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RETIRED COAST GUARD COMO. E. M. WEBSTER,
COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT, DIES

Retired Coast Guard Commodore Edward Mount Webster, 87, who successfully combined military and civilian careers as an expert in communications, died Tuesday morning (July 27) at The Westwood Retirement Home at Bethesda, Md.

COMO Webster established the Coast Guard's famed ship-to-shore radio-telephone communications system during the Prohibition Era in the 1920s, and won the Legion of Merit as Chief Communications Officer during World War II. He served as a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission from 1947 to 1956.

A native of Washington, D. C., COMO Webster graduated from McKinley Manual Training High School in 1908, and was graduated from the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction (forerunner of the present Coast Guard Academy) in 1912. He served at sea throughout World War I.

Though retired for physical disability in 1923, he was immediately recalled to active duty as Chief Communications Officer at Headquarters in Washington, D. C., until 1934. On being relieved from active duty, he joined the Federal Communications Commission as Assist. Chief Engineer.

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In 1942, during World War II, he was recalled to active duty at Headquarters and resumed his former assignment as Chief Communications Officer. After retiring again in 1946, he served as Telecommunications Director of the National Federation of American Shipping until April 1947. At that time President Truman appointed him as a Commissioner on the Federal Communications Commission. After nine and a half years in that post, he retired to become a telecommunications consultant for Western Union Telegraph Co. and later for Western Union International Inc.

For more than 40 years COMO Webster figured prominently in activities involving safety of life at sea. Beginning in 1925 he attended 27 International Conferences involving the application of radio to safety, including those under the auspices of the International Telecommunications Union, and the 1929, 1948, and 1960 International Safety of Life at Sea Conferences.

He assisted the Senate Commerce Committee in investigating the MORRO CASTLE disaster which occurred Sept. 8, 1934, resulting in far reaching safety legislation and was the principal architect for the Committee of the provisions which modernized the law promoting safety through the use of radio by shipping. In 1952, he was instrumental in negotiating the U. S.--Canadian "Great Lakes Agreement" for the promotion of safety on the Lakes by means of radio.

A few years later he served as a member of the four-man task group assisting the House of Representatives Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee to investigate matters involving safety at sea as a consequence of the ANDREA DORIA--STOCKHOLM collision disaster, July 25, 1956. Later, he performed the same service in connection with the YARMOUTH CASTLE disaster in Nov. 1965.

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During his first tour of duty as Chief Communications Officer he established the Coast Guard's communication service system during the drive against the rum runners in the late 1920s, locating strategically placed shore radio stations, developing radio apparatus appropriate to the Service operations, extending its coastal land telephone and telegraph lines, and training communication personnel. He greatly expanded the communication activities and inaugurated a modernization system program so that by the time he ended his tour of duty the groundwork had been laid for the present extensive Coast Guard Communication System.

His second tour of duty during World War II, during which time the Coast Guard operated as part of the Navy, included the organization and expansion of the marine safety and distress communication networks around the coastline of the U. S., and control and supervision of the operations of all commercial shore radio stations in the U. S. which engaged in communication with ships at sea.

Following World War II, he was instrumental in forming the organization, Radio Technical Commission for Marine Services (RTCM), with the object of bringing together the many U. S. elements of Government and industry interested in the application of electronics to maritime communications, to coordinate those interests, and make suitable recommendations for improvement.

In 1933 he was a member of an interdepartmental committee to make a study of the regulatory problems of the non-government communication industry of the U. S. The report of that committee became the basis for the legislation which created the Federal Communications Commission.

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COMO Webster leaves one son, retired Coast Guard Reserve Captain Edward Webster of 2601 N. Fields Rd., Charlottesville, Va., and one daughter, Mrs. Dorothy F. Ansoff, and five grandchildren. (COMO Webster's wife, the former Dorothy Richardson of Baltimore, died in 1973.)

Burial with simple honors will be held from Fort Myer Chapel at Arlington National Cemetery at 2:00 P.M., Friday, July 30th.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Association.

(Funeral arrangements are being handled by Joseph Gawler-Sons, Wisconsin Ave., NW, Washington, D. C.)

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