

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

CAPTAIN KENNETH P. LETTS
UNITED STATES NAVY

Kenneth Pearle Letts was born in Elsie, Michigan, on December 12, 1908, son of Edwin George Letts and Mrs. Pearl Schenck Letts, both now deceased. He attended Flushing High School, Flushing, Michigan, and entered the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from the U. S. Navy as Midshipman at large, after two years' enlisted service, on June 28, 1928. He was graduated and commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Navy on June 2, 1932, and subsequently advanced to the rank of Captain, to date from July 1, 1951.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1932, he was assigned to the USS NEVADA, and served as a junior division officer until April 1934. He was then transferred to the USS BOGGS, for eight months' duty as Communications Officer. He was a student naval aviator from January to July 1935, after which he joined the USS ROPER. He served first as Communications Officer and from February 1937 until July 1939 also had duty as Engineering Officer.

In August 1939 he returned to Annapolis for instruction in engineering at the Postgraduate School, but before completion of the course he was detached, due to the National Emergency, for duty as Engineering Officer of the USS FOX from September 1939 until July 1940. He then returned to the Naval Academy as an instructor in the Department of Seamanship and Navigation, and a year later was ordered to the USS ELLYSON (DD 454). He served on board that destroyer from her commissioning, in November 1941, until March 1943, during which period the ELLYSON participated in the Morocco Invasion at Casablanca.

He assumed command of the USS FORREST (DD 461), on March 12, 1943. Under his command that destroyer escort vessel operated with the British Home Fleet at Scapa Flow, June to November 1943, and participated in the Normandy operations in June 1944 and the Invasion of Southern France in August of that year. He was awarded the Silver Star Medal "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commanding Officer of the USS FORREST during operations against enemy forces in the European War Theater on June 24, 1944..." The citation further states:

"When the minesweeping flotilla he was escorting was taken under heavy and accurate gunfire from heavy calibre guns of shore batteries, Commander Letts laid down an effective smoke screen in shore of the formation, enabling the minesweepers to slip their sweeps and return undamaged. By his skill and initiative, he contributed materially to the success of the mission..."

He was also awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," for "meritorious achievement (in that command) prior to and during the amphibious invasion of Southern France, in August 1944..." the citation continuing: "Prior to the initial landings, he led the FORREST through dangerous and restricted waters close to known enemy minefields and within easy range of hostile shore artillery

to conduct vital spotting missions for Allied capital ships and cruisers. On several occasions he delivered concentrated and accurate gunfire against targets of opportunity. (He) was largely responsible for the successful pre-assault bombardments of the FORREST, thereby contributing materially to the effective establishment of the Allied beachheads and to the over-all success of the invasion..."

Detached from command of the FORREST on November 11, 1944, he returned to the United States, and was later ordered to the Bethlehem Steel Company's plant in San Pedro, California, to fit out the USS BRISTOL (DD 857). He assumed command of that destroyer upon her commissioning on March 17, 1945, and as her Commanding Officer participated in Third Fleet operations against Japan in July and August 1945, just prior to the cessation of hostilities. In April 1947 he was detached with orders to the Navy Department, Washington, D. C., for a tour of duty in the Bureau of Naval Personnel. There he served first as Director, Training Aids Division, and from March 1948 to July 1950 as Assistant Director, Standards and Curriculum Branch.

He next had duty afloat from September 1950 to December 1951 as Executive Officer of the USS TOLEDO (CA 133). He received a Letter of Commendation with Ribbon and Combat "V," for "distinguishing himself by exceptionally meritorious service as Executive Officer of the USS TOLEDO from April 1951 to November 1951, while engaged in action against the enemy in Korea..." which states that he "greatly contributed to the combat readiness of his ship in organizing and maintaining the ship and its personnel in a high state of efficiency and morale during operations in which the TOLEDO inflicted heavy damage on the enemy..."

In January 1952 he was designated Commanding Officer of the Recruit Training Command at the U. S. Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois, where he remained until October 1954. For a year thereafter he commanded the USS DIAMONDHEAD (AE 19), an auxiliary-ammunition-ship, and in December 1954 began another tour of shore duty as Commanding Officer, Service School Command, at the U. S. Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland, his current assignment.

In addition to the Silver Star Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," and the Commendation Ribbon, also with Combat "V," Captain Letts has the Croix de Guerre (Order of the Division) and Citation from the French Government, and the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, personally presented by President Syghman Rhee of South Korea. He also has the American Defense Service Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with silver star (five engagements); the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one bronze engagement star; World War II Victory Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp; the National Defense Service Medal; Korean Service Medal, with three stars; and the United Nations Service Medal.

Captain Letts was married in October 1946 to Miss Katherine M. O'Brien of Newport, Rhode Island. His official residence is Flushing, Michigan, but he and Mrs. Letts currently reside in Quarters "H," USNTC, Bainbridge, Maryland.