

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

REAR ADMIRAL JAMES C. DEMPSEY, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

James Charles Dempsey was born in Eastport, Maryland, on August 30, 1908, son of the late Lieutenant James P. Dempsey, USN, and Mrs. (Elizabeth Conroy) Dempsey. He attended Bulkeley School, New London, Connecticut, and Army-Navy Preparatory School, New York, and entered the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment "at large" on June 14, 1927. He was graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 4, 1931, and through subsequent advancement attained the rank of Rear Admiral, to date from November 1, 1959.

After graduation from the Naval Academy, he served from June 1931 to June 1933 as a junior officer on board the USS OKLAHOMA, a unit of Battleship Division 3, Battle Force. He had instruction at the Submarine School, New London, Connecticut, from July to December 1933, then served for three months as Boxing Coach at the Naval Academy where he won his "N" in boxing as a Midshipman. In April 1934 he joined the submarine S-14, based in the Panama Canal Zone, and from May 1935 to June 1938 was attached to the USS SHARK for her commissioning and in operations in the Atlantic and Pacific.

Returning to Annapolis, he had instruction in General Line at the Naval Postgraduate School, and from July 1939 to January 1940 was an Instructor and Plans Officer at the Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island. In February 1940 he again joined the submarine SHARK, and served as her Executive Officer while she operated from Honolulu, T. H., and Manila, P. I., until November 1941. He was commanding the USS S-37 in the Philippines area at the outbreak of World War II, in December 1941, and on February 8, 1942, the S-37 achieved the distinction of being the first U. S. submarine ever to sink an enemy destroyer. For this feat, during the Battle of Makassar Strait, he was awarded the Navy Cross.

From March 1942 until March 1943 he was Commanding Officer of the USS SPEARFISH, which on May 3, 1942, evacuated the last United States personnel to leave Corregidor before its surrender, including thirteen Army and Navy nurses who were passengers in the SPEARFISH for seventeen days enroute to Freemantle, Australia. He won a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Navy Cross for heroism as Commanding Officer of the USS SPEARFISH on a war patrol in hostile waters. Completing his tenth War Patrol while in command of the USS COD in the Southwest Pacific Area, after commissioning that submarine in June 1943, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," and a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Bronze Star Medal for heroic service during patrols of the USS COD and USS SPEARFISH.

After two months' service as Operational Planning Officer on the Staff of Commander Submarines, Southwest Pacific Force, at Headquarters in Perth, Australia, he returned to the United States to serve as Operations Officer on the Staff of Commander Submarines, Atlantic Fleet, during the period August 1944 to June 1945. During the last months of 1945 and until November 1946 he commanded Submarine Divisions 101 and 72 at Pearl Harbor, T. H., Subic Bay, Philippine Islands, and San Diego, California.

In addition to the Navy Cross with Gold Star in lieu of the Second award, the Silver Star Medal, and the Bronze Star Medal, with Gold Star and Combat "V", Rear Admiral Dempsey received three Letters of Commendation, with Ribbon, two stars and Combat "V", for service during World War II. The citations follow, in part:

Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of the USS S-37, in offensive action in the straits of Makassar on February 8, 1942...Lieutenant Dempsey attacked four vessels...at close range, completely destroying one of them in the engagement. The other destroyers of the opposing force immediately made a counter attack which lasted for a considerable time but from which, with notable skill and excellent judgment, (he) withdrew without sustaining any damage."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Navy Cross: "For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous devotion to duty as Commanding Officer of the USS SPEARFISH on war patrol in hostile waters...(He) succeeded in entering waters closely patrolled by enemy Japanese air and surface forces to attack and destroy an armed naval auxiliary vessel and a large cargo type ship, undetected by the enemy and without damage to (his) vessel. Furthermore, while engaged on a special mission, he penetrated enemy patrol lines, defied close range artillery barrage and effected the evacuation of many personnel of the United States armed forces beleaguered on an island under constant enemy attack. He then coolly and skillfully extricated his vessel from this critical and perilous situation..."

Silver Star Medal: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commanding Officer of the USS COD...during the Third War Patrol of that vessel in the Philippine Islands Area, May 10, 1944. Locating a large Japanese convoy off the coast of Luzon, Lieutenant Commander Dempsey attacked this heavily escorted group in the face of intense enemy resistance and, by his highly aggressive tactics, succeeded in sinking 10,082 tons of hostile shipping, including one destroyer, and in damaging an additional 11,426 tons... (and) brought the COD back to port without serious damage to the ship or injury to personnel..."

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS COD during that vessel's Second War Patrol...from January 11 to March 13, 1944...(He) launched a series of brilliant torpedo attacks which resulted in the sinking of over 9,000 tons of enemy shipping and, skillfully evading hostile countermeasures, brought his ship safely back to port..."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS SPEARFISH during that vessel's Fifth War Patrol in enemy Japanese-controlled waters of the South China Sea from September 8 to November 11, 1942...(He) delivered a series of aggressive torpedo attacks which resulted in the sinking of two enemy vessels totalling 10,000 tons and, skillfully evading hostile countermeasures, brought his ship safely back to port..."

Letter of Commendation, by CINCPAC: "As Commanding Officer of the USS SPEARFISH in operations in enemy controlled waters, he courageously, skillfully and aggressively pressed home attacks against enemy shipping, resulting in damage to three 7,000-ton freighters...and brought his ship through without injury to personnel and with minor damage to equipment..."

Letter of Commendation, by CINCPAC: "...as Commanding Officer of the USS COD during the first War Patrol of that vessel from 14 October to 16 December 1943...(He) launched a series of brilliant attacks against a heavily escorted convoy which resulted in sinking or damaging 11,000 tons of enemy shipping...and brought his ship safely back to port..."

Letter of Commandation, by CINCLANT: "For meritorious service as Operations Officer on the Staff of Commander Submarines, Atlantic Fleet, during the period September 1944 to July 1945. Commander Dempsey, by his initiative, unceasing attention to duty and cooperation in dealing with other commands, coordinated operations and services of vessels of this force so that maximum training and preparations were observed by all units involved...(He) greatly assisted Commander Submarines, Atlantic Fleet, in carrying out the tasks of his command..."

In November 1946 Rear Admiral Dempsey joined the Staff of Commander Operational Development Force, and served for a year as Underseas Warfare Officer, attached to the USS ADIRONDACK at Norfolk, Virginia. From January 1948 to June 1950 he was Executive Officer of the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, T. H., being Acting Commanding Officer from August through November 1948. He completed the Senior Course at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, in July 1951, after which he returned to Pearl Harbor for eleven months' duty as Commander Submarine Squadron ONE.

He has successive duty as Planning Officer on the Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff (and as a member of the Joint Strategic Planning Group); on the Staff of Commander Submarines, Eastern Atlantic (NATO) at Fort Blockhouse, Gosport, England; and again on the Joint Staff in Washington, D. C., during the period August 1952 until July 1956. That month he assumed command of the USS WACCAMAW (AO-109), and was also Second-in-Command of the Mobile Logistic Support Force, SIXTH Fleet, until detached in July 1957.

On September 14, 1957, he assumed command of Submarine Flotilla ONE, and after a year in that command, and brief instruction in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, he reported to the Joint Staff Office, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D. C., to serve as Chief of the Policy Division, Plans and Policy Directorate. He was Commander Military Sea Transportation Service, Atlantic Area, with headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, from December 15, 1959 until April 1961, then served as Commander Amphibious Group TWO. On July 11, 1962 he became Commander Amphibious Training Command, Atlantic Fleet and in June 1964 reported as Chief of the Navy Section, Joint U. S. Military Mission for Aid to Turkey, with headquarters in Ankara.

In June 1966 he became Assistant Vice Chief of Naval Operations/ Director of Naval Administration, Navy Department and "for exceptionally meritorious service...(in that capacity) from June 1966 to May 1968 ..." he was awarded the Legion of Merit. The citation further states in part: "...Among his many significant achievements has been his direction of the changes in command relationships for naval shore activities incident to a realignment of financial responsibilities. (His) planning of this complex undertaking permitted a smooth transition to the new organization, minimizing adverse impact on the conduct of Navy business. His leadership has been similarly decisive in the smooth execution of the Navy's responsibilities in the Equal Housing Program for Navy personnel, Equal Employment Opportunities, and the several programs in which the military have participated relating to opportunities for our youth. Under Rear Admiral Dempsey's supervision the business of his office has been characterized by the issuance of precise instructions based upon careful planning and thorough understanding of the spirit and intent of both the new programs and of the standing instructions in the field of naval administration..."

In May 1968 he reported as Commandant of the Fifth Naval District with additional duty as Commander of the Naval Base, Norfolk, Virginia and served as such until relieved of active duty pending his retirement, effective September 1, 1970.

He was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Legion of Merit and cited as follows: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct...from June 1968 through August 1970 while serving as Commandant, Fifth Naval District and Commander Naval Base, Norfolk, Virginia...Rear Admiral Dempsey was highly successful in carrying out the complex and myriad responsibilities of his mission. Though his sound judgment and exceptional planning and managerial abilities, he was responsible for promoting numerous military and civilian programs which enhanced Navy-community relations throughout the Tidewater Area and improved the welfare and morale of military personnel. Despite drastic reductions in resources and increased requirements occasioned by the conflict in Southeast Asia, (he) contributed directly to the improved support to the Fleet..."

His decorations are: The Navy Cross, Gold Star in lieu of the Second Navy Cross, Silver Star Medal, Legion of Merit, Gold Star in lieu of the Second Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V", Gold Star in lieu of Second Bronze Star Medal, Commendation Ribbon with two Stars, and the Army Distinguished Unit Badge. He also has the Submarine Combat Insignia with stars for ten successful war patrols; the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign

R. Adm. J. C. Dempsey, USN, Ret.

Page 5

Medal; American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; National Defense Service Medal with bronze star; Korean Service Medal; United Nations Service Medal; and the Philippine Defense Ribbon. In addition, he has the Korean Presidential Unit Citation Badge.

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