



Charles Perry Mason, VADM, USN

Date of Designation: 26 June 1917 NA #52

Dates of Active Duty: June 1912 - 1 April 1946

Combat Awards:
Navy Cross

Duty Assignment Chronology

Charles Perry Mason was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on January 12, 1891, son of William Charles and Gertrude Rider Mason. He attended high school in Columbia, Pennsylvania, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy from his native state on June 29, 1908. While a midshipman he won his class numerals in football, baseball and track. Graduated and commissioned Ensign in June 1912, he subsequently progressed in grade, attaining the rank of Rear Admiral to date from May 16, 1942. He was transferred to the Retired List of the Navy, and advanced to the rank of Vice Admiral, on April 1, 1946.

After graduation from the Naval Academy, he served consecutively in the USS *Connecticut*, the USS *Chester*, and the USS *North Carolina* until June 1916 when he reported to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for flight training. Designated Naval Aviator #52 on June 26, 1917, during the early period of World War I, he remained on duty as an instructor at the Pensacola Air Station until the fall of 1917. He assumed command of the Naval Air Station at Bay Shore, Long Island, New York, serving briefly in that assignment. In December 1917 he reported to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., where he had duty until the following April.

In June 1918 he reported for duty as Officer in Charge of Inspection and Test of Airplanes at the U.S. Naval Air

Station in Paulliac, France. While, in this duty he flew the first American built seaplane powered with single and twin engined Liberty motors delivered to the U. S. Naval Air Forces in Europe. In November 1918 immediately after the Armistice, he was assigned to Naval Headquarters, London, England, and during that tour of duty served as a member for U. S. Naval Aviation, Heavier than Aircraft, in the first Armistice Commission to inspect German air stations. Commended by the British Admiralty for his World War service, he also received a Letter of Commendation from the Secretary of the Navy for meritorious service "as an Airship Pilot attached to the United States Naval Aeronautical Forces abroad...."

Following his return to the United States in January 1919, he commanded the Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, until October of that year. While serving in that command, he qualified as a lighter-than-air-pilot. From November 1919 until May 1921 he was attached to the USS *Aroostook*, flagship of Air Detachments, Pacific Fleet. During that period of duty, he organized the first seaplane patrol squadron of the Pacific Fleet. The outstanding achievement of that Squadron was a successful flight from San Diego, California, to Panama, Canal Zone, and return in January-March, 1921.

In May 1923 he returned to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, where he had duty until November 1923, serving as Superintendent of Training Schools during the latter part of that assignment. In December 1923 he reported to the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, D. C., for duty in connection with organizing Scouting Plane Squadron 3. He commanded that squadron, attached to the USS *Wright*, flagship of Air Squadrons, Scouting Fleet, until the spring of 1925 when he joined the USS *Langley* at Pensacola, to serve as head of her Aviation Department until June 1926.

He was on duty in the Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., from July to September 1926, when he reported to the American Brown Boveri Electric Company, Camden, New Jersey, where the USS *Saratoga* was fitting out. Laid down as a battle cruiser she was converted during construction into a carrier, by provisions of the Washington Treaty for the Limitations of Armament. He served aboard that aircraft carrier from her commissioning, November 16, 1927, until the spring of 1928 when he again returned to the Pensacola Air Station for duty until June 1931. Planes from that Station responded to calls for assistance in 1929, dropping food, clothing and medicine to refugees in Florida and Southern Alabama where flood waters from overflowing rivers had completely isolated a number of towns from all communications except by air.

From June 1931 until June 1932 he was Aide on the staff of Commander, Aircraft, Scouting Force, (USS *Wright* flagship) and the following year served as Executive Officer of the carrier *Langley*. Between June 1933 and July 1935, he was Executive Officer of the Naval Air Station, Naval Operating Base, Norfolk, Virginia. During that period a squadron of patrol planes (P2Y-1) flew in September 1933 from Norfolk to Coco Solo, Canal Zone, a distance of 2,159

statute miles, the longest formation flight on record at that time.

In August, 1935 he reported for duty in connection with fitting out the USS *Yorktown* at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia. He served as Executive Officer of that aircraft carrier from her commissioning, September 30, 1937, until June 1939. He then assumed command of Patrol Wing 1, based in San Diego, California, and remained in command for a year. Following duty in the Bureau of Aeronautics, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., from June to August 1940, he had duty in connection with the establishment of the Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida, commanding that Station from its commissioning in September 1940, until May 1942.

On June 15, 1942, he assumed command of the USS *Hornet*. During the period of his command, that aircraft carrier had a narrow escape when in September 1942 a torpedo, launched from an enemy submarine and speeding toward her hull, was deflected by a depth charge from one of her torpedo bomber planes. Early in the following month the *Hornet* launched an attack on the Buin-Faisi Area, scoring hits on a tanker, a light cruiser, and two cargo ships, shooting down several enemy planes, and bombing the Kahili airfield. She also made another raid at Kekata Bay where two beached transports were hit and burned, landing barges and supplies fired, fuel dumps and anti-aircraft installations destroyed, and 12 seaplanes shot down.

The climax of the *Hornet's* career came in the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands, October 26, 1942, where she made the Japanese pay dearly for her sinking. Planes of her Air Group 8 scored four 1,000 pound bomb hits on an enemy carrier, three torpedo hits on a heavy cruiser, and bombed two heavy cruisers and a destroyer in the first attack. The *Hornet* suffered a direct bomb hit and was set on fire by an enemy bomber which dived into her stack. Fires were extinguished in two hours, but while delivering a dive bomb attack, she received two torpedo hits which disrupted her power and communications. This was followed by three more bomb hits and another suicide plane crash which started more fires. After the eleven minute attack, the *Hornet* was dead in the water, with many fires aboard, and a decided list. She was taken in tow by the Northampton, but again attacked by torpedo and dive bombers, she had to be abandoned and sunk by our own forces. All but 129 of her complement of 2900 men were rescued by other surface Vessels.

“For extraordinary heroism and outstanding courage as Commanding Officer of the USS *Hornet* during the engagement with enemy Japanese forces near Santa Cruz islands on October 26, 1942...” Vice Admiral Mason was awarded the Navy Cross. The citation continues in part: “...Subjected to violent attack by overwhelming numbers of Japanese fighters, dive and torpedo bombers, (he) directed the fighting of his ship with cool and aggressive determination. The air forces under his command succeeded in severely damaging and possibly sinking a large number of enemy warships (and) a total of seventy Japanese planes was destroyed, the guns

of the *Hornet* accounted for twenty-six of them. The notable record achieved by the units under (his) efficient and inspiring command reflects great credit upon the United States Naval Service.”

Following the loss of the *Hornet*, Vice Admiral Mason commanded a Task Group from December 1942 until February 1943, when he returned to the United States for hospitalization. On July 12, 1943, he reported for duty as Commander, Naval Air Training Center, Corpus Christi, Texas; and on December 30 of the same year, was designated Chief of the Naval Air Intermediate Training Command, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, with additional duty in command of the Naval Air Training Center at Corpus Christi. During the summer of 1944 he also had temporary additional duty as Chief of the Naval Air Training Command at Pensacola.

On September 15, 1944, he was designated Commander, Naval Air Training Bases, Corpus Christi, Texas. In May 1945 he was transferred to duty as Commander, Naval Air Bases, Fourteenth Naval District, Pearl Harbor, T.H., and remained in that assignment until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement on April 1, 1946.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Vice Admiral Mason has the Mexican Service Medal (USS *Connecticut*); the Victory Medal, Overseas Clasp; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the American Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal. He also holds the Brazilian Order of the Southern Cross; the decoration Al Merito, rank of Grand Officer, presented him by the Republic of Chile; and the Order of Military Merit, First Class, awarded Military Merit, First Class, awarded by the Government of Mexico.

He was married to the former Ralphine Flisher of Pensacola, Florida.