

## Jack Norman Stadstad

Born: November 29, 1921  
Hometown: Garden City, NY  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: April 21, 1943 / 32-10S, 34-50E  
Date / Place of burial: April 21, 1943 / Lost at Sea --  
32-10S, 34-50E  
Age: 21



Jack N. Stadstad signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the *SS John Drayton* on October 7, 1942 at the Port of New York. Already on board were Cadet-Midshipmen Thomas Kellegrew (Deck) and Herman E. Rosen (Deck). Cadet-Midshipman Morton Deitz signed on two days later as Deck Cadet. The *John Drayton* sailed on October 12 from New York bound for Abadan, Iran via Cuba, the Panama Canal, Cape Horn and Durban, South Africa loaded with a general cargo of military supplies including canned goods, ammunition, tanks and aircraft. Upon arrival at Abadan on January 31, 1943, the *John Drayton* spent the next several months discharging its cargo there and at Khorramshahr. The ship, along with other ships bound from the Persian Gulf to Cape Town was part of convoy PB 34 which sailed from Bandar Abbas, Iran on April 4. On April 6 the Cape Town bound ships broke off from the convoy and sailed independently.

By the moonless evening of April 21, 1943 the *John Drayton* was approximately 275 miles east of Durban, South Africa. The Navy report on the sinking, based on the statements of the survivors, indicates that the crew reported a near miss by a torpedo across the bow at about 1700 GCT. Shortly thereafter the crew spotted what appeared to be two vessels on the horizon. The Master ordered the ship to turn away from the ships and to increase speed to emergency full ahead. However, the Master and Chief Mate determined after discussion that due to the ship's nearness to Durban that the ships were probably patrol vessels. The ship returned to its course and normal speed. Forty-five minutes after the crew reported the first miss by a torpedo another torpedo was seen to miss the ship but nothing was seen and the crew dismissed from General Quarters.

Roughly two hours after the first torpedo was sighted the ship turned to evade what appeared to be a surfaced submarine. Upon returning to course another torpedo, later determined to have been fired by the Italian submarine *Leonardo Da Vinci*, struck the *John Drayton* on the starboard side at #3 Lifeboat. Cadet-Midshipman Rosen, who was

on watch at the time, went with the Master to ascertain the extent of the damage. The abandon ship order was given almost immediately. Afterward, according to Rosen's report,

"The writer started down to the engine room to help Engine Cadet-Midshipman Jack Stadstad who was on watch, the Third Assistant Engineer or the oiler or fireman, but the smoke and steam prevented the writer from going down the ladder. Suddenly the fireman appeared on deck, covered from head to foot with oil and burns. The writer questioned him about the others and was told there was no hope for them."

According to the accounts of Rosen, Dietz and other survivors, the abandonment of the *John Drayton* in boats #1, #2 and #4 was orderly. Although the *John Drayton's* engines were destroyed, the ship was still afloat and apparently not sinking when the *Leonardo Da Vinci* surfaced and began firing on the *John Drayton* with its deck gun. Although none of the survivors witnessed the ship sink they all concluded the ship was sunk by gunfire.

The men in the #1 and #4 boats were all rescued in within a week of sinking. One boat with eleven survivors was rescued by the Swedish freighter *SS Oscar Gorthon* on April 23. The other boat, with the Master and thirteen other survivors were rescued on April 27 by *HMS Relentless (H85)*. Unfortunately, the men aboard the *John Drayton's* #2 boat, including Cadet-Midshipmen Dietz, Kellegrew and Rosen were not so lucky. By the time they were rescued on May 20 only eight out of 24 original survivors were still alive. Among the dead was Cadet-Midshipman Thomas Kellegrew. In all, 26 men out of the ship's crew of 56 (41 merchant and 15 Armed Guard) perished either in the sinking or its aftermath.

Cadet-Midshipman Jack N. Stadstad was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Pacific War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Jack N. Stadstad was the only son and youngest child of Ole Stadstad and Jessie Cavanah Stadstad. His big sister was Vesle. Although Jack was born in Long Beach, CA, by 1930 the two Stadstad children were living in Manhattan with the Loeser family, one of their mother's relatives. After spending Jack's earliest days in Manhattan, the Loeser and Stadstad families moved to Garden City, Long Island. The 1940 U.S. Census identifies Jessie Stadstad as a telephone operator.

Jack is recalled by his Niece, Ann Festermaker Olson, as a tall young man with a dry sense of humor, who was quick to make friends. His friends and classmates remember him as a natural athlete and an outstanding swimmer. According to Ann Olson, Jack Stadstad left a family that is uniformly proud of everything that Jack stood for in his character and actions.