

## **William “Billy” Barton Mason, Jr.**

Orange County lost many sons during World War II. Below is the story of one as cited by Paul Carter in the Orange County Historical Society *Record*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Summer 2015), 4-5:

“William Barton Mason, Jr., son of William Barton Mason, Sr., and Eugenia Coppee Mason, was born in Orange, Virginia on 23 August 1915. His parents’ residence was on East Main Street in the same house that was Mrs. Russ Robertson’s guest house. Like most boys growing up in Orange, he could be found playing football on Landon Lane on the property of Mrs. Mary Frances Kempe. After elementary school in Orange, he entered Woodberry Forest School where he was a three-year varsity football player and went on to become the starting quarterback for the 1932 and 1933 seasons. He also played baseball where he hit a grand slam in 1933 to beat Episcopal. He was not only outstanding on the athletic field but was an excellent student with a character that was loved by all.

“Billy graduated in 1933. He entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis on 20 June 1933, graduated in 1937 and entered the submarine service. In the fall of 1942, Billy was cited by Secretary of the Navy Walter Knox for showing unusual bravery during a fire aboard ship.

“He closed off an area that was ablaze and brought the boat to the surface quickly. Two sailors died in the tragedy, but many lives were saved. He eventually was assigned to the submarine *USS Capelin* (SS-289) as the diving officer, and by the time of his death he was Lieutenant Commander, third in command of the submarine.

“The *Capelin* was commissioned on 4 June 1943 at Portsmouth Navy Shipyard, Kittery, Maine. It was 311 feet long and able to do 20 knots on the surface with a crew of 78 sailors. The *Capelin* departed New London, Connecticut, on 3 September 1943 for the Pacific.

“During the first patrol, the *Capelin* was credited with sinking two medium-sized Japanese freighters with 7,400 tons of cargo in the area west of New Guinea in the South Pacific. After only 17 days out on its first assignment patrolling the islands west of New Guinea, defects in the ship presented themselves and the *Capelin* returned to port for the corrections.

“The very next day, 17 November 1943, with the defects corrected to the satisfaction of the commander, it departed on its second patrol in the area of Kaoe Bay in the Celebes

Sea. This assignment was to last until 6 December 1943. The *Capelin* was never heard of again. Enemy minefields were known to be in this vicinity and she may have been lost because of a mine explosion. The United States submarine, *USS Bonefish*, had spotted another submarine in this vicinity on 2 December 1943. The *Capelin* was declared missing in action on 15 December 1943 when she failed to return from patrol duties in the Pacific.

“Billy’s death was a shock to the Orange area and especially Woodberry Forest where he was so well liked and known. J. Carter Walker, Headmaster of Woodberry Forest, wrote to Billy’s parents on January 1, 1944:

“Lieutenant Commander Mason was officially declared deceased by the Honorable James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, in January 1946. He was awarded the Purple

Heart

posthumously.

His name was

memorialized on

the Tablets of the

Missing at Manila

American

Cemetery in

Manila,

Philippines. This

cemetery covers

152 acres where

17,201 are buried

and 36,285 are

listed as missing

in action.



William Barton Mason, Jr. (at left) on duty aboard the *USS Capelin* in August 1943.

**William Barton Mason, Jr. (far left) on duty aboard the *USS Capelin*  
August 1943**

“In 1949, Mr. and Mrs. Barton Mason established the William B. Mason Memorial Medal to be awarded to the best all-around athlete of the Sixth Form at Woodberry Forest. This award is still presented today and is the only athletic award presented during graduation exercises.”

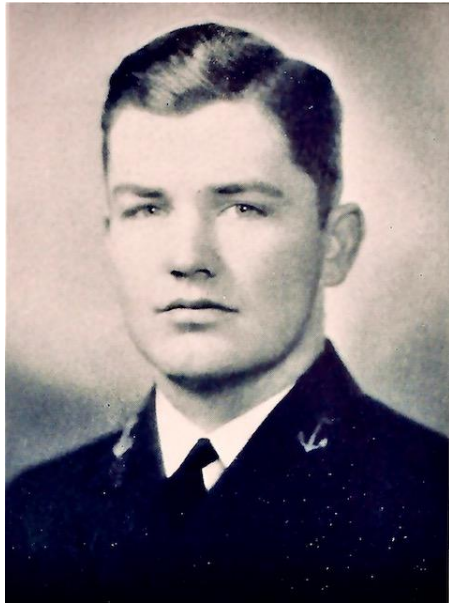
**From: US Naval Academy Virtual Memorial Hall**

[www.usnamemorialhall.org](http://www.usnamemorialhall.org)

**“William Barton Mason, Jr. ‘37**

Date of birth August 23, 1915

Date of death: December 2, 1943



Orange, Virginia

‘Billy’ ‘Punchy’ ‘Rosebud’

Though at first a military career had been Bill’s aspiration, one visit to Annapolis decided him in favor of the first line of defense. Early in plebe summer, he displayed his love of physical activity. Since then he has used his leisure moments to play football and baseball, and in offseason to get a workout boxing or playing basketball. Vowing from the time he toted his first laundry bag of gear up three decks that a fireplace was more to be desired than life in the Navy, Bill nevertheless is secretly a true salt. Witness the rolling gait that he exhibits.

Football 4, 3, 2, 1, N. Baseball 4, 3, 2, 1, N. Two Stripes.

Loss: William was lost when *USS Capelin* (SS289) was lost in early December 1943, possibly to a mine or surface attack. His parents were listed as next of kin.

William, as a Lieutenant, was awarded a ‘commendation for meritorious service’ on the occasion of a serious battery fire on his ship.”

## From Naval History and Heritage Command

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/united-states-submarine-losses/capelin-ss-289.html>



“Returning from her first war patrol after only 17 days out, *Capelin* (Commander E.E. Marshall) came into Darwin 16 November 1943 with a defective conning tower hatch mechanism, excessively noisy bow planes, and a defective radar tube. These flaws were corrected to the satisfaction of the Commanding Officer, and the ship then departed for her second patrol on 17 November. Her area was in the Molucca and Celebes seas [between Philippines and Indonesia], and she was to pay particular attention to Kaoe Bay, Morotai Strait, Davao Gulf and trade routes in the vicinity of Siape, Sangi, Talaud and Sarangani Islands. She was to leave her area at dark on 6 December.

“Nothing has been positively heard from *Capelin* since she departed. However, *Bonfish* reported having seen a U.S. submarine at 1°-14'N, 123°-50'E on 2 December 1943. This position is in the area assigned to *Capelin* at this time. An attempt to reach *Capelin* by radio, on 9 December 1943, elicited no response.

“On 23 November an American submarine was attacked off Kaoe Bay, Halmahera, 1°-34'N, 123°-07'E. However, the Japanese state that this attack was broken off, and the evidence of contact was rather thin. The only positive statement which can be made is that *Capelin* was lost in Celebes Sea, or in Molucca Passage or the Molucca Sea, probably in December 1943. Enemy minefields are now known to have been placed in various positions along the north coast of Celebes in *Capelin's* area, and she may have been lost because of a mine explosion. In her 17-day first patrol, *Capelin* sank two Japanese medium freighters for 7,400 tons of merchant shipping. This first patrol was conducted among the islands immediately west of New Guinea.”

## For students curious about submarine warfare in Pacific during World War II:

### Submarines Lost Through Enemy Action during World War II

Date of Loss, Casualties

- **Shark** (SS-174) 11 Feb 42; 59 killed; Sunk by Japanese destroyer Yamakaze; Makassar Strait, 120 miles east of Manado, Celebes.
- **Perch** (SS-176) 3 Mar 42; 60 POWs, 6 later died; Scuttled after severe damage from Japanese destroyers Ushio and Sazanami.
- **Grunion** (SS-216) 31 Jul 42; 70 killed; Sunk by gunfire from torpedoed Japanese transport Kashima Maru; 10 miles north Segula, near Kiska Island, Aleutians.
- **Argonaut** (APS-1) 10 Jan 43; 104 killed; Sunk by aircraft (582d Kokutai) and Japanese destroyers Isokaze and Maikaze southeast of New Britain in Solomon Sea.
- **Amberjack** (SS-219) 14 Feb 43; 74 killed; Probably sunk by combined efforts of a Japanese seaplane (958th Kokutai), torpedo boat Hiyodori, and submarine chaser Ch 18 off Cape St. George, New Britain.
- **Grampus** (SS-207) Feb or Mar 43; 71 killed; Sunk either by Japanese naval aircraft (958th Kokutai) southeast of New Britain on 19 February or by destroyer Minegumo in Blackett Strait on the night of 5-6 March.
- **Triton** (SS-201) 15 Mar 43; 74 killed; Sunk either by Japanese destroyer Satsuki or submarine chaser Ch 24 north of Admiralty Islands.
- **Pickrel** (SS-177) 3 Apr 43; 74 killed; Sunk by Japanese minelayer Shirakami and auxiliary subchaser Bunzan Maru off northern Honshu, Japan.
- **Grenadier** (SS-210) 22 Apr 43; 76 POWs, 4 later died; Scuttled after Japanese seaplane attacks (936 Kokutai) damaged the boat the previous day, off Penang, Malaysia.
- **Runner** (SS-275) Jun 43; 78 killed; Unknown, possibly a Japanese mine or combined air and surface attack off northeastern Honshu, Japan.
- **Pompano** (SS-181) Aug or Sep 43; 77 killed; Unknown, possibly a Japanese mine or combined air and surface attack off northeastern Honshu, Japan.
- **Grayling** (SS-209) 9 Sep 43; 76 killed; Probably rammed and sunk by Japanese transport Hokuan Maru, South China Sea west of Luzon.
- **Cisco** (SS-290) 28 Sep 43; 76 killed; Sunk by Japanese observation seaplane (945th Kokutai) and gunboat Karatsu [ex-U.S. river gunboat Luzon (PR-7)] in Sulu Sea off Panay Island.
- **S 44** (SS-155) 7 Oct 43; 56 killed; Lost to Japanese escort destroyer Ishigaki, northeast Araitto Island off Kamchatka.
- **Dorado** (SS-248) Oct 43; 77 killed; Unknown; either accidentally bombed and sunk by friendly Guantanamo-based flying boat on 13 October or sunk by a German submarine mine in the West Indies.
- **Wahoo** (SS-238) 11 Oct 43; 80 killed; Sunk by Japanese naval aircraft, submarine chasers Ch 15 and Ch 43, and minesweeper W.18 in La Perouse Strait off Japan.
- **Corvina** (SS-226) 16 Nov 43; 82 killed; Torpedoed and sunk by Japanese submarine I 176 south of Truk.



- **Capelin** (SS-289) Nov 43; 78 killed; Sunk by unknown causes, either Japanese aircraft (934 Kokutai) and minelayer Wakatake, a Japanese mine in the northern Celebes, or perhaps a hull defect reported prior to her departure from Darwin.
- **Sculpin** (SS-191) 19 Nov 43; 12 killed, 51 POWs later died and 21 POWs survived. Damaged by Japanese destroyer Yamagumo and later scuttled north of Truk.
- **Scorpion** (SS-278) Jan 44; 77 killed; Unknown, probably a Japanese mine in Yellow or East China Sea.
- **Grayback** (SS-208) 27 Feb 44; 80 killed; Probably succumbed to damage inflicted by land-based Japanese naval aircraft suffered the day before in the East China Sea.
- **Trout** (SS-202) 29 Feb 44; 81 killed; Most likely sunk by Japanese destroyer Asashimo in Philippine Sea.
- **Gudgeon** (SS-211) 18 April 44; 79 killed; Probably sunk by Japanese naval aircraft (901st Kokutai) southwest of Iwo Jima.
- **Herring** (SS-233) 1 Jun 44; 83 killed; Sunk by Japanese Army shore battery (Guards Division 52) off Matsuwa Island, Kuriles.
- **Golet** (SS-361) 14 Jun 44; 82 killed; Probably sunk by Japanese guardboat Miya Maru, auxiliary submarine chaser Bunzan Maru, and naval aircraft off northern Honshu, Japan.
- **Robalo** (SS-273) 26 Jul 44; 74 killed, 4 POWs later died; Sunk by a mine off western Palawan, Philippines.
- **Flier** (SS-250) 13 Aug 44; 78 killed, 8 survived and were rescued; Sunk by a Japanese mine south of Palawan in Balabac Strait.
- **Harder** (SS-257) 24 Aug 44; 79 killed; Sunk by Japanese Coast Defense Vessel No. 22 off west coast of Luzon, Philippines.
- **Escolar** (SS-294) 17 Oct 44; 82 killed; Possibly sunk by a Japanese mine in the Yellow Sea.
- **Shark** (SS-314) 24 Oct 44; 87 killed; Sunk by Japanese depth charges from Harukaze, South China Sea west of Luzon.
- **Albacore** (SS-218) 7 Nov 44; 85 killed; Possible Japanese mine off northern tip of Honshu, Japan.
- **Growler** (SS-215) 8 Nov 44; 86 killed; Probably sunk by Japanese destroyer Shigure, escort vessel Chiburi, and Coast Defense Vessel No. 19 off Mindoro.
- **Scamp** (SS-277) 11 Nov 44; 83 killed; Sunk by Japanese naval aircraft and Coast Defense Vessel No.4 in Tokyo Bay area.
- **Swordfish** (SS-193) Jan 45; 89 killed; Possibly sunk by Japanese Coast Defense Vessel No. 4 on 5 January or sunk by a mine off Okinawa on 9 January.
- **Barbel** (SS-316) 4 Feb 45; 81 killed; Sunk by Japanese naval aircraft in South China Sea in Palawan Passage.
- **Kete** (SS-369) 20 Mar 45; 87 killed; Probably sunk by a mine or a Japanese submarine (perhaps RO 41) east of Okinawa.
- **Trigger** (SS-237) 28 Mar 45; 89 killed; Sunk by Japanese patrol vessel Mikura, Coast Defense Vessel No.33, and Coast Defense Vessel No. 59 in the Nansei Soto.
- **Snook** (SS-279) 9 Apr 45; 84 killed; Probably sunk by a combination of Japanese naval aircraft (256th, 453rd, and 951st Kokutais); escort vessel Okinawa, Coast Defense

Vessel No. 8 , Coast Defense Vessel No. 32 , and Coast Defense Vessel No. 52; and/or submarine I-56 in the Nansei Soto.

- **Lagarto** (SS-371) 3 May 45; 86 killed; Sunk by Japanese minelayer Hatsutaka in Gulf of Siam.
- **Bonefish** (SS-223) 18 Jun 45; 85 killed; Sunk by combined efforts of escort destroyer Okinawa, Coast Defense Vessel No. 63, Coast Defense Vessel No. 75, Coast Defense Vessel No. 158, and Coast Defense Vessel No. 207 off southern coast of Honshu, Japan.
- **Bullhead** (SS-332) 6 Aug 45; 84 killed; Probably sunk by Japanese Army aircraft (73rd Chutai) off Bali in the Java Sea.

List from *Naval History & Heritage Command*:

[http://www.agriculturedefensecoalition.org/sites/default/files/file/us\\_navy/117S\\_4\\_2009\\_U.S.\\_Navy\\_Submarines\\_Losses\\_Chronological\\_Order\\_Website\\_May\\_24\\_2012.pdf](http://www.agriculturedefensecoalition.org/sites/default/files/file/us_navy/117S_4_2009_U.S._Navy_Submarines_Losses_Chronological_Order_Website_May_24_2012.pdf)