



THE WAVE

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U.S.C.G. NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER NEWSLETTER

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Captain's Log

President Bush proclaimed May 22, 2008 as National Maritime Day, continuing a resolution approved by Congress in 1933. In his proclamation President Bush called on citizens to honor the service of merchant mariners by displaying flags in their communities. He also requested that all ships sailing under the American flag dress ship. To help honor the mariner on this day, we sent the President's Proclamation, along with a special letter to all mariners whose credential was issued May 22.

National Maritime Day is a time to honor the individual mariner and the entire maritime industry for the benefits provided to the American public. "As a maritime nation, we rely upon our maritime transportation system and its professional mariners for the safety, security, and prosperity of all Americans," said Admiral Thad Allen, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard.

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President Bush Issues National Maritime Day Proclamation

On National Maritime Day, America honors our highly skilled mariners who sail the high seas, support those on the front lines of the war on terror, and promote commerce around the world.

Since 1775, the United States Merchant Marine has served our country, helping America become a great maritime power. During the Second World War, courageous mariners were among those who suffered greatly -- hundreds of ships were lost to enemy action, and many mariners made the ultimate sacrifice. We pay tribute to these heroes who answered the call to serve when our nation needed them most. Today, our merchant mariners continue to protect our homeland, including by supporting our

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Admiral Thad Allen Unveils Marine Safety Plan on National Maritime Day

WASHINGTON - U.S. Coast Guard Commandant, Adm. Thad Allen, unveiled the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Performance Plan during a speech to members of Baltimore's maritime industry on Thursday, National Maritime Day, at The Vane Brothers Company, 2100 Frankfurst Ave., Baltimore, where Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor, was the featured speaker.

The Coast Guard is making its five-year plan available for public comment via its "Homeport" Internet site, following Thursday's event, for a period of 60 days, and welcomes input from the maritime industry, stakeholders, communities and others interested in the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Program. This action plan is

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Admiral Thad Allen Unveils Marine Safety Plan on National Maritime Day

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designed to improve upon the service's marine safety program with the ultimate goal of a program that will be considerate and responsive to mariners and the maritime community with six areas of focus that include adding more than 230 marine inspectors and investigators, creating six "Centers of Expertise" to train marine safety officers and programmatic improvements designed to make the Coast Guard's marine safety program the model of effectiveness and efficiency that other maritime nations will seek to emulate.

Members of the Port of Baltimore community attending Thursday's event will hear Allen discuss the state of the nation's maritime transportation system and the value it adds to the economy, how the Coast Guard works with the maritime industry to support the maritime transportation system and details about the Coast Guard Marine Safety Performance Plan. Maritime Transportation System notes of fact include:

- Maritime trade is expected to double by the year 2020 and the current fleet of 10,500 U.S. flagged vessels subject to Coast Guard inspection and certification is expected to expand by two thirds as nearly 7,000 towing or assistance vessels migrate from the uninspected fleet under requirements for the Marine Transportation Act of 2004.

- More than \$958 billion of international commerce -- 1.4 billion tons of cargo, including 51 million containers -- are carried upon the maritime transportation system. Nearly 90 percent of U.S. war-fighters' equipment and supplies travel by sea.
- America's maritime transportation system consists of:
 - 25,000 miles of inland, intra-coastal and coastal waterways
 - 240 locks and 18,000 bridges
 - 355 ports
 - 97,000 aids to navigation and 1,000 harbor channels
 - 1,941 cargo terminals

"As a maritime nation, we rely upon our maritime transportation system and its professional mariners for the safety, security, and prosperity of all Americans," said Admiral Thad Allen, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. "The Coast Guard provides centuries of marine safety experience and expertise to the maritime community to help ensure our citizens remain safe, our ports are secure and our waters are protected." Readers can view the Marine Safety Plan at <http://homeport.uscg.mil/mycg/portal/ep/home.do>
This story was published as a press release issued from the Office of Public Affairs U.S. Coast Guard LCDR Chris O'Neil.

Captain's Log (Continued from Page 1)

American Merchant Mariners trace their patriotism back to the days of New Englander, Jeremiah O'Brien in 1775 and thousands of other patriot seamen who helped defeat the British in the Revolutionary War. Merchant Mariners later executed the largest sealift the world has ever known during World War II. U.S. merchant mariners died at a rate of 1 in 24 during WWII. All told, 733 American cargo ships were lost and 8,651 of the 215,000 who served perished on troubled waters, sometimes just off the U-Boat infested Atlantic coastline and off enemy shores abroad.

In today's global economy, we rely on merchant mariners to maintain our nation's economic prosperity, keep our ports and waterways safe and secure, and to protect our maritime environment. More than \$958 billion of international commerce -- 1.4 billion tons of cargo, including 51 million containers -- are carried safely upon the maritime transportation system. Nearly 90 percent of U.S. war-fighters' equipment and supplies travel by sea.

Please do your part to honor the mariner.
David C. Stalfort,
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Commanding Officer
National Maritime Center

NMC Posts Sea Service Renewal Calculator on Homeport

Merchant Mariner Sea Service Renewal Calculator Available on <http://homeport.uscg.mil>

On *May 29, 2008*, the United States Coast Guard's National Maritime Center (NMC) will launch a sea service renewal calculator via the publicly accessible *Homeport* internet website. This web-based tool will provide mariners the ability to calculate their sea service time for license and merchant mariner document renewal transactions.

The screenshot shows the 'HOMEPORT' website header with navigation links for Home, Login, and Register. Below the header is a menu with 'Missions', 'Port Directory', and 'Library'. The main content area is titled 'Merchant Mariner Sea Service Renewal Calculator' and contains a list of bullet points explaining the calculator's purpose and usage. Below the text is a form with a 'Credential Type' dropdown menu, a 'Delete' button, and two date input fields for 'Ship Date' and 'Discharge Date'. Each date field has 'Month', 'Day', and 'Year' dropdowns. To the right of the date fields is a 'Sea Service Type' dropdown menu with a link 'What Sea Service Types Are Available?'. At the bottom of the form are buttons for 'Add Date', 'Remove Date', 'Calculate', and 'Print Results'.

Merchant Mariner Sea Service Renewal Calculator

- This calculator will help determine if you meet the sea service requirements for renewing your Master, Mate, Engineer, Pilot, OUPV and MMD credentials.
- Individuals may attest to their own Sea Service on vessels of under 200 GRT. For service on vessels over 200 GRT please refer to 46CFR10.211 for details on acceptable documentation.
- The Sea Service time entered must have been completed within the past 5 years in order to count toward the 360 day requirement. Actual credit for Sea Service will be based on the date of application.
- Additional information and a complete list of requirements for renewal can be found at <http://www.uscg.mil/STCW> or by calling 1-888-IASKNMC or emailing iasknmc@uscg.mil
- We are working to expand the functionality of this calculator to include all types of credentials and service categories. Please re-visit this site often.

Credential Type:
Choose Credential Type

Delete	Ship Date	Discharge Date	Sea Service Type	Sea Service
<input type="checkbox"/>	Month Day Year	Month Day Year	Choose Sea Service Type	

What Sea Service Types Are Available?

Add Date Remove Date Calculate Print Results

To access the renewal sea service calculator, visit <http://homeport.uscg.mil>. From the Missions tab, click "Merchant Mariners", then the "Sea Service Renewal Calculator" link.

The NMC is working to expand this functionality to include calculations for most original and grade-raise license and merchant mariner document transactions. For questions or comments, please contact the NMC at the above telephone number or e-mail address.

DISCLAIMER: This tool is not an official evaluation of a Mariner's Sea Service. Actual credit for Sea Service will be based on the date of application.

All information is subject to verification. Please ensure you submit appropriate proof of ownership if utilizing self verification or applicable documentary evidence depicting the amount and nature of the sea service signed by appropriate officials or licensed masters.

Please email comments, complaints and suggestions to iasknmc@uscg.mil

Credentialing at the NMC

NMC Performance Update

The U.S. Coast Guard's Mariner Licensing and Documentation centralization program reached a new milestone in April as the National Maritime Center issued 3,180 mariner credentials, or approximately half of all credentials issued nationwide.

Each month, nationwide, there are approximately 6,300 applications received for processing. As the RECs continue to transition to the NMC, the number of credentials issued each month by the NMC is expected to climb even higher.

"Things are going better than we expected," said CAPT David Stalfort, commanding officer at the NMC. "Since January, we've increased the number of credentials issued by 800 percent, and we've reduced our processing time."

Analysis shows that the applications are being processed faster and credentials are being issued within 10 to 28 days. In some cases, mariners have received renewed credentials within 7 days.

Also in April, the NMC Call Center, received more than 10,000 contacts—a first in its short history—from mariners inquiring about their credentials or the services offered at the NMC. The Call Center can be reached at 1-888-I-ASK-NMC, or 1-888-427-5662, and e-mail IASKNMC@uscg.mil.

"Obviously, the industry has gotten word. And the mariners are starting to get the word. They're starting to use our technology," CAPT Stalfort said during a recent All Hands meeting. "We had 21,000 hits on Home Port (<http://homeport.uscg.mil>) alone from mariners tracking their applications."

As for the evaluation of mariner applications, 8,511 credentials were assigned to be evaluated by the



Professional Qualifications Evaluation Branch at the NMC from February 1 through April 30.

During the same three-month period, the Safety and Security Evaluation Branch (SSEB) conducted 16,549 safety and security background checks. Two percent, or approximately 331, of the background checks conducted resulted in credential denials.

CAPT Stalfort shared his enthusiasm on the recent success and challenged the staff at the NMC to continue to set new marks and to improve the credentialing process.

"There are good things being said about what the folks at the NMC are doing. We're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Sign-Up to the List Serve, Receive Updates from the NMC

Individuals who wish to learn the latest in mariner credentialing can do so by signing up to the NMC list serve at <http://cgls.uscg.mil/groups.php?ID=10>. Just click on the link and select "Subscribe" to "National Maritime Center Updates." Type in your e-mail address, pick a password and you're ready to go. It's that easy!

NMC Call Center Contractor Receives Marriage Proposal

Diana Conklin had never met the mariner from Mississippi who telephoned the National Maritime Center and asked her to marry him. The mariner, whose name will not be printed to protect his identity, was at sea when the ship he was serving on was boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard.

According to Conklin, a USCG officer informed the mariner that the ratings on his credentials did not match his shipboard duties, which surprised the mariner because he had been doing those same duties for the last several years.

The U.S. Coast Guard officer took this into consideration and suggested to the mariner that he contact the NMC to clarify the verbiage, or the lack thereof, on his credential. This is the point in the story where two wayward strangers meet and exchange 'hellos.'

Conklin, a government contractor working in the NMC Call Center, answered the mariner's phone call and asked him to provide copies of his current credentials along with his previously issued

credential. She took both credentials to CWO Luther Greer to determine if, during the renewal, the information on one credential was transferred over to the other.

"Greer evaluated what was missing, and indeed, mandated that the information be put back on his credential," said Conklin, who called the mariner back and left a message, informing him of the status of his credential.

"There was nothing [the mariner] could do because he didn't have the proper credential. His livelihood is tied to that paper," she said. "When he called back, I told him his new credential was in the mail. That's when he asked me to marry him, for helping him out so fast without him losing any money. I was just doing my job."

Citing the fact that she was already married to another man, Conklin turned down the proposal. "I told him that I couldn't. I broke his heart, but he was grateful he had a new credential."

By Michael C. Lewis

NMC Stresses Importance of CD's

Certificates of Discharge are important to mariners because they document the sea time spent on a vessel—time necessary for professional advancement.

USCG LT Rafique Anderson, serving in the Mariner Information Division at the National Maritime Center, recently met with the Lake Carriers' Association's Vessel Personnel and Safety Committee to review the procedures for submitting Certificates of Discharge to the National Maritime Center.

CD's are issued for sea time spent along intercoastal waterways and upon oceans, and can be obtained at all USCG Sectors. Each maritime shipping company is responsible for submitting a copy of the CD to the mariner and to the NMC, while also retaining a copy, which must be kept on file for three years.

"A mariner must have all sea time documented in order to be properly credited for a rating, from a raise in grade to an endorsement," Anderson said. "We're constantly updating mariners' records."

If corrections to a CD need to be made, the NMC will send the issuing company a letter stating the error along with the corrections to be made, Anderson said.

CD's are to be sent to the National Maritime Center at 100 Forbes Drive, Martinsburg, WV, 25404. For companies interested in receiving additional training on CD's, log books, shipping articles or other subject matter relevant to licensing and credentialing, contact the NMC at 1-888-I-ASK-NMC.

"We're here to assist the maritime community on licensing and credentialing the mariner," he said.

Website Changes Underway

The National Maritime Center's home page, at <http://www.uscg.mil/stcw/>, is undergoing changes to the look and feel of its content, in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard and Department of Homeland Security requirements. The changes are expected to be implemented before July 31. For questions, contact the NMC at IASKNMC@uscg.mil

What are the Mariners saying? – Customer Testimonials on Credentialing

• *John D. James, Dec. 11, 2007* – Even though I had heard stories from the old timers about the U.S. Coast Guard's (credentialing program), I found the experience very positive. Everyone involved (at the National Maritime Center) was very professional and polite. Even though I had a couple mistakes in my package, they let me know that everything was going to be OK. God bless the U.S. Coast Guard!

• *David Kinsey, Dec. 12, 2007* – Once I got to deal with the National Maritime Center, I had no problems. In fact, I was very pleased with the help I received. The REC is another matter entirely. It is impossible to get anybody on the phone. Voice mailboxes are full and hang up on you. This application was not difficult, but they could not have screwed it up more even if they tried. I thank the NMC staff very much.

• *Terry L. Bellmore, Dec. 27, 2007* – I was surprised my renewal process went so quickly. I started renewing early because of stories (I heard) of how long it would take. I did most of my renewal by mail, and traveled to Toledo for fingerprinting. After a week, my License and Merchant Mariner Document (MMD) were sent to my home address. (I was) really surprised to see them so quickly. Excellent job by REC Toledo and everyone else involved. Thank you!

• *Allen McCarty, Oct. 25, 2007* – I applied to have my 100 Ton license renewed May 7, 2007. It was due to expire June 19. I was told it took four to six weeks. I figured I had plenty of time. I just got my license back Oct. 15, 2007. That's more than six months! It was a simple renewal. I lost a whole summer's work, \$35,000, because of the delay. When I called West Virginia, I got, "She's on vacation," or "It's in review," – blah, blah, blah. I had no recourse, but to wait. I am mad and embarrassed for you. If I ran my business like this, I would be broke in two months. You should be ashamed of yourself.

• *Gary A. Spivack, Jan. 18, 2008* – Dear NMC, the REC Baltimore staff have done an outstanding job in processing mariner licenses and documents for many years. They are professional and courteous in what

must be a demanding job. The staff is helpful and knowledgeable regarding all aspects of the CFR and licensing. I realize that the U.S. Coast Guard is undergoing a major shift in mission and this has significant impact on how their traditional business is managed and practices performed. It is my sincerest hope that the new work processes will retain the levels of professionalism and service that the REC Baltimore has been known for in the Mid-Atlantic region. Finally, thank you to the men and women, civilian and military, who work everyday to secure our nation and protect our way of life.

• *Frank V. Biscoso, Jr., Jan. 11, 2008* – The computers were down at REC Toledo, but the staff was efficient and able to help me with all my needs. Great job! My MMD was provided much sooner than expected. Even the person at the information desk helped me with directions home, to the highway. From the door to the office, I was impressed.

• *Paul J. Violand, Jan. 21, 2008* – It was difficult to get someone on the phone when I called REC Houston. But I was able to get great assistance online. Otherwise, it was very good service.

• *Eduardo A. Sica, March 6, 2008* – The service provided by REC Houston-Galveston was extremely professional and efficient, as usual. On this particular day, they were very busy, and I noticed people overflowing the waiting room, despite obvious efforts by the staff to keep up with the demand for service. Perhaps a larger waiting room would be helpful.

• *Pasquale Nazzaro, Dec. 21, 2007* – There is not much more to be said except to re-emphasize that all went smoothly with a minimum of delay. As an old seafarer would say, "It was smooth sailing all the way."

REC Transition Update

This month's transition of REC New York and REC Portland to the National Maritime Center has gone "extremely smooth," according to one REC representative.

Chief Thomas Sullivan, acting Senior Inspector Personnel at REC New York, said New York geared up for the transition before it began by changing the application processing procedure at the REC, effectively removing evaluators from working "live" with the mariner.

"It put a lot of work on the clerks, but it paid off in the long run," Sullivan said. "It's great to see each evaluators' 'Work in Progress' files slowly shrinking."

In 2007, New York received 4,983 applications for mariner credentials, or roughly 8 percent of all applications submitted across the country.

Besides servicing mariners, the REC is also responsible for testing and credentialing several hundred cadets and students attending two of the largest merchant marine academies in the country—the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point, NY, and the State University of New York Maritime College at Throg's Neck.

According to Sullivan, the REC was processing between 500 and 600 applications per month prior to May's transition.

"The spirit of centralization is great. I think it's the smartest thing we can do to improve the credentialing process," Sullivan said. "We're not evaluating, but we're still testing and fingerprinting. Now we're enforcing the timeline of the application submittal. That's going to be a big learning curve for us."

Still, there are some concerns with the transition. Mariners will continue to visit the examination center, yet the REC staff is expected to be reduced by slightly less than half when the contract clerks and evaluators depart, Sullivan said, adding that the loss in workforce worries the RECs.

The RECs will continue to evaluate local licenses and pilot licenses. As such, each REC must maintain personnel familiar with grading pilot charts.

"Our staff is being reduced. Hopefully, the 'local knowledge' at the local ports is not going to be lost," he said.

Another concern, Sullivan said, is maintaining the working relationship between REC New York and the area's maritime industry.

"We have a great relationship with the industry here. There are always concerns with the transition to the NMC. But those in the industry trust that the U.S. Coast Guard is not going to let this fail."

By Michael C. Lewis

REC Seattle Receives Outstanding Federal Employees Award

For its dedication to duty and devotion to the public, the staff at the Regional Examination Center in Seattle has received the Seattle Federal Executive Board's Group Award for Outstanding Federal Employees.

Tom Curley, senior inspector personnel at REC Seattle, accepted the award earlier this month on behalf of the REC employees.

"We're thrilled that we're being recognized by a federal program for being good stewards to the public. It's definitely a feather in the cap for the crew," he said.

The award comes as no surprise. REC Seattle received the honor in 2002, and according to Curley,

the employees had every reason to believe they would win again, due in large part to their commitment to customer service over the last year.

Last year, the U.S. Coast Guard's Mariner Licensing and Documentation program began transitioning to a centralized operation at the National Maritime Center.

As other Regional Examination Centers around the country shifted their operations, REC Seattle remained a full service office, thereby enabling mariners to continue receiving licenses and endorsements needed to comply with national and international shipping laws.

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“Our customers can come in and see that we take our work seriously. We have excellent customer service personnel,” Curley said.

Established in 1961, Seattle’s Federal Executive Board (SFEB) is comprised of members of each federal agency—civilian, military and the postal service—in the greater Puget Sound area.

The SFEB’s co-chairmen, Jon Kvistad and Walter Liang, said in a statement following the awards presentation, “As public servants, we have the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life every day. The people that we honor here today have not only met, but exceeded their agencies expectations and are deserving of recognition for their dedication and exceptional service.”

In addition to the award received by REC Seattle, the U.S. Coast Guard’s Integrated Support Command (ISC) in Seattle also received an award for its efforts to help the homeless. The organization’s Outreach Support Team has made significant impact on Seattle’s homeless community by volunteering time (over 260 hours), monetary contributions, food drives



REC Seattle SIP Tom Curley accepts an award for Outstanding Federal Employees from Seattle’s Federal Executive Board. Pictured from left to right are Dr. Arden Bercovitz, Curley and Walter Liang.

and more than 20 boxes of donated clothing for St. Martins de Porres Shelter, reflecting the U.S. Coast Guard’s faithful commitment to serve and help those in peril.

By Michael C. Lewis

President Bush Issues National Maritime Day Proclamation

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troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In times of peace and war, these brave patriots help keep our Nation safe and strengthen our economy. By transporting American goods across the oceans, merchant mariners facilitate commerce and advance trade. These Americans honor the noble traditions of seafarers and enrich our country's maritime heritage.

In recognition of the importance of the U.S. Merchant Marine, the Congress, by joint resolution approved on May 20, 1933, as amended, has designated May 22 of each year as "National Maritime Day," and has authorized and requested that the President issue an annual proclamation calling for its appropriate observance.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 22, 2008, as National Maritime Day. I call upon the people of the United States to mark this observance by honoring the service of merchant mariners and by displaying the flag of the United States at their homes and in their communities. I also request that all ships sailing under the American flag dress ship on that day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of May, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

GEORGE W. BUSH

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Seafaring Series Part II: Obtaining a Mariner Credential

Last year, 66,000 applications for mariner credentials were received for processing either at the U.S. Coast Guard's National Maritime Center in Martinsburg, WV, or at one of 17 Regional Examination Centers (REC) scattered across the country.

At the NMC, the U.S. Coast Guard has standardized the issuance of mariner credentials by centralizing the licensing and documentation process, effectively consolidating the 17 RECs into local service centers.

Since the centralization of credentialing began, the folks at the NMC have reached a new milestone: 3,180 mariner credentials were issued by the center during the month of April, or approximately half of all credentials issued nationwide. As the RECs continue to transition to the NMC, the number of credentials issued each month by the NMC is expected to climb even higher.

The mariner credentials themselves are issued in the form of Licenses for deck, engineer and radio officers; Certificates of Registry (CORs) for staff officers; and Merchant Mariner Documents (MMDs) for unlicensed shipboard ratings in Steward, Deck and Engineering departments.

Any credential, whether a License, COR or MMD may contain limitations as to vessel type, tonnage, propulsion, horsepower or waters upon which service is authorized.

Each mariner credential has specific requirements as to age, citizenship, character, specialized training and qualifying sea service.

In addition to professional competencies and character standards, mariners applying for credentials must meet minimum physical and medical standards in order to ensure maritime safety.

While maintaining a sufficient maritime industry workforce is in national interest, the U.S. Coast Guard must ensure that all applicants for credentials can safely work on vessels and that their physical and medical conditions do not impair their abilities to perform required duties.

APPLICATION PROCESSING AT THE NATIONAL MARITIME CENTER

When an application for a mariner credential is received at the REC, REC personnel take fingerprints, and copy and return those documents from which originals must be submitted, such as photo IDs, or first-aid and CPR cards.

Additionally, the REC personnel review the application to ensure it is ready to be evaluated at the NMC, and open an electronic application to initiate the safety and security investigation.

The paper application then is forwarded by express mail to the NMC where it is received in the mailroom. The number of applications arriving per day ranges between only a few to several hundred.

From the NMC mailroom, the application packet is routed to the Mariner Information Division where it is in-processed and reviewed for quality assurance.

During in-process, the application packet either is given a record jacket or merged with an existing record jacket, and the documents are arranged according to an evaluation order.

The application then is transferred to the Mariner Evaluation Division where it is processed for safety and security investigation, security screening, medical evaluation, military sea service evaluation and professional qualification evaluation.

Security Screening, Medical and Performance Qualification Evaluations

The Safety and Security Evaluation Branch (SSEB) already has begun evaluating the safety and security suitability of the applicant prior to its arrival at the NMC.

"Most SSEB evaluations are completed before the paper file is received at the NMC," said Tina Bassett, chief of the Mariner Evaluation Division.

In the initial SSEB screening process, about 89 percent of the applicants have neither safety nor security discrepancies, and are forwarded to the

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Professional Qualifications Evaluations Branch (PQEB) to continue processing, Bassett said. Roughly, 11 percent of the applicants must be further reviewed by an SSEB investigating officer (IO).

"This IO may contact courts, parole officers, or other government entities to verify or enhance the information discovered in the screening process," she said.

Among all the mariners submitting an application, approximately 98 percent clear the security background investigation. Of those denied, most are due to convictions involving drug use or driving under the influence; a small number of those denied are due to a severe crime conviction.

"A mariner has to have been convicted in order for us to take action against them," said LT Ian Bird, an evaluator in the investigation section of the Security Branch.

For some mariners, before the application is denied, the applicant is sent a request to provide additional information, such as proof of cure from the use of dangerous drugs.

"If a mariner is denied, then we inform (him or her) of the requirements needed to obtain credentials and how they can appeal our decision," he said. "We're very careful with denials because we want to make sure we've done right with everybody."

Once cleared through SSEB, the application is assigned to a Professional Qualification Evaluator (PQE), who determines if the application needs to be forwarded to the Medical Evaluation Branch (MEB) for medical review.

The NMC medical evaluation system is a maritime public health system that develops and carries out policies which affect both mariners' safety and public safety, said Dr. Arthur French, Chief of the Medical Evaluation Branch.

"They are public health policies in that they balance individual risks and benefits with the safety of the public populations which may be affected by a maritime incident," French said. "Mariners must be physically and medically able to perform the routine and emergency duties which may be required while acting under the authority of their credential."

Approximately 22 percent of all applications go to the MEB for review. Analysis of the medical evaluation data shows that 99 percent of mariners do not have disqualifying medical conditions. Many

mariners, however, do have significant medical conditions that require conducting further medical evaluations.

During a medical evaluation, the application is checked to make sure that the mariner has submitted the necessary documents concerning existing medical conditions.

If a medical evaluator questions whether the documents in the application meet the medical condition, the application goes to a second level medical review by a physician, who in this case happens to be Dr. French.

"Applications are medically denied for significant cardiac conditions, neurological conditions, conditions involving prescription narcotics and conditions that result in an inability to physically perform their duties," French said.

"There are over 200 conditions that we have to worry about. Any of those, if severe enough, could potentially affect maritime safety."

When the medical evaluation is completed, the mariner's file is returned to the assigned PQE who will complete the remaining aspects of the evaluation process, including sea service, training, assessments and references.

The evaluator will remain assigned to an application until it is sent to the credential production branch where it is printed and mailed.

If the application is incomplete, the evaluator will send the applicant a letter requesting additional information. If the application is complete, the evaluator may issue an approved to test letter. If testing is not required, the evaluator will create and submit a draft of the credential/s to a reviewer who checks for accuracy of the evaluation and draft.

Once approved, the drafts are forwarded to the Data Management Branch, which then prints and mails the credential/s. The application processing, on average, takes between 10 and 28 days.

"This (production) process continues to be streamlined and improved to minimize evaluation time and errors while maximizing customer satisfaction," Bassett said.

By Michael C. Lewis

CAPT David Stalfort, Division Chief Tina Bassett and Dr. Arthur French contributed to this story

A GOLDEN MARINER

Some people wait their whole lives and may never discover that which is inevitably destined.

For Commodore Robert Stanley Bates, his destiny was one that took shape before he got his sea legs underneath him.

As a 1-year-old contest winner, Bates was given the prize of a trip on the U.S. Mail steamboat, *Uncle Sam*, on Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire.

"The Chief Engineer heated my formula with the propulsion steam and the rest is history," Bates said.

No longer wet behind the ears, Bates would go on to serve a tour in Vietnam, conduct surveillance during the Cold War, captain a ship in the Persian Gulf during Desert Storm and lead an expedition to the Lost City of Atlantis.

Until the age of 5, Bates spent his time both on the Charles River and in Boston Harbor directing his father on the family yacht, *Grampus*, and also in a boatyard in Quincy, Massachusetts, where he was fascinated at the sight of marine railway.



In 1956, at the age of 20, Bates entered the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and sailed on the USCGC *Eagle*, the only active commissioned sailing vessel in American government service.

Bates' U.S. Coast Guard career included service in Antarctica on the icebreaker USCGC *Eastwind*, ocean station duty on the USCGC *Bering Strait* and a tour in the Vietnam War on the USCGC *Yakutat*.

"Serving our country on U.S. Coast Guard cutters, U.S. Navy auxiliaries and U.S. merchant ships is a source of personal pride, an honor and a magnificent privilege," said the 71-year-old Bates. "My shipmates' professionalism truly enriched these experiences."

Stationed on a combatant as a lieutenant commander in Vietnam, Bates recounted the 3,700 rounds of 5-inch ammo that were expended on enemy targets during his tour. Numerous trips in country on the ship's small boat presented constant danger.

"Chasing a North Vietnamese 'trawler' through the Paracel Islands and into the Chinese waters of Hainan put the ship in the position to become another (U.S.S.) *Pueblo* when Chinese warships responded to our presence inside their territorial waters. It was a close call," he said.

Another close call, or rather a "miracle," occurred



when Bates and his shipmates were caught in a double typhoon in the North Pacific.

"One was gathering ferocity from the Philippines and another was heading northwest from

the Hawaiian Islands. The two converged at sea in weather that made the 'Perfect Storm' look like flat calm by comparison.

"All gear topside, including the boats, was lost and the hull was cracked," he said. "The ship and all its hands should have been lost... survival was a miracle."

Still, his love of everything nautical endured, from naval architecture to nautical astronomy, from ship handling to shipboard administration.

Life as a mariner is "life at its best," said Bates, aka 'Cap'n Bob.'

Upon retirement from the U.S. Coast Guard in

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1982, Bates got underway on a second career in the U.S. Merchant Marine. Recently, he renewed his sixth issued license as a Master of steam or motor vessels of any gross tons upon oceans.

From 1985 through 1990, he participated in the Cold War U.S. Navy Ocean Surveillance Program, serving as captain of the USNS *Stalwart*, the USNS *Vindicator*, the USNS *Persistent* and the USNS *Invincible*. In 1991, he participated in Desert Storm as captain of the survey ship USNS *Harkness* in the Persian Gulf.

“Sailing as a ship master is constant exhilaration,” Bates said. “A voyage well sailed is its own reward.”

Bates drew on all his education and seagoing experience in 2004 when he served as the expedition leader to the site of the lost city of Atlantis off the coast of Cyprus.

“It was a sensational capstone adventure to a 50-year nautical career. The thrill of exploration of a new frontier is unmatched by any other experience,” he said.

As for finding evidence that confirmed the location of Atlantis, Bates said dozens of pieces of evidence in Robert Sarmast’s expanded edition of “The

Discovery of Atlantis – The Startling Case for the Island of Cyprus” make a convincing study centered around the site at 35 degrees North and 35 degrees East.

“Unfortunately, it is one mile underwater and the antediluvian features [referring to the era before the Biblical Flood] in the Mediterranean basin have been mostly obliterated by the breach of the land dam at the Strait of Gibraltar some 10,000 years ago.”

In linking Atlantis’ past to the present, Bates said, “Connecting this discovery of Atlantis, with it being also the first Garden of Eden, could provide the much needed awareness of the brotherhood of man and a common ground for world peace.”

Due out for publication later this year is Bates’ book, “The Authority to Sail - The History of U.S. Maritime Licenses and Seaman’s Papers,” which Bates calls his “academic capstone project and a legacy of a half a century nautical career and 30 years of research.”

Bates makes his home in St. Augustine, Fl., with wife, Katharine. The couple has four sons and one daughter.

By Michael C. Lewis

For suggestions on newsletter articles or to submit material as a guest columnist, please contact Michael C. Lewis, The Wave Editor-in-Chief, at (304) 433-3481.

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