

VICE ADMIRAL JOHN ESTEN WHELCHER,
UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Vice Admiral Whelchel was born on April 1, 1898, at Hogansville, Georgia. He entered the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from his native state on August 18, 1916. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 7, 1919, he progressively advanced in rank to that of Captain, to date from June 18, 1942. His selection to the rank of Rear Admiral was confirmed by the Senate to date from August 7, 1947. On August 1, 1949, he was transferred to the Retired List of the Navy and promoted to Vice Admiral on the basis of combat citations.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1919, Vice Admiral Whelchel was assigned to duty aboard the cruiser LOUISVILLE, and in 1920 he served in the USS ROCHESTER. In May, 1921 he returned to the Naval Academy for temporary duty in connection with coaching football, and had similar duty in the succeeding years 1923, 1924, and 1925. His duty at sea over the same period included service in the USS MACFARLAND, destroyer, as Executive Officer and Gunnery Officer, the USS TEXAS as a turret officer, USS HANNIBAL, as Navigator and Gunnery Officer, and in 1927 he joined the USS FLORIDA, battleship.

In 1929, Vice Admiral Whelchel was ordered to duty, first as Aide and Flag Secretary to Commander Light Cruiser Division Four, Scouting Fleet, USS RICHMOND, flagship, and later that year transferred to duty as Aide and Flag Lieutenant in the USS TRENTON, flagship of Commander Light Cruiser Division Two, Scouting Fleet. Early in 1930, he had brief duty in the Bureau of Engineering, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and then reported for a tour of duty as Aide to the Commandant of the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia. After two years he was assigned as Communications Officer of the USS IDAHO, and served in that duty for four years and simultaneously as Assistant Gunnery Officer.

Returning to the Navy Department in 1936, Vice Admiral Whelchel had duty for two years in the Bureau of Navigation (now Bureau of Naval Personnel), then had command of the USS MC CALL, destroyer, until 1940, and transferred to duty as Executive Officer of the USS HOLLAND until the summer of 1941. At that time he was ordered to return to the Naval Academy, and had duty there in the Executive Department of Ordnance and Gunnery, and as Head of the Department of Physical Training. For his service as Head Football Coach for the three succeeding years, he received a commendatory letter from the Superintendent of the Naval Academy.

In February, 1944 Vice Admiral Whelchel reported for duty as Chief of Staff to Commander Service Squadron, South Pacific, and after one year he assumed command of the heavy cruiser USS SAN FRANCISCO. He was awarded the Legion of Merit, Gold Star in lieu of the second Legion of Merit, and the Bronze Star Medal for his services in these assignments. The citations follow:

LEGION OF MERIT

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Chief of Staff to the Commander Service Squadron

Legion of Merit, cont'd

- South Pacific Force, from February 3, 1944 to February 1, 1945. During this period, Captain Whelchel displayed professional ability and exercised sound judgment in handling the many problems of logistics and Fleet service in the area. Through his organizational skill and constant attention to the maintenance of our surface forces and the servicing of advanced bases, he contributed materially to the success of offensive operations in the Solomon Islands, Bismarck Archipelago and Marianas Islands campaigns. His forceful leadership and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

GOLD STAR in lieu of second Legion of Merit (with Combat "V")

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commanding Officer of the USS SAN FRANCISCO during operations against enemy Japanese forces on Okinawa from March 25 to April 24, 1945. Under the constant threat of attack by enemy air, surface and submarine forces as well as shore batteries and suicidal small craft, Rear Admiral (then Captain) Whelchel maintained the fighting efficiency of his ship and, aggressively directing his gun batteries, achieved an excellent record of destruction inflicted upon the enemy. His professional ability, courage and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

BRONZE STAR MEDAL (with Combat "V")

"For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS SAN FRANCISCO during operations against enemy Japanese forces at Iwo Jima from March 8 to 12, 1945. During this important operation, Captain Whelchel maintained his ship at a high level of combat readiness and directed the delivery of an accurate and rapid shore bombardment against stubborn enemy positions. By his leadership and devotion to duty, he contributed materially to the success of our assault forces and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

When detached from the SAN FRANCISCO in February, 1946, after serving the post-war period in the South China Sea in connection with the China occupation, Vice Admiral Whelchel again served as Chief of Staff to Commander Service Force, Pacific Fleet. In September, 1948 he assumed duty as Commander, Amphibious Group 4, Atlantic Fleet, and served until his retirement became effective on August 1, 1949 after thirty years service in the Navy.

In addition to the Legion of Merit with Gold Star and the Bronze Star Medal, Vice Admiral Whelchel has the American Defense

Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Victory Medal, Escort Clasp; the China Service Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three bronze stars; the Philippine Liberation Ribbon; the World War II Victory Medal; and the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp.

His official residence is [REDACTED],
[REDACTED].

* * *

23 November 1949