

# FOREWORD

I first met Bill McGee by telephone in 1992 when he called after visiting the historic Liberty ship, SS *Jeremiah O'Brien*, in San Francisco. Bill is an Armed Guard veteran and talented author. He immediately began gathering the research necessary for this ambitious book project — including all available back issues of our “Pointer” newsletter. It wasn’t long before he realized he needed the help of a Washington, D.C.-based professional. Lady Luck must have smiled on him because the next thing I knew, Bill had retained the research services of Samuel Loring Morison, author and historian in his own right, and grandson of the famous naval historian, Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison. Bill’s been writing ever since.

The importance of logistics — the branch of military science having to do with procuring, maintaining, and transporting materiel and personnel — has remained unchanged throughout history. Yet it is usually down-played, if not ignored, by military leaders and historians.

The Allies nearly lost the war at sea in 1942 when our supply lines were stretched dangerously thin. In the end, the race between American ship construction and sinkings by the enemy was won by the Allied convoy system and naval superiority in

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combating the submarine menace, and an unprecedented mass production shipbuilding program.

The U.S. Merchant Marine and Naval Armed Guard took part in every major campaign in World War II. Consider this:

Up to V-J Day, 733 American merchant vessels of over 1,000 gross tons were sunk during the war; victims of torpedoes, bombs, mines, and marine disasters largely caused by war conditions.

There were only about 55,000 merchant seamen and officers sailing in December 1941. The War Shipping Administration established a recruitment/training program which turned out 262,474 graduates during the war. This program resulted in a peak seagoing force of 250,000 Merchant Mariners.<sup>1</sup>

A total of 6,700 merchant mariners were killed or missing in action and presumed dead; 670 were made prisoners of war.

A total of 144,970 Armed Guard enlisted men and officers served on 6,236 merchant ships (American- and foreign-flag) between 7 December 1941 and 30 September 1945. Armed Guard personnel peaked on 1 November 1944 with a total of 112,108 men.

A total of 1,810 Armed Guard officers and men were killed or missing in action and presumed dead; 14 were made prisoners of war.

The merchant mariners who operated the ships were civilians, but they were also under government control and subject to

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<sup>1</sup> The War Shipping Administration also controlled many foreign flag ships. Several hundred merchant mariners and Armed Guard personnel were lost serving on these ships.

disciplinary actions by the U.S. Coast Guard and, when overseas, by local U.S. military authorities. The Merchant Marine served alongside the Armed Guard and together we delivered the goods. In times of trouble, they passed the ammunition and gave us a helping hand whenever needed. As Mike Molinari, an Armed Guardsman said: “When a ship is sunk, there is no difference between the Armed Guard sailor and the merchant mariner. They fought and died together as brothers and shipmates. Nobody can take that away from them.”

Merchant seamen were finally recognized as veterans by an act of the U.S. Congress in 1988, forty-seven years after America’s entry into World War II, and after many thousands of those who had served had passed away. I stand proud to have supported their efforts to obtain veteran status.

The mission of each Armed Guard crew was to protect the ship and its valuable cargo and crew from enemy attacks and sabotage from the day we boarded each vessel until we were properly relieved upon completion of the voyage.

The USN Armed Guard Veterans and the American Merchant Marine Veterans accept each other as members in our respective organizations. This book is a fitting tribute to the U.S. Merchant Marine and the defenders of their ships, the U.S. Naval Armed Guard.

The Naval Armed Guard’s motto was “We aim to deliver” (and we did!) with the help of the merchant seamen, our escort vessels, and the grace of God.

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