

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**  
RECEIVED MAY 16 1984  
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

S. S. JOHN W. BROWN

(VHLC File # 121-45)  
NOT ON VLR

AND/OR COMMON

Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard Hull # 2062

S. S. JOHN W. BROWN, United States Maritime Commission Hull # 312

**2 LOCATION**

temporarily located at: Ship Unit #5, Berth #24 about one nautical mile west of Milberry Point at Army Transportation Center, Fort Eustis anchor.  NOT FOR PUBLICATION

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

James River Reserve Fleet

VICINITY OF Newport News

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Virginia

CODE

51

COUNTY

Isle of Wight

CODE

093

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED watchman	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: idle

**4 AGENCY**

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)

United States Maritime Administration, Department of Transportation

STREET & NUMBER

Stanley D. Wheatley, Director of Ship Operations, Code 740, 400 7th SW

CITY, TOWN

Washington

VICINITY OF

STATE

DC 20590

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

of title

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Jessie Fernanders, Ships Dispersals & Transfers

STREET & NUMBER

Code Mar741, Rm 2200, 400 7th St, SW

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

DC 20590

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

NA

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Steam Ship John W. Brown is a WWII general cargo ship with limited troop carrying capacity built by the US Maritime Commission on the EC2-S-C1 design. This design of ship has a length overall of 441'-7 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", extreme breadth of 57', maximum draft of 27'-9", gross tonnage of 7,176, net tonnage of 4,380, deadweight of 10,865 tons and displacement of 14,245 tons. This steel vessel is of the full scantling type with a raked stem, cruiser stern, single screw and balanced rudder. Major compartmentation consists of five cargo hatches, engine room midships, fore and after peak tanks, three deep tanks, double bottom and seven watertight bulkheads. Its engine is a direct acting, condensing, three cylinder, triple expansion steam engine with an indicated horsepower of 2,500 at 76RPM consuming 30 tons of Bunker "C" oil daily and producing 11 knots of speed. The general arrangement of decks starting at the tank top includes: lower hold, second deck or 'tween deck, upper deck or main deck with crew's accommodations, boat deck with officers accommodations, bridge deck and flying bridge. The after house includes a hospital. Typical wartime crew for Liberties numbered fifty-two persons with twenty-nine gun crew. Defensive armament on the John Brown most likely consisted of a 3"-50 caliber gun forward, a 5"-50 gun aft and ten 20mm AA guns.

The present condition of the John Brown includes some alterations. The 1943 modifications to allow her to carry a limited number of troops in her 'tween decks were made during the time the ship achieved its significance, and therefore do not count as alterations. These modifications are listed for the

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sake of completeness. On the exterior, six extra gun tubs were put on: #1 hatch fwd port/starboard, house top aft p/s and #5 p/s. Companionways were put in at #1/2 p/s, #2/3 midships, #4 aft s, #5 aft p. The house on the boat deck aft is probably from this time. The bulk of the 'tween deck doors between hatches (#1/2 s, #2/3 p/s, #3/house p, house/4 p and #4/5 p ) may be from this time with a few done after 1947. The vents at #1 fwd p, #1/2 p and two at #2/3 s are probably from this time. The 'tween deck heating and extra lighting are probably mixed 1943 and 1947 onward.

Changes that qualify as alterations may also be divided into exterior and interior. On the exterior, the guns and liferafts were probably removed in 1945. The change from one gangway originally at frame 91 p/s to two at #3 aft p and #4 p was done to satisfy municipal code requirements and dates after Nov. 1947 when the ship left States Marine and became a schoolship. The removal of the compass and steering platform from the flying bridge is post-1947.

The interior alterations are post-1947. In the wheelhouse, the telegraph, magnetic compass, wheel and wood grating are missing. The engine room has some additions: an electric vacuum pump for #2 fuel oil tank, #6 50,000 gal fuel oil tank fwd stbd above the bilges, and its electric pump which is on the fwd end of the boiler flat slightly to stbd of the center line. In the crews accommodation several spaces were enlarged. The crews mess was enlarged going aft by taking out

the bulkheads at frames 106 and 109 thereby incorporating the 3 firemen's and 3 oilers' cabins. The officers' mess was enlarged by taking out the starboard bulkhead and the bulkhead at frame 87 thereby incorporating the 5 gunners' and 4 gunners' cabins. The Steward's cabin was joined to the cooks's cabin by removing the bulkhead at frame 87 with the resulting space being used as the ship's office by the schoolship. Two meeting rooms were created by removing the bulkhead at frame 99 between the 4 seamen's and 3 wipers' cabins, and by removing the bulkheads at frames 106 and 109 which separated the bosun, 4 seamen and 4 seamen. The petty officer's mess had stoves put into it.

Except for the guns, liferafts, gangways and lack of gray paint, the present exterior appearance of the John Brown is the same as when the ship attained its historical significance. Interior alterations are minor and reversible. Having been a limited capacity troop ship resulted in less changes being made when she became a schoolship. The minimal extent of qualifying alterations might enable the John Brown to be regarded as basically unaltered.

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More importantly, " the Liberty ship is the type of vessel which, in its hundreds, is accredited with saving not only Britian, not only the Allied cause, but the whole world from disaster- for there was a great fear that the war might be lost simply because Allied lifelines were stretched almost beyond limit owing to an insufficient number of ships."<sup>5</sup> The SS John W Brown is one of two remaining American-owned, minimally altered Liberty ships.<sup>6</sup> The alterations on the John Brown are minor and do not detract from the significance of the ship. It retains sufficient integrity to convey the feeling of its wartime period. Although less than 50 years old, the John Brown deserves to be included in the National Register because it is one of the last remaining of a type of ship which is of exceptional importance in American history. The Merchant Marine served in World War II as a Military Auxiliary.<sup>7</sup>

← Merchant seamen suffered a greater percentage of fatalities than any branch of the armed services, except the Marines.<sup>8</sup>

The particular history of the SS John W Brown is not extraordinary, except that she has survived, has been maintained in good condition and can be easily restored to her wartime appearance. She was built in 41 days as a general cargo ship at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard in Baltimore, launched September 7,

<sup>5</sup>Sawyer, p.13.

<sup>6</sup>The other Liberty is the Jeremiah O'Brien, hull # 806. It is on the National Register and has been restored as a museum in San Francisco at the Golden Gate Nat. Rec. Area.

<sup>7</sup>Bunker, p.11.

<sup>8</sup>Biaggi.

1942 and named after an American leader of West Coast carpenters. She is a combat veteran of Mediterranean landings at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Southern France. She carried American troops, Free French Troops, and transported Italian and German POWs from Italy to Bizerte, North Africa. She was operated from the end of the war until 1947 by the States Marine Corporation as a merchant freighter. In November of 1947, the US Maritime Commission loaned the John Brown to the New York City Board of Education to replace the City's ferryboat Brooklyn as a stationary maritime schoolship. Licensed officers taught students deck, engine and steward skills on fully operational cargo gear, deck machinery, engine room and galley. On June 30, 1982, the Board of Education closed the schoolship because of maintenance costs and the high cost of converting the ship to classrooms. C<sup>r</sup>rently, the SS John W Brown Preservation Project is trying to gain ownership of the vessel in order to preserve it as a museum and national maritime memorial to shipyard workers and seamen who constructed and sailed American merchant ships during WWII.

The Liberty ship, as represented by the John Brown, has significance in the areas of commerce, transportation, engineering, industry and military. Its economic fuel consumption, excellent cargo gear and deck machinery, and its 27½' draft made these ships very desirable to foreign countries whose fleets were destroyed by the war. Liberties formed the backbone of post-war fleets whose commerce generated income to build the new ships of the 1950s and 1960s. Many technological advances were made during the Liberty shipbuilding program. A steel cold-rolling process was developed to save steel in the making of lightweight cargo booms. A portable welding plant which moved at a walking pace was invented. The state-of-the-art of welding was advanced sufficiently to produce the first all-welded ships. Steel brittle fracture and crack arresting were really understood for the first time. Prefabrication was perfected, with complete deck houses, double-bottom sections, stern-frame assemblies and bow units speeding production. (The internal compartmentatio

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and superior construction of the Liberty ship was important because it allowed Liberty ships to sustain wartime damage no pre-war merchant ship could take and survive.<sup>9</sup>) The American Maritime industry built in 1943 a record 1,896 vessels totaling 19,238,646 dwt of which 1,238 vessels were Liberties.<sup>10</sup> The production record for a Liberty is held by the Robert E Peary which was assembled and launched in only four days, fifteen and a half hours after keel laying.<sup>11</sup>

The SS John W Brown embodies the distinctive characteristics of the type, period and method of construction of the Liberty ships which have contributed so significantly to the broad patterns of our history. The SS John W Brown has integrity of design, workmanship and association. It is therefore nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

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<sup>9</sup>Sawyer, p.33.

<sup>10</sup>Bunker, p.15.

<sup>11</sup>Sawyer, p.18.

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- Biaggi, Hon. Mario. "A Bill to Establish the 'John W Brown' as a Merchant Marine Memorial." Congressional Record. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, February 17, 1983, p.14.
- Bunker, John Gorley. Liberty Ships- The Ugly Ducklings. New York: Arno Press, 1972.
- Duffy, Francis J. "Preserving a Liberty Ship" Ships Monthly. April 1979, pp.15-17.
- Lane, Frederic C. Ships for Victory- A History of Shipbuilding Under the US Maritime Commission in World War II. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1951
- "Liberty Ship 'John W Brown' Transfer (HR 1556) March 11, 1983." Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Merchant Marine of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries House of Representatives Ninety-Eight Congress First Session. Serial No.98-7. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- "Maritime Memorial" Journal of Commerce. New York, November 1, 1983.
- Sawyer, L.A. and W.H. Mitchell. The Liberty Ships- The History of the 'Emergency' Type Cargo Ships Constructed in the United States During World War II. Cambridge, Maryland: Cornell Maritime Press, 1970.



## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Sept 7, 1942

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard, Balto.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

At the outbreak of WWII, the American Merchant Marine was caught unprepared to handle a massive seelift of war material. In 1939, the US Merchant fleet was only 12,000,000 deadweight tons.<sup>1</sup> By 1941, 92% of the 1,422 US flag ocean-going ships of over 2,000 gross tons were greater than 20 years old.<sup>2</sup> During the 1939-1945 US Maritime Commission building program, 5,095 non-military vessels were built totalling 52,989,000 deadweight tons. Of these totals Liberty ships numbered 2,708 (53%) and 29,182,000 deadweight tons (55%).<sup>3</sup> The Liberty ship represented the design solution that filled the need for an emergency type of simple, standardized cargo steamer which could be mass produced cheaply and quickly by assembly line methods and easily converted to individual service needs.

The Liberty ship was considered a "five-year vessel" and not able to compete with non-emergency vessels in speed, equipment and general serviceability. However, Liberties ended up doing well plodding the seas as an important segment of major world merchant fleets nearly 20 years later.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lane, p.3.

<sup>2</sup>Sawyer, p.12.

<sup>3</sup>Lane, p.4.

<sup>4</sup>Bunker, p.17.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

see continuation sheet

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY just the ship itself

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	353380	4110000	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated area is the ship itself.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Curtis P Junker, National Register Application Officer

ORGANIZATION

SS John W Brown Preservation Project

DATE

March 18, 1984

STREET & NUMBER

Apartment 6-K, 549 Riverside Drive

TELEPHONE

(212) 864-1638

CITY OR TOWN

New York, New York 10027

STATE

# 12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES  NO

NONE

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is  National  State  Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE DOT Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 3, 1984

FOR NPS USE ONLY

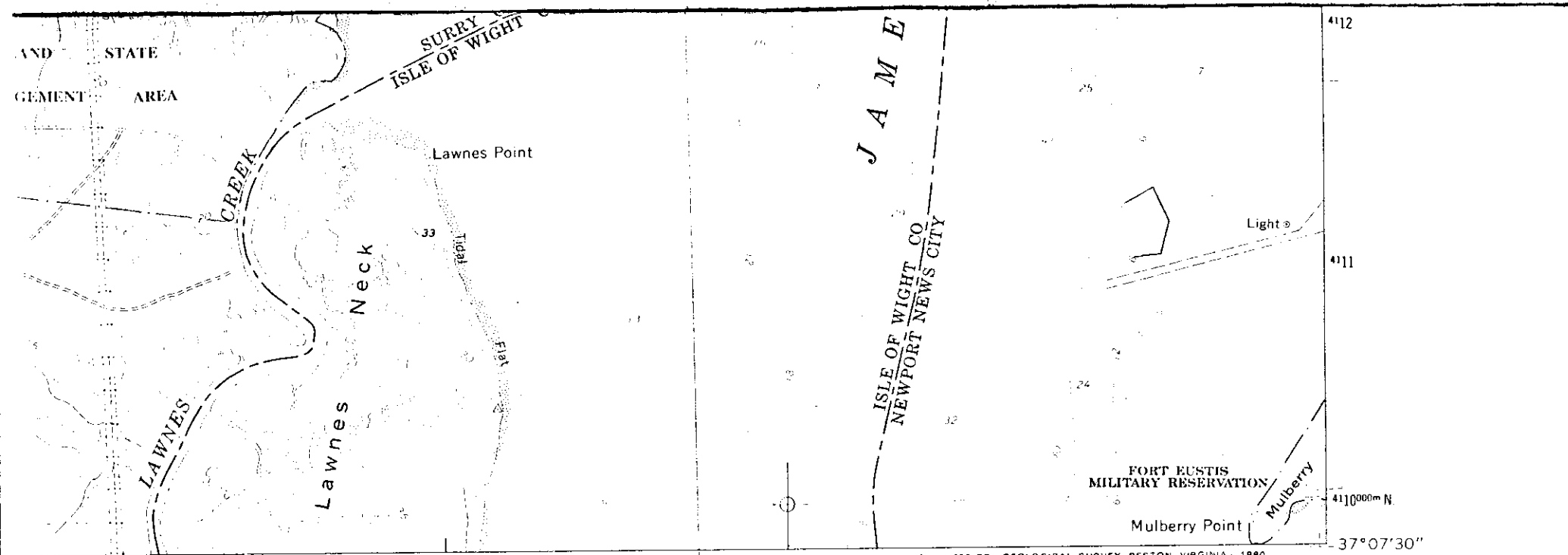
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

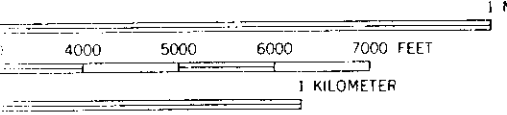
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



CASTLE) 11 SW 24000



VERTICAL DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
 THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE  
 APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
 APPROXIMATELY 2.2 FEET

NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
 SOURCES, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22903  
 AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

SS JOHN W. BROWN

LATITUDE 37° 07' 36" N, LONGITUDE 76° 39' 01" W  
 ZONE 18  
 EASTING 353380  
 NORTHING 4110000



Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with State of Virginia based on aerial photography taken 1978 and other source data. This information not field checked. Map edited 1979  
 Boundary lines shown in purple compiled from latest information available from the controlling authority

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty	—————	Light-duty	—————
Medium-duty	—————	Unimproved dirt	- - - - -
Interstate Route	—————	U. S. Route	—————
		State Route	—————

HOG ISLAND, VA.

N3707.5—W7637.5/7.5

1965  
 PHOTOREVISED 1979  
 DMA 5658 II NW—SERIES V834

(MULBERRY ISLAND)  
 5658 II SE