

# MARINE ENGINEERS' BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION (AFL-CIO)

*"On Watch in Peace and War since 1875"*



## M.E.B.A. TELEX TIMES

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In this issue//Crew Change Crisis is Unrelenting//Pandemic Affecting Mariner Health//Turbo Activations//COVID-19 Economic Relief Package//LEROY GRUMMAN Back at Sea//WOODY WILLIAMS Deployed//Jones Act Advantages for Hawaii//75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of INDIANAPOLIS Sinking//

### **CREW CHANGE CRISIS: REACHING "FARCICAL PROPORTIONS"**

The International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners (INTERCARGO), which represents dry bulk shipowners covering 2,400 vessels around the world, says the crew change crisis "is escalating from bad to worse" with about 300,000 global seafarers currently confined to their ships. As members know, COVID-19 restrictions have left seafarers stranded at foreign ports and on their vessels for many months beyond their shipping assignments. Fatigued seafarers are being pushed past their limits as a result. Mariners trapped on their vessels don't have access to the care they need if a medical crisis occurs and mental wellness is also a real concern.

"Very soon the industry is going to have to say enough is enough," said INTERCARGO Chairman Dimitris Fafalios. "The situation is reaching farcical proportions." They noted that many of these global mariners have spent over 12 months onboard their ship and about 10% of all seafarers have been serving between 12 to 17 months. The International Maritime Organization has led the charge to get nations to ease up restrictions for seafarers, but those protocols are not being honored by all port states.

### **COVID CRISIS DEVOLVING INTO MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS FOR TRAPPED SEAFARERS, SAYS NEW STUDY**

The "Seafarers Happiness Index," published this week by an international Merchant Marine support group, emphasizes that the seafarer community is in the midst of a mental health crisis thanks to the pandemic and its effects on global shipping. The Mission to Seafarers, a Christian welfare charity, created the quarterly SHI report in 2015. Based on thousands of completed surveys by global mariners, the report serves as a barometer of seafarer satisfaction with life at sea. Questions focus on a range of issues, from mental health and wellbeing, to working life and family contact.

The report revealed a decline of happiness at sea, largely due to the inability of seafarers to sign off and return home. Heavy workloads, virus fears and a perceived lack of COVID-19 precautions onboard vessels are exacerbating the decline in satisfaction. The report notes that without immediate action, there are significant risks for the mental and physical wellbeing of crew and a growing risk to safety.

The survey analyzed experiences of seafarers between April and June 2020. The latest report shows vessels are sailing with fewer crew, increased sickness onboard and a pressure to keep hygiene standards at almost hospital-like levels. The demands of meeting these standards while also

maintaining social distancing are relentless and seafarers are struggling to adhere to new guidance. This level of workload has been unyielding since the outbreak and is clearly taking its toll. Seafarers have reported feeling unsupported and stressed which is impacting work standards and their welfare. Combined with the challenge of accessing medical services, the risk of an increase in incidents of self-harm and in the number of accidents is very real as stress can affect their work and compromise safety.

The report also reaffirms the importance of communication to seafarers. With many mariners unable to leave their vessels or contact their family due to the crisis, online access is fundamental to their wellbeing. Without the connection to home and restricted support from ship visitors, seafarers are on the edge of serious mental distress. The report notes that some global shipping companies aren't communicating well with their seafarers and not offering enough support. It says, with little or no communication, mariners are trapped on vessels and are imagining the worst.

The report concludes that seafarers are at a tipping point and it is essential that faster progress is made to protect them and stop the industry from falling into a deeper crisis. Mission to Seafarers says that the message is clear: crew changes are needed, and those who can make them happen must do so, now. They say, only when mariners can return home to their families and those serving at sea feel safe, can we avert both the immediate and long-term impact of a mental health crisis among our seafarers.

### **TURBO ACTIVATIONS**

Two M.E.B.A.-crewed Ready Reserve Force vessels, both managed by Keystone Shipping, were activated on July 24. The CAPE RACE and the CAPE KNOX received notice of their Turbo Activations lasting approximately 25 days, part of a five-ship MSC/MarAd exercise. Once onboard ship, crewmembers will be serving out a 14-day COVID-19 gangway-up quarantine before departing for sea trials then returning to the dock for deactivation.

M.E.B.A. fulfilled its obligations in crewing up the vessels. The M.E.B.A. deck and engine officers, along with the unlicensed crews assigned to those vessels are currently onboard their ships in the quarantine period.

### **COVID-19 ECONOMIC RELIEF PACKAGE**

On Monday, Senate Republican leadership unveiled the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection, and Schools Act (HEALS Act), a draft plan to provide \$1 trillion in coronavirus relief funding. The legislation includes a second round of up to \$1,200 in direct payments to individual Americans, increased funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a reduction in pandemic-related federal unemployment benefits, and liability protections that would prohibit individuals from suing employers and businesses for contracting COVID-19.

The introduction of this package is a first step toward negotiating a compromise plan with House Democrats, who approved their \$3 trillion relief plan, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES Act) in early May, as Congress grapples with a response to a struggling economy, a fluctuating jobless rate, and increases in positive cases of COVID-19 and death rates.

### **LEROY GRUMMAN BACK AT SEA AFTER COVID ORDEAL**

The Military Sealift Command's fleet replenishment oiler USNS LEROY GRUMMAN left Norfolk, VA this week to resume overseas operations with the Navy's 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Fleets following a COVID-19 ordeal at the Boston Ship Repair yard. Including crewmembers and contractors, 52 people came down

with the virus onboard the vessel while it was in the yard and two people succumbed to the illness, including a civilian mariner.

The MSC has had a restrictive “gangway-up” (stay-on-ship) policy for fleet-wide civilian mariners (CivMars) since March 21. However, an association grievance filed by the M.E.B.A. on behalf of MSC CivMars pointed out that the order does not apply to other MSC and Navy employees including contractors. The association grievance is currently in arbitration.

### **MSC ESB ON INAUGURAL DEPLOYMENT**

The Military Sealift Command 784-foot Expeditionary Sea Base, USNS HERSHEL “WOODY” WILLIAMS left Norfolk, VA this week on its inaugural deployment following its commissioning in March. Joining Navy sailors onboard is a civilian mariner crew represented by M.E.B.A., MM&P and SIU.

The 784-foot long vessel features a 52,000 square-foot flight deck, fuel and equipment storage, magazines, repair and mission-planning spaces. WOODY WILLIAMS will forward-deploy to the U.S. Naval Forces Africa area of operations. The ship is designed around four core capabilities: aviation facilities, berthing, equipment staging and command and control assets. It will primarily support a variety of aviation mine countermeasure and special operations missions freeing up amphibious warships and surface combatant ships to be reassigned for more demanding operational missions.

### **JONES ACT BRINGS ADVANTAGES TO HAWAII, STUDY SHOWS**

A new report refutes claims that the Jones Act has driven up the cost of living in Hawaii and presents data showing that the cabotage law provides substantial economic contributions to the island. The American Maritime Partnership hailed findings in a new report conducted by economists at Reeve & Associates and Hawaii based TZ Economics entitled, “The Impact of the Jones Act on Hawaii.” It concludes that the Jones Act has no significant impact on the cost of living in Hawaii and points out that Jones Act carrier rates have declined in real terms for essential ocean shipping over the past ten years.

The study found that while Hawaii does have a high cost of living, that cost is primarily driven by housing expenses and other factors, not the type of consumer goods carried to Hawaii by Jones Act carriers. The Jones Act industry supports 13,000 jobs for Hawaii families. The study found that only a third of the total costs of a Jones Act carrier moving freight between the Mainland and Hawaii are affected by the Jones Act (crew and vessel capital costs). The reports says, if the Jones Act was to be waived for Hawaii, the costs of any foreign-flag vessel operated in that U.S. domestic trade would rise substantially as it would have to comply with U.S. tax, labor, and employee protection laws apart from the Jones Act that would virtually negate any cost advantage provided by a foreign registry.

Mike Roberts, president of the American Maritime Partnership said, “Waiving the Jones Act would replace American mariners and ships with foreign ships and mariners, threaten Hawaii’s supply chain, and degrade Hawaii’s and our nation’s security – yet produce no cost of living benefit to Hawaii residents.”

### **USS INDIANAPOLIS HONORED ON 75<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF SINKING**

The U.S. Navy issued a message to the fleet this week asking for a moment of silence to honor the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the WWII heavy cruiser USS INDIANAPOLIS. The vessel was torpedoed three minutes after midnight on July 30, 1945 by a Japanese submarine. The

INDIANAPOLIS sank in 12 minutes, and the initial damage made it impossible to send a distress signal. Prior to the attack, the ship had just completed a secret mission delivering components of the atomic bomb used in Hiroshima that would ultimately help end the war in the Pacific.

Around 800 of the ship's 1,196 Sailors and Marines survived the sinking, but after four to five days in the water - suffering exposure, dehydration, drowning, and shark attacks - only 316 survived.

In 2017, a team of civilian researchers led by entrepreneur and philanthropist Paul Allen found the wreck of the INDIANAPOLIS resting on the bottom of the North Pacific Ocean in 18,000 feet of water.

Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday said, “While much is written about the crew’s four harrowing days in the waters of the Pacific waiting to be found with few lifeboats, over-exposure to the elements, and almost no food or water, one thing is certain: those brave Sailors and Marines endured impossible hardships by banding together. And we must do the same today.”

“So, I ask you to pause and take a moment,” the CNO told the fleet, “to remember the brave Sailors and Marines of INDIANAPOLIS. Remember their courage and devotion to each other in the face of the most severe adversity. Remember their valor in combat and the role they played in ending the most devastating war in history. Honor their memory and draw strength from their legacy.”

#### **UPDATE YOUR INFO WITH HQ**

Be sure to keep the Union updated with your current contact information including mailing address. This can be achieved by using the address change form available on the M.E.B.A. website found at [www.mebaunion.org](http://www.mebaunion.org) under the “Members” tab or in the “Documents & Member Notices” section. Alternatively, you can send your updated information to Renee Bowman at HQ by mail, fax at (202) 638-5369, or e-mail at [membership@mebaunion.org](mailto:membership@mebaunion.org) Since the M.E.B.A. Plans office in Baltimore and Headquarters databases are NOT linked, you must also forward a signed change of address form to the Plans Office if you wish to update your information with them ([mservices@mebaplans.org](mailto:mservices@mebaplans.org)).

#### **ONLINE AUGUST MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – (All times are local)**

Monday, August 3 – Boston@1200; Seattle (Fife)@1300;  
Tuesday, August 4 – CMES@1430; Charleston@1400; Houston@1315; Oakland@1230;  
Wednesday, August 5 – Jacksonville@1300; New Orleans@1315;  
Thursday, August 6 – L.A. (San Pedro)@1230; NY/NJ@1300; Norfolk@1300; Tampa@1300;  
Friday, August 7 – Honolulu@1100.

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*The M.E.B.A. is the nation's oldest maritime labor union, established in 1875. M.E.B.A.'s expertise and demonstrated track record of readiness, safety, and loyalty in answering America's call to action in times of both peace and war is unrivaled in the world. M.E.B.A. HQ – Phone: (202) 638-5355; [mebahq@mebaunion.org](mailto:mebahq@mebaunion.org). Visit us on Facebook. For publication and related inquiries (and to send photos & hot news tips) contact Marco Cannistraro, M.E.B.A. Special Projects & Communications – [marco@mebaunion.org](mailto:marco@mebaunion.org) Visit us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter and check us out on Instagram.*