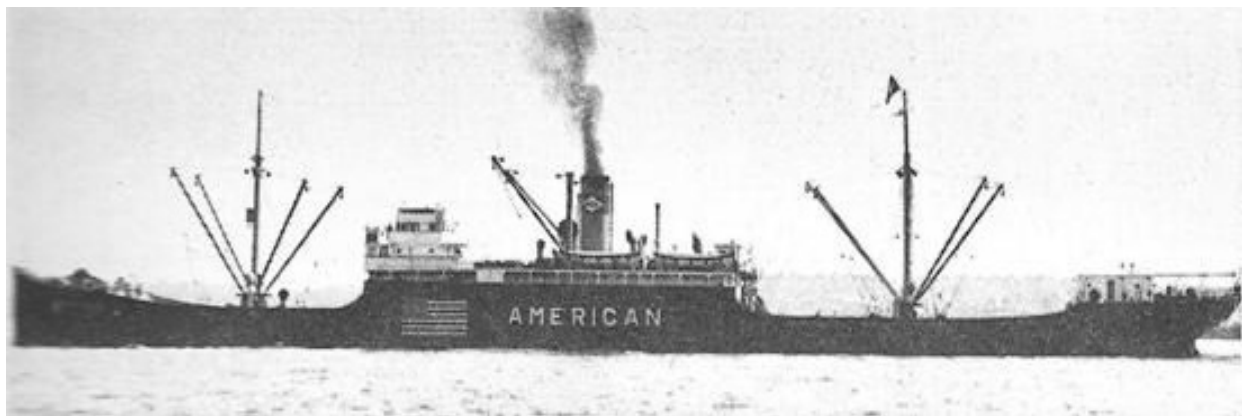


Richard Erwin Lewis

Born: April 5, 1923
Hometown: Oswego, New York
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: February 20, 1942 / 38N, 78W
Date / Place of burial: February 20, 1942 / Lost at Sea -- 38N, 78W
Age: 18



Richard E. Lewis signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the SS Azalea City at New York, NY on the day the United States began combat in World War II, December 7, 1941. Also joining him was his classmate Cadet-Midshipman Robert See, the Engine Cadet. Two months later, on February 12, 1942, the Azalea City left the island of Trinidad, en route from Bahia Blanca, Argentina to Philadelphia, PA with a cargo of flax seed. The vessel, with a crew of 38, was traveling alone and not zig-zagging. When the Azalea City failed to arrive in Philadelphia after several months, the ship was presumed lost, though its exact fate remained a mystery.



SS Azalea City

The details of the loss were discovered after World War II in the records of the German Navy. On February 20, 1942 U-432 sighted the Azalea City about 125 miles east south-east of Ocean City, Maryland. Over several hours U-432 fired three torpedoes at the Azalea City, two of which struck the ship. For some reason the ship was unable to send a distress signal after the first torpedo struck the ship and the crew did not abandon

ship. Apparently the ship capsized immediately after the second torpedo hit, taking all hands with it, including Cadet-Midshipmen Richard Lewis and Robert See . These men were the first two Academy cadets killed through enemy action. However, because their fate remained unknown for months, Cadet-Midshipman Howard P. Conway was mourned at the Academy as the first Cadet to give his life in service of his country.

Cadet-Midshipman Richard E. Lewis was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Richard E. Lewis was the only child of Henry M. Lewis and Edith M. Lewis. Although the 1930 U.S. Census identifies Henry Lewis as a real estate and insurance salesman by the 1940 Census his occupation was listed as a gate keeper for a construction company.