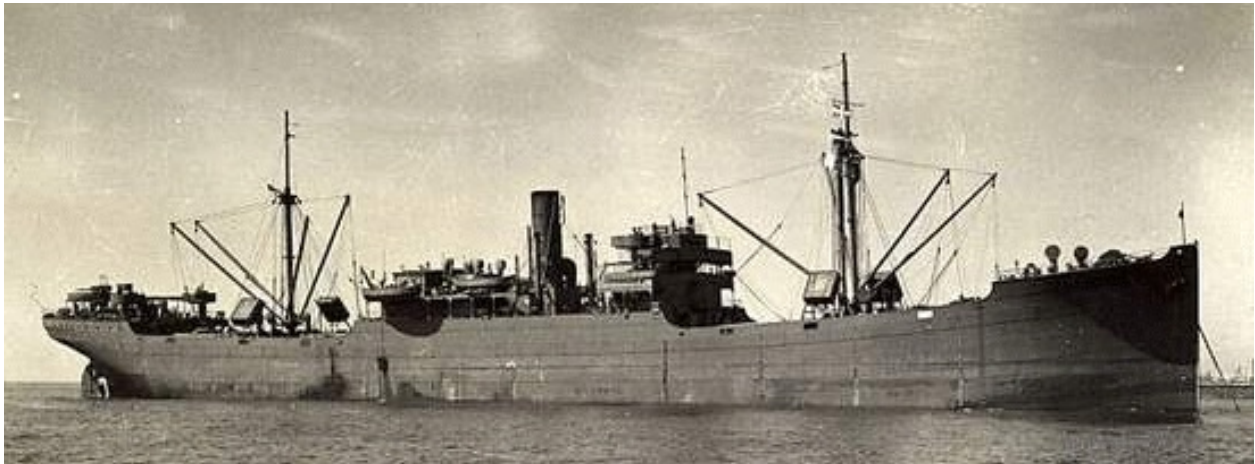


Robert Valentine Palmer

Born: October 22, 1922
Hometown: Richmond Hill, NY
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet
Date / Place of death: September 24, 1942 / 8-05N, 58-08W
Date / Place of burial: September 24, 1942 / Lost at Sea -- 8-05N, 58-08W
Age: 18



Robert V. Palmer signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the *SS West Chetac* in June 1942 at the port of New York. He was joined by Cadet-Midshipman Arthur Z. Brown who signed on as Deck Cadet. The ship sailed from New York on June 22, 1942 stopping at Philadelphia and Norfolk to load additional cargo bound for the Persian Gulf. After sailing from Norfolk in convoy TAW-14, the ship called at Key West, FL, Aruba and Trinidad, where the convoy disbanded on September 23.



SS West Chetac

On September 24 the *West Chetac* was about 100 miles north of Georgetown, British Guyana proceeding on an easterly course at seven knots without zig-zagging when it was located by U-175. According to German Naval Records, the submarine fired a spread of three torpedoes at the *West Chetac* earlier that morning which missed. The submarine also reported that the ship had been escorted by an aircraft for some time.

Some of the survivors reported that the ship had been circled by a twin engine patrol plane which they believed gave the ship's position away, not knowing that they were already being stalked by a submarine.

At 0715 the ship made a complete circle to avoid what was believed to be the wake of a submarine's conning tower. Fifteen minutes later, when the ship had steadied up on its course a torpedo fired by U-175 hit the port side of Number 2 hold, destroying the hatch covers and causing the vessel to sink by the bow in less than two minutes. Between the rush to get the boats launched and the high sea running, all four life boats capsized, throwing their occupants into the water. In his report of the sinking, Cadet-Midshipman Arthur Brown stated;

"I had been standing near the after part of the amidships house talking to a crew member and had just left, on my way to my quarters, when the ship was hit. I immediately got my lifebelt and went to my station on the boat deck. The order to lower away was given by the Chief Officer. I released the pelican hook to the bridle, and then proceeded into the boat to secure the plug. Since another man was doing this I started to unleash and clear the gear in the boat. At the time water was coming over the Number Three hatch, the vessel was settling fast. There was a heavy swell which caused the lifeboat to turn over, towards the outboard side. Falling out of the boat I swam for a hatch cover. I then sighted a raft and proceeded to swim for it. Aboard the raft was a messman. He and I assisted others in getting aboard the raft. No boats had been able to get away."

After the *West Chetac* sank, U-175 surfaced, interrogated some of the survivors and they departed on the surface. Cadet-Midshipman Brown reported that he had been told that his shipmate Robert V. Palmer reached the boat deck but was not one of the survivors. Of the fifty men aboard the *West Chetac* only 17 crew members and 2 Naval Armed Guard Sailors survived the sinking. The nineteen men were able to get aboard three rafts and keep them together until they were picked up by the USS Roe (DD 418) on October 1 eight days later. The survivors were taken to Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Cadet-Midshipman Robert V. Palmer was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

According to the 1930 census Robert V. Palmer's parents were Charles D. and Florence. They had five children. Charles H. was the oldest followed by Adeline E., Florence, Edith, and Robert was the last.