

Dante Ludivico Polcari

Born: April 20, 1921
Hometown: Medford, MA
Class: 1946
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: April 9, 1945 / 37-31N, 64-26W
Date / Place of burial: April 9, 1945 / Lost at Sea --
37-31N, 64-26W
Age: 23



Dante L. Polcari signed on as Deck Cadet aboard the T2-SE-A1 tanker, *SS Saint Mihiel*, on March 20, 1945 at Philadelphia, PA. This was one day after the ship was delivered from its builder, Sun Shipbuilding, to the War Shipping Administration. He was joined by his classmate, Cadet-Midshipman John W. Artist, who signed on as Engine Cadet. The vessel sailed in ballast to Corpus Christi, TX where it picked up a full load of aviation gasoline bound for Cherbourg, France. After leaving Corpus Christi the *Saint Mihiel* was ordered to New York where convoy CU-65, a fast convoy of tankers and other high value ships, was forming. On April 8 the *Saint Mihiel* and the other ships of the convoy sailed from New York and began forming the convoy.

On the night of April 9 the *Saint Mihiel* and another tanker, *SS Nashbulk*, collided. Part of the *Saint Mihiel's* cargo of gasoline immediately burst into flame, destroying the navigating bridge located amidships and killing most of the deck officers. The surviving crew abandoned ship as soon as possible and were picked up by the *USS Stewart (DE 238)* after about two hours in the water. Of the 50 crew members and 29 Naval Armed Guard members, only 23 of the crew and 19 Navy sailors survived. Cadet-Midshipmen Dante L. Polcari and John W. Artist were among those missing and presumed dead. Also among the dead was Third Assistant Engineer James LeRoy Maloney, a 1944 USMMA graduate.

On the morning of April 10 the *Saint Mihiel* was still afloat, although some of the cargo was still burning. The ship's senior surviving deck officer, Second Mate Bruno Baretich, assembled some of the *St. Mihiel's* survivors to board the ship to see if it could be salvaged. Aided by crewmen from the *Stewart* and another escort, Baretich re-boarded the ship, put out the fires and got the ship underway for New York. Although the ship was ultimately declared a constructive total loss, over 80% of the gasoline cargo was saved. For his actions, Baretich, a former vaudeville performer and song arranger for

Irving Berlin, received the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal. Cadet-Midshipmen Dante L. Polcari and John W. Artist were the last two Academy students to lose their lives in WWII.

Cadet-Midshipman Dante L. Polcari was posthumously awarded the Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Dante L. Polcari was the oldest of Raffaele (Ralph) Polcari and Rosalia D'Antonio Polcari's four children. Dante's younger siblings were the twins John and Tony, two years younger and his little sister Nancy. Ralph, an immigrant from Italy, owned a Barber shop in Medford, MA.