

Gordon Alan Herstam

Born: May 7, 1923
Hometown: Cleveland Heights, OH
Class: 1943
Service: USNR
Position / Rank: Asst. Beachmaster / Ensign
Date / Place of death: April 2, 1945, USS Goodhue (APA 107) off Okinawa
Date / Place of burial (initial) April 3, 1945 / Army & Navy Cemetery, Zamami Shima, Kerama Retto, Okinawa (final) March 25, 1949 / Arlington National Cemetery, Plot 34, Grave 4369
Age: 22



Gordon A. Herstam reported to the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Basic School at New Orleans, LA on May 6, 1942. According to Crew Lists on file in New Orleans, LA Cadet-Midshipman Herstam signed on aboard the United Fruit Company's SS Atlantida as Deck Cadet in early July 1942. Upon reporting to Kings Point he was assigned to Section A221 for his final training. Crew lists on file in New York, NY show that he signed on aboard the tanker SS Little Big Horn in January 1944, after his graduation from the Academy, apparently while waiting for his Navy commission to be activated.

Ensign Gordon A. Herstam, USNR was a "Plank Owner" aboard the Amphibious Troop Transport USS Goodhue (APA 107) when it was commissioned on November 11, 1944. According to the ship's Log Book, Ensign Herstam was assigned to duty as one of the ship's Assistant Beachmasters. After shakedown training off of the U.S. West Coast, the new troop transport sailed on January 4, 1945 from San Diego, CA bound for the South Pacific. From January through late March 1945 the USS Goodhue carried cargo and troops in the South Pacific before loading for the assault on Okinawa.

The USS Goodhue (APA 107) sailed from Leyte Gulf on March 21, 1945 in a convoy bound for Kerama Retto, a group of islands designated as the fleet base for the ships assaulting Okinawa. On March 26 the Goodhue's troops, along with troops from other ships in the formation secured the islands of Kerama Retto and began building the base. For about a week the Goodhue remained at Kerama Retto unloading cargo during the day and withdrawing offshore overnight with the other transports. Even in the night retirement area things were not peaceful. On Monday April 2, 1945 the

Goodhue's Deck Log records the crew going to General Quarters three times between midnight and 0742 when the ship anchored again off Kerama Retto. That afternoon, while getting underway to execute the fleet's night retirement plan, the troop transports came under a prolonged air attack by Japanese kamikazes. The Goodhue's gunners started firing at 1837. Within minutes the transports USS Henrico (APA 45) and USS Telfair (APA 210) had been hit or grazed by kamikazes.

The crew of the Goodhue fought back, desperately firing at the approaching planes, bringing one of them down on her starboard side. Meanwhile a second kamikaze was stalking the Goodhue from about 3,000 yards to starboard. As the plane turned toward the Goodhue the ship's forward 5" gun fired one shot, damaging the plane, before suffering a breakdown. The ship's 20mm gunners continued firing on the aircraft, finally managing to set the plane on fire but the kamikaze crashed into the Goodhue's mainmast at the crosstrees. Part of the plane continued aft, exploding over the fantail, while another part of the plane, with at least one bomb, swung over the port side and exploded at deck level. The explosions immediately killed seventeen of the ship's crew, including Ensign Gordon A. Herstam, who was at his station and suffered shrapnel wounds to his abdomen. Five more Army soldiers were killed and many others subsequently died of their wounds in the following hours and days.

**U.S.S. GOODHUE
(APA-107)
Attack Transport**



Dedicated To All Our Shipmates Who Served With Distinction In The Western Pacific During World War II And To Those Shipmates And Troops Who Died Or Were Wounded On That Fateful Day At Okinawa, April 2, 1945

Presented with pride by survivors and family

The Goodhue did not suffer structural damage, and was able to continue on to Kerama Retto for repairs and further service. The Goodhue's dead were buried at the Army & Navy Cemetery at Zamami Shima, on Kerama Retto the following day with full military honors. After World War II the men buried in temporary cemeteries like those interred at Zamami Shima were either re-interred at permanent military cemeteries or returned to the United States. Ensign Gordon A. Herstam's body was re-interred at Arlington National Cemetery on March 25, 1949. His grave is near that of another Kings Pointer, astronaut Elliot M. See, Class of 1949.

Ensign Gordon A. Herstam, USNR was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Asiatic - Pacific Campaign Medal. As a Cadet-Midshipman he earned the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Gordon A. Herstam was the only son of Nathan Herstam and Lilian Gordon Herstam. According to U.S. Census records Nathan Herstam was a lawyer with a private practice. Gordon's little sister, Ruth, was four years younger.