

**NATIONAL REGISTER  
ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT  
VESSEL: *Mission Capistrano*  
(T-AOT-5005)**



*Mission Capistrano* circa 1980s.  
Maritime Administration photos.



## Vessel History

The Ingalls Shipbuilding division of Litton Industries in Pascagoula, Mississippi built the *Falcon Lady*, later renamed *Mission Capistrano*, in 1971. The commercial tanker was built for Falcon Carriers of New York under a 1967 build-and-lease arrangement with the U.S. Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS)<sup>1</sup>. The arrangement called for the construction of four 37,000 deadweight ships. The three sister ships of the *Falcon Lady*, the *Falcon Duchess*, *Falcon Countess*, and *Falcon Princess* were completed in 1971-1972 and were also leased to the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC). One of MSC's primary missions is to supply fuel to American military bases located domestically and overseas. It employs tankers to accomplish this mission, with those tankers coming either from its organically-owned fleet, or under charter from commercial owners. The *Falcon Lady* was subsequently purchased by the Navy and renamed USNS *Columbia* (T-AOT-182). The Navy also purchased *Falcon Lady*'s sisterships, *Falcon Duchess*, *Falcon Countess*, and *Falcon Princess* and renamed them USNS *Neches* (T-AOT-183), USNS *Hudson* (T-AOT-184), and USNS *Susquehanna* (T-AOT-185) respectively. The Navy disposed of all three in 1983. The *Falcon Lady*/USNS *Columbia* (T-AOT-182), was the only one of the four to be retained.

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<sup>1</sup> MSTS was a post-World War II combination of four predecessor government agencies that handled similar sealift functions. These included the Navy's Naval Transportation Service and Fleet Support Service, the Army Transport Service, and the War Shipping Administration of the United States Maritime Commission. MSTS was renamed Military Sealift Command in 1970.

The *Falcon Lady* entered service November 3, 1971. At that time MSC was in the process of modernizing its tanker fleet. During the Vietnam War it had depended on sixteen T-2<sup>2</sup> tankers built during World War II and five newer T-5s<sup>3</sup>; four *Maumee*-class vessels and the *American Explorer*. The Navy originally planned to build tankers but was unable to secure the necessary funding; consequently, it opted instead for the commercial build-and-lease program.

On its maiden voyage under MSC charter, the *Falcon Lady* transported oil from Corpus Christi, Texas, to Norfolk, Virginia. It then went into regular service supplying the U.S. Navy's fuel needs from refineries in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Caribbean. In 1987, the Navy purchased the *Falcon Lady* and renamed it USNS *Columbia* for the Columbia River. In March of 1988 it was placed on Ready Reserve status and berthed in the Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Fleet (RRF) anchorage in Beaumont, Texas under the management of Mormac Industries of Connecticut. During that period, its name was changed to *Mission Capistrano*. MSC activated *Mission Capistrano* for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm on February 15, 1991, and the ship went to Gulf Copper in Port Arthur, Texas for activation. However, repairs to the ship were not completed until April 17, 1991. By that late date in the conflict the ship was no longer required and therefore did not participate. The vessel was officially downgraded from the RRF on July 31, 2004, and designated for disposal in 2006.

## Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

**Type:** T-AOT-5005

**Hull Number:** 1162

**Official Number:** 531154

**Previous name:** *Falcon Lady*

**Builder:** Ingalls Shipbuilding division of Litton Industries, Pascagoula, Mississippi

**Year:** 1971

**Sister Ships:**

**Length:** 660.2'

**Beam:** 90'

**Depth:** 46.9'

**Draft:** 36.64'

**Displacement:** 46,243

**Deadweight:** 37,000

**Gross Tonnage (GRT):** 20,751

**Net Tonnage (NRT):** 16,757

**Gross Tonnage (GT ITC International tonnage certificate):**

**Total Cargo Capacity:** 296,626 barrels.

**Speed:** 14.9 knots

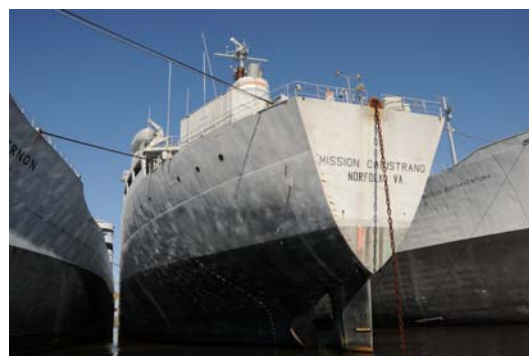
The *Falcon Lady* and its sisters were diesel-propelled ships; among some of the earliest in the postwar U.S. merchant marine. They were modern vessels of contemporary design; equipped with medium speed diesel engines, automated pump rooms, and a reduced crew of 23. By

<sup>2</sup> T-2 tankers were World War II-era U.S.-built oil tankers constructed between 1940 and 1945. At a little more than 500 feet in length, these were the largest tankers at the time. Nearly 500 were built.

<sup>3</sup> T-5 tankers were constructed in the mid-to-late 1950s. They were more than 614-feet in length and were known as "super tankers."

comparison, the earlier T2s and T5s were steam-propelled vessels without automation, thus requiring crews of 39 to 40 persons. The Falcon tankers were equipped with a flume stabilization system that reduced rolling in a seaway by transferring liquid among opposite tanks. This feature was expected to reduce fuel consumption and improve service economy by allowing the vessels to maintain speed and heading during rough weather, and by eliminating the unnecessary drag introduced by bilge keels.

The main propulsion system was twin Pielstick 16PC2V medium speed diesel engines rated at 7,500 HP each. When installed in the *Falcon Lady* this was the largest diesel power plant that had been placed in a U.S. vessel up to that date. The Pielstick engine had been developed in France and was manufactured in the United States by the Power Systems Division of Colt Industries. Coltec was later absorbed by Fairbanks Morse, who continued to develop and manufacture Pielstick engines for U.S. Navy installations into the early years of this century.



Left: Looking aft toward *Mission Capistrano's* superstructure. Right: vessel's stern. Lower right: Piping and valves at midships. Maritime Administration photos. January 2009, Beaumont Reserve Fleet.



## Statement of Significance

The *Mission Capistrano* is a typical product tanker with no distinctive or unusual characteristics. It is generally representative of its contemporary type. Vessels of this type are numerous in commercial trade, and remain well-represented in the overall world fleet. The vessel is not distinctive, nor is it of a specialized form unique to a particular trade. It is not associated with any significant events or persons. Although the vessel is notable for its early application of moderately high-powered medium speed diesel propulsion, the system itself was not technologically innovative at the time, and is not of major engineering significance.

## **Historical Integrity**

The vessel was originally constructed in 1971 and did not undergo any substantial modifications during its service life. The vessel retains its historical integrity, being substantially unchanged from original construction. All (or most) salient design features of structure, machinery and equipment are substantially intact. The vessel's overall condition is good.

## **National Register Eligibility Statement**

The *Mission Capistrano* is not yet 50 years old. The vessel does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing. It does not qualify under any of the criteria for listing on the National Register.

**Date:** 5 March 2009

**Determination:** NOT ELIGIBLE

## Sources

Brouwer, Norman. *Mission Capistrano Ship History*. 2008.

Polmar, Norman. *Naval Institute Guide to Ships and Aircraft of the U.S. Fleet*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1997.

*Marine Engineering/Log*. *Tanker is first with Diesels in U.S. Fleet*. December 1971

*Maritime Reporter*. *The MV Falcon Lady*. May 1, 1971

*Sealift*. *Falcon Lady begins operations for MSC*. May 1972

----- . *Four New Falcon Tankers Being Built for Worldwide MSTS Charter*. July 1968

## Internet Site

Maritime Administration's Property Management and Archive Record System Website:  
[www.pmars.img.com/detail.asp?Ship=6434](http://www.pmars.img.com/detail.asp?Ship=6434)

## Other

*Mission Capistrano* file located at the Maritime Administration's Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

The Louis Berger Group, Inc., *National Register Eligibility Report for the SS Naeco*. 16 February 2004.

## Attachment 1

### Historic Context

Immediately after WWII the demand for petroleum products rose rapidly leading to a swift succession of new tanker designs. Tanker capacity increased from 16,000 deadweight tons (dwt) during WWII to nearly 100,000 dwt by 1960 and to over 300,000 dwt by 1970. The following provides a summary of the history of U.S. tanker development from WWII to 1960, within which the historic significance of the *Mission Capistrano*, *Mission Buenaventura*, and *Potomac* can be evaluated.

The era of the “super-size” tankers, as they were first called, began in 1947 with the *Ulysses*, a 27,928 dwt tanker built by Welding Shipyards of Norfolk, Virginia. The *Ulysses* was the largest tanker in world, approaching twice the size of its predecessors. The ship’s construction marked the beginning of an industry trend to build increasingly larger tankers— tankers that would ultimately directly shape the future business and politics of oil. Welding Shipyards signed a contract with National Bulk Carriers to build ten identical tankers of even larger capacity and in 1948 launched the first of the fleet, the 30,000 dwt tanker *Bulkpetrol*, which established another world record.

By 1949 the major commercial shipyards were all rapidly building “supertankers” in the 27,000-28,000 dwt class, including Bethlehem Steel Company, at their Quincy, Massachusetts, and Sparrows Point, Maryland, yards, at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia, and at Sun Shipbuilding in Chester, Pennsylvania. Twenty-nine supertankers were launched in 1949, establishing a new peacetime record of total deadweight tonnage for self-propelled commercial vessels ships built by U.S shipyards. The Bethlehem-Quincy yard produced five 28,000 dwt tankers in 1949 and five more in 1950. New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Camden, New Jersey, entered the market in 1950 with the 30,155 dwt *Atlantic Seaman*, a new world record by a small margin. The *Atlantic Seaman* was 627’ long, 85’ wide, and 45’ in depth with 18,000 horsepower.

In 1952 Bethlehem-Quincy built the *Waneta*, a 29,250 dwt tanker with a length of 615’, a width of 84’ and a depth of 44’. The following year the horsepower was increased from 13,000 to 15,000, and the design became a standard for at least 20 more vessels over the next eight years that would be produced by the company’s yards or by Sun Shipbuilding. The design provided for deadweight capacities in the range of 28,000 to 31,000 tons.

The next major leap in tanker technology came in 1954 when the Greek shipping magnate Stavros S. Niarchos took delivery of several huge new 45,000 dwt tankers from various yards around the world, one being the Bethlehem-Quincy yard, which built the *World Glory*. With a length of 737’ and a deadweight tonnage of 45,000 tons, *World Glory* was the largest tanker in the world and the second largest merchant ship ever built in the U.S. after the passenger liner *United States*.

Also notable in 1954 was the construction of four 39,000 dwt tankers of the *W. Alton Jones* class by Newport News Shipyard that incorporated important new features and advancements in tanker technology. In 1956 the advanced features of the *W. Alton Jones* were incorporated into the Cities Service tanker *Baltimore*, the first tanker built under MARAD's "trade-in-and-build" program. Cities Service replaced seven WWII vintage T-2 tankers with three Baltimore-class tankers.

By the mid-1950s Japan had become established as a major shipbuilder competing in the world tanker construction market. In 1956 the *Universe Leader* was built in Japan's Kure Shipyard, establishing the new tanker size record with a length of 854', a beam of 125', and a deadweight capacity of 85,515 tons. In the U.S. the demand remained strong for tankers in the 30,000 and 45,000 dwt classes, the former now the U.S. coastwise workhorse, and the latter the "fleetbuilder" of choice for the expanding Greek and new South American shipping companies. In 1957 and 1958 the Bethlehem-Quincy yard built three sister ships of its standard 30,000 dwt design for use by Socony Mobil Oil Company and three tankers of its 46,000 dwt design, one for Niarchos and two for Venezuelan interests.

In 1959 the demand for American-built tankers reached its highest level to date, with 26 tankers completed with an aggregate deadweight tonnage of over 1,000,000 tons. Tankers of the 45,000 dwt class formed the largest group, but the need for 30,000 dwt tankers remained with seven delivered. The largest tanker built by an American yard to date, the 860', 71,282 dwt *Princess Sophie* was completed in 1959 by Bethlehem-Quincy for the Niarchos-owned shipping company, World Brilliance Corporation.

By 1960 the market for 30,000 dwt tankers began to wane although certain domestic carriers, including Gulf Oil, continued to purchase them for serving ports and loading/unloading facilities that could not handle the larger ships. American shipyards were now regularly producing "standard design" tankers in the 45,000 dwt and 66,000 dwt classes, but the demand for bigger ships continued. In 1962 Bethlehem-Quincy delivered the *Manhattan*, which at 106,568 dwt, redefined the meaning of "supertanker," a term coined 10 years earlier for 30,000 dwt tankers. With a length of 940' and a draft of 50', the *Manhattan* was the largest U.S. merchant ship ever built at that time.