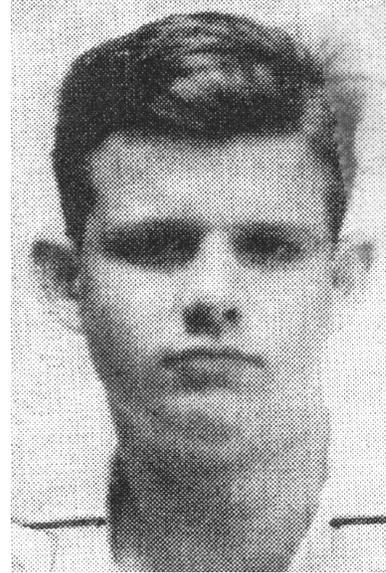


Charles Emil Blair

Born: May 8, 1918
Hometown: Port Arthur, TX
Class: 1940 - USMM Cadet Corps
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Able Bodied Seaman
Date / Place of death: May 16, 1942 / 28-52N, 90-20W
Date / Place of burial: May 16, 1942 / Lost at Sea – 28-52N, 90-20W
Age: 24



Charles Emil Blair was a member of the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps and completed training as a Deck Cadet on November 26, 1940. However, there is no notation in his U.S. Coast Guard record that he received a license as Third Mate. Coast Guard records show that he sailed as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS American Press* (1939 - 1940), the *SS Liberator* (1939), *SS Effingham* (1939), *SS Almeria Lykes* (1938, 1939), *SS Ruth Lykes* (1938) and *SS Ethan Allen* (1937 - 1938). Following completion of his Cadet Corps training he sailed as an Able Bodied Seaman aboard several ships on coastwise voyages. Coast Guard records show that he was a survivor of the torpedoing of the *SS Papoose* on March 19, 1942.

In May 1942 Charles E. Blair signed on aboard the tanker *MV William C. McTarnahan* as an Able Bodied Seaman. The ship was in ballast en route to Port Isabel, TX from New York with a crew of thirty-eight Merchant Mariners and seven Armed Guard Sailors. The ship was sailing without an escort and was not zigzagging since U-Boats were not believed to be operating in the Gulf of Mexico. However, the German Navy had just sent the U-Boats of its 10th U-Boat Flotilla to the Gulf of Mexico to disrupt the flow of oil and other war supplies to the East Coast and foreign destinations. In May 1942 alone U-Boats operating in the Gulf of Mexico sank 56 ships.

At about 10am on May 16th, 1942 when the *William C. McTarnahan* was 35 miles east of Ship Shoal Light, LA, U-506 sighted it and another ship, the tanker *SS Sun*. The submarine attacked the *Sun* first hitting it on the port bow, damaging it but not sinking it. The U-506 then attacked the nearby *William C. McTarnahan*. Two of U-506's torpedoes hit the *McTarnahan* on the starboard side at the #2 tank and engine room. The resulting fire killed all crew members in the aft section of the ship. However, the ship remained afloat and the submarine surfaced to try to sink it with gunfire. Over the next 30 minutes U-506 fired approximately 15 shells at the *McTarnahan*, hitting the ship several times while the surviving crew abandoned ship in two life boats and two life

rafts. Believing that the ship was sinking, U-506 submerged and left the scene. Four hours later fishing vessels directed by a U.S. Coast Guard patrol plane arrived in the area to rescue the survivors and take them to Houma, LA.

Seventeen of the *McTarnahan's* crew members, including Charles E. Blair, were lost in the attack. Ironically, despite U-506's best efforts, the *McTarnahan* did not sink. The ship was repaired and returned to service.

Based on his wartime service, Charles E. Blair was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal, Combat Bar with two stars, Merchant Marine Defense Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Charles Emil Blair is identified in U.S. Coast Guard documents as the son of Mrs. J. E. Blair of Port Arthur, Texas. However, even though letters were written by Mrs. Blair from a Port Arthur, TX address seeking information about her son's death, four years later mail sent to his mother at that address was returned with no forwarding address.



SS William C. McTarnahan