

John Walter Artist

Born: April 22, 1927
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class: 1946
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
Date / Place of death: April 9, 1945 / 37-31N, 64-26W
Date / Place of burial: April 9, 1945 / Lost at Sea -
37-31N, 64-26W
Age: 17



John W. Artist signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the T2-SE-A1 tanker, *SS Saint Mihiel*, on March 20, 1945 at Philadelphia, PA. This was one day after the ship was delivered from its builder, Sun Shipbuilding, to the War Shipping Administration. He was joined by his classmate, Dante L. Policari, who signed on as Deck Cadet. The vessel sailed in ballast to Corpus Christi, TX where it picked up a full load of aviation gasoline bound for Cherbourg, France. After leaving Corpus Christi the *Saint Mihiel* was ordered to New York where convoy CU-65, a fast convoy of tankers and other high value ships, was forming. On April 8 the *Saint Mihiel* and the other ships of the convoy sailed from New York and began forming the convoy.

On the night of April 9 the *Saint Mihiel* and another tanker, *SS Nashbulk*, collided. Part of the *Saint Mihiel*'s cargo of gasoline immediately burst into flame, destroying the navigating bridge located amidships and killing most of the deck officers. The surviving crew abandoned ship as soon as possible and were picked up by the *USS Stewart* (DE 238) after about two hours in the water. Of the 50 crew members and 29 Naval Armed Guard members, only 23 of the crew and 19 Navy sailors survived. Cadet-Midshipmen John W. Artist and Dante L. Policari were among those missing and presumed dead, the last two Academy cadets to lose their lives in WWII. Also among the dead was Third Assistant Engineer James LeRoy Maloney, a 1944 USMMA graduate.

On the morning of April 10 the *Saint Mihiel* was still afloat, although some of the cargo was still burning. The ship's senior surviving deck officer, Second Mate Bruno Baretich, assembled some of the *St. Mihiel*'s survivors to board the *Saint Mihiel* to see if it could be salvaged. Aided by crewmen from the *Stewart* and another escort, Baretich re-boarded the ship, put out the fires and got the ship underway for New York. Although the ship was ultimately a constructive total loss, over 80% of the gasoline cargo was saved. For his actions, Baretich, a former vaudeville performer and song arranger for

Irving Berlin, received the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal.

Cadet-Midshipman John W. Artist, was posthumously awarded the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

John W. Artist was the son of John J. Artist and Frances Artist. When he died, John Artist was one month shy of his 18th birthday; one of the youngest of the Academy's Cadet-Midshipmen to lose his life. A musical prodigy, John began taking piano lessons at age four and had accumulated several awards by the time he was nine. For High School he attended the Professional Children's School in New York City, a special school for child actors and entertainers. Although he was an accomplished pianist and singer, John was also active in several sports, and was popular with both his classmates and his teachers. He graduated from the Professional Children's School in 1944, and enrolled at the Academy soon after.