

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Black Sheep Squadron pilot remembered : Ceremony honors Ken Linder as a hero of World War II

BEN SMITHWICK, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

February 10, 2012 12:49 PM

About 50 people gathered Thursday at the Veterans Memorial Building to honor World War II Marine veteran and Carpinteria resident former Capt. Ken "Lindy" Linder, who died last September.

Mr. Linder served in the Black Sheep Squadron, VMF 214 in Okinawa, where, in 1945, he took part in the invasion of Okinawa.

Friends and family members celebrated his life at the ceremony, which featured several speakers and the presentation of a U.S. flag to Mr. Linder's wife of 67 years, Mickie.

A detailed history of his military career was presented by Jose Ramirez, a retired Army major. Mr. Linder began as a 19-year-old taking aviation classes at Pasadena Junior College in 1941.

"Upon learning of the raid on Pearl Harbor he dropped what he was doing," Mr. Ramirez said, describing Mr. Linder's decision to join the armed forces.

Shortly after enlisting, Mr. Linder entered the U.S. Navy's Aviation Cadet Training Program. In 1943 he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps.

He was later promoted to the rank of captain was assigned to the Marine Corps Air Station in Santa Barbara, where he joined Squadron VMF 214. The UCSB campus now sits on the grounds of the air station.

According to Mr. Ramirez, Mr. Linder was completing combat training in Santa Barbara before joining his squadron in 1945 on the carrier USS Franklin, which was headed to the South Pacific in support of the attack on Okinawa.

On March 19, 1945, the Franklin, which had maneuvered to within 40 miles of the Japanese mainland, was struck by an enemy bomber, killing 724 and wounding 265.

Mr. Linder and a fellow Corsair pilot were credited with shooting down the enemy plane after it pulled up from the bomb drop.

Upon returning to Santa Barbara, Mr. Linder enrolled in UCSB and joined the reserve forces, flying out of the Santa Barbara air station for a number of years. He left the service in 1951.

Mr. Linder's son, John, spoke briefly, expressing his gratitude for the memorial.

"He was a great family man," the younger Mr. Linder told attendees, his voice breaking. "The most important thing was his family."



Bagpiper Bill Boetticher opens the memorial for former Marine Capt. Ken Linder on Thursday at the Veterans Memorial Building. MICHAEL MORIATIS/NEWS-PRESS



Mickie Linder, widow of former Capt. Ken Linder, holds her hand to her heart during the playing of taps.

MICHAEL MORIATIS/NEWS-PRESS

Former Navy pilot and Vietnam War veteran John Blankenship met Mr. Linder in the 1990s at a meeting of the Alan Armstrong Squadron, a local social group for veterans.

Mr. Blankenship said Mr. Linder was supportive of the Pierre Claeysens Veterans' Museum and Library, which houses a collection of artwork, memorabilia and histories of South Coast veterans.

"I salute Ken Linder for his service to his country, for a life well lived and for creating a beautiful family who are here today to honor his memory," Mr. Blankenship said.

Mr. Blankenship said Mr. Linder was active with the local Elks and Kiwanis clubs and he helped raised the funds to build the Santa Barbara Family YMCA on Hitchcock Way.

Retired Marine Brig. Gen. Fred Lopez, a longtime friend of Mr. Linder, told the NEWS-PRESS that he was a modest man with an excellent war record. He praised Mr. Linder's ability to tell wartime stories in a way that helped others understand his experiences.

"Most soldiers, Marines and sailors really don't want to talk about their wartime experience for various reasons" he said. "It is up to us to honor them in some way."

email: bsmithwick@newspress.com



Ken Linder is shown in 2011 with a picture of a Corsair F-4U landing on an aircraft carrier. Mr. Linder flew Corsairs in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS FILE



Black Sheep Squadron VMF 214 is shown at the old Santa Barbara Marine Corps Air Station.

Ken Linder, front left, is shown at Boeing's Museum of Flight in Seattle with other members of the Black Sheep Squadron.

COURTESY PHOTOS