

## **The Battle of Midway by Craig L. Symonds**

### **Reviewed by Walter Zapotoczny**

Craig L. Symonds is Professor of History Emeritus at the United States Naval Academy and uses U.S. Naval Pacific Theater Action Reports, National Archives material and Operational Reports from World War II, oral histories and interviews, correspondence, and published collections to take a comprehensive approach to the subject. The book covers the activities and planning of the United States and Japan from Pearl Harbor attack, the decisions leading to Midway and culminates in the ensuing battle. Symonds provides the reader with a comprehensive study of one of the most important battles in the Pacific during World War II. Symonds includes maps throughout the text to help the reader follow the action. The author includes detailed appendices that list details about the ships, personal, orders of battle and plans of the opposing forces.

Professor Symonds provides the reader with a wealth of new facts and reasons why each side performed the way they did. The author weaves personal accounts into the narrative that add the human-interest aspect to the story. Symonds gives credit to those who have researched the battle before him and acknowledges their contributions. *The Battle of Midway* is part of Oxford University Press' Pivotal Moments in American History series. In the introduction to his book, Craig Symonds writes, "there are few moments in American history in which the course of events tipped so suddenly and dramatically as it did on June 4, 1942." The battle is considered by many as the turning point in the war in the Pacific.

Symonds begins the story six months prior to the actual battle of Midway, when Admiral Chester Nimitz arrived in Hawaii to take command of the Pacific Fleet after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. The Pacific Fleet was in disorder with battleships and other ships run aground, sunk at their moorings and also turned upside down. President Roosevelt had stated that despite the Japanese attack, the United States would be involved in the European war to defeat Hitler first. Even as morale was low among the soldiers and sailors in the Pacific, there were submarines, aircraft carriers and destroyers that could be used for battle. Admiral Nimitz began using them on hit and run raids against Japanese posts across the eastern and southern Pacific. Nimitz wanted to ensure that lines of communication were open to Australia.

In chapter two, Symonds describes the conquests of the *Kidō Butai* (Mobile Force), the all-powerful Japanese carrier force, which had attacked Pearl Harbor and the Japanese strategy. The Japanese had managed to extend their reach south to Singapore and Indonesia and into the Indian Ocean. They were poised to extend their reach into New Guinea by late May 1942. The author gives the reader a look at Japanese culture and their devotion to combat. Symonds identifies how the Japanese devotion to combat, in some ways, led to planes that were poorly armed and ships with inadequate fire control systems.

Symonds recounts the Battle of the Coral Sea and the affect it had on the battle of Midway shortly after. The Japanese Navy sank USS Lexington, USS Sims, and USS Neosho, and damaged USS Yorktown. The Japanese only lost one small carrier, IJN Shoho and suffered damage to a fleet carrier IJN Shokaku. Along with the loss of a carrier was the loss of experienced Japanese pilots who would not be available for the Battle of Midway. The *Kidō Butai* planned for six carriers at Midway, but only had four available. Symonds explains how Admiral Nimitz gained a new understanding and appreciation for the signal's intelligence team. They would play a critical role during the battle of Midway.

In chapter five, "Seeking the Decisive Battle," Symonds describes the Japanese strategic options in the spring of 1942. He gives the reader an extensive understanding of the Japanese plans and the dilemma they faced after not finding the American carriers and destroying them at Pearl Harbor. Symonds goes on to describe the USS Hornet and the raid on Japan by Jimmy Doolittle's B-25 bombers. The reader is given an interesting account of signals intelligence and the breaking of the Japanese naval code.

Symonds describes the battle of Midway from the pre-war buildup by Japan, through the planning stages and the actual battle. The author gives the reader a look at the character of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto and his tactics. Symonds details the re-building of the Pacific Fleet under the command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and the leadership of Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest J. King.

Dr. Craig L. Symonds has written an excellent account of the battle that changed the course of the war in the Pacific. Approximately one-third of the book is a detailed account of the actual battle, while two-thirds of the book provides the reader with a suburb account of the events leading up to the battle.

In *The Battle of Midway*, the reader finds the story from the perspectives of the Japanese and the American sides. Symonds includes the stories of the prominent figures and the sailors at the lowest level. He also offers a look at the contributions made by code-breakers and those tasked with interpreting intelligence information. In the epilogue, Symonds tells the stories of the principal participants after the battle occurred. The book's emphasis focuses on people rather than just events. Anyone who has served on a naval staff can appreciate the operational details Symonds adds to his account. The photographs, charts and references are easy to follow and provide the reader with the ability to follow the story easily. This is a riveting account of the battle of Midway and anyone interested in naval history, the war in the Pacific or Japanese strategy will find it valuable.