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Battle of Midway commemorated by Naval Station Great Lakes, City of Chicago at Midway Airport

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Three veterans of the Battle of Midway, the crucial turning point of the war in the Pacific during World War II, were honored on June 7 at Midway Airport in Chicago during a morning ceremony sponsored by Naval Station Great Lakes (NSGL), the City of Chicago Department of Aviation, and the Chicago Marine Heritage Society. Midway veterans retired Navy aviator Capt. Grant C. "Jack" Young, Navy veteran Jack Coombe and Marine Corps veteran Thomas Tobin shared the stage with fellow Pacific theater veterans, retired Navy Capt. Chuck Downey and Marine Corps veteran Emmanuel "Manny" Bud.

Speaking at the ceremony were Capt. Randy Lynch, NSGL commanding officer, who was the keynote speaker; Commissioner Rosemarie Andolino, Chicago Department of Aviation, who thanked veterans for their service; Capt. Carlos Ortiz, Navy Region Midwest chaplain, who delivered the invocation and benediction; and Cmdr. Robert Sullivan, NSGL executive officer, who served as master of ceremonies for the event. Also in attendance was Chicago Alderman Michael Zalewski of the 23rd Ward, who serves as chair of the city's aviation committee.

"We salute these warriors of the Battle of Midway," said Lynch. "Words cannot express our nation's gratitude for your extraordinary service."

"On behalf of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the City of Chicago, and the Chicago Department of Aviation, I want to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for your service to our country," said Andolino. "Thanks to you, and all of our country's veterans and active military, all of us here enjoy the freedom we do today. Thank you so much."

Coombe and Young, both in their 90's, shared their combat experiences with the crowd of over 100 gathered in the airport

terminal. Midway Airport's Memorial for the Battle of Midway served as a backdrop for the ceremony.

"I am proud of the United States Navy and proud to be a part of it," said Coombe, a U.S. Navy veteran of Pearl Harbor, the Solomon Islands campaign, the Marshall Islands campaign, the Philippines Islands campaign, and the Saipan and Okinawa campaigns. The Japanese navy "had their wings clipped," said Coombe of the victory at Midway.

"Midway taught the Navy some valuable lessons," said Young, a retired U.S. Navy aviator, who participated in the Marianas campaign and the First Battle of the Philippine Sea, and is a recipient of the Navy Cross. "I am grateful that God spared me to be here to talk to you folks today."

Lynch gave an overview of the battle in his remarks. The Battle of Midway took place June 4-7, 1942. During the battle, U.S. Navy carrier strike forces defeated an Imperial Japanese navy carrier task force. Facing four veteran Japanese aircraft carriers, the U.S. Navy won the battle with only three aircraft carriers – USS Enterprise (CV 6), USS Hornet (CV 8) and USS Yorktown (CV 5) – augmented by land-based fighters, bombers and torpedo planes from Midway.

During the battle, Japan lost four carriers, a heavy cruiser and 256 planes. The U.S. lost Yorktown, a destroyer and 145 planes. Japan's losses, both at Midway and at the Battle of Coral Sea, shifted the balance of naval power in the Pacific, and derailed Japanese plans to both threaten Hawaii and isolate Australia.

In commemoration of the victory, retired Navy Rear Adm. Mack Gaston, (Naval Training Center, Great Lakes 49th commander from 1992-95) and Lynch placed a wreath at the Memorial for the Battle of Midway that features an actual Dauntless dive bomber in addition to interactive displays.

"This airport was named Chicago Midway Airport in 1949 to commemorate the heroes of the Battle of Midway and World War II veterans," noted Andolino.

Navy Band Great Lakes sailors MU1(SW) Matthew Anderson, MU3 Elizabeth Clapper, MU3 Judd Burton, MU3 Jeff Keller, and MUSN Kristen Brawner, provided musical accompaniment for the ceremony.

For more photos of the ceremony, visit NSGL's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NavalStationGreatLakes.

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