

Salvatore R. Mercogliano. TARGETS OF ASSASSINS: THE AMERICAN MERCHANT MARINE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, 1964-1975. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael A. Palmer) Department of History, July 1997.

The purpose of this thesis is to document the career of the American merchant marine during the United States' military involvement in Vietnam. The history of this industry remains one of little research by American historians. Among the literature concerning the United States involvement in Vietnam, almost no mention is made of the five American merchant ships sunk by the Viet Cong or the more than one hundred attacks made on ships as they transited to the port of Saigon, through the Rung Sat swamp.

The years examined proved decisive to American merchant marine as it underwent a tremendous transformation. At the beginning, the commercial industry depended on ships built by the Maritime Commission based on the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. By 1975, most of these ships had been retired, or scrapped, but few replacements constructed so that the commercial industry witnessed a decrease of over 50 per cent.

This study examines the status of the commercial fleet in 1965 and the organization of the Military Sea Transport Service (renamed Military Sealift Command in 1970). The war itself is divided into four phases. The initial build-up of forces and supplies, the sustainment of a half million man military force, the withdrawal and eventual evacuation from Vietnam. Another chapter analyzed the dangers faced by merchant seamen sailing into the war zone and also the common dangers they faced on the high seas and in foreign ports on a daily basis.

It is hoped that this thesis provides the reader with a clearer understanding of an element of American maritime history that is rarely documented. This work is intended to be an element of a larger dissertation encompassing the career of American merchant marine in regards to national defense.

Targets of Assassins:
The American Merchant Marine During the Vietnam War, 1964-1975

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by
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the merchant mariners that sailed in harm's way, under the flag of the United States, throughout the world and history.

Personally, the author dedicates this thesis to my wife, Kathy, who stood by me as a merchant mariner and now a historian. Without her, I would not have had the determination, or fortitude to succeed at East Carolina University and achieve my masters. She is my inspiration and my friend.

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Chapter One: The Merchant Marine

Nature destines the Americans to be a great seagoing people . . . the commercial superiority of the Anglo-Americans should be attributed much less to physical causes than to intellectual and moral ones . . . they will become the commercial agents for a great part of the world.

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America

One Down

As the streaks of sunlight emerged from the eastern sky, the port of Saigon awoke from the night of May 2, 1964. Like many others throughout the world, the harbor contained a plethora of small boats plying their ways to markets. The waterfront contained freighters from assorted nations, including the United States. These ships transported material for the Armed Forces of Vietnam (RVNAF) to fight their struggle against the communist insurgent force, the Viet Cong (VC). Among the ships, moored to the docks in Saigon, included one with an impressive military career. In a few hours, a small purple pendant would be raised on one of the signal halyards to mark the award of the Presidential Unit Citation during another war.¹ This award placed the ship in the company with some of the most famous ships of the Second World War.²

Below decks the ship's cooks, bakers, and stewards prepared the morning meal, and the smells from the galley mixed with those of the port. A combination of this, plus oily water, local foods, garbage, and the noxious order of a sewer discharge lingered over the ship. On deck, second mate Raymond Arbon finished completing an inspection of the mooring lines and proceeded to the gangway to check in with the able bodied seamen on watch. For merchant sailors, work on board ship consists of no vacations or days off. At sea, they worked four hours

¹ This is the highest single award a ship or military unit can receive in the service of the country.

² James C. Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the United States Fleet* (Annapolis, 1945), 9-13. Four carriers received the Presidential Unit Citations: *Enterprise* (CV-6), *Guadalcanal* (CVE-55), *Bogue* (CVE-9) and the *Card* (CVE-11).

on and eight hours off. Upon arrival in port, this routine changed to eight hours on and sixteen hours off, and the most dreaded of all watches remained the midnight to eight A.M.

From the deck Arbon walked on, Wildcat fighters and Avenger bombers flew repeated combat missions and sunk four German U-boats in August 1943 and another four in October.³ The ship itself could not support the new jet aircraft in service. Although some of its sister ships served during the Korean War,⁴ for service in Vietnam the once illustrious escort carriers had been reduced to cargo ship/aircraft ferry.⁵ Instead of fighters and bombers ready for launch, the flight deck held helicopters wrapped in plastic to protect them from the acidic effects of the ocean spray. The ship performed similar missions to Saigon with no difficulties, but this day proved different.⁶

As Arbon proceeded to the gangway, a sudden jolt hurled him off his feet and onto the wooden flight deck. As he recovered from the shock, a plum of water emerged from between the dock and the starboard side of the ship. To many of the ships crew who sailed in the Atlantic during the Second World War, it reminded them of a torpedo hit. The explosion ripped open the hull, and the putrid harbor water of Saigon proceeded to flood the engine room. Since the ship entered port, the engineering staff also assumed an in port routine so that no crew members were working in the area of the explosion and no fatalities occurred. However, this relaxed condition resulted in the watertight doors between the main engine room, the generator room, gasoline pump room, and shaft alley remaining open, and allowed the harbor water to fill these compartments.⁷

³ L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *From America to United States: History of the long-range Merchant Shipbuilding Programme of the United States Maritime Commission*. Part 3 (London, 1984), 36. The subs sunk included the U-117, U-664, U-525 and U-847 in August; and U-460, U-422, U-402 and U-584 in October. On November 1, 1943, one of the *Card's* escorts, the destroyer *Borie* rammed and sunk U-405 but resulted in the lost of the destroyer.

⁴ These included the USS *Rendova* (CVE-114), *Bairoko* (CVE-115), *Badoeng Strait* (CVE-116), *Sicily* (CVE-118) and *Point Cruz* (CVE-119). These carriers operated mainly piston engine aircraft, such as Corsairs, and Avengers.

⁵ Paul H. Silverstone, *US Warships Since 1945* (Annapolis, 1987), 7. Escort carriers underwent numerous redesignations by the navy in the post-war period. In June 1955 they became Escort Helicopter Aircraft Carriers (CVHE). Some ships became Utility Aircraft Carriers (CVU) in 1958 and by 1959 most received their designation as cargo ship & aircraft ferry (AKV).

⁶ Phil Chinnery, *Air War in Vietnam* (New York, 1987), 25, 30.

⁷ "Aircraft Ferry Mined," *Sealift: Magazine of the Military Sea Transport Service* (July 1964): 3-6.

As an escort carrier, the crew of this ship exceeded 800 naval personnel. Since its delegation as an aircraft ferry in 1958, the ship no longer remained a commissioned naval ship. Instead, to save costs, the Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS) manned the ship with 74 civilian merchant mariners. The original design for the escort carriers used commercial merchant ship hulls and machinery which allowed an easy transition from navy crews to merchant mariners. When the explosion ripped into the ship, their struggle against the inrush of water proved inadequate. The ship's master, Borge Langeland, reported to Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon that the flooding of the ship could not be controlled, and the ship settled to twice its normal draft of twenty-four feet before resting on the bottom, sunk. Investigation by naval personnel subsequently revealed that VC sappers had set an explosive charge on the side of the ship using the sewer line under the dock to mask their approach and escape.

The United States Naval Ship (USNS)⁸ *Card* became the first American merchant ship sunk during the Vietnam War and during the next decade untold other merchant ships suffered attacks from gunfire, mortar, mines, and saboteurs. Besides the threats from the Viet Cong, sailors faced unforeseen dangers. The SS *Badger State* experienced a cargo load of bombs breaking loose while at sea that forced the crew to evacuate the ship in the middle of winter in the North Pacific. The most dreaded fear of any captain occurred on board the SS *Columbia Eagle* when mutineers took over the ship and hijacked it to Cambodia. The crew of the SS *African Glen* found itself trapped in the middle of a war, not in Vietnam but in the Suez Canal. The single greatest disaster for the merchant marine came not from enemy gunfire but from a hurricane named *Betsy* that struck the Gulf of Mexico coast in September 1965. The drama of the merchant marine unfolded not only in the harbors of Vietnam, but on the deck of the ships, in the offices of shipping lines, in Washington, D.C., and all around the globe.

⁸ USNS designation is used to identify a ship owned by the Navy, but manned by civilians.

The merchant marine's participation in the Vietnam War demonstrated its crucial role in national defense. Although the Vietnam War remains one of the most controversial topics in American history, there is no denying that the a strong merchant marine proved essential in that war. However, the story of the service of the American Merchant Marine during the Vietnam War is one seldom mentioned in historical accounts of the war, such as Stanley Kranow's *Vietnam: A History* or Bruce Palmer's *The 25 Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*. It remains an item of historical footnotes and little documentation. The merchant marine sustained the armed forces of the United States, and it's allies, throughout the war. At no time, did United States forces preclude operations for the lack of supply. The merchant marine, diverted from its primary role of transporting commercial goods for American businesses, performed yeoman service during the war.

The role of the American merchant marine receives little attention from American historians, despite the fact that the merchant marine's role in national defense preceded the formation of the United States and a strong merchant marine remains a central element of national policy.⁹ Additionally, the merchant marine remains one of the most heavily regulated industries in American history. As colonies of the British, many of its initial settlers made the sea their livelihood, either through commerce, shipbuilding or fishing. During time of war, many of these ships underwent conversion into privateers to augment the Royal Navy. Following the Revolutionary War, the American merchant marine, plied the world's ocean with commerce, and opened up new trade routes to the Far East and China. Attacks upon the merchant marine led to early conflicts with the French during the Quasi-War, against the Barbary States and with England. The American merchant marine proved a worthy adversary to the British commercial fleet until the Embargo of 1807 decimated the United States fleet, from which it never truly recovered.

⁹ The governments support for a strong merchant marine was first stated in the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, and reaffirmed in the subsequent acts of 1928 and 1936.

freighters in a scheduled liner service on essential trade routes.¹⁴ Besides the operational subsidy, the act established a construction subsidy for the building of new ships. This subsidy allowed a shipowner to receive from 33 1/3 to 50 per cent of the ship cost in a twenty year loan at an interest rate of 3.5 per cent. But when the act passed, the nation was in the midst of the Great Depression, and few companies had the funding to construct new ships.

To manage these subsidies, the act created the Maritime Commission, consisting of five commissioners to administer its provisions.¹⁵ The law provided that if the commercial industry did not respond, "the Commission is hereby authorized and directed to complete its long-range program previously adopted as hereinafter provided in this title."¹⁶ By enacting this section, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the Congress, embarked on a government shipbuilding program. This program created by this program, that provided the backbone of the commercial shipping industry, until the end of the Vietnam War.

The ships built by the Maritime Commission during the war represented some of the most technologically advanced features to date. The initial plan of the commission called for the building of fifty ships a year for ten years. The entrance of the United States forced the expansion of the program and the construction of many ships that had little commercial value once the war ended.

Shipping Co (Delta Line from 1962), Moore-McCormack Lines Inc., New York & Cuba Mail Steamship Co., Oceanic Steamship Co., Pacific Argentine Brazil Line Inc. (ended 1939, but again 1949-1956), South Atlantic Steamship Co. (ended 1938), United States Lines, Dollar Steamship Lines (starting in 1938 and renamed American President Lines) and Seas Shipping Co. (starting in 1938 and ending 1957).

¹⁴ H. David Bess and Martin T. Farris, *U.S. Maritime Policy: History and Prospects* (New York, 1981), 61.

¹⁵ U.S. *Public Law No. 835*. 74th Congress, 2d Session, 1936. Section 101.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Section 701. The author contends that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's experience as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I made him appreciate the necessity of a strong merchant marine in order to support the deployment of United States forces overseas. The Merchant Marine Act of 1936 attempted to stimulate shipbuilding and commercial ship operators but above all else, provided the means for the construction of a merchant marine for the Second World War.

The commission initially settled on the plans for four types of ships. The first two aimed at providing a replacement to break-bulk¹⁷ shipowners. The C-2 and C-3 freighters transported from 9,000 to 13,000 tons of cargo at speeds of 16 to 18 knots.¹⁸ The other freighter design, the smaller C-1, was earmarked as a replacement for the "tramp operators."¹⁹ The T-2 provided a replacement for the aging tanker fleet. All four designs allowed for rapid conversion into naval auxiliaries or the carriage of military cargoes. The freighters included some oversized hatches and larger cargo booms, while the tankers could be adopted into naval oilers. The problem arose that these ships represented only a small fraction of the war built fleet. The 2,701 Liberty, 414 Victory, and over 1,400 military type ships built by the Maritime Commission overshadowed the 417 standard 'C' type freighters and 651 'T' type tankers.²⁰

The construction of the Liberty ships came under the heading of "emergency construction." The head of the Maritime Commission, Admiral Emory S. Land, opposed the construction of these ships. He criticized the design as coming from a 1879 British tramp steamer and already being obsolete. The ships utilized an inefficient triple-reciprocating engine that produced a "break-neck" speed of 11 knots.²¹ Although the ships could carry the deadweight cargo similar to the C-2 and later Victory ship, the internal arrangement of the ship included only one deck above the tank top and did not provide the same square footage. The C-2 and Victory included two decks in most holds that allowed for better cargo stowage arrangement.

Immediately following the Second World War, the United States found itself in a position of worldwide economic dominance. Its merchant fleet outnumbered the rest of the world's combined totals. The chief rivals before the war, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, and Norway all

¹⁷ Break-bulk refers to the carriage of dry cargo goods in crates and pallets. Not to be confused with bulk cargo, such as ore, grain or coal.

¹⁸ This is known as their deadweight capacity.

¹⁹ A tramp ship, did not operate on a set shipping schedule like a liner (or packet) service, but steamed to ports of opportunity and aimed at delivering high value cargoes to offset periods of inactive service.

²⁰ James M. Morris, *Our Maritime Heritage: Maritime Developments and Their Impact on American Life* (Washington, 1979), 230.

²¹ John Gorley Bunker, *Liberty Ships* (Salem, NH, 1994), 6-8.

had suffered grievous damage to their fleets that took years to rebuild. This all changed with the Ship Sales Act of 1946. The surplus in shipping held by the United States seemed to endanger the domestic shipbuilding industry. American shipbuilders feared that other nations would rebuild from their own shipyards and restock their fleets while American yards would wither. As a result, Congress enacted the Ships Sale Act that allowed foreign nations the first choice of the war-built American fleet. By the time the act expired, 1,113 ships went to foreign investors, while only 847 went to American companies.²²

Concurrent with the "yard-sale" of Maritime Commission ships, American ships were also reflagged, not an uncommon practice. During the Civil War, the United States shifted merchant ships to British registry to avoid Confederate raiders, and more importantly, avoid impressment of the ship into the United States navy. Moreover, during the Second World War, President Roosevelt advocated the shifting of American ships to Panamanian registry to get around Neutrality Laws.²³ In the post-war shipping economy, the hardest hit sector became the tanker fleet. Dependent mainly on the coastal transport of oil,²⁴ the lower operating expense of foreign competitors, predominately the Greek fleets of Aristotle Onassis and Stavros Niarchos, made foreign trade impractical for American companies.²⁵ To give American companies an opportunity to continue in this trade, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., helped establish the nation of Liberia as a "flag of convenience" for American tanker operators immediately following the Second World War. By reflagging the ships to Liberia, American shipowners avoided United States Coast Guard regulations for safety, inspection and manning requirements.

²² Rene De La Pedraja, *The Rise and Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1992), 148-153.

²³ Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty for Sale: The Origins and Evolution of the Panamanian and Liberian Flags of Convenience* (Annapolis, 1981), 71-97.

²⁴ The coastal trade of the United States fell under the cabotage laws of the Merchant Marine Act of 1920. This required that trade between US ports be carried in US flagged, and built, ships and excluded foreign shipping. The intention to provide a 'protected' trade for American companies.

²⁵ Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping*, 158-160.

This act effectively removed American tankers from overseas trade and seriously impacted on the United States ability to transport fuel to Vietnam.²⁶

The Merchant Marine in 1965

In 1950 the Maritime Administration (MARAD), under the Department of Commerce, replaced the Maritime Commission in all ways but the administration of subsidies which fell on the Federal Maritime Board (FMB). These agencies both were headed by the same individual, with members appointed by the president, and confirmed by the Senate. In 1961, the Federal Maritime Commission and the Maritime Subsidy Board replaced the FMB and permanently separated these organizations from the Maritime Administration. This caused a chasm in the smooth working of shipbuilding programs, subsidies and trade conferences.

Once again the Maritime Administration directed the construction of a new class of merchant ships. The *Mariner*-class incorporated many lessons of all the earlier freighters. MARAD built thirty-five such ships and chartered them out to American ship operators.²⁷ The ship design challenged foreign competitors and included seven holds with quick-action, folding steel hatch covers. The steam turbine propulsion generated a speed of 22 knots but required a substantially larger crew than previous ships, and were more costly to operate.²⁸ The ships' success among American shippers can be measured by the number of offshoot designs, including American President Lines *Sea Racer* and *Master Mariner*-class, the American Mail Line's *Washington Mail*-class, the Pacific Far East Lines *China Bear*-class, and States Steamship *Advanced Mariner*-class in the 1960s.

By the time of the Vietnam War, the World War II-era ships built by the Maritime Commission and composing the majority of the commercial fleet, were approaching the end of

²⁶ Carlisle, *Sovereignty for Sale*, 110-133. The exception to this case being American tankers chartered to carry petroleum cargoes for the Department of Defense, which will be discussed later.

²⁷ By 1965, the operators of Mariners included Pacific Far East Lines, United States Lines, Matson Navigation, American Export Isbrandtsen Lines, States Steamship, American President Lines, Military Sea Transport Service and the United States Navy.

²⁸ Standard crew of 58.

their service lines. Most of the American shipping lines threatened to become obsolete at one time, a development termed block obsolescence. The first ships ordered from commercial companies, following the Second World War, came from the oil companies. Humble Oil & Refining Company ordered ten ships of the *Esso Lima*-class from Newport News Shipbuilding starting in 1947. These ships differed from the standard T-2 tankers in being able to carry 27,300 tons of cargo as opposed to 16,350 tons.²⁹ Growth of tankers continued through this period and culminated in the *Manhattan*, capable of transporting 106,500 tons. By 1965, fifty-five new tankers had entered into the merchant fleet but the war-built tankers remained the dominant ship in the inventory.

The tanker industry financed its ship replacement program through the expansion of oil transportation following the war. The post-war industrial boom caused a marked demand for petroleum. The subsidized liner companies initiated a program of ship replacement in 1960. By 1965, one hundred and thirty new freighters entered the fleet, but as with the tankers, they remained a minority among the war built fleet.

The merchant fleet broke down into the following categories:

538	General-cargo ships
	- 107 with speeds of 20 to 18 knots
	- 7 C-4s of 17 knots
	- 127 C-3s of 16.5 knots
	- 167 C-2s of 15 knots
	- 37 Victories of 16.5 knots (AP-3 type)
	- 19 Victories of 15 knots (AP-2 type)
	- 11 C-1s of 14 knots
	- 28 Liberty ships of 10 knots
	- 35 with speeds under 15 knots
73	Bulk carriers
18	Refrigerator ships
11	Coastal ships
34	Passenger-cargo ships
291	Tankers

²⁹ John A. Culver, "Blue-Water American Merchant Ships, 1947-1965," in *Naval Review 1966* (Annapolis, 1966), 290.

The 965 ships represented above could also be broken down into three other categories. Of the 538 general-cargo ships, 314 belonged to subsidized shipping lines.³⁰ The unsubsidized berth operators consisted of 360 ships, including 115 tramp-operated ships. The 291 unsubsidized tankers made up the rest of the fleet.

The ships in the merchant marine consisted of varied characteristics and not all proved suited for service in Vietnam. None of the merchant ships possessed a lifting capacity beyond 80 tons and most lacked adequate deck space to transport the large landing craft needed in discharge operations, that became common early in Vietnam. Among the merchant fleet, only one large roll-on/roll-off ship existed, already under charter to the navy. Nevertheless, the fleet did possess some distinct advantages. Most of the standard break-bulk freighters included cargo booms capable of lifting up to 75 tons, which allowed them to move heavy equipment, such as tanks. Moreover, many of the new ships included large hatches for access into the cargo holds and the capability to transport oversized equipment below decks.

The merchant fleet demonstrated its military potential during the largest peacetime amphibious exercise in the history of the United States, Operation *Steel Pike I*. Conducted off the coast of Spain in the fall of 1964, the operation included over 80 naval ships and 60,000 troops. Besides the naval ships present, ten merchant ships³¹ transported over 82,000 measurement tons³² of cargo and 2,400 vehicles.³³ This exercise set an eerie precedence for the role of the merchant marine over the next ten years in Vietnam.

³⁰ These included Lykes Brothers Steamship Co., Gulf & South American, Moore-McCormick Lines, American Export Isbrandtsen Lines, Delta Lines, American President Lines, American Mail Lines, Pacific Far East Lines, States Steamship Lines, United States Lines, Farrell Lines, Grace Lines, Prudential Lines, Bloomfield Steamship Co., and Oceanic Steamship Co.

³¹ The ten ships included the *Pioneer Moon* and *American Contender* from United States Lines; *Christopher Lykes* from Lykes Brothers Steamship Co.; *Export Bay* and *Export Buyer* from American Export Isbrandtsen Lines; *Mormacargo* and *Mormacscan* from Moore-McCormack Lines; *Del Sol* from Delta Steamship Lines; *Coeur d'Alene Victory* from Victory Carriers and *Smith Victory* from Smith Company.

³² A measurement ton is 40 cubic feet of cargo. It is intended to approximate a one ton load of cargo.

³³ Committee of American Steamship Lines, *The American Merchant Marine: Hero in War-Stepchild in Peace* (Washington, 1966), 36-38.

The merchant marine in 1965 proved more prepared to aid the American military than any time since the introduction of steel and steam. This mission of the merchant marine is little known but played a crucial part in the United States' involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, the commercial fleet faced another enemy, the block obsolescence of the Maritime Commission-built ships. The war enabled many companies to defer the replacement of ships due to the government's desperate need for merchant ships. By keeping ships past their intended life time, and not replacing them, the situation of the merchant marine in 1975 would prove dramatically different.

Chapter Two: The Military's Merchant Marine

It is necessary for the national defense and development of its foreign and domestic commerce that the United States shall have a merchant marine (a) sufficient to carry its domestic water-borne commerce . . . (b) capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency, (c) owned and operated under the United States flag by citizens of the United States . . . (d) composed of the best-equipped, safest, and most suitable types of vessels...*It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States to foster the development and encourage the maintenance of such a merchant marine.*

Section 101

Merchant Marine Act of 1936

The Merchant Marine and National Defense

The post World War II reorganization of the military included an analysis of its ability to transport personnel, material, and supplies overseas. Four separate organizations fought for limited shipping assets and in some ways duplicated or wasted valuable shipping space. The Maritime Commission established the War Shipping Administration to supervise the allocation of its shipping and the Navy and War Departments each possessed their own fleets of ships, the Naval Transport Service and Army Transport Service respectively. The Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet utilized the Fleet Service Force for his own requirements and these four organizations pooled their resources under the Joint Mobility Traffic Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but the arrangement proved unwieldy and cumbersome.

On October 1, 1949, the Department of Defense created the Military Sea Transport Service, referred to as MSTS, under the secretary of the navy. It designated the secretary responsible for providing sea transportation for all military services and other agencies as directed and thereby created another fleet command under the Chief of Naval Operations.³⁴

The performance of the merchant marine in the Second World War formed the backdrop for the creation of MSTS. During the course of the war, the merchant marine shipped over 268

³⁴ Vice Admiral William M. Callaghan, "Military Sea Transportation Service," in *Naval War College Review*, 5 (Jan. 1953): 31-34.

million long tons of cargo. This averaged to a delivery rate of 8,500 tons of cargo every hour. Besides cargo, it transported over 11 million troops and civilians to and from the theaters of operation.³⁵ Of course, the price for this success proved dear as 733 ships and over 6,000 men never returned to port.³⁶ The success of the merchant marine provided the military with the sense that it would always be there to support them in future contingencies.

The formation of the MSTS "nucleus fleet" came from two distinct sources.³⁷ The decline in the commercial tanker market caused great concern among the military. The need to supply the new overseas bases and forces required a fleet of U.S.-flagged tankers, but the commercial industry removed most of these tankers from foreign trade to the more lucrative coastal market. To placate the military, the Naval Transport Service retained fifty-five T-2 tankers for support of military forces world-wide.³⁸ The navy removed the military crews and contract out the operations of the ships to four commercial firms.³⁹ In 1949 these tankers, along with six naval transports,⁴⁰ formed the core of MSTS.

On March 1, 1950, seventy-one ships of the Water Transport Service of the Army's Transportation Corps followed the ships of the Naval Transportation Service to MSTS. They included four refrigerated cargo, sixteen cargo, five aircraft cargo ships, forty-one transports, one tug, one landing ship tank (LST),⁴¹ and two fuel oil barges.⁴² Most of the passenger and cargo ships utilized merchant marine crews hired directly by MSTS. These sailors were under the

³⁵ War Shipping Administration, *The United States Merchant Marine at War* (Washington, 1946), 9.

³⁶ John Bunker, *Heroes in Dungarees: The Story of the American Merchant Marine in World War II* (Annapolis, 1995), xii.

³⁷ This term is used to describe ships owned by the government and operated by MSTS. Those ships having US Navy crews on board maintain their USS designation. Those ships with civilian crews on board are designated as USNS.

³⁸ Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping*, 158-162.

³⁹ L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *Victory Ships and Tankers: The History of the 'Victory' Type Cargo Ships and of the Tankers Built in the United States of America During World War II* (Cambridge, MD, 1974), 103-109. The four companies were Marine Transport Lines, Inc.; Tankers Company, Inc.; American Pacific Steamship Co.; and Pacific Tankers, Inc.

⁴⁰ All seven transports navy manned.

⁴¹ Landing Ship Tank: designed to beach itself and discharge cargo through a bow ramp.

⁴² James C. Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the United States Fleet*. 6th ed. (Annapolis, 1950), 42.

guideline of government employment regulations and hence their designation, civil service mariners.⁴³ The combination of chartered ships and MSTS owned/operated ships continues to the present.

The smooth transition of Military Sea Transport Service proved short-lived as the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 shifted the organization into a war-time environment. This conflict provided the first true test of the concept of MSTS and its first commander, Vice Admiral William M. Callaghan.⁴⁴ The military mobilized for a war that no one expected to fight. During the three years of war, MSTS transports ferried more than 4.75 million troops to Korea. The movement of dry cargo exceeded 51.8 million tons and petroleum by 21.4 million long tons.⁴⁵ The majority of the transportation for these cargoes came from the commercial sector and not the MSTS nucleus fleet. On July 1, 1950, the MSTS fleet included 28 navy-operated, 106 civil-servant operated,⁴⁶ 41 contract-operated, and 6 chartered ships. By November 15, 1952, the MSTS fleet expanded from 181 ships to 478 and included 27 navy-operated ships, 137 civil-servant operated, 100 contract-operated, and 214 chartered ships.⁴⁷ The existence of the commercial merchant marine to augment the existing government operated fleet proved crucial to success. Yet short-falls in commercial shipping existed and required the mobilization of ships from the Maritime Administration's National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF). In 1950 this fleet consisted of 2,277 ships remaining from the Maritime Commission building spree. The majority of these were obsolete Liberty ships, with little military potential. To meet the additional shipping needs to Korea, as well as a critical shortage of coal in Europe and grain in India, 778 ships were activated. According to the annual report for the Maritime Administration:

⁴³ These sailors conformed to the same regulations as standard civil service employees.

⁴⁴ His brother, Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan, perished on board the USS San Francisco during the Battle of Guadalcanal on Friday, November 13, 1942.

⁴⁵ Ira Dye, "Sealift for Limited War," in *Naval Review 1964* (Annapolis, 1965), 143.

⁴⁶ To identify a civil-servant man ship, MSTS assigned the designator USNS instead of the usual USS. MSTS also painted the stacks of the nucleus ships with a blue, gold and gray stripe below the black topping of the stack to visually identify the ships.

⁴⁷ Callaghan, *NCWR*. 46.

The increased tonnage, without which it would have been impossible to meet supply commitments in Korea and foreign aid commitments elsewhere, came entirely from the National Defense Reserve Fleet of the Maritime Administration. Over an 18-month period beginning with Korean hostilities, 778 Government owned ships were withdrawn, repaired, refitted and put into service at the rate of more than 3 vessels every 2 days.⁴⁸

Until the war in Vietnam, Korea remained the largest operation undertaken by the Military Sea Transport Service. In 1956, following the Suez Crisis, MSTS activated tankers and cargo ships from the NDRF to supplement government and commercial shippers due to the longer sailing distances required by the closing of the Suez Canal.⁴⁹ Besides the emergency crisis, the service maintained the daily supply of bases and U.S. forces throughout the world. In 1959 MSTS supported the intervention of troops into Lebanon and the United Nations mission to the Congo the next year.⁵⁰ In 1964 the situation in the Dominican Republic and exercise *Steel Pike I* occupied MSTS, until the war in Vietnam escalated.

It's the Law

The use of government-owned ships and concerns by commercial shippers resulted in a series of agreements and legislation passed to ensure that MSTS did not become a state-run merchant marine. Before its inception, the Military Transportation Act of 1904 required that all supplies for the United States armed services be transported in ships of U.S. registry or owned by the nation. The charging of excessive or unreasonable freight rates provided the only exception to this act. The act did not specify the definition of "excessive or unreasonable" or addressed the potential problem of the non-availability of American ships.⁵¹

Immediately following the Korean War, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson and Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks formulated an agreement that regulated the size of

⁴⁸ Clinton H. Whitehurst, "The National Defense Reserve Fleet: Past, Present, and Future," in U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (Feb. 1977): 28-29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 29-30.

⁵⁰ Military Sea Transport Service, *Financial and Statistical Report-1960* (Washington, 1960), 3-4.

⁵¹ Gerald R. Jantscher, *Bread Upon the Waters: Federal Aids to the Maritime Industries* (Washington, 1975), 78.

MSTS's nucleus fleet. Referred to as the Wilson-Weeks Agreement, it specified that, except under conditions of full mobilization, the nucleus fleet could not contain more than fifty-six transports, thirty-four cargo ships, and sixty-one tankers.⁵² Besides limiting the size of the nucleus fleet, it also established the procedures for obtaining United States shipping. The first asset available to MSTS remained U.S.-flagged merchant ships in established liner services. If sufficient space, or the service did not exist to the desired location, then the chartering of U.S.-flag ships could be utilized. If both of these procedures did not provide adequate shipping, then the Defense Department could request the activation of ships from the National Defense Reserve Fleet. If these options did not provide the necessary shipping, then MSTS could resort to the chartering of foreign-flag ships.⁵³

Concurrent with the Wilson-Weeks Agreement, the Cargo Preference Act of 1954 amended the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 regarding the shipment of government cargoes. It established three classes of goods: goods bought by the government, goods provided by the government, and goods advanced by the government. The act required that at least 50 per cent of these cargoes moved by sea be on board privately-owned U.S.-flagged ships, contingent on fair and reasonable freight rates. Nevertheless, this act did not define the terms "fair and reasonable." It also included a provision whereby the government held the right to waive this requirement in times of emergency.

The Military Sea Transport Service in 1965

By 1965 the Department of Defense emerged as the largest single user of the American Merchant Marine. The shipment of military cargoes differed significantly from commercial businesses. The requirement to sustain military forces overseas and the nature of their equipment usually exceeded the capacity of the smaller tramp steamers in existence. The urgent need to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

deliver military cargoes typically drove up costs. These effects, combined with the actual cargo itself, made it extremely difficult to determine a set freight rate for a particular commodity. In liner agreements, MSTs agreed on a set rate negotiated with an operator, or conference, in a special shipping contract. In 1966 MSTs altered this process and bid out its cargo in a competitive manner.⁵⁴

The organization of MSTs differed from that of the four permanent standing naval fleets established after the end of hostilities in 1945. Commanded by Vice Admiral Glynn R. Donaho in 1964, the service contained four major subordinate area commanders. These consisted of the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean area located in Southampton, England; Atlantic area in New York City; Pacific area at San Francisco; and the Far East area in Yokohama, Japan. Each of these area commands consisted of several offices and possibly sub-area commands, depending on the geographic size of the area and frequency of military traffic. The Republic of Vietnam fell under the command of Captain J. L. Hunnicutt and MSTs Far East. MSTs established an office in Saigon to provide a liaison between the military and commercial shipping companies. As the war intensified, MSTs established shore units in the ports of Vietnam. These units typically consisted of one naval officer and four to six enlisted personnel. By 1967 MSTs units worked in Da Nang, Cam Rahn, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Chu Lai, Phan Rang, Vung Tau, Vung Ro, and Can Tho.⁵⁵

At that time, MSTs controlled a fleet of 201 ships.⁵⁶ This can be broken down into a nucleus fleet of 149 ships, consisting of cargo ships, transports, tankers and special project ships.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 145-146. A conference refers to a syndicate of shipping companies, usually operating in a similar geographic area, that negotiate a set rate for all, thereby eliminating the effects of underbidding.

⁵⁵ Callaghan, *NCWR*, 41-42.

⁵⁶ MSTs, *Financial and Statistical Report* 1965, 32. This is as of June 30, 1965.

⁵⁷ MSTs fleet of special project ships are beyond the scope of this thesis but it should be noted that they provided a unique service during this timeframe. Consisting of 39 ships, they included survey and oceanographic research ships and a series of electronic surveillance ships. Most notable was the fleet of 22 missile range instrumentation ships (T-AGMs) used to assist in the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo manned spacecraft missions.

Of the remaining ships, 50 came from the commercial market through charters and two from the National Defense Reserve Fleet operated by commercial shipping firms under a General Agency Agreement.⁵⁸ The nucleus fleet included 68 cargo ships, the majority being Victory ships transferred from the Army Transport Service in 1950. This fleet also consisted of some unique ships, not available in the commercial sector, such as two modified C-4 class freighters.

The C-4 evolved from a design proposed by the Army in 1941 based on the ships of the Seatrain Shipping Line. Seatrain developed a concept by which ships transported loaded railcars by a system of internal rails and cranes. This reduced the need to double handle cargo at the port of embarkation and discharge. By sealing the railcars, it effectively eliminated the threat of pilferage and destruction by the elements. The Maritime Commission opposed constructing this type of ship because of the damage the cargo could inflict on a listing ship. Instead they altered the design into a four-deck, seven-hatch ship for the transport of vehicles. The urgent need for troop transports forced a further modification of the ship design. The post-war need for the movement of locomotives and other military cargoes caused the army to request the use of C-4s again. In 1954 two C-4s underwent conversion into heavy-lift ships. Fitted with two 150-ton booms, the *Pvt. Leonard F. Brostrom* and *Marine Fiddler* saw extensive service in Vietnam.⁵⁹

The success of the LST in the Second World War convinced the military of the utility of loading ships by driving the cargo on and off. This concept, roll-on/roll-off, inspired the conversion and construction of three ships into "ro/ros." The first ship came from the conversion of a navy landing ship, the USS *Fort Snelling* (LSD-23) into a merchant ship following the war. Reacquired in 1959 by MSTC as the USNS *Taurus* (T-LSV 8), she contained internal decks for the movement of cargo and a stern ramp.⁶⁰ The other ro/ro, the USNS *Comet* (T-LSV 7), built in 1958, contained six holds with four decks, connected by a series of ramps. The ship included a

⁵⁸ Two C-2 refrigerated cargo ships provided service in the Pacific.

⁵⁹ L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *From America to United States: History of the long-range Merchant Shipbuilding Programme of the United States Maritime Commission*. Part 2 (London, 1981), 78.

⁶⁰ Paul H. Silverstone, *US Warships Since 1945* (Annapolis, 1987), 159.

stern ramp and two sideports for cargo operations. Supplementing the ramps, the ship included a full range of booms to lift-on/lift-off cargo. With a service speed of 18 knots and capacity of 8,730 long tons, it compared well with the war-built C-3s of the Maritime Commission but required only hours to load or offload instead of days.⁶¹

MSTS planned to add a fleet of six new ro/ros to that of the *Comet* and *Taurus*. On April 13, 1965, the Lockheed Shipbuilding and Construction Company of Seattle launched the first of these ships, the USNS *Sea Lift* (T-LSV 9). Similar to the *Comet* in design and appearance, it carried 50 per cent more cargo and traveled at speeds in excess of 20 knots.⁶² Criticism from the commercial sector about the construction of a new class of government-owned ships forced the suspension of the program after only one ship.⁶³ In its place, MSTS implemented a build and charter program. On February 18, 1965, the navy released a proposal for a private shipbuilder to construct and operate the ship for a period of seven years with successive options in order to aid in financing the ship.⁶⁴

One unique group of ships operated by MSTS consisted of a fleet of twenty-five World War II LSTs. Although all of these ships flew the American flag and remained USNS ships owned by MSTS, they were commanded and crewed by Japanese nationals. This strange arrangement stemmed from the Korean War. As the United Nations military forces planned for the invasion of Inchon in September 1950, a severe lack of landing craft required the navy to scour the Far East for shipping. The destruction of the Japanese merchant marine during the war and the destruction of their ports by air raids, left the nation in an extremely dangerous situation.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, *Characteristics and Index of Maritime Administration Designs, January 1991* (Washington, 1991), 46. In September 1964, the *Comet* loaded 297 vehicles at Norfolk, Virginia in three hours and three minutes. At Bremerhaven, Germany, under black-out conditions, it unloaded the same cargo in one hour and 21 minutes.

⁶² US DOT, *Index*, 46 & 81.

⁶³ John S. Rowe and Samuel L. Morison, *The Ships and Aircraft of the U. S. Fleet*. 9th ed. (Annapolis, 1972), 122.

⁶⁴ George R. Kolbenschlager, "Naval and Maritime Chronology 1 July 1964-30 June 1965," in *Naval Review 1966* (Annapolis, 1965), 231. This ship became the GTS *Admiral William M. Callaghan*.

The transfer of LSTs to Japan provided the needed coastal shipping remedy, because the ships could beach themselves and did not require fully-functional ports. In an extremely ironic twist of events, American LSTs with Japanese crews participated in the landings at Inchon.⁶⁵ Because the LSTs operated solely in the Far East, MSTS and the Japanese government arranged for a section of the 1952 peace treaty to include a provision for a continuance of this service. Initially, thirty-eight Japanese-manned LSTs worked for MSTS. By 1965 this arrangement proved a constant source of irritation with marine unions. The rise of the Japanese merchant marine did result in the reduction of available seamen to man the ships, and some reactivated for the Vietnam War received Korean or Ryukyuan crews.

Besides the shipment of dry cargo, the military depended on the shipment of petroleum. MSTS continued the operation of its own fleet of tankers under contract operation and civil service mariners. The fleet consisted mainly of refurbished, Maritime Commission built T-2 tankers. In the mid-1950s, MARAD built five T-5 tankers for the navy, following the trend of larger tankers. Each T-5 had the capacity of two T-2 tankers and proved more cost efficient to transport fuel than the older and smaller ships. To operate the T-2s and T-5s, MSTS contracted three contract operators: Keystone Shipping Company, Marine Transport Lines, and Mathiasen Tanker Industries, Incorporated. Besides these larger ships, five smaller civil-service-manned T-1 tankers provided service in the Far East for the shallower-draft ports in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea.⁶⁶

The Vietnam War witnessed the sunset of an entire class of merchant ships. The movement of troops by sea remained the primary means available to the government. Before the war, MSTS operated a fleet of sixteen troop transports, divided between the Atlantic and Pacific on two specific routes, from the East Coast to Europe and the West Coast to Japan two subsidiary

⁶⁵ Michael T. Isenberg, *Shield of the Republic: The United States Navy in an Era of Cold War and Violent Peace, 1945-1962* (New York, 1993), 197.

⁶⁶ Military Sea Transport Service, *Financial and Statistical Report 1965*. Part II (Washington, 1965), Ship Section.

routes included the East Coast to the Caribbean and West Coast to Pacific Islands. MSTS transports dealt primarily with the movement of troops and dependents. Although MSTS chartered space on commercial passenger ships, these ships alone could not provide the needed space required by the military.⁶⁷ The initial movement of troops to Vietnam relied on these ships but, by the end of the war, expansion and advancements in air transportation provided a more cost effective alternative to ships. As the United States completed its withdrawal from Vietnam, the troop transports performed their final missions.⁶⁸

The Vietnam War required a massive mobilization of ships and resources. This mission initially fell upon the 164 ships controlled by Military Sea Transport Service on June 1, 1964. The escalation of the war required that the MSTS fleet expand to 569 vessels in three years and did not return to the pre-war level until 1974. Although the nucleus ships increased by over 100 per cent, commercial charters experienced its greatest growth. From 33 cargo ships and 16 tankers under charter in 1965, the numbers grew to 171 and 67, respectively by 1968. By the end of the war, the nucleus fleet of Maritime Commission cargo ships, tankers, and troop ships disappeared; chartered commercial ships and a program of build and charter ships replaced them.

⁶⁷ MSTS, *Financial and Statistical Report* 1964, 25-26.

⁶⁸ MSTS, *Financial and Statistical Report* 1973, 8.

Chapter Three: Early Years in Vietnam and the Build-up, 1964-1968

Despite the tremendous growth in the capabilities of aircraft, about 97.5 per cent of all the cargo delivered to Vietnam moves in ships. Such cargo could not be handled without hundreds of merchant ships and thousands of merchant seamen.

Lane C. Kendall
Shipping Advisor to MSTS

The Fall of the French

United States involvement in Vietnam commenced immediately after the end of the Second World War. The surrender of Japanese forces allowed the strongest of the nationalist forces, the Viet Minh, to rearm themselves before reoccupation by French forces. Their goal for independence did not meet with approval by the French and the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, quickly earned the label as Communists. From the initial clashes with the nationalist, American support materialized, for the French, through American merchant ships. In 1951 the ailing Waterman Steamship Company received a contract from MSTS to ship material to French Indochina with thirteen laid-up ships.⁶⁹ MSTS civil service ships aided the French by transporting a battalion of their troops, stationed in the Republic of Korea, to Saigon on board the transport *General W. M. Black*.⁷⁰

The most prominent role played by the merchant marine was one that it became masters of in the Far East -- evacuations. In 1950 MSTS ships helped evacuate the encircled X Corps from North Korea. In twelve days, from December twelfth to the twenty-fourth, U.S. Navy and MSTS ships evacuated 105,000 troops, 17,500 vehicles, 350,000 tons of cargo, and 91,000 civilians from Hungnam to Pusan. Most notable among the ships involved, the *Meredith Victory*, commanded by Leonard P. La Rue for Moore-McCormack Lines, transported over 14,000

⁶⁹ De La Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping*, 198.

⁷⁰ Edwin B. Hooper, Dean C. Allard and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict*. Volume I. (Washington, 1976), 230-231.

civilians on a ship designed for 12 passengers. In 1954 MSTS accomplished a similar mission in Vietnam.⁷¹

Originally intended to aid in the evacuation of Mutual Defense Assistance Program supplies loaned to the French, MSTS soon witnessed another mass evacuation. Following the surrender of the French base at Dien Bien Phu, leaders from Laos, Cambodia, North and South Vietnam met with representatives from France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States and China in Geneva. The Geneva Accords divided Indo China into four separate nations, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam divided along the 17th parallel until elections could be held to determine the type of government. Pending the outcome of those elections, scheduled for 1956, the accord allowed for the resettlement of civilians. Many of communist supporters moved north overland while pro-southern civilians went by sea and air. On August 5, 1954, President Ngo Dinh Diem of the Republic of Vietnam requested President Dwight D. Eisenhower's assistance in moving a million refugees from the north. Eisenhower directed Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Robert B. Carney into action. Carney designated Rear Admiral Lorenzo S. Sabin to command the operation and Captain P. W. Mothersill to command the MSTS units.⁷² Admiral Sabin requested that all sixteen of the MSTS transports in the Pacific divert to Haiphong to aid in the evacuation. Additional vessels included fifteen cargo ships, four of these designated to carry passengers. The ships experienced problems that would be repeated in the evacuation of South Vietnam in 1975. The large number of refugees overwhelmed the capacities of the ships, and the small merchant marine crews could not supervise their passengers. The first ship, the SS *Beauregard*, arrived in Haiphong on September 2, 1954.⁷³ As time ran out for refugees and the Viet Minh closed off ports to ships, Admiral Sabin ordered the transport USNS *General A. W. Brewster* to steam inches

⁷¹ CASL, 26-28.

⁷² Hooper, Allard and Fitzgerald, *Vietnam*, 270-276.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 287-288. Originally completed as the USS Wayne (APA-54), reacquired by Waterman Steamship as the *Beauregard* in 1947. This ship underwent conversion into a container ship in 1958 and became a frequent visitor to Vietnam, while operated by Sea-Land.

off the three-mile limit so small boats could shuttle out people. On October 30, the ship sailed with 1,209 people from the village of Van Ly.

MSTS supported the withdrawal of French and Vietnamese forces throughout May 1955. Transports continued a steady movement of people from Haiphong to Saigon while LSTs moved French equipment. On May 16, 1955 all navy and MSTS ships departed ports for international waters and on May 18 set sail for the Philippines. After August, 39 MSTS ships supported 74 naval ships in evacuating 310,848 people, 68,757 tons of cargo, and 8,135 vehicles from North Vietnam.⁷⁴

The Republic of Vietnam

The geography of the Republic of Vietnam presented some difficulties for the service of merchant ships. The Geneva Accords divided the nation along the 17th parallel, and the new nation lost the service of the best natural port, Haiphong. The configuration of the country, stretching along the South China Sea with the Mekong Delta in the south, made water transportation logical. Yet the Republic of Vietnam initially possessed only one deep-draft port. Saigon proved a focal point for the shipment of supplies to Vietnam. Until the expansion of other ports at Da Nang, Cam Ranh, and Qui Nhon, all large ships discharged at Saigon and trans-loaded cargo to MSTS LSTs, or other smaller inter-coastal ships, for discharge in the ports along the coast or upriver. The government of Vietnam organized the nation into four military regions.

The shipment of munitions to Vietnam remained a priority cargo throughout the war. Besides the ever present threat of attacks, the safe handling of this commodity proved dangerous, as demonstrated by the tragedy at West Loch, Hawaii and Port Chicago, California in 1944.⁷⁵ Six miles south of Saigon, three mooring buoys at Cat Lai provided an area removed from the city to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 297-299.

⁷⁵ On May 21, 1944, a Black labor battalion was loading several LSTs with mortar ammunition when an explosion ripped through West Loch in Pearl Harbor. When the dust cleared five LSTs had been destroyed and most of the labor battalion killed. At Port Chicago on July 17, 1944 the Liberty ship *E. A. Bryan* and Victory ship *Quinault Victory* loaded ammunition when approximately 10,000 tons of the cargo detonated and killed 327 men, almost all also from an African-American labor unit.

handle these volatile cargoes.⁷⁶ Even though the anchorage came under attack several times during the war, no ammunition ships suffered a fatal explosion.

The port of Saigon suffered from severe congestion during the initial phases of the military build-up. In 1966 MSTS paid out \$ 11,071,039 in demurrage claims for ships being delayed in the ports of South Vietnam.⁷⁷ In November 1965, some 122 ships awaited discharge in the port of Saigon. To alleviate the situation in the port, MSTS designated holding areas in the Philippines, Guam, and Japan for ships awaiting offload. Because this provided only a temporary solution, the military embarked on a construction program to enlarge the port facilities of Saigon. The new addition, completed in November 1966 and refereed to as Newport, added four deep-draft wharves, each 650 feet in length. These, plus the quays in downtown Saigon, allowed for the docking of thirty-five ships, plus another twelve ships at anchor.⁷⁸

Some ships did not proceed up the thirty-eight mile Long Tau River to Saigon but remained in the anchorage of Cape St. Jacques and off the towns of Vung Tau and Cat Lo. From the anchorage in Ganh Rai Bay, ships discharged their cargoes into smaller ships and lighters for further transportation and eliminated the dangerous passage to Saigon and congestion of that port. Ganh Rai served as a primary holding anchorage for ships awaiting a berth in Saigon.

Throughout the course of the war, the Vietnamese ports proved unable to handle the amount of cargo delivered. Several major factors accounted for this situation. The first involved the lack of warehouses along the waterfronts for storage, and staging of material, for further distribution. Second, the lack of material handling equipment, such as forklifts, pallet-jacks, and handcarts, slowed the movement of cargo off the docks. Third, American ships, with their palletized and later containerized loads, discharged cargo faster than conventional break-bulk freighters and thus surpassed the capabilities of Vietnamese stevedores. Fourth, there was an

⁷⁶ Byron S. Whitehead and Edward F. Oliver, "A Chain of Ships," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (Nov. 1969), 97-98.

⁷⁷ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1966.

⁷⁸ Whitehead and Oliver, "A Chain of Ships," 97.

adequate amount of watercraft to offload ships at anchor. Shipments of landing craft mechanized (LCMs) took place on many ships, but few ships existed that could carry the larger, and more efficient, landing craft utility (LCU). Finally, the confusion between military and civilian representatives caused delays in the assignment of scarce wharf space or anchorage.⁷⁹

Da Nang, the second largest city in South Vietnam, contained a beautiful harbor, but lacked deep draft piers and an adequate shipping channel. This led to Da Nang evolving as a lightering port⁸⁰ but it lacked mooring buoys and the open roadstead exposed ships to the northwest monsoons of the fall and winter. The port did contain a small commercial pier and several LST ramps for the beaching of these craft. The city itself, divided by the Da Nang River, contained only one light bridge to handle the movement of heavy trucks. To meet the increased needs of supplies in the northern area of South Vietnam, the navy dispatched numerous landing craft to Da Nang to enhance the lighterage service. A 100-ton floating crane added to the capabilities of the port. Da Nang could then offload heavy deck cargo placed on ships from the United States, well beyond the capacities of normal ship booms. Demonstrating the ingenuity of American engineers, the navy filled in an area around Observation Light Point and constructed two deep draft piers and added a floating De Long pier. This allowed the routing of ships directly from the states to Da Nang and no longer made it necessary to offload cargo for the port in Saigon or Subic Bay and transfer to smaller ships.⁸¹

Chu Lai, located fifty miles to the south of Da Nang, did not possess any sort of harbor or sheltered area for ships. The construction of an airbase at that location proved difficult to supply by land, and required the initiation of over-the-beach operations. The navy based a pontoon

⁷⁹ Lane Kendall, "U. S. Merchant Shipping and Vietnam," in *Naval Review 1968* (Annapolis, 1968), 141. Lane Kendall served as a shipping consultant to Commander Military Sea Transport Service during the Vietnam War. This article provided a great deal of background material on the MSTTS aspect of shipping and it is unfortunate that Colonel Kendall did not follow this up with another article to complete the tale.

⁸⁰ This is the process where a ship would anchor or moor to a buoy and small watercraft, referred to as lighters, would come out to the ships and receive the cargo.

⁸¹ K. P. Huff, "Building the Advanced Base at Da Nang," in *Naval Review 1968* (Annapolis, 1968), 90-113.

causeway at Chu Lai to shuttle in supplies from ships and an underwater pipeline for fuel. To overcome this situation, Navy Seabees constructed a LST ramp that proved one of the most treacherous approaches in South Vietnam.⁸²

Cam Ranh and Qui Nhon provided the two major ports for the supply of forces in the central highlands of South Vietnam. These ports included facilities for deep-draft ships to dock. Cam Ranh came under consideration as a permanent naval base, but the withdrawal from Vietnam halted further construction of the facility.⁸³ By mid-1966, Cam Ranh expanded to a point that it handled one-fourth of all the supplies coming into Vietnam. It averaged over 100 ships a month and included five cargo piers, one fuel pier, and LST ramps. It contained storage facilities for over 20 million gallons of fuel.⁸⁴

The Troop Movements

To tie in the movement of cargo to Vietnam and the increasing role the merchant marine played in the war, it is necessary to review the transport of the major U.S. and Allied forces to the country. The arrival of the first large military ground forces came in March 1965 with the landing of the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade to secure the airfield at Da Nang. The Marines utilized Navy amphibious ships and air transportation to land these forces and the associated equipment. In May 1965, the 3d Marine Division, III Marine Amphibious Force, and the Army 173d Airborne Brigade all deployed from Okinawa to Vietnam. Since this deployment took place within the Far East area, local transportation sources, such as the MSTs LSTs, aircraft and amphibious ships of the 7th Fleet handled this movement.

This all changed in September with the deployment of the new airmobile unit, the 1st Cavalry Division. The first word of deployment came from President Lyndon Johnson in mid-July, when he announced the movement of the division to the Republic of Vietnam. The

⁸² *Ibid.*, 91-106.

⁸³ Edwin B. Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance: A Story of Naval Operational Logistics in the Vietnam War, 1965-1968* (Washington, 1972), 157-159.

⁸⁴ "The port of Cam Ranh," *ANONE*, July/Aug. 1968, 5.

transportation of the division from Fort Benning, Georgia, took place in two phases. The first involved the shipment of the division's helicopters. The damage to the USNS *Card* in May 1964 and the announcement of the deployment of additional units to Vietnam, led MSTS to activate two additional aircraft ferries on July 8, 1965.⁸⁵ The *Kula Gulf* and *Point Cruz* joined the *Card*, *Core*, *Breton* and *Croatan* in the nucleus fleet. To support the movement of the 1st Cavalry, MSTS assigned the *Kula Gulf* and *Card* to the mission. The activation of the *Kula Gulf* did not allow for the modernization of the troop billeting area and Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard wished to move his troops into the civilian crews' berthing spaces. According to historian Shelby L. Stanton, "the uncooperative Military Sea Transportation crews refused to sail."⁸⁶ To supplement the aircraft ferries, and provide the necessary berthing for the helicopter crews, the navy provided the helicopter carrier, USS *Boxer*. To move the support vehicles, MSTS diverted its three ro/ros ships -- the SS *Transglobe*, USNS *Taurus*, and *Comet* -- from their Brooklyn to Bremerhaven service. These ships remained in the Pacific during the remainder of the build-up in Vietnam.⁸⁷

To transport the 15,000 men of the division, MSTS withdrew six transports from its Atlantic service and ordered them to the ports of Charleston and Savannah in August 1965. Four of the transports--the USNS *General Simon B. Buckner*, *General William O. Darby*, *General Maurice Rose*, and *General Alexander M. Patch*--were vintage P-2 transports, dated to World War II. Built by the Bethlehem Steel shipyard in Alameda, California, the ships incorporated a split engine room design that gave them a distinct two-funnel appearance. Although the ships were air-conditioning and possessed a service speed of 19 knots, the design of the engine-room made the ships manpower intensive and prevented their conversion into commercial passenger ships. They remained in government service to provide the needed passenger service for the military between

⁸⁵ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

⁸⁶ Shelby L. Stanton, *Anatomy of a Division: The 1st Cav in Vietnam* (New York, 1987), 41. The MSTS *Vietnam Chronicle* does not mention this problem at all in its report on the movement of the division.

⁸⁷ Kendall, "Merchant Shipping," 131-132.

the east coast and Europe. The other two transports-the USNS *Upshur* and *Geiger*, entered service during the Korean War. These ships, and their sister ship, USNS *Barrett*, had been designed as passenger-cargo ships for use by American President Lines (APL) in the Far East.⁸⁸ The need for transports in the Korean War resulted in MARAD requisitioning the ships as troop transports and reimbursing APL for their cost. These ships contained facilities for 1,500 troops and 396 cabin berths, in addition to cargo in the forward and aft holds. These ships remained the last troops ships in MSTs service until withdrawn in 1973.⁸⁹

Because the mission of the division was to clear the central highlands of South Vietnam, the division offloaded at Qui Nhon. The arrival of this large number of transports, ro/ros, aircraft ferries, and eleven cargo ships severely overburdened the limited port facilities. This large scale movement of a single division into Vietnam highlights the difficulty the local ports faced with modern merchant ships. Lighters moved the majority of the cargo and troops ashore in a time-consuming manner and, from there the division moved inland to its new base at An Khe.⁹⁰

As United States forces arrived in Vietnam, allies from the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) entered the conflict. Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand provided forces at various levels. The second largest contributor after the United States became the Republic of Korea. As the 1st Cavalry arrived, it was joined by the Capital Division of the Korean Army at Qui Nhon and the Korean 2nd Marine Brigade at Cam Ranh. The Capital Division assumed the responsibility for the area around the port and to the 1st Cavalry base. On October 1, 1965, the USNS *Geiger* transported the first installment of 2,217 Korean troops.⁹¹ In August 1966, MSTs transported the 9th Korean Division in four increments.⁹² To meet the

⁸⁸ The author holds an undue favoritism for this ship as it became the training ship for the State University of New York, Maritime College and sailed on it as a cadet for three cruises.

⁸⁹ Sawyer and Mitchell, *United States to America*, Vol. I, 116-117.

⁹⁰ Stanton, *Anatomy of a Division*, 41-42.

⁹¹ MSTs, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

⁹² COMSTSFE Command History, Letter to CNO OP-09B9, ltr FE-1 5750-1 Ser 5484, dated 12 September 1969.

demand for additional troop lift in the Pacific, MSTS activated three transports from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, the USNS *General John Pope*, *General N. M. Walker* and *General William Weigel*, and returned the USNS *General R. M. Blatchford*, *General W. H. Gordon* and *General Leroy Eltinge* to full operating status.⁹³ The last three ships replaced the three navy-manned transports. The need for naval personnel on combatants and the higher operating costs due to larger crews and training requirements made this an economical decision.⁹⁴

In addition to providing transportation for the Koreans, MSTS transported over elements of the Royal Thai Army for service in Vietnam. In July 1968, eight LSTs began the movement of the Thai division from Sattahip to Saigon.⁹⁵

As the pace of military deployments to Vietnam accelerated, the navy and army established support functions in the major ports. In March 1965, the army established the 1st Logistics Command to coordinate functions in all of the Republic of Vietnam, south of Chu Lai. The command established support elements in all the major ports in its area, including Vung Tau (November 1965), Qui Nhon (February 1966), Nha Trang (February 1966), Saigon (April 1966), Cam Ranh (May 1966), and Da Nang (February 1968).⁹⁶

As the army established its logistic organization, the navy developed its own in the northern reaches of the country and around Saigon. On October 15, 1965, the navy formally established Naval Support Activity, Saigon to supervise logistics in the southern regions of the country, III and IV Corps areas. In addition to the base in Da Nang, smaller detachments operated at Chu Lai, Hue, Tan My, Dong Ha, Cua Viet, Phu Bai, and Sa Huynh. Naval Support Activity, Saigon stood up on May 17, 1966 and replaced the Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon.⁹⁷ This

⁹³ MSTS, *Financial and Statistical Report FY 66*, 8 & 19.

⁹⁴ The three transports were the USS *General W. A. Mann*, *General W. M. Mitchell* and *John C. Breckinridge*.

⁹⁵ COMSTSFE Command History 1969.

⁹⁶ Shelby L. Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle* (New York, 1987), 191-194.

⁹⁷ Edward J. Marolda, *By Sea, Air and Land: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia* (Washington, 1994), 251-261.

new activity supervised the logistic support to naval units outside of the Da Nang area. One can readily see a duplication of effort and labor as the army and navy provided logistic services in ports. This development led to confusion between the services, the MSTS representatives in the port and merchant shipping, particularly on the priority of cargoes.

Troop movements by sea peaked in 1966 and then rapidly fell off. Of the sixteen transports in the nucleus fleet, nine shifted into a reduced operating status during fiscal year 1967.⁹⁸ The removal of the Atlantic based transports caused a permanent shift in the movement of troops and dependents to aircraft. On July 31, 1966, MSTS officially ended passenger service in order to focus on troop deployments to Vietnam.⁹⁹ The transports never returned to this service. The movement of passengers by air proved more economical than by sea, and also more flexible.¹⁰⁰ The remaining transports maintained the replacement of troops from Korea and from the West Coast of the United States to Vietnam.

As the year progressed, the 1st Marine Division in Camp Pendelton, California; the 4th Infantry Division in Fort Lewis, Washington; the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii; the 9th Infantry Division in Fort Riley, Kansas; and the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in Fort Benning, Georgia were transported to Vietnam. Two unit deployments, in particular, proved unique in their use of the merchant marine.

The situation in the Dominican Republic in 1965 led to the formation of the 196th Infantry Brigade for peacekeeping operations. The unit, activated at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, prepared for deployment to the Caribbean but instead was diverted for service in Vietnam. The deployment of the brigade is a footnote in most histories, but it holds the distinction of being the longest deployment by sea for any major military unit during the Vietnam War. The transports

⁹⁸ At this time a fiscal year was defined as the period from 1 July of the previous year to 30 June of the current year.

⁹⁹ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1966.

¹⁰⁰ The introduction of the C-141 and C-5 aircraft into the military's inventory, plus the availability to charter or procure spaces on commercial aircraft made this decision inevitable.

USNS *General William O. Darby* and *General Alexander M. Patch* departed from Boston with the brigade embarking on July 15, 1966. The ships arrived at the port of Vung Tau on August 13, via the Panama Canal and Long Beach, California -- a trip totaling 12,358 nautical miles.¹⁰¹

The fighting around the city of Saigon, and along the major highways, convinced General William Westmoreland of the need for armor support in some of the battles. On March 11, 1966, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the famed Blackhorse Regiment, was sent to Vietnam. The regiment deployed by sea, but instead of loading all its equipment on cargo ships, it utilized three ships pre-positioned in Subic Bay for contingency operations. Since July 1963, three converted Victory ships, the USNS *Provo*, *Phoenix*, and *Cheyenne*, remained in Subic Bay as part of the Floating Forward Depot (FFD) concept. Created by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, he envisioned the prepositioning of such ships near possible crisis areas.¹⁰² Each contained all the equipment to support an infantry battle group of 2,100 men.¹⁰³ In January 1966, the secretary of the navy authorized twelve more, of a possible sixteen FFD ships, for prepositioning of army cargo.¹⁰⁴ The navy reversed its position on the FFD ships, and instead the twelve ships were activated under their original Victory ship names and supported MSTs cargo operations to Vietnam. In an ironic twist of history, after the Persian Gulf War the army resurrected this concept to preposition an armored brigade afloat. The equipment for this unit came from the deactivating 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Germany.

The merchant marine also transported over the forces that provided its own security. The naval and coast guard units that made up Operations Market Time, Game Warden and of the

¹⁰¹ Clark M. Gammell, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1966-30 June 1967," in *Naval Review 1968* (Annapolis, 1968), 243.

¹⁰² Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict* Volume I (Washington, 1986) 293-294.

¹⁰³ MSTs, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965. It referenced the initiating directive to be JCS message of 072119Z Aug. 1962.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, It referenced SECNAV Notice 5030 of 1966. The twelve ships identified included the *Haverford*, *Antioch*, *Adelphi*, *Lynn*, *Clarksburg*, *Clemson*, *Carthage*, *Bessemer*, *Milford*, *Radcliffe*, *Rollins* and *Webster* (designated as T-AG 179 through 190).

Mobile Riverine Force arrived in Vietnam and the Philippines on the decks of nucleus and chartered freighters. Ships departing from Seattle, Washington typically carried over river patrol boats, built by the United Boatbuilders. Other ships transported over Coast Guard 82-foot cutters, Swift built patrol boats and converted LCM-6s as a matter of routine.

The Shipping Shortage

By the time of the Vietnam War, an "old enemy" made a dramatic reappearance in the Pacific. Starting in 1951, the Japanese merchant marine once again emerged as the dominant force in Pacific trade. Taking advantage of the timid tactics displayed by U.S. shipping companies, such as American President Lines, the Japanese, "burst upon the trade routes."¹⁰⁵ Some American companies, most notably Pacific Far East Lines a spin-off of APL by one of its former executives Thomas E. Cuffe, attempted to fight for control in the Pacific and the shipping line of the eccentric Jacob Isbrandtsen. Defying the Pacific conference system, Isbrandtsen undercut all rates by 10 per cent and directly challenged Japanese and American shipping firms. A ruthless rate war resulted and only subsided after Isbrandtsen died from a heart attack on May 13, 1953, and Japanese companies emerged carrying the majority of the cargo.

The rate war rocked the merchant marine in the Pacific and eliminated some of the unsubsidized liner and tramp services. By 1963 MSTs maintained shipping agreements with twelve major shipping companies.¹⁰⁶ This agreement provided space on the companies' liner ships and did not represent the chartering of an entire ship. MSTs booked space with these companies on their ships, with the cargo being delivered as part of a routine cargo voyage in the Far East. Many companies added Saigon as a stop to incorporate this contract and profit from the increased government cargoes. As the demands to move military unit's cargoes and the time

¹⁰⁵ De La Pedraja, , *Rise and Decline of Merchant Shipping*, 176.

¹⁰⁶ MSTs, *Financial and Statistical Report FY 63*. 23. These twelve companies included American President Lines, States Marine Lines, Waterman Steamship Co., Pacific Far East Lines, United States Lines, American Export Lines, States Steamship Co., Lykes Brothers Steamship Co., Global Bulk Transport, Isthmian Lines, Isbrandtsen Co., and Matson Navigation Co.

constraints increased, it became necessary to charter entire ships for dedicated service. As MSTs solicited for the chartering of individual ships, two companies jumped at the chance to utilize their laid up ships. The Cuban Revolution destroyed the trade routes once plied by Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and Seatrain Lines.¹⁰⁷ These two companies owed their continued existence to the escalation of the war in Vietnam.

In 1960 Lykes received the first of twenty-one new ships of the *Gulf Pride*-class. These represented the first commercial freighters built by a private company in the United States since before World War II.¹⁰⁸ Lykes Brothers intended to use these new ships to replace their war-built fleet of thirty-two C-2, seven C-3, fourteen C-1, and three Victory class freighters.¹⁰⁹ The anticipated success of the *Gulf Pride*-class led Lykes to invest in ships for its Pacific trade, the *Gulf Clipper*-class. Their design included modifications to carry some containers, an 80-ton heavy lift boom, and automated boiler controls to reduce the size of the crew.¹¹⁰ The collapse of the Cuban government and the subsequent embargo of trade forced Lykes to lay up most of its older fleet and some new ships until alternative trade could be located. Business historian Rene De La Pedraja believed that "Lykes had been the first U.S. steamship company to discover in the Vietnam War a temporary substitute for the cargoes lost because of the Cuban Revolution."¹¹¹ In effect, Lykes not only used it as a temporary substitute but continued to be one of the major carriers of military cargoes up to the Persian Gulf War. Of the twenty-eight ships commercially chartered during the Persian Gulf War, nine came from Lykes Lines, the largest single contributor of ships.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ De La Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of Merchant Shipping*, 209-216.

¹⁰⁸ Culver, "Merchant Ship," 279.

¹⁰⁹ Sawyer and Mitchell, *America to United States*. Vol. II. 21-22.

¹¹⁰ Culver, "Merchant Ship," 271-273.

¹¹¹ De La Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of Merchant Shipping*, 210.

¹¹² Even military cargoes alone could not support a major shipping line as Lykes declared bankruptcy in October 1995.

As much as the Cuban Revolution disrupted trade in the Caribbean, another revolution threatened to eliminate American liner service in the North Atlantic. In 1956 a North Carolina trucker introduced to the world the container ship. Malcolm McLean purchased Waterman Steamship Company in 1955 to introduce his concept of moving truck van-containers between American ports, instead of by road. He based his concept on that introduced by Seatrain Lines, which shipped fully loaded railcars between the United States and Havana and enjoyed tremendous success until the revolution.¹¹³ McLean converted the T-2 tankers, *Ideal X* and *Almena*, with portable decks above the cargo piping system to transport fifty-eight containers. On April 27, 1956, *Ideal X* sailed from Port Newark on its historic first run. The conversion of six C-2 freighters into container ships replaced the two tankers in October 1957.¹¹⁴ McLean separated the container portion of Waterman Steamship and formed it into an independent shipping line, Sea-Land in 1960. In 1962 he introduced the first of four converted T-2 tankers. Each of these ships carried double the containers of the C-2 conversions.¹¹⁵ McLean's bid for control of the coastal trade fell short as he could not receive subsidies to operate his ships in this expensive area. Similar to Lykes and Seatrain, Sea-Land owed its further existence to the conflict in South East Asia, as it introduced container service to the U.S. military.

To standardize the rate of pay for ships of common design, MSTTS established a daily per diem rate that depended on several variables. These included the size and type of the vessel, and whether the ship transported ammunition or operated in the Vietnam War area. A *Victory*-class freighter received \$ 3,690 per day while under MSTTS contract in fiscal year 1966. When the ship operated in the Vietnam War area, it received \$ 4,630 per day. If the same ship carried ammunition as its cargo, the per diem rate increased to \$ 4,725. The most expensive ships to

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 197-202.

¹¹⁴ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships and Tankers*, 112-115. The six converted C-2 freighters were the *Raphael Semmes*, *Fairland*, *Azalea City*, *Gateway City*, *Beauregard* and *Bienville*. Each could carry 226 containers and offload them by use of a two ship-mounted gantry cranes.

¹¹⁵ These ships included the *Los Angeles*, *San Francisco*, *Elizabethport* and *San Juan*. Their names represent the ports from which they operated from, two on each coast.

operate for MSTS remained the manpower intensive transports. These ships ranged from \$ 7,935 to \$ 10,830 per day, without taking into effect ammunition and the war bonus area.¹¹⁶

For ships outside the normal classification and under the shipping agreement, MSTS adopted a new method of determining costs in 1966. Before that time, MSTS negotiated with liner shippers to determine freight rates on ships. A study conducted in 1964 determined that shipping companies charged the government excessive rates and, in response, the service adopted a competitive bidding process on cargo or ship rates to determine the most economical alternative for the government.¹¹⁷ This process was criticized by union companies, as non-union companies, with cheaper crewing costs, typically underbid them. By the same token, many companies with older and man-power intensive ships found themselves out of the running for contracts. Fortunately for most of these companies, the volume of military cargo remained so large that most could sustain their older ships until the United States withdrew from Vietnam.

Scraping the Bottom of the Barrel

To meet the increased demand for shipping, the head of the Maritime Administration, Nicholas Johnson, and the commander of the Military Sea Transport Service, at the beginning of the Vietnam War Vice Admiral Glynn R. Donaho, made repeated appeals to American shippers to provide ships for government contracts. The first such appeal came from President Johnson on July 13, 1965 and called for 54 ships. If these could not be met, activation plans commenced on 28 ships held in the National Defense Reserve Fleet. Admiral Donaho made appeals for 20 ships on November 1 and then requested an additional 72 more on January 1, 1966.

The increase in the MSTS fleet is described by the following table.

¹¹⁶ COMSTS ltr to COMSTSPAC, COMSTSLANT, COMSTSFE and COMSTSGULF, *FY 1966 Per Diem Rates*, dated August 16, 1965.

¹¹⁷ Jantscher, *Bread Upon the Water*, 145-147.

Table 1-MSTS Fleet, 1964-1968

	June 64	June 65	June 66	June 67	June 68
Nucleus Cargo Ships	57 (1) ¹¹⁸	68 (1)	84 (2)	91 (1)	91
Nucleus Tankers	25 (1)	26	27	27	27
Nucleus Transports	16 (3)	16	16	16 (9)	16 (11)
Chartered Cargo Ships	15	33 (1)	139 (3)	174 (7)	171 (4)
Chartered Tankers	20	16 (2)	38	51	67
NDRF Activated	2	2	101	166	144

The activation of additional LSTs, aircraft ferries, the diversion of Victory ships from the FFD, and special project divisions of MSTS account for the increase in the nucleus cargo ship total. The 25, to 27, nucleus tankers remained fairly constant because of the lack of any suitable ships remaining in the reserve fleet. To meet the increased, and fluctuating demands for petroleum, MSTS resorted to voyage or spot chartering¹¹⁹ of ships on a case-by-case basis. It was in this area that foreign flagged-ships made their appearance in Vietnam. The number of transports reflects the accelerated build-up in forces by the United States and then the shift toward aircraft to maintain the force levels but not totally eliminating these ships.

To meet the shortfall in freighters and not resort to foreign-flag ships, MSTS ordered the activation of ships from the National Defense Reserve Fleet. The first request for fourteen ships left Admiral Donaho's desk on July 16, 1965. The Maritime Administration utilized a separate agency-the National Shipping Authority to negotiate the operation of these ships with commercial shipping companies. The system worked under a reimbursement policy paid by MSTS. At its peak, 172 ships from the 1,484 ship NDRF operated for MSTS. These included 136 Victory ships, 11 C-2s, 4 C-3s, one modified Liberty ship, 15 C-1Bs, 3 C1-M-AV1s, and the two refrigerated C-2s previously in operation. Each ship activation cost an estimated \$ 549,000 for a total in excess of \$ 93 million.¹²⁰ Problems existed with many of the laid up ships, some of which

¹¹⁸ Number in parentheses refer to the number of ships in a reduced operating status, of the total number shown.

¹¹⁹ A voyage charter is where a ship is chartered to accomplish a specific trip from port to port. Spot chartering has a similar meaning but usually refers to the transportation of petroleum.

¹²⁰ Kendall, "Merchant Shipping," 132-135.

had not been even visited in over twenty years, let alone any maintenance work. According to Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, who succeeded Admiral Donaho as commander of MSTS, the condition of some of the ships proved so poor that scrapping proved the only course of action.¹²¹

During the activation of the SS *Albion Victory*, on December 27, 1967, for example, the ship suffered a boiler explosion while at the reserve site in Mobile, Alabama. The explosion resulted in a fire sweeping through the engine spaces and caused extensive damage to the propulsion systems. Repairs to the ship proved so extensive that the activation was deferred and the ship returned to the reserve fleet, unrepaired.¹²² Similar to the *Albion Victory*, the *Bucyrus Victory* suffered a severe fire while refueling at San Pedro, California on August 15, 1968. The fire proved so severe that she also returned to the reserve fleet without being repaired.¹²³

The Problem with Foreign Charters

The surge in cargo bookings in the summer of 1965 forced MSTS to consider the possibility of foreign charters. The first such difficulty arose when an American shipping company chartered the Mexican freighter, *El Mexicano*, for use in its regular liner service. Loading operations proceeded on the ship until opposition from the Mexican government forced a halt to the operation. The government opposed the use of Mexican merchant ships into a declared war area and ordered the cargo removed from the ship. Later, a Greek freighter loaded the cargo from the Mexican freighter, but, the crew opposed sailing to a war zone. This forced MSTS once again to remove the cargo and to book an American ship. These marked the first of a string of difficulties in using foreign-flag merchant ships.¹²⁴

Overall, MSTS avoided the use of foreign merchant ships as much as possible. The average number of foreign charters in the years 1966 to 1969 remained fairly stable at

¹²¹ Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, "The Military Sea Transportation Service," in *Naval War College Review* (May 1969): 4-8.

¹²² Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships and Tankers*, 40.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁴ Kendall, "Merchant Shipping," 136-137.

approximately 30 ships a year.¹²⁵ When one examines the total number of charters utilized, these ships were a fairly small percentage of the total, approximately ten per cent of the number of ships chartered but under five percent of the total MSTS fleet. The rapid escalation of the war and problems with the Arab petroleum producing countries in 1967 accounted for the use of these ships and did not represent an attempt by MSTS to undermine the American merchant marine.

The merchant marines involvement in Vietnam coincided with the formation of the nations. From the transportation of supplies for the French to the evacuations of civilians from the north, the American commercial shipping industry found employment supplying the Vietnamese and American governments. When the United States committed itself to fielding ground forces into South Vietnam, it required the use of the merchant marine to provide the necessary shipping. The geography of Vietnam and the limitations of the ports initially prevented a large build-up. Heavy traffic, particularly in Saigon, delayed ships from ten days to two months in some extreme cases. As MSTS diverted a large portion of its nucleus fleet to transport supplies to Vietnam, it aggressively solicited ships from the American merchant marine. Many companies readily accepted these contracts in order to find employment for their under-utilized fleets. Even with this response, the government required the use of ships laid-up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet, particularly after difficulties in chartering foreign-flagged ships.

As the troops of the United States and its allies arrived in Vietnam, the sustainment of these forces became a primary mission for the merchant marine. The commercial fleet continued to provide the liner service to Vietnam, augmented by ships activated from the NDRF. Specific ship charters and activated ships provided specialized services that commercial liners could not, mainly the transportation of hazardous ammunition to Vietnam. This continuous flow of supplies did not go unnoticed by the Viet Cong, and the chain of ships met its worst opposition only miles from the capital of South Vietnam.

¹²⁵ In fiscal year 1966 MSTS chartered 30 foreign-flagged ships; FY 67: 33; FY 68: 27; and FY 69: 24.

Chapter Four: Sustainment, 1965-1969

Never in the history of the Vietnam Conflict has a combat mission been canceled or delayed for the lack of logistical support.

General W. C. Westmoreland
Jan./Feb. 1969 *ANONE*
Magazine

The Long Haul

The movement of troops and their equipment tapered off as 1966 ended. But the role of the merchant marine in Vietnam intensified because of the need to sustain an armed force exceeding a half million men. Supplies ranging from 5.56 millimeter bullets for M-16 rifles, to toilet paper, to beer had to be shipped from the United States. Just as critical, but sometimes overlooked, the military required a constant flow of fuel. Although the common image of the war is an infantry soldier "humping" through the jungle, the American military during that time required more petroleum than used in the Second World War or in any other military operation since then. The merchant marine once again built a bridge of ships from the United States to an area of conflict. They accomplished similar missions to France in the First World War, across the Pacific and Atlantic in the Second World War to Korea and the Persian Gulf.

The expansion of the amount of cargo moved demonstrated the escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. In 1964 MSTS transported a total of 13.4 million measurement tons of cargo and 17.8 million long tons of petroleum.¹²⁶ The peak shipments for dry cargo came in 1969 with a total of 30.6 million measurement tons and petroleum in 1968 at 28.1 million long tons.¹²⁷ These represented the highest levels of cargo shipment in the history of MSTS.¹²⁸ The total cargo figure compiled by MSTS revealed the staggering figure of over 81 million measurement tons of cargo

¹²⁶ MSTS, *Financial & Statistical Report FY 64*, 2.

¹²⁷ MSTS, *Financial & Statistical Report FY 69*, 2.

¹²⁸ This includes operations as of 1996.

and 97 million long tons of fuel shipped to Vietnam and the Far East from July 1, 1964 to March 31, 1973.¹²⁹

To accomplish this tremendous feat, MSTTS initiated several contracts and programs to deliver the mountain of supplies. Building on its existing liner service agreements, MSTTS signed an agreement with eleven shippers for ocean service from the West Coast of the United States to the Republic of Vietnam, commencing on December 5, 1966.¹³⁰ Not all of these eleven companies¹³¹ received subsidies. Many of these companies simply modified their existing services to make port calls in Vietnam, but the majority devoted ships solely to this route to avoid delays in their commercial business and to find employment for some inactive ships. By the 1960s, most of these companies initiated vessel replacement programs. Many of these ships represented a new generation of shipping, including automated boiler controls, hydraulic operated hatch covers, larger hatches, and booms to handle cargo. The high cost to construct new ships however, forced almost all of the companies to rely on their older Maritime Commission built ships to sustain their fleets and to transport supplies to Vietnam.

Supplemental to this agreement, MSTTS negotiated a separate contract with Seatrain Lines for the use of their fleet of ships. An initial contract for three of the twelve Seatrain ships came into effect on May 25, 1966. By December 1966, MSTTS exercised options for the use of all twelve ships for a charter period of three years, with options extending up to eleven years.¹³² These agreements supplemented the MSTTS nucleus fleet with conventional cargo ships and Seatrain ships usable as roll-on/roll-off ships. In March of 1967, a new mode of cargo transportation made its appearance in South-East Asia.

¹²⁹ MSTTS Report 7770-8, *Republic of Vietnam Sealift Digest* No. 1 (July 1964) to No. 84 (March 1973).

¹³⁰ MSTTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1967.

¹³¹ American Export-Isbrandtsen Lines, American Mail Lines Ltd., American President Lines, Central Gulf Steamship Corp., Isthmian Lines, Lykes Brothers Steamship Co., Pacific Far East Lines, States Marine Lines, States Steamship Co., United States Lines, and Waterman Steamship Company.

¹³² MSTTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1967.

The Box That Came to Stay

The introduction of the shipping container is a story of success and failure. Before this invention, palletization emerged from the Second World War as the standard way to move goods. Products, stacked on four-by-four foot wooden pallets, allowed easy maneuvering with the use of fork-lift trucks and pallet jacks on the docks and in the interior of ships. This innovation eliminated the man-power intensive method of loading boxes into a cargo net, setting it in a hold and then individually stowing the cargo. One analysis showed that to move 100 tons of cargo by pallet took a total of 203 man-hours. A similar load, individually packed, required a total of 682 man-hours.¹³³ A standard Sea-Land eight foot-high, eight foot-wide, and 35 foot-long shipping container alone could transport over 20 tons of cargo. In terms of the movement of cargo, clearly it is easier to move 5 containers, than 77 pallets or 4,080 separate packages.

The containerization of cargo did not meet with universal approval. The personnel that loaded the cargo and stowed it on board ships, the stevedores, vigorously opposed the introduction of containers. Grace Lines became one of the first companies to adopt the Sea-Land container concept. Providing service between the United States and the west coast of South America, Grace Line converted two C-2 cargo ships into container ships. Each ship transported 476 containers and included three gantry cranes.¹³⁴ When the ships arrived for the first time in Venezuela, local longshoremen refused to handle the cargo.¹³⁵ This action severely impeded the wide-spread adoption of container ships by other shipping lines. Grace Lines took the two ships out of service and eventually sold them to Sea-Land for use in the Far East.¹³⁶

Several companies attempted to include container service in their break-bulk freighters. The adoption of two different methods of cargo handling resulted in some awkward designs. In

¹³³ Charles Sauerbier and Robert J. Meurn, *Marine Cargo Operations*. 2d ed. (New York, 1985), 512-513.

¹³⁴ Culver, "Merchant Ship," 301.

¹³⁵ Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of Merchant Shipping*, 218.

¹³⁶ The two ships became the *Ponce* (ex-*Santa Leonor*) and *Mayaguez* (ex-*Santa Eliana*). The later made famous in its seizure by the Cambodians in 1975.

1961 American President Lines' *Sea Racer*-class, based on an improved *Mariner*, provided one hold for the carriage of 126 containers with a gantry crane. The design proved a failure, because the design limited the number of containers and break-bulk cargo that could be carried.¹³⁷ Other companies faced similar difficulties, and not until 1968 did a company build a ship designed solely for the carriage of containers, the *Lancer*-class from United States Lines.

Fortunately for McLean and Sea-Land, he found employment for his new containerships with the United States military. In April 1966, Sea-Land initiated service between the East Coast of the United States and the ports of Bordeaux, France and Hamburg, Germany, for the transportation of military cargo. McLean assigned five of his converted C-2 ships to this service. This only provided partial relief and on March 29, 1967, he signed an agreement with MSTs that opened the door for containers into the Far East and Vietnam.

The contract itself included two major sections. The first established a dedicated service between the West Coast of the United States and the port of Da Nang. It specified that self-sustaining C-2s would travel once every fifteen days, starting on June 30, 1967. The use of container ships into Da Nang alleviated the major problem of backlog in the port and ship delays. The congestion in the port of Da Nang reached such a point that its first commander, Captain K. P. Huff, commented: "Finally, in February 1966, the time arrived when for 36 hours there was not one single ton of cargo in Da Nang Harbor waiting to be offloaded."¹³⁸ The ability to move cargo rapidly on and off container ships, and the improved docks and support, provided an easing of the operations in the port without the loss of productivity.

The second part of the contract utilized some ships recently acquired by Sea-Land. In 1964 the Maritime Administration made available 18 C-4 troop ships for trade-in to American shipping companies.¹³⁹ Sea-Land acquired six of these ships and converted them into container

¹³⁷ Niven, *American President Lines*, 211.

¹³⁸ Huff, "Building the Advanced Base at Da Nang," 89.

¹³⁹ Calmar acquired six ships and converted them into general cargo carriers, Matson acquired two and converted them into container ships, Bulk Carriers converted two into bulk ore carriers and Central Gulf

1961 American President Lines' *Sea Racer*-class, based on an improved *Mariner*, provided one hold for the carriage of 126 containers with a gantry crane. The design proved a failure, because the design limited the number of containers and break-bulk cargo that could be carried.¹³⁷ Other companies faced similar difficulties, and not until 1968 did a company build a ship designed solely for the carriage of containers, the *Lancer*-class from United States Lines.

Fortunately for McLean and Sea-Land, he found employment for his new containerships with the United States military. In April 1966, Sea-Land initiated service between the East Coast of the United States and the ports of Bordeaux, France and Hamburg, Germany, for the transportation of military cargo. McLean assigned five of his converted C-2 ships to this service. This only provided partial relief and on March 29, 1967, he signed an agreement with MSTs that opened the door for containers into the Far East and Vietnam.

The contract itself included two major sections. The first established a dedicated service between the West Coast of the United States and the port of Da Nang. It specified that self-sustaining C-2s would travel once every fifteen days, starting on June 30, 1967. The use of container ships into Da Nang alleviated the major problem of backlog in the port and ship delays. The congestion in the port of Da Nang reached such a point that its first commander, Captain K. P. Huff, commented: "Finally, in February 1966, the time arrived when for 36 hours there was not one single ton of cargo in Da Nang Harbor waiting to be offloaded."¹³⁸ The ability to move cargo rapidly on and off container ships, and the improved docks and support, provided an easing of the operations in the port without the loss of productivity.

The second part of the contract utilized some ships recently acquired by Sea-Land. In 1964 the Maritime Administration made available 18 C-4 troop ships for trade-in to American shipping companies.¹³⁹ Sea-Land acquired six of these ships and converted them into container

¹³⁷ Niven, *American President Lines*, 211.

¹³⁸ Huff, "Building the Advanced Base at Da Nang," 89.

¹³⁹ Calmar acquired six ships and converted them into general cargo carriers, Matson acquired two and converted them into container ships, Bulk Carriers converted two into bulk ore carriers and Central Gulf

ships.¹⁴⁰ They differed from all previous ones by lacking the cargo gear to move the boxes. The ships underwent a process known as "jumboization," by which a mid-body section is added to the ship. Because the ships needed shore cranes to offload, the contract included provisions for Sea-Land to erect two fixed cranes at the dock in Cam Ranh Bay. These ships followed a similar schedule as the C-2s but commenced operation on August 15, 1967.¹⁴¹

By the time the war wound down, Sea-Land and the container ship became an established entity on the world's oceans. The pure containership emerged as the dominant cargo carrier, and series of generations of these types ships evolved over time. The converted first-generation ships gave way to the larger and faster second-generation ships. Built from the keel up, they emphasized speed and carried over 1,000 containers. These ships replaced the break-bulk ship as the typical cargo ship. Later generations included ships that exceeded the size of the Panama Canal locks, refereed to as post-panamax ships. All of these designs found their way back to a little-known North Carolina trucker, Malcolm McLean.

Have Tug, Will Tow

Besides the large volume of merchant traffic that flowed from across the oceans, one of the most immediate concerns in Vietnam concerned the local flow of cargo out of the major ports. As Saigon, Da Nang, Cam Ranh, and Subic Bay became the locus points for cargo discharge, a system developed of transporting these supplies to smaller ports and up the many rivers in Vietnam. MSTS initially relied on its fleet of Japanese; Korean; and Ryukuyan manned LSTs to provide this service, but it proved a great strain on the fleet as the flow of supplies increased.

The LSTs proved one of the favorite targets for attack by the VC. As early as March of 1965, the first ship, USNS *T-LST 550*, suffered damage from two time bombs placed on the ship

Lines converted two into heavy-lift ships and placed them on contract with MSTS. One of these, the *Green Bay* was sunk at Qui Nhon in 1971.

¹⁴⁰ The ships included the *Long Beach* (ex-Marine Flasher), *Baltimore* (ex-Marine Cardinal), *Charleston* (ex-Marine Shark), *Trenton* (ex-Marine Jumper), and *Oakland* (ex-Marine Tiger).

¹⁴¹ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1967.

while beached at Da Nang. The ship suffered flooding in the engine compartment and required extensive repair work in Japan.¹⁴² Fortunately, no injuries occurred, but similar attacks-not to mention gunfire, rocket, and mortar attacks-made the LSTs prime targets for the Viet Cong.

MSTS operated twenty-five LSTs in 1965.¹⁴³ Even with this number of ships, the local MSTS office in Saigon proved hard pressed to meet all the commitments. An example of these services included the need to commit eight of the LSTs to the shipment of cement from Taiwan to Chu Lai during 1967.¹⁴⁴ To supplement these ships, MSTS advertised a contract for a tug and barge company to operate in Vietnam and oversee the management of the marine terminals in some of the ports. In December 1965, Alaska Barge and Transport, Incorporated (AB&T) of Vancouver, Washington, received the contract and began the dispatch of assets to Vietnam. By July 1, 1965, 17 tugs and 34 barges arrived for service, with a total of 1,370 employees by 1967. The contract included clauses concerning the operation of naval lighterage, stevedoring, and movement of cargo from the ports to final destinations.¹⁴⁵

The use of tugs and barges simplified operations greatly in regard to intra-theater transportation. The large surplus of barges allowed tugs to occupy their time shuttling barges between ports. As tugs arrived in ports with loaded barges, they picked up empty barges and greatly accelerated turn-around times in port. Later in the war, tug and barge convoys proceeded to the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh to support the government fight against the Khmer Rouge. Just as the LSTs attracted their share of attention from the VC, the small tugs of AB&T drew an untold number of attacks. The need to operate tugs in the open waters of the South China Sea and along the coasts of Vietnam exposed many to the hazards of the weather and navigation.

¹⁴² MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

¹⁴³ MSTS, *Financial & Statistical Report FY 65*, Part II. Ship Section. This would later increase to 42 by 1968.

¹⁴⁴ COMSTSFE Command History. Letter to CNO OP-09B9, ltr FE-1 Ser 1688, dated March 17, 1967.

¹⁴⁵ MSTS, *Financial & Statistical Report FY 66*. 12.

Besides the operation of tugs and barges, AB & T assumed the operational control of the terminals and stevedoring services at the port of Nha Trang, Vung Tau, Phan Rang, and Cam Ranh in 1966.¹⁴⁶ In an effort to lower costs of local operations, MSTs authorized AB&T to charter five 2,200 deadweight ton ro/ro barges for use in Vietnam. To move one short ton of cargo by LST cost approximately \$20, as compared to only \$8 by ro/ro barge. Other cost saving measures involved the replacement of naval personnel on lighterage and liberty craft in many of the ports with AB&T personnel. This allowed the reallocation of sailors to more vital areas.

This concept of moving cargo by barges and transferring it by tug appeared to be an excellent mode of transportation. The Maritime Administration began work on the design of a barge carrying ship, the premise being that the ship could proceed to a port or the entrance of a major river, offload selected barges, and then pick up return barges. The idea minimized the amount of time needed by a ship to remain in port and increased the cargo hauling time of a ship. In conjunction with Prudential and Pacific Far East Lines, MARAD contracted with Avondale Shipyard, in Louisiana, for the construction of the Lighter Aboard Ship (LASH).¹⁴⁷ The first LASH, the SS *Lash Italia*, entered service in November 1970. Over the next five years, 19 sister ships and 3 larger Sea Barge (SEABEEs) entered the merchant marine.

The Power Plants

Not all the uses of merchant ships involved the shipment of cargo. One of the more unusual assignments given to these ships was the establishment of floating power plants for new military bases established in Vietnam. The army had used four ships during the Second World War, the navy used one at its base in Thule, Greenland and the Norwegians used merchant ships as floating power plants following a water shortage in 1959 that disrupted their flow of power from hydro-electric plants. The army intended to follow this concept with eleven T-2 tankers. The

¹⁴⁶ COMSTSFE Command History. Letter to CNO OP-09B9, ltr FE-1 Ser 1688, dated March 17, 1967.

¹⁴⁷ U.S. DOT, *Index*, 183.

conversions involved the installation of junction boxes for wires leading to shore. The electricity came from the ship's own propulsion and auxiliary machinery with the cargo tanks providing enough fuel for two years of operation.¹⁴⁸

The transfer of these ships to army control removed them from the merchant marine but, in order to avoid the costly expense of towing the ships from the United States, an unique arrangement evolved. The Coast Guard, the American Bureau of Shipping, and the U.S. Public Health agreed to allow the ships a one-time voyage certificate from the states to ports in Vietnam. Upon arrival, all certifications as merchant ships were removed, and the ships became U.S. Army Floating Power Barges.

All eleven of the ships underwent conversion in 1966 and seven served in Vietnam.¹⁴⁹ These ships provided vital power in the ports of Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh, Da Nang, and others throughout the country. As the United States withdrew its forces and phased down its bases, scrap dealers purchased the ships in Vietnam in 1971 and towed them to Taiwan for disposal.¹⁵⁰ One ship converted into a power plant but not sent included an old Liberty ship -- the *Sturgis*. The ship underwent a massive conversion in 1964 that included the installation of an enriched uranium dioxide reactor. The nuclear power plant never sailed to Vietnam for fear of 'an incident.'¹⁵¹

Beans, Bullets, Black Oil and Everything Else

In discussing the amount of cargo and fuel sent to Vietnam, it is important to examine the commodities shipped and how they fluctuated as the war progressed. This table breaks down the commodities and tonnage shipped during this time.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ George R. Kolbenschlager, "Naval and Maritime Chronology, 1 July 1965-30 June 1966," in *Naval Review 1966* (Annapolis, 1966), 256-257

¹⁴⁹ The eleven tankers included the *Cumberland*, *Memphis*, *Lone Jack*, *French Creek*, *Logan's Fort*, *Escambia*, *Kennebago*, *Cahaba*, *Sebec*, *Caney* and *Tamalpais*.

¹⁵⁰ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships and Tankers*, 111-112, 161, 164, 169, 173, 177.

¹⁵¹ L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *The Liberty Ships: The History of the 'Emergency' Type Cargo Ships Constructed in the United States During World War II* (Cambridge, MD, 1973), 182-183.

¹⁵² Compiled from MSTs Report 7770-8, Republic of Vietnam Sealift Digests covering the months for those years.

Table 2-Cargo to Vietnam, 1965-1969

<i>Commodity (Measurement Tons)</i>	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
<i>General Cargo</i>	2,071,000	6,037,600	8,300,600	8,626,600	6,580,500
<i>Aircraft</i>	182,000	178,100	320,500	249,700	261,300
<i>Ammunition</i>	386,000	833,200	1,694,300	2,195,600	1,926,900
<i>Bulk Cargo</i>	0	1,900	100	384,000	2,144,600
<i>Trailers/ Containers</i>	0	243,600	269,700	237,400	228,500
<i>Refrigerated</i>	68,000	190,500	335,200	422,600	392,600
<i>Special (Military)</i>	1,490,800	2,398,300	2,494,800	2,623,800	2,281,000
<i>Petroleum (Long Tons)</i>	6,380,000	8,986,000	12,600,000	16,033,000	14,182,000

The data clearly demonstrate the escalation in cargo shipped to the Republic of Vietnam and then the decrease starting in 1969, following President Richard M. Nixon's decision to lower troop levels. The rise in general cargo, which consists of everything not identified on the list, increased over 400 per cent from 1965 to 1968. The shipment of bulk cargo, mainly rock and cement for construction, remained remarkably low until 1968, due to the Vietnamese contracting for these products themselves. The construction of facilities and bases escalated to the point that the United States needed to import such building material in massive quantities.

One of the clearest indicators in the escalation of the war is the dramatic increase in the amount of ammunition shipped. In three years, this requirement increased over 500 per cent. Not indicated on this table, but pertinent to this study, is that in all the ammunition shipped by MSTs in those years, more than half and in some cases three-quarters went to Vietnam.¹⁵³ To ensure that an adequate flow of ammunition arrived in theater and a suitable reserve supply remained available, the Air Force requested the establishment of a dedicated service to ship ammunition to the Far East. The agreement reached with MSTs, known as "Special Express," provided for five ships to be in a loaded or loading condition. Established in April 1965 with the sailing of the SS *Audrey J. Luckenbach*, the rapid escalation of the war resulted in the Air Force requesting an

¹⁵³ The percentages in ammunition shipped to Vietnam, versus world-wide are 72 per cent (1965), 61 per cent (1966), 74 per cent (1967), 68 per cent (1968) and 54 per cent (1969).

increase to ten ships.¹⁵⁴ The navy followed suit with its own dedicated service, and both remained in operation until January 1967 when cargo operations in Vietnamese ports improved to the point that no danger existed of running out of ammunition.¹⁵⁵

The movement of trailers/containers represented the initiation of roll-on/roll-off service in 1966. This total remained fairly steady, but the shipments in 1966 represented almost all of the cargo delivered by MSTS ro/ro ships that year since the withdrawal of these ships from the Atlantic service. The chartering of the Seatrain fleet allowed MSTS to re-establish this route and augment the Vietnam service. As the use of tugs and barges attracted shipbuilders during this period, the ro/ro captured the attention of shipping lines. Companies such as States Steamship Lines, Matson Navigation, and Navieras de Puerto Rico constructed similar ships in the 1970s and 1980s.

The shipment of refrigerated cargoes, such as fresh produce, meats and dairy products, usually entailed the dedicated use of a specially configured cargo ship with climate controlled spaces. In August 1965, MSTS established a scheduled service with four "reefer" ships sailing from the West Coast to Vietnam every fifteen days. Two of the ships, USNS *Asterion* and *Perseus*, came from the nucleus fleet, and the other two, *Contest* and *Flying Dragon*, from contract operators. This type of service required fast cargo handling, as spoilage occurred fairly quickly in the hot and humid environment of South East Asia.¹⁵⁶ The introduction of container ship service helped alleviate the problem of dedicated refrigerated ships as the Sea-Land ships included electrical outlets for the operation of a number of refrigerated containers known as reefers. These containers, which mounted portable refrigerator units, made cargo handling of this material ideal as it never exposed the cargo to the outside air. The containers themselves acted as their own portable storage units. This proved fortunate, because in Da Nang on September 6,

¹⁵⁴ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

¹⁵⁵ Kendall, "Merchant Shipping," 136.

¹⁵⁶ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

1969, over half of the refrigerated storage spaces went up in a mortar attack. MSTS responded by deploying a refrigerated ship to act as a floating storage depot until suitable make-shift arrangements and reefer containers arrived to fill the void.¹⁵⁷

Fuel shipped to the Far East during this period represented a majority of all the fuel shipped by MSTS.¹⁵⁸ The nucleus fleet of MSTS included three different types of tankers. The most common was the war-built T-2 tankers, all over twenty years old. The others included larger T-5 tankers and smaller coastal T-1 tankers. The T-2s and T-1s provided the backbone of petroleum shipments to Vietnam since the draft restrictions in the ports precluded the initial use of the larger T-5s.

One of the first difficulties faced concerned the establishment of shore-side facilities to store fuel. In the southern parts of the Republic of Vietnam, commercial companies, such as Esso, Shell, and Caltex, established fuel farms from which military forces procured their fuel.¹⁵⁹ In the northern region, these facilities did not exist, and the building of large fuel farms invited sapper attacks. To alleviate this problem, MSTS established a rotation of floating storage depots, provided by T-2 and T-1 tankers at Subic Bay to provide on call service. In March 1965, the T-2 tanker USNS *Cossatot* and T-1 tanker *Petaluma* initiated this program. The increased involvement resulted in a doubling of the forces with the activation of the T-1 tanker USNS *Chattahoochee* and deployment of the T-2 tanker *Saugatuck* in August 1965. Navy and MSTS T-1 tankers provided a yeoman service along the northern regions of South Vietnam at such bases as Chu Lai, Cua Viet, Hue, Hoi An, Tuy Hoa, and Phan Thiet. To improve the service, one of each type of tanker 'forward deployed' to anchorages off Da Nang and Cam Ranh in late 1965.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1969.

¹⁵⁸ Far East is the way MSTS broke down their figures in their annual reports. The data is still pertinent since most of fuel to support the naval ships and aircraft remained located in Thailand, Japan and the Philippines.

¹⁵⁹ Herbert T. King, "Naval Logistics Support, Qui Nhon to Phu Quoc," in *Naval Review* 1969 (Annapolis, 1969), 94-95.

¹⁶⁰ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1965.

The initial fuel lifts to Vietnam came from fuel storage depots in Japan. This caused an excessive amount of cargo handling, because the fuel did not originate in Japan but from producing areas in the United States and the Persian Gulf. To alleviate this problem, MSTS initiated a program of one tanker arriving in Vietnam every ten days from the producing fields in the Middle East. On August 28, 1966 the SS *Shenandoah* arrived in Cam Ranh and then proceeded to Da Nang to discharge over 195,000 barrels¹⁶¹ of diesel fuel, gasoline and jet fuel.¹⁶² In December, a scheduled service commenced consisting of three tankers each month from Japan to Vietnam.

The shipment of fuel to Vietnam strained the resources of the MSTS nucleus tankers. To improve ship readiness, MSTS extended the contracts with Keystone Shipping, Mathiasen's Tanker and Marine Transport Lines and included an incentive award of 35 to 50 per cent of the fixed fee for performance in excess of the minimum contract requirements.¹⁶³ This helped to maintain the nucleus fleet, but MSTS desperately needed support from the commercial merchant fleet and this proved a major dilemma.

The 291 tankers of the commercial fleet consisted mainly of ships larger than the nucleus T-2 tankers that MSTS required for service in Vietnam. No amount of negotiating could produce smaller ships than those available in the commercial fleet. In an attempt to avoid official protests from the shipping industry, Admiral Donaho sent letters to the fifteen largest tanker companies requesting ships for use in Vietnam. On December 22, 1966 MSTS commenced the chartering of foreign tankers to meet the requirements. To prevent difficulties, MSTS used the foreign ships to free up U.S.-flag ships for service into and out of Vietnam.¹⁶⁴

Events on the other side of Asia affected the transportation of oil in 1967. As tensions mounted between the Arabs and Israelis, the United States found itself between two warring

¹⁶¹ A barrel is equal to 55 gallons.

¹⁶² MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1966.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

factions. Because the United States supported the Israelis, the governments of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia suspended shipments of oil on June 7, 1967. The Persian Gulf provided the bulk of the oil for U.S. forces, outside of the Western Hemisphere, almost 30 per cent. The State Department negotiated a quick resolution with Bahrain in a week, but the Saudi government held out until September. The Arabs agreed to ship oil, provided that ships were not owned by the United States government or the cargo destined for a port in the United States. To alleviate this difficulty, the Defense Fuel Supply Center acquired replacement cargoes in the Caribbean and along the ports of the Gulf of Mexico. To replace the government-owned tankers sailing from the Persian Gulf, MSTS chartered 32 foreign-flag ships.¹⁶⁵

The lack of U.S. commercial support and the requirement for "handy-size" tankers, such as the T-2s, resulted in MSTS establishing a build-and-charter program to replace the World War Two ships. MSTS worked such a program with Falcon Carriers for four 32,800 deadweight ton tankers and with Charles King and Company for one 37,750 deadweight ton tanker. The ships included diesel propulsion and included charter periods for five years.¹⁶⁶ MSTS attempted a follow-on program with Central Gulf Lines in February 1969. The plan called for the construction of nine 25,000 deadweight ton tankers to be operated by the company for five years with options up to twenty-five years. Central Gulf could not complete the required financial backing, and MSTS terminated the contract.

One of the more unusual shipping arrangements made during the war involved the yearly chartering of a freighter beginning in November 1968. The increased deployment of troops and need to bolster the morale of these forces required the timely delivery of mail. Throughout the course of the war, the late delivery of mail, particularly during the Christmas holiday season, proved a constant source of irritation. To alleviate this problem and ensure that the soldiers

¹⁶⁵ MSTS, *Financial & Statistical Report FY 67*. 21-22.

¹⁶⁶ MSTS, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1967. Contracts signed on March 31, 1967.

received their gifts from home, MSTS in conjunction with the military postal service, chartered a ship specifically to bring across presents for soldiers during the holidays. On November 21, 1968, the first of the "Santa Claus Specials" sailed from Oakland, California, for stops in Vietnam.¹⁶⁷ One can only imagine the response of soldiers throughout Vietnam if this ship had not made its appointed rounds due to VC action.

As the United States built up its presence in Vietnam, the mission of the merchant marine expanded to sustaining these forces and those of the RVNAF. To meet these commitments, MSTS expanded its shipping agreements with American companies to incorporate Vietnam into their scheduled routes. It initiated new services to Vietnam, such as containerized cargo, tug and barge service, dedicated tanker and refrigerated ship schedules to meet the requirements of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). The merchant marine continued to transport supplies to Vietnam until the fall of the government in 1975. This period, 1965 to 1969, represents a vital phase that was representative of all military operations utilizing merchant ships. Follow-on shipping proved just as important to the Allies' success in France as the D-Day assault on June 4, 1944. The same situation evolved in Vietnam. A secure line of communication to the United States needed to be maintained in order to assert the military's projection of power. The navy's ability to exert control of the sea ensured a safe transit of ships, but the real danger for the ships-and their crews-emerged along the shores of Vietnam.

¹⁶⁷ D. L. Strole and W. E. Dutcher, "Naval and Maritime Events, July 1968-December 1969," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (May 1969): 83.

Chapter Five: The Targets of Assassins

A seaman's life is a lonely one. . . Seamen live in a world of changes, and one in which there is always turnover. . . . Yes, the seaman's life is a lonely one, and his world is a lonely world. . . . Behind the security of routine watches there is the ever present awareness that danger may possibly lurk around the corner. . . . Time, ever present, lags, then races...the seaman tends to be a loner. . . . The forces acting upon him make him so.

Mariam G. Sherar
Shipping Out

The Sailors

This comment points out some of the difficulties in trying to describe the experiences of merchant sailors in Vietnam. The effects the war had on the actual combatants remains a matter of conjecture and, given the confines of this study, the same must remain true regarding merchant mariners. What is apparent, however is that ships and crews sailing to Vietnam faced danger on a routine basis. This is nothing new in the history of the merchant marine. During the twentieth-century, the merchant marine braved the dangers of U-boats off the western approaches to the English Channel during the First World War, on the hell of the Murmansk Run during the Second World War, and during the evacuation of Hungnam in Korea. In the ports throughout Vietnam, merchant ships met with gunfire, rockets, mines, and mortars. The worst area for Viet Cong attacks against merchant ships was the Rung Sat, the Forest of Assassins.

The ports of Da Nang, Cam Ranh, Qui Nhon, and Vung Tau did not require the long and tedious transit as did the voyage to Saigon. In these locations, dangers arose from attacks on the port itself. The trip to Saigon, however, required ships to sail from an anchorage off Vung Tau, up the Long Tau River -- muddy thirty-eight miles-long river that snaked through the Rung Sat. Along the banks, dense jungle masked the movements of guerrillas, and made locating these forces close to impossible. The lack of roads made pursuit difficult for Allied ground forces.

In an effort to isolate the port of Saigon, the VC concentrated along the Long Tau in an effort to interdict the flow of supplies. Gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades caused damage and

loss of life on some ships as they sailed on the river and forced the United States Navy to restrict ship transits to daylight hours. As dangerous as these attacks were, the mine proved to be the true nemesis of the sailors. Viet Cong guerrillas using barrels or boxes filled with explosives and connected by wires to shore, monitored sections of the river and then detonated mines when ships passed. By mining a ship in the Long Tau, the VC hoped to block the channel and interrupt the flow of supplies to the South Vietnamese and Free World Forces. On several occasions, they came remarkably close to succeeding, and this could have severely effected military operations in the southern section of the country.

On May 26, 1965, a Panamanian ship was the first victim of this style of attack. Chartered by the South Vietnamese government to haul cement, the SS *Eastern Mariner* suffered damage from a mine while anchored of the naval base at Nha Be, approximately ten miles south of Saigon. The ship sank, but its superstructure and forward section remained above water. One other ship reported light damage from a mine and naval personnel located a mine, near a fully loaded ammunition ship.¹⁶⁸

The mining and the attacks from the shoreline against passing merchant ships alarmed shipping companies, unions, and the sailors themselves, who were sailing into a war zone, as per President Johnson's declaration off April 24, 1965. This declaration, retro-active to January 1, established this zone in Vietnam and adjacent waters, allowed the pay of enlisted and warrant officers to be exempt from taxes and all but the first 200 dollars each month for officers. These rules did not immediately apply to merchant seamen.¹⁶⁹

On May 11, 1965, Vice Admiral Donaho signed a memorandum requesting similar designation of Vietnamese waters as a danger area for merchant shipping, based on inquiries by the head of the Maritime Administration, Mr. Nicholas Johnson, and the president of the American

¹⁶⁸ NAVFOR, Monthly Historical Summary, May 1966.

¹⁶⁹ Kolbenschlager, *Maritime and Naval Chronology*, 235.

Merchant Marine Institute, Mr. Ralph Casey. The failure to initiate such a proposal could have resulted in tremendous repercussions, the least of which concerned the delay of contracts and the worst involved full fledged strikes by crews. The proposal included a 100 per cent wage bonus for crews inside the designated operation area. It contained a provision that, should the ship be attacked, the crew would receive a \$ 300 bonus and if a ship in the harbor was attacked the crewmen on adjacent ships would earn \$ 200. The act provided a \$ 20,000 life insurance policy and guaranteed \$ 500 for loss of possessions due to attacks or sinking. Secretary of the navy Paul Nitze agreed on August 20, 1965 to initiate the program, retro active to April 24.¹⁷⁰

In Comes the Navy

The mining of the *Eastern Mariner* and the indiscriminate attacks on passing merchant ships led to the initiation of a series of programs to counter the VC threat. The Rung Sat Special Zone fell under the jurisdiction of the Vietnamese navy. Two river assault groups,¹⁷¹ six motor launch minesweepers, and some patrol boats conducted periodic sweeps of the area.¹⁷² Based on the difficulties the Vietnamese Navy faced in this region and throughout the country, a team of American naval officers assessed the roles and missions of the navy in 1964. In their analysis, referred to as the *Bucklew Report*, they cited the need to reinforce the Vietnamese in their efforts to interdict of communist supplies. As American resources and advisors arrived, Captain William H. Hardcastle, Chief of the Naval Section Military Assistance Advisory Group, requested the dispatch of excess landing craft, personnel, large (LCPL), to augment the junk force used to patrol the Rung Sat.¹⁷³ On September 9, 1965, four U.S. Navy LCPLs began sweeps of the Rung Sat and continued until June 1966 by which time a permanent navy presence emerged in the swamp.

¹⁷⁰ MSTs Office Honolulu message 201930Z August 1965.

¹⁷¹ A river assault group (RAG) usually consisted of one Landing Craft, Infantry (LCI) or an Landing Support Ship, Large (LSSL) for fire support and a number of Landing Craft, Mechanized (LCM) or Landing Craft, Vehicle or Personnel (LCVP) for troop movement.

¹⁷² R. L. Schreadley, *From the Rivers to the Sea: The United States Navy in Vietnam* (Annapolis, 1992), 280.

¹⁷³ Marolda and Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and The Vietnam Conflict*, 314-316.

In January 1966, the Viet Cong began to strike at passing ships on the Long Tau in greater force. The four LCPLs proved unable to suppress the level of fire encountered in the zone. To counter this threat, the navy launched Operation *Jackstay*, an amphibious assault into the Rung Sat to attempt to clear out VC bases and supplies. An amphibious ready group and battalion task force of marines conducted the sweep on March 26, 1966. The effect of this operation on the VC is unclear. The intelligence officer for the amphibious group in the operation commented: "The most important result of *Jackstay* was its psychological effects...To the Viet Cong, it proved again that there were no longer any areas in the country that their enemies were unwilling to enter."¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, five months after this operation, the VC scored their greatest success by sinking an American freighter in the Long Tau with a mine.

The Rung Sat River Patrol Group, formed under the commander of Task Force 116, Operation *Game Warden*, held the responsibility for keeping the Long Tau River open. It included a detachment of forty river patrol boats, known as PBRs.¹⁷⁵ For quick response and to provide added firepower, the group included a detachment of UH-1 Huey helicopters from HAL-3, the Seawolves, and later in the war fixed wing OV-10 Bronco aircraft from VAL-4, the Black Ponies. To seek out, locate, and destroy suspected Viet Cong bases, a detachment of navy SEALs, provided a ground element to the force. The last unit of the group probably earned the greatest respect of the merchant sailors.¹⁷⁶ Although the patrol boats received the most attention and ships of the mobile riverine force possessed greater firepower, the minesweeping boats of Mine Squadron 11 proved the most crucial. Leaving from their base at Nha Be, they conducted daily sweeps of the Long Tau before convoys of American merchant ships sailed. The boats repeatedly came under repeated enemy attacks and earned a Presidential Unit Citation for their

¹⁷⁴ Robert E. Mumford, Jr., "Jackstay: New Dimensions in Amphibious Warfare," in *Vietnam: The Naval Story* (Annapolis, 1986), 359

¹⁷⁵ River Squadron 59, with four river divisions attached: River Divisions 591, 592, 593 and 594.

¹⁷⁶ S. A. Swarztrauber, "River Patrol Relearned," in *Vietnam: The Naval Story* (Annapolis, 1986), 367-371.

work in Rung Sat.¹⁷⁷ These boats trailed chain drags to sever wires to mines and also streamed paravanes to cut the moorings of mines and allow them to float to the surface. Originally, the intention focused on cutting control cables, but the discovery of a 4,000 pound Soviet-built mine on December 31, 1966 magnified the danger on the Long Tau River.¹⁷⁸

The Long Tau

The sinking of the USNS *Card* in May 1964 marked the beginning of an effort by the VC to disrupt the flow of supplies into Saigon. On the Long Tau, 102 ships reported direct attacks before August 1969.¹⁷⁹ This reached a height in the first half of 1969 when fifty-one ships suffered attacks, compared to forty-four for all of 1968.¹⁸⁰ The difficulty in sinking ships leads one to believe that the major objective of this campaign meant to discourage merchant sailors from sailing ships to Vietnam. The number of ships attacked precludes a detailed description of each incident, but the attacks that resulted in major damage or loss of life require the attention of historians to demonstrate the dangers faced by merchant sailors during the war.

The most infamous incident on the Long Tau took place on August 23, 1966. The SS *Baton Rouge Victory*, a ship activated from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, steamed up the river that morning from its holding area off Vung Tau. Before the ship's departure, two South Vietnamese Navy minesweepers departed from Nha Be to conduct the daily morning sweep of the channel. At 6:40 AM, the boats came under heavy fire and returned to base with one sailor dead and three wounded. The repulse of the minesweepers should have halted the movement of merchant ships on the Long Tau until the river could be adequately swept for mines, but this did

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 390. Mine Squadron 11 lost three minesweeping boats during the war.

¹⁷⁸ Clark M. Gammell, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1966-30 June 1967," in *Naval Review 1968* (Annapolis, 1968), 257.

¹⁷⁹ Whitehead and Oliver, "A Chain of Ships," 99.

¹⁸⁰ Schreadley, *From the Rivers to the Sea*, 284.

not happen. Merchant ships proceeded up the river and at 9:10 AM, twelve miles up the river, the *Baton Rouge Victory* suffered mortal damage from a command-detonated mine.¹⁸¹

The mine exploded along the engine compartment and killed seven crew members in the engineroom. The ship's captain managed to swing the ship out of the channel and beach her on the river bank to keep from blocking the channel. This attack resulted in the single largest loss of life suffered by the American merchant marine at the hands of the enemy during the war, but the Long Tau continued to be a hazard to merchant seamen. It also marked the continued success of the VC against merchant shipping: the *Card* in May 1964, the *Eastern Mariner* in May 1965, and now the *Baton Rouge Victory* in August 1966. Yet even with these successes, the flow of supplies into Vietnam never faltered. The sinking of these ships represented not even a per cent of the number of ships arriving in Saigon and throughout Vietnam in a given year of the war.

Salvage operations commenced immediately and two heavy lift craft from Harbor Clearance Unit One responded. On August 30, only seven days after striking the mine, the salvage unit refloated the ship and beached it off Vung Tau to complete repairs. Work began on removing the cargo and patching the hull of the ship.¹⁸² Upon completion of the job, the ship sailed for Singapore. Follow-up surveys determined that the damage exceeded the cost-effectiveness of repair, and a scrap dealer in Taiwan purchased the ship.¹⁸³

The attacks on ships increased as the guerrillas introduced the use of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) in addition to automatic weapons. On January 9, 1967, the British tanker *Haustrum* received nine hits from recoilless rocket fire about fourteen miles southeast of Saigon. One hit landed in the wheelhouse, wounding the ship's master and killing one seaman. Two

¹⁸¹ "Saigon Channel Snarled After U.S. Vessels Is Sunk," in *New York Times*, 24 August 1966, 6. The MSTs Vietnam Chronicle contained almost no information on ship attacks before this, except for the mining of the *Card* and attack on *T-LST 550*. The information on *Baton Rouge Victory* is minimal consisting of one line. "SS *Baton Rouge Victory*, operated by Getz Brothers, strikes mine in Saigon River and suffers seven dead."

¹⁸² Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, 208-209.

¹⁸³ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 44.

months later, on March 16, 1967, the old Liberty ship, *Conqueror*, received a similar treatment, and two crewmen suffered wounds. The incessant attacks and sniping continued on the Long Tau through 1967 and into 1968.

The bi-monthly magazine, *ANONE*, published by the MSTS Far East area command in Yokohama, Japan, interviewed Captain I. L. Morris, of the re-activated ship *SS Hope Victory*, who described a typical transit on the Rung Sat. His ship, operated by Matson Navigation, transported ammunition from the west coast to the ammunition anchorage at Cat Lai. The facility contained only three anchorages, and the need for ammunition remained so great that ten ships were often anchored off Vung Tau to await the opening of a berth. Morris described the massive deforestation of the Rung Sat by chemicals but did not eliminate the threat of attack. The characteristics of the river, only 300 to 700 meters wide, and the depth of water forced MSTS to limit the loading of ships not to exceed a draft of 27 feet. The river did not permit a ship to reverse its course without coming to a complete stop and conducting a maneuver known as backing-and-filling.¹⁸⁴ Morris described a typical attack scenario: "One of the VC tactics is to send a small sampan across the bow of one of our ships. To avoid it, our ship will turn away and as he nears the bank they'll open up with whatever they've got."¹⁸⁵

The period during 1968 and the first half of 1969 marked the heaviest attacks on shipping on the Long Tau. The typical attacks involved a ferocious barrage of gunfire and rockets on a passing merchant ship. These attacks resulted in immediate response by units of the Rung Sat Patrol Group. Roving PBRs, Seawolves, and Black Pony aircraft responded to the attacks and saturated the areas with ordnance in attempts to eliminate the guerrillas.

On May 15, 1968, the insurgents attempted their most brazen attack by hitting three ships on the river. The first ship, the chartered Japanese freighter *SS Niekai Maru*, received only

¹⁸⁴ Similar to a three-point turn in driving.

¹⁸⁵ "Ships-The 'Draft Horses' of War," *ANONE*, May/June 1969, 8-10.

sporadic fire twenty-two miles southeast of Saigon. Two hours after this attack and about half the distance to Saigon, the chartered ro/ro SS *Transglobe* received hits from four rockets. Less than a half-hour later, the Sea-Land container ship SS *Fairland* came under attack in the same area. Fortunately, none of these attacks resulted in loss of life and only minor damage. Two days later, as the *Fairland* departed Saigon for its next scheduled stop at Cam Ranh, the ship narrowly avoided damage from a command-detonated mine in the Rung Sat.¹⁸⁶

The British tanker *Anchor Queen* did not prove so fortunate. On May 19, 1968, two days after the second attack on the *Fairland*, the ship received a fierce barrage of automatic weapons fire. The previous attacks on shipping alerted the navy, and they deployed a security detachment on board to protect the ship and its volatile cargo. The attack resulted in five wounded U. S. navy sailors.¹⁸⁷

In August 1968, the ammunition anchorage at Cat Lai came under direct attack for the first time. The MSTS freighter USNS *Lt. Robert Craig* received a hit from a rocket after completing the discharge of ammunition. The ship only suffered minor damage and fortunately no ammunition remained on board the ship. That same evening, the SS *Santa Monica* received a similar hit while unloading ammunition. Amazingly, no secondary explosions took place and no casualties resulted from either attack. The next week, the SS *Transglobe* and Japanese freighter *Yutoku Maru* came under heavy attack on the Long Tau. Both ships received minor damage, and one seaman lost his life on the *Transglobe*.¹⁸⁸

The attacks proceeded and intensified as the new year began in 1969. On January 3, 1969, three merchant ships came under attack on the river. The three ships received only minor damage, but the engagement set the tone for the year. On March 22, the SS *American Racer*

¹⁸⁶ Harold S. Torrance, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1967-30 June 1968," in *Naval Review 1969* (Annapolis, 1969), 317-318.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁸⁸ D. L. Strole and W. E. Dutcher, "Naval and Maritime Events, July 1968-December 1969," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (May 1969): 280.

became the twenty-first ship attacked in the year. Portending the boldness of the Viet Cong, they attacked five ships on May 12, 1969. Only one ship, the SS *Robin Gray*, received damage and suffered one casualty.¹⁸⁹

In an effort to clear the Rung Sat of an enemy presence, the commander of the patrol group, Commander C. J. Wages, requested that troops be inserted into the area. Previous attempts by units of the Mobile Riverine Force in early 1967, following the Operation *Jackstay* in 1966, kept the area fairly secure. However, the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the expansion of United States presence in the Mekong Delta precluded additional sweeps by the Mobile Riverine Force. The American merchant mariners in Vietnam owed their renewed security to the soldiers from two unlikely sources.

The enemy force in the Rung Sat, Doan-10, consisted of nine to ten platoons, ranging from 30 to 55 men each. They maintained a base camp area in an area north of the Rung Sat, in the Bien Hoa Province. On June 22, 1969 elements of the 1st Royal Australian Regiment, Royal Thai Army Volunteers, and attached naval units opened the allied attack. The sweeps proved tremendously effective as attacks in July dropped to only two as compared to nineteen in June.¹⁹⁰ The Rung Sat remained a pacified region until the unlucky SS *Transglobe* received the first attack in six months, on February 3, 1970.¹⁹¹ With the withdrawal of U.S. forces, attacks on shipping diminished on the Long Tau and never reached the scale of the 1968-1969 level of action.

Sappers!

As grave a danger as Doan-10 threatened, the most pressing concern for merchant mariners proved that of sappers. The gunfire and rocket attacks proved more of a harassment than an actual threat to the safety of the ships. Only mine attacks resulted in the loss of ships. These

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁹⁰ Schreadley, "The Naval War in Vietnam," 300-302.

¹⁹¹ William E. Dutcher, "Naval and Maritime Events, January 1970-June 1970," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (May, 1971): 18. The *Transglobe* maintained a frequent schedule between Vietnam and Okinawa.

attacks usually entailed swimmers attaching explosive devices to the sides of ships, affixed with timers to detonate once the saboteurs cleared from the target.

The Army Corps of Engineer dredge, *Jamaica Bay*, worked on the construction of a unique base in the Mekong Delta. Located near the village of My Tho, the dredge helped form a new island for the construction of a base, called Dong Tam, for the use of riverine forces.¹⁹² Using an ingenious method of destruction, the Viet Cong planted two charges in the mud and, when the *Jamaica Bay* proceeded to scoop them up, they detonated and sank the vessel in 35 feet of water.¹⁹³ Salvage teams refloated the dredge on March 12.¹⁹⁴

Two further attacks in 1967 involved sappers. One involved the British tanker *Amastra*, anchored off Nha Trang on April 12. The ship experienced an explosion that ripped a four-by-six foot hole out of one of the ship's cargo holds, approximately 10 feet below the waterline. No explosion of fuel vapors took place, and the compartment merely flooded with sea water, instead of its normal load of fuel.¹⁹⁵ The other attack involved the chartered freighter SS *Seatrain Texas* off the naval base at Nha Be, just south of Saigon on December 22, 1967. This area served as a holding area for ships en-route to Saigon. Similar to the *Amastra*, the explosion tore a hole along the waterline on the starboard side. The crew managed to control the flooding and suffered no casualties.¹⁹⁶

To improve harbor security in the major ports and eliminate the danger of sappers, the navy instituted Operation *Stable Door*. After a thorough review of port security in the major ports, Commander Naval Forces, Vietnam instituted this program in August 1966. He established Inshore Underwater Units (IUWU) in the ports of Vung Tau, Cam Ranh, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Vung Ro. These units established tactical command centers to coordinate security patrols,

¹⁹² Cutler, *Brown Water, Black Berets*, 206.

¹⁹³ Gammel, "Events 1966-1967," 255.

¹⁹⁴ Hooper, *Mobility, Support, Endurance*, 211-213.

¹⁹⁵ Gammel, "Events 1966-1967," 264.

¹⁹⁶ Strole and Dutcher, "Events 1968-1969," 299-300

harbor movements, and surveillance within the port. The larger ports of Da Nang and Saigon revised their security procedures to conform with the IUWUs. The units included 16-foot Boston whalers, LCPLs, and 45-foot picket boats in addition to attached explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams to assist in the elimination of mines.¹⁹⁷ As these units fell under Vietnamese control in 1971, a series of attacks took place that resulted in the sinking of three ships.

The first took place in the same area as the *Seatrain Texas*. The small Nationalist Chinese freighter *Welfare* suffered a mine explosion while anchored in the Nha Be River. The ship broke free from the anchorage and drifted a mile and a half down river until she sank near the docks at the naval base at Nha Be.

Subsequent attacks took place in the harbor of Qui Nhon and Cam Ranh. These ports provided the needed logistical flow for allied units operating in the central highlands of Vietnam. The ROK Capital and 9th Divisions continued to operate in this area until 1972, and the ports maintained a steady flow of supplies. As Vietnamization took place, the American IUWU turned over its responsibility to Vietnamese forces. As the Vietnamese assumed these responsibilities, a rash of minings took place that resulted in heavy damage to a number of merchant ships.

In the port of Cam Ranh on September 22, 1970, the freighter SS *Americo* experienced a severe explosion while unloading ammunition. Determined to be an external explosion, the ship suffered heavy damage and nearly capsized. Quick efforts on the part of the crew and harbor authorities removed the ship from the dock and beached it in shallow water until repair efforts could be arranged.¹⁹⁸ The attacks in Qui Nhon demonstrated a concerted effort by the Viet Cong to slow the flow of supplies to the last remaining Allied in Vietnam. The SS *Robin Hood* experienced a tremendous explosion on March 21, 1971 when a mine blew out a 27 foot long and

¹⁹⁷ Cutler, *Brown Water, Black Berets*, 107-110.

¹⁹⁸ Toby Marquez and J. B. Finkelstein, "Naval and Maritime Events, July 1970-December 1970," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (May 1971): 333.

14 feet wide hole in the starboard side of the ship. The ship managed to stay afloat and was towed away for repairs.

Three months later, on June 14, the SS *American Hawk* suffered a similar occurrence, but the engine room flooded in addition to one of the cargo holds. Fully loaded, the ship settled to the bottom in thirty-three feet of water, as she remained tied to the dock in Qui Nhon. After refloating the ship and discharging the cargo, the ship proceeded to Hong Kong under the tow of tug. As the ship proceeded to port, part of the patch gave way and, to prevent its sinking, the tug maneuvered the ship into Junk Bay.¹⁹⁹ The ship suffered further damage from a passing typhoon, and the owner sold the ship to local scrappers in September.²⁰⁰

The sappers finished their run of hits with the sinking of the freighter SS *Green Bay* on August 17, 1971. This ship, the largest merchant ship to be sunk during the Vietnam War, experienced a similar attack as the previous ships. While discharging cargo, an explosion occurred on the starboard side, aft, and injured two crewmen. The hole caused by the mine, 18 by 31 feet, caused a massive list to the ship. The ship rolled to port, onto the pier and sank at the berth. Two U.S. Navy ships, USS *Current* and *Sioux* completed salvage of the ship on September 11.²⁰¹ The ship shared a similar fate to the *American Hawk*. Soon the ship arrived in Hong Kong, an inspection determined repairs to be uneconomical and resulted in the scrapping of the ship.²⁰²

In 1972 the port of Da Nang experienced attacks on two ships in its harbor. The heavy-lift ship, SS *Transcolorado*, suffered a mine hit that flooded hold number four on April 8. The captain grounded the ship and managed to refloat it eleven days later. The next month, in similar scenario, the SS *Jefferson City Victory* succumbed to a mine. The master quickly beached the craft, and temporary repairs allowed the ship to sail for final repairs in the United States.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ This is an area near Hong Kong where ships awaiting to be scrapped are anchored.

²⁰⁰ Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. III, 57.

²⁰¹ MSC, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1971.

²⁰² Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. II, 75.

²⁰³ MSC, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1972.

These were three phases that came be discerned from the Viet Cong attacks. However the disparity in attacks and the results do not indicate a planned series of offensive actions. The first, starting with the USNS *Card* involved the mining of ships in the port area around Saigon. The second phase involved the attacks on passing ships on the Long Tau River and in ports throughout Vietnam, and involved chiefly gunfire, mortar, and rocket attacks. The final phase entailed attacks on shipping outside of the Saigon area in the ports located in the northern provinces of the nation. The Easter Offensive by the North Vietnamese in 1972 focused on these regions and attacks on shipping most likely were undertaken to interdict the flow of supplies to the South Vietnamese and remaining Allied forces in these areas.

The Dangers of Sailing outside of Vietnam

The routine sailing of ships involved a serious element of risk. The danger from other ships, the weather, human error, and just plain accidents continually plagued the voyages of ships to Vietnam. As the war progressed, the merchant marine lost several ships. The first, the SS *Gulfstag*, a T-2 tanker, exploded and burned off the Morgan City, Louisiana, coast on October 24, 1966. The ship later sank and left a residual oilslick behind; this slick caught fire in December and took a concentrated effort to extinguish.²⁰⁴ The next month, the ore carrier *Daniel J. Morrell* sank during a storm on Lake Huron, losing twenty-eight of its twenty-nine men crew.²⁰⁵ The other major ship accident outside of Vietnam involved the disappearance of the SS *Texaco Oklahoma* off Cape Hatteras, on March 27, 1971. The ship broke up in a storm, and twenty of the thirty-one person crew disappeared with the ship into the "Graveyard of the Atlantic."²⁰⁶

The single largest loss of shipping came in the Gulf of Mexico in September 1965, when Hurricane *Betsy* swept ashore in Louisiana. The devastation along the shoreline shattered the local

²⁰⁴ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 159.

²⁰⁵ Gammell, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1966-30 June 1967," 252. This accident does not receive the same attention as the *Edmund Fitzgerald*, probably due to the lack of folksong.

²⁰⁶ J. B. Finkelstein, "Naval and Maritime Events, January 1970-June 1970," in U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (May 1971): 55.

fishing and boating industry. New Orleans, the homeport for the ships of Lykes Brothers Steamship, Inc., suffered tremendously from this storm. When the storm passed, the Lykes fleet suffered worse than it had during the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II. Four of its older C-2 ships received damage from the storm, two of which broke loose from their moorings and ran aground after destroying a number of docks. One of the new Gulf Pride ships, the *Joseph Lykes*, broke free from its moorings, cut loose several barges, sank two tugs, and finally settled in the Beinville Street area of downtown New Orleans. The *Genevieve Lykes*, one of Lykes' new fleet of Gulf Clipper ships, broke free in the Avondale shipyard and sank. What made this loss particularly hard on Lykes was the fact that the *Genevieve* sank on top of the another new ship, the *Letitia Lykes*.²⁰⁷ The U.S. government also suffered from this hurricane. Two ships undergoing activation at the time, the *Winged Arrow*²⁰⁸ and the *Wake Forest Victory*²⁰⁹ both suffered damage and returned to the NDRF without being repaired.

Fire remained the fiercest enemy of a sailor. In 1934, the passenger liner *Morro Castle* caught fire. The crew could not extinguish the flames and 122 passengers and crew died. The image of the *Morro Castle* aground off Asbury Park, New Jersey remains imbedded in the mind of most merchant sailors. The use of steel construction, the maze of piping and ducting, aids in the ability of heat to travel through a ship. The crew of the SS *San Jose* learned this on November 11, 1967 when their refrigerator ship departed from Guam for Vietnam. The ship suffered a fire in the engine room that quickly went out of control. The captain decided to abandon ship as the fire spread throughout the ship. High seas initially pre-empted efforts to tow the ship back to Guam.

On November 15, a navy ship relocated the *San Jose* and, with no evidence of fire and the weather clearly, arranged for it to be towed back to port. Upon return to Guam, the crew re-

²⁰⁷ Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. II, 62. Eventually these two ships were scrapped and two new ships, with the same names, constructed in their place.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰⁹ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 50.

embarked and worked on offloading the cargo after inspecting the ship. As cargo operations progressed, the hatches for the forward hold were opened and caused a backflash into the hold that rapidly engulfed the forward section of the ship. Tugs moved the ship from the berth and beached her, as the crew flooded the forward holds to extinguish the flames. In March 1968, the ship proceeded to Seattle under tow for major repairs.²¹⁰

Human error resulted in the grounding and collision of many ships in and outside of Vietnam. One of the more spectacular accidents took place in San Francisco Bay when the C-2 freighter *SS American Producer* attempted to avoid a collision with the *M. M. Dant*. Destined for Da Nang, the *American Producer* avoided the collision but struck a pier in the downtown area of the city. The accident destroyed over a 100 foot section of the pier and ripped a 65 foot section out of the bow of the ship. The incident received great attention, because the ship carried a load of bombs, rockets, and other explosives and forced the evacuation of a large section of the San Francisco waterfront until the ship could be removed.²¹¹

The underdeveloped harbors of Vietnam took their toll on shipping. The *SS Maury* grounded at Phan Rang on February 3, 1969. The ship suffered extensive damage to its hull, but the owner deferred repair costs to get one more run out of the ship.²¹² The repairing of a twenty-three year old ship did not make financial sense, and many other ships joined the *Maury* in this decision. In October the *Norwich Victory* grounded at Da Nang. After salvage, it also became a scrap candidate.²¹³

One site in particular caused an undue number of groundings. Located in the middle of the South China Seas, the Paracel Islands remained a disputed area between Vietnam and China. The Paracels, located on the direct route to Vietnam from the United States and Japan, consisted of many small islands and numerous submerged reefs, an extreme hazard to navigation. The

²¹⁰ Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. II, 93.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 33.

²¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 39.

²¹³ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 46.

South China Sea remained a dangerous area to sail, as the lack of navigational landmarks forced many ships to dead reckon their positions until landfall. During the course of the war, five American ships grounded in this area. All but the last ship, the USNS *Sgt. Jack J Pendleton*, were returned to service. The initial damage to the *Pendleton*, grounded on September 25, 1973, did not appear severe, but a later typhoon further damaged the ship and resulted in MSTTS declaring it a total loss. The final disposition of the ship remains a mystery as the Paracel Islands became the territory of the People's Republic of China in 1974.²¹⁴

Ship Tales?

Merchant sailors abound with tales of ship voyages that over the years magnify into mythological proportions. The tales of six such ships during the Vietnam War fit this category. Although only three of the tales took place in Vietnam, they all relate to efforts to transport supplies in support of the war.

By 1967 the transportation of supplies to Vietnam reached a matter of routine for shipping companies and the crews of most U.S. flagged ships. In June of 1967, the Farrell line freighter, *African Glen*, completed its circuit of port calls in the Mediterranean and proceeded on its next leg to Vietnam via the Suez Canal. To sailors, transit through the 'Ditch' remains one of the most laborious sea details. Over 100 kilometers long, it entailed a full day traveling in a convoy at 9 knots under the direction of Egyptian pilots. The *African Glen* arrived in the crowded anchorage off Port Said and awaited the 2:00 AM departure of the southbound convoy into the Suez Canal on June 6, 1967.

As the ship sailed in the southbound convoy, a war erupted. Instead of a threat by Viet Cong guerrillas, the danger came in the form of Israeli warplanes. The Six Day Arab-Israeli War exploded as the ships in the southbound convoy arrived in the Great Bitter Lake to anchor and

²¹⁴ Samuel L. Morison and John S. Rowe, *The Ships & Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*. 10th ed. (Annapolis, 1975), 248.

await the north bound convoy's passage, the Egyptians closed the canal by sinking block ships at the exits. The Israeli success ensured that the Suez remained closed until 1975 and effectively removed this avenue from the world shipping market. As much as it did in 1956, it forced shippers to divert ships around the Cape of Good Hope and caused a marked increase in the world shipping rates.

The inability to free the *African Glen* resulted in the decision to offload the cargo and transfer it to other ships outside of the canal. The ship, declared a compromised constructive total loss, remained anchored in the Great Bitter Lake until the Yom Kippur War. In October 1973, the ship received a barrage of Israeli air to surface missiles and sank to the bottom of the lake with only its masts and funnel showing. When the canal reopened, the ship remained there until salvage crews refloated the wreck in 1977 and finally scrapped it.²¹⁵ For the transportation of supplies to Vietnam, the closure of the canal forced a rerouting of cargoes from the East coast of the United States through the Panama Canal.

Two separate occurrences, one in 1968 and another in 1971, temporarily closed this canal when ships grounded in the Galliard Cut. In the first instance, the Japanese ore carrier, *Shozan Maru*, remained grounded for only seventeen hours but caused an eighty ship backlog, demonstrating the importance of the canal to world commerce.²¹⁶ The *Sian-Yung*, another Japanese freighter, actually sank after grounding but managed to pull off to the bank before sinking. Although the ship sank on December 12, 1970, it would not be until 1972, and a series of unsuccessful attempts, that it was finally removed and scuttled at sea.²¹⁷ The importance of the canal is evident from the record month of operation that took place in March 1967 when 1,163 ships passed through it.

²¹⁵ Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. II, 38.

²¹⁶ Torrance, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1967-30 June 1968," 307.

²¹⁷ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 58.

The second tale involved three American C-2 freighters under contract with the South Vietnamese government to haul cement from Taiwan. In early May 1968, all three ships arrived in Vietnam and remained there until July 1973. What made this case unusual was that the ships did not receive damage from the Viet Cong, but South Vietnamese officials arrested the ships and refused to allow them to depart.²¹⁸ The three ships, the SS *Cortland*, *Bowling Green*, and *Whitehall*, became the victims of a fight between the ship owners and the government of South Vietnam. The government reneged on its contract and in turn the two shipping companies placed liens against five major banks in the United States that the Republic of Vietnam used to transact business.²¹⁹ In response to this action, the government "arrested" the ships and held them in port for five years. The matter proved impossible to resolve, and the companies sold the ships for scrap; in July 1973, the three went to scrap dealers in Taiwan.²²⁰

The next ship story was one of tragedy and error that resulted in the largest loss of merchant seamen in direct support of the war in Vietnam. On the day after Christmas, 1969, the States Marine Lines C-2 freighter SS *Badger State*, limped toward an emergency anchorage at Midway Island in the central Pacific. Since leaving the naval ammunition depot in Bangor, Washington, the ship suffered repeated difficulties. A hydraulic leak in the ship steering system limited the ability of the ship to use its rudder. The weather in the North Pacific in the winter lived up to its reputation, and the ship suffered repeated rolling-in some cases, up to 52 degree rolls. The most serious, and dangerous, problem facing the men of the *Badger State* dealt with its cargo of 6,109 tons of bombs.

²¹⁸ Nicholas J. Healy and David J. Sharpe, *Cases and Materials on Admiralty* 2d ed. (St. Paul, 1986), 118. "Under United States law today as in the past, a ship can be named as sole defendant in a complaint filed in a United States district court, arrested by the United States marshal, defaulted or tried and found at fault, and sold to a purchaser at a marshal's auction, all without the active participation of the shipowner *in personam* at any stage."

²¹⁹ George Horne, "2 U.S. Companies Say Saigon Broke Shipping Contract," *New York Times*, July 31, 1968, 3.

²²⁰ Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States*. Vol. II, 34.

Loading during a rain storm, most of the wood used as dunnage and sheathing swelled from the moisture. Dunnage provided the shoring to keep the cargo from shifting. Sheathing provided a buffer between the steel skin of the ship and the cargo. Two days out from Bangor, the crew discovered loose 500 pound bombs in the lower tween deck area of the number three hold. A further inspection of other holds indicated other bombs were breaking loose throughout the ship. Investigations revealed that as the swollen wood dried out and shrank, the bombs worked free and broke loose. The bad weather and rolling the ship experienced made the situation deteriorate.

By December 23, the master requested a port of refuge and set course for Midway Island. The danger motivated the captain to request an escort in case the crew needed to abandon ship. The *Badger State* encountered a severe storm on Christmas Day that broke loose permanent fixtures, such as the galley refrigerator and desks. Early on the morning of December 26, the report of heavy banging aft led to the opening of the hatch to number five hold. Upon looking inside, the crew witnessed the sight of a few dozen 750 pound bombs rolling free on the deck. As the bombs rolled, sparks shot from the metal projectiles on the unprotected steel deck. At 9:40 AM, an explosion blew off hatch number 5 and opened an eight-by-twelve foot hole on the starboard side of the ship. Fortunately, the Greek freighter MV *Khian Star*, responded to an earlier distress call and arrived on the scene before the explosion.

The situation on the *Badger State* appeared hopeless, with a fire aft and other bombs loose in other holds, and the captain ordered the crew to abandon ship. The weather damaged the port lifeboat so the crew used the starboard boat. All the crew but the master, an injured mate, and three seamen remained behind to launch the inflatable rafts. As the crew in the one lifeboat attempted to affix the rudder and install the hand-powered levers to work the propeller, the boat drifted aft on the starboard side of the ship. As the boat drifted, bombs started to rain out of the hole blown in the side of the ship. Some of the crew leaped from the lifeboat into the 56 degrees

Fahrenheit water, but most remained in the boat. Paul C. Kinney described the scene as it unfolded:

A 2,000-pound bomb slid out nose first very quickly and, narrowly missing the boat, fell into the water. When the ship rolled back to port, a second bomb, having gained momentum in the starboard roll, came out of the hole in the manner of a ski jumper. This bomb hit one crewman in the head driving him out of the boat. The bomb then landed squarely in the laps of four other crewmen. As the bomb landed in the boat, then about one-third full of water, someone yelled, 'Let's get the hell out of here.' In one continuous motion of the bomb landing in the boat and the remaining crewmen rushing to the outboard side, the boat capsized.²²¹

As the crew of the lifeboat spilled into the water, they battled against the weather, the cold water, and, of all things, a flock of sea birds that pecked at the men. The *Khian Star* moved in to rescue the crew but, of a crew of forty men, only fourteen survived. On December 27, the chartered freighter *SS Flying Dragon* arrived on the scene and remained until the navy tug *USS Abnaki* relieved her.²²² The ship continued to burn and suffered from massive explosions as bombs throughout the ship added to the conflagration. The navy dispatched a warship to sink the ship with gunfire and so ended the life of the *Badger State*.²²³

The last of the long tales involved a word that all ship captains dread, "Mutiny." One may expect a tale of mutiny in the merchant marine during the days of wooden ships and iron men but not in a Victory-ship in 1970. The story of the mutiny on the *SS Columbia Eagle* remains little known and clouded in secrecy. The government's records on this case and the trial of one of the two mutineers remain sealed.²²⁴

The ship departed from Manila for Thailand with 10,000 tons of bombs and napalm, for the air force, on March 11, 1970. On March 15, the Department of Defense released a statement

²²¹ Paul C. Kinney, "The Fate of the Badger State," in U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (Oct. 1981), 66.

²²² *Ibid.*, 63-68.

²²³ "Ship to be Sunk by Gunfire," *New York Times*, January 5, 1970, 5.

²²⁴ Paul F. Conley, "1970 Mutiny Remains a Mystery," in *Journal of Commerce and Commercial*, March 17, 1995, 1.

saying that two armed men, linked with the peace movement, seized control of the ship and diverted it to the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville.²²⁵ The two men-Clyde W. McKay, age 25, and Alvin L. Glatowski, 20 years old, both members of the steward department of the ship, faked a bomb threat to force 24 of the 39 crew to abandon ship. The remaining crew, the ships' captain, D. A. Swann, and most of the officers, remained on board. The ammunition freighter SS *Rappahannock* picked up the 24 crewmen while the hijackers diverted the *Columbia Eagle* to Cambodia.²²⁶

The two crewmen received political asylum from the Cambodian government. The U.S. Navy diverted warships from Vietnam to pursue the ship and maintain a surveillance offshore. Initial reports by the repatriated crew of the ship identified McKay and Glatowski as "hippies and drug users." Captain Swann conveyed a message from the mutineers that this would be the first in a series of ship hijackings, protesting the war. Both mutineers escaped into the country during the midst of the political turmoil over the American bombings and Khmer Rouge attacks.

On March 26, the two gave an interview in Pnom Penh. They provided a contradictory story and denied being members of the SDS, but stated that they worked as part of a plot by the SDS, against the war. They acknowledged being guilty of mutiny and piracy and threatened murder but viewed these acts as less offensive than delivering bombs and napalm for use in Vietnam.²²⁷ The two remained at large in Cambodia, and not until April 9 did the new National Salvation Committee of Cambodia agree to release the ship and the remaining crew members. In return for the ship, the United States agreed not to offload the cargo in Thailand or Vietnam and instead sailed the ship to the Philippines.²²⁸

²²⁵ Tad Szulc, "U.S. Arms Ship to Thailand Seized by 'Men With Guns,'" in *New York Times*, March 16, 1970, 1 & 13.

²²⁶ "2 Crewmen Identified as C. W. McKay, Jr. and A. L. Glatkowski," in *New York Times*, March 17, 1970, 1.

²²⁷ "Glatkowski and McKay Give Details of Seizure," in *New York Times*, March 16, 1970, 16.

²²⁸ "Ship, Crew and Cargo of Napalm Returned to US," in *New York Times*, March 9, 1970, 2.

Both of the mutineers escaped from Cambodian "supervision," and in December Glatkowski surrendered to the United States embassy. He told reporters that both of them had attempted to join the communist party and, "I only regret I didn't sink the ship...I still believe in the revolution in America and in the revolution in Cambodia."²²⁹ The fate of Clyde McKay remains a mystery he escaped from Cambodian custody in October of 1970, and no record exists of his fate. Following the release of Captain Swann and his filing of mutiny charges against the two men, a federal grand jury indicted them on the charges of mutiny and kidnapping in June 1970.²³⁰ At his trial, Alvin Glatkowski pleaded guilty to hijacking the ship and received a sentence of ten years for mutiny and assault on the high seas on March 2, 1971. The tale of the *Columbia Eagle* remains shrouded in secrecy. The motivation of the two mutineers remains uncertain, and no substantial research exists on this controversial topic. The ship itself met its end quickly after the mutiny on the scrap heap in Taiwan the next year.²³¹

The Vietnam War presented the American military with a new type of war. It had a similar effect on the merchant marine. In previous wars, the merchant marine faced enemies on the seas. These ranged from submarines, to surface raiders to attacks in port by aircraft. The war in Vietnam added a new dimension, attack from land. The Long Tau River leading to Saigon, and the ports throughout Vietnam witnessed a campaign of harassment attacks on merchant ships attempting to perform their mission. Although the insurgent forces did manage to sink five ships and inflict untold casualties on merchant sailors they never succeeded in driving them off or interdicting the flow of supplies. Besides the danger presented by the Viet Cong, the typical dangers faced by commercial sailors became apparent from the ship tales of the *African Glen*, *Bowling Green*, *Cortland*, *Whitehall*, *Badger State*, and *Columbia Eagle*. Their stories deserve a place in the folklore of the merchant marine and contain elements of humor, tragedy and

²²⁹ "Seaman in Cambodia Explains Surrender," in *New York Times*, December 16, 1970, 3.

²³⁰ Dutcher, "Naval and Maritime Events, January 1970-June 1970," 55.

²³¹ Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships*, 62-63.

uncertainty. They convey the fact that world affairs had a major impact on the merchant marine. Just as these ships endured their odyssey, the navy had similar experiences with the *Liberty* and *Pueblo*, as well as unrest in their ships. Although these ships did not face the mines and gunfire like other ships in Vietnam, their stories remain a part of history.

Chapter Six: The Withdrawal, 1969-1973

The Defense Department doesn't appreciate the merchant marine, my own service doesn't fully appreciate the merchant marine, but the merchant marine has never let us down.

Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage
Commander MSTS at AFL-CIO
luncheon

The Situation in 1969

In February, Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, the commander of Military Sea Transport Service since 1967, addressed the Naval War College on the situation in Vietnam. He addressed several key factors that aided and hindered the effectiveness of the merchant marine to support the war.

One of the major factors he addressed concerned the matter of personnel. Unlike the navy, which actively recruited and drafted personnel, the merchant marine experienced a severe shortage in trained personnel. The addition of each ship from the NDRF, or from commercial inactive fleets, required another thirty to forty-five crewmen, not to mention the need for replacements. The situation proved so severe that the Maritime Administration accelerated the graduation of merchant officers from the federal and five state merchant marine academies in 1966 and 1967.²³² Adding to the shortage in people, the average age of the merchant mariner, approximately fifty years old, made the situation worse by the large amount of sailors retiring versus the number of new employees.²³³

The second point concerned the military diverting the merchant marine from commercial business. Admiral Ramage estimated that MSTS occupied 40 per cent of the liner capacity of the fleet. According to him, this factor accounted for the decrease in the share of foreign trade the

²³² Kendall, "Merchant Shipping," 140. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King Point, NY; the New York State Merchant Marine Academy at Fort Schuyler, NY; Massachusetts Maritime Academy at Buzzards Bay; Maine Maritime Academy at Castine; California Maritime Academy at Vallejo and Texas Maritime at Galveston.

²³³ Lawson P. Ramage, "The Military Sea Transportation Service," in *NWCR* (May 1969): 8.

fleet carried from 9.2 per cent in 1964 to 5.6 per cent in 1967. He concluded that "the American merchant marine is unable to carry on its business as usual and support a military operation of the size of Vietnam."

In his examination of the commercial fleet, Ramage cited the fact that over 68 per cent of the ships already exceeded 20 years in age (670 out of 981). The failure to replace the older vessels resulted in a non-competitive fleet, susceptible to attacks from other nations. All the ships in the NDRF exceeded twenty-five years old, and their use in future conflicts remained questionable. The difficulty in activating ships from this fleet demonstrated the problem of utilizing older ships. His examination of the tanker fleet confirmed the same situation and he described how the lack of U.S. ships had forced MSTS to charter thirty-five foreign tankers since October 1966.

One of his most vicious attacks focused on the concept of ships under "effective U.S. control." This refers to ships owned by American companies but registered in countries of convenience, such as Panama, Liberia, and Honduras. Ramage destroyed the image that this provided an additional source of shipping for the United States. He cited appeals to the owners of 412 such ships, particularly after the closing of the Suez Canal, that led to offers for only two suitable ships.²³⁴

He described MSTS failure to build new ships, in a similar manner to commercial shipping lines. Attempts to replace older nucleus ships met with repeated opposition from industry and Congress. The only alternative open to MSTS rested with the build and charter programs. Ramage painted a dark picture of the future and concluded his speech up with the following comment: "This industry, which has served so honorably and well, is now gravely sick. It is being kept alive primarily by large injections of Government-sponsored cargoes."²³⁵

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Labor

Labor in the maritime field emerged as one of the most vocal and influential organizations in the shipping industry. The union organizations not only included members of the ships' crew but the longshoremen and warehousemen who handled the cargo on the docks. On board the ships, separate unions existed for the deck officers, engineering officers, unlicensed personnel, and radio officers. Most of these unions tied into each other through the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations. Any study of any merchant marine topic must address the role played by the unions. Throughout the course of the war, a series of strikes halted the commercial fleet from conducting businesses, but except for one instance, the unions did not carry their grievances over to military cargoes. In examining these cases, it becomes obvious that organized labor possessed the ability to shut-down the military effort in Vietnam faster than any other public organization.

The establishment of labor unions in the maritime industry remains a controversial topic. Representation for sailors remained largely suppressed until the *Arago* decision of 1897. The case involved the seamen's right to break their commitment with shipping companies, referred to as shipping articles. In this case, four sailors "jumped ship," the captain had them arrested, and the police dragged them through the streets in chains. The International Seamen's Union brought the case to the Supreme Court, and their decision earned the name "The Second Dred Scott Decision." The court contended that seamen surrendered their personal liberty when they entered into contract with a shipping company; they forfeited their rights to the Thirteenth Amendment. Specifically the court stated:

Seamen are treated by Congress . . . as deficient in that full and intelligent responsibility for their acts which is accredited to ordinary adults, and as needing the protection of the law in the same sense in which minors and wards are entitled to the protections of their parents and guardians.²³⁶

²³⁶ De La Pedraja, *U.S. Merchant Marine*, 56-57.

This decision provided a rallying point for sailors and union organizers. In 1915 Senator Robert La Follette of Wisconsin sponsored the Seamen's Act, which outlawed the arrest of deserting seamen and negated the *Arago* Decision.

The formation of unions expanded in the 1930s and remained a potent force during the Vietnam War. These organizations played such a dominant role in the merchant marine that they literally controlled who worked for companies. As opposed to the common practice of a company hiring an employee and then enrolling in a union, the shipping unions used hiring halls to assign sailors to companies. Except for the most senior officers, specifically the master and chief engineer, the companies had little say in whom the unions assigned to their ships.

The unions remained avid supporters of U.S.-flagged shipping during this period. They continually lobbied the Congress, Government Accounting Office, and Military Sea Transport Service to ensure that cheaper, foreign-flag ships did not take business away from the commercial fleet. Their accusations caused Admiral Donaho to file a deposition in the U.S. District Court of Washington D.C., stating that no cargo moved on foreign-flagged ships when U.S. ships could provide the service.²³⁷ The unions aided in the war effort by examining the cargo discharge situation in Vietnam. In 1965 and 1966, several members of the International Longshoremen's Association, including their president, Thomas W. Gleason, visited Saigon to evaluate the situation and recommended improvements. This study supported the expansion of the port of Saigon and the re-organization of Vietnamese stevedores.²³⁸

Transition from War to Peace

As the Vietnam War changed following the Tet offensive of 1968, the United States involvement decreased with an emphasis on transferring the war fighting to Vietnamese forces. As the troop level de-escalated, the amount of cargo and role of the merchant marine also

²³⁷ Kolbenschlag, "Naval and Maritime Chronology, 1 July 1965-30 June 1966," 242.

²³⁸ "Delays in Port of Saigon", *New York Times*, October 6, 1966, 93.

changed. A major issue, which drew the attention of labor and shipping companies, involved the use of ships from the National Defense Reserve Fleet. Most companies opposed the continued use of these ships and advocated the transition to commercially owned ships. The reduction in cargo requirements to Vietnam allowed MSTS to return the NDRF ships to their reserve anchorages and still maintain the required flow of materials to Vietnam.

Table 3-MSTS/MSC Fleet, 1969-1973

	Jun. 69	Jun. 70	Jun. 71	Jun. 72	Jun. 73
Nucleus Cargo Ships	90	87 (14)	77 (7)	75 (12)	72 (41)
Nucleus Tankers	27	26	25	20 (3)	17
Nucleus Transports	11 (9)	3 (1)	2	2	0
Chartered Cargo Ships	157	131	83	96	49
Chartered Tankers	52	31	31	29	23
NDRF Activated	144 (26)	70 (68)	0	0	0

The large number of NDRF ships used during the build-up and sustainment in Vietnam did not eliminate the fact that the largest percentage of cargo remained in the hands of commercial shippers. At its highest levels, reserve ships carried under 20 per cent of MSTS total cargo in one year. NDRF ships focused on the shipment of dedicated loads to Vietnam, particularly ammunition. As these ships returned to the reserve fleet, commercial berth liner contracts substituted for the government-owned ships. On June 15, 1970, the SS *Santa Clara Victory*, the last of the NDRF ships activated for Vietnam, returned to Norfolk, Virginia, for deactivation in the James River reserve fleet.²³⁹

Another group of ships that experienced a tremendous phase-down was the MSTS fleet of troop transports. The last scheduled troop transport departed from the U.S. on June 8, 1968. In 1969 MSTS reduced this fleet to two active troop transports and placed all the others in reserve. A unique system evolved where one ship, with a crew of fifty served as mothership to a nest of four or five other transports with contained no crews.²⁴⁰ This arrangement did not last long as MSTS returned the older P-2 and C-4 transports to MARAD. By 1970 only the three ex-APL

²³⁹ Marquez and J. B. Finkelstein, "Naval and Maritime Events, July 1970-December 1970," 333.

²⁴⁰ MSTS, *Financial and Statistical Report* FY 68, 15.

transports remained in service. The two active transports that remained in service supported the rotation of Korean troops. The ships continued to operate between Pusan, Korea, and Qui Nhon. One transport, the USNS *Upshur*, and the AB&T tug *Cayuse* participated in an aborted effort to conduct a prisoner of war exchange. In June 1971 the ships sailed from Saigon for Haiphong to initiate an exchange of prisoners. The ships never arrived as the North Vietnamese canceled the program.²⁴¹

Following the withdrawal of the last Korean troops from Vietnam in 1973, the two transports returned to the United States, and the three sisterships became training vessels for the maritime academies in Maine, Massachusetts, and New York. In a similar move, the commercial merchant marine ended its role in the passenger ship business. In 1969 United States Lines withdrew the super-liner SS *United States* from service and laid the ship up in Norfolk. In the Pacific, American President Lines withdrew its last passenger ship, the SS *President Wilson*, in 1973, ending a service begun in 1867.²⁴²

As President Richard M. Nixon implemented his Vietnamization plan and United States forces withdrew from Vietnam, the cargo requirement to sustain declining forces diminished rapidly. In comparing the troop levels versus the tonnage shipped, the curves do not mirror each other. Troop commitments to Vietnam form a near perfect curve with the peak in 1969 and then rising and falling in the years before and after at a similar rate. Before that year, cargo shipments to Vietnam remained high, representing the need to establish an infrastructure for a modern, military force.

²⁴¹ COMSCFE Command History. Letter to CNO OP-09B9, ltr FE-00A 5750-1 Ser 7960, dated November 6, 1970.

²⁴² Niven, *American President Lines*, 239.

Table 4-Cargo to Vietnam, 1969-1973

Commodity (Measurement Tons)	1969	1970	1971	1972	Jan-Mar 1973
General Cargo	6,580,500	4,887,700	3,657,700	1,625,000	214,900
Aircraft	261,300	56,900	19,600	32,500	0
Ammunition	1,926,900	1,447,100	1,012,300	1,119,500	156,100
Bulk Cargo	2,144,600	2,958,100	2,920,800	1,149,900	233,800
Trailers/ Containers	228,500	222,200	162,700	3,200	0
Refrigerated	392,600	300,900	204,500	72,400	6,300
Special (Military)	2,281,000	1,162,000	839,400	471,800	52,500
Petroleum (Long Tons)	14,182,000	11,838,000	9,887,000	9,060,000	N/A

As the war started to wind down, several major events took place that aimed at changing the merchant marine and the role it played in national defense. On October 21, 1970, President Nixon signed the Merchant Marine Act of 1970 into law. The act itself did not provide any ground-breaking legislation but merely amended the existing act of 1936. The bill came in direct response to the failure of foreign flag ships, specifically the *El Mexicano*, to transport military cargo to Vietnam. Not as ambitious as its predecessor, the 1970 proposal aimed at the construction of 300 ships over 10 years, as compared to the 500 proposed in 1936. One major difference in this act concerned the awarding of subsidies to bulk carriers.²⁴³ Despite its lofty goals, it failed to produce its intended results. The act produced under 200 ships from its inception until the shipping industry bottomed out in the United States in the mid-1980s.²⁴⁴ The late 1970s witnessed the last great wave of merchant ship building but mostly due to the windfall business provided to shippers by the Vietnam War and a result of the oil crisis in the early 1970s.

Military Sealift Command: New Name, New Look

On August 1, 1970, the Military Sea Transportation Service faded into history as the organization emerged with a new name, the Military Sealift Command (MSC). With the new

²⁴³ Pedraja, *U. S. Merchant Marine*, 395-396.

²⁴⁴ William A. Lovett, "U.S. Shipping Policies," in *United States Shipping Policies and The World Market* (Westport, 1996), 61.

name came a series of new programs that altered the way the military used the merchant marine. The MSC nucleus fleet of that time underwent a massive downsizing and a change in missions. The cargo fleet in 1965 consisted of 68 USNS ships and accounted for over 25 per cent of the total cargo moved by MSTs. By 1975 this decreased to 6.5 per cent and the cargo fleet consisted of only ten active ships.

Two reasons account for this change. The war demonstrated the need to rely on the commercial merchant marine to sustain any large military force overseas. The military's possession of a substantial cargo fleet impeded the ability to retain commercial ships under fixed contracts. The argument is two-sided. In the one case, MSTs, owning a large fleet of cargo ships, could handle the rapid build up while awaiting the chartering of commercial merchant ships. On the other hand, if the government relied on commercial shipping, then an adequate and robust merchant marine had to be maintained to supply this force. The Merchant Marine Act of 1970 hoped to foster this growth, and the awarding of government contracts added benefits to shipping lines.

The other factor behind the reduction of the MSC nucleus cargo fleet emerged from the new Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt. He wanted to tap into the merchant marine in order to relieve the navy of some of its logistical and fleet support duties. Zumwalt voiced his opinion in a letter to his staff and major commands:

As a matter of policy I desire that we support and pursue efforts that will insure the capability of [MSC] to provide adequate sealift for all of the Services, and to man certain Navy auxiliary and support type ships with civil service crews. In addition, MSC must have the capability, utilizing either the MSC nucleus fleet or chartered commercial shipping, to provide services for underway consolidation of Navy auxiliaries as well as underway replenishment of our combatant ships.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ MSC, *Financial and Statistical Report* FY 73, 13.

Initiated under the code-name, *Charter Log*, this navy, MARAD, and MSC project attempted to ascertain if commercial merchant ships could substitute for navy auxiliaries. The first such test, *Charter Log I*, took place in March 1972 when the tanker SS *Erna Elizabeth*, operated by Hudson Waterways, Inc., conducted underway refueling operations with units of the Atlantic Fleet. Other tests included the feasibility of using LASH for cargo resupply and the operation of cable and fleet tugs by merchant mariners.²⁴⁶

Besides examining if commercial ships could fulfill this role, Zumwalt authorized the transfer of a fully rigged navy oiler to MSC for operation in direct support of a navy battle group, *Charter Log II*. In May 1972, the navy decommissioned USS *Taluga* and entered service with MSC as the USNS *Taluga*. After a successful evaluation period, the ship steamed to Vietnam and provided fuel support for carriers stationed at Yankee Station.²⁴⁷ The success of the *Taluga* convinced the navy to transfer operation of a large number of their fleet oilers, cable ships, and fleet tugs to MSC. This new organization, the naval fleet auxiliary force, became a major focus of MSC and the civil service manning of cargo ships fell by the way side.²⁴⁸

To ensure that an adequate pool of ships existed to replace the diminishing nucleus fleet, MSC added to their world-wide shipping contracts the provisions for a Sealift Readiness Program (SRP). Included under the Shipping/Container Agreements, awarded on May 14, 1973, the fifteen U.S. shipping companies agreed to provide the necessary transportation for military cargoes under established rates and agreements. In addition, each carrier agreed to commit 50 per cent of its U.S.-flagged cargo ships for use by MSC in case of a military contingency. Based on the

²⁴⁶ Marvin O. Miller, "Charter Log: Testing New Unrep Concepts," in *Underway Replenishment of Naval Ships* (Port Hueneme, CA, 1992), 218-223.

²⁴⁷ Dick Takashima, "In the Beginning it was the Taluga Tigers," in *Underway Replenishment of Naval Ships* (Port Hueneme, CA, 1992), 224-231.

²⁴⁸ The last civilian mariner manned cargo ship, the USNS *Mercury* left service following the Persian Gulf War in 1993.

awards in 1973, the SRP guaranteed MSC the use of eighty break-bulk ships, fifty containerships, and two LASH.²⁴⁹

Build and Charter

After the construction of the USNS *Sea Lift*, MSTS/MSC met stiff opposition over constructing their own ships to operate in the nucleus fleet. In order to get around this, MSTS initiated build and charter programs to add ships to the fleet and put the onus on commercial industry to build them. The programs resulted in the construction of the GTS *Admiral William M. Callaghan* in 1967 and the four *Falcon*-class tankers in the early 1970s.²⁵⁰ MSTS and the military aimed at replacing the older Victory ships in its nucleus fleet with a new class of cargo ships.

Started under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1965 in conjunction with the C-5A Galaxy air transport program, the initial design and procurement work proceeded on a fleet of thirty Fast Deployment Logistics (FDL) ships.²⁵¹ The ships, basically fast ro/ros, aimed at providing MSTS with a fleet of modern and efficient merchant ships but met stiff opposition from labor unions, the commercial industry, and Congress. In August of 1966, the navy awarded contracts exceeding five million dollars apiece to three shipbuilders to develop plans for such ships.²⁵² During the height of the merchant marine effort to support the war in Vietnam, the FDL concept reached the Congress. On May 19, 1967, both houses killed the \$ 233 million request for the construction of such ships and withdrew \$ 67.6 million previously authorized for the construction of two such ships and diverted them to construct two nuclear-powered frigates.²⁵³ MSTS and the Defense Department continued to lobby for these ships and requested funding to

²⁴⁹ MSC, *Financial and Statistical Report* FY 73, 18.

²⁵⁰ All of these ships were eventually bought by MSTS.

²⁵¹ R. W. Craig, "The FDL Program: What It Is And Why the Pentagon Wants It," in *Navy Magazine* (April, 1967): 43-45.

²⁵² Gammell, "Naval and Maritime Events 1 July 1966-30 June 1967," 242. The three shipbuilders: General Dynamics, Litton and Lockheed Shipbuilding.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 267. The Department of Defense evaluated the three shipyards plans and determined Litton's to be the best offer.

construct four ships, at a cost of \$ 184 million in 1969. The House Armed Services Committee killed the proposal and squashed all further attempts by the navy and Defense Department to build these ships during the war.

Following the demise of the FDLs, MSC faced a critical situation in its requirement for tankers. The merchant marine and the NDRF provided the necessary number of dry-cargo ships, but U.S.-flagged tankers remained in limited quantities. The T-2 tankers used by MSC, all dated to World War II and although modernized in the early 1960s, were nearing the end of their service lives. To replace these tankers, MSC re-released its tanker build and charter proposal in 1972 based on a leveraged lease deal. Marine Vessel Leasing Corporation and Marine Ship Leasing Corporation received the contracts to build the nine ships and bare-boat chartered²⁵⁴ them to the government for a period up to twenty-five years.²⁵⁵ The ships, the *Sealift*-class, proved some of the most controversial ships ever operated by the command. The Government Accounting Office investigated the ships during their construction, and a final report in August 1994 marked the end of these ships in the American merchant marine.²⁵⁶

Vietnamization

As the overall cargo tonnage diminished, the movement of cargo within and out of South Vietnam increased. To support this increased inter-theater movement of cargo, in 1972 MSC activated five of the newer *LST 1156*-class for operation by American crews in Vietnam. Building on its use of tugs and barges, Pacific Far East Lines commenced LASH service with Vietnam in August 1971. The use of LASH barges throughout Vietnam further conveyed this mode of transportation to American shipping lines.

²⁵⁴ Contract where a ship owner leases just a ship, no crew or cargo, to another shipper for his own use.

²⁵⁵ Scott C. Truver, "The Military Sealift Command's Build and Charter Program for Nine Sealift-Class Tankers," in *Naval War College Review*. (Fall 1975): 32-43.

²⁵⁶ Government Accounting Office, *U.S. Navy/Military Sealift Command: Weak Contract Administration Led to Unsafe and Poorly Maintained Ships* (Washington, August 1994).

To improve the movement of ammunition, the SS *American Courier* inaugurated an improved service. Sailing from Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point, North Carolina, the largest ammunition port in the United States, the ship transported 28 military vans (military version of containers) with ammunition.²⁵⁷ The concept of a containerized ammunition distribution system, referred to as CADS, proved so successful that MSC contracted with United States Lines to modify three of their *American Challenger II*-class to carry this type of cargo in 1972.²⁵⁸ Amazingly this concept did not meet with acceptance with the United States military. During the Persian Gulf War, of the 103 ships loaded with ammunition, only one utilized containerized cargo.²⁵⁹

By January 1972, the merchant marine accelerated the removal of equipment and supplies from Vietnam. This involved the closing of bases throughout the country and redeployment of combat units to their parent stations. Besides the movement of military equipment, the merchant marine moved some highly dangerous and controversial material. On March 3, 1973, the SS *Transpacific* sailed from Vietnam for desolate Johnston Island in the central Pacific Ocean. Upon arrival, the ship unloaded 8,700 measurement tons of herbicide orange for destruction in the island's chemical incinerator.²⁶⁰ The North Vietnamese Easter offensive forced a shift in the flow of supplies as merchant ships hurried over ammunition and fuel to support the Vietnamese and remaining U.S. forces. This action forced a rapid demand for over 1.3 million long tons of petroleum, mainly to support aircraft. To meet this demand, MSTs spot-chartered thirty-nine tankers for single voyages and five others on short-time charters, most of them foreign-flagged.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ MSC, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1971.

²⁵⁸ MSC, *Financial and Statistical Report* 1972, 12.

²⁵⁹ James K. Matthews and Cora J. Holt. *So Many, So Much, So Far, So Fast: United States Transportation Command and Strategic Deployment for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm* (Washington, 1996), 185.

²⁶⁰ MSC, *Vietnam Chronicle* 1972.

²⁶¹ MSC, *Financial and Statistical Report* 1972, 11.

Once the North Vietnamese offensive ended, operations resumed to continue the withdrawal of U.S. and Free World Forces. In order to improve the capabilities of the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) to fight, the United States initiated Project *Enhance*. This entailed the shipment of modern equipment and supplies to update the ARVN. This operation ended in November 1972 but accounted for a large portion of the cargo shipped to Vietnam in that year.

Also in 1972, in a measure taken to lower costs of operations, AB&T removed all the American crews on their tugs in Vietnam. In order to lower operating costs, AB&T reflagged all their tugs to Panama and hired foreign crews. This shift saved an estimated \$ 323 million a year in the scope of the contract but represented a defeat for the American merchant marine. At the same time, AB&T operations declined as terminal and liberty boat operation phased over to Vietnamese control.²⁶²

The final agreement reached by the United States and North Vietnam in the Paris Peace Accords required the removal of the remaining U.S. military forces within sixty days. Operation *Roll-Up* utilized twenty ships to accomplish the final withdrawal. From January 28 to March 28, 1973, merchant ships lifted 144,876 measurement tons of U.S. military cargo and 82,833 tons of Korean cargo. The MSC office in Saigon transferred to civilian control as the last navy commander returned to Japan as part of the Treaty of Paris. Alaska Barge and Transport turned over almost all of its assets to the Vietnamese and closed out its operation of the terminals.²⁶³

As the United States withdrew from Vietnam, the merchant marine underwent a transformation. As the requirements by MACV diminished, the ships from the NDRF returned to their anchorages while commercial ships maintained the burdened at the expense of transporting domestic goods. Once the war ended, these ships lost their commercial business that the war temporarily provided. The Merchant Marine Act of 1970 and the reorganization of Military Sea

²⁶² COMSCFE Command History. Letter to CNO OP-09B9, ltr FE-1 Ser 4890, dated October 19, 1972.

²⁶³ COMSCFE Command History. Letter to CNO OP-09B9, Ser FE-1/3513, dated November 13, 1973.

Transport Service into Military Sealift Command attempted to change the face of the commercial fleet. The MMA 1970 goal of replacing the aging Maritime Commission ships met with only partial success as the fuel crisis and faltering economy of the early 1970s prevented its full implementation. The new MSC expanded its mission from that of directing the military's sealift requirements to sustaining the navy and relying on the commercial fleet for its cargo requirements.

The active role of the merchant marine supporting U.S. forces in Vietnam ended. Once again, the sailors of the merchant marine supported the country in a military operation. Although they did not suffer the devastation they had in the two World Wars, the deaths of their shipmates still proved the danger of sailing. Many civilians working for the military died in Vietnam. Enemy actions did not discriminate between military and civilians and the merchant marine shared this burden. Yet the hazards of sailing ships loaded with 200,000 barrels of jet fuel into harbors prone to mortar or rocket attack or sailing up the Long Tau to the ammunition anchorage at Nha Be or Cat Lai with 10,000 tons of explosives required a certain courage and determination. The war for many ended in March 1973, but one more chapter awaited the men of the merchant marine in Vietnam.

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Chapter Seven: Boat People

At 1900 [hours] received orders from Saigon to load up to 10,000 refugees. At that time at least 80 boats moored or milling alongside with hundreds streaming towards us. Refugees almost in panic stage trying to get on board. Loading refugees by cargo booms, ladders and nets. The sight was unbelievable.

Master,
USNS *Greenville Victory*
off Vung Tau

The Fall of Da Nang

Early in March 1975, the North Vietnamese launched an all out offensive against the South Vietnamese. The initial targets of this offensive included the northern provinces and areas around Saigon. The communist attacks shattered the South Vietnamese military in these regions and, by the end of the month, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered the northern provinces abandoned. These withdrawals caused a massive exodus of refugees into the port of Da Nang. This initial concession to the North Vietnamese led to a domino effect of provinces, cities, and ports falling into communist hands. The terms of the Paris Peace Treaty prohibited the use of American naval ships in Vietnamese waters, and the mission to conduct the evacuations fell on MSC. The evacuation of Da Nang set the stage for the final withdrawal of U.S. merchant ships from Vietnam.

For the third time in its short life, MST/MS performed a major evacuation operation. Once again it accomplished this with the ships on hand or could readily obtain. At Hungnam in Korea in 1950, MST withdrew the encircled X Corps and attached Korean units from the clutches of the Chinese Army. In 1954 Operation *Passage to Freedom*, MST utilized nine government-owned ships and seven chartered ships.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ MSC, Annual Command Report 1975, 2. In 1974 MSC renamed its report 7700-2 from Financial and Statistical Review to this name.

On March 24, 1975, the United States defense attaché's office in Saigon requested the Military Sealift Command representative to divert craft to the port of Da Nang to aid in an evacuation. MSC diverted five tugs-the *Saigon 240*, *Pawnee*, *Shibaura Maru*, *Asiatic Stamina*, and *Chitose Maru*-with six barges from Vung Tau to Da Nang. The tug and barges shuttled out refugees from shore to awaiting ships but this proved unnecessary. The manager of Seapac tugs in Da Nang, Roland Schamberger reported:

Tugs and barges encountering difficult conditions in DaNang harbor as thousands attempting to board barges and ships from sampans and other craft. Embassy reports DaNang crowd control impossible.²⁶⁵

The next day, the MSC Far East area command diverted the *SS Pioneer Contender* from Saigon. Ten further ships were alerted-USNS *Sgt. Andrew Miller*, *Sgt. Truman Kimbro*, *Greenville Victory*, *SS Pioneer Commander*, *Green Port*, *American Racer*, *Green Wave*, *Green Forest*, *Pioneer Contender*, and *Transcolorado*.²⁶⁶ As the situation deteriorated in Da Nang, MSC ships provided the only means of communication to the outside world. On March 26, the Secretary of State conveyed a request for assistance to the Secretary of Defense from the South Vietnamese government in evacuating refugees from the northern provinces. The next day, the *Pioneer Contender* commenced loading MSC and AB&T personnel from the port, and the local defense attaché set up his headquarters on the ship. To prevent confusion and mass panic, MSC ships remained outside the harbor.²⁶⁷

On the 28th, the USNS *Sgt. Andrew Miller* entered port to supplement the *Pioneer Contender*, which by that time already contained over 5,000 people. When word of this situation arrived in Yokohama, MSC Far East ordered the *SS Green Port*, *SS American Challenger*, and USNS *Greenville Victory* to assist in the operation. As the ships swelled to capacity, they set sail.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶⁶ COMSCFE Command History 1975. Letter to CNO OP-09139, Ser FE-1/1102, dated August 11, 1975, 1.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

The *Pioneer Contender* headed for Cam Ranh, and the *Miller* followed on March 29 with 7,500 refugees on board. The tug *Chitose Maru* sailed for Nha Trang with 600 refugees and another 2,000 in a barge under tow.

On March 30 the *Pioneer Commander* arrived and loaded 8,000 people. Later that day, the *Pioneer Contender* returned from Cam Ranh. The situation ashore and on the water proved chaotic. Absolutely no control existed to regulate the flow of people out to the ships at anchorage. As the ships reached their full capacities, they literally hoisted up the nets, raised the anchors, and ran out of port amid a swarm of small boats. The reports of sapper attacks and rumors of North Vietnamese tanks closing on the town forced the evacuation effort to be halted. *Pioneer Contender*, with 6,000 refugees on board, and three tugs left that evening. One of the tugs, the *Shibaura Maru*, towed three barges containing mutinous ARVN soldiers. The tugs transferred their 3,500 refugees to the SS *Transcolorado* as the SS *American Challenger* arrived off the port to pick up any lucky stragglers but none appeared. This ended the evacuation of Da Nang. MSC estimated that it transported over 34,600 refugees to areas in the south. Many of these refugees later reboarded the ships as the North Vietnamese continued their advance down the coast.

The Fall of the Central Highlands

Reports of attacks near Qui Nhon caused the diversion of ships to that port. The *Pioneer Commander*, *Greenville Victory*, *Shibaura Maru*, *Saigon 240*, *Asiatic Stamina*, and the Korean LST, *Boo Heung Pioneer* all raced to aid in the evacuation. When the ships arrived off the harbor, South Vietnamese naval ships were shelling the port and none of the tugs or ships could enter Qui Nhon had fallen.²⁶⁸

At Tuy Hoa, the USNS *Sgt. Andrew Miller* arrived early on April 1 and started loading refugees. Under a sporadic artillery attack, the ship loaded 300 refugees and then raced for Cam Ranh. Yet the haven at Cam Ranh proved elusive as the North Vietnamese continued their assault

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

along Highway One toward this port. Their advance caused the diversion of the *Boo Heung Pioneer* and tugs *Pawnee*, *Saigon 240*, *Shibaura Maru*, and *Asiatic Stamina* to Nha Trang. The *Pioneer Commander* loaded 8,000 refugees and sailed on the 2d for the island of Phu Quoc, established as a temporary refugee camp.²⁶⁹

As enemy forces closed on Cam Ranh, the native population, plus those recently added refugees, faced capture. On April 1, the *Transcolorado* arrived and sailed with over 7,000 refugees. The call for other ships went out, and the *American Challenger*, *Greenville Victory*, *Green Port*, *Pioneer Contender*, and *Miller* responded. After the ships completed loading and the tugs and barges arrived, they departed for Phu Quoc. When the *Pioneer Contender* sailed on the afternoon of April 3, it carried over 16,000 refugees, a record not to be broken.²⁷⁰

As the ships sailed, the selection of the safe haven at Phu Quoc caused concern among some of the embarked refugees and the merchant crews. The island lacked adequate facilities to offload the refugees, let alone the capabilities to support this massive growth in the population. The movement of these refugees further south, to Vung Tau or Saigon could also worsen the deteriorating situation in these areas. On board the *Greenville Victory*, a "delegation" of the refugees announced that they wished to proceed to Vung Tau or else there would be, "mass bloodshed." Captain Iacobacci acceded to their demands seeing that the refugees outnumbered his crew, 140 to 1. He retained control of the ship and quickly disembarked his passengers.²⁷¹

At Phu Quoc, the disembarkation proceeded slowly. The poor condition of many of the refugees required a greater deal of care in offloading. The Vietnamese Navy detachment on the island feared a VC attack and proceeded to interrogate the people coming off, which slowed the process to a crawl (a rate of 300 to 600 a day). The ships themselves proved ill-equipped to handle these masses of people. Break-bulk ships composed the majority of the ships in this

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

operation. To handle these refugees, they loaded the majority of them into cargo holds with little ventilation, no bathroom facilities, or inadequate lighting. The 30 to 50 man crews could not provide the needed security to oversee their passengers or prevent an occurrence like that on the *Greenville Victory*. The ships' capabilities to produce the required amounts of drinking water or galley facilities could not sustain these numbers. To alleviate the situation, MSC diverted two tugs, with barges, loaded with needed food and water, to the ships.²⁷²

On April 2, the *Transcolorado* suffered a similar experience as that of the *Greenville Victory* when 200 Vietnamese marines threatened to seize the ship. To avoid bloodshed, the ship discharged its passengers at Vung Tau. Following this debacle, the ship rendezvoused with the USS *Durham*, loaded a United States Marine Corps detachment, and proceeded to Phan Rang.

The port of Phan Rang had the potential of being a huge disaster but events altered the situation. Once again, the ships and tugs raced to the port. In addition to the normal complement, two Nationalist Chinese LSTs, several Korean LSTs, and a few British warships arrived to lend assistance. The tugs and LSTs shuttled out refugees to the waiting ships. The Korean LST *Boo Heung Pioneer* carried out a record load of 8,000 in one trip. As the communist offensive reached the end of its tether and the negative image of Phu Quoc caused the 20,000 refugees at Phan Rang to disperse.²⁷³

The North Vietnamese reprieve allowed the ships a few days to reorganize themselves and prepare for a further wave of evacuees. By that time, the merchant marine had moved over 130,000 people from the northern provinces and, in all probability, this number would magnify if Saigon fell. To aid in the potential further evacuation, MSC Far East representative, Mr. Charles Hoffman, arrived on board the USS *Blue Ridge* as liaison with the navy staff. By April 20, all ships completed a cleaning and reprovisioning and stood by for phase two.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Operation Frequent Wind

As the situation in South Vietnam deteriorated into chaos, the navy and MSC prepared for the possible evacuation. Off the coast, the navy moved in the aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Coral Sea* for air support. Off Vung Tau, the navy assembled Task Force 76, composed of amphibious ships to receive refugees. This force consisted of the command ship *Blue Ridge*, the helicopter carrier *Okinawa*, and the landing ships *Vancouver*, *Thomaston*, *Peoria*, *Dubuque*, *Durham*, *Frederick Anchorage*, *Denver*, *Duluth*, and *Mobile*. Offshore, the navy moved in the carriers *Hancock* and *Midway* to handle a helicopter evacuation, along with the cruiser *Oklahoma City*, and landing ships *Mount Vernon*, *Barbour County*, and *Tuscaloosa*.²⁷⁴

As MSC awaited the evacuation, it continued to remove U.S. military cargo from Saigon. Some of the ships that proved unfit for refugee duty, such as the heavy-lift ship *Transcolorado*, proceeded into port to load this equipment. Initially dispatched to remove the fuel from the Nha Be storage facility, the USNS *Rincon*, a MSC T-1 tanker, arrived and provided fuel support to the merchant ships anchored at Vung Tau and to Vietnamese commercial craft attempting to escape.²⁷⁵ Based on the plan devised by Commander Task Force 76, MSC maintained eight to ten ships in the area for possible evacuation. The MSC office in Vietnam shipped out its records and destroyed the ones no longer needed. To improve security, the office in Saigon closed and moved into temporary facilities at Newport.²⁷⁶ The security in the port degenerated to the point that MSC ordered all merchant ships in port to sail to the holding area on April 23. As ships arrived off Vung Tau, they embarked Marine detachments for security. The loaded ships proceeded on to the ports of Guam and Subic Bay, but even they carried refugees on board.

²⁷⁴ Marolda, *By Sea, Air and Land*, 363-365.

²⁷⁵ COMSCFE Command History 1975, 10.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

As the North Vietnamese closed in on Saigon, Task Force 76 ordered all ships placed on 6 hour alert. The deck log of the *SS Pioneer Commander* on April 25 noted the arrival of merchant ships at the anchorage off Vung Tau.

0000 Vessel at anchor . . . with 54 U.S. Marines on board . .
.SS Pioneer Contender, SS Green Port, SS Green Forest
 also standing by. . . .
 0015 *SS American Racer* joined fleet at anchor.
 1650 *SS American Challenger* arrived in holding area.
 2145 *USNS Sgt. Truman Kimbro* secure at anchor in holding
 area.
 2200 *USNS Greenville Victory* secure at anchor in holding
 area
 2245 Vessel believed to be *USNS Andrew Miller* at anchor in
 holding area.²⁷⁷

Based on the deteriorating situation, the navy commander ordered the MSC office in Vietnam closed on April 26 and relocated on board the *Blue Ridge*. Once on board, the afloat office assumed operational command of all the merchant ships in the anchorage. On the morning of the 28th, *Frequent Wind* forces went on a one-hour alert. At the same time, President Thieu resigned and Duong Van Minh succeeded him in office. As the anticipated number of refugees grew, the ships at anchor loaded supplies and bottled water to prevent some of the difficulties encountered during the earlier operations.²⁷⁸ On April 29th, after a series of false starts, Commander Task Force 76 initiated Option IV of Operation *Frequent Wind*. A little after noon, the carrier *Hancock* launched a wave of marine helicopters to land elements of 4th Marines at the U.S. embassy.²⁷⁹

By 5:00 PM, the tugs *Harumi, Chitose Maru, Saigon 240, Shibaura, and Asiatic Stamita*, with barges of refugees, plus the indomitable Korean LST *Boo Heung Pioneer*, left the docks of Saigon. In addition to embarking refugees, the last MSC personnel rode the craft through the treacherous Rung Sat toward Vung Tau. Not surprisingly they ran a gauntlet of shore fire and

²⁷⁷ MSC, *Annual Command Report 1975*, 3-4.

²⁷⁸ COMSCFE Command History 1975, 12-13.

²⁷⁹ Marolda, *By Sea, Air and Land*, 367.

navigational hazards. At one point, a barge load of refugees broke loose and had to be retrieved. This convoy eventually arrived in international waters off Vung Tau at 2:00 AM on March 30th, but by this time the evacuation fleet already had its hands full.²⁸⁰

The situation at the anchorage off Vung Tau is recounted by the log of the *Pioneer* Commander:

Tuesday, April 29, 1975:

- 1900 First evacuees boarded, from small craft alongside causeway. . . .
- 2038 . . . Many private boats alongside. Total aboard at this time 411.
- 2110 Five or more boats cut loose and abandoned. Drifting in area of vessel's rudder and propeller. . . .
- 2130 Eleven private boats astern . . . Both manned and derelict boats continue to cross and hover in stern area of this vessel. . . .²⁸¹
- 2145 This vessel advised (task force) CTG 76.5 that due to the massive number of private craft, we are unable to maintain any kind of control in separating evacuees with priority.
- 2200 In excess of twenty boats and more coming. . . .
- 2300 About 2,500 evacuees aboard. . . .

Wednesday, April 30, 1975:

- 0000 Sighted burning derelict in vicinity of vessel and boats. . . .
- 0100 Wire cable parted on stem-end of causeway due to heavy strain of 25 to 39 junks secured to same. . . .
- 0645 Embarkation complete with approximately 6,000 refugees aboard.
- 0752 Causeway away.
- 0800 Preparing to get underway²⁸²

The image portrayed by the *Pioneer* Commander reflected the hysteria of the moment. On the evening of the 30th, the USNS *Sgt. Andrew Miller* loaded refugees from two barges alongside. As this continued, a helicopter full of additional refugees crash landed onto the outboard barge. Amazingly no injuries occurred, and the helicopter occupants boarded the ship as the crew of the *Miller* cut the barge and helicopter loose. Not all procedures went well; the

²⁸⁰ COMSCFE Command History 1975, 13.

²⁸¹ The stern is typically the lowest section of the ship to the water and easiest to board a vessel.

²⁸² MSC, *Annual Command Report* 1975, 4, 25.

foreign flagged merchant ship *Audaz* refused to load refugees without a Marine detachment and sailed from Vung Tau empty.²⁸³

As the refugees continued to arrive, the USNS *Greenville Victory* received the brunt of them. By the morning, the ship contained over 8,500 refugees with more arriving. Other ships loaded the excess refugees, but the decision of where to land them remained an issue. The original selection of Guam proved too far to steam for the overcrowded ships, and Subic Bay substituted as an alternative. The fastest ships, those over 20 knots, such as the *Pioneer Commander*, *American Challenger* and *Pioneer Contender*, sailed for Guam each carrying over 5,000 refugees. As the ships departed, small craft continued to follow the fleet. Some ships picked up people as far out as 90 miles from Vietnam.

As the merchant ships sailed for Subic, a fleet of twenty-six Vietnamese Navy ships joined with another 30,000 refugees on board under the supervision of a former U.S. defense attaché employee. The tugs and barges that provided such valuable assistance in this effort sailed for Thailand for redelivery to Seapac Tugs. As the ships arrived in Subic, some of the refugees went ashore while others continued on to Guam.²⁸⁴ The last ship to discharge its passengers, the USNS *Greenville Victory*, had one more tale to play out off the coast of South East Asia.

Marines, and Merchant Mariners, Over The Side!

As the evacuation of Vietnam unraveled, the Sea-Land containership SS *Mayaguez* sailed on its scheduled run from Hong Kong to Singapore, via Sattahip, Thailand. On May 12, 1975, as Captain Charles Miller navigated his ship well south of Cambodian waters, gunboats, manned by elements of the Khmer Rouge, closed on his ship. At 2:18 PM, the *Mayaguez* radioed: "Have been fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces at 9 degrees, 48 minutes north/102 degrees 53 minutes east. Ship is being towed to unknown Cambodian port."²⁸⁵ The ship

²⁸³ COMSCFE Command History 1975, 16.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²⁸⁵ Daniel P. Bolger, *Americans at War: 1975-1986 An Era of Violent Peace* (Novato, CA, 1988), 22.

proceeded toward the port of Sihanoukville, the same location that the *Columbia Eagle* sailed to in 1970.

In the midst of the evacuation effort from Saigon, the United States mounted an effort to recapture the ship. Navy patrol aircraft located the ship anchored off the island of Koh Tang. A scratch Marine force embarked on the carriers *Hancock* and *Okinawa* along with Air Force helicopters launched an air assault on the island. After securing the island, the destroyer escort *Harold E. Holt* laid alongside the *Mayaguez* to secure the ship. The military planners hoped to find the crew either on the ship or on the nearby island.

To aid in the seizure of the ship and to get the ship underway if the crew could not be located, six crewmen from the USNS *Greenville Victory* volunteered to join the rescue force. Led by First Officer Clinton J. Harriman, they departed the ship during the midst of the cleanup process in Subic Bay and arrived on board the *Holt* via an air force helicopter.²⁸⁶ Following the marines, seizure of Koh Tang, Commander Robert A. Peterson maneuvered his destroyer alongside the Sea-Land container ship. At 7:15 in the morning of May 15, he gave the order, "Marines over the side!" Once the marines searched the deserted ship, Harriman led his detachment, plus six sailors from the *Duluth*, on board and proceeded to get the ship ready for sea.²⁸⁷ The destroyer *Henry B. Wilson* picked up a Thai fishing boat off Koh Tang with Captain Miller and his crew onboard.

The operation did not proceed without its cost. Although no merchant mariners lost their lives, U.S. military casualties numbered 91, many from the assault on Koh Tang. In a strange way, the six men from the *Greenville Victory* received the accolades that many thought the entire merchant marine deserved for its role in Vietnam. The six crewmen²⁸⁸ received the praise of the

²⁸⁶ The author can not help but wonder if the decision to volunteer for this mission was no worse than cleaning a ship after being occupied by 8,500 refugees for over two weeks.

²⁸⁷ Bolger, *Americans at War*, 60-62.

²⁸⁸ First Officer Harriman, 3rd officer Karl P. Lonsdale, 2nd assistant engineer Michael A. Saltwick, Yeoman-Storekeeper Robert A. Griffin, Oiler Epifanio Rodriguez and Fireman-Watertender Hermino Rivera.

Chief of Naval Operations and Meritorious Service Awards presented by President Gerald Ford.²⁸⁹

The hectic departure of American merchant ships, loaded with refugees proved symbolic of its involvement in Vietnam. The merchant marine provided the only means to evacuate refugees from the northern regions of the nation, according to the Treaty of Paris. As the situation of the South Vietnamese degenerated, American merchant ships, overloaded and overworked, provided the saving grace of thousands of displaced civilians. The success of the merchant marine in these operations demonstrates the resolute determination of this group of individuals. Although the war ended in the collapse of the South Vietnam government, the merchant marine, much like the United States military, never suffered a defeat or failed to perform a mission during the course of the war.

²⁸⁹ MSC, *Annual Command Report 1975*, 26.

Chapter Eight: The Results

I sincerely wish that you knew about the sailor's life . . . their view [shipping companies and unions] is not . . . of a man who spends twenty-four hours a day of his life in a position that renders him helpless as far as any social activities ashore are concerned. Many of my friends have committed suicide . . . We have nothing on our hands but time and we are on a floating penal institution . . . A man with a problem as sea can become sick, insane, murderous, or just plain crack completely.

Letter by an unidentified sailor
Shipping Out

The Vietnam Effect

The role and life of the merchant mariner in Vietnam differed from that of the soldier, sailor, airmen, marine, or coast guardsman. He traveled from ports in the United States to Vietnam, and his stay in country lasted only long enough to get pierside and offload his ship. He rarely went ashore, except in Saigon. Yet this transitory nature of existence contained its element of risk, as the crews of the *Baton Rouge Victory*, *Badger State* and other ships discovered.

Besides affecting the lives of the sailors, the war itself marked a decisive moment for the American merchant marine. The years focused in this study, 1964 to 1975 marked a change in the commercial merchant marine and how the United States military perceived it. The conclusion of the war witnessed a smaller commercial fleet, even though many new ships joined the fleet, it still remained a predominately older fleet. The break-bulk freighters and tankers that entered service in the 1950s and 1960s were made obsolete by the introduction of new technologies, the containership and the super-tanker. Four major events took place that resulted in the decline of the merchant marine.

The first dealt with the failure of the commercial shippers to replace their aging fleets. The military's requirement for ships, and their active solicitation, precluded the selling off of older ships and the investment in the construction of ships. Many World War II-era ships remained in

operation, and their age and designs required companies to expend more funds to keep them operational than modern ships.

Second, the Merchant Marine Act of 1970, attempted to stimulate shipbuilding and resurrect the commercial concepts of the act of 1936. Similarly, the timing of the act of 1970 coincided with escalating fuel costs and inflation that precluded many companies from investing in new ships. As opposed to the act of 1936, the government did not attempt to stimulate the industry by constructing its own ships and charter them out to companies.

Third, the merchant marine's support to Vietnam proved crucial to the military's mission. The threat of enemy attacks forced foreign-flag ships to avoid service in this area but did not affect the role of the U.S.-flag vessels. Except for the incident involving the *Columbia Eagle*, no crew refused to sail to Vietnam and the merchant marine, once again, displayed its patriotic duty to support U.S. servicemen in the field.

The last conclusion concerns the support given to the United States government from the entire shipping industry. Not only the sailors on the ships, but the companies, the unions and the dockworkers all supported the effort of the United States in Vietnam. Throughout the course of the war, only one strike ever impacted the shipment of supplies to the war zone. This industries support, more than any other single group, was vital to the interests of the U.S. government and loss of this could have effectively strangled the flow of supplies to Vietnam, more effectively than the Viet Cong ever hoped to accomplish.

The Merchant Marine in Vietnam: Summary

The deployment of forces by the United States to Vietnam required a large commitment of support by the merchant marine. During the initial phases of the deployment, the Military Sea Transport Service relied on its nucleus fleet of cargo ships, transports, and aircraft ferries to move the necessary equipment. As the demand grew for more ships, it expanded their service by bringing in the liner companies to route ships through Vietnam as part of their normal trade

pattern and chartering ships, principally from Lykes and Seatrain in the beginning, to support the nucleus fleet. When the commercial market could not provide the ships, MSTs activated laid-up ships from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, commercial operators and crews manned the government-owned ships.

As the initial rush of ships moved the equipment and supplies for nearly half a million American military men to Vietnam, the chain of ships needed to be established across the oceans.²⁹⁰ As the ports in Vietnam developed, the long wait in Saigon diminished, and Da Nang, Cam Ranh, and Qui Nhon accepted big ships a routine liner service emerged that did not require the dedicated use of ships. The introduction of containerships by Sea-Land foreshadowed the container revolution and allowed the company to survive this turbulent time in its history.

The build-up of supplies and the flow of ships did not go unnoticed by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. As early as 1964, U. S. merchant ships in Saigon harbor became the focus of Communist sapper attacks but as the war expanded so did the effort waged against the merchant ships. The Long Tau River emerged as one of the primary battlegrounds for the merchant marine. From 1968 to mid-1969, the incessant gunfire, rocket, and mine attacks on ships reached a crescendo that required a concentrated military effort to maintain the flow of supplies. The guerrillas then shifted the focus of their attacks back toward the ships in port with a major attempt to interdict supplies in the northern provinces. Although merchant mariners in no way suffered the hardships and hazards of the soldiers in the field they did suffer losses. Five American ships, USNS *Card*, SS *Baton Rouge Victory*, the dredge *Jamaica Bay*, SS *American Hawk*, and SS *Green Bay*, were sunk as a result of direct enemy action. The number of ships damaged or attacked remains one of speculation, as the documentation remains sketchy and received fairly little attention in the naval records. The insurgents attacked over one hundred ships

²⁹⁰ There is no clear defining line between these phases, but the author attempted to break the war up into a logical sequence of events.

on the Long Tau before the mid-1969 offensives. Subsequently, the guerrillas did not seriously impede the withdrawal of forces but did conduct more attacks. Others ships were hit while at dock in the northern ports. Of the thousands of American merchant mariners who served in Vietnam, at least thirty-nine died.

Table 5 - Merchant Mariners killed in Vietnam

Ship	Number of merchant mariners killed
SS <i>Baton Rouge Victory</i>	7
Dredge <i>Jamaica Bay</i>	2
Tug <i>Michael</i>	2
SS <i>Transglobe</i>	1
SS <i>Empire State</i>	1 (Boiler explosion enroute Vietnam)
SS <i>Badger State</i>	26
TOTAL	39 killed ²⁹¹

The final tale of Vietnam, and perhaps the brightest moment in the war, involved its efforts to evacuate thousands of Vietnamese. No stranger to this mission, the ships of the MSC fleet and the commercial shipping companies performed a tremendous service under extremely arduous conditions. The crews of many of the ships did not just transport one load of refugees but went back for more and worked countless hours to help as many as possible. The image of the *Pioneer Contender*, a ship designed for eight passengers, jammed to the gunwales with 16,000 refugees staggers the imagination. As the captain of the *Greenville Victory* stated, "It's a sight that will be impressed in everyone's memory for a long time. We did our best and yet it seemed so inadequate."²⁹²

In a final ironic moments, merchant mariners returned to a place to perform a heroic mission, to save fellow comrades, where the most infamous event of the war took place. Off the coast of Cambodia, two events, the hijacking of the *Columbia Eagle* in 1970 and the rescue of the

²⁹¹ This number is based on research from accounts in the MSTs/MSV Vietnam Chronicle and newspaper and magazine accounts of ship attacks.

²⁹² COMSCFE Command History 1975, 15.

Mayaguez in 1975, deserve their places in this history. Both events, one distasteful and the other legendary, showed the merchant marine at its highest and lowest points.

The Merchant Marine of 1975

The war forever changed this nation. It also marked a dramatic change in the merchant marine. After the end of the Second World War, the size of the merchant marine declined. The largest decrease came at the end of the Vietnam War. The table below demonstrates the dramatic drop in the size of the fleet over the course of the war. From a total of 965 ships, the commercial fleet declined nearly 50 per cent by 1975. Most of the commercial fleets scrapped their Maritime Commission ships, but many of these ships still comprised a large segment of the fleet. Although the construction of ships continued, their number never kept up with the demand for ships. Most of the construction remained centered on the subsidized liner service and the tanker market. Unsubsidized cargo ship operators, the tramps, could not afford to replace their aging fleets and eventually disappeared from the American merchant marine.

Table 6-Size of American Merchant Marine

	1965	1975
Cargo Ships	538	278
Bulk Carriers	73	15
Refrigerator Ships	18	0
Coastal Ships	11	0
Passenger Ships	34	6
Tankers	291	278
TOTAL	965	517

The MSTS fleet of 1965 and the one owned by MSC in 1975 provide an example of how radically the industry changed. The composition of the fleet in 1965 consisted mainly of ships built late in the Second World War, the only exceptions being the new ro/ros and larger T-5 tankers. The 149 nucleus and 50 chartered ships handled a cargo load of 13.2 million measurement tons of cargo and 17.7 million long tons of petroleum. In 1975 the smaller fleet included new ships authorized under the build and charter programs, but the emphasis on cargo movement shifted to chartered ships. The fleet, consisted of 86 nucleus and 45 chartered ships,

moved only 9.2 million measurement tons of cargo and 11.4 million long tons of fuel. The commercial merchant marine witnessed the same level of decline. The effect of this is represented in the drop in the percentages of the amount of trade, in monetary value and tonnage, transported by U. S.-flagged merchant ships. The Vietnam War's effects on the merchant marine aided, in what business historian Rene de la Pedraja termed, "The Shakeout."²⁹³

Table 7-Percentage of Trade carried by U.S. Merchant Marine²⁹⁴

Year	Percentage of Trade in Dollars	Percentage of Trade in Tonnage
1955	33.8	23.6
1960	26.4	11.1
1965	21.4	7.5
1970	20.7	5.6
1975	17.5	5.4
1980	14.4	3.8
1985	14.9	4.4
1990	15.5	4.0
1995	13.6	3.9

As the national and government fleets decreased in size, the required labor base shrank. Before the war, the commercial merchant marine employed approximately 48,273 sailors. After the war and with the massive downsizing and introduction of newer and automated ships, this number dropped to 20,089. For MSC and their employment of civil service mariners, their employment numbers paralleled the commercial field, declining from 9,809 to 4,002.²⁹⁵

This reduction in ship numbers and levels of trade correspond with the rise of foreign national merchant marines and the "flags of convenience" nations. During the Vietnam War, the Japanese, Norwegian, German, French, and Greek national fleets increased in size. This proved temporary, as in the 1980s the shift in merchant marines went to the convenience nations of Liberia, Panama, Singapore, Bahamas, Hong Kong, Cyprus, the Marshall Islands, and Panama.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Pedraja, *Rise and Decline of the Merchant Marine*, 265.

²⁹⁴ Albert J. Herberger, "Getting the Word Out," in *Sea Power* (Dec. 1996): 12.

²⁹⁵ MSTs, *Financial and Statistical Report* 65, 33 and *MSC Annual Command Report* 75, 24.

²⁹⁶ Lovett, *U. S. Shipping Policies*, 54.

These nations, with minimal government regulations and manning standards, allowed shippers to minimize costs while maximizing profits.

New Technologies

The new ships built for the merchant marine during the Vietnam War represented some of the most technological advanced ships. The United States pioneered the introduction of the containership onto the world's ocean. The roll-on/roll-off ships and LASH presented alternative cargo handling methods for shippers to choose. The American aircraft industry excelled at creating a new wave in jet passenger liners that marked the end of the world's passenger ship fleets needed for transportation.

The traditional freighter, with its mass of booms (referred to as sticks) and wires, made its final appearance in the commercial merchant marine during the Vietnam War. Although a few ships continue to exist, the stick ship gave way to the introduction of three specific types of new cargo ships, the containership, the roll-on/roll-off ship and the Lighter Aboard Ship. With the Maritime Commission-built ships of many companies reaching block obsolescence, American shipping firms faced a key decision. Should they build new ships or scrap their existing ships and shut down. A few of the smaller companies did just that but many of the larger liner services opted to build. The question then arose regarding what type of ship to build. The use of all three types in Vietnam proved the value of each system but the commercial applications of some did not prove apparent.

The LASH ship caught the eye of a few major shippers, such as Pacific Far East, Prudential, Delta, Lykes, Waterman and Central Gulf Lines, yet the system contained several flaws. The first involved the necessity for a large fleet of these barges. These ships transported from 60 to 80 of these 500-ton barges. To make the system effective, each ship required three sets of barges-one to be carried on board, one set being loaded, and the other being unloaded. This required a great deal of added expense to operate a ship. The system also required an

adequate waterway system to move the barges and dockspace to work them. The limited port system on the west coast of the United States made this system difficult to work and caused excessive delays. The final factor, and probably the most critical, is that unlike the container, the LASH barge typically needed to be unloaded for further distribution. What really emerged from LASH ships was a system of modular break-bulk design and not a truly containerized service. The problems with LASH added to a deepening problem for American shippers in the late 1970s and 1980s as soaring fuel prices and escalating crew costs forced companies to slash expenses and in the end declare bankruptcy. Pacific Far East, Prudential, and Delta Lines all succumbed during this time. Lykes sold its ships to the navy, and only Central Gulf and Waterman made the system operate.

The other system that developed, the roll-on/roll-off ship; while a tremendous military asset, was commercially unsuccessful. Except where protected by cabotage laws, such as trade from the continental United States to Hawaii or Puerto Rico, these ships met failure. The primary cause dealt with the inability to transport enough cargo. The carriage of trailers incorporated a great deal of dead space for the wheels and lashing. The stacking of containers on top of each other in cell guides accelerated and improved their movement, dramatically decreasing their time in port.

Although the containership emerged as the primary cargo mover it met with a series of difficulties. The success of Sea-Land's service to Vietnam and the use of shore-side gantry cranes demonstrated the way to maximize cargo space on board ships and improve cargo movement. Throughout the world, the major ports installed large and fast pierside gantry cranes. The containerships grew in size and speed. In the late 1960s, Malcolm McLean introduced his newest containerships, the 33-knot, 1,000 container *SL-7-class*.²⁹⁷ These ships dominated trade in the Atlantic until the fuel crisis made the ships uneconomical to run. The trend then turned to super-

²⁹⁷ Robert Gardiner, *The Shipping Revolution: The Modern Merchant Ship* (Annapolis, 1992), 46-47.

large ships, which maximized the carrying of containers, fuel efficiency, and maximum speed through the use of diesel engines in place of steam.

In the tanker industry, the lack of U. S. shipping support severely undermined the military's effort. The need to charter foreign ships pushed MSC to continue with its build and charter program to replace the sixteen old T-2 tankers with the nine *Sealift*-class tankers. In the late 1970s, MSC continued this process with another contract to build five new T-5 tankers, the *Champion*-class, to replace the older ships built during the 1950s. In 1994, MSC redelivered the *Sealift*-tankers from its contracts but neglected to replace them. Instead, it intended to rely on commercial charters to sustain forces even with the history of the Vietnam conflict behind them.

The difficulties faced in the Persian Gulf in 1967 and during the latter Middle East fuel embargo of 1973 forced the military to commence a massive stockpiling of oil in 1977. To forestall the effects of a shutdown, the military planned to stockpile crude oil in a series of underground caves at Nederland, Texas.²⁹⁸ From that time up to 1994, MSC chartered tankers to haul nearly 60 million long tons of oil for this strategic petroleum reserve program.

With the rise in container service, the stick ship operated by the smaller operators, the tramps, disappeared. No longer would there be a surplus of merchant ships to bid in on contracts or be available on short notice to transport their supplies. These factors, plus the virtual elimination of the nucleus cargo fleet, and the difficulties encountered in activating ships from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, led to a series of new government programs.

The New Government Merchant Marine

Following the war, the government's perception of the merchant marine changed. With the commercial fleet adopting containerships and super-tankers, the need for military useful ships forced the military to organize a pool of government-owned ships to fill this mission. These

²⁹⁸ MSC, *Annual Command Report* 1977, 9.

ships, the majority laid up in reserve anchorages would draw their crews from the pool of commercial merchant mariner and provide services disappearing from the merchant marine.

In 1974 the Government Accounting Office investigated the NDRF as a potential source of shipping in future emergencies. The report identified the need for break-bulk ships to support the military, primarily the transportation of vehicles, aircraft, and ammunition.²⁹⁹ To improve the responsiveness of the NDRF; MSC, the Maritime Administration, and the navy established a subset of the NDRF, the Ready Reserve Force (RRF). The initial concept of the RRF consisted of overhauling thirty of the best Victory-ships so they could be activated in a period of five to ten days. With the decline in commercial shipping, many of these companies sold these ships to government and these ships formed the core of the RRF.³⁰⁰

One concept implemented before the war that gained support involved the Floating Forward Depot (FFD). The use of the three Victory ships, *Provo*, *Cheyenne*, and *Phoenix*, to preposition equipment near scenes of possible action, formed the concept for a program initiated by the Marine Corps. Stationing ships near potential areas of conflict eliminated the costly delay in sailing ships from the United States. It also provided a full-time employment for ships and, once offloaded, these ships could return for additional cargo. In 1980 the navy and marine corps financed the establishment of a temporary force, the Near Term Prepositioning Force, at the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.³⁰¹ This seven ship force expanded to twenty-five ships just before the Persian Gulf War. As MSC initiated a build and charter for its new T-5 tankers, it made similar arrangements for the building of 13 Maritime Prepositioning Ships. These ships, a combination of ro/ro, container and tanker technologies transported the equipment for three Marine Expeditionary Brigades. MSC contracted with commercial companies to build and

²⁹⁹ Government Accounting Office, *The National Defense Reserve Fleet-Can It Respond to Future Contingencies?* (Washington, 1976).

³⁰⁰ Only one Victory ship served in the RRF, the SS *Catawba Victory*. Many of the ships that entered the RRF served in Vietnam, such as the Lykes fleet of *Gulf Pride* and *Gulf Clipper* ships.

³⁰¹ MSC, *Annual Command Report* 1980, 26-27.

operate the ships for five years with four-five years options, a total of twenty-five years. The other ships in the Afloat Prepositioning Force consisted of ships chartered from the commercial merchant marine. They transported ammunition for the army and air force, a naval fleet hospital, and tankers for fuel support. Immediately after the war, the army added ships to preposition a heavy brigade afloat.

The loss of the tramp fleet and the excessive age of the ships in the RRF left a gap in between the arrival of the ships carrying the prepositioned cargo and the arrival of commercial and RRF ships. To fill this gap, the navy and MSC revived the Fast Deployment Logistics (FDL) ships under a new name, Fast Sealift Ships (FSS). Instead of building these ships, the navy purchased the eight SL-7 containerships from Sea-Land in early 1980s and converted them into fast ro/ros.³⁰² The program went a step further following the Persian Gulf War when the military purchased five containerships for conversion into a new generation of FDL, this time given the name Large Medium Speed Ro/Ros (LMSRs). In addition to the five conversions, they initiated a building program to produce 14 new ships.

Epilogue

Too many histories do not examine the importance of the merchant marine in national defense. Some argue that a nation does not need its own merchant marine to conduct its affairs. In a way, that is right and wrong. For the commercial transaction of a nation that is readily apparent. As of 1995, this nations' merchant marine transported 13.6 per cent of the monetary value and 3.9 per cent of the tonnage in foreign trade. No one can logically argue that the lack of a strong merchant marine hinders the economy. However, when one looks at the importance of a merchant fleet in terms of national defense its existence becomes crucial. During the Vietnam War the U.S. military relied predominately on the American-flagged fleet to move its forces and supplies. The refusal of some foreign flag ships to sail to Vietnam, particularly the *El Mexicano*, forced the U.S.

³⁰² MSC, 1983 Annual Report, 4.

to rely on American ships. The only exception being the chartering of tankers to move fuel from the Middle East during following the 1967 boycott.

The United States government merchant ship programs following the Vietnam War, build and charter tanker program, the Afloat Prepositioning Force, the Ready Reserve Force, and the Fast Sealift Ships, provided ships to augment the existing merchant fleet. All these provided a specific service that the commercial merchant marine could not provide following Vietnam. Both the commercial and MSC fleets look different. No longer did T-2 tankers and break-bulk ships make up the commercial fleets but, instead, containerships capable of carrying from 1,000 to 4,000 containers are standard, at speeds up to 24 knots and 200,000 ton very large crude carriers (VLCC) and 300,000 ultra large crude carriers (ULCC). Military Sealift Command's mission to oversee the transportation of cargo is now only one of four major functions within the command.³⁰³

The table below demonstrates the scope of the three major wars that the United States fought since World War Two and the amount of cargo transported by sea to each of the major conflicts. The Vietnam War, in its length and magnitude surpassed all the other wars, except in the transportation of passengers. Almost exclusively, the Korean War used American ships to move these numbers. At that time, the American merchant marine remained the dominant fleet in the world following its massive building program in the war. Even with these successes, additional ships were withdrawn from the NDRF to supplement the commercial fleet. In Vietnam, except for those few foreign ships, almost all the cargo resided in American bottoms. The decline of the merchant marine after Vietnam is best demonstrated by the fact that the United States lacked adequate commercial shipping and government-owned ships. Foreign flag ships transported 26.6 per cent of the cargo to the Persian Gulf. Although this number lends credence

³⁰³ These major programs include naval fleet auxiliary force, special missions, prepositioning and then sealift programs.

to the hypothesis that foreign flag ships can substitute for American ships, the two wars were not similar in their scope, objectives or enemies. It should be mentioned that thirteen foreign-flag ships hesitated or refused to enter the Persian Gulf and caused some delays.³⁰⁴

Table 8-War shipments of cargo by sea

	Passengers	Dry Cargo (measurement tons)	Petroleum (long tons)
Korea 1950-1953	4,750,363	51,769,067	21,354,978
Vietnam 1965-1973	1,632,846	81,041,100	97,083,000
Persian Gulf 1990-1992	2,758	17,632,000	6,428,000

The merchant marine is an anomaly for most historians. It is a perfect topic for new historians in that any study requires a blend of social, military, business, labor, legal and constitutional history to fully comprehend. This paper in no way details the full extend of the merchant marine's involvement in Vietnam, but it is hoped that this study provides a first step in the appreciation of the role the merchant marine plays in national defense during the war. Merchant sailors remain an enigma and the goal of this work was to undercover some of this mystery and put this area of maritime history into the light.

³⁰⁴ Matthews Holt. *So Many, So Much, So Far, So Fast*, 136.

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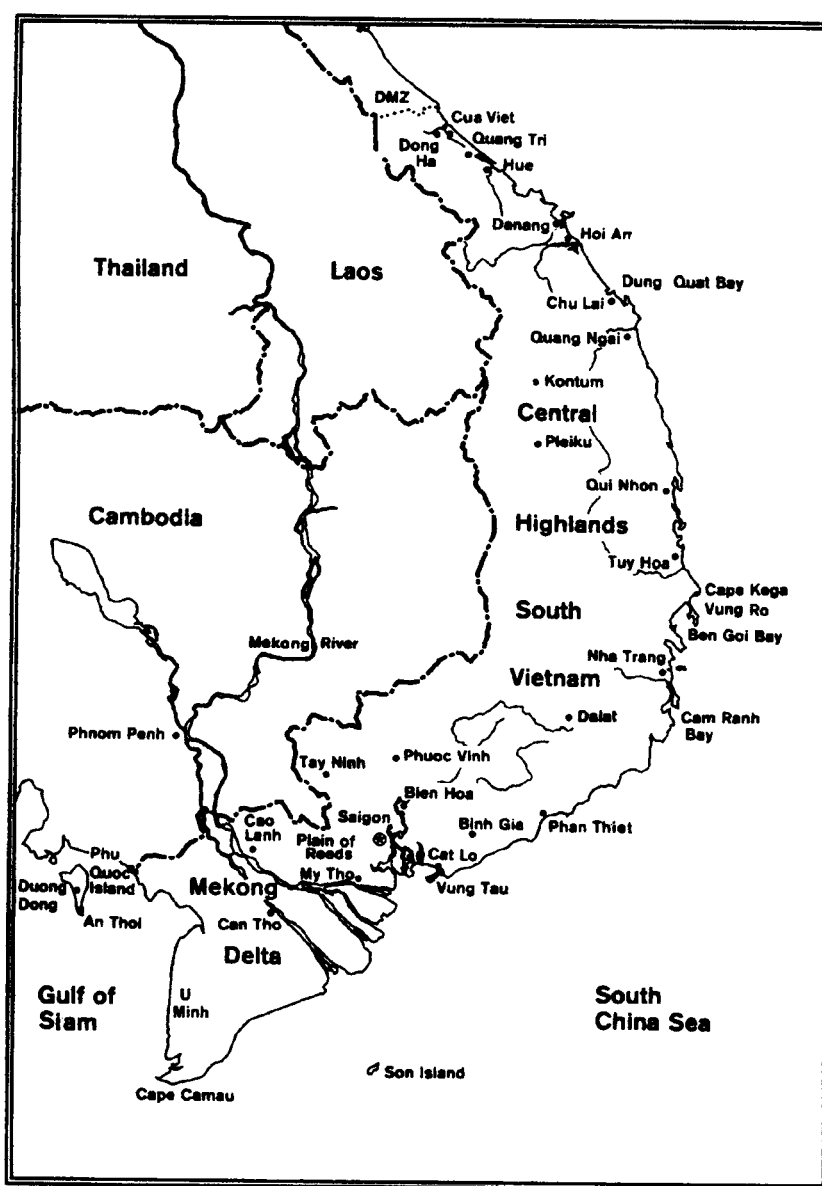
Newspapers:

New York Times

Journal of Commerce

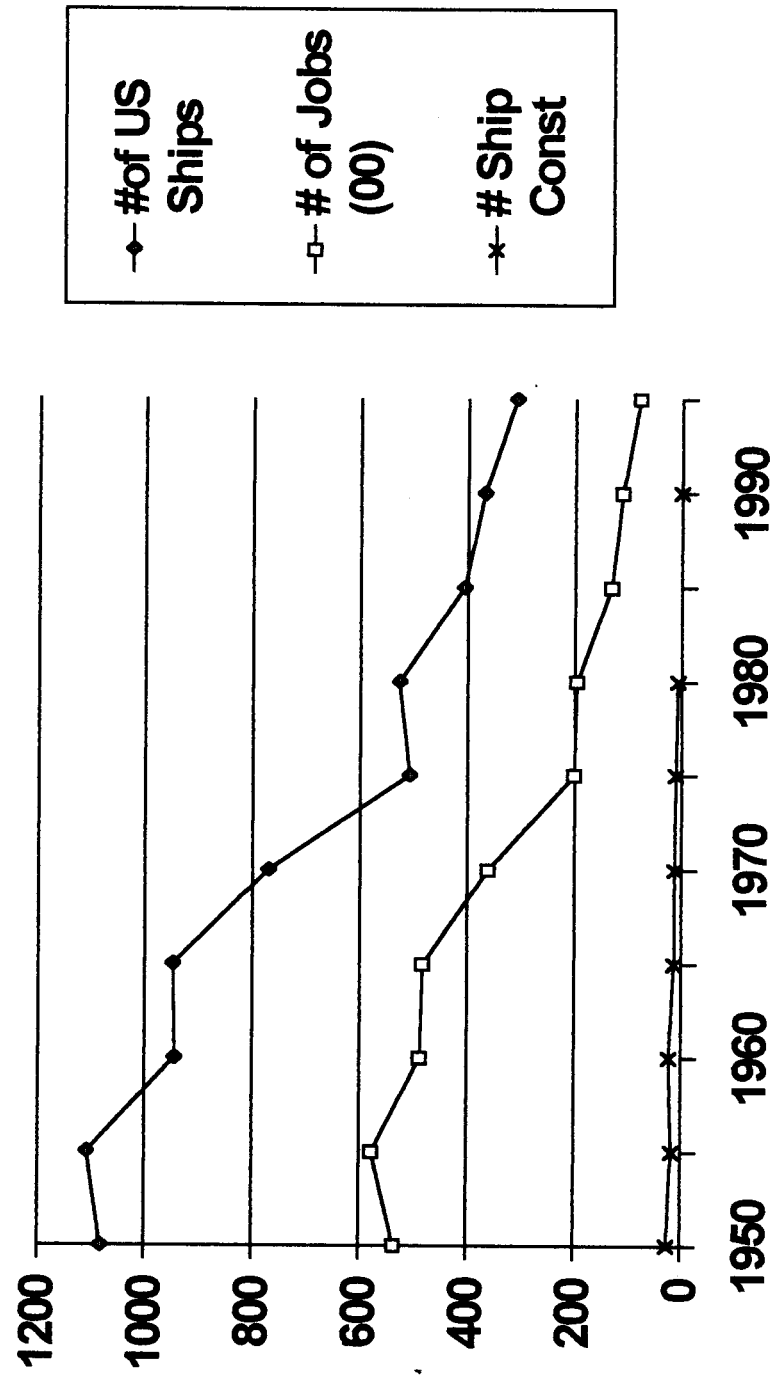
Appendix A:

South Vietnam



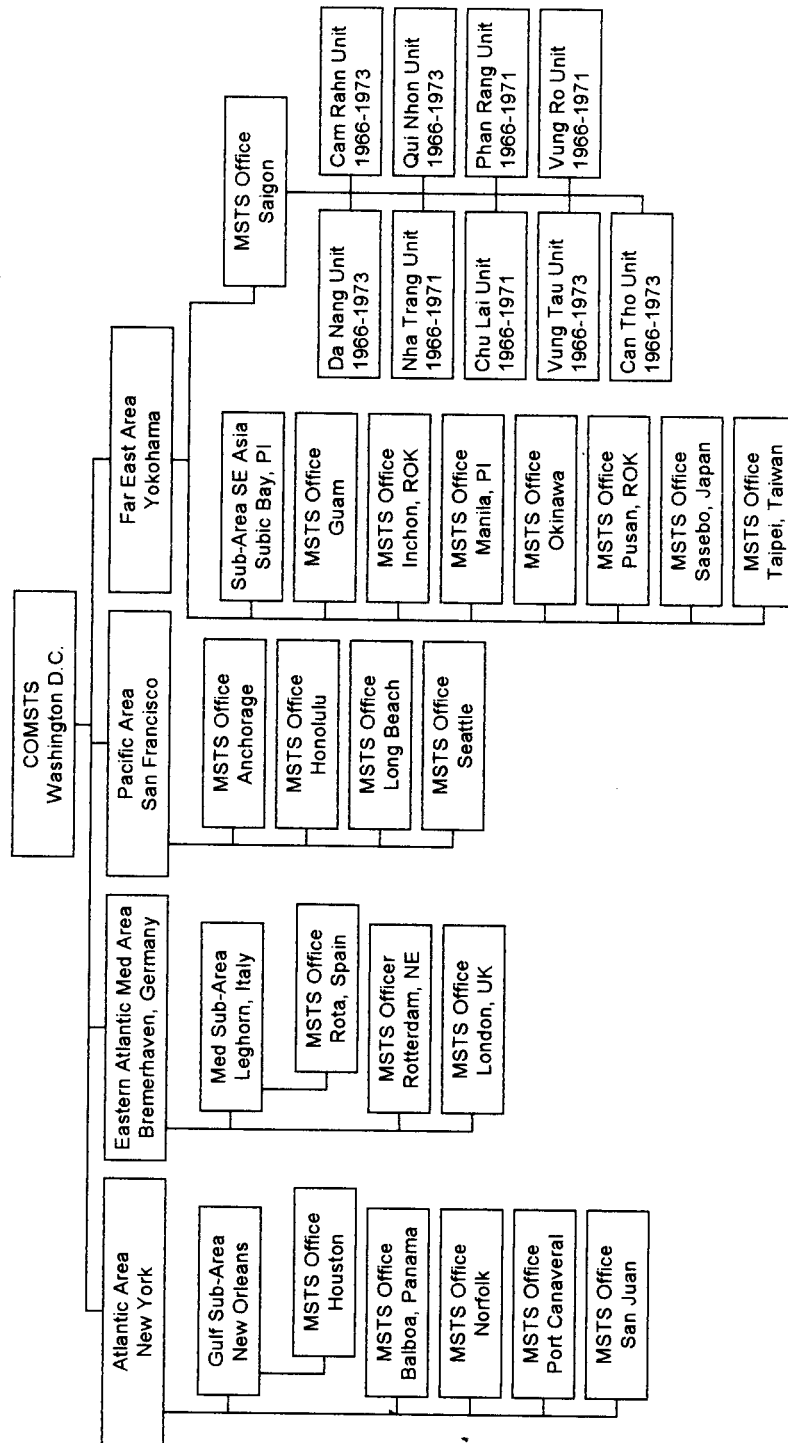
Appendix B:

American Merchant Marine

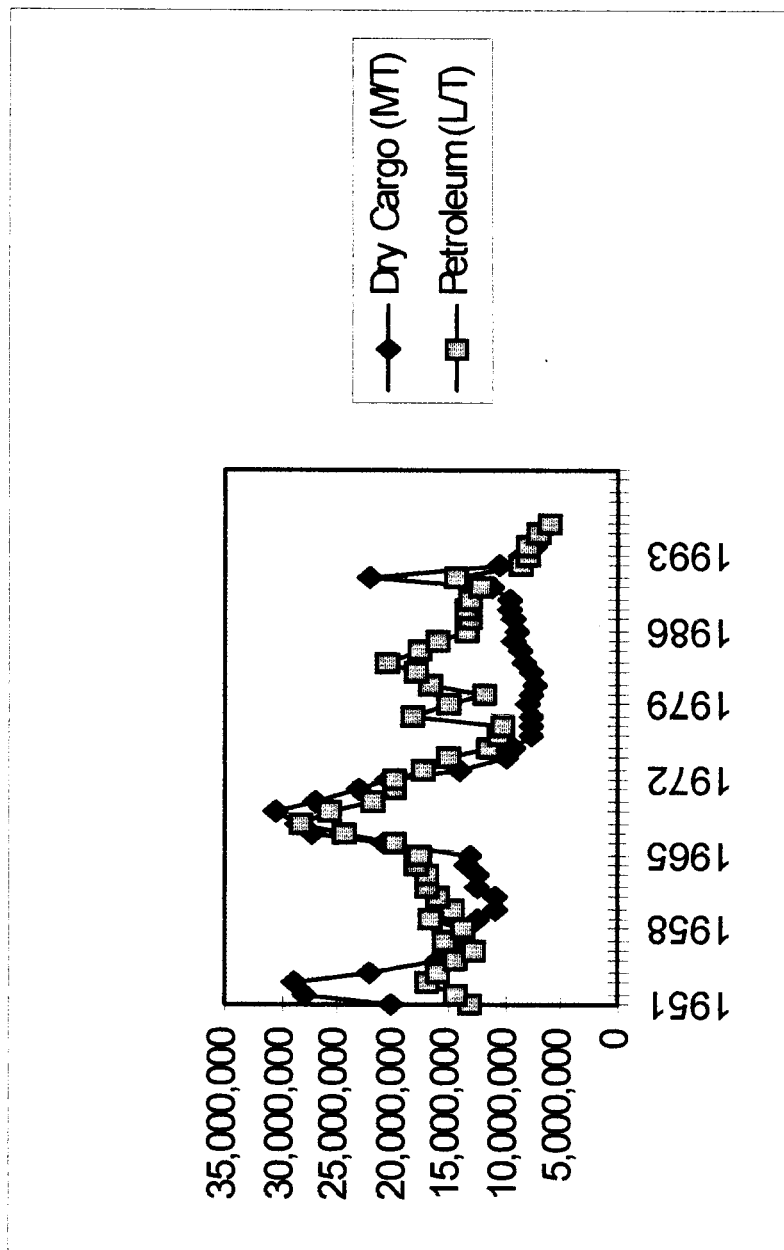


Appendix C:

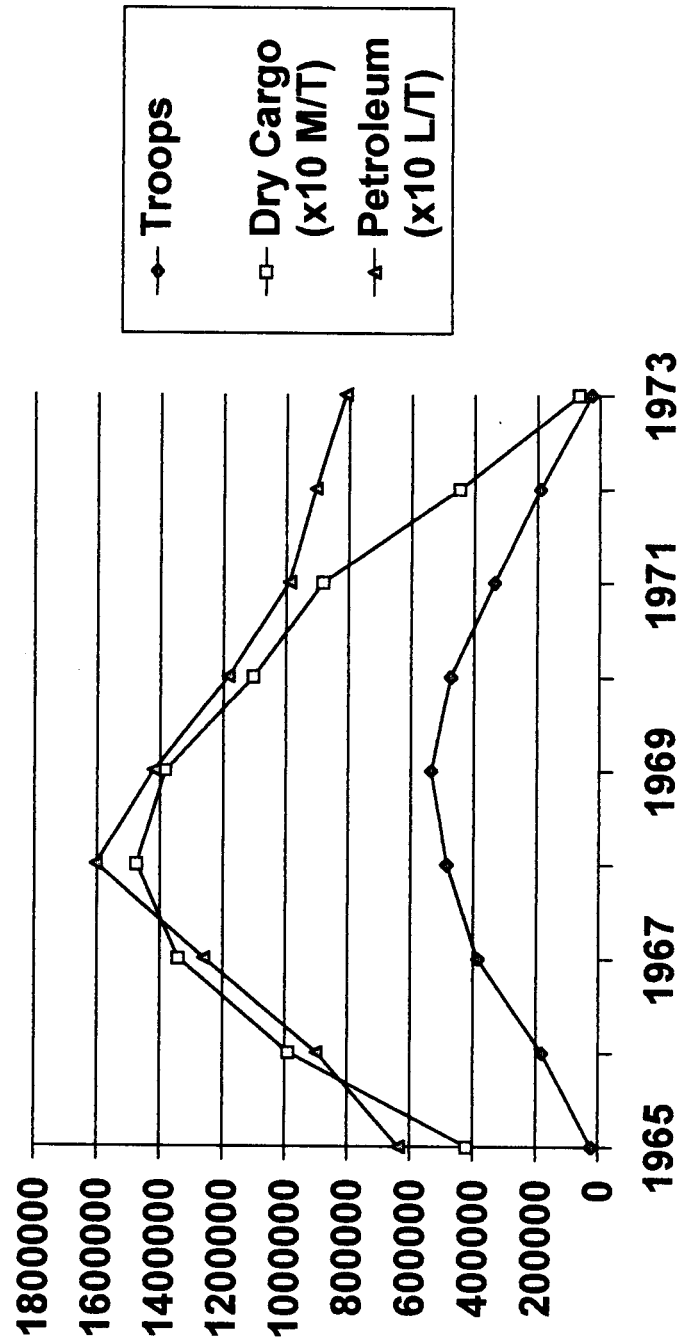
MSTS Organization 1 Aug 1965



Appendix D:
MSTS/MSC Total Cargo Shipments



Appendix E: Comparison of Troops vs. Cargo



Appendix G:
Military Sea Transport Service/Military Sealift Command Fleets

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
MSTS Nucleus												
<i>Cargo Ships</i>												
C1-M-AV1 or larger	26	29 (1)	34	38 (1)	38	37	38 (7)	33 (2)	28 (1)	28 (2)	16 (6)	11 (1)
Smaller than C1-M-AV1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	
Reefer	6	6	6	6	6	6	5 (2)	3	3	2	0	0
Miscellaneous	23 (1)	31	42 (2)	45	45	45	43 (5)	40 (5)	43 (11)	39 (30)	18 (18)	15 (15)
<i>Total Cargo</i>	57 (1)	68 (1)	84 (2)	91 (1)	91	90	87 (14)	77 (7)	75 (12)	71 (41)	35 (24)	26 (16)
<i>Project Ships</i>												
Project Ships	28 (1)	39 (7)	40 (8)	41 (10)	38 (5)	40	33 (3)	31 (1)	35 (3)	35 (2)	35 (4)	29 (6)
Transports	16 (3)	16	16	16 (9)	16 (11)	11	3 (1)	2	2	0		
Petroleum Ships	25 (1)	26	27	27	27	27	26	25	20 (3)	17	21	21 (1)
<i>Fleet Support Ships</i>												
<i>Total Nucleus</i>	126 (6)	149 (8)	167 (10)	175 (20)	172 (16)	168	149 (18)	135 (8)	132 (18)	123 (43)	96 (28)	86 (25)
Chartered												
<i>Cargo Ships</i>												
Cargo Ships	15	33 (1)	139 (3)	174 (7)	171 (4)	157	131	83	96	49	41	29
<i>Petroleum Ships</i>												
Petroleum Ships	20	16 (2)	38	51	67	52	31	31	29	23	20	12
<i>Project Ships</i>												
Project Ships	1	1	3	3	5	6	4	6	9	9	8	4
<i>Total Chartered</i>	36	50 (3)	180 (3)	228 (7)	243 (4)	215	166	121	134	81	69	45
<i>NDRF Ships Activated</i>												
NDRF Ships Activated	2	2	101	166	144	144	70 (68)	0	0	0	0	0
MSTS/MSC Controlled	164 (2)	201 (11)	448 (13)	569 (27)	559 (20)	527	385 (86)	256 (8)	266 (18)	204 (43)	165 (28)	161 (25)

* Numbers in parentheses refer to ships in reduced operating status of the total amount.

Appendix H:
MSTS Nucleus Fleet 1965

Hull Number	Ship Name	MSTS Admin Command	Year Built	Remarks	
<u>Refrigerator Ships</u>					
T-AF 42	<i>Bondia</i>	Atlantic	1944	Korean crew	
T-AF 44	<i>Laurentia</i>	Gulf	1944		
T-AF 50	<i>Bald Eagle</i>	Atlantic	1942		
T-AF 51	<i>Blue Jacket</i>	Atlantic	1942		
T-AF 63	<i>Asterion</i>	Pacific	1944		
T-AF 64	<i>Perseus</i>	Pacific	1945		
<u>Miscellaneous Ships</u>					
T-AG 162	<i>Mission Capistrano</i>	Atlantic	1944	Korean crew Korean crew Korean crew	
T-AG 164	<i>Kingsport</i>	Pacific	1944		
T-AG 169	<i>Pvt. Jose F. Valdez</i>	Atlantic	1944		
T-AG 171	<i>Sgt. Jos. E. Muller</i>	Atlantic	1945		
T-AG 172	<i>Phoenix</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AG 173	<i>Provo</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AG 174	<i>Cheyenne</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AG 175	<i>Sgt. Curtis F. Shoup</i>	Atlantic	1945		
T-AG 177	<i>Shearwater</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AG 178	<i>Flyer</i>	Atlantic	1944		
<u>Range and Missile Tracking</u>					
T-AGM 1	<i>Ranger Tracker</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AGM 2	<i>Range Recoverer</i>	Atlantic	1944		
T-AGM 3	<i>Longview</i>	Pacific	1944		
T-AGM 4	<i>Richfield</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AGM 5	<i>Sunnyvale</i>	Pacific	1944		
T-AGM 6	<i>Watertown</i>	Pacific	1944		
T-AGM 7	<i>Huntsville</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AGM 8	<i>Wheeling</i>	Pacific	1945		
T-AGM 17	<i>Timber Hitch</i>	Atlantic	1944		
T-AGM 19	<i>Vanguard</i>	Atlantic	1943		
T-AGM 20	<i>Redstone</i>	Atlantic	1943		
<u>Range and Missile Tracking:</u>					
<u>Marine Transport Lines Inc.</u>					
T-AGM 9	<i>Gen. H. H. Arnold</i>	Atlantic	1943		
T-AGM 10	<i>Gen. H. S. Vandenberg</i>	Atlantic	1943		
T-AGM 13	<i>Sword Knot</i>	Atlantic	1945		
T-AGM 14	<i>Rose Knot</i>	Atlantic	1945		
T-AGM 16	<i>Coastal Crusader</i>	Atlantic	1945		
<u>Range and Missile Tracking:</u>					
<u>Mathiasen Tanker Ind. Inc.</u>					
T-AGM 11	<i>Twin Falls</i>	Atlantic	1944		
T-AGM 12	<i>American Mariner</i>	Atlantic	1941		
T-AGM 15	<i>Coastal Sentry</i>	Atlantic	1945		
T-AGM 18	<i>Sampan Hitch</i>	Atlantic	1945		
<u>Survey Ships</u>					

T-AGOR 1	<i>Josiah W. Gibbs</i>	Atlantic	1942	
T-AGOR 4	<i>James M. Gillis</i>	Atlantic	1962	
T-AGOR 5	<i>Charles H. Davis</i>	Pacific	1962	
T-AGOR 6	<i>Sands</i>	Atlantic	1963	
T-AGOR 7	<i>Lynch</i>	Atlantic	1964	
T-AGOR 8	<i>Eltanin</i>	Pacific	1957	
T-AGOR 11	<i>Mizar</i>	Atlantic	1957	
T-AGS 21	<i>Bowditch</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AGS 22	<i>Dutton</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AGS 23	<i>Michelson</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-LST 822	<i>Harris County</i>	Pacific		
	<u>Freighters</u>			
T-AK 180	<i>Fentress</i>	Far East	1945	Crew part Japanese
T-AK 188	<i>Herkimer</i>	Far East	1944	Crew part Japanese
T-AK 198	<i>Muskingum</i>	Far East	1944	
T-AK 237	<i>Greenville Victory</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AK 240	<i>Pvt. John R. Towle</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 241	<i>Pvt. Francis X. McGraw</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 242	<i>Sgt. Andrew Miller</i>	Pacific	1945	
T-AK 243	<i>Sgt. Archer T. Gammon</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 244	<i>Sgt. Morris E. Crain</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 246	<i>Col. Wm. J. O'Brien</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 249	<i>Short Splice</i>	Gulf	1945	Korean crew
T-AK 250	<i>Pvt Frank J Petrarca</i>	Pacific	1945	
T-AK 251	<i>Lt. George Boyce</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T- 252	<i>Lt. Robert Craig</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 254	<i>Sgt. Truman Kimbro</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AK 255	<i>Pvt Leonard Brostrom</i>	Far East	1943	
T-AK 267	<i>Marine Fiddler</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 271	<i>Mirfak</i>	Atlantic	1957	
T-AK 274	<i>Lt. James E. Robinson</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AK 275	<i>Pvt. Joseph F. Merrell</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AK 276	<i>Sgt. Jack J. Pendleton</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AK 277	<i>Schuyler Otis Bland</i>	Pacific	1951	
T-AK 279	<i>Norwalk</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 280	<i>Furman</i>	Pacific	1945	
T-AKA 92	<i>Wyandot</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AKD 1	<i>Point Barrow</i>	Gulf	1957	
T-AKL 31		Far East		Crew part Ryukyuan
T-AKL 398	<i>Redbud</i>	Far East		Crew part Ryukyuan
	<u>Aircraft and Cargo Ferry</u>			
T-AKV 40	<i>Card</i>	Gulf	1942	
T-AKV 41	<i>Core</i>	Pacific	1942	
T-AKV 42	<i>Breton</i>	Pacific	1942	

T-AKV 43	<i>Croatan</i>	Gulf	1942	
	<u>Tankers:</u>			
	<u>Civil Service Mariners</u>			
T-AOG 77	<i>Rincon</i>	World-wide	1945	
T-AOG 78	<i>Nodaway</i>	World-wide	1945	
T-AOG 79	<i>Petaluma</i>	World-wide	1945	
T-AOG 80	<i>Piscataqua</i>	World-wide	1945	
T-AOG 81	<i>Alatna</i>	World-wide	1956	
T-AOG 82	<i>Chattahoochee</i>	World-wide	1956	
	<u>Tankers:</u>			
	<u>Keystone Shipping Co.</u>			
T-AO 49	<i>Suamico</i>	World-wide	1942	
T-AO 50	<i>Tallulah</i>	World-wide	1942	
T-AO 67	<i>Cache</i>	World-wide	1942	
T-AO 73	<i>Millicoma</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 75	<i>Saugatuck</i>	World-wide	1942	
T-AO 79	<i>Cowanesque</i>	World-wide	1943	
	<i>Shenandoah</i>	World-wide	1956	Bareboat charter
	<u>Tankers:</u>			
	<u>Marine Transport Lines Inc.</u>			
T-AO 76	<i>Schuylkill</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 77	<i>Cossatot</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 78	<i>Chepachet</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 140	<i>Pioneer Valley</i>	World-wide	1944	
T-AO 142	<i>Shawnee Trail</i>	World-wide	1944	
T-AO 130	<i>Mission San Rafael</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 149	<i>Maumee</i>	World-wide	1956	
	<u>Tankers: Mathiasen Tanker Industries Inc.</u>			
T-AO 65	<i>Pecos</i>	World-wide	1942	
T-AO 111	<i>Mission Buenaventura</i>	World-wide	1944	
T-AO 133	<i>Mission Santa Cruz</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 134	<i>Mission Santa Ynez</i>	World-wide	1943	
T-AO 151	<i>Shoshone</i>	World-wide	1957	
T-AO 152	<i>Yukon</i>	World-wide	1956	
T-AO 165	<i>American Explorer</i>	World-wide	1958	
	<u>Transports</u>			
T-AP 110	<i>Gen. John Pope</i>	Pacific	1943	
AP 112	<i>USS Gen W. A. Mann</i>	Pacific	1943	
AP 114	<i>USS Gen. W. M. Mitchell</i>	Pacific	1943	
T-AP 117	<i>Gen. W. H. Gordon</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AP 119	<i>Gen. Wm. Weigel</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AP 120	<i>Gen. Daniel Sultan</i>	Pacific	1943	
T-AP 121	<i>Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AP 122	<i>Gen. Alex M. Patch</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AP 123	<i>Gen. Simon B. Buckner</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AP 124	<i>Gen. Edwin D. Patrick</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AP 125	<i>Gen. N. M. Walker</i>	Atlantic	1944	

T-AP 126	<i>Gen. Maurice Rose</i>	Atlantic	1945
T-AP 127	<i>Gen. Wm. O. Darby</i>	Atlantic	1945
T-AP 153	<i>Gen. R. M. Blatchford</i>	Pacific	1944
T-AP 154	<i>Gen. Leroy Eltinge</i>	Pacific	1944
AP 176	<i>USS Gen. J. C. Breckinridge</i>	Pacific	1945
T-AP 196	<i>Barrett</i>	Pacific	1950
T-AP 197	<i>Geiger</i>	Atlantic	1950
T-AP 198	<i>Upshur</i>	Pacific	1951
T-APc 116	<i>Sgt. Johan F. Kelley</i>	Atlantic	1945
	<u>Cable Ship</u>		
T-ARC 6	<i>Albert J. Myer</i>	Atlantic	1945
	<u>Roll-on/Roll-off Ships</u>		
T-LSV 7	<i>Comet</i>	Atlantic	1957
T-LSV 8	<i>Taurus</i>	Atlantic	1946
	<u>Landing Ship:</u>		
	<u>Japanese Crews</u>		
T-LSM 335	<i>T-LSM 335</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 47	<i>T-LST 47</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 117	<i>T-LST 117</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 176	<i>T-LST 176</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 230	<i>T-LST 230</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 276	<i>T-LST 276</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 277	<i>T-LST 277</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 399	<i>T-LST 399</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 456	<i>T-LST 456</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 488	<i>T-LST 488</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 491	<i>T-LST 491</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 530	<i>T-LST 530</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 546	<i>T-LST 546</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 550	<i>T-LST 550</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 566	<i>T-LST 566</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 572	<i>T-LST 572</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 579	<i>T-LST 579</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 581	<i>T-LST 581</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 587	<i>T-LST 587</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 600	<i>T-LST 600</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 607	<i>T-LST 607</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 613	<i>T-LST 613</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 623	<i>T-LST 623</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 629	<i>T-LST 629</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 630	<i>T-LST 630</i>	Far East	WWII era
T-LST 649	<i>T-LST 649</i>	Far East	WWII era

Source: MSTs *Financial and Statistical Report FY 65*, Part II.

John C. Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*, 8th Edition. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1965.

Appendix I:
MSC Nucleus Fleet 1975

Hull Number	Ship Name	MSC Admin Command	Year Built	Remarks
<u>Refrigerator Ships</u>				
T-AF 56	<i>Denebola</i>	Atlantic	1944	
<u>Miscellaneous Ships</u>				
T-AG 164	<i>Kingsport</i>	Atlantic	1944	
<u>Range and Missile Tracking</u>				
T-AGM 8	<i>Wheeling</i>	Pacific	1945	
T-AGM 9	<i>Gen. H. H. Arnold</i>	Pacific	1943	
T-AGM 10	<i>Gen. H. S. Vandenberg</i>	Atlantic	1943	
T-AGM 19	<i>Vanguard</i>	Atlantic	1943	
T-AGM 20	<i>Redstone</i>	Atlantic	1943	
T-AGM 22	<i>Range Sentinel</i>	Atlantic	1944	
<u>Survey Ships</u>				
T-AGOR 7	<i>Lynch</i>	Atlantic	1964	
T-AGOR 11	<i>Mizar</i>	Atlantic	1957	
T-AGOR 12	<i>De Steiguer</i>	Pacific	1966	
T-AGOR 13	<i>Bartlett</i>	Pacific	1966	
T-AGOR 16	<i>Hayes</i>	Atlantic	1970	
T-AGS 21	<i>Bowditch</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AGS 22	<i>Dutton</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AGS 26	<i>Silas Bent</i>	Pacific	1964	
T-AGS 27	<i>Kane</i>	Atlantic	1965	
T-AGS 29	<i>Chauvenet</i>	Pacific	1968	
T-AGS 32	<i>Harkness</i>	Atlantic	1968	
T-AGS 33	<i>Wilkes</i>	Atlantic	1969	
T-AGS 34	<i>Wyman</i>	Pacific	1969	
<u>Freighters</u>				
T-AK 237	<i>Greenville Victory</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AK 240	<i>Pvt. John R. Towle</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 242	<i>Sgt. Andrew Miller</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 254	<i>Sgt. Truman Kimbro</i>	Pacific	1944	
T-AK 255	<i>Pvt Leonard Brostrom</i>	Pacific	1943	
T-AK 271	<i>Mirfak</i>	Atlantic	1957	
T-AK 274	<i>Lt. Jason E. Robinson</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AK 277	<i>Schuyler Otis Bland</i>	Pacific	1955	
T-AK 283	<i>Wyandot</i>	Pacific	1944	
<u>Freighters:</u>				
<u>Fleet Ballistic Missile Ships</u>				
T-AK 279	<i>Norwalk</i>	Atlantic	1945	
T-AK 280	<i>Furman</i>	Pacific	1945	
T-AK 281	<i>Victoria</i>	Atlantic	1944	
T-AK 282	<i>Marshfield</i>	Atlantic	1944	
<u>Roll-on/Roll-off Ships</u>				
T-AKR 7	<i>Comet</i>	Atlantic	1957	
T-AKR 9	<i>Sea Lift</i>	Pacific	1965	

<u>Oilers:</u>			
<u>Civil Service Mariners</u>			
T-AO 57	<i>Marías</i>	Atlantic	1943
T-AO 62	<i>Taluga</i>	Pacific	1944
T-AO 105	<i>Misphillion</i>	Pacific	1945
T-AO 107	<i>Passumpsic</i>	Pacific	1945
T-AO 109	<i>Waccamaw</i>	Atlantic	1946
<u>Tankers:</u>			
<u>Hudson Waterways Corp.</u>			
T-AO 50	<i>Tallulah</i>	World-wide	1942
T-AO 73	<i>Millicoma</i>	World-wide	1943
T-AO 76	<i>Schuylkill</i>	World-wide	1943
T-AO 149	<i>Maumee</i>	World-wide	1956
T-AO 151	<i>Shoshone</i>	World-wide	1957
T-AO 152	<i>Yukon</i>	World-wide	1956
T-AO 165	<i>American Explorer</i>	World-wide	1958
<u>Tankers:</u>			
<u>Marine Transport Lines</u>			
T-AO 168	<i>Sealift Pacific</i>	World-wide	1973
T-AO 169	<i>Sealift Arabian Sea</i>	World-wide	1974
T-AO 172	<i>Sealift Atlantic</i>	World-wide	1974
T-AO 173	<i>Sealift Mediterranean</i>	World-wide	1974
T-AO 174	<i>Sealift Caribbean</i>	World-wide	1974
<u>Tankers:</u>			
T-AOG 77	<i>Rincon</i>	Pacific	1945
T-AOG 78	<i>Nodaway</i>	Pacific	1945
T-AOG 79	<i>Petaluma</i>	Pacific	1945
<u>Cable Ship</u>			
T-ARC 2	<i>Neptune</i>	Atlantic	1945
T-ARC 3	<i>Aeolus</i>	Pacific	1945
T-ARC 6	<i>Albert J. Myer</i>	Atlantic	1945
<u>Fleet Tugs:</u>			
T-ATF 76	<i>Ute</i>	Pacific	1942
T-ATF 85	<i>Lipan</i>	Pacific	1942
T-ATF 149	<i>Atakapa</i>	Atlantic	1944
T-ATF 158	<i>Mosopelea</i>	Atlantic	1945
<u>Landing Ship:</u>			
<u>Japanese Crews</u>			
T-LST 47	<i>T-LST 47</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-LST 287	<i>T-LST 287</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-LST 629	<i>T-LST 629</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-LST 649	<i>T-LST 649</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-LST 692	<i>Davies County</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-LST 822	<i>Harris County</i>	Pacific	WW II era
T-YFNB 6		Pacific	
T-YFNB 13		Pacific	

Source: John S. Rowe and Samuel L. Morison, *The Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*, 10th Edition.
Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975.

Appendix J:
Merchant Ships Sunk or Lost in direct support of the Vietnam War

USNS <i>Card</i>	May 2, 1964	Mined and sunk at docks in Saigon; repaired
SS <i>Eastern Mariner</i> (Panamanian)	May 26, 1965	Mined and sunk in the Long Tau River
SS <i>Baton Rouge Victory</i>	Aug. 23, 1965	Mined and sunk in the Long Tau River; 7 killed; raised and then scrapped
Dredge <i>Jamaica Bay</i>	Jan. 9, 1967	Mined and sunk near My Tho; 2 killed
SS <i>African Glen</i>	June 6, 1967	Trapped and abandoned in Suez Canal; ship later sunk in 1973 and raised in 1979
<i>Shima Agawa Maru</i> (Japanese)	June 29, 1967	Foundered enroute to Da Nang in storm
SS <i>Bowling Green</i>	May 1, 1968	Ship arrested by South Vietnamese government; sold for scrap July 20, 1973
SS <i>Cortland</i>	May 10, 1968	Ship arrested by South Vietnamese government; sold for scrap July 17, 1973
SS <i>Whitehall</i>	May 12, 1968	Ship arrested by South Vietnamese government; sold for scrap July 18, 1973
SS <i>Bucyrus Victory</i>	Aug. 15, 1968	Engine room fire; Constructive Total Loss
USNS <i>T-LST 600</i>	Dec. 23, 1968	Grounded in storm at Okinawa; Constructive Total Loss
SS <i>American Producer</i>	March 5, 1969	Collision in San Francisco; Constructive Total Loss
<i>Welfare</i> (Nat. Chinese)	July 9, 1969	Mined and sunk off naval base at Nha Be
SS <i>Alamo Victory</i>	Aug. 18, 1969	Damaged by Hurricane Camille in Gulfport; Constructive Total Loss
SS <i>Silver Hawk</i>	Aug. 18, 1969	Damaged by Hurricane Camille in Gulfport; Constructive Total Loss
SS <i>Norwich Victory</i>	Oct. 1969	Grounded Da Nang; Sold for scrap
SS <i>Badger State</i>	Jan. 5, 1970	Ship sunk by gunfire after cargo of bombs detonated; 26 killed
SS <i>American Hawk</i>	June 14, 1970	Mined and sunk at Qui Nhon; later scrapped
SS <i>Green Bay</i>	Aug. 17, 1971	Mined and sunk at Qui Nhon; later scrapped
USNS <i>Cowanesque</i>	April 23, 1972	Grounded at Okinawa; Constructive Total Loss
USNS <i>Sgt. Jack Pendleton</i>	Sep. 24, 1973	Grounded Paracel Is.; Constructive Total Loss