

Casualties: Veteran mariner dies after falling from tugboat near Jacksonville

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Bayou payday: Digging deeper on the Mississippi

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Contents

Professional Mariner February 2021

Brownwater

15 Bayou payday: Dredges dig in to bring Lower Mississippi to 50 feet

BY DAVID TYLER



Trends

38 New technology aims to help mariners save the whales

BY ALAN R. EARLS

Correspondence

42 Mariners more essential than ever as pandemic's challenges mount

BY CAPT. ERIC ROMELCZYK

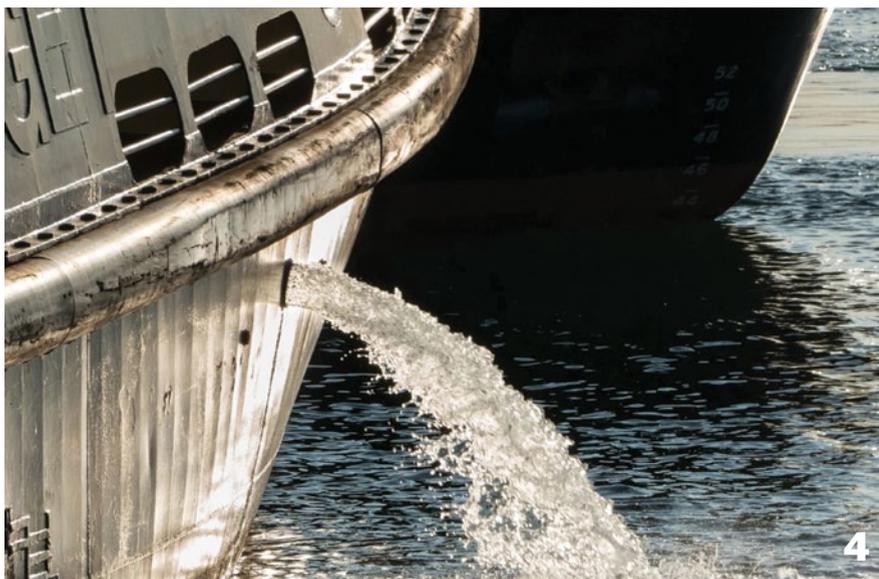


A Mariner's Notebook

48 Cheap rain gear? Penny wise is pound foolish when going to sea

BY CAPT. KELLY SWEENEY

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Industry Signals

4 Industry applauds as EPA unveils coordinated vessel discharge rules

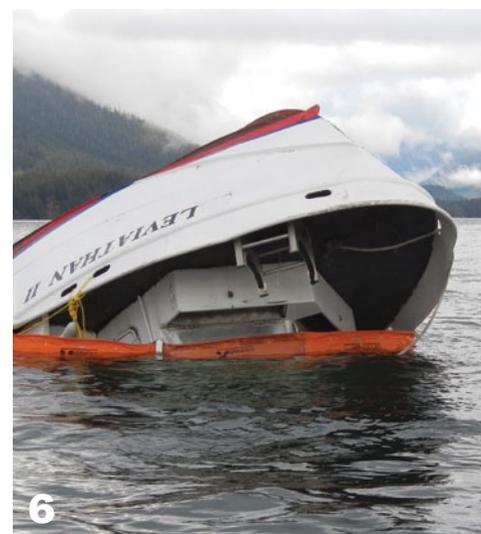
6 Canada updates, consolidates marine regulations to improve safety

8 Credential scheme puts Coast Guard, Va. maritime academy on alert

9 GPS interference plaguing navigation in some regions, MarAd warns

11 Cargo boat getting autonomous system to transit Long Island Sound

13 Remote Pacific rescue showcases professionalism of Matson crew





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Contents

Professional Mariner February 2021



Maritime Casualties

- 26 Texas mariner dies after falling from tugboat near Jacksonville
- 28 Tow hits anchored pontoon boat in North Carolina, killing one
- 28 Casualty Briefs
- 30 NTSB: Pilot's actions, bulker's speed led to Virginia wharf strike
- 33 Three crew rescued from barge after tugboat sinks off RI coast
- 34 Barge strike closes swing span on Intracoastal Waterway in Virginia
- 35 TSB: Pilot's errant orders to tugs led boxship to hit crane, berth

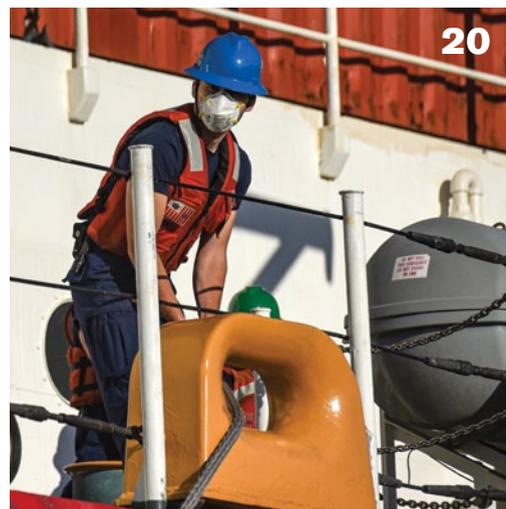
Vessels at Work

- 24 **McAllister adapts to COVID with new protocols for crews, offices**

BY BRIAN GAUVIN

ON THE COVER

The 93-foot, 6,000-hp *Tate McAllister* churns out of the harbor in Port Everglades, Fla., to meet the container ship *CCNI Valparaiso* at the sea buoy. Like many companies in the industry, McAllister Towing has weathered the COVID-19 storm by instituting new safety protocols for crews and office staff. See story, page 24. Brian Gauvin photo



- 20 ***Polar Star* swaps ends of the earth, heads for Arctic duty**

BY PETER ONG



Signals

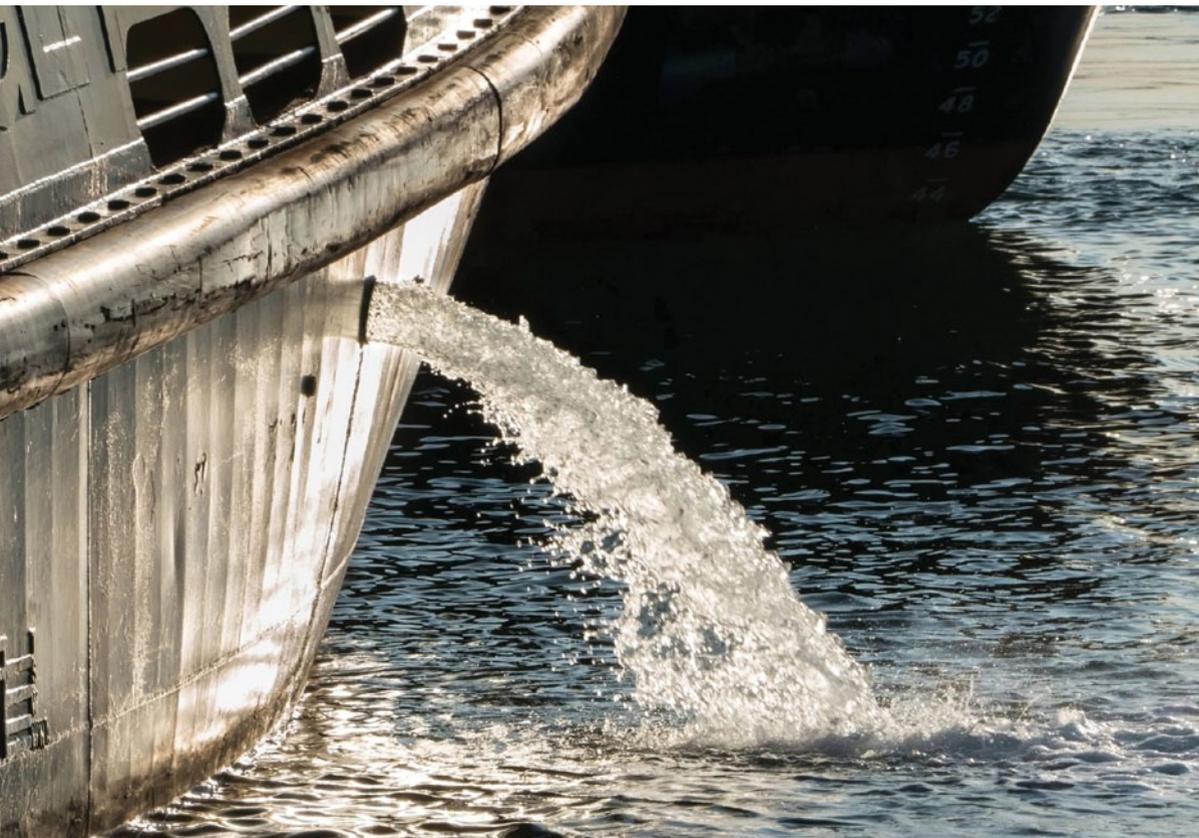
Industry applauds as EPA unveils coordinated vessel discharge rules

Maritime officials and organizations are lauding proposed vessel discharge regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), saying they're sorely needed to harmonize a mix of conflicting federal and state rules.

Congress required the EPA to

establish new performance standards by the end of 2020 under the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA) of 2018, which also requires the U.S. Coast Guard to set technical equipment requirements and enforcement policy by the end of 2022.

The new EPA regulations apply to vessels longer than 79 feet that operate in U.S. waters, including cruise ships, ferries, barges, tugs, tows, tankers, bulk carriers, containerships and research ships. They don't apply to recreational or military vessels.



The proposed EPA rules would eliminate a patchwork of state and federal regulations pertaining to vessel discharges including ballast water, bilge water, desalination and deck runoff.

Wikimedia photo

Once the new rules are in place, state laws will no longer be able to pre-empt VIDA. And that's key, say many of the 179 organizations and individuals that weighed in during a public comment session that ended Nov. 25.

"For now, we're still living with this patchwork quilt of different requirements in various states. But when these (new) regulations become final and enforceable, they'll prevent any more stringent state programs, so there's the consistency we've been begging for for 20 years," said Kathy Metcalf, president of the Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA), which represents 28 U.S.-based companies that own, operate or charter oceangoing tankers, container-ships and other merchant vessels engaged in domestic and international trade.

Discharge rules have "a significant operational impact on these vessels and their crews, which are so critical to keeping maritime trade and transport moving within the U.S. marine transportation system in a safe and environmentally responsible manner," Metcalf said. She noted that the new regulations will be enforceable out to 12 nautical miles instead of the current 3 miles.

Steve Fisher, executive director of the American Great Lakes Ports Association, which represents the interests of commercial ports and port users on the U.S. side of the Great Lakes, said his organization welcomes regulations that will smooth out "an unfortunate

chaotic landscape" of federal and state regulations that can hinder maritime commerce.

"Here you have a ship that is moving from state to state and country to country and the ship-owner can experience a different set of rules every place. That's why there's a need for federal — and even better — international harmonization of these requirements," he said, noting that proposed U.S. regulations are similar to those being implemented internationally.

In the CSA's written comments to the EPA, Metcalf also said consistent international rules are necessary. "Shipping is a global industry and the regulation of global shipping should be international as well to ensure a single set of regulations apply to all vessels, regardless of flag or location," she said. "We appreciate the fact that EPA has made every attempt to align the U.S. requirements with international requirements."

The new rules address 20 vessel discharge categories, including bilge water, chain lockers, fire protection equipment, desalination, deck runoff, hull coatings and refrigeration systems. Most debate centers on the regulation of ballast water discharges to prevent the movement of non-native aquatic species from country to country.

Shipowners who operate in small geographic areas are not required to comply with the same kind of regulations that pertain to ships sailing from other places in the world to the United States.

"We have a number of vessel-

operating companies whose market is really just moving goods around the Great Lakes," Fisher said. "They're not bringing in foreign organisms from Europe or Asia because they're never leaving the Great Lakes. The EPA comes right out and says we're exempting ships that trade exclusively in the Great Lakes."

That's a huge relief given the multimillion-dollar costs that would be involved with installing and maintaining ballast water management systems or retrofitting the fleet to connect to shore-based treatment systems, said James Weakley, president of the Lake Carriers' Association, which represents the U.S.-flagged Great Lakes fleet.

But there will be costs associated with the new regulations for shipowners trading overseas who have vessels arriving at U.S. ports.

"They'll be required to install treatment systems or equipment to comply with the water quality standards defined in these regulations," Fisher explained, noting that the Coast Guard will decide deadlines for that and "costs will come down as more and more companies get into this equipment manufacturing business."

While many organizations are looking forward to coordinated regulations, it will be a while before they're implemented. The change in presidential administrations likely will stall the process. Plus, the Coast Guard has two more years to develop its rules.

Patricia McCarthy

Canada updates, consolidates marine regulations to improve safety

Canada has significantly revised its maritime safety regulations, strengthening emergency notification and situational awareness requirements for more than 23,000 commercial vessels of all types and sizes.

Minister of Transport Marc Garneau announced the revisions, published as “Marine Navigation Safety Regulations 2020,” on Oct. 28. In addition to search and rescue modifications, the changes aim to help mariners prevent collisions and groundings, which account for 60 percent of all reported shipping accidents, according to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB).

The new publication cites the *Leviathan II* disaster in October 2015 as a driving force behind the

safety updates. The whale-watch boat capsized during an excursion on British Columbia’s Clayoquot Sound, killing six people. Emergency response was delayed because the crew was unable to issue a distress call until a flare was fired 40 minutes after the incident, and a communication error slowed efforts to determine the vessel’s location.

The regulatory text notes that between 2008 and 2018, there was an average of 16 fatalities and 50 serious injuries per year on commercial vessels in Canadian waters. While the overall trend has been improving recently, 2018 was “a particularly tragic year” with 20 fatalities.

The new publication establishes changes within four broad categories:

- Distress alerting equipment — There are new mandates for two-way radiocommunications gear and EPIRBs, including the types of vessels required to carry the equipment. These requirements take effect immediately.
- Situational awareness measures — New categories of vessels are required to have a Class A automatic identification system (AIS) to provide enhanced search and rescue information. The compliance deadline is April 2021.
- Bridge navigational watch alarm systems (BNWAS) — More vessels will be required to have these systems, which detect if the officer on watch is absent or incapacitated, then sound an alert. The compliance deadline is January 2022.
- Electronic chart display and

Leviathan II capsized off British Columbia in October 2015, killing six people. The whale-watch boat did not have an EPIRB on board and was not required to carry one. After the accident, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada urged Transport Canada to require the devices on all commercial vessels operating in open water.



information systems (ECDIS) — Some Canadian passenger vessels will face new requirements to carry ECDIS, which can be used as an alternative to paper charts by integrating information from GPS and radar. The compliance deadline is October 2021.

Another impetus for reform was streamlining and clarification. The new publication consolidates nine older regulations to better align with the Canada Shipping Act 2001. It also incorporates Chapter IV (radiocommunications) and Chapter V (navigation safety) of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). This will allow Canada “to meet its international commitments, support harmonization efforts with other jurisdictions and create a clearer and simpler set of regulatory requirements while at the same time improving safety.”

For the most part, maritime businesses seem to be on board with the new regulations. Transport Canada received comments from just four stakeholders after draft text was published in 2019.

One reason for the limited response may be that discussion about these changes started in 2007. Another reason is that newer vessels already have the required technology, which will limit expenditures. To add AIS, for example, Transport Canada estimates the cost at \$24,212 for large vessels (over 20 meters or 65.6 feet) and \$4,302 for small vessels.

Robert Turner, vice president of operations for the Chamber

of Marine Commerce, said the Ottawa-based group supports the new regulatory alignment with the SOLAS Convention and the Canada Shipping Act 2001.

“Consolidating the numerous navigation and radiocommunications regulations into one compre-

hensive regulation is also helpful,” he said.

Regarding costs, particularly for AIS, Turner said chamber members had no concerns “since their ships have been fitted with (it) for many years.”

Tom Ewing

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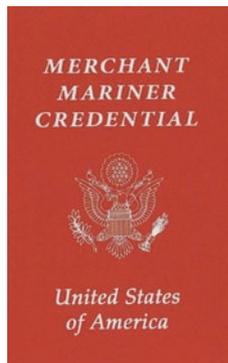
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Credential scheme puts Coast Guard, Va. maritime academy on alert

In the months following a federal indictment in which four men were charged with selling phony U.S. Coast Guard credentials from Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy (MAMA), the service has established a task force to identify mariners who obtained a merchant mariner credential (MMC) or endorsement by fraudulent means and to initiate enforcement action against them.

“The United States Marine Transportation System remains one of the safest in the world, in part by hold-



During a three-year period, more than 150 mariners allegedly bought fake qualification certificates that appeared to be from Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy in order to obtain their credentials.

ing professional mariners to rigorous standards,” said Cmdr. Martha Mannion, chairwoman of the Merchant Mariner Credentialing Fraud Task Force. “Licensed mariners are entrusted with the safety and security of commercial vessels, and the vast majority are dedicated, safety-conscious individuals who work hard to earn their professional credentials and endorsements. By submitting fraudulent course completion certificates, some merchant mariners succeeded in having MMCs and endorsements to MMCs issued without the requisite confirmation of professional competence.”

The October indictment alleges that Lamont Godfrey, who worked as chief administrator at the academy in Norfolk, Va., created counterfeit training certificates for people who never took a MAMA course. Three other men who were not associated with MAMA Eugene Johnson of Virginia, Shunmanique Willis of Texas and Alonzo Williams of Louisiana allegedly solicited mariners interested in buying fraudulent certificates required to hold various positions on merchant vessels.

The Coast Guard is investigating a three-year period during which more than 150 mariners reportedly bought fake qualification certificates that appeared to be from MAMA and loaded them into Coast Guard systems. The conspiracy netted more than \$200,000 in profits, according to the indictment. If convicted, Godfrey, Johnson, Willis and Williams could face two years in prison for conspiracy, mail fraud, wire fraud and aggravated identify theft.

“The school is not implicated in the fraud,” said MAMA President Capt. Ed Nanartowich, adding that the scheme defrauded MAMA. The Coast Guard Investigative Service uncovered the scheme and MAMA has been assisting the service in its inquiry since January 2020. The academy had no record of the fraudulent certificates.

“Our meticulous record-keeping has been instrumental in identifying the fraudulent certificates,” Nanartowich said. “Prior students who have attended MAMA classes, whether

online or in our state-of-the-art facility, and who have interacted with our instructors, tested satisfactorily and met the requirements for class attendance have nothing to worry about. The veracity of their certifications is covered internally by our course, attendance and payment records. These certificates will be recognized as a bona fide cert.”

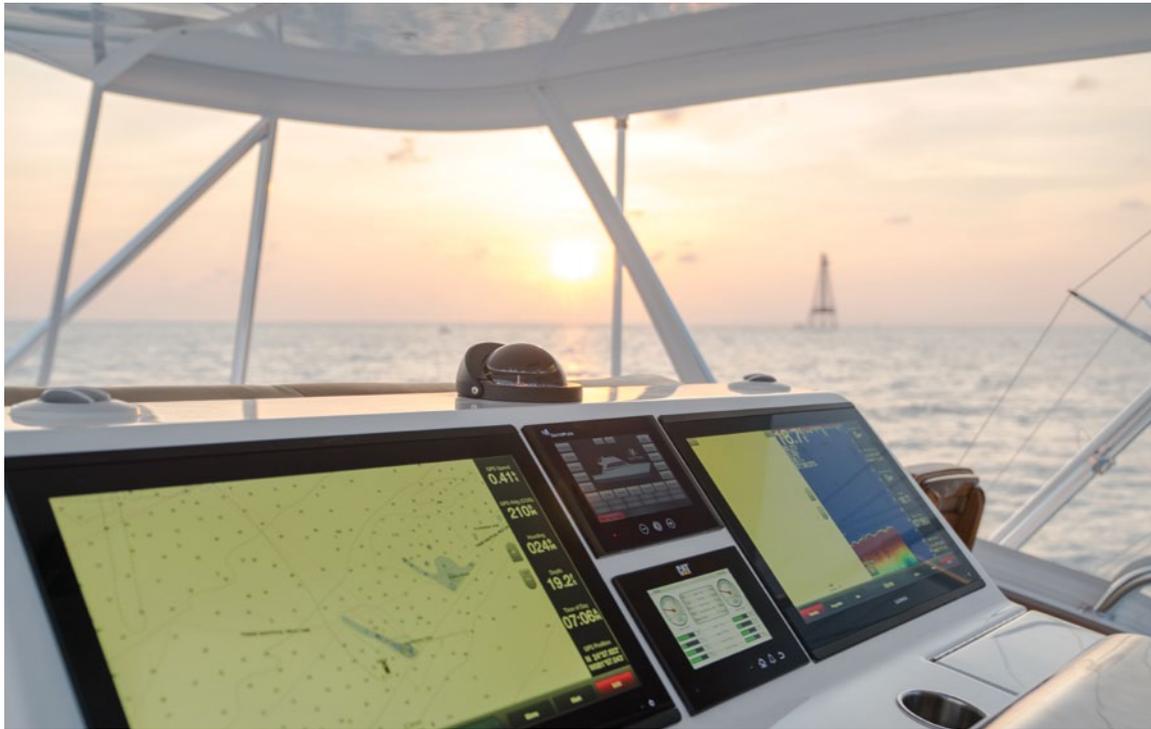
In the year since Coast Guard investigators uncovered the scheme, MAMA has fired Godfrey, improved the academy’s management system and tightened protocols.

“We are taking it beyond seriously,” Nanartowich said. “We have instituted two- and sometimes three-person integrity in the production of certificates.”

Two of the four men charged also are named in a November 2020 indictment involving a test-fixing scheme at a Coast Guard exam center in Mandeville, La. According to this indictment, credentialing specialist Dorothy Smith entered fraudulent scores on tests required for license applications over a period of seven years, resulting in applicants being granted officer-level positions illegally.

Williams, named as an intermediary in the MAMA scheme, allegedly played the same role in the Louisiana test fixing. Willis, charged as a MAMA co-conspirator, was one of 24 current or former merchant mariners found to have an unlawful license in connection with the Louisiana scheme.

Amy Paradysz



GPS jamming sows confusion by disrupting navigational signals, while GPS spoofing takes that a step further by creating fake signals that could lead to vessel collisions. The majority of such incidents have been reported in the Mediterranean and Middle East.

BoatUS photo

GPS interference plaguing navigation in some regions, MarAd warns

Mariners should be on the lookout for significant Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) interference, especially in the eastern and central Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf and multiple Chinese ports, according to recent alerts from the U.S. Maritime Administration (MarAd).

The interference has resulted in lost or inaccurate signals affecting bridge navigation, GPS-based timing and communications equipment. Satellite communications gear also may be impacted, the alerts said. In addition to the GPS system operated by the United States, GNSS includes Russia's GLONASS and other regional navigational systems.

The most recent alert, valid through March 2021, reminds

mariners to exercise caution when operating and prior to getting underway. The U.S. Coast Guard Navigation Center (NAVCEN) and NATO Shipping Center websites have published effective navigation practices for vessels experiencing GPS disruption.

NAVCEN asks mariners to report incidents in real time and to note critical information such as the location (latitude/longitude), date, time and duration of the outage or disruption. Mariners also are requested to provide photographs or screenshots of equipment failures to facilitate analysis. Incidents can be reported online (www.navcen.uscg.gov) or via phone at (703) 313-5900, 24 hours a day.

NAVCEN recommends techniques in case of GPS interference,

such as employing radar to mark bearings and distances on a paper chart (or switching to the dead-reckoning mode with a radar overlay on electronic charts) and using parallel indexing with multiple radars while underway. Situational awareness, including verified position and velocity, is crucial to maintain safe commercial operations, NAVCEN said.

The current MarAd advisory covers the entire world. However, the bulk of GPS interference incidents have been reported by vessels operating in the Mediterranean Sea, with a concentration in the vicinity of Egypt, NAVCEN reported. In the past several years, disruptions also have been reported in the Port of Shanghai.

GPS interference or jamming

disrupts navigational signals in a given area, sowing confusion and leading to bottlenecks in ports and sea lanes. GPS spoofing creates fake signals that could lead a vessel off course. Terrorists could direct an oil tanker to crash, for instance, causing an environmental disaster.

Experts say it's difficult to pinpoint the source of the disruptions. Sometimes they are due to atmospheric disturbances, technical causes such as equipment or mapping failures, or conditions in space. However, cyberattacks are strongly suspected in certain locations. Using a GNSS receiver on the International Space Station,

researchers from the University of Texas at Austin pinpointed one source of interference from March 2017 through June 2020 at an air base in western Syria.

The first MarAd advisory of 2020 outlined commercial maritime threats from Iran and its proxies in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. MarAd warned of the possibility of GPS interference, bridge-to-bridge communications spoofing and other communications jamming with little to no warning. Mariners also have reported bridge-to-bridge

communications from unknown entities falsely claiming to be U.S. or coalition warships, according to the advisory.

With the realization that GPS and other electronics may come under attack in time of war, countries are looking to history for alternatives. The U.S. Navy has experimented with a World War II-era solution, dropping weighted message pouches from aircraft onto a ship's deck. The Chinese military has trained to use bugle calls for battlefield communications if GNSS and radio signals become impossible to use.

Gary Wollenhaupt

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Cargo boat getting autonomous system to transit Long Island Sound

A hybrid-powered catamaran that carries produce and occasionally passengers across Long Island Sound is being retrofitted to become the first autonomous-controlled cargo vessel in the United States.

First Harvest Navigation of Norwalk, Conn., has been using *Captain Ben Moore* to transport supplies between the company's 4-year-old Harbor Harvest food market and a new store it opened on the waterfront in Huntington, N.Y. The 65-foot aluminum vessel was built by Derektor Shipyards and delivered in 2019.

In November, the operator began installing a remote-helm control system from Boston-based Sea Machines Robotics that will allow the catamaran to be operated with no crew aboard. First Harvest plans to keep its captain and two deck hands in place, however. It sees the system as a way to back up the captain while he is steering and free him up to help with other tasks away from the wheelhouse, including preparing cargo to be unloaded.

The SM300 system, which includes obstruction-detection and collision-avoidance technology, allows remote-control operation from shore or another vessel via



Sea Machines Robotics photos



The hybrid catamaran *Captain Ben Moore* is getting a remote-helm control system from Sea Machines Robotics that can be operated by using a joystick controller or laptop on board, or from another vessel or shore-side control room.

the internet. First Harvest President

Bob Kunkel said that after installation is completed in consultation with the Coast Guard, which is expected in early 2021, testing on the Sound will begin. Sea Machines estimated the cost of an installed SM300 system at \$100,000.

With growing interest in autonomous control systems, “everybody wants to talk about removing the crew,” Kunkel said. “We don’t think that’s where the value of the autonomy can come. We don’t

have any intention at this time of removing crew. We think we can provide safer navigation. ... The captain could come back and get the cargo ready for discharge rather than just being glued to the pilot seat as the boat is going back and forth. It would be a pilot program to see how we could operate the vessel more efficiently. It’s not going to be operated like a drone.”

Kunkel, a Massachusetts Maritime Academy graduate who has worked as a merchant marine chief engineer, said he has had a lot of discussion with the Coast Guard about the system to ensure safety would not be sacrificed. He said it is akin to an enhanced autopilot system with more safeguards to prevent accidents. There’s still some fine-tuning necessary in the system’s detection and analysis of obstructions ahead of the vessel, Kunkel said. The system has the

ability to notice that there is an obstruction ahead and warn the operator, but “it has to develop some more recognition. Right now just about everything is recognized as a boat,” he said. Kunkel is working with the manufacturer on adjustments to the system so it can better differentiate types of obstructions.

Kunkel said that during testing he would be operating the system via computer from shore, but “there will be somebody on the boat too to make sure that I don’t crash the boat into the damn dock.”

A documentary is being made about the project, Kunkel said.

Captain Ben Moore has been in operation for about a year. Kunkel said it is currently running from Norwalk to Huntington about twice a week since business has slowed due to COVID-19, curbing the demand from restaurants for fresh fish.

“We have some good contracts with a lot of food moving on the boat and we have a lot of passenger interest,” he said. “I think it will grow.”

Besides transporting food from Norwalk to the new Huntington store, the company moves produce from a farm in New Jersey and makes deliveries as far out on Long Island as Montauk. In the summer, the boat carried up to 50 passengers on day trips between Long Island and Connecticut. “That’s been pretty successful,” Kunkel said.

He said trucking the food prod-

ucts from Connecticut to Long Island would be more than an eight-hour round trip, while the catamaran reaches Huntington in about 40 minutes. “Shifting cargo from streets and highways also alleviates growing congestion, (reduces) emissions and re-establishes our waterways as a viable and cost-efficient alternative to land-based transport,” Kunkel said.

“Sea Machines and First Harvest Navigation are aligned in our commitments to innovation

Smith said autonomy systems “work 24/7 and never get tired or distracted. This ‘on-watch redundancy’ can help to prevent operational incidents and keep crews safer.”

to bolster the U.S. marine highway system and in our support of family farms,” said Michael Johnson, founder and CEO of Sea Machines.

Amelia Smith, marketing communications consultant for the 5-year-old company, said Sea Machines systems have been installed aboard vessels ranging from a Maersk containership to patrol boats. She said it’s important for people to understand that “autonomous doesn’t equal unmanned. All of our SM300 autonomous command and con-

trol system customers use the autonomy features, which include autonomous transit, obstacle detection and collision avoidance, grid autonomy, collaborative autonomy and/or remote vessel command and control.”

Smith said autonomy systems “work 24/7 and never get tired or distracted. This ‘on-watch redundancy’ can help to prevent operational incidents and keep crews safer. The majority of our customers are using this system as a mariner’s aid, with crew on board. Unmanned operations are only being done in a very few special cases in very controlled domains.”

Captain Ben Moore, the third in a series of 65-foot hybrids built by Derektor in Mamaroneck, N.Y., is the first designed for carrying freight. It is powered by a pair of Cummins QSB 6.7 diesels, generating 104 kW each at 2,400 kW, and lithium batteries connected to a pair of BAE Systems HybriDrive electric motors. The vessel has a top speed of 15 knots and boasts 300 square feet of open cargo space, 100 square feet of covered space and 140 square feet of walk-in refrigerated space. The total capacity is 12,000 pounds of cargo or the equivalent of three to five full truckloads, according to Kunkel.

The earlier Derektor catamarans are *Spirit of the Sound*, built for the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, and *CUNY I*, ordered by the City University of New York. Both are research vessels.

Bill Bleyer

Remote Pacific rescue showcases professionalism of Matson crew

Crew aboard the Matson containership *Mahimahi* learned just after lunch on July 6 that a sailboat transiting from San Francisco to Hawaii was in trouble.

The trimaran *Third Try* failed to make a 24-hour report, and the Coast Guard requested that *Mahimahi* divert toward the sailboat's last known position almost 190 nautical miles away. By dawn the next morning, all three sailors from *Third Try* were safe aboard the ship.

"It was perfectly uneventful," *Mahimahi* Capt. Tim Kalke said of the rescue in a phone interview from his ship docked in Honolulu.

But the successful rescue was no foregone conclusion, particularly in that desolate corner of the Pacific Ocean about 825 miles northeast of Oahu.

Third Try left San Francisco on June 25 with two men and one woman on board who were hoping for a nonstop circumnavigation of the world. About five days later the boat encountered 10-foot seas and 25-knot winds that damaged the 50-foot vessel, causing it to slowly break apart. A friend on shore reported the possible distress at 0800 on July 6 when the crew failed to check in.

The Coast Guard contacted *Mahimahi* through the Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue (AMVER) system. The 21 crew aboard learned about the situation at 1340 on July 6 as the

ship headed for Hawaii loaded with containers.

The initial Coast Guard report was short on detail, Kalke recalled. The Matson crew didn't know the condition of the sailboat, whether anyone on board was injured, and if they were, how badly. There also were concerns

Oahu located the vessel and made contact with its crew.

The Coast Guard gave *Mahimahi* an update at 1900, letting the crew know the three people on the sailboat were in good physical condition and that *Third Way* could make 7 knots. That eased a lot of Kalke's concerns.



Vladimir Tonic photo

about possible COVID-19 exposure.

"Between 1340 and 1900, we were running through every worst-case scenario," Kalke said. "Were there people in the water? Were there kids on board? Do they all have COVID? Did someone have a heart attack? How are they going to get on board?"

In the meantime, *Third Try's* owner recognized the vessel's situation was untenable. He activated the EPIRB, which gave authorities a clear idea of where the boat was. A Coast Guard HC-130 from Air Station Barbers Point on

Mahimahi, shown leaving the Port of Honolulu in 2019, received an AMVER call in July and diverted to rescue three mariners on a damaged sailboat 825 miles northeast of Oahu. "Every one of the crew was involved and carried out their duties professionally," says Capt. Tim Kalke.

"Once we found out we were dealing with a boat that could make way, that there were three healthy people, that they were able to come along the port side in perfect weather, everyone breathed easier," he said.

Mahimahi's crew planned to recover the sailors from a pilot ladder on the port side of the 859-foot

ship. The rescue strategy called for using the ship to make a lee to allow the sailboat to come alongside. From there the sailors could climb up the ladder onto the ship.

As *Mahimahi* closed on *Third Try*'s position, mariners on both vessels confirmed the plan over radio. By 0337 on July 7, all three sailors had climbed aboard the boxship and *Third Try* was left adrift. Given its compromised condition, Kalke said towing it hundreds of miles at 21 knots seemed imprudent. The sailors disembarked a couple of days later when *Mahimahi* reached Honolulu Harbor.

"One of our greatest challenges out here in the Pacific is distance," said Lt. Diane French, command duty officer at the Coast Guard's Joint Rescue Coordination Center in Honolulu. "First responders are often days away and we regularly rely on merchant vessel crews like the *Mahimahi*'s to assist with search and rescue cases. We are always grateful for their help."

Kalke, a three-year Matson captain with 22 years at sea, offered high praise for his crew during the "all hands" event. "Every one of the crew was involved and carried out their duties professionally," he said.

Quartermaster Allen "Gonzo" Gonzalez, 69, earned special recognition. "Gonzo did an excellent job on the helm maneuvering the ship during the rescue," Kalke said, adding that the crewman has been sailing on U.S. merchant ships since 1969 — the same year Kalke was born.

Third Try's owner contacted Kalke a few weeks after the rescue. The sailboat eventually arrived on Oahu, albeit a little later than planned. A fisherman found the vessel drifting 30 miles north of the rugged North Shore and towed it to the island on Aug. 6.

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Brownwater

by David Tyler



Big River Coalition photo

Bayou payday: Dredges dig in to bring Lower Mississippi to 50 feet

A long-awaited project to deepen the Lower Mississippi River ship channel to 50 feet from the Gulf of Mexico to Baton Rouge, La., is now underway. It will eventually allow larger ships to call at ports and refineries farther upriver than is currently possible, reducing shipping costs for exporters.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates it will take four years to dredge about 66 miles of the river, opening up 256 miles of the Lower Mississippi to post-Panamax ves-

sels with drafts of 50 feet, according to Sean Duffy, executive director of the Big River Coalition, an industry group working to promote the project.

The total cost of the project will be about \$271 million, with about \$133 million slated to be paid by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, according to Ricky Boyett, spokesman for the Army Corps' New Orleans District. The project will provide annual benefits of about \$127 million to the national economy, said Col.

Stephen Murphy, commander of the district.

The cutterhead dredge *Capt. Frank*, operated by Weeks Marine of Cranford, N.J., began work in early September just above Head of Passes, where the main section of the Mississippi divides into three branches at its mouth. The calculation of river miles starts at Head of Passes.

Deepening the channel is essential to keep the five major Louisiana ports on the Mississippi competitive, since a 50-foot depth is the new normal in the shipping industry. Com-

bined, these five ports handle over a half-billion tons of cargo each year, with four of the ports among the top 13 in the country based on tonnage.

"This is already spurring investment (along) a lot of the Lower Mississippi River because we will be able to handle the industry's largest ships," said Matt Gresham, spokesman for the Port of

Dredging to deepen the Mississippi River ship channel to 50 feet to the Port of Baton Rouge began in September above Head of Passes. When completed, post-Panamax ships will have access to 256 miles of the lower waterway.



Captain Ted/Shipsporting.com photo

The Weeks Marine cutterhead dredge *Capt. Frank*, left, which kicked off the dredging project for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was temporarily replaced by fleet sister *E.W. Ellefsen* in November to undergo repairs. Below, the 6,400-TEU *MSC Marina* unloads cargo at the Napoleon Avenue Container Terminal at the Port of New Orleans. By deepening the channel 50 feet deep, the port would be able to handle boxships up to 22,000 TEUs.

New Orleans. The only American ports that can now handle ships with a 50-foot draft are Baltimore, Hampton Roads, Miami and New York/New Jersey.

The first phase of the project involves dredging Southwest Pass. The second phase, to start in the summer of 2021, will dredge the river's lower nine crossings, according to Marti Lucore, senior project manager at the New Orleans District of the Army Corps. Crossings are places where sediment builds up in the river's curves. Target areas include Fairview Crossing, 116 miles above Head of Passes, up to Medora Crossing at 211.3 miles.

The third phase, scheduled for the summer of

2022, will involve dredging the next two crossings upriver: Sardine Point Crossing at 218 miles and Red Eye Crossing at 223.2 miles. The fourth phase is at the Baton Rouge Front crossing at 228.4 miles.

The dredging alone will cost \$184 million, with the federal government paying 75 percent (\$138 million) and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development paying 25 percent (\$46 million), Boyett said. In addition, it will cost \$87 million to relocate pipelines under the river, which is assigned to the state. However, Louisiana is working with the pipeline owners to pay half of that sum, according to Lucore. Since the pipeline project is non-federal, the U.S. government will



Gnowicz/Wikipedia photo

not fund it, Boyett said. The Soy Transportation Coalition contributed \$2 million to help defray the state's cost.

Nearly 11,000 foreign vessels called on Louisiana ports on the Mississippi in 2014, including container ships, tankers and bulk

carriers, according to the Army Corps' 2018 general re-evaluation report on the project. The current 45-foot depth of the ship channel means that larger vessels have to either carry less cargo or unload cargo to navigate farther upriver, which increases transpor-

tation costs. Every one foot of channel deepening equals \$1 million of additional cargo per ship, Duffy said.

“For that additional five feet, you have the advantage of being able to ship an additional \$5 million of cargo per vessel,” he said. “It’s a major cost savings for shippers.”

Other domestic ports are pursuing a 50-foot depth to accommodate larger ships, but Gresham believes the Mississippi deepening will have the biggest impact on U.S. trade.

“We think the Lower Mississippi (project) is going to benefit a much larger piece of the nation than a lot of these other projects, because here you have the oil refineries, the chemical plants, the grain terminals, the import-export terminals,” he said.

Right now, cargo ships no larger than 10,000 TEUs serve Gulf of Mexico ports, according to Gresham. Despite that limitation, it’s a booming business. In 2019, the Port of New Orleans set a record by moving 648,538 TEUs, up 10 percent from 2018. With a channel 50 feet deep, the port would be able

to handle containerships up to 22,000 TEUs. The only limiting factor at that point would be the vessel’s air draft, the distance from its highest point to the waterline.

Two new container terminals already in the planning stages will benefit from a deeper channel. The Plaquemines Port Harbor and Terminal District is working with several companies to build a 1,000-acre multimodal container facility 50 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi, and the Port of New Orleans is working on site selection for a second terminal downriver from the port that would have unlimited air draft.

“The new terminal, which will have a throughput capacity of up to 2 million TEUs, will require an investment in excess of \$1 billion,” Gresham said.

Commodities expected to gain the most from the project are crude oil, pig iron, iron ore and gasoline on the import side, with corn and soybeans leading on the export side, according to an economic impact report written by Dr. Timothy Ryan.

Louisiana ports handle 60 percent of U.S. soybean exports and 59 percent of

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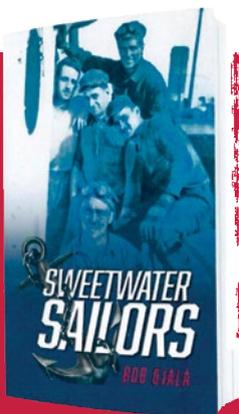
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corn exports, according to the Soy Transportation Coalition. Larger ships would mean that loads could increase from 2.4 million bushels of soybeans per ship to 2.9 million bushels. It would cut the shipping cost of soybeans by 13 cents per bushel, a significant figure for an industry competing with farmers in Argentina and Brazil, said Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the soy coalition. Soybean farmers in the 31 states connected to the Mississippi River would make an additional \$461 million per year.

Deepening the Lower Mississippi also will help the towing industry. "It will be an incremental, beneficial increase," said Mark Wright, vice president of the American Waterways Operators' Southern Region, when asked about the project's impact on barge traffic. "In the long run, you could see a 10 to 20 percent increase in work."

Harbor tugboat operators are expected to gain as well. "The bigger ships also create demand for tug services, for ship assists with tugs," Wright said. "It's likely to create more work."

On the environmental side, the deepening project will help restore marshland at the mouth of the river. Nearly 1,500 acres of open water will be converted to coastal marsh habitat, according to the Army Corps' 2018 general re-evaluation report.

The origin of the project goes back almost 40 years. A 1981 federal feasibility report recommended that the Lower Mississippi from Baton Rouge to the gulf be deepened to 55 feet, and Congress authorized the depth in 1985. Louisiana's proposed share of the cost of dredging beyond 45 feet was prohibitive, however, so between 1987 and 1994 the channel was deepened from 40 feet to 45 feet.

In 2012, the Big River Coalition led the effort to deepen the channel to 50 feet. Then in 2016, Congress passed a bill that changed the cost-sharing formula for Army Corps projects to a 75 percent federal contribution and a 25 percent non-federal contribution, which often comes from states. The project soon gained momentum and the federal government authorized funds. •



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Polar Star swaps ends of the earth, heads for Arctic duty

by Peter Ong

The only surviving heavy icebreaker in the U.S. Coast Guard fleet, the 44-year-old *Polar Star* (WAGB 10), has a new winter mission after the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cutter's annual resupply excursion to McMurdo Station in Antarctica to be canceled. Instead, *Polar Star* sailed to the Arctic in early December from Seattle, where it is home-ported, marking the icebreaker's first trip to the northern polar region in 22 years.

Polar Star usually transits to Mare Island Dry Dock in Vallejo, Calif., after Opera-

tion Deep Freeze each year for maintenance and repairs before sailing back to Seattle. The Coast Guard reported that last winter's Antarctic mission was a success, with no major malfunctions or issues compared to some previous voyages south. The 399-foot icebreaker is showing its age, though — it is close to 15 years past its intended 30-year service date — and the Coast Guard noted that spare parts are getting much harder to find since production of certain items has long since ceased. The icebreaker's exterior was repainted in 2017.

Polar Star's sister ship, *Polar*

With Mount Baker in the background, U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Polar Star* transits Puget Sound on Dec. 4 en route to the Arctic. The icebreaker normally departs for Antarctica at this time of year, but the pandemic canceled its resupply mission there.

Sea (WAGB 11), sits idle in Seattle due to an engine casualty and has been used for spare parts since 2011. The Coast Guard deemed repairs of *Polar Sea's* engines as too costly, so *Polar Star* sails on as the nation's only heavy icebreaker until the commissioning of the first polar security cutter (PSC) in 2024. The PSCs are much improved in design, with the capability of steaming through ice 6 to 8 feet thick. *Polar Star* is tentatively scheduled to serve until 2027.

This northward voyage for *Polar Star* resulted from problems on *Healy* (WAGB 20), a 21-year-old medium icebreaker



Highlighting life at sea during COVID-19, a crew member aboard *Polar Star* takes in a line as the cutter prepares to depart Seattle. Below, the ship heads for open water with assistance from the 63-foot *Westrac*, a z-drive tug in the Western Towboat fleet.

that suffered an engine room fire and starboard drive breakdown during its Arctic voyage in August 2020. *Healy* currently resides at Mare Island, undergoing an extensive and expensive repair that requires cutting into the side of its thick hull to remove the damaged engine. A replacement engine has been shipped from the East Coast through the Panama Canal and up the West Coast to Mare Island. As a result of *Healy's* engine room fire, the Coast Guard only has one operational polar icebreaker.

With the Northwest Passage

Polar Star at a glance

The U.S. Coast Guard heavy icebreaker *Polar Star* (WAGB 10) was built by Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Co. of Seattle, Wash., and commissioned in 1976. It is one of the largest ships in the Coast Guard and one of the world's most powerful non-nuclear ships. It is home-ported in Seattle.

Polar Star's three propeller shafts are turned by either a diesel-electric or gas turbine power plant. Each shaft is connected to a four-blade, controllable-pitch propeller that is 16 feet in diameter. The diesel-electric plant can produce 18,000 shaft horsepower (13,425 kilowatts) and the gas turbine plant 75,000 shaft horsepower (55,925 kilowatts).

Polar Star displaces 13,200 tons and can break through ice up to 6 feet thick at a speed of 3 knots. While backing and ramming, it can break ice up to 21 feet thick.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard



U.S. Coast Guard photos

opening up due to the melting polar ice cap, commercial shipping and the hunt for resources by Russia, China and the surrounding Arctic nations require Coast Guard vigilance and patrolling of the Arctic Circle. The service has the medium-endurance cutter *Alex Haley* and several Sentinel-class fast response cutters in Alaska, but only *Polar Star* can cut through heavy ice on this specialized mission north.

“*Polar Star* will deploy into the Arctic this winter in support of the Coast Guard’s Arctic strategy,” Lt. Cmdr. Stephen

Brickey told *Professional Mariner*. “The cutter will depart with an intended route that will be changed as needed. (It) will patrol along the U.S.-Russia maritime boundary line, strengthen international and intergovernmental partnerships, and project U.S. presence and sovereignty into the Arctic.”

Potential duties for *Polar Star* could include visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS), fisheries enforcement and inspections, escorting and inspection of commercial shipping, icebreaking and freeing

The 399-foot *Polar Star* displays its ice-breaking capability last January in Antarctica, clearing a path for resupply vessels bound for McMurdo Station.

ice-trapped vessels, and matters related to homeland security and national defense. *Polar Star* isn’t armed for its Antarctic excursions, but for the Arctic trip it sailed with two .50-caliber heavy machine guns and an “assortment of sidearms,” the Coast Guard said.

“The Arctic is no longer an emerging frontier, but is instead a region of growing national importance,” said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, commander of the service’s Pacific Area. “The Coast Guard is committed to protecting U.S. sovereignty and working with our partners to



uphold a safe, secure and rules-based Arctic.”

Polar Star's crew consists of personnel from the Coast Guard Research and Development Center, a small contingent of scientists, and representatives of an exchange involving the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Royal Navy and other Coast Guard units.

“*Polar Star* is taking on scientists; however, it is not yet known what their role or function will be,” Senior Chief Petty Officer NyxoLyno Cangemi said in November.

One upgrade on the ice-breaker for its first Arctic foray in decades is the Kongsberg CCTV system installed in 2016 to identify shipping and hazards to navigation. *Polar Star's* system is similar to the CCTV upgrade that went into *Healy* in 2013.

The system deployed on *Polar Star* includes fixed cameras above deck that have zoom capability, high-resolution lowlight sensors and an integrated wiper system. Below deck are high-resolution color dome cameras with built-in infrared

Polar Star isn't armed in the Antarctic, but for the Arctic trip it sailed with two .50-caliber heavy machine guns and an “assortment of sidearms.”

illumination for poor lighting conditions. “(The system) will provide improved video image quality, more flexible control, power conditioning, viewing, recording options and maximum durability for operating in some of the most hostile marine conditions,” according to Kongsberg.

After sailing into the Gulf of Alaska, *Polar Star* was expected to cross into the Bering Sea and then the Chukchi Sea. The ship might push farther north, depending on ice conditions, before heading back to Seattle in early March.



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At Work

McAllister adapts to COVID with new protocols for crews, offices

Story and photos
by Brian Gauvin

With a year of the pandemic behind us, McAllister Towing continues to adjust to the effects that COVID-19 has had on the tugboat industry worldwide.

“The initial pandemic outbreak brought a slowdown of business, which resulted in a number of employees being furloughed,” said Capt. Steven Kress, vice president of operations for McAllister. “Some of the employees were never brought back from furlough and were permanently laid off as business shrank. Fewer ships calling on New York required fewer tugs.”

To keep the virus at bay at the administrative level, McAllister implemented a work-from-home policy, with employees communicat-

ing via phone and virtual meetings. The 24-hour dispatch operations center remained open with COVID protocols in place.

“We’ve returned to the office on an alternating schedule to make sure that we are able to properly space out,” Kress said in November.

Kress recited a comprehensive list of protocols that include wearing a mask, social distancing and an intensive disinfection program using antimicrobial soap on doorknobs and frequently touched surfaces in common areas. For a period of time, the company covered frequently touched areas with antimicrobial film.

In addition, McAllister installed touchless faucets in the kitchens and bathrooms, as well as touchless toilet

*Eric McAllister runs with a line up to the stern of the containership **Cristina Star** in the Kill Van Kull between Staten Island, N.Y., and Bayonne, N.J. The 98-foot, 6,000-hp tug is currently deployed in Wilmington, N.C.*

flush mechanisms. It also increased the frequency of cleaning service visits.

Early in the pandemic, crewmembers avoided airports and planes by commuting solo by vehicle to their boats.

“Tug crews are kept isolated on their respective tugs, and on crew change days the boats are cleaned and disinfected,” Kress said. “Incoming crews must fill out a contact questionnaire and have their temperature taken.”

A bright light for McAllister’s





Capt. Brian A. McAllister, left, heads down the Hudson River in New York City during Fleet Week in 2018. The outbreak of COVID-19 early last year stifled ship traffic coming into the harbor, reducing work for tugboats. Below, Eric McAllister heads for its next job at the Port of New York and New Jersey.

East Coast fleet during the pandemic has been traffic at the Port of Wilmington, N.C. North Carolina Ports has aggressively upgraded facilities and access for the massive neo-Panamax containerships now transiting the expanded Panama Canal. Three neo-Panamax cranes have been installed at Wilmington, containership berthing space has been increased by 2,600 contiguous feet, and the air draft at the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge has been increased.

“We in the tugboat industry, being considered essential, have continued to work, all the while observing best practices and COVID-19 protocols,” said Capt. Glenn Turbeville, vice president and general manager for McAllister’s Wilmington fleet. “We have been very fortunate at McAllister Towing of Wilmington, with no lost time due to COVID. We will be redoubling our efforts now as winter is arriving.”



Capt. Terry Briggs, left, mans the helm of the 6,000-hp Tate McAllister as the z-drive runs with a line up on the containership Monte Tamar at Port Everglades, Fla.



Two FFS fire monitors, left, dominate the view from Capt. Brian A. McAllister aft of the wheelhouse. The Bayonne Bridge is in the background. With storm clouds building, Tate McAllister, right, heads out of the harbor at Port Everglades to meet the containership CCNI Valparaiso at the sea buoy.



Casualties

Texas mariner dies after falling from tugboat near Jacksonville

A Texas man working on a tugboat in Jacksonville, Fla., died after falling into the St. Johns River while trying to board a dredge barge.

Oziel Martinez, 41, fell from the tugboat *Pops* at about 0300 on Nov. 22 while attempting to step onto the clamshell dredging barge *New York*. Martinez was not wearing a life jacket and did not resurface after entering the river, the Coast Guard reported.

“He was transiting from the tugboat on a walkway bridge to a barge,” said Coast Guard spokesman Vincent Moreno. “I am not sure of their operations or what was going on that night for them.”

Additional details about the incident have not been released. It’s not clear if either vessel was underway, if Martinez slipped or if there were any issues with the walkway as he crossed it.

The Coast Guard is investigat-

ing the incident but likely will need several months before determining the cause.

A wrongful death lawsuit filed on behalf of Martinez’s survivors suggests the barge *New York* was poorly illuminated. The allegation could not be confirmed. The suit lists Great Lakes Dredge and Dock (GLDD) and Gore Marine as defendants and seeks at least \$10 million in damages.

“For unknown reasons, (the)



Oziel Martinez, who died while attempting to board a barge from the tugboat *Pops*, left, was well regarded by fellow members of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 25. “He was an exceptional boat captain, but an even more exceptional family man and friend,” the IUOE wrote in a social media post.

Steve Collingwood/IUOE photos

Great Lakes vessel was not properly lit for work at night,” according to the suit filed by attorneys Tony Buzbee and Chris Leavitt of The Buzbee Law Firm in Houston. “This lack of lighting contributed to a very dangerous work environment and led to Mr. Martinez’s death.”

Martinez worked aboard the 70-foot *Pops* operated by Gore Marine of Townsend, Ga. Great Lakes Dredge and Dock manages the 200-foot *New York*, one of the largest backhoe dredges in the world. Gore Marine did not respond to an inquiry about the incident. GLDD declined to comment and referred questions to Gore Marine.

Authorities did not specify the dredging project Martinez was assisting with on the morning he died, or his role aboard *Pops*. The exact location where he went into the river also was not released. Moreno said the incident occurred on the north side of Blount Island, where much of Jacksonville’s port facilities are located, near a series of bridges connecting it with the mainland.

GLDD is involved with efforts to dredge in and around the Port of Jacksonville. The company has contracted to widen and deepen the federal channel to 47 feet, expand a turning basin and deepen berths at the Jacksonville Port Authority Blount Island Marine Terminal, GLDD said in September.

A Jacksonville Port Authority

spokeswoman said only that the incident involved a private user of the Port of Jacksonville “and did not occur at any (port authority) facilities.”

Martinez, whose family lives in Starr County roughly 100 miles west of Brownsville, Texas, was married with two children. He was a 20-year veteran of the maritime industry who joined the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 25 six years ago. He worked for several large dredge operators over the years, including GLDD. He made an impression on his co-workers every step of the way and developed a solid reputation.

“There were many times we would get a call from multiple signatory contractors at the same time, requesting Ozzy for their boat,” the union said in a statement posted on social media. “He was an exceptional boat captain, but an even more exceptional family man and friend.”

“If you were working beside him on the tug or were on the other end of the line or pipe as he would make up with the derrick or dredge, you knew you were in good hands,” the statement continued. “His family was always in good hands with him as well.”

The Coast Guard spent more than a day looking for Martinez from air and water. A dive team from the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office also assisted in the search. His body was recovered on Nov. 24.

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Tow hits anchored pontoon boat in North Carolina, killing one

One recreational boater died and another was injured when a tugboat pushing a single barge hit an anchored pontoon boat in the Intracoastal Waterway near Beaufort, N.C.

The barge, pushed by the 94-foot *John Parrish*, hit the pontoon boat outside the navigation channel at about 1300 on Nov. 3, said U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr.

Dan Schrader. Both people on the recreational craft ended up in the water.

The incident is under investigation but the Coast Guard has not yet determined the cause. The ongoing inquiry limits what the service can release about the case, Schrader said. As such, the Coast Guard could not comment on details about the impact or how the

pontoon boat passengers ended up in the water.

Scott Ingle, a wildlife officer with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, said the pontoon boat did not sink. He helped coordinate its removal from the waterway later in the day on Nov. 3. He referred other questions about the incident to the Coast Guard.

John Parrish, a 1,500-hp model

CASUALTY BRIEFS

Crewman missing, presumed dead after falling from ship off Texas

A 27-year-old mariner sailing aboard the tanker *Sagami* is missing and presumed dead after falling into the Gulf of Mexico near Sabine Pass, Texas.

The victim, whose name and nationality were not identified, worked aboard the 557-foot tanker registered in Panama. He fell overboard at about 1906 on Dec. 2 when the ship was about 29 miles from shore, the U.S. Coast Guard said. The vessel was inbound to the Port of Beaumont.

"(He) was rigging an accommodation ladder when he fell overboard," Coast Guard spokeswoman Paige Hause said. "The individual was sighted in the water and life rings were tossed (to) him after he fell in."

The mariner was wearing an orange life jacket and coveralls with reflective tape. The Coast Guard searched for the crewman for more than 36 hours using two ships and four aircraft. The effort covered more than 2,800 square miles.

"The Coast Guard completed an exhaustive search using all available search and rescue assets," said Petty Officer 1st Class John McKendrick, Sector Houston-Galveston command duty officer. "Cases like these are hard and our thoughts and prayers are with this mariner's family, friends and shipmates."

A spokesman for MTI Network, an international crisis communications firm, identified the shipowner and manager as M.T. Sagami. Norway-based Odfjell Tankers also lists the vessel as part of its fleet.

"The owner and manager wish to express their deepest sympathies to the family of the seafarer," said Nick Roe of MTI Network Asia Ltd. "Our thoughts are with them at this difficult time and help and support is being provided."

Safety alert offers details of Jacksonville ro-ro fire

Crew aboard the 600-foot *Hoegh Xiamen* recognized the ship was on fire at about 1545 on June 4, while the ship was tied up at Blount Island in Jacksonville, Fla. A recent Coast Guard safety alert offers new details about the fire that burned for more than a week.

The alert, issued Nov. 30, suggests investigators are looking at the vehicles loaded on the ship as a likely cause of the fire. The Coast Guard identified

"vehicles leaking fluids, personal goods and combustibles stored within vehicles, and the failure to protect batteries from short circuiting" as possible causal factors.

Photos taken aboard *Hoegh Xiamen* on decks not burned in the fire show vehicles leaking fuel, cardboard, paint cans with paint still inside, and live ammunition inside vehicles already loaded on the ship. The official cause of the fire has not been released.

"Within three months of the aforementioned incident, a similar ro-ro (roll-on/roll-off) vessel suffered a vehicle fire on board while in Sector Jacksonville's area of responsibility," the alert said, without adding details or identifying the ship. "Although this fire was not as severe as the incident in June (2020), it is likely due to the

bow tugboat, was heading north with the unidentified barge when the incident occurred roughly 20 miles west of Beaufort. Crew aboard the tug alerted the Coast Guard, which broadcast an urgent marine bulletin to vessels in the region. Two vessels nearby pulled the victims from the water.

“A TowBoat U.S. vessel and a good Samaritan operating nearby each recovered one person from the water,” Schrader said. Both boaters

John Parrish was heading north with the unidentified barge when the incident occurred. Two vessels nearby pulled the victims from the water.

were transported to shore and paramedics brought them to Carteret Health Care hospital in Morehead City, where one victim later died.

Authorities have not identified either victim or shared details about their injuries.

The 48-year-old tugboat is registered to Biblia Inc. of Savannah, Ga. Attempts to reach owner William Van Puffelen were not successful.

Casey Conley

same contributing factors based on initial findings.”

The alert urged shippers, managers and other companies involved with moving vehicles over sea to adhere to international rules aimed at preventing shipboard fires. Safety actions include disconnecting batteries to protect against short circuiting, removing combustible materials and checking for leaks before loading.

New NTSB digest covers latest casualty lessons

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has published its Safer Seas Digest 2019, offering lessons learned from more than two dozen maritime casualties.

The annual digest, released in December, details findings by agency investigators. It uses photos, diagrams and maps to explain what went wrong, and in

many cases highlights ways to avoid similar casualties.

Incidents in the 2019 edition include the *Stretch Duck 7* capsizing in July 2018 that killed 17, and the August 2017 collision between the U.S. Navy destroyer *USS John S. McCain* and tanker *Alnic MC* near Singapore that left 10 sailors dead.

Insufficient oversight was the most common factor in casualties covered in 2019, including the *McCain* collision. Fatigue was another leading factor and it also was cited in the *McCain* incident.

“Fatigue impacts every aspect of human performance, including

decision-making, reaction time and comprehension, all of which affect seafarers’ ability to safely navigate,” the digest noted. “Having fatigued operators in critical positions when navigating a busy channel or conducting other higher-risk operations increases the probability of errors that lead to accidents.”

NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt said the goal of the document, in 2019 and every year, is to provide critical safety information to the broader maritime industry.

“With every investigation, we learn new safety lessons to prevent or mitigate future losses – but only when marine stakeholders at all levels of the industry apply these lessons,” he said.

Safer Seas Digest 2019 is available at www.nts.gov.

Casey Conley



U.S. Coast Guard photo

Smoke billows from the ro-ro *Hoegh Xiamen* on June 4 after the ship caught fire while moored at Blount Island in Florida’s St. Johns River. Investigators have found that vehicles on board were leaking fluids.

NTSB: Pilot's actions, bulker's speed led to Virginia wharf strike

The bulk carrier *Ijssel Confidence* backed toward a turning basin on the Elizabeth River in Chesapeake, Va., with two tugboats ready to assist as needed.

The 590-foot ship, under the direction of a docking pilot, picked up speed over the next 15 minutes. *G.M. McAllister*, a 4,000-hp tug positioned at the stern, became boxed in and hit infrastructure at the NGL Energy Partners terminal infrastructure.

The incident on Sept. 23, 2019 at 0657 caused nearly \$1.5 million in damage, nearly all to the terminal.

There were only negligible effects on the tugboat. None of the four tugboat crew was injured and there was no pollution.

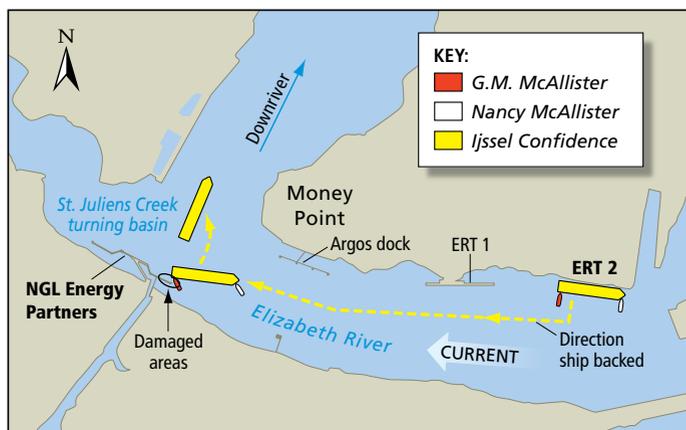
National Transportation Safety Board

(NTSB) investigators determined *Ijssel Confidence* backed too fast for the docking pilot to effectively use the two conventionally driven tugboats. The agency's report also found a lack of communication between the docking pilot and the two tugboat crews contributed to the incident.

"The *G.M. McAllister* captain and the docking pilot told investigators that there had been gaps in their communication," the NTSB



Marc Piche photo/Pat Rossi illustration



G.M. McAllister was assisting *Ijssel Confidence* downriver from Kinder Morgan's Elizabeth River Terminal berth No. 2 when the tug struck the NGL Energy Partners wharf. The tug is shown near Norfolk, Va., in 2006.

Ijssel Confidence, registered in Portugal, arrived at Kinder Morgan's Elizabeth River Terminal No. 2 on Sept. 20. The ship was departing for Charleston, S.C., to discharge its cargo of fertilizer on the morning of the incident.

Two pilots boarded the vessel within five minutes of each other starting at about 0615. The docking pilot was to guide the ship away from the terminal to a point about 5 miles downriver. From there, a pilot from the Virginia Pilot Association would bring the ship into Chesapeake Bay.

G.M. McAllister and its 4,000-hp counterpart *Nancy McAllister* would assist the ship off Kinder Morgan's berth. *Ijssel Confidence*

report said. "Had they both communicated better, and had the ship proceeded in a speed more appropriate for the tugboats, this accident could have been avoided."

The NTSB did not identify the tugboat captain or docking pilot, who worked for the Association of Virginia Docking Pilots. Attempts to reach the pilots group and McAllister Towing for comment on the NTSB findings were not successful.

would then back west-northwest toward the turning basin at Money Point. There, the tugs would spin the ship roughly 90 degrees counterclockwise for departure.

This maneuver might have been clear to the docking pilot, but he never explained it to the McAllister tug crews. “*G.M. McAllister’s* captain said that he didn’t know the docking pilot’s plan, and investigators did not hear any master/pilot exchange on the VDR, nor did they hear any discussion of the undocking evolution with the tugboat captains, the ship’s master or the state pilot,” the NTSB said.

The ship got underway at 0639. *G.M. McAllister* took position at the starboard stern while *Nancy McAllister* was off the bow. The docking pilot ordered the ship’s engine to dead slow astern. Six minutes later, *Ijssel Confidence* was moving west at 1.8 knots. Four minutes after that, the speed increased to 2.5 knots as the ship moved west-northwest. The pilot ordered the engine stopped at 0652, but the ship’s speed increased to 3.2 knots a minute later.

G.M. McAllister pushed full ahead on the ship’s stern as it approached the NGL Energy Partners terminal on the south side of the river. The docking pilot ordered him to stop. The tug, pushing ahead while also trying to keep pace with the ship’s sternward movement, effectively tugged *Ijssel Confidence* toward the terminal.

The docking pilot then ordered *G.M. McAllister* to tuck alongside the hull as the ship approached the facility. The tug captain told investigators he twisted his vessel to come against the ship, with its bow toward *Ijssel Confidence’s* stern.

“At this point, the tug was not pushing the ship any longer, but rather *Ijssel Confidence* was pulling the tug” toward the terminal, the NTSB said. Moments before

Better communication could have helped the tug crews and pilot get on the same page. This was especially relevant, the NTSB suggested, because the docking pilot typically worked with a different tug operator.

impact the tug repositioned itself, with its bow facing the ship’s hull.

“(As) the ship approached the berth structure, (*G.M. McAllister’s*) port quarter first hit the piling of the easternmost mooring dolphin and then, when the tug came ahead, struck the walkway between the easternmost mooring dolphin and the next dolphin to the west,” the NTSB said.

Neither pilot ordered the tug to change positions before the impact. It is not clear, based on the report, if the tug would have avoided the shoreside infrastruc-

ture if it remained tucked against the hull. Investigators determined the tug hit the infrastructure because the docking pilot “placed the tugboat in such a position that the tugboat was caught between the dock and the side of the ship.”

Better communication could have helped the tug crews and pilot get on the same page. This was especially relevant, the NTSB suggested, because the docking pilot typically worked with a different tug operator. The pilot also was accustomed to working with azimuthing stern drive tugboats, which perform differently than conventional tugs.

The NTSB reviewed nine undocking maneuvers from the same facility and found *Ijssel Confidence* exceeded the average speed of these ships by more than 1 knot. In eight cases, the pilots chose a course well clear of the NGL terminal. In the ninth case, where the ship approached the terminal, the pilot had two 6,000-hp tractor tugs to assist.

The docking pilot, the report said, “should have been aware that the conventional tugboats were less maneuverable than tractor tugboats, but he neglected to take into account the conventional tugboats’ reduced effectiveness and the additive effect to the ship’s speed.”

“Whatever the cause,” the report continued, “the ship’s speed made it difficult to effectively use the tugs to position the ship laterally in the waterway.”

Casey Conley

INDEX TO **ADVERTISERS**

Page	Advertiser	Product	Page	Advertiser	Product
18	A3Pi Services LLC	Naval architect and engineering	2	Intercontinental Engineering	Winches
23	Bracewell	Winches	10	Latti & Anderson	Legal
14	Chafe-Pro	Chafe gear	17	Military Sealift Command (MSC)	Recruitment
10	Chesapeake Marine Training Institute	Training and education	45	Murphy Auction	Auction house
7	Colonial Group Inc.	Fuels and lubrication	23	NOAA	Recruitment
C2	Cummins	Engines-generators	18	R.M. Young Company	Weather instruments
36	Dann Ocean Towing	Employment and recruitment	27	Sea School	Training
C4	Furuno USA	Electronics	27	Washburn & Doughty	Tug builder
14	Gladding-Hearn Shipbuilding	Shipyard			



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Three crew rescued from barge after tugboat sinks off RI coast

Three mariners sought refuge on a deck barge after their tugboat took on water near Point Judith, R.I., and they were unable to keep up with the flooding.

The 46-foot *Warthog* was towing the unidentified 108-foot barge west toward Long Island Sound on Nov. 25 when the tug encountered trouble. A female crewmember called for help at 0817 before all three people on board escaped to the barge from the sinking vessel.

“Mayday, mayday, mayday,” a female voice said over the radio. “This is tugboat *Warthog* off the coast of Point Judith. ... We are taking on water.”

The caller prepared to give coordinates when the portion of the recording released by the U.S. Coast Guard ended. None of the crew reported any injuries. It is not clear how much fuel and engine oil the tug carried, and if any escaped into the environment.

The Coast Guard is investigating the incident but has not discussed a possible cause. The source of the flooding was not known and other key details were not available while the inquiry is ongoing.

Warthog departed New Bedford, Mass., with the barge on a voyage to New London, Conn., on the day of the incident, Coast Guard spokeswoman Amanda Wyrick said. The tug and barge were newly purchased by a private owner and were to be used for construction, she said.

The tug began the journey towing the barge off the stern before

making up on the hip. “They transitioned into a side tow when the weather started picking up,” Wyrick said. “It was in that position when they started taking on water.”

The Coast Guard believes the flooding started as the tug and barge approached Point Judith. The vessels were about one mile from shore at the time. Seas were 3 to 5 feet with 5-mph winds.

“We do know that because of the

Images released to local media suggest it sank at the stern.

Warthog had been recently renamed. Wyrick said the vessel was previously known as *Cabrillo*. Sea & Shore Contracting of Randolph, Mass., reportedly acquired a vessel by that name in 2013. The tug, built in 1951, was powered by two John Deere engines with 680 total horsepower.

The Coast Guard Port State

The three-person crew aboard *Warthog* escaped to the construction barge they were towing, right, before their tugboat sank on the morning of Nov. 25 off Point Judith, R.I. The barge was later pushed ashore by the waves.



U.S. Coast Guard photo

water intrusion into the vessel, they did experience a catastrophic failure with their generator system, which therefore made their bilge pumps and dewatering systems unavailable,” Coast Guard spokesman Justin Doades told a local TV station.

The vessels were within sight of Coast Guard Station Point Judith when the crewmember made the distress call. The Coast Guard dispatched a 45-foot response boat-medium that reached the mariners on the barge within about 15 minutes. The crewmembers were not wearing personal flotation devices, Wyrick said.

The tug was below the surface by the time the Coast Guard arrived.

Information Exchange listing for *Cabrillo* indicates the vessel had previously sank and had been laid up for some time. Additional details on its condition were not available.

Sea & Shore Contracting could not be reached for comment. The company’s phone line gave a busy signal during multiple attempts over several days. The Coast Guard declined to name the new owner, claiming that information is part of the ongoing investigation.

As of Dec. 10, the tugboat was still submerged several hundred yards offshore awaiting salvage. The barge, pushed aground by the surf, had been removed, Wyrick said.

Casey Conley

Barge strike closes swing span on Intracoastal Waterway in Virginia

A swing bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway in Chesapeake, Va., sustained serious damage after a single-barge tow struck it.

The 2,000-hp *Island Lookout* was pushing a barge loaded with scrap metal when the barge hit the north side of the Centerville Turnpike Bridge at 0446 on Nov. 14. The bridge has been closed to vehicular traffic since the impact.

“The front starboard side of the north side (of the bridge) was hit while open,” U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Dan Schrader said in an email. “The tug was undamaged, but the barge did incur damages. A final amount of damage has yet to be determined.”

The Coast Guard is investigating the incident and has not yet determined the cause. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is conducting its own investigation.

The two-lane Centerville Turnpike Bridge dates back to 1955 and is crossed by about 16,000 vehicles a day when operational. The span swings open from the south side,

with the tender house located on the north side.

When open to maritime traffic, the bridge leaves an 80-foot-wide navigation channel for vessels, according to Jason Brown, spokesman for the city of Chesapeake. He said the tender house was manned at the time of the incident.

The Coast Guard has not disclosed the nature of any communications between the towboat pilot and bridge tender before the collision, citing the ongoing investigation. Brown also refused to share specifics about the incident, citing the Coast Guard and NTSB investigations. Weather conditions at the time were not available.

Almost a month after the inci-

dent, authorities still had not determined how much damage the bridge sustained.

“Our inspection process is ongoing, and at this time we don’t yet have additional information regarding the extent of the damage to the bridge, or (the) related repair timeline,” Brown said in December. “The bridge remains closed to vehicle traffic and the canal is open to maritime traffic.”

The 65-foot, twin-screw *Island Lookout* is operated by Stevens Towing of Yorges Island, S.C. No injuries were reported among the crew and the Coast Guard did not report any pollution.

“Stevens Towing is fully cooperating with the investigation of



Steve Collingwood/BeatingWithITR photos



The Centerville Turnpike Bridge was closed to vehicular traffic Nov. 14 after being struck by a barge guided by *Island Lookout*, shown in 2016 near Hampton Roads.

the USCG and the NTSB,” said Johnson Stevens, the company’s president, CEO and board chairman. “At this point we cannot speak about the incident, but we feel there will be more information to come.”

Casey Conley

TSB: Pilot's errant orders to tugs led boxship to hit crane, berth

The pilot guiding a containership into the Port of Vancouver inadvertently gave opposite instructions to the tugboats assisting the ship into the terminal, Canadian authorities said, and attempts to reverse the mistake came too late.

The Panama-flagged *Ever Summit* struck a gantry crane and berth infrastructure on Jan. 28, 2019 at 0401 while docking at Global Container Terminals' (GCT) Vanterm facility. The crane boom collapsed onto containers on the ship's aft deck, and the vessel and berth were damaged.

Canada's Transportation Safety Board (TSB) cited errant tugboat orders from the member of the B.C. Coast Pilots as a leading factor in the incident. But it was not the only one. Investigators noted the lack of terminal upgrades to account for larger containerships and the ship's close approach to the berth that provided less margin for error.

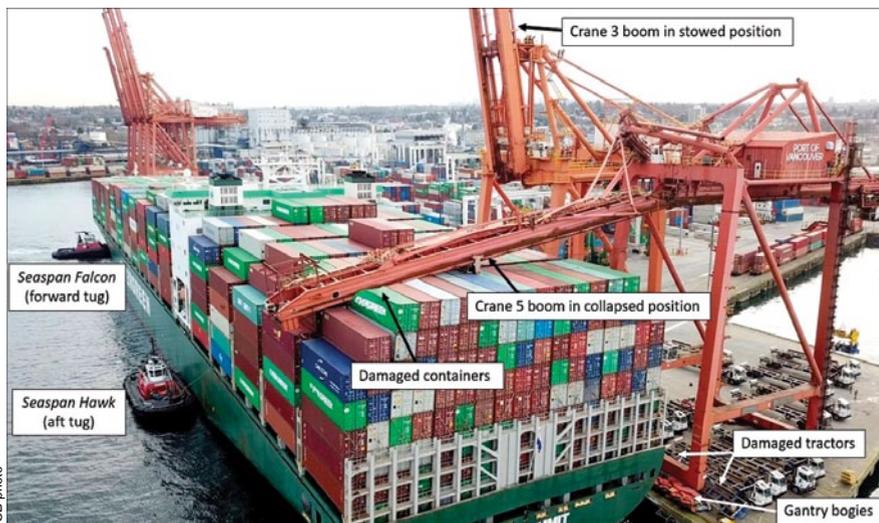
"The vessel transited the berth approximately (33 feet) off, an approach which limited the time to respond to any deviations during the berthing maneuver," the TSB said in its report published last fall.

The 984-foot, 7,024-TEU *Ever Summit* entered Vancouver Harbor at about 0320 on Jan. 28 with the B.C. Coast pilot and an observing pilot on board. The B.C. Coast pilot positioned the tugboats *Seaspan Falcon* and *Seaspan Hawk* on the port side, with *Falcon* forward and *Hawk* aft. The 6,000-hp tugs secured their lines and approached

the Vanterm container terminal at about 0340.

Ever Summit made an angled approach to the terminal, a relatively common tactic but one that ran counter to docking instructions on the ship's pilot card. That document

said. "The master expressed concern about the sheer to the pilot, but neither the pilot nor the master identified that the tugs were assisting in the opposite direction than intended. Attempting to correct this, the pilot called for increased power on the



recommended the pilot position the ship parallel to the berth and use tugboats to push it against the terminal, the TSB report said.

Regardless, *Ever Summit* was nearly in position at the terminal at 0359, and the pilot ordered the engines dead slow astern to reduce the ship's speed below 1 knot. The pilot expected this would cause the stern to sheer toward the berth and he planned to use the tugboats to counter this motion. He mistakenly ordered *Seaspan Falcon*, at the bow, to stretch the line and back at maximum power. *Seaspan Hawk* at the stern was ordered to push at full power.

"As the tugs carried out the commands, the vessel's stern rapidly sheered toward the berth," the report

A photo from the TSB report shows *Ever Summit* at the Port of Vancouver after a crane boom fell on the ship on Jan. 28, 2019. Six containers stowed in the ship's uppermost bays were damaged; the crane was declared a total loss.

tugs, but the sheer increased."

The pilot's thruster, engine and rudder orders weren't enough to avoid hitting the terminal. *Ever Summit's* flared stern hit both the berth and crane 5 positioned along the edge of the berth.

"The shoreside gantry bogies for crane 5 collapsed inward toward the terminal, and the boom fell onto the vessel," the TSB said. "At the time of the striking, the vessel was at an angle of approximately 10 degrees from the berth face."

The impact gashed *Ever Summit's* hull at the starboard stern and crane 5 was declared a total loss. A bollard and other portside infrastructure also sustained damage. Activity at the terminal was disrupted for more than a week. Damage estimates were not available.

While the TSB identified human error as a leading cause of the incident, it also noted the need for port facility improvements to safely handle larger containerships. Testing at Vanterm in 2012 found that terminal fenders were insufficient to absorb energy from ships during docking. The report suggested this disparity has increased

in the past eight years as ships have gotten larger.

The TSB also noted issues with the distance between shoreside cargo-loading equipment and the ships. The distance from the crane rail to the berth line at Vanterm is only 7 feet, the report said, "which means that even a slight angle on a vessel while berthing could cause the flare of its bow or stern to come into contact with a crane if one is in the vicinity."

The distance between the crane rail and berth line at GCT Deltaport, another British Columbia container facility, is almost 23 feet. Deltaport also is equipped with

more robust terminal fendering. In May 2019, Global Container Terminals announced a \$160 million investment to modernize and upgrade Vanterm.

In a prepared statement, GCT declined to address port issues noted in the TSB report.

"We have reviewed the report previously and won't be commenting on the investigation into the human error that led to the incident," spokeswoman Jennifer Perih said.

The B.C. Coast Pilots did not respond to messages seeking comment on the TSB findings.

Casey Conley

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Craig Hayslip photo

New technology aims to help mariners save the whales

by Alan R. Earls

While humans once stood in awe of the size and strength of whales, the roles have been nearly reversed since the mid-20th century as increasing ship traffic has added insult to the injury done by the era of whaling.

To reverse the trend, marine scientists, environmental advocates and sympathizers in the nautical community are trying to harness technology to protect whales by focusing on reducing the risk of vessel collision.

On the West Coast, a new online tool — the fruit of collaboration between the Benioff Ocean Initiative (BOI) at the University of California (UC) Santa Barbara and leading whale researchers nationally — aims to detect the presence of whales in a given area

in near real-time. The first beneficiaries of Whale Safe, as the initiative is known, are intended to be the cetaceans inhabiting the Santa Barbara Channel off the coast of California.

Morgan Visalli, a BOI scientist and project lead, said 2018 and 2019 were the worst years on record for fatal ship collisions involving whales in the state's waters, and the hope is that data from Whale Safe can bring an improvement.

The initiative involved three years of work between BOI, UC Santa Cruz, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego,

Researchers examine a blue whale killed by a collision with a ship off the Pacific coast. New technology has been developed to inform vessel operators about the presence of whales so strikes can be avoided.

Texas A&M University at Galveston, the University of Washington, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Southwest Fisheries Science Center, and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) in Massachusetts.

The project was spurred by whale fatalities in the Santa Barbara Channel, a passage as narrow as 16 nautical miles that carries a large portion of ship traffic to and from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Since the 1980s, collisions averaging one every two months have marred the relationship between humans and cetaceans in the area. To complicate matters, about a decade ago endangered blue, humpback and fin whales started feeding regularly north of Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa islands, which form part of the channel.

To help protect the cetaceans, Whale Safe combines data from three sources: a subsurface acoustic system that detects whale calls; whale sightings by scientists reported by mobile app, and forecasted activity on whale feeding grounds. The tool can display near real-time information about the presence of whales, albeit not with the level of precision needed to prescribe anything more than caution and lower speeds. But those actions alone can be enough to meaningfully reduce the likelihood of collisions.

How the shipping industry views the initiative is an open question. Capt. Kip Louttit, executive director of the Marine Exchange of Southern California,

said he was part of the working group preparing the way for Whale Safe about two years ago. "It seems like a good thing, but I haven't heard from the organization for a number of months," he said in November.

Louttit stressed that Whale Safe is a private initiative, so it doesn't have the force of law behind it. Moreover, the data it provides is limited. "It is not precise. It is hydrophones in the water that will detect the whales, but I am not sure if it provides bearings or just



Beneff Ocean Initiative photo

information that whales have been heard," he said.

Another whale protection initiative by NOAA and several partner organizations in 2007 established a voluntary 10-knot speed limit for large ships transiting the area. That measure has garnered considerable support from the shipping industry, Visalli said, but she added that many vessels still exceed that speed limit — a fact that researchers believe leads to a sharply increased risk of collisions.

The Santa Barbara Channel is not the only region where speed regulations have been attempted. In the Cabot Strait between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, a voluntary slowdown measure put in place by Transport Canada to protect North Atlantic right whales has been largely ignored, according to the conservation group Oceana.

Oceana reported that between 2017 and 2020, more than 30 right whales died from either ship strikes or incidents involving fishing gear, the bulk in Canadian

An acoustic detection system developed by scientists at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Texas A&M University at Galveston is deployed in the Santa Barbara Channel in 2019.

waters. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has listed the species as critically endangered, with only 400 remaining on the planet.

Oceana said its tracking of ship speeds in the Cabot Strait between the end of April 2020 and the

Tackling the fishing gear problem

Beyond collisions with ships, whales inhabiting the waters of North America are vulnerable to injury or death from another human-related threat: fishing gear entanglement.

Research conducted by the New England Aquarium and the Center for Coastal Studies showed that scars found on 83 percent of endangered North Atlantic right whales and about half of endangered humpbacks between Cape Cod and Nova Scotia indicated damaging encounters with ropes or nets.

In response, researchers at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) have been looking for solutions. One option they believe has potential is “ropeless” fishing technology. While not literally eliminating ropes, the technology emphasizes doing away with the time-tested technique of running a line from the surface to the bottom (e.g. to mark a lobster trap for retrieval) and leaving the rope in place for long periods of time.

One “ropeless” alternative being studied leaves the rope and float on the seabed with the lobster trap. When an owner wants to retrieve the trap, a sonic or electronic signal releases the float to bring the rope to the surface, eliminating the constant clutter of lines that can confuse and endanger whales.

Michael Moore, a senior scientist at WHOI, said that when researchers first started working on human-related whale incidents in the 1990s, it was mostly a vessel strike problem.

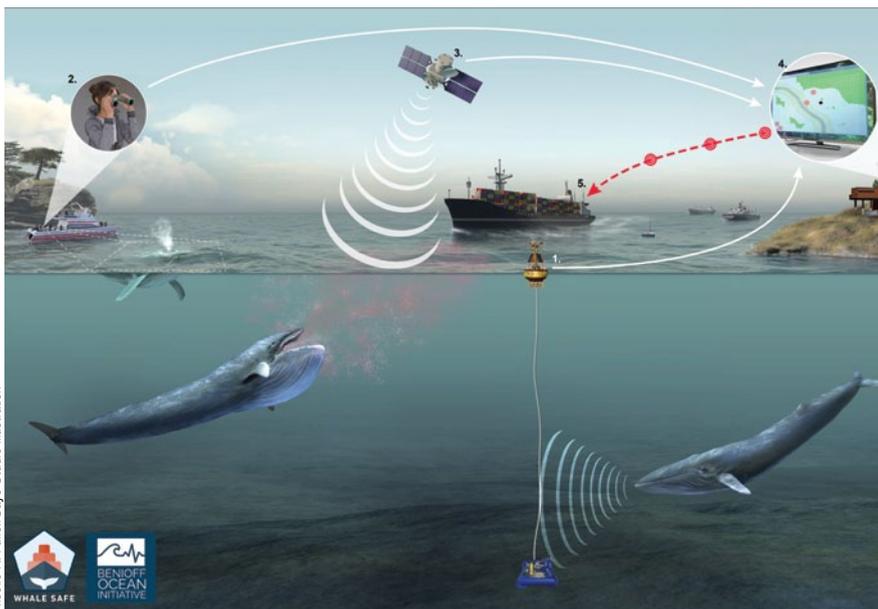
“Today, it’s both vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglement, and the entanglement especially seems to (be) getting worse,” he said.

Alan R. Earls

middle of June was not encouraging. Vessels longer than 13 meters (42 feet) had been asked to slow down to 10 knots, but 67 percent (464 out of 697) were traveling faster than the limit, and some were going 20 knots or more.

not complying can be subject to a lengthy window of regulatory scrutiny.

According to the Oceana, it is easy to use Ship Speed Watch — just click on a point on the map to find the name of a vessel, its



Nicole R. Fuller/Sayo Studio illustration

Because of such poor compliance, Oceana has asked Transport Canada to make the speed limit in the Cabot Strait mandatory rather than voluntary. In the meantime, the broader public has been invited to lend its eyes and voices to the effort. The key will be improved monitoring and surveillance, Oceana said, and that’s where another new tool comes into play: Ship Speed Watch.

Ship Speed Watch, which can be accessed at www.usa.oceana.org, updates daily with automatic identification system (AIS) signals from vessels that are operating in speed restriction zones. It can provide data going back 30 days, so vessel operators who are

The Whale Safe system at work: Acoustic monitoring instruments identify whale vocalizations; observers on tour boats record whale sightings with a mobile app; oceanographic data is used to predict where whales are likely to be each day; the three data streams are compiled and validated; whale information is disseminated to industry, managers and the public.

operating speed and its Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number. Alternatively, a user can type in the name of a ship in the drop-down box to find a vessel of interest. Further narrowing the search by data range can yield more information about the vessel’s presence in a speed restriction zone or critical habitat area along the east coast of Canada and northeastern U.S.



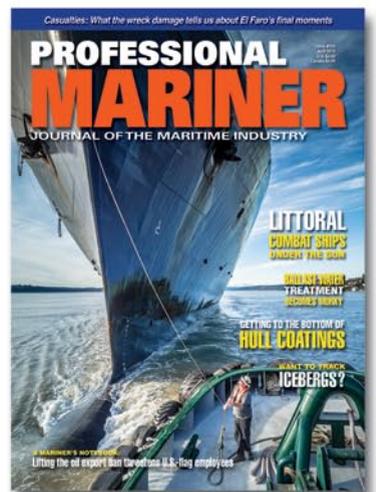
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Correspondence

by Eric Romelczyk

Mariners more essential than ever as COVID's challenges mount

It is a strange time to be a professional mariner. This is true no matter what kind of vessel you sail on and no matter what specific difficulties your sector of the industry faces — overwork due to the difficulty of relieving crews, or underwork due to the massive drop-off in passenger traffic for much of the year. As the readers of *Professional Mariner* are all too aware, a pandemic respiratory virus is the kind of challenge almost tailor-made to turn the maritime industry upside down.

I myself sail on oceangoing tugs running between Puget Sound, Hawaii and western Alaska. In March, my employer sent me a letter that I was to carry when traveling to and from crew changes. This letter designates me as an “essential critical infrastructure worker,” not to be restricted in my movements while traveling for job-related reasons. While much of the world was to shelter from the COVID-19 pandemic, the critical infrastructure that keeps us fed, clothed, medicated and supplied with the essentials of modern life — the just-in-time logistical miracle of the 21st-century global supply chain — was to be kept humming along at all costs.

I consider myself very lucky to be in my present situation. I am employed and the rhythm of

my working life has not changed much. I am much more fortunate than many of my brother and sister mariners in that my employer has continued crew changes on a more or less normal schedule. Which is not to say that nothing has changed. There are now questionnaires, temperature checks

Like many other newly classified “essential workers,” mariners are rarely noticed when we are doing our jobs well, a fact that the pandemic has underlined more starkly than ever.

and self-isolation periods to be navigated between hitches. There is no shore leave for any reason except medical necessity. Everything smells like bleach and hand sanitizer. The sanitizer itself, for a while, was the stuff that craft distilleries have been making by way of doing their part. On one hitch it smelled like bad tequila. On another it had a definite odor of cheap bourbon.

We try to take reasonable precautions with our physical health, but if COVID-19 came aboard with us, there is not much we can do. We operate a long way from help and our available medical resources are very slender. As far as our mental health, the lack of access to shore leave and the uncertainty about crew changes have greatly exacerbated the stresses of loneliness and disconnection that have always been part of this profession.

Fortunately, smartphones and satellite communications have made the isolation of maritime life in the 21st century a great deal less stressful than it was 50 years ago, or even 10 years ago. Even so, every hitch is a voyage through time as well as space. I have joked to friends about entering the “Tugboat Time Machine” — we get on the boat, and when we get off the boat it may be an entirely different season. Holidays and anniversaries, weddings, births and funerals may have come and gone. The lives of loved ones may have changed in all sorts of ways while we were away. The strength of the effect varies, but I cannot recall ever coming home from a boat and not feeling at least a little bit like a time traveler emerging into an unfamiliar future.

Lately, this effect has been truly surreal. I came home from one hitch to find that the whole world seemingly had shut itself down because of the pandemic. I came home from another to find most of the country engulfed in massive demonstrations for racial justice. I came home from yet another to find both of the above, plus massive wildfires burning up and down the West Coast and my own town preparing to evacuate. I have stopped even trying to speculate about what the world will look like the next time I come home to it.

Of course, it does help to know that I can join my vessel and leave it again more or less when I expect to. Across the world in every sector

of our industry, there are mariners trapped on their ships — unable to get a flight home or permission to even cross the gangway to get to an airport, even though their hitch should have ended months ago. Some mariners have now been aboard their vessels for as long as 17 months straight without relief or even token access to shore leave. Stranded mariners struggle deeply with feelings of loneliness and isolation, and they have a keen awareness of their separation from loved ones and life onshore.

I am not complaining about the rigors of the profession I have chosen, nor am I attempting to make any comparison between mariners and any other class of “essential

worker.” If there are particular drawbacks to maritime work at this moment, there are compensations as well. At least in the American merchant marine we are not poorly paid or lacking benefits, as are many store cashiers, delivery drivers and warehouse workers. We are not on the front lines of the pandemic, as are medical personnel. There are actually few more effective ways to quarantine than to put to sea for a few weeks or months, interacting

Across the world, thousands of mariners remain trapped on their ships due to COVID-19, unable to get a flight home or even go ashore. Their predicament, nearly a year and a half long for some, exacerbates the loneliness and disconnection that have always been part of the profession.



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with the shore only when absolutely necessary to conduct ship's business.

It is fair to say that we feel a faint sense of validation at the official recognition of our maritime transportation system as "critical infrastructure." It does seem like the tenuous threads that bind our society together only get noticed when they start to fray. The invisible wheels that keep our world turning in the way that we expect have turned out to be truly delicate machinery. Those of us in the business of keeping the world moving can hardly ignore these threads and wheels. We are one of those threads; we turn some of those wheels. After all, 90 percent of global trade involves moving goods by ship.

The linchpin of the maritime industry, I think it is fair to say, is not hulls or machinery, but the "human element." Or to put it less mechanistically, people. People who do a difficult job well, in fair weather or foul — literally and figuratively. People who carry the traditions of a seafaring profession that stretches across human history. People who are willing to step aboard their waterborne time machines, knowing that the world that will greet them when they step off the gangway again will not be the same as the one they left behind.

Now is a good time to remember that many of the mariners who keep this critical infrastructure operating, at risk to their physical and mental health from the pandemic and its repercussions, are not fairly compensated. Many mariners may not have a reasonable expecta-

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tion of being repatriated at the end of their hitch. Many mariners do not have the privilege of sailing in safe and properly maintained ships.

I am writing mainly of my brother and sister mariners in the flag-of-convenience fleets around the world who do not always have the protections afforded to some of us.

Like many other newly classified "essential workers," mariners are rarely noticed when we are doing our jobs well, a fact that the pandemic has underlined more starkly than ever. Seafaring has never been an easy profession, but it was at one time an honored and respected one. I would like to think that it could be so again. Of course, it should go without saying that with or without the recognition they have earned, the men and women of the world's merchant fleets will continue to deliver. It is a strange time to be in this trade, but

no one understands the urgency of an "all hands on deck" situation better than a mariner.



Eric Romelczyk graduated from Maine Maritime Academy in 2008. He has been sailing for 12 years on a variety of ves-

sels including small passenger boats, tall ships and tugboats. For the past four years, he has been employed as a mate on towing vessels on the West Coast. He holds a license of master, 1,600 GRT, oceans, with an auxiliary sail endorsement, and a license of master of towing, oceans.

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continued from page 48

and soon showed signs of wear. When the seams started to split, making it impossible to keep dry in wet conditions, that rain suit also ended up in the trash.

After moving on from tugs, I started working on tankers running to Alaska and decided that insulated rain gear was now needed. I found a set in a catalog, made with a quilt-like polyester material covered by a nylon shell, and bought one. It was of better quality than I'd purchased before, but it still wasn't up to the task. The suspenders slipped and slowly loosened until they didn't hold up my rain pants. Plus, though advertised as insulated, the gear had precious little and was no match for wet winter snow while loading North Slope crude oil at Valdez, Alaska. On vacation from my tanker job, I agreed to help deliver a fish processing ship from Seattle to Dutch Harbor to make some extra money. One rainy evening, I brought the rain gear with me on watch, laying it on the settee in the chartroom. Sometime during the night the ship's cat, a tabby named Noah, stealthily jumped up on the settee and peed all over the rain pants and jacket. Considering it a sign, that rain gear immediately went in the trash as well.

After all these failures, I finally made the two-hour drive from the island we live on to a marine supply company in Seattle and bought a set of rain

gear made especially for ocean sailors. It had an almost indestructible PVC outer shell, able to stand up to any rough use on deck. The polyester fleece inner lining, reinforced sewn/taped seams, and arm and leg Velcro straps kept me dry and warm in rain, snow and rough weather. The pants and jacket fit perfectly, the heavy-duty suspenders never slipped and the dual fabric "breathed" so I wasn't dripping sweat after working. Plus, I

Considering how many hours and days you will spend working in it, a well-made, functional set of rain gear is essential for every professional mariner.

could hang them soaking wet in the shower stall in my stateroom and by the next watch they'd be completely dry. I had found my "holy grail" of rain gear. Although the pants and jacket set me back over \$500, they've lasted for years.

Recently, a young mariner asked my opinion on rain gear. He got a job on an oceanographic ship that would be in the South Pacific during the rainy winter months and he wanted to make sure he was outfitted right. I told him that regardless of the brand of rain gear or the fabric, it needed to have the following characteristics:

1) It has to be able to keep you completely dry and comfortable in all rain and sea conditions — and do it for as long as you need to work outside.

2) You have to be able to move easily in it and fully perform all your work and emergency duties.

3) It's got to be tough enough to keep from ripping and tearing while on the job.

4) It needs to be able to wick moisture away and dry quickly. When I said that good rain gear could easily cost \$500 or more, he choked a bit, but I reminded him that it's an investment that will pay back dividends for years to come.

Considering how many hours and days you will spend working in it, a well-made, functional set of rain gear is essential for every professional mariner. It's important to do the research and take the time and effort to make the right choice for your situation. Once you have decided, be willing to spend the money to ensure that you'll get the quality, durability and protection you deserve — and then don't leave home without it.

Till next time, I wish you all smooth sailin.' •

Kelly Sweeney holds a license of master (oceans, any gross tons), and has held a master of towing vessels license (oceans) as well. He sails on a variety of commercial vessels and lives on an island near Seattle. You can contact him at captswweeney@professionalmariner.com.

A Mariner's Notebook

by Capt. Kelly Sweeney

Cheap rain gear? Penny wise is pound foolish when going to sea

From painful rashes due to skin rubbed raw to life-threatening hypothermia, mariners have long been plagued by having to work in clothes wet from rain,

snow, fog and ocean spray. In the days of sailing ships, sailors smeared tar on their clothes to make them water-

repellent, an unsatisfactory solution that overheated the body and made the garments stiff and hard to work in. Then in 1898, a New Zealander named Edward Le Roy developed "oilskins," the first commercially available waterproof coveralls and jackets for mariners. Using lightweight cotton sailcloth and coating it with a mixture of linseed oil

and wax, the garments didn't overheat the body as much and did a good job of keeping the mariner dry.

Although rain gear or foul-weather gear are the preferred terms nowadays, some mariners still call their rain suits "oilskins." Today's rain gear doesn't use sailcloth, but instead employs a variety of synthetic materials such as nylon, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polytetrafluoroethylene (Teflon). The quality and functionality of different brands varies greatly, something that I've found throughout my career.

For my senior-year training cruise, I was assigned to a container ship running from Seattle to the Far East. On our first full day at sea en route to Yokohama, we were met by a cold, driving North Pacific rain. Scheduled to work

with the boatswain after breakfast each day, on that first rainy morning I showed up on deck in a flimsy, bright yellow rain suit I'd bought at Kmart before joining the ship. Made of thin plastic with unreinforced seams, the pants and jacket were at least one size smaller than advertised on the package.

The boatswain gave me a long "to-do" list, beginning with climbing both the mainmast and the foremast to replace burned-out navigational light bulbs and then helping the able seamen check the lashings on the container boxes. In the process, I made a big split in the back of my too-tight rain pants and tore a hole in the right sleeve of the flimsy raincoat after catching it on the rusty edge of a hatch coaming. By the end of the morning, the cheap rain gear

had become unusable. Disgustedly, I threw it in the trash. Left with only a short, medium-weight ski jacket and no rain gear for the rest of the westbound trans-Pacific voyage, I spent many unpleasant hours working on deck, miserable from being cold and wet.

After getting a job with a tugboat company based in Long Beach, Calif., I decided that it was a good idea to buy a new set of rain gear for myself — not so much for rain, but for the green water and blowing spray we often dealt with while working on deck. I went to an army-navy surplus store on my two weeks off and bought the best rain gear they had. Unfortunately, the nylon wasn't durable enough to stand up to the rigors of working on a commercial vessel

continued on page 47

