



FORGOTTEN WRECKS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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SS *Algerian*

Built: 1896

Lost: 1916

Reason for Loss: Mined

Algerian was built in Sunderland by the Sunderland Shipbuilding Co. and launched in 1896. Initially called *Flintshire*, she was officially classified as a steel screw schooner and measured 110m in length, 13m breadth and a depth in the holds of 8m. She was powered by a triple expansion 3-cylinder steam engine, supplied by two single ended boilers. Her masts could be used to raise sail if necessary (hence the schooner classification).

Flintshire was built for Jenkins and Co. of London, who operated her until 1907. She was sold to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company in that year and in 1913 she changed hands again – this time to Ellerman Lines, who renamed her *Algerian*.

At 8.20am on 12th January 1916, the *Algerian* weighed anchor and departed the Cowes Roads. She sailed west out of the Solent on her way to Avonmouth in ballast, but was barely 2.5 miles south west of the Needles at 10.15am when a loud explosion blew a large hole in the starboard side of the vessel. She began to take on water immediately and started to settle. All of the crew safely escaped in the three lifeboats, but standing by the vessel for a while they realised that the ship wasn't sinking and the captain and some crew re-boarded her.

No. 2 hold was flooded and No.1 was filling, but the flooding had not yet caused the ship's bulkheads to collapse and, for the time being, the flooding was contained. Three Admiralty drifters and the Trinity House vessel *Warden*, alerted by the explosion, arrived to assist and *Algerian* was carefully turned and towed back past the Needles. The tug *Walvisch* arrived to assist with the towing and slowly the *Algerian* was taken up the Solent towards Cowes. At 2pm it was approaching the boom defence near Cowes.

At this point Commander Harrold, the Senior Naval Officer (SNO) of the Western Patrol, arrived on the *Robina* and boarded the *Algerian*. Realising that the running tide was going to cause her to collide with the boom vessel *Magda*, he ordered the *Algerian* to drop anchor.

According to the SNO, the No.1 bulkhead finally gave way as the ship came to a standstill. Although the master attributed this to having to let the anchor go, the Admiralty believed



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that this made little difference and that the bulkhead would have failed anyway, as there had been no effort to shore it up. The SNO tried to secure tows to beach *Algerian* immediately, but the ship started to rapidly sink by the head and the crew abandoned ship.

Algerian sank bow first until her hull touched the bottom. She then heeled over to port and went down on her side in less than 2 minutes. Although the SNO later recommended sending a diver to ascertain the cause of the explosion, the loss of HMT *Albion II* to a mine near the Needles the following day, may have satisfied the Admiralty that a mine was the cause. There is no record of a diver visiting the wreck and, save the placing of a wreck buoy over the site, it lay undisturbed until the war finished.

In October 1920 the site was dispersed by Trinity House who cleared the site to a safe depth of 50 feet. The wreck marker buoy was removed but, in October 1925, Trinity House claimed to have further dispersed the wreck to a safe depth of 48 feet, suggesting that the 1920s dispersal was not as efficient as believed.

According to more recent diving reports, the *Algerian* still stands 7m high on the seabed. At least one boiler can be identified but the thin hull plates are fragile and easily distorted. Considerable amounts of rubbish are understood to gather at the site.

It is almost certain that the *Algerian* struck one of four mines laid by the German U-boat SM *UC-5*. The U-boat had actually lain its deadly cargo in late October 1915, and the mines had remarkably remained undisturbed until the *Algerian* ran into one. The following day, the Admiralty sent a number of Auxiliary Patrol vessels into the area to sweep for mines. During the sweep the trawler *Albion II* fouled a mine and sank shortly after.

Sources

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