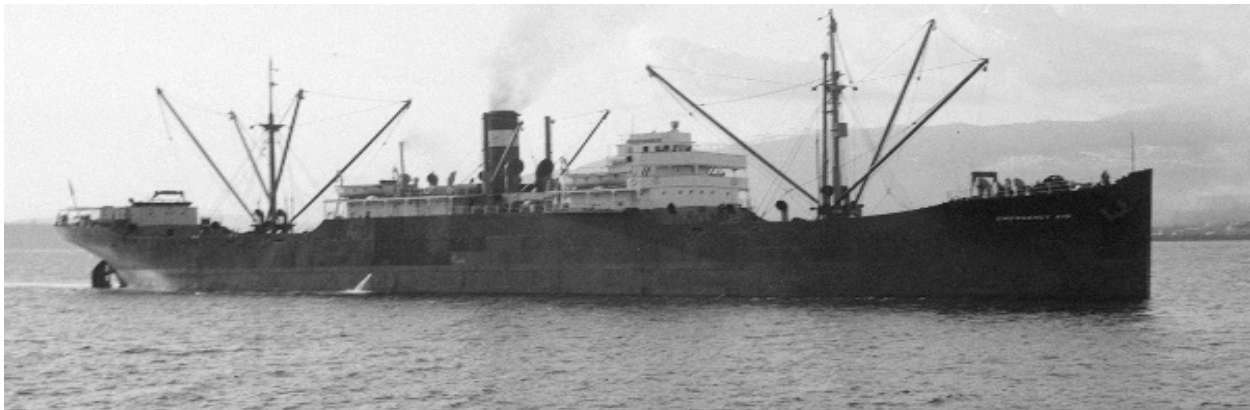


## James Henry Province

Born: October 10, 1920  
Hometown: Detroit, MI  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: February 5, 1943 / 52N, 33W  
Date / Place of burial: February 5, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 52N, 33W  
Age: 22



James H. Province signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the *SS West Portal* on December 21, 1942 at New York, NY. He was joined a few days later by his Academy classmate Cadet-Midshipman David H. Pitzely who signed on as Deck Cadet. The World War I-era "Hog Islander" sailed on January 24, 1943 for Liverpool via Nova Scotia in convoy SC-118. Aboard the ship on sailing from Nova Scotia were eight officers, the two Cadets, thirty crewmen, twenty-five Navy Armed Guard and twelve passengers.



**SS West Portal (ex-Emergency Aid)**

The slow ships of Convoy SC-118 were sailing right behind a convoy of higher speed ships, HX 224. A survivor from one of the four ships sunk in this convoy was rescued by U-632. He told his rescuers that a large convoy of slow speed ships was behind his convoy. The German Navy's High Command alerted every available U-Boat upon receiving the news from U-632. U-Boats were to locations along Convoy SC-118 most likely route from Nova Scotia to the United Kingdom. On February 4 the convoy's location was revealed to searching U-Boats by the inadvertent firing of a signal rocket.

For whatever reason, the *SS West Portal* straggled behind the convoy on the evening of February 4. According to German Naval Records that became available only after the end of World War II, the *SS West Portal* was sighted by U-143 on the afternoon of February 5. The U-143 initially fired a spread of four torpedoes at the zig-zagging *West Portal* from almost two miles away. Only the third torpedo hit the *West Portal*. The submarine closed the range for a final shot but reported that it missed. A sixth and final torpedo was reported to have hit the ship near the stern which finally sunk the ship.

The U-143's Captain reported seeing some of the ship's crew and passengers abandoning ship in the lifeboats. One of the convoy escorts, *HMS Vanessa (D 29)* received the *West Portal's* distress message and was ordered to leave the convoy to search for survivors. However, the radio message did not provide a location so the search proved fruitless. Neither the *West Portal's* life boats nor any of the men aboard the *West Portal* were ever seen again.

The battle to get Convoy SC-118's remaining ships to port was one of the largest during the Battle of the Atlantic. Seven other merchant ships were sunk while the convoy's escorts sank three U-Boats and damaged two more.

Cadet-Midshipman James H. Province was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

James Province was the oldest of James Province and Vivian Lee Page Province's five children (James, Dorothy, Terry, Beth & Billy). Based on the 1930 U.S. Census, the elder James Province died in 1929 when James was eight years old. With the death of her husband, Vivian Province moved in with her parents. By the 1940 U.S. Census, James and Billy are identified as the "Foster Sons" of Terry A. Page and his wife Ruth of Russellville, KY. This indicates that Vivian died before 1940 and the Province children had been sent to live with other members of the Page family. Before his final voyage, James had designated his Uncle, Claude J. Page of Detroit, MI as his next of kin.

According to the Province family, to help make ends meet, James help part-time jobs as a movie projectionist and "soda jerk" at the local drugstore. He is remembered as an intelligent man with a quiet demeanor who was kind and gentle to everyone.