

Captain Thomas J. Leinweber, 83, of St. Clair Shores, Michigan, and a seasonal resident of Punta Gorda, Florida, passed away on Saturday, September 6, 2008.

Born Sept. 2, 1925 in Detroit, Michigan, he was a graduate of St. Paul High School in Grosse Pointe, Michigan.

In July 1943 he entered the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York as a Deck Cadet. He graduated in May, 1945. During World War II, he served aboard Standard Oil Co.'s ESSO WILMINGTON as a cadet/midshipman. Following the end of hostilities he was discharged August 15, 1945 having earned the Merchant Marine Emblem, and decorations for the Atlantic War Zone, Pacific War Zone and Philippines Liberation.

After the war, he attended the University of Michigan for a year where he studied Marine Architecture. It was in Ann Arbor that he met his future wife Iris, who at that time was in the Nursing Program at the university.

Leaving the University of Michigan, Tom returned to sea in November 1947, sailing with the American South African Line to Cape Town, South Africa and the Mideast. In 1948, he returned to the Great Lakes sailing as a watchman and bosun on the GREATER DETROIT of the D & C Navigation Co. In November, 1948 he was working as a watchman for T.J. McCarthy Steamship Co. and after layup did winter work there. During the 1949 navigation season he worked as an agent for the Seafarers International Union. He continued with McCarthy Steamship until August, 1950 when he was recalled to the U.S. Navy for service during the Korean Conflict.

Assigned to the supply ship USS WHITESIDE, he served on the vessel from August, 1950 to July 1951. His duties took him from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and ports in California, Hawaii and Japan. In the summer of 1951 while on leave from the WHITESIDE he married Iris. They were married on August 25, 1951. In September, 1951, Tom was assigned to Orange, Texas where he helped commission the ammunition ship USS FIREDRAKE. The vessel sailed through the Panama Canal to California and across the Pacific Ocean to Korea and Japan. Iris worked in the Veterans Hospital while Tom was at sea.

Discharged from the U.S. Navy in August, 1952, Tom resumed his career on the Great Lakes with the T.J. McCarthy Steamship Co. He successfully wrote his Masters License in 1958. His first command was as Master of the GEORGE W. MEAD.

In 1963 Captain Leinweber became a registered Great Lakes Pilot for District 2, Lakes Pilots Association. He always remarked that working in pilotage was "the best job I ever had." He spent the remainder of his working career as a pilot retiring in 1995 at the mandatory retirement age of 70. However, his interest in pilotage never faded. After retirement, he served as a volunteer pilot aboard the Sea Cadet vessel GRAY FOX on its delivery voyage from Jacksonville, Florida to Port Huron, Michigan. He also served as a volunteer pilot on the Indian Naval Ship TARANGINI, piloting the vessel from Toledo to Port Huron during the June, 2003 Tall Ships Festival.

Following retirement, Capt. Leinweber divided his summer months between his home in St. Clair Shores and the family's summer cottage in Lewiston, Michigan. He spent his winters in Punta Gorda, Florida where he and Iris were part-time residents for 25 years. While in Florida, he was a member of the Robert J. MacAlvanah American Merchant Marine Lodge of North Port, Florida and the Punta Gorda Elks Lodge 2606. He was a life member of the American Legion. He also volunteered at the Charlotte Historical Museum in Florida.

Capt. Leinweber was a member of the Shipmasters for 49 years joining Detroit Lodge No. 7 on January 6, 1959. He was a dedicated member of the lodge, often bringing navigational issues to the attention of the members and suggesting action at the Grand Lodge level. He served as lodge President in 1991. For many years he served in the uniformed honor guard at Mariners' Church, both at Blessing of the Fleet in March and at the Fitzgerald Memorial Service in November. His love of the sailing profession was very deep. In recognition of his long and successful career on the Great Lakes, Detroit Lodge No. 7 nominated him for the Captain Lewis Ludington Award, which was duly granted by Mariners' Church in 1996. He was very proud of that honor.

In recent years, Tom and Iris began to spend nearly 6 months in Florida, mostly the fall and winter months. As a result, he was unable to attend lodge meetings. But his interest in the lodge was unabated. He would call the lodge secretary several times during the winter months to see what was going on at the meetings and asking for information about the Grand Lodge Convention. He often mailed newspaper and magazine articles on navigational matters to the lodge that he thought would be of interest to the members. In the summer months when he was back in Michigan, he always looked forward to the lodge's occasional summer gatherings and picnics that took place at the Westcott mailboat or at the Harsens Island homes of Tom and Cathy Baumgarten or Dick and Arlene Earl. He always enjoyed the friendship and comradery at lodge events.

It is interesting to note that to his family Tom was always "Tom" but in the lodge he was always "Tommy." As I look back to the time when Tommy was able to attend meetings on a regular basis, I always smile when I think of his arrival at meetings. "What's for lunch?" he demanded. And the coffee better be ready too! He would go out of his way to welcome new members into the lodge. After every initiation ceremony, he would be first in line to congratulate a new member on becoming a Shipmaster. He was counted on to actively participate in lodge discussions, and often brought up the issues for discussion. He would not hesitate to take the Coast Guard to task if he felt it was called for. His dislike of Sarnia Traffic Center was well known, although even Tom mellowed on that issue over time. If anyone asked Tom about his background, he would proudly declare "I'm a Kings Point man!" Often when lodge meetings were winding down or perhaps dragging on for too long, eyes would turn in Tommy's direction as he paced back and forth in the rear of the lodge room. Almost on cue he would solemnly intone "I move to adjourn!" With chuckles from the members, the motion would be put to a vote and approved. It was Tommy's special role at lodge meetings. Capt. Leinweber, a "Silver Mariner" of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, was an asset to the lodge, and a Shipmaster to the end. I will miss him.

Captain Leinweber is survived by Iris, his beloved wife of 57 years, and his two daughters, Gail (Ralph) Geromette and Jill (Mark) McLocklin. A memorial Mass was held Saturday, September 13, 2008 at St. Germaine Catholic Church in St. Clair Shores. His ashes have been interred at the Columbarium (Nimitz Section) at Arlington National Cemetery.

In providing this biographical sketch of Tommy's life, I would like to thank his wife Iris for her help in filling in the details.

Fraternally,

Paul Jagenow  
Secretary-Treasurer