

## George Carter Miller, Jr.

Born: April 18, 1923  
Hometown: Jacksonville, FL  
Class: 1943  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: February 28, 1943 / 59-49N, 34-43W  
Date / Place of burial: February 28, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 59-49N, 34-43W  
Age: 19



George C. Miller signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS Wade Hampton on December 1, 1942 at New Orleans, LA upon its delivery from Delta Shipbuilding Company. He was joined by three Pass Christian classmates, Cadet-Midshipmen Leland B. Anderson (Engine), James Hoffman (Engine) and Paul L. Milligan (Deck). According to the ship's Chief Mate, 1940 Cadet Corps alumnus John W. Clark, The ship sailed from New Orleans with cargo for the Navy Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. After discharging its Navy cargo the ship was ordered to sail in ballast for Santiago, Cuba where it loaded a cargo of sugar destined for Baltimore, MD. Chief Mate John Clark later recalled that Cadet-Midshipman Miller helped him take soundings of Santiago harbor. After discharging the sugar at Baltimore the Wade Hampton sailed for New York via Chesapeake Bay and the C&D Canal. Clark recalls that Cadet-Midshipman Miller was of great assistance in helping him deal with navigating in the thick fog surrounding the entrance to the C&D Canal.

The Wade Hampton arrived in New York on January 28, 1943. Upon arrival it began loading 8,000 tons of general cargo bound for Russia. The cargo stowed in the holds included explosives. As was typical of the time, the Wade Hampton was also loaded with a deck cargo of two PT Boats, automobile parts and acid in carboys. When the ship sailed on February 18 to join Convoy HX-227 it had a crew of 37 and 14 Naval Armed Guard aboard.

Convoy HX-227 was bound from New York for Liverpool. As the convoy approached the United Kingdom the Wade Hampton was to leave the convoy with other ships carrying cargo bound for Russia and sail to Loch Ewe, Scotland where their convoy to Murmansk would assemble. The convoy, which consisted of about 70 merchant ships, was escorted by 18 American and British naval vessels.

According to the accounts of several survivors, on the morning of February 28, Chief Mate John Clark believed that the Wade Hampton's deck cargo was in jeopardy of shifting due to the heavy weather the ship was encountering. Despite messages about submarines being sighted in the convoy's vicinity, Clark convinced the Master to drop behind the convoy so that the ship's deck crew could safely inspect and re-secure the deck cargo. At the same time the ship's lifeboats could also be swung in and better secured so they would not be lost, depriving the ship's crew of a means to abandon ship.

By the time the deck cargo had been inspected and, where necessary re-secured, the Wade Hampton had fallen behind the convoy and its escorts. The Master then ordered the engineers to bring the ship to full speed so that it could catch back up to the convoy. By evening the ship had gained approximately ten miles on the convoy but was still about five miles behind.

At around 2030 two torpedoes, launched by U-405, hit the ship almost simultaneously on the port side at the Number 5 hold. Four members of the gun crew, whose bunks were near the impact site, were killed instantly in the explosion. The propeller, steering gear, and the entire stern of the ship broke loose and were carried away. There was no sign of the submarine, and no counter attack could be made. The order was given to abandon ship, and all hands reported to lifeboat stations.

At the time of the explosion, Cadet-Midshipmen Miller and Milligan were in their cabin. Somehow Paul Milligan slept through the explosion, but, roused by his cabin mate he quickly dressed and headed with George Miller for their abandon ship station, Number 3 lifeboat. On the starboard side the ships' officers were dividing the men between lifeboats Number 2 and 4 as these were in the lee of the wind and seas. Cadet-Midshipmen Miller and Milligan climbed into lifeboat Number 3 and prepared to launch this boat from the ship's windward side. At the same time Cadet-Midshipman James Hoffman was helping to launch lifeboat Number 1 just ahead of the Number 3 boat.

The ship's Boatswain and several sailors began lowering lifeboat Number 3 in conditions that Milligan reported made it almost impossible to see. According to Milligan's account, while the sailors were lowering the boat away, the forward fall came off the cleat, allowing the fall to run away. This almost instantaneously left the boat hanging by its after fall with its bow pointed down toward the sea. All six men aboard the boat, including Cadet-Midshipmen Miller and Milligan were thrown into the water. Cadet-Midshipman Milligan was able to keep afloat in the icy water until the forward fall could be recovered to bring the bow back into position. When the boat was properly launched Milligan was picked up. However, Miller never resurfaced. In his report on the sinking of the Wade Hampton, Cadet-Midshipman James Hoffman, who saw the incident, believed that George Miller may have hit the side of the boat or the ship during his fall, causing him to lose consciousness and drown.

In any event, all four of the Wade Hampton's lifeboats were eventually launched without further incident, and pulled away with nearly all of the crew aboard. The survivors on

board these lifeboats were rescued later that day by the rescue vessel HMS Vervain (K190) and the SS Bayano. The Master and Chief Engineer elected to stay on the portion of the ship that remained afloat. They were rescued the following day by the Vervain. In all, only 4 crew members and 5 Navy gunners died, including the Naval Armed Guard officer, Ensign K.H. Cram, USNR, who refused to leave the ship without being sure that all of his men were accounted for.

Cadet-Midshipman George C. Miller was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

George C. Miller was the oldest son and middle child of Captain George C. Miller, USN and Frances H. Miller. George's siblings were Jane and Francis.

George Miller's shipmate, James Hoffman, survived the rest of his sea year, graduated in 1944 and survived the rest of the war. He was profoundly affected by the loss of George Miller and the other 141 Kings Pointers lost during World War II. Jim later spent many years tracking down the families of the lost cadets in order to see that they received the appropriate military awards and recognition for their service in the war. (See the Epilogue.)