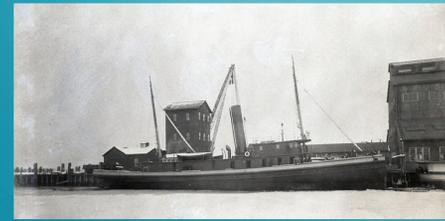


# USS CONESTOGA (AT 54)



## THE USS CONESTOGA: A 95-YEAR-OLD MYSTERY SOLVED

On March 25, 1921, the fleet tug USS *Conestoga* (AT 54) left Mare Island, California for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. After passing through the Golden Gate, the crew of 56 was never heard from again. Despite an extensive air-sea search by the U.S. Navy, no trace of the *Conestoga* was ever found. In September 2014, however, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries R/V *Fulmar* explored a sonar target in Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary that resembled an early 20th century tugboat. After a detailed investigation, NOAA confirmed the identity of the sunken vessel as USS *Conestoga*, ending the 95-year-old mystery of its disappearance.



The civilian tugboat, *Conestoga*

## SPECIFICATIONS

**NATIONALITY:** United States  
**TYPE:** Fleet Tug  
**OWNER:** United States Navy  
**MAIN BATTERY:** 3-inch 50-caliber navy gun  
**NORMAL COMPLEMENT:** 48

**BUILDER:** Maryland Steel Company  
**CLASS:** *Conestoga*  
**LAUNCHED:** November 12, 1903  
**HULL MATERIAL:** Steel  
**MACHINERY:** Triple expansion marine steam engine

**HORSEPOWER:** 1000 Indicated  
**LENGTH OVERALL (FEET):** 170.0  
**BEAM (FEET):** 29.0  
**DEPTH OF HOLD (FEET):** 15.0

## CONESTOGA FACTS:

- Served in World War I
- First Commanding Officer: Lieutenant (junior grade) Charles Olsen, USNRF
- Final Commanding Officer: Lieutenant Ernest Larkin Jones
- Sank: March 25/26, 1921
- Wreck is federally protected by the Sunken Military Craft Act and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act
- Wreck lies in Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary
- Wreck remains property of the U.S. government

## GUNNERY CREW

Here, the crew of the *Conestoga* gathers around what would later become the key piece of evidence in confirming the shipwreck's identity – a 3"/50 caliber naval gun, which first entered service on Navy ships in 1902. This photograph was taken during the *Conestoga*'s stop-over in San Diego in February 1921, only months before the ship and its crew were declared lost.



## 3-INCH/ 50 CAL. GUN

Original blueprints and photographs of the *Conestoga* were used to confirm its identity. Photos from the wreck site show the presence of a 3"/50 caliber gun aboard that had fallen to a lower deck of the ship. This image of the gun at the wreck site matched the gun seen in the 1921 image of the *Conestoga* crew. This match provided the "smoking gun" of *Conestoga*, as it presented the key diagnostic artifact in confirming the shipwreck's identity.



## CREW, 1921

Members of the *Conestoga* crew stand aboard the ship's deck in this photograph taken during the ship's stay in San Diego in 1921. Fifty-six members were aboard when the ship left from Mare Island, passing through the Golden Gate on March 25, 1921. In the months that followed, the U.S. Navy initiated the second largest air-sea search in American history to find *Conestoga* and its crew.

# TIMELINE



1903 - *Conestoga* was built for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company by the Maryland Steel Company at Sparrows Point in Baltimore, MD.

Feb. 6, 1904 - Painting of the civilian tug *Conestoga*. *Conestoga* was delivered to the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company to start its service. The tug served uneventfully except for occasional mishaps.

Sept. 14, 1917 - *Conestoga* was purchased by the U.S. Navy following the United States' entry into World War I. It was reclassified as USS *Conestoga* (AT 54) in 1920.

March 25, 1921 - Lieutenant Ernest Larkin Jones was the USS *Conestoga*'s last commanding officer. On its final voyage, the tug left Mare Island, CA for its duty station at Tutuila Samoan Islands via Pearl Harbor, HI.

June 30, 1921 - The Navy decided to officially list *Conestoga* as lost at sea with all hands effective June 30, 1921, and with that, the story of the tug entered the history books as one of the great unsolved mysteries of the Navy.

Sept. 2009 - A NOAA/Fugro multibeam sonar survey of the area around the Farallon Islands documented a probable shipwreck at an estimated depth of 189 feet.

Sept. 2014 - During an expedition aboard the R/V *Fulmar*, an ROV was used to investigate the unknown shipwreck.

Oct. 2015 - NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the U.S. Navy returned to the wreck site using an ROV to gain additional information and examine diagnostic features of the wreck.

