

2/15/62

ADMIRAL FRANK JACK FLETCHER, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

Frank Jack Fletcher was born in Marshalltown, Iowa, on April 29, 1885. Appointed to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from his native state in 1902, he completed the four year course on February 12, 1906, served the two years at sea, then required by law, and was commissioned Ensign on February 13, 1908. Receiving periodic promotions, he attained the rank of Vice Admiral, to date from June 26, 1942. On May 1, 1947 he was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy and advanced to the rank of Admiral on the basis of combat awards.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1906, he had consecutive duty until September 1907 in the battleships RHODE ISLAND and OHIO, operating in the Atlantic. After a year in the USS EAGLE, on special service, he reported to the USS MAINE, of the Atlantic Fleet in December 1908. In August 1909 he was assigned to the USS FRANKLIN, his duty drafting men for the Pacific Fleet and transporting them on board the USS TENNESSEE to Cavite.

Reporting in November 1909 to the Commander THIRD Squadron, Pacific Fleet, he was assigned to the USS CHAUNCEY, a unit of the Asiatic Torpedo Flotilla. In April 1910 he assumed command of the USS DALE, also with Asiatic Torpedo Flotilla, and in March 1912 again joined the USS CHAUNCEY, this time as Commanding Officer. Transferred to the USS FLORIDA in December 1912, he was aboard that battleship during the occupation of Vera Cruz, Mexico, in April 1914. "For distinguished conduct in battle, engagements of Vera Cruz, April 21 and 22, 1914..." he was awarded the Medal of Honor. The citation continues:

"He was in charge of the ESPERANZA and succeeded in getting on board over 350 refugees, many of them after the conflict had commenced. This ship was under fire, being struck more than 30 times, but he succeeded in getting all the refugees placed in safety. Later he was placed in charge of the train conveying refugees under a flag of truce. This was hazardous duty, as it was believed that the track was mined, and a small error in dealing with the Mexican guard of soldiers might readily have caused a conflict, such a conflict at one time being narrowly averted. It was greatly due to his efforts in establishing friendly relations with the Mexican soldiers that so many refugees succeeded in reaching Vera Cruz from the interior."

Detached from the FLORIDA in July 1914 he served briefly in the USS TENNESSEE before reporting as Aide and Flag Lieutenant on the staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet (USS NEW YORK, later USS WYOMING, flagship). He continued staff duty until September 1915, then returned to the Naval Academy for duty in the Executive Department.

Upon the outbreak of World War I in April 1917, he served as Gunnery Officer of the USS KEARSARGE until September 1917, after which he assumed command of the USS MARGARET. In February 1918 he reported to the Commander Naval Forces operating in European waters, and was assigned to the USS ALLEN. In May 1918 he assumed command of the USS BENHAM, and was later awarded the Navy Cross for "distinguished service...as Commanding Officer of the USS BENHAM engaged in the important, exacting and hazardous duty of patrolling the waters

infested with enemy submarines and mines, in escorting and protecting vitally important convoys of troops and supplies through these waters, and in offensive and defensive action, vigorously and unrelentingly prosecuted against all forms of enemy naval activity."

From October 1918 to February 1919 he assisted in fitting out the USS CRANE at the Union Iron Works, San Francisco, California, but was detached before her commissioning. He then had similar duty with the USS GRIDLEY, also building there, and upon her commissioning on March 8, 1919, assumed command. He was relieved of that command in April 1919, then served until September 1922 as Head of the Detail Section, Enlisted Personnel Division in the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.

Again ordered to Asiatic Station, he had consecutive command of the USS WHIPPLE, USS SACRAMENTO and USS RAINBOW, with additional duty in the latter assignment as Commander Submarine Base, Cavite. Returning to the United States, he served from March 1925 to August 1927 at the Navy Yard, Washington, D. C., after which he joined the USS COLORADO as Executive Officer. Detached from that battleship in June 1929, he completed the Senior Course at the Naval War College, Newport, a year later.

He had further instruction at the Army War College, Washington, D. C., before reporting in August 1931 as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, U. S. Asiatic Fleet (USS HOUSTON, flagship). In the summer of 1933 he was transferred to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, then had duty from November 1933 to May 1936 as Aide to the Secretary of Navy, the Honorable Claude A. Swanson.

In June 1936 he assumed command of the USS NEW MEXICO, flagship of Battle-ship Division THREE, Battle Force. Upon relief in December 1937, he became a Member of the Naval Examining Board, Navy Department, continuing duty in the Department from June 1938 to September 1939 as Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Navigation. He then reported as Commander Cruiser Division THREE, and on June 10, 1940, became Commander Cruiser Division SIX. He was serving in the latter command when the Japanese attacked the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. He became Commander Cruisers, Scouting Force, with additional duty as Commander Cruiser Division FOUR, on December 31, 1941. Here he was in command of one of the two Task Forces participating in operations in the Marshall-Gilbert Islands in February 1942, and the following month was second in command in the Salamaua-Lae operations.

On April 19, 1942, he was designated Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet, with additional duty as Commander Cruiser Division FOUR. He was in this command in May 1942 during the Battle of the Coral Sea, and in June, during the Battle of Midway, was Senior Task Force Commander, his flag flying in the USS YORKTOWN, which was lost in the engagement. It was in this Battle that the Japanese suffered the first decisive defeat in three hundred and fifty years, restoring the balance of Naval power in the Pacific. During the Guadalcanal-Tulagi landings on August 7 and 8, 1942, he commanded two of the three Task Forces engaged, and the American Task Forces in the ensuing Battle of the Eastern Solomons.

"For exceptionally meritorious service as Task Force Commander, United States Pacific Fleet..." he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. The citation continues: "In that position of great responsibility he exercised command of his Task Force with marked skill and resourcefulness, as a result of which heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy in the Coral Sea in May 1942 and again off Midway Island, in June 1942."

On November 18, 1942 he became Commandant, Thirteenth Naval District, Seattle, Washington, Commander Northwestern Sea Frontier. He was relieved as Commandant in October 1943, but continued to serve as Commander Northwestern Sea Frontier until April 15, 1944, when the Northwestern Sea Frontier was abolished and the Alaskan Sea Frontier established. He then became Commander of the latter, with additional duty as Commander North Pacific Force and North Pacific Ocean Area. It was revealed in July 1945, that a Task Force under his overall command had made the first penetration through the Kurile Islands into the sea of Okhotsk on March 3 and 4, 1945, and the same task force on February 4, 1944 bombarded Paramushira in the first sea bombardment of the Kurile.

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by the War Department, and cited in part as follows: "...In the highly responsible position of Commander of the United States Naval North Pacific Force and Area from October 1943 to August 1945, (he) displayed broad vision, tireless energy, and an unusually complete grasp of Army Air Forces tactics and capabilities in expertly solving the many problems involved in combined Army-Navy air operations. His professional ability and able leadership in the vast wartime expansion and organization of naval installations in the North Pacific Area contributed much to the smooth and efficient accomplishment of the over-all mission of the United States forces."

In September 1945, following the cessation of hostilities in the Far East, he proceeded to Ominto, Japan, with the North Pacific Force (consisting of about sixty vessels) for the emergency naval occupation of Northern Japan. He remained there until ordered to return to the United States, and on December 17, 1945, reported for duty as a member of the General Board, Navy Department. On May 1, 1946, as Senior Member of that Board he became Chairman, and continued to serve in that capacity relieved of all active duty for his retirement on May 1, 1947.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Navy Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, Army Distinguished Service Medal and the Purple Heart Medal (for wounds received on August 31, 1943, while attached to the USS SARATOGA), Admiral Fletcher has the Mexican Service Medal; World War I Victory Medal, Destroyer Clasp; Yangtze Service Medal; American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp. He also has the Sulu Mindanao Campaign Badge, presented by the Philippine Government in 1924, the Order of an Officer of the Imperial Order of the Dragon of Annam, and Diploma, conferred upon him by the Governor General of French Indo-China on the occasion of a visit of that official to Manila in January 1932, and the Order of the Bath with the grade of Companion, awarded by Great Britain (Canada).

15 February 1962