

THE REAL STORY OF MIDWAY – PATROL SQUADRON FORTY FOUR

NOTE: I received this story from LTJG Richard Watson and used it in a message on the Providence of God – ATC Ret. Ray Beck

In considering how God in providence works in the background on our behalf, I would like to share a story in the history of our country that you probably have not heard. As some of you know, I am retired from the U.S. Navy. In 1961, I began to serve in Patrol Squadron Forty Four. Unknown to me at that time, it was a VP 44 plane piloted by Ensign Jewell (Jack) Harmon Reid that sent a report of the sighting of the main body of the Japanese fleet as it headed toward Midway. By this



action, the first positive information was given that a Japanese task force of imposing proportions was headed for Midway. This is frequently identified as the *"single most important patrol plane contribution of World War 2."* The United States Navy had suffered great losses at Pearl Harbor and we were constantly on the defensive and possibly on the verge of defeat from an enemy with what seemed insurmountable resources. Intercepting the Japanese Fleet prior to their attack at Midway shifted the tide in favor of the United States in the Pacific and eventually resulted in victory over the Japanese Empire.

I have been involved in the reunions of VP-44 since 2001 and this year I was the Chairman of our reunion in Fredericksburg, TX – Admiral Chester Nimitz's hometown. Attending were 5 Midway veterans. I would like to share the real story of VP-44 action at Midway given by a man who is very special to Marilyn and me – LTJG Richard Watson.

On the morning of June 3, 1942, the flight crew prepared aircraft 44-P-4 for their mission of the day. Plane Captain Ray Derouin's wife

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had just given birth. To celebrate, Ray added 50 extra gallons of fuel for each of his dependants. This was 150 extra gallons, enough fuel to keep their aircraft airborne for an additional hour and a half. It is also important to note that prior to the flight, Chief Musser had acquired some blue-tipped .50 Caliber shells – the blue indicating that these were explosive rounds. At that time the Navy did not have the blue tipped shells, but for a trade of several bottles of beer they were able to acquire 5 shells from the Army Air Corp. They wanted to experiment with these new shells should they encounter the Japanese.¹ They took off at 0400 (4AM) and proceeded to the end of their outbound leg. Bob Swan asked the Pilot, Jack Reid, if they could go a little farther as they desperately wanted to pay the Japanese back for their attack on us. Jack said ok, but to keep track of the fuel. After flying another 15 minutes with no sighting, Bob asked for another 15 minutes. At the end of this second 15 minutes, Bob was ready to give Jack a new heading to return to base, when Jack sighted some specks on the horizon. They flew in closer with the cover of clouds and discovered the Japanese Fleet. They reported the position of the fleet and then under orders from headquarters flew another 30 minutes rigging the Japanese Fleet and reporting the number and types of all their ships. Upon returning to base, the plane touched down with just enough fuel remaining to reach the revetment.

Were the events associated with this flight coincidence? Can you see God in any of this? I believe that God was in the background, working His perfect plan not only for the good of the flight-crew of 44-P-4, but also for the protection and destiny of our country.

¹They did use the blue tip shells as they encountered air-to-air combat. The 50 caliber cannons ammunition belt on the PBV-5A Catalina did not contain many shells. When they had to reload, they would raise the barrel of the cannon to reload. The Japanese noticed this and would wait until our guys were loading to make their attack. To counteract this, our men would raise the barrel of the cannon while they were still loaded. When the Japanese attacked, they were in for a surprise.