

# In the Wake of

By Hal Andrews

*This article completes the Naval Aviation in WW II Series, which began in our Sep-Oct 89 issue.*

On 14 August, WW II's fighting stopped. Planes launched on combat missions against Japan were recalled, though pilots already engaged fought through their last combat actions. Combat air patrols maintained by Task Force 38 would also claim a few more enemy planes as individual Japanese pilots made last runs against the fleet. But

for the task force, as for the rest of the world, the long and hard-fought war had come to an end. Build-up of the greatest amphibious force ever to be assembled—to conduct Operation Olympic—could stop. No invasion of Japan's home islands would be necessary.

In ships of the fleet, on island bases and wherever Allied soldiers, sailors and marines were located, as the word was passed celebrations were the order of the day. Whether exuberant or quiet, each individual's reaction reflected the fact that a whole new future lay ahead. Back in the States, it was as if the whole country were participating as one in

the jubilation. While a few dramatic incidents got media attention, for the most part it was a simple outpouring of relief, thanksgiving and joy that the war was finally over.

While preparations for the occupation of Japan and the actual signing of the surrender documents went forward, it was almost impossible to believe that the patterns of life which evolved over nearly four years were about to change dramatically. Military or civilian, there was a general feeling that "everything could go back to the way it was." However, at the same time, there was a realization that with the years which had passed and the events of those years—from the



---

# Victory

smallest and most personal to the advent of the atomic bomb—the past could only be memories.

Today, the magnitude of the assembled Allied forces is hard to envision. Total Naval Aviation, from which the Pacific forces were drawn, numbered nearly 440,000—almost 100,000 of whom were officers, including 60,000 pilots. Less than 500 enlisted pilots still maintained that long-time tradition. Of the 440,000, 110,000 were Marines and 1,500 were Coast Guard, which was part of the Navy during wartime. These personnel operated a total of 41,000 airplanes, 28,000 of which were combat aircraft—10,000 in the Pacific Fleet. Twenty-six fast carriers and 64 escort

carriers were available to carry Navy and some Marine carrier-based squadrons into battle.

Task Force 38, operating against Japan on the last day of the war, was only one component of the total naval forces; surface forces, submarines, fleet air wing patrol planes and Marine bombers all played a part. The task force's nine regular carriers, each with its air group; six light carriers with their aircraft; and an integrated British Royal Navy carrier and air group comprised the most concentrated naval thrust, but only a part of the total Allied fighting force.

## Transitioning to Peacetime

Fleet and shore activities at home

and in the war zone quickly shifted to new modes. Some—like the organization of separation centers, training of personnel to man them and the actual demobilization process—had long been planned and already been initiated. Others—like the occupation of Japan, the freeing and repatriation of prisoners of war (POWs) held by the Japanese, and the surrendering process for the military garrisons in Japan's occupied countries—were quickly planned and put into action, as were the preparations for the formal surrender itself. Recovery of POWs began almost immediately,

**Fleet Admiral C. W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, arrives in his PB2Y in Tokyo Bay for surrender ceremonies on 29 August 1945. The surrender ceremony was held aboard the battleship Missouri (BB 63), seen here in the background, on 2 September 1945.**

USN 338129



## Naval Aviation in WW II

with as many as possible flown directly to Guam. Both Army and Navy planes dropped food and other necessities to POW camps that couldn't yet be taken over.

The 2nd of September saw the formal surrender documents signed on board *Missouri* (BB 63) with a tremendous flyover of Navy and Army aircraft. By this time the flow of combat equipment into the Pacific theater had been reversed, but the issue of how to get the military personnel home remained. Available war shipping could not do the job for the veterans anxious to resume their civilian lives.

While carriers heading back could accommodate large numbers of sailors if aircraft were left behind, a more direct project was established to expedite the overall troop return—Project Magic Carpet. Combat ships were modified to accommodate maximum numbers of military passengers and to shuttle back and forth. With troops still to be returned from Europe as well, these could be used for both Atlantic and Pacific transport. With their extensive hangar spaces, carriers and seaplane tenders were particularly effective. As an example, the seaplane tender *Albemarle* (AV 5)

F4U Corsairs, TBM Avengers and SB2C Helldivers fly in formation over *Missouri* (BB 63) during Japanese surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945.

80-G-472630



had multi-stacked bunks in its hangar bay, with other spaces converted to heads and mess facilities. Carrying 2,000 passengers on each trip, *Albemarle* returned 6,000 military personnel to the West Coast during the fall months. Some of the newer escort carriers (CVEs) assigned to Magic Carpet duty never did get to operate aircraft, since most of the CVEs were rapidly tied up in reserve status.

As U.S. bases throughout the war

zone were relinquished, military material was processed for retention, destruction or release for local use. Combat aircraft in at least one case were simply pushed off a cliff into the sea as the Navy pulled back from its far-flung bases. Marine squadrons accompanied the Marine ground

**As more and more combat planes went into storage, blimp hangars were used to house them. This one at Weeksville, N.C., was still being used for lighter-than-air activities when it burned to the ground in early August 1995.** NH 84328





Veterans were anxious to get home. One sailor's fanciful suggestion was to use a cardboard box stocked with food for the trip.

forces deployed in China as the rising conflict between Nationalist and Communist factions flared into civil war. Seventh Fleet escort carrier-based aircraft, as well as river-based patrol flying boats where airfields were not available, also covered activities in China. While the U.S. supported the Nationalist side, military forces were restrained from directly participating in a combat role.

Within the U.S., disestablishments became the order of the day for units and bases other than the separation centers. The Carrier Qualification Training Unit at Glenview, Ill., was one of the first to go, followed by decommissioning of the two Great Lakes training carriers, *Wolverine* and

---

*Sable*, ending a unique chapter in Naval Aviation history. Throughout the country, air stations were closed and turned over for civilian use—particularly the smaller NAAS and NAAF auxiliary stations and fields—as well as outlying training “bounce” fields. Officer and enlisted personnel were released according to a common system for all services, taking into account length of service, extent of combat duty and other factors. Programs to convert reservists to regular service were established, and pilot and other specialized training continued on a reduced scale as operational organization and training activities re-formed at peacetime lev-

**Bougainville (CVE 100) crewmen celebrate after hearing the announcement of Japan's surrender on 14 August 1945.**

80-G-377111



## Naval Aviation in WW II

els. On the East Coast, training for the two battle carrier air groups to operate from *Midway* (CVB 41) and *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVB 42) was a priority activity in preparation for shakedown cruises on both ships after their commissionings.

In November the training command was reorganized. Among the four subordinate commands was a new Naval Air Reserve Training Command. The new command moved rapidly to organize and initiate the postwar reserve program, which was designed to maintain wartime skills for a peacetime reserve force using specially maintained bases or operating at major air stations.

### Production and Advanced Technology

With production of everything needed for the planned invasion of Japan continuing at its peak rate, contracting offices worked overtime getting out stop-work and contract termination orders. Following an overall government policy, contractors and their subcontractors for all military hardware stopped work, and production workers were given time off while decisions were reached on "what next?"

Since there were adequate numbers of most major aircraft models in inventory for peacetime use, their production lines never resumed. Workers returned to finish airplanes being readied for delivery and to assess the assemblies and parts coming down the lines for retention as spares or for salvage; this was followed by scrapping most of the tooling. Automobile companies—such as General Motors with *Avengers* and *Wildcats* in production and *Bearcat* production starting up—were more than eager to fully return to their regular products, as were appliance manufacturers, many of whom were major airframe component suppliers. Having initiated engineering work for commercial models, most of the aircraft companies were anxious to move these efforts along to beat the competition into the anticipated new air age.

Carefully selecting the models, the Bureau of Aeronautics (BUAER) continued limited production of ongoing and newly developed models.



**Midway (CVB 41) was commissioned in September 1945.**

NH 67571

Included were advanced production models of existing types, such as Vought's F4U-4 *Corsairs*, and new types such as Grumman F8F *Bearcats*. With planned transition to new models then under development—such as the single-place VBT (later to be redesignated VA) attack types—production of current models was dropped. The SB2C, TBM and even the new TBY were closed out. Even though production of a new model under development was anticipated, low-level production of an existing model was continued in some cases to maintain the production base—regardless of adequacy of the existing model. And production schedules, both in number and timing, were adjusted to fit the development projects' status. While most production was being cut back, McDonnell Aircraft—with a production contract for its first *Phantom*, the FD-1 (later FH-1) jet fighter—moved into the former Curtiss-Wright St. Louis, Mo., plant, left vacant in July as production of Curtiss C-46/R5C transports was cut back after V-E Day.

Carrier construction was also adjusted. Two of the three battle carriers underway were completed and commissioned, *Midway* at the Norfolk, Va., Navy Yard in September and *Franklin D. Roosevelt* at Brooklyn, N.Y., a month later. Completion of the

third, and of the incomplete *Essex*-class carriers, was rescheduled for later dates.

Experimental aircraft programs were reviewed and most were continued to completion. Flight testing of prototypes, at low priority, was continued to assess the potential contribution of their design features to future designs. Prototype development and production build-up for planned replacement models already in flight testing—such as the McDonnell XFD-1



**Under the guidance of plane directors, pilots aboard *Midway* (CVB 41) move their planes forward to make room for others.**



After the war, Naval Aviation maintenance training was consolidated at several facilities. AMM1 Elmer Ball instructs mechanics in the use of a micrometer at NAS Seattle, Wash.

80-G-233271



Boeing B-17Gs were obtained from the Army Air Corps and modified at the Naval Air Modification Unit, Johnsville, Pa. (now NAWCAD Warminster), with a belly radome for the powerful APS-20 radar and an Airborne Combat Information Center.



The Navy seaplane base at Okinawa was devastated by a typhoon on 9 October 1945. The storm's 135-knot winds tossed aircraft about and destroyed several buildings.

jet fighter, Douglas XBT2D-1 (later AD and A-1), XBTM-1 (AM) and XP2V (later P-2)—were given higher priority. While production of the composite (piston and jet)-engined FR-1 *Fireball* was terminated, development of the XF2R-1 (similar but with its R-1820 Cyclone replaced by a GE TG-100 turboprop) was continued in support of planned production development of a similar F2R-2 turboprop plus jet fighter. While a flight test accident destroyed the first of the three XFD-1s in November, the second was already flying and the program continued with only limited delay.

Behind the scenes many ongoing and new projects aimed at enhancing

the performance of new technical advances were pursued. Both to bring Pratt & Whitney into jet engine production and out of concern for Westinghouse's ability to meet production schedules of the 19XB engine for FD-1 *Phantoms*—while developing the 24C of nearly twice the power for newer jet fighters then being designed—Pratt & Whitney became coproducer of the 19XB. The application of the high-powered airborne early warning radar successfully operated by the fleet in carrier-based TBM-3Ws to a true airborne combat information center system in Boeing B-17s modified as radome-fitted PB-

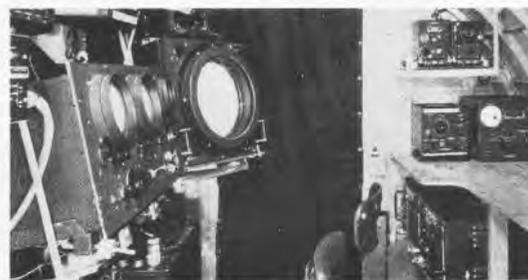
The radio-radar compartment of the PB-1W, a modified B-17G, contains the AN/APS-20 radar, radios and other communications equipment.

Jim Sullivan



Navy wartime aircraft attracted public attention when put on display around the country.

1Ws, under Project CADILLAC, was a major step on the way to today's AWACS (Airborne Warning And Control System). Exploration of space rockets and development of rocket motors, one of which would later power the Air Force's Bell X-1 through the sound barrier, and joint development of the initially jet engine-powered Douglas D-558 series of high-speed research aircraft with the National Advisory Committee for





Navy personnel pose on top of an all-white Mitsubishi G4M "Betty" with the green cross markings that it carried when transporting the Japanese delegation to the surrender signing. 80-G-344085



Aeronautics (predecessor of today's National Aeronautics and Space Administration) were among the innovative concepts and approaches that could enhance future fleet combat effectiveness. Wartime experiments were also continued with pilotless aircraft—really guided weapons—of many types.

Five-decker bunks filled the hangar and wing storage bays of Albermarle (AV 5) during "Magic Carpet" troop transport.

Typical of smaller bases being disestablished in late 1945, NAAS Pungo, Va., was an auxiliary for CVE squadron training at Norfolk.



## The Year Ends

As 1945 wound down, Naval Aviation had gone through some major transitions. There was little question that wartime experience had demonstrated aviation's new importance in the Navy, but not all of the postwar signs were positive. Though typical throughout the military services, the near decimation of fleet aviation was a cause for concern. Since V-J Day, Naval Aviation's total combat aircraft had decreased by one-third, to 19,000. A better indicator of operating force decline was the decrease in operating combat aircraft to one-half of the final wartime number, and of these the number in the fleet was down to one-quarter of the V-J Day total. More than half of the carrier air groups and all of the light carrier air groups had been disestablished. Of those flying from Task Force 38's fast carrier groups on the last day of the war, only one was still active.

More unsettling to Naval Aviation personnel directly was the upsurge in proposals for unification of the military services—seen as a new bid for the Army Air Forces to become independent and take over military aviation. In mid-December an interpretation of remarks by President Harry Truman led to a directive that Navy officers could not speak out on the subject in public. The president himself stepped



Saratoga (CV 3) waits at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 10 September 1945, ready to begin a speed run to the Golden Gate with naval personnel due for discharge. Many aircraft and escort carriers were used to ferry discharges during the famed "Magic Carpet Ride." 80-G-351676

in to correct the interpretation, and the directive was rescinded at the end of the month—passing on his statement that views were to be understood as personal and didn't necessarily reflect those of the administration.

On the plus side, the opening of the Aviation Fundamentals Ground School under Naval Air Technical Training Center, Jacksonville, Fla., indicated that new blood was entering enlisted ranks. Twelve weeks of generalized aviation instruction would give boot camp graduates seeking aviation duty a head start.

Two last-day-of-the-year actions closed out wartime chapters. The Coast Guard was transferred back to the Treasury Department and the Radiation Laboratory run by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which had led the way on many radar advances, was closed down. With continued Navy interest in high-powered airborne radar, the CADILLAC Project and personnel were re-formed as the Naval Research Laboratory Field Station to continue CADILLAC II.

### A New Year

As calendars were turned to 1946, much of Naval Aviation's readjustment had taken place. Most of the veterans who would be released from service were back in the States, and Magic Carpet's job was essentially over. The carriers and seaplane tenders could be returned to their primary combat configurations; many—including most of the CVEs and the famed "Big E," the prewar *Enterprise* (CV 6)—would be tied up and readied for mothballing in the Reserve Fleet. Regular Navy and lower point reservists were integrated into operating units, and typical wartime troop trainloads moved from West Coast to East Coast air stations to balance available manpower. New recruits on flight lines and in training command classrooms became more numerous. Planning was being conducted for fleet operations later in the year. These would include February's Operation Frostbite for cold weather tests above the Arctic Circle, during which both wartime and the latest car-

**01 Nov:** The Naval Air Training Command was reorganized with headquarters at NAS Pensacola, Fla., and the following subordinate commands: Naval Air Advanced Training, Naval Air Basic Training, Naval Air Technical Training and newly formed Naval Air Reserve Training. By this change, the titles Naval Air Operational Training and Naval Air Intermediate Training ceased to exist,

and the facilities of the former Naval Air Primary Training Command were incorporated into basic training or absorbed by the reserve program.

and the facilities of the former Naval Air Primary Training Command were incorporated into basic training or absorbed by the reserve program.

**29 Nov:** The Special Weapons Test and Tactical Evaluation Unit was redesignated Pilotless Aircraft Unit and in the next month was transferred to MCAS Mojave, Calif., and directed to operate detachments at NAF Point Mugu, Calif., as necessary.

---

rier aircraft, along with a helicopter, would operate from *Midway*. Far more ambitious, and significant, would be the summer's Operation Crossroads, testing the atomic bomb's effects on naval targets at Bikini Atoll.

Reorganizations continued. Navy photography was transferred from BUAER to the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air). BUAER organized its material functions into two groups, recognizing the increasingly complex technical issues in research and development and the need to stretch reduced resources to the fullest in support of the fleet's aviation material. Fleet air wings and other units would continue to be disestablished, while smaller air stations would be turned over to civilian use. On the other hand, looking ahead, the Naval Aviation Ordnance Test Station was established at NAAS Chincoteague, Va., and the Bureau of Ordnance's guided weapons work was transferred there, taking advantage of its out-of-the-way location and available sea ranges. Long transferred from the Navy, it is still recognized today as a prime location for space probes and small satellite launches.

**Flight testing of McDonnell's XFD-1 Phantom continued in support of the Navy's first jet fighter production order.**

Other events in the early weeks of 1946 would include the Chief of Naval Operation's rationalization of diverse Navy guided weapons projects; a BUAER proposal to establish a joint Army-Navy program for an earth satellite; the first flight of a twin-engine helicopter, the Navy's McDonnell XHJD-1; the assignment of some 50 radar officers to Patrol Bomber Squadron 101 to become airborne combat information center officers in the new squadron's CADILLAC II Boeing PB-1Ws; and BUAER's award of a contract to Douglas for the Navy's first jet night fighter. All portended a dynamic future for Naval Aviation. ■

**This PBM-5 rests at NAS Alameda, Calif., after it was flown back from a war zone carrying "high-point" crewmen and graffiti rendered by envious squadron-mates left behind.**

P. M. Bowers

