The U.S. Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC) has a new commanding officer.

Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer relieved Rear Adm. Dee Mewbourne as MSC commander during a June 28 ceremony aboard the SIU CIVMAR-crewed expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Burlington at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt and Representative Sam Spain attended the ceremony. They noted that Mewbourne, during his official remarks, thanked SIU President Michael Sacco, Executive Vice President Augie Tellez and Hunt for their work in helping provide crews for MSC ships while strengthening the overall U.S. Merchant Marine and reinforcing its readiness to answer the call.

Adm. Christopher W. Grady, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, and Lt. Gen. John J. Broadmeadow, deputy commander, U.S. Transportation Command, were the guest speakers.

Mewbourne, a native of Ormond Beach, Florida, assumed command of MSC Aug. 25, 2016, overseeing the on-time logistics, strategic sealift and specialized missions that MSC conducts around the world, many of them utilizing SIU-crewed vessels.

The agency noted, “During his tenure, Mewbourne, and his staff devoted significant effort in developing and executing a plan to adapt to the changing operational environment and keep MSC ahead of competitors and potential adversaries.”

A graduate of the Colorado State University and native of Alexandria, Virginia, Wettlaufer assumed command of MSC following his latest tour of duty as the commander of Carrier Strike Group 3 in Bremerton, Washington.

“I am truly humbled to be here and to join this fantastic team,” said Wettlaufer. “Just coming off a dynamic, around-the-world (U.S. Navy) strike group deployment, my team was a prodigious consumer and demanding customer of logistics systems around the globe. As such, I understand and appreciate the challenges which MSC overcomes every day in order to provide the systems and synchronize global activities needed to deliver, distribute and sustain our warfighters forward.”

Wettlaufer previously commanded the Dambusters of Strike Fighter Squadron 195, USS Denver and USS John C. Stennis.

According to MSC, “Wettlaufer’s completed sea assignments include multiple deployments to the Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf with Attack Squadron 85 and Carrier Air Wing 1 flying the A-6 Intruder from the USS America including Operation Desert Storm. Forward-deployed from Japan aboard USS Independence and USS Kitty Hawk as a Dambuster department head and CVW-5 operations officer, he flew the FA-18C Hornet and he deployed to the Pacific as executive officer aboard USS John C. Stennis.”

Mewbourne now will serve as deputy commander of the U.S. Transportation Command.

USNS Puerto Rico Undergoes Successful Integrated Sea Trials

A civilian-crewed U.S. military support ship recently took a big step towards delivery.

The USNS Puerto Rico – which will be crewed by CIVMARS from the SIU Government Services Division – successfully completed the first integrated sea trials for an expeditionary fast transport (EPT) ship Aug. 22. The vessel returned to the Austal USA shipyard in Mobile, Alabama, following two days underway in the Gulf of Mexico.

Integrated trials combine builder’s and acceptance trials, allowing for the shipyard to demonstrate to the Navy’s Board of Inspection and Survey the operational capability and mission readiness of all the ship’s systems during a single underway period. During trials, the shipbuilder conducted comprehensive tests to demonstrate the performance of the Puerto Rico’s major systems.

“The EPT program continues to be an example of stable and successful serial ship production,” said Capt. Scott Searles, Navy Strategic and Theater Sealift program manager, Program Executive Office Ships. “I look forward to seeing EPT 11 deliver in the fall and expand the operational flexibility available to our combatant commanders.”

SIU CIVMARS already sail aboard the previously launched EPTs. The Navy describes the ships as “non-combatant vessels designed to operate in shallow-draft ports and waterways, increasing operational flexibility for a wide range of activities including maneuver and sustainment, relief operations in small or damaged ports, flexible logistics support, or as the key enabler for rapid transport. The ships are capable of interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities, as well as on/off-loading vehicles such as a fully combat-loaded Abrams Main Battle Tank.”

EPTs support a variety of missions including overseas contingency operations, conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, supporting special operations forces, and supporting emerging joint sea-basing concepts.

In addition to the Puerto Rico, Austal USA is also currently in production on the future USNS Newport, and is under contract to build the future USNS Apalachee and a sister ship that hasn’t been named.
Trumka: Workers Quiz Candidates On Wages, Trade Pacts, U.S. Jobs

Tragedy struck twice earlier this year, as two civil-mariners died in accidents aboard different vessels. According to published reports, AB Brian Francis Crowe, 56, in the Arabian Sea died due to injuries sustained in a “workplace mishap” on the CSSS Cesar Chavez in the Arabian Sea. A month later, in late June, boatswain’s mate Martin Anthony, 51, died after falling 25 feet while doing maintenance aloft aboard the USNS William McCall. The vessel is a replenishment oiler stationed in South Carolina.

The SIU’s Seafarer’s Civilian Life Insurance Command is investigating both fatalities.

In a message to the fleet, SIU Vice President Government Services Kate Hunt said, “We are working with the agency to examine the circumstances.” SIU members often interact with MSC to improve shipboard safety, even while understanding that our industry carries some inherent dangers. Our position which we take most strongly is to help make shipboard life as safe as possible. For now, on behalf of the Seaferers International Union’s Government Services Division, I wanted you to be aware of these tragedies. It goes without saying that our thoughts and prayers go out to the families and friends of both Brian and Martin.

Workers are “not interested in a sliver of change or gestures” from politicians, but demand massive shifts to an economy that works for them rather than heavily benefiting the extremely wealthy. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka recently said. And, primed by their unions, they’re already demanding and getting that commitment from presidential candidates on the campaign trail, he added.

Trumka, a longtime friend of the SIU, made those remarks and many others during an annual Labor Day press breakfast hosted by The Christian Science Monitor. He cited several important steps that would help ensure an economy that works for all, including passage of the Protect the Right to Organize (Pro) Act, strong worker safeguards in the U.S. and massive changes in labor laws (and enforcement) in Mexico before any ratification of an updated NAFTA. (The pact, designed to replace the U.S. labor law, now has more than 200 U.S. House co-sponsors and 49 Senate cosponsors.)

Additionally, Trumka noted that unions’ popularity, at least as measured by an annual Gallup Poll, recently reached a record 64% approval. But that hasn’t translated, yet, into increasing union numbers, due to the loopholes and flaws of the right-to-work laws that have spread across the country.

He sees change coming, though, citing new state-level legislation that will open the way to organizing significant numbers of workers. Trumka also expressed optimism stemming from public-sector union membership gains that he reported at last year’s Summer Labor Council, which had decided to view the movement as “a positive but potentially devastating blow to organized labor.

However, the federation president noted, the disconnect between union popularity and results has led the AFL-CIO, in its preparations for the 2020 presidential campaign, to undertake a massive education effort among likely voters to remind them of the benefits of union membership. The campaign, to undertake a massive education effort among likely voters to remind them of the benefits of union membership.

Those issues involve kitchen-table issues, such as years of stagnant wages, pensions which crashed in the Great Recession, rising corporate shifting of health care spending from firms to workers, and the right to organize free of corporate interference and repression. The kitchen-table questions also include so-called “free trade” acts and business’s corresponding massive export of U.S. jobs to Mexico.

These issues and others have come up on the campaign trail as unionists have quizzed some of the hopefuls. The results, Trumka said, have been gratifying.

“We’re excited that all the candidates are talking about workers’ rights and unions, and that’s a big plus,” Trumka said when asked to rank top five contenders: former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders (Ind-Vermont), Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts), and Kamala Harris (D-California), and South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Trumka declined to rank them. “Any (AFL-CIO) endorsement will come from the bottom up – from our members,” he said. “We’ll communicate through our executive council,” he replied. “And it’ll be 76% of the vote there.”

“They’re asking candidates about their positions on different issues that are important to us, and forcing the candidates to think about it,” Trumka said of union members. “And if they have a position, they’ll be asked if they think it true and if they think it’s the right position. That’s where we’ve gone large in 2018. And we will do that again.

And in that regard, all the current hopefuls differ from 2016 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, whom most unions supported early in her contest with Sanders. She put kitchen table issues second, behind criticizing Donald Trump.

He added that the possibility of winning workers’ votes will increase if candidates spend more time talking about “changing the rules – and it’s not just trade, it’s tax laws, it’s regulations, it’s health and safety, it’s education, it’s health care, it’s pensions... It’s bankruptcy laws that have stripped workers of their pensions over the years.”

On other issues, Trumka reiterated labor’s opposition to the nomination of Eugene Scalia, a pro-management attorney, to the nomination of Eugene Scalia, a pro-management attorney, to be the next Labor Secretary. Trump formally sent Scalia’s name to the Senate on August 26. A confirmation hearing was scheduled for mid-September.

Trumka noted that Scalia’s desire to “pimp the record as bad.” Trumka stated. “It’s only gotten worse. His views are dangerously outside the mainstream.

Seafarers International Union Notice to All Unlicensed Crew Members

Know Your Rights – The Weingarten Decision

In a court case known as NLRB v. WEINGARTEN, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that you have the right to have your union representative present at any meeting with a supervisor, if you reasonably believe that the meeting may lead to disciplinary action.

You have the right to request a union representative (on a ship where there is no union delegate, just ask for another SIU member to be present). You must make the request! Management has no obligation to inform you of this right.

Management has the choice to grant the request, discontinue the interview, or offer the employee the choice to continue without a representative, or have no interview at all.

You have the right to confer with your representative privately, prior to answering any questions, and to receive advice and counsel during the interview.

Notice: Free Insurance Coverage for Members

All Unlicensed Personnel: As of October 1, 2019, the Seafarers International Union will be providing Life Insurance coverage to all SIU members through a policy contracted with the Prudential Insurance Company. There is no cost to you for this coverage! If you are an SIU member, please contact your local Representative or the SIU Membership Department to receive a beneficiary designation form. The SIU is pleased to provide this benefit to our members to protect them and their families. Stay safe out there!

West Coast Representative: Jesse Ruth (jruth@seafarers.org)
East Coast Representative: Sam Spain (spain@seafarers.org)
SIU Membership Department: Diana Marrone (dmarrone@seafarers.org)
A new report from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) thoroughly examines the economic plight of American workers. “This report makes clear that despite an unemployment rate below 4%, wage growth continues to elude the vast majority of working families,” noted EPI Vice President John Schirholtz. “This is a result of a decades-long attack on labor unions, and trickle-down policies that put corporate profits and CEO pay ahead of the rights and interests of working people.”

Working for America’s Working Families? EPI Asks (and Answers): How is Economy Rable nonunion employers, the EPI found. plans and to contribute more toward those plans than company standards. They are also more likely to have paid vacation and sick leave, more input into how pensions are funded, and to have an active voice in union elections. Union workers also are more likely to have employer-funded health insurance and to be protected by their unions from repercussions for reporting safety issues, they are more likely to report safety concerns, and shrinking the racial wage gap.

“Fierce corporate opposition has suppressed workers’ freedom to form unions and bargain collectively. Intense and aggressive anti-union campaigns – once confined to the most union-intensive sectors of the economy, for example, when workers seek to organize, for their employer’s benefit. Union activists’ hours or pay, or report workers to immigration enforcement authorities if employees unionize. More than one in seven union organizers and activists are illegally fired while trying to organize unions at their place of work.”

Yet, despite such conduct, policymakers “have egregiously failed to update labor laws to rebalance the system,” she said. “In fact, in many cases policy is moving backward. 27 states have passed so-called right-to-work laws, which are intended to undermine union finances by making it illegal for unions to require nonunion members of a collective bargaining unit (who don’t pay union dues) to pay ‘fair share fees’ – fees that cover only the basic costs of representing employees in the workplace. And the Supreme Court decision in Janus v. AFSCME – a case financed by a small group of foundations with ties to the largest and most powerful corporate lobbies – striking the law of all public-sector unions. Conclusion: We need to protect workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively.”

How to Become an SIU Member
Joining the SIU is easy and an important step in protecting your workplace rights. The union’s website – www.seafarers.org – includes printables PDF versions of forms that mariners may use to request and authorize deductions for labor organization dues. The forms are available at: https://www.seafarers.org/news/labor-maritime-news/union-forms/ Forms are also available under “SIU Forms” in the ABOUT tab.

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Everyday Savings
Save every day with union member-only discounts on everything from fashion and beauty to electronics and everyday household items. And whether it’s date night or a fun family night out, enjoy delicious, union family discounts at select restaurants. Find out more about this and other great Union Plus programs by visiting unionplus.org.

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At Sea and Ashore with the SIU

ABOARD USNS GUADALUPE – Pictured on the West Coast are (from left) Sharon Hill, SIU Representative Jesse Ruth and Loretta James. The members volunteered to serve on a shipboard council aimed at facilitating operations.

CREATIVE COVERS – AB Romonia Kesler (above) displays some of her handiwork, which also includes covers for bridge wing chairs, forklifts and other reels. Visit the SIU Facebook page (@SeafarersInternational) to see additional photos, including NFL-themed covers created by Kesler.

ABOARD JOSHUA HUMPHREYS – Members flank SIU VP Government Services Kate Hurt on the fleet replenishment oiler in Norfolk, Virginia.

COMMENTARY – SIU Port Agent Georg Kenny (left) and SIU Government Services Division Representative Sam Spain (right) welcome U.S. Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Virginia) to a Hampton Roads Port Council meeting earlier this year in Norfolk, Virginia. They and other meeting attendees discussed various maritime issues. Rep. Luria reiterated her strong backing of the U.S. Merchant Marine.