

Fred Pennington

Born: October 17, 1921
Hometown: Newville, AL
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: November 7, 1942 / 40S, 21-30E
Date / Place of burial: November 7, 1942 / Lost at Sea - 40S, 21-30 E
Age: 21



Fred Pennington attended Basic School at Pass Christian, MS. According to Academy records he signed on aboard the *SS La Salle* as Deck Cadet at Balboa, in the Panama Canal Zone, on September 26, 1942. Also aboard the ship was his Pass Christian classmate George E. Guilford, the Engine Cadet, and 1942 alumnus James D. Herndon, the ship's Third Assistant Engineer. Shortly after signing on, the *La Salle* sailed for Cape Town, South Africa loaded with a cargo of trucks, steel and ammunition. However, the *La Salle* never arrived at Cape Town and the ship's remained a mystery until after the war. The vessel was officially marked as "Presumed Lost" on December 2, 1942.



SS Wynah, a shipyard sister to the SS La Salle

After the war, German Navy records solved the mystery. On November 7, 1942, when the *La Salle* was nearing the end of its voyage, the unescorted freighter was sighted by

U-159 about 350 miles southeast of the Cape of Good Hope. The submarine chased the *La Salle* for over five hours, missing with one torpedo, until it managed to achieve a better target solution and fired another torpedo. The explosion of that torpedo detonated the *La Salle's* ammunition cargo, instantly destroying the ship and killing every member of its crew of 39 and 13 Armed Guard Sailors.

The crew of U-159 reported that the explosion sent pillars of flame hundreds of feet into the air. Three of the submarine's crew were wounded by the debris that rained down on the submarine for several minutes after the explosion. It was later claimed that the explosion could be heard at South Africa's Cape Point Lighthouse, 300 miles away. All of the fifty-two men aboard the ship (39 ship's crew plus 13 Naval Armed Guard Sailors) died in the explosion, including Cadet-Midshipmen Fred Pennington and George E. Guilford and Third Assistant Engineer James D. Herndon. Also among the dead was the ship's Armed Guard Officer, the former Mayor of Milwaukee, WI, Lieutenant Carl F. Zeidler, USNR. Carl Zeidler had resigned as Mayor to accept a commission in the Navy. When asked what assignment he wanted, he is said to have asked for the most dangerous job in the Navy. He was then assigned to command a merchant ship Armed Guard detachment.

Cadet-Midshipman Fred Pennington was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Fred Pennington was the youngest of three sons and four children of Charles Pennington and Mary Pennington. The Pennington children were Edna, Charles, Jr., Ted and Fred. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Charles, Sr. was a brick mason.