



## Robert W. Duncan

December 20, 1920 - October 12, 2013

Robert W. Duncan, age 92, lifelong resident of Marion, IL except for the time he served in the Navy, passed away peacefully with his family by his side at 10:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 12, 2013, at his home.

He was born in Marion, IL on Monday, December 20, 1920, the son of Absalom Wesley and Nellie Mae (Drake) Duncan.

Robert attended school in Marion and was a graduate of Marion High School. After his graduation he continued his education by attending Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, IL for 3 years until he enlisted in the United States Navy during the time of WW II thus beginning a long 26 year military career. He had no idea that his exploits as a World War II flying ace would be documented in history books for years to come.

At age 21, he joined the United States Navy and became one of the original members of the "Fighting Five" of the USS Yorktown (CV-10) called "The Fighting Lady".

Duncan and other members of his squadron flew the brand-new F6F Grumman Hellcat fighter planes from the deck of the ship. On August 31, 1943, Duncan saw his first combat at Marcus Island, a small, triangle-shaped atoll less than 1,000 miles from Tokyo. "We caught them asleep on the ground," said Duncan. "They didn't get any planes in the air but those guys on the ground were good gunners. They put a hole right in my left wing a foot or so up from the aircraft." That was the first time that anyone had shot at Duncan, much less hit him, and although he often came back from later missions with damage to his plane, at the time it was a new experience for him.

Duncan saw his first aerial combat at Wake Island, where the young pilot launched in a driving rain, cutting visibility down to almost nothing. "You could hardly see the plane you were flying wing on," said Duncan. The planes popped out of the squall line into a cloudy sky and Duncan immediately spotted a Japanese Zero. After the fierce battle with his two kills, Duncan was the first pilot flying from the Yorktown to down an enemy plane, a claim he can back up with a bottle of Old Crow, a gift from the squadron's commanding officer, that Duncan still has never opened. He also was the first pilot ever to shoot down an enemy plane with the brand-new F6F Grumman Hellcat Fighter Plane.

It would be during a large battle at Truk Island, called the "Japanese Pearl Harbor," that Duncan would earn for himself the right to another claim, that of "Fighter Ace". Duncan

shot down two more Zeros that day and received the Navy's highest honor, the Navy Cross, for, in the words of Admiral C. W. Nimitz, "extraordinary heroism...skilled airmanship, courage and gallant devotion to duty in the face of overwhelming fighter opposition."

Duncan continued to serve in the Navy, eventually downing two more planes for a total of seven and earning two Distinguished Flying Crosses, eight Air Medals and various others medals. One of his hits was taking out Warrant Officer Toshiyuki Sueda, a Japanese ace who had shot down nine American planes.

In total, Duncan had seven kills during air-to-air combat on his tour in the Pacific and destroyed another six enemy aircraft on the ground. He also took out one Japanese ship. That record earned him the distinction of one of the first flying aces in the war. To be designated an ace; a pilot had to shoot down at least five aircraft.

Duncan is credited with flying more than 100 missions during World War II and the Korean War.

In between WWII and the Korean War, Robert enrolled for 1 year at Washington University's Law School of St. Louis, MO.

He ended his 26 year military career in 1966, being honorably discharged with the rank of Naval Captain.

He also was featured in 2007 by having a part in the History Channel's feature series called "Dogfights" about WW II fighter pilots.

Robert was united in marriage to Evelyn Russell on Sunday, March 7, 1943, in Baton Rouge, LA and together they have shared over 70 years of marriage.

After his retirement from the military he became a real-estate broker with Rodd Realty of Marion, IL for several years.

He has been a longtime member of the First Baptist Church of Marion, IL.

Robert served as Chairman of the Williamson County Regional Airport Board for 21 years, served as President of the Illinois Regional Airport Association and was Vice President of Central Technology Inc. of Herrin, IL. He also was a member of the Marion Elks Club B.P.O.E. No. 800, was a 32nd Degree Mason and was a lifetime member of the Marion V.F.W. Heyde-Pillow Post No. 1301.

In 2001, he was awarded the "Lifetime Achievement Award" by the Marion Area Chamber of Commerce at the annual dinner.

He is survived by his wife, Evelyn Duncan of Marion, IL; daughter and son-in-law, Janice L. and Scott Magruder of Hattiesburg, MS; son, Steven L. Duncan of Marion, IL; grandson, David Magruder and wife, Crystal of Florence, AL; granddaughter, Heather Townsend and husband, Brian of Hattiesburg, MS; two great granddaughters, Devon Hayley Magruder and Madalynn Grace Magruder, other extended family and many friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents and brother, Carl Duncan. Arrangements for Robert W. Duncan have been entrusted to the Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home, 900 N.

Court Street, of Marion, IL.

The time of visitation was from 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 16th, at the funeral home.

The funeral service was at 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 17, 2013, at Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home with Dr. Bob Dickerson presiding.

A letter about memories of Mr. Duncan written to the family by Mayor Robert Butler was read by Dr. Dickerson.

The prelude and postlude musical selections were presented by pianist, Byron Corzine. Special vocal musical selections presented during the service were "Blessed Assurance" and "In the Garden" both by vocalist, Brian Summers with pianist, Byron Corzine. Also presented was "Because He Live" as a congregational hymn, led by Brian Summers with pianist, Byron Corzine accompanying. Recorded musical selections presented were "Go Rest High On That Mountain" by Vince Gill and the Naval Hymn "Anchors Aweigh" to conclude the service.

Interment followed in Barham Cemetery of Marion, IL.

Pallbearers were Joni Simonsen, Rene F. DeGroof, Darin McCollum, David Magruder, David Morgan and Brian Townsend.

Military honors were accorded at the graveside by members of Heyde-Pillow V.F.W. Post No. 1301, American Legion Post No. 147 and Illinois National Guard Flag Detail all of Marion, IL.

Those participating were Commander, Dan Fruge; Chaplain, Ernie Rinella; Officer of the Day, Pat Campbell; Bugler, Jim Grieme; National Colors, Bill Reynolds; VFW Colors, Wayne O'Connor; Color Guard, Bill Rice and Jessie James; Firing Squad, Don Burgrabe, Ron Ganzer, Bill Hampsey, Bill Hatfield, Fred Read, Ron Russell and George Trammell. Members of the Illinois National Guard Flag Detail participating in the folding of the flag were

SGT Jeremie Moon and SGT David Kemner.

During the folding of the flag the recorded hymn "America the Beautiful" was presented.

The folded flag was presented to Mr. Duncan's wife, Evelyn by SGT Jeremie Moon.

Also at the cemetery committal service there was an aircraft fly-over in honor of Mr. Duncan's long military service.

For those who preferred, memorial contributions were made to "Disabled American Veterans of Marion". Memorial contribution envelopes were available at the funeral home or mailed in care of Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home, P.O. Box 370, Marion, IL, 62959.

For additional information please contact the funeral home by calling 618-993-2131.

# Cemetery

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**Rose Hill Cemetery**  
1445 North Court Street  
Marion, IL, 62959

# Events

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**OCT 16 Visitation** 05:00PM - 07:00PM  
Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home  
900 N. Court St., Marion, IL, US, 62959

**OCT 17 Funeral Service** 02:00PM  
Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home  
900 N. Court St., Marion, IL, US, 62959

# Comments

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“ Both my husband, Guy "Pete" Peterson, and i extend our deepest sympathy. Not only did you lose a husband/father, the world lost a legend. Again, sympathy.

**Guy and Yolonde Peterson** - November 05, 2013 at 05:58 PM

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“ Condolences to the family and prayers the Good Lord holds you all close at this time.... also on a personal note: THANK YOU for the bravery, sacrifice, and service of this great man. We raise a long slow Salute! to you Sir... Fly on... Godspeed and God bless.

To a true American Hero... well done... much respect  
Salute!  
wes bennett and family



**Wes Bennett** - October 14, 2013 at 11:27 AM

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“ Condolences to the family... and prayers for Peace. May God hold you close at this difficult time... and to the family on a personal note.. THANK YOU, on behalf of all who have benefited from this man, his bravery and sacrifice. We raise a long slow Salute! in your honour.

Fly On Sir... Godspeed  
Wes Bennett n Family



**Wes Bennett** - October 14, 2013 at 11:17 AM

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“ Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home lit a candle in memory of Robert W. Duncan



**Wilson-McReynolds Funeral Home** - October 13, 2013 at 04:56 PM



“ My condolences to the family of Mr Duncan

**Roscoe Dellinger** - October 16, 2013 at 10:30 AM