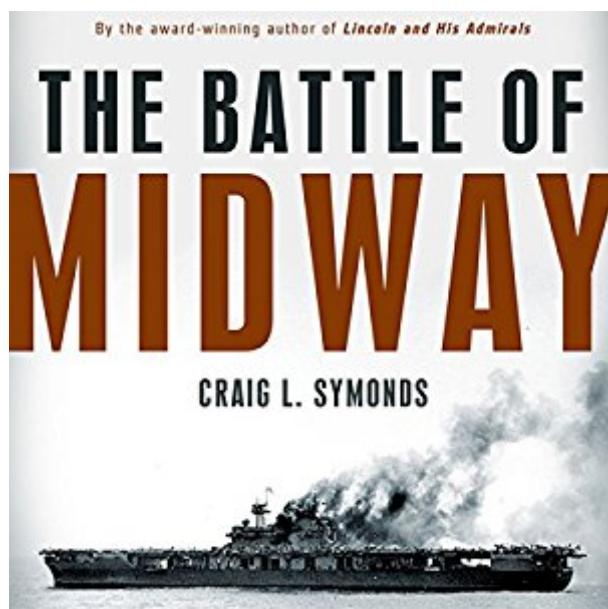


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The Battle Of Midway (Pivotal Moments In American History)



Synopsis

There are few moments in American history in which the course of events tipped so suddenly and so dramatically as at the Battle of Midway. At dawn of June 4, 1942, a rampaging Japanese navy ruled the Pacific. By sunset, their vaunted carrier force (the Kido Butai) had been sunk, and their grip on the Pacific had been loosened forever. In this absolutely riveting account of a key moment in the history of World War II, one of America's leading naval historians, Craig L. Symonds, paints an unforgettable portrait of ingenuity, courage, and sacrifice. Symonds begins with the arrival of Admiral Chester A. Nimitz at Pearl Harbor after the devastating Japanese attack and describes the key events leading to the climactic battle, including both Coral Sea - the first battle in history against opposing carrier forces - and Jimmy Doolittle's daring raid of Tokyo. He focuses throughout on the people involved, offering telling portraits of Admirals Nimitz, Halsey, Spruance, and numerous other Americans, as well as the leading Japanese figures, including the poker-loving Admiral Yamamoto. Indeed, Symonds sheds much light on the aspects of Japanese culture - such as their single-minded devotion to combat, which led to poorly armored planes and inadequate fire-safety measures on their ships - that contributed to their defeat. The author's account of the battle itself is masterful, weaving together the many disparate threads of attack - attacks which failed in the early going - that ultimately created a five-minute window in which three of the four Japanese carriers were mortally wounded, changing the course of the Pacific war in an eye-blink. Symonds is the first historian to argue that the victory at Midway was not simply a matter of luck, pointing out that Nimitz had equal forces, superior intelligence, and the element of surprise. Nimitz had a strong hand, Symonds concludes, and he rightly expected to win.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Craig Symond's new book may very well be the one that anyone deeply interested in its subject has long been waiting for--a book that tells the entire Midway story with all of the latter-day research and revelations that have enhanced or sometimes changed our understandings of the event. There are two good reasons for that. One, Symonds is an acclaimed professor emeritus from the U.S. Naval Academy, with over a dozen books on American naval and military history in print. But equally important if not more so, he relied very heavily on his association with the Battle of Midway Roundtable, an internet forum that for years has included scores of actual Midway veterans plus many of its premier historians and authors. For nitty-gritty details on any element of the battle, there is no better resource. But as you might expect from an author of this caliber, Symonds reached far beyond the internet for research. Primary sources include material in the National Archives and from the Naval War College, the Naval History and Heritage Command, and of course the Naval Academy. The references include the author's interviews with and oral histories by some of Midway's key participants, including Joseph Rochefort, Edwin Layton, Richard Best, John "Jimmie" Thach, Albert Ernest, N. J. "Dusty" Kleiss, and Donald "Mac" Showers. While an impressive source list like that can also be found in other books, Symonds has managed to couple them with an account of the battle that overcomes the criticisms commonly leveled at some of the less successful Midway authors. His book is a dual dose of thorough research and expert composition that should propel it toward the top of any critical listing of works on Midway.

When considering the truly pivotal events in American history, it is difficult to find many that are as significant as the battle of Midway. As Craig Symonds notes in his introduction, "there are few moments in American history in which the course of events tipped so suddenly and so dramatically as it did on June 4, 1942." For it was on that day that the United States Navy succeeded in smashing the heart of the Japanese carrier force that had so completely dominated the Pacific Ocean during the first six months of the war there, scoring a victory that changed the course of World War II. Symonds's book provides an account of this dramatic battle, as well as an understanding of the chain of events that led up to the clash between the American and Japanese fleets. One of the key factors he identifies early on is the growing presence of the "victory disease" infecting the thinking of Japanese naval officers. An increasing assumption of victory was perhaps understandable, though, given the successes Japanese forces enjoyed at the start of the war. Much

of this success was the consequence of the quality of Japanese equipment, as well as the demanding levels of training and previous combat experience of Japanese forces. Yet these advantages would prove to be temporary the longer the war wore on, as they were products of a system ill capable of replacing losses at the pace necessary. In the short term, though, Japan went from triumph to triumph, conquering southeast Asia and dominating Allied forces in the naval battles waged. Yet American commanders were determined to punch back.

Craig Symonds's newest book is a wonderful read for both those who know little about Midway or have read older accounts such as Walter Lord's *INCREDIBLE VICTORY* and Prange et al's *MIRACLE AT MIDWAY*. Though maybe not as dramatic as the former or detailed as the latter, it offers a great overview of the battle and the Pacific campaign that led up to it. While I am fairly new to the study of the battle, the book definitely has piqued my interest and most likely will do the same for any one else who picks it up to want to read more. Symonds has been able to pull together some of the more recent research about the battle (including Weisheit's conclusions about the true flight path of most of USS Hornet's squadrons) as well as helping to attack many of the myths we have long heard about Midway. Symonds is willing to share his own opinions of that conflict that clash with commonly held views about the battle. He is quite critical in his opinions of Mitscher's and Stanhope Ring's performances on June 4, 1942. However, after reading his evidence it is hard to disagree with his conclusions. Though this is part of the Pivotal Moments of American History series that often offer quite superficial approaches to the topic discussed, I was impressed by the detail and individual accounts. Some readers may get impatient as about a third to half of the book is devoted to the period immediately after Pearl Harbor to Midway. However, I found the author's accounts of Coral Sea and the Japanese foray into the Indian Ocean informative and useful setting up his great story. The only area that I wish were improved was the "postscripts type" section. As a reader who enjoys reading what happened to many of a book's participants, I found this too brief in the book.

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