



Part of USS *Macon* crew aboard USS *Richmond* (CL-9) the morning after the airship crashed on 14 February 1945.

LT Leroy C. Simpler (far right)

Leroy C. Simpler, Rear Admiral, USN

Leroy Coard Simpler was born in Lewes, Delaware, on June 19, 1905, son of Roy D. and Carrie C. (Warrington) Simpler. He was graduated from Lewes High School in 1923, and attended Goldey Business College prior to entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment as Midshipman from his native state in 1925. He was graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 6, 1929, and through subsequent promotions attained the rank of Captain, to date from March 30, 1945, retiring as a Rear Admiral in June 1959.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1929, he had sea duty for a year, assigned first to the USS *Idaho* and later the USS *Colorado*. On May 23, 1930, he reported to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, where he completed flight instruction and was designated Naval Aviator on April 7, 1931. He was then ordered to Aircraft, Scouting Force, and on May 29 joined Scouting Squadron 5, aviation unit of the USS *Marblehead*. He was detached on June 2, 1934, and later that month reported to Fighting Squadron 4, attached to the USS *Macon*, airship. In that assignment he flew fighter planes from this unusual airborne aircraft carrier. These were America's first "parasite fighters."

In February 1935 the *Macon* was lost off Point Sur, California, and he was assigned duty in connection with the decommissioning of the Naval Air Station, Sunnyvale, California, with additional duty at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base, Oakland, California. From February 1936 until August 1938 he was attached to the aviation unit of the USS *Augusta*, flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. During that period the Sino-Japanese war was fought, and the *Augusta* played an important part in the conduct of United States affairs in the Far East. Admiral Simpler, then a Lieutenant, was Officer-in-Charge of a detachment of bluejackets landed to assist the U.S. Marines in defense of the International Settlement.

Upon his return to the United States he was ordered to the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, where he served

from October 1938 until May 1940. For six months thereafter he was, assigned to Fighting Squadron 6, based on the USS *Enterprise*. On November 11, 1940, he was ordered to Fleet Air Detachment, Pearl Harbor, T.H., where he joined Fighting Squadron 5 of the USS *Yorktown's* Air Group. "Fighting Five," successor to one of the oldest squadrons in the Navy (Fighting Squadron 3, organized in 1927, its insignia the Striking Eagle), was temporarily based on the USS *Wasp* in the Atlantic when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

On January 2, 1942, he assumed command of "Fighting Five," which on May 11, 1942 was transferred to Pearl Harbor, to be based on the USS *Saratoga*. Under his command Fighting Squadron 5 assisted in the air coverage of Guadalcanal operations, and participated in the First Battle of the Stewart Islands on August 24, 1942. Flown to Guadalcanal to bolster defenses there, the squadron operated from land bases in the islands until decommissioned in November 1942 as the result of damage sustained by the *Saratoga* while operating in "Torpedo Junction." The following letter was received from Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., USN, Commanding the South Pacific Area: "You, and the men under your command, comprising Fighter Squadron Five, are to be congratulated on your outstanding performance of duty during operations in the Guadalcanal area between September 11 and October 16, 1942. Although operating under difficult and hazardous conditions, the many tasks assigned you were carried out with marked success as proven by the great number of enemy losses as compared to our own. Your report of operations submitted November 11, 1942, is excellent and copies are being sent to all interested parties. It will be of great value in future planning."

For his services in command of Fighting Squadron 5 during operations from the *Saratoga*, Admiral Simpler was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and a Gold Star in lieu of the second Distinguished Flying Cross. The Navy Cross was awarded him by the Commanding General, First Marine Air Wing. He also received a facsimile of, and is entitled to wear the Ribbon for, the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the First Marine Division, Reinforced,

having operated with that Division from September 11 to October 16, 1942. The citations follow:

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism, and extraordinary achievement as Commander of a Fighting Squadron during action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands Campaign on August 24, 1942. Leading his squadron in a vigorous and determined attack against an enemy air group headed toward our surface forces, Lieutenant Commander Simpler, with utter disregard for his own personal safety in the face of tremendous anti-aircraft fire, contributed greatly to the aggressive fighting spirit and high combat efficiency which enabled his squadron to destroy nineteen Japanese aircraft and damage three more..."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Distinguished Flying Cross: "For extraordinary achievement in aerial flight as Squadron Commander, Fighting Squadron Five, during operations

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against the Japanese occupied Solomon Islands, 7 August 1942. Boldly leading twelve planes of his squadron in determined and repeated machine gun strafing attacks against enemy land troops and sea installations (he) assisted effectively in silencing Japanese opposition and assuring the consummation of our landing operations without undue casualties. His inspiring leadership and loyal devotion to the accomplishment of an important mission were instrumental in the successful invasion of our forces in that area."

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commander of a Fighter Squadron during action against enemy Japanese aircraft in the Solomon Islands Area from September 11 to October 6, 1942. Leading his squadron daringly and fearlessly against overwhelming formations of enemy aircraft, Lieutenant Commander Simpler contributed to the destruction of seventeen Japanese planes from September 12 to 14, and, on October 2, personally shot down one Zero-type fighter. Vigorously pressing forward attacks in the face of fierce enemy opposition, the Squadron under Lieutenant Commander Simpler's command accounted for thirty-five enemy aircraft during its service in this area..."

Presidential Unit Citation, First Marine Division, Reinforced: "The officers and enlisted men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, on August 7 to 9, 1942, demonstrated outstanding gallantry and determination in successfully executing forced landing assaults against a number of strongly defended Japanese positions on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, Florida and Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, completely routing all the enemy forces and seizing a most valuable base and airfield within the enemy zone of operations in the South Pacific Ocean. From the above period until 9 December 1942, this Reinforced Division not only held the important strategic positions despite determined and repeated Japanese naval, air and land attacks, but by a series of offensive operations against strong enemy resistance drove the Japanese from the proximity of the airfield and inflicted great losses on them by land and air attacks..."

Following decommissioning of his squadron in November 1942, Admiral Simpler was ordered to the Navy Department,

Washington, D.C., where he served in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations from December 1942 until May 1943. He was then transferred to the Bureau of Aeronautics, where he was instrumental in developing the F8F BEARCAT carrier-based fighter, one of the world's fastest propeller-driven planes. Detached in August 1944, he assisted in fitting out the USS *Randolph*, and served as Air Officer of that carrier from her commissioning, October 9, 1944, until June 1945, and as her Executive Officer until October 22 that year.

He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with the following citation: "For distinguishing himself by meritorious achievement, while serving aboard a United States carrier, in connection with operations against the enemy in Western Pacific waters and in attacks on the Japanese Empire, the Nanpo Shoto, and the Nansei Shoto, during the period 16 February 1945 to 26 July 1945, and for outstanding services in connection with the pre-scheduled delivery of an urgently needed major warship to the combatant fleet. As Air Officer and subsequently as Executive Officer he displayed ceaseless effort, exceptional professional skill, a conspicuous capacity for leadership and outstanding organizational ability, all of which contributed materially to the preparation and early readiness of an effective Air Department which was a most essential factor in the successful operations against the enemy..."

Detached from the *Randolph* in October 1945, he next served briefly as Air Officer on the staff of Commander Reserve Fleet, Atlantic Fleet. In December of that year he returned to the Navy Department for duty in the Office of Public Relations. There he served for three years as Director of the Aviation Division. Early in 1949 he reported for duty on the staff of Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet, and on April 5, 1950, was transferred to the staff of Commander FIRST Fleet. Later that year he assumed command of the USS *Pine Island*, and on June 20, 1951, was transferred to command of the Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Whiting Field, Milton, Florida.

Under orders of June 2, 1953, he reported for duty at the Joint Operations Center, Korea, and on April 20, 1954, he was ordered detached for duty as Commanding Officer of the USS *Oriskany* (CVA 34). After a year in that command he reported as Chief of Staff and Aide to the Chief, Naval Air Reserve Training, Naval Air Station, Glenview, Illinois. In 1957 Admiral Simpler reported as Chief of Information, for Commander-in-Chief Pacific, serving in this assignment until his retirement from active duty on June 30, 1959.

In addition to the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross with Gold Star, the Bronze Star Medal, and the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Admiral Simpler has the China Service Medal; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with six bronze stars; American Campaign Medal; the World War II Victory Medal; National Defense Service Medal; Korean Service Medal; United Nations Service Medal; and, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon.