

AMERICAN

MERCHANT MARINE

EST. 1984

VETERANS

NEWS MAGAZINE

IN PEACE AND WAR

\$6



1775

Fall 2023



AMMV attends Spirit of '45 event – page 16



AMMV vets participate in Memorial Day national events – page 26



Wisconsin WWII mariner receives Congressional Gold Medal and H.S. diploma in surprise ceremony – page 20



The legacy of the Christmas Tree ship – page 22

Galvez bench memorial

William R. Galvez, born in 1927, served in the Merchant Marine during WWII and was a longtime member and former Vice President of the AMMV High Rollers Chapter in Las Vegas. He retired and relocated to Fairfax, California in his last few years of life. Bill crossed the final bar in 2020.

Bill endowed a very generous portion of his estate to AMMV to enable the organization to continue its efforts to recognize and honor the Merchant Marine. In appreciation of his gift and to honor his memory we recently installed a bench in the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Boulder City, NV, just 26 miles from Las Vegas where Bill made his home.

Several years ago, the High Rollers Chapter erected a monument at the cemetery dedicated to the WWII MMs and displaying the names of their deceased chapter members. They continue to maintain the monument and include each member's name as he or she passes on. Fortunately, AMMV was able to secure a location directly in front of the High Rollers monument for Mr. Galvez's engraved granite bench. At the suggestion of Sue Pushard, High Rollers Chapter Treasurer, the chorus from the Merchant Marine song "Heave Ho" by Jack Lawrence was adapted to fit on Bill's bench to commemorate his service during WWII.



Pat Rafferty of AMMV High Rollers Chapter



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EDITORIAL CORRECTION: The President's Report from the spring/summer magazine, 2nd column, second to last paragraph, last sentence, should read: "They have a future project which will add honors recognizing the WWII Merchant Mariners serving in the Pacific Theater to the West Coast memorial."

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Historian **vacant**

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Capt. Chris Edyvean *Midwest Chapter*

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National President Capt. Anthony “Dru” DiMattia



2023 has been another benchmark year for the American Merchant Marine Veterans association and its causes! Our WWII U.S. Merchant Marine service has gained national acclaim during the recent Memorial Day Concert paying tribute to those who sacrificed all. Our passionate members continuously find ways to recognize our WWII Merchant Mariners and

spend countless hours campaigning to establish relationships conveying the story of our Maritime Nation. These relationships take weeks, months, and years to cultivate. AMMV remains committed to paying tribute to our WWII Mariners who remain with us, those that have crossed the final bar and, lest we forget, the more than 9,500 WWII mariners who never made it home. I congratulate all our members, family, and friends for continuing this great cause of keeping the legacy alive! These ongoing national efforts commemorate and honor our Greatest Generation of mariners who were part of that winning combination and importantly pays it forward educating the public of this vital service that is in dire need today of renewed policy. Thank you for the fraternity of all our remaining AMMV Chapters, our MAL's and those who go above and beyond in keeping the legacy alive! Heave Ho!

Back in the Spring/Summer issue of our magazine I mentioned that AMMV was preparing for a unique Memorial Day weekend of events. What unfolded on that weekend in May 2023 was no less than extraordinary! On behalf of AMMV we recognize and pay a debt of gratitude to our hosts and closest supporters.

The following were the key activities and features of the trip: Capital Concerts, Inc – Annual Memorial Day Concert; Public Broadcasting Systems, Inc – Annual Memorial Day Concert; National Veterans Outreach Office – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – AMMV invited to partake in laying two wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; VA guardians; U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Honor Guard – Presentation of Colors with five Midshipman; Arlington National Cemetery – Tomb of The Unknown Soldier – Sentries – with the rules of engagement in laying the wreath; The White House – Senior Advisor for Veteran

Engagement – VIP treatment to and from White House – Breakfast w/ President and Dr. Biden; The American Veterans Center – Program Director invitation to man a dedicated U.S. Merchant Marine float sponsored by a local U-Haul center.

AMMV thanks the following maritime industry groups for their generous sponsorships: USA Maritime; Transportation Institute; American Maritime Congress; American Maritime Partnership; American Maritime Officer; Seafarers International Union; Marine Engineers Beneficial Association; International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots.

As plans for the Memorial Day Concert were well underway, the producer Capital Concerts invited six AMMV WWII mariners to the VIP seating on the West Lawn of the Capitol Building. This event aired by PBS included a segment highlighting the service of our WWII Merchant Marine and paying tribute to the 9,500 mariners who never made it home from battle carrying the vital supplies. I urge all of you to view the nationally televised live event!

<https://www.pbs.org/video/joe-mantegna-pays-tribute-wwii-veterans/>

You can also visit our website and find multiple links to our personal productions from Memorial Day weekend: <https://ammv.us/events/>

Our very own Government Affairs Committee Chairman, WWII Charles Mills (103 years old) and co-chair Patrick Cotter spearheaded the original intent of the Memorial Day weekend. As these plans were coming together for the Memorial Day Concert, we quickly learned that the VA was working on plans for our WWII Mariners and their guardians to have breakfast with the President and First Lady at the White House on Memorial Day! The VA also advised us to have two wreaths for presentation at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier due to the number of our presenters.

In the planning phase with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, we highlighted the uniqueness of presenting the Battle Standard Flag-142 and two of the five WWII mariners who would be laying the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day. Both WWII Merchant mariners Ed “Big John” Laughton and George Worsham had their ships struck by enemy attack, killing many crew members including their respective Deck Cadets from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. (Laughton and Worsham would have been amongst the last men to see the two KP Midshipmen alive.)

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

National President's Report

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

WWII veteran participation: WWII Mariner – George Worsham (99 years old) – *S/S Theodore Dwight Weld* torpedoed 20-Sept-1943 at 07:37GMT – (20) crew lost, including Deck Cadet Alan A. Atchison, Jr. George participated in laying the wreath at the Tomb of The Unknown Soldier along with family, the U.S. Merchant Marine Cadet Honor Guard and VA guardians; WWII Mariner – Edward Laughton (101) – While serving on the *S/S Hobbs Victory* as Second Mate, ordered to abandon ship upon being hit by a Japanese Kamikaze strike, killing 11 crewmen and one Navy Armed Guardsman, 06-April-1945 at 09:50 GMT; Deck Cadet Alexander W. Harris was killed in the attack; WWII Mariner – Charles Mills (103 years old) – Life long career in the maritime industry, advocating for the vital U.S. Merchant Marine service, including the active legislation H.R. 39. Charles was a charter member of National Maritime Union; WWII Mariner – William Balabanow (97 years old) – Lifetime career in the USMM including the Korean and Vietnam sealifts. Bill continues to advocate for the legacy and public education; WWII Mariner – Julian “Smitty” Smith (97 years old) – Joined the USMS 12-Jan-1944, missing the last five months of high school; serving on six different merchant vessels in three war zones. Julian remains active advocating for our U.S. Merchant Marine.

Just when we thought we would need a break from the historical three events, we were invited by the Veterans American Center to man a parade float in the Arlington Memorial Day Parade directly after the ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery! WWII mariner Dave Yoho made us aware of the historical opportunity which was made possible by his good friend, Wes Smith, Director of American Veterans Center. Dave was the Grand Marshall leading the Parade during a monsoonal rain storm! The logistics to get from Arlington National Cemetery, back to the hotel, then over to the parade route included traveling through an untimely rain storm. The standby VIP shuttle provided vehicle access into the parade, which saved the day! Upon arriving at the barricaded parade route, manned by the Capital Police, we soon thought it was going to be a spectator event. The Capital Police saw our exclusive VIP vehicle pass and waved us through, allowing us to join in the parade route directly behind our dedicated float! We caught up to our cadets in full dress-blue uniforms who were already showcasing our U.S. Merchant Marine service on the float in a torrential downpour. Our WWII Merchant Marine service was paid a wonderful tribute as the float passed by the Master of Ceremonies checkpoint, showcasing our U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Cadets, with Mr. & Mrs. Fortin, parents of Midshipman 1/C and Captain of the Honor Guard Morgan Fortin; the Mount family representing their grandpa, WWII mariner Ed Laughton; and WWII

mariner Charles Mills with granddaughter Veda Handy. The Rowlinson Media Group was able to record footage of this entire event along with breakout interviews of our WWII mariners.

AMMV is awaiting final word from the Veterans Administration for our associate membership status in the Veterans Day National Committee. During this time, we have been invited by the VA to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Veterans Day 2023. We have accepted this special invitation and have already commenced the planning. We look forward to honoring our legacy mariners along with our rich history of mariners continuing to serve our country.

AMMV is partnering with the American Battle Monuments Commission (<https://www.abmc.gov>) on what was discussed during our 2023 convention regarding a commemorative tribute to be added to the West Coast Memorial. ABMC was initially involved with the construction of the National WWII Memorial in DC which ensured the U.S. Merchant Marine shields were included in the base of the flag poles. They re-dedicated the East Coast Memorial located in the Battery, NYC alongside MARAD and AMMV as partners in that project. The new Merchant Marine commemoration to the West Coast Memorial will be dedicated in May 2024. We will update the renderings of the approved concept and inscription along with confirming the May dedication in our next issue. Stay tuned!

AMMV's Executive Board has recently agreed to partner with USA Warrior Stories, Inc. (<https://usawarriorstories.org>) in sharing our Rowlinson Media Group produced videos and photos which will be used to produce a feature length documentary of the WWII Merchant Marine service. USA Warrior Stories hopes that this documentary will educate and increase awareness of the WWII Merchant Mariners as well help spotlight and promote AMMV's contributions to this cause. Please contact us if there is anyone wishing to share their photos and videos for this project.

You will see multiple maritime articles in this news issue highlighting support for policy suggestions and actions that are currently being debated. The escalating tensions in the Far East and Mid East regarding international trade and the maritime sector must be in the forefront for our policy makers. Are you aware of Cargo Preference and the Jones Act? Review the ideas of the Maritime Trades Department supporting our mariners who seek a career path in USMM and dedicate their service in Strategic Sealift. Stay informed, get involved, be part of the solutions required to invigorate the U.S. Merchant Marine story from the past and present!

2024 will be another milestone year as we embark on the 40th anniversary of what our WWII founding brothers and sisters created, the American Merchant Marine Veterans organization. AMMV has faced challenges from day

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National Secretary / Editor Capt. Christopher Edyvean



Memorial Day and Veterans Day

During this past Memorial Day holiday, the WWII U.S. Merchant Marine were included nationally at events in Washington, DC at a level never experienced by this specific group. This did not happen by accident. Pat Cotter (AMMV Government Affairs Committee) had a long-

standing vision, of which he and AMMV National President Capt. Dru DiMattia worked tirelessly to see unfold. Having the Merchant Marine included in these events is an accomplished milestone of which we should all be proud. Thank you, Pat and Dru! Please see the extensive coverage included in this magazine issue.

As we head into press, AMMV is exploring participation at similar Veterans Day national functions. Just as with the Memorial Day events, this will be the first time since the end of WWII in which the U.S. Merchant Marine will have been included.

John Pitts

AMMV lost a good friend recently in the passing of John Pitts. John served as a Past AMMV National President and National Treasurer. He was also a past president and trustee of the American Merchant Marine Veterans Memorial Committee in San Pedro, CA. John will be remembered for his devotion to our WWII mariners, and for his friendly, good humored participation at our annual conventions.

He will be greatly missed.

Seeking submittals for AMMV News

Do you have any great seas stories, experiences, vintage photos, or other materials that might be a good fit for this magazine? If so, please email me with your ideas, and AMMV will consider.

AMMV National Convention

We are looking into potential dates and a location for our 2024 convention. What is most needed are volunteers. Please contact any of the AMMV officers if you are willing to assist at convention time.

Spirit of '45

Along with other AMMV members, I was able to attend a Spirit of '45 event in August. It was an eye opener to attend a function that honored not only the Merchant Marine, but all branches and groups who served and contributed to the WWII effort. There is much to be learned by understanding the challenges that our country dealt with and ultimately overcame during the Second World War. Today, as America struggles with many serious issues, including political division in the face of worldwide challenges and conflict, let us never forget the lessons and gifts of freedom handed down by our Greatest Generation.

Have a wonderful autumn season!

Capt. Christopher Edyvean
AMMV National Secretary, Editor,
& Past National President



National President's Report

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

one, but nothing compared to what our Greatest Generation of mariners faced carrying the vital military supplies around the world! AMMV needs volunteers on the national and regional levels engaging in details like convention planning, social media, website management, and fund raising. Again, I thank all our volunteers and the remaining chapters for keeping the legacy alive! Heave Ho!

I am saddened to learn as of this writing, that Past AMMV President and advocate, John Pitts has crossed

the final bar. AMMV sends its deepest condolences to his family and friends. He was a staunch supporter for mariner labor on the West Coast along with our WWII Merchant Marine legacy.

It has been a true honor serving our WWII mariners, their legacy, and our service of the USMM. It is my sincere hope that more volunteers will continue to carry the torch for AMMV.

Have a good watch!

Captain Dru DiMattia
Master Mariner
President AMMV





National Office Administrator Lynn Kelly



Dues are due! Please send your \$50. Annual (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024) renewal dues, if you have not already done so, to AMMV, P.O. Box 2024, Darien, CT 06820-2024 (please see the last page of this magazine for details). Not sure?? Call Lynn at (475) 470-9200.

The increase in dues has prompted a handful of members to ask, “What do we get for our dues, besides the magazine?” I thank them for the opportunity to address that question.

In early April 2022, AMMV, with permission, supplied a list to the Maritime Administrator for all members (approximately 260) who were WWII Merchant Marine Veterans and therefore eligible for the Congressional Gold Medal. This eliminated the need for our members to supply MARAD with documentation. On the day the medal became available, we hosted ten WWII MM and their families at the Capitol, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi awarded the medals. On the following day, May 19th, we coordinated with the Nautical Institute for their 50th Anniversary where, at a dinner aboard the *SS Jeremiah O’Brien* in San Francisco, nine more of AMMV’s WWII MM received their medals from Rep. John Garamendi. Medals began being mailed out from the Maritime Administrator’s Office to our remaining members on June 30th.

AMMV hosted or collaborated on recognition ceremonies for members throughout the U.S. for the next 12 months including events in Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, New York, Connecticut, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, New Jersey, and Nevada. Each time we organize an event it is covered in our news magazine, on our website, by various newspapers, on social media, and often on local TV. This gives us an opportunity to promote the sacrifices made by mariners and educate the public as to their role.

Our office has helped countless mariners, their widows, children, and grandchildren obtain the gold medal and continues to do so. Each membership renewal mailed

out to a widow or descendent of a deceased WWII MM includes a letter notifying them they are eligible to receive the replica CGM for the service of their loved one at no cost to them and includes instructions on how to go about applying for it. There is a phone number where they can get help from AMMV to do so. This service to our members will continue through July 2024.

AMMV has been present at many award ceremonies where we represent mariners both living and deceased as they are honored. In addition to the above mentioned, we were present at the Spirit of ’45 dinners (2022 & 2023), the Salute to Congress events (2022 & 2023) and the Kings Point Battle Standard Dinner. We have supplied speakers and representatives at many dinners, ceremonies, and meetings honoring mariners. We are in contact with industry representatives, government personnel, and congressmen. AMMV monitors industry legislation and regulations that affect shipping operations and crews. We have supplied educational materials to various organizations which would like to further our cause. We act as “an information outlet” letting folks know what services and benefits are available to them and how to go about accessing them.

On the day I was asked about “what do we get,” AMMV was in Washington with six WWII MM at the invitation of the Veterans Administration where our veterans placed a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (a first), had breakfast with Mr. & Mrs. Biden (a first) and appeared on behalf of MM of WWII at the Memorial Day Concert, where, also for the first time, their service was recognized as part of the presentation on PBS. As usual AMMV made the arrangements and covered the costs to the veteran and companion for travel and lodging.

In AMMV’s Preamble to the Constitution, it specifically states our purpose it to promote and educate the people and government as to the services that American Merchant Mariners have provided in war and peace. The board of directors and volunteers do just that by representing our members at every opportunity with the goal of educating and promoting the role of the Merchant Marine throughout history. As highlighted here, we have made some great progress and with your help we will continue to do so.

Calm Seas,


Lynn C. Kelly



New Interim National Vice President



Captain Darin L. Huggins is a seasoned maritime professional with a diverse and distinguished career. Hailing from the Panama Canal Zone, his upbringing was immersed in a maritime environment, with both parents employed by the U.S. Government in support of the Panama Canal Company.

Captain Huggins earned his degree and original Third mate license from Maine Maritime in 2002 and was commissioned as a Naval Officer in the Strategic Sealift Officer Program. He recently moved to Durham, North Carolina but he has fond memories of growing up in the Canal Zone.

With a career spanning over two decades, Captain Huggins has consistently demonstrated his expertise and dedication to the maritime industry. He started his journey with the Military Sealift Command in 2005 as a Second Mate on the *USNS Stockham*, where he played a crucial role in various missions.


His leadership and experience led to his appointment as a Master for Military Sealift Command in 2012. Captain Huggins has commanded several vessels, including *USNS Obregon*, *USNS Red Cloud*, *USNS Waters* and others, contributing significantly to the command's success. Captain Huggins is actively sailing as a Master aboard *USNS Watkins* with Patriot Maritime.

Furthermore, Captain Huggins is dedicated to supporting the American Merchant Marine Veterans organization as Interim Vice President. He shares the belief that the brave deeds of Merchant Mariners must be acknowledged, and his extensive experience in the maritime sector aligns perfectly with AMMV's mission to ensure just recognition and honor for all seafarers.

As a seasoned mariner with a passion for the industry, Captain Darin L. Huggins intends to make a lasting impact on AMMV and the maritime community as a whole. 


New Interim Region #5 Regional Vice President



Paula C. Papamarcos is the proud daughter of John Papamarcos, WWII Merchant Mariner from 1943-1948. Paula started attending Midwest Chapter meetings with her dad in 2014 and enjoyed hearing him talk about his service at those meetings. Paula grew up in Barrington, IL (suburb of Chicago) and graduated from University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana with a BS in Finance. She had a great career as an auditor and regional controller for a nationwide equipment rental company, received an MBA from University of California, Los Angeles, and then worked 22 years for a Miami, FL based equipment rental company as VP of Operations. Paula had retired in early 2018, allowing her to spend more time with her dad, who passed away later that year. She is also active in church, teaching Sunday school and in the prayer shawl ministry, and is co-president of a garden club. Paula has attended the Baltimore and Las Vegas conventions as well as many local AMMV events, and is honored to serve as RVP of Region 5 as a tribute to her dad's service and memory. 

REMINDER:

2024 is Election Year for AMMV Regional Vice President Positions

RVP elections for the eight regional offices will be in 2024. As per Section 202 (B) of the AMMV Bylaws, all potential candidates (including those seeking re-election) must signal intent by notifying the National President and/or the National Office in writing, no later than December 31st of the year immediately preceding the election year. The term of office will be from 7/01/2024 thru 6/30/2026. All potential candidates must remain members in good standing. 

American Merchant Marine Veterans Profit & Loss

July through August 2023

Income	
402 · Contributions	130.28
405 · Mission Advance Support	9,378.60
410 · Chapter and MAL Dues	
DAR · Dennis Roland	150.00
EOH · Edwin O'Hara	130.00
GLD · Golden Gate	700.00
JTS · John T. Schmidt/Palmetto	650.00
MAL · Members at Large	4,851.00
ORV · Oswego River Valley	50.00
Total 410 · Chapter and MAL Dues	6,531.00
411 · Convention Income	20.00
Total Income	16,059.88
Expense	
500 · Fixed Expense	
507 · Telephone	97.83
510 · Membership Promotion	94.33
511 · Svc Charges - Paypal & Square	22.80
Total 500 · Fixed Expense	214.96
514 · Convention Expenses	
517 · Convention Misc. Exp	-20.00
Total 514 · Convention Expenses	-20.00
520 · Mission Advance Expenses	
525 · Mission Support Exp	9,078.60
526 · Internet Initiative	300.00
Total 520 · Mission Advance Expenses	9,378.60
530 · AMMV News Magazine	
533 · Postage	9.00
536 · Printing	-9.00
Total 530 · AMMV News Magazine	0.00
550 · Personnel	
551 · Administration	3,400.00
Total 550 · Personnel	3,400.00
560 · Operating Expense	
564 · Office Supplies	312.65
565 · Postage - Office	137.70
567 · Licenses & Fees	321.90
Total 560 · Operating Expense	772.25
Total Expense	13,745.81
Net Income	2,314.07

American Merchant Marine Veterans Balance Sheet

As of August 31, 2023

ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
103 · Paypal	31.84
105 · Chase Bank	141,355.53
110 - Chase CD	150,000.00
Total Checking/Savings	291,387.37
Total Current Assets	291,387.37
TOTAL ASSETS	291,387.37
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Credit Cards	
201 · Chase Card - DDiMattia (8156)	235.90
Total Credit Cards	235.90
Other Current Liabilities	
311 · Dues Receivable	416.00
312 · Member Recruitment	893.00
314 · Mission Advance Fund	-29,246.70
315 · Gold Medal Fund	6,134.76
Total Other Current Liabilities	-21,802.94
Total Current Liabilities	-21,567.04
Total Liabilities	-21,567.04
Equity	
32001 · Retained Earnings	310,640.34
Net Income	2,314.07
Total Equity	312,954.41
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	291,387.37



Veda Handy, pictured with AMMV President Dru DiMattia and her grandfather, Charles A. Mills, receives a Member Appreciation plaque from AMMV.

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE CROSSED THE FINAL BAR

LAWRENCE COBB ABRAMS	Birmingham, AL	GEORGE JORDANIDES	Kissimmee, FL
LEON D. ATKINSON	Deltona, FL	JACK LAUB.....	Delray Beach, FL
CHRISTOPHER J. BRENNAN	Vass, NC	JACK F. MARSHALL	Clarksville, TN
EDSEL BRYNER.....	Washington, PA	HAROLD B. NOONAN	Sun City West, AZ
JOHN P. "JACK" COLLETTE	Bridgeville, PA	GEORGE OFFENHAUSER, SR.....	Friendswood, TX
WILLIAM FEAHENY.....	Kenner, LA	JOHN T. PITTS.....	Lakewood, CA
OTTO ERNST GRAS	Yorktown, TX	GEORGE SALOVICH.....	Ronan, MT
ARTHUR HANSEN	Hewitt, NJ	JAMES O. "JIM" SCIPLE	North Fort Myers, FL

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.

❧

Remembering John Pitts

❧



Further Recognition and Remembrance for WWI Merchant Mariner Heroes

On August 12, a special ceremony was held at the Seanscoil Community Centre in Ceathrú Thaidhg, County Mayo, Ireland, to honor the crew of the *S/S Rochester*. Following the welcoming remarks and introductions was the official launch of David Jenkin's book Captain Kokeritz, An American Hero followed by the screening of David's film of the same name to commemorate the tragic events of November 1917 (including original footage of the *S/S Rochester* and *S/S Orleans* leaving New York for Bordeaux).



Afterwards was the unveiling of a specially commissioned memorial stone in Cill Ghallagáin graveyard at the graves of the four *S/S Rochester* heroes, by descendants of the local Doherty family, in the presence of officers of the Irish United Nations Veterans Association. A blessing was performed by Fr. Tom Doherty with music by Darren Ó Riagáin and Vincent Mc Grath.

On November 2, 1917, the *Rochester* was torpedoed, forcing Captain Kokeritz and his crew to abandon ship. The survivors suffered nearly five days in the extreme elements, and it was only the strict discipline exacted by the captain that enabled the party to reach the Irish coast in safety. Captain Kokeritz had previously gained fame as a successful blockage runner to the degree that he became the target of a German bounty.



Welcome Aboard to these New Members of the AMMV


DAVID CARHART SKIPPACK..... PA
 PAUL DOELL..... DANIA BEACH FL
 ERIC DOWNER..... JUNEAU AK
 SUSAN DUNLOP PRESCOTT VALLEY..... AZ
 WILLIAM HAYWARD MANCHESTER UK
 RICK HOJAN COLUMBUS GA
 JOSEPH KELLY..... EASLEY SC
 CARRIANNE LANIER SANTA ROSA CA
 CATHERINE LEWALLEN..... COLORADO SPRINGS CO

LOUIS LIOTTI..... GARRISON NY
 DONALD MARPLE OCEAN VIEW NJ
 JAMES McCOY ELGIN..... SC
 JOHN MONTGOMERY DICKINSON TX
 CHRISTIAN HERRERA OLMEDO INDIAN HARBOUR BEACH.. FL
 KURT PIEHLER TALLAHASSEE FL
 ANTHONY ROBERTS PORTLAND..... OR
 DOUGLAS M. TORBORG VERO BEACH FL
 VICKY WORSHAM POWHATAN VA



(L to R) Capt. Chris Edyvean (Past AMMV President), Capt. Kyle Knickerbocker (AMMV Region # 4 Vice President), and Capt. Dru DiMattia (AMMV National President)

AMMV Attends Salute to Congress Dinner

On June 13, AMMV officials attended the 39th annual Salute to Congress dinner event, hosted by the International Propeller Club and held at the Army Navy Country Club in Arlington, VA. The honoree of the event was Washington Senator Maria Cantwell. The annual Salute to Congress is attended by top industry leaders, many of whom represent organizations which are key sponsors of AMMV. 



Senator Maria Cantwell addresses the crowd, highlighting the importance of our U.S. Merchant Marine and the Jones Act



Pictured in NYC during his WWII training at Sheepshead Bay is longtime AMMV member Rudy Garcia. The boy is his nephew.

Capt. Hugh Stephens receives Norwegian honors

On May 8th, Norway's Liberation and Veterans Day, WWII Merchant Mariner Hugh Stephens (age 99) was honored with the Norwegian Commemorative



Battery Park, NY

Medal. Stephens was nominated for this recognition by AMMV International Affairs Chairman Jens Inge Egeland. Jens announced, "I had the great honor and pleasure of nominating Stephens to be honored with this Norwegian medal for his part in rescuing the Norwegian refugees


from German occupied Soroya, Norway during the dramatic rescue operation named "Open Door". The 50 Norwegian refugees were later taken aboard his American Liberty ship *S/S John Ireland* in Murmansk during the same returning Arctic convoy that the

American Liberty ship *S/S Henry Bacon* was attacked and sunk by the German Luftwaffe. We will never forget those brave sailors who gave their life to rescue others."

Present at the ceremony was Norwegian Consulate General Heidi Olufsen, who stated "Today is Liberation Day and Veterans' Day. In Battery Park, we commemorate all those who fought for our freedom in WWII, including the brave sailors of the Norwegian merchant fleet. 78 years later, we are again confronted with war in Europe and reminded of the importance of protecting our values."



Dennis Ng, Capt. Hugh Stephens, Rita Cosby

Representing AMMV at the ceremony was Regional Vice President Dennis Ng. Also present was veterans' advocate and famed news reporter Rita Cosby. 

From the Midwest Chapter *(reported by Karyn Holm)*

Our Memorial Day wreath laying ceremony took place on Saturday May 27, 2023, Daley Plaza, Chicago, Illinois. The Merchant Marine flag was flown




Bob Weagant (L) and Capt. Joe O'Connor

proudly. Capt. Joe O'Connor (Midwest Chapter President), Karyn Holm (Midwest Chapter Treasurer), Paula Papamarcos (Interim RVP), Steve Weagant, and Marilyn Wnuk attended the event. WWII Merchant Mariner Robert Weagant (Midwest Chapter Secretary) was on stage. When introduced, the following was announced: "Representing the Merchant Marine Veterans is Robert Weagant, a World War II Merchant Mariner. In 2022 the Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to the Merchant Marine for their role in winning World War II, sailing every ocean to deliver troops and supplies to every war theatre, losing

thousands in their contribution to the fight for liberty. Bob's war experience is humbling. He was aboard the Liberty Ship *Muhlenberg* at Naples Italy, bombed by the Germans on January 25, 1944, there to support the Allied landings at Anzio. Fires ensued but did not reach the cargo of ammunition and gasoline. The ship was badly damaged, six of the officers and an armed guardsman lost their lives. Bob was among



(L to R): Karyn Holm, Bob Weagant, Paula Papamarcos

the remaining crew who made sufficient repairs to enable the ship to return to New York. He does not forget and lives on to tell their story." Then the band played *Heave Ho*. Steve Weagant said that seeing his dad up there and hearing these words brought tears to his eyes. 

New Vero Beach Merchant Marine Monument Unveiled

On May 18th, a new Merchant Marine monument was unveiled in Vero Beach, FL in tandem with a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony to honor a local WWII mariner.

Ross Rowlinson, Capt. Richard Martucci, and Michael E. Hyde organized the event. Among the speakers were John Michael Matthews (Veterans Memorial Island Committee Chair), Capt. Dru DiMattia (AMMV National President), and Thomas F. McCaffery (mariner, researcher, author, USMMA '76).

WWII mariner Floyd York was honored with the Congressional Gold Medal to commemorate his wartime service. Presenting this honor was a representative from Congressman Bill Posey's office.

A pre-ceremony night's dinner was held at Mulligan's Beach House. An after-party was hosted and paid for by Waldo's Restaurant and Bar.



L to R: Capt. Rick Martucci, Ross Rowlinson, Michael E. Hyde



New monument at Vero Beach, FL



WWII mariner Floyd York is recognized

AMMV Attends Spirit of '45


AMMV was well represented at the Lee County Spirit of '45 event, held on Sunday, August 13 at the Heritage Palms Golf and Country Club in Fort Myers, FL.

Spirit of '45 Day is a designated annual national day, having passed unanimously in Congress in 2010, honoring America's Greatest Generation. It is observed on the second weekend each August, coinciding with the anniversary of August 14, 1945. On that day, President Truman announced that the most destructive war in human history was over, and spontaneous celebrations broke out around the world. Spirit of '45 events are held locally across the country.

Lee County, Florida holds a special significance for Merchant Marine Veterans of WWII, as this is the birthplace of the AMMV organization (Cape Coral, FL, 1984).

The Lee County Spirit of '45 has for several years been organized by Eryka Aptaker, who once again did a

remarkable job. The Lee County Sheriff's Office arranged personnel for the Color Guard, Flag Folding Ceremony, and Firing Party. Entertainer Donna Sue Delisle provided vocals prior to the ceremony and during key segments of the program. An arrangement of pipes and drums music was performed by Guns n' Hoses Pipes n' Drums. Program speakers included WWII veteran Robert Hilliard; Bryan Casey, who is the grandson of deceased WWII Medal of Honor recipient Woody Williams; and Tom Ferguson, who spoke on POW/MIA recognition.

Representing AMMV were National President Capt. Dru DiMattia, Kimberly King, National Secretary Capt. Chris Edyvean, Dr. June Klees, Rick Wobbe, WWII MM veteran George Koch, WWII MM veteran Capt. Pete Kurkimilis, and two grandchildren of Capt. Kurkimilis. Both Koch and Kurkimilis participated in convoys sailing to Murmansk during WWII. 



(L to R): Kimberly King, Capt. Pete Kurkimilis, Dr. June Klees



Eryka Aptaker, organizer of the event



WWII vets Kurkimilis (left) and Koch shake hands



Flag folding ceremony



Lee County Sheriff's Office Color Guard



Lieutenant Angelo Vaugh (LCSO) w/ Capt. Kurkimilis



(L to R): Rick Wobbe, Capt. Chris Edyvean, WWII MM George Koch, WWII MM Capt. Pete Kurkimilis, Capt. Dru DiMattia



Capt. Kurkimilis with granddaughter Lauren and grandson Chris



This couple has been together since WWII! Meet Harry and Marvis Long. Harry was a B-26 Marauder pilot, while Marvis was a Rosie the Riveter, and she also tested TNT!



Pipes & Drums music



DYK?

The man in the background of the famous Times Square kiss photo at the end of WWII is Merchant Mariner Kenneth Hicks, who worked as an Engine Room Fireman.

Sprit of '45 – Orlando

By Steve Snyder, AMMV Region # 1 VP

On Sunday evening, August 13, I was privileged to attend the Spirit of '45 dinner at Dezerland Park Center, Orlando, FL. The event was sponsored by the Museum of Military History, Kissimmee, FL. Spirit of '45 is held to celebrate the Japanese surrender 78 years ago on August 14, 1945, and to honor veterans of WWII.

In attendance were three WWII Veterans: **Navy Wave Specialist 3rd Class Dorothy "Pat" Rudd**, age 101, one of the first 200 women to deploy overseas, 1942 thru 1945; **Marine Sargent Louis Boria Jr.**, age 95, served as a forward observer, 1943 thru



Chris Robertson and Master Chief Sargent Mel Jenner

1957; and **Chief Master Sargent Mel Jenner**, age 98, served as radio operator and gunner in the Army Air Corp, 1941 thru 1968.

The featured speaker was University of Central Florida Professor of Military History Barbara Gannon, who spoke on "What today's students can learn from the resilience of WWII veterans."

Unfortunately, unable to attend due to age, health, and travel were WWII Merchant Mariners **Ed Trester** of Saint Augustine, **Harold Seibel** of Oviedo, and **Leon Atkinson** of DeLand.

Chris Robertson, Executive Director of the Museum of Military History, asked that I say a few words:

AMMV was incorporated September 6, 1984 in Fort Myers, FL with the goal of "Just Recognition" for the service and sacrifice of American Merchant Mariners as 'veterans'. If you were on a ship in the Atlantic or Pacific carrying the troops, tanks, trucks, bombs, ammunition, fuel, and all the various supplies needed to support the troops, sailing past the U-boats, through

the mine fields, into the icy waters of the Murmansk Run, or subjected to the Japanese Kamikaze attack, or taken as prisoner of war to work as slave labor, then you deserved 'Veterans Status'. 243,000 mariners served in the WWII U.S. Merchant



Chris Robertson (Executive Director Museum of Military History) and Dorothy "Pat" Rudd

Marine. 9,521 were killed, 11,000 were wounded, and 609 were taken as POW's. In total, 733 ships were sunk. The Veterans Programs Enhancement Act of 1988 bestowed 'Veterans Status' on those WWII Merchant Mariners who were in "Active Oceangoing Service" from 12/7/1941 (Pearl Harbor) thru 8/15/1945 (Japanese surrender) 78 years ago this week.

AMMV continued to fight for "Just Recognition" for our WWII Merchant Mariners, and on March 13, 2020, President Trump signed into law the Congressional Gold Medal legislation for this group.



AMMV Members (L to R): Rick Walega, Capt. Rick Martucci, RVP Steve Snyder

Due to COVID, the presentation of the CGM was delayed until May 18, 2022, when Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi officiated the ceremony in the Statuary Hall of the Capitol, with ten WWII mariners present.

AMMV continues to locate and honor Merchant Mariners of WWII and hold local CGM ceremonies

across the country, including at the Museum of Military History in Kissimmee where those Merchant Mariners of WWII are presented, at no charge, with the 3" bronze replica of the CGM.



Marine Sargent Louis Boria, Jr.

The actual Congressional Gold Medal is located at the Merchant Marine Academy Museum in Kings Point, NY. If anyone happens to know of any Merchant Marine 'Veterans' of WWII,

please allow us to share the process of obtaining the CGM.

Thank You, and Heave Ho!



Honoring & Remembering Billy Lemuel Rose



Rose family in front of Freedom Wall (photo credit Janet Yarbrough)



Rob Burroughs presents a flag to Billy's great-grandson William (photo credit Janet Yarbrough)

School in California in 1952. He earned a Carpentry Apprentice certificate from the local union as part of his high school major. Billy was recruited back to the Merchant Marine during the Vietnam War and served in the MSTs from 1967 to 1971.

Billy passed away in 2004 but no memorial service was held and his cremated remains were scattered, so his niece, AMMV member Scarlett Rose arranged for a local Navy veteran, Rob Burroughs, to perform the flag ceremony and present a flag to Billy's great grandson, William Rose, who was named after him. William's family attended the ceremony along with other Rose cousins. Billy's plaque was placed next to his older brother, Scarlett's father Ellis Rose,

On July 15, 2023, an engraved plaque was placed on the Freedom Wall of the Veteran's Walk of Honor in Anderson, CA in memory of Billy Lemuel Rose, who was a WWII Merchant Mariner. Billy signed up at age 16 and served in the Merchant Marine from 1944 to 1950. After marrying in 1948 and starting a family, he finally received his high school diploma from Berkeley High



A family friend places Billy Rose's plaque on the Freedom Wall

who served in the Navy and the Merchant Marine during WWII and the MSTs in the Korean War. Their father, Harry Rose, who served in the Army during WWII, is next to Ellis.

Scarlett had already requested and gifted Billy's Congressional Gold Medal to his grandson, George Rose Jr. The rest of Billy's WWII medals have been requested from MARAD and will go to George and his family.

Walter Fletcher, a new AMMV member and Vietnam era Merchant Mariner, attended

the ceremony as a friend of the Rose family. George's wife Wendy took video of the ceremony and Scarlett has uploaded it to her YouTube account at <https://youtu.be/zrhvXlwtuHs>

The flag ceremony was performed by Rob Burroughs, US Navy Seabees Senior Chief, CEO of the Northern California Veterans Museum & Heritage Center: <https://www.norcalveteransmuseum.org>



Three of the Rose family veterans - Harry, Ellis, and Billy - have plaques on the Freedom Wall

"A Part of Our Fighting Team"

Appleton WWII Veteran receives High School diploma and Congressional Gold Medal

In 1944, an Appleton, Wisconsin teenager, Armin A. Barth, felt called to support the nation's war effort. Leaving family and high school behind, he headed to the West Coast. At the time, the War Shipping Administration (WSA) allowed sixteen-year-olds to join the Merchant Marine, needing more men, as President Roosevelt said, to fulfill "the most difficult and dangerous transportation job ever undertaken." The WSA fully understood that the men and women of the United States Merchant Marine were a "vital part" of the war effort, and Mr. Barth became part of our country's "fighting team."

As a Merchant Mariner, he sailed in the South Pacific on the *SS Canada Victory* (June 24 – August 15, 1944). This vessel later succumbed to a kamikaze attack at the Battle of Okinawa. He also served on the *SS Alcoa Patriot*. During his time on this vessel, he met United States Marine Corps aviators, who encouraged him to join the Marine Corps, which he did on June 9, 1945. He worked as a motor transport heavy truck driver and dispatcher until 1947 and then as a reservist until 1950. After his honorable discharge, he continued to support those who served by shuttling veterans to appointments at the Milwaukee VA.

Although Barth never completed his high school degree, he strongly advocated to family and friends the



(L to R): Lois Barth, Armin Barth, Capt. Chris Edyvean, Dr. June Klees

importance of earning an education. As heirs of this important advice, his grandson, Rick Hojan and other family members embarked on a journey of research and planning that brought Mr. Barth, along with friends, community members, and dignitaries to Appleton's American Legion Post #38 on Saturday, June 17. Unbeknownst to Mr. Barth, and under Wisconsin Statute 120.13 (37), on May 8th the Appleton School District had unanimously voted to honor his service by awarding his high school diploma.

On this sunny, June afternoon, Armin and wife, Lois, thought they would be enjoying a simple

Father's Day luncheon with local family members. What transpired was so much more. Even many of the attending family members – some who had traveled from various parts of the country – were not privy to all the planned surprises!

A formal ceremony was conducted. Speakers and presenters included Congressman Mike Gallagher (WI 8th District), Appleton School Board President Kay Eggert, and AMMV Regional Vice President Capt. Chris Edyvean. Also in attendance was Appleton Mayor Jake Woodford. Barth received his high school diploma, his replica Congressional Gold Medal, and a U.S. Merchant Marine flag. In his presentation, Congressman Gallagher emphasized that the Gold Medal was a testament to the Merchant Marine as "critical to the nation's defense," and read his official Congressional Record entry about Mr. Barth. Reflective of advancements in our country's views toward veterans, Ms. Eggert stated that the skills of service "deserve recognition within the educational community." Captain Edyvean emphasized that "today,



Armin Barth and wife Lois seated in the front row with close family members

we are honoring the service of a sixteen-year-old boy, who answered the call for his country when his country needed him the most. He gave up his todays for our tomorrows.” After the presentations, the Marine Hymn and Merchant Marine song were played, honoring Mr. Barth and his fellow countrymen for their service. A celebratory luncheon followed.

Events like these remind us of the intergenerational importance of honoring those who served in World War II and other wars, at home and abroad. Four generations of Armin and Lois’s family were present to celebrate a man who gave up a chance to finish one kind of education for that which he obtained in service to our country during the war. As a history educator and informal observer to

the day’s events, it was a joy to watch as attendees shared stories about the man they were honoring as father, uncle, grandfather, and great-grandfather. When we take the time to learn more about those who helped forge and maintain the freedoms we cherish, we become the living bridge through which their memories are passed on to future generations. In honoring the sacrifices of people like Mr. Barth, we maintain our common bonds as Americans over time and leave the next generation empowered with the knowledge of what came before, so they too may feel pride in all which our country has achieved in the name of liberty.

*Dr. June Klees
Member-at-Large*



Appleton School Board President Kay Eggert speaks prior to presenting Armin Barth his high school diploma



Several media affiliates cover the story, representing most major news networks



(L to R): Rick Hojan (grandson of Armin Barth), Kay Eggert (Appleton School Board President), Congressman Mike Gallagher (WI 8th District), WWII MM Armin Barth, and Capt. Chris Edyvean (AMMV Regional VP)





THE CHRISTMAS TREE SHIP & MARITIME HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

The holiday season brings family and friends of all ages together to celebrate beloved traditions and remember good times past. Though younger generations may tire of repeated stories from their elders, with the wisdom of age we often cherish the story-telling memories of our families as bridges to loved ones long gone. Around the Great Lakes, a well-known holiday tale is that of *Rouse Simmons*, better known as the *Christmas Tree Ship*. The story is a favorite of shipwreck and maritime enthusiasts, but the tragic loss of the vessel, its captain, and entire crew has wider and lasting significance in history.

A quick “Google Search” will take you to many reliable sources about the ship’s story. However, for those unfamiliar, I’ll touch briefly on its history before highlighting some books to add to your maritime history collection and how you can create family traditions of your own around these topics.

The History: A Primer

In the late 19th-century, Christmas-tree use grew in popularity beyond the German American communities that brought the custom to the United States. On the prairies and in urban areas, obtaining evergreens was difficult. Over time, the demand for the trees grew, and schooners on the Great Lakes replaced their usual timber with this profitable late-season cargo, bringing the new holiday tradition to families who would never cross a Great Lake or see a pine forest.

Captain Herman Schuenemann, of Wisconsin and later Illinois, was one of many mariners who braved the unpredictable nature of the lakes late in the shipping season to bring evergreens to the piers of Chicago. Parents with eager children in tow would greet the ship and pick out their family’s tree. Affectionately known as “Captain Santa,” locals appreciated Schuenemann for his jovial disposition and generosity, giving a portion of the shipload to churches and people in need. Without a doubt, Captain Santa helped families forge holiday memories and traditions for future generations to inherit.

Thus, it was with a heavy heart that many Chicagoans and Great Lakes communities learned of the disappearance of *Rouse Simmons* in late November of 1912. After depart-

ing from Thompson in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, the ship went to its watery grave near Two Rivers, Wisconsin during a severe storm on Lake Michigan. Though some clung to hope for the crew’s survival, no one waited more anxiously and grieved more thoroughly than his wife, Barbara, and their two daughters. Struggling to make ends meet and seeking to honor the work and legacy of Captain Schuenemann, his wife and daughters continued to arrange for the sale and transport of Christmas trees to Chicago well into the 20th century.

A Sampler of Readings

The details of this tale have endured and fascinated many for well-over a hundred years. Many articles, books, and webpages have been written about *Rouse Simmons*, along with artwork, plays, and video productions. To get you going on your *Christmas Tree Ship* voyage, let’s highlight some sources on the topic, starting with children’s books.

The Christmas Tree Ship, by Carol Crane and illustrated by Chris Ellison, was published by Sleeping Bear Press in 2011. This delightful tale is told from the perspective of the granddaughter of a lighthouse-keeper who shared the story of the ship with his grandchildren each year at Christmas-time as a family tradition. Though the book can be read to children of all ages, it is written for late elementary readers. It also helps educate young readers about the connections between resources, shipping, and the people who make those connections happen.

Well-known among *Christmas Tree Ship* enthusiasts is the work of Rochelle Pennington, gorgeously illustrated by Charles Vickerly and published by The Guest Cottage press in 2002. In her children’s book version of the story (*The Christmas Tree Ship: Story of Captain Santa*), Pennington captures the impact of the seasons and weather on people’s lives on and off the lakes. Young readers will consider the importance of being generous, like Captain Santa, while learning weather-related terms like *squall* and *mid-lateral cyclone*. By including photos, like a 1910 photograph of the life-saving station crew at Two-Rivers, Wisconsin, Pennington connects readers to our shared humanity across time. She also asks us to consider how Captain Schuenemann, his crew, and family might have felt experiencing the tragedy. Additionally, the

book covers the 1971 scuba diving discovery of the sunken vessel, which will appeal to readers young and old.

Published in 1998 by Putnam & Grossett, Jeanette Winter's *The Christmas Tree Ship* offers very early readers a brief history of the ship and shows the connections between rural tree farms to city markets. It also shows the importance of families doing tasks, chores, and celebrations together. This book pairs well with Mary Lyn Ray's *Christmas Farm*, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008, which explains how Christmas trees were planted, tended, and harvested throughout the seasons and years.

Moving to books for adults, Cris Kohl and Joan Forsberg's *The Christmas Tree Ship*, published in 2012 by Seawolf Communications, is a must read. These well-known maritime historians took a deep dive into first-hand and other sources to offer readers knowledge about the: use of Christmas Trees in the United States and Chicago, beginnings of the Christmas Tree Ships, Schuenemann family's history, and Rouse Simmons's background, sinking, wreckage discovery, along with modern related traditions. This is a fascinating, well-researched, and richly detailed read, and I encourage all who want a thorough overview to start here!

Two other worthy reads, filled with first-hand stories from the era, are: Rochelle Pennington's *The Historic Christmas Tree Ship: A True Story of Faith, Hope, and Love* (Pathways Press, 2004) and Fred Neuschel's *Lives and Legends of the Christmas Tree Ships* (University of Michigan Press, 2007). Pennington covers the history of the ship for adult readers in a large-print book, while Neuschel expands our understanding of the larger world of Christmas tree shipping on the Great Lakes and the maritime community involved.

For those seeking audio-visual accounts, check out the Weather Channel's 2004 production, called *The Christmas Tree Ship: A Holiday Storm Story* and "Faces of the Forgotten's," *The Doomed Christmas-Tree Ship of 1912* video on YouTube. There are other YouTube videos, historical site webpages, and online accounts available to those interested in going beyond the essentials mentioned above.

Creating Your Own Maritime History Traditions

As the *Christmas Tree Ship* legacy shows us, traditions are created, then inherited. We are the living link between the past that created our valued traditions and the future that will inherit them. Using the sources above and others, let's explore ways to incorporate the *Christmas Tree Ship* legacy into your own holiday traditions, highlighting to the next generation the importance of our country's impressive maritime history.

Story Time: Gather younger readers around for some

holiday treats and *Christmas Tree Ship* story time. As you read the stories, encourage them to think about the ways water transport impacted peoples' lives past and present. With the Schuenemann family as an example, help youngsters understand the lifestyle and sacrifices that our merchant mariners make to supply communities with their everyday needs. Ask them to consider how traditions are formed and have them invent a holiday tradition of their own around the telling of the *Christmas Tree Ship* story.

Heirloom Box: Buy a box or use an old shoebox and decorate it in a nautical holiday theme. As a family, find maritime-related items to put in it, such as shells, books, tied ropes, drawings, photos, or souvenirs. Ask the mariners in your family to write down some of their favorite stories as "letters" to the next generation. If possible, use acid-free paper and envelopes to preserve these precious memories in the box.

Greeting Cards: Look up photos and paintings of *Rouse Simmons*, buy blank greeting card sets, break out the crayons, markers, and paints, and have everyone design their own *Christmas Tree Ship* Christmas card. Consider sending the cards to Merchant Marine veterans to thank them for their service to our country.

Family Book Read: For teens and adults, pick one of the adult-reader books and start a family holiday book read and gather from time-to-time to discuss the history. Consider inviting the mariners in your family to join in and share their own experiences with the next generation. If folks are comfortable, record them telling their stories and preserve the recordings for future generations.

Maritime Memories Tree: In honor of the *Christmas Tree Ship* tradition, buy or make nautical themed ornaments with which to decorate a Christmas tree. If you live at the seaside, found objects can be used. A simple trip to a local craft or department store for supplies can lead to hours of family time discussing and designing your tree decor. If you have mariners in your family, consider using photos of them and the ships on which they sailed, turning them into photo-framed ornaments. Don't forget to write down names and relevant dates, on the back!

Hopefully, this modest sampler of books and family-time ideas will help bring maritime history and the importance of our country's merchant marine to the forefront of your holiday celebrations, and who knows? Perhaps new memories and traditions might be created and carried forward in time the way the legacy of the *Christmas Tree Ship* has!

Dr. June Klees (Member-at-Large)



Model of the Rouse Simmons, at an Escanaba, MI antique shop, certified as made with wood recovered from the wreck.



**Dave Yoho is featured as keynote speaker
on *USNS Comfort* for National Maritime Day ceremony**





COMMANDER
MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND

Dear Mr. Yoho, ^{Dave}

15 June 2023

Please accept my personal thanks for speaking at the Military Sealift Command National Maritime Day celebration, May 22, 2023, aboard USNS COMFORT.

Your remarks were inspirational! I know those who attended the ceremony were moved by your personal story, service during World War II, and life-long advocacy for the U.S. Merchant Marine. And thank you for taking the time to meet with us and take photographs with our Civil Service Mariners as I know they were thrilled to engage with you.

The occasion provided us an opportunity to celebrate and recognize our American Mariners and the U.S. maritime industry. On behalf of all the Mariners and shore staff at MSC, thank you for sharing your time and reflections.

Sincerely,

MIKE WETTLAUFER
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy





JUST RECOGNITION

Honoring Fallen USMM WWII Heroes on Memorial Day

Since AMMV was first established in 1984, our organization's leaders and members have been seeking appropriate honors for fallen USMM WWII veterans on Memorial Day. After support from Congress and U.S. Government agencies, the television producers at Capital Concerts made a positive, historic decision to honor USMM WWII veterans in a special tribute segment of the 2023 National Memorial Day Concert. On May 28, co-hosts of the 2023 National Memorial Day Concert, Gary Sinise and Joe Mantegna, honored USMM WWII veterans and their fallen shipmates for their significant contributions to victory in WWII. The segment of the concert on the Merchant Marine was moving, and the audience cheered USMM WWII veterans and their fallen shipmates for their accomplishments. AMMV is most grateful for the results that Capital Concerts achieved to make the 2023 tribute meaningful for our Nation.

The concert was broadcast nationally by PBS to millions of American homes. USMM WWII veterans were featured on camera, including Bill Balabanow,



Gary Sinise (L) and Joe Mantegna

on the USMM's accomplishments during WWII was the first one in the 34-year history of the show – a great milestone for Merchant Mariners, their families, and all members of AMMV. We will continue to collaborate with Capital Concerts and PBS in a positive way



Ed Laughton, Charles Mills, Julian Smith, George Worsham, and Dave Yoho, to honor more than 9,500 Merchant Mariners who made the ultimate sacrifice during WWII. Each of the WWII veterans was chaperoned by a proud family member. The concert segment



(L to R): President Joe Biden, Sec. of Defense Llyod Austin, Gen. Mark Milley



JUST RECOGNITION



Julian Smith (left), Bill Balabanow, George Worsham

to ensure future concerts include honors for the U.S. Merchant Mariners killed in action during WWII. That is what Memorial Day is all about!



USMMA Cadet Color Guard recessional

The Department of Veterans Affairs honored AMMV WWII veterans and their chaperones by inviting them to a breakfast with President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden on May 29, the day when our

Nation officially celebrated Memorial Day 2023. The White House invitation was a direct result of AMMV's application to become an Associate Member of the VA's National Veterans Day Committee. After breakfast at the White House, the AMMV veterans and their chaperones were transported to Arlington National Cemetery for a wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, led by President Biden, Secretary of



AMMV delegation presenting first wreath; (L to R) Ed Laughton, Charles Mills (carrying wreath), Bill Balabanow.

Defense Lloyd Austin, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley.

The honor of participating in ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery was the first time since the end of WWII that Merchant Mariners were invited to lay a wreath on Memorial Day. After 78 years, all Merchant Mariners and their families should be proud that AMMV WWII veterans were the first to honor their fallen shipmates on Memorial Day, along with other tributes expressed by our national military leaders and wreaths placed by several veterans' organizations. A four-member cadet color guard from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY presented Old Glory, the USMMA flag, and the USMMA battle standard at the Arlington National Cemetery's amphitheater. The



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AMMV delegation presenting a second wreath; (L to R): WWII MM veterans Julian Smith and George Worsham, with a cadet carrying wreath (center).

cadets also accompanied five of the WWII veterans to lay not one but two wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Seeing the USMM WWII veterans and AMMV members, their chaperones, and the cadets at the Arlington National Cemetery ceremony was a remarkable sight. Capt. Dru DiMattia worked tirelessly behind the scenes, with support from several AMMV members, to coordinate activities successfully with PBS, Capi-



Presentation of AMMV's first wreath and salute at Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

tal Concerts, the VA, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. AMMV looks forward to an annual invitation to the Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, and hopefully the National Memorial Day



President Biden's wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Concert.

After the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier concluded, Wes Smith, Program Director at the American Veterans Center, invited our WWII Merchant Mariners, the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Cadets, family, and friends to a dedicated parade float for the U.S. Merchant Marine. The National Memorial Day Parade on Constitution Avenue in Washington, DC was about to kick off at 2:00pm and we had to get everyone to the parade that was about 2 miles away. Our team of five Cadets in full uniform, along with family members and our WWII Merchant Mariners, including Charles Mills at 102 years old, stood watch in the parade! As our VIP shuttle had to navigate the DC traffic, with a pressing monsoonal rainstorm passing through, we were waved into the parade by the Capital Police once they validated our V.I.P. parade pass given to us by Amy Fisher, the event onsite coordinator for the parade.

AMMV had an extremely productive weekend, recognizing our fallen Merchant Mariners, honoring WWII Mariners who attended the events, and all those



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who tuned in at home. The educational value of the events was a vital service for our Nation.

AMMV Membership with the VA's National Veterans Day Committee

In May, the Bylaws Subcommittee of the VA's National Veterans Day Committee (VDNC) voted to approve AMMV's application as an Associate Member. A vote by the Principal Members of the VDNC is still pending. If the Principal Members approve our application, the request will be forwarded to Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough for final approval.

Though the process is taking some time to complete, the VA has invited AMMV to participate in the Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery, including the Observation at the amphitheater, the flag procession, and laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This ceremony will be similar to the 2023 Memorial Day event, and it will be the first time in history that the U.S. Merchant Marine have been represented at Arlington National Cemetery on Veterans Day. AMMV members should be proud of our organization's accomplishment and the honorable recognition by the VA.

AMMV looks forward to annual invitations to participate in both celebrations to honor all veterans of the United States, including presentation of the USMM colors at the Arlington National Cemetery amphitheater and laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The opportunity for representatives



AMMV is being considered as an associate member of the VA's National Veterans Day Committee

of AMMV, USMM veterans, and cadet color guards to attend the ceremonies will be discussed with AMMV board members to determine how our organization can participate in the annual ceremonies. Rotating the cadet color guard duties between the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and each of the six state maritime academies is being considered to share in the honors for all USMM veterans, active-duty Merchant Mariners, academy faculty and cadets, and their families. Such honors may also inspire young men and women to consider a career in the Merchant Marine.

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

On August 4, I participated in an online meeting of the California State Historical Resources Commission to support the Alameda Historical Preservation Association's continuing efforts to have the U.S. Maritime



"Glory of the Seas" building

Service Officers Training School buildings in Alameda, CA listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Carmen Reid is the author of the proposal. From 1943 to 1954, the school played a significant role in training Merchant Marine officers for duty during WWII and the Korean War. The centerpiece of the remaining buildings at the site is a building called *Glory of the Seas*,



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which resembles the prow of a Liberty Ship. The design was intended to teach deck officers to use flag signals on a curved flying bridge.

The school's buildings are the last remaining U.S. Maritime Service training facilities from WWII and the Korean War. The Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, at the National Park Service, and MARAD's Maritime Historian both support designating the school



(L to R): Pat Cotter (back), Margaret Robbins, Mike Robbins, Rep. Jimmy Panetta, Joanna Robbins

for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. There are many other supporters too.

Unfortunately, the California State Historic Preservation Officer has not allowed Ms. Reid's proposal to be heard by the Commission. The proposal focuses on the historical and architectural importance of the buildings and the opportunity to repurpose and restore the buildings for development in Alameda. AMMV's comments focused on the importance of the school's buildings and land area to Merchant Marine and United States history for a facility that was opened about 80 years ago. AMMV supports the preservation of the existing buildings at the site, and we understand the important development needs of the City of Alameda. During the online meeting, we proposed that parties interested in the site should work together to renovate the existing

buildings and help the City of Alameda with its development goals. AMMV will participate actively with Ms. Reid's efforts, through testimony at hearings and outreach, to make sure our organization's strong support is communicated to State of California decision-makers.

AMMV recognizes Ms. Reid's dedication and persistence on this matter, even though there has been significant opposition from the City of Alameda and difficulties with the State Historic Preservation Officer. During the online testimony on August 4, Capt. Tom Stapleton, retired Master Mariner, suggested that Ms. Reid seek support from maritime academies, maritime unions, U.S. flagged shipping companies, nongovernmental organizations, and members of Congress in the San Francisco Bay area to support the designation. I will work with the AMMV board and Ms. Reid to develop an outreach strategy for the suggested organizations. If any AMMV members are interested in commenting on the proposal, please let me know. Standby for future developments.

Honoring a USMM WWII Veteran in Carmel, CA

On April 23, AMMV received an email from Michael Robbins, a WWII Merchant Marine veteran, asking for help to receive his service medals. Mike's message said simply, "Since I will be 96 very shortly, time is obviously of the essence." Sheila Sova, AMMV's former vice president and friend to many USMM WWII veterans, sent me a copy of Mike's email because he lives close to my home in California. I said I would be glad to help Mr. Robbins.

I scheduled a meeting at Mike's home and interviewed him about his experiences as an Ordinary Seaman, an Acting Able Seaman, and a Quartermaster from 1943-1946. He told me he joined the Merchant Marine when he was just 15 years old, about three weeks before his 16th birthday, after watching ships sail past his hometown of Atlantic City, NJ. His parents were not pleased with his plan, but he joined up anyway.

Mike spent his first months in the Merchant Marine sailing on freshwater and coastal vessels to gain experience for his Seaman's Papers. In 1944, he was shipped



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out on the first of four merchant ship assignments that carried him to the Atlantic War Zone, the Mediterranean-Middle East War Zone, and the Pacific War Zone. During a voyage in the Mediterranean Sea, enroute to the Persian Gulf, his convoy came under enemy air attack. His job, besides chipping paint and deck duties, was a volunteer to assist a U.S. Naval Armed Guard gun crew with 20mm ammunition magazines. In the heat of the attack, Mike dropped one of the magazines of ammo on the deck, as he hastily tried to do his job. Thankfully, his ship was not damaged during the attack, either by the enemy or by the dropped ammo. As a teenager, Mike sailed on merchant ships and had many amazing experiences until his last voyage in May 1946.

Mike told me his impressive story, and I said that AMMV would help him get his service medals and the Congressional Gold Medal issued to all USMM WWII veterans. It was my honor to help him. Fortunately, Mike had his DD 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty) that listed the four ships he sailed on during WWII, and he had a copy of his Certificate of Substantially Continuous Service. I scanned the forms and sent them in an email to Katrina McRae at MARAD headquarters requesting Mike's three war zone service medals, the WWII Victory Medal, and a 3" Congressional Gold Medal. MARAD turned my request around quickly and sent the medals directly to Mike's home.

I contacted staff at Rep. Jimmy Panetta's (D-CA-19) district office to ask if it would be possible for Mr. Panetta to present the medals to Mike at a ceremony in the Congressman's office. Mr. Panetta's district staff kindly scheduled the ceremony for July 15 that was attended by Mr. Panetta, Mike, his wife Margaret, his daughter Joanne Robbins, two longtime friends, and me. Mr. Panetta congratulated Mike on his USMM service and his veteran status. Mr. Panetta also surprised Mike with a prestigious citation from floor of the U.S. House of Representatives that was entered into the Congressional Record describing his Merchant Marine service. Mr. Panetta arranged for a U.S. flag to be flown over the U.S. Capitol on Mike's upcoming birthday. Mike thanked

Mr. Panetta humbly, and said, "I came in as a boy, and went out as a man." Mike even sang a few bars of *Heave Ho! My Lads! Heave Ho!* for Mr. Panetta.

With the information obtained from my interview with Mike, I prepared an entry for the National WWII Memorial *Registry of Remembrances*. I presented him with a printout of the registry that will be a permanent record for his family and the WWII Memorial. I also gave him a *Battlin' Pete* patch and a mini USMM flag. Jens Inge Egeland, of AMMV's International Affairs Standing Committee, kindly provided a Convoy Cup Foundation medallion and a certificate of appreciation for Mike's Merchant Marine service during WWII. Just before his 96th birthday, the local *Carmel Pine Cone* newspaper ran a story about Mike's service and the ceremony at Mr. Panetta's office. Needless to say, Mike was very appreciative of all the honors he received.

I am pleased that Mr. Panetta, MARAD, the *Carmel Pine Cone*, and AMMV were able to honor Mike in the space of only three months. It was my pleasure to help a deserving USMM WWII veteran receive the medals and accolades that he earned as a teenager onboard merchant ships in three theaters of World War II.

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



Photos with the President & First Lady

**William Balabanow
and sister, Linda Lee Davis**



**Dave Yoho
and wife, Carole**





**Charles A. Mills
and granddaughter, Veda Handy**



**George Worsham
and daughter, Vicky**



**Ed Laughton
and granddaughter, Betsy Mount**

The Last Voyage of the S.S. Executive

Submitted by Doug McAllister

“The vessel sailed from New York after the usual last-minute rush and general confusion on the 18th of April 1942.” – Captain Gordon D. McAllister (U.S. Merchant Marine/Lt. Commander U.S. Naval Reserve)

So begins what my father titled “Account of Voyage of the S.S. Executive to Murmansk.” There’s nothing in the title of the account to indicate any of what was to come for the ship and its crew. There is mention, very early on in the account, that “an excessive amount of time had not been granted”... “for the complete overhaul and checking” of lifeboats and rafts prior to departure.

The account does not mention what type of cargo the Executive was carrying. According to my father it was ammunition, although he never mentioned what type since he rarely talked about the experience. Here, I must rely on my two brothers for corroboration and both remember him saying “ammunition.” The Executive was armed with a deck gun and machine guns. Army gunners apparently were on board. The Navy had only begun arming merchant ships the previous November.

The account does not mention nor does my family have any information on what transpired on the trans-Atlantic voyage, the gathering of liberty ships for the convoy to Murmansk, Russia or when the Executive arrived in that port. The Murmansk Run, as it was called, extended from 1941 to 1945. 800 ships, 350 under the United States flag, participated. Ninety-seven were sunk by bombs, torpedoes, mines, and the elements. We also don’t know when the Executive departed Murmansk but we have a good idea of what happened in the North Sea March 5, 1943.

On March 5, 1943 at about 09:00, the Executive was notified of a possible air attack. Then, a torpedo was spotted off the starboard bow.

From the account: “The wheel was put hard left and the first torpedo was seen to cross the bow, with one of our gunners opening fire upon it. Just before the first one struck its mark on the ship on our port beam, we received

a direct hit on the starboard side evidently between the engine room and number 4 hold. The engines stopped immediately. The force of the explosion was such as to clear #

4 hatch entirely – beams, hatch covers, and the booms that were cradled above the hatch, all were removed completely. The booms landed on the deck, with the rest of the debris evidently going over the side, or falling down the hold.”

My father was stationed on the top bridge

and was acting as observer. He told the Master he would get the lifeboats ready for lowering.

“When I arrived on the boat-deck, # 4 boat had been lowered, the ship was settling fast at this time and developing a decided starboard list. The boat sheered away from the ship’s side and two men were lost as they attempted to enter the boat by going down the life-lines. # 3 lifeboat was damaged considerably, and was not immediately launched, while the # 2 boat suffered a disastrous accident as a result of the forward davit tearing loose from the deck.”

While another of the lifeboats was being lowered, with five men already aboard, the forward end got away from the man tending the fall. Three of the men were recovered, two were missing. Apparently, the 2nd Assistant Engineer and a sailor had been blown overboard by the force of the explosion(s).

“Meanwhile, # 1 boat had been lowered, # 3 was now in the water though leaking badly, and # 4 was somewhere astern. The life rafts, with exception of the # 3 raft, refused to budge from their launching structures.”

A total of eight crew were lost plus one AG (which may stand for Army gunner). We have no information on when the Executive departed Murmansk but my father in his account men-

tions that it was loaded with potassium.

U-255 was one of the few German submarines to survive World War Two. She was surrendered along with her crew in Scotland at war’s end. From what we (the McAllister family) understand, our father and his surviv-



SS Executive



U-255

ing crew and Captain were picked up by a British ship and taken to Scotland before returning to New York.

From his account, my father seems to lament what he saw as insufficient lifeboat and liferaft support and lowering systems and especially what he saw as their inability to withstand the force of explosions. He also seems to have wished that more drills with the boats could have been accomplished during the voyage. But extreme weather conditions severely limited their ability to do so. He mentions that the systems were checked while in port in Murmansk only to have everything freeze up again shortly after leaving port. And left unmentioned is the extreme chaos inherent in an actual deadly attack and its effects on those facing a life and death situation.

On March 5, 1944, exactly a year after the *Executive* and crew were lost, Captain Gordon D. McAllister married Captain Alice Virginia Heysel (U.S. Army nurse corps) in a ceremony in Livorno (Leghorn), Italy. Later that year, Captain McAllister would deliver supplies to the beaches at Normandy and various ports in the Mediterranean. He later was Master of the passenger ship the *S.S. Independence* and captained various other merchant ships in the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. His sons, Gordon McAllister Jr., graduated as an engineering officer from Maine Maritime Academy, studied law and became a district judge. His son Douglas McAllister was a broadcast journalist and college professor, and son Kevin a teacher and coach.



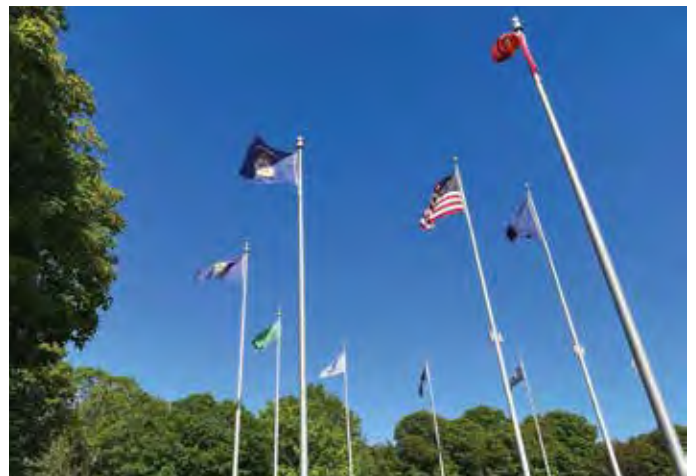
Capt. Gordon D. McAllister and Capt. Alice Virginia Heysel

Merchant Marine Flag Flies in Randolph, Vermont

Submitted by Sam Tilles, AMMV Member-at-Large

Six months ago, while paying a visit to my grandfather's grave at the Vermont Veterans Cemetery in Randolph, VT, I noticed the "circle of flags" at the entrance of the cemetery did not include the flag of the U.S. Merchant Marine. Though I was unsurprised by this, since Vermont is an inland state, being a Merchant Mariner I decided to make it my mission to encourage the cemetery to fly the U.S. Merchant Marine flag to honor those brave WWII mariners who sailed through U-Boat infested waters to get the supplies and war equipment to our Armed Forces fighting in Europe and in the Pacific. They had the highest casualty rate per capita out of all the Armed Forces and were the last to come home from the war. They did not receive any recognition for their wartime service until 1988, when they were finally granted veterans benefits. This is an injustice that today is finally being righted, as one can see with the enactment of the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2020, as well as recognition of the Merchant Marine at this year's Memorial Day Concert in Washington D.C, which featured some of our WWII Merchant Mariners.

After speaking about the Merchant Marine with the Vermont Office of Veterans Affairs, which administers the Vermont Veterans Cemetery in Randolph, they kindly agreed to fly the Merchant Marine flag that I had purchased. Being away for the past six months, I only just recently was able to check upon their progress. As they promised me, the Merchant Marine flag can now be seen flying at the cemetery's circle of flags.



RECOGNIZED AT LAST

A tribute to all who go to sea

by Mark Gleeson, Member-at-Large

I admire good writing. There are thousands of books written each year, and thousands of speeches presented, but what do you remember? What was written or said that captured the feeling, the intensity of the moment? An example is in the recent book written by ex-Steeler coach Bill Cowher where he describes talking to his father who is very ill. Bill was proposing further treatments for his father and his father says, “*I’ve had enough, Billie.*” The book is good, but those few words have stuck with me, and say a lot.

Good writers probably read a lot and it is important to read to see how other writers handle situations and emotions. President Franklin Roosevelt was a great writer and is forever remembered for his appeal to the nation to stay calm in the depression when he said, “*all we have to fear, is fear itself.*” Winston Churchill was a superb writer and the right man at the time. We all remember, “*never have so many, owed so much, to so few.*” He was addressing the role of the RAF winning the Battle of Britain. Dr. Martin Luther King is remembered for the “*I have a dream*” speech, and the late Dr. Charles Krauthammer wrote on every subject, and no one was better.

I have had several opportunities to be slightly creative in writing. To find the right words, the right phrase, for the right occasion.

I was honored many years ago to be the main speaker at the first Maritime Day Program of the Mon Valley chapter of Merchant Marine Veterans in Elizabeth, PA. I had been serving as co-chairman of a national committee seeking recognition of denied WWII merchant seamen. These memorial presentations cannot be long as men are sitting in the sun, and what could I really say that was so important? In the audience were our shipmates and vets from all the other services. We were so honored. I remember outlining what we had been doing to gain veteran recognition, and then listed a few specific events that few people knew about from WWII. Convoys that were famous, invasions participated in, the breakwaters formed on D-Day by sinking ships off Omaha Beach. I bemoaned the fact that most of these events were unknown to the public. I came to the end of my presentation and asked the attendees to pause at the end of a day, when the rivers were calm and quiet, and I said, “*Tell me shipmates, who tolls the bell for us?*” I answered by own question when I said, “*We do, only we here in Elizabeth do.*”

I finished my presentation and was expecting some-

one to comment on my using an inspiration from Ernest Hemingway. The only person who commented was a local reporter for a local newspaper who asked if I had a copy of the speech. I am pleased that through the years, others had picked up *Who tolls the bell*, and used it. It always fits.

My last opportunity to say something significant in a few words came in 1990 when I was invited to address a monthly meeting of the *John Brown* Chapter of veterans in Baltimore. We had finished a ten-year Congressional fight to pass legislation finally recognizing merchant seamen who had not gotten to sea until after August 15, 1945. The Department of Defense had refused to recognize the men although the war was not officially over until the end of 1946.

I flew to Baltimore, took a cab to the motel where the luncheon meeting was to be held. Some friends of mine from Pittsburgh, including some Armed Guard, had driven down to be with me. I remember several attendees were in their officer uniforms, including some captains. After lunch, I gave my presentation which was really a listing of events over the last 10 years. I came to the end of the presentation, thanked everyone for their support, stopped for a few seconds, fixed the audience with my eyes, raised my eyes up, and said:

RECOGNIZED AT LAST,
RECOGNIZED AT LAST,
THANK GOD ALMIGHTY,
WE’RE RECOGNIZED AT LAST.

I waited a few seconds, said thank you, and sat down. A polite applause, no requests for a copy of the speech, no interviews. No one said how fitting it was that I had drawn reference to Martin Luther King saying, “*Free at last.*” I came home with my citation.

I write vignettes on the WWII merchant marine. I often include a phrase written by someone describing the wartime experience. I include, “*Never again will the world see such a fleet of ships, and never again will the world see such a group of men who sailed them.*”

Whoever first wrote that could not have said it better.

Two years ago, Congress presented the WWII merchant mariners with a Congressional Gold Medal. We are the men of the WWII merchant marine. *Recognized at last.*

Mark Gleeson can be reached at:

shamrock127@comcast.net



National WWII Museum seeks WWII Merchant Marine artifacts

The National WWII Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana covers all aspects of the American experience during the Second World War, and U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Merchant Marine material are much rarer than Army and Navy collections. The WWII Museum is always looking to add new items and stories to highlight these less-recognized branches of service.



If you have a loved one who was in the Merchant Marine during WWII, we are always looking for letters, uniforms, photographs, scrap books, and other materials that highlights USMM contributions to winning the war.

To do this, we ask that you shoot photographs of the items you might have to offer, individually or in a group, as well as tell us a little bit about your loved one's wartime career.

You can send that information to:

artifact.donations@nationalww2museum.org

Your contribution might help with future exhibits, articles, and web pieces, as well as aid staffers, researchers, and educators.

It is important to tell not only the story of the Army and Navy, but also recognize the contributions of those who had the dangerous and thankless job of crossing the seas to supply the Allies.

Cory Graff, Curator & Restoration Manager



AMMV Partners with College Student Organization!

On the education and outreach front, AMMV is excited to announce that it has partnered with the *Civics Corps*. Based at Bay de Noc Community College in Michigan, the *Civics Corps* is a student club that promotes dialogue and learning between generations in service to the community. Every fall semester, the students learn job-ready skills through organizing and hosting "Veterans Speak!" as a national Zoom-based event that highlights the experiences of veterans of different ages through conversation. Each year, AMMV will provide a key-note speaker to highlight the histories of the Merchant Marine and AMMV, help the students find Merchant Marine veterans to be panelists and audience members, and promote the event nationally through our channels. Please stay tuned and keep an ear out for announcements. There will be upcoming opportunities to assist the students and participate in the event, as we expand our education and outreach efforts to the next generation!



102-year-old North Carolina WWII Mariner Receives CGM

Editor's note: Thanks to Wendy Coble of the U.S. Maritime Administration for providing the details in this story.



On July 13th, WWII Merchant Mariner Wesley S. "Bob" Bessell, Jr. received his replica Congressional Gold Medal. Mr. Bessell experienced significant action during WWII. Congressman Chuck Edwards of North Carolina presented the honor to this 102-year-

old veteran. In addition, Bessell received the Atlantic War Zone Medal, Mediterranean War Zone Medal, Pacific War Zone Medal, Victory Medal, Merchant Marine Combat Bar with silver star (the star denotes having been on a ship sunk by enemy action), Honorable Service Button, and Merchant Marine Emblem.

Bessel was interviewed by Wendy M. Coble, Historian and Acting Federal Preservation Officer, Office of Strategic Sealift, U.S. Maritime Administration. Coble stated, "There's not many of these veterans left, and we want to try to honor them while we can. Obviously, they did not get the honor that they should have... So, when we found out about a veteran, especially one who's 102, we want to run as quickly as we can to go see them."

Bob Bessell was born July 9, 1921, in Manhattan but was raised in Port Washington, NY. While at Port Washington High School, he was student body President and Captain of the football team as well as a founding member, actor, and set hand of the Huntington Township Theatre Group on Long Island.

Sailing and going to sea was in Bob's blood. His grandfather was a sailor and as a youngster Bob had cared for yachts and he wanted to go to sea. His maritime career began early when he served as a cabin boy at the age of 15 on J.P. Morgan's yacht *Corsair* on a round trip journey from NY to Southampton, England. Bessell started training with the U.S. Coast Guard on Hoffman Island, NY, and it was during his training that America joined the Second World War. Most of his classmates were taken immediately as Ordinary Seamen (since they had not completed their training) to be Able-Bodied Seamen onto ships in the warzone. In order to build up his time to make AB, Bob became permanent quartermaster on the Hoffman Island training ship *Vema* for seven months. Once armed with the AB certificate, he started his career on merchant ships.

Served in the Merchant Marines 1942-1945

- *S/S West Hardaway* – Able Bodied Seaman 5-5-42 to

- 6-15-42 (two voyages)
 - Sunk by torpedo 6-15-42
 - Caribbean

- *S/S J.W. McAndrews* – Wheelsman (Quartermaster) 9-16-42 to 4-7-43 (two voyages)
 - Operation Torch – Troopship
 - Atlantic
- *S/S Christoble* – Wheelsman (Quartermaster) 4-8-43 to 5-20-43
 - Atlantic coastwise
- Attended Officers Candidate School, New London, CT. June/Sept 1943
 - Training aboard the tanker *M/S Gulfhawk* 10-11-43 to 11-25-43
 - Mediterranean
- *S/S Atlantic City* – 3rd Mate 12-24-43 to 2-28-44
 - Ship collided with another ship mid ocean but did not sink
 - England
- *S/S Atlantic City* – 2nd Mate (provisional) 2-29-44 to 4-28-44
 - England
 - One month's medical leave
- Completed test for 2nd Mate
- *S/S Zane Grey* – 2nd Mate 7-13-44 to 11-12-44
 - Rammed midship but did not sink
- *S/S Zane Grey* – 1st Mate 11-28-44 to 3-2-45
- Completed test for 1st Mate
- *S/S Gutzon Borglum* – 1st Mate 6-23-45 to 12-8-45
 - Ship blown onto reef in a typhoon but did not sink
 - War ends
- *S/S Edward Rutledge* 2-13-46 to 4-18-46

Bob met his wife Sheila while delivering documents after a voyage to Liverpool, England. He describes his first glimpse of Sheila after a rainstorm in Liverpool and swears her beautiful face was lit by a shaft of light through the rainclouds. They were married for 72 wonderful years and had three children. They now have four grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Bob's son Matt conducted an oral history interview for the Library of Congress' veteran's history project. That interview can be seen at <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.77342/>.



Cargo Preference Essential Element for U.S. Merchant Marine, National Security

Rear Admiral Mark H. Buzby, USN (Ret)



Recently, there have been renewed calls by some to do away with – or greatly diminish – the requirements that govern the sea transportation of cargo that is owned, procured, furnished, or financed by the US Government – better known as Cargo Preference.

A removal of the current 50% requirement would have immediate and devastating effect on the US flag fleet. I state this with the confidence of having observed multiple US flag ships “flag out” of US registry when a change to Cargo preference statutes in 2013 reduced the required US carriage percentage of non-DOD government cargo from 75% to 50%. Doing away with Cargo preference requirements would directly result in the reduction in the size of the already small US flag deep sea fleet, adversely impact the size of the correspondingly small pool of US citizen seafarers, and jeopardize our Nation’s ability to execute sealift of US forces in times of crisis or conflict.

As MARAD Administrator, I testified often of the “three - legged stool” of maritime policy that underpins and supports the U.S.-flag merchant marine: the Jones Act, the Maritime Security Program (and newly enacted Tanker Security Program), and Cargo preference. Cargo preference is the least understood of the three, and it is under direct attack now. Short-sighted detractors are now pushing to end cargo preference for food aid programs like Food for Peace, in which American-grown food is moved on American-flagged ships to help those in need in the some of the poorest parts of the world. This has been a successful program for nearly 70 years helping to provide much needed food and aid to families starving and suffering from famine and conflict. At the same time, these programs support American farmers, American truckers, American rail operators, American manufacturers, American milliners, American oil and flour producers, American longshoremen, and American mariners. Currently, only half of all those cargos must travel in US flagged vessels.

We should not underestimate the strong signal that a US flag ship delivering life saving food and aid sends to everyone that the US is there and engaged. Putting food aid on flags of convenience says nothing... just another government hand out. Cargo preference is an important component of global engagement, non-lethal and peaceful.

Other Cargo preference statutes date back to 1904, stipulating that 100% of Department of Defense cargo must travel in US flagged vessels, ensuring a safe and secure means to deliver our fighting forces and their sustainment around the globe. Imagine

if such a statute was not in place and the movement of military cargos was dependent on the whims of a foreign flag carrier during times of heightened tension or crisis. I don’t think we want to go there.

Lacking a comprehensive national maritime strategy that coherently and comprehensively ties together the contributions of our civilian merchant marine and our uniformed sea services (Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and NOAA) to our national defense and economic security, the individual elements of maritime policy which are “sailing in loose formation” today are susceptible to attack from special interests not aware of the important role each plays in support of the other. The attacks on Cargo preference are a perfect example; a seemingly detached policy focused on moving food aid and other government cargos helps sustain a sizeable percentage of the US Flag fleet, which provides jobs for the maritime work force, which is the same pool of mariners the US government will depend upon to activate and sail our Ready Reserve Force sealift fleet to transport and sustain US and allied forces in times of national emergency. The math is simple: reduced cargo equals reduced ships, fewer ships equals fewer crews, and fewer crews means we cannot man our sealift ships.

President Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have made their interest in dominating the maritime sector perfectly clear: they construct 80% of ship to shore cranes, 86% of intermodal chassis, and 95% of the world’s shipping containers. Their shipyards turnout 47% of the world’s shipbuilding tonnage, and PRC companies operate over 5,500 merchant ships. They subsidized their shipbuilding industry by over \$132 billion from 2010-2018. The CCP knows what the British Empire knew, what the Founding Fathers knew, what Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan postulated in 1890: control the seas, control the world.

I want to be clear: ending cargo preference will create national security risks, and lack of cargo will continue to shrink the size of the US maritime fleet and reduce US sealift capability at a time when we cannot afford to give up one ship or lose a single mariner. The adverse ripple effect will extend to the shore side maritime and shipbuilding industry as well. I encourage Congress to reject misguided and unwise proposals that will make us even more dependent on the Chinese Communist Party for our economic health and instead support a robust US maritime policy that will sustain the US commercial sealift needed to support US national security.

Rear Admiral Buzby served as Maritime Administrator from 2017-2021. He retired from the US Navy in 2013 after 34 years of service which included command of the US Navy’s Military Sealift Command. Prior to serving as MARAD Administrator, he was President of the National Defense Transportation Association.

Originally published in SEAPOWER magazine, reprinted with permission.



AMMV member Charles A. Mills of Pearland, Texas recently celebrated his 103rd birthday!



WWII Merchant Mariner Keith Baker, "last man standing" from the AMMV Oswego Valley Chapter, recently jumped out of an airplane to celebrate his 100th birthday!



AMMV member Balabanow recalls 1949 incident aboard ship

Editor's note: AMMV member William Balabanow received the *Harvey-Wichita Award* at the AMMV National Convention earlier this year, honoring him for a lifetime of advocacy for the American Merchant Marine.

Balabanow served in the USMM for several decades, and has many "sea stories" to tell. He recently sent me an article from a 1949 newspaper which captures quite a notable incident in his career. Here is the text of that article:



Local Sailor Who Aided Captain Is Identified

The local seaman who was wounded when he went to the aid of his captain during a shipboard fight Monday in New York, has been identified as William Balabanow, son of Mrs. William Morrow, Rohrerstown.

Balabanow was shot in the back when he tried to defend Capt. Victor G. Diaz, of New York. Mrs. Morrow said she heard from her son yesterday. He told her he had been treated at a New York hospital and discharged, she said.

12-07-1949



TRAINING SCHOOL MEMORIES OF A WWII MARINER



This photo was submitted by AMMV member and WWII mariner Norman Palmer. He says: *Just ran across this in a batch of old Brooklyn [Sheepshead Bay] photos. Here is an anecdote of a happening to me while at the base. I had a midweek liberty, and one of the young Italian boys in my section named Angelucci pleaded with me to bring him back a pizza. This was forbidden by regulations. I got a mailing tube and had the pizza wrapped and rolled up to fit in tube. The gate guard, who could smell this a mile away, asked what the tube contained. I told him it was a calendar. He asked me what kind, and I said "Italian." With a wink, he passed me in. At 02:00 in the morning the two of us finished the pie.*

Norman Palmer, Member-at-Large
npalmer8@cox.net

I WAS A 15-YEAR-OLD RADIO OPERATOR

by Don Airington – donairington@gmail.com

When the war started, I was 12-years-old. My brother Jonfre was 17 when Pearl Harbor was attacked and joined the Navy immediately. Mother, Jennie Beulah, moved us to California as the lure of big bucks at the shipyards was very attractive as well as she might get to see her oldest son when he was in port. Her sister and her husband were already there and offered us lodging.

My cousin Bill Roscher and I were close. We both tried to go to high school but the Oakie and Arkie labels made it difficult to make friends with the natives. So, with the war making everyone quite patriotic, the lure of the radio school was irresistible, as you also had a better chance with girls if you were in uniform. My father was a radio operator in World War One, and he gave me a morse code key for Christmas, so I had a little knowledge of code and I liked it.

Everything fit nicely, so Bill and I put on some bell bottom jeans, a chambray shirt, and a white sailor's cap, and we hitchhiked to Long Beach from Wilmington, dressed like real sailors, so that people would give us a ride.

I received my license the on the day that President Roosevelt died in April 1945. The next day I went to the union hiring hall to see if they needed me to end the war. The "Walking Boss" was hiring people by yelling out the job descriptions.

"I need three Wipers and ten Ordinary Seamen". Next came the bigtime announcement, "I need three Radio Operators."

I yelled, "Here!" and waved my arm. A mass laughter came over the hall as everyone sensed a nervous "first tripper."

When I was sworn in that morning, the naval officers wanted me to prove that my parents agreed for me to ship out. I explained that my father was dead but that I had a letter from my mother approving of me shipping out. They read the letter and went to the window and looked down on several new ships. One of them had fresh stores aboard, ready to go, except they needed three radio operators for each ship. Evidently the one with fresh stores had only two operators, and they needed me to win the war!

They looked at each other, shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, and I was hired by the General Steamship Company. It felt good to be approved of, even if reluctantly so.





Membership Application for:
MEMBER-AT-LARGE

(To join an organized Chapter, please contact AMMV HQ for further information.)

American Merchant Marine Veterans is an incorporated non-profit group working to promote the history of the U.S. Merchant Marine; membership is now open to any interested persons with a desire to share in our goals. Climb aboard and join us as we strive to educate the public about the role which the U.S. Merchant Marine has played throughout American history!

AMMV aims to obtain overdue recognition for our WWII Merchant Marine Veterans and gain recognition for post-WWII U.S. merchant seamen. AMMV members participate in memorial events and support laws/program which promote our modern U.S.-flagged fleet. Membership includes a full color quarterly AMMV News magazine and an annual membership card.



Join online at ammv.us or complete the following information and send to National Headquarters:

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

EMAIL: _____ DATE OF APPLICATION: _____

Do you have any connection to the Merchant Marine? (Please explain) _____

Member-At-Large Dues are \$50 annually (July 1st through June 30th). Other options are \$90 for two years, or \$130 for three years. Send check or money order to:

***American Merchant Marine Veterans
P.O. Box 2024, Darien, CT 06820-2024***

Questions? Please call AMMV HQ: (475) 470-9200; email ammermarvets@gmail.com



Press Release

DELAND HISTORIC TRUST

U. S. ARMY ST TUGBOATS: WWII AND BEYOND

July 9, 2023: *Tiger* is Home!

We have managed to return the most original U.S. Army ST built in DeLand that we know of: *ST479 Tiger*. This amazing boat still has her original engine and superstructure in place as built; but we came home on a nice auxiliary engine installed by the owners. She made the trip to DeLand from Astor...She's home...the ONLY U.S. Army ST tugboat to ever return to where she was built...and the only one in the USA with verified wartime experience... She has made a 4,900+ mile return to the U.S. from Stockholm, Sweden...after 79 years! My thanks to John and Margareta Higgins who lovingly donated the boat to us...and local patriot Ruth Ann Fay who helped us in a big way to get her home. And I can't forget all of the dedicated volunteers in our preservation and rescue team that have worked hundreds of hours to make this dream happen. Now we work on getting her out of the water and into a permanent monument dedicated to the WWII builders and crews. Want to get involved? Contact info:

Dan Friend, President
DeLand Historic Trust, Inc.
386 943-9537
usarmysttugs.com

501(c)(3) Tax Exempt charity dedicated
to the preservation of local history



*AMMV Regional VP Steve Snyder (L)
with Dan Friend, Founder and President of
DeLand Historic Trust*

American Merchant Marine Veterans

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