



*Richard Haydel*

# J. EDWARD SNYDER, JR.

1934–2007

Elected in 1979

*“For contributions to the Polaris missile reentry systems  
and to the National Oceanographic Program.”*

BY ROBERT A. FROSCHE

**J.** EDWARD SNYDER, JR., Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.), former captain of the battleship *New Jersey*, and former oceanographer of the Navy, died on November 4, 2007, at the age of 83. He was elected to NAE in 1979 for “Contributions to the Polaris missile reentry systems and to the National Oceanographic Program.”

Like many naval officers, Ed was born far inland, in Grand Forks, North Dakota, on October 23, 1924, son of a Methodist minister. With great humor and imagination, he built a successful career in the Navy based on engineering and scientific knowledge and the capabilities and skills of a distinguished, idiosyncratic leader and commander. He received his B.S. from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1944, and, after considerable field experience as an engineer and scientist and attendance at the Naval War College, he earned an M.S. in nuclear physics from MIT in 1965.

After graduation from the Naval Academy and service at sea, Ed was put in charge of a technical group assessing blast and radiation damage from the Bikini Atoll nuclear tests. He subsequently held several other technical positions, including head of the technical evaluation of the MK56 fire-control system, research assistant and scientific staff member at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratories (working on initiators for fission and thermonuclear weapons), and head of the evaluation of

shipboard engineering for antisubmarine sensing and fire-control systems for escort destroyers. In 1957 he was the Navy program manager for the Polaris reentry body (REB) systems being designed and built at Lockheed. As Working with the of the Atomic Energy Commission on the Polaris program, he was responsible for quality assurance for the MkI Polaris REB (including the warhead and fusing devices) and for the REB training program.

Ed later went to sea as commander of a destroyer in a development squadron. In 1963, he became a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (R&D), with responsibility for matters related to ballistic missiles. He was also assigned to be representative of the Secretary of the Navy to the Deep Submergence Review Group, which was created to advise the secretary on possible submarine rescue operations following the loss of the *USS Thresher*. In this capacity, Ed was not only a great asset to the Navy secretariat, especially the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (R&D), but also a lively and sociable member of the office.

When the *USS New Jersey* was activated in 1968, Captain Ed Snyder, her designated captain, was assigned to take her out of mothballs, ready her for deployment, and take her into battle off Vietnam, with a primary assignment for shore bombardment with her 16-inch naval rifles. During the preparation, Ed found ways to modernize and simplify the ship, reducing her manpower requirements and, with an eye to economy, saving the cost of removing the 40mm gun tubs by welding the openings shut and painting the insides blue, thus converting them to swimming pools for the officers and crew. He also replaced the shower in the captain's quarters with a bathtub, which he preferred. (His daughter assisted by painting it red.)

As skipper, he frequently roamed the ship, ate with the crew in their mess hall, celebrated birthdays with them, and provided ship's newsletters for them to send home. His crew both respected and loved him.

While off the coast of Vietnam, a small U.S. naval vessel

(commanded by a lieutenant) somehow did not recognize the *New Jersey* and sent a searchlight message: "Unknown vessel—identify yourself." After the message was repeated by the small vessel, with no reply from the *New Jersey* because only its captain could release messages, a third message was sent by the small vessel: "Unknown vessel—identify yourself or we will open fire." In the meantime, Ed had been called and he directed the reply, using the 24-inch searchlight: "AA—New Jersey BB62: OPEN FIRE WHEN READY – FEAR GOD – DREADNOUGHT." ("AA —New Jersey BB62" is the message header; AA stands for "unknown vessel," and BB62 is "Battleship 62." Battleships have been known as "dreadnoughts" since the British first called them that.)

Following the decommissioning of the *New Jersey*, Ed served as chief of staff to the commander of the cruiser Destroyer Force, Atlantic Fleet, and then was promoted to rear admiral; he was appointed oceanographer of the Navy in 1971, a position he held until his retirement in 1979.

One of Ed's first tasks as oceanographer was to consolidate the activities of the Naval Oceanographic Office (NOO), move it, as directed by Congress, to a new location at the Stennis Space Center in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and make it a major center of excellence. Against considerable inertial resistance, he succeeded in doing so, and NOO is now a recognized center of excellence that provides oceanographic, meteorological, and hydrographic products of great value to the Navy and the entire oceanographic community.

During his eight years as oceanographer of the Navy, he was "double hatted" in a number of positions, from which he was able to improve coordination in oceanography and ocean engineering among U.S. federal agencies and internationally. These positions included: Naval Deputy to the administrator of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, special assistant for oceanographic and polar affairs to the assistant director of the National Science Foundation, special assistant to the assistant secretary of state for oceans and environment, principal point of contact at the U.S. Department

of Defense for the Senate National Ocean Policy Study, member of the U.S. House of Representatives Oceanographic Advisory Committee, and U.S. vice chair of the US/USSR bilateral Agreement on Studies of the World Ocean.

Ed was awarded the Legion of Merit, the Secretary of the Navy Certificate of Commendation for his work on Polaris missile reentry systems, the Navy League of the U.S. Rear Admiral W. S. Parsons Award, and two additional Gold Stars of the Parsons Award. He was also a member of Sigma Xi.

He and his beloved wife Mary Louise Snyder, had a son, Edward Snyder III; a daughter, Anne Gibson Snyder; and a grandson, Jesse Edward Stovall.

Ed Snyder was a distinguished engineer and Navy officer and a man of great intelligence, talent, humor, and humaneness. With his ready wit, he could illuminate serious situations with apt, but funny remarks. He will be greatly missed by all of us who knew him and worked with him.

