Chapter 14

The Tide Is Turning

My name is John Fisher. I have blond hair and hazel eyes. I was 36 in 1942.

A blue expanse greeted me as I climbed up to the flight deck of one of our carriers out in the Pacific. The sky and the ocean seemed to match shades and blend together at the horizon in the distance. Only the speckles of green from the nearby islands gave away the distinguishing features between water and air. The seas were very calm and seemed to just be awakening with the rest of this corner of the world.

The sight was very similar to the one I await for back at my home in Fort Bragg, California. I’m originally from further south in Sacramento, but I was assigned to move up north closer to the water than my hometown. My wife, Margaret, is home taking care of the little baby while the older is off at Kindergarten. I miss my family greatly on days like this with such a beautiful sight to greet me. I feel like they should be able to enjoy this sight, and it always reminds me of the beauty I am missing at home.

I shook out of my reverie and headed over to my beloved P-40 fighter to check and make sure all was operations for today. Being a Captain in the United States Army Air Corps, I commanded a small group of fighters, and one of our main jobs was to escort the B-29 bombers to and from the raids over Japanese occupied countries. Other jobs we had to perform were to protect the U.S. fleet and try to eliminate as many enemy planes and ships. This wasn’t always an easy feat considering the numbers and daring of the other pilots. I didn’t realize that I was about to have my work cut out for me.

While working on my plane, my commanding officer came over to do his daily inspections of our work and make sure everything was set. Today was different, however, because he gave us our orders for the upcoming battle that intelligence reports had predicted with the movement of some of Japan’s fleet. After being informed, I ordered the ground crews to load up the ammo cases and fuel tank. Sitting off to the side, I inspected the maps of the area we were currently in for any obstacles to look out for. I also walked around to my squadron to inform them off any changes in the formations, and I gave them a quick pep talk before the action.

It was after lunch on May 7 when the sirens sounded to alert us of the approaching threat of Japanese cruisers. We could not see the enemy ships yet so we quickly headed into our planes and took off. As I flew closer, I could see the intelligence reports were wrong in many of their observations about the Japanese fleet. For one, the fleet was not as nearly as large as anticipated and there were not as many enemy planes.

The enemy had finally spotted us because all of the planes aboard the cruisers started to take off and come towards us. I informed my squad to stay in formation until just about the last second when everyone peeled off to defend themselves against the planes and try to hit the ships beneath. Weaving in and out of the planes and dodging the flak and anti-aircraft guns, I hit one of the ships and blew some important looking pieces apart as I soared back up. Just as we finished most of our runs, relief came to us from another squadron of P-40s. I ordered my men back for a fresh ammo and fuel.

This went on for the rest of the day and into the night. My superiors named it the Battle of the Coral Sea for obvious reasons that this is the Coral Sea. When the Japanese finally stopped coming closer to try to invade more islands, this become the first time in history two opposing carriers fought only using aircraft without the opposing ships sighting each other. The totals are we sunk the smaller Shoho carrier, and we had hit the Shokaku carrier with two bombs, set it on fire, and forced it to return home. The Japanese had sunk one of our oil-tankers, the USS Lexington had been hit with two bombs and burned out of control, and had hit the USS Yorktown with one bomb. While it was late at night, some of the planes of the Japanese had attempted to land on the USS Yorktown but ended up being shot down.

We may not have won this battle, but we had stopped their momentum with victories for now. For the next month, planes and ships were being prepared for the next battle that was to come much further north.

Sailing up to Midway, we learned that this was the Japanese’s next target from our “fresh water” fake. This was that the island of Midway does not have a fresh water supply, so the high command sent out a fake message that they were running out of water on the island. The code breakers had intercepted the message and knew that this was the place that the enemy was planning to take next. They also intercepted the reports that six cruisers would be there to try and take Midway and the rest were back at the Coral Sea. It was also learned that the Japanese had no clue were any of our ships were at in the ocean. The Japanese Fifth Carrier Division had also been taken off the front lines for repair after the Battle of the Coral Sea.

On June 4, the sirens sounded again as the approaching ships and planes came closer to Midway. My squadron flew closer and all I could see were significantly less planes than anticipated, but they made up for it by covering the skies in flak and anti-aircraft fire. Shelling between the ships also make the skies that much more dangerous. For hours on end, we dived and bombed each other's ships and shot down plane after plane. Squadrons of torpedo planes and dive bombers flew off from the USS Enterprise, USS Hornet, and USS Yorktown. At the late night of the 4th and early morning of the 5th, the battle was over. We had finally won!

The totals came back as the Japanese only had 248 planes during this battle. We had destroyed 4 carriers, 1 cruiser, damaged 1 cruiser, and 2 destroyers. Unfortunately, they had finally sunk our USS Yorktown. On June 9, the Japanese postponed further plans to take Midway. This was the turning point of the war in the Pacific. I was 36 years old. Maybe now, we could go on the attack.