



THE MARINE CORPS-LAW ENFORCEMENT FOUNDATION

APRIL 2016

NEWSLETTER

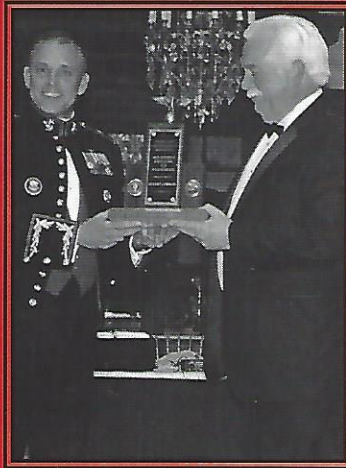
ISSUE #51

THE MARINE CORPS-LAW ENFORCEMENT FOUNDATION SUPPORTS THE CHILDREN OF OUR COUNTRY'S HEROES



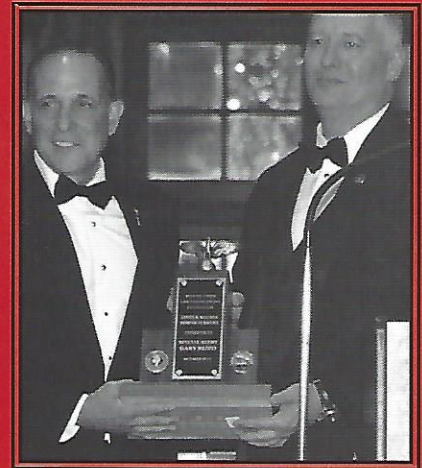
ROSEMARY HAAS TRIBUTE

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ANNUAL PHILADELPHIA GALA

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

by James E. Merna

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34TH BASILONE MEM PARADE

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SALUTE TO JIM CAVANAUGH

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

by James E. Merna

The National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC honors the 16 million Americans who served in the United States Armed Forces during World War II, the more than 400,000 who died, and the millions who supported the war effort from home. Many of the heroes of that great conflict came home and built a nation that remains the world's most powerful example of democracy and freedom. But many others did not return, did not live to see the fruits of their sacrifice. Many of those who perished came from different walks of life, but were united by love of country, belief in freedom, and an abiding faith in America's future.

One of those 400,000 who was killed and did not return home was my oldest brother Signalman Second Class George Charles Merna, US Navy, who was killed in action at age 19 with the sinking of his ship off the coast of Leyte in the Philippines on February 11, 1945. He was the oldest of seven children, consisting of six boys and one girl. I mourn his loss to this day, 70 years later. When he died, I was 13 years old. I hardly knew him because we were separated not only by death, but in life as well. Let me explain who he was, the circumstances of his life and death, representing the best of those our nation sends into harms way in time of war.

Like each of his siblings, he was born and raised in the Bronx in the midst of the Great Depression.

Times were hard. Our father had less than an eighth grade education, was an alcoholic, and when he worked, was a part time taxi driver and mechanic. As the Depression worsened, he soon found himself, like 13 mil-

lion Americans, out of work, and out of hope. Conditions deteriorated when our mother abandoned the family and our father was left with seven minor children and no job. Catholic Charities stepped in and George and his younger siblings, ranging in age from five to twelve, were shipped up New York's Hudson River to two Catholic orphanages in Rockland County where we spent a good part of our youth. Orphanages were prevalent in the 1940s and '50s for chil-

dren who were orphaned or from broken homes.

First stop for all of us except George was St Dominic's Convent in Blauvelt, where we attended elementary school. Since George was of high school age then, he was sent to St. Agnes in Sparkill, about four miles away. When we fin-

ished eighth grade, all of us except our sister, moved over to St. Agnes. Both institutions were run by Dominican nuns, though of different orders. By the time we got to St. Agnes, our brother George was gone. With World War II underway, he joined the Navy at age 17, in 1943. He went to Sampson, NY for basic training, to Bainbridge, MD for Signalman School, then to Camp Bradford, VA for amphibious training. On July 2, 1944, he reported on board his ship, LST 577 (Landing Ship Tank). In his 2014 book "Neptune," about the Allied invasion of Europe and the D-Day Landings, Craig L. Symonds, Professor History Emeritus at the U.S. Naval Academy, described the LST as "what was perhaps the most important vessel of the war." Many crew members of LST's dubbed them "Large Slow Targets." A little over 300 feet long, the LST transported



WWII Memorial in Washington, DC.

Continued on next page

ALL IN THE FAMILY.... *Continued from page 32*

tanks, troops and supplies right up on the beach where it disgorged its personnel and cargo through huge bow doors.

In 1944 a massive American and Allied fleet was building to invade and liberate the Philippine Islands. The Battle of Leyte Gulf would become the last great naval battle of WWII. It engaged some two hundred thousand men and 282 American, Japanese, and Australian ships over more than a hundred thousand square miles of sea. My brother's ship and its crew got their first taste of battle in November 1944 with the U.S. amphibious landings at Leyte and again at Lingayen Gulf in January 1945. At the Leyte invasion, LST 577 repelled two enemy suicide attacks during the initial landings at Lingayen Gulf, shot down a pair of "Tojo" single-engine fighter planes, and assisted in the destruction of another. On Feb. 11, 1945, while steaming off the east coast of Leyte with LST 577 the lead ship in the convoy, it was hit and sunk by a Japanese submarine-launched torpedo. George was on the signal bridge at the time of the explosion when the ship was cut in half, killing him and 166 replacement soldiers and crewmen immediately. His ship was awarded two battle stars for its heroic actions in World War II. My brother and others killed in that campaign were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart.



Not much more than five years after George was killed in World War II, four of his brothers followed him in the military with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. And like our oldest brother, we all joined when we were 17. Three of us served as Marines with the First Marine Division in Korea, and a fourth was there in the Navy on a ship bombarding North Korean shore installations. My only remaining brother, Jerry, made a career in the Marine Corps with combat tours in Korea and Vietnam, the latter where he was commissioned as a lieutenant after many

years of enlisted service. Years later, two of my four sons served as well. The oldest son is a 1987 graduate of the Naval Academy, now a corporate attorney in Atlanta. The other recently retired as a Marine Colonel, a combat veteran of Desert Storm and Iraq, with 25 years of active duty service as a senior career infantry officer. He culminated his career as commander of a Marine Expeditionary Unit deployed at sea in the Pacific.

Like others who were killed at sea or lost on the battlefield without recovery, the further separation from our brother George continued because there was no body returned home. His is a watery grave in the depths of the Pacific. For many years, his family had no place to honor his memory and mourn his loss. But Arlington National Cemetery now has a special Memorial Section to honor missing servicemen. Visitors who drive or walk by will see a section that looks like all the others, complete with headstones. The only difference is that there are no bodies buried in the ground. And the headstones, unlike all others there, have three additional words inscribed at the top that say "In Memory Of." You can only imagine the satisfaction and comfort this brings to the grieving families. This is proof positive of a kind, generous and compassionate nation grateful for its war heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice.

* * * * *

James E. Merna, a resident of Annapolis, Maryland, is a Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, and a 1957 graduate of the University of Maryland. He was named the National Marine of the Year by the Marine Corps League at its national convention in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1968.

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SAVE THESE DATES

21ST ANNUAL NYC GALA

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

Location: The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel

301 Park Avenue

New York, NY 10022

Contact: Sue Boulhosa – sboulhosa@mc-lef.org

22ND ANNUAL ATLANTIC CITY GALA AND GOLF TOURNAMENT

Sat, June 11, 2016 (Gala) & Mon, June 13, 2016 (Tournament)

Location: Tropicana, Atlantic City

2831 Boardwalk

Atlantic City, NJ

Contact: Lisa Spengler – 609-335-1130 or mclefac@aol.com

7TH ANNUAL GATHERING OF HEROES

Tuesday, April 26, 2016

Location: Irish Pub

1123 Walnut Street to 2007 Walnut Street

Philadelphia, PA

Contact: Allie Pfender – 267-968-6249

8TH ANNUAL GARDEN STATE GOLF OUTING

Monday, June 13, 2016

Location: Royce Brook Golf Club

201 Hamilton Road

Hillsborough, NJ 08844

Email Contact: James.Mottola@sobel-cpa.com

13TH ANNUAL ARIZONA GOLF TOURNAMENT

Friday, May 13, 2016

Location: Desert Mountain Golf Club

37700 Desert Mountain Parkway

Scottsdale, AZ 85262

Contact: Kirk Tushaus – 480-505-4004 or Ktushaus@lasallest.com

5TH ANNUAL BRESCOME BARTON, INC. CHARITY GOLF OUTING

Monday, September 19, 2016

Location: New Haven Country Club

160 Hartford Turnpike

Hamden, CT 06517

Email Contact: sboulhosa@mc-lef.org



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Feedback Corner

- Please send more information about the Foundation
- I want to help. A donation is enclosed
- Sign me up! I want to join the Marine Corp-Law Enforcement Foundation. There are no dues
- Put my name on your mailing list
- Enclosed is a story for the next Newsletter

Membership is approved upon receipt of application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone (____) _____

Mail To _____

Address _____

Email _____



**Back: Uncle Werner Frese and George C. Merna
Middle: Aunt Lucille (Byers) Haiduk; Aunt Blanche (Byers) Frese; Aunt Cecile (Byers) Leed; Grandmother Blanche Byers; Aunt Pat (Byers) Masterson; Uncle Harry Leed;
Bottom: Cousin Barbara Jean Haiduk**

George Merna S.M. 3/4

L.S.T. 577

F.P.O. San Francisco, Calif.



Mr. George Merna

210 W. 104 Street

New York City, N.Y.

U.S.A.



Air Mail



UNITED STATES NAVY R.

Friday, Dec. 22 -

Dearest Dad -

We'll be hoisting the anchor pretty soon now, undoubtably will be underway Christmas eve, so we celebrated our Christmas today, Had fresh ham & eggs, and a orange too for breakfast - boy it was solid.

You see we'll have the Army on board Christmas day, and it would be fair us getting a decent meal, and them with only their rations, so we'll dig into whatever they pull out of the storeroom today.

We've been in port for quite a few weeks now, during that time they've given the sides a new coat of paint, after many days of chipping rust off the deck they laid on three coats of paint, they figure that should hold for quite a while.

also I had my signal gang painting and whatnot



UNITED STATES NAVY

on our signal bridge and con, its camouflaged,
with a light gray and green, with a conical duck
with a white hat on one side of the con. Alongside
the duck is our ships name in block letters, The
Ugly Duckling, doesn't look bad at all.

We painted the deck, flag bag, searchlights, and
other equipment and such also, it's all done with
a neat looking navy blue.

Got out a few letters to the kids yesterday,
it'd sure be great if it were possible for me
to spend XMas eve with the kids at church,
I'll try and picture it XMas eve on watch.

May the coming year be brighter for all of us
Dad - Always your loving son -

LOVE TO GRANDMA AND AUNT BETTY ALSO - Sonny -



UNITED STATES NAVY

January 19-'45

Dearest Dad -

Writing this on our return trip from a
operation in the Philippines that was pretty
successful for our ship individually. We shot our-
selves down a couple of Jap planes, made a neat
beaching - unloaded our troops and cargo in short
time, and retracted smoothly.

We're on our way back to our home base and
our overdue XMas mail plus two weeks. I was advanced
one rate higher this month - second class petty officer
now.

Hope you Grandma Aunt Betty and all the kids
are fine, I'm in your O shape.

Your loving son
- Sonny -



MARCH 2016



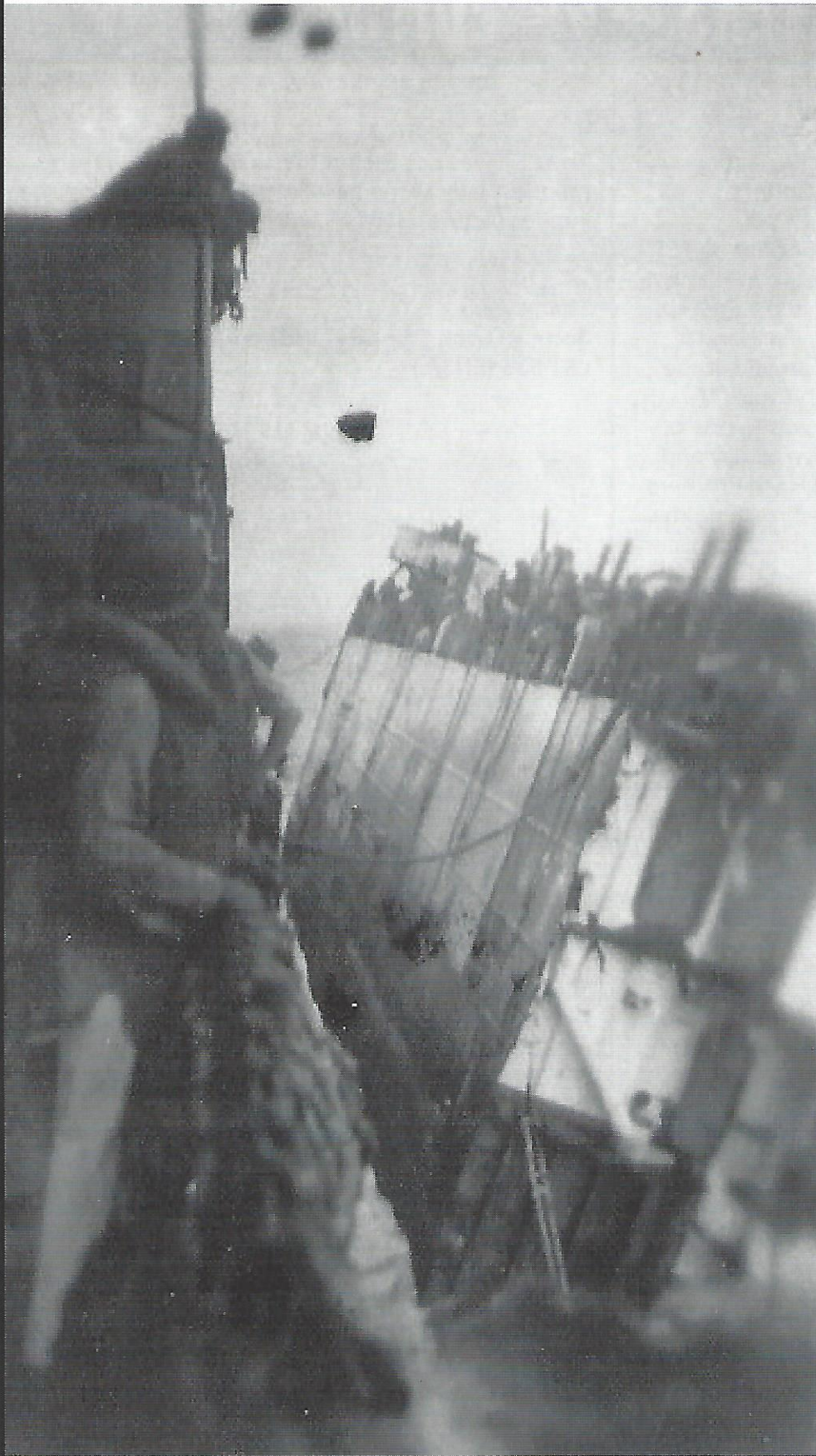
LST Scuttlebutt

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITED STATES LST ASSOCIATION



*LST 325 Visiting
Pittsburgh in 2015!*

**CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE! WWW.USLST.ORG
RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION! CONNECT WITH FELLOW LST VETS & FAMILIES!
JOIN TODAY!**



**LST 204
WWII Veteran
Robert
Weller, U.S.
Coast Guard,
Submits
Photo of the
Sinking LST
577!**

Rescue vessel pulls up alongside forward section of the LST 577. Robert Weller was there aboard the LST 204 when a Japanese torpedo sank the USS LST 577 on Feb. 11, 1945.

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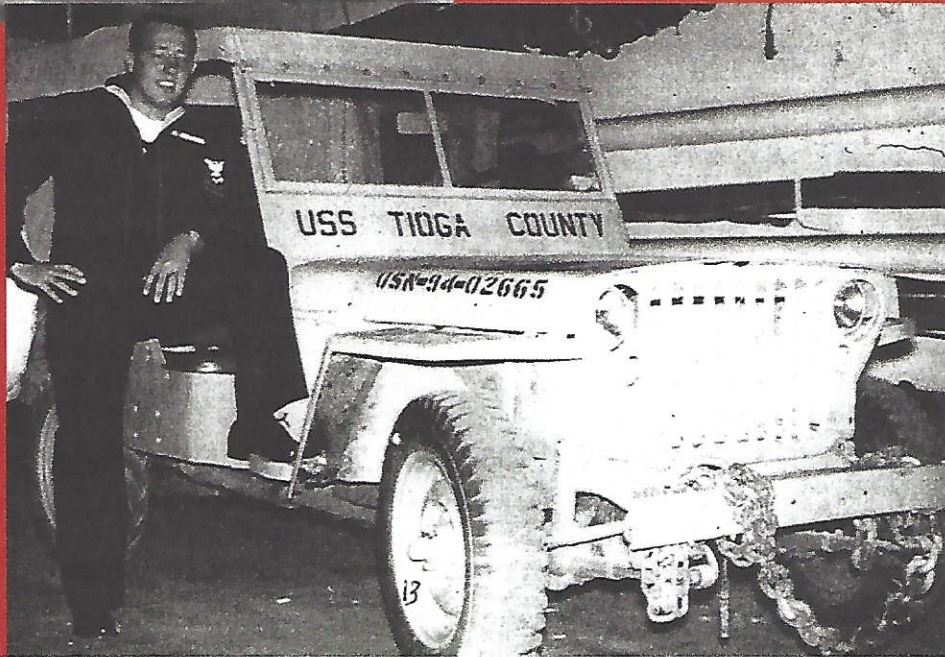
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ARLINGTON VA 22202-1928



**Charles R.
Huggins
Submits
Great Photos!**

**TOP: The USS Tioga County
(LST 1158) underway,
location unknown.**

**RIGHT: Charles Huggins
aboard the LST 1158 in
Yokosuka, Japan in 1956.**



12 June 1945

Pers-8249-eid

MERNA, George Charles, SM2c(T), USNR, 815 47 03

FINISHED FILE - Pers 5325

My dear Mrs. Merna,

It is with deepest regret that I, as senior surviving officer of the USS LST 577, write to you concerning your son, George Charles Merna, Signalman second class, United States Naval Reserve, who, following the sinking of this ship, was reported as missing. After carefully reviewing the known facts, he must now be considered as killed in action.

The USS LST 577 was returning to the Philippines with a resupply convoy when at about 9:30 A.M. on February 11, 1945 she was torpedoed. George was on the signal bridge at the time of the explosion. A very short time elapsed between the explosion and the sinking which made it impossible for George to abandon ship. The action occurred several hundred miles east off the coast of Leyte. The time of day permitted a thorough search for any survivors in the vicinity.

George was always an earnest and sincere worker. We held him in the highest esteem, not only as a leader of men but in every assignment he undertook. The excellent work George performed will long be remembered by his shipmates.

Words cannot express the sorrow of George's shipmates and myself in your loss. Your son joined the crew at Camp Bradford. He was aboard at the time of the commissioning and grew up with the ship. We went through the mill together, meeting our first enemy action in the Leyte Campaign. Then followed successively, the other Philippine operations.

I fully realize the inadequacy and emptiness of words in your present sorrow and grief. May the thought that George carried on in the finest traditions of the Navy be some consolation to you. It is for us to carry on to the finish, the ideals and purposes for which he fought but the attainment of which he was not privileged to see. He was a brave man, a credit to his home and country. I was proud to be able to serve with him and call him my shipmate.

Very sincerely,

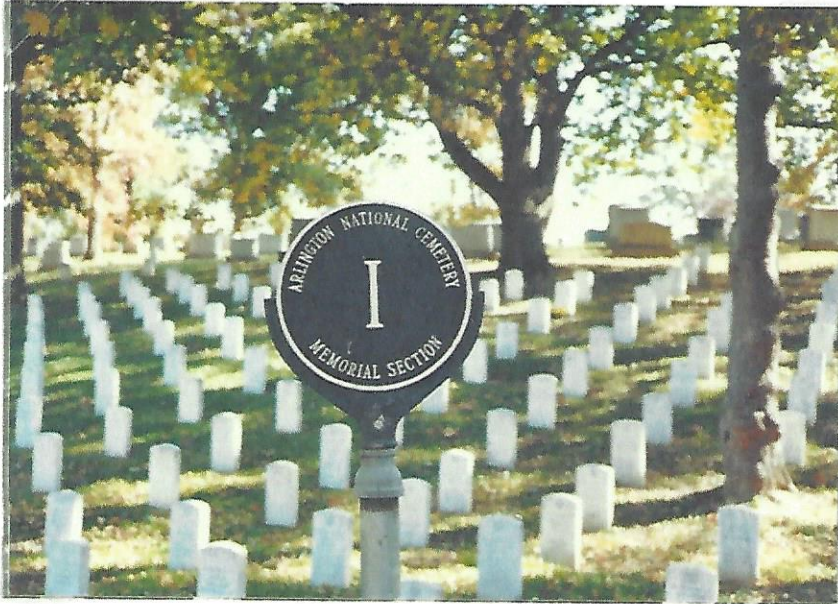


12 JUN 1945

WILBUR R. ISAACSON
Lt.(jg), USNR

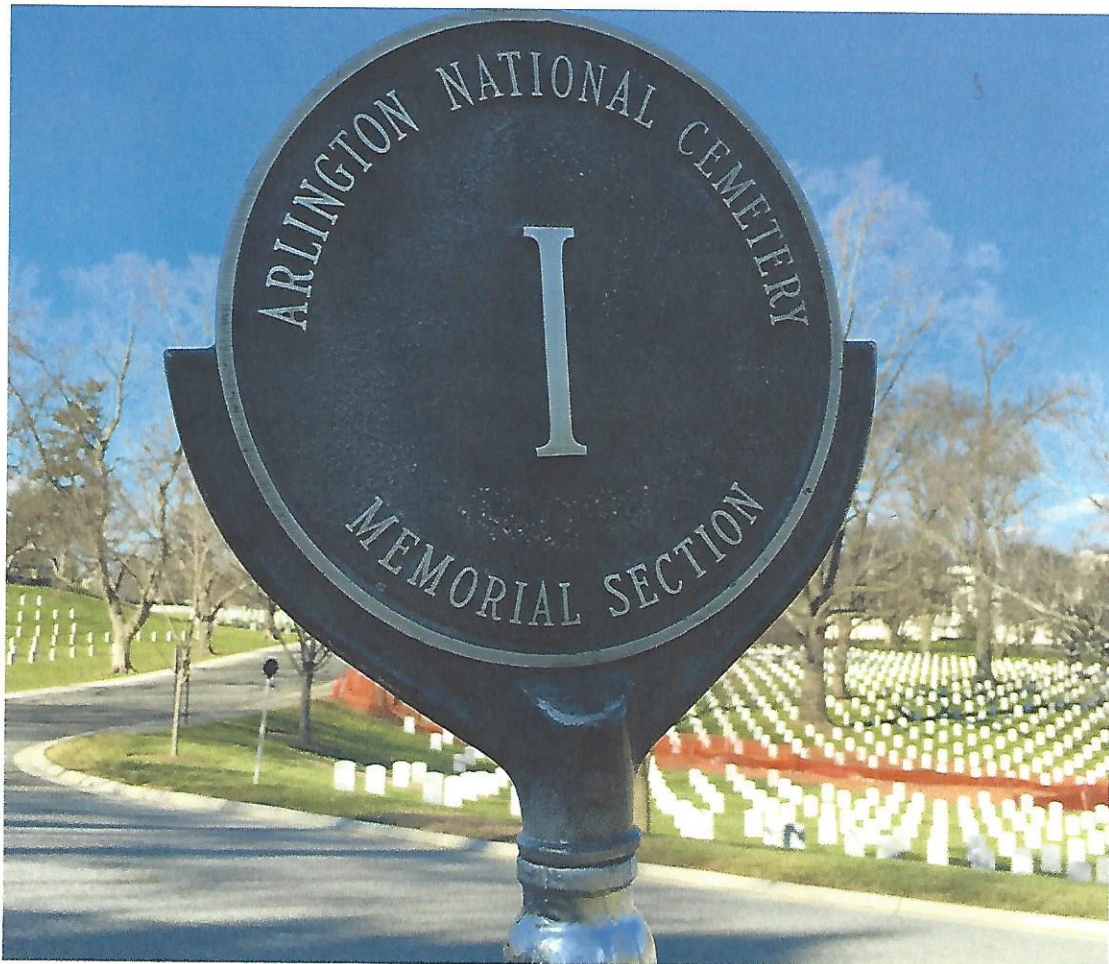
Mrs. Geraldene Merna
164 East 127 Street
New York, New York

Arlington National Cemetery MEMORIAL SECTION



- Special Section created by Act of Congress
- No physical remains
- Honored gravesite for Servicemen killed in action whose remains were never recovered or who are listed as Missing In Action

MEMORIAL SECTION I, BURIAL SECTION FOR GEORGE CHARLES MERNA, SIGNALMAN 2D CLASS, US NAVY



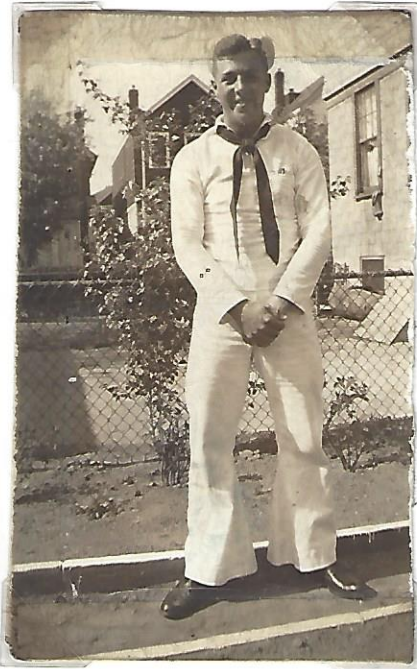


L: George Charles Merna *
• *Back of picture, in George's Handwriting, says
• *"September, '43 To Lucille From Sonny"*
("Lucille" was one of his Mother's four Sisters, Aunt Lucille (Byers) Haiduk of Ozone Park, LI, NY. Her husband, Ed Haiduk, served in the Marine Corps during WWII

**R: Memorial Section I
Arlington National Cemetery**



ANCHORS AND GLOBES A MERNA TRADITION



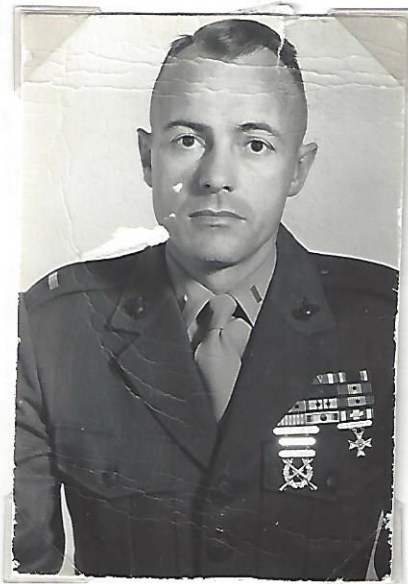
George Charles Merna, Signalman Second Class USN
Born: Nov. 28, 1926; St. Agnes: 1941-1943
Enlisted: Sept. 23, 1943; Killed in Action: Feb. 11, 1945
When his USS LST-577 was sunk in So. Pacific



Robert P. Merna, Moraga, California
Former YN1, USN: 1951-1956



Richard G. Merna, Clinton, Maryland
Former Cpl, USMC: 1953-56 and 1961-62
Korea



Gerald F. Merna, Sterling, Virginia
1stLt USMC (Ret): 1947-1968,
Korea and Vietnam



James E. Merna, Lanham, Maryland
Former Sgt, USMC: 1950-1953
Korea



Li Ensign James Faulk Merna, U. S. Navy (Naval Academy - 1987) (Son of Jim & Sue Merna)

Ri Lieutenant Colonel John Merna, U. S. Marine Corps, Gulf-Iraq Wars (Son of Jim & Sue Merna)

(Retired as Colonel, 1 July 2015)



VISITING DAY AT ST. DOMINIC'S CONVENT, BLAUVELT, NY SUMMER 1942: Back: George Francis Merna (8-21-03); George Charles Merna (11-28-26); Middle: Gerald Francis Merna (4-1-30); James Edward Merna (11-1-32); Robert Paul Merna (4-28-31); Bottom: Vivian Merna (2-22-35); Thomas Merna (10-12-37) & Richard George Merna (8-7-34)