

Forgotten SOLDIERS

Fred Lewis
Merchant Marine
‘SS Marcus Daly’

The “SS Marcus Daly” and The Merchant Marine

To start this off, let me just say that as a young person growing up in the greatest nation in the world, the USA, I am personally grateful to all those men and women who are currently serving or who have served in all of the branches of the armed forces for the defense they have provided and continue to provide. I don't think there is anyone who is a resident of this nation that would say any different. Until I began research for this story, there was one group that, in all of my American history classes, and all of the tales that I have been told, I had never heard of: the group of sailors known as the Merchant Marines.

The Second World War was a time of great bravery and gallantry but there has been an injustice in the telling of the tale. The Merchant Marines played a large role in our victory. It's time that we all know this and pay them the respect they so deserve. The following passage is the telling of one Merchant Marines' experience during his time of service and I think you'll find it both enlightening and intriguing.

Researched by: Gage Everhart (age 23)

“On August 1, 1944 the ‘SS Marcus Daly’ sailed alone with a crew of 68: 27 Navy armed guard, and 41 Merchant Marine.”

“Being from a family of seafaring people with a love for ships and the sea, I, Fred Lewis, joined the U.S. Maritime service on June 27, 1944 at the age of 17. I spent a month in maritime service training at Avalon in Catalina Island, California and was subsequently assigned to the Liberty Ship ‘SS Marcus Daly’ on July 30, 1944. The ship was docked in Wilmington, California, loading a deck cargo of 12 night fighters (which look a lot like P61’s) and a general cargo of ammunition, chemicals, medical and various other cargo.”

On August 1, 1944, the ‘SS Marcus Daly’ sailed along with a crew of 68: 27 Navy Armed Guard, and 41 Merchant Marine.

All was quite and normal sailing until the morning of August 24th at 0300 hours. We were south of New Britain Island in the Solomon Sea when, all of the sudden, a bright light was directed at us. We challenged the source of the light and received no reply so we opened up with 10 rounds from our left aft 3”50. The light went out following our gun fire so we continued onward at a speed of 10 knot (our top speed) towards our destination never knowing who or what the light was.

On August 28, 1944, we arrived at Finschafen, New Guinea, unloaded our planes and then continued on to Oro Bay to unload the rest of our cargo. We spent the next three months sailing to various ports in New Guinea and the Admiralty Islands until October 18th, when we were dispatched from Hollandia bound for Tacloban, Leyte carrying a load of 600 troops, a general, 31 officers and all their equipment, including vehicles. We were in a convoy with 79 other ships and six escorts. When we reached Tacloban, we docked with another Liberty Ship, the ‘SS Adoniran Judson’. While at the dock in Tacloban, we were under attack day and night. During our time there, the ‘SS Marcus Daly’ was credited with downing three planes and its men



were commended by General Macarthur for defending the docks.

We left Tacloban bound for New Guinea on October 30th in a convoy of ten ships with two escorts in sweep from Oro Bay to Lae and then to Hollandia picking up troops and their equipment all along the way. By November 29th, our convoy, now 40 ships and six escorts, was bound for Leyte but on December 5th when we were approximately one days sailing from our destination the convoy came under attack.

Dive Bombers and Torpedo planes attacked heavily and we experienced some very near misses. Two enemy planes were downed by our 3” 50’s and it began to appear that we

“The ‘SS William Ladd’ was hit with a bomb and sunk stern down while still anchored.”



Damage visible on the Marcus Daly after the attack on Dec 10, 1944.

would escape unscathed, but at 1700 hours a Dive Bomber crashed into the lower portion of the forward 3” 50 gun tub and the number one hold, causing an explosion and a catastrophic fire. Three crew (two Merchant Marine and one Navy) and 200 troops were killed or missing and the forward ammo magazine was flooded from the attempts made at extinguishing the flames. While the crew and troops fought the fire, the Captain turned the ship around so as to keep the fire forward and not let it spread. All the while, strategically keeping the ship from being hit by the passing torpedoes. When the fire was finally out, we joined the rest of our convoy to continue on with the rest of our journey.”

Upon arrival at Leyte on December 6th, we were unable to anchor due to severe bow damage, We tied up to another ship (the ‘SS William S Ladd’) in order to unload the remaining cargo. While docked, on December 10th at 1645 hours, we were attacked again, this time by three Japanese planes. We were untied from the ‘SS William S Ladd’ with an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) along our port side, loading cargo, when one of the three planes crashed into our port three boom, flying bridge gun tub and the port wheelhouse wing. Boat deck lifeboats, along with the remains of the plane and bomb, landed in the LCT, sinking it while causing an explosion and fire. There were no survivors from the LCT. The ‘SS William Ladd’ was hit with a bomb and sunk stern down while still anchored.



Fred Lewis
S.S. Marcus Daly

*Honored Members
of the
Merchant Marine*



Russell Adams
S.S. Francisco Morazan



Aaron Booker
S.S. Cap Greig

"YOU BET I'M GOING BACK TO SEA!"



The following day, Captain Ophiem moved the ship to San Pedro Bay next to Samar Island for better protection. We anchored the ship, using the emergency anchor with insurance cable. It took until December 21st to off-load the rest of the cargo and make the necessary repairs so that we could sail to Hollandia for more extensive repair.

We spent Christmas at sea that year, not arriving in Hollandia until December 28th. The many wounded received treatment. The additional repairs, necessary to make the ship, seaworthy were made. We departed Hollandia December 30th alone, bound for San Francisco. Many men on board were wounded, but all were happy and thankful to be headed home, finally.

January 28, 1945, we arrived in San Francisco, and were met by a DE escort who dipped his colors in salute of our ship. By this time, we had seven downed Japanese planes to our credit. We docked in Richmond, California at the Kaiser Permanente metals yard number one, the same yard that the 'SS Marcus Daly' was originally launched from just two years prior. We brought her home for repairs.

The 'SS Marcus Daly' was not sailed again until 1946, but was awarded the 'Gallant Ship Award' by the US Maritime



Damage to the port flying bridge gun tub after the attack on Dec 10, 1944.



Bob Doyle
Matson Lines



Martin Garabedian
S.S. Wilson



Rufus Hernandez
S.S. William N. Byers



Robert Hodgkiss
S.S. Charles Haddock

“They gave their time, their bodies, and often their lives, yet when the conflict ended they faded into the background.”



The Stack of the SS Marcus Daly displaying the number of “kills” attributed to the crew

Commission on April 29, 1946. All said, it was a cruise to remember and be proud of!

By the most conservative estimate, more than 730 Merchant vessels were sunk and more than 6,800 Merchant seamen were killed or missing in action during World War II. The Merchant seamen suffered casualty rates matched only by the Marines during World War II. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the first GI Bill of Rights on June 22, 1944, he added, “I trust Congress will soon provide similar opportunities to members of the Merchant Marine who have risked their lives, time, and time again during war for the welfare for their country.” It would take another 43 years before Congress agreed.

Though promised, when entering the service, that they would receive the same veteran benefits as other branches of the armed services, Merchant Marine veteran status was not recognized until 1988. Merchant Marine seamen, as a collective group, were, by an administrative action of the Department of Defense, approved for Veterans status on January 19, 1988 (nearly 50 years after most of them had served). Veteran’s status was therefore granted to all surviving Merchant seamen who served on outgoing vessels between December 7, 1941 and August 15, 1945 entitling them to discharge certificates and benefits. The US Coast Guard finally mailed the discharge papers to those



Harold Hudson
S.S. Fairisle



Gene Kelly
S.S. Harry Leon Wilson



William Lee
S.S. Franee W. Park




Jack Smith
S.S. Hillsdale Victory

Let's Finish the Job!

mariners still living in March of 1988. Less than forty percent of the men who sailed the Merchant Marine fleet during those years were alive to take advantage of these benefits.

From my own perspective, I find the fact that these brave men were never recognized both outrageous and offensive. They gave their time, their bodies, and often their lives, yet when the conflict ended they faded into the background. The ships of the Merchant Marines transported most of the troops and supplies for this battle and were often subject to attack. Why isn't this taught? If you ask me this deserves at least a chapter in the history books. I take my hat off to these men and in print eternalize my gratitude to them.

I know that nothing anyone will ever say can make restitution for what has transpired, but I think that public exposition is the one thing that I might be able to give back to these men. I hope that everyone reading this article (Merchant Marines included) knows that we would never have made it through WWII without the Merchant Marine and that the rest of the nation is very grateful. Hopefully that helps... 



30 April 1946 Capt. Opheim receives "Gallant Ship Award" for the S.S. Marcus Daly



Howard Souza
S.S. Wisconsin



Jack Spiovalo
S.S. Phillipa



Andy R. Weare
S.S. Richard B. Moore



Robert N. Wright
S.S. President Taft