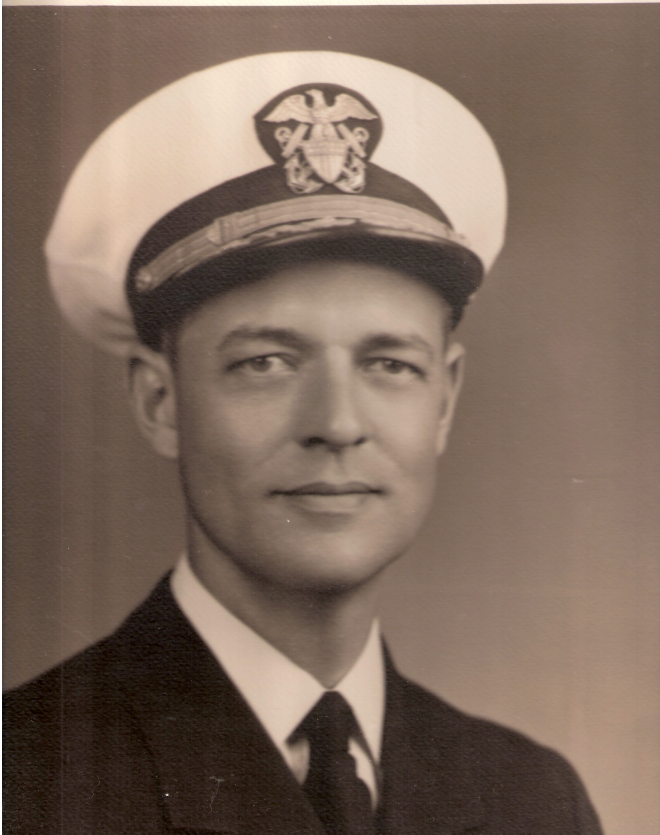


# CAPT Charles J. Odend'hal, Jr., USN

By his son, Charles J. Odendhal III



Charles Joseph Odend'hal, Jr., was born to Coast Guard Captain C. J. Sr. and Josephine Odend'hal on February 2, 1911. Ensign Charles J. Odend'hal, Jr., graduated from US Naval Academy, June 1932. He was first assigned to the Battleship USS [Texas](#) (BB-35) for two months in the Engineering Department. October 1932, transferred to the Cruiser USS [Indianapolis](#) (CA-35) Boiler Division, while being refitted for sea duty. Then Jr. Div. Officer, Fire Control during shakedown cruise June thru September 1933. Sea Duty October thru December 1933. Range Finder and Optical Officer thru May 1934.

June 1934, NAS Pensacola, Student Aviator. June 1935, prompted to Lieutenant (jg), continued Pilot Training until September 1935. November 1935, joined VB Squadron 3-B as Assistant Gunnery Officer and SBD Dive Bomber Pilot on the Carrier USS [Lexington](#) (CV-2) until based ashore at NAS San Diego, September 1936.

July 4 to July 30, 1937, he participated in Amelia Earhart Search aboard the [Lexington](#). August 8, 1937, he transferred to USS [Ranger](#) (CV-4), Bombing Squadron 4 as Gunnery Officer and SBD Pilot until June 1938. Then became a Flight Instructor NAS Pensacola, with Squadron VN2D8, until September 1939, instructing in PBY flying boats.

October 1939, he was assigned to Cruiser USS [Helena](#) (CL-50) for training and Officer of the Deck for the shakedown cruise as well as pilot of the catapult launched Curtiss SOC-3 [Seagull](#) seaplane used for search missions.

May 1940 promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to Senior Aviator aboard Cruiser USS [Omaha](#) (CL-4), again flying SOC-3 seaplanes. January 1941 he is listed as Naval Aviator, Patrol Squadron 54 on Neutrality Patrol in European Waters; assumed to be with the USS [Omaha](#).

April 1941, he volunteered to go to England, apparently flying a PBY across the Atlantic. May 4, 1941, he arrived in England to instruct British pilots in [Catalina](#) Flying Boats; American PBYs sent to England as patrol bombers. Shortly afterward, PM Churchill ordered ALL AVAILABLE ASSETS to search for the German Battleship [[Bismarck](#)]. He probably flew missions, with a British co-pilot, in that search. The [Bismarck](#) was sunk May 27, 1941. He was assigned as a [Catalina](#) (PBY) instructor with Coastal Command, officially Assistant Naval Attache with the American Embassy in London. During this time he was reported to have attacked German submarines operating in the Thames estuary.

While in England, he volunteered to fly combat missions against cross channel raids by German aircraft which continued for another year after the Battle of Britain ended in September 1940. During 1939-1941, the English

had extra fighters, but a shortage of trained pilots. However, American pilots were not officially able to assist until after American entered the war in December 1941.

His then commanding officer, Captain Don Wilcox, said they would go to a local airfield in full pilot "kit" and were welcomed to take any fighter that was ready to fly. These were usually Hawker *Hurricanes*, with which they were familiar by way of limited training. They would follow after the assigned fighters and shoot down German bombers which were separated from formations and trying to make it back to France.

Later, after American entered WWII and while still instructing in *Catalina* Flying Boats, he often told of flying as co-pilot in twin engine Bristol *Blenheim* armored attack bombers, on wave top missions against "Flack Barges" along the French coast. The Germans were firing 88mm cannons against Allied bombers flying high overhead and were often surprised by the low flying *Blenheims*, but still managed to damage many of them with machine gun fire. He said he was lucky to be alive.

During the latter part of 1943, he returned to the USA and attended the Armed Forces Staff College. In February 1944, he became Commander, US Naval Unit 14th Air Force (Sino-American Cooperation Organization). He assisted 10th AAF pilots flying the "Hump" and provided intelligence, often from behind Japanese lines, for General Chenault's 14th AAF Flying Tigers. He received special commendation for his efforts and was transferred to Task Force 58 in October 1944. SACO was the Pacific version of the OSS; which became the CIA.

January 1945, Commander Odend'hal Jr. became Navigator of the Aircraft Carrier *Bunker Hill* (CV-17), Admiral Mitscher's Flag Ship for Task Force 58. During the battle for Okinawa, May 11, 1945, the *Bunker Hill* was heavily damaged by two Japanese *Kamikaze* bombers. It was soon nearly fully afire, listing heavily to one side and in danger of sinking. Commander Odend'hal Jr. assumed the duties of Officer of the Deck and directed bridge activities which restored communications. He soon became acting Executive Officer when the ship's Executive Officer collapsed from his wounds. He is credited with devising a unique high speed maneuver which forced burning fuel and considerable water out of damaged hull areas, righting the ship, reducing the fires and saving the ship.

After WWII, he was assigned to the Staff of COMNAVFE based at Yokosuka Naval base, Japan. He was then assigned to the Office of Public Information as Section Head 10/45 to 2/46, staying with the Secretary of Navy's offices in the Pentagon, first assisting in reorganization efforts during 2/46 to 7/46. Then again assigned to the Office of Public Information during 7/46 to 2/47. Becoming a staff member of the Naval Committee for National Security 2/47 to 3/48. He was again assigned to the Secretary of Navy's office assisting in reorganization during 3/48 to 8/48. During this time he became proficient in flying SNB twin engine aircraft on base inspections. SNB is a Beechcraft model 18.

Then he became Executive officer of the Aircraft Carrier *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116) during 9/48 to 9/50. Later, assigned to the Naval War College 8/50 to 7/53, at Newport RI; living with his family at Fort Adams.

Then he became Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Commander Naval Forces, Far East during 9/53 to 4/54, becoming Plans Officer 3/55 to 8/55. Then he became Captain of the Aircraft Carrier *Windham Bay* (T-CVU-92) during 9/55 to 8/56, largely at sea on resupply voyages in support of Fast Carriers.

During the remainder of 1956 he attended Atomic Weapons school at NAS San Diego, then completed flight training in TV-2 (USAF T-33) and F9F-6 *Cougar* aircraft at NAS Olathe, becoming one of the few Carrier Commanders who could fly modern jet aircraft which could break the sound barrier. Then he realized his dream by becoming Skipper of the Carrier *Hancock* (CVA-19) during 1/57 to 2/58. He became the Director of Shore Establishments for the Bureau of Aeronautics during 3/58 to 2/59, then Director of Staff, Ship Characteristics Board, from 10/59 until he retired in 1962.

Upon retirement he worked for Thompson Ramo Woolridge in the D.C. area for awhile and then for the Texas

Electrical Service Company in Fort Worth.

Captain Charles J. Odend'hal, Jr., USN (Ret) died at Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland, June 9, 1982 and was buried on the hill above JFK's grave in Arlington National Cemetery.

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In the name of the President of the United States, the  
Commander, FIRST Carrier Task Force, Pacific, presents the  
BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

COMMANDER CHARLES JOSEPH ODEND'HAL, JUNIOR  
UNITED STATES NAVY

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For meritorious achievement in connection with operations against the enemy while serving as Navigator and Officer of the Deck; and later as Executive Officer of a United States aircraft carrier in the vicinity of Okinawa on 11 May 1945. After his ship had been damaged by heavy enemy air attack, he resolutely continued with his duties as Navigator and Officer of the Deck, directing bridge activities and restoring communications. When the Executive Officer collapsed from wounds, he took over the duties of Executive Officer, capably and courageously supervising the activities of damage control, ship control, medical aid and ship's defense. His efforts contributed materially to the saving of his ship and his leadership was at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United Service."

FREDERICK G. SHERMAN,  
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy.