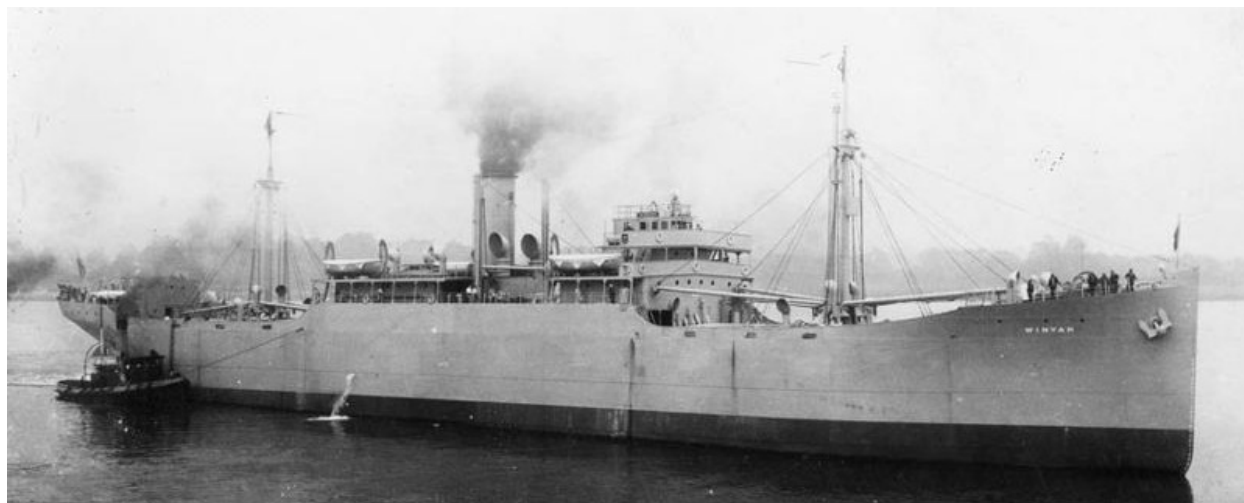


## James Dale Herndon

Born: February 16, 1922  
Hometown: San Benito, TX  
Class: 1942  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Third Assistant Engineer  
Date / Place of death: November 7, 1942 /  
40S, 21-30E  
Date / Place of burial: November 7, 1942 / Lost  
at Sea -- 40S, 21-30E  
Age: 21



James D. Herndon was appointed as Cadet, U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps on June 27, 1940 and assigned to the Cadet School, Algiers, LA. U.S. Coast Guard records indicate that James was originally designated as a Deck Cadet. However, according to Academy records and crew lists on file in Honolulu, HI, he sailed as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Pan Crescent from August 1940 to November 1941. According to Academy records he was joined aboard the SS La Salle on September 26, 1942 by Cadet Midshipmen George E. Guilford (Engine Cadet) and Fred Pennington (Deck Cadet) from the Pass Christian, MS Basic School. The La Salle sailed the same day for Cape Town, South Africa loaded with a cargo of trucks, steel and ammunition. However, the La Salle never arrived at Cape Town and the fate of the LaSalle remained a mystery until after the war. The vessel was officially marked as "Presumed Lost" on December 2, 1942.



**SS Wynah, a shipyard sister to the SS La Salle**

After the war, German Navy records solved the mystery. On November 7, 1942, when the La Salle was nearing the end of its voyage, the unescorted freighter was sighted by U-159 about 350 miles southeast of the Cape of Good Hope. The submarine chased the La Salle for over five hours, missing with one torpedo, until it managed to achieve a better target solution and fired another torpedo. The explosion of that torpedo detonated the La Salle's ammunition cargo, instantly destroying the ship. The crew of U-159 reported that the explosion sent pillars of flame hundreds of feet into the air. Three of the submarine's crew were wounded by the debris that rained down on the submarine for several minutes after the explosion. It was later claimed that the explosion could be heard 300 miles away, at South Africa's Cape Point Lighthouse.

Everyone aboard the SS La Salle was killed instantly, including Third Assistant Engineer James D. Herndon and Cadet-Midshipmen George E. Guilford and Fred Pennington. Also among the dead was the ship's Armed Guard Officer, the former Mayor of Milwaukee, WI, Lieutenant Carl F. Zeidler, USNR. After resigning as Mayor so the he could be commissioned Zeidler is said to have asked for the most dangerous job in the Navy. He was then assigned to command a merchant ship Armed Guard detachment.

James D. Herndon was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, Merchant Marine Defense Medal, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

James was the youngest of Amos Allen Herndon and Ethel Mae Turvey Allen's two adult sons. He grew up on a farm outside of San Benito, TX where all of the family worked either on the farm or at neighboring farms or businesses. In the 1940 U.S. Census James was identified as a farm laborer, his brother Clarence as a truck driver and his mother as a fruit picker.