



Thomas G. W. Settle

Notable – Accomplishments/Contributions, Records

Following are excerpts from Wikipedia

Born November 4, 1895 in Washington, D.C. – died April 28, 1980, Bethesda, Maryland was an officer of the United States Navy who on November 20, 1933, together with Army major Chester L.

Fordney, set a world altitude record in the *Century of Progress* stratospheric balloon. An experienced balloonist, long-time flight instructor, and officer on the airships USS *Shenandoah* (ZR-1) and USS *Los Angeles* (ZR-3), Settle won the Litchfield Trophy in 1929 and 1931, the International Gordon Bennett Race in 1932, the Harmon Aeronaut Trophy for 1933, and the Harmon National Trophy for 1932 and 1933. He also set numerous distance and endurance records.

In 1934 Settle transferred to sailing duties, initially as captain of the China-based USS *Palos* (PG-16). In 1944–1945 he commanded the heavy cruiser USS *Portland* (CA-33), earning the Navy Cross for his action in the Battle of Surigao Strait. After World War II Vice Admiral Settle held Navy appointments in the continental United States and overseas, and was charged with tasks ranging from distributing international aid to Greece and Turkey to conducting nuclear tests in the Aleutian islands.

Early career

Settle graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1918, second in his class, and began his naval career as an ensign on the destroyers USS *Sampson* (DD-63), USS *Chew* (DD-106) and USS *Whipple* (DD-217). The nickname "Tex" dates back to his Academy years. After these assignments he attended the Cruft High Tension Laboratory of Harvard University, graduating as a communications engineer in the summer of 1924.

Settle married Fay Brackett, an employee of Cruft Laboratory, in June 1924, and in July assumed his next Navy assignment, that of communications officer on USS *Shenandoah* (ZR-1), a rigid, 207-meter airship based at Lakehurst Naval Air Station. When the newly built USS *Los Angeles* (ZR-3) arrived at Lakehurst later in October 1924, Settle was appointed its communications officer as well; dual appointments were possible because helium supplies allowed flying only one airship at a time.

Airship pilot

On the day when *Shenandoah* crashed, Settle was training alone in a captive kite balloon. After the crash he volunteered for airship pilot training and received his Naval Aviator's (Airship) wings No. 3350 on January 19, 1927. Settle also wanted to train as an airplane pilot, but Admiral Moffett declined his requests. Soon he flew a small balloon for 21 hours over 478

miles (769 km)—a flight that could make a world distance record had it been equipped with a barograph.



August 25, 1927. *Los Angeles* rotates around the mooring mast, Settle in the control car.

On August 25, 1927, when captain Charles E. Rosendahl was on the ground, Settle happened be the senior officer on board *Los Angeles* when the airship, tied to a mooring mast, literally "stood on its nose". At 13:29 a sudden cold weather front hit *Los Angeles*; the resulting increase in the buoyancy of the airship, warmed by sunlight, pushed it upward. The tail freely went up while the nose remained tied to the tower. Settle requested Rosendahl's permission to disengage from the tower, but the captain "saw no need for it". Winds threw the tail further upward; Settle sent the men into the tail, but *Los Angeles* kept rising until reaching a nearly vertical (88 degrees) nose-down position. The airship slowly rotated back; Settle called his men back and released aft balance, saving *Los Angeles* from a tail-first impact. *Los Angeles* survived the accident and served until 1932, performing 331 flights without major accidents or fatalities.

Test pilot

Later Settle piloted different types of airships stationed at Lakehurst. In January 1928 Settle nearly drowned at sea when his J-3 non-rigid airship carrying trainee pilots lost power and was swept into the Atlantic; the crew managed to restart the engines and reach Lakehurst. As a flight instructor, Settle—although an aviator himself—was known for merciless airborne training drills and advocated abolition of flight pay incentives, convinced that they attracted "deadwood" into naval aviation. In October 1928 Settle crossed the Atlantic on board *Graf Zeppelin* together with two other Navy observers. Inspired by the reliability of German airships, he publicly denounced United States dependence on German Maybach engines.^[28] Settle spent the first half of 1929 in the Akron, Ohio hangars of Goodyear-Zeppelin, supervising construction of the future USS *Akron* (ZRS-4) and USS *Macon* (ZRS-5), threatened by saboteurs. In 1930 he tested captive sailplanes carried by *Los Angeles*, where he remained the second in command. In 1931 Settle became the first pilot of *K-1*, the first U. S. Navy non-

rigid airship with an internally suspended control car, and the first using propane as engine fuel. *K-1* remained the sole specimen of its type; the Navy considered it too large for its task.

Balloon races

Settle entered his first balloon race together with George N. Stevens on May 30, 1927. They had to ground their 35,000 cubic feet (990 m³) balloon due to heavy rain after only 393 miles (632 km) in flight, losing the race. This incident motivated Settle to seek all possible cooperation from Navy meteorologists in the future. Settle became the definitive Navy competitor in national and, when qualified, international gas balloon races:

In May 1928 Settle withdrew early from the National Race in Pittsburgh, where lightning strikes downed three balloons, killing two pilots and injuring four.

In May 1929 Settle and ensign Wilfred Bushnell competed at the National Race, winning the Litchfield Trophy with a 952 miles (1,532 km) flight which set a world record in three balloon categories and qualified them for the International Balloon Race.

In July 1931 Settle and Bushnell (now lieutenant) won their second Litchfield Trophy.

In September 1932 Settle and Bushnell won the International Gordon Bennett Race with a 963 miles (1,550 km) record flight from Basel to Vilnius. The flight earned Settle his first national Harmon Trophy.

In September 1933 Settle and lieutenant Kendall made a 776 miles (1,249 km) flight, setting a world endurance record but only coming second in the International Gordon Bennett Race, losing in distance to the Polish team of Franciszek Hyniek and Zbigniew Burzyński.

Century of Progress



Universal newsreel footage about the failed launch attempt



November 21, 1933. New Jersey police rescue Settle (left) and Fordney from the swamp.

The first flight from Soldier Field, with Settle alone on board, attracted thousands of spectators and ended in a flop. Moments after liftoff, an open gas release valve forced *Century* to fall in a nearby railroad yard.



For the next flight the Marine Corps recommended their representative, Major Chester L. Fordney, to join Settle as instrument operator (the experiments were vital to justify financing of the flight). Fordney himself "was crazy for tying up with an adventurer like Settle". On November 20 they lifted off from the Goodyear-Zeppelin facilities in Akron, Ohio, watched by only a few hundred spectators. Nevertheless, the flight received national publicity as radio transmissions from the stratosphere were broadcast on radio networks. *Century* floated at peak altitude for two hours, and landed softly in Bridgeton, New Jersey marshes in the confluence of Delaware and Cohansey rivers, incidentally, a few miles from Jean Piccard's home. It was already dark, so Settle and Fordney spent the night in the chilling cold of the gondola. They dumped radio batteries during descent, so in the morning Fordney waded five miles through the swamp in search for help. The balloon's barograph, examined by the National Bureau of Standards, confirmed the world altitude record of 18,665 meters (61,237 feet). The flight earned Settle the Harmon Trophy and the FAI Henri de la Vaulx medal. Earlier in 1933 the *USSR-1* had flown to 62,230 feet, but it was not recognized by the FAI, so Settle and Fordney became the official record holder until the flight of *Explorer II* in 1935.

Awards





1st Row	Navy Cross	Navy Distinguished Service Medal	Legion of Merit	Distinguished Flying Cross
2nd Row	World War I Victory Medal	China Service Medal	American Defense Service Medal	American Campaign Medal
3rd Row	Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with seven battle stars	World War II Victory Medal	Navy Occupation Medal	National Defense Service Medal

Books by Settle

- *The Last Cruise of Palos* (1964), in: Howell, Glenn (2002). *Gunboat on the Yangtze: the diary of Captain Glenn F. Howell of the USS Palos, 1920-1921*.
- McFarland. ISBN 0786412321, ISBN 978-0-7864-1232-7., originally published in *Shipmates*, vol. 24 no. 4, April 1964