

Peter Nicholas Chunosoff

Born: November 10, 1922
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: May 28, 1942 / 16-28N, 67-37W
Date / Place of burial: May 28, 1942 / Lost at Sea –
16-28N, 67-37W
Age: 19



Peter N. Chunosoff signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS Alcoa Pilgrim on March 4, 1942 at Mobile, AL. Also aboard the Alcoa Pilgrim was Cadet-Midshipman Edward T. Ursin who signed on as the Engine Cadet.

On the night of May 27/28 the Alcoa Pilgrim was en route from Port of Spain, Trinidad to Mobile, AL loaded with 9,500 tons of bauxite. According to the Navy report on the sinking, the Alcoa Pilgrim was unarmed and zigzagging on a westerly heading at 15.5 knots. Around 0100 GCT, when the Alcoa Pilgrim was about 150 miles south of the Mona Passage the ship was sighted by U-502 in the bright moonlight. Shortly thereafter U-502 fired one torpedo which struck the Alcoa Pilgrim on the starboard side at the engine room, just below the water line. The engine room was destroyed in the explosion, sinking the ship in 90 seconds which left no time to send a distress signal.

No boats were successfully launched, though at least one was lowered as the ship began to sink. Cadet-Midshipman Peter Chunosoff was lost overboard when this lifeboat capsized. Cadet-Midshipman Edward T. Ursin was able to escape on one of the two life rafts that managed to get clear of the ship.

Shortly after the sinking U-502 approached one of the rafts. The submarine's commander asked in fluent English for the name and nationality of the ship, the tonnage and cargo, and whether the life raft had a sail. The U-502 then left the area at full speed. Only nine of the forty crew members survived the sinking. The survivors, including Cadet-Midshipman Ursin, were picked up from the two life rafts on June 2 by the SS Thomas Nelson and landed at Port of Spain on June 5, 1942.

Cadet Midshipman Peter N. Chunosoff was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Peter N. Chunosoff was the only son and oldest of Nicholas Chunosoff, a Russian immigrant, and Cecilia Chunosoff's two children. According to the 1940 U.S. Census Nicholas was employed as a shipping clerk in a department store. Peter's little sister was Laura, who was three years younger than him. Crew lists on file in Boston, NY indicate that Peter signed on as Ordinary Seaman aboard the SS Express at New York, NY on June 3, 1941 and was discharged there after a voyage to India in late September 1941. Given the dates it appears that he applied for admission to the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps shortly after leaving the SS Express and began his training in early 1942.