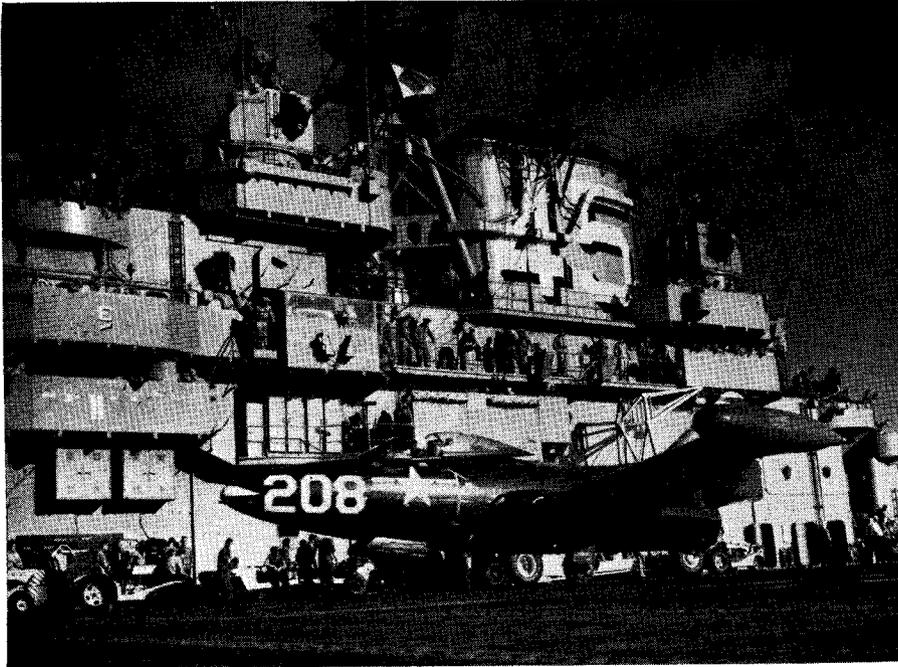


# THE VALLEY FORGE STORY



EARLY in the Korean conflict, Navy jets had their battle test. The Panther F9F's proved their worth in early Korean fights.



This is the fourth in a series of brief carrier histories and takes the USS Valley Forge into her third tour in the Korean conflict. Arbitrary cut-off date for the sketch is December 31, 1951.



THE USS *Valley Forge* has won many a distinguished first, but in the beginning, she was a significant last—last of the *Essex* CV-9 class carriers which had been the very heart of the fast carrier task forces in World War II.

Her keel had been laid September 7, 1944, as U. S. Naval forces were blasting their way to victory in the Pacific. But even then there were no chances to be taken and, to make sure that there would be no sudden shortage of CV-9's, new ones were being built. Of these, the *Valley Forge* was the last. The next big carriers would be CVB's.

Commissioned 3 November 1946, the *Valley Forge* was named after the famous Revolutionary Encampment in Pennsylvania. Her construction was financed by the war bond purchases of the people of Philadelphia.

It was hard for a Fighting Lady to make a proper debut without gunfire, especially when she entered a society that had proved itself valorous and aggressive in battle. But the *Valley Forge* sailed into the limelight within 18 months of her commissioning in no uncertain manner. With her two escorting destroyers, USS *Lowe* and USS *Thomas*, she made up the first force of American vessels to cruise around the world since 1907 when the Great White Fleet made its tour.

San Diego, Hawaii, Sydney, Hong Kong, Singapore, Ceylon, Suez, Gibraltar, Bergen, Portsmouth, England, New York, Panama, and San Diego again! Thus the full circle was made between 9 October 1947 and 11 June 1948, the *Valley Forge* proving to be not only one of our ablest—but also our biggest—diplomat at large.

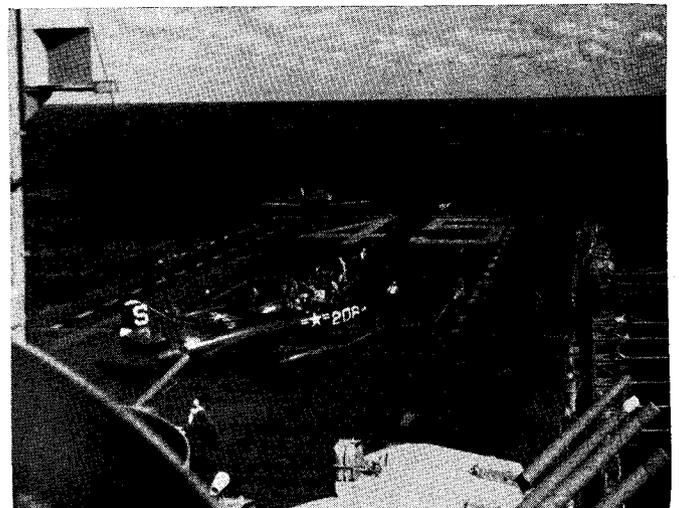
There were gun salutes and welcoming committees, distinguished guests and official receptions, all in proper order and part of the diplomatic round. But many an officer and man will remember other unofficial events—the sun bursting in glory just as the *Valley Forge* sailed into Sydney Harbor, the crowded crossroads of the world in Singapore, lean hungry faces in Tsingtao, the rich costumes of sheikhs striding along the streets of Arab villages, the great Rock of Gibraltar from the air, and the flagship of Lord Nelson at Portsmouth.

At journey's end, the *Valley Forge* had achieved these firsts:

First U. S. carrier to make a round-the-world cruise.  
First U. S. carrier to transit Suez Canal.  
First U. S. carrier to conduct flight operations in the Persian Gulf.

Two years later, the *Valley Forge* was to chalk up a fighting first—first U. S. carrier to send her pilots into the Korean conflict. At the exact moment of the sudden start of hostilities, she was the only U. S. carrier in the western Pacific, operating in the Subic Bay area, Philippines.

Four days later she was in Okinawa, and on Saturday, 1 July 1950, she was headed for the fighting front. There was everything to be done before Monday. LCdr. J. M. Murphy of VF-53 reports that on Saturday evening the squadron had "ground training in the form of a most appropriate lecture entitled 'Points of Interest in Korea.' Ens. Kuhlman seemed to know what he was talking about. I never figured out where he got his information or how he did it so quickly."



HERE a Panther jet takes off from the deck of the *Valley Forge*, ready to deliver its lethal load where it will hit the Reds hard

By Monday morning, the diplomat had become a warrior, as the *Valley Forge* launched units of CVG-5.

And it spelled something vitally new for in the very first launch there were 12 F9F-3's of VF-51 and VF-52, the first U. S. naval jets to go into battle.

There was drama in the irony that on the 'eve of Fourth of July 1950, HMS *Triumph* was the fighting partner of the *Valley Forge* forever associated with General Washington. On this occasion, the *Triumph's* planes were first in the air.

Targets of the epoch-making strike were the airfields of Pyongyang and Pyongyang East. Forty to 50 aircraft were estimated on the field at Pyongyang. Four airborne enemy Yak fighters were sighted, and one each was shot down by Lt. (jg) Flog and Ens. E. W. Brown Jr. One IL-2 on the ground was destroyed, and Yaks, IL-10's and another IL-2 were strafed on the ground.

"The return to the ship was uneventful. . . . The first phase was completed, the initial tenseness was a thing of the past, and we were ready to settle down and really work on North Korea." These were the words of one of the *Corsair* pilots.

And indeed they did set themselves diligently to the task. North Korea was to get a going over.

From that day to 23 November, CVG-5 made 3,444 offensive sorties in 65 strike days. Using F9F jet *Panthers*, F4U *Corsairs* and AD *Skyraiders*, CVG-5 inflicted heavy damage on a variety of targets—aircraft, locomotives, railroad cars, oil refineries, factories, power stations, warehouses, aviation installations bridges, roads, small freighters and tankers, villages and various military installations, large and small.

During the early part of September, when the Pusan perim-



LT. HUNTER N. Sneed, Jr., briefs a group of jet pilots on enemy terrain prior to the first strike of the *Forge's* second tour

eter was at its smallest, VF-51 concentrated all its efforts in supporting the embattled troops—and did a top-notch job.

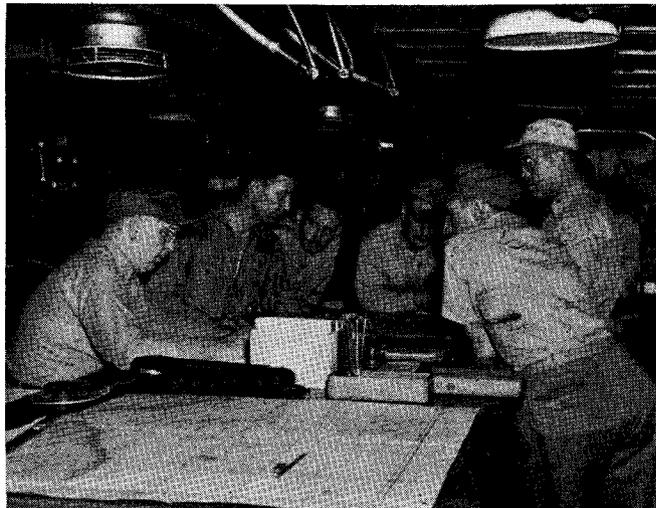
Again and again fighter and attack planes of the *Valley Forge* helped to soften up the Seoul and Inchon area, and on the D-Day, September 15, Ens. Eldon W. Brown Jr. of VF-53 touched off the nearest thing to an atomic explosion in the Korean War. He did it when he hit a long line of boxes some seven feet high and three boxes wide near a gun emplacement. As his bullets struck, he knew he'd better get out in a hurry, there was a peculiar orange flame of burning ammunition.

"I grabbed the stick and throttle tightly, leveled my wings and held on," Brown said. "Wham! the explosion was terrific. A big red cloud of dust mushroomed up past me and by that time I was up to almost 4,000 feet."

By mid-October, four carriers, the *Valley Forge*, the *Philippine Sea*, the *Leyte* and the *Boxer* made it a foursome for Task Force 77. On 15 October, there was an all-day, all-out offensive to celebrate the new carrier strength. A record number of 395 naval planes attacked over 6,000 square miles of enemy territory. Hungnam, Hamhung, Songjin, Chingjin, Sinpo and Pukchong were the chief targets.

"After we finished their cities," said LCdr. Douglas Hodson, "we headed for the countryside, four planes in a group, looking under trees, in houses and under haystacks. . . . The North Koreans had camouflaged their equipment well, but not quite well enough."

On 19 November with four and a half months' active fighting behind her, the *Valley Forge* sailed for the United States, but even as she crossed the Pacific eastward, events in



RADM. JOHN M. Hoskins listens to reports of fliers who have just returned from a strike on Korea in second month of conflict

Korea were sending UN forces into reverse.

No sooner had the *Happy Valley* arrived in San Diego 1 December 1950 than it was necessary to speed her back to the Korean War zone. She had no more than time for a passing salute and five days later, she was on her way and by 22 December she was once again a part of Task Force 77 which she joined off Wonsan. The quick return which came to be known as Operation Turnabout will always loom large in the log of the *Valley Forge*.

As 1951 opened, the carrier with CVG-2 embarked was continuing her fighting career in Korean waters. Toward the end of January she had a 10-day period in Sasebo, Japan. The carrier was in great need of overhaul.

After the *Valley Forge* returned to the United States 7 April 1951, she went to Bremerton for overhaul. On August 5 at Seattle, she was an outstanding attraction in the city's second annual "Seafair." The smart appearance of the ship, her officers and men prompted a "Well Done" from Com-Thirteen.

After a period during which the *Valley Forge* was the training ship for numerous San Diego-based squadrons, she set out for Hawaii enroute to the Orient. On 4 December 1951, the ship anchored off Yokosuka, Japan, and three days later joined Task Force 77 and embarked on her third combat tour.

December 14, 1951 marked the 34,000th landing on the *Happy Valley* made by a *Panther* jet. All through December, the *Valley Forge* proved a valued member of the Task Force 77 team. She proved to be an aerial menace to anything moving—trucks, locomotives, trains, boats, and oxcarts. On 297 sorties on 17 strike days, anvils of the *Forge* rang out.