

## Captain Warren G. Leback



*March 17, 1924 - Nov. 21, 2019*

Captain Warren G. Leback had a 65-year career in the maritime industry starting at the age of 18 during World War II as a cadet midshipman on the *Joseph McKenna*, a liberty ship operated by Grace Line. A native of Astoria, Oregon, he graduated from Astoria High School in January, 1942, and entered the Cadet Basic Training School on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay in April, 1942. After completing his training in June of that year, he reported for duty on the *McKenna* where he spent seven months at sea. During his first voyage, his ship brought back from Pearl Harbor the stern section of the destroyer *USS Cassin*, which had been bombed on December 7, 1941. The section was fitted onto the forebody for a new destroyer, which was also named *USS Cassin*. On his second voyage, the *McKenna* sailed for Guadalcanal with a load of military cargo. Although the *McKenna* arrived at Guadalcanal six weeks after the American landings, Japanese bombers were still harassing the anchored merchant ships. During the attacks, Warren saw action as a member of the *McKenna's* anti-aircraft gun crew. The ship's crew received Merchant Marine Combat medals for their service at Guadalcanal. After being discharged from the *McKenna*, Warren reported to the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY, to complete his studies and graduated in January, 1944. He then returned to sail on Grace Line ships in the South Pacific Theater. In 1947, Warren received his Master's License, which he maintained until his death.

Warren worked for Grace Line until 1960 serving as third, second, and chief mate on several vessels and Master of the passenger cargo ship *Santa Monica*. He also held managerial positions in Barranquilla and Cartagena, Colombia, and in New York City. In New York, his responsibilities included personnel, labor relations, and vessel maintenance and repair. He oversaw the design of cargo systems and crew quarters for the new passenger liners *Santa Rosa* and *Santa Paula*, coordinated the design and conversion of the *Santa Eliana* and *Santa Leonor* to containerships, and was responsible for preliminary economic studies and development designs for the *Santa Magdalena* class combination passenger/cargo/containerships.

From 1961 to 1964, Warren was the General Manager of Marine Operations for Central Gulf Steamship Corporation in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was in charge of vessel operations, maintenance and repair, vessel conversion and construction, labor relations, and chartering.

From 1965 to 1972, Warren served as a vice president for Sea-Land Service, Inc. in Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. He was responsible for vessel operations, ship construction, crane maintenance, purchasing, labor relations, chartering, and terminal marine operations. During his tenure, he directed the expansion of the fleet from fourteen to fifty-five ships. This included the conversion of twenty-eight WWII era ships to containerships at U.S. shipyards and construction of ten new ships at European shipyards. All of the vessels were for American Flag operation. Eight of the new ships were high speed vessels. One, the Sea-Land Exchange, holds the westbound Trans-Atlantic cargo ship speed record of 34.92 knots from Bishop's Rock, England, to Ambrose Light, New York. A second, the Sea-Land Trade, holds the eastbound Trans-Pacific cargo ship speed record of 32.75 knots from Kobe, Japan, to Race Rock, British Columbia.

In 1973, Warren joined the Interstate Oil Transport Company of Philadelphia. As Assistant to the President, he supervised the construction of three 265,000 DWT tankers and participated in the design and contracting for two 390,000 DWT tankers. In 1975, Warren was hired by the El Paso LNG Company in Houston. As Vice President for Marine Operations, he was responsible for a fleet of LNG tankers delivering liquified natural gas from Algeria to terminals in Maryland, Georgia and Texas. In 1981, he was appointed Deputy Maritime Administrator in the U.S. Department of Transportation by President Ronald Reagan. In 1985, Warren joined Puerto Rico Marine Management, Inc. as Senior Vice President; he was responsible for vessel operations, construction, and chartering.

From 1989 to 1993, Warren served President George H. W. Bush as Maritime Administrator in the U.S. Department of Transportation. He was the first graduate of Kings Point to hold this distinguished position. His responsibilities included overseeing 105 Ready Reserve Fleet vessels and 225 National Defense Fleet vessels, supervising the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and six state maritime academies, providing marketing assistance to U.S. Flag lines, and port promotion. He negotiated maritime agreements with Russia, Ukraine, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of South Korea, and Brazil. In 1993, Warren returned to the private sector retiring in 2006 as President of First American Bulk Carrier Corporation.

Warren was an active member of numerous maritime organizations including servicing as National President of the United States Merchant Marine Academy Alumni Association and National President of the Council of American Master Mariners. He also served as a chair of the Board of Trustees of the American Merchant Marine Museum.

Warren received the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy's Outstanding Professional Achievement Award in 1964, the Alumnus of the Year Award in 1978, the Distinguished Service Award in 1984, and the Meritorious Alumni Service Award in 1989. In 1997, he was elected to the Academy's Hall of Distinguished Graduates. A classroom in Bowditch Hall at the Academy is named in his honor. In 1991, he was honored with the Admiral of the Ocean Sea Award by the

United Seamen's Service. He received Honorary Doctorates from the Maine Maritime Academy and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

Warren came from a family with a strong maritime tradition. His grandfather was a shipwright and fisherman. His father was a fisherman, captain, and Columbia River pilot. His twin brother, Calvin, went to sea and finished his career as a captain with Sea-Land Service. When reflecting on his career, Warren would say, without hesitation, that the time he enjoyed the most was sailing for Grace Line. Every day at sea was different; the ships were well maintained; and the officers were like family.

Captain Leback was predeceased by his wife, Dorothy Jewel Leback and is survived by his children: Warren Thomas Leback and his wife Chloe, Christine Leback Sitwell, and Karen Frances Leback; his grandchildren: Todd Leback and his wife Lisa Grove, Emily Leback Achin and her husband John, Peter Leback, and Sergey Sitwell; and his great-grandchildren: Miles, Maude, Henry, Clover, and Violet.