

MIDWAY REFOUGHT by Norman Bell

The Avalon Hill "Midway" Game from 1964 is similar to their 1962 "Bismarck" Game – each side has their own Search Board to locate the enemy; but this is aeroplane v ship combat which takes place on the separate Battle Board. The Search Board has Midway bottom right and covers the ocean to the north, east and south east where the Japanese are hoping to hide and strike without being attacked in return. Surface combat is a possibility but the rules for that are basic and abstract, so I won't go there and so shouldn't the outgunned and outnumbered Americans. This is, torpedo and dive bombers against ships. Carriers of both sides and the Island of Midway have Fighter, Torpedo and Dive Bomber aircraft, represented in the game by "strength point" counters. But when they are shot down they are gone forever, so protect your carriers, sink the enemy carriers with any onboard aircraft without losing too many of your own aircraft. Ideally you catch your opponent with armed and fuelled aircraft on the deck. The USN has the advantage of having PBY search aircraft on Midway. The short range carrier based aircraft are useful but they alert the enemy that there must be a carrier somewhere over the horizon. The following is a taster of the Game using the Random Event, Search and Strike Cards which make solitaire play possible.

0500:0700hrs June 3rd 1941. The IJN Fast Striking Force (FSF) of four carriers, battleships and cruisers is heading towards Midway on course 90 degrees. The light cruiser Tone is detached to the North to provide an air search capability on the flank. The Midway Invasion Force (MIF) is 24 hours behind the FSF. The code breakers of the USN have provided time for the carriers Enterprise, Hornet and Yorktown and escorts to take up position to the North of Midway. This is the USN's chance to avenge Pearl Harbor and attack Akagi, Kaga, Soryu and Hiryu. One of Midway's PBY Catalina's spots the Japanese Fleet but radio failure means that a warning will not be possible before the aircraft's return to Midway. A patrolling Japanese submarine puts a torpedo into USS Vincennes which has to detach from the fleet and divert to Midway. US destroyers force the submarine to dive deep and a warning of the presence of US ships will not be possible until nightfall.

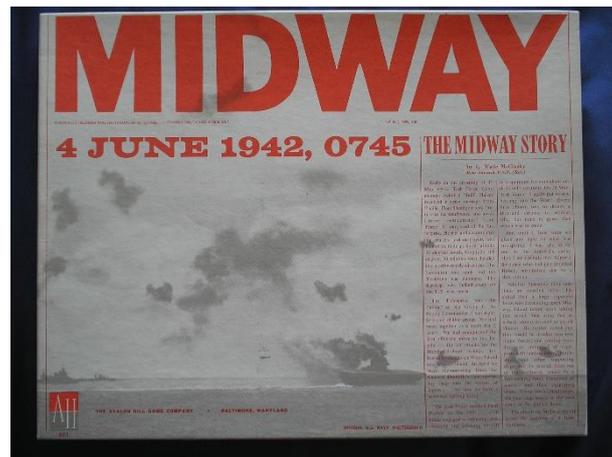
0700:0900hrs. The Tone's air search finds nothing but empty ocean. Another PBY sees the IJN ships but suffers a radio failure and cannot warn Midway.

0900:11:00hrs. The IJN Fast Striking Force continues east and is in partial cloud which turns into a rain squall, hiding the ships from US eyes in the sky. The first PBY lands at Midway and the USN now knows where the enemy was four hours ago.

1100:1300hrs. The Tone's search aircraft sights the US ships North West of Midway and radios their position before being shot down by the CAP. Both fleets begin to ready aircraft for a strike on the enemy ships. The estimated position of the IJN is confirmed by a search PBY and it looks like the afternoon will see reciprocal air attacks as the opposing fleets move into range.

PBY aircraft have located the Japanese Fast Striking Force and the search aircraft from IJN Tone have located the US Fleet. Both sides prepare a strike against the enemy. But do you send a strong fighter escort with the strike or keep a strong CAP to protect your ships?

13:00 to 15:00hrs. The Fast Striking Force IJN decides to launch an all-out attack on the USN Ships North West of Midway. The available fighters are divided in favour of accompanying the strike over providing CAP for the Fleet. The USN sends most of the carrier fighters with their strike; with fighters from Midway boosting the CAP over the carriers. The Japanese Ships are hidden by a rain squall, the American aircraft are uncoordinated and have to return to the carriers. The USN Ships are found by a search aircraft which is shot down but not before the American Fleet's position is radioed back to the Akagi. Despite the latest info the Japanese strike force fails to find the USN Ships.



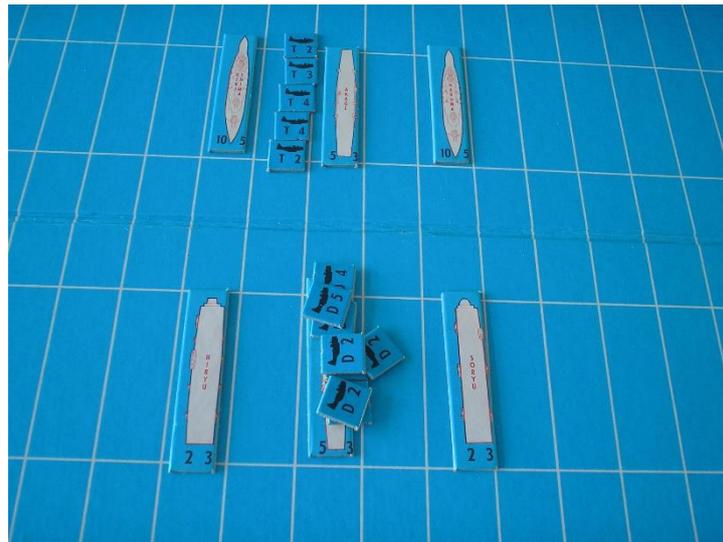
Valuable fuel is used in an unsuccessful search and (three strength points of) Japanese torpedo aircraft are lost when they ditch in the sea. The entire force of Midway fighter aircraft (six strength points) run out of fuel and ditch returning to Midway. A rookie mistake by the USN.

15:00hrs to 17:00hrs. Mikuma, Mogami, Kumano and Suzuya are in the West and are speeding to join up with the FSF. Both fleets recover their aircraft from the wasted strike attempts. The FSF moves to shorten the range to the Americans, thinking that it would be the last guess of their position by the enemy. The US carriers belatedly move South East towards Midway. The FSF's position is misreported by a PBY to Midway. The USN Fleet is found by a Japanese aircraft and correctly reported back.

17:00hrs to Midnight. The Japanese Midway Invasion Force is making progress ahead of schedule. The Tone is steaming towards the FSF, having lost her search aircraft there is no point in being on picket duty. The Fast Striking Force is heading North for two reasons: the enemy will not suspect that course and it will shorten the time before Mikuma, Mogami etc can rendezvous and add their anti-aircraft fire to the defence of the fleet. The USN ships are heading South to reduce the distance to Midway so that it is within range of aircraft and no more can be lost at sea.

Midnight to 05:00hrs 4th June. Both sides ready aircraft for an attack on the enemy fleet. Search aircraft are flown off at first light. PBYs from Midway spread out probing the ocean to the East and North.

05:00 to 07:00hrs. A PBY finds the FSF and reports. A second PBY finds the Tone and she is obviously heading towards the FSF. An IJN search aeroplane spots the USN fleet, reports its position but is shot down by the CAP. Both sides launch a strike against the enemy and both sides decide to send the bulk of their fighters with the strike, keeping a minimum CAP over the carriers. In what could be the decisive moment of the battle, the Japanese aircraft fail to find the US Fleet but the US aircraft find the Japanese and a coordinated attack is made. The CAP fighters engage the US fighter escort and 7 Japanese aircraft strength points are lost and 3 strength points of US fighters are shot down.



The Torpedo planes attack the Akagi and the dive bombers target the Kaga. 3 strength points of torpedo planes and 4 strength points of dive bombers are lost to the anti-aircraft fire but both Japanese carriers are hit. The surviving aircraft return to the US carriers. The returning Japanese aircraft see smoke rising from the two largest aircraft carriers but all planes are successfully recovered.

07:00 to 09:00hrs. Again both sides rush to re-arm and re-fuel their aircraft. The US manoeuvre to place their ships between the enemy and Midway. The Japanese resume a course towards Midway and are determined to send the American carriers to whatever they call Davy Jones's Locker. PBYs from Midway fan out and search aircraft from both fleets try and track the enemy. This day, 4th June surely will see a decisive battle.

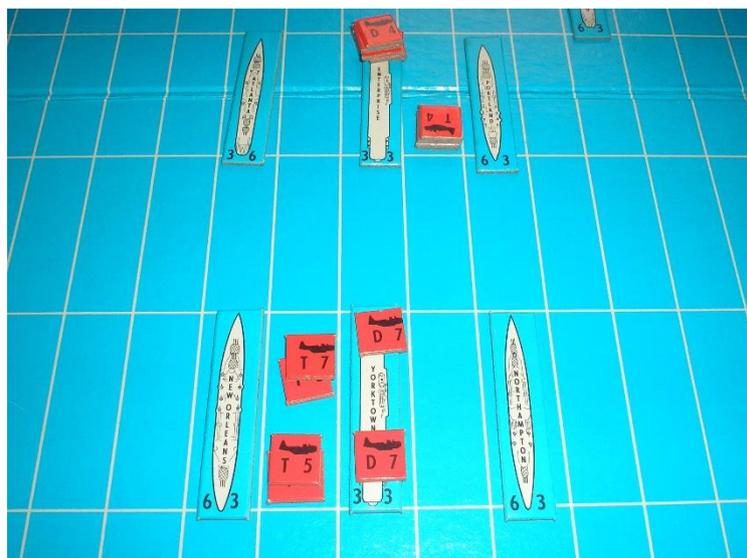
09:00 to 11:00hrs. A PBY from Midway spots and reports the Midway Invasion Force (MIF), battleships, cruisers, one light carrier the Zuiho, destroyers and troop ships off in the East. A PBY is shot down and therefore the USN is unaware that Mikuma, Mogami, Kumano and Suzuya have joined the Fast Striking Force (FSF) and therefore increased the anti-aircraft fire available. The USN calculate that the FSF is within range of the torpedo and dive bombers on Midway.

11:00 to 13:00hrs. The USN keeps the fleet between Midway and the estimated position of the FSF. A PBY is able to confirm the location of the FSF but the MIF cannot be found in the vastness of the Pacific. (They were missed by an over-tired PBY crew). Expecting an attack,

the FSF flies off the torpedo and dive bombers in a speculative sweep against the USN and retains a strong fighter CAP overhead. The USN do indeed launch a maximum effort strike against the FSF which fails to find the Japanese ships. All carriers and Midway recover their aircraft, the Japanese have been able to continue repairing the damage to Akagi and Kaga. Surely the USN has missed a golden opportunity to make a devastating attack from an unknown location.

13:00 to 15:00hrs. After hours of high speed steaming, the USN reduces speed and reverses course in an effort to evade any Japanese search aeroplanes. A PBY, despite cloud finds and reports the FSF but the Midway Invasion Force (MIF) remains undiscovered and the possible location area increases accordingly. It can only be assumed that the MIF is heading towards Midway. The USN readies aircraft for another attempt to attack the FSF. The IJN FSF readies aircraft hoping that the short range search planes can find the enemy. The American carriers are their priority target before any attack on the island of Midway.

15:00 to 17:00hrs. The Japanese FSF is to the North West of Midway, the USN is South West of Midway. The FSF is found by a PBY from Midway, the US Fleet is spotted by a search aeroplane and reports before being shot down. Both sides launch a maximum effort strike and both sides decide to send a strong fighter escort with the strike, retaining a small CAP. The two airstrikes happen almost simultaneously. Japanese escort fighters and the USN CAP battle it out and the CAP comes off much worse losing almost three times the number of aircraft compared to the Japanese losses. The torpedo and dive bombers of the Akagi, Kaga and Soryu attack the Yorktown while the aircraft from Hiryu and Zuiho attack the Enterprise. 7 strength points of torpedo planes and 7 strength points of dive bombers are victims of the defensive anti-aircraft fire but the Yorktown is hit by 3 bombs and 1 torpedo. The Enterprise is hit by 2 bombs and 1 torpedo. Both US carriers are severely damaged and will have difficulty recovering their aircraft and launching further strikes.



The USN attacking aircraft from the carriers and Midway fail to coordinate their strike and arrive over the FSF at different times. The strike escort fighters deflect the Japanese CAP from the attacking aircraft which attack piecemeal. The Enterprise torpedo aircraft attack

the Suzuya achieving one hit at the cost of 3 aircraft strength points. The Midway dive bombers attack Haruna, hitting her twice at the cost of one half of the attackers. The Midway torpedo aircraft attack Haruna, one torpedo hits home but all the attacking aircraft are shot down. The torpedo aircraft from Yorktown and Hornet attack Kaga. One hit at the cost of 2 strength points. The dive bombers from Enterprise and Yorktown attack Hiryu. The attack is devastating, she slowly turns turtle and sinks just as the Japanese aircraft return



from their strike. The dive bombers from Hornet attack Soryu. The Soryu is severely damaged for the loss of one quarter of the attacking aircraft. Returning aircraft to both fleets struggle to find somewhere to land. Hiryu's aircraft land on Akagi, Soryu's torpedo aircraft are recovered by Akagi and Zuiho and she recovers her own dive bombers. The Yorktown's aircraft are diverted to Midway and to the undamaged Hornet.

17:00 to Midnight. Both sides lick their wounds and work to repair damage. The just afloat Yorktown accompanied by the USS Portland retires towards Midway, with the intention to move south of Midway. The remaining US ships move to place themselves between Midway and the enemy. US Navy intelligence is that another powerful enemy surface fleet is to the East. This is the Yamato, Nagato, Mutsu, cruisers and light carrier Hosho. This group is approximately 24 hours from Midway and the USN must try for a victory before this overwhelming Japanese force arrives.

Midnight to 05:00hrs 5th June. The USN decides that the targets in priority order are the enemy carriers, the invasion ships led by the Atago and last the Yamato group. The Japanese want to finish off the US carriers and invade Midway. Both sides prepare to launch a maximum effort strike.

05:00 to 07:00hrs. The US do not divert any air assets to locate the Yamato but search for the carriers. A PBY from Midway spots the Japanese carriers but a radio malfunction means that the USN does not know the enemy's location. The Japanese spot both the Yorktown and the main fleet. The USN knowing they have been found and expecting an attack, fly off the torpedo and dive bombers on a speculative sweep to find the enemy and launch all available fighters on CAP. The Japanese send a full strike against the US Fleet. The Japanese aircraft fail to co-ordinate and attack in two separate groups. The CAP battle with the

escorts and both sides lose 4 aircraft strength points. Cap fighters follow some torpedo planes down and combined with the ships' anti-aircraft fire shoot down the torpedo planes attacking the USS Minneapolis. Two torpedoes hit the Minneapolis, she remains afloat with a list to starboard. The Akagi's dive bombers attack the Enterprise scoring one hit at the expense of a quarter of the attackers. A torpedo hits the Enterprise amidships and she begins to sink. Other torpedo planes attack the USS New Orleans which is directing her AA fire at the planes attacking Enterprise. The New Orleans is hit and she is down at the stern. One half of the torpedo planes are shot down. Returning US planes are recovered on the Hornet or diverted to Midway. Two strength points of torpedo aircraft have to ditch in the sea as Hornet could not take them.

Damage Status USN:

Enterprise sunk	Hornet damaged	Yorktown crippled
Vincennes heavy damage	New Orleans damaged	Minneapolis damaged

Aircraft losses:

Fighters 81.5%	Torpedo aircraft 59%	Dive bombers 40.5%
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Damage Status IJN:

Akagi damaged	Kaga heavy damage	Hiryu sunk
Soryu heavy damage	Haruna damaged	

Aircraft losses:

Fighters 54%	Torpedo aircraft 57%	Dive Bombers 50%
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With the Hornet and Yorktown having to withdraw towards Hawaii, the Japanese may try and finish them off, they can invade Midway which has its fighter defenders outnumbered 2:1. Who can say how the Pacific War would have progressed if Midway had fallen.