

I appologize for having to type up Mr. Milton's Part 1 of his three part editorial. It seems someone walked out of my office with the June 2006 issue of WorkBoat Magazine and no one will fess up to it. Thus, Part 1 was taken from WorkBoat Magazine's Web Site.

A young mariner seeks choices — Part I

By Joel Milton

After signing in for my appointment to pick up my license renewal and Z-card at the Coast Guard's Regional Examination Center in New York, I took a seat in the waiting area.

A young man with close-cropped hair was sitting in front of me. He looked like he was either in the service or just got out. A few seconds after I sat down, he turned around and asked if I was in the merchant marine. After I said yes, he asked if I could explain the able seaman certification to him and what it meant for his employment prospects. I began to do so, but I was interrupted by a call to pickup my new credentials. I promised him, however, that I would talk to him when I was done.

Fifteen minutes later, we walked out the door and down to the seawall at the Battery. It turns out that the young man was recently discharged from the Navy after serving four years at sea in the deck department on various vessels, including an aircraft carrier. His naval experience had qualified him for an able seaman's ticket, which he was in the process of obtaining. He was also looking for a decent job and missed working on the water. His current job ashore wasn't paying enough, and he needed to do something soon. He was searching for alternatives.

He had looked into shipping out with the Navy's Military Sealift Command as a civilian mariner, but he was recently married and the idea of months away from home didn't appeal to him or his wife. He was also considering a transfer to the Coast Guard but wasn't too excited about that option either.

He asked me what I did. Pointing at a big Moran tugboat rounding the Battery towing a light barge on a short wire, I told him I worked on tugs. "How long do you go out for?" he asked. When I told him I worked a two-week-on/two-week-off schedule, his eyes lit up.

(Ed. Note: Part two will appear in the July issue.)

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On the Water

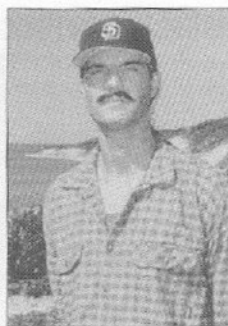
A young mariner seeks choices — Part II

BY JOEL MILTON

The young man was excited to find out that he could work on the water and have a decent home life at the same time. A two-week on/two-off schedule permits it.

"College isn't really for me," he told me. "I want to work on boats again, but I also want to raise a family and see my kids grow up." He was sharp and asked intelligent questions.

The young man appears to be an especially attractive recruit for an industry that is killing itself through the lack of new blood. He's young, willing to work, has some relevant working and life experiences, is accustomed to the



close-quarters living conditions typically found on workboats, and will soon be the holder of a Z-card (Merchant Mariner Document) with an AB (able-bodied seaman) certification as well. What more could a company want? For an industry that suffers from chronic shortages of both qualified mariners and viable new recruits, he looks like a can't-miss prospect.

But I had to present him with the whole picture — the good, the bad and the ugly. I explained that even though there is a big demand for people just like him, the marine industry is still extremely reluctant to make the changes necessary to attract potential

recruits away from other vocations.

I pointed out that companies often offer no real apprentice programs where a green deckhand can comfortably learn on the job, without the pressure of being forced to fill a position that should be occupied by a qualified seaman. I told him that STCW requirements have made it practically impossible to obtain 500/1,600-ton deck licenses, which many companies require mariners to have.

I also told him that if he was interested in becoming an engineer it was unlikely that he would find a company where he could work as a dedicated apprentice — an assistant to the chief engineer — and really learn the job properly from the bottom up. Once he heard these things, the bloom came off the rose pretty quickly.

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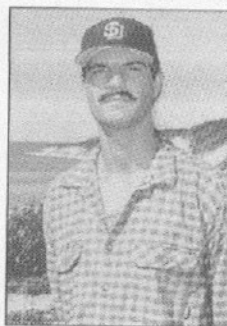
On the Water

A young mariner seeks choices — Part III

BY JOEL MILTON

Even after I presented the big picture to the young mariner he asked more questions, not willing to give up on the idea of working on the water.

What he said pretty much sums up all you need to know about the current state of affairs. First, he thanked me for my time, saying that no one else he had tried to talk to during several visits to the Regional Examination Center could or would bother to answer any of his questions and point him in the right direction. I find that to be pathetic. We all know the state the industry is in, and everyone complains about the low quality of new hires. But we are only



hurting ourselves if we aren't willing to spare some time to help out someone who is trying to make a go of it. Second, the young man said that he had never heard a word about the tug and barge or oilfield sectors of the marine industry. They were not even remote career possibilities until his chance meeting with me at the Coast Guard REC.

This should also be a wake-up call to the industry. If young men and women that leave the armed services, especially the Navy and Coast Guard, are largely unaware that possible careers await them in the workboat segments of the

Merchant Marine, then there is something seriously wrong. These potential recruits likely don't read *WorkBoat*, *Professional Mariner*, or any of the other trade publications. They don't see the healthy number of help-wanted ads, some of them full-color pages, that can be found in the trade magazines month after month. The ads, unfortunately, succeed only by aiding companies in their efforts to steal personnel from each other amidst a shrinking labor pool. This is clearly a dead-end street.

Young people need to know that there are careers to be had in our industry. Then the companies that can provide these careers need to do the hard work necessary to make them attractive and highly sought by these young people.

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