

William Rutherford Linde

Born: October 10, 1921
Hometown: Hartford, CT
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
Date / Place of death: February 2, 1943 / 54-50 N, 28-55 W
Date / Place of burial: February 2, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 54-50N, 28-55W
Age: 21



William R. Linde signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Jeremiah Van Rensselaer on January 1, 1943. Joining the ship on the same day was Cadet-Midshipman William G. Holby, the Deck Cadet. Upon completion of loading a cargo of general Army supplies, plus a deck cargo that included a railroad tank car, five trucks, telephone poles and oil in barrels, the ship sailed from New York on January 22, 1943, in convoy HX-224, bound for the United Kingdom. In his report on the sinking, William Holby recalled that the trip was very rough, stating,

“Heavy seas caused part of the ship’s deck cargo consisting oil in barrels to be washed overboard.”

The Armed Guard Commander, Lt (j.g.) Marshall T. Ismond, USNR, reported that the ship had lost the convoy on at least four occasions after sailing from New York and managed to keep its proper station in the convoy at night only one night in seven. He reported that the ship’s Deck Officers felt that there was greater danger of collision from other ships in the convoy than from submarines. During the afternoon of February 1, the Jeremiah Van Rensselaer was ordered to change its position in the convoy from one near the front of the convoy to one in its rear. During the maneuver the ship completely lost sight of the convoy and was unable to rejoin it.

On the early morning of February 2, the straggling Jeremiah Van Rensselaer was located by U-456. At 0320 GCT one of U-456’s torpedoes hit the ship at the Number 1 hold on the port side, blowing a large hole in the hull. A second torpedo hit about three minutes later in about the same place. According to survivors, five minutes later another torpedo struck the ship at #4 hold.

The explosions from the torpedoes started fires in the deck cargo which may have caused the crew to assume that the ship was sinking. Without actually receiving orders from the Master to abandon ship, the crew hastily took to the boats. According to his report, Cadet-Midshipman William Holby reported for duty in the wheelhouse but found it deserted except for the Captain on the starboard bridge wing. In a letter to the Linde family in 2008, William Holby said that when the first torpedo hit,

“I was sitting on my bunk reading and quickly started getting dressed. Bill jumped out of his bunk and ran out on deck. Most of the crew were out on the boat deck getting life boats over the side. With the ship rolling as it was this became a very difficult operation.”

In a letter to William Linde’s parents written in July 1943, another crewman, William K. McLean, confirms that the inexperienced crew lost their heads and mishandled what he called the most important job, abandoning ship. According to McLean’s letter, both he and Cadet-Midshipman Linde were able to get into the Number 1 Life Boat which he says was lowered safely to the water. However, more men than the boat could safely hold climbed into the boat, which quickly filled with water and sank. Cadet-Midshipman Linde spotted a nearby raft and jumped from the sinking lifeboat to the raft. The raft was eventually covered three deep with men desperately holding on to keep themselves from being washed overboard in the heavy seas.

Among the frozen men aboard the raft, McLean said that William Linde was one of the few who could move. Despite the cold, William put a light on the end of an oar and stood up on the pitching life raft for two hours hoping that someone would see the light. McLean said that William tried to keep all of the men on the raft awake, knowing that going to sleep in those conditions would be fatal. However, in the letter McLean said,

“It seems to me that we were about 2 hours or so out when Bill said something like this, ‘I am sorry boys but I am frozen,’ and passed on. His body was washed overboard a short time later.

As I said before, I am sure you will be proud of the way your son passed on. I am & I know others who lived thought and feel the same way.”

Ironically, despite the hasty abandonment of the SS Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, the ship remained afloat while many of its crew drowned or froze to death. The convoy’s rescue ship, SS Accrington, was able to locate and rescue the men in Number 4 lifeboat and several others who were able to get aboard, and stay aboard, some of the life rafts. According to the account of the SS Accrington’s Chief Officer,

“The torpedoed ship was later boarded by a Third Officer, the wireless engineer and 2nd Engineer where they found one man alive on the burning ship. The engines were discovered to be in order but the fuel had not been shut off and the boilers were found to be red hot. Thus she could not be salvaged under her own steam.”

To prevent the ship from becoming a hazard to navigation, the SS Jeremiah Van Rensselaer was sunk by one of the convoy's escorts. Of the Rensselaer's seventy men (42 crew and 28 Armed Guard) only seven crew members and seventeen Navy gunners survived. Based on reports of the survivors, many of those who died might have lived.

Cadet-Midshipman William R. Linde was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

William R. Linde was the oldest son of Carl H. Linde and Elizabeth McDougal Pollock Linde's four children. According to the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census, Carl Linde was employed by the Post Office. The family lived in Hartford, Connecticut at 190 Hawthorn Street, described by local residents as one of the most attractive streets in the city.



William At Home on Leave

William attended West Middle School and Hartford High School. As the oldest brother he established a paper route that was passed on from brother to brother. He established a reputation for this brothers to live up to when he delivered the newspaper by boat in a flood. Another job "pioneered" by William for this younger brothers was working at Highland Dairy. He was later employed by Aetna Life Insurance Company while attending Hillyer College to study accounting. The boys all lived in one room in the house where William posted the following;

*Think big and your deeds will grow
Think small and you'll fall behind
Think that you can and you will
It's all in the state of mind.*

William was a member of Boy Scout Troop 22, which was a very important part of his life, along with the First Presbyterian Church. William's sister Marion believes that he was a person of strong Christian faith. To this day, in thinking about the circumstances of William's untimely death, Marion takes some comfort in the thought that the hope of his faith could have sustained and strengthened him at the end.



William R. Linde, Age Sixteen

To honor his older brother, William's youngest brother, Captain David Joy Linde, USCG, awarded the diplomas to the Kings Point graduating class of 1981.