

# New Commander of Atlantic Fleet Wins Post Through Merit

## Admiral Wilson's Twenty-nine Years' Service Marked by Skill, Energy and a Courage Which Is Not the Kind That Requires the Stimulation of Battle

By RICHARD WATKINS.  
FOR precisely the same reason that Admiral Henry Braid Wilson is practically unknown to the public, his blue flag with four white stars now flies from the mainmast of the great dreadnought Pennsylvania, flagship of the Atlantic fleet.

Spanish war he earned another half stripe, becoming a full Lieutenant. It was as a "two stripe" that he served throughout that war. He saw and assisted in the destruction of Admiral Cervera's fleet at the battle of Santiago, July 3, 1898, from the deck of the battleship Indiana, then one of the most powerful vessels of the navy. After that war, but still a Lieutenant, for no chance to win fame interrupted his usual but strictly executed duties, he served as navigator and executive officer on the battleship Kentucky, the flagship of "Fighting Bob"

navy, both in gunnery and in seamanship in general. During the intervals of duty and command at sea Admiral Wilson had several important posts ashore. While in general charge of recruiting at the office of the Bureau of Navigation in Washington he introduced new methods of securing men. He placed the whole work of recruiting men and of handling the enlisted personnel on a businesslike basis, a basis which, though it since has been expanded to meet the increased needs of the navy, is still the rule in navy recruiting.



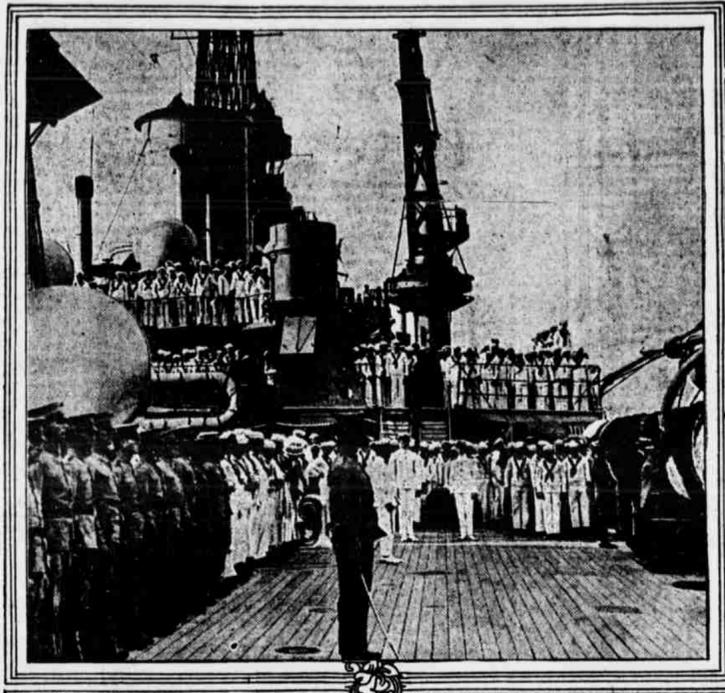
ADMIRAL HENRY B. WILSON, NEW BOSS OF THE ATLANTIC FLEET.

## Success in Convoying American Troops Bears Evidence of His Able Work in Great War—Honored by Allies as Well as at Home, Modesty Leads Him to Dodge Glory

thriftless was necessary. While Admiral Wilson handled his own forces with great skill and energy, his cooperation was so complete and friendly as to win, not only the respect, but the love of the French. In August, 1917, when President Wilson conferred the activities of the commanding officers in the war zone with a view to rewarding those of exceptional merit, Rear Admiral Wilson's work attracted his particular attention and he was promoted to Vice-Admiral. Later President Poincaré of France visited Admiral Wil-

son and it is known there was at the time every reason to believe that the report reaching Brest was official. As soon as it became apparent that such was not the case Admiral Wilson issued a terse statement of sixty-nine words absolutely exonerating the new association and taking the full burden of responsibility on himself, without further explanation or excuse. In this statement Admiral Wilson said: "The statement of the United Press relative to the signing of the armistice was made public from my office on

"We have now to add only that Admiral Wilson's frankness matches his modesty, and it is obvious that his courage is not of that kind which requires the stimulation of battle to bring it to the surface." For several months after the signing of the armistice Admiral Wilson continued his work in France. He returned home on the U. S. S. New Mexico as she escorted President Wilson home on the George Washington when he returned from France in February. Upon his arrival here he was assigned to the command of Bat-



SCENE ON THE FLAGSHIP PENNSYLVANIA AS WILSON SUCCEEDED MAYO



REAR-ADMIRAL MAYO and MRS. MAYO WITH Capt. de SAINT-SEINE WHO PRESENTED HIM WITH THE LEGION OF HONOR ON HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE COMMAND OF THE ATLANTIC FLEET.

being selected for promotion to Rear Admiral. From that time on, when selection, rather than seniority became the rule, his rise was rapid, meteoric, in fact.

When the United States entered the world war Rear Admiral Wilson, as he was then, was selected by the Navy Department to command the patrol forces of the Atlantic coast. He has under him a miscellaneous assortment of 190 craft of every variety below the rating of armored cruisers with which to defend the Atlantic coast and its great commerce from the attacks of German submarines and raiders which Germany boasts would wreak havoc among coastwise and transoceanic shipping and might also shell our towns. It soon became apparent that the German boat was only an empty threat, but before this was known Admiral Wilson had organized his force.

Later, when the United States entered the war on a large scale and began shipping troops in large numbers to France to weigh down the balance of power for the Allies, great naval bases were established along the French coast. Again the Navy Department picked Admiral Wilson as the man for the big job. In addition to taking command of these many new bases, an unfamiliar duty which he handled as if he had been for years preparing for just such a contingency, Admiral Wilson also was placed in charge of a large patrol force. His destroyers and gunboats met the torpedoes at appointed rendezvous several hundred miles at sea and circled about them swift as projectiles and just as deadly to the submarines lurking beneath the surface. No transport carrying troops to France failed to make port after Admiral Wilson had become responsible for its safety.

son at Brest and inspected in person the American base and the vessels operating from it. He complimented the commandant highly for his services. Subsequently there was conferred on Admiral Wilson the Cross of the Legion of Honor. But Admiral Wilson refused to accept the cross on the ground that he felt the work he was doing in France did not qualify him for the decoration as the United States Government's standing orders provided that American officers may accept such honors only if conferred for acts of war. In the judgment of Vice-Admiral Wilson, his protection of the American transports and administration of the naval bases were not "acts of war."

the basis of what appeared to be official and authoritative information. I am in a position to know that the United Press and its representatives acted in perfect good faith and that the premature announcement was the result of an error for which the agency was in no wise responsible." At that time THE SUN, commenting editorially upon the unusual and courageous announcement, said concerning his declination of the cross: "The press dispatches recording his decision suggested that he conceived the acts of war for which foreign decorations may be accepted to be acts performed in actual combat. At that time THE SUN took occasion to speak of the essential, arduous and highly complicated task entrusted to Admiral Wilson, and said that there would be many who would not agree with Admiral Wilson's classification of his own duties, but that nobody would fail to applaud his modesty, as all acknowledged his success in his post.

tieship Force 2, made up of dreadnoughts of the navy. He held this post until June 30, when on the deck of the Pennsylvania he read his orders appointing him commander-in-chief of the Atlantic fleet. Now Commands Great Fleet. It should be stated, however, that despite his efforts, Admiral Wilson was not able to dodge the honor of a foreign decoration which the whole navy—and the whole army—say he deserves. A few days before his promotion he was called into the office of Secretary Daniels at Washington and there Captain Saint-Seine, French naval attaché at Washington, in the presence of the Secretary, bestowed upon him the rank of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor. At the same time thirteen other naval officers were made lesser officers of the Legion. "The excellent military qualities of the highest order and obtained the most splendid results," so the French Government declared in making the award. In his new post he is commander of sixteen battleships, 108 destroyers, twenty submarines, a host of auxiliaries and a large number of vessels of the train, minelayers, supply ships, etc. Eventually he will also command twelve or more cruisers now busy carrying troops home from France. When he learned that he was to succeed Admiral Mayo, Admiral Wilson's memory went back to his days on the Kentucky under "Fighting Bob" and he recalled another young officer, now Rear Admiral Carlo B. Brittain, who was also noted for his energy and officerlike qualities. He picked this man, a good officer and a good friend, as his chief of staff, the man who will carry into execution his orders, and in general see that his ideas are properly carried out. Seeks Highest Type of Men. Admiral Wilson is known to be greatly interested in getting the highest type of men both for officer and sailor, in the navy, and in keeping him contented once he is aboard ship. He will no doubt do much in this line, although his first action on assuming command was to pass a reassuring word about the fleet that no radical changes are contemplated at present. He intends to study his job before he alters routine matters. He is considered an expert in the navy on handling men, one of the reasons why he was believed to be the best man to command the great fleet. Although he dodges publicity and glory as much as possible Admiral Wilson once, at least, failed to escape his full share of it. That was on his return to his birthplace at Camden, N. J., to see his mother shortly after he reached this country. The citizens turned out in his honor, proclaimed a holiday, and after he had seen his mother, gave him a rousing reception at the City Hall and afterward a shad dinner which is still one of the liveliest topics of conversation in the town on the Delaware. And Admiral Wilson is in even greater peril of a repetition of the celebration when he ventures to see his mother again.

the fierce light of publicity. The reason for this is that the navy is a great fighting machine and Admiral Wilson, from the time he entered Annapolis to last Monday when he assumed the most important post a naval officer afloat may aspire to, has been so efficient a part that the great mass of the people ashore never heard of him. In the great navy machine, as in all machines, it is the part that breaks down that attracts attention. Within the navy, among the officers and gobs afloat from New York Bay to the China station and among the bureau chiefs in Washington, however, the name of Admiral Wilson is well known. His elevation to the highest command afloat, less than three years after he became a flag officer, is a matter of real satisfaction, a proof that the best man wins without fear or favor. "Afloat or on the beach," one naval officer who has closely watched the career of Admiral Wilson said recently in explaining his promotion to the rank of Admiral, "Wilson has the knack of doing things just a little bit better than the next man. He never has had a spectacular chance, an opportunity to do anything startling, but despite this misfortune he has gone right ahead simply by doing the routine and every other sort of work that was put up to him."

Evans, whose name, on the roll of the navy, but not in the mouths of its officers and men, was Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans. The ship was then on the China station. Admiral Evans speedily recognized in Lieut. Wilson an officer whose zeal, unflinching energy and officerlike smartness made him unusual, even with the high standard prevailing in the American Navy. There was a strong mutual liking and respect between Admiral "Fighting Bob" and his junior officer. His first command, an event long looked forward to, with its grave responsibility and its indication of hard won success in his chosen profession, came in 1909, when with the rank of commander, with three broad gold bands on his sleeve, he was assigned to the scout cruiser Chester, the first of the turbine ships of the navy. Later he commanded the North Dakota, also a turbine ship. Under him she became one of the most efficient ships in the

work. He also served ashore as president of the Board of Inspection, which not only inspects the older ships, oversees important repairs, etc., but also surveys the new ships of all classes to make certain they come up to contract requirements. Admiral Wilson had reached the rank of Captain in 1916 and had command of the great Pennsylvania, the pride of the Navy, when the event which was to reward him for his twenty-nine years of unusually hard work and close attention to duty came. In that year Congress passed a law requiring that officers above the rank of Lieutenant-Commander should be promoted by selection rather than by seniority. Just how highly Captain Wilson of the Pennsylvania was regarded in the Navy is shown by the fact that when the Selection Board, composed of Rear Admirals, met in December, 1916, Captain Wilson was one of the six officers distinguished by

## Frank A. Vanderlip Tells What Happened to Europe

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long as there are, here and there, plague centers in which idleness, lack of production, disorganized transportation, want and hunger make a breeding ground for the Bolshevick microbes. CHAPTER II. Transportation. If there were nothing else afloat with Europe except the breakdown of railway transportation, most of the European nations would still be facing a problem of gigantic proportions. The early settlement of which is not only essential to the resumption of industrial life but is actually essential to maintaining life itself in some of the large centers. Hundreds of thousands of people have starved to death in the last twelve months in Europe. I am not using figures as I said Lloyd George does, merely as adjectives. There is competent authority for such a statement. This terrible catastrophe has only in part been caused by lack of food. In an important measure the disaster is directly traceable to the breakdown in transportation, to the physical inability to move stores of existing food into localities where people were dying of starvation. At one time there were a hundred unloaded cargoes of food in the harbor of Marseilles, held there because preceding cargoes were blocking the lines of transportation. The railroads of Spain were, on the whole, in much better condition than I expected to find them. In France the system has wonderfully stood the test of the enormous movement which has been imposed upon it. But equipment is deficient, and much of it unbelievably ancient. Added to that is the ineffectual system of handling the traffic. One of our high military officers described the despatching of a freight car, say from Brest to Paris, as comparable with dropping a letter in a mail box. Some time, presumably, the car would arrive at its destination, but in the meantime there was no record of its whereabouts. No matter how important it was to have it reach its destination, no way existed to trace it, and it might get lost on a side track for a month. The situation in France or even in Belgium is by no means illustrative of the situation further east. It is true that in Belgium the Germans took

up practically all double track, even the principal main through lines, and have left but a single track for all traffic. Literally hundreds of masonry bridges have been destroyed in Belgium and northern France. It is easy to say that all this damage can be readily repaired, and so it can in time. My notes, however, indicate that the transportation system is so badly repaired, and at the present moment the tremendous handicap resulting from an inability promptly to move freight would alone be an enormously disorganizing factor to the industrial life of these countries. As one goes further east, however, the transportation system is found to be far more seriously disorganized. It is true that there has now been established some through services that might be taken to indicate a return to normal railroading conditions. One can travel from Paris to Warsaw, or to Belgrade, Bucharest or Constantinople. When it comes to transporting freight through the whole district east and south of Germany and of old Austria-Hungary the situation assumes serious aspects. Serbia was swept almost clean of all railway equipment. In France the railroad tariff is fixed by law. It is now admittedly too low, but there has been an indisposition materially to increase it, just as there has been an indisposition to increase taxes. The result is a sad deficiency in income and a serious decline in the physical condition of the rolling stock. The French railroads seem never to scrap rolling stock. I have seen a locomotive regularly running on a French railroad that bore the date 1857 on its name plate. That locomotive would be in a museum in America. Its boiler tubes were all of copper. It is to-day in regular operation. The way in which France has conserved its old rolling stock makes me wonder if Americans have not gone mad on rebuilding railroads. "Economical as is the management of the French lines, their income at the present too low rates is not sufficient to keep up properly their physical condition. The Allies have paid the Nord Railway three million pounds on account, and that is all that has kept the road going. The finances of all the French roads are bad. In France a tremendous amount will have to be spent to restore the railroads to a good physical condition. The problem is by no means insurmountable, but France will have to

put up rates. Everything that a railroad buys has gone up and there makes doubly difficult the restarting of industry. Among all of Europe's needs, none is more poignant than the rehabilitation of her railroads. Occasionally I had an interview that was so rich in material and that was given under such circumstances that I could make very brief running notes. I find in my notes, which indicate a lamentably scanty and scrappy one, the notes of an interview I had with a man who has made a great success on two continents and knows thoroughly from personal experience the railroad conditions in America, England and in Europe and who has rendered distinguished services throughout the world. My talk with him ranged over many subjects. Portions of the interview would logically fall in various chapters of this book, but perhaps it will be as interesting and readable to try to give an outline of what he had to say without any attempt at logical arrangement. "In England an extraordinary happy arrangement was made at the outbreak of the war. The British Government took over 95 per cent. of the railroad lines, guaranteeing them the same net return as they made in 1913. The Government allows the same amount to be spent on upkeep and charged to operating expenses as was spent in 1913, plus 20 per cent., the 20 per cent. being allowed to cover the increased cost of material and labor. There was so much difficulty in getting labor that one million pounds of this upkeep fund is unexpended. "The passenger rates in England were increased 50 per cent., not so much to get additional revenue as to prevent travel. Freight rates were not materially raised. Much traffic that had formerly moved by water had to be moved by rail, and this made ever in the minds of Englishmen. In America the policy of legislators and of the Interstate Commerce Commission has often been vindictive. England will probably be slow in making its final decision in regard to the railroads. It is the habit there to consider public questions carefully, but in the end it will be fairly considered and the owners of railroad securities will be treated fairly. "Personally, I think the Government ought to get out of the railroad business. Political influences will always hamper its policy of management. I doubt if railroads can ever be publicly run successfully in a democracy, although perhaps they can in an autocracy. "I have been spending some time in Belgium. You can discount somewhat the Belgian hard luck stories. The Belgian is inclined to exploit his misery. It is true that certain towns were wiped out, but all were not. Belgian agriculture is better than it was before the war. The Belgian children

have been well fed. Keep an eye on Belgium. Her industries may revive first in Europe, and she has great ability in the industrial field. "Here in France industry is handicapped in many ways. The Frenchman is jealous and suspicious of his neighbors. He is an individualist and does not like to cooperate. The genius of the French is for small business. They do not want Americans or English to come in to do business in France. That policy is undoubtedly a mistake. They ought to welcome the energy and brains of outsiders who would help them to get going. There has been enough altruism and amateur charity in regard to France. What France ought to do is to let capital and brains flow in and give vitality to her whole industrial life. She should do away with her restrictions. But, in fact, she has become more Chauvinistic than ever. "Do not be deceived, however, by the possibility of recovery in France. France has been very sick, but there is nothing wrong with her constitution. Foreigners can do business in France if they will only learn how to do so about it. Americans particularly do not know how to deal with Frenchmen. Americans are too direct and too blunt. No Frenchman wants to talk business in the first interview, and much of the business of France is done by indirection. One must take time to find out where to get in and in direct contact never take a Frenchman too seriously. The field of industry in France would be difficult for an outsider, but in the field of finance there is unlimited opportunity. "You ask what America should be doing in Europe. Europe is fairly crying for brains and capital. There are possibilities everywhere, and there are particular possibilities in some of the byways of Europe that capital does not think of. Portugal is one. Clear-sighted engineers with a business sense would find many opportunities in Portugal and in Spain. There are great mineral resources there and an excellent climate. "One of the old regions of the world, Mesopotamia, will be made to flourish like a green bay tree if a little capital and some brains would get hold of the situation and revive the irrigation system of ages ago. In the Balkans and

Patrolled Troops to Safety. For the benefit of the uninitiated, "the beach" in the language of the navy, includes everything which is not safely and naturally afloat on the ocean. The Capitol and navy offices in Washington, New York's far famed city line, and the Grand Canyon are all "on the beach" as far as the navy is concerned. If a few American transports appearing off the coast of France, loaded beyond the limits of their capacity with thousands of soldiers in the days when a single company might mean the difference between the fall and the saving of Paris, if a few of those crowded ships had been torpedoed the people of the world, might have heard of Admiral Wilson. It was his duty to guard those transports with his patrol ships. But he was not heard of, for though his craft were sunk and his men died, so well were the troops guarded that not a soldier lost his life when under the protection of Admiral Wilson's force. Admiral Wilson was born in Camden, N. J., February 23, 1861, and when a youngster of 16 entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis to be drilled, reprimanded, educated and tasked to obey like hundreds of other boys, until four years later he was considered strong enough to be his own master and therefore fit to command others. Then followed the usual wandering and slow promotion by seniority of an officer of the United States Navy, the swing from Atlantic to Pacific, from Occident to Orient and from torrid to frigid zones. In those days advancement for even the most skilled officers crawled with weighted feet. For nearly ten years, from 1884 to 1894, young Wilson, then an ensign, walked "patrol" for another half stripe of gold and finally he got it, reaching the rank of Lieutenant, junior grade, some seventeen years after he first entered the Naval Academy. A year or so before the