

USPS Unveiling Ceremony
United States Merchant Marine Commemorative Stamps
Opening Remarks, July 28, 2011, by Gregory Williams '79
Aboard the World War II Victory Ship *S.S. Lane Victory*

On behalf of Chairman Don Knight, President Ralph Wetterhahn, Captain von Rettberg, Captain Itson, the United States Postal Service and all the crew and members of the United States Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II... I welcome you all to the S.S. Lane Victory for this memorable moment in the history of the United States Merchant Marine.

75 percent of the earth's surface...is covered by water. From the very earliest of times, men have used rafts, boats and ships for fishing, fighting and transporting people, goods and supplies up and down rivers, across lakes... and oceans the world over.

Passages across the English Channel can be traced as far back as 4,000 BC when farmers crossed in animal skin boats with their families, livestock and crop seeds. The perils and hardships of life at sea are well documented from pirates to Mother Nature. In early times of war, merchant ships were often forced to arm themselves in self defense ... and very early on, passengers were expected to help defend their ship.

Scientific and technological advances have taken us from rafts woven from reeds, to Galleons powered by hundreds of oarsmen... to the proud and mighty Clipper ships of sail... to steam propulsion and finally ...to today's great merchant ships that carry nearly 8,000 containers of cargo powered by some of the largest diesel engines ever built by man.

Despite the superb seamanship and courage of seamen of all nations... ships and men have always found themselves at the mercy of the sea and her elements.

Maritime history is recorded in poetry, song, romance and literature... in every language ... of lovers, husbands, brothers, sons and family brethren who set sail... never to return again. There is a pact between man and the sea... honor and respect her fury, for she will never be tamed...yet revel in... and cherish her beauty and glory that precious few will ever witness.

Today, modern cargo vessels run on very timely and regular schedules. Retailers, manufacturers and businesses need to know that a ship will be in port on a particular day... so that they may move out inventory, or bring in raw materials in a timely and efficient manner. It is interesting to note, the first regularly scheduled sailings of merchant ships came about in the early 19th century as the British Post Office needed timely sailings to deliver mail to her colonies the world over. The Queen Mary and all the other British merchant passenger ships were prefixed "RMS" ...signifying Royal Mail Ship. Two great merchant ships lost to perils of the sea, the Titanic and the Lusitania, were both Royal Mail Ships on regularly scheduled routes.

Today, we honor the United States Merchant Marine with beautiful commemorative stamps.

It is truly an honor to have the S. S. Lane Victory chosen for this special occasion. In America's darkest hour of World War II, the United States Merchant Marine and her civilian seaman were tasked with delivering the tens of millions of tons of cargo needed to support our troops all over

the world. In addition to ship convoys or sailing individually to ports all over the globe... US merchant vessels participated in every single invasion of World War II. It took 7 tons of supplies to support one soldier for one year in WWII. Every helmet, jacket, boot, tent, rifle, bullet, tank, jeep, truck... every ounce of food, every drop of gas and oil was delivered by civilian seamen of the United States Merchant Marine on ships very much like this one.

They paid dearly for their devotion.

In 1942, German U-boats and enemy planes sank an average of 33 merchant ships a week. It was a staggering loss of men, ships and material. As a result, the United States Merchant Marine suffered the highest casualty loss ratio of all the services in WWII.

All of our heroic forces suffered greatly in WWII, with Navy losses at 1:144, the US Army at 1:64; the USMC at 1:36 and the Merchant Marine at a stunning 1 of every 26 men.

The SS Lane Victory honors the one of every 26 merchant seamen who never came home...and still rest at the bottom of the sea today.

Today, whether in peacetime or conflict...the courageous men and women of the United States Merchant Marine... will always stand tall and proud... to sail under the stars and stripes of this great nation we call the United States of America.

Thank you... and welcome aboard the S.S. Lane Victory.

Gregory P. Williams
Captain, United States Merchant Marine