

Tanker gushes 100,000 gallons of fuel into inlet

by Pat O'Brien
Times Writer

More than 100,000 gallons of aviation fuel have sloshed into Cook Inlet from a damaged Greek tanker that ran aground Saturday morning.

The U.S. Coast Guard has declared the incident a major oil spill and a state official has said it is probably the largest such accident ever to occur in the inlet.

Capt. Glenn Haines said the ship, the Cepheus, now anchored at the Port of Anchorage, is still leaking small amounts of the fuel and efforts to control the problem are being hampered by frigid air temperatures, swift tides and ice-filled, silty waters.

Although the accident has not reached "catastrophic" stages, Haines said the Coast Guard has activated an emergency response procedure that allows the agency to draw on a wide range of equipment and manpower from throughout the state and federal governments.

Three members of the Coast Guard's Pacific Strike Team are already working here and more help has been requested from the group, based in San Francisco.

"They are the Coast Guard's swat team, if you will," for environmental pollution problems, Haines said.

Haines said the Coast Guard's intentions to begin air reconnaissance of the spill today were

hampered by foggy conditions. Even if the planes could have taken off, he said he was not optimistic about what observers might find or what might be done if oil slicks are sighted.

However, he said early estimates indicate that as much as 50 percent of the oil may have evaporated already, "even at these low temperatures."

Fuel from the tanker now stretches from the lower end of Fire Island to waters offshore from Eagle River, Haines said, an area roughly 20 miles in length.

The oil that has been spilled is high-grade jet fuel, a thin product that is quickly mixed into the water. When that happens, it is difficult to find

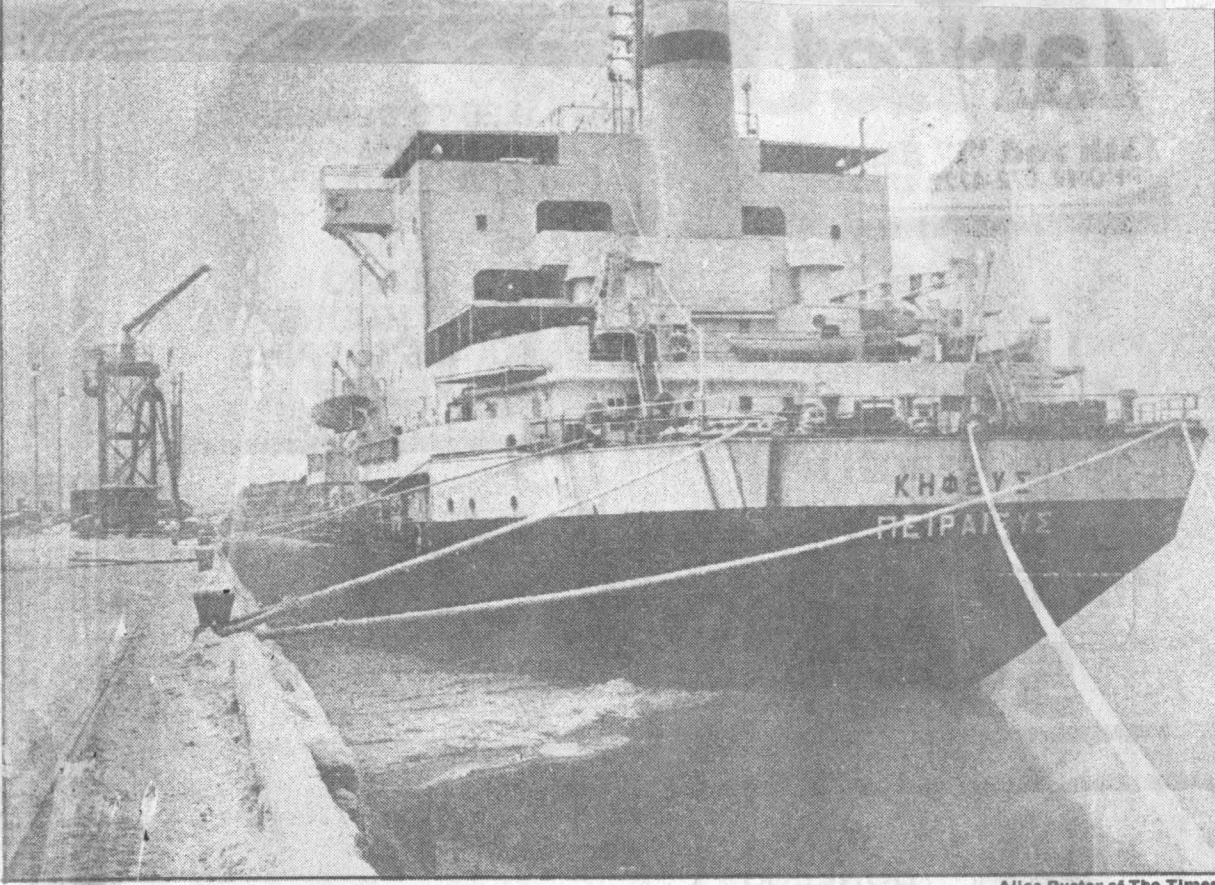
where a spill is moving, making any clean-up activity less effective, Haines said.

Once aircraft can take off, those in the air will be trying to see if the oil is pooling in areas where tidal action is less severe — places where it will be easier to retrieve, Haines said.

"This is a very high-energy area as far as tidal movements go," Haines said, adding that water washes in and out of the channel at 6 knots.

With ice "pretty well socking in the inlet," he said it's hard to even see a sheen from the material on the surface. Ice would also be a problem in moving clean-up barges into the area.

Haines said his officers are trying to determine See Coast, page A-10



Alice Puster of The Times

A Greek tanker, leaking its cargo of aviation fuel, sits at the Port of Anchorage — minus more than 100,000 gallons

Coast Guard battles oil spill

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why the Cepheus ran aground across Knik Arm from the port, but no conclusions have been reached. The ship is a 535-foot vessel that was carrying 200,000 barrels of Jet-A kerosene owned by the Mapco Petroleum Co. of Fairbanks. The cargo was destined for Butler Aviation, Haines said.

The vessel ran aground at Cairn Point at 7 a.m. Saturday, just across the inlet from Anchorage. At 8:30 that morning a tugboat pulled the ship free and towed it into the municipal port, Haines said.

The cargo, which was picked up in the Bahamas, began gushing out at the time the ship ran aground, Haines said. It was not until Tuesday that the Coast Guard learned the extent of the problem, because the ship's tanks were pressurized and technicians didn't want to open them. They feared the fuel would spill more quickly if the tanks were vented.

Some of the uncontaminated fuel was being pumped from the ship, but the unloading was halted when it appeared it was causing more fuel to

spill into the waters at dockside, Haines said.

No further oil will be removed voluntarily from the Cepheus until the ship can be trimmed to prevent further discharges.

As the investigation continues, Underwater Construction Co. divers are scanning the hull in 20-degree water to assess damages. Crowley Environmental Services Co. has been hired to do clean-up work, Haines said.

Robert Martin, with the state Department of Environmental Conservation in Anchorage, said the agency is working closely with the Coast Guard in trying to assess the damages the spill may cause.

In addition, Martin said the DEC has scheduled meetings with Alaska Department of Fish and Game officials to determine what the spill may do to fish and to wildfowl that might be wintering in the area.

Coast Guard and DEC officials request anyone who spots an oil slick or knows of areas where flotsam accumulates to call their Anchorage offices at 271-5137 or 274-2533.

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THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 26, 1984

180,000 gallons of fuel spill into Cook Inlet

by Cary Virtue
Times Writer

The punctured Greek tanker Cepheus continued leaking its cargo of aviation fuel today, and the total spilled into Cook Inlet now totals more than 180,000 gallons.

The tanker, which is now moored at the Port of Anchorage, ran aground near here Saturday and immediately began leaking its cargo.

Coast Guard crews are awaiting the arrival of high-capacity pumps so they can begin the delicate task of pumping the remaining fuel from the tanker. That operation should begin tonight.

"It (the tanker's hole) is unpluggable because we're having so much trouble with divers," said Coast Guard Capt. Glenn Haines, who is in charge

of the clean-up operation. "The latest estimate (of fuel loss) is in excess of 180,000 gallons. It was primarily lost at grounding. But there has been a slow leak while she's been sitting (at dockside)."

Haines said about 40,000 gallons of heavy oil and about 2 million gallons of aviation fuel remain in the Cepheus.

Removal of the fuel is being conducted by the ship's owners, and Coast Guard officials are monitoring the clean-up efforts, Haines said.

Haines said that work crews will first heat and remove the tanker's own heavy fuel oil before pumping out its cargo of aviation fuel.

"They could be pumping (by) tonight, but it's a matter of hooking up the lines right," Haines said. See Oil, page A-10

Oil spill probe continues

Continued from page A-1

"How we get it ashore, if we get it ashore is still under discussion. By mid-afternoon today, we should have a firm answer."

Patches of spilled fuel from the tanker now stretch from the lower end of Fire Island to waters offshore of Eagle River, Haines said, an area roughly 20 miles long.

The oil that has been spilled is high-grade jet fuel, a thin product that is quickly mixed into the water, making clean-up efforts difficult.

Three members of the Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team are assisting with clean-up of the spill.

Haines said officials are still trying to determine why the Cepheus ran aground across Knik Arm from the port. The ship is a 535-foot vessel carrying 200,000 barrels of jet-A kerosene owned by the Mapco Petroleum Co. of Fairbanks. The cargo was bound for Butler Aviation, Haines said.

The vessel ran aground at Cairn Point at 7 a.m. Saturday, just across the inlet from Anchorage. At 8:30 that morning a tugboat pulled the ship free and towed it into the port, Haines said.

Aviation fuel began gushing from the ship as soon as it ran aground. But it was not until Tuesday that the Coast Guard learned the extent of the prob-

lem, because the ship's tanks were pressurized and technicians didn't want to open them. They feared the fuel would spill more quickly if the tanks were vented.

Some of the fuel was pumped from the ship, but unloading was halted when it appeared the operation was causing more fuel to spill into the water at dockside, Haines said. No further oil will be removed until the ship can be trimmed to prevent further discharges.

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