



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

Commander Elmer Fowler Stone, USCG



1887-1936

Behind the controls of the U.S. Navy seaplane NC-4 when it made its historic crossing of the Atlantic was a Coast Guard officer, Commander E. F. "Archie" Stone. He was the pilot and navigator on this first successful trans-Atlantic flight. Elmer Fowler Stone was born in Livonia, Livingston County, New York, on 22 January 1887. His family moved to Norfolk, Virginia in 1895. Stone attended high school in Norfolk, Virginia, and after graduating, began work as a stereotypist. In 1910, at the age of 23, he qualified as a cadet in the Revenue Cutter Service of the United States after passing the required examinations, scoring higher than any other applicant that year. He was appointed as a cadet on 30 April 1910 in the Revenue Cutter Service's School of Instruction. He graduated three years later, on 7 June 1913, and was commissioned as a third lieutenant in the Revenue Cutter Service.

His first assignment put him on board the Revenue cutter *Onondaga*, and was detailed to study the steam machinery of the vessel. This was 13 June 1913, and by 1 November of the same year, Third Lieutenant Stone, feeling he had qualified himself to perform the duties of an engineer officer, requested that headquarters assign him to duty as a line officer. Headquarters, on 14 February 1914, complied with his request and Stone became a line officer of the *Onondaga*.

On 9 October 1914, Stone was transferred to *Itasca*, in which vessel he served until 1 February 1915, when he was again assigned to *Onondaga*. It was while he was serving on board *Onondaga* that he participated in the rescue of seven seamen who had been shipwrecked on the lumber-laden schooner *C.C. Wehrum* off False Cape, Virginia. For the manner in which he handled his boat crew, Stone was complimented by the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury



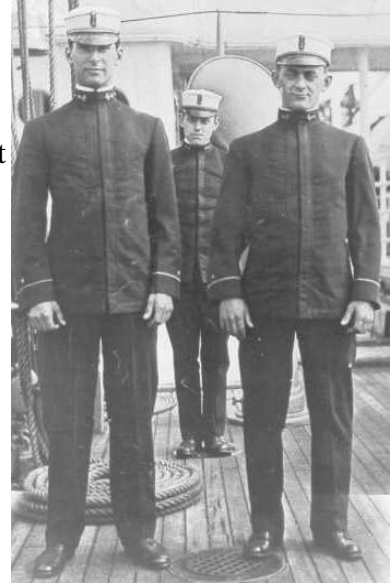
U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

Department on 24 June 1915. By this time, in January 1915, the Revenue Cutter Service had been combined with the Life-Saving Service to form the United States Coast Guard.

Early in 1916, Stone put in his first request to be assigned to duty in connection with aviation; especially those phases of aviation that had a direct bearing on assistance to vessels in distress and the search for derelict vessels. On 21 March 1916

he was one of two Coast Guard officers assigned to aviation training. The other officer was Second Lieutenant Charles E. Sugden. On 1 April 1916 he reported to the air station at Pensacola, Florida. On 10 April 1917, after successfully completing the training, he was appointed Naval Aviator No. 38 on the Navy's roster of naval aviators.



(Right: Stone--on far right--as a Revenue Cutter Service cadet.)

After the United States entered as a belligerent in World War I and the Coast Guard was transferred to the Navy Department, Stone served on board the USS *Huntington*, a Navy armored cruiser, which was employed in convoy escort duty, from July 1917 until October 1917. *Huntington's* World War I career was active. The cruiser sailed for Hampton Roads 1 August and arrived New York five days later. There, *Huntington* formed with a convoy of six troopships bound for France, departing 8 September. En route, several balloon observation flights were made. As they approached the coast of Europe, the convoy was turned over to American destroyers in European waters and *Huntington* steamed back to Hampton Roads, arriving 30 September. After replenishing at Norfolk, *Huntington* sailed to New York 5 October to have her catapult and seaplanes removed. Stone was detached from *Huntington* a few days later that month to Naval Air Station Rockaway Beach. For his service during the war on board *Huntington* he was awarded the Victory Medal with a Patrol Clasp. He was detached from NAS Rockaway Beach in May, 1918 and was assigned to the Navy Department's Bureau of Construction and Repair. The following month, on 7 June 1918, he was promoted to second lieutenant and was promoted to first lieutenant on 1 July 1918.

It was while he was a first lieutenant that Stone made history as the pilot of the Navy seaplane NC-4 during an attempt by the Navy to complete the first trans-Atlantic flight. The Navy's expedition consisted of three Curtiss flying boats, the NC-1, NC-3, and NC-4. They were in direct competition with three teams of British pilots, who were flying from a base in St. Johns, Newfoundland. All were hoping to win a prize of \$50,000, offered by London's *Daily Mail*, that would be awarded to the first team to cross the Atlantic by air successfully.



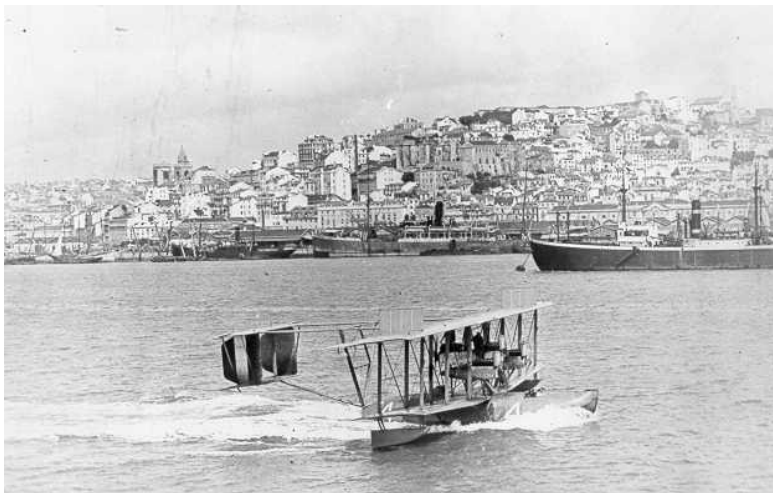
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Preserving Our History For Future Generations



The crew of the NC-4, in Lisbon (Left to Right): Chief Machinist's Mate Eugene S. Rhoads, USN; LT James L. Breese, USN; LTJG Walter Hinton, USN; LT Elmer Stone, USCG; LCDR A.C. Read, Commanding Officer, NC-4. Missing from photo is ENS Herbert C. Rodd, USN.

The NC-4 started from the Naval Air Station at Rockaway, New York, at 1000 hours on 8 May, 1919, in concert with the NC-1 and NC-3, and although the NC-1 and NC-3 did not complete the journey, the NC-4 successfully crossed the Atlantic and landed in Lisbon, Portugal on 27 May 1919. Stone was decorated that same day by the Portuguese government with the Order of the Tower and Sword.





U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

The US Navy's Curtiss flying boat NC-4 in the harbor of Lisbon, Portugal, on 28 May 1919.

Stone then flew to Plymouth, England, arriving there 31 May 1919. He was awarded the British Air Force Cross by the government of England on 9 June 1919. He received a promotion to the temporary rank of captain on 25 September 1919. He was awarded a Navy Cross for "distinguished service in making the first successful trans-Atlantic flight" on 11 November 1920. He received a written commendation from then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, dated 23 August 1919, that stated:

"I wish to heartily commend you for your work as pilot of the Seaplane NC-4 during the recent trans-Atlantic flight expedition. The energy, efficiency, and courage shown by you contributed to the accomplishment of the first trans-Atlantic flight, which feat has brought honor to the American Navy and the entire American nation. . ."

On 2 September 1921 he reverted to his permanent rank of first lieutenant. On 1 October 1921 he was awarded the Victory Medal with Aviation Clasp and on 23 May 1930 he was awarded a special Congressional Medal, especially designed for the occasion, by the President in the name of Congress for "extraordinary achievement in making the first successful trans-Atlantic flight."

On 30 March 1920, he was appointed as Coast Guard Aviator No. 1. From 20 November 1920 until 1 October 1926, Stone was assigned to duty with the Navy Department's Bureau of Aeronautics. During this period, he not only served as a test pilot, but he did considerable work in connection with the shipboard catapult system and deck arresting gear for use on the new aircraft carriers *Lexington* and *Saratoga*. He also invented a gunpowder catapult design, working with Mr. Carl F. Jeansen of the Navy's Bureau of Ordnance, which under tests proved to be successful. He then went on to lead the development and installation of catapult and the Mark I and Mark II Norden/Barth hydraulic arresting gear systems for the Navy's aircraft carriers.

While with the Navy, he also energetically supported attempts to initiate aviation in the Coast Guard; the first being at Morehead City shortly after the war, which failed for lack of funds. The second attempt, which was successful, was at Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1926 under the direction of Commander C.C. von Paulsen. Stone always maintained his interest in aviation and with Hall and Von Paulsen formed the "triumvirate" that directed the founding of Coast Guard aviation. On 21 April 1924 he was promoted to lieutenant commander, as by this time the Coast Guard had adopted the Navy's rank structure.

On 21 September 1926 Stone was detached from the Navy Department and returned to Coast Guard service. Upon leaving the Navy, the chief of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, Jr., USN, commended Stone, in a written commendation dated 4 November 1926, for "valuable services in the development of catapult and deck arresting gear for aircraft and aircraft carriers, and as a test pilot."



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations



Stone requested sea duty and was assigned, in November 1926, as the executive officer of the cutter *Modoc*, home-ported in Wilmington, North Carolina. After serving for two years on board *Modoc*, in September, 1928, he was given the command of Coast Guard Destroyer *Monaghan*, home-ported in New London, Connecticut, and served as her commanding officer until June 1929.

(Left: Stone climbing into the cockpit of Coast Guard Grumman JF-2 V167.)

He was then given command of Coast Guard Destroyer *Cummings*, where he served until May, 1931. Both destroyers were former Navy warships that were turned over to the Coast Guard to help augment the fleet during the enforcement of Prohibition.

From May 1931 to early March, 1932, Stone served as the senior member of the trial board for the new Coast Guard seaplanes that were being built by the General Aviation Manufacturing Corporation in Baltimore, Maryland. On 8 March 1932 Stone reported as the commanding officer of Coast Guard Air Station Cape May, New Jersey. Two years later, on 23 April 1934, he became Inspector of Naval Aircraft for the Douglas Aircraft Company at Santa Monica, California.

On 10 January 1935 he was commended by the Secretary of the Treasury for establishing a world record for amphibian planes; 191 miles per hour over a three kilometer test course at Buckroe Beach, Virginia on 20 December 1934. For the same feat he was awarded a Certificate of Record by the National Aeronautic Association. On 1 May 1935, he was promoted to the rank of commander.

On 21 May 1935 he reported as the commanding officer to the Air Patrol Detachment at San Diego, California. It was here at the Naval Air Station that he met his untimely death the following year.

On 20 May 1936, Commander Stone, while inspecting a new patrol plane, walked over and sat down on a concrete hanger abutment. He fell over with an attack of coronary thrombosis, resulting in his almost instant death. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. On 12 May 1983 he was inducted into the United States Naval Aviation Hall of Honor.

Commander Stone's uncanny foresight and ability in aviation, his fine qualities of leadership, made him respected and beloved by all who served under him. One officer who knew him well describes him as "pop-eyed, bushy-haired, stub-nosed, careless of dress but as alert as a terrier; a man who cared little for the form, but much for the matter." Commander Stone is now



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

recognized to have been ahead of his time in many things to the extent that he did not receive the deserved support of more conservative officers. At one Coast Guard air station stands a monument to him, with the apt quotation: "A prophet is not without honor." Eccentric perhaps, and something of a trial for his seniors, but he left behind a rich tradition, the foundation for morale for Coast Guard aviators who follow him.



**CDR Stone at his desk as the commanding officer of Air Station Cape May, circa 1933.
U.S. Coast Guard Photo No. G-APA-10-15-73 (17).**

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U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

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