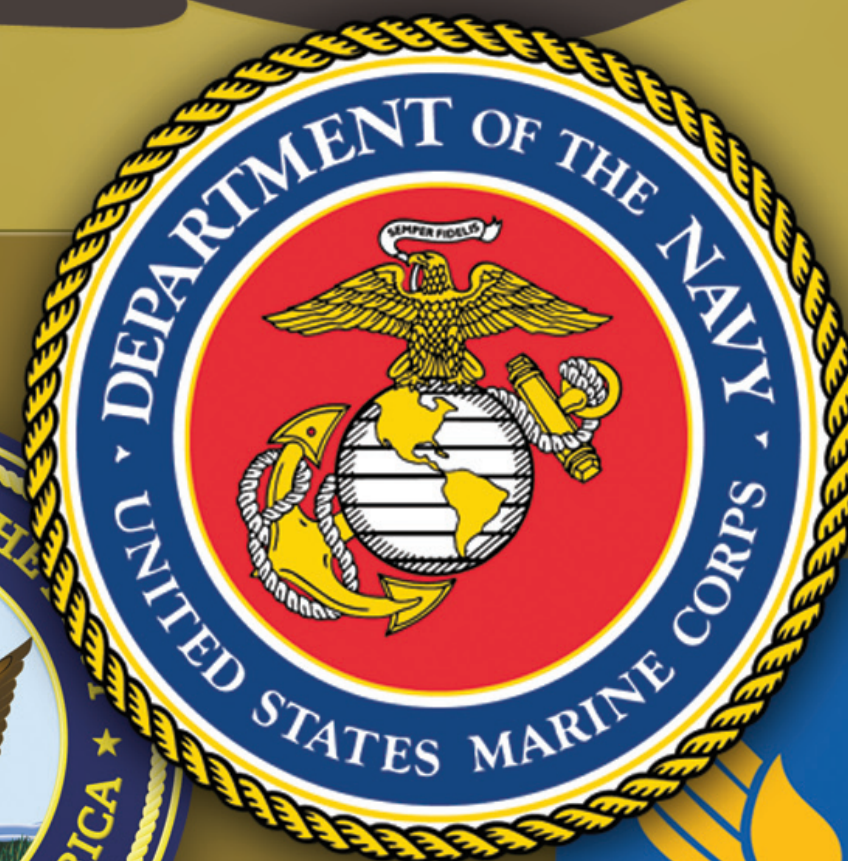


MAJ. WILLIAM JR. CLAY

Nov 21, 1944 - United States Marine Corps, VMF-121 Squadron
FG-1 Corsair from the US base on Peleliu Island



The Man: The wreckage you see today is what remains of an FG-1 Corsair flown by Maj. William Clay, Jr. of Texas after his final mission. On the morning of November 21, 1944, William and fellow pilots from the Marine fighter squadron VFM-121 took off from the island of Peleliu to bomb and strafe targets on Yap. The purpose of the mission was to insure the continued inoperative status of the Yap airstrip and to strafe barge traffic in surrounding waters. The island had been hit hard during the previous six months by high-flying, long-range B-24 bombers of the US Army Air Force as well as raids from US carrier aircraft. Both airstrips were out of commission and few buildings remained standing on the island. After bombing the main airfield and revetment area the pilots circled the island to look for boats and barges. William observed a small craft just off Maap Island and led his wingman on a strafing pass. As they passed over the boats, William's wingman, Lt. Fisher, looked back to observe a large splash. William's plane had been hit by anti-aircraft fire and exploded, crashing close to shore. Yapese from the village of Wuluu' recovered his remains, buried them, and cared for the grave until the Americans returned to look for him. After the war Maj. William Clay Jr.'s remains were returned to Arlington National Cemetery for burial. The villagers still refer to the wreckage as "William's" plane.

The Plane: The FG-1 was a Goodyear-manufactured version of the inverted gull-winged F4U-1 Corsair fighter. It was the most capable land and carrier-based fighter bomber of World War II. The Japanese allegedly nicknamed it "Whistling Death" for the noise made by air-flow through the wing-mounted air intakes. F4U and FG pilots claimed 2,140 air combat victories against 189 losses to enemy aircraft. The Corsair bore the brunt of fighter-bomber missions, dropped 15,621 tons of bombs during the war (70% of total bombs dropped by fighters during the war.)

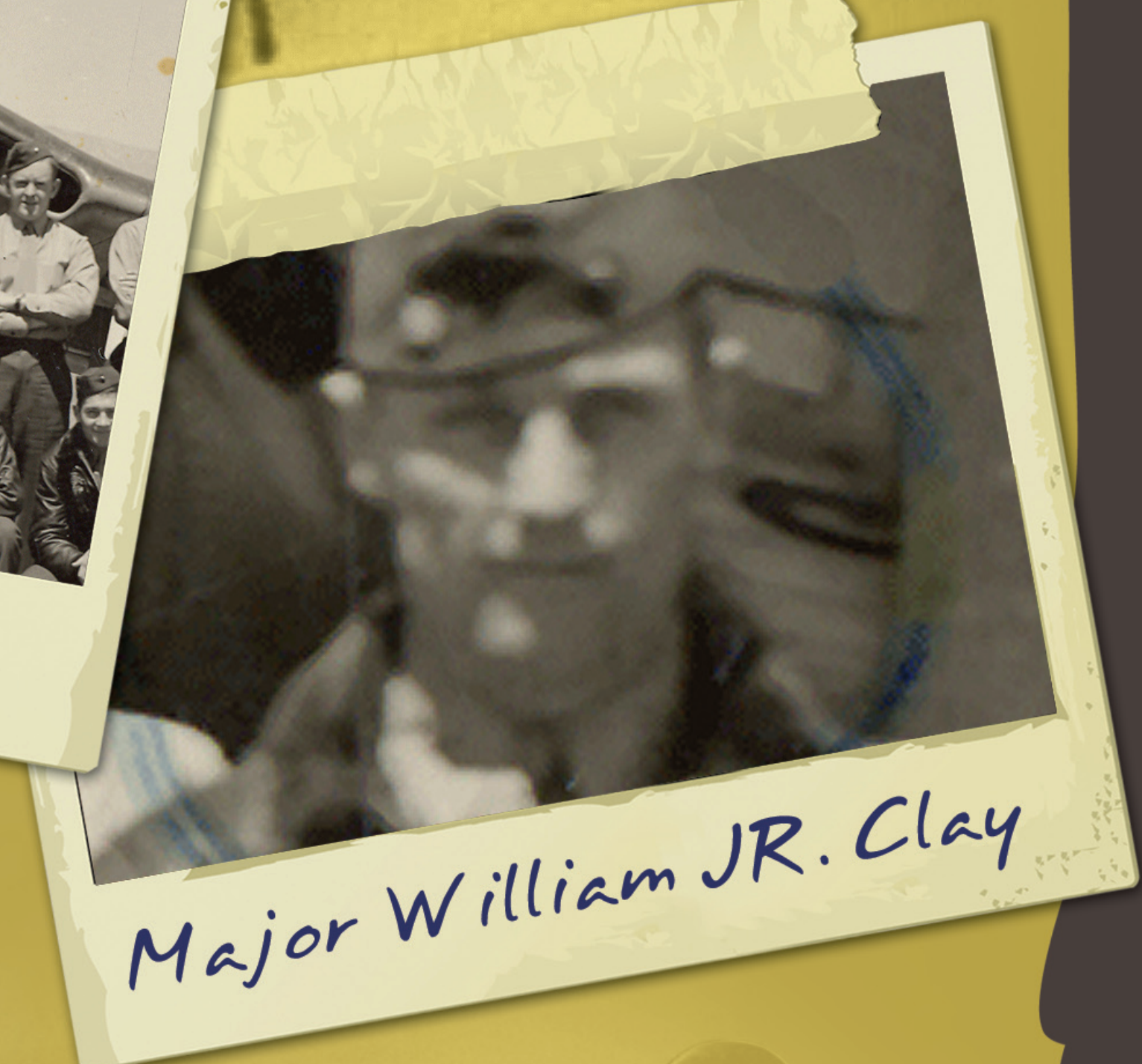
The Base: William's VFM-121 Squadron was based on the island of Peleliu when he was shot down. Peleliu is one of the islands in the nation of Palau. The island was the site of the vicious Battle of Peleliu between September and November 1944. U.S. Major General William Rupertus, commander of 1st Marine 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. It remains one of the war's most controversial battles, due to its questionable strategic value and high death toll. The fighting was winding down but continued on Peleliu as Maj. William Clay, Jr. took off to bomb Yap on his fateful mission.

This marker is in memory of Maj. William Clay, Jr. and all the other brave men who lost their lives on Yap Island during World War II.

A MAN IS NOT DEAD UNLESS HE IS FORGOTTEN! MISSING AIR-CREW PROJECT: WWW.MISSINGAIRCREW.COM



Major Clay's Squadron



Major William JR. Clay

