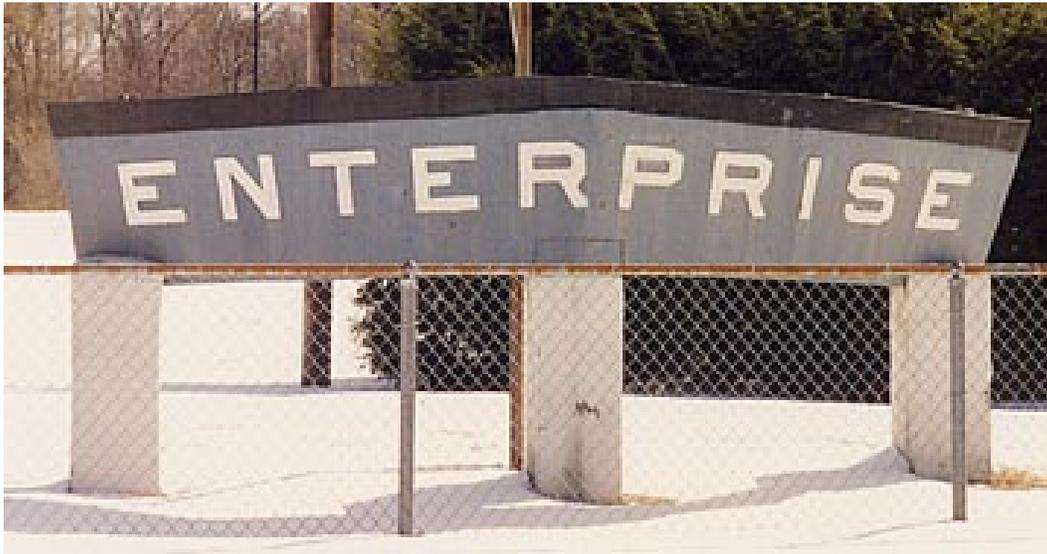


A MOST UNUSUAL AIRCRAFT CARRIER MEMORIAL

by Bill Lee

Improbably tucked away in the suburban community of River Vale, New Jersey is one of the few remaining tangible memories of NNS Hull Number 360 – the USS ENTERPRISE (CV-6). Here, behind the centerfield chain-link fence of a Little League ball field, rests a sizable portion of that famous vessel's stern with its raised white lettering clearly visible. The ballpark's flagstaff is located immediately behind – Old Glory still flies over the Big E.



This most unusual (and decidedly unofficial) memorial is primarily the result of one man's efforts; Henry Hoffmann, a ship demolition expert who first became known in maritime circles for dismantling the liner NORMANDIE at the end of World War Two. He was well aware of numerous efforts to preserve CV-6, the most decorated vessel in WWII, as a museum. But, when that campaign sadly failed and his employer purchased ENTERPRISE in 1958 for its scrap value, Hoffmann's assigned task for head and hands often gave way to the dictates of his heart.

Mr. Hoffmann was a self-taught engineer and a navy man who understood every seaman's feelings for ships in which they had served. Although his naval service was in the German Navy during World War One, Henry Hoffmann was disappointed that his adopted country let such a significant part of contemporary naval history disappear, so he did what he could to help preserve the memory of this famous aircraft carrier.

On several occasions during the scrapping process at Kearny, NJ he helped the Enterprise Association recover pieces of flight deck planking and other artifacts. When former crewmembers came for a last look, he bent the rules and provided tours. But Hoffmann was not just a friend to Big E crewmembers; he was a contributor to history as well.

Mr. Hoffmann quietly (and probably without permission) arranged to have a portion of the ship's fantail saved. A section some sixteen feet long and three feet high – with backing stiffeners intact and weighing over a ton – was moved to his hometown. On it reads the raised letters “**ENTERPRISE**”. This alone qualifies him for a place in the mythical hall of fame for light-fingered bluejackets. Just imagine him telling his “Chief” – Mrs. H – “Gee, I don’t know *where* that thing came from, maybe it fell off a truck”.

With community help, Hoffmann’s improbable treasure was placed at the local ballpark where his son played baseball, and then suitably dedicated. That ball field was subsequently renamed in honor of Henry Hoffmann, following his death in 1965. But even today, this unlikely memorial – the only significant portion of CV-6 that still remains – is well maintained and deservedly rests proudly under the flag that ENTERPRISE so ably defended over fifty years ago.

What better place could have been selected by this thoughtful immigrant-turned American to perpetuate the memory of the Big E than a facility devoted to providing young Americans an opportunity to learn about team spirit and fair play in a free society?

