



**Midway's heroic men  
held the rock in  
1942 and gave courage  
to the free world**



During all General Quarters drills, Midway's observation tower is manned by Sgt. O. M. Key. The entire island can be seen from here

**T**HE DAY was June 6, 1942. The place, a sunlit expanse of the Pacific Ocean, about 1500 miles northwest of Pearl Harbor. Aboard the group of ships, all painted with the unmistakable markings of the Imperial Japanese Navy, there hung an ominous, foreboding silence. Among the seamen who padded noiselessly at their task on the upper decks and in the lower compartments, there was little small talk, and an almost complete absence of the jokes and laughter which had accompanied the task force on its strike at tiny Midway Island.

High on the bridge of his command ship, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, Imperial Japanese Navy, stared stoically out to sea. He found little amusement in the antics of the birds which followed the ships, nor in their raucous, almost-human shrieks and calls. The soft, tropical wind offered scant solace as his thoughts drifted to the dispatch en route to the Imperial Japanese Headquarters in Tokyo. And he reminisced on the happenings of the past three days.

On June 4, Admiral Nagumo's striking force of carriers, battlewagons and an array of smaller combatant ships had approached its objective—Midway Island—for what was to have been an easy assignment. His task: three days of attack and pre-landing softening-up, against what the Imperial Staff surmised to be an ill-equipped, under-strength, unprepared U. S. Marine defending force. At the end of the three-

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day period, an occupation unit of Japanese land forces, construction battalions and Special Naval Landing Force Troops was scheduled to land and take over the island. But for the landing force, the entire operation turned out to be a dry run—they never got their feet wet.

The Japanese intelligence summary of the Midway Island situation had been correct in several respects, but totally wrong in one of the most important phases. The Marine defenders were possibly ill-equipped and under-strength, but as Admiral Nagumo was to learn, they were far from unprepared. Marine Air Group-22, flying aircraft far inferior in air performance to the Japanese Zeros, had carried the two-day battle to the enemy. From the airstrips at Midway, the Marine flyers—many of them fresh from Stateside flight school—had scrambled to meet the attacking armada, shooting down an incredible score of 43 enemy aircraft. And on the ground, the 6th Defense Battalion troopers had been far from idle. As the bombers came over to

drop their lethal loads, the eagle-eyed gunners had made the skies over Midway a mighty dangerous place to be. In one furious 17-minute action, the battalion was credited with downing at least 10 enemy aircraft.

Withdrawing his attacking force to the West, Admiral Nagumo surveyed the situation. Several of his major ships had been damaged by Marine dive bombers, many of his aircraft destroyed, and in spite of the bombs dropped on the island, it was apparent that Midway was far from "softened up." His dispatch to Tokyo, informing the Imperial Staff that the attack had been somewhat less than successful, was the first Japanese admission of World War II that the Marine air-ground team was a power with which to be reckoned. And from Toyko on June 9, came verification of Admiral Nagumo's conclusions. "The Midway occupation operations," stated the high command communique, "have been temporarily postponed."

The "temporarily postponed" aspect proved to be the understatement of the war. The Marine air-ground team had successfully defended Midway, at a cost of 49 killed and 53 wounded. Although subsequent actions by the Army and Navy were to be both successful and important, the Corps' doctrine of the defense of advanced bases as demonstrated on Midway, proved conclusively to the Japanese high command that there would be a long row to hoe before the flag of the Rising Sun flew

**TURN PAGE**



Patrolling Marine sentries are responsible for keeping the goonies off the runways. Corp Philip Kazan found the goonies hard to herd



Eagle-eyed Marines coached the island's Navy personnel when they fired on the Midway range



Problems are worked out by TSgt. Austin Sapp and Lieut. Cdr. S. B. Muoio, the security officer

## MIDWAY (cont.)

over the Capitol in Washington, D. C. In summing up the Midway actions, Admiral Nimitz called the battle "... a new and shining page in the annals of the Marine Corps."

That was the picture on Midway Island, 1942. Today, unmistakable signs of that epic struggle still remain. Abandoned concrete emplacements command the strategic approaches to the beaches, where the major activity of the moment is swimming and fishing. Throughout the island, underground shelters and buildings of the 6th Defense Battalion are all but covered with masses of vines and tropical growth. Scarlet and gold signs, once vivid in the tropical sun have now faded, almost to illegibility.

Across from the present-day Naval Station administration building stands a neat one-story wooden structure. The low, wooden picket fence surrounding it is snow white, and the grass it encloses is carefully trimmed and mowed. This is the home of the Marine Detachment, Midway Island. Here, Technical Sergeant Austin A. Sapp and his 14-man crew provide for the security of the island—a mission which the Corps has carried out at Midway, off and on, since 1904.

The detachment—officially carried on the rolls of Marine Barracks, Pearl Harbor as the 7th Guard Platoon—is one of the few remaining field units of the Corps to be headed by an NCO. All men are members of Marine Barracks at Pearl Harbor, and are carefully selected and screened for the Midway duty. Only troops with excellent records and mature stability are con-

sidered for assignment to the remote island, and strangely enough, there are always more than enough volunteers to fill the quota. For the NCOinC, the tour of duty is one year, and for the remainder of the detachment, six months. No extensions are considered; the men are returned to Pearl to finish the time remaining on their overseas tours.

With overall security as its prime mission, the detachment operates a 24-hour-per-day motor patrol of the entire island. The patrol checks supply buildings, restricted areas and the long stretches of beach and airstrips. With only 16 miles of roads on the island, the cycle is a comparatively simple one, and to maintain a maximum degree of security, the jeep-mounted sentry reports to the Navy officer of the day and the Marine sergeant of the guard every hour on the hour.

The two sergeants of the detachment stand day-on-day-off sergeant of the guard watches, with additional duty as brig turnkey. The brig, a 15-cell lockup located in the Marine detachment building, has been a losing proposition; for as far back as anyone can remember it has failed to house a customer. But its appearance belies its lack of business. Every field day at the barracks finds the off-duty crew busy in the brig area with brooms and swabs and an occasional paint job.

Because of the multiple duties of the detachment, it operates as two separate guards of the day. Each consists of a sergeant, three motorized sentries, and three standbys for courier guard and emergencies. Since Midway airstrips serve as a refueling and emergency landing site, air traffic has at times reached a fairly brisk pace. Each plane which sets down carrying courier mail

is furnished a Marine guard during its stay on the island. On occasion, when the courier traffic is heavy and a plane is grounded for a day or two for repairs, Gunny Sapp has had to shuffle his detachment like a greased checkerboard to keep it operating efficiently. This, plus the fact that at all times men must be available to stand special sentry duty for arriving VIPs when such is requested by the Naval Station commander.

The entire detachment is on 24-hour call in the event of fires, riots or crash calls. An extra emergency vehicle is furnished during the night hours, enabling the Marines to move out almost as soon as the crash phone sounds in the sergeant of the guard's office. Five men answer each emergency call, mainly to keep unauthorized personnel out of the immediate area. On a busy night, when the detachment answers four or five calls, there is little sleep for the standby crew. But as one of the troopers points out, mindful of the small area of the island, "I wasn't going on liberty, anyway. . ."

During certain type cargo unloadings at Midway, a security call goes out to the Marine detachment. Guards are furnished to ride the loaded trucks from the docks area to the final destination. General quarters drills are busy times for the detachment. Two men are assigned to observation posts commanding excellent views to the approaches to the island, while the remainder of the Marine crew, augmented by nine Naval personnel, man a special mortar section commanded by Gunny Sapp.

In addition to its security chores on the island, the detachment handles the weapons training program for the Naval Station personnel. In groups

averaging about 15 men, the sailors are lectured, snapped in and given indoctrination firing on the M-1, mortars, carbines, machine guns and bazookas. Officers are given a similar course on the .45 pistol. As of this writing, the weapon indoctrination program has reached close to the 100 percent mark, and future firings will be conducted as personnel rotation occurs.

Living conditions of the detachment on the island are excellent. Although not as pretentious as their Stateside post counterparts, they more than adequately fill the bill, and in some aspects, offer the small Marine group a form of detached living not found elsewhere on the island. The two sergeants and senior corporal of the detachment are billeted in a large room in the main building. The remaining



This old 6th Defense Battalion beach position is a constant reminder to peaceful Marine fishermen of the strategic position Midway holds



The detachment's 11 junior members are quartered in this Quonset hut. The multiple duties assigned to the unit keep the Marines busy



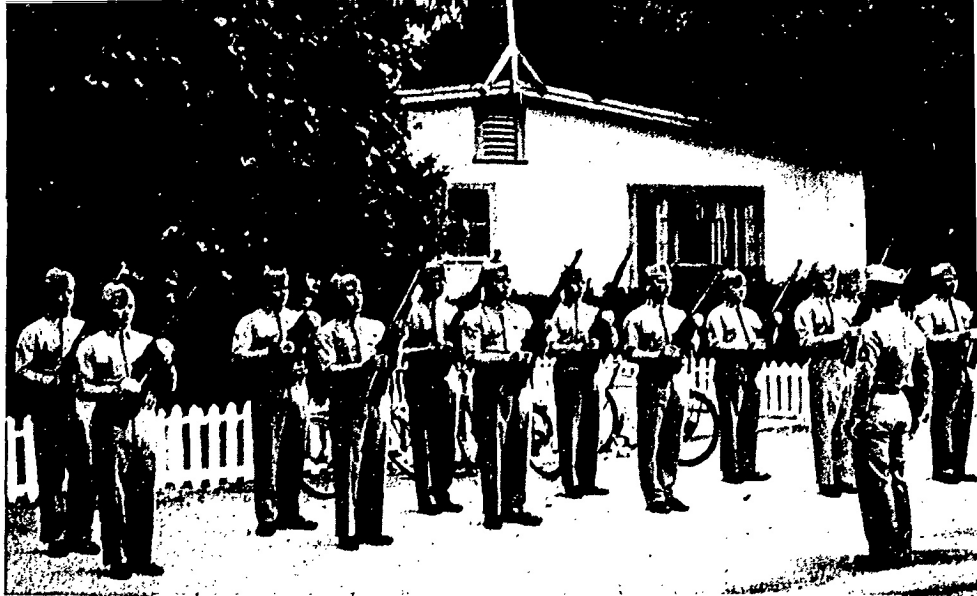
11 men are quartered in a Quonset hut at the rear of the brig. Three showers and heads, individual chest of drawers, fans and radios, all spell out comfortable living for the troops. A community hot locker at the rear of the Quonset holds greens and other bulky clothing, and insures against mildew during the hot Summer months. Only when a rotation of men is underway do the quarters become a trifle crowded. With two or three extra troops on hand, folding cots are broken out to accommodate the overflow.

Early in 1955, the detachment decided that a recreation room would add a homey touch to the Marine area, and all hands turned to on the project. Building material was begged, borrowed and scrounged; old but serviceable furniture sweet-talked from appropriate sections; and tools appeared on the job as if by magic. Even gold-colored drapery material was drawn from Special Services, to be sewed by a sympathetic chief's wife into curtains for the off-duty lounging area. A generous collection of books and old magazines has put in an appearance, and since April, 1955, the watchstanders have enjoyed the fruits of their labor.

Training for the under-sized detachment follows as closely as possible the standard Marine Corps syllabus, but because the off-duty section is normally a small handful of men, Gunny Sapp is at times caught short in setting up the weekly training schedule. But subjects such as squad drill, fire team

TURN PAGE

◀ Off-duty Marines can choose a number of recreation facilities



Midway Marines always receive last minute checks by TSgt. Sapp before inspection. This is the only time the men have to wear ties



Inspections by Capt. M. H. Eppes, USN, Midway's commander, keep the Marines sharp for frequent honor guards for visitors

## MIDWAY (cont.)

tactics and troop and stomp, all get their fair share of attention along with the almost daily lecture periods. Much emphasis is placed on weapons; the pistol, bazooka, machine guns and mortars are fired frequently on the small, detachment-operated range, and with all men taking a turn at instruct-

ing the Navy training groups, they have developed into weapon experts in their own rights.

Recreational facilities and off-duty activity on the island are diversified but water sports, naturally, dominate the scene. Two swimming beaches, complete with floats, diving boards and qualified life guards have been set up for officer and enlisted personnel. Six outboard motors and boats can be checked out through Special Services, along with deep sea fishing gear. Skin

diving and underwater photography are two of the newest hobbies practiced on Midway, with several members of the detachment now fairly expert at searching out the underwater game. Two 18-foot sailboats are available to qualified personnel, and with the constant winds blowing around the island, they offer an exciting afternoon's entertainment.

A station gym, complete with weight-lifting gear, boxing ring and basketball courts; a skating rink and six bowling alleys all round out the indoor sporting activity. The station hobby shop has sections for leatherwork, photography, woodworking, and model airplanes.

The theater—a 650-seat affair—gets a big turn-out every night. Each Saturday, the MATS flight from Hickam Field, brings with it seven movies to be shown through the coming week. Some of the pictures are old and others fairly recent; but it makes little difference to the appreciative audience. Occasionally a USO or Hollywood talent show stops off at Midway for a performance, and invariably plays to a jammed house.

A unique system has been set up on the island concerning movies, laundry and haircuts. For the flat rate of 50 cents per month, all enlisted men below the rate of chief or master sergeant, get all three on a package deal. There is no limit on the number of haircuts, the amount of laundry or the number of movies attended. According to Gunny Sapp, the system has worked out well for the detachment; each man gets a haircut weekly and one-day service on laundry. "And the old excuse of not having the price of a haircut just doesn't work here," says Sapp. "All

you need is the energy to walk to the barber shop.

A deluxe enlisted club rounds out the off-duty picture on Midway. A fountain and snack bar is open nightly, and the main lounge bar serves a liquid menu ranging from 20-cent beers to bottled champagne. In the club, as elsewhere on the island, civilian clothes are permitted after working hours. An outdoor patio adjoins the club for those hands preferring the evening breezes, and an indoor game room gets a good crowd nightly for its pool tables and shuffleboard.

Air mail from the States normally arrives on the island two or more times a week, depending upon the air schedule. Outgoing mail leaves every day, mostly aboard planes of the Tokyo-

Hickam Field run, which have stopped at Midway to refuel. The major "straight dope" source on Midway is the island's own radio outlet, the Armed Forces Radio Station, KMTH. On the air from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. five evenings a week and from 7 to 11 p.m. on Sunday and Monday, the station is a top morale factor of the island and its number one information center. Any hot news received is immediately sent out over the air, including arrival of mail planes.

By far, the greatest source of amusement on Midway, is not a man-instigated event, but the coming and going of the gooney birds. Although Midway is a bird sanctuary and inhabited by terns, moaning birds, canaries and other varieties, the star performer is the gooney. During the height of the mating season there are between 100,000 and 300,000 goonies on the island. The average adult bird weighs six to eight pounds and sports a wingspread up to seven feet. The goonies are without doubt the world's weirdest birds. They waddle like a skid row drunk, and honk, scream and clack their long bills until the entire island sounds like a regiment of flamenco dancers suffering from a collective hot foot. During the

season, they cover all available space—including the airstrips. And therein lies a story, dubbed in some quarters, "The Second Battle of Midway."

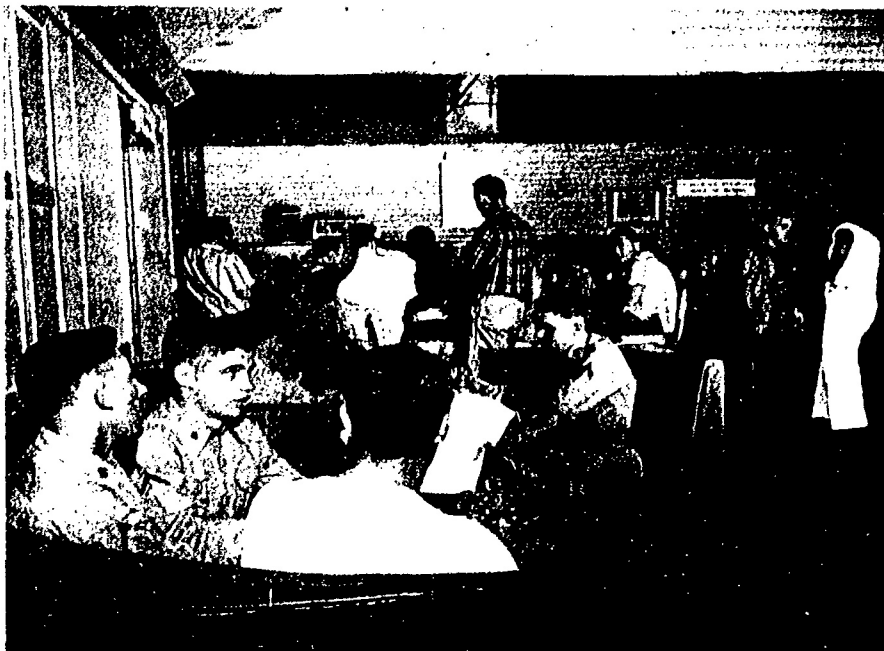
Because of the danger to aircraft, the Department of Defense asked the Department of Interior to get the goonies off the strip. Finally, experts from the Fish and Wildlife Service arrived on the island and went to work. First they tried to smoke out the goonies. Smoke flares and old rubber tires were burned a few feet from the birds nesting on the runways, but the only result was a few curious glances from the goonies who continued their activities. Then the experts tried the noise approach, and the Marines got into the act. Bazookas and mortars were fired close to the birds ensconced on the runways, and when the last big boom had echoed in the distance, the results were negligible—a few birds had moved, and then only a few feet. Finally, in a last attempt, 100 nests were raided and the eggs removed. According to the experts, it's still too early in the game to determine if the goonies have learned to stay off the airstrips—but it's a safe bet that you can't teach an old gooney new tricks.

Through the year, personnel stationed



Corp. R. Jordan (left) lends a nightly hand at Station KMTH

**New buildings, jet aircraft and underbrush  
give the lonely little island a new  
look, but the gooney birds haven't changed**



at Midway have given the island many names. It has been variously known as "The Rock," "Midway-to-Nothing," "The Hole," and other titles, best omitted. Yet, none of the present day Marine detachment classifies his duty in the aforesaid categories. Few of the troops draw more than \$10 per month, preferring to let their pay ride the books. The chow is good and recreational facilities and off-duty activities are more than adequate. The duty is good, affording each man an opportunity to become a thinking part of a small, smooth-functioning military organization.

And for those Marines who've been around—you just can't beat that combination. **END**

◀ The enlisted club is the social center of Midway's night life