

## William Lowry Lyman, Jr.

Born: March 25, 1923  
Hometown: Upper Montclair, NJ  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: July 14, 1943 / Avola, Sicily  
Date / Place of burial: July 14, 1943 / Lost at Sea --  
Avola, Sicily  
Age: 20



William L. Lyman signed on aboard the SS Timothy Pickering as Deck Cadet on December 11, 1942 at the port of New York. He was joined by Christopher C. Brennan (Deck), Warren P. Marks (Engine) and Lawrence D. McLaughlin (Engine). Signing on as Second Mate was former Cadet Officer George Alther.

The Allied Invasion of Sicily, "Operation Husky" involved amphibious assaults near Gela (U.S. Forces) and Avola (British Forces), Sicily on the morning of July 10, 1943. Shortly thereafter the Timothy Pickering arrived off Avola after sailing in convoy from Alexandria, Egypt on July 6 with 130 British soldiers and a cargo of munitions, TNT, high octane gasoline, artillery pieces and trucks. On the morning of July 13, the vessel was anchored in the harbor, about half a mile from shore, with the bow in and the starboard side closest to the shore. The crew had begun unloading the vessel's cargo.

At 1040 GCT, the allied shipping off Avola was attacked by German dive bombers. One of them dropped a single 500-pound bomb on the Timothy Pickering in its Number 4 hold. The bomb detonated in the ship's engine room, causing a massive explosion of the ship's cargo with resulting fire. The explosion left a gaping hole in the starboard side of the ship causing it to quickly begin sinking.

With no time to either launch lifeboats or be given an order to abandon ship the crew began to leave the ship immediately, leaping over the side into the oily waters, or sliding down ropes and the anchor chain. In May 1944 the Academy's newspaper, *Polaris*, printed a report on the loss of the Timothy Pickering which expanded on the report of the sinking by Cadet-Midshipman Brennan, one of only 29 survivors.

"The ticklish cargo of explosives and high-test octane was being gently worked over the side to waiting supply barges when one such raider

appeared and began to attack. The plane's bomb landed squarely into the open number four hatch of Brennan's ship. The explosion was instantaneous. Sheets of yellow flame and billowing clouds of smoke rose hundreds of feet in the air. Two adjacent ships were set afire; others were bombarded with huge chunks of metal. Cadet-midshipmen on other vessels heard the explosion some 50 miles out at sea. To stunned observers nearby, the doomed ship seemed to dissolve into thin air."

The Timothy Pickering's other Cadet-Midshipmen were not as lucky as Brennan. According to Brennan's report, William Lyman was in his quarters when the ship was hit by the bomb and was not seen afterward. Warren Marks was in the engine room at the time of the explosion, and was killed instantly. Brennan states that Lawrence McLaughlin was seen jumping over the side of the ship, but drifted into the burning oil that surrounded the blazing ship. Along with the three Cadet-Midshipmen, 19 other crew members, 8 Naval Armed Guard Sailors, and 100 British soldiers died in the attack. Also among the dead was Second Mate George W. Alther, Jr., whose heroic actions during the disaster were recognized by the award of the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal.

Cadet-Midshipman William L. Lyman was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Presidential Testimonial Letter, and the Victory Medal.

William L. Lyman was the eldest of William L. Lyman, Sr. and Edith Lyman's three sons (William, Peter and David). Peter later recalled that William was a leader for the rest of the family, especially after their mother, Edith, died in 1935 when William was only twelve. William's family nickname was "Boots" although none of his brothers remember how he came by it. The 1930 U.S. Census lists William Sr.'s occupation as Treasurer and Manager of a manufacturing firm. By the 1940 U.S. Census, William Sr. had remarried a widow, Maple Adams, who also had a son named David who was the same age as William. Thus, William had both a brother and step-brother named David.

According to Peter, during summer vacations on Cape Cod, Boots led his brothers on expeditions to the beach or crabbing in nearby rivers. Boots enjoyed hunting small game. From these hunting trips he would occasionally bring home a squirrel or bird which he would keep in the refrigerator until he could try his hand at taxidermy. The boys knew when their step-mom had found William's latest taxidermy project by her ear splitting shriek. At Montclair High School, Boots was a pole-vaulter on the track and field team, and also played six-man football. In the fall of 1941, he enrolled at Colby College. However, after finishing his first academic year he left to attend the U. S. Merchant Marine Academy.

A memorial to William L. Lyman, Jr. was placed at Mt. Hebron Cemetery in Montclair, NJ by his family.