

# National Maritime Day

By Jeff Campbell

## JOINT CEREMONY

The Maritime Administration, Military Sealift Command, and the Smithsonian Institution teamed up to honor some of America's finest sailors on National Maritime Day during a ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. National Maritime Day recognizes the maritime industry every year on the 22nd of May, which is the date, in 1933, of the first transoceanic voyage under steam power. This year's tribute was highlighted by the opening of a new permanent exhibit dedicated to the Maritime industry.

The National Maritime Day Joint Ceremony took place in the museum's Flag Hall, before the entrance to the Star Spangled Banner exhibit, and just one floor above the Smithsonian's latest addition, "On the Water: Stories from Maritime America." Museum Director Brent Glass welcomed guests to the ceremony, saying National Maritime Day was the perfect time for the new exhibit's ribbon cutting.

"The maritime influence on American history is one of the most compelling chapters in the national story," said Glass. "'On the Water' will transport visitors to places they have never been, allowing them to experience life at sea through the experiences of real people and objects from one of the Smithsonian's oldest collections."

Wayne Clough, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, took to the podium next and thanked the exhibit's major supporters, including the US Congress and the A.P. Moller and Chastine Mc-Kinney Moller Foundation. "More than two million

visitors have been in this museum since it reopened just a scant seven months ago," Clough said. "There will be many more with the new exhibit, 'On the Water.' We may live on the land, but we depend on the water to survive."

### NDTA SUPPORTED THE EFFORT

In 2005, when the "On the Water" team was in search of a sponsor, Project Director and Curator Paula Johnson wrote in the *DTJ* about the exhibit's goals. She noted in the December issue: "While maritime professionals know that waterborne trade is essential to the daily lives of virtually all Americans, the general public is largely unaware of how ships, maritime workers, and the nation's maritime infrastructure serve their needs for fuel, consumer goods, food, and much more."

Her hope of bridging that knowledge gap was realized when the museum welcomed the public to the exhibit on National Maritime Day.

"The tremendous support to this exhibit has meant a great deal," Johnson said, men-



*Apprentice Antonio Jones, a cadet from Seafarers International Union, stands at parade rest next to the wreath honoring US Merchant Mariners, which was placed within the "Answering the Call" section inside the new "On the Water" exhibition on National Maritime Day.*

*Engineer Richard Mathews and 2nd Mate Colin Wright find news about their experience aboard the MV Maersk Alabama in the exhibition's section "What's New on the Water?"*

tioning NDTA among the list of people and organizations she thanked during the opening ceremony. “This is the culmination of the great effort of a lot of people to bring the story of mariners to the general public,” she said as the first guests made their way through the exhibit. We tried to create an exhibit that would inspire our visitors to see how important the maritime industry is to their history and today.”

The A.P. Moller and Chastine McKinney Moller Foundation answered the call to provide the major sponsorship that made the exhibit possible. Ane Maersk Mc-Kinney Uggla, vice chairman of the foundation, was on hand to convey how much the exhibit meant to her, coming from a family of mariners. She began with some lighthearted remarks: “The Vikings are coming, the Vikings are coming; I’m happy to say that we, as descendants of the Scandinavian Vikings, have been received in greater friendliness.” Ms. Uggla said that this time, the Vikings came not to pillage, but strengthen ties. “Many visitors to the museum will gain appreciation for the maritime industry,” she said.

The ceremony’s keynote speaker, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, called the Museum a jewel. “Those of us who spend time in Washington are blessed to have such a wonderful place,” he said. LaHood praised the adventurous sailors who tamed rough waters during our Nation’s formative years. “National Maritime Day has been a proud tradition for more than 75 years,” he said.

That tradition continues today, as civilian merchant mariners continue to answer the call of duty. Secretary LaHood asked the three members of the *Maersk Alabama* in attendance to stand so the audience could recognize their service. The first mate, second mate, and an engineer were three of the 21-member crew of the *MV Maersk Alabama*, which was seized by pirates off the coast of Somalia on April 8, 2009.

The company of the *Alabama* made it home, but many mariners have made

the ultimate sacrifice. The ceremony included the placing of a wreath in their honor, while a member of the US Navy Band played Taps. “The maritime profession continues to attract a very brave class of men and women,” LaHood said.

### WALKING THROUGH (MARI)TIME

A visitor walking through “On the Water: Stories from Maritime America” will advance chronologically in each section of the exhibition, beginning in 1450 with “Living in the Atlantic World.” At the exhibit entrance you’ll face the first of 77 ship models on display from the National Watercraft Collection, the Tobacco Ship *Brilliant*. The large model represents one of the last ships to transport goods to Britain before the Revolutionary War, its prominence signifying a new era of maritime commerce in the New World.

This section also introduces visitors to early American maritime trade through an interactive map depicting trade routes and several audio clips from sailors and passengers describing the conditions of life at sea.

After checking out some artifacts from the notorious pirate Blackbeard’s ship, the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*, visitors can take the Pirate Quiz in the second section, “Maritime Nation: 1800-1850,” which helps visitors separate romanticized stories from the reality of piracy.

The third section, “Fishing for a Living: 1840-1920,” gives visitors the opportunity to see a 30-foot wooden whaleboat while listening to traditional whaling songs and sea chanteys.

“Inland Waterways: 1820-1940” has several History Channel-produced videos about river transportation. You’ll also find a popular object, the lens from the Bolivar Point Lighthouse, which guided mariners near Galveston, Texas, from 1907 to 1933.

“I thought the exhibit was really nice,” said Colin Wright, third mate of the *MV Maersk Alabama*. “My favorite piece was the lens from Bolivar Point. I’m from Galveston, so it reminds me of home.”

“Answering the Call: 1917-1945,” features models of World War II era cargo ships and a soundtrack from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s radio addresses to teach visitors about the emergency ship-building program.

Finally, “Modern Maritime America” shows models of the types of ships that make today’s global commerce happen.

Whether you feel more at home on land or at sea, a trip to the National Museum of American History’s new exhibit, “On the Water,” will give you a greater appreciation of the work mariners have done and continue to do to keep America moving. Plan your visit at [www.americanhistory.si.edu/](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/). DTJ



Ms. Ane Uggla, Vice Chairman of the A.P. Moller–Maersk A/S Board and daughter of Shipowner Maersk McKinney Moller, cut the ribbon to officially open the “On the Water: Stories from Maritime America” exhibition. From left to right: former Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater; Commander, Military Sealift Command, Rear Admiral Robert D. Reilly Jr.; Acting Maritime Administrator James E. Caponiti; Paula Johnson; Vice Admiral Albert J. Herberger; Ms. Ane Uggla; Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough; Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood; Director of NMAH Brent Glass.