

# Five Transport Vessels Survive, Thrive in Hostile Water Simulation, Tactical Adviser Says

Aware that in the increasingly tense global security environment the U.S. Navy's sealift and logistical support fleet may have to sail through seas contested by a near peer adversary, U.S. Transportation Command recently sent five unarmed transport vessels through simulated hostile waters in a convoy similar to those used during World War II's dangerous "battle for the Atlantic."

The five ships, crewed by civilian mariners, "executed tactical formation maneuvers" to counter the threat of hostile submarines or sea mines, TRANSCOM said in a release. The civilians were assisted by experienced Navy Reserve officers under a new program created in recognition of the possibility of attacks against the sealift and supply ships, which would be crucial in any major overseas conflict.

The convoy exercise was conducted during an unprecedented "turbo activation" in late September in which 33 vessels from the Military Sealift Command (MSC) and the Maritime Administration (MARAD) fleets were mobilized on short notice to test whether the ships – most of which are

considered aged –  
were mechanically ready to sail and that enough qualified  
mariners would be  
available to crew them during a national security crisis.

“The turbo activation was an exercise to prove that the  
material  
readiness and crews’ skill level of our surge sealift ships  
make it possible to  
respond to world events on short notice,” said Cmdr. Vincent  
D’Eusanio, the  
tactical adviser (TACAD) who sailed aboard one of the ships in  
the exercise.

“We had to know if our ships would be capable of delivering  
supplies and equipment to our deployed troops serving overseas  
when required,”  
said D’Eusanio, who also is MSC’s TACAD program manager.

The TACAD program was initiated in 2017 “based off of years  
of experience and past lessons learned,” D’Eusanio said in the  
TRANSCOM release.

“During World War II, we lost lots of merchant ships and  
mariners. Some of this  
was a result of not knowing how to sail a merchant ship in a  
hostile  
environment. When the Navy began to train mariners to counter  
threats, like the  
German U-boats, our losses dwindled.”

Most of the TACADs are Navy reservists who sail as mariners  
in their civilian careers. D’Eusanio is a licensed chief  
engineer with the  
Staten Island Ferry when not on Navy duty.

The TACADs are assigned to educate the civilian crews “about  
how to sail in a contested environment ... provide tactical  
advice and facilitate

communications with the combatant fleet to allow our mariners to successfully operate in unfriendly waters,” D-Eusanio said.

After sailing from their East Coast ports, the five MSC ships rendezvoused in the North Atlantic, formed into a convoy and performed tactical maneuvers while sailing through the simulated contested waters. The crews were trained to reduce their electromagnetic signature to avoid being detected and targeted by enemy missiles or aircraft, said Capt. Hans Lynch, MSC’s Atlantic commodore who led the East Coast mobilization.

They also were instructed how to darken the ships at night to reduce the chances of being spotted by the enemy. Lynch said the activation was not only a good test of the materiel condition of the ships and the availability of trained mariners but also the ability of the U.S. Coast Guard and the American Bureau of Shipping to provide technicians to determine if the ships were ready to sail.

“Everyone did really well,” he said. “None of the ships had major issues due to not being able to be inspected or getting people required to the vessels.”