

Clarence Bert Dengler, Jr.

Born: June 15, 1923
Hometown: Pottsville, PA
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Third Mate
Date / Place of death: February 5, 1945 / New York Harbor
Date / Place of burial: February 5, 1945 / Lost at Sea – New York Harbor;
Memorial at Charles Barber Cemetery, Pottsville, PA
Age: 25



Clarence B. Dengler signed on as Third Mate of the T-2 tanker *SS Spring Hill* on February 1, 1945, just a few weeks after graduating from Kings Point in Section B-389. On February 5, 1945 the *Spring Hill* was anchored in Anchorage 27 off Pier 18, Staten Island, New York, loaded with 140,000 barrels of high-test gasoline. At around 0845 that morning she was rammed on the port bow by the foreign flag merchant ship *M/V Clio*. The *Spring Hill's* forward cargo tanks immediately exploded and burst into flames, ultimately consuming about 1/3 of the ship's cargo. Crew members who survived the explosion jumped overboard into the ice choked water of New York harbor. Many men tried to make their way to the aft of the ship, where the flames were less intense, but most were unable to do so. In attempting to swim to other ships in the vicinity, several men were caught in burning gasoline floating on the surface of the water. Nine crew members, including Clarence Dengler, and 11 Armed Guard members died in the disaster. The remains of Clarence Dengler and four other members of the *SS Spring Hill's* crew were never recovered. They were declared "Presumptively Dead" on February 20, 1945.

As the ship's least experienced Third Mate it is likely that he was on watch at the time of the collision. The report by the *Spring Hill's* Armed Guard Officer states, "The General Alarm was sounded by the mate on duty." Thus, Dengler's action may have saved several of the ship's crew by alerting them to the approaching danger.

Clarence "Curly" Dengler attended Basic School at Pass Christian and signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS Curaca* on May 19, 1943 at New Orleans, LA. One month later he was hospitalized in Valparaiso, Chile and left ashore when the *SS Curaca* sailed. A few weeks later he was apparently fit for duty and signed on as Deck Cadet

aboard the *SS Elias Howe* which sailed from Valparaiso to Suez loaded with nitrates. On September 24, 1943 the *Elias Howe* was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine I-10 in the Gulf of Aden. The crew, including Cadet-Midshipman Clarence Dengler, were able to abandon ship before the cargo of nitrates exploded. Clarence returned to the U.S. as a passenger aboard the British passenger ship *SS Stirling Castle* on November 7, 1943. Three weeks later, on November 30, 1943, Clarence Dengler signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS Santa Cruz* at New York, NY. He was discharged at San Francisco, CA on March 18, 1944, completing his Sea Year. Upon his arrival at Kings Point for Advanced Training he was welcomed into the Tin Fish Club and joined the Propeller Club. He graduated on December 22, 1944.



Dengler Family Memorial, Pottsville, PA

Based on his service as a Cadet-Midshipman, Clarence B. Dengler was posthumously awarded the Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, the Victory Letter and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Clarence was the only son and youngest of Clarence B. Dengler, Sr. and Stella E. Covely Dengler's three children. According to U.S. Census and other records, Mr. Dengler was a

shoemaker. Clarence's older sisters were named Eleanore and Anita.

Clarence B. Dengler died before the Academy's Yearbook "Midships" could be published for his graduating section. The following was printed on his Section's page;

"It is with utmost regret that Kings Point announces the loss of her son, Ensign Clarence B. Dengler.

Ensign Dengler, while at the Academy, by his demeanor, personified in an exemplary manner, the finest qualities of an officer and a gentleman. His beaming smile and congenial personality warmed the hearts of those associated with him here.

We will ever cherish his friendship as a privilege that few of us will be so fortunate to share again."