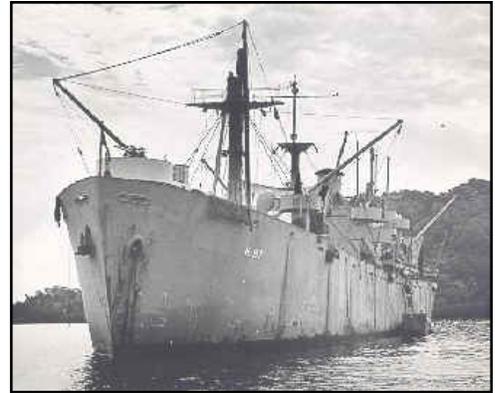


On This Day in Coast Guard History – 16 NOV 2005

In 1950-A dedication of the monument erected in Arlington National Cemetery on the gravesite of those who lost their lives on the night of 29 January 1945, when USS SERPENS was destroyed off Lunga Beach, Guadalcanal. This was the largest single disaster suffered by the US Coast Guard in World War II. Among the dead were 193 Coast Guardsmen (176 reservists), 56 Army personnel and one United States Public Health Service member. Their remains were reinterred at Arlington National Cemetery a few years later and an octagon-shaped monument now marks the largest group burial at Arlington.



USS SERPENS (AK-97) a "Liberty"-type cargo ship was commissioned in May 1943 with a Coast Guard crew. She served in the South Pacific and was modified in late 1944 for the transportation of ammunition.

For More Information

The 250 remains were originally buried at the Army, Navy and Marine Cemetery in Guadalcanal with full military honors and religious services. The remains were repatriated under the program for the return of World War II dead in 1949. About 1,500 people attended the reinterment service on Wednesday, June 15, 1949. A witness described it as "one of the most elaborate military services accorded our fallen heroes... Words would have been inadequate to express the deep gratitude and admiration...in the hearts of [all] who witnessed the service."

The USS SERPENS Monument was dedicated on Thursday, November 16, 1950 at 2:00 PM. The octagonal monument occupies two grave spaces in section 34. About 100 relatives and 200 others attended the dedication. Participating units included a color guard from US Coast Guard Cutter DUANE, a color guard from The Old Guard at Fort Myer, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant chaplains, and The United States Army Band (Pershing's Own). Vice Admiral Merlin O'Neill, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard gave a brief address. "We cannot undo the past,... but we can insure... that these men shall be respected and honored forever."



http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/casualties_uss_serpens.html