



# REMEMBER WHEN

*A look back at the nation's oil & gas industry.*



The nation's, as well as Oklahoma's, oil and gas industry is rich in history. As part of a new partnership with the American Oil & Gas Historical Society (AOGHS), Exploring Energy will bring you energy stories from the past in each publication. Also catch "Remember When Wednesday" each fourth Wednesday of the month with AOGHS Executive Director Bruce Wells joining the discussion on KECO 96.5's Exploring Energy show from 8 to 9 a.m. and on 102.3 KWDQ, sponsored by Big Chief Plant Services. For more articles, photos and features, or to support AOGHS, visit [www.aoghs.org](http://www.aoghs.org).

## Offshore Rocket Launcher

BY BRUCE WELLS  
aoghs.org

American Oil and Gas  
Historical Society Director

Many offshore petroleum platforms have found use after retirement, including more than 450 decommissioned rigs that today serve as aquatic habitats - artificial reefs - in the Gulf of Mexico. Two retired platforms later became museums and offshore energy education centers.

In Louisiana, "Mr. Charlie," the world's first submersible drilling rig when it was launched in 1953, drilled wells for four decades before becoming a training facility and education center in Morgan City. The "Ocean Star," a former jack-up rig now moored in Galveston Bay, Texas, opened as a petroleum museum in 1997 after completing more than 200 offshore wells.

Less well-known is the "Ocean Odyssey," the only converted drilling rig to become an equatorial rocket launching pad. Originally to have been named "Ocean Ranger II," the \$110 million platform was under construction in Japan on February 15, 1982, when its predecessor and namesake tragically capsized in a North Atlantic storm off Newfoundland. Renamed "Ocean Odyssey," the new plat-

form went to work that same year.

Between April 1983 and September 1985, "Ocean Odyssey" drilled off the coasts of Alaska and California before a two-year hiatus. In early 1988, it was contracted to Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) for North Sea exploration drilling. All was well until September 1988, when a blow-out and fire suddenly ended the rig's career.

After spending several years as a rusting hulk in the docks of Dundee, Scotland, advancing aerospace technologies came to the rescue of the self-propelled platform, 436 feet long and about 220 feet wide.

The advantages of space launches from the equator and the availability of the "Ocean Odyssey" prompted Boeing to convert the rig into a launch platform. According to experts, the speed of earth's rotation is greatest at the equator, providing an extra launch boost.

By April 1995, Boeing (with 40 percent ownership) led a four-country joint partnership, Sea Launch LLC. The venture included Russia (25 percent), Norway (20 percent), and Ukraine (15 percent). In March 1999, a Russian Zenit-3SL rocket fueled

by kerosene and liquid oxygen placed a test satellite into geostationary orbit from the modified platform's remote Pacific Ocean launch site.

Commercial launches began on October 9, 1999, with a DirecTV satellite payload. By 2014 the converted petroleum platform had made 36 such launches for XM Satellite Radio, Echo Star, and other communication companies. A new industry was "launched," and the consortium established its U.S. home port in Long Beach, California, near aerospace and maritime supply companies. Before the end of 1995, Hughes Space and Communications had contracted for 10 launches.

However, economic and legal troubles emerged. After almost 40 launches (with three failures), operating costs and a declining world economy led to Chapter 11 bankruptcy and reorganization in 2009. Russia emerged with 95 percent ownership of the partnership. Then began litigation and claims and counter-claims within the Sea Launch consortium. The last launch from "Ocean Odyssey" came in May 2014 - one month after civil war broke out in Ukraine.

According to fi-

ancial reports, Sea Launch LLC's debt when it filed for bankruptcy was estimated at \$1 billion. The cost per launch was more than \$80 million. Boeing sued to recoup part of a reported \$978

million loss in loans, trade debt, and partner liabilities (a 2016 court ruling ordered Boeing's Russian and Ukrainian partners to pay \$515.93 million).

At the end of 2014, the "Ocean Odys-

sey" and its command ship, "Sea Launch Commander," were moored at the Port of Long Beach, California, where they remain today. Learn more offshore history at [AOGHS.org](http://AOGHS.org).



Constructed in 1982, the "Ocean Odyssey" was designed to endure 110 foot waves. Photo courtesy Sea Launch.

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(Photo above) A Boeing-led international partnership modified the drilling platform to launch satellites from near the equator.

(Photo on left) Another decommissioned platform, the "Ocean Star," opened as an oil museum in 1997. Photo by Bruce Wells.