Retroactive Comp Time for Travel Award Available to Eligible MSC CIVMARS

As reported previously on the SIU CIVMAR list serve and in East and West Coast CSU union meetings, the SIU and the Military Sealift Command (MSC) have reached agreement on the retroactive comp time for travel (CTFT) award for eligible MSC CIVMARS.

CIVMARS may request compensation time for travel when they travel to and from assignments or training outside of their normal work hours. This negotiated award covers the period of time when MSC did not provide the CTFT (though it should have).

“This wraps up a multi-year negotiation, and the SIU negotiated an excellent retroactive award for MSC CIVMARS who are entitled to this time,” SIU Assistant Vice President Chet Wheeler reported. “Using Interest Based Bargaining (IBB) negotiations and resources from the AFL-CIO helped reach this comprehensive agreement. All unlicensed CIVMARS, union and non-union members benefited from these negotiations. Depending upon a CIVMAR’s length of service with MSC, a CIVMAR may be awarded up to approximately 2.5 weeks of additional leave.”

As a result of the SIU’s strenuous and determined advocacy over several years, the agreement provides CIVMARS two (2) hours of comp time for each month a CIVMAR worked for MSC between May 1, 2008 and December 31, 2013. CIVMARS must still be working with MSC to be entitled to these hours. CIVMARS can find the hours awarded to them by checking their Leave and Earning Statement (LES)

If you are eligible for a retroactive pay award it will be noted on your LES. To ensure that CIVMARS will not forfeit any of this time, it must be used within two years of the date it was awarded. (Again, that date is on your LES.) CIVMARS should request this leave using the same procedures currently used to request other types of leave, using a Request for Leave or Approved Absence Form. You must notify your union if you are asking for “Retroactive Comp time for Travel.”

“All CIVMARS should plan carefully as to how you will use this leave,” SIU Government Services Division Representative Sandy Smolin explained. “If you have a significant amount of accumulated annual leave time, you don’t want to forfeit annual leave either. There is a way to organize and request your leave time and file the appropriate forms so that generally, you can preserve all your leave time. If you must give up your annual leave, there is a way to donate it to other CIVMARS in need.”

SIU union members can request help organizing their leave time and protecting themselves from leave forfeiture by contacting their union representatives or e-mailing siufedmariner@seafarers.org. If you have not joined the union you can get an SIU membership application (Form 187) by contacting your union representative (see box on page 3) or downloading the application from the Seafarers International Union website. From the home page, look in the SIU Membership menu and then click on Union Forms.

Most collective bargaining agreements have safety provisions and most agencies have many policies and procedures covering safe ship practices, but sometimes these written policies are not enough to ensure safety.

With the Military Sealift Command’s (MSC) focus on fleet-wide safety after a year of increased accidents and safety incidents, the SIU is asking all federal mariners from all units – SUISAN BAY-MARAD, ACOE, NOAA and MSC – to enhance their reporting efforts to the union when they believe they have encountered an unsafe working condition. In the past, federal mariners have expressed concern and fear of retaliation if they come forward with a safety issue. This should not be a concern of mariners for several reasons. First, the SIU believes most agency representatives and ship supervisors are interested in preventing accidents and promoting a safe work environment. Second, if you believe you have been retaliated against as a result of a safety report, the union will investigate the situation and will support and assist SIU bargaining-unit federal mariners in resolving the issue.

At the last MSC-Labor Management Council in Baltimore, the SIU had requested information about safety statistics in general and proposed the establishment of a joint labor-management accident prevention committee. This request was agreed to and in conjunction with it, MSC’s commanding officer, Rear Adm. T.K. Shannon reported he had directed that the agency establish a cross-functional team to examine the cause of the increased accidents with government-owned and operated vessels as well as MSC contracted vessels crewed by SIU mariners.

The MSC leadership hoped that by using a broad-based cross-functional team, delving into the root causes of these accidents and enhancing MSC’s safety culture, accidents would be reduced. The SIU wholeheartedly supports this effort. Everyone learns when there is transparency surrounding these events and an honest effort is made to learn from mistakes.

Serious accidents don’t only impact a mariner, but also his or her family. The consequences can be severe. In addition to wages being diminished for the injured worker, caregiving responsibilities can impact a spouse or partner’s ability to keep his or her job as well. If you are hurt on the job, worker’s comp is less than a regular salary. The economics of getting hurt may mean a mariner can’t keep up with his or her bills. This in turn may mean greater debt and a negative impact on your credit report. For those mariners who hold security clearances, please note that a negative credit report may create a situation where your clearance isn’t renewed or is pulled. Without a clearance, some mariners may be unable to sail.

For dues-paying federal mariners, help with transportation home from outside the U.S., seeking filing assistance with the Department of Labor’s Workers Compensation Division, assistance with leave and attendance issues, review of fitness-for-duty by MSC’s medical department, security clearance questions, and other issues involved in job injuries are all part of the help you receive by being a union member.

In apparent 2016 the SIU will begin the joint labor-management safety committee work with MSC. The SIU anticipates starting similar work at SUISAN BAY-MARAD in late spring. The SIU currently addresses any safety issues brought to its attention from NOAA and ACOE bargaining unit members as well.

All federal mariners are encouraged to contact the union with safety concerns or ideas as to how to improve safety. If you see something unsafe, don’t be scared to say something – report your concern to your union representative and appropriate shipboard department heads.

Tryed and True Mantra: Shipboard Safety Doesn’t Happen by Accident

SIU, NOAA to Begin Contract Negotiations; NOAA Union Members Urged to Submit Proposals, Suggestions

Kate Hunt, SIU East Coast Government Services Representative, reports that the SIU has sent a formal request to NOAA asking to re-open the existing collective bargaining agreement between the parties. The union is hopeful that contract negotiations will begin this spring.

“This will be a tremendous effort and I urge all NOAA mariners who are members of the SIU to take part in the preparation for this new agreement. We need members to get involved, send their suggestions for improvements and propose revisions for the negotiations,” Hunt said. Negotiations will take place in Norfolk, Virginia. If you are not an SIU member but would like to be part of the negotiation preparation, check out the information box on page 3 of this edition for instructions on how to join.

The SIU represents all NOAA employees, and we update the NOAA fleet as more information becomes available.

Register to Vote

All federal mariners are strongly encouraged to vote on Election Day (or by absentee ballot during the election period). Detailed information about voter registration is available online at: https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote

Via this website, depending on one’s state of residence, a visitor can either register directly online (23 states offer online registration) or complete the National Mail Voter Registration Form and then print, sign and mail it to the address listed under the user’s state in the individual State Instructions.

The website also includes information about voter eligibility, voting by absentee ballot, finding local election offices and much more. This election is especially important for all federal employees as Republican and Democratic candidates have very different ideas about changes to how civil service employees will be treated under a new administration.

Throughout this year the SIU will provide information about the presidential candidates’ ideas for civil service employees throughout the federal government. Check the News section of the SIU website for occasional updates.
President’s Column

Safety, Solidarity and Your Support

In February, I had a chance to greet CIVMARS working for MSC. These federal mariners attended the annual Maritime Traditions Day celebrations, held this year in San Diego, California. CIVMARS also had an opportunity to meet SIU Government Services Vice President Kennet Mangram and Assistant Vice President of Federal Employees to name a few. These unions and others all share in the work of this department, as do the numerous MTD port councils across the U.S. and Canada. Collectively, MTD-affiliated organizations represent five million union members, which gives us a greatly amplified voice on Capitol Hill and wherever else we promote the U.S. Merchant Marine.

In the course of its history the MTD has backed some of the most significant pieces of legislation in support of the maritime industry—legislation such as the Cargo Preference Act of 1954, the Merchant Marine Act of 1976 and the Maritime Transportation Act of 1996. All of which has helped keep the maritime industry strong and relevant to this day.

One of the most important issues to any working person and family is to ensure that a mariner who is engaged in seagoing or coastal vessel, dredge or launch will be safe and return home after a long voyage or a day on the deck plates. If you have been able to keep up with the Seafarers LOG over the past few years, you are aware we have devoted extensive coverage to the sinking of the El Faro. I am one of the Apache crew (see page 3) who took part in the search for the El Faro and played a significant role in finding the vessel and its crew. We can tell you that finding the El Faro and learning more about what happened meant a great deal to the families of the crew who were perish, as it did to our union members, officials and staff.

Nothing about going to sea or working on vessels—big or small—is easy. As AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka noted in his MTD speech, the 33 crew members who died in a violent storm will be remembered on the national Workers Memorial Day. CIVMARS also had an opportunity to meet with the families of the El Faro.

While acknowledging that many people deserve recognition for U.S. success in that war, McDew wrote that the favorable outcome “was due in large part to the 10,000 U.S. mariners who sped 220 shiploads of decisive U.S. combat power through-out the buildup known as Operation Desert Shield. Without those mariners and vessels, our ability to project decisive force and demonstrate our national resolve would have been a mere fraction of what was required to ensure the swift victory the world witnessed. Simply put, moving an army of decisive size and power can only be accomplished by sea.”

But the general’s op-ed wasnt merely a history lesson. In fact, one of his main points was that the U.S. may not currently be able to duplicate its seafar performance from the Persian Gulf War—a development he described as shocking and unacceptable.

“As a country, we have collectively worked to maintain a strong maritime industry that supports our needs,” McDew observed. “We have sought to delay the day when U.S. national objectives is with U.S. ships operated by U.S. mariners.”

The full article is widely available online. Editor’s note: MTD reports through three separate chains of command, one of which is USTRANSCOM for defense transportation matters. USTRANSCOM provides coordination of air, land and sea transportation for the Department of Defense.

Infamous Last Words: “We get the same wages and benefits, no way will I pay union dues!”

FEDERAL MARINER JANUARY - MARCH 2016

Gen. Darren W. McDew

Editor’s note: MTC reports through three separate chains of command, one of which is USTRANSCOM for defense transportation matters. USTRANSCOM provides coordination of air, land and sea transportation for the Department of Defense.
**CIVMAR-Crewed USNS Apache Locates El Faro Wreckage; NTSB to Launch 2nd Search for Voyage Data Recorder**

Following the tragic sinking of the M/V El Faro on Oct. 1 during Hurricane Joaquin, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) a few months later released images and footage of the ship’s final resting place. All 33 individuals aboard the El Faro perished. They included 17 U.S. mariners, 11 shipmates from the Sea- farers-affiliated American Maritime Officers, and five Polish nationals.

The 796-foot ship was located in about 15,000 feet of water on Oct. 31 near Crooked Island in the Bahamas. The salvage team, working aboard the CIVMAR-crewed USNS Apache, documented the wreckage and searched for the voyage data recorder (VDR), sometimes referred to as the black box. Because the debris field was so deep a traditional submarine could not be used. A remotely operated vehicle (ROV), the CURV-21, equipped with high-definition cameras, was sent from the Apollo. The ROV used high-definition cameras to survey the ship’s hull. Robotic arms are used to cut cables and maneuver the vehicle. Though the VDR has not been recovered, the video and photos taken by the CURV-21 illustrated the power of a hurricane. The striking images show the wheelhouse was sheared off from the rest of the wreckage.

Tom Roth-Roffy, lead investigator with the NTSB, described the Hammond. "With its raincoats and scarf, you could be two decks above: that: the lower navigation bridge and the bridge deck… just to see the violence of the sea and the winds that would have had to occur to cause that kind of an event…"

The full set of wreckage photos, as well as the video, can be found on www.seafarers.org in a Jan. 4 post in the News section.

After the search was completed, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Florida) wrote a letter to Christopher Hart, chairman of the NTSB, and urged him to consider another search for the missing VDR. "It is critical that we determine the cause of the El Faro sinking to prevent tragedies like this from happening again," wrote Nelson. "While I have faith in your ability to complete this investigation with the information you have gathered, it is important to ensure the most complete investigation possible."

The NTSB announced Feb. 11 that it would launch a second expedition to search for evidence. According to the NTSB announcement, "A key objective of the upcoming mission, which is expected to begin in late March and last about two weeks, is to locate the voyage data recorder (VDR) and to provide investigators with a more extensive and detailed survey of the shipwreck. The exact launch date will be announced later."

**Newest MSC Fleet Replenishment Oiler to be Named USNS John Lewis**

The next generation of Navy fleet replenishment oilers is a few years from starting construction, but the first vessel has been named. The future oiler, which will be crewed by SIU Government Services Division mariners working in the Military Sealift Command (MSC) fleet will be the USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205).

**The John Lewis** is named after current U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia), who was honored earlier this year at a vessel-naming ceremony conducted at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus made the announcement, and shared his thoughts on the future vessel.

"As the first of its class, the future USNS John Lewis will play a vital role in the mission of our Navy and Marine Corps while also forging a new path in fleet replenishment," said Mabus. "Naming this ship after John Lewis is a fitting tribute to a man who has, from his youth, been at the forefront of progressive social and human rights movements in the U.S., directly shaping both the past and future of our nation."

Lewis is a civil rights movement icon who participated in the “Freedom Rides” of 1961. He was a keynote speaker at the March on Washington in 1963, and led 600 protesters across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Lewis was elected as U.S. representative of Georgia’s Fifth Congressional District in 1986, and has dedicated his life to protecting human rights.

**Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus (left) greets Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia) before the ceremony for the future fleet replenishment olier USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205). (U.S. Navy photo)**

**Submissions Wanted**

Attention all ACOE, NOAA, SBRF-MARAD and MSC federal mariners: Your work on behalf of our government is vital. Your union appreciates all you do in your workplace and on behalf of our nation.

We want your voices to be heard! We want to make sure we are writing about issues and topics that are of importance to all our Government Services units. Please send your comments, pictures and requests for coverage to siufedmariner@seafarers.org

We will do our best to print your photos and publish articles based on your requests.

**How to Become an SIU Member**

Joining the SIU is easy. The union’s website – www.seafarers.org – includes printable PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize payroll deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are posted at: www.seafarers.org/memberbenefits/civmar.asp

Forms are also available under “union forms” in the SIU membership tab.

**Contact Information**

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**Look for more information about this benefit and how to increase it during the upcoming open season in the next issue of The Federal Mariner. If you have immediate questions about the FEGLI program or the status of your current life insurance policy with FEGLI you can call your Human Resources office or visit the OPM website: www.opm.gov**
This year’s Maritime Trades Department (MTD) executive board meeting took place in San Diego. Some 250 attendees representing the SIU, the U.S. Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC), the U.S. National Defense Transportation Agency (NDTA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and many other maritime unions were represented.

The two-day gathering (Feb. 18-19) was packed with guest speakers and other stakeholders who came to address many different union representatives, vessel operators and guests. The MTD, a constitutional department of the AFL-CIO, includes 21 union affiliates representing a combined membership of more than five million.

Kicking off the second day of the meetings, pension chair Bill Fischer, the council’s executive director, addressed the Maritime Trades Department (MTD) executive board Feb. 19 in San Diego. The MTD is a constitutional department of the AFL-CIO, and its 21 affiliates (including the SIU) represent approximately five million union members. SIU President Michael Sacco also serves as MTD president.

Fischer, a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran, fired up the crowd and drew several standing ovations. Fischer, a proud military Veteran in the audience of 200 or so to then, requested a show of hands from everyone whose family included a veteran. The hands immediately raised. “Nearly everyone at the meeting either had worn the uniform or had a family member who served.”

“The working class and the veteran class are one,” Fischer stated. “When you’re talking to an audience of people who work, you’re talking to an audience of people who served. When you see folks fighting for and defending our rights on the job here at home, very often they have a background of military service.”

And right now, brothers and sisters, there’s nothing more important than standing together and fighting like hell for our members and workers out there every single day, just like our military brothers who served.

“Many of the SIU members are pictured above, with SIU officials. SIU CIVMARS Attend Maritime Trades Department Executive Board Meeting.