



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

## Willard J. Smith

1966-1970



Willard John Smith was born at Suttons Bay, MI on 14 May 1910. He is the son of Emma and Oscar Smith, who retired from the US Coast Guard as a Commissioned Warrant Officer. Admiral Smith graduated from Charlevoix (MI) High School in 1927 and attended the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor for three years.

He entered the US Coast Guard Academy, New London, CT with an appointment as a cadet in August 1930. He graduated with a commission as Ensign on 15 May 1933. He subsequently advanced in rank to Lieutenant (jg) on 15 May 1936; Lieutenant on 5 August 1939; Lieutenant Commander on 2 October 1942; Commander on 1 January 1944; Captain on 1 November 1955; Rear Admiral on 1 July 1962; and four-star Admiral, on 1 June 1966.

He served his first assignment as a line officer on board the Coast Guard Cutter *Saranac*, based at Galveston, TX. Stationed next at Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC, he served as Aide to the Commandant from November 1936 to May 1939. From there he was assigned to flight training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola and received his wings on 14 June 1940.

### WORLD WAR II

His first assignment in the aviation branch of the service was in connection with the construction and commissioning of the Coast Guard Air Station at San Francisco. While attached to that station until February 1944, he was temporarily assigned to duty at the beginning of World War II with Navy Patrol Squadron VP-44 conducting anti-submarine patrols in the Pacific. In addition, during the summers of 1941 and 1942, he commanded an aircraft conducting urgently needed aerial surveys in Alaska. He received a letter of Commendation from the Commandant of the Coast Guard for landing a PBY plane in open sea 200 miles southwest of San Francisco on 13 February 1943 to remove an officer from a naval vessel to a naval hospital in time to save the patient's life. During the remainder of the war he again served as Aide to the Commandant of the Coast Guard.

### POST WAR

From October 1946 to June 1948 he commanded the Coast Guard Air Station at Traverse City, MI. He then returned to Coast Guard Headquarters to serve as Assistant Chief, Aviation Division for two years. He was assigned as a student to the Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, VA from August 1950 to January 1951. That was followed by several weeks of instruction in LORAN operations at the Aids to Navigation School, Coast Guard Training Station, Groton, CT and an assignment in April 1951 as Commanding Officer of the Coast



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Guard Depot on Guam as Commander, Western Pacific Section. In mid-1952 were added the duties of Commander, Marianas Section.

From September 1952 to August 1954 he commanded the Coast Guard icebreaker *Mackinaw*, based at Cheboygan, MI, a vessel specially designed for icebreaking and aids to navigation work to help shipping commerce in the Great Lakes. The next three years marked his fourth tour of duty at Coast Guard Headquarters, this time as Chief, Administrative Management Division. In June 1957, he became Commandant of the Cadets at the Coast Guard Academy. In July 1960, he was reassigned to duty as Chief, Operations Division of the 13th Coast Guard District, Seattle, WA.

By nomination of the President on 31 January 1962 and approval of the Senate Smith was appointed to rank as permanent Rear Admiral from 1 July 1962. At that time he left Seattle to assume the post of Superintendent of the US Coast Guard Academy, relieving retiring RADM Stephen H. Evans.

Two extraordinary occasions highlighted his tenure of office at the Academy. In August 1962, ADM Smith brought the Academy's 295-ft., three-masted training bark *Eagle* on her first trip to Washington, DC. At that time he was host on board the bark to such distinguished visitors as President John F. Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, various members of Congress, and Admiral Edwin J. Roland, Commandant of the Coast Guard. He also cooperated in the planning of OPERATION SAIL in July 1964. This involved massing many of the world's remaining tall-masted windjammers in a spectacular marine parade in New York Harbor led by *Eagle* as host ship.

Admiral Smith was awarded the Legion of Merit for his service at the Academy. He was cited for making major changes updating the Academy curriculum to keep in step with modern advances in technology and management. Also, for proposing and developing an electives program which provides incentives and opportunities for cadets to broaden their education--improving their capabilities as future Coast Guard officers, and for vigorously supervising a building program of improving laboratory, classroom, and other facilities.

Admiral Smith's tour of duty at the Academy was terminated in July 1965, with his transfer to Cleveland, OH as the Commander, 9th Coast Guard District. This command directed Coast Guard operations in the Great Lakes region.

He was appointed Commandant of the U S. Coast Guard with rank of Admiral effective 1 June 1966 He relieved retiring Admiral E. J. Roland on May 31st at formal change-of-command ceremonies held on board the 327-ft. Coast Guard cutter *Campbell* at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, DC.

On 11 November 1966 ADM Smith received the Distinguished Service Medal for meritorious achievement in assisting in the formation of the newly created Department of Transportation. Under-Secretary of the Treasury Joseph W. Barr made the presentation. Admiral Smith's World War II campaign awards include the American Defense with sea clasp; American Area; Asiatic-Pacific Area; and World War II Victory. In addition to the Legion of Merit his later



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decorations include the National Defense Service Ribbon, the Command-at-Sea Insignia, and the Distinguished Service Medal. The Admiral received an American Legion Distinguished Service Medal in November 1969.

He passed away on 1 April 2000.