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**Processor:** Updated by Archivist (February 2010) but original collection processed by Archivist, August 2004 and Finding Aid by Archivist, October 2004.

# **Military Sealift Command in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm**

## **1990-1991**

### **COLL/521**

**Creator:** Military Sealift Command

**Extent:** Total boxes: 26  
Cubic feet: 8.6

**Inclusive Dates:** 1989-1991

**Access:** The collection has had a Kyl-Lott Declassification Review and is open to the public. However, many records remain classified because of referral to other agencies for further declassification review.

**Classification:** The collection had an initial "Declassification Review" followed by a Kyl-Lott review in April 2008. Many of the records remain classified and have been referred to other agencies for further declassification review.

#### **Scope and Content Notes**

This collection contains materials relating to the activities of Military Sealift Command during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Much of the collection consists of briefings and reports on the status of MSC ships and cargo. A group of subject files completes the collection.

The collection is organized in three series. Series I contains daily briefings that summarize the status of MSC components. These reports list the current location, estimated arrival date at final destination, and operational status of maritime prepositioning ships, fast sealift ships, hospital ships, ready reserve forces, and chartered vessels. The briefings are arranged chronologically.

Series II holds various reports on MSC operations during the Persian Gulf War. They are arranged alphabetically by title and chronologically there under. Significant reports found in this series include the "Basket Case" Report, recording the readiness of ships supporting MSC operations; the N9 Dry Cargo Program Report, which lists ships by port and provides information their planned arrival and departure dates, capacity, and speed; and Unit Deployment Reports, listing ships assigned to transport various units to the Persian Gulf area.

The final series, Subject Files, contains miscellaneous documents on a variety of topics. Much of this information was gathered to support the writing of a history of MSC during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Several drafts as well as the final version of this history are included. Also in this series are documents related to ammunition, problems and lessons learned, and chronologies of events during and leading to Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. This series is arranged alphabetically by topic.

## **Historical Note**

Military Sealift Command (MSC) is an echelon II Navy operating force under the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). The mission of Commander, Military Sealift Command (COMSC) is to provide ship operating services to Department of Defense (DOD) components, provide strategic sealift in support of National Command objectives, and to provide ocean transportation for DOD activities. MSC operates and maintains government owned ships, and is responsible for shipping DOD cargo on commercially operated and chartered ships. To accomplish the assigned mission and responsibilities, MSC is designated as the "Single Manager for Ocean Transportation" by the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and CNO. The mission of Military Sealift Command is to provide ocean transportation of equipment, fuel, supplies, and ammunition to sustain U.S. forces worldwide during peacetime and in war for as long as operational requirements dictate. During a war, it can be expected that more than 95 percent of all equipment and supplies needed to sustain the U.S. military will be carried by sea.

Military Sealift Command operates about 120 ships worldwide with about 100 more ships in reserve status. What sets MSC ships apart from other Navy ships is that all MSC ships are crewed by civil service or contract merchant mariners instead of active duty Navy personnel. Using civilian crews frees Navy personnel for more traditional war-fighting assignments. MSC exercises operational control over ships activated from the National Defense Reserve Fleet. Ready Reserve ships are activated in the case of a national emergency within a 5, 10 or 20-day time frame. In addition to reserve ships, MSC exercises control over T-AH 19 Class Hospital Ships, Fast Sealift Ships (FSSs), and Maritime Prepositioning Ships (MPSs), which are prepared to respond immediately in the event of war or national emergency. Hospital ships provide mobile, flexible, rapid response capabilities for acute medical and surgical care in support of deployed elements of the Armed Force. FSS transport mechanized armored equipment to strategic locations throughout the world in minimal time (e.g., to Europe within 5 days and the Persian Gulf within 2 weeks). MPS are prepositioned at various strategic locations overseas and contain ammunition, supplies and armored equipment to support U.S. troops.

MSC's five area commands-Atlantic, Pacific, Europe, Far East, and Central-are each headed by a U.S. Navy captain. The area commands maintain operational control of MSC ships that are assigned to, or pass through, their areas of responsibility. Area commanders are the focal points for MSC customers in their areas. As personal representatives of Commander, Military Sealift Command, they are the "face of MSC" for the command's customers. The area commands also are the direct links to MSC ships, providing maintenance, logistics, and other needed services. Area commanders and their staffs are responsible for executing the plans and policies that result from business decisions made at MSC headquarters, effectively translating headquarters vision into field action. The commanders of MSC Atlantic and MSC Pacific also are assigned additional duty as the Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force East and West Project Officers, respectively. Duties include management of the NFAF ships

assigned to them as well as administrative support to other MSC programs and activities.

Today's MSC is an outgrowth of four different agencies that provided ocean transportation for the U.S. military through World War II-the Naval Transportation Service, the Army Transport Service, the U.S. Maritime Commission's War Shipping Administration and the Navy's Fleet Support Services. Following World War II, U.S. military leaders sought a better system. Military Sea Transportation Service, MSC's name prior to 1970, was established on 1 October 1949 to be the U.S. military's ocean transportation provider. MSTS faced its first challenge almost immediately with the onset of the Korean War in June 1950. The command moved thousands of troops and millions of tons of cargo to Korea, operating more than 450 ships at the height of the hostilities. The MSTS mission expanded in 1958 to include the operation of scientific support ships-vessels involved in oceanographic research, missile tracking, communications and other special missions.

MSTS continued to define its role within the Navy and DOD in the 1960s. MSTS ships transported people and supplies to and from Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. MSTS ships also supported the Apollo 11 mission to the moon in 1969. MSTS began the 1970s by changing its name to Military Sealift Command. In 1972, MSC began operating its first Naval Fleet Auxiliary Force ship, civilian mariner-crewed fleet replenishment oiler USNS *Taluga*. Today MSC operates about 30 NFAF ships working side-by-side with the U.S. Navy combatant fleet worldwide.

In 1984 Secretary of the Navy John Lehman formally added strategic sealift to the U.S. Navy's other three primary functions of strategic deterrence, sea control, and power projection. This ensured that sealift programs would be considered on a balanced basis with other U.S. Navy programs, bringing them under one strategic, tactical, and operational purview during overall planning. In the 1980s, MSC introduced afloat prepositioning ships-vessels laden with combat equipment and supplies and prepositioned at sea within several days sailing time of potential contingency areas. The seven initial Near Term Prepositioning Ships, operating near Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, were the forerunners to the Maritime Prepositioning Shps operated by MSC for the U.S. Marine Corps and which began service in 1984.

MSC showcased its sealift and prepositioning capabilities in Operation Desert Shield in 1990-1991. At the peak of strategic sealift activity, MSC operated 212 dry cargo ships and 22 tankers. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Frank B. Kelso 11, USN, awarded MSC a Navy Unit Commendation, MSC's first, for its execution of strategic sealift in support of the war. As a result of lessons learned from the Persian Gulf War and changing world dynamics after the fall of the Berlin Wall, DOD expanded afloat prepositioning and surge capabilities, building 19 large, medium-speed, roll-on/roll-off ships for MSC operation.

### **Subject Headings (LCSH)**

United States Navy. Military Sealift Command.

Persian Gulf War, 1991-Naval operations, American.

Military sealift-United States.

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- 67. Chartered Ship List 10 December 1990-28 January 1991
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- 69. Daily Issues Report 1 April-15 July 1991
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- 72. Deployment Status Report 5-17 April 1991
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- 92. Alpha Summary of Slips/Voyages
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- 105. Ammunition: N5 Plans
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- 133. Force Inventory 1 August 1990-7 March 1991
- 134. Glossary of Terms/Abbreviations
- 135. History of Military Sealift Command's Role During Operation Desert Shield/Storm February 1991
- 136. History of MSC during Operation Desert Shield/Storm-Initial Draft February 1991
- 137. History of MSC during Operation Desert Shield/Storm-Figures/Diagrams 1991
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171. Publication: All Hands	November 1990-June 1991
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The audiocassettes in Box 26 are available only by permission of Head, Operational Archives. Researchers are to use the transcripts found in Box 25.

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