

Frederick Cowper Whitehead, Jr.

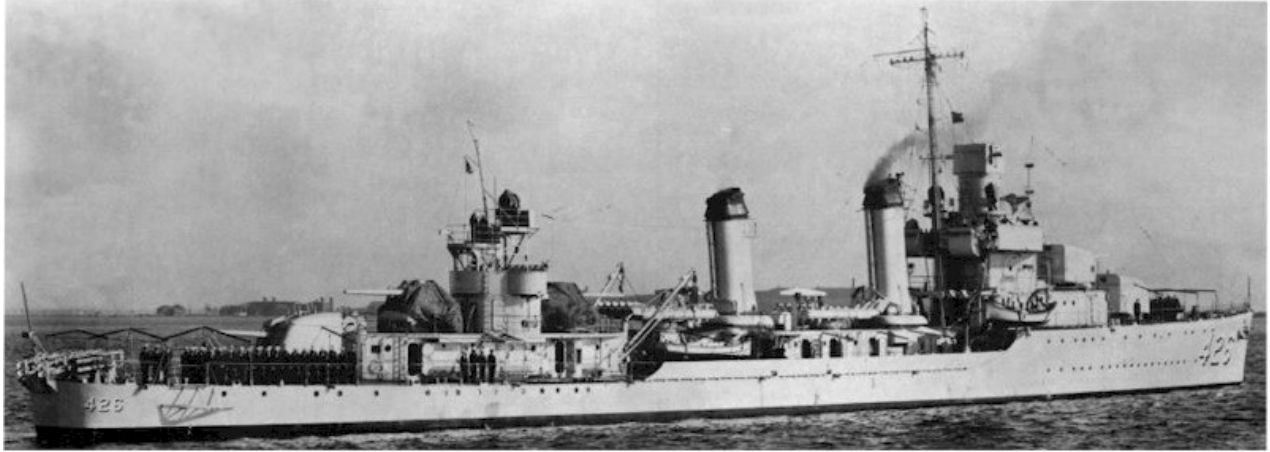
Born: December 16, 1918
Hometown: Roanoke, VA
Class: 1943
Service: USNR
Position / Rank: Asst. Engineering Officer /
Ensign
Date / Place of death: April 20, 1944 /
Mediterranean
Date / Place of burial: April 20, 1944 / Lost at Sea
– Mediterranean;
Tablets of the Missing at North Africa American Cemetery,
Carthage, Tunisia
Age: 25



Frederick C. Whitehead was sworn in as a Midshipman, USNR, at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy on September 18, 1942. Just a few weeks later, on October 6, 1942, he signed on as Engine Cadet aboard the passenger ship *SS Santa Paula*, which was serving as a U.S. Army Troop Transport. He completed his at sea training aboard the *Santa Paula* on April 5, 1943 and returned to Kings Point to complete his education.

On December 24, 1943 Frederick C. Cowper, along with his classmates in Section A-240, graduated from Kings Point. After a few weeks of leave he was sworn in as an Ensign, U.S. Naval Reserve on January 15, 1944. He reported to the U.S. Navy Supervisor of Shipbuilding, New York, NY on January 20, 1944 for further assignment. One week later he was assigned to the destroyer *USS Lansdale (DD 426)*, a *USS Benson (DD 421)* Class Destroyer, then on duty in the Mediterranean. U.S. Navy records indicate that Ensign Whitehead reported aboard the *Lansdale* on March 26, 1944 at Oran.

Between April 10 and April 20, 1943 the *USS Lansdale* was assigned to escort convoys along the north coast of Africa from Oran to Bizerte, in the face of determined air and submarine attacks, including attacks by German radio controlled bombs, the first so called “smart” bombs. On April 18, 1944, the *Lansdale* sailed from Oran to join convoy UGS-38, bound for Bizerte. Because the *Lansdale* was equipped with equipment to “jam” the radio frequencies the Germans used to control their smart bombs, the *Lansdale* was assigned to the convoy’s port (seaward) forward corner.



USS Lansdale (DD 426)

On April 20th, the convoy was making way past Cape Benegut off the Algerian coast. As twilight came, about two dozen German JU 88 and HE 111 bombers armed with torpedoes attacked the convoy in three successive waves. The first wave destroyed the SS *Paul Hamilton*, killing Kings Point Cadet-Midshipman Edward Zapletal and everyone else aboard.



Destruction of SS Paul Hamilton

The *Lansdale*, silhouetted by the explosion of the SS *Paul Hamilton*, was targeted by several aircraft from the second and third waves of German planes. In the ensuing action the *Lansdale*'s gunners shot down two attacking planes while the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander D. M. Swift, dodged torpedoes launched by others. However, the *Lansdale* could not dodge all of the torpedoes. At 2106 the *Lansdale* was hit on the

starboard side at the Forward Fireroom, where Ensign Whitehead, the Assistant Engineering Officer, was on duty. All of the crew in the Forward Fireroom, including Ensign Frederick C. Whitehead, are believed to have died instantly. The ship took an immediate list to port and began circling clockwise due to jammed steering gear.

Despite the best efforts of the crew the, *Lansdale*'s port list increased to 80° at which point the Commanding Officer ordered the crew to abandon ship. When the survivors were mustered, 47 men, including Ensign Whitehead were missing and presumed dead.

Ensign Frederick C. Whitehead, USNR was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and European-African-Middle East Area Campaign Medal. Based on his merchant marine service as a Cadet-Midshipman, he was also awarded the Atlantic War Zone Bar, Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Frederick C. "Fred" Cowper was the oldest of Frederick Cowper Whitehead and Myrtle Lee Whitehead's three sons. Fred's little brothers were John and Richard. According to the 1940 U.S. Census, and city directories, Frederick Sr. was employed as an engineer for the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company. The 1941 year book of High Point College (now High Point University), lists Fred Cowper Whitehead as a member of the school's Sophomore class.
