



David McCampbell, Captain, USN

Combat Awards:

- Congressional Medal of Honor
- Navy Cross
- Legion of Merit with Combat "V"
- Silver Star
- 3 Distinguished Flying Crosses and the Air Medal

Duty Assignment Chronology

David McCampbell was born in Bessemer, Alabama, on January 16, 1910, son of Andrew Jackson and LaValle Perry McCampbell. He attended Staunton (Virginia) Military Academy and had a year at Georgia School of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy by Senator P. Trammell of Florida, in 1929. As a Midshipman he qualified as an expert rifleman, and was active in athletics (baseball and swimming). He was AAU Diving Champion, Mid-Atlantic States in 1931, and was Eastern Intercollegiate Diving Champion in 1932. Upon graduation on June 1, 1933, due to Congressional legislation limiting commissions in the U. S. Navy that year, he was honorably discharged from the U. S. Navy and the same day was commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Naval Reserve. During the following year, while in inactive status in the Naval Reserve, he was employed as a construction company in Alabama, and as an assembly mechanic with the Douglas Aircraft Corporation. On June 14, 1934, he was transferred from the Naval Reserve to the U. S. Navy, and was commissioned Ensign to rank from May 29, 1934. Through subsequent advancement he attained the rank of Captain, to date from July 1, 1952.

Upon recall to active duty, he joined the USS *Portland* in June 1934, and in July 1935, was assigned to duty as Aircraft Gunnery Observer with Scouting Squadron 119 aviation unit of that cruiser. He was detached in June 1937 to report to the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, for flight training, and was designated Naval Aviator on April 23, 1938. For two years thereafter he served with Fighting Squadron 4, based on the aircraft carrier USS *Ranger*, and in May 1940 he was sent to Norfolk, Virginia, for duty with the USS *Wasp's*



Air Group. He subsequently served as Landing Signal Officer aboard the USS *Wasp* early in World War II, until that carrier was lost in enemy action in the South Pacific on September 15, 1942.

During his period of service aboard the *Wasp*, that carrier rescued the crew of the schooner George E. Klenck, which was foundering in heavy gales off Cape Hatteras in March 1941, carried planes to the British Forces on the Island of Malta in the summer of 1942; and participated in scattered actions in the Pacific to keep open the supply lines to Guadalcanal following the Battle of the Eastern Solomons in August 1942. After his return to the United States, he had consecutive duty at the Naval Air Stations in Jacksonville and Melbourne, Florida, from November 1942 until August 1943.

After fitting out Fighting Squadron 15, he commanded that Squadron from September 1943 until February 1945 assuming command of Air Group 15, based on the USS *Essex* on February 8. In addition to his duties as Air Group Commander of "fabled Fifteen," he became the Navy's high scoring pilot with a total of 34 airborne enemy planes destroyed, the greatest number ever shot down by an American pilot during a single tour of combat duty. His feat of destroying nine in one flight was unequaled in the annals of combat aviation. He was credited with the destruction of 20 grounded planes

Under his leadership Air Group 15 ranged from the Central to the Far Western Pacific; participated in campaigns and attacks in the Marianas, Iwo Jima, Palau, Philippines, and Formosa; took part in the First Battle of the Philippine Sea, when Task Force 58, under command of Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, USN, conducted the now famous "Marianas Turkey Shoot" and destroyed over 400 planes in one battle, and continued its exploits up to and including the Battles of Leyte Gulf.

During the seven months and more than 20,000 hours of operations before it was returned to the United States for a rest period, Air Group 15 destroyed more enemy planes (315 airborne and 348 on the ground) and sank more enemy shipping (296,500 tons sunk and over half a million tons damaged and or probably sunk) than any other Air Group in

the Pacific War. Among the major combat ships sunk was the battleship MUSASHI (a 45,000 ton sister-ship to the YAMATO), 3 carriers, and a heavy cruiser. Additional ships damaged included 3 battleships, a carrier, 5 heavy cruisers, 4 light cruisers, and 19 destroyers.

For his brilliant record in command of Air Group 15, Captain McCampbell was awarded the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, the Legion of Merit with Combat "V," the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross with two Gold Stars in lieu of the second and third similar award, and the Air Medal. The citations follow, in part:

MEDAL OF HONOR: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Commander, Air Group FIFTEEN during combat against enemy Japanese aerial forces in the First and Second Battles of the Philippine Sea...(He) led his fighter planes against a force of eighty Japanese carrier-based aircraft bearing down on our Fleet on June 19, 1944...(and) personally destroyed seven hostile planes during this single engagement in which the outnumbering attack force was utterly routed and virtually annihilated. During a major Fleet engagement with the enemy on October 24, Commander McCampbell, assisted by but one plane, intercepted and daringly attacked a formation of sixty hostile land-based craft approaching our forces...(and) shot down nine Japanese planes, completely disorganizing the enemy group, forced the remainder to abandon the attack before a single aircraft could reach the Fleet...."

NAVY CROSS: "For distinguishing himself by extraordinary heroism and skill in operations against the enemy in the vicinity of Luzon, Philippine Islands, while serving as Target Coordinator for the combined aircraft of three Task Groups on 25 October 1944. His coolness, quick thinking, superior judgment and outstanding leadership resulted in the sinking of one medium aircraft carrier, one light cruiser, two destroyers, and the damaging of one battleship. By his outstanding performance not only was the maximum damage inflicted on the enemy but our own losses were kept at a minimum..."

SILVER STAR MEDAL: "For distinguishing himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a pilot of a carrier-based fighter plane in an attack against the enemy in the Central Philippine Islands on 12 September 1944. When he so ably led the attack group as to cause maximum damage and destruction to the enemy and he did, personally, engage and destroy four enemy airplanes in aerial combat and, in the face of anti-aircraft fire, did strafe and cause serious damage to an enemy merchant ship..."

LEGION OF MERIT: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct...while attached to the USS *Essex*, during action against enemy Japanese forces in the Philippine Islands from November 11 to 14, 1944...(He) directed the operations of several attack groups during this period, skillfully deploying the forces under his command to strike at the enemy with devastating speed, power and precision in perfectly coordinated raids which resulted in maximum damage inflicted on hostile shipping and vital harbor facilities and in the complete destruction of a large Japanese troop convoy..."

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS: "For distinguishing himself by heroism while participating in an aerial

flight...as Commander of an air group in operations against the enemy. He led his group against the strong fortifications on Marcus Island on 19 May 1944 and early in the action was hit by anti-aircraft fire which seriously damaged the after fuselage and controls, and set fire to the auxiliary gasoline tank. Despite this heavy damage to his own plane, he remained to direct operations of his group until all ammunition was expended, then led them back to their carrier..."

GOLD STAR in lieu of the second DFC: "...while participating in an aerial flight against enemy forces on 13 June 1944. As Commander of a carrier-based Air Group, he led component parts of his group in an outstanding attack against an enemy convoy in the vicinity of the Marianas Islands... (resulting) in the destruction of upwards of fifty thousand tons of enemy merchant shipping, at least one enemy destroyer and three escort vessels, and damage to numerous others..."

GOLD STAR in lieu of the third DFC: "For distinguishing himself by heroism and extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight as pilot of a carrier-based fighter plane on 13 September, 1944. When, as leader of a fighter assigned to a mission against the enemy in the Central Philippines, he did engage and destroy in aerial combat three enemy planes and did, in the face of anti-aircraft fire, destroy two more planes on the ground by strafing..."

From March 1945 to January 1947 he was on duty at the Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, as Chief of Staff to Commander Fleet Air Quonset Point, and as Commander Carrier Air Groups, Hampton Roads, Virginia. He was next assigned to the Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, Virginia, first as a student and later as a member of the Staff (Intelligence Division). After attending Language School at Anacostia, D. C., he was sent to Buenos Aires, Argentina, as the Senior Naval Aviation Advisor to the Argentine Navy, and remained there from October 1948 to January 1951.

In February 1951 he joined the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVE-42) as Executive Officer, and from March 1952 until July 1953 was Planning Officer on the Staff of Commander Aircraft Atlantic, with Headquarters at the Naval Air Station, Norfolk. In July 1953 he assumed command of the Naval Air Technical Training Center at Jacksonville, Florida, and a year later became Flight Test Coordinator, Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland.

In June 1956 he joined the Staff of the Commander SIXTH Fleet, in the Mediterranean, and in January 1958 was detached for duty as Commanding Officer of the USS *Severn* (AO-61). He commanded the USS *Bon Homme Richard* from February 1959 until May 1960, when he was assigned to the Joint Staff Office, Joint Chiefs of Staffs, Washington, D. C. He later served briefly in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, and in September 1960 became Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, to the Commander Chief, Continental Air Defense Command, with headquarters at Colorado Springs, Colorado. He remained there until relieved of active duty pending his retirement, effective, July 1, 1964. Captain and Mrs. McCampbell, the former Sara Jane Heliker of West Palm Beach, FL, have three children, David Perry, John Calhoun, and Frances McCampbell.