

Midway Magic (WWII's aircraft carrier) by Scott McGaugh (2004)

It took 18 months to build Midway at Newport News Shipbuilding in Newport, RI. Launched in 1945, the Midway was the largest ship in the world [& 1st to be too large to pass through the Panama Canal]. It had a crew of 4500 sailors. It was the 1st to have a steel deck. It was top-heavy & the hull design made it unstable [it listed 24 degrees in a storm]. In 1946, it heads for the frigid waters near Greenland. The cold wind & waves made it a nightmare. They added gas to the engine's oil to keep it from coagulating.

April 1945 Americans came to Nordhausen, Germany only hours before the Russians & discovered an underground factory that made V-2 rockets. One was launched from Midway 18 months later [1st ballistic missile launched at sea]. It was destroyed after 12 seconds when it was out of control. June 1950 President Truman ordered 90 non-nuclear bombs to be transferred from the Atomic Energy Commission to the military. We started training for defense against ABC warfare [atomic, biological & chemical]. By 1952 two nuclear bombs were aboard Midway.

Christmas 1952 a party was held aboard & invited local dignitaries & more than 100 daughters. But rough seas prevented them from returning until morning & soon after VD swept throughout the crew. The Midway did not stop to take on supplies, the supply ships came along side. The carrier steamed under the Golden Gate Bridge on 14jul1955 after a 57,000-mile journey. A \$55-million two-year modernization project added a 2nd [angled] flight deck, 55,000 # crane, air conditioning, etc.

Vietnam's Rules of Engagement put a huge handicap on American pilots [causing too many deaths]. Midway returned to San Francisco 23nov1965 & began a four year & \$200-million renovation. The late sixties drugs became a problem: 150 were discharged in '66 for drugs & 4 years later it was 5,000. In '72, 36% of the crew were infected with venereal disease after leaving port in Philippines.

The catapult would thrust the jet into 8 G-force. It would take the pilot 4-seconds before he would get control of the plane or get wet. At night it was difficult for the pilot to see the deck coming in at 150 mph & 200' above the sea. 1972 Ron McKeown [world's greatest fighter pilot] flew into a trap: he shot down two Chinese MiGs & the rest disengaged. Two months later he became the commanding officer of Top Gun.

29apr75 Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese & over 3000 refugees fled to the Midway [by boat & helicopter]. In total, that month 120,000 Vietnamese & 20,000 Americans fled Vietnam. In the 70s, Midway was constantly getting worked on to keep up with current standards. Japanese workers did a great job while it was stationed there [73-91]. Some of the crew volunteered at orphanages when at different ports. Russians played military chess with Americans. One day Midway turned into the wind to launch jets & a nearby Russian destroyer changed course & cut her off. Midway went 10 miles away at 30 knots & did her maneuvers. The American jets did a 20,000' dive & left the Russians in a sonic boom.

The night of 29jul80, Midway was running blackout & a Panamanian freighter changed course & ran into her. The disaster was repaired. Ironically it was 13 yrs to the date after a fire that killed 134. After 40 yrs of service, they removed over 300 tons by reducing the armor plating from 6" to 3". 1990 Midway was near Iraq helping fight Saddam Hussein. 1991 Midway helped evacuate people from the erupting Mt. Pinatubo, Philippines. 4sep91 Midway returned to Puget Sound, decommissioned in '92 Midway was decommissioned & moved to San Diego to be a museum in 2004.

Facts:

1000' long & 250' wide; weighed 45,000 tons; 212,000 HP [12 boilers fed 4 power plants & (4) 18' propellers] would let it reach 30 knots [35 mph]; it could travel 20,000 miles at 15 knots; it would use up its fuel supply [2.2 million gal] in 20 days at 18 knots (7 days at 30 knots); carried 80 planes; It's fire sprinkler system could spray 40,000 gpm; it's kitchen could cook 1000 lbs of meat & 10,000 cups of coffee at a time; daily food supplied = 1000 loaves of bread, 5000 lbs of veggies, 4500 lbs of meat, 20,000 lbs of dry goods; most of the crew earned about \$90/month; 4-acre flight deck; carried 1.2 million gal of jet fuel; produces 240,000 gal of fresh water daily.

Quotes:

"The friends you chose will always reflect on you." (John Hipp)

"Some never get the chance, others do & fail. My sincere congratulations that you were in the third category: tried & true." (Capt Hage)

Movies:

"Wing & a Prayer"