

VICE ADMIRAL RALPH SMITH RIGGS,
UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Ralph Smith Riggs was born in Paris, Texas, on June 20, 1895, a son of Joseph Newton Riggs and Mrs. (Minnie Little) Riggs. He entered the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland from the 15th Congressional District of Texas in 1914. Graduated on June 28, 1917 with the Class of 1918, he was commissioned Ensign, and attained the rank of Rear Admiral on December 12, 1944, to date from June 16, 1943. Upon transferring to the Retired List of the Navy on August 1, 1951, he was advanced to Vice Admiral on the basis of combat awards.

Assigned to the USS MINNEAPOLIS when detached from the Naval Academy in June, 1917, he joined that cruiser when she was commissioned on July 3, and served aboard until April, 1918. After temporary consecutive duty at the Receiving Ship, New York, New York, in the USS DANTE ALIGHIERI, and later in the USS MANLEY, one of the destroyers based on Queenstown, Ireland, in September, 1918 he reported for instruction preliminary to command of Eagle Boats at New London, Connecticut. He fitted out and assumed command of USS EAGLE #2 when placed in commission on November 8, serving in that command until March, 1919.

He joined the USS UTAH in Cuban waters on March 29, 1919, and when detached in September, 1923 he was ordered to the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. From July, 1925 until May, 1929 he served as Aide and Flag Lieutenant consecutively on the staffs of Commander, Light Cruiser Divisions, Scouting Fleet, Division Three, and later Division Two, which included service with the Yangtze Patrol of the Asiatic Fleet, aboard the USS RICHMOND, flagship.

After instruction at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, from July, 1929 until May, 1930, he served until July, 1931 in the Hydrographic Office, Navy Department. For one year September, 1931 to October, 1932, he was Aide and Flag Lieutenant on the staff of Commander, Battleship Division One, Battle Force, USS TEXAS, flagship. Joining the USS ZANE, he served until April, 1933 when he assumed command of that destroyer. In June, 1934 he was relieved of that command to return to the Bureau of Navigation, for duty in the Discipline Division (Officers), until March, 1936. Again ordered to sea, he was Navigator of the battleship WEST VIRGINIA until June, 1938. He then assumed command of the USS ARCTIC, attached to the Train, Base Force, at San Diego, California.

Duty as Aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (successively the Honorable Charles Edison, Lewis Compton, and Ralph Bard), from June 1939 until October, 1941, preceded duty in command of Destroyer Division Two, Pacific Fleet, aboard the USS AYLWIN, until August, 1942. He was then transferred to command of Destroyer Squadron Fourteen. Awarded the Bronze Star Medal and the Navy Cross for services which extended to March, 1943, the citations in part follow:

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious achievement while serving as Commander of a United States Navy Destroyer Division during action against enemy Japanese forces off Bougainville on February 20, in the Battle of the Coral Sea from May 4 to 8, and the Battle of Midway from June 4 to 6, 1942. When Japanese aircraft viciously attacked his group and two of the planes attempted suicide dives, (he) skillfully maneuvered his flagship close aboard the carrier, thereby enabling his ships'

devastating gunfire to blast both planes into the sea. With the enemy attempting to land on our carriers during a night engagement in the Battle of the Coral Sea, his division again sent up a relentless barrage to beat back the attackers . . . Later, he conducted effective screening operations for our carrier task force at Midway. . ."

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism and outstanding achievement aboard the USS BAILEY while serving as Commander Destroyer Squadron FOURTEEN during action . . . off the Komandorski Islands on March 26, 1943. Engaged in a fierce running battle for three hours and a half with an enemy force twice the strength of his own, (he) . . . maneuvered his destroyers so skillfully that he undoubtedly saved a heavy cruiser of the task group, which was in serious difficulty and needed time for repairs. . . Scoring one torpedo hit and inflicting additional damage on the opposing ships by gunfire, his bold attack was a deciding factor in turning back the Japanese force, thereby thwarting a desperate attempt to deliver urgently needed supplies to enemy troops in the Aleutian Islands. . ."

In July, 1943 he reported as Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Destroyers, Pacific Fleet. He was awarded a Legion of Merit, "for exceptionally meritorious service" in that assignment, July 7, 1943 to March 12, 1944. The citation further states: ". . . (He) rendered invaluable service in welding this command into a superb fighting force . . . thereby contributing to the reliability and efficiency of destroyers in carrying out extensive operations against heavily fortified Japanese strongholds and to the sustained drive to extend United States control westward. . ."

Assuming command of the USS SOUTH DAKOTA in March, 1944, he served in the Pacific until November 30, 1944. For that period of service in the Southwest Pacific Theater of War, he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit. The citation states in part: "Boldly penetrating dangerous, restricted waters of the Pacific, (he) waged furious battle against heavily fortified Japanese strongholds, skillfully directing devastating bombardments to inflict extensive and costly damage on the enemy and pave the way for the advance of our landing forces. . . He effectively fought off repeated day and night Japanese aerial attacks, thereby preventing the enemy from penetrating his force and keeping material damage to Fleet units at a minimum. . ."

From November, 1944 until January, 1946 he was Commander, Cruiser Division Twelve. He was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Bronze Star Medal, and Gold Star in lieu of a third Legion of Merit, each with combat distinguishing device, V. The citations follow:

Bronze Star Medal: "For heroic achievement . . . in action against enemy Japanese forces during the bombardment and occupation of Mari-veles Harbor, Southern Bataan and Corregidor, Philippine Islands, from February 13 to 18, 1945. Operating in mine-strewn waters under intense fire from enemy heavy guns on Corregidor, (he) skillfully placed his ships and directed their fire in delivering a devastating counter-fire which silenced many of the hostile guns and contributed greatly to the reduction of enemy defenses at the entrance to Manila Bay. . ."

Gold Star in lieu of third Legion of Merit: ". . . As Commander Cruiser Division TWELVE and a Cruiser-Destroyer Task Group operating against the enemy Japanese-held Philippine-Borneo Area, from December 5, 1944, to July 7, 1945. . . By keen perception of the tactical situation and sound judgment employed in each engagement, (he) contributed materially to the effective support rendered our landing forces and to the extensive damage and destruction inflicted on the Japanese. Under repeated attack by hostile aircraft, he hurled the full strength of his fighting units against the enemy, driving off or destroying the attackers with no damage to his ships. . ."

On January 16, 1946 he assumed command of Cruiser Division Fourteen. Returning to the United States, the following August he reported to the U.S. Naval Base, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for duty as Commandant. After four months' duty as a member of the General Board in the Navy Department, in September, 1947 he was designated Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Naval Reserve) and Director of Naval Reserves. He was so serving when relieved of active duty pending his transfer to the Retired List of the Navy on August 1, 1951.

In addition to the Navy Cross, the Legion of Merit with two Gold Stars and Combat V, the Bronze Star Medal and Gold Star with Combat V, Vice Admiral Riggs has the Victory Medal, Destroyer Clasp (USS MANLEY); Yangtze Service Medal; American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two silver and two bronze stars (12 engagements); the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two stars and the World War II Victory Medal.

Vice Admiral and Mrs. Riggs, the former Miss Kathryn Pew of Toledo, Ohio, have one son, Ralph Smith Riggs, Jr. Their local residence is [REDACTED]. Official home address, [REDACTED].

- - - -