



The Bird That Continues to Fly: A History of the Ancient Albatross Award

by Nora L. Chidlow, USCG Archivist

“Know your craft. Retarded as you might look on the ground, in the air you must reign supreme. Study the rules of aerodynamics, the weather, watch the experienced aviators, and practice, practice, practice. Stand out there on the runway facing into the wind with your brand new feathered wings spread wide, just waiting to feel the lift. Play chicken with that big C130 bearing down on you....he can go around. If you fly beautifully, no one will dare laugh at you for sitting on a green tennis ball instead of an egg.” – VADM Vivien S. Crea during her Ancient Albatross ceremony at CGAS Elizabeth City

On 26 June 2008, VADM Crea became the Coast Guard’s twenty-first Ancient Albatross – and the first female aviator to achieve this distinction. However, as RADM George Passmore so aptly put it when he relinquished the Ancient Albatross in 1992, it’s not so much just an award:

“This ceremony is not about the principals.....it’s about this coat, flight suit, helmet and scarf I am wearing. It’s about people, airplanes, history, heroes, and nonheroes. It’s about our past, our present, our future. When it comes to flying, we think about people the great deeds they have done. Some of the aviators who came before us made the ultimate sacrifice of laying down their life while trying to save others.”

History of Coast Guard Aviation

The Coast Guard Aviation Act was signed into law on 29 August 1916. This consisted of legislation establishing ten Coast Guard air stations by the Treasury Department. However, the Act was never funded, and Coast Guard aviation was left in the hands of a few until 1920. One of these few was LT Elmer F. Stone, who was the pilot of a Navy NC-4 Flying Boat that was the first aircraft to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in 1919. The first Coast Guard Air Station was established at Morehead City, North Carolina on 24 March 1920. Aviators at that station flew six Curtiss HS-2L borrowed from the Navy and the station was operated experimentally without appropriated funds. Stone, who had been on loan to the Navy, was responsible for supervising, reconditioning, and testing the six planes. Although the station shut down in June of the following year, its success led to renewed interest in 1925, when new methods were devised to counteract rumrunners of the Prohibition era. Coast Guard aviation grew steadily throughout the late 1920s, and, since its primary mission was law enforcement, planes were often taken from seized rumrunners. A second attempt to operate an air station near Gloucester, Massachusetts was very successful and paved the way for a formal aviation program in the Coast Guard. Eventually, Coast Guard air stations dotted the coastline from Massachusetts to Florida.

World War II was the final push in making aviation an indispensable component of the Coast Guard, when pilots flew anti-submarine patrols along the American coastline. Today, aviation remains an integral part of the Coast Guard's search and rescue missions.

The days of the aviator's goggles and long white scarf may be long gone, but not for the Ancient Albatross. This bird continues to fly, regardless of age or weather conditions. The Ancient Albatross award was initiated in 1966, the golden anniversary of Coast Guard aviation. By then, the Coast Guard had a fleet of 160 aircraft in service. LCDR Gilbert Brown, an aviator assigned to the Operations Aviation Units (OAU) in June 1966, had seen many references to the Navy's Grey Eagle award, and felt that the Coast Guard should have its own recognition as well. Brown's inspiration for the name of the award came from two sources: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 *Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* poem and the Grumman HU-16E planes that were used by the Coast Guard for its search and rescue missions. The poem depicts a mariner at sea who shoots and kills an albatross – and the HU-16E planes used in 1966 resembled an albatross with their short, fat, stubby bodies and thin long wings.

The award was first approved of and published in COMDTINST 1650.8 on 30 December 1965. It was sponsored by the Commandant's Trust Fund and comprised of a silver bowl mounted on a wooden base. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this bowl ever became reality. In March 1969, the award became a large bronze and wooden wall plaque, with a miniature version given on an individual basis. The trophy has since evolved into a winged bird in flight with one wing touching the water. Ancient Albatrosses still receive the miniature version to keep. The inscription on the trophy reads:

"This award is presented to the Coast Guard aviator on active duty holding the earliest designation in recognition of a clear defiance of the private realm of the Albatross and all its sea-bird kin while in pursuit of time-honored Coast Guard duties."

The winged bird trophy is now at the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, Florida, and the names of its recipients continue to be engraved on it.

Eligibility for the Ancient Albatross Designation

"Eligibility for the title of Ancient Albatross and entitlement to the award will be determined by ascertaining that aviator or aviation pilot on active duty whose date of designation as such precedes in point of time that of any other Coast Guard aviator or aviation pilot. If two or more candidates were designated aviators on the same day, the award shall be presented to the candidate who is senior in rank on the day the award is presented." (COMDTINST 1650.8c, 5 April 1978)

An aviator could not earn his flight wings until he had first obtained his sea legs. Criteria for flight training included two years of shipboard duty, usually in the engineering section - one year on deck, one year below deck. In the mid 1950s, if a Coast Guardsman wanted to avoid six straight years at sea, he put in for a LORAN tour, graduate school, or flight

training. Pre-flight training at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola was no more than six weeks. Flight orders came from Washington [Headquarters] close to completion of flight training. Pay was around \$140, a considerable amount of money back then. Aviators wore half-Wellingtons and a green uniform, which set them apart from other aviators of the day. Once they earned their wings, aviators embarked on a career as a Coast Guard pilot, doing rescue missions or ice operations.

History of the Ancient Albatross Trophy

VADM William Shields received the first Ancient Albatross designation at his retirement ceremony on 1 July 1966 during a formal dinner at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. He received a small wooden case that folded closed with a circular bronze replica of a larger host plaque. It was also designed to be displayed as a desk paperweight. VADM Shields actually became the Coast Guard's first Ancient Albatross on 30 December 1965; however he did not receive the memorabilia until his retirement dinner.

Over the years, new traditions have been incorporated to make the ceremony what it is today. Each ceremony differs in its small details that make it unique. The ceremony has evolved into a rite of passage that is steeped in Coast Guard history and tradition. Early ceremonies were for the most part very low-key, and it wasn't until the Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl – a fraternity of retired and active Coast Guard aviators officially established in 1977 – got involved that the Ancient Albatross ceremony became what it is today. Traditional flight gear, the Royal Pterodactyl Egg, the award plaque, and citations are passed from upon the longest-standing Coast Guard aviator's retirement.

The earliest aviator to wear the flight gear during the ceremony, as evident in records held at the Historian's Office, is ADM Charles Tighe. The 27 August 1966 ceremony was held at CGAS Elizabeth City, one of many commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Coast Guard aviation. VADM Shields helped ADM Tighe don the leather coat, much to the amusement of spectators.

The tradition of passing on the additional gear - helmet, goggles, and long white scarf - was probably initiated with CDR Walter Goldhammer when he became the Ancient Albatross in 1974, since there was no ceremony for his predecessor, RADM Chester Bender. The leather coat was on loan from the Navy until around 1975, when it was donated by Hazel Gershowitz, widow of the Coast Guard's "Flying Rabbi", David Gershowitz, to the Pterodactyls. Gershowitz was the first Coast Guard aviator to fly a Navy jet fighter while in official Coast Guard capacity. However, the leather helmet, goggles, and white scarf were added much later, probably on loan from the Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. The Royal Pterodactyl Egg was introduced in 1985, when RADM Donald "Deese" Thompson relieved RADM Frederick Schubert. It symbolizes future Coast Guard aviators and continues to be an integral component of the ceremony.

Today's ceremony is conducted as near as possible to the date of succession, held at a location of the recipient's discretion and convenience. The Ancient Order of the Pterodactyls coordinates and funds the ceremony, which is open to the public. Sikorsky

Aircraft is the corporate sponsor of the award itself. The Ancient Albatross receives mementos from the Coast Guard, a certificate from the Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl, and temporary custody of loaned flight gear. His or her name is inscribed on the winged bird trophy at the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, Florida.

There is usually a general feeling of surprise and pride when an aviator learns that he is due to receive the Ancient Albatross designation. Naturally, since it's given to the longest serving aviator in the Coast Guard, it also has a tendency to make the aviator feel pretty ancient! Thus, donning the vintage flight gear during the Ancient Albatross ceremony is always something the aviator will forever remember – no matter what season it was. In fact, most of the ceremonies were held in the warmer months, and many an aviator had to put up with the hot, heavy, and dank leather flight coat, designed to keep an aviator warm at frigid, open-air temperatures hundreds of feet above land. VADM Crea's ceremony was in June at CGAS Elizabeth City – and she said she would have to keep her remarks short, because if she didn't, she would die. She was already wearing the coat!

What does it truly mean to be a Coast Guard aviator; an Ancient Albatross? A true aviator is one who truly savors the sole concept of flight, soaring through the skies – regardless of weather conditions – at speeds that surpass that of an actual albatross bird. As RADM Thompson puts it in his remarks when he passed the mantle to VADM Edward Nelson in 1988:

“What’s it like when you close the throttle and the engine sighs into silence for the final time? It’s a delicious pain. Happily, you have survived. Unhappily, those joyous airborne moments are no more. You won’t miss the rain-swept approaches on dark and worrisome nights. But you will miss the exhilaration of breaking into clear blue from a cloud-shrouded climb. You won’t miss the endless nights at sea or duty nights away from home. But will there be a substitute for those marvelous moments when the familiar cutter or runway profile comes into view and you key the mike to report – “in sight”?”

Some interesting tidbits about individual ceremonies:

- The first aviator to wear the traditional flight jacket was ADM Charles Tighe, the second Ancient Albatross. His ceremony coincided with the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Coast Guard aviation at CGAS Elizabeth City on 27 August 1966.
- ADM Chester Bender's 1974 ceremony at Headquarters was so low-key that it lasted only 15 minutes with a handful of aviators assigned to Headquarters present. Change of watches was not yet widely publicized within or outside of aviation circles.
- A vintage Naval Aircraft Factory N3N-3 plane belonging to Carl Swickley served as the backdrop for the transfer of the Ancient Albatross to RADM Chester A. Richmond in July 1975 at Port Angeles. RADM Richmond had trained in the very same plane in 1942.
- The first time the Ancient Albatross distinction was ever passed through a third party was when CDR Walter Goldhammer retired and RADM Richmond was next in line. RADM Richmond was unable to be physically present when CDR

Goldhammer relinquished the gear. Instead, the gear was handed to the most junior aviator at CGAS Brooklyn, LTJG David Rogers. Rogers then arranged for its transport and presentation to RADM Richmond at CGAS Port Angeles a few weeks later.

- The 1988 ceremony in which VADM Donald “Deese” Thompson passed the distinction to RADM Edward Nelson is unique in one aspect. Two Sikorsky HH-52A helicopters, carrying VADM Thompson and RADM Nelson, landed simultaneously at opposite ends of the airfield, eventually coming nose to nose and then turning to arrive at their final locations side by side. VADM Thompson and RADM Nelson were then escorted to the awards platform a few feet away in a vintage Model-T Ford. As they drove away from the flight line to the podium, RADM Nelson asked the driver what year the Ford was. His answer was probably around 1949, which no doubt was ancient to him. RADM Nelson chuckled and gently told the young man he was only off by about twenty years.
- ADCMAP John P. Greathouse was the first enlisted pilot to become an Ancient Albatross in July 1977. He was also the last enlisted pilot to receive the award, and the last Coast Guard enlisted aircraft pilot on duty. He was the first active duty pilot to receive the award; previous recipients had long given up aviation duties and were at desk jobs by the time they received their awards.
- The Royal Pterodactyl Egg was introduced in May 1985, when RADM Frederick Schubert transferred the title to RADM Thompson. It has been used in all subsequent ceremonies.
- At RADM George Passmore’s ceremony in 1991, he and retiring aviator VADM Howard Thorsen arrived in separate Sikorsky HH-52A helicopters. During his remarks, Thorsen presented a set of his wings to CGAS Brooklyn’s most recently winged aviator. He had worn them on flights from above the Arctic Circle to the South Pole, and from Bahrain to Japan. Thorsen had hoped this would be incorporated as a tradition of the ceremony, but it never did, although RADM David Kunkel did the same thing during his ceremony.
- A “vintage” Sikorsky HH-52A was flown in from an aviation museum for the 1993 ceremony at CGAS Brooklyn, when RADM Thomas Matteson handed the mantle to RADM William Donnell. When the helicopter was given a pre-flight check upon arrival, many discrepancies were found – but the crew - two Army CWOs - didn’t want to know what they were!
- VADM Richard Herr’s retirement ceremony in 1998 at CG ATC Mobile was jointly held with MCPO-CG Eric Trent’s retirement ceremony. They arrived together at the ceremony in a Ford Model A. It was the first time both an officer and an enlisted Coast Guardsman had received the award simultaneously.
- At the same ceremony, recognizing RADM Edward Barrett as the new Ancient Albatross, cannons were fired as the honorees drove into a decorated hangar in a 1930 Ford Model A truck. The Azalea Trail Maids, a group of women wearing Southern belle dresses, curtsied as RADM Barrett made his way to the stage.
- When RADM James C. Olson retired in 2006, the next Ancient Albatross in line was VADM Terry Cross. Since he was due to retire in just a few weeks, it was decided, for ceremonial purposes, that the mantle should be passed to the second next person – RADM David Kunkel. However, RADM Olson was unable to

personally present RADM Kunkel the honor. Thus, he passed it to VADM Cross in a ceremony at CGAS Sitka. It was the first and only time a change of watch was held in Alaska. And, it was the only time both recipients were stationed in Alaska! VADM Cross presented the award to RADM Kunkel a few weeks later in a ceremony at CGAS Elizabeth City. RADM Olson is the longest reigning Ancient Albatross, having held that distinction for nearly six years.

Past Ancient Albatrosses:

VADM William D. Shields

Date designated aviator: 14 May 1935

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 30 December 1965, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.

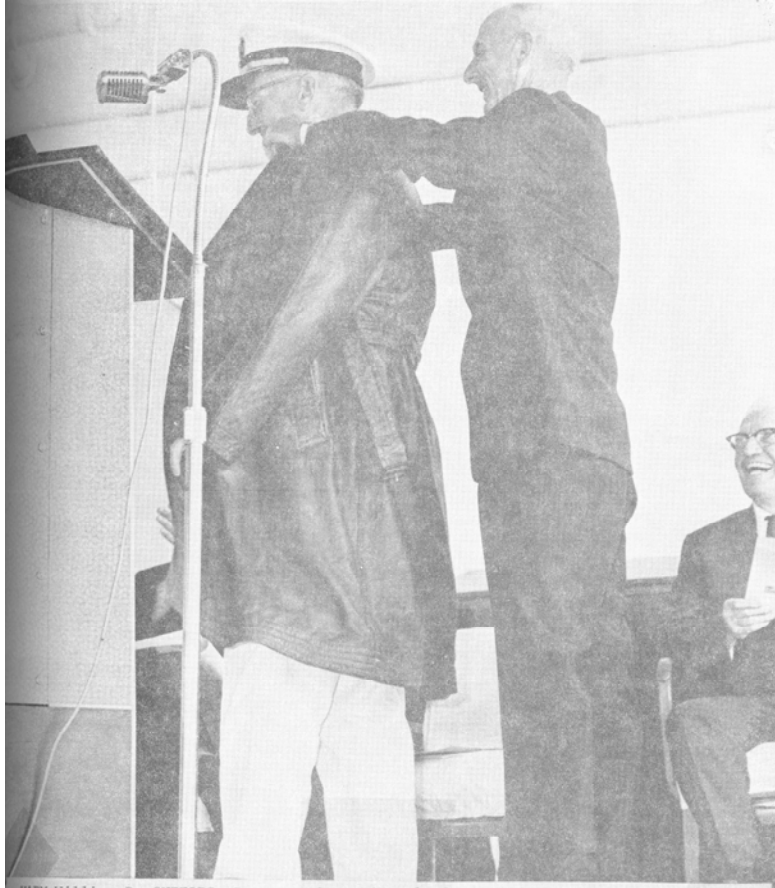


A 1931 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy, Shields served aboard the HUNT and GALATEA before entering flight school in April 1934 at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. His first flight assignment was at CGAS St. Petersburg in August 1935. While serving on the NORTH STAR from May 1941 until January 1942, Shields assisted in the capture of the German-controlled Norwegian trawler BUSKOE, the first naval capture of the war. He eventually rose to Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard in January 1962, and was in that capacity when he retired in 1966. He passed away on 1 February 1985.

RADM Charles Tighe

Date designated aviator: 7 June 1939

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 27 August 1966, CGAS Elizabeth City



Tighe graduated from the Academy in 1935 and served on the TAHOE, AURORA, and HERMES before attending flight school in June 1938 at Pensacola. His first flight assignment was at CGAS San Diego. He was the pilot of the first plane to ever engage with enemy submarines attacking American ships in the Gulf of Mexico, between the Mississippi Delta and Tampa, Florida. He later became Commander of the Eleventh Coast Guard District, San Pedro, California in 1968. Tighe retired in 1970, and passed away on 21 December 1995.

ADM Chester R. Bender

Date designated aviator: 7 June 1940

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 28 August 1970, CG HQ (no ceremony)

Graduating from the Academy in 1936, Bender served on board the MENDOTA, BIBB, and OSSIPPEE before going to flight school in June 1939 at Pensacola. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Elizabeth City, North Carolina. He became the Air-Sea Rescue Liaison at the Far East Air Force Headquarters in the Philippines in December 1944 and received a Bronze Star Medal for his work there. He had the distinction of learning to fly seaplanes before landplanes and retired from active flying in 1959. Bender eventually became the Commandant of the Coast Guard, retiring in that capacity in 1974. He died on 20 July 1996.

CDR Walter R. Goldhammer

Date designated aviator: 20 April 1943 (AP #82) and 29 December 1945 (#481)

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 1 June 1974, Governors Island



Goldhammer entered the Coast Guard through the Recruit Training Center at Ellis Island in September 1939. He served on board the HAWTHORN, and the CHAMPLAIN before transferring to the Academy, where he completed a year-long training course in January 1942. He then served on the ANTIETAM before entering flight school in September 1942 at Pensacola. Goldhammer's first flight assignment was at CGAS Miami (Dinner Key) in April 1943. He was one of the few enlisted aviators who served in World War II and was one of the NORTHWIND's two helicopter pilots for her 1959 cruise. In 1967, he and his son Stephen formed the first Coast Guard father and son flying team. At his retirement in 1975, he was the Chief of Search and Rescue Operations for the Third District. Goldhammer crossed the bar on 2 March 1996.

RADM Chester A. Richmond, Jr.

Date designated aviator: 25 May 1943; helicopter 5 June 1952

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 1 July 1975, CGAS Port Angeles



Graduating from the Academy in 1941, Richmond served on board the HUNTER LIGGETT and the INGHAM. He took his preliminary flight training in October 1942 at the Naval Reserve Aviation Base in Grosse Isle, Michigan. CGAS St. Petersburg, was his first flight assignment. On February 26, 1962, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross for achievement as an aircraft commander of a Coast Guard helicopter that delivered a doctor and emergency medical supplies to a remote part of Alaska. By 1969, he was the Chief of the Office of Research and Development at Headquarters. Richmond retired from active duty in 1977.

ADCMAP John P. Greathouse

Date designated aviator: 20 November 1944

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 1 July 1977, CGAS Seattle



“Silver Eagle”, as Greathouse was known, completed recruit training in Port Townsend, Washington in November 1941. He received his aviator’s wings in 1944 at Pensacola. His first flight assignment was at CGAS San Francisco in August 1943. Greathouse logged more than 9,000 flight hours in the HU-16E (Grumman Albatross), and was the last enlisted Chief Aviation pilot from World War II. In his later years, he was a flight instructor at various air stations. By the time he retired in 1979, Greathouse had logged approximately 14,146 flight hours, a record that remains unsurpassed today. He passed away on 30 August 2005 at the age of 86.

CAPT William D. Harvey

Date designated aviator: 24 January 1952

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 23 February 1979, CGAS Mobile



Harvey received his flight training at Pensacola in 1944 and has flown over 6,300 hours. He was Captain of the Port Office in Philadelphia from August 1950 to December 1951, when he began a stint on board the MENDOTA for five months. He then served at various air stations from October 1952 until August 1970, when he joined the Department of Transportation as a military assistant to the Safety & Traffic Program. Harvey retired in 1979.

VADM Charles E. Larkin

Date designated aviator: 24 September 1952

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 5 September 1979, CGAS Astoria



Larkin graduated from the Academy in 1949, and served on the BIBB and MATAGORDA before entering flight school at Pensacola in August 1951. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Salem in October 1952. In 1959, he piloted a helicopter in zero visibility, while evacuating a seriously injured man from a ship 40 miles off of San Francisco. Larkin was awarded the Air Medal for this rescue. He retired as Commander of the Pacific Area in 1984.

RADM Frederick P. Schubert

Date designated aviator: 23 May 1955

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 31 July 1984, CGAS San Francisco

Upon graduation from the Academy in 1951, Schubert served aboard the KUKUI and MINNETONKA. He entered flight school in May 1954 at Pensacola, and his first flight assignment was at CGAS Brooklyn, starting in August 1955. By the time he retired in 1985, he was the Deputy Acting Chief of the Office of Marine Environment and Systems at Headquarters.

VADM Donald C. "Deese" Thompson

Date designated aviator: 17 August 1955

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 24 May 1985, CGAS San Diego



Thompson graduated from the Academy in 1952, and served on the BIBB and ANDROSCOGGIN. He entered flight school in June 1954 at Pensacola. Thompson's first flight assignment was at CGAS San Diego as a search-and-rescue aviator. When he retired in 1988, Thompson was Commander of the Atlantic Area at Governors Island.

RADM Edward Nelson, Jr.

Date designated aviator: 31 January 1957

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 8 June 1988, CGAS Mobile



June 1953 marked Nelson's graduation from the Academy, and he served on the MENDOTA from July of that year until October 1955. At that point, he entered flight school at Pensacola. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Salem. Nelson was Commander of the Seventeenth District at Juneau, Alaska, when he retired in 1989.

VADM Clyde E. Robbins

Date designated aviator: 1 March 1957

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 8 May 1989, CGAS Port Angeles



Robbins graduated from the Academy in 1954, and served on the HALF MOON before entering flight school in February 1956 at Pensacola. His first flight assignment was at CGAD Bermuda in 1957. He received an Air Medal for the rescue of five men from a disabled ship amidst severe weather conditions in 1965. Robbins was the director of the Office of Intelligence and Security at the Department of Transportation when he retired in 1993.

VADM Howard B. Thorsen

Date designated aviator: 19 August 1958; Helo – 4 October 1962

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 5 June 1990, CGAS San Francisco



Thorsen, a 1955 Academy graduate, served on the INGHAM before entering flight school in April 1957. His first flight assignment was at CGAD, Argentia, Newfoundland in October 1958. Thorsen received his helicopter training at Pensacola in September 1962. By the time of his retirement in 1991, Thorsen was Commander of the Atlantic Area and the Maritime Defense Zone.

RADM George D. Passmore

Date designated aviator: 22 December 1959

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 27 June 1991, CGAS Brooklyn



Passmore is a 1957 graduate of the Academy. He served on the COOK INLET before completing his flight training at three different stations: Pensacola in December 1958, Whiting, FL in September 1958, and Corpus Christi in March 1960. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Brooklyn from April 1960 until July 1962. When Passmore retired in 1992, he was the Commander of MLC Atlantic Area at Governors Island.

RADM Thomas T. Matteson

Date designated aviator: 21 May 1962

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 5 June 1992, CGAS Savannah

A 1957 graduate of the Academy, Matteson served on the CASTLE ROCK. He entered flight school at Pensacola in April 1961, and his first flight assignment was CGAS Miami (Dinner Key) in May of 1962. Matteson was superintendent of the Academy when he retired in 1993.

RADM William C. Donnell

Date designated aviator: 7 September 1962

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 19 June 1993, CGAS Brooklyn

Donnell attended the Officer Candidate School at Yorktown, graduating from there in June 1961. He received his flight training at Pensacola, and his first flight assignment was at CGAS Brooklyn, in October 1962. By the time he retired in 1997, he was the Assistant Commandant, Human Resources Directorate at Headquarters.

VADM Richard D. Herr

Date designated aviator: 1967

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 23 May 1997, CGAS Mobile

Herr is a 1964 graduate of the Academy and served on the ESCANABA from September 1964 until April 1966. He then attended flight school in Pensacola, being assigned to CGAS Elizabeth City in October 1967. He was Vice Commandant of USCG at the time of his retirement in 1998.

RADM Edward J. Barrett

Date designated aviator: September 1968

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 30 June 1998, CG ATC Mobile

A 1966 graduate of the Academy, Barrett served on the McCULLOCH before completing his flight training at Pensacola in September 1968. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Astoria. He was director of the Joint Interagency Task Force East in Key West when he retired in 2000.

RADM James C. Olson

Date designated aviator: 9 May 1972

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 14 July 2000, CGAS Elizabeth City

Olson is a 1970 graduate of the Academy. He served on the DUANE before entering flight school at Pensacola in June 1971. His first flight assignment was at CGAS Astoria, where he was a search-and-rescue pilot. By the time of his retirement in 2006, he was Commander of the Seventeenth District at Juneau.

RADM David W. Kunkel

Date designated aviator: 31 October 1975

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 13 May 2006, CGAS Elizabeth City



RADM Kunkel received his training at Cape May in September 1972, and completed officer training at the same location the following year. He completed his flight training at Pensacola in October 1975, and his first flight assignment was at CGAS New Orleans. By the time he retired in 2008, he was Commander of the Seventh District at Miami.

VADM Vivien S. Crea

Date designated aviator: 1975

Date of Ancient Albatross designation: 26 June 2008, CGAS Elizabeth City



VADM Crea was one of the first two female aviators in the Coast Guard assigned to flight school in 1975 at Pensacola. However, during the year of her attendance, students transferred to the Air Force Navigation School because the Naval facility closed down. As a result, VADM Crea earned both her Navy/Coast Guard Pilot Wings and her Air Force Navigator's Wings. She was the second woman aviator to get her wings. Her first flight assignment was at CGAS Barber's Point, Hawaii. VADM Crea is presently the Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard.

Enlisted Ancient Albatross Award

In 1988, the Enlisted Ancient Albatross Award was established to honor the Coast Guard enlisted aircrew members on active duty. Accurate documentation of the date of aircrew qualifications, as compared to those of the Officer Ancient Albatrosses, did not exist for most enlisted aviators. Thus, the earliest date of graduation from aviation “A” school became the criteria. CWO3 Kevin Miller and ATCM Charlie Craig each independently requested approval from the Commandant for this award. The Commandant at the time, ADM John Kime, gave his seal of approval. The Pterodactyl Board felt that the enlisted community was deserving of such a recognition. There have been eight Enlisted Ancient Albatrosses since its inception. The Ancient Albatross Enlisted Trophy is sponsored by Northrop Grumman Corporation. The vintage flight gear used for the Enlisted Ancient Albatross ceremony is loaned from the Naval Aviation Museum.

Recipients of the Enlisted Ancient Albatross Award

ADCM J. T. Woltz – 8 June 1990
MCPO-CG Eric A. Trent – 1 December 1995
SCPO Gary Butler – 30 June 1998
AVTCM Douglas W. Farence – 2 November 1999
AMTCM Bernard D. Irsik – 14 July 2000
AMTCM Mark T. Bigart – 24 April 2002
AMTCM William Beardsley – 11 April 2003
CPO Peter MacDougall – 13 May 2006

What does the future hold for a bird that does not age or seemingly become extinct??? The Royal Egg will continue to hatch more top of the line aviators for as long as Coast Guard aviation remains in existence, with each succeeding aviator passing down a bit more of Coast Guard aviation history. To borrow a few lines from the Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl’s official proclamation of each aviator:

“...has outrageously defied the laws of nature and circumspect fortune, surviving a career in aviation copiously littered from end to end with scraped wing tips, dented wing floats, bent airframes, drowned seat cushions, ground loops, wave offs, busted check rides, ulcerated instructors, and terror-stricken crewmembers and inasmuch as he has left scattered in his wake, or otherwise faded into oblivion, all his flying superiors or counterparts who preceded him, thereby resulting in his precarious longevity exceeding that of all current active Coast Guard aviators, thus gaining him the coveted title and notoriety of reigning Ancient Albatross.....”

Thus, the United States Coast Guard pays homage to a breed of unique aviators by recognizing its avian counterpart – the albatross, one of the largest birds known for its ability to cover great distances without stopping.

Sources:

LCDR Gretchen Jones, CGAS Miami.

Personnel Files, Historian's Office

Aviation Subject Files, Historian's Office

The Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl

Naval Aviation Museum, Pensacola, FL

CAPT Stephen Goldhammer, USCG (Ret.), son of CDR Walter Goldhammer

Mrs. Jeannette Gagnon Shields, widow of VADM William Shields

Barbara Shields Dempsey, daughter of VADM Shields

Barbara Richmond, wife of RADM Chester Richmond

The *Mobile Register*, Mobile, AL

And all of the living Ancient Albatrosses

