

# NAS holds Battle of Midway Commemoration

By Penny Randall  
Editor

Naval Air Station Meridian personnel paid tribute to one of the most significant events in naval history – the Battle of Midway during a commemoration ceremony on June 3.

NAS Meridian Commanding Officer Capt. Charles Gibson welcomed guests and shared his thoughts on the Battle of Midway.

“Midway had many heroes... the code-breakers who gave us the location and date of the battle, the shipyard workers, the Airmen and Marines who fought at Midway Island, the aviators flying from land and sea, and the Sailors who fought at sea,” Gibson said.

“We can look back and take heart – many of those who fought at Midway are gone now, but they point the way and left us a legacy – we stand on their broad shoulders and continue to learn from them. We too face a tough determined, and in many ways a more barbaric enemy, unprincipled enemy. We too cannot yet see the end to his long war on terrorism. But you should know that today’s military members are just as strong and just as brave as those who fought and won World War II. We can honor them all, past and present, for their courage, but it is in their memory that we remember them today.”

The Battle of Midway occurred June 4-7, 1942, just six months after the Japanese attacked American forces at Pearl

Harbor. Nearly 200 Sailors, Marines and civilian personnel gathered in front of the installation’s Administration Building for a short ceremony in the nearly 100 degree heat.

As we celebrate the Centennial of Naval Aviation, what a better time to honor a Battle of Midway survivor who spent 50 years of his life associated with the military.

Meridian’s own retired Lt. Demetrios Gianakos was the honored guest at the ceremony. Gianakos joined the Navy at the age of 17 after his mother signed the papers allowing him to enlist.

Gianakos, now 87, who has trouble walking and hearing so his son, retired Lt. Col. Kris Gianakos spoke on his behalf.

“This is a very humbling experience to be standing here today talking about an individual that I absolutely love,” Kris Gianakos said. “When I ask my father, ‘Why did you join the Navy?’ he says, ‘Because they paid me to go to school.’”

The senior Gianakos’ naval career began in the aviation field with Patrol Bombing Squadron VP-71 on board a PB7Y bombing aircraft that could take off and land on the water completing maritime patrol and reconnaissance missions. Just a few weeks after completing boot camp, the senior Gianakos found himself arriving in Hawaii on Dec. 25, 1941.

“They told us to throw all our gear in the airplane and fly to Midway,” the senior Gianakos said. “No predeployment... just get in and go do, and that’s what we

did.”

The senior Gianakos’ squadron immediately began flying search patterns in the Pacific.

“My dad told me that due to the individuality of that American flying the airplane who extended his search a little further than he probably should have, they discovered minesweepers from the Japanese fleet which gave the intel to the carriers to launch the attacks,” Kris said.

The senior Gianakos’ career extended through Korea and Vietnam where he was commissioned an officer. He was stationed in numerous places including Kingsville, Texas, Alaska, San Diego, Maryland and Alaska. Gianakos ended his career in the military at NAS Meridian in May 1971. He continued his service by working as a ground school instructor training student aviators at NAS Meridian for 20 more years.

About three months ago the senior Gianakos was asked to do an oral history of his military service. He was asked, “What was more significant to you, Pearl Harbor or the World Trade Center attacks?”

“Now you have to realize that my dad is from New York City, but his instant response was Pearl Harbor.” He was asked why and answered, “To see the strength and power of the U.S. Fleet in that kind of condition had an impact on me that was beyond anything I ever imagined.”