

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL JAMES P. CLAY, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

James Powell Clay, born in Hutchinson, Minnesota, on July 19, 1900, attended Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from the Third District of Minnesota in 1918. As a Midshipman he was a member of the Rifle Team. He was graduated and commissioned Ensign in June 1922 and was subsequently promoted as follows: Lieutenant (junior grade), June 3, 1925; Lieutenant, July 10, 1928; Lieutenant Commander, September 1, 1937; Commander, January 1, 1942; and Captain, May 10, 1943, to rank from June 21, 1942. On July 1, 1952 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.

Upon graduation in 1922, he was assigned to duty with the Navy Rifle Team, and participated in the matches at Camp Perry, Ohio, in September that year. At the conclusion of the matches, he joined the USS PITTSBURGH at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and served in her until December 1923, when he was transferred to duty in the USS SIMPSON at Tunis. Returning to the United States a year later, he was under instruction at the Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island, from January to June 1925, when he again had duty with the Navy Rifle Team and participated in the Camp Perry matches.

In October 1925, he joined the USS MERVINE and served on board during the Second Nicaraguan Campaign, and until May 1929. He was an Instructor in the Department of Ordnance and Gunnery at the Naval Academy, from July 1929 until May 1931, then had duty as Captain of the Navy Rifle Team. From October 1931 until May 1934 he served in the USS MARYLAND, and the three succeeding years again was an Instructor in the Department of Ordnance and Gunnery at the Naval Academy. During his tours of duty at the Naval Academy, he coached Midshipmen Rifle Teams, which won five National Intercollegiate Championships.

From August 1937 until November 1939, he served on China Station, commanding the USS MINDANAO and USS WHIPPLE. In 1938, he was present at Canton, China, during about four hundred air raids, evacuation and Japanese occupation.

Upon his return to the United States, he had duty at the Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island, from December 1939 until March 1941. The following five months, as Assistant Naval Attache at the American Embassy, London, England, he acted as U. S. Naval Observer in the Western Mediterranean with the Royal Navy, most of this period spent in the HMS RENOWN.

Upon the outbreak of World War II, he was assigned to the Office of the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, Readiness Division, where he was in charge of anti-submarine training of ships of destroyer,

destroyer escort and submarine chaser classes. In August 1943, he was ordered to command Destroyer Squadron SEVEN in the Mediterranean and assigned duty as Commander Destroyers, EIGHTH Fleet, which continued until May 1945. He was awarded the Legion of Merit and a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Legion of Merit, each with Combat "V," and cited as follows:

Legion of Merit: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commander of an Escort Group with Flag in the USS PLUNKETT, during the advanced landings in the Anzio-Nettuno Area, Italy, in January 1944. A daring and aggressive leader, Captain Clay skillfully deployed the units under his command to provide effective protection against hostile submarine, E-boats and aircraft for the assault convoy during its assembly, sortie and seaward movement in the assault area. Subsequent to the landings, he disposed the ships of his Group to screen the transport anchorages and gunfire support areas and to escort convoys returning to reloading ports. His judgment, brilliant combat tactics and his efficient control of operations while under concentrated aerial torpedo and glide-bombing attacks in which 53 officers and men of the Flagship were killed, contributed materially to the success of the landings and the sustained maintenance of the Anzio beachhead. Captain Clay's courageous and inspiring conduct under fire reflects the highest credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service."

Gold Star in lieu of the Second Legion of Merit: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Commander of the Anti-Submarine and Convoy Control Group of the Western Naval Task Force, during the amphibious invasion of Southern France in August 1944. When the assault convoys moved from mounting and staging areas to assault anchorages, (he) skillfully disposed his units to screen them from enemy submarine, E-boat and guided missile attack. During the unloading period, he established an effective outer beachhead screen which protected vital shipping supporting the advance of the Allied Armies against enemy penetration from seaward. Efficiently organizing and scheduling the sailing of return convoys, he expedited the movement of vital equipment and material in special use craft and shuttles. By his excellent supervision of the progress of maintenance operations and his control of incoming convoys to newly opened beaches, he contributed materially to the rapid build-up achieved by the Allied Armies and to the ability of service units to support the phenomenal advance of our troops."

During the above assaults, his command included English, French and Greek destroyers.

He served as Chief of Staff to Commander Destroyers, Atlantic, until December 1946; commanded the USS HUNTINGTON until November 1947; and until May 1950 was Assistant Naval Attache for Research, London,

England. His last assignment, prior to his retirement on July 1, 1952, was Inspector General of the Eastern Sea Frontier, with headquarters in New York, New York.

Since retirement, he has developed and operated an investment firm, specializing in Mutual Funds, in Arlington, Virginia.

In addition to the Legion of Merit with Gold Star and Combat "V," Rear Admiral Clay has the Victory Medal (World War I); Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal (USS MERVINE); China Service Medal (USS MINDANAO and USS WHIPPLE); American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp (USS WHIPPLE); American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the Distinguished Marksman Badge. He also holds the French Legion of Honor and the Croix de Guerre and Companion of the Order of Phoenix, awarded by the Government of Greece.