

REAR ADMIRAL LAURENCE ALLEN ABERCROMBIE
UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

Laurence Allen Abercrombie was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, on October 11, 1897, son of John Andrew and Mary (Davenport) Abercrombie. He attended Lawrence High School, and following graduation he worked for a year with the United States Worsted Company. He attended Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts before entering the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, by appointment from the Seventh Massachusetts District in June, 1917. While at the academy, he participated in class baseball, and was a member of the Naval Academy Choir and musical clubs. During World War I he served as a midshipman aboard the battleships DELAWARE and GEORGIA, NEVADA and MISSISSIPPI successively in the summers of 1917 and 1918.

A member of the class of 1921-A, he was graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 3, 1920, and subsequently progressed through the grades to the rank of Captain on June 21, 1942. Transferred to the Retired List of the Navy on June 30, 1951, he was promoted to Rear Admiral on the basis of combat awards.

Upon graduation in 1920, he was ordered to the USS BLACK HAWK, tender of Destroyer Squadrons, Atlantic Fleet, which in 1923 was sent from the Atlantic to the Asiatic Station via the Suez Canal. Upon arrival at Shanghai, China, in April, 1923, he was detached and transferred to the USS VILLALOBOS, and after three weeks was assigned to the USS ISABEL, gunboat, flagship of Commander, Yangtze Patrol. In July, 1924 he joined the USS HURON, then flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, and the following November participated in the landing and subsequent operations at Chefoo, China.

Upon returning to the United States in July, 1925, he served one year aboard the battleship UTAH, operating in the Atlantic with Division 2, Battleship Division, Scouting Fleet. He had duty as Instructor in French, Department of Modern Languages at the Naval Academy from August, 1926 to May, 1928, and during the summer of 1927 he studied in Tours, France.

From July, 1928 until January, 1931 he had sea duty aboard the USS PITTSBURGH, flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. During this period he attended the coronation of Emperor Hirohito of Japan. The celebration lasted ten days, and part of the exercises included a naval review of assembled flagships of the world at Yokohama. The U.S. Squadron, flying the Stars and Stripes, gave a salute to the new monarch. From April, 1931 until August, 1933 he served a tour of duty in the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and was then ordered to the Navy Yard, New York, New York, to assist with fitting out the USS NEW ORLEANS. He went aboard when that heavy cruiser was commissioned on February 15, 1934, followed by her shakedown cruise to Sweden, Denmark, Holland, and England. He served in the NEW ORLEANS until May, 1937, with duty during the last few months as her Communication Officer.

Returning to the Naval Academy in June, 1937, he served as an Instructor in the Department of Modern Languages, spending the summer of 1938 at the American Embassy, Paris, France, furthering his study of the French language, and later qualifying as interpreter and trans-

lator of that language. Detached from the Naval Academy in June, 1939, he reported to the USS ARIZONA to serve as Gunnery Officer. Assuming command of the USS DRAYTON on March 21, 1941, he was commanding that destroyer at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in the Pacific. He was awarded the Navy Cross and cited "For distinguished service in line of his profession as Commanding Officer of the USS DRAYTON on December 24, 1941, conducting operations with that vessel which resulted in the destruction of an enemy vessel."

As Commanding Officer of a Destroyer Division in action south of the Gilbert Islands, he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a third Navy Cross. The citation in part states: "For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous devotion to duty . . . October 22, 1942. Boldly striking at the enemy in a daring daylight raid on a hostile patrol line, (he) expertly maneuvered his division to engage Japanese surface units with the result that two enemy vessels were sunk by the accurate gunfire of his force and repeated Japanese aerial attacks were repelled without damage to ships or personnel of his command. Through the high combat efficiency of the forces under his inspiring leadership . . . an important and hazardous mission was brought to a successful conclusion."

He was in command of Task Unit 62.7.2 in the Solomon Islands Area when he was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross the citation, in part, stating: "For . . . outstanding courage as Screen Commander of Task Unit 62.7.2 during action against enemy Japanese aerial forces in the Solomon Islands Area, February 17, 1943. By the accurate and timely warning given by the ships under his command, (he) enabled the Task Unit Commander to dispose his transports and destroyers for the most effective action against hostile torpedo planes. Despite the difficulties and hazards of a night engagement during which five Japanese planes were destroyed, (he) brought his forces through without casualty or damage. . . ."

In August, 1943 he was ordered to the Navy Department for duty in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Office of Naval Intelligence. In April, 1944 he was reassigned to duty with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and when detached a year later, he reported to the Naval Training School (Damage Control) at San Francisco, California. In August, 1945 he took command of the heavy cruiser CHESTER, and served during the "mopping-up" operations in the Pacific following the Japanese capitulation.

In March, 1946 he was relieved of that command and ordered back to Washington for duty as Director of the Naval Reserve program in the Potomac River Naval Command. Under his direction the Naval Reserve program in the area comprising Washington and adjoining sections of Virginia and Maryland, was organized to give veterans opportunities for continuing in the ranks and ratings they held in the service while on active duty. In October, 1946 he became assistant to the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Naval Reserve) (Rear Admiral J. E. Gingrich) and was assigned as Chief of Naval Reserve Plans and Policies. He served as such until May, 1949, when he was transferred to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. He was so serving when relieved of

active duty pending his transfer to the Retired List of the Navy on June 30, 1951.

In addition to the Navy Cross with two Gold Stars, Rear Admiral Abercrombie has the Victory Medal, Atlantic Fleet Clasp; the Navy Expeditionary Medal (USS HURON); the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the World War II Victory Medal; and the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp.



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9 July 1951