

Theodore Gordon Ellyson

A Register of His Papers in The Naval Historical Foundation Collection in the Library of Congress

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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2007

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Collection Summary

Title: Papers of Theodore Gordon Ellyson

Span Dates: 1912-1951

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1913-1920)

ID No.: MSS81309

Creator: Ellyson, Theodore Gordon, 1885-1928

Extent: 1,050 items; 3 containers; 1.2 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: U.S. naval officer and pioneer aviator. Biographical information and correspondence chiefly between Ellyson and his wife, Helen Mildred Lewis Glenn Ellyson, describing his naval sea duty and naval aviation.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Personal Names

Ellyson family.

Ellyson, Helen Mildred Lewis Glenn.

Ellyson, Theodore Gordon, 1885-1928.

Organizations

United States. Navy--Aviation.

United States. Navy--Officers.

Subjects

Adriatic question.

Naval aviation--United States.

Locations

Adriatic Sea--History, Naval.

Caribbean Area--History, Naval.

Dalmatia (Croatia)--Boundaries.

Haiti--History.

Hispaniola--History.

Italy--Boundaries--Yugoslavia.

Odesa (Ukraine)--History.

Sevastopol (Ukraine)--History.

Soviet Union--History--Revolution, 1917-1921--Evacuation of civilians.

Yugoslavia--Boundaries--Italy.

Occupations

Aviators.

Naval officers.

Administrative Information

Provenance:

The papers of Theodore Gordon Ellyson, the first United States naval aviator, were deposited in the Library of Congress by the Naval Historical Foundation in 1991 and converted to a gift in 1998.

Processing History:

The papers of Theodore Gordon Ellyson were arranged and described in 1992. The register was revised in 2007.

Copyright Status:

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Theodore Gordon Ellyson is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Preferred Citation:

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Theodore Gordon Ellyson Papers, Naval Historical Foundation Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Event</i> |
|---------------|--|
| 1885, Feb. 27 | Born, Richmond, Va. |
| 1901 | Appointed United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. |
| 1905 | Graduated United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. |
| 1910 | Ordered to Los Angeles, Calif., to take flight lessons offered to the navy by Glenn Curtiss |
| 1911 | Helped Curtiss design hydroplanes and land planes First passenger to go aloft in a hydroplane Passenger on the first flight of the A-1 aircraft and later made two solo flights, Hammondsport, N.Y. Made first night flight by a naval airman Piloted first aircraft successfully launched from a wire cable, Hammondsport, N.Y. |
| 1912 | Piloted first aircraft successfully launched from a catapult, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. Married Helen Mildred Lewis Glenn |
| 1913 | Detached from naval aviation |
| 1913-1916 | Served aboard the <i>South Carolina</i> (battleship) |
| 1914 | Designated Naval Aviator Number One |
| 1916-1918 | Instructor, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., serving aboard the <i>Wyoming</i> (battleship) and <i>Kansas</i> (battleship) |
| 1918 | Received Naval Aviator Number One certificate Received first pair of gold wings given to a pilot Duty at Submarine Chaser Base, New London, Conn. Duty with Submarine Chaser Squadron, United States Naval Base Twenty-seven, Plymouth, England (later received Navy Cross for developing submarine chasing tactics doctrine) |
| 1919 | Commander, Crew Number Fourteen, <i>Nucleus</i> (ship) Commander, <i>Zeppelin</i> (steamer) |
| 1919-1920 | Commander, <i>J. Fred Talbot</i> (destroyer) |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 1920 | Commander, successively <i>Little</i> (destroyer) and <i>Brooks</i> (ship) |
| 1921 | Executive officer, Naval Air Station, Hampton Roads, Va. |
| 1921-1922 | Head, Plans Division, Bureau of Aeronautics, Washington, D.C. |
| 1922-1925 | Aviation member, United States Naval Mission to Brazil assisting in the reorganization of the Brazilian navy |
| 1925 | Returned to Bureau of Aeronautics, Washington, D.C. |
| 1926 | Executive officer, <i>Wright</i> (airship tender) Duty in connection with fitting out the <i>Lexington</i> , the navy's second aircraft carrier |
| 1926-1928 | Executive officer, <i>Lexington</i> (aircraft carrier) |
| 1928, Feb. 27 | Killed in airplane crash over the lower Chesapeake Bay while flying from Norfolk, Va., to Annapolis, Md. |
| 1928, Mar. 10 | Declared dead by United States Navy |
| 1928, Apr. 11 | Body washed ashore at Willoughby Spit near Hampton Roads, Va. |

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Theodore Gordon "Spuds" Ellyson (1885-1928) span the years 1912-1951, with the bulk of the collection concentrated in the years 1913-1920. Encompassing biographical information and correspondence, the collection covers the period during which Ellyson was completing required sea duty. Letters from Ellyson to his wife, Helen Mildred Lewis (Glenn) Ellyson, comprise the largest portion of the collection.

The Biographical file includes a typed, four-page biography of Ellyson, 1951, apparently written as a tribute, as well as a photograph of the certificate presented to him in 1918, dated 1 January 1914, which designated him Naval Aviator Number One. Contained also in this series are a 1915 certificate for stock in the Army and Navy Cooperative Company and a wedding announcement for his marriage to Helen Mildred Lewis Glenn in 1912.

Helen Ellyson's correspondence contains letters of condolence written to her after her husband's death in 1928, a block of letters received from various family members between 1912 and 1928, and a group of letters written to her mother, Mrs. John T. Glenn, between 1915 and 1924. The latter correspondence reflects Helen's life as a naval officer's wife.

Ellyson's letters to his wife span the years 1912-1928 and are arranged in chronological order. His correspondence discussed his love for her and their children, Helen and Mildred, whom he called "Mutt" and "Midget," his longing to be home, and the family's constant financial problems. Ellyson also described his daily routine, the endless drills, problems with superiors, his duties and obligations as an officer, his feelings about aviation, naval scuttlebutt, foreign ports, people encountered, and entertainment aboard ship and ashore.

Ellyson's earliest letter to his wife in the collection dates from December 1912 when he was still attached to naval aviation in Washington, D.C. His letter of 28 December showed his chagrin that Lawrence Sperry was sent to San Diego, California, to work on automatic stabilizers for airplanes originally developed by the navy. In subsequent letters, Ellyson continued to discuss flying and inspecting airplanes, but for some reason he had lost his enthusiasm by 26 March 1913: "I have decided to quit flying for good and all, that is never to get in a machine again for any reason. Things have come to such a pass here that I had to decide, either to go to Annapolis and take charge of the camp or quit for good." He detached from naval aviation on 21 April 1913.

From May 1913 until June 1916, while Ellyson served aboard the battleship *South Carolina*, his letters reflected his participation in "gunboat duty" (the coercive tactic of placing ships off the coast of a country to effect political stability and prevent intervention by foreign powers) in the Caribbean at Tampico and Veracruz (Veracruz Llave), Mexico, and Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, during the Banana Wars. In Mexico, problems had arisen between the United States and the government of Gen. Victoriano Huerta. Haiti, on the other hand, was experiencing civil unrest as violence raged between the factions of its two presidential aspirants, Joseph Theodore and Oreste Zamor. In Ellyson's letter of 12 July 1914, he revealed confidential information about the United States government's plan to intervene in Haiti and Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic). Only seven letters, from April to December, represent the correspondence for 1915.

Ellyson spent June 1918 until March 1919 at United States Naval Base Twenty-seven in Plymouth, England, in charge of submarine chasers. Because of wartime censorship during World War I, he commented only briefly in his letters about his duties and wrote mostly about the British way of life and the various forms of entertainment in which he participated. This group of letters provides insight into the life and social obligations of a naval officer.

Correspondence from July 1919 through May 1920 reflects Ellyson's command of the *J. Fred Talbot* in the area of the Adriatic Sea. Topics discussed during these months include the Dalmatian boundary dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia; the seizure of Fiume (Rijeka), Dalmatia, by seven thousand Italians under Gabriele D'Annunzio; the American rout of the Italians from Trau (Trogir), Dalmatia; and the evacuation of Americans from Odessa and Sevastopol, Russia, during the Russian civil war.

Although the bulk of Ellyson's letters end on 5 August 1920, his last letter to his wife was written while aboard the *Lexington* on 17 February 1928, ten days before his death. Miscellaneous correspondence to and from Ellyson's family members covers the years 1912-1923.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein alphabetically.

Container List

| <i>Container</i> | <i>Contents</i> |
|------------------|--|
| BOX 1 | Biographical file |
| BOX 1 | Biography, 1951 |
| BOX 1 | Certificate as first naval aviator (photograph), 1914 |
| BOX 1 | Certificate for stock in the Army and Navy Cooperative Co., 1915 |
| BOX 1 | Wedding announcement, 1912 |
| BOX 1 | Correspondence |
| BOX 1 | Ellyson, Helen |
| BOX 1 | Condolence letters, 1928 |
| BOX 1 | From family members, 1912-1920, 1928 |
| BOX 1 | To Glenn, Mrs. John T., 1915-1924 |
| BOX 1 | Ellyson, Theodore Gordon |
| BOX 1 | From family members, 1912-1914 |
| BOX 1 | To |
| BOX 1 | Ellyson, Helen |
| BOX 1 | Dec. 1912-Apr. 1914 (5 folders) |
| BOX 2 | May 1914-Mar. 1919 (9 folders) |
| BOX 3 | July 1919-Aug. 1920 (4 folders) |
| BOX 3 | Feb. 1928 |
| BOX 3 | Other family members, 1913-1923 |