

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER COOK CLELAND,
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Lieutenant Commander Cleland was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 24, 1916, the son of Chester C. and Mrs. Altje Cook Cleland. He attended Shaw High School in Cleveland, and owned and operated a Motorcycle Shop during those years. After three and one-half years at the University of Missouri, at Columbia, where he studied Mechanical Engineering, he spent a year traveling, working his way through Central and South America, and upon his return to the United States became Engineering Inspector for Thompson Products, Cleveland, Ohio.

On November 10, 1940, he enlisted in the Navy and started aviation training at the St. Louis Reserve Base. Appointed Aviation Cadet on February 10, 1941, he completed training and received his wings at the Naval Air Station, Miami, Florida, on September 5 of that year. At this time he was commissioned Ensign in the Naval Reserve, and subsequently attained the rank of Lieutenant Commander, to date from October 3, 1945.

After accepting his commission as Ensign, USNR, in September 1941, Lieutenant Commander Cleland reported to the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, where he was assigned to Scouting Squadron 72 (later based on the USS WASP). He served in that squadron until detached in November 1942 with orders to duty in connection with fitting out Scouting Squadron 16. He remained with that squadron, redesignated Bombing Squadron 16, based on the USS LEXINGTON, until the summer of 1944.

Lieutenant Commander Cleland was the pilot of a pilot-gunner team with a Navy dive bomber (a Douglas Dauntless SBD) which made thirty-nine combat flights, dropped 37,000 pounds of bombs, shot down four enemy planes, destroyed four planes on the ground, scored direct hits on two cargo ships and one 28,000-ton carrier, sank a landing barge, scored a near miss on a cruiser, bombed an underground hangar, demolished Jap buildings, supply dumps and AA batteries on Tarawa, Mille, Wake, Kwajalein, Palau, Hollandia, Truk, Saipan, and Guam, and fought their way out of many tight situations.

The exploits of this team began in September 1943 when their carrier's planes struck at Tarawa, continued over Kwajalein in December, made three attacks on Truk, during one of which the Dauntless was struck by heavy Anti-Aircraft fire which ripped a jagged hole in her starboard wing, but from which she returned safely to base. Saipan followed; then the Battle of the Eastern Philippines, where to get at the Japanese Fleet they had to fight their way through a group of enemy fighters. They pressed home their attack, scoring the carrier hit and shooting down an enemy Zero. Lieutenant Commander Cleland successfully brought his battered plane back to the

U. S. Fleet, but was unable to land on his own carrier and put the SBD down on the deck with insufficient gasoline left to taxi up the deck. After repairs, however, his plane made four later attacks on Guam, again surviving Anti-Aircraft damage.

For extraordinary heroism as Pilot of a Dive Bomber in Bombing Squadron 16, Lieutenant Commander Cleland was awarded the Navy Cross, and for meritorious achievement in aerial flight during the period September 1943 to April 1944, he has been awarded the Air Medal with Gold Stars in lieu of the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Air Medals. The citation to the Navy Cross was as follows:

NAVY CROSS:

"For extraordinary heroism as Pilot of a Dive Bomber in Bombing Squadron SIXTEEN, attached to the USS LEXINGTON, in action against enemy Japanese forces during the First Battle of the Philippine Sea, on June 20, 1944. Leading his section in a daring strike against two enemy carriers far from home base, Lieutenant Cleland maneuvered for advantageous striking position and, carrying out his attack with outstanding skill in the face of intense antiaircraft fire and relentless aerial opposition, contributed materially to the sinking of one of the enemy carriers, the probable sinking of the second and to the destruction of two attacking hostile planes. Then, leading his section on the long and hazardous return flight to base, he succeeded in effecting a safe night landing on board the LEXINGTON. By his airmanship, courage and devotion to duty throughout this hazardous operation, Lieutenant Cleland upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For wounds received in those engagements, Lieutenant Commander Cleland was also awarded the Purple Heart Medal with bar.

In September 1944 Lieutenant Commander Cleland returned to the United States for duty at the Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Maryland, with the Accelerated Field Service Test Unit. He was relieved of active duty on October 26, 1945, and has continued as a Member of the Organized Reserve with regular periods of training since that time.

In addition to the Navy Cross and the Air Medal with four Gold Stars, Lieutenant Commander Cleland has the American Defense Service Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with several engagement stars, and the World War II Victory Medal.