

Major Peyton S. Mathis Jr.

Commanding Officer, 44th Fighter Squadron, 18th Fighter Group, U.S. Army Air Forces

Born: May 23, 1915 (Montgomery, Alabama)

Died: June 5, 1944 (Ohiola Village, Guadalcanal Province, Solomon Islands)



(Historical Background)

Maj. Peyton S. Mathis, Jr. became the Commanding Officer of the 44th Fighter Squadron on 6 February 1944.

On the morning of 5 June 1944, 54 United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) aviators departed Munda and Guadalcanal to rendezvous along the northern coast of New Georgia in the central Solomon Islands. The combined forces of the 13th Fighter Command, equipped with P-38 Lightnings, intended to dive bomb Japanese gun positions in the Shortland-Poporang area of the northern Solomon Islands. At 0905 hours Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col) W. H. Council, the 18th Fighter Group commander, ordered a move toward the target area. Within minutes, Major (Maj) Peyton S. MATHIS, Jr., had lost power in his P-38J's right engine and dropped out of the formation. At approximately the same time, Brigadier General (Brig Gen) Earl W. Barnes, commander of the 13th Fighter Command, cancelled the mission. Major MATHIS subsequently feathered his right propeller, jettisoned his bombs, and turned back toward Guadalcanal with his squadron.

The 44th Fighter Squadron flew southeast until it reached Savo Island where Maj MATHIS instructed his pilots to commence landing at Kukum Field along Guadalcanal's north coast. The control tower requested that Kukum be readied for an emergency landing, but Maj MATHIS replied that the other pilots would land before him as his was not an emergency but a single-engine landing. After all other aircraft had alighted; Maj MATHIS circled Kukum Field and began his descent. Flying south over the water west of the field he began his final turn for landing, but suddenly straightened his course, disappeared behind the hills southwest of the airstrip, and crashed into a ravine. Search parties located Maj MATHIS's crash site on the afternoon of 5 June 1944. The rescuers, however, failed to recover the body as the cockpit rested under approximately seven feet of water in a "dense jungle swamp." On 10 February 1949, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company searched in the hills for the aircraft but could not locate it. Three days later the American Graves Registration Service (AGRS) declared Maj MATHIS unrecoverable.

On 25 August 2013, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) sent an Investigative Team to Guadalcanal. The team, with the assistance of two local individuals, traveled approximately 650 meters south of Ohiola to a location where two P-38 vertical stabilizers and part of a fuselage slightly protruded from a peaty swamp area southeast of Bloody Ridge. Between 26 November and 2 December 2013, a JPAC Recovery Team performed recovery operations at the crash site. On 6 December 2013, the JPAC-Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) accessioned possible human remains and later identified them as being that of Maj. Peyton MATHIS Jr.

Awards and Decorations

Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart (Posthumous), Air Medal with Numeral "10", American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one Silver Service Star, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one Bronze Service Star, World War II Victory Medal, and Pilot Wings.

Graveside Service and Interment with Full Military Honors

January 3rd, 2015 (Sat) @ 2pm

Greenwood Serenity Memorial Gardens, 909 Lincoln Rd, Montgomery, AL 36109

Funeral Director: Mr. Jeremy Wade, office (334) 272-3181