

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT
VESSEL: *Gulf Banker*



Gulf Banker in Beaumont, Texas, June 26, 2008

Type: Break Bulk (C3-S-37d)
Hull Number: 1005
Official Number: 295249
Builder: Avondale Shipyards, Avondale, LA
Year: 1964
Sister Ships: *Gulf Trader, Gulf Farmer, Gulf Merchant, Gulf Shipper*
Location: Beaumont, TX
Length: 471'
Beam: 69'
Depth: 41.5'
Draft, full load: 30'-1-1/8"
Displacement, loaded: 17,210
Deadweight: 11,367
Gross Tonnage (GRT): 8,970
Net Tonnage (NRT): 5,491
Gross Tonnage (GT ITC International tonnage certificate): 9,613
Cargo Cubic Capacity: 564,000 cubic feet
Speed: 18 Knots
Main Engine: General Electric Geared Turbine (3).
Shaft Horsepower: 11,000 SHP
Ship Service Generators: Two at 600 KW
Boilers: Two Water Tube
Boiler Manufacturer: Combustion Engineering

Vessel History

The keel of the break-bulk cargo ship *Gulf Banker* was laid on March 27, 1963, at the Avondale Shipyard in Louisiana. It was launched on October 5th, and delivered to its owners in late June 1964. The ship was designed by Gibbs & Cox of New York, designers of 38 replacement vessels built for Lykes Brothers during the 1960s. Its hull dimensions were virtually identical to those of the Lykes ships but its tonnage was not the same due to differences in the superstructure.

The *Gulf Banker* was the second of five vessels completed in 1964 in a modernization of the fleet of the Gulf & South American Steamship Company based in New Orleans. Gulf & South American had been operating five C-2 type cargo ships in a service between ports on the United States' Gulf Coast, and ports on the west coast of South America. The ships placed in service in 1964 were given the names of the vessels they replaced. Those ships, built in 1943 and 1944, had been used to found the company in 1947. The other names in 1964 series were *Gulf Farmer*, *Gulf Merchant*, *Gulf Shipper*, and *Gulf Trader*.

The Gulf & South American Steamship Company was a cooperative effort of the Grace Line and Lykes Brothers. Grace was involved in trade between the Atlantic seaboard of the United States and the west coast of South America. Lykes was based on the United States Gulf Coast. Both were interested in operating services between the Gulf Coast and South America. Rather than establishing competing services they agreed to form a new shipping company in which each would hold a fifty percent interest. The arrangement was still in force when the *Gulf Banker* and its sister ships were built. If either Grace or Lykes decided to leave the partnership the other company had the option of buying them out.

In 1969, W. R. Grace, the diversified parent company of the Grace Line, decided to liquidate its shipping business. Its service from Atlantic coast ports was sold to Prudential Lines. In 1971, Lykes Brothers bought out Grace's percentage of Gulf & South American. Lykes continued the Gulf to west coast of South America service, initially with the five ships that had been built for it. However, since the *Gulf Banker* series vessels were virtually interchangeable with the new break-bulk vessels in the Lykes fleet, they were soon assigned to the company's other numerous trade routes as necessary. The *Gulf Banker* spent much of 1970 on Lykes Brothers' service out of the Great Lakes to South America, or to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Lykes Brothers had been naming its ships for members of the Lykes family, but chose not to rename the five former Gulf & South American vessels.

The replacement ships of the 1960s were larger, and in many ways more modern than the ships they replaced, but they were designed and built before anyone fully appreciated the coming impact of containerization. As built, their holds were not practical for the transport of the 40-foot containers that were coming into universal use. By the time Lykes acquired the *Gulf Banker* the company had embarked on a program of jumboization of a number of its vessels to add cellular holds that would accommodate

these containers. By 1983 containerization had almost completely transformed the movement of dry cargo by sea and the demand for commercial break-bulk vessels was disappearing. Lykes Brothers obtained government approval to acquire large foreign-built containerships as replacements and began transferring its purely break-bulk vessels to the Maritime Administration in 1984. The *Gulf Banker* was transferred on June 11th of that year and placed in the Reserve Fleet in Beaumont, Texas.

The *Gulf Banker* was assigned to the Ready Reserve Fleet (RRF), a subset of the National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF). The NDRF was established under Section XI of the Merchant Ship Sales Act of 1946 to serve as a reserve of ships for national defense and national emergencies. A RRF component was established in 1976 as a subset of the NDRF, which is composed of vessels that can be activated on short notice to provide rapid deployment of military equipment during an emergency. When activated, the ships are transferred from the Maritime Administration to the Navy's Military Sealift Command. The Ready Reserve Fleet later became known as the Ready Reserve Force. The break-bulk vessels were effective at locations lacking container handling facilities or good road and rail connections. With their multiple hatches and open deck space, they offered more flexibility in stowing cargo and are able to load and discharge cargo using their own booms and winches.

Prior to RRF operations, NDRF vessels supported emergency shipping requirements in seven wars and crises. During the Korean War, 540 vessels were activated to support military forces. A worldwide tonnage shortfall from 1951 to 1953 required over 600 ship activations to lift coal to Northern Europe and grain to India. Another tonnage shortfall following the Suez Canal closing in 1956 caused 223 cargo ship and 29 tanker activations from the NDRF. From 1955 through 1964, another 698 ships were used to store grain for the Department of Agriculture. During the Berlin crisis of 1961, 18 vessels were activated and remained in service until 1970. During the Vietnam War 172 vessels were activated.

Desert Shield/Desert Storm

In August 1990, the RRF consisted of 96 ships, 78 of which were activated to support Desert Shield/Desert Storm. This was the first large-scale activation and employment of the RRF since it was separated from the NDRF. The vessels involved were roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) vessels (which describes how cargo is handled), break-bulk cargo ships, tankers, and barge carriers.

Two of the five former Gulf & South American vessels, the *Gulf Banker* and the *Gulf Trader* were activated in 1990 to provide logistical support for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Activation of the *Gulf Banker* was done by the Houston Ship Repair Company yard in Orange, Texas. On September 10, 1990, the ship was totally disabled by a boiler failure 350 miles off of Florida's coast. It was towed back to Jacksonville, Florida, where its cargo was discharged and the boiler repaired. In spite of this casualty the *Gulf Banker* transported two cargoes of military supplies from Beaumont, Texas to Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia, and a third cargo of ammunition from

Sunny Point, North Carolina to Rota, Spain. The *Gulf Banker* returned to the Beaumont Reserve Fleet anchorage on June 11, 1992, and was downgraded from RRF to NDRF on October 1, 2001.

More than seventy-five percent of the RRF provided sealift to support the U.S. effort's in the Persian Gulf between August 1990 and April 1991. The ships transported 750,000 short tons of dry cargo, which was one-fifth of the total dry cargo sealifted during the conflict. The Ro-Ros proved to be the most effective vessels and they delivered nearly twenty percent of Central Command's material and other support during the first phase of the operations.

Unfortunately, there is very little published on the role of the Maritime Administration's RRF during the Gulf War. Locating information that details the operations of the individual ships has proved very difficult. One of the best books published on the subject is, *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War*, by Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller. While this book does not discuss details of a specific ship's operations, it does provide an excellent overview of the logistics during the build-up to the war and RRF's role in that build-up. Several of the topics that the book discusses include the difficulties encountered during the vessels' activation into the Navy's Military Sealift Command, their successes, the amount and kind of material that they carried.

Description/Characteristics of Vessel Type

The "Gulf and South America" Class ships are conventional break-bulk vessels with five cargo holds, with a basic design of the C3-S-37d nearly identical to that of the C3-S-37c. A break-bulk vessel is a cargo vessel that is designed to carry its cargo in a series of holds, which are large internal storage spaces. Cargo is handled using masts and booms with cables that are located at each side of each end. This design led to the popular nickname "stick freighter." The *Gulf Banker* had the then popular profile with a single multi-decked superstructure aft of amidships, containing the navigating bridge, crew and passenger quarters, and the upper machinery spaces. It carried a maximum of 12 passengers in six staterooms. The hulls were transversely framed on the sides and decks, but longitudinally framed on the bottom, a structural improvement that in the 1960s had only recently been adopted by American break-bulk ships.

The ships built for the two companies were generally similar, there were, however, minor differences, primarily related to the routes they would travel. For example, the bunker capacity of the 37d was 2,039 long tons, whereas that of the 37c was 2,600 long tons, reflecting, it is believed, the difference in voyage length and the bunkering facilities of the Gulf & South American route as compared with that of the longer average Lykes Brothers voyage. That difference represents a potential 561 additional cargo deadweight tons, if the need arose. The cargo-handling gear was also slightly different. On the 37d, there were 17 booms, consisting of a 60-ton jumbo boom and 16 at 15 tons. In addition, there seemed to be minor differences in the capacity of cargo deep tanks, in consideration of the lesser need for this feature on the Gulf & South American routes. It is, however,

difficult to be specific on this minor point.

In the engine room, the 37d's Combustion Engineering boilers perhaps represented a marginal change with a heating surface of 16,900 square feet, identical with that of the earlier 37c vessels from Avondale, but somewhat less than the 19,690 square feet of the Foster-Wheeler boilers installed in the Bethlehem-built members of the class. In both cases, the safety valves were the same on both groups: 700 psi at the drum and 630 psi at the superheater outlet.

Gulf Banker's voyages between the Gulf of Mexico and the west coast of South America took two to three months. Ports normally loaded at in the United States included: New Orleans; Baton Rouge; Lake Charles; Mobile; Pascagoula; Gulfport; Pensacola; Corpus Christi; Beaumont; and Houston. Ports called at in South America included: Santa Marta, Barranquilla, Buenaventura, and Cartagena in Colombia; Colon and Balboa in Panama; Guayaquil in Ecuador; Talara, Pisco, Huacho, Huarmey, Callao and Ilo in Peru; and Arica, Antofagasta, Talcahuano, and Valparaiso in Chile. On November 16, 1969 the *Gulf Banker* was involved in a collision on the Mississippi River below New Orleans with the barge carrying a Chevron Oil Company drilling platform. The tug *Wilken A. Falgout* towing the barge, and the *Gulf Banker*, were found by a court to be equally at fault.

Statement of Significance

The *Gulf-Farmer* class was a typical Lykes Brothers' design when built, but probably did not influence the design of similar vessels in that owner's fleet. Because the ships were based entirely upon a previous class, they did not contribute to the evolution of break-bulk ships. As to their relevance to the development of cargo vessel design, there was little difference from the 37c vessels and they did not represent a noticeable step in the evolution of mid-20th century cargo transportation by sea. If anything related to these ships was memorable, it was neither technical nor operational –it was the fact that they were jointly owned by two competing organizations, and as long as the co-owners remained in a state of status quo, they performed well. It is difficult for many of today's observers to imagine, at this point in time nearly a half century after their construction, a jointly-owned American-flag operation of that nature.

The activation of *Gulf Banker* during the build-up for Desert Shield/Desert Storm was the RRF's first large-scale activation since its creation in 1976. However, this was still a continuation of the Maritime Administration's role of assisting the military during national emergencies. Further, *Gulf Banker* delivered a total of three cargoes of military supplies and ammunition without incident. This was one of the last classes designed to carry bulk cargo and packaged military supplies, which was still handled with booms and winches. By 1964, the maritime industry was already experimenting with more efficient designs, such as Ro/Ros, and barge-carrying LASH (lighter aboard ship), vessels capable of carrying both barges and containers. The "stick freighter" was the last of its class built in the U.S. that still had regular bulk storage.

Integrity of Characteristics/Features

The overall condition of the vessel is good; however, the vessel represents an obsolete type which has little utility in modern shipping markets.

National Register Eligibility Statement

The vessel is not yet 50 years of age and does not possess the exceptional importance necessary for such properties to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The vessel does not possess the significant historical or technological characteristics, or integrity of design and materials necessary for listing. While it did participate in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, it was just one of 78 RRF vessels activated by the Navy to support the operations and its role was not significant enough to qualify under criteria A.

Date: 30 July 2008

Determination: NOT ELIGIBLE

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