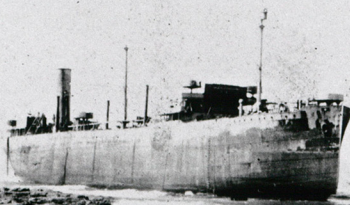


SS CITIES SERVICE BOSTON

16 MAY 1943



The SS Cities Service Boston was a 9000 ton United States oil tanker used during World War Two, to supply the Australian and Allied forces with fuel. It was shipwrecked at Bass Point in 1943.



SHELLHARBOUR
CITY MUSEUM

SS CITIES SERVICE BOSTON

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The SS *Cities Service Boston* departed Long Beach, California, with a consignment of aviation fuel, and arrived in Brisbane, Queensland 2 May 1943.

After discharging its cargo, it sailed in an 11 ship convoy (code named PG 50) to Sydney with the support of four warships *HMAS Colac, Bendigo, Ballarat* and *Moresby*. Along the way they were targeted by Japanese submarines. To avoid attack, they sailed closer to the shore.

At noon on 15 May, the *SS Cities Service Boston* was the lead ship on the starboard side, in an 18 ship convoy bound for Melbourne, en route to Iran. On board, were 62 men including 20 armed guards.

That night the convoy encountered rough seas and was scattered. The *SS Cities Service Boston* was driven towards the rocks at Bass Point and the steering mechanism was disabled.



Wreck of the SS *Cities Service Boston*



Wrecked Lifeboat from the SS *Cities Service Boston*



Salvage of the SS *Cities Service Boston*



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At 0545 on Sunday 16 May 1943, Corporal Fred Tieck was awakened by the duty soldier in the Volunteer Defence Corps hut at Bass Point. Out at sea, they saw a light flashing in the distance, and it was getting closer to the shore.

Aboard the Boston, the lookout sighted the reef, but it was already too late. The hull of the ship grated the reef and then hit hard. To prevent the ship sinking, Captain Bartholomew ordered full steam ahead to drive the ship up on the rocks to give his crew the best chance for survival.

The alarm was raised by Corporal Tieck. He could not call for help as the storm damaged the phone lines, so he sent his lance corporal two miles to Shellharbour to get help. By 0700 Defence Headquarters in Sydney were aware of the wreck and sent help from the 6th Machine Gun Battalion who were camped at Dapto.



Salvage of the SS Cities Service Boston



Dave Taylor (centre), Harry Rogers and a workmate salvaging the SS Cities Service Boston 1957



Salvaging the propeller of the SS Cities Service Boston



Salvaging the propeller of the SS Cities Service Boston



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston



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The stationed soldiers arrived at Bass Point at 0830, travelling through very deep water along the way. Some 40 soldiers, as well as the police and members of the Volunteer Defence Force (VDF), began rescuing the crew. Shellharbour locals, mainly fishermen and farmers led by Jack Burke, worked with the VDF to assist. They set up a bosun's chair which was worked in shifts.



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston

At 1600 when most of the 62 strong crew had been rescued, tragedy struck. The tide had risen by 1500 hrs and a huge rogue wave swept over the ship, washing ten or twelve soldiers into the water. Lieutenant Matchett, a champion swimmer and North Wollongong lifesaver, dived in to the oily sea and was responsible for saving at least three lives.



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston



Salvage of the SS Cities Service Boston

Lieutenant Matchett was followed by the Battalion's dentist, Captain Harris, Captain Nicholson and Senior Mate Askew. Most men eventually clambered back onto the rocks. Many of the rescued crew were taken to the homes of Shellharbour locals, who took care of them until proper assistance could arrive.

Four soldiers who were swept into the sea, lost their lives;

Sergeant William Francis Allen NX 133804

Private Geoffrey William Pitt NX 127791 (body recovered)

Private Raymond John Snell NX 118174 (body recovered)

Private Bruce Howard Simmons NX 111705



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Mick Wilkinson of the 6th Machine Gun Battalion recalled

'At the time we didn't know they were drowned till we got back to camp. It was bad enough being in the rain all day then to find your mates were missing. That made it a horrible night. There was hardly a word. 'Happy' (Private Geoffrey Pitt), slept next to me in the tent'.

The soldiers were posthumously awarded the US Soldiers Medal by US Consul-General Mr Ely Palmer at Martin Place, Sydney 4 June 1944.

The wrecked ship was stripped, and parts sold to a subsidiary of Broken Hill Proprietary Limited (BHP).

The soldiers' bravery is remembered by a memorial at the site, and each year a memorial service is held to mark the anniversary of the wreck and to honour those men who lost their lives saving others.

46 years after the event four surviving American crew visited Australia for the Memorial Service at Bass Point, and personally thanked some of their rescuers face to face.



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston



Wreck of the SS Cities Service Boston



Martin Schultenups with a seal at the site of the SS Cities Service Boston wreck at Bass Point



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