

Vessel History: SS *Pollux* (T-AK-290 / T-AKR-290)



Aerial view of the Fast Sealift Ship SS *Pollux*. Maritime Administration photograph.

SS *Pollux* is one of eight *Algol*-class vehicle cargo ships, also known as Fast Sealift Ships (FSS).¹ These ships are currently the fastest cargo ships in the world, capable of speeds in excess of 30 knots. *Pollux* was originally built in 1973 as the high-speed commercial cargo container ship SS *Sea-Land Market* by A.G. Weser Seebeckwerft in Bremerhaven, Germany, for Sea-Land Services, Inc. Sea-Land employed the ship, one of eight “SL-7”-class cargo vessels, in round-the-world commerce before selling it to the U.S. Government in 1980. The U.S. Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC) acquired all eight ships of the class in 1981 and 1982.

¹ The seven additional FSS ships in MARAD’s Ready Reserve Force include: *Altair*; *Antares*; *Algol*; *Bellatrix*; *Regulus*; *Capella*; and *Denebola*.

Pollux was one of the initial four former Sea-Land ships converted from an SL7 to a “Fast Sealift Ship” (or FSS) for the U.S. Navy. *Pollux*'s conversion into an FSS began at Avondale Shipyards in New Orleans, Louisiana on July 28, 1984. Avondale delivered the ship to MSC on October 28, 1984. Its cargo hold was redesigned into a series of decks connected by ramps so vehicles can be driven onto or off of the ship for fast loading and unloading. Four cranes were installed—two twin cranes amidships capable of lifting 35 long tons and twin cranes aft capable of lifting 50 long tons.² The self-contained features of the ship enable it to load and offload cargo in areas lacking normal port facilities. The ship also has a helicopter landing area.

FSS's have six cargo decks including the lightdeck midship, three midship compartments and two sidports with a hinged ramp from the flight deck to A deck. The aft cargo holds (5-8) are configured for shipping containers with cell guides. One roll-on/roll off (Ro/Ro) light vehicle deck (main deck) aft accommodates jeeps and light trucks.

The A, B, C, and D deck levels are designed to accommodate wheeled and tracked vehicles up to the weight of an M-1 tank. The ships can travel from the U.S. East Coast to Europe in just six days and to the Persian Gulf, via the Suez Canal in 18 days, thus ensuring rapid delivery of military equipment in a crisis. Combined, the eight FSS's can carry nearly all the equipment needed to outfit a full Army mechanized division. Although all of the FSS's have slightly different configurations, they are all able to load wheeled and tracked vehicles.

MSC transferred custody and administrative responsibility for the FSS's to the Maritime Administration (MARAD) on October 1, 2007. That year, the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) estimated a cost savings of approximately \$8.3 million in the first year, and approximately \$15.2 million in subsequent years, by transferring the ships from the MSC to MARAD.³ MARAD officially took title to all eight FSS's on October 1, 2008.

Pollux, like all RRF ships, is maintained at readiness in a reduced operating status for USTRANSCOM, ready to receive and transport cargo within five or ten days of activation. The vessel is situated at the MARAD Layberth Facility (MLF), a facility adjacent to the Beaumont Reserve Fleet that is owned by MARAD and can support up to eight surge sealift vessels in a reduced operating status.

Pollux participated in the Persian Gulf War in 1990-1991. Along with the other seven *Algol*-class vehicle cargo ships, the ship transported 14 percent of all cargo transported between the United States and Saudi Arabia during and after the war. Since MARAD acquired *Pollux*, the ship has successfully completed three no-notice turbo activations.

² A long ton is 2,240 pounds.

³ Determination and Findings for Interagency Acquisition of Fast Sealift Ship Operation, Maintenance, Layberth and Related Contracting Services. N00033-07—MARAD.1.

Vessel Characteristics

Overall Length:	946.0'
Beam:	105.6'
Draft (summer LL)	36.8'
Displacement (Summer LL)	55,910 LT
Lightship Displacement:	29,316 LT
Total DWT (Summer LL):	25,594 LT
Gross registered tonnage:	24,471
Net registered tonnage:	17,895
Engine Type:	Steam Turbine
Crew/Supercargo/Total Persons Allowed:	62/12/74
RRF Speed-Max:	30 knots
RRF Speed Contract/Economical:	27/22.5 knots
Cargo Capacity:	199,362 square feet
TEU Capacity:	733
Fuel Type:	IFO-180
Fuel Consumption at Sea-Max:	458 MT per day
Fuel Consumption-Contract/Economical:	383/230 MT per day
Fuel Consumption in Port:	24 MT per day
Ramp Capacity:	Port/Starboard Side ramps) 90 LT