



We Delivered: The U.S. Navy Armed Guard in World War II

Lyle E. Dupra

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During World War II, few people knew of the U.S. Navy Armed Guard -- few even today are familiar with the sacrificing service of the men in this branch of the Navy, often called "the other Navy."

The Armed Guard of World War II was established before the U.S. was officially involved in the war, to train men to serve aboard commercial Merchant Marine ships that were traveling the seas, amidst the threat of German submarines, to deliver weaponry, troops, food, and water for our government. Armed guard crews eventually totaled 144,970 personnel, serving on 6,236 ships.

Of these ships, 710 were sunk and damaged; 1,810 Armed Guard personnel were killed in action and suffered unknown injuries. 27 Armed Guard were prisoners of war, with 14 surviving.

The Merchant Marine -- America's heroic "fourth arm of defense" alongside the Army, Navy, and Marines -- was made up of some 250,000 civilians. More than 6,600 Merchant seamen lost their lives, serving their country in time of need, and many were taken as POWs. Merchant ships, called "slow rustbuckets," had no protective armor or elaborate armament for defensive action. Documents show that where a gun was not to be had, a creosoted wooden pole was mounted on the deck to appear to the enemy like armament!

In brutal winter seas, at the mercy of a likewise brutal enemy, the men of the U.S. Navy Armed Guard and Merchant Marine were sent out. Yet little, if any, recognition has been given these men.

Dupra's work recognizes their much-overlooked service in protecting America's freedom.

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