

AMERICAN  
MERCHANT MARINE  
VETERANS  
NEWS MAGAZINE

IN PEACE AND WAR

\$6



Winter  
2022/2023



Longtime AMMV member Bob Ross honored at All Hands On Deck show — page 24



Thirteen WWII Merchant Mariners honored at the National WWII Museum in NOLA — page 14





# 2023 National Convention

*March 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>*

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*Deadline for making reservations with our group rate is March 5th*

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	<b>AMMV website:</b>	<b>Capt. Dru DiMattia</b>

**International Affairs** ..... **Jens Inge Egeland** *Member-at-Large*





# National President Capt. Anthony “Dru” DiMattia



*Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.* This is a shot across the bow! Diplomacy is desperately needed around the globe! This includes right here at AMMV as we embrace final chapters of our forged legacy honoring the Greatest Generation!

Make no mistake, our mission is long from over as most of us agree, the service of the Merchant Marine re-

mains unknown to the general public. 250,000 WWII Merchant Mariners answered the call of our country, of which approximately 9,500 were KIA. These mariners were part of the winning combination ridding tyranny from taking hold by maintaining the vital supply lines at all costs.

Thousands more mariners have served in the later conflicts and some paid the ultimate sacrifice; specifically, the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Our mariners have fulfilled the strategic sealift requirement through ODS, OIF, OEF, 911 response in Lower Manhattan, ORH, and in United Shield and related operations in Somalia from December 5, 1992 to March 31, 1995. In 2014, RRF mariners were involved with the Chemical Weapons Disposition platform for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, facilitating the neutralization of 450,000 liters of chemical agents transferred from Syria, and continued humanitarian relief efforts around the world. Don't forget the CIVMARS aboard the MSC Vessels supplying our military in forward deployment arenas all over the globe! Don't forget all those CONMARS sailing on the MSP vessels. Don't forget all the CONMARS sailing on the Jones Act vessels, and all our mariners sailing the intercoastal fleets. Lest we forget the *El Faro*, and all merchant vessels which have succumbed to the sea.

We at AMMV look forward to results of the ongoing recapitalization program. We encourage our representatives to look further down the road for a comprehensive *jobs bill* which would address more shipbuilding right here in the United States! Our service requires consistent subtle public awareness.

Won't you join AMMV and help raise awareness,.....  
Raise the Flag?

This past year, 2022, will be remembered for the humble gains as Congress bestowed the highest honor to our WWII Merchant Mariners with the collective Congressional Gold Medal. When you look back over the decades of our founding mariners of AMMV, waging campaigns for their service, this year can be aligned with their valiant efforts!

The collective efforts of our maritime stakeholders truly answered the call honoring our WWII mariners! I want to thank your tireless contributions from all our members who continue to “FLY THE FLAG” of the U.S. Merchant Marine.

Though we fell short in gaining enough sponsorship of the WWII Merchant Mariner compensation legislation, our very own Government Affairs Chairman WWII Mariner Charles Mills and his Co-Chair, Patrick Cotter, continue to make way on multiple projects. At 102 years of age, Charles remains at a “FULL AHEAD” bell!

Meanwhile, Pat Cotter has been on a three-year campaign gaining support for the inclusion of the Merchant Marine flag and song to be included during the annual Memorial Day event in D.C. Continued efforts have gone before the producer, host, and DOD-Deputy Secretary of Defense, who has positively favored an appropriate segment honoring our WWII mariners! Stay tuned for more from our Government Affairs Committee.

In this issue you will see the events that took place in October and several additional ceremonies which stretched into December. AMMV remains extremely fortunate to have our members engaging with honoring our WWII mariners and educating the public.

Hurricane Ian made landfall on 28 September 2022 in Southwest Florida. The impact of this storm has placed many of us in the shipyard for repairs. Fallout from the storm continues but slow recovery is progressing. Two of our WWII members were displaced from their dwellings and continue to be so at the time of this printing. I wish to give a huge shoutout to Director Chris Robertson of the Museum of Military History in Kissimmee, FL for spearheading a fund raiser for these two WWII members! Supporting his fundraising efforts were Region # 1 VP Steven Snyder and M.A.L. Captain Rick Martucci. BZ!

AMMV administrator Lynn Kelly has continued working with MARAD's Katrina McRae supporting our members who have not received the duplicate medals for

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## National President's Report

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

various reasons. I want to thank her for the continued dedication serving our members and their families. In addition, please take note of the fabulous work done by our past president and magazine editor, Captain Chris Edyvean. He continues to produce incredible results with our magazine which receives great feedback from around our fraternal membership and the industry! I also wish to thank all of our Executive Board, the Regional Vice Presidents, committee members, diehard volunteers around the country, and especially the ones who consistently engage in our operations.

Looking ahead in 2023, we will be embracing our 35th annual convention in Las Vegas, NV! AMMV hosted its 2014 National Convention at this same Vegas venue. You can find the necessary information in this issue for registering for the convention and booking your hotel room. We are looking forward to a great turnout in Vegas! AMMV must address multiple issues with our membership base, inclusive of maintaining the legacy and education amongst other ideas to market and target our goals.

If you all can recall the message conveyed by our Rep. Congressman Garamendi on May 18th, 2022 in the Statuary Hall, I repeat here:

*"This is not the final piece of this; the story of your sacrifice, the story of your service in making it possible for the military in the Pacific and in Europe, in having the munitions, to have the food, to have the supplies; that story will live on. Because it is the story of success, it is the story of sacrifice."*

The service of the U.S. Merchant Marine lives on!

Just recently, AMMV received a communication from a Vietnam Merchant Mariner seeking some feedback about his service. Coincidentally we came across a very recent piece of legislation, bill H.R. 8925 introduced in September 2022 (117th Congress)! I hereby give a shoutout to mariners in Michigan's district # 8.

To all of the mariners and AMMV members wondering where we see our next voyage? Come join our cause! We need to collaborate with all maritime stakeholders and have a common voice for this service. I'm not suggesting reinventing anything, but to resonate what our service continues to be for our National Security and economic prosperity!

My extended term serving as National President of AMMV is ending June 30, 2023. It has been a great honor to have represented this organization helping to gain recognitions for our WWII mariners and to educate the public of our Maritime Service.

May we pay homage to our mariners past and present, and never forget those who remain in the watery graves, and those who have crossed the Final Bar. ....Heave Ho!

See us on the web, Facebook, Twitter, and You-Tube.

Have a good watch!

Captain Dru DiMattia

Master Mariner

President, AMMV



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# National Vice President Sheila M. Sova



## Honoring our WWII Merchant Mariners Act

In 2007, Democrat Representative Bob Filner of California introduced H.R. 23 “Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of WWII Act of 2007”. It was the 110th Congress (2007-2008) and it passed the

House. It was reintroduced in 111th Congress (2009-2010), again by Rep. Filner, and again it passed the House. In fact, a version of the WWII Merchant Mariner “compensation” bill has passed the House of Representatives as recently as 2021 (as an add-on to a version of the Defense Act, which ultimately failed).

Charles Mills of Texas, a regular member of the ‘Storm the Hill’ gang, was invited by Congressman Al Green of Texas in September 2021 to Washington D.C. (Rep. Green was the sponsor of the most recent version of this legislation, H.R. 39, which died at the conclusion of the 117th Congress.) He even invited Mr. Mills to meet with the Congressional Black Caucus!

Are you aware that if a WWII mariner was drafted into the Korean War or joined another branch of service after WWII, they are exempt from the provisions of any of these Merchant Mariner compensation bills? Out of the 250,000 U.S. Merchant Mariners who served in World War II, about 60,000 were drafted into the Korean War. It seems that when these bills were written, the only considerations taken by the author was the fact that the U.S. Merchant Mariners of WWII did not receive provisions of the G.I. Bill, including VA benefits, for 43 years after the war was ended. They assumed that if you were in another branch of military, that you automatically received the G.I. Bill.

Yet many young men, like my father, Orville Lee Sova, WWII MM Vet, did not utilize the G.I. Bill that he earned by being drafted into the U.S. Army. Instead, he went to work for the airline industry so that his new Italian bride could visit her family regularly. That was his choice, and seven kids later, it was a choice that he never regretted. But the G.I. Bill should never have been a focal point during the creation of this legislation. It is time for a change in the

next Congress.

One of the reasons Charles Mills wanted to speak to the members of Congress was to explore other points to consider in seeking passage of Merchant Mariner compensation legislation. As Charles explained: “We were the only branch of service that paid to go to war.” Consider the following facts that applied to all WWII Merchant Mariners, regardless of whether they later served in another branch of service:

1. Navy personnel were exempt from income taxes, while merchant mariners paid income taxes and “Victory” taxes.\*
2. All military branches received U.S. government supplied uniforms and warm weather gear. Mariners were told to bring two types of clothing (one for frigid and one for tropical climates) because they did not know their destination until they got on the ship. The U.S. government supplied the Naval Armed Guard with coats and heavy-duty gloves and boots. The warm weather gear brought from home by the mariners were no match for the frigid Arctic weather.
3. Partial disability for Navy personnel, cash value was \$11,500; yet, the mariner was \$0.\*
4. Navy widow’s pension, cash value \$15,350 – \$27,000.\*
5. If forced to abandon ship, the mariners pay immediately stopped. This was considered an exit off the ship. Yet many mariners spent days and sometimes weeks maneuvering a lifeboat after a torpedo or kamikaze attack. While transporting Army or Marine Corps troops after an attack, it was not unusual for the mariner to command the lifeboat. Using only a compass or the stars up above, the mariner would navigate the military troops to safety. All the while, the mariner was unpaid, while the troops in the lifeboat were still getting a paycheck sent back home.
6. A POW was guaranteed a paycheck of \$1 a day sent home to family members unless you were a U.S. Merchant Marine. In that case, your family received nothing.
7. If U.S. Navy personnel were killed or lost at sea, the U.S. government issued the family a \$10,000 insurance payment, but if you were a merchant mariner, the payment was \$5000, a 50% reduction. Was their life worth twice as much as the mariner?

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# National Office Administrator Lynn Kelly



## ***Congressional Gold Medal for WWII Merchant Mariners***

Although we had been anticipating the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal since the signing of the bill in March 2020, we were notified, with very short notice, that the ceremony would take place in Congress on May 18<sup>th</sup>.

AMMV was proud to help facilitate the attendance of ten WWII Merchant Mariners at Statuary Hall in Congress. The event was very exciting and required much planning for our Board of Directors and volunteers.

In late March 2022, AMMV sent the names and contact information for our 265 members who were listed in our database as WWII mariners and therefore eligible to receive the 3-inch gold medal. The list went to Katrina McRae at the Maritime Administrator's Office in Washington DC. Katrina and her staff began verifying these veterans and their service. On May 18<sup>th</sup>, ten of the medals were hand carried to Congress by MARAD's David Hatcher hours after being minted and were awarded to our veterans at the official ceremony in Washington. The second ceremony took place two days later on May 20<sup>th</sup> in San Francisco at the Nautical Institute Conference where we honored nine more of our vets. The first big mailing of the medals from MARAD was done on June 30<sup>th</sup> and the next one on July 11<sup>th</sup>, other mailings followed. In October there were 34 men on the AMMV list where MARAD had not confirmed that a medal was mailed. AMMV sent each a letter in the mail explaining the situation and asking each mariner to send a copy of his DD-214 Honorable Discharge to Katrina or to me. This accelerated several more medals to be issued, as well, unfortunately, as turning up several deceased members. As of this writing there are approximately ten members where we have not yet been able to confirm that a CGM was mailed out. We are "chipping away" at these one at a time and will continue to do so. As you know we have held or participated in many awarding ceremonies across the country since May and will continue to do so into 2023.

In order to be eligible for the Congressional Gold Medal, a mariner would have had to have been at sea on

an oceangoing vessel for more than 60 days and served in any shipboard capacity between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946. The families of those mariners who are no longer living are entitled (one per family) to receive one smaller exact replica of the medal which measures 1.5 inches. If you are the family member representing the deceased veteran's family, please send a copy of the veteran's DD 214-Honorable Discharge to:

Dept of Transportation (Maritime Administration)  
Office of Sealift Support  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington DC 20590

Attention: Katrina McRae (W25-313)

Or, email the document to: [katrina.mcrae@dot.gov](mailto:katrina.mcrae@dot.gov)

Be sure to make clear where you would like to have the medal sent. Please allow several weeks to receive the medal.

## ***AMMV State of the Organization***

Our main problem at this time is our attrition rate. Although we continue to have a small but dedicated volunteer base and continue to add new members, we are unable to replace the WWII mariners whom we have lost. Those numbers have dropped from thousands to about 250. Unfortunately, although we are blessed to have many mariners from the Korean War, Vietnam War, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, Desert Shield...etc., and current merchant mariners, we have not come anywhere near the numbers we had in the 1990s. Due to by-law amendments in recent years our membership is now open to all supporters, regardless of whether they have a MM background. Financially our operating budget is strong due to some very generous contributors and a fiscally cautious board. This has allowed AMMV to continue its outreach and education and to promote and support our WWII mariners. You will notice in this issue that we are beginning to turn a new focus on the participants of the later global conflicts. This does not mean that our respect and admiration for the WWII MM's has diminished, only that in order to persist in carrying their torch we need to take some steps to insure our continuance. As with most endeavors there comes a time when we need to expand our base and broaden our message. For example, a bill has been introduced recognizing the Merchant Mariners who sailed in southeast Asia in support of the Vietnam War efforts. Unfortunately, the congressional session ended on January 3rd and the bill would need to be

***(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)***



## National Office Administrator's Report

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introduced again. AMMV will monitor that progress. Hopefully this new direction will bring renewed interest for some and serve as an invitation for further participation from others. The membership voted at the Tampa Convention in 2019 to budget \$5,000 for advertising, and AMMV will take a serious look at that option in 2023 in an effort to reach out to potential members.

### ***Why join us at the convention?***

In this issue you will see the details of our next convention (March 28-31) in Las Vegas at the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino. We try very hard to keep the expenses down so as to accommodate as many participants as would like to attend. Please consider joining us! These are truly wonderful, welcoming events where we not only accomplish

important business but stress camaraderie and strengthen AMMV's purpose. It is our one time a year to meet and share our passion for what we have been trying to accomplish as well as celebrate our successes. At our conventions we are made aware of many participant's talents, new ideas, and ability to contribute their "manpower" to the organization in a way that is comfortable and enjoyable to them. The administration will not ask for money or for volunteers, nor in any other way do we solicit. It truly is a "coming together" and sharing of purpose. Our future direction is an important consideration. The business meetings are open to all members, and everyone is welcome to offer suggestions and comments within the framework of our by-laws and constitution. We offer outstanding knowledgeable speakers in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. Whether you are a new member or one of the "old reliable" we would love to see you in Las Vegas.

Calm Seas,  
Lynn C. Kelly



## National Vice President's Report

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

8. Since naval personnel considered the mariners to be civilians, they were often refused passage back to the U.S. on naval vessels. They would have to find a merchant vessel returning to the States.

Should the provisions of H.R. 39 (117th Congress) be re-introduced into the House, changes to the text of the bill should include these important facts listed above. Congress could estimate the number of living U.S. Merchant Mariners of WWII who would apply for the \$25,000 proposed compensation, simply by tallying the number of 3-inch Congressional Gold Medals replicas given to living mariners by MARAD.

Should the bill be re-introduced, sending this article directly to your own congressman might enlighten a few of them. I am reminded by recent article regarding the National World War II Museum in New Orleans: *"Having heard nothing about the role of the Merchant Marines in the war, I got an education via the Ralph E. Crump, LTJG, USNR, U.S. Merchant Marine Gallery. The U.S. Merchant Marines were responsible for transporting weapons, men, and other cargo to U.S. troops overseas ... and paid the price."* \*\*

As Congressman Garamendi said in Washington D.C. this past May 2022, at the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony, *"This is just the beginning of more to come!"*

\*usmm.org

\*\*Arkansas Democrat Gazette – *Call to arms: National WWII Museum in New Orleans requires multiple trips*, by Helaine Williams, December 18, 2022

Sheila M. Sova  
AMMV National Vice President



## UPDATES ON AMMV NATIONAL OFFICERS ELECTION

### **National President:**

*Incumbent President Capt. Dru DiMattia has signaled agreement to continue to serve in this capacity. Credentials found to be in good order. No other candidates were declared. DiMattia may continue to serve.*

### **National Vice President:**

*No candidates were declared. The position will be vacant as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023. The Board of Directors may vote to fill position on an interim basis.*

### **National Treasurer:**

*Incumbent Treasurer Dennis Kelly has signaled agreement to continue to serve in this capacity. Credentials found to be in good order. No other candidates were declared. Kelly may continue to serve.*

### **National Secretary:**

*Capt. Chris Edyvean (Midwest Chapter) declared candidacy. Credentials found to be in good order. No other candidates were declared. As per Article II, Section 202 (B) and Article II, Section 206 (C) (6) of the AMMV By-Laws, Edyvean is considered elected for the term July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 thru June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025.*



# NEWS Magazine Editor Capt. Christopher Edyvean



## Return of National Convention

After three years of COVID-induced issues, namely 18 months of postponements which ultimately knocked the convention timeline out of whack, the AMMV National Convention is finally back on course for a late-March scheduling in Las Vegas.

While details are still in the works, I have no doubts that with Capt. Dru leading the charge, this will be as successful a convention as any. Please support the convention, as this is the critical time of year in which we lay-out plans for both the long term and immediate future of the organization. We hope to see you there; however, if you cannot attend, please consider a small donation via the sponsorship page.

## AMMV at full speed ahead!

I have watched as many non-profit maritime and veterans' groups have struggled over the past several years. Some

have folded, while others are taking on water and have a questionable future. Meanwhile, AMMV has managed to only grow stronger, thanks to its dedicated base of volunteers and some hearty donations. We thank everyone who has contributed large and small to help make AMMV what it is today.

## Magazine kudos

I have received many positive comments about the AMMV magazine, and I appreciate the applause. Yet, I must give credit where credit is due. Lynn Kelly reviews all magazine features before they are sent to lay-out, and again following the initial lay-out of each issue. She finds grammatical errors and typos that I miss, and she offers many suggested "tweaks" to help arrive at the best possible version of each magazine issue. In addition, our contracted lay-out person, Susan Alexander, lends her creative skills to the magazine. Susan has great patience when I ask her to reposition items or fulfill last-minute requests. Thank you, Lynn and Susan!

Wishing a very "Happy New Year" 2023 to our members, supporters, and veterans!

*Christopher L. Edyvean*

Capt. Chris Edyvean

AMMV News Editor & Past National President



## Welcome Aboard to these New Members of the AMMV

LIAM BAUMAN .....	BALTIMORE.....	MD
JOHN A. BERITZHOFF .....	ROSS.....	CA
BILL BOYD .....	ROSENBERG .....	TX
BARBARA BREASE .....	HEALY .....	AK
J. RICHARD GALLAGHER.....	DALLAS.....	TX
BARBARA KETTLER .....	RICHMOND .....	TX
JOSEPH A. MACHADO.....	BALTIMORE.....	MD
VERONICA MURPHY MAZZOLA.....	GULF BREEZE .....	FL
SHERI & BRIAN NEHILA.....	EASTON.....	PA
LAWRENCE G. NUNNINK .....	GRASS VALLEY .....	CA
THOMAS C. OSS .....	PRESCOTT .....	WI
PHIL STRISSEL .....	ANNAPOLIS.....	MD
KRISTIAN WINROTH .....	EDGEWATER.....	FL
SHARON ZIMMERMAN.....	LAKELAND .....	FL

## Calling All Vietnam Era Mariners

Although we will always revere and honor our WWII Merchant Mariners at AMMV, we would also like to look "ahead" to mariners of more recent eras to narrate their stories, as well as educate those who are not familiar with the role the U.S. Merchant Marine played during conflicts that came after WWII, as well as in peacetime.

If you are a Vietnam era mariner (Feb 1961-May 1975) and have a "sea story" to share, we would like to hear from you. Please email AMMV News Magazine editor Capt. Chris Edyvean, [cjedyvean@hotmail.com](mailto:cjedyvean@hotmail.com) or Lynn Kelly, [ammermarvets@gmail.com](mailto:ammermarvets@gmail.com) at the AMMV National Office.





# Region #1 Vice President Stephen Snyder

## ***AMMV WWII Lifeboat Activities***

For the first time in over 27 years, our WWII lifeboat did not “sail” in the Jacksonville Veterans Day Parade.

The arrangement with the Museum of Military History in Kissimmee is for the return of the lifeboat each Veterans Day for this parade.

On Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>, with Hurricane Nicole approaching Florida, in consultation with Chris Robertson, Director of the Museum of Military History, and my being a “prudent mariner”, it was deemed best to leave the lifeboat in “Port Kissimmee” as we could not risk the safety of the boat and crew to “sail” up I-95 during the height of the storm.

As the storm cleared on Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>, the lifeboat did “sail” in Orlando’s Veterans Day Parade, to great respect and enjoyment of the spectators along the route. Since transferring the lifeboat to Kissimmee, it has been viewed over 25,000 times at the museum and when “sailing” to special events in the Kissimmee/Orlando area.



*Pictured in the WWII lifeboat at the Orlando Veterans Day parade are Museum of Military History Board Member Donny Shroyer, museum Executive Director Chris Robertson, museum Board Member Cortnie Grno, AMMV National President Capt. Dru DiMattia, museum Board Member Christine Ladas-Drake, and museum Board Member Steve Montiero. Steve Montiero is a Channel 6 news traffic anchor every morning in Orlando.*

## ***Museum of Military History holds fundraiser for WWII Merchant Mariners in need***

The Museum of Military History, whose Board of Directors now include AMMV member Capt. Richard “Rick” Martucci of Vero Beach, does great work towards recognizing WWII Merchant Mariners.

On Saturday Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>, the museum during their annual Pearl Harbor event, hosted a fundraiser raising \$3,460 for WWII Merchant Mariners Don Dittmer and Jim Sciple, who lost everything on Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> during Hurricane Ian. Don Dittmer of Kissimmee was in attendance and was honored by the Quilts of Valor Foundation with a hand sewed quilt meant to cover veterans with healing comfort.

### Encourage support for:

The Museum of Military History  
5210 W. Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway  
Kissimmee, FL 34746

[www.museumofmilitaryhistory.com](http://www.museumofmilitaryhistory.com)

Quilts of Valor Foundation: [www.QOVF.org](http://www.QOVF.org)



*WWII veteran Don Dittmer receives a quilt from Marge Nix of Quilts of Valor*



## American Merchant Marine Veterans Profit & Loss

July through December 2022

<b>Income</b>	
402 · Contributions	5,630.61
403 · Interest Income & Bank Bonuses	554.04
405 · Mission Advance Support	5,603.34
406 · Gold Medal Fund Support	8,147.98
410 · Chapter and MAL Dues	
DAR · Dennis Roland	365.86
EOH · Edwin O'Hara	225.00
GLD · Golden Gate	725.00
JTS · John T. Schmidt/Palmetto	50.00
LON · Lone Star	50.00
MAL · Members at Large	11,078.00
NBM · North Bay Mariners	275.00
NOA · North Atlantic	32.00
OHV · Ohio Valley	225.00
ORV · Oswego River Valley	50.00
THR · Three Rivers	575.00
410 · Chapter and MAL Dues - Other	224.00
<b>Total 410 · Chapter and MAL Dues</b>	<b>13,874.86</b>
411 · Convention Income	
412 · Convention Registrations	208.00
<b>Total 411 · Convention Income</b>	<b>208.00</b>
420 · Magazine Ads	300.00
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>34,318.83</b>
<b>Expense</b>	
540 · Gold Medal Expenses	6,648.34
500 · Fixed Expense	
507 · Telephone	195.78
511 · Svc Charges - Paypal & Square	150.20
<b>Total 500 · Fixed Expense</b>	<b>345.98</b>
514 · Convention Expenses	
515 · Convention Events	500.00
<b>Total 514 · Convention Expenses</b>	<b>500.00</b>
520 · Mission Advance Expenses	
521 · Awards	443.85
525 · Mission Support Exp	4,759.49
526 · Internet Initiative	400.00
<b>Total 520 · Mission Advance Expenses</b>	<b>5,603.34</b>
530 · AMMV News Magazine	
533 · Postage	1,369.19
536 · Printing	4,533.48
538 · Layout	1,300.00
<b>Total 530 · AMMV News Magazine</b>	<b>7,202.67</b>
550 · Personnel	
551 · Administration	10,200.00
<b>Total 550 · Personnel</b>	<b>10,200.00</b>
560 · Operating Expense	
564 · Office Supplies	381.94
565 · Postage - Office	435.78
566 · Printing - Office	809.53
567 · Licenses & Fees	602.43
569 · Legal Fees	7,900.07
<b>Total 560 · Operating Expense</b>	<b>10,129.75</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>40,630.08</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>-6,311.25</b>

## American Merchant Marine Veterans Balance Sheet

As of December 31, 2022

<b>ASSETS</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	
Checking/Savings	
105 · Chase Bank	339,941.02
<b>Total Checking/Savings</b>	<b>339,941.02</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>339,941.02</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>339,941.02</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	
<b>Liabilities</b>	
<b>Current Liabilities</b>	
Other Current Liabilities	
315 · Gold Medal Fund	11,135.12
311 · Dues Receivable	320.00
312 · Member Recruitment	893.00
314 · Mission Advance Fund	3,897.69
<b>Total Other Current Liabilities</b>	<b>16,245.81</b>
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>16,245.81</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>16,245.81</b>
<b>Equity</b>	
32001 · Retained Earnings	330,006.46
Net Income	-6,311.25
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>323,695.21</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; EQUITY</b>	<b>339,941.02</b>

**AMMV is now offering  
paid advertisements in our  
News Magazine!**

***Promote your business while  
helping to support the American  
Merchant Marine Veterans  
organization!***

***For pricing and more information, contact  
AMMV HQ (Lynn Kelly) at (475) 470-9200,  
ammermarvets@gmail.com***

*Paid advertisements/tributes should be related to the U.S.  
maritime industry/Merchant Marine, U.S. military, or American  
maritime history. AMMV reserves the right to reject potential  
advertisements which do not fit the guidelines of the magazine.*

# IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE FINAL BAR

CAPT. WILLIAM M. AYERS ..... Seguin, TX  
RAYMOND W. BOOGAARD ..... Jenison, MI  
GERARD DRISCOLL ..... Monongahela, PA  
NORMAN F. FORREST ..... Fremont, CA  
FRANK HIGGINS ..... Healy, AK  
CHARLES E. JERRIER, JR. .... Milton, MA  
RAYMOND N. NASH ..... Lakeland, FL  
WILLIAM LYDELL PERKINS ..... Sibley, LA

DONALD C. SCAFIDI ..... Diamondhead, MS  
CHARLES F. SCHELTER ..... Santa Rosa, CA  
LOUIS SCHIAVON ..... Aptos, CA  
BURT A. SHEARER ..... Mercer Island, WA  
PETER QUICCIARINI ..... Elmhurst, NY  
HAROLD WAGNER ..... San Ramon, CA  
WILLIAM WESLEY WHITE ..... Bostic, NC

To honor a loved one, memorial donations may be made to the American Merchant Marine Veterans organization on the loved one's behalf. This is a tribute to their memory and the dedicated service they gave to their country and to mankind. Thank you for your thoughtful gesture. Donations may be sent to: AMMV, P.O. Box 2024, Darien, CT 06820-2024.

## A Few Minutes of Solitude

*(by Glen Chesnut)*

Somewhere below the equator,  
headed for the Philippines,  
I step through the fiddley door,  
drenched in sweat  
from the 110-degree heat  
of the engine room.  
It's 4 in the afternoon,  
one hour till suppertime.  
I go in my fo' c' sle and get a cool  
can of beer from my ice chest.  
I take my beer to the shade  
of the starboard deck  
and sit on a bench alone.  
There is no wind, only a hint  
of a breeze made by the ship  
as it slips through the water  
at 15 knots.  
I can hear the deckhands  
chipping paint up near the bow.  
I'm aware of the muffled groan  
of the turbine seep below the waterline.  
The ship, cutting the water,

makes the steady sound of ssh, ssh.  
The surface of the sea is smooth like ice,  
shiny till it meets  
the blue dome of the sky.  
I take a long pull on my beer.  
My wet clothes suck my body cool.  
A school of flying fish breaks  
the mirrored surface of the water  
and the winged-fish glide, glide, glide;  
then hit the bright skin of water and skip  
like the flat rocks I used to throw  
when I was a kid.  
I try to remember ever seeing  
A flying fish take flight  
in choppy water. I can't.  
I guess they are fair-weather fliers.  
The chipping has stopped up forward;  
the deckhands have knocked off.  
I finish my beer and head for the shower.  
After that, it will be  
suppertime.

For more info, please visit: <https://glenchesnut.com>



# *We made history: The largest group of World War II Merchant Marine veterans at one time at the National WWII Museum!*

*Sheila M. Sova – AMMV National Vice President*

My father's Congressional Gold Medal bronze duplicate arrived at my home a few months ago. It was an emotional experience holding that medal and realizing what it symbolized! Dad, we finally did it! It was almost seven years ago, this past Veterans Day, that I went in front of my town's city council to express dismay that the U.S. Merchant Marine flag was not flying at the city's monument. That was my first ever speech in front of a crowd. I ended my first public speech with, "If I taught one person about the U.S. Merchant Marine WWII veterans, then I have done my job."

That speech sent me on a seven-year journey which included four trips to Washington D.C. Three of those trips were part of the "Storm the Hill" group, and the fourth was to witness history at the official Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in the U.S. Capitol on May 18<sup>th</sup>.

Regional ceremonies have since been held on the east and west coasts. It was time for a regional ceremony in the Gulf Coast region. The National WWII Museum in New Orleans seemed like the perfect place. With inviting the general public and including family/friends, this event was

sure to be a crowd pleaser.

I reached out to the National WWII Museum and the Gary Sinise Foundation, and quickly received positive responses. Soon afterwards the venue, travel, and lodging were arranged. Both of these nonprofits provided our WWII USMM veterans with an unforgettable trip to New Orleans. The Gary Sinise Foundation funded the travel and lodging for each veteran and guardian as well as their hotel stay at the attached Higgins Hotel. The brand-new hotel was named for Higgins WWII boats. The Higgins Hotel in its Art Deco 1940's flair was the perfect "time traveler" destination for the members of the Greatest Generation.

Our favorite dinner hangouts were Kilroy's and Rosie's Rooftop. Enjoying crab beignets and shrimp po boys while overlooking the skyline of New Orleans at night is a once in a lifetime experience. Breakfast at Café Normandie was not for the light or picky eater. Shrimp and grits, crawfish, Eggs Benedict, smoked salmon, and breakfast potatoes were some of the French Cajun cuisine attracting folks to the breakfast table each morning.

The quickest way to reach our members and non-members who had not yet received the Congressional Gold Medal was to post on social media using Facebook and Twitter. Numerous requests came from family members of veterans. All but three of them were AMMV members and now, those three have become members as well as some of their family.

In the spring of 2022, I was contacted by Joel Whitehead, President



*All thirteen veterans pose with Tom Gibbs of the Gary Sinise Foundation and AMMV National Vice President Sheila M. Sova; front row (seated) L to R: Lawrence Nunnink, Maxwell Nelson, William Feaheny, Billy Boyd, Donald Sperier, Julian Smith; back row (standing) L to R: Tom Gibbs of GSF, Louis Cinfici, Marc Oncale, James Lindsey, Charles Mills, Harold Wellington, George Offenhauser, John Nelson, AMMV VP Sheila M. Sova*





*Charles Mills and AMMV National VP Sheila M. Sova present Stephen Watson, President & Chief Executive Officer of the National WWII Museum, a replica Congressional Gold Medal for the Museum.*

Partnership, American Waterways Operators, Catholic War Veterans, Gary Sinise Foundation, International Propeller Club, International Propeller Club – New Orleans Chapter, J. Whitehead & Associates, Jones Walker Law Firm, K & L Gates LLP,



*MARAD Associate Administrator for Strategic Sealift Kevin Tokarski gives an eloquent speech regarding the WWII U.S. Merchant Marine veterans*

Maritime of Research and Industrial Development, National WWII Museum, Navy League of the U.S. – New Orleans Chapter, Transportation Institute, and the Kings Point Alumni – New Orleans Chapter. For those groups and individuals, we cannot thank you enough for all of your support. It was obvious that our sponsors have never forgotten

of the International Propeller Club of New Orleans. I reached out to Joel when plans were set for the New Orleans events. Joel sent out emails to the maritime industry seeking donations. A total of 15 organizations ultimately contributed to help fund various segments of events; specifically, the American Maritime Congress, American Maritime Officers, American Maritime



*NOLA resident, WWII mariner, & Kings Point graduate Donald Sperier holds up a photograph of himself as a young man.*

these brave heroes!

A total of thirteen veterans were registered for this event. Included in the group was the fourth WWII Merchant Marine female to be granted veteran status, 101-year-old Dr. Billie Adels Pennings. Dr. Pennings crossed the bar just three weeks prior to the New Orleans event. A tribute was mentioned at the ceremony. Although I never met Dr. Pennings in person, I am grateful that I got to speak to her on the phone for an interview.

One non-AMMV member came from California with his family. The family had planned to visit the WWII Museum as a gift for their 93-year-old WWII USMM veteran father. After three years of canceled trips, the family just happened to pick the weekend of October 1st to come to New Orleans. The family had looked through the events



*WWII mariner Julian Smith is captivated by a video in the Ralph E. Crump Merchant Marine Gallery at the Museum*



*Kneeling: Kenneth Corn (Master of Ceremonies); first row (seated): L to R: William Feahenny, James Lindsey, Charles Mills, George Offenhauser, Lawrence Nunnink; second row (standing) L to R: Marc Oncale, Donald Sperier, Wayne White, Louis Cinfici, Maxwell Nelson, Julian Smith, Harold Wellington, John Nelson. Not pictured is Billy Boyd.*



for the National WWII Museum only to discover that the WWII Merchant Marine were being honored during their weekend stay. Wayne White ended up joining us the entire weekend and is now applying for the Congressional Gold Medal. Fate played a big role in Mr. White's weekend!

Many of the veterans had received their Congressional Gold Medal in the mail. But having Kevin Tokarski, Associate Administrator for Strategic Sealift/MARAD, shake their hand and utter these words, "On behalf of a grateful nation, we thank you", was emotional for every person in that audience. The veterans teared up as each had their picture taken by a staff photographer with Mr. Tokarski and the CGM.



*The Nunnink family from California having breakfast at the Cafe Normandie; from left to right: Michele Nunnink, Mary Kay Beam, WWII mariner Lawrence Gregory Nunnink, and Tim Nunnink.*

Awarded their CGM's at the event was Lawrence Nunnink of California, Billy Boyd of Texas, and Donald Sperier of Louisiana. Mr. Sperier was one of three local



*Joanne and Ron Campana, AMMV members & NOLA KP Chapter*

residents from the New Orleans area, joining Mark Oncale and William Feaheny. Also from New Orleans were AMMV members Joanne and Ron Campana who were our "boots on the ground". From decorating the hospitality room, to providing snacks for everyone, they even hunted down Donald Sperier two days before the event, who was unaware that a Congressional Gold Medal was waiting for him!

Ron Campana,

a Kings Point Alumni, discovered that both Mr. Feaheny and Mr. Sperier were graduates of Kings Point. The Campanas plan to continue a friendship with all three local veterans. Mr. Oncale owned a seafood company but now enjoys time in his vegetable garden, giving most of his vegetables away.

Joanne was the recipient of a large bag of okra and cucumbers. New Orleans hospitality was certainly welcoming!

AMMV members Veda Handy and Justine Wong

volunteered when needed. Justine brought an entire entourage of eight, including Edmond Gor, former President of the Chinese American WWII Veterans group. She and her crew ventured out and took Charles Mills and granddaughter Veda on a whirlwind tour of New Orleans. Charles kept up with the group, hopping trolley cars, riding ferry boats, and visiting restaurants.

Susan Barr of Ohio Honor Flight assisted wherever she was needed. This event could not have happened without all the volunteers who shared part of their weekend.



*Justine Wong, AMMV member and daughter of a World War II Merchant Marine veteran, traveled from California to attend this event. She is pictured with Charles Mills.*



*At breakfast, clockwise from left: Kenneth Corn, WWII mariner Harold Wellington, WWII mariner Julian Smith, Susan Barr, and Joe Machado (both of Honor Flight Ohio)*

The ceremony was filmed live on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 from the National World War II Museum in New Orleans. Immediately after the ceremony, I received an email from representatives of the United Kingdom Battle of the Atlantic Foundation who had watched the ceremony live. A standing ovation was given to the veterans. The Victory Belles sang the National Anthem and Heave Ho My Lads



on stage during the ceremony. The Master of Ceremonies was Kenneth Corn, Vice President of the Veterans of Carolinas Museum, website: <https://theveteransmuseum.org>.

Speaking at the ceremony was Stephen Watson, President & Chief Executive Officer of the National WWII Museum and Pete Crean, Vice President of Education and Access. Kevin Tokarski spoke and Ken Corn introduced each veteran with a brief bio. I was then introduced as National Vice President of the



*The Victory Belles trio performed Heave Ho and the National Anthem*



*Local NOLA celeb Captain Joey Cargol of the Crescent River Port Pilots' Association, assisted our WWII veterans by pushing wheelchairs and filling in as a guardian. Capt. Cargol made headlines in 2020 when he fulfilled a lifetime dream of canoeing the entire length of the Mississippi River. Pictured is Captain Cargol swapping seas stories with Lois Cinfici (left) and Harold Wellington.*

American Merchant Marine Veterans organization. It was my honor, along with Charles Mills, to donate a Congressional Gold Medal duplicate on behalf of the AMMV. (President DiMattia was battling Hurricane Ian that had just hit Florida, preventing himself and veteran Jim Sciple from attending this event.)



*WWII mariner Billy Boyd with daughter Barbara Kettler*

Afterwards, a lunch was held in which the Victory Belles trio held a "meet and greet"

with our veterans. They sang *Happy Birthday* to both Harold Wellington (98) and Maxwell Nelson (101), and cupcakes were served. On Sunday, the veterans and their guardians were led by docents for a tour of the WWII Museum. Recommended is the 4-D movie narrated by Tom Hanks, *Beyond All Boundaries*, which is shown daily in the Solomon Victory Theater. The 4-D movie was a wonderfully immersive experience that provided a world-view of the events leading up to and throughout the war. Just remember to hold on to your seat when the explosions and gunfire start! It's not for the faint of heart!

Seven years ago, I joined this organization to carry on the legacy of my father, Orville Lee Sova. The highlight of my time with AMMV culminated with this event at the National World War II Museum. Recognizing the WWII U.S. Merchant Marine on stage was the ultimate crown in a royal palace known as the National WWII Museum. Even Kevin Tokarski commented that this event was one of his best days as a MARAD employee! I can say with certainty that this too was one of my best days as an AMMV member.



*John Nelson and son John, of the AMMV John T. Schmidt Palmetto Mariners Chapter*



*A group of young Marines with some of our WWII mariners at Rosie's on the Rooftop*

Incidentally, the Gary Sinise Foundation offers year-round complimentary trips for WWII veterans and guardians, including hotel stay and airport transportation to the National WWII Museum. Call or email them and ask for the Soaring Valor program for WWII veterans. Contact Tom Gibbs: [tgibbs@garysinisefoundation.org](mailto:tgibbs@garysinisefoundation.org)


The October 1<sup>st</sup> ceremony may be viewed online at: <https://rb.gy/xxhet2>

The photo collection for this event may be viewed at: <https://rb.gy/zgfrmw>



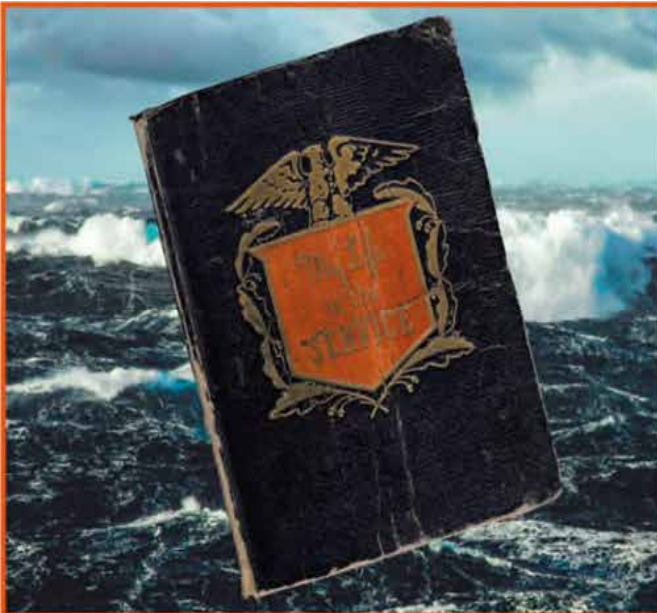


# World War II Merchant Marine Veteran Harry G. Pierson Receives Convoy Cup Honors

On October 1<sup>st</sup> the Norwegian/Nova Scotian Convoy Cup Foundation presented the Convoy Cup Award to U.S. Merchant Marine veteran Harry G. Pierson, Jr. of Scarborough, Maine, in recognition and appreciation of his service at sea on the convoys during the Second World War. Mr. Pierson was an engineering officer and served on U.S. merchant ships in all positions from 4<sup>th</sup> Assistant Engineer to 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Engineer from 1943 to 1946. He received his initial training at Fort Trumbull and served on vessels in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. Mr. Pierson, who is 100 years old, received the award at the home of his daughter in Scarborough. The award was presented by Capt. Jeffrey Monroe, Arctic Campaign Memorial Association Chaplain, and the Rev. Gary Drinkwater, Port and Maritime Chaplain, Anglican Church in America. In addition to the medallion and certificate, Mr. Pierson was presented with a letter from Senator Angus King of Maine who has been a champion in Congress for veteran issues. Pierson has authored a book of his WWII memoirs, titled *U.S. Merchant Mariner's WWII Diary: A Small Window of Tens of Thousands*. 



(L to R) front: Mrs. Pierson, Harry G. Pierson, back: Fr. Gary Drinkwater, Capt. Monroe



*Rustbucket or new 'Got the job done'*  
US Merchant Mariner's  
**WW II DIARY:**  
A Small Window of Tens of Thousands  
HARRY G. PIERSON, JR.

**Harry Pierson, Jr.** is a registered professional engineer, retired, who has worked for major consulting and engineering firms, in the steam power generation, petroleum, and pulp-and-paper industries for over thirty years, in the United States and Canada.

Pierson's book is available from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and WestBow Press.

<https://www.hgpwwlldiary.com>

# Celebrating a 101<sup>st</sup> Birthday for Ed Laughton

Patrick Cotter – AMMV Government Affairs Standing Committee

On October 29, 2022, Christian Yuhas (AMMV Region #8 Vice President and Golden Gate Chapter member), my wife (Mary Jane), and I were invited to attend the 101<sup>st</sup> birthday



*Granddaughter Betsy Mount lights the candles on Ed's cake (photo credit: Rob Ellis)*

party for Ed Laughton in Seaside, CA. Ed was a World War II Merchant Mariner who served as the Second Mate onboard the SS *Hobbs Victory*. He and his shipmates sailed from San Francisco in 1945 to deliver

tons of ammunition to U.S. troops for the invasion of Okinawa. On April 6, 1945, a Japanese kamikaze attack evaded the convoy's anti-aircraft fire and struck the *Hobbs Victory* with a mortal blow. The ship was set on fire and the inferno caused the ammunition cargo to explode. Eleven Merchant Mariners and one U.S. Naval Armed Guard sailor were killed in the attack. Ed and more than 70 other men aboard the *Hobbs Victory* survived the attack. They were rescued by the USS *Success*, a U.S. Navy minesweeper.

Ed's family is so glad that he survived to celebrate his 101<sup>st</sup> birthday. Dozens of Laughton family members and friends were invited to an amazing party hosted by Betsy Mount (Ed's granddaughter) and her husband James Mount. Christian Yuhas and I gave brief comments about the importance of the USMM during WWII and the awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal, respectively. Ed received the official full-size medal during a ceremony with Rep. John Garamendi in May 2022.

Betsy asked me to award Ed a smaller version of the medal after my remarks. The smaller version, minted by the U.S. Mint, really surprised Ed in a good way. I reminded all the guests just how significant the Congressional Gold Medal is to honor the courage and sacrifice of all USMM WWII veterans. I informed the audience that about 170 Congressional Gold Medals have been awarded since 1776, including famous national leaders, national personalities, and courageous military groups. The USMM WWII veterans are now members of an elite group of honorees who have received the Congressional Gold Medal.

The party was lots of fun, the food was second to none, and the entertainment could not be outdone, including songs from the 1940s, Samba dancers, and a great DJ. For each guest over 21, Ed gave them a bottle of his favorite whiskey with a smiling photo of Ed giving thumbs up and the words "Cheers to 101 Ed!" on the front, two whiskey glasses with an embossed letter E, and a hangover recovery kit with an assortment of remedies – how thoughtful. Many thanks to Betsy and James Mount, the entire Laughton Family, and all the guests for a wonderful time! We look forward to an invitation to Ed's 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday party! **Heave Ho, Ed!**



*Patrick Cotter & Ed Laughton (photo credit: Rob Ellis)*



*(photo credit: Rob Ellis)*



# National WWII Museum opens *Expressions of America* display

*Editor's note: Some of the photos and text are reprinted from the National WWII Museum website, with permission.*

Recently, the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, LA debuted a special new display called *Expressions of America*. The following is promotional text from the museum's website at <https://expressionsofamerica.org>.

Experience the music, art, and personal reflections of the 1940s through *Expressions of America*, an outdoor sound and light show available exclusively at The National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

A nighttime spectacular for all ages, *Expressions of America* brings history to life on a grand scale. Stunning visuals projected 90 feet tall transform the exterior of the Museum's buildings as actor Gary Sinise narrates an inspiring glimpse into what life was like for the men and women who served our country in every way imaginable.

Generously presented by Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation, *Expressions of America* combines cutting-edge technology with the real words of the WWII generation to present an experience like no other.

Attending the opening display were WWII Merchant Marine veterans William Balabanow and Donald Sperier. Balabanow reports:

*"I am a WW2MM Veteran who was blown away by the enormity of the Veterans Day celebration sponsored at the National World War II Museum, in New Orleans, LA, this past Nov 11, 2022. My sister, Linda Davis, and I came down from PA, via*

*a Nashville rendezvous with another group of WW2 veterans, and were so moved at the honors bestowed upon our veterans of WW2 that we are ready to come down again... I never saw such a display of pride displayed from such a distinguished group of American citizens highlighting the WW2 veterans. I, being a Merchant Mariner of WW2, join with the other five branches of the Military in saying "THANK YOU" for remembering us."*

Complete information about the display is found on the museum's website.

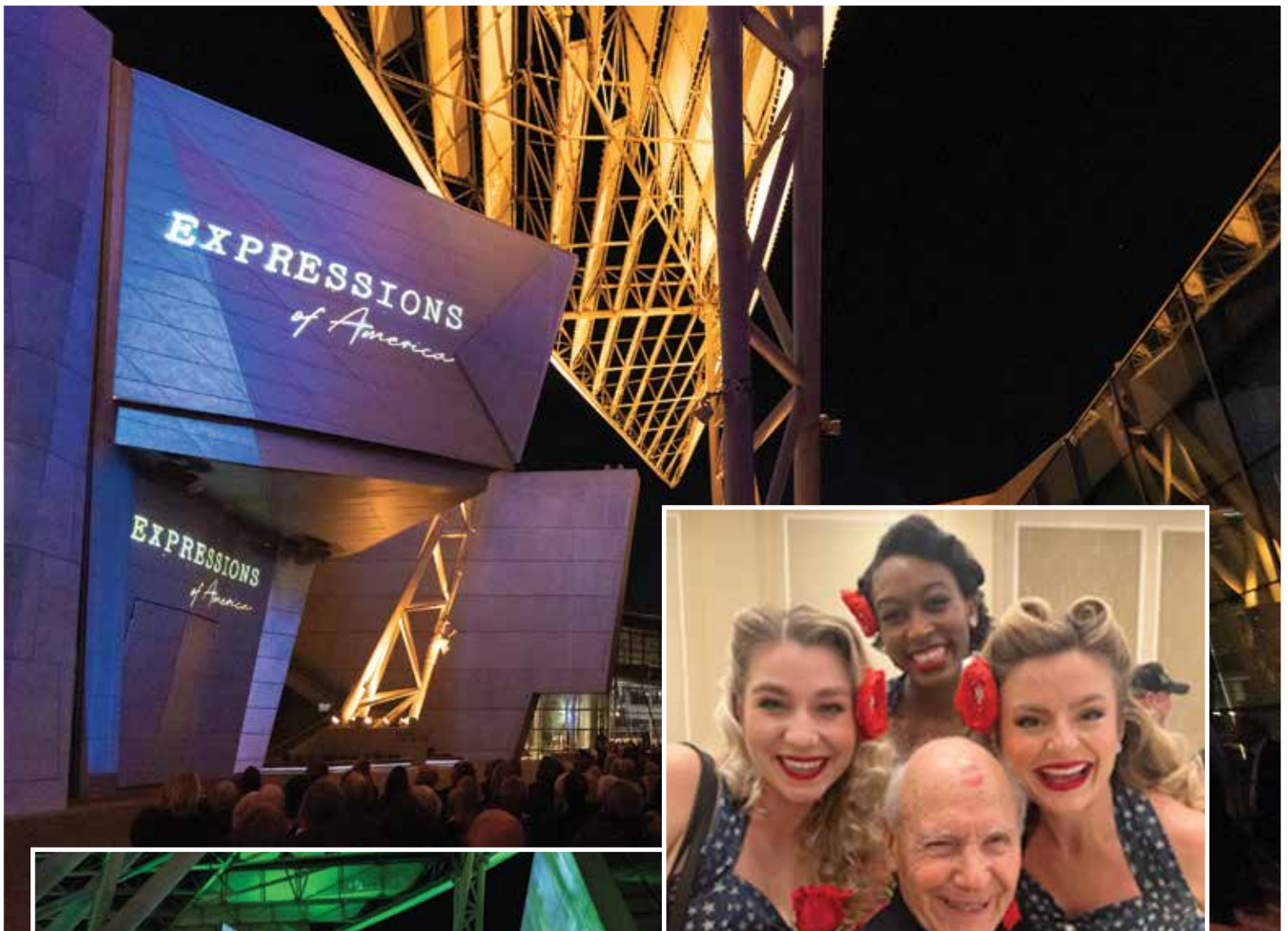


*William Balabanow and sister, Linda Davis*



*Pictured in the center (standing with red walker and a "thumbs up") is longtime AMMV member William Balabanow*





*Donald Sperier enjoys the event*





REMEMBER HONOR TEACH



# WREATHS — across — AMERICA

“Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, our mission to Remember, Honor, and Teach is carried out by coordinating wreath-laying ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as at more than 3,400 additional locations in all 50 U.S. states, at sea and abroad.”



*Remembering WWII MM Veteran Douglass Pushard at Boulder City, NV are his grandson Robert and great-grandson Ryan.*



*AMMV National President Capt. Dru DiMattia and AMMV member Ricky Walega place a wreath at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.*



*Jackson, grandson of Three Rivers Chapter President Scott Nowak, at the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Exeter*



*WWII Merchant Mariner Frank Mendez and AMMV Region # 8 VP Christian Yuhas attend Wreaths Across America at the Sacramento National Cemetery in Dixon, CA.*



*Taylor, granddaughter of Three Rivers Chapter President Scott Nowak, at the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Exeter*



*AMMV Region # 2 VP Capt. George Bruno at the Jefferson Memorial Cemetery in Birmingham, Alabama*



*Lori Gracey places at wreath at her father Glenn Gracey's headstone at Fort Gibson National Cemetery in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Glenn served in the WWII Merchant Marine and was a member of AMMV.*





*Marker of George Ratcliffe, who was an AMMV member (Spring Grove Cemetery)*



*El Faro memorial, Jacksonville, FL*



*At the El Faro memorial in Jacksonville, the pathway direction of 33 bollards marks the latitudes and longitudes of Jacksonville to her intended destination of San Juan.*



*AMMV National Treasurer Dennis Kelly at the Spring Grove Cemetery in Darien, CT (first veterans cemetery in Connecticut)*



*AMMV members (L to R): Ken "Sinbad" Delancey, Past National President John Pitts, and Sean Torkelson attend the Wreaths Across America ceremony at the American Merchant Marine Veterans Memorial in San Pedro, CA.*



*Florida National Cemetery*



# WWII Merchant Mariner honored at Branson musical show

*Editor's note: The following article is reproduced with permission. It was written by Tim Church and appeared in the Branson Tri-Lakes News on December 16<sup>th</sup>. While attending this event, AMMV National President Capt. Dru DiMattia, along with Jody Madaras from the musical group All Hands On Deck, also took time to travel to Kansas City to visit with AMMV member and WWII mariner Gene Barner.*

Earlier this month audiences of the final 2022 All Hands On Deck Show in Branson, were given the honor to bear witness the presentation of a Congressional Gold Medal to a World War II Merchant Marine.

With a packed house at The Copeland Theatre at the Meadows on Thursday, Dec. 8, World War II Mariner Bob Ross of El Dorado, Arkansas took the stage during intermission of the Branson based touring show where he was officially bestowed his Congressional Gold Medal.

AMMV President and Master Mariner Captain Dru DiMattia was on hand to present Ross with his medal. As part of the presentation, DiMattia shared some insight into the history of the Merchant Mariners with those in attendance, starting with the fact that they've been in existence since the Revolutionary War.

"The Merchant Marine answered the call and delivered the supply chain on both sides of the world. In order to make it happen, this is where our good friend, World War II Merchant Mariner Mr. Bob Ross comes in as they were building the ships, the supply chain was getting broken by the wolf pack," DiMattia said. "In order to build the ships faster than they were being sunk, they had to do recruitment. During that recruitment there were 250,000 young men and there were some women as well.

"We had to innovate the ship yards in order to build those ships faster than they were being sunk and with their ingenuity and the unbelievable patriotism here we are. The Merchant Marines delivered the goods and they were a part of the winning combination."

All Hands On Deck Show Creator, Producer and Performer Jody Madaras helped make arrangements with the American Merchant Marine Veterans to host the ceremony when he

learned Ross and his family would be attending the final show of the season.

"What an honor to help present the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal (Congress' highest award) to WWII Merchant Mariner Bob Ross at our final show of the season," Madaras said in a statement. "Knowing that Mr. Ross and his family are such good friends of our show, the leader of the American Merchant Marine Veterans Capt. Dru DiMattia along with the AHOD team helped make this happen."

Upon DiMattia handing Ross his Congressional Gold Medal, he explained to the audience how on March 13, 2020, legislation was signed into law authorizing the Congressional Gold Medal for American Merchant Mariners who's honorable deeds played a critical role in World War II.

"The United States Department of Transportation Maritime Administration is honored to present the Merchant Mariners of World War II the Congressional Gold Medal to Mr. Bobby G. Ross. The Congressional Gold Medal, which is the highest honor bestowed by the U.S. Congress honors those dedication, heroism and public service have created a lasting impact on American History," DiMattia said. "The Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act 2020 authorizes MARAD, that's the Maritime Administration today, to award duplicates of the medal to individuals who between Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946 were members of the U.S. Merchant Marines. This country will always be grateful to

the many thousands of Merchant Mariners for their gallant support of our country."

The original Congressional Gold Medal awarded to World War II Merchant Mariners was presented by the

Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi during a ceremony convened in Statuary Hall by Congressional leaders on May 18, 2022, and is now displayed in the American Merchant Marine Museum in New York.

In response to receiving the medal, Ross simply said with a chuckle, "Thank you." Following the ceremony, Ross visited with Branson Tri-Lakes News about his time as a Merchant Mariner.

"I went in as a Utility Messman, which we served in the sewage department. In other words, we fed the crew and did those jobs," Ross said. "I never attended any of the maritime schools, so it was sort of on the job training sort of thing for me. I soon became the Head Messman and that goes into what we called a Salon Messman, which was for the officer's and all. I enjoyed it very much."



Like many joining the wartime efforts at that time, Ross who was only 14-years old, also lied about his age to become a Merchant Marine.

"We had a different type of patriotism back then. It's just kind of like, I like to describe it like someone slipping in the back room and killing your baby brother or something you know," Ross said. "When they bombed Pearl Harbor, it was a terrible ordeal and we couldn't wait to do something. Every kid in school, every boy just couldn't wait to try to join or try to do something."

"I was a big ole boy," Ross said. "I was 6 '1 or 6' 2 tall at that time at 14. I have a son that's 6'6. It's in the family."

More than 70 years after his service, Ross shared what it means to him to be recognized for his wartime efforts.

"It's a very humbling experience. I never expected anything. We went unrecognized for so many years, we thought nothing about it," Ross said. "We never talked about it. Even when some of us got together, we didn't talk about it. Then all at once we're getting this recognition. It's a real nice thing."

When asked if there was anything he would like the community to know, he shared one final thought.

"I'd do it again. I'd do it all over again," Ross said. "That's all I have to say and I think they would too."

Joining Ross for his special day was his daughter and son-in-law Shirley and Crawford Knight. While visiting after the ceremony, both Shirley and Crawford became emotional when sharing their thoughts on Ross's recognition.

"Pretty special. A long time coming," Crawford said. "They didn't get any recognition. They didn't get the G.I. benefits (until 1988) all of us got from our service."

Shirley explained her emotional response comes from the lack of recognition for her father until the last couple of years.

"The day the war was over they had the Army, Navy,

Marines all lined up and playing their anthems for them. All the sudden, the group of soldiers in front of Daddy and them, they played their anthem and then everybody walked off. And the Merchant Marine were still there," Shirley said. "No one greeted them or anything. It makes you kind of bitter to think they were unrecognized. They got all those goods to the ship and everybody. They were the ones who did it. Their own people tried to hold them up. Daddy's worked hard for them and helped them get this far. We're very pleased."

DiMattia joined in on the conversation as well, and explained the consistent persistence is what led to the recognition these Merchant Marines are receiving today.

"It's never too late to do the right thing. It's taken 75 years to get these guys honored with the Congressional Gold Medal," DiMattia said. "They didn't receive veterans benefits until 1988; 43 years after the war. Amazingly enough it does take raising your hand and if you need to raise your hand again a second time, a third time; you do it. Good things prevail."

Initially World War II Mariner Eugene Barner of Kansas City was also set to be a part of the Branson ceremony, but was unable to travel due to his health. In response, DiMattia and Madaras made a surprise house call to Barner's home to present him in person with his U.S. Congressional Gold Medal.

"It's easy to see that the WWII generation (aka the Greatest Generation) felt, especially in 1942, that they could contribute something to their country—and they did it selflessly, and honorably," Madaras said. "Men like Bob Ross and Gene Barner (who was supposed to attend the same performance) are incredible role models for us all—and celebrating them is a must!"

The 2022 season of the All Hands On Deck Show has come to a close, but will return to The Copeland Theatre in 2023. Visit [allhandsondeckshow.com](http://allhandsondeckshow.com).



## A visit with WWII mariner Eugene Barner

by Capt. Dru DiMattia

Along with Bob Ross, *All Hands On Deck* producer and singer, Jody Madaras, had invited WWII Merchant Mariner Eugene Barner to be honored at a special Congressional Gold Medal during the intermission of their last show in Branson, Missouri on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

However, it was quickly determined that the 3-hour trip (each way) might be a bit much for Barner. So, Jody came up with a plan that he and I would make a road trip the following morning after the show to visit Barner at his place!

Upon arrival, we went to Eugene's door for a wake-up call! To say the least, he was very happy to see us!

Jody's plan all along was to get Eugene out for lunch at their favorite spot, Jack Stack's BBQ, to hear some sea stories! Come to find out, Eugene joined the USMS right after high school in 1943. He trained in Sheepshead Bay, and then was off to San Francisco to catch his first ship, where

he made runs across the Pacific and down to New Guinea.

You may recall, Eugene was a driving force as part of AMMV's Storm the Hill gang, having participated in all four evolutions (2015, and 2017-19).

Once we returned to Eugene's place, we discovered a Veteran's Wall of Honor, where Eugene has a photo framed and a USMS emblem displayed. We gathered around and paid tribute to Barner, and then presented his duplicate encased Congressional Gold Medal!



Gene Barner is visited by AMMV President DiMattia (left) and Jody Madaras





# A TRIBUTE TO MY MAN, GERARD

## AUGUST 7, 1926 – OCTOBER 12, 2022

As people go through life, they meet many individuals. Most of these meetings are quickly forgotten. Some meetings turn out to be long lasting for special reasons. Many years ago, I was fortunate to meet Gerard Driscoll, a fellow merchant mariner. As the years passed and the group of mariners that we formed grew smaller each year, my association with Gerard seemed to increase as we became involved in many projects relating to the WWII Merchant Marine. Gerard passed on recently and this made me think about all the things we had done together, and especially, how different Gerard was from other merchant mariners I knew.

Many writers have written about members of the Greatest Generation. These are men and women who grew up during the depression and served in the military services of WWII. Perhaps the distinctive feature of these people is their response when asked why they served their country and they would respond *"because it was the right thing to do."* And so, it was with Gerard. His family consisted of 11 boys and three girls. Gerard and two of his brothers joined the Merchant Marine, two joined the U.S. Air Force, and one the Navy. At the age of 17, Gerard began sailing on a Great Lakes ship in 1944, passing coal in the engine room to make steam. However, wanting to go to sea, he contacted the Coast Guard which sent him to the West Coast



where he was assigned as an oiler on a freighter going to the Pacific theatre.

Gerard sailed in the Pacific, participating in three invasions, finally leaving the service in 1948 when he enlisted in the Army. He then spent four years as a Combat Engineer in Germany. He retired in 1952 and went to sea again as an oiler for another four years. Few seamen can match this dedicated service record and when asked why he enlisted in the Army, he said *"it was the right thing to do."* He sailed on 18 ships.

I participated in many maritime activities with Gerard over the years because Gerard asked me to join him. I admired his energy and devotion to telling the public and young people of the merchant marine and what they had accomplished over the years in serving their country. He never tired of new things to do and never refused a

request to do something, or be in charge. If there was ever a person that was the leader of our Band of Brothers, and represented the heart and soul of the Merchant Marine in the Greatest Generation, it was Gerard Driscoll.

My man, Gerard. You served your watch with distinction, rest in peace. You were the best of us all, and we were fortunate to have known you.

Mark Gleeson  
USMM '45-'46



### *Through a daughter's eyes: Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony*

What an experience it was! To actually accompany my father as he received this prestigious award truly tugged at my heart strings. He was filled with pride as was I for him. 96 years old and finally getting the recognition he so deserved. A memory I will treasure forever. I had been with him on this journey for decades. Passing out petitions for this recognition. Joining his Merchant Marine chapter. Attending all the meetings. Assisting with Maritime Day. Pounding the pavement with him asking for donations for this event. My father was one proud Merchant Marine. After receiving the Gold Medal, he even slept with it under his pillow! He spent 12 years on the seas with the Merchant Marines and I believe those were some of his happiest times of his life. He has since crossed the bar but I thank God he lasted long enough to receive the Gold Medal.

Cynthia Komlos, daughter of WWII MM Gerard Driscoll





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Darien, CT 06820-2024  
(475) 470-9200  
[ammermarvets@gmail.com](mailto:ammermarvets@gmail.com)

Dear AMMV member or supporter:

The American Merchant Marine Veterans organization is pleased to announce that we are "back on track" with our annual convention timeline! As our by-laws dictate that our convention should move around the country, 2023 marks our return to the western United States. The Gold Coast Hotel and Casino is the chosen venue; AMMV had previously held its 2014 National Convention here.

Inflation? Not with AMMV! The National Office has worked hard to secure convention pricing which is even cheaper than the 2014 event held at the same location! Registration is free for WWII mariners, and only \$50 for others. The costs of the two lunch buffets and one featured dinner are being offered to our attendees at slightly less than the actual cost to AMMV. You may register for the whole package or select via a la cart. Our Registration Form is included in the following pages; also, we have the same registration availability on our website. Please visit [ammv.us](http://ammv.us).

Room pricing at the Gold Coast is the best deal we've had for a convention in many years. The hotel/casino is not far from the Las Vegas Harry Reid International Airport, and offers many amenities and features. You may book your room online or over the phone.

We hope that you will consider joining us in Las Vegas! We will work through our business sessions in order to make AMMV a better organization, and we'll be treated to fascinating guest speakers. And, during your spare time, there is something in Vegas for everyone!

Heave Ho! See you in Vegas!

--AMMV Convention Committee



# AMMV 35th National Convention

*March 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023*



## **Instructions for hotel and conference registration:**

### **Hotel reservations:**

Gold Coast Hotel & Casino, 400 W. Flamingo Road, Las Vegas, NV 89103

(Located only 4 miles from Harry Reid International Airport!)

- Book online at <https://www.goldcoastcasino.com/groups>
  - (Enter group code MMVC23C)
- Or call 888-402-6278
  - (Use group code MMVC23C)
- Reservations must be made no later than March 5<sup>th</sup> to receive discounted rate

### **Conference registration:**

Complete AMMV Registration Form; mail-in form & check to AMMV HQ

OR visit [ammv.us](http://ammv.us) and complete online registration





**Convention Registration Form**  
*AMMV 2023 35<sup>th</sup> National Convention*  
March 28<sup>th</sup> thru 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023  
Gold Coast Hotel & Casino  
4000 W. Flamingo Road  
Las Vegas, NV 89103

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Additional names(s) in party: \_\_\_\_\_

**FULL CONVENTION REGISTRATION PACKAGE**

**\$200 per person (\$150 for WWII Merchant Marine Veterans)** Includes all business sessions, Hospitality Room access, Wednesday & Thursday luncheons, and Thursday evening featured dinner.

**Full Convention Package (non-WWII Vets) ..... \$200 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Full Convention Package (WWII Vets) ..... \$150 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

*Please select your party's meal choices for the 3/30 evening dinner*

Choice 1: Chicken breast, stuffed w/ feta cheese, spinach, onion, roasted peppers, topped with a vodka tomato sauce Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Choice 2: Pacific salmon, broiled & served with chive beurre blanc Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Choice 3: Filet mignon, tender beef filet with a peppercorn sauce Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

**À LA CART SELECTION (for those who do not select full package)**

**Registration Fee ..... \$50 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

Includes attendance into all business sessions and Hospitality Room. Does not include Wednesday & Thursday luncheons or Thursday evening featured dinner. WWII Merchant Marine Vets are not required to pay the \$50 Registration Fee; however, their guest(s) must pay the fee.

**Lunch buffet (Wednesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>) ..... \$40 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Lunch buffet (Thursday, March 30<sup>th</sup>) ..... \$40 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Plated dinner (Thursday, March 30<sup>th</sup>) ..... \$70 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

*Please select your party's meal choices for the 3/30 evening dinner*

Choice 1: Chicken breast, stuffed w/ feta cheese, spinach, onion, roasted peppers, topped with a vodka tomato sauce Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Choice 2: Pacific salmon, broiled & served with chive beurre blanc Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Choice 3: Filet mignon, tender beef filet with a peppercorn sauce Quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL due for all selections ..... = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

***Note: Convention Registration does not include your hotel stay.***

Please make check payable to: AMMV  
Mail check (no cash please) with completed form to:  
**AMMV, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 2024, Darien, CT 06820**





*AMMV 2023 35<sup>th</sup> National Convention*  
 March 28<sup>th</sup> thru 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023  
 Gold Coast Hotel & Casino  
 4000 W. Flamingo Road  
 Las Vegas, NV 89103

## **Tentative Convention Agenda**

**\*\*\*Exact times will be solidified prior to convention start date \*\*\***

### **Monday, March 27<sup>th</sup>**

Arrival date for Convention Committee volunteers; set-up Hospitality Room, etc.

### **Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>**

Continue set-up work .....	Salon C – NV Ballroom East	Morning hours
Registration & Hospitality Room open .....	Salon C – NV Ballroom East	Afternoon hours
AMMV Board Meeting .....	(Location TBD)	18:00 – 20:00
Registration & Hospitality Room open .....	Salon C – NV Ballroom East	Evening hours

### **Wednesday, March 29<sup>th</sup>**

Organizational business .....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Morning hours
Luncheon with guest speaker .....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Lunch break
Organizational business, cont. ....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Afternoon hours
Hospitality Room open .....	Salon C – NV Ballroom East	Evening hours

*\*\*\* Evening free time in Vegas (no scheduled activities) \*\*\**

### **Thursday, March 30<sup>th</sup>**

Guest speakers/presenters .....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Morning hours
Luncheon with guest speaker .....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Lunch break
Guest speakers/presenters .....	Salon AB – NV Ballroom East	Afternoon hours
Featured evening dinner with Keynote Speaker ....	Salon F – AZ Ballroom East	18:00 – ???

### **Friday, March 31<sup>st</sup>**

Convention Committee volunteers clean-up .....	Morning hours
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***Heave Ho!***

# 2023 Convention Sponsorship Opportunities

*Your organization or group can help support convention functions!*



## Sponsorship Levels:

- \$500 Captain's Office
- \$250 Engineer's Control Room
- \$100 Bosun's Locker
- \$25 Crew Lounge

*All sponsors at \$250 thru \$500 level will have logo displayed in the convention agenda flyer, on video display throughout conference, and in next issue of AMMV magazine on our "thank you" page. Names of \$100 and lower sponsorship levels will be indicated in the agenda flyer and on our "thank you" page.*

Name/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsorship level: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to: **AMMV**

Mail check (no cash please) with completed form to:

**AMMV, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 2024, Darien, CT 06820**

*or call AMMV HQ to pay over the phone at (475) 470-9200*

For \$250 – \$500 sponsorships, please email your organization's logo to:

[\*\*\*cjedyvean@hotmail.com\*\*\*](mailto:cjedyvean@hotmail.com)

**ATTN:** AMMV sponsorship



# WWII Merchant Mariner Donald Lee receives Congressional Gold Medal


Donald T. S. Lee was presented on November 10, 2022 the Merchant Mariners of WWII Congressional Gold Medal in a ceremony conducted in Woodland Hills, CA by Northrup Grumman's Military civilians from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force.

Northrup Grumman is one of the largest defense contractors in the country, of which Mr. Lee's daughter, Anita Lee Wright, currently serves as Manager of Strategic Mission Solutions Business Development.

Mr. Lee was born in Hawaii in 1925 and was in high school when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Following basic training in 1944, Engine Cadet Donald Lee sailed from San Diego into the Pacific theatre of war, in which travels took him past Australia to Calcutta, India, transporting 500-pound bombs for General Chennault's Flying Tigers. Later, in 1945, Lee sailed the Mediterranean and also brought troops back from Le Havre, France.

After graduating from Kings Point U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in 1947 with a Chief Engineer's license, Lee served on active duty with the U.S. Coast Guard in the Korean War. After the war he served as an engineering instructor at various basic training centers.

Donald Lee retired at age 60, following 40 years of service in the U.S. Coast Guard and six years in the Merchant Marine. Upon retirement, he held the rank of Commander.

Following is the latter part of the presentation speech given to honor Mr. Lee: *"Awarding the Congressional Gold Medal is the highest expression of national appreciation to the U.S. Merchant Marine. Our nation's founding American mariners have selflessly protected and helped advance our nation's vital interests at home and around the world. This country will always be grateful to the many thousands of merchant mariners for their gallant support of our country. Mr. Lee, your honorable deeds played a critical role in WWII. Without your service and leadership in the Merchant Marine to have the munitions, food, and supplies in the Pacific and Europe, the success would not have happened in WWII. The Gold Medal is justly deserved. This country is grateful to you, Mr. Lee."* 



*Don Lee receiving the Merchant Marine WWII Congressional Gold Medal Award*



*Donald Lee, circa 1945*



*Don Lee accepting the award and speaking to 200 attendees*



*Lee and his family after accepting the award*

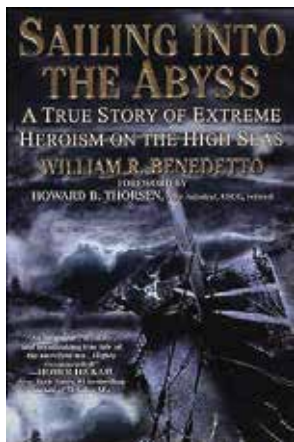


# BOOK REVIEWS

Reviewed by Capt. Chris Edyvean, AMMV News Editor

## Sailing into the Abyss: A True Story of Extreme Heroism on the High Seas

Author: William R. Benedetto



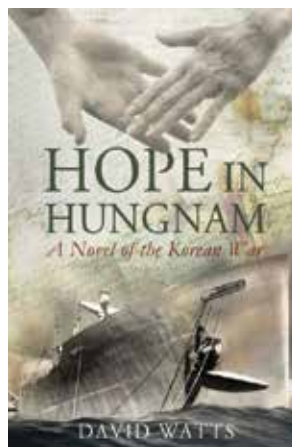
Although not a new book (published in 2005), *Sailing into the Abyss* is the timeless true story of the fateful last trip of the *S/S Badger State*, a U.S.-flagged vessel bound for Vietnam in 1969 with a cargo of bombs and munitions, in which the captain and crew were forced to abandon ship due to compounded difficulties during the voyage. The

root of the issue was inexcusable poor securing of the cargo prior to sailing from the States. Bombs began to break loose in several of the holds as the vessel encountered horrendously rough weather. Simultaneously, the crew was forced to deal with other disturbing mechanical issues. The efforts of the officers and crew to manage the situation is a story of heroism for the ages. Also weaved into Benedetto's book is a healthy dose of U.S. maritime history. This is a real "page-turner", and picks up momentum as the story unfolds. *Sailing into the Abyss* is available from Amazon.


soon afterwards aboard the *S/S Del Valle* headed for Vietnam. The author captures the essence of sailing during this era, as he falls victim to temptations both at sea and ashore. *First Ship* is the first in the "12 Years in the Merchant Marine" series of nine books from John Merriam; the author would receive a scholarship from the SIU and go on to become an attorney. If you enjoy firsthand accounts of life in the Merchant Marine, then this book is for you. *First Ship* and other maritime books by Merriam are available on Kindle from Amazon.

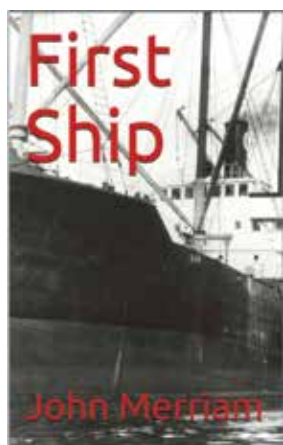
## Hope in Hungnam: A Novel of the Korean War

Author: David Watts



Part nonfiction and part historical fiction, *Hope in Hungnam* recalls the mass evacuation of refugees during the Korean War near Christmastime, 1950. The historical element details the basic events and military actions preceding the evacuation of the port of Hungnam. Captain Leonard LaRue and the officers of the *Meredith*

*Victory* are a dominant part of the storyline, as the ship and its voyages leading up to this historic event are well noted. The author takes liberties in recreating likely dialog between Capt. LaRue and his deck officers. Along the lines of historical fiction, a handful of characters are added to illustrate both the rage of war and the compassion of humanity. The main two fictional characters are a U.S. Marine private and a young Korean mother who meet during dire circumstances in the early stages of the evacuation. *Hope in Hungnam* is a captivating read, penned by an author who wishes for the remarkable story of the evacuation to be preserved. It is available via Amazon. 



## First Ship (From the series, "12 Years in the Merchant Marine")

Author: John Merriam

*First Ship* is a short read which recounts the journey of a troubled young man, who in seeking an escape from his problems lands himself at a Seafarers International Union (SIU) training facility, and



# Roles of Merchant Mariners are many, including humanitarian

## (Be prepared for large crowds on your ship!)

2022 has been a year of great recognition for American Merchant Marine Veterans, especially in the Awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to all WWII Merchant Mariners at the U.S. Capitol in May. During the ceremony, Congressional members recognized and explained the true value Merchant Mariners bring to the United States as a nation during peace and war. Their services are many as are their stories.

One story is that of my dad, Arthur F. Boucher. Captain Boucher joined the Merchant Marine in 1941 and graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point in February 1944. He also retired from the Naval Reserve.



Photo credit: Jack Howard Holle

in 1981, and passed in 1988. During his career, he was either a deck officer or ship's captain on over 21 different ships spanning over 300 round trips throughout the world on various vessel types, including Liberty Ships, United States Lines cargo vessels, container ships, and the passenger ships *S/S America* and *S/S United States*.



Source : Demos Kukas, Chief Officer, *S/S American Challenger*, Apr. 1975



Photo credit: Jack Howard Holle (1917-1990) who was on the ship returning home

When researching his DD-214 that is required to obtain a duplicate of the Congressional Gold Medal, our family found that his career in the Merchant Marine lasted 40 years. He retired

Little did he know at the time when he was Chief Officer of the *S/S Colby Victory* in 1945 that his ship was called upon to transport our many troops home at the end of the WWII.

Those trips/experiences truly

tested the role of merchant mariners but more importantly prepared them for other challenges later in their careers. From 1967-1975 Captain Arthur Boucher and his crew were assigned to the *S/S American Challenger* and would later be placed under contract with the Military Sealift Command (MSC) for the U.S. Navy. During that timeframe, the *American Challenger's* role, as well as that of several other U.S. ships, was to transport troops, vital supplies, and military equipment in support of the U.S. military presence in the Vietnam War.

The biggest challenge however, for our American Merchant Mariners during the Vietnam War all started March 27, 1975. The *American Challenger* was discharging military equipment in Busan, Korea when the Defense Attaché

Office (DAO) in Saigon sent out a telegram to the captains of *S/S Pioneer Commander*, *S/S Pioneer Contender*, *S/S Trans Colorado*, and the *S/S American Challenger* stating to commence preparation for refugee evacuations and proceed to Da Nang immediately. When Captain Boucher and his crew arrived in Da Nang harbor on April 1, 1974, they did not see any refugees nor small boats they were expecting to encounter. It turns out the *S/S Pioneer Commander* had already picked up thousands of refugees and commenced their movement to safer waters. DAO then telegraphed Captain Boucher that evening to proceed to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam where they arrived in the harbor April 2, 1975.

That is when the chaos really began.

If anyone had the opportunity to watch the Oscar-nominated documentary *Last Days in Vietnam*, you will notice in the film all the Navy and commercial ships involved in the Sealift evacuation especially the last 25 minutes of the movie.

The importance of the American Merchant Mariners is absolutely vital as it continues to support our nation in peace and war.

David Boucher

[Dbouch47@gmail.com](mailto:Dbouch47@gmail.com)



*S/S American Challenger* (source: [shipspotting.com](http://shipspotting.com))



# ***John Pitts represents Merchant Marine veterans at special ceremony in Orange, CA***



*John Pitts represents AMMV and the U.S. Merchant Marine*

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, former AMMV President John Pitts attended the annual *Field of Valor* veterans' recognition program in Orange, CA.

There were 1,776 U.S. flags arranged on a baseball field, each of which had a placard attached to the flag pole with the name, picture, and branch of service of a veteran.

Prior to the event, Pitts provided the event organizers with the music for the U.S. Merchant Marine song *Heave Ho*, which was included in the musical medley of all military anthems.

Pitts reported that the U.S. Merchant Marine were well recognized with special tribute, and that this was the first time they were included in this specific event.

The program was attended by 300 people on 11/5, which was the first day of the event. The flags continued to fly during other daily ceremonies through Veterans Day on 11/11.



## ***The Port Richmond Banner Project***

AMMV received a report from member Bernard Lopez of Port Richmond, Staten Island, NY. Bernard's father was a WW II Merchant Mariner (1942-1945) named Angel C. Lopez.

A recent ceremony, which kicked off a new section of road banners featuring local veterans, was held at the Port Richmond Reformed Church on May 21, 2022 in conjunction with Armed Forces Day. Residents of Port Richmond, Staten Island, New York City can now boast 1.3 miles of banners displaying local veterans' photos from all branches of the Armed Services, including the Merchant Marine, lining Port Richmond Avenue on Staten Island. Staten Island has a rich maritime history dating back to colonial days in New York. It is presently one of the five boroughs (or counties) which make up New York City. The boroughs are the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn (also called Kings), Queens, and Staten Island, which is also called

Richmond.

The *Banner Project* was facilitated by the Port Richmond Strong organization, whose current president is

Mary Bullock. The founder of the *U.S. Veteran Military Banner Project* and Vice President of Port Richmond Strong is Mario Buonviaggio. World War II U.S. Merchant Mariner Angel C. Lopez is prominently displayed on the banner which hangs at the intersection of Ann St and Port Richmond Avenue.

There are many towns in the United States that have similar banner projects, often called the Hometown Heroes Banner Program, honoring our country's heroes. If your town or city is one, please see that any local WW II Merchant Mariner is honored with a banner. We at AMMV along with the Lopez Family celebrate the recognition afforded Angel C. Lopez and all veterans honored in this manner.







## The American Battle Monuments Commission launches year-long centennial anniversary commemoration at National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

ARLINGTON, Va. (December 14, 2022) — The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), the agency tasked in 1923 with operating and preserving America's overseas military cemeteries and memorials, launched its year-long centennial anniversary commemoration today at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

"ABMC represents 100 years of an unbroken promise to this nation, her fallen and their families," said ABMC Secretary Charles K. Djou. "Every person who died in wartime service deserves to be remembered and accounted for, and through the commemoration of American military service, sacrifice, and achievements, ABMC remains committed to fulfilling that promise as we enter into our next hundred years."

Led by the agency's chief of historical services, Mike Knapp, Djou, and ABMC Chairman Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mark P. Hertling took part in a moderated discussion about ABMC's history and progress toward the future.

"Being able to highlight these kinds of stories for an international audience and those in the U.S. is an important part of our mission moving forward," said Hertling. "We hope to tell the ABMC story with passion and historical relevance, which is in many ways the story of those who fought and died for our values and the common desire all mankind has for freedom and liberty."

At the event, ABMC also unveiled a first look at content from ABMC's upcoming documentary, to be released in 2023. Through the words of families of the fallen, interpretive guides, cemetery caretakers and other ABMC staff,

the film showcases the agency's ongoing work to preserve the legacy of those memorialized at its sites as well as the evolution of our mission into a new century of service.

A full lineup of ABMC events is planned for 2023, which includes both a centennial anniversary commemoration and documentary film premiere in Washington, D.C.; a documentary film tour at locations throughout the U.S.; special overseas commemorative events; the release of a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary photographic anthology of the ABMC produced in partnership with the Smithsonian; the introduction of a new virtual 360 tour platform of ABMC sites; grand opening of a new visitor center at the Netherlands American Cemetery; and more.

"For 100 years, ABMC has ensured that the memories of those who fell abroad defending the U.S. and those they served with, never die," said Djou. "Our mission is timeless, and we look forward to the evolution ahead of us as we work to preserve their legacy among each new generation."

A recording of the event will be available on ABMC's YouTube platform.

### Contact info:

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(703) 584-1501  
Web: <https://www.abmc.gov>  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/usabmc>  
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/usabmc>  
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/usabmc>



## HELP WANTED

### SS RED OAK VICTORY

1337 Canal Blvd., Berth 5 – Richmond, CA 94804

**Position: Executive Director, SS Red Oak Victory**

**Job Description:** The Richmond Museum Association (RMA), which operates the *SS Red Oak Victory* in Richmond, California, seeks an Executive Director to provide leadership and to execute the goals and objectives of the *SS Red Oak Victory* and RMA. The position is half to full-time and at present a volunteer position.

**Responsibilities:** Contacts in the Maritime Industry, Ship Yards, Vendors, etc. The goal is to operate and cruise the *SS Red*

*Oak Victory* in the San Francisco Bay. Prepare an annual budget and subsidiary budgets. Develop policies and procedures with the Department Heads for all aspects of the ship's operation. Create and present reports to the ship's Department Heads, the RMA President & the RMA Board of Directors on a regular basis.

**Minimum Qualifications:** Must have Maritime experience, Sea Going or Port Engineer experience. Strong project management and organizational skills.

**Preferred Qualifications:** Experience and interest in restoring an historic vessel or structure is a plus.

Please no phone calls. Send resume and letter of interest to the Chief Engineer at [sealandgreg@gmail.com](mailto:sealandgreg@gmail.com) or to the Ship Keeper at [omaloneyrov@gmail.com](mailto:omaloneyrov@gmail.com).

In addition, *Red Oak Victory* is looking for volunteer docents to give tours of the ship and Engine Room. The ship is open on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. Interested parties may contact [alan@redoakvictory.us](mailto:alan@redoakvictory.us).



# Local 97-year-old receives WWII honor

## Merchant Mariner recognized for war effort 77 years later

*Editor's note: This story and photo originally appeared in the Moultrie News, a trusted news source serving the East Cooper community of South Carolina since 1964. It is reproduced with proper permissions. To read more, visit: [www.moultrienews.com](http://www.moultrienews.com)*

*By Anna Sharpe for the Moultrie News*

Seventy-seven years following the conclusion of World War II, Mount Pleasant (South Carolina) resident John Nelson finally received recognition for his contributions to the war effort. Nelson, 97, received the Congressional Gold Medal for Merchant Mariners of WWII.

Nelson joined the Merchant Marine in 1943, as a married 17-year-old who was eager to aid in the war effort.

Originally, he wanted to join the Navy, but said he was turned down for being married. Still a sailor at heart, he became a mariner and was sent to St. Petersburg, Florida.

"I worked in the shipyard and when I got the opportunity, the Merchant Marine was open and asking for people, I went right away to sign up," Nelson said. "We wanted to do our part and I went. I'm glad I went and I'm proud I went. And I did the best I could."

It's a time in his life that he remembers clearly and fondly. He lists off all the places he sailed: Italy, France, Germany and South America. As a mariner, he sailed on Liberty ships, large cargo ships that transported critical goods and materials needed for victory: ammunition, missiles and even soldiers themselves.

"About 95% of everything that was carried overseas was carried by the Merchant Marine ... If you look at the invasion of Normandy and not just the men, but look at the ambulance, the jeeps, look at the ammunition," Nelson

said. "A man can run on the beach, but if he ain't got no bullets and he ain't got no toothpaste and toilet paper ... We brought everything."

The Merchant Marine is made up of civilian sailors who were crucial to turning the tides of the war. It was more than just a delivery service for the soldiers, and it did not come without risk. Though they weren't involved in combat, the Merchant Mariners had a high casualty rate, one in 26. The ships were easy targets for enemy submarines, and sailors had to navigate mine-filled waters.

Touted as the "forgotten" arm of the WWII military, the mariners didn't receive veteran status until 1988.

To finally be recognized in 2022 for his service to his country meant the world to Nelson.

The medal bears the image of the Merchant Mariners. The backside of the medal depicts a convoy of Liberty ships, much like the ones that a young Nelson spent his early days working on, with the phrase "full victory ahead" across the top.

"It's a real honor. I take it as a real honor. I'm real proud of it. I'm real proud of everything we did," Nelson said.

Nelson continued to work with the mariners, aiding in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, until retiring to his home in the Lowcountry. Only three years shy of becoming a centenarian, he continues to move full steam ahead.

The garage of his home serves as a woodshop where he crafts baskets for a booth at the Charleston City Market. He's a third-generation merchant there – another point of pride for the man. But above all else, he's satisfied with how he served his country and honored to have his duty finally realized nearly 80 years later.







# JUST RECOGNITION

## Update on AMMV Efforts to Honor USMM Veterans October through December 2022 Honoring Merchant Mariners on Memorial Day

On September 13, 2022, Capt. Dru DiMattia sent a letter to the new Administrator of MARAD at the Department of Transportation requesting the Administrator's personal assistance to honor Merchant Mariners on Memorial Day. In early December, Capt. DiMattia had a conference call with MARAD representatives to see how they might be able to help AMMV convince the television executives at the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and Capital Concerts, Inc. to include a respectful segment in the 2023 National Memorial Day Concert. The segment that AMMV is proposing would be similar to segments honoring Gold Star Mothers and Women in the Military that were featured during the 2022 National Memorial Day Concert. MARAD senior staff pledged their Agency's support for discussions with the television executives.

Unfortunately, Capt. DiMattia has not received a reply to his September 13, 2022 letter to Bruce Ramer, Chairman of the Board for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), regarding including a segment honoring Merchant Mariners during the National Memorial Day Concert. Considering how time is passing by without a response from Mr. Ramer, Capt. DiMattia sent a December 14, 2022 certified letter directly to Michael Colbert, Capital Concert's executive director who manages the content of the National Memorial Day Concerts. Capt. DiMattia and AMMV's Government Affairs Standing Committee will maintain close contact with Capital Concerts and other television executives to include a respectful segment honoring those Merchant Mariners who were killed in action during WWII as a component of the 2023 National Memorial Day Concert.

AMMV's Government Affairs Standing Committee has developed a collaborative link with staff at Sen. Elizabeth Warren's office. We initially sent comments on Sen. Warren's proposed bill to create the National Gold Star Families Day Act. The bill was designed to create a national holiday at the end of September to honor all Gold Star families who lost loved ones during major U.S. military conflicts. AMMV reminded the staff that USMM officers and crew members killed in action during WWII also had

a Gold Star program and the USMM should be included in the bill.

Capitalizing on our initial comments, I requested that Sen. Warren's staff evaluate whether they could assist AMMV in reaching a collaborative agreement with Capital Concerts to include a segment on Merchant Mariner killed in action during WWII to honor them on Memorial Day. We need a champion to lend support to our proposed segment idea for the National Memorial Day Concert, and Sen. Warren has worked extensively on national veterans' issues. I anticipate receiving a response from Sen. Warren's staff in January 2023.

Capt. DiMattia has explored ways for AMMV to work with the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to honor USMM veterans as a component of their yearlong centennial anniversary commemorations. He has received positive responses to his involvement in a national conference call with ABMC. A senior representative of Susan Davis International, an award-winning communications strategies company working with ABMC, has also expressed interest in honoring Merchant Mariners killed in action.

### ***U.S. Maritime Service Officers' School in Alameda, CA***

Carmen Reid, who nominated the U.S. Maritime Service Officers' School to be included on the National Register of Historic Places, continues her efforts to have her proposal heard by the California State Historical Resource Commission. AMMV fully supports the listing and we have provided written and testimonial support for her application to the State of California. Ms. Reid continues to work diligently with the National Park Service and the California State Historic Preservation Officer to process the nomination further and to bring it forward for review by the State Historical Resources Commission. AMMV is prepared to testify at any hearing to support listing the school's buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. The listing will preserve the memory of the contributions of 6,500 USMM officers to WWII and other major U.S. mili-



# JUST RECOGNITION

tary conflicts, as well as several of the school's buildings that can be renovated for productive use in Alameda, CA.

## ***Application for the National Veterans Day Committee***

On September 16, 2022, Capt. DiMattia applied to the Department of Veterans Affairs requesting Associate Member status on the National Veterans Day Committee. The Committee includes 25 Standing Members and 20 Associate Members who coordinate on the celebration activities for Veterans Day. AMMV looks forward to a successful application for membership. AMMV's Government Affairs Standing Committee will contact the VA in January 2023 to

ensure that our application is approved and AMMV will be an active participating Associate Member of the National Veterans Day Committee.

## ***Afterword***

If you or your AMMV friends have additional stories or activities that will help with our goals and negotiations, I would like to hear from you. Please take a moment to send me an email about your activities. I would be glad to provide information if you need support.

Patrick Cotter  
Member at Large  
AMMV Government Affairs Standing Committee  
[coolenvconsulting@gmail.com](mailto:coolenvconsulting@gmail.com)



## **WWII mariner Julian Smith receives special honors**

On November 5<sup>th</sup>, WWII Merchant Mariner Julian Smith was presented with a shadowbox (which includes his replica Congressional Gold Medal) to honor his service. This was part of a dinner event sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Cincinnati Chapter. The shadowbox was presented by Joseph A. Machado and Susan Barr of Ohio Honor Flight. Julian also attended the special event in NOLA in early October.



*Joseph Machado presents a shadowbox to Julian Smith*





# Ack-Ack Girls

by Lynn Kelly – AMMV National Office Administrator

“At home”, we often think of the women during WWII as the “Rosie the Riveters”, building ships and planes, and keeping the factories running. My own grandmother was a volunteer rolling bandages in New York. While her son and son-in-law fought in Europe and Asia, her daughter worked as a driver for military officers in NY, and her husband was a shipbuilder at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The war effort consumed families in the U.S. in various occupations, all contributing to the successful outcome of the war.

The United States has never initiated mandatory military service for women; however, conscription for women in Great

Britain began in December 1941. At first the National Service Act called up only single women and childless widows between the ages of twenty and thirty, but it soon expanded. The idea of British women “doing their bit” for crown and country was a rallying point – from

the air warden who patrolled the streets to the volunteer ambulance drivers who navigated cratered streets to ferry the injured to hospitals. During WWII, women flew planes, drove motorcycles, and built bombs. If you visit Whitehall today, the Monument to the Women of World War II stands as a reminder of the sacrifice that women across Britain made when their country needed them most.

One of these remarkable groups of women is referred to as the Ack-Ack Command who defended London’s skies on anti-aircraft guns. Made up of recruits from the army’s women’s branch, the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the “gunner girls” were formed to help fill out the ranks of anti-aircraft batteries stationed in Britain and across Europe as the war raged on. These women were chosen for their aptitude and intelligence. They were extensively trained in identifying aircraft, target calculation, and ammunition assessment.

By parliamentary decree, women were unable to engage in combat roles back then, so they couldn’t actually load or fire the massive guns at their stations. Instead, they did everything else needed to perform the task of defending the trains, rivers and waterways where the supplies were brought into the country. Most often these “gunner girls” were part of defense crews that were positioned at night on rooftops in and around London to spot and eliminate German aircraft which were targeting merchant ships and railways supplying the allied war effort.


Typically, in each battery of six women and three men

there would be a female “spotter” who, using powerful binoculars, would identify and call out the approaching German aircraft. Two more women would operate the height and range finder by pinpointing the aircraft through their eyepieces.



Retrieved from [thefemalesoldier.com](http://thefemalesoldier.com)

Finally, the two “predictors” would turn the dials to calculate with exacting precision how far the gun would have to fire, and the woman on the Sperry would set the fuse so the shell would explode at the precise moment to enact maximum damage. Next the Sperry operator would yell out when there was a read, and the information would be relayed from the “predictor” to the guns, where two men loaded the explosives, and the gunner, always a man, would fire. The crew worked fast. This entire operation was supposed to be completed in seconds. If it took any longer, they would become the targets.

The nature of their work meant that the gunner girls were constantly exposed to danger. More than 350 of them lost their lives. For the Ack-Ack Command and other women who performed dangerous but necessary services during WWII with patriotism, great bravery, and under constant threat to their well-being, we gratefully say thank you. 

# AMMV National Vice President Sheila M. Sova continues to connect with family members of WWII Merchant Mariners

For many years, Sheila Sova has run both the official AMMV Twitter page and the (non-AMMV affiliated) Merchant Mariners of WWII Facebook page. Sheila has met literally hundreds of family members of WWII mariners both alive and deceased. In all cases, Sheila assists by answering questions and providing valuable information. Most recently, she has made many WWII mariners and family members/descendants of WWII mariners aware of the Congressional Gold Medal having been awarded to this group. Such information can sometimes make a profound difference in the manner a late veteran is honored and remembered. For example, Linda Hinson, a daughter of a deceased WWII mariner, recently modified her dad's marker to reflect the CGM honors. Afterwards, she wrote to Sheila:

*"I wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your help and encouragement. I just ordered a veterans marker for my dad's grave. He never had one!*



*He passed in 1989 and we didn't know about veterans status, and now he is included with the Congressional Gold Medal recipients! Because he passed before Nov 1990 and already had a headstone, he only qualifies for a bronze veteran medallion that will be place on his current headstone. I will be ordering that. But today I placed an order for a bronze marker to be placed on the foot of my dad's grave. I paid out of pocket, but I had it inscribed the way we wanted. So, it all worked out. I wanted to show you the bronze plaque on granite that will be placed probably sometime in the late spring. I even got to pick out the star border! This is all because of you! I would not have even known to pursue this for my*

*Merchant Marine dad. My late dad would have been 100 years old on December 8th. So, this is for you dad! Happy Birthday! Thanks again, Sheila! Wonderful to honor our Merchant Mariners of WWII!"*



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# Loss of the *S/S Badger State*; another look by Captain Tom Stapleton

On Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1969, I visited the job call at the Local 90 (Licensed Masters & Pilots) union hall San Francisco. There were a few jobs listed on the large chalk boards as OPEN which meant any union applicant or member with at least a 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate's license could "throw in for the job".

Shortly after the call, one job was left unfilled (open). A young graduate from the California Maritime Academy (1967), Sam Bondy, walked into the union; I recognized him as a California Maritime graduate the class ahead of mine. He was a popular, joyful, and lively Italian American. He was always remembered for his sense of humor.

With pride, he greeted me and shared his good news—the draft board just relisted his draft status day as December 24—meaning that his chance for being called up for the military draft was now just about nil. His attention then shifted to one job on the blackboard:

*S/S Badger State*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate's position Open; location, Bangor, Washington, start date Tuesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. The ship would be loaded with ammunition and bombs for the war effort in South Vietnam. Sam's plan was to join the ship on coastwise articles for typically two weeks of loading the ordinance and just before signing Foreign Articles (360 days), quit typically, two days before. Sam didn't realize that the ship would only be in port just six days before sailing and when he arrived aboard, was now obligated to sign-on Foreign Articles immediately, his lucky streak, questionable. The ship began loading deadly 500-to-2,000-pound bombs upon arrival on December 9<sup>th</sup>. This vessel had a crew of forty men. In 1966 owner of the vessel, States Steamship Lines, removed the port and starboard bilge keels of the ship as a cost-saving measure that was supposed to reduce heavy rolling in a heavy seaway. This later proved to be a terrible mistake.

The vessel sailed on Dec 14<sup>th</sup> at 1300, and anchored two miles away since another vessel immediately needed the berth to load ordinance. The *Badger* went to anchor as the cargo wasn't properly secured. Straps and metal banding were considered by the Navy to be satisfactory instead of heavy tommying and bracing with stout heavy timbers. The ship shifted to a safe anchorage near to the Bangor ammo depot.

Route planning and weather forecasting in 1969

were primitive when steaming westward just south of the Aleutian Chain. Routing just south of the Aleutians in the dead of winter and directly into low pressure easterly storm tracks with dense cold seas and heavy westerly swells looked promising to an inexperienced Naval ship router, especially routing with a modified great circle route to destination. The vessel should have remained a few days at anchor to better assess the routing options until the departure abated.

The vessel's stability was very stiff, which resulted in very quick rolling side to side and was the main cause for the cargo to shift (side to side) once at sea. Additionally, the Naval Control of Shipping and the Fleet Weather Center (Alameda, CA) weather routing used very poor judgement in advising routing directly head-on with an approaching deep low system heading directly east endangering the partially loaded *Badger State*.

Captain Charles Wilson apparently was heavily pressured to head smack into the foul weather, rather than diverting 920 miles to San Francisco Bay where the adrift cargo could have been resecured, and possibly more ordinance would have been available for loading in Port Chicago. More cargo could have drastically reduced the *Badger State*'s snap rolling. Additionally, during the Vietnam War, Stan Flowers Marine Carpenters (200 carpenters)

were available and under contract with the Navy to provide lumber, blocking, and bracing the cargo while at the San Francisco anchorages. This option was never passed along by the military on the west coast (Bangor nor Port

Chicago). The adrift or unsecured ammunition could have been resecured in San Francisco Bay by the carpenters and the ship would have resumed sailing to the Far East via favorable weather south of Hawaii. During the Gulf War (Operation Desert Shield, Storm, and Sortie) as Master aboard several breakbulk ships, I was directed to take a route to the Persian Gulf that was unsafe and I advised Naval Routing that I was going to take a safer route: Surigao Straits—which I wisely did.

I have safely sailed on several C-2 cargo vessels during my career: *S/S Santa Adela* (3<sup>rd</sup> Mate), *S/S Bayou State* (around the world as 2<sup>nd</sup> Mate for six months), and on the *S/S Hawaiian Citizen* (converted to a containership) as Chief Mate. Riding a partially loaded or empty C-2 cargo



*Sam Bondy*



*S/S Badger State*

ship is miserable for the crew and guarantees massive cargo shifting due to a narrow beam and snap rolling.

Historically, American ships are regulated by the American Bureau of Shipping, which is tasked with ensuring that seaworthiness of American vessel tankage, void spaces, bilges, and piping. This was proven important many times when I conducted inspections of bilge, ballast, and ballast tanks of those C-2 class vessels and discovered many structure members that were totally rusted after 25 years of service and required significant steel renewal internally and externally.

The U.S. Coast Guard conducted the investigation into the loss of the *S/S Badger State* with USCG personnel only, much like they did with the *S/T Exxon Valdez* grounding and ensuing oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska on March 24, 1989. Some items and causes were overlooked in both investigations in part because the investigating teams were largely Coast Guard personnel and rarely included senior and experienced deck officers and licensed engineers.

An example: An investigator for the USCG team which conducted an investigation on the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez*, when asked if dead reckoning (DR tracks) were laid down prior to the outbound sailing with the estimated times and course changes prior to the tanker's departure, revealed that their team never considered the importance of grounding prevention. For professional merchant deck officers, running a DR track provided basic navigation cross-check prior to any course change.

**Survival Suits:** invented in the 1960's by Gunnar Gudal of Seattle and finally required by the USCG in the early 1990's. This equipment could have saved many members of the *Badger State* crew. After the USCG investigation, the USCG never suggested that these survival suits should be approved and required aboard all U.S.-flag commercial vessels, including the *Bayou State*.

Additionally, many more vessels sank in the following ten years before substandard gravity lifeboats were replaced by fully enclosed, motorized lifeboats launched from the stern. This modern design would greatly reduce injuries and deaths in instances of abandoning ship.

**Weather Routing Equipment and Software.** This was very primitive when the *S/S Badger State* sailed from Bangor, Washington. Naval routing of the vessel was directed in Alameda, California with limited Weather Bureau products for Masters. The physical characteristics of each routed vessel didn't exist at that time. Electronical affordable weather fax receivers from the National Weather Bureau



were not yet developed and ship navigators only had shortwave messaging to create a crude surface analysis chart daily. It was only in the early 1980's, when private companies created weather routing by using the National Weather Bureau, that weather routes improved with generic vessel routing and shore based 24/7 routing. This included ocean routes and later, self-routing from OSI by the early 1980's. The late Lee Chesneau of the Weather Service was a pioneer in the early 1980's who pioneered interpreting and using the vast array of new Weather Bureau products, including the 500 mb weather maps for safe vessel routing for U.S. shipmasters.

**SOS, Cargo Shifting, and Fires in the Cargo Holds of the *Badger State*.** The ammunition and 2,000-pound bombs were sliding side to side as the vessel rolled deeply, 30 to 50 degrees; several bombs punched through in #5 cargo hold (without exploding). An American cargo vessel, the *S/S*

*Flying Dragon* stood nearby on Christmas morning, as did SOS responding cargo vessel, *Khian Star*. On



*Example of bilge keel to reduce vessel rolling*

the morning of December 26<sup>th</sup>, several rescue Air Force planes appeared and were dropping rafts, food, and walkie-talkie radios to establish communications with the ship. In an attempt to save crewmembers, using the starboard lifeboat, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate Sam Bondy and several of crew floated free in the starboard lifeboat. They slowly drifted aft of the ship while the ship snap rolled from side to side, each time causing unsecured bombs to violently slide side to side up. Just as the lifeboat was alongside hold #5, a 2,000 lb. bomb spit out from a large starboard hole. The bomb landed on the manned liferaft from 20 feet above. Instantly the bomb swamped the boat and crushed several crewmembers, killing several crew members, including Bondy.

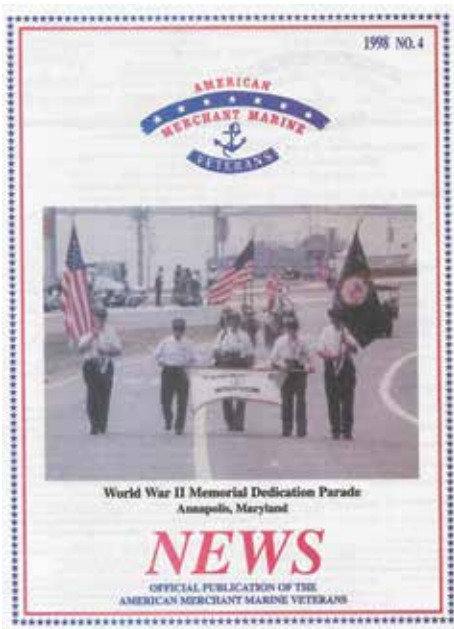
Ten days after the ship was abandoned, the U.S. Navy intentionally sank the ship. In all, 26 crewmembers perished, and 14 crewmembers survived the sinking of the *S/S Badger State*.

*Captain Tom Stapleton, Retired Master Mariner, First Class Pilot, Master-Unlimited tonnage, USNR Captain, USAR Class A-2 Unlimited Army vessels and Colonel*



*Cold-water immersion survival suit*





## From the AMMV Archives:

# “I Was a 16-Year-Old Wiper”

*Editor's note: The following is a condensed version of a story by Vern “Tiny” Johnson, of AMMV’s Midwest Chapter, which was originally published in a 1998 issue of AMMV News.*

When the war started, I was in junior high school in Janesville, Wisconsin, and my dad worked in the GM assembly

plant, which, shortly after, switched over to making munitions.

Well, I was still only 16 years old when I took the train to Sheepshead Bay, Long Island. I selected engine room studies because my dad worked on the assembly line and I figured I knew about engines, too.

I graduated in November (1944) with Fireman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class papers, and there was an opening as wiper on the Liberty ship *SS Jesse Billingsley*, so I took it and signed on December 13<sup>th</sup> in Boston, Massachusetts. It was night time when I got to the dock. At Sheepshead Bay I had seen ships anchored in the harbor, but this was the first I’d ever seen close up. It was light and riding high, and to me it looked like a sky scraper. With my sea bag slung over my shoulder I climbed the gangway and told the officer on watch that I was their new wiper. So, now I’m a seaman.

We loaded top to bottom with munitions in Bangor, Maine, and steamed to Halifax to join a convoy to the U.K. We were told our destination was Murmansk, Russia, and the convoy moved out on New Year’s Day.

A couple days out we were hit by what our old timers in the crew said was the worst winter storm they had ever seen.

Somewhere en route, we got a change of orders. It was reported that, in recent Murmansk convoys, only one ship in three was getting through, so, maybe because of our munitions cargo, we were being diverted to England.

After we approached the U.K., most of the rest of the convoy went into the Irish Sea perhaps to Loch Ewe, before continuing to Murmansk, but a few of us went around the southern tip of England, through the English Channel and the narrow Straits of Dover, up along the east coast of England, to Hull. During the voyage, we were in a staggered single file, with a tanker inside toward the shore and ahead of us. At some point, a sub sneaked through and WHAM!!! – torpedoed the tanker. The explosion set the ship ablaze and

the oil on the sea afire. We could see them frantically trying to lower lifeboats on the opposite side of the ship and also saw men jumping overboard, attempting to stay clear of the burning oil. Yells and screams from the ship and from the guys down in the water didn’t make it easier as we kept going and praying that a rescue ship would pick up survivors. We also knew if a torpedo hit us there’d be no ship to jump from. A little later we heard depth charges going off.

The *Jesse Billingsley* tied up at a pier in Hull but off-loaded the bombs on the outboard side onto barges, three at a time, in a sling. Next day I was able to get shore leave, and as I stepped out on deck toward the gangway – CRASH!!! – the cable from the boom broke and three bombs dropped on deck. I had to return to my cabin and change my pants! The bombs didn’t explode because they weren’t armed, as I found out later.

A couple of us got a cab at the docks and headed out to a dance they had told us about in the city. There were a lot of burned-out buildings but the thing that struck me were the big holes in the ground. The driver said they were from *buzz bombs* that the Nazis had been sending over. Nasty thing about a *buzz bomb*, you were safe as long as you could hear it. Then, when the fuel ran out and the motor cut off, it dropped like a rock. The primary target was the dock area and the ships unloading cargo. Like us.

Next day, aboard ship, we were told that our munitions cargo was still bound for Murmansk but that it stood a better chance of being delivered if it was towed on barges. After we unloaded, we took aboard sea water for ballast and joined a convoy for our return voyage to the states. Two days out, we burned a bearing and the engine room went down. We lay dead in the water for the better part of a day while it was being repaired. I gotta tell you it’s a helpless feeling, all you want to do is get moving again. The convoy, of course, kept sailing but they did leave one destroyer escort with us. Apparently, there was a submarine in the vicinity because every once-in-a-while they’d drop a depth charge.

It’s an interesting feeling, being in the engine room below the water line, when a depth charge goes off. There’s a double tick, like striking steel with a hammer, just before the bomb goes off. After what seemed like forever, the bearing was fixed and we caught up with the convoy. We returned to New

York. I signed off on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945 and took the train back to Bensenville for a couple weeks.

After I returned to New York, I joined the National Maritime Union and went to the hall to wait my turn for the next ship. It was a couple weeks before a wiper's job was available on the tanker *SS Gulf of Venezuela*, so I took it and signed aboard on March 22. We joined a convoy for Casablanca but our job was to refuel the destroyer and destroyer escorts that guarded the convoy.

Whenever they ran low, they pulled alongside and we put the hoses over and filled their bunkers. Apart from that, it was a routine trip with no bad storms and no submarine attacks. We refueled in Casablanca and waited for the convoy to form for the voyage back to the states.

We came back to New York and I signed-off on May 5, then signed-on again the next day, but this time as acting deck engineer. We loaded again with fuel oil but this time it was rumored that we were going to Egypt, which was one of my many reasons for staying with the ship. Again, we refueled the naval escort vessels in our convoy and once again we went to the Mediterranean but this time, we never got further east than Gibraltar. The big news however, was VE Day! The war was over in Europe. We heard about it at sea.

We noticed one interesting thing, as we were tied up alongside a U.S. hospital ship in Gibraltar Harbor. They took aboard a cargo of pregnant army nurses who, like us, were

heading back to the states, now that the war was over on this side of the world.

I signed off on June 13, 1945 and returned home for a couple weeks, then went back to the union hall and threw in my card for the next ship. This one was a Liberty ship, *SS Nathan S. Davis*. Only thing was, it was waiting for me in San Francisco. A shipmate and I bought tickets and headed west.

We finally joined our ship on August 1. Our destination was Okinawa and the primary cargo was building supplies to rebuild the island that had been hit by a hurricane a short time before. The *Nathan S. Davis* was somewhere in the middle of the Pacific when the news flashed – the war is over! We could now turn on our running lights which was something of a shock after total blackout at sea. We also never reached Okinawa because we had a more urgent project to become a troop ship and bring back our soldiers.

I was taking turns as deck engineer, fireman and oiler, sometimes all on the same watch. After some weeks of shuttling back and forth, we finally headed home and arrived at Port Hueneme, California in November. I stayed aboard as part of a very skinny skeleton crew and was not able to get off until January 9, 1946.

First thing I did was buy a robin's egg blue, gabardine suit and then a train ticket for home. My mom had left the Christmas tree up for me and now I was willing to accept the fact that the war was over.



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