

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

CAPTAIN WALTER E. CLARKE, UNITED STATES NAVY

Walter Edward Clarke was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 26, 1914, son of William and Beatrice (Winser) Clarke. He received the degree of Bachelor of Science from James Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois, in 1938, and on July 30, that year entered the U. S. Naval Reserve. He had preliminary flight training at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base, Robertson, Missouri, and on January 26, 1939 was appointed Aviation Cadet, U. S. Naval Reserve. After flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, he was designated Naval Aviator, November 1, 1939 and commissioned Ensign, to date from November 20, 1939. He subsequently advanced in rank to that of Captain, to date from August 1, 1958, having transferred from the Naval Reserve to the Regular Navy on October 24, 1944.

After receiving his commission in 1939, he joined Fighting Squadron FIVE and was serving with that squadron when the United States entered World War II, December 8, 1941. That squadron operated off the USS YORKTOWN, USS ENTERPRISE, USS RANGER, USS WASP and USS SARATOGA until August 30, 1942, when the SARATOGA was torpedoed. The squadron was then sent to Henderson Field, Guadalcanal. He was "shot down," "shot up," and torpedoed and was one of the thirteen pilot survivors out of the original thirty-nine assigned at the start of the Guadalcanal invasion. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Gold Star in lieu of the Fourth Distinguished Flying Cross. The citations follow in part:

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...in action against enemy Japanese forces during the Solomon Islands Campaign, September 13 and 14, 1942. While operating with his squadron from an airfield on Guadalcanal Island, Lieutenant Clarke, with cool courage and utter disregard for his own personal safety, shot down two enemy planes..."

Gold Star in Lieu of the Fourth Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...during operations against enemy Japanese forces on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands on October 14, 1942. Participating in a flight which intercepted a force of numerically superior hostile aircraft attempting to carry out a bombing strike against our forces on Guadalcanal, (he) pressed home daring attacks through strong fighter plane opposition and successfully shot down one of the enemy bombers. His skilled airmanship and courageous devotion to duty were contributing factors to the defense of Guadalcanal..."

He was also awarded Gold Stars in lieu of the Third and Fourth Air Medal and a Gold Star in lieu of the Fifth Distinguished Flying Cross for completing five strike missions each during the period August 7, 1942 to October 9, 1942. He is entitled to the Ribbon for, and facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded units operating in the Guadalcanal area.

He had duty ashore from January 1943 to December 1944 as Fighting Squadron Training Officer at the Operational Training Command, Sanford, Florida, and in January 1945 assumed command of Fighting Squadron TEN, the "Grim Reapers." Under his command, that squadron participated in aerial battles at Iwo Jima, in the first carrier strikes on the Japanese homeland, the invasion of Okinawa and furnished air cover over China during the surrender negotiations with the Japanese. He was awarded Gold Stars in lieu of the Second and Third Distinguished Flying Cross and was cited as follows:

Gold Star in lieu of the Second Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...as Leader of a Group of Fighter Planes attached to the USS INTREPID, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Inland Sea, March 19, 1945. Locating and attacking a hostile escort carrier docked in a shipyard while leading a sweep against enemy Naval units, Lieutenant Commander Clarke dived at it first, despite intense anti-aircraft fire from the warship and ground positions, scoring a near miss on the carrier. Leaving the vessel in flames from a direct bomb hit, two near misses, many direct rocked hits and severe strafing from all participating planes, he then led the sweep in two successful strafing attacks against hostile freighters underway in the Inland Sea..."

Gold Star in lieu of the Third Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...in action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Okinawa, April 16, 1945. Engaging in combat with two hostile fighter aircraft and a dive-bomber while flying a patrol to protect our ships and ground forces, Lieutenant Commander Clarke courageously and skillfully shot down all three enemy planes, thus saving our forces from attack and possible severe damage..."

He also received the Air Medal and Gold Star in lieu of the Second similar award for completing five strike missions each during the period March 18 to April 2, 1945.

In January 1946 he joined the Staff of Commander Carrier Division SIX as Flag Lieutenant and in June of that year, reported for instruction at the General Line School, Newport, Rhode Island. Completing the course there in May 1947, he next served as Executive Officer of the Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Mustin Field, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the period January to June 1949 he had instruction at the Air Command and Staff School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, after which he served as Operations Officer at the Naval Operating Base, Bermuda.

In May 1950 he joined the USS PALAU (CVE-122) as Navigator and in December 1951 was detached for duty as Head of Aviation Liaison in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. He remained there until July 1954, and after service as Operations Officer on board the USS CORAL SEA (CVA-43), he reported in December 1955, as Operations Officer on the staff of Commander Carrier Division SIX. From June 1957

to June 1959 he was Air Operations Officer on the Staff of the Commander in Chief, Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, with headquarters in London, England, after which he was assigned until April 1961 to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, where he served as Assistant Director of Aviation Planning until May 1960, then as Assistant Director of the Technical Study Group.

In April 1961 he reported as Commanding Officer of the USS VALCOUR (AVP-55) and from June 1962 until July 1963 commanded the USS FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (CVA-42). He next served on the Staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet and from January 1965 to July 1966 was Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Carrier Division SIX. The following month he became Officer in Charge, Pacific Operational Liaison Office, on the Staff of Commander in Chief, Pacific. In June 1968, he reported as the Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commandant of the Eighth Naval District in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In addition to the Distinguished Flying Cross with four Gold Stars, the Air Medal with three Gold Stars and the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Captain Clarke has the American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one silver star and two bronze stars (seven operations); European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the National Defense Service Medal.