

The following article appeared in the  
June 2018 issue of *Naval History*.



# Citizen Sailors in Naval Service

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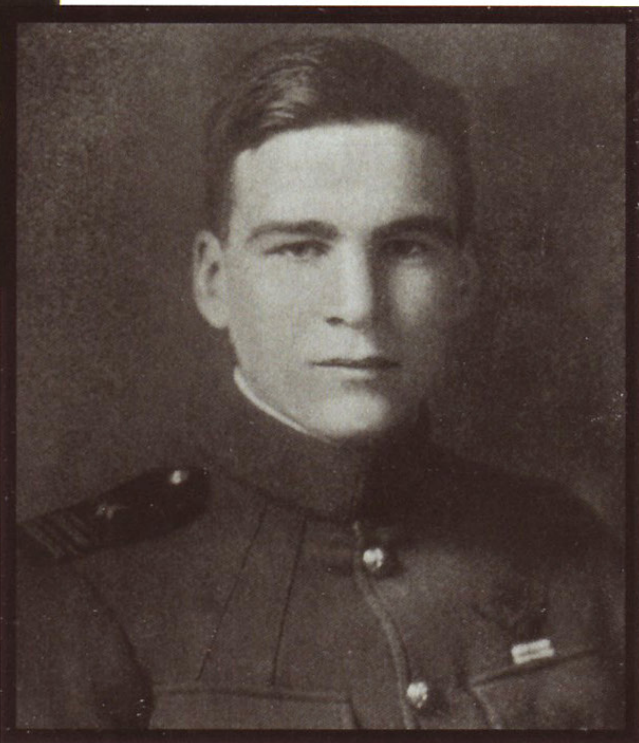




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The **CIVILIAN WARRIOR** has had a place in the U.S. military since the days of John Paul Jones. But that place has **NOT ALWAYS BEEN EASILY UNDERSTOOD, OR ACCEPTED.**

NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND



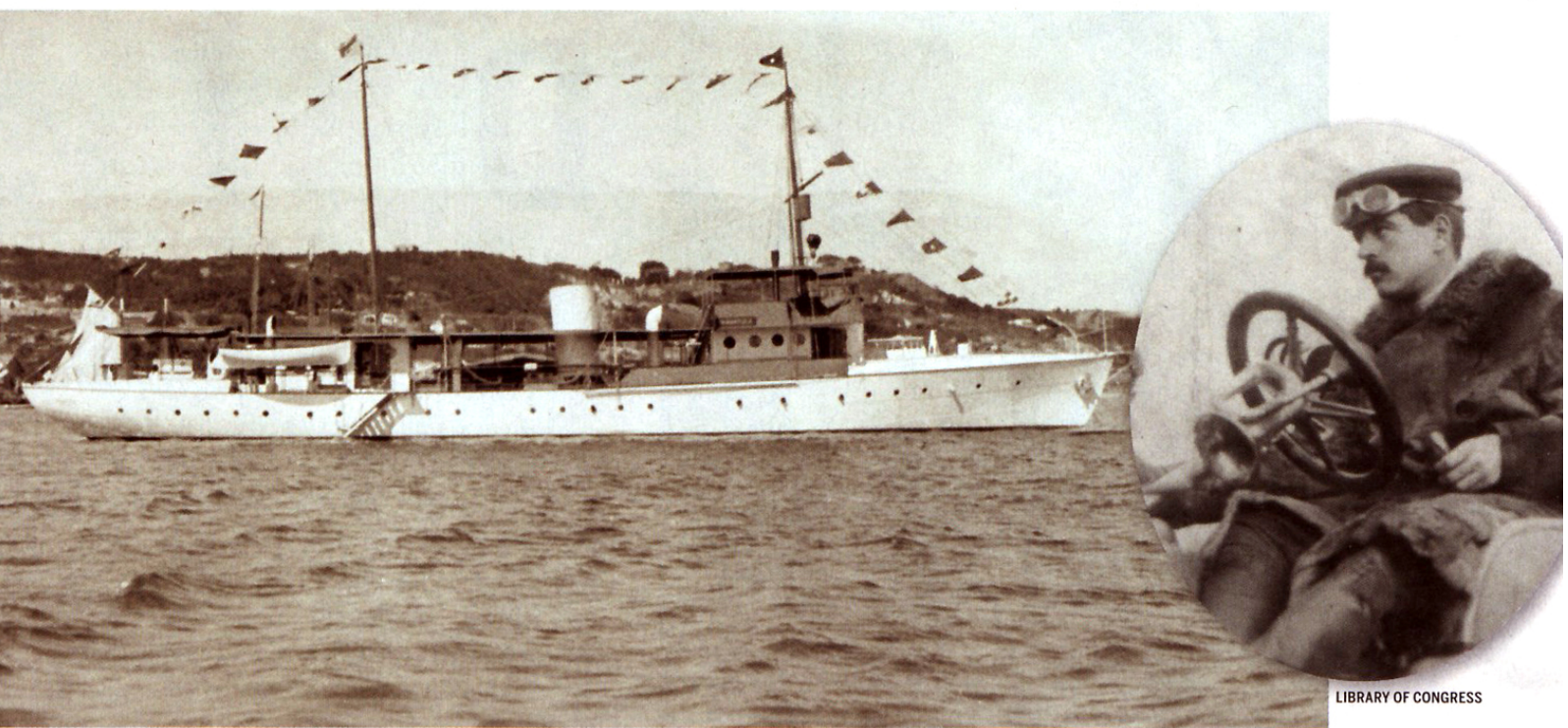
Above left: Student reservists enrolled at Princeton University in 1952. Naval Reservist David Ingalls (above) of the First Yale Unit became the Navy's only World War I aerial ace.

**D**uring the Peloponnesian War from 431 to 404 BC, Greek historian Xenophon wrote a thought-provoking assessment of the citizen sailors of the Athenian Navy: "It is the ordinary people who man the fleet . . . they provide the helmsmen, the boatswains, the junior officers, the look-outs and the shipwrights; it is these people who make the city powerful."

Nearly two millennia later, the idea of the citizen sailor at sea played an important role in the embryonic United States. Among the American colonials who took up arms in 1775 was a merchant sea captain with a questionable background: John Paul Jones joined the nascent Continental Navy—a "force" that began with seven converted merchant ships that were pitted against the most powerful navy in the world—and rapidly rose to command, taking his adopted country's undersized navy to the very shores of the enemy in November 1778.

Jones was, by definition, a naval reservist. He took up arms not for a career, but in response to an existential threat to his country. Jones was a prototype U.S. Navy citizen sailor, a concept that proved over





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William K. Vanderbilt Jr. brought his 128-foot yacht, the *Tarantula*, along when he joined the Naval Reserve. She was armed with two 6-pounder guns and two .303-inch machine guns. Inset: Vanderbilt was also an avid motorist.

time and in varying degrees to be an essential part of what has become the world's most powerful navy.

During the Quasi-War with France between 1798 and 1800 and the War of 1812 with Great Britain, the U.S. Navy relied on merchant marine seamen and members of the individual state naval militias to augment its ranks. Each of the groups posed a particular problem: The reservists from the merchant marine were not trained adequately for naval service, and the loyalty of the men from the state militias was often split between the sailor's *homestead* and his *homeland*.

The latter problem had been illuminated previously in Great Britain by no less a naval warrior than Vice Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson when, as Britain was threatened with invasion by Napoleon in 1801, he wrote to the British Admiralty of his concerns about the effectiveness of naval reservists. Hinting at a mutual resentment between career and reserve warriors common in many militaries, Nelson wrote, "These men say 'our employment will not allow us to go from our homes beyond a day or two.'"

A more significant test of civilian sailors in U.S. naval service occurred during the run-up to World War I with the enactment of the Naval Militia Act of 16 February 1914, which placed the Naval Reserve under the supervision of the Navy Department. In addition to the inherent challenges involved, the pre-World War I Reserve units were not adequately trained, and they were officer-heavy. A follow-on bill was passed allowing Naval Reserve units to be built with retired Navy personnel to combat the lack of training and organization.

Arguably the most important aspect of the 1914 legislation was a provision stating that providing a U.S. naval

reserve would no longer be an ad hoc matter. That was at least limited recognition of the growing importance of the reservist in U.S. naval service.

In May 1917, industrialist, yachtsman, and civilian sailor William K. Vanderbilt Jr. was commissioned as a lieutenant (junior grade) and placed in command of his own yacht, the *Tarantula* (SP-124), which also had been commissioned into the Navy in a lease agreement with the railroad heir. Vanderbilt and the *Tarantula* patrolled the waters of the Third Naval District and acted as a convoy escort off New York and New Jersey until 1 October 1917, when Vanderbilt returned to his family's business with the New York Central Railroad, where he spent the remainder of the war years. In 1921, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve. The *Tarantula* remained in active service after Vanderbilt's return to civilian life and sank after a collision with the steamship *SS Frisia* in October 1918.

Patriotism was clearly contagious during World War I, affecting the elite in business and also academia. A small undergraduate aviation club at Yale University decided to lobby the U.S. Congress for their unit to be included in the Navy. Calling themselves the First Yale Unit, the club began in 1915 with ten students led by F. Trubee Davison, whose father helped raise \$300,000 for the group's training and equipment. Department-store magnate John Wanamaker also was a significant facilitator when he underwrote a venerable wooden-hull Curtiss flying boat named "Mary Ann" for the group's early flight training.

In his two-volume history titled *The First Yale Unit*, published in 1925, Ralph Paine focused on that special inspiration:



[T]hese young men were not content to sit on the sidelines. Convinced that their country could not help being drawn into the war, they reached the sound conclusion that they ought to be trained and ready. They did not await the turn of events nor postpone action until the draft swept them into service.

Since military aviation was in its early stages, a high degree of determination was needed to convince the Navy of the group's military value. Finally, however, one section of the Naval Reserve Appropriations Act of 29 August 1916 made The First Yale Unit an official part of the U.S. Navy. The former Yalies quickly became frontline combatants, most serving in British or French squadrons.

The members of the unit went on to distinguish themselves in the "war to end all wars." For example, Lieutenant David Ingalls, flying the legendary Sopwith Camel biplane for the Royal Air Force, became the Navy's only World War I aerial ace.

The First Yale Unit remains a symbol of the unvarnished patriotism driving U.S. Navy reservists to serve on the sea service's operational leading edge. Admiral William Sims, who commanded U.S. naval forces operating from Britain during the war, wrote that the First Yale Unit would "serve to remind future generations of a high-minded and intelligent interpretation of duty."

Men were not the only ones becoming active in the war effort: More than 11,000 women, often referred to as "Yeomanettes," volunteered for service in the Navy. In his recent book on the history of the Navy Reserve, titled *Ready Then. Ready Now. Ready Always*, Commander David Winkler, USNR (Ret.), describes the weighty military analysis that went into the U.S. Navy's decision to enlist women, "Suddenly the Navy found that those who could master the typewriter keyboard were just as critical as those who could tie a knot."

In time (and of greater importance), the Navy—both active-duty and reserve—would go on to recognize that women could fly aircraft, command ships, create path-finding computer programs, and carry out senior leadership roles in a modern Navy.

The post-World War I period was a special challenge for the Navy's citizen warriors. Major funding cuts and reorganization resulted in a three-element reserve force that included the Fleet Naval Reserve, the Merchant Marine Naval Reserve, and the Volunteer Naval Reserve. Unfortunately, following tradition, all three tended to be standby elements of the active-duty Navy rather than real-time components of a ready force.

Hard on the heels of this was the legislative establishment in March 1925 of a special reserve program for universities, the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC),



Some members of the First Yale Unit wait while an engine of their flying boat is serviced.



The first American women enlisted in the armed forces were the 13,000 Yeomanettes who served in the Navy during World War I.



which became a special source of reserve officers for the Navy. In an article in the June 1928 issue of the Naval Institute's *Proceedings*, Captain (later Fleet Admiral) Chester Nimitz wrote: "The primary objective of the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps is to provide systematic instruction and training at civil educational institutions, which will qualify selected students . . . for appointment as officers in the Naval Reserve."

Nimitz was alert to benefits of a U.S. Navy Reserve beyond actual war-making, such as creating a widespread understanding among civilians of the need for a strong navy in general: "The secondary objective is to further acquaint the college authorities and the student bodies with the Navy and what it means to the Nation."

The advent of World War II brought on a wide array of new reserve programs within the U.S. Navy, such as the creation of the V-7 and V12 officer training programs and an accelerated college NROTC program, which helped meet the skyrocketing need for naval officers in the unparalleled military buildup following the attack on Pearl Harbor. By June 1945, almost 85 percent of U.S. Navy personnel were civilian sailors, and casualty numbers make the point that many reservists were front-and-center during the war. In fact 18,196 of the Navy's enlisted casualties and 2,983 of the commissioned officers' casualties were reservists.

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the reservists' frontline World War II performance is that 15 of the Navy personnel who were awarded the Medal of Honor during World War II were reservists. Seaman First Class Johnnie David Hutchins from Texas was one such sailor. During action in 1942 off New Guinea, Hutchins' ship, LST-473, was facing both bomb and torpedo attacks. At one point a bomb struck the bridge of his ship, where he was on duty.

In part, his Medal of Honor citation reads:

Hutchins, although mortally wounded by the shattering explosion, quickly grasped the wheel and exhausted the last of his strength in maneuvering the vessel clear of the advancing torpedo. Still clinging to the helm, he eventually succumbed to his injuries, his final thoughts concerned only with the safety of his ship, his final efforts expended toward the security of his mission.

The latter half of the 20th century's military conflicts left their marks, with World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War era forcing the U.S. military to change radically. The extended cycles of peace, interrupted periodically by all-out war and massive U.S. military buildups, were over. So too was the Navy's traditional approach to its reserves, which could be characterized as "We'll call you when and if we need you."



The Congressional Research Center lists nine different military conflicts since the Vietnam era. These smaller, intense wars forced the Navy to rethink what kind of a reserve force would be needed as it moved into the 21st century. That rethinking was accelerated by profound technological changes, such as unmanned vehicles on, over, and under the oceans' surface, as well as directed-energy, electromagnetic, and guided weapons. In addition, advanced military concepts, such as "distributed lethality," "cyber security," and "information dominance" are at work.

Two articles in the Naval Institute's *Proceedings* showed that reservists were still crucial to modern war efforts. The first appeared in October 1984 and was written by Vice Admiral Robert Dunn, who held command of a carrier air wing, fought 255 combat missions over Vietnam, commanded the aircraft carrier USS *Saratoga* (CV-60), and conducted tours as Chief of Naval Personnel and Chief of Naval Reserve. In short, Vice Admiral Dunn was uniquely qualified to comment in service-wide terms on the future of the Navy's reserve force.

After providing an impressive list of specific missions that were being carried out by the Navy's reservists, he summed up:

They do more than the active Navy realizes. They do more than Congress appreciates. They do a lot. But the Naval Reserve has the capacity to do more . . . . In modern war, there will be little time to train and equip all of the people, ships, aircraft squadrons, construction battalions (Sea Bees), medical teams, and other specialized units needed.

With his straightforward comments, Dunn illuminated the onset of an era when there would not be months—or even weeks—to mobilize. The era of "come as you are warfare," when reserves would have to match immediately the war-fighting proficiency of their active-duty counterparts on an ongoing basis, was at hand. Said another way, when a career U.S. Navy warrior looked into the eyes of a reservist, he or she had to see another warrior—not a temporary place-taker with loyalties divided between homestead and homeland.

The second article, written by Captain Harlan Miller, appeared in October 1990. Miller in his own way had strong credentials to speak out on the subject of the reserves, having served 12 tours in nine different Naval Reserve units and commanded two reserve intelligence units during his career. Miller's article also focused on the need for radical change. His reference to "the drill" is aimed at the traditional reserve center weekend, make-work sessions that were, for many years, the essence of Naval Reserve training. "It is time to dump the drill. In fact, it is time to dump the Naval Reserve. We should do away with 'the Reserve' and make 'Reserve' a status, not an organization. We can be one Navy."

This radical talk was disturbing to some who were set in their ways, but after the Navy called reservists to participate in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, implementation of the far-reaching "One Navy" idea clearly had grown roots. Further official recognition of that came in the elimination of what had been separate but unequal "product branding."

In 2005, it was determined that there would no longer be a "USNR" designation in the U.S. Navy. Henceforth all members of the U.S. Navy would be identified as "USN," and the term "Naval Reserve" was changed to "Navy Reserve." In 2006, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vern Clark made the Navy's intent clear with a blunt message to all commands: "This is more than a name change. It more accurately describes our alignment as one Navy, and I want it to influence the integration between our active and reserve components."

To an outsider, the labeling changes may have seemed trivial. But for those within the Navy, the change was a seismic shock. As of that moment, there was indeed "One Navy," with an active-duty component and a reserve component.

Most recent Chief of Naval Reserve Vice Admiral Robin Braun reflected optimism about the future of the U.S. Navy's reserve component with appropriate emphasis on the essential difference between a stand-by force and an operationally integrated force: "[T]oday's Navy Reserve is arguably the most operationally experienced and integrated force in its history, with thousands of sailors having mobilized to support Fleet and combat commander requirements."

The U.S. Navy's citizen warriors at sea have come a long way, and they have put aside deeply embedded attitudes—at times mutual animosities—to establish two things: Their essential patriotism is unabated, and they are fully committed to full partnership with their active-duty counterparts.

For their part, the active-duty side of what currently is the world's most powerful Navy has executed its own attitude adjustment about the ongoing readiness of the naval force that will be needed to meet 21st-century challenges.

In the process, the U.S. Navy establishment has adjusted appropriately to radically evolving circumstances with the most difficult procedure a bureaucracy can employ. It has *changed* to meet present and future needs for civilian warriors who serve on a peer level with their active-duty counterparts.

Xenophon and John Paul Jones would be pleased. ⚓

Rear Admiral Callo has written three books about Vice Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson, including *Nelson Speaks* (Chatham, 2001) and *Nelson in the Caribbean* (Naval Institute Press, 2002). Named *Naval History* Author of the Year in 1998 and winner of the Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Naval Literature, he lives in New York City. He is the recipient of the Lee Wayland Douglas Award for Literary Achievement, which was awarded by the Association of the United States Navy in 2010.