

Report of AMMV activities in Washington, D.C. (May 16th – 18th, 2022)

Our WWII veterans, family members, caretakers, and AMMV officers arrived in Washington D.C. on Monday, May 16th. AMMV had secured a room block at the Marriott Residence Inn, only a half mile from the White House. It is notable to mention that the Gary Sinise Foundation donated \$15,000 to help offset the costs associated with these events centered around the official Merchant Mariners of WWII Congressional Gold Medal ceremony.

Activities kicked off the next morning with our contracted shuttle service making runs to the National WWII Monument. Although this was an informal gathering, various maritime interests and local news outlets were present to capture the visit. In addition, Ross Rowlinson of Rowlinson Media Group accompanied the AMMV gang throughout the entire time in D.C. to document all events. Making a surprise visit to join us at the monument was Patricia Garamendi, wife of Congressman John Garamendi who sponsored the CGM legislation. The weather cooperated nicely, and the morning was relaxing and enjoyable.

In the afternoon, a VIP shuttle made a stop at the famous Watergate Hotel, where the American Waterways Operators (AWO) were holding their “2022 Spring Convention and Barge-In”. WWII veteran Charles A. Mills (accompanied by granddaughter Veda Handy), WWII veteran George Shaw (accompanied by wife Helen), and AMMV Past National President Capt. Chris Edyvean participated in this brief visit to allow the AWO group to honor our veterans.

The International Propeller Club’s annual Salute to Congress dinner, which is considered the biggest annual maritime/political event in the nation, was the evening event. Jim C. Patti, President of the IPC and organizer of the event, graciously allowed for up to 30 seats for our AMMV group, the cost being sponsored by the SIU, AMO, MMP, & MEBA maritime unions.

The Salute to Congress was held at the scenic Army Navy Country Club in Arlington. An extended cocktail hour on the outside decks overlooking the golf course and club property made for a wonderful start to the evening, with the weather still being perfect. During the dinner, our WWII veterans received multiple standing ovations and rounds of applause.

The Salute to Congress dinner Keynote Speaker and recipient of recognition was Congressman Joe Courtney of Connecticut, who is the Chairman of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces. IPC President Patti stated that “Chairman Courtney has been – and continues to be – a vigorous and persistent fighter on behalf of the maritime industry and has worked tirelessly on behalf of America’s maritime workforce, at sea and ashore.” Unfortunately, Rep. Courtney could not make the function due to responsibilities requiring his presence on the Hill. Neil McKiernan, Chief of Staff for Rep. Courtney, attended in his absence.

The official Congressional Gold Medal ceremony for our WWII Merchant Mariners began the following morning at 11:00 E.T. at the Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. The bus transporting our AMMV group from the hotel received an escort from the Capitol Police.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi officiated, and ceremonial remarks were made by Rep. Kevin McCarthy (House Minority Leader), Mitch McConnell (Senate Minority Leader), Vice Admiral

Scott Buschman (USCG Deputy Commandant for Operations), Rear Admiral Michael Wettlaufer (Commander, Military Sealift Command), Lucinda Lessley (MARAD Deputy Administrator), Rep. John Garamendi, and Rep. Joe Courtney. The Colors were presented/retired by the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (Kings Point) Honor Guard. The Merchant Marine anthem *Heave Ho* was performed by a U.S. Navy vocal quartet. In total, ten WWII Merchant Mariners were in attendance. Dave Yoho was allowed remarks near the end of the ceremony, and he delivered an emotionally charged message. Speaker Pelosi wrapped up the ceremony, as Dave Yoho and Charles A. Mills accepted the CGM on behalf of the WWII U.S. Merchant Marine.

Others in attendance for the ceremony included the superintendents of our maritime academies, high ranking representatives from maritime unions and coalitions, and other members of Congress who did not have a speaking role.

To the surprise of our AMMV honorees and accompanying family, the replica bronze medals were on hand and presented, in cases, to the ten veterans. Photo sessions lasted for nearly an hour after the ceremony concluded.

The AMMV group was then bussed to MEBA HQ at the Hall of the States building for a special rooftop celebration with food and beverages. Several maritime industry folks made brief closing comments to the group, and more photos were taken. Tomaczek Bednarek, on behalf of the Joey Lowenstein Foundation, presented blanket throws to our veterans which feature Joey's artwork coupled with images of the CGM. Finally, Rita Cosby conducted interviews of our WWII veterans.

The following individuals (**WWII Merchant Mariners listed in bold face print**) attended both the International Propeller Club's Salute to Congress dinner on May 17th and the official Congressional Gold Medal ceremony on May 18th: **William Balabanow**, Linda Lee Davis (sister of Mr. Balabanow), **Gerard Driscoll**, Cynthia Driscoll-Komlos (daughter of Mr. Driscoll & AMMV National Secretary), Russ Komlos (son-in-law of Mr. Driscoll), **James Lindsey**, Dale Howell Lindsey (daughter of Mr. Lindsey), **Jack Laub**, Deborah Lawrence (daughter of Mr. Laub), **Charles A. Mills**, Veda Handy (granddaughter of Mr. Mills), **George Offenhauser, Sr.**, Rosalie Murphy (daughter of Mr. Offenhauser), Vance Murphy (son-in-law of Mr. Offenhauser), **Bobby G. Ross**, Shirley Knight (daughter of Mr. Ross), Crawford Knight (son-in-law of Mr. Ross), **James Sciple**, Rick Wobbe (caretaker of Mr. Sciple), **George C. Shaw**, Helen Shaw (wife of Mr. Shaw), Captain Dru DiMattia (AMMV National President), Sheila M. Sova (AMMV National Vice President), Capt. Chris Edyvean (Past AMMV President & AMMV News Editor), Tomaczek Bednarek (entertainer & veterans' advocate), and Rita Cosby (Emmy-Award winning TV host, Best-Selling Author, veterans' advocate). In addition, the following individuals attended the official Congressional Gold Medal ceremony on May 18th: **Dave Yoho**, Carole King Yoho (wife of Mr. Yoho), David Yoho (son of Mr. Yoho), Brad Yoho (son of Mr. Yoho), Tracey McCormack (daughter of Mr. Yoho), and Adele Liffers (daughter of Mr. Yoho).

Many AMMV officials assisted with various tasks in the planning and outreach for these action-packed few days, but Capt. Dru DiMattia went above and beyond his duties as AMMV National President to ensure the overall success of such. This involved (just to name a few

things) chartering buses and shuttles, establishing contracts with the hotel, coordinating with veterans and caretakers, and serving as a liaison between several of the stakeholders. The entire AMMV family is thankful for the efforts of Capt. DiMattia and the AMMV National Officers/office staff for all of the hard work and dedication that made this short time in D.C. a success!

To view photos from our group's activities in Washington, D.C., click [**HERE**](#).