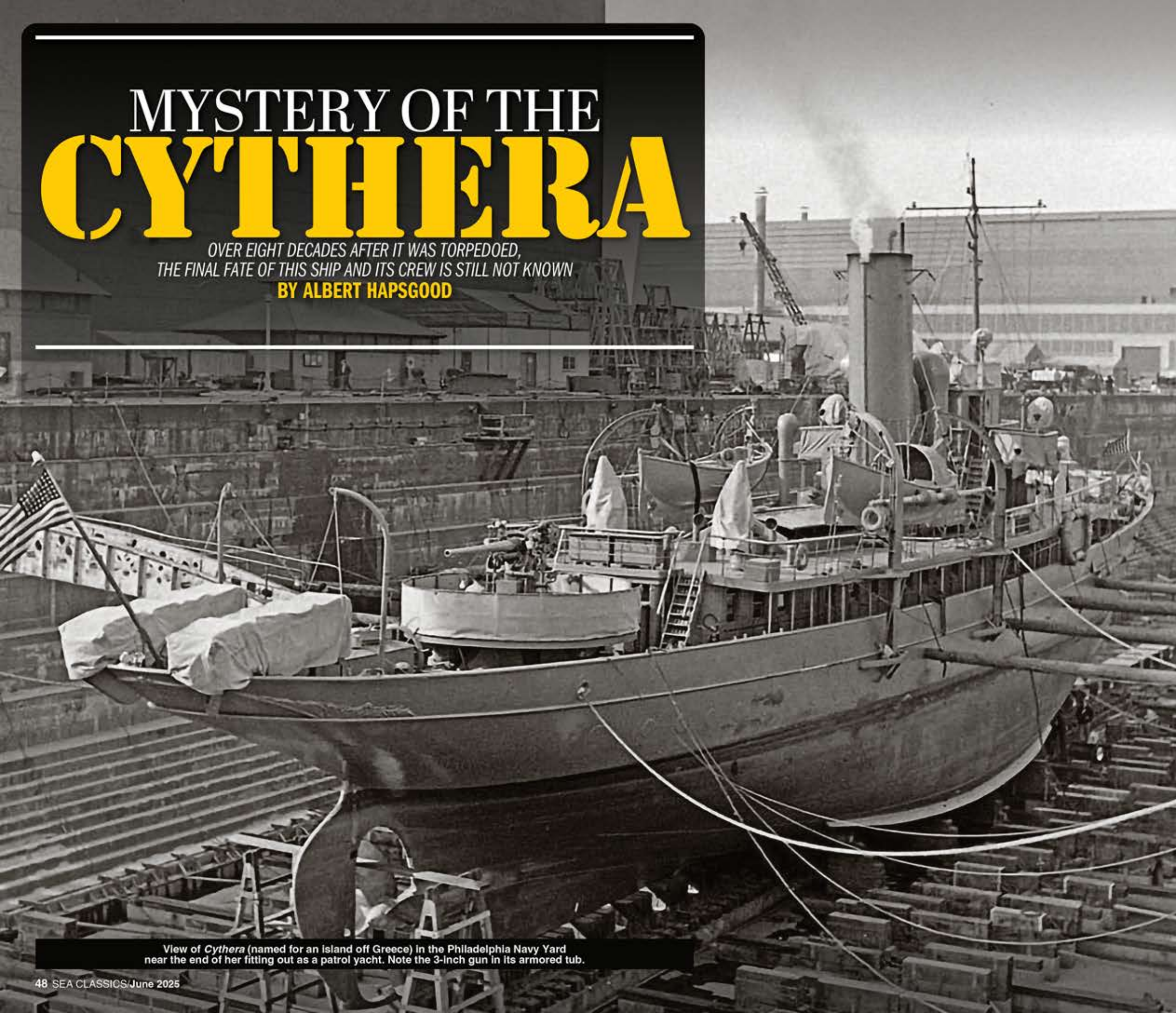


MYSTERY OF THE CYTHERA

OVER EIGHT DECADES AFTER IT WAS TORPEDOED,
THE FINAL FATE OF THIS SHIP AND ITS CREW IS STILL NOT KNOWN

BY ALBERT HAPSGOOD



View of *Cythera* (named for an island off Greece) in the Philadelphia Navy Yard near the end of her fitting out as a patrol yacht. Note the 3-inch gun in its armored tub.

During 1905, William L. Harkness, a wealthy American businessman who inherited a large portion of Standard Oil stock, decided to have a yacht built. He contracted with Ramage and Ferguson in Leith, Scotland, to build the 215-foot ship and it was launched on 20 September 1906 with the name *Agawa*. With his wealth, he became a noted yachtsman and sportsman and would own several yachts. One of those was the steam yacht *Gunilda* and during August 1911 he was sailing the vessel on Lake Superior when he ran her aground, due to his failure in recognizing a requirement for a pilot and then compounding the matter by not hiring tugs at the appropriate time. She would sink days later.

Harkness used *Agawa* mainly for pleasure but when the United States entered the Great War, the Navy leased the ship from him for service in the sector patrol. She was commissioned as USS *Cythera* (SP-575) on 30 October 1917. Arriving at Newport, Rhode Island, on 28 October 1917, she was assigned to Patrol Force, Atlantic Fleet. She departed Newport on 1 November 1917 with her squadron and escorted and towed submarine chasers to European waters before arriving at Gibraltar on 29 December. Based on that island, she patrolled and escorted convoys between Gibraltar and the Mediterranean ports in France, Italy, and North Africa. She was decommissioned on 17 March 1919 and returned to Harkness a few days later.

Harkness would die on 10 May 1919 at age 60 and left an estate worth one billion dollars. *Cythera* remained with the family but reacquired its original name. With America entering WWII, the Navy reacquired the yacht from Harkness' widow Edith on 31 December 1941 (she sold the ship to the Navy for \$1). The ship was classified as a patrol yacht with the hull number PY-26. The modification work was done at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and three 3-inch gun mounts were installed along with two stern depth charge racks and .50-caliber machine guns. Her top speed was listed at 12-kts and her captain was 56-year-old L/Commander Thomas Wright Rudderow. He had served aboard the transport USS *DeKalb* during WWI and afterwards remained active in the