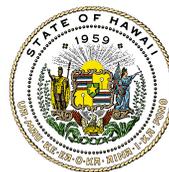


PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA Marine National Monument

Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo Discovery at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge: Fact Sheet

- In July 2012, NOAA marine debris divers from the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center Coral Reef Ecosystem Division (PIFSC-CRED) discovered a sunken aircraft in the lagoon within Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, part of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, in about 10 feet of water north of Eastern Island and reported it to PMNM's Maritime Heritage Coordinator.
- Shortly afterwards, during PMNM's Maritime Heritage research cruise that same summer, maritime archaeologists conducted an initial survey of the wreck site while at Midway Atoll as part of a larger Maritime Heritage expedition to PMNM. Survey included collection of photographs and video, measured sketches and the creation of a site plan.
- In the months following, the preponderance of evidence suggested that the sunken aircraft at Midway Atoll was a Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo, a type of American fighter aircraft used early in World War II and one of the types of planes based at Midway during the Battle of Midway.
- Archival research conducted in 2010 compiled a thorough inventory of aircraft losses in PMNM. Two Brewster Buffalos were reported lost within five miles of Midway Atoll. One of these were lost during a dogfight with Japanese zeros and crashed outside of the lagoon. The second of these was lost during a water landing inside of the lagoon in February of 1942 in the same location where the aircraft was surveyed in July of 2012. The nature of the wreckage (indicating a water landing) along with the location led archaeologists to believe that they were looking at the Brewster Buffalo lost in February of 1942.
- The pilot of the Brewster found at Midway, Lt. Col. Charles W. Somers, Jr., made an emergency water landing in a squall in February of 1942. He survived this crash and was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in March of 1942 after he engaged in combat with a Japanese four-engine seaplane, destroying the enemy aircraft. The pilot then went on to become one of the first officers attached to VMF-214, the famous Black Sheep squadron. He participated in the Korean conflict and retired as Commandant of the Marine detachment of Pensacola Naval Air Station.
- Brewster Buffalos suffered dramatic losses during the Battle of Midway, despite their contribution to the successful turn of events during that engagement with the Japanese. Of the 19 Brewster F2A-3 Buffalos that took off from Midway Atoll to engage with the enemy during the Battle, only four returned and of those, only two were operable.
- The only other Brewster Buffalo in existence is on display at the Aviation Museum of Central Finland, on loan from the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida until mid-2013, after which it will be returned to the Naval Aviation Museum. The Midway Brewster Buffalo is the only one that was part of the squadron deployed to Midway Atoll, and in use by the U.S. military.



PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA

Marine National Monument

- The Pacific Aviation Museum Pearl Harbor in Honolulu is planning a Battle of Midway exhibit in late 2013 and hopes to include the story of this aircraft.
- At least 67 naval aircraft, many associated with WWII, are recorded as being lost in the vicinity of Papahānaumokuākea, but only three have been discovered and documented by NOAA archaeologists to date – the newly discovered Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo at Midway Atoll, and two F4U Corsairs (Corsairs were not used during the Battle of Midway).
- The Battle of Midway is considered the most decisive U.S. victory of that period and is referred to as the turning point of WWII in the Pacific. The majority of the sea battle took place 100 to 200 miles to the north of PMNM, but an intense air fight was waged directly over and around Midway itself. Numerous Japanese and American planes splashed down at Midway; many of these sites are war graves.
- On September 13, 2000, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt designated the lands and waters of Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge as the Battle of Midway National Memorial, “so that the heroic courage and sacrifice of those who fought against overwhelming odds to win an incredible victory will never be forgotten.” This is the first National Memorial to be designated on a National Wildlife Refuge.
- Strewn with remnants of its historic past, Midway Atoll has numerous features that are on the National Register of Historic Places. The work of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on Midway Atoll also aims to enhance the quality of habitat for hundreds of thousands of nesting seabird species, which includes remediation of historic structures on the atoll.
- The work of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) Maritime Heritage Program is part of NOAA’s broad research on ocean resources and ecosystems. The discovery of the Midway Brewster F2A-3 Buffalo and other shipwrecks and sunken aircraft in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and other National Marine Sanctuaries helps connect people to the place by learning about the human dimension attached to it.
- Collaborative efforts to protect PMNM (and other sites within ONMS) result in exciting discoveries like this. The plane wreck was first discovered by a team of PIFSC/CRED divers working at Midway Atoll to survey and remove marine debris; in the past, marine debris divers have discovered other MH resources such as the *Pearl* and the *Hermes*, two British whaling wrecks for which Pearl and Hermes Atoll was named.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees - the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai'i - joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place. Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was inscribed as the first mixed (natural and cultural) UNESCO World Heritage Site in the United States in July 2010. For more information, please visit

www.papahanaumokuakea.gov.

