

Isidore Schaffer

Born: November 14, 1921
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Second Assistant Engineer
Date / Place of death: March 20, 1945 / 68-26N,
33-40E
Date / Place of burial: March 20, 1945 / Lost at Sea
- 68-26N, 33-40E;
Memorial at Baron Hirsch
Cemetery, Staten Island, NY
Age: 23



Isidore Schaffer entered Kings Point in late 1941. On February 27, 1942 he signed on aboard the *SS Expositor* as Engine Cadet to begin his Sea Year. After surviving a convoy to Murmansk, Russia (PQ-15) he was re-assigned to the *SS Exiria* to complete his Sea Year. He returned to the Academy in August 1942 to complete his studies and receive his license as Third Assistant Engineer. Following his graduation he signed on as Third Assistant Engineer aboard the *SS John L. Motley*. He subsequently served aboard the *SS Exchange* before sailing as Second Assistant Engineer aboard the *SS Exminster* in 1944. After working aboard the *SS Exminster* he served aboard the *SS William D. Burnham* until it was damaged on November 23, 1944 by torpedoes fired by U-978 after failing to rendezvous with its convoy. Eighteen members of the crew died during the attack. However, Isidore Schaffer survived the sinking. Now a member of the "Tin Fish Club", he returned to New York aboard the British passenger / troopship *SS Aquitania*, arriving there on January 12, 1945, ready to go to sea again.

After signing on aboard the *SS Thomas Donaldson* in February 1945 the ship sailed for Murmansk, Russia via Gourock, Scotland loaded with a cargo of 6,000 tons of explosives and general cargo with a deck cargo of railroad locomotives. On March 12, 1945, the twenty-six ships convoy JW-65 sailed from Gourock escorted by two aircraft carriers, a cruiser and 18 smaller escorts. At 1220 (local) March 20, when the ship was about 20 miles from Kola Inlet, the approach to Murmansk, the ship was struck amidships by a torpedo fired by U-968. The impact destroyed the engine room, killing everyone on watch at the time, including Second Assistant Engineer Isidore Schaffer.

Despite the damage and rapid flooding, the Chief Engineer, First Assistant Engineer, and Third Mate attempted to rescue the three men on watch in the engine room. However, by the time they got to the engine room, it was already completely flooded. Due to the ship's cargo of explosives, the Captain ordered the crew to abandon ship shortly after the torpedo struck. The Armed Guard was ordered to abandon ship at 1230. The survivors were rescued by *HMS Bamborough Castle (K 412)* one of the convoy's escorts. One of the survivors, the Deck Maintenance Man died aboard the *Bamborough Castle*.

However, since the ship did not immediately sink the Master and several crewmen remained aboard to assist with towing and possible salvage of the ship and its cargo. There was no fire on board the ship, but a crack was observed in the hull, amidships on the port side. The *Thomas Donaldson* was taken in tow by *HMS Honeysuckle (K 27)*. At about 1630 tow was passed to a Russian tugboat, but the ship sank shortly thereafter. Of the 69 merchant crew and Naval Armed Guard on board, only the three men on watch in the engine room and a deck maintenance man, who was wounded in the attack, died.

For his service aboard the *SS Thomas Donaldson* and his previous merchant marine service Isidore Schaffer was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with two stars, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter. He would also have been eligible for the Soviet Commemorative Medal awarded in 1995 by the then Soviet Union to U.S. Merchant Mariners who sailed in the Murmansk convoys.

Isidore Schaffer, known as "Izzy" during his time at the Academy, was the third of Joseph Schaffer and Rose Schaffer's six sons. His older brothers were Meyer and Herman while his younger brothers were Roy, James and Harold. He also had an older sister, Florence. By 1940 Joseph Schaffer had died, leaving Rose Schaffer a widow. Her four oldest children, including Isidore all worked to support the family. Isidore's occupation is shown as being a helper in a metal trades company while attending his final year of high school.

The April, 1943 edition of "Polaris" described Isidore Schaffer upon his graduation;

"Isidore Schaffer hails from Brooklyn – 'nuf sed. Izzy is good natured and easy going. Loves music and plays the phonograph in his spare time. Remembers the time he aspired to become a taffy puller. Loves Academy life . . ."

On September 20, 2010 a wreath was laid over the site of the *SS Thomas Donaldson's* sinking by Russian sailors and crew members from the *USS Taylor (FFG 50)* to honor Isidore Schaffer and his two shipmates. The visit by the *USS Taylor* was part of ceremonies commemorating the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II. The *USS Taylor* was the first U.S. warship to visit Murmansk since 1945.