



Mobil Apex

The Mobile Apex fire on April 29, 1969 at the Hess Refinery on St. Croix was an event that kept the U.S. Coast Guard busy for a couple of days. The response came from a cutter from St, Thomas and cutters and aircraft from San Juan. My involvement was minimal. Being a crew member on the Grumman HU16E Albatross was one of observer. The crew on the Sikorsky HH52 helicopters got up close and personal with the tanker when they dropped foam on the fire. I remember crew members talking of the heat with one crew with singed eyebrows. Maybe a little too close.

The Albatross's role was primarily to be the eye in the sky as the tanker was towed out to sea as it continued to burn. Everyone, regardless of their role was aware of the potential of explosion knowing the Mobil Apex's cargo of gasoline and naphtha.

There was a consideration of sinking the vessel to ensure the safety of all involved but as it was towed over 35 miles south of St. Croix, the fire seemed to come under control. Sinking the vessel would have had other concerns... the environmental contaminants. Many thought the Mobil Apex was a doomed ship, but it came back to life with several owners and names until it finally surrendered in 1995.

This event had more Coast Guardsmen involved than most and it was expected that a unit citation maybe awarded. The cutter Courageous received the award and we got an atta-boy but no citation. It was stated that "You don't get awards for showing up for work and do what we are supposed to do". I do not disagree. That's what I signed up for, but ribbons are pretty.