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### Andrew Kinsey, Master of the USNS Red Cloud

I was fortunate to have been with Maersk from one of the first years of the Maritime Prepositioning Ship contracts. We've been able to support the troops in a lot of different instances going through the first Persian Gulf War, Somalia, and now Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.



I was actually there [in the waters off the Philippines in 1986] during the overthrow of [President Ferdinand] Marcos and the attempted coup on Corazon Aquino, too.

I've been master for about 10 years, and since [Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom] I've made more than 12 trips to the Gulf. It takes six weeks to get over there. Depending on cargo availability, they will either begin to backload us while we're still discharging, or we might go into a MODLOC (Miscellaneous Operational Details, Local Operations) in the Gulf of Oman to wait. But, ideally, they sail us over, we discharge, and within five days we have the ship loaded and we're back on our way. We've been carrying a lot of armament, a lot of M1A1s.

This past spring, we were taking some equipment back out of Ash Shuaybah, Kuwait, for Naval Coastal Warfare Squadron 25. I had my brother on a sister ship in the Gulf, my first cousin as an engineer on one of the other LMSRs (large medium-speed roll-on/roll-off ships), and my nephew was a helo pilot off the Carl Vinson, all at the same time. It was really quite a family affair in the Persian Gulf.

As I explained it to my wife, during the first Gulf War, you really were pretty secure up until Hormuz, and then you would start to worry a little bit. Now the rules of the game have changed. I consider that we've lost home-field advantage. You have to worry about the near-littoral threat at any chokepoint transit because the threat is much wider now than it was in the past. We have to be vigilant.

Before we enter the Mediterranean, they put on a 12-man Navy embark security team that rides with us. They stand watch right up there on the bridge. During chokepoint transits — Suez, Bab el Mandeb and the Straits of Hormuz — we have the entire contingent standing by.

We're a 30-man crew on a 950-foot ship, so we do quite a bit with a small crew. The crew takes a lot of pride in what they do, and I'm very fortunate to have a lot of retention. [The Red Cloud's accident-free rate, 1,590 days and counting] is a direct result of that. We've been able to prove our worth, and there's a lot of pride in how the program has grown.

For the entire crew, the biggest challenge is separation from family. A military unit that's deploying has a support structure for the families, but merchant seamen and their families are left to their own devices. I try to foster a family atmosphere. I call the crew a family, because my family has gone to sea.

By far [the most rewarding aspect is to] do a job that has a direct impact on the support of the troops. Our first load of Marine Corps equipment out of Wilmington, N.C., was discharged before the [Iraqi Freedom] ground war started. I remember being back in New York and looking at *Newsday* and seeing the center spread in the paper about the Marine Corps advancing into [Iraq]. I could look at that and say, "Hey, I helped carry that cargo over."

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