

Walter Charles Hetrick, Jr.

Born: August 14, 1920
Hometown: Lawrence, NY
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
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: 20



Walter C. Hetrick signed on the SS James McKay as Deck Cadet on November 11, 1942 at New York, NY. Three other Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen, Philip G. Branigan (Deck), Leonard L. Ehrlich (Engine) and John J. McKelvey (Deck) were also aboard. In addition to the four cadets the ship's Third Assistant Engineer, Henry E. Harris, was a Cadet Corps alumnus. According to Crew Lists on file in New York, NY, Walter Hetrick had previously sailed as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Aquarius, signing off just a few days before signing on aboard the James McKay.



SS James McKay

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.

Cadet-Midshipman Walter C. Hetrick was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Walter C. Hetrick was the oldest of Walter C. Hetrick, Sr. and May V. Hetrick's three sons. Walter's next younger brother, William also graduated from Kings Point, and became a Master with Farrell Lines. According to Albert D. Wood, Class of 1947, Walter, Sr. was a successful Cedarhurst, Long Island businessman. He said that even though May never got over the loss of her eldest son, she became like a mother to a generation of Kings Pointers from her apartment over Jack's Bar in Cedarhurst. Many of her "boys" went on to successful careers with Farrell Lines.

According to his youngest brother, Robert, Walter graduated from Cedarhurst High School on Long Island. He was interested in sports, loved the outdoors and became an accomplished horseman. Robert said,

"Friends flocked to him. He developed the finer qualities and abilities of manhood and earned the admiration of the community."

Robert felt that the following from Shakespeare, sums up Walter's life,

*"Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do;
Not light them for ourselves;
for if our virtues Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike as if we had them not."*