

The Eagle's Scream



Commemorative Air Force Florida Wing



Special Edition

June 6-7 2009

Special Edition

A Day of Remembrance

The Battle of Midway



A little before 6:00 A.M. on June 4 a PBY Catalina float plane droned through the bright morning sky. Lieutenant Howard B. Ady and his crew

had been searching a sector northwest of Midway since well before dawn. Then came the electrifying message from Ady's plane: PLANE REPORTS TWO CARRIERS, TWO BATTLESHIPS, BEARING 320 DEGREES, DISTANCE 180 MILES, COURSE 135 DEGREES, SPEED 25 KNOTS. Only an hour earlier Nimitz had asked Layton to give him a specific prediction of when and where the Japanese carriers would be first spotted. Layton swallowed hard and hazarded 0600, from the northwest at a bearing of 325 degrees, at a distance 175 miles from Midway. When Nimitz received the PBY's report in his operations room he could not resist tweaking his intelligence officer; turning to Layton he dryly commented, "Well, you were only five minutes, five degrees, and five miles out."

Fifteen minutes later a patrol of six Marine F4F Wildcat fighters from Midway ran headlong into

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D-Day



June 1944 was a major turning point of World War II, particularly in Europe. Although the initiative had been seized from the Germans some months before, so far the western Allies had been unable to mass sufficient men and material to risk an attack in northern Europe.

By mid-1944 early mobilization of manpower and resources in America was beginning to pay off. Millions of American men had been trained, equipped, and welded into fighting and service units. American industrial production had reached its wartime peak late in 1943. While there were still critical shortages -- in landing craft, for instance -- production problems were largely solved, and the Battle of the Atlantic had been won. Ever increasing streams of supplies from the United States were reaching anti-Axis fighting forces throughout the world.

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a hornet's nest -- an incoming wave of Japanese Zeros and bombers. Captain John F. Carey, leading the Wildcats, went after one of the bombers but was instantly struck in the legs by machine-gun fire from the tail gunner. He was able to make it back to Midway and land with both tires punctured, but with no strength in his legs he was unable to apply the brakes. The plane crashed into a revetment and two ground crewmen pulled him from the wreckage and wrestled him to cover -- just as the first bombs began to crash about the airfield. Most of the Midway fighter force consisted of slow and outmoded F2A-3 Buffalos, nicknamed "Flying Coffins," and they were no match for the Zeros. Buffalos were so slow that a Zero flying level could outpace a Buffalo in the steepest dive it could safely execute. In all, fifteen of the twenty-six Midway fighters were shot out of the sky; others landed in the midst of the Japanese bombing and were destroyed on the ground. Only two of the planes would ever fly again.

But Midway was better prepared with anti-aircraft armament, and that evened the score. Sixty-seven of the 108 Japanese attackers were destroyed or damaged so badly as to be put out of action. At 7:00 A.M. Lieutenant Joichi Tomonaga, leading the attack, urgently radioed Nagumo: another strike was needed. Nagumo agreed, then hesitated. Ninety-three aircraft aboard the carriers Akagi and Kaga had been held back from the first wave, fitted with torpedoes and armor-piercing bombs to be used against any American ships that might appear. But there were no reports of American ships; surely the U.S. carriers were still back at Hawaii. Nagumo hesitated a few more minutes, then finally gave the order to replace the planes' weapons with land-attack bombs. The process would take an hour.

Reconnaissance was not a strong point of the Japanese Navy. At 7:28 A.M. a float plane reported ten enemy ships; it took the plane another forty minutes to incorrectly identify them as cruisers and destroyers, and it was almost a full hour after his initial report that the pilot almost casually added: ENEMY FORCE ACCOMPANIED BY WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER. Alarmed, Nagumo ordered the armament changed out once again in preparation for a strike against the American carrier. But at that moment Tomonaga's returning strike force was circling and running dangerously

By the beginning of June 1944, the United States and Great Britain had accumulated in the British Isles the largest number of men and the greatest amount of materiel ever assembled to launch and sustain an amphibious attack. Strategic bombing of Germany was reaching its peak. In May 1943, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had given high priority to a Combined Bomber Offensive to be waged by the Royal Air Force and the U.S. Army Air Forces. By late summer 1943, Allied bombers were conducting round-the-clock bombardment of German industry and communications. In general, British planes bombed by night and American planes bombed by day. Whereas an air raid by 200 planes had been considered large in June 1943, the average strike a year later was undertaken by 1,000 heavy bombers.

After considerable study strategists determined to make the cross-channel attack on the beaches of Normandy east of the Cherbourg Peninsula. Early objectives of the operation were the deep-water ports at Cherbourg and at Brest in Brittany.

Three months before D-Day, a strategic air campaign was inaugurated to pave the way for invasion by restricting the enemy's ability to shift reserves. French and Belgian railways were crippled, bridges demolished in northwestern France, and enemy airfields within a 130-mile radius of the landing beaches put under heavy attack. Special attention was given to isolating the part of northwestern France bounded roughly by the Seine and Loire Rivers. The Allies also put into effect a deception plan to lead the Germans to believe that landings would take place farther north along the Pas de Calais.

Opposed to the Allies was the so-called Army Group B of the German Army, consisting of the Seventh Army in Normandy and Brittany, the Fifteenth Army in the Pas de Calais and Flanders, and the LXXXVIII Corps in Holland -- all under command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Commander of all German forces in western Europe was Field Marshal von Rundstedt who, in addition to Group B, also had at his disposal Group G composed of the First and Nineteenth Armies. In all, Von Rundstedt commanded approximately fifty infantry and ten Panzer divisions in France and the Low Countries.

low on fuel, waiting to land. They would have to be recovered first, refueled, and relaunched before the bombers could be brought up to the flight decks -- still more maddening delay.



In command of TF 16 was Admiral Raymond Spruance, who had taken Halsey's place at the last minute when Halsey had been packed off to a Honolulu hospital suffering from an odd dermatitis that covered his entire body. Spruance was almost the opposite of the pugnacious

Halsey, a cerebral and even cautious commander with cool, steady judgment. But in the Battle of Midway, Spruance stretched "calculated risk" to the limit. When the Japanese Striking Force was located, Spruance quickly determined that it would be several hours before he would be in the best position to launch his planes. He decided not to wait; risking everything, he let loose with an all-out attack at once. Spruance knew that striking immediately would increase the odds of catching the Japanese ships at their point of maximum vulnerability, just as they were recovering the Midway strike force. He also knew it meant that his own torpedo bombers would run out of fuel before they could make it back to their ships. With luck they might be able to land at Midway; more likely, they would have to ditch their planes and make the best of it.

The Japanese had already dodged a series of ineffectual attacks from Midway-based B-17 and B-28 bombers and outmoded SBU Vindicator dive bombers (the pilots of the latter sardonically called them "Wind Indicators" for their habit of spinning around when landing in a crosswind). The American carriers were equipped with more modern aircraft, but these at first seemed destined to the same fate as the Midway force. Three squadrons of TBD Devastator torpedo bombers were cut to pieces by antiaircraft fire and by the swarm of fifty Zeros protecting the Japanese fleet. It was almost a massacre: Of the forty-one planes that attacked, only four made it back. But just as the melee was ending at about 10:20 A.M., forty-nine SBD Dauntless bombers from Yorktown

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Despite unfavorable weather forecasts, General Eisenhower made the decision to attack on June 6, 1944. At 0200 that morning one British and two American airborne divisions were dropped behind the beaches in order to secure routes of egress from the beaches for the seaborne forces. After an intensive air and naval bombardment, assault waves of troops began landing at 0630. More than 5,000 ships and 4,000 ship-to-shore craft were employed in the landings. British forces on the left flank and U.S. forces on the right had comparatively easy going, but U.S. forces in the center (Omaha Beach) met determined opposition. Nevertheless, by nightfall of the first day, large contingents of three British, one Canadian, and three American infantry divisions, plus three airborne divisions, had a firm foothold on Hitler's "fortress Europe."

A Brief History of the CAF

Colonel Jim Bannerman

The Commemorative Air Force is probably the best-known collection of flyable WWII aircraft in the world. As with many aviation museums its beginning was humble. In 1957 a group of pilots in El Paso, Texas bought a P51 Mustang and ferried it to a small airstrip in Mercedes, Texas. Later that year they painted the words "Confederate Air Force" on the fuselage and the organization was born. As interest grew, two Grumman Bearcats were purchased from the U.S. Navy at Litchfield Park near Phoenix Arizona and ferried back to Mercedes to join the P51.

In 1960 the CAF took on a more formal status when the objectives of the organization were stated: "... to preserve in flying condition a complete collection of combat aircraft of all military services of the United States in World War II". All members of the CAF were given the rank of Colonel and the mythical Jethro E. Culpeper was made leader. Visits were made to Litchfield Park and the Air Force base at Davis-Monthan where WWII aircraft were being scrapped. By 1963 ten types of Navy and Air Force fighter aircraft had been acquired. A Bell King Cobra helicopter was found in Honduras and a Republic Thunderbolt fighter/bomber was found

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and Enterprise slipped in unnoticed at fourteen thousand feet.

Lieutenant Commander Clarence Wade McClusky, air group commander of the Enterprise, had led thirty-two of the Dauntlesses to the Japanese fleet's last reported position only to find empty ocean. Running short of fuel, he at last spotted the wake of a Japanese destroyer and decided to follow it. The decision paid off: A few minutes later, and there below him, in full view, were Kaga and Akagi. McClusky pushed his nose down, heading straight for the carriers in a seventy-degree dive. Kaga, its deck crowded with planes and scattered with armament and fuel lines, took a direct hit. The ship's communications officer hurried toward the bridge to urge the captain to move to safety; then two more bombs struck, and when he looked again the bridge was gone. Akagi's deck went up in a chain reaction of exploding planes and armament. Commander Minoru Genda, air officer of the First Air Fleet, who had been confined to bed with pneumonia and who had dragged himself, feverish, to the bridge to watch his air crews launch the first wave, now surveyed the carnage and uttered a single word of ironic understatement: Shimatta -- "we goofed."



The carrier Soryu meanwhile was hit twice by the Dauntless squadron from Yorktown, led by Lieutenant Commander Maxwell F. Leslie. The ship erupted in flames so intense that the hangar doors melted. The fourth Japanese

carrier, Hiryu, shrouded in haze, escaped for the moment, and she at least would have her revenge. Hiryu immediately launched an attack against the Yorktown; one bomb smashed through the ship's side and sailed through the coffee urn in the ready room before lodging in the stack and exploding, knocking out five of the boilers and slowing the ship from thirty knots to a crawl. A series of torpedo hits finished her off, and the order to abandon ship was given at 2:55 P.M.

in Nicaragua. With the exception of the Bell Air Cobra all were in flying condition.

At the first annual air show on March 10, 1963 the decision was made to include in the collection all combat aircraft of US origin. Six Canadian RCAF T-6s and a North American Mitchell B-25 were added to the collection and participated in air shows around Texas. A B-26 Invader medium bomber joined the Mitchell in 1964 and the CAF First Bomb Wing was established. By 1967 a B-17 Flying Fortress and a B-24 Liberator as well as a Havoc and a Marauder had joined the Bomb Wing.

In 1966 a permanent hangar was built at Mercedes and the CAF had a real home. The organization grew as members joined from all over the world. Foreign aircraft were added to the fleet and a Spitfire came from England, a Mosquito from Canada and five Spanish-built Messerschmitt Bf 109s were purchased from the Spanish Air Force. As the collection grew the facilities at Mercedes became over crowded and the organization accepted an invitation from the city of Harlingen Texas to relocate to its International Airport. Three hangars were allocated by the city. One was used for the fighters, one for the Bomb Wing and the third for a maintenance facility. An adjacent WWII Army Air Corps office building was converted to house an Officers Club and an indoor museum.

In 1970 CAF Wings were established throughout the United States and several foreign countries. There are currently 71 wings of which our Florida wing is one. The fleet currently numbers in excess of 140 aircraft including the only remaining Twin Mustang in flying condition in the world. In 1971 a B-29 Super Fortress joined the fleet after having spent 17 years in the California desert. It is one of only two in flying condition and appears regularly in air shows around the country (although it is presently down for engine maintenance).

The Florida Squadron of the CAF was founded in 1995 by Robert Robbins, Richard Russell, Fred McKaig and Richard Kelso, and was operated out of a small rented hangar at the Deland airport. There were 27 charter members and Dick Russell was elected Squadron Leader.

But the American forces would have the final word that fateful day. All airworthy dive bombers left on the Enterprise, twenty-four planes, were ordered out against Hiryu. No fighter escort could be spared; they had to remain to protect the American ships. At 4:45 P.M. the dive bombers spotted the enemy, and four bombs set her ablaze. In the space of a day, four of the six carriers that had launched the attack against Pearl Harbor had been destroyed. Japan lost more than three hundred aircraft and three thousand men. Yamamoto had obtained his decisive confrontation.

Nagumo kept the news from Yamamoto as long as he dared; when the Commander in Chief was finally told that his gamble had failed, he sank into a chair stunned and speechless. Demoralized and hesitant, Yamamoto at first ordered a cruiser bombardment of Midway for the following morning, then countermanded it. Yamamoto's huge battleship force, stripped of its air cover, was now like a short-armed, muscle-bound boxer. It could only land a blow against an opponent who grappled in a close embrace, and Spruance prudently kept his distance, pulling back to the east through the night to where he could still threaten with his aircraft without being threatened by Japanese guns. Yamamoto's huge battle force still outgunned the Americans by orders of magnitude. But with his carriers gone, he was left with no choice but to retire from the battlefield.



Editors Note

The information for the *Battle of Midway* and *D-Day* articles were obtained from the following web sites:
<http://www.worldwar2history.info/Midway/>
<http://www.worldwar2history.info/D-Day/>

In November 1996 the Squadron acquired the L-17 from the Mayor of Sanibel Island who had made a gear-up landing. Previous to that it was owned by the Lake of the Ozarks flying school. The airplane was disassembled at the Ft Myers airport and transported to our Squadron hangar by Colonels Steve Moddle, Earl Leone and Lou Calobrisi. After extensive rebuilding by the CAF members, our L-17, N2995C flew for the first time as a CAF airplane in March 2002. In 2007 Colonel Bob Kline donated his L-17 to the organization. These two aircraft regularly fly to air shows thru out the state to represent the Florida Wing of the CAF.

The Squadron achieved Wing status on April 19, 1997 and construction of a new 5,000 sq.ft. hangar was begun in 2003. The wing moved into the new hangar in the fall of 2005. The hangar, which includes a conference area and kitchen, also houses the Bob Robbins Memorial Library. The Robbins family donated Bob's extensive memorabilia collection including hundreds of books, movies, audio tapes and videos to the library. This library is open to the general public for research and reading enjoyment, and its contents are available to the public on the Wing's website: www.caffl.org.

In May 2006 the CAF assigned a former Navy TBM torpedo bomber to the Florida Wing for restoration and eventual operation. This huge aircraft served with the U.S. Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force. It was later used in the fire fighting service in Canada. An earlier restoration effort was started by a private individual, who subsequently donated the project to the CAF, before it was assigned to the Florida Wing. The TBM is powered by a 1900 horsepower engine, is over 40 feet long and has a wingspan of 52 feet. Its weight is 18,250 pounds while carrying a bomb or torpedo load of 2,000 pounds. It is estimated that it will require between 7 and 10 years and over \$100,000 to completely restore this aircraft to flying condition, thus providing ample challenges for the expanding membership of the Florida Wing.



You Can be Part of the Fun if you Join the CAF



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List CAF members, if any, with whom you are acquainted _____

Print name as you would like it to appear on name tag _____

OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE

1. **To acquire**, restore, and preserve in flying condition a complete collection of combat aircraft which were flown by all military services of the United States, and selected aircraft of other nations, for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations of Americans.
2. **To construct** or obtain museum buildings for the permanent protection, maintenance, and display of these historic aircraft, period artifacts, and documents as a tribute to the thousands of men and women who built, serviced, and flew them and to build and organize the "Combat Airman Hall of Fame."
3. **To perpetuate** the spirit in which such combat aircraft were flown in the defense of our nation, in the memory and hearts of all Americans.
4. **To establish** an organization having the dedication, enthusiasm, and Esprit de Corps necessary to operate, maintain, and preserve these aircraft as symbols of our American Military Aviation Heritage.

Payment Information

- **Please remit a total of \$275 with this application. (Annual dues are \$200.00 for National membership with an additional \$75 for Florida Wing Dues).**

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Annual membership dues of \$200.00 include \$30.00 for a 1-year subscription to Dispatch magazine. If you do not wish to receive Dispatch please check here. (Membership dues will remain \$200.00)

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The COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE is a self-supporting, all-volunteer organization. It is non-profit, tax-exempt and incorporated under the laws of the State of Texas for charitable and educational purposes. You do not need to be a pilot or military veteran to become a member of the CAF. Candidates must be 18 years of age or older.

I certify that the statements made by me in this application are true, to the best of my knowledge and belief, and are made in good faith. I will give my full support to the aims and objectives of the COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE and will assist the General Staff in attaining these goals.

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CAF Aircraft Sponsor Program

The Sponsor Program makes this collection of airplanes possible and is largely responsible for their continued preservation. Those who sponsor the aircraft will have the privilege of serving as ground or flight crew members if they wish and can qualify. Costs of sponsorships range from \$150.00 to \$10,000.00. You do not need to be a pilot or mechanic to sponsor an aircraft or participate in its operation. For more information, please call Headquarters at 432-563-1000.