

THE MERCHANT SEAMEN

Having just browsed through The Tregenna website which I found most interesting.... I figured I would send the attached on to you for your perusal !

Needless to say I hope you will find it worthy enough to pass on to as many Merchant Seamen as possible?

Many before me have found out....that the news media is not much help!!

Kind Regards

Brian G. Redding

Brief Biography...

Born 1938 in Southampton, England. UK. I had an interest in ships and the sea from the early age of twelve. It was at that age onwards that I used to spend many hours during holidays and weekends on launches and barges with my father, running stores and crew down river to tankers tied up at Fawley Refinery or anchored in Cowes Roads off the Isle of Wight. My father was also an ex wartime Merchant Seaman...one ship he was on was torpedoed but although partially submerged they managed to bring it in safely to port!

Upon leaving school at the age of fifteen I ended up working on the local tugboats that handled the numerous liners etc in and out of the port of Southampton!

I still yearned for a more adventurous life though and joined the Merchant Navy a year later...serving with different shipping companies I saw most of the world as through the eyes of a seaman over the following ten years.

One of my most memorable voyages was of nine months duration on a small fleet tanker supplying fresh water to the troops etc on Christmas Island, where they were testing H-Bombs during the late fifties!! It is interesting to note that a certain cruise line is now using it as one of it's port of call's including Fanning Island which is just a short haul from there.

One of the things I learned early at sea was the fact that most, if not all Merchant Seamen had bitterness inside them re the fact that Allied Wartime Merchant Seamen were a forgotten force, so far as various governments were concerned?

In nineteen fifty-three there were still numerous seamen in the British Merchant Navy that had served through the war years!

It was with this fact still deeply imbedded in my mind after all these years that prompted me with the assistance of James Brown, to put pen to paper and come up with the poem in memory of Allied Merchant Seamen who fought together with the armed forces in various campaigns around the world.

James Brown was a Battle of Britain Spitfire Pilot and was shot down twice but fortunately survived the war with no injuries...he passed away in December 2005.

Among his many talents was the fact that he wrote numerous poems, I therefore asked him to put together for me a poem re Allied Merchant Seamen?

He did so but included the Army/Navy & Air Force and that of course was not what I wanted!

I therefore obtained his permission to change the last verse and a few other lines!

He agreed to the changes I made...I then commissioned a local artist to paint a convoy at sea and added the poem to the bottom of the painting.

That was back in 2003 and like the roots of a tree it is slowly spreading out in various countries for the lads and their surviving dependants to see!

May they now rest in peace knowing that the world leaders have at long last acknowledged, the great injustice done to these heroic volunteers aged from fourteen to sixty-five plus years plus!

CURRENT HISTORY OF THE POEM/PAINTING

September 2003. The Right Hon John Prescott (Ex Merchant Seaman), deputy prime minister of England accepted a copy of the painting. He thanked me by letter and advised it would be displayed in his office.

October 2003. St. Mary's Church in Southampton accepted and displayed a copy of the painting in their Merchant Navy Chapel. It took approximately five months to go through the approval process.

October 2003. Mr. Jim Monaghan President of the Southampton Flying Angel accepted a copy of the painting for display in the mission.

December 2003. The Right Hon Iona Campanola, Lt. Governor of B.C. accepted a copy of the painting... photo of the presentation on hand.

December 2003. Rear Admiral J.Y. Forcier Marpac Commander of the Canadian Pacific Fleet accepted a copy of the painting, photo of the presentation on hand.

April 2004 the painting/poem was used on the front cover of a magazine called "Convoy" with distribution Canada wide.

May 2005. a copy of the painting was included in a time capsule under a memorial erected at Camp Milag. It was a wartime concentration camp for Allied Merchant Seamen just outside of Bremen in Germany.

May 2005 a copy of the painting was presented to Paul Chaplin, Sailing Master of a Tall Ship called the "Empire Sandy" in Toronto. During WWII the vessel was a deep sea rescue tug operating on the East coast of Canada and celebrations were held to celebrate the Battle of the Atlantic on May 1st 2005. A contingent of thirty-five surviving British wartime crew came out from England to attend the ceremonies.

August 2005. Veteran Affairs in Prince Edward Island requested another six copies of the painting, making a total of eleven to date for use by their Merchant Navy Project Managers!

2005. I was asked for permission to allow the poem to be used on a British Merchant Seaman's grave in Japan! Permission was of course granted...

Several Branches of the Canadian Legion across Canada now have the painting on display.

I have also been advised that a copy of the painting is displayed in a Liverpool museum!

The MNA Bristol & District Branch, England. UK published the poem in Issue #60 of their magazine in November of the very first year of the memorable Merchant Navy Day Sept 03.

Over the past years numerous copies of the painting have been given to ex Wartime Merchant Seamen and others.

I have also recently been advised by the MNA Chairman in Southampton, UK that he is now able to get a bronze plaque of the poem installed in the bomb damaged ruin of "HOLYROOD CHURCH" which is the Merchant Seamen Memorial in Southampton. The cost seems to be a problem though so I shall get one made here in Victoria, take it back and make a presentation. Hopefully they will get the news media involved and that would then give it good publicity nation wide for the lads to see!

Brian G. Redding

The Merchant Seamen

No poppies wave above our heads
Or mark the place where we must sleep

Below the oceans wild and wide
Our resting place is in the deep

Out of the night torpedoes came
To start the roar of flash and flame

The stink of burning oil and then
The cries of all the dying men

We ask you not to call us brave
For we volunteered 'tis true

We gave our lives so you could live
And asked no thanks from you

Armed forces from around the world
Put their lives upon the line

Just the same as we did
Having faith in the divine

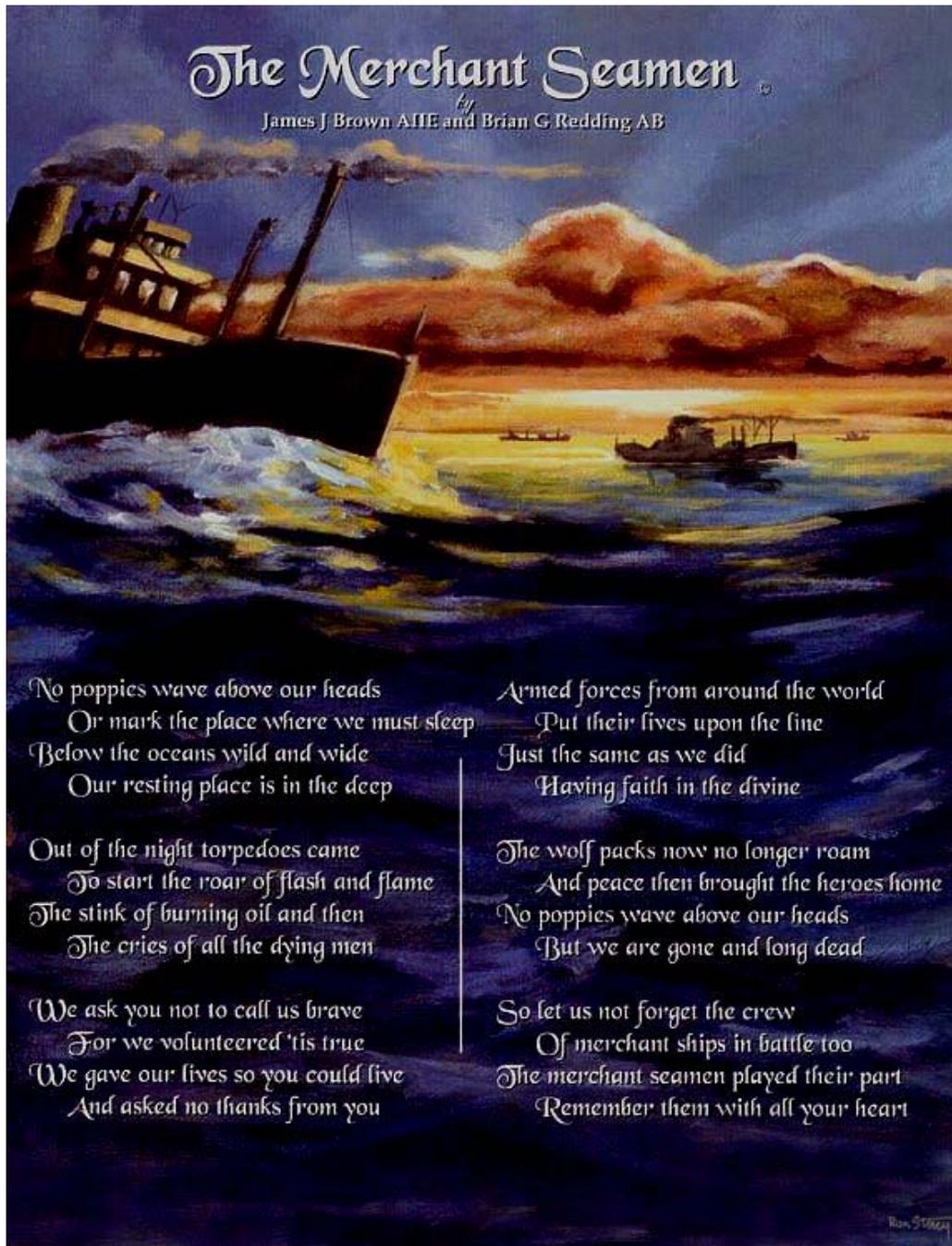
The wolf packs now no longer roam
And peace then brought the heroes home

No poppies wave above our heads
But we are gone and long dead

So let us not forget the crew
Of merchant ships in battle too

The merchant seamen played their part
Remember them with all your heart

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