

Delaware's Forgotten World War II Hero: Wilmer Earl Gallaher at Midway

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I. Introduction and Summary

The months after the devastating Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor were difficult ones for the United States. The Japanese had destroyed the cream of our Pacific Fleet and began a reign of conquest almost unparalleled in modern times: China, Singapore, French Indochina, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, Wake Island, etc. To fight back, the US had only its few precious aircraft carriers and the men who flew their planes.

Following the intelligence breakthroughs of the Navy's codebreakers and Admiral Nimitz's audacious confidence in their conclusions, the carriers were placed in position to neutralize the next Japanese attack on the strategic Midway Island. The pilots did the rest.

One of them was Lieutenant Wilmer Earl Gallaher, a Wilmington, Delaware native. He was Commander of Scouting Squadron Six (VS-6) aboard the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6). His skill, valor, and personal leadership directly helped sink two of the four Japanese aircraft carriers destroyed that day. This decisive result by the underdog Americans eliminated the threats to Midway, further Japanese expansion, and hundreds of irreplaceable first-line Japanese pilots. The Americans then began the long road to victory in the Pacific. Thus, a Delawarean was a key contributor to one of the most significant battles in world history. Yet, his role has been largely forgotten. We hope to begin to change that situation with this report.

II. Biographical Information and Early Naval Career

Wilmer Earl Gallaher was born in Wilmington, Delaware on 9 May 1907 (Figure 1)¹. His parents were Albert Gallaher, age 32, and Julia Carr, age 24, living at the time at 846 Kirkwood Street, on the city's east side. He was the only boy among three sisters: Virginia, 2 years older; Sarah, 1 year younger; and Elizabeth, 3 years younger.² Albert was a carpenter and later a millwright working in the chemical industry². By 1910, they had moved to 219 Franklin Street and by 1920, they were at 405 W. 31 Street, all in Wilmington.

Gallagher, Wilmer Earl

RETURN OF A BIRTH.
CITY OF WILMINGTON, DEL.

1. Full Name of the Child *Wilmer Earl Gallagher*
2. Sex *boy*
3. Color *white*
4. Date of Birth *May 9 - 1907*
5. Place of Birth—Street *846 Kirkwood*
6. Father's Name *Albert W. Gallagher*
7. Father's Age *32 years*
8. Occupation of Father _____
9. Father's Birthplace { State or Country _____
Maryland
10. Mother's Name Prior to Marriage *Julia A. Carr*
11. Mother's Age *24 yrs.*
12. Mother's Birthplace { State or Country _____
Pennsylvania
13. Child's number in family *2nd* State if Still Born _____
14. Number by this Mother _____
15. Date of this Certificate _____
16. Date of Registration _____
17. I hereby certify that the above is a true Report of the birth at the time and place above stated.
Denny R. Derron Informant.

N. B.—At No. 1 give the full name of the child, and BE PARTICULAR TO GET MIDDLE NAMES IN FULL. At No. 3 state whether the child is white, black or mulatto. At No. 5 give the street, number and ward.

If the child was still born, or has died since birth, state the facts at No. 13, WITH ANY OTHER FACTS OF INTEREST.

In the case of twins or triplets, a separate blank is to be filled for each child.

Figure 1: Gallagher Birth Record¹

Gallagher went to Schools 23 and 24 and Wilmington High School. According to Bill Frank, long-time feature columnist for the Wilmington News Journal and its predecessors, he dropped out in his junior year of 1924³ (Appendix A). He enlisted in the Navy 23 February 1926 and was trained at Newport, Rhode Island and at the Radio School at Hampton Roads, Virginia. He had to go back to high school when he learned of the requirements for the US Naval Academy. He took the entrance exams in April 1927 and was accepted to the Academy in May. His parents were living in the Richardson Park section of Wilmington by then and the neighborhood was thrilled to hear the news⁴.

He must have been quite the ladies' man based on his Academy nickname of "Lovey"⁵ (Figure 2). The Gym Team was a major interest. In fact, "Dusty" Kleiss, later to be in his squadron, said that he nearly won a spot on the 1928 US Olympic Team.⁶ He graduated in the class of 1931.

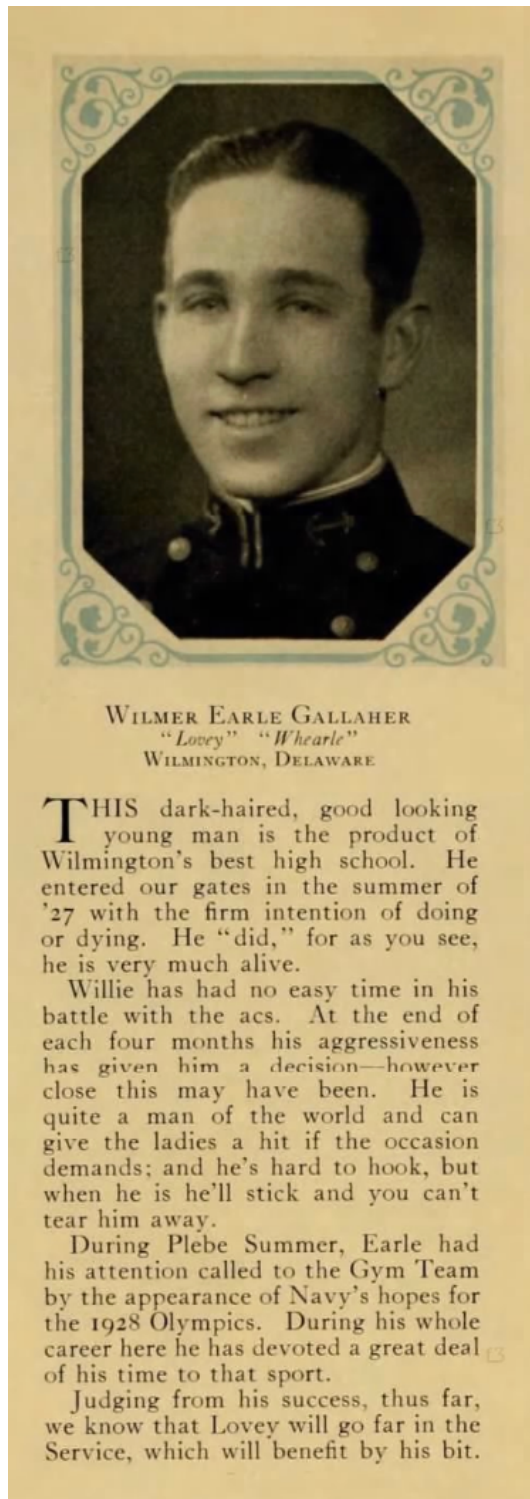


Figure 2: Gallaher at the USNA, 1931⁵

Upon joining the fleet, Gallaher served on the ill-fated battleship USS *Arizona* (BB-39) and destroyer USS *Barney* (DD-149) before entering Pensacola for flight training in 1933.⁷ After receiving his wings in 1935, he served on both the USS *Langley* (CV-1), the first American aircraft carrier, and the USS *Ranger* (CV-4).⁷

He married Annette Woods 31 October 1934 in Pensacola⁸ and had one son with her, William A. Gallaher, born in 1939. He also had a daughter, Florence Ann Gallaher, born in 1930 and thus, probably from a previous relationship of Annette's. The Gallahers divorced 22 December 1955 while he lived in Alexandria, Virginia.⁹

III. Early War Experiences

When war broke out, Gallaher was assigned to the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) as Executive Officer of Scouting Squadron 6 (VS-6), flying Douglas SBD-3 Dauntless dive bombers. Gallaher was well respected in the unit. "Dusty" Kleiss wrote:

*"I liked him instantly. He possessed a friendly demeanor and had excellent skill. Undoubtedly, Gallaher had the best aim of any of the dive bomber pilots in the Navy at the time. He was easily the true genius of our squadron."*⁶

Gallaher was flying over Hawaii and Pearl Harbor during the Japanese attack on 7 December. He saw the devastation and fought back against the enemy planes.

Enterprise was at sea and was supposed to have been back at Pearl on 6 December. However, it was luckily delayed due to bad weather. The air group of carriers usually returned to land-based airfields when the carriers were in port. Thus, Gallaher was leading a flight when he saw planes flying over Oahu. He first thought they were U.S. Army planes since they would often have mock battles with each other, though it would be unusual for a Sunday morning and without advanced warning. It was then that Japanese Zero fighters began attacking and he saw smoke rising from the harbor. His radioman began to fire at the planes with red balls ("meatballs") on the side that proved they were Japanese. He radioed "*Pearl Harbor is under attack.*" He claimed that he didn't add the rest of the famous message that was rebroadcast to the world: "*This is no drill*", but rather "*This is no [expletive]*". He landed at a Marine Corps base, Ewa Field, and was told: "*get the hell off the ground. Can't you see what's going on, the planes are burning all over the field*". He then took off and flew to Ford Island, as he usually did. However, the ground forces started firing at the incoming American planes. A number were unfortunately shot down.¹⁰

He saw the wreckage in the harbor and said that he was

*"very, very, very upset because the Arizona had been my first ship in the Navy as an ensign, and the Arizona had taken the worst licking. I was very, very upset about that"*¹⁰

He and eight others later took off on a bombing run to attack the Japanese ships. However, none were found.¹⁰

Enterprise then participated in several hit-and-run raids in early 1942. The first U.S. carrier strike of the war was against Roi and Kwajalein of the Marshall Islands on 1 February 1942. Gallaher successfully hit the stern of a cruiser off Kwajalein.^{10,11} He became leader of Scouting 6 when LCDR Hopping was shot down.¹² Gallaher's gunner, RM 1/C Thomas Merritt, then shot down the

Japanese plane that had shot down Hopping.¹³ Kleiss said that “...Gallaher was a superb replacement. He led us by example. He demanded perfection and he got it.”¹²

The next raid on 23 February was on the former U.S. territory Wake Island.

While the results of these raids were minimal, they had a psychological effect on the Japanese, and a positive effect on American morale. Importantly, the pilots gained essential battle experience, but at the expense of a significant loss of pilots. Only eight of the original nineteen pilots who had left San Diego in May 1941 still served by March 1942.¹⁴



Figure 3: Scouting Six in Formation, 17 October 1941¹⁵

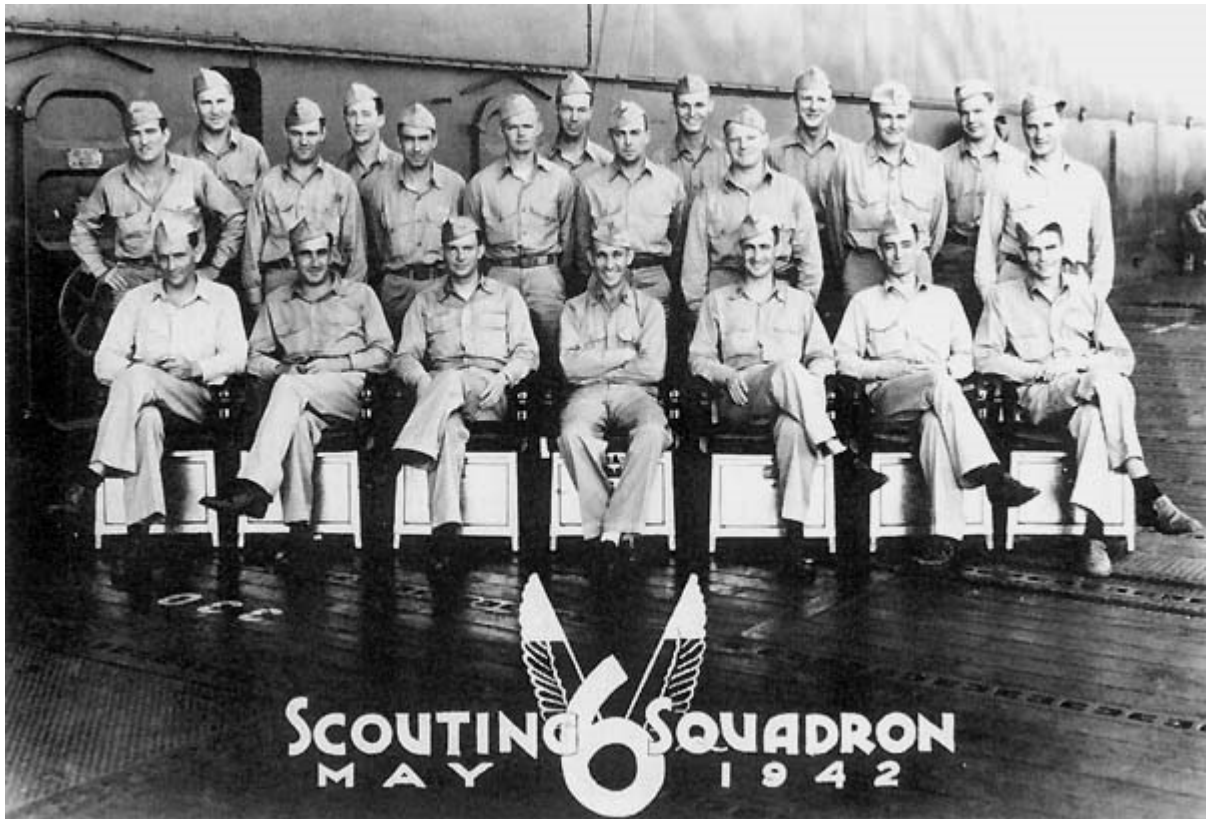


Figure 4: Group Photo of Scouting Squadron 6 (VS-6), 12 May 1942, about one month before the Battle of Midway¹⁶.

Seated (L-R): Lt (jg) J. Norman West, Lt Frank A. Patriarca, Lt Charles R. Ware, **Lt Wilmer E. Gallaher (CO)**, Lt Clarence E. Dickinson, Jr., Lt (jg) Norman J. "Dusty" Kleiss, ENS John R. McCarthy, AV(N).

Second row (standing) (L-R): ENSs [all A-V(N)] John Q. Roberts, Carl D. Peiffer, James A. Shelton, William R. Pittman, John c. Lough, Vernon L. Micheel, Eldor E. Rodenburg, Thomas F. Durkin, Jr., Richard A. Jaccard, Frank W. O'Flaherty, Clarence E. Vammen, Jr., James C. Dexter, Reid W. Stone, William P. West.

IV. The Battle of Midway: Rationale and Preliminary Issues

Since the Battle of Midway was one of the seminal battles in world history, it is no surprise that there have been many books written and movies made about it, including a documentary actually filmed during the Japanese bombing of Midway Island by celebrated director John Ford. Thus, we will only summarize the basics here and in the next section, focus on Gallaher's specific role.

The Japanese wanted Midway Island to expand its defensive perimeter, but most importantly, to lure the American fleet into a decisive battle that would force the Americans to negotiate a peace treaty. This plan was put into place earlier than desired due to the Doolittle Raid on 18 April 1942.¹⁷ This audacious mission involved land-based B-25 bombers flying from an aircraft carrier, USS *Hornet* (CV-8), to bomb Japan. It caused little real damage, but was another psychological blow and humiliation to the Japanese.

While the Japanese sank the U.S. aircraft carrier USS *Lexington* (CV-2) and heavily damaged the carrier USS *Yorktown* (CV-5) in the Battle of the Coral Sea, 4-8 May 1942, two Japanese carriers, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, were also heavily damaged and not available for Midway. This meant that there would only be four carriers instead of the planned six. Nonetheless, the Japanese still had a numerical advantage in carriers.

What the Americans did have was advance knowledge of the attack due to their breaking of the Japanese code. Initially, all they knew was the target was “AF”, but weren’t sure what “AF” was. The staff famously devised a stratagem to have Midway feign not having fresh water and report that with an unencrypted message. When they decoded a Japanese message saying, “AF is short of water”, the target identity was confirmed.

Boldly accepting the intelligence as to the time and place of the attack and risking the remaining Pacific aircraft carriers, Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, prepared a plan to station the carriers northeast of Midway. This position would place the smaller American fleet out-of-range of Japanese patrol planes, but allow an attack on the Japanese from an unexpected position.

The other major issue was the status of the *Yorktown*. As indicated above, she had been heavily damaged at the Coral Sea, but was able to reach Pearl Harbor. The initial estimates were that it would take months to repair her. Nimitz gave the shipyard 72 hours. Amazingly, the yard was able to do enough so that *Yorktown* was available with *Enterprise* and *Hornet* to meet the Japanese. Nonetheless, it would still be four Japanese carriers to three for the Americans.¹⁸

V. The Battle of Midway: Gallaher's Critical Role in the Carrier Strikes (See Appendix B for Gallaher’s contemporaneous mission report)

A. The Morning Attack

On 28 May 1942, Task Force 16 with *Enterprise* and *Hornet* left Pearl Harbor. Though Admiral Halsey was no longer in charge of the operation due to a severe case of dermatitis, Kleiss said that:

*“Gallaher knew a little more about the upcoming operation than most pilots on Enterprise. Years earlier, he had dated Halsey’s daughter, Margaret.”*¹⁹

Based on the broken code and subsequent intelligence, American reconnaissance planes began searching the expected area on 4 June 1942. As both predicted and hoped for, the Japanese fleet was spotted. Gallaher and his fellow pilots were ready to be launched. He felt:

*“the feeling of anticipation, more than any kind of fear or anything like that, the anticipation of the fact that we were really gonna have the chance, this was my feeling and I know the feeling of many of the pilots, of paying them back for Pearl Harbor.”*²⁰



Figure 5: Gallaher at Midway²⁰

In the meantime, Admiral Nagumo, commander of the Japanese fleet, launched his strike on Midway Island. The attack did considerable damage, but did not put its airfield out-of-commission and end the threat of land-based planes. Thus, a second strike was needed and the planes that had been armed with torpedoes to attack any American ships had to be rearmed with bombs. This was a non-trivial operation that took considerable time. It is important to note that Nagumo's understanding of the tactical situation was significantly clouded by a series of uncoordinated American attacks from Midway and incomplete reports from his own reconnaissance aircraft. When the American ships were finally spotted, Nagumo's planes had to be rearmed with torpedoes because of the bigger carrier-based threat. His planes from the Midway attack also needed to land. This took more time.

Then, the first of the carrier-based American planes arrived: Torpedo Squadron 8 (VT-8) from *Hornet* commanded by LTCR John Waldron. It was a suicide run: flying slowly and steadily, at low altitude, with no fighter escort, and with torpedoes that tended to not work. No damage was done. All fifteen planes were shot down and only one pilot survived, ENS. George Gay. He was famously able to stay afloat to observe the rest of the American attack and be rescued. Torpedo Squadron 6 (VT-8) from *Enterprise* was next to sacrifice themselves. Nine of fourteen planes were shot done.

What the heroism of the torpedo squadrons did accomplish was to bring the Japanese fighters to low altitudes and open the skies to the dive bombers that were on the way.

However, the Japanese fleet was not in the position the dive bombers expected. When LTCR Wade McClusky, *Enterprise's* air group commander, could not find them, and with his air group's fuel running low, he began a search and soon spotted a Japanese destroyer steaming fast. Assuming that

she must be following the main fleet, McClusky ordered a change in course to follow. This led him directly to the enemy carriers and the attack.

McClusky's bomb missed, but Gallaher had what he called *"the perfect dive"* and squarely hit the *Kaga*. Then Gallaher:

"couldn't resist the temptation" and did what he had warned his men not to do: *"kind of stand your plane on its tail and watch the bomb hit."* His radioman said, *"god damn, that was a beautiful captain."*¹⁰

*"For Gallaher, this was a particularly poignant moment. It was revenge for his fellow Scouting Six pilot Johnny Vogt, who had been shot down over Pearl Harbor. It was revenge for the destruction wrought on the battleship USS Arizona that day, the aftermath of which Gallaher had witnessed and would never forget. 'Arizona', he said to himself as his bomb struck home, 'I remember you.'"*²¹

Other bombs landed on *Kaga*, including one by Kleiss. Figure 6 shows a painting of the attack.



Figure 6: Aviation artist David Gray's depiction of LT. Dusty Kleiss's diving attack on *Kaga*, LT Earl Gallaher scored the first hit. (The flaming wreckage near the stern represents his bomb strike.) Dusty scored the second hit. (His bombs--one 500-pounder and two 100-pound incendiaries--are going off near the bow the carrier.) LT Clarence Dickinson scored the third hit (also amidships, possibly near the bridge), and ENS George Goldsmith scored the last hit, striking *Kaga* with a 1,000-pound bomb.²²

Three VB-6 dive bombers from *Enterprise* under the command of LCDR Richard (Dick) Best soon hit *Akagi*, Nagumo's flagship. Other dive bomber squadrons from *Yorktown* (VB-3), commanded by LCDR Max Leslie, hit *Soryu*.

In a few minutes, three of the four Japanese carriers were aflame and on their way to the ocean floor. Kleiss said, *“Three frontline Japanese aircraft carriers were huge bonfires, flaming like Kansas straw stacks.”*²³ The bombing accuracy was impressive: *“Twenty-seven pilots attacked Kaga and four scored hits. Three attacked Akagi and one scored a hit. Nine attacked Soryu with three scoring hits.”*²⁴

The long search and battle had used a lot of fuel. Several of the pilots ran out and had to ditch. Not all were rescued. Of Gallaher’s squadron, eight of fifteen returned, two others ditched and were rescued, and six were unaccounted for (Appendix B).

B. The Afternoon Attack on the *Hiryu*

Despite the destruction, there was one Japanese carrier still left, the *Hiryu*. In fact, *Hiryu*’s planes successfully bombed *Yorktown* twice, which eventually was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Scouting planes located *Hiryu* in the afternoon and the pilots prepared for another strike. *Enterprise*’s air group commander, McCluskey, had been wounded in the morning operation. Gallaher was the most senior of the remaining pilots and thus, was given command. Kleiss wrote:

*“I was overjoyed to hear our superb skipper would be leading us. Gallaher’s leadership shined immediately. He drew up a plan that differed greatly from the morning attack. Instead of wasting time trying to unite the air groups, Gallaher wanted Enterprise to launch its dive bombers and not wait for Hornet’s air group to unite. This way my squadron could conserve its fuel, we could take our time when making our attacks, and we didn’t have to worry about coordinating with other groups.”*²⁵

Enterprise deployed twenty-four dive bombers: six from VS-6 (*Enterprise*), four from VB-6 (*Enterprise*), and fourteen from VB-3 that had flown off the sinking *Yorktown*. While the morning mission took three hours to find the Japanese, this one only took ninety minutes. Gallaher went first to bomb, when *Hiryu* suddenly made a sharp turn. He tried to compensate, but wrenched his back in the process. He missed; others, including Kleiss, did not. *Hiryu* *“looked like a big smoking taco”*²⁶ and was doomed.

Gallaher was lucky he was able to land. His back injury initially prevented him from reaching the tailhook lever. Without that activated, nothing would stop the plane from rolling down the deck into the sea. Somehow, he was able to overcome the pain and pull the lever. Gallaher had to be lifted out of the plane and sent to sick bay.

Gallaher’s battle was over, though not for his squadron which continued to fly missions over the next two days. He continued to worry about them:

*“At night, when the kids were coming in, I was supposed to be in bed, but I was up on the deck and I squeezed them aboard, every one of them.”*¹⁰

VI. The Aftermath

Gallaher was awarded the Navy's top combat award, the Navy Cross, for his actions at Midway (Figure 7)^{7,27}. The award read in part²⁸:

“Participating in a devastating assault against a Japanese invasion fleet, Lieutenant Gallaher, with fortitude and resolute devotion to duty, pressed home his attacks in the face of a formidable barrage of anti-aircraft fire and fierce fighter opposition. His courageous aggressiveness and inspiring leadership were contributing factors to the success of our forces and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”



Figure 7: Navy Cross Ceremony held at Bronson Field, an auxiliary airfield located outside of Pensacola on November 28, 1942. Rear Admiral George D. Murray, the former commander of USS Enterprise, hands out the medals. Murray is shaking hands with now LCDR Wilmer Earl Gallaher.

Fourth from the right is LT James Seton Gray, former commander of Fighting Squadron Six, who received a gold star on his Distinguished Flying Cross. Next to Gray (and third from the right) is LT Irvin H. McPherson, a pilot who belonged to Torpedo Squadron Six. McPherson was one of only five VT-6 pilots who survived the battle. Next to McPherson is LT Thomas Clinton Provost III, formerly of Fighting Squadron Six. At Midway, LT Provost shot down LT Michio Kobayashi, the commander of Hiryu's dive bombers. Finally, the one on the far right is LT Nels Luther Alvin Berger, formerly of Scouting Five. At Midway, Berger participated in the diving attacks on the destroyer Tanikaze (damaged) and the heavy cruiser Mikuma (sunk).²⁷

Previously, he had been commended by Navy Secretary Frank Knox for the raid on the Marshall Islands and received a letter of commendation for his participation in the Wake Island attack.²⁹

Gallaher returned home to Wilmington on 14 August 1942 and was the keynote speaker at the Naval Aviation Rally at his alma mater, Wilmington High School.²⁹ He was given a tremendous ovation by the audience of 300 people and told them that *“that attack on the carrier was what he had been waiting for. ‘I had been dreaming of it since the war started.’”*

Gallaher became commanding officer of the Naval Air Station at Pensacola in July 1943.³⁰ By May 1944, he was executive officer of an aircraft carrier in the Philippines and Okinawa.^{3,30,31}

He remained in the Navy after the war and had a series of staff positions, starting with the Naval War College.^{3,31} During the Korean War from 16 July 1951 to 9 July 1953, he was Commander Naval Forces Far East, for which he received the Legion of Merit.²⁸

Two sea assignments followed: captain of the sea plane tender USS *Kenneth Whiting* (AV-14) from July 1953 to June 1954³² and captain of the aircraft carrier USS *Princeton* (CVS-37) from 14 January 1956 to 19 January 1957 (Figure 8).^{7, 33}



Figure 8: Command Photo, USS *Princeton*, 1956⁶

On a personal note, he married Caro Miller on 25 August 1956 in San Diego, California.³⁴

His final posting was as a liaison officer to the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic. Gallaher retired from the Navy in 1959, upon which he was promoted to rear admiral.¹⁰

He died of cancer 4 February 1983 at the Bethesda Naval Hospital and was buried at the Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia³¹ (Figure 9). As Bill Frank wrote, “*The funeral...was attended by an unusually large number of high ranking naval officers.*”³³ (Appendix B). He was survived by his wife Caro nee Miller, son Albert, and a sister, Elizabeth Sharman, still living in his Wilmington, Delaware hometown.

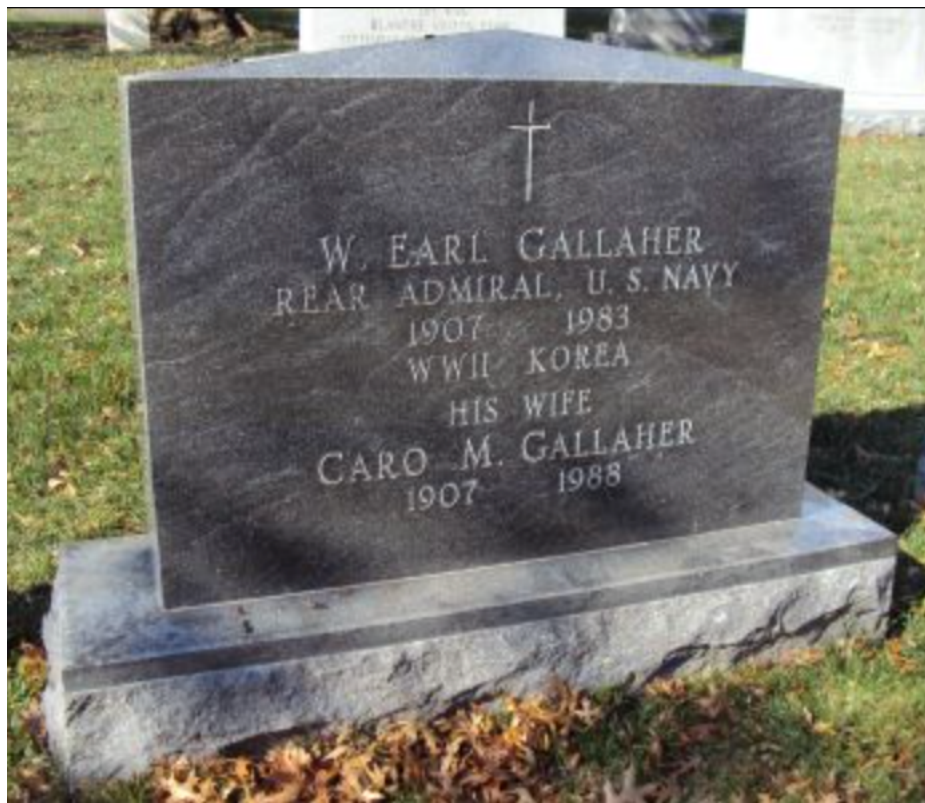


Figure 9: Internment, Arlington National Cemetery³⁵

VII. Legacy

A. The Battle

There is no question that the Battle of Midway is remembered by history as the turning point of the Pacific war. Prior to it, the Japanese had appeared unstoppable. After, Japan’s ability for large-scale offensive operations was crippled. It did not have the capacity to replace either the aircraft carriers or the highly-trained pilots.

This dramatic change in fortune was due to a combination of things. A full analysis and literature survey are beyond the scope of this report. Yet, it is illustrative to summarize the thoughts of “Dusty” Kleiss, a key VS-6 participant in the battle and friend of Gallaher. He believed that credit

should go to the skill and training of the pilots, the martyrdom of the torpedo bomber squadrons flying on a “suicide mission”, and the quality of the SBD-3 dive bomber.³⁶

He also believed that the admirals get too much credit. However, without the American code breaking skill, the confidence Admiral Nimitz had in the subsequent intelligence, and the risk Nimitz took in placing ALL the Pacific carriers near Midway, the pilots would not have been in position to do their work.

Finally, Kleiss discounted the “luck theory” of the timing that he said cheapens what the aviators accomplished. Clearly, the outcome would have been different if the dive bombers had come at a different time from when the Japanese planes were rearming and refueling on deck and the torpedo planes had brought the Japanese combat air patrol down to low altitudes. Yet, there is an old saying that “serendipity rewards the prepared mind”. Perhaps this saying can reconcile the two views because the American dive bomber pilots were sufficiently trained and prepared to take advantage of the opportunity.

And yes, the battle pivoted on the events over a very short time window. Mitsuo Fuchida, Japanese pilot on board *Akagi* during the battle and leader of the first wave at Pearl Harbor is quoted by Simms and McGregor as saying:

“Five minutes! Who would have dreamed that the tide of battle would shift completely in that brief interval of time?”³⁷

B. Wilmer Earl Gallaher

How does history remember Wilmer Earl Gallaher? Despite his prominent role in the battle, and the effusive praise of him by “Dusty” Kleiss, he is largely forgotten by all but World War II buffs and historians. When Gallaher passed away in 1983, Bill Frank of the Wilmington News Journal wrote a piece entitled “Once again Delaware has forgotten one of its outstanding heroes”. This article is given in its entirety in Appendix A. Frank pointed out that Gallaher’s obituary in his hometown newspaper was only 4 paragraphs long. It trivialized his actions as:

“During World War II, he served at Pearl Harbor and Midway, and in several other battles. He had worked most recently as an instructor for Northwestern High School’s Junior Naval ROTC program.”³⁸

How demeaning!

Gallaher never wrote a book like Kleiss did towards the end of his life, so unfortunately, the subsequent 42 years have not changed this situation. Gallaher doesn’t even have a Wikipedia page!

Another Delaware World War II hero, George S. Welch, had an elementary school named for him at the Dover Air Force Base. Welch was one of the few American pilots to fly at Pearl Harbor and shoot down Japanese planes.³⁹ Ironically, there actually is a Gallaher Elementary School in Newark, Delaware. However, it is named for someone else, Robert S. Gallaher, former president of the Newark School Board.⁴⁰

The one place Gallaher is publicly feted is at the National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, Texas⁴¹. A display there includes items he wore during the battle (Figure 10).

Perhaps this report will jumpstart efforts to get proper recognition for one of Delaware’s greatest modern heroes. Both the 85th anniversary of Midway and the 120th anniversary of his birth are in 2027. With the last of the “Greatest Generation” passing away, it is finally time for him to get his long overdue recognition.



Figure 10: Gallaher’s Midway Flight Jacket, Shirt, Helmut, and Logbook on display the National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, Texas⁴¹

VIII. Appendices

A. Bill Frank Article³

Once again Delaware has forgotten one of its outstanding heroes

REAR ADM. Wilmer Earl Gallaher, who died of cancer Feb. 4, was born in Wilmington 75 years ago. He was regarded as one of America's major World War II heroes.

News of his death at the Bethesda, Md., Naval Medical Center, made less than a ripple in his native state and city; four paragraphs in the News-Journal papers.

Historians called him one of those who turned the war around

Gallaher, whose most recent home was in Kensington, Md., retired from the Navy in 1959. Although his death was barely noted here, historians of the war against Japan credited him as one of the dive bomber pilots from the carrier Enterprise who turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. That was in the decisive Battle of Midway, early in June, 1942.

Bill Frank

Gallaher at that time commanded one of two Dauntless dive bomber squadrons in the battle and it was his squadron that crippled the flagship of Adm. Chuichi Nagumo's striking force, cheating the Japanese of what they expected to be their decisive victory.

In "But Not In Shame," his book about World War II six months after the Pearl Harbor disaster, John Toland wrote that Midway was one of the greatest sea battles in history and that America won by a combination of Japanese errors, brilliant U.S. command decisions and the determination and courage of men like Gallaher.

The story has been told that during the attack on Pearl Harbor on what President Roosevelt called a "day that will live in infamy," Gallaher saw the battleship Arizona smoldering and smashed in her berth.

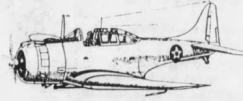


Adm. Gallaher
... fulfilled a dream

From that day on, he dreamed of making a dive-bombing attack upon a Japanese carrier, a dream fulfilled at Midway when he saw the bombs he had loosed explode among the planes spotted on the carrier Akagi's flight deck.

For him it was a moment of exultation as he whispered to himself, "Arizona, I remember you!"

After the Midway victory, Gallaher was awarded the Navy Cross, the Navy's highest decoration for valor. (Only the Congressional Medal of Honor is higher.) The citation praised Gallaher for "leading his squadron in vigorous and intensive dive-bombing attacks upon the Japanese invasion fleet. He defied a



concentrated barrage of anti-aircraft fire and powerful fighter opposition with cool skill and complete disregard for his own safety."

Navy Secretary Frank Knox also mentioned Gallaher's brilliant service in raids on Japanese forces in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands.

Gallaher did not emerge from the Battle of Midway unscathed. He injured his back. After several attempts he landed on the Enterprise and had to be tenderly taken from his plane to a hospital.

When news of all this filtered home, all of Delaware was very excited and proud, but when the war was over, the admiration began to fade, as was the case with most of our state's other heroes.

The official history of Delawareans' participation in World War II, for example, gives Gallaher only one paragraph.

● ● ●
Gallaher was a dropout in his junior year at the Wilmington High School when it was located on Delaware Avenue. He would have been graduated in the class of 1925 but later he enlisted in the Navy and was stationed at Norfolk, Va.

When it seemed likely that he'd be appointed to the Naval Academy, he discovered his lack of credit in trigonometry and chemistry prevented his admission there.

So back came Gallaher for more courses in the Wilmington High School and then was graduated from Annapolis in 1931. Four years later, he earned his wings.

Also in his service during World War II, he served aboard an escort carrier in the battles for the Philippines and Okinawa.

After the war, he was on the staff of the Naval War College. He earned the Legion of Merit as assistant chief of staff of Far East Naval forces during the Korean War.

In 1955, he was named captain of the Princeton, flagship of Carrier Division 17. On that carrier he com-

manded a crew of 2,500. He also was liaison to the Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic. Another command was the USS Kenneth Whiting.

Gallaher is survived by his wife, Caro, a son, Albert, of Novato, Calif., and a sister, Elizabeth Sherman of the Wilmington area.

The funeral at the memorial chapel of Arlington National Cemetery on Feb. 10 was attended by an

The Arlington service was attended by many top naval officers

unusually large number of high ranking naval officers.

General indifference on the part of Delaware to outstanding individual veterans of World War II, or in fact any of the other wars is, indeed, a sad commentary that does not add to the state's credit.

Bill Frank is a News-Journal columnist.

B. Scouting 6 Action Report – 4-6 June 1942 (Contemporaneous), LT Earl Gallaher⁴²

USS ENTERPRISE CV-6

The Most Decorated Ship Of The Second World War

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SCOUTING SQUADRON SIX ACTION REPORT - 4-6 June 1942

[Home](#) > [Action Reports And Logs](#) >

Battle of Midway - 4-6 June 1942

This is the after-action report submitted by LT Earl Gallaher, Commanding Officer of Enterprise Air Group's Scouting Squadron Six, detailing that squadron's operations during the Battle of Midway.

Sections:

[First Attack of 4 June.](#)
[Second Attack of 4 June.](#)
[Action of 5 June.](#)
[Attack of 6 June.](#)

SCOUTING SQUADRON SIX

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

June 20, 1942.

From: Commander, Scouting Squadron SIX.
To: Commanding Officer, U.S.S. ENTERPRISE.
Via: Commander, ENTERPRISE Air Group.
Subject: Report of Action, June 4-6, 1942.
Reference: (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, Art. 874, par. 6.
Enclosure: (A) Scouting Squadron SIX Tactical Organization of June 2, 1942.

1. Scouting Squadron Six participated in four separate attacks against Japanese naval forces during the period June 4 through June 6, 1942, and in one photographic flight over Japanese naval forces on June 6, 1942. On June 4, 1942 there were nineteen pilots attached to the squadron, seven of whom had been in the squadron for more than seven months, two for more than three months, seven for two months and three for one month. There were eighteen SBD-3 planes assigned and all were in commission. Action was expected. The following is a chronological account of the part Scouting Squadron Six played in the actions:

A. Thursday June 4, 1942, forenoon and afternoon.

1. On Thursday, June 4, 1942, Scouting Squadron Six participated in an attack on a Japanese force consisting of four aircraft carriers, several battleships or heavy cruisers, and many destroyers, about 150 miles Northwest of Midway Island. The attack group was led by the Enterprise Air Group Commander and consisted of thirty-two SBD's, fifteen from VB-6, loaded with one 1,000 lb. bomb each, sixteen from VS-6, loaded with one 500. lb bomb and two 100. lb bombs each, and the EAGC plane loaded with one 500 lb. bomb and two 100 lb. bombs. The squadron tactical organization was as follows:

First Division

6-S-1	Lt. W.E. GALLAHER	MERRITT, T.E. ACRM(AA)
6-S-2	Ens. R.W. STONE	BERGIN, W.H., RM1c
6-S-3	Ens. J.Q. ROBERTS	SWINDELL, T.R., AOM1c

6-S-7	Lt.(jg) N.J. KLEISS	SNOWDEN, J.W., RM3c
6-S-18	Ens. C.E. DEXTER	HOFF, D.L., RM3c

Second Division

6-S-10	Lt. C.E. DICKINSON Jr. DE LUCA, J.F., ARM1c	
6-S-15	Ens. J.R. MCCARTHY	HOWELL, E.E., RM2c
6-S-12	Ens. C.D. PEIFFER	JECK, F.C., RM3c

6-S-16	Lt(jg) J.N. WEST	STITZELBERGER, A.R., RM2c
6-S-17	Ens. V.L. MICHEEL	DANCE, J.D., RM3c
6-S-14	Ens. J.C. LOUGH	HANSEN, L.D., RM2c

Third Division

6-S-4	Lt. C.R. WARE	STAMBAUGH, W.H., ARM1c
6-S-5	Ens. F.W. O'FLAHERTY	GAIDO, B.P., AMM1c

6-S-6	Ens. J.A. SHELTON	CRAIG, D.W., RM3c
6-S-8	Ens. W.R. PITTMAN	ADKINS, F.D., AMM2c
6-S-11	Ens. R.A. JACCARD	PIXLEY, P.W., RM3c

2. The attack group departed at 0930 and climbed to 20,000 ft. enroute to the objective. Before reaching the objective, 6-S-9 was forced to return to the ship when the pilot was unable to shift to high blower. This airplane is not shown on the above tactical organization.
 3.
 - a. At about 1205, the Japanese fleet was sighted and was seen to consist of 4 CV, 4 BB or CA and 8 to 10 DD. The weather was clear and visibility excellent. There were scattered cumulus clouds from 1,500 ft. to 2,500 ft. and the ceiling was unlimited. The surface wind was 5 to 8 knots from the southeast. The Enterprise Air Group Commander designated by voice radio one CV target for himself and VS-6 and another CV target for VB-6. Commander Scouting Six followed the three plane section led by CEAG on a CV of the Kaga or Akagi class and observed two of this sections bombs to be near misses - the impact of the third bomb was not observed. The CV at this time was undamaged. A clear view of the entire flight deck was obtained during the dive and any damage by previous bomb hits would have been noted. The bomb dropped by the Commanding Officer of Scouting Six was a direct hit in the center of the flight deck about 200 ft. from the stern. At least two more direct hits were scored by the first division and the CV was afire and smoking heavily. 6-S-2 joined up with 6-S-1 almost immediately after pull-out from the dive and a high speed low altitude retirement was made through an opening in the screening vessels. During retirement several more hits were observed on the CV attacked by Scouting Squadron Six and about five minutes after completion of the attack a terrific explosion was observed which completely enveloped the CV in flames. Although several Japanese fighters were observed overhead in position to attack, no attacks were pressed home against 6-S-1 and 6-S-2. A Messerschmitt type fighter was seen to attack 6-S-8 and the fighter was seen to crash into the water in flames. Retirement was continued in the direction of Midway for a short time and then an interception course was set for our own task force. During retirement it was observed that three CV were on fire and smoking heavily.
 - b. The second division leader followed immediately after the last plane of the first division on the designated target scoring a direct hit with his 500 lb. bomb. At least two other hits were scored by this division. The third division was seen to follow the second division on the designated target. None of the pilots of this division returned but the second division leader stated that the third division made at least one direct hit.
 4.
 - a. Four of the five planes of the first division returned. 6-S-3 was seen to enter his dive but has not been heard from since.
 - b. Two planes of the second division returned. 6-S-10 was forced to land in the water just as he reached our task force. The personnel were picked up by the U.S.S. Phelps and were later transferred to the U.S.S. Enterprise. The personnel of 6-S-15 were rescued but are not available for the compilation of this report.
 - c. None of the three planes of the third division returned and no information is available as to whether they were shot down or whether they had forced landings due to shortage of fuel.
 - d. The two planes which accompanied CEAG returned.
 - e. Summarizing, eight planes out of fifteen returned; the personnel of two other planes were rescued; the personnel of six planes are unaccounted for. One of the eight planes which returned, 6-S-8, was damaged by machine gun fire and could not be flown on subsequent attacks.
 5. The twin mount free-gun in 6-S-8 came out of its mount in the dive. ADKINS, Floyd Delbert, 382-13-76, A.M.M.2c, U.S.N., held the gun in his lap during the dive and so effectively manhandled it after the dive that he shot down a Messerschmitt type fighter which attacked his plane immediately after the pull-out.
 6. No fighter opposition was encountered prior to pull-outs from the dives and very little A-A fire was encountered as it seemed to be concentrated on the torpedo planes which were attacking at the same time. Some planes encountered both A-A fire and attacks by fighters on retirement.
 7. The conduct of all pilots and gunners was magnificent. Although only seven of the sixteen pilots had previously dropped live bombs, all pilots pressed home their attacks and released at low altitude. A high percentage of hits was the result.
- B. Thursday, afternoon and evening.
1. On Thursday afternoon and evening, June 4, 1942, Scouting Squadron Six participated in a second attack against Japanese surface ships. Only seven of the nine planes remaining after the first attack could be launched. One of these, 6-S-16, returned almost immediately due to engine trouble. The attack group was led by Commander Scouting Squadron Six, and consisted of six planes of VS-6, four planes of VB-6, and fourteen planes of VB-3. The VS-6 tactical organization for this flight was as follows:

6-S-1	Lt. W.E. GALLAHER	MERRITT, T.E., ACRM(AA)
6-S-2	Ens. R.W. STONE	BERGIN, W.H., RM1c
6-S-11	Ens. R.A. JACCARD	PIXLEY, P.W., RM3c
6-S-7	Lt(jg) N.J. KLEISS	SNOWDEN, J.W., RM3c
6-S-17	Ens. V.L. MICHEEL	DANCE, J.D., RM3c
6-S-18	Ens. C.E. DEXTER	HOFF, D.L., RM3c

2. The objective was given as 1 CV, 2 BB, 3CA, and 4 DD at Lat. 31-40N, Long. 172-10W.
3. The attack group departed at 1745 and climbed to 13,000 ft. while enroute to the objective. The objective was sighted at about 1845 to the Northwest and was seen to consist of 1 CV, 1 BB, 1 CA or CL and 3 to 4 DD. The heavy ships were widely separated and each was accompanied by a destroyer. The weather was the same as described for the morning attack. The attack group climbed to 19,000 ft. while circling to a position up-sun from the enemy. The attack was started at about 1905 with a high-speed run-in. Four or five "Zero" fighters attacked before the push-over point was reached but no VS-6 planes were shot down. VS-6 dove first and the first two planes missed astern when the CV made a sharp 180° turn away from the direction of the dive. The third plane to dive scored a direct hit and at least one hit was scored by the second section. Three planes of VB-6 and most of the VB-3 planes attacked the CV and several more hits were made and the CV was afire from stem to stern. Some VB-3 planes attacked a BB and at least one direct hit was made. Retirement was made at high speed and at low altitude.
4. Fairly heavy AA fire was encountered during the dive and after pull-out. "Zero" fighters also attacked after pull-out.
5. All VS-6 planes returned safely from this attack.
6. All pilots and gunners conducted themselves in the same exemplary manner as was done in the first attack. All the crews had flown on the first attack.

C. Friday, evening.

1. On Friday, June 5, 1942, nine SBD planes of Scouting Squadron Six participated in an attack against a Japanese CL. The tactical organization was as follows:

6-S-13	Lt. PATRIARCA	BADGLEY, J.R., ACRM(AA)
6-S-16	Ens. PITTMAN	ADKINS, F.D., AMM2c
6-S-11	Ens. JACCARD	PIXLEY, P.W., RM3c
6-S-7	Lt(jg) KLEISS	SNOWDEN, J.W., RM3c
6-S-9	Ens. RODENBURG	BRUCE, T.J., Sea2c
6-S-18	Ens. DEXTER	HOFF, D.L., RM3c
6-S-2	Ens. STONE	BERGIN, W.H., RM1c
6-S-17	Ens. MICHEEL	DANCE, J.D., RM3c
6-S-1	Ens. VAMMEN	CLARK, M.W., AMM2c

The attack group was led by Lieutenant D.W. SHUMWAY, VB-3, and consisted of a total of 32 SBD's from VB-3, VB-5, VB-6, and VS-6. All planes were armed with one 500 lb. bomb.

2. The objective was given as 1 CV (damaged), 2 BB, 3 CA and 4 DD which had been last reported at 1000 at Lat. 30-00N, Long. 179-32W, course 310° T., speed 12 knots.
3. The attack group departed at 1730. Half of the group formed a scouting line at low altitude while the remainder of the group climbed to 18,000 ft. enroute to the objectives. At 2030 contact was made with a Japanese CL at Lat. 33-00N., Long. 177-00E. It was then dusk. The CL was attacked and many near misses, but no direct hits were observed. During the attack, the CL maneuvered at high speed.
4. Heavy small calibre AA fire was encountered.
5. All VS-6 planes returned safely but 6-S-1 piloted by Ensign C.E. VAMMEN, Jr., landed aboard the HORNET.
6. Landing aboard was accomplished after dark. The pilots of 6-S-16, 6-S-11, 6-S-9, 6-S-18, 6-S-17 and 6-S-1, made their first night carrier landings. These pilots had had no previous night flying in SBD planes and had had no night field carrier landing instruction.

D. Saturday, forenoon.

1. Eighteen VSB planes, of which six were Scouting Six planes, were launched at about 0710 to search a relative sector 180°-360° (T) to a distance of 200 miles. All Scouting Six planes completed their search without making any contacts.
2. 6-S-1, piloted by Ensign C.E. VAMMEN, Jr., accompanied the Hornet group on an attack mission and failed to return.

E. Saturday, afternoon.

1. On Saturday, June 6, 1942, six SBD planes of Scouting Squadron Six participated in an attack against a Japanese force consisting of 1 CA, 1 CL and 2 DD. The tactical organization was as follows:

6-S-16	Lt. F.A. PATRIARCA	BADGLEY, J.R., ACRM(AA)
6-S-2	Ens. R.W. STONE	BERGIN, W.H., RM1c
6-S-11	Ens. R.A. JACCARD	PIXLEY, P.W., RM3c
6-S-7	Lt(jg) N.J. KLEISS	SNOWDEN, J.W., RM3c
6-S-17	Ens. V.L. MICHEEL	DANCE, J.D., RM3c
6-S-18	Ens. C.E. DEXTER	HOFF, D.L., RM3c

The attack group was led by Lieutenant SHORT, VS-5, and consisted of 31 SBD's from VB-3, VS-5, VB-6, VS-6; 3 TBD's from VT-6 and 12 F4F-4's from VF-6.

2. The objective was given as 2 BB, 2 CA and several DD at Lat. 29-33 N., Long. 175-35 E., course 270° T., speed 15 knots.
 3. The attack group departed at 1315. The SBD's proceeded independently, climbing to about 19,000 ft. enroute to the objective. At 1400 1 CA, 1 CL and 2 DD were sighted. The SBD's continued thirty miles ahead of this force searching for the BB's, but no other ships were sighted. A high speed run-in was then made on the force contacted at 1400 and an attack delivered at about 1415. Most of the SBD's attacked the CA, which was very heavily damaged. Some pilots attacked the CL and at least one hit was observed. The VF planes strafed the 2 DD.
 4. All Planes returned safely.
 5. At 1750 one VS-6 airplane, piloted by Lt.(jg) C.J. DOBSON departed on a photographic mission in company with 3-B-10. The photographer in 6-S-18 was MIHALOVITCH, J.S., CP(PA).
 6. At the conclusion of the three-day battle the status of pilots and gunners of Scouting Squadron Six is as indicated by Enclosure (A).
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