

## Marvin William Brodie, Jr.

Born: February 15, 1922  
Hometown: Columbus, OH  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: December 2, 1943 / Bari, Italy  
Date / Place of burial: December 2, 1943 / Lost a Sea –  
Bari, Italy  
Age: 21



Marvin W. Brodie signed on aboard the Liberty ship SS John Harvey as Engine Cadet on October 5, 1943 at Baltimore, MD. Three other Kings Point cadets also signed on aboard the John Harvey; James L. Cahill (Deck), Richard B. Glauche (Deck), and Alvin H. Justis (Engine). According to a report filed by Cadet Midshipman Cahill, the ship sailed to Norfolk, VA to finish loading and joined a convoy that sailed for Oran, North Africa on October 15. Unbeknownst to most of the crew, part of the ship's cargo was 2,000 M47A1 mustard gas bombs. The bombs had been loaded at Baltimore between September 30 and October 8 under the supervision of a seven man detail of Chemical Warfare specialists from the Army's Eastern Chemical Warfare Depot. The seven men remained aboard the John Harvey to monitor the condition of the bombs while at sea and supervise their discharge. The bombs were being sent to the Mediterranean as a precaution so that American forces could retaliate if the Germans resorted to chemical warfare.

The John Harvey arrived in Oran on November 2, discharged its cargo other than the mustard gas bombs and then loaded a cargo of ammunition. A convoy of about forty ships, including the John Harvey, sailed from Oran for Augusta, Sicily on November 19, arriving there on November 25. The John Harvey sailed the next day in a convoy of thirty ships bound for the ports of Taranto and Bari on the Italian mainland with the Bari bound ships arriving there on November 28. The port facilities at Bari were unable to keep up with the number of ships in the port, resulting in days-long delays in discharging ships anchored in the port. Because of the high level of secrecy surrounding its cargo, the John Harvey was held in port for several days awaiting discharge, moored alongside other ships loaded with ammunition and gasoline, including the Liberty Ships John L. Motley, the John Bascom, and the Samuel J. Tilden.

Because of its distance from German airfields an air attack on Bari was not considered likely so the port was not protected by the normal air defenses. As a result, a German attack force of more than 100 Ju88 was able to completely surprise the few defenders of Bari on the evening of December 2, 1943. Due to the lights being left on the bombers were able to accurately bomb the ships in the port and port facilities with only the loss of a single aircraft. They left behind 28 ships sunk, twelve more damaged, over 1,000 merchant mariners and military personnel killed, and a port so badly damaged that it took three weeks to resume discharging ships.

According to the few surviving eye witnesses, the John L. Motley and the Samuel J. Tilden were among the first ships to be hit by the bombers. However, after the second wave of aircraft finished their attack the John Harvey was in flames from stem to stern. With the fires threatening the John Harvey's cargo of ammunition its crew fought desperately to save the ship, and their lives. However, the damaged John L. Motley had broken free from its mooring lines and, completely engulfed in flames, was drifting towards the John Harvey. Suddenly, the John Motley exploded, destroying the ship and detonating the John Harvey's cargo. The John Harvey disintegrated, sending the contents of its cargo of mustard gas bombs into the air and water throughout the port area.



**Explosion of either SS John Harvey or SS John L. Motley at Bari, Italy**

Thirty-six of the ship's crew, all 28 members of its Armed Guard and the Army Chemical Warfare specialists perished instantly, including Cadet- Midshipmen Marvin H. Brodie, Richard B. Glauche, and Alvin H. Justis. The only survivors from the John Harvey were

Cadet-Midshipman James L. Cahill and one of the ship's Able Bodied Seaman who were ashore when the attack began. One of the major factors in the high number of casualties from the attack is that doctors and other medical personnel attending to the wounded did not diagnose their signs and symptoms as those of mustard gas poisoning since no mustard gas was believed to be in the area.

Cadet-Midshipman Marvin W. Brodie was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, Victory Medal, and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Marvin W. Brodie was the only son and youngest child of Marvin W. Brodie, Sr. Marvin's sister was Catherine. Marvin, Sr. was employed by the Post Office. The 1930's were hard on the Brodie family, according to the 1930 U. S. Census, the Brodie children were lodging with the Cullison family. According to Columbus, OH city directories, Marvin, Sr. was living at the YMCA since 1926. The same records indicate that Marvin, Sr. had secured a home for himself and the children by 1932. None of the available records indicate that Marvin, Sr. was married from 1926 onward, so Marvin and Catherine lost their mother at a very young age. Marvin attended West High School in Columbus where he was a member of the chorus. After graduating from high school he attended Ohio State University before applying to Kings Point.