

SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ELENI K

The single-screw steamer, *Eleni K* (originally *Johns Hopkins*) was built at Baltimore in March 1943, for the United States War Shipping Administration. It was one of 2742 mass-produced Liberty Ships, constructed to carry troops and cargo during World War II. The vessel was 441.7 feet (134.6 m) in length, 57.1 feet (17.4m) breadth, 27.9 feet (8.5 m) depth and 7245 gross tons.

Following the war the Liberty Ship, *Johns Hopkins*, was sold and renamed *Thetis* (1946) and *Santa Elena* (1956). In 1960 it was purchased by the Eleni Shipping Company and renamed *Eleni K*.

The Greek freighter arrived in Thevenard, South Australia, in mid 1966, where it was considered unseaworthy by shipping authorities and taken to Port Adelaide for repairs, before returning to load bulk wheat. On 29 September 1966 the *Eleni K* departed Thevenard with 7776 tons of wheat, bound for Port Lincoln where a further 2000 tons were to be loaded. The Harbormaster was concerned about the loading of the vessel and ensured that its master took written responsibility.

A design fault recognised early in the development of Liberty Ships was their tendency to crack around midships, yet this cargo was divided between the

forward and after holds, leaving the centre hold empty.

Approximately 90 minutes after leaving port (and only 10 minutes after the pilot disembarked) the *Eleni K* broke its back and buckled in the area of the No 3 (or central) hold. The engines were stopped, and the vessel anchored, but sank soon after. In mid-October the German freighter *G / Nickelson* salvaged 1770 tons of wheat using suction equipment, under difficult conditions, but further salvage was halted on 25 October.



Aground at Thevenard, 1966. Photo: PortsCorp

In November the *Eleni K* was refloated and towed to its present position between Goat Island and St Peter Island, where it was grounded in 11-13 metres of water. The towing operation, by the tug *Tusker*, took four days and proved difficult, with the towline parting twice. Finally on 17 November 1966 the vessel was flooded in the fore and aft compartments, and awash at the weather deck at high tide.

An inspection of the site in 1968 revealed that illegal salvage work had caused considerable damage, including a fire in the midships accommodation, the theft of all portholes and the removal by explosives of the spare propeller.

Today the extensive remains of the *Eleni K* provide one of the best shipwreck dives in South Australia. The relatively intact vessel is sitting upright, with the top of the bridge about two metres under the surface.



***Eleni K* today**

Winches and windlass are still sitting on the deck. The engine room, as well as other sections of the site, can be penetrated and the triple expansion steam engine and boilers are still standing in position. The hull and decks appear to be in a relatively intact state, although there are signs of the hull collapsing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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