

RADM Earl P. Yates, USN



*Earl P. Yates entered the U.S. Naval Academy in 1940 and served as a Naval Aviator until his retirement as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans for Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) in 1974. He served in extensive combat in World War II aboard destroyer USS **DYSON** (DD-572) at the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay and Battle of Cape St. George. He had Vietnam War experience as OIC of SEVENTH Fleet Detachment CHARLIE in Saigon. His commands included VF-41, VAH-9, Carrier Air Group EIGHT, USS **RALEIGH** (LPD-1,) USS **JOHN F. KENNEDY** (CVA-67 —first Commanding Officer,) Fleet Air Whidbey/Fleet Air Wing FOUR, and U.S. Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Operations Support Group.*

Earl Preston Yates was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on 23 December 1923, son of Earl Preston and Elizabeth Pool (Holton) Yates.¹

Graduating from high school at 15-years old, “Buddy” Yates first attended the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, before he was able to enter the U.S. Naval Academy in July 1940 with the class of 1944. With the outbreak of World War II, his Academy class was accelerated by a year. He graduated and was commissioned an ensign on 9 June 1943. As a result, he was one of the youngest (19 years old) graduates of USNA. He was first assigned to the destroyer USS DYSON (DD-572) as a gunnery officer. Assigned to Destroyer Division FORTY-FIVE and Destroyer Squadron TWENTY-THREE, under Captain Arleigh Burke, DYSON participated in the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay on 1-2 November 1943, contributing to sinking a Japanese light cruiser and a destroyer and damaging four other Japanese warships. On the night of 24-25 November, DYSON participated in the lopsided U.S. victory in the Battle of Cape St. George, contributing to sinking three Japanese destroyers. DYSON engaged in numerous other combat actions along the coast of New Guinea, before joining with Task Force 38 in late 1944 for carrier strikes on Luzon, Formosa and the coast of China. DYSON, along with the rest of DESRON 23 was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

On the night of 24-25 November 1943, DYSON was one of five U.S. destroyers that engaged five Japanese destroyers off the northwestern tip of Bougainville. In a battle that could easily have gone either way, as so many had in the vicious night surface battles in the Solomon Islands, the U.S. destroyers came out ahead, sinking three and badly damaging a fourth Japanese destroyer, without suffering a hit or casualty in return. The usual description of the Battle of Cape St. George as “near perfect” distorts just how fine a line there was between victory and defeat. Ensign Yates understood just how lucky he was (and so did Arleigh Burke.) This was Ensign Yates’ second night battle, the first even more ferocious and confused, yet DYSON came through that battle (Empress Augusta Bay) unscathed as well. By the end of 1944, DYSON had sunk three Japanese warships, two cargo ships, participated in eight shore bombardments, and shot down seven Japanese planes, without being hit. Years later when his wife passed, Buddy Yates designed his own headstone (a bench at the USNA cemetery;) under his name is just one word, “Lucky.”

¹ Modern Biographical Files in the Navy Department Library, “Yates, Earl Preston” (<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/research-guides/modern-biographical-files-ndl/modern-bios-y/yates-earl-preston.html>). Retrieved 3 October 2021.

In December 1944, Ensign Yates returned to the U.S. for flight training and was designated a Naval Aviator in December 1945. He was then assigned to Bombing-Fighting Squadron EIGHTY-TWO (VBF-82,) flying the F4U-4 Corsair and deploying to the Mediterranean aboard carrier USS [RANDOLPH](#) (CV-15) with subsequent operations in the Caribbean and North Atlantic, primarily as a midshipman training ship until being decommissioned and placed in reserve. In June 1948, Lieutenant Yates was assigned to the Naval Postgraduate School at Annapolis, MD for instruction in aeronautical engineering. At some point he earned a Masters Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In June 1951 he reported for duty under instruction to Fleet All-weather Training Unit Atlantic. In January 1952 he was assigned to Experimental Squadron THREE (VX-3,) flying the F6U Pirate (disparagingly dubbed the "Groundhog,") which was deemed underpowered, unsuitable for combat, and never issued to operational units. he served during the very dangerous transition from propeller to jet aircraft in the U.S. Navy; test flying the underpowered "Groundhog" was particularly challenging. The squadron then experimented with probe and drogue aerial refueling with the AJ-1 Savage, a large carrier-based bomber intended to carry atomic weapons.

In June 1953, Lieutenant Commander Yates reported as Executive Officer of Fighter Squadron FOUR ONE (VF-41) "Black Aces" flying the F2H-3 Banshee straight-wing jet fighter, deploying to the Caribbean aboard the newly-modernized carrier USS [HORNET](#) (CVA-12.) After he fleeted up to Commanding Officer in September 1954, VF-41 deployed to the Mediterranean, embarked on carrier RANDOLPH (CVA-15.) He commanded a Banshee jet squadron at a time when U.S. Navy operational losses were very high. In June 1955, he reported to the Armament Division of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Washington DC.

In June 1958, Commander Yates reported to Heavy Attack Squadron NINE (VAH-9) as Executive Officer and then Commanding Officer. VAH-9 flew the A3D-2 Skywarrior (also known as the "All three dead" due to the improbability of the three person crew surviving any crash, as the huge jet had no ejection seats), deploying to the Mediterranean aboard new carrier USS [SARATOGA](#) (CVA-60.) In June 1960, he attended the Air War College at Max-

well AFB, AL. In June 1961 he reported to Carrier Air Group FOUR for Air Group pipeline training before assuming command of Carrier Air Group EIGHT (CVG 8) in November 1961, embarked on USS [FORRESTAL](#) (CVA-59,) for a Mediterranean deployment. In November 1962 he was assigned to the Joint Staff in Washington DC. In July 1963, he reported as Administrative Aide to the Secretary of the Navy (three different SECNAVS including Paul Nitze.) In July 1964, he became Executive Assistant and Naval Aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research and Development.

In June 1965, Captain Yates assumed command of the landing ship dock USS [RALEIGH](#) (LPD-1,) including amphibious exercises in Norway north of the Arctic Circle. In July 1966, he assumed duty as Officer-in-Charge of Commander SEVENTH Fleet Staff Detachment CHARLIE in Saigon, Vietnam, for which he was awarded a Legion of Merit. In July 1967, he reported to the staff of Commander Naval Air Force Atlantic Fleet. In October 1967, he was named Prospective Commanding Officer of carrier USS [JOHN F. KENNEDY](#) (CVA-67,) then under construction at Newport, VA. He assumed command upon her commissioning on 7 September 1968, taking her through shakedown trials, workups and her initial deployment to the Mediterranean. “Buddy” Yates had the opportunity to establish a command climate of excellence that endured throughout the life of the ship.

Promoted to Rear Admiral, in September 1969 he assumed command of Fleet Air, Whidbey and Fleet Air Wing FOUR, at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, WA. Fleet Air Wing FOUR was disestablished in April 1970, but he remained in command of Fleet Air, Whidbey until July 1971. He then assumed command of Amphibious Operations Support Command, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. In July 1972, he reported to the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command staff as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans, where he was awarded a second Legion of Merit. He retired from Active Duty on 1 July 1974.

RADM Yates’ awards include the Legion of Merit (two awards,) Meritorious Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, National Defense Service Medal (two awards,) Vietnam Service

Medal (one bronze star,) Republic of Vietnam Navy Distinguished Service Order with bronze star, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal with Device.

After retiring from active duty, “Buddy” Yates spent time with his large extended family and wintering in the Bahamas on his boat, the Puka Kai, and was active in support of the Vietnamese immigrant community. He retained a life-long association with the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV-67) and her crew. He was present for the keel laying for USS [JOHN F. KENNEDY](#) (CVN-79) on 22 August 2015 and gave the order to lay the keel. He was present for the christening of CVN-79 on 7 December 2019.

“Buddy” may have given a lot of credit to “luck,” but he was also extremely good at what he did. He was talented at many things, and his obituary reads like a true “Renaissance Man” who could have done anything with his life, so it was actually our nation and Navy that were lucky to have benefited from his long and distinguished service in many years at sea and in command.

Rear Admiral Earl Preston “Buddy” Yates, U.S. Navy (Retired) passed away on 13 September 2021 at age 97.

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