

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL MICHAEL P. BAGDANOVICH  
U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Michael Peter Bagdanovich was born in Nashua, New Hampshire, son of the late John and Agatha (Stanapedis) Bagdanovich. He attended elementary and junior high schools in Nashua and on July 25, 1922 enlisted in the U. S. Navy. He was a student at the Naval Academy Preparatory School, Norfolk, Virginia, in 1923, and in June 1924 was appointed to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland. As a Midshipman he excelled in sports, winning fame on the collegiate gridiron. He played end on the National Championship team in 1926, and was nominated for All-American honors as a tackle his First Class year. He was a member of the Varsity Crew for three years (Captain his First Class year), and participated in basketball, swimming, and wrestling for four years.

Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 7, 1928, he progressed in rank attaining that of Captain, to date from March 25, 1945. On July 1, 1955 he was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy and was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral on the basis of combat awards.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1928, he was assigned to the Communications Division of the USS NEW MEXICO, flagship of Commander Battleship Division FOUR, Battle Fleet. In May 1930 he transferred to the USS TEXAS, flagship of the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, to serve as Communication Officer until December 1930, when he was detached for flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida.

Designated Naval Aviator, November 23, 1931, he reported in March 1932 as Gunnery Officer with Fighting Squadron ONE - the famous "High Hat Squadron" - attached to the USS SARATOGA. In June 1935 he joined Patrol Squadron FIVE, based at the Naval Air Station, Coco Solo, Canal Zone, and two years later, June 1937, assumed command of the Aviation Unit on board the USS DETROIT. Detached from the DETROIT in July 1940, he next served for two months as Chief Flight Instructor of Squadron FIVE, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, after which he had duty as Chief Flight Instructor, Executive Officer of the Training Squadron, and Training Officer at the Naval Air Station, Miami, Florida.

In March 1942 he became Commanding Officer and Group Commander of Escort Scouting Squadron THIRTY, attached to the USS CHARGER, and later that year was assigned to the USS SUWANEE, participating in the invasion of North Africa. The SUWANEE was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, and he is entitled to the Ribbon for, and a facsimile of that citation. He assumed command in January 1943 of Air Group SEVENTEEN, operating from the USS BUNKER HILL. While in command of that group, he gained fame leading his fliers against enemy installations - wearing a baseball cap with three gold stripes (he was a Commander then) across the visor, and a stubby cigar in his mouth as he roared off the carrier deck in his TBF "Avenger"

torpedo bomber. For his exploits in the Pacific, which contributed to the sinking of several Japanese combatant ships, and the possible sinking and damaging of others, and after which valuable reconnaissance photographs were obtained, he was awarded the Air Medal, the Gold Star in lieu of a Second Air Medal, and the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citations state in part:

Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement...as pilot of a torpedo plane and as Commander of an air group during a bombing strike against enemy shipping at Rabaul, New Britain, on November 11, 1943. Despite the intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire encountered, (he) pressed home his attack with aggressive determination and materially aided in the sinking of an enemy destroyer, one cruiser, the probable sinking of another cruiser, and the severe damaging of two additional combatant ships. After the assault had been completed, he remained over the territory and photographed the damage inflicted on enemy vessels and shore installations..."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement...during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Tarawa and Nauru from November 18 to December 8, 1943. Completing his fifth mission during this period, (he) contributed materially to the success of his squadron in the infliction of damage on the enemy..."

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For extraordinary achievement... in the New Ireland area, from December 25, 1943 to January 5, 1944. During this period (he) led two combined air groups against eight enemy combatant ships, and several supply ships in Kavieng harbor, sinking one destroyer, two large cargo vessels and three barges. In addition, two cruisers, four destroyers, several small cargo ships, many barges and one torpedo boat were severely damaged and possibly sunk. Despite intense anti-aircraft fire and large numbers of attacking enemy fighters, (he) obtained valuable reconnaissance photographs during each action..."

He is also entitled to the Ribbon for, and a facsimile of the Presidential Unit Citation awarded the USS BUNKER HILL.

In January 1944 he reported as Executive Officer of the Naval Air Station, Miami, Florida, and in October of that year assumed command of the Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Cecil Field, Jacksonville, Florida. He remained in that command until June 1945, after which he commanded the USS WOLVERINE. Detached from that training carrier in November 1945, the next month he became Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Station, Orote, Guam, Marianas Islands.

Between September 1947 and August 1950 he was Head of the Aviation Ordnance Department at the Naval Proving Ground, Dahlgren, Virginia, followed by duty afloat in command of the USS NORTON SOUND. In November 1951 he became Commanding Officer of the Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Chincoteague, Virginia, and from June 1953 to

January 1955 was in command of Fleet Air Wing FOURTEEN. Following a period of hospitalization, he reported in March 1955 as Assistant to the Bureau of Aeronautics General Representative, Western District, Los Angeles, California. He was serving in that capacity when relieved of all active duty pending his retirement, effective July 1, 1955.

In addition to the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with Gold Star and the Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon with two stars; Rear Admiral Bagdonovich has the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the American Campaign Medal; the European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one engagement star; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three stars; the World War II Victory Medal; and the National Defense Service Medal.

He is a member of the U. S. Naval Academy Alumni Association, the Naval Academy Athletic Association, and the National Rifle Association of America.