

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER GODFREY DECOURCESES CHEVALIER
UNITED STATES NAVY, DECEASED

Godfrey DeCourcesses Chevalier, one of the Navy's early aviators, was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on March 7, 1889. He entered the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from the Eighth District of Massachusetts in 1906, and was graduated on June 3, 1910. After the period at sea required by law, he was commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Navy on March 7, 1912, and subsequently advanced in rank to that of Lieutenant Commander, to date from February 21, 1922.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1910, he was assigned to the USS NEW HAMPSHIRE, of the Second Division, Atlantic Fleet, and when commissioned Ensign, Early in 1912, was transferred to the USS PETREL, a gunboat also operating with the Atlantic Fleet. Later that year he was ordered to the USS CUMBERLAND, for duty in connection with the Naval Aviation Camp at the Naval Academy. There he completed a course in aviation. On March 10, 1913, during Atlantic Fleet Maneuvers in Cuban waters, he made a record flight with Lieutenant (later Admiral) John H. Towers, USN, then returned to the Annapolis Camp to serve as an instructor until January 1914.

He then reported to the USS MISSISSIPPI, aeronautics training ship, operating on the East Coast, and later the same year was sent with the Aviation Detachment on board the USS BIRMINGHAM to Tampico, Mexico, for aviation maneuvers. After brief service on the USS NORTH CAROLINA, also assigned to aviation training, he reported early in 1915 to the Naval Aeronautics Station, Pensacola, Florida, for duty in experimental aviation. In March 1915 he was designated Naval Aviator No. 7. During that year he had temporary additional duty as Inspector of hydro-aeroplanes then under construction at Marblehead, Massachusetts.

In June 1916 he was again assigned to the NORTH CAROLINA, and on board that battleship participated in the installation of the first catapult on a naval vessel and piloted the first plane shot off by catapult. Later the same year he transferred to the USS WASHINGTON (renamed USS SEATTLE) and had duty in connection with torpedoes of that vessel. After the United States entered World War I in April 1917, he was assigned to the USS NEPTUNE for transportation to France, where he had duty in connection with aeronautics, with temporary duty at Headquarters, Paris. Later in 1917 he assumed command of the U. S. Naval Aeronautic Station, Dunkerque, Nord, and participated in Belgian coast patrol.

Early in 1918 he had temporary duty in London, England, after which he commanded the Northern Bombing Squadron, U. S. Naval Aviation Forces, with headquarters at Paris, France, and before the end of the year was assigned to the U. S. Naval Headquarters, London, England. For World War I service, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, with the following citation: "For exceptionally meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility in connection with the first aeronautical detachment to reach France, and as Commander of the U. S. Naval Air Station at Dunkirk, which was established and maintained in spite of constant bombing by the enemy. Later he commanded the Assembly and Repair Base at Eastleigh, England."

After the Armistice in November 1918, he returned to the United States, and reported to the Aviation Division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. Early in 1919 he was sent back to London, for duty at the U. S. Naval Headquarters there. He then had successive duty on the Staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet, in connection with Fleet Aviation, and at Mitchel Field, Long Island, New York, as Commanding Officer of the Atlantic Fleet Ship-Plane Division.

Late in 1920 he assisted in fitting out the USS LANGLEY, the Navy's first vessel to be built as an aircraft carrier. After her commissioning at the Norfolk Navy Yard, Hampton Roads, Virginia, he served on board as Officer in Charge of the Aviation Detachment. In 1921 he had additional duty as Officer in Charge of the LANGLEY Detachment at the Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Virginia. He was given much credit by Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, then Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, for developing landing deck gear. On October 26, 1922, he flew the plane which made the first landing on the deck of the LANGLEY.

Lieutenant Commander Chevalier died on November 14, 1922, at the Naval Hospital, Norfolk, Virginia, of multiple injuries incurred in a plane crash. He was

She acted a sponsor for the USS CHEVALIER (DD-451), which was named to honor her husband, launched at the Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine, on April 11, 1942, and commissioned in April of that year. DD-451 was lost in the Solomon Islands Area while engaging superior enemy forces, in October 1943. Another destroyer (DD-805, later DDR-805) was named CHEVALIER to perpetuate the name, again sponsored by Mrs. Chevalier when launched at Bath Iron Works, on October 29, 1944. She was commissioned on January 9, 1945, at the Boston Navy Yard, and participated in combat operations in August 1945, and later had three tours of combat duty in the Korean Area in 1950-1953. A plaque on the quarterdeck of the CHEVALIER was presented to the second ship of the name by his hometown of Medford, Massachusetts, similar to the one in the memorial auditorium which was dedicated to him in Medford. Chevalier Field at Pensacola, Florida, was also named to honor Lieutenant Commander Chevalier.

In addition to the Distinguished Service Medal, Lieutenant Commander Chevalier had the Mexican Service Medal, World War I Victory Medal, with Overseas Clasp; and two foreign decorations: the French Legion of Honor, rank of Chevalier, and the Crois de Guerre with Palm, also awarded by the Government of France.