

# NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM A. MOFFETT, U. S. NAVY, DECEASED

William Adger Moffett was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on October 31, 1869. He was appointed Naval Cadet from the First South Carolina District by the Hon. Samuel Dibble and entered the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland on September 6, 1886. He was graduated on June 6, 1890, and after the two years' sea duty then required by law before commissioning, was commissioned an Ensign in the U. S. Navy on July 1, 1892. His advancement was as follows: Lieutenant (jg), March 3, 1899; Lieutenant, July 13, 1899; Lieutenant Commander, July 1, 1905; Commander, March 4, 1911; Captain August 29, 1916; and Rear Admiral, to date from July 25, 1921.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1890, he served successively on board the USS PENNSYLVANIA, USS BALTIMORE, USS PORTSMOUTH, USS CHICAGO and on April 23, 1895 he joined the USS AMPHITRITE as Watch and Division Officer. Detached a year later, he was a student at the Naval War College from June to October 1896, then reported to the T. S. CONSTELLATION for brief duty, after which he served for two years on board the Nautical School Ship ENTERPRISE.

From January 1898 to February 1899 he had successive service as Watch and Division Officer on board the USS MOHICAN and the USS CHARLESTON, serving during the Spanish-American War with Admiral Dewey in the Battle of Manila Bay. He continued sea duty in the CHARLESTON, and later the USS BALTIMORE, USS MONONGAHELA, USS KENTUCKY and USS ST. MARY'S. On November 15, 1902, he reported to the USS MINNEAPOLIS for engineering duty, and was transferred to the USS MAINE upon her commissioning, May 29, 1903. He was detached on June 2, 1904, with orders to duty as Executive Officer of the USS AMPHITRITE.

On April 22, 1904, he assumed command of the Naval Station, Guantanamo, Cuba, with additional duty on board the AMPHITRITE and as Captain of the Yard. He returned to the United States for instruction in the Compass Office of the Bureau of Equipment, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and upon completion of that assignment attended the Summer Conference of Officers at the Naval War College. He returned to the Bureau of Equipment in September 1906, and served there until March 31, 1908.

Duty as Navigator, later as Executive Officer of the USS MARYLAND preceded a tour of shore duty as Inspector of the Eighteenth Lighthouse District, San Francisco, California. On June 30, 1912, he reported to the works of the William Cramp and Sons Ship and Engine Building Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for duty in connection with fitting out the USS ARKANSAS. He joined that battleship as Executive Officer on her commissioning on July 7, 1912, and served in that capacity until October 24, 1913.

Assuming command of the USS MAINE on October 29, he was transferred to command of the USS CHESTER a week later. During the period of his command of the CHESTER, he had additional duty in command of the USS NORTH CAROLINA, USS BROOKLYN and the Receiving Ship at Boston, Massachusetts for brief periods. For distinguished service while in command of the CHESTER during the Battle of Vera Cruz, he was awarded the Medal of Honor by Congress. The citation which accompanied the medal follows:

Medal of Honor: "For distinguished conduct in battle, engagements of Vera Cruz, April 21 and 22, 1914; brought his ship into the inner harbor during the highest of the 21st and 22nd without the assistance of a pilot or navigational lights, and was in a position on the morning of the 22nd to use his guns at a critical time with telling effect. His skill in mooring his ship at night was especially noticeable. He placed her nearest the enemy and did most of the firing and received most of the hits."

Relieved of command of the CHESTER on September 16, 1914, he assumed duty as Commandant of the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois, and additional duty as Supervisor of the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Naval Districts. He continued his primary duty as Commandant of the Naval Training Station, in the rank of Captain, during the entire World War I period, expanding that previously small station to the largest recruit training depot in the United States, from which most of the trained naval personnel was furnished for all the naval activities during the war period.

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his wartime accomplishment, the citation stating: "For exceptionally meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility as Commandant of the NINTH, TENTH, and ELEVENTH Naval Districts and Commandant of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station."

On December 10, 1918, shortly after the Armistice, he became Commanding Officer of the USS MISSISSIPPI, and after two years in that command, he returned to shore duty. On January 3, 1921, he reported to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, and on March 7, 1921, assumed duty as Director of Naval Aviation. He was commissioned the first Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, with the accompanying rank of Rear Admiral, for a term of four years from July 25, 1921; was reappointed Chief of that Bureau by President Calvin Coolidge on March 13, 1925; and again reappointed by President Herbert Hoover on March 13, 1929.

Having been qualified as a Naval Aviation Observer on June 17, 1922, while serving as Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics (his first term), he had temporary additional duty from January to April 1930 as Assistant to the Naval Advisors to American Representatives on the London, England, Naval Conference.

During the latter years of his service as Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Rear Admiral Moffett was recognized as more experienced in all types of airplanes, seaplanes and big airships than "any Admiral in any Navy in the World." The development of lighter-than-air in America was largely due to his vision, determination, and untiring efforts, the result of which was seen in the building of the USS AKRON and USS M'CON. He was killed in the crash at sea of the USS AKRON on April 4, 1933.

In addition to the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Medal, Rear Admiral Moffett had the Spanish Campaign Medal, the Philippine Campaign Medal, Mexican Service Medal, Cuban Pacification Medal, and the World War I Victory Medal.

A destroyer, the USS MOFFETT, named to honor him, was christened by Admiral Moffett's daughter, Beverly, at the launching at Quincy, Massachusetts, on December 11, 1935, and was placed in commission on August 27, 1936. In April 1936 a trophy, designated the "Rear Admiral William A. Moffett Memorial Trophy," was purchased with funds received from Naval Aviators, to be awarded annually in memory of Admiral Moffett to the battleship or cruiser based aviation unit conducting its operations throughout the year with the maximum of safety.

Navy Office of Information  
Biographies Branch  
11 September 1962