

FLOYD BENNETT
MACHINIST, UNITED STATES NAVY, DECEASED

Floyd Bennett was born in Warrensburg, Warren County, New York, on October 25, 1890. With the entry of the United States into World War I, he enlisted in the Navy on December 15, 1917, in Burlington, Vermont, and was ordered to the Naval Air Station, Bay Shore, New York. In March 1918 he was transferred to the Naval Training Station, Norfolk, Virginia, where he received the rating of Machinist Mate Second Class, Aviation. May 1918 saw Bennett at the Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Virginia, where in September he received the rating of Machinist Mate First Class and in February of the following year, he was made Chief Machinist Mate, Aviation. On July 30, 1919 he was honorably discharged but immediately reenlisted, and served continuously until 1927.

He was ordered to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, in December where he took the aviation course for enlisted pilots. He returned to Hampton Roads a year later and remained on duty there until September 1924, at which time he was ordered to the cruiser USS RICHMOND. He was one of the pilots from RICHMOND who conducted a landing site reconnaissance in Greenland for Army around-the-world pilots in 1924. It was while serving in the RICHMOND that his rating was changed to Aviation Pilot.

In April 1925 he was transferred to the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, Washington, D. C., for duty in the Naval Air Detail of the MacMillan Arctic Expedition. In Charge of the Air Detail was Lieutenant Commander Richard E. Byrd. The mission of the Air Detail was to survey areas designated, to test equipment and gain more experience in the problems of navigation in the northern latitudes. During this expedition the three amphibian planes flew over Greenland, Baffin Bay and Baffin Island. On November 17, 1925 the Secretary of the Navy commended Bennett for his "Efficiency, indefatigable energy and courage while engaged on duty in connection with operations of the air unit, MacMillan Polar Expedition, summer of 1925."

He next saw duty in the Byrd Arctic Expedition and was the pilot with Byrd in his historic flight over the North Pole on May 9, 1926. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal on August 6, 1926, for his "Exceptionally meritorious service to the Government; his courage and ability contributed largely to the success of the first heavier than air craft flight to the North Pole and return."

By Act of Congress of January 5, 1927, Bennett was promoted to officer rank, Warrant Machinist. On February 19, 1927, Congress awarded him the Medal of Honor for the North Pole flight which was personally presented to him by the President. The citation reads: "Distinguishing himself conspicuously by courage and intrepidity at the risk of his life as a member of the Byrd Arctic Expedition, and thus contributing largely to the success of the first heavier than air craft flight to the North Pole and return."

Subsequently, Bennett made a successful tour of forty-four American cities in the same plane as flew over the North Pole and for this very trying tour he received a letter of commendation from the Secretary of the Navy.

He was next selected by Byrd to fly with him in the AMERICAN in Byrd's trans-Atlantic flight but because of serious injuries suffered on a test flight crack-up in April 1921, he was unable to accompany the man he so admired and for whom he had such deep affection.

Byrd's next venture called for an aerial expedition to the South Pole and he selected Bennett as his assistant, second in command. Meanwhile, Bennett flew to the relief of Captain Herman Koehl and Baron Guenther von Huenfeld of Germany and Commandant James Fitzmaurice of Ireland, who together made the first westbound trans-Atlantic flight from Baldonnell Airdrome, Dublin, Ireland, to Greeneley Island, Newfoundland. It was during this operation that he contracted pneumonia. In an attempt to save Bennett's life, Byrd flew serum from New York to Quebec and was at his side when he died on April 25, 1928.

Out of deep personal regard and affection for his pilot, Byrd named the plane in which he flew over the South Pole during the 1929 Antarctic Expedition the FLOYD BENNETT. Upon reaching the pole, Byrd dropped an American flag that was weighted with a stone from Bennett's grave.

Floyd Bennett is buried at the National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia.

In recognition of his outstanding contributions to Naval Aviation, the Navy has named one of its Naval Air Stations in New York, Floyd Bennett Field.

11 September 1962