

CHESAPEAKE  
(Hess Voyager)  
Beaumont Reserve Fleet  
Beaumont vicinity  
Jefferson County  
Texas

HAER TX-117  
HAER TX-117

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## *Chesapeake* (*Hess Voyager*)

HAER No. TX-117

**Location:** Beaumont Reserve Fleet, Neches River, Beaumont vicinity,  
Jefferson County, Texas

**Type of Craft:** Petroleum tanker

**MARAD Design No.:** Stm/50K

**Builder's Hull No.:** 4603

**Official Registry No.:** 296863

**IMO No.:** 6420056

**Navy Designation:** T-AOT-5084

**Principal Measurements:** Length (waterline): 708'  
Length (over all): 736'  
Beam: 102'  
Draft (maximum): 39'  
Deadweight: 50,023 long tons  
Gross registered tonnage: 27,015  
Net registered tonnage: 19,148  
Maximum continuous  
shaft horsepower: 15,000 hp  
Service speed: 15 knots

(The listed dimensions are as of 2011, but it should be noted that draft, displacement, and tonnages were subject to alteration over time as well as variations in measurement.)

**Propulsion:** Steam turbines geared to a single shaft and propeller.

**Dates of Construction:** Launch: August 18, 1964  
Delivery: October 29, 1964

**Designer:** Sinclair Oil Corporation

**Builder:** Bethlehem Steel Company, Sparrows Point Shipyard,  
Baltimore, Maryland

**Original Owner:** Hess Shipping Corporation (Hess Oil & Chemical Corporation)

**Present Owner:** Maritime Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation

**Names:** *Hess Voyager* (1964-1980)  
*Chesapeake* (1980-present)

- Disposition:** Laid up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet
- Significance:** Built as the *Hess Voyager* and acquired by the government in 1987, the petroleum tanker *Chesapeake* was assigned for twenty years to the Ready Reserve Force maintained by the navy's Military Sealift Command. It was used as needed to support American military operations around the world. Equipped in 1989 with the Offshore Petroleum Discharge System for discharging cargo on undeveloped shores, the ship operated in the Persian Gulf during the first Gulf War, was stationed at San Francisco during the 1990s, and supported U.S. forces in the Indian and Pacific oceans from 2001 to 2006 through deployment to the prepositioning force based at the island of Diego Garcia. Since 2009, the ship has been laid up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet at Beaumont, Texas.
- Author:** Michael R. Harrison, 2011
- Project Information:** This project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, administers the HAER program.
- The project was prepared under the direction of Todd Croteau (HAER Maritime Program Coordinator). Jet Lowe (HAER Photographer) created large format photographs, and Michael R. Harrison (Historian) wrote the historical report.

### Description:

The *Chesapeake* is a bulk oil tanker. It has a raked stem, cruiser stern, one complete deck, an enclosed forecastle, and a single deckhouse located at the stern. The ship is propelled by two Bethlehem steam turbines geared to a single shaft and propeller. Two boilers manufactured by Combustion Engineering produce the steam for the turbines, turbo generators, and other ancillary machinery.

### History:

The *Chesapeake* was built in 1964 as the *Hess Voyager* for the Hess Oil & Chemical Corporation at Bethlehem Steel's Sparrows Point Shipyard in Baltimore. Intended for the transport of crude oil and refined petroleum products between the company's refineries and terminals along the U.S. Gulf and East coasts, the *Hess Voyager* was the first new ship the Hess Corporation had ever ordered. The balance of its fleet at that time comprising jumboized World War II-era T-2 tankers.

Bethlehem Steel reused the design of the tanker *Sinclair Texas* (now the *Petersburg*) to build the *Hess Voyager*. According to an article by Edward A. Morrow in the *New York Times*, the *Sinclair Texas*, completed in June 1963 for the Sinclair Oil Corporation, was designed by the Sinclair Corporation itself. Its bridge-aft design – where the navigating bridge and officers' quarters were placed aft instead of in their own midships deck house – was intended to reduce construction costs and operating expenses. The *Sinclair Texas* and the *Hess Voyager* are early examples of large American-built tankers with such a design. Other cost-saving features incorporated into the earlier ship and duplicated on the later one were automatic cargo-handling pumps hydraulically controlled from the deck and zinc-coated ("Dimetcoted") interior and exterior metal surfaces to reduce corrosion and the need for painting.

The *Hess Voyager* was sponsored at its launch by Norma Hess (*née* Wilentz), the wife of company president Leon Hess. It was given the name of a previous company ship that had been sold in 1963.

After a number of years in service, the ship was sold to Keystone Shipping, which renamed it *Chesapeake* in 1980. In December 1987, Keystone transferred the ship to the Maritime Administration under the latter's Ship Exchange Program for use by Military Sealift Command (MSC), the navy's ocean-cargo agency. In 1989, the ship was equipped with the navy's Offshore Petroleum Discharge System, a means of offloading cargo in areas without port facilities. This system comprised on-deck reels for flexible conduit, new high-pressure cargo pumps, and gantries and cranes for stowing and launching the system's submersible mooring platform, buoys, portable shore terminals, and support boats.

The *Chesapeake* was assigned to MSC's Ready Reserve Force where it was maintained ready for rapid activation when needed to support Department of Defense activities. Its first major deployment in this role was in the Persian Gulf during the first Gulf War.

The *Chesapeake* was outported to San Francisco during the 1990s. From 2001 to 2006, it supported U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf and the Indian and Pacific oceans through a long-term deployment to the prepositioning force based at the remote island of Diego Garcia. Since 2009, the ship has been laid up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet at Beaumont, Texas.

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