

Naval War College Review

Volume 54
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 12

2001

In My View

Stanley Weintraub

Dallas Woodbury Isom

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Weintraub, Stanley and Isom, Dallas Woodbury (2001) "In My View," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 54 : No. 3 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol54/iss3/12>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

IN MY VIEW

MacARTHUR'S CHRYSLER

Sir:

Your reviewer of my *MacArthur's War* in the Winter 2001 issue [Dr. Donald Chisholm, of the Naval War College] must have had a bad-hair day. Not a single one of his nit-picking corrections, some of them already altered in the next printing, relate to the thrust of the book (largely ignored in the interest of demonstrating his superior naval expertise), which was that General MacArthur bungled the command of the Korean War by failing to run a hands-on operation and by a pattern of willful and arrogant insubordination.



Professor Chisholm

His technicality that the Japanese minesweepers and crews were not really part of the Imperial Navy obscures the immorality of employing them in a war operation at Wonsan in which at least one ship and crew were casualties.

And he missed at least one more error as crucial to MacArthur's mismanagement as the rest—now corrected in the paperback reprint. The shiny new vehicle in which the general rode to Haneda Airport as he was exiting Japan was a Chrysler rather than a Cadillac.

STANLEY WEINTRAUB

Pennsylvania State University

THEY WOULD HAVE FOUND A WAY

Sir:

The essay by Parshall, Dickson, and Tully in this issue [pages 139–51] was both a critique of my article “The Battle of Midway: Why the Japanese Lost” [Summer 2000, pp. 60–100] and an exposition of their own theory of why the Japanese could not get a strike force launched from their carriers at Midway before those carriers were bombed at 1025 on 4 June. I wish to respond to certain points of their critique of my article and then offer some comments on their theory.

First, I want to commend the authors for producing a most interesting essay. They and I share the belief that the conventional American scenarios of what happened on the Japanese carriers that fateful morning do not make sense, and they as well as I have attempted to fashion more plausible scenarios—based on more recent Japanese sources—to explain why Admiral Nagumo could not get a “grand scale” attack launched. In that endeavor we have come up with very different explanations on certain points, though we agree on others. As one of the purposes of my article was to stimulate critical analysis of the subject, I welcome alternative points of view in the hope that from the clash of ideas a better understanding of what really happened on the Japanese side of that battle will eventually emerge.

Indeed, the authors have made me rethink some of my conclusions. I have even been persuaded to concede one point that affects the timing in my scenario for the operation to rearm the torpedo planes and dive-bombers on the Japanese carriers. I now accept that the second-wave planes were already in the hangars when Nagumo’s order to rearm them was given at 0715. Even had they been spotted on the flight decks soon after the first wave departed for Midway, I now believe that when the first American attack wave from Midway was anticipated (Nagumo knew before 0600 that his carrier force had been spotted), they would have been struck below to free the flight decks for combat air patrol (CAP) activity. The Japanese record of Zeros on CAP being recovered around 0700 on *Akagi* and *Hiryu* substantiates this. This has the effect of advancing my rearming schedule for *Akagi* by the time it would take to get the first few torpedo planes to their arming stations in the hangar. (As I have the rearming process commencing on each plane as it reaches its arming station—about six minutes for the first one, twelve minutes for the sixth—rather than waiting until the entire squadron was lowered, the net advancement would be about ten minutes.)

This does not, however, vitiate my key point, which is: If Nagumo did not receive the *Tone* 4 sighting report until 0800, instead of 0740 as commonly assumed, the rearming operation would have proceeded twenty minutes longer

before suspension or reversal than under the conventional scenario. As a result, under my original rearming schedule, all the torpedoes would have been removed by 0800, not only constraining Nagumo's options at 0830—when a decision had to be made whether or not to launch a strike against the American carrier force—but leaving much more to do after 0830 to restore the torpedoes than if the rearming operation had been reversed at 0745.

Under a schedule advanced by around ten minutes, even more would have been done by 0800—land bombs would probably have been installed on the first *chutai* (division) of torpedo planes on *Akagi*. This would have left even more work to be done after 0830 to reinstall the torpedoes—resulting in Nagumo's 1030 deadline for launch being delayed even longer than under my original schedule. However, this does not negate my supposition that had Nagumo reversed the rearming operation at 0745, as claimed in the conventional scenarios, there probably would have been time to restore the torpedoes in time for a launch to have taken place by 1000.

Having lauded the authors, and even having conceded a substantial point to them, I now turn to some points in their critique of my article that I think are in error.

They dispute my hypothetical assertion that the respotting of the torpedo planes on the flight decks of *Akagi* and *Kaga* could have begun at 0920 had they been rearmed with torpedoes (which I contend would have been possible had the rearming operation been reversed at 0745, as has been claimed). They refute this by saying (on p. 145) that this would have been prevented by “the high tempo of CAP operations” during the period commencing at 0920. They say that at 0920 “the Japanese were alert to a constant stream of incoming American strikes. Until the coast was reasonably clear, and his CAP well stocked with fresh fighters to last through the spotting process, Nagumo cannot have been expected to spot his strike.”

I believe this to be overstated. At 0920, Nagumo was aware that one American torpedo bomber squadron was approaching his carrier force (with dive-bombers expected soon to follow.) He had no reason at that time to expect a “constant stream of incoming American strikes.” As for CAP operations during the period after 0920—five Zeros were launched at 0932 and three more at 0945—they were not an impediment to spotting attack planes on the flight deck aft. Although the authors state (on p. 143) that planes would not “usually be spotted aft during *fighter* takeoff operations” (their emphasis), they give no logical reason why this could not be done if there was a compelling reason to do so. Their note accompanying this statement says, “Any strike force spotted aft would likely have contained a fighter escort of some sort, requiring Zeros to be brought up from the forward section of the hangars via the forward elevators,

thereby obstructing the flight deck for takeoffs in any case.” Only three Zeros from each carrier were to be used for escort. One would think that they could be brought up after the last CAP Zero to be launched prior to 1000 had taken off; that would have been at 0945. There is no reason why they would have had to be spotted at the same time as the first attack planes were spotted aft. Thus, there is no good reason given why Nagumo could not have begun spotting his strike on the flight decks at 0920 had they been ready (which, of course, they were not).

As for my assertion that had (hypothetically) the strike force been ready to launch at 1000, it could have been launched during the fifteen-minute “window” between attacks on the Mobile Force, the authors (on p. 145) counter as follows: “This is wrong on several counts. First, we know that *Akagi* landed a CAP fighter at 0910 and two more at 0951, meaning that even if there had been strike aircraft on deck at 0920 (which we think unlikely in any case), they had to have been moved back down into the hangar by 0951.” They seem to be saying that a “grand scale” strike would have been aborted—and the strike planes stricken below—in order to land two Zeros on CAP at 0951! I believe that most people would assume that the recovery of those two Zeros for reservicing would have been postponed until the strike was launched. The authors err in assuming that because Zeros on CAP were landed when no strike was spotted, those Zeros would have also been landed in different circumstances—such as when a launch of strike aircraft was imminent.

The authors continue: “Also, Isom clearly does not factor in the immutable time costs associated with spotting and engine warm-up—a ‘fifteen-minute window between attacks’ simply does not suffice.” My hypothetical case assumes that the strike planes would already have been spotted by 1000, and with the engines of all but the last few planes brought up already being warmed up. The engines on those last few planes could be warmed up while the planes in front of them were being launched. In view of this, fifteen minutes would have sufficed to launch the strike had it been ready (as I posit it would have been had the rearming operation been reversed at 0745).

The authors go on to say that I ignore “Nagumo’s own estimate that the strike force would be ready at 1100, although a 1030 takeoff was hoped for, if things went well. Launching at 1000, though, for all the reasons cited above, was never even remotely in the cards, and Nagumo knew it.” Here, they appear to have confused the two rearming scenarios I have been comparing: the one that would have resulted had Nagumo received the *Tone 4* sighting report at 0740—as conventionally assumed—as opposed to the rearming schedule that probably actually resulted from his not receiving it until 0800, and reversing the rearming operation after that time.

The 1030 scheduled launch time was a consequence of the actual (and later) reversal of the rearming operation—and of course, a 1000 launch time was “not in the cards.” But my point was that it well might have been had the rearming operation been reversed at 0745. (Incidentally, the authors have misread Nagumo’s statement in his official report. Nagumo states, on page 7 of that report, that he was advised that the torpedo-equipped attack planes in Carrier Division 1 (*Akagi* and *Kaga*) would be ready for takeoff at 1030, and that the torpedo planes in Carrier Division 2 (*Hiryu* and *Soryu*)—which had returned from the Midway strike—would be ready by 1030–1100. These latter planes would be in a strike group separate from the one he hoped to launch at 1030, which included the torpedo planes only of Carrier Division 1.)

Having lambasted the authors on the preceding points, I now want to concede another point to them. In their next paragraph (on p. 145) they state: “Furthermore, the assertion that two-thirds of *Akagi*’s torpedo planes were on deck at 1000 is clearly wrong.” Here, I believe the authors are correct. My reconstruction of the actual rearming schedule was premised on the second-wave planes being lowered to the hangars after Nagumo’s rearming order was issued at 0715. As discussed earlier, I now accept that they were already in the hangars at 0715. As this would have advanced the rearming schedule by at least ten minutes—requiring even more work to be done to reverse it after 0830—it would have resulted in fewer torpedo planes being ready for respotting by 1000. Whether or not any of *Akagi*’s torpedo planes actually got up to the flight deck before it was bombed is, despite *Senshi Soshō*’s claim, still debatable (though I am now convinced that none of *Kaga*’s were on the flight deck).

Now for a few comments on the authors’ theory of why Nagumo could not get a “grand scale” strike launched before his carriers were bombed at 1025. They contend that beginning with several minutes before 0700 and running until 1030, the need to keep the flight decks free for CAP activity prevented the spotting of strike planes for a launch at all times during that (three-and-a-half-hour) period. Such a launch was precluded, they say, because it would require forty minutes to raise and spot a squadron of torpedo planes or dive-bombers, plus additional time to warm up the engines and make the launch—adding up to nearly an hour. (It is said that the Zeros on CAP could not be deprived of servicing or reinforcements for that long.) They conclude that the inability of Nagumo to launch a strike “hinged neither on whether Nagumo received *Tone 4*’s message at 0740 or at 0800, nor on how quickly the armorers in the Japanese hangars could do their work.”

The implications of this theory are astonishing. According to its logic, Nagumo would not have been able to launch a grand-scale strike against the American carrier force even had he not rearmed his second-wave torpedo planes and dive-bombers for a second strike on Midway, and even if he had received the

Tone 4 sighting report immediately after it was sent at 0728, and even if a more thorough search effort had discovered the American carriers at 0700. The blunders committed in rearming, search, and communications operations, which have been blamed by Japanese as well as American historians for the debacle that befell Nagumo, were—we are told—irrelevant. Even if Nagumo's torpedo planes had been properly armed at 0700, the authors contend, they could not have been launched, because they were in the hangars at that time and could not have been raised and spotted on the flight decks before 1030—until the American attacks were over.

This theory, which completely finesses my analysis and that of many others, is in my view simplistic. While the authors are to be commended for bringing to light complications in Japanese carrier operations caused by CAP activity—complications underappreciated by commentators on the battle, including me—they have applied certain elements of their theory much too rigidly.

First, regarding elevator operations: They contend that forty minutes was required to raise from the hangar and spot on the flight deck a squadron of planes. Although it could take forty minutes to raise and spot a squadron of torpedo planes on *Akagi*, this was true only if one elevator (the aft one) was used. Only the aft elevator could be used when a full air group was in the hangar, as dive-bombers would block the use of the midship elevator for raising torpedo planes. (This would have been the case after 0900, when the Midway strike dive-bombers, having returned, were stowed in the hangar.)

However, several Japanese veterans of the battle whom I interviewed stated that if the dive-bombers were already aloft—as *Akagi's* were after the Midway strike force departed—the middle elevator could also be used to raise (or lower) torpedo planes in an emergency. Likewise, when *Hiryu's* and *Soryu's* torpedo planes were aloft (such as before 0900), the aft elevator on those carriers could be used to raise dive-bombers. (Unlike *Akagi's* aft elevator, the ones on those carriers were large enough to accommodate dive-bombers.) This would reduce the elevator time by almost half. Also, the elevators on the newer *Hiryu* and *Soryu* were faster than those on *Akagi* and *Kaga*. Dive-bombers on those carriers could be raised and spotted in less than forty minutes even if only one elevator was used. Thus, it did not always, on all carriers, take forty minutes to raise and spot a squadron of bombers.

This faster elevator operation for the dive-bombers on *Hiryu* and *Soryu* is implied by *Senshi Soshō* (the official Japanese history of the battle, which the authors appear to accord a great deal of credibility). It states (on pages 289–90) that the dive-bombers could have been launched very soon after 0830 (and Minoru Genda, Nagumo's air officer, states that at least some of those bombers were already on the flight decks at around 0830). But the authors, rigidly applying what they believe to be Japanese carrier doctrine, state (on p. 146) that

the “dive bombers were all in their hangars at the time and would have taken another forty minutes to put in action, even if they had been rearmed.”

Yet Genda, Ryunosuke Kusaka, and Tamon Yamaguchi thought that the dive-bombers could be launched soon after 0830. Even if they were in the hangars at 0815, those Japanese officers apparently relied upon a fairly quick raising of them to the flight deck, utilizing two high-speed elevators on each of the carriers. For the authors to insist that only one elevator could be used for each squadron of bombers and that it would invariably take forty minutes to raise and spot them on the flight deck regardless of the circumstances and gravity of the emergency is, in my opinion at least, much too extreme.

Second, regarding CAP operations: Although they clearly constrained deck-spotting operations of the bombers, the constraints were not as absolute as the authors maintain. I have already pointed out that CAP takeoffs did not prevent the spotting of bombers aft. Landings of Zeros for reservicing did require a free flight deck aft, but there was much more flexibility than the authors allow. For example, they state that as *Hiryu* recovered CAP at 0840 “even if strike planes had begun to be promptly brought up on *Hiryu* after the American B-17s departed at 0815, they would have had to be stowed below again by 0840.” Again, I believe most people would assume that landing of the Zeros would be postponed until the strike had been launched. To suggest that a strike ready to go would be aborted in order to land some Zeros on CAP seems much too dogmatic.

Thus, we are told that even the option of a launch of dive-bombers alone at 0830—an option that Nagumo has been roundly criticized for not taking up—was in fact actually precluded by Japanese carrier doctrine relating to elevator operations and CAP. Likewise, we are told that this carrier doctrine precluded the spotting of a strike between 0920 and 1000 and its launch during the “window” between 1000 and 1015, even had one been ready.

While an underappreciation of the constraints that CAP operations placed on strike plane operations may have been the greatest weakness in my analysis, it seems to me that dogmatism by the authors regarding Japanese carrier doctrine is the greatest weakness in their essay. I still believe that Nagumo and Genda would have found a way to spot and launch a strike before 1025 had one been ready. Therefore, I still believe it relevant to inquire why one never got ready.

DALLAS WOODBURY ISOM
London, United Kingdom