

James P. Coffey

Born: April 10, 1915
Hometown: Jamesburg, NJ
Class: 1942 - USMCC Cadet Officer
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Second Mate
Date / Place of death: March 2, 1943 / 62-10N, 28-25W
Date / Place of burial: March 2, 1943 / Lost at Sea - 62-10N, 28-25W
Age: 28



James Coffey signed on aboard the *SS Meriwether Lewis* as Second Mate on February 3, 1943. From August to November 1942 he sailed as Junior Third Mate aboard the *SS Nismaha*. The crew list for the U.S. Army Transport *Maui* also identifies him as Junior Third Officer in early 1942. The crew list indicates that as of this time he had 2 ½ years of experience at sea. His U.S. Coast Guard record indicates that he had been sailing as Able Seaman, Deck Maintencenceman and Ordinary Seaman on several other ships since 1940. He received his U.S. Coast Guard papers as Wiper and Ordinary Seaman on October 13, 1937 at Baltimore, MD.

When James Coffey signed on aboard the *SS Meriwether Lewis*, the ship had four Cadet-Midshipmen from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy; Randall P. Bourell (Deck), Alan Clark (Deck), Daniel J. Maher (Engine), and Francis McCann (Engine). On February 18, 1943 the *Meriwether Lewis* with its four Kings Point cadets sailed from New York as part of convoy HX-227 bound for the United Kingdom and then to Murmansk, Russia. The ship was loaded with a cargo of vehicle tires, ammunition, and according to some references, a deck cargo of PT Boats.

According to German Navy records, the *Meriwether Lewis* was identified as a straggler from a convoy, and unsuccessfully attacked, by U-759 in the early morning of March 2. The submarine was unable to re-attack the *Meriwether Lewis* due to problems with its engines, but it was able to contact U-634 and lead it to the straggler. The U-634 fired four torpedoes at the *Meriwether Lewis*, hitting it with one of them. The damage was apparently sufficient to stop the ship, but did not sink it. The submarine hit the *Meriwether Lewis* with two more torpedoes, the last of which detonated the ship's ammunition cargo. Although there was plenty of time to abandon ship, the USCGC *Ingham* (WPG 35) found only a 30-mile line of floating tires during its two day long

search for the *SS Meriwether Lewis* and crew. Thus, the ship's entire crew of 44, including four Second Mate James J. Coffey, the four Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen, and 28 members of the Naval Armed Guard perished in the sinking.

Based on this voyage and his previous voyages James J. Coffey was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

James Coffey was the only son of James P. Coffey and Barbara Coffey. He had a younger sister, Miriam, who was 8 years younger. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, James' father was a plumber.