

COMMANDER DON L. ELY
UNITED STATES NAVY

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Don Lelo Ely was born in Maquoketa, Iowa, on August 28, 1916, son of Claude H. and Hazel M. (Grant) Ely. He attended Los Angeles (California) City College (Associate Arts) and the University of Southern California, where he was a graduate of primary and secondary CAA pilot training courses in 1937. Prior to entering the Naval Service on February 17, 1941, he was employed by a family-owned Paper Box Company in Los Angeles. After instruction at the Naval Reserve Base, Long Beach, California, and flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, he was commissioned Ensign on September 3, 1941, and was designated Naval Aviator on October 28, 1941 at Miami, Florida. He subsequently advanced in rank to that of Commander, to date from October 1, 1953.

From October 28, 1941 until April 1942 he was a student in the Advanced Carrier Training Group, and from April until November 1942 was a pilot in Bombing Squadron SIX based on the USS ENTERPRISE operating in the Pacific. For seven months thereafter he remained in the South and Central Pacific as a pilot of Bombing Squadron FIVE of the USS YORKTOWN. For service in the two assignments he is entitled to the Ribbon and Stars for, and facsimiles of the Presidential Unit Citations to the USS ENTERPRISE and the USS YORKTOWN, and was personally awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, a Gold Star in lieu of the second Air Medal; and the Silver Star Medal. The citations follow in part:

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroic achievement in aerial flight as a pilot of an airplane of Bombing Squadron SIX in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Battle of Midway, June 4-6, 1942. In a dive bombing attack against enemy Japanese Naval forces, Ensign Ely defied their intense anti-aircraft fire to dive his plane in a resolute and purposeful attack, contributing decisively to the victory of our forces. His extreme courage, tenacity and complete disregard for his own life in executing difficult and dangerous mission were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U. S. Naval Services."

Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement in aerial flight as pilot of a Dive Bomber Plane...at Wake Island on October 5, 1943. Despite intense anti-aircraft fire which damaged his plane, Lieutenant Ely pressed home a bold dive bombing attack and by scoring a direct hit on a gasoline s. w. g. deprived the enemy of a desperately needed fuel..."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight...in action against enemy Japanese forces at Truk Island, February 16 and 17, 1944... (He) led his flight to the harbor despite intense fire from anti-aircraft emplacement and shore batteries and the presence of enemy fighter planes. Diving to a low altitude, he scored a direct hit on an armed merchantman which was later confirmed as sunk...He contributed to the infliction of extensive destruction on enemy shipping during these attacks..."

Silver Star Medal: "For gallantry and intrepidity as Leader of a Flight of Bombers in Bombing Squadron FIVE, attached to the USS YORKTOWN, during operations in support of the occupation of Hollandia, April 23, 1944...Lieutenant Ely directed the aircraft under his command in a precision attack upon the Japanese position, despite concentrated enemy antiaircraft opposition, which resulted in several personnel and equipment losses inflicted on the enemy. Leading two large strikes at Truk on April 29 and 30, he skillfully directed the bombing of assigned target areas in brilliantly planned attacks executed with devastating results..."

In June 1944 he reported to the Naval Air Station, Los Alamitos, California, where he served as Assistant Operations Officer until August 1946, and for ten months thereafter, he was Staff Public Information Officer to Chief Naval Reserve Training. He had instruction at the Combat Information Center School, Point Loma, California, from June to October 1947, after which he was assigned to Attack Squadron 155, based on the USS BOXER, and later on the USS VALLEY FORGE, with duty first as Executive Officer, and from December 1948 until December 1949 in command. During the year to follow he was a student at the General Line School.

Six months' duty as Staff Public Information Officer to the Chief, Naval Air Basic Training, Pensacola, Florida, preceded sea duty, beginning in June 1951 as Air Officer of the USS SAIPAN (CVL 48). He was detached in December 1953 with orders to the Naval Intelligence School, where he was a student for sixteen months. Since June 1955 he has been U. S. Naval Attache and U. S. Naval Attache for Air to Iran, with residency at Teheran.

In addition to the Silver Star Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Gold Star in lieu of the second award, Commander Ely has the American Defense Service Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; with one silver and one bronze star (six engagements); American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the National Defense Service Medal.