

Battle Of Midway

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This film, which won the 1942 Academy Award for Best Documentary, was made by John Ford, a commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve at the time and on temporary duty at Midway Island during the battle as a photographic and intelligence officer. While shooting 16 mm color footage from atop the island's power plant, Ford was exposed to enemy fire by attacking aircraft and wounded in the arm by shrapnel. He received a Purple Heart and later the Legion of Merit.

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Video:  Battle of Midway

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khVf0NlePFM>

Read the related article: Fighting the War

Transcript:

Audio Transcript

(00:22) [Words on screen]

This is the actual photographic report of the Battle of Midway. In number of surface and aircraft destroyed it is the greatest naval victory of the world to date. The following authentic scenes were made by the U.S. Navy photographers.

Narrator 1(00:53)

A Navy patrol plane. Routine patrol. Only behind every cloud may be an enemy.

Narrator 1(01:14)

Midway Island. Not much land, right enough, but it's our outpost. Your front yard.

Narrator 1(02:13)

These are the natives of Midway. Tojo has sworn to liberate them.

Narrator 1 (02:38)

The birds seem nervous. There's something in the air. Something behind that sunset.

Narrator 1 (03:26)

Excitement this morning. The storm patrol have sighted an enemy fleet. During the night, flying fortresses have landed at Midway.

Narrator 2 (03:40)

An historic council of war is held.

Woman (03:52)

That fellow's walk looks familiar. My neighbor's boy used to amble along just like that. Say, is that one of them flying fortresses?

Narrator 2 (04:04)

Yes ma'am, it is.

Woman (04:17)

Why, it's that young Will Kenny. He's from my hometown, Springfield, Ohio. He's not going to fly that great big bomber?

Narrator 2(04:25)

Yes ma'am, that's his job. He's a skipper.

Woman (04:28)

Well his dad is an engineer. Thirty-eight years on the old Ironton Railroad. And his mother. Well she's just like the rest of us mothers in Springfield or any other American town. And his sister, Patricia. She's about as pretty as they come.

Narrator 2(04:45)

I'll say so.

Woman (04:50)

Well Junior Kenny. Good luck. God bless you, son.

Narrator 1 (05:51)

Suddenly, from behind the clouds, the Japs attack!

(06:11) [Men in unison]

There go the Marines!

Narrator 1 (07:24)

Yes. This really happened.

Narrator 1 (09:25)

Meantime our war ships stop the Jap fleet.

Narrator 1 (09:57)

Then suddenly, the trap is sprung!

Narrator 1 (10:14)

Navy planes roared from the decks of our carriers. Army bombers, Marines. *Thunder* destruction over a three-mile battle area.

Narrator 1 (11:25)

The invasion forces were hit and hit and hit again.

Narrator 2(11:38)

Men and women of America, here come your neighbor's son, home from the day's work. You want to meet them. There's Jimmy Patch. Seven Meatballs on his plane. How many more today, skipper?

Pilot (12:00)

[Signals four]

Narrator 1 (12:28)

Back at Midway, Tojo swore he'd liberate the natives.

Narrator 2 (12:36)

But they're just as free as they ever were.

Narrator 1 (13:09)

The Battle of Midway is over. Our front yard is safe. But a big job is still to be done. Day after day our patrol planes search for survivors. Every tiny coral reef, every distant mile of sea. Search for men who fought to the last round of ammunition, and flew till the last drop of gas, and then crashed into the sea. Eight days. Nine days. Ten days without food or water.

Narrator 2 (13:41)

His first cigarette. Boy that first drag sure tastes good.

Narrator 1 (13:48)

Eleven days. Well done Mathy Hughes. Logan Ramsey. Frank Fesler. That's thirteen for Frank.

Woman (14:47)

Get those boys to the hospital. Please do, quickly. Get them to clean cots and cool sheets. Get them doctors and medicine. A nurse's soft hands. Get them to the hospital. Hurry! Please.

Narrator 1 (15:04)

There was a hospital. Clean, orderly, a hundred beds. And on its roof the red cross plainly marked. The symbol of mercy the enemy was bound to respect.

Narrator 2(15:22)

The next morning divine services were held beside a bomb crater that had once been a chapel.

Narrator 1 (15:33)

At eventide, we buried our heroic dead. The last salute from their comrades and their officers.

Narrator 1 (16:03)

Captain *Simad* of the Navy. Colonel *Shannon*.

Narrator 2 (16:15)

Major Roosevelt.

(17:24) [Words on screen]

Four Japanese carriers sunk. 28 Jap battleships, cruisers, destroyers sunk or damaged. 300 Japanese aircraft destroyed.

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