



# U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

## Frederick C. Billard

1924-1932



Rear Admiral Frederick Chamberlayne Billard was born in Washington, D.C. on 22 September 1873. He was appointed a cadet from Maryland on 11 January 1894 and received his early training on the practice ship, USRC *Chase*. He was appointed a Third Lieutenant in the Revenue Cutter Service on 27 April 1896 and a Captain on 12 September 1912. During the Spanish-American War he served on the cutter *Corwin*, then attached to the Pacific Fleet. From 1900 to 1905 he was navigator and instructor on the cutter *Chase* and from 1906 to 1911 he was Aide to Captain Worth J. Ross, Chief of the Revenue Cutter Service. In 1918 he commanded USS *Aphrodite*, operating in the European War Zone. This

was the first American war vessel to pass through the Kiel Canal after the signing of the Armistice. In May 1919 Admiral Billard returned from Europe and became Aide to the Commandant of the Coast Guard. He was made Superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy at New London, Connecticut in 1921. With the rank of Rear Admiral, he succeeded William Reynolds as Commandant on 11 January 1924.

Billard's tenure saw great change and challenge for the Coast Guard. The service grew considerably, both in vessels and manpower, as a result of Prohibition. New patrol craft, and the personnel to man them, were needed to interdict the importation of alcohol. The procurement and construction of these ships along with the acquisition of destroyers from the Navy posed many problems for the service. Billard oversaw the incorporation of these new vessels and the reorganization of the service with great skill. With his experience as Academy Superintendent, he also led a campaign for improvements. The result saw the reform of the curriculum and the eventual construction and re-establishment of the Academy at its current New London location in 1932. Not only was he an indefatigable worker, he was personable and seemingly knew most of the Coast Guard officer corps even to the most junior level. This engendered a deep sense of loyalty in all of those who served under his command.

Having been appointed to three consecutive terms, he died in office on 17 May 1932. Dearly loved by all those who had the honor of serving under him, his passing was deeply mourned. In his book *Guardians of the Sea: History of the United States Coast Guard, 1915 to the Present*, Robert Erwin Johnson stated that "Frederick Chamberlayne Billard must rank with the greatest commandants of the Coast Guard. He had guided his service through a very trying period, presiding over an unprecedented expansion and attempting to deal with the herculean task of prohibition enforcement without neglecting his service's traditional responsibilities."

Rear Admiral Billard was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.