



Lieutenant Orlando Henderson Petty



Orlando H. Petty was born on 2/20/1874 in Cadiz, Ohio. Some accounts list his place of birth as Harrison, Ohio. The forms he filled out by hand list Cadiz. He was the son of Asbury F. Petty and Sarah Kyle. His twin brother was Orville Anderson Petty. He graduated from Muskingum College, and then went to medical school at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, graduating in 1904. He married Marcia Mellersh in 1908. They had two children: Clara and Orville. He died on 6/2/1932, at the age of 58, in Philadelphia, PA

After Petty completed his training, he continued on the faculty at Jefferson and specialized in metabolic disorders (what we would refer to as endocrinology today). At the age of 42, he joined the U.S. Naval Reserve Force and was commissioned as a lieutenant, junior grade, on 5 December of 1916.

In a letter received by the USN on 3/29/1917 he wrote:
"To Surgeon General, USN

Subject: Request for assignment to active duty in the event of hostilities or if services are now needed will gladly serve in the interhostile period. In the event of hostilities or if my services are now needed I respectfully request assignment to active duty. As I am actively connected with two hospitals I would perhaps be more efficient with a hospital assignment. If such is not available I will well and faithfully perform whatever service you may assign me.”

He shipped over to France in July of 1917 on the USS Henderson. He was stationed in St. Nazaire, France from 8/1917-11/1917.

He was transferred to the medical staff serving the USMC 5th Regiment, AEF, on 5/8/1918 (USN Reserve Force class 4). His commanding officer was Lt. Commander Paul Dessez. He worked in the battalion aid station in Lucy-le-Bocage where he worked under arduous conditions. The aid station was subjected to heavy artillery barrages and gas attacks on multiple occasions during his work there. The events depicted in *Our Desperate Hour: A Novel of the Battle of Belleau Wood* are the author's recreation of events described in available historical records. Petty was severely gassed while struggling to treat and rescue USMC Captain Lloyd Williams on June 11th, 1918.

Petty was evacuated and after degassing was admitted to Field Hospital Number 16. This was the hospital for gas cases located in Luzancy, France. It is a bit unclear how long he was there. His service records indicate admission on 6/11/1918 and discharge in “Jun 1918”. He was an inpatient at “Officer's Hospital #4” from 8/11/1918 -9/1/1918. This was probably American Red Cross Military Hospital Number 4 in Paris. The exact location of that hospital in Paris is unclear. Another record showed him receiving care at Base Hospital #101 for bronchitis (probably due to the gas exposure) on 8/27/1918. Yet another record showed him at “Red Cross Hospital #3”. From 9/1/1918 to 12/13/1918 one record has him assigned to US Navy Base Hospital 5 in Brest, France. He was transferred to the US Naval Air Station, Pauillac, Bordeaux, France on 10/16/1918. It appears that his time in the hospitals from September through his debarkation back to the US in December was partially for treatment, but that he probably continued to serve in a reduced duty fashion on the medical staff. According to Veterans Bureau records, his diagnoses included:

1. Gassed.
2. Fibroid Phthisis
3. “Chronic Enteritis and Colitis”
4. “Gall Bladder Infection”

Fibroid Phthisis is an antiquated term that included cases of tuberculosis complicated by chronic lung scarring along with other non-tubercular lung scarring. The thought at the time was that the non-tubercular cases (such as the condition we now call 'black lung disease') eventually became infected with tuberculosis. This disease, however, could be confused with other forms of fibrotic or scarring diseases of the lungs, including scarring in the aftermath of mustard or other warfare gas exposure. The "Chronic Enteritis and Colitis" was probably a form of persistent or chronic gastroenteritis, which in another report was listed as dysentery.

Petty's gas mask was torn while he carried Captain Lloyd Williams away from the destroyed battalion aid station in Lucy. During the evacuation and for an undocumented time afterward, he treated Williams and others without the gas mask in the midst of a gas attack. This exposed his facial skin, eyes, nose, mouth, and lower respiratory tract to mustard gas (the main gas apparently used in that attack). This would have left him with skin and eye inflammation. Swallowed mustard gas could cause gastroenteritis. When inhaled, mustard gas commonly caused chemical bronchitis that was often complicated by pneumonia. Heavy exposure could cause a non-infectious inflammatory reaction in the lungs that could lead to the formation of scar tissue that today would be called pulmonary fibrosis. At that time might be difficult to distinguish this from the aftereffects of tuberculosis. The diagnosis of "Fibroid Phthisis" could be entirely due to the late effects of the gas exposure. However, tuberculosis was common in that era and many physicians were exposed to it and became infected. Some of those would be left with chronic lung scarring. Radiology was a new science in that era, and chest x-rays were not a routine procedure. Thus, it was unlikely that he had baseline chest x-rays unless he had prior tuberculosis.

He left France on the USS De Kalb and arrived in the US on 12/19/1918. He was honorably discharged from active service on either 12/19/1918 or 12/21/1918 and returned home. He continued to serve in the US Navy Reserve Force after that. In 1921 the Congress reduced the appropriation for the US Navy Reserve Force from a requested \$12 million to \$7 million. This led the Navy to drastically reduce its reserve force. In this process, Petty was honorably discharged from his "class 2" reserve commission on 9/30/1921. He applied for reinstatement in what was termed a "class 6" commission in October of 1921, but the Navy denied his application. The record of this stated that he was denied due to the fact that they had not received his application before the deadline

of 1/1/1922. While he filed an application in October of 1921, the application must have not been complete.

Petty applied for Veterans Bureau War Risk insurance compensation for his service-related disability in February of 1922. This was approved. Later records indicated that the disability was rated as “not less than 30%”, though the exact physical deficits were not clear.

At some time between 1922 and 1927, he applied for a commission in the US Army Reserve Medical Forces. There was a statute that stated that service members receiving compensation for service-related disability were ineligible to serve in the reserve forces. The Army surgeon general waived this exclusion for Petty, who held the rank of major until at least 1927.

In 1927, Petty discussed the possibility of a transfer from the Army back to the Navy. The 4th Naval District was planning to establish a group of six specialists to serve as the nucleus of a special medical unit attached to the USMC. They wanted Petty to be one of their members. He passed a physical exam and was ruled fit for that duty and offered a commission as a lieutenant commander in the Volunteer Naval Reserve, for Special Service [USN MC-V(S)]. However, the surgeon general of the Navy could not waive the statutory exclusion of those receiving Veterans Bureau compensation. On that basis, Petty withdrew his application to the Navy.

After the war, Petty returned to Philadelphia. He took a position at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a professor of metabolic diseases. He also served as the personal physician of Philadelphia mayor Harry Mackey. He was appointed to head the Philadelphia Public Health Department in 1931. During that time, he was active in the field of metabolic diseases and authored a number of articles and a book: *Diabetes: Its Treatment by Insulin and Diet*. 1924, Philadelphia, PA. F.A. Davis. This book went through a number of printings and was apparently quite well received.

The details of Petty's health after the war are unclear. He was found dead in his bedroom, shot through the heart with his military service pistol, on 6/2/1932. The death was ruled a suicide. His family stated that he had been in ill health. He is buried in St. Timothy Churchyard, Roxborough, PA.

Lieutenant Orlando H. Petty's awards include:

U.S. Navy Medal of Honor citation of Lieutenant Orlando H. Petty, (M.C.), USNRF (as printed in the official publication "Medal of Honor, 1861-1949, The Navy", page 123):

"For extraordinary heroism while serving with the Fifth Regiment, United States Marines, in France during the attack in Bois de Belleau, 11 June 1918. While under heavy fire of high explosive and gas shells in the town of Lucy, where his dressing station was located, Lieutenant Petty attended to and evacuated the wounded under the most trying conditions. Having been knocked to the ground by an exploding gas shell which tore his mask, Lieutenant Petty discarded the mask and courageously continued his work. His dressing station being hit and demolished, he personally helped carry Captain Williams, wounded, through the shellfire to a place of safety."

U.S. Army Distinguished Service Cross

The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Lieutenant (MC) Orlando Henderson Petty, United States Navy (Reserve Force), for extraordinary heroism in action while serving as Medical Officer attached to the Fifth Regiment (Marines), 2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces, in France during the attack in the Boise de Belleau, 11 June 1918. While he was treating wounded under bombardment of gas and high-explosive shells, Lieutenant Petty was knocked down and his gas mask torn by a bursting gash shell, but he discarded his gas mask and continued his work. Later, when his dressing station was demolished by another shell, he helped carry a wounded officer through the shellfire to a place of safety.

U.S. Army Silver Star Citation

By direction of the President, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved July 9, 1918 (Bul. No. 43, W.D., 1918), Lieutenant (MC) Orlando Henderson Petty, United States Naval Reserve, is cited by the Commanding General, SECOND DIVISION A.E.F., for gallantry in action and a silver star may be placed upon the ribbon of the Victory Medals awarded him. Lieutenant Petty distinguished himself by gallantry in action while serving as a Medical Officer with the Fifth Regiment (Marines), 2d Division, American Expeditionary Forces, in action at the Bois de Belleau, France, 11 June 1918. Under heavy shell fire of both high

explosive and gas shells, Surgeon Petty attended to the evacuation of all wounded with extraordinary valor. Being knocked to the ground by an exploding gas shell and, tearing his mask, he discarded the mask and continued his work in a most courageous manner. When his dressing station was hit and demolished, he personally helped carry a wounded officer through the shell fire to a place of safety.

Croix de Guerre, with Palm awarded, 1919, by the French government.



US Navy photo#: NH 47318

References:

Thanks to André Sobocinski at the Office of Medical History, Communications Directorate, US Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery for his help finding Lt. Petty's service records.

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<http://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=2481>

Naval History and Heritage Command, accessed on 10/24/2016
<https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography.html>

The official Navy photo of Petty at the top is: US Navy Photo#: NH-47317

The following web information was accessed on 10/25/2106:
<http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/united-states-bureau-of-the-census/mcnary-family-with-trees-and-history-tti/page-11-mcnary-family-with-trees-and-history-tti.shtml>

John Frederick Andrews
Novels of the Great War