A T2 tanker at sea during WWII. A total of 525 T2 tankers were built at American shipyards between 1942 and 1945. The entire fleet had the same dimensions. However, because of the structural problems they were not particularly popular with crews.

"A FLOATING GARBAGE CAN"

SIX DECADES AFTER ITS MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE IN WHAT WOULD BECOME KNOWN AS THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE, THE LOSS OF THE SS MARINE SULPHUR QUEEN IS EXAMINED

BY RAYMOND JACKSON

Captain James V. Fanning scanned the darkened sea on 3 February 1963 as the SS *Marine Sulphur Queen* followed the coastal route after departing Beaumont, Texas, sailing by the Sabine Pass, and heading towards the vessel's final destination of Norfolk, Virginia. Fanning had made the trip a number of times before but, as of late, he had become more and more distrustful of his employer — Marine Sulphur Transport Corporation and their fleet of ships. The company had built up a reputation of shoddy maintenance combined with shady business practices. As *Marine Sulphur Queen* headed toward the Florida Straits, Fanning could see the weather was changing and not for the better, giving the captain pause to worry about his cargo of molten sulphur, which was "cooking" at approximately 245-degF.

Fanning's ship had begun life 19 years earlier as a T2 tanker with the name SS *Esso New Haven*. The craft was built by the Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company in Chester, Pennsylvania, and was completed in March 1944. The T2 was a class of oil tanker constructed and produced in large quantities by the American government during the Second World War with some 525 T2s constructed between 1942 and the end of 1945. The utilitarian vessels were used to transport fuel oil, diesel fuel, gasoline, and crude oil. As the war moved ahead, the T2s were in heavy use since their petroleum cargos were constantly needed on the front lines of the world's combat zones.

However, there were problems with some of the T2s during and after the war. Basically rapidly constructed because of the pressure of the war, some of the tankers were showing structural

Originally built as SS *Esso New Haven*, the T2 tanker would perform valuable petroleum hauling duties during and after the war with Esso.

problems including what was called a "weak back." This term meant that the keel could split at a point weakened by corrosion or other problems, usually around midships. Such a splitting had happened to several T2s while many others in this class were discovered to have hairline or larger fractures within the keel and on major frames.

During 1960, *Esso New Haven* went into dry dock at the Bethlehem Steel Company located at Sparrow's Point in Maryland. The T2 was converted to carry a cargo of molten sulphur and this involved the construction of a continuous, independent tank some 308 feet long, 30 feet 6 inches wide, and 33 feet high. It was constructed out of the original holds and this design called for removal of all transverse bulkheads that had been in the original centerline tanks along with modifications to the internal structure.

The massive tank for the molten sulphur was subdivided into four smaller internal tanks. A space was created to surround the main tank on all sides. This left a two-foot clearance on the sides and bottom of the ship, with some three feet left between the top and the ship's weather deck. A steam system was installed throughout the vessel in order that the molten sulphur maintain a temperature of approximately 245-degF.

The external surfaces of this independent tank were insulated with a fibrous glass material some six-inches think on the top of the tank and four-inches thick on other surfaces. A watertight bulkhead was installed at Frame 59, which divided the void into two spaces. The forward space contained cargo tanks #1 and #2 and the #3 and #4 cargo tanks were divided at