

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

COMMANDER GRIFFITH BAILY COALE,  
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE, RETIRED

Commander Coale was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 21, 1890, son of William Ellis Coale and Mrs. Mary Ella Baily Coale. He is a graduate of Maryland Institute where he was President of the Art Students' Association for two years. He studied abroad for three years as a pupil of M. Heymann in Munich, Richard Miller and Laparra in Paris, and for a short time in Italy and Spain. He painted professionally in Baltimore for seven years, during which time he served as Marine Camoufleur E.F.C., U. S. Shipping Board, in 1917-1918.

Moving to New York City in 1922, Commander Coale completed many murals, portraits, and decorative paintings for buildings in that city, including the New York Trust Company; New York Athletic Club; Lee, Higginson and Company; City Bank Farmers Trust Company; Dry Dock Savings Institution; Home Office of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company; Criminal Courts Building; and others. In 1939 he completed a painting of the visit of the King and Queen of England to Columbia University, to be hung in the University Library, and the following year did two large exterior murals on the Rail Building and the Crosley Building at the New York World's Fair. He also has many paintings in other cities in the East.

A mural painter by profession, Commander Coale is an expert on small boats and ship models and a small boat sailor by choice and avocation. The late Stephen Vincent Benet said of him, "You can't talk to Coale for half an hour without realizing that his first love is, and remains, the sea, and that he has a wide and accurate knowledge of ships and sailormen, past and present, that he knows as much about salt water as he does about paint."

Commissioned Lieutenant Commander in the U. S. Naval Reserve to rank from August 8, 1941, he received a spot promotion to the rank of Commander, to date from May 16, 1946. He was transferred to the Retired List of the Navy in the rank of Commander, on November 1, 1947.

Commander Coale's first assignment took him, aboard a vessel of a convoy, to Iceland. His book, "North Atlantic Patrol," the log of a seagoing artist, resulted. Illustrated with his paintings of the varied activities aboard ship - blacked out quarters, men standing watch in icy weather - it tells of that hazardous journey in the submarine-haunted waters of the North Atlantic. His experiences, so vividly portrayed by brush and pen, are a veritable adventure to the reader; to Coale and his comrades, a duty packed with thrills and excitement. This is a book of exciting facts rather than fiction, of men and ships carrying out orders, the Navy its subject - a Navy of glorious history, fine traditions - an old service engaged in a new war.

In the spring of 1942, Commander Coale went to Hawaii, where from the dock at Pearl Harbor he reconstructed in mural design the sneak attack of the Japanese on the morning of December 7, 1941. The Battle of Midway in progress about that time, he packed up his canvas and left to gather material for painting which would record that epic operation. Some of these pictures were brought together to illustrate a second book by Commander Coale, entitled "Victory at Midway," as masterful as the first.

Commander Coale was next assigned to cover Naval action in the Southeast Asia Command, under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. He went to India via London and Cairo, and returned through the Pacific, thereby travelling completely around the world. The many and colorful activities of the joint American-British Naval forces in the areas visited are the subjects of another great series of pictures.

Commander Coale's final work for the Navy was a large mural portraying American planes attacking Japanese battleships during the Battle of Midway, featuring the importance of the Navy air arm. This is in the Naval Academy Mess Hall, at Annapolis, Maryland, along with others painted by artists of the Combat Art Section of the Navy's Public Information Division.

For meritorious service during World War II, in the Atlantic, Pacific, and East Asia Theaters, Commander Coale received a Letter of Commendation (with ribbon) from the Secretary of the Navy. He is also entitled to the American Area Campaign Medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Area Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.

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Prior to his Naval service, Commander Coale was President of the National Society of Mural Painters; Secretary of the Board of Trustees Marine Museum of the City of New York; Secretary of Ship Model Society of New York; a member of the Rhode Island Ship Models Society; the Editorial Advisory Board of "American Neptune;" the Society for Nautical Research, Greenwich, England; and an honorary life member of the New York Commandery, Naval Order of the United States.

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