NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: SS *President*

Left: The SS *President*, formerly the *President Tyler*, at the Maritime Administration's Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet in Benicia, California in February 2009. Maritime Administration photo. *Right:* The *President Tyler* near the port of San Francisco circa 1961. http://www.apl.com/history/images/tyler.jpg

Vessel History

The SS *President* was launched as the *President Tyler* on December 20, 1960 at the Bethlehem Steel Company Shipyard in San Francisco. Its keel was laid on January 28, 1960 and it was delivered to its owners, American President Lines (APL) on August 3, 1961. This San Francisco-based company was operating both cargo ships and passenger vessels between the United States Pacific Coast and the Orient, and on an around the world service. The *President Tyler* was the second of two "Searacer[1]" class multi-purpose cargo vessels designed by George G. Sharp, Inc. for APL. Its sistership was the *President Lincoln* completed in May 1961.

The *President Tyler* and *President Lincoln* were an early response to the rise of containerized cargo. They had the hull form of the "Mariner[2]" class break-bulk cargo ships developed in the 1950s, and the traditional cargo ship profile with a single superstructure near the midship point housing navigating bridge, crew accommodations and upper machinery spaces. The majority of holds were designed for break- bulk cargo, with standard hatches and mast and boom cargo gear. The masts were of a multi-leg design joined at the top. This mutually supporting system made possible a shorter and much lighter rig than the conventional masts or king posts. There were twenty-four 10-ton capacity booms and one 30-ton capacity boom.

Containerized cargo was to be carried in Hold No. 4 immediately forward of the superstructure. The hold itself was cellular, with vertical guides to aid in stowing the containers and to prevent motion at sea. Instead of one hatch on the centerline, there were six hatches of identical dimensions, three on each side of the centerline. There was a single gantry to load or discharge

[1] Searacer refers to a distinct type of combination break-bulk-container vessel.
[2] The Mariners were the first new class of cargo ships built in the U.S. after WWII.

the containers mounted on rails to move forward and aft and they were fitted with a retractable boom that could be extended outboard over a wharf or barge. The retractable boom had a capacity of 56,000 lbs.

The *President Tyler* was placed in the National Defense Reserve Fleet in Suisun Bay, California on October 11, 1979, and renamed the *President* on January 1, 1980.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

Type: C4-S-1qb
Official Number: 286232
Previous name: President Tyler
Sister ships: *President Lincoln*
Builder: Bethlehem Steel Company Shipyard in San Francisco.
Year: 1961
Length: 528
Beam: 76'
Depth: 32.5'
Draft: 27'
Gross Tonnage (GRT): 13,223
Speed: 20 knots
Main Engine: Bethlehem Steel Steam turbines, rated at 17,500 shaft horsepower. Babcock & Wilcox boilers.

The SS *President* at Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet in Benicia, California in February 2009. Maritime Administration photos.

The Searacers were 528-feet in length between perpendiculars and 76 feet in breadth. Their depth to the main deck was 44 feet 6 inches and their design draft 29 feet 10 inches. They had a gross tonnage of 13,223, a non-container cargo capacity of 553,400 cubic feet and, as built, a

container capacity of 126 TEU[3]. They were powered by steam turbines built by the Bethlehem Steel Company rated at 17,500 shaft horsepower. Steam was provided by two Babcock & Wilcox boilers. The service speed was 20 knots. The ships had accommodations for 60 crewmembers and 12 passengers.

The *President Lincoln* and *President Tyler* were modified in 1968 to increase their container capacity to 378 TEU. The work, done at the Willamette Iron and Steel Corporation in Richmond, California, involved increasing the amount of cellular hold space and extending the trackage for the gantries. Work done in 1971 further increased their capacity to 410 TEU. APL placed their first container-only vessels in service in 1974. In spite of the modifications, by the late 1970s the Sea Racers had too little container capacity to be competitive and demand for their break bulk capacity was declining. In 1979 the ships were traded in to the Maritime Administration.

Statement of Significance

The *President* was one of two combination break-bulk-container vessels, or Searacers, that was constructed when shipping companies were beginning the transition from the traditional break-bulk cargo ship to container ships. The *President Tyler* and *President Lincoln* were the first ships built with cellular holds designed to accommodate containers, and the first built with container-handling gantries. Their design illustrates a difficult and controversial period when shipping companies wrestled with more cost-effective and efficient methods to carry their cargo in order to be more competitive. While the *President Tyler* was just one of two built, the design was experimental in nature and later proved inefficient. No more vessels of this type were built.

Historical Integrity

The vessel was originally constructed in 1961 and was modified in 1968 to increase its container capacity. The modifications increased the amount of cellular hold space and extended the trackage for the gantries. The vessel was further modified in 1971, which increased its capacity to 410 TEU. All (or most) salient design features of structure, machinery and equipment are substantially intact. The vessel's physical integrity is very degraded, and the ship's overall condition is poor. *President* represents an obsolete type which has little utility in modern shipping markets.

National Register Eligibility Statement

The *President* is not yet 50-years-old. Its design and technology were not revolutionary and they did not influence future designs, except perhaps to illustrate that the Searacer class was

[3] A TEU is a unit for describing a ship's cargo carrying capacity, or a shipping terminal's cargo handling capacity, based on the original standard container of 20x8x8, or Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit. The contemporary standard forty-foot (40x8x8 feet) container equals two TEUs.

inefficient, therefore no more were built. Ships could either handle break-bulk cargo or containers, but not both and the two systems actually worked against one another. The vessel is not associated with a significant event. It is associated with George G. Sharp, acclaimed naval architect and marine engineer, who was the chief surveyor for the American Bureau of Shipping before starting his own marine architectural and engineering firm in 1920. Sharp's designs include the Nuclear Ship *Savannah*, the first nuclear-powered combination cargo/passenger ship and the USNS *Comet*, the first roll-on-roll-off vessel carrier built for the MSTS[4]. Sharp's plans were used on hundreds of ships; however, the Searacer class was not successful and does not represent the best of the company's designs.

Date: 20 March 2009
Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

Sources

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De la Pedraja, René. *The Rise & Decline of U.S. Merchant Shipping in the Twentieth Century.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

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Internet Sites

Maritime Administration's Property Management and Archive Record System Website: http://www.pmars.imsg.com/detail.asp?Ship=3970

Maritime Business Strategies, LLC: www.coltoncompany.com/shipbldg/ussbldrs/postwwii/shipyards/

www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/taot-181.htm

[4] 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.