

VICE ADMIRAL BURTON B. BIGGS, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Burton Beecher Biggs was born in Elliott, West Virginia, on July 3, 1898. He attended high school in Ansted, West Virginia, and began his naval career with the Class of 1921 at the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland in 1917. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 3, 1920, he subsequently progressed in grade as follows: Lieutenant (jg), June 1923; Lieutenant, June 1926; Lieutenant Commander, July 1936; Commander, September 1940; Captain, June 1942; and Rear Admiral, to date from May 1, 1948.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1920, he had sea duty as a junior turret officer and Aide to the Executive Officer of the USS UTAH, operating with the Atlantic Fleet. He then served successively from July 1921 to November 1926 as Engineer and Gunnery Officer of the USS SHAW; on the staff of Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet; for three years as a quarterdeck division officer in the USS SEATTLE; and for three months aboard the USS DETROIT, flagship of Light Cruiser Division 3, Scouting Fleet.

Returning to the United States, he served as Aide to the Commandant, Ninth Naval District, Great Lakes, Illinois, from December 1926 to December 1928, after which he again returned to duty afloat. Service as Flag Lieutenant to Commander Battleship Division FOUR and later to Commander Scouting Fleet, preceded duty as Mining Officer in the USS OGLALA, flagship of Mine Squadron One, Control Force, in which he served until the following June. He then had orders to duty as Executive Officer of the Ammunition Depot, Fort Mifflin, Pennsylvania, serving two years in that capacity.

In May 1933 he joined the light cruiser RICHMOND as Assistant Gunnery Officer, and from August 1934 until August 1935 served as her Senior Assistant Engineer. The RICHMOND carried the flag of the Commander Special Service Squadron, making good will visits to South and Central American ports, and was maneuvering off the California Coast on the night of February 12, 1935, when the Navy's dirigible MACON broke up and crashed into the sea forty miles off Point Sur. The RICHMOND steamed to the scene for rescue operations, and though destruction of the dirigible was complete, only two men lost their lives.

From August 1935 to May 1938 he served as an instructor of Economics and Government at the Naval Academy, and a month later he returned to sea duty as Gunnery Officer of the USS CHESTER. In May 1940 he assumed command of the USS ARCTIC, provision ship, which later carried supplies to the Pacific Fleet, and which was affectionately called by her skipper the "beef boat."

During the early period of World War II, he served in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, first as Officer in Charge of the Officers' Records Section, and later as Director of Officer Performance Division.

He was awarded the Legion of Merit for "exceptionally meritorious conduct ...successively as Appointment Officer and Director of the Officer Performance Division, Bureau of Navigation (later Bureau of Naval Personnel), from the outbreak of hostilities to July 1943..."

The citation continues in part: "(He) assisted in drafting the Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act and the Missing Persons Act, both passed by Congress in 1942. When tremendous casualties were sustained by our forces at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines he rendered invaluable service in developing an organization for handling their cases expeditiously with a view toward comforting the bereaved families and alleviating their financial distress...During a critical period of war, he contributed immeasurably in the successful administration of his Department and to the essential operations in the Office of the Director of Officer Personnel ..."

Assigned to the staff of Commander FIFTH Fleet as Logistics Officer, in August 1943 he assumed one of the toughest jobs of his career, that of determining in advance of operations what the Fleet would need, then getting it where it was needed. To see how supply lines were holding under combat conditions, and to deal with supply problems on the scene, he went out with the FIFTH Fleet on history-making air strikes and amphibious invasion operations. From the bridge of the flagship, he observed the raid on the Marshalls, January 29-30, 1944, which paralyzed the enemy's air strength on the islands.

On February 16-17, he witnessed the first big raid on Truk, the heaviest assault delivered up to that time by our Fleet Air Arm, and in March, the carrier force air-strike on the Peleliu Islands. Other major campaigns in which he participated included amphibious operations in the Gilbert, Marshall and Mariana Islands; at Iwo Jima, and Okinawa; the First Battle of the Philippine Sea; and in carrier task force raids on Truk, Palau, Tokyo, Kyushu, and enemy fleet units in the Inland Sea. He was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a Second Legion of Merit, with Combat "V" for "exceptionally meritorious conduct as Logistics Officer on the staff of Commander FIFTH Fleet in Action against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific War Area from August 5, 1943 to August 5, 1945..."

The citation states in part: "...A pioneer in the development of mobile service squadrons to provide complete logistic support for the Fleet at sea and in the forward areas, (he) contributed materially to the development of the technique of rearming all types of Fleet units at sea, of particular value in making possible the long period of sustained combat operations by units of the Fast Carrier Force during the Okinawa Campaign..."

Upon his return to the United States in September 1945, he was ordered to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, for duty in the Petroleum and Tankers Division, and with the Army-Navy Petroleum Board. This tour of duty covered temporary additional duty with the Pacific

Fleet on several occasions. On November 2, 1946, he assumed command of the heavy cruiser USS SAINT PAUL, and held that command for almost a year. On September 22, 1947, he reported for duty as Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Service Force, Pacific Fleet, and, in December 1948 returned to shore duty as Executive Secretary of the Armed Forces Petroleum Board, Navy Department, Washington, D. C.

The board was redesignated Munitions Board Joint Petroleum Committee, of the Department of Defense in June 1949, and he served as its Chairman from June 1949 until January 1952. He was awarded the Secretary of the Navy Commendation Ribbon and Metal Pendant "for outstanding services as Executive Secretary of the Armed Services Petroleum Board and subsequently as Chairman of the Munitions Board Joint Petroleum Committee from 25 February 1949 to 10 January 1952."

The citation continues in part: "...Rear Admiral Biggs successfully fostered a high degree of coordination between the Petroleum industry and the Government of the United States and was instrumental in establishing the agencies and committees necessary to insure the production and distribution of the petroleum products required by the Armed Forces on a worldwide basis. By his technical knowledge and foresightedness, he was largely responsible in averting a crisis in the supply of aviation gasoline in Korea and in raising the flow of all essential petroleum products in that area to a satisfactory level during the early stages of the conflict..."

On November 21, 1951 Mr. Oscar L. Chapman, (then) Secretary of the Interior, sent to Vice Admiral Biggs, via the Secretary of the Navy, a Letter of Commendation in which he stated he wished to "...acknowledge the very real contribution (Rear Admiral Biggs) made in his cooperation ...in carrying on the work of the Military Petroleum Advisory Board... His knowledge, personal integrity, courage and high sense of duty won (the nation's oil men's) confidence, respect and admiration."

A Testimonial Resolution of the National Petroleum Council, on October 31, 1951 was awarded to Vice Admiral Biggs. It stated in part: "Admiral Biggs has contributed immeasurably to the defense efforts of this Nation...This council expresses its very great appreciation for the able services which Admiral Biggs has rendered during the year of his association with this Council and commends him for the good judgement, statesmanship and wisdom of the many decisions he has been called upon to make or recommend..."

He assumed command of Service Squadron Three, a subordinate command of Commander Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet on February 29, 1952. In that capacity, he directed the logistical support of the Fleet off Korea in the United Nations operations. "For exceptionally meritorious conduct ...as Commander Service Squadron Three and Commander Task Force Ninety-two during operations against aggressor forces in Korea from 29 February to 21 November 1952..." he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Third Legion of Merit with Combat "V." The citation continues in part:

"Charged with the responsibility of providing logistic support to combat units in Korean waters, Rear Admiral Biggs skillfully directed the operations of a large and miscellaneous force of service and auxiliary vessels. A capable and resourceful officer, he pioneered concepts of mobile logistic support and underway replenishment. His continual emphasis on mobility resulted in a logistic force capable of following combatant units wherever needed. Through the development of a technique of underway replenishment, he was instrumental in the SEVENTH Fleet's ability to maintain almost continual pressure on the enemy in Korea, reducing to a minimum the necessity for trips into port for upkeep and replenishment. Under his effective command, service and auxiliary vessels established numerous records in the field of logistics. By his outstanding professional skill, initiative and tireless devotion to the fulfillment of a vital assignment, (he) contributed materially to the success of the Naval campaign in the Korean conflict..."

He served in that command until detached on November 20, 1952, and on November 24, 1952 reported as Commander Service Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet. In that major type command, Admiral Biggs was principal logistics agent for Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, and provided logistics support for shore installations and combatant ships covering over one-third of the Earth's surface. On August 22, 1955 he assumed the position of President, Navy Discharge Review Board, Navy Department, with additional duty as Senior Member, Naval Clemency Board, and President, Naval Retiring Review Board. On May 1, 1957 he was appointed Naval Inspector General and served in that capacity until September 30, 1958.

He was retired on September 30, 1958 at his own request, and was advanced to the rank of Vice Admiral on the Retired List. On August 12, 1959 he was recalled to active duty to serve as Director for Petroleum Logistics Policy, Office of the Secretary of Defense (Installations & Logistics), and from August 11, 1963, until relieved of active duty on January 1, 1964, he served as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Installations and Logistics), Washington, D. C.

In addition to the Legion of Merit with two Gold Stars and Combat "V," and the Navy Commendation Ribbon, Vice Admiral Biggs has the Victory Medal, Fleet Clasp; American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with six engagement stars; World War II Victory Medal; China Service Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal; the National Defense Service Medal; Korean Service Medal; United Nations Service Medal; Korean Presidential Unit Citation; and Military Order of Taeguk from the Korean Government.