

Robert Navarre Simmons

Born: April 6, 1917
Hometown: Seattle, WA
Class: 1939 - USMMCC Cadet Corps
Service: USNR
Position / Rank: Executive Officer / Lieutenant
Date / Place of death: May 18, 1945, Okinawa /
26-11.5N, 127-37E
Date / Place of burial: Honolulu Memorial, Plot M,
Row 0, Grave 916
Age: 28



Robert N. Simmons became a member of the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps in August 1939. Crew lists on file in Seattle, WA show that he signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS West Ivis* of the Pacific Argentine Brazil Line on February 16, 1940 at Seattle, WA for a voyage to the Caribbean and East Coast of South America. It is unknown when he signed off the *SS West Ivis*, but he neither continued serving with the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps, nor received a license from the U.S. Coast Guard.

U.S. Navy records indicate that Robert N. Simmons entered the U.S. Navy as a Midshipman November 22, 1940 after previously enlisting on August 9, 1940. He was promoted to Ensign, USNR on February 28, 1941 and reported aboard the USS Drayton (DD 336) on April 8, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. The USS Drayton was at sea escorting the USS Lexington (CV 2) when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. After operating out of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. West Coast for most of 1942, the Drayton spent the next 10 months in combat in and around Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands. By the time Robert Simmons was transferred from the USS Drayton on August 19, 1943 he had been promoted to Lieutenant.

Lieutenant Simmons was assigned to the USS Longshaw (DD 559) as its Executive Officer when the ship commissioned on December 4, 1943. After its shakedown cruise and crew training the USS Longshaw sailed for duty with the Pacific Fleet. By May 1945 the Longshaw was involved in combat duty in the Central Pacific, Phillipines, Taiwan Strait, Southeast Asia and Okinawa without returning to the U.S. The USS Longshaw reported for duty off Okinawa on March 24, 1945 and spent the next two months providing shore bombardment for troops fighting ashore and anti-aircraft protection for ships supporting the landings. As a result, the crew was operating in combat conditions 24-hours per day.



USS Longshaw Underway in the Pacific

According to the USS Longshaw's After Action Report, by May 18, 1945 the ship's crew was exhausted. At 0719 on May 18, 1945 while maneuvering, the ship ran hard aground on a reef. For two hours strenuous efforts were made to free the Longshaw. During that time the Japanese relocated a shore

battery which took the ship under fire at 1101. The ship received several hits in quick succession causing extensive damage and an explosion which blew the bow off. The Captain ordered the crew to abandon ship, but was apparently wounded and died shortly thereafter. Lt. Simmons was apparently killed during the Japanese shelling. The hulk of the USS Longshaw was destroyed by gunfire and torpedoes later that day.

During his Naval service Lieutenant Robert N. Simmons, USNR was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, American Defense Service Medal and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with at least three stars. In addition, for his service in the merchant marine he was eligible for the Merchant Marine Defense Bar.

Robert N. Simmons was the youngest son of Clyde Barrett Simmons and Beatrice Eva Navarre Simmons. Interestingly, the middle name of both of his siblings was also Navarre. On March 27, 1941 Robert N. Simmons wed Winifred Sandoe. Of their four years of marriage they were with each other just eight months. However, from their marriage two children were born, including author Craig Vetter, who wrote a memoir about the father he never knew based on his letters to Winifred; "ALL MY LOVE, SAMPLES LATER: My Mother, My Father, and Our Family That Almost Was. A Story of Life and War."