

Commander Juan del Castillo: Officer, Humanitarian and Self-Made Scientist

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The Coast Guard is a sea service with a variety of unique missions that attracts personnel with unique interests and experiences. A few examples of these individuals include Alex Haley, a journalist in the service whom later became a famous writer after leaving the service; and Dr. Olivia Hooker, the first African American women admitted to the service as a SPAR in 1945, who went on to have a distinguished career as a psychology professor at Fordham University.

Juan del Castillo is ranked among the many Coast Guard personnel who distinguished themselves within the service and then on into civilian life. Born in New York in 1921, he attended La Salle Military Academy in Oakdale, New York, and graduated from Manhattan College in 1942. In June 1942, he began what became a forty-year career with the Coast Guard Reserve. After first enlisting in the service, he quickly earned an appointment to Reserve Officer Training at the Coast Guard Academy. He completed Reserve Officer Training in December 1942 becoming the first Coast Guardsmen of Hispanic heritage to receive a commission.



LTJG Juan del Castillo during World War II. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Joan del Castillo)



Coast Guard manned USS Albuquerque (PF-7)

It was in the Coast Guard that del Castillo honed his leadership ability. During World War II, he served on PC-469, a heavily armed patrol craft responsible for escorting convoys in the Caribbean at a time when u-boat attacks there were a common occurrence. He was also selected for Naval Communications School at Harvard University and served the latter part of World War II in the treacherous North Pacific on board the Coast Guard-manned patrol frigate, USS Albuquerque.

After the war, del Castillo left active duty, but continued to serve as a reservist, and took a job with the family import business, Rafael del Castillo & Company. During this period in his career, he became interested in famine relief in the developing world. Armed with his bachelor's degree in political science and his Coast Guard training, del Castillo

became a self-taught authority on food science, famine relief and large-scale food aid distribution.



Officers of the patrol frigate [USS Albuquerque \(PF-7\)](#). LT Juan del Castillo stands second from the left (photo courtesy of [David Hendrickson](#))

Over the following years, while serving in his role as a Coast Guard Reserve officer, del Castillo worked in executive positions with the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). During this time, he invented the formula for Corn Soy Milk, considered one of the most important high protein foods ever developed. Next, he invented a rice substitute out of sorghum for international food programs. Unlike large commercial food producers, del Castillo developed these highly nutritional food substitutes without a staff or a laboratory. Over four million men, women and children worldwide consume these food products and avoid malnutrition or starvation daily.

As if his important advances in food science were not enough, del Castillo also held positions at USDA responsible for the distribution of foods for the national school lunch program, elderly and family feeding programs and supplying food to Indian reservations. He also served as first director of the food stamp and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program. After his retirement from the Coast Guard Reserves in 1981, del Castillo continued his work on nutritious food for feeding the needy and starving and he took a leading role in the cause of improved survivor annuities for military widows.

Juan del Castillo, the Coast Guard Officer, war hero, self-taught scientist and humanitarian passed away in 2009. Before he passed, del Castillo was recognized for his important contributions to humanitarian food aid programs with the USAID Lifetime Achievement Award. Commander del Castillo left behind a wife of fifty-seven years, six children and nineteen grandchildren.

Carrying on the family tradition, one of his grandchildren began training as a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy in August 2010, nearly seventy years after del Castillo did as a Reserve Officer Trainee. del Castillo serves as yet another example of the talented individuals who have served in the Coast Guard and embody the service's core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty.