

Howard Spencer Bartlett, Jr.

Born: January 5, 1923
Hometown: Fresno, CA
Class: 1944
Service: USNR
Position / Rank: Jr. Division Officer/ Ensign
Date / Place of death: May 11, 1945 / Okinawa
Date / Place of burial: May 12, 1945 / Buried at sea
/ Tablets of the Missing,
Honolulu Memorial, Honolulu,
HI.
Age: 22



Howard S. Bartlett was appointed Cadet, Merchant Marine Reserve on June 3, 1942. Crew lists on file in New York, NY indicate that he signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS George B. McClellan at San Francisco, CA on June 30, 1942 and signed off articles at New York, NY on April 3, 1943 after a voyage from Oran. Following his graduation from Kings Point in 1944, Howard Bartlett was commissioned an Ensign, USNR and reported for active duty. He reported aboard the USS Bunker Hill (CV 17), on December 7, 1944 at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. According to the Bunker Hill's Log Book, Ensign Bartlett was assigned as a Junior Division Officer, although which Department and Division he was assigned to is not indicated.



USS Bunker Hill - April 1945

The USS Bunker Hill sailed from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard on January 24, 1945 and was on duty with the Fifth Fleet's Carrier Task Force by mid-February when it launched air strikes on the Japanese home islands of Honshu and Nasei Shoto. These strikes were followed by supporting attacks for the invasion of Okinawa. On April 7, 1945 aircraft from the Bunker Hill and other Fifth Fleet aircraft carriers ended the last sea battle of the war by sinking the Japanese battleship Yamato. In the following weeks the Bunker Hill's aircraft defended the surrounding fleet from attacks by Japanese kamikaze suicide planes and supported ground troops in action on Okinawa.

On the morning of Friday, May 11, 1945 the Bunker Hill was the flagship of Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher's Fifth Fleet and was maneuvering as part of Task Group 58.3 with the USS Essex (CV 9) and other ships. By 0930 that morning, after 58 straight days in action, the ship's crew had already gone to General Quarters three times since 2am. At about 0510, around dawn, the Bunker Hill began launching aircraft. By 0940 most of the aircraft launched earlier in the morning by the Bunker Hill earlier had returned on board and were being serviced on the flight deck or on the hangar deck.



USS Bunker Hill - May 11, 1945

Twenty-five minutes later, apparently without warning since the ship was not at General Quarters, the USS Bunker Hill was hit by a Japanese Zero fighter that slipped through low cloud cover, dropped its bomb and then crashed just aft of #3 Elevator. A minute later a second Zero suicide plane and its bomb hit at the #2 Elevator. The bombs and gasoline aboard the kamikazes set off additional

explosions and fires in the aircraft parked on the flight deck and in the hangar deck below.

For the next two hours the surviving crew fought to control and extinguish the fires and keep the ship afloat. The flames were so intense and wide spread that escorting

destroyers came alongside to rescue men who could not get through the flames to safety. The fire and explosions eventually caused the abandonment of Fire Rooms #1 and #2 and the Forward Engine Room. By 1630 the fires were out and the USS Bunker Hill was capable of moving under its own power. However, the badly damaged ship was no longer capable of functioning as a combat vessel. As a result Vice Admiral Mitscher and the survivors of his staff were transferred to the USS Enterprise.

On Saturday, May 12, 1945 the USS Bunker Hill began counting its dead while continuing to treat the wounded and working to keep their ship afloat. Between 1pm and 7pm the ship held three burial at sea services for its 351 honored dead, including Ensign Howard S. Bartlett, USNR.

Ensign Howard S. Bartlett, USNR was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. For its actions prior to and during Ensign Bartlett's service aboard, the USS Bunker Hill was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. Cadet-Midshipman Howard Bartlett earned the Atlantic War Zone, Pacific War Zone and Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bars, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter for his merchant marine service.

Howard S. Bartlett was the oldest of Howard S. Bartlett, Sr. and Stella May Pheley Bartlett's two sons. Howard's little brother, Robert, was six years younger. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, both of Howard's parents worked outside the home. Howard, Sr. worked for the local power company as a repairman while Stella worked as an assistant instructor for the local schools.