

# NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL JOSEPH H. WELLINGS, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Joseph Harold Wellings was born on April 23, 1903, in Boston, Massachusetts, son of John A. and Bridget G. (Sullivan) Wellings, both now deceased. He attended Samuel Adams School (Boston), Boston Latin School, and Boston English School, before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from the Tenth District of his native state in 1921. As a Midshipman he participated in football, boxing, baseball, and sailing, and won the Daughters of American Revolution Sword for practical seamanship. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 4, 1925, he subsequently progressed in rank to that of Rear Admiral, to date from May 1, 1953.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in 1925, he joined the USS UTAH, operating with Division TWO, Battleship Divisions, Scouting Fleet. In September 1926 he transferred to the USS FLORIDA, a unit of Battleship Division TWO, Scouting Fleet, and continued service in her until May 1929. Following duty in the USS TILLMAN, attached to Destroyer Division TWENTYNINE, Training Squadron, Scouting Force, he was assigned duty in connection with the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps Unit at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In July 1935 he joined the Staff of Commander Battleships, Battle Force (Admiral William D. Leahy, USN), as Aide and Flag Lieutenant, and in March 1936 transferred in the same capacity to the Staff of Commander Battle Force. He reported in January 1937 aboard the USS CALIFORNIA, flagship of Commander Battle Force, and continued service in that battleship until April 1938. Thereafter until August 1940 he was assigned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. Relieved of duty in the Department, he was assigned as an Observer with the British Fleet. He continued duty as an Observer serving additionally as Assistant Naval Attache, American Embassy, London, England. During this period he participated in many naval operations including the search and sinking of the German battleship BISMARCK. In this engagement he was Operations Officer in the British battleship RODNEY.

He again returned to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, in June 1941, and in February 1942 was assigned for three months to Headquarters, Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, Navy Department. In June 1942 he reported for fitting out duty in the USS STRONG at the Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine. He assumed command of the STRONG upon her commissioning, August 7, 1942. After her shakedown cruise, she was employed in convoy operations in Caribbean, Eastern Atlantic, and North African waters. On January 30, 1943, at Noumea, she began operations against the enemy in the Pacific. She was sunk on the night of July 4-5, 1943, during the landings of our forces at Rice Anchorage, New Georgia Islands. For services while commanding the STRONG, he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, with Combat Distinguishing Device "V," and the Silver Star Medal. The citations follow in part:

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious achievement...during combined minelaying expeditions and bombardment missions in the enemy Japanese-held Kolombangara and New Georgia Areas, Solomon Islands, the nights of May 7 and 13, 1943. Skillful maneuvering through poorly charted waters under cover of darkness, (he) carried out his assigned duties courageously and with unwavering determination, delivering his devastating bombardments against these heavily fortified strongholds and successfully mining areas used extensively by Japanese surface forces, subsequently bringing his ship through without damage following each decisive action..."

Silver Star Medal: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity...in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands on July 4-5, 1943. As part of a task force in close support of the landings...at Rice Anchorage on New Georgia Island, (he) skillfully maneuvered his ship through restricted submarine infested waters and effectively bombarded enemy shore batteries and installations in the face of intense Japanese opposition until the STRONG was struck by an enemy torpedo. Calmly and efficiently (he) directed the abandonment of his sinking ship, heroically remaining aboard as she went down. The explosion of her depth charges threw him, seriously injured, into the sea, and several hours later he was rescued..."

He was also awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in the above action.

Following the sinking of the STRONG, he was hospitalized until January 1944, when he reported for temporary duty with the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit, Fleet Operational Training Command, Atlantic Fleet. In March 1944 he assumed command of Destroyer Division ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY. Transferred in the same capacity, to Destroyer Squadron TWO, he commanded that squadron from November 1944 until March 1945. "For meritorious achievement in connection with operations against the enemy as Commander Attack Group Screen, Blue Beach, at Lingayen Gulf, Philippine Islands, during the period January 9-16, 1945..." he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of the Second Bronze Star Medal, with Combat "V."

For services in the Pacific Area, he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of the Third Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," and cited as follows: "For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS STRONG...and as Commander Destroyer Division ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY...and as Commander Destroyer Squadron TWO...As Commanding Officer of the STRONG (he) took part in the Solomon Islands Campaign, carrying out escort duties successfully despite many air attacks in which the STRONG shot down four enemy aircraft. Later, as Commander Destroyer Division ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY, and as Commander Destroyer Squadron TWO, he carried out escort and fast carrier task group screening duties in the Western Pacific and Philippine Islands area..."

Detached from command of Destroyer Squadron TWO in March 1945, he returned to the United States for duty in connection with the transfer program of Officers to the Regular Navy, in the Bureau of Naval Personnel,



Navy Department. He continued in that assignment until August 1946, when he reported for instruction at the National War College, Washington, D. C. He was graduated in June 1947, but remained for duty on the Staff for a year thereafter. Following service as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans, on the Staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, he assumed command, in July 1950, of the USS COLUMBUS. Under his command that cruiser operated with the SIXTH Fleet in the Mediterranean as flagship of Commander Naval Forces, Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Returning to Washington, he served in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Personnel) until July 1953. He then reported as Commander Naval Base, Newport, Rhode Island, with additional duty from June 30, 1954, as Commandant of the First Naval District. In September 1955 he became Deputy for Navy to the Commander Joint Task Force SEVEN and Commander Task Group SEVEN POINT THREE. "For exceptionally meritorious conduct...(in that capacity) at Washington, D. C. and Eniwetok-Bikini Atolls, Marshall Islands, during the period September 7, 1955 to August 10, 1956..." he received a Letter of Commendation, with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, from the Secretary of the Navy. The citation further states in part:

"Joint Task Force SEVEN, composed of Army, Navy and Air Force elements and scientific task groups, in cooperation with the Atomic Energy Commission, conducted nuclear thermonuclear tests at the Pacific Proving Grounds (Operation REDWING), which were of national importance and international significance. The success of the operation was dependent, to a large measure, on effective naval support. As Commander of the Naval Task Group, Admiral Wellings was primarily responsible for the accomplishment of the mission assigned that Group. This mission included, but was not limited to, providing air and surface security patrols for the area, providing living accommodations for large numbers of task group personnel during certain phases of the tests, maintaining an emergency evacuation capacity for all personnel in the Pacific Proving Ground, supplying facilities for the afloat phases of the scientific program and providing intra-atoll air and surface transportation. Due to the nature of the operation, extreme flexibility in the utilization of the forces assigned was required. That, the Task Group was able to expeditiously fulfill, with marked success, all the many complex requirements placed on it with the limited forces available attests to Admiral Wellings' effective planning and direction, and contributed materially to the accomplishments of the Task Force. Admiral Wellings' foresight, effective leadership and outstanding professional efficiency in the discharge of his responsibilities were major factors in the success of Operation REDWING..."

On September 25, 1957 he assumed duty as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Plans and Policy), Navy Department. In that assignment he also served as Head of the U. S. Delegation for the negotiations of U. S. Base Lease Agreements with the West Indies Federation. On September 30, 1958 he became Deputy Director (his title was later changed to Vice Director), The Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D. C. As

such he participated in many political-military conferences in various parts of the world, particularly Southeast Asia. On April 30, 1962 he reported as Commandant of the First Naval District, with headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts and was assigned additional duty as Commander Naval Base, Boston and Commander Naval Base, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He continued to serve as such until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement, effective August 1, 1963.

In addition to the Silver Star Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with two Gold Stars and Combat "V," the Purple Heart Medal and the Commendation Ribbon, Rear Admiral Wellings has the American Defense Service Medal, Base Clasp; American Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal, Europe Clasp; National Defense Service Medal; and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. He also has the Expert Pistol Shot Medal and the Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation Badge.