

At Sea – Disembarkation Presentation - Day 69 Dec. 04:

At 7am it was still dark when we got up. Just a week ago we left the early morning sun rise of spring time in the southern hemisphere and now we were rapidly going northward into wintry late morning sunrises.

At 10am there was a meeting for all passengers in the Queen's Lounge for the Disembarkation Presentation. We arrive at the Long Beach passenger terminal tomorrow morning about 7am and it is important that we departing passengers get off the ship quickly so the rooms can be prepared for the new passengers coming aboard later in the day. We all had mixed emotions at this time. It was a great 70 day cruise and we would like for it to continue but at the same time the home scene was tugging at us and we wanted to get on with the trip home. The audience was put in a good mood as stewards served complimentary champagne and orange juice while we waited for the program to start. There was also some entertaining funny video of recognizable Amsterdam staff shown on the big screen on stage.

Cruise Director, Gene Young took the stage, as shown on the right, and started the meeting off by thanking all of us for cruising with Holland America. Then he turned attention to the details of how we should handle our luggage transfer and get ourselves off the ship tomorrow. When those formalities were over, Gene spoke for all of us in thanking the officers and service staff of the Amsterdam for all they have done for us during the cruise. Here again some funny video was shown featuring a few of the staff with high profile jobs. We have been to several of these disembarkation presentations and this was the first one we had experienced with such a light hearted and effective use of television. We wondered if this



might be an innovation of Gene who was just finishing his first tour of duty as a Cruise Director. We thought that the video of the crew in various scenes was going to take the place of the usual parade of the stewards and clerical staff onto the stage. We were clearly mistaken as Gene called them down on stage from the balcony.

As the band played a rousing tune stewards from the different sections of the Hotel Department filed onto the stage in a seemingly endless stream of uniformed stewards, clerical staff and officers. A significant fraction of the 600 crew members were assembled in front of the audience as Gene ushered in each new group as shown below. We caught a glimpse of several stewards we knew. In talking about the hard work done



for us by the crew Gene gave us some information about the gratuities that we hadn't known before. We were aware of and support a Holland America policy of automatically adding an \$11 per day charge to each passenger's bill as a gratuity to be distributed to the stewards. People are free to stop the charge or reduce it by submitting the proper signed form to the front office. We did not know how the gratuity money was distributed. Gene informed us today that 70% of the money goes to the service staff that has direct contact with the passengers. The remaining 30% goes to crew members who work behind the scenes in the kitchen, clerical and engineering functions.

When everyone was in place and settled down, Gene introduced Captain Eversen to the audience and he gave a short farewell speech as shown on the right. Similar to what Lucia had done at the CSI farewell party; Captain Eversen ended his remarks with "Tot Siens" which is Dutch for "until we meet again".



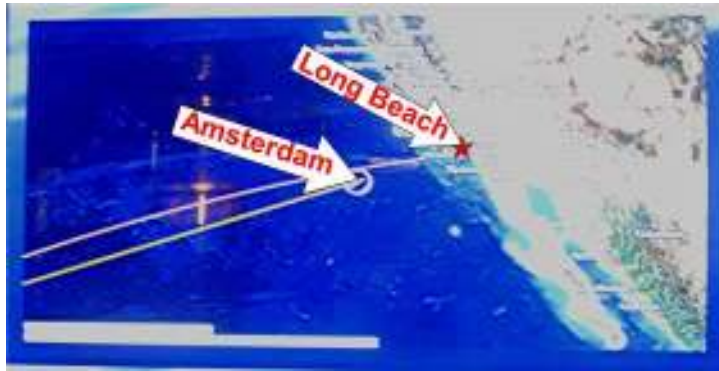
When the Captain had finished speaking, Gene introduced Alexa Wildish, the lead female singer of the Amsterdam Singers and Dancers troupe, as shown on the right. We were glad to see Alexa on stage. She had hosted our dinner table near the beginning of the cruise on October 10 (Day 13).



Alexa then joined with the other members of the cast, as shown below, and led everyone in singing the song, "Love in Any Language", which gives the message that people all around the world have similar hopes, dreams, and capability to love each other. It makes a great theme song for an international voyage like the one we just finished. As the song ended some air cannons went off and showered the audience with confetti and brightly colored streamers. This ended the disembarkation presentation for our 70 Day 2011 Grand Asia and Australia Voyage.



At noon the TV representation of the Amsterdam's position indicated we were drawing close to the US mainland, as shown on the right. We had gone about 2000 miles since leaving Honolulu and the Amsterdam was about 290 miles west of the Long Beach Port where we will be docking tomorrow. The air temperature on deck was about 60°F with the breeze a little too strong for comfort.



In the afternoon we attended a presentation by Astronaut Tom Jones. He told the story of how the 365th Fighter Group in World War II used their P-47 Thunderbolt fighter planes to provide close air support to ground troops advancing across France and Germany after D-Day. Tom showed slides, like the one on the right of the Hellhawks emblem used to identify their members and facilities.

Tom's comments were taken from the book, "Hellhawks! The Untold Story of the American Fliers who savaged Hitler's Wehrmacht" (2008) that he co-authored with Robert Dorr.



Tom selected several of the pilots and told their stories of heroism during the fighting that took place from June 1944 until the end of WWII in Europe. The P47 was a rugged plane that could deliver withering shower of bullets and bombs and survive damage due to enemy fire or contact with the ground. He showed one example of how the pilot had flown so close to the ground in support of our troops that his propeller was damaged but still managed to get back to the air base. The P-47 and pilots of the 365th were particularly effective in destroying the German tanks and winning the Battle of the Bulge.

In the evening we finished packing our stuff into six pieces of luggage. Five of the bags would be taken by Federal Express from the ship directly to our home. One of the bags would be taken to the Cruise Terminal Building in Long Beach where we would retrieve it and take it home on the plane with us. After some tugging and pressing we got all the bags closed. We placed them in the hallway for pickup by the stewards, as shown on the right.



We want to give a special note of thanks to the team of folks who work in the Photography Department on the Amsterdam. We had been introduced to the manager, Lisa, and other members of the group in a “Good Morning Amsterdam” TV show produced on November 17. In getting ready to write the blog entry for today, Orlin suffered a senior moment and formatted the digital camera memory card before he downloaded the pictures to the computer.

The pictures appeared to be deleted by the formatting step so we had no pictures of the day’s events. Before giving up we checked with the Photography Department and they were able to retrieve the pictures which had appeared to be lost forever. Since our blog depends so heavily on pictures we were very happy with what they could do for us.

On the subject of the blog we have been surprised at how little time it has taken to upload the blog entry for each day. Typically the entries were about 1MB in size and after all the keying steps only 6 or 7 minutes of Internet time was used during uploading. We had thought it would be more like 10 or 12 minutes per entry so we purchased 1000 minutes at the start of the cruise and the Amsterdam gave us 100 “free” minutes making a total of 1100 minutes in our account. It turns out that we could have completed the cruise blogging effort by purchasing only 600 minutes of Internet time. However, it would have been a close call and the minutes get more expensive when purchased in small blocks. We have been surfing the Internet the last few days and burning Internet minutes but we will probably leave about 300 minutes unused in our account when we check out tomorrow. One of the perks we and others constantly recommend to Holland America is a program where returning customers could get free Internet time. So far there is not movement in that direction.

With the luggage and blog issues settled for the day we settled in for our last night of the cruise on board the Amsterdam. Tomorrow we expect to arrive at the Cruise Terminal in Long Beach, California about 7am.