



Fourth Arm of Defense

Sealift and Maritime Logistics in the Vietnam War



Salvatore R. Mercogliano



Front Cover: Soldiers of the Army's 11th Light Infantry Brigade stand at attention at a ceremony in Qui Nhon, marking their deployment to South Vietnam by MSTs troopships in December 1967. NHHC VN Collection

THE U.S. NAVY AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Edward J. Marolda and Sandra K. Doyle, *Series Editors*

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Salvatore R. Mercogliano



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON, DC
2017

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Printed in the United States of America.

Published by

Naval History & Heritage Command

in partnership with the Naval Historical Foundation

805 Kidder Breese Street SE

Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060

www.history.navy.mil

Book design by Jessica Craney

U.S. GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL EDITION NOTICE



Use of ISBN

This is the official U.S. Government edition of this publication and is herein identified to certify its authenticity. Use of 978-0-945274-96-4 is for the U.S. Government Publishing Office Edition only. The Superintendent of Documents of the U.S. Government Publishing Office requests that any reprinted edition clearly be labeled as a copy of the authentic work with a new ISBN.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mercogliano, Salvatore R., author.

Title: Fourth arm of defense : sealift and maritime logistics in the Vietnam War / Salvatore R. Mercogliano.

Other titles: Sealift and maritime logistics in the Vietnam War

Description: Washington, D.C. : Naval History and Heritage Command, [2017] | Series: The U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War

Identifiers: LCCN 2017007729 (print) | LCCN 2017010115 (ebook) | ISBN 9780945274964 (alk. paper) | ISBN 9780945274971 (pdf) | ISBN 9780945274988 (epub) | ISBN 9780945274995 (mobi)

Subjects: LCSH: Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Transportation. | Military sealift—United States—History—20th century. | United States. Navy. Military Sea Transportation Service. | Merchant marine—United States—History—20th century. | Vietnam War, 1961-1975—Naval operations, American.

Classification: LCC DS559.8.T7 M47 2017 (print) | LCC DS559.8.T7 (ebook) | DDC 959.704/345—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017007729>

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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office

Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov; Phone: toll free 866-512-1800; DC area 202-512-1800; Fax 202-512-2104

Mail Stop: IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001



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Author's Collection

USNS *Card* (T-AKV-40) underway. The ship's mining in the port of Saigon attested to the danger inherent in logistics operations during the Vietnam War.

INTRODUCTION

As the streaks of sunlight emerged from the eastern sky over Saigon, the port awoke on the morning of 3 May 1964. Like many others throughout the world, the harbor contained a plethora of small boats scuttling to and fro as they moved their products to market. On board one such vessel were Lam Son Nao and Nguyen Phu Hung, men of the 65th Special Operations Group, a fighting unit of the National Liberation Front (NLF). The Communist insurgent organization, whose fighters the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies referred to pejoratively as the Viet Cong (VC), was established in 1960 and was directed by the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) in Hanoi. The purpose of the NLF and its northern backers was to overthrow the government of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

The underwater sappers had just affixed explosives to the hull of the aircraft transport USNS *Card* (T-AKV-40), a former aircraft carrier and veteran of World War II. *Card* had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for her involvement in the sinking of eight German U-boats during that conflict. Hence, the ship served as a symbol of the strength of the United States and its military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam.

Meanwhile, *Card's* cooks, bakers, and stewards prepared the morning meal, the smells from the galley mixing with the odor of floating garbage, gasoline, and sewage emanating from the waters of the port. At approximately 0515 local time, just as a South Vietnamese police boat closed on the vessel occupied by the pair of Viet Cong sappers, an explosion ripped into *Card*. Two bombs, each consisting of 88 pounds of C4 and TNT, detonated along the starboard side at the waterline and just aft of the quarterdeck. At that moment, Second Mate Raymond Arbon, a merchant mariner from New Orleans, was walking the quarterdeck. Down in the

boiler room, Fireman John McDonald stood under a vent blower, enjoying what relief he could find from the heat of the boiler and the tropical environment. The detonation sent a geyser of water over the top of the former carrier, knocking Arbon off his feet and drenching him. McDonald was hurled upward into the blower and then thrown back down on the engine room platform as the lights went out. Some veterans on board, who had sailed during World War II and faced German U-boats, thought the ship had been torpedoed.

Card, the first of 11 U.S. merchant ships sunk by enemy action during the long Vietnam War, was an aircraft transport operated by the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS). The ship and three others like it delivered combat planes from the United States to the Republic of Vietnam in an effort to strengthen the country's military, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). President Lyndon B. Johnson, advised by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara after the latter's March 1964 visit to Vietnam, had approved the provision of \$60 million in military assistance to the government of Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh. *Card* left the United States loaded with Douglas A-1 Skyraider attack planes and Bell UH-1B Iroquois "Huey" helicopters for the Vietnam Air Force.

Card was not the first U.S. merchant ship to carry military material to Saigon. In February 1951 during the First Indochina War, USNS *Windham*



North Vietnam commemorated the sinking of *Card* (T-AKV-40) with this propagandized and inaccurate stamp.

Author's Collection

Bay (T-CVE-92), a U.S. Navy-manned escort carrier operated by MSTS, delivered Grumman F8F Bearcat fighters to French forces. Some of the ship's crew heard bomb- or grenade-like explosions when they went ashore, but they were not deterred from enjoying three days of liberty in the Vietnamese city, called by some the "Paris of the Orient."

A decade later, on 11 December 1961, USNS *Core* (T-AKV-41) arrived in Saigon bearing 32 Piasecki H-21 Shawnee helicopters and 400 soldiers of the U.S. Army's 8th and 57th Transport Companies. *Core's* arrival caused quite a stir, particularly with Stanley Karnow, a journalist dining on the terrace of the Majestic Hotel and seated next to a U.S. Army press officer. The two Americans were discussing whether or not American involvement in the war was increasing. As the aircraft ferry arrived in port,

the surprised Karnow exclaimed, "Look at that carrier!" Endeavoring to downplay the evidence that U.S. intervention was indeed on the rise—a Johnson administration tactic—the public affairs officer replied, "I don't see nothing." The Viet Cong, on the other hand, recognized the importance of the sighting and attempted to sink *Core*. The effort failed, however, when VC sappers were unable to ignite their explosive charges.

MSTS served the Navy but civilian merchant mariners crewed *Core* and *Card* and other formerly commissioned U.S. vessels. These civilian-manned ships operated with fewer crew members than they would have during the years of heavy combat that would follow so there were no armed men patrolling *Card's* deck during her fateful visit to Saigon. Moreover, too few South Vietnamese policemen



NHHC VN Collection

kept watch over the port facilities. As a result Lam Son Nao and Nguyen Phu Hung were able to enter the sewer system and travel to a discharge drain that emptied near *Card*, allowing the men, unseen, to attach their explosives to the ship's hull.

The explosion opened the main engine, emergency diesel, generator, and gasoline pump rooms, and shaft alley to the Saigon River. As Arbon recovered from the blast, he noticed the forward and aft mooring lines slacken as the carrier listed to starboard. When emergency lighting snapped on in the engine room, Fireman McDonald discovered water flooding the lower levels, extinguishing the boiler, and cutting off power to the pumps and forcedraft fans. With the loss of watertight integrity, the ship sank to 48 feet—double its normal draft—and settled into the mud alongside the dock.

Borge Langeland, *Card's* master, immediately alerted Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon, the U.S. Navy's major command in the capital, of the ship's situation. The Navy soon dispatched a five-man salvage crew from the Ship Repair Facility at Subic Bay in the Philippines to Saigon. MSTS headquarters in Washington, DC, also flew out two salvage experts, Commander R. E. Wurlitzer and J. W. Giberman. Other naval personnel, Vietnamese contractors, and the salvage ship *Reclaimer* (ARS-42) converged on the port. The team raised the vessel and, 17 days later, *Tawakoni* (ATF-114) took *Card* under tow and brought her first into Subic Bay and later to Yokosuka, Japan, for repairs. The ship returned to duty on 11 December 1964 and soon afterward transported elements of the 1st Cavalry Division to South Vietnam.

By then the United States was already on a direct path to war. In August 1964, three months after the attack on *Card*, North Vietnam's navy attacked the destroyer *Maddox* (DD-731) in the Gulf of Tonkin, prompting President Johnson to order retaliatory carrier strikes on naval vessels and installations in North Vietnam. Of greater significance, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution enabling the President to take military measures he deemed fit to counter Communist aggression in Indochina. Equally focused on war, North Vietnam dispatched

major ground units against the Republic of Vietnam and, in November, Viet Cong forces attacked the U.S. airfield at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, destroying planes and killing American service members.

Card's sinking made the headlines in the United States, but it was soon overshadowed by the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign launched against North Vietnam and the deployment of U.S. combat divisions to South Vietnam. While lacking the drama of the combat operations, the oceangoing logistics effort mounted by the U.S. Navy and America's merchant marine from 1965 to 1973 was nothing short of monumental. The MSTS (renamed the Military Sealift Command in 1970) enabled the United States to fight and sustain an eight-year conflict on the continent of Asia, 7,000 miles from American shores. The U.S. Merchant Marine and its civilian crewmembers transported 99 percent of the ammunition and fuel and 95 percent of the supplies, vehicles, and construction materials employed by allied forces in the war. With dozens of ships steaming between the United States and South Vietnam on any given day of the war, a virtual "steel bridge" spanned the vast Pacific Ocean. ↴



USN

Vice Admiral Emory S. Land oversaw a massive merchant marine building program that was instrumental to America's victory in World War II.

THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE AND EARLY SEALIFT OPERATIONS

The provision of logistics support to U.S. armed forces overseas was a common occurrence in modern American history. During the Philippine-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean War, the merchant marine transported American armies to Asia and Europe and kept those forces well-armed, equipped, and provisioned. The Merchant Marine Act of 1936, championed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, stipulated that it was “necessary for the national defense and development of its foreign and domestic commerce that the United States shall have a merchant marine.” The legislation further provided for a merchant marine “capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency.” The merchant marine especially proved its worth in World War II during which President Roosevelt referred to the organization and its mariners and sailors as the nation’s “Fourth Arm of Defense.” Vice Admiral Emory S. Land simultaneously oversaw the U.S. Maritime Commission, the U.S. Maritime Service, and the War Shipping Administration. Those organizations spurred a building program that produced 5,777 merchant ships that then transported 63 percent of all the world’s goods. After World War II and during the early Cold War, there was much less demand for a sizeable merchant fleet. At the same time, automation and mechanization enabled the fleet to operate fewer but more efficient ships with smaller crews and hence lower operating costs.

Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson authorized establishment of the Military Sea Transportation Service on 1 October 1949. As outlined in its initiating directive, the organization’s purpose was “to provide, under one authority, control, operation and administration of ocean transportation for personnel, material, mail, and other cargo.” Through this directive, American leaders hoped to end interservice bickering between

the Navy and Army, the latter of which had long operated its own vessels. In 1950 the Army transferred its 115 ships and 17,000 merchant mariners and civilian staff members to MSTS.

During the Korean War MSTS grew to a fleet of close to 500 ships (including 214 under charter), which transported 4,750,363 troops, 51,769,067 tons of cargo, and 21,354,978 long tons of petroleum to the combat theater. MSTS also supported the movement to Europe of four U.S. Army divisions in support of the new North Atlantic Treaty Organization, established in 1949. During the period 75 percent of the MSTS operating budget went to the commercial maritime industry.

MSTS ships delivered supplies during the early 1950s to another locale that figured prominently in the next decade—Vietnam. In San Francisco on 25 June 1950—ironically, the first day of the Korean War—SS *Steel Rover* loaded armored vehicles, trucks, jeeps, and ammunition as part of the \$2.6 billion U.S. Mutual Defense Assistance Program. The material was not intended for the South Korean armed forces but for the French forces fighting Communist Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh movement in Indochina.

Ho Chi Minh’s ally in the fight against France was the People’s Republic of China, also hostile to the United States. Hence, it was no surprise when Chinese guns opened up on *Steel Rover* when she passed along the Chinese coast south of Hong Kong on 6 August. One round hit the ship’s starboard side but caused only minimal damage. Escorted by a Royal Navy ship the following day, *Steel Rover* continued her journey and reached Saigon without further incident. Many more U.S. vessels, including 13 ships contracted with the Waterman Steamship Company of Mobile, Alabama, supplied the French throughout the war.

Despite U.S. assistance the Viet Minh defeated their French opponents, most notably at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in the spring of 1954. The resulting

Geneva Agreement of July 1954 provided for French withdrawal from Indochina and the temporary partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The agreement also allowed Vietnamese north of the dividing line, an area governed by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, to settle in the south, which was controlled by a non-Communist government.

The United States aided that effort in Operation Passage to Freedom. In August U.S. Seventh Fleet combatants and MSTs ships, under the command of Rear Admiral Lorenzo S. Sabin, began embarking refugees at Haiphong in the north and transporting them to Saigon in the south. Sabin had served as a vice commander and inspector general of MSTs and directed amphibious operations on Normandy's Omaha Beach during World War II, so he brought a wealth of knowledge about naval and commercial shipping to the mission. A naval vessel, the attack transport *Menard* (APA-201), took on board the first passengers on 16 August. The first MSTs ship to do so was *SS Beauregard*, a chartered freighter/passenger ship that embarked refugees on 2 September.

The exodus generally proceeded uneventfully during the next months, but neither Haiphong nor Saigon possessed adequate cargo facilities or pier space. USNS *Pembina* (T-AK-200), for instance, arrived in Haiphong to load 2,000 tons of cargo, taking 13 days to do so. As another example, Sabin had to enlist merchant seamen, U.S. Sailors, and members of the French Foreign Legion to serve as stevedores in loading *SS Culucundis*.

USNS *Marine Adder* (T-AP-193), one of six MSTs troop transports to take part in the operation, loaded her first refugees on 13 September. During succeeding months the ship made six round trips. Her crew delivered 14 babies while at sea and served the passengers over 82,000 pounds of rice. The ship also gained recognition when she transported the 100,000th Vietnamese refugee to Saigon. Finally, on 18 May 1955 *Marine Adder* became the last U.S. vessel to depart Haiphong in Operation Passage to



Southeast Asia

Freedom. In 1957 the government of the Republic of Vietnam awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to nine nucleus fleet vessels and seven chartered ships, including *Marine Adder* and *Beauregard*. The ocean-going operation transported 293,002 Vietnamese civilians and 14,868 soldiers, 2,978 French military personnel, 8,135 vehicles, and 68,757 tons of cargo.

MSTs streamlined its operations after the First Indochina War. Headquartered in the Old Navy Building on Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C., Commander MSTs oversaw four regional area commands: Eastern Atlantic/Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific, and Far East (based in Yokohama, Japan). The latter command was responsible for supporting the war effort in Vietnam. MSTs also incorporated two former subordinate entities, the Naval Transportation Service and the Petroleum



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Vietnamese refugees board *LST-516* in Haiphong Harbor prior to the ship's departure for southern Vietnam in the 1954–1955 Operation Passage to Freedom.



NM(National Archives), 80-G-652355

Left to right, Lieutenant General W. “Iron Mike” O’Daniel, Rear Admiral Lorenzo S. Sabin, and U.S. Ambassador Donald R. Heath on hand to mark the arrival of 100,000 refugees in southern Vietnam.

and Tankers Branch. The first organization comprised auxiliaries, amphibious ships, transports, attack cargo ships, and oilers manned by naval personnel, and provided logistics support to Navy bases in the Pacific. By the mid-1960s MSTs had decommissioned all but three transports and replaced them with similar ship types with civilian crews. The Petroleum and Tankers Branch originally operated 55 T-2 and 2 T-1 tankers, but by the time of the Vietnam War, MSTs reduced the fleet to 21 T-1, T-2, and larger T-5 tankers. The Keystone Shipping Company, Marine Transport Lines, and Mathiesen Tanker Industries managed and crewed the tankers.

Several factors led to a decline in MSTs’s ability to support a major military commitment in Southeast Asia during the early 1960s. An agreement signed earlier in the Cold War between Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson and

Secretary of Commerce Charles Sinclair Weeks (the Wilson-Weeks Agreement) stipulated that commercial interests would be allocated approximately 50 percent of the overseas shipping business in support of the military. Cost-cutting measures also halved the size of the merchant fleet by late 1964. MSTs then operated 201 cargo ships, tankers, and troop transports.

America’s merchant marine was in somewhat better shape by 1965, operating 965 ships with a combined carrying capacity of 14.7 million deadweight tons. In addition the World War II building program had produced 1,512 vessels (14.4 million deadweight tons) anchored and in reserve at eight locations around the nation. On the negative side,

many of these ships built during that war were obsolete by 1965. The commercial fleet possessed some unique attributes, such as standardized C-class freighters that could handle certain oversized cargo on deck and employ their own equipment to off-load cargo at undeveloped ports. Before Vietnam, the United States also constructed 55 tankers, including the 106,500-ton SS *Manhattan* that dwarfed standard 16,500-ton T-2 tankers.

Hence, MSTs and the merchant marine had both strengths and weaknesses as the United States prepared to deploy major combat forces to Southeast Asia on the eve of the Vietnam War. ↴

MSTS Fleet – 1965 *(All ships are USNS unless otherwise indicated)*

Miscellaneous Auxiliaries:

Mission Capistrano T-AG-162
Kingsport T-AG-164
Pvt. Jose F. Valdez T-AG-169
Sgt. Joseph E. Muller T-AG-171
Phoenix T-AG-172
Provo T-AG-173
Cheyenne T-AG-174
Sgt. Curtis F. Shoup T-AG-175
Shearwater T-AG-177
Harris County T-LST-822
Flyer T-AG-178

Range Instrumentation:

Ranger Tracker T-AGM-1
Range Recoverer T-AGM-2
Longview T-AGM-3
Richfield T-AGM-4
Sunnyvale T-AGM-5
Watertown T-AGM-6
Huntsville T-AGM-7
Wheeling T-AGM-8
General H. H. Arnold T-AGM-9
General Hoyt S. Vandenberg T-AGM-10
Twin Falls T-AGM-11
American Mariner T-AGM-12
Sword Knot T-AGM-13
Rose Knot T-AGM-14
Coastal Sentry T-AGM-15
Coastal Crusader T-AGM-16
Timber Hitch T-AGM-17
Sampan Hitch T-AGM-18
Vanguard T-AGM-19
Redstone T-AGM-20

Oceanographic Research:

Josiah W. Gibbs T-AGOR-1
James M. Gillis T-AGOR-4
Charles H. Davis T-AGOR-5
Sands T-AGOR-6
Lynch T-AGOR-7
Elatnin T-AGOR-8
Mizar T-AGOR-11

Survey:

Bowditch T-AGS-21
Dutton T-AGS-22
Michaelson T-AGS-23

Cable:

Albert J. Myer T-ARC-6

Helicopter Repair:

Corpus Christi Bay T-ARVH-1

Roll-on/Roll-off:

Comet T-LSV-7 *Taurus* T-LSV-8

C-4 Cargo:

Pvt. Leonard F. Brostrom T-AK-255
Marine Fiddler T-AK-267

C-3 Cargo:

Schuyler Otis Bland T-AK-277

C-2 Cargo:

Wyandot T-AKA-92

VC-2 Cargo:

Greenville Victory T-AK-237
Pvt. John R. Towle T-AK-240
Pvt. Francis X. McGraw T-AK-241
Sgt. Andrew Miller T-AK-242
Sgt. Archer T. Gammon T-AK-243
Sgt. Morris E. Crain T-AK-244
Lt. George Boyce T-AK-251
Lt. Robert Craig T-AK-252
Sgt. Truman Kimbro T-AK-254
Pvt. Joseph F. Merrell T-AK-275
Sgt. Jack Pendleton T-AK-276
Lt. James E. Robinson T-AK-274

Fleet Ballistic Missile VC-2 Cargo:

Norwalk T-AK-279 *Furman* T-AK-280

C-1 Cargo:

Fentress T-AK-180
Herkimer T-AK-188
Muskingum T-AK-198
Col. William J. O'Brien T-AK-246
Short Splice T-AK-249
Pvt. Frank J. Petrarca T-AK-250
Mirfak T-AK-271
Sgt. Jonah E. Kelley T-APC-116

Reefer:

Bald Eagle T-AF-50 *Bondia* T-AF-42
Blue Jacket T-AF-51 *Asterion* T-AF-63
Laurentia T-AF-44 *Perseus* T-AF-64

Aircraft Ferries:

Card T-AKV-40 *Core* T-AKV-41
Breton T-AKV-42 *Croatian* T-AKV-43

Light Cargo Ship:

AKL-31 *Redbud* T-AKL-398

Dock Cargo Ship:

Point Barrow T-AKD-1

Landing Ships:

LST-47 *LST-117* *LST-176* *LST-230*
LST-276 *LST-277* *LST-399* *LST-456*
LST-488 *LST-491* *LST-530* *LST-546*
LST-550 *LST-566* *LST-572* *LST-579*
LST-581 *LST-587* *LST-600* *LST-607*
LST-613 *LST-623* *LST-629* *LST-630*
LST-649 *LSM-335*

T-5 Tanker:

Maumee T-AO-149
Shoshone T-AO-151
Yukon T-AO-152
American Explorer T-AO-165
SS Shenandoah

T-2 Tanker:

Suamico T-AO-49
Tallulah T-AO-50
Cache T-AO-67
Pecos T-AO-65
Millicoma T-AO-73
Saugatuck T-AO-75
Schuyllkill T-AO-76
Cosstot T-AO-77
Chepachet T-AO-78
Cowanesque T-AO-79
Mission Buenaventura T-AO-111
Mission San Rafael T-AO-130
Mission Santa Cruz T-AO-133
Mission Santa Ynez T-AO-134
Pioneer Valley T-AO-140
Shawnee Trail T-AO-142

T-1 Tanker:

Rincon T-AOG-77
Nodaway T-AOG-78
Petaluma T-AOG-79
Piscataqua T-AOG-80
Alatna T-AOG-81
Chattahoochee T-AOG-82

P-2 Transport:

General John Pope T-AP-110
USS General W. A. Mann T-AP-112
USS General William Mitchell T-AP-114
General W. H. Gordon T-AP-117
General William Weigel T-AP-119
General Daniel I. Sultan T-AP-120
General Hugh J. Gaffey T-AP-121
General Alexander Patch T-AP-122
General Simon B. Buckner T-AP-123
General Edwin D. Patrick T-AP-124
General Nelson M. Walker T-AP-125
General Maurice Rose T-AP-126
General William O. Darby T-AP-127
USS General J. C. Breckinridge T-AP-176
Barrett T-AP-196
Geiger T-AP-197
Upshur T-AP-198

C-4 Transport:

General R. M. Blatchford T-AP-153
General Leroy Eltinge T-AP-154



NHHC VN Collection

Soldiers of 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, cheer their arrival at Cam Ranh in July 1965 on board the troop transport *General LeRoy Eltinge* (T-AP-154).

THE BUILDUP OF FORCES

In the early months of 1965, President Johnson decided, based on the advice of Secretary of Defense McNamara and other key civilian and military advisors, to mount major military operations against North Vietnam and Communist forces in South Vietnam and Laos. In March, aircraft based on Seventh Fleet carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin and Air Force planes in South Vietnam and Thailand launched the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against North Vietnam. This would last until the end of

October 1968, during which time combat aircraft flew more than 300,000 sorties against North Vietnam and dropped 864,000 tons of bombs and missiles on the nation. This total surpassed both the combined air effort of the Korean War and the Pacific campaign of World War II. Also in March 1965 Seventh Fleet landed a Marine expeditionary brigade in northern South Vietnam to protect the air base at Danang from any Communist retaliation for the U.S. air strikes. That same month, the U.S. Navy deployed ships and patrol planes along South Vietnam's 1,200-mile coast to interdict the seaborne infiltration of arms and other munitions from North Vietnam.

In April President Johnson allowed the Marines ashore to transition from their defensive mission to offensive operations against the Viet Cong in the region around Danang. Two months later the President approved plans to deploy the equivalent of several U.S. Army infantry divisions to sites in South Vietnam, and by 1968 U.S. forces ashore totaled 549,000. Washington also moved ahead with plans to strengthen the military and economic



Left to right, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam Maxwell D. Taylor, Secretary of State Dean C. Rusk, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara discuss aspects of the Vietnam War.



The landing of 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, at Danang on 8 March 1965 marked a significant milestone in the escalation of the Vietnam War.

infrastructure of South Vietnam and the existing counterinsurgency campaign against the Viet Cong. These actions would require an oceanic troop movement and logistics effort on the scale of World War II.

Directing the overall Vietnam logistics support effort from his new headquarters at 3800 Newark



USNI

Vice Admiral Glynn R. Donaho, Commander MSTS, oversaw the massive trans-Pacific movement of U.S. and allied troops and supplies to Vietnam from 1965 to 1967.

Street in Washington, D.C., was Vice Admiral Glynn “Donc” Donaho, Commander MSTS since 30 June 1964. The 1927 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy served on board fleet submarines in the Pacific during World War II. He earned four Navy Cross Medals and a Silver Star while commanding *Flying Fish* (SS-229), *Picuda* (SS-382), and a submarine division.

Managing the voyages to and from Vietnam in 1965 was his subordinate Commander MSTS Far East, Captain James L. Hunnicutt. Headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, Hunnicutt directed the staff work of 23 officers, 45 enlisted sailors, 105 civil servants, and 223 Japanese civilians. Subordinate offices operated at Sasebo and Okinawa, Japan; Taipei, Taiwan; and Inchon and Pusan, South Korea. He later set up offices in Guam, Subic Bay, and Thailand. To carry out his functions, Hunnicutt directed a fleet of three C-1 freighters, a heavy-lift C-4 cargo ship, two coastal cargo ships, five T-1 tankers, and 17 tank landing ships (LSTs).



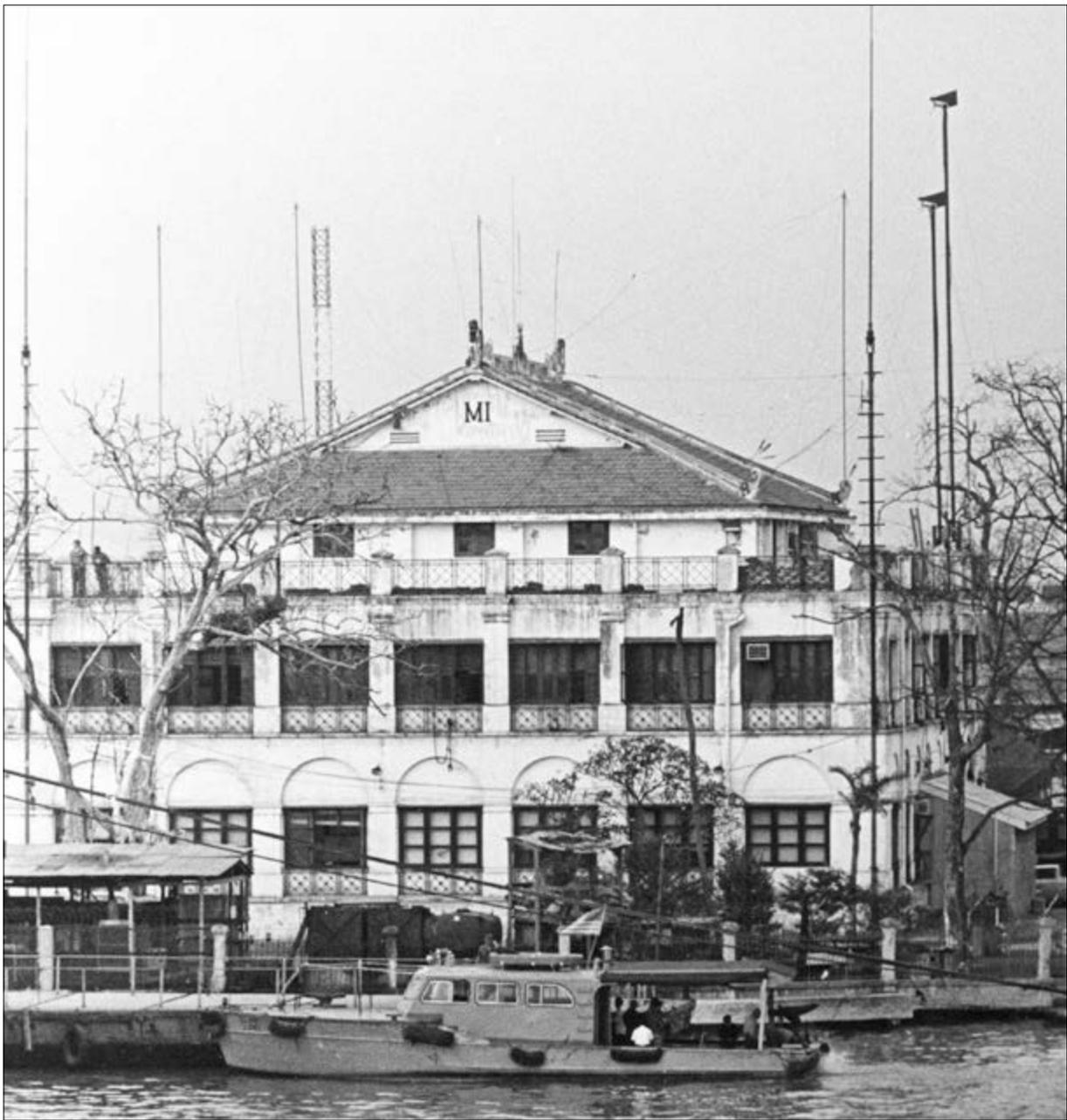
USNI

Pvt. Frank J. Petrarca (T-AK-250), a C1 freighter of the MSTS Far East Fleet, tied up at Saigon, March 1969.

One of the captain’s first priorities was to establish an MSTS presence in Vietnam, so in early 1965 he dispatched Lieutenant Commander G. J. Kaiser (relieved in November 1965 by Captain Donald J. Jacques) and another officer to Saigon. The pair initially operated from a small room at Naval Support Activity Saigon. Eventually, the MSTS office in Saigon, with more than 100 staff members, took over an entire floor of a former French shipping firm on Trinh Minh Street. The office also dispatched several five- to seven-man teams to ports around the country to monitor the arrival, off-loading, and departure of MSTS ships.

The first major combat formation transported to Vietnam after the Marine landing at Danang was the Army’s Okinawa-based 173rd Airborne Brigade. Air Force transports moved most of the troops by air to the base at Bien Hoa, northeast of Saigon. The Navy was called on to bring in the unit’s artillery, antitank guns, engineering equipment, and headquarters staff. USNS *General William A. Mann* (T-AP-112), one of three Navy-manned troopships under MSTS operational control, and three MSTS tank landing ships arrived at Vung Tau, southeast of Saigon, after a five-day voyage from Okinawa. Soon thereafter, they delivered their cargo to the South Vietnamese capital.

The transportation of American forces by sea had been standard throughout U.S. history, so it was not unusual that in 1965 the United States deployed more than half of its expeditionary force to Vietnam on troop transports. MSTS then operated 16



USNI

The French-built headquarters building of MSTs Vietnam on the Saigon waterfront.

troop ships, all of which were run solely by civilian mariners. One of the ships, USNS *General Nelson M. Walker* (T-AP-125), was a veteran of Magic Carpet, the operation to return troops to the United States after World War II and the Korean War. During the latter conflict, she sailed more than 35,000 miles in three months and loaded over 18,000 passengers at 15 different ports. A typical voyage from San Francisco to Vietnam in 1965 for *General Nelson M.*

Walker took 18 to 21 days. A civilian crew of 233 and a military contingent of 18 men operated the 608-foot ship, which could transport 2,746 troops and 454 cabin passengers at a speed of 19 knots.

The passage to Vietnam posed a challenge. The supply line stretched 7,000 miles across the Pacific Ocean from the West Coast of the United States. A ship sailing from San Francisco to Saigon proceeded not westward but northwestward on the Great Circle

Route due to the curvature of the earth. Each vessel first sailed along the Aleutian Chain into the North Pacific—one of the most dangerous bodies of water during the winter months—then southwest, paralleling Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula and the coast of Japan. Merchantmen then had to contend with typhoons, common during the summer months, along the coasts of China and the Philippines. The final leg of the journey brought the ships into the South China Sea, notorious for its shoals and other “dangerous grounds.” For those ships traveling to Saigon, a 45-mile segment remained, including the Long Tau River that passed through the Rung Sat Swamp (the Vietnamese called it the “Forest of Assassins”) teeming with Viet Cong guerrillas.

The trans-Pacific experience was unique for those soldiers, Sailors, airmen, and Marines who

made the voyage to Vietnam on a troopship. One soldier, Jerry Baker, described conditions on board: “It was full of people, always people, wherever you went.” As the ship reached tropical waters, the heat below often became unbearable, compelling many passengers to sleep on the weather deck or in lifeboats. For some, this was their first time on the ocean and seasickness typically hit them very early in the voyage, taxing the ship’s medical departments.

The prolonged transit gave commanders an opportunity to orient the men to their units and prepare them for the mission ahead. The long voyage also afforded the men an occasion to reflect on how they would deal with combat in an alien land. Baker often sought solitude on *General Nelson M. Walker’s* stern. He remembered that “at night there was nothing nearer than the dark with a zillion stars.” He



NH 103688

added, “You’d hear a ‘swrrrr’ sound going through the water [from the ship’s two propellers]. [The stern] was one of those places you could get away to and be by yourself. This was the perfect spot.” Robert Simpson used the time afloat to scribble lyrics on the bottom of the bunk over his head. To the tune of a popular song of the era, “Universal Soldier,” he wrote:

You’re the one who must decide who’s to live and who’s to die.

You’re the one who gives his body as a weapon of the war—

And without you all this killing can’t go on.

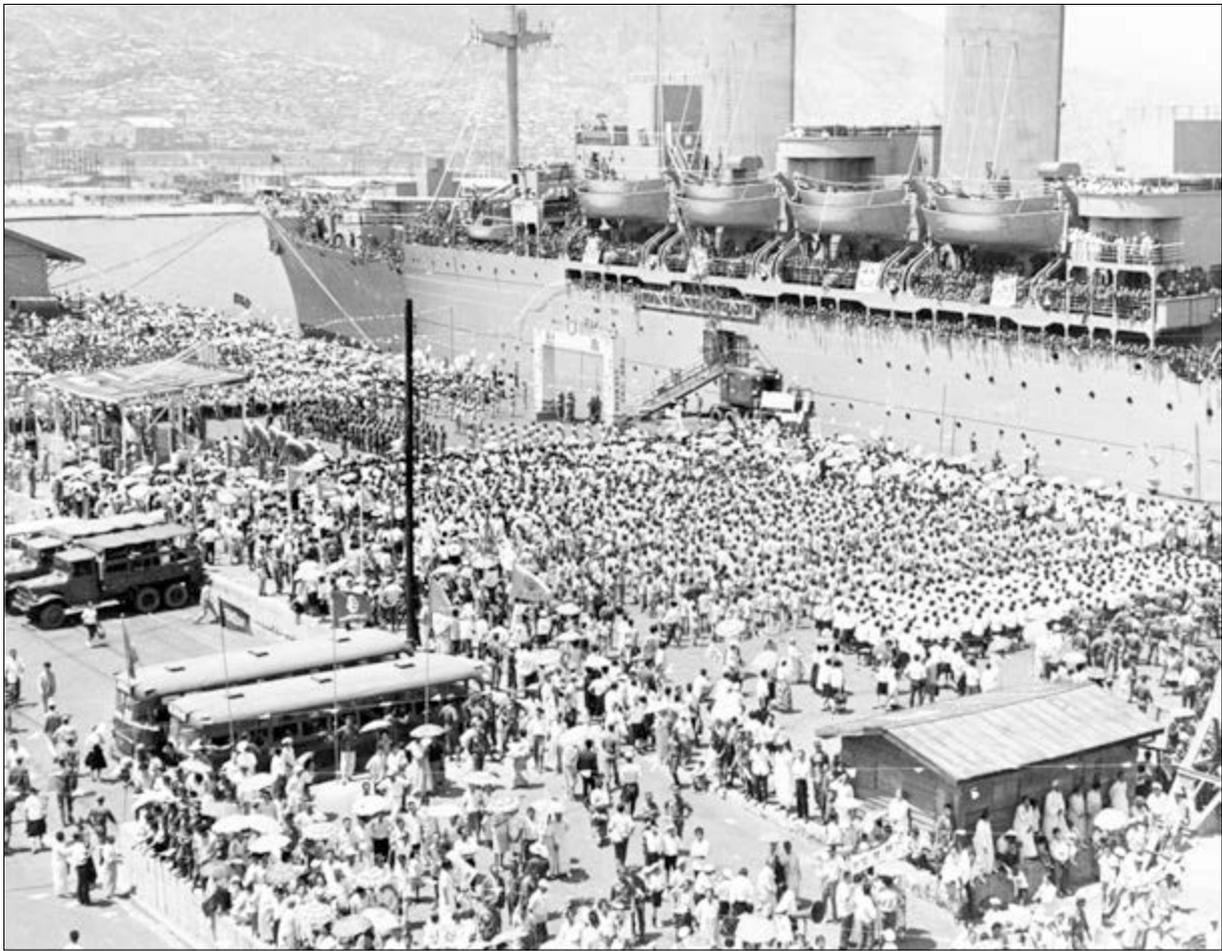
The voyages enabled the soldiers and Marines to ease their transition from peace to war. For those men who survived death or injury during their tours of 12 or 13 months in country, which actually began when they boarded the initial transport to Vietnam, the trip home afforded them time to prepare for the return to civilian life. On both legs of the journey, the men could take advantage of movies, recreational activities, and long hours of conversation with comrades.

Another veteran of the trans-Pacific operation was USNS *General LeRoy Eltinge* (T-AP-154), a freighter converted into a troopship during World War II and then put in reserve. Hastily recalled to service, on 13 May 1965 she set sail from San Francisco to Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam, loaded with the Army’s 35th Engineer Group, which would construct port facilities. The aged troopship, however, broke down 450 miles west of Midway Atoll. USNS *Furman* (T-AK-280) soon rendezvoused with *General LeRoy Eltinge* and towed the immobilized ship to the atoll for repair work. MSTs dispatched USNS *Barrett* (T-AP-196) to the site where she embarked the Army engineers and completed the journey to Vietnam, reaching the destination nine days later than *General LeRoy Eltinge*’s scheduled arrival. During the same period, *General W. H. Gordon* (T-AP-117) and three freighters loaded 2nd Brigade, the 1st Infantry Division’s equipment and transported it and the troops to Qui

Nhon. Once again seaworthy, in July *General LeRoy Eltinge* embarked the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in California. Although configured to carry a maximum of 3,650 troops, the 3,600 soldiers on board complained about the crowded conditions. The soldiers were clearly not enamored with their troopship. One of the paratroopers described the vessel as “five hundred and ten feet of rusting gray steel.” Nonetheless, *General LeRoy Eltinge* completed her mission and delivered the combat unit to Vietnam. She and her sister ship, USNS *General R. M. Blatchford* (T-AP-153), remained in service until January 1967.

President Johnson’s announcement on 28 July 1965 that he was ordering the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to Vietnam occurred at the same time that he decided to significantly reinforce the ground forces already there. During the next several months, the ten MSTs troopships in the Pacific transported the 1st Infantry Division, the Republic of Korea (ROK) Capital “Tiger” Infantry Division, and the ROK Marine Infantry “Blue Dragon” Brigade to Vietnam. By the end of 1965, General William C. Westmoreland, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV) had three Army infantry divisions and a brigade, the 3rd Marine Division, one regiment of the 1st Marine Division (transported by Seventh Fleet amphibious ships), and one Korean division and a brigade on hand. MSTs delivered 82,800 troops to Vietnam in 1965 and the Air Force airlifted another 85,100, nearly an even split between sea and air transportation.

Vice Admiral Donaho marshaled his resources to accomplish the deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to Vietnam. The operation demonstrated MSTs’s ability to accommodate not only the troops but also the equipment for an entire combat division in one operation. Not since the demise of Operation Gyroscope—the rotation of Army divisions to Europe in 1958—had MSTs attempted to move such a large force overseas. To handle the transportation of the airmobile division, comprising 15,000 soldiers, 452 Bell UH-1 “Huey” helicopters, and 98,000 tons of equipment, Admiral



NH 104846

Hundreds of officials and other citizens take part in a June 1967 ceremony in the port of Pusan to mark the departure of South Korean combat troops for Vietnam on board the transport *General W. H. Gordon* (T-AP-117).

Donaho deployed six Atlantic fleet troop transports to Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. To maintain the flow of troops to Europe, MSTs chartered berths on board the superliner SS *United States* and other commercial ships and airliners. On 16 August 1965 USNS *General Simon B. Buckner* (T-AP-123) departed Charleston with the 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division embarked. USNS *General William O. Darby* (T-AP-127), USNS *General Maurice Rose* (T-AP-126), USNS *General Alexander M. Patch* (T-AP-122), USNS *Upshur* (T-AP-198), and USNS *Geiger* (T-AP-197) soon followed.

General Alexander M. Patch and *Upshur* were the first ships to arrive at Qui Nhon with elements of the division's headquarters staff. As other troopships arrived at the port, they anchored in the roadstead

since no oceangoing berths existed there at the time. Landing craft completed the movement of the troops ashore. Afterward, ten freighters arrived carrying trucks and equipment.

Among the MSTs fleet at Qui Nhon were three ships especially suited to the movement of the Army's wheeled vehicles. Developed during the late 1950s, roll-on/roll-off ships enabled vehicles to be driven on and off the vessels quickly via side and stern ramps. USNS *Comet* (T-LSV-7), USNS *Taurus* (T-LSV-8), and SS *Transglobe* participated in the 1st Cavalry Division move. Subsequently, they established a service among Okinawa, Cam Ranh, and Saigon, later adding Qui Nhon, Danang, and Bangkok, Thailand, to their routes.

Another trio of ships loaded the division's helicopters at Mobile, Alabama, and Jacksonville,



South Vietnam

Florida. USNS *Croatan* (T-AKV-41), the refurbished *Card*, and the reactivated USNS *Kula Gulf* (T-AKV-8), carrying a total of 271 aircraft, departed the embarkation ports in August 1965 bound for Vietnam. Overcrowding on board these ships led to disputes among the division commander, Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard and MSTs officers, but they worked out their problems. Rumors that the division would have to launch a combat landing once it reached Vietnam caused further anxiety.

The Navy supplemented these ships, at Admiral Donaho's request, with the amphibious assault ship *Boxer* (LPH-4), originally an *Essex*-class aircraft carrier and combat veteran of World War II. The ship was used to transport Air Force North American P-51 Mustangs to Japan during the Korean War, so the new mission was not unusual. In Jacksonville, she embarked 239 aircraft, including 57 Boeing CH-47 Chinooks, 4 Sikorsky CH-54 Tarhe "Flying Cranes," and 6 Cessna OV-1 Birddogs. The ship then steamed to Qui Nhon by way of the Mediterranean and Suez Canal. Once there, crew



Vice Admiral Glynn R. Donaho, along with his subordinate officers, bounds up the gangway during one of his frequent visits to ships operated by MSTs.

Author's Collection

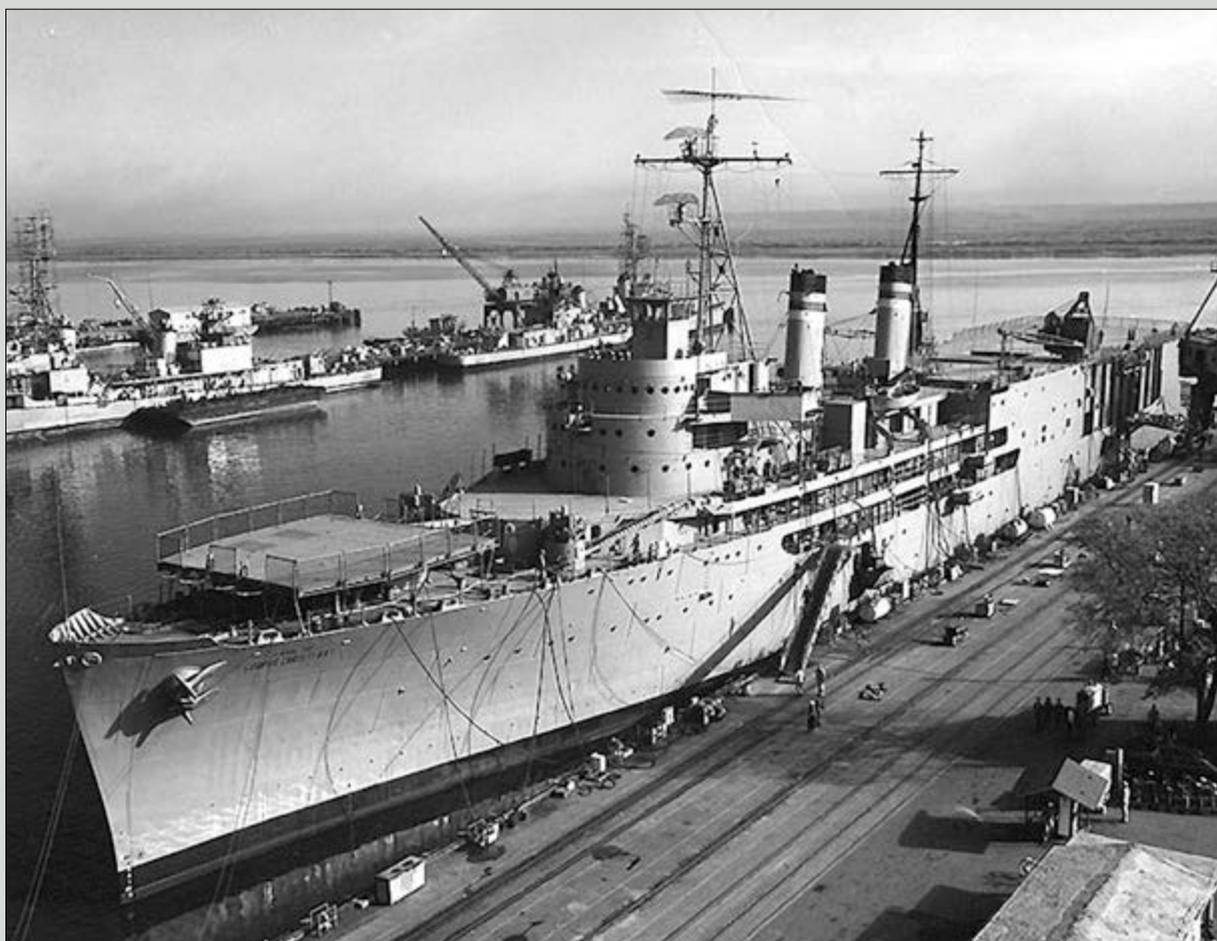
The Army's Aircraft Carrier: USNS *Corpus Christi Bay*

TO PROVIDE REPAIR SUPPORT for the large helicopter complement of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and other units in Vietnam, in August 1964 the Maritime Administration recalled the seaplane tender *Albemarle* (AV-5) from the National Defense Reserve Fleet at James River, Virginia. The ship was then placed in service as USNS *Corpus Christi Bay* (T-ARVH-1) in honor of the Army aviation base in south Texas. Captain Harold Anderson and his crew of 130 merchant mariners and 370 Army technicians placed the ship in service on 27 March 1965.

The naval shipyard at Charleston, South Carolina, transformed the ship into a floating army maintenance facility. The reconfigured vessel boasted

42,000 square feet of workshops, 10,000 square feet of storage area, two helicopter landing pads, and two 20-ton cranes capable of hoisting aircraft. The ship, with Army Lieutenant Colonel Harry O. Davis' 1st Transportation Battalion Air Maintenance Depot (Seaborne) embarked, sailed for Vietnam on 11 January 1966 under MSTC control. The ship carried out her maintenance and repair duties at Cam Ranh Bay, Vung Tau, and elsewhere along the coast of South Vietnam throughout the war.

Following her Vietnam deployment, which ended on 19 December 1972, *Corpus Christi Bay* completed one more mission. In Operation Hula Hoop, the ship, along with USNS *Wheeling* (T-AGM-8), monitored French nuclear tests in the Tuamotu Archipelago



The aircraft repair ship USNS *Corpus Christi Bay* (T-ARVH-1) in Charleston, South Carolina, prior to her departure for service in Vietnam.

of the South Pacific. Plans to maintain the ship in a reserve status at her namesake port proved impossible due to budgetary constraints following the war. *Corpus Christi Bay* was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register in 1974 and scrapped the following year. The afloat aviation support concept lived on, however. During the 1980s the Maritime Administration converted SS *Wright* (T-AVB-3) and SS *Curtiss* (T-AVB-4) to provide repair support for U.S. Marine aviation units. ↴



Author's Collection

Captain Anderson (left), one of six master mariners to command *Corpus Christi Bay* (T-ARVH-1) during her seven-year deployment to Vietnam, hosts a visit to his ship by Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer Jr., Commander II Field Force, Vietnam.



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A UH-1B Iroquois “Huey” helicopter lifts off the aircraft repair ship *Corpus Christi Bay* (T-ARVH-1), then operating at Danang.

members freed the aircraft from their “Spraylot” (shrink-wrapped) coverings and readied them for flight. Landing craft then ferried aircrews out to the ship who flew the aircraft to the 1st Cavalry Division’s base at An Khe in central South Vietnam.

The next period of the Vietnam buildup, which lasted from April 1966 to January 1967, consisted of the MSTS deployment of the 4th Infantry Division, 9th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, and the ROK 9th “White Horse” Infantry Division. Seventh Fleet deployed the remaining two regiments of the 1st Marine Division. In Phase II, MSTS transported 91,000 troops in organized units to Vietnam and airlift-delivered 371,000 men as individual replacements—one out of every five troops traveled by sea.

The 3,124-man 196th Light Infantry Brigade, initially intended for a crisis in the Dominican Republic, boarded *General William O. Darby* and USNS *General Alexander M. Patch* (T-AP-122), under John LeCato, in Boston, Massachusetts, on 15 July 1966. The ships then set sail for Vietnam. After traversing the Panama Canal and stopping briefly at Long Beach, California, the ships delivered their passengers to Vung Tau on 11 August. The 12,358-mile journey then marked the longest troop transit in MSTS history.

In mid-1966 General Westmoreland requested three *Victory*-class ships based in Subic Bay, Philippines—USNS *Phoenix* (T-AG-172), USNS *Provo* (T-AG-173), and USNS *Cheyenne* (T-AG-174)—to deploy the 11th Armored Cavalry “Blackhorse” Regiment, to defend road convoys. The ships had been loaded with combat equipment years before as a readiness measure championed by Secretary of Defense McNamara. He wanted cargo and fuel ships forward deployed near trouble spots. The Vietnam War preempted plans to deploy nineteen floating forward depot (FFD) ships. The overwhelming need for resources in Vietnam ended the experiment. The concept of Army afloat prepositioning would benefit from this experiment in the future, however, when the Army revived the concept in 1994—ships deployed at Diego Garcia loaded out the equipment of the 11th Armored Cavalry



Author's Collection

A T-1 tanker pumps fuel ashore to a tank farm at Vung Tau, a port on the southern end of the dangerous route to Saigon.

Regiment, then being demobilized in Germany.

With the completion of Phases I and II, MSTs placed four P-2 transports in reduced operation at Caven Point, New York, and three P-2 and two C-4 transports at Hunter's Point, California. A skeleton crew of 50 merchant mariners at each site kept the ships ready for activation in 90 to 120 days for potential use in another sealift operation.

During Phase III, which ended in June 1968, seven MSTs transports deployed additional units to Vietnam, including the Royal Thai Army Volunteer "Queen's Cobra" Regiment, two U.S. Army divisions, and two U.S. Marine Corps regiments. With this mission completed, by 1970 MSTs deactivated the ships at Cavin and Hunter's Points. During the last years of the war, only *Barrett* and *Upshur* remained in the troop transport business; the pair deployed elements of the Thai "Black Panther" Division to Saigon and rotated Korean troops between Vietnam and South Korea. After the war, these vessels and sister ship *Geiger* were employed in the training of thousands of merchant mariners at the New York, Maine, and Massachusetts maritime academies. ↴



USNI

Hoping to stem the Communist tide in South Vietnam during 1965, General William C. Westmoreland, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, urged MSTs to rush the deployment of combat troops to the war zone.



NH 104181

General Simon B. Buckner (T-AP-123), *General William O. Darby* (T-AP-127), *General Alexander M. Patch* (T-AP-122), and *General Maurice Rose* (T-AP-126) of the MSTS Ready Reserve Fleet tied up at the Cavin Point, New York, Army Depot in early 1967.



National Archives K-54226

USNS *Sea Lift* (T-LSV-9) underway in the East China Sea in 1968. Renamed USNS *Meteor* (T-AKR-9) in 1975, she was one of a planned class of six vessels, capable of transporting an entire armored division.



USNI

SS Brinton Lykes enters the port of Seattle. Lykes Lines and other shipping firms were critical to the success of the war's seaborne logistics effort.

ORGANIZING THE TRANS-PACIFIC LOGISTICS OPERATION

The Wilson-Weeks Agreement dating from the 1950s limited the size of the MSTS nucleus fleet in peacetime but enabled the Navy to obtain extra ships in times of conflict. From 1965 to 1968 the MSTS nucleus fleet grew modestly. The number of ships expanded from 68 to 91, including two aircraft transports, three troop transports, and 25 LSTs.

To handle the Vietnam buildup, however, the government looked primarily to the civilian marketplace. One of the first actions performed was to call upon the established U.S. shipping companies to honor service agreements that allowed the Navy to contract for cargo or ships. Many of the Pacific-based shipping firms initially added Saigon as one of their ports of call. As cargo backed up at Saigon—sometimes idling ships for weeks and impacting service to other ports in the region—the firms not only charged the U.S. government hefty late fees but balked at taking on new military cargo.

In December 1966 the Navy solicited contract bids whose purpose was to stimulate competition in the American shipping industry. It worked. American Export-Isbrandtsen, American Mail, American President Lines, Isthmian, Lykes Brothers, Pacific Far East, States Marine Lines, States Steamship, United States Lines, and Waterman Steamship signed contracts with the naval service. These agreements specified that the contracting firm had to provide space in their ships for military cargo and include Saigon in their scheduled stops.

MSTS also directly chartered vessels from two firms that figured prominently in the Vietnam buildup—Lykes Line and Seatrain. Fidel Castro's Cuban revolution and the resulting U.S. embargo in the early 1960s severely reduced the shipping business in the Caribbean that Lykes Line had dominated. At the same time ships that the company had ordered constructed in more profitable times began to roll off the building ways. Beginning in 1960



Author's Collection

The MSTS Contracting Office. Civilians played a major role in the logistics support of the Vietnam War.

26 *James Lykes*-class C3 freighters and 12 *Louise Lykes*-class C4 cargo ships entered service. The firm then had an excess number of modern freighters with little business to conduct in the region. Seizing the opportunity, Lykes Line signed contracts with the Navy that assigned a sizeable number of the company's ships to MSTS and Vietnam service. The sight of Lykes Line freighters tied up at the docks in Southeast Asia became common during the war.

Another firm similarly affected was Seatrain, known for pioneering the field of ocean transportation of fully loaded railroad boxcars. The military prized these ships for their ability to haul large pieces of equipment and oversized cargo. During World War II *Kitty Hawk* (AKV-1), formerly SS *Seatrain New York*, delivered Navy and Marine Corps aircraft to Midway Island just prior to the climactic 1942 battle. SS *Seatrain Texas*, famous for her delivery of Sherman tanks to the British 8th Army on the eve of the Battle of El Alamein in World War II, frequently docked at Saigon during the Vietnam conflict. MSTS employed a dozen Seatrain vessels during the 1965–1968 buildup.

Despite a labor strike for improved working conditions and pay that idled 100 ships at Atlantic and Gulf ports, U.S. shippers and labor unions rallied to

the cause when MSTS called on them. The shippers and labor unions were the first to handle the initial wave of combat units deploying to Vietnam, making available 47 ships for three to six months of service.

A sizeable increase in the number of ships available for Vietnam service occurred in 1965 when Secretary of Commerce John T. Connor mobilized 25 ships of the National Defense Reserve Fleet, many of which had been anchored at eight sites around the country since World War II. Because of the Vietnam emergency, the first ships went to sea without resolving numerous mechanical problems; some of them immediately broke down. Better preparation of ships for sea duty, most of them VC-2 *Victory*-class ships, later reduced underway problems. During the buildup from 1965 to 1968, the Maritime Administration activated 172 ships from the reserve fleet at a cost of \$549,000 per ship, in the process scrapping 28 ships that failed to measure up to operational requirements. The administration also negotiated agreements with 40 shipping companies to manage the activated vessels.

Finally, the government contracted for the services of 30 foreign ships (10 percent of the total chartered on average, each year). The use of non-American ships and crews, however, sometimes



The Master of Sealift: Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage

NO MSTs COMMANDER WAS MORE RESPONSIBLE

for the success of the trans-Pacific logistics operation of the Vietnam War than Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, USN.

A 1931 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Ramage earned national fame during World War II as one of America's most fearless and successful submarine commanders. As the commanding officer of *Parche* (SS-384), on 31 July 1944 he led his submarine into battle against a heavily defended Japanese convoy and sank four merchant ships. His extraordinary courage and professional leadership under fire earned Ramage the nation's highest award, the Medal of Honor. Similar feats against other Japanese merchantmen and warships resulted in the award of a Navy Cross and a Gold Star in lieu of a second Navy Cross.

During the postwar period, Ramage ascended the Navy's hierarchy as he commanded submarine forces and served in key billets in the Pentagon. In recognition of his superior leadership and organizational skills, in July 1964 Chief of Naval Operations David L. McDonald appointed him Commander Third Fleet and shortly afterward Deputy Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet.

Understanding the need for an exceptional leader to handle the challenging Vietnam support effort, in March 1967 the Navy called on Ramage to command MSTs. Ironically, the storied warrior, who had sunk many merchant ships in World War II, directed the operations of the U.S. merchant marine in the Vietnam War. He readily took on the responsibility, since he later stated that even before he joined the Navy, he "had [his] eyes set on the merchant marine."

From the start, Ramage focused not only on maintaining the flow of vital supplies to the fighting forces in Vietnam but also improving the function and cost-effectiveness of the operation. He worked especially hard to strengthen relations between the Navy on the one side and the commercial shipping industry, merchant seaman's unions, and foreign-flag carriers on the other. Recognizing that "we couldn't get enough U.S. tankers," the admiral chartered foreign-flag ships that, at one point, constituted almost half of the vessels in the petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) pipeline. He championed the contract with Sea-Land Services because of its revolutionary employment of container ships and shipping containers to deliver supplies to the forces ashore. He was especially proud



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Vice Admiral Lawson P. Ramage, April 1967. The MSTs commander ensured that the 500,000 American troops fighting in South Vietnam were amply supplied with ammunition, fuel, weapons, and other vital resources.

that containers with "refrigerated cargo . . . would come off the ship [and be transported by truck to the troops so that] they had frozen or chilled produce right there at their doorstep." He believed that "this greatly increased the quality of the food they were getting." He was equally pleased with the efficiency of Alaska Barge and Transport's movement of supplies along Vietnam's coast and into the rivers as well as the bravery of the company's civilian mariners. Ramage improved the efficiency of the 500-plus logistics fleet by inactivating scores of older ships and promoting the development of more capable cargo ships and tankers.

The admiral later observed that his time at the helm of MSTs was "the greatest experience of my life." The Navy was equally pleased with the admiral's performance, awarding him a Gold Star in lieu of a second Distinguished Service Medal when he stepped down as commander of MSTs and retired from the Navy on 1 April 1970. The *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer USS *Ramage* (DDG-61) commemorates the sixth commander of MSTs. ⚓



USN

Cargo handlers off-load C-rations transported to Danang by SS *Hibueras* in December 1966.



Author's Collection

Stevadores help off-load bombs from an MSTS ammunition ship.

caused problems. For instance, the Mexican government prohibited employment of SS *El Mexicano* in the Vietnam War zone. The crew transferred the military cargo to a Greek ship but their government also refused to allow its vessel to enter Vietnam. Finally, after much delay, an American ship completed the delivery.

Even as MSTS gathered resources for the Herculean logistics effort, ships already in service rushed critical war materials to the operational theater. Initially, too many ships crowded into Vietnam's few ports, severely complicating port operations. To cope with the situation, MSTS Far East established interim anchorages in the Philippines, Okinawa, and Guam. The service office in Subic Bay synchronized the movement of ships from the reserve sites with MSTS Office Vietnam. It also directed some ships to transfer their cargo to lighters for delivery to smaller outlying ports.

The Navy established a "special express" program to expedite the movement of high-priority Air Force munitions to Vietnam. As directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), in April 1965 MSTS chartered SS *Audrey J. Luckenbach*, the first of the program's dedicated ships. By June 1966 19 ships served the "special express" mission. Convinced of the program's value, the Navy's Chief of Material then persuaded MSTS to set aside four ships as floating forward depots to support Seventh Fleet's ammunition requirements. The service ended the express program in early 1967, once Vietnamese port services were able to expedite the flow of ammunition to the combat forces.

General Westmoreland's command planned for major depots in Saigon and Cam Ranh that would have on hand supplies that could sustain combat operations for 45 days. COMUSMACV also wanted the support commands at Vung Tau, Can Tho, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Danang to have 15 days' worth of supplies on hand. At first, the Army Materiel Command (AMC) employed a "push" system for ships fully loaded with supplies that the AMC thought the combat units wanted. Frequently, however, laden ships arrived lacking material the combat troops desperately needed. Later, AMC adopted a "pull system" in which the depots in Vietnam communicated the needs of the combat units before the Army loaded the cargo onto MSTS ships in the United States.

POL were other vital commodities transported by MSTS ships throughout the war. Anticipating the need for fuel to power Air Force and Marine aircraft, even before the buildup in Vietnam, Secretary of Defense McNamara deployed a pair of tankers for storage at Subic Bay. Waiting for the call to action in April 1965 were USNS *Petaluma* (T-AOG-79) and the T-2 tanker USNS *Cossatot* (T-AO-77). *Petaluma* was a 325-foot tanker powered by four diesel-electric engines, crewed by merchant mariners, and carrying 4,000 tons of aviation fuel.

The ship's third officer, Charles Hoffman, read an article in *Stars and Stripes* about Marines preparing to land at Chu Lai in northern South Vietnam. Ironically, the next day Hoffman learned of orders directing his ship to Chu Lai. At a top speed of



USNI

A Lykes Lines ship chartered by MSTs off-loads oil drums at Saigon the old-fashioned way. Tankers employing hose lines that stretched from ship to shore proved a much more effective method for delivering fuel.

10 knots, it took the ship 75 hours to reach what *Petaluma's* officers had identified as Chu Lai. Only the following day did they discover that their actual destination was 60 miles to the north. Unfamiliarity with the country's geography caused similar problems in the early war years.

A tank farm for the storage of POL destined for Saigon existed just south of the capital at Nha Be. Prior to 1965, the commercial firms Caltex, Esso, and Shell maintained one million gallons of fuel there. Once hostilities against North Vietnam had begun, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff determined that close to two million gallons—or a 30-day supply—needed to be stored there for the use of U.S. armed forces in the Saigon region.

To meet that challenge and keep fuel flowing to U.S. forces throughout the country, MSTS reinforced the tanker fleet; USNS *Saugatuck* (T-AO-75) and USNS *Chattahoochee* (T-AOG-82) joined *Cossatot* and *Petaluma* on the runs to Nha Be, Cam Ranh, Danang, and Qui Nhon. Smaller T-1 tankers anchored off the country's smaller ports to deliver their cargo ashore via lighters or floating hoses. By 1968 Danang and Cam Ranh could accommodate large tankers, including T-5s. At the height of the war, a tanker loaded with POL supplies, two-thirds of which came from the Middle East, arrived off

Vietnam every ten days. The Six-Day War of June 1967, which resulted in the closure of the Suez Canal and an oil embargo, put a strain on the logistics effort, but only temporarily disrupted the flow of POL. MSTS sought out alternative oil supplies in the Caribbean and the United States and chartered more foreign-flag tankers to carry the cargos to the Western Pacific.

In addition to ammunition and fuel, MSTS assured the provision of ample perishable and nonperishable food to General Westmoreland's troops. In the early years four refrigerator ships serviced Vietnam: USNS *Perseus* (T-AF-64), USNS *Asterion* (T-AF-63), SS *Contest*, and SS *Flying Dragon*. To accommodate the growing number of troops streaming into the country, the service deployed a pair of refrigerator ships off Danang. The Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) wanted a 15-day supply of food on hand, therefore, MSTS contracted the United Fruit Company's entire fleet of "banana boats," mainstays of the Caribbean trade, to provide fresh food to the troops during the buildup. Later in the war, refrigerated container ships replaced many of United Fruit's ships.

In a speech at the Naval War College in 1969, Vice Admiral Ramage, the MSTS commander, observed that one of his major challenges was



NHHC WJ Collection



USN 112655 NHHC

Perseus (T-AF-64) steams from San Francisco with a cargo of refrigerated goods in August 1967.

finding crews for the merchant ships. The average age of a merchant mariner at that time was 50, not typical of the average young Sailor, airman, Marine, or soldier serving in country. Each ship called up from the reserve fleet needed a crew of 40 officers and men. To cope with the problem, the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point, New York, and the state maritime academies shortened the graduation times for future deck and engineering officers. MSTs also installed more automated equipment in its ships to lessen the need for sizeable crews. Ramage also bemoaned the constant push and pull between MSTs and the commercial sector for ships. Unlike World War II, when the nation employed all of its resources for survival, during the "limited conflict" in Vietnam, the rule was business as usual with many shipping firms searching for profits. Finally, he observed that too many freighters and tankers built in World War II were approaching obsolescence and taxing the efficiency of the logistics effort. These deficiencies, however, important as they were, did not appreciably hamper the oceangoing logistics effort. ↴



NH103229

Seventy-seven-year-old Junior Licensed Engineer Anthony F. Rieber stands by to operate the engine order telegraph on board *General Maurice Rose* (T-AP-126) in 1966. He and other veteran merchant mariners answered the call by MSTs for experienced crews.



USNI

Ships tied up at Cam Ranh Bay's North Pier (left) and Delong Pier, January 1966.

MOVING CARGO ONTO AND ALONG THE SHORE

The U.S. logistics support establishment had to not only transport military material to Vietnam but also move it ashore. Even as MSTs gathered and deployed its maritime assets for the buildup, other commands evaluated Vietnam's capacity to handle the massive influx of soldiers, tanks, trucks, artillery pieces, construction materials, ammunition, fuel, and other essential war-making supplies. They were distressed with what they found; few places on earth were as unprepared as Vietnam in 1965 to accommodate such a monumental influx. Danang, Qui Nhon, and Cam Ranh boasted excellent natural harbors on the South China Sea, and Saigon, while far inland, had been a major port since French colonial times. The port facilities at these sites, however, were minimal or nonexistent. Saigon boasted 10 berths—only three of which handled military cargo—for oceangoing ships and Cam Ranh had two, but Vietnam had no other deep-water berths. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Paris Clark, on the MACV J-4 (logistics) staff, summarized the situation. He observed that “ten first-class ports in the continental United States were shipping materiél to South Vietnam as fast as they could, but MACV only had four second-class ports to receive it.”

Few warehouses or outdoor storage sites existed at any port to accommodate a massive influx of equipment and supplies. Since South Vietnam's railroads had been largely destroyed by the fighting and its roads were rudimentary or under enemy control, much of the material shipped to the major ports had to be reloaded onto coastal vessels for delivery to smaller ports. Too few of the efficient U.S. utility landing craft (LCUs) reached Vietnam in 1965. A lack of requisite material-handling equipment—trucks, forklifts, pallet-jacks, and handcarts—slowed the movement of cargo off the docks. Vietnamese port authorities had to employ an army of unskilled stevedores to off-load incoming cargo. Few watercraft



Chief Boatswain's Mate Charles H. Fitzgerald (left) confers with William B. Barton, the master of *SS President McKinley*, as the ship enters Danang in June 1968.



Old salts. Master Chief Boatswain's Mate John Gonzalez (left), Chief Boatswain's Mate William Fischer, and Chief Boatswain's Mate Harold W. Hurst discuss their duties as Danang harbor pilots, May 1967.



USNI

The busy port of Saigon, with the MSTS Vietnam headquarters shown in the lower center of the photo, needed extensive development.



Author's Collection

Cargo unloaded from SS *President Pierce* awaits transportation from a Saigon dock to U.S. military bases inland.

were available to lighter or transport material from ships anchored in the harbor to the shoreside facilities. Finally, cultural, linguistic, and other differences between South Vietnamese and U.S. logistics authorities complicated delivery. The ports soon became hopelessly clogged with cargo waiting for movement inland and ships stood idle because they could not be unloaded. The situation was so chaotic that by November 1965, 122 fully loaded ships waited at anchor off Saigon and at holding areas throughout Southeast Asia, Japan, and Guam.



USNI

Forklifts operated by Vietnamese women help unload cargo. Thousands of Vietnamese civilians—male and female—worked long hours moving the supplies forward.

The U.S. Army's 1st Logistics Command, established in April 1965, began a robust construction program to expand and improve South Vietnam's port facilities. Lending support to that effort were MSTS, Service Force Pacific Fleet, Naval Support Activity Saigon, and Naval Support Activity Danang. The objective of this enormous project was to build additional piers for oceangoing ships at Saigon, Danang, Cam Ranh, and Qui Nhon and berths at the minor ports of Can Tho/Vung Tau, Chu Lai, Phan Rang/Nha Trang, and Vung Ro. Eventually, there would be 32 deep-draft piers in South Vietnam. When the minor ports were ready to receive ships, MSTS Office Vietnam posted 5- to 8-man teams at each to coordinate cargo deliveries.

In August 1966 even as the piers were being built at the various ports, the Army Corps of Engineers brought in large dredges to clear 65 million cubic



USNI

Commander Robert W. Freeman, Officer in Charge MST5 Unit Cam Ranh Bay, July 1968. The U.S. naval personnel who served at Vietnam's seaports proved essential to the speedy delivery of supplies.



USNI

Radioman Second Class R. G. Brown of MST5 Unit Cam Ranh Bay communicates with his counterpart at Qui Nhon to coordinate ship arrivals at these ports on the central coast of South Vietnam, July 1968.

feet of mud from South Vietnam's harbors, large navigable rivers, and ship channels. The dredges accomplished their mission, but not without cost. Viet Cong sappers killed three civilian crewmen and sank *Jamaica Bay* on 9 January 1967 and, in later years of the war, the VC sank the dredges *Thu Bon I*, *Sandpumper*, *Davidson*, and *New Jersey*.

For Vietnam the Army adapted a technology that had enabled the Allies to hold and then expand their Normandy invasion beachhead during World War II. The Mulberry harbors, built by the United States



NHHC VN Collection

The Army dredge *New Jersey* works to keep Cam Ranh Bay navigable for deep draft ships. Viet Cong underwater sappers sank the dredge in the latter part of the war, killing three civilian crewmen.

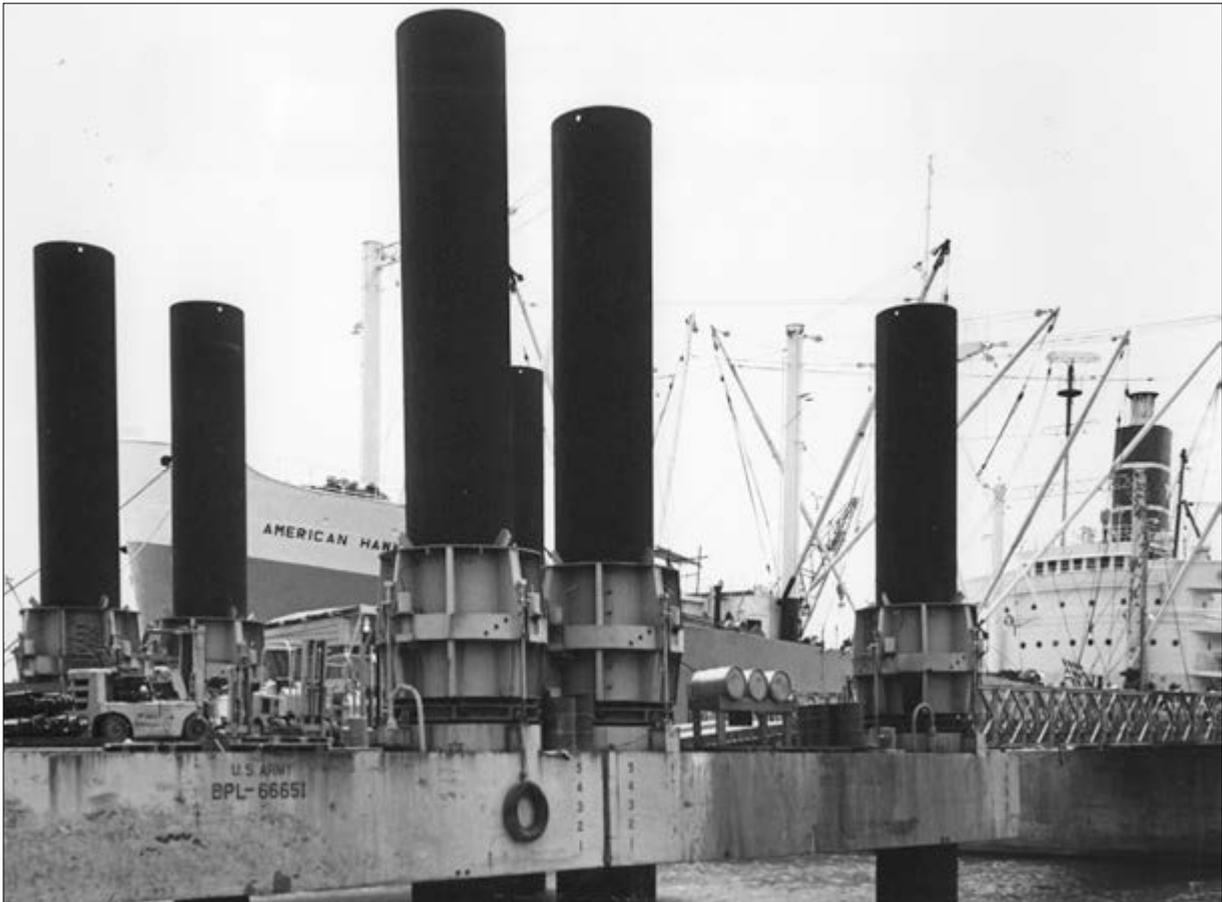
and Great Britain, helped the Allies move equipment and supplies ashore even before they had captured Cherbourg, Antwerp, and other major ports from the Germans. During the 1950s the United States devised a similar structure, the Delong Pier, that consisted of a string of connected barges anchored by pilings. In 1966 MST5 transported one, in two pieces, from Charleston, South Carolina, to Danang and reassembled it there in 45 days. After the success of that operation, MST5 had firms in Japan build Delongs for South Vietnam's other ports. By the end of pier construction, South Vietnam could handle more than 500,000 short tons per week, up from an original 16,000 tons.

Army engineers also established mooring points seaward of the major ports, allowing MST5 tankers to pump fuel through underwater hose lines to tank farms and bladders ashore. Recognizing that there was no additional space for berths at Saigon, the Army constructed an entirely new \$25 million cargo facility, aptly named Newport, just upriver from Saigon. By April 1967 it boasted four berths



USN

Logistics operations at deep draft piers constructed at Danang.



USN

A Delong Pier at Cam Ranh Bay takes on cargo from SS *American Hawk* in April 1967. Enemy underwater sappers sank the ship at Qui Nhon in June 1971.

for oceangoing ships and four ramps for LSTs. To assist in the distribution of cargo all along the coast, MSTs and the Navy dispatched LSTs, landing craft, mechanized (LCMs), and LCUs to South Vietnam. The Army also provided lighter amphibious resupply cargo (LARC) vehicles that could move from the water onto the beach to deliver supplies.

According to an article in *Sealift* magazine, in March 1966, Secretary of Defense McNamara observed:

Indeed we are moving more than 700,000 measurement tons per month to Southeast Asia by ship and these ships are now being unloaded promptly. In November of last year we had 122 ships with military cargoes awaiting unloading in South Vietnamese ports or in holding areas. This total is now down to 41 ships, well within the normal range for an operation of this size. The cargo backlog, which rose as high as 257,000 measurement tons on the 27th of November, is now down to less than 100,000 tons, the equivalent of 4 days of work at the current unloading rate.

Even veteran mariners noted the change in the scope and scale of operations. Captain A. G. Smith of *SS Mormachawk* wrote to the commander of Naval Support Activity Danang, “Please be advised that the discharge of this vessel by Naval personnel . . . was over and above, in every respect, any comparable operation this writer has experienced during World War II, the Korean, and present Vietnam conflicts.”

One of the hallmarks of U.S. maritime and naval history has been the country’s ability to introduce and adopt new technologies such as clipper ships, steam propulsion, and steel hulls. During the Vietnam War vessels capable of over-the-beach supply, tugs and barges, and cargo containers made significant contributions to the logistics effort.

American LSTs first made their mark in World War II. American naval leaders considered the logistics ship so essential to a successful landing in Normandy that they recommended delaying the operation until enough were on hand. Upset about the delay, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill referred to the cause as “some goddam things called LSTs.” The American LSTs proved their worth not



The fuel bladders on the beach at Cam Ranh Bay supplemented more permanent storage facilities inland.

USN



USNI

A wharf intended to accommodate oceangoing vessels is under construction at Newport, a facility north of Saigon.

only on D-Day but throughout World War II and the Korean War.

American naval leaders understood in 1965 that, with Vietnam's ports unable to handle a massive movement of incoming supplies, only vessels capable of "logistics over-the-shore" operations could ease the burden. The LST was ideally suited for that mission. Each 4,000-ton, 327-foot ship could load and discharge cargo, including tracked and wheeled vehicles, through cavernous bow doors directly onto the beach or onto quickly built concrete ramps. MSTS employed some of its LSTs to load supplies at Saigon, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh, and Danang and to distribute those materials at smaller ports along the coast and into the larger rivers of South Vietnam. Other ships transported material from Subic Bay and Japan by way of Okinawa.

These ships were unique in one respect: Japanese and Korean nationals crewed them. Right after World War II, the United States occupation authorities in Tokyo and Seoul employed Japanese and Korean mariners aboard LSTs to repatriate hundreds of thousands of former Imperial Japanese Army soldiers. The ships and their non-American crews continued to serve U.S. interests during the Korean War and remained in operation right up to the Vietnam War.

At the end of 1965, Admiral Donaho realized that the seven LSTs then carrying out duties along the coast of Vietnam were too few to accomplish all the missions required by MACV. By activating ships and transferring others from the Atlantic, Donaho added 19 LSTs to the MSTS Far East fleet by March 1966. Another six ships—all manned by Koreans—entered Vietnam service in February



NH 74483

T-LST-572 discharges cargo at Danang's Museum Pier in January 1966.



USNI

An Army truck and a crane unload ammunition and other cargo from *T-LST-277*, one of the versatile LSTs operated by MSTs.



USNI

Army trucks stand by to take on board barbed wire and other cargo delivered by *T-LST-491* in July 1967.

1967. Eventually, 42 LSTs supported MSTs as did the Navy's Landing Ship Squadron 2 with five ships crewed by American Sailors. The Republic of Korea, the Republic of China (Taiwan), and Thailand operated a total of six LSTs as part of the multinational effort to preserve the independence of South Vietnam.

Complementing the work of the LSTs were tugs and barges that MSTs chartered for Vietnam service. Ironically, the Alaska Barge and Transport Company (AB&T), headquartered in Vancouver,

Washington, proved to be one of the stars of the logistics effort. Beginning in December 1965, AB&T convoyed 17 World War II-era *Miki*-class tug boats and 38 barges across the Pacific. These units began their work in March 1966 and served throughout the war. They proved indispensable to logistics movement on the South Vietnamese rivers and canals. AB&T's units not only transported material but also carried out stevedoring, towing, salvage, and liberty boat services. At the peak of operations, the company employed 1,200 Vietnamese and 220 American civilians. Rear Admiral Samuel Moore, Commander MSTC Far East and later Commander Military Sealift Command, related that he had "never seen a more dedicated group of men on such a job."

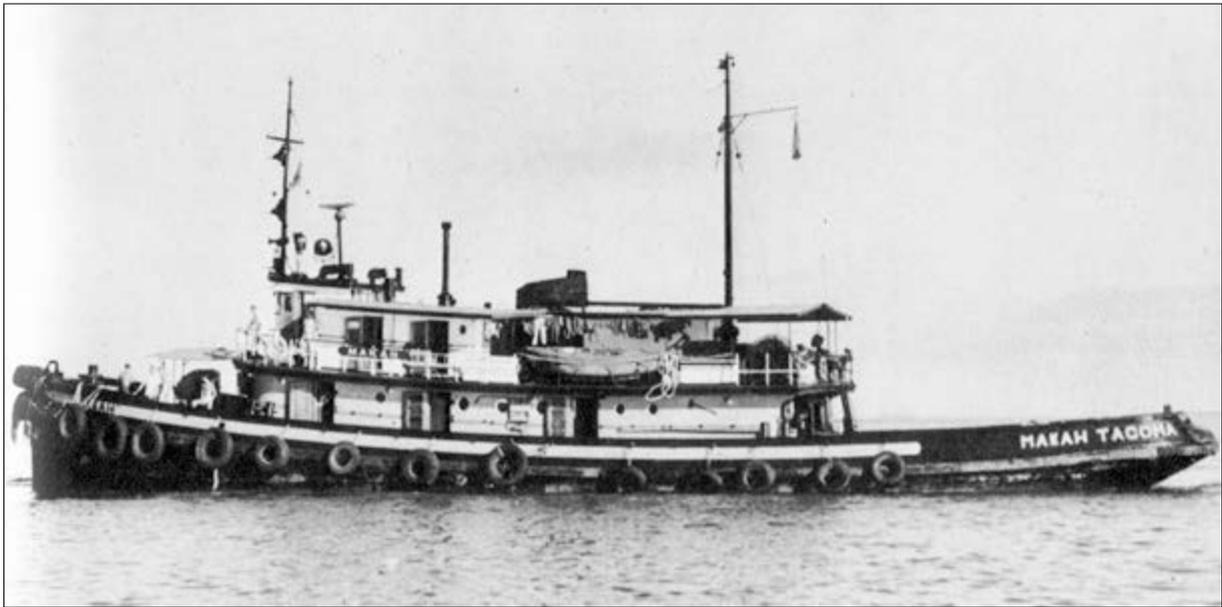
AB&T crews braved enemy fire to transport supplies along the inland waterways of South Vietnam and, later in the war, the Mekong River to Cambodia. The *Miki*-class tugs had been constructed of wood, due to steel shortages during World War II, and their hulls and deckhouses often proved more resistant and better able to absorb damage from Soviet- and Chinese-built rockets than steel.

The Viet Cong frequently targeted the company's tugs and barges, which were unarmed and manned by merchant mariners. On 7 April 1968 the tug *Michael* became the first such vessel to experience an enemy attack on the Mekong River. That morning, Viet Cong rockets severed the tow cable and drum on the aft of the tug and also exploded in the pilothouse, severely wounding Captain Wally



The Saigon headquarters of the Alaska Barge and Transport Company, which operated tugs and barges in the dangerous waters of South Vietnam from the beginning of the war to the very end.

Proux and Mate James Almony. Relief Captain Nathan Durbin rushed to the bridge and assumed command. He piloted *Michael* out of danger and stopped her at Vung Tau to seek medical assistance for Proux and Almony, but both merchant mariners succumbed to their wounds. Even ashore, AB&T's merchant mariners faced danger. On the 4th of July 1968, a Viet Cong platoon launched mortar, rocket, and small arms fire against the base at Phan Rang that killed one merchant mariner. During the war AB&T lost 11 tugs and barges to enemy action and



Author's Collection

The Miki-class tug *Makah* underway.

natural events. Despite the danger, the men of this firm provided vital logistical support throughout the war.

The use of cargo containers proved to be one of the most innovative, efficient, and timely means of providing logistics support to America's armed forces in Vietnam. Historians credit Malcolm McLean, a former truck driver and owner of the seventh largest trucking company in the United States during the 1950s, with designing the modern shipping container. He believed that a container could be loaded with cargo at a point of origin, sealed, transported by truck or rail to a port, lifted whole onto a ship for the ocean transit, and then lifted off the ship at a point of delivery. At no time during the transportation process would stevedores have to handle the cargo inside the container. In 1956 SS *Ideal X* sailed from Newark, New Jersey, to Houston, Texas, with fifty-eight 35-foot trailers stacked on an elevated weather deck, the first test of this revolutionary concept.

McLean recognized in 1965 that containerized cargo in general and his Sea-Land Services firm in particular could make a significant contribution to the Vietnam logistics support effort. With the blessing of General Frank S. Besson Jr., head of the

Army Materiel Command, McLean and two of his top managers flew to Saigon in December to begin discussions with officials at MSTS Office Vietnam.

While McLean met with initial opposition, in May 1966 MSTS contracted three Sea-Land "containerships" to transport 476 containers between Oakland, California, and Okinawa every 12 days. The success of that operation prompted MSTS in October to put out bids for container service to Vietnam. McLean's firm won the contract in part because he promised to provide ships, containers, trucks, chassis, and relevant terminal services. Under the terms of the contract, Sea-Land was also responsible for moving the 35-foot containers from the ports of entry to depots inland. Hence, Sea-Land was able to track shipments, retain oversight of the containers, and ensure that the empty boxes were returned for further use. Containers sometimes "disappeared" in the sprawling Army base complexes of Vietnam; MACV had to pay Sea-Land for the missing units.

On 29 March 1967 MSTS signed an agreement for \$70 million with Sea-Land to provide seven ships and develop terminals at Danang and Cam Ranh. The three C-2 ships at Danang possessed the necessary cranes to off-load 274 containers in port.



USN

SS *Oakland*, a C-4 in the Sea-Land Corporation's container fleet, arrives for off-loading at Cam Ranh Bay, July 1968.

The ships sailed between Oakland or Seattle every 15 days. On the morning of 1 August, *SS Bienville* arrived in Danang with 226 containers holding 7,221 measurement tons of cargo and completed off-loading the boxes by dawn the following day. Unloading a typical “break-bulk” or palletized cargo freighter would have taken many more days. Eventually, modified T-3 ships with a 476-container capacity replaced the smaller C-2s. Sea-Land’s manager for Vietnam, Phillip Clarke, oversaw the installation of container-handling cranes ashore at Cam Ranh and that November, witnessed the arrival of containership *SS Oakland*, a converted C-4 troop transport able to carry more than 600 containers. That ship and two others operated between California and Cam Ranh on a 16-day cycle. Later, three additional C-4s also made the run from the United States to Cam Ranh; a ship arrived at the port every eight days. *Beauregard*, a C-2 under Captain “Uncle” Alfred J. Stewart, and *SS Raphael Semmes*, commanded by Jack “Three-Finger” Kuhn, served as shuttle ships between Cam Ranh, Qui Nhon, Danang, and Newport.



NHHC VN Collection

Tug *Osceola* moves along the waterfront at Danang.

Between 1967 and 1969 the number of containers delivered to Vietnam every month by Sea-Land ships rose from 456 to 2,688. From 1967 to 1973 Sea-Land earned close to \$450 million, most of the profits resulting from its Vietnam service. Admiral Ramage related that the Sea-Land ships transported three times the cargo normally carried by conventional freighters, and by the end of the war were delivering 10 percent of all the cargo to reach Vietnam. This was a truly impressive performance. ↓



USN

SS Beauregard, a modified C-2 with shipboard cranes, taking on board cargo containers in Houston, Texas, 1966.



USN

A dockside crane prepares to transfer cargo containers from a Sea-Land ship to trucks waiting on the dock, 1968.



NHHC VN Collection

SS Eastern Mariner, sunk by Viet Cong forces on 26 May 1966, lies beached on a mud flat in the Long Tau near Nha Be.

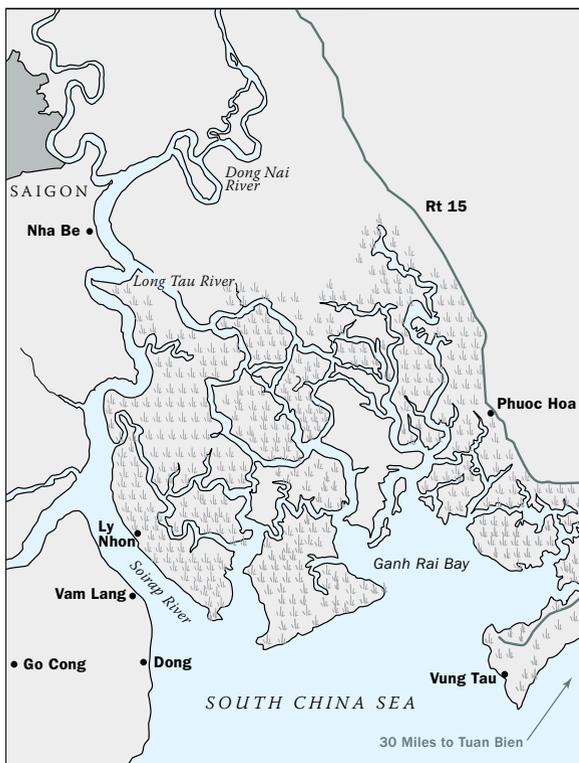
MERCHANT MARINERS UNDER FIRE

After braving the dangers of the sea, many merchant mariners and their ships had to fight to survive the hostile environment of Vietnam. One of the most perilous legs of the journey from the United States to Saigon was the last 45 miles. Viet Cong forces armed with command-detonated mines, recoilless rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and small arms lined both sides of the Long Tau, a shallow, serpentine river between Vung Tau on the South China Sea and Saigon, South Vietnam's largest city. Bordering the river was the Rung Sat Swamp, a lightly populated bog of dense foliage, meandering waterways, and mud. The Rung Sat concealed many Viet Cong guerrillas. Throughout the war the enemy made a concerted effort to cut the Long Tau, an accomplishment that would have isolated the capital of South Vietnam and

frustrated allied military objectives throughout the Mekong Delta. The Viet Cong never achieved that goal, but allied merchant mariners and fighting men paid a price to deny the enemy that victory.

From the earliest days of the Republic of Vietnam, the River Force of the Vietnam Navy (VNN) had fought to secure the Rung Sat. The United States continued that effort with Operation Jackstay in March 1966. During that fight, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine, and South Vietnamese forces carried out a major combined action to clear the enemy from the area. Navy patrol boat, river (PBR); motor launch minesweepers (MLMS); minesweeping boats (MSBs); Sea-Air-Land forces (SEAL) commandos; and helicopters deployed for the action. In the end the allied forces killed or captured 69 enemy troops and destroyed Viet Cong supply sites, but the enemy was far from beaten.

To counter the efforts of the VC in the Rung Sat, the allies deployed forces to keep the Long Tau River open. On 20 May 1966 the Navy established Mine Squadron 11, Detachment Alpha (later renamed Mine Division 112). The unit's twelve 57-foot fiberglass-hulled MSBs, along with VNN minesweeping motor launches, continuously swept the river to



The Rung Sat.



Homemade Viet Cong mines like this one posed a lethal threat to American and South Vietnamese naval vessels and merchantmen transiting the Long Tau River.



NHHC VN Collection

SS *American Corsair* steams upriver to Saigon as a Navy minesweeping boat uses its sweep gear to prevent Viet Cong guerrillas on shore from triggering command-detonated mines.

South Vietnamese unit to suspend its mission. Other motor minesweepers made one check of the same waters and passed word that *Baton Rouge Victory* could proceed on her mission.

At 0910 while only miles from Saigon, *Baton Rouge Victory* hit a moored mine that ripped a 35-by-45-foot hole in the port side, ruptured the port boiler, and disabled the main propulsion and primary steering controls. The detonation and superheated steam escap-

ensure the safety of the merchant ships. Patrols were conducted early in the morning from Nha Be using paravanes and chain drag sweeps to sever electrical wires that connected mines in the river with Viet Cong guerrillas ashore ready to trigger them.

Heavy Viet Cong activity against U.S. merchant ships and river patrol forces on the Long Tau occurred during the period from December 1965 to February 1967. During that period the enemy made 18 attempts against allied vessels. One such assault took place on 23 August 1966. That morning, SS *Baton Rouge Victory* waited in the Vung Tau roadstead at Vung Tau, preparing to head up the Long Tau for Saigon with a cargo of 8,250 tons of vehicles, electronic equipment, general supplies, and post-exchange goods. Captain Konrad Carlson's ship, which the Maritime Administration had contracted States Marine Lines to operate, had been activated from the National Defense Reserve Fleet at Suisun Bay, California, the previous December.

As *Baton Rouge Victory* waited at Vung Tau, a pair of Vietnam Navy minesweeper motor launches departed Nha Be to sweep downriver toward the sea. At 0640 Viet Cong small-arms and recoilless-rifle fire ripped into *MLMS 151*, killing one sailor, wounding another three, and forcing the

ing from the boiler killed seven crewmen (Raymond Barrett, John Bishop, Earl Erickson, James McBride, Timothy Riordan, Robert Rowe, and Charles Rummel) in the engine room; two men managed to escape. The survivors were little comforted with the knowledge that they would receive \$300 for enduring the attack on their ship or that their beneficiaries would have been able to cash in a \$20,000 life insurance policy had they been killed. The men's contracts with MSTs, common to merchant mariners who agreed to serve in the combat theater, had no provision for long-term medical care for wounds received during enemy attack.

Fearing that his vessel would sink and block the main shipping channel to Saigon, Captain Carlson immediately conned the ship toward the shore and beached her on the south bank of the river. Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, Commander Naval Forces Vietnam (COMNAVFORV) suspended ship traffic on the river and quickly dispatched U.S. and South Vietnamese combat units to the scene. Navy river patrol boats, SEALs, and soldiers of the Army's 1st Infantry Division secured the ship and surrounding area to await the arrival of salvage forces. Salvage Master L. B. Delanoy of the Navy's Harbor Clearance Unit 1, oversaw the ship's recovery by

two heavy-lift craft that towed the ship to Vung Tau 17 days after the mining. After USNS *Sport Splice* (T-AK-249) delivered the patch for the stricken ship's hull and she was repaired, she sailed from Vung Tau on 9 December. Unfortunately, the next day another merchant ship rammed the ill-fated merchantman. Eventually, *Baton Rouge Victory* reached Singapore where she was scrapped. The mining of *Baton Rouge Victory* proved to be the only time during the war that the enemy managed to interrupt the logistics lifeline to Saigon for a full day.

American and Vietnamese sailors paid a high price to keep the shipping lane open. In August 1966 attackers sank a Vietnam Navy motor launch minesweeper, killing or wounding five Vietnamese sailors and wounding two American naval advisers. Guerrillas sank another MLMS in January 1967. On 15 February 1967 ambushers struck *MSB-49* with 75mm recoilless-rifle and automatic-weapons fire that wounded all six crew members and devastated the boat. That same day, the enemy sank *MSB-45*, killing two American Sailors and wounding another 16.

On 13 March 1967 MSTs Office Vietnam issued



Commander Naval Forces Vietnam Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward (center) discusses the enemy threat with his subordinates, Captain John T. Shepherd (left) and Commander James A. Hodgman, USCG.

specific instructions for merchant ships slated to make the run to Saigon:

- a. Transit the river only after the Military Police detachment has embarked.
- b. Ensure transceiver for 2716 KC [Kilocycles] voice is in good operating condition. Guard [monitor] 2716 KC voice from one hour prior



With an Army tug and the Alaska Barge and Transport Company tug *Patrick* in the lead, a pair of heavy-lift craft operated by the Navy's Harbor Clearance Unit 1 proceed downriver with SS *Baton Rouge Victory* after they raise her from the mud of the Long Tau River.



NHHC VN Collection

A Viet Cong ambush on 15 February 1967 badly damaged *MSB-49*, mortally wounded one of her crewmen, and injured five others.

- to getting underway until ship is berthed and clear of the river. Report any hostile activity and passing of miles 35, 30, 25, 22, 18, and 10 to Saigon Port Control (MSTS Office Saigon).
- c. Ensure that there are no unnecessary personnel topside or in the engineering spaces.
 - d. Keep all watertight doors secured except leave escape hatches open.
 - e. If attacked, repeatedly fire a red flare or smoke flare in the direction of attack and sound long blasts on the ship's whistle until air support arrives.
 - f. Lay out and charge main deck fire hoses.
 - g. If ship is critically hit and sinking, the Master must make every attempt to ground the ship clear of the shipping channel.
 - h. It is recommended that U.S. Navy ships transit the river at General Quarters.
 - i. Have anchor detail stationed with one anchor ready for letting go.

These instructions were necessary because the Viet Cong maintained their interdiction campaign. For instance on 20 April 1967, while en route to Saigon, *T-LST-550* came under 75mm recoilless-rifle fire that killed one Japanese crew member and wounded another five. On the 18th of November, the American President Lines SS *President Buchanan* departed her anchorage at Vung Tau. Captain E. A. Olsen and a Vietnamese pilot conned the ship into the Long Tau. Almost an hour later the ship, steaming at 12 knots, neared the second major turn in the river. As Olsen prepared to issue an order to his helmsman, a fusillade of mortar, recoilless-rifle, and machine-gun fire opened up on the ship's starboard side. The ship's anchor crew sought cover on the bow as two Army military policemen posted on board for security opened fire with their M-14 rifles. Olsen ordered all hands below deck and rang up full speed ahead. The captain and his bridge crew then ducked behind the bulwarks. For the next 12 minutes, *President Buchanan* endured a steady hail

of enemy fire. Eventually, Navy river patrol boats and Army helicopters arrived and suppressed the attack. None of the crew sustained injury, thanks in part to Olsen's quick thinking and the men's readiness for action.

Five other merchant ships sustained direct attacks during 1967. However, 1968 proved to be an even more harrowing time for the merchant mariners on the Saigon run. The enemy launched 44 assaults that year. The VC, for instance, carried out strikes in February on three ships and an assault in April that killed two men on the tug *Michael*. The enemy, employing B-40 and B-41 rocket-propelled grenades, recoilless rifles, and automatic weapons executed ten attacks in May. On 30 August they

assaulted the roll-on/roll-off ship *Transglobe*, a frequent enemy target. The guerrillas launched a 122mm rocket, normally a high-arching indirect fire weapon, directly at the ship. It struck the ship and critically wounded crew member Ernest Goo. Captain Leon Jean called for a helicopter that evacuated the man but he died of his injuries. Later that year Major General Charles T. Horner Jr., commander of the Army's 2nd Logistical Command, presented Jean with a plaque emblazoned with four battle stars and a Purple Heart to acknowledge the ship's combat actions and the loss of her crew member.

The VC launched 51 assaults in the first half of 1969, but by the end of the year the allies had won



U.S. naval personnel inspect a launcher similar to the equipment used by the Viet Cong to fire a 122mm rocket at SS *Transglobe* in August 1968.

NHHC VN Collection

the battle for the Rung Sat. The victory resulted from a campaign kicked off in June, the goal of which was to destroy a VC sapper battalion, the enemy's primary fighting force operating on the Long Tau. The sappers operated from the Nhon Trach District of Bien Hoa Province north of the Rung Sat. A force of U.S. and South Vietnamese riverine combatants; attack helicopters; and U.S., Australian, and Thai infantry units swept through Nhon Trach and part of the Rung Sat. The operation resulted in the destruction of four enemy base camps and the death or capture of 53 guerrillas.

Afterward, U.S. and South Vietnamese forces kept applying pressure on the enemy guerrillas, frustrating their efforts to regroup. Army bulldozers and aerial-sprayed herbicides denuded much of the Rung Sat's foliage. The enemy did not launch a single attack on the merchant ships transiting the Long Tau well into 1970. Lieutenant Robert W. Champion, the commanding officer of Mine Division 112, reported later that after more than 2,000 operations by his minesweepers, the only enemy gear they recovered were 17 lengths of wire and not a single mine. On 1 November 1970 the VC carried out an attack on the American President Lines' SS *President Coolidge*, but the next attack did not occur until a year later when the enemy struck Sea-Land's *Raphael Semmes*.

The allies suffered damage to their merchant ships and the death or wounding of seamen, but the merchant mariners succeeded in their effort to keep the fighting forces armed, fueled, and supplied. Over the course of the war, the enemy attacked 138 merchantmen on the Long Tau.

But in the wake of the May 1964 VC attack on *Card*, U.S. and South Vietnamese military leaders moved swiftly to improve the security of ships in the port of Saigon. Prior to and during the arrival at Saigon of *Core* with a load of 70 Douglas A-1 Skyraider attack aircraft in the summer of 1965, the Vietnam army deployed 500 soldiers along the dock on 24-hour patrols. Periodically, these men tossed hand grenades into the water to discourage, wound, or kill enemy swimmers attempting to place mines. Divers scoured the harbor bottom and nearby piers

for explosive devices. The U.S. Army's 716th Military Police Battalion then escorted vehicles carrying the planes from the dock to Tan Son Nhut Airport. These precautions resulted in the incident-free delivery of combat aircraft to the Vietnam Air Force. These measures, however, did not always work to frustrate the enemy's determined effort to cut the logistics lifeline to allied forces by attacking merchant ships in port. On 26 May 1966, for instance, the enemy mined three ships at Nha Be. At 0150, sappers detonated an explosive device next to SS *Eastern Mariner*, a Panamanian-flagged freighter loaded with 4,000 tons of bagged cement. The vessel settled by the stern as the crew abandoned ship. Later, with the assistance of tugs, the crew beached the ship and divers surveyed the hull.



Chief Warrant Officer Robert L. Henshaw, the officer in charge of Nha Be's explosive ordnance team, works to neutralize a Viet Cong mine loaded with 75mm recoilless-rifle rounds discovered in the Long Tau River, February 1968.

At 1000 that same day, the French-flagged tanker *Milos Del Mar* prepared to anchor when she exploded a mine that caused no damage to the ship. As Navy explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) divers inspected the hulls of the other ships at Nha Be, they discovered a mine near *SS Our Lady of Peace*, which carried 500-pound bombs. The enemy weapon consisted of 130 pounds of TNT, an electrical detonator, and a timing device attached to the ship's anchor chain by a length of nylon parachute cord. When the tide changed, the mine would have drifted under the surface to the side of the freighter and exploded. An EOD team defused the mine and recovered it for study. Prior to these attacks, the allies stored both ammunition and fuel at Nha Be, but the 26 May event convinced authorities to separate the dangerous substances. As a result the Army established three moorings for ammunition ships at Cat Lai, near Vung Tau.

Ammunition stowage in shipping containers, unlike other cargo, was not always feasible; artillery and other rounds needed special handling and care.

Hence, beginning in June 1966 the Coast Guard dispatched five detachments to Vietnam to oversee the unloading of ammunition.

During 1966 and 1967 the U.S. Navy employed significant resources to protect South Vietnam's major ports and the merchant ships docked there. COMNAVFORV deployed Inshore Undersea Warfare Units (IUWU) 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 at Vung Tau, Cam Ranh, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Vung Ro, respectively. In Operation Stable Door, these units operated landing craft, personnel, large; Boston Whalers; and 45-foot picket boats that constantly patrolled the harbors. EOD divers routinely searched harbor waters and the hulls of anchored or docked merchant ships for mines. Each IUWU established a harbor entrance control post manned by Sailors and equipped with surface search radars and radios that enabled quick reaction to any suspicious activities in port. Despite the ability to sink or damage a few ships, during the period from 1965 to 1968, the enemy never appreciably slowed the delivery of troops, ammunition, fuel, and other supplies.



A trio of National Defense Reserve Fleet Victory ships moored at the Cat Lai ammunition depot in November 1969.

In recognition of MSTs' successful maritime logistics effort during the buildup phase, early in 1969 Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius awarded MSTs Office Vietnam a prestigious Navy Unit Commendation, the citation for which read:

For exceptionally meritorious service during the period 15 April 1965 to 30 September 1968, in providing urgently needed sealift support for the logistic buildup of United States, Republic of Vietnam, and free world military assistance forces in an arduous and hostile environment, and for development of Republic of Vietnam sea and river ports, in the face of extremely difficult conditions, including attacks from enemy forces at all locations along the Republic of Vietnam coastline. Military Sea Transportation Service Office, Vietnam, through able administration of MSTs shipping assets, contributed materially to the success of the U.S. effort in Southeast Asia. ↴



NHHC VN Collection

As part of Operation Stable Door, the crew of a 45-foot picket boat of Inshore Undersea Warfare Unit 51 inspect a sampan for enemy contraband in March 1969.



NHHC VN Collection

A Navy explosive ordnance disposal diver working to prevent enemy underwater sappers from placing mines on the hulls of ships in port.



USNI

Sailors of MSTs Unit Vung Tau read the citation awarding a Navy Unit Commendation to MSTs for outstanding service from April 1965 to September 1968. (left to right) Storekeeper Arthur D. Huntington, Yeoman Second Class David Christiansen, and Boatswain's Mate First Class Donald L. Dircks.



USNI

Secretary of the Navy Paul R. Ignatius on board a Navy river patrol boat in the Bassac River during his visit to South Vietnam in October 1968.



USNI

Vice Admiral Arthur R. Gralla's testimony helped dissuade Congress of the notion that the Army would be a more efficient steward than the Navy of the sealift function.

THE DRAWDOWN

The surprise and severity of the Communist Tet Offensive of January 1968 convinced many Americans, including President Johnson, that victory in Vietnam was unattainable. His public address of 31 March calling for peace negotiations with Hanoi, the end of bombing north of the 19th parallel of North Vietnam, and his forthcoming retirement from office heralded a turning point in the war. Richard M. Nixon, elected President in November 1968, announced his plan to gradually withdraw U.S. forces from the war and prepare the South Vietnamese armed forces to carry on the fight in a program known as “Vietnamization.”

During the years from 1968 to 1973, MSTS was responsible for returning much of the equipment of the 500,000-man U.S. expeditionary force to the United States; transporting the latest weapons to Vietnam for the RVNAF; and maintaining the

flow of ammunition, fuel, and other supplies to the American troops still in country. Indeed, during the post-Tet years, the war was far from over.

In the early 1970s the North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies increased attacks on shipping in South Vietnam’s ports. This campaign to destabilize the allied war effort registered more success than in previous years because the withdrawal of U.S. Navy port security and harbor defense resources taxed the capability of the VNN. On occasion the South Vietnamese defenders stymied enemy attacks on merchant ships. On 22 April 1972, for example, VNN divers discovered and disarmed an explosive charge affixed to the hull of *Upshur*, loaded with Korean troops.

Enemy sappers, however, had greater success in the period from March 1970 to May 1972 when they sank seven ships at Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh, and Danang, the major ports supplying central

The Tragic Saga of the *SS Badger State*

FOR MSTS SHIPS AND MERCHANT MARINERS, the transportation of ammunition across the Pacific Ocean could be a dangerous endeavor. The States Marine Lines C-2 freighter *SS Badger State* sailed from Bangor, Washington, bound for Vietnam in mid-December 1969. Soon after departure, the ship’s steering system began leaking hydraulic fluid, compromising the operation of the rudder. Heavy weather in the North Pacific rocked the ship, causing her to roll repeatedly more than 50 degrees. Rough seas often buffeted the MSTS ships making the transit to Vietnam, but *Badger State*’s case was especially worrisome since she carried 6,109 tons of bombs in her holds. Author William R. Benedetto, in his history

of this event, noted, “in the annals of maritime history . . . no other ship has ever been held hostage by a cargo of bombs.”

The Navy depot in the states had loaded the ammunition during a rainstorm that soaked the wood used to secure the cargo (dunnage), and prevent one bomb from banging into another. Two days out to sea, the crew discovered bombs breaking loose and knocking about the holds. The mariners were not comforted when they remembered advice published in the May 1968 issue of *Sealift*, the official publication of MSTS:

Ordnance experts and others knowledgeable about such matters as unarmed bombs, will be quick to reassure the laymen that there is little



USNI

States Marine Lines' SS *Blue Grass State*, a sister ship of SS *Badger State*.

to fear from a bomb or projectile as long as there is no detonator attached. But, despite all the evidence that it is virtually impossible to explode one, that an unarmed 1,000-pound bomb is about as lethal as 1,000 pounds of cabbage, it is nevertheless nerve-racking to be riding a ship with even one such bomb adrift in a cargo hold.

Concerned, Captain Charles T. Wilson altered course and headed the ship toward a safe haven in the roadstead at Midway Atoll and requested an escort in case he and his crew had to abandon ship. Making matters worse, *Badger State* encountered a severe storm on Christmas Day. The next morning the crew peered into the ship's holds and made a terrifying discovery; several dozen 750-pound bombs were rolling free and causing sparks as metal hit metal. At 0940, an explosion blew off hatch number 5 and opened an 8-by-12-foot hole in the starboard hull. Soon other bombs broke loose, starting a fire that threatened to ignite another hazardous cargo: 10,640 barrels of fuel oil. The captain ordered abandon ship.

Crewmen lowered a lifeboat and as they worked to prepare it for operation, the boat drifted aft down the starboard side. Suddenly, bombs started to spill out of the hole in the hull and rain down on the boat. Some men leapt into the sea while others remained on board.

Paul C. Kinney, in "The Fate of *Badger State*," which was published in the October 1981 issue of U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, 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.

Those men who made it out of the boat entered frigid 56 degree water lashed by heavy winds. Fortunately for the survivors, the Greek freighter MV *Khian Star* had arrived on the scene and her boats came to their rescue. In the end, however, only 14 of the 40-member crew survived. Considered a hazard to navigation, gunfire from a Coast Guard ship later sank the crewless *Badger State*.

A Coast Guard investigation blamed the catastrophe on faulty loading materials and procedures; the tendency of the ship to "snap roll," which put great stress on the bomb restraints; routing of the ship through the rough waters of the North Pacific; and, not least, the severity of the storm.

Even as *Badger State* and her crew suffered their fate, MSTC had taken steps to improve the handling and transportation of ordnance. That same December, the Concord Weapon Station in California loaded SS *Azalea City* with ammunition, but in this instance the cargo was secured in 226 specially designed and reinforced 35-foot containers. This method of moving ammunition minimized cargo handling, reduced costs, and speeded up the loading process—it took only one day to load *Azalea City*.

The sacrifice of *Badger State*'s merchant mariners



USNI

Sailors of the aircraft carrier *Intrepid* (CVS-11) load a pallet of bombs transferred to their ship from an ammunition ship off Vietnam in October 1966.

in support of the war effort did not go unnoticed. Just after noon on 31 August 1970, the President posthumously awarded Boatswain Richard D. Hughes of *Badger State* the American Merchant Marine Seamanship Trophy, which was presented to Mrs. Richard D. Hughes and her daughter at the Oval Office. The citation read that Hughes had displayed “distinguished seamanship under great stress . . . during the fire and explosion which cost him his life.”

The following men lost their lives in the disaster:

Mohamed T. Al-Muwallad, Wiper
 Gilbert F. Baker, Chief Engineer
 Nick Barbieri, Oiler
 Sam A. Bondy Jr., Third Mate
 Bennie L. Brown, Steward
 Joseph Candos, Able Seaman
 Leonard Cobbs, Chief Mate
 Charles E. Coe, Messman
 Nelson Fabre, Able Seaman

Ali A. Gazaly, Messman
 Edward C. Hottendorf, Able Seaman
 Richard D. Hughes, Bosun
 John H. Jenkins, Galleyman
 Edwin L. Jones, Messman
 William K. LaFayette, Radio Officer
 Konstantinos Mpountalis, Electrician
 Richard C. Murray, Ordinary Seaman
 Francisco C. Nunez, Oiler
 Raymond W. Reiche, Second Assistant Engineer
 Floyd K. Rilling, Able Seaman
 Jose A. Rodriguez, Second Electrician
 Leonard J. Scypion, Fireman-Watertender
 Calvin R. Smith, Oiler
 Kinnie Woods, Third Assistant Engineer
 Robert A. Ziehm, Second Mate

↴



Author's Collection

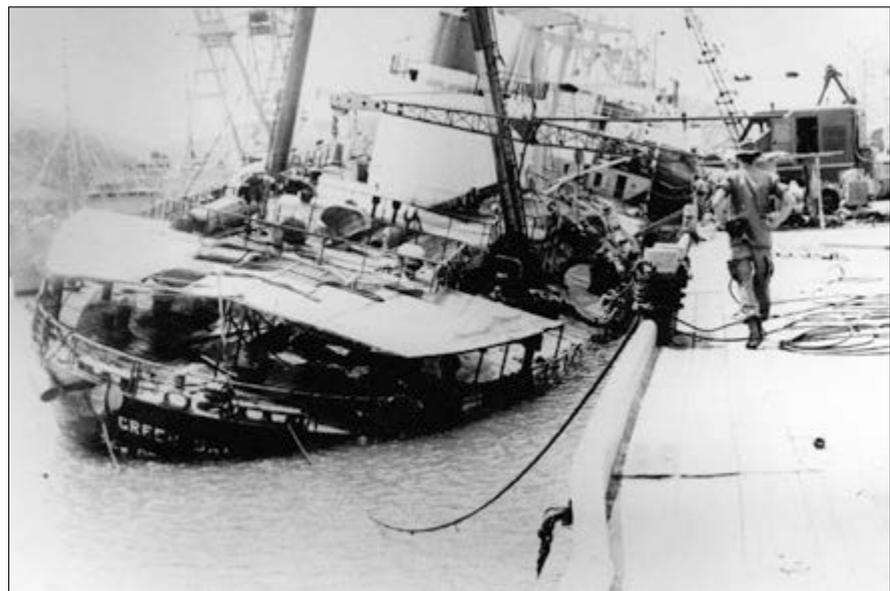
A South Vietnamese diver (on the right) involved in the operation to prevent Viet Cong swimmers from attaching limpet mines to the hulls of allied merchant ships.

and northern South Vietnam. The upsurge began at 0456 on 12 March 1970, when sappers mined SS *Americloud*, which was tied to a DeLong Pier at Qui Nhon. The explosion tore a huge hole in the ship's hull, compelling tugs to move her away from the dock and into shallow water where she could be more easily refloated. Tugs took similar action on 22 September 1970 when the enemy exploded a device that badly damaged SS *Americo*, which was unloading ammunition at Cam Ranh. An explosion on 21 March 1971 at Qui Nhon blew a large hole in the starboard side of SS *Robin Hood*, requiring the ship's departure from Vietnam for repairs. On

14 June at the same port three months later, Viet Cong sappers sank the fully loaded SS *American Hawk* in 33 feet of water.

The enemy scored their greatest coup with the 17 August 1971 attack in Qui Nhon against the freighter SS *Green Bay*, the largest merchant ship sunk during the war. The explosion injured two merchant mariners and ripped an 18-by-31-foot hole in the hull. The ship listed to starboard, capsized at the dock, and sank. Ultimately, the freighter had to be scrapped. The action shifted to Danang during 1972. In April sappers sank the heavy-lift ship SS *Transcolorado* and, the following month, SS *Jefferson City Victory*. Quick action by their masters to refloat and patch the vessels enabled them to survive the attacks.

During the post-Tet period, the war spread beyond Vietnam. The horrendous losses suffered by North Vietnamese army and Viet Cong forces in 1968 enabled the allies to go on the offensive. In 1969 President Nixon authorized U.S. bombing operations against enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia. In March 1970 supporters of Lon Nol, the Cambodian defense minister, ousted pro-Communist Prince Norodom Sihanouk from power and established friendly relations with Washington. During late spring South Vietnamese and U.S.



NHHC VN Collection

SS *Green Bay*, sunk by a Viet Cong mine in August 1971, lists to port at the dock in Qui Nhon.

The SS *Columbia Eagle* Mutiny

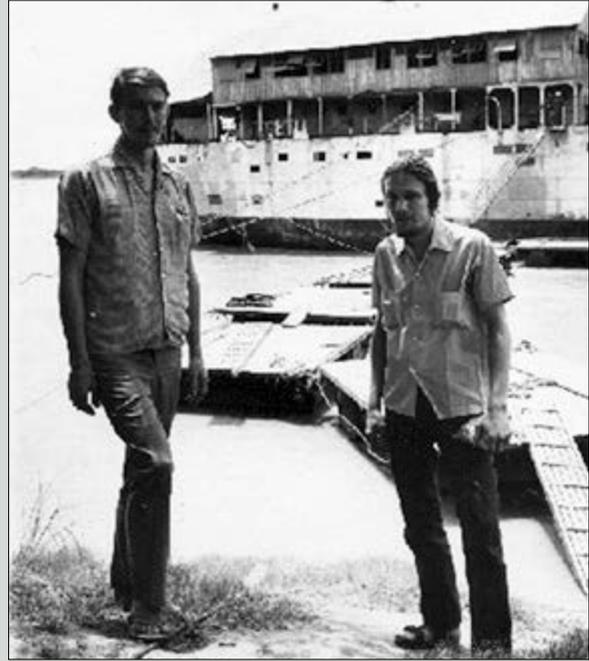
THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE did not escape attempts to hinder military operations by Americans opposed to the war. On 14 March 1970 the captain of SS *Rappahannock* reported picking up 24 merchant mariners who had been afloat in two lifeboats in the Gulf of Thailand. The men claimed that Donald Swann, the master of the *Victory*-class freighter SS *Columbia Eagle*, had ordered them to abandon their ship because of a supposed bomb on board. As they waited in their boats for the master and the remaining 15 crew members to join them, however, the ship belched a cloud of black smoke and steamed off.

Only later was the mystery cleared up. Earlier that day, Fireman Water Tender Clyde W. McKay and bedroom Steward Alvin L. Glatkowski asked Chief Mate Herrick Morgan to arrange for an audience with Swann. As soon as the trio entered the master's stateroom, McKay brandished a pistol and made demands. According to *Columbia Eagle*'s logbook:

At 1315 this vessel was seized by Clyde W. McKay and Alvin L. Glatkowski who held captain and chief mate hostage in the master's quarters under the threat of setting off a bomb unless the master and chief officer complied with their demands while being held at gun-point.

The ship carried a load of 750- and 500-pound bombs for the Air Force and was bound for Sattahip, Thailand, when the two men took control. The mutineers were especially incensed that part of the cargo included napalm bombs. During the passage from the United States, McKay and Glatkowski had hatched their plan to seize the ship and order the master to sail it to China, North Vietnam, or the Middle East. Realizing that the U.S. Navy would in all likelihood frustrate that plan, the mutineers directed Swann to head for Sihanoukville, Cambodia, the primary port of the government of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a friend to America's foes China and North Vietnam.

After their arrival in port two days later, McKay and Glatkowski announced their intention to seek asylum with the Cambodian government. When a pair of Cambodian naval vessels docked next to the *Columbia Eagle*, the mutineers surrendered the ship and their weapons to the Cambodians. Washington ordered the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Mellon*, steaming in the vicinity, to remain in international waters but prepare to seize the vessel if the Cambodians did not



Courtesy Roberto Loiderman and Richard Linnett.

Mutineers Clyde W. McKay (left) and Alvin L. Glatkowski, who seized control of SS *Columbia Eagle* in March 1970, shortly before their incarceration by Cambodian authorities.

return her. That action proved unnecessary; the ship was released and sailed to the Philippines and later Taiwan, where she was scrapped.

Sihanouk's overthrow by his pro-American defense minister, Lon Nol, did not work to the benefit of the mutineers. The new government detained the pair for several months. McKay escaped and went into hiding. Pol Pot's murderous Khmer Rouge may have killed the American when they took over the country in 1975. On 15 December 1970 Glatkowski turned himself in at the U.S. Embassy in the capital of Phnom Penh. The government charged him with one count of Mutiny on the High Seas, nine counts of Assault with a Dangerous Weapon on the High Seas, 12 counts of Transportation of Kidnapped Person in Foreign Commerce, and one count of Neglect of Duty by Seamen. On 2 March 1971 Glatkowski appeared in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles and pleaded guilty to the mutiny and assault charges. Judge Manuel L. Real sentenced him to ten years for mutiny and five years for the assault on Swann, the sentences to run concurrently. Glatkowski, who served his time at Lompoc Federal Prison in California, was the first American convicted of mutiny in 150 years. ↓

ground forces entered Cambodia and destroyed or captured tons of North Vietnamese weapons, ammunition, and other supplies cached at base areas along the border.

The conflict in Cambodia also spread beyond the border areas when an indigenous Communist guerrilla force, the Khmer Rouge, launched major offensives to defeat the new government in Phnom Penh. The group's forces soon isolated the capital from the country's seaports. Under attack by the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese army, Lon Nol called on the United States to provide his forces with ammunition and fuel. The only way to transport these vital commodities to the capital, however, was by water—the Mekong River.

On 12 January 1971 Vice Admiral Jerome H. King Jr., COMNAVFORV, instructed his deputy, Rear Admiral H. Spencer Matthews, to oversee a U.S.-South Vietnamese-Cambodian convoy operation on the Mekong. This military support to Cambodia was essential, since enemy forces had

launched eight attacks against vessels on the river beginning in November 1970. In the last of these, on 6 January 1971, enemy 75mm recoilless rifles put a number of rounds into a Shell Oil Corporation tanker and a barge tied up alongside, killing six crewmen.

Cambodian and South Vietnamese ground forces took responsibility for securing the banks of the river from the border with South Vietnam to the capital, a distance of 70 miles. South Vietnamese and Cambodian naval forces escorted the merchant ships and American air forces (Air Force, Army, and Navy fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters) provided overhead cover.

The first convoy, designated TP-1, sailed on 17 January with three merchant ships and two tugs towing barges laden with fuel. Enemy fire along the river killed one South Vietnamese sailor and wounded ten, but the convoy ultimately delivered its cargo to Phnom Penh. The going got tougher on the 23rd, when the 30 escort vessels and 24 ships, tugs,



Courtesy Michael A. Taylor

and barges of TP-3 had to fight off four ambushes to accomplish their mission.

The missions soon took on the likeness of the Allied convoys running the gauntlet of Nazi attacks in their voyages to Murmansk in the Soviet Union during World War II. On 22 February 1971, for example, convoy TP-7 sailed with two merchant ships, two tugs towing ammunition and fuel barges, a tanker, and an LCM-8 loaded with ammunition. On three separate occasions, the enemy hit the convoy with B-40 rocket, 57mm recoilless-rifle, and small-arms fire.

During the third attack three enemy shells hit the Alaska Barge and Transport's tug *Shawnee*, knocking out the vessel's electricity and steering and grievously wounding Chief Mate Theodore D. Sauers, whose brain injury later permanently disabled him. As a merchant mariner, Sauers was not entitled to veteran's benefits. In addition, he had signed on for service to Vietnam, not Cambodia. His family eventually sued Alaska Barge and Transport and the U.S. government to obtain compensation to cover his steep medical bills. In 1979, after an appeal in the Ninth Circuit Court, he was awarded \$685,113.79.

The Mekong River convoys continued to deliver their supplies to Phnom Penh but it took an increasing number of ground, air, and naval forces to do so. When the eight merchant vessels of TP-18 sailed on 8 May 1971, they were protected by a fleet of South Vietnamese and Cambodian landing ships, river patrol boats, assault craft, minesweepers, and U.S. Navy helicopters. Between February and September 1971, 640 fuel carriers, ammunition barges, and tugs in 32 convoys traveled to and from the South Vietnamese border to Phnom Penh. The enemy carried out 29 attacks against them.

When the Americans were in overall charge of the Mekong River convoys, the enemy failed to halt even one transit to or from the Cambodian capital. By July 1971 the fuel ships and barges were delivering 25,000 tons of POL to Phnom Penh each month.

The Mekong River convoys did not fare as well in succeeding years. In keeping with the schedule of U.S. withdrawals from South Vietnam,

COMNAVFORV ended American direction of the Mekong River convoys in March 1972. Soon after, Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese closed in on Phnom Penh and increased their attacks on the convoys. In April 1973 river ambushers sank two freighters, an ammunition barge, and a fuel barge and damaged another eight vessels. The final convoy to and from the capital, on 26 January 1975, lost five vessels to enemy ambushes and mines. In April 1975 the Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh, overthrew the Lon Nol government, and soon turned Cambodia into the "killing fields" of Southeast Asia.

The U.S. overseas logistics establishment changed some of the ways it did business, partly as a result of the Vietnam War experience. The Air Force renamed its Military Air Traffic Service the Military Airlift Command and in September 1970 the Navy retitled the Military Sea Transportation Service the Military Sealift Command (MSC). By the end of the war, most of the troops went to Vietnam and returned to the United States by air. Recognizing that fact, MSC inactivated its fleet of transports. It also culled its fleet of old freighters and tankers and replaced them with newer and more technologically advanced ships. For instance, the command leased *American Challenger*-class C-4 freighters from United States Lines and retained in service many of the Sea-Land container ships. MSC also contracted



Seal of the Military Sealift Command

with Marine Transport Lines to build and operate nine *Sealift*-class tankers.

The Navy planned to replace the aging *Victory*-class freighters with thirty new forward deployment logistics (FDL) ships. MSC wanted a vessel capable of 24-knots, humidity-controlled holds, roll-on/roll-off ramps, and the ability to off-load either pier side or at anchor. Planners also anticipated that the ship would employ helicopters to deliver supplies ashore, a concept successfully tested during the war by HMAS *Sydney*, an Australian aircraft carrier.

The Navy selected Litton Industries to design the FDL. The vessel would be propelled by 60,000-shaft horsepower-gearred steam turbines driving twin screws. It would be 855 feet in length and have a

104-foot beam, the latter to allow the ship's passage through the Panama Canal. Litton concluded that their ship would be able to off-load its entire cargo onto the pier in 12 hours and from an anchorage in 24 hours. A single FDL would be able to carry cargo equal to that of seven *Victory*-class freighters, a quartet would be capable of transporting the equipment of an entire infantry division, and eight could move an armored division. The FDL did not come to fruition, however, because the enormous \$150 billion outlay for the long Vietnam War precluded significant warship or merchant ship construction. The FDL concept did, however, materialize in the form of large medium-speed roll-on/roll-off ships after the Persian Gulf War.



NHHC VN Collection

In addition to coping with limited resources, the new Military Sealift Command had to battle bureaucratic foes for its existence. On 24 February 1971 Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard issued a memorandum to the secretaries of all military branches and the Joint Chiefs of Staff stating:

In order to improve effectiveness of supply support and to increase efficiency and economy, traffic management functions for land and ocean transportation, other than intra-theater land transportation in overseas areas, will be consolidated and assigned to the Secretary of the Army as the Single Manager for surface transportation.

This proposal aimed to transfer all sealift functions, except for the operation of the small MSC nucleus fleet, from the Navy to the Army. The Navy would no longer be able to charter ships from the commercial sector.

Vice Admiral Arthur R. Gralla, Vice Admiral Ramage's relief as Commander Military Sea Transportation Service in April 1970, was not about to let that happen without a fight. He served as a 16-year-old deck hand on merchant ships in the 1930s and fought with distinction in World War II, earning a combat award for his actions at the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He commanded warships and worked in numerous staff billets in the postwar period and served as head of the Navy's Bureau of Ordnance and Inspector General before his assignment as Commander MSTs.

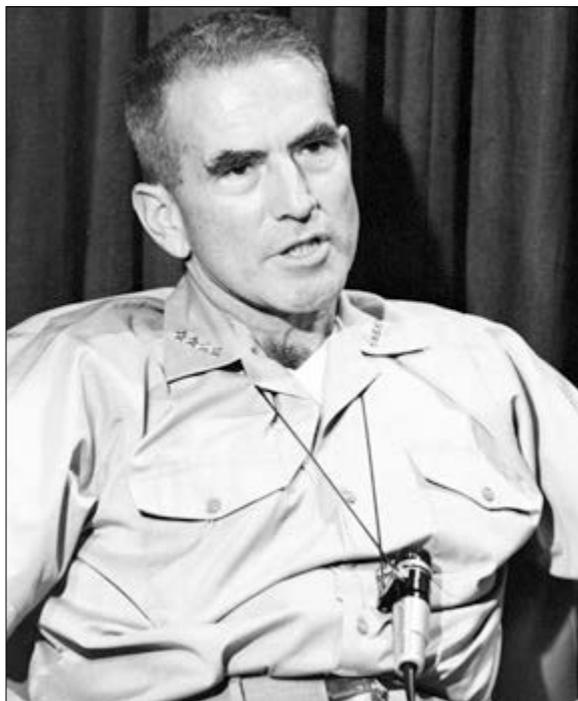
Gralla testified before Congress in September 1971 that Packard's proposed measure would "disrupt, disorganize, and I suspect, demoralize the relationship of military sealift and merchant marine interests." Chief of Naval Operations Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. and the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the exception of Army Chief of Staff General Westmoreland, concurred with Gralla. Congress did not endorse the proposed change.

The Navy's bureaucratic opponents, however, exacted their revenge. The admiral was forced into retirement in November 1971, the MSC area

commander billets were reduced from one-star flag rank to captain, and the Commander MSC billet was reduced from two-star to one-star. Gralla's deputy, Rear Admiral John Chase, then took the helm as Commander MSC.

The huge expenditures of the Vietnam War compelled the Navy to reduce personnel costs and decommission many fleet oilers whose primary duty had been to refuel carriers and other warships by underway replenishment. In that process, a Navy oiler would steam parallel to a combatant and pass fuel to the latter via hose lines strung between them. Admiral Zumwalt was impressed with the Soviet Navy's use of commercial tankers to replenish warships so he ordered a test to see if U.S. commercial tankers could be equipped and manned by merchant mariners to directly serve deployed naval forces. He observed that "U.S. flag commercial ships constitute hundreds of mobile U.S. bases which can be utilized by our government in many ways for furtherance of our national interests."

As with any new concept, opposition quickly



Chief of Naval Operations Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. and most of the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not favor Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard's proposal for reordering the maritime transportation program.

surfaced. Critics pointed out that commercial tankers normally transported crude oil, not the refined fuel used in diesel or gas turbine-powered warships. Portions of the commercial industry opposed their ships being directly tied to Navy service. Some Navy leaders did not want to rely on commercial tankers crewed by civilian mariners as their secondary, much less sole, source of fuel.

As directed by Zumwalt, Admiral Gralla and the Maritime Administration launched a series of tests—named Charter Log—to evaluate different concepts. MSC contracted the Hudson Waterways Company for the use of *SS Erna Elizabeth* in Charter Log I, which began in February 1972.



Navy Art Collection

Refueling at Sea by Walter E. Brightwell.

USNS *Taluga* and Underway Replenishment of the Fleet

OWING TO THE STELLAR PERFORMANCE of USNS *Taluga* (T-AO-62) and her crew of merchant mariners, Charter Log II had the greatest long-term impact on the operating Navy, MSC, and the merchant marine.

In May 1972 the Navy decommissioned the oiler *Taluga* and transferred her to MSC to become the command's first true underway replenishment oiler. During the next six months Captain Lawrence Nasset, the master of *Taluga*, oversaw the training of 105 civilian mariners and 16 naval personnel to handle the work previously accomplished by the 220-man Navy crew. Navy yard workers removed the vessel's weapons and converted cavernous personnel berthing areas into two- and four-person staterooms.

Taluga then completed a three-week training program at Port Hueneme, California, where the crew learned how to operate the underway replenishment (UNREP) gear. That accomplished, the ship and her crew spent the next two weeks at sea with the Fleet Training Group putting into practice what they had learned. In *Underway Replenishment of Naval Ships*, Captain Henry Phelps, tasked with evaluating the experiment, reported:

I know a professional job when I see one, and UNREPs conducted by *Taluga* have been top drawer. Crew progress has been noticeable and is continuing. Everyone pitches in with stewards, oilers, and wipers doubling as line handlers, signalmen, and phone talkers. Spirit is great, morale



Author's Collection

USNS *Taluga* (T-AO-62) proved that civilian-manned tankers could successfully service the Navy's combat vessels.

is high aboard ship, and there is a healthy spirit of competition in every operation.

As a final test of the ship's readiness for fleet service, *Taluga* replenished the *Ranger* (CV-61) carrier battle group. While the carrier steamed along *Taluga*'s port side, other task group warships took on fuel from hoses on the starboard side.

The Navy was now convinced that *Taluga* and her crewmen, nicknamed the "tigers," were ready for operations with the fleet. In October 1972 the ship reported for duty with Service Group 3 (Task Force 73) at Yankee Station. The Attack Carrier Striking Force (Task Force 77) was then involved in combat operations against North Vietnam. Over the next two years,

The small tanker could transport 275,000 barrels of fuel (35,000 tons) at a maximum speed of 16.5 knots. Equipment compatible with Navy underway replenishment gear, including an astern fueling rig, was installed on the ship. Captain William “Billy” Phillips, who rode the ship as Admiral Zumwalt’s representative, pronounced Charter Log I a success. The astern fueling rig, however, proved too cumbersome and manpower intensive.

Six more tests followed:

Charter Log II: Determining whether civilian mariners could replace a Navy crew on board an oiler.

Charter Log III: Manning an oiler with senior

Navy enlisted personnel, in a manner similar to civilian manning. For practical and political reasons, this test was never conducted.

Charter Log IV: Testing the capability of MSC-chartered tankers in astern refueling opportunities.

Charter Log V: Turning over cable repair ships and fleet tugs to MSC and replacing their crews with civilian crews.

Charter Log VI: Refueling from commercial tankers, carried out in the Indian Ocean.

Charter Log VII: Determining whether a commercial lighter aboard ship could resupply Navy combat store ships at sea. ↴

Taluga carried out over 500 UNREPs. In June 1973 the oiler earned the second highest rating of all logistics ships in the Western Pacific. The following year, she was rated number one.

In Sidney W. Emery Jr.’s *Proceedings* article titled “Civilian-Manned Support Ships: A View from the Fleet,” one sailor who worked with *Taluga*’s crew praised the “tigers”:

Those guys were damned good. . . . To be sure, they were a motley-looking bunch compared to our crew. You could pick out every sort of garb from khaki cutoffs to rugby shirts; all of them wearing lifejackets. The *Taluga* was carrying a small crew, and her men were generally much older than their counterparts on board our cruiser. Yet, something in the way they handled the rigs, the way they communicated once alongside, the manner in which they responded—all spoke of professionalism.

The Charter Log experiments validated the concept of civilian mariners operating in direct support of U.S. naval vessels, not only in peacetime but also in wartime. In recognition of his outstanding performance in command of *Taluga*, the Navy awarded Captain Nasset its highest award to a civilian, the Distinguished Civilian Service Award. Chief Engineer Donald K. McKee earned a Navy Superior Civilian Service Award for his dedication to the mission.



NHHC VN Collection

The use of civilian-manned oilers to refuel naval vessels, as ably demonstrated during *Taluga*’s service with the fleet, persuaded Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James L. Holloway III to approve tasking MSC with that responsibility.

Rear Admiral John D. Johnson, Commander Task Force 73, who later became MSC’s tenth commander, noted the “outstanding support *Taluga* has continually provided to units of the Seventh Fleet.” The Seventh Fleet commander, Vice Admiral James L. Holloway III, was so impressed with the success of the Charter Log experiment and *Taluga*’s performance with his fleet that he accelerated the deployment of civilian-manned tankers to MSC when he became CNO in July 1974. ↴



NHHC VN Collection

The AB&T tug *Pawnee* and an AB&T barge assist in the transfer of refugees to SS *Green Port* during the chaotic evacuation of central South Vietnam in March 1975.

THE END OF U.S. MILITARY OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

When North Vietnam launched the Easter Offensive on 30 March 1972, only a small number of American military advisors remained in South Vietnam. President Nixon, however, immediately ordered increased logistics support for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. The Task Force 77 carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin and U.S. Air Force and Marine aircraft based in Thailand and South Vietnam also needed massive supplies of petroleum to help defeat the enemy's assault. To meet this requirement MSC chartered 44 U.S. and foreign tankers. The need for this supply continued through the year as South Vietnamese ground troops, with U.S. air support, defeated North Vietnam's offensive and President Nixon ordered the Operation Linebacker bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

The Department of Defense upgraded the weapons and equipment in the hands of the South Vietnamese under Project Enhance from May to October 1972. As peace talks resumed in Paris in October, the United States ordered a large-scale shipment of supplies to Vietnam in Operation Enhance Plus, before a treaty was signed. Beginning on 12 October and ending 23 December, the Department of Defense shipped more than 105,000 tons of equipment, including 70,767 weapons, 382 artillery pieces, 622 tracked vehicles, and 2,035 wheeled vehicles—in total nearly \$2 billion worth of military hardware. The powerful allied military response finally convinced the leaders in Hanoi to settle the conflict. In accordance with the Paris Agreement of 27 January 1973, signed by the United States and the Vietnamese parties to the hostilities, all American military forces would be withdrawn from South Vietnam by 29 March.

MSC, in Operation Roll-Up (28 January to 29 March), employed 20 merchant ships to remove 144,876 tons of U.S. military and 82,833 tons of allied military cargo. A civilian, D. E. Berney, took

charge of MSC Office Vietnam when the last naval officer in charge, Commander T. J. Sullivan, left the country. The Alaska Barge and Transport Company closed its terminals and turned over its assets to the South Vietnamese government.

During the Vietnam War, MSTs/MSCs and the U.S. Merchant Marine mounted and sustained a trans-Pacific logistics operation equaled only by America's global effort in World War II. From July 1964 to March 1973, ships under MSTs control transported more than 81 million tons of cargo and 97 million tons of fuel to Vietnam. In comparison, during World War II, the United States shipped 203 million tons of cargo and 64 million tons of petroleum. In 6,799 voyages to Vietnam, chartered and commercial ships delivered 64 percent of these cargos, MSC nucleus fleet ships transported 21 percent, and activated reserve fleet ships another 15 percent. Only the United States could have handled such a Herculean overseas operation in the 20th century.

The Military Sealift Command took center stage for the last major operation of the conflict in Indochina—the evacuation of refugees. That endeavor began on 10 March 1975 when North Vietnam's army launched its final offensive to seize South Vietnam. Enemy forces attacked the remote town of Ban Me Thuot in the central highlands and routed the South Vietnamese troops there. Concluding that his army was not strong enough to defend all of the country, President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered the withdrawal of his forces from the surrounding region. That movement of troops and civilians toward the coast turned into a panicked flight when enemy forces cut the main roads.

Learning of the disaster, the troops guarding the northern provinces of South Vietnam also began to flee toward the major port of Danang, with five North Vietnamese divisions close behind. Thousands of soldiers, marines, and civilians crowded into the city hoping for evacuation by sea.

The Vietnam War Logistic Effort

Commodity (Tons x 1,000)	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	Total
<i>General Cargo</i>	2,071	6,038	8,301	8,627	6,581	4,888	3,658	1,625	215	42,002
<i>Aircraft</i>	182	178	321	250	261	57	20	33	0	1,301
<i>Ammunition</i>	386	833	1,694	2,196	1,927	1,447	1,012	1,120	156	10,771
<i>Bulk Cargo</i>	0	2	0	384	2,145	2,958	2,921	1,150	234	9,793
<i>Trailers/ Containers</i>	0	244	270	237	229	222	163	3	0	1,367
<i>Refrigerated</i>	68	191	335	423	393	301	205	72	6	1,993
<i>Special (Military)</i>	1,491	2,398	2,495	2,624	2,281	1,162	839	472	53	13,814
<i>Petroleum</i>	6,380	8,986	12,600	16,033	14,182	11,838	9,887	9,060	N/A	97,083
<i>Ship Arrivals in Vietnam</i>	385	991	1,360	1,304	1,002	781	473	435	68	6,799

	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
<i>Nucleus Cargo Ships</i>	57 (1)	68 (1)	84 (2)	91 (1)	91	90	87 (14)	77 (7)	75 (12)	72 (41)
<i>Nucleus Tankers</i>	25 (1)	26	27	27	27	27	26	25	20 (3)	17
<i>Nucleus Transports</i>	16 (3)	16	16	16 (9)	16 (11)	11 (9)	3 (1)	2	2	0
<i>Chartered Cargo Ships</i>	15	33 (1)	139 (3)	174 (7)	171 (4)	157	131	83	96	49
<i>Charter Tankers</i>	20	16 (2)	38	51	67	52	31	31	29	23
<i>NDRF Activated</i>	2	2	101	166	144	144 (26)	70 (68)	0	0	0
<i>TOTALS</i>	135 (5)	161 (4)	405 (5)	525 (17)	516 (15)	481 (35)	348 (83)	218 (7)	222 (15)	161 (41)

*Numbers in parenthesis indicate number of ships in reduced operating status.

Because the Paris Agreement barred U.S. military forces from entering South Vietnam's territorial waters, on 24 March the Navy directed MSC to use its unarmed civilian-manned ships in an evacuation mission. Five tugs towing barges were immediately sent to Danang and the following day the command alerted 10 freighters to prepare to evacuate refugees from the port. Soon after the first ships arrived at Danang, they embarked U.S. consulate, MSC, and other American personnel and thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. Once filled to capacity, the ships steamed for the south. By 30 March order had broken down in the city so the

MSC ships loaded all the people they could—the last of the 30,000 embarked during the four-day operation—and withdrew from the port. On that day the North Vietnamese army stormed the city.

The enemy captured the ports of Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Nha Trang, and Cam Ranh in rapid succession. MSC ships took on board thousands more refugees, but the speed of the enemy's advance limited the number of refugees the ships could rescue. Crowding and the lack of sufficient food and water for the thousands of embarked passengers prompted armed South Vietnamese soldiers to order the masters of several MSC ships to head for Vung Tau, south

of Saigon, rather than the chosen disembarkation site, the remote island of Phu Quoc in the Gulf of Thailand. Alarmed by this development, the Navy dispatched 50-member Marine security details to the MSC ships to restore order and resupply the ships with food, water, and medicine. The maritime exodus of 130,000 refugees from northern and central South Vietnam finally ended when the North Vietnamese advance to the south slowed. During the first week of April, the front stabilized east of Saigon at Xuan Loc.

Deciding that Hanoi had breached the terms of the Paris Agreement with its brazen offensive, the administration of President Gerald R. Ford ordered the Seventh Fleet to concentrate south of Saigon and to prepare to evacuate Americans and endangered South Vietnamese citizens. An armada of 27 ships, including aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and amphibious ships, gathered off the port of Vung Tau. MSC reinforced the naval force with 10 ships: USNS *Sgt. Truman Kimbro*, USNS *Sgt. Andrew Miller* (T-AK-242), USNS *Greenville Victory* (T-AK-237), *SS Pioneer Contender*, *SS Pioneer Commander*, *SS Green Forest*, *SS Green Port*, *SS American Challenger*, *Boo Heung Pioneer*, and *Audaz*.

As fighting resumed at the end of the month and North Vietnamese forces continued their push toward Saigon, MSC directed its staff in the capital to destroy or ship out their records and relocate to the Seventh Fleet flagship, *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19). MSC Office Vietnam then directed the actions of the merchant ships offshore from *Blue Ridge*. Ironically, Charles Hoffman, who had steamed to Chu Lai with *Petaluma* at the start of major conflict in 1965, was on board for the final act of the Vietnam War.

Finally, on 29 April the Navy ordered the evacuation of Saigon in Operation Frequent Wind. Even as Marine and Air Force helicopters lifted refugees from the besieged city, the tugs *Harumi*, *Chitose Maru*, *Saigon 240*, *Shibaura*, and *Asiatic Stamita* and Korean LST *Boo Heung Pioneer* towed barges filled with refugees from Saigon's docks and headed for the open sea. The enemy fired on the vessels as they traversed the treacherous Rung Sat Swamp. This convoy eventually reached Vung Tau at 0200 on 30 April.

As the log of *SS Pioneer Commander* recounted, the situation offshore was anything but orderly:

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.
- 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 underway.

On the evening of the 30th, *Sgt. Andrew Miller* loaded refugees from two barges tied up alongside. Shortly afterward, a helicopter full of refugees crash-landed on the now empty barge. The helicopter's passengers and crew, none of whom apparently suffered injuries from the mishap, boarded *Sgt. Andrew Miller*. The MSC crew cut the flaming barge and helicopter loose. Not all operations went as smoothly; the foreign-flagged merchant ship *Audaz*, which was denied a Marine security detachment by the Navy, sailed from Vung Tau empty. On 2 May, the MSC ships, with 44,000 passengers, were joined by a fleet of 26 Vietnam Navy ships carrying 30,000 refugees. The mass of ships headed for the Philippines. After lifting a total of 179,050 refugees

by 15 May 1975, MSC's role in the Vietnam War was finally over.

Despite the evacuation from Vietnam and the end of the war, American merchant ships still faced danger in the waters of Southeast Asia. At 1418 on 12 May 1975, Captain Charles Miller of the Sea-Land Corporation's container ship SS *Mayaguez*, en route to Sattahip, Thailand, radioed an alarming report: "Have been fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces [Khmer Rouge soldiers] at 9 degrees, 48 minutes north/102 degrees 53 minutes east. Ship is being towed to unknown Cambodian port."

A Navy patrol plane, fired upon by the forces below, located the ship off the island of Koh Tang. Armed with this information, Washington ordered an operation to recapture the ship and rescue the crew. Intelligence reports persuaded American leaders that at least some of the men were being

held on the island. In actuality the Khmer Rouge had moved all the men to Kompong Som. With the approval of President Ford, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the deployment of Navy warships to the area. The destroyer escort *Harold E. Holt* (DE-1074), the guided missile destroyer *Henry B. Wilson* (DDG-7), the aircraft carriers *Coral Sea* (CVA-43) and *Hancock* (CVA-19), and the amphibious assault ship *Okinawa* (LPH-3) immediately headed for the scene. As U.S. forces converged on the area, the accidental crash of a Sikorsky CH-53 Sea Stallion helicopter in Thailand killed 23 American service personnel.

An Air Force helicopter airlifted to *Harold E. Holt* six volunteer merchant mariners, led by *Greenville's* First Officer Clinton J. Harriman. Their purpose was to get *Mayaguez* underway if the crew could not be found. Air Force helicopters also transported elements of the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, to the destroyer escort.



Traumatized refugees rescued from Saigon by a Marine helicopter move across the deck of the aircraft carrier *Midway* (CVA-41) off the coast of South Vietnam on 30 April 1975.

Refugees Lifted by MSC-Controlled Ships from March 28 to May 15, 1975

Ship	Total Number of Refugees
SS <i>American Challenger</i> – United States Lines	23,500
SS <i>American Racer</i> – United States Lines	3,900
<i>Boo Heung Pioneer</i> – Republic of Korea Navy	7,200
SS <i>Green Forest</i> – Central Gulf Lines	8,000
SS <i>Green Port</i> – Central Gulf Lines	15,000
SS <i>Green Wave</i> – Central Gulf Lines	5,200
SS <i>Pioneer Commander</i> – United States Lines	22,000
SS <i>Pioneer Contender</i> – United States Lines	34,200
SS <i>Pioneer Contractor</i> – United States Lines	100
Seapac tugs and barges	6,800
SS <i>Transcolorado</i> – SeaTrain Lines	11,800
USNS <i>Greenville Victory</i> – MSC	10,000
USNS <i>Sgt. Truman Kimbro</i> – MSC	8,200
USNS <i>Sgt. Andrew Miller</i> – MSC	23,000
Tug <i>Vera 8</i>	150
TOTAL	179,050



Washington ordered the guided missile destroyer *Henry B. Wilson* (DDG-7) and other warships to the waters off Cambodia where Khmer Rouge fighters had seized SS *Mayaguez*.



NHHC VN Collection

70 Marines raise Old Glory on recaptured SS *Mayaguez*.

As planned, on the morning of 15 May combat aircraft from *Coral Sea* bombed the airfield at Kompong Som as Air Force helicopters deployed a Marine assault force on Koh Tang. The fight for the island proved to be a hard one that cost the lives of 14 Marines, two sailors, and two airmen and the loss or damage of 13 helicopters.

Meanwhile, *Harold E. Holt* and her embarked Marines moved to recapture *Mayaguez*. Just before Commander Robert A. Peterson laid his naval vessel alongside the merchant ship, Air Force LTV A-7 Corsair IIs dropped tear gas on her to incapacitate

any defenders. At 0715, the boarding party, wearing gas masks, moved quickly and efficiently to secure the ship. The crewmen had earlier been put on a boat by the Khmer Rouge and sent toward the American ships. Shortly after the assault, Harriman and his men and six sailors from *Duluth* (LPD-6) boarded the ship to get her underway. The merchant mariners eventually restored power to the vessel and were joined by the released crew of *Mayaguez*. Later, in the Oval Office of the White House, President Ford presented the volunteer merchant mariners from *Greenville Victory* Meritorious Service Awards. ⚓



NHHC VN Collection

Sailors and merchant mariners observe as the destroyer escort *Harold E. Holt* (DE-1074) prepares to take SS *Mayaguez* under tow after her dramatic recapture by U.S. naval forces on 15 May 1975.



NHHC Persian Gulf War Collection

The Vietnam War logistics experience strengthened the U.S. sealift establishment for the challenges of the future. To support Operation Desert Shield, fast sealift ship USNS *Regulus* (T-AKR-292), escorted by a Coast Guard cutter, departs Savannah, Georgia, to deliver war materials to U.S. forces deployed to the Persian Gulf.

CONCLUSION

The sealift effort mounted by the United States to support American and allied forces fighting in Vietnam was one of the most remarkable maritime logistics operations in military history. Military Sea Transportation Service, the National Defense Reserve Fleet, America's commercial shipping industry, and contracted foreign firms put to sea a mighty fleet that helped enable the United States to deny North Vietnam a quick conquest of the Republic of Vietnam. In two years—1965 and 1966—sealift ships transported 173,000 American and South Korean troops and their equipment to the combat theater. Simultaneously, cargo ships and tankers delivered the ammunition, fuel, food, building materials, and other supplies essential to the sustainment of an expeditionary force that, by 1968, totaled more than half a million troops. For over eight years, the sealift forces maintained the logistics pipeline across the broad Pacific Ocean and with the end of hostilities assisted in the humanitarian evacuation of more than 179,000 Americans, Vietnamese, and other friendly nationals from Indochina.

The sealift operation that entailed close to 7,000 ship transits to Vietnam succeeded because U.S. government agencies responsible for maritime affairs, the Navy and the other armed forces, American shipping firms, and friendly foreign governments cooperated to an unprecedented degree. Also instrumental to the success of the sealift operation were the MSTS/MSC commanders, especially Vice Admirals Donaho, Ramage, and Gralla, who oversaw much of the ambitious enterprise.

Enemy action in Vietnam (and *Badger State's* disaster at sea) claimed 12 ships and 11 tugs and barges. Hostile forces also seized *Mayaguez* and her crew, albeit briefly. America's civilian mariners braved the dangers of the sea and the hostile environment of Vietnam to carry out their duties as their fathers had done in World War II and the

Korean War. *Badger State's* tragedy cost the lives of 26 merchant seamen while enemy gunfire on the Long Tau and Mekong rivers and mines in port and ashore killed another 25 U.S. naval officers, enlisted personnel, and American and non-American merchant mariners. Since there was no "front line" in Vietnam, even those service personnel at the bases sometimes became casualties. On 16 October 1969, for instance, a Viet Cong mortar round killed Lieutenant Commander Paul E. Wall of MSTS Unit Vung Tau while he carried out his responsibilities at the small port. An enemy attack killed 21-year-old Seaman John J. Stegeland III at his post in Qui Nhon at the start of North Vietnam's Easter Offensive in April 1972. Many more merchant mariners suffered wounds during the war.

In the early years allied logistics forces faced monumental challenges to accomplish the mission. Ships withdrawn from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, many of them built during World War II, needed significant repairs to ready them for service on the tempestuous North Pacific. Key U.S. ports were not accustomed to loading ships with huge stores of ammunition, fuel, heavy armored vehicles, and other bulky and sometimes dangerous cargo. The ports of South Vietnam, the final destination for this material, were woefully unprepared to accommodate hundreds of ships in their roadsteads and lacked requisite cranes or other off-loading equipment, warehouses, or fuel storage facilities. Initially, MSTS lacked sufficient or capable landing craft, barges, tugs, LARCs, or other conveyances to lighter cargo along the coast or transfer it across the beaches.

The sealift organizations, however, surmounted these obstacles with dogged determination and innovative thinking. The Maritime Administration and MSTS honed procedures for loading cargo in the United States and transporting it safely and expeditiously across the Pacific. The containerization of cargo and construction of container ships,

championed by the pioneering Malcolm McLean, significantly improved the delivery of vital war materials as did the chartering of additional foreign-flag ships. A crash construction program undertaken by the Army and MSTS provided the Republic of Vietnam with ports able to handle oceangoing ships. The revolutionary Delong Piers and the Newport facility near Saigon enhanced the off-loading process as did new warehouses, cargo hardstands, LST ramps, mobile cranes, and other cargo-handling equipment. Roll-on/roll-off ships sped the disembarkation of armored fighting vehicles. Advanced offshore discharge gear facilitated the transfer of fuel supplies to the fighting forces ashore. Landing ships and craft, barges, and tugs—some operated and crewed by men from the Republic of Korea, Republic of China (Taiwan), and Thailand—eased the distribution of cargo to South Vietnam's minor coastal ports and into the country's rivers. LARCs and other amphibians enabled the transfer of cargo over unimproved beaches. The MSTS/MSC offices in Japan, the Philippines, Guam, Thailand, and Vietnam were critical to the efficient functioning of the overall sealift effort.

The Vietnam War's huge draw on the country's resources eventually compelled the U.S. Congress to reduce not only the nation's military forces and overseas commitments but ships and personnel of the merchant marine and MSC. The 965-ship merchant fleet of 1965 had been reduced by 1975 to 517 vessels. During the same period MSC's fleet dropped from 201 to 161 ships. Fewer than half of the 48,273 merchant mariners and 9,809 other civilians serving with MSC in 1965 remained on the job in 1975.

Nevertheless, the war in Vietnam inspired the U.S. maritime organizations to modernize and streamline their resources in preparation for future conflicts. The Military Sealift Command Maritime Administration eliminated almost all of its troopships, aircraft transports, and old break-bulk freighters and tankers in the reserve fleet. In 1977 the U.S. government created within the National Defense Reserve Fleet the Ready Reserve Force and eventually provided the new organization with 102 of the most advanced cargo ships, tankers, and

other support vessels. Five tankers were equipped with hoses and other equipment enabling them to transfer fuel ashore from a point 3 miles out to sea. Congress also funded the construction of advanced roll-on/roll-off ships and container ships equipped with cranes that could off-load other ships as well as themselves.

The concept of forward-deploying ships loaded with military supplies to global trouble spots before the outbreak of a conflict, first conceived in the Vietnam War era, came to fruition in the 1980s with a \$7 billion investment by the government. Congress funded the construction and conversion of 13 specialized maritime prepositioning ships (MPS). The *Kocak*-, *Hauge*-, and *Bobo*-class vessels featured controlled climate holds and the combined capabilities of containerships, break-bulk freighters, roll-on/roll-offs, and tankers. The ships also mounted cranes and embarked lighters that allowed the vessels to off-load while at anchor. Concluding that *Corpus Christi Bay* had provided a valuable aircraft repair service to the Army during the war, the Marine Corps persuaded the Navy Department to convert a pair of *Wright*-class containerships into aviation logistics ships. MSC deployed its modern ships in three MPS squadrons based in the Atlantic Ocean, Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and the Mariana Islands. Each squadron contained equipment and thirty days' worth of supplies for a 16,500-man Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB). The other armed services stowed material in 11 dedicated ships at Diego Garcia and the Western Pacific.

MSC purchased from the Sea-Land Corporation eight SL-7 containerships built in the early 1970s and modified them into fast sealift ships (FSSs) by installing a roll-on/roll-off area amidships and pedestal cranes able to load and discharge cargo swiftly, even at ports lacking requisite cranes and other off-loading equipment. The eight ships, each capable of 33 knots, could embark a full mechanized U.S. Army division at East Coast ports, transport the unit to a crisis spot, and return to the United States to load additional units.

The successful use of the civilian-crewed oiler *Taluga* to fuel warships in the latter stages of the



NHHC Persian Gulf War Collection

MV *PFC Dewayne T. Williams* (T-AK-3009), operated by the Military Sealift Command, offloads armored fighting vehicles and earth-moving equipment at a port in Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War.

Vietnam War led to the general use of merchant mariners to operate fleet tugs, ammunition ships, combat stores ships, and submarine tenders in support of the Navy's operating forces. On 1 February 2010 *Frank Cable* (AS-40) became the last Navy auxiliary ship to be turned over to MSC for manning by civilian mariners.

The proof that America's maritime organizations had profited from the Vietnam experience was plain to see 15 years later in the Persian Gulf War. Just two weeks after the 2 August 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces, a trio of MPS ships off-loaded the armored fighting vehicles, ammunition, and equipment of a Marine expeditionary brigade in Saudi Arabia. The troops arrived soon afterward by air. On the 25th, other MPSs discharged the gear and supplies for a second MEB in Saudi ports. Hence, in relatively short order, strong U.S. ground units were on hand to deter or

defeat an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia. This rapid deployment of combat forces validated the maritime prepositioning concept. The Ready Reserve Force (RRF) also earned its keep in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The activated ships of the RRF, along with the fast sealift ships and ships of the U.S. and foreign merchant fleets, transported a half-million-strong U.S. combat contingent to the theater of war in only seven months. In June 2002 USNS *Watson* (T-AKR-310) off-loaded cargo in Kuwait and was followed by 154 other vessels in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Years of effort by the U.S. maritime organizations and the sacrifices made by MSC personnel and American and foreign civilian merchant mariners did not bring victory in the Vietnam War. But the 10-year experience deploying and supplying allied forces in Southeast Asia strengthened the U.S. sealift establishment for the challenges of the future. ♪

Acronyms

AB&T	Alaska Barge and Transport Company
AMC	Army Materiel Command
COMNAVFORV	Commander Naval Forces Vietnam
COMUSMACV	Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam
EOD	explosive ordnance disposal
FDL	forward deployment logistics
FFD	floating forward depot
FSS	fast sealift ships
IUWU	inshore undersea warfare units
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LARC	lighter amphibious resupply cargo
LCM	landing craft, mechanized
LCU	utility landing craft
LST	tank landing ship
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MEB	Marine expeditionary brigade
MLMS	motor launch minesweepers
MPS	maritime prepositioning ships
MSB	minesweeping boats
MSC	Military Sealift Command
MSTS	Military Sea Transportation Service
NLF	National Liberation Front
PBR	river patrol boat
POL	petroleum, oil, and lubricants
ROK	Republic of Korea
RRF	Ready Reserve Force
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEAL	Sea-Air-Land forces
UNREP	underway replenishment
VC	Viet Cong
VNN	Vietnam Navy

The Author



Salvatore R. Mercogliano has been a professor of History at Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina, since 2010. He teaches courses in Western civilization, U.S. history, American military experience, the Civil War, and world maritime history. He was named Professor of the Year in 2015 and 2011 and honored by his colleagues with the D. P. Russ Jr. and Walter S. Jones Sr. Alumni Award for Teaching Excellence. He has also taught at Methodist University, East Carolina University, Central Carolina Community College, the U.S. Military Academy, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. Dr. Mercogliano has published numerous articles and given presentations on a variety of maritime related topics, with a focus on the role of the merchant marine in national defense. He holds degrees from the State University of New York Maritime College (BS in Marine Transportation), East Carolina University (MA in Maritime History and Nautical Archeology), and the University of Alabama (PhD in Military and Naval History), along with his U.S. Merchant Marine deck license. Dr. Mercogliano lives in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina, with his wife Kathy and son Christopher.

Acknowledgments

This work originated with my participation during Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm when I sailed on board several ships for the Military Sealift Command, in particular the hospital ship *Comfort* (T-AH-20). While serving on board *Comfort*, my interest in the role of the merchant marine in national defense was awakened. With the encouragement and support of my wife Kathy, I enrolled in the graduate program at East Carolina University, where my advisor, Dr. Michael A. Palmer, encouraged my research and connected me with the series editor, Dr. Edward J. Marolda. The concept for my master's thesis (the basis for this work) arose after reading a manuscript of *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War*. When the Naval History and Heritage Command and Naval Historical Foundation decided to publish a series on The U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War, I was honored to resurrect my previous research and delve into a topic that is rarely studied by naval historians.

This work would not have been possible without the aid and assistance of many personnel, especially the staffs at the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC) and Military Sealift Command (in particular, several articles by Lane Kendall); the libraries at Campbell University, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the U.S. Naval Academy; and all those veteran merchant mariners who contributed to the research and understanding of this subject. Thanks to Roberto Loiederman and Richard Linnett for the use of their photo of McKay and Glatkowski. Lori Janice Jorgensen of the U.S. Naval Institute and Lisa Crunk of the NHHC's photo archives were particularly helpful in the photo research for this work.

Lastly, none of my work and effort would have been possible without the endless support of my wife Kathy and son Christopher.

Publisher's Note

The Naval History and Heritage Command extends a grateful thank you to the Naval Historical Foundation for making the U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War series possible. They generously sponsored not only the author's work on this book, but also the subsequent editorial services that helped make it a reality. The NHHC is grateful for the NHF's support and its dedication to telling the story of this important era in the Navy's history.

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ISBN 978-0-945274-96-4



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