

Alexander Walker Harris

Born: November 9, 1925
Hometown: Greenville, SC
Class: 1946
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: April 6, 1945 / Kerama Retto, Okinawa
Date / Place of burial: April 6, 1945 / Lost at Sea – Kerama Retto, Okinawa
Age: 19



Alexander W. Harris signed on aboard the new SS Hobbs Victory as Deck Cadet on February 14, 1945 at San Francisco, CA. He was joined by Cadet-Midshipman John L. Danner who signed on as Engine Cadet. The ship sailed independently for the South Pacific on February 25, 1945 loaded with a cargo of U.S. Army ammunition bound for Okinawa. On its way to Okinawa the Hobbs Victory called at Eniwetok and the U.S. Navy fleet base at Ulithi Atoll. From Ulithi the Hobbs Victory sailed for Okinawa in convoy with six other ships.

The Hobbs Victory arrived at the harbor of Kerama Retto, the fleet anchorage and logistics base near Okinawa, on the morning of April 6, 1945. That afternoon the Hobbs Victory, along with the other ships in the explosives anchorage, the SS Pierre Victory and the SS Logan Victory, were subjected to three separate attacks by Japanese kamikaze aircraft. During these attacks the SS Logan Victory and USS LST 447 were hit and eventually sank. In order to stay clear of the burning Logan Victory, the Hobbs Victory got underway until early evening when it anchored again.

However, within minutes of anchoring two more Japanese aircraft flew parallel to the Hobbs Victory from about 3,000 feet away. The Hobbs Victory's Armed Guard managed to shoot down one of the planes, but the second aircraft changed course, and headed directly towards the vessel. The gun crews damaged the aircraft but could not prevent it from hitting the ship. At 1845, the kamikaze smashed into the Hobbs Victory just forward of the Number 4 lifeboat, at boat deck level causing a terrific explosion, killing all hands in the Engine Room and destroying the port side life boats.

According to accounts of the survivors the entire port side of the house and boat deck were blown out by the explosion. Within minutes the port side of the midship house

was engulfed in flames which spread to the #4 hold. After thirty minutes of trying to fight the fire the Captain ordered the surviving crew to abandon ship. The survivors were picked up by the minesweeper USS Success (AM 310) and subsequently transferred to the USS Gosper (APA 170) for medical evaluation and treatment. Fourteen of the 98 men aboard the SS Hobbs Victory, including Cadet-Midshipman Alexander Harris, died in the attack or of their wounds. Both Cadet-Midshipman Danner and the Master reported that Alexander Harris had just finished blacking out the vessel and believed that he was in or near his room in the midship house when the kamikaze hit the ship. Despite the best efforts of a Navy fireboat, the fires aboard the Hobbs Victory could not be controlled and the ship sank early the next morning.

Cadet Midshipman Alexander W. Harris was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal, Combat Bar with star, Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Alexander W. Harris, was the youngest of Donald Ryan Harris and Frances Weldon Walker Harris's two sons. He reported to the Pass Christian, MS Basic School and was appointed a Midshipman, Merchant Marine Reserve, U.S. Naval Reserve on July 1, 1944. While Alexander was growing up the family lived in North Carolina and Pennsylvania before settling in Mobile, AL. Donald Harris was involved in the automobile business. In 1941 Alexander entered Christ School in Asheville, NC, a boarding school where his grandfather, Reverend Reuben R. Harris had been the Headmaster. At Christ School Alexander was President of his Junior and Senior Classes and the Gamma Lambda Sigma Fraternity. As a Senior he was named one of the school's Prefects and elected President of the Student Council. Alexander was a natural athlete and was elected team captain for both the football and basketball teams. In his Senior year, Alexander became the first Christ School student to win the school's highest athletic ward, the Athletic Trophy, and its highest overall honor, the Headmaster's Cup.

In a letter to his parents, the Master of the Hobbs Victory wrote,

"His willingness to do anything at all times to help out and learn was a pleasure to see. He was exceptionally well liked by all the crew. There were many clean jokes played on him in fun and he took them all in good spirit. One thing he was continually kidded about was his enormous appetite. It seemed as though he was always hungry and could never get enough to eat. He was therefore often found between meals fixing up a little snack for himself. His breakfast each morning was a wonder in itself. It consisted of eight large pan cakes, an order of bacon or ham and eggs and few other small items. It was a sight to watch him get away with it and never stagger under the load. Now and then the cooks would add a few extra cakes to the stack and watch to see if he could eat them all. He took and relished all that came."

"Your son was a fine clean and strong young man and it was a pleasure having him sail with me. In closing, I extend my deepest sympathies."