NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: USNS *Range Sentinel* (T-AGM-22), ex-USS *Sherburne* (APA-205)

USNS *Range Sentinel* underway in 1985. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Sherburne_(APA-205)

Vessel History

The *Range Sentinel* (T-AGM-22), was built as a standard dry-cargo ship with the hull of a Victory-class C-2 cargo vessel, but was completed as an attack transport at the Permanente Metals Corporation Shipyard No. 2 in Richmond, California on May 18, 1944. The Maritime Commission built 534 Victory ships during, and several after World War II, of which 117 were completed as attack transports. The ship was launched on July 10, 1944 and commissioned on September 20, 1944 as the USS *Sherburne* (APA-205), named for Sherburne County, Minnesota.

Following its commissioning, *Sherburne* made a shakedown cruise to San Pedro, California, and was later stationed in the San Francisco Bay area training crews for duty on other attack transports. On January 12, 1945 *Sherburne* sailed to San Diego for amphibious operations training. On February 15, it left from its homeport in the San Francisco Bay area for Pearl Harbor to transport troops to the Marshall Islands.

Sherburne left Hawaii on March 20 sailing in a convoy that arrived in Eniwetok[1] eight days later. The ship then visited Kwajalein, Ulithi, Guam, and Saipan, finally embarking troops at Saipan for amphibious landings in Okinawa.

The *Sherburne* returned to San Francisco on May 24 to load troops bound for the Philippines. It ferried troops between islands in the Philippines until mid-August. After the Japanese surrender, *Sherburne* sailed to Batangas Bay, Philippines to load troops from the First Cavalry and the Eleventh Airborne Divisions that were assigned to the Tokyo occupation. The *Sherburne* entered Tokyo Bay on the morning of September 2, 1945 passing the USS *Missouri* as the surrender document was read.

The *Sherburne* embarked troops in Yokohama and returned to the Philippines to pick up additional occupation forces. In October and November of 1945, *Sherburne* provided accommodations in Okinawa for more than 1,400 survivors from vessels that were destroyed in a typhoon. Sherburne later participated in "Operation Magic Carpet," the post-World War II effort led by the War Shipping Administration (WSA)[2] to return over eight million American military personnel from the European, Pacific, and China Burma India (CBI) theaters to the U.S. The ship returned servicemen to the U.S., arriving in Seattle in late November. The *Sherburne* returned to Okinawa in December to bring home military personnel, returning to San Francisco on February 5, 1946.

Hundreds of Liberty ships, Victory ships, and troop transports began repatriating soldiers from Europe in June 1945. Beginning in October 1945, over 370 Navy ships were used for repatriation duties in the Pacific. Aircraft carriers, battleships, hospital ships, and large numbers of attack transports were used. The European phase of Operation Magic Carpet concluded in February 1946, while the Pacific phase continued until September 1946.

The Navy decommissioned *Sherburne* on August 3, 1946, and put it in layup. It was transferred to the Maritime Administration on September 9, 1958, and placed at the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet in Benicia, California. The ship received one battle star for its WWII service.

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[1] Eniwetok is an atoll in the Marshall Islands. The Battle of Eniwetok was part of the Pacific campaign of WWII fought from February 17 - 23, 1944.

[2] The War Shipping Administration was a World War II emergency agency established by President Franklin Roosevelt on February 7, 1942. The agency bought and operated the civilian shipping tonnage used to move troops and supplies necessary for the US to fight the war. The WSA was administratively split off from the US Maritime Commission, which was established in 1936, however, the two agencies continued to work closely together. On September 1, 1946, WSA functions were returned to the Maritime Commission and in 1950, the Maritime Commission became the Maritime Administration.

USS *Sherburne* becomes USNS *Range Sentinel*

The Navy reacquired *Sherburne* on October 22, 1969 for conversion to a Missile Range Instrumentation Ship to support the Poseidon and later Trident Fleet Ballistic Missile test firing programs. Missile Range Instrumentation Ships, also known as Tracking Ships, are fitted with special antennas and electronics to monitor missile launches and to collect data. These ships extended the range of shore-based tracking facilities because many missile test launches were conducted over open ocean for safety reasons.

Northwest Marine Ironworks in Portland, Oregon converted the ship. *Sherburne* was renamed USNS *Range Sentinel* on April 26, 1971, designated T-AGM 22, and delivered in October to the Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC). The ship arrived at its new homeport of Port Canaveral, Florida, adjacent to the missile testing facilities on Cape Canaveral later that year.

The normal cruising area of the *Range Sentinel* was limited. When an underwater launching was scheduled, the ship accompanied the submarine to a point 30 miles east of Cape Canaveral. When the submarine submerged, the *Range Sentinel* remained within visual range of the submarine's location while the crew observed and photographed the missile launch.

The next generation of submarine-launched missiles was the Trident, first tested at Cape Canaveral on January 18, 1977. The first submarine to be armed with Trident missiles was delivered to the Navy in late 1979. The Trident submarines had a greater length than the 455-foot *Range Sentinel*. The *Range Sentinel* continued to participate in missile test firings until it was deactivated at Cape Canaveral on July 9, 1997. It was struck from the Navy Register on May 3, 1999 and returned to the Maritime Administration, this time to its James River Reserve Fleet off Fort Eustis, Virginia, where it remains today.

Twenty-three merchant-type vessels that were converted to missile range instrumentation ships supported Air Force, National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), and Navy missile testing operations from 1961 to today. Many were built on surplus Liberty or Victory ship hulls. *Range Sentinel* was the last of eight ships converted from a Victory-ship hull to serve as a missile range instrumentation ship. There are currently two active instrumentation ships operated by MSC: the USNS *Observation Island* (T-AGM-23) and USNS *Invincible* (T-AGM-24).

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Type: Missile Range Instrumentation Ship, previously a *Haskell*-class Attack Transport
Official Number: T-AGM 22, previously APA-205
Previous name: USS *Sherburne*
Builder: Permanente Metals Corporation Shipyard No. 2 in Richmond, California
Year: 1944
Length: 455'
Beam: 62'
Draft: 23'
Displacement: 11,860 tons (full load)
Gross Tonnage (GRT): 7,612
Speed: 17.7 Knots
Range: 10,000 nautical miles at 15 knots
Main Engine: 1 Westinghouse steam turbine; 1 propeller, design shaft horsepower 8,500
2 Babcock and Wilcox combustion-engineering boilers
Complement: 69 civilians and 27 technicians
Armament: none
Radar: Two navigation and four missile tracking radar

The USNS *Range Sentinel* was originally designed for amphibious operations. Its troop spaces were located in the upper cargo holds and could accommodate a military unit of 1,562 men. The lower holds provided stowage for the unit's supplies and vehicles. The Victory ship profile of the midships deck house, surmounted by the bridge, and open decks forward and aft, was retained. Cargo hatches and cargo handling gear were adapted to the stowage and launching of a fleet of landing craft usually consisting of two LCMs (Landing Craft Mechanized), and up to 22 LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel). The ship's crew numbered 536 men. It was armed with one 5"inch/38 caliber gun, one 40 mm quad mount, four 40 mm twin mounts, and ten 20 mm single mounts.

In 1971, it was transformed into a missile range instrumentation ship. All of the Sherburne's armament was removed and two navigation and missile tracking radar were installed on the vessel.

Left: The crew of the USS *Rutland* lowers an LCM off Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. Right: USS *Noble* (APA-218), another attack transport underway off San Diego, December 4, 1956. Official U.S. Navy photographs, Naval Historical Center.

Statement of Significance

During WWII, the Maritime Commission built 117 *Haskell*-class attack transports, using the modified Victory ship design. These ships were widely used during the war due to their ability to carry large numbers of troops, equipment, and supplies. The USS *Sherburne* participated in several amphibious operations in the Pacific Theatre during the latter part of the war. *Sherburne* participated in Operation Magic Carpet, the post-World War II effort to repatriate over eight million American military personnel from the European, Pacific, and China Burma India (CBI) theaters. *Sherburne* earned one battle star for its WWII service. The vessel was in Tokyo Bay on the morning of September 2, 1945 as the Japanese surrender document was read on board the USS *Missouri*.

After the war, many of the *Haskell*-class attack transports served in other capacities and continued in service well after the war ended. After the conversion from an attack transport to a missile range instrumentation ship, *Range Sentinel* supported the Poseidon and later Trident Fleet Ballistic Missile test firing programs.

Historical Integrity

The overall condition of *Range Sentinel* is good. Originally planned for commercial service, the ship was later designed to be an attack transport. From 1969-1971, the vessel was extensively converted from an attack transport to a missile range instrumentation ship. The ship retained its basic configuration and its vintage main propulsion plant; however, its auxiliary systems were substantially upgraded or replaced. Any historical integrity the ship may have had as an attack transport was compromised. Further the vessel represents an obsolete type and has little utility in the modern shipping market.

National Register Eligibility Statement

The vessel does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing. While it did participate in WWII, it was one of many vessels used to transport troops, equipment, and supplies and its role was not significant enough to qualify under Criteria A. Its participation in the Poseidon and Trident Fleet Ballistic Missile test firing programs, while notable, was also not significant enough to qualify, particularly considering the recent nature of those operations. Moreover, it was one of many surplus Victory ships that served this purpose.

Date: 6 August 2009
Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

Brouwer, Norman. *USNS* Range Sentinel *Ship History*. 2006.

Polmar, Norman. *The Naval Institute Guide to the Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet.* Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005.