HONORING THE FALLEN ONE STORY AT A TIME
Midway was a pivotal event of WWII in the Pacific. The naval battle was a titanic clash between nations, but ultimately it is a story woven of individual sacrifice and valor.

We want to share with you the story of AMM1c D.D. Woodside, one of the brave pilots of Torpedo Squadron 8 who made the ultimate sacrifice at Midway. D.D. Woodside was the pilot of 8-T-5, a new Grumman Avenger Naval plane assigned to the USS Hornet carrier.

Follow along as we bring to life this single thread of the story of the Battle of Midway using original military personnel records, and find out what you can learn from your own veteran's records.
Enlistment Form and Oath - Darrel D. Woodside of Iowa was fresh out of high school and just over 18 years old when he first enlisted in the Navy in June 1937. He would go on to earn his pilot's wings and remain in the service for the rest of his life.

This paper is the formal service contract between the enlistee and the Navy. Almost always found in Naval OMPF files, it contains great details like residence, next of kin, and a detailed physical description.
By July of 1937, D.D. Woodside was assigned to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois for boot camp. Here he would learn basic Navy skills alongside recruits from all over the country.
Each significant event throughout the career of enlisted navy servicemembers (such as battle participation, assigned duties, disciplinary notes or advancement in rating) generated a detailed page in their service record book. Individual pages were then bound in a small book forming a portable record. During the war these records were used to keep track of milestones in the career of individual servicemembers.
Today, navy service books allow us to track the individual throughout their tour of duty making the booklets an excellent resource for understanding the service history of the individual sailor.
Transfer Orders:
By November of 1937 D.D. Woodside received his first assignment. Sent to San Diego, he would become part of the crew of the USS Memphis. She was an Omaha class light cruiser built shortly after WWI. Used as a fleet scout, the USS Memphis carried small float planes that launched from catapults.
Serving both ship and shore duties during this time he would have taken part in coastal patrol duties on the west coast, peacekeeping patrols to the West Indies, and had his first prolonged exposure to naval aviation. These records which are maintained in the service files of naval personnel can be used to dive deeper into other resources (such as deck logs and ship histories) to better understand a veteran’s experiences and movements.
D.D. Woodside moved rapidly through flight training assignments. Beginning with Patrol Squadron 18 in San Diego, he briefly returned to duty on the USS Memphis before joining Patrol Squadron 43 based in Seattle, WA. He was rated Aviation Machinist Mate Second Class while flying in Alaskan practice exercises. His enlistment term expired on 31 Mar 1941.
This comprehensive service list is a rare find in a file. Dated 1945, it was most likely created as part of the process of confirming his final benefits and awards. It also highlights the difficulty of sorting out assignments, as unit designations constantly evolved, merged and were recycled in later decades.
Report of Examination for Advancement in Rating: This sheet records the results of testing for advancement. D.D. Woodside passed with flying colors in October of 1939. Examination reports provide a comprehensive look at a veteran’s performance and job competence. Some examinations occurred on a regular schedule, while others were given by request or recommendation. Enlisted personnel had rates, while Officers had ranks.

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The File of AMMLc D.D. Woodside
Discharge and Re-Enlistment: Carrying an excellent rating and recommendation at the completion of his initial commitment, D.D. Woodside received an honorable discharge at the end of May 1941. With war already raging in Europe he chose to remain in the Navy and continue his flight training. A veteran may have more than a single discharge date, especially if they served longer than two years. Discharges were issued for expiration of enlistment term, and also for rank changes from enlisted to officer.
Orders:

D.D. Woodside was already making plans before his tour ended. He had requested shore duty on the east coast in December of 1940. He had also been recommended for the Naval Aviation program at Pensacola, FL as early as 1938.
Upon re-enlistment he was immediately assigned there for further flight training. He was also given a month of leave in November of 1941 after earning his wings, which he spent at home. This was likely the last time his family saw him. These pages illustrate the details which fill out the human story behind the dry lines of bureaucratic forms.
Three days prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Woodside reported for duty with Torpedo Squadron Eight at Norfolk Naval station in Virginia.

Dated paperwork found in files can be used to track a veteran’s movements and create a timeline of service and locations.
Pearl Harbor changed everything for D.D. Woodside. After five years in the Navy, he was a freshly minted pilot suddenly serving for a country at war. The Navy accelerated pilot training and on 13 December 1941 Woodside was sent to the Advanced Carrier Training Group, where he would practice carrier takeoffs and landings for the next month.
This emergency form was required of each pilot who entered the program, and sealed into an envelope. WWII pilots and crews lived with tremendous risks. Each flight could well be their last. Forms like these facilitated the notification of the families of those who were lost.
D.D. Woodside would spend the months after Pearl Harbor at the Norfolk VA base of Torpedo Squadron 8. As coded Japanese transmissions were broken and deciphered early in 1942, the Navy began to plan for an attack on Midway. TS-8 was assigned to the carrier USS Hornet. The squadron was divided as some left to join the Hornet in Hawaii, while some pilots remained in Norfolk to take the first delivery of new Grumman TBF Avenger planes.
The new planes and their pilots would arrive at Pearl Harbor one day after the USS Hornet had set out for Midway Island. This is the original temporary duty order which sent Lt. Langdon K. Fieberling and five other handpicked TS-8 pilots to join the fleet at Midway. Only one of these planes would survive the coming battle.
The six plane detachment led by Lt Fieberling would land on Midway island the evening of 1 June 1942. The fleet and ground forces were on high alert and the six pilots remained on stand-by with their planes, torpedoes loaded and ready to take off at any moment. On the morning of 4 June patrol planes sighted unknown aircraft one hundred miles from the island. Within fifteen minutes of receiving this news the six Navy crews from TS-8 were airborne at 0600 along with a host of assorted Army and Marine aircraft.
AMM1c (NAP) D.D. Woodside piloted 8-T-5, one of the new Grumman Avengers. He was headed into combat for the first time. An hour after takeoff his squadron detachment would be the first Naval aircraft to attack the Japanese fleet. They did so without protection from the faster fighters, which were flying at higher altitudes escorting dive bombers.
TS-8’s ferocity and bravery as they engaged the Japanese fighter pilots and fought to the death gave pause to the Japanese commanders, who made a fatal decision to delay arming their aircraft with ground weapons for a direct attack on the Midway airfield.
The remaining 15 planes of Torpedo Squadron 8 launched from the deck of the Hornet only a few hours later and were obliterated in an attack on the Japanese fleet, tying up their fighters and opening the way for dive bombers from the USS Yorktown and the USS Enterprise to sweep in and destroy four major Japanese air carriers later in the morning.
What we know of the fate of the six wing detachment of TS-8 comes partly from the statements of Pilot Ensign Albert Earnest and Gunner RM3C Harry Ferrier. Their battered plane 8-T-1 was the only TS-8 Avenger to return to Midway island after being catastrophically damaged by Japanese fighter planes. Their third crew member Gunner Sea1c Jay Manning was killed in his turret by enemy fire.
Along with the rest of his squadron, D.D. Woodside never came home. ‘After Action’ statements like this one from Albert Earnest were taken in order to determine the possible status of MIA personnel, to gather information about the performance of planes and equipment and to gain insight into enemy tactics.
Once the Navy determined that the whereabouts of D.D. Woodside were unknown, the family was informed of his status. Telegrams such as this one were all too common during wartime, and the delay in notification reflects the chaos following a major battle such as Midway and the time taken to interview personnel and conduct searches of battle sites and POW reports.
Mrs. Woodside wrote the Navy immediately regarding her son D.D. Woodside. It would take months to sort out the initial errors made by the Navy in identifying her son as a gunner rather than a pilot, which originated due to his enlisted rating. Her heartbreaking hope that a mistake had been made was pinned on these errors, and gradually faded as more details of the Battle of Midway emerged to the public.
The specific details she mentions in the letter regarding her son’s duty assignments and movements are unusual, and show that he was in contact with her regularly.
In the days and weeks following the loss of D.D. Woodside, the Navy began the process of closure. His few effects were inventoried and forwarded to his mother, and the process of recognition and awards for his service and sacrifice was begun. The transferal paperwork for medals which are maintained in his service file document and preserve the story of his heroic actions in aerial combat.
AMM1c (NAP) Darrel D. Woodside was declared dead on 5 June 1943 in accordance with Naval law, one year and a day after he was reported missing in action at Midway. His remains were never recovered. He was posthumously awarded the American Defense Service Medal, the World War II Victory Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal with One Engagement Star, the Purple Heart, a Presidential Unit Citation, and the Navy Cross.
His squadron’s bravery in the first hours of the Battle of Midway literally changed the course of the engagement. Their sacrifice caused the Japanese command to abandon their carefully laid plan of attack, and bought time for Allied planes and ships to locate and cripple the Japanese Pacific Fleet.
Here are some links which may be of further interest for those who have enjoyed the series on the service of AMMc1 D.D. Woodside:

'Torpedo 8: The Other Chapter" by Commander Harry H. Ferrier, U.S. Navy (Retired)

Hall of Valor project page for D.D. Woodside

National Archives: The Battle of Midway/TS-8 A Memorial To A Fallen Unit

John Ford footage from USS Hornet on YouTube

Harry Ferrier - TS-8's Celebrated Survivor  By Robert J. Mrazek