Tankers in the Patuxent:
The ESSO Fleet Lay-Up Site
in the 1930s
Merle T. Cole

An Offprint from
THE AMERICAN NEPTUNE
Volume XLVII, No. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 45-53
Reproduced with Permission by the Calvert Marine Museum, 2010
Tankers in the Patuxent: The ESSO Fleet Lay-up Site in the 1930s

Merle T. Cole

Tankers in the Patuxent: The ESSO Fleet Lay-Up Site in the 1930s

MERLE T. COLE*

THROUGHOUT the 1930s, a significant portion of the world's largest tanker fleet lay idle in the Patuxent River near Solomons, Maryland. As the company history summarizes, "the tankers had difficulty in adjusting to the ups and downs of the oil industry in the late 1920s and the 1930s." 1

I. THE ESSO FLEET

In the earliest major case of "divestiture," the United States Supreme Court handed down its famous 1911 decision ordering the mammoth Standard Oil Company to dissolve. Among the many separate, but similarly named, companies emerging from the dissolution was the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (incorporated in Delaware). This entity was most commonly referred to by shorter names such as "Jersey Standard," the "Delaware Company," and—after 1923—"ESSO." The latter was formed from the initial letters of "Standard Oil." 2

Jersey Standard started its new life facing an acute shortage of tanker tonnage, and relied mainly on chartered vessels and those of the Deutsch-Amerikanische Petroleum-Gesellschaft (DAPG), a German affiliate, to transport the company's crude and refined petroleum products. Not until 1913 were the company's first tanker hulls laid down. These ships, the William Rockefeller and John D. Archbold, joined the fleet the next year. With the outbreak of World War I the company's Foreign Shipping Department, which managed all marine operations, gained control of DAPG vessels interned in neutral American ports and "almost overnight the company fleet expanded from two to twenty-eight tankers." Additional tonnage was constructed to meet subsequent wartime needs, so that by 1917 Jersey Standard owned forty-one tankers, "more than a quarter of all American-register tankers afloat at the time." 3

The Jersey fleet—defined as "the tankers of affiliates in which the parent company owned the majority of the stock"—was in excellent condition after the war, notwithstanding the loss of both of its two original tankers to enemy action.

Half the 44 vessels sailing under the Jersey flag [in 1919] were less than three years old; 27 other tankers were owned by affiliates. This combined fleet of 71 ships was the second largest privately owned tanker fleet afloat, being surpassed only by the Royal Dutch-Shell armada of 100 vessels. 4

The reference to tanker age is significant because "repairs were so heavy in a vessel's fifteenth year that one of that age was considered to be virtually worn out." 5 The huge size of the Delaware Company's fleet

* Interviews and questionnaires were used extensively to gather data for the second part of this article, since ESSO company records pertaining to the Solomons site were apparently purged some years ago. Special thanks are due to Bobby M. Pouncey of Solomons, Maryland, who provided invaluable assistance by supplying the names of men familiar with operation of the lay-up site. Much of the credit for completion of Part II must go to Bobby and his support of this project.


4. Ibid., 472. The definition is from Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 204.

is evident in the following comparison with other fleets in the petroleum industry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>No. Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard of New York</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-American</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Persian</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Oil</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan American</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Company</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burmah Oil</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of California</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediately after the war, the world witnessed an international shipping boom of unprecedented intensity. Many companies, including Jersey Standard, placed orders for thousands of deadweight tons of new vessels. (Deadweight tonnage is the difference between a vessel’s loaded and light displacement tonnage, i.e., the ship’s capacity, in long tons.) Then in 1920 the bottom fell out, ushering in a shipping depression which prompted the company to consider selling some of its older fleet units.

In April 1920, Jersey Standard appointed a shipping committee to study ways to improve administration of its marine operations. David T. Warner, head of the Foreign Shipping Department, served as committee chair until replaced in both capacities by Robert L. Hague in July. Hague had been marine superintendent for Standard Oil of California until 1918, and thereafter chief of the United States Shipping Board’s construction and repair division. Under Hague’s management, the newly renamed Marine Department undertook a series of economy and efficiency measures to reduce fleet operating costs.

It was an uphill battle as the shipping depression ground on into 1921. Fleet management problems were exacerbated by delivery of ten new tankers, contracted for in the boom period immediately after the war. Jersey Standard had no alternative but to lay up part of its fleet, and twelve tankers were idle by the fall of 1921, at a cost of $1,090,000. This dreary situation carried over into the next year, but losses from the twelve laid-up ships were reduced to $126,600 “by utilizing the vessels for floating storage of oil.” In 1923 the situation dramatically reversed, and the idle tankers were “emptied of their stored cargoes and dispatched to California to participate in the oil rush there.”

On 1 October 1927, the Jersey fleet comprised ninety-two tankers—ocean-going, coastal, and inland deep-water. “By far the largest fleet of a single affiliate, in both numbers of ships and tonnage, was that of Standard Shipping, consisting of thirty-eight tankers, of 481,000 tons, flying the flag of the United States.” Next came the thirteen tankers (161,000 tons) of the Baltisch-Amerikanische Petroleum-Import-Gesellschaft, mbH (“Bapico”), based in the Free City of Danzig; Imperial, fifteen tankers of 113,000 tons, under British registry; twenty-two other vessels (195,000 tons) owned by eight European Continent affiliates; and four small tankers (10,000 tons), under Peruvian, Argentine, and Dutch registry. Despite the vast scale of this fleet, Jersey Standard exercised only broad policy guidance, and “the affiliates were left to manage their own shipping affairs.”

Standard Shipping . . . principally carried crude oil and products for Jersey affiliates between ports on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the United States. Its ships brought crude oil from Humble tanker terminals to Jersey refineries on the Atlantic Coast or products from Baytown and Baton Rouge for Standard Oil Company of New Jersey to sell in its markets.

The official company history records that 1920-1927 were “outstanding years for the Jersey Marine Department.” But the seemingly bright future of petroleum transportation was shattered by the onset of the Great Depression.

The demand for tanker tonnage reached a peak in 1929 and stimulated the building of new ships. The business depression in 1930 and radical changes in tanker movements quickly created a surplus of tonnage.

The situation was again inflamed by delivery of new ships, on the order of a million deadweight tons, and

7. Ibid., 472-73; Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, The Use and Disposition of Ships and Shipyards at the End of World War II: A Report Prepared for the United States Navy Department and the United States Maritime Commission, June 1945 (Washington, 1945), 236.
by the purchase of Beacon Oil Company, which added six tankers. In 1929 the company was finally driven to impose “better coordination of the affiliates’ tanker utilization and chartering. . . .” By the end of 1930, Jersey Standard had “a tied-up surplus of 1,500,000 deadweight tons”—twenty-two U.S. flag and five foreign tankers. The tankers were laid up “if they could not earn at least enough to cover their variable, or out-of-pocket costs.” The company could have opted to avoid the economic roller coaster by retaining only a small fleet and chartering ships to meet the rest of its transport needs. But management explained to stockholders its belief that “ownership of tanker tonnage adequate to handle the greater part of the movement of its products is in the interest of its manufacturing and distributing business.” Accordingly, the company was faced with the prospect of potential long-term tanker lay-up in response to market fluctuations.

One estimate held that about a quarter of the world’s tankers were idle in 1931. But “concentration on efficiency” netted “an actual saving” in the cost of Jersey marine operations that year. In May 1932, Jersey Standard bought 95.8 percent of the Pan American Foreign Corporation’s capital stock. This purchase added substantially to “subsidiaries’ reserves of crude oil in Venezuela and Mexico,” as well as acquiring “a large refinery at Aruba. . . .” In the same year “consumption of lubricating oils . . . showed a marked loss,” and the company experienced the first-ever decline of gasoline sales in the United States. Somewhat ironically, the Pan American properties included twenty-seven oceangoing and twenty-five small tankers (the latter used primarily to haul crude oil from Lake Maracaibo wells to the Aruba refinery), swelling the Marine Department inventory at a time when an average of twenty-five tankers were tied up. Lesser numbers of ships were also added by purchase of Huasteca Petroleum Company, Anglo-American Oil Company, Ltd., and Lago Shipping Company, Ltd., during 1932.15

In 1933, seven new tankers were added to the fleet, but the average number idle was reduced to seventeen. This improvement came with the increased demand for petroleum products and the commencement of a large movement of fuel oil from California to U.S. North Atlantic ports in the fall of 1933. This longer voyage replaced the short run from the U.S. Gulf to North Atlantic ports and absorbed a greater quantity of tonnage.16

Demand for petroleum products remained high during 1934, when movement of 167.7 million barrels “set a new high record for the oceangoing fleet.” Shipments of fuel oil from California “continued in large volume. . . .” Because of these trends, “All our tankers in suitable condition were kept fully employed, and freight rates remained steady. . . .” The company could also report stability and improved earnings throughout 1935, coupled with growing concern over an aging tanker fleet. The evident need for an extensive construction program was tempered by the fact that, under existing national maritime policy, the coastwise shipping primarily engaged in by the Delaware fleet was “restricted to vessels constructed in American yards and flying the U.S. flag.” American-built and registered vessels entailed considerably greater expense than the foreign-built, foreign flag tankers used by Jersey’s nineteen affiliates. Two major changes occurred in the Jersey fleet during 1935. On 31 May, the Bapico fleet was transferred from Danzig to Panamanian registry, reflecting growing concern over Nazi intentions. The newly created Panama Transportation Company joined Jersey as an affiliate.17 On 1 December, Standard Shipping Company and the marine properties of Pan American Foreign Corporation merged with Jersey Standard’s Marine Department, with Hague as general manager.18

At the end of 1936 Jersey Standard’s fleet aggregated 191 tankers, at over 2 million deadweight tons—14 percent of the world’s total. But increased demand for petroleum products was such “as to absorb all of the world’s supply of tanker tonnage,” and Standard resorted to time chartering to reinforce its already enormous capacity. “By the middle of [1937] all serviceable tankers were in operation and freight rates reached the highest level since 1930.” Increasing world tension was evidenced by the company’s agreement to participate in a “national defense tanker program” sponsored by

14. Ibid., 5-6; Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 210-11, 213-14, 220.
15. SONJ Annual Reports, 1931, 5, 1932, 3-5; and 1933, 5; Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 212-13.
16. SONJ Annual Report, 1933, 3-5.
18. SONJ Annual Reports, 1934, 3-4 and 1935, 3-5; Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 217; Lamp (October-December 1935), 5 and 22 (October 1939), 12; Charles Sterling Popple, Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) in World War II (New York, 1952), xxiv-xxv.
the United States Maritime Commission. Jersey agreed to construction of twelve tankers incorporating special features to speed conversion into naval auxiliaries. The Maritime Commission funded the cost of those special features.\(^9\)

The petroleum industry suffered again in 1938 because of decreased production and increased production costs. For the tankers, “substantially lower freight rates came into effect and prevailed throughout 1938 . . . .” In that year ESSO added six oceangoing tankers to its fleet, but agreed to a Maritime Commission request to sell four of the new “national defense” vessels to other operators.\(^10\)

Tanker rates were at a low level during the early part of 1939 and then increased sharply as a result of the marine strike. During the summer, the strike having been terminated, rates receded to those prevailing early in the year. The outbreak of war [1 September] stimulated chartering and all serviceable tankers were again placed in operation.\(^11\)

Tanker shortages and higher freight rates developed in response to slower voyages to Europe resulting from the convoy system, and “heavy movement coastwise of heating oil due to the [unusually] severe winter.” But despite the convoys, “hampering government regulations, and the sinking of tankers,” industry earnings were greatly improved in the first year of war. ESSO took delivery of four new tankers (two from the “national defense” program), while foreign affiliates lost four ships to submarines and mines.\(^12\)

ESSO had planned to scrap several “older and less efficient ships, some of which were laid up,” but decided in the face of the tanker shortage to recondition the vessels, which were then “transferred to foreign registry and placed in operation.” Between October 1939 and February 1940, the Maritime Commission authorized ESSO to transfer fifteen old tankers to the affiliate Panama Transportation Company. This transfer to neutral registry permitted continued delivery of petroleum products to Great Britain and France, particularly after the Proclamation of Neutrality on 1 November 1939 imposed severe restrictions on American-flag operations in Europe.\(^13\)

The year 1940 started with a tanker shortage in the face of increased demand. But by mid-year, the French, Low Countries, and Norwegian markets were closed by German occupation, and Italy entered the war as a beligerent. ESSO again faced a surplus tonnage situation, and began laying-up ships in June. By September, thirty-four tankers were idled. Domestic demand soon took up the slack from export losses, with the approach of winter and quickening pace of industrial activity. The resultant “exceptionally heavy” demand caused “all of Jersey’s vessels [to be] restored to active duty.” Tanker shortages continued due to the “high rate of sinking and the additional time required for deliveries within the war zone as a result of the convoy system” (estimated as taking “about twice as long”).\(^14\)

By this time, foreign affiliates had lost eighteen tankers and suffered five more seriously damaged. To maintain a maximum number of ships in operation, ESSO was forced “to carry out extensive repairs to some of our older vessels which, under peace time conditions, would probably have been scrapped.”\(^15\)

The following table, showing growth of the ESSO fleet, is based on data from the company’s annual reports:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. Tankers</th>
<th>Deadweight Tons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>854,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>959,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>1,050,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>(Not available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1,548,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1,957,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2,057,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>2,027,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1,987,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>2,020,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2,105,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>2,155,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>2,186,530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. THE PATUXENT LAY-UP SITE

ESSO’s major lay-up site was located in the Patuxent, which afforded numerous natural advantages as a long-term mooring point, and had been used by the Shipping Board (and its successor, the Maritime Commission) since 1927. The government leased a strip ashore running eastward from Point Patience, just north of the

---

20. Ibid., 1938, 2, 5.
21. Ibid., 1939, 5.
22. Ibid., 2, 5.
23. Ibid., 5, Popple, 188-90; Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 392-93.
town of Solomons. The lease was subsequently included in a Navy Department land acquisition, and is now part of U.S. Naval Recreation Center, Solomons.\textsuperscript{26} The Maritime Commission kept a maximum of six ships at Point Patience, but ESSO's needs were far greater in terms of both physical space and local labor required to work on the idle tankers. The chosen spot was Millstone Landing, a steamboat dock situated roughly between the present east and west seaplane basins of U.S. Naval Air Station, Patuxent, about a mile SSW of Fishing Point and 1.5 miles SSE of Sandy Point (the southern tip of Solomons Island). The site was just inside the mouth of the Patuxent River, where the river empties into Chesapeake Bay, and provided adequate draft except where shoals ran north from Fishing Point and Hog Point, on the southern shore. Millstone Landing had been a major covert operations center and Hog Point, on the southern shore. Millstone Landing had been a major covert operations center for Confederate smugglers during the Civil War. The land behind the lay-up site was thickly wooded, broken only by a few widely scattered houses, and remained undeveloped until taken by the navy in World War II as an aviation test center. Although isolated, the site was "near Baltimore for repair facilities, ship supplies and convenient for transfer of personnel."\textsuperscript{27}

The number of tankers laid-up at Millstone Landing varied between twenty and forty over the years, in response to fluctuating demands for crude oil, and resultant freight rate changes. Apparently, when more than twenty ships were present, they were divided into two groups, moored about two hundred yards apart. The tankers were not docked or tied to the shore, but rather placed in the stream and cabled together, "Parallel, side by side, [alternately] bow to stern, anchors ahead, mooring lines as needed." Deck watchmen were on duty as the officer in charge was "very strict about safety and security" of the vessels.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Merle T. Cole, monograph, \textit{The Patuxent River “Ghost Fleet,”} 1927-1941 (Solomons, Md., 1986).

\textsuperscript{27} Interview, Clyde C. Taylor, 13 July 1985. Taylor arrived at Millstone Landing in a snow squall in March 1933. His ship, the 11,365-d.w.t. \textit{I. C. White}, was hung up on the bar at the entrance of the river for several hours. Regarding Confederate activity, see Sec. of the Navy Gideon Wells to Sec. of State William H. Seward, 8 July 1861, quoted in Edwin W. Beitzell, \textit{Life on the Potomac River} (Abell, Md., 1968), 38. Early development of the aviation test center is summarized in War Records Div., Maryland Historical Society, \textit{Military Participation}, vol. I of \textit{Maryland in World War II} (Baltimore, 1950), 206-7. The quote is from Adolph Larson to author, August 1985.

\textsuperscript{28} Taylor interview; Linwood Thomas, Victor Dingle, and Thomas F. Smith to author, August 1985; Dr. Page C. Jett to author, July 1985. The quotes are from Larson to author. These men worked at the site at various times during the decade 1930 (Smith) to 1940 (Dingle). Dr. Jett was a medical consultant and advisor there. Thomas reports that tankers were grouped twenty-nine in one fleet and ten to eleven in the other, "under Panamanian flag."

\textsuperscript{29} William B. Vautrinot to author, 1 November 1985; John S. Conaghan to Vautrinot, 28 October 1985; Taylor interview; Larson, Thomas, and Smith to author; Larson, Knowlton and Popple, 210. For organization of the company home office, see Standard Shipping Company (Incorporated in Delaware), \textit{Marine Regulations} (New York, 1933), 9.

\textsuperscript{30} Thomas J. McTaggart to author, 29 October and 1 November

The locale provided little in the way of recreation. Other than "bars and a few seafood houses" in Solomons, fleet employees could find diversion in "movies, slot machines, card games [and] illegal drinking." However, there was "good, daily bus service to Baltimore," and many employees brought their private automobiles, which permitted travel to Washington and Baltimore in search of amusement.31

While shipboard maintenance operations pose a number of occupational hazards, former workers reported no knowledge of work-related deaths or serious injuries. ESSO kept a company doctor aboard the "mother ship," and engaged Page C. Jett, a local physician, as medical consultant.32

Two natural events came closest to being classifiable as "notable disasters" for the laid-up fleet. A hurricane lashed the Chesapeake Bay region on 22-24 August 1933. This "August storm" caused extensive damage to numerous vessels and marine facilities in the bay and its tributaries. Within the ESSO fleet, men were rousted from bed during the storm to secure tankers with additional cabling, and labored for many hours into the night. Despite their hard work, some ships broke loose and drifted without steam, or food for the skeleton crews, until retrieved. In January-February 1934, an exceptionally cold winter froze the tankers in for several weeks. Indeed, all water traffic was stopped. As Captain Larson observed, "The severe hurricane of 1933 and the solid freeze-up of the harbor the winter of 1934 proved that the fleet was well secured."33

One unusual aspect of the Millstone Landing site was its use as a training base for ESSO lifeboat racing crews. In 1927, Capt. John F. Milliken convinced the Neptune Association to sponsor a lifeboat race to promote international good will. The competition became an annual event and was held each Labor Day in New York Harbor. It involved rowing 2.5-ton lifeboats over a two-mile course from the Narrows to 73d Street. Norwegian crews won every year between 1927 and 1932, except for a British victory in 1928 (no race was held in 1930).

In 1933, Hague offered an impressive silver cup, the R. L. Hague International Lifeboat Racing Trophy, as an additional prize in the competition. This was also the first year that an American crew—from the ESSO fleet—won. This crew lost "the boss' cup" to the Italians of the Conte di Savoia in 1934, won again in 1935, but lost to the Savoia in 1936 and 1937. The Italians' third victory retired the Hague cup. There was no race in 1938, and the Teagle team won the last prewar event on Labor Day 1939. ESSO entered crews in postwar competition, but none of these trained in the Patuxent.

Although assigned to the W. C. Teagle, which was not laid up in the Patuxent, the ESSO team was actually housed on the "mother ship" Ethyl. Capt. Adolv Larson was sent to the site in early June 1933 specifically to train the racing crew. One of the original team recalled the selection and training process:

Forty men were picked and were slowly weeded down to eight regular oarsmen, four substitutes and a trainer. On the "Ethyl" we had a chef to cook the food, which was hand-
picked for athletes in very strict training. Of course we had a
galley, comfortable bunks, showers, a sun deck for relaxing.
The rules were strict, no wine, women or song. We trained
all summer on the river and in the creeks around Solomons.
We came ashore and ran up and down the roads for exercise.
Just before Labor Day we went to New York for the race.
During the summers of 1933, 1934, and 1935 we went through
the same routine. . . .

In 1937, Mr. Richard Carroll was the trainer and he was killed
by a bolt of lightning while the crew was off Sandy Point. . . .
[Carroll was split in half by the strike, and two crewmen
seated near him were badly burned.]4

The presence of the tankers stirred mixed reactions
among the “locals.” As one former employee reported,
“Some resented it. Most were glad of the cash money
being spent by the men of the ESSO Fleet in a place
where there was practically no employment.” Another
observed, “There were practically no single girls left in
Solomons. All [were] married to ESSO men.” One sea-
soned ESSO officer paid the “locals” a high compli-
ment. He found them “friendly and cooperative . . . ex-
cellent workers—very savvy marine men.”35

At least one complaint was lodged through official
channels. This came from Cary T. Grayson, chairman
of the American National Red Cross, in a 2 November
1937 letter to Gen. Julian L. Schley, chief of the Army
Corps of Engineers. Grayson complained that

the Standard Oil Company have a bad habit of anchoring a
varied number of tank ships in the Pawtuxent River just
south of Soloman’s Island. . . . The presence of these
ships in these waters is a very definite menace to the fishing
and oystering. Is it possible to prohibit the semi-permanent
mooring of this type of craft in these waters?

Schley’s office forwarded the inquiry to the U.S. En-

gineer Office in Washington, D.C. on 8 November “for
report.” The commander of that unit ordered an in-

vestigation and reported back on the 17th. His report
is illuminating and worth citation in detail.

1. The Standard Shipping Company of New York . . . has
anchored, since about 1930, certain of their laid-up fleet of
tankers in Drum Point Harbor, at the mouth of the Patuxent
River. The number of vessels in the area has varied but the
maximum noted has been twenty-three and they are anchored
in compact groups. The area used is along the right bank of
the river channel, opposite Solomons Island, where the
minimum channel width is one half mile. The depth of water in
the area is 40 to 70 feet. . . .

2. There have not been any complaints received in the inter-
val since 1930 that the vessels obstructed or interfered [sic]
with navigation or had any adverse effect on fishing or the
oyster industry. It is not believed that the anchored vessels
can have any effect on oystering since dredging is not per-
mitted by law in the Patuxent River and the depth of water
is too great for hand tonging of oysters. Any interference
[sic] with fishing is not understood as only a small area is
occupied by the laid-up fleet. It is known that stringent reg-
ulations govern the vessels while anchored in the area, pro-
hibiting the discharge of any oil, debris, etc. overboard.

3. In view of the fact that there is no evidence of any inter-
ference with navigation it is not apparent to this office that
there is any basis for considering regulations to restrict the
use of the area for anchoring of vessels.

General Schley relayed the essence of this report to the
complainant on 29 November, apparently closing the
issue.

The lay-up site’s declining days are not well docu-
mented. An official company history of the fleet’s par-

ticipation in World War II states that nine tankers were
stationed there at various times in 1939, but most ap-
parently had departed by the end of October. The next
use of the site came “after the fall of France [May 1940]
changed the tanker situation. . . . more than 20 ships
[were] tied up in the Patuxent River during the summer
and fall of 1940 . . . .” The latest departure date given
is June 1941, for Paul H. Harwood, which had been
idled since 1 August 1940. Prior to that, the last ships
to leave lay-up were Elisha Walker and Dean Emery,
both in early November 1940.37

34. Lamp 16 (October 1933), 6; 17 (October 1934), 24; 18 (October-
December 1935), 22-23; 19 (October 1936), 20-21; 20 (October 1937),
12; and 22 (October 1939), 13. The quote is from Clyde C. Taylor in
“World Champions Trained in Solomons.” Bugeye Times 6 (Spring
1981), 1-2, and interview with the author. As Captain Conaghan en-
nviously observed, the lifeboat crews “ate better than the rest of us peons.
But who needs steaks, eggs, roast beef, pie and ice cream every day?”

35. Smith, Thomas, and Larson to author.

36. Grayson to Schley, 2 November 1937; Maj. W. D. Luplow, Dist.
Engr., Washington, DC, to Chief of Engrs. through Div. Engr., South
Atlantic Div., 17 November 1937; and Schley to Grayson, 29 November
1937 in Record Group 77, Office of Chief of Engineers, Civil Works,
1923-1942, Rivers and Harbors Files, Patuxent River-Paw Paw River,
Box 1361, File 7175, National Archives and Records Admin., Wash-
ington National Records Center, Suitland, Md. This record group contained
no other correspondence regarding the laid-up ESSO fleet.

37. Standard Oil Company (New Jersey), Ships of the ESSO Fleet in
World War II (n. p., 1946). The quote is from page 47. See also 27, 51,
54, 75, 76, 81, 83, 99, 144, 149, 154, 175, 187, 219, 231, 250, 253, 277,
278, 326, 377, 421, 428-29, 461, 468, and 500. Other tankers specifically
cited as tied up in the summer and fall of 1940 were: E. G. Seubert,
H. H. Rogers, C. A. Canfield, R. G. Stewart, Charles Pratt, H. M.
Flagler, T. J. Williams, W. L. Steed, Edward L. Doheny, and E. M.
Clark.
Merle T. Cole is a research associate with the Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland, where he has authored a number of monographs on the naval and maritime history of the Solomons area. He has also published in such journals as West Virginia History and Maryland Historical Magazine, as well as numerous county historical society media. Mr. Cole is a member of the Company of Military Historians. He serves as public affairs officer for the 2d (Chesapeake) Brigade of the Maryland State Guard, with rank of first lieutenant. In civilian life, he is a personnel specialist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, in Beltsville, Maryland.