

Kenneth Whiting



CDR Kenneth Whiting, photographed aboard Saratoga while serving as her executive officer, 1927–1929 (NHC photo)

Kenneth Whiting, born at Stockbridge, Mass., 22 July 1881, was appointed Naval Cadet 7 September 1900. He graduated with the class of 1905 and was commissioned Ensign 25 February 1908 after serving the required sea duty.

Having volunteered for submarine duty, Whiting subsequently commanded *Porpoise*, *Shark*, *Tarpon*, and *Seal*. Convinced that a man could escape from a sunken submarine through a torpedo tube, on 15 April 1909 he proved the feasibility of his theory by swimming out of the 18" torpedo tube of *Porpoise*, submerged at 20 feet in Manila Bay.

A year later Glenn Curtiss offered to train the first naval aviator and Whiting applied (he talked his friend and classmate Theodore G. "Spuds" Ellyson into doing the same, and to Whiting's horror Ellyson was accepted and became Naval Aviator #1.) In 1914 Whiting finally obtained orders to Dayton, Ohio, where he became the last naval officer taught to fly by Orville Wright himself. Whiting was designated Naval Aviator #16. As a true pioneer of naval aviation, he assumed command of the 1st Naval Air Unit in France following America's entry into World War I. Lt. Comdr. Whiting was then assigned to command Naval Air Stations 14 and 15 at Killingholme, England. For this service he was awarded the Navy Cross "for exceptionally meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility."

Whiting never left aviation and was one of the earliest advocates of a ship able to operate airplanes, an "aircraft carrier" — a "plane carrier," as it was known at the time. He was partially responsible for the conversion of collier *Jupiter* into the Navy's first aircraft carrier *Langley*, of which he was the first acting commanding officer ("Whiting agitated for carriers from the spring of 1916 until 1919, when the *Langley* conversion was authorized," remembered retired Rear Admiral George van Deurs.) On 18 November 1922 Commander Whiting, piloting a PT seaplane, made the first catapult launching from *Langley*, at anchor in the York River. Whiting was personally responsible for the development of carrier operations aboard the experimental *Langley* and continued active participation in naval aviation, commanding *Langley* (1933–1934) and *Saratoga* (1934–1935), and various air squadrons prior to his retirement as Captain 30 June 1940. He was then retained on active duty as General Inspector of Naval Aircraft, Eastern Division until 1943. Captain Whiting was assigned command of the Naval Air Station, New York, 19 February, and held this post until his death 24 April 1943.

Seaplane tender USS *Kenneth Whiting* (AV-14) and Whiting Field, a Naval Air Station at Milton, Florida were named after him.

Sources:

- DANFS
- *United States Naval Aviation 1910–1995*
- *USS Saratoga CV-3*, by John Fry