

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

COMMANDER HENRY BARTON CECIL, U.S. NAVY, DECEASED

To honor a gallant Naval Aviator, the Navy, in 1941, designated an auxiliary base field at Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida, "Cecil Field", named after Commander Henry Barton Cecil, who was killed in the loss of the USS AKRON, dirigible, on April 4, 1933, off Barnegat Light, coast of New Jersey.

Born in New River, Tennessee, on February 17, 1888, he was appointed midshipman from Tennessee's Second District, and entered the United States Naval Academy in 1906. Graduated in June, 1910, he served at sea in the USS IDAHO before receiving his commission as Ensign on March 7, 1912. He subsequently attained the rank of Commander dating from June 5, 1930.

Detached from the IDAHO, he took passage to the Asiatic Station in May, 1912, and reported for duty aboard the USS ALBANY in July. Thereafter, he had consecutive duty in the USS MONTEREY; as Aide to the Commandant, Naval Stations, Olongapo, and Cavite, Philippine Islands; in the USS MONADNOCK; USS SARATOGA; USS PALOS, gunboat; and again in the USS SARATOGA, flagship of Commander-in-Chief, Asiatic Fleet.

He volunteered for aviation duty in 1915, reporting to Naval Aeronautic Station, Pensacola, Florida, in April, 1916 for instruction. He had continuous duty in connection with aviation thereafter. He was designated Naval Aviator No. 42, qualified in both heavier-than-air and lighter than air craft. When detached from Pensacola, he was given charge of training in aeronautics the officers and men of the Naval Reserve at Newport News, Virginia. He served there from May to September, 1917. After brief assignments aboard the USS MONTANA and at Naval Air Station, Rockaway, Long Island, New York, he reported in January, 1918 to the Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe, for duty with U.S. Naval Aviation Forces in France. He served in command of the U.S. Naval Air Station, Pauillac, Gironde, France, from January 29 to April 15, 1918, thereafter was placed in command of the Naval Air Station, L'Aber Vrach, France. The Navy Department awarded him a special Letter of Commendation, stating: "He organized and operated the United States Naval Station at L'Aber Vrach, France, and the success of that Station being largely due to his initiative, courage and loyal devotion to duty."

After serving briefly at Brest, France, on the staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Europe, in February, 1919 he returned home, and had temporary duty from March to August, 1919 attached to the U.S. Naval Aviation Detachment, Akron, Ohio, in connection with lighter-than-air training. He then served several months at the Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation, until reporting in December to Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for instruction in NC seaplanes. Upon completion of the course in July, 1920, he was assigned to the tender, USS HARDING, for duty in command of the Atlantic NC Seaplane Division. The following November he was transferred to the USS SHAWMUT, flagship of the Air Force, Atlantic Fleet. When the USS WRIGHT relieved the SHAWMUT in December, 1921, he transferred to that vessel and served with the Aircraft Squadrons, Atlantic Fleet, until May, 1922.

Reporting to the Navy Department, he had duty in the Flight Division, Bureau of Aeronautics, from May, 1922 to September, 1924. The next two years he served as Assistant Naval Attache, American Embassy, Rome, Italy. Returning to the United States, he was assigned duty as Aide on the Staff of Commander-in-Chief, Battle Fleet, with additional duty as Fleet Aviation Officer aboard the USS CALIFORNIA, flagship. After serving in that duty one year, he became Executive Officer of the USS WRIGHT, flagship of Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet, on the east coast. He served in that assignment from October, 1927 to June 11, 1929. He then reported to Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department, for duty as Head of the Flight Division.

Early in 1931 he joined the USS WEST VIRGINIA, flagship of Battleship Divisions and Division 5, Battle Fleet, on the west coast, returning to Bureau of Aeronautics later that year, to serve as Head of the Flight Division.

Commander Cecil was a passenger on the USS AKRON (LTA), on a training flight out of Lakehurst, New Jersey, when she was wrecked off the coast, and he was declared officially dead on April 4, 1933.

He had the Victory Medal, Aviation Clasp, as well as the Letter of Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for World War I services.

19 October, 1950