

Sea-Air-Space: TRANSCOM Chief Touts Navy, Merchant Marine Cooperation



Air Force General Randall Reed, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, discussed the strength of the Navy-Merchant Marine connection on April 8. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

Air Force General Randall Reed, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, walked attendees at the Navy League Luncheon on April 8 through a history lesson of national and international conflicts to show the importance of the team of the U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine.

As a boy growing up in the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area, he

would ride his bicycle to the historic Fort Grove and watch commercial ships sail by, followed by gray Navy ships from Norfolk Naval Base.

“The inextricable link between Navy combatants and our commercial Merchant Marine, the combination of those two makes our country great and that is what also makes TRANSCOM great,” he said.

Throughout American history, the Navy, often at incredible odds, has made the waterways safe so merchant ships could carry supplies. Some of the historical issues are familiar to the audience at Sea-Air-Space, Reed said.

During this year’s conference, “We’ve talked about trouble with shipbuilding, we’ve talked about supply chains, we’ve talked about contested logistics, long distances. And the next fight we have coming up, there’s this thing about blockades we have to consider. We have very capable adversaries with very large fleets. There’s a need for shallow draft ships and we have to get the mission done for sustainment. If this isn’t enough to keep you up at night, then you probably miss the fact that I’m not talking about today. I’m actually talking about the challenges that we had during the Revolutionary War,” Reed said.

“And the message here, ladies and gentlemen, is we’ve been here before, and during that time we had just as much uncertainty.”

Lessons from other periods in history are also still relevant, Reed said, such as during the War of 1812, when the U.S. Navy swept away threats on the water, in this case Lake Erie, so the Merchant Marine could supply the front lines from behind.

“So, in this case, once again, it’s the Navy being able to fight, set the conditions to get some kind of sea control, to allow the Merchant Marine to provide the sustainment that’s needed for the rest of the force.”

That carried on through two world wars, and especially World War II, when the Merchant Marine was called upon to perform sustainment heroics, at great cost to its ships and crews.

“And with that, we became the nation that the world needed us to be, to have great influence to partner with allies, partners and friends, in order to create a period of peace for the last 80 years that has delivered for all of us, I’m told, economic prosperity that the world has never seen,” Reed said. “And so with that, I want to take a moment to pause and say the combination of the Navy and the Merchant Marine at that time was really incredible and actually changed the world.”

Going forward, Reed said sustainment is still the “name of the game,” only now it’s contested by groups such as the Houthi rebels from Yemen who don’t have to have a lot in the way of resources.

The Merchant Marine needs newer ships and better equipment, Reed said, and he’s been telling that to supportive members of the U.S. House and Senate.

“I’m telling them that the ages of our ships right now are way too old, and we need to get younger ships and I’ll take them however I can get them. But the main thing is, it’s not necessarily for the ships and the platforms, it’s also for the proof force because we have a very capable proof force and they need the best in the biggest equipment that we can absolutely get for them.”

This was brought home to him during a recent visit to the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, Reed said. There, he witnessed 14 cadets receiving expeditionary medals from the secretary of transportation, a scene he said nearly brought him to tears.

“Think about that. Expeditionary medals on a cadet because as part of their education they take to sea, and these cadets have actually seen combat. They’ve actually been in harm’s

way. They were actually telling us stories of what it's like to sail past Yemen and watch things go over their head or to watch the Navy actually engage targets to protect them. And they were not afraid. In fact, they were ready to go back for more. And so, ladies and gentlemen, we need to do this for them."



Medal of Honor winner Edward C. Byers Jr. was awarded the Admiral Arleigh Burke Leadership Award.

Photo Credit: Dan Goodrich

Awards

Following the lunch, the annual Navy League Awards were presented:

- The Admiral Vern Clark Individual Award went to Angelo

Owens, the safety and occupational health division director at the Fleet Readiness Center East.

- The Admiral Vern Clark Unit Safety Award went to Airborne Command & Control (VAW) 117 Wallbangers.
- The General James L. Jones Individual Award went to Deputy Chief Ryan Tworek at Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow, California.
- The General James L. Jones Unit Safety Award went to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California.
- The Albert A. Michelson Award went to Robert Taylor of Bardex Corp.
- The Fleet Chester W. Nimitz Award went to Robert "Scott" Forney III of General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems.
- The Admiral Arleigh Burke Leadership Award went to Master Chief Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr., U.S. Navy, retired.

"I really do look out at this room and I see the fabric of America, the threads that hold our nation together during our most precious times" Byers said upon accepting the award.