



# Gooney Gazette II

Friends of Midway Atoll Newsletter



April 2012

## Reflections of a Returning Refuge Manager

by Robert Shallenberger

I left Midway in 2002, after three years as the Refuge Manager. Now, after a decade away, I was given an opportunity to return. The visit brought back some great memories. Midway was truly a highlight in my conservation career.



Photo credit: Robert Shallenberger

I must admit, with the reduced human population, the place looked a bit like a ghost town. I missed my wonderful Sri Lankan and Filipino friends, but I was glad to see that the Thais were as adept as ever in keeping the physical plant operational. I was encouraged to see the important physical improvements, such as the airport fire station, the new fuel containers and the upgraded generators.

Yet, the accelerating loss of highly significant historic buildings was disturbing to this history buff. I was particularly fond of the Cable buildings. They are not long for this world, nor are the galley, the theater and the seaplane hangar. It was refreshing to see the improvements completed and underway in the visitor center. Yet, in my view, it will never be much of a “window on the Monument” if only a lucky few get to enjoy the experience.

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I was most impressed by the progress made in the biological program, in particular the recovery of the Bonin petrel colony in the absence of rats and the successful establishment of a thriving population of Laysan ducks. Both success stories underscore the value of persistence and patience when dealing with wildlife management challenges. I was very



pleased to see the progress made in the battle against *Verbesina* and *Casuarina*. Evolving methods to deal with these aggressive aliens are paying off as well. Of course, who could avoid smiling with satisfaction when observing the latest Short-tailed Albatross chick and Wisdom attending to her offspring as well.

Despite the progress, many challenges lie ahead. Roads need resurfacing, roofs still leak and lead paint remains a serious threat. Who knows what, if anything, can be done to confront the tsunami debris? That said, there are reasons to be optimistic about Midway's future that include the very high quality of Refuge staff, the solid contributions of volunteers, the cooperative working relationship between Chugach and the Refuge, the advocacy of FOMA, the political visibility of the Monument and the growing awareness of Service managers at the highest levels.

I did manage to squeeze in some photography while on this trip. I operate on the premise that you can't have too many photos of albatross, particularly if you are lucky enough to visit when the colony is at its peak.

So, I'll leave you with my "Five Favorites" from the February trip. First photo is on page one.



Photo credits: Robert Shallenberger



Photo credits: Robert Shallenberger



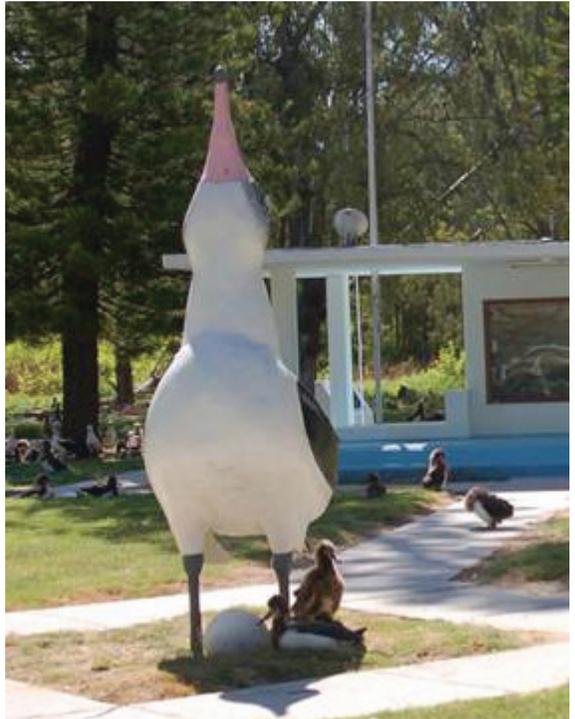
# Bring Back the Gooney!!

by Teya Penniman

You can't miss the gooneys on Midway, especially the Laysan albatross, as most of the real estate on the atoll has been staked out by hundreds of thousands of these spectacular birds. With wingspans of more than six feet and elaborate displays of billing, clacking, high-pitched calling, and sky pointing, the gooneys command attention. Until recently, it was also impossible to miss the giant 12-foot wooden Laysan albatross, its bill pointing skyward, in a never-ending courtship dance.

The oversized gooney "hatched" in 1972 - carved out of a 30-foot piece of mahogany driftwood by a Navy dentist, Lieutenant Commander Robert C. Cook, who was stationed on Midway in the 1970s. According to the October 1973 issue of the Navy's "All Hands Magazine," Cook began the project in his backyard on Midway. He cut the log into two sections, carving the body from one piece and the head and neck from the other. He secured the two pieces together with four-foot-long steel pins. The article by James Alan Bromley, concludes: "Then, upon painting, the carving took on the luster of life, so real, in fact, that many gooneys appear quite content nesting in the shade of their newly acquired 'big brother' who relentlessly stands in his 'sky moo' position, looking very proud and very gooney."

The gooney bird statue has been officially recognized as part of the island's historical resources. Bromley noted that the statue stood as a central attraction of the historical center that was erected to commemorate the 1942 Battle of Midway. According to a 2008 Draft Environmental Assessment, the Midway Memorial Mall encompassed several plaques, "a large gooney bird statue," and two five-inch guns.



Gooney birds - big and small.  
Photo by Avery Loy



1973 Christmas card for the Naval Weather Service Environmental Detachment Midway Photo by Midway Station Photographer; provided by Jerry Baber.

Unfortunately, the massive piece of mahogany was no match for voracious termites, an invasive pest that found its way to the island as part of the human occupation over the decades. The original pieces of the gooney bird were shipped to Honolulu to explore making a replica out of more resilient material by a capable fabricator. FOMA stands ready to help cover some of the costs to bring the gooney back, but we need additional support from those who know and love the old bird. We're hoping to raise \$15,000. Any support is welcome (and tax deductible!). You can donate by check or via PayPal at our website: [www.friendsofmidway.org](http://www.friendsofmidway.org)

## 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Midway Special Exhibit at The National WWII Museum

The National WWII Museum's Research Department offers a sneak peek at the upcoming special exhibit, *The Turning Point: April 18-June 7, 1942*. This special exhibit is open from April 18-July 8, 2012.

### IN OTHER NEWS...

- Canada based Glacialis Productions plan to travel to Midway from April 26 – 30 to film a segment as part of a larger documentary called "1000 Days for the Planet". Their mission is to document the incredible beauty and wealth of species that live on the planet, as well as to bear witness to the state of the biosphere and its relationship with humanity.
- UK based Future Planet Films are planning to video a segment at Midway as part of their documentary called *Plastic Oceans* from May 21 – 28
- Artist and film maker Chris Jordan and three others are planning to travel to Midway from June 28 – July 5 to film and photograph wildlife and marine debris for their film they hope to release in 2013 to raise awareness on marine debris and its effects on wildlife and the environment.

## Marine Debris Update

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.

Refuge staff continue to work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), US Coast Guard, the State of Hawaii, and others to ensure that resources and an action plan are in place in the near future to mitigate the impacts of the tsunami debris field generated by the March 2011 tsunami. In March 2012, the Japanese Government released an official estimate of the amount of debris that was washed into the ocean at 5 million tons. Of this amount, approximately 1.5 million tons remained afloat.

Please see the following link for more information: <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/news/features/dec11/japan-tsunami-debris.html>

## Facebook May Bring New Friends to Friends Groups by Karen Leggett

As of mid-September, 2011 about 140 people have responded to the Refuge System's Facebook awareness campaign, which encourages people to go to the Refuge System Web site to find local refuges and Friends organizations. The Facebook notice – headlined "Love Wildlife?"-- has been posted on more than 700,000 Facebook pages of those who have shown an interest in wildlife conservation.



While the Refuge System can't measure whether people who clicked on the ad actually joined a Friends group, it is another opportunity to put the mission of the Refuge System and Friends organizations front-and-center before a vast audience. Interesting note: The response rate went up after the accompanying photo was changed from a pelican to cuddly polar bear cubs.

Facebook notices are inexpensive ways for Refuge Friends groups to highlight membership.

Refuge System Facebook Following Is Growing

Just three weeks after the Refuge System's launched its Facebook site, <http://www.facebook.com/USFWSRefuges>, more than 760 people were following the conversation. Be sure to become a follower of the page – and ask your friends to do the same.

### And Twitter, Too

The Refuge System is pumping out news on its own Twitter site as well: <http://twitter.com/USFWSRefuges>. It's a great way to get spread the word about events and accomplishments across the country. Give your Twitter and Facebook ideas to Karen Leggett in the Refuge System Branch of Communications ([Karen\\_Leggett@fws.gov](mailto:Karen_Leggett@fws.gov)).



## Midway History Corner. . . by Darlene Moegerle

**D**id you know that the Commercial Pacific Cable Company's around the world cable which reached Midway on June 18, 1903, played a significant role in the Battle of Midway almost 39 years later? Without it the outcome of the war in the Pacific would probably have been significantly different. Here is a brief story of how it came about.

In 1941, a war between the United States and Japan was becoming imminent. The US was committed to defending the seas between Australia and Hawaii and Admiral Nimitz knew that with the limited number of troops and vastly inferior weapons, the only US chance for success was in being in the right place at the right time!

Japanese Admiral Yamamoto realized that the only hope of Japanese success in defeating the United States fleet in the Pacific lay in rapid conquests and complete destruction. Early on, he warned his superiors that if the conflict went on for more than 18 months, the outcome would not be in their favor. The Japanese needed to destroy the US ability to retaliate and this meant a total destruction of the American aircraft carriers. We know the first attempt occurred at Pearl Harbor but, when this failed, he had to initiate "Plan B", attacking the naval facility at Midway Atoll.



United States intelligence gathering was severely hampered in the Pacific region simply by the logistics of the area. Usually military intelligence can be gotten through talking with captured prisoners, finding enemy documents or even reconnaissance. The only source of intelligence available in the Pacific area was by intercepting Japanese communications and breaking the codes. The Navy Intelligence Section, though operating with a very small staff, was becoming quite good at their responsibility, and in mid- May, they reported that Japanese battle-ships and several carriers were possibly heading for Oahu.

The intelligence cryptographers had decoded several of the abbreviations that the Japanese were using in their messages but the "AF" which they were seeing with more frequency was still a mystery. Using deduction they concluded that "AF" was a designator for a geographical location in the area of Hawaii. But, how were they to determine which area it was?

A clever young intelligence officer approached Admiral Nimitz with a plan to have a message sent from Midway "...using plain language to the Commandant of the 14th Naval district (in Hawaii) stating in effect, that Midway's distillation plant had suffered a serious casualty and that fresh water was urgently needed to which the Commandant would reply, also in plain language, that water barges would be sent, under tow." The message was sent and we know the rest of the story...the Japanese intercepted the unencoded message and by their subsequent coded message, confirmed that "AF" was indeed Midway and that it truly was their target.

So how does the Commercial Pacific Cable Company cable fit into this story? It was via the underwater cable that the original message was sent to the Commandant on Midway that started the ruse. The original instructions were sent undetected over this antiquated but secure communication link!

## Chester William Nimitz US Navy Fleet Admiral

Biographical Sketch from the Nimitz Library Papers

Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz was born in Fredericksburg, Texas, on February 24, 1885, the son of Chester Bernhard and Anna (Henke) Nimitz. Appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy from Texas, he graduated in 1905 with distinction, seventh in a class of 114.

In 1912 Nimitz risked his life to rescue an enlisted man from drowning. Despite an early court-martial and reprimand for running his second command, the destroyer Decatur, aground, Nimitz's advancement through the naval ranks was swift. His career would encompass a broad range of duties ashore and at sea, including the commands of destroyers, submarines, cruisers and battleships. He was considered an expert on the topics of diesel engines and undersea warfare.

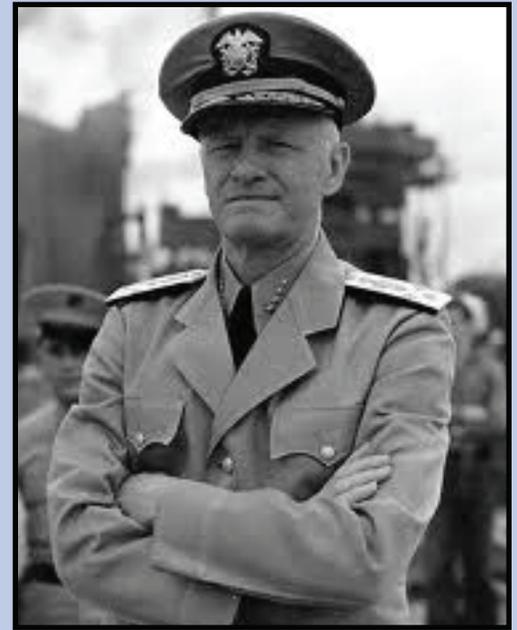
During the First World War, Nimitz served as Chief of Staff to the Commander of the Submarine Division, Atlantic Fleet. He was assigned to the University of California in 1926 and there established one of the first Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps Units. Among his duties during the 1930s, Chester William Nimitz would serve as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, commander of a cruiser division and commander of a battleship division. Nimitz attained the rank of Rear Admiral in 1938.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, Nimitz was promoted from Chief of the Bureau of Navigation to Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet. The following year, he was awarded the additional title of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Areas. Nimitz commanded "all U.S. and Allied forces in the North, Central and South Pacific, except the Army Air Force bombers that raided Japan from the Marianas." A brilliant leader and strategist Nimitz led his forces to victory against the Japanese. His triumph would be crowned in 1944 with the Navy's highest rank, that of Fleet Admiral. Chester William Nimitz would have the honor of signing for the United States at Japan's surrender aboard his flagship, the U.S.S. Missouri, in 1945.

From 1945 through 1947, Nimitz served as Chief of Naval Operations, and in 1948 became Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy in the Western Sea Frontier. Nimitz sincerely enjoyed his naval career, never formally retiring from the Navy.



Chester William Nimitz died 20 February 1966 at his home in California and was buried in the Golden Gate National Cemetery, San Bruno, California. He was survived by his wife, Catherine Vance Freeman Nimitz (whom he married in 1913) and his children: Rear Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Jr., USN retired, Catherine Vance Lay, Anna Elizabeth (Nancy) Nimitz and Mary Manson Nimitz.



Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz, GCB, USN (February 24, 1885 – February 20, 1966) was a five-star admiral of the United States Navy. He held the dual command of Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet (CinCPac), for U.S. naval forces and Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA), for U.S. and Allied air, land, and sea forces during World War II.[1] He was the leading U.S. Navy authority on submarines, as well as Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Navigation in 1939. He served as Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) from 1945 until 1947. He was the United States' last surviving Fleet Admiral.

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