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# Navy Employs Civilians To Ferry Nuclear Arms

WASHINGTON, Sept. 21 (AP) — At least two cargo ships sailed by civilian crews are used by the Navy to transport nuclear missiles across the Atlantic, according to public documents and various sources.

The ships, assigned to the Military Sealift Command, ferry ballistic missiles of the type deployed on submarines to and from various bases — primarily Charleston, S.C., King's Bay, Ga., and Holy Loch, Scotland.

"Most people don't realize how often we move nuclear weapons," says William Arkin, an analyst with the Institute for Policy Studies, a liberal Washington research organization. "It's a daily event because of maintenance requirements, safety checks, upgrades and replacements."

The role of the Military Sealift Command in such transport work, however, is largely unknown and belies a common perception among military analysts and others that nuclear weapons assigned to the Navy are handled only by active-duty personnel.

## Navy Security Personnel

Unlike cargo or ammunition ships accompanied by Navy battle groups, ships under the Sealift Command frequently ply the oceans without warship escort.

Navy literature says the ships always carry a small detail of 7 to 10 active-duty sailors responsible for communications and security. Navy sources say the vessels also rely on the anonymity that accompanies their outward appearance as standard cargo ships. The vessels are carefully tracked during their voyages and are in constant communication with Navy facilities.

The Military Sealift Command con-

trols a fleet of about 120 transport ships operated by civilians, delivering cargo and oil to military installations around the world. Navy officials, following standard policy, refuse to either confirm or deny that Sealift Command ships carry nuclear weapons.

## Drug and Security Checks

But the service, in a variety of public documents, has spelled out many details. For example, in describing recent plans for testing civilian employees for signs of drug use, the Navy included the following note: "This does not include the crews of three ships, all of whom are already designated for testing under the Nuclear Weapons Personnel Reliability Program."

According to other documents and sources, these ships are the Marshfield, the Vega and the Kilauea, all of which belong to the Sealift Command.

A 1984 Navy reference booklet describes the first two vessels as "Fleet Ballistic Missile Resupply Ships" and says they have "environmentally controlled stowage for fleet ballistic missiles" and Navy personnel "to provide safety and security for the missiles."

The Kilauea differs from the Marshfield and Vega in that she is an ammunition ship of the type that sails with surface warships. The inclusion of the Kilauea's civilian crew in the Personnel Reliability Program, however, indicates that she carries nuclear weapons of some sort.

A 1980 directive states that civilian Sealift Command personnel whose duties are associated with nuclear weapons must have security background checks, "mental alertness," "good social adjustment and emotional stability" and "a positive attitude toward nuclear weapons duty."

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## A sub fleet is crippled

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operational deterrent. The Polaris reactor design fault is understood to be the same as the one which has led to three hunter-killer subs being scrapped.

Hunter-killers and Polaris subs are both nuclear-powered. But only the four Polaris subs, based at Faslane, are nuclear-armed.

John McFall, Labour MP for Dumbarton and a member of the all-party Commons defence select committee, said:

"The Government claim that all four boats are required to ensure an effective defence."

## Refused

"It would appear they have been engaged in an elaborate charade."

Dr John Large, a consultant nuclear engineer, added: "You can't see Polaris stretching until Trident arrives."

But Captain Peter Voure, Navy public relations director, said: "Somebody is spreading mischief. Polaris is being maintained at sea and not with only one sub."

But he refused to say how many Polaris subs said to be 25 years old were able to go to sea.

The Navy also denied calling on American help to maintain a deterrent patrol.

N Sub Acc

## US sub damaged in Atlantic

From our Correspondent in Washington

THE US nuclear-powered attack submarine, Augusta, was damaged in the Atlantic two weeks ago, it was reported in Washington yesterday. There were no injuries or damage serious enough to prevent the \$700 million boat returning under its own power to its home port, New London, Connecticut, source said.

The navy declined official comment.

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