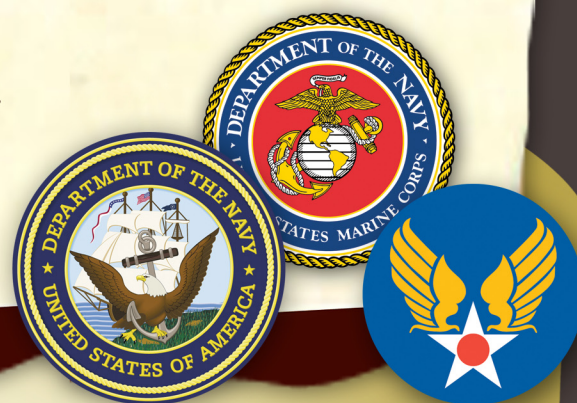


1ST LT. GIRVIS HALTOM, JR. - OCTOBER 24, 1944

US MARINES, VFM-122

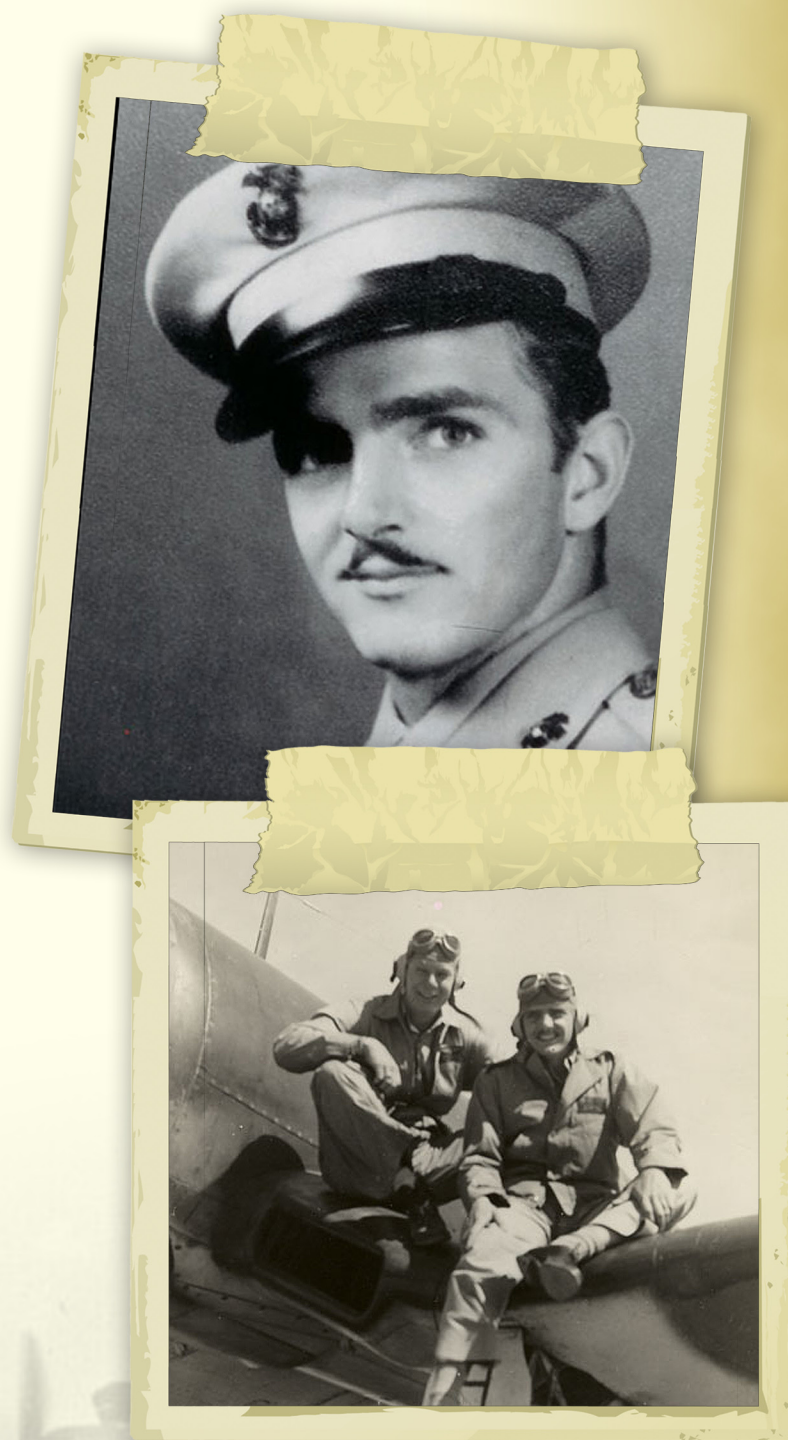
FG-1 CORSAIR FROM PELELIU, PALAU



The Man: Girvis W. Haltom, Jr. was the son of Girvis W. & Lossie Mattison Haltom of Stephens, Arkansas. He was a graduate of Stephens High School, Class of 1941, and attended Magnolia A & M College prior to entering the Marine flight program in the summer of 1942. Upon graduation and receiving his Commission and wings in 1943, Snooks, as he was called, was assigned to the Marine Fighter Training wing at El Centro, California. After instructing in aerial gunnery for several months, he was given an overseas combat assignment and ended up on Peleliu, Palau during its invasion. After flying close ground support for the invading Marines, he was assigned to a bombing mission to the nearby bypassed island of Yap. On October 24, 1944, 1st Lt. Girvis Haltom, Jr. took off from Peleliu with eight other FG-1 Corsair fighters to bomb and strafe the Yap airfield, the guns and revetment areas around the strip. After dropping his bombs on the airfield, Lt. Haltom noticed a Japanese anti-aircraft gun south of the airfield. He approached the gun with his wingman from the south flying low and fast at 600 feet when he was struck. His plane was seen to do a slow roll to the right and then crashed and exploded northwest of the airstrip. In 1947 his remains were located and the Associated Press (AP) ran the following story, "Yap, Caroline Islands (AP) – One of the loneliest American graves in all the Pacific lies beneath the palm trees of this lovely little island. It is the only American grave on Yap. No one knows the name of the young flier who was buried there by the natives after his fighter plane crashed and burned more than three years ago. The grave is lonely, but it is not forgotten. Each day the natives place fresh flowers at the base of a crude cross and push back the encroaching jungle growth." Three years after the war ended his gravesite was located and his remains were returned and interred at Stephens, Arkansas.

The Plane: The F4U Corsair was a carrier-capable fighter aircraft that saw service primarily in World War II and the Korean War. Goodyear-built Corsairs were designated FG and Brewster-built aircraft F3A. The Corsair served in smaller air forces until the 1960s, following the longest production run of any piston-engineered fighter in U.S. history (1942–1952). Some Japanese pilots regarded it as the most formidable American fighter of World War II. The US Navy counted an 11:1 kill ratio with the F4U Corsair. The F4U incorporated the largest engine available at the time, the 2,000 hp 18-cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp radial. To accommodate a folding wing, the designers considered retracting the main landing gear rearward, but for the chord of wing selected, it was difficult to fit undercarriage struts long enough to provide sufficient clearance for the large propeller. Their solution was an inverted gull wing. Statistics compiled at the end of the war indicate that the F4U and FG flew 64,051 operational sorties for the US Marines and US Navy through the conflict (44% of total fighter sorties), with only 9,581 sorties (15%) flown from carrier decks. F4U and FG pilots claimed 2,140 air combat victories against 189 losses to enemy aircraft, for an overall kill ratio of over 11:1. The aircraft performed well against the best Japanese opponents with a 12:1 kill ratio against Mitsubishi A6M and 6:1 against the Nakajima Ki-84, Kawanishi N1K-J and Mitsubishi J2M combined during the last year of the war. The Corsair bore the brunt of fighter-bomber missions, delivering 15,621 tons of bombs during the war (70% of total bombs dropped by fighters during the war).

The Base: The Battle of Peleliu, codenamed Operation Stalemate II took place between September and November 1944. The invasion of Yap was originally planned as part of Operation Stalemate II until the decision was made to bypass it and proceed to Peleliu since Yap was in ruins. The US Forces, originally consisting of only the 1st Marine Division, later relieved by the Army's 81st Infantry Division, fought to capture an airstrip on the small coral island. US Major General William Rupertus, commander of 1st Marine Division, predicted that the island would be secured within four days, but due to Japan's well-crafted fortifications and stiff resistance, the battle lasted for over two months. The battle remains one of the war's most controversial, due to its questionable strategic value and high death toll. When considering the number of men involved, Peleliu had the highest casualty rate of any battle in the Pacific War. The fighting was still taking place on Peleliu when 1st Lt. Girvis Haltom took off to bomb Yap on his fateful mission.



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