

Story about Lieut. Melvin C. Roach.  
Written by James Reilly.

Early in 1940 Lieutenant Melvin C. Roach was on the Enterprise and then to Henderson Field. From there he went back to Norfolk. Then did a tour around the country with Butch O'Hare. Betty being his wife told James Reilly that their picture was in Mayor Daley's office in Chicago for years and years. After that he went aboard the Essex just before the ship pulled out of Norfolk. Aboard the Essex he was with Air Group VF-15.

Background of who I am and how I have this information:

My mother began nursing school at Norfolk General Hospital in 1939 where she met Betty Watkins and they began a friendship that lasted until Betty's death in March 1999. Betty was Melvin's widow. She knew me since I was born in 1952 and was almost like my second mother. She even dated my father during his brief breakup with my mother during the war and before Melvin.

When Betty found out she was dying she called my mom and asked her to come see her and to bring me. She knew I was a lover of things navy (my own father was a 30 yr + navy officer who died from WWII injuries) and that's why she asked me to come to.

She took out a chest she'd kept all those years and said she wanted me to have it. She also put in there some of her own personal items, her nursing school photo, her nursing hat, and other pictures. In the box was everything she had of Melvin's; photos, his flight log, documents, his own type written story and some other personal effects. Melvin brought her a Japanese Kimono, which she was buried in. She died with a photograph of Melvin on her chest.

Newspaper article tells of Melvin finding Haven on Jap-Occupied Island. For tales of high adventure between sky and sea just took up Lieut. Melvin C. Roach, navy fighter pilot. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, a medal at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, May 31, for heroism in aerial action in the battle of Midway, June 1942. He was cited for "a daring attack at great personal risk against enemy aircraft, approaching the USS Yorktown.

Comments from one who knew Melvin.

I knew of Lt. Roach. He was one of our best pilots. He had crashed shortly after take off dead ahead of our carrier. There was no trace of him. He was flying # 34. He was very well respected by all of us. The target that day was a convoy just out of Saipan. I'm sure that destroyers tried to locate him and his plane, but to no luck. I wish I could be of more help. By Elmer Cordray