

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT VESSEL: *Mission Buenaventura* (T-AOT-1012)



Stern and bow of *Mission Buenaventura* at the Beaumont Reserve Fleet in January 2009. Maritime Administration photos.



Vessel History

The *Spirit of Liberty*, later renamed *Mission Buenaventura*, was built for the Keystone Shipping Company in 1968 by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation at its Sparrows Point, Maryland shipyard. It was one of eight sister product tankers constructed there to a standard design. The other seven tankers were also built for commercial owners; Overseas Shipholding Company and the Ogden Marine Corporation. Upon its completion, Keystone chartered the *Spirit of Liberty* to the U.S. Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS)¹. One of the primary MSTS missions in the 1960s was to supply fuel to American military bases located overseas. It employed tankers to accomplish this mission, with those tankers coming either from its organically-owned fleet, or under charter from commercial owners. In 1970 MSTS was renamed Military Sealift Command (MSC).

Spirit of Liberty supplied fuel for American military operations during the Vietnam War. In 1973 the tanker supported the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean during the Arab-Israeli War. The vessel remained chartered to MSC until May 1987, when it was one of nine vessels purchased by the Navy for the Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force (RRF). The vessel was renamed *Mission Buenaventura* and designated T-AOT -1012. After a shipyard overhaul, the *Mission Buenaventura* was delivered to the Maritime Administration on July 12, 1987. The ship was maintained in a five-day activation status at the reserve fleet anchorage in Beaumont, Texas, and managed by Mormac Marine Enterprises of Stamford, Connecticut.

¹ The MSTS was a post-World War II combination of four predecessor government agencies that handled similar sealift functions. These included the Navy's Naval Transportation Service and Fleet Support Service, the Army Transport Service, and the War Shipping Administration of the United States Maritime Commission.

The RRF was established in 1976 as a subset of the National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF). The NDRF was established under Section XI of the Merchant Ship Sales Act of 1946 to serve as a reserve of ships for national defense and national emergencies. The RRF component of the NDRF is composed of vessels that can be activated on short notice to provide rapid deployment of military equipment during an emergency.

Desert Shield/Desert Storm

In August 1990, the RRF consisted of 96 ships, 78 of which were activated to support Desert Shield/Desert Storm. This was the first large-scale activation and employment of the RRF since it was established within the NDRF in 1976. Prior to that time, NDRF ships were employed in crises such as the Korean and Vietnam Wars. 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. These vessels supplemented other government-owned and chartered vessels to carry military cargo to the Middle East during the build-up prior to the first Gulf War. 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.

The *Mission Buenaventura* was one of three RRF tankers (the others were *American Osprey* and *Potomac*) activated for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. The *Mission Buenaventura* was activated in 1991 at the Houston Ship Repair in Orange, Texas. The tanker supplied fuel to U.S. military forces in Jeddah Saudi Arabia and Khorfakkan in the United Arab Emirates between February and April 1991. After hostilities ended, the vessel was ordered to return to the U.S. for deactivation. In June 1991 Houston Ship Repair was awarded the contract to deactivate the tanker in Galveston, Texas. Upon completion of the shipyard work, the tanker was returned to Beaumont Reserve Fleet for retention. During the remainder of its RRF service, the *Mission Buenaventura* moved several times for shipyard work, including topside repairs in 1997, drydocking at the Bender shipyard in Mobile, Alabama in December 2001, and further topside repairs at Orange, Texas in 2002. The vessel was officially downgraded from the RRF on July 31, 2004, and designated for disposal in 2006.

Once activated, the ships of the RRF are placed under the Operational Control (OPCON) of the MSC. Summary operational details for individual ships, such as the *Mission Buenaventura*, are not well documented, and primary sources that are available for research similarly provide little narrative detail. Unfortunately, there is very little published material about the role of the Maritime Administration during the Gulf War. One of the best books published on the subject is, *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War*, by Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller. While this book does not discuss details of a specific ship's operations, it does provide an excellent overview of the logistics during the build-up to the war and RRF's

role in that build-up. Several of the topics that the book discusses include the difficulties encountered during the vessels' activation into the Navy's Military Sealift Command, their successes, and the amount and kind of material that they carried.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Type: T-AOT-1012
Hull Number: 4616
Official Number: 516521
Previous name: *Spirit of Liberty*
Builder: Bethlehem Steel, Sparrows Point, MD.
Year: 1968
Length: 660'
Beam: 90'
Depth: 49'
Draft: 36.6'
Displacement: 45,877
Deadweight: 38,238
Gross Tonnage (GRT): 21,521
Total Cargo Capacity: 334,733 barrels
Speed: 16.5 knots
Main Engine: Steam turbine, 10,935 horsepower

The *Mission Buenaventura* was constructed at a time when the traditional merchant ship form was evolving. By the mid-to-late 1960s, most new tankers featured all-aft superstructures and machinery, replacing the traditional divided superstructure profile that had been popular since the early twentieth century. The *Spirit of Liberty*/*Mission Buenaventura* has a raised foredeck accommodating the anchor windlass and a unified, multi-deck superstructure at the stern housing the navigating bridge, crew living quarters and upper machinery spaces. It had a crew of nine officers and 17 seamen.



Left: The *Mount Washington*, built in 1963, with the traditional divided superstructure. Right: *Mission Buenaventura*, designed with an all-aft superstructure. Maritime Administration photos.



Statement of Significance

The *Mission Buenaventura* is a typical product tanker with no distinctive or unusual characteristics. It is generally representative of its contemporary type. Vessels of this type are numerous in commercial trade, and remain well-represented in the overall world fleet. The vessel is not distinctive, nor is it of a specialized form unique to a particular trade. It has limited association with both the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, however, its role was not significant enough in either conflict to qualify under criteria A considering the vessel's age and the nature of the events.

Historical Integrity

The vessel was originally constructed in 1968 and did not undergo any substantial modifications during its service life. The vessel retains its historical integrity, being substantially unchanged from original construction. All (or most) salient design features of structure, machinery and equipment are substantially intact. The vessel's physical integrity is slightly degraded, and the vessel is in overall fair condition with moderate topside deterioration.



Left: Valves and piping midships.
Middle: Looking across to the superstructure. *Right:* Overall view of the upper deck. Maritime Administration photos.



National Register Eligibility Statement

The *Mission Buenaventura* is not yet 50 years old. The vessel does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing. While it did participate in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm, it was just one of 78 RRF vessels activated by the Navy to support the operations and its role was not significant enough to qualify under criteria A.

Date: 5 March 2009

Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

Brouwer, Norman. *Mission Buenaventura Ship History*. 2008.

Couper, Alastair. *The Shipping Revolution: The Modern Merchant Ship*. London: Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1992.

De la Pedraja, René. *The Rise & Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

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Marolda, Edward J. and Robert J. Schneller, Jr. *Shield and Sword: The United States and the Persian Gulf War*. Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1998.

Wertheim, Eric. *Combat Fleets of the World, 15th Edition, Their Ships, Aircraft and Systems*. Annapolis, Maryland.: Naval Institute Press, 2007.

Internet Sites

Maritime Administration's Property Management and Archive Record System Website:
www.pmars.imsug.com/detail.asp?Ship=6434

Maritime Business Strategies, LLC:
www.coltoncompany.com/shipbldg/ussbldrs/postwwii/shipyards/

www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/taot-181.htm

Other

Marine News. Government \$87.8 Million Purchase of Nine Merchant Ships for RRF. 1988

Marine Engineering. 1968

Mission Buenaventura file located at the Maritime Administration's Headquarters, Washington, D.C.