

REAR ADMIRAL THOMAS L. WATTLES, U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

Thomas Lippitt Wattles was born in "Elmington," Clarke County, Virginia, on July 15, 1900, son of Charles William and Mary Alexander (Lippitt) Wattles. He attended public schools in Alexandria, Virginia, and Columbian Preparatory School, Washington, D. C., before entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from the Eighth Congressional District of Virginia, in June 1917. While a Midshipman he had World War I service during the summer of 1918 in the USS WISCONSIN, a battleship of the Atlantic Fleet.

He was graduated and commissioned Ensign on June 3, 1920, with the Class of 1921-A, and was subsequently promoted as follows: Lieutenant (jg) June 5, 1923; Lieutenant June 15, 1926; Lieutenant Commander, July 1, 1936; Commander, February 1, 1941; and Captain, to date from June 20, 1942. He was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on July 1, 1949, and advanced to the rank of Rear Admiral on the basis of combat citations.

After graduation from the Naval Academy in June 1920, he was assigned to the USS OKLAHOMA, a battleship of the Atlantic Fleet, and from July to September 1921 remained with the Atlantic Fleet for instruction in the Destroyers Engineering School Afloat in various vessels of the Destroyer Force. On November 6, 1921, he reported for duty in the USS DENVER, operating with the Special Service Squadron in Central and South American waters, and remained on board that cruiser until March 14, 1923. He then assisted in fitting out the USS RICHMOND, light cruiser building at William Cramp and Sons Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and served on board from her commissioning, July 2, 1923, until December 1925.

On January 2, 1926, he reported to the USS CHEWINK at the Submarine Base, New London, Connecticut, and after completing submarine training in July of that year, served for two years with Submarine Division NINE. He was qualified to command in July 1927, during that time. From June 1928 to June 1929 he commanded the USS R-3, operating with Submarine Division 9, Pacific Fleet, and based at Pearl Harbor, T. H., and for two years thereafter he was Detachment Gunnery Officer and Torpedo Overhaul Officer at the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor. He was commended by the Secretary of the Navy for meritorious achievement in torpedoes during the year 1929-1930.

From May 1931 until June 1933 he served as Gunnery Officer of the USS NAUTILUS, a unit of Submarine Division 12, Battle Force, operating in California waters, and during that time was again commended by the Secretary of the Navy, this time for attaining the highest combined merit in gunnery battle practice, Submarine Class, for the year 1932-1933. During his third year in the NAUTILUS, he was serving as Executive Officer and Navigator.

He was a student at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, from June 1934 to May 1935, when he completed the Junior Course and reported for duty as Aide to the Commandant, Ninth Naval District, and Commanding Officer U. S. Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois. He remained there for

seventeen months and in October 1936 returned to sea as Commanding Officer of the USS DAHLGREN, of Destroyer Division 16, Battle Force. During one month before his detachment on July 27, 1937, he served as Acting Commander of that Division. He then served until August 12, 1939, as Navigator of the USS TEXAS, battleship, operating with the Training Detachment, U. S. Fleet.

From August 1939 until March 1942 he was Battalion Officer, in the Executive Department at the Naval Academy, and the last two months of that assignment was Executive Officer of Bancroft Hall. In April 1942 he assumed command of Destroyer Division 20, of the Atlantic Fleet, and remained in that command for eight months, during which period he engaged in various convoy trips in the Atlantic as Escort Commander, and participated in the invasion of Morocco (Operation TORCH). Following this invasion, Rear Admiral E. D. McWhorter, USN, Commander Carriers, Atlantic Fleet, states in an official letter dated 23 December 1942:

"1. The outstanding performance and high efficiency of all destroyers of Destroyer Division Twenty contributed in great measure to the unqualified success of the Air Group in Operation TORCH....

"2. Captain Thomas L. Wattles, U. S. Navy, deserves the highest commendation and appropriate recognition for his unfailing devotion to duty throughout Operation TORCH and for his outstanding conduct during battle."

From December 1942 until October 1943 he served as Commander Destroyer Squadron 16, with additional duty as Commander Destroyer Division 31. As a squadron commander he served as escort commander of various convoys in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Admiral R. E. Ingersoll, USN, Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet, commended him for his performance of duty. He also received a commendatory letter from Vice Admiral H. K. Hewitt, USN, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters, which read in part as follows: "An unofficial report has reached me via Commander in Chief, Mediterranean, concerning your efficient performance of duty as escort commander in the Mediterranean recently. The report expressed admiration of the excellent manner in which you handled the large mixed convoy comprising K.M.S.14 and U.G.S.8."

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct...as Commander Destroyer Squadron SIXTEEN in the attack on the Island of Sicily from July 10 to 12, 1943..." he was awarded the Legion of Merit, with Combat "V," and citation which continues: "Although subjected to persistent, determined air bombardment and constantly menaced by enemy submarines, Captain Wattles directed the hazardous screening operations of his forces with expert tactical skill and sound judgment. His splendid leadership and the courageous devotion to duty of his command under extremely harassing conditions contributed greatly to the protection of the transport area and to the success of the landing attacks effected by our assault troops."

In October 1943 Admiral Wattles reported as Pre-Commissioning Training Officer, on the Staff of Commander Operational Training Command, Atlantic Fleet, and also served as Assistant Chief of Staff and as Acting Chief of Staff before his detachment in December 1944. He was awarded the Bronze

Star Medal with citation to follow: "For meritorious achievement as a Member of the Staff of the Commander Fleet Operational Training Command, United States Atlantic Fleet, from October 1943 to December 1944. Serving as Pre-Commissioning Training Officer during the formative period of the Fleet Operational Command, Captain Wattles rendered valuable service in the planning and development of pre-commissioning training of the crews of all types of vessels and in the perfection of a refresher training program of operating vessels. Subsequently serving as Acting and Assistant Chief of Staff, he effectively administered and coordinated the work of the staff...(and) contributed directly to the success of this important program, thereby reflecting great credit upon himself and the U. S. Naval Service."

During the latter period of the war he commanded the light cruiser TOPEKA, from her commissioning on December 23, 1944. USS TOPEKA served with the Fast Carrier Task Force of the THIRD Fleet which supported the attack on Okinawa and participated in the bombardment of the Japanese mainland, and anchored in Tokyo Bay at the end of hostilities. Admiral Wattles received a Letter of Commendation from the Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, with authorization to wear the Commendation Ribbon, for outstanding services in that command.

When detached from the TOPEKA on November 7, 1945, he was named General Inspector for the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D.C. In May 1947 he became Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Training and Welfare, and was so serving when he suffered a coronary thrombosis which resulted in his retirement on July 1, 1949.

In addition to the Legion of Merit with Combat "V," the Bronze Star Medal and the Commendation Ribbon, Rear Admiral Wattles has the Victory Medal, Atlantic Fleet Clasp; American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with operation stars; the World War II Victory Medal; and the Navy Occupation Service Medal (Asia Clasp).

Directly descended from John Wattles, who came to Massachusetts from Scotland in 1651, Admiral Wattles is the great, great grandson of William Wattles of Norwich, Connecticut, who, during the Revolutionary War commanded the privateers "Nancy," "Young Cromwell," "Phoenix," "Vomot," and "Thetis," in action against the British. He is also a direct descendant in the tenth generation of John Alexander, after whom the city of Alexandria, Virginia, was named.

He is a member of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia; the U. S. Naval Academy Alumni Association; Retired Officers Association; Naval Historical Foundation; U. S. Naval Institute; Civil War Round Table of Washington, D. C.; Sons of Confederate Veterans; Sons of the Revolution; the U. S. Naval Academy Alumni Foundation; and the Society of the Cincinnati, State of Maryland.

Since retirement, Rear Admiral Wattles spent two years in assisting Theodore Roscoe in the writing of "United States Destroyer Operations in World War II," published by the U. S. Naval Institute. He is currently employed as a research associate on the Ordnance Research Staff of the University of Pittsburgh in Washington, D. C.