

REAR ADMIRAL WILLIAM WOHLSEN BEHRENS,  
U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

William Wohlsten Behrens was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania June 6, 1898. He attended Temple University Law School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, before his enlistment in the U.S. Naval Reserve Force on April 11, 1917. Appointed Ensign in the Reserve Force in May 1919, he was transferred to the U.S. Navy in that rank July 1919 and subsequently progressed in grade until his promotion to Commodore, August 22, 1945. He was transferred to the Retired List in rank of Rear Admiral on July 1, 1947.

During World War I, he served as an enlisted man on submarine patrol off the Atlantic Coast. Following his commissioning, he commanded Submarine Chaser No. 26 from September 1919 until July 1920. The two succeeding years he served consecutively in the USS QUINCY, the USS RAMAPO, USS GWIN, USS CONNER and the USS ALLAN. From June to December 1922 he had duty at the Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, Rhode Island. In January 1923 he joined the USS BRUCE in which he served until August 1924, and after assisting in fitting out the USS WHITNEY, served in that destroyer from her commissioning, September 2, 1924, until May 1926.

Duty in charge of the Naval Exhibit Afloat at the Sesquicentennial Exposition, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, until December 1926, was followed by sea duty in the USS WYOMING from January to July 1927 when he was assigned duty at the Receiving Barracks, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In December 1928 he again returned to sea, serving consecutively as Executive Officer of the USS MAHAN and the USS LANSDALE until March 1931 when he rejoined the WYOMING. He was aboard when that battleship picked up the submarine of Sir Hubert Wilkins (NAUTILUS, ex. O-boat), and towed that vessel from mid-Atlantic to Queenstown, Ireland, in June 1931.

Detached from the WYOMING in August 1931, he served as executive officer of the USS CLAXTON from October 1931 until June 1932. After commanding the USS IUKA for a brief period, he reported in July 1932 for duty in the Fourth Naval District, Philadelphia. In March 1934 he was assigned duty in connection with fitting out the USS MINNEAPOLIS, joined her when she was commissioned, May 19, 1934, and served as her assistant first lieutenant from June of that year until October 1935. He was then transferred to the USS HENDERSON, and from February 1936 until June 1937 was in command of the USS SOUTHARD.

Duty as Aide to the Commandant, Navy Yard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from June 1937 until March 1939, preceded command of the USS CIMARRON until July 1940, when he was transferred to the USS CONCORD as executive officer. That cruiser, undergoing over-



haul at San Francisco, California, at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, later operated on convoy duty in the South Pacific and patrolled the west coasts of Central and South America. Detached from the CONCORD in July 1942, he returned to the United States where he had duty in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., from August of that year until November 1943.

After fitting out the USS HOUSTON, named for the cruiser lost in Java Sea in February 1942, he commanded that cruiser from her commissioning, December 20, 1943, until July 31, 1945, and for extraordinary heroism as her Commanding Officer on October 14, 1944, was awarded the Navy Cross with the following citation:

NAVY CROSS:

"For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of the USS HOUSTON, during action against enemy Japanese forces off Formosa on October 14, 1944. With his ship dead in the water and listing violently in the heavy seas following an enemy aerial attack, Commodore (then Captain) Behrens remained steadfast and calm, efficiently directing damage control measures and the removal of personnel to other ships in the formation before his crippled ship was taken in tow by another cruiser. With his ship again under attack by hostile aircraft two days later, he inspired his officers and men to heroic effort, maintaining control and contributing in large measure to his ship's successful return to a friendly port. By his valiant leadership, determination and grave concern for the safety of his ship and her crew, Commodore Behrens upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Returning to the United States in August 1945, he was assigned duty as Commander, Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland, and served there in the rank of Commodore until relieved of all active duty pending his retirement on July 1, 1947.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Rear Admiral Behrens has the Purple Heart Medal, the Victory Medal, Submarine Clasp (enlisted service), and is entitled to the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp (USS CONCORD); the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal; the American Campaign Medal; and the World War II Victory Medal.



For his service in inaugurating the Naval V-12 program as Officer in Charge of the Administrative Training Division of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, he received the honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Franklin and Marshall College in 1943.

12 January 1950