

Gordon Wallace Lyons

Born: December 4, 1917
Hometown: Dallas, TX
Class: 1942
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Chief Mate
Date / Place of death: August 28, 1944 / 15-10N, 55-18E
Date / Place of burial: August 28, 1944 / Lost at Sea -- 15-10N, 55-18E
Age: 26



According to Academy records, Gordon W. Lyons was one of 47 men who took the competitive examination to join the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps on November 16, 1940. He passed the examination and signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the *SS Zoella Lykes* at New Orleans on April 8, 1941. Crew lists show that he made at least two voyages to the Far East aboard the *Zoella Lykes*. Academy records also show that by December 1941 he had returned to the Maritime Commission Cadet School at Algiers, LA where he received 25 demerits for returning late from leave. According to his U.S. Navy Service Record, Gordon W. Lyons was appointed a Midshipman (Cadet), MMR/USNR on April 17, 1941. He was detached on December 30, 1941 and assigned as Deck Cadet to the *SS Nishmaha*. His U.S. Navy records indicate that he graduated from the Merchant Marine Cadet program on July 6, 1942 and received his Third Mate's license on July 11, 1942. He was subsequently employed as Third Mate aboard the *SS Frederick Lykes* since August 8, 1942. He signed off of the *Frederick Lykes* on March 11, 1943. Shortly before signing on aboard the *SS Frederick Lykes*, Gordon Lyons applied for a commission as Ensign, USNR. He was commissioned on October 13, 1942 with a date of rank September 22, 1942.

Gordon W. Lyons had signed on Chief Mate aboard the *SS John Barry* when it sailed from Philadelphia, PA on July 19, 1944 bound for Dharan, Saudi Arabia. The ship was carrying a cargo of oil drilling equipment, pipe, vehicles, and other war material. In addition to the ship's normal cargo it was also carrying hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of silver Saudi rials, newly struck at the Philadelphia Mint, to pay oil field workers in Saudi Arabia. After sailing in convoy to Port Said, Egypt, the *John Barry* passed through the Suez Canal sailing unescorted en-route to the Persian Gulf.

On the evening of August 28, 1944 the *John Barry* was off of the coast of Oman sailing in moderately rough seas under bright moonlight. The zig-zagging freighter was spotted by U-859 which fired at least one torpedo at, or shortly after, 1800 GCT. One torpedo hit the *John Barry's* starboard side between the #2 and #3 holds, destroying the Number 1 lifeboat. The other boats were reported to have been launched within fifteen minutes of the torpedo explosion. However, the Number 2 lifeboat, with Chief Mate Gordon Lyons aboard, was swamped during launching throwing its crew into the water. The boat was eventually righted, bailed out and put back into use. However, neither Gordon Lyons nor another of Number 2 Lifeboat's crew could be found once the life boat was righted. These two men, who are presumed to have drowned when the boat swamped, were the only fatalities in the sinking of the *SS John Barry*. The other 66 men were rescued the next day by the *SS Sunetta*, a Dutch tanker, and the *SS Benjamin Bourn*.

Forty five minutes after the first torpedo hit the *SS John Barry*, U-859 fired a second torpedo which hit amidships breaking the ship in two, sinking it in 8,500 feet of water. In 1989 a converted drill ship recovered a little less than half of the silver rials stowed in the *John Barry's* #2 Hold.

Gordon Lyons' photograph indicates that he had already been awarded the Atlantic War Zone, Pacific War Zone and Mediterranean and Middle-East War Zone bars before he signed on aboard the *SS John Barry*. For his service aboard the *SS John Barry* he was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal and Combat Bar with star. In addition, he would have also received the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

According to U.S. Census information, Gordon W. Lyons was the oldest of Percy Felix Lyons and Agnes Cecilia Hughes Lyons' three sons and three daughters. Gordon's siblings, who ranged from three to nine years younger, were Jessie, Robert, Kenneth, Marion and Doris. These records indicate that although Gordon was born in Illinois, the rest of his siblings were born in either Mississippi (Jessie) or Louisiana. However, by the time of the 1930 U.S. Census the Lyons family was living in Dallas, TX where Percy Lyons worked as a railroad engineer. In 1935 Gordon graduated from North Dallas High School. According to the 1940 U.S. Census Gordon was living in New Orleans where he was employed as a clerk in a warehouse in 1940 before he applied for the Merchant Marine Cadet Corps.