

Theodore Scharpf

Born: May 27, 1920
Hometown: Brooklyn, NY
Class: 1941 - USMMCC Cadet Officer
1940 - New York MMA
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: First Assistant Engineer
Date / Place of death: January 27, 1943 / 36-37N, 30-55W
Date / Place of burial: January 27, 1943 / Lost at Sea -- 36-37N, 30-55W
Age: 22



Theodore Scharpf entered New York Merchant Marine Academy in 1938 and was aboard its Training Ship, *SS Empire State* for its 1939 cruise to Europe and the Far East. Following his graduation in 1940, he sailed as Cadet Officer aboard the *SS Deltargentino* and *SS Veragua*. On September 13, 1941 he signed on aboard the *SS Lancaster* as Third Assistant Engineer and remained there through several voyages, including a voyage to Murmansk and back in Convoy PQ-15 and QP-13.

According to U.S. Coast Guard Records, Theodore Sharpf signed on aboard the *SS Charles C. Pinckney* on January 1, 1943. The ship sailed with convoy UGS-4 from Hampton Roads, Virginia on January 13, 1943 loaded with ammunition, a general cargo of war supplies and mechanized equipment bound for Casablanca. The *Charles Pinckney* was one of three ships, including the *SS City of Flint* and the *SS Julia Ward Howe*, which fell behind the convoy on January 21, 1943. All three ships, no longer protected by the convoy escort of six U.S. Navy destroyers, were sunk by U-boats.

On January 27th the *Charles C. Pinckney* was about 200 miles south-southwest of Fayal Island, Azores. During the morning the watch sighted a submarine far off on the horizon, traveling parallel to the *Charles C. Pinckney*, apparently at great speed. The gun crew fired a few shots at the submarine, but even at maximum elevation, these did not come close to their target. The *Charles C. Pinckney* then increased to its maximum speed of 11 knots.

Late in the afternoon, the *Charles C. Pinckney* changed its course to proceed directly away from the submarine, but the crew was unable to tell whether or not the submarine

followed. At about 2145 local time, the Chief Mate observed a torpedo, fired by U-514 heading directly for the ship, and ordered a hard right rudder, but the order came too late. The torpedo struck just behind the ship's bow. The explosion detonated part of cargo which blew off the bow and killed two men in the forward gun crew. On the Captain's order, the crew abandoned ship immediately, with all but one of the boats lowered successfully. The gun crew remained on the ship at great peril to their own lives, given the cargo of munitions on board. When the German submarine which had fired the torpedo later surfaced near the port beam, the gun crew fired on the sub. Although the gun crew claimed they sunk the submarine, it had actually made an emergency dive.



SS Charles S. Pinckney

Since the ship did not immediately sink, the crew re-boarded the ship to see if it could be repaired. After inspecting the ship's engines the Chief Engineer reported that it would not be possible to raise steam and continue sailing the ship. However, the crew was able to collect additional supplies, and send a distress signal. Around midnight U-514 fired two more torpedoes, the second torpedo hit the *Charles C. Pinckney*, causing the crew to abandon ship again. Soon thereafter U-514, approached the boats and questioned the survivors.

The four lifeboats began making for the Azores, but were unable to stay together in heavy seas during the second night. One lifeboat, carrying six crew members, including the Second Officer, and eight Naval Armed Guard Sailors, was picked up on February 8th by the Swiss ship *Caritas I*, and later landed at Horta, Fayal Island. The other three lifeboats were never seen again. Of the 73 persons aboard the *SS Charles C. Pinckney* (42 crew, 29 Naval Armed Guard, and 2 U.S. Army Security Officers), only these 14 were rescued. Theodore Scharpf, along with Cadet-Midshipmen Vincent Corrigan and Robert L. Lamac were among those lost.

Based on his service aboard the *SS Charles S. Pinckney*, and his previous merchant marine service, Theodore Scharpf was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the 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.

Theodore Scharpf was the youngest of Margaret Scharpf's two sons. Theodore's father died sometime in the 1920's. Emat, Theodore's older brother, was fifteen years older and employed as a bank examiner in 1930. The 1940 Census does not identify an occupation for either Theodore or his mother, although it appears that they had taken in a boarder.