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# AMERICAN MARITIME OFFICER

WWW.AMO-UNION.ORG

Volume 56, Number 2

March/April 2026

## Maine Maritime Academy Welcomes Historic Arrival of National Security Multi-Mission Vessel *State of Maine*

Maine Maritime Academy officially accepted its new training ship, the National Security Multi-Mission Vessel (NSMV) *State of Maine*, in a formal ceremony on March 31, which was well attended by American Maritime Officers.

The vessel arrived in Portland Harbor under the direction of an AMO-led crew on March 21, where it was greeted by a ceremonial water salute marking its first entry into port.

The *State of Maine* is the third of five purpose-built NSMVs developed to modernize the training capabilities of state maritime academies. The vessel will serve as Maine Maritime Academy's primary training ship, preparing cadets for careers in the U.S.



*State of Maine* – Page 12

## *Stena Polaris* Completes 25,000 NM Voyage Around The World in Support of Operation Deep Freeze 2026



By Captain Carl Schoenbucher  
Master, *Stena Polaris*

The good vessel *Stena Polaris* recently wrapped up a 25,000 NM voyage around the world in support of this year's Operation Deep Freeze.

The logistical challenges were a little greater this year due to the limitations set for available routes that could be used. We loaded our vessel out of the Mediterranean and would have typically transited through the Red Sea and proceeded down to McMurdo through the Indian Ocean. However, due to the continuing conflicts in the southern Red Sea, we were directed to exit the Mediterranean and proceed south to the Cape of Good Hope. This was an approximately 7,000 NM voyage (21 days) and our ship and crew were able to pick up an Emerald Shellback Certificate along the way.

Deep Freeze – Page 3

The *Stena Polaris* completed a 25,000 NM voyage around the world in support of Operation Deep Freeze (ODF) 2026. The delivery of fuel to McMurdo Station is part of Military Sealift Command's annual resupply mission in support of ODF – the Joint Task Force Support for Antarctica mission to resupply the remote scientific outpost.

Page 2: We Continue to Work to Grow Our Fleet and the Industry

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# We Continue to Work to Grow Our Fleet and the Industry

**By Willie Barrere  
National President**

Greetings everyone. As many of you know, and the rest will soon find out, this is an election year for AMO. Due to house rules, this must be my last column until the election cycle concludes. More information about the upcoming election is on page 5.

We currently have numerous opportunities coming up for growth, with several ongoing conversations. However, due to non-disclosure agreements in place, we can't announce details at this time.

That said, I don't want to grow AMO at the expense of the other unions – it should be all of us working and thriving together. I know not everybody feels this way, but the majority do. The potential for this is outlined in the SHIPS Act in Congress and in

the administration's Maritime Action Plan. Growing the U.S. fleet should not be dog eat dog. This looks bad for both labor and industry.

I recently spoke with Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy about the current status of the maritime industry and the U.S.-flag fleet. He stated we are currently holding, with a plan in place to expand. In our conversation, I emphasized cargo is key to ship-count expansion.

Although the administration is keen to build more vessels and revitalize our nation's shipbuilding capabilities, this will take years, whereas an increase in cargo – Defense Logistics Agency cargo, 100 percent cargo preference for government-impelled cargo like PL 480, and LNG exports with some form of U.S.-flag participation – can generate immediate gains for our national

ship count. This message needs to be conveyed at all levels and we will work to do so.

We need to work together to educate our industry leaders. As we go to press, AMO, along with more than 100 industry leaders and representatives, will be attending the maritime industry's Sail-In this week on Capitol Hill to educate our elected representatives on what we do for national defense and national supply-line security. AMO and others are involved in numerous conversations to grow this industry.

In the next few months, you will see continued collaboration between AMO and MEBA, and hopefully MM&P. We must have partnerships moving forward. The 'fight everyone' mentality needs to be put to rest.

You will see some changes in our digital media and outreach. Our LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram accounts are getting

more focus, and the STAR Center website will be undergoing renovation. We would like more engagement from the membership, with more articles on maritime lifestyle. MEBA is doing something similar as we work together to market our industry nationwide. The opportunities in the U.S. fleet are not headlining the lists of highest-paying jobs out of college – this needs to be addressed.

We are doing very well with recruiting and we are focused on obtaining more jobs for our membership and growing our industry as a whole.

As we go into election season, I encourage you all to be cognizant of the rules for voting and I urge you all to exercise your right to vote. We usually have about 30 percent participation from our membership. This is our union. Let's have good dialogue and an excellent turnout.

**By Captain Scott Kreger  
Master, USNS PFC Dewayne T. Williams**

On February 25, the officers and crew of the *USNS PFC Dewayne T. Williams* were honored with a visit by the Gold Star Williams family. It was their first time visiting the ship since the christening over 40 years ago at Quincy Shipbuilding.

The Williams family included sisters, Diane, Penny and Lorraine, and brother, Howard. Extended family included their niece, Kristy Strickland, and nephew's family, Brian, Jill, Carter, McKinley and Gabriella Chemin. Additional visitors included Retired Colonel Nick Straffon and Karen Straffon, who are heavily involved with getting military members recognized for their courage and sacrifice for our country.

It was a day filled with joy, celebration and remembrance of the life of PFC Dewayne T. Williams. He was one of seven children and there was no shortage of childhood memories shared with the crew. His heroic action taken on September 18,

## Crew of *USNS PFC Dewayne T. Williams* Honored with Visit by Gold Star Williams Family



1968 was a reflection of who he was as a son, brother and friend to all who knew him. The entire crew in attendance will forever carry a bond with the Williams family.

The crew of the *USNS Williams* during the visit included Captain Scott Kreger, Chief Mate David O'Brien, Second Mate Jason Montoleone, Third Mate Tharen Burns, Bosun Vlad Bendus, AB Anneliza Brown, Chief Engineer Donald White, First Assistant Engineer Michael Heckmuller, Second A.E. Frank Sambula, Third A.E. Austin Soucy, Third A.E. Dustine Arbore, Electronics Officer Ricky Reidl, QMED Electrician Thomas Koncul, GUDE Darryll Williams, and Storekeeper Rodolfo Campbell. More photos are available on the AMO website.



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American Maritime Officer  
(USPS 316-920)  
Official Publication of  
American Maritime Officers  
601 S Federal Highway  
Dania Beach, FL 33004  
(954) 921-2221



Periodical Postage Paid at Dania Beach, Florida and at Additional Mailing Offices  
Published Every Other Month

# Deep Freeze

From Page 1

After a brief visit in Cape Town, ZA, we continued around the Cape and proceeded on southeasterly course for about 7,300 NM (24 days) until reaching the correct longitude to cut through the Ice Bridge and get down into the Ross Sea. This is just about the loneliest and roughest section of ocean in the world. Notably, we did not see another ship on AIS or radar for 21 days. This was a first in my career after 35-plus years at sea. We were fortunate to be able to slip between systems as we wove our way further south into the Southern Ocean without experiencing any notable wind and seas.

The passage through the Ice Bridge took us about 30 hours of 8/10 ice. Prior to entering the Ross Sea, our good ship and crew were blessed by King Neptune and the Emperor Penguins Court and they were awarded their Red Nose Certificates. After a 48-day voyage, we arrived at the ice shelf three days earlier than predicted ready to complete our mission once the ice channel was completed by the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Polar Star*.

This year's delivery of fuel to McMurdo marked the following achievements and landmarks since the start of these re-supply missions.

1. The *Stena Polaris* is the largest ship to ever pull into the ice pier at McMurdo without tug assist or bow thrusters. The pier is made out of ice, floating freely, and is attached to land by cables. No mooring lines actually go to the pier. There was still a lot of ice in the harbor, so this evolution



AMO officers onboard the *Stena Polaris* for the mission included Chief Engineer Allen Hamond, Second Mate Rob Sirois, Third Mate George Bellenger, Third Mate Tristin Woolf, Second Mate Kirsten Snyder, Second Assistant Engineer Connor Daly, Third A.E. Marcus Adam, Chief Mate Joe Mainella, Ice Captain Leroid JR Jones, Third A.E. Cordell Johnson, and Captain Carl Schoenbucher.

took us over five hours and required the *Polar Star* to come back in and break the ice up more than it was.

2. The *Stena Polaris* was the last ship to ever tie up to an ice pier at McMurdo. Once we left, the ice pier was towed out and a new docking system installed. This is the end of an era, and I have come in on three classes of tankers to this pier over the last 25 years.

3. This was probably the longest

cargo lift with minimal stops ever recorded for this particular mission. We topped the ship off with 140 days of fuel, 120 days of provisions, and took freshies at Cape Town, McMurdo, and Punta Arenas.

I am happy to announce all cargo operations went without a hitch, and we were able to get in and out in a timely manner. A big shout out to the entire crew for this accomplishment – we all pulled together.

Upon departing McMurdo, we came

back out of the Ross Sea and continued to proceed east toward Cape Horn, 4,000 NM (13 days). We were finally challenged and had four to five days of working in thick fog and ice because we couldn't break out of the Southern Ocean due to storm force winds and seas to the north of us. This weather pattern continued right up until we rounded Cape Horn, and our good ship and crew were awarded their Mossback Certificates. I also awarded each member of the crew with a single gold earring, which is a rite of passage for this achievement.

After a brief stop in Chile for FFV and a crew change, our vessel continued north to complete our circumnavigation of the Earth, with close to 10,000 NM between 50 and 60 South in the world's most desolate and dangerous oceans. The last leg of the voyage, back to the Mediterranean, was about 6,300 NM (20 days) and earned the new crew their Shellback Certificates. This will have made this entire mission approximately 95-plus days start to finish at the Strait of Gibraltar. Bravo Zulu goes out to all who supported this mission, which led to its success.



The *Stena Polaris* was to be the last ship to ever tie up to an ice pier at McMurdo. After the ship departed, the ice pier was towed out and a new docking system installed.



## AMO Members, Applicants Train at STAR Center



AMO members enrolled in the Steam Crossover course at STAR Center in January with Instructors David Sobolewski and Gregory Thomas were John Regis and Jeffrey Lee Wright II.



AMO members completing the MSC ATO LEVEL II course at STAR Center in January with Instructors Kristin Mangold (left) and Glenn Macario (right) were William Francis Shea IV, Jason Ihrig, Glen Baumgart, Luke Kurelja, Damon Zschoche, Connor Melnyk, Kevin Stith, Christopher Hill, Christopher Brown and James Toy.



AMO members completing Shiphandling at the Management Level at STAR Center in March with Instructors Kristin Mangold (left) and Karl Carr (right) and Simulator Operator Matthew James Burke (second from left) included Andrew Porteus, Gerald Dreher, Anthony Sblendorio and James Reilly.



AMO members completing the Advanced Stability course at STAR Center in January with Instructors Robert Silva (center) and Felix Garcia (right) were Gabriel Menoyo Garcia, Samuel Watterson, Mavry Sepulvado, Pieter Oudejans, James Johnson, Connor Ahers, Jeremiah McCarthy, Matthew Link, Pavel Gorodnichin, Julia Dillon and Elliot Grindle.

### Current Course Schedule Available on the **STAR Center Website**



The current STAR Center course schedule is available on the STAR Center website at the address below. The STAR Center schedule will no longer be printed in the AMO newspaper. The STAR Center course schedule is also sent by email each month to AMO-contracted vessels and to AMO members and applicants at the email address each has on file with the union.

[www.star-center.com/schedule.html](http://www.star-center.com/schedule.html)

### AMO Members and Applicants Can **Register Online** for STAR Center Courses

STAR Center is no longer accepting paper course registration applications by FAX, nor scanned paper applications by email. AMO members and applicants will need to register for courses on the STAR Center website. With a phone, scan the QR code to open a link to the online course registration form, or in the address bar of a Web browser, enter the following URL:

[www.star-center.com/forms/reg.mbr.live.html](http://www.star-center.com/forms/reg.mbr.live.html)



### AMO Members and Applicants Are Asked to Register for Courses As Far in Advance As Possible, and To Submit a Course Application Even if the Preferred Course/Start Date Has a Wait List

AMO members and applicants are asked to submit an application for course registration as far in advance of the course's start date as possible for all courses. Applications received less than 60 days in advance of a course's start date are more difficult to accommodate. AMO members and applicants are also asked to submit an application for their preferred course and start date even if there is a wait list. STAR Center is sometimes able to accommodate those who are on a course wait list.

# Notice of Nomination and Election: 2026 AMO Election of National Officers

To: All Members of the American Maritime Officers (AMO)

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

This is the American Maritime Officers' official notice of the upcoming nominations period during which nominations will be accepted for the seven elected positions set out in the National President's Pre-Balloting Report. In accordance with the timetable set out in Article XI, section 1(c) of the American Maritime Officers National Constitution, nominations must reach National Headquarters no earlier than 1:00 P.M. EDT May 5, 2026 and no later than 1:00 P.M. EDT June 10, 2026.

Nominations cannot be accepted prior to May 5 at AMO headquarters. Signed nomination letters — as well as signed certifications as required by the AMO National Constitution, Article XI, Section 1(b) — can be emailed to [nominations2026@amo-union.org](mailto:nominations2026@amo-union.org), or sent via tracked U.S. Postal Service mail to AMO headquarters at the following addresses:

American Maritime Officers — Nominations  
Attention: Maria Moffitt  
PO Box 66  
Dania Beach, FL 33004

OR

American Maritime Officers — Nominations  
Attention: Maria Moffitt  
601 S Federal Highway  
Dania Beach, FL 33004

The National President's Pre-Balloting Report, which was mentioned above, is included with this notice. It was approved by the membership at the regularly scheduled April Membership Meeting and identifies the seven AMO National Executive Board positions that will be up for election during the 2026 AMO National Election: National President, National Secretary-Treasurer, National Executive Vice President, National Vice President — Deep Sea, National Vice President — Great Lakes, National Vice President — Inland Waters, and National Vice President — Government Relations.

Article XI, Section 1(b) of the AMO National Constitution sets out the requirements for submitting nominations. For questions related to the nominations process, Members may submit inquires via email to [nominations2026@amo-union.org](mailto:nominations2026@amo-union.org).

At the regularly scheduled June Membership Meeting, after nominations have closed, a Credentials Committee will be elected from the Membership. The Credentials Committee, per Article XI, Section 2, determines whether persons nominated have been nominated correctly and possess the necessary qualifications.

Copies of the full AMO National Constitution were published and included in the January-February 2026 AMO newspaper. The AMO National Constitution is also available online.

Fraternally,  
Willie Barrere  
National President

## National President's Pre-Balloting Report: AMO 2026 Election of National Officers and National Executive Board Members

In accordance with Article VIII, Section 1(e) of the American Maritime Officers National Constitution, the undersigned (National President) herewith submits to the Membership the Pre-Balloting Report for the American Maritime Officers 2026 Election of National Officers and National Executive Board Members. The term of office for each of the seven Elected National Officers is four (4) years.

The Elected National Officers shall be as follows:

HEADQUARTERS (Dania Beach, Florida)

- 1) National President
- 2) National Secretary-Treasurer
- 3) National Executive Vice President

DEEP-SEA

- 4) National Vice President

GREAT LAKES

- 5) National Vice President

INLAND WATERS

- 6) National Vice President

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- 7) National Vice President

The Depository approved by the AMO National Executive Board to which the ballots are to be mailed or delivered is the United States Postal Service at PO Box 188, 21 NW 1st Avenue, Dania Beach, Florida. Returned mail will be returned to the independent mailing and balloting service for re-mailing.

The National Executive Board has designated TrueBallot, Inc. as the independent mailing and balloting service for the 2026 election.

Fraternally,  
Willie Barrere  
National President

## U.S. Coast Guard: National Maritime Center Now Issuing Medical Certificates Not Requiring a Waiver by Email

*The following is excerpted from a bulletin released by the U.S. Coast Guard.*

The National Maritime Center (NMC) began issuing medical certificates electronically via email on April 1, 2026. This enhancement improves delivery speed, reliability, and accessibility by providing mariners with immediate access to their certificates.

### 1. Medical certificate (no waiver) delivered via email – standard delivery method.

- All new medical certificates that do not include a medical waiver will be delivered electronically to the mariner's email address on record as the standard method of issuance.
- Certificates must be signed to be valid. It is also recommended that mariners print and maintain a signed certificate for their use.

To help mariners during this transition, mariners should ensure their current email address is included on the medical certificate application. An active and valid email address is required to receive a medical certificate.

### 2. Didn't receive your medical certificate post-launch?

- Mariners should first check the [online status tool](#) to confirm issuance status.
- If the certificate shows "Issued", contact the NMC Customer Service Center to request the certificate be resent.

- Submission of an application or affidavit is not required to have a certificate resent.

### 3. Medical certificates with medical waivers (email delivery coming soon)

- Electronic delivery for medical certificates that include waivers is currently in development and is expected to be available shortly after initial implementation.
- These certificates will continue to be handled under current processes until electronic delivery is implemented.

This improvement is designed to simplify the process, reduce wait times associated with mail delivery, and provide mariners faster, more reliable access to credentials needed for employment and compliance. For more information, visit the NMC website (address included below).

If you have any questions about any of the upcoming changes, contact the NMC Customer Service Center, Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. EST, by using the NMC online chat system on the NMC website (address included below), via email to [IASKNMC@uscg.mil](mailto:IASKNMC@uscg.mil), or by calling 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662).

*The complete bulletin and an additional update including guidance for digitally signing certificates and other issues (both include a link to the [online status tool](#)) are available on the National Maritime Center website: [www.dco.uscg.mil/national\\_maritime\\_center](http://www.dco.uscg.mil/national_maritime_center).*

# Updated Dynamic Positioning Revalidation Course Now Available at STAR Center

An updated Dynamic Positioning (DP) training course is now available at STAR Center, marking an important update to the organization's training and certification program. The updated DP Revalidation course replaces the previous DP Revalidation/Refresher and Competency Assessment course.

This change follows updates introduced in the 2026 Certification and Accreditation Standard – Volume 1: Training and Certification (February 2026). Under the new standard, the previously separate DP Refresher and DP Revalidation courses have been consolidated into a single DP Revalidation course. With the release of the updated standards, the new DP Revalidation course aligns training with the latest certification requirements. The consolidation of training requirements means there is now one course and one certificate for revalidation and refresher, simplifying both enrollment and certification processes.

In addition, the 2026 standard has removed Annexes G and M, which previously



fully aligned with the 2026 certification standards while simplifying training administration and maintaining high professional competency for DP operators. This course is designed for a DPO who:

- Has accumulated less than 150 DP sea time days within the validity period of the NI issued DPO certificate, OR
- The DPO who has accumulated a minimum 150 days of DP sea time within the validity period of the NI issued DPO certificate but elects to complete the DP Revalidation Course in lieu of completing the continuing professional development (CPD) program and the DP Revalidation online exam.

If the participant is completing the course for the first time, there is no minimum DP sea time requirement. Where a participant is undertaking the DP Revalidation Course for a second or subsequent time, a minimum of 28 DP sea time days is required for revalidation. This sea time may be accrued either before or after completion of the DP Revalidation course; however, the sea time must have been gained within the validity period of the NI issued DPO certificate.

Any questions related to this course and NI DPO requirements should be directed to Snow Kausland, Head, Curriculum Development, at 800-942-3220 Ext. 7704 or via e-mail: [skausland@star-center.com](mailto:skausland@star-center.com).

Enrollment questions or applications should be directed to Student Services at 800-942-3220 Ext. 201 or via e-mail: [register@star-center.com](mailto:register@star-center.com).



addressed DP Refresher and Competency Assessment courses. These updates further streamline the DP training framework and reflect the industry's move toward a more unified certification pathway. This update ensures the organization remains

## AMO Attends Central Marine Logistics Company Conference



AMO Great Lakes Representative Pete Kinsey attended the Central Marine Logistics company conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in March, meeting with American Maritime Officers members who sail in the CML fleet and participating in conference events with AMO members, company executives and staff.

## American Steamship Company Senior Officers' Conference Held at STAR Center



American Maritime Officers members attending the American Steamship Company senior officers' conference in February at STAR Center included Ben Conley, Greyson Spegele, Todd Tittel and Robert Medley. AMO officials participating at events during the conference included AMO President Willie Barrere, Executive Vice President Danny Robichaux and Great Lakes Representative Pete Kinsey.

# Shipboard Informational Meetings with AMO Members



AMO President Willie Barrere, Deep Sea Vice President Jeff Richards and Secretary-Treasurer Bob Rice in February held informational meetings with American Maritime Officers members working aboard the LMSRs *Leroy A. Mendonca* and *Roy P. Benavidez*, the *Cape San Roman* and *Cape Suarez Point*, and the *USNS Montford Point* and *SS Wright*.



AMO members from the *Mendonca* included Second Assistant Engineer Dan Tapley, First A.E. Brandon Granger, Chief Engineer (Officer in Charge) Jo-Vanii Sprauve, Chief Mate (ROS)/Captain James Gill, Third Mate Derek Willis and Third A.E. Garrett Hargis.



AMO members from the *Benavidez* included Chief Engineer (OIC) Robert Brown, Third A.E. Bobby Dunn, Third Mate Brooke English, Chief Mate (ROS)/Captain Josh Hopper and Second A.E. Keith Neathery.



AMO members participating from the *Cape San Roman* included Third Assistant Engineer Lamont Stewart, Third Mate Will Schmidt, Chief Engineer (Officer in Charge) Mike Voda, First A.E. Brad Neathery, Chief Mate (ROS)/Captain Kevin Wood and Second A.E. John Schad.



AMO members participating from the *Cape Suarez Point* included Third Mate Ryan Schirch, Second A.E. Mike Neathery, Chief Engineer (OIC) Bob Narh, Chief Mate (ROS)/Captain Terry Simmons, First A.E. Mark Merenda and Third A.E. Antuan Barnes.



AMO members from the *SS Wright* included Chief Mate (ROS)/Captain Kevin Johnson, First Assistant Engineer Antoine Jennings, Chief Engineer (Officer in Charge) Ryan Neathery, Second A.E. Philander Walton and Third A.E. Anthony Hite.



AMO members from the *Montford Point* included Electronics Officer Alexandra Perl, Captain Ryan Arnold, Second A.E. Lance Spain, Third Mate Jason Davis and Third A.E. Barak Kanealii.

## MONTHLY AMO MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Regular monthly membership meetings for American Maritime Officers will be held on the first Wednesday of every month except in the months of January, June, July and September, when the membership meeting will be held on the second Wednesday. Meetings will be held at AMO National Headquarters and will begin at 1 p.m. local time. The next meetings are scheduled to take place on the following dates:

**May 5 (Tuesday\*), June 10, July 8**

\* The May membership meeting will be held one day earlier due to a scheduling conflict.

# AMO Steps Up to Support the Next Generation of Maritime Officers

American Maritime Officers officials and staff attended and supported events across the nation during the first quarter of 2026 with organizations that provide professional and financial support to young people preparing for a career in the maritime industry and work to educate the public about the important roles of U.S.-flag shipping.

AMO was onboard for the 2026 Women on the Water conference in February, which featured a wide range of events in Maryland and in Washington, D.C. The annual WOW conference, hosted this year by the Great Lakes Maritime Academy, focuses on connecting female cadets and professionals in the maritime industry, providing networking opportunities and mentoring, and highlighting achievements of, and addressing challenges faced by, women who work at sea. The event was attended by AMO President Willie Barrere, Assistant Vice President for Government Relations Alaina Basciano Carouge and AMO East Coast Representative Marissa Cap. Speaking at different events were Maritime Administrator Stephen Carmel and former Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao. Basciano Carouge and Cap served on multiple panels, individually or together, which included *A Discussion in Organized Labor* and *The Only Woman in the Room*, as well as *Changes in Maritime Policy in the Last 10 Years*.



Also in February, AMO attended and made a scholarship contribution for the 39th Annual Black History Celebration at SUNY Maritime College, sponsored by the Organization of Black Maritime Graduates (OBMG). The dinner saw OBMG award more than two dozen scholarships to SUNY minority cadets to further their maritime careers.

AMO's support continued in March as the union was a sponsor of The Marine Society of the City of New York's annual dinner in New York City on March 19. Cadets from SUNY Maritime College and Kings Point midshipmen were among those receiving scholarships from the Marine Society. During the event, the organization issued a total of \$120,000 in scholarship donations to maritime academies, organizations supporting maritime cadets, and to individual cadets.

On the West Coast, AMO President Barrere, West Coast Representative Alex Butler and AMO member Eric Balianz (now on faculty with Cal Poly Maritime) attended the annual conference of The Council of American Master Mariners in California.

Cal Poly Maritime also hosted the 2026 Women in Maritime Leadership Conference in March. The annual event is open to all, with industry leaders speaking about various aspects of maritime careers. This year, AMO Career Advancement Liaison Captain Kathleen Friel served as a panelist along with officials of other unions to discuss advantages of union membership in the maritime industry. Barrere and Butler also attended the event and spoke with cadets during class sessions.



AMO was onboard for the 2026 Women on the Water conference, which featured a wide range of events in Maryland and in Washington, D.C. Our union was represented by AMO President Willie Barrere, Assistant Vice President for Government Relations Alaina Basciano Carouge and AMO East Coast Representative Marissa Cap. Speaking at different events were Maritime Administrator Stephen Carmel and former Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao. Basciano Carouge and Cap served on multiple panels, individually or together.





The Marine Society of the City of New York, during the organization's annual dinner in March, issued a total of \$120,000 in scholarship donations to maritime academies, organizations supporting maritime cadets, and to individual cadets. AMO was a sponsor of the Marine Society event, at which AMO President Willie Barrere was the honored guest and speaker and was made an honorary member of The Marine Society of the City of New York. Seen in these photos, Barrere was joined by AMO Plans Board of Trustees Chairman/Secretary Anthony Naccarato, Marine Society of the City of New York President Captain Timothy Ferrie, and Organization of Black Maritime Graduates (OBMG) Founding Member and Treasurer Captain Howard Wyche, and OBMG Board Members Denalin Randall and Sun Yang, greeting State University of New York Maritime College cadets and United States Merchant Marine Academy midshipmen at the event and congratulating future maritime officers on their scholarship awards.



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In March, AMO President Barrere, West Coast Representative Butler and AMO member Eric Balianz (now on faculty with Cal Poly Maritime) attended the Professional Development Conference of the Council of American Master Mariners (Camm) in California. Here, Butler meets with cadets from Texas A&M University at Galveston and Camm Secretary-Treasurer Captain Augusta Roth, a professor and director of continuing education at the Texas A&M Maritime Transportation College of Marine Sciences and Maritime Studies.

# U.S. Coast Guard Extends Validity of Expiring Mariner Credentials – National Only – Until August 31; Separate Guidance for Applying for STCW Dispensation

**PLEASE NOTE:** As the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) remained in a partial shutdown at the time of publication, the U.S. Coast Guard National Maritime Center continues to issue updates to mitigation efforts for Merchant Mariner Credentials and Medical Certificates. The details of these mitigation efforts and document validity extensions for National Endorsements (and Pilot for Medical Certificates), as well as requirements for extending International Endorsements and Medical Certificates, can be found in the latest bulletin issued April 17, 2026.

It is very important to keep in mind that, although you may qualify for an extension under the terms provided in the USCG's latest bulletin, the decision to allow you to continue to sail and/or join a vessel on your "expired" certificate or credential is ultimately up to the company by which you are currently employed.

If the vessel you are assigned to gets underway or is expected to get underway in any capacity, whether coastwise or international, you **MUST** obtain an STCW dispensation letter, which can only be requested by the company by which you are currently employed.

The complete bulletin, including the required letter referenced below, can be downloaded from the National Maritime Center website, the address for which is included in this article.

## Lapse in Appropriations and Government Shutdown UPDATE #3: Mitigation Efforts – Extensions

Due to the government shutdown, the National Maritime Center (NMC) and all Regional Examination Centers (RECs) remain closed. Customer walk-in service at the RECs is suspended. Examinations and other REC appointments are canceled. To mitigate the impact caused by the government shutdown, the NMC has implemented the following measures:

- **The Application Submission Portal (ASAP)** for submission of applications and supporting documentation remains active. Processing will resume once appropriations are restored.

- **Merchant Mariner Credentials (National endorsements only) and Medical Certificates (National and Pilot expiration dates only)** that expire between January 1 and May 31, 2026, remain valid until August 31, 2026. Mariners who are actively working on expired credentials that meet the expiration criteria must carry the expired credential AND a copy of the attached letter while sailing under the authority of those credentials. The NMC will not issue separate or replacement MMCs or Medical Certificates reflecting the extension.

- **International Convention Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, as amended, for MMCs and Medical Certificates:**

- **MMCs:** Pursuant to Article VIII, dispensations may be granted for continued service for mariners operating on endorsements that expired on or after January 1, 2026, provided a renewal application was submitted to the NMC and the employer applied to the Coast Guard for dispensation. STCW dispensations that are approved will expire up to August 31, 2026. Once the STCW dispensation letter is issued, mariners shall carry the letter AND a copy of this bulletin with the MMC. Requests for dispensation must be submitted via e-mail with a

subject line "STCW Dispensation" to [STCWDispensations@uscg.mil](mailto:STCWDispensations@uscg.mil) and must include the following information: ship name, IMO number, ship tonnage, mariner name, mariner reference number, capacity per STCW regulations, credential issuance and expiration dates, company name, company point of contact, and valid mariner e-mail address.

- **Medical certificates:** In accordance with STCW Regulation I/9, when the STCW expiration date of a Medical Certificate occurs during a voyage, the certificate remains valid for three months from the expiration date.

- **Additional information letters, approval to test letters, mariner training course completion certificates, and drug test letters** that expire between February and May 2026, are extended until August 31, 2026. The NMC will not issue updated letters reflecting the extension.

- **Qualified assessor and designated examiner certification letters and course approvals** that expire between February and May 2026, are extended until August 31, 2026. The NMC will not issue updated certificates/letters reflecting the extension.

- **Mariner examinations:**

- Mariners who began but did not complete all modules of an examination prior to February 13, 2026, may resume testing without penalty once the NMC reopens. Testing should be completed within 60 days of reopening. Contact the NMC regarding waivers due to sea service.

- 90-day retest periods are paused beginning on February 13, 2026, and will restart upon reopening. Contact the NMC regarding waivers due to sea service.

- **For questions regarding credentialing issues related to National Defense, marine employers are advised to contact our Customer Service Center.**

For updates on NMC and REC operating status, please monitor the NMC website:

[www.dco.uscg.mil/national\\_maritime\\_center](http://www.dco.uscg.mil/national_maritime_center)

For questions, contact our Customer Service Center via the NMC online chat system linked on the NMC website, via email to [IASKNMC@uscg.mil](mailto:IASKNMC@uscg.mil), or by calling 1-888-IASKNMC (427-5662).

The NMC understands the shutdown will affect our industry customers and stakeholders, and we apologize for any potential inconvenience.

Sincerely,  
Patrick A. Drayer  
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard  
Officer in Charge, Marine Inspections

Harold A. "Capt. Van" Vanderploeg, 92, of East Brunswick, New Jersey, passed away peacefully in his home on February 26, 2026, surrounded by family. Born on January 24, 1934, in Detroit, Michigan, to Harold A. and Gertrude L. (Smith) Vanderploeg, he grew up in Holland, Michigan. He was a respected ship Master and devoted husband, father, and grandfather, who was known for his courage and dedication. He lived a life defined by devotion – to service, to the sea, and above all, to those he loved.

Capt. Van's childhood in Holland shaped his lifelong connection to the water. He graduated from Holland High School before attending the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His calling, however, soon led him to the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, where he studied from February 1953 to February 1957 as part of the Class of 1957A. During his four years at the academy, he served on the Drill Team and rose to become Regimental Drill Master for two years, a role that reflected his natural leadership and unwavering discipline.

Even before Kings Point, Capt. Van

## Captain Harold Vanderploeg: 1934-2026

had already begun carving his path at sea. He worked as a deckhand on 100 foot yachts out of Chicago and Miami, gaining early experience that would become the foundation of a remarkable maritime career.

Capt. Van's professional life was defined by excellence, courage, and a steadfast sense of duty. He served in both the U.S. Merchant Marine and the U.S. Navy Reserve, dedicating nearly five decades to the service of his country and the global maritime community.

From 1954 to 1967, he sailed with Moore McCormack Lines, rising through every deck rating from cadet to Captain. He



served aboard both passenger and commercial vessels. He sailed on the *SS Brasil* from its maiden voyage in 1958 until 1965, and on the *SS Argentina* from 1965 to 1967. During this period, he also delivered supplies to Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

In 1967, Capt. Van transitioned ashore to serve as Port Captain for Moore McCormack Lines in Brooklyn, New York, a position he held for 16 years, after which he worked for U.S. Lines as Superintendent of Container Vessels.

After joining American Overseas Marine (AMSEA) in 1984, he served as Master of the Military Sealift Command COMPSON 3 flagship, the *MV 1st Lt. Jack Lummus*, from 1986 until his retirement from American Maritime Officers in 2001 while stationed in Guam and Saipan. During this time, he was involved in several specialized missions supporting major U.S. military operations, including Desert Shield and Desert Storm

aboard the Aviation Logistics Support ship *SS Wright*, and Restore Hope in Mogadishu, Somalia aboard the *MV Lummus*. He returned to sea for his final voyage as Captain aboard the *Cape Juby* in 2002, closing a career marked by integrity, skill, and unwavering service.

Capt. Van's life changed forever in January 1965 aboard the *SS Brasil*, when he met Hildegard Mader, who was sailing as a member of the steward department. They married in August 1966 and settled down in Milltown, New Jersey for 52 years before moving to East Brunswick.

Capt. Van is preceded in death by his parents and son-in-law, Robert Groom. He is survived by his beloved wife Hildegard; his children, Donn (Angela) and Tina; and his grandchildren Dylan, Connor, and Rylie. His legacy lives on in the stories he shared, the voyages he completed, and the generations who carry his memory forward.



## DIRECTORY

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memberservices@amo-union.org / FAX: (954) 367-1066

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cholmes@amo-union.org / contracts@amo-union.org

#### AMO MEMBERS & APPLICANTS: UPDATE CREDENTIALS, DOCUMENTS

Secure File Upload:

<https://www.amo-union.org>

Select LOGIN/MEMBER LOGIN to access Member Portal

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E-mail: memberservices@amo-union.org

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### STAR CENTER

#### STUDENT SERVICES

#### LODGING AND COURSE INFORMATION

2 West Dixie Highway  
Dania Beach, FL 33004-4312  
(954) 920-3222 Extension 201  
(800) 942-3220 Extension 201  
register@star-center.com  
Course Attendance Confirmation: (800) 942-3220 Extension 200  
24 Hours: (954) 920-3222 Extension 7999

### SERVICES

#### AMO Coast Guard Legal Aid Program

Michael Reny  
Mobile: (419) 346-1485  
MikeReny@BEX.NET  
FAX: (419) 243-8953

#### MEDICAL CLINIC

2 West Dixie Highway  
Dania Beach, FL 33004  
(954) 927-5213

## AMO PLANS CONTACT INFORMATION

AMO Plans normal business hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern.

#### Phone: (800) 348-6515

To request a connection with a specific person, dial "0" for the operator.

Medical Customer Service: extension 12

Retirement Services – Pension, 401(k), MPB, and Defined Contribution: extension 14

Vacation: extension 15

E-mail – Medical Plan: amomedical@amoplans.com

E-mail – Vacation Plan: amovacation@amoplans.com

E-mail – 401(k) Plan: amo401k@amoplans.com

E-mail – Retirement Services: amopension@amoplans.com

FAX – Retirement Services: (954) 922-7539

FAX – Medical Plan: (954) 920-9482

FAX – Vacation Plan: (954) 926-7274

## State of Maine

From Page 1

Merchant Marine and supporting federal humanitarian and disaster response missions, addressing a critical shortage of qualified officers necessary to crew government and commercial owned sealift ships.

"This new ship will help provide rigorous instruction and crucial maritime training for MMA students for decades to come," said Senator Susan Collins. "I am proud to serve with former Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao as co-sponsor and as godmother of the new 'State of Maine.' We have arrived at this glorious day after a long voyage that was not without its treacherous shoals. In 2019, as Chair of the Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, I worked hard to secure \$300 million for this ship. Brokering the agreement between the House and the Senate for that appropriations bill was a challenging task that required months of negotiation and advocacy."

AMO will take over the vessel in all licensed positions when the NSMV is operated for national emergency missions or when activated by the government for humanitarian missions.

"A strong merchant marine means a strong America. By equipping Maine Maritime Academy with a state-of-the-art vessel to train future merchant mariners, we are fulfilling President Trump's promise to restore America's maritime dominance," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy. "Today, we aren't just delivering a vessel — we are charting a course toward a more resilient and successful America."

Maritime Administrator Stephen Carmel echoed those sentiments as MARAD continues to encourage modernization of the U.S.-flag fleet.

"We are incredibly proud to partner with Maine Maritime Academy to deliver the *State of Maine*," Carmel said. "Together, MARAD and MMA are transforming maritime education and ensuring our nation remains ready and resilient."

State maritime academies train over half of all new officers essential to the economy and national security. Beyond



Senator Susan Collins, co-sponsor of the *State of Maine*, met with AMO President Willie Barrere, East Coast Representative Marissa Cap, Deep Sea Vice President Jeff Richards and Heidi Richards during the delivery ceremony for Maine Maritime Academy training ship.



Barrere, Cap and Richards greet U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy at the delivery ceremony for the *State of Maine*.



training, the new NSMVs feature modern medical facilities, a helipad, and capacity for 1,000 people, providing critical sealift and storage for disaster relief and humanitarian missions.

"As our first purpose-built training ship, the *State of Maine* will provide world-class learning experiences for cadets pursuing unlimited tonnage licenses. It's a game-changer for our mission and a powerful reflection of what's possible through strong partnerships and shared vision," said Maine Maritime Academy President Craig Johnson.

"We are proud to deliver the *State of Maine* for the Maine Maritime Academy, continuing TOTE Services' long-standing commitment to innovation, excellence, and the U.S. maritime community," said President of TOTE Services Jeff Dixon.

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao, 18th U.S. Secretary of Transportation and 24th U.S. Secretary of Labor, was a co-sponsor for the *State of Maine*.

"The delivery of the new *State of Maine* marks a significant milestone in strengthening America's maritime future. This state-of-the-art training vessel will provide cadets at Maine Maritime Academy with hands-on, real-world experience essential to developing the next generation of U.S. merchant mariners," Chao said.

"The *State of Maine* will enhance our nation's readiness to respond to humanitarian crises and disaster relief operations, representing a critical investment in those who will carry forward the proud tradition of the U.S. Merchant Marine."

## AMO in the Crescent Towing Fleet in Savannah



Members of American Maritime Officers working aboard the tug *Angus Cooper II* in Savannah, Georgia, included Captain Brenton Edenfield and Chief Engineer Jeff Parker.



AMO members working aboard the Crescent Towing tug *Arkansas* in Savannah, here in Savannah, included Chief Engineer Rob Cantrell (right). With him is SIU member Wheelman Chris Sikes.