

## Preface

Australia may well exist today because the Americans held off the Japanese in the Battle of the Coral Sea. If Japanese forces had taken Port Moresby, they would have run submarine operations down the east coast of Australia and operated long range air patrols out into the Pacific and intercepted US shipping trying to make it across. Under such conditions would the US have stopped trying to use Australia as a base and instead fought from their own shore?

Trying to fight the war from the Californian coast would have been impossible. In the 1940s there were no nuclear-powered aircraft carriers that could stay on station forever. The supply lines would have been too long, and the plan of using Australia to radically shorten the distance to strike at Japan's home islands might not have been possible.

The Battle of Midway, following a month after Coral Sea, is widely held to be the first major check of the Japanese. But if Coral Sea had not forced two Japanese fleet carriers out of the battle, would Midway have been a loss? Would Australia, alone and isolated from the mother country of Britain, have sued for peace?

Coral Sea itself, a strung-out days-long complicated affair, was small by the size of the fights that took place later in the Pacific, but it was bloody enough – 543 Americans and around 900 Japanese died in the fight. Each side lost an aircraft carrier. It was not an outright victory for the Allied forces – Australians were there as well with two ships – as the Japanese forces inflicted more damage than they received. It was the strategic result that was important.

For the next two years Japanese ambition would continue to try to deter the Americans from utilising Australia, but they now had to operate from far-distant bases such as Rabaul and Truk and reach Port Moresby overland. Their campaign down the Kokoda Track was stopped by the Americans and Australians. It is true that Japanese aircraft and submarines did indeed inflict much damage off Australia's coasts: over 4,000 people died in offshore battles in the war. But if the Japanese had taken Port Moresby, it may have been enough to change the course of the war.

Without Coral Sea, the Pacific may have been held by Japan, and the future of all of those countries in Asia under the influence of Japan might have seen them subjugated to what was an evil empire.

The book is organised on the basis of analysing:

- What the two sides fought with
- How they operated and fought, and
- Where and how the battle took place

This work is a study of the aircraft and ships involved; the tactics and practices they used in theory, and an analysis of how those were applied on the days the battle took place, and what actually happened. But most importantly, the work seeks to sketch out for the non-expert reader how the huge battle that took place off Australia unfolded, and the effect it had.