

**NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: SS CAPE GIBSON**



SS *Cape Gibson* steaming past the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in San Francisco Bay during sea trials circa mid-to-late 1990s. Maritime Administration photograph.

Vessel History

Cape Gibson is a break-bulk general cargo ship owned by the federal government. Built for subsidized commercial liner service in 1967–68, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) purchased the ship in 1988 for use in its Ready Reserve Force (RRF), which consists of a group of vessels that can be activated on short notice to assist in the deployment of military equipment and supplies during times of national emergency. Maintained under contract for MARAD and manned during periods of activation by civilian crews for the Military Sealift Command (MSC), the ship provided sealift support during Operations *Desert Shield/Desert Storm/Desert Sortie* in 1990–92 and Operation *Enduring Freedom* in 2002–03. It is currently moored at MARAD's Beaumont Reserve Fleet in Beaumont, Texas, where it serves as a training platform for military and homeland security personnel.

Cape Gibson was originally built as *Indian Mail*, the second ship completed in a flight of five C5-S-75a break-bulk general cargo vessels constructed at Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company for the American Mail Line of Seattle, Washington. The other ships in the flight included *Alaskan Mail* (delivered 1968, now *Cape Girardeau*), *Korean Mail* (1969, scrapped 1995), *Hong Kong Mail* (1969, scrapped 2008), and *American Mail* (1969, scrapped 2009). These ships made up the final phase of a fleet modernization program undertaken by American Mail Line in the early 1960s. Although larger than the five ships built in the program's first and second phases, *Indian Mail* and its sisters were substantially similar to the earlier ships in overall design and equipment, basically being modifications of the Mariner cargo ship design (C4-S-1a) developed in the early 1950s.¹ The design of the C5-S-75a class was characterized in the professional press as "conservative, with few of the new basic features found on other American vessels," but, "in terms of equipment," the ships were said to have "the best of everything"²

Indian Mail was built under a federal construction-differential subsidy administered by MARAD. Newport News Shipbuilding bid \$16,290,050 to build the vessel. Government-stipulated national-defense features—predominantly additional reserve horsepower—added \$45,000 to the ship's price, for a total contract price of \$16,335,050. MARAD calculated that the cost of the ship would be \$7,106,000 if built in a foreign shipyard, and provided American Mail Line a subsidy of 55.0 percent, the highest rate allowed by law.³

Indian Mail was designed by the J. J. Henry Company of New York. The construction contract was signed on June 9, 1966. The keel was laid November 13, 1967, and the ship was launched July 27, 1968. It was delivered December 30, 1968.⁴ *Indian Mail* was sponsored at its launch by Jermaine Magnuson, wife of Warren G. Magnuson, U.S. senator from Washington state and chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee. The Indian ambassador to the United States, Nawab Ali Yavar Jung, was present, as were a variety of officials from the U.S. Department of Transportation and American Mail Line.⁵

Indian Mail was designed to carry general bulk, break-bulk, and refrigerated cargos. Its original cargo design also included capacity for 409 containers and 2,377 tons of liquid cargo carried in deep tanks.⁶ It entered American Mail Line's subsidized liner service in early 1969 connecting ports in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada with ports in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the

¹ The ships in the first phase of American Mail Line's fleet modernization were the *Washington Mail*, *Japan Mail*, and *Philippine Mail*, delivered in 1962; the second phase comprised *Oregon Mail* and *Canada Mail*, delivered in 1964 and 1965. "Line alters plans for 4 freighters," *New York Times*, June 21, 1965, 57.

² "SS 'Alaskan Mail,' A Ship that has Everything," *Marine Engineering/Log* (November 1968), 61.

³ Frank A. Gerhardt, "Title V New Construction Contracts, for period beginning July 1st 1957," chart reproducing financial data from the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md., Records of the Maritime Administration (RG 357), http://appendix.usmaritimecommission.de/documents/documents_main.htm. Slightly different contract prices appear in the *1966 Annual Report of the Maritime Administration*, 23, 104.

⁴ Frank A. Gerhardt, "The Maritime Administration Shipbuilding Program from 1950 to 1984," chart reproducing contract data found in the Records of the Maritime Administration (RG 357), National Archives and Records Administration, http://appendix.usmaritimecommission.de/documents/documents_main.htm.

⁵ "Freighter is Christened," *Baltimore Sun*, July 29, 1968, C9.

⁶ "'68 Good Year for U.S. Yards," *Marine Engineering / Log* (February 1969), 64.

Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. It continued operating on the Pacific, as far as can be determined, until 1988.

At the time of the ship's delivery, American President Lines⁷ owned 90 percent of American Mail Line. The ship was transferred to APL in October 1973 when the two companies merged, but it retained its original name until September 5, 1978, when, after the two companies were completely consolidated, its name was changed to *President Jackson*.⁸

APL sold the ship to MARAD on March 31, 1988. MARAD renamed it *Cape Gibson* and the ship entered MARAD's National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) as an asset of the RRF with a five-day activation status. It was outported in Alameda, California.⁹

Cape Gibson was ordered activated for deployment in Operation *Desert Shield* on September 21, 1990. The vessel's crew, as well as workers at Southwest Marine in San Francisco, missed the ship's specified five-day readiness window by 12 hours (some sources say six hours) due to "boiler tube failures and problems with the steam safeties." The ship was delivered to MSC on September 27. It made three trips to the Middle East over the next five months. For its first trip, it loaded cargo at Oakland, California, sailed on October 9, and arrived at Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia, on November 1. It next loaded ammunition at Nordenham, Germany, from which it again sailed for Ad Dammam on December 14, arriving December 29. Its third trip originated in Guam, where it loaded ammunition for the U.S. Air Force and sailed January 30, 1991, for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, arriving February 14. The ship made additional voyages for MSC during Operation *Desert Sortie*—the return of U.S. military assets to their peacetime depots—but details of these have not been found. MSC returned the ship to MARAD on February 28, 1992.¹⁰

Early in 1993, as part of deactivation from its Gulf War service, *Cape Gibson* was modified to carry the Modular Cargo Delivery System (MCDS). Two special cargo lifting and transfer platforms were installed over cargo hatches on deck, one forward of the deck house and one aft, to allow the ship to conduct underway replenishment (UNREP) of warships via tensioned highlines. During this period, a raised deck was added to the stern for the staging of cargo for vertical replenishment (VERTREP), i.e., the airlift by helicopter of supplies from the cargo ship to nearby naval vessels.¹¹

Beginning in 2000, *Cape Gibson* was managed for MARAD by Patriot Contract Services, LLC, of Walnut Creek, California.¹² In December 2002, the ship was activated for Operation *Enduring*

⁷ House Committee on the Judiciary, *The Ocean Freight Industry*, H. Rpt. 1419, 87th Cong., 2d sess., March 12, 1962, 47.

⁸ Vessel status cards for *Cape Gibson ex-Indian Mail*, MARAD Vessel History Database, <http://www.marad.dot.gov/sh/ShipHistory/Detail/739>.

⁹ Vessel status cards for *Cape Gibson ex-Indian Mail*, MARAD Vessel History Database.

¹⁰ Quote from "RRF Activation Summary (Desert Shield / Desert Storm)," Maritime Administration files; Erhard Koehler, "RRF Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm readiness notes," Maritime Administration files; vessel status cards for *Cape Gibson ex-Indian Mail*, MARAD Vessel History Database; Ronald F. Rost, John F. Addams, and John J. Nelson, *Sealift in Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm: 7 August 1990 to 17 February 1991*, Report CRM 91-109 (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, May 1991), B3, B9;

¹¹ MARAD Division of Ship Maintenance and Repair, Office of Ship Operations, *Readiness Assessment of the RRF*, August 28, 1992, Maritime Administration files.

¹² "Cape G Class breakbulk," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/cape-g.htm>.

Freedom. It made at least one voyage across the Pacific, carrying ammunition from Indian Island, Washington, but the full extent of its service during this period has not been determined. The ship was deactivated and returned to MARAD on December 12, 2003.¹³

During its time in the RRF, *Cape Gibson* took part in numerous at-sea exercises and no-notice activations. It also participated in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), a multinational warfare exercise, in 2002, 2006, and 2008. The ship was drydocked in 1998 and again in 2007. *Cape Gibson* was downgraded from ready reserve status in November 2008 and moved from Alameda to the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet on November 20.¹⁴

In October 2009, MARAD lent the ship to the Texas Maritime Academy, a part of Texas A&M University. The ship was towed to Galveston and the school renamed it *Texas Clipper IV* (previous training vessels for the university having also been named *Texas Clipper*). Although used at first as a stationary training vessel, the school's intention was to work with MARAD to modify the ship from its MCDS configuration into an operational training ship. A solicitation for design services published in April 2010 envisioned converting the ship in two phases, first to carry 160 cadets plus 40 officers and crew, then, later, to a capacity of 500 cadets and 65 officers and crew.¹⁵ Funding to carry out this conversion was never identified, and the ship was returned to MARAD in February 2012 in favor of a different ship from the reserve fleet.¹⁶ *Cape Gibson* is currently berthed at the Beaumont Reserve Fleet in Texas and is used as a training platform for selected federal agencies.

¹³ "Cape Gibson Milestones," MARAD Vessel History Database, <http://www.marad.dot.gov/sh/ShipHistory/Detail/739>; "Gibson Loads on West Coast," *Sealift* (January 2003), <http://www.msc.navy.mil/sealift/2003/January/gibson.htm>.

¹⁴ "Cape Gibson Milestones," MARAD Vessel History Database.

¹⁵ "SS Cape Gibson (Galveston, TX), Architectural and Engineering Services," Department of Transportation solicitation no. DTMA1R10023, April 29, 2010, <https://www.fbo.gov/spg/DOT/MARAD/HQOA/DTMA1R10023/listing.html>.

¹⁶ "Cape Gibson Milestones," MARAD Vessel History Database.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Vessel Name:	<i>Cape Gibson</i>
Former Names:	<i>Indian Mail</i> <i>President Jackson</i> <i>Texas Clipper IV</i>
Dates of Construction:	Contract signed: June 9, 1966 Keel laid: November 13, 1967 Launched: July 27, 1968 Delivered: December 30, 1968
Type of Craft:	Break-bulk cargo ship
MARAD Design No.:	C5-S-75a
Builder's Hull No.:	588
Official No.:	517717
Navy Designation:	T-AK 5051
Designer:	J. J. Henry Company, Inc., New York, N.Y.
Builder:	Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Va.
Length (bp):	582'-6"
Length (oa):	605'-0"
Beam (maximum molded):	82'-0"
Draft (maximum molded):	35'-0"
Displacement:	31,995 long tons
Deadweight:	22,208 long tons
Gross registered tonnage:	15,949
Net registered tonnage:	10,002
Bale capacity:	1,045,160 cubic feet
Refrigerated cargo capacity:	21,839 cubic feet
Liquid cargo capacity:	95,080 cubic feet
Maximum continuous shaft horsepower (at 105 rpm):	24,000
Normal shaft horsepower (at 102 rpm):	21,600
Service speed:	20.8 knots
Maximum speed:	23 knots
Crew (original):	45
Passengers (original):	12 ¹⁷

Cape Gibson has a welded steel hull with riveting in way of the gunwale connections and certain deck and bottom shell seams. It is longitudinally framed along the bottom and transverse framed at the deck and sides. It is subdivided by nine transverse watertight bulkheads into seven holds, fore and after peaks, and the machinery compartment. There are two decks in the hull plus a third deck in Holds 1 through 4. Corrosion control measures incorporated in the original construction allowed the ship to be built with reduced scantlings.¹⁸

A single deck house is positioned just aft of amidships. As originally configured, it contained accommodations for 63 officers, crew, cadets, and passengers. The various passenger spaces are

¹⁷ E. Scott Dillon, Ludwig C. Hoffmann, and Donald P. Roseman, "Forty Years of Ship Designs Under the Merchant Marine Act, 1936-1976." Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers *Transactions* 84 (1976): 203; *Lloyd's Register of Shipping*, 1970-71.

¹⁸ Details of the ship's construction and equipment are drawn from *American Bureau of Shipping Record*, 1969: 1014; "SS 'Alaskan Mail,' A Ship that has Everything," *Marine Engineering / Log* (November 1968), 61-65; and Dillon, "Forty Years of Ship Designs," 207.

now devoted to crew use. The Navigating Bridge Deck holds the wheelhouse, radio room, and sea cabin. The Bridge Deck, next below, contains senior officers' quarters. The Boat Deck contains the original staterooms for 12 passengers plus the passenger lounge, passenger library (all now repurposed) and the emergency generator room. The Upper Deck holds officers' staterooms, officers' lounge, and the officers' and (former) passengers' dining room. Crew quarters are on the Main Deck, as are the crew lounge and hospital. Crew's mess, galley, and food stores are on the Second Deck below the deck house. All accommodation spaces are air conditioned and have been since the ship's construction.

The ship's machinery space is subdivided into two levels. The upper level contains the boilers, turbines, reduction gearing, turbogenerators, a centralized control board, the combustion controls, and the electrical switchboard. The lower level contains the condensers, pumps, air-conditioning and reefer compressors, and the evaporator.

The ship is propelled by steam turbines. The steam is supplied by two Babcock & Wilcox boilers that generate 137,000 pounds of steam per hour in normal operation. The main engine is of cross-compound double-reduction type with high- and low-pressure turbines developing 21,600 shp at 102 rpm and 24,000 shp at 105 rpm. The astern element is fitted into the low-pressure turbine. The turbines and gears are by General Electric. They drive a single four-bladed screw of 22' diameter. Electrical service is provided by two General Electric turbogenerators supplying 1,250 kW each. A 150-kW emergency generator is installed on the Boat Deck. An 800-hp, electrically driven Bird-Johnson Model 80 thruster is fitted in the bow to aid maneuvering. The thruster was included in the ship's original construction. The steering gear is a single-ram, electro-hydraulic type manufactured by Western Gear Corporation.

The ship was designed to carry general break-bulk cargo, bulk cargo, refrigerated cargo, liquid cargo, and containers. It has seven cargo holds—four forward of the deck house and three aft—plus numerous deep tanks. Four self-supporting bipod cargo masts equipped with 15- and 20-ton booms, as well as three pairs of kingposts with 20-ton booms, serve the cargo holds. A 70-ton heavy-lift boom serves hatches 5 and 6. The cargo lift and transfer units of the Modular Cargo Delivery System are installed on the Main Deck atop Holds no. 3 and 5. Folding hatch covers on the Main Deck and 'tween decks are hydraulically operated. All cargo booms and hatches were designed and supplied by MacGregor-Comarain, Inc., except the heavy lift boom, which is by Newport News Shipbuilding. Selected 'tween deck hatches can be rigged to form grain feeder trunks. An "Air-Glide" system, where compressed air was used with special pallets to assist stowage of containers in the 'tween and orlop decks, was originally fitted on the ship. The ship carries two lifeboats.

Statement of Significance

The activation of *Cape Gibson* during the build-up for Operations *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* was the RRF's first large-scale activation since its creation in 1976. *Cape Gibson* delivered cargoes of military supplies and ammunition without incident and provided desperately needed services in a time of national need. Subsequent crises involving MARAD's role of assisting the military

during national emergencies have generally utilized more efficient ship types more in keeping with modern logistics operations.

Historical Integrity

The overall condition of *Cape Gibson* is good; it has experienced only normal wear and aging for a vessel of its age. The hull, machinery, passenger and crew accommodations are largely intact. The ship was modified in 1993 from its original 1968 configuration to carry the Modular Cargo Delivery System (MCDS). Additionally, a raised deck was added to the stern for the staging of cargo for vertical replenishment (VERTREP).

National Register Eligibility Statement

Cape Gibson is not 50-years-old and does not possess the extraordinary historical significance in any category necessary to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. While it did participate in Operations *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* it was one of 78 RRF vessels activated by the U.S. Navy to support those operations and its role was not significant enough to qualify under Criteria A, particularly considering the recent nature of those operations.

Date: 05 November 2014

Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

American Bureau of Shipping Record. Various years (1968–present).

Annual Reports of the Maritime Administration. Various years (1966–present).

“Cape G Class breakbulk.” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/cape-g.htm>.

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SS *Indian Mail* at Vancouver, British Columbia, November 22, 1970. Photograph by Walter E. Frost, City of Vancouver Archives, No. AM1506-S3-3-: CVA 447-5174.2.



SS *Cape Gibson* at dock in Saudi Arabia during Operation *Desert Shield*, December 1990. Department of Defense photograph, National Archives and Records Administration, Still Pictures Branch, College Park, Md., RG 330.