

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

VICE ADMIRAL WILLIAM E. ELLIS, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

William Edward Ellis was born in Burlington, North Carolina, on November 7, 1908, son of C. B. and Margaret C. (Cannady) Ellis, both now deceased. He attended grade and high school in Burlington, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from his native state in 1926. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 5, 1930, he subsequently advanced in rank, attaining that of Rear Admiral to date from August 1, 1958 and Vice Admiral, to rank from June 2, 1964.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1930, he joined the USS MISSISSIPPI, and in April 1931 was detached for flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Designated Naval Aviator on March 17, 1932, he was assigned in June of that year to Observation Squadron FOUR B, aviation unit of the USS COLORADO. During June and July 1934 he was attached to Bombing Squadron THREE B, after which he served with Scouting Squadron TWO, attached to the USS SARATOGA. In July 1935 he reported for duty with Patrol Squadron FIVE, operating with Aircraft Squadrons, based on Coco Solo, Canal Zone, where he remained until May 1937.

He had duty in connection with fitting out the USS ENTERPRISE at the Newport News (Virginia) Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, from June 1937 until May 1938, interspersed with an assignment, September 1937 to March 1938, with Fighting Squadron SIX. Upon the commissioning of the ENTERPRISE, May 12, 1938, he joined that aircraft carrier to serve until June 1940. He was next attached to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, and in February 1941 transferred to the Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Texas. He remained at Corpus Christi until April 1942, when he assumed command of Escort Fighting Squadron TWENTY SIX. For meritorious service in the latter capacity during the assault on and occupation of French Morocco from November 8 to 11, 1942, he received a Letter of Commendation, with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon from the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.

He is also entitled to the Ribbon for, and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the USS SANGAMON, on which Escort Fighting Squadron TWENTY SIX was based.

In August 1943 he became Commanding Officer of Air Group EIGHTEEN, and for outstanding services in that command was awarded the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Navy Cross. The citations follow in part:

Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement...as Commanding Officer of an Air Group attached to the USS INTREPID, in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific Area from September 7 to 24, 1944. Skillfully directing his group in its first combat operation, (he) was largely responsible for the successful completion of a hazardous assignment..."

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement...as Target Coordinator of a strike composed of planes from the USS BUNKER HILL and the USS INTREPID, during action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of the Philippine Islands, on October 18, 1944. Alert and aggressive as he scouted islands north of Luzon, (he) sighted four large enemy transports concealed in a bay and, immediately directing his flight to the target area, skillfully led them in pressing home devastating attacks to account for all four within a short period of time...He contributed in large measure to the destruction of enemy shipping and personnel..."

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism...during operations against Japanese forces in the vicinity of the Philippine Islands, on October 24, 1944. Serving as target coordinator during our initial strike against major Japanese task forces in the Sibuyan Sea, (he) boldly circled within perilously close range of powerful enemy antiaircraft fields and coolly directed the attacks of our airmen against hostile warships. Flying approximately ten hours a day throughout three days of furious action, he skillfully led coordinated strikes against one force consisting of thirteen destroyers, eight cruisers, and four battleships, and a second force of enemy carriers, which contributed in large measure to the sinking or damaging of enemy warships. By his brilliant leadership and aggressive initiative and daring combat tactics, (he) was in large measure responsible for the success of this decisive engagement..."

Continuing duty in the INTREPID, he served from November 1944 to April 1945 as Air Officer, and for the next seven months was Executive Officer. Detached from the INTREPID in November 1945, he then reported as Chief Staff Officer to the Commander Naval Air Bases, Twelfth Naval District. In July 1948 he became Commanding Officer of the Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Atlantic, with headquarters at Boca Chica Airfield, Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

From August 1950 until June 1951 he had instruction at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, after which he had duty in the Joint Staff Office, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D. C. In August 1953 he assumed command of the USS BADOENG STAFF, and in July 1954 reported as Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander Operational Development Force. He commanded the attack aircraft carrier FORRESTAL in 1956 and 1957 and in April of that year was ordered to duty as Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Carrier Division SIX.

On July 18, 1958 his selection for the rank of Rear Admiral was approved by the President and from November 21, that year, until November 1959 he was Director of the Air Warfare Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department. He then transferred to the Bureau of Naval Weapons, Navy Department, where he served as Assistant Chief of the Bureau for Field Support. On March 8, 1961 he reported as Commander Carrier Division TWO and on May 19, 1962 assumed the duties of Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Air), Navy

Department. On June 2, 1964 he became Commander SIXTH Fleet and Commander Naval Striking and Support Forces, Southern Europe. "For exceptionally meritorious service...from May 1964 to May 1966..." in that capacity, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. The citation further states in part:

"During this period of increasing world tension, Vice Admiral Ellis maintained the forces of the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean area in a state of constant vigilance and continued readiness for any contingency. Under his command, the responsiveness, training, and morale of his force were refined and enhanced despite increased difficulties in the logistic, personnel, and material areas occasioned by the Navy's response to the paramount requirements of our present struggle in Southeast Asia. Vice Admiral Ellis' foresight, judgment, and planning for deploying and positioning SIXTH Fleet units were reflected recently in the rapid reaction and efficiency with which he responded to the request for Navy assistance in the recovery of a hydrogen bomb lost off the coast of Spain. His guidance and advice, based on his broad professional background, contributed significantly to the successful completion of this mission by Task Force SIXTY-FIVE. Through his unusual perspicacity and adroitness in his relationships with officials of Allied Nations bordering on the Mediterranean and with commanders of contiguous national and NATO military commands, Vice Admiral Ellis was instrumental in significantly furthering the interests of the United States."

In May 1966 he became Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, and "for exceptionally meritorious service...from May 1966 through September 1968..." he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Distinguished Service Medal. The citation continues in part:

"During this period, Vice Admiral Ellis participated in and directed the planning which resulted in the multinational North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Standing Naval Force Atlantic; in the development of new concepts for the employment of maritime forces in support of the military strategy of NATO; and in a variety of activities, the sum of which has brought about a new awareness on the part of NATO of the growing dependence of the Warsaw Pact Nations on a maritime strategy. As Chief of Staff during a time in which NATO has seen many significant challenges and organizational changes, he applied his exceptional talents in the field of politico-military interrelationships so as to effectively support the Command, the Alliance it serves, and the policies of the United States..."

On October 1, 1968 he was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy.

In addition to the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal with Gold Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, the Commendation Ribbon, and the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Vice Admiral Ellis has the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the American

Campaign Medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one engagement star; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one silver star and two bronze stars (seven engagements); the World War II Victory Medal; the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp; the China Service Medal; the National Defense Service Medal with bronze star; and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two stars.