

### **Commander Willis W. Bradley**

**Commander Willis W. Bradley**, U.S.N. (Highest Rank CAPTAIN). Citation for Service in WWI: For extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty while serving on the U.S.S. Pittsburgh, at the time of an accidental explosion of ammunition on that vessel. On 23 July 1917, some saluting cartridge cases were being reloaded in the after casemate: through an accident an explosion occurred. Comdr. Bradley (then lieutenant), who was about to enter the casemate, was blown back by the explosion and rendered momentarily unconscious, but while still dazed, crawled into the casemate to extinguish burning materials in dangerous proximity to a considerable amount of powder, thus preventing further explosions.

Born in Ransomville, New York, Bradley moved with his parents to Milnor, North Dakota, on 28 June 1884 and to Forman, North Dakota, in 1891. He attended the public schools, and Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. He served as the deputy registrant of deeds of Sargent County, North Dakota in 1902 and 1903.

He graduated from the United States Naval Academy on September 12, 1906 and went to sea in USS *Virginia* (BB-13). After two years at sea as a passed midshipman, he received his commission as an ensign on September 13, 1908. Successively, Bradley served in USS *Culgoa* (AF-3) from the fall of 1908 to October 1910, helped to fit out and commission USS *Perkins* (DD-26) (Torpedo Boat Destroyer No. 26), and served in her until March 1911. From then until September 1912, he saw duty, first in the transport USS *Hancock* and then in USS *South Carolina*. Next, he commanded USS *Biddle* (TB-26) (Torpedo Boat No. 26) and the Reserve Torpedo Group at Annapolis, Md.

Beginning in September 1913, Bradley studied ordnance and explosives at the Naval Postgraduate School in Annapolis, Maryland, and then at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He continued his studies at the Naval Proving Ground in Indian Head, Maryland, at Bausch & Lomb, and at the Midvale Steel Co. in Pittsburgh, Pa. In July 1915, Bradley returned to sea in command of USS *Stewart*. That December, he was transferred to command of USS *Hull* and of the Reserve Torpedo Division, Pacific Fleet.

After service in USS *San Diego* between September 1916 and February 1917, Bradley became gunnery officer on the USS *Pittsburgh*. In that capacity, he received the Medal of Honor (World War I) for his actions on July 23, 1917 during a powder explosion in one of the ship's casemates. Though temporarily stunned, he entered the compartment, saved a man's life, and then reentered the casemate to extinguish burning gunpowder.

Bradley moved ashore again in January 1918 to head the Explosives, Fuses, and Primers Section of the Bureau of Ordnance. From there, he went to the Naval Torpedo Station in Keyport, Washington, in August 1919 to serve as a naval inspector. Returning to sea in June 1920, Bradley served as gunnery officer in USS *Texas* (BB-35) until May 1921. At that time, he reported to the Mare Island Navy Yard to assist in fitting out and commissioning USS *California* (BB-44). After the battleship went into commission on August 10, he served as her gunnery officer.

Bradley returned to Keyport in May 1922 for two years of duty at the Naval Torpedo Station as the Naval Inspector in Charge. From July 1924 to November 1926, he

commanded USS *Gold Star* (AK-12), the station ship at Guam in the Mariana Islands. Between late 1926 and the middle of 1929, Bradley served in the Naval Reserve Section in the Bureau of Navigation. Following that tour of duty, he became Governor of Guam in June 1929. As Governor, he issued Guam's first Bill of Rights, sought United States citizenship for the Chamorros and proclaimed them to be citizens of Guam, and reorganized the Guam Congress. He also made possible the first free elections of village commissioners. He was considered a Progressive Republican and civil libertarian.

On April 8, 1930 he created the only official government run local post called "Guam Guard Mail". It used overprinted Philippine stamps for the 1st, 3rd, and 4th issues and a locally printed one for the 2nd. It was needed since the U.S. Post Office did not deliver the mail to individual homes or businesses. "Guam Guard Mail" lasted one year forcing the Post Office to take over the operation on the northern half of Guam on January 1, 1931 and the southern half on April 9, 1931.

Bradley resumed sea duty in July 1931 in command of USS *Bridge* (AF-1). Two years later, he became Captain of the Yard at the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. After six months, however, he was transferred to command of USS *Portland* (CA-33).

That assignment lasted until June 1937 at which time he was reassigned to the Naval War College as a student. After a year of duty with the Pacific coast section of the Board of Inspection and Survey beginning in May 1938, Capt. Bradley commanded Destroyer Squadron (DesRon) 31, Battle Force, based in San Diego for a year. At the conclusion of that assignment, he resumed duty with the Board of Inspection and Survey on the west coast. He continued in that billet through the end of World War II and until his retirement on August 1, 1946.

Bradley was elected as a Republican to the Eightieth Congress (January 3, 1947 – January 3, 1949). He served as assistant to the president of the Pacific Coast Steamship Co. from 1949 to 1952. He served as member of the California State Assembly from 1952 until his death.

Bradley died in Santa Barbara, California, August 27, 1954. He was interred in Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, California. The U.S.S. Bradley (FF-1041), was named in his honor.

#### **Military Awards:**

**Masonic History:** Brother Bradley was a member of Golden Fleece Lodge #31, Forman, ND, Scottish Rite 32°, Knight Templar, Shriner, and member of National Sojourners.