

James Volney Rowley

Born: March 30, 1922
Hometown: New York, NY
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 10, 1943 / 19-49N, 74-38W
Date / Place of burial: March 10, 1943 / Lost at Sea --
19-49N, 74-38W
Age: 20



James Rowley signed on aboard the brand new *SS James Sprunt* as Deck Cadet on February 23, 1943 at Charleston, South Carolina. He was joined by his Academy classmates Cadet-Midshipmen Michael Buck (Engine), Howard McGrath (Engine) and John Tucek (Deck). The ship loaded at Charleston for a voyage to Karachi, India via Texas and the Panama Canal with general cargo and 4,000 tons of high explosives.



SS James Sprunt shortly after completion

On the morning of March 10, 1943 the *James Sprunt* was traveling in convoy KG-123 about three miles southeast of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Another ship in the convoy, the *Virginia Sinclair*, had been torpedoed at 0430 on the same morning. At 0809 U-185 fired torpedoes at the convoy, hitting the *James Sprunt*.

The *James Sprunt's* cargo of explosives blew up with extraordinary force, completely disintegrating the ship. The glare from the explosion was seen more than forty miles away, and witnesses on other ships recalled the violent tremors, and debris that fell like hail on the other ships. There were no survivors among the 43 crew members and 28 Naval Armed Guard members including all four Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen; Michael Buck, Howard McGrath, James Rowley, and John Tucek.

The thirty day life of the SS James Sprunt may have had the shortest life span of any Liberty ship. The ship was delivered from North Carolina Shipbuilding to the War Shipping Administration on February 13, 1943, loaded cargo from the 19th to the 29th and was destroyed on March 10, 1943.

Cadet Midshipman James R. Rowley was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

James V. Rowley was the only son and youngest child of James L. Rowley and Abbie Chase Rowley. James' sister, Kathryn was two years older. According to the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census, the Rowley family lived in the Chicago, Illinois area where James' father was an office equipment salesman. However, on his U.S. Coast Guard records, James listed his mother as his next of kin living in Little Neck, New York, which is close to Kings Point.