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Commander, U.S. Transportation Command
Address at the Admiral of the Ocean Sea Award Dinner
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Mariners: Delivering Strength for our Nation

AS DELIVERED

Good evening.

General Wykle, thank you for the introduction.

It is such an honor to join you tonight as we recognize the heritage and patriotism of the maritime industry fueled by the many men and women who have courageously sailed the open seas. This gala event has certainly brought out the best of the best in the industry, and frankly, it's a little intimidating. Fortunately, over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to meet several of you in person through various events, but for those I met tonight, it has been a pleasure and I look forward forging a longstanding relationship.

Before we get started, I would like to take a moment to offer a thank you to the president of the United Seamen's Service, Ed Morgan. I have heard of the United Seamen's Service referred to as the USO for mariners. Thank you for providing for the welfare of our mariners, their families, and mariners of other nations. And thank you for hosting this fantastic gala dinner to honor the 2021 Admiral of the Ocean Sea award winners.

Over the past 52 years, you have honored some legendary leaders in the maritime industry, and tonight's winners certainly carry that legacy. Congratulations!

I would also like to commend and thank everyone for their dedication to the mission over the last 12 months. It certainly has not been easy, and you had some obstacles: COVID, vaccines, supply chain issues...but at the end of the day, you accomplished the mission and were ready when our Nation needed you. Additionally, your support to incorporate counter-COVID protocols for federal contractors has and will continue to ensure Merchant Mariners remain safe and ready to answer our Nation's call. Thank you.

Some of you might be wondering what an Air Force General knows about the maritime industry, and to you, I would say that's a fair question. But I did watch Tom Hanks in *Greyhound* to freshen up my vernacular and I brushed off my notes on celestial navigation using the sexton port on my KC-135.... However, on a serious note, as the TRANSCOM Commander, ... I know the Department of Defense relies on you to deliver our decisive military force, a job you have done for decades.

I also know it is not always about transporting military equipment. This industry is critical to advancing American interests through a strong global economy, connected to our allies and partners.



As a seafaring nation, our country has been, is, and will continue to be reliant on the strength of our maritime industry and the many mariners who are known for their determination, grit, and selfless service. You are true patriots, committed to preserving our unique experiment in democracy.

In major conflicts, you are the “first to go, and the last to return.” As president Roosevelt stated, you are “America’s lifeline in war” and I submit you are America’s economic lifeline during peacetime.

If you have listened to me in the past, you have certainly heard me say how TRANSCOM is inextricably linked to our commercial industry partners. I have even referred to you all as TRANSCOM’s fourth component. You are critical to our warfighting framework through sharing the global trade networks and the unparalleled mobility capacity you offer. Since World War 2, we have enjoyed strategic dominance in each of these aspects and through you, we have presented our Nation’s leaders with options...But let me be clear, times are changing.

Our nation, and the maritime industry, is facing direct challenges across the maritime domain, eroding our advantages, and threatening our ability to deliver and sustain a decisive military force when needed. With over 85% of our forces in the Continental United States, we are counting on your ability to help us project military power across trans-oceanic distances, at a time and place of our Nation’s choosing.

We understand we will have to “fight” to get to the “fight” which is why we are shifting our focus to daily strategic competition. We must maintain and demonstrate our strategic comparative advantage by creating multiple dilemmas for our adversaries, while overcoming the complexities of an all-domain contested environment. To do this, we are exploring every risk mitigation measure available.

As many of you already know, in our Defender Series exercises, we are utilizing roll-on/roll-off vessels to demonstrate our ability to transport our decisive force around the globe. This logistics capability has longstanding deterrent value, and our adversaries are taking note.

We are also routinely performing Joint Logistics Over the Shore operations demonstrating the ability to deliver our military equipment anywhere, at any time... even in austere conditions. However, indicators point to a need to be even more agile and resilient.

In crisis or conflict, we will require combined naval support operations. These protection operations, with integrated support from Navy Fleet commanders, enhance survivability and provide mission assurance for critical cargo needed to win decisively.

The incorporation of tactical advisors with merchant mariner crews on TRANSCOM directed missions is another example. These Navy Reserve personnel, many who are also merchant mariners, are trained by Military Sealift Command to integrate commercial ships and their crews with military operations to enhance Joint Force agility while delivering flexible combat power. This mariner-military coordination and integration highlights the requisite interoperability for national success in strategic competition, crisis, or conflict.

Only by exercising our current capabilities can we identify the need to diversify and improve them for the future. But we cannot stop with only exercising our current capabilities. We need to be thinking bigger. We need to think about diversifying our capabilities and minimizing our reliance on foreign entities.



Recently, our analysis team completed a Mobility Capability Requirements Study and a Fuel Tanker Study at the direction of Congress. Analyzed against our most stressing logistics war plan, the Fuel Tanker Study highlighted an increased requirement for Bulk Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants tankers. Notably, this study clearly demonstrated the need for a Tanker Security Program as a strategy to increase U.S. flagged tanker capacity and reduce the risk of reliance on foreign flag tankers in contingency operations. These U.S. flagged tankers will ensure the Department of Defense has sufficient tanker capabilities to provide bulk fuel to elevated risk locations.

Further, the ability of these commercial tankers to pass fuel to a U.S. Navy oiler at sea greatly increases our ability to meet National Security objectives in a high-end conflict. This CONSOL capability is critical as we evolve operations to match a fully contested conflict.

We also support expanding our intra-theater sealift capabilities within the Pacific to improve our ability to transport unit equipment, dry cargo, and bulk fuel the last 1,000 miles. Small and agile vessels such as Offshore Supply Vessels, expand and support the final distribution network needed in the region.

Going forward, we are strong advocates for these necessary initiatives to ensure the entire logistics enterprise remains capable into the future. Programs such as the Tanker Security Program, the Maritime Security Program, and the Jones Act ensure we have reliable access to industry capabilities for defense needs.

We also remain ardent advocates for the continued development and education of mariners for operations in the future contested environment: survivability, ship maneuvering, electronic warfare...just to name a few.

General Shelton, Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff might have said it best, “our national security strategy depends on a vital merchant marine” foundation. As I have met our maritime industry leaders and our mariners, I have seen firsthand the power you bring to the fight. I know that without our maritime industry, we cannot deliver a decisive military force at a time and place of our Nation’s choosing!

In conclusion, I could not be more proud of the relationship between USTRANSCOM and our maritime industry. We value U.S. mariners operating U.S. vessels and we recognize the important role our mariners play to the strength of our Nation.

Once again, congratulations to our award winners. It has truly been an honor to spend the evening with you and celebrate your seafaring legacy. I am thankful for your continuous support and your many contributions to our national defense.

Together, we deliver.