

THE MARITIME ADMINISTRATION'S READY RESERVE FORCE

The Ready Reserve Force (RRF) program was initiated in 1976 as a subset of the Maritime Administration's (MARAD) National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) to support the rapid worldwide deployment of U.S. military forces. As a key element of Department of Defense (DOD) strategic sealift, the RRF primarily supports transport of Army and Marine Corps unit equipment, combat support equipment, and initial resupply during the critical surge period before commercial ships can be marshaled. The RRF provides nearly one-half of the government-owned surge sealift capability. Management of the RRF program is defined by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between DOD and Department of Transportation (DOT).

The program began with 6 ships in 1977, peaked at 102 in 1994, and now consists of 49 ships including: 35 roll-on/roll off (RO/RO) vessels (which includes 8 Fast Sealift Support vessels (FSS)), four heavy-lift or barge carrying ships, six auxiliary craneships, one tanker, two aviation repair vessels, and three combat logistics ships. Four RRF ships are homeported in the NDRF anchorage in Beaumont, Texas. The balance is berthed at various U.S. ports. Layberth facilities are leased from commercial sources and by negotiating for government owned facilities. These outported locations are coordinated with military planners and chosen to minimize sailing time to strategic loadout ports. Outported RRF ships are also used as training platforms for cargo handling by Navy and Army units and for homeland security training by various law enforcement agencies.

RRF ships are expected to be fully operational within their assigned 5 and 10-day readiness status and sail to designated loading berths. Commercial U.S. ship managers provide systems maintenance, equipment repairs, logistics support, activation, manning, and operations management by contract. Ships in priority readiness have Reduced Operating Status (ROS) maintenance crews of about 10 commercial merchant mariners that are supplemented by additional mariners during activations. Readiness of the RRF is periodically tested by DOD directed activations of ships for military cargo operations and exercises.

The program has experienced a total of 603 vessel activations, with an average of about 27 activations per year since 1990. The RRF made a major contribution to the success of DESERT SHIELD/STORM Operations from 1990 through 1992, when 79 vessels were activated to meet military sealift requirements by carrying 25% of the unit equipment and 45% of the ammunition needed. Two RRF tankers, two RO/RO ships and a troop transport ship were needed in Somalia for Operation RESTORE HOPE in 1993 and 1994. During the Haitian crisis in 1994, 15 ships were activated for UPHOLD DEMOCRACY operations. In 1995 and 1996, four RO/RO ships were used to deliver military cargo as part of U.S. and U.K. support to NATO peace-keeping missions. Four ships were activated to provide humanitarian assistance for Central America following Hurricane Mitch in 1998. During the 1990s, RRF ships supported the Afloat Prepositioning Force (APF) with specialized tankers. One dry cargo vessel remains in use and is capable of underway replenishment for the Navy's Combat Logistics Force.

The RRF was called upon to provide humanitarian assistance to the U.S. Gulf Coast following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita landfalls in 2005 with 866 ship-days of support. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) used nine of MARAD's vessels to support relief efforts; five were in the RRF. Messing and berthing was provided for refinery workers, emergency response teams, and longshoremen, providing about 83,000 berths and 270,000 meals.

From 2002 to June of 2008, 118 ship activations were called for in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM. In that period, there were 13,575 ship operating days with a reliability rate of 99.0%. Almost 25% of the initial equipment needed to support the U.S. Armed Forces operations in Iraq was moved by the RRF.

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.

The RRF has rightfully been called "America's Sea Power Reliant Partner."