

= SS American (1900) =

SS American was a steel @-@ hulled , single propeller cargo ship built at Chester , Pennsylvania , by the Delaware River Iron Shipbuilding and Engine Works for the American @-@ Hawaiian Steamship Company and the Hawaiian sugar trade . During World War I service for the United States Navy , the ship was known as USS American (ID @-@ 2292) . Late in her career for American @-@ Hawaiian , she was renamed SS Honolulu .

American was a little more than 430 feet (130 m) long and 51 feet (16 m) abeam . Coal @-@ fired boilers powered a single triple @-@ expansion steam engine which turned a single screw propeller . This power plant ? supplemented with auxiliary sails ? was capable of moving the ship at up to 12 knots (22 km / h) . As one of the first four ships ordered by the American @-@ Hawaiian Steamship Company after its 1899 formation , American was used on the Hawaii ? New York sugar trade via the Straits of Magellan . In 1901 she set a record for the fastest New York ? San Francisco ocean passage , making the voyage in 59 days . After 1905 , she was employed in inter @-@ coastal service via the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and , after it opened in 1914 , the Panama Canal .

Taken up for wartime service after the United States entered World War I in April 1917 , she completed two round @-@ trip voyages to France without incident . Shortly after the start of her third such voyage , however , she collided with another U.S. Navy vessel , USS West Gate , sinking that vessel with the loss of seven of her crew in October 1918 . She completed one more round trip in U.S. Navy service , sailing to Gibraltar after the Armistice in November . She returned to New York in February 1919 , was decommissioned , and returned to American @-@ Hawaiian .

SS American resumed cargo service with American @-@ Hawaiian after her return from naval service , being renamed Honolulu in 1925 . She was sold in 1926 and taken to Osaka where she was broken up sometime after her arrival there in November that same year .

= = Design and construction = =

The American @-@ Hawaiian Steamship Company , shortly after its March 1899 formation , placed orders for its first four ships for the company 's planned sugar service between Hawaii and the East Coast of the United States . Three ships ? American , Hawaiian , and Oregonian ? were ordered from Delaware River Shipbuilding in Chester , Pennsylvania , while the fourth ? Californian ? was ordered from Union Iron Works of San Francisco . The contract cost of the three Pennsylvania @-@ built ships was set at \$ 425 @, @ 000 each , but financing costs drove the final cost of each ship higher ; the final cost of American was \$ 61 @. @ 00 per deadweight ton , which totaled just under \$ 540 @, @ 000 .

American (Delaware River yard no . 308) was launched on 14 July 1900 , and delivered to American @-@ Hawaiian in October , joining Californian in the American @-@ Hawaiian Fleet . American , the first of the trio of Pennsylvania ships to be completed , was 6 @, @ 861 gross register tons (GRT) , and was 430 feet 1 inch (131 @. @ 09 m) in length and 51 feet 2 inches (15 @. @ 60 m) abeam . She had a deadweight tonnage of 8 @, @ 850 LT DWT , and her cargo holds had a storage capacity of 376 @, @ 699 cubic feet (10 @, @ 666 @. @ 9 m³) . American had a speed of 12 knots (22 km / h) , and was powered by a single triple @-@ expansion steam engine with coal @-@ fired boilers , that drove a single screw propeller . American and her sister ships , equipped with two upright masts , carried and used two large trysails , a fore staysail and jib , and a main staysail , to help conserve coal for their journeys .

= = Early career = =

At the start of her American @-@ Hawaiian career , American sailed in scheduled service from New York and Philadelphia around South America via the Straits of Magellan , up to San Francisco and from there to Honolulu . Along the way , she was refueled with coal at Saint Lucia in the British West Indies and at Coronel in Chile . The Chilean coal was often of lesser quality which burned too quickly and dangerously sent sparks flying from the ship 's funnel ; the quality and fire danger were

key reasons that all subsequent American @-@ Hawaiian ships used oil instead of coal for fuel .

The early American @-@ Hawaiian voyages averaged about 70 days in each direction from New York to San Francisco , which was about 55 days shorter than the typical time required for sailing ships . Insurers initially made the company pay a 6 % premium for taking its large ships through the treacherous 300 @-@ nautical @-@ mile (560 km) channel in the Straits of Magellan , rather than the safer passage around Cape Horn . But by 1903 , American @-@ Hawaiian 's safe operation and experience on the route allowed the company to negotiate a 3 ½ % rate , just a ½ % surcharge over the standard rate of 3 % . The experience on the route also paid off in shorter transit times : American set a record time with a 59 @-@ day New York @-@ to @-@ San Francisco passage in 1901 . However , typical times for the trip were just over 50 days by 1903 .

In May 1905 , after two years of negotiations , American @-@ Hawaiian signed a contract with the Tehuantepec National Railway of Mexico , abandoning the Straits of Magellan route in favor of the Tehuantepec Route . Shipments on the Tehuantepec Route would arrive at Mexican ports ? Salina Cruz , Oaxaca , for eastbound cargo , and Coatzacoalcas , Veracruz , for westbound cargo ? and would traverse the Isthmus of Tehuantepec , Mexico 's narrowest point , on the railroad . Eastbound shipments were primarily sugar and pineapple from Hawaii , while westbound cargoes were more general in nature .

After the United States occupation of Veracruz on 21 April 1914 (which found six American @-@ Hawaiian ships in Mexican ports) , the Huerta @-@ led Mexican government closed the Tehuantepec National Railway to American shipping . This loss of access , coupled with the fact that the Panama Canal was not yet open , caused American @-@ Hawaiian to return to its historic route of sailing around South America via the Straits of Magellan in late April . With the opening of the Panama Canal on 15 August , American @-@ Hawaiian ships switched to taking that route . In October 1915 , landslides closed the Panama Canal and all American @-@ Hawaiian ships , including American , returned to the Straits of Magellan route again .

American 's exact movements from this time through early 1917 are unclear . She may have been in the half of the American @-@ Hawaiian fleet that was chartered for transatlantic service . She may also have been in the group of American @-@ Hawaiian ships chartered for service to South America , delivering coal , gasoline , and steel in exchange for coffee , nitrates , cocoa , rubber , and manganese ore . However , when the United States entered World War I in April 1917 , the entire American @-@ Hawaiian fleet , including American , was requisitioned by the United States Shipping Board (USSB) , which then returned the ships for operation by American @-@ Hawaiian .

= = U.S. Navy service = =

In May 1918 , the United States Shipping Board (USSB) selected American for service carrying United States Army cargo to France as a part of the U.S. Navy 's Naval Overseas Transportation Service (NOTS) . On 22 May , American was turned over to the Navy and assigned the identification number of 2292 . She was commissioned as USS American on 25 May with Lieutenant Commander (Lt. Cdr .) Myron P. Schermerhorn , USNRF , in command . One week later , American , loaded with cargo , departed New York and joined up with an eastbound convoy on 2 June , reaching Brest , France , on 17 June . She sailed to Bordeaux via La Pallice to unload , and departed on 6 July , reaching New York 16 days later . After a quick turnaround , American sailed for Bordeaux again on 5 August and had arrived back at New York on 6 September .

= = Collision with West Gate = =

On 4 October , American began her third trip to France in a convoy escorted by the cruiser Denver and headed to Bordeaux . On the night of 6 / 7 October ? noted in the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships as " particularly dark and rainy " ? the ships were having trouble maintaining their stations in the convoy ; American was sailing in the column headed by the convoy 's guide ship , Sagua .

At 02 : 28 on 7 October , while about 250 nautical miles (460 km) south of Halifax , the steering gear engine of USS West Gate ? ahead and to the starboard of American ? jammed , sending the ship veering sharply to the port . West Gate 's crew put the ship 's engine at half speed to try to drop out of the convoy , but minutes later , men on the bridge sighted the red light from the oncoming American . Though West Gate 's bridge rang up " full speed ahead " to avoid the collision , there was not enough time for the engine to respond before American 's bow cut into the starboard side of West Gate , near the poop deck .

American , which was lightly damaged by the collision , reversed her engine to back out of the tangle while West Gate 's engine was shut down . After American was completely backed out , West Gate began rapidly settling and was ordered abandoned . A total of seven men from West Gate died in the accident ? two when their lifeboat capsized , and a further five that probably died in the initial impact . West Gate 's commanding officer , Lt. Cdr . R. B. Vandervoort , and six men he had personally escorted to a life raft were picked up by one of American 's lifeboats at 06 : 00 , after some 3 ½ hours in the water . The Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships does not report any casualties on American from the collision .

American proceeded to Halifax , where she had her collision damage repaired over the next six weeks . She departed for Gibraltar on 27 November , a little more than two weeks after the signing of the Armistice with Germany that ended the fighting . After calling at that British port on 9 December , American docked at Marseilles , before leaving for New York in the new year , arriving there on 9 February 1919 . American was decommissioned and returned to American @-@ Hawaiian on 4 March , and formally struck from the Naval Vessel Register on 14 May .

= = Later career = =

American resumed cargo service with American @-@ Hawaiian after her return from World War I service . Though the company had abandoned its original Hawaiian sugar routes by this time , American sailed in inter @-@ coastal service through the Panama Canal . In June 1925 , American @-@ Hawaiian announced its intent to acquire six steamers from W. R. Grace and Company . Later in the year , American was renamed Honolulan in order to free her name for the newly acquired Santa Barbara . In 1926 , Honolulan was sold for scrap . She was taken to Osaka , Japan , and was broken up some time after her arrival there in November that same year .