

Michael Buck, Jr.

Born: February 15, 1920
Hometown: Mount Kisco, NY
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 10, 1943 / 19-49'N,
74-38'W
Date / Place of burial: March 10, 1943 / Lost at
Sea - 19-49'N, 74-38'W
Age: 23



Michael Buck signed on aboard the brand new Liberty Ship SS James Sprunt as Engine Cadet on February 23, 1943 at Charleston, South Carolina. He was joined by his Academy classmates Howard McGrath (Engine), James Rowley (Deck) and John Tucek (Deck). The ship loaded at Charleston for a voyage to Karachi, India via Texas and the Panama Canal with general cargo and 4,000 tons of high explosives.



SS James Sprunt shortly after completion

On the morning of March 10, 1943 the James Sprunt was traveling in convoy KG-123 about three miles southeast of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Another ship in the convoy, the Virginia Sinclair, had been torpedoed at 0430 on the same morning. At 0809 U-185 fired torpedoes at the convoy, hitting the James Sprunt.

The James Sprunt's cargo of explosives blew up with extraordinary force, completely disintegrating the ship. The glare from the explosion was seen more than forty miles away, and witnesses on other ships recalled the violent tremors, and debris that fell like hail on the other ships. There were no survivors among the 43 crew members and 28 Naval Armed Guard members including all four Kings Point Cadet Midshipmen; Michael Buck, Howard McGrath, James Rowley, and John Tucek.

The thirty day life of the SS James Sprunt may have had the shortest life span of any Liberty ship. The ship was delivered from North Carolina Shipbuilding to the War Shipping Administration on February 13, 1943, loaded cargo from the 19th to the 29th and was destroyed on March 10, 1943.

Cadet Midshipman Michael Buck was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Michael Buck, Jr. was the fourth of Michael Buck, Sr. and Veronica Buck's five sons (Alexander, John, Joseph, Michael and Peter). The Bucks also had four daughters of which Anna and Mary were Michael's big sisters while Veronica and Helen were his little sisters. Based on the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census, it appears that Michael was known as Marion (Maryan) by the rest of his family.