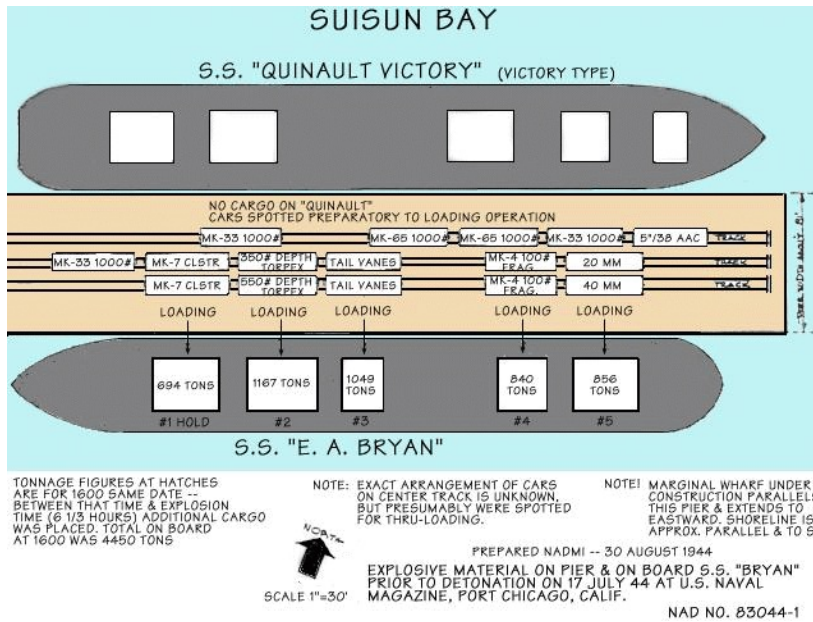


Walter Frederick Kannberg, Jr.

Born: August 12, 1921
 Hometown: Chicago, IL
 Class: 1944
 Service: Merchant Marine
 Position / Rank: Third Assistant Engineer
 Date / Place of death: July 17, 1944 / Port Chicago, California
 Date / Place of burial: July 17, 1944 / Lost at Sea – Port Chicago, California
 Age: 22



Walter F. Kannberg joined the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps in 1942 and attended the Pass Christian Basic School. He was issued his U.S. Coast Guard sailing papers on October 13, 1942 at Chicago, IL. He signed on aboard the SS *Simon Willard* as Engine Cadet on January 1, 1943 at Mobile, AL. After a voyage to Capetown, South Africa and back via the Caribbean and South American, he signed off in New York in early May 1943. Upon his return to Kings Point he became the Third Battalion Commander.



On July 11, 1944 Walter F. Kannberg signed on as Third Assistant Engineer of the SS *Quinault Victory* at Portland, OR. He had graduated from Kings Point just a few months earlier with Section A393. On July 17, 1944 the *Quinault Victory* was alongside the pier at the Naval Magazine, Port Chicago, CA preparing to load a cargo of ammunition for its maiden voyage. Across the pier, the SS *E. A. Bryan* had loaded a little

more than 4,600 tons of explosives and ammunition. Over 400 tons of ammunition and explosives were on the pier waiting to be loaded. At 2200 Pacific War Time ammunition loading was proceeding normally with the exception of some "new ship" faults aboard the Quinault Victory which were being corrected so that loading could start by 2400.

However, between 2218 and 2219, Pacific War Time, the ammunition either aboard the E. A. Bryan or on the pier adjoining it exploded with a bright flash, leaving huge vertical column of smoke and fire. For a few seconds smaller explosions were observed on the pier followed by a final major explosion, probably the cargo of the E. A. Bryan. The two



Hulk of SS Quinault Victory, July 18, 1944

explosions completely destroyed both ships, the pier and everyone there at the time. The explosions were felt across 14 counties, and left a death toll of 320, including 202 African-American men assigned the dangerous task of loading and unloading

munitions. Another 390 were wounded in the blasts.

For his merchant marine service Walter F. Kannberg was posthumously awarded the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

At the time of his death Walter F. Kannberg was married to Anita Brooke Weaver. The two were married on April 16, 1944 with Walter's brother Robert present as a witness and, presumably, best man. Walter was the oldest son and middle of three children of Walter F. Kannberg, Sr. and Martha Kamradt Kannberg. Walter's big sister (one year older) was Ruth Georgiana. According to U.S. Census information Walter Sr. was a painting contractor. In 1940 Ruth was working as a file clerk for a motor club and Walter, who was nineteen in 1940, was working as a draftsman for an electrical manufacturing firm. According to the February, 1944 issue of "Polaris", Walter attended the Armour Institute of Technology and subsequently worked as an air conditioning fuel engineer. Prior to reporting to joining the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps, Walter was in instructor in small boats and sailing with the Maritime Commission's Maritime Seaman Training Organization in St. Petersburg, FL.

Interestingly, although Walter's brother Robert is not an alumnus of Kings Point he also became a licensed marine engineer, sailing as Third Assistant on the SS Maryville Victory in 1945 and aboard the Coe Victory in 1950.

The tragedy could have been even worse for the Merchant Marine Academy as two Cadet-Midshipmen from San Mateo, Lynn Osborn and Rex Boone, were ordered to

report to the ship on the afternoon of June 17. However, according to their classmate Jack M. Beggs, Osborn convinced Boone to stay ashore at a relative's home that night. When they woke up the next morning the relative asked, "Did you hear the big explosion at Port Chicago last night?" Thus, because of the desire to stay ashore one more night the "142" did not become the "144".