

Walter William Zech

Born: April 16, 1916

Hometown: Philadelphia, PA

Class: 1939 - USMMCC Cadet Officer
1937 - Pennsylvania Nautical School

Service: China National Aviation Corp.

Position / Rank: Navigator

Date / Place of death: March 8, 1944 / Camaguey, Cuba

Date / Place of burial: Unknown / Philadelphia, PA

Age: 27



Walter W. Zech, graduated from the school ship *Annapolis* of the Pennsylvania State Nautical School in 1937. Crew lists on file in New York show that Walter Zech signed on aboard the *MS City of Rayville* on March 3, 1939 as Cadet Officer (Deck). He subsequently served as Cadet Officer (Deck) aboard the *SS Lightning* in April 1940 and the *SS President Roosevelt* in July 1940. On July 24, 1940 Walter Zech signed on aboard the passenger ship *SS Washington* as a Junior Deck Officer on voyages that returned to New York from the West Coast via the Panama Canal. According to the "Philadelphia Evening Bulletin" on March 11, 1944 Walter Zech had raised his license to First Mate. However, by July 1943 Walter Zech had completed a special course in aircraft navigation at the University of Miami. After completing this course, he was employed by Pan American Airlines before switching to China National Aviation Corporation as a navigator ferrying aircraft from the U.S. to China via India.

On Tuesday March 7, 1944, he was serving as navigator on a China National Aviation aircraft ferry mission of two aircraft which took off from Morrison Field (now known as Palm Beach International Airport). The two aircraft were bound eventually for Calcutta, India, via Caribbean Island bases, Natal, Brazil and across the South Atlantic to Accra, Africa. On this trip the lead pilot decided to stop for refueling at Camaguey Army Air Corps Base, Cuba rather than Nassau or Kingston, Jamaica

Newspaper accounts indicate that Zech's aircraft had trouble immediately after take off from Camaguey on Wednesday, March 8. Witnesses said that the plane attempted to return to base but crashed on its approach for an emergency landing. All four of the plane's occupants, including Walter Zech were killed. Walter Zech was originally assigned to the other aircraft but for some reason he apparently changed aircraft.

Walter Zech was the husband of Stella Zech and had a son, Walter Ray who were living in Miami at the time of his death. He was the one of Ruth Zech Willis' three sons. Walter's brothers were Stanley and Harry. Walter also had a sister named Erica. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Walter's father died in the 1920's, leaving his mother a widow. The Census indicates that Walter's mother was a school teacher. According to the report of his death in the "Philadelphia Evening Bulletin" from March 11, 1944 Walter graduated from Philadelphia Central High School in 1934.