

REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM NATHANIEL THOMAS
CHAPLAIN CORPS, U.S. NAVY, RETIRED

Rear Admiral Thomas was born in Rankin County, Mississippi, on March 21, 1892, son of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Thomas of Crystal Springs, Mississippi. He was graduated from Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1912, and from Seashore Divinity School in June, 1914. He attended the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, and received honorary degrees of Doctor of Divinity from Millsaps College in 1935, and from American University, Washington, D. C. in 1941.

He was ordained Deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church by Bishop Warren A. Candler, Natchez, Mississippi, on December 7, 1913, and was ordained Elder by Bishop James Atkins, Laurel, Mississippi, on November 28, 1915. He had pastorates in the Millsaps Memorial Methodist Church, Jackson, Mississippi (1910-1911); Daleville Methodist Church, Daleville, Mississippi (1912-1913); and the Methodist Church, Summit, Mississippi (1913-1917).

Appointed Acting Chaplain, with the rank of Lieutenant (junior grade) on January 5, 1918, Rear Admiral Thomas subsequently advanced in grade until commissioned Rear Admiral on July 1, 1945, to date from May 24 of that year, while serving as Chief of Chaplains under the Chief of Naval Personnel. His nomination to the permanent rank of Rear Admiral was confirmed by the Senate on January 23, 1948 to date from August 7, 1947. He was transferred to the Retired List of the Navy on September 1, 1949.

After entering the Naval Service, Rear Admiral Thomas reported to the Receiving Ship, Boston, Massachusetts for a short indoctrination course, and on February 23, 1918 he was transferred to the USS MADAWASKA, transport ship, employed in conveying troops between the United States and French ports, until September, 1919. He next had duty as Naval Chaplain at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Fort Lyons, Colorado, until February, 1922. He joined the USS PENNSYLVANIA of Division 4, Battleships, Battle Fleet, in the Pacific, and served until July, 1924.

Rear Admiral Thomas was Assistant Chaplain at the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from August, 1924 until October, 1927, when he returned to sea duty in the USS RALEIGH. He made the cruise to Honolulu in that light cruiser in 1928, and in 1929 when, as flagship of Vice Admiral John H. Dayton, Commander Naval Forces, European Waters, she visited European and African ports. Relieved of duty in the RALEIGH in October, 1929, he was stationed in the Fourteenth Naval District, Honolulu, T.H., from November of that year until July, 1932. He joined the USS WEST VIRGINIA, flagship of Battleships, Battle Force, U.S. Fleet, and served aboard until May, 1933. At that time he returned to the United States and had duty continuously for twelve years as Chaplain of the Naval Academy, Annapolis. He was detached in July, 1945 with orders to duty as Chief of Chaplains under the Chief of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. He was relieved of all active duty in August, 1949 pending his retirement on September 1, 1949.

For his services as Senior Chaplain at the Naval Academy from December, 1941 to June, 1945, and for duty as Chief of Chaplains he was awarded the Legion of Merit with the following citation:

LEGION OF MERIT

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Senior Chaplain at the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, December, 1941 to June, 1945; and subsequently as Chief of Chaplains from July, 1945 to the present. When called upon to assume new duties, Rear Admiral Thomas left behind him at the Naval Academy the fine results of his many years of faithful service and the enduring impression of his sincere Christian character, profoundly influencing Midshipmen preparing to defend their country. Serving wisely and sympathetically in the administration of the Chaplain Corps, Rear Admiral Thomas, by his inspiring leadership and unwavering devotion to the spiritual needs of personnel of all religious faiths, upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

In addition to the Legion of Merit, Rear Admiral Thomas has the Victory Medal, Transport Clasp (USS MADAWASKA); the American Defense Service Medal, the American Campaign Medal, and World War II Victory Medal.