



# USNS MERCY NEWS

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The Official Newsletter of USNS MERCY (T-AH 19)

Spring 2001

## KERNEL BLITZ '01: A Resounding Success



Story by LCDR Gary Penton  
Photos by PH1 Gregory Messier

**Petty Officer 2nd class Luke Willdigg from Long Island, New York communicates with the pilot of an Army National Guard H-60 helicopter carrying simulated casualties using hand signals while it is chained down on the flight deck of the hospital ship USNS Mercy (T-AH 19)**

The sandy beaches and shores along Camp Pendleton came alive recently as 25 ships, 75 aircraft and approximately 15,000 Sailors, Marines, soldiers, airmen and Coast

Guardsmen representing four nations began the largest joint training exercise of the year. The exercise, named Kernel Blitz is designed to enhance the training of Sailors and

Marines in the complexities of brigade-size amphibious assault operations.

See **KERNEL BLITZ**, page 5



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# From the Skipper

*CAPT Kathleen O'Farrell, CO, USNS MERCY*



The MERCY crew had an exceptional training opportunity during KERNEL BLITZ 01 (26 March – 06 April 2001). Although we were at sea for only seven days, each day was packed with training evolutions and readiness assessments. There were 85 helicopter landings between 01 April and 05 April. Many of the helos delivered simulated

casualties to the flight deck where they were introduced into MERCY's fine-tuned trauma management system. In all, there were 188 simulated patients admitted on the ship during the exercise.

The steady helicopter support during this KERNEL BLITZ was from the air ambulances of the 126<sup>th</sup> Medical Company, California Army National Guard. The rate of delivery of casualties to the flight deck closely resembled what would be expected in a war scenario. I am extremely grateful for the quality of training that this support gave us.

MERCY also received excellent trauma system and trauma management training from Dr. Bill Long and the two trauma nursing coordinators, Mrs. Katie Zalin and Mr. Paul Schneider, who deployed with us from Portland, Oregon. These three civilians generously shared their time and expertise with the MERCY crew and helped the MTF achieve an even higher level of skill and readiness than normal. Each of our guests expressed amazement at the size and capability of the ship. They asked me to pass on to you their appreciation for the warm and enthusiastic reception that they received from the crew of USNS MERCY.

MERCY's training officer, LCDR Laurent, put together an extensive continuing medical, nursing, and pastoral care education agenda for the exercise. There was excellent participation in these lectures and seminars. Additionally, the "Fundamentals of Critical Care Support" course was completed by 24 members of the clinical and nursing staff, resulting in a significant improvement in MERCY's readiness to manage seriously ill patients. The crew will miss LCDR Laurent who has just transferred to Cherry Point, North Carolina. Her relief

as MERCY's Training Officer, LCDR Patricia Corley, participated in KB 01 and is already moving ahead with Shipboard Orientation and future exercise plans.

The Military Sealift Command also had a series of objectives for the ship to accomplish during KB 01. The newly overhauled boilers were tested, including a sustained high speed run, and the portside lifeboats were put in the water and operated. The crew's fire fighting and mass casualty skills were tested in a simulated mass casualty situation involving a missile explosion in a berthing compartment. Most crewmembers that were involved in the mass casualty exercise found the training to be very realistic. The ship's Master, Captain Tom Schwinn, was pleased with the performance of the MERCY Fire Fighting/Damage Control Team and the medical response.

All in all, KERNEL BLITZ 01 was a great success, and I want to thank all of the crewmembers that had a part in making it so successful. I also want to thank crewmembers who participated in the Talent Show and who put together the Steel Beach flight deck picnic. Both events were wonderful and were enjoyed by everyone.

Our next exercise, MERCEX 01-3, will be conducted pierside, 16-20 July 2001. It will give the ship an opportunity to assess her readiness and training status in each department. During the exercise, plans for future exercises will be tailored to correct deficiencies and to train for our specific missions. The call-out for MERCEX 03 is limited to the CBR Team, the Flight Deck Crew, and the Critical Core. The call-out has been disseminated on the two hospital e-mail systems. There will be a few minor changes during the next month, but, for the most part, it is complete.

MERCY needs to maintain the integrity and training level of the CBR Team and the Flight Deck Crew. In the past, these teams have occasionally been allowed to drift down to only a small number of members due to transfers, separations, and other personnel changes. At the end of KB 01, these teams were at their peak performance. I want to maintain that skill level by calling them out regularly for training during exercises. The final exercise for this fiscal year, MERCEX 01-4, will be conducted during the last week in September. It will be a combat support exercise involving a 250 bed level call-out.

*See FROM THE SKIPPER, page 3*

# MERCY Gets New Master

*Photo and story by LCDR Gary Penton*

The crew of USNS MERCY gives a hearty welcome to Captain Tom Schwinn, who assumed duties as MERCY's Master on 19 March, 2001.

Captain Schwinn was born in Suffern, New York. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Transportation from the S.U.N.Y. Maritime College at FT Schuyler, Bronx, New York.

Captain Schwinn was hired by Military Sealift Command (MSC) in June 1978 as a third officer and sailed aboard the USNS METEOR and USNS FURMAN. In 1980 he sailed as ship's navigator (second officer) aboard USNS MISPILLION. From 1982 through 1984 he sailed as Cargo Officer aboard the tankers USNS PASSUMPSIC, USNS NAVASOTA, and USNS MISPILLION.

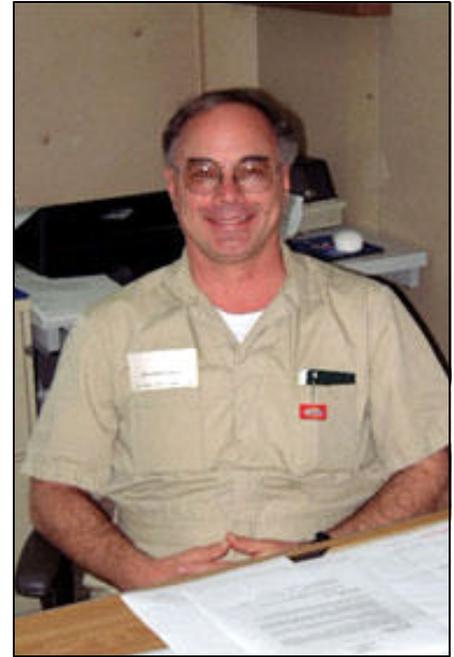
From late 1984 until 1992 he served as Chief Mate aboard USNS MISPILLION, USNS NAVASOTA, USNS HASSAYAMPA, USNS PONCHATOULA and USNS PECOS. The Chief Mate is in charge of the Deck Department aboard ship and is second in command.

Captain Schwinn was promoted to Master in mid 1992. A

Master is a ship's Captain that is in the United States Merchant Marine and is licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard. As a Master, he has sailed aboard USNS SPICA, USNS VICTORIOUS, USNS GUADALUPE, USNS NARRAGANSETT, USNS CATAWBA, USNS OBSERVATION ISLAND, and now, USNS MERCY.

"So far I'm amazed at what has been accomplished since I got here. My initial feeling, coming aboard a ship that hasn't been activated in over a year, was that it would be a difficult task to get it underway in a week. Even when coming out of a shipyard after 60 or 90 days, getting a steam ship online, getting it crewed, provisioned and ready to go - considering our personnel shortages within MSC - I was amazed to find the ship in such excellent condition. The Chief Mate and the 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer were really on top of what was going on. I am very pleased that those two guys had such a good handle on things," said Captain Schwinn, a 23-year MSC veteran.

Captain Schwinn will also become the next Port Captain of Military Sealift Command, Pacific in San Diego, California, with the



*Captain Tom Schwinn, a 23-year Military Sealift Command veteran, assumed duties as the MERCY's Master in March.*

additional duty of Master, USNS Mercy. As the Port Captain, he will be responsible for a variety of activities to include supervision and promotion of numerous MSC personnel and inspection of MSC ships and facilities. As Master of MERCY, he ensures the ship is ready to sail within five days of receiving orders to deploy.

## From the Skipper

*continued from page 2*

My relief as Commanding Officer, MTF USNS MERCY, will be CAPT J. D. Malone, who is also the Director of Medical Services at

Naval Medical Center, San Diego. He will take command of MERCY in August 2001. CAPT Malone deployed with the ship for KB 01 and is quickly becoming familiar with MERCY's mission and training plan.

Please note the FY 01-02 MERCY exercise schedule in this

newsletter. It will help you to plan around your other responsibilities and make sure that you're available to train on the ship. I hope everyone has a safe summer. I look forward to working with the crew on my last MERCEX in July 2001.

# Welcome to Chief Engineer Ed Shirley

By LCDR Gary Penton

Photos by HM2 Teresa Miller

MERCY welcomed her new Chief Engineer, Mr. Ed Shirley, on 16 March. Mr. Shirley hails from Bucksport, Maine and attended the University of Maine. He has two sons, Karl (25) and Denzil (22), who reside in Oroville, California.

Since joining the MSC in June 1984, Mr. Shirley has served on several ships in various capacities. He was Deck Machinist/Engineer on USNS PASSUMPSIC, Junior Engineer on USNS MISPILLION and USNS MERCURY. He served as 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Engineer on USNS KILAUEA, 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Engineer on USNS MARS and USNS NIAGARA FALLS, and returned to USNS MARS as Chief Engineer before serving as Chief Engineer on USNS SAN JOSE and USNS MERCY.

We asked the Chief what his first impressions of MERCY were.

“Engineering-wise, this ship is very unique. It has been converted well and has a very reliable power plant, but it is unique and takes getting used to. It has great diesel generators and VERY LARGE evaporators that make a lot of water. A major difference between MERCY and other ships I’ve served on are the emergency diesel generators. We have three 2000-kilowatt generators that are dedicated to the hospital department. On other ships the emergency diesel generators feed into the switchboard but these don’t. They are three or four times as big as normal emergency diesel generators and they are set up and designed to protect the hospital department and the patients.”



**MISS ROSE**  
Diesel Class II Winner

**Chief Engineer Ed Shirley's Lobster Boat,  
"Miss Rose"**



**Mr. Ed Shirley, a 17-year MSC veteran, joins  
USNS MERCY as Chief Engineer.**

When talking about the ships crew, Mr. Shirley was genuinely impressed with the Navy crew.

“From what I’ve seen, the firefighting teams are very impressive. They are very enthusiastic, they’ll do what you tell them to do and they want to know how to perform their jobs correctly. Their interaction with the civilian crew is great.”

“Usually, I handle all fuels for aircraft on ships but I was quite surprised to find that the Navy handles aircraft fueling here on MERCY. I’ve met with them and talked with them a bit. I asked questions [relating to fueling procedures] and they have all the answers. They are sharp.”

Mr. Shirley shared another of his life’s passions with us.

“I love to fish in Maine in the summer,” said Shirley. “I’ve got a couple of places in Maine. I try to stay home as much as possible in the summer.”

“That’s my lobster boat on that calendar.” He proudly points to the calendar hanging on a wall above the sofa in his office, “We race ‘em up and down the coast. It’s a Northern Bay. She’s 36-foot long with a 15-foot beam and has a 430 horse-power Volvo engine.”

“I also have a home on Verona Island. There’s nothing better than Maine in the summer but, unfortunately, the winters can be harsh,” he reflected, “when I retire I’m going to take it (boat) south to Bermuda for the wintertime.”

Welcome aboard Chief! We hope you enjoy your new assignment and we wish you the best of luck!

# KERNEL BLITZ

*continued from page 1*



***Clockwise from top left: Stretcher bearers carry a simulated casualty from an Army National Guard H-60 helicopter to awaiting medical personnel on board the USNS MERCY (T-AH 19); Chief Petty Officer Shelley Rutkowski watches as one of MERCY's emergency boats is hoisted back aboard. The emergency boat was sent out to conduct search and rescue training; Captain Kathleen O'Farrell, commanding officer of the medical treatment facility talks to the crew and embarked medical support personnel about upcoming events after an abandon ship drill; Commander James Ferguson uses an Ambu bag to provide positive pressure ventilation to a simulated patient that needs help breathing on board the the MERCY.***

Ships of the United States Third Fleet landed Marines of the First Marine Expeditionary Force by means of helicopter, hovercraft and conventional landing craft. The landing force practiced maneuvers while the ships concentrated on providing follow-on support from the sea. Amphibious landing operations are considered among the most complex of all naval maneuvers. The United States is the only nation currently maintaining a brigade-level amphibious assault capability.

The exercise included amphibious landings and naval gunfire support, medical evacuations and humanitarian assistance. The sea forces were made up of 25 ships including a Canadian frigate, the hospital ship USNS Mercy, and three large Amphibious Assault ships with their embarked airwings. USNS Mercy served as a sea-based platform for medical care and triage during the two-week exercise. Below is a photographic depiction of USNS MERCY during KERNEL BLITZ '01.

# Q&A with the CMC

By LCDR Gary Penton

We sat down with the Command Master Chief at the conclusion of KERNEL BLITZ 2001 and tried to get his thoughts and impressions of the ship's performance during the most recent exercise.

**Q.** Did the crew meet the Skipper's and your expectations for KERNEL BLITZ?

**CMC:** The foremost expectation for KERNEL BLITZ 01 was the support of the Marine Corps' largest exercise in Southern California. This was a big success, and was accomplished through the enormous talent, dedication, and professionalism displayed by both the Medical Treatment Facility and Civilian Mariners.

**Q.** How would you describe the level of the crew's morale?

**CMC:** The morale of the crew was high. Team Spirit was there at all times and everyone was motivated to get involved with training. We asked a lot of the crew so we had to provide them with a way to unwind. The crewmembers enjoyed a fantastic "Steel Beach Party" on the flight deck and the following night, we witnessed a great talent show on the mess decks. We also celebrated the 108<sup>th</sup> Chief Petty Officers Birthday. The fantastic food provided by the Supply Department was well appreciated too. I didn't receive

a single complaint about morale or living and working condition of the crew.

**Q.** The crew obviously worked hard in preparation for KERNEL BLITZ. What is the focus of training for the next MERCEX?

**CMC:** We accomplished a lot during KERNEL BLITZ '01; however, we cannot rest upon our laurels. We need to focus on the next MERCEX 01-3, and that means more training. Captain



HMCM (SW/AW/FMF)  
Oscar E. Basa

*Q. Did the crew meet the Skipper's and your expectations for KERNEL BLITZ?*

O'Farrell's goals for the next exercise are to assess the training status of the crew and to refine the training plan that leads to KERNEL BLITZ '03. We will also focus on teambuilding, initiatives to increase safety, and meeting the needs and desires of the crew. My hat is off to the men and women of this great ship. We have come a

long way towards meeting MERCY's mission. There is always room for improvement, so we need to stay focused on our training requirements and mission.

**Q.** Was the Chief's Mess satisfied with the performance of their troops? How would you describe the performance of the CPO community.

**CMC:** The Chief's Mess was very satisfied with communication up and down the chain of command. We were also very happy with the performance of the crew. Every single crewmember contributed to the success of KERNEL BLITZ '01.

I truly appreciate the support and flexibility shown by each of the chiefs. The brotherhood and camaraderie is at best. There are many challenges ahead and we are eager and ready to face them all. The CPO community makes the navy run and you can bet that we are here to do the job.

Questions  
& Answers

# MERCY Civilian Mariner Wins Over Crew

*Photo and story by LCDR Gary Penton*

On the last night of USNS Mercy's underway period in support of KERNEL BLITZ '01, the crew held a talent contest. I was not at all surprised at the incredible talent that this crew has but one performer in particular stole the show.

Able Seaman William "Bill" Hoff, an 18-year MSC veteran, did a superb rendition of Arlo Guthrie's "City of New Orleans," followed by a rousing audience-singing-along of "The Dyslexic," which was written by one of his many friends.

"Oh gosh, I've been playing since I was a kid, off and on. I was in the country music industry for a while but decided that I love playing music too much to make a job out of it," Hoff said. "I came to work with MSC in January, 1983 and I've been bouncing around the world ever since."

"The 12-string guitar has to be the worlds greatest diplomat...it's



*Able Seaman Bill Hoff serenades crew with a fantastic rendition of Arlo Guthrie's "City of New Orleans."*

pulled me out of some rough situations in the past, and it's allowed me to enjoy some very unique experiences."

"I was a guest of the royal family one night in Bahrain because of this [12-string guitar.] We were outside of the Hilton (staying over

the weekend) on a Saturday night.

The hotel didn't have a band and I had my guitar with me so I asked the bartender if I could play. There were other customers sitting around the corner of the bar in traditional dress, rather reserved, but still enjoying themselves. I played a few songs and at closing time, the people who were sitting around the bar asked me if I would like to join them at another place. I said, 'sure, I think that would be nice.' We were escorted out to a Mercedes limo with a police escort. It was only then that I found out that I was to be a guest of the royal family."

We finished this interview on the way to the ship's brow while sharing a pushcart for our sea bags. Able Seaman Hoff is off on another adventure. This time, it's to Singapore to meet his next ship, USNS Yukon, for another trip to the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean.

## Pizza Night

*By LCDR Gary Penton*

*Photo by HM2 Teresa Miller*

Several of the ship's Mess Specialists and Food Service Assistants got a well deserved break during KERNEL BLITZ '01 when the Commanding Officer, with a contingent of Officers and Chief Petty Officers, lended a hand by preparing and serving dinner.

"I love it! It's good for morale. It's really nice because I was back there and when one of the Commanders came in, my chief told me to go take a break. I told him I

can't yet, I can't yet, and he just said GO!," said Hospital Corpsman Third Class Danie Tardie a native of Baltimore Maryland. HM3 Tardie can usually be found at labor/delivery at the hospital. This week however, she is making life a little nicer for the crew by serving as a Food Services Assistant (FSA.)

"The C.O. took over my job on the line and she even served me spaghetti," said Hospitalman Rachel Yearra, who hails from the town of Pope Valley, in the Napa Valley, in Northern California.

*Right: Captain O'Farrell, MTF CO, on the Serving Line.*



# Civilian Doc and Nurses Lend a Hand!



*Photos by HM2 Teresa Miller*

**Mrs. Katie Zalin (left with CO,) Mr. Paul Schneider (center,) and Dr. Bill Long (right,) all from Portland, Oregon provided consultation in trauma systems and trauma care management onboard USNS MERCY during KERNEL BLITZ '01.**



**USNS MERCY souvenir mugs for everybody!**

# CIVMAR Crew Meets Lofty Goals

By LCDR Gary Penton

It takes a lot of work to keep a nearly 70,000-ton hospital ship ready to deploy. Amazingly, it is a small cadre of military and civilian mariners (CIVMAR) that maintain this 900-foot long ship so that it is ready to deploy within five days of notification by the President. Not only do they maintain the ship, they also make necessary repairs and supervise the contracts for renovations required to keep pace with the incredible rate of advancement of medical technologies.

“We got an amazing amount of work done, considering that we weren’t in an availability period,” said Mr. Craig Gallagher, USNS MERCY’s Chief Mate. “Of course the overhaul of the boilers was the primary job so much hinged on the success of that one project. But there were the other modifications like the new blood bank and the isolation ward that were completed just prior to KERNEL BLITZ ’01 giving the crew the opportunity to break in the new equipment underway in real world conditions.”

“The work we’ve accomplished is probably on the scale of what would normally be done in the shipyard, but we’ve been able to accomplish everything here pierside. It took a bit longer than it would have, and the actual work we’ve done costs about the same but we’ve saved a lot of money by not taking the ship into a yard period,” said Gallagher, a 21-year Military Sealift Command veteran.

“Another modification completed just prior to KERNEL BLITZ was the work done by the nursing staff in getting the new Vidmar cabinets in Casualty Receiving, Post-anesthesia Care Unit and the Intensive Care Unit installed and stowed prior to getting underway. I think everyone working in those areas recognized the improvement from that modification.”

“On the CIVMAR side of the house getting ready for KERNEL BLITZ meant going from a reduced operating status (ROS) crew of 12 to a fully operational status (FOS) crew of 60. One disadvantage we have is that the FOS crew assigned to the ship may not have any experience on a Navy hospital ship, so the first few days are spent getting familiar with the ship and learning how to get around. We spent time training the new Civilian Mariners on their Damage Control and emergency duties as well as their watch duties. Much of the week prior to departure was spent testing out the ships engineering and navigation systems, training the new crew on the equipment, and ensuring everything was ready for getting underway. Another major hurdle was getting the aft galley operational, so we brought it on line early to make sure that our three-person galley crew could handle the load. They did a great job and everyone ate good.”

“It took five days of intense work and training to get the ship underway but [when we returned to port] we had shut down all those systems within eight hours and were back on shore power in our ROS status and the FOS crew were heading out to their next assignments.”

## USNS MERCY POINTS OF CONTACT

### USNS MERCY EXECUTIVE STEERING COUNCIL (in port numbers)

CAPT O’Farrell, Commanding Officer	532-7180
CAPT Sorensen, Executive Officer/OIC	556-3276
HMCM Basa, Command Master Chief	532-6405
CDR McKinsey, Director for Nursing Services	532-3311
CAPT Nash, Director for Clinical Services	532-8563
CAPT Sel. Kompanik, Supply Officer (July relief will be CDR Marcinek)	556-6165
LCDR Popa, AOIC/Dir for Admin	556-3293
LCDR Corley, Training Officer	532-9087

LT May, Helo Control Officer	532-7677
LCDR Penton, PAO	532-5439

### OTHER IMPORTANT NUMBERS

NMCS D Quarterdeck	532-6400
USNS MERCY Admin	556-3291
USNS MERCY Quarterdeck	556-3278

### MMPO

LT Jones, Division Officer	532-9776
HMC Storey, LCPO	532-9779

# USNS MERCY Training Schedule



<i>MERCEX</i>	<i>DATES</i>	<i>NOTES</i>
<b>01-3</b>	Exercise: 16-20 JUL 01 No Fast Cruise; No Hotel Svcs Assess Readiness & Training	270 FOS Personnel Critical Core: 16-20 JUL 01 Flight Deck Crew: 18-20 JUL 01 CBR Team: 18-20 JUL 01
<b>01-4</b>	Exercise: 24-28 SEP 01 Full Hotel Svcs: 26-28 SEP 01 Fast Cruise: 26-28 SEP 01	672 FOS Personnel Critical Core: 24-28 SEP 01 FOS 250-Bed: 26-28 SEP 01

**ATTENTION!!!**

**DUE TO HIGHTENED SECURITY, FUTURE TRAINING DATES HAVE BEEN OMMITTED. PLEASE CHECK WITH THE USNS MERCY ADMIN CREW FOR DETAILS ON UPCOMING TRAINING PERIODS.**