**EXCERPTS FROM "MIDWAY BY THE NUMBERS" BY J. WEDO AND T. SALADA**

Part of the study of any battle involves numbers, usually in terms of men and equipment. A good example of this is the aforementioned Battle of Jutland, which involved around 250 ships on both sides. Another good example is recital of the approximate numbers involved in the invasion of Normandy, France in June 1944, also known as D-Day: 6,000 naval craft, 13,000 planes, 150,000 men, and so forth. Further, Operation Citadel, which led to the Battle of Kursk in Russia in July 1943 involved, on both sides, upwards of three million men and 9,000 tanks. Such numbers are so large as to be almost incomprehensible, which is understandable because most persons have never seen anything that large. The numbers for the great naval battle of Midway are, for the most part, nowhere near that large, and understanding it might be easier as a result.

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Just as the Civil War Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863 set up the Battle of Chattanooga two months later, it should be impossible to study or discuss the Battle of Midway without starting with the Battle of the Coral Sea. As is known, this was the first battle in history between two carrier fleets in which aircraft did all the fighting. Neither side was really prepared for this.  This is like showing up for a football game and being told that your field of play is now about 16 football fields and you cannot see the other team.  Admirals now had to anticipate enemy movements two hours ahead instead of line of sight. This alone should tie it to Midway because Midway was the second such carrier battle and it occurred exactly one month later. But Coral Sea has hooks to Midway for four main reasons, which follow.

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Perhaps no action illustrates Nimitz’s determination better than his insistence on the quick repair of *Yorktown* that was damaged severely at Coral Sea. This act is an integral part of Midway historiography, but it is rarely emphasized as a winning character trait of Chester Nimitz. He knew from decoded intelligence that the IJN would sail four or five carriers and he knew that he would need that third carrier, *Yorktown*, to have a fighting chance. On her trip to Pearl, she sent a message indicating the damage and repair parts required along with repair estimates of up to three months. Per Nimitz’s written order voiding the safety rule on purging a ship’s aviation fuel (Avgas), *Yorktown* entered drydock. With a foot of water in the drydock, Nimitz in rubber waders joined engineers evaluating the damage to the hull. Despite the three-month repair estimate, he ordered the ship returned to sea with full air operations within 72 hours.

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Therefore, of 11 USN carrier squadrons in the morning attack, only seven found the KDB.  Most of the torpedo squadrons were shot down (36 of 41 airplanes) while scoring no hits, but the dive bombers hit their mark.  American dive bomber pilots trained hard in the two years that the Dauntless was in the fleet.  In both the morning and afternoon attacks on June 4, they had about a 30 percent hit rate, just about what they hit in training. An indicator of the quality of that training is that they were not being shot at in practice runs; yet, in these real attacks against Japanese ships, the air crews performed as well as they did in training. It is interesting to consider the potential damage if *Hornet’s* two (also highly inexperienced) dive bomber squadrons (around 35 planes) had also found the KDB.

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As stated above, Admiral Chester Nimitz had to fight the battle with what he had, but it goes beyond this. Not only did Nimitz decide to take a stand over Midway, but he fought the *only* battle that he could win. That was the beginning of his greatness in that war, deciding on fighting *that* battle *that* way. He had verified intelligence, he had the island and the three carriers, and he had the planes. They were not the best planes, but he had them. He knew the capabilities of his crews, and he fought the fight he was given with the weapons he had. In this, Nimitz joins the list of commanders who made the simple and important decision to fight the fight they could win: General Ulysses Grant’s campaign against the South in 1864 and General Bernard Montgomery’s attrition of the Afrika Korps at El Alamein in 1942 being two examples. This was all he could do, and at great cost, his forces vindicated his decision and themselves.