

Shore based aircraft had not been able to stop the enemy march to the south; in fact, in the only attack which they launched they bombed our own cruisers - fortunately, they missed.

Coral Sea marked the end of the period, during which we had been totally on the defensive, a period filled with bitter losses yet brightened by the magnificent job done by our Navy, crippled as it was by the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor five months before. In her darkest hours our Navy performed in keeping with the highest traditions which have made her the pride of Democracy and the scourge of the forces of imperialism and oppression.

The war in the Pacific may be classified into 4 stages:

(a) The Defensive, when we were engaged almost exclusively in protecting our shores and our lines of communication from the encroachments of the enemy.

(b) The Defensive - Offensive, during which, although air operations were chiefly defensive in character, we were able nevertheless to take certain offensive measures.

(c) The Offensive - Defensive, covering the period immediately following our seizure of the initiative, but during which we still had to use a large part of our forces to defend our recent gains.

(d) The Offensive, which began when our advance bases were no longer seriously threatened and we became able to attack the enemy at places of our own choosing.

The defensive phase was discussed closing with the famous engagement in the Coral Sea on the 7th and 8th of May. A lull in operations followed, during which both sides were preparing for future operations.

Knowing that most of our available carrier and cruiser strength was stationed in Southern waters, it appeared likely that the Japanese would make the most of the opportunity to strike us in the Central or Northern Pacific or both, since they had interior lines.

Consequently our carriers and supporting vessels were recalled hurriedly and very secretly from the South Pacific.

Our total forces, available in the Central Pacific, consisted of the carriers ENTERPRISE, HORNET and YORKTOWN, 7 heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, 14 destroyers and about 20 submarines. These were divided into two Task Forces, one under Rear Admiral Spruance the other under Rear Admiral Fletcher. The YORKTOWN had been patched up temporarily and scouting and patrol lines were established well to the westward of the Midway Island.

On the morning of 3 June a large enemy attack force was sighted several hundred miles southwest of Midway on an easterly course.

On the following morning, 4 June, contact was made with enemy aircraft headed toward Midway from the northwest, and immediately afterward two carriers and the enemy main body were picked up in the same vicinity.

The enemy aircraft were not prevented from dropping bombs on Midway but they were subjected to heavy fire and their plane losses were large. Meanwhile Navy, Marine Corps and Army planes from Midway attacked carriers, battleships and other vessels, inflicting damage on one enemy carrier.

At this point our own carriers took a hand in the engagement.

The new famous Torpedo Squadron Eight was launched from the HORNET from a position North of Midway and, without any fighter protection or dive bombers, attacked a force of four enemy carriers - all planes in the squadron were shot down and only one pilot survived; but hits were made on the enemy carriers.