

## Rear Admiral George Collier Remey 1841-1928

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GEORGE COLLIER REMY  
Rear Admiral U. S. N.

# ANNALS OF IOWA

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## REAR ADMIRAL GEORGE COLLIER REMEY

1841-1928

Of especial interest to Iowans is the career of George Collier Remy, a native of Burlington, the first rear admiral of the United States Navy born west of the Mississippi River.

On his father's side Admiral Remy was descended from Abram Remy, a Huguenot refugee to this country, landing at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1700.

On his mother's side Admiral Remy descended from the Pilgrim Father, John Howland. Nathan Howland who served in the last French and Colonial War and was an officer in the Revolution was his great-grandfather. Admiral Remy's parents, William Butler Remy and Eliza Howland, were married in St. Charles, Mo., and migrated to Burlington the same year, 1837. Three of their sons performed distinguished service in the United States Navy. The second son, Colonel William Butler Remy, U. S. M. C., was first judge advocate general of the Navy, which post he filled from 1880 to 1892. The third son, Edward Wallace Remy, was lieutenant U. S. N. who was lost from his ship while a young man.

Admiral Remy's career was one of all-around achievement, in times of peace as in times of war. He served this country in four wars. He was a midshipman aboard the U. S. S. Hartford in Chinese waters at the outbreak of the Civil War. It was several months before news of the opening up of hostilities between the states reached China and several months later the Hartford reached home. He had various details one of which was the command of a vessel off the Charleston blockade where he had various encounters capturing blockade runners bringing munitions of war from Europe to the Confederates. Remy commanded one of the attacking parties on the attack

on Fort Sumpter. He was captured by the Confederates and was in prison thirteen months in Columbia jail in South Carolina, later being transferred to Libby Prison in Richmond where he was held for several weeks before his exchange was accomplished.

In 1873 in the town of Burlington George Collier Remy, then a commander, married Mary Josephine Mason, the daughter of Charles Mason, the first chief justice of Iowa. They were blessed with a family of six children.

In the years following the Civil War Remy had frequent duty in Washington, intermingled with sea duty. He was on the staff of Admiral Gherardi from 1880 to 1882 and witnessed the bombardment of Alexandria, Egypt, by the British squadron in the latter year.

Remy commanded the base of naval operations at Key West during the Spanish-American War, and two years later he took command of the United States squadrons in the Far East, at that time the largest squadron that the United States Navy had ever mobilized. During his duty there as commander in chief in the Far East he engaged in putting down the insurrection in the Philippines and took part in quelling the Boxer uprising in China.

Admiral Remy's entire career was one of efficiency and service so well carried out that there never was any question or criticism brought against him. When the problem of adopting modern methods of gunnery came up in our Navy in the early 1900's and the feeling was very bitter in the service between those on one hand who thought the old methods sufficient, and the progressives on the other hand led by Admiral Sims, who realized that our gunnery needed improvement to keep us abreast of the European navies, Admiral Remy endorsed Sim's recommendations. This was the beginning of the modern improved gunnery in our Navy.

Although Admiral Remy was removed by eight generations from his pioneer French ancestors he was the French gentleman in type, strikingly handsome with a politeness and charm that won the hearts of all who knew him. He was broad and universal in his religious sympathies as is noted in a foundation which he created in the name of his wife for the poor

of the Diocese of Washington, stating in the writ of gift that its benefits were to be distributed to the needy regardless of creed, nationality or race. The appreciation in which he was held in the service is summed up in the inscription on a loving cup presented to him on the completion of his last cruise, which reads as follows:

PRESENTED  
TO  
REAR ADMIRAL GEORGE COLLIER REMEY,  
UNITED STATES NAVY  
COMMANDER IN CHIEF, U. S. NAVAL FORCES  
ON THE ASIATIC STATION  
APRIL 19, 1900 TO MARCH 1, 1902  
BY  
THE CREW OF HIS FLAG SHIP  
THE BROOKLYN  
AS A MARK OF ESTEEM AND A TOKEN OF THEIR  
LASTING REMEMBRANCE OF HIS UNIFORMLY KIND  
AND JUST TREATMENT TO THE ENLISTED MEN OF  
HIS COMMAND

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(The facts that George Collier Remy was born and reared in Iowa, that he was appointed to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, that he returned to Iowa and married the daughter of Chief Justice Charles Mason, and that he was the first man from Iowa to attain the rank of rear admiral warrant us in presenting the foregoing brief biography and character sketch. He was born in Burlington, Iowa, August 10, 1841, died at his home in Washington, D. C., February 10, 1928, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The vast accumulation of Admiral Remy's letters, papers, art objects and other mementos have recently been deposited in the collections of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa at Des Moines.—E. R. H.)

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