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## ***MOVING RIGHT***

*RIGHT PLACE* ★

*RIGHT TIME* ★

*RIGHT INVENTORY* ★

**ASSOCIATED UNIT PILOT PROGRAM PROVES VIABILITY** PAGE 30

# Sealift Is Key to Sustainment Operations

By James L. Henry

Albert Einstein famously said, “Nothing happens until something moves.” In the U.S. Army, a requisition order may start the movement process, but it does not move anything. That happens through DoD’s robust transportation and logistics support systems, which enable the U.S. to project its forces around the globe. For the Army, these complex logistics and transportation systems are mission-critical.

The Army’s mission is “to deploy, fight and win our Nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt and sustained land dominance by Army forces across the full spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force.” But the Army cannot win without sustained supplies of goods and materiel, which is why sealift is essential to the Army’s ability to fulfill its mission.

We can be lulled into thinking the Army can quickly go anywhere at any time; however, goods and materiel do not magically appear. They must be moved. Today’s airlift provides fast and flexible deployment, but its capacity is limited and its costs can be high. Sealift is therefore the workhorse for the Army, providing sustainment cargoes for any enduring effort.

The Navy provides important surge sealift capability to support DoD through assets maintained by its Military Sealift Command. The command is responsible for 127 ships crewed by approximately 8,000 civilian mariners supporting military operations around the world, including those that pre-position combat cargo at sea and move military equipment and supplies to deployed forces. Military Sealift Command also has access to 46 Ready Reserve Fleet ships maintained by the Department of Transportation’s U.S. Maritime Administration in a reduced operating status, which are crewed by civilian mariners, and charters commercial ships to meet DoD sealift requirements.

## Sea Bridge

While those assets are a vital component of America’s sealift capability, the Navy does not have—nor does it need—enough organic ships to support a large-

scale sustainment mission. It relies, as it has throughout history, on commercial U.S.-flagged ships, which some call the U.S. Merchant Marine, to support sealift domestically and internationally and DoD’s military missions around the globe. The commercial Merchant Marine fleet provides a vital day-to-day sea bridge for the U.S. Army overseas, carrying critical cargoes that ensure America’s warfighters have the goods and materiel to win a war anywhere. That fleet also supports a

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pool of commercial mariners available for Navy sealift missions, including full crewing of the Ready Reserve Fleet in times of activation.

The core of the U.S.-flagged fleet supporting military operations worldwide is comprised of the 60 ships operating in the Maritime Security Program fleet administered by the Maritime Administration and utilized by DoD’s U.S. Transportation Command. U.S.-flagged ships operating in domestic commerce—the so-called Jones Act fleet—also support DoD through participation in the Voluntary Intermodal Sealift Agreement, and by sustaining a defense shipbuilding, maintenance and repair industrial base.

The ships in the Merchant Marine are an important auxiliary of DoD, which annually ships more than 1 million metric tons of cargo overseas. But it is not only the ships and logistics network provided by the Merchant Marine that are critical DoD assets. According to a Maritime Administration study, 11,678 civilian mariners are needed for military and commercial U.S.-flagged vessel operations to support defense sealift. More than half the mariners come from com-

mercial U.S.-flagged ships. The Maritime Security Program fleet employs 2,386 mariners capable of supporting DoD, and the Jones Act fleet employs 3,380 mariners. These 5,766 commercial mariners serving in the Merchant Marine are an essential adjunct to DoD’s sealift capabilities, for without crews, U.S. ships sit idle.

The Army has extraordinary capabilities to fulfill its missions around the world, and those capabilities are supported by crucial sealift provided by the Merchant Marine and the Navy—ships, logistics networks, mariners, etc. These assets help sustain the Army so it can win wars and defend U.S. interests anywhere in the world.

## Full Funding Needed

But even the best strategy can fall victim to poor planning and logistics. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “You will not find it difficult to prove that battles, campaigns, and even wars have been won or lost primarily because of logistics.” Therefore, America must maintain and enhance its sealift capabilities by fully funding Military Sealift Command and the Maritime Security Program, supporting peacetime cargo preference and protecting the Jones Act. The ability to project forces overseas to defend America’s interests depends on the ability to plan for long-range transportation on a sustained basis. Navy assets are crucial to that planning process, but so too are the assets and capabilities of the Merchant Marine.

Einstein was right when he said, “Nothing happens until something moves.” And the things that move on U.S.-flagged ships with American crews sustain Army forces around the globe. That’s the reason former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis called the Merchant Marine “the fourth arm of defense.” □

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