphered Japan's code and discovered the plan to attack Midway.

About 300 Americans were killed during the four-day battle.



Robyn Thorson, Director of the USFWS Service's Pacific Region, and Battle of Midway veteran, Sgt. Edgar Fox, listen during the ceremony. Photo Pete Leary



Battle of Midway veterans, retired marine Sgt. Edgar Fox (red hat) and retired Marine Co. John Miniclier (far right) were joined at the event by World War II veterans Roy McArdle (tan suit) and Joe Moore, who were stationed at Midway after the historic battle. USFWS photo by Pete Leary



Admiral Cecil D. Haney, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, presents a memento to Sue Schulmeister, Manager of the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. USFWS photo by Pete Leary



Admiral Cecil D. Haney, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, presents USFWS Pacific Regional Director Robyn Thorson with a Pacific Fleet emblem. USFWS photo by Pete Leary



Retired Marine Col. John Miniclier choked back tears as he was greeted by Retired Japanese Vice Admiral Yoji Koda, one of the many well-wishers at the ceremony. USFWS photo by Pete Leary.



Retired Marine Col. John Miniclier lived on the 2nd floor of the Power Plant 70 years ago with filmmaker John Ford, who captured the action on film when the Japanese attacked Midway Atoll on June 4, 1942.

Colonel Miniclier witnessed the ensuing attack by Japanese Zeros from a nearby searchlight tower. USFWS photo by Pete Leary

Ceremony photos

by Pete Leary



The playing of the national anthem began the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Midway commemoration on June 4, 2012. USFWS Photo by Pete Leary

Admiral Cecil B. Haney, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, presents a memento to Ann Bell of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, organizer of the commemorative event. USFWS photo by Pete Leary



A U.S. Navy band provided the music during the 70th anniversary event. USFWS photo by Pete Leary

Pictured on bottom right of page 5
Battle of Midway veterans, retired marine Col. John Minielier and retired Marine Sgt. Edgar Fox (red hat), cut the ribbon on the new Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge exhibit memorializing the Battle of Midway. USFWS photo by Pete Leary



(from left) Admiral Cecil D. Haney, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Ann Bell, coordinator of the Battle of Midway event, Sue Schulmeister, Refuge Manager of the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, and Robyn Thorson, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Region, helped launch the opening of the refuge's new Battle of Midway memorial exhibit. USFWS photos by Pete Leary



History Corner ——— Grief at the Reef ! by Darlene Moegerle

Getting ships through the reef and into the harbor at Midway Atoll has always been a problem! From the first recorded shipwreck on the fringing reef to the fear of a modern-day cruise ship entering the harbor, the narrow and shallow channel has been a source of much concern! Midway was discovered in 1859 by Captain C. N. Brooks. In 1867 Captain William Reynolds, was sent by Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, to take formal possession of the atoll and claim it for the United States.

In 1869, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for dredging a 600 foot wide entrance channel through a break in the western side of the reef. Reynolds had recommended that the channel be 24 feet deep to allow entrance by the largest war ships built at that time. The project also included dredging an anchorage in Welles Harbor.

The project started in late March 1870 when the old Civil War gunboat, USS Saginaw, arrived with workers, machinery and explosives. For six months divers worked to blast through the reef. Due to bad weather and extremely dense limestone and basaltic rock, the endeavor was given up with a report that a channel “barely wide enough for a small boat” was all that had been accomplished. Interest in Midway as a stopover on the route to China waned after this debacle, and for the next 30 years, visits to the atoll were limited to shipwreck survivors and Japanese bird feather collectors.

In 1903 the “around the world cable” arrived near Midway and twice a year, supply boats braved the breakers and fickle winds to replenish stores of the residents. For the most part, these small boats were able to navigate through the narrow, shallow channel safely.

Another 30 years would pass until concern about Japanese activity in the Pacific region resulted in a 1938 Navy report which recommended immediate development of Midway as a naval air and submarine base. Using a 1935 survey authorized by Congress, a new channel on the south side of the atoll was recommended as well as facilities for two divisions of submarines; construction of a pier, a channel and a turning basin inside the lagoon for large auxiliary vessels.

In 1939 the Army Corps of Engineers began to dredge the lagoon, blast a new southern entrance through the reef and create a deep channel in the lagoon between Sand and Eastern Islands. The harbor was dredged to accommodate submarine refitting and repair. Coral heads near the surface of the lagoon were removed to provide seaplane runways. The seaplane base was established on Sand Island and the airfield on Eastern. The Corps completed this massive project in 1940 and immediately the US Navy took over operations at Midway.

In April of 1943, a contractor arrived to begin further dredging to enlarge the entrance channel and the anchorage area. At this time the seawalls were installed and material from the dredging was used to re-configure Sand Island so the north-south runway could be constructed. When this project was completed the mooring capacity was six cruisers, five destroyers, and a submarine repair ship. In 1944 the USS Macaw, a submarine rescue ship, caused more work to be done on the main channel! Attempting to rescue a stranded submarine, the Macaw ran aground in the channel and eventually had to be abandoned.

Keeping the channel open was a high priority during the war years, so the channel HAD to be cleared! It is reported that 2.5 tons of explosives were needed to blast the Macaw wreckage free of the reef. The remains of the ship still rest on the eastern side of the main channel. The bow is in approximately 25 feet of water near the channel’s edge. The stern is in about 55 feet of water.

The last attack on the channel came in 1957 as Midway geared up to become the southern point of the DEW line. Again, the channel was widened and deepened so the largest US tanker ships could enter the harbor.

Thus it seems that at last, man has conquered the nearly indomitable reef of Midway Atoll!

It only took 87 years!



Other News . . .

Film makers Simon Nash and Michael Pitts were on Midway from June 18 to July 5 to film and photograph wildlife and marine debris for their film. The filming to date has gone well. They have captured images of monk seals under the guidance of a Hawaiian monk seal scientist, dolphins, and many sea birds.

- Plastic Oceans filming is also being done by Michal Pitts starring Dr. Jennifer Lavers, a researcher from Australia talking about the effects of plastic on albatross.



Jim and Jan are filming fledglings down on the beach.

Update on Marine Debris:

Thirteen divers from the NOAA Marine Debris program arrived at Midway on May 28 and worked until the Sette arrived to pick them up on June 23. They removed derelict fishing ropes and nets from the reefs and shorelines. They also completed marine debris survey and removal operation on the majority of Midway's shallow coral reefs around the fringing reef and completed shoreline surveys of all three major islands including Sand, Eastern, and Spit. The team removed a total of 23,306 kg of derelict fishing gear and misc. plastics extending



Photo: Rachel Grandpre

over 25 meters in length, 5m in width, and 2m in height in 20 operational days. In order to continue debris removal operations aboard the Oscar Elton Sette the marine debris team left floats and misc. plastics on Midway. On June 23, the Sette and Marine Debris crews loaded three 17' inflatables, misc equipment and gear, and 13,589 kg of derelict fishing gear onboard in one day. It was a long day but the Sette crews made it happen. Refuge staff continue monthly monitoring of marine debris plots. The data have not shown any significant increases in the amount or types of debris washing up which could indicate that the March 2011 Japanese Tsunami debris field has not yet reached Midway or is passing to the north of the refuge.

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A big thank you to Darlene Olsen-Holst and her hard working staff who handle the Friends of Midway Atoll merchandise in the store. We really appreciate all your hard work! Mahalo!

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