

## THEODORE GORDON ELLYSON "Always wanted to be the first"

Theodore Gordon Ellyson, the first Naval officer to qualify as an airplane pilot, and distinguished pioneer of U.S. Naval Aviation, was born on February 27, 1885, in Richmond, Virginia.

On a father-and-son trip to Hampton Roads, Virginia, Ellison witnessed a Navy fleet enter the harbor and from that point on he knew he wanted to be a Navy man.

Appointed Naval Cadet, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, in June 1901 and graduated with the Class of 1905. After two years at sea, then required by law before commissioning, he was commissioned Ensign in the U.S. Navy on January 31, 1907. Subsequently, he advanced as follows: Lieutenant, junior grade, on January 31, 1910; Lieutenant, September 16, 1910; Lieutenant Commander, May 23, 1917; and Commander on July 1, 1918. ✍

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- April 1910 - assumed command of **USS TARANTULA**
- December 1910 – ordered to Los Angeles, CA for flight training
- December 1911 – witnessed a float plane land in the water alongside the **USS PENNSYLVANIA**, was hoisted aboard ship, then lowered back to the water, from which it took off. He then knew that he had to develop a launching system.
- November 1912 – made a successful take-off from a barge in the Washington Navy Yard using his redesigned catapult system.
- February 1918 – was detached for duty at the Submarine Chase Base, New London, CT.
- June 1918 – was attached to Submarine Chase Squadron at U.S. Naval Base, Plymouth, England. For his wartime service, he was awarded the Navy Cross. He was largely responsible for development of submarine chase tactics and doctrine.
- July 1920 – During the next five months, Ellyson successfully commanded **USS LITTLE** and **USS BROOKS**
- January 1921 – was ordered to Hampton Roads, VA to serve as Executive Officer of Naval Air Station.
- July 1925 – assumed command of

Torpedo Squadron One.

Commander Ellyson was killed on February 27, 1928 on his forty-third birthday, in a crash of an airplane in lower Chesapeake Bay, while on a night flight from Norfolk, VA to Annapolis, MD.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Commander Ellyson was awarded the Victory Medal and Submarine Chaser Clasp. On February 27, 1941, a new auxiliary airfield at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, FL was named ELLYSON FIELD, in honor of Commander Theodore G. Ellyson, USN.

The **USS ELLYSON (DD-454)** built just prior to World War II, was also named to honor Commander Ellyson.

Ellyson loved the Navy so much that he once told his wife, "Even you come second". The only thing he loved as much as the Navy was accomplishing things before anyone else. In 1911, he had successfully merged both passions, becoming the Navy's first pilot. ✍



**Ellyson Catapult Launch Nov. 1912**

(Photo's courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command).



**Ellyson Hydro Testing - 1911**

### Invitation to 246<sup>th</sup> Marine Corps Birthday Ball

I have included the link for the MARDET Marine Corps Ball and I would like to invite all the members of the Richmond Navy League to the event in Downtown Richmond. Ball tickets can be purchased through the web-site: [www.mardetfortleeball.com](http://www.mardetfortleeball.com)

It will be on 10 November 2021 as a formal evening event.

**Respectfully,**  
**LtCol Julian M Tsukano**  
**USMC, Commanding Officer**  
**Marine Detachment (MarDet)**  
**Ft. Lee, Virginia**

**Message from the CO:** Our Marine Corps Birthday will be contingent on the latest State of VA, Dept of Defense, and USMC COVID-19 restrictions and changes may occur up to the day of the Marine Corps Ball. We apologize upfront for the additional restrictions. All attendees are highly recommended to self-screen for COVID infections and to not attend if you have had contact or suspect you have had contact with an infected individual. In order to avoid unnecessary restrictions, please get vaccinated. ✍

**THEODORE G. ELLYSON**  
was designated by the  
Department of the Navy,  
Air Pilot No. 1,  
NAVY AIR PILOT  
on  
January 1, 1914.