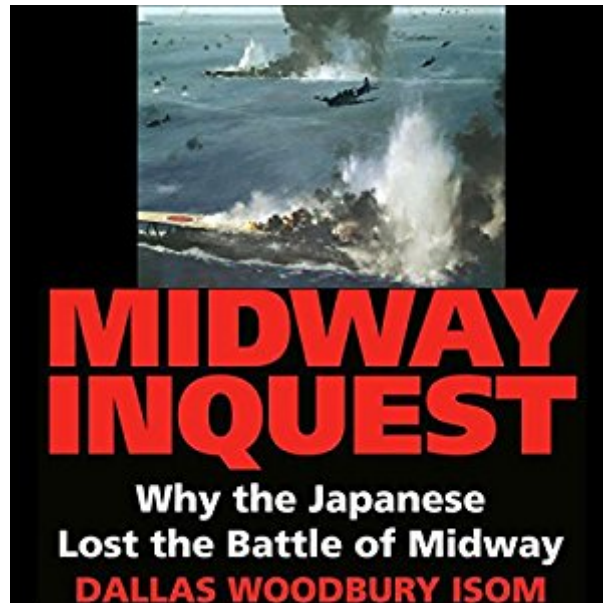


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Midway Inquest: Why The Japanese Lost The Battle Of Midway



Synopsis

Midway, the most famous naval battle in American history, has been the subject of many excellent books. However, none satisfactorily explain why the Japanese lost that battle, given their overwhelming advantage in firepower. While no book may ever silence debate on the subject, *Midway Inquest* answers the central mystery of the battle. Why could the Japanese not get a bomber strike launched against the American carrier force before being attacked and destroyed by American dive bombers from the *Enterprise* and *Yorktown*? Although it is well known that the Japanese were unable to launch an immediate attack because their aircraft were in the process of changing armament, why wasn't the rearming operation reversed and an attack launched before the American planes arrived? Based on extensive research in Japanese primary records, Japanese literature on the battle, and interviews with over two dozen Japanese veterans from the carrier air groups, this book solves the mystery at last.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book purports to shed new light on the Battle of Midway, but actually it is a smoke screen. It just might be the worst book on the Pacific War I have ever read. The basic problem is that the author explicitly set out to exonerate the senior Japanese officers who are traditionally assigned most of the blame for this crushing defeat. Isom accuses previous historians of treating Admiral Nagumo and his staff as "stupid" and "incompetent" -- a wild exaggeration. He then relies almost totally on the postwar interrogations and memoirs of these officers who had good reasons to misremember or fudge the nature and exact times of their actions. Sometimes this requires elaborate rationalizations to explain away conflicts between these sources and contemporary

documents. Like the former law professor he is, Isom defends the 1st Air Fleet's command decisions with every possible argument, including many that show a profound lack of understanding of how WWII navies operated and some that actually impeach the competence of the officers he claims to defend. For instance, Isom makes several impossible claims about the radio suit of Nagumo's flagship AKAGI. He claims that key intelligence reports transmitted from Tokyo were not received by AKAGI due to her small and badly positioned antennas, and small command island structures. Actually, all the Japanese fleet carriers had antenna arrays almost identical to those of US fleet carriers, supported on tall masts that were folded down only when planes were actually landing or launching. The size of the islands is irrelevant because the main radios of carriers were not located in the island structure, but below the flight deck.

This book is written in the form of a legal inquest to find out what happened. The author is to be commended for his massive research, inclusion of detail, and attempt to break down just what went wrong on the Japanese carriers minute by minute. The problem is that while he purports to be just searching for the truth in the facts, my impression is that this was written from the point of view of Admiral Nagumo's defense attorney, not an objective court. The author does a great service explaining the time-consuming process of rearming Kate Torpedo bombers, but I thought he jumped through a lot of hoops along the way to exonerate Nagumo. I agree with the other reviewer that "shattered sword" gave me a much better and easier to understand picture of how Japanese carriers operated, along with much of the same material on their doctrine. I also tend to agree with their conclusion that it was mostly over-confidence ("victory disease") from a string of endless victories and their belief that they would have to entice the Americans to fight, rather than realizing that the Americans might bring the fight to them. I also really did not care for the extensive wargaming and "what if" scenarios the author went off on at the end. Carrier warfare cannot be predicted that accurately. I also disagree that the Kate Torpedo bomber was the real "ship killer" in the war, especially when used against carriers. They were more vulnerable, hit a little less often, and while better at sinking a ship, they were probably less useful for quickly putting a carrier out of action by messing up the deck. Their explosive force damaged the ship deep down, and often did not even bother planes on deck or in the hangars. That was the really vulnerable area for a carrier.

Clearly, the Battle of Midway is the most chronicled single event in the U.S. Navy's history. Six decades of books, media productions and scholarly studies on it would seem to have covered every conceivable fact that can possibly be analyzed and reported. At this late date, then, researchers

face an intimidating challenge in coming up with anything new as to how and why the battle turned out as it did. *Midway Inquest* is author Dallas Isom's attempt to do just that, and he largely succeeds. Isom, a law professor at Willamette University, initially presented his thesis (that Japanese carrier admiral Chuichi Nagumo was befuddled by circumstances largely beyond his control) in 2000 via a detailed treatise in the Naval War College "Review." That article was something of a groundbreaker in Midway historiography, for it included a fresh analysis of certain key evidence coupled with original revelations that brought important new understandings of Nagumo's woes as the battle unfolded. *Midway Inquest* is the author's NWC article expanded into book form, with abundant supporting data and supplemental text. The book's subtitle, "Why the Japanese Lost the Battle of Midway," may appear rather simplistic to casual students of the battle, for those facts have long been assumed. But Isom believes that there is much more to the story, and that certain elements of the classic explanation for Japan's defeat at Midway are wrong. He bases his theories on several interviews with Japanese veterans and extensive review of primary documents in Japan. The result is two rather significant findings that Isom brings to the Midway discussion.

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