

E-mails from John Slater, re: LCDR John Austin Collett

I made my first visit to the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor last month. One of the major themes of the exhibit is that Dec. 7 marked the end of the age of the battleship and the dawning of the age of the aircraft carrier. On my way out of the memorial, I ran across an informative plaque that underscored that message (see first attachment). But what really got my attention was the sidebar in the upper-right-hand corner of the plaque. I zoomed in on it so I could share it with you (see second attachment).

Who knew John Collett was a visionary, not to mention an author? I wanted to read his Naval Proceedings article, and thanks to the wonders of interlibrary loan (being a retired college professor does have some benefits), I came up with a copy (see third attachment).

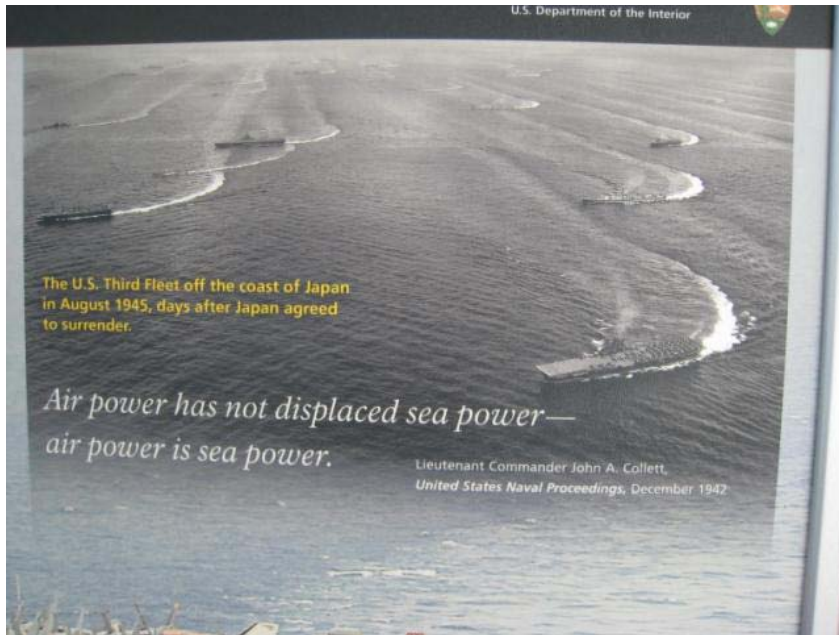
The fascinating thing is that he wrote the article after the Battle of Midway in early June and before his death on October 26. It was published after he died.

John

Attachment 1



Attachment 2



Attachment 3

[Naval Institute Proceedings](#)

I got such a good response from my Arizona Memorial find, I figured I could spend some time doing additional research. And what better day for it than Memorial Day?

Like any good journalist, I'll start with my most significant discovery. It's a 1944 story from *Time* magazine, reporting on LCDR Collett's controversial article in U.S. Naval Proceedings. I discovered it at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,802553,00.html>, but you have to be a *Time* subscriber (which I'm not) to read more than the first couple of paragraphs. I decided to save you the price of a subscription. I visited my friendly library, photocopied the appropriate page from microfilm, and scanned the photocopy. The quality is dreadful, but I think it's legible. And it appears that the *Time* reporter didn't know that LCDR Collett was killed before his article was published. Fascinating! (See next page for *Time* article.)

## WEAPONS

### "Air Power is Sea Power"

*There is no excuse for an aircraft carrier being sunk either by gunfire or submarine attack, and any carrier so sunk was poorly operated at the time.*

So wrote Annapolis-trained, 34-year-old Lieut. Commander John Austin Collett, naval aviator, in the current issue of the *United States Naval Proceedings*. In the traditionally close-mouthed Navy a young officer may speak his piece if it is technically sound.

The U.S. has lost a carrier to submarine attack: in Vice Admiral Robert Lee Ghormley's command in the South Pacific the *Wasp* was nailed by a Japanese submarine off the Solomons. To submarines or gunfire the Royal Navy has lost no less than four (*Courageous, Glorious, Ark Royal, Eagle*). Naming none of these names, Flyer Collett wrote:

"If a carrier maintains a speed of at least 20 knots, the probability of a successful submarine attack is very low. Unfortunately some carriers in this war have been tied to ten-knot tankers and transports as if they had guns sticking out of every port and all the underwater protection in the world. It is remarkable that such ships have not been hit more often than they have."

Britain's loss of the *Glorious* by gunfire (in battle with *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*) seemed also the result of bad handling, under the Collett doctrine. He found that only "extremely bad weather" or a lucky break could enable a battleship or cruiser to close with a carrier.

Carrierman to the core, Commander Collett probed deeper, came up with a doctrine in flat opposition to the conviction of most high-ranking naval officers that there is still substantial need for the battleship. Of Midway, one of the decisive battles of world history, he wrote:

"The American carriers proceeded to launch an air attack on the Japanese carriers which brought them to a standstill . . . and resulted in the crippling and eventual sinking of all four of them. Before this could be completed the Japanese had located the carrier *Yorktown* and put her out of action with a well-coordinated air-group attack.

"Seagoing air power . . . had accomplished what land-based air power had failed to do. . . . The picture which then existed was that of a greatly superior enemy surface fleet, which included battleships, helpless to advance in the face of a greatly inferior surface fleet, without battleships, which still possessed some seagoing air power. (This should dispose of the statement that we must have battleships if the enemy has battleships.)"

From the battle of Midway, Commander Collett drew these conclusions:

▶ "The aircraft carrier, not the battleship, is the backbone of the fleet.

▶ "The aircraft carrier is not in the fleet to protect surface ships but as the main offensive striking weapon.

▶ "The aircraft carrier enjoys a superiority over other contemporary surface ships which is greater than any previous type of ship has enjoyed over its contemporaries in all history.

▶ "Land-based air power, as exemplified by the big bomber doing high-altitude horizontal bombing, is ineffective against a fleet equipped with seagoing air power.

▶ "The role of the battleship as a weapon

to plague their speaker, Dr. Frank Buchman. They also plagued 28 of his followers, all draft-age aliens, who were the center of one of the few big footloose yet kicked up about administration of the Selective Service Act.

The Buchmanites were seeking draft deferment on the grounds that their Moral Re-Armament organization (successor to Buchman's sin-&-tell Oxford Group) was necessary to the nation's wartime morale. Prompt to disagree were New York Local Board No. 17 and the district Appeals



MRAERS AUSTIN & BUCHMAN  
The draft board said "I-A."

Associated Press

with which to win battles at sea *à la* Jutland has practically vanished.

▶ "Any attempt to say that naval battles will be fought by lines of battleships, once the carriers have been sunk, is wishful thinking. Somebody's carriers won't be sunk and he will have complete control of the situation.

▶ "Air power has not displaced sea power—air power is sea power. The principles of naval warfare as laid down by Mahan still hold—only the weapons have changed."

## DRAFT

### Buchman's Kampf

*"I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler who built a front line of defense against the Anti-Christ of Communism. . . . Think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to God. . . . Through such a man God could control a nation overnight and solve every last bewildering problem."*

Those words, spoken six years ago and never retracted, rose last week from the files of the New York *World-Telegram*

Board. Yet somehow the Buchman men had managed to find friendlier ears on more exalted heads.

Of the 28 morale-engineers one was Norwegian, one a Dane, one a Canadian, the rest Englishmen out of reach of their own nation's draft laws. Among them: Tennis Henry Wilfred ("Bunny") Austin. Last summer they were classified I-A. They were facing induction in November when Brigadier General Ames T. Brown, New York Selective Service Director, ordered the cases reopened after an MRA leader approached him with an introduction from Representative James W. Wadsworth of New York, co-author of Selective Service.

In draft files were statements from Senators Truman, Burton, Representative Lea and many another Congressional bigwig recommending hearings for MRA workers, or at least endorsing the vaguely stated precepts of MRA. By last week those statements were causing many a headache.

Said General Brown: "I understand that national headquarters of Selective

I also found some photos of LCDR Collett, and tons of photos of the ship, taken at various times in her history:

<http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/730.htm>

Here's a site dedicated to the Grumman Torpedo Bomber (TBF). Scroll down to the Battle of Santa Cruz for more info about LCDR Collett:

<http://acepilots.com/planes/avenger.html>

Here's a clipping from the Omaha World Telegram about the launching of USS Collett, with additional info about the ship's namesake:

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=56787458&PIpi=54787171>

And here's a vivid description of the Battle of Santa Cruz, which calls LCDR Collett "Jack," and reports that he was last seen stepping off the starboard wing of his crashed plane:

[http://www.erichammelbooks.com/books/f\\_carrier-strike.php](http://www.erichammelbooks.com/books/f_carrier-strike.php)

Finally, an apparent eyewitness account of the battle, in which LCDR Collett's TBF was seen "blazing." (Search the page for "Collet" rather than "Collett"; the account misspells the name.):

<http://usswashington.com/worldwar2plus55/dl26oc42.htm>

And with that, I think I'll take the rest of the day off. It *is* a holiday, after all.

Cheers,

John