

RADM Robert H. Gormley, USN



RADM Gormley enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1943, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1947, and served as a Naval Aviator until his retirement in 1976 as Chief of the Studies, Analysis and Gaming Agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He served in the Korean War combat zone and in the Vietnam combat zone as Commanding Officer of Fighter Squadron VF-41 (over 100 combat missions,) Operations Officer for Carrier Group FIVE, and Commanding Officer of USS [WHITE PLAINS](#) (AFS-4.) Additional commands included Carrier Attack Wing SEVEN and USS [JOHN F. KENNEDY](#) (CVA-67.) For his Vietnam service he was awarded a Legion of Merit with Combat "V," two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Bronze Stars, and three Navy Commendation Medals with Combat "V."

Robert Gormley enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve on 17 February 1943, during the height of World War II. Initially in the inactive reserve, he was accepted into the V-12 (Reserve Officer) Program and commenced studies at the University of Texas. In 1944, he was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy in the wartime accelerated (three years) Class 1948A. His classmates described him as a “gentle, lovable, sensitive soul.” Nevertheless, he graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Naval Science and was commissioned an ensign on 6 June 1947.

Ensign Gormley’s first assignment was to the East Coast destroyer USS [PUTNAM](#) (DD-757,) deploying twice to the Mediterranean. PUTNAM was the first U.S. Navy ship to fly the United Nations flag when she was the first of three destroyers assigned to assist UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in his attempt to bring about a cease-fire after Israel declared independence in May 1948 and surrounding Arab nations attacked in response. On 23 July 1948, PUTNAM went into Haifa, Israel to evacuate the UN team when a truce broke down. (Bernadotte was assassinated in September 1948 by Zionist extremists.)

Selected for Naval Aviation, Ensign Gormley reported to Naval Air Station Pensacola in January 1949 for flight training. Lieutenant (junior grade) Gormley earned his wings of gold and was designated a Naval Aviator (HTA) on 28 June 1950. This was followed by additional training at the Naval School for All-Weather Flight at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. In August 1950, LTJG Gormley was assigned to the newly-activated (in response to the outbreak of the Korean War) reserve Anti-Submarine Warfare Squadron VS-892 “Red Griffins,” flying the TBM-3S/3W ASW variant of the Avenger torpedo bomber. The squadron deployed to the Western Pacific aboard the escort carrier USS [SICILY](#) (CVE-118,) but was disembarked and replaced by a Marine F4U Corsair squadron for urgently needed close-air support to Marines holding the Pusan Perimeter in Korea. VS-892 operated from shore until the later arrival of reactivated escort carrier USS [RENDOVA](#) (CVE-114.) In January 1952, Lieutenant Gormley transferred to the staff of Commander, Carrier Division SEVENTEEN as Aide and Flag Lieutenant, embarked on escort carrier USS [BADOENG STRAIT](#) (CVE-116) for her second Korean War deployment.

In March 1953, LT Gormley transferred to Fighter Squadron VF-143 as it was transitioning to the new swept-wing version of the F9F, the F9F-6 Cougar. On 7 December 1953, LT Gormley was injured in an aircraft accident and spent several months in the hospital. In May 1954, LT Gormley reported to Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Kingsville, Texas as a jet flight instructor. In January 1955, he then reported to Naval Air Station Olathe, Kansas as Standardization Officer and Flight Instructor with the Jet Transitional Training Unit.

In May 1957, Lieutenant Commander Gormley assumed duty as Operations Officer for Fighter Squadron VF-31, flying the all-weather jet fighter F3H-2N (one of the first squadrons to deploy with the new AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missile.) VF-31 embarked on the new attack carrier USS [SARATOGA](#) (CVA-60) for her second deployment, including providing air cover for the U.S. Marine amphibious landing in Lebanon in response to the 1958 crisis. In December 1958, LCDR Gormley reported as Fighter Training Officer on the staff of Commander Carrier Group FOUR, which was responsible for the first two “super-carriers,” USS [FORRESTAL](#) (CVA-59) and SARATOGA. In June 1959, he attended the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, graduating in June 1960. He then served as Assistant Fighter Weapons Officer on the staff of Commander, Operational Test and Evaluation Force (COMOPTEVFOR.) In August 1962 he attended Harvard University in Cambridge Massachusetts, graduating in July 1963 with a Masters Degree in Public Administration.

Following transition training in Fighter Squadron VF-101 to the F-4B Phantom II jet fighter-bomber, Commander Gormley reported to Fighter Squadron VF-41 as Executive Officer, deploying to the Mediterranean with Carrier Attack Wing SEVEN, embarked on USS [INDEPENDENCE](#) (CVA-62.) He assumed command of VF-41 in February 1965 for INDEPENDENCE’s Vietnam deployment from May to December 1965. INDEPENDENCE was the fifth carrier to deploy to Vietnam, and arrived at a time when air combat operations over North Vietnam took a dramatic increase. During 100 days on station in the Gulf of Tonkin between June and November 1965, CDR Gormley flew over 100 combat missions, including the first major series of coordinated strikes on vital North Vietnamese supply lines north of the Hanoi-Haiphong complex. The

strikes were met with the most massive surface-to-air missile barrage in history (to that point—it got a lot worse.) For his leadership in combat missions, CDR Gormley was awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Bronze Star, eight Air Medals, and three Navy Commendation Medals with Combat “V.” INDEPENDENCE (and VF-41) were awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for this deployment.

In June 1966, CDR Gormley assumed command of Carrier Attack Wing SEVEN, embarked on INDEPENDENCE for another Mediterranean deployment. Upon conclusion of the deployment, CDR Gormley was assigned duty in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Systems Analysis) in Washington DC.

Promoted to captain in July 1968, CAPT Gormley reported as Operations Officer on the staff of Commander Carrier Division FIVE, then homported at Cubi Point, Subic Bay, Philippines, but constantly rotating amongst the carriers conducting strike operations into North Vietnam from Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin (as many as four or five carriers at a time, including the ASW carrier, during this period.) CAPT Gormley was awarded a Legion of Merit with Combat “V.” Following a training pipeline, CAPT Gormley assumed command of the new combat stores ship USS [WHITE PLAINS](#) (AFS-4;) he was the second commanding officer. WHITE PLAINS deployed to the Gulf of Tonkin providing underway replenishment to the carriers on Yankee station and surface combatants on the gunline off Vietnam. CAPT Gormley was awarded a Bronze Star for this command tour. WHITE PLAINS was also the class trial ship for the Vulcan Phalanx Close-in-Weapon System (CIWS) but none were installed on other ships of the class due to funding. In October 1971, CAPT Gormley assumed command of the attack carrier USS [JOHN F. KENNEDY](#) (CVA-67,) at that time the newest carrier in the fleet. CAPT Gormley took JOHN F. KENNEDY on an extended Mediterranean deployment including operations in the far northern Atlantic.

In January 1973, CAPT Gormley assumed duty as Head, Command and Policy Branch in the Strategic Plans and Policy Division in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. He was promoted to rear admiral on 28 March 1973. In June 1973, RADM Gormley was assigned as the Inspector General for Com-

mander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet in Norfolk. His last assignment was as Chief of the Studies, Analysis and Gaming Agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon, Washington DC. RADM Gormley retired in July 1976.

RADM Gormley's awards include the Legion of Merit with Combat "V," two additional Legion of Merits, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Bronze Stars, eight Air Medals, three Navy Commendation Medals with Combat "V," the Navy Unit Commendation, two Meritorious Unit Commendations, American Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, China Service Medal, Navy Occupation Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal (two awards,) Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Following retirement from active duty, RADM Gormley developed an aerospace and defense advisory business focused on unmanned aerial vehicle systems, new aircraft development, aircraft combat survivability, and military intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Clients included U.S. and foreign entities, including the Defense Advanced Research Programs Agency (DARPA,) Office of the Secretary of Defense (Intelligence,) and the Department of Defense Joint Aircraft Survivability Program. International projects included the sale of defense material to Greece, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and China. His pro bono work included participation on national security studies undertaken by the National Academy of Science and the Defense Science Board. He also founded the Combat Survivability Division of the National Defense Industrial Association, and served as the Chairman for 16 years. He also actively supported the Wounded Warrior Project.

The "gentle, lovable, sensitive soul," described by his USNA classmates, was also a true warrior with a calm, commanding presence and a sharp mind and keen wit. When the Vietnam War boiled over in 1965, he set the example of duty first, demonstrating combat leadership from the front, emulated by many squadron CO/XO's and airwing CO's to follow as the war became ever more dangerous and costly. Robert Gormley volunteered for a dangerous business. Flying big TBM torpedo-bombers off small escort carriers was always

risky; doing it in all weather and at night in the Sea of Japan in the winter during the Korean War was especially challenging. He transitioned to jet fighters at a particularly dangerous time; he didn't let injuries from aircraft accident deter him, as he subsequently flew the F3H Demon, the aircraft with the second highest operational loss rate of any Navy jet fighter. Besides 100 combat missions in Vietnam, he continued to make valuable contributions to the war effort on the staff of CARDIV FIVE and as CO of a combat stores ship providing critical and timely support to ships engaged in combat operations. His exceptional leadership abilities were recognized by being trusted with command of the Navy's newest aircraft carrier at the time, the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY, with the opportunity to set a standard of excellence for the life of the ship. He was promoted to flag at an exceptionally challenging time in the U.S. Navy, dealing with post-Vietnam budget cuts and social upheaval. Much of his Navy career and post-Navy career focused on improving aircraft survivability, to which more than a few Naval Aviators probably owe their lives. His example of duty and sacrifice in long years at sea serves as an inspiration to all who continue to serve in this most challenging profession. His legacy lives on.

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