

George Edward Pancratz

Born: April 13, 1923
Hometown: Little Falls, MN
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: September 18, 1943 / Tunisia
Date / Place of burial: September 19, 1943 / U.S. Military Cemetery, Mateur, Tunisia;
April 2, 1949 / Calvary Cemetery, Little Falls, MN



Age: 20

George E. Pancratz signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS Bushrod Washington* on May 7, 1943 at New York, NY, just two weeks after the ship had been completed. He was joined by his classmate, Cadet-Midshipman William S. Sempell who signed on as Engine Cadet the same day. Shortly thereafter the *Bushrod Washington* sailed for the Mediterranean where it remained for the rest of its short life.

On September 3, 1943, the *Bushrod Washington* sailed from Oran with a convoy bound for the landing beaches at Salerno, Italy, with a cargo of ammunition, high octane aviation gasoline in drums, bombs, "C" rations, Army trucks and landing craft. The vessel arrived at Salerno on September 11th, and anchored about three quarters of a mile off Salerno Beach, in a northeast-southwest direction, stern to shore. The *Bushrod Washington* was carrying a crew of 42 merchant seaman and 33 Naval Armed Guard. The ship's Master was Jonathan Wainwright, V, son of General Jonathan Wainwright, the American Commander at Corregidor and Bataan in the Philippines.

On September 14th at 1322, the vessel was attacked by either German dive bombers or glide bombs. Much of the cargo had been unloaded over the previous days, but the gasoline and explosives were still on board. One bomb missed the ship by about 150 feet while another struck the vessel in the midship house between Lifeboat #2 and #4. This bomb went through the crew mess room and exploded below the main deck. Reports differ on whether the bomb hit the engine room directly, or landed in the ice machine room nearby. In either case, the ship's engines were moved to starboard by the force of the explosion, and the port boiler exploded. The engine crew on duty, which included the First Assistant Engineer and the Cadet-Midshipman William Sempell, never made it out of the engine room.

The explosion also ignited the gasoline in the Number 4 hold. Within minutes the entire ship was a raging inferno. At 1352, the Captain ordered the crew to abandon ship. Many crew members made it into Lifeboat #1 and #3. Others jumped overboard and were rescued by small boats that came alongside the ship. Captain Wainwright and four other crew members later re-boarded the ship in an attempt to extinguish the fire. However, this proved to be impossible, and the ship was finally abandoned. Six members of the *Bushrod Washington's* crew, including Cadet-Midshipman William Sempell, and one of the Naval Armed Guard Sailors were lost in the bombing.

The injured crew members, including badly burned Cadet-Midshipman George Pancratz, were placed aboard the Royal Navy Hospital Ship *HMHS Amaraopora* for care and transportation to hospitals in North Africa. George Pancratz died of his wounds four days later, and was buried in the U.S. Military Cemetery at Mateur, Tunisia.

Cadet-Midshipman George E. Pancratz was posthumously awarded the Combat Bar with two stars, Mariners Medal, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and Presidential Testimonial Letter. Although Academy records indicate that Cadet-Midshipman Pancratz was a member of the "Tin Fish Club", the name of the ship he served aboard before the *Bushrod Washington* could not be determined.

George Pancratz was the oldest son and the second of four children of Lambert Pancratz and Irene Tanner Pancratz. George had an older sister named Gertrude and younger siblings named Thomas and Barbara. Lambert Pancratz owned a sheet metal shop specializing in fabrication and repair of roofs and heating / ventilation systems. Although George's body was initially buried in an American Military Cemetery in Tunisia, his body was returned to his parents in 1949. On April 2, 1949 his body was re-interred at the Calvary Cemetery in Little Falls, Minnesota.