

Bronstein was first NH naval officer to die in World War II

MANCHESTER — Ben Richard Bronstein was born in the city on April 14, 1915, and attended local public schools, graduating from Central High School. He graduated from the University of New Hampshire in 1936 and from Tufts Medical School in 1940.

After completing his medical studies, he joined the staff of the Elliot Hospital. He subsequently enlisted in the U.S. Navy and on Oct. 4, 1941, was appointed assistant surgeon with the rank of lieutenant junior grade.

On Nov. 6, Bronstein reported for duty at the Portsmouth Navy Yard. From Portsmouth, he was sent to Casco Bay, Maine, to await transportation to Argentia, Newfoundland, where he would join the crew of the destroyer U.S.S. Jacob Jones. He reported for duty aboard the Jacob Jones in late December.

It was not widely publicized at the time, but Allied merchant shipping was experiencing significant losses along the Atlantic Coast from 1941 to 1942. To

combat the U-boats, Vice Adm. Adolphus Andrews established a roving Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) patrol. The Jacob Jones, under the command of Lt. Cmdr. Hugh Black, left New York City on Feb. 22, 1942, to join the ships on ASW duty. On Feb. 27, the Jacob Jones steamed south along the New Jersey coast to patrol and search the area between

Barnegat Light and Five Fathom Bank. Shortly after her departure, she was given orders to concentrate her patrol activity in the waters off Cape May and the Delaware Capes. She spotted the burning wreckage of the tanker R. P. Resor, which had been torpedoed the previous day east of Barnegat Light. The Jacob Jones searched the area for survivors and then headed south to continue its patrol.

At dawn on Feb. 28, off Cape May, German submarine U-578 began its torpedo attack against the Jacob Jones. The port side

of the destroyer was hit with at least two torpedoes. According to survivors, the first torpedo struck just behind the bridge, causing substantial damage and exploding the ship's magazine. The blast literally sheared off everything forward of the point of impact, completely destroying the bridge, the chart room, the officers' quarters and petty

officers' quarters. The Jacob Jones was dead in the water and because of the damage to her bridge was unable to send a distress message.

A second torpedo struck about 40 feet forward of the ship's fantail (the overhang at the extreme rear of the ship), destroying the crew's quarters. Only the middle section of the ship remained intact.

The Jacob Jones was the first U.S. warship to be sunk off the American coast by enemy forces. Out of a crew of 200, only 11 men survived. Among those lost was 26-year-old Dr. Ben Richard

Monumental Generation



COURTESY

On Feb. 28, 1942, Dr. Ben Richard Bronstein of Manchester was on board the U.S.S. Jacob Jones when it was attacked by a German U-boat off Cape May, N.J. Only 11 of the 200 crew members survived.

Bronstein. He was the first naval officer from Manchester and New Hampshire to lose his life in World War II.

In Bronstein's honor, two U.S. Navy ships have carried the name U.S.S. Bronstein. The

booklet, "Manchester's Honored Veterans" provides the following information: The first of the ships to be named after Bronstein, the U.S.S. Bronstein (DD-189), was launched on Nov. 14, 1943, with the namesake's mother as the sponsor. This ship went on to have an impressive war record. It was credited with assisting in the sinking of four German submarines. The ship was decommissioned in 1945 and transferred to Uruguay in 1952.

The second ship, the destroyer escort DE-1037, was commissioned on June 16, 1963. She was decommissioned Dec. 13, 1990.

The city of Manchester rededicated the former Hanover Square as Bronstein Park in honor of its native son. The following wording can be found on the plaque erected in Bronstein's honor: "In memory of Dr. Ben Richard Bronstein, Lieutenant, Medical Corps. Aboard the Destroyer U.S.S. Jacob Jones, lost in action February 28, 1942. First naval officer from the State

of New Hampshire to have sacrificed his life in the fulfillment of his duty in World War II."

Each of us has the opportunity to honor Dr. Bronstein and the more than 12,300 Manchesterites who served in the armed forces during World War II by contributing to the Manchester World War II Memorial. Checks should be sent to the Manchester World War II Memorial, One City Hall Plaza, Manchester, NH 03101. Donations may also be made using a major credit card or Paypal by accessing at the memorial's Web site at www.ManchesternhWWIImemorial.com; click on the "donate" tab.

A few copies are still available of the "Manchester's Honored Veterans" booklet, a true collector's item. The booklets are being offered on a first come, first served basis for a donation of \$100. If you're interested in obtaining a copy of the booklet, please call me at 391-7920.

— Gene Mackie