

Ensign Worth Bagley ^[1]

Ensign Worth Bagley, a native of Raleigh, was the only U.S. Navy officer killed in action during the Spanish-American War.

Born in Raleigh in 1874, Bagley graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1895. After serving for two years on the USS *Montgomery*, *Texas*, and *Maine*, he was promoted to ensign on July 1, 1897. In November 1897 he was appointed inspector of the new torpedo boat *Winslow*. A month later he became the *Winslow's* executive officer, or second in command, under Lieutenant J. B. Bernadou.

In April 1898, the *Winslow* was mobilized with the rest of the Atlantic fleet for operations in Cuban waters. On the morning of May 11, the ship went with the *Hudson* and the *Wilmington* to force the entrance to the harbor of Cárdenas. She was fired upon by one of several Spanish gunboats, and a battle followed. The *Winslow* was soon disabled but was hauled out of range of the Spanish guns. Just as the battle ended, Ensign Bagley and four sailors were killed by a shell.

Worth Bagley's brother, David W. Bagley, served in World War I and World War II, retiring in 1947 as an Admiral.

Worth Bagley remembered

Because he was the only naval officer killed during the war, Worth Bagley received a number of honors.

Naval ships

Three ships were named USS *Bagley* in his honor: Torpedo Boat No. 24, Destroyer No. 185, and DD-386. A fourth, DE-1069, was named for both Worth Bagley and his brother.

At the Naval Academy

In 1899, a tablet was laid in his honor in the chapel at the U.S. Naval Academy, as this article from the *Baltimore Sun Almanac* noted:

"In the chapel of the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, January 22, 1899, a handsome memorial tablet was unveiled to the memory of Ensign Worth Bagley, United States Navy, the gallant ^[2] young officer who was the first to fall in the war with Spain. Lieut. J. B. Bernadou, who himself had a narrow escape in the same engagement, withdrew the curtain from the tablet.

"The tablet is of brass, and has a backing of antique oak. The inscriptions and ornamentations are inlaid in brass. Beneath a sword entwined by a palm is the following Inscription:

In Memory of **WORTH BAGLEY**, Ensign United States Navy,
The First American Officer who Fell In the
Spanish-American War. Killed on Board the Torpedoboat Winslow
During the Bombardment at Cardenas,
May 11, 1898.
"I have fought a good fight. I have
finished my course. I have kept the
faith." -- II Timothy, 4:1.
This Tablet is Erected by
The Officers of the Atlantic Torpedoboat
Flotilla.¹

In poetry

Ensign Bagley was honored in at least one poem, as well: "One Country -- One Sacrifice: Ensign Worth Bagley, May 11, 1898," by Richard Watson Gilder:

In one rich drop of blood, ah, what a sea
Of healing! Thou, sweet boy, wert first to fall
In our new war; and thou wert southron all!
There is no North, no South, -- remembering thee.²

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- 1. *Sun Almanac* (Baltimore: A. S. Abell Company, 1899), p. 46.
 - 2. Richard Watson Gilder, "One Country — One Sacrifice: Ensign Worth Bagley, May 11, 1898," *In Palestine and Other Poems* ^[3] [New York: The Century Co., 1898], p. 88.

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This statue of Worth Bagley stands in front of the State Capitol in Raleigh.

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