

Bunker Hill

Wednesday, 23 January 2008

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The S.S. Bunker Hill was one of the largest tankers on the high seas. It was once stationed east of Yap Island, which was controlled by the Japanese in World War II. The main cargo of the ship was aviation fuel and crude oil. On 5 March 1964, the Bunker Hill had just completed removing cargo at the Shell Oil dock in Tacoma. The vessel was then on its way to reload at the Shell refinery in Anacortes, when she sank after an explosion.

Background Information Vessel type: T-2 oil tanker

Length: 524 feet

Beam: 68 feet
In sworn statements taken after the sinking, a dock worker and local agent for the owners of the Bunker Hill said that the ship had been completely emptied of cargo (gasoline, diesel oil, stove oil, and industrial fuel) on 5 March 1964. Left onboard for the trip to Anacortes was 1,713 barrels (i.e., 71,946 gallons) of bunker fuel. NOAA reports that the Bunker Hill sank after 'being ripped apart by an explosion in an empty cargo tank.' According to the log of the Pacific Tow Boat Company, a spill response and cleanup operation occurred after the sinking from 6-11 March 1964. While no record indicates the amount of fuel recovered, the log includes a statement from 10 March 1964 that "no signs of oil" were coming from the vessel. In 1982, NOAA's Ocean Technology and Engineering Services division conducted tests of a bathymetric swath survey system on the Bunker Hill. This report determined that the bow section was located south of the stem section. The bow section is lying on its side and includes the midship superstructure which houses the bridge. This section is approximately 300 feet long and 50-75 feet wide. The stem section (northern piece) appeared to have been a square piece of wreckage 100 by 100 feet. Although the stem section described in the NOAA report is significantly smaller than the stern of the Ship, the fuel oil tank was originally located at the stern of the boat.