



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

James S. Gracey

1982-1986



James Steele Gracey was the son of Mr. Ernest J. and Mrs. Edna S. Gracey. Born on 24 August 1927 in Newton, MA, he graduated from Needham High School in Needham, MA. Winning an appointment as a cadet on 12 July 1945, he graduated from the US Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT with a B.S. Degree in Engineering and a commission of Ensign on 3 June 1949. During his four years as a cadet, he served as the Battalion Commander, captain of the baseball team, and a member of both the soccer and rifle teams. On graduation day he was awarded the prizes for the Most Proficient in Practical and Theoretical Seamanship and Proficiency in Tactics and Drills.

He remained at the Academy temporarily as Instructor in the Tactics Department until September 1949. He was then assigned as Deck Officer on the 311-foot ocean station vessel *Barataria* based at Portland, ME. During the summer and fall of 1951, he attended the Provost Marshal General School at the former Coast Guard Training Detachment, Camp Gordon, GA; the Coast Guard Explosives Loading Supervisors School at Port Chicago, CA; and the Illinois Institute of Technology Course on Fire Protection Engineering.

From September 1951 to April 1953, he was stationed at the Captain of the Port Office, Boston, MA where he was the Dangerous Cargo and Vessel Movements Officer. He also served collateral duty as Cadet Procurement Officer for Northern New England. Between March and May 1953 he attended the LORAN Indoctrination School at Coast Guard Training Station, Groton, CT. After completing the course he commanded the LORAN Transmitting Station, Ocean Cape, Yakutat, AK, for one year.

He then returned to the Academy for a brief assignment as Assistant Tactics Officer and Baseball coach from June to September 1954. During the following two years he was a student at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration where he received an MBA in June 1956. As part of his work at Harvard, he spent the summer of 1955 in Industry Training at Norton Company, Worcester, MA.

From July 1956 to July 1960, he served at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC, as a Branch Chief in the Supply Division. During the following two years he commanded the buoy tender *Mariposa* out of New London, CT. The ship serviced aids to navigation along the seacoast of Connecticut and Long Island and broke ice on the Hudson River

From September 1962 to April 1965, he served as Comptroller, Second Coast Guard District, St. Louis, MO with collateral duties that included Cadet Procurement in Kansas and Missouri. He then transferred to the Third Coast Guard District staff in New York to serve as assistant Project Officer for the conversion of Fort Jay, Governors Island from an Army post to a Coast Guard facility. His duties included developing the organization for the host command and



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planning all the Island's "humanities." For that duty he was awarded the Secretary of Treasury Commendation for Achievement Ribbon. From March 1966 to June 1969, he was Executive Officer of the Coast Guard Base at Governors Island for which he received a Coast Guard Letter of Commendation. His special duties during that period included community relations with the large Island population and labor relations, including negotiating contracts with several different unions.

Deep selected for the rank of Captain, he returned to Headquarters in July 1969 to assume to the post of Chief, Programs Division under the Chief of Staff. For outstanding meritorious achievement in those duties, he received the Meritorious Service Medal in 1973. Among other accomplishments he was cited for formulating planning, programming, and budgeting procedures and for developing a computer program for analyzing and translating resource requirements into a printout display to aid the analytical processes in budget planning.

Following his nomination to flag rank by the President on 17 January 1974, and the approval of the Senate, Captain Gracey was transferred to Portsmouth, VA in June 1974 to become Chief of Staff, Fifth Coast Guard District. He was promoted to Rear Admiral from 1 October 1974. At that time he assumed duties of Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District, Cleveland, OH which covers Coast Guard operations in the Great Lakes region. For that tour of duty he was awarded the Legion of Merit in 1977.

In addition to his duties as District Commander, ADM Gracey served as Chairman of the Cleveland Federal Executive Board, Chairman of the Great Lakes Basin Commission's Standing Committee on

Transportation and as Vice Chairman of the Winter Navigation Board. His other accomplishments included resolving long-standing issues regarding Great Lake Pilotage and negotiating for the Secretary of Transportation a new agreement with Canada regarding those issues.

Transferred again to Headquarters in August 1977, ADM Gracey assumed the post of Chief of Staff of the U. S. Coast Guard. For his performance in this assignment he was awarded a second Legion of Merit.

Promotion to Vice Admiral came when Admiral Gracey accepted command of the Coast Guard Pacific Area and Twelfth Coast Guard District in San Francisco on 1 July 1978. In San Francisco he also served as Regional Emergency Transportation Coordinator, Chairman of Department of Transportation's Regional Hazardous Materials Working Group, Chairman of the Minority Business Opportunity Committee of the San Francisco Federal Executive Board, and a Trustee of United Way.

After his tour as Commander of the Pacific Area, he transferred to Commander, Atlantic Area and Commander, Third Coast Guard District. On 28 May 1982, Admiral Gracey assumed the post of Commandant of the Coast Guard with the rank of Admiral.



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During his tour as Commandant ADM Gracey successfully maintained the service through difficult budget battles each year and successfully fought attempts to privatize many USCG functions, including a Congressional attempt to privatize SAR. He also directed the service when the Atlantic Strike Team battled a Virginia fire, the largest in history. Making sure the USCG was on the cutting edge of technology; new units were added to the fleet, including more 270-footers, 110-foot patrol boats, and Hu-25A Falcons. He also upgraded much of the existing fleet with the FRAM and MMA programs.

Under Gracey, the USCG maintained its position as a national defense force. The Coast Guard supported the U.S. military operations including the 1983 invasion of Grenada. The 1984 implementation of the Maritime Defense Zone Concept caused Gracey to remark that, "It puts us on the map with a specifically assigned duty ahead of time," thus assuring the service's military capabilities and mission requirements.

Admiral Gracey also directed the service during Operation BLUE LIGHTNING, a combined USCG and Bahamian force, which seized record amounts of illegal drugs. Other high profile operations included USCG participation in the *Challenger* SAR case and the UNITAS program which strengthened the service's ties with Caribbean nations. In the end Admiral Gracey stated that his greatest accomplishment during his tenure as commandant was "the ability to keep the USCG afloat – keep it on an even keel, and keep it moving forward."