

The Battle of Midway is considered by many experts as the “turning point” of World War II in the Pacific Theater. Whatever we may now consider as genius, strategy, heroics, or errors, all of these decisions were made by individuals with limited information and time. We have the luxury of looking back at the past to evaluate the battle with much of the information easily accessible online and through a multitude of historical sources.

Directions: Read the paragraph “Nagumo’s Dilemma” below. Then review the timeline of the Battle of Midway from the Japanese perspective on the next page. Explain which of these moments were responsible for the outcome of the battle.

Admiral Nagumo is in quite the predicament. He is the commander of the Kidō Butai, the powerful naval air force of the Empire of Japan. He is in charge of invading and capturing Midway Atoll, the first step in a plan to lure the US carriers into a deadly trap. He did not obey the instructions from his commanding officer, Admiral Yamamoto, and was now very close to losing the battle that he started. His decision to rearm his carrier strike team with land bombs put the lives of 97 other pilots at risk. Those men are on their way back to his ship from their first attack to rearm their aircrafts, and they plan to return to Midway for a second attack. However, he had just discovered that the US carriers which he was supposed to destroy, have discovered where he and the rest of the Kidō Butai are located. He needs to make a quick decision. Admiral Nagumo doesn’t have the time or the capability to land and replenish the Midway strike team while launching his carrier strike team simultaneously. His carrier ship can do only one thing at a time. He has two choices: send an immediate attack with the wrong kind of armament and risk 97 planes running out of fuel and crashing, or wait until the Midway attack team had lands and are ready to fight the enemy all together properly.

June 4th, 1942	Battle Timeline	Command Timeline
0400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0430 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 108 aircraft launched by Japan ○ 7 recon planes launched to scout for US carriers ○ No. 4 is 30 minutes late to take off 	
0500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0532 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ US Catalina spotted observing Kido Butai, element of surprise lost 	
0600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0620 – 0650 Strike on Midway [<i>All US land-based planes launched BEFORE attack had begun due to Catalina reconnaissance</i>] ○ 24 US fighters (18 Buffaloes and 6 Wildcats) defend islands against 36 enemy 	
0700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0700-0839 Midway Pilots attack Kidō Butai <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1st Attack --> 0710 – 0720 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 30 defending Zeros against 6 TBF Avengers (Navy) and 4 B-26 (Army) ▪ All misses ▪ B-26 attempts suicide bombing on Akagi, misses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0700 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lt. Tomonaga reports need for second strike • 0715 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nagumo decides to send reserve air group as 2nd strike to Midway – begins rearmament process

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2nd Attack --> 0753 – 0812 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 16 USMC SBD Dauntless against 9 defending Zeros ▪ Glide bombings only, no diving, all misses ▪ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0745 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No. 4 reports “10 enemy surface units” (no specifics given), rearmament order reversed • 0753 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attack by dive bombers risked the counterstrike takeoff
0800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3rd Attack --> 0810 – 0820 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 15 US B-17s attempt bombing from 20,000 ft., all misses ○ 4th Attack --> 0827 – 0837 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 11 US Vindicators against 11 defending Zeros ▪ USS Nautilus attacks Kirishima, misses, pursued by Destroyer Arashi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0820 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ US carrier confirmed as a part of the “10 surface units” • 0837 – 0910 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lt. Tomonaga’s strike team lands safely

<p style="text-align: center;">0900</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0917 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kidō Butai changes course to NE, heading right for the alleged enemy location • 0918 - 0937 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 15 Devestator bombers (VT-8) spotted and attack Kidō Butai • 0940 - 0958 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 14 Devestator (VT-6) bombers spotted and begin 2nd attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nagumo needed 40 minutes to launch his counterstrike on the US carrier position • The Combat Air Patrol fighter planes continue to land, replenish, and launch on the deck • The carrier strike team is fully fueled and armed but stuck below in the carrier hangars.
<p style="text-align: center;">1000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1010 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 6 Wildcats (VF-3) and 12 Devastators (VT-3) attack the Kidō Butai ○ “Thatch Weave” dogfighting technique used ○ Zeros led away from protecting carriers ○ All misses on carriers • 1022 - 1026 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 31 Dauntless dive bombers (VB-6,VT-6) attack Kidō Butai ○ VB-6 and VT-6 target and attack Kaga <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4 hits ▪ Full hangar cause series of explosions ○ Soryu targetted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 hits ▪ Full hangar cause series of explosions ○ Akagi targetted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1 hit ▪ Full hangar cause uncontrollable fire ○ Hiryu escapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counterstrike delayed

1. Based on this information given to you, what single moment do you believe secured victory for US forces? Why?

2. Which of Commander Nagumo's two choices would you have chosen to pursue had you been in his place? Explain and defend your answer using specific examples from the text.
