

**William F. Butterworth, Jr.**

**William F. Butterworth, Jr.**  
**Fireman Second Class, U.S. Navy**  
Born September 5, 1925  
Killed in Action October 25, 1944

William “Billy” F. Butterworth, Jr. was born on September 5, 1925, in McKinney, Virginia located in Dinwiddie County. He was the oldest child of William F., Sr. and Mildred Butterworth and was later joined by sisters, Evelyn and Nancy. Billy’s paternal grandparents were William Barner and Margaret Rives Butterworth and his maternal grandparents were Thomas Sydnor and Eva Royal Jones. In the late 1920’s the family moved to Hopewell when Billy’s father, who was a banker in McKinney, took a job with State Planters Bank. They first lived on Lynchburg Street, later on Poythress, and then 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue before moving to 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue in mid-1944 after Billy joined the Navy.

The family attended St. John’s Episcopal Church on Cedar Lane in Hopewell where Billy was confirmed on December 8th, 1940, and presented by the rector of the parish, William Byrd Lee Milton to the Right Reverend William O. Brown, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. With Billy's confirmation, he was registered as a member of the Episcopal Church of St. John's in Hopewell. Billy attended DuPont Elementary School and was also a member for Boy Scout Troop 123. He enjoyed riding horses, so Billy would ride any time he could on the family farm in Dinwiddie with his Aunt Ellen and their neighbors. At Hopewell High School Billy was in the more advanced Scientific Curriculum and also played the drums in the school band. When he was a senior the yearbook said about him *“Handsome Billy is a regular man about town. He’s always ready either for a good time or some hard work.”*



*left to right: Billy with sisters Nancy & Evelyn*



*right: Billy with family friend Eliza Beck in  
Dinwiddie County, Virginia*

Upon graduating from high school in June 1943 at age 17, Billy took a job with the Old Dominion Water Corporation in Hopewell. That summer Billy decided he wanted to join the Navy. Since he was still 17, his father had to sign for him to join, enlisting on August 4, 1943. Upon enlisting, Billy went to the Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois for boot camp training. Following a furlough home, Billy returned to Great Lakes to attend the Electrical Service School, graduating from that training on February 7, 1944.



*Billy's parents, Mr. & Mrs. William F.  
Butterworth, Sr.*



*Billy's High School Yearbook Senior Picture*

Afterwards he went to the Naval Operating Base at Norfolk, staying there until he was sent to Houston, Texas and on April 28 was officially assigned to the newly commissioned *USS Samuel B. Roberts* (DE-413), a destroyer escort, a relatively small ship designed mainly to hunt submarines and protect ship convoys. At Houston Billy went through additional training before officially boarding the *Roberts*.

On May 3, 1944, the ship was loaded with ammunition and the crew steamed into the Gulf of Mexico to begin live fire training. Over the next couple of months the *Roberts* crew continued training and escorted shipping vessels along the East Coast with stops in Bermuda, Norfolk and Boston. On July 7, the *Roberts* collided with a whale and, although not in danger of sinking, had to go to Norfolk for repairs. While at Norfolk Billy was able to make several trips home.



*Billy wearing leggings during training camp*



*Billy with sister Evelyn while home in 1944*

On July 22, 1944 the *Roberts* left Norfolk for the Pacific, passing through the Panama Canal on July 27 and July 28. Even though the crew could not leave the ship then, they got to see the beautiful sites of the Panamanian jungle as the ship slowly transferred through the canal locks and associated lakes. After leaving the Panama Canal, the *Roberts* headed to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, all the while training with their weapons. During this time on August 9, 1944, Billy wrote home to his sister Evelyn about the rigors of the Navy, saying *"I got my hair cut short yesterday because the Captain raised H\_\_\_ about it at an inspection the other day. He also gave me H\_\_\_ for having nonreg shoes on. I had on my new shoes that I bought while I was home on leave. I can't have that happen again!"*

The *Roberts* was at Pearl Harbor from August 10 through August 21, so Billy and his shipmates probably got more shore leave before leaving to perform escort duty. After leaving Hawaii they headed southwest towards the equator causing the temperatures onboard to raise well over 100 degrees below deck where Billy normally served. But Billy seemed to enjoy many of the new experiences with plans to put them to use once back in civilian life. He wrote to his previous co-workers at the water company that the manager will *"have to take me on as an electrician after the war instead of a booster pump or filter operator. I'm enjoying the electrical work I do aboard ship so I think I'll stick to it, if possible, after the war."*

On August 30, 1944 the *Roberts* arrived at Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Island. There the crew was again afforded liberty on shore before heading back to Pearl Harbor on September 2. While on the way back to Pearl Harbor, Billy wrote a letter to home on September 5 in which he said *"It is my 19<sup>th</sup>*

*birthday, celebrated in the middle of the ocean. I never thought that I would be over 10,000 miles from home on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday did you?"* He added *"we are due to cross the International Date Line anytime now. If we cross it today at least by 12 o'clock tonight, tomorrow will be the 5<sup>th</sup> also and I'll have two birthdays in the same year!"*

The *Roberts* arrived back at Pearl Harbor on September 10, 1944, during which time more training was conducted before heading out on their second Pacific escort trip eleven days later. During one of the two stops at Pearl Harbor, Billy happened to run into Frank Hancock, a good friend from Hopewell. On September 30, the *Roberts* received orders to report to Manus Island in the Admiralties near the equator and north of New Guinea. On October 5 the *Roberts* crossed the equator, which is an event with a long tradition of initiation for those onboard that have never crossed the equator, to include Billy and many of his shipmates. Anyone that had never crossed the equator before was called a pollywog and those that had previously crossed were called shellbacks. The initiation lasted for two days, in which Billy and the other pollywogs endured hideous haircuts, being smeared with smelly concoctions of diesel fuel and oil, and crawling through a canvas tunnel full of rotting food garbage. The *Roberts* arrived in Seeadler Harbor at Manus on October 6, from where Billy sent a letter home on October 8, but he did not mention the initiation event in the letter. Instead he talked about how much he appreciated all the letters he recently received from family and friends back home.

At Manus the *Roberts* received instructions for its role in preparation for the invasion of Leyte Island in the southern Philippines. On October 12 the *Roberts* and other ships left Manus to take up their positions off the Leyte coast, near Samar Island. They were to be in place by October 17, but a typhoon played havoc on the entire flotilla, causing them not to arrive until October 18. From then until October 24 the *Roberts* screened for Japanese submarines around the carriers and landing craft they were protecting. On October 24, the larger, more powerful American battleships left the area in search of Japanese aircraft carriers that had been reported about 300 miles away, leaving a small force including the *Roberts* defending the remaining American aircraft carriers and landing craft.

On the morning of October 25, a large Japanese fleet was able to conduct a surprise attack on the American ships that were still guarding the fleet remaining at Leyte Gulf. Although outgunned by the larger Japanese battleships, the *Roberts* and other American ships were able to successfully defend the American aircraft carriers. However in doing so the *Roberts* was sunk along with three other American ships, but the Japanese retreated because of the strong American resistance.

Starting on October 27, news spread throughout the United States of the naval battle that resulted the sinking of American ships, which caused concern at the Butterworth household. However there were no details of which American ships were lost until the government finally released details on Saturday, November 18, twenty-four days after the *Roberts* was sunk. Billy's mother read in that day's *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that the *Roberts* one of the ships was lost in the naval "Battle of the Philippines". Billy's father immediately contacted the Red Cross to investigate since they had not been informed. It wasn't until 9:40 am the next day, Sunday, November 19, that the official telegram arrived. As it turned out, the government previously tried to deliver the telegram to the Butterworth family's old address on 21<sup>st</sup>

Avenue instead of their new residence on 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, thus delaying the notification. The telegram read as follows:

*“The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you that your son William Frank Butterworth, Jr., Fireman Second Class USNR is missing following action in the service of his country. The Department appreciates your great anxiety, but details not now available and delay in receipt thereof must necessarily be expected.”*

Billy’s father wrote to the Associated Press to try to find out more details. The AP forwarded the letter to Lieutenant Commander Robert. W. Copeland, the Commanding Officer of the *Roberts*, who had survived when the ship was lost. Captain Copeland replied by letter on January 5, 1945, included below, giving more details of the incident with hope that Billy somehow survived.

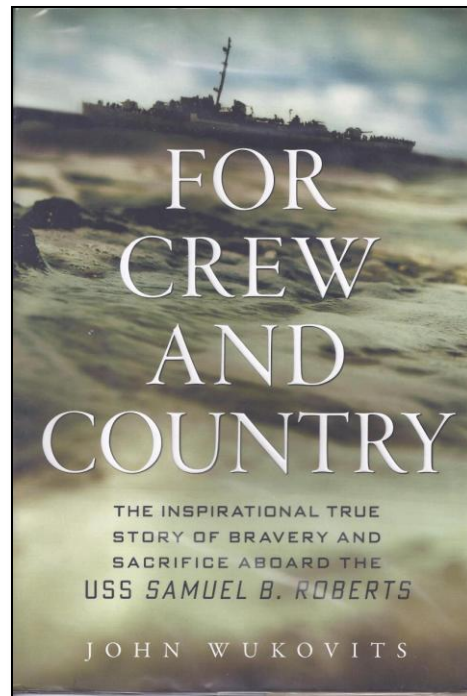
As it turned out, although there were 120 survivors from the *Roberts*, unfortunately Billy was one of the 89 crew members that perished. It was well over one year later, on February 13, 1946, before the Chief of Naval Personnel informed the Butterworth family that Billy was determined to have been killed in action.

In memory of Billy, his family installed a memorial plaque at the family cemetery in Dinwiddie, Virginia. He is also memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines where his name is inscribed on the Wall of the Missing and his name is inscribed on the *USS Samuel B. Roberts* monument at the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in San Diego, California. He is also listed on the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia and on the City of Hopewell War Memorial. In addition, Billy is listed in the book *Gold Star Honor Roll of Virginia in the Second World War*. Billy was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and other service medals pictured below that are cherished by his family to this day.

At the time this biography was developed, Billy was survived by his sister, Evelyn Butterworth Bannerman, who continues to treasure his memory. The collection of information, mementos and pictures included in this document were preserved by Billy’s parents, the late Mr. & Mrs. William F. Butterworth, Sr. and more recently his sister Evelyn, on behalf of their family.



A special thanks is extended to Mr. John Wukovits, author of the book *For Crew and Country* for permission to use information included in this biography from his book about the crew and travels of the *USS Samuel B. Roberts*. The cover of the book is to the right.



*USS Samuel B. Roberts DE 413 at sea, painted in Pacific camouflage scheme*

*October 1944 shortly before its loss*

*Below: Portion of the Richmond Times-Dispatch Article of November 18, 1944 in which Mrs. Butterworth read about the USS Samuel B. Roberts being lost. This article came out the day before the family was notified by the Navy Department that Billy was Missing in Action.*

# Enemy Fleet Is Rendered Impotent

## Philippine Sea Battle Detailed

WASHINGTON, Nov. 17--(UP) —The United States naval victory in the Philippines was so overwhelming that it may prove one of the decisive battles of modern times and it was of such magnitude that it will greatly reduce American casualties in future phases of the Pacific war, the Navy announced today.

It was the climactic phase of a vast United States strategic plan, covering some 1,700,000 square miles of the Pacific, which started with carrier plane attacks on Japanese targets about September 1, developed so successfully that the invasion of the Philippines was advanced to October 20, and ended with the smashing of a good part of the Japanese navy, it was revealed.

The battle wrote a proud new chapter in American seamanship and bravery. Submarines pursued entire enemy fleets. Destroyers, destroyer escorts and PT-boats charged with blazing guns into the fire of enemy battleships into the mouth of death.

### Japs Outshot, Outsmarted

The Japanese were outmaneuvered, outshot and outsmarted, and they put into the fight the best they had.

Even now full details of the astonishing two months of action by United States land, sea and air forces, working in perfect co-ordination, cannot be told, because it would aid a confused and stricken Japanese high command.

But the Navy, in a communique, was able to give new details of the battle and the actions leading up to it, combining them in one breath-taking picture of naval might, skill and courage.

"The Japanese are still wondering what happened to them," the Navy said.

For the first time, the Navy listed the names of all sizeable American ships lost in the Philippines battle—the light carrier Princeton (name previously revealed), the escort carriers St. Lo and Gambier Bay, the 2,100-ton destroyers Johnston and Hoel and the destroyer escort Samuel B. Roberts. A few smaller craft were lost.



**The Missing in Action notification telegram received by the Butterworths at 9:40 am on November 19, 1944. Note that the telegram was addressed to the Butterworth's old address on 21th Avenue, not 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which caused a delay in them receiving the telegram.**

<p><b>CLASS OF SERVICE</b></p> <p>This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.</p>	<h1>WESTERN UNION</h1> <p>A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT</p>	1201	<p><b>SYMBOLS</b></p> <p>DL = Day Letter</p> <p>NL = Night Letter</p> <p>LC = Deferred Cable</p> <p>NLT = Cable Night Letter</p> <p>Ship Radiogram</p>
<p>The filing time shown on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination</p>			
<p>YA07</p>		<p>1944 NOV 19 AM 9 05</p>	
<p>Y. WA 100 50 GOVT=WASHINGTON DC 19 445A</p>			
<p>MR AND MRS WILLIAM FRANK BUTTERWORTH SR=</p>			
<p>409 NORTH 21 ST HOPEWELL VIR=</p>			
<p>THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON WILLIAM FRANK BUTTERWORTH, JR FIREMAN SECOND CLASS USNR IS MISSING FOLLOWING ACTION WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATES YOUR GREAT ANXIETY BUT DETAILS NOT NOW AVAILABLE AND DELAY IN RECEIPT THEREOF MUST NECESSARILY BE EXPECTED=</p>			
<p>VICE ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS THE CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL.</p>			
<p>THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE</p>			

# THE HOPEWELL NEWS

POLITICALLY INDEPENDENT, THIS NEWSPAPER IS DEDICATED TO THE PROGRESS OF HOPEWELL AND PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY

HOPEWELL (The Inland Port) VIRGINIA

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1944

## Billy Butterworth Is Missing In Philippines

William Frank Butterworth, Jr. F 2/c, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Butterworth, Sr., 219 N. 15th Avenue, has been reported as missing by the Navy Department. The wire was received Sunday morning.

Billy was on the destroyer escort Samuel B. Roberts, which was reported Saturday morning by the Navy as having been lost in the great three-pronged "Battle of the Philippines" with the Japanese Navy late in October. This was the first time the Navy had listed the names of all sizable American ships lost in the Philippine battle.

### Official Telegram

Mrs. Butterworth read the Associated account in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, and Mr. Butterworth immediately had the Hopewell Red Cross Chapter ask the National Red Cross to investigate. The official telegram from Vice-Admiral Randall Jacobs arrived the next morning, Sunday, shortly after 9 A. M. The wire follows:

"The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you that your son William Frank Butterworth, Fireman, Second Class, USNR, is missing following action in the service of his country. The Department appreciates your great anxiety, but details not now available and delay in receipt thereof must necessarily be expected."

### Entered In 1943

Billy graduated from Hopewell High School with the class of 1943 and was employed by the Old Dominion Water Corporation when he entered the Navy on



W. F. BUTTERWORTH, JR. F2/c

August 4, 1943. He took his boot training at Great Lakes, Illinois, and then went back there to attend Electrical Service School, from which he graduated February 7, 1944. He then went to the Naval Operating Base at Norfolk, where he stayed until the first of May.

His crew was sent to Houston, Texas, where the Samuel B. Roberts was built and commissioned. They took the destroyer escort on a 30 day shakedown cruise to Bermuda, and went into drydock in Boston on June 23. Early in July on the way from Boston to Nor-

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## Butterworth

(Continued from Page 1)

folk the ship struck a whale and put in at the Portsmouth, Va., Navy Yard for inspection and repairs. While there Billy made several trips home, before they left for the Pacific on July 27.

The ship was in and out of Pearl Harbor for a time, but his family has not heard from Billy for some six weeks—evidently from the time his ship was sent to join the fleet off the Philippines. The last letters received from him were dated October 25, 6, 7 and 8th.

The Navy had previously reported the light carrier Princeton as sunk in the great battle. CWO James C. Steele, Jr., of Hopewell, has been reported as missing from her. The list announced Saturday included two escort carriers, the St. Lo and the Gambier Bay and two destroyers, the Johnston and Hoel, in addition to the Samuel Roberts.

*Letter from Lt. Commander Robert W. Copeland, commander of the Samuel B. Roberts received on January 5, 1945 by the Butterworths*

Dear Mr. Butterworths:

Your letter of December 7th, 1944, addressed to the Associated Press, San Francisco, was forwarded to the Navy Public Relations Officer in San Francisco, and in turn forwarded to me.

I will be happy to give you what information I can. As you know from what you have read, our ship was engaged in the biggest daylight naval engagement of this war, a kind of battle for which she was not designed, and we fought against overwhelming odds.

Your son is one of a very very few men who are numbered among our casualties which were high, for which some little hope can be held out. He was seen to leave the ship, apparently unscathed and uninjured, but suffering from extreme exhaustion, having done yeoman service passing five inch ammunition in the handling room of a five inch gun which had maintained an extremely high rate of fire for over an hour before the gun was put out of commission.

After we abandoned ship the seas were running very high. Some of us were able to reach rafts and floater nets onto which we hung. Many were too weak and exhausted to reach them, and were hanging onto planks and other bits of wreckage. Some of our strongest swimmers made many hazardous trips through the heavy seas to bring some of these men to the rafts and nets and one man who did more than any other single individual in this regard brought back eight or nine men. He returned again to a plank on which your son and three other exhausted men were hanging but was so exhausted that he couldn't bring another man back. The tricks of the sea were drifting the net and planks apart. No one on the plank was strong enough to swim to the raft and none on the raft were able to go to the plank, all of the strong swimmers having already exhausted themselves. We gradually drifted apart and that is the last seen of the four men. Late in the morning, just before the Japanese ships left the area they were seen picking up a few men, no doubt taken prisoner for the purpose of being interrogated. It is not known who these men were, as they were too far from us to be identified. They might have been survivors of either the Gambier Bay, Johnston, or from our ship.

I realize that I am not able to offer you much encouraging news. If your son had been picked up by an American vessel you would have heard from him before now. I doubt that without water that they could have survived more than 4 days if not picked up in that time, as we who spent 30 hours in the water were badly exhausted when picked up. If they made land and were taken by the Japanese or were picked up by the Japanese destroyer no word can be expected about them via the Bliss and Cross for at least four months. I join with you in hoping that he and the other three men with him when last seen shall have survived.

Sincerely,

R.W. Copeland,  
Ex commd. Officer  
S. B. Roberts.

*Presidential Citation Award received April 18, 1946*



IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF

William Frank Datterworth Jr.

WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY

At Sea, Asiatic Area, attached U.S.S. Samuel B. Roberts, 26 October 1945 (Presumed)

HE STANDS IN THE UNBROKEN LINE OF PATRIOTS WHO HAVE DARED TO DIE

THAT FREEDOM MIGHT LIVE, AND GROW, AND INCREASE ITS BLESSINGS.

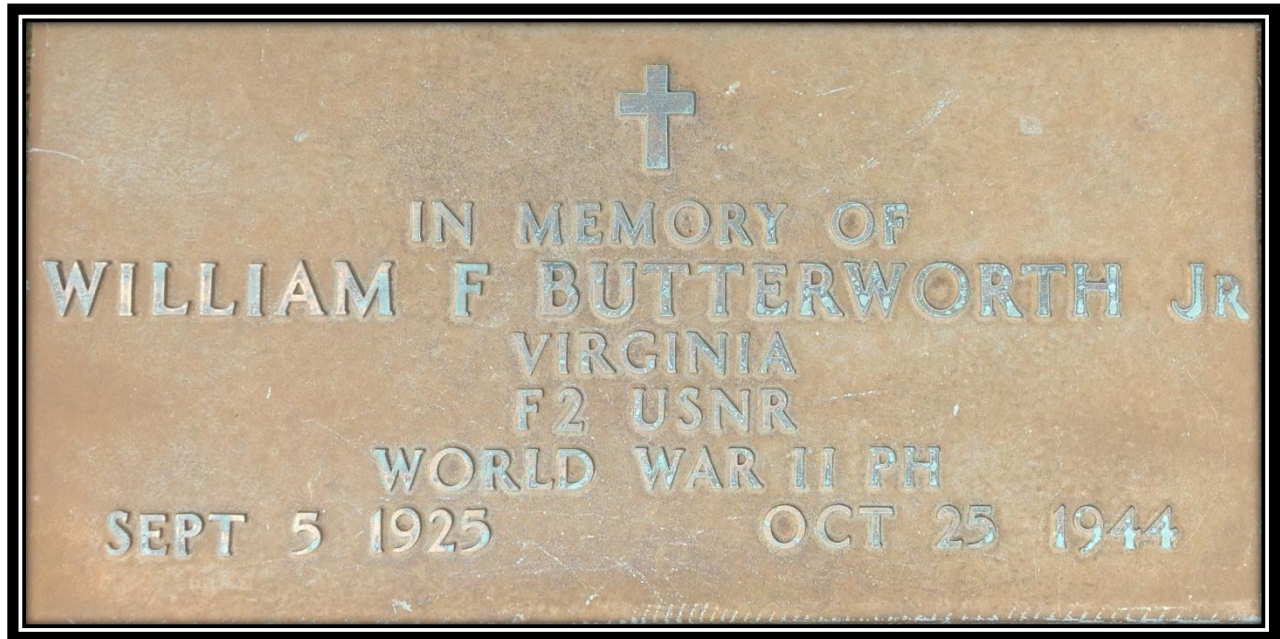
FREEDOM LIVES, AND THROUGH IT, HE LIVES—

IN A WAY THAT HUMBLER THE UNDERTAKINGS OF MOST MEN

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Harry Truman", is written in a cursive style.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

***Memorial Plaque at the Butterworth Family Cemetery  
in Dinwiddie County, Virginia***



***Virginia War Memorial, Richmond, Virginia and Billy's Inscription on the Wall***



**City of Hopewell War Memorial  
and Billy's Inscription**



WILLIAM F. BUTTERWORTH

# USS Samuel B. Roberts Memorial at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery

## San Diego, California and Billy's Inscription



***Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio, Manila, Philippines  
and Billy's name as inscribed on the Wall of the Missing***



BUTTERWORTH WILLIAM F JR



*Billy's Awards as Displayed by his Family*



*Top left: World War II Victory Award*

*Top right: Purple Heart*

*Bottom left: Asiatic Pacific Campaign Award*

*Bottom center and right: American Campaign Award*

*Purple Heart Award – Front*



**Purple Heart – Back Inscription:  
“William F. Butterworth - F2C – USNR”**



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Mrs. Jeanette Wallace

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