

The 'Galloping Ghost' Goes on Eternal Patrol

By Carl LaVO

With flaming red hair, a Dale Carnegie smile, and boundless enthusiasm, retired Rear Admiral Eugene Fluckey was the most decorated military veteran for the past 50 years.

The former submarine commander, who passed away in June at age 93, was well known for his oft-stated philosophy: "We don't have problems, just solutions."

In World War II, he snatched victory out of the slightest of opportunities.

As skipper of the USS *Barb* (SS-220), Fluckey's hit-and-run tactics kept the enemy off guard and revolutionized undersea warfare. He was the first to launch what he called "ballistic missiles" from the deck of his boat to set factories afire on the coast of Japan. He landed saboteurs ashore to blow up a 16-car train. And he sought out a secret Japanese port on mainland China where he attacked a 30-ship convoy at anchor, damaging or sinking seven vessels before outrunning the shells of a pursuing destroyer on an hour-long dash through shallow and uncharted seas to reach water deep enough to dive.

The "Galloping Ghost of the China Coast"—a moniker given the captain by his executive officer—sank more than 95,000 tons of enemy shipping, including an aircraft carrier, cruiser, destroyer, and numerous cargo ships in five war patrols during 1944 and 1945. It was more tonnage than any other sub captain. To accomplish that, the *Barb* dodged more than 400 enemy bombs, shells, and depth charges. For his heroics, Fluckey earned the Medal of Honor, four Navy Crosses, a Presidential Unit Citation, and the Navy Unit Commendation.

After the war, Fluckey was involved in development of the submarine-launched Regulus and Polaris missile systems, and he also helped develop the Trident missile system that today is the bulwark of the Navy's sea-based nuclear deterrent. Over



HIGHLY DECORATED OFFICER Rear Admiral Eugene Fluckey earned not only the Medal of Honor he holds in this photo, but also four Navy Crosses, a Presidential Unit Citation, and the Navy Unit Commendation.

a 40-year career, he also was Director of Naval Intelligence, Commander of the Pacific submarine fleet, and Commander of NATO's Iberian operations, where he was the target of assassins at the height of the Cold War.

Fluckey was unflappable. His wife once told a reporter, "I don't know anyone he doesn't like, nor do I know of anyone who doesn't like him. He fits into all crowds and doesn't know what it is to have a temper."

From his earliest days he believed in positive thinking as a means to overcome any obstacle, as he did in defying physi-

cians by reversing severe near-sightedness that would have forced him to resign from the Naval Academy prior to his graduation in 1935. That driving purpose occasionally put him at odds with superiors. In a poll among squadron skipper at the Coco Solo sub base in Panama, where Fluckey served in the *S-42*, they voted him the officer least likely to succeed because he "rocked the boat" with too many new ideas. However, his enthusiasm and persistence had many admirers. The Central Intelligence Agency once described him as "fearless and foresighted, a footnoter whose lone dissents of one year became the majority view the next."

The admiral was born in Washington, D.C., in 1913, the son of school teachers who believed in "feeding the soul," as one relative put it. Through a steady diet of courses in critical thinking, he followed that life-guiding philosophy and imbued many others with that same spirit, including the crew of the *Barb*. "Most were very young men, 19 and 21 years old," recalled retired Navy Captain Max Duncan, Fluckey's torpedo officer in the *Barb*. "Many of them said they were inspired to go earn their degrees after the war because of Gene's influence about education."

Fluckey was naval aide to Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz after the war. He also successfully pushed a \$2 million fund-raising drive in the mid-1950s to build the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis. Rear Admiral William R. Smedberg III, superintendent of the Academy, took on the near-impossible challenge, confiding that "this dynamic Fluckey" was his secret weapon. "He had a brilliant idea a minute. I was constantly being pushed and prodded to do things I wouldn't ever have done myself."


In 1960, Fluckey became the youngest admiral in the Navy.

Copyright © 2007, Proceedings, U.S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland (410) 268-6110 www.usni.org

Nearly 20 years after his retirement, in 1992 he was the surprise guest at a party for officers-in-training at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Connecticut. He enthralled them with tales, especially of the *Barb's* narrow escape from a closing frigate after the attack on Nam Kwam Harbor. "Fluckey spoke about calling his engineering chief to give him more speed and tie down the governors," recalled Lieutenant David Ratte. "Strangely, I could not help but think of 'Captain, I'm giving it all I've got!' from Scotty in the fictional *Star Trek* and how closely this resembled *Barb's* real-life heroic escape from the enemy's clutches. That story has never left my mind. We men of today's submarine force salute Admiral Fluckey, the 'Galloping Ghost of the China Coast,' and the never-say-die legacy that heroic submariners of World War II passed to us."

Seven years later at age 85, Fluckey returned to Groton to address a class of graduates. He encouraged them to set an example as they embarked on their own careers. "Put more into life than you ex-

pect to get out of it," he said. "Drive yourself and lead others. Make others feel good about themselves. They will outperform your expectations, and you will never lack for friends."

Admiral Fluckey succumbed to complications of Alzheimer's disease on 28 June. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mike Mullen announced the news: "As we mourn his passing, so too should we pause and reflect on the contributions of this great man to our nation, and of the thousands of lives he guided, the careers he mentored, the difference he made simply by leadership." 



U.S. NAVY

Mr. LaVO is the author of *The Galloping Ghost: The Extraordinary Life of Submarine Legend Eugene Fluckey* a biography released in May by the Naval Institute Press.

ANOTHER NAVY CROSS Then-Commander Fluckey receives one of his Navy Crosses from Vice Admiral Charles A. Lockwood, Commander Submarines, Pacific Fleet, on board the *Barb* in World War II.



U.S. NAVY

CENTURIES OF SERVICE Rear Admiral Fluckey (back row, fourth from left) stands to the right of Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz at a 1964 gathering that represented 267 years of naval service. Back row: Rear Admiral John Tyree Jr., Vice Admiral Vernon Lowrance, Nimitz, Fluckey, Rear Admiral I. J. Galantin, and Rear Admiral Eugene Wilkinson. Front row: Lieutenant John Leeds and Lieutenant Roland Brandquist. Obscured by Gallantin is Lieutenant Commander Charles Diesel.