

Fulton Edison Yewell, Jr.

Born: September 28, 1921
Hometown: Baltimore, MD
Class: 1943
Service: Merchant Marine
Position / Rank: Second Mate
Date / Place of death: December 2, 1943 / Bari, Italy
Date / Place of burial: December 2, 1943 / Lost at Sea –
Bari, Italy
Age: 22



Fulton E. Yewell entered the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Corps on July 11, 1941 when he reported to the Cadet School at Fort Schuyler, NY. However, he did not receive a Naval Reserve appointment due to his “. . . inability to meet naval physical requirements.” Despite this setback, his performance at the Cadet School as of August 30, 1941 was noted as being “Superior”. During his at sea training Fulton served aboard the *SS Cranford* until it was torpedoed by U-155 on July 30, 1942. He returned to Kings Point as a member of the “Tin Fish Club” wearing the Combat Bar with Star and Atlantic War Zone Bar.

After graduation from Kings Point with Section A-105, Fulton Yewell signed on as Third Mate aboard the *SS John L. Motley* at Baltimore, MD on June 4, 1943, shortly after it was delivered from its builders, Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipbuilding, to the War Shipping Administration. Also joining the ship on the same day were Cadet-Midshipmen Edward Howard (Deck Cadet) and Jay Litton (Engine Cadet). The *John L. Motley* made one voyage to the Mediterranean and returned to New York from Oran in mid-September 1943. Coast Guard Records show that Fulton Yewell was promoted to Second Mate and signed on it that capacity on October 16, 1943. After loading a cargo of ammunition, the *John L. Motley* sailed on its second voyage to the Mediterranean, reaching the crowded harbor of Bari, Italy on November 28, 1943.

On December 2, 1943 the *John L. Motley* was moored alongside the jetty at Bari, Italy discharging its cargo when a massive German air attack on the port took defenders by surprise. The attack and ensuing explosions sank seventeen ships and put the harbor out of use for three weeks. This attack become known as “Little Pearl Harbor”.

A Naval Armed Guard member on the *SS John Bascom*, moored next to the *John L. Motley*, reported that the *John L. Motley* sustained three bomb hits, one in the Number



Explosion of Either John L. Motley or SS John Harvey at Bari, Italy

5 hold, one in the Number 3 hold, and one down the vessel's stack. The crew was able to control the fires caused by the first strike, but after the second hit, the fires on board raged out of control, burning through the vessel's mooring lines, and setting her adrift. The subsequent explosion of the Motley's cargo killed everyone on board, including Fulton E. Yewell, Jr., and Cadet-Midshipmen Edward D. Howard and Jay F. Litton.

However, the damage caused by German bombs to the *John L. Motley* did not end there. The explosion on the *John Motley* set off a chain reaction on the nearby *SS John Harvey*, which was carrying a secret cargo of mustard gas munitions. The *John Harvey*, which had already been hit and was on fire, disintegrated when the *Motley* exploded, releasing deadly mustard gas into the air and water around the vessel. The death toll in Bari was more than 1,000 civilians and Allied seamen. Six Kings Point cadets were lost, on three different vessels. Thousands more seamen and civilians sustained serious injuries caused by the exposure to mustard gas. The effect of these injuries was exacerbated by the fact that doctors in the area didn't realize they were treating mustard gas victims.

Upon his death Fulton E. Yewell had earned, or was posthumously awarded, the Mariner's Medal, the Combat Bar with two stars, Atlantic War Zone Bar, the Mediterranean - Middle East War Zone Bar, the Victory Medal and Presidential Testimonial Letter.

Fulton E. Yewell, was the only son of Fulton E. Yewell, Sr. and Rose Delano Yewell. Baltimore City Directories from the 1920's indicate that Fulton Sr. was a builder. However, the couple were divorced some time in the 1920's. The 1930 U.S. Census shows that Fulton and his mother were living with Fulton's uncle, John S. Delano, a Chesapeake Bay pilot. By 1940, according to that year's U.S. Census, Fulton's mother was married to William M. Burich and Fulton is listed as Mr. Burich's stepson. Mr. Burich worked as a salesman for a local dairy.

The April, 1943 edition of "Polaris" described Fulton Yewell upon his graduation;

"'Steamboat' is famous for the speed with which he completes his examinations. Famed for his double-jointedness, being able to bend in any direction. Can turn around and look himself over. Is opposed to everything traditional and loudly makes it known."