

## Capt. Norman A. Sterrie (1911-2008)

*A Featured Veteran from St. James and Minneapolis, Minnesota*

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Captain Norm Sterrie had an exemplary flying record as a naval aviator during World War Two, earning three Navy Crosses and the Distinguished Flying Cross. He became a physician after the war and was instrumental in founding the Park Nicollet Medical Center which today has clinics in St. Louis Park, Minneapolis, and Brooklyn Center.

**Beginnings.** Norman A. Sterrie was born on November 14, 1911, in St. James, Minnesota. He grew up in St. James and, following high school, went on to Carleton College where he received a BA in 1939. Shortly thereafter, he

enlisted in the U.S. Navy and earned his gold Naval Aviator wings in June 1940 at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida.

**War in the Pacific.** He began his service in WWII flying TBM Devastator dive bombers. The first of his three Navy Crosses was earned on March 10, 1942, while serving on the USS *Lexington* (CV-2) as a member of Torpedo Squadron Two. The medal was awarded for participating in an attack that resulted in the sinking of at least one Japanese warship. His second Navy Cross came less than two months later during the Battle of the Coral Sea when, on May 8, 1942, he led an attack that severely damaged a Japanese aircraft carrier, contributing to its destruction. During that battle, the *Lexington* was so critically damaged that Sterrie was forced to abandon ship with the rest of the crew and the carrier was scuttled at sea. Sterrie had been among the last pilots managing to land his plane on deck, in the midst of heavy fighting. After the loss of the original *Lexington*, he was reassigned to a new carrier bearing the same name USS *Lexington* (CV-16).



Lt. Commander Sterrie, center, his radioman and gunner by his sides, stands with his TBM Avenger aboard USS *Lexington* (CV-16) in 1944.



At war's end in 1945.

Sterrie's third Navy Cross was awarded two years later during the First Battle of the Philippine Sea on June 20, 1944. Now a Lieutenant Commander, Sterrie was flying a TBM Avenger and was in charge of Torpedo Squadron Sixteen. He led an attack on the Japanese carrier *Shokaku* and achieved a direct hit which aided materially in its sinking. Ironically, the *Shokaku* had contributed to the destruction of Sterrie's first carrier, *Lexington* (CV-2) two years earlier. The battle, known as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot," destroyed over 600 Japanese aircraft. His other awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross and three Air Medals.

**A career in medicine.** After the war, he served with the U.S. Naval Reserve until 1959. While in the Reserves, Norman enrolled in the University of Minnesota's School of Medicine and received his MD degree in 1949. He became a pediatric allergist and by 1953 was on the staff of the St. Louis Park Medical Center. During the 1960s, he was chairman of the Center's building committee and played an instrumental role in expanding the clinic into the Park Nicollet Medical Center. He served as the clinic's physician-leader from 1970-1975 and retired from the medical profession in 1980.

**Later years.** In retirement, Dr. Sterrie enjoyed canoeing and biking. He was also an accomplished musician—he played the clarinet, saxophone, oboe, bassoon and cello—and was a member of several musical groups.



After 47 years of marriage, his beloved wife Betsy passed away. Dr. Sterrie passed away on December 31, 2008, at the age of 97. He was survived by a daughter and a son, two granddaughters, and five great grandchildren. He is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in St. James, Minnesota.

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*Norman Sterrie wrote an autobiography, edited by Al Zdon, entitled "Three Blue Crosses." It is available for sale in the museum store. To order, call 320-616-6050 or email [connect@mnmilitarymuseum.org](mailto:connect@mnmilitarymuseum.org)*