

USS Protector AGR-11

The Last Radar Picket Ship

Thanks to Dominic Ullom (AGR-5, 1956-59) for sending the following information on the Protector.

Dominic clipped this article from The Virginian Pilot, dated September 28, 2004. The picture in the article does not show the Protector.

As published earlier the Protector is part of what is called the "Ghost Fleet" and she was scheduled to be towed to England for scrapping. Protesters in England said the ships posed an environmental hazard and should not be allowed in England. It seems that they got their way.



Members of the Ghost Fleet sit on the James River. Four ships — the General Nelson M. Walker, the Protector, the Donner and the General William O. Darby — will be tagged to Texas to be dismantled.

Four more Ghost Fleet vessels are being sent to their graves

BY SCOTT HARPER
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NEWPORT NEWS — Four more environmentally risky "Ghost Fleet" ships will be scrapped and their toxic innards recycled under contracts announced Monday worth \$3.5 million.

The head of the government caretaker of the James River Reserve Fleet, or Ghost Fleet, said the vessels represent a milestone. The 10 steel vessels, with rusting hulls most likely to leak heavy oil into the open environment, all are under contract to be dismantled.

"I feel very good that we're making progress here," William O. Schubert, head of the U.S. Maritime Administration, said at a press conference overlooking the multi-billed fleet off Fort Eustis in Newport News.

Still, much work needs to be done, Schubert said.

Only two of the junk vessels have been towed to their graves so far this year, and there are at least 41 other unwanted, but more stable, ships that must leave the James River by September 2006 to comply with a cleanup mandate from Congress.

Headed by U.S. Reps. Jo Ann Davis and Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Schubert said the latest contracts will send four ships to two Texas scrapyards, All Star Metals and

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this year.

Marine Metals, both located in Brownsville, near the Mexico border.

All Star Metals will receive three of the ships, all built in the 1940s — the General Nelson M. Walker, the Protector, and the Donner. The Protector, a converted Liberty ship from World War II, has been moored at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth.

Marine Metals, which has won previous salvage contracts, will get the fourth vessel, the General William O. Darby, a troop carrier with service in WWII, Vietnam and Europe.

All of the ships will be towed by tugboat down the Atlantic coast, around Florida, through the Gulf of Mexico to south Texas. The trip should take between 12 and 15 days, number permitting. Schubert said he "fully anticipates" the ships leaving Virginia waters by the end of the year.

Environmentally, the Donner is perhaps the most notorious ship in the 99-vessel Ghost Fleet.

In August 2002, it created the largest known oil spill from the fleet to date — about 1,000 gallons of heavy fuel,

which escaped through a hole in its rusted hull. An oil slick stretched for two miles on the James and spread a half-mile across. It cost \$250,000 to clean up.

Since then, the Donner has been patched and all oil has been pumped from its belly, so it will not require special protections during transfer to Texas, officials said.

The other three ships hold a combined 300,000 gallons of fuel and oil. Their removal from the James should help defuse what Scott, the congressman, described as "an environmental disaster just waiting to happen."

Beginning in World War I, the government has stored freighters and military support ships in the middle of the James River. Some went back into duty, the rest were declared surplus and sold at auction.

But in the 1990s, concerns about exports of junk ships to India, China and other nations lacking in environmental and worker-safety rules led to a virtual ban on overseas sales, and ships began to stockpile.

The Maritime Administration needs to get rid of about 110 obsolete ships of reserve fleets across the country. Most of these are moored in the James, including some of the oldest and poorest-constructed ships.

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