

Wreck spotlights Coast Guard during shutdown

By LORI TOBIAS
The Oregonian

NEWPORT — As Coast Guard crews worked to escort the Mary B II across the Yaquina Bay Bar in seas breaking at 16 feet-plus last week, there came a moment when Commanding Chief Thomas Molloy knew they'd reached the point of no return. The 42-foot fishing boat was too far north.

"The next thing I see is the jetty in his sodium lights," Molloy recalled. "It was in imminent danger and there was nothing we could do about it. The jetty dead ahead in his light — that is the image that plays over and over in our minds."

The three-man crew of the Mary B II died.

It was an agonizing end to what Coast Guard crews routinely do as part of their jobs and focused national attention on their search-and-rescue work as the partial government shutdown stretches into its 28th day, the longest in U.S. history.

Coast Guard members continue to work through the shutdown, the only branch of the military not getting paid because it falls under the direction of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Other military branches are under the U.S. Department of Defense and have funding approved.

This month already, Yaquina Bay Coast Guard crews stationed in Newport have assisted five disabled boats, escorted in numerous vessels when seas have turned dangerously rough and risked their own lives trying to save the crew of the Mary B II.

Active duty members of the Coast Guard, numbering about 42,000 nationwide, were supposed to get paid Tuesday. The majority of about 8,500 civilian employees are on furlough. "To the best of my



Oregon State Police

Authorities in Newport examine the wreckage of the Mary B. II, a commercial crabbing boat that capsized.

knowledge, this marks the first time in our nation's history that servicemembers in a U.S. Armed Force have not been paid during a lapse in government appropriations," Adm. Karl L. Schultz, the Coast Guard commandant, said in a message to members.

"I recognize the anxiety and uncertainty this situation places on you and your family, and we are working closely with service organizations on your behalf," he wrote.

There has been no interruption in Coast Guard service, nor will there be, said Lt. Russ Tippetts, a spokesman for the Coast Guard's District 13 in Seattle.

"Safety and life at sea is always going to be our No. 1 priority and we're always going to answer that call," he said.

Stress

But the stress of the shutdown — caused by a political dispute over funding for President Donald Trump's proposed wall along the southern border of the U.S. — is taking its toll, Tippetts said.

"I can't really speak on behalf of everyone at the Coast Guard, but it can be demoralizing," Tippetts said. "They want to be out there saving lives and we are out there serving the citizens of the United States, but there is going to be that worry in the back of your mind, is my family financially stable? What are we going to need to do in the coming months?"

The Coast Guard is working with its members to help them manage their finances and see what expenses can be cut, Tippetts said.

"We are also encouraging members to work with landlords and banking institutions to see if they can defer payments," he said. "We asked all members to make contingency plans and prepare for this to go on for a couple months if need to be."

The Coast Guard can also provide mutual assistance loans, which are interest-free, but must be repaid.

Coast Guard members aren't permitted to accept

gifts valued at more than \$20 from the public and no more than \$50 in one year. But help is coming from other sources, like the non-profit Chief Petty Officers Association in North Bend.

"We're not affiliated with the Coast Guard, therefore that authorizes us to accept donations and there are no limits to the donation," said Kevin Sweetman, chief petty officer and president of the association.

"Typically throughout the year, if a member is in need, we're able to give money to that member directly," Sweetman said. "It can be food; it can be money. For this scenario, it's been kind of overwhelming the support we're seeing from the local communities."

Junior Coast Guard members make about \$1,500 to \$2,000 a month after taxes, a bit more if they have dependents. That's for a 40-hour week, plus a duty day requiring them to stay on base 24 hours.

Others are also stepping up to help: the New-

Pension checks for Coast Guard retirees in doubt, congressman says

Staff and wire reports

An Oregon congressman said pension payments for 50,000 retirees from the Coast Guard could be at risk in two weeks if the government shutdown continues.

The retirees may not get their Feb. 1 pension checks unless Congress and the president agree to fund the government by the end of the month, U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio,

an Oregon Democrat, told NBC News.

Active-duty Coast Guard personnel missed their first paychecks because of the shutdown on Tuesday.

"In the last couple hundred years, and Coast Guard is the oldest service, we've never stiffed our uniformed military," DeFazio, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said.

port-based Rogue Ales is offering discounts at some of its restaurants to Coast Guard families and community groups are setting up a food pantry this weekend in Astoria for Coast Guard members.

Elsewhere around the country, a state lawmaker in Massachusetts introduced a bill calling for the state to pay the salaries of active duty Coast Guard members during the shutdown and seek reimbursement from the federal government when the shutdown ends.

A New Jersey university is deferring tuition for Coast Guard students until their tuition assistance is available again. The Coast Guard suspended the assistance during the shutdown.

In the meantime, 1,135 active duty Coast Guard members and 138 Coast Guard reservists on the Oregon Coast remain on the job.

Risk

In Newport, on the night of the Jan. 8 wreck of the Mary B II, Coast Guard

crews looked for survivors as massive waves broke around them. The response included a 52-foot motor life boat with five aboard including Molloy; a 47-foot motor life boat with four crew members; and a helicopter with four crew members from North Bend. Eight others worked on rescue, including crew members on the beach or doing radio communication.

"You hear it before you see it," Molloy said. "You hear this roaring and sucking sound coming right at you. You can feel the wave pull the water out from under you. Without light, trying to concentrate, it can be demanding."

"While crossing the bar, another big set came in — 18 to 20 feet. You can see the white when it starts to break. I looked to the right and I see this wave, this wall of water standing up and it starts to break to my right and look to my left and it starts to break to the left. It met and closed out right in the middle of the channel on top of us. The crew was definitely scared."

Hammond fisherman accused of bribing sex abuse victim gets probation

By BRENNIA VISSER
The Daily Astorian

A Hammond fisherman pleaded no contest Thursday to a misdemeanor charge of interfering with a witness in a sex abuse case.

As part of a plea agreement, the district attorney's office dismissed two felony counts of bribing a witness and two counts of tampering with a witness.

Paul Angelo Leitch,

known as "Sturgeon Paul," was accused of facilitating a meeting between Hammond fisherman Dennis Sturgell and the victim's father. Sturgell was sentenced this month to 13 years in prison in the sex abuse case.

Leitch, 48, was sentenced to pay \$600 in fines and given 12 months probation with the condition he has no contact with Sturgell or the victim.

Federal Hanford cleanup watchdog sidelined by government shutdown

By ANNA KING
Northwest News Network

There are several agencies and a group of stakeholders who watch over cleanup at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. But the partial government shutdown is blocking some of that important oversight.

In the past 10 years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency office in Richland, Washington, has shrunk from nearly 10 experts working on Hanford issues to just three — including the top manager.

The agency's job is to watch over several key cleanup projects at the site. For example, cleanup near the Columbia River, a massive dump at Hanford and the so-called Z-9 Crib.

That's where the government poured a lot of liquid radioactive waste in an underground structure near the central part of the site.

In partnership with Washington's Department of Ecology, it's EPA's job to watch over Hanford cleanup. But with the partial shutdown, that office is closed.

Besides overseeing Hanford, the experts at the EPA Hanford office also help oversee work at several Superfund sites in the agency's Region 10, including Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska.

Another watchdog group that's being slowed down because of the shutdown is the Hanford Advisory Board.

The board is important because it includes stakeholders like Northwest

tribes, industry and retired Hanford experts who watch over the cleanup and advise the federal government with a formal process.

The board is required to publish an adequate notice in the federal register, and get travel approved in advance of its meetings — and that can't happen with the shutdown.

The full board meets only five times a year. And it's last meeting in December was canceled because of former President George H.W. Bush's death, meaning the board has not met since September.

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