

REAR ADMIRAL JESSE G. COWARD, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Jesse Grant Coward was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 10, 1900, son of Charles and Josephine Francis (Grimmer) Coward. He attended Richmond Hill High School before his appointment to the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from New York in 1918. As a Midshipman he was a member of his Class Boxing Team and the Academy Tennis and Boxing Squads. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 3, 1922, he subsequently progressed in rank to Captain, to date from November 6, 1943. He was transferred to the Retired List on August 1, 1947, and advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral on the basis of Combat Citations.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1922, he was assigned to the USS PITTSBURGH until March 1924, and served as a junior officer while that cruiser operated with the European Squadron during the troublesome days in Turkey and Asia Minor. The next three years he was in the Far East, attached to the USS McCORMICK, and took a landing force ashore on several occasions in the Pootung area in 1926. He was commended while serving as the Chief Engineer of the McCORMICK during that period.

He returned to the United States in the USS CHAUMONT in April 1927, and in June began a course of instruction at the Naval Postgraduate School, Annapolis, continuing the course at Columbia University, New York City, from which he was graduated with the degree of Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering. Again ordered to Asiatic Station, he served from December 1929 until September 1930 in the USS CANOPUS, and for fifteen months thereafter on board the USS OAHU. He received a Commendatory Letter for his service as Chief Engineer of the CANOPUS, and had numerous minor engagements with Chinese bandits along the middle Yangtze River in 1931 while serving as Executive Officer and Acting Commanding Officer of the OAHU, and while acting as Armed Guard Officer on American merchantmen plying up and down the river.

In February 1932 he reported to the Navy Department, Washington, D. C., for duty, and served four months in the Bureau of Engineering and from June 1932 until November 1933 in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (Fleet Training). He again served on board the USS CANOPUS from February 1934 until January 1935, then had duty on the Staff of Commander Destroyer Squadron FIVE, attached to the USS BLACK HAWK, Flagship, until August 1936. Upon his return to the United States in September of that year, he was ordered to the New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn, New York, where he completed a tour of duty as Ordnance Officer in September 1938.

He assisted in fitting out the USS ST. LOUIS at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia, and served on board that cruiser from her commissioning, May 13, 1939, until April 1941, as Engineer Officer. In May 1941 he assumed command of the USS STERETT (DD-407) and remained in command of that destroyer after the outbreak of World War II in December 1941, until January 1943. During that period, the STERETT operated with the British Home Fleet out of Scapa Flow, protecting convoys on the Murmansk run, later took part in the reinforcement of Malta in the European Area

of Combat in April and May, 1942; and, moving to the Pacific Area, participated in action at Guadalcanal. He is entitled to wear the Ribbon for the Presidential Unit Citation awarded his ship, the USS STERETT, for heroism in action on November 12-13, 1942, at Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, when she sank one destroyer and assisted in sinking a battleship and a cruiser or destroyer.

He was personally awarded the Navy Cross, with the following citation: "For extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession, during action with enemy forces on the night of November 12-13, 1942, on which occasion the force to which he was attached engaged at close quarters and defeated a superior enemy force. His daring and determination contributed materially to the victory which prevented the enemy from accomplishing its purposes."

He was also awarded the British Distinguished Service Cross by the King of England, with citation as follows: "For distinguished service whilst in command of the USS STERETT operating with the Home Fleet in 1942. This destroyer formed part of the Task Force 99 from 4 April to 1st September 1942, at which time Commander Coward displayed fine seamanship and excellent appreciation of his duty as a Fleet Commander."

From February to November 1943 he had duty at the U. S. Naval Repair Base, San Diego, California. When detached he assumed command of Destroyer Squadron FIFTY-FOUR, for further action in the Pacific War Area. His squadron was officially credited with the sinking of the Japanese battleship FUSO, and two destroyers; and also torpedoed a second battleship and a third destroyer. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," a Letter of Commendation with Ribbon, by Commander FIFTH Fleet, and a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Navy Cross, for action in that order. The Citations follow, in part:

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious achievement as Commander of an Anti-Submarine Screen, during operations against enemy Japanese forces on Saipan Island, on June 14-15, 1944. Braving continuous heavy gunfire from enemy shore batteries and operating under difficult navigational conditions, Captain Coward deployed his ships to screen successfully our heavy bombardment ships, when required to deliver accurate and effective gunfire..."


Letter of Commendation: "For excellent service in the line of his profession as the commander of a squadron of close-fire support ships on July 24, 1944, during the assault on and capture of Tinian...He caused his ships to deliver accurate and effective fire against hostile shore positions. He later ordered his flagship to protect and assist one of the ships of his squadron which had been damaged. His courage and professional skill while under enemy fire contributed in a large measure to the success of the operations..."

Gold Star in lieu of the Second Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism as Commander of a Destroyer Squadron, during action against enemy Japanese forces during the Battle of Surigao Strait on the night of October 24-25, 1944."

" - Although illuminated and subjected to enemy fire, Captain Coward brought his ships to within short range of heavy enemy vessels, launched a daring torpedo attack, which inflicted severe damage on the enemy, and retired without loss or injury...He contributed greatly toward eliminating an imminent and dangerous threat to our transports and other ships in Leyte Gulf..."

In March 1945 he reported for duty on the Staff of Commander Destroyers, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and served in that assignment throughout the remaining period of the war and until December 1945. He was hospitalized in Brooklyn, New York, and Key West, Florida, Naval Hospitals in 1946, and was subsequently relieved of all active duty, pending his retirement from the Naval Service on August 1, 1947.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Gold Star in lieu of the Second Navy Cross, the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," the Navy Commendation Ribbon, the Ribbon for the Presidential Unit Citation to the USS STERETT, and the British Distinguished Service Cross, Rear Admiral Coward has the World War I Victory Medal (Midshipman, 1918); the Yangtze Service Medal; American Defense Service Medal with Bronze "A"; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four operation stars; the American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two stars.



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Adm. Jesse G. Coward, Destroyer Commander

BRADENTON, Fla., May 22 (AP)—Rear Adm. Jesse G. Coward (USN, ret.), a much-decorated destroyer skipper of World War II, died Monday night in Bradenton. He was 63.

He was a graduate of the U. S. Naval Academy. During the early years of his career, Admiral Coward took part in several minor engagements with Chinese bandits along the middle Yangtze River.

But it was after he assumed

command of the USS Sterett in 1941 that he won a place in Navy history.

Under Admiral Coward, the Sterett operated for a time with the British home fleet out of Scapa Flow, Scotland, protecting convoys on the Murmansk run. Later, it took part in the reinforcement of Malta and in several Pacific battles.

The Admiral and his crew received a Presidential unit citation for operations in 1942 near Guadalcanal. He was awarded the Navy Cross after his ship helped sink a destroyer, a battleship and a cruiser in the Battle of the Solomons.

Two years later, Admiral Coward was awarded a second Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism" during action against Japanese forces in the Battle of Surigao Strait.

He was retired Aug. 1, 1947, at Key West.

Services and burial in Arlington Cemetery will be held Friday at 11 a. m.