

# ROBERT HENRY MCARDLE

CAPTAIN  
U.S. MARINE CORPS

WORLD WAR II  
1920 - 1944

WRITTEN BY CALEB DUSSART, KASSIE SWIGER, AND GABRIEL YOUNG  
GRAFTON HIGH SCHOOL  
INSTRUCTED BY REBECCA BARTLETT

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**Robert “Bob” Henry McArdle** was born in Akron, Summit County, Ohio, on March 24, 1920, to Joseph and Pearl (Yardley) McArdle. During the early years of Robert’s life, the family lived at 804 Owners Street in Akron, where his father worked as a tire builder. Despite both of Robert’s parents being born and raised in Pennsylvania, their move to Ohio in the late 1910s corresponds with Akron’s growing rubber industry. Between 1910 and 1920, companies like B. F. Goodrich, Goodyear, and Firestone, which were all located in the “Rubber Capital of the World,” sent recruiters to neighboring states in search of robust men to pull and build tires by hand. Through this difficult occupation, Joseph was able to support his wife and three sons, Joseph “Bonner,” Robert, and Lee, and make enough money for the family to own their Akron home despite having a mortgage against it.

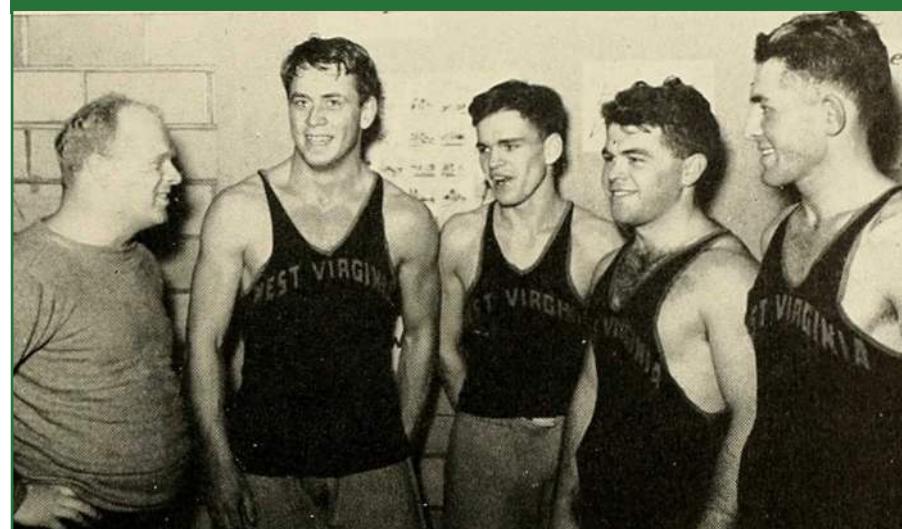
Possibly due to the horrendous working and safety conditions in the rubber factories, by 1930 Robert’s father had moved the family back to Fayette County, Pennsylvania. Here the McArdles rented a home in Filbert, where Joseph worked as a foreman for the Henry Clay Frick Coke Company at the Palmer, Filbert, and Ralph coal mines. At Filbert, Joseph oversaw the transportation of coal via an underground conveyor belt to the Monongahela River, where it was loaded onto barges at Palmer for shipment to the U.S. Steel mills in Pittsburgh. The Filbert mine encompassed approximately 3,000

acres and produced around 5,000 tons of coal each day, contributing to Frick’s substantial business empire.

Despite Robert’s youth occurring during one of the most difficult economic periods in American history, his parents were able to put food on the table throughout the Great Depression. By 1935, Joseph’s job as a mine foreman allowed the family to move to Morgantown, West Virginia, which gave Robert and his two brothers more opportunities compared to small-town Filbert. Robert grew up in Morgantown and attended Morgantown High School, where he was an active student and athlete. As a senior, Robert was appointed honorary captain of the wrestling squad by virtue of his undefeated record, and maintained positions in other athletic programs such as track and intramural boxing. He also took part in several academic programs, like the Science Club, Thespians, and Senior Follies. Additionally, Robert was a member of “Us and Company,” which worked to maintain “high scholastic and athletic standards as well as a neat personal appearance and originality in undertakings.” All these activities established Robert as a leader among his peers. His chiseled good looks were no hindrance either, and possibly were the reason why his fellow Marine pilots dubbed him “Hunky” McArdle.

Upon his high school graduation in 1937, Robert continued his education at West Virginia University, where he followed up on his wrestling endeavors. Living so close to WVU’s campus, his residence at Willey Street offered him the opportunity to walk to classes and the school’s sports facilities. In his second year, Robert stood out as one of the most consistent wrestlers on the team. This success was rewarded, with Robert serving as captain of the 1941 wrestling squad and ending his “collegiate career by winning all his

Bob McArdle (center) as part of the 1939 West Virginia University wrestling team, which he captained in 1941. *1939 WVU yearbook*



matches but one and leading the squad in scoring.” Robert also participated in WVU’s Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), at first in Company E, 2nd Battalion, and then Company H, of the 3rd Battalion. All these positions contributed to Robert’s leadership skills and helped him enter the U.S. Marines with rank.

After graduating college in 1941, Robert worked as a miner at the Pursglove Coal Mining Company for a short time. Despite supporting the war effort through his work as a miner, Robert came from a family willing to serve, with his older brother Bonner enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Corps and his younger brother Lee later enlisting in the Navy. Following in his older brother’s footsteps, Robert enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in October 1941, where he had to stay in fit condition to be called up at any moment. On July 25, 1942, Robert was commissioned as a second lieutenant at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Miami, Florida. Two days later, he was assigned to the Second Marine Air Wing of the Fleet Marine Force and was ordered to the Naval Air Station in San Diego, California.

Within a month of Robert’s arrival in San Diego, he received word that his father had passed away from a heart attack on August 29. At only 22 years old and unable to return home to mourn his father’s death, this moment must have been difficult for the young pilot. It would have also been challenging for Robert’s mother Pearl who had to grapple with the loss of her husband while her two oldest sons were actively serving in the U.S. military. Although Robert had not yet left for the Pacific theater of war, his older brother Bonner was serving overseas in England.

In October 1942, Robert was assigned to Air Regulating Squadron 2 (ARS-2), a unit designed to assist Marine pilots headed to the Pacific theater. Because of this, Robert was temporarily assigned to an Advanced Carrier Training Group (ACTG), where he participated in 75 hours of instruction and learned various flying techniques and plane operations. A key part of ACTG training was how to take off and land on aircraft carriers, something that would be critical for Marine dive bombers serving in the Pacific. Robert also learned the specifics of the Douglas Aircraft Company’s Dauntless scout dive-bomber. Pilots of these planes, along with their rear gunners, had to be in peak mental and physical condition to dogfight enemy aircraft or dive at targets to deliver 500- or 1000-pound bombs—all while staying alive.

Sometime in early 1943 McArdle married Marion L. Anglemyer, who had also attended Morgantown High School and graduated with Robert in 1937. While Robert was serving in the Marine Corps, Marion was working in Morgantown as a service representative for the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company. Although the specific date or place the two married is



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SBD Dauntlesses equipped for a bombing run. The Navy eventually phased out missions of the type that killed McArdle. NARA

unclear, Marion likely traveled to California for the nuptials while Robert was stationed in San Diego.

On January 7, 1943, Robert was assigned to the First Marine Air Wing of the Fleet Marine Force, Marine Scout Bomber Squadron 132 (VMSB-132), then attached to Marine Air Group 11 (MAG-11). Nicknamed the “Crying Red Asses,” VMSB-132 had already completed a tour in Guadalcanal before Robert and 197 other Marines joined the squadron. He departed from San Diego and arrived in Nouméa, New Caledonia, on January 28. From there, he boarded the USS *Allen* (DD-66) for transportation to Espiritu Santo Naval Base, where he arrived on February 1. The Pacific Island of Espiritu Santo is south of the Solomon Islands and is part of the New Hebrides archipelago, which was used as a base by the U.S. military throughout much of the Pacific War.

Throughout February, Robert and the rest of VMSB-132 trained in free gunnery, dive bombing, air tactics, and radio problems. Furthermore, each morning one pilot was required to complete a predawn aerology mission (gathering aerial weather data) while others took part in daily sector searches to check for enemy personnel. Throughout their operation on Espiritu Santo, the squadron prepared for a return to Guadalcanal, which was important in the Allies’ fight over control of the South Pacific’s Solomon Islands. From August 1942 to February 1943, the Allies had taken part in the first major land offensive against the Imperial Japanese in the Battle of Guadalcanal. After six months of heavy fighting and horrendous casualties, the Japanese

abandoned their efforts to retake Guadalcanal, the island was secured by Allied forces, and it became a crucial staging ground for future “island hopping” missions in the Pacific for the rest of the war.

Robert arrived in Guadalcanal on March 3, 1943. VMSB-132 was tasked with providing support for ground troops, and was responsible for attacking nearby Japanese bases and shipping. Throughout March, Robert took part in antisubmarine patrols and assisted with attacks on the Vila Airfield—a round-trip flight of over 400 miles—on which the Marine bombers dropped 1,000-pound “Daisy Cutter” bombs and scored hits on antiaircraft positions and bivouac areas. Located on the southeastern part of the Kolombangara Island, Vila Airfield was used as a forward airfield by the Japanese and was central to their position within the Solomon Islands. Even routine operations against enemy positions could be fatal, but McArdle’s participation in a March 18 attack on Vila Airfield turned especially eventful when Robert lost the exhaust from his plane’s engine. Luckily, he and his rear gunner successfully returned to Guadalcanal. VMSB-132 also took part in special convoy coverage, which protected Allied ships throughout the dangerous waters of the South Pacific. Robert formed a tight-knit group of friends in his squadron, who nicknamed him “Hunky McArdle.”

Along with the stressful bombing missions, VMSB-132 had to deal with poor food and difficult living conditions in Guadalcanal, slightly offset by nightly movies and a small amount of athletic equipment to pass their downtime. By April 1943, VMSB-132 was evacuated to Espiritu Santo where they took part in more training flights and squadron tactics, and practiced free and fixed gunnery attacks and night flying. Robert received a brief respite during this time when he was detached to nearby Australia for a period of rest and recovery. Following his return from Australia, McArdle accepted a temporary promotion to first lieutenant on April 22.

The squadron returned to Guadalcanal on June 22, 1943, where they took part in more air strikes against Japanese airfields. While potholing Japanese airstrips was important work, subsidiary attacks on antiaircraft guns turned out to be a fraught business. Late-war Navy calculations—formulated too late to affect VMSB-132 or Robert McArdle—determined that a dive bomber’s probability of directly hitting and destroying an antiaircraft gun was 300 to one. And, that a dive bomber needed to hit within 20 feet of the gun’s sandbag or concrete revetments for even a chance at success. These were the odds Robert and the other pilots in VMSB-132 were up against.

On June 30, Robert took part in yet another bombing mission against antiaircraft positions on Vila Airfield. The men reported antiaircraft fire was intense, which led to seven planes failing to return, including Robert’s Dauntless SBD-5. Robert’s section leader reported he last saw McArdle and his radio gunner, Private First Class Albert R. Irion, enter their dive, but found McArdle’s plane was missing when the squadron regrouped for their return flight. The squadron’s reports do not conclude that McArdle was hit by enemy

fire. However, the postwar memoir of squadron mate John McEniry, who was present on many missions with McArdle including this final run, states unequivocally that Robert was hit by antiaircraft fire.

Six planes were dispatched in search of the missing personnel, but the weather was exceptionally bad, and the searching planes were forced to return with unsuccessful results. Despite the other crew members returning within the week, McArdle and Irion remained unaccounted for, and the two were declared missing in action on June 30, 1943.

Robert’s family was notified soon after he went missing, and it was reported to the local newspapers that they feared he was dead. With Robert missing in action, the *Beckley Raleigh Register* explained there were now 27,106 Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard casualties reported to next of kin since the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The McArdles were one of 10,515 families clinging to hope that missing in action would not prove a fatal designation. Two years later, on June 30, 1945, Robert was declared dead, and his body was determined nonrecoverable.

Because of his heroic efforts as a United States Marine Corps dive bomber in World War II, Robert was posthumously awarded the rank of captain and received the Purple Heart for his service. He is also memorialized on the Tablets of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines. To honor her son’s service, Robert’s mother Pearl also requested a headstone to be installed in Grafton National Cemetery in 1961. Sadly, for Pearl, Robert was not the only son she outlived. Her oldest son, Joseph Bonner, was killed in 1968 in an automobile accident and her youngest son, Lee, died three months later in Vietnam. Men like Robert McArdle are a constant reminder of the cruel odds of war—and of the bravery required to face them.

Excerpts from the document that shows McArdle’s posthumous promotion, hitherto unreported. NARA

U.S.M.C. CASUALTY REPORT	DATE 3Jul45	CARD yes	CAS. NO. 060112
MCARDLE, Robert Henry	NAME Lt. Capt.	CLASS USMCR	IDENT. NO. 011818
ORGANIZATION POW AMP DET HQ USMC Washington, D.C.	TYPE OF CASUALTY MIA-KIA	AREA PAC	DATE OF CASUALTY 1Jul45
*Determined non-recoverable by Field Board 15Dec49. (mls)			
* Posthumous promotion. Auth MC Ltr of 23Apr46 to wife of Marine.			



**SOURCES** FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY TO BE INCLUDED IN FINAL VERSION

# SOURCES

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Full bibliographies will be included in the final draft of each biography, available later in the summer of 2024.

**The West Virginia National Cemeteries Project** is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council, funded in part by the Veterans Legacy Grant Program of the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and initiated in 2021. All biographies produced as part of this program are composed by West Virginia high school students, who conduct original research on veterans interred at the Grafton National Cemetery or the West Virginia National Cemetery, both of which are located in Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia.

As home to one of the nation's first National Cemeteries—founded shortly after the Civil War—the community of Grafton has longstanding traditions of honoring America's veterans, including the longest continuously celebrated Memorial Day parade in the United States. The Grafton National Cemetery, located in the heart of the city and founded in 1867, is typically the endpoint of each year's parade. Since the Grafton National Cemetery began to run short of space during the 1960s, the West Virginia National Cemetery was dedicated in 1987, just a few miles outside of Grafton.

The West Virginia Humanities Council is proud to thank the following organizations for their participation in the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project: West Virginia Archives and History, the West Virginia University history department, Taylor County Historical and Genealogical Society, Taylor County Public Library, Grafton High School, and University High School.

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