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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
MILITARY SEA TRANSPORTATION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20390

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COMSTSINST 3121.1D
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20 August 1969

COMSTS INSTRUCTION 3121.1D

From: Commander, Military Sea Transportation Service
To: Distribution List

Subj: Operational control procedures

1. Purpose. This Instruction promulgates operational control procedures for MSTS-controlled ships.
2. Cancellation. This Instruction supersedes COMSTS Instruction 3121.1C.
3. Scope. This Instruction is applicable to all MSTS-controlled ships except contract-operated and chartered tankers. Operational control procedures for contract-operated, time chartered, and bareboat chartered tankers are set forth in the effective edition of COMSTS Instruction 3121.3. Instructions concerning commercial tankers under voyage charter to COMSTS are set forth in COMSTS Instruction 3121.7 series.
4. Policy. The procedures described herein are intended to be general in nature because of the wide variety of ship types employed by MSTS to accomplish the tasks assigned. These procedures are not intended to restrict unduly the commands responsible for the movements of MSTS-controlled ships. MSTS activities should be alert to recommend to COMSTS advantageous modifications in schedules, unusual loading/discharging conditions, repair needs, etc., in order that MSTS ships may most expeditiously and economically complete Department of Defense cargo, passenger, and special projects operations.
5. Definitions. For the purposes of this Instruction the following terms are defined:
 - a. Operational Control (OPCON), according to JCS Pub. 1, is: "Those functions of command involving the composition of subordinate forces, the assignment of tasks, the designation of objectives, and the authoritative direction necessary to accomplish the mission...." More specifically, in respect to OPCON of MSTS-controlled ships, it is that control for the purpose of routing, sailing, protection, diversion, and operations of ships. It may include in-port control of ships.

b. MSTS-controlled ships are:

(1) MSTS Nucleus Fleet ships: those United States Naval Ships (USNS) owned by the U. S. Navy and permanently assigned to MSTS for administration and operation. These USNS are in-service ships, which are civil service manned, or contract-operated ships, which have merchant marine crews, or direct-hire foreign-manned ships. In addition, in-commission ships (USS) of the U. S. Navy could be, as they have been in the past, permanently assigned to MSTS for administration and operation.

(2) General Agency Agreement (GAA) ships: those Government-owned ships which are in the custody of the Maritime Administration, have been activated from the National Defense Reserve Fleet, and are operated by General Agents, per agreement with MARAD, for the account of MSTS.

(3) MSTS chartered ships: privately-owned ships of the U. S. Merchant Marine or, occasionally, foreign flag ships chartered by MSTS. The contractual arrangement may be time charter (TC), voyage charter (VC), consecutive voyage charter (CVC), or bareboat charter (BC).

(4) In-commission ships (USS) of the U. S. Navy temporarily assigned to MSTS for operations. (If so assigned, although they are MSTS-controlled ships, they are not MSTS Nucleus Fleet ships.)

c. Commercial shipping consists of those vessels moving cargo for MSTS under shipping agreement, shipping contract, container agreement, negotiated rates, berth term, or dedicated service contract.

d. Special Projects are those operations directed toward other than routine transportation. They include, but are not limited to, MSTS shipping assigned to the following: research, range instrumentation activities, hydrography, oceanography, cable laying and repair, and repair facilities.

6. Operational Control Procedures.

a. General Procedures.

(1) Depending on the circumstance, COMSTS, MSTS subordinate commands, or the Operational Control Authority (OCA) will normally exercise operational control of MSTS-controlled ships. In emergencies, the Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOPA) or the Captain of the Port (COTP) may assume operational control. When MSTS-provided ships are assigned by MSTS to a Navy task force for a military operation or exercise and are directed by MSTS to change operational control (CHOP) to that force, the Commander Task Force (CTF) or his designated subordinate will exercise operational control.

(2) Except as otherwise provided in this Instruction or in specific sailing orders, operational control of MSTS-controlled shipping will be delegated to MSTS area and subarea commanders by COMSTS. Unless otherwise directed by COMSTS, when a ship transits one MSTS area to another, operational control of the ship shall pass from one MSTS area or subarea commander to the other. (Note paragraph 6.b(4).) This change of operational control is automatic and no report by the ship is required. The effective edition of COMSTS Instruction 5440.2 delineates the areas of responsibilities of MSTS area and subarea commanders.

b. Specific Procedures.

(1). Transports.

(a) Determination of transport employment and assignment will be made by COMSTS based upon passenger lift requirements of the shipper services. COMSTS will promulgate transport schedules, taking into consideration the recommendations of subordinate MSTS commanders.

(b) So as not to interfere with passenger lifts and adherence to schedules, cargo may be booked on transports without specific reference to COMSTS.

(c) Except in emergency situations, COMSTS' approval shall be obtained prior to any diversion or deviation from transport schedules promulgated by COMSTS.

(2) Cargo Ships. Because of the many variances and problems peculiar to cargo ships, MSTS area and subarea commanders shall be guided by the following:

(a) MSTS control of voyage chartered ships is limited to the designation of the loading berth and discharging berth, or both, and, in coordination with the shipper services, the arrangement for providing a safe berth except when the terms of the individual charter party provide for operational control of the vessel's movements by the charterer.

(b) United States-Overseas Voyage Schedules. Continental MSTS area and subarea commanders shall promulgate message voyage schedules for cargo ships loading at United States ports within their respective areas for overseas destinations. Schedules shall be transmitted as far in advance as possible for ships' departures, and never less than one day prior to departure date. Such schedules shall provide for routing of the ships to the final overseas port of discharge. Procedures for routing of cargo ships upon departure from last scheduled overseas ports are set forth in subparagraph (e) below.

(c) Schedule Addressees. Schedules shall be addressed to COMSTS for action, with information addressees limited to CNO, cognizant shipper service headquarters (Chief of Transportation, Department of the Army; Headquarters, Naval Supply Systems Command; Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps; Headquarters, U. S. Air Force; Agency for International Development (AID)), appropriate fleet, force and sea frontier commanders, district commandants, MSTS commands, and other military commands requiring advance information on the routing of MSTS cargo ships. MTSO Canal Zone shall be made information addressee on all cargo ship schedules which include Panama Canal transit (COMSTSINST 3120.3 series). ALUSNA Cairo shall be made information addressee on all cargo ship schedules which include calls at an Egyptian Port or Suez Canal transit; the schedule messages shall indicate whether vessels are to load, discharge, bunker or repair, or are scheduled for transit only.

(d) Schedule Information. Cargo ship schedules shall provide for routing of ships concerned to all overseas ports for which cargo is destined for discharge, with estimated arrival and departure dates at such ports. Schedules may further provide for routing of vessels to overseas ports to procure necessary bunkers, or to load cargo for lift to scheduled ports on a ship's itinerary. Schedules for General Agency Agreement (GAA) or chartered ships shall include the name of ship operator and names of agents at scheduled ports, when appropriate.

(e) Routing of Cargo Ships Beyond Last Scheduled Discharge Port. The following instructions apply to the routing of MSTS-controlled cargo ships beyond the last scheduled overseas discharge port. Indicated routings shall be included in message voyage schedules promulgated in accordance with subparagraph (b) above, unless alternate routing is directed by COMSTS for specific ships. Route USNS to the MSTS area/sub-area command to which administratively assigned. Route other MSTS-controlled cargo ships as follows:

<u>Last Scheduled Discharge Port In:</u>	<u>Route To:</u>
Pacific and Far East Area	San Francisco
Alaskan area, including Aleutians and Bering Sea	Seattle
Europe, Africa, Middle East, Atlantic, and Caribbean areas	New York

(f) Retention of Cargo Ships for Temporary Overseas Employment.

Dependent upon strategic considerations, COMSTS may designate certain cargo ships for temporary employment in a specific overseas area. Routing and scheduling within overseas areas of ships so designated shall be in accordance with instructions issued by the overseas MSTS area or subarea commander concerned. COMSTS and other interested naval commanders shall be advised whenever a cargo ship temporarily employed in an overseas area is scheduled to depart that area.

(g) Diversions and Schedule Modifications. MSTS area or subarea commanders who assume operational control may divert or modify voyage sailing orders when deemed operationally or economically advisable on the basis of an UNODIR message to COMSTS with the cognizant administrative commander and other interested commands as information addressees. This UNODIR message is not required for vessels under the administrative control of an MSTS commander operated solely within the boundaries of the area of responsibility of that commander nor for cargo ships designated by COMSTS for temporary employment in a specific overseas area in accordance with subparagraph (f) above.

(h) Routing of Cargo Ships to United States Ports. Procedures for designation of cargo ships for loading assignment upon return to United States ports are contained in directives issued by COMSTS. The cognizant continental MSTS area or subarea commander is authorized to position cargo ships that have been designated by COMSTS for subsequent cargo loading at any continental port within his respective area, dependent upon next cargo loading assignment. Area or subarea commanders effecting changes in routing of cargo ships to alternate United States ports shall keep COMSTS and other commands concerned advised of routing instruction issued to such ships.

(i) Schedule Date Changes. MSTS cargo ships shall be sailed as scheduled when practicable. Because of inclement weather, vessel material derangements, delays in cargo operations, early completion of planned cargo operations, and other factors beyond the control of MSTS area and subarea commanders, actual arrivals and departures of cargo ships may vary from estimated scheduled dates during the course of a voyage. Cognizant MSTS area and subarea commanders, except in areas where procedures outlined in subparagraph (f) above are authorized, shall promulgate schedule date changes, and reason(s) therefor, to interested commands whenever a cargo ship is estimated to arrive or depart two or more days from scheduled dates indicated. Movement reports normally reflect minor date changes in the movement of cargo ships.

(j) Bulk carriers. Determination of bulk carrier (coal ship) employment and assignment will be made by COMSTS based upon the solid fuel lift requirements of the shipper services. COMSTS will

promulgate bulk carrier schedules, taking into consideration the recommendations of subordinate MSTS commanders. Cargo shall not be booked to bulk carriers without specific reference to COMSTS. Except in emergency situations, COMSTS' approval shall be obtained prior to any diversion or deviation from bulk carrier schedules promulgated by COMSTS.

(3) Tankers. The operational control of MSTS tankers in full operational status will remain with COMSTS unless specifically passed to other commands.

(4) Special Projects Ships. In addition to the policy stated elsewhere in this Instruction, the following comments are provided on operational control for special projects ships. This additional guidance is required by virtue of the unusual characteristics and variety of the ships, missions, and sponsors involved.

(a) Operational control of range instrumentation ships, Apollo instrumentation ships, and Antarctic research ships has been permanently assigned by COMSTS to designated area commanders because of specialized mission communication control requirements. These ships shall not change operational control when crossing area boundaries unless otherwise directed by COMSTS.

(b) All other special projects ships shall be operated in accordance with the normal procedures expressed in paragraph 6.a of this Instruction unless otherwise directed by COMSTS. Additional instructions for shifting operational control in crossing area boundaries shall be included in sailing orders when appropriate.

(c) Time chartered special project ships are on occasion acquired by MSTS to meet specific sponsor requirements. Operational control of these ships must be considered separately in each case and guidance will be provided by COMSTS. Insofar as practicable, operational control shall be exercised in the same manner as that discussed in paragraph 6.a.

(5) Import Control. Import operational control is that control which includes all import ship movements, berthing, loading/discharging, issuance of sailing orders for the next leg of the voyage, and reports of any anticipated change in sailing time of more than 24 hours except that in the case of transports the provisions of COMSTS Instruction 4621.13, or latest revision thereof, will apply. It is delegated to the local MSTS representative by the cognizant area or subarea commander or is exercised by that commander.

(a) Special circumstances occur when there are no MSTS representatives present at ports of call. In such cases Masters and Commanding Officers shall be governed by directives received from the activities designated by the MSTS area or subarea commanders.

(b) In the event of an emergency, the Senior Naval Officer Present or the local port authority may issue orders or direct the movement of MSTS ships and/or MSTS-controlled shipping in that port. MSTS area and subarea commanders who issue sailing orders to MSTS ships and MSTS-controlled shipping shall ensure that Masters/Commanding Officers are instructed and given information relative to all current directives for the area in which the ship will operate and any reports of diversions required by other authority.

(6) Commercial shipping. MSTS has no operational control, as such, of commercial shipping. In the case of shipping agreement vessels, MSTS may designate the loading or discharging berth.

(7) Voyage Sailing Orders. MSTS area commanders, or their designated representatives, shall prepare and issue voyage sailing orders for all MSTS ships and MSTS-controlled shipping. Sailing order format will be determined by the command issuing the order and dependent upon the mission and type of ship.

(8) Optimum Track Ship Routing (OTSR). The effective edition of COMSTSINST 3140.2 applies.

(9) Movement Reports. Complete instructions for these reports are contained in the effective edition of COMSTSINST 3123.5, which is based upon directives of the Chief of Naval Operations. Strict compliance with this COMSTS Instruction is mandatory for each Master of an MSTS-controlled ship.

(10) Diversions and Schedule Modifications. MSTS area and sub-area commanders who assume operational control may divert ships or modify sailing orders when required to do so by emergency situations and to avoid congestion at ports of call and delays due to weather or diversion, keeping COMSTS, the cognizant administrative commander, and other interested commands advised.

(11) Search and Rescue. Under maritime law and in accordance with long standing traditions of the sea, Masters and Commanding Officers of MSTS ships are responsible to aid in search and rescue operations (SAR) when circumstances warrant. Masters/Commanding Officers of MSTS ships shall render immediate SAR assistance when requested by a ship or aircraft in distress or when directed by proper authority.

(a) When an MSTS ship becomes involved in an SAR operation, the Master/Commanding Officer shall immediately report by message any change of operational control and communication guard to the cognizant fleet command, Movement Report Center/Office, COMSTS, area/subarea commander, and OCA. Upon termination of rescue operations or when released

from operational control by the area SAR commander, a message report shall be made to the same addressees indicating the resumption of normal operational control and communication guard. A letter report shall be made in accordance with the effective edition of COMSTS Instruction 3130.1.

(b) MSTS ships in commission (USS) shall be further guided by instructions contained in applicable fleet publications.

(12) Ships Sailing Under Naval Control of Shipping Organization (NCSORG) Routing. The U. S. Naval Control of Shipping Organization's function is to provide for the safety of MSTS and merchant vessel movements in time of war or emergency. Selected MSTS-controlled ships are sailed during peacetime by NCSORG for training and evaluation. When MSTS-controlled ships are sailed under NCSORG routing, the ships will be under the operational control of the appropriate Operational Control Authority (OCA). The sea areas of the world are divided into zones of responsibility. The U. S. Naval commander responsible for shipping control in his zone is designated the OCA. Masters/Commanding Officers of ships routed in the NCSORG will be briefed and issued pertinent instructions by the local Naval Control of Shipping Officer (NCSO). Operational control by the OCA is exercised for the purpose of routing, protection, reporting, and diversion of shipping. The OCA does not have cognizance over the general employment and allocation of shipping, harbor movements, or loading/discharging. Whenever a ship is to be sailed under NCSORG operational control for part or all of a voyage, the sailing orders for the ship's voyage shall so indicate.

(13) Diplomatic Clearance. The effective editions of OPNAVINST 3128.3 and OPNAVINST 3128.9 provide guidance in the planning, obtaining of proper clearances, and the execution of visits to foreign countries by MSTS ships, and diplomatic clearance for research operations in territorial waters and/or on continental shelves. CNO and COMSTS letters and messages approving special MSTS arrangements or procedures continue in effect. USNS and USS ships, because of their public vessel status, require either diplomatic clearance or notification of visit to proper authority prior to entering certain foreign ports. Some ports may be entered by MSTS ships without prior clearance or notification because of existing governmental agreements. Clearances for certain research operations must also be obtained as noted below. Clearance or notification of visit procedures are as follows:

(a) All diplomatic clearances to countries requiring CNO/State Department action will be requested by COMSTS upon receipt of request from MSTS area commanders. If such diplomatic clearance has not been obtained 48 hours prior to the ship's ETA, as indicated by latest movement report, COMSTS will so advise the MSTS area commander and the ship concerned by priority message and COMSTS will initiate further action to expedite the granting of clearance.

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(b) CNO has delegated authority to COMSTS and MSTS area commanders to send clearance request and/or notification necessary to obtain clearance from countries not requiring CNO/State Department action. This authority does not extend to MSTS subarea commanders. MSTS area commanders in whose area of responsibility the port of call is located shall submit the request for clearance or notification of visit in accordance with agreements in effect with the country concerned as indicated by the effective edition of OPNAVINST 3128.3. The information required by OPNAVINST 3128.3 for clearance or notification of visit (i.e., (a) the name of the Master/Commanding Officer and (b) the number of officers and enlisted personnel/crew embarked) will be contained in the original voyage schedule message promulgated by MSTS area/subarea commanders in accordance with paragraph 6.b(2) of this Instruction.

(c) Diplomatic clearance for surveys or research in territorial waters of foreign countries and/or on the contiguous continental shelves shall be obtained by the project sponsor in accordance with the provisions of OPNAVINST 3128.9.

(14) Security Classification. All movements of MSTS-controlled ships, less special project ships, shall be unclassified except in those cases when the shipper service indicates the classification of the passenger movement or cargo loaded necessitates classification of vessel movements or when otherwise directed by the appropriate OCA or COMSTS. Security classification of special project ships' movements will be governed by project classifications or project sponsors' desires. The security classification assigned to a voyage shall apply to all schedules, voyage sailing orders, and movement reports relative to that voyage.

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Deputy

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