Monday Maritime Matters

Description

VADM Aaron Merrill, USN, was another hero of the Pacific Campaign in WWII, like ADM Conolly I documented last Monday. Born March 20th, 1890 in Plantation Stanton, Mississippi, the grandson of a Civil War veteran, and was given the same nickname as his Grandfather: â€œTip,â€• derived from service at the Battle of Tippecanoe.



Graduating from the US Naval Academy in 1912, Aaron Merrill was assigned to the USS LOUISIANA and then USS TENNESSEE, and was deployed to the Mediterranean to protect US interests in the area during the Crimean War.

He sounds like a sailorâ€™s sailor. From a page at Geocities, a long and impressive list of sea and shore tours is seen:

> Jan 1913-July 1914 He volunteered for duty in the gunboat USS Scorpion and served in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean with Constantinople, Turkey as home port. He was engineering officer.
>
> 13 Oct 1914 to 18 June 1916 Following brief duty with the Practice Squadron at the Naval Academy, he served duty on the destroyer USS Roe and then duty on the USS Conyngham. The Conyngham was a ship of the â€œMayflower Divisionâ€• which was the first United States Unit to participate in World War I.

He trained officers and personnel for new Destroyers at San Francisco, CA; he was Executive Officer at Naval Training Camp, Detroit, MI. The last months of World War I he was aboard the USS Aylwin (DD-47), a unit of the Destroyer Force based in Plymouth, England.

March 1919 He went to Harwich, England where he assumed command of the USS Harvard. Under his command it sailed the English Channel, Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland.

June to Nov 1919 He was executive Officer of the Lafayette Radio Station being built in Crois dâ€™Hins, France.

Nov 1919-Aug 1923 Merrill, who had been promoted to the temporary rank of Lieutenant commander, reported for duty as Flag Lieutenant, and later as Intelligence Officer, on the staff of Rear Admiral Mark L. Bristol, United States High Commissioner to Turkey and Commander of United States Naval Forces in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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It was in Constantinople, Turkey he met Louise Witherbee, whom he married in New York in January 1922, returning to Constantinople after a brief honeymoon in the States.

Aug 1923 He had several monthsâ€™ duty in the Receiving Ship, New York, NY.

Mar 1924-July 1925 Consecutive service as Communications Officer of the USS Nevada and Commander of the USS McCormick bound for China.

July 1925 Commander of the gunboat USS Elcano, operating with the Asiatic Fleet in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River.

7 Aug 1926 He reported for duty as Squadron Engineer of Destroyer Squadron, Asiatic Fleet.

Summer 1927 Duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, DC.

June 1929 Commander of the USS Williamson a unit of the Scouting Fleet.

June 1932 After three years at sea he was promoted to the rank of Commander and again assigned for a year to the Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington, DC.

June 1933 to 01 May 1934 Aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Henry Latrobe Roosevelt.

1 June 1935 Commander Merrill was assigned to the 8â€³gun cruiser USS Pensacola. He was aboard when she conveyed the remains of the Ambassador to the United States, Paul May, to his home in Antwerp, Belgium. Merrill was honored as an Officer of the Order of the Crown by the Belgium Government for his service.

8 June 1936 He was ordered to command Destroyer Division Eight, flying his pennant on the USS Barry (DD-248).

May 1937-38 Assigned as Naval AttachÃƒÂ© for Air at the American Embassy, Santiago, Chile. During his period he cruised extensively with the Chilean Fleet. He was the first foreigner to round the Horn in a Chilean Man-of-war. For his service to Chile, he was awarded the Order al Merito Grade de Comendador by the Government of Chile.

1938-1939 Merrill completed the senior course at the Naval War College, Newport, RI which was climaxed by his promotion to Captain.

1939-1940 He commanded Destroyer Division of Leaders in the Pacific with the USS Sommers as his Flagship.

Early 1941 He requested duty as Professor Naval Science and Tactics, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. He was serving there with the Naval Reserve Officersâ€™ Training Corps Unit when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

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April 1942 Relieved of duty at Tulane University, Aaron Stanton Merrill became the first commanding officer of the new Battleship USS Indiana, BB-58. He assumed command upon her commissioning, 30 April 1942

23 Jan 1943 Relieved as Captain of the USS Indiana by Captain Thomas Green Peyton

11 Feb 1943 His nomination as Rear Admiral was confirmed by the Senate, and he assumed command of the 12th Light Cruiser Division. This Division comprised the new cruisers USS Montpelier, USS Columbia, USS Cleveland and USS Denver. After a brief period of training, Cruiser Division 12 was assigned to Task Force 38 under the command of Rear Admiral Giffin, and based at Havana Harbor in the New Hebrides Islands. USS Montpelier was his Flagship.

Cruiser Division 12 got its first bloody nose the night of 30 January 1943 in the night battle of Rennell Island. The heavy cruiser USS CHICAGO was torpedoed in this action by Jap planes and sunk by torpedo planes the following day while under tow.

Shortly after the Rennell Island action, Admiral Giffinâ€™s Division of Heavy Cruisers were ordered to Alaskan waters, and Admiral Merrill fell heir to The Task Force which â€œwon its spursâ€• as Task Force 36.2

Mar 1943 to Mar 1944 Under his command Task Force 36.2 operated as a unit of the Third Fleet in the Solomon Islands Areas.

15 June 1944-23 April 1945 Director of Office of Public Relations, Navy Department. Shortly after he reported for duty in Washington, Merrill was appointed Navy member of a mission to hold hemispherical defense conversations with the Chilean government in Santiago, Chile. While on this duty, he laid the groundwork for an American Naval mission to Chile to replace the traditional British mission which had continued since the days of Admiral Lord Cochrane. For this service he was made â€œGrand Officer of the Order of Merit â€• of Chile.

3 Jan 1946 Commandant of Eight Naval District, New Orleans, LA. In June he was assigned additional duty as Commander of Gulf Sea Frontier. Merrill continued to serve in this command until relieved of active duty pending retirement for physical disability with the rank of Vice Admiral on 1 November 1947

After his retirement Vice Admiral and Mrs Merrill moved to Natchez, MS where they lived until June 1951. They later bought a home at 1503 Valence Street, New Orleans, LA.

28 Feb 1961 Vice Admiral Aaron Stanton Merrill died in Natchez, MS

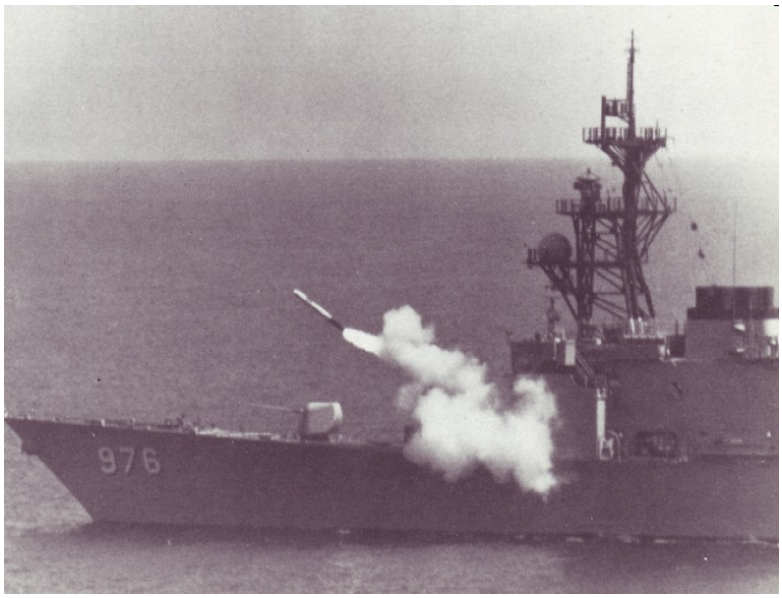


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While the above list is rather dry, it provides details or a career spent in the Fleet, or in direct support of operations, but VADM Merrillâ€™s major significance in WWII was in the opening amphibious assaults made by the Allied Navies in the vicinity of Guadalcanal. He led his four light cruisers and eight destroyers during the fighting in â€œThe Slotâ€• and later being noted for his leadership at the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay. His actions during this battle earned him the Navy Cross.



In VADM Aaron â€œTipâ€• Merrillâ€™s honor, the USS MERRILL (DD-976) was commissioned March 11th, 1978.



More later today, but to be brief, the USS MERRILL was stationed in San Diego, and carries the distinction of being the first vessel of the Navy to be fitted with the TOMAHAWK Weapons System (TWS), being designated the â€œOPEVALâ€• unit for the system.
The MERRILL was decommissioned on Macrh 26th, 1998 and was sunk in 2003.

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Category

1. Navy

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