

ELMER C. BIGELOW, WATER TENDER, FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE, DECEASED

Elmer Charles Bigelow was born in Hebron, Illinois, on July 12, 1920. On September 21, 1942 he enlisted as an Apprentice Seaman in the U. S. Naval Reserve at Chicago, Illinois, and was promoted as follows: Fireman, Third Class, January 21, 1943; Fireman, First Class, September 1, 1943; Water Tender, Third Class, January 1, 1944; and Water Tender, Second Class, August 1, 1944.

Following his enlistment in the U. S. Naval Reserve, young Bigelow received training at the U. S. Naval Training Station, Great Lakes Illinois, and subsequently at the Naval Training School, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

Bigelow was received aboard the USS FLETCHER on June 12, 1943. That destroyer convoyed troops to Vella LaVella Island in October 1943, and shifted to the Gilbert Islands area where she covered landing operations. The FLETCHER was a unit of a force which assisted in the bombardment of Wotje Island, and later covered landings at Mindoro, Lingayen, San Antonio, Subic Bay, Nasugbu, Bataan, Corregidor, Palawan and Zamboanga. She was also present for initial landings in the Dutch East Indies.

On February 15, 1945, while still attached to the USS FLETCHER, Bigelow died as a result of wounds received in action. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving on board the USS FLETCHER during action against enemy Japanese forces off Corregidor Island in the Philippines, February 14, 1945..." The citation continues: "Standing topside when an enemy shell struck the FLETCHER, Bigelow, acting instantly as the deadly projectile exploded into fragments which penetrated the No. 1 gun magazine and set fire to several powder cases, picked up a pair of fire extinguishers and rushed below in a resolute attempt to quell the raging flames. Refusing to waste the precious time required to don rescue breathing apparatus, he plunged through the blinding smoke billowing out of the magazine hatch and dropped into the blazing compartment. Despite the acrid, burning powder smoke which seared his lungs with every agonizing breath, he worked rapidly and with instinctive sureness and succeeded in quickly extinguishing the fires and in cooling the cases and bulkheads, thereby preventing further damage to the stricken ship. Although he succumbed to his injuries on the following day, Bigelow, by his dauntless valor, unfaltering skill and prompt action in the critical emergency, had averted a magazine explosion which undoubtedly would have left his ship wallowing at the mercy of the furiously pounding Japanese guns on Corregidor and his heroic spirit of self sacrifice in the face of almost certain death enhanced and sustained the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country."

In addition to the Medal of Honor and the Purple Heart Medal, also awarded posthumously, Bigelow was entitled to the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.

