



SEALIFT

U.S. NAVY'S MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND... *UNITED WE SAIL*

MARCH 2017 ISSUE

MV OCEAN GIANT DELIVERS: OPERATION DEEP FREEZE



Sailors assigned to Navy Cargo Handling Battalion (NCHB) 1 prepare to lift a container off the ship and on to McMurdo Station, Antarctica, in support of National Science Foundation and U.S. Antarctica Program research. (U.S. Navy photograph by Chief Petty Officer James Hawley)

By Sarah Burford, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command-chartered container ship MV Ocean Giant is currently conducting cargo offloads at McMurdo Station, Antarctica, in support of MSC's annual resupply mission Operation Deep Freeze, the Joint Task Force Support for the resupply to the remote scientific outpost.

Ocean Giant, arrived at the remote Antarctica base's ice-pier Jan. 24, with 550 pieces of cargo of nearly 7 million pounds of supplies such as frozen and dry food stores, building materials, vehicles, and electronic equipment and parts; 80 percent of the materials needed for the winter over period. The ship was met by members of Navy Cargo Handling Battalion One who are working around-the-clock offloading the cargo. In years past, temperatures at McMurdo Station have hovered in the single digits and below zero. The icy winds from Mt Erebus, known to be the coldest place on earth, blew upwards of 20 knots or more, making for long, bone chilling days. This year, the weather condition on the remote continent, has been exceptional, with temperatures near freezing and low winds. According to Larry Larsson, MSC's representative at McMurdo Station, a slight change in scheduling has also played a positive role in cargo operations.

"In the past couple of years, National Science Foundation started bringing in the cargo ship first before the tanker. The ice pier is pristine condition this year, so it's in great shape for cargo ops," explained Larsson. "The biggest challenge hasn't been the weather, it's been the challenge to have the cargo operation completed on schedule and with no injuries. In past years, the cargo operations were delayed by two to three personnel injuries and halted due to high winds. This year, all goals have been met and no one has been injured to date."

Following its off load, Ocean Giant will be loaded with retrograde cargo for transportation off the continent, including ice core samples carried back to the United States in sub-zero freezer containers, as well as trash and recyclable materials for disposal and equipment no longer required on station.

"This is the first year that cargo ops were completed in seven days," said Larsson. "The weather has been very calm which has provided the Navy Cargo Handlers a great working environment."

Ocean Giant began its journey in Port Hueneme, Calif., Dec. 30, 2016. The ship stopped briefly in New Zealand before making the transit to McMurdo Sound, Antarctica. Ocean Giant is the first of two MSC chartered ships supporting ODF 2017. The tanker ship MV Maersk Peary will arrive this week with nearly 3.5 million gallons of diesel fuel, jet fuel and gasoline; 100 percent of the fuel needed for the year.

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint service, on-going Defense Support to Civilian Authorities activity in support of the National Science Foundation, lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program.

Mission support consists of active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Army, and Coast Guard as well as Department of Defense civilians and attached non-DOD civilians. ODF operates from two primary locations situated at Christchurch, New Zealand, and McMurdo Station, Antarctica.



Sailors assigned to Navy Cargo Handling Battalion (NCHB) 1 and New Zealand Defense Force Soldiers inspect and prepare rigging prior to lifting cargo off the ship in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2017. (U.S. Navy photo by Chief Petty Officer James Hawley)

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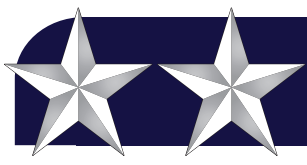
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NAVTRACKS

Recently we released the Military Sealift Command Navigation Track, or NAVTRACK for short. A “Navigation Track” is placed on a chart to depict the intended path a ship will follow to reach its destination. In a similar fashion, a detailed list of ways and means were developed to unite our efforts along a journey to provide unparalleled assured global support to the joint warfighter.

The previously released Voyage Plan provides strategic guidance whereas the Navigation Track provides the operational and tactical

direction.

One way to look at this document is that our Voyage Plan provides four strategic themes that will guide our work. NAVTRACK offers operational lines of effort that support our four strategic themes. Finally, each line of effort is supported by specific, detailed and measurable tasks at the tactical level. These are the tasks that must guide our day to day work.

My experience has confirmed that alignment is crucial to our success. As such these foundational documents are designed to align MSC efforts with Commander, U.S. Transportation Command and Chief of Naval Operations strategic priorities.

I encourage you read NAVTRACK and discuss it with others in the command. This is a living document. Over the next three years we’ll complete most of the tasks we have identified, but we’ll also be adding to our list as we innovate and discover new ways to conduct our business. Your input, ideas and initiative are crucial to ensuring this document helps to guide our work, and enable our mission to empower global warfighting capabilities.

Thank you for all you do each and every day. Your work makes a difference to this command and to the security of our nation.

United We Sail,

Rear Adm. Dee L. Mewbourne, USN
Commander, Military Sealift Command

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK RELEASED

From Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

The Office of the Chief of Naval Operations released the Leadership Development Framework, Jan. 25.

Strengthening and broadening leadership development is a key objective of the gold line of effort in “A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority,” and the 10-page framework outlines how the Navy will develop leaders to demonstrate both operational excellence and strong character.

“Leaders have always been essential to the Navy’s success,” Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. John Richardson said. “The strategic environment is such that our leaders must think more clearly and learn more rapidly than our adversaries. Developing leaders will remain the principal focus of our Navy.”

The framework explains the most important characteristic of a leader is drive - the relentless pursuit of “best ever” performance. Navy leaders should focus their development down two lanes: warfighting competence and character.

The best way to develop these two is through formal schools, on-the-job training and self-guided learning. “World-class leadership is our Navy’s decisive advantage,” Richardson writes. “Some Navy leaders are already world-class; many more can become world-class with the right focus.”

The Leadership Development Framework can be found at www.navy.mil/cno/docs/NLDF_Final.pdf

MSC IN TRANSITION

The mission of Military Sealift Command is to empower global warfighting capabilities.

As we continue to carry out this mission every day around the globe, MSC is going through a significant transition phase. The processes and procedures that enabled our success over the past 65 years will not be adequate now in this new maritime environment.

While transition areas can lead to change and change can lead to uncertainty, the command must view change as an opportunity. We are currently presented with a window of opportunity to remake the organization to better meet the demands of the future security environment and requirements of operating in the maritime domain.

It’s worth discussing and applying innovative thinking to this transition. A major transition area is our operating environment. Not since World War II have the sea lanes of communication transited by the U.S. Navy been contested. The assumption that waters will be uncontested and maritime supremacy will be achieved almost immediately can no longer be made. How do we transition our entire enterprise so that all parts of the command are focused on operating in a contested environment?

Our mission sets and platforms are in transition. There is high demand for our new expeditionary platforms. We must continue to learn and innovate, and determine how to operate and integrate these platforms to meet the requirements of our Fleet and DoD customers. Our new oiler, the T-AO 205 class, only a few years out, will provide new capabilities for our fleet replenishment mission. And, T-ATS, our fleet tug and salvage ship replacement, is now a program of record. We need to think about how we train our mariners and how we develop tactics, techniques, and procedures to operate these new classes of ships.

Another area of transition is our workforce. What a unique environment we are now working in! We have Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials all working in the same workspace. This provides an unprecedented opportunity for learning and growth for every generation. In this environment we are all teachers and students.

The command is going through a physical transition as well with the headquarters moving from Washington Navy Yard, D.C., to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. The move, started in 2014, will be complete by the end of FY 2017. Could we use this physical transition as an opportunity to reorganize and improve our workforce efficiency and organizational effectiveness? Is there a path forward where we could consolidate the workforce in one location and thereby promote synergy, attract a 21st century workforce, harness the efficiency of IT and promote stewardship? Ultimately, this physical transition provides an opportunity to refresh our identity.

With the relocation of the command from Washington, D.C. and from planned retirements, many experienced personnel have left the command, at the same time new talent is entering our workforce. While there is a learning curve as new personnel need time to gain experience, this new talent brings a diversity of thought and fresh perspective. How do we tap-in to this diverse talent pool, and make MSC the Navy employer of choice?

MSC has a proud lineage, dating back to 1949 and the establishment of the Military Sea Transportation Service, the single managing agency for the Department of Defense’s ocean transportation needs. I have no doubt that we will continue to maintain operational excellence in everything we do.

As a command in transition, we have an opportunity to remake our organization and propel it to the next level. This work will require continuous improvement, high-velocity learning, war-gaming and innovation in every area. Every member of the command has a role to play during this transition. Collaboration, transparency, teamwork and ownership are the keys to making our transition a success.

Thank you for your dedication and service to our nation.

United We Sail,

Rear Adm. Dee L. Mewbourne, USN

THE WOMEN OF MSC; BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

By Shevonne Cleveland, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

Women are changing the face of merchant marines and Military Sealift Command (MSC) leads the pack when it comes to female mariners. Women continue to break the glass ceiling of a workforce once open exclusively to men. In 1974 the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) amended their admission requirements to become the first federal service academy to admit women, two years ahead of the Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force and Army.

The USMMA at Kings Point, New York is one of the major pipelines for women seeking careers in the merchant marines. Within the last five-years female admission has increased from 15 percent in 2016, to 19.7 percent for the class of 2020, a record high for women's admissions at the academy. Amongst the 2016 graduating class of 229, 30 were women. In addition to USMMA there are six state maritime academies that actively recruit and train women; California, Maine, Massachusetts, Great Lakes, Texas A&M, and the State University of New York Maritime College.

Following completion from one of these academies graduates decide on careers afloat or ashore depending upon their areas of expertise and personal preferences. Eventually, many decide on pursuing a career with MSC.

Capt. Susan Diane Orsini is a 1988 graduate of USMMA Kings Point and began her career with MSC in 1990 as a Third Mate. Today she is Master of USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5). Orsini admits, like so many other sea-farers, work/life balance is a challenge but as a woman in her profession she says her greatest challenge comes from within.

"The biggest challenge for me has probably been in recognizing that I don't have to do it all on my own. Men in male dominated fields have always relied upon each other. I think most women feel they have to prove they can do it (whatever 'it' is) on their own, in a male dominated field," she says. "But we don't have to. I don't have to, and usually whatever 'it' is that we are trying to do, the product would be better if we took advantage of the knowledge and abilities of our co-workers, who just happen to be men."

As women continue to break the 'glass ceiling' as merchant mariners, there is still potential room for growth in the industry. According to the most recent report from the National Civilian Labor Force, women in ashore jobs at MSC makeup 32.64 percent of the total workforce ashore and 8.81 percent afloat. Robin Lee, Deputy Director of Equal Employment Opportunity at MSC, says mission fulfillment is more than just numbers. "Our ultimate goal is to create an inclusive workplace, one that fosters growth and opportunity but also one that fosters an effort for total inclusion."

While the numbers of women in the industry continue to increase both ashore and afloat, Orsini is still one of only three CIVMAR women Masters at MSC. Her journey however, has not been as some would expect. "People will often comment about 'how hard' it must have been for me, as a woman, in the maritime field. If it was, I didn't notice," says Orsini.



Capt. Susan Orsini, the master of Military Sealift Command's USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5). (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)

"As a Master, I feel it's a pretty level playing field. I feel my peers treat me as their equals, and my assignments have been on par with other ship's Masters irrelevant of gender. Honestly, as I'm doing my job the furthest thought from my mind is that I'm a woman doing this. The first thought is that I am a Captain and I need to take care of [things]."

Orsini attributes the joys of her job to the Trenton crew.

"What I enjoy the most is seeing a disparate group of people thrown together on the same ship become a cohesive, coordinated team actively working together for a common goal. The whole team on USNS Trenton is an ideal example of what I like about my job," she says.

For women already in the field or considering a career in the maritime industry, Orsini offered some advice.

"Be yourself. Don't try to out man the men if you aren't one," she says. "Find your voice. Speak and demonstrate confidence. You don't have to be loud just don't finish your sentences with that upward pitch that makes it sound like a question, unless it is one. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Not asking for help when you need it usually has a poor outcome."



Capt. Susan Orsini, the master of Military Sealift Command's USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5), conducts an interview prior to the ship getting underway. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)



Capt. Susan Orsini, the master of Military Sealift Command's USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5), receives an award from Capt. Ray Addicott, former MSCPAC Commander, 1991. (U.S. Navy courtesy photograph)



Chief Mate Andrea Liebl, of Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Carson City (T-EPF 7), scans the horizon for hazards, Dec. 20. Carson City got underway to perform sea trials. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)

USNS CARSON CITY; SWIFT FURY FROM THE SEA

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship got underway from Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story to perform a mock final contract trial, Jan 20.

"The Carson City got underway for what we call a "Mock Final Contract Trial (FCT)," According to Brent Holbeck, MSC Marine Transportation Specialist, Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) Program, "Final contract trials are conducted prior to the end of a new ship's guarantee period to determine if there are any defects, failures, or deterioration other than that due to normal wear and tear."

The mock FTC is a rehearsal of underway events the ship and her crew will be required to demonstrate for inspectors from the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) in the near future.

"Expeditionary fast transport ships are designed and delivered to MSC with the capability to operate at high speeds in permissive environments to deliver personnel, equipment, and supplies over operational distances with access to littoral offload points including austere, minor, and degraded ports," said Holbeck. "As more ships are delivered and employed, the utility of the EPF outside of its original intended design is being realized,

so new missions are continuously being evaluated to meet combatant commander's requirements."

Carson City is the seventh Expeditionary Fast Transport class of ships to be added to MSC's inventory and was named to honor the city of Carson City, Nevada.

"Carson City is currently crewed by 26 Civil Service Mariner (CIVMARS)," said Holbeck. "The EPF's are crewed to fill the typical roles found on other MSC ships, but with fewer people."

"EPF Mariners receive type rating training and certification prior to being assigned to a ship, so that sets them apart from most other CIVMARS," added Holbeck. "Serving on an EPF with a small crew is a great opportunity, especially for junior officers and unlicensed mariners, to gain experience and have more responsibility than what you might find on other classes of ship. These are challenging but rewarding billets, therefore EPF billets are typically the highest paid in the fleet."

During Carson City's final contract trial the crew performed an extended high-speed run, high-speed maneuvers, an abbreviated breaking maneuver, a ships anchor drop and recovery, and tested the ship's high expansion foam fire-fighting system.

"The ship and crew of Carson City performed very well," said Holbeck. "The ship's systems worked as advertised for all of the mock final contract trial tests."



A view of Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Carson City (EPF 7) as the vessel performs a high-speed run, Dec. 20. Carson City got underway to perform sea trials. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)



Civil Service Mariners attached to Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Carson City (EPF 7) secure the anchor after an 'anchor drop,' Dec. 20. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)



Civil Service Mariners attached to Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Carson City (EPF 7) secure the anchor after an 'anchor drop,' Dec. 20. Carson City was underway to perform sea trials. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)

MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND MARINER SHARES LONG JOURNEY TO IMMIGRATE, SERVE U.S.



Lt. Cmdr. Gregory Cygal, a strategic sealift officer assigned to Military Sealift Command Far East and a U.S. Navy Reserve component Sailor. (U.S. Navy photo by Grady T. Fontana)

By Grady Fontana, Military Sealift Command Far East

Like the interior hotspot in the world's largest tectonic plate, the Pacific plate, feeding, forming, and changing the vast and diverse geology and ecology of the Hawaiian Islands, immigration is reshaping the United States'

fiber and future—her economy, workforce, family structures, demography, culture, cuisines, languages, and politics.

Though immigration has been debated for generations between Congress—and American society, there is no denying that the U.S. was built largely on the backs of immigrants. As former Senator Edward M. Kennedy said, "Immigration is in our blood. It's part of our founding story. In the early 1600's, courageous men and women sailed in search of freedom and a better life. Arriving in Jamestown and Plymouth, they founded a great nation. For centuries ever since, countless other brave men and women have made the difficult decision to leave their homes and seek better lives in this Promised Land."

While the process of immigration takes on various forms and procedures for different individuals, 2nd Mate Gregory Cygal has embarked on a long journey to citizenship. He is currently assigned to Military Sealift Command's (MSC) prepositioning ship USNS 1st LT Baldomero Lopez (T-AK 3010), and at 50, he's a remarkable example of how

immigrants have contributed and serviced the Nation.

Born and raised in Poland, Cygal came to the United States at 19. At 20 he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. After one tour as a rifleman, he went to college and joined the Army Reserve.

After college, he became a merchant marine and also received a commission in the Navy Reserve.

However, prior to immigrating to the U.S., Cygal was a Polish national. In 1985, he was 18 and attending Technical School of River Shipping in Wroclaw, in western Poland near the German border. This was during the Cold War and leaving Poland wasn't simple.

"I was in a Polish nautical school and part of my curriculum was to go to the merchant ships every year for two months," said Cygal. "I flew to Greece to meet my ship, which was a Polish merchant ship. When I was in Greece, I defected and requested political asylum."

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USNS BRUNSWICK HEADS OUT FOR ITS MAIDEN DEPLOYMENT

Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

The Navy's Expeditionary Fast Transport vessel USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) and its crew of nearly 50 U.S. Navy Sailors and civil service mariners departed from Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Jan. 30.

Departing Virginia marked the ship's first overseas deployment since being added to Military Sealift Command's inventory.

Capt. Jason Ivey, Brunswick's Master said, "It's relieving, and it gives a sense of closure and accomplishment to what we've been doing. We've been working so hard to get here that to finally see it done and to, you know, we're leaving our home away from home here in Little Creek, but we're heading out West and San Diego and then farther west and it should be fun. Everybody's ready to go."

The ship will transit first to Naval Forces Pacific Command, U.S. Third Fleet, where it will remain for three months before transiting to her home port in Saipan, U.S. Naval Forces Far East Command, where it will be forward deployed in support of Seventh Fleet's efforts to conduct Theater Security Operations, promoting peace, security, and preserving freedom of the seas.



Military Sealift Command's expeditionary fast transport ship, USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6), gets underway from Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Jan. 30. Brunswick got underway to begin its first overseas deployment. (U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)



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The ocean surveillance ship USNS Able (T-AGOS 20) prepares to moor on board Fleet Activities Yokosuka. Able is visiting Yokosuka for a port visit to promote stability and security in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, demonstrate commitment to regional partners, and foster relationships in the area. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Brian G. Reynolds)



ABLE VISITS YOKOSUKA

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Brian G. Reynolds, Submarine Group 7 Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command ocean surveillance ship USNS Able (T-AGOS 20) arrived at Fleet Activities Yokosuka Jan. 16 for a port visit as part of its Indo-Asia-Pacific patrol.

The visit strengthens the already positive alliance between the U.S. and Japan through the crew's interaction with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. It also demonstrates the U.S. Navy's commitment to regional stability and maritime security in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations.

"The crew has worked tirelessly during this deployment," said Phillip Thrift, Able's master. "The visit gives the crew some well-deserved time off and an opportunity to explore the rich culture of Japan."

Able is the first ship in the U.S. Navy to bear the name and is the second of four Victorious-class ocean surveillance ships. Its primary purpose is to conduct anti-submarine warfare by deploying a Surveillance Towed-Array Sensor System (SURTASS) which provides passive acoustic mobile detection, tracking, and reporting of submarine contacts at a long range. Additionally, Able is one of four ocean surveillance ships capable of searching for submarines using Low Frequency Active Sonar (LFA). The data provided by SURTASS is analyzed aboard Able and then sent to Submarine Group 7 (CSG-7) in Yokosuka, Japan. CSG-7 then uses the information collected to make critical decisions regarding the placement of its assets.

Able is operated and maintained by civilian contractors for the Military Sealift Command. The SURTASS surveillance system is operated by an aboard military detachment from Naval Oceanographic Processing Facility Whidbey Island, Washington.



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GUATEMALA HOSTS OPENING CEREMONY FOR CONTINUING PROMISE 2017

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Shamira Purifoy, Continuing Promise 2017 Public Affairs

An opening ceremony was held to celebrate the arrival of the humanitarian mission Continuing Promise 2017 (CP-17), Feb. 2, at its main medical site in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

Capt. Errin Armstrong, mission commander for CP-17, spoke at the event with the assistance of a translator.

During his speech, Armstrong expressed the significance of the Continuing Promise mission and the partnerships established in the Central and South American region, including Guatemala.

"This year's Continuing Promise mission is its seventh iteration in a span of 10 years, and our visit to Guatemala will be the sixth during the same period of cooperation," said Armstrong. "Through Continuing Promise's spirit of teamwork, all of us have the unique opportunity to enhance our medical, dental, and veterinary capabilities on a local and global scale."

Continuing Promise is a U.S. Southern Command mission introduced in 2007. It provides medical, engineering, veterinary, and humanitarian assistance activities in select countries to strengthen partnerships and improve cooperation on many levels with partner nations, inter-agency organizations, and nongovernmental organizations.

Guatemala is CP-17's first stop on its three-month humanitarian and civic assistance mission. Armstrong said the work done over the 12-day visit will build on relationships developed in previous years and increase the capacities of countries and communities to provide for themselves, making the visit to Puerto Barrios and possible future visits an exchange of information and chance to strengthen partnerships.

"During Continuing Promise 2017 we will continue to work and train side-by-side with doctors and nurses; government agencies, including the ministry of health; Guatemalan military forces; and countless volunteers from the community and international aide organizations," said Armstrong. "Together through these partnerships, we will help communities develop the ability to meet their own needs on a daily basis while leaving a tangible positive impact on the people we help."

Prominent Puerto Barrios government officials and community members also addressed the audience of host nation volunteers and U.S. and Guatemalan military members at the engagement.

During the event, Geraldina Motta, director of Operation Blessing International, a nonprofit humanitarian organization, gave special praise to CP-17 participants for their commitment to service.

"I want to thank the U.S. military for what you are doing," said Motta. "You are doing God's work."

The event took place at a local athletic complex, turned into the main medical site where service members began providing various medical screenings and treatments for host nation patients after the ceremony ended.

After Guatemala, CP-17 will make two additional scheduled mission stops in Honduras and Columbia.



Utilitiesman 2nd Class Elliott Shultz, right, and Utilitiesman 3rd Class Paige Briggs, both assigned to Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit (CBMU) 202, assemble a tent in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, in support of Continuing Promise 2017. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Shamira Purifoy)



Mr. J. R. Locke addresses civilian teammates and service members assigned to Military Sealift Command during a special observance honoring Dr. Martin Luther King(U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING; REFLECTING ON HIS DREAM AND LEGACY

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

Military Sealift Command hosted a special observance ceremony to honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on board Naval Station Norfolk, Jan. 19.

The celebration was coordinated by MSC’s Equal Employment Opportunity team and was held to commemorate Dr. King’s leadership against racial inequality.

The special observance included the reading of the presidential proclamation which was presented by Lt. Cmdr. Kevin McGraw of MSC’s N-4 department.

“When the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., shared his dream with the world atop the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he gave mighty voice to our founding ideals,” read McGraw. “Few could have imagined that nearly half a century later, his iconic profile would forever be memorialized in stone, standing tall and gazing outward, not far from where he stirred our collective conscience to action.”

Dr. King is the only non-President to have a national holiday dedicated in his honor. He is also the only non-President to be honored in the National Mall at the Nation’s capital, Washington D.C.

“As we reflect on Dr. King’s legacy, we celebrate a man and a movement that transformed our country, and we remember that our freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of others,” McGraw continued. “Given the causes he championed, from civil rights and international peace to job creation and economic justice, it is right that today we honor his work by serving others.”

According to Senior Chief Yeoman Nashera Brown, assigned to MSC’s administrative team, the federal holiday recognizing Dr. King’s legacy takes place annually on the third Monday in January.

“The theme for this year’s holiday is “Remember! Celebrate! Act! A day on! Not a day off!” said Brown. “We are calling on the American people to engage in public service and promote peaceful social change.”

The keynote speaker for MSC’s special observance was Mr. J.R. Locke, the Executive Director of Hampton University Business Incubator.

“We are here to celebrate and remember the efforts of Dr. King,” said Locke. “Our nation is facing some challenging times. We want to do all that we can to try and eliminate many of the problems in our society today.”

“Dr. King was a great leader and he was a humble man,” said Locke. “I have a very strong admiration for what Dr. King stood for and his fight for justice, equality, diversity and inclusion.”

“Dr. King was a consensus builder and once said, ‘a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus’, according to Locke.



Mr. J. R. Locke addresses civilian teammates and service members assigned to Military Sealift Command during a special observance honoring Dr. Martin Luther King(U.S. Navy photograph by Bill Mesta)

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US 6TH FLEET FLAGSHIP USS MOUNT WHITNEY CELEBRATES 46TH YEAR OF EXCELLENCE



A view of the bridge of USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) (U.S. Navy courtesy photograph)

The Mount Whitney crew celebrated with the cutting of a cake by Commanding Officer Capt. Kevon Hakimzadeh, Chief Engineer Eric Simpson, and Information Systems Technician 1st Class Robert Kantrowitz.

“At 46 years young, USS Mount Whitney is the third oldest ship in the United States Navy,” said Hakimzadeh, “While it would be reasonable to assume that a ship in commission that long would be approaching the end of her usefulness, that is certainly not the case for Mount Whitney.”

“Our ship defies her age by continuing to prove her importance to our nation. Her operational schedule last year was as intense as any other ship in the Navy,” added Hakimzadeh. “This year, with the efforts we are putting into her life-cycle extension, I am confident that Mount Whitney will continue to serve long after many of her newest Sailors today are retired.”

Interior Communications Electrician 3rd Class Rebeca Gibson, USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) Public Affairs

USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) celebrated its 46th birthday with a cake cutting ceremony while in Rijeka, Croatia, for its 2017 shipyard period, Jan. 16.

On Dec. 19, 2016, Mount Whitney entered drydock for its 2017 shipyard period in Rijeka, Croatia. During this time, vital systems and a hospitality upgrade will be installed during the six-month shipyard period. Mount Whitney will return to service this year following an installation period in Gaeta, Italy.

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At 18, the decision to defect required steady nerves, given the fact he spoke no English and had little life experience. However, he had the camaraderie of another accompanying student and friend.

“It was like an adventure but I don’t think I could go through it again—I would be a nervous wreck,” said Cygal. “(Defecting) was more a spur of the moment. At that time, Poland was part of the Warsaw Pact, which meant Poland was a communist country and aligned with the Soviet Union. A lot of people were rebelling against the government because the population was always pro-West. We wanted to get out of there and have nothing to do with communism.”

Today, Cygal is a contracted mariner with MSC and a navigator on the USNS 1st LT Baldomero Lopez. He has spent the past 16 years on the Lopez.

In addition, he is a lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve. In the reserve component, Cygal is a strategic sealift officer (SSO) with MSC Far East. When he is conducting annual training, he is supporting various exercises such as exercise Cobra Gold 2017 (CG17) in Thailand.

“I’ve been affiliated with MSC Far East for about nine years now,” said Cygal. “I’ve been doing a lot of exercises with them. I’ve done Cobra Gold three times; I’ve done exercises in Korea four times; I was in the Philippines last year supporting as an SSO.”

The road to political asylum wasn’t straightforward. Initially, the Greek police ignored the request. Due to the sheer volume of refugees in Greece, they ceased to accept any political asylums; the police were overwhelmed. “I asked, so what are we supposed to do? They said don’t know, don’t care. Do whatever,” said Cygal.

Cygal and his friend took a job at a local orchard picking oranges. There, they met a person who was able to connect them to the right people who could help. The brother of one of the owners of the orchard was the local chief of police and he was able to steer along the application process.

After declaring political asylum, they were subsequently arrested and held at an immigration detention center for a few days, then sent to a refugee camp in Greece for almost a year while awaiting disposition.

“It wasn’t as bad as people think,” said Cygal. “You’re free to come and go, you get three meals a day, you receive some English classes, and access to medical care.”

After the year, Cygal interviewed with the U.S. Embassy in Greece; he was granted political asylum and approved to immigrate to the U.S. where he settled in Dallas and worked at a local restaurant for about a year until he enlisted into the Marine Corps.

He became a warrant officer in the Army Reserve after his service with the Marines and began attending California State University Maritime Academy in Vallejo, Calif.

In 1996, Cygal graduated as a merchant marine and started working in commercial shipping.



Lt. Cmdr. Gregory Cygal, a strategic sealift officer assigned to Military Sealift Command Far East and a U.S. Navy Reserve component Sailor. (U.S. Navy photo by Grady T. Fontana)

“My first job, for about two months, was on the oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico,” said Cygal. “I applied at MSC first, but at the time there was a hiring freeze...so as soon as MSC opened up, I worked with them for about three years on various ships with MSC Pacific.”

Cygal worked for a couple commercial companies after MSC, but finally, landed a job with an MSC contractor company where he’s worked on the USNS 1st LT Baldomero Lopez ever since.

The Lopez is assigned to Maritime Prepositioning Ships Squadron Two under the operational control of MSC Far East and operates out of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. “USNS Lopez is one of the five legacy ships. We basically carry equipment for the Marine Expeditionary Brigade,” said Cygal.

Through the years, he has been involved in various contingencies supporting the Department of Defense, from Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002, humanitarian assistance after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian ocean, to various exercises around the world.

When Cygal isn’t on the Lopez, he resides in Surin, Thailand with his wife and two daughters. Fluent in Thai, Cygal has been a tremendous asset to MSC while supporting CG17. His duty as an SSO is to coordinate sealift operations as a maritime expert. He assists the expeditionary port units coordinate with the naval assets and local husbanding agents that are participating in the exercise.

Combined with active duty and reserve time, Cygal has more than 25 years of military service with 20 years as a merchant marine assigned to MSC. In 1991, he became a U.S. citizen.

In retrospect, he is glad to have made the decision that has led him to this point. “I’m happy where I am in life,” said Cygal.



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