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Adm. Robert E. Dixon, Hero of a Naval Battle

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Rear Adm. Robert E. Dixon, United States Navy, retired, who led an attack that sank the first Japanese aircraft carrier in World War II, died Wednesday.

He was 75 years old.

Admiral Dixon, whose message, "Scratch one flattop!" was quoted in nearly every account of the war in the Pacific, died at a Virginia Beach hospital.

Admiral Dixon was a lieutenant commander in charge of dive bombers on the carrier Lexington in the May 1942 Battle of the Coral Sea. He planted one of a dozen bombs that, with seven torpedoes, sank the Japanese carrier Shosho.

Stanley Johnston, war correspondent for The Chicago Tribune, was aboard the Lexington at the time of the attack on the Japanese ship and reported:

"All the tension on the carrier exploded the moment we heard Comdr. Dixon's voice come in strong and clear: 'Scratch one flattop! Dixon to carrier: Scratch one flattop.' "

Admiral Dixon was awarded the Navy Cross for his role. He later served aboard the carriers Yorktown, Enterprise, Saratoga and Bunker Hill, participating in most of the major carrier actions of the war.