

John James McKelvey

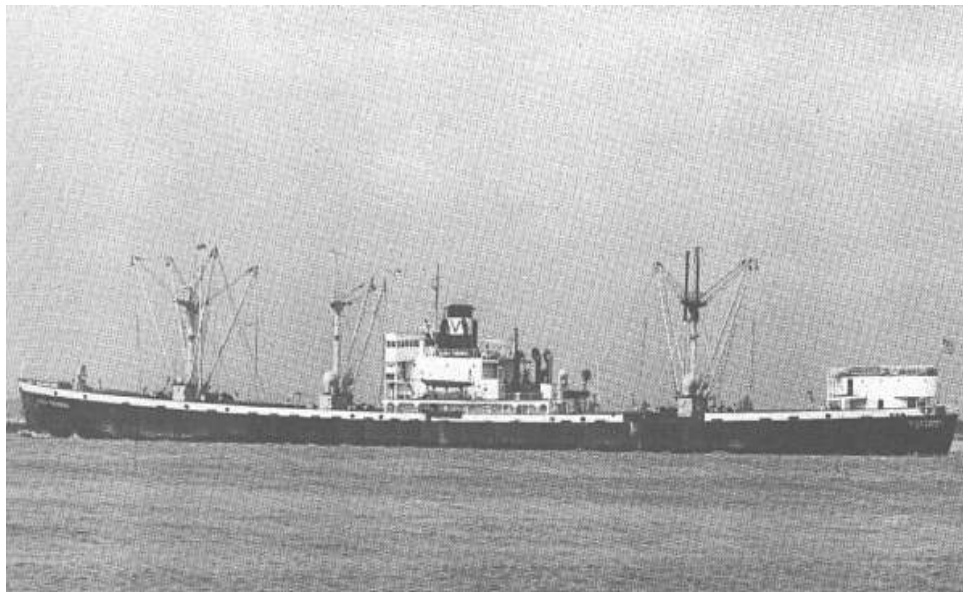
Born: October 13, 1920
Hometown: Patterson, NJ
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: December 7, 1942 / 57-50N, 23-10W
Date / Place of burial: December 7, 1942 / Lost at Sea -
- 57-50N, 23-10W



Age: 22

James J. McKelvey signed on the SS James McKay as Deck Cadet on November 11, 1942 at New York, NY. Three other Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen, Philip Branigan (Deck), Leonard L. Ehrlich (Engine) and Walter C. Hetrick (Engine) joined him. In addition to the four cadets the ship's Third Assistant Engineer, Henry E. Harris, was a Cadet Corps alumnus.

The James McKay sailed from New York with Convoy HX-216 bound for Belfast, Northern Ireland and Cardiff, Wales on November 19. On November 25 the convoy encountered a Northwest gale and reduced visibility that caused the convoy to partly



scatter. The weather was sufficiently rough to cause the James McKay's general cargo to shift, endangering its stability. As a result, the ship left the convoy and sailed into St. Johns, Newfoundland on November 29 to re-stow its cargo.

SS James McKay

After re-stowing its cargo, The James McKay sailed from Newfoundland to join up with the next eastbound convoy, HX-217. However, there is no indication that the James McKay ever actually joined up with HX-217, possibly due to the convoy being scattered in a Southwesterly gale from December 2- 4.

According to German Navy records, the James McKay was located and attacked by U-600 on the night of December 7/8, 1943 when the ship was about 400 miles south of Iceland. Three of U-600's torpedoes hit the James McKay, one amidships and the other two in the after portion of the ship. The ship stopped, sent out distress signals and the crew abandoned ship in two lifeboats although the ship was still afloat. It required two more torpedoes from U-600 to sink the James McKay. Neither the two lifeboats, nor any of the people aboard the James McKay, were ever seen again.

Cadet Midshipman John McKelvey was already a member of the Academy's "Tin Fish Club" for surviving the sinking of the SS Oliver Ellsworth in October of 1942 on the "Murmansk Run". He was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with two stars, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

John McKelvey was the oldest child and only son of John and Irene McKelvey. He had a younger sister Carolyn (Carol) who was seven years younger. According to Academy records, John reported to Kings Point on the afternoon of April 6, 1942 to begin his training.

John's sister Carol recalls that, despite the real danger surrounding John every day at sea, he continued to send cheerful letters home to his family. She recalls that although he was granted a longer leave after surviving the sinking of the Oliver Ellsworth, John insisted on going right back to sea. When he left home for the James McKay he took all of his uniforms with him as he had no idea where the ship was going or where it would go from there. Carol said that John's letters, despite being cut up by the military censors, assured his family and reminded them to make sure to set a place for him at Christmas Dinner. In his letters John specifically asked his father to listen to the Army-Navy football game for him. According to Carol,

"The love he sent from sea to shore was a treasured gift. We could ask for no more. His qualities of honesty, sincerity, gratitude and patriotism made our family proud of this young man."