

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

VOLNEY CECIL FINCH (1892 – 1953)

The shockingly unexpected death of Volney Cecil Finch, on November 9, 1953 brought to an untimely end the remarkable career of a quiet, unassuming man who had achieved distinction as a naval officer before he became one of the best-loved members of the Stanford engineering faculty.

A native Californian, characteristically known to his intimates as Joe, rather than Volney, Professor Finch was born in Smith River on August 24, 1892. As a youngster anxious to do things, he left college and held various engineering positions before enlisting in the Navy in June 1917. He learned to fly at Pensacola and received his advanced training in France where he served as a Naval aviator until the war ended late in 1918.

During the next few years, while assigned to the Ship Plane Divisions of the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets, he exhibited such outstanding technical and flying ability that he was ordered to the Naval Academy - where his interrupted undergraduate training was completed - and was then selected as a member of the first group of Naval Aviators sent to MIT for postgraduate work. Upon receiving his U.S. in Aeronautical Engineering in 1927, Lt. Finch was appointed Engineering Officer of the Navy's top fighter unit, the famous VF-1 (High Hat) Squadron. With this group he worked and flew until injuries sustained in the forced landing of an experimental airplane necessitated his retirement in 1930.

That autumn, courses in Aeronautical Engineering were offered for the first time by Alabama Polytechnic Institute and they were taught by a young professor named V. C. Finch. In

1933, he came to Stanford as an associate Professor; in 1936 he was made Professor of Mechanical Engineering and, upon its formal organization in 1951, became a member of the Division of Aeronautical Engineering.

In 1941, Professor Finch was recalled to active duty by the Navy. Assigned first to design work in Washington, he subsequently served as Engineering Officer at various Naval Air Stations and finally saw combat duty as a member of the Staff of the Commander of the Pacific Fleet Air Force. An unpublished incident of this period reflects the character of the man. To acquaint himself with the problems of an airship patrol squadron to which he was then attached, he voluntarily earned the designation of Pilot, Lighter than Air Craft - at the age of 51. Released from active duty and retired for the second time, Commander Finch returned to Stanford in December 1945.

His work here - diversified at first but later confined largely to aircraft power plants - was a labor of love in which he found deep satisfaction. he earned and treasured the friendship of his students and followed their professional careers with keen interest. Although his services as a consultant were widely sought, he had found time to write five books and was revising one on jet propulsion at the time of his death. To all of these endeavors he gave his best.

In the words of an old shipmate, "Joe Finch was a quiet and unassuming naval officer, a model son and husband, loved, trusted and respected by all who knew him." To this tribute from Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, Joe's Stanford colleagues add their heartfelt "Amen."

Be it therefore resolved that this Memorial be incorporated in the minutes of this meeting of the academic Council and that copies be sent to the wife, mother and sisters who survive our colleague.

Charles E. Clifton

A. L. London

Elliott G. Reid, Chairman