

= SS Washingtonian (1913) =

SS Washingtonian was a cargo ship launched in 1913 by the Maryland Steel Company as one of eight sister ships for the American @-@ Hawaiian Steamship Company . At the time of her launch , she was the largest cargo ship under American registry . During the United States occupation of Veracruz in April 1914 , Washingtonian was chartered by the United States Department of the Navy for service as a non @-@ commissioned refrigerated supply ship for the U.S. fleet stationed off the Mexican coast .

In January 1915 , after a little more than one year of service , Washingtonian collided with the schooner Elizabeth Palmer off the Delaware coast and sank in ten minutes with the loss of her \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 cargo of 10 @,@ 000 long tons (10 @,@ 200 t) of raw Hawaiian sugar . In the days after Washingtonian 's sinking , the price of sugar in the United States increased almost 9 % , partly attributed to the loss of Washingtonian 's cargo . Lying under approximately 100 feet (30 m) of water , Washingtonian 's wreck is one of the most popular recreational dive sites on the eastern seaboard .

= = Design and construction = =

In November 1911 , the American @-@ Hawaiian Steamship Company placed an order with the Maryland Steel Company of Sparrows Point , Maryland , for two new cargo ships ? Panaman and Washingtonian . The contract cost of the ships was set at the construction cost plus an 8 % profit for Maryland Steel , but capped at a maximum cost of \$ 640 @,@ 000 each . The construction was financed by Maryland Steel with a credit plan that called for a 5 % down payment in cash and nine monthly installments for the balance . The deal had provisions that allowed some of the nine installments to be converted into longer @-@ term notes or mortgages . The final cost of Washingtonian , including financing costs , was \$ 71 @.@ 49 per deadweight ton , which totaled just under \$ 733 @,@ 000 .

Washingtonian (Maryland Steel yard no . 131) was the second ship built under the contract . The ship was 6 @,@ 649 gross register tons (GRT) , and was 360 feet 11 inches (110 @.@ 01 m) in length (between perpendiculars) and 50 feet 2 inches (15 @.@ 29 m) abeam . She had a deadweight tonnage of 10 @,@ 250 LT DWT , and , at the time of her launch , was the largest American @-@ flagged cargo ship . Washingtonian had a speed of 12 @.@ 5 knots (23 @.@ 2 km / h) , and was powered by a single steam engine with oil @-@ fired boilers which drove a single screw propeller . Washingtonian 's cargo holds , providing a storage capacity of 490 @,@ 858 cubic feet (13 @,@ 899 @.@ 6 m³) , were outfitted with a complete refrigeration plant so she could carry perishable products from the West to the East Coast , such as Pacific Northwest salmon or fresh produce from Southern California farms .

= = Service = =

When Washingtonian began sailing for American @-@ Hawaiian , the company shipped cargo from East Coast ports via the Tehuantepec Route to West Coast ports and Hawaii , and vice versa . Shipments on the Tehuantepec Route arrived at Mexican ports ? Salina Cruz , Oaxaca , for eastbound cargo , and Coatzacoalcas , Veracruz , for westbound cargo ? and traversed the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on the Tehuantepec National Railway . Eastbound shipments were primarily sugar and pineapple from Hawaii , while westbound cargoes were more general in nature . Washingtonian sailed in this service , but it is not known whether she sailed on the east or west side of North America . After the United States occupation of Veracruz on 21 April 1914 (which took place while six American @-@ Hawaiian ships were being held in various Mexican ports) , the Huerta @-@ led Mexican government closed the Tehuantepec National Railway to American shipping . This loss of access (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 . During the U.S. occupation , Washingtonian was chartered by the Navy Department to serve as a non @-@

commissioned refrigerator and supply ship for the U.S. fleet off Mexico . She was outfitted for her first voyage at the New York Navy Yard and sailed with 500 @, @ 000 pounds (230 @, @ 000 kg) of fresh meat for the Navy and the United States Army . Washingtonian sailed in a rotation with the commissioned Navy stores ships USS Culgoa and USS Celtic .

With the opening of the Panama Canal on 15 August , American @-@ Hawaiian ships switched to taking the canal route . In late August , American @-@ Hawaiian announced that Washingtonian ? her Navy charter ended by this time ? would sail on a San Francisco ? Panama Canal ? Boston route , sailing opposite Mexican , Honolulan , and sister ship Pennsylvanian .

Washingtonian sailed from Los Angeles in early October with a load of California products ? including canned and dried fruits , beans , and wine ? for New York and Boston . After delivering that load , Washingtonian headed for Honolulu , Hawaii , to take on a 10 @, @ 000 @-@ long @-@ ton (10 @, @ 000 t) load of raw sugar valued at about \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 . Departing Honolulu on 20 December , Washingtonian arrived at Balboa on 17 January 1915 and transited the Panama Canal . Sailing from Cristóbal two days later , she headed for the Delaware Breakwater en route to Philadelphia .

= = Collision = =

At 3 : 30 a.m. on 26 January , some 20 nautical miles (37 km) from Fenwick Island , Delaware , the American schooner Elizabeth Palmer was under full sail at 8 knots (15 km / h) on a southwest by south course . Elizabeth Palmer 's captain saw a large steam vessel , Washingtonian , on an apparent collision course ahead , but did not change course since navigational rules of the time required steam @-@ powered vessels to yield to vessels under sail power . The captain of Washingtonian , two quartermasters , and a seaman were all on watch and saw Elizabeth Palmer , but misjudged the schooner 's rapid pace . When Washingtonian , underway at 12 knots (22 km / h) , did not change course or speed , Elizabeth Palmer impacted the starboard side of the steamer , leaving a large hole that sank Washingtonian ten minutes later . Less than a mile (2 km) away , Elizabeth Palmer , with her jib boom and the top of her foremast stripped away by the impact , began taking on water through her split seams . When it became apparent that the big schooner would sink , her captain ordered her abandonment , and she slowly settled and went down about an hour after the collision . After Washingtonian 's crew abandoned ship , one crewman , a water tender , was found to be missing and was presumed drowned . Washingtonian 's 39 survivors and all 13 crew members from Elizabeth Palmer were picked up about an hour after the collision by the passenger liner Hamilton of the Old Dominion Line , which arrived at New York the next day .

The collision had repercussions for American @-@ Hawaiian and the world sugar market . The financial impact of the collision on American @-@ Hawaiian , estimated at \$ 2 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 , was devastating . Contemporary news reports in The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal both told of the collision 's impact on the sugar market . Claus A. Spreckels , president of Federal Sugar Refining , noted that the loss of even such a large cargo would not normally have much effect on the sugar market . However , weather in Cuba , then the largest supplier of sugar for the United States , had reduced that island nation 's crop by more than 200 @, @ 000 tons . Further affecting the situation was World War I , then ongoing in Europe , which had reduced the tonnage of shipping available to transport commodities like sugar . With all of these factors , the asking price for sugar futures contracts for February 1915 delivery was 2 @. @ 90 cents per pound (6 @. @ 39 cents per kg) a week before Washingtonian 's sinking , but had risen to 3 @. @ 16 cents per pound (6 @. @ 96 cents per kg) the day after the sinking .

Washingtonian 's wreck , a skeletal framework of hull plates and bulkheads , lies upside down in about 100 feet (30 m) of water , and is one of the most @-@ visited wreck sites along the eastern seaboard . Washingtonian 's wreck is a popular night dive , and also a favorite with sport divers for catching lobster .