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Jesse G. Johnson, RADM, USN

Date of Designation: June 1925

Dates of Active Duty: 2 December 1917 - 13 January 1947

Combat Awards:

Bronze Star with combat "V"

Duty Assignment Chronology

Jesse Gearing Johnson was born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, on January 9, 1895, son of George Alexander and Mary Harper (Buckman) Johnson. While a student at Swarthmore College, he enlisted in the Naval Reserve Force on December 2, 1917, during World War I. After instruction at the Naval Reserve Officers School, Naval Operating Base, Hampton Roads, Virginia, he was honorably discharged to accept appointment as Ensign, USNRF, on November 13, 1918. He was transferred to the U. S. Navy from the Naval Reserve on September 2, 1919, and subsequently progressed in rank to that of Captain, to date from December 10, 1945. on his transfer to the Retired List on January 13, 1947, he was advanced to Rear Admiral on the basis of citation received for duty in combat.

In December 1918 he joined the USS *Onward* (SP-311), and was assigned to submarine chasers until July 1919, serving as Executive Officer of SC-188 and as Commanding Officer of SC-199, the first aviation tender in the U. S. Naval Service. He was then ordered to the USS *Von Steuben*, in which he made three transport trips to Brest, France during the next three months.

For eleven months he served in the USS *Caldwell*, and when detached in June 1920, he had fitting out duty, then joined the USS *Humphreys* at her commissioning and served on board for two years. During that period he made the Near East Cruise around the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and participated in the evacuation of white Russians from the Crimea and the evacuation of Greeks from Ismit. After this he

wrote the only account of the Greek Evacuation of Ismit. He received the Navy Expeditionary Medal for service ashore in Turkey during the Greek evacuation of Ismir.

He continued serving in the *Humphreys* after she was put into Reserve, until June 1923, and from July of that year until August of the next was attached to the USS *Langley*. He was then ordered to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for flight training, and was designated Naval Aviator prior to his detachment in June 1925. He spent the next three years in Scouting Squadron ONE and Torpedo Squadron NINE, operating with the Atlantic Fleet and based in Cuba in winter and at Annapolis in summer. While at Annapolis, he was the first qualified lecturer on strategy and tactics of aircraft fighting at the Naval Academy.

In September 1926 he began a tour of shore duty at the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, where he was Chief Airplane Test Pilot, and from July 1931 until June 1932 served on the Staff of Commander Aircraft, Scouting Force. He then had two years on board the USS *Salt Lake City* as Senior Aviator, attached to Scouting Squadron TEN-S, followed by two years with Patrol Squadron EIGHT in Hawaii. While in the latter assignment, he made cruises to outlying possessions, including the French Frigate Shoals, and Midway. During an airplane Field Investigation trip on the USCGC *Itasca*, he stopped at Palmyra. Then to Jarvis Island. From Jarvis to Baker and Howland Islands, he participated in a one thousand mile navigation trip along the Equator, after which he stopped at Johnston Island en route to Pearl Harbor. During the trip, he mapped the Island of Wake for the Navy. For this work he received commendatory letters from the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations,

He served with Fighting Squadron FIVE-B of the Fleet Air Detachment, San Diego, California, from July 1936 to March 1937, after which he was Flight Deck Officer of the USS *Ranger* until June 1939. That month he returned to the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, and was serving in the Assembly and Repair Department of that Station at the outbreak of World War II in December 1941. Detached in October 1942, he was

assigned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and in November reported as Commanding Officer of Acorn THREE (Red), an airfield assembly which constructed, then operated an advanced land-plane and seaplane base overseas in the Pacific Area. As such he participated in the consolidation of the Solomon Islands.

In July 1943 he reported as Executive officer of the USS *Guadalcanal* (CVE- 60). In that assignment he also served as an Assistant Task Force Commander. "For meritorious service as Executive Officer (of that aircraft carrier escort vessel), attached to Task Group TWENTY-TWO POINT THREE during the capture of an enemy German submarine off French West Africa, June 4, 1944..." he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V." The citation continues:

"Participating in the skillfully coordinated attack on the German U-505 which climaxed a prolonged search by the Task Group, Captain (then Commander) Johnson assumed the duties of commanding the *Guadalcanal*, relieving the commanding officer for other important responsibilities in the capture of the submarine. After the attack on the U-505, he placed his ship alongside, fully realizing that the submarine might momentarily explode or that there might still be enemy personnel on board, and sent parties aboard her with lines to attempt to take her in tow until more fully equipped salvage parties arrived. By his valiant service during the first successful boarding and capture of an enemy man-o'-war since 1815, Captain Johnson contributed materially to the effective prosecution of the Battle in the Atlantic and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Detached from the *Guadalcanal* late in 1944, he fitted out the USS *Webster* (ARV-2) and assumed command of that aircraft repair ship at her commissioning in March 1945. After stops at Hawaii and Eniwetok, the *Webster*, operating in the Tokyo Bay area, was station ship at the Yokosuka Navy Base. He continued to command her throughout the remaining period of the war, and until July 1946, then served on the Staff of Commander Norfolk Group, SIXTEENTH Fleet and as Commanding Officer of CVF Sub-Group until his retirement became effective in January 1947.

In addition to the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," Rear Admiral Johnson has the World War I Victory Medal; Navy Expeditionary Medal; American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.

Rear Admiral Johnson was married to Miss Elizabeth Harrold of New York, New York, at Constantinople, Turkey, on June 11, 1921. They had three daughters: Joan, Suzanne and Adrienne.