



Thomas Andrew Burney

Thomas Andrew Burney
Seaman Second Class, U.S. Navy
Born September 2, 1923
Killed in Action January 7, 1944

Thomas "Tommy" Andrew Burney was born on September 2, 1923, the oldest child of Neill Jefferson, Sr. and Rosa Wyche Burney, both of whom were from North Carolina. Neill was born in 1891 and Rosa was born in 1893. After getting married in North Carolina on April 17, 1922, they moved to the Hopewell area that same year. Tommy was named after his grandfathers, the Rev. Thomas Evans Wyche and Andrew Franklin Burney. His grandmothers were Sarah Eleanor Benson Burney and Mary Earle Smith Wyche. All of his grandparents lived in North Carolina as well.

At Hopewell, Tommy's father was a carpentry contractor, doing work for the local manufacturing industries and at Fort Lee. Tommy had three sisters, Elinor Sue, known as "Sue", Alvah Jean and Nancy Evans, brother, Hal Wyche, known as "Swoose" and half-brother Neill Jefferson, Jr., who went by "NJ". The Burney family attended West End Presbyterian Church, where Tommy's father was an elder.



Tommy as a youngster



Left to right: sister Sue, Tommy, brother Hal and their mother.

The Burneys lived at 2200 Lee Street in western Hopewell, which was a much different place then. His sister Nancy related the following about living in that area and Tommy,

“As Tommy’s baby sister, only seven years old upon his volunteering for the Navy in 1942, my memories of him are somewhat limited, but very special.

We lived on Lee Street at 22nd Avenue, but our Dad owned many blocks of property at the end of Lee Street in Hopewell, including a barn for our cows, chickens, hogs, etc. On many days when Daddy, Tommy and Hal would walk to the barn, I’d skip along behind them and enjoy playing in the hayloft while they gathered eggs, milked the cow and cleaned up. Many times I stood around watching Tommy learn to milk the cow, and sometimes he would help Dad walk the cow back to our house and stake her on the vacant lots behind our house. Many pine trees grew there – Tommy called the area “The Pines”.

Tommy and his neighborhood friends, Charlie, Bobby, Sammy, Darrell, etc, etc, and brother Hal, were always playing games of marbles, soft ball, rubber guns, “mumbley peg”, kick the can, etc. in the yard or in the street, and I always tagged along behind getting in their way! Tommy (and Hal) had a large dog named “Dan”, who became my best friend after Tommy died and after Hal graduated from school and joined the Navy. Dan followed me to school everyday – that is until the school principal told me he could no longer be there. So I looked forward each day to hurrying home and being with Tommy’s and my best friend.

While growing up I so well remember the many trips Tommy and Hal (and their many friends) made to go hunting in the nearby woods. How they so enjoyed bringing squirrels, birds, etc. home to eat, however I never developed a taste for them!”

Alvah Jean also had similar fond memories of Tommy and his friends. She said,

“Tommy was part of a group of about six boys who played together. They worked puzzles, played cards, marbles and made airplanes. One day the boys decided to make fudge. After the fudge was made, the porch seemed like the perfect place to let it cool. After a while one of the boys suggested they should check on the fudge and his brother, Sammy, volunteered. He returned and sat down calmly at the table with the rest of the group. When the boys inquired about the fudge, Sammy simply said, “Its okay. The dogs are eating it.” What happened next we will never know.”



Tommy’s High School Portrait

Tommy attended Dupont Elementary School as a youngster and carried The Progress Index newspaper when he was a little older. After graduating from Hopewell High School in 1941, Tommy got a job at Tubize and worked there until he joined the Navy. He entered service on November 30, 1942, and went to the Naval Station in Great Lakes, Illinois, for boot camp training. A couple weeks later, Tommy wrote a letter to his mother on December 15, 1942, saying in part,

"If you send me that package you wrote about, don't put anything in it except candy, cookies and a pen & pencil. I have no place to put anything else. Just had mail call and I got yours, Nancy's & Alvah's letters. N.J. wrote me. Tell him I don't care to get The Hopewell News sent here. I would not have time to read it thoroughly any way. The weather is a little warmer today and we are working inside stenciling our gear. My sea bag is full of clothes and I have gotten a Xmas present for you. I am sending it as soon as I get a chance. I hope you like it. I was lucky and got it from one of the old hands here who had some left over from a CO he had ordered them for. They have them at the canteen but this one is lot prettier. So I hope you get it and like it."

The Christmas present Tommy got for his mother referenced in his letter is the Navy pillow cover pictured below, which is still preserved by his sister Nancy.



Later Tommy attended the Navy Training School at the University of Wisconsin, then volunteered for sea duty and was assigned to the *USS St. Augustine* on July 16, 1943. The *St. Augustine* was built in 1929 as a private steel-hulled yacht named *Viking* that was 272 feet long. Her first owner was George L. Baker and her second owner was Norman B. Woolworth of the Woolworth Department Store, who sold it on December 5, 1940, to the Navy, then she was converted to a patrol gunboat. When Tommy was assigned to the *St. Augustine*, she had already been serving as shipping escort along the East Coast for over one year. The *St. Augustine* was based out of New York and made regular convoy escort runs, mainly for merchant ships traveling between New York and several Caribbean ports.

Alvah Jean had the following recollection about Tommy coming home from the Navy for Christmas 1943,

“One Christmas in particular that was very special for all of us was when Tommy came home for the holiday. We were very excited to decorate! We made shiny balls, popcorn strings, paper ring chains and a homemade angel for the top. We placed pine cones on the tree also. It was so much fun! The entire house smelled delicious. Mother always baked lemon pie and coconut cakes. We loved them! We were so blessed to be all together for Christmas and spend time with Tommy.”

That would be the last time the family would see Tommy. Soon afterwards, on the morning of Thursday, January 6, 1944, a convoy lead by the *St. Augustine*, and including a tanker and two Coast Guard ships left New York harbor bound for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, into a gale with nearly forty mile-per-hour winds and waves nearly twenty feet high. While sailing under blackout conditions off Cape May, New Jersey, the *St. Augustine* left the convoy at 10 p.m. to investigate a radar indication of an unidentified ship that was not part of their convoy. In doing so the *St. Augustine* was rammed by another tanker, not part of their convoy, quickly sinking the *St. Augustine*. Although Coast Guard ships that were in the convoy came to the rescue, of the 145 crew members on the *St. Augustine*, 115 perished including Tommy.

Over the weekend the Navy assessed the casualties. Then on Monday, January 10, 1944, the Navy Department sent a telegram to Tommy’s parents informing them that he had died as a result of a collision at sea. The telegram also asked the Burneys to advise about their preference for funeral services. Tommy’s sister, Nancy recounted the tragedy,

“I well remember the day Mother and Daddy were notified of Tommy’s death. They had notified the DuPont Elementary School office and asked that I be allowed to come home. Someone from the office came to my room and asked me to go with them to the office. There they shared the news with me and escorted me home to Mom and Dad. What sorrow endured. Many thanks to my school mates for stopping by to visit. “

Additional telegrams were exchanged to make arrangements for Tommy’s remains to be returned to Hopewell for interment in the City Point National Cemetery. Tommy’s funeral was held Monday, January 17, 1944, at the West End Presbyterian Church. He was the first victim from World War II to be buried in the City Point National Cemetery in Hopewell. Tommy had just turned 20 years old a few months prior to the accident. Photographs at the cemetery of the funeral with full military honors ceremony that January day are included below. Regarding the funeral, Nancy said

“I vividly remember Tommy’s funeral and the military burial. What stands out is that one of Tommy’s friends from the Navy escorted his body to Hopewell. For many years afterwards Mother and I would walk to the cemetery to place flowers on his grave, and Dad and I would walk to the cemetery for Memorial Day Services they used to have. To this date, my husband and I still participate in the annual “Wreaths Across America “ program in Tommy’s memory.”

Articles about Tommy's funeral were published in all the local newspapers, and in North Carolina where his grandparents and many of his relatives lived. In March 1944, the Burneys received a letter from Mrs. Virginia J. Hatch, wife of the ship's captain, Parker C. Hatch, who also lost his life in the collision. Her letter is also included below. Then in August 1944, Alfred Carey, one of Tommy's best Navy friends on the *St. Augustine* who survived the collision, wrote to the Burneys. Alfred and Tommy had been on watch a few hours before and both were asleep at the time of the collision. In that letter he said,

"Tommy and I met each other at Pier #92 in New York, where we worked together while we were waiting for our ship; we both went aboard at the same time. Tommy and I were great friends. We stood watch together and worked together all the time when we were on the St. Augustine. Both of us used to speak of our families so much that I almost feel that I have always known you, although we never met. I am sure he felt the same about my family. He used to tease me about Delaware and often said that someday I must go home with him to Virginia and see what really beautiful country is like. He loved fishing and hunting and often spoke about these sports and of his dog, whom he always took with him. Tommy and I thought a lot of each other, and we had loads of fun together.

His wonderful personality made him the friend of every member of the St. Augustine's crew, and I can truthfully say that he was exceptionally happy doing his work aboard ship. At any rate, if he ever disliked any part of Navy life, no one knew it. He never complained and was always ready and willing to do his duty. His happy smile helped many of us keep our chins up, for a person just couldn't be sad when he was around.

The night of the accident, Tommy and I had been on watch from six until eight o'clock in the evening. Afterward, both of us went below deck to our beds to rest. That was the last I saw of him."

In addition to the letters from Mrs. Hatch and Alfred Carey, they received letters of condolences from The Secretary of the Navy and the U.S. Navy Surgeon General. In Tommy's honor, his name is inscribed on the City of Hopewell War Memorial Monument on 15th Avenue, not far from where Tommy was raised and just one block from his church, the War Memorial Monument at the Prince George Regional Heritage Center at Prince George, Virginia and at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia. In addition, Tommy is listed in the books *Gold Star Honor Roll of Virginia in the Second World War* and *Young American Patriots - World War II – Virginia*. Tommy was posthumously awarded the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal which are cherished by his family to this day in a display case designed by his brother, Hal, and procured by his sister, Nancy.

At the time this biography was developed, Tommy was survived by his sisters Nancy and Alvah Jean, who continue to treasure his memory, as well as numerous nieces and nephews. The collection of information, mementos and pictures included in this document were provided by Tommy's sister, Nancy, who has preserved these items on behalf of Tommy's family.



Tommy standing in the snow, possibly while in training in Wisconsin



Tommy at home on leave

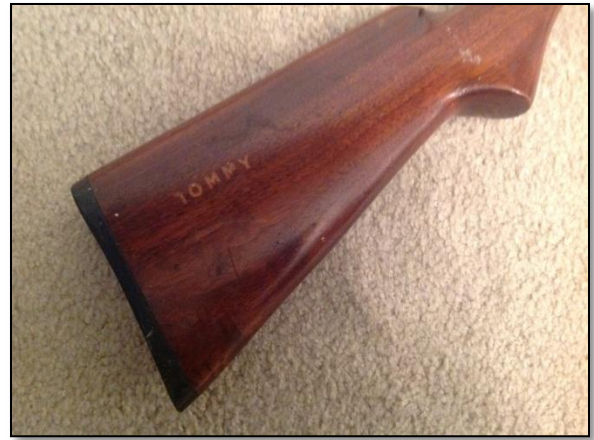


Tommy's father, Neill J. Burney, Sr.

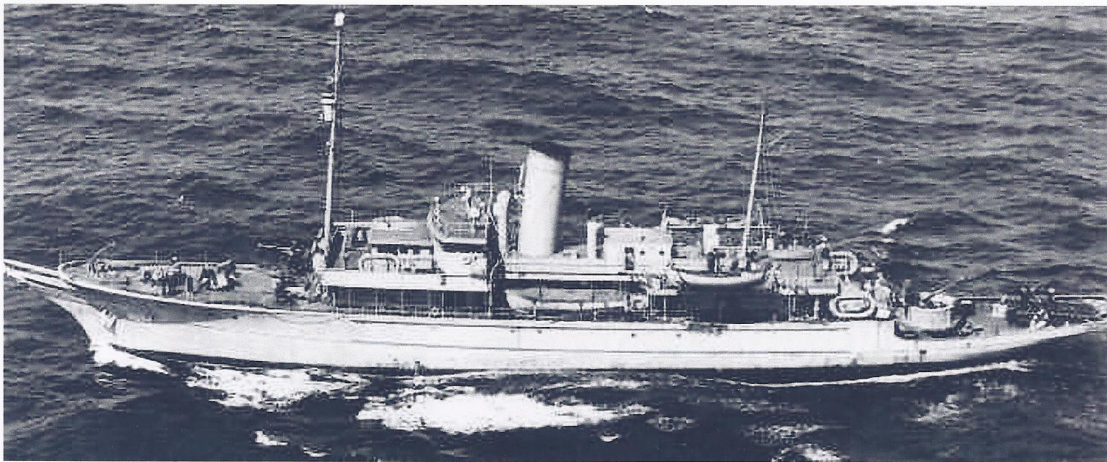


Tommy's mother, Rosa Wyche Burney

Tommy loved to hunt with his 12 gauge shotgun pictured here, which has his name on the stock. The gun is still owned by Tommy's family.



The USS St. Augustine that Tommy was aboard when he perished.



U.S.S. St. Augustine

**Copy of the January 10, 1944 telegram notifying the Burneys
that Tommy had died while in service of his country**

659 43 99

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">CLASS OF SERVICE</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">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 style="margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: small; margin: 0;">(54)</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">SYMBOLS</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">DL = Day Letter NT = Overnight Telegram LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram</p>
A. N. WILLIAMS AGENT	NEWCOMB CARLTON CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD	J. C. WILLEVER FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

The filing time shown in the **YA03** grams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

LA1248 156 GOVT=PXXNR WASHINGTON DC 9 1010P

MR AND MRS NEIL JEFFERSON BURNEY=

2200 LEE ST HOPEWELL VIR=

1944 JAN 10 AM 8 49

THE NAVY DEPARTMENT DEEPLY REGRETS TO INFORM YOU OF THE DEATH OF YOUR SON THOMAS ANDREW BURNEY SEAMAN SECOND CLASS USNR AS A RESULT OF COLLISION AT SEA WHILE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS DUTY AND IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY. PLEASE TELEGRAPH COLLECT TO THE BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY NAVY DEPARTMENT WASHINGTON DC WHETHER OR NOT YOUR DESIRE TO HAVE HIS REMAINS SENT HOME OR INTERRED IN ANY NATIONAL OR NAVAL CEMETERY YOU MAY ELECT WITHOUT COST TO YOU. IF SENT HOME ALL EXPENSES OF PREPARATION ENCASEMENT AND TRANSPORTATION WILL BE PREPAID TO DESTINATION AND REASONABLE NECESSARY EXPENSES NOT TO EXCEED FIFTY DOLLARS WILL BE ALLOWED TOWARDS FUNERAL EXPENSES SUBJECT TO REIMBURSEMENT BY THE BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY NAVY DEPARTMENT. IF THE BODY IS SENT HOME PLEASE ADVISE WHETHER OR NOT YOU DESIRE AN ESCORT TO ACCOMPANY THE BODY. THE NAVY DEPARTMENT EXTENDS TO YOU ITS SINCEREST SYMPATHY IN YOUR GREAT SORROW=

REAR ADMIRAL RANDALL JACOBS CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

**Announcement of Tommy's death in The Hopewell News,
January 11, 1944**

Thomas Andrew Burney Dies In Collision Of Ships Off New Jersey

Naval Patrol And Merchant Vessel Crash In Night

Mr. and Mrs. Neil Jefferson Burney of 2200 Lee Street, have received a telegram from the Navy Department informing them of the death of their son, Thomas Andrew Burney, S. 2/c, USNR, as a result of "a collision at sea while in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country."

He was on the naval patrol ship St. Augustine, which was sunk last Thursday night after a collision with an unidentified merchant ship, in the Atlantic Ocean sixty miles southeast of Cape May, New Jersey. The survivors and about 30 bodies were brought ashore at the Cape May Guard Station.

Hutton Yacht

The St. Augustine was once a \$1,250,000 pleasure yacht used by heiress Barbara Hutton. A joint Naval and Coast Guard board of inquiry met at Cape May to investigate the collision, but no details have been announced.

The body is being sent home and services will be held at Wesley End Church, with interment in the National Cemetery, it was announced. In addition to information about the return of the body, the wire from the Navy Department read as follows:

Navy Telegram

Washington, D. C.
January 10, 1944

Mr. and Mrs. Neil Jefferson Burney

2200 Lee Street, Hopewell, Va.
The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you of the death of your son, Thomas Andrew Burney, S. 2/c, USNR, as a result of a collision at sea while in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country.

The Navy Department extends to you its sincerest sympathy in your great sorrow.

Rear Admiral Randall Ince
Chief of Naval Personnel

20 Years Old

Only twenty years old at the time of his death, Seaman Burney had graduated from Hopewell High School with the class of 1942.
(See "T. A. Burney," Page 3)

T. A. Burney

(Continued from Page 1)

of 1941. He had worked at Tubize before he enlisted in the Navy in November, 1942. Following his boot training at Great Lakes, Illinois, he was sent to radio school at the University of Wisconsin. Then he volunteered for sea duty and had been on this patrol ship in the Atlantic.

Besides his parents he is survived by three sisters, Alvah Jean, Nancy Evans and Eleanor Sue; one brother, Hal Wyche, and one half-brother, Neal J. Jr.; as well as other relatives and many friends.

*City Point National Cemetery Funeral for Thomas Burney
January 17, 1944*



Honor Rifle Squad



Folding of the Flag



Presentation of Flag to Parents



Flower Covered Grave Site

Funeral Program

Crossing The Bar

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be
No moaning of the Bar
When I put out to sea,

* * *

For tho' from out our bourne
of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot
face to face,
When I have crost the bar
—Tennyson



Services for
Thomas Andrew Burney
Seaman 2nd Class USNR

Born
September 2, 1923
Hopewell, Virginia

Died
January 7, 1944
Serving His Country

Services Held At
West End Presbyterian
Church

Clergymen
Rev. William E. Hill, Jr.
Chaplin Charles F. Nims

Interment
City Point National
Cemetery



Pallbearers: Sgt. Carmen Berry, Sgt. Claude Roth, Sgt. Joseph Karbonoitcle, Sgt. Robert Teal, Cpl. Alexander Klauder and Cpl. Louis Voss.

Honor Rifle Squad: Sgt. J. J. Worch, Cpl. Crews, Cpl. Waddel, Cpl. Hedgepath, Pfc. Greene and Pfc. Kyser

Bugler: Sergeant Jackson Traylor sounded Taps

In honor of Seaman Burney, who was the first Hopewell World War II casualty to be interred in the City Point National Cemetery, all U.S. Flags on all public buildings, the City Hall and Hopewell Schools were flown at half mast during the funeral services.

**Letter from Mrs. Virginia J. Hatch
Wife of the St. Augustine's Captain**

MRS. PARKER C. HATCH
5 GRAMERCY PARK
NEW YORK, N. Y.

March 9, 1944

Dear Mr. Rummy:-

I have been wishing to, and am happy now to be able to write you as a companion in grief for the loss of our good men.

The Bureau of Personnel in Washington has graciously sent me the full list of addresses of the next of kin of the men aboard the St. Augustine at the time of the accident, with permission to write to you all. I hope you will accept my thoughts of you and for you with the same feeling they are given, the feeling of close human companionship that the Captain had for all his men which all have said made such a happy ship.

I hope above all that you have found a strength to carry on as loyal family members in the Service of the United States Navy. My greatest strength has come from faith in our ship, its Captain and its men. We can all have confident pride and honor that in this accident our men gave their lives for the good of a great many others. I do not know all the good things that have or will come from this tragic event, but I can assure you a great deal has already been done to make as certain as possible that this will not happen again.

With permission I have the privilege of quoting from a personal letter to me the very sincere feelings of Rear Admiral M. F. Dreamel, Commandant U. S. Navy Yard, Philadelphia, "The outstanding fact that will endure is the fact that your husband and the brave men with him gave their lives for their country."

(continued on next page)

Thomas Andrew Burney Military Awards Display



**The City of Hopewell War Memorial Monument
and Tommy's inscription**

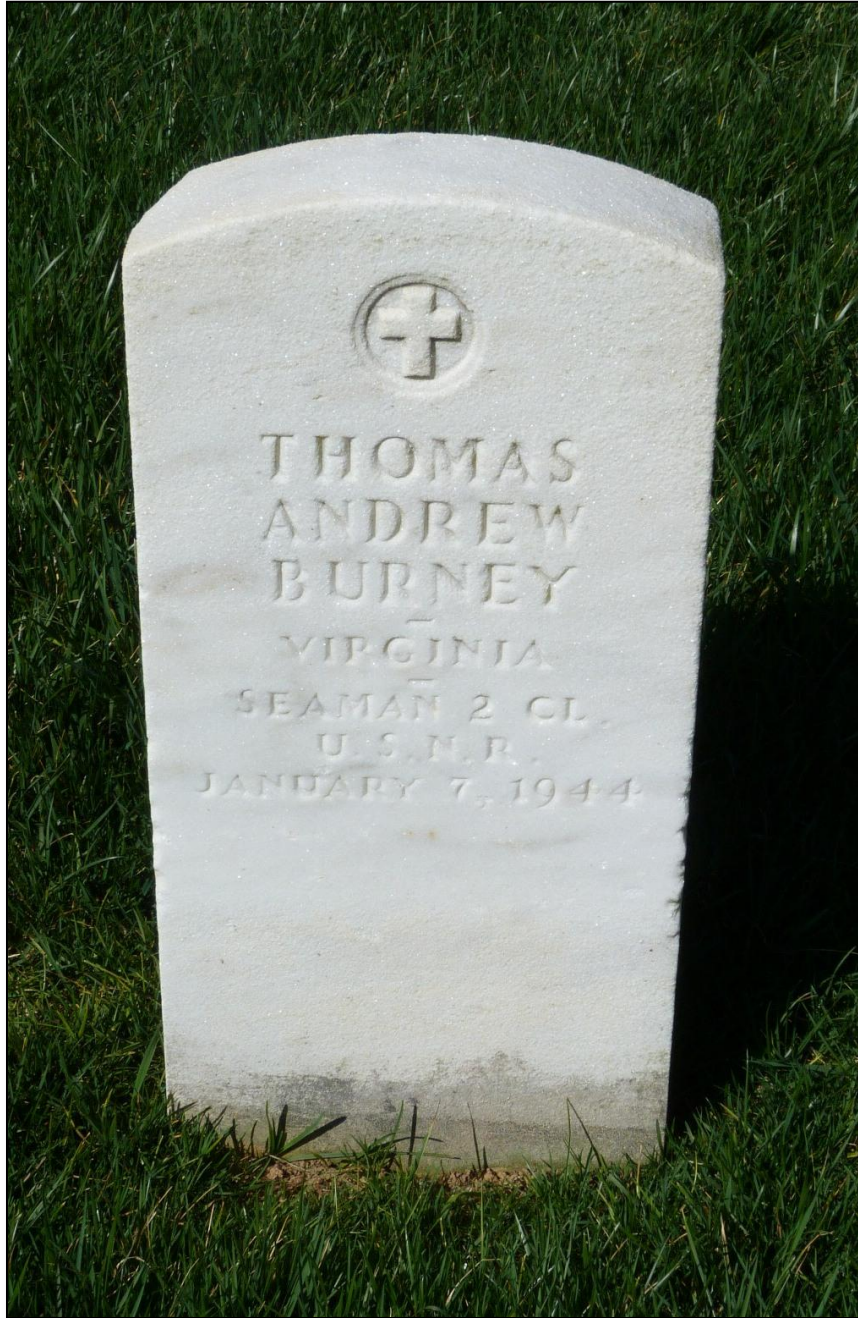


**Prince George County War Memorial and Tommy's Inscription
at the Historic Prince George Courthouse**



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





Final Resting Place

City Point National Cemetery

Hopewell, Virginia

This memorial tribute made possible by support of:

J.T. Morriss and Sons

The Bank of Southside Virginia

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Williamson

Mrs. Jeanette Wallace

Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey McCants

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The Prince George Regional Heritage Center

P.O. Box 452

Prince George, VA 23875

804-863-0212

pghistory@aol.com