



Merchant Marine Academy

National Maritime Day

Fleet Week New York, NY

Talking Points for VADM Perry

22 MAY 2024

It is great to be here today, good afternoon everyone! With just a month to go for the first class midshipmen, I imagine you're ready to celebrate a little after a few exams. Before you get to celebrate, it's important that we take time to remember, especially on a day like today, those who have gone before us.

So today on this 91st National Maritime Day I'm honored to be with you.

CAPT Tortora, thanks for your remarks. I appreciate the history you've recounted, reflecting on the significance of this day.

It holds great meaning, for we honor the extraordinary contributions and sacrifices of our Merchant Mariners—those heroes, often unsung, who keep our maritime operations robust and resilient.

Now you may be wondering...why a U.S. Navy Submariner is speaking at an event dedicated to celebrating Merchant Mariners?

Well, as a career submariner, I've spent a lot of time under the water, in some challenging environments, but today as a fleet commander I know all too well – and I see every day – that the vital role that you Mariners play enables global operations by our navy, and of our allies.

Vital Role of Mariners

Mariners as individuals and as teams are in fact a critical enabler in our maritime environment.

Your work is crucial not only to the success of our missions but to the very foundation of our strategic capabilities.

YOU are the professionals who operate the vital ships, the fast ammo ships, the oilers, the submarine tenders, the hospital ships that sustain our Warfighting Navy all around the globe.

Naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote that “a true sea power must have a vibrant merchant marine.” And that is as true today as when he wrote it, nearly 100 years ago. When *your* profession thrives, *we* succeed.

And it’s your unwavering commitment that enables Sailors like me – and thousands of Sailors who are here in New York for Fleet Week– to survive, to thrive, and to dominate the maritime domain alongside our Allies and partners.

Our Navy’s goal today is to create a modernized naval force that not only stands the test of time, but also adapts to the ever-changing maritime landscape... that incorporates from seabed to space, across scorching equatorial climates to a frigid and frozen Arctic...all the amazing capabilities that we’re developing around the globe.

But this isn’t just about building ships and combat systems; it’s about developing a professional workforce in our Navy and your Merchant Marines with the right education, experience, mindset, and technical capabilities to become the technical experts in our craft. That is, to become masters of our craft, to effectively compete in peacetime while we deter, and to win, in combat.

Now, our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Lisa Franchetti, talks about putting more players on the field, ready with the right skills, the right mindset to defend democracy in peace, and be prepared to fight and win in conflicts, alongside our allies and partners....allies and partners I might mention here, that the Germans currently have one of their Merchant Mariner ships, the Frankfurt an Main, that just pulled into Manhattan.

Merchant Mariners are indeed among these vital players, and your efforts ensure that our Navy remains agile, equipped, and ready to respond to any challenge.

At any given time, about a third of our Navy’s ships, about a hundred on any day, are deployed around the globe. And wherever we have U.S. Navy ships, you can bet that a



Merchant Mariner is nearby...in fact a whole crew of them is likely onboard those support ships, whether we are in peace time or in combat.

America's Navy can only go to sea when we have the logistics support required...it is *crucial* to keeping our Navy fit to fight.

Our nation's first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley – an Army officer – he once said that “Amateurs talk strategy, but professionals talk logistics.” While strategy may guide our actions, it's logistics...what *you* deliver...that sustains them

Your contributions don't stop there, however, our Merchant Mariners not only provide logistics support...you also lay to the ocean floor the millions of miles of sub-sea, undersea cables that our modern economy depends on. These are vital links between continents, and they are essential to global communication and to commerce. In fact, they are the lifeblood of day to day operations of our economies, our governments, and frankly our societies.

As we look to the future, our economic and national security will continue to rely upon the safe, reliable maritime trade that you deliver, unimpeded access to markets, and a free and open international rules-based order.

Our Warfighting Navy is out there defending and deterring, but *you* are the lifeblood that sustains us and connects us all.

Mariners and the Trans-Atlantic Link

Today, this ceremony remembers the first pioneering voyage of the first all-steam ship that, CAPT Tortora mentioned, SS Savannah, which sailed across the Atlantic, from Savannah, Georgia to Liverpool, England in 1819.

While in Europe, it made stops in Sweden, in Russia before eventually returning to the United States after six months. Today Second Fleet routinely deploys ships across the Atlantic, to the Baltic, to the Mediterranean, to the Arctic and into the High North. But it was Savannah blazed that trail, for us to get the support we needed, from Merchant Marine ships.

This was a technological advancement of its time, the first steam ship cross-Atlantic transit, and this voyage enabled the United States to strengthen trans-Atlantic links, traveling across the ocean faster than ever before thanks to steam-power.

But it was the operation, the deployment of this new-fangled propulsion capability – steam power – that enabled us to make that transit. It was Merchant Mariners that did the work.

Today, these trans-Atlantic links are even more essential, preserving our relationships with Allies and partners, and we are stronger together thanks to the skills, tenacity, and sacrifices of the Merchant Mariners.

Honoring the Sacrifices

So let's reflect for a moment on those sacrifices.

As you're the only eligible service academy to hoist this battle standard, it's great to be here today, but let's remember that you fly this battle standard as a solemn reminder of the midshipmen who gave their lives, fighting on ships sunk by German U-boats in the Atlantic.

In total, 142 Kings Point midshipmen were lost. Incredible.

You should be very proud of that, and I'm very proud to be here today to honor your future service in uniform.

Mariners and Recent Events

Our Mariners today honor the memory and legacy of those who have paid the ultimate price. You honor them by continuing to serve, and by doing your part for a very grateful nation.

Conflicts and threats across the Atlantic have in fact increased in recent years, and Merchant Mariners were there every day to respond.

Consider the recent humanitarian efforts in Gaza, where the Merchant Mariners of Ready Reserve Fleet vessel, Motor Vessel Roy P. Benavidez delivered components to build piers, enabling the flow of aid to those in desperate need.



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Or their role in transporting armaments to the European continent in support of Ukraine, standing firm against Russia's illegal invasion.

These are just a few examples of our Mariner's enduring commitment to global stability and peace.

Call to Action: We Need YOU!

As you look to the horizon of your careers – whether you're a midshipman about to receive your commission, or a seasoned Mariner on the faculty– take heart in knowing that what *you* do *matters*!

And, I might say that, somewhere along the journey you will come to the realization that what you do at sea as a Merchant Mariner prepares you for anything else in life. And I say that after a career of learning, and a career at sea with shipmates, teaches you that you can accomplish anything.

Your continued involvement in the prosperity and security of our nation...it is vital. Whether you do this through a reserve commission, or working for Military Sealift Command, and just staying in the industry, or perhaps by taking the hard job at the union hall. We need you.

So today as we celebrate National Maritime Day, on behalf of the United States Navy, and NATO, I extend my deepest gratitude for your service.

Your dedication, courage, and your commitment, it makes all the difference. You are the backbone of our nation's maritime strength.

Thank you, and God Bless the United States of America.