



Leroy Gill, Jr.
Class of 2019

Leroy Gill graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1958 as a B student. He played basketball as a freshman, sophomore, and junior, and outside of school he worked in maintenance at the Zion Church of God.

In July 1957, the summer before his senior year, Leroy enlisted in the United States Navy (USN) along with his long-time friend Harold Washington. For three years, he served as Third Class Quarter Master receiving his honorable discharge in 1960. He promised his parents he'd graduate from high school while serving his country, and true to his word, he finished his high school credits and graduated in the same year as his classmates in 1958. Following his USN discharge, he had a brief stint as a law enforcement officer and was the first African -American volunteer fireman with the El Medio Fire Department in Oroville.

In June 1964, Leroy joined the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS-PAC, a Federal civilian support agency) as an Able Seaman. Following tours at sea, he enrolled in Crawford Nautical School (CNS) and earned his Third Officer rank in 1966. He continued at sea and simultaneously attended CNS, was promoted to Second Officer in 1969 and Chief Mate in 1972. Between 1974 and mid-1976, Chief Mate Gill served as a damage control instructor at Treasure Island in Oakland, California. In December 1977, he was promoted to Captain serving on the USS Mispillion, making him the second black Captain in the history of the United States Merchant Marines (USMM).

Captain Gill served on a variety of ships, including cargo, passenger, hydrographic survey, special project and fleet auxiliary vessels. He has served as permanent Master of USNS Spica since MSCPAC received the stores ship from Britain's Royal Fleet Auxiliary in 1981 until June 1992. USNS Spica was twice named the "Top Logistic Ship" in the United State Seventh Fleet and was the only recipient of the "Afloat Transportation Award" by the National Defense Transportation Association in 1990.

Captain Gill commanded the USNS Spica during both Desert Storm and Desert Shield earning many well-deserved commendations during his combined 36 years of Navy and Marine service. Twenty-one years were spent in command of several ships including the USNS Navasota, Taluga, Meteor, Hess, Kawishiwi, Mars, Niagara Falls and Spica. One of the most prestigious awards Captain Gill received was the "Superior Civilian Service Award", which he was honored to receive on four occasions while serving in the Merchant Marines.

Other achievements included winning the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation Award, the Admiral Gano Award twice, the "Smart Ship Award" four times, and in 1992, received the "Superior Civilian Service Award."

On Friday, September 21, 2018, Captain Gill was honored with an appreciation luncheon at Feather Falls Casino and Lodge for his continuous support and service to the South Oroville African American Historical Society (SOAAHS).

Captain Gill retired from Military Sea Transportation Service in 1997 with a celebration held at the then famous Spenger's Fish Grotto in Berkeley, CA. The celebration was attended by notable MSTS and United States Navy dignitaries including Admiral Robert Toney, United States Navy (deceased) and member of the Oroville Union High School District Hall of Fame, Class of 2011.

A quote from his best pal from OHS, Harold Washington, (brother of Dave Washington, OUHSD Hall of Fame Class of 2016) writes in his letter of support, *“One of my fondest memories of Leroy is when I decided to join the Navy after graduation in 1957 and he decided he wanted to join also. So he set out to convince his mom to let him join and with his pragmatic negotiation skills, he was successful. So the two of us were off to see and explore the world outside of Oroville.”*

Captain Gill’s roots in Oroville run deep. As an example, for the past 59 years, he continues to come to Oroville to have his automobiles serviced by local agencies. He also continues to serve as chairman of the Legacy Awards Committee of the South Oroville African American Historical Society.

He is a long-standing member of Capital Christian Center Church in Sacramento and makes his home in the North Highlands area with his wife Theresa.