

Frederick Spencer Johnson at Cornell and World War II



above: Fred as Lieutenant, U.S. Naval Air
below: The Yorktown (CV10) at sea



Lt Frederick S. Johnson with crew of Grumman TBF Avenger.



Lt Frederick S. Johnson receiving Distinguished Flying Cross from Rear Admiral A. T. Radford for a daring attack on a Japanese destroyer which was sunk in the Philippines area

USS Yorktown (CV-10) is an Essex-Class aircraft carrier. Initially to have been named Bon Homme Richard, she was renamed Yorktown while under construction to commemorate USS Yorktown (CV-5) lost at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Yorktown was commissioned in April 1943, and participated in several campaigns in the Pacific Theater. Torpedo Three Squadron was originally based on the Carrier Lexington (CV-3,) then reassigned to the Yorktown II.

Frederick Spencer Johnson was born and raised in Westfield, NY, and entered the College of Agriculture at Cornell University in September 1939. As a freshman he rowed lightweight crew, joined Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, and took flight training in ROTC. After Pearl Harbor he entered the U.S. Navy and was assigned to Pensacola, FL for further flight training. In late 1942 Frederick was assigned to Torpedo Three Squadron on the Yorktown II.

Yorktown's combat operations started September 29, 1943 with air strikes on Japanese installations on Wake Island. On 10 November, Yorktown departed Pearl Harbor in company with Task Force 50 --the Fast Carrier Task Force, Pacific Fleet -- to participate in the occupation of the Gilbert Islands. On 19 November, she arrived at the launch point near Jaluit and Mili Atoll and launched a series of raids to suppress enemy airpower during the amphibious assaults on Tarawa, Abemama, and Makin. The aircraft carrier made passing raids on the installations at Wotje and Kwajalein Atolls on December 4th, before returning to Pearl Harbor.

On January 16 1944, the warship exited Pearl Harbor to support an amphibious assault -- Operation Flintlock, the invasion of the Marshall Islands. Her Task Group 58.1, arrived on January 29 with carriers -- Yorktown II, Lexington, and Cowpens -- sending air strikes on Taroa airfield located on Maloelap Atoll, as preparation for assaults on Majuro and Kwajalein on January 31. Yorktown aviators continued their strikes on Kwajalein in support of the troops attacking that atoll.

Over the next four months, Yorktown participated in a series of raids in which she ranged from the Marianas in the north to New Guinea in the south. On March, 30-31 she launched air strikes on Japanese installations located in the Palau Islands; and on April 1 her aviators went after the island of Woleai. On June 19, Yorktown aircraft began strikes on Japanese air bases on Guam to neutralize Japanese land-based planes. During the first day of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Yorktown aircraft claimed 37 enemy planes destroyed and dropped 21 tons of bombs on the Guam air bases.

After re-provisioning at Ulithi on December 30, she returned to TF 38 for on strikes at targets in Formosa and the Philippines in support of the landings at Lingayen. On January 15, 1944 raids were launched on Formosa and Canton in China. The following day, her aviators struck at Canton and went to Hong Kong. She sortied with TF 58, on a series of raids to support the assault on and occupation of Iwo Jima. On February 16-17, the carrier launched strikes on the Tokyo area of Honshu. On February 25 and sent two raids to bomb and strafe airfields near Tokyo. On March 18 she launched strikes on airfields on Kyushu, Honshu, and Shikoku. On March 30, Yorktown and the other carriers of TF 38 concentrated solely on the island of Okinawa and its surrounding islets, which continued for the next six weeks.

The only exception came on April 7 with discovery of a Japanese task force built around the super-battleship Yamato, the heaviest battleship ever built displacing 72,000 tons with nine naval guns, 460 mm (18.1 Inches), each capable of firing 1,460 kg (3,220 lb) shells over 42 km (26 miles.) Air Group 9 aviators claimed several torpedo hits on Yamato just before the battleship exploded and sank. Yorktown II arrived in San Pedro Bay at Leyte on June 13 for replenishment and upkeep. On July she and TG 38.4 got underway on the final series of raids on the Japanese home islands, arriving on July 10 at the Tokyo area of Honshu. These strikes continued until Japan's capitulation on August 15.

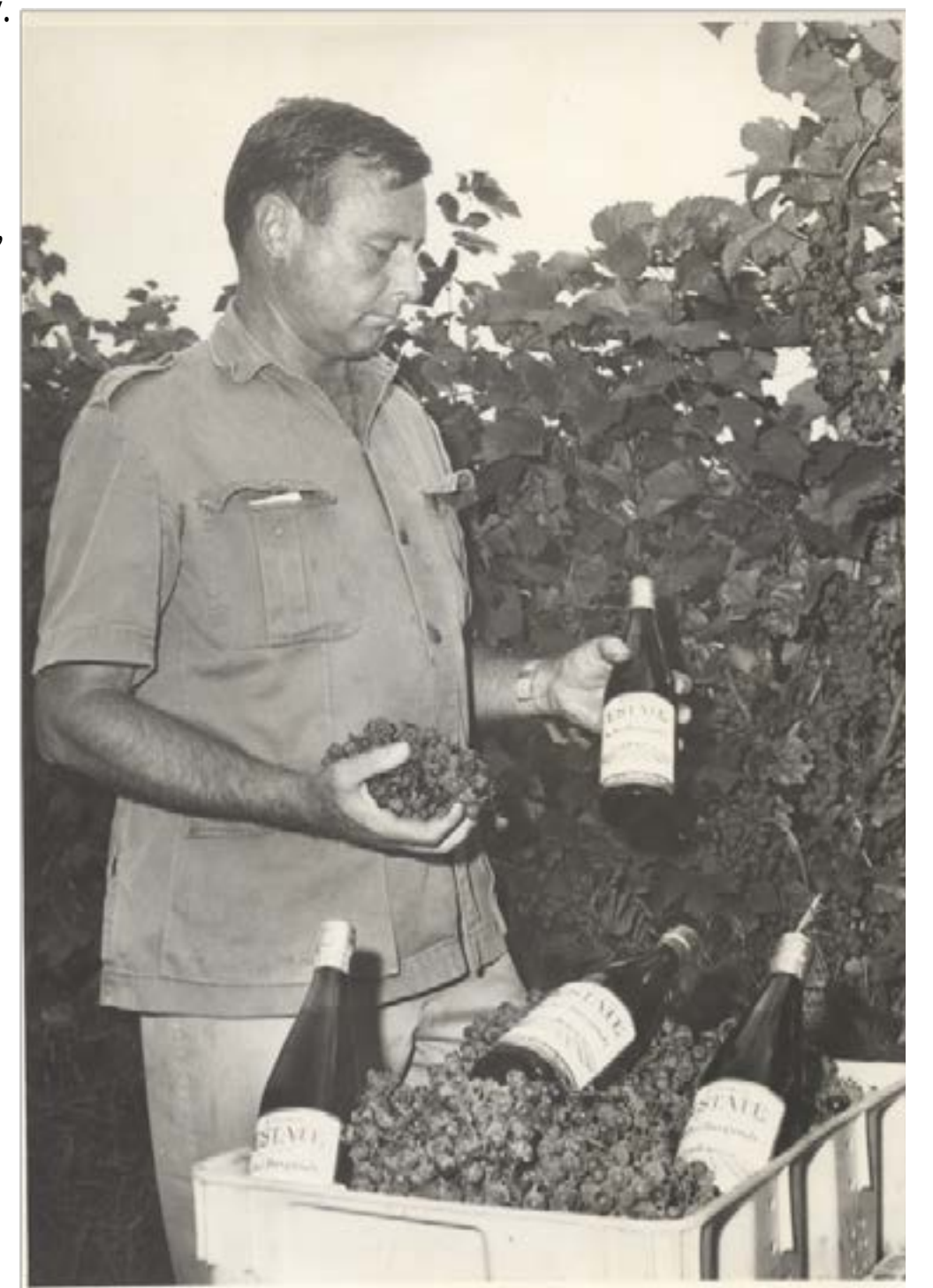
Frederick was back stateside undergoing training to be a forward air controller for the invasion of Japan when the 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man' atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 5th and 8th. Along with various service awards, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal.

He left the Navy and returned to Cornell in September 1945, and graduated in June 1946. His first job was with the Dole Pineapple Company in Hawaii. In late 1949 he joined the Rockefeller Foundation to work in Latin America. He served in the Navy Reserves for five years in both Hawaii and western NY.

In 1951 Frederick married Cecily Moot from Buffalo, NY, a 1945 graduate from Vassar College. From 1952 to 1961 he managed Nelson Rockefeller's farms and ranches in Venezuela and Ecuador. After the death of his father, (Frederick William Johnson, Cornell 1901), he returned to western New York and established Johnson Estate Winery on his father's farm. Located along the shores of Lake Erie in Westfield, NY, the winery is now New York's oldest estate winery.

From 1962 to 1982, during the winter months, Frederick continued to consult in tropical agriculture for clients such as the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, Chase Manhattan Bank and WR Grace.

Frederick and Cecily Johnson's legacy at Cornell continues with son Frederick Jr (1975 and MBA 1977,) who met and married Jennifer Schroeder (MBA 1979), with daughter Elizabeth (1976) and son Anthony (1980.) Fred and Jennifer now own and manage the winery, with frequent trips to Cornell. Seven grandchildren include Frederick Spencer Johnson III, Navy ROTC and like his grandfather, now a Lieutenant in the Navy, Cornell 2010, and John Behm, Cornell 2011.



Fred at the Johnson Estate Winery, 1962