

Naval Vessel Historical Evaluation
FINAL DETERMINATION



This evaluation is unclassified

Name	Hull Number
OBSERVATION ISLAND	T-AGM 23
Vessel Class	Previous Vessel Designation (if any)
MARINER-type high speed cargo vessel converted to missile range instrumentation ship.	Also known as ex-MA-28, ex-YAG-57, ex-E-AG-154
Vessel Location	Current Status
Beaumont (TX) Reserve Fleet	Stricken 31 March 2014

Initial Evaluation Date	Initial Finding
16 December 2014	Ineligible
Final Evaluation Date	Eligibility for Listing to the National Register of Historic Places
12 March 2015	Ineligible

Vessel Snapshot

Lineage	This missile range instrumentation ship, that monitors missile launches and collects data on same, was the first U.S. Navy ship named for the island located in the southern part of Lake Okeechobee, Florida.
Displacement	12,978 tons
Length	564 feet
Beam	76 feet
Draft	30 feet

Speed	20 knots
Propulsion	Two boilers; 1 GE turbine; 19,250 hp (14.36 MW); single screw
Armament	Sensors and Processing System: AN/SPQ-11 <i>Cobra Judy</i> , Air Force shipborne phased-array radar system Ships Inertial Navigation System (SINS)
Laid Down	15 September 1952
Launched	15 August 1953
Built By	New York Ship Building Corporation, Camden, N.J.
Sponsor	Mrs. Samuel C. Waugh, wife of Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Samuel C. Waugh [1953]
Delivered	24 February 1954
Commissioned	15 December 1958
Decommissioned	1 January 1972
Stricken	30 March 2014

Vessel History

Deployment Summary	<p>Delivered to the Maritime Administration (MARAD) and United States Lines for operation under General Agency Agreement on 24 February 1954.</p> <p>EMPIRE STATE MARINER, Capt. Vince P. Arkins, Master, made three voyages for the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS). The first two took her to Bremerhaven and Liverpool, while the third, commencing in May 1954, took her along both the east and west coasts, as well as to the Canal Zone, Guam, Korea, and Japan. She returned to Mobile, Ala. in September 1954, after which she was laid up on 9 November 1954, in the National Defense Reserve Fleet.</p>
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	<p>Acquired by the Navy, 10 September 1956.</p> <p>Converted first naval ship having a fully integrated Fleet Ballistic Missile System was authorized 15 October 1957. No major hull or engineering changes were made to the ship during that conversion, other than installation of a roll stabilization system. However, extensive alterations were accomplished in the superstructure and hold to accommodate the FBM Weapons System.</p> <p>Commissioned as OBSERVATION ISLAND (E-AG-154), December 1958. The vessel then operated on the Atlantic Missile Range off Cape Kennedy, conducting dummy missile launches and communications tests. In June 1963 OBSERVATION ISLAND expanded her role of oceanographic survey in the Atlantic Range. She conducted the first successful at-sea launches of the A-3 <i>Polaris</i> on 17 and 21 June.</p> <p>President John F. Kennedy, on November 16, 1963, witnessed an A-3 <i>Polaris</i> launch on board OBSERVATION ISLAND, six days before his assassination, and gave his final speech from a U.S. Navy vessel.</p> <p>In 1969 OBSERVATION ISLAND launched the first <i>Poseidon</i> Fleet Ballistic Missile ever successfully deployed from a vessel at sea, earning the ship and crew the Meritorious Unit Commendation.</p> <p>Decommissioned in 1972.</p> <p>Transferred to MARAD for lay up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet</p> <p>Reacquired, 18 August 1977, by the Navy, assigned to the Military Sealift Command (MSC) and placed in service as Range Instrumentation Ship, OBSERVATION ISLAND (T-AGM-23) a part the MSC Special Mission Ships Program (PM2), MSC Pacific.</p> <p>Stricken 30 March 2014. Awaiting disposition.</p>
Awards	<p>Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (2) – 1998, 2003</p> <p>Meritorious Unit Commendation (3) – 1969, 1971, 2005</p> <p>National Defense Service Medal</p> <p>Navy “E” Ribbon (4) – 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985</p> <p>Navy Battle "E" (4)</p> <p>Navy Unit Commendation (2) - 1960</p>

Noteworthy Events	OBSERVATION ISLAND monitored the first at-sea launch of the A-1 <i>Polaris</i> missile was from the fleet ballistic missile submarine GEORGE WASHINGTON (SSBN-598) on July 20, 1960. The ship was also present for initial tests of the A-2 and A-3 variants of <i>Polaris</i> .
DANFS* Entry	Yes, but published <i>circa</i> 1970. Updating in progress.

**Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*

Criteria Evaluation¹

i. Was the vessel awarded an individual Presidential Unit Citation?	No
ii. Did an individual act of heroism take place aboard the vessel such that an individual was subsequently awarded the Medal of Honor or the Navy Cross?	No
iii. Was a President of the United States was assigned to the vessel during his or her naval service?	No
iv. Was the vessel was the first to incorporate engineering, weapons systems, or other upgrades that represent a revolutionary change in naval design or warfighting capabilities?	No
v. Did some other historic or socially significant event occur on board the vessel?	No
Historic Evaluation Conclusion	Ineligible

Sources	http://www.nvr.navy.mil/nvrships/details/AGM23
	http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/o1/observation_island.htm
	http://www.navsource.org/archives/09/53/5323.htm
	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USNS_Observation_Island_(T-AGM-23)
	https://awards.navy.mil/awards/webbas01.nsf/(vwWebPage)/home.htm?OpenDocument

Historic Preservation Stakeholder Comment

Historic preservation stakeholder comments received are considered when preparing final determinations. The initial determination for this vessel was made available for comment by

¹ Evaluation conducted using triggers established for naval vessels in *Program Comment for the Department of Navy for the Disposition of Historic Vessels*, issued by the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation on 15 March 2010.

historic preservation stakeholders for 60 days. During that time, the Navy received no written comments.