



## Sun Ship Historical Society's Ships History Page

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**Name: S.S. *Gulf Dawn***  
**Hull No: 154**

Hope you enjoy this 'Ship's History Page'. As always, if you have any additional information, suggestions or corrections, please let me know.

Note 1: While due diligence has been applied in the research of this information, responsibility for any errors is the ultimate responsibility of the end-user.

Note 2: Information has been obtained from various sources to enhance the history of Sun Ship and where possible, sources have been identified

Thank You,  
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### 1. Ship's Record:

**Courtesy: Maritime Commission Data-N/A**

**Contract No: N/A**

**Contract Cost: N/A**

**Shipway: N/A**

**Ship Operator: N/A**

### Courtesy: SSHS Archives

**Name: S.S. *Gulf Dawn***

**Hailing Port: Philadelphia, PA**

**Contract Date 1935.08.20**

**Keel Laying Date: 1935.11.30**

**Launch Date: 1936.05.02**

**Delivery: 1936.07.25**

**Time-on-Ways: 5m-9d**

**Time-in-Wetdock: 2m-3d**

**Total-Bldg-Time: 7m-25d-**

**L-B-D: 426.4-64.2-34**

**DWT: 11,402**

**Gross Reg Tons: 7,096**

**Net Tons: 4337**

**Light Tons: 4151**

**Ship Type: Tanker**

**Propulsion: Steam Turbine-Westinghouse**

**Boilers(s): 2-Foster Wheeler 'A' type boiler**

**Propeller(s): 1**

**HP: 2,800**

**Speed-Knots: 11.5**

**Cargo Capacity bbls: 85,496**

**Complement: Pending**

**Classification: ABS**

**Sponsor: Miss Constance C. Drake**

**Registered Port: Philadelphia**

**Owner: Gulf Oil Corp.**

**Official No: 235070**

**Contract Price: \$1,400,000 - \$1,600,001<sup>1</sup>**

### Courtesy: MSI (Miramar Ship Index)

**Renames: 42-*Big Horn* (AO-45), 48-*C.B. Watson*, 55-*R.A. Hummel*, 58-*Trinity Trader*, 59-*Oswego Trader***

**Disposition: BU-Kure, Japan 1960.07.30**

### 2. Ship's Specifics:

2.1: Propulsion: Westinghouse double-reduction steam turbines that produced 2,800 shaft horsepower as late as 1945 and gave her a sustained speed of 11.5 knots.

2.2: Boilers: Two Foster Wheeler A type, 3-drum, bent-tube, marine steam generators. Operating pressure at 400 PSI and normal steam production will be 15,000 pounds-per-hour, super-heated to a final temperature of 725 degrees F.

2.3: Generators-Two Westinghouse 125-kilowatt 240-volt operating at 1200 RPM. Westinghouse also supplied one 25-kilowatt, 240-volt auxiliary generator, at 3600 RPM and two motor-generator sets each consisting of a 25-horsepower 230-volt motor driving a 15-kilowatt 120-volt generator at 1750 revolutions per minute.

2.4: Ship was built to the Isherwood Arc-Form design of hull, including the Isherwood bracket less system

### 3. History:

Gulf Dawn was the one of four similar tankers built for the Gulf Oil Company of which two; the ***Gulf Dawn*** (H-154) and the ***Gulfbelle*** (H-153) were built at Sun Ship.

The largest and longest-serving ship of this program was Sun Ship's ***Gulf Dawn*** (H-154), which was delivered to the Gulf Oil Corp. on July 25, 1936 and was in commercial service for approximately 5 years 9 months before going to the U.S. Navy.

The ***Gulf Dawn*** was taken over by the Navy on March 31, 1942 and was converted by both the Bethlehem Steel's Brooklyn Yard and Boston Navy Yard and was commissioned April 15, 1942 and renamed the ***Big Horn*** (AO-45).

USS Big Horn (AO-45 / IX-207) was a Q-ship of the United States Navy named for the Bighorn River of Wyoming and Montana.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Atlantic Fleet:**

Sailing to Boston on 23 April (1942-dmk), **Big Horn** entered the Boston Navy Yard for conversion to a Q-Ship. A disguised heavily armed merchantman, the decoy ship was intended to lure unsuspecting U-Boats to the surface and sink them with gunfire. While at Boston, **Big Horn** completed her disguise as a fleet oiler and was given extra watertight integrity, by the installation of thousands of sealed empty drums in her cargo tanks, in case she was torpedoed. That work was completed on 22 July 1942.<sup>6</sup>

After two days on the degaussing range and in calibrating compasses and radio direction finders, **Big Horn** proceeded to Casco Bay (Maine-dmk) for training under Commander, Destroyers, Atlantic Fleet. This training period was followed by a shakedown cruise which was completed on 26 August 1942, at which date USS **Big Horn** put in again at the Navy Yard, Boston for further alterations and repairs until 12 September 1942.<sup>6</sup>

The **Big Horn** anchored in The Narrows in New York Harbor on December 1, 1942. During the next few weeks, **Big Horn** entered the Todd Shipyard at Hoboken, New Jersey, for 9-weeks of repair work and alterations. The work included the installation of 'Mousetrap', a Hedgehog depth charge projector, and a DF (direction finding) radio receiver. She departed New York on February 17, 1943.<sup>6</sup>

On 19 February 1943, ship became a member of a newly organized Task Group consisting of the **Big Horn** and three 173-foot (53 m) Patrol Craft-boats: PC-560, PC-617, and PC-618. Antisubmarine measures had been so successful that no vessels had been sunk in coastal waters since July 1942. This Task Group was designed to hunt U-boats in the central Atlantic; the three PC-boats would escort **Big Horn**, which would act as bait and support in antisubmarine combat, as well as fuel and supply ship for the escorts.<sup>6</sup>

On her final cruise as a Q-ship, **Big Horn** departed New York on July 20, 1943 and she served as the flagship of a small Task Group which included only two other vessels: PC-618 and PC-617.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Coast Guard, 1944:**

By the end of 1943, the Navy had adequate convoy escorts and the Q-ships were no longer required. Q-Ships were assigned new duties and the long-legged (long distance capability) **Big Horn** was transferred to the Coast Guard **USCGC Big Horn (WAO-124)** to join *Asterion* (AK-100) on 25-day weather-patrol duty in the mid-North Atlantic under the supervision of the United States Coast Guard and manned by Coast Guard officers and crew.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Pacific Fleet, 1945:**

She was returned to the Navy on February 1, 1945, but still operated by a Coast Guard crew and was reclassified as (IX-207) and assigned to the 'Service Forces Pacific', where she operated as a shuttle tanker delivering fuel to fleet oilers between Ulithi and the Philippines.

Big Horn's Q-Ship gear was removed prior to March, 1945<sup>8</sup> The tanker sailed to Okinawa on 11 August and she was at that island on 15 August 1945, when her crew heard the news of the Japanese surrender.<sup>6</sup> During this period, she could transport some 7,900 tons of fuel as a shuttle tanker.<sup>6</sup>

Departing Okinawa on 29 September, **Big Horn** steamed to Japan, where she was assigned duty as a station tanker at Nagoya on 3 October. She remained there through January 1946.<sup>6</sup>

With the ending of the war, the **Big Horn** returned home February 1946 to New Orleans, Louisiana and was decommissioned on May 6, 1946 and transferred to the Maritime Commission, berthed at Orange, Texas, and sold into commercial service in 1948.<sup>6</sup>

Her reconversion back to a tanker in 1945 included removal of the 15,000 empty drums in the cargo tanks and wing spaces, restoration of the summer tanks by removing watertight doors and relocating the working spaces there, and removing the excess armament and associated structures.<sup>10</sup>

**Big Horn** returned to commercial service in 1948 consisting of service to the following owners:<sup>3</sup>  
1948: **C.B. Watson** – Sabine Tptn Co.-Baltimore  
1955: **R.A. Hummel** – Penfield Corp-Monrovia (Mathiasen tankers, Philadelphia)  
1958: **Trinity Trader** – Penfield Corp-Monrovia  
1959: **Oswego Trader** – Oswego Bulk Carriers-Monrovia  
1960: She was broke-up in Kure, Japan, starting on July 7, 1960.

#### 4. Q-Ship Specifics:

On January 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt proposed to Adm. Ernest J. King that the Navy start a Q-Ship program, which were combat-ready naval vessels disguised as merchant ships. Adm. King then assigned Vice Adm. Frederick J. Horne the task of developing the program, which was known as 'Project LQ'. Their role was to serve as decoys and looking like a typical commercial tanker, they gave the appearance of vulnerability.<sup>2</sup>

Tankers were one of the choices for Q-Ships, this was due to the hull being divided into multiple compartments for transporting various grades of oil. When these compartments were filled with buoyant materials, they would serve to keep the tankers afloat with 1 or 2 compartments hit by torpedoes, when at that time, the submarine would surface and attempt to sink the tanker by gunfire.<sup>2</sup>

The presumption was that upon finding a tanker (Q-Ship), the German U-Boat commander, after firing torpedoes, would surface and attempt to sink it with gunfire rather than waste additional valuable torpedoes. Once fired upon, the Q-Ship crew, dressed as merchant seamen, would ignite a 'smudge-pot' to give the appearance of being on fire and then some of the 'crew' would board a life-boat and sail away from the ship, giving the appearance that she was being abandoned.<sup>2</sup>

The largest, most successful and longest-serving of the Q-Ships, was the 7,096-gross-registered-ton **Big Horn** (AO-45).<sup>2</sup>

After being taken over by the Navy the ship's complement consisted of 15 Officers, 224 enlisted personnel.<sup>8</sup>

A side effect of the **Big Horn** was the saving of many standard tankers due to the German Navy becoming aware that at least one large tanker was in fact a naval combat vessel, the U-Boats became more cautious in attacking other unescorted American tankers.

#### Armament:

Armament-Original: Along both the port and starboard sides of the ship were three hinged doors, all disguised as normal hull plating. Hidden behind each of these six doors was a 4-inch/50-caliber naval rifle. Another 4-inch/50-caliber gun was located out of sight at the stern.<sup>02</sup>

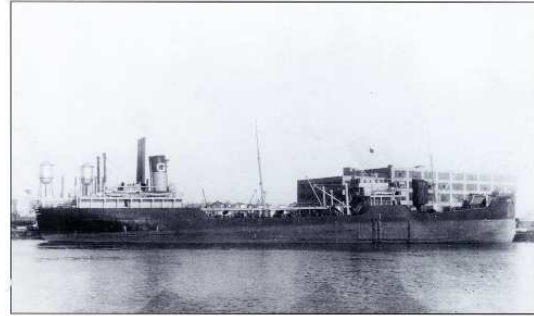
Armament-Later (1945-as IX-207): Single 3-inch/50-caliber fore and aft, two single 40-mm

antiaircraft guns on the forecastle, and eight single 20-mm antiaircraft guns

#### 5. Photos:

5.1 **Gulf Dawn** in commercial service, discharging cargo at Girard Point, Philadelphia, PA c: 1938.12.15

Courtesy of: Dave Boone-Administrator of the Delaware River Shipping Facebook Site  
SSHS: 500\_154\_01\_09



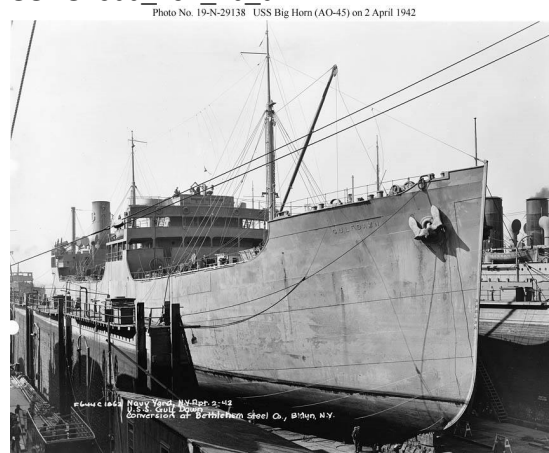
5.2 Gulf Dawn in commercial service.  
Courtesy of: John Curdy and the Delaware River Shipping Facebook Site  
SSHS: 500\_154\_01\_04



5.3 USS **Gulf Dawn** undergoing conversion at Bethlehem Steel Yard, Brooklyn on 2 April 1942, prior to commissioning in the U.S. Navy.

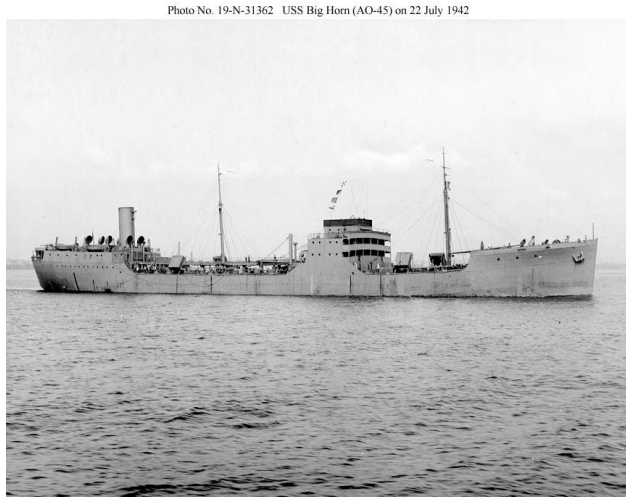
Courtesy of: Shipscribe<sup>10</sup>

SSHS: 500\_154\_10\_02

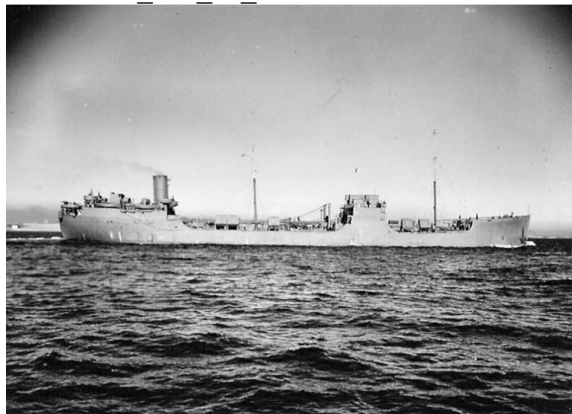




5.4 USS **Big Horn** heading for Boston for 'Atlantic Duty' after completing her conversion work in Brooklyn. July 22, 1942  
 Courtesy of: C.G. Compass/retired Cmdr. Douglas L. Jordan<sup>8</sup>  
 SSHS: 500\_154\_10\_04



5.5 An American submarine periscope view of **Big Horn** on its first weather patrol. c: January 1945  
 Courtesy of: C.G. Compass/retired Cmdr. Douglas L. Jordan<sup>8</sup>  
 SSHS: 500\_154\_08\_01a



5.6 One of **Big Horn's** 4-inch deck guns is unmasked for gunnery drills  
 Courtesy: Coast Guard Compass<sup>8</sup>  
 SSHS: 500\_154\_08\_07



5.7 A March 1945 photo of Big Horn after removal the Q-Ship gear and conversion back to fuel tanker role for Pacific War Duty.  
 Courtesy: Coast Guard Compass<sup>8</sup>  
 SSHS: 500\_154\_08\_09



5.8: **Big Horn** arrived at Orange, Texas on May 6, 1946 for layup.

Courtesy of Steamboat Bill Periodical-Fall 1994<sup>2</sup>

SSHS: 500\_154\_02\_198a



## 6. Resources:

- 1-SSHS Archives
- 2-Steamboat Bill, Fall, 1994 issue.
- 3-Miramar Ship Index
- 4-Independence Seaport Museum
- 5-Hagley Museum and Library
- 6-USNI Proceedings-454\_89\_200404\_012
- 7-Wikipedia
- 8-Coast Guard Compass
- 9-United States Naval Institute.
- 10-Shipscribe.com
- 11-Marine Eng.& Shipping Age 1935.04.158

Drawing page with outboard profile, deck and tank arrangements for **Gulfbelle** H-153 and **Gulf Dawn** H-154.

Courtesy of Marine Engineering & Shipping Review from August 1936 issue/ISM<sup>4</sup>.

SSHS: 454\_24\_36\_2274

