

MERCER MEMORIAL DAY 500

2011 HONOREES



Don Bee, Aviation Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class USN, at 18, went to sea on the legendary USS Intrepid aircraft Carrier during WW2 with 3,200 other young men. As Airplane Director his crew of 16 moved airplanes to and from the flight deck. During combat he helped load 40mm quad Bofor guns. March 18, 1945 a Japanese Betty Bomber kamikaze crashed just off the starboard bow sending a wing, flaming gasoline, shrapnel and landing gear parts onto the hangar deck and into the number one elevator pit. Don and mate Harold Patterson immediately manned and quickly extinguished the fire even before the ship's firemen arrived saving the ship from major disaster. Another suicide attack brought a kamikaze plane through the flight deck and hit so close to Don that the area was instantly filled with dense smoke, fire and debris. He couldn't breathe so he crawled to a scupper hole used for mooring lines. Don was able to put his head, arm and shoulder out through the hole to the sea. Then the ship's Captain ordered the ship to be put into a hard over turn to let the debris roll into the sea. Don remembers coming very close to water that day as he hung there while the ship tipped. When Japan signed the peace treaty aboard the USS Missouri, the Intrepid remained on station at a distance on combat ready air patrol duty. Don learned that a crewman's love and loyalty to his ship comes during the crucible of combat. After 34 years of service the Intrepid was made into a Sea, Air, and Space Museum in New York Harbor.



Michael Giroski was assigned to the 482nd Bombardment Squadron, 505th Bombardment Group, 20th Air Force based on the island of Tinian in the Marianas Islands. He flew 33 bombing or mine laying combat missions against Japan in a B-29 named Peachy; as radar man, navigator and bombardier. In one raid, heat thermals from ground fires combined with anti-aircraft fire flipped the Peachy onto its back. When the plane got righted it was so low that when it landed on Tinian they found telephone and telegraph wires wrapped in the engine cowlings. After the bomb runs they faced 1500 mile trips back to Tinian over the vast Pacific Ocean with a plane shot full of holes, leaking fuel, controls damaged, running on 2 or 3 engines and nothing to guide them back but their radar. On two occasions the Peachy had to land on Iwo Jima because it was so heavily damaged it could not make it all the way home. On their first mission they lost 11 of their 28 planes and by the end of the war the Peachy's crew was the last surviving crew of those that they deployed with. Because of his skill and courage, Michael earned five Air Medals and two Distinguished Flying Crosses. Today the Peachy is displayed at the Pueblo, Colorado Airport.



Anthony DeNoi, USAF, was 25 when he went to war in Vietnam with the 16th Special Operations Squadron. As an Illuminator Operator his job was to spot anti-aircraft fire launched to destroy his gunship. With 267 combat missions under his belt the airman, on March 30, 1972, was hit by two 57mm anti-aircraft rounds that set his plane on fire, blowing off the wing and opening up the fuel tanks causing the crew of 15 to bail out into the Laotian jungle mountain range called the Steel Tiger West. And, with a broken neck and two paralyzed legs, he found himself alone 25 miles behind enemy lines. He spent 13 hours in the jungle before a Pararescue Team found him and then spent a year in the States recuperating before volunteering to return to Vietnam to fly 38 more missions. He spent 72 months in Vietnam where he earned 7 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 18 Air Medals and 1 Purple Heart. CMSGT DeNoi retired from Grissom Air Force Base, Indiana, where he received the Legion of Merit for his distinguished career. He became the second most decorated enlisted man to serve in the Strategic Air Command during the Vietnam era.



Captain James A. Stranahan III served his country with the USMC in the South Pacific during WW2. He was involved in the island invasions of Kwajalein and Saipan. While serving in action against Japanese forces on Saipan on June 15 and 16, 1944, he was awarded the Navy Cross, as well as the Silver Star and Purple Heart, for extraordinary heroism as the Commanding Officer of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines, 4th Marine Division. After the loss of his commanding officer, 1st Lt. Stranahan assumed command and rallied his men leading them through intense enemy shelling. Pushing back the flanks of the enemy despite their overwhelming numerical superiority, he led the fight from his exposed position for more than a day until he was seriously wounded and evacuated. His was the first company to reach the objective for his Division and his courageous, gallant leadership and cool initiative in the face of great odds, was directly responsible for forming a base on which the remainder of the Battalion was established and was thereby instrumental in their success.

His heroic conduct and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

To Contact the Honorees call 724 662 2786