

# “HER LOSS REMAINS UNKNOWN”

THE STRANGE STORY OF THE  
DISAPPEARANCE OF THE USS CYCLOPS  
BY MARSHALL WAINWRIGHT

Sometimes the most mundane of ships leave a legacy of mystery and fascination. Such was the case of the USS *Cyclops*. Built by William Cramp & Sons of Philadelphia, the USS *Cyclops* (AC-4) was the second of four *Proteus*-class colliers built to haul coal for the US Navy. The second Navy ship to carry this name, *Cyclops* was launched on 7 May 1910 and placed into service on 7 November of that year.

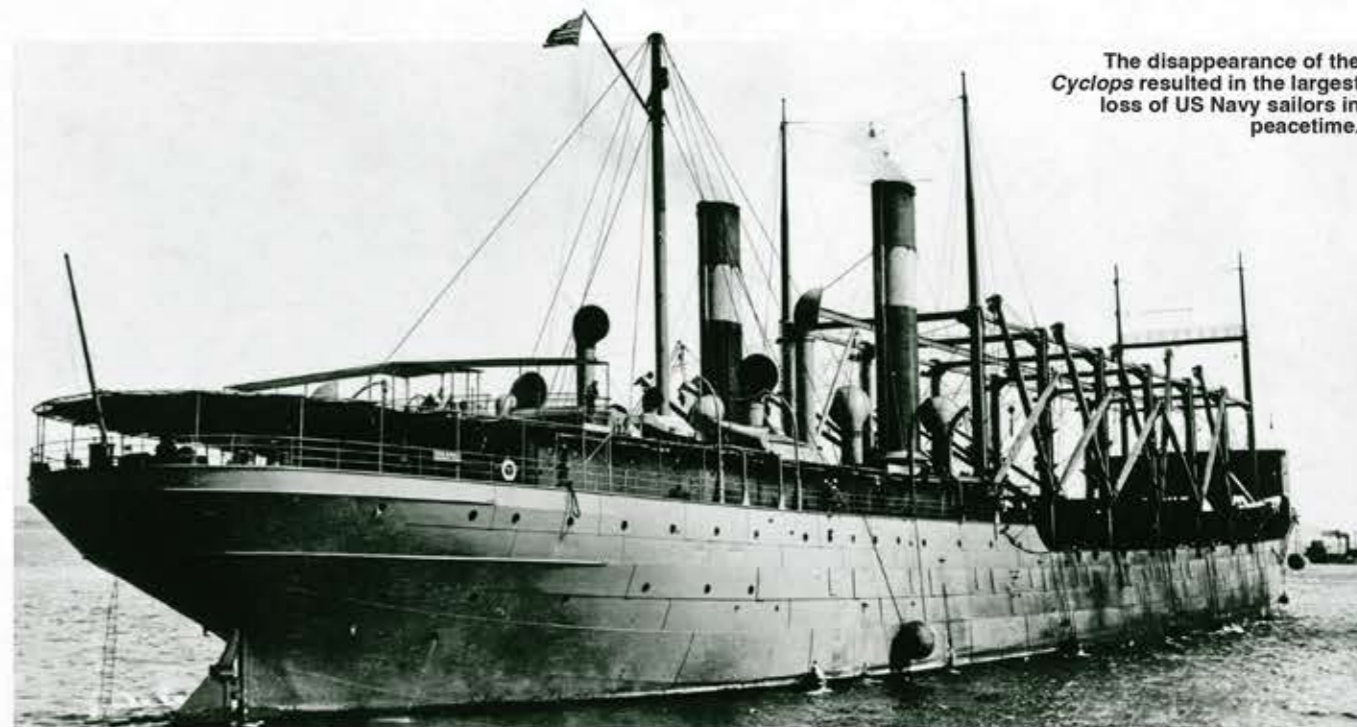
*Cyclops* was some 542 feet in length with a beam of 65 feet and a draft of 27 feet six inches. The ship had a displacement of 19,670 tons and initially went into service with the Naval Auxiliary Service's Atlantic Division. She voyaged in the Baltic Sea area from May to July 1911 in order to supply ships of the Navy's Second Division. After that service, she returned to Norfolk, Virginia, and operated on the East Coast from Newport, Rhode Island, to the Caribbean, servicing the fleet when and where needed.

When the United States occupied Veracruz, Mexico, during 1914/1915, the services of *Cyclops* were called upon to coal the many Navy ships on patrol in that area. This began with the Battle of Veracruz and lasted for seven months. The incident came in the midst of poor diplomatic relations between Mexico and the USA and was related to the ongoing bloody Mexican Revolution that was tearing the country

apart. The occupation was a response to the Tampico Affair of 9 April 1914, when Mexican forces detained nine America sailors. The unarmed sailors were arrested when they entered a fuel loading station. The sailors were released by the Mexicans but USN

Cmdr. Henry T. Mayo demanded an apology along with a 21-gun salute. He got the apology, but not the salute. This, and other problems with

Certainly not the most attractive of sea-going vessels, *Cyclops* and her three sisterships were built for the efficient hauling of coal and other minerals. Ships in her class had a distinct superstructure with a dozen vertical beams, two stacks, and an elevated bridge near the bow.



The disappearance of the *Cyclops* resulted in the largest loss of US Navy sailors in peacetime.

Mexico, would lead President Woodrow Wilson to order the occupation.

To cope with Mexican resistance, some 6000 troops eventually went ashore and there was a brief bombardment from the long guns of the ships in the harbor. Two early aircraft

built by Glenn Curtiss were transported to the area, assembled, and flown over Veracruz on scouting duties. This was

the first-ever operational use of Navy aircraft and the first time American aviators had been shot at by ground forces. Into this melee sailed the *Cyclops* and the ship immediately began coaling the large variety of warships that were now in the harbor. She also assisted in transporting refugees from the fighting.

When the United States entered the Great War, the *Cyclops* was commissioned on 1 May 1917 and fitted with four 4-inch guns. This meant that instead of being run by civilians, the coal ship crews now had officers that were members of the Naval Reserve Force. The next month, she joined a convoy to France and returned to the USA in July. She then served along the East Coast, except for a single voyage