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George Thomas Owen, Rear Admiral, USN

Rear Admiral Owen, born in White Pine, Tennessee, on September 15, 1895, attended McKinley technical High School and George Washington University, both of Washington, D. C., before his enrollment on July 9, 1917 in the U. S. Naval Reserve Force. On January 17, 1918, he was appointed Ensign in the Naval Reserve Flying Corps. On March 3, 1919 he received a promotion to Lieutenant (junior grade) to rank from October 1, 1918, and on October 30, 1919, he was honorably discharged from active service. He was promoted to Lieutenant while inactive, to rank from July 1, 1920. Discharged from the U. S. Naval Reserve Force on November 30, 1921, he accepted an appointment in the regular Navy and was commissioned Lieutenant, to rank from August 3, 1920. He subsequently advanced to the rank of Captain, to date from June 16, 1942. He served in the rank of Commodore (temporary) from May 250 1944, until July 31, 1945, when he reverted to his permanent rank of Captain. He was retired on November 1, 1948, and promoted to Rear Admiral on the Retired List of the U. S. Navy.

Designated naval aviator on January 21, 1918, Rear Admiral Owen had service in the Naval Reserve Flying Corps during World War I, first at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, from January to July 1918, and later with the Naval Aviation Forces, Paris, France, at the U. S. Naval Air Stations, Queenstown and Whiddy Island, Ireland, the remainder of the war. Following the signing of the Armistice, he returned to the United States via the USS *Leviathan* and in December 1918 he reported for duty at the Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Aboard the USS *Aroostook*, flagship of Air Force, Pacific Fleet, where he had training duty prior to being transferred from the Reserve to the regular Navy until March 1924, he was commended for his services as pilot in the first transcontinental flight by Naval aircraft, in 1921. On March 12, 1924, he reported to the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, D. C., where he served until November 22, 1926. He then joined Observation Squadron 3, Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting

Fleet, attached first to the *Richmond*, later the *Raleigh*. He next had successive duty with Observation Squadron 5 (later redesignated Observation Squadron 2) and Utility Squadron 2, operating with Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet, from April 1928 until October 1929, after which he reported for duty at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, to serve until June 1932.

Rear Admiral Owen reported on June 30, 1932, for duty with Utility Squadron 1, attached to the USS *Argonne*, and on June 6, 1933 he assumed command of that squadron, then attached to the USS *Wright*. During this assignment he commanded the Aviation Unit in the Aleutian Islands Survey Expedition in 1934, receiving a Letter of Commendation for services in that command. From October 1934 until July 1936, he was in command of Patrol Squadron 8, Aircraft Squadrons, Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii.

Reporting to the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, on August 31, 1936, he fitted out and assumed command of Patrol Squadron 15, attached to the USS *Owl*, on its commissioning, September 1, 1936, with additional duty from May 1937, in command of Patrol Wing, USS *Owl*. On September 24, 1937, due to change in title, Rear Admiral Owen became Commander, Patrol Wing 5, Aircraft, Base Force, with additional duty commanding Patrol Squadron 15, attached to the USS *Owl*, and still later in September his title was changed to Commander, Patrol Wing 5, Aircraft, Scouting Force. Detached in May 1938, he reported that month to Fleet Air Base, Coco Solo, Canal Zone, for duty as executive officer of that base, and for the period February 11 to March 9, 1939, was also Commander, Fleet Air Base, later redesignated, Naval Air Station, Coco Solo, Canal Zone.

Rear Admiral Owen returned to the United States in the summer of 1940 and was assigned duty in connection with fitting out the USS *Curtiss* at the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey. He became executive officer of that seaplane tender upon her commissioning on November 15, 1940. For his services as acting commanding officer of the USS *Curtiss* during the Japanese attack, on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Rear Admiral Owen was awarded the Silver Star Medal, with the following citation:

SILVER STAR MEDAL:

“For-conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Acting Commanding Officer of the USS *Curtiss* in action against enemy Japanese forces at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. When enemy air and sea units suddenly attacked his gasoline loaded ship in the harbor, Commodore (then Captain) Owen immediately organized his command in a spirited, effective defense and, although violent fires were started and the *Curtiss* was severely damaged by a hostile bomb and a crashing plane, skillfully and with aggressive determination continued directing the gunfire of his vessel against the enemy attacks, enabling his men to destroy several Japanese aircraft and a small submarine while bringing the fire under control. Commodore Owen’s brilliant initiative, prompt action and tenacious devotion to duty throughout this extremely perilous engagement contributed in large measure to saving

the ship and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

Detached from the *Curtiss* on March 23, 1942, Rear Admiral Owen reported to the Naval Air Station, Alameda California, and on April 10, 1942, he assumed command of Patrol Wing 5, Patrol Wings, Atlantic Fleet, to serve until November 2, 1942. He was then detached with orders to duty as commanding officer of the Naval Air Station, Argentia, Newfoundland, where he remained until January 1943. Returning to the United States he reported on February 5 of that year as commanding officer of the Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas, and after a year's service in that command became Commander Fleet Air Wing 15 in March 1944.

On May 25, 1944, Rear Admiral Owen was promoted to the temporary rank of Commodore, while serving as commanding officer of Fleet Air Wing 5 and of the Naval Air Station, Port Lyautey. For his service in the Mediterranean from March 7 to September 11, 1944, he was awarded the Legion of Merit, and cited as follows:

LEGION OF MERIT: (With Combat "V")

“For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commander Fleet Air Wing FIFTEEN, while engaged in Anti-Submarine operations in the Moroccan Sea Frontier, and special aircraft operations in the Mediterranean area, from March 7 to September 11, 1944. Serving with distinction throughout this period, Commodore Owen organized and successfully carried out the expansion of Wing facilities, necessitated by increased and intensified operations. Bringing his command to the maximum peak of efficiency, he coordinated all outlying, Wing activities with those of Allied forces to exert continued and effective pressure against the enemy, thereby contributing directly to the clearing of the Mediterranean approaches of enemy underseas craft and to the success of special operations conducted by Wing aircraft in the protection of Allied shipping and convoy lanes. His aggressive leadership and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

Rear Admiral Owen continued to serve as Commander Fleet Air Wing 15 until transferred to command of Fleet Air Wing 5 on July 31, 1945, at which time he reverted to the rank of Captain. Detached from command of Fleet Air Wing 5 in August 1946, he returned to the United States. On March 21, 1947, he was ordered to duty as commanding officer of the Naval Air Material Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and served in that command until relieved of all active duty pending retirement. He was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on November 1, 1948, and promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral.

In addition to the Silver Star Medal and Legion of Merit, Rear Admiral Owen has the Victory Medal, overseas Clasp; and is entitled to the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the American Area Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-

Pacific Area Campaign Medal; and the World, War II Victory Medal.

Rear Admiral Owen had two children, Nancy G. Owen and George Thomas Owen, Jr.