

Night Fighter

We don't know when he first saw her, but she must have been an impressive sight: standing tall and with shapely lines. He was Robert Franklin Wright, Class of 1945. She was the USS *Enterprise*, the most decorated American warship of World War II.



Before reporting aboard *Enterprise*, Bob Wright had attended Clemson College, enrolling in September 1941 as mechanical engineering major. Wright, from Athens, Georgia, had already completed one year at his hometown University of Georgia before transferring to Clemson. During his time at Clemson, the war, which had been raging in China and Europe for years, finally reached America. After the completion of the spring semester, Wright entered the Navy in May 1942. He attended the Navy's pre-flight school in Athens before heading to Pensacola, Florida for flight training and commissioning as a Navy ensign.

On Christmas Eve 1944, *Enterprise* sailed from Oahu, Hawaii bound for the Philippines. For the first time, she carried an air group specially trained in night carrier operations. The group included a Night Torpedo Squadron and a Night Fighter Squadron, VF(N)-90 which included among its pilots Lieutenant (jg) Bob Wright.



As the new year began, *Enterprise* and her aircraft conducted night fighter sweeps against shore targets and shipping from Formosa to Indochina. The F6F(N) Hellcat fighters were specially equipped with an AN/APS-6 radar housed in the airplane's starboard wing. The radar enabled the pilot to locate and attack enemy planes in complete darkness and also guided the pilot back to his ship through the use of a homing beacon.



On January 16, *Enterprise* night aircraft attacked enemy shipping and installations in the Hainan and Hong Kong areas. It was on one of these night sorties that Wright disappeared. He was awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Wright is memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery, Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines.