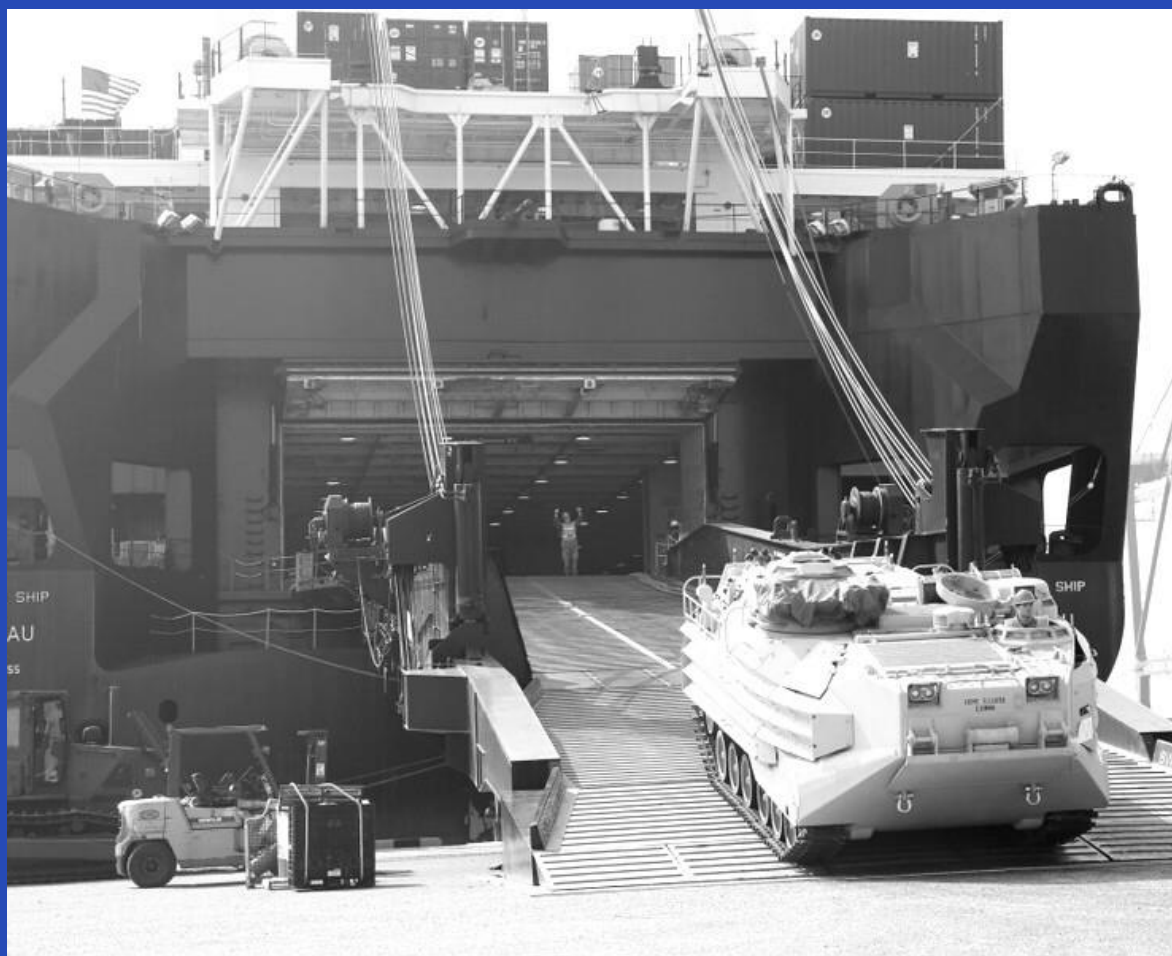


# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



STRATEGIC SEALIFT  
OFFICER FORCE

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

The Strategic Sealift Officer Force (SSOF), composed entirely of Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) warfare-qualified officers, executed its mission with purpose and passion in alignment with the Navy Reserve's Fighting Instructions and governing directives. Despite the continued challenges of the global pandemic, the SSOF executed its mission at a five-year high.

The SSOF continues to promote Warfighter Readiness and is focused on manning, training and employing our force to their designed mobilization function. All tasks executed in the 2021 mission were designed to proactively manage the force in preparation for the transition of capabilities from the Active to the Reserve Component.

## 2021 MISSION

The purpose of the SSOF is to maintain a corps of actively sailing officers who are trained to operate merchant ships as Navy Auxiliaries and of a shore-side cadre assigned to Navy activities that support strategic sealift readiness. It augments the basic sealift capability necessary to meet defense requirements. (BUPERSINST 1001.34F)

In alignment with the mission of the Navy Reserve, the SSOF provides strategic depth and delivers operational capabilities to the Navy and the Joint Forces in times of peace and war.

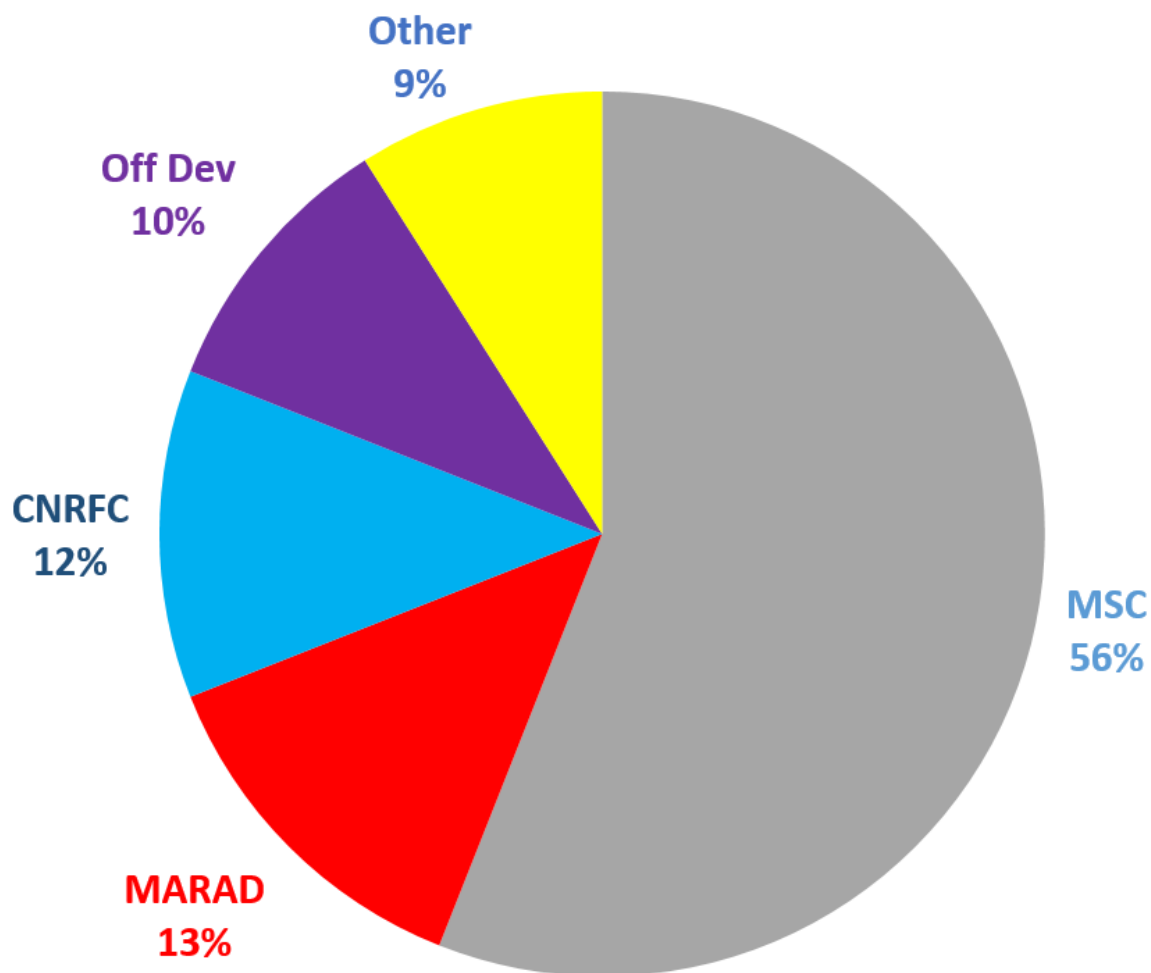
2021

# SUPPORT TO THE FORCE

By % to stakeholder

We provided support to a spectrum of Navy commands and interagency partners including our major stakeholders Military Sealift Command (MSC) and the Maritime Administration (MARAD).

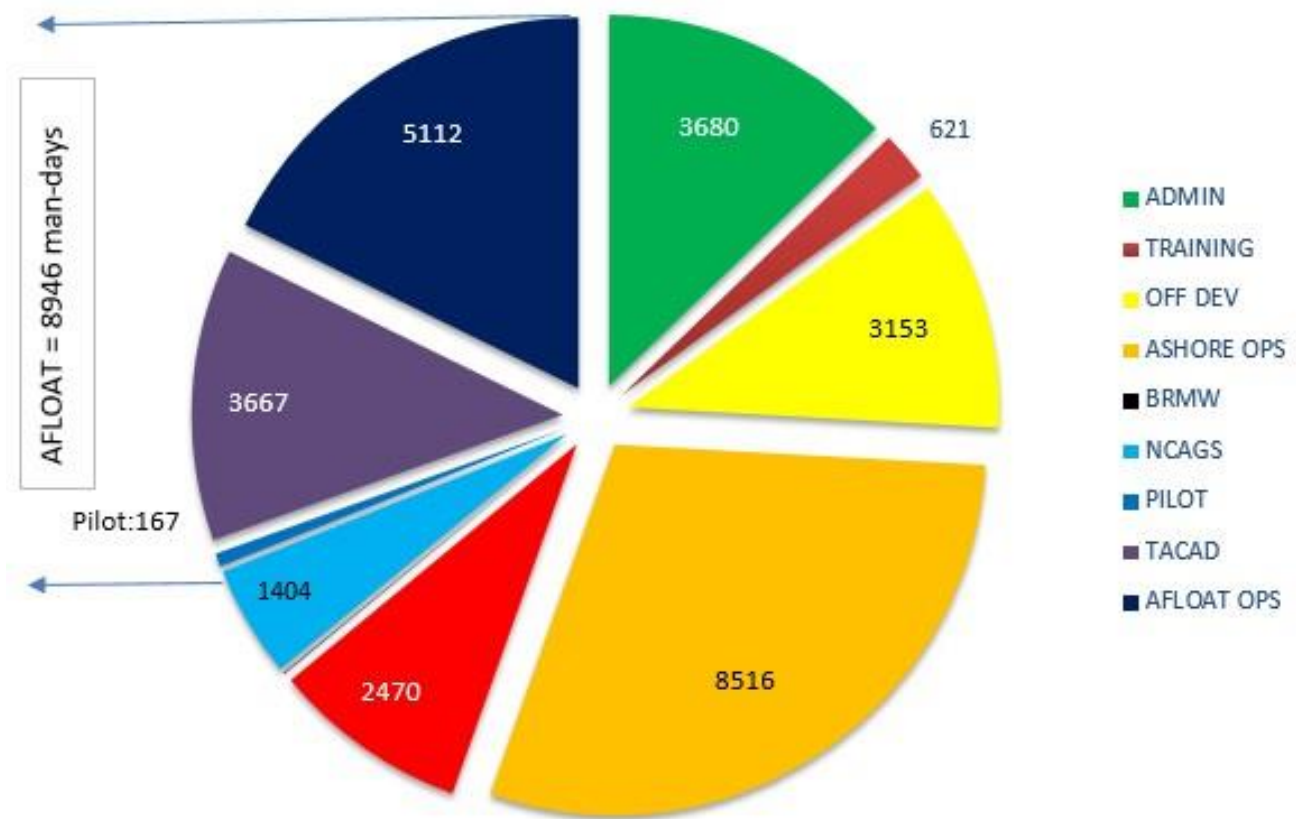
The SSOF executed \$11.7 million; through funding provided by Commander, Navy Reserve Forces Command.



2021

# SUPPORT TO THE FORCE

By man-days



Maintaining Warfighter Readiness is paramount to the success of the SSOF. The Unlimited Coast Guard license and Standards of Training, Certification and Watchstanding (STCW) must be maintained via classroom and practical training.

Operations, Tactical Advisors (TACAD), Shipyard, Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) and Pilot support fulfills vital functions to our stakeholders and allows the SSOF to ensure the ability to transfer active component functions to the reserve in time of war.

Admin functions employ the necessary staff to proactively manage a globally dispersed SSOF and maintains a trained and capable force.

# MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND HEADQUARTERS NORFOLK, VIRGINIA



**SSO LT Chris George trains mariners onboard M/V ARC INDEPENDENCE about UAS/UAV response during a TACAD underway mission.**

## OPERATIONS

### SSOF Commodore's Staff

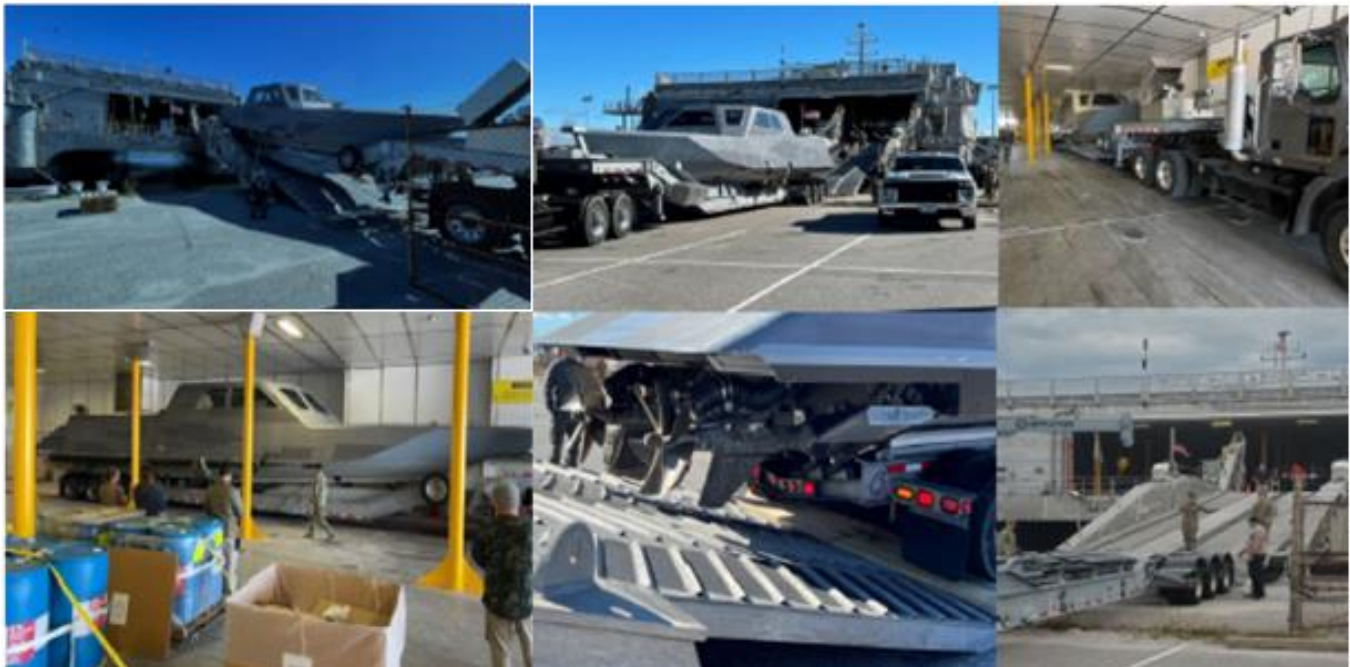
The SSOF staff processed 813 Active duty for training orders in support of the SSOF mission. Proactively and aggressively detailed IRR personnel into billets to utilize skillsets and best meet the needs of the Navy. Managed the force by enforcing Navy standards and assisting the SSOF in completing requirements to fulfill billets for stakeholders. Leveraged authorized DOD virtual functions to train instructors, fulfill training class requirements and provide valuable skills and training to the workforce.

### TACAD

The SSOF provided a total of 4,553 man-days of support to MSC Headquarters (MSCHQ); including 2,205 for TACAD and 1,175 for operations. In FY21, the TACADs were employed across the globe, supporting 18 missions and three exercises. A total of 50 TACADs provided embarked support aboard 18 contractor-owned, contractor-operated (COCO) vessels. Mission support included transporting Roll-on, Roll-off (RORO) cargo, containerized ammunition cargo, submarine towing support and CONSUL fueling. Exercise support included Defender Pacific, Turbo Activation-21 and a large scale COCO vessel exercise.



## MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND ATLANTIC NORFOLK, VIRGINIA



**Special Boat Team 20 loads a Combatant Craft Medium (CCM) aboard USNS Newport (T-EPF 12)**

### OPERATIONS

Strategic Sealift Officers (SSOs) used their shipboard expertise and civilian experiences to facilitate operations between MSC U.S. Navy counterparts. This cooperation is demonstrated within MSC Combat Logistics Force as over 30 SSOs with U.S. Coast Guard mariner credentials supported MSC Atlantic (MSCLANT) to fill critical afloat manning gaps during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to filling critical billets within MSC, the SSOs also collaborated with the Special Warfare Community and Boat Team 20 (SBT-20) to solve an ongoing challenge of transporting the command's assets across theaters. In an effort to extend the operational range of combatant craft vessels, SSOs organized a 'proof of concept' operation to load Combatant Craft Medium (CCMs) aboard expeditionary fast transport USNS Newport (T-EPF 12). Capitalizing on the experience and shipboard knowledge of the SSOs and ship masters, the CCM was taken out of the water and placed aboard a trailer at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Virginia, where it was driven and loaded via the ship's cargo ramp. Using this evolution as a case study, the SSOs are collaborating with MSC's Adaptive Force Packages Team to develop a manual for loading CCMs, trailers, and their primary moving vehicles aboard EPF platforms. This capability would give the Special Warfare Community an alternative option to transport equipment across designated theaters.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, MSC commander issued a "Gangways Up" order, suspending all liberty and leave for civilian mariners (CIVMARs) assigned to MSC ships worldwide. This order was issued to protect the CIVMARs health and safety by limiting the movement of crews and embarked security personnel.

The SSO community assisted MSCLANT staff by working with ship masters to establish clean spaces aboard vessels as well as coordinate the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.



**USNS Newport (T-EPF 12) underway supporting the "proof of concept" operation at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek, Virginia**

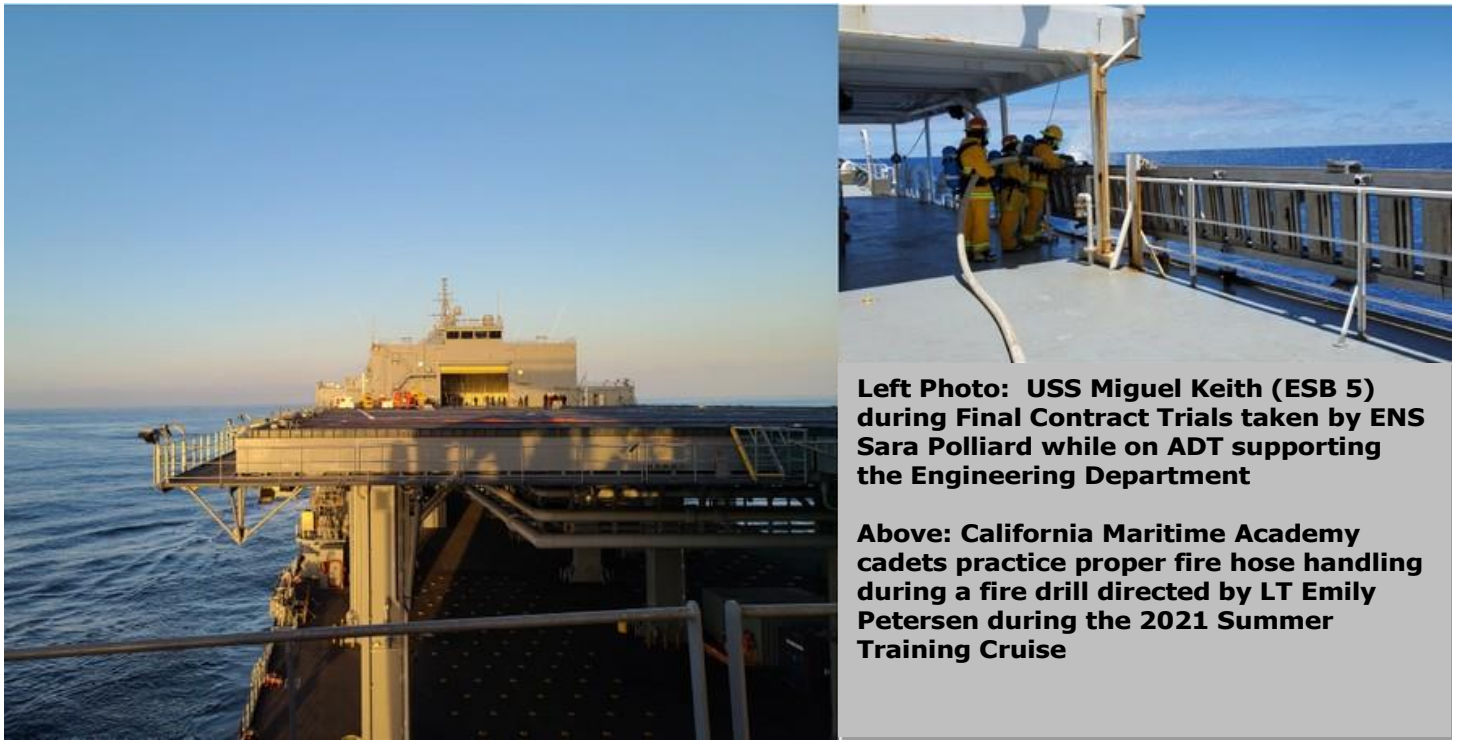
## Summary.

As the real-time logistics arm of MSCLANT, SSO members are often called to stand-up a watch, support exercises and help facilitate coordination of replenishment-at-sea (RAS) events between Navy and MSC assets. This fall, during the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group (CSG) training exercise, four SSOs supported the exercise by standing a 24/7 watch supporting the Dam Neck CSG-4 cell in Virginia Beach, Virginia. These SSOs were

responsible for coordinating the movement and utilization of MSC assets during the exercise and reacting to changes as the exercise developed. They were able to use their civilian experience to quickly familiarize themselves with their assigned duties as they stood watch with the CSG-4 watch cell and provided a seamless service and line of communication between MSCLANT and their Navy counterparts during the exercise. Based on the successful service the SSOs were able to provide, CSG-4 plans to incorporate the SSO community in future exercises to provide similar support.

**THE SSOF PROVIDED 2,913  
TOTAL MAN-DAYS OF SUPPORT  
TO MSCLANT; INCLUDING  
1,202 FOR OPERATIONS, 1,206  
FOR TRAINING, AND 233 DAYS  
OF SHIPYARD SUPPORT.**

# MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND PACIFIC SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



**Left Photo: USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) during Final Contract Trials taken by ENS Sara Polliard while on ADT supporting the Engineering Department**

**Above: California Maritime Academy cadets practice proper fire hose handling during a fire drill directed by LT Emily Petersen during the 2021 Summer Training Cruise**

## OPERATIONS

During FY21 Strategic Sealift Officers answered the call, supporting many important MSC Pacific (MSCPAC), MARAD and U.S. Navy missions.

SSOs provided depth and support during a challenging fiscal year buffeted by a global pandemic and fiscal constraints. The SSO community responded to multiple personnel shortfalls and requirements by sending officers to fill key billets.. This included members sailing onboard MSC ships, serving as TACADs onboard Strategic Sealift vessels, or fulfilling key roles on staffs which would normally be held by experienced CIVMARs or Active Component Sailors. In addition SSO's contributed to the command's pandemic response by sending SSOs to assist MSCPAC staff in addressing the ever-changing COVID-19 environment and reporting requirements. The SSO community provides critical capabilities to the active Navy in many areas.



During FY21, MSCPAC identified multiple shortfalls within shipyard repair periods which resulted in longer repair periods for the critical Combat Logistics Force (CLF) ships, thus causing a severe gap in mission capability. The SSO community responded immediately to support the next three ships entering Mid-Term Availabilities and Regular Overhaul. Leveraging their industry knowledge to highlight potential problems and areas of concern, SSOs provided timely reports to the MSCPAC team, allowing them to take early and substantial action on any issues that arose. This direct support allowed all three ships to exit their maintenance availabilities on schedule. While preparing for Final Contract Trials (FCT) USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) requested additional licensed officers to support the demanding inspection. With none to spare at MSC, SSO's responded by providing three licensed engineers for 47 days which allowed the vessel to pass FCT with flying colors and deliver on time.

THE SSOF PROVIDED 2,485  
TOTAL MAN-DAYS OF  
SUPPORT TO MSCPAC;  
INCLUDING 1,491 FOR  
OPERATIONS AND 583 FOR  
SHIPYARD SUPPORT.

## Summary

Strategic Sealift Officers provide depth and subject matter expertise in skills that are not traditionally held by the U.S. Navy Active Duty component or DOD. The SSO program repeatedly delivered when asked; whether it was to crew the California Maritime Academies Training Cruise and train the future of the industry, fill senior leadership roles ashore, provide needed support at sea or in shipyards. These motivated knowledgeable individuals supported over 20 separate commands and were critical to mission success for Military Sealift Command, MARAD and the U.S. Navy. Strategic Sealift Officers continue to live up to the motto, "We deliver."

# MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND EUROPE AND AFRICA

## NAPLES, ITALY



**LT Brendan Welsh assists USNS Yuma crew (T-EPF 8) lower the stern ramp to the pier in Durres, Albania, on May 2, 2021. USNS Yuma loaded U.S. Army cargo for intra-theater lift to Zadar, Croatia, for forward movement in support of DEFENDER Europe 2021.**

## OPERATIONS

FY21 was a year that the Navy was still battling with COVID challenges while still executing its mission, and realigned its priorities to Global Power Competition. The strategic realignment placed U.S. 6th Fleet and more specifically MSCEURAF in a more central role and SSOs have been there helping to turn the tide. Starting day one of FY21, SSOs were in theater standing the watch as Surface Duty Officers in Naples, Italy, managing MSC assets around the AOR and dedicating endless hours of support to our crews. SDOs coordinate everything from routine operations to emergency operations like Medical Evacuations and migrant rescue operations all with COVID-19 adding additional risk and threat to mission.

While some were ensuring smooth operations at the fleet level, other SSOs were having impact closer at the tactical or ship level. In Souda Bay, Greece, a nexus in 6th Fleet, four SSOs provided port support to the base overseeing and coordinating the movement of dozens of ships that went on to have real world impact delivering all manner of supplies to our Forward Deployed Naval Forces. In Rota, Spain, highly specialized SSOs took up the mantle of Harbor Pilots which increased US Navy's port operational capabilities and reduced the dependency on local pilots for preserving peace in the region. As a hub for Navy operations, SSOs provide a key redundancy for the Navy.

## EUROPE AND AFRICA

As the year progressed, several vessels entered maintenance periods where SSOs provided 643 man-days of support. Leveraging deck and engineering skills, the maintenance teams ensured three USNS and two USS ships were delivered back to the fleet better than when they entered. One of the USNS ships leaving maintenance was the USNS Yuma, which went on to Durres, Albania, and supported Joint Logistics Over the Shore (JLOTS), the sealift component of DEFENDER Europe 21. It was here in Albania where DOD really appreciated the reach of SSOs who were onboard USNS Bob Hope (T-AKR 300), USNS Yuma, and ashore in the MSC Office-Durres. Six officers from both the Individual Ready Reserve and the Selected Reserve led the movement of over 700 pieces of U.S. Army cargo which went on to support 28,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen from 26 countries. Using their unique sealift skillset, the officers involved made JLOTS-21 a resounding success.

Finally, SSOs supported logistical needs in MSCUERAf during the collapse of the Afghan government. Due to the U.S. immediate need to evacuate personnel, many logistical assets were diverted to provide this support. Having the talent for planning and thinking in a dynamic situation, MSCEURAF was able to meet all obligations for normal support while supporting this emergent evacuation effort.

### Summary.

SSOs leverage skills that are not found anywhere else within the Navy Reserve. Their unique experience allows them to provide afloat support as officers, augment workforce to provide inspections and engineering support for ship availabilities, or enhance unit mobilization readiness by providing civilian to military maritime coordination. They are an essential link that allows the Navy to better perform at the junction between civilian and military. The Strategic Sealift Officer Force proves daily, whether on the watch floor, in the wheelhouse, or in the office- that it will provide capability that the Navy needs.

THE SSOF PROVIDED 2,469  
TOTAL MAN-DAYS OF  
SUPPORT TO MSCEURAF;  
INCLUDING 1,665 DAYS OF  
OPERATIONS, 643 DAYS OF  
SHIPYARD SUPPORT AND 141  
DAYS OF HARBOR PILOT  
SUPPORT.

## MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND CENTRAL MANAMA, BAHRAIN



**SSO's stationed at Navy Central Command gather together at NAVCENT Circle**

## OPERATIONS

Over the past year, SSO's have been of vital support to commands within U.S. 5th Fleet, including MSC Central (MSCCENT), MSCCENT Maintenance HUB, Command Task Force 53 (CTF-53), Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS), and other U.S. Navy Central Command (COMUSNAVCENT) operations and missions. As the 5th Fleet Area of Responsibility (AOR) returned to normalcy after the harsh environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, SSO's led the way back to standard operations overcoming obstacles and utilizing their knowledge and experience gained from their professions in the maritime industry. They were directly responsible for the safe movement of 885 civilian mariners in 2021, coordinating over 150 logistical operations via land, air, and sea in order to maintain the operational readiness of 5th Fleet, as well as COMUSNAVCENT, MSC, and host nation COVID requirements. Although COVID impacted the timeline for these logistics movements, multiple other significant events occurred within the 5th Fleet AOR that directly involved the SSOF. On March 23, 2021, M/V Ever Given ran aground in the Suez Canal, blocking all traffic north and south bound. This delay lasted six days, causing one of the biggest logistical problems of our time, affecting not only merchant shipping, but Navy movements, as well. With all eyes on the Dwight D. Eisenhower carrier strike group due to transit the Suez



canal on March 27, COMUSNAVCENT turned to the NCAGS team of six SSO watchstanders to provide continuous information and updates as to the status of the M/V Ever Given, as well as providing naval architecture insight for the process of re-floating the vessel. SSO's not only play a vital part in tracking vessels and personnel movements, but are crucial in operational plans and executions for NAVCENT.

The port of Lebanon, Beirut, was devastated by a massive, accidental explosion on August 4, 2020, and not a single Navy asset entered the port for nearly a year. However, in 2021, the first two Navy assets to enter the port of Lebanon since the explosion were the M/V Sagamore, performing the U.S. Transportation Command quarterly ammunition movement, and the USNS Choctaw County (T-EPF 2), supporting the Lebanon Humanitarian Conference as a hosting platform for COMUSNAVCENT and Lebanese authorities. Leading both these missions were four SSO's supporting CTF-53 and MSCCENT, who organized, planned, coordinated, and executed both missions to their completion and amazing success.

## Summary

THE SSOF PROVIDED 1,964  
TOTAL MAN-DAYS OF  
SUPPORT TO MSCCENT;  
INCLUDING 1,153 FOR  
OPERATIONS AND 468 FOR  
SHIPYARD SUPPORT

SSOs are at the forefront of operations in the 5th Fleet AOR. Their vast, combined knowledge and maritime experience makes them adaptable to any situation, as well as viable assets to any command structure they are put into. Their efforts have supported and led not only their respective commands, but NAVCENT overall, in one way or another. However, it is their work ethic to become better Naval Officers as the links between the civilian and military maritime worlds that cannot be understated. From their willingness to learn at each command they are received by, to their strong support of daily and future operations, their drive to succeed is unwavering, and constantly growing.

## MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND FAR EAST SINGAPORE



**LT Irene Blevins performed a 90 day ADT at SSU Guam from May to July 2021. LT Blevins used her experience as 2nd Mate to assist in coordinating CIVMAR reliefs, COVID response, and port operations.**

### OPERATIONS

FY21 was another year for MSC Far East (MSCFE) to be innovative in providing support to its mission in providing logistics and special mission ships to the U.S. Navy. With following the MSCFE COVID operating restrictions and adhering to the over 20 different countries in the AOR's COVID operating restrictions, strategic thinking needed to occur to overcome and deliver on tasks and missions that were routine just two years before

The officers of the SSOF have been able to use their expertise in port and ship operations to bridge the gap to the new normal of operations in the western Pacific. During FY21, 13 SSOs performed 1,354 days of active duty service. Usually SSOs are brought in for two-week exercise support ADTs, however, the pandemic took those opportunities away, but opened the door to long term ADTs where SSOs could make meaningful and deep impact.

SSOs used their expertise in shipyard maintenance and operations to run the day to day business of the combat logistics fleet and focused on re-opening maintenance and operations that were closed off due to COVID. The SSOF brought in the working knowledge of maritime union relations and ship repair in foreign nations that proved to be a major contribution in reopening Singapore and Thailand for maintenance availabilities.

SSOs were assigned to SSU Guam for to coordinate relief of overdue CIVMARs. CIVMAR relief was a major issue in the MSCFE AOR as many countries shut their borders to incoming and outgoing travel. This caused Guam to become the main hub for crew reliefs in the western Pacific. Deck Officer SSOs used all tools at their disposal such as husbanding service providers, port operations, MILAIR flights, and helicopters embarked on USNS ships to coordinate CIVMAR reliefs and CASREP part deliveries that had minimal impact to operations.

The Philippines have historically been a crucial location for the logistics fleet to resupply and refit. Due to the large impact of the pandemic in the Philippines, MSCFE had to determine other avenues to continue U.S. Navy operations in the South China Sea. SSOs on independent duty in Subic Bay have served as liaisons to the local authorities to promote U.S. 7th fleet interests such as access to new ports and shipyards.

## Summary.

Without the support of the SSOF, many critical task would not be completed. The SSOF employs their skills to smooth communication and tasking, especially when it comes to the interaction with the maritime industrial base. Their civilian skills are uniquely suited to this environment.

THE SSOF PROVIDED 1,646  
TOTAL MAN-DAYS OF  
SUPPORT TO MSCFE;  
INCLUDING 1,062 FOR  
OPERATIONS AND 489 FOR  
SHIPYARD SUPPORT

2021

# OTHER SUPPORT TO THE FORCE



**CAPT Todd Hiller, NCAGS OIC, congratulates SSO ENS Liam Hood, NCAGS Maritime Domain Awareness Specialist, during pinning ceremony after completing the requirements to wear the SSO Warfare Insignia.**

## Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping

The SSOF provided 1,404 man-days of support to Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS). NCAGS remains one of the most relevant and noteworthy units in the reserves. Understanding the merchant marine and strategic sealift, while also having relationships with the merchant industry makes NCAGS the perfect environment for SSOs. The information sharing and situational awareness are vastly increased due to the knowledge of the SSOF. SSO's fill a major gap by identifying seams where industry meets naval operations, creating teams within the interagency, industry and national partners. SSOs make sense of the flow across the maritime spectrum and vitally increase the situational awareness of the Navy in the maritime enterprise.



## Bridge Resource Management Workshops

The SSOF provided 1,061 total days of support to Commander, Navy Surface Forces. This support provided Bridge Resource Management Workshops to 39 Navy combatant ships; with 331 days underway at sea. BRMW is conducted in conjunction with the Surface Warfare Community to identify potential situational awareness and communication improvements as it relates to vessel navigation and safe operation within the maritime ecosystem.



**CDR Jonathan Keffer, BRM-W Manager and Atlantic Fleet Coordinator underway on USS James E. Williams (DDG-95) providing merchant mariners navigational experience to active duty Surface Warfare Officers (SWOs)**

# 2021

## CONCLUSION

The SSOF provided extensive support to its major stakeholders totaling 28, 863 man-days of support. For FY22, our focus is to continue alignment with the Navy Reserve Fighting (ALNAVRESFOR 025/20). SSOF Lines of Effort include specific call outs from the Fighting Instructions for IRR and Sealift personnel:

1. Warfighter Readiness is our fitness to serve in a mobilization billet (3.A and 3.B)
2. Transition capabilities for sealift from the Active to the Reserve (3.A.4)
3. Proactively manage the IRR to create strategic depth (3.B.5)

Experienced SSOs are in high demand and are given exceptional opportunities in the Navy, while gaining fleet experience and providing needed operational support in the contested maritime environment.

The SSOF serves a critical need which has been recognized as needing further clarification and support. OPNAV N4, MSC, CNRFC and MARAD are working hand-in-hand to codify the capabilities needed for the SSOF to project naval power and further enforce strategic depth.