



Scripts.com

National Geographic: The Battle for Midway

By Unknown

A lonely outpost of coral and sand.
A thousand miles from anywhere.
Yet here,
on a blue morning in June, 1942,
America and Japan fought for control
of the Pacific
and changed the history of the world.
It was one of
the greatest Naval battles of all time,
a turning point in
the Second World War in the Pacific
Midway.
Here in a few bloody hours,
thousands of young men
sacrificed their lives.
Now to the shadowy waters off Midway
comes Robert Ballard,
the man who discovered the Titanic.
Ballard's quest is
to find the American
and Japanese aircraft carriers
that were sunk in the battle,
including the U.S.S. Yorktown.
But the ships are lost more
than three miles down
unseen, untouched on the ocean floor
the final resting place
of many young men.
A story of martyrs and heroes,
admirals and airmen...
of secret codes and lucky hunches
of lost chances and
the painful cost of victory
all in one monumental day.
Tragedy and Triumph.
The battle for Midway.
Midway.
It is hard to ignore the archeology
of war in this place.
Nearly a lifetime after the clash
at Midway,
four former soldiers walk
the island's white coral sands.
Two Americans, Bill Surgi

and Harry Ferrier,
and two Japanese, Haruo Yoshino
and Yuji Akamatsu
all veterans of the battle.
The last time the veterans were here,
they came as enemies.
Now, as respectful comrades, they will
explore the meaning of their ordeal.
I met the two Japanese gentlemen,
aviators, and, so I've made my peace.
And I have no animosity toward them.
They were warriors, like we were,
just doing their job.
Welcome aboard.
All in their 70s now,
the survivors have traveled thousands
of miles
to join undersea explorer
Robert Ballard
in the search for the five aircraft
carriers lost at Midway.
Ballard's quest,
sponsored by National Geographic,
is to find Bill Surgi's ship,
the Yorktown,
and Yuji and Haruo's carrier, the Kaga
It will be the voyage of a lifetime
for the vets.
May, 1942.
The United States and Japan are at war
It is five months
since the devastating sneak attack
on the Pacific fleet
at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
Now Japan is poised for total
domination of East Asia and the Pacific.
Pearl Harbor.
In a dingy basement
beneath command headquarters,
Navy code breakers have pulled off
the greatest intelligence coup
of the Pacific War.
Out of coded enemy radio transmissions
they have teased out the secret plans

for the next major Japanese attack.
A huge Japanese task force
is preparing
to strike a crippling blow against
the already weakened U.S. Navy.
It will happen at Midway, as early as
June 3rd-less than a month away.
Yet now the U.S. knows what's coming.
And the Americans will lie in wait,
hoping to ambush the Japanese fleet.
Day one of the Ballard expedition.
To begin their exploration of the past
the veterans travel with
Ballard 180 miles from Midway
to the place where
Ballard thinks the Yorktown went down.
There is no X to mark this spot,
just blue water and
the occasional gooney bird.
But below the waves, Ballard believes
he will discover history.
For here, young men came to fight
and to die.
I mean, to be at the very spot,
you know,
this is where the battle took place.
This is like going to Gettysburg,
this is like going to Bull Run,
this is like going to Normandy.
This is where a great chapter
in human history,
tragic in many ways,
was played out on the stage,
and we're on the stage right now.
While Ballard studies the terrain,
the veterans explore their own
landscape of memory and loss.
This is what I looked like back then.
This was taken before
the Pearl Harbor attack.
I think this is what saved my life.
This is the hat I was wearing
at the time.
Very brave, very brave.

A little older, a little wiser.
Pearl Harbor, 1942.
Yorktown sailor Bill Surgi hears they
are headed for a place called Midway.
The word Midway was a mystique,
mystery,
an awesome word to banter about.
We were not fully aware of
what actually was going on there.
So all we knew was that
we needed help at Midway.
Yorktown will rendezvous
with her sister ships,
Hornet and Enterprise,
at a point approximately 325 miles
northeast of Midway.

Their mission:

At the same time,
four Japanese carriers,
Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, and Hiryu,
under the command
of Admiral Chuichi Nagumo,
are steaming for Midway.
These are the same machines
and men who bombed Pearl Harbor.
The Japanese know nothing of
the American trap awaiting them.
Many of the American airmen
and sailors headed toward Midway
have never faced enemy fire
including Yorktown radioman
and gunner Lloyd Childers.
Childers was attached
to a torpedo bomber squadron.
He can't forget an intelligence
briefing he attended with other crews.
They said, if a 15-plane squadron
of TBD's makes torpedo runs...
...against a determined Japanese fleet
if three of you get through
to deliver torpedoes,
you will have considered that
you have accomplished your mission.

I immediately became alarmed,
because the odds were not good.
Lloyd Childers will soon find out just
how bad the odds really are.
It's the seventh day of the expedition
Time to part the waves and
take the first glimpse of the bottom
three miles down.
Ballard's eyes will be the U.S. Navy's
remotely operated robot explorer
called ATV
equipped with lights and video cameras
Will Ballard finally, after years
of planning and enormous effort,
be able to find the downed Yorktown?
For the veterans,
the ATV is a time machine
carrying them back to a distant world
of fury and fire.
All stations, deploying the vehicle
into the water now.
I remember walking up and down those
decks and 56 years after the fact,
I'm gonna look at those decks again.
And it'll bring back memories.
The ATV has now traveled over two miles
and almost five decades.
The ocean bottom is getting close.
Twelve thousand feet
The depth Ballard found Titanic.
All stations...
past the one-five-thousand feet.
Passing one-five thousand feet, aye.
Approaching 16,000, the depth Ballard
found the battleship Bismarck.
Nearing the sea floor, deeper than
Ballard has ever gone before.
Under the relentless pressure
of the ocean depths,
key equipment on the ATV has imploded.
It has collapsed into itself,
reducing metal and glass to rubble.
The ATV is crippled.
Just how badly no one yet knows.

It's a disaster that may mean the end
of the expedition.

June 3, 1942

The white sands of Midway
are now heavily defended
by hundreds of
young American servicemen
and dozens of bombers,
fighters, torpedo planes.
The battle is less than 24 hours away.
Among those waiting is a small
six-plane torpedo bomber squadron.
Both the planes and their young crews
are untested in combat,
but the young pilots are eager
to face the Japanese.

Seventeen-year-old Harry Ferrier
served as a radioman and gunner.
You don't think about the fact
that people do get killed, you know,
as a teenager, which I really was.
You think you're immortal.
And we had what we thought were
the best airplanes
that the Navy had come up with
and we would really give
the Japanese the hell,
I guess you'd say, and come back.
And it didn't work that way.

Dawn, June 4th nearly six months
to the day since Pearl Harbor.
Two hundred-forty miles from Midway,
Admiral Chuichi Nagumo readies
his attack.

He is supremely confident
of the final outcome
and utterly unaware of the American
aircraft carriers slowly closing in.
My spirits were, well, up to then,
we had won ever battle we fought,
so we thought we would win again.
Now is the moment of attack.

Six a.m.

With Japanese aircraft bearing down,

the American planes on Midway scramble
into the air.
With them is the torpedo bomber
carrying Harry Ferrier,
Bert Earnest and the third member
of their crew,
Jay Manning, the turret gunner.
They're going after
the Japanese carriers.
Earnest, Ferrier and
Manning clear the island just minutes
before enemy planes hit Midway.
The Americans fight back
with everything they've got.
Less than half an hour later,
the first Japanese strike is over.
But if the enemy aircraft carriers
are not stopped soon, Midway may fall.
Six-fifty a.m. June 4, 1942.
A hundred-and-sixty miles
from a battle-torn Midway,
the torpedo bomber carrying Ferrier,
Earnest and Manning head straight
at the Japanese fleet.
As they near the carriers,
the Japanese fighter attack
becomes more intense.
And tragically effective.
But very shortly,
Manning had stopped firing,
and so I looked back over my shoulder
to see what was going on,
and he was just hanging down
in his harness in the turret
and obviously had been killed.
And then, really, the next thing
I remember was waking up
with my head hanging down
and blood pouring off my head.
Their plane is shot up.
Their controls and compass out
of commission.
Their comrade Jay Manning is dead.
But Ferrier and Earnest

are still alive
and now they have
to find their way home.
I decided to climb up above the clouds
and see if I could see anything,
and I did.
And when I got up there,
I saw a great big plume of
smoke over to the east.
...and realized that probably
was Midway, which had been attacked.
They manage to land safely in a
plane that is literally shot to pieces.
After getting patched up at
a field hospital,
Harry Ferrier waits for the return of
the other five planes in his squadron.
He waits in vain.
But it was afternoon,
you know, early afternoon,
and it became obvious that our airplane
was the only one that had come back,
that the other five did not,
and we eventually just had to accept
the fact that they
all five were shot down.
It is day eight of the expedition.
Ballard's robot explorer, the ATV,
is still crippled.
And the Navy doesn't know if they can
get it up and fully running again.
They need more time,
the one thing Ballard can't spare.
Fortunately, the sonar
is still going strong.
Instead of just waiting,
Ballard leaves
the phantom Yorktown behind
to look for Japanese carriers
at a site 170 miles away.
The Japanese veterans
have not seen these waters in 56 years
not since the death of their ship,
the Kaga.

Yet here, time is erased.
My heart is racing in anticipation
of seeing the ship.
I keep remembering the image
of the sinking carrier.
I hope it is found soon.
After all the frustration and delay,
the ATV makes it to the bottom
of the sea.
But all too soon,
Ballard realizes the bottom is barren
no carrier, no planes
just rocks and mud.
No excuses.
I just didn't find it. Period.
Round one.
To Kaga.
I'll get to Yorktown.
I really want the Yorktown.
That's where I'm headed.
But one unspoken question
is inescapable.
If the sonar was wrong
about finding the Kaga,
is it also wrong about the location
of the Yorktown?
Seven a.m. The waters off Midway.
Japanese commander, Admiral Nagumo,
is still completely in the dark
about the trap awaiting him.
Eight-twenty a.m.
Admiral Nagumo receives
truly startling news.
His scout planes sight the one thing
they never expected to see
an American carrier.
Nagumo is shocked to discover
he has a real fight on his hands.
Now he must decide on his next step.
Should he launch a
limited strike immediately?
Or regroup, refuel,
and rearm all of his forces
and then obliterate what he believes

to be the one American carrier?
He decides to wait.
It is a decision that will change
the course of the entire war.
While Nagumo waits,
the American pilots wing their way
towards his carriers.
Yet very quickly,
many of the American squadrons get
separated from each other.
Most of the torpedo bombers find
themselves on their own
without fighter protection from
the fast, lethal Japanese Zeros.
One after another,
the young torpedo bomber crews attack
just as they have been taught steady on
low, straight at the target
directly into murderous enemy fire.
And one after another,
they are blown out of the sky.
The Enterprise torpedo squadron
The Yorktown's 21 out of 24.
And of the 30 from Hornet's torpedo
squad, only one man makes it back.
Yet not a single torpedo makes a
single successful strike
against any of the Japanese carriers.
Despite all the sacrifice,
the Americans are losing the battle.
America is facing defeat at Midway.
And the enemy commander,
Admiral Nagumo,
is set to launch a massive attack
against the American carriers.
Nagumo's crews work feverishly
to get nearly a hundred warplanes
into the air.
Abandoning all caution,
they leave explosives and
gasoline strewn everywhere.
The decks are a disaster waiting
to happen.
Less than a hundred miles away,

is the last American hope,
the dive bombers.
But none of them can find the enemy.
The Japanese have taken
a 90 degree turn northward
to engage the U.S. ships.
Then Enterprise's dive bombing
squadron plays a hunch
and changes course.
And in their sights appear
the four Japanese carriers
Kaga, Akagi, Soryu and Hiryu.
And there is not a Japanese fighter
anywhere to be seen.
The enemy fighters are still
too busy defending their carriers
against the last of
the American torpedo planes
to stop the dive bombers high above.
It's a sight Lt.
Dick Best has been longing for.
I was amazed to see that a,
the deck was a bright yellow,
because our decks had been stained
a north Pacific blue ever since
the start of the war.
And in addition to the deck being
a bright yellow,
the big rising sun up forward
of the elevator,
it was glowing red,
like a tremendous advertisement.
Here we are, we are the Japanese Navy.
He dives toward the rising sun.
And releases his bomb
as does the rest of his group
onto Japanese decks now crowded
with torpedoes,
bombs, gasoline, planes-and men.
She was a mass of flames
from bow to stern,
with tremendous eruptions coming up
every four to five seconds
as a bomb must've hit.

Japanese survivors float hour after
hour in the water,
in silence with the dead and dying
as Kaga burns.
Most are rescued by
other Japanese ships
but not all.
We were fortunate to have been rescued
so quickly.
But there were still men left swimming
and they committed suicide.
In five short minutes Kaga, Akagi,
and Soryu have been devastated
scores of planes destroyed,
many hundreds of young men killed.
Many of the Japanese airmen are caught
in the sky above their burning ships
with nowhere to land.
In just five minutes, the cream
of the Japanese Navy is finished.
But the battle is far from over.
At first, I would like to read
a letter to my friends here.
Ballard's search for
the Japanese carriers has failed.
And the two Japanese veterans
will soon leave the Laney Chouest.
But the voyage to Midway allows Haruo
and Yuji the opportunity
to bid their fallen comrades one
last farewell
and to remember all the young men
who died in battle.
We believe that the innumerable spirits
who sacrificed their lives for their
country should be forever honored
for their distinguished service.
We are honored to have fought
alongside you in battle.
Veterans from both countries have
overcome past animosities
and have pledged a renewed peace.
Spirits, please rest in peace.
Yes, I was thinking, as Haruo and Yuji

were paying homage to their shipmates,
that I, too, lost 45 shipmates
at this very spot.
As all the planes in my squadron,
except the one I was in,
were actually shot down here among
the Japanese battle force,
so this was a very solemn moment
for me as well as for them.
Eleven a.m. on June 4th.
Admiral Nagumo regroups his
surviving planes on the deck of Hiryu
the only carrier
to escape American bombs.
There is still a chance
to emerge victorious.
The Japanese pilots take off,
heading for
the closest American carrier
Yorktown.
The enemy dive bombers score three hits
killing more than a dozen men.
But, unlike the Japanese carriers,
there are no bombs,
torpedoes or fuel on deck,
waiting to explode.
For all the smoke and fire,
Yorktown is still afloat.
Two hours later, as the Yorktown
continues to patch herself up,
a second wave of enemy planes target
the carrier.
Yorktown's fighter pilots scramble
eager to engage the enemy.
Down goes one Japanese torpedo bomber
after another.
But still the enemy comes.
I look out there and
here's this torpedo coming,
and it looks like a brand new nickel
just come shining through the water,
right beneath us. And I said,
Oh, my God, this is it.
And it goes off.

One American carrier is down.
The Japanese carrier Hiryu must
be stopped-fast.
When they find it, Lt. Dick Best
is right there, once again.
And I did look back when I was
far enough out to the west to turn,
and she was aflame,
and burning just the way the ones
in the morning had been.
I felt myself to be the Lord
of creation at the time,
the sense of accomplishment,
and fulfillment of revenge
is so sweet that
I don't think I ever felt anything
as intensely again in all my life.
Caught in the inferno on the Hiryu
is Taisuke Maruyama,
one of the torpedo pilots
who had just crippled the Yorktown.
The maintenance crews and emergency
crews who had tried
to extinguish the fire were injured
by the explosion,
and many lost their legs and hands.
The military doctor was operating
on them on the deck, soaked in blood.
The troops were burnt black,
dead bodies strewn across the deck.
Hiryu, Soryu, Akagi, Kaga.
By the end of the day, all four
Japanese carriers have been destroyed.
Hundreds of young men dead, maimed,
burned, or left to drown.
Twenty-four hours later,
the injured Yorktown is still afloat
and headed home
escorted by the destroyer Hammann.
What nobody sees is the enemy
submarine below the surface
with two sitting ducks in her sights.
Japanese torpedoes split the Hammann
in two, taking 81 men to the bottom.

And mortally wound Yorktown.
For nearly a day, the carrier lingers
on the surface, refusing to die.
Yorktown Radioman Lloyd Childers
is in sick bay, on a nearby ship,
with serious wounds to both legs.
He watches his carrier go down.
This huge ship slowly sank below the
water, the waves,
until it disappeared and we watched it
until it was completely gone.
It's very brutal business.
My other thoughts were that
it's a terrible thing
that so called civilized nations could
do things like that to each other,
convincing me that we're not really
civilized yet.
It is Day 19 of the expedition.
It has been hours since Robert Ballard
sent a robot vehicle down
nearly 17,000 feet
to find the USS Yorktown.
And half a century since Bill Surgi
has seen his carrier.
Ballard has only a left
to find the Yorktown.
After six long hours, the ATV finally
reaches bottom, over three miles deep.
All they see are rocks
that have probably rested here
undisturbed for a thousand years.
I wanna keep looking to the left.
Yet within a few moments of
touching down, they see something
something that shouldn't be there.
A smooth patch of ground clear of rock
as though something had swept across
the bottom.
Something unnatural,
something man-made.
They follow the trail.
Bingo, bingo, bingo.
Suddenly a glint

a shiny metallic glint catches
the video eye.
Dead ahead, range 150 feet.
Keep it nice and high.
I want him to look down and away.
And now the sonar on the ATV itself
is announcing something big
and oddly beautiful dead ahead.
There it is.
Stop, stop, stop, stop. Contact.
It's definitely Yorktown.
There's no question about that.
The Yorktown at last
exactly where Ballard thought it
would be.
Hold that, hold that still.
Try to hold that.
I'm lookin' up my ready room right now
this under the bridge on the island,
on the flight deck.
Too much, too much,
all the people that did their jobs.
I can see them doin' them now.
Keep coming up.
Oh, Yorktown, you're beautiful.
Okay, now I want to pivot to the right
to zero-nine-zero.
The Yorktown-1,100 miles from Hawaii,
over 3 miles below the surface.
Her 19,000 tons sunk halfway
into the mud; her bow crushed.
Yet Yorktown is still intact.
The bridge.
The flight deck.
The pilot house.
She is nearly untouched by time,
her guns still pointing skyward,
to fend off the final attack.
I walked across the deck
and I still got it.
Thanks again for finding it.
My pleasure.
And on behalf of the crew,
I'm glad to be here.

Me too.
That's the boat.
I got to see my ready room.
Maybe next time I'll get to see
where I got all this banging at.
Well, we'll be back.
That's right. It ain't gettin' away now
Thank you.
How does it feel, Bill?
I'm here, they're not.
So I'm representing the crew
and I did my job.
June 4th, 1942.
America has won the battle for Midway
and stopped Japan cold.
The Japanese Navy would never recover
from its losses.
For the Japanese pilots, the defeat
at Midway and the death
of their comrades is
just the first agony.
They will return home to find
themselves kept in isolation,
in silence.
They treated us like prisoners of war.
We were shut away from outside contact
since they were afraid
we might leak information.
You see the veterans who've come back,
whether they're Japanese and Americans
And we brought them here to this spot,
and it spoke to them.
Every one of them cried.
They didn't laugh.
They didn't celebrate. They all cried.
They're hurting.
And this is a half a century later.
So it's their story and what
they're telling us is, don't do this.
This is not fun. It's not wonderful.
Comrades in arms who sleep in darkness
at the bottom of the ocean
for 50 years after the end of the war,
thank you for your sacrifice.

I've brought a tribute, flowers
from Japan, chrysanthemums,
which I've placed on your grave.
My heart is full!

Thank you.

It's difficult,
you think how many people gave up
their lives that day
and they call George Gay and they call
eventually Bert and I,
you know, you're heroes,
but you know, I've said
and I'll always go to my grave
believing that the real heroes died
that day.

They earned a victory.