

ENS. HOWARD ALLEN HOLDING - SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1944

US NAVY, VF-20 SQUADRON

F6F-5 HELLCAT FROM THE CARRIER USS ENTERPRISE (CV-6)



The Man: The wreckage of Ens. Howard Allen Holding's F6F-5 Hellcat rests in the Yap Harbor near Colonia. Howard was a college student and musician from Salt Lake City, Utah prior to entering the US Naval Aviation program in 1942. In the early afternoon of September 6, 1944, Howard and 34 fellow US fighter pilots ascended from the flight decks of the carriers USS Enterprise, USS Franklin and USS San Jacinto to conduct a fighter sweep of the already battered island of Yap. The island had been hit hard over the previous three months by high-flying, long-range B-24 bombers of the US Army Air Force but there were still a few buildings standing. They circled around to attack out of the sun from the southwest. On their first pass of what was thought to be a routine neutralization strike (milk run), Howard and two other F6F-5 Hellcats from his squadron were shot down near this location. First, a plane flown by Lt. Harry Brown was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went down in a shallow dive hitting the ground west of Colonia, then a plane flown by Ens. Joseph Cox was hit by anti-aircraft fire and turned into Howard's plane causing a mid-air collision. Both planes quickly became caught in tight, nose-down spirals from which neither recovered. Howard's plane crashed into the harbor while Joseph's plane crashed near the present day Yap dump. Howard's remains were never found and to this day he remains missing in action (MIA).

The Plane: The Grumman F6F Hellcat was a fighter aircraft descended from the earlier F4F Wildcat fighters. The Hellcat and the F4U Corsair were the primary US Navy carrier fighters in the second half of WWII. The Hellcat proved to be the most successful aircraft in naval history destroying 5,171 enemy aircraft. Navy and Marine F6Fs flew 66,530 combat sorties (45% of all fighter sorties of the war, 62,386 sorties were flown from aircraft carriers) at a cost of 270 Hellcats (an overall kill-to-loss ratio of 19:1).

The Carrier: The USS Enterprise (CV-6), the "Big E", was the sixth aircraft carrier of the US Navy and the most decorated ship of WWII. She participated in more major actions of the war against Japan than any other US ship. Her aircraft and guns downed 911 Japanese planes; her bombers sank 71 ships and damaged or destroyed 192 more. Enterprise earned 20 battle stars, the most for any U.S. warship in World War II. She participated in more major actions of the war against Japan than did any other US ship. These actions included the Battle of Midway, the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, various other air-sea engagements during the Guadalcanal campaign, the Battle of the Philippine Sea, and the Battle of Leyte Gulf, as well as the "Doolittle Raid" on Tokyo. On three separate occasions during the Pacific War, the Japanese announced that she had been sunk in battle. Some have labeled her the most glorious and honored ship in all of United States Naval history, rivaled only perhaps by the 18th century frigate USS Constitution.

This is in memory of Ens. Howard Allen Holding and all the other brave men who lost their lives on Yap Island during World War II.

