

William John Secunda

Born: 1924
Hometown: Butler, PA
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Third Assistant Engineer
Date / Place of death: April 19, 1944 / 54-15N,
163-30W
Date / Place of burial: April 19, 1944 / Lost at Sea –
54-15N, 163-30W
Age: 20



William J. Secunda reported to Kings Point in early 1942. On June 26, 1942 he signed on aboard the *SS William Johnson* as Engine Cadet to begin his Sea Year. Following his graduation he signed on aboard the *SS John Straub* as Third Assistant Engineer which had been delivered in December 1943.

On the night of April 18/19, 1944, the *SS John Straub* was sailing off the coast of Sanak Island, Alaska en route from Seattle, Washington to Attu Island in the Aleutians with a cargo of diesel oil and high-octane gasoline. At about midnight local time the ship was destroyed by a series of violent explosions. The ship broke in half just aft of the deck house and engine room. The forward section of the ship sank within three minutes, while the stern remained afloat for 14 hours. Because of the speed with which the forward section sank, no order was given to abandon ship.

Initially the loss of the ship was attributed to either brittle fracture of the steel in the hull in the Arctic cold or some other internal source. However, post-war investigations proved that the ship was sunk by a torpedo fired by the Japanese submarine I-180. Ironically, the Navy had declared the area "submarine free" before the sinking.

The only survivors of the *Straub* were 13 Naval Armed Guard members, the Third Mate, and an Able Seaman, all of whom were on the stern section of the ship at the time of the explosion. The survivors were picked up about 9 hours after the stern section sank.

For his service aboard the *SS Joseph Straub*, and his Sea Year, William J. Secunda was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

William Secunda was the oldest son and third of Joseph Secunda and Mary Secunda's six children. His older sisters were Mary and Elizabeth. John, Helen and Paul were his younger siblings. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Joseph Secunda was a Blacksmith. Mary and Elizabeth are also identified working outside the home.