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BROAD-SHOULDERED HEAVY LIFT MOBILITY

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 17 November 1965

by

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Chief of Naval Operations

A year ago the state of the world, the United States and the Navy were such that I could speak almost in academic terms of the general picture as it existed for the Navy. The most important things that had happened at that time were the two Tonkin Gulf incidents which involved our destroyer patrols, and they were too recent and rather isolated to permit an adequate evaluation of their significance.

It must be agreed, I think, that there have been many changes since then. As we all know, the picture changed rather abruptly after the Pleiku attack in February, and in the months since then, we have seen a remarkable example of national military power applied over a great distance into a strange environment which has strongly resisted the exploitation of nearly all of our basic principles of warfare.

You will notice that I said "nearly all" of these principles. This was intentional, because today I'd like to talk about one aspect of this conflict which, even in these curious and difficult circumstances, continues to operate pretty much unaffected by the ground rules of this or any other war in history. This one aspect is military transportation; more particularly the nautical part of it. Of course, I realize that even in this aspect changes galore have taken place. But even so, the long logistic support lines to South Vietnam have once again brought out the fact that the heavy lift mobility—without which no military effort—ancient or modern—can be sustained, must rely upon water transportation. Since the Navy's

number one job is, and always has been, to insure that we can use the oceans for this type of movement, I'm going to talk today about this aspect of our Navy's business.

First, let's review briefly a few background matters because we are often prone to permit military principles—good, sound principles—to fall into disregard merely from lack of use.

Just about 14,000 years ago, which would be about 5000 years, the matter of military transportation was a fairly simple one. It was simple because this was the time of light loads of high density, and they were carried for the most part on the most common means of transportation, the camel, or donkey or horse.

However, even then if heavy loads were to be hauled from place to place—loads such as building materials, grain and the like, it was both necessary and natural to use water transportation. And it followed that, in a military sense, an enemy could do great harm by denying the use of such a water thoroughfare for the transportation of these heavy loads. This is one of the earliest applications of a principle later expounded by a man named Mahan.

As the centuries, and wars, went by, and newer methods of transportation replaced the camel or donkey or horse, events proved that history did indeed have a way of repeating itself, and here, the lesson repeatedly encountered—and seemingly repeatedly forgotten—was that, for the transportation of gross quantities of material, it was always necessary to employ the same principle used by that original logistic authority—Noah.

As to just how vital this requirement has been, and how necessary this sealift capability has been considered in the history of our own country, I think is expressed in a research survey, by Albion and Pope, entitled "Sea Lanes in Wartime," it states: "Threats to our seaborne commerce, whether from submarine and airplanes in this century, or from privateer and frigate in the days of sail, have led us into war more often than any other single cause."

Of course, in all these wars we found it necessary to exploit the principle of sealift to the best of our capabilities. For example, if we go back only to 1918 and World War I, we find that Army authorities on logistics reckoned that the continued availability and commitment of two dead-weight tons of shipping were needed to keep a soldier supplied in France. To that end, we accomplished

what was at that time the greatest shipping movement in history—the safe transportation of two million men and more than seven million tons of supplies across 3000 miles of dangerous seas.

The gathering of supplies as well as the soldiers was the job of the Army, but the crossing—the procurement, manning and protection of transports and cargo ships—fell on the Cruiser and Transportation Force of the Atlantic Fleet. Also, it should be added that despite submarine attacks, the first installment of the AEF convoys was delivered safely and, in the words of one officer, "We didn't lose but one horse, and that was a mule." That perfect record remained unbroken; for the rest of the two million men were convoyed eastward by the Naval Transport Force without loss.

In 1942, however, because of the bulkier implements of mechanized warfare, a soldier required the commitment of seven or eight dead-weight tons in Western Europe, and perhaps double that amount in more distant theaters of war. As to the importance of providing that requirement, Winston Churchill perhaps expressed it best when he said, "We must regard this struggle at sea as the foundation of all the efforts of the United Nations. If we lost that, all else is denied us."

The problem did not diminish in Korea, where to support 500,000 men we required 350 ships operating daily in the Pacific pipeline, with another 250 in the short Japan-Korea route.

To bring the picture up to date, when I was in Vietnam in September, the Air Mobile Division Commander said that he used between 500 and 1000 tons per day, over the beach, to support his operations. The larger number of Marines up North require even more tons. All told, there are about one-half million military personnel—U.S., South Vietnamese, Korean, Australian and New Zealand—in Vietnam for whom our country has support responsibilities. We in the Joint Chiefs of Staff have to worry about providing those required tons.

How much tonnage is involved?

Well, planning factors for our own Army establish that, for Vietnam, there must be provided very close to one long ton per man-per-month.

What is the sealift contribution to this requirement?

Our military sealift achievements are those of our sealift team—the Navy's Military Sea Transportation Service, and its partner, the Merchant Marine. Their achievements are impressive. Ships of MSTS and the Merchant Marine are moving 98 percent of the military equipment and supplies lifted to Vietnam by transportation agencies of the Defense Department. And, moreover, ships (exclusive of those of our amphibious force) have in the past six months lifted at least two out of every three fighting men who have gone to Vietnam. At the same time, ships of our amphibious forces moved additional cargo and troops to that area. Furthermore, tankers of MSTS, the Merchant Marine and the Fleet are carrying practically all the aviation and other bulk petroleum products being used in Vietnam and the surrounding area. At the present time we are putting into Vietnam seven to eight hundred thousand tons of material and equipment every month, mostly over the beach.

You might wonder if others realize the importance of sea transportation of this war material. Both the Army and Air Force have demonstrated that they do. In September last year, for example, the First Cavalry Division—the airmobile division—went bags, baggage and helicopters from the U.S. to Vietnam on board the aircraft carrier USS *Boxer*. They even took their mule by sealift. I understand the only casualty was that the mule did inadvertently back into a branding iron with "USN" on it.

The Army is also interested in a slightly different variety of sealift—in effect, lifting a helo overhaul shop to Vietnam to save the transit time from Vietnam to Texas for rework on the growing numbers of helicopters deployed in Vietnam. To meet this need, we are reconfiguring one of the Navy's large seaplane tenders to turn it into a floating helo overhaul shop for Army helicopters.

It is this acknowledged deficit in heavy lift capability within MSTS which has frequently prompted requests for the use of Navy combatants for this sort of sealift. The Air Force, for instance, like the Army, found it desirable to request a carrier to lift some of its tactical attack aircraft out to Vietnam. Regretfully, we had to decline this request because at the time our own operational commitments had grown so extensively that we had been forced to shift units from the Atlantic to the Pacific and, at the same time, had measurably increased periods of deployment in order to meet our own increasing tasks.

At this point I should indicate again the particular significance of the lift operation of the airmobile division, which occurred while I was in South Vietnam. What may not have been especially evident in the accounts of the operation was the fact that by utilizing the type of transportation afforded by the USS *Boxer*, even helicopters were able to fly into South Vietnam under their own power—no knockdown and crating and then uncrating, putting together, and flight testing were necessary. In short, when you get down to the business of tons-to-be-delivered, there just is still only one way to do it and stay solvent.

Airlift has proven itself to be a precision military tool with which the Air Force has done a magnificent job in transporting critical cargoes from the United States to South Vietnam. I know because I've seen the amount of high priority Navy items which move through Travis Air Force Base. I also know that, although airlift can move troops and material quickly, it cannot be overlooked that certain provisions must be made to support the supporting airlift. It is necessary, for example, to make arrangements for the fuel for return trips, and, as the tempo of aircraft operations involved increases, there must be provision for the additional spare parts and maintenance which then become necessary at advanced bases. Except in certain limited cases, it takes ships to move the huge quantities of fuel and many, many other support items overseas.

Now, against the possibility that there may have been created in your mind a sealift picture which consists mostly of long global pipelines of plodding World War II cargo ships—which we do have, and ancient tankers—which we do have, and rusty old tramp merchantmen—which we do have—let me add that we haven't exactly been sitting on our barnacles in the military sealift business.

In considering all elements of this broad-shouldered, heavy lift mobility which is so essential, let's look now at what is called the Fast Deployed Logistics support program. A year or so ago we hadn't heard much about this concept; it started out as a thing called a Forward Floating Depot, with the idea of repositioning in ships—like warehouses—certain supplies and equipment for a contingency operation. This presumably came about in an effort to attain a capability to deploy large numbers of troops as rapidly as possible and have them equipped for combat shortly after arrival in a forward area. As a consequence, the Army now has three ex-Victory ships—full of Army equipment—anchored in

Subic Bay. This, like most other prepositioned equipment, would be impractical to move by present day airlift. Now, prepositioning anywhere can become expensive, and to cut down on the amount of material which needs to be prepositioned, a plane even larger than the C-141 became necessary.

I first soloed in 1929 and have spent most of the time since then either in or in close proximity to aviation. And recognizing the limitations as well as the extraordinary contributions of air, I wondered if we perhaps shouldn't look at a combination of improved prepositioned equipment ships and the C-141 as well as combinations which might be made possible with the advent of a still larger transport aircraft. So a study was made whereby we would use a ship of brand new design to permit prepositioning Army divisional equipment in ships deployed around the world in various strategic places. In a contingency operation, these ships could then proceed to ports with large enough airfields near by to permit the troops to arrive by air and marry up with their tanks, trucks and heavy artillery. You might call it a recipe for instant military power—just add men.

At this point it should be understood that this was not something the Navy tried to sell. This was simply another way of doing a job. Incidentally, this particular study did indicate that certain monies which might be saved by using existing designed transports could be used to purchase extra prepositioned Army equipment. This idea caught on much more quickly than we anticipated. We found ourselves directed last year to order two of these ships and to change our own Navy desired budget by eliminating two roll-on/roll-off ships.

The whole idea now has grown to a point where we have now been given the task of looking into how many of these ships we need, how we are going to use them, where we are going to use them, and what they are going to look like.

Although the Navy has been given this project, I'm sure that you recognize that we must be completely—and I emphasize—completely responsive to the Army's desires. This project is just now getting off the ground. Moreover, an entirely new approach to ship construction will be used in this FDL project, one in which we pick a single contractor who would develop, in one building complex, the capability to design and construct these ships like automobiles on an assembly line and turn them out at what, hopefully, would be a much reduced price. Some are even thinking in terms of numbers as high as forty of these ships.

Possibly, the foregoing points may appear somewhat parochial in nature. For that reason, I would invite your attention once more to the fact that the subject discussed is that unglamorous part of war which is equally essential to all Services. The Army likes its airborne, its Special Forces; the Air Force its SAC and TAC; the Navy and Marines our amphibious elements, carrier striking forces and subnarines. But since the oceans are almost solely the domain of the Navy and since I'm convinced that for forever and a day they will remain the major lifeline of our peacetime exports and imports and our major wartime support routes to all of our Services, the control and protection and adequate usage of these oceans is a responsibility which the Navy must be able to discharge—for you!

For that reason I can only urge you not to sell sealift short—it will be around a long time after you and I have passed from the scene.

As a nation, as a people, we seem always to have to learn the hard way, and thereafter, periodically, to relearn our lessons.

It is my earnest hope that you of this audience, as thoughtful citizens with a keen interest in national security, will conclude now and in the future that the state of our country's broad-shouldered, heavy lift mobility is a true measure of our national strength.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Admiral David L. McDonald, U.S. Navy, graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1928, and served for the next two years in various junior officer billets aboard the battleship USS *Mississippi*. He entered flight training at Pensacola in the fall of 1930, and after successfully completing the flight course in 1931 he reported to Fighting Squadron SIX aboard USS *Saratoga*. After three years in Fighting Squadron SIX and one year in an aviation unit aboard a light cruiser, he served as an instructor at the Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida and then subsequently served in patrol aircraft in the Seattle-Alaskan area.

World War II duty saw him aboard the Aircraft Carrier *Ranger* in the Atlantic, a short tour at the Naval Air Station Jacksonville and then in the Pacific aboard USS *Essex* in which he served as both Air Officer and Executive Officer.

Subsequent to the war he served on the Staff of Commander Naval Air Force Pacific; the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet; and in various assignments in Washington. He attended the National War College and, prior to his selection for flag rank, served as Commanding Officer of USS *Mindoro* and later of USS *Coral Sea*.

As a flag officer, he first served as the Director of the Navy's Air Warfare Division in the Pentagon. He served for three years in Paris, France as the Senior U.S. Naval Officer on the Staff of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, then reported as Commander Carrier Division SIX in 1960, and Commander 6th Fleet in 1961.

In 1963, Admiral McDonald was promoted to four-star rank, and was appointed Chief of Naval Operations.