

Henry Edward Harris, Jr.

Born: November 27, 1921
Hometown: Shamokin, PA
Class: 1942
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Third Assistant Engineer
Date / Place of death: December 7, 1942 / 57-50N,
23-10W
Date / Place of burial: December 7, 1942 / Lost at
Sea – 57-50N, 23-10W
Age: 21



Henry E. Harris graduated from Kings Point in October 1942. According to U.S. Coast Guard records, he was issued his license as Third Assistant Engineer (Steam) on October 9 and his license as Third Assistant Engineer (Diesel) on October 14, 1942. He signed on the SS James McKay as Third Assistant Engineer a few days later in the Port of New York when the ship arrived from Capetown, South Africa. Four Kings Point Cadet Midshipmen, Philip G. Branigan (Deck) , Leonard L. Ehrlich (Engine), Walter C. Hetrick (Engine) and John J. McKelvey (Deck) were also aboard.



SS James McKay

According to U.S. Coast Guard and Academy records, Henry E. Harris had previously served as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Almeria Lykes from May 23, 1942 until it was torpedoed by German "E" boats on August 13, 1942. He had previously sailed as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Margaret Lykes in 1941.

The James McKay sailed from New York with Convoy HX-216 bound for Belfast, Northern Ireland and Cardiff, Wales on November 19. On November 25 the convoy encountered a Northwest gale and reduced visibility that caused the convoy to partly scatter. The weather was sufficiently rough to cause the James McKay's general cargo to shift, endangering its stability. As a result, the ship left the convoy and sailed into St. Johns, Newfoundland on November 29 to re-stow its cargo.

After re-stowing its cargo, the James McKay sailed from Newfoundland to join up with the next eastbound convoy, HX-217. However, there is no indication that the James McKay ever actually joined up with HX-217, possibly due to the convoy being scattered in a Southwesterly gale from December 2- 4.

According to German Navy records, the James McKay was located and attacked by U-600 on the night of December 7/8, 1943 when the ship was about 400 miles south of Iceland. Three of U-600's torpedoes hit the James McKay, one amidships and the other two in the after portion of the ship. The ship stopped, sent out distress signals and the crew abandoned ship in two lifeboats although the ship was still afloat. It required two more torpedoes from U-600 to sink the James McKay. Neither the two lifeboats, nor any of the people aboard the James McKay, were ever seen again.

Henry E. Harris was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with two stars, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter. He was the oldest of Henry Edward Harris, Sr. and Helen Elizabeth Pflugner Harris' five children. Henry, Sr. was an Optometrist in Shamokin, PA a small town located in East Central Pennsylvania.