On May 30, 2016 at the American Legion 721 book signing I met Mr. Mike Lavin who told me he was the nephew of one of the warriors, John “Jack” Lavin. After a follow up note, Mike sent the following information regarding Jack.

**John B. Lavin**

**Service Record**

Jack enlisted in the Coast Guard on Feb. 26, 1943. According to my father, his uncle John Dunford, who was serving in the U.S. Navy shore patrol (stationed in Buffalo), recommended that Jack enlist in the Coast Guard. On his enlistment form, there is a notation “does not want COTP.” This stands for “Captain of the Port,” which is the Coast Guard officer responsible for enforcing safety and security of the vessels, harbors, and facilities in their assigned zone. The Buffalo Coast Guard Station was (and still is) a COTP zone. This notation may have meant that Jack did not want to be assigned to Buffalo, or it may have meant that he was not interested in domestic harbor duty at any location. The actual reason for this notation is unknown, but may have related to advice given by the recruiter or by his uncle John.

Jack traveled immediately to New York City (presumably by train) and was assigned to active duty on March 5, 1943 as an Able Seaman. In his enlistment papers, Jack indicated he wanted to serve in the military police. After basic training, this was changed to storekeeper. Neither of these choices took place.

He trained at the Manhattan Beach Training Station (MBTS) in Brooklyn, which was the largest Coast Guard training facility in the nation. At the time, Coast Guard basic training lasted 8 weeks, often followed by advanced training specific to the seaman’s eventual assignment. Jack was stationed at MBTS from March 5 to May 29, 1943.

I discovered a narrative report from another Coast Guard recruit who described his experiences in Manhattan Beach’s boot camp a year later, in April 1944. We can assume that Jack’s experience was similar. In addition to the standard regimen of
physical training, close order drill, and instruction in military procedures and protocols, Manhattan Beach trainees learned seamanship, knot-tying, water safety, rowing, firefighting, and semaphore. They also worked on several training vessels, including the land-locked USCGC Neversail. The author of this narrative (Ted A. Morris) also describes exercises where the trainees dove into burning water to simulate a sinking ship.

Following basic training, Jack was transferred to a barracks at the New York Receiving Station for a few days (May 29 to June 2, 1943), awaiting a permanent assignment. He was then assigned to the Bellport Coast Guard Station in the Moriches area of Long Island, where his principal duty was “Beach Patrol.” At this time, he was promoted to Seaman 2nd Class, which was standard practice upon completing basic training. On the first few days of his new assignment, he apparently received additional training at the nearby Forge River Lifeboat Station (June 3 through June 5) on Fire Island.

Jack served on beach patrol duty at Bellport for slightly more than a year, from June 1943 until June 19, 1944. According to my father, at times Jack patrolled the beach on horseback. (It is possible Jack received this assignment because his recruitment papers indicated he had some experience in horseback riding as a hobby.) Beach Patrol was actually an important responsibility because of German U-Boat sightings in the area and because Nazi spies (soon captured) had landed on Long Island’s Amagansett beach a year earlier, on June 12, 1942.

From June 19 through June 28, 1944, Jack was transferred to the Long Beach Barracks, also on Long Island, near Far Rockaway. At this time he received his second promotion, to Seaman 1st Class.

On June 28, 1944, Jack was transferred again to the New York Coast Guard Receiving Station, where he remained through October 31. During this period, he received extensive training in various locations:

- A ten-day course in functional swimming (at a NYC hotel)
- A cargo-loading course (at Pier 19 in NYC)
- Lookout and night-vision training (Tompkinsville, NY)
- Unnamed training (in Prices Neck, RI)

Following this training, he obtained a ten-day leave, after which he reported to his new assignment. On November 2, 1944, Jack was transferred to a troop transport ship, the U.S.S. General W.P. Richardson (AP-118). He remained on this duty until the time of his death, May 4, 1945.

The Richardson was a new vessel, built by the Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in Kearney, New Jersey. The ship was launched on August 6, 1944 and commissioned on November 2, 1944, the date Jack was transferred. It was P2-S2-R2 type AP personnel transport, U.S. Navy ships operated by the Coast Guard. These ships were 622 feet long and carried approximately 4,200 troops and 533
crewmembers. They were armed with four 5" guns and four 1" quad anti-aircraft guns. The U.S.S. General W.P. Richardson (AP-118) was named after a WWI general.

According to the ship’s official history, Jack made four round-trip trans-Atlantic crossings before his death:

Dec 10, 1944—Jan. 4, 1945
  Returned to New York Jan. 4

Jan. 15, 1945.--Feb. 9, 1945
  Newport News, VA to Naples, Italy, arriving January 25
  Returned to Newport News, February 9

February 18, 1945—March 21, 1945
  Newport News, VA to Naples, Italy, arriving March 1
  On to Marseilles, France
  Back to Naples, arriving March 9
  Returned to Boston, March 21

Late March/early April 1945—April 28, 1945
  To LeHavre, France
  On to Southampton, England
  Returned to New York, arriving April 28, 1925

Jack died in New York City on May 4, 1945 (right before VE DAY), in what the Coast Guard listed as “accidental death.”

According to his military record, Jack took three leaves during his 2+ years of active duty. According to my father, he spent each of these leaves visiting his family in Buffalo.

- Jan 25-Feb. 3 1944 (8 days) while stationed at Bellport.
- Oct 7-Oct 18, 1944 (10 days) prior to reporting to the USS Richardson
- Feb 9-Feb 16, 1945 (6 days) between his 3rd and 4th trans-Atlantic crossings

Throughout his service, Jack appeared to be a good Coast Guardsman, with proficiency ratings in all four categories consistently in the range of 2.8 to 3.3. His conduct ratings were always 4.0.

He was an Able Seaman from enlistment to June 5, 1943
Seaman 2nd class from then until June 12, 1944
Seaman 1st class from then until death

My father, James R. Lavin, Jr. served in the 66th Infantry Division (The Black Panthers), which shipped over to England on December 10, 1944. My father was in combat in
Europe at the time of his brother’s death and he did not learn of it until sometime in July. Dad had been transferred to the 42nd Infantry Division (Rainbow Division. He always regretted that he was unable to attend Jack’s funeral.

**Brief Biography**

**Birth Date:** July 20, 1923

**Death Date:** May 4, 1945

**Age at Death:** 21; almost 22.

**Nickname:** Jack; Jackie (His middle name is the maiden name of his maternal grandmother (Mary Dunford).

**Parents**

- **Father:** James R. Lavin, Sr.
- **Mother:** Margaret Wagner (nee Dunford)

**Place of Birth:** Buffalo, NY

**Siblings**

- **Brother:** James R. Lavin, Jr.
- **Half-brothers:** George F. Wagner, Jr.
  - Robert Wagner

**Occupation**

Between high school graduation and the military, Jack worked as a baggage handler for the New York Central Rail Road, at the downtown terminal. His enlistment contract said “mail clerk,” but that may be a mistake. His initial Coast Guard Personnel Qualification Card (dated 3/24/43) says he drove an “electric baggage truck” for the NYCRR and had been employed for ¾ of a year. A subsequent version of the form, dated 8/3/43 (after his basic training), stated he was a “mail clerk” for the NYCRR, “preparing incoming and outgoing mail for distribution,” employed for half a year. He may have performed both tasks while working at the railroad terminal. As a kid, he had a paper route with the Courier-Express. During high school, he worked as a golf caddy in the summers. He may also have worked as a theater usher at the Shea’s Great Lakes Theater, but I’m not sure about that.

**Physical Description**
Enlistment contract indicates height at 5’8’, weight 163 pounds, hair and eyes brown, with a “ruddy” complexion. Other forms from the Coast Guard cite slightly different height and weight: 5’7” or 5’9” and 156 pounds or 160 pounds.

Cause of Death

Jack was run over by a NYC subway train under questionable circumstances at the Delancy Street/Bowery Station. Authorities identified the body by “papers in his pockets.” Military records say “Accidental death while on authorized liberty.” His family believes he was mugged after winning a large sum of money in a poker or craps game. That evening he called his mother to tell her of his winnings and to let her know he would wire money home. Per his obituary, Jack had been home on leave the previous week. Although this does not appear on his military record, it seems likely, because he had been granted leave following the other Atlantic crossings.

Hobbies

Per my Dad, Jack was an excellent swimmer; in the summer he would swim from Tifft Street out to the breakwall in the harbor. CG Personnel Qualification Card lists hobby as “swimming” and states “has ridden in horse riding club.”
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