



### **Seaman Wilbur E "Dusty" Rhodes**

On February 28, 1942 the USS Jacob Jones, with 125 officers and crewmen was torpedoed by a German Submarine U-578. Of the 125 only 11 U.S. Navy men survived - sadly for his hometown of Mercer, PA, "Dusty" Rhodes was not one of those survivors.

Wilbur "Dusty" Rhodes enlisted in the U. S. Navy in 1939 at the age of 22. During World War II he served as a gun pointer, Seaman First Class aboard the USS Jacob Jones DD 130, a destroyer stationed in the Atlantic area. In 1941 the convoy escort was assigned to anti-submarine patrols of the East coast of the United States. On February 28, 1942, while patrolling 26 miles off the coast of Cape May, New Jersey, the John Jacob took two direct torpedo hits. Many of the crew were killed instantly - Seaman Rhodes stepped up to the plate and took command of the chaotic scene, restoring order on the ship as it was sinking. Adolph Storm, Stafford, CT delivered the eulogy for Seaman Rhodes' funeral and is quoted as saying "...He brought order on the boat, and stood by giving directions. The last I saw of him, he was still standing there on the deck telling others to man the life boats or jump overboard..... I heard an explosion and saw a sheet of flame....I went overboard as the ship went down with "Dusty" shouting orders". He was one of the first two Mercer County victims of World War II, along with John R. Huff of Grove City.

Seaman Rhodes was awarded a Gold Medal in the 1941 Newport Naval base 135-pound wrestling championship. He was a wrestling and football star at Mercer High School under the coaching of Coach Bill Crowell.

Seaman Rhodes was born in 1916 to Wilbur E & Mae Williams Rhodes and grew up in Mercer with his brothers Ernest and James and a sister, Frances. Former Mercer Mayor, John G. "Jerry" Johnson remembers Rhodes as an outstanding athlete and a well liked young man". For years the Wilbur Rhodes Veterans of Foreign Wars Post awarded a trophy to a young athlete in his memory.