

CAPT. MELVIN MERRILL EDWARDS
ISMA Pennant Number 8012
1902-1994

Capt. Melvin Edwards was born on a farm near Harbor Beach, Michigan on July 27, 1902. Raised on the family farm, he often saw vessels plying their trade on the waters of Lake Huron. At the age of 20 while visiting a vessel in the harbor, he asked for a job and was hired as a deckhand. As time passed he advanced to watchman, then wheelsman. With the encouragement of his Captain he took a correspondence course in navigation and then attended maritime classes in Milwaukee. He earned his mate's license and finally his Master's License.

By 1937 he was serving as first mate aboard the Steamer Lyman C. Smith. In 1939 he served as first mate aboard the Steamers Denmark and Horace E. Wilkerson, and in 1940 he was first mate aboard the Charles Hubbard and again the Lyman C. Smith. It was in 1940 that he was named Master of his first vessel. He assumed command of the Wilbert L. Smith on June 20, 1940. He was in command of vessels for the next 26 years.

While in command of the Wilbert L. Smith his vessel and crew made front page news with the rescue of four Flint men aboard a 37 foot sailboat adrift in a Lake Huron gale. In 1943, the Wilbert L. Smith was again in the news when it was the first vessel of the season at Owen Sound. As Master of the Smith, Capt. Edwards was presented with the traditional top hat by dignitaries of Owen Sound.

Captain Edwards commanded eight other vessels during his long career. While in the employ of the Great Lakes Steamship, Wilson Transit and Republic Steel fleets, he served as Master aboard the Hurlbut W. Smith, J.F. Durston, Norway, John B. Cowle, J. Burton Ayers, Richard M. Marshall, Tom M. Girdler and Thomas F. Patton. According to his wife Dorothy, Capt. Edwards considered the Cowle to be his favorite vessel. He was Master of the Cowle for six full seasons and parts of three others. In 1958 while in command of the Cowle, Capt. Edwards was presented with the "Men of Iron" award, given by the Cleveland Plain Dealer to the Master of the first vessel of the season to arrive in Cleveland. Captain Edwards' last command was the Thomas F. Patton, the flagship of the Republic Steel fleet, where he served as Master and Commodore of the fleet from 1964 through 1966. He retired from Republic Steel with full pension in 1967. His Great Lakes sailing career spanned 46 years.

Captain Edwards became a member of Detroit Lodge No. 7 in 1941. His installation is recorded in the official lodge minutes of March 25, 1941. He was issued pennant number 8012. Becoming active in lodge affairs, he was elected Second Vice President in 1949. Proceeding through the chairs, he served as First Vice President in 1950 and finally as lodge President in 1951. He was reelected for a second term as lodge President in 1952. 25 years later Detroit Lodge No. 7 bestowed a rare and special honor on Capt. Edwards when he was granted honorary life membership in Detroit Lodge No. 7. He most recently attended a lodge meeting on February 7, 1994. At the time of his death he had been a Ship Master member for over 50 years, longer than any other present member of Detroit Lodge No. 7.

Capt. Edwards, age 91, passed away on May 26, 1994 in Rochester Hills, Michigan after a short illness. He is survived by his wife Dorothy and five children.



OWEN SOUND, CAN. MAR. 1943 FIRST DOAT IN

Men of Iron



Shown are Captain Melvin Edwards and Chief Engineer Wally Goerss of the Steamer JOHN B. COWLE accepting the "Men of Iron" award from Mr. Wright Bryan, editor of The Plain Dealer. The award was presented on arrival on May 9th for the first vessel of the season to arrive in Cleveland with Upper Lakes iron ore. This is the first year such an award has been presented in Cleveland. It is expected to establish a similar annual ceremony.

In accepting the award Captain Edwards said, "No one knows better than I do that the credit for winning this award should go to the men of this ship. To have a good ship you must have a good engineer and a good crew — we have both."

Among those in attendance at the ceremonies on the bridge of the COWLE were Maurice Goetz, Cleveland District Manager for Republic Steel Corporation; Joseph Wood, Vice President of Traffic for Wilson Marine; James Rowland, Cleveland Harbor Commissioner; Earnest Shealy, Cleveland Chamber of Commerce Transportation Commissioner, and Henry Silverthorn, Cleveland Harbor master.

Retirement Landlocks Ship Captain

When April rolls around, it will be difficult for Melvin M. Edwards of Rochester to sit still.

After 45 years of sailing the Great Lakes, Capt. Edwards has officially gone into retirement and will be spending the shipping season at his W. Hamlin Rd. home.

His years on the lakes have ranged from a deckhand to commanding a 640-foot flagship. And in between were years filled with many exciting tales of storms, rescue and near-luxury living aboard one of the largest and newest ore boats on the lakes.

For the past five years, Edwards has been captain of the Thomas F. Patton, flagship of the Republic Steel Corporation fleet. The ship is named after the company president. With eight staterooms for guests, a fine galley, a lounge with TV, hi-fi, tape recorder and plush furniture, the Patton is a far cry from the early ships that Captain Edwards sailed on.

YOUNG EDWARDS grew up on a not-too-prosperous farm in The Thumb area. At the age of 20 —

1922 — he made the jump into a new world. While visiting the captain of a ship at Harbor Beach, he asked for a job. "Let me see your hands, son," the captain asked. When he saw that the youth's hands showed signs of hard labor, he got the job.

He moved from deck hand to watchman, then wheelman and after three years of study wrote his first mate license. After another year, he took special schooling and received his master's license. During this time he served under the same captain.

As a deckhand, he was paid what seemed to him the fantastic sum of \$65 a month. Now the same job pays over \$100 a week. "Then, everyone worked 12 hours a day and overtime pay was unheard of. Your day end-

ed when the work was finished," the captain recalled.

On the last trip of December 1926, his ship was caught in a Lake Superior storm. Running back and forth along the north shore of the lake, the boat's roll was so hard that it tore the compass binacle loose from the pilot house floor. Edwards and a mate sat on the floor all night and held the compass.

He recalls a summer of 1929 when an airplane landed on Lake Erie. In the dark, they managed to pluck two men and a woman from the water after hours of searching, but another man drowned.

When captain of his own ship, Edwards picked up four doctors on Lake Huron whose boat was disabled. He maintains, however, that Lake Michigan is the most hazardous of the Great Lakes.

In 1940, at the age of 38, he was made captain for the Great Lakes Steamship Company. He was one of the youngest captains on the lakes,

commanding the Wilbert L. Smith. In 1953, he became commodore of the Great Lakes Steamship Company fleet, commanding their flagship, the Richard M. Marshall, a 644-foot ore carrier.

THEN, IN 1956, the company was absorbed by Republic Steel and he was named captain of the John B. Cowell. But then, once again, Capt. Edwards became a flagship commodore when he was named to the Thomas F. Patton, a job he held until his retirement.

Most of his runs during these 46 years have been between Duluth, Minnesota and Lake Erie ports, carrying either ore or coal. A round trip takes five days.

From the time he left home in April until the shipping season ended in late December, he never saw his Hamlin Road home. In fact, he set foot ashore only a few hours each week.

"Some people wonder why I never (Continued on Page 4, Sec. 1)

1967



CAPTAIN M. M. Edwards may be landlocked after 46 years on the Great Lakes, but he still can keep up with the shipping activities by listening to the shortwave ship radio communications.

Retirement

(Continued from Page 1, Sec. 1)

lived in a port city so I could see my family when we docked," Capt. Edwards said. "The truth is that it takes but two hours and 15 minutes to load and only five hours to unload and that would give the family only time enough to come down and wave. Anyway, the family could go with me anytime they wanted to."

And the family did. Usually during the summer, Mrs. Edwards or any of their five children (one is now in the Army) would board the Patton for a trip or two. He usually had at least one member of the family along all summer.

The public would give anything to go rides on such ships as the Patton. And although it usually always sails with passengers, they are strictly guests of the company, usually steel salesmen and their customers. "They are given the best of everything," Capt. Edwards said. Meals are as good as those served in the best restaurants.

The captain's quarters includes an office, sitting room, bedroom and bath. Under that is the guest lounge. Under that is the passenger staterooms, then the crew's quarters. Each room accommodates two men and has a private bath.

"**THERE IS A MISTAKEN** belief that seamen are a rather uneducated lot," Capt. Edwards explained. "This is not true. We have many students, teachers and men from all walks of life who sign for summer duty." A contract can be signed for a 30-day period, but one may with-

draw at any time. The minimum age is 18 years.

A crew of 36 would consist of the captain, three mates, three wheelmen, six watchmen, three ordinary seamen. Below decks are five in the galley, one chief engineer, and five assistants, three oilers, three firemen and three wipers. Hours are 4 hours on and 8 hours off.

AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT, it costs a lot of money to operate such a ship. Captain Edwards figures operating expenses at \$2,700 a day. A five day run takes 47,000 gallons of oil; the phone bill is around \$120 a month (ship to shore); towing charges in and out of port run \$1,200 per five day trip; and the ship uses an average of 1,400 gallons of paint per season.

The average speed of an ore carrier is 19 miles an hour light, 17 miles an hour loaded. If the ship must put into dry dock it costs \$1,500 just to put it in, then \$500 a day to keep it in, plus labor and repair. The boat must go in every five years for a Coast Guard inspection. To build a ship like the Patton today would cost around \$8 million.

In one season, the Patton traveled 78,000 miles, which is three times around the world.

How did a ship captain decide to live in landlocked Rochester?

"Well, we just couldn't stand the small lot and noise of living in Detroit, so we started driving one day about 15 years ago and ended up here in Rochester."

Capt. Edwards expects he will miss the lake. He doesn't even own a rowboat. He does have several shortwave radios on which he can listen to the ship radio bands.

"People always asked me what I did with myself all winter. I always replied that I needed every day of it to rest up from the long April to December pull."

Now he will have a long time for resting.

Saved in Lake

early 1940's

Huron Gale

Four Rescued From Huron By Ore Boat

Flint Residents Tossed 14 Hours In 37-Foot Craft

Caught in a 45-mile-an-hour gale on Lake Huron and in danger of drowning, four Flint men were tossed about helplessly by huge waves in their 37-foot sailboat for 14 hours Sunday until rescued 20 miles from land by the W. L. Smith, an ore carrier.

All Chevrolet employees, they are Dr. Otto J. Preston, assistant medical director, of 1312 Maxine avenue; Robert H. Marsh, first aid attendant, of 2038 Ferris avenue; Gordon Glover, insurance department, of 1210 Pershing street, and David F. Lynch, fire protection, 232 East Rankin street, owner and skipper of the sailboat.

Starting out in the International six meter Jack boat at 10 a. m. Saturday from Saginaw Day Yacht club at Bay City, they headed for Alpena, about 200 miles distant, and were tossed about from 1 a. m. Sunday until rescued at 3:30 that afternoon.

Hauling down sail when the wind accompanied by rain became furious, they threw out their anchor when about seven miles off Oscoda light but it failed to hold and their light craft was blown out into the shipping lanes.

The rescue, directed by Capt. M. Edwards of the W. L. Smith, was the most dangerous part of their experience, for each of the four men had to jump from the sailboat to the carrier when the lighter craft was carried on the crest of a wave to the level of the carrier.

Previously the carrier's crew had thrown lines to the sailboat and maneuvered her alongside, but the lines broke after the four had been rescued and Lynch's craft, so far as is known, is still adrift.

Although there was food aboard the sailboat, all went without eating during the 14 hours they were tossed about. They were too busy keeping the sailboat afloat to think of nourishment.

As soon as they were picked up, the carrier radioed Harbor Beach coast guard station and when the carrier was abreast of that point they were removed by a coast guard boat.

Although all four were badly shaken up from the tossing, none was injured and their chief concern today was the loss of the \$3,000 craft.

Mr. Marsh, who knows that section of the lake well, said the waves were as high as he had ever seen them there, with the wind velocity also reaching a high point.

The four were taking the sailboat to Alpena for storage for the duration of the war.

"Too much praise can not be given Capt. Edwards and his crew," said Mr. Marsh.

OBITUARY

Melvin M. Edwards

Captain shared love of sailing with his family

By DARRELL PRESSLEY

Of The Oakland Press

Services will be held Sunday for Capt. Melvin M. Edwards of Rochester Hills, who sailed the Great Lakes for almost 50 years.

His daughter Victoria Sanchez remembers the summers when he took his family sailing with him.

"I always looked forward to that," said Sanchez of her time with her father, who died Thursday.

Edwards, 91, was born in Harbor Beach, Mich., July 27, 1909. He was a captain on one of the fleet of Great Lakes freighters owned by the Republic Steel Corp. He sailed the Great Lakes for 46 years — 26 years as captain.

At the time he obtained the rank of captain, Mr. Edwards was one of the youngest on the Great Lakes. He retired in 1967.

Mr. Edwards served in the

U.S. Coast Guard during World War II and was honorably discharged with the rank of commander.

Mr. Edwards was a member of St. John Lutheran Church in Rochester and the International Ship Masters Lodge No. 7 in Detroit.

One thing Sanchez remembers about her father is that he was an honest man whose actions spoke louder than words.

"If you gave a man your word, then you had to follow through," he would say.

He is survived by his wife Dorothy; daughter, Victoria Sanchez of Holt, Mich.; sons John N. of Columbiaville, Mich., Melvin K. of Exeter, N.H., David W. of Pulaski, Tenn., and Daniel S. of Marlette, Mich.; 11 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 7-9 p.m. today and 3-5 and 7-9 p.m. Saturday at the Pixley Funeral Home, Rochester.

Services will be held at 1 p.m. Sunday at the funeral home.

Memorials may be made to the Older Persons Commission in Rochester or Neighborhood House in Rochester.

May 27, 1994

THE OAKLAND PRESS

SATURDAY MAY 28 1994

DEATH NOTICES

EDWARDS, CAPTAIN MELVIN M.; age 91; of Rochester Hills; May 26; dear husband of Dorothy; father of John N., Melvin K., David W., Daniel S. and Mrs. Fernando (Victoria) Sanchez; 11 grandchildren; four great-grandchildren. Captain Edwards was a member of St. John Lutheran Church, International Ship Masters Lodge #7, Detroit. He sailed the Great Lakes for 46 years-26 years as Captain for the Republic Steel Corp, retiring in 1967. He served in the U.S. Coast Guard WWII with the rank of Commander. Funeral service Sunday, 1:00 Pixley Funeral Home, Rochester. Friends may call at the funeral home Friday 7-9 and Saturday 3-5 and 7-9 p.m. Family would appreciate memorials to OPC or Neighborhood House.

Old-time sailor

January 20, 1984

Captain remembers winter on the lakes

By JEAN SAILE
Of The Oakland Press

AVON TWP. — Down at the Donut Depot where the old-timers gather for afternoon coffee, the cold spell calls up memories of the winter of 1926.

Capt. Melvin Edwards, 82, retired in 1967 after 46 years on the Great Lakes, was a second mate on a freighter then.

"Took us 30 days to make the last run before we laid up for winter," he tells former Pontiac Township Supervisor Roy Wahl and retired barber, Garlan Jones.

Edwards' ship was hauling coal to Duluth. In unloading, a lot of the coal froze to the ship's side and had to be knocked off. That done, the ship left for old Fort William on Lake Superior to load grain.

"We got into the grain elevators, and everything froze so fast that everytime we had to shift the boat, we had to get tugs to break the ice."

The grain was bound for Buffalo. "There was a bad storm coming down Lake Superior. We lost 24 hours, and then we locked through the Soo. We started down the St. Mary's and got stuck in the ice headed into the Rock Cut."

Stranded for three days while tugs got them out, Edwards can remember a farmer driving right alongside the boat with his team and sleigh to get supplies to the galley.

"We finally went on to Buffalo where we unloaded. We were supposed to go to Huron to lay up, but there was so much ice we couldn't get in. Had to lay up in Buffalo."

Those were the days before ice breakers, and the aim was to

finish the last run prior to Christmas so that the crews could get home for the holidays. Edwards made it, but he recalls the whole winter as being one of the worst he has known.

Though Lake Superior has had its share of shipwrecks, Edwards favors it among the five other bodies of water. "There's always someplace you can find protection," says the old captain who never lost a ship.

Edwards, the descendant of non-seafarers, was born and raised on a farm near Harbor Beach. "A lot of young fellows there went sailing, and I thought I'd try it, too. I went to everybody's favorite captain and got a job as a deck hand with him. He helped me a lot."

Edwards took a correspondence course in navigation one year while he was on the boat, and then went to navigation school in Milwaukee twice — first to enable him to get his mate's license and then his master's license.

About all that navigators had to rely on in those days was memory. "First ship I sailed on had a clock on the wall and an old barometer, and that was that. Now the boats are equipped with everything, and they're still adding to it."

Because he was a captain, Edwards was able to take his wife, Dorothy, and their five children along for much of the summer. While none of his four sons nor his daughter wound up following the sea, their education into its discipline was early.

"From the time school was out until they started in the fall, some of the kids were on the



Captain Melvin Edward

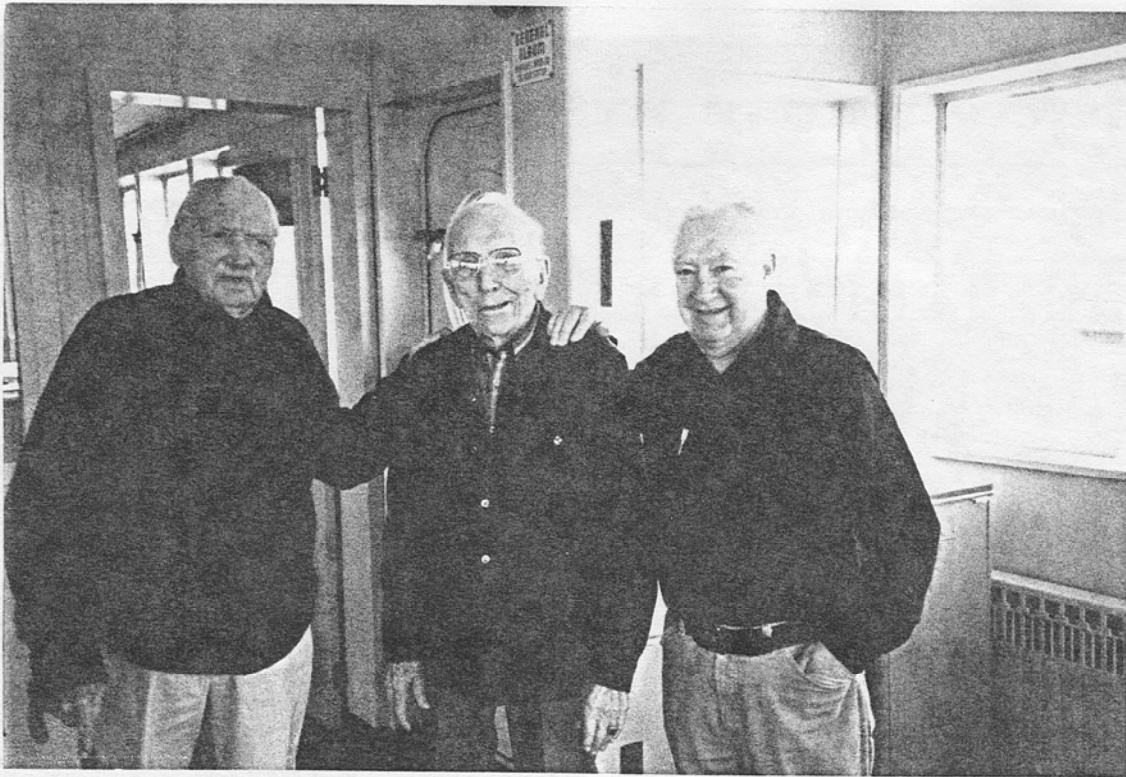
boat all the time. I kept them busy, painting and chipping, from the age of 12 on," he recalls.

Edwards served on several ships, the later ones devoted solely to the delivery of iron ore. Retired from the Republic Steel Corp., which purchased the old Great Lakes Steamship Co., with which he started, he still remembers the fall color display afforded sailors the first week of October, and the food — "better

than any hotel in the country."

Although he's gone back to the lakes as a passenger, Edwards is mainly devoted to taking life easy. Once interested in woodworking, he now does only what has to be done.

When the electric clock he earned by bringing the first spring load of ore into Cleveland gets near 2 p.m., however, Edwards heads for the Donut Depot and the sharing of what used to be.



Captain Edwards (center) with Commodore Edward Baganz (on the left) and Capt. Don Erickson (on the right) in the William Clay Ford pilot house at Dossin Museum.

Captain Melvin Edwards attended his last lodge meeting on February 7, 1994. He is shown in this photo signing the lodge logbook for the last time

