



WOMPATUCK NEWS

Ammunition Depot Employee, Herbert L. Foss, Awarded Medal of Honor for Bravery 125 Years Ago

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Herbert L. Foss

March 25 is National Medal of Honor Day. Herbert L. Foss, a longtime resident of Hingham and employee at the ammunition depot, received The Congressional Medal of Honor July 7, 1899 for his bravery in the Battle of Cienfuegos during the Spanish -American War.

Foss was born on October 12, 1871 in Belfast Maine. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy on January 31, 1897. He served as a Seaman on the *U.S.S. Marblehead*.

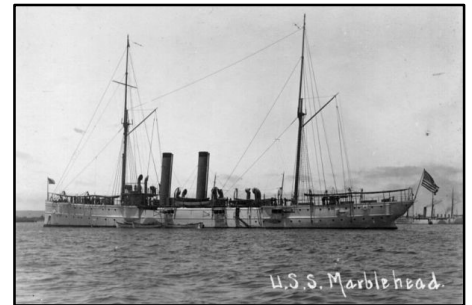
The United States entered the Spanish-American War in April 1898 on behalf of the revolutionaries in Cuba who were being oppressed by the Spanish.

On May 11, 1898 Seaman Foss and his crewmates snared the critical communication cable connecting Cuba and Spain off the coast of northwest Cuba. The mission was a daring operation to cut the undersea cables linking Spanish fortifications at Cienfuegos with the outside world. Destruction of the cables was ordered to disrupt communications.

In two boats, sailors from the *U.S.S. Nashville* and the *U.S.S. Marblehead* were joined by a Marine guard as they moved 15 feet from the enemy shore. With great difficulty while under intense enemy fire, the men pulled the cable up over the bow of their ship and proceeded to sever it.



The Battle of Cienfuegos where Seaman Foss cut the cable linking Cuba to Spain



U.S.S. Marblehead

Since many of his shipmates were killed or wounded in the process, Foss finished the job by cutting the cable with a hacksaw, destroying the line of communication and giving the U.S. a strategic advantage in the war.

Seaman Foss further distinguished himself aboard the *U.S.S. Marblehead* during the Battle of Santiago in July 1898.

The Spanish-American War ended with an American victory, U.S. control of the former Spanish lands of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, and temporary control of Cuba.

For his bravery during the Spanish-American War, Seaman Foss was awarded The Congressional Medal of Honor, the Admiral Sampson Navy Medal, the Good Conduct Medal and the Service Medal.

On November 9, 1899, his name was entered and recorded on the Navy and Army Medal of Honor Roll.

After the war, Foss worked at the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot as an Ordnanceman. His last job was superintendent at Hingham's Fort Hill Cemetery, caring for the veteran graves.

Foss was active in many Hingham and state organizations, including the Old Colony Lodge, the Knights Templar, the Spanish War Veterans Post and the Odd Fellows.

Although active in these organizations, he lived a quiet life. Very few people knew he won the Medal of Honor. According to the Town of Hingham website, his "receipt of The Congressional Medal of Honor had remained in obscurity to all but his family" until 1987.

In 1937, Foss collapsed while working in the cemetery. Taken to the South Weymouth Hospital, he later died of a coronary embolism on September 1, 1937 at the age of 66.



Herbert L. Foss grave site in Hingham

A funeral service was performed at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Hingham. From there, a procession formed and marched to the Fort Hill cemetery. The flag draped casket was borne along a 110th Cavalry Caisson drawn by six white horses. Military and Masonic Committal Services were accompanied by a bugler and

U.S. Marine Firing Squad from the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot.

He was buried at the Fort Hill cemetery. Foss's funeral was one of the biggest ever seen in Hingham.

The Hingham Veteran's Council conducts an annual ceremony at Foss's grave on the anniversary of his birthday on October 12. The ceremony includes the following: "The U.S. Navy Funeral Honors Detail will lay a wreath in his honor, the American Legion/VFW Rifle Squad will fire a salute, and members of the Old Colony Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons will conduct a ceremony."

Although born in Maine, Foss considered Hingham his home. His grandson donated his medals, citation and photograph to the Town of Hingham. They may be viewed at the Town Hall along with severed cable from the Battle of Cienfuegos. Another display of Foss can also be seen at the Bare Cove Park Dock House Exhibit.

To honor Herbert Foss, the boat terminal in Hingham and Hingham High's crew boat were named after him.



Herbert L. Foss ceremony at Hingham boat terminal October 12, 2022.



Harriet Kirkpatrick of Weymouth holds a Medal of Honor flag for her grandfather, Herbert L. Foss, while sitting with her friend, Fran Young of California, during the Annual Recognition Ceremony of Seaman Herbert L. Foss on October 12, 2022.



Foss statue at Hingham boat terminal.