

607 3 2 1 On the morning of October 22, 1949, the S/S SANTA ISABEL arrived Charleston laden with a cargo of bananas and Peruvian cotton in bales. The Peruvian cotton was unloaded directly from the hatches of the ship upon decked over barges known as lighters for towage up the Cooper River approximately nine miles to the fumigation plant.

Two lighters were chartered. One was obtained from Charleston Constructors for \$15 per day. The bales of cotton were stacked on the decks of the lighters and at 4 p.m. the Tug FORT SUMTER left Adgers Wharf under command of John J. Jackson and proceeded north to the SANTA ISABEL. The Tug FORT SUMTER nudged both lighters up beyond the piers of the Todd Shipyards, where the lighters were rearranged and secured for the voyage. The Tug FORT SUMTER for a fee of \$15 per hour began a routine tow up the Cooper River riding a flood tide toward the fumigation plant. The lighters danced across the calm waters, the smell of Peru hung heavy in the air, and life was good.

A deckhand gave the alarm. The Charleston Constructors lighter was sinking. Captain Jackson stopped his engines and observed both bits on the lighter fail. The lighter floated free from the tug. Bales of cotton began to fall into the harbor and the lighter was awash to her decks. The FORT SUMTER beached the sunken lighter on the eastern shore of the river. On the morning of October 23rd, the sunken lighter was pumped out and towed up river carrying wet bales of cotton for fumigation. But many bales were lost.

At dawn two days after the sinking, in what appeared to be a reenactment of D-Day, the beach of Sullivan's Island was discovered

littered with bales of Peruvian cotton. They were rescued, placed on trucks, and taken to the fumigation plant and then to City Compress for drying and reconditioning.

Cargo owners sued for their loss. Some claimed the Tug towed the lighter with the low end forward, but Tug FORT SUMTER and her owners denied negligence. Examinations after the casualty supported poor maintenance and unseaworthiness of the barge as cause of the loss. June 26, 1951, Judgment for cargo owners against the lighter in rem and against charterer, reduced 10% for lack of diligence by cargo owners in reconditioning cotton. No liability for Tug FORT SUMTER. At that point in history, no one had ever seen an ocean shipping container.

More next week on The Admiralty Docket. Until then, remember your rights and responsibilities may change as you approach the shore and may God Almighty grant you pleasant sailing. 607
