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**\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\***

The New York Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States announces **Paul Stillwell** as the winner of the RADM Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Naval Literature for his book ***Battleship Commander: The Life of Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr.*** published by Naval Institute Press (October 15, 2021).

Announced today by Past Commander William H Schmidt, Esq., and Vice Commander – Historian Daniel M. Thys, M.D., Co-Chairmen of the RADM Samuel Eliot Morison Award Committee of the New York Commandery, the award will be presented to the winner by CAPT Lawrence B. Brennan, USN (Ret), Commander, New York Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States in a ceremony at The Racquet & Tennis Club on Park Avenue, New York City on Monday, November 14, 2022. For further information on the New York Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States and information on attending this event, please see the NY Commandery web site at [navalordernyc.org](http://navalordernyc.org)

The prize is named for the late **Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison**, a Harvard University history professor widely considered to be America's most distinguished naval historian. The award is administered and presented by the New York Commandery of the Naval Order of the United States. The finalists and winner are selected by a distinguished committee of members of the New York Commandery. Books may be recommended for consideration by members of the Naval Order of the United States but must be nominated for Committee consideration by a Companion of the New York Commandery. There are detailed and stringent standards that must be met by the author and the work and the Committee follows set guidelines in considering the nominees.

This distinguished writing prize is presented to an American author “who by his published writings has made a substantial contribution to the preservation of the history, heritage and traditions of the United States Sea Services – the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and U.S. Flag Merchant Marine.”

A sample of past recipients includes 1984 **Victor H. Krulak**, (*First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*); 1989 **John F. Lehman**, (*Command of the Seas*:

*Building the 600 Ship Navy*); 1999 **Edward L. Beach, Jr.**, (*Salt and Steel: Reflections of a Submariner*); 2002 **Norman Friedman**, (*Seapower As Strategy: Navies and National Interests*); 2003 **John F. Lehman**, (*On Seas of Glory: Heroic Men, Great Ships, and Epic Battles of the American Navy*); 2004 **James D. Hornfischer**, (*The Last Stand of the Tin Can Sailors*); 2005 **Michael Walling**, (*Bloodstained Sea: The U.S. Coast Guard in the Battle of the Atlantic*), 1941-1944; 2006 **Joseph F. Callo**, (*John Paul Jones: America's First Sea Warrior*); 2007 **Ian W. Toll**, (*Six Frigates: Epic History of Founding of the US Navy*); 2008 **George C. Daughan**, (*If by Sea: Forging of the US Navy*); 2009 **James L. Nelson**, (*George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea*); 2010 **James Scott**, (*The Attack on the Liberty: The Untold Story of Israel's Deadly 1967 Assault on a U.S. Spy Ship*); 2011 **Robert Gandt**, (*The Twilight Warriors: The Deadliest Naval Battle of WWII*); 2012 **Elliot Carlson**, (*Joe Rochefort's War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway*); 2013 **Walter R. Borneman**, (*The Admirals: Nimitz, Halsey, Leahy, and King — The Five-Star Admirals Who Won the War at Sea*); 2014 **Jack Cheevers**, (*Act of War: Lyndon Johnson, North Korea, and the Capture of the Spy Ship Pueblo*); 2015 **Craig L. Symonds**, (*Neptune: The Allied Invasion of Europe and the D-Day Landings*); 2016 **Tim McGrath**, (*Give Me a Fast Ship: The Continental Navy and America's Revolution at Sea*); 2017 **Richard Snow**, (*Iron Dawn: The Monitor, the Merrimack, and the Civil War Sea Battle that Changed History*); 2018 **John F. Wukovits**, (*Tin Can Titans: The Heroic Men and Ships of World War II's Most Decorated Navy Destroyer Squadron*); 2019 **Hampton Sides**, (*On Desperate Ground: The Marines at the Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle*); 2020 (No Award – COVID); and, 2021 **M. Ernest Marshall** (*Rear Admiral Herbert V. Wiley U.S. Navy: A Career in Airships and Battleships (History of Military Aviation)*)

Former Navy Secretary **John F. Lehman** is the only author honored twice with the Morison Award (*Command of the Seas & On Seas of Glory*)

The **Naval Order of the United States**, founded in 1890, prides itself on its many distinguished members, among them Admirals George Dewey, William Leahy, Ernest King, Chester Nimitz, William Halsey, Raymond Spruance, Arleigh Burke, William Crowe, and Elmo Zumwalt. Its purpose is “to encourage research and writing on naval and maritime subjects, preserve documents, portraits and other records of prominent figures, deeds and memories of our naval and maritime history.”

**Paul Stillwell** is a free-lance historian. He has a bachelor's degree in history (1966) from Drury College, Springfield, Missouri, and a master's degree in journalism (1978) from the University of Missouri. From 1962 to 1992 he participated in the Naval Reserve. He served as an enlisted man from 1962 to 1966, reaching the rating of personnelman third class. He was commissioned ensign in 1966 and officially retired in 1992 with the rank of commander. He was on active duty from 1966 to 1969; he served in the tank landing ship *Washoe County* (LST-1165), 1966-69, in the Western Pacific, including Vietnam. He served from May to October 1969 in the battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62), which operated during that period in the Eastern and Mid-Pacific. In early 1988

the Navy recalled him to active duty for a month and sent him to the Persian Gulf as a historian to document the U.S. Navy's role during the Iran-Iraq War.

In late 2004 Stillwell completed a 30-year tenure with the U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis, Maryland. From 1974 through 1981 he was with the monthly *Proceedings* magazine, working successively as departments editor, managing editor, and senior editor. From 1981 to 1987 he was editor of the annual *Naval Review* issue of *Proceedings*, and from 1987 to 1992 he served as first editor-in-chief of *Naval History* magazine. For 23 years he wrote a column for each issue of *Naval History*. From 1993 to 2004 Stillwell was director of the Naval Institute's history division.



**Paul Stillwell**

Stillwell is editor or author of 13 books:

- >*Air Raid: Pearl Harbor!* (1981)
- >*Battleship New Jersey: An Illustrated History* (1986)
- >*Battleship Arizona: An Illustrated History* (1991)
- >*The Golden Thirteen: Recollections of the First Black Naval Officers* (1993)
- >*Sharks of Steel* (coauthored with Vice Admiral Robert Kaufman, 1993)
- >*Assault on Normandy: First-Person Accounts from the Sea Services* (1994)
- >*Battleship Missouri: An Illustrated History* (1996)
- >*Battleships* (2001)
- >*Carrier War: Aviation Art of World War II* (2002)
- >*Submarine Stories: Recollections from the Diesel Boats* (2007)
- >*Aviation Art of World War II* (coauthored with James Kitchens and G. E. Patrick Murray, 2008)
- >*Trailblazer: the U.S. Navy's First Black Admiral* (coauthored with Vice Admiral Samuel L. Gravely Jr., 2010)
- >*Battleship Commander: The Life of Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr.* (2021)

*The New York Times* selected *The Golden Thirteen* as one of the notable books published in the field of history in 1993. He wrote the chapter on World War II for a

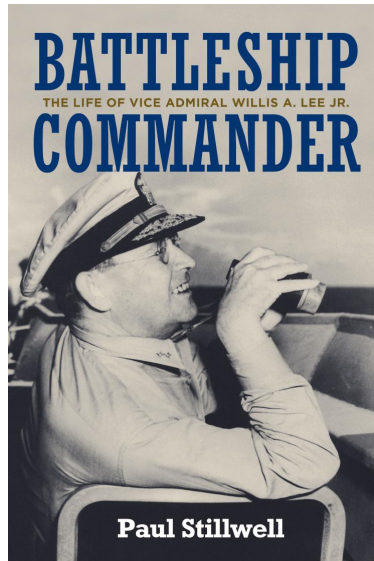
book titled *The Navy*, compiled by the Naval Historical Foundation and published in 2000 by Hugh Lauter Levin. He has contributed chapters to other books as well.

In December 1991 he was one of anchorman Tom Brokaw's guests in Hawaii during NBC-TV's live coverage of the ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Stillwell was also featured in CNN newscasts of the time and was a commentator for a CNN documentary marking the Pearl Harbor anniversary. In June 1994 Katie Couric interviewed him as part of a live Today Show broadcast from Normandy, France, for the 50th anniversary of D-Day. He also appeared on CNN and in a D-Day documentary aired on the Arts and Entertainment cable network. He served as chief consultant and an on-camera interviewee for the Discovery Channel documentary "Battleship," which aired for the first time in June 1997. Subsequently he has been an interviewee and consultant for ABC and CBS programs dealing with the USS *Missouri*. In July 1999 Stillwell provided live commentary on NBC's Today Show and CNN's Burden of Proof in connection with the burial at sea of John F. Kennedy Jr. He has appeared in History Channel programs concerning Pearl Harbor, the battleship *Arizona*, the battleship *Missouri*, Admiral William Halsey, Admiral Raymond Spruance, and the movie *The Sand Pebbles*. He appeared on the Weather Channel in a program about the typhoon that hit the U.S. Third Fleet in December 1944. In 2021 he appeared as an interviewee in a documentary about ships named USS *St. Louis*, produced by the St. Louis PBS station.

In April 1994 Stillwell was awarded the Naval Institute book author of the year award for 1993, based on the publication of *The Golden Thirteen* and *Sharks of Steel*. In August 1994 he received the Navy League's annual Alfred Thayer Mahan Award for Literary Achievement. In September 2017 the Naval Historical Foundation presented Stillwell the prestigious Dudley Knox Award for career achievement in naval history. In 2020 Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region selected him for the Forrest Pogue Award for excellence in oral history collection. In April 2022 he received the Naval Institute book author of the year award for 2021, based on the publication of *Battleship Commander: The Life of Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr.*

Stillwell has done hundreds of oral history interviews, including 75 during his three-week stay in the Persian Gulf in 1988. In that time the interviewees ranged from the admirals running Operation Earnest Will to a ship's cook and a Marine sentry. His award-winning book *The Golden Thirteen* was based entirely on oral histories, and interviews played a large part in his books on battleships and submarines, Pearl Harbor, and Normandy. On behalf of the U.S. Naval Institute, he did the interviews, editing, and indexing of dozens of bound volumes of career-length oral history transcripts. Subjects included Chiefs of Naval Operations, Coast Guard Commandants, fleet commanders, naval pioneers, enlisted personnel, the first black admiral, Navy diver Carl Brashear whose life was covered in the movie *Men of Honor*, the first black naval officers, the first commanding officer of the first nuclear submarine, prisoners of war, and a Navy medical officer. For the Naval Historical Foundation, Stillwell did a career-length oral history of Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For the Pritzker Military Library he did oral histories of two Marines who served on Iwo Jima in 1945.

## ABOUT *BATTLESHIP COMMANDER*



This is the first-ever biography of Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr., who served a key role during World War II in the Pacific. Recognizing the achievements and legacy of one of the war's top combat admirals has been long overdue until now.

*Battleship Commander* explores Lee's life from boyhood in Kentucky through his eventual service as commander of the fast battleships from 1942 to 1945. Paul Stillwell draws on more than 150 first-person accounts from those who knew and served with Lee from boyhood until the time of his death. Said to be down to earth, modest, forgiving, friendly, and with a wry sense of humor, Lee eschewed the media and, to the extent possible, left administrative details to others. Stillwell relates the sequential building of a successful career, illustrating Admiral Lee's focus on operational, tactical, and strategic concerns. During his service in the Navy Department from 1939 to 1942, Lee prepared the U.S. Navy for war at sea, and was involved in inspecting designs for battleships, cruisers, aircraft carriers, and destroyers. He sent observers to Britain to report on Royal Navy operations during the war against Germany and made plans to send an action team to mainland China to observe conditions for possible later Allied landings there. Putting his focus on the need to equip U.S. warships with radar and antiaircraft guns, Lee was one of the few flag officers of his generation who understood the tactical advantage of radar, especially during night battles.

In 1942 Willis Lee became commander of the first division of fast battleships to operate in the Pacific. During that service, he commanded Task Force 64, which achieved a tide-turning victory in a night battle near Guadalcanal in November 1942. Lee missed two major opportunities for surface actions against the Japanese. In June 1944, in the Marianas campaign, he declined to engage because his ships were not trained adequately

to operate together in surface battles. In October 1944, Admiral William Halsey's bungled decisions denied Lee's ships an opportunity for combat.

Continuing his career of service near the end of the war, Lee, in the summer of 1945, directed anti-kamikaze research efforts in Casco Bay, Maine. While Lee's wartime successes and failures make for compelling reading, what is here in this biography is a balanced look at the man and officer.

## Reviews

**"Former naval officer Paul Stillwell has earned a deserved place as 'Mr. Battleship' in history circles. And if 'long-awaited' ever described a biography, *Battleship Commander* must retire the trophy. Stillwell began researching the Lee story more than 40 years ago, and the results show. He combines an enormous amount of research and interviews ... in a text of fluid prose and often gripping narrative." -- *American Rifleman***

**"*Battleship Commander* not only demonstrates Lee's importance to American naval professionalism in his own day, but also his legacy of leadership for today's Navy.... The biography is top notch." --*The Strategy Bridge***

**"Paul Stillwell has filled one of the remaining voids in the bibliographic study of America's World War II naval leadership with his well-written narrative of Vice Adm. Willis A. 'Ching' Lee.... This study in leadership is highly [recommended] to all SWOs." --*Naval Historical Foundation***

**"This is a very professionally and personally researched and delightfully written biography of one of America's least known but most effective naval leaders of the Pacific part of World War II. The book should, very deservedly, make Admiral Lee much better known and appreciated." --*Baird Maritime***

**"*Battleship Commander: The Life of Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee Jr.* by Paul Stillwell and published by USNI is such a joy to read. The author clearly presents how VADM Lee's marksmanship, advanced mathematical skills, cleverness, and wit in his childhood years later benefitted the U.S. Navy in wartime Pacific. This book would be a perfect reference for future navy commanders as it reveals how Lee could generate a cohesive and happy crew. Lee was very much appreciated by ADM Nimitz for his brilliant mind, and his ability to transfer theory into practice, but most of all for his humility and non-pompous nature." --*The Maritime Review***

**"*Battleship Commander* by Paul Stillwell is one of those books that you start it and just can't put down until it's finished - then you pick it back up and read it again! If you want an insight into Admiral Lee's interactions with Naval personnel - his peers and superiors as well as subordinates - this will work for you." --*Guns, Food, and More***

**"Admiral Lee deserves to be more widely known than he is today, and this book is a fitting tribute to his naval career. The author takes us from Lee's humble beginning in Natlee, Kentucky, to his tragic death aboard a navy small boat transporting him to his office on Great Diamond island near Portland, Maine. Between these two events lies a tale of a professional sailor who did his job well and deserves recognition for his skilled service." --*WWII History***

**"*Battleship Commander* is a long-overdue book that illuminates the life of W.A. 'Ching' Lee Jr. This book will appeal to students of naval history with its perspective on the battles of Savo Island and Leyte Gulf, but also for its insights into how the relationships between officers shape the decisions and performance of the task forces and fleets. It's a good study in leadership. The work is an excellent example showing that there is more than one way to lead and succeed within an organization. Lee's life demonstrates how elements of servant leadership help an organization succeed. Stillwell's book has earned a spot on the bookshelf next to Potter's biographies of Nimitz and Halsey." --*Armchair General***

**"Compelling reading ... [and] a balanced look at the man and officer." --*Virtual Mirage***

**"Stillwell has dived deeply into the life of a modest but brilliant operational commander, respected by all ranks. The author's impressive collection of memories of Lee from those who knew him vary from considered professional assessments of his leadership qualities to folksy anecdotes which not only illustrate his humanity but gives the reader an insight into the world of the 1920s and 30s and the vast U.S. Navy of the war years. A fine biography of a fine man." --*Australian Naval Institute***

**"While Lee's wartime successes and failures make for compelling reading, what is here in this biography is a balanced look at the man and officer." --*Virtual Mirage***

**"*Battleship Commander* is a deeply researched and fascinating look at the naval war in the Pacific. While many books have been written about other leaders like Admirals Nimitz, Spruance, Halsey and Mitscher, and there are many fine accounts of the campaigns there, until now the important contribution of Willis A. Lee has been largely neglected. Perhaps that is due in part to Lee's own modesty - indeed, he always shunned the spotlight. Stillwell's welcome examination of this key player gives a very important perspective on a complicated and multifaceted war that continues to reveal new insights." --*StrategyPage***

**"A fascinating description of a true naval hero of the Second World War, whose combat experiences in fast battleships and early understanding of radar became part of the DNA of the surface Navy. Paul Stillwell brings a lifetime of experience as a naval historian to bear in this well written and timely biography." --Adm. James Stavridis, 16th Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and author of *The Sailor's Bookshelf: Fifty Books to Know the Sea***

**"Behind an outward façade of country manners and a notably untidy uniform, Vice Admiral Willis Augustus ('Ching') Lee wielded an acute intelligence and a preternatural ability to work a complex tactical plot in his head. A world class-marksman whether aiming a pistol or 16-inch guns-he relaxed by checking firing table math in publications. In November 1942, he gained immortality as the victor in one of the most desperate battles in U.S. Navy history that decided the struggle for Guadalcanal. With relentless research, deep immersion in the Navy of World War II and an agile pen, Paul Stillwell's superb biography installs Lee as one of the greatest admirals in U.S. history." --Richard B. Frank, author of *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire***

**"Admiral Willis Lee fought and won arguably the most important naval battle of the pivotal Guadalcanal campaign. Paul Stillwell's superb biography gives us an intimate look at a uniquely human commander, and one of the most gifted surface warfare officers the U.S. Navy has ever produced." --Jon Parshall, co-author of *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway***

**"In *Battleship Commander*, Paul Stillwell brings to life one of the U.S. Navy's most unusual admirals of WWII. Shunning the spotlight, Willis A. Lee Jr. fashioned a quiet leadership style that produced momentous results. Stillwell has sketched a rich portrait of a unique admiral who doesn't fit the stereotype of an admiral." --Elliot Carlson, author of *Joe Rochefort's War: The Odyssey of the Codebreaker Who Outwitted Yamamoto at Midway***

**"Finally, a biography of Admiral Lee. Stillwell has made a great contribution to the historical record. Through personal interviews and letters, he gives us insight into the U.S. Navy's foremost battleship commander. Lee's many talents, great effectiveness, and quiet humility are all detailed in this thoroughly researched and engaging account." --Trent Hone, author of *Learning War: The Evolution of Fighting Doctrine in the U.S. Navy, 1898-1945* and co-author of *Battle Line: The United States Navy, 1919-1939***

**"Paul Stillwell writings on any World War II naval subject produced is an absolute must read for anyone interested in the field. His life of Willis Lee is one of the most anticipated books of the season and will deserve the close attention of anybody who cares about the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during World War II and its flowering as a war-winner. His work lives and breathes as a testament to the professionalism and rigors of naval operational arts and the spectacular ends which they can be put." - James D. Hornfischer, author of *Neptune's Inferno* and *The Fleet at Flood Tide***

**"What an extraordinary achievement by Paul Stillwell in bringing alive this wonderfully told and compelling story of a truly important hero of World War II. From Lee's early years as a young hellion to the pivotal naval battle he won at Guadalcanal, this is a book to savor. Filled with fascinating anecdotes, it shows us the path to greatness and the cost of war on a man and his family." --Robert J.**



**Mrazek, award-winning author of *The Indomitable Florence Finch: The Untold Story of a War Widow Turned Resistance Fighter and Savior of American POWs***