



To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

<< [Back](#)

From This Morning's Editions Of The News-press

SW Fla. man put battles in view

Navy photographer captured scenes of Coral Sea, Midway

By Denes Husty Iii
dhusty@news-press.com
Originally posted on May 08, 2006

The Japanese fighter plane flew down the length of the aircraft carrier USS Yorktown, strafing the flight deck and wounding a chief petty officer standing near the captain.

All the while, young Navy photographer William Roy kept filming the epic battle of the Coral Sea.

"It was an exciting time," the Florida native said.

Although the crucial naval engagement took place 64 years ago, Roy — now 86 and a retired Navy commander and corporate attorney living in Naples — remembers vividly his part in photographing the crucial sea battle that helped turn the tide in favor of the United States in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

At his request, the period of last Friday through this Tuesday has been declared Coral Sea Week by Collier County commissioners.

Roy survived the bombs, torpedoes and bullets during the Coral Sea battle to take part in the Battle of Midway, in which the Yorktown was sunk.

"I damn near drowned," he said.

He said his hope is that future generations will remember the Coral Sea and the following decisive Battle of Midway, which halted the Japanese advance across the Pacific.

His recollections have been recorded as part of Collier County's Capture Living History project that focuses on World War II veterans and their stories of the great conflict.

A UNIQUE BATTLE

During the memorable Coral Sea battle, Roy said he was stationed on the bridge near the captain, Elliott Buckmaster, as Buckmaster directed high-speed maneuvers to avoid enemy bombs and torpedoes.

He said he was amazed by the captain's skill.

"He avoided eight torpedoes. It was just amazing," Roy said.

Then luck ran out.



Amanda Inscore/news-press.com

World War II veteran William Roy, in his Naples home, shows some of the war photos he took and collected.

[Order Picture](#)

ALSO FROM NEWS-PRESS.COM

- ▶ [WWII Capture Living History Project](#)
- ▶ [Battle of Midway photos & information](#)
- ▶ [Battle of the Coral Sea photos & information](#)
- ▶ [Listen: William Roy talks about the Battle of the Coral Sea](#)

DELIVERING YOUR WORLD

- ▶ [Subscribe to The News-Press](#)
 - ▶ [Signup for breaking or daily email news](#)
 - ▶ [Printer friendly version](#)
 - ▶ [Email this article](#)
-

..... ADVERTISEMENT

"We took a direct hit by a bomb that penetrated the flight deck to the fourth level and killed 84 of the crew," he said.

Soon after the fighter plane strafed the ship, Roy said he saw a torpedo plane flying parallel to the port, or left, side of the Yorktown.

"When I'm filming him, the pilot raised his right fist and shook it just before the plane exploded," Roy recalled.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was unique. It was the first duel between aircraft carriers in which the ships never came within eyesight of each other.

It was also the first time that the U.S. Navy sank a large Japanese ship, a light carrier.

Although the carrier USS Lexington was sunk — along with an oiler and a destroyer — and the Yorktown was damaged, the battle is credited with stopping the Japanese from invading New Guinea in preparation for a future assault on Australia. The Australians hold an annual celebration of the victory, Roy said.

In fact, Roy said he was invited to be the keynote speaker at the annual event last Friday in Adelaide, Australia. The stop is part of his sixth trip around the world.

WAR CHANGES CAREER

The South Pacific, where the Coral Sea battle was waged, is a long way from Lake City, where Roy — son of a Methodist minister father and school teacher mother — grew up.

He joined the Florida National Guard while still in high school in 1936.

After high school, Roy said he went to work for a local photographer who had been in the Navy.

His friend convinced him a ship is better than a foxhole so he enlisted in the Navy at age 18, Roy said.

He began his Navy career as a Fireman Mate Third Class and, after officers found out about his photography experience, he became a Photographer Third Class for the battleship Arkansas.

He became a second-class petty officer after attending a four-month Navy photography school in Pensacola and was reassigned to the Yorktown.

The Yorktown was at Pier 7 in Norfolk, Va., on Dec. 7, 1941, when Japanese carrier planes attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, propelling America into World War II.

The Yorktown was soon sailing to the Pacific.

Following the Coral Sea battle, the damaged Yorktown sailed back to Hawaii where shipyard workers repaired the ship in three days, instead of the estimated three months.

The reason for the rush job was that the Yorktown, along with carriers Enterprise and Hornet, were dispatched with support vessels to stop a 200-ship Japanese fleet from invading Midway Island, Roy said. The enemy hoped the attack would draw out the U.S. Pacific fleet to where it could be destroyed.

However, the Japanese didn't know that the U.S. Navy had cracked their military code and lay in ambush.

At the end of the epic battle June 4-7, 1942, planes from the Yorktown, Enterprise and Hornet sank all four Japanese carriers and a cruiser, ending the Japanese threat to Hawaii.

Unfortunately for Roy and his shipmates, the Yorktown was sunk.

The large ship, struck by bombs and torpedoes, listed severely to the port side.

Roy photographed the action from the flight deck with anti-aircraft guns blazing in the background.

"We lost power. There was no way to communicate. By word of mouth we got the message to abandon ship," Roy said.

Jumping into the water into a thick slick of oil from the dying ship, "I was choking and throwing up," he said.

After dark, a boat towed him and others to a destroyer.

Unbelievably, the Yorktown didn't sink at that point. Roy joined a repair party that went back aboard.

The ship's death knell came when a Japanese submarine fired four torpedoes. Two hit the Yorktown. One hit the destroyer Hammond, sinking it.

Again, Roy and his fellow sailors abandoned ship, this time onto another ship nearby.

Roy said he received no personal credit for photographs and film he shot of the Coral Sea and Midway battles. They are listed as official U.S. Navy photographs in the National Archives.

On leave in San Francisco a few months after the Battle of Midway, Roy said he saw on a movie theater marquee with the words "Yorktown sunk."

"I went up to the ticket window and asked the lady, 'Do I have to pay to see my own pictures?'" Roy said.

It was the film he saved in three canisters under his life jacket and shirt when he abandoned ship, he said.

She sent him to the manager, who let him in for free.

<< [Back](#)