

Weldon William Wald

www.ancestry.com in the U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946

Name: Weldon W Wald
Birth Year: 1923
Race: White, citizen (White)
Nativity State or Country: Texas
State of Residence: Texas
County or City: Bell
Enlistment Date: 7 Jan 1943
Enlistment State: Texas
Enlistment City: Fort Sam Houston
Branch: Branch Immaterial - Warrant Officers, USA
Branch Code: Branch Immaterial - Warrant Officers, USA
Grade: Private
Grade Code: Private
Term of Enlistment: Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law
Component: Selectees (Enlisted Men)
Source: Civil Life
Education: 3 years of high school
Civil Occupation: Surveyors
Marital Status: Married
Height: 71
Weight: 164

in the U.S. Rosters of World War II Dead, 1939-1945

Name: Weldon W Wald
Gender: Male
Race: White
Religion: No Record
Disposition: Nonrecoverable
Service Branch: Army
Rank: Staff Sergeant
Service Number: 38364854

in the World War II and Korean Conflict Veterans Interred Overseas

Name: Weldon W Wald
Inducted From: Texas
Rank: Staff Sergeant
Combat Organization: 853rd Engineers Battalion Aviation
Death Date: 27 Nov 1943
Monument: North Africa
Last Known Status: Missing
U.S. Awards: Purple Heart Medal

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=137864474>

Birth: Jan. 23, 1923

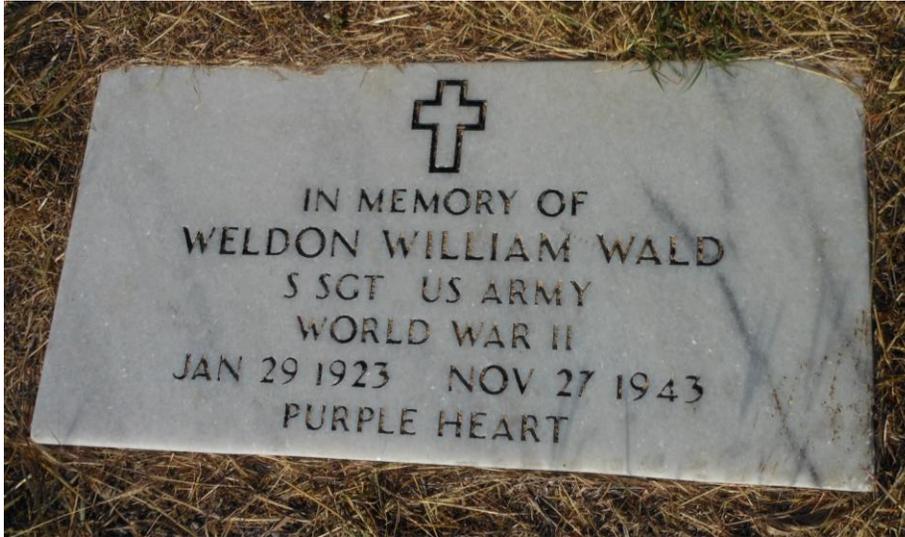
Death: Nov. 27, 1943

Parents: W J Wald (1902 - 1949) & Meta M *Hanusch* Wald (1899 - 1990)

Inscription: IN MEMORY OF S SGT U S ARMY WORLD WAR II PURPLE HEART

Burial: Hillcrest Cemetery, Temple, Bell County, Texas, USA

Plot: SECTION 2



<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=56251037>

SSgt Weldon W Wald

Death: Nov. 27, 1943

Note: Entered the service from Texas.

Burial: North Africa American Cemetery and Memorial, Carthage, Tunis, Tunisia

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|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| WALCH ALBERT R | PFC | 6 INF 1 ARMD DIV | MARYLAND |
| WALD WELDON W | S SGT | 853 ENGR BN (AVN) | TEXAS |
| WALDREP R B | TEC 5 | 853 ENGR BN (AVN) | TEXAS |
| WALEWSKI STANISLAUS M | 2 LT | SOUTH ATLANTIC WING ATC | ILLINOIS |
| WALKER JAMES P | MAJ | 428 BOMB SO 310 BOMB GP (M) | ARKANSAS |
| WALKER LAIRD K | 2 LT | 414 BOMB SO 97 BOMB GP (H) | CALIFORNIA |
| WALL CHARLES H | S SGT | 1 SQ 480 ANTISUB GP | GEORGIA |
| WALLACE CHARLES R | S SGT | 32 PHOTO SO 5 RCN GP | OKLAHOMA |
| WALLACE PAUL E | PVT | 91 ARMD FA BN | KENTUCKY |
| WALLEN GEORGE A JR | S SGT | 2 SQ 480 ANTISUB GP | PENNSYLVANIA |
| WALSH LEO E | PFC | 6 INF 1 ARMD DIV | INDIANA |
| WALSH MARTIN E | 1 LT | AIR CORPS | NEW YORK |
| WALSH MORTIMER V | 1 LT | 414 BOMB SO 97 BOMB GP (H) | NEW YORK |

AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

Weldon W. Wald

Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army Air Forces

Service # 38364854

853rd Engineer Battalion, Aviation

Entered the Service from: Texas

Died: 27-Nov-43

Missing in Action or Buried at Sea

Tablets of the Missing at North Africa American Cemetery

Carthage, Tunisia

Awards: Purple Heart

A Calamity at Sea, 70 Years Ago
By Jesse Greenspan

On November 26, 1943, the day after Thanksgiving, German bombers attacked a convoy of Allied ships traveling through the Mediterranean Sea on its way to the Far Eastern theater of World War II. At first, the assault appeared to be failing. But as the sun set, a remote-controlled glider bomb slammed into the *HMT Rohna*, a British transport with mostly Americans onboard, and blew gaping holes in both the port and starboard sides. Despite the presence of nearby rescue boats, 1,149 men went down with the *Rohna*, an incident the U.S. government largely kept secret for decades.

The *HMT Rohna*, an 8,602-ton, coal-burning vessel, was not built for the military. Lacking alternatives, the British nonetheless pressed it and many other ships like it into service during World War II as troop transports. In the early-to-middle stages of the conflict, the *Rohna* carried men and supplies between Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Bombay, India, evacuated women and children from Singapore, and participated in the invasion of Sicily. It then headed to Oran, Algeria, where about 2,000 U.S. troops boarded it. On Thanksgiving 1943, the *Rohna* and five other troop transports left port to join convoy KMF-26 in the middle of its journey from Britain to India. Survivors of the *Rohna* disaster later recalled that their Thanksgiving meal consisted principally of watery canned chicken and weevil-filled bread.

The following late afternoon, as the convoy sailed roughly a dozen miles off the North African coast, about 30 German aircraft swooped in. The ships responded by opening fire, putting up a thick smoke screen and attempting to electronically jam the Nazis' bomb frequencies. With the assistance of Allied fighter planes, they destroyed several German bombers while initially suffering very little damage of their own. During the second wave of the attack, however, a German bombardier guided a remote-controlled glider bomb—a precursor to today's "smart" missiles—into the *Rohna* about 15 feet above the waterline. The subsequent explosion started an engine room fire, sent debris flying and knocked out the ship's lights, communications systems and water pressure. It also punctured holes in the sides so large that, as one survivor put it, "you could drive a truck through."

An estimated 300 men died in the blast, and the casualty toll only grew from there, arguably due in part to the *Rohna's* deficiencies. Of the 22 lifeboats onboard, most were either destroyed by the bomb, defective or mishandled. And the remainder were "old, beaten up things," one survivor asserted. At least some of the ship's 101 rubber life rafts were likewise unusable, and the men apparently never received proper instructions on how to inflate their life belts. Moreover, the crew "had no thoughts in the emergency for anyone but themselves," according to a report from the U.S. Adjutant General's office. (Other sources say the crew acted honorably and that the lifesaving equipment was adequate.) Within an hour or so, the *Rohna* disappeared below the surface, and all those who hadn't yet jumped into the water were forced to do so. Many were sucked under the ship never to reappear; others found themselves covered in leaking oil. The cold, darkness, big swells and strong currents also took their toll, as did German strafing fire.

In the aftermath of the attack, the commander of the convoy designated a handful of rescue ships and ordered the remainder to continue on course. The *USS Pioneer*, a minesweeper, proved to be the most adept at finding survivors, picking up 606. The tugboat *Mindful* saved over 200 additional men, and the freighter *Clan Campbell* pulled 83 from the water despite high decks that made rescue operations difficult. At the same time, the destroyer *Atherstone*, the corvette *Holcombe* and a French tugboat that came from shore retrieved a few dozen men between them. The rescuers worked throughout the night, coming across their last survivor nearly 12 hours after the *Rohna* sank. Nevertheless, 1,015 American GIs, 120 British and Indian crewmembers, 11 gunners and three Red Cross workers didn't make it out alive. No other U.S. military disaster at sea has ever been deadlier.

After a few weeks of rest, the *Rohna* survivors followed the rest of the convoy to India, from where some then dispersed to Burma and China. Meanwhile, since most of the dead bodies remained unrecovered, the U.S. government classified them as "missing in action." The notified families originally held out hope. "From my experiences in the Navy I've heard of hundreds of men who were reported missing, and showed up a few months later," Harold Glickman, the cousin of Pvt. Abraham Gunn, wrote to Gunn's parents on

January 5, 1944. "We just must be patient and calm, but above all we must never, never lose our faith." Later on, however, the status of Gunn and his fellow *Rohna* victims was changed to "killed in action."

In order to prevent the Germans from learning about the success of their cutting-edge remote-controlled bomb, the U.S. government disclosed only vague details about the incident, such as that around 1,000 men had been lost at sea. By and large, this secrecy stayed in place following the war. Finally, after a survivor secured the release of relevant documents under the Freedom of Information Act, the Birmingham News published a piece on the *Rohna* in 1993 that was picked up by the Associated Press. The first reunion of *Rohna* survivors took place later that year, a monument was dedicated at Alabama's Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in 1996 and a few books on the subject came out in 1997 and 1998. Congress then got involved, honoring both the dead and the survivors in a 2000 resolution. "The men who gave their lives for their country on board this ship were heroes who deserve to be recognized and not forgotten," Congressman Jack Metcalf, the resolution's sponsor, said on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives that September. "All Americans need to learn of their bravery and sacrifice."

History of the *Rohna*

On November 26, 1943, during WWII, one thousand, one hundred and thirty eight men perished when a British troopship, the *HMT Rohna*, was attacked from the air and destroyed in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Algeria. Two important but virtually unknown historical events occurred at that time.

It was the first successful "hit" of a merchant vessel at sea carrying US troops by a German remote-controlled, rocket-boosted bomb, thus giving birth to the "Missile Age," and it resulted in the greatest loss of troops (1,015) at sea in U.S. history. Combined with the loss of ship's crew and officers, and three Red Cross workers, more lives were lost than on the *USS Arizona* at Pearl Harbor.

The "hit" was so devastating that the U.S. Government placed a veil of secrecy upon it. The events which followed were so shameful that the secrecy continued for decades until recently, when documents were grudgingly released under pressure of the Freedom of Information Act. The government still does not acknowledge this tragedy, thus most families of the casualties still do not know the fate of their loved ones.

The Memorial

In 1995, over fifty years later, a group of *Rohna* survivors, next-of-kin and rescuers, informally came together for the sole purpose of enabling the creation and dedication of a *Rohna* Memorial.

On Memorial Day, 1996, a monument was dedicated to the memory of the 1015 men who lost their lives in this incident, at Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in Seales, Alabama.

Four years later, The *Rohna* Survivors Memorial Association was more formally organized. Many of those involved in the earlier Memorial Dedication project worked diligently toward the formation of this new organization. Read more.

The Association

In 1999, articles and by-laws were drawn up and the association defined its goals, which are:

- To continue in the search for survivors as-yet-undiscovered and the families of those who perished, so as to provide them with information they never had about the fate of their loved ones,
- To bring the *Rohna* story before the public, to honor the men who lost their lives in this incident and those on the rescue vessels who acted selflessly in their rescue efforts,
- And to further, by reunions and other communications, the closeness among the membership

HMT Rhona Casualties

Wald, Weldon W., S/Sgt., 38364854

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