

## Joseph Richard Lawrence, Jr.

Born: March 19, 1919  
Hometown: Allentown, PA  
Class: 1942  
Service: U. S. Naval Reserve  
Position / Rank: 1st Division Officer / Lt. (j.g.)  
Date / Place of Death: December 12, 1944 / aboard  
USS Castle Rock (AVP 35) in  
San Diego, CA  
Date / Place of burial: Undetermined  
Age: 25



Joseph R. Lawrence, Jr. was appointed a Midshipman, USNR on August 20, 1942. He accepted the appointment and was officially sworn in on September 22, 1942. During his Sea Year, Cadet-Midshipman Lawrence sailed as Deck Cadet aboard the SS George Washington, SS City of Flint and SS Topa Topa. The latter ship was torpedoed and sunk on August 29, 1942. Joseph Lawrence was one of the thirty-five survivors and thus was one of the founders of the "Tin Fish Club". The survivors were rescued the next day by the British SS Clan Macinnes and repatriated to the U.S. aboard the Navy stores ship USS Tarazed (AF 13). After graduation from the Cadet Corps program in November 1942 Joseph Lawrence signed on aboard the SS Pan Crescent as Third Mate at the Port of New York in early December 1942.

On March 15, 1943 Joseph Lawrence was sworn in as an Ensign, USNR with a date of rank from February 19, 1943. After a brief assignment in New York, Ensign Lawrence was assigned to the pre-commissioning crew of the USS Schuylkill (AO 76) a T2-SE-A1 tanker being converted into a Navy Fleet Oiler. Ensign Lawrence officially joined the crew of the USS Schuylkill upon its commissioning on April 9, 1943. After more than a year of service aboard the Schuylkill Joseph Lawrence was promoted to Lieutenant (junior grade) on May 1, 1944. Three weeks later, he was detached to Naval Air Station, Dallas, for temporary duty involving flight instruction. However, on July 11, shortly after he reported for flight training, he was transferred to Lake Washington Shipyards in Houghton, Washington. When he arrived there he was assigned to the pre-commissioning crew of the USS Castle Rock (AVP 35). Upon the commissioning of the Castle Rock on October 8, 1944 he was assigned to duty as the First Division Officer. For the next few months the USS Castle Rock conducted the training necessary to prepare the ship for combat duty with the Pacific Fleet.

On December 12, 1944, just six days before the ship sailed for duty with the Pacific Fleet, the USS Castle Rock was moored at San Diego, California. At 2210 that evening, Lt. Lawrence returned from a visit ashore. Five minutes later an enlisted man from another Department aboard ship warned the Officer of the Deck that Lt. Lawrence might try to shoot himself. The Officer of the Deck proceeded to Lt. Lawrence's quarters where he found Joseph Lawrence unconscious on his bunk, a gun in his right hand and, blood coming from his mouth. The Officer of the Deck immediately summoned the ship's Duty Pharmacist's Mate to provide medical treatment. Upon examination, the Pharmacist's Mate discovered a gunshot wound on the right side of Lt. Lawrence's chest. The Officer of the Deck then summoned an ambulance and a doctor. The doctor arrived within minutes. However, at 2224, fourteen minutes after he returned aboard the ship, Joseph R. Lawrence was pronounced dead.

On December 14, two days after Lawrence's death, a court of inquiry assembled on the ship to inquire into the circumstances of the death of Lt. (j.g.) Joseph R. Lawrence, USNR. The court called witnesses and deliberated from 0930 to 1150 when it "adjourned to await orders from the convening authority." The findings of the court inquiry could not be located.

Lt (j.g.) Joseph R. Lawrence, Jr. was posthumously awarded the World War II Victory Medal and the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal for his U.S. Navy service. For his merchant marine service Cadet-Midshipman Joseph R. Lawrence earned the Combat Bar with star, Atlantic and Pacific War Zone Bars, The Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Joseph R. Lawrence, Jr. was the son of Joseph R. Lawrence, Sr. and Louise Lawrence of Allentown, PA.