

## American Merchant Marine Veterans Convention Speech March 30, 2016

You honor me by asking me to speak to-day -

I admire what this organization has done and continues to do. You bring veterans together in a sense of fraternity and I am personally indebted to you for bringing our stories forward and thank you also, for reminding us of our fellow Merchant Mariners who have crossed the bar.

I trust you were not offended that I choose to call my remarks today - **Hell No, We Won't Go Away** - we need a clarion call to enlighten others - to plant seeds of information to replace misinformation- and yet, while harboring no malice towards those who do not know, -- or those who take actions or impede the actions of others by simply not knowing - and - not realizing what they do not know.

Here is the story from my perception, I was born in August 1928. In 1929, the stock market collapsed, on a day which was called black Friday. And we entered into the worst depression that our country has ever experienced. In 1933, the banks closed. People lost their homes and savings.

WW - II began in Europe and Asia in the early 30's. In 1938, President Roosevelt established the US Maritime Service. He believed that we would be drawn into a war and that we would need ships to carry goods and troops to foreign ports throughout the world. The Maritime Service would be the training ground. -- I was at that point 10 years old. - History proves the idea had great purpose - and - Merchant Mariners are proof that the idea worked --- **"They gave us the goods and we delivered."**

The US Maritime Service eventually recruited and trained 250,000 men; most of them in their teens. Many of the early recruits came from the Civilian Conservation Corp. Another product of the Roosevelt administration, which provided jobs and a learning environment for young men. The pay was approximately \$17 a month. Most of which went to their families each month as an allotment. They repaired roads, bridges, federal and municipal buildings, did maintenance on the many waterways in the US. Sadly their story is virtually unknown to younger generations.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The U.S. declared war on Japan – and a few days later Italy and Germany declared war on the United States. In that turbulent period, the U.S. Maritime began training thousands to become Merchant Mariners. Trained in military style camps, provided with uniforms that emulated the Navy and the Coast Guard, structured under US Navy regulations; mandated and managed by the US Coast Guard. Their recruiting stations were centered in key cities, with boot camps in the North and South and on the West Coast. Officer training was done in a variety of places and President Roosevelt's concept was fulfilling its promise of men and ships.

When that war started, I was 13 years old. I lived in the inner city of Philadelphia and I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was or why our Navy was at Pearl Harbor or even where that was.

The die was already cast. German U-boats patrolled the Atlantic, off the East coast of the US. -- Ships that traversed this long sea-lane were sunk mercilessly by German U-boats. They had developed the technique of standing miles offshore just beyond the sea-lanes. The lights of our major seacoast cities created silhouettes of our ships that could be identified by U-boat captains, and became easy targets. The

majority of the ships sunk were merchant ships. In the beginning of WWII, the ships were unarmed; --there was no armed guard and no convoys to escort them.

The truth of the carnage which took place in those sea-lanes was not made public. The government did not want the American people to know how vulnerable our coastlines were; or how badly the war was going; and all of this -- occurred right off the coast of some of the most populated areas of the US. -- How come this is not part of the education of those who make our laws - those who teach our children or those who write our history?

**In 1944, I was 15 years of age**, because I had skipped two grades, I was a junior in high school. My friends were 2 and 3 years older. Most of us were emotionally participating in the fervor of American patriotism. My closest friends were going to war, and I wanted to go also. On a falsified birth certificate, I attempted to enlist in the Navy. I completed the physical and waited to hear back from them, only to be notified; that they had discovered my duplicity and my enlistment was declined. Near the Naval recruiting station, was a US Maritime recruiting station. Those on duty dressed no differently than those at the US Navy. The enlisted men wore whites with a white sailor's hat. The officers dressed in dark blue with gold braid.

This time through the help of a friend, I did better at falsifying my birth certificate. Eventually, I was sworn in after a physical and other data. A week later, I arrived at the Philadelphia train terminal and along with others, took a train to New York City and then via bus was taken to Sheepshead Bay, the US Maritime Service training camp. There was a military gate; we were marched in, in civilian clothes and within two hours, we were showered and reclothed. We took an oath of allegiance and we were officially in the US Maritime Service. This

began for me a significant emotional and educational experience. One that influenced a wayward teenager to become disciplined in a character molding time of life and despite what eventually happened, I am ever grateful for the experience.

That day was 72 years ago. I'm tinged with the emotion of how it all came to be -- and how what happened makes it possible for me to stand before you today as a proud trainee of the US Maritime Service and a proud U.S. Merchant Mariner having done to the best of my ability what I was asked to do.

Now let me do a fast forward. About a year ago, my wife was going over our personal email file. She offhandedly asked me, "What do you know about Sheepshead Bay"? I said -- that it is where I did my basic training for the US Maritime Service. She told me that someone was republishing a Sheepshead Bay magazine from 1944. I looked over her shoulder at a picture of the magazine. It resembled what Look or Life Magazine used to look like with many pictures on the cover. Here it is --- **(hold up magazine)** I said to my wife, "That's me in that picture". We were leaving on a cruise, but I ordered the book and when I returned to my office, it was there.

## **Now Examine the Sequence of Events**

On-line Sheepshead Bay – Carole

Called Dallas/Ft. Worth Chapter – Barbara D’Augustino

Ordered 20 or 30 books D.F.W Chapter – Sandy Moran Recommend  
my contacting Natl.

Called Sindy Raymond – She told me about activities and  
Congresswoman Janice Hahn

Introduced me via email to Chris Ed-a-vean & Morris Harvey

My activities caused me to hear from or about –  
Don & Patti Scafidi & Carole Gutierrez

Then contacted by Sheila Sova who fights our cause, defends our name  
and gives anyone who criticizes Merchant Marines – good cause to  
wish they hadn’t –

Incidentally, the WWII Memorial opened on Memorial Day 2004.  
Almost 60 years after WWII ended. The land was donated by the U.S.  
Parks Service but the money for its building, \$197 million, came from  
private donations.

Its creation came about through the efforts of a congresswomen from  
Toledo, Ohio – named Marcy Kaptur and Senator Bob Dole, a WWII  
veteran.

Obviously, a major asset of this organization is the number of strong  
women – pulling for us.

Now let me be clear -- there are millions of pictures, -- messages and videos on the internet. How does this picture of 70 plus years ago find me? A coincidence -- not really, -- there are no coincidences. The circumstances are Gods way of remaining anonymous. So with Gods help and design I am here today. - One of my favorite Latin expressions is - **vocatus sive non vocatus deus aderit** - God will be present whether called upon or not.

Now another flashback. The years preceding December 7, 1941 were difficult for all of us, whether for your generation or your parents. We were coming from an era of **scarcity**. Many of you like me came from families who did not own a home much less a car and certainly no TV. Some families were barely able to afford a radio. The generation, prior to 1941, seldom ate in restaurants, most had never flown in airplanes, some never had a real vacation. My mother never traveled further than 40 miles from where she was born. And the breadwinner often was a father who sometimes had two jobs to make ends meet. Mine was unemployed for 2 years during the Depression.

**Scarcity**, for many of our families also meant a limited formal education. Many didn't make it through high school. Few made it to college. There were few opportunities for leisure activities and vacations were possible only through the ingenuity of those who found ways to have a picnic, get to a seashore or lake for a - few days, visit a relative, or similar.

WWII created the greatest avalanche of enlistment that our military had ever experienced. The U.S. put 16 million men and women in uniform; 250,000 of those men came from the US Maritime Service. America fought on 5 continents. We lost 480,000 lives. Americans took pride in their families, -- their country, and their flag and we as Merchant Mariners swore to honor that which -- we promised to do.

We suffered the highest casualties of all the services in WWII. One out of every 26 Merchant Mariners died. Over 1600 ships were sunk or disabled. We don't wear those statistics as a proud label. Many of those who made the final sacrifice were on ships that were poorly armored or had none at all. In the early days of WWII, there was no armed guard and the concept of convoy was not yet employed. -- I ponder -- the reasoning of some lawmakers ---Were we veterans of WW - II? -- Were our sacrifices worthy of recognition? -- and why is it so difficult to get them to hear and understand our story.

The youth of today, and many adults, including those who create our laws, know little of what we did. Merchant ships and their crews were in every invasion of WWII. The goods these ships delivered created a presence on every battlefield, -- every remote outpost, -- every motor pool, -- and every military base and hospital.

The majority of food to supply our troops and frequently those of our allies. The equipment to transport our armies, the parts to repair vehicles, the fuel to make them go, the plane parts and the fuel for these planes all came on a ship, the majority of which were manned by people like us. -- Were we -- veterans of that great war? -- or a group of men whose service our country would utilize - then forget. - Only the future will determine.

Somehow, the rumor grew, that we were paid two or three times what those in the military were paid for the same kind of duty. For those of us who know the truth, that is misinformation - it is propagated by those -- who do not know - and do not know -- that they do not know. God bless them, ignorance becomes reality for those who do not seek that which is beyond their own perception.

The compensation system, for the Maritime Service and Merchant Mariners was complex. We were paid 20-25% more than those who performed similar tasks on military ships. Incidentally, those who served on Navy submarines were paid 50 to 75% more than their contemporaries who served in other parts of the military. The Merchant Mariner pay system was regulated by a “risk and reward” balance, as was the submarine service. Here is a major difference. If our ship was sunk or put out of commission, when you left that ship your pay stopped. Those unfortunate enough to be captured by the enemy and held in prison camps were tortured the same as the other prisoners and received a dollar a day for their incarceration. When they returned home, medical bills for injuries suffered were their personal responsibility. Remember, when you got off the ship in whatever form, if you weren't coming back your pay stopped.

And there **were** bonuses. -- If your ship was torpedoed or sunk you received a bonus. When you were in a military combat zone, you received a bonus. This was often less than perfect -- they forgot to tell you that when your ship was leaving NY Harbor and going to Venezuela to pick up crude oil, you weren't in a combat zone. Tell that to those on those ships that were sunk or put out of commission in those zones and those on the ships who suffered and died. Tell that to the families of those who died in the convoys to Murmansk Russia.

It is critical that law makers know and acknowledge that -- **we did what we were asked to do.** We served in the manner that we were asked to serve. And in many ways, some Merchant Mariners were no different than those soldiers and sailors who were stationed in camps at home or overseas, who never saw combat.

In my circle of friends, some who went into the Navy, the Army or the Marines – I and one other friend were the only ones to serve in combat

areas. But remember, 1 out of 26 Merchant Mariners died and 1600 ships were sunk or disabled.

Back to Sheepshead Bay for a moment. I elected to be in the engine crew. Something intriguing about being around machinery and power. In truth, I didn't know how to change a spark plug. My first ship was a T-2 Tanker. A pretty modern ship at the time, -- it could do between 18-20 knots while a Liberty ship did between 9-11 knots. I never once, perceived a danger in what I was about to do. I never once evaluated or asked for an explanation about what happens in the bowels of a ship. -- I, like many of my contemporaries didn't know what to ask about - we didn't think of what we were about to do - for many of us it was a duty and service to our country. Issues such as benefits, post war hospitalization or most of what we now call --**injustice**, -- simply never entered the minds of many of us. Call us naïve, -- foolish or ignorant - we were, all of whatever you call a teenage kid.

My ship left NY Harbor and did a shakedown cruise to Halifax Nova Scotia. It came back to a shipyard to receive additional armament and something called a spar deck. An extra-reinforced elevated decking that could carry jeeps, plane parts and other heavy equipment. We also had a U.S. Navy armed guard crew. The ship, -- when loaded with oil sat low in the water. -- And I was proud to think that I was in the engine staff that made that ship run. We left the shipyard, then picked up crude oil in Venezuela. Then dropped that crude oil off in Curacao, Netherlands West Indies. In exchange for the crude oil dropped off, we took on Bunker C, the fuel on which combat ships ran. We left Curacao and went through the Panama Canal. What a glorious and significant emotional experience for a 16-year-old kid.

We entered the Pacific Ocean. Not knowing where we were going. We did have armament. We had a fair sized 3-inch 50 gun forward. We had a 5" x 38 gun on the stern. We had 8 anti-aircraft guns, 20 caliber, I think. On about the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> day into the Pacific Ocean, they tried out those guns. I was on watch in the engine room when that occurred. The sounds of the gunfire resonated through the cowlings. They are those big scoops that suck in the air. The sound radiated to the engine room, magnified as if through giant speakers. I was a fireman water tender on duty in an engine room, 35 to 40 feet below the waterline. I asked the oiler or engineer on my watch; incidentally, they were the old guys, probably in their early to mid-twenties. The question I asked was, "so what do we do, if this ship is hit and we have to abandon ship?" I ask myself these days, why didn't I know this answer? Why didn't I understand what I had volunteered to do? Their answer came back, in almost a callous tone, they said - "kid, if this ship is hit, you're not going to leave the engine room."

I considered myself, a tough dude. I fought with the boxing team in Sheepshead bay. I fought in every port where they had a boxing ring where competitive bouts were held, some on military bases and - having grown up in an inner city, I had my share of street fights. And suddenly I realized -- I was a scared 16 year old kid trying to play adult.

I hold no animosity, because of the things we Merchant Mariners did not receive. I hold no animosity for the bureaucrats who waited until 43 years after the war ended to give us veteran status and a limited GI bill - **hooray!** I was almost 60 years old and they were going to enable me to go to college on the GI Bill or get a GI mortgage. I hope this doesn't sound cynical. Again, I just never thought of it. I was on that ship for almost 13 months. Like you, doing what I was asked to do, -- we shuttled back and forth from island to island in hostile waters and

to the Panama Canal occasionally for repairs and then right back to the South Pacific.

The day the war with Japan ended, my ship was somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The purser and the first mate came into the mess hall to tell us about Los Alamos where they tested the A bomb, about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and they told us the war was over. That date was August 15, 1945; four days later, I would turn 17 years of age. And I was still a naïve kid in an adult world.

Our hopes of coming home immediately were dashed. We had a load of oil and a ship shape vessel. We went through the canal and headed to England where the fuel was needed.

Now let me fast forward again. The war was over. Instead of scarcity now, we were coming home to a world that would soon explode with abundance. Despite the fact that many of us learned the hard way that we weren't covered by the G.I. Bill, -- for diseases, or extended injuries, both physical and emotional, created by and during our time in service. I had malaria, which till today eliminates me from donating blood. Incidentally, the pipes in the engine room are covered with Asbestos and I contracted a disease called Asbestosis, although not uncommonly, they didn't discover that until I was 50 years old. Fortunately, for me, what I had is plated, meaning covered over by tissue and doesn't seem to affect my health today. As to my Malaria. I found out soon enough that I would pay for my own doctors' visits and the Quinine medicine. I also was treated for ulcers from the time I was 18 until I was almost 60 years old. Then they discovered -- that I didn't have ulcers -- but a disease called H Piloni -- which they diagnosed -- as coming from drinking water, in a third world country, prior to my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Another fast forward. About two years ago, my wife and I were on a cruise ship on the Rhine River. We took a side trip with a group of other tourists to the Audie Murphy Museum, which is on the border between France and Germany. Audie was the most decorated soldier in WWII. A man rightfully venerated for his many acts of heroism. We went to the museum and the guide explained the rigors of war and what had happened to American troops. He said, those returning from WWII accounted for the highest level of alcohol addiction that our country and others had ever experienced. The guide said that many veterans, from all countries, came home with Post-Traumatic Stress. Those in the group, accepted the information, I asked if I could make a comment.

I said that in 1945 when our troops came home the term - Post-Traumatic Stress was never used. In - WW I -- there were those that were shell shocked. In - WW II -- they called it battle fatigue. - Post Traumatic Stress became known later. P.S.T. is real and it doesn't only come from being in battle. Many of us had difficulty sleeping or adapting to an environment we didn't remotely understand.

To-day, if you fly from one time zone to another and your sleep pattern changes, they call it jet lag - the clinical name is Circadian Dysrhythmia - we all have an internal system called a Circadian clock. It is how we know we are hungry or sleepy - think of the young guys who stood watch - 4 on 8 off - think of the isolation, unknown destinations, close quarters, lack of contact with family members, or even land - all contradicting their Circadian clock.

Then we came home - there was no debriefing, no transition - the war was over "Go Home". Then enter the world where we would -- really become civilians - trying to get a job -- rebuild relationships - and catch up with all the trends and changes of post war America - bet on it, the majority of us had Circadian Dysrhythmia - or worse, many suffered anxiety attacks, depression, and many dealt with Post-Traumatic Stress.

Neither the Maritime Service, the Merchant Marine, nor the United States government is responsible for not knowing in advance what would happen as we participated during the war. It is however, disingenuous for our lawmakers to disavow any of this in an informed age.

What is so difficult to understand? We joined the Maritime Service to do what was right. We went away to serve our country. We went because we were young, naïve, foolish and -- patriotic.

Merchant Mariners slept in bunks with 2" mattresses, they stood watch 4 hrs on 8 hrs off, sailed into storms, combat areas and often outside of contact with others for long periods. Were we so foolish to believe that whatever our sacrifice, others would know and understand our part of helping to win the war, and if nothing else, at least give us our dignity.

Again, I hold no rancor for or to those who make the laws, teach the history of our country or those who are misinformed. Yet I weep for those who gave much and today are so little recognized.

Many of you are from the Korean War era or Vietnam. With audacity, they were labeled as police actions, not wars. Many of you left the Merchant Marines and enlisted in the military, the majority of us may suffer from similar maladies. These are situations that those who make our laws -- those who decide what we can and cannot have -- those who do not examine the facts -- and **those who judge us will never understand** -- because they do not know -- and cannot perceive that which they do not know.

**Do they, -- can they, -- will they -- ever comprehend that we gave up our youth.** For many of us, there were no high school graduations, dances, proms, sporting events, meeting at the malt shop, going to the movies, having your first car as a teenager. These are things we, consciously or unconsciously, agreed to abandon when we took an oath and did what we were asked to do.

In my 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> year, there were no holidays, no Christmas, Thanksgiving or birthdays for me. Oh, we did celebrate them in some way aboard ships but there were no family gatherings, no family exchanges of warmth or the joy of our own home, what followed was at best a minimal understanding of what we did or how we did what we did.

Yet we can feel blessed because we came back -- while one out of 26 of our fellow Merchant Mariners didn't. And some of us still wear the scars, some physical, some emotional about what giving up our youth really meant. Why can't they hear what we are saying? -- why can't they understand our pain? Our ranks are rapidly diminishing. Many of our comrades live in nursing homes or with relatives. Many exist on social security or small pensions from post war jobs.

My ship came home to Mobile, Alabama and was put into the "mothball fleet". I traveled home to the city of Philadelphia on the train. I think it took 3 days. I was filthy dirty and hungry. I was not yet 18 years of age when I finally came home. Ironically, I lived in Pennsylvania and was not old enough to vote nor could I legally buy a drink and that -- is painfully funny.

However, most of us made the best of it -- and we hopefully, live with some positive memories. You and I have things which no act of law can replace or deny, we had life experiences that some will never

understand and we did come home to a world where many people our own age seemed immature because they never had similar experiences. I went to college at night with others who were 18 to 21 yrs of age – with whom I had nothing in common.

We saw and experienced other countries, and cultures; we saw destruction and privation created by war, which even with the distance created by time we will never forget. We came home to an era of abundance. The ability for military veterans to buy a home under the GI bill. The ability to go to school if you wanted it badly enough, and in our case pay for it, which I did. But in this abundance there was also scarcity. Jobs were hard to get. Remember we had 16 million in uniform and a majority of them was coming home at one time.

We came home and tended to put aside that which we experienced, never realizing that what we did and how we did it would be in our memories -- while not so, in those who make the rules, pass the laws and tell us what we can and cannot do.

Moreover, we acquired skills, built on the necessity to survive in a wartime seafaring environment. No one can take away those skills or understand how it helped us grow while helping our country win a war. I have no hesitancy about saying, -- the war forced youngsters into maturity. It motivated us to acquire skills that others without our wartime experience may never know or understand – and for some, it also added the pain of exclusion that no act or law will ever fully remedy.

Today, there are those lawmakers who though small in number – stand in alliance with our cause.

Here is a direct quote from a Fox News release on Jan 13<sup>th</sup> of this year referring to House Bill #563, introduced by Democratic California Congresswoman, Janice Hahn, who stated on our behalf, "it would give them the "recognition and honor they have long been denied for their wartime service and their vital role in our military victory." This was her bill giving one time compensation to WWII vets still living.

The author of the article stated, "Passing the bill at a time of fiscal austerity may be a heavy lift. The total price-tag is \$125 million, to establish a compensation fund for the lump-sum payouts - with only about 5,000 mariners still alive, all in their late 80's and 90's."

Included in the article was a statement by a republican congressman, John Duncan of Tennessee, who also sponsored the bill. He said, "We have spent trillions on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the overall war on terror," "There are so few of these Merchant Mariners remaining, surely we can carve out this very modest amount from our massive defense spending in honor of these brave men who made such a huge sacrifice during World War II and have asked for so little." And with these words these lawmakers were trying to touch the hearts of others in Congress. Those who make the laws and tell us what we can and cannot do.

Now to add to the hypocrisy of these circumstances, for those who do not support this cause. Here is an excerpt from a 286-page report on examples of government waste.

## 286-Page Report from a Congressional Study Contains 101 Examples of Waste, From the Big \$100 Billion in Government-Wide, Improper Payments

Here are a few -

- National Institute of Health spent \$1 million to study monkeys on treadmills
- \$853,000 from the National Science Foundation for wine classes for minors
- \$780,000 National Institute of Drug Abuse study to determine if college students can get addicted to pizza.
- The Department of Agriculture spent \$5 million to promote food safety
- \$1.2 million National Science Foundation for a life size Pac-Man game
- \$899,000 was spent studying “the social interactions of guppies.”
- NASA spent \$1.2 million testing microgravity on sheep
- Nearly \$43 million of U.S. taxpayers’ money was spent on building a gas station in Afghanistan.

And the current political campaigns for the forthcoming election is expected to total over \$1 billion.

My thoughts go to those WWII veterans. There are less than 5000 of us still alive. We range in ages from very late 80’s to mid 90’s – the one-time benefit would say thank you – we appreciate your war time service and a grateful country understands. – Let us live in hope -- yet til that happens. Let us not forget – a part of our message to those who don’t understand, those who choose not to know -- and those who are content to pursue other followings knowing that our numbers diminish rapidly each day – each week – yes, let them hear our mantra – **Hell No! We Won’t Go Away!**