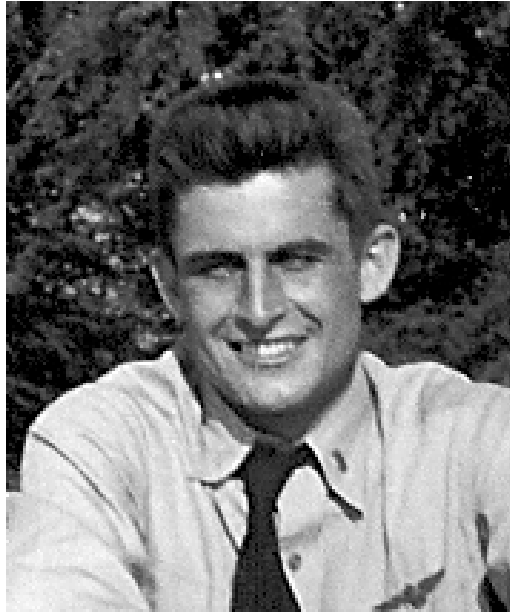


An account of the final days of the war

as told by Lt.-jg. Gene Loveland,
a member of the Hellcat fighter squadron VF-87 on board the *USS Ticonderoga*
(used with permission from the author)



Eugene Loveland

In August 1945, Ens. Robert Clark was on board the Ticonderoga in the Sea of Japan. His the fighter squadron , the VF-87, completed missions on the military installations at Honshu, the Japanese naval base at Ominata, and airfields at Kabayama. On August 1, the carrier headed southward to avoid a typhoon. Shortly afterward, pilots of the VF-87 received orders for a long-range fighter sweep against shipping at Fusan on Korea, and alarming preparations for their mission implied that they were not expected to return. The following account is taken from Reflections of a Naval Aviator, the self-published memoirs of Lt.-jg. Gene Loveland (left):

"After the evening dinner, 16 of us were called to the ready room for a special briefing. We were to be 'volunteers' on a mission to destroy as much shipping as possible in the inland sea, known as the Sea of Japan. This was the body of water between Korea and Japan where most of the waterborne supplies were coming from to supply the Mainland.

"The catch was, we would not have enough fuel for the mission and return to the ship. The plan was to sink as much shipping as possible and then continue to Korea, find a place to land and do the best you could to get back to the fleet. This didn't sound very plausible, but no one raised a hand to comment. Ah youth!

"In our backpack, we had condensed rations, a Chinese/American dictionary, water purification tablets and territorial rubberized maps. On the back of our flight suit we had an American flag and a Chinese flag.

action, the red flag appeared over the bridge, followed by the cut engines sign by the flight officer. As the engines shut down and dead silence occurred, the loudspeaker blared out, 'The fleet is ordered to stand down.' We returned to our ready room where we were told that the entire fleet was to stand down until further orders. Now what? Another day of thinking about it and conjuring up all sorts of scenarios. All day hanging around the ready room, laughing at ghoulish jokes and wondering.

"Late afternoon the ship's executive officer came to our ready room and told us that an atomic bomb had been released over Hiroshima. What's an atomic bomb? Why were we called back? A series of unrelated questions.

"Uniquely the exec. had been stationed at White Sand proving ground during the atomic tests and was fully briefed on its capabilities. What we heard was unbelievable and something hard to conceive. But when reports finally started to come through, we realized what a phenomenal weapon had been created and used.

"Our flying resumed and all references to our 'volunteer mission' seemed to have evaporated. Three days later, on August 9th, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki where large contingents of troops were lodged and where the giant Mitsubishi iron works was located.

"This time I had a full view of what the bomb could do. A few days after the second bomb was released, I was assigned to fly fighter cover for the photo reconnaissance flight over Nagasaki. The sight was almost indescribable. This large city was literally no more. Not a building was standing. An absolutely flat charred piece of earth, a mile or more square with straight lines crossed like a checkerboard. It was gone! Except for the crossing roadways, you would have thought it was a prairie.

"The bomb at Nagasaki finally brought forth a plea to surrender from the Japanese. And although no formal agreement had been signed, the surrender was accepted as real."

Signing of the Surrender and Return Home



"In preparation for the official surrender, the fleet moved into Tokyo Bay. We were the first carrier to move into position. On September 2nd on the deck of the Battleship Missouri, General McArthur took the Japanese sword as 1500 planes flew over the fleet. It was over!" (photo and text courtesy of Gene Loveland, member of the VF-87)



On deck of the Ticonderoga: the banner flying from the tower reads "Homeward Bound." (Gene Loveland photo).

After the surrender, "we took an entourage of VIP's, reporters, film producers and others on board. Our mission, while the ship was racing back to Pearl trying to set a record, was to produce film footage for Hollywood and the news media; thus, creating a vast collection of footage for their archives and film libraries for the future. Much of these events are still being shown today as history of World War II becomes more popular.

"The ship towed a large log many yards behind, and we would fly over in formation, brake off, make our run on the log and with guns blazing, rockets exploding we would drop bombs on the moving target. With Hollywood's ability to superimpose a variety of targets at the end of our runs, it made fodder for the rash of war films that followed.

"The ship made its record run in 8 days. When we were not flying, you could find all the pilots on deck in shorts and no tops, working on a tan. We felt the need after ten months away, to look as glamorous as possible.

"A few days out of Pearl Harbor we had career discussions in the ready room. The results were the choice of getting off at Pearl, taking the test for a commercial pilot's license, and the opportunity to augment into the regular Navy and take a one grade promotion. Those who had positive plans for the future that did not include the Navy were to stay aboard and continue on to San Francisco and face the challenge of civilian life.

"Most of the squadron chose to explore the Navy career because a civilian life at this time was a mystery. The conversion to a peace time economy would take some time and job opportunities would be scare for a while.

"The planes were gone and the flight deck and hanger deck were filled with Marines and their backpacks heading home. With three other men [including Robert Clark] from the squadron on board, we said goodbye to all our buddies and made a lot of promises to write, call and visit; none of which occurred - of course.

"As we entered the channel leading to San Francisco, it was a feeling of relaxation and joy. I was overcome with a euphoria never experienced before. A feeling of being released and dropped down in a totally new world.

"The weather was California at its best. No clouds and brilliant sunshine as we glided under the Golden Gate Bridge that majestically spanned the harbor. We passed Alcatraz off to our left, reminding us that it wasn't really Utopia where we landed, but damn close.

"Being the first major ship to arrive in the 'Bay' from the peace signing event, we received a celebrity's welcome. Fire boats shooting colored water in the air and blowing their horns. Hundreds of pleasure boats with people waving gave us great feeling of being home. It was very exciting!

"We returned to our quarters to pack our small collection of personal belongings. I turned in the last book I read to the library and was struck by the title as I laid it on the desk: *World's End*, by Upton Sinclair."