

Arthur Jack Gradus

Born: June 17, 1923
Hometown: Long Island City, NY
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 10, 1943 / 66-53N,
14-10W
Date / Place of burial: March 10, 1943 / Lost at
Sea – 66-53N, 14-10W
Age: 19



Arthur J. Gradus signed on aboard the SS Richard Bland as Deck Cadet on April 17, 1942 at Philadelphia, PA. He was joined by his academy classmate Cadet-Midshipman Charles W. Tamplin who also signed on as Deck Cadet. Although the Richard Bland was originally assigned to the infamous Convoy PQ-17 to Murmansk, Russia, the ship apparently ran aground shortly after leaving port and was towed back for repairs. After completing the necessary repairs the ship subsequently sailed to deliver its cargo to Murmansk with Convoy JW-51A which arrived in Kola Inlet, Russia without the loss of a single ship on December 25, 1942.



SS Richard Bland

After discharging its cargo the Richard Bland, loaded with 4,000 tons of lumber, general cargo and deck cargo sailed from Kola Inlet, Russia on March 1, 1943 with the other ships of Convoy RA-53, bound for Loch Ewe, Scotland. At about 0930 local time, March 5, 1943 U-255 fired three torpedoes at the convoy. Two torpedoes hit the SS Executive sinking the ship. The third torpedo fired by U-255 hit the Richard Bland on

the starboard side at #1 hold and went out the other side of the ship, causing the deck to crack and creating other structural damage. Although the ship did not sink, the impact of the torpedo partially disabled the ship, leaving her unable to keep up with the convoy for several hours. Although the Bland was eventually able to rejoin the convoy, heavy weather that night found the ship falling behind again.



Arthur Gradus (right) at Wiley Hall, Kings Point

At about 1530 local time on March 10, U-255 found the Richard Bland again, about 35 miles off the coast of Langanes, Iceland. The Bland was hit by another torpedo on the port side at the Number 4 hatch, but remained afloat. Preparations were made to abandon ship, a distress signal was sent and acknowledged by a shore station, and the ship's confidential papers were thrown overboard. An attempt to lower the windward boats and bring them into the lee of the ship failed, leaving two boats and eight men adrift. At about 1835, local time, the ship was hit amidships by another torpedo from U-255. The explosion caused the ship to break in half, just forward of the bridge, with the forward portion remaining afloat while the after portion sank.

As the ship began to break up the Captain ordered the two remaining lifeboats lowered and life rafts launched. Several life rafts were lost in the high seas and intermittent snow as the crew attempted to launch them. The crew abandoned this effort and took to the two remaining lifeboats. One survivor, Lt (j.g.) William A. Carter, USNR, reported that his boat was so overloaded that because they had only a few inches of freeboard they were shipping water over the sides and had to bail the water out to keep afloat.

After a long night in a cramped lifeboat in high seas, 27 survivors in the boat commanded by the Third Mate were picked up by the HMS Impulsive (D11) at about 0730 the following morning. The Impulsive also rescued one of the windward boats and its crew of four while another destroyer rescued the other boat and its crew of four. The last lifeboat, under the command of the Master was never seen again. Fifteen Armed Guard and nineteen merchant crew members were aboard this boat, including Cadet-Midshipmen Arthur Gradus and Charles Tamplin.

Cadet-Midshipman Arthur J. Gradus was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Arthur Gradus was the only son of Jacob Gradus and Martha Gradus. According to the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census Jacob Gradus was a Foreman and Clerk for Post Office. The photograph above was provided by Arthur Gradus' Basic School classmate, Louis D. Chirillo who is standing to Gradus' right, with the camera.