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National Maritime Day, 1986

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

From the very beginning, America has been a seafaring Nation. In fact, the discovery of our continent was the result of one of the most daring seafaring adventures in human history. Even before the founding of the Republic, our people looked to the sea—for peaceful trade and to ensure prosperity.

The sea-lanes were the pathways to new beginnings in a new world for millions who came to our shores and helped to build a country already rich in trading and seafaring traditions.

American maritime leadership was also reflected in ship design. The fabled "Yankee Clippers" of the early 19th century represented the first major innovation in wind-powered craft since the 15th century. They dashed across the seas at unprecedented speeds, making them the ultimate in merchant sail. And when steam-powered vessels began to eclipse sailing ships in the latter part of the 19th century, it was largely the result of pioneering work by two Americans, John Fitch and Robert Fulton.

Since America fronted on the world's two largest oceans, it was fitting that an American naval officer, Alfred Thayer Mahan, should have been the author of the first major historical study of the influence of sea power in geopolitics. Theodore Roosevelt, who as a young man was the first to review Mahan's book, later, as President, took the lead in providing the United States with its first world-class navy. From this rich heritage, America emerged as the greatest trading Nation on earth.

All of us today owe a debt of gratitude to the civilian merchant mariners who have braved the perils of the sea and the assaults of enemies who threatened our way of life. Through the centuries, untold numbers sacrificed their lives to preserve American freedom. In World War II alone, nearly 6,000 U.S. merchant seamen aboard 733 American ships were lost in enemy attacks. But our sea-lane lifelines remained open.

It is appropriate that we pause to pay tribute to those civilian sailors, past and present, in our commercial fleet and to all other Americans who support them and guard the lifelines of the sea that sustain us all.

In recognition of the importance of the American merchant marine, the Congress, by joint resolution approved May 20, 1933, designated May 22 of each year as "National Maritime Day" and authorized and requested the President to issue annually a proclamation calling for its appropriate observance. This date was chosen to commemorate the day in 1819 when the SS SAVANNAH departed Savannah, Georgia, on the first transatlantic steamship voyage.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 22, 1986, as National Maritime Day, and I urge the people of the United States to observe this day by displaying the flag of the United States at their homes and other suitable places, and I request that all ships sailing under the American flag dress ship on that day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twentieth day of May, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

Ronald Reagan