

Analysis of Japanese Defeats at The Battle of Midway in 1942

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Abstract

After achieving success in the attack on the Navy base at Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941, the Japanese Empire felt that it had still not completed its goal of crippling the strength of the United States Navy in the Pacific region. This was because the United States and its allies were considered to be a serious threat to Japan's ambitions to dominate Greater Asia. This was done as a continuation of Japan's plan to attack the base and its fleet of warships and fighter planes at Midway. This was preceded by strategic efforts and deceptive tactics to create threatening conditions on the Aleutian islands, it was hoped that this would lead the United States to be trapped in the area, and then they would be attacked by the Japanese Navy fleet in full force. However, what happened was just the opposite, the naval battle at Midway on June 4-7th 1942 resulted in huge defeats and losses for the Japanese Empire, where four aircraft carriers, fighter planes, and several warships were sunk, as well as many crew members and pilots. who died. Meanwhile, on the United States side, an aircraft carrier and several warships were sunk and damaged and many soldiers died. The purpose of writing this article is to use the history of the naval battle at Midway as a very valuable lesson in developing war strategy planning, especially in maritime defense strategies, which can be applied by the Indonesian Navy in the present and the future. The research method used is a qualitative method with a literature approach regarding the history of naval battles in general, including the battle at Midway. Meanwhile, the output of this article is addressed to the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia as input regarding the importance of a mature strategy in the National Defense Strategy at sea

Keywords: *Battle of Midway, Japanese defeat, US victory*

INTRODUCTION

The Battle of Midway, fought in June 1942, was a crucial turning point in the history of the Pacific War during World War II. Located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Midway Atoll witnessed naval warfare between the United States and the Japanese Empire. This battle was not just a confrontation between the two navies, but also a decisive moment that changed the power dynamics in the Pacific arena. With the Allies failing to protect secret Japanese communications codes from being cracked, the battle presented an opportunity for the United States Navy to turn the tide. In this area, two naval powers clashed with each other in strategy, technology and courage. The Battle of Midway demonstrated not only military strength but also tactical intelligence to win the battle in the Pacific.

This problem formulation provides a basis for detailing and better understanding the factors that contributed to Japan's defeat at Midway Atoll, which in turn can provide a foundation for future study and improvement of naval defense strategies.

The research objective in analyzing Japan's defeat in the naval battle at Midway Atoll is to understand in depth the factors that caused this defeat.

RESEARCH METHODS

In general, this research utilizes historical methods and military analysis to explore historical records, war documents and intelligence reports from both sides. In-depth literature review of available sources.

An in-depth understanding of the geographic conditions at Midway and sea conditions is also the focus of research to describe environmental aspects that influence war tactics and strategy.

Additionally, military theory and concepts such as sea denial, expansionist strategy, and tactical decisions can be integrated into the analysis to provide a solid conceptual framework. With this approach, the research method attempts to decipher the causality and complexity of the events at Midway, providing a thorough understanding of why and how Japan suffered critical defeats in this naval battle.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Parshall (2005) in his book entitled "Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway", tells the story that after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan experienced a deep transformation from an isolated feudal state to a modern power that wanted to compete with Western countries. The Meiji Restoration, initiated by a group of Japanese elites who wanted to end the feudal era and open Japan to the outside world, provided the basis for dramatic changes in politics, economics, society, culture and military. Determined to overcome backwardness, the Meiji government launched a series of ambitious reforms. Modern education was introduced, transportation systems and infrastructure were built, and the armed forces were updated with Western technology. These steps, along with industrialization policies that supported key sectors such as mining, heavy industry, and technology, brought Japan toward status as an impressive economic and military power in the early 20th century. The desire to become a developed country is reflected in the spirit of modernization and adaptation to Western models, of course, while maintaining Japan's unique cultural heritage. The Meiji Restoration became a historical milestone that marked Japan's journey towards change and success as one of the leading powers in the modern world (Tully, 2005).

Furthermore, in the second half of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, Japan had great ambitions to dominate Asia as part of its modernization and regional expansion efforts. Influenced by the spirit of the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government attempted to transform the country into a dominant regional power. During this period, Japan expressed strong ambitions to become a major power in the naval sector. This motivation is triggered by awareness of the importance of maritime power in determining global influence and the need to protect national security. As part of the modernization and industrialization initiatives that began during the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government systematically invested in the development of a modern and sophisticated Navy. The warship-building program, application of the latest technology and intensive personnel training created a powerful Imperial Japanese Navy.

This ambition is fueled by a drive to secure natural resources, open new export markets, and establish Japan's position as a leader in the Asia-Pacific region. The first step in achieving this ambition was success in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, in which Japan gained influence over Taiwan and the Liaodong peninsula. This success was then followed by the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, in which Japan achieved victory and gained control over several regions in Manchuria. Then at the peak of its ambitions with expansion into Southeast Asia and the Pacific during World War II, which resulted in massive occupation and created the

Japanese Empire involving vast areas around it. However, ultimately, the ambition to dominate Asia had heavy consequences and became one of the main factors in Japan's defeat at the end of this war.

The History of the Battle of Midway

The beginning of Japanese attack on the United States Navy began on the morning of December 7th, 1941, in what became known as the Pearl Harbor Attack. This attack was a response to Japan's ambition to expand its territory in Asia and the Pacific, and also as a preventive measure to ensure the success of their chain war strategy. With surprise and careful coordination, a Japanese air fleet consisting of bombers ambushed the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This attack caused enormous damage, destroying much of America's Pacific fleet and damaging critical military infrastructure. Japan considered the presence of United States warships as the main line of defense in the Pacific, therefore this attack was aimed at giving Japan a significant initial advantage in the Pacific War. With the Pearl Harbor attack which occurred surprisingly without any previous declaration of war, it became a trigger for the United States to officially become involved in World War II, which then strengthened the Allied coalition and changed the dynamics of global conflict.

The Battle of Midway occurred six months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The intention of Japan to attack Midway was to complete the attack on the United States. The Commander of the Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, mobilized the entire force of the Japanese Navy fleet in full, the fleet deployed by Japan in this battle, namely 4 aircraft carriers namely Kaga, Akagi, Soryu and Hiryu, more than 150 various types of warships, 248 fighter aircraft and 16 seaplanes. Meanwhile, the United States deployed 3 aircraft carriers, namely Enterprise, Hornet and Yorktown as well as many fighter aircraft at Midway base (Pertempuran Midway, n.d.).

The naval battle at Midway Atoll featured two very influential military leaders, namely Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto of the Japanese Navy and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz of the United States Navy. Admiral Yamamoto, as the mastermind behind the Pearl Harbor attack, carried a reputation as an accomplished strategist, even though his decision to attack Midway later turned out to be a major defeat in the Pacific War. On the other hand, Admiral Nimitz, with his strategic vision and strong leadership, managed to read Japanese tactics and position the United States fleet effectively to respond to the threat at Midway Atoll. Nimitz's smart decision to preserve resources and learn about Japanese plans through intelligence allowed the United States to achieve a crucial victory. The leaders of both sides represent the complexities and strategic challenges of naval warfare, and the contrast between their approaches at Midway Atoll highlights the role of leadership in determining the outcome of a battle.



Figure 1: Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, 1884-1943,
Japanese Naval Marshal
Source (Symonds, 2011)



Figure 2: Admiral Chester W. Nimitz 1885-1966
Supreme Commander of the US Navy Pacific Ocean Region
Source (Symonds, The Battle of Midway, 2011)

Even though Japan had carefully prepared plans to attack Midway Atoll, in reality, the US had already prepared itself for Japan's plans. By playing the role of its intelligence, the US

succeeded in reading and decoding the Japanese military operations, so that the Japanese invasion plan with the number of troops, the location to be visited, the "D" day, the "H" hour and the attack strategy were known to the US.

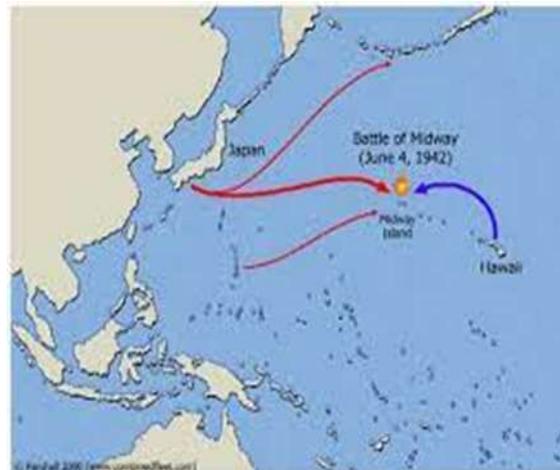


Figure 3: Battle Location
Red Line: Japan Navy, Blue Line: US Navy
Source (Symonds, The Battle of Midway, 2011)

From the same book, Parshall (2005) explains that the Midway battle caused significant losses for both parties, Japan and the United States, where this naval battle reached its peak on June 4th-7th 1942. The United States' victory in this battle not only was a strategic turning point in the Pacific War but also reflected the success of tactical strategy and intelligence superiority. The sinking of Japan's four major carriers (Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, and Hiryu) marked major losses for the Japanese Navy, while the United States lost only one carrier, the USS Yorktown.

The following is an estimate of the total losses in terms of lives, aircraft carriers, warships and aircraft:

- 1) Japan:
 - a) Estimated around 2,500 - 3,000 soldiers
 - b) Aircraft Carriers: The four Japanese aircraft carriers, namely Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, and Hiryu, were all sunk.
 - c) Warships: Apart from the aircraft carrier, several supporting warships were also sunk or damaged.
 - d) Aircraft: Japan lost approximately 250 to 300 aircraft, including fighters and bombers.
- 2) United States:
 - a) Estimated around 307 soldiers
 - b) Aircraft Carriers: USS Yorktown was sunk as a result of torpedoes and bomb attacks.
 - c) Warships: Apart from the USS Yorktown, several supporting warships also suffered damage.
 - d) Aircraft: About 150 to 175 United States aircraft were destroyed or damaged (Tully, 2005).

The United States' success in stopping Japanese expansion in the Pacific illustrates the importance of coordination, preparedness, and effective leadership. The Battle of Midway Atoll was not only a military confrontation but also a lesson in how thoughtful strategy and quick adaptation can change the course of a war. This incident not only gave the Allies a strategic advantage but also confirmed that qualitative and strategic superiority was often more decisive than numerical strength in naval battles.

The battle at Midway Atoll not only reflected military strengths and weaknesses but also involved special characteristics of the Japanese nation that had an impact on the course of events. Japanese culture, which reflects values such as honor, loyalty, and dedication to duty, had a major influence on Japanese war strategy and tactics. Courage and the spirit of fighting to the death, often an integral part of Japanese military pride and tradition, can be seen in the brave actions of Japanese ship crews and pilots during battle. On the other hand, the tendency to prioritize glory and neglect vigilance for enemy information can be drawn as an example of high but sometimes risky enthusiasm. It is this characteristic that reflects a strong fighting spirit but is sometimes hampered by an imbalance between tradition and modern tactical needs. The Battle of Midway illustrates how the character of the Japanese nation, rooted in their historical and cultural values, contributed to the dynamics of warfare in the Pacific Ocean during World War II.

General Analysis

Japan's defeat in the naval battle of Midway Atoll in World War II provides an in-depth analysis of the factors that led to this fateful outcome. The problem formulation in the analysis of Japan's defeat includes several important aspects. First, the role of inaccurate intelligence and less careful communications security policies are key factors. Second, Japan's failure to disguise secret planning and lack of understanding of the presence of the United States fleet at Midway provided an opportunity for the United States to plan an effective defense. Third, a lack of coordination between Japanese navies and disrupted communications between their ships contributed to their defeat. Fourth, the inability to respond quickly to changes in the situation and poor coordination between military units are important elements in formulating the problem formulation. Fifth, the use of tactics that lack flexibility and are too fixated on initial plans can be identified as factors that make it easier for the United States to design a successful counteroffensive.

Japan's choice to engage in naval warfare at Midway Atoll was a strategic decision that reflected their expansionist ambitions in the Pacific during World War II. Midway Atoll was considered an important strategic position for securing supply lines and expanding control of the Pacific region. On a strategic level, Japan attempted to achieve maritime supremacy by occupying Midway and securing a naval base that could be used as a jumping-off point for further military operations. The engagement at Midway also involved plans to draw the United States fleet into a naval battle that supported the principles of Japan's chain warfare strategy.

The location of Midway Atoll, in the North Pacific Ocean, is a group of coral islands that are home to marine biodiversity and are historically important in a military context. This atoll consists of three main islands, namely Sand Island, Eastern Island, and Spit Island. Apart from its importance in military history, this atoll is also a refuge for seabirds, turtles, and other marine species. Midway also has unique geographic characteristics with a large lagoon surrounded by coral reefs. Its natural conditions create an environment that is very important for marine ecology and is an ecotourism destination.



Figure 4: Midway Atoll
Source (Symonds, *The Battle of Midway*, 2011)

However, the selection of Midway also carries great risks for Japan. This decision involved long distances from their home bases, increasing vulnerability to logistical deficiencies and intelligence risks. Additionally, the United States was able to utilize the secret information obtained to prepare their defenses, making it difficult for Japanese plans to achieve the necessary tactical surprise. Therefore, the choice of Midway as a battleground reflected Japan's ambition to solidify its position in the Pacific, but also carried great risks that ultimately led to strategic failure and significant defeat.

The naval battle at Midway Atoll involved a comparison of personnel, ships, and aircraft that reflected strategic tensions between Japan and the United States. The Japanese Navy, under the command of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, involved around 180 ships, including four main aircraft carriers, namely Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, and Hiryu. The number of Japanese personnel reached tens of thousands, with more than 300 fighter aircraft. On the United States side, the Navy under the command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz had around 120 ships, including three major aircraft carriers, namely USS Yorktown, USS Enterprise, and USS Hornet. Although the United States' numbers of ships and personnel were inferior, they managed to compensate for these weaknesses with superior intelligence, tactical strategy, and personal courage. The presence of sophisticated fighter aircraft such as the Douglas SBD Dauntless and Grumman Wildcat also gave the United States an advantage in facing Japanese air attacks. The battle at Midway Atoll demonstrated that qualitative and strategic factors are often more important than mere numerical strength in determining the outcome of a conflict.

Japan's attack on the United States Navy at Midway Atoll can be understood as part of its chain warfare strategy in the Pacific War. After its success at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japan had ambitions to expand its territorial control in the Pacific and Asia. Midway Atoll, considered an important strategic position, became an attractive target for the Japanese to expand their line of control and gain control over strategic supply lines. Additionally, the Japanese hoped that by destroying the United States Naval force at Midway, they could secure their dominant position in the Pacific region. This attack was also considered a preventive measure to avoid a possible counterattack from the United States, which could threaten the success of Japan's chain war strategy. Although his intentions were understandable from a tactical and strategic perspective, the Japanese failure at Midway became one of the important turning points in the Pacific War, giving the Allies a strategic advantage and changing the course of the war in the Pacific Ocean

Analysis Theory

Sun Tzu Theory

This was applied to warfare in ancient China, where according to Sun-Tzu, to achieve success in war, he put forward a war strategy which was later adopted by many countries. The strategy put forward has four war strategies, namely assessing the opponent, launching a battle, planning an attack, and using spies. (Feng, 2007).

Even though we pay attention to Sun Tzu's teachings which state that by applying different formations the enemy will not be able to predict our troops' next movements and they will be surprised when they receive a sudden attack from us (Feng, 2007).

From the perspective of Sun Tzu's teachings, Japan's defeat at the Battle of Midway reflects several principles that may not have been followed or ignored. Sun Tzu, an ancient Chinese military philosopher, emphasized the importance of careful planning, understanding battlefield conditions and flexibility in war strategy. First, the Japanese may have failed to detail their planning and did not fully understand the opponent's strengths and weaknesses. Failure to keep attack plans secret can also be seen as non-compliance with the principle of secrecy and reducing the element of surprise. Additionally, the attack on Midway may have reflected a lack of synchronization and coordination between units, which contradicted the principles of balance

and synergy of force emphasized by Sun Tzu. The decision to pursue overly ambitious expansionist ambitions may also conflict with Sun Tzu's principles that advise focusing energy on realistic goals. The defeat at Midway illustrates the importance of understanding and following Sun Tzu's principles in the face of a powerful enemy and the complex dynamics of war. The strategic and tactical mistakes made by the Japanese at Midway had significant consequences and implied the need to understand and integrate Sun Tzu's teachings in the planning and implementation of war strategy. In addition, Sun Tzu's theoretical approach, which emphasizes flexibility, ingenuity, and deep understanding of the opponent can also be applied to explain Japan's defeat at Midway.

Clausewitz Strategi Theory

According to Carl von Clausewitz, war strategy is the use of battle to achieve war goals (Clausewitz, 1976). Meanwhile, according to Peter Paret, strategy itself is the key to the implementation of war and is governed by principles that stipulate those large powers take offensive action against weak enemy forces to achieve victory (Paret, 1986).

From a military perspective, the Battle of Midway can be analyzed as a result of the complexity of war dynamics and the relationship between political and military elements. Clausewitz emphasized that war is a form of politics continued by military means, and in this context, the Battle of Midway demonstrated the complex interaction between Japan's political goals and the military tactics they used. The attack on Midway, driven in part by Japanese ambitions to expand control over the Pacific region, can be seen as an extension of broader political goals. However, the imbalance between expansionist ambitions and military strategies that are not always compatible can be regarded as non-compliance with Clausewitz's principle of unity between political goals and military actions. The Japanese defeat at Midway, which ultimately had a major impact on the dynamics of the Pacific War, reflected the complexity of war and the importance of effectively integrating political and military aspects. Clausewitz also emphasized the importance of awareness of the uncertain and dynamic character of war, and the Japanese defeat at Midway demonstrated that unexpected factors and changes in circumstances could play a critical role in the outcome of the battle. By understanding the Battle of Midway through the lens of Clausewitz's theory, we gain insight into the complex interactions between politics and the military that shaped large-scale conflicts such as World War II

A.T. Mahan Theory

According to Mahan (1890) in his concept "The Influence of Sea Power upon History" stated that dominant naval power determines the success of a country. In the context of Midway, Japan's defeat reflected a lack of control over strategic sea lanes and a failure to properly exploit naval superiority.

If you look at the number of sea forces, Japan is superior to the US. This is very much in line with what was put forward by Alfred Thayer Mahan who was a High-ranking United States Navy Officer, in his book "The Influence of Sea Power Upon History" he put forward a theory that "Power" is the most important element for the progress and glory of a nation. country, which if maritime forces continue to be empowered will increase the welfare and security of a country. (Mahan, 1890) The battle at Midway showed that the United States, by having effective aircraft carriers and the ability to control maritime territory, was able to turn the situation around. Mahan's view of the importance of sea lanes as a national resource and prosperity was also reinforced by the United States' success in cutting off Japanese supply lines and neutralizing their naval power at Midway

Sea Denial Theory

The theory of "sea denial" is a critical aspect in analyzing Japan's defeat in the Battle of Midway. According to Vego (2016), this theory states that rather than trying to control the sea absolutely, a power can achieve its goals by inhibiting and obstructing enemy efforts to use the

sea as a vital route. Japan's failure at Midway can be attributed to this concept, considering that the United States succeeded in creating a situation where Japan was placed in a disadvantageous position (Vego, 2016).

Through the use of intelligence and decryption of secret Japanese plans, the United States succeeded in creating conditions that allowed them to meet Japan with tactical surprise. Success in blocking Japanese plans and reducing strategic surprise can be seen as an application of sea denial theory. Additionally, this naval denial was reflected in the United States' ability to defend Midway, hindering Japanese expansion in the Pacific region.

Thus, the Battle of Midway became a case study of how sea denial theory could be implemented successfully, where the side that controlled information and exploited geographic circumstances could effectively repel a larger sea force. The United States success in adopting this strategy at Midway not only caused significant losses for Japan but also became one of the important turning points in the Pacific War.

Sea Control Theory

Japan's defeat in the naval battle at Midway Atoll can be interpreted through the prism of the theory of "sea control". This concept, which is closely related to Mahan's thought, emphasizes the importance of controlling strategic maritime routes and sea areas to achieve military and economic success. In the context of Midway, Japan's defeat reflected its failure to maintain strategic control of the sea.

The United States Navy has successfully implemented an effective sea control strategy, primarily through the use of aircraft carriers. These aircraft carriers provide the flexibility and power projection that allows the United States to dominate these maritime areas. In contrast, Japan's loss of four carriers at Midway effectively thwarted their efforts to maintain naval control of the Pacific area.

According to Vego (2016) regarding sea control theory, states countries that can dominate sea trade routes and secure strategic sea areas will have a strategic advantage in war (Vego, 2016). Japan's defeat at Midway demonstrated that sea control was not just about numerical strength, but also about flexibility and tactical intelligence in the use of naval resources. Thus, sea control theory provides a relevant conceptual framework for explaining the dynamics of the naval battle at Midway and understanding its impact on the course of the Pacific War.

CONCLUSION

The Battle of Midway had a major impact on the Pacific War at that time. With the defeat on the Japanese side, it marked the end of World War II in the region. Winning and losing have both brought losses to both parties at war. Even though the theory and strategy to win the war have been carefully planned, this still has to be balanced with a high level of discipline and a high level of vigilance when experiencing undesirable things, so that you do not suffer huge losses. Many lessons can be learned from that battle, both in terms of victory and defeat.

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