

Charles Wallace Tamplin

Born: August 8, 1923
Hometown: Troy, OH
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 10, 1943 / 66-53N,
14-10W
Date / Place of burial: March 10, 1943 / Lost at Sea –
66-53N, 14-10W;
Memorial at Riverside Cemetery,
Troy, OH
Age: 19



Charles W. Tamplin signed on aboard the *SS Richard Bland* as Deck Cadet on April 17, 1942 at Philadelphia, PA. He was joined by his classmate Cadet-Midshipman Arthur J. Gradus who also signed on as Deck Cadet. Although the *Richard Bland* was originally assigned to the infamous Convoy PQ-17 bound for Murmansk, Russia, the ship apparently ran aground shortly after leaving port and was towed back for repairs. After completing the necessary repairs the ship subsequently sailed to deliver its cargo to Murmansk with Convoy JW-51A which arrived in Kola Inlet, Russia without the loss of a single ship, on December 25, 1942.



SS Richard Bland

After discharging its cargo the *Richard Bland*, loaded with 4,000 tons of lumber, general cargo and deck cargo sailed from Kola Inlet on March 1, 1943 with the other ships of Convoy RA-53, bound for Loch Ewe, Scotland. At about 0930 local time, March 5,

1943 U-255 fired three torpedoes at the convoy. Two torpedoes hit the *SS Executive*, sinking the ship. The third torpedo fired by U-255 hit the *Richard Bland* on the starboard side at #1 hold, passed through the hold, and out the other side of the ship. This caused the deck to crack and other structural damage. Although the ship did not sink, the impact of the torpedo partially disabled the ship, leaving her unable to keep up with the convoy for several hours. The *Richard Bland* was only able to briefly re-join the convoy before heavy weather, combined with difficulties with its steering gear, caused the ship to become a straggler again.

At about 1530 local time on March 10, U-255 found the *Richard Bland* again, about 35 miles off the coast of Langanes, Iceland. The *Bland* was hit by one torpedo on the port side at the Number 4 hatch, but remained afloat. Although the boats were lowered to their embarkation stations, the ship was not abandoned. A distress signal was sent and acknowledged by a shore station, and the ship's confidential papers were thrown overboard. The Captain decided to lower the windward boats to see if they could be brought around to the leeward side of the ship should they be needed. However, the four men in each boat were unable to bring them alongside in the heavy seas. The Armed Guard remained at their stations, but after an initial periscope sighting astern, nothing more was seen of the submarine. The Master requested the gun crews to stand down, hoping the submarine would leave them alone. This tactic was fruitless as at about 1835, local time, the *Richard Bland* was hit amidships by another torpedo from U-255. The explosion broke the ship in half, just forward of the bridge.

As the ship began to break up the Captain ordered the two remaining lifeboats lowered and life rafts launched. There were heavy seas at the time of the attack, as well as intermittent snow, and several life rafts were lost as the crew attempted to launch them. The nearly 60 remaining crew and Armed Guard quickly abandoned ship into lifeboats, designed to hold 20 persons each. One survivor, Lt (j.g.) William A. Carter, USNR, reported that his boat was so overloaded that they had only a few inches of freeboard.

After a long night in a cramped lifeboat in high seas, 27 survivors in the boat commanded by the Third Mate were picked up by the *HMS Impulsive (D11)* at about 0730 the following morning. The *Impulsive* also rescued one of the windward boats and its crew of four while another destroyer rescued the other boat and its crew of four. The last lifeboat, under the command of the Master was never seen again. Of a total crew of 69, 35 survived. Fifteen Armed Guard and nineteen merchant crew members were killed, including Cadet-Midshipmen Charles Tamplin and Arthur Gradus.

Cadet-Midshipman Charles W. Tamplin was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Charles Tamplin was the youngest child of Harry Halfield Tamplin and Erma Parke Tamplin. Charles' brother, Parke, was three years older. The boy's big sister, Caroline, was eleven years older than Charles. Tragically, Erma died on August 8, 1923 while giving birth to Charles. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Harry Tamplin re-married

about a year after Erma's death. The two boys were raised by their step-mother, Gladys H. Tamplin, no doubt with the help of their sister Caroline. Harry Tamplin's occupation is listed in the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Census as being a real estate and insurance broker. Charles Tamplin's nephew, also named Charles, provided the following biography of him based on Charles Tamplin's letters home in 1942 and 1943.

"Charles placed family relations high on his priority list. He was popular with the opposite sex and managed to find a girl in each of his locations. During his initial basic training at Kings Point he was a sought after guest for Long Island dinner parties and dances. Charles attended the Methodist Church and found his contact with religion to be a support for the activities of his life.

He applied himself to his studies and was always making extra effort. He was a favorite of the instructors who saw him as a willing student. He enjoyed music and looked forward to quality concerts that time and circumstances allowed him to attend.

Charles maintained a close connection with his family members and was always responsive to their wishes! His correspondence to his family was frequent and voluminous. He found time to construct his letters so that they were interesting to the reader. Perhaps we could say that he was willing to behave towards others as if receiving a great guest."



**Charles W. Tamplin Memorial
Riverside Cemetery, Troy, OH**