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Captain's Log

"As we begin the transition of REC Houston this month, we are nearing the end of the first stage of our efforts to improve the Mariner Licensing and Documentation program. What a difference a year makes! The flywheel of change and improvement is starting to spin faster and faster as we ramp up our processes at the RECs and NMC, producing a record number of credentials in July.

Looking ahead, we will soon begin the "standardization and centralization" and the "modernization" stages of our improvement efforts. During the standardization and centralization stage, we will focus our energies on improving our standard operating procedures and streamlining the centralized operations.

(See Captain's Log on Page 6)

NMC Celebrates Coast Guard Day

During this birthday bash, children, and a few adults, gobbled down tufts of cotton candy and cupfuls of snow cones, pounced around a moon bounce and admired in awe the tricks of a colorful clown while their faces were being painted. Still, there was much more to this party.

Those hoping for a sunny day at the park got what they bargained for Monday as more than 600 family members, friends and youngsters celebrated the Coast Guard's 218th Birthday at Poor House Farm Park.

Known as the fifth armed service, the Coast Guard came into existence August 4, 1790, when Congress authorized the construction of ten vessels to enforce

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U.S. Representative Shelley Moore Capito Visits NMC

As a U.S. Congresswoman from West Virginia, she knows that it takes a special person to serve in the U.S. Merchant Marine. Indeed, she also recognizes the importance of the Coast Guard's role in licensing and documenting men and women mariners.

U.S. Representative Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) visited the National Maritime Center following the facility's June 26 dedication ceremony to see firsthand what the Coast Guard's centralization of the mariner credentialing process is all about.

See Capito Visits NMC, Page 4

Credentialing **at** the **NMC**

NMC Performance Update

For the first time in its history, the National Maritime Center has issued more than 5,000 mariner credentials during the month of July, surpassing the previous mark of 3,480 set in June.

“Congratulations to all who work at the NMC,” said NMC Deputy Director Ike Eisentrout. “Everyone here has a purpose that contributes to getting our services and products to the customer. We are scaling the MLD mountain one credential and service at a time.”

Breaking Down the Numbers

Most Credentials Issued in a day – 463 on July 17
Most Credentials Printed in a day – 359 on July 17
Most Credentials Being Evaluated in a day – 525 on July 22
Most Credentials Being Evaluated in a month – 7,972 in July
Total number of Denials in July – 125



National Maritime Center Unit Photo – July 2008

New Look to the NMC Web site

On July 31, 2008, the NMC web site transitioned onto the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) template pages. This change will only affect the site background look and feel, as well as the URL. The site menu and content location remain the same as the old STCW site. The new URL is: <http://www.uscg.mil/nmc/>.

What are the Mariners saying?

• **Jim Hairston, July 8, 2008** – I'm enclosing this letter because the survey does not do justice to your staff. When I first started my license process, it was a real nightmare. As I got deeper into the process and started dealing with the senior military at the REC in Baltimore and the civilians at the NMC, it became easier. I've had dealings with two NMC personnel and it seemed like they could not do enough for me within the limits of the regulations. I am really impressed with your staff at the NMC and the REC in Baltimore.

• **Betty Sherman, July 14, 2008** – The only reason that I needed to visit the Long Beach office was to have my fingerprints taken. I drove two and a half hours both ways for a 10-minute procedure. It would be extremely convenient to have a San Diego office with the same capabilities as Long Beach.

• **Paul D. Poirier, June 16, 2008** – The service at the NMC was much appreciated. My evaluator was most helpful once she finally got my file. Just to let you know, my file was first sent to Toledo back in September 2007. Nine months later, for whatever reason, I finally received my credentials. I think the timeframe on renewals definitely needs to be improved. Only due to the fact that my ship was in the ship yard longer than expected was I able to keep my job. It really came down to the wire. We as mariners rely solely on the NMC at this point to provide our renewals to us ASAP so that we can stay gainfully employed. I would urge the NMC to please move at a more rapid pace, especially with renewals as again, our livelihoods depend on it.

• **Stephen F. Heare, July 15, 2008** – Ms. Monica McCormack of your staff was extremely helpful in processing my application. She went out of her way to expedite my medical review and provided me with up-to-date information on the status. I was very impressed with her excellent customer service attitude!

• **Robert J. Grenda, July 1, 2008** – Ms. Erin Darrough was my contact person; usually by phone or fax. She was professional and represented the U.S.C.G. in a stately, organized and positive manner. Ms Darrough does a great job being part of your team! I appreciate all the help and communication I've received both from her and others. Thank you. Keep up the good work!

• **Gary Pierce, July 10, 2008** – I went on the website and got the information and checklist for renewal. The Seattle office was very good and handled my application very professionally. I am very pleased with the service of both the regional offices and the National Maritime Center. Thank you.

• **Richard J. Burnett, July 6, 2008** – All the personnel at the local REC in St. Louis were very helpful and professional. The time it took to actually receive the license was very long—from April 21, 2008 to June 30, 2008. Thank you and have a great day!

• **Edward S. Connolly, July 13, 2008** – Keep up the good work! I thank all the men and women for serving in the U.S. Coast Guard.



Coast Guard Day

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to enforce tariff and trade laws, prevent smuggling and protect the collection of the Federal Reserve.

In 1915, Congress merged the Revenue Cutter Service and the life-saving service to form the reorganization of today's Coast Guard. During its long history, the Coast Guard has filled many roles, from saving lives at sea to protecting the country's maritime environment and enforcing maritime laws. In addition, members of the Coast Guard have fought in every major conflict including Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The combined unit celebration, catered by Famous Dave's BBQ in Hagerstown, Md., brought together members of the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC), the Operations Service Center (OSC) and the National Vessel Documentation Center.

CAPT David Stalfort, Commanding Officer at the NMC, said compared to the years past, this birthday ranks among the best.

"Last year, we hardly had anybody at the unit. What a tremendous turnout today," said CAPT Stalfort, who brought his 13-year-old son, Connor. "People have worked hard. This is a well-deserved break."

Those who attended joined in the fun with games of volleyball, football and soccer, even a little karaoke, while others threw down dollar bills for a chance to drench their favorite person in the dunk tank. Some folks simply sat back and soaked in the summer breeze, took a nap or walked the park grounds.

Wendy Rhoads, a branch chief at the NVDC, has worked with the Coast Guard since 1979. "It's really special when you've been part of something that's been around for 218 years," Rhoads said. "It's a time when you get to enjoy being with people you work with, but also celebrate the Coast Guard. We had a wonderful time!"

The festivities also included a static display of emergency rescue equipment, law enforcement representatives from Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), Bubble and Mr. B Clowns and McGruff the crime dog. Then, of course, there was the balloon toss, sack races, finger printing, the fishing tournament, a dessert contest and "On the Spot" DJ Music & Karaoke.

By Michael C. Lewis

Capito Visits NMC

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"I was very impressed with the facility and the worker-friendly environment. It obviously had a lot of good planning," said Capito, who serves on the Transportation Committee. "I had no idea of the scope of all that goes into the various types of licensing and the things that go into mariner certification."



Shelley Moore Capito

Following her tour, Capito said the U.S. Coast Guard's role in licensing and credentialing the thousands of merchant mariners is "well placed."

"There is a well developed system with experience. We've streamlined the credentialing process, which, in the end, will be a cost savings measure," she said. "If you have this process consolidated, you can come up with more safety provisions and more thorough and consistent licensing. That means safer travel on our nation's waterways and better economics for the businesses involved."

Since the attacks of 9/11, the Coast Guard has adapted to meet the growing needs of the nation and the challenges surrounding new and evolving threats of the 21st century, Capito said.

"There's been a push since 9/11 to decentralize Washington, D.C. a little. The Eastern Panhandle has been part of that," she said.

Personally, Capito said she considers the job of a merchant mariner to be tough, but necessary.

"It can obviously be very solitary. It takes a special person to do it. With the professionalism in place, I hope we can encourage more and more young people to go into this field," she said. "This is one of those occupations that will remain necessary. You can't put a robot on these boats."

By Michael C. Lewis

Coast Guard Day Unit Pictures – NMC, OSC and NVDC



Watch me! I can bounce a water balloon off my forehead.



This is better than a mosh pit!



There's nothing like a cool dip on a hot day.



It's another day on the job for CG CAPT David Stalfort.



Hey Ma! Get a load of me, styling in a potato sack.



Folks, there's a time to work and a time to play. We're young enough to know the difference.

Photos by Michael C. Lewis

REC Miami, Houston Transition to NMC

On June 30, the Regional Examination Center (REC) located in Miami, FL, began its transition to become a field unit of the National Maritime Center (NMC) in Martinsburg, WV. Then on August 5, REC Houston kicked off its transition to the NMC. Both REC Houston and REC Miami will start operating as storefront operations where the staff will help the mariner ensure their application is ready for evaluation. Mariners still will need to verify their identity, get fingerprinted and take their tests at the REC. Once ready, the REC will send the application to the NMC for evaluation. The NMC will conduct an entire evaluation, including security, professional qualification and medical. Once the applicant is found to be fully qualified, the credential will be printed and issued by the NMC.

REC Miami and REC Houston will be joining 14 other RECs, which have already transitioned: REC Anchorage, AK; REC Baltimore, MD; REC Juneau, AK; REC New Orleans, LA; REC Toledo, OH; REC St. Louis, MO; REC Memphis, TN; REC Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA; REC Seattle, WA; REC San Francisco, CA; REC New York, NY; REC Portland, OR; REC Charleston, SC; and REC Honolulu, HI. By the end of the calendar year, all 17 RECs will have transitioned into NMC field units.

The future role of the transitioned RECs will be primarily that of a mariner advocate. As the "face" of the Coast Guard to the mariner, it is essential that the REC help the mariner complete the application and ensure it is ready to be evaluated before forwarding the application to the NMC for evaluation.

The goal of the restructuring and centralization effort is to improve customer service, decrease credential processing time and improve the consistency of our products. In the future, it is envisioned that credentials will be issued faster and the level of customer service will exceed the mariner's expectations.

If you have any questions regarding the transition process, please contact your local REC or see the "REC Transition Guide" on our web site at <http://uscg.mil/hq/cg5/nmc>. For more information on other improvements we're making to Mariner Licensing and Documentation, check out the NMC web site or go to <http://homeport.uscg.mil> and select Merchant Mariners under the list of Missions. We thank you for your patience as we continue to centralize operations.

Sincerely,
David C. Stalfort
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard

Captain's Log

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In the modernization stage we will incorporate technology into our operations to improve our capabilities. Later this month, the NMC senior staff will spend a few days at an offsite where we will develop a multi-year strategic plan, charting a course to our vision of building the mariner credentialing version of Intuit, Inc.'s Turbo Tax.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the REC/NMC workplace climate assessment. Your response and direct feedback is very important to building and maintaining a great working

environment. Summaries of the survey results have been distributed to each of the divisions and we will continue to seek feedback.

Finally, Bravo Zulu to all of you that helped make Coast Guard Day 2008 a roaring success."

David C. Stalfort
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Commanding Officer
U. S. Coast Guard
National Maritime Center

“So what does it take to get a Coast Guard document?”

Hundreds of anxious mariners ask that question daily at training schools, Coast Guard offices, employment agencies, personnel departments, and union halls across the country. Each of the prospective applicants will probably get dozens of different answers—many of them wrong—before their quest for a Coast Guard document succeeds (or simply ends).

In this issue of *The Wave*, we start a series of articles to answer the common questions mariners have about qualification requirements and procedures. The material is drawn from the book, *U.S. Coast Guard Licenses and Certificates – How to Qualify, Apply, and Prepare* by Greg Szczurek. As the manager of Curriculum Development at Houston Marine Training Services, Mr. Szczurek has more than 30 years of experience in helping mariners meet their career goals. Information on the book is available on the web at www.USCG-licenses.com.

The answer to the question, “What does it take to get a Coast Guard document?” begins with an overview of the basic qualification standards, which range from the minimum age you must be to the maximum time an application is valid. In future issues we will take you deep down into the weeds of the rules. Before we start fighting through the undergrowth, though, let’s take a look at some of the forest:

Minimum Age

The first step toward obtaining a Coast Guard document is to reach the minimum age specified for the credential. In the case of the entry level Merchant Mariner Document, this can be as early as age 16, provided you have parental consent. Some Mate licenses are available at age 18 but most advanced tickets require you to be 21.

Sea Time

Meeting the age requirement is not usually an issue because you will probably reach the ripe old age required while obtaining the sea service specified for a document. Although ratings like Able Seaman or Qualified Member of the Engine Department can

be obtained after serving for a matter of months, most licenses require several years of sea time. And that is *sea time*, not just calendar time of employment for a boat company or shipping firm.

Qualifying for a license with a sea service requirement of 24 months, for example, will take you four calendar years if you work a “half-on, half-off” schedule. And you may not even get credit for all of your onboard time if the vessel spends most of its time at the dock or in a shipyard. Time can be accelerated for some licenses, however, if you work 12-hour days and are eligible to claim “time and a half” credit for each day.

Sometimes time is not enough. If it’s not the right type of service or on a specified size of vessel you might as well have stayed ashore. The area of operation (inland vs. offshore) can also affect how much of your time is counted toward a document.

You can go back to the time water was invented (or at least since you were 16 years old) to count your experience, but you must also have a minimum amount of recent experience. Time on your own vessel can be counted for some licenses, as can service in the military or on foreign flag vessels.

If it sounds like counting your sea time is an important but complicated proposition, you’re right. That’s why we’ll take a long, close look at the issues involving sea service in future issues.

Citizenship

U.S. citizenship, either native born or naturalized, is a bottom-line requirement for every license except for Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessels. You can get rating certificates such as Able Seaman, Lifeboatman, or Qualified Member of



Greg Szczurek

the Engine Department as a foreign national, but you will have to show legal entry into the country and related documentation. In upcoming issues we will list the forms of documentation acceptable to the Coast Guard for proving citizenship.

STCW

To many mariners STCW is a four-letter word because of the complexity, expense, and time it has added to the qualification process. The acronym stands for "Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping," an international convention that the U.S. and other maritime nations around the world have adopted as a basis for setting qualification requirements. Designed to insure that every nation uses the same minimum standards for issuing documents to their seafarers, it requires most mariners to go through extensive approved education and training programs and complete numerous onboard assessments on their way up the career ladder.

You'll have to deal with STCW if you have plans for a document authorizing service on vessels over 200 GRT on offshore waters. If you are going to work on vessels smaller than that or plan to operate strictly inshore, breathe a sigh of relief.

Training

Many credentials require completion of special training courses. Programs range from a 1-day First Aid and CPR course to ten-day sessions on the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System or celestial navigation. Multiple courses are required for some of the higher licenses, adding up to almost 100 days of classroom instruction.

The courses must be Coast Guard approved, so you will need to check carefully with the training

provider to make sure the money you are spending will get you the certificate of completion you need.

Proficiency Demonstrations

Mariners struggling with the preparation for Coast Guard written exams often look up from their books to ask the plaintive question, "Why can't the Coast Guard just come down to my boat and see that I know how to run it?" At the same time, licensed Masters struggling with a less than competent Mate often rub the sleep from their eyes and ask, "What can we do about all these 'paper Mates' who can pass the test but don't know how to run a boat?" Be careful what you ask for...

Many documents now require that applicants demonstrate their proficiency over a wide range of activities before they are even allowed to struggle

through the written exam. To get a deck officer license for offshore vessels of 500 GRT or more you must be assessed in more than 50 different tasks. Candidates for towing vessel licenses have a comparable

competency check-list that must be turned in with their application paperwork. Many approved courses require students to be evaluated through hands-on exercises in extinguishing fires, donning lifejackets, and righting overturned life rafts.

Although it's reasonable to require that a person be capable of doing his job *before* he is authorized and paid to do it, the assessment process is, at best, cumbersome and time consuming. It can be exercise in futility if applicants can't find either the right conditions to perform the competency demonstrations or a qualified assessor willing to evaluate them. Even worse, it can be pointless if the assessments are "pencil whipped" by individuals who don't want to make the effort to do them properly.



License holders who are doing the assessments have their own concerns. Many are worried about the potential liability they might incur if a mariner they have checked off for proficiency in a given task goes on hurt himself or someone else while performing that activity at a future time. In a future issue we'll lay out a road map for navigating the assessment maze to help nervous assessors minimize their exposure while they are developing the skills of their crewmembers.

A Clean Bill of Health

Applicants for Coast Guard documents must pass a physical examination covering visual acuity, color vision, and general health conditions. The specific standards vary depending on the document, and when it comes to evaluating situations like diabetes, hypertension, loss of a limb, or other medical conditions that may keep a person from responding capably, the review process can be lengthy. The physical exam will include a drug screen unless you already participate in an approved random drug test program.

Clean Living

When you apply for a document the Coast Guard will conduct a criminal record review, which will include a check with the National Driver Register for any offenses involving drugs or alcohol or serious traffic violations. If you've done something you aren't particularly proud of, be sure to note it at the time of your application. The Coast Guard has a process that gives people a second chance if they have paid their dues and show evidence of rehabilitation, but they aren't very forgiving of applicants who try to hide something in their past.

Come clean with everything, including those situations where you have been told by your lawyer or even the judge that the record is sealed or the conviction is expunged. The law regarding your statement of criminal convictions requires you to report that it happened, regardless of how it was resolved.

Application Paperwork

Coast Guard statistics show that most delays in the licensing process are due to mistakes or oversights in the preparation of the application

paperwork. Back in the day, an application consisted of just four pieces of paper: application form, physical exam report, proof of citizenship, and letter of service. An applicant's file may now bulge with certificates of completion from training schools, a stack of proficiency demonstrations, background check information, receipts for payment of user fees, and documentation of a medical complication, in addition to the standard forms. In future articles we'll discuss ways to help you complete the all-important paper chase.

Examination Day

This day may not even come for many people, and not because they have failed to meet the qualification requirements. You can obtain many licenses and certificates by completing an approved course instead of taking a test at a Coast Guard Regional Examination Center. This doesn't mean that you won't have to sweat a test, though, because the end of course exam given by the training provider has to be equivalent in scope and difficulty to the Coast Guard's. But the fact that you don't have the pressure of proving your knowledge in a strange environment gives most people a better chance of succeeding.

Timing Is Everything

The qualification and application process is riddled with potential deal-killers involving deadlines. A clock starts ticking the moment you turn in your application because it's only valid for a year. You must complete your exam in a 90 day period or you will have to start over again. Some certificates of completion from approved schools have only a year's shelf life. If you don't have a license, these time windows may sound generous. If you've slogged through the bureaucracy and found a deadline looming because of a last minute delay, you know that you can't start early enough to get your paperwork in order.

So what does it take to get a Coast Guard document?

In addition to all of the above, it takes patience, persistence, and just plain hard work. Sounds a lot like life, doesn't it? In the next issue of *The Wave*: "Sea Service—How to get the most out of your time (and off) the water. By Greg Szczurek

A GOLDEN MARINER

ENGINEERING A LEGACY

Imagine flying to work, sleeping under the Northern Lights and waking up to the sight of humpback whales breaching amid a backdrop of glaciers and snow-capped mountains.

For the last 15 years, Katie Haven has been doing just that, and loving every minute of it. Haven, who is the first female to be named chief engineer on the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS), received her 100 ton Masters License at the age of 18 and has been working on boats ever since.

"I remember thinking what am I getting myself into. It was quite an experience, quite a feeling of responsibility," said Haven who has been with the AMHS since 1993. The AMHS transports people, goods and vehicles among 32 Alaskan communities, Canada and the "Lower 48" states.

As chief engineer aboard the Alaskan ferry M/V Kennicott, Haven travels roughly 1,000 miles of coastline round trip every two weeks. The cruise—from Prince Rupert in British Columbia, up the Alaskan Panhandle to Ketchikan and Juneau, across to Yakutat, on to Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island, and then to the Kenai Peninsula, just south of Anchorage—affords scenic vistas and challenging seas, she said.

"It offers a nice variety of things to keep me busy and challenged. It also offers time to reflect and glance out the window. The scenery, looking at the glaciers, the whales, the eagles, the otters, and the Northern Lights, is beautiful! Sometimes the humpbacks breach and splash straight out of the water," she said. "The inside passage is the most incredible thing. I never get tired of it. It's always changing."

Haven, 47, began her nautical career as a 13-year-old Sea Scout growing up on Puget Sound in Seattle, Wash. In Sea Scouts, a coed program for young adults, she discovered her love of sailing, and Alaska.

"We learned everything about boats and took a cruise up to Alaska, to Ketchikan. I was 14 years old and it was amazing. It was a really good way to spend my teenage years, to stay out of trouble and do fun things with a group of kids."



During her first stint as a young captain, she commanded a passenger charter in the Sound. During one voyage, a man announced after boarding that he would not ride the vessel if she was the captain.

When he found out she was indeed the captain, "he choose to stay on, and at the end of our trip, he complimented me and said I did a good job," said Haven, who graduated from the California Maritime Academy in 1986.

Haven recently received her third issued license as a chief engineer on vessels of unlimited horsepower. She considers

herself to be part of the "second wave" of modern day women working on the water.

"The women who broke through the ice in the maritime industry came 10 years before me. Where I was working, they had seen women for awhile," she said. "I had enough confidence and I kept my sense of humor. I relied on my abilities and hoped people realized that if you work with someone long enough you become part of a team."

Being named the first female chief engineer in the AMHS was an accomplishment for her personally,

though she said she never thought of her job in terms of gender.

"My dream was if I could get a job as a third engineer on a ship, I thought I would be the happiest person in the world," she said. "Working on boats satisfied so many things for me. I was never really ambitious. A lot of it was timing, jobs that were available and the need for mariners. I was in the right place at the right time for that to happen. When I did find myself with a chief's job, I thought wow, how did that happen."



Haven holds the propeller on an Alaskan ferry.

As for advice to other women who wish to follow the mariner career path, Haven said, "Just keep your cool; keep your sense of humor. Do the best you can and don't be afraid to ask questions."

She also suggested women get involved in the Women's Maritime Association, an organization established 25 years ago by a group of volunteer

women who worked in the maritime industry. Learn more about it at www.womensmaritimeassoc.com.

"It's a great resource for men and women. There are quite a few of us who have a couple decades of experience who are willing to help the young women coming in, with support, guidance, questions or other issues," she said.

Haven shared one experience while she was serving aboard a car carrier during wintertime in the North Atlantic Ocean when a storm struck in the middle of the night.

"I woke up sliding out of my bunk feet first onto the deck. The ship keeled over so far that I was standing up on my side when I landed," she said. "Nobody knows why the ship stayed upright. Lights stayed on and the engine kept running. We rolled enough to capsize the ship."

The damage to the cargo was extensive on the car decks as much of the equipment came loose, Haven said.

"It was quite a big disaster," she said. "Nobody was hurt though and that was pretty miraculous. I consider it to be part of the adventure of being at sea. I am grateful to have survived it. Anyone who has been at sea a long time has stories like that."

When Haven's not on the water, she takes a four-hour hop home to north central Washington. There, she hopes to accomplish her next goal—retirement. "I want to find a nice piece of property in a rural community where I can continue to volunteer my time."

By Michael C. Lewis

Photos courtesy of the AMHS and Katie Haven

For suggestions on newsletter articles or to submit material as a guest columnist, please contact Michael C. Lewis, The Wave Editor-in-Chief, at (304) 433-3481 or by e-mail at Michael.C.Lewis@uscg.mil.

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