

Joseph Peter Alexander

Born: April 24, 1921
Hometown: Attica, GA
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: October 18, 1942 / 49-39N,
30-20W
Date / Place of burial: October 18, 1942 / Lost at
Sea – 49-39N, 30-20W
Age: 21



Joseph P. Alexander signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS Angelina at Pensacola, FL on June 20, 1942. He was the ship's only cadet until September 9 when Cadet-Midshipman Joseph Krusko signed on as the ship's Engine Cadet. After a voyage to Liverpool, the Angelina was returning in ballast to New York in convoy ON-137.



SS Angelina

On October 17, 1942 gale force winds had resulted in the Angelina straggling behind the convoy. However a Canadian corvette had also been forced to fall behind the convoy and was keeping station off the Angelina as they coped with the heavy seas. Due to the heavy seas, neither ship was zigzagging.

At about 2345 GCT one torpedo fired by U-618 struck the Angelina on its starboard side at #4 hold. The Angelina listed to starboard after the impact, and the well deck flooded, preventing the gun crew from manning the 4" gun on the stern. Fortunately, although the Angelina's radio could not send a distress signal, the corvette did send an SOS. The general alarm sounded soon after the first torpedo struck, and all hands prepared to abandon ship in the vessel's port lifeboat and rafts. About twenty minutes after firing on the Angelina, U-618 fired another torpedo, hitting the stern on the starboard side and detonating the ammunition magazine there. The Angelina sank at about 0030 (GCT), within minutes of the second torpedo hitting the ship.

However, despite getting away from their sinking ship, the weather was not in the crew's favor. Many men were washed overboard and drowned in the heavy seas. The port (#2) lifeboat, which was launched successfully, capsized in the waves, and only half of the occupants were able to seize hold of the overturned boat. The few who remained were gradually losing their hold, though the heroic efforts of the ship's carpenter kept five men clinging to the hull. Another six men managed to stay on a raft.

Fortunately, the convoy's rescue ship, the SS Bury, received the corvette's SOS and arrived on the scene at 0345 (GCT) and rescued the six men on the life raft. After searching for over two hours, the Bury found the capsized lifeboat, rescuing the three men still hanging on to it. The Armed Guard Commander, Ensign A. J. Gartland, USNR cited the ship's Chief Mate, E. A. L. Koonig and its Carpenter Gus Alm, for heroism during the abandonment and boarding the Bury, respectively. Sadly, one of the men rescued by the Bury, Felix Posario, died before the Bury reached St. Johns, Newfoundland a week later. The other 46 crew members of the Angelina, including Cadet-Midshipmen Joseph P. Alexander and Joseph Krusko, were lost at sea.

Cadet-Midshipman Joseph P. Alexander, was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Joseph P. "Peter" Alexander was the oldest of Read Alexander and Mary R. Alexander's four children, Joseph, Robert, Charles and George. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Read Alexander was a feed and fertilizer salesman to the local farmers.