

## Richard Marion Record

Born: June 1, 1924  
Hometown: Oklahoma City, OK  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Class: 1944  
Date / Place of death: March 16, 1943 / 50-38N, 34-46W  
Date / Place of burial: March 16, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 50-38N, 34-46W  
Age: 18



According to Academy records, Richard M. Record signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the *SS James Oglethorpe* in February 1943 at Savannah, GA, just a few days after it was completed. Around the same time two other Cadet-Midshipmen also signed on; Wayne D. Fajans (Engine) and William H. Ford (Deck). Another Cadet-Midshipman, John Lambert signed on as the second Deck Cadet a few days later. After the *SS James Oglethorpe* completed the installation of its armament and final fitting out and adjustments, the ship sailed for its first loading port. The ship joined convoy HX-229 in New York on March 9, 1943 for a journey to Liverpool, England. The *James Oglethorpe* was loaded with a cargo of steel, cotton, food in the holds and a deck cargo of aircraft, tractors and trucks. It had a crew of 44 merchant sailors, 26 Naval Armed Guard, and 4 Navy passengers.

Cadet-Midshipmen Fajans later reported that,

“The weather was the usual kind experienced during this time of year in the North Atlantic, i.e., dirty and heavy seas.”

In his report of the sinking, Cadet-Midshipman Ford stated,

“The day before our vessel was lost No. 2 boat was carried away by heavy seas and Nos. 1 and 3 extensively damaged. As a result of this damage, our available life savings equipment was materially reduced.”

Early in the evening of March 16, Cadet-Midshipman Wayne D. Fajans reported that he had seen the conning tower of a submarine on the starboard side of the ship while at his gun station and reported this fact to the gunnery officer. However, no action was taken by the ship’s gun crews. Analysis of German Navy records found that the

submarine reported to have been seen by Cadet-Midshipman Fajans was not one of the submarines that later attacked the *James Oglethorpe*.

At 2120 GCT on March 16, 1943, U-758 fired a "spread" of four torpedoes at convoy HX-229, hitting, and sinking, the *M/V Zaaland* with one torpedo and the *James Oglethorpe* with another. The U-758's other two torpedoes missed. The *James Oglethorpe* was hit in either Hold #1 or #2 (survivor reports differ). The torpedo's impact started a fire in the cargo which was quickly extinguished, very likely by the water flooding into the hold. According to the accounts of survivors, although the ship settled about three feet lower in the water it did not appear to be in danger of sinking. However, the Captain did give permission, or at least some crew members believed that he had given the crew permission, to abandon ship despite the ship being in a hard left turn with its engines still running. Of the remaining lifeboats (Number 4, 5 and 6) only the Number 6 boat was safely launched. Cadet-Midshipman Fajans, who was in Number 5 boat, fell into the sea when the boat's forward fall broke. Seeing the chaos occurring with lowering the boats, the Chief Mate and Cadet Midshipman William Ford jumped into the sea, joining the men from Number 4 and 5 boats in the water. The crew of the Number 6 lifeboat were able to pick up some of the men in the water. The nine men in this boat were rescued the corvette *HMS Pennywort (K 111)*. The destroyer *HMS Beverly (H 64, ex-USS Branch (DD 197))* rescued 21 other men from the water. These men were landed in Scotland (*HMS Pennywort*) and Northern Ireland (*HMS Beverly*). Some of the men, including Cadet-Midshipman Ford, returned to the U.S. aboard the *SS Queen Mary*.

About 30 members of the crew stayed on board to help the Captain sail the ship to St. John's, Newfoundland, the nearest harbor. The *James Oglethorpe* was last seen by those in the lifeboat and in the water at about 0200 GCT still afloat and underway. The ship, and its remaining crew, were never seen again. Although some accounts credit U-91 with sinking the crippled *SS James Oglethorpe* on March 17, German Navy records only credit U-91 with sinking the *SS Irene Du Pont* and *SS Nariva*. It is likely that the *SS James Oglethorpe* foundered due to the torpedo damage and high seas. From the accounts of the thirty survivors it is unknown whether Cadet-Midshipmen Richard Record and John Lambert were among the seventeen men who perished abandoning the ship on March 16 or were among the thirty men lost when the *James Oglethorpe* sank.

Cadet-Midshipman Richard M. Record was posthumously awarded the Mariner's Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Richard M. Record was the oldest of Marion Record and Louise G. Record's two sons. Richard's little brother, Jack, was four years younger. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Marion Record was an electrician.