

Name: _____

edHelper

Battle of the Coral Sea

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first of six World War II battles fought by ships and airplanes. There were no land targets to destroy. Torpedoes launched from ships and bombs dropped from planes were the weapons used. Humans would decide the fate of hundreds of men and the ships they sailed. Success was gauged by which side had the most ships still afloat after the smoke cleared.



The Japanese were feeling very good about themselves and their efforts to control Asia and the Pacific area. They had crippled the American fleet with their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. They had sailed across the Pacific toward Asia taking control of all islands in the sea. Their army was taking control of large masses of land in Asia. By April of 1942, it was time to stop and see if their plans were successful. The Japanese leaders decided that it was time to put a line of defense around all that they had conquered. They targeted Australia as a location on the perimeter of their holdings to be taken over and used for their own protection. The Australians and their American allies had other plans in mind.

Admiral Chester Nimitz was commander of the Pacific Fleet. He ordered two American carriers that had survived Pearl Harbor toward Australia. These two carriers, the *Lexington* and the *Yorktown*, were to aid the Australians in protecting Port Moresby. Port Moresby was an Australian base on New Guinea. If the Japanese were able to take control of Port Moresby, they would be able to fly bombing missions over mainland Australia very easily.

The two American carriers and their bombers were scheduled to meet with three British cruisers on May 1 just off New Hebrides. The Japanese were confident that they had damaged the American fleet enough that it would be no threat. They thought that they had cut off outside communications to the Australians. The British were busy fighting in Burma. They ignored any thought of danger to their forces from these sources. Ships from both sides sailed around the Coral Sea for days just missing detection by each other. Luck and poor decisions from the commanders kept the enemies from meeting earlier.

All this changed on May 7. Early that morning, all the ingredients for a battle were in place. Japanese planes had spotted the American carriers and their cargo of bombers. At almost the same time, American planes had spotted the Japanese ships. Bombers from both sides were ordered into the skies. The American bombers were the first to fire on the Japanese ships. Ninety-two planes were eventually able to destroy one small Japanese carrier, the *Shoho*.

The Japanese had misidentified their target. What they thought were American carriers turned out to be a fuel tanker and its escorts. They lost twenty planes in their attempt to sink it.

Name: _____

The next day proved to be the first time a carrier took on a carrier in battle. Eighty-two planes were launched from the *Lexington* toward the Japanese ships. At the same time, the *Yorktown* launched thirty-nine bombers. Intercepted radio messages told the American commanders that sixty-nine airplanes were headed toward their ships. The *Yorktown's* planes hit the *Zuikaku* first. It was able to escape into a rain squall for protection. That gave the ship *Shokaku* time to come to its aid. American bombers finally spotted the ships and damaged the *Shokaku* enough that it had to drop out of the battle.

At the same time, Japanese planes were striking the American ships. The *Lexington* was struck with deadly force. She didn't show outward damage, but fire and explosions from her interior did the damage. The captain tried to coax her burning hull into port. It was a losing battle. Captain Frederick Sherman finally had to order all hands to abandon ship. A few hours later, the USS *Phelps* was ordered to torpedo and sink the *Lexington* so that the Japanese could not use her. The *Yorktown* was easier to maneuver and was able to avoid the Japanese barrage. One bomb did hit it, but it did little damage.

When all the smoke cleared, the Americans had lost one ship. The Japanese carriers were both damaged beyond use. The navy the Japanese thought they had destroyed had fought back. The battle for the Pacific had just become harder to win.

Battle of the Coral Sea

Questions

- _____ 1. The Coral Sea is in the Atlantic Ocean.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 2. What had Japan conquered by the time it reached the Coral Sea?
- A. Europe
 - B. America
 - C. the islands of the Pacific
 - D. Asia
- _____ 3. Who was the commander of the American Pacific Fleet?
- A. Captain Frederick
 - B. General MacArthur
 - C. Admiral Nimitz
 - D. Commander Fletcher
4. Why was it important to keep Port Moresby out of Japanese hands?

Name: _____

edHelper

- _____ 5. What is the job of a carrier?
- A. carry ammunition
 - B. carry troops
 - C. carry cargo
 - D. carry and launch bomber aircraft
- _____ 6. What is significant about the battle on May 8?
- A. It was the end of the war.
 - B. All ships were destroyed.
 - C. The Japanese navy was destroyed.
 - D. It is the first time two carriers battled each other.
- _____ 7. The Battle of the Coral Sea was the last battle fought in the Pacific.
- A. true
 - B. false

☐ Have you ever played the game Battleship? What do you have to do to win the game?

☐ What would be hard about having a battle in the middle of the ocean?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.