

# MEBA & the Workhorse

## Ships of the Military

**M**EBAs officers serving aboard the largest and most strategically important vessels in the Military Sealift Command fleet have earned a reputation for outstanding ability and extraordinary skill - and for good reasons.

Working in close collaboration, the MEBA and a private company that has operated the vessels under a five-year contract have put together an impressive program of education and training for the officers serving on eleven Large Medium Speed, Roll-On Roll-Off vessels (LMSRs), the ships that have proven themselves in Iraq to be the new workhorses of the military cargo fleet.

"I'm real impressed by the courses provided by (the MEBA Training Plan at) the Calhoun MEBA School. I don't think we would have had the great success with Operation Iraqi Freedom last year without those programs," commented Claude Pfeffer, a long-time MEBA member now serving as Chief Engineer on the LMSR USNS YANO.

Chief Pfeffer made this comment in early February, as he was helping prepare the YANO for its first voyage in Operation Iraqi Freedom 2, the massive re-deployment of troops and equipment that will be the largest military sealift since World War II. In OIF 2, just as in last year's initial Iraq sealift effort, the LMSRs play a central role. The enormous size and versatility of the vessels - each over 900 feet in length with the capability to carry well over 300,000 square feet of cargo - means that these ships have now become the favored method of efficiently supplying America's troops in the Persian Gulf.



The LMSR USNS SEAY being loaded up at Packer terminal in Philadelphia. The 950-foot vessel shipped off a mountain of equipment to Iraq in early February as part of OIF 2. The ship had already made numerous voyages in support of OIF 1.

### Partnership with Patriot

"At the Calhoun School we are proud of our achievements in the LMSR program," commented Instructor Rick Simonson, who along with Instructor Gerard Dundon, has been directing the key Government Vessel Operations course at the School.

"We've worked hard and we've achieved results. The tremendous record of MEBA members in Operation Iraqi Freedom speaks for itself," Simonson said.

"The Calhoun MEBA School is a joint labor-management enterprise and we credit Patriot Contract Services Inc. (a unit of American Ship Management, LLC), which has been our partner in this process," School Director Joyce Matthews noted. "We now have almost five years of experience together on the LMSRs and that is a precious resource for the Military Sealift

Command (MSC) and for our country's armed forces as a whole," she said.

The Government Vessel Operations course is vital to the MEBA's success in the LMSR program but is by no means the sole element. The two-week course provides all the MSC's mandated training requirements for LMSR engineers, but also includes additional educational instruction specifically designed around Patriot's LMSR contract.

### SAMM and More

One part of the Government Vessel Ops. course that was highly valued by Chief Pfeffer and the other engineers aboard the YANO is a three-day segment on the use of a computer program called Shipboard Automated Maintenance Management or SAMM.

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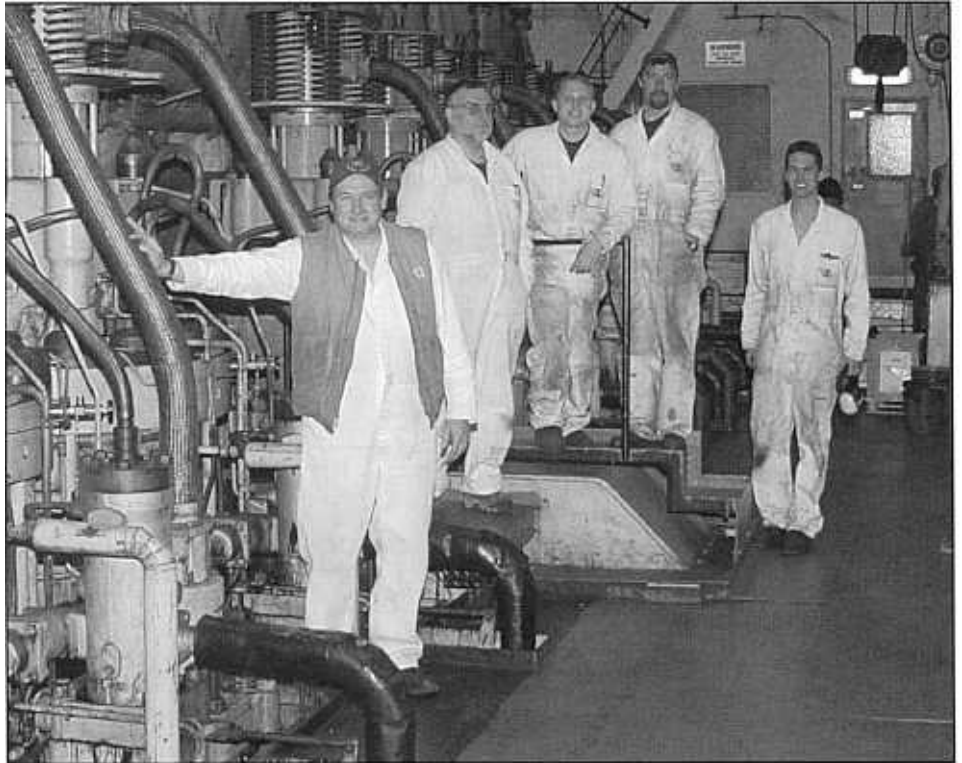
SAMM is a specialized MSC computer program that is not used on commercial vessels, so training with the program makes MEBA officers even more valuable to MSC. And although it is commonplace for MEBA officers to quickly master unfamiliar computer programs in the commercial sector, the SAMM training is a clear demonstration of the Calhoun School's commitment to making extra efforts on behalf of the LMSR program, Simonson pointed out.

Likewise, the Government Vessel Ops. course includes segments on chemical analysis/water testing, technical writing and lube oil analysis that are not required, yet provide the basis for MEBA engineers to attain professional proficiency well above and beyond basic government requirements.

Not that the Calhoun School takes required course work lightly. For example, Simonson said he believes that the MEBA's two-day Chemical Biological and Radiological-Defense (CBR-D) training goes far beyond similar courses offered at other training institutions. Some of these



Military Sealift Commander Vice Admiral David Brewer III with Calhoun MEBA School Director Joyce Matthews. The School has a series of course offerings that meet and exceed the requirements for mariners sailing aboard MSC vessels.



The engine officers of the USNS YANO a few days before she made sail for Jacksonville to take on cargo bound for Iraq. Left to right is Chief Engineer Claude Pfeffer, 2nd A/E Dan Rose, 3rd A/E Brian Fritschi, 1st A/E Chris Bolduc and 3rd A/E John Fiteck.

institutions seem "to be just going through the motions, but we take it deadly serious," Simonson said.

"You know, we have thought a lot about CBRD and we obviously hope that it is never needed. But this is not just about Iraq. Our members want to be ready for the next thing as well, and you never know, there are a lot of these kinds of weapons circulating around all over the world," he remarked.

Supplementing the Government Vessel Ops. course are other offerings specifically geared to the requirements of the military. Notable among these is Small Arms Training, taught by Instructor Bob Smith, in which MEBA members are trained in the use of light weapons that would be used if the vessels were attacked by terrorists or pirates.

### Basic Support

It would be misleading to focus on the Government Vessel Ops. course to the exclusion of some of the other basic course offerings that are relevant to the LMSR program.

A primary example would be the Calhoun School's standard course in medium-speed diesel technology. Although applicable to other vessels outside the LMSR program, the diesel course is constantly adding to a pool of highly qualified engineers whose skills can be applied to LMSRs, if needed.

Less specialized but equally necessary are the School's fundamental courses, such as Firefighting, Hazardous Materials and Medical Care. Although applicable to almost all vessels, the skills taught in these courses are just as important on the workhorses of the military cargo fleet.



The USNS BENAVIDEZ loaded up in Crete on January 6. The vessel was one of the first activated for Operation Iraqi Freedom 2. Photo courtesy of MSC.

### And More to Come

Never content to rest on its laurels, the Calhoon MEBA Training School is making steady progress on new offerings related to the LMSR program. According to Simonson such new course offerings are likely to be:

- Maritime Security Officer
- Anti-Terrorism Awareness
- Environmental Protection Coordinator
- Gas-free Engineering

This list should not be considered exclusive since the MEBA is committed to working with its contracted companies to improve specialized education on a continuing basis. As the requirements (and preferences) of the MSC and MEBA-contracted companies evolve, so will the offerings of the School, Simonson said.

### Back in the Engine Room...

Back in the engine room of the YANO,

Chief Pfeffer and the other engineers are converting their extensive Calhoon School training to practical application. The same is happening aboard the ten other LMSRs where MEBA officers are at work.

Third Engineer John Fitek commented in February that there was plenty to do aboard the ten-year-old vessel as it prepared for sea and all the assistant engineers were putting in a lot of extra hours. The grueling work schedule will continue even after the vessel is on its way to the Persian Gulf, if the past is any guide.

The MEBA officers are, of course, well prepared for the demanding pace and specialized skills of the LMSR fleet. The officials of the union and the staff of the Calhoon School have done their jobs in preparing these officers for service in the LMSR fleet. These shipboard officers have answered the call to duty both ashore and afloat - and the LMSR fleet is in good hands. ✕

## LMSRs with MEBA Officers Aboard

USNS BENAVIDEZ  
 USNS BRITTIN  
 USNS FISHER  
 USNS GILLILAND  
 USNS GORDON  
 USNS HOPE  
 USNS MENDONCA  
 USNS PILILAAU  
 USNS SEAY  
 USNS SHUGHART  
 USNS YANO