

Capt. Douglas Spencer Bliss **(2 Feb 1879 – 2 Apr 1949)**

Numerous articles prior to 1920 detail Spencer Bliss' participation in rowing organizations and his role as recruiter for the DC National Guard.

The Evening Star, October 7, 1920, p. 1

D.S. Bliss Gets Post

Appointment of Capt. D. Spencer Bliss of 923 East Capitol street as assistant prohibition commissioner was announced by Commissioner Williams of the bureau of internal revenue today.

Capt. Bliss takes up his duties immediately, succeeding H.M. Gaylord, who resigned. The new assistant prohibition commissioner is a native of Washington and has been employed in the internal revenue bureau since 1899. He resigned in June 1917, to accept a commission in the Quartermaster's Corps of the Army, where he served until last October.

Following his reinstatement in the bureau as acting chief of the sales tax division, he was transferred to the head of the executive division of the prohibition unit.

During the Spanish-American war he served with the 1st Regiment, District of Columbia Volunteers. He also was with the Mexican mobilization forces.

The Evening Star, August 4, 1933, p. 4

Texan Made Deputy Revenue Commissioner

Wright Matthews and D. Spencer Bliss Given Promotions in Miscellaneous Division

By the Associated Press

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D. Spencer Bliss, head of the sales tax division of the miscellaneous tax unit, also has been designated to act as a deputy commissioner.

The Washington Post, December 7, 1933, p. 4

Spencer Bliss Selected Head Of Alcohol Unit

Succeeds Dr. J.M. Doran Who Becomes Code Authority

Capt. Spencer Bliss, veteran tax expert of the Internal Revenue Bureau, yesterday was appointed Commissioner of Industrial Alcohol, succeeding Dr. James M. Doran, by Henry Morgenthau, jr., Acting Secretary of the Treasury, as the first step in the conversion of the Bureau of Industrial Alcohol into a "distilled spirits unit."

Capt. Bliss has been acting deputy commissioner in charge of the miscellaneous tax unit of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Early in the prohibition era he served as assistant commissioner of prohibition, and helped organize the Bureau of Industrial Alcohol. He is a member of the President's inter-department liquor committee. Dr. Doran resigned as commissioner to head the trade association and act as code authority of the distilling industry.

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The Washington Post, January 12, 1934, p. 1

U.S. Seeks Curb on Illicit Whisky by Lifting Ban on Imports

The Government yesterday speeded its drive to break the hold of the bootlegger on the liquor traffic and to insure a supply of good liquor at reasonable prices.

Secretary Morgenthau, serving both good and bad liquor at his press conference, revealed this as the purpose behind lifting the restriction on importation of American-type whisky for 30 days and permitting the use of molasses alcohol in addition to grain alcohol for 45 days.

At the same time, Capt. D. Spencer Bliss, commissioner of industrial alcohol, revealed the country's supply of bonded whisky is less than 1,000,000 gallons, which is insufficient to supply the Nation a week at the present rate of consumption.

The good liquor served by Secretary Morgenthau to newspapermen was bootleg whisky. Morgenthau pointed out that the bootleg whisky was better because it had been aged, while the legal whisky had been rectified by combining a small amount of good whisky with green whisky.

Bootleg Rum Superior

He used this as an argument for permitting importation of good whisky and making possible the use of pure alcohol in rectifying, instead of raw whisky.

When reporters entered the Secretary's office, they found eight bottles lined up on his desk. They were invited to sample the contents and express an opinion. They agree with him that the bootleg whisky was superior.

The only available legal American-made whisky, other than the small quantity of bonded liquor still in existence, is green liquor, at most only a few weeks old.

There is not sufficient alcohol in the United States to begin to supply the demand for rectifying purposes, in spite of the fact every distillery is working 24 hours a day.

Because of the alcohol shortage, whisky now on sale is composed of an average of 5 per cent – sometimes as low as 1 per cent – of aged whisky, 95 to 99 per cent of liquor just out of the still, and coloring matter to give an aged appearance.

Bonded Supply Dwindling

Tests made by Government chemists, as well as by private chemists, show that a good grade of bootleg whisky, aged in a charred barrel for six months, is far superior to legal whisky.

When prohibition was repealed there were in the warehouses of the United States a total of 6,000,000 gallons of bonded liquor, according to Capt. Bliss, who estimated the present supply is less than 1,000,000 gallons. To meet the demand, 100,000,000 gallons of aged whisky will be needed annually, he believes, and he added there is no reason to believe there will be such a supply for four or five years.

Most of the bonded whisky that has been withdrawn from the warehouses has not been sold as such, Capt. Bliss said. Instead, it has been mixed with alcohol or green whisky and sold as rectified whisky. Of the 6,000,000 gallons of bonded liquor in warehouses, 4,500,000 gallons were in barrels and 1,500,000 gallons in bottles. There is evidence that most of the bottles have been opened and their contents used to make rectified whisky.

Alcohol Shortage Acute

"There has been very little good whisky of any kind on sale since prohibition," Capt. Bliss said. "There is no objection to rectifying with alcohol if enough whisky is used, but the supply of whisky as was stretched so far that even when pure alcohol was used the result was not good.

"Then the alcohol shortage became so acute and the price so high that most manufacturers simply turned to green liquor. The drinker can detect that kind immediately. It has what we call a 'slot taste.'"

The lifting of the ban on molasses alcohol, in the opinion of Capt. Bliss, will have some effect in stopping the use of raw whisky for rectifying. He estimated the amount of such alcohol that could be turned over to distillers at 14,000,000 gallons.

“But what will the manufacturers mix with the alcohol?” he asks.

With the supply of good American whisky virtually exhausted, the import restrictions on American type whisky – rye and Bourbon – have been temporarily lifted. Capt. Bliss estimates there are 15,000,000 gallons of such whisky available for import, nearly all from Canada.

Bottled Supply Scarce

This either may be sold in bottles or used for rectifying. As compared with the estimated need of 100,000,000 gallons a year, this supply is not large.

What then?

Capt. Bliss said he couldn't answer. The only apparent solution is more green liquor.

But there is one touch of silver behind the cloud that accompanies the drought. That is the fact, according to Capt. Bliss, that whisky, aged for six months in charred barrels, is not bad – at least not nearly as bad as the product hardly cold from the still that is being legally sold now. Capt. Bliss said this whisky should be on a par with good bootleg whisky now being sold and that there should be at least a partial supply of six-month old spirits six months from now.

The gin supply is being affected by the shortage of alcohol. Most American gin is rectified. It can not be rectified with green whisky. Alcohol must be used. Unless the supply of alcohol is materially increased, gin drinkers will not be able to obtain a supply.

Import restrictions were tightened to permit returning Americans to bring with them only one quart of liquor duty free. Under customs regulations they are allowed to bring in \$100 worth of merchandise without paying duty. Reports from the Canadian border indicate thousands of Americans making a practice of bring \$100 worth of liquor.

The Washington Post, March 11, 1934, p. 1

Rum Agencies' Merger Asked By Roosevelt Taxation and Enforcing Units' Consolidation Wanted at Once

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The present Commissioner of Industrial Alcohol, D. Spencer Bliss, who formerly was with the Internal Revenue Bureau, will return to that agency. It was thought probable that he would be named as a deputy in charge of alcoholic beverages.

The Evening Star, May 13, 1936, p. A4

Company G Holds Annual Reunion Survivors of First D.C. Volunteers in Spanish War Dine

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Capt. D. Spencer Bliss acted as toastmaster and First Sergt. John A. Chrisholm called the roll.

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The Evening Star, February 14, 1938, p. 18

Spencer Bliss of Capital Among Many to Pay Final Tribute To Late Syracuse Coach

By the Associated Press

Syracuse, N.Y., February 14 – Rowing celebrities from all parts of the United States will join tomorrow in final tribute to James A. Ten Eyck, Syracuse's "grand old man of rowing."

The list of honorary pall bearers at the former Syracuse rowing coach's funeral at the university chapel tomorrow afternoon includes former coaching associates, oarsmen and newspaper men who cover the sport.

Among them are Charles Walsh of Annapolis, Md.; Capt. D. Spencer Bliss of Washington and Robert Edgren of Los Angeles.

Bliss, D. Spencer, Capt. Suddenly in Phoenix, Ariz., on April 1, 1949, Capt. D. Spencer Bliss, son of the late Alfred G. and Jane Bliss, brother of Flora R. Pickells and Annie B. Walz, uncle of Mrs. Dorothy Pickells Shepherd, Mrs. Ruth Walz O'Connell and Spencer Bliss Walz. Friends may call at the Lee Funeral Home, 4th st. and Mass ave. n.e., after 12 noon Wednesday, where services will be held on Thursday, April 7, at 2 p.m. Interment Congressional Cemetery.

The Evening Star, April 2, 1949, p. A1

Bulletin

Douglas S. Bliss Dies

Douglas Spencer Bliss, who retired last month as deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue here, died at a Phoenix (Ariz.) hotel last night, the Associated Press reported. He had been undergoing treatment for a lung ailment.

The Evening Star, April 3, 1949, p. A34

D. Spencer Bliss Dies In Arizona; Retired Revenue Official

Douglas Spencer Bliss, recently retired deputy commissioner of the Internal Revenue here, died in a Phoenix, Ariz., hotel Friday night.

The 70-year-old Washington native was found dead in his hotel room by a maid, Associated Press dispatches reported. He had gone to Arizona for treatment of a bronchial ailment after his retirement in February.

Mr. Bliss had been in Government service for 50 years. He started as a Treasury Department clerk in 1899 and was the oldest Treasury employe in point of service when he retired. Among the positions he had held were section chief of various divisions, assistant commissioner of prohibition, commissioner of industrial alcohol and deputy commissioner in charge of the miscellaneous tax unit. His tenure of the latter post dated from 1934.

Mr. Bliss was a lifelong resident here. He had been a member of the Corcoran Cadets and had served in the Spanish-American War, the Mexican Border Campaign and in World War I as a Quartermaster Corps captain. A star athlete in baseball and football at Eastern High School. He also was a champion lightweight boxer and oarsman in his youth.

Active in Community Chest and Red Cross work. Mr. Bliss was a 32nd Degree Mason and a Shriner and also was a member of the United Spanish War Veterans, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Manor Country Club.

A bachelor, he is survived by two sisters, Mrs. Flora Pickells, with whom he lived, at 923 East Capitol street and Mrs. Annie B. Walz of 117 Thirteenth street S.E.

Funeral arrangements have not been completed.

The Washington Post, April 3, 1949, p. M14

D.S. Bliss, Retired U.S. Official, Dies

Douglas Spencer Bliss, 70, who retired a month ago as a deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, died in a Phoenix (Ariz.) hotel Friday night, the Associated Press reported.

When he retired, he was the oldest Internal Revenue employe in point of service, having been in the Government 50 years and 7 months. He had lived at 923 E. Capitol st. for many years.

A retired Army captain he saw active service during the Spanish American War, the Mexican mobilization and the first World War.

Captain Bliss joined the Treasury Department in 1899, and his career included such posts as assistant commissioner of prohibition and commissioner of industrial alcohol. He served as deputy commissioner in charge of the miscellaneous tax unit from 1934 until his retirement.

He had suffered from bronchial asthma for several years.

He is survived by one sister, who was thought by friends here to have accompanied him on a trip to Arizona and California.

The Washington Post, April 16, 1949, p. B2

Bliss Leaves Estate Here Of \$123,936

Douglass Spencer Bliss, former deputy commissioner of Internal Revenue who died April 1 in Arizona, left an estate here of \$123,936, it was learned yesterday.

According to terms of the will filed for probate in District Court, the bulk of the estate will go eventually to two nieces and a nephew. They are Mrs. Dorothy P. Heber of Michigan, and Mrs. Ruth O'Connell and Spencer Bliss Walz of Washington.

A sister, Mrs. Annie Bliss Walz of 117 13th st. se., gets \$500 and a life interest in the bulk of the remainder goes to another sister, Mrs. Flora B. Pickells of 923 East Capitol st.

Interred: Congressional Cemetery, Range 108 Site 221

National Archives

Record Group 56: General Records of the Department of the Treasury

56.14: Records of Other Organization Units (1871-1986)

56.14.4: Records of the Bureau of Prohibition

The Bureau of Prohibition was responsible for tracking bootleggers and organized crime leaders. They focused primarily on interstate and international cases and those cases where local law enforcement officials would not or could not act.

Predecessor Agency: Prohibition Unit, Department of the Treasury

Successor Agency: Alcohol Tax Unit, Department of the Treasury