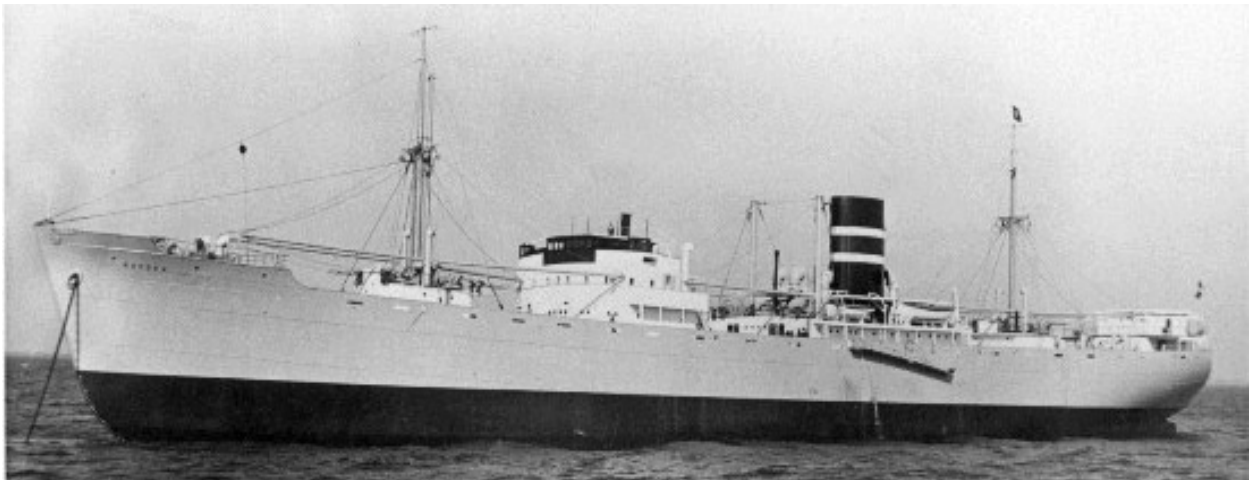


## Robert Shepard Nauman

Born: September 2, 1921  
Hometown: Chicago, IL  
Class: 1943  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: October 7, 1942 / 34S, 17-05E  
Date / Place of burial: October 7, 1942 / Lost at Sea --  
34S, 17-05E;  
Memorial at Highland Cemetery,  
Lawton, OK  
Age: 21



Robert S. Nauman signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the MS Firethorn on September 6, 1942 at the Port of New York. The MS Firethorn was originally a Danish vessel, the Norden, that had been requisitioned by Presidential Executive Order on July 12, 1941. Now owned by the War Shipping Administration it was registered in Panama and bareboat chartered to United States Lines. On February 26, 1942 the ship began operation by U.S. Lines under a General Agency Agreement.



**SS Firethorn (ex-Norden)**

Cadet-Midshipman Nauman was joined by Cadet-Midshipman Louis J. Rovella who signed on as Engine Cadet. The ship was crewed with 40 foreign merchant mariners and 21 Armed Guard Sailors. However, the two Cadet-Midshipmen were the only

American merchant mariners in the ship's crew. When the ship sailed it was loaded with a cargo of general war supplies and a deck cargo of tanks.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, the Firethorn was passing about 60 miles northwest of Cape Town, en route to Suez, Egypt. Traveling at about 12 knots, she was zigzagging under overcast skies. At approximately 0830, two torpedoes launched by the German submarine U-172 struck the vessel in quick succession. The first torpedo hit the ship on the port side at the Number 3 hatch, tearing open the hull and exploding on contact. The second struck the engine room on the port side, penetrating the hull before exploding. The ship sank in less than 90 seconds.

The crew had no time to launch the lifeboats, but the rafts and one boat floated free as the vessel went down, undoubtedly saving those crew members who had survived the initial explosions. Of the 61 men aboard the Firethorn the Captain, 8 merchant seamen, 2 Armed Guard Sailors and Cadet-Midshipmen Robert Nauman and Louis Rovella were lost. Survivors collected on four rafts, and in one boat that had floated free of the sinking ship. The rafts were lashed together and remained in the vicinity of the sinking, while six men manned the boat and made for the coast of South Africa. The survivors on the boat were picked up by the HMS Rockrose (K 51) on October 8. The following day, the Rockrose picked up the survivors on the rafts. All were taken to Cape Town.

Cadet-Midshipman Robert S. Nauman was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Robert Nauman was the oldest of the two sons of Robert M. Nauman and Margaret H. Nauman. Robert's little brother, seven years younger, was Jacob. According to U.S. Census data the family had moved around quite a bit when Robert was younger. Robert Senior managed restaurants in Des Moines, Iowa and St. Paul, Minnesota. A memorial to Robert is located on the grave of his mother and brother at Highland Cemetery, Lawton, OK.



**Robert S. Nauman Memorial, Lawton, OK**