



THE WAVE

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U.S.C.G. NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER NEWSLETTER

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Captain's Log

As this edition of The Wave goes to publication, REC Boston is starting their transition to centralized operations. REC Boston, which is the last REC to transition to centralized operations, will begin sending new credential applications to the NMC for processing beginning on September 8, 2008.

On August 25, 2008, Rear Admiral Sally Bryce-O'Hara, Deputy Commandant for Operations at Coast Guard Headquarters visited the NMC to review our operations and tour our facility. RADM Bryce-O'Hara said she was very impressed with the business process improvements that are taking place at the RECs and NMC.

She was equally impressed with our extensive use of performance metrics and process data in streamlining credential production. Keep up the great work!

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NMC Aids in Identification of 1948 Plane Crash Victim

MARTINSBURG — The chill of winter swept across the East China Sea as the tanker *SS Sunset* steamed into the port of Shanghai, China, on March 11, 1948, capping a three month voyage across eight of the world's "seven seas."

Settling in for the journey home that same day, Joseph Francis Van Zandt, and 23 of his shipmates, boarded Northwest Airlines charter Flight 4422, destined for New York's La Guardia Airport.

The lights of the aurora borealis were said to be unusually bright on the night of March 12, 1948, as they danced across the sky, clouding the pilot's vision as he cruised at 11,000-feet.

That evening, approximately one hour after refueling in Anchorage, Ak., the ill-fated plane slammed into Mount Sanford, a 16,237-foot glacier in Alaska's Wrangell Mountains, killing 24 mariners and an air crew of six.

A search and rescue operation located the wreckage the next morning, but realized that if, miraculously, anyone had survived
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Joseph Francis Van Zandt

Crash Victim

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the crash, he would not have survived the night in the 35-degrees-below-zero temperature, as noted in Bruce Felknor's, "Tragic Voyage of the SS Sunset Crew."

Because the wreckage was inaccessible, the bodies were never recovered and the debris was quickly buried in the churning ice of the glacier.

At the time, the crash was the worst in Alaskan history. Once rumors began to fly that the DC-4 was carrying Chiang Kai-shek's gold out of China, and even secret documents, it became one of the most notorious.

Fifty years later, after four years of searching, two commercial airline pilots – Maj. Kevin A. McGregor, USAFR (Ret), and Lt. Col. Marc Millican USAFR (Ret) – discovered the wreckage. There, amidst the debris, the two friends and fellow Air Force reservists found thrust through the snow and ice a frozen human forearm and hand.

In 2002, it was deemed impossible to identify the mummified left arm and hand through DNA or fingerprint. Nevertheless, a team of world-renowned DNA analysts, fingerprint experts and forensic genealogists spent nine years of sleuthing before they were able to identify the remains – with some help from the U.S. Coast Guard – as belonging



Kevin McGregor (left) and Mark Millican videotape the nose strut cylinder.

to Van Zandt, a 36-year-old mariner from Roanoke, Va.

Using Van Zandt's archived personnel records at the National Maritime Center (NMC), a positive fingerprint match was made in August against the recovered hand.

"This is the oldest post-mortem identification using fingerprints," McGregor said. "The National Maritime Center did a heck of a job. We worked with several of your staff members, over the past several years, in retrieving fingerprint records of the 24 merchant mariners lost in the crash of NW Flight 4422. You guys' help was absolutely critical in this thing."

Jon Furukawa, who previously served as the Records Management Branch Chief at the NMC, received McGregor's request for the mariners' records and forwarded it to Records Management Specialist Senobie Starling.

Starling recalled spending "half the day" with McGregor's team while they took pictures of each individual fingerprint on the fingerprint card.

"I think this is neat. They found a hand without a (readable) fingerprint and were able to identify who it belonged to 60 years after the crash," she said. "That's amazing."

Unveiling the Mystery of NW4422

As pilots, both McGregor and Millican heard plenty of rumors surrounding flight 4422. In 1997, when the two discovered what they believed to be wreckage from the crash site, they decided to take a different approach to the project.

"We decided not to believe any of the rumors. We learned there were rumors even among the families that this plane never crashed at all. The families really had no idea what had happened," McGregor said. "We didn't go up there looking for gold. We wanted to solve all the mysteries."

The two began gathering information on the crash in the late-1980s. McGregor traveled the world interviewing hundreds of people who might have known anything about

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Crash Victim

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NW4422, whether they witnessed it, were related to one of the mariners, or in the area during the mass of treasure hunting expeditions that followed the crash.

“There is a lattice of things that came from different places of the world to make this project complete,” he said. “The lines that go off this project are just amazing.”

Ask McGregor and he'll tell you the most difficult part of the research project was learning about the *SS Sunset* and the mariners who sailed on it.

“This was an oil tanker taken all the way from Philadelphia to Shanghai. Some people got off; some got on. All we know is who got on the plane in China,” he said. The plane was chartered through Caltex, also known as the California Texaco Petroleum Co., which owned and operated the *SS Sunset*.

Through his research, McGregor discovered that one crash victim, merchant mariner Howard Davidson, was part of the World War II invasions of Normandy, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, “yet he perished on a charter plane.”

Another *Sunset* crew member, Robert Delaney, had two ships torpedoed out from underneath him during WWII.

“Part of our goals with this project has been to educate people about the U.S. Merchant Marine. It's a very important part of our country, our history and our military,” he said. “Merchant mariners need to be reminded that what they do is very important.”

After 20 years of research, and an estimated \$250,000 spent out of their own pockets, both pilots believe they have solved the mysteries surrounding the crash, including whether there was any gold aboard the plane.

“We think most of the treasure rumors are not true. Neither Mark nor I believe that the gold belonged to Chiang Kai-shek,” he said. “The other rumor was that the mariners were paid in China with gold. There was no payroll in gold on the plane.”

If gold was on the plane, McGregor alluded to the possibility that someone from an earlier expedition could have walked away with it.

In a 2005 RNPA Contrails article written by Gary Ferguson and entitled, “The Puzzle of NW4422 Solved?” Ferguson describes one person, who in 1999, was telling several other people that there was a “very specific amount of gold aboard the plane:

“nine wooden kegs, each containing three bars.”

Ferguson wrote, “Each of those bars were purported to weigh 82-pounds. Here's the math: $9 \times 3 \times 82 = 2,214$ pounds. Assuming \$450 an ounce, that's a hefty \$16 million!”

Revealing the Identity of Passenger #29

Twenty eight of the 30 fingerprints had been compared to the remains of the hand before a match was made to #29 – Van Zandt's.

Initially, attempts to compare the fingerprints to the remains of the hand were unsuccessful. Several years later, however, Michael Grimm Sr., a former fingerprint expert for the federal Bureau of Investigation, developed a new technique that involves hydrating and restoring human flesh in such a way that a fingerprint could be extracted.

Besides the fingerprints, Van Zandt's identification has been confirmed using nuclear and mitochondrial DNA (passed down by the mothers).

In 2006, Dr. Odile Loreille, a research scientist at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory in Rockville, Md., was asked to assist McGregor's team in identifying the remains.

Loreille, whose expertise is extracting DNA from embalmed remains, has worked on such high profile cases as Mozart and Russia's Royal Romanov Family; the remains of the Romanov's have been successfully identified.

For this project, Loreille developed new methods that allowed her to read the hand and arm's mitochondrial DNA sequence, which was matched against Francis Van Zandt's mother's, mother's, mother's sister's daughter's daughter's son in Ireland, Mr. Maurice Conway.

“Identifying this was a true adventure. We talked with a lot of relatives. It was suspense until the end,” Loreille said during a recent phone interview. “This is one of the most challenging projects I've been a part of, but also one of the most rewarding.”

The samples extracted from the DNA, she said, will contribute to her work in identifying the embalmed remains of soldiers from the Korean War, buried in the Punch-bowl Cemetery in Hawaii.

Undoubtedly, McGregor describes the identification as a “good thing for the country.”

“When you open up the newspaper on any given day, you read one bad thing after another,” he said.

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Credentialing at the NMC

AMO Union Representative Talks Credentialing

Centralization of the mariner credentialing program at the NMC represents the greatest change in Coast Guard licensing in 43 years, said a representative from the largest maritime union for licensed officers.

Mike Murphy, Director of Government Affairs for the American Maritime Officers Union, weighed in on centralization, credentialing and other issues that affect the professional life of a mariner during a Thursday All Hands meeting at the NMC.

"This whole concept of centralization was pretty scary for a lot of us, let me tell you. It was something that, over the years, was proposed a number of times, but just never got off the ground," he said. "I have to admit that, personally, I was a little worried about it."



Murphy

Over the years, Murphy said he, like other mariners, has gotten comfortable working with the RECs. Change, especially in the maritime business, is one of those things, he said, that

people are always a little uncomfortable with.

"When I met your CO (CAPT David Stalfort), I really bought into this. He's a good salesman. I feel we have the right man, at the right time and the right place, and our industry needed it."

Murphy, who graduated from the California Maritime Academy in 1968, has held a mariner's document for 43 years. After spending 23 years as an officer in the U.S. Navy, he retired and went back on his U.S. Merchant Marine license, working his way up from Second Mate to Captain. For 14 years, he sailed as a Captain with Maersk Line, holding five commands during which he made multiple trips to Iraq, and delivered three new 950-foot long, 70,000-ton government ships.

Speaking from his own experience as a mariner, Murphy told the group of more than 200 NMC employees, "What I'm hoping to accomplish today is

NMC Monthly Production Update

Credentials Issued in August – 5,351
Most Credentials Issued in a Day – 353 on August 18
Credentials Evaluated in August – 8,039
Medical Evaluations in August – 568
Total number of Denials in August – 150

that you walk away from here with an understanding of how important what you do everyday is to the professional life of a mariner. When I say that, I say it with great gravity."

Acquiring a mariner credential is an "intimidating process," he said, adding that there's a certain amount of anxiety that goes along with it.

"Then you get that first document, and man, that's a big deal. I remember my first document more than anything else," he said.

The next "hurdle" comes when a mariner wants to upgrade, and must work through the process all over again, from studying for the exams to submitting the application.

"Then you come up on that third renewal. You got about 15 years in. A lot of people acquire wives, children, mortgage payments, car payments, etc. Now this document represents a lot more than what you started out with," he said. "It's not just a means to go get onto a ship and make some money. This is your entire livelihood carried around in your pocket."

Murphy beseeched his audience to "imagine for a moment, a guy (or gal) who has all of this on the line. He submits his application, and there's a glitch or a delay, but he has get back to work. Mariners don't earn money if they aren't on that ship."

At this point, the mariner is experiencing tremendous anxiety, he said, adding, "I think they call it a 'significant emotional event'," he said.

"You at the NMC are one of most important elements in a mariner's professional life. And it happens every time he (or she) upgrades, changes or renews his (or her) credentials."

Michael C. Lewis

What are the Mariners saying?



• *Perry Parchmont, August 12, 2008* – I am very satisfied with the time frame in which I received my Merchant Mariners Document and STCW renewals and would like to thank the National Maritime Center team for such quick response. Also thanks to REC Miami for their improvements over the years. Best wishes to all departments.

• *Wayne Carnes, July 23, 2008* – The REC in Juneau, Ak., is excellent. They went above and beyond the call to help me out. From the time the REC gave the NMC word to print my endorsement, it took four weeks to arrive. I am very concerned my official documents are coming U.S. Mail without tracking numbers. This makes it too easy for them to be stolen or lost.

• *David Lentz, August 13, 2008* – The Regional Examination Center in Charleston, SC, was very good. I received my renewal package within a few days. The process of renewal and fingerprinting went smoothly, taking only about an hour.

The NMC was very helpful in providing an updated status of my renewal. The whole process took 52 days, which seemed a bit long. All in all, I was very pleased. My questions were answered and I was directed to the appropriate people when necessary.



• *William Bratton, August 9, 2008* – I contacted the office in Charleston, SC, for my husband, who is on a ship and had misplaced his original STCW and needed a replacement right away. The phone menu was easy to understand and use, and I was able to speak with the right person, Linda, right away. Linda was very helpful and gave me all the information we needed to begin the process.

Bill was able to send the necessary applications to her, and because she still had his file, she was able to send it all to the West Virginia location for processing at once. The STCW arrived very quickly and I was able to send it onto Bill on the ship.

The whole process was very easy, and Linda was very helpful, and patient with all my questions. When I called again with another question and had to leave a message, she returned my call very quickly. Linda deserves a promotion and a raise!!!

Previously, when I was with the Merchant Marine, I also used the Charleston location to renew my MMD. Everyone was professional and helpful, and very pleasant, and I was in and out in record time. The added bonus is Charleston is a great place to visit and spend a few days, *and*, since it is only 3 hours away from us, I don't mind driving there because Bill is a non-driver and I have to do all the driving. LOL!

Debra Gardner and William Bratton

REC Transition Update

Transition of REC Houston Represents Time of Change

Every American touches a product from the Houston, Tx., shipping channel daily, says a retired "Coastie," now in charge of licensing merchant mariners.

Situated on the largest petrochemical port in the Western Hemisphere, the Regional Examination Center (REC) in Houston, has begun its transition to the Coast Guard's National Maritime Center in Martinsburg, WV.

Larry Griffin, the Senior Inspector Personnel (SIP) at REC Houston, said he's pleased to see that the Coast Guard has committed to a change and improved service to the country's merchant mariners.

"It's critical that efficient licensing is in place to promote commerce," he said. "If tankers delivering goods slow down, the economy slows down."

Griffin knows well the impact mariners have on the shipping industry as his father served in the U.S. Merchant Marine for approximately 30 years, during the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

"He loved the sea," Griffin said of his father, Elmer "Griff" Griffin, who owned a commercial fishing boat.

During heavy weather off the Oregon coast, "Griff" and his salmon trawler broke down on more than one occasion, and sure enough, each time the Coast Guard came to the rescue.

"He loved the Coast Guard. They rescued him a couple times," he said. "Dad steered me toward the Coast Guard. He got me to join."

When Griffin's mother found out he was going to be working at an REC in 1997, she told him, "They don't treat you're dad very well at the REC."

"I said, 'Mom, I'll do everything I can to change that'," said Griffin, who has spent nearly eight years at the REC. "I think we've done that here. REC Houston brings outstanding service to the region. I'm hoping we can continue to improve that."

So far, Griffin says the transition to the NMC, a process he described as a "small speed bump," has gone very well.

"It's a much easier process than what we have done in the past. The only issues we had to deal with were

the really small details that you couldn't plan for. We're keeping the industry advised of what's going on."

The REC's relationship with the maritime industry in Houston is "excellent," Griffin said, adding that he expects the transition to only improve those relations.

"They love the services the Coast Guard provides here, especially with licensing. It's a pretty specialized service," he said. "We haven't had a backlog (in credentialing) in years. We have a very quick turnaround time in credential production, which helps the mariners."

If you ask Griffin, helping the mariners is what matters most; that and keeping a promise to mom.

"Mariners make a ton of very important decisions every day based on the RECs. Every decision we make has to be based on them," he said. The more information we can provide them, the better.

REC Puget Sound Bids Farewell



Sector Seattle holds a farewell ceremony for crew of REC Puget Sound. Pictured from front left to right are CDR Mark McCadden, Chief, Prevention Dept.; Connie Urtz, REC ASIP; Ted Mondares, REC User Fee Clerk; Cynthia McCoy, REC Legal Instruments Examiner. From rear are Tom Curley, REC SIP; John Dwyer, Chief Inspections, CAPT Steve Metruck, Commanding Officer Sector Seattle; Antje Jarvis, REC Legal Instruments Examiner; Ken Heaton, REC Legal Instruments Examiner and Chris Adekoya, REC Legal Instruments Examiner.

A GOLDEN MARINER TO NORMANDY AND BACK AGAIN

On June 6, 1944, hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy, France, during Operation Overlord in World War II, sacrificing their lives to liberate Europe from Adolf Hitler's reign of terror.

There, among the more than 6,900 vessels wading in the English Channel in support of the invasion, stood merchant mariner George Murphy on watch on the Liberty ship *SS Clara Barton*.

Coincidentally, Murphy, of Leicester, Ma., grew up less than five miles from Oxford, Mass., the birthplace of Clara Barton, who founded the American Red Cross.



"I thought it was ironic that the same ship I was assigned too was named after someone who lived so close to me in Leicester," said the 84-year-old Murphy. "The Normandy Invasion has always stayed with me."

The war was on and scores of men were enlisting in the armed forces. Murphy chose to contribute to the war effort by going to sea. In 1943, he graduated from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, in

Buzzards Bay, launching what would become the career of a lifetime.

Because America, at the time, desperately needed qualified seaman to serve aboard commercial vessels, Murphy turned down active duty as an ensign in the U.S. Navy to serve as a third assistant engineer in the U.S. Merchant Marine, where he was assigned to the *SS Clara Barton* docked in Boston, Ma.

During the war, Murphy participated in several convoy runs throughout the North Atlantic where "wolf pack attacks" were coordinated by an underwater web of German U-boats.

At the outset of the Allied Invasion of Occupied France, Murphy's ship spent four days in Normandy and then carried the wounded GIs back to England, dodging attacks from U-boats below and the German Luftwaffe in the skies above.

"We were under constant attack in Normandy. We had holes in our hull from all the shrapnel, but we never took a direct hit," said Murphy as the inflection in his voice took on a more serious tone. "The ship next to us, a few hundred yards off the bow, was sunk from an aerial bomb by the German Luftwaffe."

Throughout the Allied Invasion of Europe, Murphy made several trips carrying the wounded between England and Europe.

"It changed me," he said. "I have the greatest respect in the world for those soldiers who faced the onslaught from the Germans up on that hill (at the top of the beach). I really, really have to give those guys credit."

While heading home from Europe after the invasion, the *SS Clara Barton* struck a buoy in Normandy, bending the propeller blades over.

"They didn't have a new propeller that fit our ship in Europe, so they sent us home, from Ireland to New York," said Murphy, adding that the ship joined a small convoy of other damaged vessels. "With a bent propeller, we couldn't keep up with the other convoy ships. The convoy commander gave us two options, to either turn back or continue home. We decided to cross the ocean by ourselves." (Continued on Page 9)

The veil of safety that so often accompanies the carefully careening mass of a convoy had been lifted.

Steaming alone at sea, Murphy and his mates now faced a different, more prolonged threat—not from the U-boats, but from starvation.

“We ran out of food after 10 days. We ended up eating the C-rations the troops left on board,” he said. “We were running out of fuel too. It was real close. We were determined to make it before Christmas.”

All told, it took Murphy and the crew 26 days to cross the Atlantic Ocean, a trip that paled in comparison to the normal 10 days. On Dec. 24, 1944, the *SS Clara Barton*, and all her men, rolled into Boston Harbor. “I went out and kissed the ground,” he said, following the landfall.

After the war ended in late April, early May 1945, Murphy continued on with his engineering career in the U.S. Merchant Marine, amassing 43 years of seafaring service, 18 of which were spent as a port engineer for U.S. Lines.

The years at sea took its toll on Murphy and soon enough he welcomed the opportunity to come ashore and work in an office. As port engineer, he was assigned to five or six ships in the steamship company’s fleet, ensuring repairs and routine maintenance were completed. Instead of spending

“days and days at sea” waiting for repairs, he would fly out to the ship if it was in trouble, make the repairs and fly home, just in time for dinner.

“It’s a different life today than when I went to sea,” he said. Today, Murphy says many port areas are outside main cities, where the dock time is limited to a few hours, as opposed to back in his heyday, when ships often stayed in metropolitan ports for a few days.

“I would do it again. I had a good time,” he said. Murphy retired in 1986—the same year U.S. Lines went bankrupt—after receiving his eleventh issued license as a chief engineer of steam vessels of any horsepower.

As for his time aboard the *SS Clara Barton*, Murphy said, “Perhaps it was fortuitous,” that Clara Barton devoted her life to caring for and improving people’s lives.

“She took good care of us, protected us during the Normandy Invasion,” he said. “I’ve stayed in touch with some of the survivors of the crew and we all have a soft spot in our hearts for that ship.”

Michael C. Lewis

Editor’s note: The picture attached to this story was provided by George Murphy, who recently donated it to Clara Barton Elementary School in Oxford, Ma.

Captain’s Log

Continued from Page 1

The NMC Senior Staff recently met for three days at a planning offsite. During the offsite, we assessed our operations and charted a course to develop and launch the Merchant Mariner Secure Electronic Application System, or MM-SEAS.

Our first “way point” or milestone will be the development of an “application wizard” that mariner’s will be able to use to submit their applications electronically. Other way points include development of an evaluation component, a course approval component, and an examination component.

Together, these components will work for the MM-SEAS by improving consistency and quality during the credentialing process, thus reducing processing time, and improving customer service. The MM-SEAS is an important part of modernizing the Coast Guard’s Mariner Licensing and Documentation program.

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

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Crash Victim

(Continued from Page 3)

“Our U.S. government has really kicked in here. Whether it was a single person from a wreck 60 years ago, in this country, we still care about them. In fact, we go to huge lengths to care about people. Both Mark and I believe this is a great country.”

When asked how the experience has changed his life, McGregor said it's become part of his life. “I don't know if we've become part of flight 4422 or if the crew has become part of us? I've learned so much about these guys,” he said. “I'm just happy we could bring closure to the families.

“It was never about Mark and I. It's about everybody else. It's about the people who died in the crash. It's about the experts. We just happen to be at the controls. We could not have done this without the help from the National Maritime Center. But probably the most important thing is that we could not have done this without the help from the families.”

Kevin McGregor is writing the last chapter of his book in which he documents the crash of NW4422, the search, the discovery and the many years spent investigating to determine the identification of the hand and arm, which recently was donated to AFDIL.

Some information contained in this article was contributed by author Bruce Felknor, American Merchant Marine at War, www.usmm.org.

Michael C. Lewis



Pictured from left to right are Kevin A. McGregor, Maj. (Ret) USAFR, Andy Yeisser; Colleen Fitzpatrick, PhD, Forensic Genealogist; Mike Grimm, ex-FBI, (Ret) latent fingerprint examiner; Odile Loreille, PhD, Paleo DNA Researcher-Scientist, AFDIL; Mike Grimm, Jr., Evident Forensic Products, LLC. Not pictured are Chriss Lyon, Researcher/Genealogist; and Marc Millican, Lt. Col. (ret) USAFR.

Below are the names of the SS Sunset crew who perished:

Wilfred “Billy” Henry Beswick, Old Trafford, Manchester, England
Eugene J. Adler, Fall River, Mass.
Morris “Max” Brooks, Bronx, N.Y.
John R. Comshick, West Hazleton, Pa.
Howard A. Davidson, Bayonne, N.J.
Robert William “Billy” Delaney, Keyport, N.J.
John V. Elkins, Richmond, N.Y.
Eugene O. Foote, Kaplan, La.
Olan J. Jacobson, Brooklyn, N.Y.
John “Jackie” Joseph Jamele, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Everett W. Jenkins, Brazil, Ind.
August E. Koistinen, Toivola, Wis.
James G. Lampman, Jersey City, N.J.
Michael Marushak, Sewaren, N.J.
Travis M. McCall, Tifton, Ga.
James G. Mooney, Paterson, N.J.
Edwin Mustra, Plainfield, N.J.
Robert J. Rabich, Easton, Pa.
John W. Rapchinski, Bayonne, N.J.
Daniel C. Rice, Milwaukee, Wis.
Carl F. Sigmund, Poquonock Bridge, Conn.
Stanley C. Wilkowski, Bayonne, N.J.
Francis J. Van Zandt, Roanoke, Va.
Arthur Eilertsen, New York, N.Y.

Northwest Airlines Crew

Captain Robert Petry, pilot
Captain James Van Cleef, pilot
Jehu Stickel, co-pilot
Wayne Worsely, navigator
Donald Rector, flight mechanic
Robert Haslett, purser

Incidentally, a ring engraved with, “Iran 1946,” was also found at the crash site by McGregor and Millican in 1999. Later, it was determined that the ring belonged to Eilertsen. A private ceremony was held August 16 to return the ring to Eilertsen's nephew, Mr. Ron Oravetz, of Xenia, OH.

A Timely Question: How do you count Sea Service?

In this issue of *The Wave*, we continue 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. 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.

How Do I Count Sea Service?

To count your days of seagoing service accurately, you must understand that a “day” is defined in the regulations as “eight hours of watchstanding or day-working not to include overtime.” For vessels under 100 GRT, however, you may receive a day’s credit for less than eight hours, but in no case will the acceptable period be less than four hours. Thirty days are considered to be one month, and 12 of those thirty day months add up to one 360-day year on the Coast Guard’s calendar.



Merchant Marine Academy flagship *Kings Pointer*

If you work on a vessel where a 12-hour day is authorized and practiced (crew boats, supply boats, towboats, and some commercial fishing boats), you can claim one-and-a-half days for each 12 hour day worked. A 20 day hitch is thus transformed into 30 days of sea time. The 24 months (720 days) that you need to qualify for a license can be reduced to 480 “12-hour” days – if you have served on vessels that are authorized to work a two watch system. To claim this time, your documentation of service must specifically state that you worked 12 hours per day.

When reading the requirements, keep in mind that “sea service” means time on the vessel – not time of employment. You may have been employed by a

towboat company (or several) over a period of 4 years and two months, for example, but the Coast Guard will only credit you with the time you spent on the boat. If you worked a “21 on – 21 off” schedule, you spent one-half of that total time “at sea,” which calculates as:

$$50 \text{ months} \times 30 \text{ days} \times \frac{1}{2} = 750 \text{ “8 hour” days}$$

That doesn’t give you the 30 months (900 days) to qualify as a Towing Vessel Mate, but when you apply the “time and a half” calculation you get:

$$750 \times \frac{1}{2} = 1125 \text{ days}$$

There is one exception to the “time on the vessel” definition of sea service, however. Applicants for deck or engine licenses on Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODUs) must meet requirements that are expressed in terms of “employment assigned to work on MODUs, including time spent ashore as part of normal crew rotation.” The three years required to qualify for Barge Supervisor can therefore

be obtained in three calendar years, provided that you are continuously assigned to offshore service.

Foreign Service

Experience that you have obtained on foreign flag vessels can be used to qualify for a U.S. license or certificate, as long as the service is reasonably equivalent to the standards for tonnage, horsepower, waters, and operating conditions. To receive credit for the time, you must provide the Coast Guard with satisfactory documents containing the information outlined on the sample letter of service in the “Application Paperwork” section. A translation into English will be necessary if the document is in a foreign language.

Dual Purpose Time

Don't overlook time you may have gained in the engine room if you are applying for a deck license. Applicants for Mate 200 on either inland or near coastal waters can use engine room experience to meet up to 25% of the service requirement.

Time gained on inland waters can be used to qualify for some offshore licenses. You can use up to nine months of inland service to qualify for a near coastal route on an Uninspected Passenger Vessel Operator license, which has a total service requirement of 12 months. Up to half of the 12 months required for Mate 200 near coastal can be served on inland waters. Similar provisions are found in other license standards.

Shore-side Experience

Time gained in maritime-related employment ashore can be used to qualify for upgrading a license, but not when applying for an original document. You can receive credit for up to six months of service toward an upgrade if you have been employed in the following positions:

1. Port engineer or shipyard superintendent – Every three months in these positions is equivalent to one month of sea time.
2. Instructor at a school of navigation or marine engineering – Every two months is equivalent to one month of service.

School Days

Attendance at Coast Guard approved schools can be used to meet as much as two-thirds of the required service for deck and engineer licenses and merchant marine certificates. Students are credited with thirty days of sea service toward either an Able

Seaman certificate or a MODU deck license, for example, if they complete a certain six-day school approved by the Coast Guard. The specific amount of sea service credit awarded varies with each course, check with the school you are thinking of attending to see if their course gives you sea time credit. Note that sea service from approved courses is generally not acceptable for licenses subject to the STCW.

Simulator training in conjunction with an approved school also can be used to meet as much as 25% of the required sea service for any license transaction, but neither time on the simulator nor attendance at an approved school can be used to meet recency requirements.

Military Service

Sea service on military vessels can be used to qualify for licenses and certificates, as will be explained in the next issue of The Wave.

If Nothing Else Works...

If you don't fit into one of the neat pigeonholes of the standard service requirements, don't give up. Other experience in a marine-related area, other than at sea, or service performed on unique vessels, may be accepted by the Coast Guard.

Greg Szczurek

Editor's Note: The Merchant Mariner Sea Service Renewal Calculator is available on <http://homeport.uscg.mil>.

The material contained within Mr. Szczurek's monthly column is for information only, and not authority for action. Mr. Szczurek is not employed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

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