

Edwin Ray Stauffacher, Jr.

Born: January 22, 1920
Hometown: Glendale, CA
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Third Mate
Date / Place of death: December 30, 1944 /
Mindoro Island,
Philippines
Date / Place of burial: January 3, 1945 / U.S.
Army Air Forces
Cemetery #1, San
Jose, Mindoro Island, Philippines; Plot 1, Row 4, Grave 61
Unknown / Forest Lawn Cemetery, Los Angeles, CA



Age: 24

After completing Basic School at San Mateo, Edwin Stauffacher sailed as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS Kit Carson* (November 24, 1942 to March 12, 1943) and the *SS William B. Allison* (March 17, 1943 to November 12, 1943). Upon completion of his training at Kings Point, Edwin Stauffacher signed on aboard the *SS John M. Clayton* at Los Angeles, CA as Third Mate on March 22, 1944.

By late-December 1944 the *John M. Clayton* was anchored off of the island of Mindoro where it, along with several other merchant ships were discharging troops and supplies. On the night of December 30 1944 / January 1, 1945 the ship was anchored off of White Beach, Mangarin Bay, after having unloaded all of her 401 Army troops and most of her cargo, which included Army vehicles. Close to midnight the ship was attacked by a Japanese aircraft with its motor silenced. The plane strafed the ship, riddling the lifeboats with bullets, destroying one of them. The plane dropped one bomb, which struck the port side of the Number 3 hold, exploding upon impact. The explosion blew off the hatch covers and started a fire in the Number 3 hold which was quickly extinguished by the gaping hole in the port side.

Two Cadet-Midshipmen, Paul White and Lewis Little were on board the *John M. Clayton* at the time of the attack. According to Cadet-Midshipman Lewis Little's report of the attack,

“On the night of 1/1/45 while our vessel lay at anchor in Mindoro Gulf, Philippine Islands, an alert was sounded at 2030. Japanese planes were spotted and immediately attacked us. The night was dark and the weather extremely calm. At the time of our attack, there were four other cargo vessels in the Gulf.

At 2340 [ship's time] while I was at my assigned post in the engine room, a torpedo dropped from the enemy aircraft hit in Number 3 hold causing fire which gutted the forward part of the deck house. Six men were burned alive and many other crew members received severe burns. We immediately fought the fire with water drawn from the engine room and after a difficult struggle were able to put the fire out although the vessel had been slowly sinking. Not many hands became excited during the attack and those few that did were immediately calmed down. The vast majority of the crew members conducted themselves with extreme calmness and coolness.”

Third Mate Edwin R. Stauffacher was one of those burned. He was taken ashore for medical attention but pronounced dead of his wounds at the Army's Second Field Hospital. He was buried at 1400 on January 3. The others who were killed included another member of the crew and four Armed Guard Sailors. Cadet-Midshipman Paul White's hands were badly burned in the attack. He was subsequently flown from Mindoro a few days after the attack for hospitalization.

Based on his service aboard the *SS John M. Clayton*, and his previous merchant marine service, Edwin R. Stauffacher, Jr. was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, the Pacific War Zone Bar, Philippine Liberation Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.



SS John M. Clayton Underway

Despite the best efforts of the crew and Navy salvors the heavily damaged was in danger of sinking. In order to preserve the ship for possible salvage, the *SS John M. Clayton* was beached on the morning of January 2. However, Navy salvors soon raised the ship and sailed it to Pearl Harbor. At Pearl Harbor the ship was repaired

sufficiently to serve as the USS *Harcourt* (IX 225) from June 1945 to May 1946.

Edwin Ray “Ed” Stauffacher was the only child of Edwin R. Stauffacher, Sr. and May Elizabeth McCann Stauffacher. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Edwin, Sr. was employed as an Electrical Engineer for the local power company. After graduating from High School Ed attended Glendale Junior College where he was a member of the Tau Alpha Delta fraternity before applying to the Merchant Marine Academy.