



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

## Edwin J. Roland

1962-1966



Edwin John Roland was born on 11 February 1905, at Buffalo, NY, where he graduated from Canisius High School and attended Canisius College. Appointed a Cadet in 1926, he graduated from the U. S. Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Engineering and with a commission of Ensign on 15 May 1929. While a cadet, he was also captain of the football squad and was active in baseball and basketball.

He served his earliest assignments as Gunnery Officer on board the destroyers USCGC SHAW (1929-30), and the USCGC WILKES (1930-31), which were part of the old Destroyer Force operated by the Coast Guard between 1924 and 1934 in an all-out attempt to suppress smuggling. He won a commendation for being instrumental in capturing the gunnery trophy for both vessels. During 1929-31, he was, in addition to his regular duties, captain of the Coast Guard football squad that won the President's Cup in competition with the Army, Navy, and Marines in 1931. The trophy was presented to the then LTJG Roland by Mrs. Herbert Hoover, wife of the President of the United States.

In 1932 he was in charge of target observation and repair for the Destroyer Force Target Practice in the Gulf of Mexico and for Cutter Target Practice off Norfolk, VA. In September he was assigned as Navigator and Gunnery Officer on board the USCGC ESCANABA, based at Grand Haven, MI. Detached in 1934, he spent the next four years at the Coast Guard Academy as an Instructor in Physics and Mathematics and an Assistant Coach for football, basketball, and baseball. During the summer cadet practice cruise of 1936 on board the USCGC CAYUGA, he participated in the evacuation of Spanish Civil War refugees.

From September 1938 to January 1940, he first served as Executive Officer and later as Commanding Officer of the USCGC NEMESIS out of St. Petersburg, FL after which he was assigned as Communications Officer at the 8th Coast Guard District office at New Orleans, LA.

During World War II he served as Chief, Enlisted Personnel Division at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC from May 1942 to October 1943. He next served as Commander, Escort Division a unit of Task Force 60, which escorted convoys from the United States to Mediterranean ports. His flagship was the Coast Guard-manned destroyer escort, USS VANCE (DE-387). For meritorious performance of that duty he was awarded the Navy Commendation Ribbon.

In December 1944 he became the first Commanding Officer of USCGC MACKINAW (WAGB-83), the first heavy duty U. S. icebreaker ever built. Especially designed for work in the Great Lakes, her homeport was at Cheboygan, MI. For meritorious service while commanding that ship, he received a Coast Guard Commendation Letter. The letter cited him for icebreaking on



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an unprecedented scale in the Great Lakes. This permitted tidewater Navy and Army vessels and merchant vessels to pass through the ice and deliver urgently needed supplies essential to the war effort.

From April 1946 to June 1949, he served as Chief of Staff, as well as Chief, Operations Division of the 9th Coast Guard District, Cleveland. He next commanded the USCGC TANEY out of San Francisco until August 1950. He was then designated Commandant of Cadets at the Coast Guard Academy. He remained in that post for four years.

After completing one year of student work at the National War College in June 1955, he returned to Coast Guard Headquarters to serve in the Office of the Chief of Staff. On March 16, 1956, he was assigned as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Coast Guard. With his nomination by the President and with the approval of the Senate, he was advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral effective 1 July 1956. He was subsequently assigned as Commander, First Coast Guard District, Boston. On 1 July 1960 he assumed the dual post of Commander, Eastern Area and Commander, 3d Coast Guard District, New York. With the approval of the President and the Senate, he was appointed Assistant Commandant of the U. S. Coast Guard with rank of Vice Admiral effective from 12 February 1962. He assumed the duties of that office at Headquarters on 1 February.

On 23 April 1962 he was appointed Commandant of the U. S. Coast Guard with rank of Admiral. He succeeded the retiring Admiral Alfred C. Richmond on 1 June 1962. He was relieved by Admiral Willard J. Smith and retired from the USCG on 1 June 1966 with various awards.

On July 9, 1963, ADM Roland received the Legion of Merit from the Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon in recognition of his outstanding record in maintaining a military readiness posture "unparalleled in the peacetime history of the Coast Guard." On 21 January 1966 ADM Roland received the Distinguished Service Medal for the service's swift response to the Navy's request for patrol craft to assist in coastal surveillance in South Vietnam. His also skillfully guided the handling of the Cuban Exodus operations in the Straits of Florida in 1965. ADM Roland also went to Saigon during the summer of 1965 to confer with the Naval Coastal Surveillance Forces shortly after the arrival of the 82-foot cutters in South Vietnam. Based at Danang these 82-footers constituted Coast Guard Squadron One.

It was during ADM Roland's administration that the Coast Guard's long sought program for modernization of its fleet with medium and high endurance cutters got underway with the launching and christening of the first major cutter built since World War II. Mrs. Roland sponsored this first vessel, the 210-ft. Medium Endurance Cutter RELIANCE (WMEC-615) at Todd Shipyards, Houston, Texas, on May 11, 1963.

From March 3 to April 5 of 1966, ADM Roland was U. S. Delegate to the Load Line Conference on merchant ships convened at London, England. He also served as the U. S. delegate to the Extraordinary Session of the Maritime Safety Committee of IMCO (International Maritime Consultative Organization). This meeting was called at London during 3-6 May 1966



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to review of merchant ship standards in order to prevent such disastrous fires as occurred on board the YARMOUTH CASTLE and the VIKING EXPRESS.

On 15 January 1965 ADM Roland received Italy's highest award, the Commendatore (Knight Commander) of the Order of the Italian Republic for the U. S. Coast Guard's many years of assistance to Centro-Internazionale Radio-Medico (C.I.R.M.). This is a humanitarian Foundation, created in Rome in 1935, which arranges medical first-aid at sea and hospital services by air-sea radio for injured and sick seamen on board ships between C.I.R.M. and ships of all flags through its radio stations along the coasts of the United States. The medal was presented to Admiral Roland by Captain Masetti, Naval Attache, Italian Embassy, Washington, DC. In keeping with the law regarding the wearing of foreign decorations, the Medal was sent to the State Department for safe-guarding until the Admiral's retirement.

ADM Roland received The American Legion Distinguished Service Medal from the Robert L. Hague Merchant Marine Industries Post No. 12142, Department of New York, on 6 November 1965. He was cited for outstanding contributions to the American Merchant Marine and Safety of Life at Sea while chairing the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Subcommittee of the Shipping Coordinating Committee. He also received recognition for being the U. S. Delegate to the Maritime Safety Committee of the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) and for encouraging the inauguration and expansion of the Automated Merchant Vessel Report (ANVER ) System to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

In a ceremony held at New York City Hall on 21 March 1962, Mayor Robert F. Wagner presented Admiral Roland with the City of New York Medallion for distinguished service while he served as Commander, Eastern Area and Commander, 3d Coast Guard District, New York.

In addition to the Legion of Merit Medal, the Distinguished Service Medal, Coast Guard Commendation Letter, and Navy Commendation Ribbon, Admiral Roland received the following service medals and ribbons: American Defense Service; American Area; European-African-Middle Eastern Area; World War II Victory. He also received the Expert Rifle Shot and the Expert Pistol Shot Medals.

Following is a resume of his appointments in rank: Ensign, 15 May 1929; LTJG 15 May 1931; Lieutenant, 15 May 1933; Lieutenant Commander, 1 January 1942; Commander, 14 December 1942; Captain, 5 August 1949; Rear Admiral, 1 July 1956; Vice Admiral, 12 February 1962; Admiral, 1 June