



Cdr. Walter Stephens

USN Retired

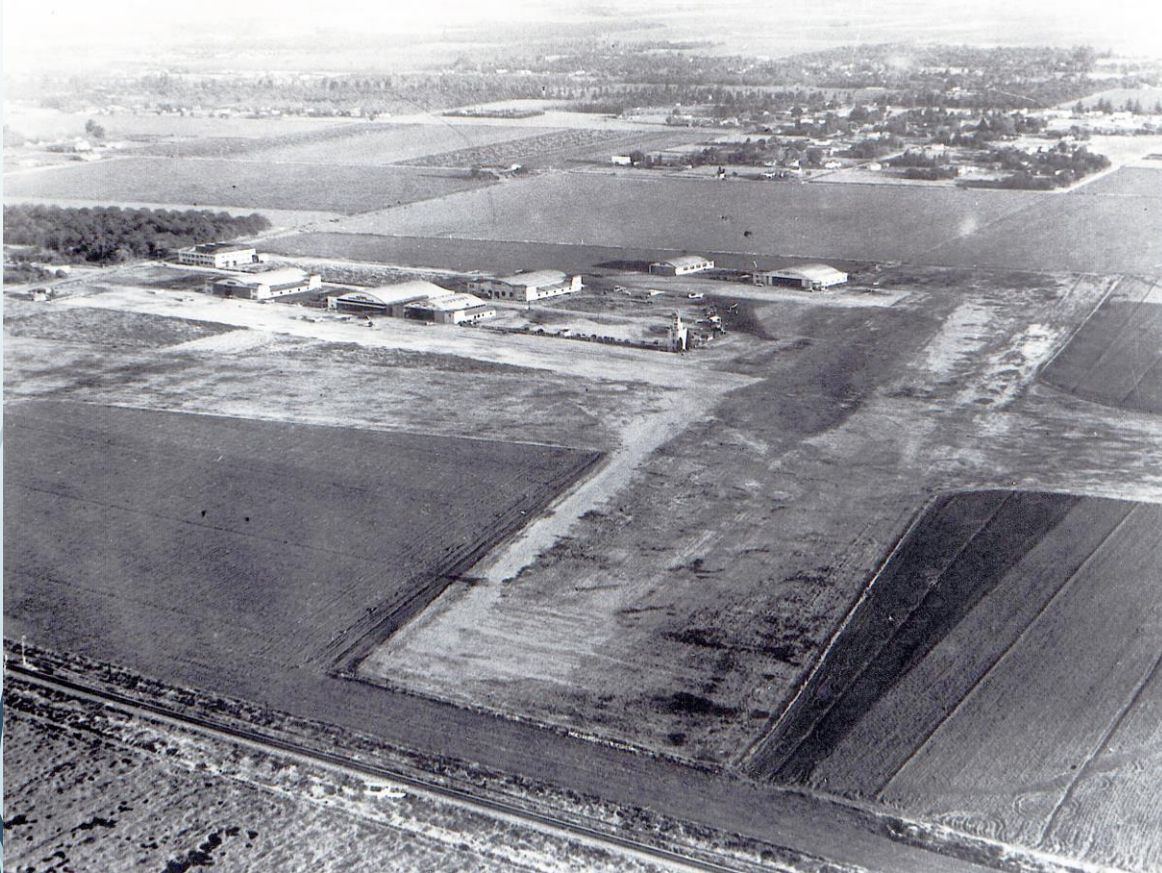
A Navy Life



It's all in the past

- ▶ Walter Stephens was born in San Diego, California on January 23, 1921
- ▶ Moved the next year to Santa Monica, CA, where he lived (except for a year in Arizona) from grammar school through high school (1938)
- ▶ Swam, body-surfed, hunted and fished, drove a hot rod car
- ▶ “I was either at the beach or at the airport.”
- ▶ Always interested in flying; learned through UCLA and flew out of Van Nuys Airport; received private pilot's license in 1941.
- ▶ Majored in Physics and Engineering at UCLA; Cadet Officer in ROTC and member of the rifle team

- ▶ First solo flight to/from Van Nuys Airport, 1941



- ▶ Earned his private pilot's license January 15, 1941, one week before his 20th birthday

Joined the Navy

“It’s better than the Army”



- Walt's best friend, Jim Sutton, convinced him that Navy flying was better than Army flying
- Both joined the Navy as Aviation Cadets
- Jim was sent to the east coast to flight school for sea planes
- (Cdr. Jim Sutton later served in the Special Weapons Unit on the USS Midway)
- Walt was sent to Corpus Christi, Texas
- The two didn't see each other again until 2015

Flying and more flying, Texas to South America

Pearl Harbor came while he was an Aviation Cadet

Graduated from flight school as an Ensign, USNR

First orders were to stay at Corpus Christi as a flight instructor.

Went to the American Airlines Co-pilot school, then went to Naval Air Transport Squadron VR-1 at Norfolk, VA

Stationed in Miami with VR-7, and supplied anti-submarine patrol squadrons up and down the coast of South America

Flew as co-pilot on R4Ds (the Navy's version of the DC-3) up and down the east coast, then the R5D after rejoining VR-1 at Patuxent River, MD

In Reply
Refer to ~~VVV~~
FVR-1/Pl6-3/00
(97-ajm)

NAVAL AIR TRANSPORT SERVICE
AIR TRANSPORT SQUADRON ONE
U. S. NAVAL AIR STATION
PATUXENT RIVER, MARYLAND

MEMORANDUM

7 December 1943

To: Lt.(jg) W. Stephens

Subj: Designation As Plane Commander, Landplanes, With Air Transport Squadron One.

1. Having satisfactorily completed the required written and flight tests for qualification in this squadron you are hereby designated as Plane Commander with Air Transport Squadron One. The effective date of this designation is 1 December 1943.



W. E. LARNED
Commander, Air Transport Squadron One

cc: Operations Officer
Flight Officer

WWII—Across the Atlantic

Spent most of the war years flying from Patuxent River across the Atlantic by way of the Azores to Paris, Scotland, and North Africa.

During the war, Walt flew just about every plane the Navy had, ferrying them from the manufacturer to the Naval bases—fighters, dive bombers, torpedo bombers, and transports.

“I happily spent the war doing just what I wanted to do--flying. Never shot a soul and never got shot at.”



Shore Duty – Bureau of Aeronautics, Washington DC

Research and development group dealing with new aircraft instruments and navigation gear—the old instruments were too large and not right for the higher speed and altitude range of the new jets.

Naval aviators were required to fly while on shore duty, so he checked out planes and flew off every Wednesday to Meriden Connecticut, where he would have lunch with his fiancé, Dot, an ensign in the WAVES who worked in communications and cyphers—then back in the afternoon.



Married—and off to the West



Married Dorothy McGettrick in 1947, with the usual consequences: Ann, Jan, and Alan



Post WWII—Still Flying—North to Alaska

- ▶ Monterey, CA
- ▶ Fleet Logistic Air Wing
- ▶ Oakland, CA
- ▶ Oak Harbor, WA, where he flew the northern part of the route from Whidbey Island to Annette Island to Yakutat, and across to Kodiak, and out to the Aleutians to Adak



After 15 years flying—off to SEA!

- Walter failed his eye exam for the first time after 15 years as a pilot
- Brother-in-law Charles Holzer brought Walt and Dot aboard a **Destroyer**
- Walt was hooked!
- Destroyer squadron staff—cruised through the Mediterranean from Portugal to Istanbul on several ships:
- USS Worcester



USS Worcester CL144

The Wandering Wo



- ▶ 1956, joined the light cruiser **USS Worcester**
- ▶ Toured the Pacific out of Long Beach, with the 7th Fleet, visiting Sasebo and Yokosuka, Japan; Hong Kong, Manila, and many other ports before returning home to Long Beach, California.

USS Beatty DD 756 to the Mediterranean Sea



Captain of the **USS James E. Kyes** DD787



- ▶ 1958 brought Walt's first command, the USS James E. Kyes

Backing out of San Diego for the trip to Japan with the Mission Bell

- Approach to CVH 31 for refueling

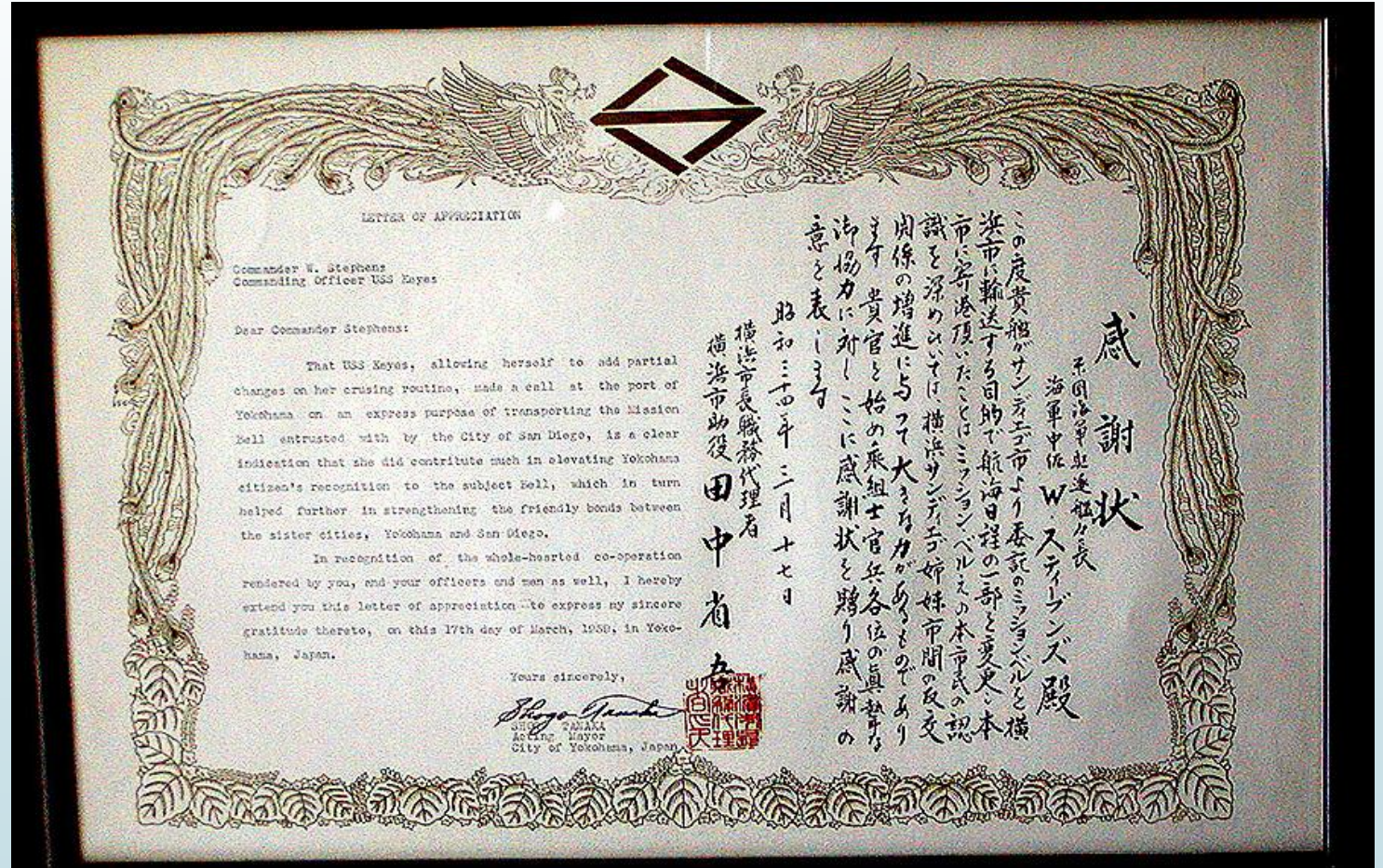


Refueling in choppy waters



Delivered the Mission Bell to Yokohama, Japan

- ▶ **The bell almost didn't make it.** The moorings came loose in a storm, and Cdr. Stephens considered dumping it over the side before it broke completely loose and destroyed everything in its path toward the stern.
- ▶ They were able to secure it after reducing speed, so the bell was delivered as planned.



Stationed at Tongue Point Naval Base; Astoria, Oregon; closed the base



...but caught some sturgeon in the
Columbia River first



USS Prairie AD15

- ▶ Stationed in San Diego



Next stop: Yokosuka, Japan

- 1964-1967
- Chief staff officer, fleet activities
- Also did lots of competitive shooting



Final Assignment Azusa, CA as Assistant Naval Plant Rep at AeroJet General – then RETIREMENT!



- ▶ AeroJet was developing new torpedoes for the Navy
- ▶ RETIRED after 29 ½ years (plus Cadet time)
- ▶ Finished BS degree in Biology at Cal Poly Pomona

Retirement, Loss, and a New Love

- ▶ Retired to Sunsites, Arizona to play golf
- ▶ Took up watercolor painting, producing one or two paintings each day for 10 years.
- ▶ Dot passed away...
- ▶ So he started a new chapter with **Virginia** in 2012



Continues to Celebrate!



...and hike daily and take photos.



