

## John Paul Tucek, Jr.

Born: August 8, 1922  
Hometown: Rutherford, NJ  
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



John P. Tucek signed on aboard the *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 James Rowley (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*.

At 0810 the *SS James Sprunt's* cargo of explosives blew up with extraordinary force, disintegrating completely. 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 been 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 19<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> and was destroyed on March 10, 1943.

Cadet-Midshipman John P. Tucek was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

John Paul Tucek, Jr. was the son of John Paul Tucek, Sr. and Rose June Tucek. He graduated from high school in Rutherford, New Jersey in 1941 where he was the Captain and star of his high school football team during his senior year. A passenger list on file in New York indicates that John and his mother took a trip to Curacao in 1934 aboard *SS Astrea*, so he was no stranger to the sea. John attended Washington and Lee University after graduation. After one year there, he decided to apply for admission to Kings Point in June 1942 and reported for his initial training in October 1942.