

MARINER YIELDS LICENSE AFTER SEX ABUSE CHARGE

Coast Guard accused him of assaulting cadet at sea

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

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A mariner engineer surrendered his license to work at sea on Wednesday, a week after the Coast Guard charged him with sexually assaulting a U.S. Merchant Marine Academy cadet in 2019.

It's a move that closes the book on a high-profile case that led to a flood of other complaints of sexual abuse aboard MMA ships, according to federal documents and the accuser's attorney.

A Coast Guard investigating officer filed upgraded administrative charges on Aug. 17 that sought to permanently revoke the merchant mariner credentials of Edgar Sison, a former senior engineer for Maersk Line, Limited. Sison is accused of sexually assaulting Hope Hicks, then a cadet at the Kings Point service academy, records show.

In March, the Coast Guard sought to suspend Sison's credentials for unauthorized use and possession of alcohol while on the Alliance Fairfax vessel in August 2019. But the agency added sexual assault charges after the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, which declined to com-

ment, decided against criminally charging Sison, who lives in Jacksonville, Florida.

On Wednesday evening, Sison voluntarily surrendered his credentials rather than seek a trial challenging the charges before a federal administrative law judge, thereby ending the case, records show. "Sexual misconduct has no place in the maritime industry. Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from fear and harassment," the Coast Guard said in its announcement that Sison's license surrender meant they were withdrawing the charges.

J. Ryan Melogy, Hicks' attorney, said the outcome is the "best we could hope for" at this point in the case.

"This is extremely important given how high-profile this case has become," said Melogy, who, along with Hicks, attended a recent meeting with federal prosecutors where they were told Sison would not be charged.

Messages left with Sison were not returned.

Hicks, who is now serving in the Navy, made headlines in 2021 after disclosing — anonymously at the time — on a maritime whistleblower website that Sison, a first assistant engineer 40 years her senior, pressured her to drink alcohol in his stateroom and after she was

WHAT TO KNOW

■ **A mariner engineer, Edgar Sison, surrendered his license** to work at sea on Wednesday, a week after the Coast Guard charged him with sexually assaulting a United States Merchant Marine cadet in 2019.

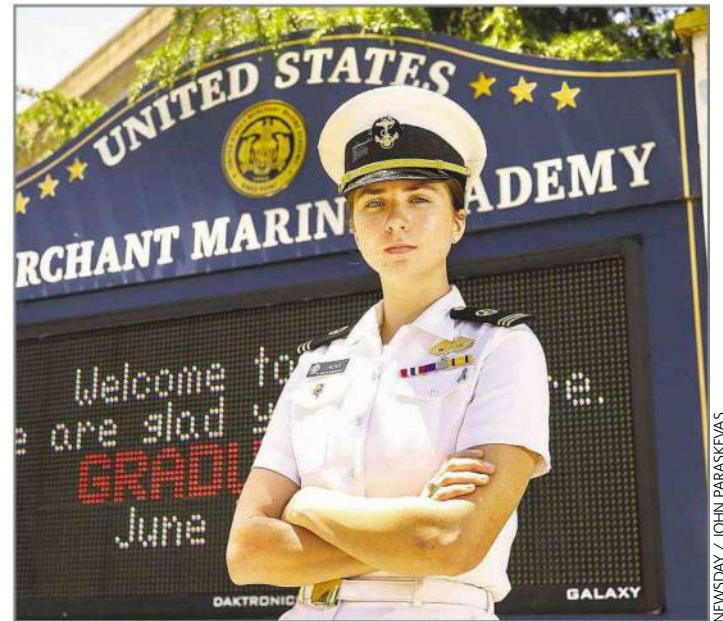
■ **The surrender came after a Coast Guard investigating officer filed** upgraded administrative charges seeking permanent revocation of Sison's credentials.

■ **The Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point has been the subject** of several prior complaints of sexual abuse and harassment.

unconscious, raped her.

When Hicks, who was 19 at the time and the only woman on board, confronted the supervisor, he told her "no one is ever going to believe you," she said.

"It took me a very long time to recover from what happened and I would say that I'm still not fully recovered," Hicks said in an interview with Newsday in 2021 before her USMMA graduation. "But after a while, I just realized that the problem is bigger than myself."



Hope Hicks, in June 2022 as a midshipman at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, filed a sexual assault complaint.

The Coast Guard charging documents state that Sison's "engagement in a sexual act with the junior crew member, while the junior crew member was physically incapable of declining participation in, or communicating unwillingness to engage in, that sexual act was sexual abuse."

Hicks' disclosure prompted the U.S. Department of Transportation to suspend, for the second time, the Sea Year program, in which midshipmen are required to complete more than 300 days of work on commercial vessels in international waters.

USMMA, which trains men and women to be midshipmen working on deep sea vessels and in the military, has been the subject of several prior complaints of sexual abuse and harassment. The school, which trains students in marine engineering, naval science and other subjects, is one of five federal service academies and was

the first in the nation to admit women.

A spokesman for the Maritime Administration, which oversees the Merchant Marine Academy, said the agency "remains committed to the enhancement programs designed to strengthen safety for cadets and mariners, and will continue to work to advance culture change in the maritime industry. MARAD will not discuss the specifics of matters involving current or former midshipmen out of respect for their rights to privacy."

Maersk said it terminated five crew members after conducting its investigation of the assault.

Hicks filed a lawsuit in 2021 against the Denmark-based shipping giant, alleging the company failed to protect her from sexual assault and harassment during the Sea Year program. She reached an undisclosed settlement with Maersk in November.

Dominican officials assess storm damage

The Associated Press

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic — Authorities in the Dominican Republic fanned out across the Caribbean country on Thursday to evaluate the damage Tropical Storm Franklin inflicted on crops and homes after causing heavy flooding that killed at least two people and left one missing.

More than 670 homes were

affected by the storm, according to preliminary government figures, and 24 communities were cut off by heavy rains.

Crews evacuated more than 3,300 people to higher ground ahead of the storm, and another 352 residents sought safety in government shelters.

Among them was Domingo Ogando Figueroa, who took shelter in a communal center in the city of San Cristobal with his

wife and three children.

"We hope everything turns out well," he said as he asked authorities to prevent water from the Yubaso River near his home from backing up.

The request was echoed by Santa Rosario Rodríguez, a homemaker who went to a shelter with her two daughters when the Nigua River by her house started to swell.

"When it fills up with water, it has nowhere to go," she said.

The storm left hundreds of thousands of people without power and more than 1.6 million without water after knocking 120 aqueducts out of service.

By Thursday, schools, businesses and government agencies were reopened as the tropical storm spun northeast of the country.

As of late Thursday morning, Franklin was about 90 miles east-northeast of Grand Turk Is-

land. It had maximum sustained winds of 60 mph and was moving north at 7 mph across open waters.

Franklin is expected to strengthen into a hurricane over the next few days, but poses no threat to land.

It is the seventh named storm in the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to Nov. 30. An eighth named storm, Gert, dissipated on Tuesday.