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NAVAL WEAPONS STATION YORKTOWN

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Weapons Station Yorktown honors its namesake at Battle of Midway ceremony

By Mark O. Piggott

YORKTOWN—Naval Weapons Station (WPNSTA) Yorktown recognized the courage and sacrifice of the Sailors of USS Yorktown (CV 5) during the Battle of Midway, June 4, at a ceremony commemorating the event.

Regarded as the turning point in the Pacific during World War II, the Battle of Midway took place, June 4-7, 1942. During the battle, an American Carrier Strike Force, augmented by shore-based patrol bombers, decisively defeated an Imperial Japanese Navy Carrier Task Force, inflicting irreparable damage on the Japanese Fleet.

“This historic victory at Midway can be attributed to traits that continue in our Navy today ...” said Captain Lowell Crow, WPNSTA Yorktown Commanding Officer. “... Bold, confident and proficient Sailors, willing to go into harm’s way with well-built, resilient ships and aircraft.”

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MA1 Raymond Turner, Naval Weapons Station (WPNSTA) Yorktown Sailor of the Quarter, and MA3 James Hornaday, WPNSTA Yorktown Junior Sailor of the Quarter, stand by for the wreath laying at the Battle of Midway commemoration ceremony, June 4, at Kirkpatrick Field. (Photo by Mark Piggott)

During the Battle of Midway, Japan lost four carriers, a heavy cruiser and 256 planes. The U.S. lost the carrier Yorktown, a destroyer and 145 planes. Japan's losses, both at Midway and at the Battle of Coral Sea, shifted the balance of naval power in the Pacific, and derailed Japanese plans to both threaten Hawaii and isolate Australia.

One person who could relate the story of Midway to the Sailors and civilians in the audience was the guest speaker, Mrs. Sheila Noll, Vice Chairman of the

York County Board of Supervisors. Her father, LCDR Philip T. Smith, was Communications Officer aboard USS Atlanta (CL 51), a light cruiser that provided anti-

aircraft protection for the carriers USS Enterprise (CV 6) and USS Hornet (CV 8) as part of Vice Admiral Halsey's Carrier Task Force.

"The Battle of Midway has a special meaning for me," she explained. "My sister, Phyllis, was born on June 4, 1942, the day the Battle of Midway began. Our father made the ultimate sacrifice five months later at the Battle of Guadalcanal."

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As I look out at this audience, I realize that—for most of you present this morning—the Battle of Midway is but a paragraph in a history book,” Noll continued. “However, for your grandparents, or perhaps your great-grandparents, it was ever so much more. It was the first great battle in the Pacific theater and it was won by the United States.”

Of course, for every victory there are always casualties. The Japanese lost four aircraft carriers, one cruiser, 248 aircraft and more than 3,057 killed. The United States lost one aircraft carrier, one destroyer, 150 aircraft and 307 killed. For Yorktown, her air group fatally damaged the Japanese aircraft carrier Soryu and shared in the destruction of the carrier Hiryu and cruiser Mikuma.

However, successive strikes by dive bombers and torpedo planes from Hiryu seriously damaged Yorktown, causing her crew to abandon ship during the afternoon of June 4, 1942. Two days later, while salvage efforts were underway, the Japanese submarine I-168 torpedoed both the damaged carrier and the destroyer USS Hammann (DD 412), sinking the latter immediately and Yorktown shortly after daybreak on June 7, 1942.

“Admiral Chester Nimitz called it ‘a glorious page in history,’” Noll added. “Signals intelligence, sound aircraft tactics and more than a little luck, the U.S. Navy seized the initiative for the first time—a fighting force to be reckoned with.”

“A fighting force made up of brave men and courageous men upholding the finest traditions of the Navy. The legacy of those brave Sailors lives on in all our young men and women who don the Navy blue,” she concluded.

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Just months after the devastating attack at Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Midway turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. This historic naval engagement demonstrates the innovation and strength of the U.S. Navy, essential to ensuring the security, prosperity and vital interests of the U.S.

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