

## Francis Bernard Tone

Born: July 4, 1923  
Hometown: Easton, PA  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: December 2, 1943 / Bari, Italy  
Date / Place of burial: December 2, 1943 / Lost at Sea – Bari, Italy  
Age: 20



Francis B. Tone signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the *SS Samuel J. Tilden* on July 14, 1943 at New York, New York shortly before the ship sailed for Palermo, Sicily in convoy UGS-15. After arrival in Sicily the ship was assigned to “shuttle” service between Allied ports in North Africa and Italy. The vessel generally traveled in a convoy of 70 to 100 ships. On the vessel’s last run, however, she traveled between Augusta, Sicily, and Bari, Italy, in a convoy of only three ships and a single armed British trawler. After stopping at Tarranto, Italy to pick up about 300 military passengers and a cargo of gasoline, ammunition and hospital units, the *Samuel J. Tilden* sailed for Bari, Italy, arriving on the evening of December 2, 1943.

Upon its arrival at Bari on the evening of December 2, 1943, the *Samuel J. Tilden* was anchored just outside of the port waiting for a pilot to board the ship and enter the harbor. At the time, a shore searchlight operated by British port control authorities was playing on the vessel to guide the pilot boat to the ship. Under the fierce glare of the searchlight (which was not extinguished until seven minutes after the air raid began), the vessel was easy prey for the large force of German bombers that surprised the defenses of Bari. The catastrophic results of this attack became known as “Little Pearl Harbor”.

Cadet-Midshipman Robert Donnelly, who survived the attack, later described the events of that evening in his a report on the loss of the *SS Samuel J. Tilden*.

“Approximately five minutes after the first flares were dropped, a bomb was dropped through the fiddle hatch, just aft of the stack. This bomb completely demolished the engine room where the writer was on duty. The concussion blew the writer up to the next deck where he lay for fifteen minutes. The rest of the men on duty in the engine room, including the

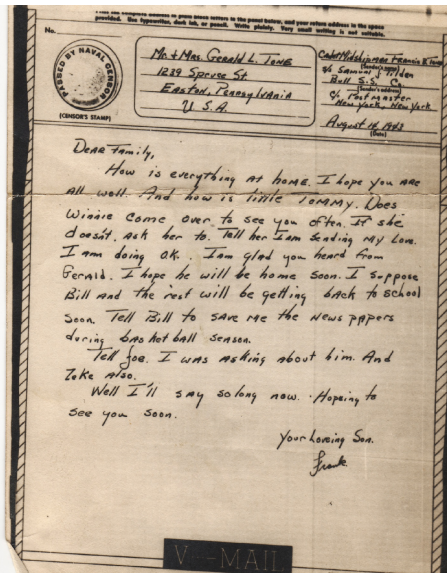
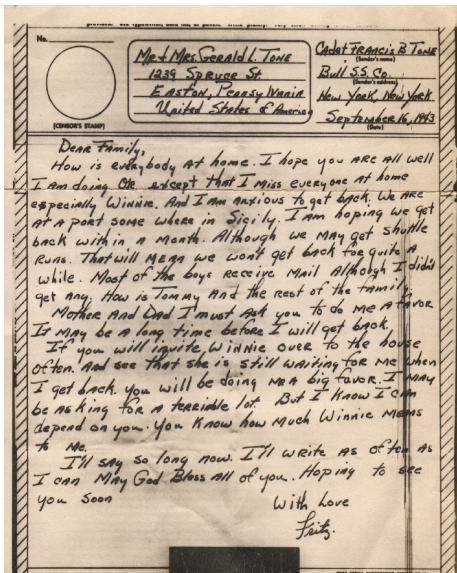
First Assistant Engineer, Second Assistant, Third Assistant, two oilers and two firemen, are all believed to be lost. As the writer lay on the upper deck unconscious, another bomb hit on the starboard side amidships and the vessel began burning fiercely.”

It is not known precisely how or where Cadet-Midshipman Francis Tone was when he died, but according to Donnelly’s report,

“The writer did not see Cadet-Midshipman Francis B. Tone, but it is believed that he was killed in the engine room when it was struck by the first bomb. He is classed as missing in action.”

The ship’s #3 lifeboat was destroyed in the explosion of the first bomb and subsequent strafing of the ship by German bombers. The second bomb reported by Donnelly set the ship on fire, first forward and then aft which caused the ammunition magazine in the stern to explode. The crew and passengers of the *Samuel J. Tilden* began abandoning ship after the attack was over in the remaining life rafts and lifeboats. Two boats were able to reach shore, while others were towed by harbor launches. Casualties included 10 of the 41 man crew of the *Samuel J. Tilden*, including Cadet-Midshipman Francis Tone, and 14 passengers.

Cadet-Midshipman Francis B. Tone was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.



Letters Home written by Francis B. Tone

Francis B. “Frank” Tone was the second of Gerald L. Tone and Florence Young Tone’s five sons and one daughter. Frank’s older brother, Gerald, graduated from Kings Point in 1944. Frank’s younger siblings were his little sister, Mary Jane, and brothers William, Donald and Philip. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Gerald L. Tone was

employed as an Electrician. Known as “Fritz” to his friends, Francis Tone attended Easton High School, graduating in the class of 1942. He was an excellent basketball player, a leader among his friends, and an outgoing and well-respected young man.