



American Merchant Marine Veterans, Inc.

Serving America in Peace and War

PRESS RELEASE

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Honoring the Ultimate Sacrifice of U.S. Merchant Mariners

WASHINGTON, DC –Monday, May 25, 2026. On National Memorial Day, the United States will honor the men and women of the U.S. Merchant Marine who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving aboard U.S. merchant ships during times of military conflict. Members of the American Merchant Marine Veterans, Inc. (AMMV) and U.S. Merchant Marine veterans from World War II will honor their shipmates and family members who were killed in action or lost at sea by attending events at Arlington National Cemetery beginning at 10:45 AM EST, including laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and participating in the National Memorial Day Parade on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, DC that starts at 10:00 AM EST.

“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,” said AMMV president and active U.S. Merchant Marine Capt. Darin Huggins.

Knowing how important families are to those men and women who serve at sea, Capt. Huggins said, “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.”

Though U.S. Merchant Mariners contributed to all major U.S. military operations since 1776, this is only the fourth time that AMMV and Merchant Marine veterans have been invited to participate in the ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery. Family members of the late John Courcomelis and the late Sheldon C. Meade, two World War II Merchant Marine veterans, will be escorted to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. After presentations by President Trump, senior cabinet and military leaders, and the presentation of the U.S. Merchant Marine colors by apprentices from The Seafarers Harry Lundeberg School of Seamanship, a commemorative wreath will be laid in honor and remembrance of U.S. Merchant Mariners lost during military conflicts.

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The Meade family will honor the late Ordinary Seaman Meade, who was killed when about 100 German bombers surprised dozens of merchant ships anchored in the harbor at Bari, Italy on December 2, 1943. Most of the Allies' ships in the harbor were damaged or destroyed, including the Liberty ship, the *SS John Harvey*. The Liberty ship was carrying 2,000 mustard gas bombs that were ordered by a British general to retaliate against the enemy if chemical munitions were used during WWII. When the *John Harvey* was bombed, it exploded and released mustard gas that killed thousands of military personnel, merchant sailors, and civilians. The raid was called the "second Pearl Harbor" because the Allies were completely surprised by the raid.

In a separate Memorial Day event, U.S. Merchant Marine veterans from WWII, Dave Yoho (Grand Marshall for the National Memorial Day Parade), James Quinn, and Gene Richardson, will ride the U-Haul Company's float in the National Memorial Day Parade sponsored by the American Veterans Center. They will fly the U.S. Merchant Marine flag and greet the public along Connecticut Avenue in Washington, DC.

Of the sacrifice of the U.S. Merchant Marine during WWII, Dave Yoho said, "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.'" The U.S. Merchant Marine has played a vital role in the successes of U.S. Armed Forces protecting our liberty and ensuring our nation's maritime leadership.

AMMV is pleased to acknowledge the support from the following U.S. Government agencies: the Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Army's Military District of Washington, DC. Also, AMMV wishes to thank the following U.S. maritime industry sponsors for their support: the American Maritime Congress; the American Maritime Officers; the American Veterans Center; the Gary Sinise Foundation; the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots; the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association; Matson Navigation; the Transportation Institute; the U-Haul Company; and the Seafarers International Union.

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!

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