

George Duncan McCall

Born: March 13, 1922
Hometown: Hartselle, AL
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: July 14, 1943 / 15-25S, 41-13E
Date / Place of burial: July 14, 1943 / Lost at Sea --
15-25S, 41-13E
Age: 21



George D. McCall signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the newly completed SS Robert Bacon on March 3, 1943 at New Orleans, LA. He was joined by three other Cadet-Midshipmen from the Pass Christian Basic School, Francis T. Joos (Deck), Edward S. O'Connell (Engine) and Charles C. Wendt (Engine). The ship sailed from New Orleans on March 19 loaded with general cargo and explosives bound for Durban, South Africa via Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the Panama Canal and Capetown. After discharging cargo in Capetown and Durban the ship was routed via Aden to Port Tewfik on the Suez Canal. At Port Tewfik the ship loaded the personnel effects of approximately 250 deceased Army Officers along with some mail and sailed for Capetown via Mombasa, Kenya. The Robert Bacon sailed from Mombassa on July 12 via the Mozambique Channel.

Late in the evening or early morning of July 13/14 the Robert Bacon was sighted by U-178. At 0235 local time on July 14, 1943 (2335 GMT, July 13, 1943), the Robert Bacon was hit by a torpedo forward on the port side at #2 Hold. The shock of the explosion was reported by the survivors to have caused extensive damage on the main deck and filled the Number 1 and Number 2 lifeboats with water and fuel oil. In the Engine Room all of the main and auxiliary steam lines were reported to have parted while the fuel pumps were blown off of their foundations. Although the ship was slowly flooding, by 2350 the crew had abandoned ship in lifeboats Number 3, 4 and 6 and the ship's life rafts.

According to the report of Cadet-Midshipman Edward O'Connell the Number 5 lifeboat was launched but was swamped by the heavy seas, rendering it useless. Cadet-Midshipman George McCall, who had been helping to launch that lifeboat, began climbing down the embarkation net to see if the boat could be bailed out. However, he became entangled in the net and was trapped between the lifeboat and the side of the

ship. For whatever reason he was unable to climb back up the net to safety. Edward O'Connell noted that throughout the abandon ship process George McCall could be heard calling for help. Unfortunately, none of the other boats could get near him due to his location, the weather and their inability to see exactly where he was in the darkness. Edward O'Connell reported that he and two other crewmen attempted to rescue George McCall by pulling a life raft up to where he was trapped. However, the men accidentally released the raft from ship which prevented them from reaching him.

About five minutes after the Robert Bacon's crew had gotten away from their sinking ship, U-178 fired a second torpedo which hit the ship under the stack, close to where McCall was clinging to the net. Edward O'Connell believed that his classmate, George McCall perished in the explosion of the torpedo. However, the ship was still not sinking fast enough for the U-178. Half an hour later, a third torpedo was fired, which sent the ship plunging down into the sea by the bow, carrying the remains of George McCall with it. The submarine later surfaced and approached the lifeboats, asking for the Captain. The crew claimed that they didn't know where the Captain was. Satisfied, the sub commander left the scene after pointing the survivors towards land and wishing them luck. Eventually all but six of the Robert Bacon's 71 crew and Armed Guard were rescued and arrived safe ashore.



George D. McCall (front row, sixth from left) with his Preliminary Section at the Pass Christian Basic School

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

George D. McCall was the only son and oldest child of Nora A. McCall. His sister Mary Frances was two years younger. Another sister, Aileen, appears in a photograph with George and Mary Frances, but there is no mention of her in either the 1930 or 1940 U.S. Census. According to the 1930 U.S. Census Nora McCall was the head of the household, indicating that George and Mary Frances lost their father at an early age.

The 1940 U.S. Census indicates that George was working as a Clerk in the Citizen's Bank in Hartselle, Alabama. During his school years George McCall was President of the Morgan County High School Student Body, where he was also on the football and tennis teams. Described as a self-assured and determined young man, George taught Sunday school and was a soloist at the family church. After graduating from high school, George volunteered to help coach the Morgan County High School football team until he broke his leg during a practice scrimmage. While working at the bank, George evaluated several careers, and decided to enter the Merchant Marine. According to his sister, Mary Frances,

“There is nothing more beautiful than the dedicated love of a son for his Mother and Sisters. This was George Duncan McCall!!”