

## Edward James Gavin

Born: April 23, 1923  
Hometown: West Orange, NJ  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: February 3, 1943 / 59-22N,  
48-42W  
Date / Place of burial: February 3, 1943 / Lost at  
Sea - 59-22N, 48.42W  
Age: 19



Edward J. Gavin signed on aboard the U.S. Army troop transport SS Dorchester on January 19, 1943 in the port of New York, NY as Engine Cadet. He joined Samuel T. Tyler, the Deck Cadet, who had made the previous voyage. On February 3, 1943, the Dorchester was about 150 miles west of Cape Farrell, Greenland in a small convoy with two other ships (Convoy SG-19). The ship carried a complement of 130 crew members, 23 Naval Armed Guard, and 751 passengers (made up of U.S. Army personnel, civilian workers, Danish citizens, and U.S. Coast Guard personnel). The vessel, which was traveling between St. John's, Newfoundland, and Narsarssuak, Greenland was also laden with 1,069 tons of general cargo and lumber, and 60 bags of mail and parcel post.

Just before 5 a.m., one of five torpedoes fired by U-223 struck the Dorchester on the starboard side near the engine room. There were no submarine sightings before or after the attack, and those on watch did not notice any wake indicating a torpedo attack. Survivors recalled little noise, but a considerable concussion. A gaping hole in the starboard side of the ship caused extremely rapid flooding, and the engines were completely destroyed. Two of the lifeboats were also destroyed by the impact of the torpedo.

Only three minutes after the vessel was hit, the Captain gave the order to abandon ship. However, only two boats were successfully launched. Whether because of shock, confusion, or limited space, hundreds of passengers and crew remained on board and went down with the ship when it sank about 30 minutes after being hit. Some were apparently unaware of the seriousness of the situation. Two of the convoy's U.S. Coast Guard escorts, USCGC Escanaba (WPG 77) and USCGC Comanche (WPG 76) remained at the site of the disaster, picking up survivors throughout the night, and into

the following day. In all, only 229 of the SS Dorchester's 904 passengers and crew survived the sinking. Cadet-Midshipmen Edward G. Gavin and Samuel T. Tyler were among those missing and presumed lost.



**USAT Dorchester**

In a renowned act of bravery, four U.S. Army chaplains on board the ship gave their life jackets to nearby soldiers who had none. The four men held hands and prayed as the ship went down. Each was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and Distinguished Service Cross. A stamp honoring the four men was issued by the Post Office in 1948.



Cadet-Midshipman Edward J. Gavin was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal and

Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Edward J. Gavin was the only son of James and Linda Gavin. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, the elder Gavin was a salesman for a printer. Edward's sister, Alyce, who was fifteen years older, is identified in the same document as being a clerk in a department store. Edward, known as "Eddie" by friends and family, was remembered as a reserved and unselfish young man with an innate mechanical ability. After graduating from West Orange High School, he worked briefly for Western Electric Company before attending Kings Point.