

Public Information Division  
U. S. Coast Guard Headquarters  
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Biographical Sketch

COMMODORE JOHN S. BAYLIS,  
U. S. COAST GUARD  
(RETIRED--DECEASED)

Commodore John Stansbury Baylis was born on September 24, 1884, at Jamaica, N. Y., the son of Mr. and Mrs. John E. Baylis. He received his early education in New York public schools, and in October 1903 was graduated from the New York Nautical Schoolship ST. MARY'S, now known as the New York State Merchant Marine Academy. During his nautical training he made several cruises to Europe, and was appointed Master-at-Arms which put him in charge of cadets day and night. Upon his graduation he made a 16-months' trip around the world on the square rigged four-masted British barque ARROW.

COMO Baylis entered the U. S. Coast Guard, then known as the U. S. Revenue Cutter Service, on October 7, 1907, as a cadet in the School of Instruction (early Coast Guard Academy) on board the Cutter ITASCA. He was graduated on May 28, 1910, with a commission of Third Lieutenant (or Ensign) from the Academy at its new location that year at Fort Trumbull, Conn.

He served his first tour of duty on board the famous Cutter BEAR in the Bering Sea and the Arctic. He was awarded a Marksman's Medal in 1911 and on July 6 of that year was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant (Lieutenant (jg)). In April 1913, he was transferred to the Cutter TUSCARORA in the Great Lakes until ice conditions closed the navigation season and he was reassigned to the Cutter ACUSHNET at New Bedford, Mass. He returned to the TUSCARORA the following spring. In 1915, after serving a temporary stint on board the Cutter MOHAWK, he was assigned at the Port of New York to neutrality law enforcement duties in view of World War I developments in Europe. After another brief assignment in the TUSCARORA, he next reported for duty on board the Cutter SENECA in January 1916, to serve on patrol off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland to warn ships of icebergs after the TITANIC disaster.

Throughout his service career COMO Baylis received frequent commendations for his services beyond the call of duty. While with the SENECA he received a Coast Guard Letter of Commendation from Commodore-Commandant Ellsworth P. Bertholf for his "dauntless devotion to duty" on Dec. 18, 1916, when, with a surfboat crew from the cutter, he made a trip through a freezing gale to assist the Army transport SUMNER which ran aground off the coast of New Jersey.

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After his transfer to the Cutter MANHATTAN in March 1917, COMO Baylis eventually advanced to rank of Lieutenant on July 1, 1918. Appointed Lieut. Commander (T) on September 21, 1918, he was assigned as Routing Officer of the Third Naval District. Josephus Daniels, then Secretary of the Navy, commended him for meritorious service on this job during World War I. From January to September 1919, he was assigned to Naval Overseas Transportation Service in Washington, D. C.

At the end of 1919, COMO Baylis was appointed Superintendent of the New York State Nautical School and Commanding Officer of the Schoolship NEWPORT to train merchant marine officers. In June 1921, Rear Admiral H. P. Huse, U. S. Navy, commended him "for the assistance rendered by the officers and crew of the Schoolship NEWPORT on the occasion of the burning of the GRANITE STATE, both in fighting the fire and in getting vessels away from the dock and out of danger."

In October 1922, COMO Baylis was commended by Portuguese officials for assisting the Portuguese Schooner LUIZA which had drifted out of Funchal Harbor during a gale and was in grave danger from a bad leak. Appointed to the permanent rank of Lieut. Commander on January 12, 1923, he was detached from the Nautical School in May of that year and assigned to command the Cutter MASCOUTIN at Norfolk, Va.

In July 1924, COMO Baylis assumed command of the Destroyer PAULDING (one of the old Destroyer Force operated by the Coast Guard in an all-out war against smugglers, 1924-1934), which seized many rum runners during prohibition days. He was commended by Rear Admiral Frederick C. Billard, then Coast Guard Commandant, for attempting to rescue the crew of the CG-236 during a severe gale which broke nearly all the PAULDING's rails and fittings, smashed her boats and smoke stack, and filled her compartments with water. Despite this battering, COMO Baylis kept the PAULDING at sea until there was no longer any hope of being assistance to the lost ship or her crew.

While commanding the PAULDING, he also was called upon to command the Destroyer WAINWRIGHT and then the Destroyer BEALE for their first patrol cruises. The engineering trophy for creditable achievement in 1928 went to the PAULDING. Admiral Billard later commended COMO Baylis for the "initiative, zeal and efficiency" he displayed when advising the work of raising the U. S. Army sub-mine planter SHUMM.

Appointed Registrar of the Coast Guard Institute, established at the Coast Guard Academy, New London, Conn., April 1929, he was also put in command of the Cutter ALEXANDER HAMILTON, based at New London. He advanced to rank of Commander July 1, 1929. At times he served as Acting Superintendent of the Academy and as Aide to former Secretary of the Treasury Andrew W. Mellon. He also supervised arrangements of such affairs as the International Yacht Races and the President's Cup Football Game.

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In January 1932, COMO Baylis assumed command of the Cutter ITASCA which carried with it the role of United States Commissioner on the cutter's patrols in the Pacific, visiting islands under the territorial jurisdiction of the U. S. Government. During that tour of duty the cutter twice made the highest score of any cutter in short-range battle practice and won the gunnery trophy for cutters. (The ITASCA later became renowned for her part in the search for Amelia Earhart who was lost off Howland Island in 1937, for Captain Elm and other lost fliers.)

Between March 1935 and early summer of 1942, COMO Baylis was stationed in New York in various capacities including Chief of Staff of the New York Division, as a Member of the Marine Casualty Investigation Board, Aide to the Captain of the Port, Assistant Commander of the New York District, and as Captain of the Port. Sandwiched among these duties was his command of the Cutter CAMPBELL on her shakedown cruise beginning in Sept. 1936.

The varied duties of COMO Baylis' service career brought him commendations from J. Edgar Hoover for assisting with men and boats in kidnapping cases; from Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Russell R. Waesche for "untiring devotion to duty" and "hearty cooperation" during a special mission from September 26 to October 1 of 1933; from the President of Pan American Airways System for being "unsparing in his efforts" during the disaster to the Bermuda-bound plane CAVALIER on January 21, 1939. In May 1939, while he was Assistant Commander of the New York District and Asst. Captain of the Port of New York, he was commended by the Secretaries of State and Treasury, and thanked by the Soviet Embassy in Washington for assistance rendered in connection with the flight of Brigadier General Vladimir Kokkinaki and Major Mikhail Gordianko from Moscow to North America.

During World War II, COMO Baylis' knowledge of New York Harbor that he acquired during the first World War proved invaluable to planning boards and joint Army, Navy, FBI and Coast Guard intelligence committees. As Captain of the Port of New York from February 1941 to June 1942, he enforced neutrality among Italian, Danish, French and other foreign ships docked in the harbors. He also secured the fullest cooperation with other Federal agencies and with commercial maritime interests in putting into effect security measures that proved successful in the war effort.

He was promoted to Captain as of May 25, 1941. In June 1942, he began his next tour of duty as District Coast Guard Officer at San Juan, Puerto Rico, commanding Coast Guard activities in the Caribbean area for two and half years of the war. From March 1945 through the remainder of that year, he commanded the Coast Guard Training Station at Manhattan Beach, New York.

After his promotion to Commodore in January 1946, he was designated Coordinator of the Port Security Unit in New York, his last tour of duty until his retirement on October 1, 1946, with more than 36 years of service, having reached the statutory age of 62.

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Commodore Baylis held unlimited licenses for both sail and steam vessels. He held memberships in the Sons of the American Revolution, Explorers Club, Propeller Club, New York Athletic Club, and the Whitehall Club.

His awards included the Silver Star, Victory Button, Victory Medal for World War I; the Gold Lifesaving Medal awarded him in July 1924; for World War II service the Navy Commendation Ribbon for outstanding service as District Coast Guard Officer of the Tenth Naval District, San Juan, P. R.

Following is a resume of his appointments in rank: Ensign, May 28, 1910; Lieutenant (jg), July 6, 1911; Lieutenant, July 1, 1918; Lieut. Commander (T), September 21, 1918; Lieut. Commander (Perm.), January 12, 1923; Commander, July 1, 1929; Captain, May 25, 1941; Commodore, January 1, 1946. Retired October 1, 1946.

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Commodore Baylis died at the age of 87, of a ruptured abdominal aneurysm at the U. S. Public Health Service Hospital on Staten Island, N. Y., Wednesday, November 24, 1971. He was buried with full military honors and graveside services at Arlington National Cemetery on Monday, November 29, 1971. Commodore Baylis was one of the very few officers remaining from the old Revenue Cutter Service. There were only a total of seven cadets in his class when he entered the Academy, and a grand total of 41 in the three classes at that time.

Commodore Baylis is survived by his widow, Mrs. Baylis, the former Marie Kleber, living at 416 Highland Avenue, Clifton, N. J. He also leaves one son, John S. Baylis Jr. who is a retired Navy officer.

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