

Veterans remember Battle of Midway as WWII turning point

HONOLULU (AP) — Sixty years after the Battle of Midway, ceremonies across the nation and on the tiny atoll itself will commemorate the day U.S. forces sunk four Japanese aircraft carriers and turned the tide of World War II.

Though today it is home only to birds, turtles, seals and other wildlife, Midway's role in World War II was critical.

"Unless you were alive, I think Midway may be something that some people have heard about but maybe can't comprehend," said Col. Lee Wyatt, a history professor from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Despite the importance of the June 4-6, 1942 battle, some veterans and historians are disappointed that it does not receive the same attention as other key events of the war, such as Pearl Harbor or V-J Day.

For three days, American dive bombers and fighter pilots fended off the Japanese naval fleet's attempt to gain Midway as an outpost. After Midway, the crippled Japanese fleet withdrew, never again to gain the offensive.

"It's a huge moment for American military history and American naval history," Wyatt said. "The Pacific war was extremely important to our emergence as a superpower."

The victory also provided the United States with a strategic military installation.

"It brought submarines four days closer to the patrol stations in Asia," said retired Navy Capt. Bill Dozier, 83, of Honolulu.

Many squadrons suffered heavy losses, like Torpedo Squadron 8, whose sacrifice has become part of Navy lore. The squadron's 15 aging TBD Devastators, too slow and

poorly armored to tangle with the famed Japanese Zeros, were picked off one by one when they took to the skies on June 4, 1942, without inflicting any damage to Japanese ships.

But Torpedo 8 drew enemy fighters nearly down to sea level, leaving the Japanese ships unprotected from high-flying American SBD Dauntless dive bombers.

Only one of the squadron's 30 pilots and gunners survived.

Ensign George Gay was rescued when a sea plane piloted by S.O. "Pappy" Cole spotted him floating in the water the day after the battle. Cole took a vote of his eight fellow crew members before attempting the risky rescue.

"He said 'I've never made an open-sea landing; we might not make it, but I'd like to try,'" recalled Jack Bohner, a radio operator aboard the PBV-5A Catalina.

The vote was unanimous, the landing a success and Gay, who had spent 30 hours in the water, lived to tell his story hundreds of times and write a book titled "Sole Survivor."

Events planned to mark the battle include a symposium in Honolulu on the war in the Pacific, "Midway Night" dinners planned in cities across the nation and a wreath-laying ceremony at the island on Wednesday by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For more than 90 years, Midway — about 1,200 miles northwest of Hawaii — was under the jurisdiction of the Navy. The Naval Air Facility on Midway was closed in the early 1990s, and the atoll was turned over in 1996 to the Interior Department to be managed as a National Wildlife Refuge.

Fire shuts down highway in NJ

BERKELEY TOWNSHIP, N.J. (AP) — A forest fire burned across more than 1,000 acres near a state park on Sunday, threatening hundreds of homes and shutting down a 24-mile stretch of one of the state's busiest highways.

By nightfall, state forest fire officials said they had stopped the fire from moving forward. One house was engulfed in flames, and nine were damaged. At the fire's peak, 500 homes were evacuated.

State police said the Garden State Parkway was closed along the east side of Double Trouble State Park, and several local roads also were shut down.

Berkeley Township Police evacuated the town's Pinewald section, sending residents to a school building. By early evening, fire officials said the main threat was that the flames

were burning toward nearby Beachwood.

"We were working in the backyard and we saw all this smoke out there," said Geri Morris, wife of Beachwood Mayor Harold Morris. "My niece called from the back of Beachwood and said, 'Everything's turning black.'"

The Crystal Lake Healthcare and Rehab Center in Bayville evacuated vulnerable residents, including those with chronic health problems, officials said.

The fire started about 1 p.m. near a cranberry bog, and had spread through 1,000 acres around Double Trouble State Park by evening.

Horace Somes, division fire warden for the New Jersey Forest Fire Service,

planned to set backfires — controlled fires that burn away the brush that could fuel the larger blaze — around the perimeter to contain the main body

of the fire. Including the backfires, they expected that between 1,500 and 1,600 acres would be consumed.

Firefighters' efforts were hindered by 30 mph wind gusts and drought conditions. They initially tried to contain the flames but eventually had to fall back, said Horace Somes, division fire warden for the New Jersey Forest Fire Service.

"May was an average rainfall month, but on top of that we had 12 months of dryness," he said. "We have a fire on our hands we can't fight with normal attack."

About 60 state firefighters and 100 volunteers battled the blaze, using at least three helicopters. A state forest fire crewman suffered a minor injury.

The fire was in central New Jersey near the coast about 50 miles northeast of Atlantic City. The parkway in the area is usually packed on summer weekends with people visiting the shore.

"We have a fire on our hands we can't fight with normal attack."

— Horace Somes
Division fire warden
New Jersey Forest

US Airways battling with congress

Airline contends curtailing loans could force company into bankruptcy

WASHINGTON (AP) — US Airways and its supporters are battling congressional efforts to curtail the \$10 billion in emergency airline loans that Congress approved just after Sept. 11, warning that squeezing the bailout program could force the company into bankruptcy.

The airline and lawmakers friendly to its cause are in an uphill battle against holding up the loans for even a few months. The delay would help to pay for add-ons to the \$27.1 billion President Bush wants in new emergency spending for the military and homeland security.

The fight has contributed to slow progress on legislation paying for the battle against terrorism, because the House and Senate versions of those bills contain provisions restricting the loans.

US Airways, still among the nation's 10 largest airlines despite severe post-Sept. 11 pressure, has been preparing to seek a federally backed loan of about \$1 billion from the program. Airline officials maintain that waiting until Oct. 1, when the government's new

fiscal year begins and the loan guarantees would become available again, will be too late.

Congress and Bush created the loans — along with a separate \$5 billion in grants — to help airlines weather the drop in travel after the terrorist attacks.

"We'll have to consider reorganizing under the bankruptcy laws" without the government-backed loans, said US Airways spokesman David Castelvetter. "When you do that, jobs are at stake."

US Airways tried to stave off the loan restrictions, with lobbying by top executives and Capitol Hill visits by some employees in May.

The airline had also contributed nearly \$167,000 to congressional candidates in 2001 and early 2002, the sixth most of any airline, according to records compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, a private group that monitors political contributions.

Even so, the airline struck out twice, both with the House and with the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The \$29 billion-plus counterterrorism

bill that the House passed on May 24 included language forbidding any new federally guaranteed loans to ailing airlines until Oct. 1. US Airways says it needs a cash infusion by August.

The Senate committee has a similar provision — plus a permanent cut in the loan program's size to \$4 billion — in its \$31 billion anti-terror legislation. Senators planned to begin debating that bill Monday when they return from their Memorial Day recess. The fight over the loans could be time consuming.

"This bill is not ready for passage," Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., whose state has US Airways hubs in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, warned before Congress' break. "There are serious changes that must be made in this legislation for this bill to go through the Senate."

With intense opposition from lawmakers from areas where the airline has major operations — mostly in the East — congressional aides say privately that the provision could well end up being dropped.

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