

COMMANDER VERNON J. COLEY, JR., U. S. NAVY

Vernon Jackson Coley, Jr., was born in Oakland, California, on February 4, 1918, son of Vernon J. and Ethel A. Fuhrer Coley. He was graduated from the University of California with the degree of Bachelor of Science and commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Naval Reserve in May 1939. He resigned his commission to enter Naval Aviation as an Aviation Cadet, and upon designation as Naval Aviator was recommissioned in June 1940. He transferred from the Naval Reserve to the U. S. Navy and subsequently advanced in rank to that of Commander, to date from July 16, 1950.

Upon completion of aviation training at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, he was assigned to Patrol Squadron 23 at Pearl Harbor as a prospective patrol plane commander. His squadron had been redesignated Patrol Squadron 11 and was at the Naval Air Station, Kaneohe, T. H., when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. As Squadron Navigator he later participated in action in the South Pacific, including the Solomon Islands Campaign in 1942. He returned to the United States in January 1943 and served throughout that year as a flight instructor and gunnery instructor attached to Bombing Squadron 2, based at the Naval Air Station, Sanford, Florida, later moved to the Naval Air Station, Beaufort, South Carolina.

In January 1944 he reported to Headquarters Squadron 8 at the Naval Air Station, Alameda, California, as Combat Pool Pilot, and from February through June again served in the Hawaiian Islands, as Flight and Gunnery Training Officer of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Training Unit, Fleet Air Wing TWO, based at Kaneohe. He then became Training Officer of Night Attack Combat Training Unit, Barbers Point, Oahu, concerned with night combat tactics development. During the period February through September 1945 he was Executive Officer of Patrol Bombing Squadron 133, based on Tinian and Iwo Jima when the Japanese surrendered.

For World War II service he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and a Gold Star in lieu of an additional Air Medal. The citations follow in part:

Distinguished Flying Cross: "For heroism and extraordinary achievement as Commander of a Patrol Plane during a raid on enemy Japanese shipping at Tonolei Harbor on the night of October 22, 1942. By skillful planning and bold execution, Lieutenant Coley launched an extremely long range torpedo bombing attack in the face of tremendous anti-aircraft fire, probably scoring a direct torpedo hit on an enemy battleship and a near miss on a large Japanese transport. His cool courage and conscientious devotion to duty were maintained with utter disregard of personal safety ...!"

Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement in aerial flight during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Western Pacific combat area from March 18 to 26, 1945. Completing his fifth mission during this period, Lieutenant Commander Coley contributed materially to the success of his squadron. His gallant devotion to duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Gold Star in lieu of Second Air Medal: "For meritorious achievement...as Pilot of a Navy Privateer in Patrol Bombing Squadron ONE HUNDRED THIRTY THREE during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific War Area from March 27 to August 2, 1945. Completing five missions during this period Lieutenant Commander Coley contributed materially to the success of his squadron and to the infliction of damage on enemy installations..."

From October 1945 to November 1947 he served as Executive Officer of the Naval Air Facility, Naval Ordnance Test Station, Inyokern, California, and for two months thereafter was a student at the Fleet Airborne Electronics Training Unit, Pacific. In February 1948 he assumed command of Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron 125 at the Naval Air Station, Whidbey Island, Washington. He was detached in May 1949 and in July reported to the Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, Maryland, where he attended the Test Pilot Training School and then served until May 1952 as a Test Pilot in the Tactical Test Division. While there had temporary additional duty as Officer in Charge, Project SKI JUMP II in the Arctic.

He next served for fifteen months with Patrol Squadron 57 as Commanding Officer while that squadron was based at Whidbey Island then deployed to the Naval Air Station, Atsugi, Japan. As such he participated in action in the Korean Area and was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of the Third Air Medal, with citation as follows:

"For meritorious achievement as a member of a Patrol Plane Crew of Patrol Squadron 57 during operations against enemy forces from 30 March to 23 June 1953. He participated in twenty patrol and reconnaissance missions during this period..."

Remaining in the Far East, he served from December 1953 until March 1955 as Operations Officer on the Staff of Commander Fleet Air Wing 6, Headquarters at the Naval Air Station Iwakuni, Japan. In May 1955 he returned to the Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River, for a tour of duty as Assistant Director, Electronic Test Division. Since May 1957 he has been Commanding Officer of Air Development Squadron 6, based at the Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island, for preparation, planning and participation in the Navy current expedition to the Antarctic, Operation DEEPFREEZE.

In addition to the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with two Gold Stars, Commander Coley has the American Defense Service Medal with star; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four engagement stars; the American Campaign Medal; World War II Victory Medal; National Defense Service Medal; the Korean Service Medal with two operation stars; and the United Nations Service Medal.

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