

Nurse Honored for War Service

Mrs. Elmira B. Wickenden Third Woman in Country to Receive Medal for Merit.

Today in Washington Mrs. Elmira B. Wickenden, R. N., with her husband and two pretty daughters standing proudly by, becomes the third woman in the nation's history to be awarded the Medal for Merit.

The alert, slender, dark-eyed Mrs. Wickenden is being honored for her "superior organizing talent and energetic action" as executive secretary of the National Nursing Council for War Service, which co-ordinated the activities of all nursing and allied agencies to aid the Government and the armed forces during the war.

In her comfortable home at 5 The Byway, Bronxville, Mrs. Wickenden, who was taking penicillin for a severe cold, had decided it would be easier to get up than to try to receive the visits and telephone calls of the press and well-wishers from her bed.

"I was in Canada with my fam-

ily up nursing schools and public health services. In such jobs you don't stick to a routine—you create. My year in Belgium working with civilians was one of the most rewarding of my whole life."

In Hospitals.

Mrs. Wickenden stressed the possibilities of public health, industrial, and psychiatric nursing. A nurse can find great satisfaction in bringing good care to rural U. S. areas which do not yet have it, she feels. Enthusiastic about the work of the Public Health Service, she hopes that soon health centers, visiting nurse centers and public health offices for a community will all be located under one roof, in hospitals. Such co-ordination, she said, would improve the caliber of service and encourage more people to take advantage of it.

Along with her work for the nursing council Mrs. Wickenden was active in establishing U. S. Cadet Nurse Corps, and appointed by the President as nurse advisor to the U. S. Mission, World Health Organization, in June, 1946. She was the first nurse to receive the Medal for Merit. Other recipients were Mrs. Mary L. Ham and Mrs. M. Berg.



Mrs. Elmira B. Wickenden.

ily when the telegram came," she said. "To tell you the truth, I wasn't quite sure what the Medal for Merit was. But the idea was so exciting that I didn't relax much during our vacation.

For the Profession.

"I've always felt that medals should be awarded to the military, not to civilians. But now I realize that this is a distinction for the whole nursing profession rather than just for me, and I'm proud to be able to receive it in that spirit.

"I think I was asked to head the council because I lived near New York, was well known in nursing (I served overseas for two years in world war I), and had retired and didn't have any professional duties to attend to. I'm sure people said, 'Well, why doesn't she do it? She has plenty of free time.' So I did.

"The council was organized to unify the activities of national nursing agencies, Red Cross nursing, Army, Navy and Government nursing, all groups that worked with nurses in any way. Our job was to disseminate information, see that enough nurses were recruited, see that jobs went smoothly and duties weren't duplicated—in other words, to solve the problems of service and civilian nursing. We were proud of the way Negro nurses were integrated into the services. I retired after the war, but the council is working on a post-war plan."

Public Health Nursing.

Pausing occasionally to sip a cough drop (no substitute, she feels, for a cigarette), Mrs. Wickenden said that after her graduation from the Waltham, Mass., Training School for Nurses she served as a Red Cross nurse for a year, and with the Hoover Reconstruction group in Belgium for a year, then went into public health nursing. Retiring to marry and have children, she went back into the profession during the '30s to study the effects of the depression on public health nursing.

"Opportunities in nursing are really limitless," she said emphatically. "I don't know of any profession that offers such opportunities for travel and truly creative work. Experienced nurses have worked in China, the Middle East, with UNRRA and the Army and Navy in war areas all over the world. Greece, the Orient, South America, and the Middle East still want qualified American nurses to help them set