

NAVY DEPARTMENT

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NAME OF WARSHIP TO HONOR WOMAN OF NAVAL SERVICE FOR FIRST
TIME IN ANNALS OF UNITED STATES

For the first time, a woman of the Naval Service is to have a combatant vessel, the USS HIGBEE, named in her honor. The vessel will be named for the late Mrs. Lenah S. Higbee, Registered Nurse, first Superintendent of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps - - the only woman to receive a Navy Cross while still alive -- and one of four women to receive that decoration from the Navy.

Mrs. Higbee, who died January 10, 1941, at Winter Park, Florida, is to have a new destroyer named for her. This vessel is under construction at the Bath Iron Works Corporation at Bath, Maine. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal approved the recommendation of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations to name the ship in honor of Mrs. Higbee.

Naval annals disclose only one other combatant ship named for a woman -- the old Revenue Cutter HARRIET LANE, which was taken over by the Navy in the Civil War -- honored the niece and official hostess of President James Buchanan.

Apart from these two combatant vessels, bearing the names of women, the Navy has had numerous auxiliary types with feminine designations.

Mrs. Higbee, first Superintendent of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps, was appointed to duty in the Nurse Corps soon after its formation in 1908. Previously, women nurses had been employed periodically in Naval hospitals to care for the sick and wounded, but not until May 1908 did Congress authorize the employment of nurses as a part of the Medical Department of the United States Navy.

The widow of the late Lieutenant Colonel John Henley Higbee, U.S. Marine Corps, Mrs. Higbee was born May 18, 1874 at Chatham, New Brunswick. She completed her nurse's training at the New York Post-Graduate Hospital in 1899 and had taken a post-graduate course at Fordham Hospital, New York City.

She was appointed a Navy Nurse October 1, 1908 and was ordered to duty in the U.S. Naval Hospital, Washington, D.C. She became Chief Nurse April 14, 1909 and Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps on January 20, 1911. On November 30, 1922, she was honorably discharged at her own request. She is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, beside her husband.

For her World War I service, Mrs. Higbee received the Navy Cross on November 11, 1920, with this citation:

“For distinguished service in the line of her profession and unusual and conspicuous devotion to duty as Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps.”

The only other women in the Navy to receive the Navy Cross were these nurses -- Miss Lillian Mary Murphy, Registered Nurse; Miss Edna E. Place, Registered Nurse; and Miss Marie Louise Hidell, Registered Nurse -- each of whom was awarded the honor posthumously.

They served in World War I and died in Naval Hospitals during the influenza epidemic of 1918 -- Miss Murphy at the U.S. Naval Hospital at Hampton Roads, Virginia and both Miss Place and Miss Hidell at the U.S. Naval Hospital at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The citations were similar, except for mention of the hospital, and said the Navy Crosses were given:

“For distinguished service and devotion to duty.”

The citations added that:

“During the epidemic of influenza, the nurses worked day and night among the patients until stricken with the disease.”

Miss Murphy was born September 27, 1887 at St. Catharines, Ontario; graduated from St. Mary's Hospital at Brooklyn, New York, April 28, 1910; came into the Navy in January 1918 and served at the Naval Hospital at Hampton Roads. She died October 10, 1918.

Miss Place was born August 5, 1890 at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; graduated from St. Timothy's Hospital at Roxborough, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 11, 1917; came on active duty in the Navy in June 1918 and was attached to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Philadelphia. She died September 29, 1918.

Miss Hidell was born August 14, 1879 at Leesburg, Virginia; graduated from Reading Hospital, Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1902; came into the Navy in May 1918; served at the U.S. Naval Hospital at Philadelphia and died there September 29, 1918.

The old Revenue Cutter USS HARRIET LANE had an unusual career. A steam vessel, she was launched in November 1857. Secretary of the Treasury Howell Cobb chose the name of Harriet Lane for the ship and the President's niece herself sent presents to the commissioned officers. An oil painting of Miss Lane was placed in the cutter's cabin.

The HARRIET LANE was placed at the disposal of the Prince of Wales, when he visited the United States in 1860; she was part of the force that went to the relief of Fort Sumter, South Carolina; she was attacked by the Confederates at Galveston, Texas, and captured by them; served for a time under the Flag of the Confederacy, during which time she ran cotton to Cuba and was detained by the Spanish authorities until the close of the conflict. After the war, she was sold and served in the lumber trade in her latter years. While on a voyage from Brunswick, Georgia, to Buenos Aires, she encountered heavy weather, and sank in the Caribbean.

In the modern Navy, one of the feminine names that has achieved fame is the converted yacht USS ISABEL. When World War I was declared, the ISABEL was under construction at the Bath Iron Works, Bath, Maine, for Mr. John North Willys, president of the Willys-Overland Company, Toledo, Ohio. His wife's name was Isabel.

While designed as a yacht, the ISABEL was built along the same lines as a destroyer and, when completed, she was taken over directly by the United States Government.

In World War I, she served out of France on convoy duty; after the war sailed as far up the Mississippi River as St. Louis, for recruiting and display purposes, stopping at all important cities en route; operated with the Yangtze Patrol Force in China, much of the time as flagship and until the present war started, she cruised in the waters of China and the Philippines.

Among the names given to auxiliaries in the Navy among the transports are these, denoting famous women of other days -- USS DOROTHEA L. DIX, FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, SUSAN B. ANTHONY, ANNE ARUNDEL and ELIZABETH C. STANTON.

Among the patrol vessels, the yacht, USS RUBY, formerly the PLACIDA, is serving in the Navy. There is a cargo vessel, called the USS VENUS. The USS POCAHONTAS, recalling the famous Indian Princess who is credited with saving the life of Captain John Smith in early Virginia, is a harbor tug.

In the Continental Navy, the HANNAH was famous. In the United States Navy, feminine names have been sprinkled through the Navy List, which carries the names of Naval vessels.

But, the naming of the USS HIGBEE, -- a fighting ship bearing the name of a woman of the Navy -- marks a new departure in the history of the Service.

(Photographs available in the Photographic Section, Office of Public Relations.)
