Monday Maritime Matters

Description

I met this imposing figure, as some of my Black Shoe peers about the blogosphere may have. I worked for his son in the later part of my career, and now, there is a ship sailing the oceans named after this incredible man.

Admiral John Bulkeley, USN
Ã,

His nickname? The â€œSea Wolf.â€• John D. Bulkeley didnâ€™t get to Admiral the easy way. He had to go door knocking to get his appointment to the Naval Academy and was successful with a Congressman from Texas, as he couldnâ€™t get a nod from his native state of New Jersey.It appears the salt water in his veins may have been genetic:

> John Bulkeleyâ€™s destiny may have been cast long before he sought the salt spray of the open ocean. His ancestors, including Richard Bulkeley, brought aboard HMS VICTORY by Lord Nelson just prior to the Battle of Trafalgar in 1804; John Bulkeley of HMS WAGER under Captain Bligh, who sailed with Ansonâ€™s Squadron to raid Spanish silver ships of the new world; and Charles Bulkeley, raising the Union Jack for the first time on an American warship, the ALFRED, commanded by John Paul Jones, influenced his intense love of the sea.

USS INDIANAPOLIS (CA-35) in Pearl Harbor c. 1937

He made it through the US Naval Academy, Class of 1933 and entered the Army Flying Corps, butâ€¦too many hard landings sent him to sea, being assigned as an Ensign to the USS INDIANAPOLIS (CA-35) (the much later stories cruiser that carried the atomic bomb to Tinian). While assigned as Shipâ€™s Company, but traveling on a steamer, he displayed, possibly not the first of many feats, the hallmark of audacity and initiative that labeled him for many years:

> As a new ensign in the mid-thirties, he took the initiative to remove the Japanese ambassadorâ€™s brief case from a stateroom aboard a Washington-bound steamer, delivering same to Naval Intelligence a short swim later.

Earned him a medal or promotion you ask? Not likely, but the resulting â€œrewardâ€• was not to sit him at the end of the long green table without a coffee cup and ashtray:

> This bold feat, of which there were to be many more in his life, didnâ€™t earn him any medals, but it did get him a swift one way ticket out of the country and a new assignment as Chief Engineer of a coal burning gunboat, the SACRAMENTO *[PG-19]*, also known in those parts as â€œThe Galloping Ghost of the China Coast.â€• Picture in your minds the movie â€œSand Pebblesâ€•.

default watermark

It was on China Station where the CHENG met his future wife. They witnessed the invasion of Shanghai and Swatow, as well as the bombing of the PANAY by the Japanese during their time together in that theater before WWII.

In 1941, Lieutenant Bulkeley was assigned as the Squadron Commander of six motor torpedo boats in the Philippines. It fell to this man to escort General MacArthur, his wife and their son to safety, dodging intense Japanese ship patrols to get the General to southern Mindanao, where a B-17 picked he and his family up. LT Bulkeley and his shipmates were left to find their own way to Australia, which they finally did.

Rewarded? Yes, for that daring escapade, LT John D. Bulkeley was presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor.

By the resources available with some quick searches, John Bulkeley was next present for the momentous Normandy invasion, managing the PT boats and minesweepers, protecting the landing from threats by German E-Boats and waterborne mines.

USS ENDICOTT (DD-495)

Shortly after the invasion, he was assigned to the USS ENDICOTT (DD-495) as Commanding Officer, where he was assigned to patrol in the English Channel and had a few scraps with German corvettes. Of his 5 5â€³/38 cal guns, only one was working, yet he sent both corvettes to become fish reefs. Audacity once more:

default watermark

> [â€¦]
> The tale of his WWII exploits would not be complete without the mention of his love for destroyers, of which he would command many in his years to come. As Normandy operations wound up, he got his first large ship command, the destroyer ENDICOTT, and a month after the D-day invasion of Europe he came to the aid of two British gunboats under attack by two German corvettes. Charging in as dawnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s light broke the horizon with his uncanny ability and determined leadership, with only one gun working, but with a band of brothers for a crew, he unhesitantly engaged both enemy vessels at point blank range, sending both to the bottom. When I asked him about this action, he replied, â€œWhat else could I do? You engage, you fight, you win. That is the reputation of our Navy, then and in the future.â€•
>
> The Admiral was a strong believer in standards, some would say, from the old school, as the enemy Captain of one of the corvettes soon learned. Coming up from the sea ladder, he would not salute the colors of the ENDICOTT, and was promptly tossed back into the sea. The third time did the trick, and he was taken prisoner and allowed on deck.
> [â€¦]

ADM Bulkeley was a no nonsense man. From Wikipedia:

> In the early 1960s, Bulkeley commanded Clarksville Base, Tennessee, then a tri-service command under the aegis of the Defense Atomic Support Agency. Having lost none of his wartime daring, Bulkeley was known to test the alertness of the Marines guarding the base by doning a ninja suit, blackening his face and endeavoring to penetrate the classified area after dark without detection. This was a dangerous endeavor, as the Marines carried loaded weapons. Ever popular with his men, who both respected and admired him, Bulkeley could be seen driving around the base in his fire-engine red Triumph TR-3 sports car with a large

> silver PT boat as a hood ornament. Promoted to Rear Admiral by President Kennedy, who commanded PT-109 during World War II, Bulkeley was dispatched to command the disputed Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba, where he met Cubaâ€™s threat to sever water supplies in response to the Bay of Pigs invasion and other assaults by ordering the installation of desalinization equipment to make the base self-sufficient. Fidel Castroâ€™s government put out a â€œwanted-dead-or-aliveâ€• poster, offering 50,000 pesos for this â€œguerrilla of the worst species.â€•

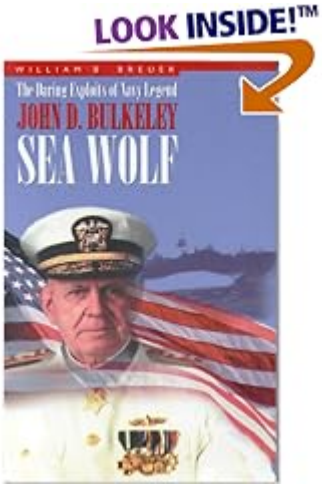
ADM Bulkeley himself went to the dug up pipeline at GTMO, near the gate into Cuba territory and helped cut the water off himself, in full view of the Cubans.

Later, he went on to be the hard nosed officer who wanted the best for all sailors and headed the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSERV), a group of Naval Officers who actually worked for Congress to determine the viability of each ship on a three year cycle, as to itâ€™s ability to continue in active service. He relentlessly hammered on specific systems, the MK-15 Close in Weapons Systems (CIWS), inflatable life rafts and various ship design features (the famous â€œno chamber in the deckâ€•). Us poor fleet sailors thought he was after us, but in actuality, he was making a point with the design and procurement side of the Navy. That is where I met the Admiral, on Final Contract Trials (FCT) aboard USS LEFTWICH (DD-984), sometime in late 1979. His Flag Lieutenant was LT Blake Miller, who I relieved years later at another job. ADM Bulkeley was an aloof man, from my perspective, and all business.

default watermark

The outcome of his seemingly indelicate manner of criticizing our ships was major changes in designs for the ARLEIGH BURKE DDG-51 Class units, which had slight chamber in their decks and positive pressure air systems, both of which are invaluable in staving off chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) attacks, and those are but a few things I know the INSURV was able to force into the design of that class of ship, based on mountains of data collected over many years of inspections.

The paraphrase of his eulogy by his son is here.



â€œSea Wolfâ€• is the biography of this fascinating, bemedaled hero.

USS BULKELEY (DDG-84)
Ã,
USS BULKELEY is the first ship to honor VADM John D. Bulkeley, USN.
embedded by *Embedded Video*

default watermark

USS BULKELEY (DDG-84) At Work

Category

1. Maritime Matters
2. Military
3. Military History
4. Navy

Date Created
July 2, 2007
Author
admin