



OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE

Colleagues, HCR 4 honors Lieutenant Commander Neil Swarhout for heroic acts as a United States Navy pilot during World War II and the Korean War.

I first learned of the heroics of Mr. Swarhout through a conversation with a great friend and former colleague from Happy Valley. I quickly researched my local Gresham Outlook Newspaper and read the story authored by my dear friend and constituent Anne Endicott. The article captured the spirit of a humble man that unless you knew his story, you would never know he's a war hero and a distinguished recipient of the Navy Cross, the second highest decoration for valor next to the Medal of Honor.

Neil Swarhout was born in Wisconsin, March 14, 1922 and moved to St. Helens, Oregon in 1928. He graduated high school in 1940 and was working at Fir-Tex, a forest product processing plant, where he earned what he described as a whopping 66 and a half cents per hour. In September of 1941 he enrolled in Oregon State College and shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, feeling inspired by the national patriotism, he enlisted in the Navy in March of 1942. He claims to have chosen the Navy because he favored sleeping in white sheets instead of tents and enrolled in the Naval Aviation Cadet Program to become a pilot because he looked lousy in bell bottoms.

He received his Golden Wings in 1943 and was trained as a dive bomber. Lt. Commander Swarhout and his squadron were aboard the U.S.S. Hancock, where he carried out numerous attacks on Japanese targets.

He was awarded his first Air Medal for his heroic acts when the USS Franklin laid dead in the water, within 50 miles of the Japanese coastline following an attack by a suicide bomber. Lt. Commander Swarhout pursued a Japanese Mitsubishi G4M bomber making a run at the disabled ship, following the plane through flames and debris to sea and ensuring it was out of action. In his own words he states he "shot down a Japanese plane trying to make a suicide run on the Franklin." He said he was "so close to this guy the bullets were converging in front of him and he could have chewed him up with his propeller."

But it would be his efforts under fire that would earn him the Navy Cross and I quote

Quoting from a military blog site referred to as the debrief,

The official citation states the Navy Cross was awarded to Swarhout, "For extraordinary heroism," in operations against enemy Fleet units at Kure Harbor, on July 28, 1945.

"Lieutenant Junior Grade Swarhout made a skillful and courageous bombing run upon an enemy battleship scoring a direct hit with a 1,000 pound bomb, despite accurate and intense anti-aircraft fire from enemy warships and shore batteries. His attack contributed materially to the heavy damage inflicted upon the enemy vessel. His outstanding courage and determined skill were at all times inspiring and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

That's how the US Navy characterized his efforts, but Lt. Commander Swarhout himself stated "I got a hit on a battleship and they gave me the Navy Cross"

Colleagues, please join me in recognizing those that have served from our greatest generations and specifically honoring Lt. Commander Neil Swarhout with the passage of HCR 4.

