

## **Arthur Richard Chamberlin, Jr.**

Born: November 24, 1921  
Hometown: Piedmont, CA  
Class: 1943  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: September 27, 1942/ 28-08S,  
11-59W  
Date / Place of burial: September 27, 1942 / Lost at  
Sea 28-08S, 11-59W  
Age: 20



Arthur R. Chamberlin signed on aboard the newly delivered SS Stephen Hopkins as Deck Cadet on May 16, 1942 at San Francisco, CA. Also signing on as Engine Cadet on the same day was Cadet-Midshipman Edwin J. O'Hara.

After sailing across the Pacific with war cargo, the Stephen Hopkins called at Durban and Cape Town, South Africa before sailing across the South Atlantic, bound for Paramaribo, Suriname. On September 27, 1942 the visibility was reduced due to fog and haze. Despite having five lookouts no one aboard the Stephen Hopkins sighted either the German Raider Stier (known as Raider J) or its supply ship Tannenfels until 1235 GCT when they appeared out of the mist. Ordered to stop by the Stier, the Stephen Hopkins' master, Captain Paul Buck, refused and turned the ship away from the Germans to bring his heaviest weapon to bear, a single 4" gun.

The Stier was armed with six 150mm guns, one 75mm gun, a twin 37mm anti-aircraft gun and four 20mm anti-aircraft guns with modern fire control and a trained crew. The ship also had two float planes and two torpedo tubes. The Tannenfels was only armed with anti-aircraft machine guns. Against this armament the Stephen Hopkins had one 4" gun, two 37mm and several .50 and .30 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns manned by a small detachment of Naval Armed Guard and the ship's crew.

At 1238 the Stier began firing on the Stephen Hopkins at close range. Shrapnel and machine gun bullets rained down on the Stephen Hopkins' crew killing several men and wounding others, including the Armed Guard Commander, Lieutenant (j.g.) Kenneth M. Willett, USNR. Despite his wounds, Willett got the guns manned and began returning fire a range of about 1,000 yards. Willett steadfastly continued to direct gunfire from the Stephen Hopkins at the two German vessels while Paul Buck maneuvered his ship

to keep its stern pointed at the German ships. In their exposed post the Naval Armed Guard crew was decimated by shells and machine gun bullets. Eventually, only the wounded Willett was serving the 4" gun. He kept firing at the Stier's waterline, inflicting heavy damage. When the ammunition magazine for the 4" gun magazine exploded, Willett was out of action. However, Cadet-Midshipman Edwin J. O'Hara, who was nearby, rushed forward to take his place. O'Hara fired the five shells left in the ready service locker at the Tannenfels before being mortally wounded by enemy fire.

After twenty minutes of intense shelling, with the ship on fire and sinking, Captain Buck gave the order to abandon ship. The Second Assistant Engineer and the steward lowered the only undamaged lifeboat over the side, and several other crew members lowered rafts. When last seen Lt. Willett was cutting loose life rafts. The lifeboat then made the rounds in the water, collecting those crew members on rafts that it could reach until the men in the lifeboat could no longer see in the fog and mist. One raft with five men, including possibly Captain Buck, could not be reached and was never seen again. The survivors were able to see the Stephen Hopkins sink stern first and shortly afterward heard the detonation of the Stier's ammunition magazines, sinking that ship. Only nineteen of the sixty men aboard the Stephen Hopkins made it to the lifeboat, including five wounded men. Among those who did not survive the battle were Cadet-Midshipmen Arthur R. Chamberlin and Edwin J. O'Hara.

On September 28 the survivors of the Stephen Hopkins set their course west for South America. After a voyage of 31 days and 2,200 miles, fifteen of the men arrived at Barra do Itabopoana, Brazil, on October 27. The survivors told the story of the Stephen Hopkins' fight with the two German ships to Timothy J. Mahoney, the American Vice Consul in Brazil the next day. However, press reports of the Stephen Hopkins did not appear until December.

When the press was able to report the story of the Stephen Hopkins the ship was hailed as a "Hero Ship" and cited the action as the first between a German surface raider and U.S. merchant ship which resulted in sinking the raider. For the action of September 27, 1942 the SS Stephen Hopkins, and its crew, were awarded the U.S. Maritime Commission's Gallant Ship Unit Citation.



The men of the Stephen Hopkins were also honored by a grateful nation. Lt. (j.g.) Kenneth M. Willett, USNR was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for his actions. Of the crew, Paul Buck, (Master), George S. Cronk (Second Assistant Engineer), Joseph Earl Layman (Second Mate), Richard Moczowski (Chief Mate), Edwin J. O'Hara (Engine Cadet) and Ford Stilson (Chief Steward) were awarded the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal. The awards for Buck, Layman, Moczowski and O'Hara were made posthumously.

Five ships were named in honor of the crew of the Stephen Hopkins and of the ship itself.

SS Paul Buck  
SS Edwin Joseph O'Hara  
USS Kenneth M. Willett (DE 354)

SS Richard Moczowski  
SS Stephen Hopkins II

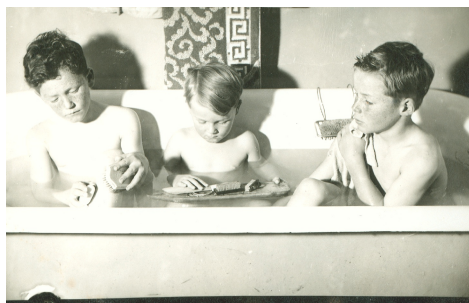
In addition to the Gallant Ship Unit Citation, Cadet-Midshipman Arthur R. Chamberlin was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Arthur "Artie" Chamberlin was the oldest of Arthur R. Chamberlin and Sadie Chamberlin's three sons. According to the 1930 Census Arthur, Sr. was an X-Ray technician. Artie is remembered by his brothers John and Bob as a great sailor and a skillful "scrounger." John recalled that as a boy Arthur caught a few pollywogs, and traded them for a Boy Scout knife, which he traded for a flashlight, which he traded for a pair of roller skates, right up the line, ultimately ending with a Snipe sailboat that he kept at the Berkeley Yacht Harbor. During the Depression Arthur always had spending money because he had two paper routes and also worked at the Sixth Street Market in Oakland. In his "spare time" Artie also sold Christmas trees during the holidays and magazines "door-to-door" throughout the year. Bob fondly remembered sailing trips with his oldest brother on Lake Merritt in Oakland and on San Francisco Bay. The latter included an adventurous overnight sail in San Francisco Bay that was very impressive to his eight year old brother.



**Artie Chamberlin at home**

In his book "Unsung Sailors: The Naval Armed Guard in World War II", Justin F. Gleichauf reports that Arthur Chamberlin formed a close friendship with Wallace Breck, one of the Hopkins' Armed Guard gunners. According to Gleichauf, Chamberlin taught Breck seamanship and navigation. Breck survived the sinking of the Hopkins and visited Chamberlin's family to offer his sympathy and share the details of Chamberlin's death.



**John, Bob and Artie in the tub**



**The Chamberlin Brothers with their Mother (l-r John, Bob, and Arthur)**