



# RICHARD E. BENNIS

REAR ADMIRAL, U.S. COAST GUARD (RET)

Rear Admiral Richard E. Bennis was born in Syracuse, New York. He graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1972 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Natural Resource Development. Rear Admiral Bennis attended Harvard University where he received his Masters Degree in 1983 in Energy and Environmental Policy.

Rear Admiral Bennis received his commission from Coast Guard Officer Candidate School in June, 1972. His tours of duty include: Port Operations at Marine Safety Office Jacksonville; Assistant Chief of Military Personnel First Coast Guard District; Department Head at Marine Inspection Office Houston; Chief, Program Development Branch Office of Port Safety, Security and Environmental Protection Coast Guard Headquarters; Marine Safety Assignment Officer, Office of Personnel Coast Guard Headquarters; Executive Officer, Marine Safety Office Tampa; and Commanding Officer Marine Safety Office Charleston. He served as the Chief of the Office of Response, Coast Guard Headquarters where he served as Captain of the Port of Hampton Roads and Commanding Officer of Marine Safety Office Hampton Roads.



Rear Admiral Bennis' final assignment was Captain of the Port and Commander Activities New York, the largest operational field command in the Coast Guard. In that capacity he led the maritime operations during OPSAIL 2000 and the Coast Guard response to the attack on the World Trade Center.

His decorations include four Coast Guard Meritorious Service Medals, three Coast Guard Commendation Medals, the Coast Guard Achievement Medal and numerous unit and service awards.

Rear Admiral Bennis was married to the former Gloria Smith of Rhode Island.

Rear Admiral Bennis retired from the Coast Guard in March, 2002. He crossed the bar on 3 August 2003. He was survived by his wife, three grown children and one grandchild.

For then-CAPT Bennis' actions in helping avert what could have been a disaster in the Port of Charleston South Carolina in 1992, he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. RADM Bennis was later honored in October 2008 when a section of Charleston harbor was re-named "Bennis Reach." He has the distinction of being the only person in the United States that has a reach named for them.

RADM Bennis was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.



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Richard Bennis, Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard (retired), Captain Of The Port Of New York And New Jersey during the evacuation of Lower Manhattan after the attack on the World Trade Center and first head of the Office of Maritime and Land Security of the Transportation Security Administration, died Sunday at Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg, VA, after a four year battle with melanoma. He was 53.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the day after having the staples removed from his head following brain surgery, then Captain Bennis was headed to Florida to look for a retirement residence when he turned back because of the attack on New York City. Since the bridges into the city were blocked, he returned via boat from Sandy Hook, New Jersey, in time to organize the more than 100 boats of all descriptions that voluntarily formed to evacuate nearly 500,000 people from Lower Manhattan.

For the next six weeks, Bennis led a round-the-clock effort that increased the Coast Guard presence in New York Harbor by 500 percent, changing their primary mission from one of response to one of active prevention and enforcement security patrols; the first such activity since World War II. The strategy and effectiveness of this effort set the precedent that charted a new direction for the entire Coast Guard as it entered a new phase of its history.

Rear Admiral Bennis was equally renowned throughout the east coast seaports because of his widely acclaimed expertise in handling spills of oil and other hazardous materials. After receiving his commission as an Ensign from the Coast Guard Officer Candidate School in Yorktown, Virginia in June 1972, he served in various leadership positions in the Coast Guard's marine safety and environmental protection programs, including Captain of the Port in Charleston, South Carolina and Hampton Roads, Virginia.

In 1992, Bennis heroically averted a catastrophic ship explosion in the Port of Charleston, South Carolina. The Santa Clara I had spilled some of its containerized cargo on deck during a storm. The arsenic trioxide and magnesium phosphide, both highly unstable materials, could easily explode if exposed to water. Bennis devised a method of controlled destruction that eliminated the threat, one tablespoon at a time. Bennis' actions saved the ship, protected the crew and surrounding port community, and led to national improvements in shipping container safety and inspection.

Between 1995 and 1997, Bennis led the Coast Guard's Office of Response. He changed the way the Coast Guard responded to all emergencies, from search and rescue to oil spills, setting the stage for the U.S. government to adopt the national incident management system currently under development by the Department of Homeland Security.

As Captain of the Port and Commander of Coast Guard Activities New York, Bennis led the largest operational field command in the Coast Guard. He was responsible for all Coast Guard missions in the Metropolitan New York/New Jersey area and the Hudson River from Sandy Hook, New Jersey to the Canadian border. In that capacity he led the maritime operations during OPSAIL 2000 and responded to many maritime and environmental emergencies before being called upon to assist the city in its time of greatest need.

Admiral Bennis retired from the Coast Guard in March 2002.

Immediately after leaving the New York area, Bennis was asked by Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta to become the Associate Undersecretary for Maritime and Land Security for the new Transportation Security Administration. His challenge was to secure the maritime, rail, highway, mass transit and pipeline modes of the National Transportation System at a cost the industry and the traveling public could afford.

Richard Bennis was born in Syracuse, New York, on December 21, 1949, but grew up in Wyoming, Rhode Island. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resource Development from the University of Rhode Island in 1972, then immediately joined the Coast Guard. He returned to his studies in 1983 and earned his Masters Degree in Energy and Environmental from Harvard University.

His decorations include the Transportation Distinguished Service Medal, three Secretary of Transportation Gold Medal Awards, four Coast Guard Meritorious Service Medals with the Operational distinguishing device, three Coast Guard Commendation Medals, the Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medal, the Coast Guard Achievement Medal, four Meritorious Team Awards and three Coast Guard Special Operations Service ribbons.

Besides his wife, Gloria, his high school sweetheart whom he married in 1968 he was survived by his mother, Winifred and sister, Joyce of Wyoming, Rhode Island, his three grown children, Keith of Mount Pleasant South Carolina, Timothy, of Staten Island, and Wendy Westberry of Columbia South Carolina, and his grandson Nicholas of Staten Island.