**Theodore Gordon Ellyson**

**U.S. Navy Pilot Number 1**

**February 27, 1885 to February 27, 1928**

Source: Naval History and Heritage Command

Theodore Gordon Ellyson was born at Richmond, Virginia on 27 February 1885 and appointed naval cadet at the age of sixteen. After graduating from the Naval Academy and serving on the *USS Texas*, the US Navy’s first battleship, he was commissioned ensign 31 January 1907 while serving on armored cruiser *USS Colorado.*

From December 1908 until February 1910, when the US Navy’s submarine force consisted of nine submarines in active commission and three in reserve, he was attached to submarines in the orient. Returning to the United States, he then commanded the First Submarine Division and served in other related duties.

On 2 January 1911, he reported for aviation instruction at Los Angeles. Ellyson was the lone lieutenant ordered to report to the Glenn Curtiss Aviation Camp at North Island, San Diego on Dec. 23, 1910. He completed his training in April of the following year, and became Naval Aviator No. 1. During the following 28 months, he was closely associated with the development of naval aviation, then in its infancy. Ellyson later made history in November of 1912, when he executed the Navy’s first successful catapult launch from a stationary coal barge at the Washington Navy Yard.

In 1915, his excellent work in every phase of sea-going flying earned him the distinction of being appointed Naval Pilot Number One. The lieutenant spent the years before World War I honing his flying skills and experimenting with the art of aviation. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his aviation service in the war.

In January 1918, while serving as gunnery officer on the *USS South Carolina*, he was also issued Naval Aviator’s Certificate Number One. In June 1918, he reported for duty with a submarine chaser squadron at the US Naval Base, Plymouth, England, and he continued in this duty throughout the rest of World War I. For distinguished service in the development of successful sub-chaser tactics and doctrine he was awarded the Navy Cross.

After the war, he reported for duty with Nucleus Crew Number 19 at Spithead, England, for the purpose of aiding in taking over German transports. He took command of *USS Zeppelin* (née SS Z*eppelin*) and made one trip from France to the United States with returning troops of the AAF. He then helped outfit and commission destroyer *J. Fred Talbott* (DD 156) and served in her in the Atlantic before commanding [*Little*](http://destroyerhistory.org/flushdeck/usslittle/) (DD 79) and [*Brooks*](http://destroyerhistory.org/flushdeck/ussbrooks/) (DD 232).

From January 1921 to December 1922, he served as a naval aviator at the Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Virginia and in the Bureau of Aeronautics. Following two and one half years with the United States Naval Mission to Brazil, he returned to the Bureau of Aeronautics, then served as executive officer of both the *USS Wright* (AV 1) and *USS Lexington* (CV 2), the latter after fitting her out and placing her in commission.

On 27 February 1928, his 43rd birthday, Commander Ellyson’s brilliant well-rounded career was terminated when the plane in which he was making an emergency night flight from Hampton Roads to Annapolis, Maryland crashed for unknown reasons in Chesapeake Bay. It was his 63rd plane crash. It was also his 43rd birthday. Carmichael was just 6 years old at the time.

He was buried at the Naval Academy Cemetery in Annapolis.