

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

A recent article titled "Missing: America's Merchant Marine" appeared in the Seapower magazine published by the Navy League of the United States. The author, Charles S. White, is a well known figure in the United States Maritime industry and expresses his "Point of View". His concerns have to do with the reduction of the United States merchant fleet which is practically non existent on the World Market and why it is in ~~the~~ ^{such a} sorry shape, ~~that it is~~. The reasons are many and varied and take more than the three minutes that I have available. The lack of U.S. government subsidies is part of the problem as the countries with large merchant fleets continue to subsidize their fleets with tight government control. The U.S. fleet (or what there is of it) is under tight government control with endless numbers of regulations. Ironically, container based intermodalism is an American development. The few U.S. owned container ships that do ply the oceans are used between the U.S. mainland and Hawaii and Puerto Rico. The reasoning is the Jones Act which prohibits all foreign flagged ships from moving cargo between U.S. ports. Foreign ships may bring cargo from another part of the world to a U.S. port and they are able to carry American goods to another part of the world. If the Jones Act was to be lifted or modified we would probably lose most of what we have left of our domestic fleet. This act also covers all of our navigable rivers and waterways. It amazes me why our government thinks so little of a merchant fleet when our nation is surrounded by water on three sides. Any further reduction of our military and merchant fleets can have serious consequences for our ship building industry and national defense. We would be hard pressed to find foreign ships and crews to aid us in a dire world emergency. Most of the huge ships that carry containers all over the world are built in the shipyards of other countries. When our troops are ordered overseas, they are flown and arrive within hours but most of the long term supplies and equipment they need must be carried by ships thus we turn our backs on those men and women who have vowed to protect our nation. Years ago there was a move by American ship owners to register their ships overseas where regulations and taxes were much less plus they could hire foreign crews whose wages are far below those of an American seaman. On a local level, Humboldt Bay receives an occasional cargo ship to load wood products. All these ships are of a foreign registry. The only U.S. flagged vessels that do arrive are the tugs pulling the barges loaded with fuel from the Bay area. It is pretty common these days for movement of tons of cargo by air but the airplane will never fully take the place of a cargo ship.

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