

JUNE 4, 1942



A Battle of Midway Scenario for

CARRIER STRIKE!

R.L. Rasmussen

Watercolor by Capt. R. Rasmussen, USN (Retired), image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

OVERVIEW

This scenario for *Carrier Strike!* Attempts to recreate the events of June 4, 1942, a date best known as the first day of fighting in the Battle of Midway in the Pacific Theater of World War II. The battle proved to be a resounding American victory, but it could have been a resounding Japanese victory if circumstances were even slightly different.¹

This scenario outline serves as a supplement to the standard *Carrier Strike!* Rules, with additional rules designed to specifically re-enact the Battle of Midway. Any situation not specifically covered in this scenario should be handled in accordance with the standard rules.

You'll notice numbered citations throughout these rules. While not footnotes in the academic sense, the numbers reference an explanation, clarification, or historical fact in the designer's notes at the end of this document. These citations have no effect on game play, and are included for illustrative purposes only.

THE BATTLE

The Japanese, seeking a quick end to their war with the United States, planned to attack U.S. installations on Midway Atoll. While controlling Midway would bring the Japanese military within striking distance of Hawaii, the real purpose of the attack was to lure American aircraft carriers into battle, where they could be surprised and destroyed.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, American code



Diorama by Norman Bel Geddes, depicting the attack by American dive bombers on the Japanese aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga* and *Soryu* during the Battle of Midway.

Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

breakers had deciphered enough Japanese encryptions to know the date, time, purpose, and location of the attack. It was the Americans who held the advantage of surprise; the hunters had unknowingly become the hunted.

While the Americans held some advantages, the Japanese Navy was still one of the world's best, and could not reasonably be discounted. Through a series of interconnected misfortunes and flawed intelligence, the battle proved to be the worst case scenario for Japanese forces at nearly every turn, resulting in the worst defeat Japan had suffered in three centuries.

The Japanese lost four aircraft carriers, and just as importantly, the experienced pilots and maintenance crews stationed on them. The Japanese Navy would no longer be able to conduct offensive operations for the rest of the war.

COMPONENTS

You will need all of the components from your *Carrier Strike!* game. You'll need to print and cut out the graphic representations of Midway Atoll, the identification cards for American and Japanese forces, and the four cloud banks appearing on the last two pages of these rules. If you print the graphics on standard 8.5 by 11-inch paper, they will fit perfectly within the hexagonal grid of the *Carrier Strike!* game board.

ASSIGNING UNITS

For this scenario, the Red Player will take the role of the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), while the Yellow Player will take the role of the U.S. Navy (USN). Both sides will have the usual number of *Carrier Strike!* carriers, planes, pilot skill discs, and torpedoes; the Yellow Player will also base some planes and torpedoes on Midway Atoll.

SETUP

The Yellow (American) player places forces on the board first.² It is helpful for the Yellow (American) Player to mentally picture his or her side of the board in three sections, from left to right.

The graphic cutout representing Midway Atoll is placed in the corner of the left-most section, leaving exactly three vacant hex spaces between the graphic and either edge of the board in that corner. Orient the graphic so that the larger island is closer to the red side of the game board.³

The Yellow (American) Player places the two yellow carriers anywhere she or he chooses in the remaining two-thirds of the yellow side of the board.⁴ Place an American identification card next to each yellow

carrier; this card is to move with its corresponding carrier throughout the game. If a player wants to move a plane through such a card, temporarily move the card out of the way, but keep it close enough so that its associated carrier can still be identified.⁵

The yellow carrier representing Admiral Spruance's Task Force 16 is loaded with a full complement of four yellow

planes and six yellow torpedoes; the planes are fitted with the standard range of pilot skill discs, numbered one through four, just as they are in the standard rules. The other, Fletcher's Task Force 17, is loaded with only two yellow planes and three torpedoes. Task force 17 begins play damaged; only one torpedo hit from the Red (Japanese) Player will sink the carrier representing Task Force 17.



Although the initial strike on Midway caused heavy damage, as seen here on Sand Island, a second strike was needed.

Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Lastly, the yellow player places two yellow planes and three yellow torpedoes on the graphic representing Midway Atoll. Of the remaining yellow components, the yellow player will still have four pilot skill discs, numbered one through four. The yellow player may allocate the four remaining pilot skill discs between the planes of the Task Force 17 carrier and Midway Atoll at his or her discretion.

The Red (Japanese) Player begins by placing the two red carriers.⁶ Each carrier is loaded with the full complement of four red planes, four pilot skill discs numbered one through four, and six red torpedoes; they may be placed anywhere on the Red Player's side of the board, in accordance with the standard rules. Place a Japanese identification card next to each red carrier; this

card is to move with its corresponding carrier throughout the game. The card is for identification purposes only - if a player wants to move a plane through such a card, just move the card out of the way, but keep it close enough so that its associated carrier can still be identified.

Lastly, the Red (Japanese) Player places the first three cloud banks anywhere on

the board, as long as they do not overlap the hex spaces occupied by Midway Atoll or any part of any ship.⁷ The Yellow Player then places the fourth cloud bank, following the same restrictions. Remember that, while the clouds do not affect movement of planes or ships, they do affect bombing the atoll, launching torpedoes, and dogfighting. See the section on Modified Game Play for details.

OBJECTIVES

Historically, both sides considered the primary objective of the battle to be the destruction of all enemy aircraft carriers. For the Americans, the secondary objective was to defend military installations on Midway Atoll; for the Japanese, it was to destroy the military installations on Midway to prepare for an amphibious landing of ground troops. Both players should seek to accomplish both their primary and secondary objectives.

MODIFIED GAME PLAY

This scenario plays as a standard game of *Carrier Strike!* with the exceptions outlined below.

Turn Order

The Red Player takes the first turn.⁸

Initial Attacks and Scouting. Knowing the location of the enemy carriers was of primary importance for both sides in the Battle of Midway, and the timing of accurate intelligence regarding enemy positions proved to be decisive in the historical battle. As a result, the following restrictions and mechanics apply.

- The IJN may choose to launch attacks against Midway on the first or any subsequent turn. The IJN may not launch attacks against USN carriers until they are located through scouting. The IJN may launch aircraft intended for use against enemy carriers when those carriers are discovered on a future turn, but such aircraft must be moved so that no more than two hex spaces can be between them and

a friendly carrier until the enemy carriers are located.

- Planes based on Midway may attack the IJN carriers on the first or any subsequent turn.⁹
- At the start of the game, the Yellow (American) Player may choose to launch planes to defend Midway Atoll.¹⁰ The USN may not attack IJN carriers until they are located through scouting. The USN may launch aircraft intended for use against enemy carriers when those carriers are discovered on a future turn, but such aircraft must be moved so that no more than two hex spaces can be between them and a friendly carrier until the enemy carriers are located.

Scouting

At the start of a player's turn, if enemy carriers have not been located, that player rolls the numbered six-sided die that was included in the game. The Yellow (American) Player modifies the die score by adding one to the rolled result.¹¹ A player that rolls a modified or unmodified score of six has located the enemy carriers. Players that do not have the required score to locate the enemy continue to check at the start of their respective turns. Any player unable to locate the enemy carriers through scouting rolls during the first five turns automatically knows the enemy carriers' location at the start of the sixth turn. Players might consider borrowing six-sided dice from other games to track how many scouting rolls they have made. Once a player has located the enemy carriers, attacks on those carriers may be launched. Note that the only way to locate an enemy is by rolling

the required modified or unmodified six at the start of one's turn; being attacked by an enemy that has located you doesn't tell you where they came from!

Midway Atoll

Midway is a unique target in this scenario. The IJN player must score three bomb hits to destroy its ground installations.¹²

- For the purposes of this scenario, bombs are loaded and represented in the game the same way torpedoes are, and any bombs loaded count against the limit of torpedoes available to the IJN player. Once a plane is designated as carrying a bomb, that bomb may only be dropped on Midway Atoll, i.e., it cannot later be used as a torpedo against a carrier if the player controlling the plane has a change of mind. To drop a bomb, the IJN player ends movement of a plane loaded with a bomb/torpedo over any of the five hex spaces occupied by Midway Atoll, and then announces that a bomb is dropped; doing so scores one hit.¹³ The torpedo token representing the bomb is removed from play, and the plane is returned to a friendly carrier (or, for the yellow player, back to Midway Atoll) as if it launched a torpedo.
- For the Yellow (American) player, planes based on Midway Atoll don't have to be lined up in sequential spaces as they would on an aircraft carrier.¹⁴ Midway-based planes can take off from or land on any of the five hex spaces the island occupies, and may load torpedoes from any part of the island before launching.

Cloud Banks

Planes may enter and leave cloud banks without hindrance.

Planes ending movement in hex spaces occupied by cloud banks cannot initiate a dogfight or drop bombs or torpedoes, nor can enemy planes initiate a dogfight with them.

Every time a player wins a dogfight, that player may move one of the cloud banks up to three hex spaces in any direction, simulating the effects of changing cloud cover. Note that when a cloud bank moves, any planes inside of it do not move with the cloud bank.¹⁵

VICTORY

Most wargames assume a winner-takes-all stance toward victory: the first side to attain an objective is the undisputed and total winner. This stance conflicts with history, however, as virtually all actual military conflicts are resolved in degrees of victory. These degrees include strategic victories that irreversibly shift the tide of a war, to tactical victories that only shift the tide slightly or delay the outcome, to pyrrhic "victories" that cause as much or more damage to the winner as the loser.

As a result, this scenario allows for up to three types of victory conditions. Players can agree in advance if only one, two, or all three types will apply for a given game. Applying

multiple victory types at the same time makes it possible for both players to win and lose in different ways during the same game.

The victory types are:

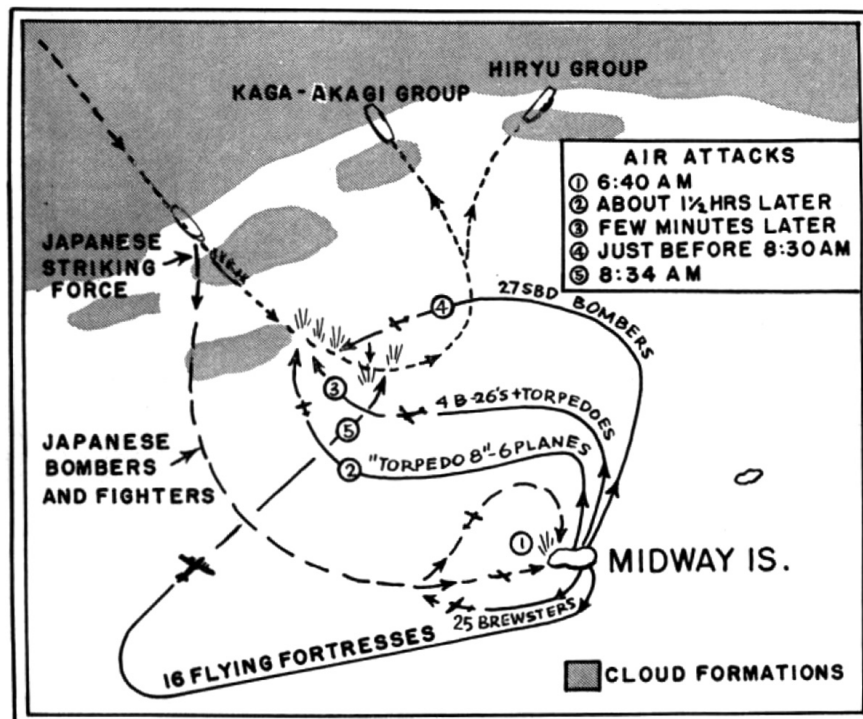
- Victory through Primary Objective Only. The simplest approach is to declare that the first player to achieve the greater objective - the destruction of all enemy aircraft carriers - is

based upon the condition of their forces when one side completes the primary objective: destroying all enemy carriers. Score five points for completing the primary objective, three for completing the secondary objective, one for each bomb or torpedo hit scored against the enemy during play, and one for each enemy plane removed from the game,

regardless of how they were removed. From this subtotal, players subtract one point for each of their own aircraft removed from the game, regardless of how they were removed. The player with the higher total wins the game.

Historical Victory. Since scenarios like this replay historical events that may diverge from the historical accounts during play, another dimension of victory could involve comparing the

performance of players' forces with their historical counterparts. Working from historical damage and casualty totals and using the same scoring system used for Degrees of Victory, the Yellow (American) Player needs to score 13 or more points, while the Red (Japanese) Player must score more than -2. Note that the -2 point total is not a typographical error; the Japanese were that soundly beaten during the actual battle.



This sketch, published in *All Hands Magazine* in 1943, details sorties flown by Midway-based aircraft.

Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

the winner. This method is how a normal game of Carrier Strike! is won, so both players should be familiar with it.

- Degrees of Victory. A second view accounts for the degrees of victory that are found in real warfare. A victory with virtually no damage or casualties is greater than one in which your own forces suffered as badly as the enemy. To simulate this reality, players tally a score

DESIGNER'S NOTES

1. The number of coincidences that made the American victory at Midway possible are too numerous to mention here, but consider these examples:

- The Japanese sent out search planes to locate the American aircraft carriers. Only one search plane was delayed by 30 minutes. The delayed plane was the one to discover U.S. forces. If that plane had not been delayed, the Japanese could very well have known the location of the American carriers 30 minutes earlier, resulting in a very different battle.
- About two hours after American search planes first located the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), the U.S. Navy (USN) submarine *Nautilus* launched torpedoes against the IJN aircraft carriers. The Japanese fleet detached the IJN Cruiser *Arashi* to engage the *Nautilus*. Hours later, after the *Arashi* failed to locate the *Nautilus*, it was steaming at high speed to catch up with the rest of the IJN Fleet. C.W. McClusky, the commander of a USN dive bomber attack, had been given inaccurate intelligence about the location of the IJN fleet; while searching for the enemy carriers, he spotted the *Arashi*, deduced that she was headed for the fleet, and used her course to find the enemy. If it were not for the timing of the *Nautilus*' attack and the *Arashi*'s return, McClusky never would have found the IJN Fleet.
- When McClusky did find the IJN Fleet, he didn't follow dive bomber doctrine regarding target selection, leading to some confusion among his pilots. Instead of dividing attacks evenly between the two carriers in sight, 27 of his 31 pilots attacked the IJN Carrier *Kaga*. Recognizing the confusion and also that the *Kaga* was beyond repair, the appropriately named R.H. Best took the rest of the dive bombers to attack the other carrier, IJN *Akagi*; Best scored only one hit, but it started a chain reaction of explosions that ultimately sunk the vessel. If it weren't for Best's clear thinking, the IJN would only have lost one carrier in that attack, leaving the IJN with far more strength for battling U.S. carriers.

2. The American player places forces on the board first for two reasons. First, Midway Atoll was in position long before any of the ships in this battle were built; secondly, American code breakers had deciphered most of the IJN communication code JN-25, and the USN Task Forces were lying in wait for the Japanese when the Battle of Midway began.



IJN *Akagi*, photographed weeks before the battle.

Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

3. The graphic representation of the island depicts the actual coastline of Midway Atoll, even if it is grossly out of scale. Positioning the graphic in this manner ensures that the island is oriented toward the Japanese Navy as it was during the historical battle. The goal here was to create components that would easily fit in the game box, but that would also leave no room for debate about what hex spaces could be targeted as Midway Atoll.

4. This placement loosely mirrors the historical starting position of the two USN strike forces, which met before the battle at "Point Luck," 325 nautical miles north of Midway Atoll. Admiral Chester Nimitz was in overall command of American forces from the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. His command included ground and air forces on Midway Atoll, jointly commanded by several U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine Corps officers; Task Force 16, commanded by Rear Admiral Spruance; and Task Force 17, commanded by Rear Admiral Fletcher.

5. The primary function of the identification cards is to help the players differentiate between the two USN Task Forces, as the historic offensive output and defensive ability of those task forces were unequal.

Task Force 16 included two carriers, the USS *Enterprise* and the USS *Hornet*, both of which were operating at full strength. By way of comparison, Task Force 17 had only one carrier, the USS *Yorktown*, which was so heavily damaged during the Battle of Coral Sea a month before this battle that the Japanese believed her to be sunk. The *Yorktown* actually needed about two weeks to be fully repaired, but crews at Pearl Harbor were able to make her seaworthy, but not fully operational, in only 36 hours. She was able to participate in the Battle of Midway, but clearly not at full strength.

Due to these circumstances, Task Force 17 begins play damaged, so both players need to clearly understand which yellow carrier represents Task Force 17. The cards for Task Force 16, Midway Atoll, and IJN forces are included to help create a sense of role and place for the players.

6. The battle was fought by Japan's First Carrier Striking Force, with Vice Admiral Nagumo in overall command. The striking force was composed of two divisions, each of which is represented by one aircraft carrier in this *Carrier Strike!* Scenario. One carrier represents the First Carrier Division, directly commanded by Nagumo, while the other represents the Second carrier Division, directly commanded by Rear Admiral Yamaguchi, who reported to Nagumo.

7. The primary reason to add cloud banks was to balance the game for the Red (Japanese) Player. Historically, Japanese pilots were more experienced and their aircraft more advanced than their American counterparts at this point in the war. If it wasn't for the dozens of variables that allowed the Americans to do so much damage in so little time, the IJN could easily have scored a decisive victory in the Battle of Midway, but the mathematics of the *Carrier Strike!* game didn't translate well when the primary and secondary objectives were defined. Consider this: in order to achieve both primary and secondary objectives, the Yellow Player only needs to score four torpedo hits, two on each red carrier. The Red Player needs to score six hits to achieve the primary and secondary objectives: three torpedoes (treated as bombs) on Midway Atoll, two torpedoes on Task Force 16, and one torpedo on Task Force 17. Plainly put, those requirements mean that the Red (Japanese) player has to hit with 50 percent of available torpedoes, while the Yellow (American) Player only needs to hit with 33 percent of available torpedoes.

Since both players start with the same number of torpedoes, a mechanic was needed to slightly increase the chances for red planes to hit with bombs or torpedoes, and/or evade destruction in dogfights. Allowing the Red (Japanese) player to place three of the four cloud banks helps to balance the mathematical odds against that player, while reflecting history more accurately.

8. Even though American code breakers had a fairly clear idea of the timing of the Japanese attack, Nimitz wanted to time his carrier-based attacks so that they occurred just after the initial IJN strike on Midway had returned to refuel and rearm. Thus, since the Americans chose to wait, the Japanese technically had the initiative at the start of the battle, so red goes first.

9. American reconnaissance planes were the first to discover the IJN Carrier Divisions. The IJN attacked Midway Atoll and Midway-based aircraft attacked IJN forces within the first hour of the battle, so allowing both sides to attack each other from the start of the game is appropriate.

10. Historically, Midway Atoll was never notified that American carriers were in the vicinity, to protect the secrecy of the operation. The defenders at Midway genuinely believed that they were facing the entire IJN invasion force alone. Of course, Admiral Nimitz isn't in charge of this game, so the Yellow player can make whatever choice seems appropriate about sending carrier-based planes to defend the atoll.

11. The American bonus to the scouting roll reflects the information obtained via code breaking. The Americans knew where the Japanese would be, but the Japanese were under the impression that the American carriers were still in Pearl Harbor. Moreover, when Nagumo finally did receive reports sighting American carriers, the initial reports were incomplete and inaccurate, so a scouting bonus for the Yellow (American) Player is appropriate.

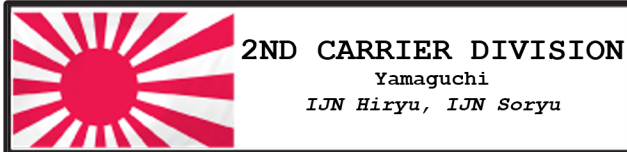
12. Midway Atoll requires three hits to destroy for three reasons: (1) the atoll occupies nearly as many hex spaces as two carriers, making it a more substantial target; (2) unlike a carrier, the island cannot take evasive action; and (3) historically, the initial Japanese strike on Midway was only a partial success, and the commander of the attack notified Nagumo that another strike would be necessary. The atoll should require more hits to destroy than a carrier to reflect these circumstances.

13. While Midway Atoll had some ground-based anti-aircraft batteries, these forces weren't even able to shoot down 10 percent of the Japanese aircraft that attacked the atoll, even with the help of ground-based, but admittedly obsolete, fighters. The atoll cannot shoot in this scenario to reflect that ineffectiveness.

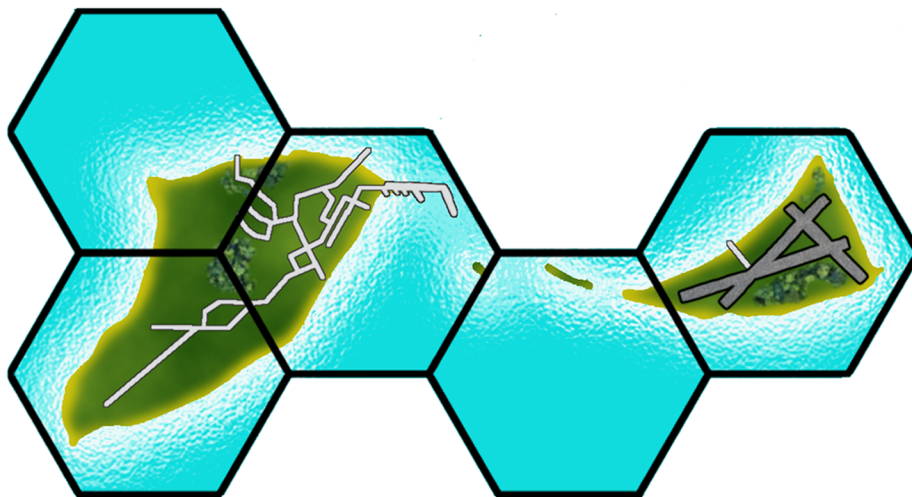
14. Midway Atoll featured multiple airstrips with relatively few aircraft, so "spotting" of planes in a specific order for takeoff - the way aircraft carriers had to, due to limited space on their flight decks - is unnecessary.

15. The cloud banks can move for several reasons: they shelter planes carrying torpedoes and/or bombs; moving clouds encourages players to dogfight and not just hide in the clouds, since the clouds can only be moved through dogfighting, and moving the clouds can expose enemy planes that were hiding in them.

Information Cards



Midway Atoll



Cloud Banks

