

# 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 2,742 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 (17.4 m) breadth, 27.9 feet (8.5 m) depth and 7,245 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, Greece, and renamed *Eleni K*.

*Eleni K* arrived in Thevenard, South Australia, in mid-1966. Shipping authorities considered it unseaworthy and it was taken to Port Adelaide for repairs, before returning to load bulk wheat. On 29 September 1966 the *Eleni K* departed Thevenard with 7,776 tons of wheat, bound for Port Lincoln where a further 2,000 tons were to be loaded. The Harbourmaster 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 1,770 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 m 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.

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.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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