

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

VICE ADMIRAL WALTER H. BAUMBERGER, UNITED STATES NAVY, RETIRED

Walter Harlen Baumberger was born in McMechen, West Virginia, on January 27, 1912, son of Wesley R. and Virginia Elizabeth (Chaddock) Baumberger. He attended Parkersburg (West Virginia) High School prior to entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, on appointment from his native state in 1930. As a Midshipman he played football and was a member of the N-Club. Graduated and commissioned Ensign on May 31, 1934, he subsequently advanced in rank, attaining that of Vice Admiral, to date from March 17, 1967.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1934, he joined the USS PENNSYLVANIA, and while attached to that battleship coached the ship's football team, which won the Fleet Championship in 1937. Transferred to the USS HOVEY in May 1938, he remained on board that destroyer until July 1939, after which he served for several months as Assistant Football Coach at the Naval Academy. In December 1939 he reported as Assistant Gunnery Officer on board the USS NEW YORK, was attached to that battleship when the United States entered World War II, December 8, 1941, and subsequently participated in the Algeria Morocco landings.

Returning to the Naval Academy in June 1943, he served as an instructor in Ordnance and Gunnery and also was Officer Representative for Football in 1944. In April 1945 he assumed command of the USS ENGLISH. Under his command, that destroyer rescued personnel, including Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, USN, and his Staff from the burning carrier USS BUNKER HILL, which had been attacked by Japanese suicide planes off Okinawa on May 11, 1945. For outstanding services while in command of the ENGLISH he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, with Combat "V," and the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. The citations follow, in part:

Bronze Star Medal: "For meritorious service as Commanding Officer of the USS ENGLISH in operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific Area from April 30 to September 2, 1945... Displaying outstanding skill in evading and driving off numerous enemy air attacks and successfully carrying out those hazardous assignments without damage to his ship, he materially contributed to many successful bombardment missions and the possible sinking of an enemy submarine..."

Navy and Marine Corps Medal: "For heroic conduct...during a major air battle against enemy Japanese forces in the waters off Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, May 11, 1945. When one of our fast carriers was attacked by Japanese suicide planes and badly damaged, Commander Baumberger unhesitatingly brought his ship alongside the stricken vessel and, working tirelessly to control the raging fires, was instrumental in saving many trapped and wounded personnel..."

Detached from command of the ENGLISH in May 1946, he briefly commanded the USS GAINARD and in September of that year joined the USS MISSOURI to serve as First Lieutenant, Navigator and Operations Officer. Between September 1948 and June 1951 he was again an instructor in Ordnance and Gunnery at the Naval Academy, with additional duty as Officer Representative for Track, Secretary to the Board of Visitors and a member of the Executive Committee of the Naval Academy Athletic Association.

After two years' duty on the Staff of the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet, he reported in August 1953 as Commander Destroyer Division TWO HUNDRED EIGHTY-TWO. He next attended the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, August 1954 - June 1955, and in July was assigned to the Politico-Military Policy Division (Pacific-Far East), Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. In July 1957 he assumed command of the USS TRUCKEE, and in August 1958 was detached from that oiler for duty as Assistant Director (for Captain Detail), Officer Distribution Division, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department.

He was Commanding Officer of the USS CANBERRA from January to November 1960, after which he served as Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific. In February 1962 he became Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Flotilla THREE, and served as such until May 1963, when he reported as Director of the Ships Material Readiness Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department. "For exceptionally meritorious service from May 1963 to May 1965..." in the latter assignment, he was awarded the Legion of Merit. The citation continues in part:

"During this period, (he) has been responsible for and has directly supervised the development and implementation of the Standard Navy Maintenance and Material Management (3M) System which involves the maintenance and material functions that are performed on and in ships and aircraft of the Operating Forces by operating force personnel, and includes the maintenance and material functions performed in depots..."

On May 28, 1965 he reported as Commander Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet and for "exceptionally meritorious service from May 1965 to March 1967..." in that capacity, he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Second Legion of Merit. The citation further states in part: "Responsible for maintaining the Cruiser-Destroyer Force at a high level of readiness while the number of ships deployed to the waters of Southeast Asia was increased, Rear Admiral Baumberger immediately and effectively met the challenge, skillfully utilizing his knowledge and understanding of cruiser-destroyer operations, his background in maintenance and material management, and his dynamic leadership..."

In March 1967 he became Deputy Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet and Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander in Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and cited in part as follows: "...Through his diligent application of sound principles of executive management, and by his close and energetic

monitorship of the myriad problems and actions which confront the Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet, Vice Admiral Baumberger assured that administration, training, readiness and operations of the U. S. Pacific Fleet were skillfully carried out and that policies and directives were executed promptly and efficiently, thereby contributing vitally to the successful daily pursuit of Pacific Fleet tasks..."

In September 1970 he reported as Commander of the United States Taiwan Defense Command and served as such until September 1972. He was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of the Third Legion of Merit and cited in part as follows: "...Through his vast professional knowledge and capabilities, along with his perceptive judgment, keen foresight and fine sense of diplomacy, (he) has contributed essentially to the continuation of the historically warm and cooperative relationships existing between the Governments of the Republic of China and the United States..."

Ordered to Headquarters, Eleventh Naval District, San Diego, California, he remained there until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement, effective January 1, 1973.

In addition to the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit with two Gold Stars, the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," Vice Admiral Baumberger has the American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one operation star; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two operation stars; World War II Victory Medal; the National Defense Service Medal, with star; and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon.