



**American Merchant Marine Veterans
Honor U.S. Merchant Mariners**

**Arlington National Cemetery and
National Memorial Day Parade**

**Monday, May 25, 2026
Washington, DC**



158th National Memorial Day Observance 10:45 AM EST, Memorial Amphitheater Arlington National Cemetery



By invitation from the Secretary of Defense, family members of the late John Courcomelis and the late Shelton C. Meade, two Merchant Marine WWII veterans, will be escorted to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They will be accompanied by a member of the Seafarers International Union and representatives of AMMV to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This is the fourth year of AMMV's traditional participation in the wreath laying ceremony. The distinguished group will honor all Merchant Mariners killed in action or lost at sea during our Nation's military conflicts.



An apprentice color guard team from The Seafarers' Harry Lundeborg School of Seamanship, located on the Piney Point, MD campus of the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education, will present the Merchant Marine colors. Since 1967, the School has prepared students for successful careers as U.S. Merchant Mariners. Students receive entry-level training under the Unlicensed Apprentice Program. Classes are also offered for experienced seafarers to help them to upgrade their skills.

AMMV is grateful to the following agencies for the opportunity to participate in the National Memorial Day wreath laying event:

- U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- U.S. Army's Military District of Washington DC

**AMMV Thanks Our Sponsors for Honoring
Merchant Mariners on Memorial Day 2026**



MEMORIAL DAY, MAY 25, 2026

Honoring the Ultimate Sacrifice of Shelton C. Meade, U.S. Merchant Marine

Several members of the Meade family will attend the Memorial Day ceremonies as guests of AMMV to honor the late Shelton C. Meade, an Ordinary Seaman who was killed in action in Bari, Italy while serving aboard the infamous *SS John Harvey*. Seaman Meade was posthumously awarded the U.S. Merchant Marine Mariner's Medal, similar to the U.S. Armed Forces' Purple Heart, and the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal. Today and every day, AMMV honors all Merchant Mariners who sacrificed their lives during ship operations in our nation's war zones.

On November 28, 1943, the *John Harvey*, a U.S. Merchant Marine WWII Liberty ship under the command of Captain Elwin Knowles, arrived in Bari Harbor after a long voyage that began in Baltimore, MD. The *John Harvey* secretly carried 2,000 mustard gas bombs, in addition to the ship's normal cargo of war supplies. The mustard gas bombs, ordered by a British general, would have been used to retaliate against the Germans, if the enemy conducted a chemical attack on Allied forces. The poison gas cargo was shrouded in official military secrecy.

Bari Harbor was an important supply port for the British Eighth Army and the American Fifteenth Air Force on the Adriatic Sea in southeastern Italy, just north of the "heel of the boot." On the night of December 2, 1943, about 100 German Junkers JU-88 bomber aircraft attacked Allied ships anchored close together in Bari Harbor. The aerial attack was a total surprise.

Without warning, the *John Harvey* was hit by German bombs and exploded, causing an unintentional release of mustard gas which injured or killed hundreds of military personnel and civilians. More than 60 men aboard the *John Harvey* were killed in the attack, including Ordinary Seaman Meade. About 40 Allied ships were damaged or sunk during the German air attack that lasted for less than an hour.

U.S. secrecy about the incident was maintained during WWII. However, U.S. records about the results of the attack on Bari Harbor were declassified in 1959. The attack and the cargo of the *John Harvey* remained obscure until 1971 when author Glenn Infield first published his book titled *Disaster at Bari*. The medical outcome of that Bari, Italy disaster produced initial medical findings in the development of chemotherapeutic treatments for leukemia based on the chemistry of mustard gas.

21st National Memorial Day Parade
10:00 AM EST, Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC

The Merchant Marine will be represented on the U-Haul float during the 21st National Memorial Day Parade. A Merchant Marine flag will fly on the float to honor the service and sacrifice of all Merchant Mariners.



This year, WWII veterans Dave Yoho (Grand Marshall of the Parade), James Quinn, and Gene Richardson will represent all U.S. Merchant Mariners and AMMV members aboard the U-Haul float.



“And so, when you’re with others, tell them of what we did, urge them to read about us and find out about us. Greet us today if you can. Then say to them, ‘We gave up our yesterdays for your and their tomorrows,’” said Dave Yoho, U.S. Merchant Marine WWII veteran, when he spoke at the Merchant Mariners of World War II Congressional Gold Medal ceremony held inside the U.S. Capitol Rotunda on May 18, 2022.



2026 Memorial Day Message Capt. Darin Huggins, AMMV National President

“On Memorial Day, Americans should salute fallen U.S. Merchant Mariners, including more than 9,500 Merchant Marine officers and crew members killed in action or missing at sea during World War II, who served in war zones under the command of U.S. military sealift operations. Laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Memorial Day and participating in the National Memorial Day Parade are fitting tributes for our nation to honor thousands of U.S. Merchant Mariners who gave their lives during military conflicts.

We also honor their surviving families and loved ones, as our nation remembers all service members who made the ultimate sacrifice in times of war. In addition, AMMV is proud to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and colonial Merchant Mariners who contributed to victory during the Revolutionary War.”

About the American Merchant Marine Veterans

Founded in 1984, AMMV is dedicated to educating Americans and our government officials about services that U.S. Merchant Mariners have provided to our nation in connection with war efforts and preservation of national security. Furthermore, AMMV advocates for the value our Merchant Marine veterans and the importance of maintaining a strong American Merchant Marine fleet.

We are a nonprofit organization chartered in the State of Florida, and we are organized into eight regions with chapters across the United States and the world. As Merchant Mariners of the Greatest Generation cross the final bar, AMMV will maintain their legacy and grow our membership to include American Merchant Mariners of all wars, conflicts, and humanitarian events around the world. Please join AMMV and support the courage and accomplishments of the U.S. Merchant Marine!

AMMV National Headquarters
P.O.Box 220052, Charlotte, NC 28222
(980) 202-0736 | admin@ammv.us | www.ammv.us