

Rear Admiral (lower half) Cathal Liam "Irish" Flynn, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired) passed on 25 February 2021 at age 82. Irish enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1960, earned a place in the Underwater Demolition Team Community, transitioned to the SEALs, and served in the Naval Special Warfare Community until his retirement in 1990 as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations. He earned a Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V," a Combat Action Ribbon and Presidential Unit Citation for his Vietnam War tours in 1964 and 1967; he went on to command Underwater Demolition Team TWELVE, Naval Special Warfare Group ONE, and was the first flag officer to lead the Naval Security and Investigative Service (now NCIS.)

Born in Dublin, Ireland, Irish attended schools in Ireland, France and Spain, before graduating from Trinity College of the University of Dublin in 1959 with a Baccalaureus in Arte Ingeniaria (BAI) degree in Civil Engineering. On 8 February 1960, he enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve to attend Officer Candidate School in Newport Rhode Island. He was commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve and continued on active duty. In June 1960, Ensign Flynn reported to the Naval Amphibious School at Little Creek, Virginia, where he entered the intense Underwater Demolition Team replacement officer training program and was one of the three out of 14 officers to make it through the class. He would subsequently earn qualifications as a diver and parachutist.

In October 1960, ENS Flynn reported to Underwater Demolition Team ELEVEN (UDT 11) as a Platoon Officer at Coronado, California. In December 1961 he was promoted to lieutenant (junior grade) and sometime during this tour was awarded a Master of Arts in Civil Engineering from the University of Dublin. On 1 January 1962, SEAL Team ONE was stood up at Coronado and SEAL Team TWO at Little Creek, formed entirely out of personnel from UDT Teams. For many years, the existence of these SEAL teams was classified secret. In November 1963, LTJG Flynn became a member of SEAL Team ONE. He deployed to Vietnam in 1964 as a naval advisor under the special operations section of the U.S. Military Advisory Command Vietnam (MAC-V) in the Danang area, where he was awarded a Secretary of the Navy Commendation for Achievement that stated, "the results of his efforts were vividly demonstrated by the successful combat accomplishments of the forces trained under his personal supervision." He was promoted to lieutenant in June 1964 and augmented into the U.S. Navy in May 1965.

LT Flynn reported to Washington DC in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations as Assistant for Special Operations (OP-345E.) In June 1967, he returned to SEAL Team ONE as Executive Officer and Officer-in-Charge of Detachment BRAVO operating in the vicinity of Nha Be against Viet Cong forces in the Rung Sat Special Zone in the Mekong Delta. LT Flynn was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V" and SEAL Team ONE was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.

In July 1967, LT Flynn assumed command of Underwater Demolition Team TWELVE at Coronado, during which UDT-12 was awarded a Meritorious Unit Commendation. Promoted to lieutenant commander in July 1969, the same month he attended the Naval War College where he was a distinguished graduate in 1970.

In June 1970, LCDR Flynn reported to the Naval Ship Systems Command as Principal Assistant for Special Warfare Units, where he was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal (very rare for an O-4 at the time.) In August 1972, he attended the American University in Washington DC where he earned a Master of Arts in International Studies with a specialty in East Asia/China, graduating in June 1974.

Promoted to commander in June 1974, he reported that month to the staff of Commander-in-Chief, US. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor as Amphibious and Special Warfare Officer. In June 1976 he attended the National Defense University, graduating in 1977. In June 1977, CDR Flynn reported as Chief Staff Officer (CSO) for Naval Special Warfare Group ONE in Coronado, California. CDR Flynn returned to the Pentagon in August 1979, this time to the Office of the Secretary of Defense as the country director for Iran and Indian Ocean affairs, just in time for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the

Iranian hostage crisis, including the failed U.S rescue attempt (Operation Eagle Claw,) and the Iraqi invasion of Iran.

Promoted to captain in November 1980, he assumed command of Naval Special Warfare Group ONE in Coronado in July 1981. In March 1984, after attending the Naval War College two-month post command course, he reported to the recently created Joint Special Operations Command (incorporating lessons learned from Operation Eagle Claw) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina as the Director of Operations (J3.)

In August 1985, CAPT Flynn was designated a rear admiral (lower half) for duty in a billet commensurate with that rank, becoming the first flag officer to head the Naval Investigative Service (NIS) as it assumed additional responsibilities and transitioned to the Naval Security and Investigative Command. His tenure was marked by intensive counter-intelligence actions and investigations with the break-up of the Walker-Whitworth spy ring operating within the U.S. Navy, and the arrest of Navy Intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, spying for Israel. He also served concurrently as the Assistant Director of Naval Intelligence for Counter-Intelligence and Anti-Terrorism. He was promoted to rear admiral (lower half) on 1 February 1987.

In September 1987, RDML Flynn then reported to the newly established (April 1987) U.S. Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida as the Director for Plans, Policy and Doctrine (J5.) In September 1989 he returned to Washington DC as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations. RDML Flynn retired on 1 August 1990.

RDML Flynn's awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (two awards,) the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit (two awards,) the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V" (two awards,) Navy Achievement Medal, Combat Action Ribbon, Presidential Unit Citation (for SEAL Team ONE,) Meritorious Unit Commendation (for UDT 12,) National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with silver star, Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Commendation (Gallantry Cross,) and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

After retiring from active duty, RDML Flynn joined the Science Applications International Corporation. He served on committees of the National Research Council and the Defense Science Board. From 1993 to 2000 he served as the Associate Administrator for Civilian Aviation Security in the Federal Aviation Administration, receiving superior achievement awards from the FAA and Department of Transportation in a sometimes frustrating endeavor to improve aviation and airline security. Although no longer in the position, he was called to testify in hearings following the 9/11 attacks, noting that aviation security was previously premised under the assumption that hijackers wanted to achieve an objective, but also wanted to live. He subsequently served on the Advisory Board of the Homeland Security and Defense Divisions of Isonics, Corporation.

There is an expression sometimes heard around the Pentagon that nowadays you can't turn around without a three or four-star Navy SEAL serving in positions vital to national security, before and after they retire. It's an exaggeration, but Navy SEALs have served as Numbered Fleet Commanders, Commanders and Deputy Commanders of Combatant Commands, Director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center and Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, among others, all a testament to the extraordinary leadership and warfighting experience of U.S. Navy SEALs. This was not always the case. Somebody had to blaze a trail, and that somebody was Cathal "Irish" Flynn. Somebody had to keep the trail open during lean periods when the mainstream Navy was often indifferent to sustaining and growing the SEAL Community, especially in the 1970's. Irish Flynn was already in UDT when President Kennedy announced (in the same speech as the Moon landing challenge) that the services would be forming special operations units focused on counter-insurgency and counter-guerilla warfare. (Actually, Navy planning for the SEALs was already well underway, and it was CNO Arleigh Burke who gave direction even before Kennedy's announcement.) Irish Flynn was among the first to go

into the SEAL teams, which were in action as advisors in Vietnam before conventional forces became engaged. Irish was in this Vietnam crucible, when from 1966 to 1971 SEALs earned 3 Medals of Honor, 7 Navy Crosses, numerous other awards for valor, and three Presidential Unit Citations, at a cost of 48 SEALs killed. Irish moved up the ranks when there was little realistic prospect of a Navy SEAL going beyond captain, and when he was selected for flag there were no SEAL flag officer positions in the Navy, so he served in related joint positions where his SEAL experience was useful. But, the door was open and others would follow.