



# MARINAI d'ITALIA

## NEWSLETTER USA GROUPS



### ALMOST FIFTY YEARS AGO

Do you remember 1976, the year of the celebration of the Bicentennial of the birth of the United States of America? Many of us, on dates close to the 4th of July of that year, participated in the events

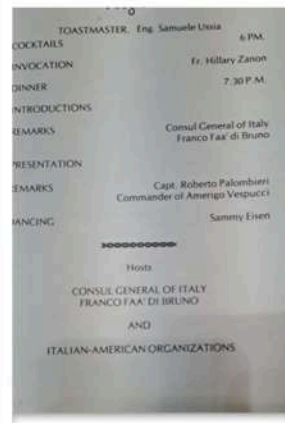
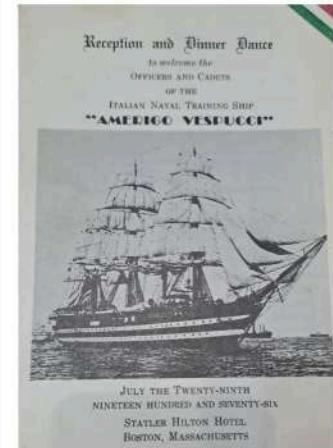


related to the visit of Nave Vespucci to the East Coast of the United States and to Boston in particular. The photos on the right refer to the dance and reception offered in Boston to the Officers and the Italian Naval Academy Cadets that were part of the crew of the Vespucci during the training campaign of the summer of 1976.



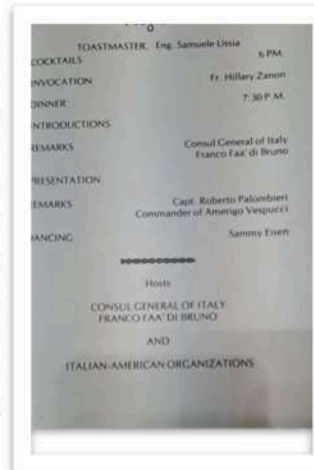
Recently the Vespucci returned to Italy concluding a training campaign that, at the ripe old age of ninety-four, led her to complete a

round-the-world trip that lasted more than two years. An undertaking that has seen the involvement along with the Navy of other Italian entities and organizations with the goal of making our Italian excellence known to as many world countries as possible. During the campaign Nave Vespucci has been an ambassador of all the Italian values and traditions, unique in the



world and appreciated everywhere. In addition to the Italian culture and excellence, Nave Vespucci has made evident the determination with which the Italian Navy prepares the young students to life at sea. All the advanced technology that these young recruits will learn and apply during the continuation of their careers aboard the so-called "Gray Ships" will have to be employed at sea, the unpredictable element that

must be always dealt with first. On board the Vespucci, the Naval Academy 1st Class cadets have also learned to manage their physical and mental resources, a necessity to be always ready to make decisions from which the fate of their crews will depend. All this will take place at sea, far from the mainland where often the echo of the sailors' exploits does not even reach.



## GINO BIRINDELLI, THE TROUBLESOME SAILOR

Important figures, who lived during the last war, have often been deliberately forgotten, only because they are inconvenient, in an era that has made materialism and consumerism the new ideals for young people.

Gino Birindelli, an Italian Navy officer, hero of the Second World War, whose ethical and moral thought, still very relevant, should be a reference today for many soldiers and politicians is one of those. Beyond his service merits, we can say that he always lived with simplicity, correctness and firmness, until the last day of his life.

Gino Birindelli, a troublesome man, as he was defined by some post-war soldiers and politicians, whose sharp words shook the consciences of those who had preferred cowardice to moral ethics, was born in Pescia (Pistoia) on January 19, 1911.

On 1925, at the age of fourteen, he left the Piarists' College in Florence and entered the Royal Naval Academy of Livorno. He graduated on 1930 with the rank of Midshipman beginning a long and brilliant career on board various surface and submarine vessels of the Navy. On 1937, he graduated in Civil Engineering from the University of Pisa. On September 1939 he was assigned to the 10th MAS (Assault vehicle flotilla) based at La Spezia, to begin training on assault vehicles together with other great figures of the time: Teseo Tesei, Elios Toschi and Luigi Durand de la Penne. During the intense activity at the Bocca del Serchio, a secret training base for frog men manning slow-running torpedoes, better known as "Pigs", one of his lungs was damaged by a malfunctioning closed-circuit respirator and had to be admitted to the hospital in the city of Massa. Intolerant of the situation, he literally escaped from the hospital to return to Bocca del Serchio, in time to participate in the first expedition of the assault vehicles against the English base of Alessandria during which he was decorated on the field with the Silver Medal for Military Valor, for having dived five consecutive times to rescue a sailor trapped inside the sinking submarine Iride. He then participated in the first and second assault vehicles expeditions against the British base of Gibraltar. During the second expedition his vehicle broke down and he was forced to sink it, was captured and taken prisoner by the British. For this action he was later decorated with the Gold Medal for Military Valor.

For the next twenty months he remained a prisoner in British and American hospitals until, at the end of 1943, after the armistice, the Italian government of Badoglio had him repatriated. On 1944 Birindelli was promoted to Commander and assumed the office of Deputy Chief

of Staff of the MAS General Inspectorate participating in the War of Liberation with surface vessels along the Albanian and Yugoslav coasts. His health conditions worsened and forced him to a long hospitalization. At the end of the hostilities he served as commanding officer of the San Marco Battalion, and afterward as Second in Command on the battleship "Italia". He was subsequently assigned to the Varignano Diving Center as Commander of a group of divers, mostly veterans who had served in the assault vehicles, who after the war had been given the task of demining the northern Adriatic, to make it safely navigable again. He attended the Superior Institute of Maritime Warfare and then commanded first the 3<sup>a</sup> Corvette Flotilla and afterward the 3<sup>a</sup> Torpedo Boat Flotilla. Promoted to Captain on 1952, he took on increasingly prestigious positions, including the command of the Varignano Divers and Commandos Base (thanks to him named after Teseo Tesei), the command of the cruiser Raimondo Montecuccoli, with



Admiral Gino Birindelli

which from September 1956 to March 1957 he completed a circumnavigation of the globe, and the appointment as representative of the Command of the Allied Forces of the Mediterranean. On 1962 he was promoted to Division Admiral and commanded the 1<sup>a</sup> Naval Division. On 1966 he was promoted to the rank of Fleet Admiral and as such served as Navy Personnel Director General, Commander in Chief of the Naval Fleet (CINCPNAV) and finally NATO Allied Naval Commander of Southern Europe.

A prestigious career during which Birindelli never forgot his men. On February 1970, as Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet, during a press conference on board the cruiser Garibaldi, he firmly denounced the crisis in which the Navy found itself and the state of deep moral and material malaise affecting all navy personnel. On that occasion, according to witnesses' accounts, he welcomed aboard of the Garibaldi with all due honors the parliamentarians members of the Defense Commission but then had them transhipped to the various naval units at anchor in the port of Cagliari, giving the order to the Commanders to keep them mainly in the engine rooms, hot and noisy, and certainly among the least comfortable environments on board. After four hours of navigation with almost calm seas, the Parliamentarians were brought back to the Garibaldi where they protested vehemently for the treatment received, but Admiral Birindelli, with the spirit that had animated him all his life, replied that they had just experienced the best conditions in which the personnel on board the ships lived.

Birindelli's statements sparked strong political reactions and stances at



Torpedoe S.L.C. (Pig)

## "The purpose of life is to create, to do, to give. Action is joy of the spirit"

all levels but eventually led to the publication of a planning document, known as the "Navy White Book", and the Naval Law of 1975 which was the prerequisite not only for a substantial modernization of the fleet, but for the creation of housing for families and for a revision of the meager salaries of the staff. Birindelli was elected Member of Parliament in the VI Legislature, from 1972 to 1976. On December 15, 1973, he retired from the Navy, surrounded by the esteem and sincere affection of the personnel he had always defended with firmness and moral honesty until the last day of service. He had, like all honest people, detractors but his firmness allowed him to go on until the end with his head held high.

Admiral Gino Birindelli died at the Celio military hospital, in Rome, on August 2, 2008 at the age of 97. The funeral took place at the Grazioli Lante barracks in Rome (the then headquarters of the Navy Supreme Command) at the presence of all the highest civil and military authorities. An honor guard of Italian navy seals in working uniform lifted the



coffin and sadly carried it on their shoulders.

"The real, essential, difference between the soldier and other individuals is determined by two basic reasons: he is, and must feel, the man of crisis, that is, the one who must know how to intervene with clarity of ideas when everything falters and everyone risks losing their heads; he is the man who has filled his heart with a great love, that of the Fatherland". These words are taken from Birindelli's book "Vita di Marinaio", now available only in English, titled: "Navy Life. You were to die". Phrases that are not intended to be an exaltation of the figure of the

soldier but underline the mission that he faces in his life amidst a thousand storms, putting his own interests before those of his own Country. It is part of the individual coherence that many had, and have, but which is often not recognized now as then. Today many references have changed, sometimes for the better but more often for the worse. Maturity and respect for the individual are being replaced by the flattening of roles and transgression as an end to itself, rectitude and honesty by cunning, causing the ethical and moral impoverishment of the new generations that certainly does not make us more prepared to face the challenges of the third millennium. Below are few excerpts of the spiritual testament written by Gino Birindelli, a man and a sailor who gave so much to the homeland and did so much for all of us sailors, and that can help us understand the depth of his ethical and moral greatness:

*-Never ask anything from anyone but yourself. Ask your God only and always for the strength to "not ask," but thank Him continually for what you have been able to do.*

*-Man's greatest strength is willpower, the strength that allows us to "tear the stars from the sky", to set "the sky as the only limit to our own abilities and aspirations", the strength that pushes the handicapped to compete in sport, to become self-sufficient through work.*

*-Assist endlessly those who commit themselves with persevering sacrifice to the material and spiritual elevation of themselves and others.*

*-Every act of solidarity that you propose should be, first of all and in good measure, your responsibility.*

*-A larger Family given to us by God. This is the Homeland and to it – as such – we owe absolute dedication and devotion.*

*-Civilization is respect for oneself, for others, for the opinions of others. Culture has the primary purpose of increasing the degree of Civilization of individuals.*

*-Freedom and Peace are – only and always – the product of the hard, tireless, painful commitment of men of goodwill. The human construction on which Peace is based has, as its keystone, Justice; that on which Freedom is based has Courage.*

*-True courage, the one that counts, is Moral Courage. It comes from honesty, from a sense of duty, from a commitment to oneself to protect the human rights of all.*

*-Only where every action is inspired by a lively sense of responsibility can there be order and democracy.*

I don't think it is necessary to comment further on these sentences, written by Gino Birindelli, a protagonist of the sea and of our time.

Reference: an article written by Andrea Mucedola

## CELEBRATION OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE IN NY

A celebration of the Italian National Day of Remembrance, commemorating the martyrs of the Foibe, was held on February 10th, 2025, at the Italian Consulate in New York. The memorial event was hosted by the Italian Consul General in NY, Mr. Fabrizio De Michele. Present to the ceremony were also the Military Advisor to the Italian delegation to the United Nations, the General of the Carabinieri Alfonso Manzo, a delegation of the ANMI Amerigo Vespucci Group of NY, led by the President, Mr. Rocco Munna, and a delegation of the Carabinieri Association led by the President, Mr. Tony Ferri.



## CAPRI, THE PILOT WHO MADE THE MADONNA FLY IS BACK



Almost 56 years have passed since Mount Tiberius was flown over by a US Navy helicopter, a Sikorsky RH53D, from which hung a long cable that held attached a bronze statue, almost 5 meters high and weighing eleven quintals, which was to be placed next to the seventeenth-century church of Santa Maria del Soccorso, which stands on the hill, to replace the previous one that had been mysteriously destroyed on a stormy night. For the people of Capri, fishermen and sailors it was unthinkable to look up and no longer find that sacred icon to which they asked for protection during their trips at sea. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of that event, as reported in an article in the local newspaper, the committee that every year organizes La Piedigrotta Tiberiana, the mid-September festival that celebrates the peasant roots of the island



and the memory of the Roman emperor who lived here for a long time, invited one of the pilots of the US Navy to come to Capri, the Italian-American Livio Capilla, then thirty years old, who was part of the crew of the Sikorsky RH53D, who made the installation of the new statue possible. Livio, who, as you know, is a member of the Banfi group of the NJ, in 1969 was part assigned to the VR-24 logistics squadron, a group based in NAS Sigonella, near Catania, Sicily, home to the heavy transport helicopters used for resupply and support the US Navy Sixth Fleet. Below is Livio's account, in his own words, of those events that he still remembers with a wealth of details and emotion. "The request for the Capri operation came to the US Navy through the embassy in Rome, since at the time there were no other helicopters in Italy capable of carrying out such a transport due to the size and weight that had to be transferred with the exception of an RH53D helicopter based in NAS Sigonella, Sicily. As the only pilot in the squadron who could speak Italian fluently, I was chosen to survey the area and to determine if the lift could be carried out safely. I flew to Naples, then I met in Capri with the members of the committee in charge of the operation, and after confirming that would provide us with the necessary equipment to attach the statue to our helicopter, we established the date on which to carry out the lifting. It was August 26, 1969. My squadron mobilized immediately

because everything had to be ready for the day on which the birth of the Virgin Mary is celebrated, that is, September 8. The helicopter took off from Sigonella, made a stopover in Naples, Capodichino, to refuel, then continued to Capri where it landed in the soccer field at Palazzo a Mare, where the statue, very tall and heavy, had already been set up. I was already there, and after taking command of the crew that had made the transfer of the helicopter to Capri, I took off, lifted the statue of Our Lady from the soccer field and flew toward the concrete base erected for the statue near the mini-chapel on the top of Mount Tiberius. At first we tried to place the statue directly on the pedestal, but the task became impossible due to the lack of proper eye contact with the ground below. We were hovering at 1000 feet with views of the water below but without any visual reference to the pedestal below us. After what seemed to be an



eternity, we decided to place the statue on the ground, adjacent to the pedestal, thus allowing the team of artisans and workers of Capri to execute plan B, consisting of building a scaffolding with which to lift the statue and place it on the pedestal. During the entire flight from the soccer field to the pedestal on Mount Tiberius we were accompanied by the continuous sound of the church bells and the sound of the sirens of the ships moored in the marina, amidst the applause and joy of the faithful who could finally have their Madonna del Soccorso back on the top of the mountain. We flew back to the soccer field and the helicopter left for Sigonella with the original crew while I was invited by the city council to stay on the island to celebrate with the islanders. The people of Capri welcomed me as a hero and affectionately gave me the nickname of "pilot of the Madonna". After 40 years, in August 2019, I was invited back to the island of Capri to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the event, a truly memorable occasion, as well as the welcome of the people of Capri, many of whom had participated in that distant event.

