



Fred R. Maxwell, Jr. returns to the beach after final qualifying flight in N-9 aircraft #218. NAS Pensacola. January 9, 1918.

Fred R. Maxwell, Jr., Captain, USN

Date of Designation: 1918 NA # 265 1/2

Summary of Significant Career Events

At the time of his death in 1988 at 99 years of age, Captain Fred R. Maxwell was the oldest naval aviator in the United States. He won his wings as a World War I reserve officer at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida in 1918, just 15 years after the Wright brothers flew the first heavier-than-air machine at Kitty Hawk, NC.

Aside from his family, Maxwell had two great loves - the University of Alabama and naval aviation. He was happily able to serve both.

In 1917 when he went to enlist in the U. S. Navy with degrees in both mechanical and electrical engineering, he thought he would be working on a ship as an engineer. But a recruiter gave him a form that had just come in for a newly created position in naval aviation. The wartime demand for naval aviators was so great that graduation from Annapolis was no longer required. He was among the first 12 reservists to be sent to the training program at Pensacola. The war ended in 1918, leaving him hooked on aviation.

Between WW I and WW II, Maxwell became a professor of electrical and mechanical engineering at the University

of Alabama and in 1923 inaugurated an aeronautical engineering department, now designated aerospace engineering. He was instrumental in the development of three Tuscaloosa, Alabama, airfields, including the one still in operation. During this time he had oak trees planted in Tuscaloosa as memorials to World War I servicemen and again after World War II.

In January of 1941, almost a year before Pearl Harbor, he was called back into the Navy. He was then 52 years old, too old to be on active flight duty so he served for five years as Officer-in-Charge of the Cadet Ground School in Pensacola.

Maxwell was a founding member of the Early and Pioneer Naval Aviators Association, known as the Golden Eagles. He was a charter - and life member of the Association of the U.S. Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola. In 1985, Maxwell was named to the Alabama Aviation Hall of Fame.

Sixty-four years after he received his wings in Pensacola, he pinned the wings on his grandson, Karl Elebash, a Marine Corps helicopter pilot, at Whiting Field in Pensacola.



June, 1982