

**Cdr. Bernard J. O'Rourke U.S. Navy**  
*He Became an Officer and a Gentleman,  
Which is an Enviably thing.....Rudyard Kipling*

Bernard was born in Livingston, Montana in April, 1929. His mother died soon after and his father left for work in San Francisco leaving him in Philipsburg with his grandfather and unmarried aunts to raise. They ran a boarding house at the end of the main street (it's still there) and that's where Bernard grew up. He did the usual things as a boy i.e. fishing on Rock Creek, Boy Scouts, playing basketball etc.

By the time he was in high school, his grandfather and aunts had passed away. Alone again, he was taken in by the owner of the Philipsburg Hardware Store (Ed Poese) and his wife (Waive K. Poese) who was the superintendent of the Granite County schools. Ed died the year that they had taken Bernard in, but he stayed on with Waive to finish high school.

Although his early life wasn't easy, he managed to earn a scholarship to Carroll College in Helena, Montana. He completed three years in Pre Med and with the onset of the Korean War (1950) a sense of patriotism prompted him to join the U.S. Navy, serving as a Medic with the Marines. He was wounded rescuing a Marine and awarded the Purple Heart. While still in a Naval Hospital he applied and was accepted for flight training. Earning his Navy Wings of Gold, he was commissioned an Ensign in 1952 in Pensacola, Florida.

Most of Bernard's career was spent as an Anti Submarine Warfare (ASW) pilot and specialist. He flew aboard several US aircraft carriers and was awarded many medals and citations for exemplary service. In between carrier and squadron deployments, he was able to complete his education at the US Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California earning a Masters in Foreign Affairs.

Recognized for his ASW expertise, he was assigned as the US Navy Exchange Pilot with the Canadian Squadron VS 188 stationed at HMCS (Her Majesty's Canadian Ship) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Flying aboard the Canadian carrier (HMCS Bonaventure) during the Russian Missile Crisis in Cuba he was recognized for his exemplary performance and awarded his first Commendation Medal for Meritorious Service.

He served a tour at the Pentagon in Washington, DC as the Staff Operations Officer. There he was responsible for briefing senior staff officers including Admiral Rickover (of submarine fame) on ASW activities in both the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets and the latest developments in Submarine detection.

Following his Washington, DC tour, he was ordered to Naval Air Station (NAS) Atsugi, Japan as Staff Air Planning Officer responsible for coordination of US Navy and Marine activities in Vietnam. He was awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Vietnam), the Vietnam Service Medal and the Navy Unit Commendation Medal presented by the Secretary of the Navy John H. Chafee..

The Navy Unit Commendation Medal was awarded for his exceptional servicewhile performing the mission of providing aviation logistic support to the Pacific Fleet and to Marine Corps aviation units engaged in combat operations in Southeast Asia.

In 1970 his Foreign Affairs expertise was needed as the Japanese Imperial Navy (now known as the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) was to reoccupy their old base (Atsugi). He was ordered to remain at Atsugi as the Executive Officer of the base to coordinate that effort.

Completing that assignment Bernard and family returned to the states for his final assignment at NAS Sand Point in Seattle, WA as the Thirteenth Naval District Planning Officer. Here he was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by the President of the United States. In particular he was recognized as being responsible for the coordination of Operation Homecoming (the return of the Vietnam Prisoners of War (POW)). His personal dedication to detail and sensitivity for the personal problems of the POW's ensured the successful completion of the operation with dignity and compassion. Admiral Holloway, Chief of Naval Operations wrote "By his untiring effort, astute leadership, and steadfast devotion to duty, Commander O'Rourke reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service He served a total of 28 years with 11 of those years assigned as Foreign/Sea Service.

He died on July 9, 2002 and in accord with his last wishes, he shipped out to sea aboard the USS Ford (Naval Frigate) for his Burial at Sea. The Commanding Officer of the USS Ford remarked "Commander O'Rourke loved the Navy. He loved his family. He was proud of his Montanan heritage and he served them all well. What more can be said of a man? His was a proud and distinguished career. Squadron mates and friends frequently spoke of his "Montanan" character of honesty and integrity. He was very proud of being from Montana/Philipsburg and remarked that his sense of duty to country, family, honor and pride he owned to the people of that small town. His was not a life of ease or privilege, but he was determined to succeed and that he did. He never forgot Philipsburg and its people, so Bernard's family consider it fitting that he be remembered at his old high school along the Wall of Honor. And it is hoped by the family that each year a student who best emulates these qualities is chosen for this scholarship.