

# Edward G. Wendorf, World War II ace

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Navy Cmdr. Edward G. “Wendy” Wendorf was flying his first combat mission as a Navy ensign in December 1943 when Japanese forces in the Marshall Islands fired hundreds of bullets at his F6F Hellcat.

He shot down four Japanese planes before an enemy slug struck his left temple. With one hand covering his bleeding left eye, Cmdr. Wendorf flew 45 minutes back to the carrier Lexington, where he successfully landed on deck without the help of his radio, tail hook, flaps or brakes – all of which had been disabled by anti-aircraft fire.

“It was a classic example of American ‘can-do’ attitude,” said friend Phil Schasker, a vice president of the American Fighter Aces Association.

Cmdr. Wendorf died at Sharp Grossmont Hospital Feb. 10. He was 90. The cause of death was cardiopulmonary arrest, said his son, Kit Wendorf.

Navy personnel counted 220 bullet holes in Cmdr. Wendorf’s Hellcat, which they later used as a tool in the marketing of war bonds.

Just hours after Cmdr. Wendorf’s heroic return to the Lexington, a Japanese torpedo struck the ship just below the sick bay where he was recovering from his injuries. A friend pulled him out of the flooding sick bay compartment — a violation of standard procedure that nonetheless saved Cmdr. Wendorf’s life, Kit Wendorf said.

After his wound healed, Cmdr. Wendorf returned to duty, serving seven more months in the Pacific Theater. He shot down two more Japanese aircraft during that time, qualifying him as an “ace” pilot with six confirmed aerial victories.

“He didn’t feel like he was a big shot or anything,” Schasker said. “He just told the truth and was grateful that he had the opportunity and survived. He was a great all-American guy.”

Cmdr. Wendorf continued his service with the Navy until 1966. During his 24 years in the military, he taught at the Navy’s aviation school in Pensacola, Fla., was a staff member at the military’s Chief of Naval Air Training, and served as executive officer of the VU-3 utility squadron and a transport pilot in the Military Air Transport System.

His decorations included a Distinguished Flying Cross with two Gold Stars, an Air Medal with 11 Gold Stars, a Purple Heart and the Presidential Unit Citation.

“He was a very good fighter pilot,” said fellow ace Cmdr. Bill Hardy.

Following his military career, Cmdr. Wendorf worked for 10 years as a manager at Ryan Aeronautical Co., where he worked on the Firebee and Superfirebee drones. He worked another 10 years in the Convair division at General Dynamics Corp., managing logistics for the Cruise missile program.

After retiring from his civilian career in 1987, Cmdr. Wendorf was active in the American Fighter Aces Association. He also volunteered as a docent at the USS Midway Museum, sharing his war stories with curious visitors every week.

“People just loved to hear it,” said docent coordinator Jim Nash. “He was a very pleasant, very down-to-earth guy.”

He was also the only ace on the museum’s staff, Nash said.

Cmdr. Wendorf was born in West, Texas, on Feb. 22, 1922. The University of Texas recruited him with a football scholarship, but he left after two years to join the Navy.

Cmdr. Wendorf is survived by his second wife, Jan, of San Diego. He is also survived by his children from his marriage with the late Marjorie Wendorf: Dee Winn, Mark Wendorf and Kit Wendorf, all of Encinitas; and six grandchildren.

A memorial service is planned for March 11. Cmdr. Wendorf’s remains will be interred at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to any charity in Cmdr. Wendorf’s memory.

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