

REAR ADMIRAL REGINALD R. BELKNAP, U. S. NAVY, DECEASED

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Reginald Rowan Belknap was born in Malden, Massachusetts, on June 26, 1871, son of the late Rear Admiral George Eugene Belknap, USN, and Mrs. (Frances Georgiana Prescott) Belknap. He attended various schools, both private and public, and prepared for entrance to the U. S. Naval Academy at Columbian Preparatory School in Washington, D. C. He was appointed to the Naval Academy from the First Arkansas District in 1887, and while there for four years participated in fencing, bootball, baseball and rowing, and served as Umpire for the first Annapolis-West Point Football game in 1890.

After graduation on June 1, 1891, he had the two years at sea, then required by law before commissioning, on board the USS CHICAGO, and at final graduation in June 1893 was commissioned Ensign in the U. S. Navy. His promotions were as follows: Lieutenant (junior grade), March 3, 1899; Lieutenant, October 26, 1899; Lieutenant Commander, July 8, 1905; Commander, March 4, 1911; and Captain, to date from May 23, 1917. He was transferred to the Retired List of the Navy on June 30, 1926, but remained on active duty. On March 3, 1927, he was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral on the Retired List, and on June 30, 1927, he was relieved of all active duty.

As a commissioned officer he served first in the USS BALTIMORE, later transferring to the USS YORKTOWN, USS MONOCACY and USS NEWPORT. On May 14, 1898, he was ordered to duty as Flag Secretary on the Staff of the Commandant of the Naval Base, Key West, Florida. In September of the same year he joined the USS INDIANA, and in June 1899 was transferred to the USS BADGER. During that year he had duty in connection with the Samoan High Commission, and in October 1899 joined the USS RANGER. From April 1900 until May 1902 he served on Asiatic Station, first on board the USS BROOKLYN, later as Flag Secretary on the Staff of Commander in Chief, Asiatic Fleet.

After his return to the United States, he reported on June 2, 1902, to the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and, completing a two-year tour of duty there in November 1904, was assigned duty as Judge Advocate in a Court of Inquiry at the Navy Yard, Boston, Massachusetts, in connection with the grounding of the EAGLE. In August 1905 he was ordered to the USS KEARSARGE, in which he served first as Navigator, later as Executive Officer. Late in 1906 he served as a Member of the General Court Martial at the Navy Yard, Norfolk, Virginia, and after a period of temporary duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence, Navy Department, was sent to Berlin, Germany, as U. S. Naval Attache. While in that assignment from November 1907 until October 1910, he had additional duty as U. S. Naval Attache at Rome, Italy, and Vienna, Austria, for one year.

After the Messina earthquake in 1909, he was in charge of the Red Cross Relief Ship BAYERN expedition, and later had charge of the American housing construction in ten places in the stricken area, building 2,500 small cottages, a church, schools workshop, hospital and hotel. Before returning to the United States in October 1910, he served as Naval Aide to ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, special ambassador to the funeral of King Edward VII of Great Britain.

On October 30, 1910, he joined the USS NORTH DAKOTA as Executive Officer, and while so assigned, served as a member of a Court of Inquiry at the Navy Yard, New York in July 1911. Detached from the NORTH DAKOTA in December of that year, he returned to the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, where he served as Assistant to the Chief of the Bureau from January 1912 until May 1913, and as Senior Member of a Board there for the last four months of that tour of duty. He attended the long course at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, the next year, and before detachment served as President of a Court of Inquiry at the Naval Training Station, Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island, July 28 to August 4, 1914.

The next day he reported to the USS TENNESSEE for duty as Naval Aide to the Assistant Secretary of War, in connection with relief of Americans in Europe, later reporting to the American Ambassador in Berlin for special temporary duty. On September 3, he was detached from the TENNESSEE for duty as Assistant to the U. S. Naval Attache, Berlin, Germany, and on November 9, the same year, he assumed command of the USS CHESTER. At Boston, Massachusetts, on December 12, he assumed command of the USS SAN FRANCISCO, and on July 3, 1915, was designated Commander, Mining and Mine Sweeping Division, Atlantic Fleet. On December 16, 1915, he was detached from command of the SAN FRANCISCO, but continued in command of the Mining and Mine Sweeping Division (redesignated Commander Mine Force, Atlantic Fleet), his pennant in the USS BALTIMORE, later the USS SAN FRANCISCO, during the early period of World War I.

He received a commendatory letter from Admiral Henry B. Wilson, USN, after the grounding of his flagship in 1917, which stated: "The promptness with which these tugs arrived on the scene of the OLYMPIA's trouble indicates that your Force is very much on the job."

On September 24, 1917, he reported to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., and on April 10, 1918, he returned to the Atlantic Fleet as Commander Mine Squadron ONE, Mine Force, his pennant alternately in SAN FRANCISCO and BALTIMORE. From Captain Yarnell of Admiral Sims's Staff in 1918 he received the following statement: "The whole Mine Force is short in criticism and complaints but long on work and results and the Navy should be intensely proud of them."

Admiral Mayo, in his report of inspection of the Mine Force in November 1918, said, "The arrangements in force are remarkable for their conformity to the plans prepared at home before the Mine Force crossed the Atlantic," and was "highly pleased with the zeal, loyal cooperation and efficiency of the Force, ashore and afloat." Among three officers named for exceptionally useful service by the Secretary of the Navy in his Annual Report, 1918, was "Captain R. R. Belknap, whose service in mine-laying deserves commendation..."

Vice Admiral W. C. Pakenham, Royal Navy, stated: "When your Force steamed through Scapa, I thought Providence as well as skill must have been on your side to enable you to pass through a period of such dangerous service, and yet to take all home." In April 1919 Admiral Benson said: "Captain Belknap deserves, in the opinion of the Chief of Naval Operations, more credit for the success of this undertaking than any other man."

Rear Admiral (then Captain) Belknap was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, for his World War I service, with the following citation: "For exceptionally meritorious service in command of Mine Squadron One of the Mine Force, during the Operation of laying mines in the North Sea, and for his excellent work in connection with the equipping of these ships for mine laying duty."

Admiral May later said: "The Navy and our Country owe to Captain Belknap a debt which can hardly be overestimated; for it was the knowledge and experience acquired and the doctrine and methods established in the Mine Force under command of (then) Commander Belknap that enabled the Navy to, first, fit out improvised but very efficient mine-laying vessels and, second, to operate them under war conditions in a manner which brought commendation from all."

In 1910-1920 he served on the Staff of the Naval War College, Newport, and the next year commanded Destroyer Submarine Base, Squantum, Massachusetts. He had another tour of duty on the Staff of the Naval War College from June 1921 until April 1923, then reported to the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Camden, New Jersey, to fit out the USS COLORADO. He assumed command of that battleship at her commissioning, August 30, 1923, and remained in command almost two years. From June 1925 until September 1926 he had command of the Receiving Ship, San Francisco, California, after which he became Commander of the Naval Training Station, Norfolk, Virginia. He remained in the latter assignment until his relief from all active duty on June 30, 1927.

In addition to the Distinguished Service Medal, Rear Admiral Belknap had the Spanish Campaign Medal; Philippine Campaign Medal (USS BROOKLYN); China Relief Expedition Medal (USS BROOKLYN); World War I Victory Medal (USS SAN FRANCISCO); and Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal. He also had the following foreign decorations: Belgian Order of Leopold, Grade of Officer, and French Legion of Honor, Grade of Officer.

After his retirement, Admiral Belknap served as Treasurer, Burser and Registrar of the General Theological Seminary, New York, N. Y., Commander of the Boston Chapter and of the New York Chapter of the Military Order of the World Wars, and two terms as the Commander in Chief (National) of the Military Order of the World Wars. A prominent Episcopalian layman, he was a member of the Board of Managers of the Seamen's Church Institute, President of the American Church Union and Chairman of the Laymen's National Committee.

Admiral Belknap died in West Haven, Connecticut, on March 30, 1959, at the age of 86, and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.

The USS BELKNAP (DLG-26), second vessel so named, building at Bath Iron Works Corporation, Bath, Maine, named to honor Rear Admiral Reginald Rowan Belknap and his father, Rear Admiral George Eugene Belknap,

RAdm. Reginald R. Bellmap, USN, Dec.

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