

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Lieutenant jg Robert Erickson Killed in Action

Robert Erickson (nicknamed "Clipper") was born in 1923 in Ishpeming, Michigan to Dr. and Mrs. A.W. Erickson. After graduating from Ishpeming High School in 1940, he enrolled at the University of Michigan in its pre-med program planning to follow in the footsteps of his father.

Unfortunately, this career move was interrupted by both World War II and his admission to the Naval Flight Training Center at Pensacola, Florida. He graduated from Naval Flight Training and was commissioned as Ensign, U.S.N.R. Following combat training and carrier landing practice, he was assigned to Fighting Squadron 15 attached to the U.S.S. Essex. In this capacity, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation, which accompanied the award, read as follows: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement in aerial flight as pilot of a fighter plane in Fighting Squadron 15 operating against enemy Japanese forces near Ormoc Bay, Western Leyte, Philippine Islands November 11, 1944." Boldly striking at a Japanese convoy, Ensign Erickson made a daring masthead level bombing attack on a destroyer and, despite intense and accurate fire from hostile anti-aircraft guns, obtained a direct hit causing an explosion and thereby rendering heavy damage to the vessel. His superb airmanship and unflinching determination in the face of grave peril reflect great credit on Ensign Erickson, and

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his gallant conduct throughout this and other hazardous missions was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Services.”

Later the same year, his parents were advised in a personal letter from the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, that their son has been officially listed as dead in the Navy’s records.

The letter follows:

“Your son, Ensign Robert Erickson, United States Naval Reserve, has been carried on the official records of the Navy department in the status of missing in action as of 13 November 1944. Your son’s plane, attached to Fighting Squadron 20, took off from the USS Enterprise in a flight of 17 planes to participate in a fighter sweep against grounded enemy aircraft and installations at Clark Field in the Philippines but failed to return to the ship following the attack. All information was included in the letter sent to you by his commanding officer.

“In view of the strong probability that your son’s plane crashed or made a forced water landing – and that he lost his life as a result, thereof; because no official or unconfirmed reports have been received that he survived; because his name has not appeared on any lists or reports of personnel liberated from Japanese prisoner of war camps, and in view of the length of time that has elapsed since he was reported to be missing in action, I am reluctantly forced to the conclusion that he is deceased.

“I know what little solace the formal and written word can be to help you meet the burden of your loss, but in spite of that knowledge, I cannot refrain from saying very simply that I am sorry. It is hoped you may find some comfort in the thought that your son gave his life for his country, upholding the highest traditions of the Navy.”

TJ Mudge, Mar. 2004