



Commander Bruce Avery Van Voorhis has been selected for having gallantly given his life for his country. Japanese Imperial forces attacked U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and British forces at Hong Kong on December 8, 1941. U.S. bases on Guam and Wake Island fell shortly thereafter. The Japanese then invaded the US controlled commonwealth of the Philippines during 1941-42. U.S. and Filipino military personnel held out at Bataan until April 9, 1942 at which time they were ordered to surrender.

America's reaction was limited due to the loss of a major portion of the Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. The Doolittle Raid on Tokyo resulted in Japan initiating an attack on U.S. facilities on Midway Island while they were moving to attack New Guinea. U.S. ships were rushed to the Coral Sea where they forced the Japanese fleet to turn back. Admiral Nimitz was also able to surprise the Japanese fleet at Midway and deliver a decisive victory for the U.S. Navy

While the Japanese military was able to make limited advances in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands during 1942, The Australian Army successfully defended a critical Royal Australian Air Force base at Milne Bay and Allied forces successfully captured Guadalcanal in February 1943. Operation Cartwheel was begun in June 1943 to cut off Rabaul, a major Japanese base, by destroying its supply and communications lines. This would then allow the U.S. to initiate an island hopping campaign that would eventually lead to the main islands of Japan. Bruce Van Voorhis was an instrumental part of this effort.

Bruce Avery Van Voorhis was born in Aberdeen, WA, on January 29, 1908. His father moved the family to Fallon one year later so that he could serve as the Indian Service Representative at Stillwater on the Quinault Reservation. Bruce attended the Oats Park Grade School and Churchill County High School where he graduated in 1924. He was appointed from Nevada to the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1925 and graduated an Ensign in June 1929.

His first assignment was to the USS Mississippi, but he was selected for aviator training at Naval Air Station, Pensacola in November 1930. After receiving his wings in 1931, Bruce was assigned to USS Maryland, USS Ranger, and USS Saratoga. After a stint at the Panama Canal, he served aboard the USS Enterprise and had temporary duty on board the USS Yorktown. In 1940, he served on board the light cruiser Honolulu. Following that, he was assigned to the Naval Air Station Anacostia, Washington, D.C. and served there until late 1941. Bruce was promoted to Lt. Commander in January 1942, and in December of that year, he assumed command of Patrol Squadron 14, then commanded Bombing Squadron 102.

The 102nd Bombing Squadron had only recently transitioned from PBV Catalina aircraft to PB4Y-1 Liberators. After training was completed on the Liberators, the 102nd deployed to Carney Field, Guadalcanal, arriving May 1, 1943. Operation Toenails, The invasion of New Georgia, began on June 21, 1943. Three days after the first landing, Van Voorhis sent out three of the 102nd aircraft the Japanese held island of Ballale where the reportedly bombed the island from one end to the other.

Over the next several weeks, the 102nd sought out enemy shipping and airfields. The squadron encountered a total of 43 ships and 51 aircraft. On July 4th, Van Voorhis and his crew personally bombed a large cargo ship, destroyer, and destroyer escort that were heading toward New Georgia. On the morning of July 6, 1943, van Voorhis volunteered for a reconnaissance mission of the Japanese held island of Kapingamarangi. The plane took off from Guadalcanal at 4:20 am and, after takeoff, there was no radio contact. The mission was in support of the Battle of the Solomon Islands that had begun the previous day.

When the bomber came over the lagoon, it immediately came under antiaircraft fire. Bruce and his crew shot down one fighter plane, made six low level bombing runs against the radio station, and completed multiple strafing runs against three seaplanes and ships in the lagoon. Reports made after the attack by an Australian coast watcher and friendly natives indicated that, on the last run, Van Voorhis deliberately came in low in order to ensure that the last bomb drop would take out the target. A Navy report at the time indicated that the plane was caught in its own bomb blast and the aircraft crashed into the lagoon, killing everyone on board.

Bruce was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor as a result of his bravery, his copilot received the Navy Cross, and the crew was awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses. In addition, van Voorhis was posthumously promoted to Commander. Their remains were later recovered and Van Voorhis was buried at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery along with several of his crew. There is also a headstone marker at the Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA.

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