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James D. Ramage (COURTESY PHOTO)

4 hours ago • By PAT KINNEY, pat.kinney@wfcourier.com

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WATERLOO, Iowa --- A U.S. Navy rear admiral from Waterloo and a key figure in the history of American naval aviation has died.

James D. "Jig Dog" Ramage, who also was instrumental in the naming of Waterloo's Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center, died at his Coronado, Calif. home July 21, two days after his 96th birthday, the Coronado Eagle & Journal newspaper reported.

Ramage is one of the most decorated individuals in the history of U.S. naval air power, according to numerous military accounts and tributes.

"This guy was a real hero," said Waterloo attorney Ed Gallagher Jr., a fellow Navy World War II veteran who worked with Ramage on local projects. "He loved Waterloo. He really did."

Nicknamed "Jig Dog," his Navy call sign drawn from the semaphore pronunciation of his first and middle initials, Ramage grew up in the Highland area of east Waterloo and delivered The Courier there as a youth.

He graduated from East High School and attended what is now the University of Northern Iowa.

His grandfather, James Groat, served in the Union Army in the Civil War and later was elected mayor of Waterloo. His father, an auto dealer, served in the Spanish-American War.

During WWII, Ramage became commander of the carrier USS Enterprise's dive bomber squadron. He participated in 11 combat operations in the Pacific. He directed air attacks in the 1944 invasion of Saipan and was personally credited with crippling a Japanese carrier "and leaving it in a sinking condition." He also participated in the raid on Truk lagoon.

He served in the Korean and Vietnam wars and commanded aircraft carriers such as the USS Oriskany, attack wings and a carrier division in Vietnam in the Tonkin Gulf.

Ramage received the Navy's highest honor, the Navy Cross, as well as the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal, all for valor in combat. In 1988, he helped lead the campaign to rededicate and rename Waterloo's ConWay Civic Center as the Five Sullivan Brothers Convention Center, named for the Waterloo brothers who died together during World War II.

He donated a collection of his service ribbons and decorations to the Grout Museum and served as honorary co-chairman of its fund drive to build the \$11.5 million Sullivan Brothers Iowa Veterans Museum, which opened in 2008.

Ramage also lectured on World War II Pacific campaigns in conjunction with the Smithsonian Institution. In 2001, the annual "Jig Dog" Ramage Award recognizing excellence in Navy carrier operations was created and named for him. He also is a member of the Carrier Aviation Hall of Fame.

In 2006, Ramage was inducted into the American Combat Airman Hall of Fame in Midland, Texas, along with former President George H.W. Bush; Medal of Honor winner and former South Dakota Gov. Joe Foss; and Enola Gay pilot Paul Tibbets, whose crew dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Locally, Ramage was known for his affectionate boosterism of Waterloo and return trips here. He would return calls to The Courier, identifying himself by his old delivery route number.

At a speech during the convention center renaming in 1988, he began by booming into the microphone, "Waterloo, I love you."

Ramage was buried at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego.

Correction added (8/20): Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery was incorrectly spelled as Fort

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