

Emma C. Steed (- 17 Dec 1949)

Steed, Emma C. (Mother). On Saturday, December 17, 1949, at her residence, 5321 Fairfax dr., Arlington, Va., Emma C. (Mother) Steed, beloved wife of J. Nathaniel Steed. Remains resting at the Ives Fufneral Home, 2847 Wilson blvd., Arlington, Va., until Tuesday, December 20, at 1:30 p.m., thence to St. George's Episcopal Church, North Nelson and 9th sts., Arlington, Va., where funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. Interment Congressional Cemetery.

The Evening Star, December 18, 1949, p. A10

'Mother' Steed, GI's Friend in Two Wars, Dies

Mrs. Emma C. Steed -- "Mother" Steed to thousands of servicemen here and abroad during both world wars -- died yesterday at her home, 5321 Fairfax drive, Arlington, after a long illness.



"Mother" Steed, who died yesterday, with two of "her boys" at a party in her honor during World War II at Servicemen's Club No. 1, which she founded. —Star Staff Photo.

The 85-year-old World War I Red Cross worker had suffered from a heart ailment and had been in a coma for the last eight weeks.

She had been blind since 1946. She lost the sight of one eye while serving in France during World War I. It became infected as she went into battle areas setting up canteens. In 1946, she lost the sight of her other eye when she was struck by a ball while watching a servicemen's game she had sponsored in Rock Creek Park.

Shortly after the beginning of World War II, Mrs. Steed was credited with starting Servicemen's Club No. 1 at Ninth street and Pennsylvania avenue N.W. Armed with only a percolator and two cups, she was determined to start a home for the soldiers, sailors and Marines here who had no place to go. The club was started with about 80 beds. In 1945 it boasted beds

for 74, food for several thousands and recreation programs for approximately 40,000 a month.

"Mother" Steed became official hostess of the United Nations Service Center here, and, as supervisor at the center, she arranged more than 1,500 dances for service people. She received numerous awards for her work and was given her highest decoration in 1947 -- a meritorious service award signed by President Truman.

On her 80th birthday in September, 1944 - celebrated at the club - several hundred servicemen of both World Wars stood in long lines to kiss her or whirl her around the floor in a fast fox trot. They stood at attention in her honor and pinned corsages of orchids, roses and gardenias on her, covering the bodice of her dress. It took two tables to hold all the gifts. The Navy School of Music's dance band played.

On her birthday two years later she was praised and presented a gift by Brig. Gen. C.B. Ferenbaugh, then commanding the Washington Military District, at a celebration in her honor at the service center. On the occasion her husband, Joshua N. Steed, a retired chief clerk in the Adjutant General's Office, shared in the honors.

But she said it was the love of "her boys" and their remembering her through the years that were her greatest rewards. She had no children of her own.

Shortly before this country entered World War II, Mrs. Steed was interviewed during a radio program here by Mrs. Charles L. McNary, wife of the late Senator from Oregon. Then hostess at the Soldiers', Sailors' and Marines' Club, 1015 L street N.W., Mrs. Steed recalled some of her Red Cross canteen days in World War I at Dijon, France. She added that she often met veterans she had known over there and that they remembered her. She said that not many months before the interview she was approached by a man in a small Western town who said:

"Mother, don't you remember me? I was in the guard house at Dijon?"

She admitted that the soldiers in the guard house were among her favorites.

The World War II soldier was not as "carefree and wild" as those in the first World War, she maintained.

"They have more seriousness and purpose deep down underneath their jitterbugging and funny talk," she said.

As a Red Cross worker in World War I, Mrs. Steed went to France in 1918. Her ship was torpedoed off Ireland, but was able to get into port.

After that war, Mrs. Steed operated a lodging house at Ninth street and Pennsylvania avenue N.W., catering largely to war veterans and depression victims. Later she was in charge of quarters for 125 veterans at 318 C street S.W.

Mrs. Steed was a native of Washington and she and her husband recently celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Besides her husband she has no immediate survivors.

Funeral arrangements have not been completed. The arrangements are being made at the Ives funeral home, 2847 Wilson boulevard, Arlington.

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Funeral Rites Today For Mother Steed

Funeral services for Mrs. Emma C. Steed -- "Mother" Steed to thousands of servicemen here and abroad during both world wars -- were held this afternoon in St. George's Episcopal Church, North Nelson and Ninth streets, Arlington. Burial was to be in Congressional Cemetery.

The 85-year-old World War I Red Cross worker died Saturday at her home, 5321 Fairfax drive, Arlington, after a long illness. She had suffered from a heart ailment and had been in a coma for the last eight weeks.

Mrs. Steed, who started Servicemen's Club, No. 1, at Ninth street and Pennsylvania avenue N.W., shortly after the beginning of World War II, died totally blind. She lost the sight of one eye while serving in France in World War I and the other when struck by a softball while watching a servicemen's game she sponsored in Rock Creek Park in 1946.

Mrs. Steed, a member of an old Washington family, was the wife of Joshua N. Steed, a retired chief clerk in the Adjutant General's Office.