

## Edwin David Howard

Born: May 28, 1924  
Hometown: Sylvania, OH  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet  
Date / Place of death: December 2, 1943 / Bari, Italy  
Date / Place of burial: December 2, 1943 / Lost at Sea – Bari, Italy  
Age: 19



Edwin D. Howard signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS John L. Motley at Philadelphia, PA on June 4, 1943 shortly after it was delivered from its builders, Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipbuilding, to the War Shipping Administration. He joined his classmate, Jay F. Litton, who signed on as Engine Cadet and Academy alumnus, Second Mate Fulton E. Yewell. The John L. Motley made one voyage to the Mediterranean and returned to New York from Oran in mid-September 1943. After loading a cargo of ammunition, the John L. Motley sailed on its second voyage to the Mediterranean, reaching the crowded harbor of Bari, Italy on November 28, 1943.

On December 2, 1943 the John L. Motley was moored alongside the jetty at Bari, Italy discharging its cargo when a massive German air attack on the port took defenders by surprise. The attack and ensuing explosions sank seventeen ships and put the harbor out of use for three weeks. This attack became known as "Little Pearl Harbor".

A Naval Armed Guard member on the SS John Bascom, moored next to the John L. Motley, reported that the vessel sustained three bomb hits, one in the Number 5 hold, one in the Number 3 hold, and one down the vessel's stack. The crew was able to control the fires caused by the first strike, but after the second hit, the fires on board raged out of control, burning through the vessel's mooring lines, and setting her adrift. The subsequent explosion of the Motley's cargo killed everyone on board, including Kings Point graduate Fulton Edison Yewell, Jr., the ship's Second Mate, along with the Cadet-Midshipmen Edward D. Howard and Jay F. Litton.

However, the damage caused by German bombs to the John L. Motley did not end there. When the Motley blew up, the ship was only 50 feet or so distant from the SS John Bascom. The Motley's explosion destroyed the port side of the Bascom, sinking the ship within minutes. The explosion on the John L. Motley also set off a chain reaction on the nearby Liberty ship SS John Harvey, which was carrying a secret cargo of mustard gas munitions. The John Harvey, which had already been hit and was on

fire disintegrated when the John L. Motley exploded, releasing deadly mustard gas into the air and water around the vessel.



**Explosion of Either the SS John L. Motley  
or SS John Harvey at Bari, Italy**

The death toll in Bari was more than 1,000 civilians and Allied seamen. Six Kings Point cadets were lost, on three different vessels. Thousands more seamen and civilians sustained serious injuries caused by the exposure to mustard gas. The effect of these injuries was exacerbated by the fact that doctors in the area didn't realize they were treating mustard gas victims.

Cadet-Midshipman Edwin D. Howard was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean - Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Edwin Howard was the oldest of Edwin C. Howard and Mary A. Howard's two sons and the middle of their three children. The 1940 U.S. Census indicates that Edwin C. Howard was the Vice President and Manager of a Gas and Oil Company. He is remembered by his sister as a trickster, and enormously popular among both classmates and teachers. Though slow to grow, Edwin surprised everyone by suddenly growing 12 inches during his senior year in high school. He was engaged to a young woman from his high school, and asked his sister to accompany him to buy the engagement ring. Although Edwin had his pilot's license, he was unable to enter the Army Air Force due to an allergy. His sister recalled a letter Edwin sent home from the Mediterranean shortly before his death, in which he told his family, "Don't worry about me – I am invincible."

The Liberty Ship SS Edwin D. Howard, built in March 1945 by J. A. Jones Construction Company, Panama City, FL, was named in honor of Cadet-Midshipman Edwin D. Howard. The ship was later acquired by the Navy and converted to the Radar Picket Ship USS Scanner (AGR 5).