

Casualties: Two die after tugboat sinks in storm on British Columbia coast

# PROFESSIONAL MARINER

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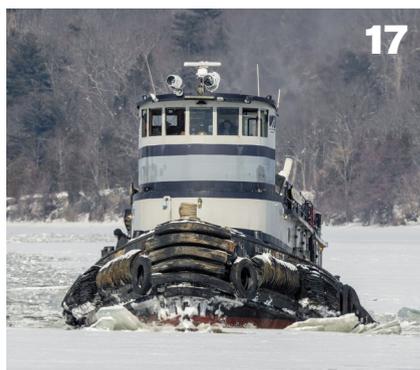
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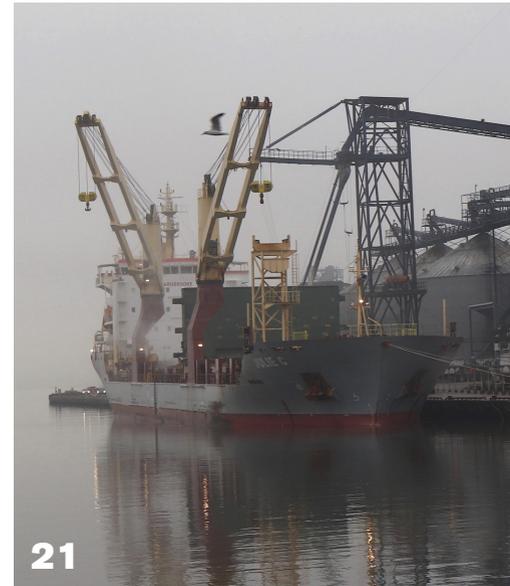
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### 24 Versatile Weeks dredge tender built tough from bottom up

BY BRIAN GAUVIN

#### ON THE COVER

The Weeks Marine dredge tender *Jack K.* takes a spin during trials in March at Rodriguez Shipbuilding in Bayou La Batre, Ala. In addition to its principal duties, the versatile newbuild is equipped to push barges, handle anchors and move pipe while also carrying an oceans classification for towing equipment offshore. See story, page 24. Brian Gauvin photo



# Signals



Up to 14,000 U.S. mariners need to be prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccine, says Don Marcus of the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots, but the transient nature of the profession makes inoculation at the state level “very difficult logistically.”

Adobe Stock photo

## Mariners not a priority for states during COVID vaccine rollout

As millions of Americans receive their COVID-19 vaccines, there is a vital group of workers who are still not being given priority: mariners.

Because the vaccines are being administered by state governments, there is no mechanism nationally to put mariners at the front of the line, even though they are crucial in delivering essential goods across the country.

As of mid-March, efforts

by the Defense Department, the Maritime Administration (MarAd), the Coast Guard and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had not produced a plan to administer vaccines to mariners.

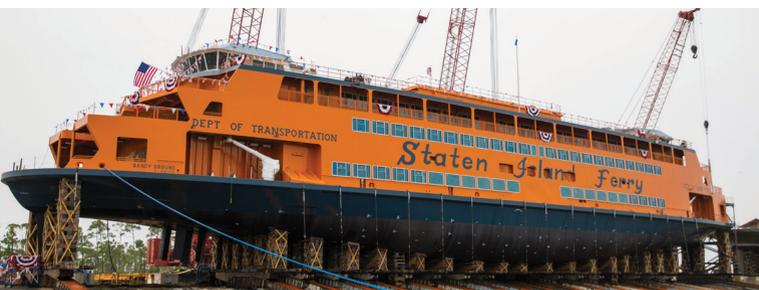
“The vast number of merchant mariners are, at this point, falling through the cracks, and it looks like it’s going to continue that way absent something dramatic,” said Don Marcus, president

of the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P). Between 12,000 and 14,000 U.S. mariners need to be prioritized for the vaccines, he said.

Several maritime unions have reached out to state governments with no result. “Mariners are exposed every day on the dangerous front lines, moving cargo and (delivering) things like food, energy and medical supplies so fundamental to the



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## industry signals

health of California and the nation,” wrote Dave Connolly, president of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific, in a letter to California Gov. Gavin Newsom. “Many agency experts recognized the early priority of merchant mariners due to the key logistical nature of their work. Mariners are easily identified by merchant mariner credential (and are) accustomed to inoculations, and vaccinating would cost little effort or vaccine.”

“Our numbers are not great, but we play an outsized role in maintaining the economic and military security of our nation,” stated a letter to the National Governors Association signed by eight leaders of U.S. maritime unions.

But receiving vaccines at the state level is often not practical for mariners. “Our mariners are transient for the most part,” Marcus said. “They are transient when they are working and transient when they are coming to and from their workplace. It’s very difficult logistically if we had access to vaccines, but we simply don’t at this point. We’re trying to get more traction, but right now it remains a work in progress.”

In Canada, mariners are considered essential workers and are being prioritized for vaccines. “Canadian mariners stand to be vaccinated in a second phase of the vaccine rollout, expected to begin in April,” said Stuart Neil, communications director for the International Chamber of Shipping.

Essential workers such as health-care professionals and at-risk populations are being prioritized worldwide for COVID vaccines, which is understandable, Neil said. “We are not calling for seafarers to jump ahead of this queue, but rather to add seafarers to the internationally recognized list of key workers,” he said.

As more vaccination protocols go into place, failure to prioritize mariners could have far-reaching consequences. “If mariners cannot fly out to join ships without having been vaccinated, this could seriously jeopardize the sustainability of worldwide supply chains and the well-being of mariners,” Neil said.

Although the U.S. government has told state governments that mariners are critical workers, it can only advise the states regarding vaccines. “The department has reached out to officials in key states to ask that mariners get maximum priority for vaccines,” a MarAd representative said.

Marcus said the worst COVID outbreaks have been at shipyards. “The most exposures we have seen are from shipyard workers and vendors coming on board without proper precautions and then the ship gets infected,” he said. “And we’ve had four fatalities with our union on the inland side, mostly aboard vessels in New York Harbor.”

*David A. Tyler*

## Low sulfur fuel supply meeting demand, but quality issues remain

**W**hile bunker supplies to meet the International Maritime Organization's 2020 sulfur cap have been adequate so far, there are still concerns in the industry about fuel quality that could lead to compliance and operational issues.

The IMO reported only 55 cases of 0.5 percent fuel being unavailable worldwide in the 12 months after the low sulfur mandate went into effect on Jan. 1, 2020. During the first year of implementation, more than 60,000 ships plied the world's oceans in trade, the IMO reported, so the availability of compliant fuel was seen as a success.

"We had a great deal of preparation during 2019 and before from all stakeholders, and all indications are that there have been no significant issues with the supply of low sulfur fuel oil," said Roel Hoenders, head of air pollution and energy efficiency at the IMO.

The IMO 2020 regulation reduced the maximum sulfur content of fuel oil from 3.5 percent to 0.5 percent, which is expected to significantly reduce the amount

of sulfur oxide emitted by ships. Vessel operators in Emission Control Areas, including those in the United States and Canada, have been required to meet a 0.1 percent standard since 2015, but increased demand for compliant fuel raised concerns about supplies and quality.

While the availability of 0.5 percent fuel has been adequate, operators have faced issues with the quality of fuel blends, such as high levels of wax and paraffin and viscosity disparities.

"Just because a fuel meets the IMO sulfur requirement doesn't mean it's good to go operationally," said Kathy Metcalf, president and CEO of the Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA). "The 0.5 percent fuel is blended, and depending upon the location of the refinery, and even in some cases within a refinery and seasonally, the components may vary."

From January to May 2020, BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping, Intercargo and Intertanko surveyed shoreside vessel operations employees and gleaned

192 responses on their experiences with fuel quality and safety. Sixty-two percent of the respondents reported increased sludge deposits, including increased sludge discharge from the ship's separators. The next most common complaint, from 32 percent of the respondents, was wax appearance in the fuel oil system. However, 14 percent did not report

“Just because a fuel meets the IMO sulfur requirement doesn't mean it's good to go operationally.”

Kathy Metcalf, Chamber of Shipping of America

any off-spec or operational quality issues.

Due to the nature of the survey, the answers don't represent a comprehensive view of the problems in the world fleet. Still, the responses provide insight into the industry's challenges during the early days of the transition, the survey's authors noted.

While Metcalf hasn't heard of any cases in which fuel quality caused a vessel power plant to stop operating, off-spec bunkers could cause excessive wear and tear on critical engine components. She cited viscosity variations that require the temperature of the fuel to be adjusted so it's within the range that operators need.



Independent analysis has revealed discrepancies when loading fuel certified as 0.5 percent or lower. In some cases, operators found the fuel exceeded the sulfur limit.

Hepag-Lloyd Illustration

“When you load your first load of 0.5 percent at a place where you’ve never loaded it before, it requires careful attention by the engineering folks so they don’t have a problem that could lead to a loss of the plant,” Metcalf said.

Operators have faced the dilemma of loading fuel with a bunker delivery note that certified it at 0.5 percent or lower, but an independent analysis indicated the fuel exceeded the sulfur limit. Based on statements by port state control agencies, “the bunker delivery note is the Holy Grail,” Metcalf said. “That’s the document that they’re going to use to make a call as to whether you’re compliant.”

The CSA is advising its members that if they have a post-load analysis that shows noncompliance, they should notify the U.S. Coast Guard and the port where the vessel is headed.

“In a lot of cases the excess is within the margin of error, so the Coast Guard doesn’t do much about it although technically you’re not in compliance,” Metcalf said. “Generally, the Coast Guard notes the situation in the data collection system and the vessel just goes on.”

About 4,000 vessels worldwide have been fitted with exhaust gas cleaning systems and continue to

use 3.5 percent fuel, according to Poul Woodall, executive director of the Clean Shipping Alliance 2020, an industry advocacy group for adopting scrubbers. Woodall said that ships using scrubbers and 3.5 percent fuel emit less sulfur on a well-to-wake basis compared to 0.5 percent fuel.

Metcalf estimated that about 30 percent of CSA members use scrubbers, but some countries are banning the discharge of washwater from open-loop scrubber systems.

“Depending where you’re calling, you may have to carry a tank of the compliant fuel,” she said.

*Gary Wollenhaupt*

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## Bankruptcy judge removes Morton Bouchard as CEO of company

**A** bankruptcy court judge in Texas in February ordered the beleaguered Bouchard Transportation Co. to immediately remove CEO Morton S. Bouchard III from his position.

Bouchard had been the fourth generation of his family to run the 103-year-old towing company based in Melville, N.Y. He and the company declined to comment on the decision or who might succeed him.

The order by Judge David R. Jones came at a hearing in U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas. Bouchard and 51 subsidiaries filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in September with debtor-in-possession financing that would allow the company to continue to operate.

Bouchard Transportation has faced financial difficulties due to the pandemic as well as civil lawsuits and federal compliance action after a fatal accident involving one of the company's vessels. An explosion killed two crewmembers aboard barge *B. No. 255* in October 2017 off Port Aransas, Texas, releasing about 2,000 barrels of crude oil.

The company told the bankruptcy court on Feb. 24 that it was in talks with its lender about access to new emergency loans to cover operating expenses and payroll. But with the financing still uncertain at a subsequent court conference, Jones halted the discussion and ousted Bouchard as CEO in a Feb. 26 order.

Matthew Ray of Portage Point Partners LLC was appointed chief restructuring officer for the company. The judge also authorized the debtors to transfer barge *B. No. 260* to Billybey Marina Services LLC of New York City.

ment actions. The orders restricted the operation of company tugs and barges in New York, New Orleans and Port Arthur and Corpus Christi in Texas.

In December 2019, the Occupational Safety and Health

**Morton S. Bouchard III addresses the audience at a Coast Guard Foundation dinner in New York City in 2016. Bouchard Transportation's financial difficulties led to a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing last September and Bouchard's subsequent removal as CEO on Feb. 26.**



In March 2020, Bouchard announced that it had obtained financing sufficient to settle multiple claims from dockage companies and employees that had not been paid, along with claims for accidents involving company barges. The bankruptcy filing estimated Bouchard's assets at \$500 million to \$1 billion, with liabilities from \$100 million to \$500 million. The largest unsecured debt was \$17.4 million owed to VT Halter Marine in Pascagoula, Miss.

Early this year, after obtaining additional financing, Bouchard addressed deferred maintenance and crew payment problems that led to it being the subject of Coast Guard captain of the port enforce-

Administration ordered the company to compensate a barge worker who the agency said was illegally fired after reporting safety concerns to the Coast Guard. The company was ordered to pay back wages with interest and more than \$250,000 for emotional distress and punitive damages.

The company was founded in 1918 by Frederick Bouchard and its first cargo was a shipment of coal. By 1931, Bouchard had acquired its first oil barge. Morton S. Bouchard III took over running the company in 1992. During his watch, the company expanded its operations to cover all three U.S. coasts and the Great Lakes. Its fleet includes 25 barges and 26 tugs.

*Bill Bleyer*

## Gulf of Guinea hot zone for piracy, crew abductions in 2020, IMB says

**A**lthough COVID-19 slowed most maritime activity in 2020, piracy did not face a slump.

In its annual piracy report, the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB) tallied 195 reported incidents of armed robbery against ships worldwide, up from 162 reported in 2019. Much of the

bers. One hundred thirty people were abducted this way. After a kidnapping, crews are typically held on land until their release is negotiated. Last year, the periods of captivity lasted up to six weeks.

The report warned that all types of vessels were targeted for kidnappings. On average, kidnappings occurred 60 nautical miles from



Sailors from the Ivory Coast participate in a hostage rescue drill with the Ghanaian navy in 2017. Sponsored by U.S. Africa Command, the exercise was designed to improve cooperation between Gulf of Guinea and West Africa nations to counter sea-based piracy.

activity occurred in Africa's Gulf of Guinea, which is the site of a disturbing proliferation of crew kidnappings.

"It's become a business," said Michael Howlett, director of the IMB. "They are taking off whole complements of crew and then taking them back on land. They are showing greater capability and attacking farther from the coast."

In the Gulf of Guinea, there were 82 piracy incidents in 2020, according to the report. In 22 of them, the attackers, usually armed with guns, kidnapped crewmem-

bers, but the farthest was 200 nautical miles.

There were no murders as a result of these attacks, but on Jan. 23, 2021, pirates killed a crewmember and abducted 15 others after boarding a Turkish-flagged containership in the Gulf of Guinea.

Most pirates in the gulf come from the Niger Delta, where poverty and unemployment remain high despite a vast petroleum industry. Around 2005, a coalition of insurgent groups emerged, demanding a greater share of oil revenue and carrying out attacks on pipelines

### Piracy update for the Americas

With 30 piracy and armed robbery incidents recorded in South American, Central American and Caribbean waters in 2020, the International Maritime Bureau's five-year statistics show no sign of improvement for this region.

The beginning of 2020 came with a warning about a maritime threat in the southern Gulf of Mexico. The nature of the threat was four piracy incidents that took place between April 4 and April 15, all involving attacks on offshore supply vessels. Some of the incidents involved crew injuries and theft.

While the IMB recorded no additional incidents in the Gulf of Mexico in 2020, media have described a steep increase in the number of attacks on maritime oil infrastructure in Mexico since 2016 – including an average of 16 attacks a month between January and September 2019, according to some reports. Although these numbers are unconfirmed, they suggest that there could be a significant degree of under-reporting of incidents in the gulf.

The Callao Anchorage in Peru has been regarded as a robbery hot spot for many years and 2020 was no different, with eight incidents recorded (two less than in 2019). However, an alarming new trend is the increase in robberies in Brazil near Macapa City at the mouth of the Amazon River. Seven incidents were reported in this area in 2020, a trend that continued into January 2021.

*Gard marine insurance*

and other infrastructure. Buoyed by knowledge of seafaring industries and local geography, and angered at not receiving more material benefit from the oil industry, many militants became pirates.

“This insurgency/piracy nexus often exists among different kinds of organized crime,” states “The Anatomy of Gulf of Guinea Piracy,” a paper published by the U.S. Naval War College. “In the Gulf of Guinea, however, piracy is committed with impunity and insurgents, rather than achieving a symbiotic relationship with pirates, have fully transformed into pirates themselves.”

In recent years, ransom has replaced theft as their business model. “Before, pirates were satisfied with taking ropes, paint and some valuables from ships,” Fabrizio Barcellona, a section coordinator for the International Transport Workers’ Federation, told *Professional Mariner*. “Now they are often determined to take seafarers hostage in the hopes of lucrative release payments. Their attempts at capturing seafarers often go wrong and leave

parties on both sides injured or dead.”

The IMB advised ships in the Gulf of Guinea to stay at least 250 nautical miles from shore when not transporting cargo. Howlett also called for better, more coordinated security measures among the eight countries that border the gulf. These countries don’t allow the naval forces of another to enter their waters.

“The Gulf of Guinea is very complex and there are a lot of sensitivities,” Howlett said. “(Countries) need to be more focused on initiatives for greater information-sharing.”

Another region experiencing an increase in pirate attacks is the Singapore Strait, where 23 incidents occurred in 2020, according to the IMB. The attacks were mostly armed thefts conducted from vessels under the cover of darkness. The number of incidents in the region nearly doubled from 12 in 2019.

The report warned mariners to be vigilant in those areas. However, the number of incidents in 2020 was comparable to other recent

years — the IMB tallied 201 pirate attacks in 2018 and 191 in 2017 — and the overall global piracy situation is remarkably better since the Somali pirate crisis of a decade ago. In 2010, the IMB gathered 445 reports of attacks, about half of which were by Somali pirates, and 1,181 crewmembers were taken hostage that year. In 2020, no piracy reports came from the Somalia region.

Barcellona cited the resolution of the problem there as a model for the Gulf of Guinea.

“The international community was able to deploy an international naval force around the coast of Somalia, where patrols and enforcement slowly but surely managed to reduce attacks on ships to nearly zero,” he said. “However, unlike in Somalia, local governments in the gulf do not allow external naval forces into their waters, or (allow) merchant vessels to have private, armed security guards on board. As long as these governments block other solutions, they must lift their game to combat this rising threat.”

*Nick Keppler*

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## MarAd authorizes construction of two more academy training ships



MarAd rendering

When alumni return to Maine Maritime Academy in Castine, Maine, they're not drawn to the docks or the football stadium. Instead, they gather around the scale models of previous training ships that the school has used to prepare cadets for their careers at sea.

"Whenever we have functions that bring in alumni, you can hear them telling their kids, 'That's the ship I sailed on,' and their careers were built around their experience on board these various training ships," said Dr. William J. Brennan, president of the academy and chairman of the Consortium of State Maritime Academies.

The group was the driving force behind getting approval in 2019 from the U.S. Maritime Administration (MarAd) to build five national security multi-mission vessels (NSMVs) for the

**Maine Maritime Academy and Texas A&M Maritime at Galveston will receive the third and fourth national security multi-mission vessels from Philly Shipyard. Delivery of the first ship in the series, for SUNY Maritime, is slated for early 2023.**

country's maritime academies. In January, MarAd authorized the construction of two more ships in the series, for Maine Maritime and Texas A&M Maritime, bringing to four the number of vessels officially in the works. The first steel for hull No. 1 was cut at Philly Shipyard in December.

"To think we were so successful in getting this program stood up is a testament to the consortium," Brennan said. "I wasn't particularly sanguine about the prospects because it's a relatively insignificant program in the federal government."

As the saying goes, it helps

to have friends in high places, and Brennan spent years on Capitol Hill in various capacities. Being from Maine, he became friendly with Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, when the two were congressional staffers early in her career. Now a senior senator, she chaired the Senate appropriations subcommittee on transportation

### NSMV at a glance

#### Dimensions

- Length: 524' 1"
- Beam: 88' 7"
- Depth: 55' 1.5"
- Design draft: 21' 4"

#### Propulsion

- Four 3,900-kW diesel-electric main engines divided between two engine rooms
- Total installed power: 15,700 kW
- Full speed: 18 knots (four engines)
- Cruising speed: 12 knots with two main engines in one engine room
- Range: 11,000-plus miles at 18 knots

#### Maneuverability

- Azimuthing bow thruster for "take home" power
- Stern thruster
- Flap-type rudder

#### Accommodations

- Training ship mode: 600 cadets, 100 officers, faculty, staff and crew
- Surge capacity for humanitarian assistance/disaster response missions
- Food storage for 60 days
- Freshwater storage for 14 days

*U.S. Maritime Administration*

when the NSMV discussions started.

“It was Sen. Collins who made this happen over time and it was fortuitous that she was the chairman of the appropriations (sub-committee),” Brennan said.

The NSMV process began nearly a decade ago. The training ship for SUNY Maritime Academy, *Empire State VI*, was approaching 60 years old and needed to be replaced.

Brennan coordinated the efforts of all of the maritime academy presidents and got the ball rolling in Washington. The biggest challenge was to make politicians

understand the importance of the schools and the value of the training ships.

The NSMVs will be owned by MarAd. Funding has been allocated for four ships, with construction manager TOTE Services retaining an option for a fifth vessel. SUNY Maritime will receive the first NSMV, followed by Massachusetts Maritime, Maine Maritime, Texas A&M Maritime and the California State University Maritime Academy. Delivery of the first NSMV is scheduled for early 2023. The total contract value of the five-ship program is estimated at \$1.5 billion.

Capt. John Cashman, commandant at Maine Maritime, said the ship replacing the 31-year-old *State of Maine* will enable the school to expand its programs. For example, each NSMV will have a training bridge in addition to a live bridge.

“To be able to train students on the systems they’ll encounter when they’re in the fleets is huge,” Cashman said, adding that students training for land-based operations will benefit as well. “If you’re working shoreside logistics and the engineer is sending back a message on a part that’s delaying a cruise, you have a better understanding.”

*Eric Colby*

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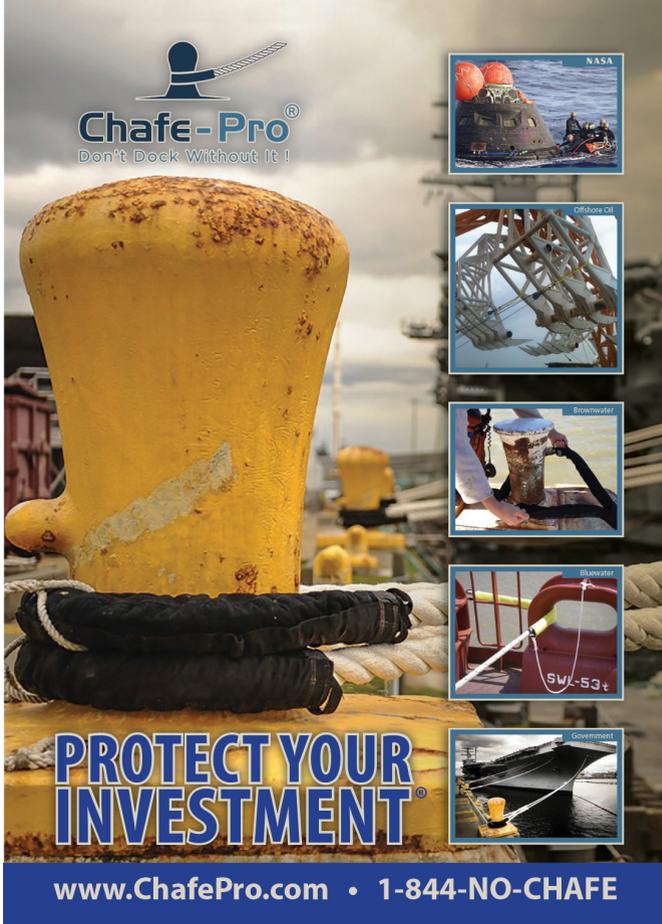
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John Wisniewski photo

## Provision in defense act bans barge anchorages on Lower Hudson

The controversial issue of tying up oil barges and other commercial vessels along the banks of the Lower Hudson River has been settled by a new federal law.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which was enacted on Jan. 1 after Congress overrode President Trump's veto, includes the ban on tying up. The provision was introduced by U.S. Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney, a Democrat who represents the area and is chairman of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee.

The Coast Guard proposed establishing 10 anchorages on the Lower Hudson in a June 2016 notice in the Federal Register. The action followed requests from the Maritime Association of the Port of New York-New Jersey Tug and Barge Committee, the Hudson River Pilots Association and the

American Waterways Operators. The anchorages between Yonkers and Kingston, N.Y., would have contained more than 40 berths.

While supported by the towing industry, the proposal generated opposition from residents, local officials and environmental groups.

"This is a major win for the Hudson Valley," Maloney said after the ban was enacted. "We are the gatekeepers of the Hudson River, and it's up to us to be good stewards of the river so New Yorkers can enjoy it for generations to come."

"The Hudson River is safer today because of the legislation," said Hudson Riverkeeper Paul Galley. "Communities from Yonkers to Rhinebeck banded together to stop the ill-conceived plan that would have led to new anchorages for oil barges, threatening the progress made restoring the river."

Ned Sullivan of Scenic Hudson said that "we can stop worrying about floating 'parking lots' destroying world-class scenic beauty or resulting in catastrophic spills that could pollute communities' drinking water, poison wildlife or imperil river-based tourism."

Towing industry leaders criticized the legislation.

"It is a bit ironic that at a time when the state of New York is trying to promote the Port of Coeymans and the Port of Albany as ports of the future for the state's green initiative, particularly wind farms, that politicians decide to

**A Bouchard Transportation tugboat guides a tank barge up the Hudson River near Manhattan. In 2016, the U.S. Coast Guard proposed establishing 10 anchorages for commercial vessels on the river from Yonkers to Kingston, N.Y., after requests from maritime industry stakeholders.**

foray into marine transportation with such an emotional decision,” said Capt. Steven Kress, vice president of operations for McAllister Towing.

“Anchorages for barges are a needed resource in a prudent company’s tool belt to assist the safe movement of barges up and down the Hudson River and to the Port of New York,” he continued. “Whether those barges are carrying wind turbines, petroleum products, steel, household goods or food stuffs, inclement weather, berth delays, heavy traffic or any number of unforeseen occurrences can make a captain decide to minimize the risk by going to anchor. Putting a ban on anchorages takes that valuable resource away.”

The Hudson River Pilots Association did not respond to multiple requests for comment on the ban.

After the Coast Guard proposed the anchorages, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation that gave the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation — in consultation with the Coast Guard, the Board of Commissioners of Pilots, the New York Department of State, the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and local elected officials — the authority to determine how vessels carrying petroleum can operate on the Hudson. The bill also allowed the establishment of “tanker avoidance zones” near waterfront communities, critical aquatic habitat and other sensitive areas in and along the river.

•  
*Bill Bleyer*

## Maritime Publishing acquires *Professional Mariner* magazine

**M**aritime Publishing of San Diego has acquired Navigator Publishing, the parent company of *Professional Mariner* and sister



magazine *Ocean Navigator*. The sale included both print magazines and their respective websites, newsletters and email marketing products.

The agreement, which closed in mid-March, brings *Professional Mariner* and *Ocean Navigator* together with *Pacific Maritime* magazine and *Fishermen’s News*. Maritime Publishing previously acquired those publications from Philips Publishing Group of Seattle. Both magazines, which ceased publication early in the COVID-19 pandemic, will re-launch this spring.

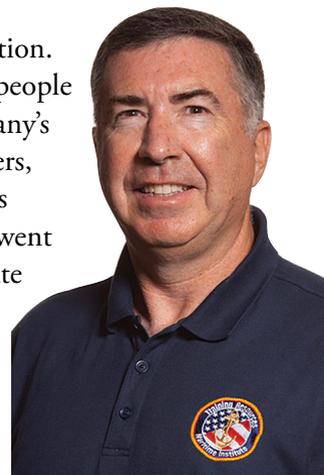
Businessman Dave Abrams will serve as publisher for the new media company. Abrams is CEO of the Training Resources Maritime Institute (TRLMI) in San Diego, the largest private maritime training facility in the Western United States. TRLMI is the parent company of Maritime Publishing.

“We are in the business of providing mariners with knowledge through education,” Abrams said. “*Professional Mariner* and *Ocean Navigator* have been providing knowledge through current industry news and original reporting for decades, so they are a natural exten-

sion of our existing business. The titles give us the ability to provide mariners with advocacy, news and information about the industries and adventures we train them for.”

Navigator Publishing launched *Ocean Navigator* in April 1985, and eight years later the company published the first issue of *Professional Mariner*. Headlines in the first issue included “NWS flip-flops over termination of U.S. weather-fax broadcasts” and “Adventures at firefighting school.” The magazine will continue to publish original reporting on casualties, maritime safety and training under the new ownership.

Over the years, *Professional Mariner* expanded its print and digital offerings. *American Tugboat Review* is published each spring, while *American Ship Review* comes out in the fall. These annual special issues are the only magazines of their kind focused entirely on U.S. tugboat and large vessel construction. Thousands of people read the company’s email newsletters, and its websites recently underwent their first update in more than a decade. More improvements are coming in the near future.



**Dave Abrams**

Alex Agnew, the co-founder and president of Navigator Publishing, will remain with Maritime Publishing as associate publisher and consultant. Navigator's editorial and sales staffs have joined the new company and will continue to work from their office in downtown Portland, Maine.

"I am very excited to be passing the torch to Dave and his team at Maritime Publishing," Agnew said. "I believe they will elevate the already outstanding content that we have been known for and provide resources to expand our efforts in both print and digital media. We could not think of a better successor to carry on our legacy."

Maritime Publishing has already invested in *Professional Mariner* and its three sister magazines. The company hired journalists in Southern California and Alaska, giving the magazine access to experienced writers based in West Coast maritime hubs. *Professional Mariner* will open a Gulf Coast bureau later this spring, and it has outfitted reporters and editors with new hardware, software and communications tools.

“For me, it’s all about the mariner and the overall maritime community. Helping people connect with each other through the various training and media platforms is the ultimate goal.”

Dave Abrams,  
Maritime Publishing

Maritime Publishing will partner with TRLMI to expand the audience and attract new paid subscribers for the four magazines. This broader reach will provide new opportunities for advertisers to reach potential customers through tailored print, digital and email marketing campaigns.

Abrams has a proven background that includes managing public and private businesses. But he is no stranger to the maritime industry. In addition to running TRLMI, Abrams is a former U.S.

Navy surface warfare officer and currently holds a U.S. Coast Guard 100-ton master license. He is an authorized instructor for the Coast Guard Auxiliary's Boating Skills and Seamanship program and the National Safe Boating Council's "Boat Control On-Water" training course.

Abrams also has owned both powerboats and sailboats, and has cruised his current vessel, *Lahaina Sailor*, a 58-foot Cape Horn trawler, over 5,000 miles between British Columbia and the Sea of Cortez.

"My interest in publishing arose from a desire to help mariners stay educated and informed, not just through historical practices associated with training, but through current industry news and events," he said. "For me, it's all about the mariner and the overall maritime community. Helping people connect with each other through the various training and media platforms is the ultimate goal."

For more information on the new company and its offerings, visit [maritimepublishing.com](http://maritimepublishing.com) and [TRLMI.com](http://TRLMI.com).

Casey Conley

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# Towing

by Will Van Dorp



New York Power Authority photos

## Classic tug takes on winter to prevent Mohawk Valley flooding

**F**ar too often, Erie Canal communities have been threatened by flooding in the spring due to the formation of ice jams. Tugboats might not be a solution most people would consider to mitigate the problem, but New York's Reimagine the Canals program is

now utilizing a tug to break up sheet ice along the route shared by the canal and the Mohawk River. The goal is to preserve a historic canal-side landmark area.

Mild weather early last winter in the Mohawk River region was good news for the low-lying Stockade Dis-

trict in Schenectady, N.Y. The architecture and streetscapes in the Stockade make up one of the oldest continuously settled neighborhoods in the country. First settled in 1661 by Dutch merchants and fur traders and inhabited ever since, the 82-acre zone has “the highest concentration of

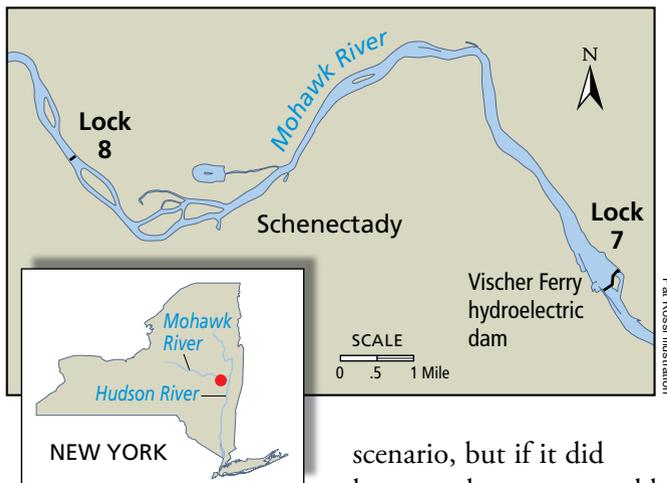
**The 85-foot Margot, built in 1958 for work in the petroleum trade, breaks ice in January on the Mohawk River near Schenectady, N.Y. The goal is to stop the formation of ice jams that contribute to springtime flooding in the valley.**

historic period homes in the country, with over 40 houses more than 200 years old,” according to the National Park Ser-

vice. Of the 380 buildings in the neighborhood, two are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In recent years, the

the icebreaker, with the 48-foot *Benjamin Elliot* providing emergency backup in case *Margot* becomes disabled in the ice. That is not a likely



Stockade has flooded when the weather warms quickly in the spring. Mohawk River ice, sometimes up to 12 inches thick, breaks up and causes ice jams downstream, forcing the water to rise. The flooding has disrupted the lives of residents and resulted in huge insurance claims for increasingly fragile structures.

Enter the tugboats stationed above the 30-foot-high Vischer Ferry hydroelectric dam and the adjacent Erie Canal Lock 7. The 85-foot *Margot*, part of the New York State Marine Highway fleet, serves as

scenario, but if it did happen, the rescue would be complicated because the canalized Mohawk River is closed each winter for maintenance and upgrades.

*Margot* was built in 1958 by Jakobson Shipyard in Oyster Bay, N.Y., originally carrying the moniker *Hustler II* for the Oil Transfer Corp. The tug changed hands several times over the years and was acquired by the New York State Marine Highway Transportation Co. in 2002. The single-screw veteran is powered by a 1,440-hp Fairbanks Morse diesel engine.

When temperatures plummeted in the region in mid-January and stayed below freezing, ice built up behind the dam and *Margot* began its mitigation work. Ice-breaking above the dam allows ice to freely flow

through upstream constrictions, reducing the chance of ice jam formation. The tug works to prevent ice from becoming more than 12 inches thick, as well as to move it over the dam when warm temperatures create the potential for ice sheet movement.

Stationing a tugboat above the dam to break up ice was an idea generated by Reimagine the Canals. The New York Power Authority and New York State Canal Corp. (NYS Canals) launched the flood mitigation effort in partnership with a collection of private, state and federal entities: Clarkson University, Union Col-



The New York State Canal Corp. recently acquired a Watermaster to assist with icebreaking above the Vischer Ferry hydroelectric dam on the Mohawk River. The machine also can be deployed for dredging in warmer months.

**Capt. Chris Deeley mans the helm of Margot, which joined the New York State Marine Highway fleet in 2002.**



lege, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the National Weather Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition to using *Margot*, NYS Canals has acquired a Watermaster, a 36-foot amphibious multipurpose machine. Multipurpose in this case means it can break ice in winter and dredge during the summer. Unlike a tugboat, the operator of the Watermaster does not need to have a U.S. Coast Guard captain's license.

NYS Canals is also becoming more proactive when it comes to monitoring ice jams. Partnering with the

USGS, the agency is developing a model to predict ice jam formation, which will be part of the warning system that alerts canal-side residents of an impending threat. Installing pneumatically operated crest gates along the top of the Vischer Ferry dam is another mitigation option being studied.

Flooding in the Mohawk Valley occurs at other times of the year as well, as in 2011 in the wake of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. Apart from the current icebreaking initiative, the Federal Emergency Management Agency granted the city of Schenectady \$8.6 million in 2018 to study options and implement solutions.



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New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo called the 2021 icebreaking operation “a pilot program to

understand the effectiveness of the icebreaking tugs.” He said the state would be continuously

evaluating its efforts “and will look to incorporate lessons learned from this pilot into future resili-

ency planning efforts and operations.”

The Reimagine the Canals initiative utilizes 21st-century technology to protect one of New York’s most valuable 17th- and 18th-century heritage sites. The function of the canal system may have changed in the past century, but the value of the Erie Canal and the canal-side Schenectady community cannot be understated — two landmarks adding priceless value to the state.



**Margot powers through Mohawk River ice to prevent it from becoming more than 12 inches thick. The tug is taking a lead role in a multi-partner pilot project inspired by Reimagine the Canals.**



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Paul C. LaMare III photo

# ‘High highs, low lows’: Great Lakes-Seaway ports ride out pandemic

by Patricia McCarthy

**T**he Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway System carried an impressive amount of cargo in 2020 despite COVID-19 limitations. Overall tonnage for the navigation season, which ran from March 25, 2020 to Jan. 15, 2021, was only down 1.7 percent compared with 2019 for U.S. and Canadian ports that use the waterways.

How was that possible?

“Despite the incredible challenges of the pandemic, Great Lakes-St. Lawrence shipping demonstrated tremendous resiliency in 2020,” said Bruce Burrows, president and CEO of the

Chamber of Marine Commerce, an Ottawa-based group that represents more than 130 industry stakeholders in the United States and Canada. “Our ships never stopped moving, safely delivering essential food, fuel, power and materials needed to keep going during one of the worst health and economic crises in modern history.”

Burrows said the chamber’s Trusted Partners program helped members align their best practices for safety and enabled good communication between ship operators, pilots, ports and marine suppliers “to ensure efficient

and safe ship-to-shore interactions.”

The St. Lawrence Seaway announced that cargo shipments totaled nearly 38 million metric tons in 2020, almost in line with 2019. Burrows said the pandemic’s economic impacts varied depending on the type of cargo.

“Ports with strong grain volumes have been able to make up for declines in other cargo volumes,” he said. Fertilizers, cement and steel slabs did well in 2020, and wind turbine shipments were particularly strong at U.S. Great Lakes ports. But shipments of some construc-

Wind turbine components are delivered to Michigan’s Port of Monroe in June for General Electric’s wind energy efforts in the state. Strength in the alternative energy sector has provided a boost to Great Lakes-Seaway ports during the pandemic.

tion materials, petroleum and iron ore took a heavy hit before rebounding later in the year, Burrows said.

Representatives of the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corp. agreed that cargo diversification was key to keeping ports busy, and they confirmed Burrow's assessment of top-performing cargoes in 2020. In a year of "high highs and low lows," Port Milwaukee Director Adam Tindall-Schlicht said his port saw exports of Wisconsin-grown agricultural commodities increase by nearly 82 percent and overall tonnage rise 5 percent compared with 2019.

"One of the chief commodities here is imported salt from Goderich in Ontario, and we've seen a return to more normal activity in the domestic and international salt trade on

*Federal Barents, below, delivers skids and coils of European steel to Port Milwaukee in July. Overall tonnage at the port rose 5 percent in 2020 over the previous year despite COVID-19. Opposite, Julie C. loads Ontario-grown grain at Richardson International's Hamilton terminal in November.*

the Great Lakes," he said. "Our production and handling of cement products saw an increase in 2020 by about 3 percent. We associate that with Wisconsin's ongoing shovel-ready construction projects."

Tindall-Schlicht said two major highlights for the Seaway system have been the strength of U.S.-Canadian agricultural exports and the wind turbine trade, especially at the Port of Duluth-Superior and the Port of Indiana-Burns Harbor. "(That) has been a real success story," he said. "There are a lot of reasons we think the Seaway system is showing signs of strength despite the economic duress associated with the pandemic."

Port Milwaukee has weathered the pandemic well by being proactive. "From Day 1, we were working with our customers and our

tenant partners to make sure they had the latest public health guidance so that there was no commercial operational disruption related to COVID-19," Tindall-Schlicht said. He added that a significant investment in international marketing and advertising for Port Milwaukee has proven fruitful, and that state support has made a huge difference.

"We have a very unique program in our state called the Harbor Assistance Program in which the Wisconsin Department of Transportation provides supplemental grant funding to allow commercial ports to target huge infrastructure projects year after year," he said.

At a time when infrastructure throughout North America is in a "state of degradation," Tindall-Schlicht noted that Port Milwaukee has continued to invest in upgrades, securing federal and state funding to build a \$35 million export terminal.

The Lake Carriers' Association (LCA), which represents the U.S.-flag Great Lakes fleet, also noted a heavy investment — about \$87 million — by shipping companies to upgrade vessels in Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan. The shipyard work includes replacing steel plating, engine overhauls, navigation equipment updates and conveyor belt repairs and replacements.



Chamber of Marine Commerce photo

“Maintaining our vessels is a lot easier than replacing them,” said Eric Peace, operations and communications director for the LCA.

Peace echoed how critical it was to be proactive to keep vessels moving on the Great Lakes throughout 2020.

“At the start of the pandemic, there was no Coast Guard guidance right away. We ended up engaging with the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and local health departments to make sure they understood we were not cruise ships, that we were shipping raw materials,” Peace said. “As it progressed, we put together response and prevention plans, informing mariners that we were going to be asking them where they’ve been, giving them questionnaires, taking their temperatures — all the precautions we could so as not to introduce (the coronavirus) onto a ship.”

Those efforts paid off, said LCA President James Weakley. There were no confirmed COVID-19 cases on LCA-enrolled vessels last year, a feat he attributed in part to early distribution of useful plans.

“I think the real credit for success goes to our captains, chief engineers and chief cooks. They incorporated the prevention plans into their safety culture,” Weakley said. “Our hope for 2021



HOPA Ports photo

is a healthy return of our sailors after the winter layup and an economic recovery to keep our ships sailing.”

Burrows said he believes grain shipments will be strong again in 2021 “as there is still a lot of carryover from the last harvests, and grain was stored at port terminals over the winter and is waiting to go.” Success for the year depends on the pace of economic recovery in both the United States and Canada, he said, and how governments handle vaccination distribution and economic stimulus measures.

“It will be important for essential workers in the marine sector — such as crewmembers and those involved with ship-to-shore interactions — to be part of the prioritization process for vaccines,” Burrows said. “These workers are just as

“I think the real credit for success goes to our captains, chief engineers and chief cooks. They incorporated the (COVID) prevention plans into their safety culture.”

James Weakley,  
Lake Carriers'  
Association

much ‘frontline’ workers as those in the trucking, rail, airline and other essential services (who) have ensured our supply chains continue to operate.”

Peace said the arrival of COVID testing, which wasn’t readily available for much of 2020, was “good news” for the LCA for the coming year. Tindall-Schlicht said Port Milwaukee also was optimistic about 2021, having seen a significant uptick in international cruise activity on the Great Lakes before the pandemic that he thinks will resume.

He also praised the “Highway H2O” initiative that allows Great Lakes ports to collaborate and internationally market the system as one. This allows cargo vessels to target multiple ports — “a winning equation for many years.” •

# At Work

## Versatile Weeks dredge tender built tough from bottom up

Story and photos by Brian Gauvin

**J**ack K., a 62.5-foot Cummins-powered dredge tender, is described by Weeks Marine's project manager as a Swiss army knife for the tugboat set. The new-build will assist dredges, tow dredges, push barges, handle anchors and move pipe, primarily along the Gulf Coast, while also carrying an oceans classification for towing equipment offshore.

The versatile vessel was designed by MiNO Marine of Jefferson, La., and built by Rodriguez Shipbuilding in Bayou La Batre, Ala. Following a dormant period at the yard, owner Joey Rodriguez received multiple orders from three companies in the past year. The latest contract is with Weeks for two 62.5-foot dredge tenders and a triple-screw 78-footer.

Reduced boat and equipment maintenance was a priority for the owner. "We designed these boats to be rugged and to have a long career

with Weeks," said Shaun O'Brien, senior port engineer for towing and project manager for the newbuilds. To that end, the full length of *Jack K.*'s bottom plate is half-inch steel, as are the shear strakes. The deck plating is three-eighths of an inch thick as opposed to the more common five-sixteenths of an inch.

"It's really nice having an all-Cummins package for lower maintenance and operating," said Dave Tuck, a Weeks engineer and assistant project manager for the three new tugs. The vessels have stainless-steel piping, stacks and hand rails, and the piping is welded rather than threaded to cut down on leaks.

The model bow lugger and shallow-draft design is a Rodriguez specialty. The rudders are a fishtail design that the builder has been modifying to suit different boats and budgets over the years. Rodriguez said he offsets the rudders

*Jack K.* maneuvers during trials in March at Rodriguez Shipbuilding in Bayou La Batre, Ala. "The handling is outstanding," says Dave Tuck, assistant project manager for Weeks Marine.

inboard, a configuration that allows them to capture 85 percent of the propeller thrust.

"Offsetting the rudders inboard enhances the (sideways) walking ability of the tug tremendously," he said. Extending the leading edge of the rudders also contributes to what he called "a maximum-performing rudder design. After 43 years building boats, you learn a little bit about designing rudders."

"The handling is outstanding," Tuck said.

*Jack K.*'s power train consists of two Cummins 750-hp engines coupled to Twin Disc gears and Kahlenberg propellers. Auxiliary power is provided by two Cummins 60-kW generators. Furuno supplied the wheelhouse electronics package.



There is a Coastal Marine Equipment (CME) towing winch on the stern and a pair of NABRICO deck winches on the bow for facing up. The stern also has an anchor shoot with centerline roller. The fendering was provided by M&M Bumper Service of Bourg, La.

The 78-foot triple-screw dredge tender has greater tankage capacities and a larger CME towing winch than the smaller tugs, which will enable it to handle larger and longer tows. The vessel is slated for delivery in August.

## Jack K.

### SPECIFICATIONS

Owner/operator: Weeks Marine, Cranford, N.J.  
 Designer/builder: MiNO Marine, Jefferson, La./  
 Rodriguez Shipbuilding, Bayou La Batre, Ala.  
 Dimensions: L: 62.5' B: 22' D: 8'  
 Mission: Dredge tender  
 Accommodations: Up to six crewmembers

### PROPULSION

- (2) Cummins QSK19 MCRS 750-hp main engines
- Twin Disc M6X-5222DC reduction gears, 6:1 ratio
- (2) Cummins QSB7-DM 65-kW generators
- (2) Four-blade, stainless-steel Kahlenberg propellers, 66 by 54 inches
- Aquamet 17 propeller shafts

### NAVIGATION/COMMUNICATIONS

- (2) Furuno DRSGAX radars
- Furuno FA170 AIS
- Furuno SC30 GPS satellite compass
- Furuno GP33 GPS/WAAS navigation display
- Furuno FAP7001 autopilot
- Furuno DFF1 depth sounders
- (2) Icom M604A VHF radios

### DECK GEAR/ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

- Cummins QSB7-DM tow motor
- Coastal Marine Equipment towing winch with 1,200 feet of 1.25-inch wire
- (2) NABRICO DF-156-40-11-HE facing winches with 84 feet of 1-inch wire
- M&M Bumper Service fendering



Capt. Nick Bertholet enters the wheelhouse at the Rodriguez yard with COVID-19 protocols in place.



Two Cummins QSK19 main engines, left, deliver a combined 1,500 horsepower. Jack K.'s winch package includes a Coastal Marine Equipment unit on the stern, below left, and two NABRICO units on the bow, below.



Aboard Jack K., from left: Nicholas Dow, deckneer; Dave Tuck, assistant project manager; Capt. Nick Bertholet; Eric Brady, mate; and Robert Curnutte, deckneer.

# Casualties

## Two die after tugboat sinks in storm on British Columbia coast

**T**wo mariners died and a third suffered serious injuries after their tugboat sank in a remote British Columbia waterway during a strong winter storm.

Capt. Troy Pearson and deck hands Charley Cragg and Zac Dolan were aboard the 36-foot *Ingenika* when it capsized in the Gardner Canal near Kemano while towing the 200-foot barge *Miller 204*. The tug's emergency beacon activated at 0040 on Feb. 11 about 16 nautical miles north of Gribbell Island.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) vessel *Inkster* responded to the distress signal

from nearby Hartley Bay. *Inkster's* crew found Cragg deceased, and the Canadian Coast Guard later recovered Pearson's body. A private helicopter found Dolan, 19, alive on the shore and transported him to a hospital. Authorities did not specify the nature of his injuries.

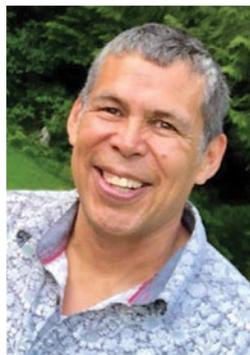
Canada's Transportation Safety Board (TSB) is investigating the incident, but a final report will likely take at least a year to produce. In March, the agency said it was expanding the scope of its investigation

due to the "potential for yielding safety lessons," a spokeswoman said.

At press time in late March, the TSB had not released additional information about the incident. *Ingenika*, operated by Wainwright Marine Services of Prince Rupert,

remained on the sea-floor in an unidentified location in Gardner Canal.

*Ingenika* left Kitimat at about 1600 on Feb. 10 with *Miller 204* in tow off the stern. The vessels were headed for Kemano



*Ingenika*, a 36-foot tugboat that sank on Feb. 11 with three aboard, tows a barge off the coast of British Columbia in an undated photo. Capt. Troy Pearson, top, and deck hand Charley Cragg, above, were killed. Another deck hand on the vessel survived.

Wainwright Marine Services/Contributed photos

Bay, home to a large hydropower plant, to discharge a cargo of construction equipment. Weather conditions that night were frigid, with temperatures dipping below zero degrees Fahrenheit and winds gusting beyond 60 mph.

It's not clear what happened aboard the tugboat or what trouble the crew encountered. Authorities have not specified when or where Pearson and Cragg were found, or where Dolan was when help arrived. All three were wearing survival suits. It is not known if the crew deployed a life raft or issued a mayday call.

Search teams found *Miller 204* aground roughly 4 miles from the tug's last known location in Gardner Canal.

Judy Carlick-Pearson, the widow of the captain, is urging Canadian authorities to locate and raise the tugboat. She believes the vessel will contain key clues about what happened on its final voyage.

"We need that vessel salvaged because we still have no real concrete answers," she said in a recent phone interview. "We don't know ... if there were instability issues or if there were structural issues or

any mechanical issues. We don't know that."

Carlick-Pearson has launched a petition campaign urging the Canadian government to salvage the tug, and Cragg's family wants the vessel raised for the same reasons, according to Canadian media accounts. As of late March, nearly 12,000 people had signed a petition asking for the vessel to be salvaged as part of the investigation.

Canadian authorities have not committed to that effort. The RCMP's Marine Division deployed a remotely operated

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vehicle (ROV) after the incident to try to locate the sunken vessel. The ROV followed the tug's apparent path to a depth of 565 feet without finding it, Transport Canada spokeswoman Frederica Dupuis told *Professional Mariner*.

"The suspected depth of the vessel would make any attempts at recovery difficult and very dangerous," Dupuis said.

Carlick-Pearson raised questions about the 700-hp *Ingenika* performing such a tow with its low freeboard "in some of the sketchiest channels in Canada." She said this type of tow was standard for *Ingenika* but relatively rare for similarly sized tugs in British Columbia.

Wainwright Marine Services did not respond to inquiries about the incident or the makeup of the tow.

Canadian regulations did not require *Ingenika* to be inspected. "This tug was under 15 gt in size and therefore was not required by regulations to be inspected, but (it was) required to meet the standards set out in the Canada Shipping Act 2001 and associated

regulations applicable to vessels of its type and size," Dupuis said.

Pearson, 57, lived in Prince Rupert with his wife and 12-year-old son Carver. Pearson joined his dad on fishing vessels as a child and by age 15 was earning a full share on a commercial fishing vessel. He later worked for BC

“The suspected depth of the vessel would make any attempts at recovery difficult and very dangerous.”

Frederica Dupuis,  
Transport Canada

Ferries and owned a sportfishing business before joining Wainwright in 2017. He was promoted to captain in 2019.

"He was probably one of the most methodical, cautious people around, and he never in 25 years put myself, my son or anyone in danger," Carlick-Pearson said, describing her husband as diligent

and well-prepared. "I don't think he ever said no to a job. He was a true mariner."

Cragg, 25, grew up near Vancouver and had recently moved to Terrace, British Columbia, according to news accounts in Canada. He grew up around boats, but the accident voyage was his first time working on a tug, Carlick-Pearson said. Attempts to reach Cragg's family were not successful.

"Charley was a mariner," his family said in an obituary. "He loved the ocean and everything she had to offer. His zest for life and adventure whether at sea or in the mountains was who he was to the core."

Carlick-Pearson is mourning her husband and still seeking closure. She believes raising the vessel could lead to new regulations that protect other mariners from the same fate.

"If something is not done about it now," she said, "do we wait until the next big accident to happen and then try to look at it again?"

Casey Conley

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Capt. Ted photo

## Towboat pilot ‘tried to outrun’ current before Louisiana bridge strike

The pilot of a towboat pushing 29 barges down the Mississippi River failed to compensate for the fast-moving current before hitting a bridge pier near Luling, La., federal investigators said.

*Cooperative Spirit's* tow broke apart after striking the Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge at 0113 on March 15, 2020. One barge sank and another was destroyed. Total damage and lost cargo from the incident at mile 121.6 reached \$1.65 million.

The pilot helming the 185-foot *Cooperative Spirit* acknowledged to National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators that the tow rounded 26 Mile Point out of shape for the bridge transit. He also said current pushed the tow to the left bank as it approached the span.

“The pilot chose to primarily use increased engine speed in an effort to move the tow to starboard away from the bridge pier,

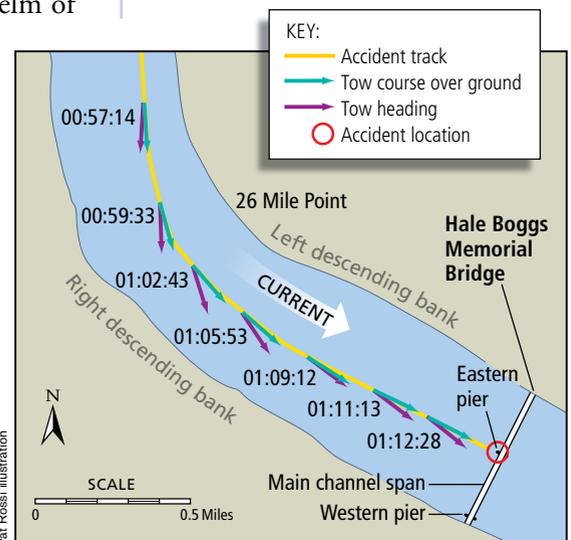
stating that he ‘tried to outrun (the current),’” the NTSB said in its report. “However, the tow’s course over ground did not appreciably change as engine speed increased, while the increasing speed over ground reduced the time the pilot had to maneuver.”

Authorities did not identify the pilot, who had 29 years of towing industry experience. The same mariner was at the helm of the upbound *Cooperative Spirit* on Jan. 26, 2020 when it collided with a downbound tow pushed by *R.C. Creppel*, the NTSB said. *R.C. Creppel* sank after the collision

at 26 Mile Point and three of its four crewmembers died.

American River Transportation Co. (ARTCO) of St. Louis operated the 10,500-hp triple-screw towboat. The company removed the pilot from *Cooperative Spirit* for “a short period” after the fatal collision to allow him to “reset,” the report said. The length of that reset was not available.

**An NTSB graphic details the track of the *Cooperative Spirit* tow as it flanked the bend at 26 Mile Point on the Lower Mississippi River before hitting the Hale Boggs Memorial Bridge. The towboat is shown on the river in 2010.**



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ARTCO considered the pilot experienced and “very safety conscious” — traits that reportedly did not change after he returned to work, the NTSB said. The company did not respond to inquiries about the Hale Boggs bridge incident, or its decision to allow the pilot to return to work after the *R.C. Creppel* incident.

*Cooperative Spirit* got underway from St. Louis on March 6, 2020 with 30 barges in a six-wide, five-deep arrangement. Twenty-nine of the barges carried grain, while the 30th was empty. The tow changed crew near Baton Rouge, La., on March 10. The pilot was among the crew who came on board.

The tow made slow progress over the next several days due to stops along the way, including one in Plaquemine, La., to drop off the empty barge. Later, the tow held up awaiting space in the fleeting area at its final destination of Kenner Bend (mile 115.8). Sufficient space came available late on March 14, and *Cooperative Spirit* got underway at 2317. The pilot relieved the

captain at midnight for a six-hour watch.

The first hour was uneventful. The tow passed the upbound bulk carrier *Ikan Parang* 2.5 miles upriver from the Hale Boggs bridge. The pilot initiated a flanking maneuver to bring the tow around the left-hand bend at 26 Mile Point. He completed the maneuver eight-tenths of a mile upriver from the bridge.

The Lower Mississippi River was running fast and high on the morning of the bridge strike. The Carrollton Gauge located 15 miles downriver recorded 15.3 feet — a level considered high but below flood stage. The current was running about 6 mph near the Hale Boggs bridge. An eddy also might have formed upriver from the bridge, the NTSB said, which would have made maneuvering more difficult.

The 1,195-foot tow was too close to the left descending bank rounding the bend, the report said. The pilot responded by working the throttles individually, occasionally moving the rudders to starboard. He progressively

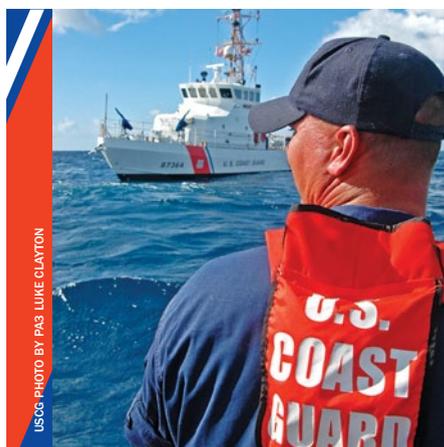
increased power to the engines until all three were at a maximum 212 shaft rpm. The pilot told investigators he tried to “outrun” the current.

“Although the pilot stated that he used starboard rudder and increased engine speed in an attempt to counteract the current, the video evidence showed he used limited rudder as the tow approached the bridge,” the report said. “Ultimately, the pilot’s actions in compensating for the strong current were ineffective, resulting in the tow hitting the bridge’s eastern tower pier.”

The tow hit the bridge at almost 12 mph. Barges *ART1008* and *ART44080B*, on the forward section of the port string, struck the eastern pier. *ART1008* sank stern first about a mile downriver, the NTSB said, while *ART44080B* was damaged beyond repair.

*Cooperative Spirit* and other good Samaritan vessels rounded up the drifting barges. The bridge pier sustained scrapes but otherwise was not damaged.

*Casey Conley*



USCG PHOTO BY PA3 LUKE CLAYTON

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## Barge runs into shorefront homes after tug master falls asleep

An empty gravel barge careened into several waterfront homes near Gig Harbor, Wash., after the tugboat’s captain fell asleep at the controls.

The 71-foot, 1,800-hp *Island Chief* was pushing the barge south in the Colvos Passage when it veered toward land at about 0715 on March 15. The barge hit one house and damaged decks and property at two other homes before coming to a stop along the shore.

“The report was he took the watch at 0600 and then fell asleep,” U.S. Coast



U.S. Coast Guard/Kyle Stubbs photos



Shoreside homes and property near Gig Harbor, Wash., were damaged after being struck by a barge just after sunrise on March 15. The barge was being guided by the 71-foot *Island Chief*, shown in 2015 on Seattle’s Duwamish River.

Guard spokesman Trevor Lilburn said in a phone interview. “That is what (the captain) reported.”

There were no injuries or pollution, and the tug and unidentified barge were not damaged. The Coast Guard is investigating but has not issued a final report, which likely won’t be available for many months.

Cmdr. Nathan Menefee, chief of prevention at Sector Puget Sound, described the incident as “very concerning.” The sector will investigate “to determine the cause and whether additional actions are necessary to prevent a similar incident in the future,” he said.

*Island Chief*, owned by Seattle-based Island Tug & Barge Co.,

operated with a crew of four mariners. The master worked a standard six-on, six-off watch rotation that meets Coast Guard rest requirements.

The incident happened just after sunrise on an otherwise calm morning on Puget Sound as the tow headed to an anchorage near DuPont, Wash. Video taken by a property owner recorded the sounds of crashing in the moments before the barge entered the frame. It moved slowly and appeared to bounce off a rocky wall along the waterfront. The barge stopped about 100 feet south of the damaged properties.

“Because of the location of where it went aground, it went straight in and struck the bulkhead and three homes that sat right at the water’s

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edge,” said Tina Curran, spokeswoman for Gig Harbor Fire & Medic One. “One of the homes was damaged to the point where it needed structural support.”

“It was kind of heading in and then hit and kind of scraped alongside,” she said of the impact.

Erik Ellefsen, general manager of Island Tug & Barge, acknowledged the tug captain dozed just moments before the barge came ashore. He said the captain awoke after the barge’s first contact with land and took steps to minimize damage.

“His evasive maneuvers once things happened saved people from being hurt and further property damage and environmental impact,” Ellefsen said in a phone interview.

The tugboat released the barge after it stopped along the beach while puzzled property owners shouted questions to the crew, trying to understand what happened. *Island Chief* ultimately pulled the barge to deeper water and re-established the tow before returning to Seattle.

Authorities did not release an estimated cost of damage. Island Tug & Barge is working with the affected property owners to facilitate repairs, Ellefsen said.

“Our main focus now is to repair the damage to the homes as quickly as we are allowed to,” he said on March 17. “We have already begun that process, and are deeply grateful for the cooperation we have had with the residents involved.”

*Casey Conley*

## Towboat loses power, hits Ohio River dam before drifting through

**E**ight crewmembers escaped from an upbound towboat that lost propulsion on the Ohio River and drifted through a dam near Belleville, W.Va.

The 1,800-hp *Edith Tripp* struck the Belleville Dam at about 1300 on March 3 before passing through one of the structure's open gates. The towboat's empty hopper barge, which was not identified, became wedged against the dam before passing through early the next morning.

Both vessels sustained minor



Meigs County Emergency Management Agency photos

*Edith Tripp*, above, floats down the Ohio River below the Belleville Locks and Dam on March 3 before being corralled. The vessel drifted about 15 miles. The empty gravel barge being guided by the towboat became pinned against the dam, right, before passing through during the night.



damage in the incident. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awaited lower water to survey the dam located at mile 203.9.

The Coast Guard is investigating the propulsion issue aboard *Edith Tripp*. Preliminary reports suggest debris became lodged in the vessel's single propeller.

"It was a mechanical failure in which something caught in the propeller and caused the clutch to basically seize up and burn out," said Coast Guard Lt. Noel Shriner, head of the Prevention Division for Marine Safety Unit Huntington (W.Va.).

Crouse Corp. of Paducah, Ky., operates the 93-foot *Edith Tripp*. The company did not respond to an inquiry about the incident.

The river was at minor flood stage when the incident occurred. The tow locked through at Belleville and was roughly a half-mile upriver from the dam when *Edith Tripp*'s propulsion failed, Shriner

said. The current, moving at up to 10 knots, pushed the tow back toward the dam.

Crew aboard the towboat recognized the gravity of their situation. They lowered the skiff and ferried five members to safety in two parties. The captain, engineer and second engineer stayed on board to attempt to regain control of the tow. They were the last to leave the 45-year-old *Edith Tripp* before it made contact with the dam.

"The starboard quarter made contact with one of the dam pilings, and that impact caused the wires to break between the barge and the towing vessel," Shriner said. "The towing vessel proceeded to go through the dam, and the barge got wedged at an angle between one piling and another."

*Edith Tripp* went through the dam stern first. It drifted about 15 miles downriver before the rescue tug *Miss Thatcher* corralled it. *Miss Thatcher* also rounded up the hop-



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per barge after it broke free during the night and passed through the dam, said Jamie Jones, the emergency management director for Meigs County, Ohio.

Neither vessel is believed to have hit anything while drifting downriver. Jones said there are campgrounds along the banks and other riverside infrastructure, but there are no fixed crossings until the Ravenswood Bridge at mile 221. *Miss Thatcher* rounded up the drifting vessels upriver from the span.

*Edith Tripp* “came to shore a couple of times, but with the water being so high, basically it bounced off the trees and down the river it went,” Jones said. “With the height of the river ... if there were any permanent docks, they were well below the water level and the vessel would have gone right over top of them.”

The Belleville Locks and Dam facility was built in the early 1960s. It has eight tainter gates that can be raised and lowered to control flows, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. The gates were fully open at the time of the incident due to high water, which allowed the vessels to pass through.

The incident didn’t affect operations at the dam, Army Corps spokesman Brian Maka said in early March. “There was no noticeable damage. Once the water recedes they will be able to inspect it more closely.”

*Casey Conley*

## Strong current pins tow to railroad bridge over Tennessee River

**A** towboat pushing eight loaded barges up the Tennessee River ran into fast-moving current that stopped the tow's forward progress and pinned it against a railroad bridge.

the incident occurred. The port side of *Bearcat's* tow pressed against the concrete bridge pier closest to the shore, located on the east side of the navigation channel.

Surveys conducted after the inci-

increase of more than 50 percent from the normal rate.

TVA spokesman Scott Fiedler said a flow rate of 50,000 CFS is the threshold for the agency to issue a notice to mariners. The estimated current speed at the bridge location was not available.

The assist tugboat *Viking* reached the stranded tow on Feb. 23. *Viking* removed *Bearcat's* barges one at a time to prevent a breakaway. Mann said the effort lasted much of the day and finished at about 1630.

The bridge incident occurred about 60 miles downriver from Knoxville on a relatively quiet section of the Tennessee. The waterway has a 652-mile navigable channel that runs from Knoxville to Paducah, Ky., where it meets the Ohio River.

"Commercially we don't get a lot of traffic out there other than the tugs that work in the area," Mann said of the incident location. "That is why they had to wait so long for the assistance vessel to arrive."

After coming free from the bridge, *Bearcat* reassembled its tow and continued its voyage. The Coast Guard did not disclose its destination or the cargo in the barges. The service also would not say how many crew were working on the tow.

Serodino Inc. of Chattanooga, Tenn., operates *Bearcat*, which was built in 1991. Attempts to reach the company for comment about the incident were not successful.

*Casey Conley*



*Bearcat* works a barge into the lock at the Chickamauga Dam in Chattanooga, Tenn., in 2017. The towboat and its eight-barge tow were pinned for two days against the Norfolk Southern railroad bridge, below, near Loudon, Tenn., in late February.

The 76-foot *Bearcat* was passing under the Norfolk Southern railroad bridge at mile 591.5 near Loudon, Tenn., when it encountered trouble at about 0630 on Feb. 21. The tow remained stuck against the span for two days until an assist tugboat arrived.

*Bearcat* and its tow "stalled due to a strong head current just after passing under (the bridge) and the master lost control," the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said in an incident notice. "The tow began to top around and laid up against the bridge piers" on the upstream side.

Todd Mann, an investigator with Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment Nashville, said no injuries or pollution were reported. The cause is still under investigation, limiting what the service can share publicly.

*Bearcat* and its dry cargo barges were approaching Loudon when



Michael Derrick/Bob Davis photos

dent did not reveal any structural damage to the bridge, Mann said. Attempts to reach Norfolk Southern Railway for additional details were not successful. The tow stayed intact during the episode, and the navigation channel remained open.

The railroad bridge is located about 10 miles downriver from the Fort Loudoun Dam operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Water at the dam was flowing at 45,650 cubic feet per second (CFS) on the morning of the incident, an

## Venerable icebreaking workboat sinks at its slip in Milwaukee

In the early morning hours of Feb. 22, Port of Milwaukee harbor master Wayne Johnson got a phone call he wasn't expecting. The port's 60-year-old workboat, *Harbor Seagull*, had sunk at its slip in about 20 feet of water.

"When I got that call ... my heart went up into my throat," he said. "To see her on the bottom was very heartbreaking."

Adam Tindall-Schlicht, director of the Port of Milwaukee, said *Harbor Seagull* began taking on water late on Feb. 21 or early on Feb. 22, eventually sinking at about 0530 in the Kinnickinnic River. Dock lines kept the boat from drifting away from the seawall.

Personnel at the port responded quickly, collaborating with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Wisconsin Department of Environmental Protection and other agencies. An oil boom was deployed to contain residual spilled fuel.

"The immediacy of the response

of our operations team prevented any sort of environmental degradation as a result of the sinking," Tindall-Schlicht said.

The 44-foot *Harbor Seagull* had spent 10 hours breaking ice in Milwaukee Harbor on Feb. 20. The boat is capable of punching through ice up to 18 inches thick at a speed of 10 knots.

On Feb. 23, a diver attached chains to lifting points on the workboat, and Michels Corp. of Milwaukee used a 300-ton crane on a barge to hoist the vessel to a position where pumps could be used to empty it.

As of mid-March, the cause of the sinking had not been deter-

mined. "We are taking our time and analyzing all possibilities," Tindall-Schlicht said. There was no structural damage to *Harbor Seagull's* hull, and Johnson said that when he looked at security camera recordings, it appeared that the boat went down quickly.

*Harbor Seagull* was built in 1961 by T.D. Vinette Co. of Escanaba, Mich. In addition to icebreaking, the boat is used for lifting and setting navigation buoys, towing and spring clean-ups. It has a 2-ton hydraulic crane to pick up trees and other large debris. It also has a fire monitor capable of throwing 500 gallons of

water per minute up to 200 feet.

"We are cautiously optimistic that with the ongoing work we are doing, we will be able to repair her in 2021," Johnson said.

Estimates for the repairs run between \$200,000 and \$300,000. The work will include substantial upgrades that the port had already been planning for the vessel. A replacement could cost as much as \$1 million.

Johnson, for one, is in no hurry to see *Harbor Seagull* replaced. "She has been the primary workboat in Milwaukee Harbor for decades," he said. "She has an emotional connection throughout the community."

Eric Colby

A crane lifts *Harbor Seagull* from the Kinnickinnic River, below, on Feb. 23. The workboat, shown breaking ice in 1984, has a storied history in Milwaukee.



MKE Marine Reports/Milwaukee Public Library photos



Adobe Stock photo

## Mariner training after COVID: Will online render ‘hands-on’ obsolete?

by Alan R. Earls

**A**n emerging trend before the pandemic, online training has now become a major element in maintaining and improving mariner skills almost everywhere — with consequences that so far seem to be mostly positive.

Ukraine-based Danica Crewing Services recently conducted a broad survey of mariners that included questions about online training. Fifty-three percent of seafarers said they receive some sort of computer-based instruction when they are back home, with the courses generally provided by their company. COVID-19 had little impact; the training did not slacken during the pandemic and may have increased slightly.

According to the Danica report, the use of online training doubled between 2019 and 2020 for European mariners. Sixty-three percent said they found it to be useful, and a remarkable 85 percent of those who used the online training option indicated that it was superior to classroom training they had experienced.

“There are some courses that are perfectly suited to either online or remote delivery and some classes where the training would not be effective in that manner,” said Dave Abrams, CEO of the Training Resources Maritime Institute in San Diego. It’s difficult to simulate via computer the conditions that mariners face when putting out a

fire, he noted, and “climbing onto a raft in a survival suit or deploying a lifeboat is not something you want to learn how to do for the first time when your life depends on it.”

One challenge is that many mariners do not have access to the internet while at sea, and some don’t have reliable access at home. “Some mariners don’t even own a computer,” Abrams said. Then there is the issue of different learning styles. Mariners tend to be “hands-on” learners, and “death by

**Will virtual reality headsets replace classroom simulators as maritime training evolves? The jury is still out among training providers and industry analysts, but VR units offer an attractive advantage: lower cost.**

PowerPoint” is not the preferred method of conveying knowledge to these students, he said.

“My instructors try to make learning experiential and even entertaining,” Abrams said. “A lot of learning is done through sharing of sea stories, both from the students and instructors. You just don’t get that kind of interaction through an online course. We do offer online courses, but many of those still require the students to take exams or assessments in person.”

Julie Keim, owner of Compass

learning that participants don’t have to face in a traditional classroom setting. “What I have heard from students who have experienced online training is that it has been a fiasco,” Keim said. “It doesn’t work when the instructor moves around, they can’t hear, or the application crashes.”

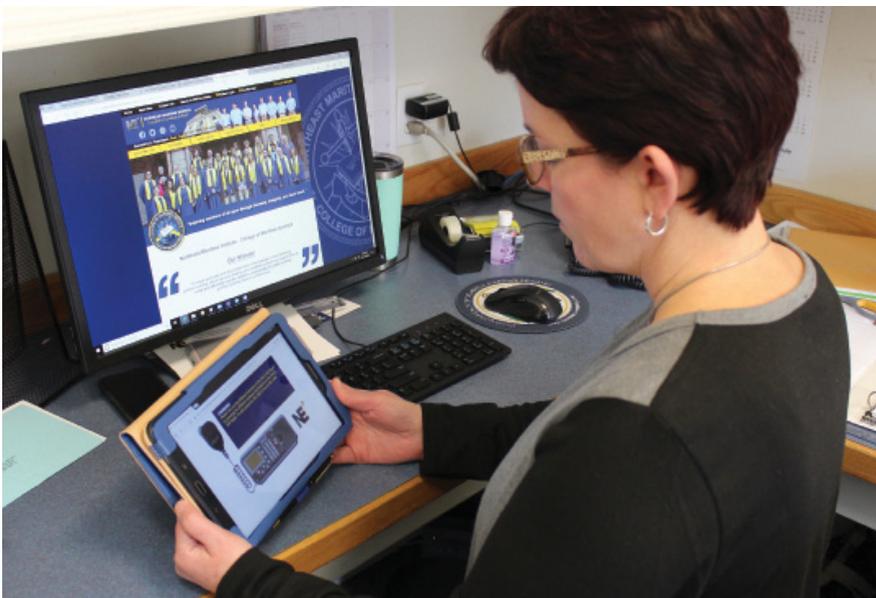
However, with COVID restrictions, Compass Courses has gone from a typical class size of 44 to just 12. Keim is now thinking about offering some of the basic training modules for personal sur-

ing Center at Delgado Community College in New Orleans, was faced with a similar rock-and-a-hard-place choice as COVID restrictions affected traditional training. He said the school made the necessary compromises over the past year, investing in equipment to support real-time Zoom classes — not just online or on-demand, but actual interactive classrooms.

Schwab said the U.S. Coast Guard approved the programs on a temporary basis and is reviewing the arrangement quarterly, noting that students still must show up in-person for both testing and “practical” work. And while he is hopeful that some of the investments in remote learning may be applicable to refresher and awareness training, he expects instruction to largely revert to traditional forms once vaccination rates have made COVID a less pressing concern.

But there are those who believe that with the help of advanced technology, mariner training can evolve online to something as good or better than traditional classroom learning. The trend has accelerated during the pandemic, which has forced enterprises to aggressively explore and rapidly adopt remote work and automation solutions to ensure the safety of workers and maintain consistent operations, said Dirck Schou, CEO and co-founder of Seattle-based Taqtile, which develops augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies.

“Especially in the maritime industry, organizations need solutions (that are) flexible enough to



Northeast Maritime Institute photo

Courses in Edmonds, Wash., said she has resisted online training for years “because I’m a lower-level licensing school and one-on-one instruction is really important for mariners just starting out. I think you get different learning experiences when you have other students in the classroom to network with and talk about their employers or their own personal experience.”

There also can be technological drawbacks with computer-based

**Maritime training options are becoming increasingly mobile, a fact highlighted by in-person classroom restrictions during the pandemic. Many courses, including Northeast Maritime Institute’s HALO VHF radio simulator course, are available on mobile devices.**

vival online because it is a refresher and revalidation course. “That makes more sense to me than for a person just getting into the industry,” she said.

Rick Schwab, senior director of the Maritime and Industrial Train-



U.S. Navy photo

**U.S. Navy Quartermaster 1st Class Micky Young operates a bridge team trainer during a simulation of a ship's transit and mooring at Naval Station Pearl Harbor. COVID-19 forced the postponement of in-person simulator instruction at training sites worldwide.**

adapt to varied situations as they look to improve the resiliency of maintenance and training at remote locations,” Schou said. He said his company is seeing increased adoption of AR solutions that enable organizations to leverage the knowledge of their workforce experts and share it quickly and efficiently across teams of frontline workers handling complex machinery.

AR-based solutions can allow highly skilled workers to efficiently author step-by-step processes for use in any operational or training capacity aboard their ship, or on any other similarly equipped vessel around the world, Schou said.

Other mariners can then follow the procedures to correct equipment issues, ensure configuration control, increase operational availability and improve readiness.

“These solutions are especially valuable for high-complexity maintenance tasks where procedures are long, error-prone, infrequent or require remote assistance,” Schou said. The AR solutions also provide a critical audit and evaluation tool when used during more routine tasks to ensure they are performed consistently and accurately, allowing workers to capture video and photos after key steps in procedures.

Most training providers have switched to some form of online delivery during the pandemic via a Zoom or Teams call where they go through the same material as in a classroom setting, said Kristian

Andreasen, CEO of Kanda, a digital consulting organization based in Denmark and Singapore. Since a lot of training in the maritime sector also involves simulator work, that part of the process is often being postponed until it can be done safely in person.

However, Capt. Jon Kjaerulff, director of business development at MITAGS West in Seattle, said remote instruction has grown in importance at the center to the point where simulator training has been extended to those not able to attend in person.

“We had a series last year with the Mexican pilots association that was essentially a Zoom meeting where MITAGS could share its screen with attendees,” Kjaerulff said. “At first they were skeptical, but they had peers from all over and they said it exceeded their expectations. Now we are looking to expand that.”

Andreasen said most training providers are only online now due to necessity and they will revert to in-person instruction once allowed. He said that long-term change will have to come from the customer side — namely shipowners and ship operators.

“In my opinion, I think there is a lot of psychology at play, especially the endowment effect,” Andreasen said. If a training provider invested several million dollars in a physical simulator, then it is very difficult to entertain the thought that the same exercises “can be done on a \$800 commercially available VR headset,” he said.

However, Andreasen said he

doesn't believe in a "silver bullet" for training, not even VR. Learning about a procedure and remembering it is about muscle memory and repetition, he noted. The great advantage of VR is that it provides a cheaper option for doing exactly that.

"The user activates their muscle memory as they move about in the simulation, and it is very easy to send a headset home to employees and let them go through it 20 times at their own pace," he said. Likewise, he feels Zoom is acceptable for quick status checks but not good for real learning.

An engaging online experience

for maritime training should be modeled on gaming, where this is already working well, Andreasen said. Games like World of Warcraft, Fortnite and League of Legends have longstanding communities of people collaborating. They also have years of experience on how to communicate and disseminate information between thousands of people on a purely online platform.

"Going forward into this bright new digital future, we should look more to our kids and how they structure their online lives," he said.

In the long run, mariners are going to drive how course materials are delivered, Abrams said. VR and

AR will play a role as the price of that technology comes down, and remote participation in "live" training will be possible. But 20 years from now, "mariners will still come to school for some aspects of their training," Abrams said.

As far as instruction becoming entirely online and on-demand, Keim said simply that she hoped "it doesn't go that way." Schwab expressed a similar sentiment. "As a school we are always looking at new options, but we believe we need to have that real-time learning with real assessments, so we aren't likely to put things online for 'any-time' participation," he said. •



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# Correspondence

by Capt. Marc Deglinnocenti

## Ship autonomy points toward savings, but be wary of higher cost

The order is given and it's full speed ahead for robot vessels called maritime autonomous surface ships (MASS).

The technologies being researched and developed are showing no signs of stopping. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has defined four categories of MASS with differing degrees of autonomy:

- Degree one: Seafarers are on board to operate and control ship-board systems and functions.
- Degree two: Remotely controlled ship with seafarers on board.

- Degree three: Remotely controlled ship without seafarers on board.

- Degree four: Fully autonomous ship with an operating system able to make decisions and determine actions by itself.

The timeline of one ship developer is to have a MASS cargo vessel operational on near-coastal waters by 2025 and another one on international waters by 2035. Many governments are encouraging that research and development with grants based on studies and experiments of their own. That push

includes the development of artificial intelligence maneuvering (AIM) for all types of vessels, along with the elimination of all crewmembers.

Ships that are free of any crew on board can sometimes be justified in very specific cases, but ridding professional mariners from large merchant ships is mostly a dangerous idea. This simple fact has not dissuaded advocates from building MASS cargo ships such as *Yara Birkeland*, a 262-foot vessel currently operating on the inland waters of Norway. It carries 120 containers. Belgium also will be operating one

The 262-foot *Yara Birkeland* transits off Brevik, Norway, in December. The all-electric containership, built by Vard for the Norwegian fertilizer company Yara International, is scheduled to gradually shift from manned operations and become fully autonomous by 2022.

Knut Brevik, Andersen photo



of its own soon that will carry 400 containers. These computer-run ships are mistakenly touted as being safer.

Most vessel collisions are caused by some form of human error. AIM can eliminate most of that by initiating collision avoidance actions sooner and more correctly in compliance with the navigation rules of the road. While interviewing the owner of a ship insurance company, he said that having no crew on board will save money, both in property damage and personal injury claims. That might be true for collisions, but it's equally true that other areas of shipboard safety will be compromised. This simple fact is ignored by many in favor of MASS economic returns, with savings as much as 30 percent per cargo run for a fully autonomous ship. That's the real driving force behind MASS. But is it reliable enough to provide those returns?

AIM is a computerized electronic device, and like all electronic devices it is subject to failure. Once AIM fails, MASS is out of luck. When the subject of shipboard fires is brought up, you get the argument that automatic firefighting equipment can be installed on board. Fire sprinklers can put out some common combustible fires, but they cannot take the place of a human firefighting team.

When I asked the insurance company owner what happens if a fire starts in a cargo container not equipped with sprinklers, I was told that it becomes an "acceptable loss." So who cares if the ship runs into an oil platform or



Rolls-Royce photo

flounders on the rocks and causes a huge oil spill along a coastline? I guess that is an acceptable loss to them too. How many years will it take for the marine environment to recover? What other losses are acceptable to these new MASS shipping companies?

No crew on board means that there is no one to stop terrorists from boarding a large merchant ship and using it as a weapon. I talked to the U.S. Coast Guard about that. They said that MASS vessels will have cameras on board and satellite tracking to alert authorities if that happens. A Coast Guard or Navy strike force could then intercept the ill-doers and neutralize them. If that is the case, we would have to purchase not dozens of warships and aircraft, but thousands

**Rolls-Royce's concepts for autonomous cargo ships include a bulk carrier. While autonomy is valid for certain types of vessels, especially those operating in dangerous environments, the author says merchant ships are not among them.**

more to cover every future MASS merchant ship. Some AIM developers say if assault assets are unavailable at the time to stop piracy and the like, then all they have to do is send a satellite signal to disable the ship. Isn't technology great?

Technology that allows the owners and operators to remotely shut down a ship also can allow a hacker to take control of it. Now you don't even have to board it to do damage. All you have to do is hack into the emergency override commands right at a critical juncture and send the ship at full speed into another one. The IMO recognizes the need to

prevent this and the need for cybersecurity in MASS. In its interim guidelines for MASS trials, dated June 14, 2019, the IMO states that “appropriate steps should be taken to ensure sufficient cyber-risk management of the systems and infrastructure (in MASS).”

I interviewed a marine cybersecurity expert who told me that there is a definite hacking risk with MASS. The Coast Guard also told me that it is taking cybersecurity seriously, yet it is still considering the reduction of bridge crewmember requirements with MASS. The service cited the past reduction of engineering crewmembers due to automation and monitoring of engine spaces as a precedent for a reduction in MASS bridge crews. That’s bad reasoning. Some MASS uses are valid, but those uses are not for merchant ships.

MASS technology for mine-sweepers is worth perfecting. Ships sweeping mines were blown up in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, resulting in a great loss of life. Landing rockets on zero-crew MASS vessels has a lot of merit, and research vessels and fireboats inserted into high-temperature toxic environments also are good candidates for MASS.

So I’m not anti-MASS, nor am I anti-AIM. AIM can be a great tool for modern-day professional mariners, but it should not replace them. We did not get rid of crews when radar was invented, nor should we now with AIM. It should only be considered as another important piece of collision avoidance electron-

ics for the bridge crew to utilize. That can greatly help our maritime industry and our society.

Where is society heading with MASS? Right now the IMO is conducting a MASS scoping study, the results of which are still pending due to delays caused by the pandemic and the complicated issues involved in legalizing MASS. We know that the U.S. Maritime Administration (MarAd) has been in favor of developing and promoting MASS on merchant ships. It has sponsored studies and conducted some of its own. With the recent resignation of Mark Buzby and the appointment of Lucinda Lessley as the agency’s acting administrator, however, it’s anyone’s guess what future direction MarAd will take when it comes to MASS policies.

Some professional merchant mariners will be retrained to occupy shore-based MASS positions, according to MarAd, but many will lose their jobs. Will the Coast Guard require these new workers to have a master’s license for remotely controlled MASS? The service hasn’t made a decision about that yet. If it decides to issue land-based MASS licenses, will the new masters be strictly classroom taught? If the answer is no, then where and how are they supposed to get their at-sea experience?

If there are no more merchant mariners, then we can’t properly train and promote any more pilots either. The IMO and Coast Guard say they are studying that issue now. AIM cannot anticipate every scenario in a crowded harbor better than a local pilot can. This is

another one of MASS’ shortcomings. A professional pilot is always better than AIM.

AIM cannot replace professional crews on large merchant vessels because it simply cannot do all of their jobs. It can’t repair an engine or steering gear underway, nor can it perform preventative maintenance. It certainly cannot strategically fight a shipboard fire or clean out a clogged fire pump to keep automatic sprinklers working. It can’t conduct on-scene flooding prevention after a collision. It can’t render aid to ships in distress, nor can it repel unauthorized boarders. MASS cannot clean up an oil spill or deploy containment booms. It can’t even lash down a piece of gear that comes loose in a storm.

We need MASS to help save lives in very specific instances when vessels are constantly engaged in inherently dangerous operations. In all other cases, the scope should be limited to the role of another piece of marine electronics for onboard personnel to utilize to their advantage. That’s the best way to save money. AIM can be a good thing on most ships at sea as long as a professional crew is on board too. What we need now is for someone to invent some artificial common sense (ACS) to go along with it. •

*Capt. Marc Deglinnocenti is a maritime technical writer. His sea time dates to 1974 in a wide variety of roles on sailboats, conventional and tractor tugboats, training ships, barges, warships, cargo ships, passenger vessels and research vessels. He can be reached by emailing [oldarmada@gmail.com](mailto:oldarmada@gmail.com).*

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ments in Louisiana. That story was widely reported — it even made *The New York Times*. During the same period the scandal was being read about in newspapers nationwide, I did not see or hear anything about merchant mariners being designated as essential workers, courageously delivering the goods during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not only does the media disregard many of the good things merchant mariners do, the press will even throw shade on the U.S. merchant marine when the story essentially has nothing to do with us. One example is the mass killing that occurred at a Luby's restaurant in Killeen, Texas, on Oct. 16, 1991. George Hennard, a Glock 17 in one hand and a Ruger P89 in the other, opened fire, killing 23 people and wounding 27 others in what at the time was the worst single-gunman mass killing in U.S. history. I was a third mate on a chemical tanker when that terrible event occurred and recall reading about it in the *Los Angeles Times*. Seeming to imply some sort of a connection

between working on commercial ships and his killing spree, one of the first things mentioned in the news article was that Hennard was a disgraced former merchant mariner.

Whether it is yet another anti-Jones Act article or some other hit piece directed at the U.S. merchant marine, we should not just sit idly by and ignore it. I think that it is essential for merchant mariners to push back. Writing letters to the editor, calling in to talk radio shows, posting pro-merchant marine videos and pictures online, and making positive comments on internet forums and message boards are all good ways to be proactive.

Advocates of the U.S. merchant marine, including unions, professional organizations and industry groups such as the Propeller Club and Navy League, also need to step up their game. Not only should these entities send out letters to the editor, issue press releases and post online responses to spurious anti-merchant articles and reports, but they also should develop strong relationships with journalists who write about maritime

issues — such as Carl Nolte of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Carl has quoted me when he needed a merchant mariner's opinion on an important maritime issue of the day, and he is a supporter of the U.S. merchant marine personally and in print.

My dad was right: Most landlubbers don't know anything about commercial mariners and the vital work we do. That's something any seafarer who has tried to explain the difference between the merchant marine and the military knows firsthand. It may well take another 75 years before the damage caused by the lies of our detractors is completely reversed, but it is absolutely necessary for us to get our truth out there. It's time that the public saw us for the heroes we are.

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 [captksweeney@professionalmariner.com](mailto:captksweeney@professionalmariner.com).*

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# A Mariner's Notebook

by Capt. Kelly Sweeney

## Drunks? Troublemakers? Time for mariners to set record straight

**F**ollowing in the footsteps of my dad, who sailed as an able seaman and boatswain, I had made the decision to become a merchant mariner. One spring Sunday afternoon dur-

ing a family dinner in Spokane, Wash., I announced my decision to attend a four-year maritime school, where after

graduation I would come out with an unlimited third mate license and a bachelor of science degree. Hearing this news, my dad was excited and vowed to help me any way he could.

A few days later, having just come home from an evening lecture at Spokane Falls Community College, I walked into the kitchen to make a sandwich

before heading to my temporary job as a janitor at a Mexican restaurant. My mother and her best friend Babe were having a cup of tea at the table. With a sour look on her face Babe said, "Your mother tells me that you are applying to a maritime college." I nodded my affirmation. In a deprecating tone she then said, "Going to sea is a bad idea. Sailors are drunks and troublemakers. You should go to WSU or Gonzaga. You could become something respectable, like a lawyer or maybe a priest." Stunned into an uncustomary silence by her rude, intrusive remarks, I got out of there as fast as I could.

Later, I angrily told my dad about what she'd said, and I asked if merchant mariners did indeed have a "certain reputation" among the public. He replied, "During and after the war, a lot of bad things

were said about the merchant marine. Landlubbers like Babe just repeat what they've seen or heard. It all started with Walter Winchell." A nationally syndicated columnist and radio personality famous in the 1940s and 1950s, Winchell was known for his ruthless "take no prisoners" style. He would mercilessly attack whoever or whatever was the latest focus of his derision. Years ahead of his time, Winchell had no problem peddling "fake news" as long as it suited his purpose.

One of Winchell's notorious hit pieces claimed that civilian American mariners refused to unload vital military supplies at Guadalcanal in the South Pacific during World War II, forcing sick and injured soldiers to do it for them. That was not true, and both he and Hearst Newspapers were sued for libel and

found guilty. Unfortunately, by then the damage had already been done. Winchell's articles helped turn public opinion against the U.S. merchant marine, and many believe that they were a factor in our government's decades-long refusal to grant veteran status to merchant mariners after the war.

It is a rare newspaper article or news report that mentions U.S. merchant mariners supplying the military with what it needs, delivering food aid to starving countries and risking their lives every day at sea. From what I've seen, the mainstream media inevitably reports negative news stories about the U.S. merchant marine, but good news stories are largely ignored. A case in point is the 2020 scandal involving test fixing and the selling of fraudulent deck and engine officer licenses and endorse-

*continued on page 47*



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