

April 2010

S.E.A.L.I.F.T

THE U.S. NAVY'S MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND

A Shackleton reaches the South Pole during MSC's annual resupply of Antarctica



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Article by Laura M. Seal
Pg. 4



INSIDE — Pless delivers Marine Corps cargo to South Korea • MSC helps recover downed Ethiopian plane

National Science Foundation photo by Chris Demerest

Aligning with Navy's Global Force for Good

One of the perks of being the "boss" is getting to do the fun stuff, like christening ships. When I went to San Diego last month to attend the christening and launch of our newest T-AKE, dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Charles Drew, I got to meet the Drew family members who participated in the ceremony. And that was the truly fun part. What an incredible family!

Dr. Charles Drew, the ship's namesake, came up with the means of separating plasma from whole blood, thereby enabling the development of the blood bank, a medical miracle that has saved untold numbers of lives since World War II. Drew's three daughters, who served as the ship's sponsor and matrons of honor, are the chief of staff for the Los Angeles County supervisor, a former Washington, D.C., council member, and a community leader. Amongst children and grandchildren, there are several lawyers, doctors and students of law and medicine. As I said, it's an incredible family. And it's a family with ideas.

One of those ideas was inspired by an article written by Will Shuck in the Sacramento, Calif., Capitol Weekly newspaper. In it, Mr. Shuck noted that anyone who had ever paid taxes had certainly had a part in the amazing things that California has accomplished.

Sylvia Drew Ivie, the youngest Drew daughter who is a chief of staff in the Los Angeles County government, talked with me about extrapolating Shuck's idea to a national level.

Here's part of what she wrote to me after the christening ceremony was over:

"Thank you again on behalf of the whole family for an exhilarating honor and experience. I am so pleased that we had an opportunity to meet and to talk together. We all felt so very proud of our Navy and of the work you do in peacetime activities to aid those in need all over the world. A short video of the launch and a thank you to the taxpayers for partnering with that work would be a tremendous boost to any viewer."

That got me to thinking about what we in MSC do for our nation everyday around the world. Ms. Ivie's idea also aligns beautifully with the Navy's just released new theme: "The Navy: A global force for good." And it certainly underscores all the

USNS Charles Drew



U.S. Navy photo by Sarah Burford

USNS Charles Drew, the 10th Navy ship in the dry cargo/ammunition ship class, slides into the water following its christening Feb. 27 at the General Dynamics NASSCO shipyard in San Diego.

excellent work MSC has done in Operation Unified Response in Haiti and countless other natural disasters in years past.

We all pay taxes. Our mothers and fathers pay taxes. Our children will someday pay taxes. That means we all have a stake in the excellent things that have been done and will be done by the United States as a global citizen.

We need to tell that story wherever we go. And we all need to be proud of our part in that story. I think you'll hear more about this as time goes by.

Navy looks to MSC for engineering solutions

Shifting gears a bit, you might be interested to know that the Navy has taken notice of the way we operate and maintain our ships – and has asked for our help. Over the past several years, the Surface Force has noticed a steady decline in the material con-

dition and engineering reliability of its largest medium-speed diesel powered ships, the Whidby Island-class dock landing ships, or LSDs. These ships have power plants very similar to those of our T-AO fleet replenishment oilers, which have been very reliable performers for many years. The LSDs, on the other hand, have become increasingly prone to breakdown and escalating operating costs. Clearly, something had to change. The Navy turned to MSC for the answer.

Working closely with the Naval Surface Force Atlantic staff, MSC Port Chief Engineer-East Ray Blanchet went aboard several of the LSDs in Little Creek, Va., to observe operations and crew actions. Being an exceptional engineer, Chief Blanchet quickly diagnosed the problem and provided the Navy with a detailed set of findings and recommendations. In short, there was a lack of training at the junior personnel level, a lack of engineering management experi-

ence at the more senior levels and operating procedures being practiced that caused more casualties than they prevented!

As a result, the Navy has embarked on a year-long, side-by-side comparison of ship operations using MSC watch-standing practices, training standards and operational procedures in half of the LSD class, with the other half continuing to do things the way they are done now. I think I know which half of the class I'd rather serve in.

And it goes even further. I recently had conversations with the commander of Fleet Forces Command, Adm. John C. Harvey Jr., concerning the long-term health of his fleet. He sees millions being spent to maintain his ships in a seemingly losing effort, while we maintain our ships with far less money and far fewer people – and in generally BETTER condition than his ships. He wants to know our secret!

While there are many technical answers to that question, I told him the principal reason was because of the experience and professionalism of the men and women who sail in and maintain our ships. Experience matters.

Thanks for doing what you do so well each and every sea mile. People notice.

Until next month, sail safe!

Yours aye,

Mark H. "Buz" Buzby
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy
Commander, Military Sealift Command

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T-AKE ship class grows

USNS Matthew Perry delivered to MSC; USNS Charles Drew launched

By Sarah Burford
SEALOGPAC Public Affairs

The Lewis and Clark-class of dry cargo/ammunition ships – the Navy's newest class of logistics ships, also called T-AKEs – continued to grow in February with the launch of the 10th ship in the class and the delivery of the ninth to Military Sealift Command. These civil service-crewed ships replenish the Navy's carrier and strike groups and other naval forces at sea worldwide, enabling them to remain underway, on station and combat ready for extended periods of time.

USNS Charles Drew was christened and launched Feb. 27 at the General Dynamics NASSCO shipyard in San Diego. Ship sponsor Bebe Drew Price, daughter of the ship's namesake, broke the traditional bottle of champagne

across the bow.

The ship honors Dr. Charles Drew, an American physician regarded as the father of the blood bank who researched and developed methods of blood collection, plasma processing and storage. Drew's research in blood storage first benefited soldiers in the field during World War II, but has continued to save the lives of millions of people worldwide. His blood bank design is still the model for modern hospitals and organizations such as the American Red Cross.

MSC accepted delivery of USNS Matthew Perry Feb. 24. Perry was launched and christened at NASSCO's shipyard Aug. 16, 2009, and underwent a series of tests and trials prior to delivery.

"The T-AKEs are an incredibly important asset to the Navy, and we are proud to see the class continue to grow," said Capt. Jerome Hamel, commander

of Sealift Logistics Command Pacific.

"Not only do the T-AKEs support Navy warfighters by delivering stores, ammunition, fuel and spare parts, but the ships are also capable of fulfilling non-traditional missions, such as the 2009 Pacific Partnership humanitarian assistance mission of USNS Richard E. Byrd."

Perry is expected to begin conducting missions for MSC in the fall and will operate in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. Drew is scheduled for delivery to the MSC fleet later this year. Each ship, measuring 689 feet in length, will be crewed by 124 civil service mariners who operate and navigate the ship and 22 U.S. Navy sailors who provide supply coordination.

T-AKEs, the first of which was delivered in 2006, have replaced MSC combat stores ships and will replace MSC ammunition ships.

Pless delivers Marine Corps cargo to South Korea

By Edward Baxter
SEALOGFE Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS MAJ Stephen W. Pless delivered hundreds of pieces of U.S. Marine Corps cargo in support of major Far East-theater exercises Freedom Banner and Key Resolve/Foal Eagle in South Korea in mid-February.

Exercise Freedom Banner, which was conducted in two parts between Feb. 17 and April 4 in Mokpo, South Korea, is an annual training exercise supported by elements of the Okinawa-based 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force. The exercise demonstrated the capabilities of a Marine Air Ground Task Force, using combat equipment and supplies strategically prepositioned aboard Pless.

Once the cargo was ashore, it was redeployed to another part of South Korea for use in Marine Corps Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle. Then Freedom Banner is scheduled to finish up after Key Resolve/Foal Eagle is finished in early April with the back-loading of cargo onto Pless.

Pless, the focal point of the exercise, ordinarily operates with MPS Squadron Three in the Western Pacific – prepositioning Marine Corps combat gear at sea for rapid delivery to warfighters who are flown into a theater of operations. The ship carries one-fifth of the equipment and supplies needed to sustain more than 15,000 Marine Expeditionary Brigade personnel in combat for up to 30 days.

“Exercises like Freedom Banner demonstrate the remarkable speed and mobility we get with afloat-prepositioned gear,” said Mike Neuhardt, MSC’s MPS project officer. “These training opportunities give the Navy-Marine Corps team the specialized experience they need to employ this capability for a large Marine Air-Ground Task Force. This is a robust capability we wouldn’t have without the efficiencies of sealift and the experience of the offload forces.”

During Freedom Banner, 55 U.S. Marines and eight Navy sailors comprising an Offload Preparation Party, or OPP, embarked the ship complementing Pless’ crew of 25 civilian mariners, all of whom work for a private company under contract to MSC. The OPP prepares shipboard cargo for employment and is also responsible for its offload. For Freedom Banner this equipment included more than 280 tactical vehicles.

After the equipment was offloaded, it was staged and moved forward to Camp Mujuk, near the coastal city of Pohang, South Korea, to support the Marines’ participation in annual exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle March 8-18, one of two major theater exercises conducted annually by U.S. and South Korean forces.

Key Resolve/Foal Eagle was held at multiple locations throughout Korea and included 18,000 U.S. personnel from all branches of the military. The two-part exercise consisted of both computer-based simulation exercises (Key Resolve) and a series of field-training exercises (Foal Eagle). The exercises are designed to improve interoperability between U.S. and South Korean forces in response to a potential conflict on the Korean peninsula.

Preparation

Pless pulled pierside at Tengan Pier on the Japanese island of Okinawa, Feb. 10-15, in preparation for Freedom Banner. While at Tengan, an advance team of 55 Marines and eight Navy Seabees from Navy Cargo Handling Battalion One, based at Cheatham Annex, Va., embarked

the ship to work closely with Pless’ crew in crafting a plan for the offload operation that would take place the following week.

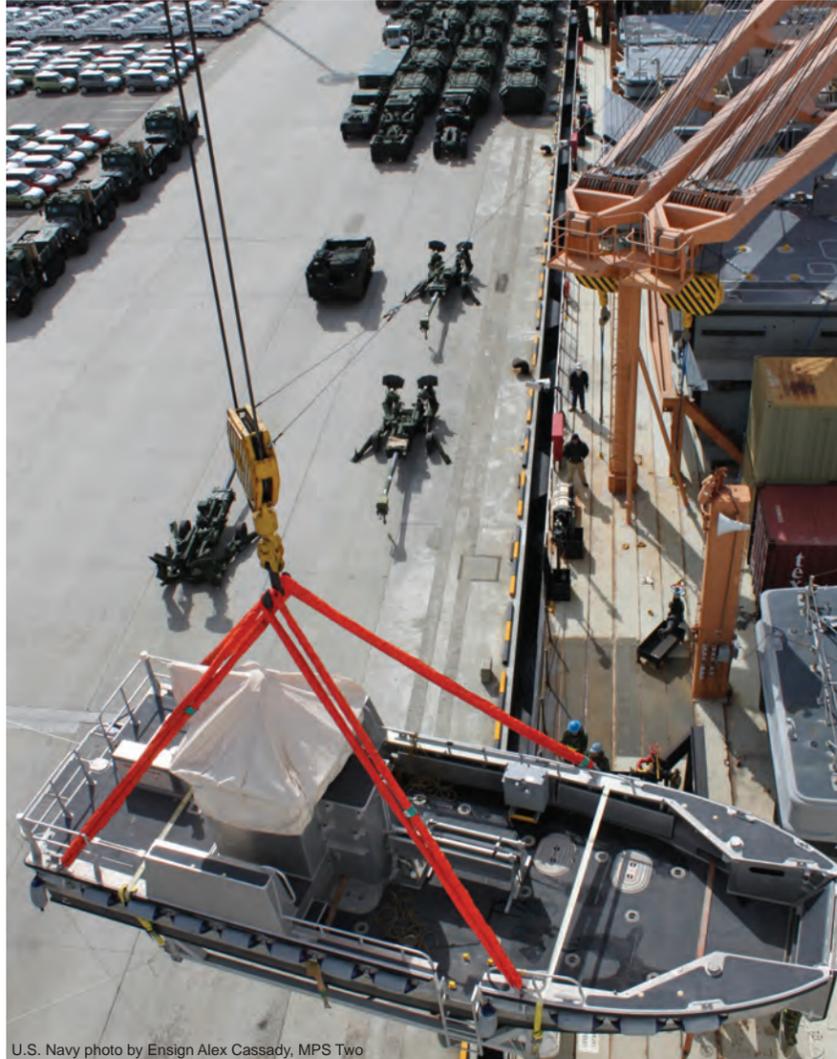
After the offload plan was solidified, Pless got underway for a 500-mile-journey to a commercial port facility in Mokpo, a city on South Korea’s west coast where the offload was to take place.

While en route to Mokpo, Pless encountered heavy seas with 15- to 20-foot swells.

“The biggest challenge we faced was fighting the strong currents and keeping the ship on course through the narrow straits

Crew members and Marines moved about 70 pieces of cargo – mostly amphibious assault vehicles or AAVs – off the ship in a carefully orchestrated maneuver.

By late afternoon the next day, the offload was complete, and more than 280 massive pieces of cargo had been delivered ashore, including seven-ton trucks, Humvees, ambulances, bulldozers and howitzers. Most of the equipment was moved north towards Camp Mujuk, near the South Korean coastal town of Pohang, where the equipment was deployed for use in the



U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Alex Cassidy, MPS Two

Military Sealift Command civilian mariners aboard Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS MAJ Stephen W. Pless offload an embarked utility boat from the ship during Exercise Freedom Banner 2010 in Mokpo, South Korea. The boat was temporarily moved off the ship in order to make space on Button’s main deck so that a number of howitzers could be rolled onto the main deck from the main deck cargo hold. Pless’ crew then lowered the howitzers onto the pier using embarked cranes for the Marine Corps to use in Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle 2010, one of two major Korean peninsula defense exercises conducted each year.

as we approached Mokpo,” said Pless’ civilian master Capt. Joe Souza. He and his crew carefully navigated the ship around numerous islands and rocky formations near Mokpo. “There were also many local fishermen in the area so the crew had to be very alert,” Souza said.

Navy Capt. Geoffrey Pack, commander, MPS Squadron Three, praised Souza and his crew for their expertise in maneuvering through the rough waters.

“There are three routes a ship can take to access Mokpo port,” said Pack. “Captain Souza, who has visited the port on several occasions, knew the best and safest route. There are no ‘first-times’ for Pless’ crew members. They have all seen it and done it before. There is simply no substitute for experience.”

The offload

After the ship safely arrived at Mokpo the morning of Feb. 17, personnel from MPS Squadron Three, Marine Combat Logistics Regiment 35 and Navy Cargo Handling Battalion One joined forces to begin the offload. The ship’s giant stern ramp was placed on the pier at 11:30 a.m., and cargo operations commenced two hours later.

From that point on, armored and tracked vehicles were driven down Pless’ stern ramp

field-training portion of the exercise.

The first leg of the offload served as practice for Marine Corps cargo operations. AAVs and other vehicles were staged near the bow of the ship for reloading. The second leg of the offload focused on cargo the Marines had selected earlier for use in Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle.

In order to more easily access some of the embarked howitzers aboard Pless, the crew and Marines offloaded a utility boat from the ship’s main deck. The open space on that deck made it possible for the crew to roll out the howitzers from the cargo holds. Pless’ 35-ton-capacity shipboard cranes then carefully lowered the howitzers to the pier. Marines on the pier unhooked the howitzers and attached them to trucks where they were driven to the main staging area for Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle. Twenty-five pieces of cargo were offloaded by crane during the second part of the operation.

Chief Mate Andrew Petruska coordinated closely with the Marines and the specially formed offload team to ensure that the cargo remaining on the ship was correctly distributed within ship-stability limits.

“The offload was well organized and proceeded very smoothly thanks to extensive coordination with the OPP,” said Petruska. “Everyone knew what to expect

and just went to work to make it happen. On a ship the size of Pless, we carry about six to eight times the amount of cargo that an LHD [Landing Helicopter Dock Ship] or LHA [Landing Helicopter Assault Ship] would have on board, and our deck crew is only seven mariners. Keeping track of where everything winds up is always a challenge, but the professionalism and attention to detail by the Marines and ship’s company made it look easy. The offload was a fine example of teamwork between Navy, Marines and civilian contract mariners. With the Pless offload complete, all of the cargo that was destined for use in Exercise Key Resolve/Foal Eagle was ashore and staged within hours. The ship’s crew and the Marines then loaded the other cargo, which had been staged near Pless’ bow, back on to the ship.”

Ashore training

For two weeks prior to and during the offload, seven Reserve personnel from the Bronx, N.Y.-based Expeditionary Port Unit 102, deployed to South Korea to work with the Marines and plan for the offload. MSC’s EPU’s are highly mobile units that can quickly deploy to a contingency, establish port operations and manage the arrival and departure of cargo ships in port. EPU 102 crewed a Mobile Sealift Operations Command Center, also called an MSOCC, which provides critical communications equipment for operating and managing port operations even when a port infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. The EPU also conducted additional training and coordination once the ship departed.

EPU 102 was embedded with the Marines’ Combat Logistics Regiment 35 and served as a liaison between the Marines and the ship to ensure the success of the mission. EPU sailors also kept an open line of communication with Sealift Logistics Command Far East headquarters in Singapore.

“This was the first time many members of the EPU team had worked together in a real-world operation,” said Navy Capt. Scott Gibney, acting commanding officer at the Mokpo Port. “Communication and teamwork were the keys to success.” Gibney is a merchant marine Reservist who served as acting commanding officer of the MSC port team at Mokpo. Information Technology 2nd Class Nina Ritchie also deployed from MSCO Korea to establish communications and connectivity in the MSOCC.

“We can learn a lot from training at our Reserve units, but, we gain much more from real-world exercises and operations like this,” said Personnel Specialist 3rd Class Latoya Alexander of EPU 102.

Six Reserve sailors from MSC’s EPU 111, based out of Oklahoma City, Okla., also reported to Mokpo to receive training in sealift operations during Key Resolve/Foal Eagle.

On Feb. 19, South Korean Navy Rear Adm. John Cheol Lim, commander, Republic of Korean Navy Third Fleet, visited Pless. Pack met with the admiral and provided a brief on Maritime Prepositioning Force capability in the theater. Later, Souza led the admiral and 16 officers from the nearby U.S. 3rd Fleet headquarters on a tour of the ship.

“Cargo operations were very smooth, which allowed the ship to get underway almost 24 hours earlier than previously scheduled,” said Pack. “The embarked Marine Corps and Navy Seabee team was very professional and easy to work with.”

On the afternoon of Feb. 19, Pless set sail for nearby Gwangyang, South Korea, and later sailed onto Sasebo, Japan, to take on fuel. Pless will remain in the Korean theater of operations until all the exercise cargo is backloaded, which is scheduled for early April in Mokpo.

MSC ships and famous explorer's relation

By Laura M. Seal, MSC Public Affairs

The open ocean route from New Zealand or Australia to the ice pier at McMurdo Station, Antarctica, may be the most treacherous voyage a ship can make. The journey takes ships and their crews on a one- to two-week voyage that is subject to unpredictable weather patterns and is complicated by miles and miles of floating ice that only the most expert ship handlers can safely navigate. Ice conditions are extreme even in the Antarctic summer months of January and February. As approaching ships come within about 17 miles of McMurdo Station, an ice breaker is needed to break a channel through the solid ice shelf that blocks access.

Two Military Sealift Command ships – one tanker and one dry cargo ship, each with hulls and machinery specially designed to withstand the harsh environment – and their civilian, contract crews have made this voyage every year since the station was established by the National Science Foundation in 1955. The two ships deliver the majority of the dry cargo and fuel needed to sustain scientists and support personnel on the continent year round. Without these supplies, vital scientific research on topics ranging from climate change to zoology would not be able to continue.

MSC's delivery of supplies by ship to McMurdo Station's ice pier is part of Operation Deep Freeze, which is directed by a U.S. Air Force-led joint task force and has both sea and air components. After MSC delivers cargo by sea, the Air Force distributes the supplies by air from McMurdo Station to remote research locations across the continent.

While duty calls the crews of MSC's ships to the Antarctic each year, adventure called famous Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton more than a century ago. Sir Ernest visited the continent numerous times in the hopes of making it to the South Pole – a destination that he never reached. He died of natural causes in 1922 at the outset of his third attempt to reach the South Pole as the leader of an expedition.

This February, MSC completed not only its annual resupply mission, but also – in a way – Sir Ernest Shackleton's unresolved quest for the pole. Nearly 90 years after his death, one of the explorer's distant relatives, part of today's MSC team, arrived at the South Pole Feb. 9.

Operation Deep Freeze 2010

Two MSC personnel from Sealift Logistics Command Pacific spent nearly four weeks combined on site at McMurdo Station overseeing the offload of the two MSC ships. Larry Larsson, a cargo operations officer with 10 years of experience with MSC, arrived by Air Force plane Jan. 16 to prepare for and oversee MSC tanker USNS Paul Buck's offload. This was Larsson's third consecutive trip to 'the ice' as part of this operation.

Navy Cmdr. Scott Shackleton, a Reservist attached to the SEALOGPAC headquarters Reserve unit, arrived at McMurdo Station – also via Air Force plane – on his first trip to McMurdo Station Jan. 26, to oversee the offload of MSC-chartered dry cargo ship MV American Tern. In addition to being a highly qualified and specially trained cargo offload officer with 16 years of experience with MSC, Cmdr. Shackleton is a distant relative of famous Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Buck delivered more than 5.5 million gallons of diesel, gas and jet fuel to McMurdo Station's ice pier Jan. 22-27. American Tern followed Feb. 1-8, delivering more than 7.5 million pounds of dry cargo and then loading an additional 7 million pounds of cargo – which ranged from 100,000-year-old ice core samples valued at \$40 million for research, to trash and recyclable materials for disposal – for transport off the continent. Approximately 50 sailors from a Navy cargo handling battalion worked around the clock to conduct the offload and load.

American Tern completed its offload of back-loaded cargo March 11 in Port Hueneme, Calif.

While at McMurdo, Larsson and Cmdr. Shackleton served as liaisons between the ships' crews of U.S. merchant mariners, the Navy sailors offloading the equipment and the scientific personnel receiving the equipment. Larsson and Shackleton also tracked safety issues, coordinated the ships' schedules and handled specialty cargo requirements.

"Working in Antarctica is very different, but you grow accustomed to the situation and the environment," said Larsson. "It's very rewarding to be part of this mission and support all of the scientific research that is made possible by the people who live and work in Antarctica."

In addition to his daily operations, Cmdr. Shackleton was able to make history.

Cover: The mountains of the Royal Society Range frame Military Sealift Command-chartered dry cargo ship American Tern as it approaches McMurdo Station in Antarctica. The annual supply mission delivers everything from food and heavy equipment to paper clips and paint. Navy Cmdr. Scott Shackleton (center right), an MSC Reservist, stands at the South Pole – a feat his famous relative, Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton (center left), never accomplished despite three attempts.

Background: Escorted by Swedish ice breaker Oden (left), MSC tanker USNS Paul Buck makes a delivery to McMurdo Station, Antarctica, in late January. Buck delivered five million gallons of fuel, enough to sustain the scientific station for a year.

Top right: MSC reservist Navy Cmdr. Scott Shackleton and Larry Larsson, a Sealift Logistics Command Pacific cargo operations officer, oversaw the offload of the two MSC ships delivering supplies to McMurdo Station.

Poster: A promotional poster for a lecture tour given by Sir Ernest Shackleton in 1913. Shackleton embarked on an extensive lecture tour between expeditions from 1909-1914, during which he shared his and fellow Antarctic explorers Royal navy Capt. Robert F. Scott and Roald Amundsen's experiences. Many Brits turned out to listen to the vivid recounts of Shackleton, who was knighted by King Edward VII, awarded a Gold Medal by the Royal Geographical Society and appointed a Younger Brother of Trinity House – a prestigious honor for British mariners – upon his return.

Voyage to the bottom

ive support Operation Deep Freeze

MSC Reservist, relative of Sir Ernest Shackleton, reaches South Pole

Cmdr. Shackleton's visit to the South Pole makes him the first known person bearing the famous explorer's name to reach the site – a milestone that his distant relative Sir Ernest did not achieve despite three heroic attempts. Cmdr. Shackleton was able to visit the pole for about 20 minutes when he and six other sailors hitched a ride on an Air Force tanker as it made a regular run to the pole to deliver fuel that will be used at that remote location throughout the year.

Cmdr. Shackleton would have had video footage of the event, but temperatures at the pole were so cold – about 50 degrees below zero with wind chill – that his digital video recorder did not work. Luckily, he was able to take a few photographs before his camera froze.

While Cmdr. Shackleton was in Antarctica, he also visited a small hut within walking distance of McMurdo Station that Sir Ernest twice called home – first as part of explorer Robert Scott's 1902-1903 Discovery Expedition and again during Sir Ernest's own 1907-1909 Nimrod Expedition. Sir Ernest is most remembered for his famous Endurance Expedition of 1914-1916. During that unsuccessful attempt to the South Pole, he and his crew of 27 were stranded on the ice for nearly 15 months. Remarkably, all of the Endurance crew survived.

Cmdr. Shackleton, like his famous ancestor, took to the sea at a young age. He began sailing on commercial ships at the age of 18, then enrolled in the California Maritime Academy, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Marine Engineering in 1987 – the same year he joined the U.S. Navy Reserve. Cmdr. Shackleton sailed for commercial industry until he accepted a job at the University of California Berkeley, where he is now the assistant dean for capital projects and facilities in the College of Engineering.

Cmdr. Shackleton, who departed McMurdo Station for home Feb. 10, said that his Antarctica experience was both unique and rewarding.

"I've always felt a kinship with Sir Ernest," said Cmdr. Shackleton. "It's been an honor for me to have this tie to him and the name Shackleton."

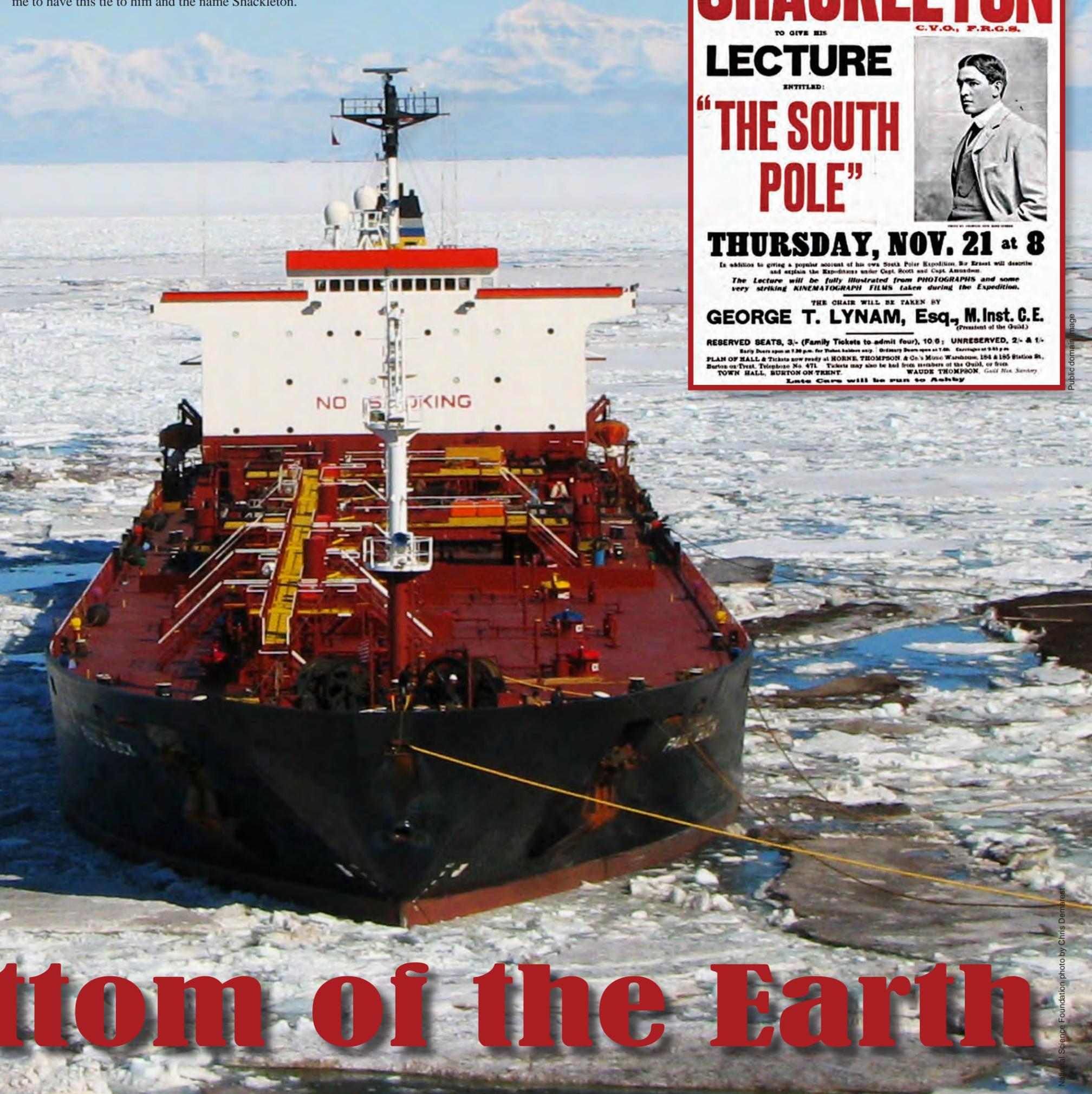


National Science Foundation photo

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has arranged with THE LECTURE AGENCY, Ltd., of London, for
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LECTURE
ENTITLED:
"THE SOUTH POLE"

THURSDAY, NOV. 21 at 8
In addition to giving a popular account of his own South Polar Expedition, Sir Ernest will describe and explain the Expeditions under Capt. Scott and Capt. Amundsen.
The Lecture will be fully illustrated from PHOTOGRAPHS and some very striking KINEMATOGRAPH FILMS taken during the Expedition.
THE CHAIR WILL BE TAKEN BY
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RESERVED SEATS, 3/- (Family Tickets to admit four), 10/6; UNRESERVED, 2/- & 1/-
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Late Cars will be run to Ashby

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National Science Foundation photo by Chris Demarest

ATLANTIC • LINES

Sealift Logistics Command Atlantic's anti-terrorism/force protection personnel performed intrusion-access tests aboard MSC dry cargo/ammunition ships USNS Sacagawea and USNS Lewis and Clark, Feb. 9 and Feb. 22 respectively, while the ships were in port at Naval Station Norfolk. Congratulations to the crews of both ships for successfully thwarting attempts by simulated intruders to gain access by means of unauthorized identification.

Sacagawea and Lewis and Clark gangway personnel stopped the 'would be' intruders from boarding the ships by scrupulously checking their identification cards and noticing that they were not legitimate. Rather than causing alarm, gangway personnel calmly asked to review the identification cards again, compared the imposters to the ship's authorized access list and then quietly alerted their chain of command of the potential intruders at the gangway. Each ship's chief mate responded and upon their respective arrivals, was notified by the watch of the false identification cards. Once exposed, the 'intruders' correctly identified themselves and signaled to the chief mate that the ship had successfully passed the intrusion access drill.

Operation Unified Response, the U.S. military's humanitarian and disaster relief effort in Haiti continued to be at the forefront of SEALOGLANT attention.

Nine members of SEALOGLANT's U.S. Naval Reserve Expeditionary Port Units 109 and 110 took over the function of ship coordination in Haiti and at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in early February. The EPUs continued to assist with the port-opening process at Port-au-Prince through the end of February. EPU team members include Navy **Cmdr. Ezra Mead**, Navy **Lt. Cmdr. Stanley Herndon**, and **Petty Officers 1st Class Raymond Sierra, Joung Hyun Koo, John Wojcik, Jon Michaels, Sara Cowles, David Silva and Craig Thompson.**

Navy **Capt. John Hafner**, a Merchant Marine Individual Ready Reserve Group member on active duty for training, coordinated cargo operations for Haiti from Guantanamo Bay, Feb. 12-20. Hafner played a key role in the re-delivery of several tug and barge units that were no longer needed.

"It was immensely gratifying to be able to contribute to this life-saving relief effort," said Hafner. "I was able to employ my civilian skills as a merchant marine officer to make a positive contribution to the overall effort."

Relieving Hafner was **Dean Doolittle**, marine transportation specialist at MSC's SEALOGLANT Jacksonville office. Doolittle remained in Guantanamo Bay until mid-March.

Richard Caldwell, SEALOGLANT's lead marine transportation specialist, remained a central figure in MSC's day-to-day support for U.S. Transportation Command's joint logistics over-the-shore mission in Haiti. Caldwell provided oversight for humanitarian and sustainment cargos transported from Florida and Guantanamo Bay on high-speed ferry MV Huakai, for which the Maritime Administration assumed caretaker responsibilities in 2009, in addition to a series of chartered tug and barge combinations.

SEALOGLANT logistics staff members Navy **Lt. Cmdr. Renee Whitsell** and **Robert Stailey** worked with the command's combat logistics-force scheduling team of **Thomas Howser** and **Mary Quill**, and with afloat supply corps officers, to formulate and execute the afloat sustainment plan for U.S. Navy and foreign navy ships supporting Haiti relief operations. The successful administration of the plan culminated with Sacagawea, Lewis and Clark, and MSC fleet replenishment oilers USNS Big Horn and USNS Grumman providing fuel and stores to aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson and the USS Bataan Amphibious Ready Group. Also receiving logistics support from the

MSC ships were Dutch, British, Canadian, Italian and Spanish naval ships performing relief operations near Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Since mid-January, members of the Merchant Marine Individual Ready Reserve Group assisted SEALOGLANT with staff duty office responsibilities, shipboard-inspection and compliance issues and provided general assistance to staff members during the busiest Operation Unified Response timeframe. MMIRRG officers are Navy Reserve officers who hold a U.S. Coast Guard deck or engineer license.

In mid-January, Navy **Cmdr. Glen Macario** became SEALOGLANT's first MMIRRG program officer-in-charge. The earthquake in Haiti occurred a few days before Macario's arrival.

"I was very proud of the quick response I received from fellow MMIRRG officers when I requested support for Haiti relief operations," said Macario. "There were 36 resumes on my computer within two days." While operating out of SEALOGLANT, MMIRRG provided personnel to serve staff duty, liaison and other functions at Guantanamo Bay.

Leaders at MSC ship and shore activities are encouraged to contact the SEALOGLANT MMIRRG officer in charge at sealoglant.mmirrgoic.fct@navy.mil or (757) 443-1887, if they have training opportunities or requests for support. The typical MMIRRG officer is experienced as a deck or engineering officer and often has maritime-related, shore-based business skills.

Tom D'Agostino, senior marine transportation specialist at SEALOGLANT's Charleston, S.C., office, assisted chartered tanker MV Houston with its discharge of 234,000 barrels of fuel in Charleston Feb. 14-15. D'Agostino also assisted Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS Jack Lummus and fleet replenishment oiler USNS John Lenthall when they arrived at Detyens Shipyard in Charleston for maintenance periods beginning Feb. 12 and Feb. 22, respectively.

Richard Bolduc, SEALOGLANT supervisory marine transportation specialist at SEALOGLANT's office in Jacksonville,

Fla., reported that during the month of February, his office assisted USNS Big Horn, USNS Jack Lummus, USNS Sacagawea, USNS Dahl, MV Huakai and tug/barge Dublin Sea load or discharge a total of more than 260,000 barrels of fuel, nearly 1,500 pieces of cargo and 690 pallets of supplies, most of which was going to or returning from relief operations in Haiti.

SEALOGLANT proudly announced that **Donald Price**, anti-terrorism/force protection director, was named Supervisor of the Year; **Kirk Schiltz**, ordnance specialist, was named Civilian of the Year; **John Gregov** was named Outportsman of the Year; and **Mel Lewis**, mobilization and planning specialist, was named Civilian of the Quarter.

The awards were presented by SEALOGLANT commodore Navy **Capt. Michael Graham** Feb. 22 in Norfolk, Va. Each awardee distinguished himself through sustained superior service, outstanding leadership, taking initiative and focusing on mission accomplishment.

"For all award winners, congratulations from the staff for your outstanding support of the command," said **Robert Jackson**, SEALOGLANT deputy director. "Without the expertise you provide on a daily basis, we would not be able to accomplish the multiple mission sets that fall within our scope of responsibility. Well done to each of you, as well as the rest of the staff, for another great year of success and accomplishments."

SEALOGLANT bid fair winds and following seas to Navy **Chief Petty Officer Sandra Redfearn** and Navy **Chief Warrant Officer Paul Prince** upon their retirements from the U.S. Navy. Redfearn retired Feb. 19 after 20 years of service. During her tenure at SEALOGLANT, she was responsible for maintaining the navigational chart library, creating the command's current operational cell and providing weekly ship-status briefs. Prince retired on Feb. 26 after completing 24 years of service. Prince supervised the movement of more than 60 million pounds of ordnance on and off MSC vessels as SEALOGLANT's representative at Naval Weapons Station Earle, N.J.

EUROPE • AFRICA • NEWS

Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS 2nd LT John P. Bobo arrived at Blount Island Command in Jacksonville, Fla., March 3, to offload cargo after sailing from Europe in preparation for Bobo's upkeep period in South Carolina. Bobo, which is typically MPS Squadron One's flagship, transferred its flag to MPS Squadron One alternate flagship MPS USNS PFC Eugene A. Obregon while the two ships were in Rota, Spain, in January. Flagship duties will transfer back to Bobo when the ship returns from its refurbishment period in late summer.

Military Sealift Command-chartered high-speed vessel HSV 2 Swift continues to support African Pacific Partnership theater security cooperation missions in East Africa. In February and early March, Swift conducted visits in company with Navy frigate USS Nicholas to Port Est, Reunion; Port Louis, Mauritius; Port Victoria, Seychelles; Cape Town, South Africa; Maputo, Mozambique; and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Navy **Capt. Jim Tranoris**, commander, Combined Task Force 63 and Sealift Logistics Command Europe, led these visits while embarked on Swift with a multinational African Partnership Station staff.

MSC voyage-chartered, multi-purpose cargo ship MV Flintermar was used as a coaster to lighter with MSC-chartered dry cargo ship MV Virginian to conduct a container cross-deck transfer – the transfer of cargo containers from one ship to the other using a shipboard crane – while anchored in Talamone Bay, Italy, Feb. 26.

SEALOGLANT welcomed its new public affairs officer, **Kim Dixon**, to Naples in March.

MSC refuels MSC



Top: Military Sealift Command hospital ship USNS Comfort and MSC fleet replenishment oiler USNS Grumman steam alongside one another during an underway replenishment in the Caribbean Sea Feb. 22. MSC civil service mariners returned Comfort to Haitian waters immediately after the refueling. Nearly 1,000 victims of Haiti's earthquake were treated on board Comfort in support of Operation Unified Response from Jan. 20 to March 9.

Right: Comfort civil service master Capt. Robert Holley communicates with his crew via radio during the underway replenishment with Grumman.



U.S. Navy photos by MC2 Shannon Warner

HQ • HIGHLIGHTS

Military Sealift Command headquarters celebrated Black History Month throughout February. A special observance was held Feb. 17 at the Navy Yard Catering and Conference Center featuring guest speaker Michael Brown, District of Columbia council member. The event also included musical performances and a sampling

of traditional African-American food.

Twenty students from the Air Force Advanced Logistics Readiness Officer Course, U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center at Fort Dix, N.J., visited MSC headquarters in February. The students received a command brief from the headquarters operations staff. Students also visited Baltimore for a familiar-

ization tour of MSC's large, medium-speed, roll-on/roll-off ship USNS Mendonca, which is pierside in reduced operating status.

MSC deputy commander **Rear Adm. Robert Wray** joined eleven MSC headquarters personnel and their friends and family members who volunteered their time and effort for more than 250 Special Olympians March 4 during a bowling tournament in Hyattsville, Md. MSC vol-

unteers included **Allison Bednarek**, **Doug Mansell** and **Matt Clifford**, engineering; **Linda Fitzpatrick** and **Donald Petska**, office of the comptroller; **Thyra Jones** and **John Quandt**, Strategic Planning Directorate; and **Alicia Royster**, Sealift Program.

MSC bid farewell to **Randall Whittier**, contracting office, and **Christopher Wahler**, maritime forces, manpower and management, in March.

FAR • EAST • HAILS

Navy **Capt. Jim Romano**, commander, Sealift Logistics Command Far East, visited the Republic of Korea Feb. 16-20. During his visit, Romano met with Military Sealift Command Office Korea commanding officer Navy **Cmdr. Chris Cruz** and conducted an all-hands call with MSCO Korea staff members. In addition, Romano conducted an office call with Army Lt. Col. Samuel Blanton, commanding officer, Surface Deployment and Distribution Command's 837th Transportation Battalion, at Busan's Pier Eight. Romano then visited Ready Reserve Force ship SS Cape Jacob and MSC prepositioning ship MV TSGT John A. Chapman at nearby Chinhae.

Next, Romano, accompanied by Cruz and MSCO Korea's operations officer Xavier Monroy, visited Mokpo, a port facility on South Korea's western coast, where he observed Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS MAJ Stephen W. Pless' participation in annual exercise Freedom Banner 2010. Romano also met with Navy **Capt. Geoffrey Pack**, commander, MPS Squadron Three, and conducted an all-hands call with MPS Squadron Three staff members on board Pless Feb. 17. While in Mokpo, Romano met with Marine Corps Col. James Rubino, commander of Okinawa-based Combat Logistics Regiment 35, and commander of the 300-plus Marine Corps task force deployed to Mokpo in support of Freedom Banner. Romano also met with acting commanding officer, Navy **Capt. Scott Gibney**, and sailors from the Bronx, N.Y.-based Expeditionary Port Unit 102, which

embedded with the Marines at Mokpo.

Navy **Capt. Fred Harr**, commander, MPS Squadron Two, spoke at a ribbon-cutting ceremony opening for a new housing facility for United Seamen's Service employees assigned to Diego Garcia, March 4. The housing facility was built by sailors from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion One. Navy **Lt. Cmdr. Paul Springer**, Military Sealift Command Office Diego Garcia commanding officer; **Capt. Mike Flanagan**, Naval Support Facility commanding officer; and Thomas Upson, United Seamen's Service Center director, also attended the ceremony.

Harr and Springer attended the change of command ceremony for the new British representative to Diego Garcia March 3. British Royal Navy Cmdr. Christopher Moorey relieved Cmdr. Richard Stephens as the senior British officer on Diego Garcia.

Navy **Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shannon Taylor** was selected in March as both the Military Sealift Fleet Support Command's and COMSC Shore Sailor of the Year.

"I am humbled by the honor to be selected as both MSFSC and COMSC Shore Sailor of the Year," Taylor said. "This honor is bestowed to an individual, but it is truly a shared accomplishment through teamwork."

MSCO Diego Garcia welcomed Navy **Lt. j.g. Brian Sheckells**, who relieved Navy **Lt. j.g. Jamie Spencer** as executive officer. The command bids fair winds and following seas to Navy **Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Danny Baxter**.

CENTRAL • CURRENTS

Sealift Logistics Command Central saw the departure of MSC fleet replenishment oiler USNS Kanawha in February after the ship successfully completed its tasking in the U.S. 5th Fleet operating area. While in theater, Kanawha provided support for the USS Nimitz and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike groups, Amphibious Ready Group USS Bonhomme Richard and numerous coalition naval combatants while supporting U.S. 5th Fleet's operations. These included Partnership Strength Presence, Maritime Security Operations, the Struggle Against Violent Extremists, and operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. Kanawha and its crew safely and efficiently conducted 74 underway replenishments, transferred 9.2 million gallons of F76 fuel, 673,331 gallons of F44 fuel, and delivered 1,496 pallets of cargo and provisions. Before departing U.S. 5th Fleet operating area, the master and crew of USNS Kanawha received a Bravo Zulu message from Navy **Capt. Don Hodge**, commodore, Carrier Task Force 53.

MSC fleet replenishment oiler USNS Patuxent became a part of U.S. 5th Fleet operations in late February to provide crucial services to U.S. forces. U.S. 5th Fleet also welcomed back MSC fleet ocean tug USNS Catawba in February from the ship's extended dry-dock period in Dubai. Catawba underwent numerous upgrades while in the shipyard. According to Catawba's civil service master, **Capt. Charles Rodriguez**, the shipyard period was one of the most intense undertakings he had seen during his 35 years of service aboard U.S. Navy and MSC ships.

Rodriguez credits the successful shipyard period to the efforts of personnel from Ship Support Unit Bahrain, port engineers **Javid Ghasemian** and **Daniel Crouch**, and **Chief Engineer Thomas Smith**. Rodriguez also thanked the United Arab Emirates Coast Guard who provided an escort vessel from Dubai to Jebel Ali. "Their service was the most proficient, efficient and effective I have ever observed," he said.

February marked the departure of SEALOGCENT/CTF 53's Fleet Logistics Support Officer, Navy **Lt. Carlos Merced**. Before leaving, Merced was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for outstanding performance in coordinating more than 3,500 subsistence requirements. The command wished Merced a fond farewell and the best of luck in future endeavors at Fleet Industrial Supply Center, San Diego.

Military Sealift Command Office Kuwait held its change of command Feb. 3, with CTF-53/SEALOGCENT Commodore Navy Capt. Donald Hodge in attendance. Navy **Capt. Allie Milligan** relieved Navy **Cmdr. Phil Gerard** in a lead-change maneuver ceremony at Port of Shuaiba, Kuwait. The lead-change maneuver is an air-based passing of leadership, which was converted into a ceremonious seafaring change of command using two MSC-chartered tugs, the Omeed Taher and Sharief Verve. MSCO Kuwait now comprises members from Pittsburgh's MSC Expeditionary Port Unit 103 and three other MSC units. They relieved MSC Expeditionary Port Unit 102 from Bronx, N.Y.

PACIFIC • BRIEFS

Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler USNS Henry J. Kaiser hosted 60 students and eight staff members from the 2010 Executive Leadership Development Program Feb. 18. The ELDP class spent the day underway with Kaiser off the coast of Southern California, observing the shipboard environment and an underway replenishment demonstration with MSC fast combat support ship USNS Rainier. Following the underway period, Monica Sheppard, director of the Innovations Division, United States Joint Forces Command, presented **Rick Appling**, SEALOGPAC's deputy operations officer, with a letter of appreciation for his coordination of the ELDP underway. Appling is a graduate of a previous ELDP class.

On March 4, a civilian engineering contractor suffered a heart attack that stopped his heart on Kaiser. Fortunately, Kaiser's Medical Service Officer **Rene S. Pamintuan** revived the patient with standard CPR and the use of the automatic external defibrilla-

tor. The patient was then flown to Balboa Hospital for treatment.

Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, commander, Military Sealift Command, visited San Diego Feb. 25-28. While there, Buzby toured MSC's newest dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Matthew Perry and one of MSC's most seasoned veterans, ammunition ship USNS Flint. Buzby also held an admiral's call with the civil service mariners at the Customer Service Unit West and served as a speaker at the christening and launch of the dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Charles Drew.

Navy **Capt. Jerome Hamel**, commander, SEALOGPAC, awarded Navy **Lt. Florence Beato** the Navy Commendation Medal during a brief ceremony Feb. 22. Beato received the medal for his meritorious service while serving as assistant manager internal controls officer and mission capability assessment coordinator for SEALOGPAC from July to October 2009. The award is Beato's sixth Navy Commendation Medal.

COMPASS • HEADING

Military Sealift Fleet Support Command announced its Mariner Award of Excellence recipients Feb. 24. These awards recognize and honor civil service mariners of the MSC fleet considered the most outstanding in their department during the year. From the deck department are **Chief Mate Edward Santillan**, **2nd Mate Airica Dryden** and **Boatswain's Mates David Floyd** and **Felix Garcia**. From the engine department are **2nd Assistant Engineers Larry Baker** and **Duane Sims**, **Deck Machinist Harold Schaum** and **Junior Engineer Victor Abad**; from the supply department are **Chief Stewards Victorino Damasco** and **Orlando Josafat**, **Yeoman Storekeeper Michael Wine** and **Steward Utilityman Forencio Ebanculla**; from the communications office are **Chief Radio Electronic Technician Colin Strong** and **Ship's Communications Officer Jeffrey Yohn**; from the medical department are **Medical Services Officers Renato Pamintuan** and **Christopher Hudson**. Hudson was also selected from among all of the awardees as the Mariner Employee of the Year.

The following unlicensed civil service mariners were recognized for demonstrating their skill in assisting and developing expertise among their fellow crew members by being named Shipmates of the Year: **Junior Engineer Victor Abad**, **Chief Steward Ricardo Bautista**, **Radio Electronic Technician Robert Briggs**, **Supply Utilitymen Ric Castillo** and **Nelson Collado**, **Chief Cook Edwin Rodriguez** and **Yeoman Storekeeper Michael Wine**.

MSFSC's contracting directorate has been busy working on a 70-day reactivation and regular overhaul contract package for fleet replenishment oiler USNS Joshua Humphreys. The ship is being reactivated by MSC after having been out of service for four years.

MSFSC labor and employee relations specialists and civil service mariners joined other Military Sealift Command personnel, as well as representatives from Seafarers' International Union, Marine Engineer's Beneficial Association, and International Masters, Mates and Pilots Union, for a briefing on interest-based bargaining techniques. The Washington, D.C.-training session, which was hosted by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, approached bargaining in different ways.

In February, **Loren Heckelman** relieved **Joyce Jurkowski** as comptroller, MSFSC. Heckelman brings extensive knowledge and experience to his new position, which he gained during 29 years as a Navy supply officer and his subsequent two years in the private sector. Heckelman's last four assignments in uniform were fleet comptroller, U.S. Fleet Forces Command/U.S. Atlantic Fleet; commanding officer, Fleet and Industrial Supply Center Norfolk; senior readiness programmer, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; and supply officer on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln.

MSFSC wishes fair winds and following seas to **Information Systems Technicians 1st Class Tracy Jackson**, **2nd Class Monica Porter** and **3rd Class Ralph Cummings**. The three petty officers transferred from MSFSC in mid-February.

Fair winds and following seas also to **Pursers Alfredo Bautista Lee Tice**, **Chief Steward Robert Burdine**, **Assistant Damage Control Officer Brigido Garcia**, **Medical Services Officer James Gilliam II**, **Capt. Thomas Schwinn** and **Utilityman Rafael Velazquez** as they retire. Thank you for your service.

For more MSFSC and civil service mariner news, view the online newsletter at www/msc.nav.mil/msfsc/newsletter.

Grapple helps recover downed Ethiopian aircraft

By Adrian Schulte,
MSC Public Affairs

Civil service mariners and U.S. Navy divers aboard Military Sealift Command rescue and salvage ship USNS Grapple were training with Tunisian divers in the Mediterranean waters in the port of Bizerte, Tunisia, when the tragedy happened. Ethiopian Airlines Flight 409 crashed off the coast of Lebanon Jan. 25 on its way to Addis Ababa, killing all 90 people on board.

Navy guided missile destroyer USS Ramage and Navy P-3 Orion aircraft responded to a request for assistance within hours of the crash. Later on the same day, Grapple was also called on to assist the government of Lebanon in the recovery and salvage of the crashed plane.

“When we received notification to depart Tunisia and go to Lebanese territorial waters to assist with the recovery effort, it was bittersweet,” said Grapple’s civil service master Capt. Curtis Smith. “Wanting to finish the job in Tunisia was foremost, but sailing across the Mediterranean to assist another country with recovery efforts is one of the many jobs Grapple does.”

Grapple is one of four MSC rescue and salvage ships that can rapidly deploy and provide salvage, towing and firefighting assistance. The ship is fitted with a 7.5-ton-capacity boom forward and a 40-ton-capacity boom aft that can be used for salvage operations. Grapple is crewed by 26 civil service mariners who operate and navigate the ship and four Navy sailors who operate the communications suite.

In the past, Grapple and its sister ships have been called upon for similar missions. In 2008, USNS Grasp recovered two downed Air Force F-15C jets from the Gulf of Mexico.

After receiving the call, Grapple got underway for Augusta Bay, Sicily, to pick up 15 U.S. Navy divers, explosive ordnance disposal technicians and their gear before heading to Lebanon. The divers and EOD personnel were from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit Two based in Little Creek, Va., and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit Eight homeported in Augusta Bay.

“It’s not out of the ordinary to bring EOD units alongside MDSU units,” said Navy Chief Warrant Officer William Turner, officer in charge of the embarked MDSU detachment. “They bring additional

equipment to the table that allows us to work more efficiently in an operation like this.”

The EOD detachment brought along their semi-closed circuit MK-16 MOD1 breathing apparatuses, side-scan sonar equipment and a diving medical officer to assist with the mission.

On the way to the crash site, Grapple was diverted to Cyprus for three days to allow a threatening weather system to pass. Grapple arrived off the coast of Lebanon the morning of Feb. 6.

Grapple’s divers and CIVMARs immediately got to work upon arrival. The divers and EOD personnel teamed up with members of the Lebanese armed forces to locate the debris field. The CIVMARs operated the ship’s boom to raise wreckage that was located 115 to 148 feet below the sea surface.

Grapple’s CIVMARs also operated the ship’s rigid-hull inflatable boat and work boat with the divers in order to assist the Lebanese military with their efforts to locate and recover the plane’s data recorders, said Smith.

The divers and crew of Grapple recovered part of the plane’s tail section and transferred it to a Lebanese landing craft, said Smith. The rear section of the fuselage was dragged out of the way to allow the Lebanese military to dive and locate a data recorder.

Grapple’s CIVMARs and divers wrapped up their mission the evening of Feb. 10, four days after arriving on scene.

The teamwork of the divers and CIVMARs aboard Grapple contributed to a successful mission, said Smith.

The divers and EOD personnel counted on the cooperation of their international counterparts to get the mission done.

“I’m proud of the work that our team accomplished,” said Turner. “It was great to work alongside the EOD team and the Lebanese armed forces; and our team accomplished a lot in a short timeframe.”

After completing the mission, Grapple dropped off the members of the EOD unit in Augusta Bay, before returning to Norfolk, the port from which Grapple operates when not forward deployed.

MC2 William Pittman, U.S. 6th Fleet Public Affairs, contributed to this story.



U.S. Navy divers 2nd Class Todd Walsh and Matthew Trautman, both assigned to Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 embarked aboard Military Sealift Command rescue and salvage ship USNS Grapple, prepare to dive into the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Lebanon Feb. 9. Grapple assisted the Lebanese Armed Forces during recovery operations of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 409.

Button shines in Flash Metal exercise in Maldives

By Edward Baxter
SEALOGFE Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command’s Diego Garcia-based Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS SGT William R. Button participated in Flash Metal 2010, a bilateral maritime security training exercise in the Maldives, a group of 19 scenic atolls located off India’s southwestern coast, Feb. 15-17.

The 673-foot-long Button, which routinely supports the U.S. Marine Corps as the flagship for the nine-ship MPS Squadron Two in the Indian Ocean, served as a platform for maritime-interception training with forces from the Republic of the Maldives’ National Defense Force Coast Guard. Because the Maldives has no standing navy, their Coast Guard protects the nation’s 644 miles of coastline and nearby commercial sea lanes.

Flash Metal was designed to provide valuable, hands-on training in maritime security matters, as well as to foster strong military-to-military relationships between the United States and the Republic of the Maldives.

Leading the exercise was an embarked team of 15 Guam-based special force operators from Navy Special Warfare Unit One and nine Maldivian Coast Guard personnel based aboard their modern, 78-foot coastal-surveillance vessel — the Maldivian National Defense Force ship Ghazee.

The role of Button’s 29 civilian mariners, who work for a private company under contract to MSC, was to ensure the

safety of all personnel on board, including the up to 50 additional personnel embarked on the ship during the exercise. The ship’s 10 embarked military personnel, under the command of a Navy captain squadron commander, were responsible for coordinating all operational aspects of the exercise with the embarked Navy Special Forces and the host nation.

Setting sail

On the morning of Feb. 12, Button headed north from Diego Garcia for the Maldives — known for its crystal blue waters and scenic beaches — and anchored off Huluhule, Bandos, and the Garifushi Islands on the morning of Feb. 15. The ship would remain at anchor throughout the exercise.

“Overall, the journey to the Maldives was very smooth and the seas were calm,” said Button’s civilian master Capt. Lloyd Dorricott.

Before the exercise began, MPS Squadron Two’s operations officer, Navy Chief Warrant Officer Charles Briggs, met with the Maldives’ assistant defense minister and Maldivian Coast Guard officials in order to make final plans for the exercise.

Training gets underway

Once plans were in place, the multi-faceted training got underway with a focus on several aspects of maritime security. Training included comprehensive reviews of procedures for boarding a ship suspected of carrying illicit cargo or personnel at sea; searching and securing of personnel and

living spaces; and securing of a bridge and engine room.

“The Maldivians were attentive students who seemed very eager to learn throughout the training evolutions,” said Navy Capt. Fred Harr, commander of MPS Squadron Two, who was embarked on Button. “The embarked military members and Button’s civilian mariners provided outstanding support to ensure that all training objectives were met.”

Flash Metal also included training in damage-control methods. Navy Hull Technician 2nd Class Cory Petersen from Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia’s port operations department conducted two days of intense damage control training for the nine officers and crew from Ghazee.

Damage control training zeroed in on response to shipboard fires and repair of cracked or ruptured pipes. Similarly, Petersen embarked on the Maldivian vessel to observe their damage control methods.

“Once aboard Ghazee, I could see their forces were quite well trained in fire fighting procedures, including checking a potential hot space before entering,” Petersen said. “The Maldivians were very receptive, open minded and easy to work with.”

Commodore Harr was also impressed when he embarked Ghazee. “Their vessel was very modern and well maintained,” Harr said. “The engineering plant was most impressive, possessing both jet drive and conventional propeller propulsion.”

High marks as host

Throughout the exercise, Button excelled in its support as a training platform — especially with the larger-than-usual number of personnel embarked.

Button’s eight-person steward’s department, led by Chief Steward Dennis Redding, worked long hours to ensure that everyone ate well while onboard.

“The ship’s stewards department is accustomed to and is well prepared to accommodate additional personnel,” Dorricott said. “This crew can shift gears and adjust from a smaller crew to a surge of personnel in a relatively short period of time.”

Fostering strong relationships

Leaders from the Maldives, a growing democracy which held its first-ever multi-candidate presidential election less than two years ago, showed interest in the bilateral exercise. The Honorable Ameen Faisal, the Maldives’ minister of defense and national security, and Maj. Gen. Moosa Ali Jaleel, chief of the Maldives’ defense force, went on board Button to observe the exercise Feb. 16-17.

Upon the completion of a highly successful three-day exercise, Button departed Maldivian waters Feb. 18 and arrived back in Diego Garcia’s scenic lagoon Feb. 21.

“The exercise was a significant opportunity to demonstrate to the Maldivian senior leadership, both civilian and military, what they are capable of,” Harr said. “I hope we can build upon the success of this exercise to increase cooperation between our two nations in the future.”