

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

VESSEL: *Mount Vernon*



Mount Vernon's sistership, *Mount Washington*, circa 1980s. Note the divided superstructure, which was typical for tankers when *Mount Washington* and *Mount Vernon Victory* were constructed in the early 1960s. Maritime Administration photo.

Vessel History

The *Mount Vernon* was completed on January 27, 1961 as the 46,000- ton deadweight commercial tanker *Mount Vernon Victory* by the Bethlehem Steel Company shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts¹. The U. S. Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) chartered the ship from Victory Carriers of New York, the American- flag operation of Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis. In the years prior to *Mount Vernon Victory's* construction, Onassis formed dummy ship-owning companies that were ostensibly used to circumvent U.S.-flag vessel ownership rules. Victory Carriers was established as a U.S.-citizen² company in response to government complaints.

The *Mount Vernon Victory* and its sister ship *Mount Washington*, also chartered by MSTS, belonged to a group of “standard” tankers whose prototype had been the 45,130-ton, *World Glory*. Built by Bethlehem Steel (Quincy) in 1954, *World Glory* was both the largest tanker ever built in the U.S. and the largest tanker in the world at that time. By the time *Mount Washington* was launched nearly a decade later, 20 of these vessels had been built or were under construction for a half dozen owners.

Mount Vernon Victory left its drydock on October 27, 1960. Sea trials were conducted while it

¹ For much of the 20th Century, Bethlehem Steel was the one of the largest shipbuilding concerns in the United States. At its height it owned as many as eight full-service shipyards distributed among the three seacoasts and the Great Lakes.

² Victory Carriers was “owned” by Onassis’ daughter, who had been born in the United States during World War II.

was enroute from Quincy to Hoboken, New Jersey. The ship was formally christened at the Bethlehem Shipyard in Hoboken and it sailed for the Caribbean the following day.

In 1963 the ship transported crude oil from Mobile, Alabama to the Sun Oil Company refinery in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania. The *Mount Vernon Victory* was one of the U.S.-flag vessels that transported fuel to Southeast Asia to supply U. S. Forces in Vietnam. In 1965, responding to a grain shortage, *Mount Vernon Victory*, and its sister ship *Mount Washington*, transported grain to India and Pakistan. On December 18, 1972, contracts were signed to use both ships to transport surplus grain to the Soviet Union. During 1973 *Mount Vernon Victory* made voyages to Iran and Bangladesh. The contracts for transporting grain to the Soviet Union remained in force until the grain transfer agreement between the two countries expired on December 31, 1981.

The U.S. Navy acquired *Mount Vernon Victory* for the Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force (RRF) in 1988. It was renamed *Mount Vernon* and assigned the designation T-AOT -5083. The tanker was accepted into the RRF and placed in a retention status at the Beaumont Reserve Fleet at Beaumont, Texas on March 31, 1990. The *Mount Vernon* was not activated for service thereafter, and in fiscal year 1995, it was downgraded to National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) status as part of a downscaling of the RRF. It was further downgraded to non-retention status in October of 2007.

Historic Context

Immediately following WWII, the demand for petroleum products rose rapidly, which led to a rapid succession of new tanker designs that increased their capacity 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 *Mount Vernon Victory* 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 marks 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 next year the horsepower was upped 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.

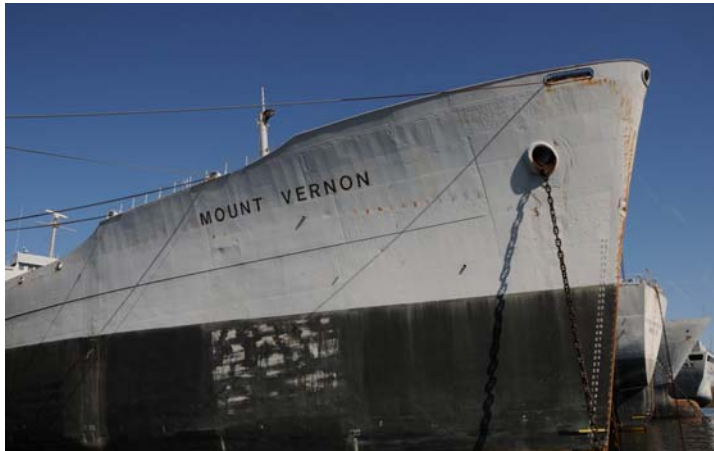
The next major leap in tanker technology came in 1954 when the Greek shipping magnate Stavros S. Niarchos took delivery of several huge new 45,000 dwt tankers from various yards around the world, one being the Bethlehem-Quincy yard, which built the *World Glory*. With a length of 737' and a deadweight 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 the Maritime Administration'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.

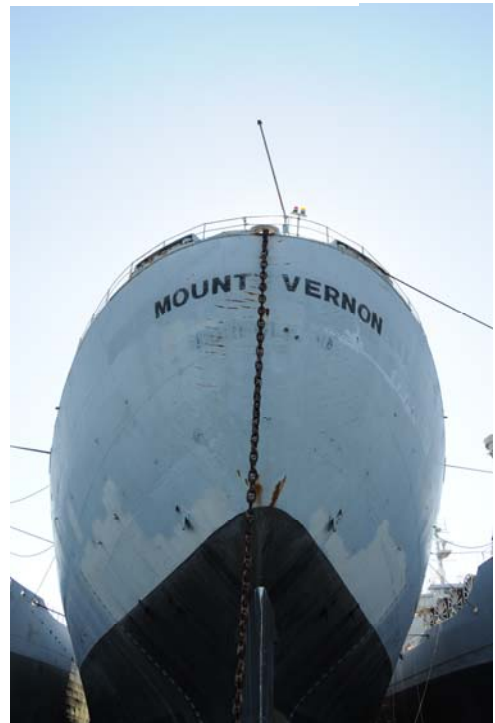


Mount Vernon at the Beaumont Reserve Fleet in January 2009. Maritime Administration photos.



Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Type: Tanker/Liquid Bulk (stm/49k)
Hull Number: 1671
Official Number: 284178
Previous name: *Mount Vernon Victory*
Builder: Bethlehem Steel, Quincy, Massachusetts
Year: 1961
Sister Ships: *Mount Washington*
Length: 736.1'
Beam: 102.4'
Depth: 50.7'
Draft: 39.813
Displacement:
Deadweight: 46,000
Gross Tonnage (GRT): 18,040
Cargo Capacity: 390,000 barrels
Speed: 16.5 knots
Main Engine: Compound Steam Turbines 21,500 shp.



The *Mount Vernon Victory* had the profile that had been popular for tankers since the early twentieth century. Its superstructure was divided, with a multi-storey deckhouse forward of amidships housing the navigating bridge and some crew quarters, and a second deckhouse at

the stern housing the upper machinery spaces and the remaining crew quarters. It was a single screw vessel powered by compound steam turbines rated at 21,500 shp. Bethlehem Steel built *Mount Vernon Victory's* engines and the Foster-Wheeler Corporation built its two boilers. It had a normal crew complement of 38.



Topside of the *Mount Vernon* looking forward. Beaumont Reserve Fleet, Beaumont, Texas, January, 2009. Maritime Administration photos.

Statement of Significance

Mount Vernon Victory is associated with shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, whose shipping company owned the vessel; however, Onassis controlled one of largest privately-owned merchant fleets in the world. *Mount Vernon Victory* was just one of many merchant vessels owned by Onassis. The *Mount Vernon* is a typical product tanker with no distinctive or unusual characteristics and is generally representative of its contemporary type. The vessel is not distinctive, nor is it of a specialized form unique to a particular trade. It has limited association with both the Vietnam War and in the transport of grain to India, Pakistan and the former Soviet Union when those countries were experiencing grain shortages. Its role was not significant enough to qualify under criteria A considering the vessel's age and the recent nature of the events.

Historical Integrity

The vessel was originally constructed in 1961 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 is in fair condition with very moderate topside deterioration. Some equipment has been cannibalized to support the operations of *Mount Washington*, which was converted to an OPDS tanker and remained in active RRF service until around 2003.

National Register Eligibility Statement

Mount Vernon Victory supported operations in several historically significant events; the Vietnam War and in supporting grain shipment operations during the shortages in the 1960s and 1970s. Its role, however, was not significant enough to qualify under criteria A, particularly considering the recent nature of the events. The vessel is associated with Aristotle Onassis, however, as discussed previously, it was one of many merchant ships controlled by Onassis and therefore does not qualify under criteria B. The vessel does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing under criteria C.

Date: 10 March 2009

Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

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