

## Vane "Speed" Harrison



Vane "Speed" Harrison was born in Morocco, IN on August 28, 1917 in the, then, Morocco Train Depot; his father, Charles, and his mother Nellie were living in the depot along with Vane's older brother, Herschel, as Vane's father was the agent there at the time. Later the family moved into a home in Morocco. While in high school Vane was given the nickname "Speedie", by the HS principal, and that was later shortened to just Speed, apparently due to his slow, easy going ways. During his time at Morocco High School, Speed was involved in sports and graduated from high school in 1935.

On July 18, 1942 Vane received a telegram to report for service. After receiving the notice, Vane enlisted in the Navy and reported to Great Lakes Naval Base in November 1942 for basic training, and then on to San Diego, California for navigator training. Vane found out that he was the only candidate for training that passed the required testing without a college degree. Vane enlisted in the Navy with the intent on taking flight training, but with the Navy so short on qualified navigators, he was steered in that direction with the promise of flight training as soon as it would be possible. After graduation from training, Vane was sent to the island of Attu in the Aleutian Islands off Alaska, where he served as navigator in a Ventura Bomber, telling his daughter, Karen, that without today's GPS, they had to use only the stars to navigate; no equipment. He was part of 4 bombing missions over Japan.

Vane was attached to the Naval unit with their squadron name being "The Empire Night Express". The Navy chose that for a Bomber base location as it was the shortest distance by air to the bases to be bombed in Japan. Weather conditions were very cold and foggy and many planned flights had to be cancelled due to the poor weather conditions. At that time there was no heat in the planes.



Vane received a commendation letter from James Forrester, Secretary of the Navy reading ... "For meritorious achievement in aerial flight as Navigator of a Ventura Bomber during the first night Photo-Reconnaissance Bombing Mission by Aleutian-Based Landplanes to the Northern Kurile Islands on January 20, 1944". Ultimately, Vane was part of 4 bombing missions over Japan.

The Navy honored their promise and, after the war ended, Vane was sent to Pensacola, Florida for pilot training. First in a PBY and then in a fighter jet. He had planned to re-enlist, but life happened and he was honorably discharged on December 21, 1945.



Vane married his wife, Anna Maniak of Gary Indiana, and they had one daughter, Karen Harrison McClatchey. Vane lived the rest of his life in Morocco, Indiana. He Joined the Morocco American Legion Post 146 after returning home and was a Charter member, serving more than once as Post Commander. Vane passed away on June 19, 2012 and is buried in the Oakland Cemetery, Morocco, along with his parents and Two brothers and his wife.



## THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the AIR MEDAL to

LIEUTENANT, JUNIOR GRADE, VANE HARRISON  
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

“For meritorious achievement in aerial flight as Navigator of a Ventura Bomber during the first night Photo-Reconnaissance Bombing Mission by Aleutian-Based Landplanes to the Northern Kurile Islands on January 20, 1944. With full knowledge of the hazards involved due to extremely adverse weather, the limited range of the aircraft, and the probability of heavy Japanese opposition, Lieutenant, Junior Grade (then Ensign) Harrison volunteered for this pioneer mission over enemy home islands. His outstanding skill and loyal devotion to the accomplishment of a mission pointing toward future offensive operations against the Japanese were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

For the President,

*James Forrester*

Secretary of the Navy





***Ventura Bomber - Navigator***



***PBY - Pilot***