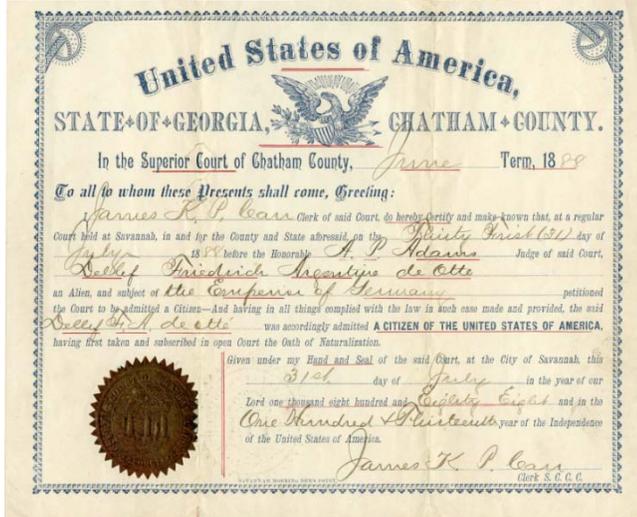


## Rear Admiral Detlef Frederick Argentine de Otte, USRCS & USCG

Recently, the Historian's Office received a donation of family photographs, many dating back to the 1860s-1870s, of the family of Rear Admiral Detlef F.A. de Otte, who served forty-four years in the Coast Guard. He is incorrectly listed in some websites as being the first Hispanic to graduate from the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction and subsequently the first Hispanic to achieve the rank of Commodore at retirement. De Otte was actually of Danish and German descent, and the first foreign-born Commodore in the Coast Guard. The Historian's Office also has some personal papers and photographs of de Otte's career.



Detlef Frederick Argentine de Otte was born on 4 February 1867, on a ship that his father captained, while it was docked in Buenos Aires, Argentina. De Otte's father, Paul, was a sea captain who added the "de" to the Otte name after leaving Denmark. His mother, Metta Danim, was German. The Otte family were Danish ship owners since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it was no surprise that young Detlef aspired to follow in the family tradition. His very first voyage was as a ship's boy on the German vessel CONCORDIA in June 1883 at the age of sixteen.



*Clockwise from top left: Detlef's father, Paul W. Otte—note the Waterloo Ribbon; Metta Danim Otte with six-year-old Detlef and his sister Paula, c. 1873; and his 1888 American citizenship certificate.*

Eighteen-year-old de Otte enlisted in the Revenue Cutter Service on 17 August 1886. He served on the BOUTWELL as an ordinary seaman and was honorably discharged at his own request on 21 December 1888 due to illness. He became an American citizen in July 1888, and then reentered the service through the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1889.



*A portrait of Detleff F.A. de Otte at the time of his entrance to the Revenue Cutter Service School of Instruction in 1889. He was twenty-two years old.*

Commissioned an ensign upon graduation in 1891, he returned to the BOUTWELL and stayed on board until 1895. He then transferred to the CORWIN until 1897, going on five Alaskan cruises. Serving on the DEXTER for a few months, de Otte then went to the LEVI M. WOODBURY in 1898. The Spanish-American War was in full swing by then, and de Otte was on blockade duty in Cuban waters. He found himself back on the BOUTWELL from 1898 until 1900. The DEXTER called him back for the next two years, and then he served in the Life-Saving Service in New York and Rhode Island until 1905.

Returning to sea, he was on board the GRESHAM until the following year. From 1906 until 1908, he served aboard the MANHATTAN, including a brief stint on the RUSH in 1908, going on three more Alaskan cruises. He was on the WINDOM from 1908 until 1909, and back on the RUSH from 1909 until 1911. In 1910, he took the first floating federal court through the Aleutian Islands in Alaska.



*CAPT de Otte in 1902.*



*The crew of the RUSH, 25 October 1910, Juneau, Alaska. CAPT de Otte is seated second from left.*

De Otte was the commanding officer of the ONONDAGA when it rendered assistance to the USS WARRINGTON, a U.S. torpedo boat destroyer, on 28 December 1911 after a collision with an unknown ship. That winter, under his command, the ONONDAGA answered forty-one of forty-two assistance calls, the most of any cutter in one season.



De Otte served as an inspector to the Life-Saving Service in 1913, serving in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia until 1915. The Revenue Cutter Service merged with the United States Lifesaving Service that year to form the United States Coast Guard, and he was called to Headquarters in September of that year.

*de Otte as Captain of the Port of Hampton Roads and the Harbors of Norfolk and Newport News, Va. , c. 1920-1924*

In March 1917, he returned to sea aboard the LOT M. MORRILL for four months. He became the Section Patrol Commander for Detroit in July 1917, a position he served in until he was called to Brest, France in October 1918 as Supervisor of Harbor and a member of the Council of Fire that governed Brest. He received the Victory Medal with the Overseas clasp for that service. De Otte stayed there until

March 1919, and returned to sea duty aboard the SENECA until September 1920. He then became the Captain of the Port of Hampton Roads and the Harbors of Norfolk and Newport News, Virginia until 1924.

During this time, he created and became the commander for the Norfolk District, which is known today as the Fifth District. In 1927, de Otte became the Captain of the Port of San Francisco, as well as the Commander of the California District. He was instrumental in the expansion of the Coast Guard on the West coast, adding more vessels and stations, including the expansion of Government Island. He also played a role in the curtailing of rumrunners in Pacific waters.

De Otte transferred to Headquarters in May 1930 and retired on 1 March 1931 at the rank of Commodore. He is the first foreign-born Coast Guard flag officer to reach that rank, and is one of only sixteen Commodores in the history of the Coast Guard. He became a Rear Admiral in 1937, and passed away in New York City on 28 December 1939 at the age of seventy-two.

De Otte was married to the former Lela Tucker of Maryland. They had four children, Lela, Donald, Ruth, and Marie. Donald followed in his father's footsteps and also had a distinguished Coast Guard career. De Otte is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Written by Ms. Nora Chidlow, Coast Guard Archivist

