

Hardison, Osborne Bennett ^[1]

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by Harriet H. Robson, 1988

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Osborne Bennett Hardison, naval officer, was born in Wadesboro, the second of six children of Harriet Bennett and William Cameron Hardison. Educated in private school through his thirteenth year, he attended Horner Military Academy for one semester before entering [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[2] at age fourteen. He was graduated with an A.B. degree in 1911 and was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy the following year. Upon his graduation there in 1916 as one of seven honor men in his class, he was commissioned ensign and joined the [USS *Texas*](#) ^[3], commanded by Captain [Victor Blue](#) ^[4], also a North Carolinian. Hardison served on this ship throughout World War I and until 1920. From February 1918 until after the armistice, the *Texas*, in the Sixth Battle Squadron, operated in the war zones in association with the British Grand Fleet and was present at the surrender of the German fleet.

Before transferring to naval aviation in 1923, Hardison served several brief assignments including one aboard the [USS *Mayflower*](#) ^[5], the presidential yacht in Washington, D.C. On completing flight training he began duty with the aircraft squadron at Hampton Roads, Va.; following temporary duty at the Naval Academy he became an instructor in its Department of Engineering Aeronautics, leaving in August 1927 to assume command of aircraft squadrons based on the [USS *Lexington*](#) ^[6]. Afterwards he served for several years in the Bureau of Aeronautics and in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations as aviation officer.

In June 1938, Hardison joined the [USS *Ranger*](#) ^[7] as executive officer; a year later he became aviation officer and subsequently fleet aviator on the staff of the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet. After a little more than a year as commander of the Naval Air Station, Anacostia, D.C., in September 1941 he became aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air and in that capacity represented the assistant secretary at the commissioning of the Naval Pre-Flight School at The University of North Carolina.

In October 1942, with the rank of captain, he was ordered to command the [USS *Enterprise*](#) ^[8], one of two aircraft carriers the United States had left in the Pacific. The day after he began this duty, the *Enterprise* participated in the [Battle of Santa Cruz Island](#) ^[9] when the *Enterprise* and the [USS *Hornet*](#) ^[10] inflicted severe damage on a powerful Japanese fleet moving to support land operations at Guadalcanal. For his role in this action Hardison was awarded the Navy Cross. Under his command the *Enterprise* also participated in the Battle of the Soloman Islands (14–15 Nov. 1942), and his ship was awarded a Presidential Citation.

On being detached from command of the *Enterprise* later that month, he was promoted to the rank of rear admiral and assumed command of Fleet Air, South Pacific. For this service he was awarded the Legion of Merit "for exceptionally meritorious conduct. . . . Faced with numerous handicaps and difficulties attendant upon operations in the forward area [he] acted aggressively and with thorough comprehension of the many problems involved, resolutely accomplishing a steady increase of resources necessary to carry the conflict to the enemy. By his able leadership in the planning, procurement, and utilization of materials and personnel for the air branch [he] contributed materially to the prosecution of the war in this area."

In January 1944, Admiral Hardison became Chief of Naval Air Primary Training Command charged with the administration of a naval command distributed throughout the United States. He created a basic aviation training program designed to equip every potential navy aviator with a complete mastery of aircraft in flight. During this period the Pre-Flight School at The University of North Carolina was one unit of Hardison's command, and he visited the campus often on inspection trips. In February 1945, he delivered the university's commencement address.

Reporting in September 1945 as commander, Air Craft Philippines Sea Frontier, he was the U.S. naval representative at the celebration pursuant to Philippine independence. In 1946, he assumed command of Carrier Division Five which supported occupation forces in the Far East. A tour of duty followed in the Office of Naval Operations where he served as Chief of Pan American Affairs, U.S. Navy, and in January 1950 he became Commander of Naval Forces, Mariannas, with additional duty as deputy military governor of the Bonin Volcano Island. In August 1951, he was named Commander of the Air Fleet, Jacksonville, Fla., and later went to Washington, D.C., as Special Assistant to the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air). On 1 Jan. 1954, Hardison was transferred to the retired list and was advanced to the rank of vice-admiral "on the basis of his combat awards."

In 1926, Hardison married Ruth Morgan of Washington, D.C.; they had two sons [Osborne Bennett, Jr.](#) ^[11], and William Gerry Morgan.

At the time The University of North Carolina celebrated its sesquicentennial, the trustees and faculty voted to confer an

honorary degree upon Hardison; however, duty in the Pacific prevented his attending the 1945 commencement to receive this honor. But in 1950, when his son Osborne was graduated, the admiral was awarded the LL.D. degree. The citation read, in part: " . . . carrying on a great tradition, he has ably demonstrated in his long career the contributions made by the sons of this State and this University to the Armed Services of this Nation in peace as well as at war."

Hardison was killed in a street accident in Washington, D.C.; at his expressed wish, he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

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