



The Merchant Navy Association
from ship to shore, from past to present



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PRESS RELEASE - immediate

THE MERCHANT NAVY DAY COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE AND REUNION

Sunday 7th September 2008 in Trinity Gardens at Tower Hill at 1100 hrs.

Commodore R Thornton MDA RFA is this year's Parade President and our Principal Guest is Admiral The Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC with many guests from Diplomatic Services, Shipping Companies, Associations and supporters.

This annual international event supports the growing recognition achieved for our previously unacknowledged and often forgotten seafarers. Their resolve, dedication and commitment helped to maintain HM Armed Forces across the globe and contributed greatly to the freedoms we all now enjoy. This year, on the 90th Anniversary of the end of WWI, we especially remember the 17,000 merchant seafarers who lost their lives in that war. On day one of that War 60 merchant ships were arrested in Hamburg and all those merchant seafarers were sent to Concentration camps.

On Sunday February 28th 1915 the 500grt collier, SS Thordis, which had just been transferred over from the Norwegian flag three days earlier, was steaming down the Channel when the periscope of a U-boat was sighted off the Starboard side of the ship. Captain Bell proceeded to stop his ship and observe the U-boats movements which slowly proceeded across the bows of the Thordis to a position about 30 to 40 yards away on her Port side. Suddenly the U-boat altered course and then at a distance of some 700 yards the track of a torpedo was seen. When it had almost reached the vessel, a wave suddenly lifted her stern clear, and the torpedo passed harmlessly underneath. Captain Bell then ordered his ship to immediately close in on the U-boats position. There followed a deafening crash, a scrapping noise, and the submarine was believed to have been sunk. Captain Bell made for Weymouth with a large gaping hole just above the ship's water line. Later German wireless reports indicated that the U-boat, although seriously damaged, did not sink and returned safely to port. For his actions Captain Bell from Redcar received the DSC, as well as an engraved gold watch and was given a commission as Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve. A Money Prize of £660.00 was also distributed among the Captain and crew of the Thordis.

This year, as always, we will remember them all.

Capt J M R Sail
National Chairman, Merchant Navy Association