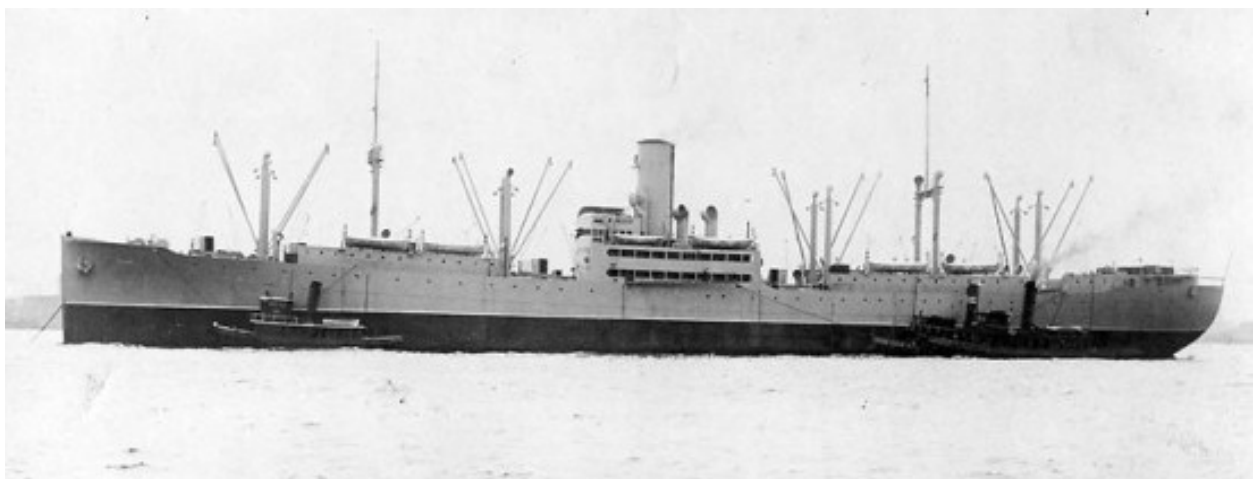


Lee Thomas Byrd

Born: April 29, 1922
Hometown: Benson, NC
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 17, 1943 / 50-38N,
34-46W
Date / Place of burial: March 17, 1943 / Lost at
Sea – 50-38N, 34-46W
Age: 25



Lee T. Byrd signed on aboard the SS Harry Luckenbach as Deck Cadet on March 2, 1943 at New York, NY. In addition to Byrd, the Harry Luckenbach had three other Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen aboard; Walter J. Meyer (Engine), Francis R. Miller (Engine) and William H. Parker (Deck). The ship's Third Mate, Leroy W. Kernan was a 1942 graduate. The ship sailed from New York on March 8 as one of 40 ships in convoy HX-229, bound for Liverpool with a general cargo of war supplies. A second HX convoy, HX-229A with more ships sailed about 10 hours after the ships of HX-229. During their transit of the North Atlantic the two convoys overtook a slower convoy, SC-122. The three convoys, with a total of 110 ships, but less than 20 escorts, would be the centerpiece of what has been described as the greatest convoy battle of World War II.



SS Harry Luckenbach

The ships of convoy HX-229 had proceeded without incident or attack until March 16. For the next three days the convoy was under attack by over forty U-Boats. On the morning of March 17, when HX-229 was about 400 miles east-southeast of Cape Farrell, U-91 fired five torpedoes at the convoy, not aiming at any specific ship. However, the Harry Luckenbach in the starboard forward corner of the convoy was hit by two of the torpedoes at the engine room. The ship sank in minutes, but amazingly, three lifeboats were able to get away from the sinking vessel. One or more of the boats were later sighted by HMS Beverley (H-64), HMS Pennywort (K-111), HMS Volunteer (D-71) and, possibly, HMS Abelia (K-184). However, none of these ships were able to pick up the survivors from the boats. None of the 54 crew members and 26 Naval Armed Guard of the Harry Luckenbach survived the sinking.

By March 20 the surviving ships of the three convoys arrived in the United Kingdom, having lost twenty-two ships and their crews, while sinking just one of the attacking U-Boats. According to a Royal Navy report on the convoy battle,

“The Germans never came so near to disrupting communications between the New World and the Old as in the first twenty days of March 1943”

The fact that the Germans were unable to do so is a testament to the courage of Merchant Mariners like Lee T. Byrd, and the example that he set for the Kings Pointers that came after him.

Cadet Midshipman Lee T. Byrd, was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Lee T. Byrd was the eldest of Zebedee B. Byrd and Callie Geneva Byrd's two sons. Lee's younger brother was Zebedee. The family lived on their farm in Elevation Township, Johnston County, North Carolina. When he registered for the draft, Lee indicated that he was employed by Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, in Newport News, VA. According to Academy records, Lee reported to Kings Point for his initial training on January 3, 1943.