

## Charles W. Thomas

(1903-1973)

Rear Admiral Charles W. Thomas, U.S. Coast Guard (Retired) was born in Pasadena, California in 1903. On 3 March 1973 he and his wife were struck down and killed by a speeding car in Ushuaia, southern Argentina, while they were attempting to walk across the street. Admiral Thomas was well known in polar circles — both north and south. At the time of his death he was serving as lecturer and ice pilot on the passenger motor vessel *Linblad Explorer*, which was on a cruise to the Antarctic.

Thomas had a long, varied, colourful career. He will long be remembered as one of the polar "greats". He was elected a Fellow of the Arctic Institute in January 1959 for distinguished scientific service in the Arctic. He earned Masters' degrees in Marine Geology (Washington University) and Marine Biology (The University of Maryland). He was a qualified oceanographer. He is the author of papers on such diverse subjects as sea pollution, undersea research, polar navigation, and ship handling. His well-known book, *Ice is Where You Find It*, was published in 1951.

Admiral Thomas, following his graduation from the Coast Guard Academy in 1924, rose steadily in rank and in responsibility in the Coast Guard, until his retirement as Rear Admiral in late 1957.

In June 1943, Thomas was placed in command of the cutter *Northland*, which captured and destroyed a Nazi weather-radio station, and established a Naval Station on Jan Mayen Island. The following year found him in command of the heavy-duty, combat icebreaker *Eastwind*, and of a northeast Greenland Task Unit. *Eastwind* pursued through the ice-pack and captured the German armed trawler *Externstiene*, and another weather station on North Little Koldeway Island off the northeast coast of Greenland. For those exploits, the then Captain Thomas was awarded the Legion

of Merit. Capt. Thomas became the Commander, Greenland Patrol, early in 1945.

After the war, in 1946-1947, RADM Thomas commanded the icebreaker *Northwind* on the fourth Byrd expedition to the Antarctic, designated Operation High Jump. His ship cleared the way through the ice of the Ross Sea for the Navy cargo ships. The following year, 1948, in the same ship he reestablished the Bering Sea Patrol that had been suspended during the war. Several other assignments followed, and in 1955 he was designated Chief of Staff, Antarctic Planning Group to implement the Navy's support of U.S. participation in the Antarctic in the International Geophysical Year. As that effort moved from the planning to the operational phase, designated Operation Deep Freeze I, Thomas was named Chief of Staff and Aide to Commander, Task Force 43. He was assigned additional duty as Task Unit Commander, Deep Freeze I. That assignment placed him again in command of *Eastwind*.

Captain Thomas was back in the Antarctic again as Task Group Commander in Operation Deep Freeze II. The Group was made up of *Northwind* and the assault cargo ship *Arneb*. On his retirement Rear Admiral Thomas accepted direction of Arctic operations for the U.S. National Committee for the International Geophysical Year.

There followed until his death a long line of diverse activities to add to what was already a full and exotic career. In 1958 he undertook the direction of a study of the Arctic Basin and its sea ice for the University of Washington. In 1960 he accepted a post with Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology. From 1963 until his retirement from the University in 1969 he was Assistant Director of the Hawaii Institute of Geophysics. Later he was a professor of science at Nathaniel Hawthorne College in New Hampshire.

Rear Admiral Thomas is survived by a son, Charles W. Thomas, Jr.; a daughter, Irina Thomas, and a stepson, Dewey Watson.

John C. Reed

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