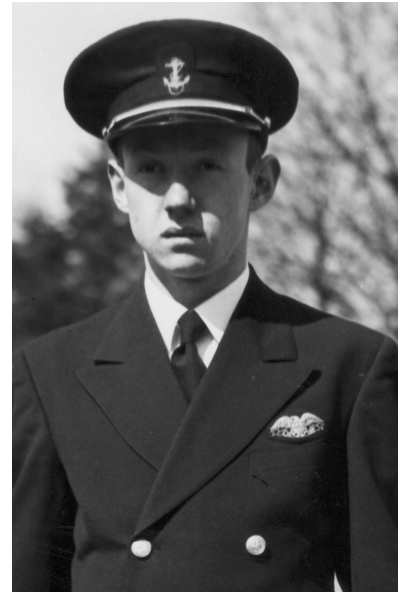


## Donald Samuels Wright

Born: March 28, 1924  
Hometown: Moline, IL  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: September 21, 1943 / 2-08N,  
50-10E  
Date / Place of burial: September 21, 1943 / Lost at  
Sea – 2-08N, 50-10E  
Age: 19



Donald S. Wright signed on aboard the *SS Cornelia P. Spender* at Wilmington, NC on April 30, 1943, shortly after it was delivered by its builder, North Carolina Shipbuilding to the War Shipping Administration. He was joined by Cadet-Midshipman Frederick Steingress (Engine). By September 1943 the ship was in the British Crown Colony of Aden at the southern end of the Red Sea to refuel. The ship sailed from Aden on September 16 bound for Durban, South Africa carrying a load of steel rails, steel plates, concrete reinforcing rods, and 300 tons of gum Arabic. She was sailing alone in clear weather against a stiff current and was not zig-zagging.

In the early morning of September 21, when the ship was about 300 miles off the coast of Somalia, the *Cornelia P. Spender* was located by U-188. At 0803 U-188 fired one torpedo at the *Cornelia Spender*, which hit the ship on the port side at #5 hold. The explosion blew off the hatch cover and broke the propeller shaft, which made it impossible for the ship to maneuver. However, although the ship was damaged and adrift, it was not sinking. Alerted by the explosion, the crew, including Cadet-Midshipmen Wright and Steingress, made their way to their stations. Both Wright and Steingress helped the Armed Guard man the guns.

Seeing that the *Cornelia Spender* was not sinking, the U-188 attempted to surface, apparently to finish off the *Cornelia Spender* with its deck gun. However, when the U-188's conning tower appeared about 100 yards off the *Cornelia Spender's* port quarter the gun crews took the submarine under fire, forcing it to submerge. U-188 fired another torpedo at the stubborn Liberty Ship's port side hitting near the stern. The explosion detonated the ammunition remaining in the magazine, destroying the after gun mount. Cadet-Midshipman Donald Wright and Able Bodied Seaman Melvin H. Franklin were killed in the explosion, the only fatalities in the attack.

The lifeboats had been lowered to their embarkation stations after the first torpedo strike. Following the second hit, the crew made their way to the boats in order to abandon ship. One lifeboat, under the Third Mate, had to return to the ship, fighting the stiff current, in order to rescue remaining crew members, including Cadet-Midshipman Steingress, who along with several other crewmen and Armed Guard had been wounded by the magazine explosion. The Armed Guard crew abandoned on rafts, and were later picked up by the lifeboats. Most of the survivors were picked up either by the *SS Sandown Castle* or *HMS Relentless (H-85)* and taken to Aden. However, sixteen men in one life boat spent fifteen days before reaching land.

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

Donald Wright, was the only son of Donald Wright, Sr. and Florence Wright. However, according to the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census, the Wrights were divorced when Donald was a small boy. He grew up in his grandparent's home in Moline, IL with his mother. His grandfather was a mechanical engineer employed by Deere & Company, the well known agricultural and tractor manufacturer. At this time Donald's mother and grandmother taught people how to play contract bridge. By 1940 the family finances had improved and Florence Wright was now working in a local law office.

In 1942 Donald graduated from Moline High School and joined the other young men of his class in making their contribution to the war effort. A friend of Donald's says that Donald had been involved in the boating on the Mississippi River and that may have influenced his decision to apply to the U. S. Merchant Marine Academy. The same friend said the following about him,

“As he matured he was able to grasp the real value of life. Neighborly friendliness produced enjoyment as he grew up. He realized that life is a brief sojourn and he should enjoy each day as it was presented to him. Donald indeed, went forward with a cheerful, optimistic attitude. He carried his own “sunshine” with him. Friends gravitated to him. The devotion of his friends was not affected in the least by good fortune or the lack of it. His enduring friendships were based on what he was - rather than what he had.”