

## Robert Charles Vancure

Born: October 27, 1919  
Hometown: Youngstown, OH  
Class: 1944  
Service: Merchant Marine  
Position / Rank: Engine Cadet  
Date / Place of death: January 9, 1943 / 56-15N, 22W  
Date / Place of burial: January 9, 1943 / Lost at Sea -  
- 56-15N, 22W  
Age: 23



Robert Vancure signed on aboard the *SS Louise Lykes* as Engine Cadet on October 18, 1942 at New York, NY. He was joined by three other Kings Point Cadet-Midshipmen, Charles Gassner (Deck), Allen Miller (Deck) and Eugene Walters (Deck). In addition, the ship's Third Assistant Engineer, Frederick Baumann and Third Mate, Harry Wolfe, were former U.S. Maritime Commission Cadet Officers. The *Louise Lykes* made one voyage to the Mediterranean and returned to New York on December 12, 1942. A fifth Cadet-Midshipman, Marion Chrobak (Engine) joined the ship for its next voyage. The ship sailed on January 2, 1943 loaded with general cargo and ammunition bound for Belfast, Northern Ireland. For unknown reasons the ship did not sail in a convoy and was not escorted. On January 9, 1943 the ship was in mid-Atlantic several hundred miles south of Iceland.

On the evening of January 9, 1943, U-384 located the solitary ship and fired four



**SS Louise Lykes**

torpedoes while surfaced. Two torpedoes hit the ship which, according to German Navy records, disintegrated in a massive explosion. The captain of the U-384 reported that he had to submerge the submarine to prevent damage from falling debris. When the submarine re-surfaced 5 minutes later there was no sign of the ship or its crew. There were no other witnesses to the disaster, and there were no survivors among the 50 merchant crew, 34 Naval Armed Guard, and 10 U.S. Army personnel aboard, including the five Cadet-Midshipmen and two Cadet Officers. This was the single deadliest sinking in the Academy's history. .

Cadet-Midshipman Robert C. Vancure was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Robert C. "Bob" Vancure was the eldest of Charles E. Vancure and Henrietta Bingham Vancure's five children. Bob had three brothers, John, William and Thomas. His little sister, Dorothy, remembered Bob as being very protective of her and his two younger brothers. Dorothy remembers that Bob always had some kind of part time job to help out with the family finances and to maintain his Model T Ford. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Bob was working as a machinist in a local steel mill. His sister said that he was training to follow in his father's footsteps as a tool and die maker. However, when the war came his interest in ships and the sea led him to his training as an engineer at the Merchant Marine Academy. Dorothy specifically recalls,

"He was always cheerful, upbeat and positive. He had a sense of humor that infected the lives of all who were a part of his short life."