

Edwin Parslow Wiggin

Born: July 9, 1924
Hometown: Quicksand, KY
Class: 1944
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Deck Cadet
Date / Place of death: March 11, 1943 / 51-35N,
28-30W
Date / Place of burial: March 11, 1943 / Lost at Sea –
51-35N, 28-30W
Age: 18



Edwin P. Wiggin signed on aboard the *SS William C. Gorgas* as Deck Cadet in Mobile, AL on January 27, 1943, shortly after the ship was delivered to the War Shipping Administration from its builder. Joining Cadet-Midshipman Wiggin were three of his classmates, James Cordua, Edwin Hanzik and James Moon. Already aboard was the ship's Third Mate, 1942 alumnus Rafael R. Riveria. On March 10, 1943 the *Gorgas* was traveling in convoy HX-228, en route from New York to Liverpool, loaded with general cargo, including 900 tons of explosives and a deck cargo of an LCT and two PT Boats. The ship carried a crew of 41 merchant mariners and 26 Naval Armed Guard Sailors.

At around 2030 on March 10, another ship in the convoy was torpedoed, and the general alarm was sounded. The crew remained on alert, with the Naval Armed Guard manning the battle stations. The weather was hazy, with moderate to heavy swells and ten to fifteen knot winds in bright moonlight. At 2330, the *Gorgas* was hit on the starboard side amidships by a torpedo fired by U-757. The explosion destroyed the engine room, instantly killing the three engineers on watch. The master ordered the crew to abandon ship. By 2350, when 51 survivors in lifeboats and rafts had left the ship, snow had begun falling in higher winds. The U-757 located one of the boats and questioned the survivors. Shortly thereafter the submarine found the ship still afloat and fired another torpedo to sink it. Immediately after the ship settled under the waves it's ammunition cargo exploded, damaging U-757 so much that it was unable to dive. The submarine was escorted on the surface back to France by another submarine.

The *Gorgas'* survivors 51 survivors were picked up at about 0700 on March 11th by the destroyer *HMS Harvester (H 19)*. Shortly after rescuing the *Gorgas'* survivors, the *Harvester* sighted U-444 on the surface. Although the submarine dove to escape the

Harvester's gunfire, a depth charge attack brought the submarine to the surface. It is unclear why the *Harvester's* commander made his decision, but U-444 was rammed at full speed by the *Harvester*, severely damaging both ships.

Although U-444 was able to break free of the *Harvester*, it was rammed again and sunk by the Free French corvette *Aconit (K 58)*. However, the almost motionless *Harvester* was easy prey for U-432 who fired two torpedoes, quickly sinking the destroyer with nearly all of its crew and 39 of the *Gorgas's* survivors. The *Aconit* was immediately on scene attacking the U-432 with depth charges and forcing it to the surface. The *Aconit* fired at the surfaced submarine and then rammed it, sending the U-432, and all but 20 of its crew to the bottom. With this vital task accomplished, the *Aconit* rescued twelve *Gorgas* survivors, 48 survivors of *HMS Harvester*, and 24 German Sailors.



Launching of SS William C. Gorgas

After the *Harvester* sank, the Master of the *Gorgas*, James Calvin Ellis Jr., was seen by some of the survivors floating in a life ring in the cold seas. When he was offered a place on a life raft by one of the seamen, he declined, telling the man to keep his place. Soon after, he lost his grip on the life ring and was lost in the icy waters.

Cadet-Midshipman Edwin Wiggin, his three U.S. Merchant Marine Academy classmates and 1942 graduate Rafael R. Ramirez were among those lost. It is believed that all five survived the initial attack, but were lost in the subsequent sinking of *HMS Harvester*. He was posthumously awarded the Mariners Medal, Combat Bar with star, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal, and the Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Edwin P. Wiggin was the son of Gilbert Henry "Bertie" Wiggin and Mabel Helen O'Dell Wiggin. At some point before attending Kings Point he attended the University of Kentucky where he is listed on their roll of World War II dead.