

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL JOSEPH C. CLIFTON, U. S. NAVY, DECEASED

Born October 31, 1908 in Paducah, Kentucky, Joseph Clinton Clifton attended the University of Kentucky prior to entering the U. S. Naval Academy in 1926. While at the Academy he was a member of the varsity football team during the '27, '28 and '29 seasons. His outstanding ability on the football field was nationally recognized his senior year when he was named All-Eastern Fullback and honorable mention All-American.

His early naval service included duty aboard the battleship TENNESSEE, followed by flight training at Pensacola, Florida. Later he served as a naval aviator with Scouting Squadron THREE on the aircraft carrier SARATOGA, and with Scouting Squadron TEN on the cruiser TRENTON. He was Gunnery and Engineering Officer of Fighter Squadron FOUR on the carrier RANGER when that ship won the gunnery trophy for the Fleet in 1939. At the outbreak of World War II he was serving as Flight Training Officer at the Naval Air Station, Miami.

In September 1942, while he was the Commanding Officer of Fighter Squadron TWELVE on the USS SARATOGA (CV-3), his unit participated in the first strike on the highly fortified harbor of Rabaul. In January 1944 he became Commander of Air Group TWELVE aboard the carrier SARATOGA. For heroism and extraordinary achievement in those commands, he was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and twice awarded the Legion of Merit. Credited with five Japanese planes, he also was awarded the Air Medal, and for services as Commander of the Combined Air Groups from HMS ILLUSTRIOUS and USS SARATOGA, was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Distinguished Service Order by the British Government.

During the last year of the war he served as Flight Training Officer at the Naval Air Station, Green Cove Springs, Florida and as Executive Officer of the USS WASP. Briefly, in 1946, he was both Commanding Officer and Executive Officer of that carrier. After a tour of duty in the Air Warfare Division of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), he had brief duty early in 1949 on the Staff of Commander, Fleet Logistics Support Wings, Pacific, and from June 1949 to December 1951 was Commander of Transport Squadron EIGHT.

In December 1951 he became Commanding Officer of the USS CORSON, a seaplane tender assigned to patrol duty on the Formosa Straits during the Korean conflict. He served as Deputy Chief of Staff for Training on the Staff of the Commander, Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet for eight months.

Instruction at the Naval War College preceded his assignment in July 1954 as Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Memphis, Tennessee. On December 5, 1956 he assumed a "Three Hat" assignment as Commander, Airborne Early Warning Wing, Atlantic, and Commander,

R. Adm. J. C. Clifton, USN, Dec.

Fleet Air Detachment, Argentia, with additional duty as Commander Barrier, Atlantic Fleet. He was Chief of Naval Air Advanced Training, with headquarters at the Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas, from March 1958 until February 1960, and the next month became Commander Division SEVEN.

In May 1961 he reported as Chief of Naval Air Technical Training, with headquarters at the Naval Air Station, Memphis, Tennessee, and continued to serve as such until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement, effective July 1, 1963. Rear Admiral Clifton died on December 24, 1967, in Santa Monica, California.

5 January 1968

REAR ADMIRAL JOSEPH C. CLIFTON, U. S. NAVY, DECEASED

Education: University of Kentucky, 1/2 year; U. S. Naval Academy (BS, 1930); Flight Training, NAS, Pensacola, Fla. (Naval Aviator, 3/32); Naval War College (1954)
Special Achievements: Eagle Scout; Scout Commissioner; Special Events Speaker; All-Eastern Fullback, (1929); Honorable Mention, All-American Fullback (1928 & 1929).
Hobbies: Sports; Golf; Hunting; Fishing; Racquet Squash; Youth Activities

PROMOTIONS:

Commissioned Ensign, 6/5/30
Lieutenant (jg), 6/5/33
Lieutenant, 6/30/38
Lieutenant Commander, 6/15/42
Commander, 8/20/43
Captain, (T), 3/4/46
Captain, (P), 7/1/57
Rear Admiral, to date from 7/1/58
Retired, 7/1/63

DECORATIONS AND MEDALS:

Legion of Merit, with Gold Star in lieu of Second
Distinguished Flying Cross, with Gold Star in lieu of Second
Air Medal
Distinguished Service Order, by Great Britain
Mentioned in Dispatches, by Great Britain
Navy Unit Commendation to USS WASP
American Defense Service Medal
American Campaign Medal
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, with stars
World War II Victory Medal
Korean Service Medal
United Nations Service Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Korean Presidential Unit Citation

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CITATIONS:

Legion of Merit: "For exceptionally meritorious service as Air Group Commander of an Air Group in Central Pacific waters during the period 29 January 1944 to 28 February 1944. During this period he led and directed his Air Group in a series of highly successful strikes on many enemy bases against heavy enemy opposition. Through his aggressive and fearless leadership, his group was able to protect the escorted bombers from enemy fighter attack, to take photographs of enemy installations, to bomb with devastating accuracy enemy installations, and to conduct many strafing attacks over our own ranks into the troops of the enemy. During all of these actions, he showed great courage, persistent heroism, enthusiastic aggressiveness and disregard for personal safety in directing the operations of his group..."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Legion of Merit: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commander of the Combined Air Groups from HMS ILLUSTRIOUS and the USS SARATOGA during joint operations of British and United States Naval Forces against enemy Japanese bases in the Netherlands East Indies, April 19 and May 17, 1944. Skillfully planning, leading and coordinating the operations of the combined Air Group in two extremely hazardous attacks on enemy bases at Babang, Sumatra, and Soerabaja, Java. Commander Clifton enabled his courageous, determined airmen to destroy or inflict heavy damage on important hostile ships and shore installations. In the face of persistent, intense anti-aircraft fire, he personally accounted for two grounded planes, damaged two others and shot one out of the sky, and during both missions obtained valuable photographs of the target regions..."

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial attack against the enemy as Commander of a fighting squadron during the raid on Japanese warships in the strongly fortified harbor of Rabaul, New Britain on November 5, 1943. Commander Clifton, as leader of the dive bomber escort, fearlessly led his escort into exceptionally heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire with complete disregard of his personal safety. He strafed enemy ships and pulled out with and ahead of the dive bombers, evaded heavy anti-aircraft fire and successfully beat off determined enemy fighter attacks until the diving attacks had been completed and retirement effected. His resolute determination and daring leadership contributed materially to the success of the attack, both in enabling the dive bombers to concentrate on their respective targets unhampered by fighter oppositions and in protecting them when they were most vulnerable to fighter attacks. During the retirement, he destroyed one enemy fighter that was closing to short range of his wingman..."