

Birth: Dec. 5, 1910

Batavia

Genesee County

New York, USA

Death: Jun. 4, 1942, At Sea

James was the son of James Charles and Edith Ernestine Owens. While in college James played football for the University of Southern California team. He married Helen Marie Ross about 1940. Both were graduates of USC. Helen was born in Iowa to Jesse Clifford and Edna Frances (Hendry) Ross.

James C Owens Jr was appointed an Naval Aviation Cadet(NAVCAD), USNR, 3 September 1935. Following flight training at Pensacola, Fla., he was designed naval aviator #4922 and was commissioned an Ensign A-V (N) on 01 Nov 1936. He served on board Lexington (CV-2), and on 01 September 1941, he joined Torpedo Squadron 8 on board Hornet (CV-8). He was promoted temporary Lieutenant on 2 Jan 1942. He was the interim Executive Officer of Torpedo Squadron Eight during the period Mar - Jun 1942 when Lt Swede Larson, the Executive Officer, was leading half of Torpedo Squadron Eight who were in Norfolk, VA accepting delivery of the new TBF-1 Grumman Torpedo Planes.

OWENS, JAMES CHARLES, JR.

Citation:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to James Charles Owens, Jr. (0-075974), Lieutenant, U.S. Navy, for extraordinary heroism in operations against the enemy while serving as Pilot of a carrier-based Navy Torpedo Plane and Executive Officer of Torpedo Squadron EIGHT (VT-8), embarked from the U.S.S. HORNET (CV-8), during the "Air Battle of Midway," against enemy Japanese forces on 4 June 1942. Grimly aware of the hazardous consequences of flying without fighter protection, and with insufficient fuel to return to his carrier, Lieutenant Owens resolutely, and with no thought of his own life, delivered an effective torpedo attack against violent assaults of enemy Japanese aircraft fire. His courageous action, carried out with a gallant spirit of self-sacrifice and a conscientious devotion to the fulfillment of his mission, was a determining factor in the defeat of the enemy forces and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

The Presidential Unit Citation was awarded to the Officers and men of (VT-8) for extremely heroic and courageous performance in combat during the Air Battle of Midway, June 4, 1942. Flying low without fighter support, Torpedo Squadron EIGHT began the perilous mission, Intercept and attack! First to sight the enemy, the squadron attacked with full striking power against crushing enemy opposition, scoring torpedo hits on Japanese forces. Realizing to a man that insufficient fuel would prevent a return to the carrier, the pilots held doggedly to the target, dropping torpedoes at point-blank range in the face of blasting anti-aircraft fire that sent the planes one by one, hurtling aflame in the sea. The loss of 29 lives, typifying valor, loyalty, and determination, was the price paid for Torpedo Squadron EIGHT's vital contribution to the eventual success of our forces in this epic battle of the air.

Lt James Owens and his radioman/gunner, ARM1 Amelio Maffei, were killed in action and their remains were unrecoverable. Both men were awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received during combat on 4 Jun 1942.

USS James C. Owens (DD-776), an Allen M Sumner-class destroyer, was named after him. Launched 01 Oct 1944, sponsored by his widow and commissioned 17 Feb 1945. Decommissioned on 15 Jun 1973 and sold to the Brazilian navy where it was known as Sergipe. It was struck on 17 October 1995 and scrapped.

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California) - 07 Aug 1942, Fri - Page 3

Death of Son as Hero Told

Parent's Grief Softened as Flyer's Companion Describes Midway Feat

It's a bitter experience to give your only son for your country. That's the way Mr. and Mrs. James C. Owens Sr. of 1446 Belfast Drive felt at first when the Navy Department notified them that their son, Lieut. James C. Owens Jr., 31, U.S.N., was missing and presumed lost after the June 4-7 Midway battle. Yet, after hearing from Ensign George H. Gay, sole survivor of Torpedo Squadron 8 which thundered down on the Japanese naval flotilla of Midway Island and sent three of its five carriers to Davy Jones' locker, their grief turned to pride.

All But One Killed

The 15 pilots and their 15 gunners manning the squadron, of which Lieut. Owens was second in command, died to a man, with the exception of Ensign Gay. But in dying they performed a tremendous, amazing feat in knocking out the aerial might of the Jap armada. Other Navy air squadrons sank a fourth Jap carrier and set a fifth blazing from stem to stern, besides sinking many other surface craft and knocking out scores of Jap planes.

Eyewitness Story

The Owens got the eyewitness story of how their son died from Ensign Gay, who was rescued after floating in his life raft for 26 hours after the battle. Later Gay delivered some personal belongings of his fellow officer to the parents. Jimmy Owens enlisted as a pilot in the Navy seven years ago, training at the Long Beach Naval Reserve Aviation Base and then at the Pensacola Naval Air Station. He was in Torpedo Squadron 8 seven months ago, when the war broke out.

Group Photographed

Lieut. Comdr. John C. Waldron was the skipper and executive officer. By a fortunate coincidence, the squadron pilots lined up and were photographed just before the Midway battle began. A copy of the photograph is one of the things Ensign Gay delivered to the couple. Also in the group was Lieut. (j.g.) Jeff D. Woodson of Beverly Hills. When Torpedo Squadron 8 sighted the enemy far ahead and below, Comdr. Waldron led eight of the death-weighted planes down toward one portion of the flotilla and directed Lieut. Owens to take the other against another group of enemy craft.

Zero Fighters Attack

The comparatively slow-moving torpedo planes had no fighter escort, and clouds of Zero fighters rose to meet them. This didn't deter the American pilots a whit. They nosed down into their screaming dives to level off just above the ocean and speed toward the fleeing, twisting and turning Jap carriers. Gay was in the tail position in Owen's group. Just before he turned to escape after dropping his torpedo he saw that every other plane in the squadron had been downed. He

was wounded in the left arm and wrist and the left leg.

“Yes, we’re certainly going to miss Jimmy,” his father said. “But we’re proud that he had the privilege of so heroically and effectively serving his country – even if he had to give his life in doing it. “I guess . . . well, we sort of feel that we belong to America, and America belongs to us, in a sort of extra special way, after that.”

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California) - 12 Jun 1944, Mon- Page 16
Destroyers Will Bear Names of Four Heroes – Vessels Being Built With \$40,371,372 Left From War Bond Drive For Cruiser Los Angeles

Four sleek destroyers named for Los Angeles’s outstanding naval heroes of World War II will be launched soon as a triumphant climax to last year’s War Bond campaign to build the cruiser Los Angeles. The drive boomed over the top – a \$40,000,000 quota – and onward to total sales of \$80,371,372. The extra funds are being used in Pacific Coast shipyard to construct 2200 ton destroyers honoring four Angelenos killed in action.

They are Capt. Willard Woodward Keith, Jr., U.S.M.C.R.; Lt James Charles Owens, Jr., U.S.N., Lt. Patrick Henry Hart, U.S.N., and Aviation Radioman 3rd Class Robert Kingsbury (King) Huntington, U.S.N.

Four Die In Pacific

Keith was killed at Guadalcanal and the three others lost their lives June 4, 1942, in the air Battle of Midway. Keith was the son of Willard W. Keith Sr., who was Southern California regional director of the Office of Civilian Defense and subsequently director of the State War Council. Owens, executive officer of Torpedo Squadron 8, which became known as the “suicide squadron, “ was a football and track ace at Los Angeles High School before playing football at the University of Southern California. Hart was a Polytechnic High School graduate and a bank employee before being appointed a midshipman in 1933.

“Warship Dividend”

Huntington, a native Angeleno, attended elementary Los Angeles schools, the California Preparatory School in Covina, the Eliot School in Altadena, and Pasadena Junior College, before going to the University of Washington and enlisting in the Navy in 1941. James L. Beebe, chairman of the citizens’ committee which engineered and overwhelmingly successful bond drive, and Mayor Bowron announced the “warship dividends” to be built in addition to the cruiser Los Angeles. A committee of admirals reviewed service records of officers and enlisted men of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard to choose the outstanding heroes, giving consideration to men who either were born in Los Angeles County or had lived some portion of their life her or whose parents were residing here.

Exploits of Heroes

Capt. Keith, who attended Beverly Hills High School and Stanford University, lost his life while leading marines in bayonet and hand-grenade charges at Guadalcanal. An enemy platoon entrenched with machine guns on commanding ground was annihilated. Keith was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, the Purple Heart and the Presidential Unit Citation.

Owens delivered an effective torpedo attack at Midway against violent assaults of enemy aircraft and an almost solid barrage of anti-aircraft fire. The Navy last year dedicated Owens Hall, formerly the Sigma Chi fraternity house, in his honor at the University of Southern California. He also was awarded the Navy Cross and the Presidential Unit Citation.

Hart received the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism as pilot of another torpedo squadron plane the same day in the Battle of Midway. Ignoring tremendous ack-ack fire and overwhelming fighter opposition, he pressed his assault against Jap naval units until it became relatively certain he would sacrifice his life if he accomplished his mission. He carried on and his squadron scored direct hits on two enemy aircraft carriers.

Huntington, known always as "King," participated as a radioman and free machine gunner on a Torpedo Squadron 8 plane in this battle. He pressed home his attack against similar gunfire, grimly aware he was flying without fighter support and with insufficient fuel to return to his carrier. He has been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, The Presidential Unit Citation and the Purple Heart.

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California) - 16 Jul 1942, Thu - Page 29

Hero Jimmy Owens Once Ace L.A. High Athlete

Naval Flyer Reported Missing at Midway. Former Grid Captain and Track Star.
By Braven Dyer

Official Navy dispatches yesterday told the world that aviators in the Navy's Torpedo Plane Squadron No. 8 were assured of "conspicuous places on the rolls of honor of this war." One of those courageous youths, now reported missing, was Jimmy Owens – Lieut. James Charles Owens of Los Angeles, one of the finest young athletes ever turned out at Los Angeles High School.

I knew him well; also his mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. James Charles Owens, who have lived in this city for almost 30 years. Jimmy wasn't very big in the poundage bracket but he was a real champion, as he proved in the now historic Battle of Midway.

He played football and competed in track and field at L.A. High. His senior year he was captain of the roman eleven, coached by Eddie Rich. I believe Jimmy won all-city honors on the gridiron from his quarterback spot.

In 1928 he captured the low hurdles as a member of the L.A. High's city championship track squad. Ran the race in 24 4/5s. Later in the day he and seven other fleet runners set a new world's interscholastic record for the mile relay, turning the distance in 3m. 2/5s. I covered that meet and looking back in the files discovered yesterday this comment: "Red Houck and Jimmy Owens are two of the finest looking young athletes we ever laid our eyes on."

Remember Them?

Many of you remember Jimmy Owens. And you'll also recall some of his teammates on that city championship team – Frank Lombardi, Dave Foore and Jim Ferrie. From L.A. High Jimmy went to Southern California. Unfortunately for Lightweight Owens, who weighed on 150 pounds at that time, this was the era of Howard Jones' best football teams. Howard had more material than he knew what to do with. And he was mighty partial to big men.

Some of us had to fight like the devil to get him to use Cotton Warburton, who later became an All-American. But there wasn't room on the first team for two little fellows, so Jimmy Owens spent most of his varsity career on the bench. But he helped make those bone-crushing teams of 1930, '31 and '32 mighty tough outfits by his tireless work with the scrubs.

Flying Instructor

Jimmy graduated in 1934 and entered the Navy in 1935, just seven years ago this month, his father says. Of recent years he had been a flying instructor at Pensacola, Norfolk and on the West Coast. Two months ago he went to Pearl Harbor. The official dispatches say his was one of 15 torpedo planes which went out alone without fighter protection to meet the Jap invasion. Not one of these planes returned. Of approximately 30 men in the squadron only one was saved. The others are reported "missing."

His parents last heard from Owens in late May. They've had five of their letters returned. Two years ago Jimmy was married to Helen Marie Ross, a Trojan graduate.

Fervently hoping that by some miracle their Jimmy may still be alive on one of the many islands adjacent to the Midway battle area, Mr. and Mrs. Owens gain some small comfort in the knowledge that their son carried out his mission with all the courage and skill of a true champion. For Lieut. Jimmy Owens and his pals dealt the first knockout blow to the invading Japanese fleet – probably at the cost of their lives.

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California) - 08 Jan 1943, Fri - Page 33

FLYER'S WIDOW PLACES PLAQUE HONORING HIS HEROISM Navy Dedicates S.C. Buildings

In honor of three of America's war heroes, the Navy yesterday dedicated buildings on the University of Southern California campus where naval cadets will receive preflight training preparing them for combat aviation against the foes of freedom.

In a brief, simple ceremony witnessed by the 250 men of the 1st battalion --- vanguard of the 600 who will comprise the first class – the Navy dedicated Owens Hall, Newkirk Hall and Henderson Hall on the SC campus.

Owens Hall, formerly the Sigma Chi Fraternity house, honors the memory of Lieut. James C. Owens, Jr., S.C. graduate who as executive officer of famed Torpedo Squadron 8 went to a hero's death in the Battle of Midway. The sole survivor of the 15 pilots and 15 gunners in the squadron, Lieut. (j.g.) George Gay Jr., is again at sea with another naval aviation unit. Owens Hall was dedicated by pretty Helen Owens, widow of the flyer, who told the battalion: "I hope you'll all be as happy in the Navy as Jimmy was – and good luck to you."

Also present were Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Owens Sr., Mrs. Helen Moore, wife of Lieut. Benjamin (Benny) Moore, former flying mate of Lieut. Owens, and 4-year old Marilyn (Mandy) Moore. The Navy was represented by Lieut. John E. Canaday of the Naval Aviation Cadet Selection Board and Lieut. (j.g.) J.A. McDevitt, officer in charge of the school.

Newkirk Hall, formerly Aneas Hall, honors the late Capt. John (Scarsdale Jack) Newkirk, former Navy pilot who became an American Volunteer Group hero in China, where he was killed.

Henderson Hall, a former apartment house, honors Maj. Loftus P. Henderson, Marine Corps flyer, who dived his plane into a Jap cruiser in the Solomons. The University of Southern California is one of 20 colleges throughout the country with which the Navy has contracted for the ground training of its aviation cadets.

(Bio compiled and articles transcribed by G47)

Family links:

Spouse:

Helen Marie Ross Blair (1911 - 1988)*

*Calculated relationship

Note: Entered the service from California.

Burial:

Honolulu Memorial *

Honolulu

Honolulu County

Hawaii, USA

Plot: Courts of the Missing

*Cenotaph [?]

Maintained by: G47

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Record added: Aug 06, 2010

Find A Grave Memorial# 56118393