



Mission: History

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1945: Okinawa Secured After 72 Bloody Days

On 22 June 1945 Marine Corps Major General Roy S. Geiger announced Okinawa secured and a formal flag-raising ceremony took place. After a bitter 72-day fight, the final stepping-stone to the Japanese home islands had been won.

The costs had been enormous. More than 4,900 sailors and 3,443 Marines were killed or missing in action and another 4,824 sailors and 16,017 Marines were wounded. Thirty-four ships and other vessels had been sunk and another 368 damaged, mostly by Kamikazes, and the Navy lost 763 aircraft. No other campaign in World War II had cost the Navy so dearly.

The cost to the Army was no less severe. Its casualties were 7,613 killed or missing and 31,807 wounded.

The Japs paid a much higher price to defend Okinawa, with 107,539 killed and another 23,764 buried alive in

(Continued on page 3)

1942: MIDWAY



JAPANESE SUBMARINE *I-168* issues the *coup de grâce* to *Yorktown* on 6 June. One torpedo broke destroyer *Hamman* in half and two exploded simultaneously on the carrier.

America's Trafalgar; Pivotal, Not Decisive

Midway is America's Trafalgar and both are spoken of in the same way — simply "Midway" or "Trafalgar." The words "Battle of" are implied, but rarely heard.

Another characteristic shared by the two actions is, despite the totality of victory for the U.S. Navy at Midway and the Royal Navy at Trafalgar, neither battle was decisive.

Following Midway, the Japanese navy still held a significant edge in all types of ships over the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and it would be more than two years until the Jap navy was decisively defeated at Leyte Gulf and a third year until Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

While England annihilated the combined French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, she lost her commander and had yet to fight the French in the Mediterranean. Waterloo was 10 years away.

Both battles were pivotal in that the directions of the wars changed. The sports page cliché "momentum" is appropriate here. At Midway, momentum changed with dramatic swiftness. While the two forces were still in the same part of the ocean, the Japanese were joined by two light carriers from their Aleutian force, giving them three ships of that class against the Americans' two remaining carriers with their depleted aircraft. In surface combatants and submarines, the Japs enjoyed overwhelming superiority.

But the Japanese turned away — the momentum had changed. And it stayed

(Continued on page 4)

1898: Leathernecks Take Gitmo; Navy Gets Base

"American admiral Sampson seizes of the bay of Guantánamo, and to the following day they disembark there near for the first time 600 North American infants of navy."

"Hardly they step on Cuban earth are attacked with violence by Spanish forces in the Cuzco and Playa of the East."

That translation from the Spanish of the events of 10 June 1898, by a Spanish-speaking translator, omits a few details. Moreover, those "infants of navy" were United States Marines.

On 6 June, Rear Admiral William T. Sampson, commanding a squadron

blockading Santiago, Cuba, detached the cruiser *Marblehead*, Cdr. B. H. McCalla, and the auxiliary *St. Louis* to investigate Guantánamo Bay as a possible naval base.

On arriving in the bay at dawn, McCalla noted Spanish soldiers gathered near a building on a hill and promptly razed the structure with 5-inch and 6-pounder fire. A Spanish gunboat, intending to face the American ships, retired when the size of *Marblehead's* guns were realized.

McCalla's first move was to cut all communications cables leading from Guantánamo, cutting it off from the rest

(Continued on page 4)

1794: The Glorious First of June -

Howe Defeats Villaret-Joyeuse, or Does He?

Huge Grain Convoy Allowed to Reach Desperate French

It was the worst of times for France, the spring of 1794. Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety and its Reign of Terror were in full madness with the incessant crash of the guillotine that would not end until July 27, with its architect's head in the basket.

Moreover, the state was impoverished, much of its treasure had disappeared with the departing royalty, and it was near famine because of the failure of crops, from both weather and negligence.

An immense convoy, laden with American grain, lay in Chesapeake Bay and would sail for France with a modest escort, hoping to avoid detection by the English. A formidable French fleet under Admiral Louis-Thomas Villaret-Joyeuse would screen the convoy from any English fleet sent to destroy it.

An English fleet under Admiral Lord Richard Howe sailed out into the Atlantic where it was hoped the French main fleet could be brought to battle. Rear Admiral George Montagu, with a smaller group, was to guard the French coast after completing escort duty with an English convoy. Ideally, the French fleet could be dealt with by Howe and the grain convoy caught in a vise between Howe and Montagu.

Howe found Villaret-Joyeuse on 28 May at about 14° west longitude, about 400 nautical miles west of Land's End, and engaged briefly, with *Audacious* and *Révolutionnaire* being so badly damaged they were sent back to England and France respectively.

On the 29th, Howe was still to leeward but was determined to gain the weather gage by breaking through the French line. His lead ship, *Caesar*, failed in the attempt due to wretched seamanship on the part of her captain but Howe, in *Queen Charlotte*, went



MATHER BROWN'S FAMOUS PAINTING of the battle, with all officers in their best dress uniforms. Left to right: Lord Howe; Lt. Boycott of the Queen's Regiment; Lt. Walter Lock, R.N.; Lt John Neville of the Queens Regiment, slain; Sir Andrew Douglas.
British National Maritime Museum

through in company with *Leviathan* and *Bellerophon*. Again, the action was short, but three French ships were rendered unfit for further fighting.

The 30th was shrouded in fog, though Howe kept contact with Villaret-Joyeuse, who was reinforced with five ships, giving him the edge, and on the 31st Howe held off to make certain his captains understood his intentions.

It will be well to digress here to note that it was Howe who first devised a book of signals, in which the evolutions of battle were encoded as simple flag signals. This, for the first time in naval warfare, allowed commanders to issue orders without the need to spell out every word. It was unfortunate that not all of his captains had made themselves familiar with those signals.

Following breakfast on 1 June, Howe ordered signal No. 34 to be hoisted. That meant that having the advantage of the wind, he intended to sail at the enemy line abreast, pass through the enemy line and engage from leeward. He expected that every ship could take a prize. As it was, only six ships carried out the order perfectly, but six prizes were taken.

An hour later, signal No. 36 was hoisted, instructing each ship to steer for and engage her opponent in the enemy's line, and finally, at 9:30, signal No. 5 was flown — to engage.

In Howe's signal book is the notation "If closer, a red pennant over the flag," and he made certain a red pennant flew over the number 5.

At 12:25, the action was over and

(Continued on next page)



KING GEORGE III, his family and much of his court on board HMS *Queen Charlotte* at Spithead on 26 June 1794. The king presented Lord Howe with a diamond-hilted sword and gold chain in recognition of his defeat of the French in The Glorious First of June. Notably missing from the celebration were Howe's captains, who had rowed the royal entourage to the flagship. Captain Cuthbert Collingwood wrote that the king "knew of no honour the officers of the Navy had received by his presence unless sitting in a boat for four hours was an honour."

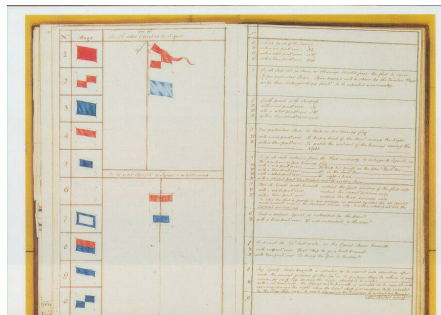
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signal No. 102 was hoisted, ordering the ships to close with the Admiral forthwith. Howe had won a significant tactical victory against a strong opponent with a heavier weight of guns. On 2 June, he wrote a brief report and sent it on ahead of the fleet, so that by the time he reached Spithead church bells were ringing and throngs greeted him. The victory was already being called The Glorious First of June, and has been to this day.

But what of the convoy carrying the much-needed grain? Howe failed to pursue it and Montagu was chased off by the battered remains of the French fleet. The grain arrived in Brest to celebrations rivaling those of the English. Villaret-Joyeuse had sailed with the warning from Robespierre that if the convoy were destroyed or captured he would face the guillotine. Villaret-Joyeuse kept his head long after Robespierre had lost his, and was governor of Venice when he died in 1812.

Lord Howe's Signals Book Revolutionized Command Communications in Battle

Earliest communication of orders to subordinate captains was done by hailing or sending messages by boat. Later, prearranged plans were made and simple flag signals assigned to them on a case-by-case basis. This was of little help to a commander surprised by an enemy. Howe's signals book (below) standardized evolutions and signals for them. Unfortunately, it was not clearly understood by his captains during his time.



MANUSCRIPT of Howe's signals book.

With Okinawa Finally Secure, Planners Look to Home Islands

(Continued from page 1)

caves and tunnels. Only 10,755 Nips were captured. Eighteen Japs were killed for every American. If the ratio held in an invasion of the home islands, where at least 2 million Japanese soldiers would fight to the death for their emperor, the U.S. could expect to pay for victory with another 111,000 lives. Experts predicted twice that cost.

Among those killed at Okinawa was the highest-ranking general officer to lose his life in World War II. On 18 June, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, the overall commander of land operations, was struck and killed by a coral fragment thrown up by Jap artillery fire.

Also killed at Okinawa was war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who had begun



MARINE MAJ. GEN. LEMUEL SHEPHERD consults a map during Okinawa campaign

covering the war from London during the blitz in 1940. Regarded as the best friend of the dogface, he had covered the American Army from foxholes in Africa, Sicily, Italy and France until the European war was won. There was still a war in the Pacific, though, so Pyle went to Okinawa.

Pyle was in a Jeep when a Jap Nambu machine gun opened up. His last words, as he turned to the others with him, were "Are you all right?"

A Message From Garcia

(Continued from page 1)

of the world. He then picked up two Cuban officers who had been sent to Sampson by General Calixto Garcia (made famous in Hubbard's *Message to Garcia* recounting Lt. Andrew S. Rowan's arduous journey to meet the leader of the Cuban insurgents) and returned to Santiago with the information that Guantánamo would make a fine naval base.

On 10 June, a battalion of Marines arrived from Florida and was disembarked from its transport, the Spanish having fled with such haste that they left money, jewelry, weapons and personal effects in their quarters. The blockhouses were burned as a prevention of yellow fever, along with the potential souvenirs.

The south, or leeward coast of Cuba is arid, and thickets of cactus and scrub surrounded the Marines' encampment and concealed small groups of Spanish soldiers. Two Marine pickets were killed on the second night, only 300 yards from Lt. Col. R. W. Huntington's command post. On 13 June, Cuban Col. Laborde told Huntington that the Spanish forces were dependent on a well in the Cuzco Valley for water.

The following day, two companies of Marines led by Capt. George Fielding Elliott (at 52, the youngest company grade officer present), supported by 50 Cuban rebels under Lt. Col. Enrique Thomas, marched two miles to the well to destroy the installation, which was defended by almost three times as many Spanish soldiers.

Elliott accomplished his mission at a cost of six men killed and 16 wounded. He was aided by naval gunfire from the dispatch boat *Dolphin*, directed by Sgt. John H. Quick who stood atop a hill with his back to the Spaniards and communicated with the ship using semaphore flags. Quick was awarded the Medal of Honor.

After the Spanish-American War ended on 12 August, Guantánamo Bay remained an American naval base. Its status was formalized by a lease agreement in 1903.

Not a bad week's work for 600 "infants of navy."

Midway's Literary Legacy

(Continued from page 1)

changed. Having seen four fleet carriers sent to the bottom in a matter of minutes, they would not risk them again until four were sacrificed as decoys during the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

There is little that can be written here that will add to what has been said during the Commandery's commemoration of Midway. However, *Mission: History* has prepared a short reading list of books about Midway or containing substantial reference to the battle, which may be of value.

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Quite welcome, however, are suggestions of events for coverage. Please offer suggestions two months ahead of the anniversary of an event.