
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the December meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is Stephen Moore, author of *Pacific Payback* and *The Battle for Hell's Island*, he will be speaking this evening on developments in naval aviation in the Pacific from Pearl Harbor to the Battle of Midway. He will be joined by veterans of the Pacific air campaign.

Aviation changed rapidly between the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903 to Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927 to supersonic aircraft in the 1950s. The pace of change rivals that of computer technology in the late 20th century.

From the start, innovative pilots and military leaders sought military applications for this fragile flying machine. Before the Great War, the Italians used aircraft in Libya and an American pilot flew in the Balkan War, providing reconnaissance for armies. Within weeks of the start of World War I, airplanes became a central part of military actions, not only in monitoring troop movements but in combat. At first pilots were armed with pistols or rifles; machine guns quickly followed. The most serious problem became how to shoot forward - to aim the whole plane - without shooting off your own propeller. The Dutch designer Anthony Fokker developed an interrupter gear, for the German army, which synchronized the machine gun to fire at the rate and time to pass through the propeller arc without hitting the blades. Until the Allies developed a similar mechanism, German aviators had a great advantage in aerial combat and were able to reduce or prevent Allied aerial reconnaissance. By the end of the war all the elements for air power in future wars: strategic bombing; interdiction; close air support; reconnaissance; air defense; and air superiority. Nonetheless, the full potential and the real limitations of air power remained unclear.

Not to be outdone, the Navies too found uses for the airplane. First, by employing airplanes for aerial spotting of submarines and reconnaissance. At sea, purpose-designed airplanes - sea-

planes - were hoisted over the side to take off and land on the water alongside. The first plane to take off from a ship occurred in 1910 from the *USS Birmingham*. By 1918, the British had a landing deck on the back of ships allowing planes to land and take off. In the interwar years (particularly the 1920s), the United States and the Japanese Empire showed the most interest in developing maritime aviation.

The Imperial Japanese Navy's *Hōshō* and the Royal Navy's *Hermes* were the first purpose-built carriers with full-length flight decks and a side-mounted control tower island. The British carriers had armored flight decks while the US and IJN favored unarmored, inflammable, wooden decks - both shifted to armored decks mid-war.

Both the Navy and the Marines began extensive experiments with aviation. The Marines began developing dive-bombing techniques in 1919. In 1922, the US Navy commissioned its first aircraft carrier, a converted collier, the *USS Langley* (CV-1). Though the battleship admirals remained wedded to their big guns and Mahanian decisive battles - as were the Japanese admirals, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett convinced them that air power could be a major part of the fleet. Moffett, not himself an aviator, was a master politician, friend of Assistant Secretary/President Franklin Roosevelt, and a master of the naval bureaucracy.

In both navies, the reconnaissance function was primary and carriers were not the primary fleet weapons system. On the eve of the Second World War, the Imperial Japanese Navy had the most well-developed carrier doctrine - including offensive components not found in the USN, the best carriers, the best naval aircraft, the best aircrews and best pilots. (Unfortunately for the IJN, seniority gave command to VADM Nagumo, a cruiser admiral who did not make best use of his tools.)

Naval warfare changed on a quiet Sunday morning in Hawaii, December 7, 1941. Although the Japanese surprise attack proved to be an operational and strategic failure, the destruction of the USN's battleships meant the carriers became the primary offensive weapons platform by default. Failing to destroy the fleet repair facilities and oil reserves meant many damages and sunk ships could be raised and repaired without going to the mainland, and the

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns - contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

aircraft carriers that were not in harbor were able to refuel, take on more planes and pilots, and begin operations.

The US fleet aircraft carriers, notably the original three — *USS Yorktown* (CV-5), *USS Lexington* (CV-2), and *USS Enterprise* (CV-6) — easily ranged the vast distances of the Pacific with their attendant screens of cruisers and destroyers. Of necessity, they operated in separate task forces rather than fleet actions as the IJN could do. During the first seven months of the war, the usefulness of these “floating cities” became obvious. The **Battle of the Coral Sea** in May 1942 was a new type of sea battle waged with the exchange of air strikes, the opposing surface ships never coming into gunnery range or making direct contact. The climax came with the **Battle of Midway** in June 1942 when American aircraft destroyed four Japanese aircraft carriers, *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, and *Hiryu*. Even more important was the loss of Japan’s most experienced flight crews, the best trained in the world.

Midway turned the war in America’s favor.

Further Readings:

- Stephen Moore, *Pacific Payback* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2014).
- Stephen Moore, *The Battle for Hell’s Island* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2015)
- Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011).
- Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc. 2007)
- John Lundstrom, *The First Team: Pacific Naval Air Combat from Pearl Harbor to Midway* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984).
- James H. Belote and William M. Belote, *Titans of the Seas: The Development and Operations of Japanese and American Carrier Task Forces during World War II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

Announcements:

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - Dec. 15, 2015 – *Union Men of Texas* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
- St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Jan. 25, 2015 – *Anglo-American Relations* - 715-386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net
- Rochester WWII History Round Table – 507-280-9970; www.wv2roundtable-rochester.org
- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org

See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/wv2hrt>

- um.org 612-713-2523
- Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>
- World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
- Airshow - Eden Prairie - 16-17 July 2016 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100
- Fort Snelling Civil War Weekend, Aug. 2016
- Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: 27 Jan. Dalrymple, *Return of a King* - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

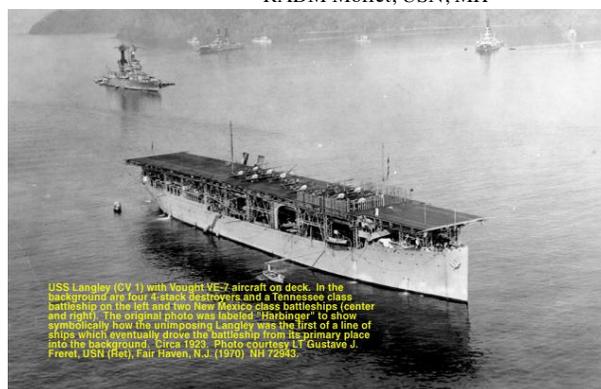
Round Table Schedule 2016

- 14 Jan. **Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought**
- 11 Feb. Liberation of Concentration Camps
- 10 Mar. From OSS to CIA
- 24 Mar. Birth of New Age of War
- 14 Apr. Operation Dragoon/Anvil
- 28 Apr. OSS Maritime Units — First SEALS**
- 12 May Start of Cold War

Photo # NH 4725 Rear Admiral William A. Moffet, USN



RADM Moffet, USN, MH



USS Langley (CV-1) with Vought VE7 aircraft on deck. In the background are four T-class destroyers and a Tennessee class battleship on the left and two New Mexico class battleships (center and right). The original photo was labeled “Hawkeye” to show symbolically how the unimposing Langley was the first of a line of ships which eventually drove the battleship from its primary place into the background. Circa 1923. Photo courtesy of Gustave J. Freret, USN (Ret), Fair Haven, N.J. (1970) NH 72943.

USS Langley (CV-1) on commissioning



Lieut. Cmdr. Godfrey deC. Chevalier, flying an Aeromarine, made the first landing aboard USS Langley underway off Cape Henry, Va., Oct. 26, 1922. Lieut. Cmdr. Chevalier, Naval Aviator #7, died Nov. 14 in the Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, Va., of injuries suffered in a plane crash two days earlier at Lochaven, near Norfolk.

USS Langley (CV-1) receiving first aircraft



USS Enterprise (CV 6) at anchor. Commissioned at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, Newport News, Va., May 12, 1936, Capt. N. H. White commanding. The ship was launched 3 Oct. 1936. [NH 77249]

USS Enterprise (CV-6)