

# 1945 October 1-7

## Lost at Sea


We seem to have an innate attraction to the water. Prime real estate everywhere often overlooks a river, a lake, a bay, a sea, or an ocean. People flock to bodies of water for leisure. For all their beauty and attraction, however, we seldom think of the oceans as a vast graveyard of ships and the men, women, and children who rode or crewed those ships. That dichotomy of alluring beauty and unfeeling cruelty is captured succinctly in the title of a wartime novel by [Nicholas Monsarrat](#): [The Cruel Sea](#).

"Lost at sea" are the three most feared words for anyone who has had a loved one who failed to return from a voyage. Seventy-five years ago this week, the La Crosse community had a reminder.

**Hold Memorial Rites Sunday**

Memorial services for Harold Edward Sackmaster, fireman, second class, will be held at the Trinity Lutheran church Sunday at 10 a. m.

Sackmaster was a member of the crew of the USS Destroyer Hull, which was sunk during a typhoon in the western Pacific in December. He was listed as missing, then reported dead in SACKMASTER April, 1945.



He entered the navy May 31, 1944, and completed his boot training at Farragut, Ida. He was home on a 15-day leave in August before going to fireman's school, Bremerton, Wash. and overseas in October, 1944.

Survivors are six sisters, Mrs. Peter Oppelt of Dubuque, Ia., Mrs. William Pierce of Racine, Mrs. George Hoer of Milwaukee, Mrs. Byron Anderson of Clinton, Ia., Mrs. Louis Bantle and Mrs. Ray Johnson, La Crosse; three brothers, Russell, Lloyd and Ray, all of La Crosse.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 October 6, page 2)

**Harold Edward Sackmaster** was born on February 9, 1925, in La Crosse, Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> His parents were Edward and Agnes Sackmaster.<sup>2</sup>

Neither of his parents were natives of La Crosse. Edward Adam Sackmaster was born in Norwalk, Wisconsin, on August 3, 1877.<sup>3</sup> On July 10, 1900, Edward married Agnes Nimmo in Monroe County, Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup> Agnes Delia Nimmo was born in Melrose, Wisconsin, on July 13, 1884.<sup>5</sup> In June 1900, her family was living on a farm in the town of Sparta in Monroe County.<sup>6</sup> Edward was not quite 23 years old when he married Agnes Nimmo, who was three days shy of her 16th birthday.

By 1910, Edward and Agnes Sackmaster were living at 512 Milwaukee Street in La Crosse. Edward was working as a brakeman for the railroad. They had five children.<sup>7</sup>

Before Harold was born, his family lived in several locations in the city as his father changed jobs at the same time. In 1917, they were living at 519 Car Street.<sup>8</sup> In September 1918, Edward was still a brakeman for the railroad, but they were living at 1616 Prospect Street,<sup>9</sup> and they remained there in 1919.<sup>10</sup> Edward was working at the La Crosse Rubber Mills, as were two of his sons, in 1920 when they lived at 702 Charles Street.<sup>11</sup> Two years later, Edward had moved the family to 516 Kane Street. He still worked at the Rubber Mills.<sup>12</sup>

It appears to have been a bit of an unsettled life for the large family. When Harold was born in 1925, he was the youngest of their 10 children.<sup>13</sup>

In August of 1926, Harold's 16-year-old sister, Helen, made news in La Crosse. After she had been gone from her home for over a week, her father reported her missing to the La Crosse police department. Helen Sackmaster joined up with an acquaintance of three years, 19-year-old Evelyn Johnson of Chaseburg.<sup>14</sup> Evelyn had been told to leave home by her father a year earlier, to earn her own money, because he was unable to pay medical bills from her treatment for kidney trouble. Evelyn went to La Crosse and found employment.<sup>15</sup> Evelyn had to give up her rented room due to lack of money, and she had been staying with her sister and then a cousin in La Crosse. Helen, who said she ran away from home "because my dad is so mean to me," stayed with Evelyn for two nights.<sup>16</sup> When Helen came back to the house at 5:00 a.m. one morning after being out all night, Evelyn's relative told Helen she had to leave. When Helen left, Evelyn went with her.<sup>17</sup> The pair slept in the Burlington train depot for two nights, went to a dance at Stoddard with two young men, and were picked up by the La Crosse police on August 10.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to say who was more at fault---Helen, who was described as being almost flippant about the whole episode and may just have been a rebellious teen, or her father who waited a week to report her missing. Helen Sackmaster did reconcile with her father and return to the family.

Although they were still living at 516 Kane Street, Edward Sackmaster had left his job at the Rubber Mills by 1930 and was employed as a welder for the Moto Meter Gauge & Equipment Division of the Electric Auto-Lite Company.<sup>19</sup> Seven of their children, ranging in age from 26 to 5 1/2 (Harold), were still living with Edward and Agnes.<sup>20</sup> Edward remained at the welding job in 1932<sup>21</sup> and 1934.<sup>22</sup>

Things started to unravel for the family soon after that. Agnes Sackmaster died in early 1935, after "a lingering illness," at the age of 50. She was survived by her six daughters and four sons.<sup>23</sup> Her youngest child, Harold Sackmaster, was just 10 years old. Edward Sackmaster continued to live at 516 Kane Street for about four more years.<sup>24</sup> He was living at 943 Farnam Street when he died at the age of 62 in April 1939.<sup>25</sup> This was the home of his daughter, Edna, and her husband, Raymond Johnson.<sup>26</sup>

So Harold Sackmaster had lost both of his parents by the time he was 14 years old.

Before joining the Navy, Harold lived with at least two of his siblings. In 1940, he was living with Edna and Raymond Johnson, along with their son, Richard, at 943 Farnam Street.<sup>27</sup> Harold quit high school and by early 1943, he was living with his brother, Lloyd Sackmaster, at 2335 Loomis Street and working for the Northern Engraving Company in La Crosse.<sup>28</sup>

Harold Sackmaster joined the Navy on May 31, 1944. He had recruit training at [Farragut, Idaho](#). After a 15-day leave back home in August 1944, he went to fireman's school at [Bremerton, Washington](#). He shipped out in October 1944 on the destroyer *U.S.S. Hull*.<sup>29</sup>



Destroyer DD-350, *U.S.S. Hull*, 1944 May  
(navsource.org)

As a fireman on a ship, Harold Sackmaster helped operate the boilers that burned oil to create steam that in turn provided all the power for the vessel.

The *USS Hull* that Harold Sackmaster boarded in October 1944 was already a veteran of World War II action. The third Navy vessel to bear the name *Hull*, DD-350 was launched at the New York Navy Yard in January 1934 and commissioned one year later.<sup>30</sup> She was one of eight 1,500-ton *Farragut*-class destroyers designed in 1931, and all eight were built by the middle of 1935.<sup>31</sup> In October 1939, Pearl Harbor became its home port, and the ship was present on December 7, 1941, during the Japanese surprise attack that drew the United States into World War II. Unscathed in that attack, the *Hull*

participated in early operations against the Japanese, including the invasion of [Guadalcanal](#), the retaking of the Aleutian Islands of [Attu](#) and [Kiska](#), the invasion of [Tarawa](#), the [Marshall Islands](#), and the [Marianas Islands](#).<sup>32</sup>

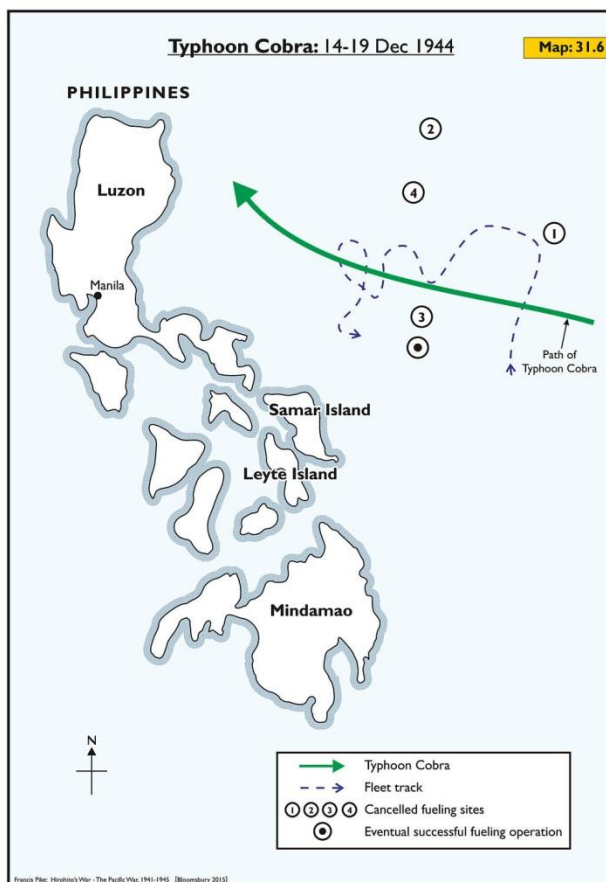
At just over 341 feet long and 34 feet wide,<sup>33</sup> destroyers, or "tin cans" as the sailors called them, were small but versatile workhorses for the fleet. Their main guns bombarded beaches and other ships, while their anti-aircraft guns helped protect larger ships from attacks from aircraft. They were a threat to larger ships because of their complement of [torpedoes](#). Destroyers were used extensively to escort convoys because their [depth charges](#) could destroy submarines. When equipped with radar, they provided an early warning system for the cruisers, battleships, and aircraft carriers at the core of the fleet. Many a naval aviator whose plane had crashed or a sailor whose ship had sunk was rescued by a destroyer.

It was during an interim in action for the ship that Harold Sackmaster joined the crew. In August 1944, the *Hull* returned to Seattle for repairs and equipment updates. After that work was completed, she left the United States for Pearl Harbor, arriving there on October 23, 1944. The *Hull* joined a refueling convoy for the Third Fleet and sailed for the western Pacific on November 20, 1944.<sup>34</sup>

This group rendezvoused with an aircraft carrier task force in the Philippine Sea to begin refueling on December 17. Refueling while underway at sea is a tricky operation even in good weather. On December 17, the weather was starting to deteriorate because of an approaching typhoon. Only some of the refueling was accomplished before rough seas later in the day required an end to those operations.<sup>35</sup>



*U.S.S. Langley*, a small aircraft carrier, listing in heavy seas, probably during Typhoon Cobra  
(Naval History & Heritage Command)



(Francis Pike, *Hirohito's War-The Pacific War, 1941-1945*, Bloomsbury, 2015)

The task force found itself swallowed by the full force of [a typhoon on December 18](#). With winds reaching over 100 miles per hour, even huge battleships struggled to maintain headway. Smaller ships, like the destroyers, were buffeted by the waves like toy boats in the ocean. The *Hull* bounced with and against waves until about 11:00 a.m. when it listed to an angle of 80 degrees and rolled over. Only seven officers and 55 enlisted men were saved from her crew.<sup>36</sup>

Toiling in the boiler room in the bowels of the ship, Harold Sackmaster and the others in his department would not have had a chance to get out before the sea rushed in to suffocate them. The ship became their tomb, the sea their cemetery.

Two other destroyers, the [U.S.S. Monaghan](#) and the [U.S.S. Spence](#), were also capsized by waves that [Admiral William Halsey](#) estimated were fifty to sixty feet high. Only three of the *Monaghan's* crew survived. Four light aircraft carriers and four escort aircraft carriers were badly damaged, as were a light cruiser, seven more destroyers, two destroyer escorts, a fleet oiler, and a fleet tug. More than 200 aircraft were torn loose and lost from aircraft carriers.<sup>37</sup>

In what was called the worst natural disaster in the history of the Navy, 790 men were killed. Of those, 775 were on the three destroyers that had sunk. Only 91 crewmen of those three ships survived.<sup>38</sup>

It was almost a month before the Navy announced what had happened.

# Over 700 American Seamen Lose Lives In Wild Typhoon

**By Rembert James**

Ulithi Lagoon, Caroline Islands, Dec. 29 ((delayed))—(A)—Whistling 135 mile winds and tempestuous seas flipped over and sank three U. S. destroyers tossing their hapless crews into the churning Western Pacific sea, survivors said here today.

Visibility was zero and the flying spray felt like needles, a survivor said.

Rescuers, too, braved death. One man was carried under his own rescue vessel and bobbed up on the other side.

## List Lost Ships

The ships lost were:

USS Spence, 2,500 tons, captained by Lt. Comdr. James Paul Andrea, of Alexandria, Va., missing.

USS Hull, 1,300 tons, Lt. Comdr. James Alexander Marks, Chevy Chase, Md., rescued.

USS Monaghan, 1,390 tons, Lt. Comdr. Floyd Bruce Garrett, Jr., Little Rock, Ark., missing.

Survivors said they believed it was ripped by a sharp-toothed barracuda which strikes its prey hard and terribly fast.

## Eye Witness Talks

In the plain language of the sea, Chief Machinist's Mate Henry John Deeters, 28, of New Orleans, whose home is now at Boston, Mass., said:

"There were several deep rolls and she (the Spence) went over on her port side. The stack was lying on the water. As she went down, I dove off. About a hundred got off, I guess.

"I saw a lot of my buddies floating around dead. I was in the water 50 hours before rescued."

Apparently the first rescue occurred at 10 o'clock that night—more than nine hours after the hundreds were tossed into the sea.

A gunnery officer on a destroyer escort said that a chief radioman happened to be rigging a new radio mast on his ship in the darkness—the other had carried away in the storm—when he saw a tiny light

A portion of a contemporary newspaper article about the tragedy  
(Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1945 January 13, page 9)

One of those lost was 19-year-old F2c Harold E. Sackmaster of La Crosse. Relatives were notified on January 4, 1945, that he was missing.<sup>39</sup> His status was changed to died in service in April 1945. A memorial service was held at Trinity Lutheran Church on Sunday morning, October 7, 1945.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the Navy Hymn was played or sang at the memorial service. It is a fitting tribute to anyone who has ever experienced the "peril on the sea."



**Eternal Father, Strong to Save  
(The Navy Hymn)**

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep,  
O hear us when we cry to thee  
For those in peril on the sea!

O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard  
And hushed their raging at thy word,  
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,  
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep,  
O hear us when we cry to thee,  
For those in peril on the sea!

Most Holy Spirit! Who didst brood  
Upon the chaos dark and rude,  
And bid its angry tumult cease,  
And give, for wild confusion, peace,  
O hear us when we cry to thee  
For those in peril on the sea!

Eternal Father, grant, we pray,  
To all Marines, both night and day,  
The courage, honor, strength, and skill  
Their land to serve, thy law fulfill;  
Be thou the shield forevermore  
From every peril to the Corps.

Lord, guard and guide the ones who fly  
Through the great spaces in the sky.  
Be with them always in the air,  
In darkening storms or sunlight fair.

[\(United States Naval Academy Chapel\)](#)

Harold Sackmaster is memorialized on the Walls of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines, along with 36,286 others who are missing forever.<sup>41</sup>

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IN MEMORY OF  
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
 HAROLD E. SACKMASTER

RANK  
 FIREMAN SECOND CLASS, U.S. NAVY

UNIT  
 UNITED STATES NAVAL RESERVE

DATE OF DEATH  
 DECEMBER 18, 1944

COMMEMORATED IN PERPETUITY AT  
 MANILA AMERICAN CEMETERY  
 TAGUIG CITY, PHILIPPINES



*"Time will not dim the glory of their deeds."*  
 — GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING

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(American Battlefield Monuments Commission)

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#### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The National Archives in St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for Wisconsin, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 621; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 October 9).



Harold Edward Sackmaster is not to be confused with Harold William Sackmaster who was born on July 3, 1924, to Nellie P. (Nelson) Sackmaster.

<sup>2</sup> 1930 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 16A, dwelling 355, family 392, Edward and Agnes Sackmaster; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication T626, roll 2667.

<sup>3</sup> "Edward Adam Sackmaster," *Find A Grave*, accessed 2020 November 29, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/90907500/edward-adam-sackmaster>.

<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, *Wisconsin Vital Record Index, pre-1907*, Volume 4: 265, Agnes Nimmo; Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Madison; transcription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9). The Wisconsin Historical Society, *Pre-1907 Vital Records Collections* (Volume 4, page 265) <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Marriage/MR2574317> shows that Agnes Nimmo married Adam E. Sackman. The name is so close to Edward Adam Sackmaster that they are likely the same person. There are two possible reasons for the discrepancy: poor penmanship in the original record, or her husband changed his name. To add to the confusion, the 1905 Wisconsin State Census (*Ancestry.com. Wisconsin, State Censuses, 1855-1905* [database on-line] (Provo, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007) shows a single, 20-year-old Agnes Nimmo living with her parents at Melrose, Wisconsin. Since Harold Edward Sackmaster is the topic of this article, and not his parents, we will leave this mystery for another time.

<sup>5</sup> "Wisconsin, Births and Christenings," Index, 1801-1928, Agnes Delia Nimmo; FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah; transcription, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9).

<sup>6</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Monroe County, Wisconsin, population schedule, town of Sparta, p. B4, dwelling 82, family 83, John H. and Clara B. Nimmo; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 1854.

<sup>7</sup> 1910 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 3A, dwelling 42, family 45, Ed and Agnes H. Sackmaster; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 1178.

<sup>8</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1917* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1917), 388.

<sup>9</sup> The National Archives and Records Administration; *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918*; M1509, roll 4582; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed 2020 October 9).

<sup>10</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1919* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1919), 514.

<sup>11</sup> 1920 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 10B, dwelling 218, family 239, Edward and Agnes Sackmaster; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, roll 2076.

<sup>12</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1922* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1922), 527.

<sup>13</sup> 1930 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 16A, dwelling 355, family 392, Edward and Agnes Sackmaster; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication T626, roll 2667.

<sup>14</sup> "Two Girls, In Custody of Police, Unfold Story of Wandering For 10 Days," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1926 August 11, page 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Two Girls, Held By Police, Await Word From Parents," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1926 August 12.

<sup>16</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1926 August 11.

<sup>17</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1926 August 12.

<sup>18</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1926 August 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1930* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1930), 447.

<sup>20</sup> 1930 U.S. census.

<sup>21</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1932* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1932), 427.

<sup>22</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1934* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1934), 431.

<sup>23</sup> "Obituary-Mrs. Agnes Sackmaster," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1935 March 1, page 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Wright's La Crosse (Wisconsin) City Directory 1939* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Wright Directory Co., 1939), 480.

<sup>25</sup> "Edward Sackmaster," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1939 April 27, page 6.

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<sup>26</sup> 1940 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 5A, dwelling 943, family 86, Raymond and Edna M. Johnson; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 9); citing NARA microfilm publication M627, roll 4491.

<sup>27</sup> 1940 U.S. census.

<sup>28</sup> *U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947*.

<sup>29</sup> "Hold Memorial Rites Sunday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 6, page 2.

<sup>30</sup> "DD-350," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, accessed 2020 October 9,

<https://www.hazegray.org/danfs/destroy/dd350txt.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> "USS Hull DD 350," *Destroyer History Foundation*, 2020, <https://destroyerhistory.org/goldplater/usshull/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>33</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>34</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>35</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>36</sup> *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*.

<sup>37</sup> "Typhoon Cobra," *USS Hull Association*, 2020 August 27, <http://www.usshullassociation.org/DD350/Hull350-2.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel J. Cox, "H-039-2: Typhoon Cobra---The Worst Natural Disaster in U.S. Navy History, 14-19 December 1944," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, 2019 December 26, <https://www.history.navy.mil/about-us/leadership/director/directors-corner/h-grams/h-gram-039/h-039-2.html>.

<sup>39</sup> "6 Servicemen Are Missing," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 January 13, page 1. Navy records show the name of the person notified was Hilda Reynolds, 408 Hagar Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin. Hilda was not the first name of any of Sackmaster's sisters, so she may have been a girlfriend. *Ancestry.com, U.S., World War II Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Casualties, 1941-1945* [database on-line], (Lehi, Utah: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2007).

<sup>40</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 6.

<sup>41</sup> Manila American Cemetery, *American Battlefield Monuments Commission*, accessed 2020 October 9, [https://www.abmc.gov/database-search-results?field\\_first\\_name=harold+&field\\_last\\_name=sackmaster&service\\_number=&field\\_abmc\\_burial\\_unit=&field\\_place\\_of\\_entry=All&field\\_cemetery=All&field\\_cemetery2=All&field\\_branch\\_of\\_service=All&search\\_api\\_fulltext=&field](https://www.abmc.gov/database-search-results?field_first_name=harold+&field_last_name=sackmaster&service_number=&field_abmc_burial_unit=&field_place_of_entry=All&field_cemetery=All&field_cemetery2=All&field_branch_of_service=All&search_api_fulltext=&field).