

William Raymond Weis, Jr.

Born: March 19, 1921
Hometown: Oakland, CA
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: November 7, 1942 / 11-34N, 63-26W
Date / Place of burial: November 7, 1942 / Lost at Sea -- 11-34N, 63-26W
Age: 22



Launching of SS Nathaniel Hawthorne

William R. Weis signed on aboard the *SS Nathaniel Hawthorne* as Deck Cadet on May 10, 1942 at Portland, OR just a week after the ship was delivered to the War Shipping Administration by its builder, Oregon Shipbuilding. Joining him on the ship was his Basic School Classmate, Richard Farrell. By November 1942, the ship was en route from Georgetown, British Guiana to New York, via Trinidad, loaded with a cargo of 7,576 tons of bauxite. The vessel was traveling in convoy TAG-19, and carried a complement of forty crew members, ten Naval Armed Guard, and two passengers.

At 0340 on November 7th, while the convoy was traveling about 40 miles northeast of Isla de Margarita, the *Nathaniel Hawthorne* was struck on the port side at the Number 1 hold by a torpedo fired from U-508. Seconds later, another torpedo struck the port side near the engine room. The engines stopped after the second hit, and the entire midsection of

the ship was blown to pieces. As the ship listed port and began sinking, a third explosion, believed to have been bottles of acetylene gas, sealed the ship's fate.

Of the 52 men on board, only 10 crew members, 3 Naval Armed Guard, and one passenger survived. Cadet-Midshipmen William R. Weis, Jr. and Richard P. Farrell were lost in the attack. Those who survived had managed to jump overboard and swim to one of three rafts that floated free of the ship after it sank. Thirty-nine hours later, they were rescued by the crew of the *USS. Biddle (DD 151)*. The *Nathaniel Hawthorne's* Armed Guard officer, Ensign Kenneth H. Muir, USNR, was awarded the Navy Cross for directing his men to safety as the ship sank, despite being severely wounded.

Cadet-Midshipman William R. Weis was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Pacific War Zone Bar the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

William R. Weis was the oldest of William Raymond Weis and Louella Haselton Weiss' two children. William's little brother, Robert, was three years younger. According to the 1930 U.S. National Census, William R. Weis, Sr. was employed as a Meat Inspector by the City of Oakland. By the 1940 U.S. Census William was working as a switchboard operator at Saint Rose Hospital in Hayward, CA. According to information assembled by James Hoffman, William Weis reported for his basic training at the West Coast Basic School's temporary home, the Navy's Training Base at Treasure Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. He was one of the earliest Cadet-Midshipmen to begin training on the West Coast.