Vast Oil Spill Killing Birds
Along San Francisco Bay

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 19 — The beautiful Bay of San Francisco was ugly today.

Since early yesterday morning, huge patches of oil — hundreds of thousands of gallons of it — had been floating on the water.

Beaches and rocks around the city had been turned black.

Seals, seeking refuge from the oil, tried to clamber to safety atop shoreline rocks, but they kept slipping off.

Hundreds of birds were rescued from the bay, their bodies soaked in oil. But many more, experts estimated, perished.

Tankers Collide

The ugliness began at 1:45 A.M. yesterday, when two Standard Oil tankers collided off the Golden Gate Bridge in a dense and chilly fog. One tanker, the Oregon Standard, had six of her 26 oil compartments ripped open, spilling from one-half million to perhaps more than a million gallons of oil into the bay.

The oil, called bunker oil, was tightly refined for use in household furnaces and ships’ boilers. The spill was the worst in the history of San Francisco Bay and the first major spill to occur in a naturally protected harbor of that size.

About half the spilled oil washed out into the Pacific Ocean late last night and early this morning. It slowly spread up the coast, turning beaches black and invading extensive coastal marshlands, which harbor many species of migratory birds and shore birds native to the northern California coast.

A large number of migratory birds are in the area, experts said, because they winter here.

A high tide that began to enter the bay late this afternoon carried some of the oil that had drifted out into the ocean back into the bay.

A spokesman for the Coast Guard said much of the oil might just sluice back and forth through the mouth of the bay until it was cleaned up. Clean-up operations, according to the Standard Oil Company, should take a few more days.

A hearing will begin tomorrow under Coast Guard auspices to determine why the spill occurred and, if possible, to determine any guilt. The hearing will take at least two days.

Spokesmen for Standard Oil said today they had “absolutely no idea” how the collision could have occurred. They said foggy conditions were not unusual.

Philip Berry, national president of the Sierra Club, offered an explanation.

Oil tankers worldwide are in short supply, Mr. Berry said in a telephone interview.

Savings Drive Alleged

“Therefore,” he said, “oil companies use every hour they can get out of every tanker. They shorten their down time, or the time they spend in port. This saves them maybe a few thousand dollars each trip.”

The saving in time, Mr. Berry continued, presents a hazard.

“The company takes some risks in moving the ships in and out during daylight hours. But to move ships in a pea-soup fog in the middle of the night, without a pilot on either ship, is a set-up for disaster,” Mr. Berry said.

The extent of the oil damage had not been determined today. Plans to take aerial

Continued on Page 54, Column 2
Oil Spill on San Francisco Bay Kills Birds and Blackens Shore

Continued From Page 3/

photographs of the bay area and its surrounding coastal regions were thwarted by fog, which kept major airports here closed for most of the day.

Telephone calls continued to come in to various agencies reporting oil sightings, but no central authority collected all the reports to draw an accurate picture of the total damage.

A spokesman for Standard Oil of California, which has a major refinery at Richmond, just across the bay from the Golden Gate Bridge, said the exact amount of oil that spilled had not yet been calculated.

He said that records still had to be examined and gauges must be checked, but that the oil spill could not have exceeded 1,134,000 gallons. The 1969 oil well blow-out in Santa Barbara released an estimated 800,000 gallons of crude oil into the ocean.

The oil company, which is responsible for cleaning up the spill, has hired 250 people to help out.

The workers put out 4,000 bales of hay to soak up oil along shorelines. They employed 10 tugs, 25 charter boats, seven oil-skimming barges, 30 vacuum trucks, 13 tank trucks, 20 dump trucks, two boats to pick up oil-laden birds, four Caterpillar tractors and four scooomobiles.

At least several hundred birds were picked up, some about 20 miles south at San Mateo, even though no oil had drifted much past the bay bridge.

At least three central pick-up stations were established to receive oil-soaked birds.

From these stations, the birds were sent to clean-up and shelter stations.

The Audubon Society, the California Game and Wildlife Authority, the Friends of the Earth, the San Francisco Humane Society and various other organizations were involved in the clean-up and rescue operations. Their switchboards were swamped with calls for two days as local people sought to volunteer to help rescue birds.

Among the types of birds rescued were western grebes, American coots, scooter ducks, gulls and cormorants.