

## Reformed Squadron – 20 September 1945

### Narrative History of Composite Squadron Ten

Officially, in the Records Office in Washington, the records say:—VC 10 reformed at NAAS Ventura County Airport ,1 January ... Lt. Cleland S. Hattaway,USN 95583, acting Commanding Officer...”. And thus began the second cruise of Composite Squadron Ten.

Actually Compron Ten was steel tempered in the great Battle for Leyte Gulf, and forged in the action off Samar Island on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October in 1944 when a handful of escort carriers and their screening destroyers engaged a major Japanese task force for more than two hours in broad daylight, fighting a heroic and successful battle “ in the highest tradition of the service”, although the cause seemed hopeless. Compron Ten was reformed on an ideal, an ideal best exemplified in a skipper who in the thick of battle, without bombs or torpedoes, made repeated dummy runs at low altitude over the enemy column of heavy cruisers in order to divert the intense anti-aircraft fire from other planes in the squadron. The extraordinary heroism and leadership he displayed became a symbol for the rest of the squadron and an ideal on which to base the future greatness of Composite Squadron Ten, the second.

All the members of the “old squadron” were on leave when the squadron was reformed, but a nucleus of the new group were present in the form of new pilots from Operational Training Schools, eager to prove that they were able to conform to the traditions laid down by the experienced pilots. This group was lead by Lt. Cleland S. Hattaway,USN, an experienced pilot, formerly with Composite Squadron Seven aboard the USS Manila Bay. “Hatt” had gone from the Fleet to Operational Training and then back to sea again as the second senior fighter pilot in the reformed squadron. Formerly from Kansas city, Kansas, Hatt had stopped off there on his way to the West Coast and reported in to the squadron on December 19,1944, only to find Ensign Edward D. Slovek already there by one day and waiting for somebody to tell him what to do.They had company the next day when Ensign G.E.Masse and Ensign John L Moore reported aboard. December 20<sup>th</sup> found Dick Arnicar, Art Custer, Bob Frank aboard, and on the next day Joe Carroll, Clyde “Chief” Caudill,Ed Gaertner, and long Bob MacGill came in. On December 22<sup>nd</sup> that ferocious foursome Oscar Ayers, Bill Fleming, Chuck Ewers , and Al Jones found themselves rooming together with “Ek” Echard, Norman Van Dine, and Dick Whitcomb in nearby huts. Rich DeSomer and John Martin came in on Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup>. “De” was so quiet and likeable, everybody thought that he was a fighter pilot for the first two weeks until they found him out.

And the “Bill Budd’s Boys” began coming in and peace was known no longer in the vicinity of Oxnard, Calif. Bill chose Christmas Day to report( what a gift to the girls in Ventura County!) and found his boys all waiting for him.(They still wait for him) Don McMullen had reported in on Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup>, and John P. “Hit me ,Bill” Enright, Warren” Felix” Feldmeyer, Walter Fuchs, and Stanley “Pete” Piotrowski reporting on Christmas Eve. They were all torpedo pilots and lived in two adjoining rooms and when Merl Wee, another of “the boys”, reported in from Air Group 98 on Jan. 13<sup>th</sup>, the seven caused more commotion than all the rest of the squadron combined.

In the meantime Robert Boggs had slipped quietly in on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> and Lonnie McKeel, but not quietly, on Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>. Howard Atha came in on Dec.28<sup>th</sup> saying “

You otto seen me running that CASU outfit”, and “Providence Don” Mair (pronounced “Mayuh) reported on New Year’s Day with “Tex” McNabb, that genial rustler with the W.C.Field’s nose. Stan Jensen reported in from Air Group 98 on Jan.13<sup>th</sup> and Charles Becker, the last of the new men, reported on Jan.28<sup>th</sup>.

In the meantime former members of the original squadron began coming aboard. The first to report was Lt.H.B.Bassett, Executive Officer, who reported on Jan.9<sup>th</sup>, followed on Jan.14<sup>th</sup> by the Skipper, LtCmdr. E.J.Huxtable. The other pilots and crew began to come in in fast order from then on until Jan. 29<sup>th</sup> when Jim Lischer reported in like a hurricane. He was the last to report and the flying personnel of the squadron was complete.

Ground Officers? Yes, we had them, but they came in more slowly. ACIC Harry West was first on the ground, reporting on Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>. Tom Smith, Personnel-Administrative Officer came in on Jan.28<sup>th</sup>. Ens.W.A.Borwnlie, Radar Officer reported on Feb.7<sup>th</sup>. The flighty Flight Surgeon,Lt.R.D.Anderson, came aboard Feb.14<sup>th</sup>, and Lt.jg. Irish Dan Sweeney, Ordnance Officer, finally showed up on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

Squadron training had been progressing satisfactorily in the meantime. Even before the first planes were delivered on Jan.6<sup>th</sup>, ground training was going strong with classes in Recognition and Navigation, and as soon as there were sufficient planes, the flight schedule went into force.

The training schedule was interrupted Jan.27<sup>th</sup> for the official Recommissioning ceremonies. This was presided over by Capt. John G. Crommelin, USN, Director of Fleet Air Training. Capt. Crommelin also presented awards earned in the Occupation of Saipan. Lt.Cmdr. Huxtable received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medals were presented to Lt. Bassett,Lt(jg).Dugan, Chiefs Blaney and Martin, and Aviation Machinist’s Mate Blanford. It was a joint ceremony for both VC-10 and VC-5, also in training at Ventura County, and the two squadrons made a very nice showing in the parade grounds at the Air Station.

That same night it was decided to try night flying from Ventura County but visibility was poor and the air field’s lighting inadequate, so no planes were airborne. However, night flying was in the future!

Saturday, Feb.3<sup>rd</sup> brought lots of excitement for Felix Feldmeyer and taught a worthwhile lesson to the rest of the squadron. Some power lines were in the valley near Santa Paula, California, got too close to Feldmeyer’s plane and he limped home(safely) with a damaged left wing and a vertical stabilizer nearly cut in two. Lucky Felix!

Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> brought its excitement to Chubby Bill Budd, but it was a different kind of excitement. A telephone call resulted in Skinny coming down to the hangar with a grin wider than a TB’s bomb bay and the announcement that he was PAPA of a thirteen pound six ounce boy. Of course, as most suspected, little William Isaac Budd actually weighed only six pounds, thirteen ounces, but a few mistakes at such a moment were understandable. Needless to say ”Budd’s Boys” celebrated that night.

A little now about Ventura County Airport. Also known as “ Oxnard” and as “Mira Loma”, Ventura County was an Auxilary Air Station under the supervision of NAS San Diego. Formerly a private flight academy and later a training base for the Army, Mira Loma was used by the Navy as a training base for ACORN units and for CASU(F) units as well as for fleet air squadrons. The usual gripes were in evidence as always with

healthy young pilots. “It was too cold”, “it was too hot”; “It was too damp”. Actually there were some legitimate complaints. The food was poor. The living quarters were cold and damp. There was no hot water. The officers and crew went unshaven for days at a time rather than try to shave in cold water. And, worst of all, a squadron in training was being controlled by units also in training and consequently inexperienced.

But in spite of inconveniences, training went on apace, and the squadron began to round into condition. Gunnery exercises, navigation, glide bombing, low-level bombing, radar training, formation flying, night flying, field carrier landings, all in order and at the proper time. A few minor accidents, of course. Those that happened to the “Old timers” brought chuckles of glee. Hattaway made a wheels up landing. He “just forgot to roll his wheels down”. Stewart ground looped, Dugan made a wheels up landing. Each contributed to the “kitty fund” and the squadron made plans for a party at the expense of these luckless pilots.

The first squadron party was held at the Officers’ Club, Ventura County, on Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>. It was a good party. Practically every officer was there. The married ones brought their wives. The single ones brought fair ones from all over sunny California. How those boys did get around! A good party and not too many headaches the next morning, but who cares about headaches—after the ache is gone?

Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup> brought the first training in air support and the squadron began to feel as though there was a purpose in its existence. “The enemy were attempting a landing on the California coast.” The fact that we were “the enemy” just made it that much more interesting. On the 27<sup>th</sup> we were to support the landing forces as they stormed the beach on San Clemente Island. By March 1<sup>st</sup>, “the enemy” were presumed to have landed in California and to have made its way up the Eliso Canyon into Mojave Desert. “Why?”, we did not ask ourselves. That was the PLAN.

Away went the squadron on schedule on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Twelve torpedo planes and fourteen fighters. The engineering department had done a great job. On to San Clemente! Only—the weather was bad and the exercise had to be cancelled. The powers that be had forgotten to notify us! But it was a nice flight down and back, good training in navigation, good training in formation flying, and particularly good training for the whole squadron in briefing practices, chart reading, code messages, and all the other details that must be covered before an operation begins. The flight to Mojave was cancelled also because of bad weather.

March 3<sup>rd</sup> was a bad day for the Ground Officer personnel. Tom Smith, Personnel Officer, left for NAS Norman, Oklahoma. He thought it was a terrible mistake and so did the rest of the squadron, but telephone calls to San Diego and two calls to Washington still left Tom with set of orders in his hand, and Tom had to go.

April 7<sup>th</sup> brought another group of medals, but these weren’t the kind the boys try to win—Purple Hearts. Congratulations were in order for Leading Chief Andrews and for Dudley, Horton, Clarkson, Fauls, Chapman and Subers. The Skipper presented the awards and made the ceremony very impressive.

The first of those moral building events, the Squadron Beer Party, was held on Thursday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. Ice-cold beer was plentiful, together with coke for those who preferred it (I saw two bottles). This, plus the best frankfurters ever manufactured, made the afternoon a success for the those who believed in keeping the inner men happy. There was a volley ball game—twenty-two on a side—in which the officers soundly trounced

the crew. But there was a baseball game which the officers still refuse to discuss. You can't score more than twenty-two runs in one inning! Even with both umpires favorable to the pilots, the score was decidedly unfavorable. Wheeler, as usual was thrown in the ice barrel, but beer floats on water, and so did Wheeler. Merl Wee stood too close to the wrong end of a ball bat late in the game and contributed three teeth to the good of the cause. His good sportsmanship was testified to by a bloody but toothless grin as he tried to tell the group that he was all right and not hurt a bit. It was a good party and generated good feeling among the members of the Squadron.

Things began to hum on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Carrier qualifications next week. Two hard days on bounce drill and catapult practice at Ream Field and then aboard the USS Matanikau (CVE101). April 19<sup>th</sup> qualifications began. The pilots went at it with a will and a sure know-how. The carrier's deck gang knew just what to do also. Sixty – three landings and take-offs in sixty minutes was a mark to brag about—that plus the complete absence of barrier crashes. It was a job well done. Ironically, the Landing Signal Officer, Ens. R.G. “Sandy” Sandridge reported aboard April 28<sup>th</sup>, just too late to work on the qualifications. He was to get plenty of work later on.

April 24<sup>th</sup> the squadron moved to the desert; fighters to Holtville, torpedoes to Salton Sea. Holtville was nice though hot; Salton Sea was—Salton Sea. Strangely enough the Ground Officers all decided it was essential that they stay with the fighter pilots. Both groups of pilots enjoyed this rocket training immensely, especially when they fired the five inch HVARs. The fighters were particularly proud to have been chosen the first squadron to be trained under the new “ballistic aiming” method and rightfully proud of the record they made in the rocket course. The torpedo pilots did the good job that they could always be counted upon to do.

Anti- Submarine Warfare Training! “ Does this mean we'll be a hunter-killer group???” It started at NAS San Diego, May9th and that was the question on every pilot's lips. A couple of days of lectures and then bombing practice. Not good at first, in fact deplorable. Then the boys started hitting. Bill Budd set off the fireworks with thirty-four consecutive hits. Pyzdrowski never had more than one miss on a flight. “ Hux” reached perfection on the second half of the course,100%, a hit for every bomb dropped. Capt. Jno.G.Crommelin,USN, in his report on the training said:

“VC-10 set a new record for bombing when compared to all carrier squadrons trained to date, although the amount of practice fell short of the syllabus time. It is to be congratulated for the interest, enthusiasm and attitude shown during the training period in addition to setting such a high standard of bombing proficiency.”

After the first week the fighters left ASW and moved to Twenty-Nine Palms for training in air support work. The Fleet Post Office didn't know where anybody was, so some of the squadron mail was sent to Ventura, some to Holtville and some to Twenty-Nine Palms, and very little to San Diego. Finally it all got together, but very late. May23rd--ACIO West was talking: “ I think we'll be here until the middle of August. We weren't through our training program yet and there are five Composite squadrons on the coast that have been in training longer than we have. You should be perfectly safe to wait and have your wife come out here in June or later.”

May24th--“Composite Squadron Ten will embark for Pearl Harbor  
May31st.”

## **Pandemonium!**

Such packing and scurrying, purchasing of forgotten items, reports, telephone calls, letter writing, last dates, parties, was never before seen in such a short length of time. Big Sweeney (LT.Cmdr. E.J.Sweeney,USNR) had reported on May 9<sup>th</sup>, just in time to be given a slug of work. A new yeoman, Howard Strum, reported in and found himself truly “ at sea”. Supplies, equipment, survival reports, inventory of planes, embarking reports, it all went on Big Sweeney’s desk and he did a man-sized job. All credit to him. The fighter pilots were still at Twenty-Nine Palms. The torpedo pilots tried to crowd a ten day course in torpedoes, mine-laying, and smoke laying into five days. They did, too. A Purple Heart came to Zarzynski, hardworking assistant to Doc Anderson.

Little Sweeney(Lt.jg. Dan Sweeney) took charge of a farewell party for the officers. “It won’t cost more than one dollar per person”, so said Sweeney. The ante was five dollars and did he get razzed? The party though was a huge success. A dinner dance, held at the beautiful Camp Fidd Officers’ Club in Balboa Park, found all officers in attendance with their wives and dates and everybody in a receptive mood for the champagne cocktails which opened the gala affair. No one remembers what closed it.

Thursday, 31 May 1945, all men aboard the USS BARNES ( CVE-20) at 0900. All were aboard, but the Barnes was not loaded, so everybody secured until 1500. Back aboard again then after lingering farewells to the fair ones left ashore. More than one member of the squadron had to swallow heroically as he walked up the gangplank. Fifty feet up a gangplank puts you a long , long ways from home.

The Barnes weighed anchor at 1700 and the squadron was at sea. Any who might have looked for excitement or danger were to be disappointed. Only a few were seasick and none of these seriously. Eating, sleeping, reading, poker, and bridge consumed the time until Diamond Head loomed on the horizon on 6 June 1945.

The ship docked at Pearl Harbor the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> with the squadron staying aboard that night, but entrucking to NAS Kaneohe the next morning.

There was to be no rest for the squadron, nor time to enjoy the beauties of the islands. Flight schedules were full to capacity. Live bombing, Field carrier practice, carrier qualifications again, this time on the USS CORREGIDOR(CVE\_55), air support training, rockets, night bounce, night carrier qualifications, fighter director training, all followed one another in a seemingly endless cycle.

June 26<sup>th</sup>, Gunner A. A. Andrews, who had been Leading Chief for the Squadron all through the reforming period until his promotion in April, was detached and sent home—to Minneapolis Naval Air Station for training in Liberator ordinance. Lucky guy!. The squadron had already been out of the States long enough to want to go home . Chief W.E,Ballou took over Andy’s duties and affairs continued to run smoothly “ just like Andy was here”. Both were good capable men and well equipped to do the job properly.

The long awaited medals and awards earned by the original squadron in the Battle for Leyte Gulf finally arrived and were presented during a formal inspection on July5, 1945. Captain Edward L.B.Weimer,USN, Chief of Staff of Fleet Air Wing Two, made the presentations. The introductory remarks of Lt.(jg) H.A.Patrick,USNR, Flag Lieutenant, are worth quoting:

“We honor today twenty-seven officers and men of Composite Squadron Ten. Composite Squadron Ten was commissioned September 23, 1942, and spent its first tour

of duty on the ill-fated but courageous USS GAMBIER BAY (CVE 73). It participated in and supported the Occupation of the Mariannas in June and July 1944, the Occupation of Palau in September 1944, and the liberation of the Philippines on October 20 to 25, 1944”.

“It was in that campaign, known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf, and more particularly the third of those famous sea battles known as the Battle off Samar, in which the squadron lost its carrier to enemy shell fire and earned the awards presented today.”

“Forty-eight members of that squadron were recommended for awards as a result of that five day campaign. Twenty-seven of those men are still with the squadron, now back out again for its second inning against the Japanese enemy”.

Awards were made to the following members of the squadron: Silver Star to Lt.Cmdr.E.J.Huxtable, Ens.P.A.Bennett: Distinguished Flying Cross to Lieut. H.B.Bassett, Lieut. J.R.Stewart,Lt.(jg) C.J.Dugan,Lt.(jg) J.F.Lischer, Lt.(jg) E.A.Osterkorn, Lt.(jg) W.C.Shroyer,Lt.(jg) R.E.Weatherholt, Lt.(jg) R.J.Wallace; Air Medals Medals to Lieut. G.E.Bisbee, Lieut.C.A.Wickersham,Lt.(jg) W.W.Abercrombie,Lt.(jg) L.C.Giger, Lt.(jg)H.A.Pyzdrowski, Lt.(jg) O.E.Wheeler,J.D.Britt,ACM,R.S.Martin,ACOM,D.A.Blanford,AMM1c. A.F. Jennings,AMM1c, J.Lock,ARM1c,F.F.GrabosAMM2c, J.W. Houlihan,ARM2c, L.M.Austin, ARM3c, W.R.Phillips,ARM3c,J.W.Shrader, ARM3c, L.Vilmer, ARM3c.

Another squadron beer party was the anticipated success on July 10<sup>th</sup>. Hot sand and cool surf made the beer (and coke) particularly tempting. Juan Sweeney proved to be an excellent fry cook, but he tired after the first hamburger( which he consumed himself) and others less experienced but more enthusiastic, took over the hot task of feeding the group. Did a good job too and the party went down in memory as a huge success.

Sweat and sunburn! All because Burt Bassett learned to play tennis, and darned good tennis, although he would never admit it (nor would Doc Anderson). Anyhow Burt wanted a squadron tennis tournament and that we had. Tuffy Barrows drew up the schedule and carefully put Doc and Bob MacGill in separate brackets, which proved wise because each swept through all his opposition (not without trouble) and Doc finally won the championship from MacGill on Sunday afternoon, July 22<sup>nd</sup>. The “Captain’s Cup” was a used beer can manufactured and decorated by Tuffy in one of his “lighter moments”.

On July 20<sup>th</sup> orders were received to move to the Forward Area and after a hectic period of packing and re-packing, the squadron embarked aboard the USS SAGINAW BAY ) CVE 82) on July 24,1945. The ship sailed at noon the next day and the following nine days were as pleasant as any ever experienced by the members of the squadron .The SAGINAW BAY was a clean and trim ship, manned by capable officers who went out of their way to be pleasant to their passengers. A word of thanks to a fine ship and officers and men. During the trip Bill Budd organized a bridge tournament and enrolled 17 teams, 34 of the 54 officers. It was an excellent pastime and E.J.Sweeney and George Bisbee nosed out the team of Bassett and West by thirty points to win the championship.

The ship anchored in Arpa Harbor, Guam, on Saturday ,August 4<sup>th</sup>, and the ComAirPac representative who met us, brought orders to transfer to the USS FANSHAW BAY (CVE 70) , our permanent ship. The transfer was made that same night and by 0030 on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the squadron was at home.

The ship weighed anchor for Eniwetok early the morning of he 6<sup>th</sup>, and the next

Day the first flights were made off the squadron's own carrier. Local CAP's local ASP's And Fighter Director training hops were scheduled. The weather was bad and none of the Training hops were made, but a submarine contact was made eighteen miles astern ship put Weatherholt and Frank in the air as hunter-killer teams to investigate the sub. No trace was found and the flight landed without incident.

The "Fanny Bee" anchored in Eniwetok Harbor on 9 August and while the ship worked hard to get supplies aboard and get cleaned up and painted up, the squadron worked equally hard investigating the islands in the atoll and particularly the Officer's Club on Eniwetok Each was successful in its own way.

The longest week of the war was spent in Eniwetok Harbor. For that week rumors of peace proposals and counter- proposals floated constantly over the airwaves and around the scuttle-butts. Finally on 15 August 1945 ( East longitude) the fateful announcement was made that the terrible war was ended. It was received with one wild uncontrollable cheer and then silence and meditation as each of the hundreds of men aboard the ship pondered his own future and what peace would mean after these years of war.

But schedules must go on and at 0715 on Aug.16,1945, the FANSHAW BAY, in company with the USS KITKIN BAY, set sail for ADAK in the Aleutians in accordance with previous orders. Flights went on as scheduled except that the two squadrons on the two ships took turns flying every second day. The trip was uneventful, except for the welcome relief of cooler weather, and the two carriers anchored in ADAK HARBOR on Friday, August 24<sup>th</sup>, to find the other four carriers of the Task Force already there awaiting our arrival. Then followed a week of intense reconnaissance work, investigating the Officer's Clubs, the Ships Service Stores, the Army PX's and a little fishing and mountain climbing for relaxation. New winterized planes were brought aboard. " The Navy has not heard that the war is over!"

But ten officers and two of the crew knew the war was over and wanted to go home. Didn't AINav 196, plus its amendment, say that all pilots and crewmen having forty-four points or the Silver Star or the DFC could be discharged and sent home? The answer was "yes", but—only three officers and the two crewmen were released. Didn't a dispatch from the Task Force Commander and another from CNO direct their discharge? Yes, but only Looney and Lindquist, Bennett, Shroyer and Wallace left with our congratulations and envy.

So seven disgruntled pilots stayed on with the Squadron and sailed West from ADAK on 31 August 1945, part of Task Force 44, their unhappiness only slightly lessened by our destination—JAPAN! The HOGGATT BAY, NEHANTA BAY, MANILA BAY, SAVO ISLAND, KITKIN BAY, plus nine destroyers, escorted the FANSHAW BAY (now in slightly better condition due to the covering capacity of Navy paint) and COMNORPAC and his staff. Destination—Ominato in Mutsu Bay in Northern Honshu.

Flights were scheduled every day, but typical North Pacific weather kept the pilots in a steady status in the Ready Room constantly, but never in the air, until Thursday, September 6<sup>th</sup>, on which day two flights, on each of torpedos and fighters, were airborne.

Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> the ship and squadron were detached from Task Force 44 and became part of Task Force 42 charged with the responsibility of taking Mutsu Bay and Ominato.

On Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> the Task Force steamed blithely into Japanese waters under the guidance of a Japanese pilot and the FANSHAW BAY became the first carrier to anchor in Northern Honshu.

September 10<sup>th</sup>, Monday Capt. Huxtable and Lieut. Wheeler took two planes to Yokosuka Airfield near Tokyo, carrying photographs and officer-messenger mail from COMNORPAC to the Third Fleet. They stayed overnight and returned the next day with glowing tales of the destruction of Tokyo and Yokahama.

September 11<sup>th</sup> was a happy day for Stewart, Lischer, Wickersham, Dugan, Weatherholt, Osterkorn, Bisbee and Subers, for on the day they finally received discharge orders and transferred over to the destroyer, USS JARVIS, for transportation back to Adak and then home.

Some of the boys decided they would like to transfer to the "Regular Navy" and remain in this pleasant life several more years. So in order to give them a taste of the more unpleasant side of the Navy life, a series of student watches was set up for their education and enlightenment. One mystery of the Navy was cleared up for them the very first day. With typical Navy inconsistency the call "Away, motor whaleboat, awayeeee" was found to mean, "come closer little boat, come here". It was learned that a whale boat has nothing to do with whale fishing. What a wonderful institution is the United States Navy!

September 15<sup>th</sup>. Happy Day! We leave for Pearl Harbor. No one knows the disposition of the Squadron, but the direction is correct, and it was with thoughts of home that the squadron watched the mountains of Honshu and Hokkaido fade in the distance.

Thus ends the second cruise of Squadron VC-10.

Harry T. West, Lieutenant, USNR

September 20, 1945