

Otto Edward Kern, Jr.

Born: February 17, 1921
Hometown: Detroit, MI
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: November 18, 1942 / Oran, Algeria
Date / Place of burial: November 19, 1942 / U.S. Army Cemetery, Oran, Algeria



Date Unknown / North Africa American Cemetery, Carthage, Tunisia, Plot A Row 15 Grave 13

Age: 21

Otto E. Kern, Jr. signed on aboard the SS Richard Henry Lee as Deck Cadet on August 12, 1942. His classmate Walter H. Barker signed on as Engine Cadet. The ship had arrived in New York just a few days before from the "Murmansk Run" on Convoys PQ-16 and QP-13. The Richard Henry Lee sailed from New York on August 22, 1942 en route to ports in the United Kingdom (Cardiff and Swansea, Wales) via Boston, Halifax, NS and Belfast. After discharging and loading cargo the Richard Henry Lee then sailed for the Mediterranean from Loch Ewe, Scotland on October 25 with Convoy KMS 2G, which arrived at Oran on November 12, 1942.

On November 17, 1942 the Richard Henry Lee was at the French Naval Base at Mers-el-Kebir, now a suburb of the city of Oran, Algeria. That evening Cadet-Midshipman Otto E. Kern, along with Oiler Edward Blechel and Able Seamen Jose N. Roberts and Clarence Bovay went into Oran. At about 0015 Local Time the men asked for a ride back to their ship from an Army Military Police jeep patrol that was headed toward Mers-el-Kebir. Sergeant Harold L. O'Brien, who was in charge of the patrol, agreed to take the men as far as he could. The four merchant seamen, plus an Army Corporal, crowded into the back of the jeep, which was driven by Private Alfred L. Dyer.

Near Fort St. Andre in Oran the jeep passed a convoy of Army trucks heading in the opposite direction. One of the trucks hit the jeep on the left side, throwing it into the curb on the right with enough force to break the stock on Private Dyer's "tommy gun". None of trucks in the convoy stopped or even slowed down for the accident. When Private Dyer was able to bring the Jeep to a stop, two of the men sitting in the rear of

the Jeep, Cadet-Midshipman Otto Kern and Able Seaman Jose N. Roberts, were laying in the center of the road about twenty-five feet away. Private Dyer radioed for an ambulance while Sergeant O'Brien and Edward Blechl drove in the jeep to a nearby dispensary to bring medical help for Cadet-Midshipman Kern. However, the French Doctor they brought to the scene declared that both Kern and Roberts were dead when he arrived. Two Army officers arrived shortly thereafter to take charge of the investigation and remove the bodies. Army authorities informed the Master of the Richard Henry Lee of the accident and deaths shortly thereafter.

Cadet-Midshipman Otto E. Kern, Jr. was buried the following day at the U.S. Army cemetery in Oran. After the war, Kern's remains were moved to the North Africa American Cemetery in Carthage, Tunisia. He is buried near two other Kings Pointers; Niles Stevens and Thomas Kellegrew. The name of another Kings Pointer, Frederick Whitehead is inscribed on the Cemetery's list of those lost at sea.

Otto E. Kern, Jr. was posthumously awarded the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.



Kern's Department Store, Detroit, MI 1942

Otto Kern was the youngest of Otto Kern and Katherine Helen H. Kern's four children. His older siblings were Ernst, Richard and Mary Louise. The senior Kern was an executive of Kern's, one of Detroit's "Big Three" department stores, which had been started by his father. The land where the main store was located is now the site of the Compuware Corporation's Headquarters. The family sold the company in 1957 and the stores closed in 1959.

The Otto Kern family lived in Bloomfield Heights, Michigan, one of Detroit's northern suburbs, where they were prominent members of the Catholic church. Otto, Jr. was a Boy Scout and a member of the Cranbrook High School wrestling and track teams. He was remembered by his High School classmates as being a man with a "fun" personality who was popular with the girls. His family and friends found that he developed a power of self reliance that was apparent to all. One of Otto's brothers believed that the following statement by Abraham Lincoln best summarized his brother.

"And having chosen our course, let us renew our trust in God and go forward without fear and with manly hearts."