



Wendell G. Switzer, Vice Admiral, USN

Wendell Gray Switzer, born in Topeka, Kansas, on September 30, 1898, attended Washburn College in Topeka for two years before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, in 1917 by Senator Thompson of Kansas. As a Midshipman, he served during World War I in the USS *Ohio*, operating with the Atlantic Fleet in the summer of 1918, and in the next summer in the USS *Florida*. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 5, 1920, with the Class of 1921, he subsequently advanced in rank to Rear Admiral, to date from July 25, 1944.

After graduation from the Naval Academy, he served successively in the USS *New York*, USS *Macleish*, and USS *Hull*, and was detached from the latter in June 1923 for flight training at the Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida. Designated Naval Aviator on January 11, 1924, he was ordered in May of that year, to Observation Plane Squadron SIX, operating with Aircraft Squadron Scouting Fleet, and based on Hampton Roads, Virginia. During this assignment, he had temporary additional duty in the USS *Texas*. In September 1925 he joined the USS *Utah* for three months' service.

Between January 1926 and June 1928, he served as a Flight Instructor at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, then attended a course in ordnance engineering at the Postgraduate School, Annapolis, Maryland. He continued his instruction from March 1939 to May 1931 at the Navy Yard, Washington, D. C., and, in the following month, joined Patrol Squadron SEVEN-F in the USS *Argonne*. In September 1933 he was transferred to Fighting Squadron FIVE based on the USS *Lexington*.

In June 1934 he was assigned to the Engineering Division, Material Branch, Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department, Washington., D. C., and in June 1937 assumed command of Fighting Squadron FOUR, based on the aircraft carrier USS *Ranger*. He joined the staff of Commander Aircraft, Battle Force, as Gunnery Officer in May 1939, and in July 1940 was ordered to return to the United States.

He was attached to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, as Superintendent of Aviation Training and Executive Officer, and for his outstanding services in this assignment received a letter of Commendation with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, from the Secretary of the Navy. He assumed command of the USS *Tangier* in September 1942. He commanded the *Tangier* until September 1943, when he was assigned duty with Fleet Air, West Coast. During October 1943 he had duty in connection with the Pre-Commissioning Detail of the USS *White Plains* at the Naval Station, Astoria, Oregon, but was detached before its commissioning.

He assumed command of the USS *Tripoli* in October 31, 1943. Under his command that vessel was engaged in anti-submarine warfare in the Atlantic. In June 1944, he became Aviation Plans Officer in the Bureau of Ordnance.

On May 25, 1945 he assumed command of the USS *Wasp*, which was credited with shooting down the last two planes of the war and also with successfully fending off the last kamikaze attack on an American ship by a Japanese plane off Tokyo, on August 9, 1945. Planes from the *Wasp* carried food and supplies from Bataan and Corregidor to men imprisoned at an internment camp near Narumi, a suburb of Nagoya on Honshu, after the "Cease Fire" order had been given.

For his services in command of the *Wasp*, he was awarded the Legion of Merit with Combat Distinguishing Device, and for the period when the *Wasp* was cited for action, May 19, 1944 to August 15, 1945, he received the Ribbon for, and a facsimile of the Navy Unit Commendation awarded that carrier. The citation for the Legion of Merit reads in part: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct...during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of the Japanese Homeland from July 11 to August 31, 1945. An officer of keen judgment and professional ability, (he) directed the *Wasp* in launching damaging strikes against hostile installations in the Yonago, Mito, Heratsuka, Fujisawa, Tokyo and North Central Honshu areas and against shipping in Kure Harbor and Maizure Bay. Under his efficient command, the *Wasp* operated at times within eighty-seven miles of the Japanese coast despite numerous attacks by enemy kamikaze aircraft..."

Relieved of command of the *Wasp*, he was Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, from April 26, 1946 until August of that year. The following month he reported as Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander

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Air Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and in October 1947 was assigned duty as Commander Naval Ordnance Test Station, Inyokern, California. He remained in that assignment until September 1949, when he assumed command of Carrier Division SIXTEEN and Task Force EIGHTY ONE. In April 1950 he became Commander Carrier Division SIX and for four months had additional duty as Commander Carrier Division TWO. A year later, on April 4, 1951, he joined the staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet, as Chief of Staff and Aide.

On July 1, 1953, Admiral Switzer assumed duties as Chief of Naval Air Technical Training with headquarters at the Naval Air Station, Memphis, Tennessee. In October 1955, he reported as Commander Naval Forces Marianas, assuming this duty at his headquarters on Guam on October 27, 1955. At the same time, he assumed additional duties as: Commander U. S. Naval Base, Marianas; Commander Marianas Bonin Defense Command; Representative for Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, for the Administration of the Saipan District, Trust Territory of the Pacific Fleet, for the Administration of the Saipan District, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands; and Deputy Military Governor of the Bonin-Volcano Islands. On February 16, 1956 he became Commander Naval Forces, Philippines, and on June 30, 1957 reported as Commander Fleet Air, Jacksonville, Florida, with additional duty in command of the Naval Air Bases in the Sixth Naval District. He continued to serve in that capacity until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement effective April 1, 1959. Upon transferring to the Retired List he was advanced to the rank of Vice Admiral on the basis of a combat award.

In addition to the Legion of Merit with Combat Distinguishing Device, Commendation Ribbon, and the Navy Unit Commendation, Admiral Switzer has the World War I Victory Medal with Atlantic Fleet Clasp; American Defense Service Medal with Fleet Clasp; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal, Europe Clasp; and the National Defense Service Medal.

He was married to the former Miss Anna Lamar, and they had two children, Lieutenant John L. Switzer, U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1946, a Naval Aviator, and Mrs. Ann Reilly. A second son, Lieutenant (jg) Wendell G. Switzer, Jr., U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1953, was killed September 1, 1955 when his Navy attack bomber crashed into the James River off Fort Eustis, Virginia. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.