

= SS John Burke =

SS John Burke ( MC hull number 609 ) was an American Liberty Ship built during World War II , one of the 2 @, @ 710 type ' EC2 @-@ S @-@ C1 ' ships that carried all kinds and types of dry cargo during the war . The ship was named for John Burke ( February 25 , 1859 ? May 14 , 1937 ) , the 10th Governor of North Dakota . Burke was built at Kaiser Shipbuilding Company 's Oregon Shipbuilding yard in Portland , Oregon . Burke 's keel was laid November 20 , 1942 and the hull was launched on December 13 . After fitting @-@ out , Burke was delivered to the US Navy December 23 , just 33 days after construction began . The Navy placed Burke under charter to Northland Transportation Company in early 1944 .

On December 28 , 1944 , while transporting ammunition to Mindoro , Philippines , Burke was hit by a Japanese kamikaze aircraft , and disintegrated in a tremendous explosion . John Burke was one of three Liberty Ships and one of forty @-@ seven ships sunk by kamikaze attack during World War II .

= = Construction and design = =

John Burke was powered by two oil @-@ fired boilers and a single 2 @, @ 500 hp ( 1 @, @ 864 kW ) vertical type , triple @-@ expansion reciprocating steam engine . The machinery space ( dark blue in the picture ) was located at the middle of the ship ( see the color @-@ coded image ) . The single propeller was driven through a long propeller shaft that ran through a tunnel ( lower green area in the picture ) under the aft cargo holds . The propeller rotated at 76 rpm , giving a speed of about 11 knots ( 20 km / h ; 13 mph ) . There were two decks running the full length of the ship , with seven watertight bulkheads dividing the machinery space and five cargo holds ( light blue in the picture ) , three ahead of the machinery space and two aft . Crew accommodations were provided in a large three @-@ deck structure located in the middle of the ship ( medium blue in the picture ) directly above the machinery space , and in a small structure ( medium blue in the picture ) located at the stern . The bridge , radio room and Captain 's quarters were located on the top deck ( yellow in the picture ) of the three @-@ deck structure . The fuel for the boiler was carried in several tanks ( red in the picture ) located throughout the ship . Ship 's storage ( light green in the picture ) was located at the bow and above the machinery space . Gun crew quarters and the ship 's hospital were located in the stern structure . When the ship was armed , the gun ' tubs ' ( white in the picture ) were located at the bow , stern and above the bridge . These could be any mixture of 5 inches ( 130 mm ) , 4 inches ( 101 @. @ 60 mm ) , 3 inches ( 76 mm ) , 40 millimetres ( 1 @. @ 57 in ) , 20 millimetres ( 0 @. @ 79 in ) and / or .5 inches ( 12 @. @ 70 mm ) caliber guns .

The ship 's steering was by a contrabalanced rudder ( black , at left in the picture ) , with its associated steering gear located in a compartment ( green in the picture ) above the rudder and below the aft structure . Steam @-@ powered generators provided electric power for radios , navigation equipment , refrigeration compressors , pumps , lighting , and degaussing . An evaporator produced fresh water for the boilers and for the crew . Large hatches above the cargo holds allowed steam winches and booms rigged to three centerline masts to quickly load or unload cargo .

= = History = =

Liberty ships were an expedient solution to a pressing problem , and it was never intended that they last more than five years . It is remarkable that two ( SS John W. Brown and SS Jeremiah O'Brien ) have not only survived seventy plus years of service , but that they are in ' like @-@ new ' condition , and are open to the public as museums . The British needed a way to replace the ships lost to German U @-@ boats , but did not have the resources to build them . In 1939 they asked the United States to help solve the problem , bringing a ship design that they wanted built . The design was modified to fit American production methods , and five new shipyards were built to give the shipbuilding industry capacity . These ships were called Ocean ships with each ship 's name starting

with Ocean .

The United States needed more ships as war approached . The ' Ocean ' design was revised and simplified to allow mass production . This new design was the basis for the Liberty ship . On December 7 , 1941 Japan attacked the military bases at Hawaii , Guam , and a few days later , the Philippines . Liberty ships carried weapons , ammunition , food , tools , hardware , vehicles , and other things for the war effort . They could also be equipped to carry a large number of troops by rigging bunks in the holds similar to those used by the armed guard . Liberty ships began taking troops and materials wherever they were needed , crossing both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans . Like other Liberty Ships , John Burke transported war materials between the United States and the rear areas of the Pacific War , often calling at Pearl Harbor , Australia , Guadalcanal , Hollandia and Manus .

On what would be her final trip , Burke departed Seattle , Washington for Guam , where she spent several days loading munitions for the invasion force on the island of Mindoro . Burke then departed with the 100 @-@ ship " Uncle Plus 13 " convoy , bound for Leyte in the Philippines . The convoy arrived at Leyte the night of December 27 .

Japanese forces were alerted to the convoy 's arrival shortly before daybreak on December 28 . A flight of six Japanese kamikaze fighter / bombers was sent up from Cebu Island shortly after dawn . If the convoy was destroyed , the U.S. forces on Mindoro would be cut off from their supply line .

That morning Burke and the other ships in the Mindoro @-@ bound TG 77 @.@ 11 ( under the command of Captain George F. Mentz ) were at general quarters shortly after receiving the dawn weather report that reported that air cover would not launch until the poor weather cleared . The crews began their wait for the inevitable arrival of Japanese aircraft .

= = The attack = =

At about 0815 hrs , the first kamikaze appeared on the American ship 's radar , and orders were immediately given for the convoy to begin evasive maneuvering . Through holes in the clouds , the Japanese pilots sighted the large American force as it steamed through calm seas South of Cebu and Bohol Islands . Finding the convoy without air cover , a group of six Japanese planes began their attack . One of the pilots , flying an Aichi D3A " Val " , chose John Burke as his target . Diving through heavy anti @-@ aircraft fire , the Japanese pilot had no intention of pulling out of his steep dive . At 1020 , despite the damage to his aircraft , he crashed between Burke 's # 2 and # 3 cargo holds .

A brief flash of fire was visible to most of the ships in the convoy , and for several seconds , only smoke could be seen billowing from her hold . A few seconds later , a huge pillar of fire shot out of Burke 's cargo hold , followed by an immense cloud of white smoke . Within seconds all eyes were drawn to Burke where an enormous fireball erupted as her entire cargo of munitions detonated , instantly destroying the ship and killing her crew of 40 merchant marine sailors and 28 or 29 armed guards . For several seconds , Burke was not visible under an enormous mushroom cloud of smoke , fire and explosions . Several ships nearby were damaged by the force of the blast and flying fragments . The shock wave rocked the entire convoy , and several ships reported that they had been torpedoed . A US Army " FS " type ship just aft of Burke was severely damaged by the blast , sinking before it could be identified . As the cloud of smoke cleared , nearby ships closed on Burke 's former position to search for survivors . It was soon clear that Burke , and all 68 men aboard her , were gone .

The Combat Air Patrol arrived at 1213 after the weather cleared , providing air cover for the next three hours .

The Japanese attack that morning was just the beginning of a two @-@ day series of attacks on the convoy , costing several more ships and hundreds of lives . In spite of the near @-@ constant attacks , the force reached its destination at 0648 December 30 with much @-@ needed material for the Mindoro invasion .

Today , SS John Burke 's fragments lie 1 @,@ 500 feet ( 457 m ) below the surface , in the vicinity of 9 ° 1 ' 11 " N 123 ° 26 ' 50 " E , the location the ship was last seen , in the strait between Negros ,

Siquijor Islands and Dapitan , Zamboanga del Norte , Mindanao , Philippines .

= = Liberty Ship Resources = =

SS John W. Brown website

SS JEREMIAH O 'BRIEN website

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