

## The Battle Won

The fighting was over, the battle won as ships of the victorious Allied fleet anchored in Tokyo Bay. It was the first day of September, 1945, exactly six years after the Germans had smashed their way into Poland setting off the Second World War.

For Lieutenant junior grade Barham Foster Dillard, Jr. of Greenville, that Saturday was another day of routine duty aboard the USS *Lexington*, one of sixteen fleet carriers then in Pacific waters. Of course what passed for “routine” aboard *Lexington* had changed a lot over the past two weeks.



Dillard, had entered Clemson in 1939, at about the same time as war erupted in Europe. A textile engineering major, Dillard left the college in 1942 and joined the Navy. Now, three years later, he was a pilot with a Corsair-equipped fighter-bomber squadron, part of Air Group 94 assigned to *Lexington*, CV-16. Dillard's ship was the second US carrier to bear the name of the famous Revolutionary War battle. The first *Lexington*, CV-2, had been lost in the May 1942 Battle of the Coral Sea.

Dillard's *Lexington* had participated the previous October in the climactic battle of Leyte Gulf, her aircraft assisting in the sinking of battleship *Musashi* and carriers *Chitose*, *Zuiho* and *Zuikaku*, the latter having participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor. These losses effectively ended the Japanese fleet's offensive capability. Despite taking a hit from a kamikaze, *Lexington* continued to attack Japanese targets until retiring to Ulithi for repairs on November 9, 1944.



Admiral Marc Mitscher selected *Lexington* as his flag ship for Task Group 58.2 as it attacked Luzon and Formosa in early January 1945. *Lexington's* aircraft targeted enemy shipping and airfields at Saipan, Indochina and Hong Kong. In February, *Lexington* attacked targets near Tokyo and then sailed for Iwo Jima to support the Marine invasion there.

After overhaul in the shipyards at Puget Sound, *Lexington* departed the west coast in late May. She joined Rear Admiral Thomas Sprague's task force for another series of air strikes on the Japanese home islands. On August 15, *Lexington's* pilots were headed toward their targets when they received radioed orders to jettison their bombs and return to the ship. The Japanese had capitulated.

Although the routine had changed, Air Group 94's planes and pilots kept flying. Instead of dropping ordnance, they switched to dropping supplies to Allied prisoners-of-war still stranded in Japanese camps. They also flew patrols over Japan, in part as a show of force.

On Saturday, September 1, Dillard was assigned to fly one of the Group's F4U Corsairs. Ensign Lewis Bettis, Jr., one of Dillard's VBF-94 squadron mates was also slated to fly. At some point during the flight, Dillard's and Bettis's aircraft collided in mid-air. Both pilots were killed.

The following day, World War Two officially ended.

