

Noble Edward Irwin

One of the most highly decorated serviceman from the Greenfield Community was a sailor by the name of Noble Edward Irwin born on September 29, 1869, on his father's farm which was located along "Sugar Run", a small creek which runs just outside the boundaries of Greenfield. Noble was a typical farm boy who did not complete his high school education because he had to help on the farm.



He applied for an appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis with little hope of success. But this appointment by the Honorable J.J. Pugsley, Representative of the Twelfth Ohio District was made in 1887. Although Noble had not completed high school, with the grim determination which would be displayed throughout his career, he passed the entrance exam with flying colors within a matter of six weeks.

Noble's magnificent physique enabled him to win a place on the Academy football team which played West Point in the first Army-Navy football game in 1890 which Navy won. His teammates dubbed him "Bull" a tribute to his prowess on the gridiron. He captained the team the following year and again Navy won the game. He was graduated from the Naval Academy in 1891, but his fame as an athlete was such that he was called back to serve as Athletic Director from 1907 to 1909.

Noble Irwin was commissioned Ensign on July 1, 1893, and on July 25 he joined the U.S.S. Newark operating on the South Atlantic Station during the Brazilian Revolution.

In March, 1898, he was detached with orders to the U.S.S. Baltimore where he served in the Battle of Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War. It was during this battle that Ensign Noble Irwin had the distinction of being the only American Officer wounded in that famous battle.

After the close of the Spanish-American War, Noble took part in the Philippine Campaign. In 1899 he was transferred to the U.S.S. Monocacy and was a part of the China Relief Expedition. It was during this period that the insurrection called the "Boxer Rebellion" occurred. The members of the American and other foreign legations were besieged in Tientsin by the Chinese Revolutionaries. Five thousand American soldiers and marines were sent ashore under the command of Lt. Noble Irwin to relieve the legations. The Boxers were quickly dispersed after some fierce fighting.

With the outbreak of World War I, Noble Irwin became the first director of Naval Aviation. He increased the number of naval aviators from 100 to more than 20,000. He was the oldest man in the army or navy to earn his flying wings.

Noble Irwin was a man of considerable diplomatic skill and tact. He was frequently dispatched on foreign diplomatic missions.

During a long and distinguished career which spanned some 46 years, Noble Irwin was promoted through grades to Rear Admiral on Dec. 2, 1924.

Admiral Irwin earned numerous decorations through the years. Among them:

- 1898 Battle of Manila Bay Medal (U.S.S. Baltimore)
- 1908 Philippines Campaign Medal

- 1908 China Relief Expedition (U.S.S. Monocacy)
- 1909 Spanish Campaign Medal
- 1919 Mexican Service Medal
- 1919 Officer of the Legion of Honor of France "For exceptional service in organizing conduct of the War (Aeronautics)"
- 1920 Navy Cross "For exceptionally meritorious service in a duty of great responsibility as Director of Naval Aviation, in connection with the development, building, and operation of the Naval Air Service for war purpose."
- 1921 Victory Medal (World War Service Medal)
- 1933 Estrella de Abdon Calderon, First Class, by the Government of Ecuador "For cordiality and courtesy extended Ecuador - outstanding instance search made by U.S. Naval Forces for missing Ecuadorean Schooner 'Plus Ultra' "

Admiral Noble Irwin retired from the Navy on October 1, 1933, completing some 46 years of service.

The Admiral died on August 10, 1937, in Warners Hot Springs, California.

Although more than half his life was spend in foreign lands and waters, and the Admiral never returned to residency in the Greenfield community, he always gave his residence as Greenfield, Ohio.

This article was compiled by Paul Orr.