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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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R Dear Mr. Jones:

This is in reply to your letter of February 17, 1972, in which you requested our comments on a letter from Mr. William C. Pittman concerning strategic implications of merchant marine ship design. We received a similar letter directly from Mr. Pittman.

The General Accounting Office normally does not question matters involving strategic planning of the Department of Defense. We have discussed this matter, however, with Navy and Maritime Administration officials. They have described to us how commercial and defense interests are coordinated on merchant ship construction programs.

1. The Navy provides guidance on defense features to be built into U.S. merchant ships constructed under the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. The majority of U.S. merchant ships have been constructed under the provisions of this act. Navy officers, headed by a rear admiral, are assigned to the Maritime Administration to ensure a coordinated effort. Guidance is furnished on basic construction standards, speed, shock resistance, power, propulsion systems, size, etc. The guidance further is detailed for different types of ships, such as cargo ships, container ships, and tankers. The Navy recognizes that merchant ships must be commercially competitive in peacetime but hopes to provide for speedy wartime conversion for sealift of Department of Defense equipment and supplies.
2. Plans exist for equipping merchant ships with defensive systems, and the Navy stockpiles certain equipment, such as defensive weapons, for this purpose. There is a formal program for the exchange of research and development information with industry, and in its planning the Navy attempts to ensure an adequate mobilization base of plant facilities and skilled personnel for activation, conversion, repair, and construction in wartime for both Navy and merchant ships.

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We hope this information will be of interest to Mr. Pittman. The information he submitted certainly will be useful to us as background material in our reviews of the Department of Defense transportation needs.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James B. Peck".

Comptroller General
of the United States

The Honorable Robert E. Jones
House of Representatives