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## FILM REVIEW: MIDWAY (2019)

McCallie L. Smith III – Co-Written by Robert Ezekiel

On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces launch a devastating attack on *Pearl Harbor*, the United States (U.S.) naval base in Hawaii. Six months later, on June 4, 1942, the Japanese navy commenced an attack against an American naval base in the Pacific, this time at Midway Island. Over the course of three days, the U.S. Navy both from the sea and from the air engage the enemy in what became the turning point for the Allies in the Pacific campaign.

Well-known director Roland Emmerich, whose films include *Independence Day* and *The Patriot*, successfully assembles on screen both the battle and the events leading to it. Emmerich's *Midway* saga is unlike many of the war films that have been released in recent years, for both better and worse. It is safe to say that *Midway* is not a genre defining film such as *Saving Private Ryan*, nor is it as hollow, romanticized, or embellished as Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor*. *Midway* is an earnest war film and, for this reviewer, feels generated in the vein of post-war Hollywood war features that used to star the likes of Audie Murphy and Gregory Peck. To further the analogy, the script of the feature, which was written by Wes Tooke, feels seemed written in the style of late 1950's Hollywood, and the actors seem to be projecting a wonderful aura of nostalgia in their delivery. Both these elements combined generates a work that utilizes all the wonders of modern cinema (i.e. color, CGI, and editing software) in services of a film that would not be out of place if directed by David Lean in 1957 (*Bridge over the River Kwai*). Emmerich's decision to emulate the post-war Hollywood style begs comparison with the last major Hollywood film to depict the story of *Midway*. Many member of the original 1976 *Midway* cast were World War II veterans, as was the director Jack Smight. Emmerich does not have the same ability cast veterans in his film, but he makes up for this lack of authenticity with his application of nostalgia and combat depiction. Emmerich's *Midway* is by no means a shot for shot remake of the original 1976 feature, but in its own way an homage or a modern tribute to this significant historical event.

With immaculate attention to historical detail surrounding props, costumes, and scene setting the production team flawlessly represents the era. The film took very few liberties in its historical representation, as the film is as much period piece as it is a war film. However, that is not to say that the film has no historical inaccuracies. One of these minor inaccuracies occur late in the film when sailor Bruno Gaido, played by Nick Jonas, is captured at sea by the Japanese Navy. Gaido is interrogated, and after refusing to give up the ship's name he came from is thrown overboard with an anchor tied to his leg. Many may think this event is Hollywood taking liberties for dramatic flair, with one reviewer in the *Hollywood Reporter* saying that it "is probably pure fiction."<sup>1</sup> However, the event itself is not fiction but recorded fact. The historical inconsistencies in this case are actually that when Gaido was thrown overboard it was not an anchor that was used for weight. In actuality after being interrogated for two weeks Gaido was thrown overboard with two water-filled kerosene cans tied to his persons and not an anchor.

The script can be, at times, overly ambitious and unable to fully depict the density of the various events corresponding and leading up to the events of *Midway*. Lots of screen time was given to the segment covering *Pearl Harbor*, and the same was allocated to time highlighting the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo. Other important events however do not receive the same treatment. For example there could have been more screen time to highlight the Battle at Coral Sea leading up to Midway. Another significant steppingstone that led to the ultimate success at *Midway* was the breaking of Japanese code by naval intelligence. While both of these events have a corresponding scene in the film, both could have been expanded and elaborated upon. This would be to the benefit of the viewer who is predisposed to have no prior knowledge on the history of the Pacific theatre of the Second World War beyond *Pearl Harbor* and the dropping of the Atomic bomb. Upon further investigation of the film, the presence of Doolittle's Raid and its aftermath may be due to the fact that the film received extensive

Chinese backing in fund. The common sentiment in China surrounding the history of World War II, is that people are often to dismissive of Japanese action taken against china during the War, especially the atrocities that were endured by civilians and soldier alike.

Despite occasionally biting off more than it could chew, the film was exciting, informative, and more than entertaining. Emmerich's *Midway* exceptionally depicts close proximity scenes of World War II naval warfare. *Midway* is one of the most expensive independent films of all time, and while the films might not land with every viewer, it is a film that is more than sincere in its execution. This World War II epic is a welcome addition to any war film catalog.

## ENDNOTE

1 John DeFore. Review of *Midway*, by Roland Emmerich. *The Hollywood Reporter* (2019). Accessed Mar. 3, 2020 at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/midway-review-1252463>.