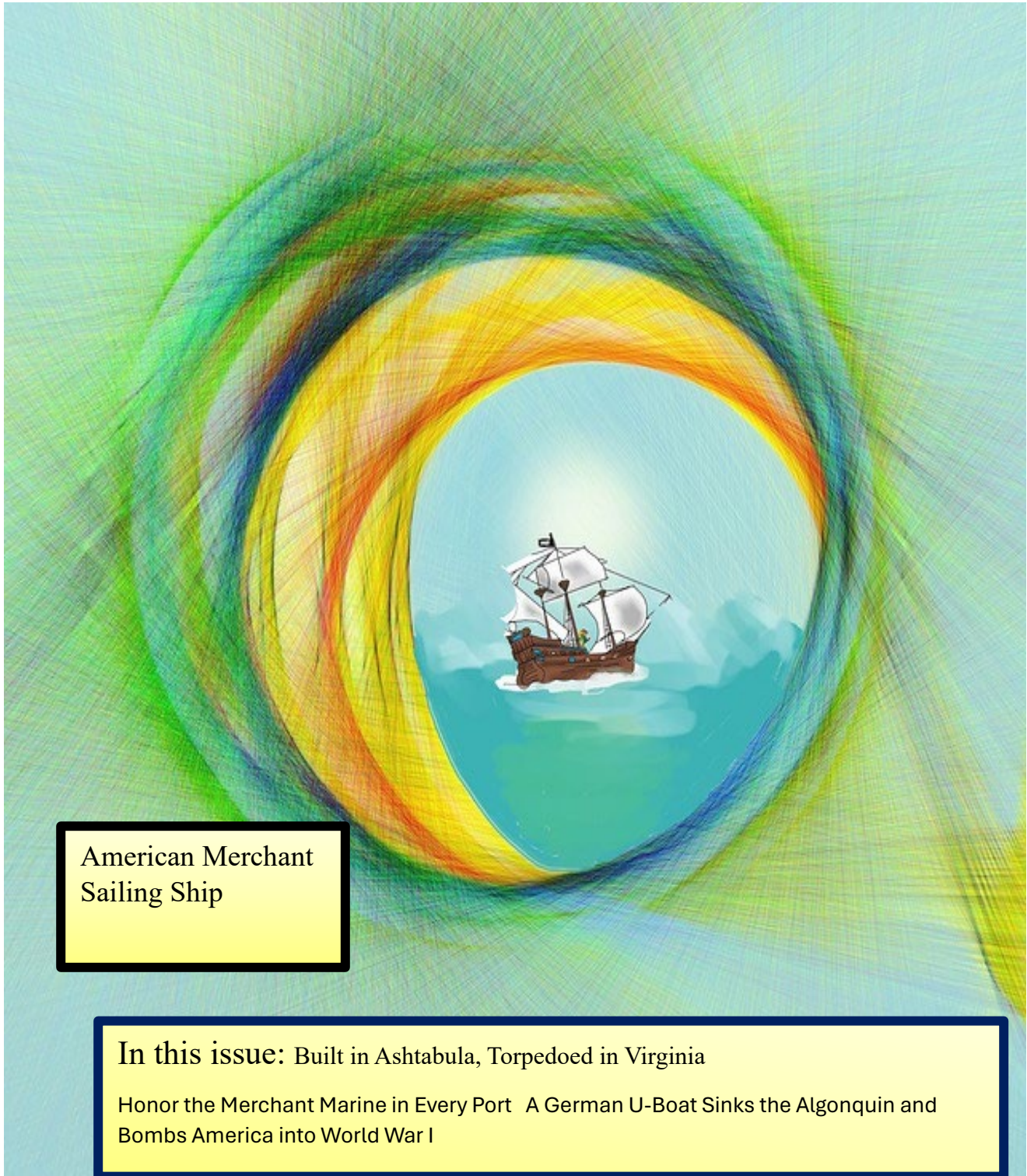


Ports and Portholes

April 2024

Volume 2, Issue 5



American Merchant
Sailing Ship

In this issue: Built in Ashtabula, Torpedoed in Virginia

Honor the Merchant Marine in Every Port A German U-Boat Sinks the Algonquin and Bombs America into World War I

Built in Ashtabula, Torpedoed in Virginia

The Great Lakes Engineering Works in Ashtabula, Ohio built many ships that left the wakes of useful lives behind them. The David H. Atwater ended its coal transporting life as tragically and dramatically as any spun sailor's yarn.

The Ashtabula Works of Great Lakes Engineering built the steam merchant ship David H. Atwater in 1919.



The David H. Atwater began its christened life as the Crabtree for the United States Shipping board and was launched in June 1919 at the Ashtabula Great Lakes Engineering Works. By 1922, the North Shore Transit Company of Port Huron, Michigan had purchased the ship and renamed it W.J. Crosby. Seven years later, it turned Canadian when the Canada Forwarding Company Ltd, in Port Arthur, Canada purchased it. The merchant ship acquired its final name in 1935, when the Atwacoal Transportation Company in Fall River, Massachusetts bought it and Fall River became its homeport. The David H. Atwater carried cargo between Norfolk, Virginia and Fall River, Massachusetts.

The merchant ship Atwater sailed its perilous route during the hightide of the attacks on United States shipping that German U-boat commanders called "The

Second Happy Time.” “The Happy Time” describe he period in the Battle of the Atlantic lasts from January to August of 1942 when Axis submarines attacked merchant shipping and naval vessels along the coast of North America. During the “Second Happy Time,” Axis submarines sank 609 ships for a total of 3.1 million tons of cargo while losing only 22 U-boats. Thousands of Allied lives were lost, mostly those of merchant mariners.

The David H. Atwater and its crew contributed to these statistics.

Carrying a cargo of 3,911 tons of coal, the David H. Atwater left Lambert’s Point, Virginia, Norfolk on a voyage to its home port Fall River, Massachusetts on April 3, 1942. With a crew of eight officers and nineteen men, The Atwater did not have an escort nor did it carry arms. Captain William Keith Webster ignored instructions and departed Norfolk in the afternoon which meant that he would not arrive at the mouth of the Delaware Bay before dark, making his vessel extremely vulnerable to submarine attacks.



Captain William Keith Webster

Despite untimely afternoon departure from Norfolk, Captain William Keith Webster was an experienced sailor.

Captain Webster and the Atwater had reached a point about ten miles east of Chincoteague Inlet, Virginia when German submarine U-552, only 17 months old and based in St. Nazaire, France began to shell her.

Submarine commander Kapitän-Lieutenant Erich Topp who had already received the Knight’s Cross, had stalked the Atwater underwater and then surfaced about six hundred yards away about 9L30 that evening.

Without warning, the U-552 opened fire with her 88mm deck gun and automatic weapons possibly including her 20mm cannon.



*1*Kapitän-Lieutenant Erich Topp



The U-552 was nicknamed "Roter Teufel" (or Red Devil) because the Conning tower had a red devil painted on it.

Ocean City Dispatch

The Atwater caught fire and one of the first shells demolished the bridge and killed all of the officers. Altogether, the submarine fired 93 shots with its deck gun, 50 of them hitting and quickly sinking the Atwater. As the Atwater sank, the submarine's crew fired on the struggling Atwater survivors as they attempted to get into the lifeboats.

Amidst a firestorm of bullets and shells, the crew of the Atwater tried to enter the lifeboats, but when Captain Webster fell, his crew abandoned the lifeboats and jumped into the Atlantic Ocean. All of the officers died, and only three of the men who jumped overboard survived by swimming to an empty lifeboat.

Hearing the gunfire, the small Coast Guard patrol boat USS CG-218 arrived at the scene about 45 minutes after the sinking of the Atwood. Its crew discovered a lifeboat with three survivors and three bodies inside.

Fifteen minutes later, the Coast Guard cutter LSCGC Legare arrived. The Legare crew members found a second lifeboat containing a body and riddled by gun fire. The bullet-riddled gunboat strengthened the belief that U-Boat crews deliberately murdered the survivors after they sank a vessel. The Legare transported the three survivors and three bodies to Chincoteague Island Coastguard Station and steamed back into the Atlantic to search more extensively for survivors and the U-Boat. Officials sent the destroyers USS Noa and USS Herbert to the scene, but by then the U-52 had escaped to sink other vessels. The Coast Guard took the bodies, lifeboats, and life rafts from the Atwater that they recovered to Ocean City, Maryland. Medical personnel preparing the bodies to be shipped to Norfolk were riddled with bullet wounds.

Kapitan-Lieutenant Erich Topp, who was the third most successful U-boat captain, and his crew were never charged with murdering the crew of the David Atwood. Captain Topp later attained the rank of rear-admiral in the postwar West German Navy.

The Crew of the SS David Atwater



Cyril Benjamin Adamseck.

Merchant Marine, American, was the First Mate on the David Atwater. He was born on May 19, 1892, in Detroit, Michigan. He died in the David Atwater torpedoing on April 3, 1942, at age 49. He left a wife and two daughters. He is buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

Chief Engineer **William Bevan**, 46, was born in 1896. He hailed from North Westport, Massachusetts. He did not survive the submarine attack.



Ordinary Seaman **Harold Hampton Brown, Jr.** was 23 years old, born August 18, 1918, He is from Warwick, Rhode Island and buried in Brayton Cemetery in Warwick, Rhode Island.

Jack Burros, Messboy, 34, of Providence, Rhode Island, survived the attack of the U-552.

Able Seaman **Ernest Cartwright** was born in North Carolina in 1913. He survived the attack by U-552.

William Cox, Fireman/Watertender was an African-American, born on March 29, 1898, in Georgia. He was the son of John Cox, of Savannah, Georgia. A liberty ship, SS William Cox, was named in his honor. He did not survive the attack by U-552.

Nesbit Cummings, Fireman/Watertender, was an African-American, born in 1897, and 45 years old. He did not survive.

9-10-41-503A
 GIN RESERVED FOR BINDING
 FADING INK. Every item of information should be carefully supplied.
 Physicians: please write the cause of death clearly and legibly.

Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census		COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS		State File No. 638-E
1. PLACE OF DEATH (a) County: <u>Norfolk</u> Registration district No. (For reg. use) (b) Magisterial district: <u>Norfolk</u> (c) City or town: <u>at Sea-</u> (d) Name of hospital or institution: <u>Atlantic Ocean</u> (e) Length of stay in hosp. or inst. In this community. (Specify whether years, months, or days) (f) Is place of death within corporate limits?		2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED (a) State: <u>Georgia</u> (b) County: <u>Savannah</u> Street No. <u>506 1/2 W. Broad st</u> (c) City or town: (d) Is place of residence within corporate limits? (e) Citizen of foreign country? <u>no</u> (Yes or No) If Yes, name country		
3. (a) FULL NAME: <u>Nesbit Cummings</u> (b) If veteran, name war:		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION 20. Date of death: <u>Apr. 2nd, 1942</u> (Month by name) (Day) 19 (Year) at (Hour) M		
4. Sex: <u>Male</u>	5. Color or race: <u>Colored</u>	6. (a) Single, married, widowed, divorced. <u>Married</u>		
7. Date of birth of deceased: <u>1900</u> (Month by name) (Day) (Year)		21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from _____ 19____ to _____ 19____; that I last saw h. alive on _____ 19____ and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above. Duration Immediate cause of death: <u>Multiple injuries to</u> Due to: <u>falls</u> Due to: <u>Shrapnel</u> Other conditions: <u>Shrapnel wounds</u> (Include pregnancy within 3 months of death) <u>1917</u> Physician		
8. Age: Years <u>42</u> Months _____ Days _____ If less than one day _____ hours _____ min. _____	9. Birthplace: <u>Savannah</u> <u>Ga.</u> (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)		10. Usual occupation: <u>Seaman</u>	
11. Industry or business:				

William Edward Fitzler, 56, from Fall River, Massachusetts, was the Third Assistant Engineer on the David Atwater. He was born on June 2, 1885, the son of Ferdinand H. and Nora Fitzler and husband of Ella L. Fitzler. He did not survive.

Albert Henry Fletcher, 58, Second Mate was born December 1, 1883, and lived in Amityville, New York. He did not survive.

Sabino Luiz Gomez, 49, Fireman/Watertender, was born on December 3, 1889, in the Cape Verde Islands. He was an African-American who lived in Providence, Rhode Island. He survived the U-552 attack.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U 2659 I. NAME (Print) Sabino Luiz Gomez ORDER NUMBER _____
(First) (Middle) (Last)

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 30 Transit St. Providence R.I. Rhote Island
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)
 [THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS None
(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)

4. TELEPHONE none 5. AGE IN YEARS 3-2 6. PLACE OF BIRTH Cape Verde Islands
(Exchange) (Number) (Day) (Month) (Yr.) (Town or county) (State or country)

DATE OF BIRTH December 3 1889
(Day) (Month) (Yr.) (State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Joseph M. Silver, 30 Transit St. Providence R.I.

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Atwater Coal Co. Fall River, Mass.

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS On boat
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE

U. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 4-1-42) (over) 16-21630-1 Sabino Luiz Gomez (Registrant's signature)

Orville Eaton Green, 21, was an Oiler on the David Atwater. He was born on July 5, 1920, in Oregon City, Oregon, the son of John f. and Maud F. Green. He did not survive the attack and he is buried in Mountainview Cemetery in Oregon City, Oregon.

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 710 DIVISION ST. OREGON CITY OREGON
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)
 [THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS Same
(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)

4. TELEPHONE _____ 5. AGE IN YEARS 21 6. PLACE OF BIRTH Oregon City
(Exchange) (Number) (Day) (Month) (Yr.) (Town or county) (State or country)

DATE OF BIRTH July 5 1920
(Day) (Month) (Yr.) (State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mr. Frank Green, 710 Division St. Oregon

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS Seaman Unemployed

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Seaman
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE

Orville E. Green



Albert Julius Halbig, 42, an Oiler on the David Atwater, was born on August 9, 1899, in Walker Springs, Alabama. He is buried in Elmwood Memorial Gardens, Columbia, South Carolina.

Funeral services for Albert Halbig, 42, who was killed Thursday night in the Atlantic when his ship was torpedoed, will be held at 4 o'clock this afternoon from the Thompson Funeral Home.

Mr. Halbig was listed along with 16 others killed on board the ship, according to a telegram received here last night. He had served with the Merchant Marines. His

T. 666	ALBERT JULIUS HALBIG	T. 10342
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) WALKER SPRINGS, ALABAMA		
3. MAILING ADDRESS ATWATER COAL CO. NORFOLK, VIRGINIA		
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 42	6. PLACE OF BIRTH WALKER SPRINGS ALABAMA
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS MRS. IRENE HALBIG (WIFE)		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS 1123 RICHLAND ST., COLUMBIA, So. CAROLINA		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS ATWATER COAL CO. NORFOLK, VIRGINIA		

body was brought to Columbia from Norfolk Sunday night and arrived here at 9:30 yesterday morning. He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Irene Gay Halbig.

Published in The State Tuesday, April 7, 1942

He Was Faithful to Every Duty

Charles Holder, Fireman/Watertender, 58, was born in 1884 in Barbados, British West Indies. He did not survive the attack.

Mertilly Alphonso Hunte, 54, an African American, was the Steward on the David Atwater. He was born on March 3, 1884, in St. Thomas, Virginia Islands and he was the son of James Henry and Flora Hubte, of Accomack, Virginia. He did not survive the attack.

Johan Emil Johanessen, 62, Second Assistant Engineer, was born on January 27, 1878, in Stavanger, Rogaland, Norway, but lived in Brooklyn, New York. He did not survive the attack.

First Assistant Engineer **Carl Paul Kramer**, 56, was born on January 14, 1886, in Nauen, Germany. Son of Carl W. and Augusta M. Kramer, of Brooklyn, NY. He did not survive the attack.

Frank Joseph LaCasse, Ordinary Seaman, 27, was born on February 26, 1915, in Hillsboro, New Hampshire. He was buried at sea. Frank served as an Ordinary Seaman, S.S. David H. Atwater, Merchant Marines during World War II. He resided in Portsmouth, Rockingham County, New Hampshire prior to the war. Frank was declared "Missing In Action" when the David H. Atwater was shelled by German submarine U-552 and sunk about ten miles east of Chincoteague Inlet, Virginia during the war. He was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal and

the Combat Bar with a Star!
His remains were not recovered.

1. NAME (Print) (First) (Middle) (Last)					
2. ADDRESS (Print) 570 HUNT STREET CENTRAL FALLS PROVIDENCE R.I. (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)					
3. TELEPHONE NONE	4. AGE IN YEARS 26	5. PLACE OF BIRTH BERKLEY (Town or county) (State or country)	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.		
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS MRS. BELZIMERE LOSSIER (Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)			8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON WIFE		
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 570 HUNT STREET CENTRAL FALLS PROVIDENCE R.I. (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)					
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME NONE					
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS UNEMPLOYED (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)					

Joseph Albert Lussier, 27, Able Seaman, was born on June 20, 1914, in Burkley, Rhode Island. He did not survive the sinking of the David Atwater.

Joseph Patrick Mann, Utilityman, age 44, was born on February 4, 1898. He was the son of Joseph Patrick Mann of Norfolk, Virginia. Missing in Action. Lost at Sea. He was awarded the Merchant Marine Mariner's Medal.



Isaac Margolis, 34, Radio Operator on the David Atwater, was born on November 17, 1907, in Gradno, Poland. He is buried in Mt. Lebanon Cemetery, Glendale, New York. Radio Officer
A hero of the Merchant Marine

Faithful to the traditions of the sea...killed at his post of duty...when the SS David Atwater was struck by enemy shell fire. April 2, 1942. Beloved son and brother.

SERIAL NUMBER 4839	1. NAME (Print) Herbert Mungin (First) (Middle) (Last)	ORDER NUMBER 953
2. ADDRESS (Print) 809 Magnolia Savannah Ga (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)		
3. TELEPHONE 5	4. AGE IN YEARS 34	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Savannah Ga (Town or county) (State or country)
6. DATE OF BIRTH Oct. 20 1906 (Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)		6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs. Lula Mungin (Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)		8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON wife
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 809 Magnolia Savannah Ga (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)		
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Ocean Steamship Co		
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Room 46 NRWp (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE		

Herbert Mungin, African-American Fireman/Watertender, 34, was born in 1908 in Savannah, Georgia. He was the son of Henry and Laura Mungin, and the husband of Lula M. Mungin of Savannah, Georgia. He did not survive the attack.

Franz Theodore Friedrich Robisch, Third Mate, 59, was born on March 25, 1883, in Detroit, Michigan. He later moved to New York, New York. He did not survive the attack by the U-552.

Burton Rogers, 40, an African-American Messman, was born in 1902. He lived in New York, New York. He did not survive the attack.

T. 1839		BURTON (None)		ROGERS		T. 11,401	
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)							
369 EDGECOMBE AVE		NEW YORK		N.Y.			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]							
3. MAILING ADDRESS							
SAME							
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]							
4. TELEPHONE		5. AGE IN YEARS		6. PLACE OF BIRTH			
		39		CHICAGO			
DATE OF BIRTH							
		MAY 6		ILLINOIS			
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS							
MR. ARTHUR WILLIS		369 EDGECOMBE AVE		NEW YORK, N.Y.			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS							
ATWACOA		TRANSPORTATION CO		150 SO MAIN ST FALL RIVER, MASS.			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS							
SAME							

Emil Ernest Schuler, 16, Ordinary Seaman, was born on February 20, 1926, in Eutingen, Germany. He was the son of Emil Friedrich and Emilie Erna Schuler of Cranston, Rhode Island. He is buried in Highland Memorial Park, Johnston, Rhode Island.

Able Seaman **Charles Henry Van Namee**, 43, was born on August 6, 1898, in Otsego County, New York. He was the son of John and Gertrude M. Van Namee of Malden, Massachusetts and had served as Seaman Second Class in the US Navy from June 3, 1918, to January 8, 1919.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)							
SERIAL NUMBER		1. NAME (Print)				ORDER NUMBER	
T. 1651		CHARLES HENRY VAN NAMEE				T. 10,120	
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)							
36 GLEN STREET		MALDEN, MIDDLESEX		MASS.			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]							
3. MAILING ADDRESS							
SAME							
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]							
4. TELEPHONE		5. AGE IN YEARS		6. PLACE OF BIRTH			
		44		NEW CASTLE			
DATE OF BIRTH							
MALDEN PREJ-W		AUG 6		NEW YORK			
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS							
MRS GERTRUDE M. VAN NAMEE		SAME					
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS							
ATWACOA		TRANS CO					
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS							
150 SO MAIN ST		FALL RIVER, BRISTOL MASS					
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE							
D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 1-1-42)		☆		900		18-21030-1	
				Charles H. Van Namee			

Capt. Wm. K. Webster



SEARSPORT, April 7—Funeral services for Captain William Keith Webster, 38, better known as "Scotty," will be held from the residence of Mrs. Ralph M. Moody, Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock, instead of Tuesday as previously announced, the Rev. John Fitzpatrick, pastor of the First Congregational church, officiating. There also will be an Odd Fellows and Rebekah service. Burial will be in the family lot in the Gordon cemetery.

He was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, the only child of Mrs. Suzanne Keith Webster, a nurse in Shetland Islands, Scotland, and the late William Webster. He ran away from home when he was 14 years old, going on the sea, and during the World War I he was on a British transport ship. He was in the British transport and merchant marine for five years and for 14 years was in the navigating department, United States Merchant Marine. For the past five years he has commanded coastwise steamers. He was a loyal supporter of the Disable American Veterans national program.

He has made Searsport his home for the past 20 years. A members of Sears lodge, IOOF, Brigadier encampment, IOOF, and Knyvetta Rebekah lodge, No. 125, all of Searsport.

Besides his wife, Mrs. Leila Irving Webster, he is survived by an adopted daughter, Mrs. Arthur Marcotte of Providence, R. I., and a daughter, Miss Rowena Webster, a student at Morallee business college, Auburn, R. I.

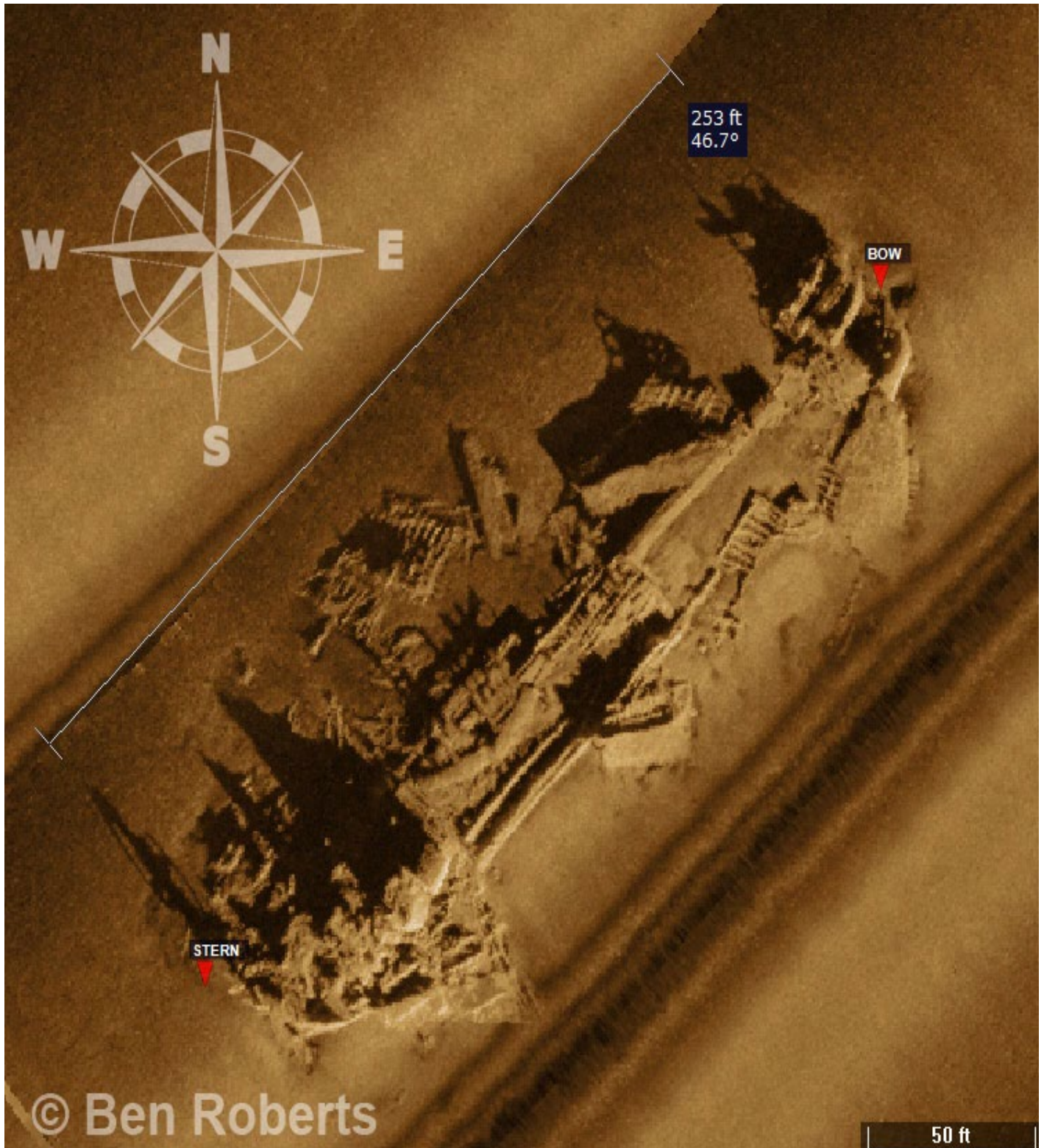
son of the late Henry Whiting of

William Keith Webster, 38, Master of the David Atwater, was born on February 4, 1904, in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was the son of George and Suzanne Webster and the husband of Leila Webster of Providence, Rhode Island. He is buried in Gordon Cemetery Searsport, Maine.

Death record indicates that William K. Webster was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. Parents are George Webster and Suzanne Keith. Obituary stated he was the only son of Suzanne Keith Webster, a nurse in Shetland Islands, Scotland, and the late William Webster. That he ran away from home at age 14, going to sea, and during WWI was on a British transport ship. UK Merchant Navy Seaman database states Military service 1918-1921, United Kingdom. Obituary said he was in the British transport and Merchant Marine for five years, and for 14 years was in the navigating department, U.S. Merchant Marine. Past five years had commanded coastwise steamers. Death certificate from Commonwealth of Virginia, has date of death April 2, 1943, at 9:25 pm. His ship was torpedoed in public waters in the Atlantic Ocean and exploded. He was a naturalized citizen of the United States.

He married Leila Louise (Whittaker) Irving, a widow with daughter Marie Irving, on April 17, 1923, in Searsport, ME. They had a daughter, Rowena Keith Webster together. They all survived him. He was buried in Gordon Cemetery, Searsport. His wife was later (1952) buried with him and shares a gravestone

Today DAVID H. ATWATER lies in 65' of water about 8 miles off Assateague Island, just south of the Virginia-Maryland border. Click this link for more information.
[Eastern Search & Survey. August 22, 2021](#)



Honor the Merchant Marine in Every Port



Like all sailors, Merchant Marine sailors forge connections to each other and the ships and waterways they sail. Michael James Monahan, born in Covington, Kentucky, was no exception.

The story of Merchant Marine machinist Michael James Monahan took place in different settings than Ashtabula and the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum or lakeshore ports like Cleveland and Conneaut, but the connections are as solid as a ship's anchor.

Ashtabula citizens Joe Cook and Wallace E. Wason, were two World War II veterans who were not in the Merchant Mariners but were instrumental in creating the Merchant Marine Memorial

in Point Park, a few oar strokes from the museum's front door, and establishing the Ohio Valley Chapter of the American Merchant Marine Veterans. Cincinnati resident Bert Hinds, regional vice president of the American Merchant Marine veterans, told part of Michael James Monahan's story in a manuscript from the Merchant Marine collection in the library of the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum.

MICHAEL JAMES MONAHAN

Throughout the navigation ages, Great Lakes and ocean sailor casualties have washed home on beaches to be tenderly cared for by the people on land. Sailors in the Merchant Marine were among those casualties, especially during World War II. They laid down their lives with a will for freedom and many were fated to end their earthly voyages ashore in places that were not their original homes.

Michael James Monahan, originally from Kentucky, was one of these Merchant Marine sailors. In April 1942, his body washed up on St. Augustine Beach, and the

coroner listed exposure in the Atlantic Ocean waters after a German submarine torpedoed his ship as his cause of death.



Michael James Monahan was born on June 7, 1893, in Covington, Kentucky. His father is listed in some documents as Michael James Monahan, and in others, Michael B. Monahan and his mother is listed as Mary Monahan. The same conflicting information appears for his father Michael's birthplace. Some census records say he was born in Ireland and others in Maine. His mother Mary was born in Ohio. Michael had two sisters, Jeanette, and Helen.

His World War I draft registration shows that Michael was born on June 7, 1893, in Kentucky. The registration information also reveals that he had light brown hair, blue eyes, a slender build, and was short of stature.

Census records and other documents list Michael's birthday anywhere from 1893 to 1896. By the time Michael had completed four years of high school and was working as a machinist, the family had moved to Newport, Kentucky.

The 1920 Census puts Michael still living in Newport, Kentucky with his father Michael and his sister Jeanette. He worked as a machinist in a foundry.

By 1930, Michael had joined the Merchant Marine. The 1930 Merchant Seaman Schedule of the United States Federal Census locates his home port as Port Arthur, Texas and indicated he served on the Steamer Gulflight.

THE PARTIALLY SUNKEN SS GULFLIGHT

Launched on August 8, 1914, the Gulflight was an American tanker that the New York Shipbuilding Company of Camden, New Jersey built for the Gulf Refining Company, later to become Gulf Oil. The Gulflight left Port Arthur on April 10, 1915, with a cargo of gasoline in the tanks and barrels of lubrication oil bound for Rouen, France. A German U-boat, U-30, torpedoed the Gulflight on May 1, 1915, in the Scilly Isles, making her the first American ship to be torpedoed during World War I. The torpedoing created a diplomatic firestorm which eventually moved the United States closer to declaring war with Germany in 1917. The German government apologized for the Gulflight attack, but did not stop its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, a strategy which brought the United States into the War two years later after the sinking of the Lusitania and drastic changes in American policy.

The Gulflight did not sink, but instead her owners had her towed into port in the Scilly Isles to be evaluated and unload some of her cargo. After that, she sailed under her own power to Rouen to deliver her remaining cargo and then traveled to Newcastle-upon Tyne for repairs and returned to service.

The 1930 Merchant Seaman Schedule of the U.S. Federal Census located the Gulflight in Port Arthur Texas, and listed Michael James Monahan as associated with the ship. Somehow, he survived the torpedoing of the Gulflight.

In 1937, the Nantucket Chief SS Co. Inc of Port Arthur, Texas bought Gulflight and changed her name to SS Nantucket Chief. A year later, British registry Harris & Dixon Ltd. of London bought her, and they renamed her the SS Refast. On January 26, 1942, German U-582 torpedoed and sank the Refast south of St. Johns Newfoundland. The 1940 Census listed Michael Monahan as living in New York City since 1935 and working as a machinist.

THE SS GULFAMERICA



By 1942, Michael was a crewman serving on the SS Gulfamerica. In 1942, the Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyards Inc. of Sparrow's Point, Maryland completed its construction of the American steam tanker SS Gulfamerica. Operated by the Gulf Oil Company of New York City, she made

Philadelphia her homeport. The Gulfamerica's home voyage was scheduled to take her from Port Arthur, Texas to New York with a cargo of 101,500 barrels of oil.

On the night of April 10, 1942, she traveled unescorted about five miles off Jacksonville, Florida. The lights of Jacksonville Beach Resort illuminated her in sharp relief because the authorities had not imposed a blackout. Some of them had to be concerned, however, because shortly after 10 p.m., the Gulfamerica began to zigzag instead of steaming a straight course. Twenty minutes later, a German submarine U-123, Reinhard Hardegen, commander, sighted her and fired at torpedo.

Striking the number seven tank on the starboard side, the torpedo created an explosion and fire. The captain ordered the engines stopped and the ship abandoned and the Gulfamerica sent distress calls. The U-123 fired about twelve shells into the engine room on the port side with her deck gun, trying to destroy the radio antenna and the anticraft gun.

The abandoning ship turned into chaos, one lifeboat capsizing while another with the master and ten crewmen pulled away within ten minutes. Ten minutes later, another boat left holding just three men, while three others abandoned ship on a life raft. Later it, picked up two men from the water.

The torpedo blast and gunfire killed five men and fourteen more men drowned after they jumped into the water. Two officers, two armed guards, and fifteen crewmen were killed in the sinking and twenty-four crew members, and five Navy Armed Guard survived the torpedoing.

United States Coast Guard patrol boats rescued the survivors, taking them to Mayport, Florida. The Gulfamerica settled by her stern with a 40-degree list to starboard, but she did not sink until April 16.

Michael James Monahan was not one of the survivors. His body was washed ashore, and papers found on his body identified him. After the coroner finished identifying Michael Monahan, he was buried in an unmarked grave in St. Lorenzo Cemetery in St Augustine.

The sinking of the Gulfamerica jolted complacent business as usual 1942 authorities to think blackout measures. The U.S. government had been tardy declaring lights out, but Florida Gov. Spessard Holland acted quickly. On April 11, he decreed a “screenout” for coastal lights. By the end of 1942, blackouts and covered car headlights were part of America’s wartime routine.

THE GRAVE WITH NO MARKER ACQUIRES MARKERS AND MEMORY

Five decades and three years passed, and the story of Michael James Monahan was nearly forgotten as was the service of Merchant Marine sailors either forgotten or unrecognized. Then another Michael, Michael Grogan, a reporter for the St. Augustine Record, happened to be digging through some old newspaper files, and he found brief articles about a man’s body washed ashore on St. Augustine Beach and buried in San Lorenzo Cemetery.

His curiosity piqued, Michael Grogan visited St. Lorenzo Cemetery, and found the grave, but no marker. He visited the funeral home, found the old death certificate, and wrote a short article about the grave with no tombstone. One of the members of the St. Johns River Chapter of the American Merchant Marine Veterans living in St. Augustine read the story and sent it to John Lockhart, a director of the St. Johns Chapter. John Lockhart researched and discovered that Michael James Monahan had been a machinist on the SS Gulf America.



The funeral home personnel also read Mike Grogan's story in the St. Augustine Record, and they placed a temporary marker on the grave of Michael James Monahan which the government later replaced with a permanent marker.

To further recognize Michael James Monahan, the U.S. Maritime Commission and the War Shipping Administration named a Liberty Ship built at the J.A. Jones Construction Company yard in Panama City,

Florida the SS Michael James Monahan.

The stories of Michael James Monahan and Michael Grogan impressed yet another Michael, Michael Gannon, a professor at the University of Florida. Professor Gannon found the stories of Merchant Marine Michael Monahan and newspaper reporter Michael Grogan so interesting that he traveled to Germany where he found and interviewed Reinhard Hardegen who lived in Bremen, Germany. Professor Gannon continued his research until he had enough material to write a book that he titled *Operation Drumbeat*.

INTERVIEWING REINHARD HARDEGEN

Reinhard Hardegen

Professor Gannon's interview with Commander Reinhard Hardegen gave additional perspective to the story. Commander Hardegen told Professor Gannon that after the torpedo struck the Gulfamerica, he closed in and used his deck gun to finish off the ship. He noticed that large crowds had gathered on the beach to watch the sinking and its aftermath. Onlookers soon thronged the highways leading from Jacksonville trying to get to the beach for a closer look.

In a hazardous move, Reinhard Hardegen decided to maneuver around the tanker and attack from the landside, although silhouetted by the shore lights, the U-123 was a perfect target for defensive fire. The shallow water also made it imperative for the U-boat to lie only 820 feet from the Gulfamerica which opened the possibility of return fire or getting swept up in the burning oil fire. After spending some time firing the deck gun, with the Gulfamerica burning fiercely, Reinhard Hardegen decided to leave. Now planes droned overhead, trying to find the submarine with parachute flares and a destroyer and several patrol boats closed in on the water.

The aircraft forced the U-123 to crash dive to the bottom, only sixty-six feet down, and the destroyer USS Dahlgren dropped six depth charges. The submarine sustained heavy damage and was convinced the destroyer would return for another attack, Commander Hardegen ordered the secret codes and machinery destroyed and his U-boat abandoned. As the commander, his orders were to open the tower hatch so the crew could escape using escape gear, but he was paralyzed with fear and could not finish the evacuation. Fortunately for Commander Hardegen and for unknown reasons, the Dahlgren did not drop any more depth charges and moved away. The U-123 made emergency repairs and limped away into deeper waters. Commander Hardegen told Professor Gannon, "Only because I was too scared was, I not captured.

Bert Hinds, regional vice president of the American Merchant Marine veterans, who told part of Michael James Monahan's story reported the belief of an anonymous Navy Armed Guard survivor who claimed that the real reason Commander Hardegen brought the U-123 about was that an offshore breeze blew the burning oil towards his submarine and by bringing the U-123 about, he kept his ship up wind of the burning oil.

Whatever his reasoning, Commander Hardegen did not fire on civilians and lived to tell his sea story.

THE SS MICHAEL JAMES MONAHAN

In 1993, military authorities were concerned that time had made ammunition from World War II, the Korean War, and some cold war ammunition unstable, and they needed to destroy it. They created Operation Chase to achieve their goal. The U.S. Navy acquired several surplus Liberty ships which were loaded with surplus ammunition and missiles from the Military Sea Transport Service.

The Navy scuttled the first ship, the SS John Shafroth, west of the Golden Gate in deep water. The second Operation Chase ship, originally named Joseph N. Dinand, but renamed the SS Village, was also a Liberty Ship. It exploded shortly after sinking, registering on seismic charts of the Atomic Energy Commission and the U.S. Office of Naval Research.

After these perilous beginnings, all the sinking ships in Operation Chase were fitted with charges to ensure that the cargo of the ships detonated, and these trials convinced officials to distinguish between manmade convention explosions, nuclear explosions, and natural seismic earthquake shocks.

The remaining vessels used in Operation Chase were Liberty ships: The SS Santiago; the SS Iglasias; the SS Isaac Van Zandt; the SS Horace Greely; the SS

Corporal Eric G. Gibson; the SS Robert Louis Stevenson; and the SS Michael J. Monahan. The Michael J. Monahan was loaded with overaged Polaris missiles that had been stored at Charleston, West Virginia.

The Navy learned invaluable information about underground/underwater nuclear explosions from these tests and they could have been a deciding factor in keeping the Cold War contained.

SEAMAN MICHAEL JAMES MONAHAN



There are many ironies in the story of Seaman Michael James Monahan. He survived one torpedo explosion, he did not survive another torpedo explosion, and his namesake ship sank in another explosion. He washed up onto a Florida beach as a stranger, and the hands of kind strangers buried him. Strangers told his story and became his friends. Michael James Monahan's story makes him a lasting friend to Merchant

Seaman because it became part of the campaign to persuade the United States government to recognize merchant seamen as veterans, which it finally did in 1988.

Seaman Michael James Monahan, part of a brotherhood of mariners with stories to be told and retold.



The Peace of a St. Augustine Beach

This article was inspired by information taken from Honoring the U.S. Merchant Marine and the U.S Navy Armed Guard of World War II

A Collection of the 40 Manuscripts about the U. S. Merchant Marine and U.S Navy Armed Guard during World War II published in Joe Cook's Weekly column in the Ashtabula Star Beacon from May 9, 1997, through February 6, 1998. Autographed front cover: Best wishes to Wally Wason, co-founder of the Northeast Ohio chapter of the American Merchant Marine Veterans.

Joe Cook, September 14, 2000. This collection can be found in the library of the Ashtabula Maritime and Surface Transportation Museum.)

Interesting Merchant Marine Statistics

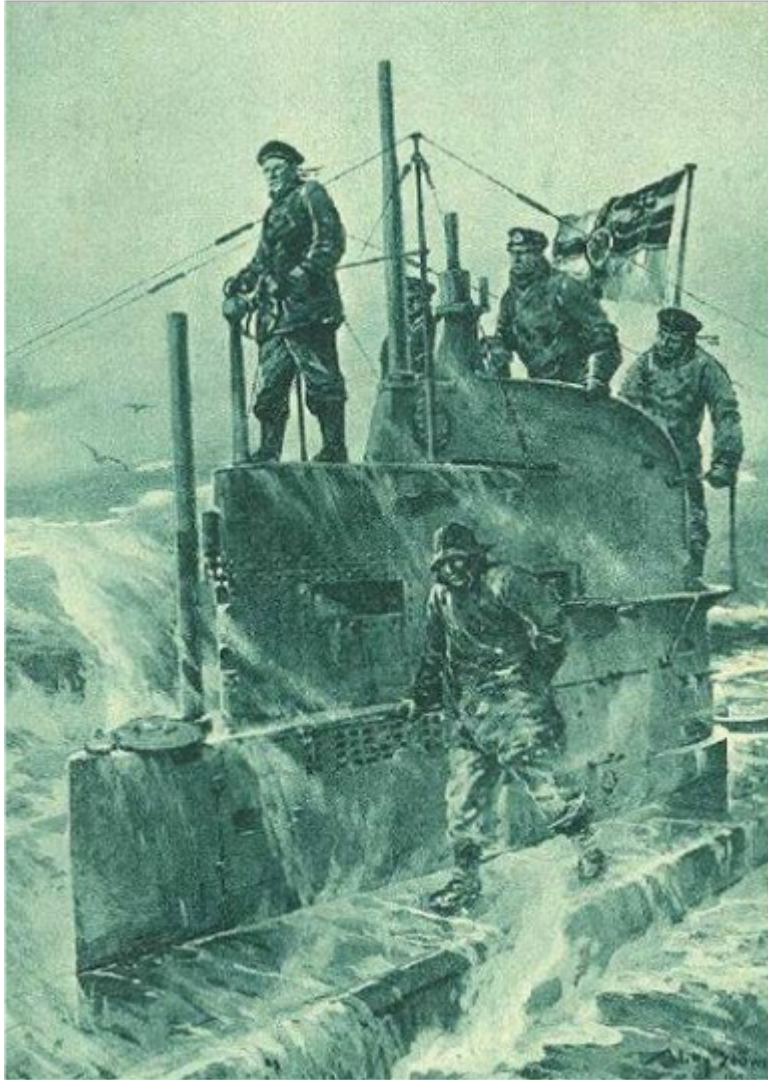
Approximately 24,000 African-Americans (10 percent of the Service) served in the Merchant Marine during WWII. African-Americans served in every capacity aboard the ships, at a time when the Army and Navy employed policies of racial restriction and segregation.



Merchant Marine mariners received veteran status in 1988, only after a long court battle.

[Struggle for Veteran Status](#)

A German U-Boat Sinks the Algonquin and Bombs America Into World War I



German submarine, World War I Willy Stower

The American steamship Algonquin was one of the last casualties of Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare that brought American into World War I.

For the United States, the first four months of 1917 were a swift slide down a slippery slope into World War I. In January 1917, Germany resumed its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare that it had abandoned in 1915 after SMU-20

torpedoed the *Lusitania*. Germany's new policy targeted all ships trading with Britain, including the ships of neutral countries like the United States.

German Foreign Secretary Zimmerman Sends a Telegram
In February 1917, the British intercepted a telegram that came from Arthur Zimmerman, the German Foreign Secretary, to the German Ambassador to Mexico and gave a copy to the American ambassador. Secretary Zimmerman proposed that in case of a war with the United States, Germany and Mexico would become allies. Germany would bankroll Mexico's war with the United States and when Germany and Mexico won, Mexico would reclaim her lost territories of Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico.

The American ambassador reported the contents of the Zimmerman Telegram and American indignation against Germany escalated. The American public grew more incensed when German submarines sank four United States merchant ships and 15 Americans died.

The Steamship *Algonquin* Leaves New York in February, 1917

The steamship *Algonquin* was one of the first American merchant ships to leave the United States after Germany announced her submarine blockade. On February 20, 1917, she sailed from New York bound for London carrying foodstuffs. The *Algonquin* didn't carry any munitions, she flew the American flag and the flag was also painted on her side. Her cargo was valued at \$1,700,000.

Built in 1888 at Glasgow, Scotland, the *Algonquin* was a single screw steamer of 1,086 tons gross, 245 feet long, and 40 feet of beam. She operated between New York and St. Johns, New Brunswick under Canadian ownership, and British registry from 1900 to 1916. The *Algonquin* was transferred to the American flag in December 1916, when the American Star Line purchased her.

Departing from New York City, the *Algonquin* safely crossed the Atlantic and had reached a point about 65 miles off of Bishops Rock, a small rock at the westernmost tip of the Isle of Scilly off the coast of Cornwall, when she encountered a German U-boat. The U-boat opened fire on the *Algonquin* from a distance of 4,000 yards, firing about twenty shells. These failed to sink the steamer, so men from the submarine carrying bombs boarded the *Algonquin* and detonated the bombs to sink her.

The crew of 26 men, eleven of them Americans, put off in small boats and after 27

hours of strenuous rowing landed safely at Penzance on the Cornish coast on March 14, 1917.

Captain Nordberg Tells His Story

Captain A. Nordberg and his crew arrived in Plymouth, England, on March 15, 1917. He gave eyewitness testimony about the German sinking of the *Algonquin*. According to Captain Nordberg, on Monday morning, March 12, 1917, he stood on the bridge just after daylight on the mate's watch and he and the mate spotted a submarine that they estimated was about three miles away. The captain saw the flash of a gun and a shell fell short of the *Algonquin*. "There was no warning. I stopped the engines and then went full speed astern, indicating this by three blasts on the whistle. The submarine kept on firing, the fourth shot throwing a column of water up which drenched me and the man at the wheel. It was a close call."

Captain Nordberg and Crew Take to the Lifeboats

After four of the shots that the Germans had fired hit the *Algonquin*, the crew took to the boats. According to Captain Nordberg, the submarine approached and with only its periscope showing, circled the steamer several times. The submarine surfaced and some of the Germans boarded the ship and placed bombs aft. The bombs exploded and the *Algonquin* sank within a quarter of an hour.

Captain Nordberg said, "I appealed to the submarine commander for a tow toward land in view of the roughness of the weather, but the German commander gruffly replied. "No, I am too busy."

The crew of the *Algonquin* pulled away in the life boats. None of them were injured by shell fire, but suffered from exposure. All of their personal effects and the ships papers were lost.

The *London Times* Comments

A story in the March 15, 1917, *London Times* commented on the sinking of the *Algonquin*. "London is past expecting anything but the worst from German submarine commanders, but nevertheless reports of some of the details of the sinking of the American steamer *Algonquin* aroused indignation here today."

According to the survivors, the crew of the submarine which they variously identified as the *U-38* and *U-39*, seemed determined to demolish the lifeboats with

their gunfire. They boarded the *Algonquin*, hauled down the American flag and exploded bombs in the ship's hold.

The U boat crew laughed at the *Algonquin's* crew and refused to tow the ship's lifeboats nearer shore. The crew of the *Algonquin* was almost exhausted from 27 hours of strenuous rowing when a British ship rescued them.

One of the *Algonquin's* Owners Weighs In

On March 14, 1917, John Stephanidis of New York, one of the owners of the *Algonquin*, said that he expected to go to Washington and discuss the sinking of the steamer with President Wilson and Secretary of State Robert Lansing.

President Wilson Appears Before Congress

Less than a month later, at 8:30 on the evening of April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress asking for a declaration of war against Germany, largely because of its unrestricted submarine warfare. On April 4, 1917, Congress granted Wilson's request and the United States was at war with Germany.

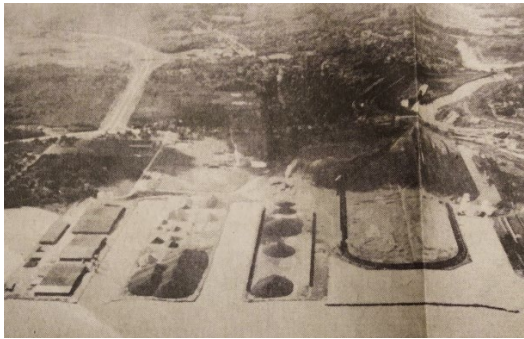
References

Gibson, R.H. and Prendergast, Maurice, *The German Submarine War, 1914-1918*, Periscope Publishing Ltd., 2002.

Halpern, Paul G., *A Naval History of World War I*, Routledge, 1995.

Herwig, Holger H., "Total Rhetoric, Limited War: Germany's U-Boat Campaign, 1917-1918:", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, The Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (Spring, 1998)

Pinney Dock



Pinney Dock Back in the Day



Pinney Dock 2023

Specifications: 310 acres located on Lake Erie Storage Capacity: 200 acres of open storage (seven million tons) 400,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space 7,500 NT of bulk cargo silo storage

Commodities Handled: Iron Ore, Limestone, Salt, Fertilizer, Pig Iron, Steel, various Bulk Commodities and General Cargoes

Access: Marine service via three fully dredged slips and six docks totaling 15,000 linear feet of vessel berth space (28' draft) Accessible by Lake Erie; Highway access from Ohio SR11, Interstate 90 and Ohio Turnpike; Rail access from Norfolk Southern and CSX Terminal Services: Loading and Unloading Services by Vessel, Tank Truck and Tank Car Approximately 49,000 Linear Feet of Rail Trackage Available Unit Train

Capabilities Terminal Address 1149 East Fifth Street Ashtabula, OH 44005-0041 440-964-7186 Business Address One Terminal Road Carteret, NJ 07008 732-541-5161.

Kinder Morgan provides energy, transportation, and storage services in a safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible manner for the benefit of people, communities, and businesses. Delivering Energy to Improve Lives and Create a better world.

Printed by Pinney Dock editor: Kathy Warnes kathywarnes@gmail.com