



Harry Benton Porter, Sr

February 7, 1918 - February 24, 2009

Captain Harry B. Porter, a master pilot who served under six Maryland governors, during his career as Captain of The Maryland Lady, the Maryland Independence, and the Aurora, from 1966 to 1989, died February 24, 2009 in Catonsville, Maryland. The Kent Island native was 91. While at the helm of the state yachts, he hosted many dignitaries and celebrities, including Princess Anne and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and the President of Zaire. Capt. Harry was drafted in 1941 and spent over four years in the U.S. Army. He participated in the D-Day Invasion in 1944 as a technician in the 104th Medical Battalion, 29th Division of the Maryland National Guard. He received an honorable discharge in 1945.

Capt. Harry was born in a three-house development named Mattapex on Kent Island's Route 8. His parents were Capt. J. Harry and Rosie Porter. Porter graduated from Stevensville High School in 1934. His boyhood days on the Eastern Shore were spent working on farms and ferryboats, and culling oysters. After service in the army, he returned home and joined his father on oyster buy-boats and "freighting" grains on the bay. From 1948 until his retirement in 1989, he skippered many boats along the waterfronts of North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. He had a wealth of experience in navigating the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River, the C & D Canal, the Intercoastal Waterway, and various ports between Baltimore and Norfolk. Capt. Harry acquired a master and pilot license for 2000-ton vessels during his maritime

career.

In 1966, he became Captain of the Maryland State Yacht and was the subject of many articles over the next 23 years, due to this “unsought” celebrity status. The Annapolitan published several pieces on Captain Harry over the course of his career. One such article chronicled his life on the water. “Used to be you went up and down the Bay with your pocket watch, your compass, and a lead line. On the old freight boats, it was just you and one other man. You were captain, engineer, deck hand, cook, and whatever you had to be...if you got in a jam there was nobody to ask what to do. You got in [to port] or you didn’t. There was no Loran, or radar, or ship-to-shore radio to depend on. It was just you. When you are in the bay 24 hours a day, seven days a week, you learn to take it as it comes. There’d be days the water’d just roll over one end and out the other for hours at a time. You’d wonder sometimes if you were ever going to make it in.”

When pressed about his unique status, he admitted his discomfort with all the attention that his position seemed to draw. But he was proud of the public relations service he and his crew performed on behalf of the State of Maryland. He reported that his favorite skippering experience was an annual cruise with the Ostomy Society of Maryland’s Youth Club aboard the state yacht, during the Mandel Administration. He retired from the position of captain of the governor’s yacht in 1989. He credited his ability for discretion and his loyalty to his employers for his longevity. From 1969 until 2005, he enjoyed his home on Cox Creek, where he entertained his family with crab feasts and barbeques. He relished tonging for oysters during the winter months and often gifted his catch to special friends. He spent the remainder of his days at Charlestown in Catonsville.

Captain Porter was a respected and revered member of his community, and a gentleman of “the old school.” Rarely seen without a necktie, his friends and

colleagues regarded him as a gracious and unassuming man, with vast knowledge of the Eastern Shore and the waters of the bay. He was a member of the Kent Island Yacht Club, the VFW 7464 of Grasonsville, and the American Legion 278 of Kent Island. Porter was also president and board member of the Kent Island Lions Club, where he received many commendations, including the prestigious “Melvin Jones” award for exemplary service. He was a devoted husband and loving father. His daughters recall the wonderful twinkle in his crystal blue eyes when he related a joke or tall tale, when he spoke of his trips on the bay, or when he bragged about his grandson and great granddaughter.

His daughter Jacqueline recalled the story about a captain who used to make routine trips up the Chester River all the time. This captain missed his mark one night and ran ashore on a sandbar. The engines were still running, but the boat wasn't moving, so he called for his deck hand to take the wheel for a few minutes. The captain proceeded to go to the galley, on the pretense of getting a drink of water. When he returned to the pilot house, he started raising “hell,” accusing the deck hand of running them aground. The poor deck hand never learned the truth.

His daughter Jill would travel with her father in the summer aboard his freighters. “I was only four or five when we made a run to Baltimore with a load of corn. It was such an adventure. When loaded, the gunnels would be under water and I was able to slip and slide the entire length of the boat. We docked in the inner harbor, and unloaded at Pier V, with all the other freighters. And then we would hoof it over to Broadway to do a little shopping and to get a hot dog at the market. Dad and Mom used to tell me stories about how they would ‘boat’ from Kent Island to Baltimore to do seasonal shopping. My grandfather bought Dad his first bicycle at a shop on Broadway today, which is still open today.”

Visitation will be held on Saturday, February 28, 2009 from 3 to 5 pm at Fellows, Helfenbein and Newnam Funeral Home, 106 Shamrock Road, Chester, MD. Services are to be held at 2 pm on Sunday, March 1, 2009 at the Kent Island Methodist Church, 2739 Cox's Neck Road, Chester, MD. He is survived by his wife, Isabel Baxter Porter, whom he married in 1948. His sister, Imogene Porter Brown is deceased. Survivors include two daughters, Jacqueline Ziskind of Owings Mills, and Jill Porter of Annapolis, and a son, Harry Porter, Jr. of Centreville, a grandson, Bryan Parks Saddler, Esq. and Bryan's wife, Paula, and a great granddaughter, Tess Saddler. Memorial contributions may be made to the Kent Island United Methodist Church, where Capt. Harry was a member, or the Kent Island Fire Department.

Tribute Wall



“ *Harry Benton Porter, Sr*

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Harry Benton Porter, Sr*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Harry Benton Porter, Sr*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ *Dear Ms Isabel, Jill and Jackie,
What a wonderful man we have lost !!! Guess he and Daddy are up
in heaven "catchin' up". I will always remember Captain Harry's
faithfulness to Daddy while he was sick. When he didn't go to the
nursing home he would call to check on him. You both were very
special to Daddy and Mother and your visits while they were
confined meant so much to them. Captain Harry will be missed by
so many here in Queen Anne's county. Take care of yourselves, Ms
Isabel we love you !!!
Marvin and Jane###imported-begin##Jane Coppage##imported-
end##*

February 28, 2009 at 01:50 PM



“ To All:

We were so sorry to hear about Capt. Harry's passing. Wheeler foundly tells the story about Capt. Harry coming in the store early on his way to work. Wheeler asked why he was in such a hurry this particular morning. He said if he didn't get to the boat first, those young bucs will throw out yesterdays coffee and make new! Wheeler has told that tale on him a million times. Condolences to all on your loss. Miss Isobel, we love you!##imported-begin##Holly and Wheeler Baker##imported-end##

February 28, 2009 at 10:25 AM



“ *We knew Capt. Harry for many years through the Yacht club and what a wealth of information he was. He was missed after moving to Catonsville but never forgotten. He was a real gentlemen and this is what we need more of in this country. Best to you Isobel and the family. You have our prayers.##imported-begin##John & Jean Sadler##imported-end##*

February 27, 2009 at 02:56 PM



“ *Ms. Isabelle and family: Our sympathy and thoughts are with you at this time in the loss of Capt. Harry. He will be missed by many, but now another Captain in the sky has arrived. We know there are many memories of him that will be held dear to your hearts. God Bless and may you always have love, peace and sunshine in your hearts. Lynda and Gene Palmatary, 221 Hope Road, Centreville, Md.##imported-begin##Lynda H. Palmatary##imported-end##*

February 27, 2009 at 09:18 AM



“ I first met Capt. Harry as a member of the State Police security detail for Gov. Marvin Mandel. I spent a lot of days on the bay with Captain Harry, and I enjoyed them all. He was a fine man and his family has my deepest sympathy.##imported-begin##Captain Jack Howard, Maryland State Police, Retired##imported-end##

February 26, 2009 at 07:04 PM



“ We are so sorry to hear of your loss. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. Another 29er has been called home. His tour on earth has ended. He has arrived at his new and eternal destination.##imported-begin##Jack Bigelow##imported-end##

February 25, 2009 at 10:34 PM



“ Dear Isobel,

We were so sorry to hear of Capt. Harry's passing. George and I last saw him having breakfast with the boys at the Hilton Garden Inn. We also will remember that twinkle in his eye as he told a tall tale. We will miss him.##imported-begin##George & Barbara Yewell##imported-end##

February 25, 2009 at 01:23 PM



“ Dear Isabel and family,

I was so saddened to hear of Harry's passing. We go back a long way. I first met Harry when he was skippering the Maryland Lady down in St. Michaels in the early 70's. Later when I was manager at Piney Narrows, Harry was a regular bringing the yachts in for winter storage.

I remember one summer day when he was bringing in the Aurora in to Piney Narrows and I yelled Hi Harry! Little did I know that Gov. Hughes was aboard and he waved back. Gov. Hughes said that Capt Harry was better know on the Bay!

I was honored to serve with him at the Kent Island Lions Club. Our son Erich was so pleased when Capt. Harry gave him one of his old captain's hats. He still proudly displays it in his room.

Capt Harry loved the Bay and the Shore and it is only fitting that he will come home to rest. He left a huge impact on me and my family and we will sorely miss him.

Our best wishes

Klaus & Anne Liebig and family###imported-begin###Klaus Liebig###imported-end##

February 25, 2009 at 12:26 PM



“ *Isobel, Jackie and Jill: We are so sorry to hear about your loss of Capt. Harry. We will miss him terribly. Fond thoughts of crabs, oysters, O's baseball and dirt piles fill our minds and hearts. Capt. Harry's gentle kindness and affection will be sorely missed. We love you all very much.###imported-begin###Jeane, John, Matt & Bryan Cockey###imported-end##*

February 25, 2009 at 11:23 AM



“ Jackie,
Sorry to hear about the loss of your father. You are in my thoughts and prayers. If there is anything you need do not hesitate to ask.##imported-begin##Shelly Bazensky##imported-end##

February 25, 2009 at 09:49 AM



“ *Dear Miss Isobel, Jacque and Jill -
I was so very sorry to learn of Capt Harry's passing. Remember, he is no longer in pain and God has allowed him to return to his beloved Kent Island.
My thoughts and prayers are with each of you.##imported-begin##Ruthie Voshell-Russ ##imported-end##*

February 25, 2009 at 09:01 AM



“ Jackie:

*I wish to extend condolences to you and your family for your loss.
May G-d bless.*

Gloria##imported-begin##Gloria Pleet##imported-end##

February 25, 2009 at 08:26 AM



“ Ms. Isabelle, Jill & Jackie,

We were very saddened to hear about your loss of Capt. Harry. He was such a nice man and good friend. It was an honor to have known him over the years. I loved to hear him talk about my grandmother being his teacher and I enjoyed the good natured arguments between him and my father. He will be greatly missed by a lot of people.##imported-begin##Kathy & Bill Comegys##imported-end##

February 24, 2009 at 05:17 PM