MSC’s Newest Ship USNS John Lewis Christened at General Dynamics NASSCO San Diego

By Sarah Burford, Military Sealift Command Pacific Public Affairs

Fleet replenishment oiler USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205), the Military Sealift Command’s newest ship, was christened during a ceremony at the General Dynamics NASSCO shipyard in San Diego, July 17.

The event was attended by the family of the ship’s namesake as well as a bipartisan congressional delegation made up of 30 members including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Maxine Waters, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, Rep. Jackie Speier, and Rep. Nikema Williams, Lewis’ successor. Other dignitaries included James Geurts – Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary of the Navy; former Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus; Vice Adm. Ross Myers, Commander, Fleet Cyber Command and Commander, U.S. 10th Fleet; Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, Commander, Naval Surface Force; Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer, Commander, Military Sealift Command; and actress and social activist, Alfre Woodard Spencer, the ship’s sponsor.

The ship honors Rep. John Lewis, a long-serving member of the United States House of Representatives and civil rights activist. Lewis was known for his work as the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and as one of the organizers of the 1963 March on Washington. In 1965, Lewis led the first of three Selma to Montgomery marches across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, known as Bloody Sunday, state troopers and police attacked the marchers, including Lewis.

Lewis served 17 terms as a Congressman as the dean of the Georgia congressional delegation, Chief Deputy Whip, Senior Chief Deputy Whip, and on countless committees. Lewis was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his long service in government, by then President Barack Obama in 2011.

“How perfect the motto of this ship; Unbreakable Perseverance,” said Pelosi in her key note address. “Everyone who sees this ship will be reminded of John’s perseverance.” She went on to say, “God truly blessed America with the dedication and leadership of John Lewis.”

The 746-foot John Lewis is the first of the new John Lewis-class, previously known as the T-AO(X). This class of oilers has the ability to carry 162,000 barrels of diesel ship fuel, aviation fuel and dry stores cargo. The upgraded oiler is built with double hull to protect against oil spills and strengthened cargo and ballast tanks.

IN THIS ISSUE

- USNS Mercy
- Large Scale Exercise
- USS Mount Whitney
- UAS Test
- Racer Goose 2021
- USNS Joshua Humphreys
- Pacific Partnership
- Tallisman Saber 2021
- MSC FE Decades of Support
- We Are MSC
- Reservist Supports MSC
- Fitness Corner

John Lewis continued on page 8
Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer, Commander, Military Sealift Command, recently presented crew members of the Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19), in port in San Diego, with Civilian Armed Forces Service Medals for their outstanding support of the ship’s deployment to Los Angeles for COVID-19 support.

Wettlaufer, who was in San Diego for the christening of MSC’s newest ship, fleet replenishment oiler USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205), visited Mercy to meet with the Civil Service Mariner crew and to present them with their medals.

“These are a great bunch of CIVMARS,” said Wettlaufer. “They are amazingly dedicated and professional, and it is a privilege for me to be able to recognize their hard work personally.”

Wettlaufer presented medals to 14 Mercy crew members during his visit. Another eight, were awarded, but not presented to crewmembers not aboard the ship at the time of the visit.

“I’m happy to see these guys get the recognition they deserve,” said Trevor Sandlin, Mercy’s Chief Mate. “They sacrifice every day, to keep this ship mission ready, and when the call came down to support COVID relief efforts last year, they had this ship ready to go inside of five days, and continued that dedication to duty throughout the mission. For many of these guys, this is the highest, or the only award like this they will ever receive as CIVMARS, so it means a lot to them to get something like this and to be recognized for their hard work.”

According to the Department of Defense, the Armed Forces Service Medal is awarded to those with qualifying military service who are part of a U.S. mission “deemed to be a significant activity and who encounter no foreign armed opposition or imminent hostile action.” The medal is not something that is routinely awarded to civilians, but in this case, special consideration was given to the Mercy’s CIVMAR crew.

“The Armed Forces Service Medal isn’t an award that is usually given to civilians, but we really felt that the crews of USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort deserved them for their part in the COVID deployments,” explained Eudell Walker of the MSC Awards Office. “This award went all the way to the Secretary of the Navy. It was really great to find out that he agreed with us and recognized these CIVMARS with this award.”

Mercy spent nearly 50 days pier-side at the Port of Los Angeles, serving as a referral hospital treating non-COVID-19 patients, and in effect as a ‘relief valve’ for local hospitals as they were able to focus their efforts on COVID-19 cases. The ship supported the lead agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), under the Department of Defense’s Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) mission. While in Los Angeles, 77 patients were provided care ranging from basic medical/surgical care to critical care, to trauma. Additionally, the Medical Treatment Team conducted 36 surgeries, 77 X-ray exams, 26 CT scans and administered hundreds of ancillary studies ranging from routine labs to high-end x-rays and blood transfusion support. MSC CIVMARS operated U.S. military assistance to Croatia reached approximately four and a half billion Kuna (over $700 million) in the form of training, equipment, infrastructure construction, and specialized military education. Since Croatia joined the NATO Alliance 12 years ago, U.S. and Croatian bilateral defense relationships and give back to the city.

Charge d’Affaires Mark Flemming welcomed the port visit and noted defense cooperation between the United States and Croatia is a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship.

Fleming said: “Over the past ten years, U.S. military assistance to Croatia reached approximately four and a half billion Kuna (over $700 million) in the form of training, equipment, infrastructure construction, and specialized military education. Since Croatia joined the NATO Alliance 12 years ago, U.S. and Croatian military personnel have served together from Afghanistan to Iraq to Kosovo. The U.S.-Croatian partnership on land and at sea is essential to our two countries’ NATO military cooperation and shared security.”

After departing Split, Mount Whitney will kick off LSE 2021, a two-week live, scenario-driven, globally integrated exercise that will provide high-end training at sea and ashore against a challenging adversary force. LSE 2021 will signal that the U.S. military remains ready because of its global operation commitments and is stronger because of its alliances. LSE 2021 will demonstrate the flexibility inherent within Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO), Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE) signaling to our competitors the U.S. military remains ready at the high-off-loaded mission cargo, assisted with repairs to mission equipment and provided essential services to keep the MTF up and running, as well as maintaining all the physical aspects of the ship throughout the deployment.

Military Sealift Command Command Supports U.S. Navy’s Large Scale Exercise 2021

By Sarah Burford, Military Sealift Command Pacific Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command (MSC) fleet replenishment oiler USNS Yukon (T-AO 202) and dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Washington Chambers (T-AKE 11) participated in the Pacific portion of the U.S. Navy’s Large Scale Exercise 2021.

Yukon and Chambers provided logistics services including aviation fuel, bunker fuel, dry food, as well as machine parts and equipment to the ships operating in the region.

“Exercises like LSE 21 demonstrate MSC’s ability to provide crucial logistics support to our joint warfighters,” said Capt. Kendall Bridgewater, Commander, Military Sealift Command Pacific. “MSC is a vital part of our Nation’s defense force and exercises, like this, enable us to operate at an accelerated tempo that will better hone our skills for future operations.”

LSE 2021 is a globally integrated exercise designed to test advanced warfare concepts across the full-range of maritime and amphibious operations under Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO). LSE 2021 took place Aug. 3-16, in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Fleet Forces, and U.S. Naval Forces Europe areas of operation.

USNS Mercy Civil Service Mariners Receive Armed Forces Service Medals for 2020 COVID-19 Relief Deployment

By Sarah Burford, Military Sealift Command Pacific Public Affairs

The U.S. Sixth Fleet flag ship, USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) and U.S. Sixth Fleet staff departed Split, Croatia, after a port visit July 30 – August 2, a day before the start of Large Scale Exercise (LSE) 2021.

Vice Adm. Gene Black, commander U.S. 6th Fleet, hosted Croatian defense and governmental officials aboard Mount Whitney to reinforce the strong U.S., Croatian bilateral defense relationship. While in port, Sailors and staff volunteered at the NGO MOST homeless shelter during a global relief effort to boost international community relationships and give back to the city.

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LSE 2021 will demonstrate the flexibility inherent within Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO), Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment (LOCE) signaling to our competitors the U.S. military remains ready at the high-end-of-warfare expressly because of its global operational commitments, rather than in spite of them.
Naval Air Warfare Center Teams up with Military Sealift Command to Test Unmanned Aerial System Concept in a Maritime Environment

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

A team of contracted civilian Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) specialists, attached to Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division’s (NAWCAD) Ux-24 Unmanned Test Squadron, teamed up with Military Sealift Command and the crew of MSC’s fleet replenishment oiler USNS Joshua Humphreys (T-AO 188) to test a new concept in material transportation, while the ship was at sea in the Atlantic Ocean, July 15-16.

The team performed three UAS test flights as part of the warfare center’s Blue Water unmanned air systems project. The Blue Water UAS featured a removable, internal cargo bay capable of transporting small payloads of material from one location to another.

“Our team went underway to test the feasibility of operating the UAS in a maritime environment, which is one of the most difficult environments to operate any type of aircraft in,” said Project Engineer Mark Richarrella, of NAWCAD’s Ux-24 Unmanned Test Squadron. “The ultimate goal was to see if this UAS could perform a ship-to-ship mission.”

For the test to be considered successful, the team needed to prove the unmanned aircraft could travel a distance of at least 200 nautical miles while carrying out a ship-to-ship logistic support mission.

“The Blue Water system is designed to be a cargo transport or logistics UAS capable of delivering a combined weight of supplies and mission fuel of 30 pounds,” Richarrella added. “We were here to demonstrate that this UAS could successfully complete an extended range mission of 200-250 nautical miles with approximately 12 pounds of repair parts.”

The Blue Water UAS tested during the underway included the aircraft, ground station and telemetry station.

MSC Delivers Cargo, Supplies in Support of 2021 Annual Pacer Goose Sustainment Mission

By LaShawn Sykes, Military Sealift Command Atlantic Public Affairs

Chartered by U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command, heavy lift container ship MV SLNC Magothy arrived Naval Station Norfolk, July 16 and immediately began its loading operation for Thule Air Base in Greenland, located 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

Under Pacer Goose Sustainment 2021, 17 contract mariners assigned to Magothy, along with employers from Norfolk’s Defense Logistics Agency Distribution center, worked around the clock for four straight days to meet the ship’s deadline of loading 42 pieces of critical cargo and supplies that included one fire truck.

Magothy set sail for Thule AB July 19 with more than 90,000 pounds of critical supplies expected to sustain the base for the next 365 days.

Despite working under extremely hot conditions, the loading operations this year was very efficient, conduced with excellent cooperation from all involved parties, said Capt. Noah Myrus, master of MV SLNC Magothy.

Due to environmental factors and based on historic ice patterns, the month of July is the most favorable time of the year to reach so far into the Arctic Circle, Myrus said.

Because ice growth is unpredictable, Magothy requires two escorts. For the first leg, Canadian Coast Guard Icebreaker Captain Molly Kool will escort the vessel to Disko Island. Then for the second leg, Supply Tanker Maersk Peary will escort Magothy from Disko Island to Thule AB.

“Having an escort increases the level of safety during the transit from Disko Island to Thule,” Myrus said.

Upon arriving Thule, Magothy will take several days to unload. Once complete, the icebreaker will return to Thule to escort Magothy back to Disko Island before going off hire. Magothy is expected to return to NAVSTA in mid-August with all of Thule’s solid waste.
USNS Joshua Humphreys;
Answering the Call to Duty

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

It’s never easy to be \“on duty,” but the Civil Service Mariners (CIVMAR) who crew Military Sealift Command’s fleet replenishment oiler Joshua Humphreys (T-AO 188) sure make being on duty look easy.

USNS Joshua Humphreys is currently filling the role as Military Sealift Command Atlantic’s Duty Oiler, which means the ship has been providing logistical support for all of the U.S. Navy’s ships operating off the East Coast of the U.S. in the Atlantic Ocean.

“We are one of 13 fleet replenishment oilers MSC operates for the U.S. Navy,” said Capt. Raymond Donnelly, USNS Joshua Humphreys’ Ship’s Master. “We specialize in refueling and resupplying the Navy’s combatant ships and auxiliary ships while at sea; allowing our warfighters on station, on mission and in the fight.”

“When filling the role as the ‘Duty Oiler,’ our ship won’t deploy overseas,” he added. “We receive our orders for support from Combined Task Force 83, who provides us with the list of ships operating in the region who require at-sea re-supply. We make sure our Navy’s ships don’t have to be taken off station, to pull into port for fuel from a fuel barge or fuel depot.”

The fleet replenishment oiler’s most recent underway logistic support mission lasted for six days and was completed July 19, when the ship pulled back into Naval Station Norfolk.

“We deliver fuel, including marine diesel fuel and aviation fuel,” according to Donnelly. “We also deliver food, repair part and supplies, many of which are the same products as you would find at your local supermarket.”

USNS Joshua Humphreys utilizes both the connected underway replenishment-at-sea (UNREP) and vertical replenishment-at-sea (VERTREP) capabilities to deliver fuel, food, stores, repair parts, and small amounts of ammunition to U.S. Navy and allied ships while at sea.

Connected UNREPs involve sending fuel and supplies from USNS Joshua Humphreys to the ship in need of re-supply via fuel hoses and a cable system operated between the two vessels. A VERTREP involves the use of helicopters to transport supplies from the oiler to the receiving ship.

According to Donnelly, “Sailing on the USNS Joshua Humphreys is not a ‘nine to five’ job. As duty oiler, we have been underway for numerous weeks supporting numerous exercises for the Navy.”

“Most recently we provided UNREP services for the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) and the six Navy ships who were training with them,” he said. “In the month of June alone, we conducted 42 UNREPs, so we have been busy; we have been working.”

During USNS Joshua Humphreys’ most recent underway, they conducted five connected UNREPs with the guided missile destroyer USS Truxtun (DDG 103), USS Bainbridge (DDG 96), USS Mason (DDG 87); MDC’s fast combat support ship USNS Arctic (T-AOE 8), and the guided missile cruiser USS Vella Gulf (DDG 72). During the UNREP with USNS Arctic alone, USNS Joshua Humphreys delivered 1.5 million gallons of fuel.

The oiler also supported VERTREP training for Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 22 (HSC 22). With the assistance of the ship’s crew, the pilots and aircrew from HSC-22 performed flight deck landing qualifications using MH-60 Seahawk helicopters.

Humphreys continued on page 8
Talisman Sabre 2021
Rappahannock, Alan Shepard train with Australian Navy during
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freedom of the seas or engaging an aggressive adversary,
logistical support of U.S. and allied naval forces. Whether
maintaining peacetime training in complex, multi-domain warfare
scenarios that replicate current and potential future global security challenges. For Military Sealift
Command ships like Rappahannock and Alan Shepard, TS21 increases
capabilities and interoperability to respond to combat operations, disaster
disaster response preparedness around the Indo-Pacific.
Pacific Partnership’s mission is to work collectively with host and partner
countries together to prepare during calm periods to effectively respond in times of crisis. Each year,
the mission has evolved over the years from an emphasis on direct care to an operation focused on
enhancing partnerships through host nation subject matter expert and civil-military exchanges.
Adm. Chris Engdahl, commander Expeditionary Strike group 7. “These
operations in small or damaged ports. Working at the invitation of each
host nation, Pacific Partnership is joined by partner nations to strengthen
disaster response preparedness around the Indo-Pacific.
Pacific Partnership’s mission is to work collectively with host and partner
countries to enhance regional interoperability and disaster response
capabilities, increase stability and security in the region, and foster new and enduring friendships across the Indo-Pacific.
Under Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy’s
largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with 35 maritime nations in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

The Pacific Partnership 2021 team, led by Capt. Jesus Rodriguez, disembark
the Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport USNS City of Bismarck (T-EPF 9), City of Bismarck is serving as the
mission platform for Pacific Partnership 21. Pacific Partnership, now in its 16th iteration, brings
coalition partners together to effectively respond in crisis of crisis. Each year, the
mission team works collectively with host and partner nations to enhance regional interoperability and
disaster response capabilities, increase security and stability in the region, and foster new and
enhancing partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. (U.S. Navy Photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Joseph R. Vincent)

Pacific Partnership 21, the annual U.S-led multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the
Indo-Pacific, kicked off with a medical subject matter expert exchange at
Manila Naval Hospital, July 28.
The Military Sealift Command expeditionary fast transport ship USNS
City of Bismarck (T-EPF 9) arrived at the mission port, July 14, where
participants disembarked before conducting a 14-day quarantine as part
of ongoing COVID-19 mitigation measures.
Pacific Partnership brings nations, throughout the Indo-Pacific region,
together to prepare to effectively respond in times of crisis. More than
200 personnel from the U.S. and host nations will participate virtually
and on the ground during the mission, led by Commander, Amphibious Squadron 5, Capt. Jesus Rodriguez, embarked on City of Bismarck.

"The humanitarian and disaster response, engineering and medical projects conducted during Pacific Partnership are invaluable," said Rodriguez. "Working alongside our partners and host nations in the Indo-
Pacific ensures we are always able to provide humanitarian assistance
when asked, no matter the circumstance. By working together, we build
joint-capability and strengthen our partnerships."

Planners from the U.S. and partner nations have worked together over the past months to adapt Pacific Partnership amidst the challenges and demands of a global pandemic. In June, Pacific Partnership 21
successfully hosted its first virtual event, a medical seminar with teams in Papua New Guinea.

"Providing maritime logistics to the fleet is essential to the welfare of our Sailors and Marines and critical to warfighting at sea," said Rear Adm. Chris Engdahl, commander Expeditionary Strike group 7. “These
evolutions required patience, precision, and I am consistently impressed with the professionalism and support we receive from the captains and crews of our Military Sealift vessels.”

During the at-sea portion of TS21, partner nations trained together to operate with, and sustain each other in a contested maritime environment.

Rappahannock and Alan Shepard worked closely with the Royal Australian Navy’s HMAS Brisbane (DDG 41), HMAS Parramatta (FFH 154) and HMAS Ballarat (FFH 155), conducting a number of maneuvers necessary in that situation.

Events consisted of close-quarter turns, evasion tactics, formation
streaming, and emergency breakaway procedures. In addition, crews of the
two Military Sealift Command combat logistics ships and the Australian ships practiced bridge-to-bridge communication protocols.

"Exercises such as TS21 are essential to ensure successful combat logistics support of U.S. and allied naval forces. Whether maintaining peacetime freedom of the seas or engaging an aggressive adversary, logistical support of naval assets is a keystone element to a rapid and sustained response," said Capt. James J. Orsini, master of Rappahannock.

"From initial planning to execution, Pacific Partnership 21 recognized the
need to adapt for in-person and virtual engagements across all lines of effort,” said Lt. Cmdr. Joshua McNett, Pacific Partnership 21 mission operations officer. "The team has worked closely with host nations to tailor events to meet their needs and respect their COVID-19 mitigation measures. The challenges we have overcome are a testament to the resilience and teamwork that our partners and allies have strengthened over the last 15 years of Pacific Partnership.”

Throughout the course of Pacific Partnership 21, experts in the fields of engineering, medicine, and disaster response partnered with each host
country to conduct civic-action projects, community health services, medical consultations and disaster response training activities.

Virtual engagements included presentations, live question and answer sessions, panel discussions and interactive small group breakout sessions, as well as band performances featuring musicians from participating nations.

"Pacific Partnership provided the U.S. Pacific Fleet Band with the
opportunity to collaborate with partner nation bands, as well as create new
relationships with fellow musicians in the host nations," said Lt. Luslaida Barbosa, U.S. Pacific Fleet bandmaster. "The virtual environment forced us to think outside the box to create engaging and meaningful content, while showcasing our enduring partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific region.”

Engagements between Pacific Partnership participants and host nations were intended to improve capacity, enhance regional partnerships and increase multinational cooperation for disaster preparedness.

Pacific Partnership was formed in response to the December 2004 “Boxing Day” tsunami, one of the world’s most catastrophic natural disasters that devastated parts of South and Southeast Asia. The mission has evolved over the years from an emphasis on direct care to an operation focused on
enhancing partnerships through host nation subject matter expert and civil-military exchanges.

Expeditionary fast transport ships, such as City of Bismarck, provide rapid intra-theater transport and have the capability to conduct relief operations in small or damaged ports. Working at the invitation of each
host nation, Pacific Partnership is joined by partner nations to strengthen
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Pacific Partnership’s mission is to work collectively with host and partner
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Under Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy’s
largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, and routinely interacts and operates with 35 maritime nations in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Rappahannock, Alan Shepard train with Australian Navy during
during
Talisman Sabre 2021

By Leslie Hull-Ryde, Military Sealift Command Far East Public Affairs

USNS Rappahannock (T-AO 204) and USNS Alan Shepard (T-AKE 3) participated in Exercise Talisman Sabre 21 (TS21), a large-scale, bilateral military exercise between Australia and the United States, which began July 18 off the northeastern coast of Australia.

"Providing maritime logistics to the fleet is essential to the welfare of our Sailors and Marines and critical to warfighting at sea," said Rear Adm. Chris Engdahl, commander Expeditionary Strike group 7. “These evolutions required patience, precision, and I am consistently impressed with the professionalism and support we receive from the captains and crews of our Military Sealift vessels.”

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"The more we learn from each other as to how we conduct operations, the better we, as an allied force, can plan for, coordinate with and respond to any tasking.”

Since 2005, Australia, the United States and other multinational partner forces have used this biennial exercise to enhance interoperability by training in complex, multi-domain warfare scenarios that replicate
current and potential future global security challenges. For Military Sealift
Command ships like Rappahannock and Alan Shepard, TS21 increases
capabilities and interoperability to respond to combat operations, disaster response and humanitarian assistance efforts.
Military Seaift Command Far East Celebrates More than Seven Decades of Support

By Leslie Hull-Ryde, Military Sealift Command Far East Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command Far East celebrated the MSC enterprise’s 72nd birthday on July 9.

The Military Seaift Transportation Service, the predecessor to what is now known as Military Sealift Command, was established in 1949. Since then, MSC has provided the entire Department of Defense and other government agencies critical sealift support.

As one of MSC’s five area commands, the Far East team ensures approximately 50 ships in the Indo-Pacific region are manned, trained and equipped to deliver essential supplies, fuel, cargo, and equipment to warfighters, both at sea and on shore.

“Much of MSC’s rich history is steeped in this region,” said MSCFE Commodore Capt. Samuel F. de Castro.

“Today, we continue the longstanding tradition of reliable service of sustainability in the Indian and Pacific Oceans that enables our warfighters to do their jobs without worrying about where their next meals, spare parts or equipment are coming from.”

A fleet of civil service and contracted mariners aboard government-owned and government-contracted ships accomplish MSCFE’s multifaceted mission in the Indo-Pacific.

“I am extremely proud of the unwavering commitment of our professional mariners who spend months – years – at sea to ensure our clients get the support they need to conduct their missions,” de Castro said.

“We deliver and sustain not only the U.S. Navy and other services within the Department of Defense but our international partners and allies as well.”

Originally, the mission was to transport troops, combat equipment and supplies. Now, while staying true to that core responsibility, MSC does so much more.

MSCFE also conducts other special missions. These include towing, rescue and salvage, submarine support, cable laying and repair and navigational support.

MSC’s Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons 2 and 3 are strategically located throughout the Indo-Pacific Region. These ships and their crews deliver equipment and cargo wherever the Army, Air Force, Navy or Marine Corps may need them.

Task force commanders employ any one of MSC ships to ensure mission accomplishment. COMLOG WESTPAC/CTF 73 is the U.S. 7th Fleet’s provider of combat-ready logistics, operating government-owned and contracted ships that keep units throughout 7th Fleet armed, fueled and fed.

As the U.S. Navy’s largest forward-deployed fleet, 7th Fleet employs 50-70 ships and submarines across the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. U.S. 7th Fleet routinely operates and interacts with 35 maritime nations while conducting missions to preserve and protect a free and open Indo-Pacific Region.

Military Sealift Command also supports combatant commands and other federal agencies when necessary – and has done so in some way for decades.

Regardless of the geographic location, MSC assets have been involved in every major conflict since World War II. Just days after North Korean troops invaded South Korea, Army troops and equipment were en route, thanks to the MTS, which was renamed Military Sealift Command during Vietnam.

According to the Navy History and Heritage Command, MSC transported 8 million tons of fuel and 54 million tons of combat equipment in support of the Vietnam War. MSC also provided critical support during the Cold War, Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

“We deliver and sustain not only U.S. Navy, but other services within the Department of Defense on July 9. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Gregory Johnson)

“True or false?” By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Far East Public Affairs

I recently got underway aboard Military Sealift Command’s oceanographic survey ship USNS Bruce C. Heezen (T-AGS 63), where I had the opportunity to meet and interview Third Mate Paul Femia. Here are the highlights from our conversation:

What is a 3rd Mate and what are some of the roles and responsibilities you are responsible for in this position?

The primary role of all the ‘Mates’ is to perform watch-standing duties. While standing the watch, we are responsible for the safe navigation of the vessel, as well as general safety and security monitoring. As is the case with most 3rd Mates, I am responsible for the maintenance and inspections of the majority of the vessel’s damage control and safety equipment.

How long have you been a mariner and would you please briefly describe your history in the maritime community to date?

June 2021 marked the first year in the maritime industry for me! Prior to sailing aboard the USNS Bruce C. Heezen, I sailed on the M/V Cape Edmond and the M/V Cape Ray. Both of those vessels are roll-on, roll-off ships in the U.S. Maritime Administration’s inventory.

Why did you decide to become a mariner?

Growing up, I was fortunate to spend a lot of time on the water. Being at sea reminds me of time I spent with my father. My older brother became a mariner and sailed up until he was a 2nd mate. I decided to follow in his footsteps.

What do you attribute the success you have attained to this point in your career as a mariner?

My success is a direct result of the amazing support of my family, especially my parents. The friends I have made throughout my life have also been a major factor in my success.

What are your future goals in the maritime community?

I intend to continue sailing and hopefully will be able to earn the distinction of sailing as a Chief Mate and even a ship’s Captain.

What advice do you have for your peers in the maritime community and those who are considering becoming a mariner?

No one has the exact formula for success, but your elders, especially experienced mariners, can teach you more than you could imagine! Always listen for advice and tips; they can carry you a long way.

Is there anything else you would like to add about your career as a mariner?

As a young Mate, I definitely have a lot to learn but I know for sure that the best part about sailing is the people you are able to meet. I believe no other careers and occupations offer such a wide ranging collection of individuals, yet at the same time we are a small community that shares a strong connection.

As an oceanographic survey ship, USNS Bruce C. Heezen supports worldwide oceanographic programs which include performing acoustical, biological, physical and geophysical surveys. Civilian mariners who crew USNS Bruce C. Heezen are employed by the operating company Ocean Shipholding, Inc.

We Are MSC: Third Mate Paul Femia

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Far East Public Affairs

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How long have you been a mariner and would you please briefly describe your history in the maritime community to date?

June 2021 marked the first year in the maritime industry for me! Prior to sailing aboard the USNS Bruce C. Heezen, I sailed on the M/V Cape Edmond and the M/V Cape Ray. Both of those vessels are roll-on, roll-off ships in the U.S. Maritime Administration’s inventory.

Why did you decide to become a mariner?

Growing up, I was fortunate to spend a lot of time on the water. Being at sea reminds me of time I spent with my father. My older brother became a mariner and sailed up until he was a 2nd mate. I decided to follow in his footsteps.

What do you attribute the success you have attained to this point in your career as a mariner?

My success is a direct result of the amazing support of my family, especially my parents. The friends I have made throughout my life have also been a major factor in my success.

What are your future goals in the maritime community?

I intend to continue sailing and hopefully will be able to earn the distinction of sailing as a Chief Mate and even a ship’s Captain.

What advice do you have for your peers in the maritime community and those who are considering becoming a mariner?

No one has the exact formula for success, but your elders, especially experienced mariners, can teach you more than you could imagine! Always listen for advice and tips; they can carry you a long way.

Is there anything else you would like to add about your career as a mariner?

As a young Mate, I definitely have a lot to learn but I know for sure that the best part about sailing is the people you are able to meet. I believe no other careers and occupations offer such a wide ranging collection of individuals, yet at the same time we are a small community that shares a strong connection.

As an oceanographic survey ship, USNS Bruce C. Heezen supports worldwide oceanographic programs which include performing acoustical, biological, physical and geophysical surveys. Civilian mariners who crew USNS Bruce C. Heezen are employed by the operating company Ocean Shipholding, Inc.

We Are MSC: Third Mate Paul Femia

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Far East Public Affairs

I recently got underway aboard Military Sealift Command’s oceanographic survey ship USNS Bruce C. Heezen (T-AGS 63), where I had the opportunity to meet and interview Third Mate Paul Femia. Here are the highlights from our conversation:

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Military Sealift Command Far East is known throughout the Indo-Pacific Region for its on-time, on-station logistics support to U.S. forces and international partners.

An army of Civil Service Mariners and contracted mariners crew MSC ships, ensuring critical supplies and equipment are delivered where and when needed.

But who helps these professional mariners report to their ships, when and where they are needed?

Lt. Irene Blevins, a reservist assigned to Ship Support Unit Guam, that’s who.

The SSU Guam team is responsible for local coordination, engineering, contracting, administrative and information technology support to MSC ships. In the last year, that has included helping civil service and contracted mariners navigate the in-theater, in-country arrival requirements so they can get to their ships as quickly as possible.

“The normal duties and responsibilities of the staff assigned to SSU Guam have steadily increased throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Cmdr. Gillian Medina, commanding officer of Ship Support Unit Guam.

“Having Irene on board built capacity and allowed us to take on this additional and very important tasking.”

Those ashore tasked with ensuring all administrative requirements in Guam and follow-on countries are met must remain flexible and stay on top of ever-changing guidelines. If that meant only one country to track, no problem, but in the U.S. 7th Fleet Area of Operations, that includes a number of geographically dispersed and administratively diverse countries. Some mariners board their MSC ships in Guam; others transit through en route to their ships which may be underway or in a different location.

No problem for Blevins, though.

“I assisted with timely reliefs for [civilian mariners] by interpreting the latest COVID-19 guidance,” she said.

“I helped ensure MSC was aware of the changing requirements on Guam and how to best accomplish crew changes with as little impact to civil service mariners as possible.”

She says she’s enjoyed the challenge.

“I was very glad to be able to help support CIVMAR reliefs. I know firsthand how difficult transitions can be, especially in such a dynamic environment.”

During the last year, the SSU facilitated numerous civil service mariner crew reliefs on Guam.

“We are only able to do this because of reservists like Irene who brought unique experience and enthusiasm to this unanticipated aspect of our mission,” Medina said.

Blevins graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, in Kings Point, New York, in 2016. Since then, she has served as a second and third mate aboard MSC’s special mission ships, including aboard USNS Loyal (T-AGOS 22). As a strategic sealift officer, or SSO, she also served aboard SS Curtis (T-AVB 4) and SS Cape Island Station (AKR-5076).

Strategic sealift officers are mariners who also serve as reservists. According to MSC leaders, the SSO community merges the expertise of the merchant mariner with the warfighting capabilities of a naval officer.

“T’m glad I can support MSC missions in both capacities as I feel it is an important part of contributing to our national defense,” Blevins said. "Strategic sealift officers are critical to mission accomplishment because we have the licensed-mariner perspective. We have expertise in deck and engine operations. We also have experience of working on a ship with minimal manning.”

She volunteered for the SSU Guam assignment because she felt it would be an “interesting and educational opportunity” to gain a shore-side perspective of the organization she’s been part of for the last five years.

“I have been sailing in the Far East [Area of Responsibility] since graduation from Kings Point and have significant underway and operational experience,” the Las Cruces, New Mexico, native said.

“In this assignment, I learned more about how MSC is managed from a ‘big picture’ perspective, including ship repairs, scheduling and crew changes.

“I think I can apply a lot of things I learned during this assignment when I get back to the ship as well as during any future reserve assignments I have in support of MSC.”

Don’t Forget Your Fruits and Vegetables

From Leanne Gerstbrein, Military Sealift Command Health Coordinator

Diet rich in fruits and vegetables nourish your body with the essential vitamins and minerals it needs for optimal functioning.

How much should I be eating? According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate nutritional guide, you should aim to fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal. It is recommended that adults eat anywhere from 1 2/3 cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables every day, depending on your age, sex, and activity level.

Why is this important? Feeding your body with an adequate amount of fruits and vegetables lowers your risk of cancer and other chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and vision and gastrointestinal health issues. It also improves your immune system and overall health. In addition, fruits and vegetables are energizing, packed with nutrients and fiber, low in calories and fat, and full of water to help you maintain a healthy weight.

What is currently in season? Check out this seasonal produce guide with a list of fruits and vegetables that are currently in season as we transition into fall:

- Apples  - Bananas  - Beets  - Bell Peppers
- Broccoli  - Brussel Sprouts  - Cabbage  - Carrots
- Cauliflower  - Collard Greens  - Celery  - Cranberries
- Grapes  - Green Beans  - Kale  - Lettuce
- Mushrooms  - Pineapple  - Onions  - Peas
- Peaches  - Pineapple  - Potatoes  - Pumpkin
- Raspberries  - Sweet Potatoes  - Spinach  - Turnips

MSC offers the free following services to its Civil Service Mariners:

- InBody Screenings (measures percentage of body fat, muscle mass, basal metabolic rate, or how many calories you burn at rest in a day, and more)
- Individualized Health Coaching
- Online health education and exercise classes
- Subscription to Weekly Wellness newsletters, covering a variety of health and wellness topics
- Health Risk Assessment and a subscription to the online wellness portal
- SHIP FIT: A workout plan distributed quarterly with all bodyweight exercises that can be done while underway or at home

If you or someone you know may benefit from any of the above listed services, or for more information on the Health Promotion program at MSC, contact one of your Health Promotion Coordinators:

CSU-East: Email: leannehe герстбрайн.ctr@navy.mil, (757) 443-5630
CSU-West: Email: kyle.kutina.ctr@navy.mil, (858) 224-3968

(U.S. Navy photo)
and will be equipped with a basic self-defense capability, including crew served weapons, de-gaussing, and Nixie Torpedo decoys, and has space, weight, and power reservations for Close In Weapon Systems such as SeaRAMs, and an Anti-Torpedo Torpedo Defense System. The Lewis-class of oilers will replace the current Kaiser Class fleet replenishment oilers as they age out of the MSC fleet.

“As the global maritime environment is increasingly crowded and contested, John Lewis will continue working to improve our ability to project power with speed and agility,” Rear Adm. Wettlaufer said. “As the global maritime environment is increasingly crowded and contested, John Lewis will continue to support our National Security Strategy in building partnerships with our friends and allies, and enable Naval forces to rapidly respond to crises, deter adversaries, and maintain forward presence to protect the homeland,” said Wettlaufer. “USNS John Lewis with current and future ships that make up our combat logistics force are absolutely fundamental to that mission as they provide fuel, parts, provisions, and mail for Naval Forces around the globe.”

Six more Lewis-class oilers are on order for the Navy. In July 2016, US Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus that he would name the Lewis-class oilers after prominent civil rights activists and leaders including Harvey Milk, Earl Warren, Sojourner Truth, Lucy Stone and Robert F. Kennedy.

The July 17 ceremony marked the one year anniversary of Lewis’ death from pancreatic cancer. “We miss John on this platform, but we will never be without him,” said Woodward Spencer. “May this ship inspire and free the spirit of those who serve on her and those of us on land”

U.S. Navy photo by Bill Mesta

As Duty Oiler, Joshua Humphreys is currently crewed by approximately 70 personnel.

“The crew of our ship is all civilian with no active duty service members aboard,” said Donnelly. “So we all have our U.S. Coast Guard credentials and are Merchant Marines by trade who choose to serve the Federal Government as Civil Service Mariners.”

“Members of the ship’s deck department perform key roles in executing UNREPs on a fleet replenishment oiler as they run and manage all of the UNREP equipment,” Donnelly stated. “But it is not just the deck department who make UNREPs happen; it is the members of every department aboard the ship who make an UNREP happen.”

“For example, the ship’s purser, who manages all of the ship’s money, stands watch on the ship’s stern as the aft lookout in case someone falls overboard,” he added. “Member of the supply department manage the inventory of fuel in the ships fuel tanks.”

Some of the services provided by the ship’s crew include culinary support, navigation, fuel distribution system management and communication capabilities.

“Another example would be the engineers. The engineering team makes sure that the ‘props’ are spinning, the lights are on and that all the gear is working. The deck department operates the UNREP gear and if engineering team repairs the gear,” according to Donnelly.

“And don’t forget about the Medical Services Officer who is on station in case someone gets injured,” he stated. “When we perform UNREPs it is not a one department show. It is an all hands evolution and everyone is involved.”

In August, USNS Joshua Humphreys Provided logistic support for combatant ships participating in the U.S. Navy’s Large Scale Exercise.