World War II U.S. Merchant Mariners Honored during National Memorial Day Concert

WASHINGTON – On Sunday, May 28, during the National Memorial Day Concert on the U.S. Capitol grounds, the Public Broadcasting Service and Capital Concerts will honor more than 9,500 U.S. Merchant Marine men and women who were killed in action during World War II. WWII Merchant Marine veterans, representing the American Merchant Marine Veterans organization, will be honored in a special segment of the concert.

David Yoho, a WWII Merchant Marine veteran, will be a featured spokesman during the Concert. He will give a vivid and heartfelt interview about our Nation's fallen heroes and the value of the Merchant Marine that has been recognized by U.S. Presidents and America's senior military leaders. Mr. Yoho's moving description of his wartime experience as a teenager and his respect for all his Merchant Marine shipmates will be a highlight of the show.

In addition to Mr. Yoho's interview, the four Merchant Marine WWII veterans, William Balabanow, John Laughton, Charles Mills, and George Worsham, will honor their fallen shipmates during the show. In particular, Mr. Laughton and Mr. Worsham

survived enemy attacks that sank their ships and killed many of their fellow Merchant Mariners.

On September 14, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “It seems to me particularly appropriate that Victory Fleet Day this year should honor the men and management of the American Merchant Marine. The operators in this war have written one of its most brilliant chapters. They have delivered the goods when and where needed in every theater of operations and across every ocean in the biggest, the most difficult and dangerous transportation job ever undertaken. As time goes on, there will be greater public understanding of our merchant fleet’s record during this war.”

More than 240,000 U.S. Merchant Mariners served during WWII. They faced torpedoes, bombings, kamikaze attacks, ice, and storms to deliver millions of troops and the necessary military goods for the Allies’ war effort. According to the U.S. War Shipping Administration, the U.S. Merchant Marine suffered one of the highest casualty rates of any service during WWII. Officially, a total of 1,554 merchant ships were sunk due to war conditions. Also, over 1,800 U.S. Naval Armed Guard shipmates were killed or missing in action during WWII, while manning guns on merchant ships.

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY honors 142 cadet midshipmen who died during WWII. Because of their supreme sacrifice, Kings Point is the only one of the Nation’s five federal service academies authorized to carry a Battle Standard flag as part of its Color Guard.

Captain Dru DiMattia, president of American Merchant Marine Veterans, said, “I appreciate the decision to honor U.S. Merchant Marine WWII casualties during the National Memorial Day Concert, as valued contributors to the Allies’ victory. This is a historical event for the U.S. Merchant Marine and our country. Our organization is honored by support from President Biden, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Rep. Jimmy Panetta,

the Department of Defense, the Maritime Administration, the National Park Service, and the Friends of the National WWII Memorial.” Capt. DiMattia is available for advance interviews.

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