



**Clarence E. Ekstrom, Vice Admiral, USN**

Clarence Eugene Ekstrom was born in Waupaca, Wisconsin, on March 10, 1902, son of the late John Ekstrom and Mrs. Matilda Hansen Ekstrom of Lynwood, California. He attended high school in Waupaca, and the Naval Academy Preparatory School, Annapolis, Maryland, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy from the 8th District of Wisconsin in June 1920. He participated in basketball (varsity); and in his first class year won the ordnance prize, a sword of the Class of 1871, and the Thompson Sextant, a navigation prize. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 4, 1924, he was promoted through all the grades to Vice Admiral to date from July 23, 1958.

Detached from the Naval Academy following his graduation in 1924, he joined the USS *California*, and served in the Gunnery Department of that battleship until ordered in February 1926 to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for instruction in aviation. He was designated Naval Aviator on December 13, 1926, and returned to the *California* for duty with the aviation unit aboard, Observation Squadron TWO. Later due to reorganization, he served with Observation Squadrons 1-B and 4-B, until May 1929. The next month he returned to the Naval Academy to attend the Postgraduate School for the course in Aeronautical Engineering, and under its supervision, continued the course at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, where he received the Master of Science degree in June 1931,

Later that month he reported as Project Engineer at the Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia, and served one year. He joined Aircraft, Battle Force, in the USS *Langley* for duty with Fighting Squadron 3-B, and was serving with that

squadron when in April 1935 they transferred to the USS *Ranger*. The following June he reported to the Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., for a two year tour of duty in the Engineering Section.

In August 1937 he was assigned briefly to Patrol Squadron 7 in the USS *Wright* and transferred to Patrol Squadron 19 based on the USS *Teal*. He served in that squadron until September 1939, the title having been changed to Patrol Squadron 43 the previous July. From September 30, 1939 he was Commanding Officer, Cruiser Scouting Squadron 9, with additional duty as Wing Commander on the staff of Commander Cruisers, Battle Force and Cruiser Division 9, USS *Honolulu*, flagship.

Returning to shore duty, he was attached to the Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas, from August 1941 to March 1943. He then had duty in connection with fitting out the USS *Bunker Hill*, and became Executive Officer of that carrier upon her commissioning and subsequently joined the Pacific Fleet. For her war service, including this period of duty, the *Bunker Hill* was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, and Vice Admiral Ekstrom was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Bronze Star Medal "For meritorious service...from May 25 to December 15, 1943. Effectively organizing and training all departments of his ship during the precommissioning and training period, (he) rendered valiant service during the strike against the enemy stronghold of Rabaul, New Britain, the siege and capture of the Gilbert Islands and the strike against Nauru..."

He transferred to the Naval Station, Astoria, Oregon, Precommissioning Detail, to assist with fitting out the USS *Savo Island*, and on February 3, 1944 assumed command of that carrier escort. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," the Navy Cross, and the Legion of Merit with Combat "V," the citations in part stating:

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious achievement as Commanding Officer of the USS *Savo Island* during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Palau Islands throughout September and October of 1944. Maneuvering his ship under difficult conditions of combat and weather for a total of eighteen days, (he) skillfully directed his inexperienced crew in providing effective air support in greater measure than was scheduled and was materially responsible for the infliction of extensive damage upon enemy shipping, installations and vehicles..."

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of the USS *Savo Island*, operating as a Unit of three Groups of Escort Aircraft Carriers in action against major ships of the Japanese Fleet during the Battle off Samar, on October 25, 1944. An aggressive and determined leader, (he) courageously directed the activities of his ship and air department during the initial battle for Leyte Gulf and, by inspiring his officers and men to heroic efforts in the face of an attack by an overwhelming enemy Task Force... contributed materially to the infliction of severe damage on

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the Japanese Fleet. Through his gallant fighting spirit and expert seamanship, he was instrumental in turning potential defeat into a decisive victory...”

Legion of Merit: “For exceptionally meritorious conduct...during the landings of our troops at Leyte, Mindoro, Lingayen Gulf and Zambales, from October 12, 1944 to February 5, 1945...”

He is also entitled to the Ribbon for and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the USS *Savo Island*.

From January 1945 to April 1945 he served on the staff of Commander Air Force Pacific Fleet, as Force Tactical Officer and later Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations. “For exceptionally meritorious conduct” in that assignment, “from January 23, 1945 to September 2, 1945.” he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit. The citation continues. “Demonstrating superior organizational ability and sound judgment, (he) directed the movements of all surface vessels and organized aviation units assigned the administrative control of Commander Air Force; prepared newly formed aviation units for combat service; and revised tactical instructions and doctrine for the operations of Fleet aircraft and vessels...He was largely responsible for the timely delivery of combat ready personnel and material to the battle areas, thereby contributing materially to the ultimate defeat of the Japanese...”

When detached from staff duty, he returned to the Navy Department, and served in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations as Assistant Chief of the Aviation Personnel Division until August 1948. He then attended the National War College, Washington, D. C., until the summer of 1949, when he assumed command of the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. When relieved in August 1950, he reported as Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Whidbey Island, Seattle, Washington. In August 1951 he was detached from that command and became Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet. He remained in that capacity until May 1952, when he became Commander Carrier Division SEVENTEEN. In July 1953 he was assigned Assistant Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics for Material and Services, Navy Department.

He was Commander Carrier Division SIX from April 13, 1955 until April 1956, after which he served as Commander Fleet Air, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. He had duty in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, during July and August 1958, and on September 30, that year became Commander SIXTH Fleet. In October 1959 he assumed command of Naval Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and for “exceptionally meritorious conduct...from October 1959 to November 1962...(in that capacity)...” he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. The citation further states in part:

“Displaying marked professional competence and resourcefulness, Vice Admiral Ekstrom has been highly suc-

cessful in carrying out his many responsibilities throughout this period. His diligent application of the principles of leadership and high personal standards of conduct have left a lasting impression on the personnel of his command. Under his skillful direction, the combat readiness and capabilities of the Naval Air Force units in the U. S. Pacific Fleet have steadily increased, thereby assuring the United States an effective and formidable instrument for preserving peace in the several international crises that arose during his tenure of command. Through his perseverance and thorough planning toward improving aviation safety, a ‘level readiness’ program was instituted which has significantly overcome previous pilot training deficiencies and has had a most encouraging effect on aviation safety in the U. S. Pacific Fleet. Vice Admiral Ekstrom’s keen perception and understanding of recent scientific developments and their effect on aviation naval warfare have enabled him to expertly guide the forces under his command through a modernization period that will guarantee their readiness posture for many years to come...”

On December 1, 1962 Vice Admiral Ekstrom was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy,

In addition to the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with Gold Star and Combat “V,” the Bronze Star Medal with Gold Star and Combat “V,” and the Ribbon for the Presidential Unit Citation with two stars, Vice Admiral Ekstrom has the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with silver star (five engagements); the American Campaign Medal; the World War II Victory Medal; the National Defense Service Medal; the Korean Service Medal; the United Nations Service Medal; and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two engagement stars.

He was married to the former Elizabeth Lobdell of Seattle, Washington, and they had two children, John K. and Martha L. Ekstrom.

He was a member of the Army-Navy Country Club and Institute of Aeronautical Sciences