

THE MARITIME ADMINISTRATION'S NATIONAL DEFENSE RESERVE FLEET

Introduction

Section 11 of the Merchant Ship Sales Act of 1946 established the National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) to serve as a reserve of ships for national defense and national emergencies. At its height in 1950, the NDRF consisted of 2,277 ships at the following eight anchorages: Stony Point, New York; Fort Eustis, Virginia; Wilmington, North Carolina; Mobile, Alabama; Beaumont, Texas; Benicia, California; Astoria, Oregon; and Olympia, Washington.

The Fleet

Today's fleet is much smaller consisting of just three of its original eight anchorages located at: Fort Eustis; Beaumont; Suisun Bay in Benicia, California, and at designated port facility berths. The program consists primarily of dry cargo ships with some tankers and military auxiliaries. As of June 30, 2010, there were 165 vessels in the NDRF. In 1976, a Ready Reserve Fleet component was established to provide rapid deployment of military equipment. The Ready Reserve Fleet later became the Ready Reserve Force (RRF), which now comprises 49 vessels. In addition to maintaining ships for the United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), the Missile Defense Agency sponsors two NDRF ships for missile tracking. An additional 25 non-NDRF ships are held for other government agencies on a cost-reimbursable basis.

There are 31 vessels in retention status, which are preserved in a way that keeps them in the same condition as when they entered the fleet. Dehumidification of air-tight internal spaces is an effective means of controlling the corrosion of metal and growth of mold and mildew. A cathodic protection system uses an impressed current of DC power that is distributed through anodes to the exterior underwater portions of the hull, resulting in an electric field that suppresses corrosion and preserves exposed hull surfaces. Cosmetic work is generally deferred because ship aesthetics is not imperative to the activation and operation of the vessels.

Operations

Since 1950, NDRF vessels have supported emergency shipping operations during war and national emergencies. During the Korean War, 540 vessels were activated to support military forces.

A worldwide tonnage shortfall from 1951 to 1953 required over 600 ship activations to lift coal to Northern Europe and grain to India. In 1956, 223 cargo ships and 29 tankers were activated in response to another tonnage shortfall caused by the closing of the Suez Canal. From 1955 through 1964, another 698 ships were used to store grain for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During the Berlin crisis of 1961, 18 vessels were activated and remained in service until 1970. During the Vietnam War, 172 vessels were activated to support military operations there. In August of 1990, the RRF consisted of 96 ships, 78 of which were activated to support Operations DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. This was the first large-scale activation and employment of the RRF since it was separated from the NDRF. The vessels involved were roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) vessels (which describe how cargo is handled), break-bulk cargo ships, tankers, and barge carriers. More than seventy-five percent of the RRF provided sealift to support the U.S. effort's in the Persian Gulf between August 1990 and April 1991. The ships transported 750,000 short tons of dry cargo, which was one-fifth of the total dry cargo sealifted during the conflict. The Ro-Ros proved to be the most effective vessels and they delivered nearly twenty percent of Central Command's material and other support during the first phase of the operations.

In 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) used five RRF and four NDRF ships for its relief operations in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The ships supported recovery efforts mainly by providing messing and berthing for refinery workers, oil spill response teams, and longshoremen. A dedicated Disaster Relief Fleet is currently being promoted with the goal of providing a quicker response time by establishing ship-based command centers and prepositioning supplies.

MARAD activated six vessels in response to the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. Three of the six vessels took part in the relief efforts. The first vessel carried supplies and equipment for the U.S. Navy's Seabees (Construction Battalions). The second vessel provided logistical support for the relief efforts from Port au Prince's harbor, while the third vessel operated as a high speed freight and passenger shuttle between the continental U.S. and Port au Prince.

Disposal of Obsolete Vessels

In addition to maintaining a fleet of active and in-active ships, MARAD is the Federal government's disposal agent for Federally-owned obsolete, merchant-type vessels, and naval auxiliaries that are equal to or greater than 1,500 gross tons. MARAD has disposed of vessels through a variety of methods that include the following: domestic and foreign recycling; sinking for use as artificial reefs; and deep-water sinking in conjunction with the U.S. Navy's SINKEX Program. Of the 85 non-retention vessels currently in the NDRF, 71 are in the disposal process or are ready for disposal and 14 are being reviewed for their historical significance.

Ship Donation

MARAD has the authority to donate obsolete ships to qualified organizations. However, such ships may not be used for commercial transportation purpose.

Training

Twelve ships are used for training purposes; seven are assigned to the state maritime schools located in New York, Massachusetts, Maine, Texas, California, and Michigan and five are used for military and homeland security training.

Loans and Transfers of Artifacts and Equipment

MARAD has authority to transfer equipment from its obsolete ships to qualified organizations. Over the years, MARAD has provided countless numbers of artifacts and equipment to memorial ships located throughout the U.S. For example, in 2008 MARAD transferred equipment and parts from the ex-USS *Gage*, a WWII troop transport slated for disposal, to the memorial ships USS *Slater* and USS *Massachusetts*, for use as replacement parts. Additionally, MARAD is the custodian of artifacts that document and represent the history of MARAD and its predecessor agencies going as far back as the 1930s. The artifact loan program is an important element in MARAD's program of making its heritage assets accessible to the widest possible audience.

Historic artifacts may be loaned to organizations that are eligible and qualified under the provisions of Federal statutes.