

Major Charles J. Biddle, prominent Philadelphia attorney, distinguished himself by outstanding service as a World War I flying ace and as the first commanding officer of the 103rd Observation Squadron, Pennsylvania's first National Guard flying unit.

Born in May 1890 to a distinguished Philadelphia family, Charles Biddle graduated from Princeton in 1911 and the Harvard Law School in 1914. Upon America's entry in World War I, Biddle left his law practice and sailed to France where he enlisted in the French Air Service in which he received initial flight training. He received his "Brevet" (French equivalent of the American pilot's "wings") in July 1917 and was assigned to the French Squadron Escadrille as a fighter pilot. Biddle scored one victory while with this unit when he shot down a German Albatros two-seater observation plane. Biddle transferred "on paper" to the fledgling United States Air Service but remained with the French Air Service until January 1918. He was then transferred to the famous Lafayette Escadrille, which five weeks later became, in essence, the United States 103rd Aero Squadron. Biddle showed he had what it took to be an outstanding fighter pilot and leader, eluding enemy fire after being shot down in no-man's land and becoming Pennsylvania's first Ace, ending the war with seven victories. Just before the war's end, Biddle was promoted to the rank of major and appointed to command the USAS 4th Pursuit Group, which consisted of the 17th, 25th, 141st and 148th Aero Squadrons. After the war, Major Biddle returned to Philadelphia and his law practice.

In 1924, Major Biddle returned to the service of his country when he became the first commander of the 103rd Observation Squadron of the 28th Division, Pennsylvania National Guard. The major was ordered to organize the country's fifth flying squadron, and Pennsylvania's first, with sixty-five enlisted personnel and eighteen officers, and to prepare to receive six-to-eight planes from the government. He set up headquarters at the Philadelphia Navy Yard while he negotiated for a flying field in South Philadelphia. In this position, Major Biddle became the first commander of the State Air Service, in a sense, the first commander of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. After establishing the 103rd, he retired from the military in late 1924.

Major Biddle was decorated with the U.S. Distinguished Service Cross, the French Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre, with four palms. The King of Belgium also bestowed him with the Order of Leopold. Major Charles J. Biddle died on March 22, 1972. The heritage of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard is reflected in the accomplishments and service of men like Charles J. Biddle. The singularly distinctive accomplishments of Major Charles J. Biddle as a fighter pilot, Pennsylvania's first Ace, and the founding commander of what has become the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, reflect great credit upon himself, the Pennsylvania Air National Guard, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and truly warrant his induction into the Pennsylvania Air National Guard Hall of Fame.