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Maritime Unions, MSC Conduct Annual Labor-Management Forum in Norfolk

SIU President Sacco Elaborates On Value of CIVMAR Training

This year's annual Military Sealift Command (MSC) labor-management forum took place at the Norfolk (Virginia) Naval Base in the historic Philadelphia House. The gathering was much smaller in size than previous meetings, allowing for a wide-ranging, dynamic exchange of ideas.

This was the first labor-management forum conducted since Rear Adm. Dee Mewbourne became the commanding officer of MSC. Forum council members attending the meeting included Admiral Mewbourne, several MSC SES representatives, and executive officials of the Seafarers International Union (SIU); Masters, Mates and Pilots (MM&P); and the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA).

SIU President Michael Sacco outlined the union's agenda for unlicensed CIVMARS. He noted, "The SIU's highest priorities involve overall shipboard safety and training. These two areas are closely linked. Without highly skilled CIVMARS working in safe environments, MSC cannot effectively carry out its mission. Training is always important and in our view, it's especially important right now. MSC's fleet is expanding as a growing number of experienced CIVMARS are reaching retirement age. Younger, enthusiastic employees with less seagoing experience are coming aboard. These employees require training to ensure they remain safe in their current roles. We want to make sure that everyone in the fleet gets the training and support they need to fulfill their duties, advance their careers and contribute to the mission safely and effectively."

President Sacco went on to urge that MSC ensure there is a robust training system in place along with enough funding available to provide training to as many CIVMARS as possible. He encouraged Admiral Mewbourne to stress the importance of training to all of MSC's shore-side staff, especially the marine placement specialists and the training department representatives. He also advocated that CIVMARS be allowed every opportunity to get appropriate training to remain safe in the fleet as well as to advance their careers.

Other topics discussed during the meeting concerned liberty and relief issues. Specific problems were outlined and discussed to provide Admiral Mewbourne with real-time, descriptive examples about how the problems in these areas are adversely impacting CIVMARS. SIU representatives explained how these liberty and leave is-



Pictured from left to right are Jack Taylor, Anthony Verducci and Michael Morris of MSC, SIU President Michael Sacco, MSC Commander Rear Adm. Dee Mewbourne, MEBA President Marshall Ainley, MM&P President Capt. Don Marcus and Chris Thayer of MSC.

"The SIU's highest priorities involve overall shipboard safety and training. These two areas are closely linked. Without highly skilled CIVMARS working in safe environments, MSC cannot effectively carry out its mission. . ." - Michael Sacco, president, Seafarers International Union

sues negatively impact quality of life for MSC CIVMARS and are prompting CIVMARS to consider leaving their sailing career with MSC. The SIU also requested that the union and the agency work together to develop ways to address several issues which arise when a CIVMAR is disciplined. First, there

appears to be a lack of clarity in some cases when MSC is communicating with CIVMARS about the nature of a disciplinary action. Also discussed was the lengthy time it is taking MSC to process some disciplinary actions. The union's goal is to form a joint labor-management work group to address

these issues. As SIU representatives explained during the meeting, when a CIVMAR waits lengthy periods of time for disciplinary issues to be resolved, this situation not only impacts the mariner's ability to earn a better wage, but also affects the ship's force and delays relief for others throughout the fleet.

In addition to the issues formerly noted, other topics discussed were the establishment of an MSC Suicide Prevention Council, and ideas to advance licensed officers' leadership skills, including the development of a cross-functional leadership team.

President's Column

Proud to Promote SIU Members

This quarter has been very active for me and the SIU representatives working on behalf of federal mariners who work for NOAA, the Army Corp, the SUI SUN Bay Reserve Fleet and the U.S. Military Sealift Command. We've attended meetings and events at different agencies. The SIU also represented you at the annual maritime congressional "Sail-In" on Capitol Hill. I traveled to Norfolk, Virginia, for the annual MSC-Labor Forum. This quarter my travels started in Texas at the winter meetings of the AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department.



Michael Sacco

Our time in Norfolk at the labor-management forum allowed me, SIU Government Services Division Vice President Kermet Mangram and Vice President of Contracts and Contract Enforcement George Tricker to spend time with MSC's Commander, Rear Adm.

Dee Mewbourne. The story on the front page of this edition gives greater details about the meeting and how it unfolded. Admiral Mewbourne's presentation about sailing in more threatening maritime environments and what is needed to make sure CIVMARs are prepared for these times was both interesting and thought provoking.

I also had the honor of presenting remarks for an event at the Department of Transportation (DOT). Mariners who keep watch over the vessels at the SUI SUN Bay Reserve Fleet in California work for the Maritime Administration, an agency within the DOT. This dual-purpose event saluted the parent organization on its 50th anniversary and also, more importantly, served as a "welcome home" to DOT Secretary Elaine Chao, a longtime friend of our organization. Secretary Chao is a great advocate of the U.S. Merchant Marine, and we're already working together to help ensure the survival and revitalization of our industry.

As many unlicensed federal mariners are already aware, you are represented by the Seafarers International Union and its affiliated entities. This puts you in a large family of workers and it also means you are protected by organizational alliances which look out for your interests.

One of these organizations is the Maritime Trades Department, mentioned above. The MTD is a constitutionally mandated department of the AFL-CIO, and I also serve as its president. We are one of the MTD's 22 affiliates, which collectively represent more than five million members. When the SIU has a key issue that affects the livelihoods of Seafarers, we can count on the MTD to promote our interests. And I can say from experience, when you knock on a door as a representative of an organization with more than five million members, the door opens.

Additionally, grassroots activism remains vitally important for us, and on that note, be sure to read about the Sail-In. While the SIU works every day to make sure your legislative interests are protected on Capitol Hill, we use the annual Sail-In to show our solidarity throughout the industry, to educate and advocate by meeting with as many senators and congressman as possible during this day-long event.

Every time we meet with people who are responsible for making the laws which impact you, we stress the important role you play in delivering materiel and fuel and whatever else is needed to our war fighters, supporting the scientists who work to safeguard our environment, protecting our reserve fleet and keeping our waters safe and navigable. Your role in the federal government maritime industry and your workplace contributions are vital to our country's security and success. Your union understands the importance of this work and appreciates what you do each day.

SIU Directory

Michael Sacco, *President*

Augustin Tellez, *Executive Vice President*

David Heindel, *Secretary-Treasurer*

George Tricker, *Vice President Contracts*

Kermet Mangram,
Vice President Government Services

Chester Wheeler,
Asst. Vice President Government Services



Pictured from left to right are John Jaskot of Jones Walker, two staff members from office of Sen. Mike Rounds (R-South Dakota), John Abrams of APL, and SIU VP Government Services Kermet Mangram.

Union, Industry Reps Team Up to Boost U.S. Mariners, American Maritime Industry

Whether meeting with freshmen legislators or longtime friends of the industry, participants in the eighth annual Maritime Congressional Sail-In brought a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to Capitol Hill on March 1. The purpose of the event is to advocate for federal mariners and private-sector seafarers and the maritime industry in general.

The SIU turned out in force for the critical grassroots activity, which features teams of maritime industry representatives gathering throughout the day with House and Senate members and their respective staffs. One of the primary goals of these meetings was to make congressional representatives aware of the contribution of both the federal and private-sector maritime industry fleets to our nation's economic and national security. The teams provided a solid rationale for supporting U.S. crews, the Jones Act, the U.S. Maritime Security Program (MSP), cargo preference laws, and American shipbuilding. SIU participants included

Executive Vice President Augie Tellez; Vice President Government Services Kermet Mangram; Vice President Lakes and Inland Waters Tom Orzechowski; Vice President West Coast Nick Marone; Vice President Atlantic Coast Joseph Soresi; Legislative Director Brian Schoeneman; and Port Agents Joe Baselice, Elizabeth Brown, Mark von Siegel and Pat Vandegrift.

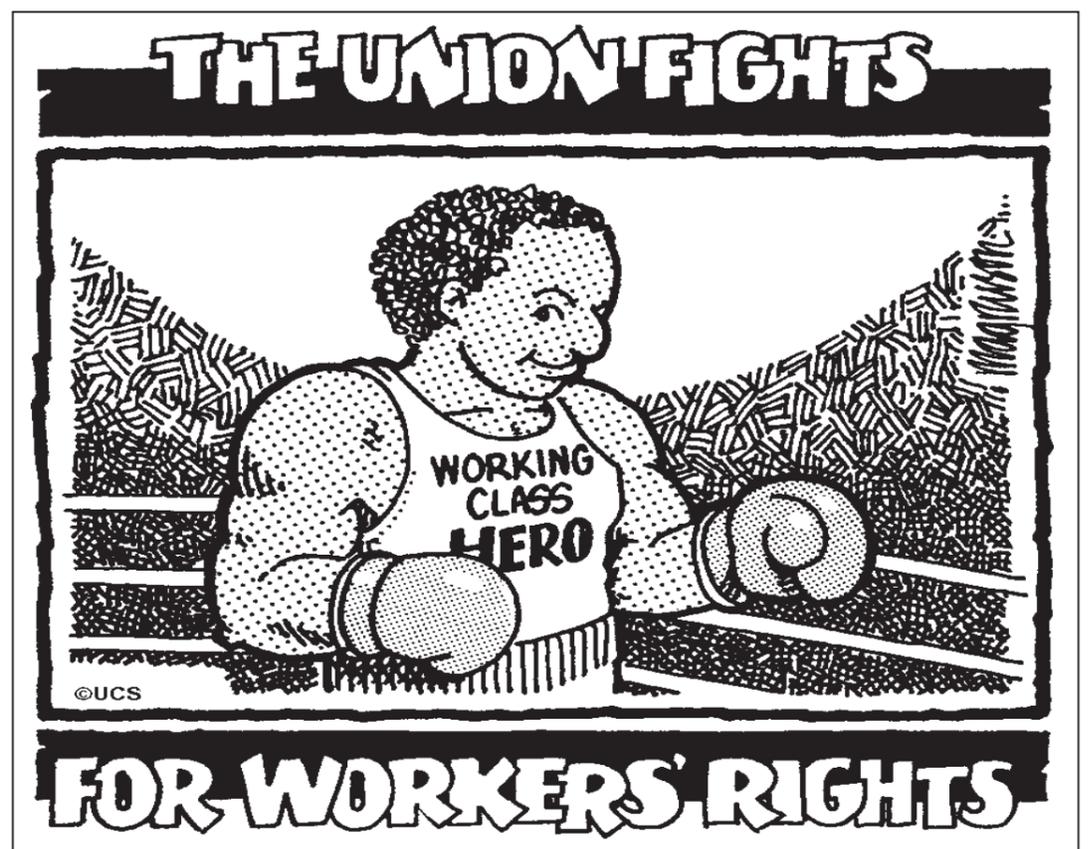
Altogether, there were 92 Sail-In participants, including representatives from every major seafaring union; every USA Maritime member company and association; a number of Jones Act companies and organizations; three state maritime academies; the Navy League of the United States; the AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department; and the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department.

Those individuals were divided into 23 groups that took part in 131 meetings in the nation's capital. There were 102 meetings in the House and 29 in the Senate. Significantly, 24 of the meetings

were with House freshmen, while three of the Senate gatherings also were with newly elected legislators.

As usual, much of the effort was directed to members of key committees that affect the maritime industry. These representatives are responsible for introducing and voting on legislation which impacts U.S. crews and the maritime industry. For instance, meetings took place with seven of the 11 members of the House Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee or their staff, and with nine of the 17 members on the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee or with staff.

Similarly, meetings took place with a majority of legislators or staff from the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, the Senate Seapower Subcommittee, the House Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, and the Senate Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Subcommittee.



Longtime NOAA Mariner Caps Career with Unprecedented Voyage

For at least one of the crew members of the *Ronald H. Brown*, which completed a nearly three and one-half year voyage on March 27, 2017, the trip was more than a historic milestone. For Bosun **Bruce Cowden**, the unprecedented journey marked his final trip on the high seas as an active member of the SIU. He will retire effective June 23 following 25 years of dedicated service.

A native of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, Cowden donned the SIU colors in 1989. "I joined the SIU roughly one year after I started working for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration," said Cowden, who is married and the father of three.

Interestingly, the bosun's career ended aboard the same platform on which he had spent the bulk of his life as a professional mariner. "I have been working for NOAA for quite a few years," Cowden said. "Before this voyage, I already had sailed aboard the *Ron Brown* for 17 years. I also had worked four years aboard the NOAA Ship *Ferrel* and another six on the *Malcolm Baldrige*."

Prior to launching his career as a civilian mariner at NOAA, Cowden served a six-year stint in the U.S. Navy where he achieved the rank of Bosun Mate Second Class. "My longest period at sea prior to sailing on the *Brown* during the three and one-half year mission took place while I was in the U.S. Navy," he said. "I was gone for 150 days during one stretch back in the 70s."

The sea, it seems, is just as much a part of Cowden's essence as any other characteristic that distinctively defines him. "My first transatlantic voyage was back in 1966 when I was about 12 years old," he said. "My dad took us across the Atlantic aboard the old *Queen Elizabeth*. I think that trip was what really got me started with my love affair with the sea.

"I have always been drawn to the sea, I suppose," he continued. "I started working sailboats off the coast of South Carolina when I was 17. I later joined the Navy and spent six years there. I also spent a couple of years working at shipyards.

"I then joined NOAA, got my AB (ticket) and the rest is history. That's all I've done since," Cowden said. "My family is of Norwegian ancestry who hail from New York and New Jersey," he continued. "I have a number of uncles and other relatives who were sea captains . . . so I guess you could say that the sea is in our blood. We simply love it."

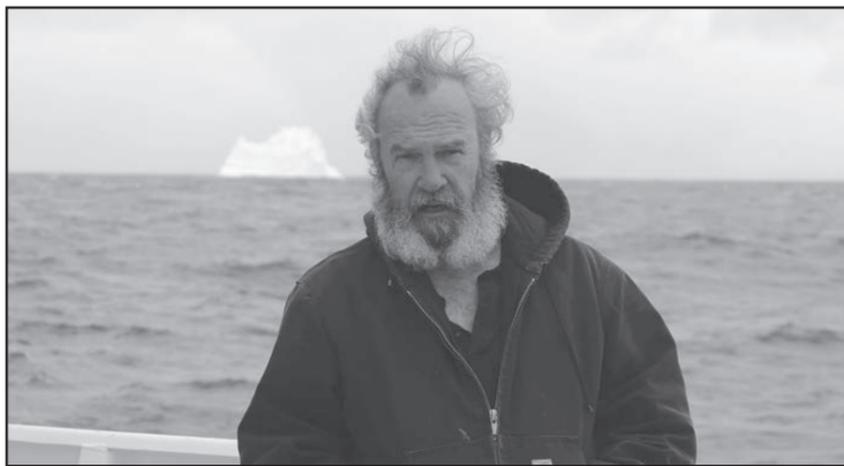
Reflecting on the industry currently as opposed to how it was during his early days as a mariner, Cowden said a great deal has changed. "The industry now is tremendously different from what it was when I first started sailing," he said. "Mariners now have so much more technology available to them in all aspects of their jobs than we did. Suffice it to just say that we had the sextant, they now have GPS. That's how much it's changed.

"Besides technology, the other thing that really comes to mind is credentials," he said. "There are so many different things involved in getting a [document] now. . . . It is so much harder. My original [document] was not that hard to get and there was no expiration date on it.

"And that's one reason I am retiring," Cowden continued. "I don't want to have to deal with the Coast Guard anymore. The credentialing process is now way too difficult and far too expensive."

However, "despite all of these changes, I'd do it again (choose being a mariner for a career) in a heartbeat," he said. "I've lived a richer life because of the sea and I have traveled all over the world. There are not too many places I have not been. Sure, there are hardships involved, but I learned to deal with them over the years. The thing I'll miss most is the adventure of travel and experiencing other cultures."

For anyone weighing the pros and cons of becoming a mariner, Cowden said he'd advise them that it's not a life for everybody. "A lot of people should not even think doing it," he said, "but for those who are adventure-minded and want to see the world, it's probably the best way to travel. Why pay to go to



Bosun Bruce Cowden is pictured aboard the *Brown* in the frigid waters of the arctic. Note the iceberg in the background.

those places when you can get someone to pay you to take them there?"

Reflecting on the SIU and the role it has played in his life over the years, Cowden said: "I never had to use the union very much. I never had any issues with jobs, pay and so on during my career.

Still it was always reassuring just knowing I belonged to the SIU and that they (union officials, reps, rank-and-file brothers and sisters) were there to help you in case I needed them," he said. "I know that they work hard looking out for the membership, negotiating good contracts and landing good jobs for us.

"And that's what I pass on to the people I work with who are not SIU members," he continued. "I always tell them that what they would pay in dues for being members pales in comparison to what they'd receive in terms of support if they ever had any problems concerning jobs, wages, grievances and so on."

The bosun said that currently, he had no firm future plans. "I might do a little contract

work for science since the majority of my career was spent in the scientific arena and most of my skills entail the deployment and recovery of scientific equipment," he said. "Or I may do nothing at all.

"Most likely though, I may start remodeling houses or something along that line. I've got to find something to keep me busy though; I can't simply sit still and watch TV all day," he concluded.

SIU President Michael Sacco marked this milestone with the following statement: "The SIU applauds and appreciates Bosun Cowden's extraordinary government-vessel seagoing career and his support of the SIU. Mr. Cowden's experience and dedication to NOAA and the crew members he has served with have helped the agency and his shipmates meet their mission goals safely and successfully. All of the SIU wishes Bosun Cowden fair winds and following seas as he leaves his seagoing life for new adventures."

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.

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CIVMAR Note

During the last 12 months, SIU representatives have been advised that some CIVMARS who have been assigned to a higher position aboard vessels (shipboard promotions) have had problems with their wages when the promotions were reviewed at a later date. Grievances were filed on behalf of three CIVMARS who were paid at a higher wage after performing assigned work only to find that some of their wages were clawed back by DFAS.

MSC maintained that although the work was performed, the promoted CIVMARS were not qualified to take the position even though they were assigned by shipboard supervisors. The SIU took the grievances through the appropriate steps of the collective bargaining agreement and spent many hours advocating for these employees. After many months and several productive discussions with MSC representatives, the wages were eventually returned to the mariners.

Unlicensed CIVMARS promoted aboard a vessel should make sure to call or write to Chet Wheeler, Assistant Vice President for Government Services, 510-444-2360 ext. 17 or cwheeler@seafarers.org to receive information to ensure your work rights and wages will be protected in this situation.

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The NOAA Ship *Ronald H. Brown* sails into Charleston, South Carolina March 25, 2017 following its longest-ever deployment. (Photo by AB Tracy Sorgenfrei, NOAA)

SIU Mariners Crew Vessel During Historic Voyage

Federal mariners working in the SIU's Government Services Division were aboard a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) ship that recently made history by becoming the longest-ever deployed NOAA vessel.

The NOAA ship *Ronald H. Brown* returned to its home port in Charleston, South Carolina, March 27 following 1,347 days. During this period, the 275-foot vessel—which departed Charleston July 18, 2013—traveled nearly 130,000 miles while conducting scientific research and servicing buoys that collect a wide variety of environmental data. At various points in its record voyage, according to several sources, the *Brown's* crew and as many as 30 research scientists, among other tasks:

- Recovered, serviced and deployed more than 80 buoys that monitor ocean and weather conditions in the tropical ocean, including ones that recorded El Niño;

- Studied ocean acidification, intense moisture-bearing winter storms known as “atmospheric rivers” off the U.S. West Coast, and took part in an unprecedented multi-agency rapid response mission to observe the 2015-2016 El Niño;

- Took more than 1,600 water measurements in the Atlantic Ocean, from Iceland to Antarctica, and in the Pacific Ocean, from Alaska to Antarctica, to better understand the ocean's physical properties and long-term changes in those properties;

- Surveyed 353,975 square miles of sea floor, including a project near Kingman Reef and Palmyra Atoll in the Pacific, to map the U.S. Extended Continental Shelf; and

- Conducted ecological assessments of bays on the north slope of Alaska, and fisheries and oceanographic studies off the Arctic coast of Alaska.

“My congratulations and thanks to the officers and crew of NOAA Ship

Ronald H. Brown for their hard work, dedication and service during this extended and unprecedented deployment,” said Rear Adm. David Score, director of NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations, upon the vessel's return to its homeport. “Working from ocean to ocean and from pole to pole, the ship and her crew have expanded our understanding of some of nature's most powerful forces.”

Seafarers aboard the vessel during its unparalleled voyage included: Bosun **Bruce Cowden**, ABs **Reginald Williams**, **Michael Lastinger**, **Daniel Hauerland**, **Nickolas Baker** and **Tracey Davis**, 2nd Cook **Emir Porter** and GVA **Richard Jackson**.

“It's really good to be home,” said Bosun Cowden, the highest-rated SIU mariner in the *Brown's* unlicensed crew during the unequal voyage. “That was a long time at sea.

“We did go into various ports during the voyage,” he continued. “Our legs at sea averaged from 35 to 40 days before

making port, but we did not return to our home port for the entire time.” Prior to this trip, Cowden said the longest period that he'd spent at sea was 150 days. “That happened back in the 70s while I was in the Navy,” he recalled.

So, what can one say of spending three and one-half years on the high seas? “It was a good voyage,” shared Cowden. “I really can't think of any real problems that I or members of the crew ever encountered during the entire time. Aside from being away from home for so long, which some dealt with better than others, the most difficult part of the trip was having to work during bad weather. And that did not happen very often – for the most part the weather was very good.

“We spent time in a lot of very good ports including Iceland, Maderia, Natal Brazil, Antarctica, Straits of Megellan, Tahiti, and Easter Island to name a few,” he said. “We were stuck in Barbados for two weeks because of a government shutdown.” (On Oct. 1, 2013, the U.S. government shut down for 16 days after Congress was unable to agree on a budget for the new fiscal year.)

Cowden said the crew enjoyed a good working relationship with the officers as well as the research scientists aboard the vessel. “They never voiced any complaints regarding the quantity or quality of our work,” he said. “The crew's training was very sufficient to handle the job at hand and we took advantage of every opportunity to hone everyone's skills, especially when we were in ports. We did firefighting training drills while in Seattle. ... We drilled every week.

Overall, the entire experience was a positive one for all involved,” Cowden concluded. “They (officers and research scientists) really took care of us and we did the same for them. It was a totally successful team effort.”

Editor's Note: Longtime *Ronald H. Brown* Chief Bosun Bruce Cowden called an end to his career following the vessel's historic voyage. See story on Page 3.



Pictured in the photo above (from left to right) are: AB Tracy Davis, GVA Sean O Connell, AB Mary Beth Phillis, AB Michael Lastinger, BGL Reggie Williams, AB Daniel Hauerland, Chief Bosun Bruce Cowden and three NOAA scientists.