



John G. Crommelin, Rear Admiral, USN

Date of Designation: 26 November 1926

Dates of Active Duty: June 1923 - 1 June 1950

Duty Assignment Chronology

John Geraerdt Crommelin, Jr., was born in Montgomery, Alabama, on October 2, 1902, a son of John a. Crommelin and Mrs. Katherine Vasser Gunter Crommelin. He attended the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, from the Second District of Alabama in 1919. While a Midshipman he played class football and was a member of the varsity boxing squad for three years. Graduated and commissioned Ensign in June 1923, he attained the grade of Captain, to date from May 1, 1943. He was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on June 1, 1950, and advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral, on the basis of combat citations.

Following graduation from the Academy in 1923, he had three months duty in the Bureau of Ordnance, Navy Department, before reporting in November to the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia. There he had fitting out duty in the USS *West Virginia* and joined her when she was commissioned on December 1, 1923. Transferred to the USS *Chaumont* in February 1924, he continued sea service aboard that transport until ordered to return to the United States. In February 1925 he was assigned flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, and upon completion of the course was designated Naval Aviator on November 26, 1926.

He remained at Pensacola until February 1927, at which time he joined Fighting Squadron FIVE-S (later changed to FIVE-B) attached to the USS *Wright* and USS *Lexington*, successively. While on board the latter, he received a Commendatory Letter from the Secretary of Navy, for performance of duty as Gunnery Officer of that Squadron

for the year 1929-1930. Continuing service with Fighting Squadron FIVE-B (later changed to Bombing Squadron ONE-B) until December 1929, he then returned to Pensacola, for duty as an Instructor.

From June 1933 to September 1934 he served with the aviation unit of the USS *California*. He received a second Commendatory Letter from the Secretary of Navy, for obtaining high fixed machine gun score in battleship units for the year 1933-34, and was also commended by the Commander Cruisers, Scouting Force, for compiling a pamphlet on firing fixed machine guns. In September 1934 he was ordered to the aviation unit of the USS *Colorado*, and following a short assignment, between June and August 1935, with Fighting Squadron THREE-B, based on the aircraft carrier *Ranger*, he had approximately two years' duty at the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, Washington, D. C.

Returning to sea in August 1937, he reported to the USS *Saratoga*. From June 1938 he had duty with Bombing Squadron THREE, based on that carrier, and between March and July 1939 commanded that aircraft unit. Following service as Commanding Officer of Bombing Squadron FOUR, based on the USS *Ranger*, until May 1940 he next had a tour of duty in the Flight Division, Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department.

On June 29, 1942, he joined the USS *Enterprise* as Air Officer, and in December of that year assumed the duties of Executive Officer. While attached to that aircraft carrier he participated in the occupation of Guadalcanal; the Battle of Stewart Islands in August 1942; the Battle of Santa Cruz in October; the Battle of the Solomon Islands in November 1942; and in the Battle of Fennel Island in January 1943. Later that year the *Enterprise* underwent an extensive overhaul,

“For especially meritorious performance of duty under fire...” as Air Officer of the USS *Enterprise* during the Battle of Santa Cruz on October 26, 1942, he received a Letter of Commendation with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, from the Commander South Pacific Force and South Pacific Area. The citation continues in part: “...The thorough manner in which (he) prepared all branches of his department for battle and his calm courage under heavy fire are worthy of special commendation.”

He is also entitled to the ribbon for and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the officers and men of the USS *Enterprise*. For consistently outstanding performance and distinguished achievement during repeated action (...participating in nearly every major carrier engagement in the first year of the war...) against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific war area, December 7, 1941, to November 15, 1942....”

Upon being detached from the *Enterprise* in September 1943, he joined the staff of Commander Carrier Division TWENTY-FOUR, as Chief of Staff and Aide. During this assignment he was aboard the flagship *Liscome Bay* when

she was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine in the Gilbert Islands area on November 24, 1943. Jumping over the side of the *Liscome Bay*, blazing from bow to stern, and surrounded by burning oil and gasoline, he was burned before a destroyer came to his rescue. He was later awarded a Purple Heart Medal for injuries received in this engagement.

In May 1944, he was assigned duty on the staff of the Commander Carrier Division TWELVE, and for "exceptionally meritorious conduct...as Chief of Staff of a Carrier Task Group Commander, during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the forward Pacific Area, from January 1, to August 8, 1944..." he was awarded the Legion of Merit with authorization to wear the Combat Distinguishing Device "V." The citation continues: "...as skilled in the performance of duty, (he) contributed materially to the success of the operations of the various Carrier Task Groups commanded by his flag officer. .."

On September 27, 1944, he reported for duty on the staff of the Commander Fleet Air, West Coast, and for his services as Director of Training, charged with the training of all pilots and squadrons on the West Coast, he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit, the citation stating: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Director of Training on the Staff of Commander Fleet Air, West Coast, Captain (then Commander) Crommelin displayed outstanding leadership and ability in discharging the responsibilities of the Training Division, thereby assuring the maximum preparation of pilots for combat. In the carrier refresher landing phase of training, he developed a new pattern which has become doctrine and, over a five month period reduced the accident rate 60%. By his effective organization of the training program, he attained a high degree of coordination..."

Continuing duty with Commander Fleet Air, West Coast, he assumed duty in July 1945 as Chief of Staff and Aide, with additional duty as Deputy Commander. Upon orders of October 1945, he reported to the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, for temporary service on the Selection Board, and in November had duty in connection with fitting out the USS *Saipan*. He assumed command of that carrier upon her commissioning on July 14, 1946, at the Navy Yard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

When relieved of command of the *Saipan* in September 1947, he became Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander Operational Development Force, Atlantic Fleet, and after a year's service in that assignment reported to the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, for instruction (Senior Course). He was assigned in April 1949 to duty in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in connection with the Joint Logistics Planning Section, then had brief duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, before his assignment in November 1949 as Aviation Officer on the staff of Commander Western Sea Frontier. He was furloughed on April 1, 1950, and at his own request was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on June 1, 1950.

In addition to the Legion of Merit (Combat "V") and Gold Star, the Commendation Ribbon, Purple Heart Medal, and the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon (USS *Enterprise*), Rear Admiral Crommelin has the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; the American Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.

He was married in 1930 to Miss Lillian E. Landis of San Diego, California. The official family home was Harrogate Springs, Wetumpka, Alabama.

Rear Admiral Crommelin is the eldest of five brothers, all graduates of the U. S. Naval Academy, and all save one, Captain Henry Crommelin, naval aviators. They are:

Vice Admiral Henry Crommelin, USN, Class of 1925
CDR Charles Laurence Crommelin, USN, Class of 1931
LCDR Richard Gunter Crommelin, USN, Class of 1938
CAPT Quentin Claiborne Crommelin, USN, Class of 1941

John Crommelin will always be remembered by his shipmates for his career self-sacrifice in defense of Naval aviation, and he did not fully understand the esteem and depth of affection veterans held for him. In 1949, he was a captain serving at Navy headquarters in Washington when steps toward unification of the armed forces were being discussed and made. But strategic, organization and personal differences between the Navy and the Air Force and also, on a lesser scale, between the Army and the Navy - exploded into a series of charges, counter charges and public hearings that shook the Pentagon. Captain Crommelin, as he then was, publicly complained that the Defense Department was scuttling naval air power and showing improper favor to the Air Force. He also asserted that "a Prussian General Staff system of the type employed by Hitler" was being imposed on the armed forces under unification. He was relieved of his duties at the headquarters and publicity reprimanded by Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, for making public confidential Navy letters linking top admirals to active opposition against unification. Captain Crommelin was transferred to San Francisco to be Air Officer of the Western Sea Frontier. After he continued his criticism in the face of orders to keep silent, he was ordered by Admiral Sherman to be furloughed at half pay, beginning early in 1950. That year The New York Times military affairs expert Hanson W. Baldwin wrote that Captain Crommelin was a "stormy petrel who wouldn't shut up."

In later years he operated part of his family plantation, named Harrogate Springs, in Elmore County, raised a variety of crops. He also ran unsuccessfully for various public offices. He was a candidate in the Democratic Presidential primary in New Hampshire in 1968 and also repeatedly announced himself as a candidate for the United States Senate. The National states Rights Party nominated him for Vice President in 1960.