

Grover Paul Lietz

Born: March 21, 1921
Hometown: Okawville, IL
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
Date / Place of death: February 23, 1943 / 46-15N, 38-11W
Date / Place of burial: February 23, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 46-15N, 38-11W
Age: 21



Grover P. Lietz signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the SS Jonathan Sturges at the Port of New York on January 12, 1943. Also onboard were Cadet-Midshipmen Harry Burlison (Deck), Ralph Kohlmeyer (Engine), and William Wilson (Deck). The ship's Chief Mate was 1940 Cadet Officer David L. Edwards. After safely delivering its cargo to England the Jonathan Sturges was returning to New York with Convoy ON-166 from Liverpool to New York City when it fell behind the convoy on the night of February 23/24, 1943. The ship, with a crew of 44 merchant mariners and a Naval Armed Guard of 31, was carrying 1,500 tons of sand ballast. In bad weather and poor visibility the Sturges was making 6 knots, about ½ its full speed.

At about 1 am, the vessel was struck in the forward part of the ship by two torpedoes fired by U-707. The engines were secured, but the ship, which had apparently been broken in two, began to sink bow first. Survivors recalled that the explosions gave off a sweet odor, and left a sweet taste in their mouths for hours after the incident.

Although the radio officer was able to send a distress signal, there was no time to await a reply as the crew abandoned ship. Two lifeboats and four life rafts were successfully launched. According to the post sinking report of the survivors, nineteen men were able to get into one life boat while the Master, Chief Mate David Edwards and fifteen others were in the other boat. The other twenty-four survivors were able to reach the four life rafts. However, the boats and rafts were soon separated.

On February 27, three days after the sinking, the boat with nineteen men aboard met up with a lifeboat carrying three survivors from the Dutch ship SS Madoera who had been in the same convoy. Eight of the Sturges' survivors climbed into the Madoera's boat. Although one of the Jonathan Sturges' crew eventually died of exposure, the other

eighteen (along with the three Madoera survivors) were rescued by the USS Belknap (DD 251) on March 12, 1943. However, the other lifeboat with its seventeen survivors was never seen again. Of the twenty-four men on the life rafts, only 6 survived. These men were rescued on April 5 by U-336 and spent the rest of the war as Prisoners of War.

Cadet-Midshipman Grover P. Lietz as posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Grover Lietz was the son of Edwin Lietz and Susie Lietz. He grew up on a farm in rural Washington County, Illinois with his four brothers (Elmo, Lavern, Darrell & Enos) and three sisters (Vergal, Dolores and Juanita). However, by the 1940 U.S. Census, Grover was living with Vergal and her husband Earl McGuire in St. Louis, MO. The records show that Grover was a messenger for a railroad.

According to his brother Enos, Grover was popular with his class mates at Okawville High School where he was Captain of the basketball team. Grover is credited by team mate Warren D. Stricker as being his inspiration for graduating from Kings Point in 1945.



1936-37 Okawville High School Basketball Team. Team Captain Grover Lietz (center), Warren D. Stricker (USMMA '45) on left wearing #1