

On Saturday afternoon, July 14, 2007, nineteen people gathered for a weekend of diving eastern Lake Erie aboard Osprey Charter's boat "Southwind." Aboard were members of the Lake Erie Wreck Divers (LEWD), the Bay Area Divers (BAD), and other individuals. The divers included KB Sporck, Pete Deegan, Ed Noga, Bob Overstreet, Penny Clark, Leslie Taborac, Dave Miller, Doug Dobransky, Jim Jones, Roy Morris, Ed Selent, Griff Ralston, Ken Hyatt, Dave Berman, Jason Myatt, Marga Devam, Dave Anderson, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee. Jim Herbert captained the boat with the able help of Mike as deckhand. Unfortunately, the weather was not very cooperative with overcast, windy conditions, 3'-4' seas, and whitecaps, making impossible a long run to the originally planned wrecks of the "Trade Wind" and "Crystal Wreck." So, instead, it was decided to go to closer wrecks for Saturday and try to run to the originally planned wrecks the next day, Sunday.

Clouds and rain approached as the trip was underway to the first wreck, which fortunately was just a short trip from Barcelona's harbor. It was the "John J. Boland," a large steel freighter that foundered in 135' of water in October, 1932, after a sudden storm caught it without its hatch covers secured and excess coal loaded on its deck. Four people died in the sudden sinking of the ship, which – per typical fashion with steel ships – rolled as it sank. As a result, the wreck lies almost upside down, but it is partially on its starboard side, exposing the port deck and gunwale. Because of the stormy conditions and the morning trip's report of 5'-10' of visibility on wrecks to the east, it was feared the dive was going to have poor conditions. However, the divers were pleasantly surprised to find about 40' of visibility and bright ambient lighting conditions on the bottom. The bottom temperature was a little cooler than normal at 41 deg F, but the thermocline was at about 55' with 70 deg F water and 20'-30' of visibility above it.

The mooring was tied to the skeg near the large four-bladed propeller and single rudder at the stern. The rudder appears to be of an older and slightly archaic design when compared to modern rudders. Although the bottom is fairly deep, most of the wreck can be seen by swimming along the gunwale at a depth of 105'-110'. Because of the large size of the ship (250' length), almost the entire dive could be spent just swimming along its length with little time left to examine the bow and stern. Scooters greatly help to see the entire wreck of the "Boland," and there were three scooters used by various divers aboard. The rest of the divers spent most of their time on the stern or only swam half of the wreck's length. The stern deckhouse can be examined, and it offers much to see. Its doorways and portholes can be looked into to see the partially silted interior of the rooms, but it would be unsafe to enter without the proper equipment and training. The interior is easily silted, and the tilted landscape makes disorientation easy. Mounted on the deck around this deckhouse can be seen various pieces of equipment like a large winch, stairs, railings, and piping. Lifeboat davits can also be seen plunging into the mud. Swimming forward, many large open, empty cargo holds are passed. It's a long swim, but eventually the bow's deckhouse is reached. Inside its doorways can be seen the officers'

quarters. Peeking inside the doorways, nice wood paneling can be seen on the walls along with various pieces of furniture like bed frames, radiators, and cabinets. Then it's a long swim back to the stern and the mooring line.

After surfacing, it was discovered conditions were beginning to calm down with only 2'-3' seas. This made for a more pleasant trip to the second dive site, the "Betty Hedger," also called the "Sulfur Barge." This wreck's nickname comes from the large pile of sulfur cargo, which dominates the center of the wreck. It is a wooden barge that sank in 115' of water during a November, 1937, storm while being towed with two other barges. It is unclear if the other two barges sank in deep water or not. The mooring is tied to a concrete mooring block off the bow, which points southwest. Upon descending it was discovered visibility was again as good as or even better than the previous dive at approximately 40'-50', and lighting conditions were even brighter. The hull's sides are fallen outwards, leaving the large cargo hatch frames improbably suspended 10'-15' off the bottom and delicately balanced on a series of large square center posts running down the length of the ship. The hatches all form one large hatch with dividers at each support post. Decking is suspended along the sides of the hatch frames with occasional large cleats attached. The entire structure appears to have a "T" shape when viewed from the front with the sulfur packed around the center posts in a large mound.

Unfortunately, some time in the recent past, the bow has collapsed and fallen forward towards the mooring block. Previously, there had been a bow deck with a capstan and two large bollards at the center for towing the barge. This deck now lies upside down on the bottom, and the capstan can be glimpsed underneath still hanging from the deck. There were also a small winch and navy-style anchor lying flat on the deck on the port side, but they can no longer be seen. At the extreme port side lying on the bottom can be seen a navigation light fixture, which was previously attached to the bow's deck. The entire forward center post is pulled out of the sulfur pile and is lying on top of the mound. Since its base is completely clear of zebra mussels, the collapse must have happened recently, or possibly the sulfur contamination of this section of wood has prevented colonization. Unfortunately, the inside of the collapsed cargo hatch frame at the extreme bow could not be seen. This is where the tonnage marks were etched into the wood that allowed this wreck to originally be identified. A bent metal bracket marks the spot on the collapsed structure where the center post attached to the hatch framing, and the markings are probably on the other side facing downwards.

Swimming down the length of the wreck, fishing net can be seen snagged on the port hatch coaming amidships. At the extreme stern can be seen the sides of the cabin attached to the main structure. Missing are the roof, floor, front, and back walls of the cabin. The side walls each have two portholes installed, and on the outside of all the portholes except the forward port one can be seen metal screening still intact after all these years. The stern's deck has fallen to the

bottom, and there is a capstan mounted in the middle. A winch was seen attached to some decking partially fallen to the starboard side at the stern, and a large pipe was seen lying on the bottom on the port side with a "T" flange in the middle of it pointing up.

After surfacing and heading back to shore in the now-calm and clearing conditions, everyone freshened up and then gathered to eat a great dinner at the Barcelona Café at the top of the hill entering the marina. Jim Herbert's daughter Lisa is the chef, and she created some marvelous meals and desserts, which everyone enjoyed before heading off to bed.

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The next day, Sunday, July 15, 2007, dawned windy again with 3' seas and occasional whitecaps, which dashed any hope of getting to the "Trade Wind" or "Crystal Wreck." At this point Bob Overstreet, Penny Clark, and Leslie Taborac decided to get an early start on their drive home, leaving just sixteen people aboard. The first wreck of the day was the "Dean Richmond," a wooden steamer that sank in October, 1893, in a terrific storm with the loss of its entire crew of 23 and a cargo of zinc ingots, flour, and general package goods. For a while the "Dean Richmond" was one of the most sought shipwrecks in the lake because it was rumored to be a treasure ship carrying valuable copper ingots and secret government gold. Garry Kozak spent eight years at great financial and personal cost searching for this wreck, and in 1983 he discovered the wreck only to find there was no gold or copper. It lies upside down, which is unusual for a wood vessel, in 110' of water with the bow pointed northeast. The mooring is attached to the stern, and a large rudder turned hard to starboard greets descending divers. The ship was a rare twin-screwed vessel, but salvagers took the starboard propeller in the 1980's. However, the port side's four-bladed propeller remains, and the mooring is attached to its shaft. The gracefully curved rounded transom almost forms a flattened deck on the lake bottom with current-sculptured grooves in the clay around it.

The bottom conditions were bright and sunny, and the thermocline was found at 55' with 41 deg F water below it. Visibility was excellent at 40'-60'. The keel of the wreck can be swum at a comfortable depth of 90', adding to the bottom time on the wreck. Although inverted, it is an interesting wreck with a scattering of debris all around it on the bottom. This is due partly to treasure salvager's dynamite in the 1980's, which tore holes and openings along the port side of the wreck. Peering inside will reveal a large wooden "cavern" with a litter of wooden debris on the bottom. Penetration into this overhead environment is not advisable, however, unless properly trained and equipped. Swimming to the bow, the port side is split open and partially detaching from the main hull. Swimming back on the starboard side, several small square holes can be seen in

the hull's side near the bottom. These are side loading doors, and some allow access to the interior of the wreck, and some are completely sealed by wooden debris or extruded clay walls. What appears to be a telephone pole stands vertically out of the mud about 30' away from the wreck amidships on the starboard (north) side. This is actually the ship's mast, which somehow got stuck vertically into the bottom and snapped off as the ship rolled inverted and sank. The remains of a navigation light holder can still be seen on the mast, and the mast is square in cross section. A large amount of debris can be seen to the north of the wreck extending far beyond the limits of visibility.

After surfacing, conditions were once again noticed to be calming down to 2' seas with a clear sky. A slow, relaxing trip was made to the second wreck, and along the way the brig "Niagara" was seen sailing on the lake. It turned broadside as we moored, allowing us to fully see this recreated 1812 warship. The second wreck was the barkentine "Indiana," also known as the "Stone Wreck." Its nickname is due to its conspicuous cargo of Buffalo sandstone that was eventually used to identify it. This stone covers the decks, fills the cargo holds, and exists in large square pieces as well as small irregular pieces. This 18-year old ship sank after springing a leak in September, 1870, but fortunately the entire crew survived. The mooring on the wreck was tied amidships to the starboard railing, and the bow points northeast. The sides are intact and stand 5'-8' high off the bottom for most of the wreck except the bow, which is completely smashed, probably from the impact of the heavily weighted ship with the bottom. The bow's pawl bitt and windlass can be seen fallen forward with their beefy support beams exposed underneath. Lying pointing out into the debris field on the starboard side is a spar or part of the bowsprit. A very large burbot, also called a ling cod or lawyer fish, was seen hiding on the bow and towards the end of the dive posed out in the open for photographs.

Moving aft from the windlass, a 5'-high stub of the foremast can be seen, followed by the frames of a cargo hatch. The starboard side's decking is collapsed, but the port side's decking is intact, and the stone-filled spaces underneath the deck can be glimpsed on this side with stone also piled on top of the deck. A very unusual feature of this wreck is the fact that there are two centerboards, and the forward centerboard box is standing with a capstan at its center. Due to the collapsed deck on the starboard side, the capstan is tilted on the buckled decking. The capstan is an older style with the cylindrical head, and there are two small off-center hatch openings on both sides of the centerboard box. This centerboard box's winch is missing, but the aft hole for access to the box is visible. The mainmast opening in the deck can be seen immediately aft of the first centerboard box, and then the second centerboard box begins. The mainmast is missing, and the mast hole is cut in half due to the collapsed decking on one side. The decking on both sides becomes intact towards the end of the aft centerboard box, and the winch for this centerboard can be seen to be in place. Another cargo hatch opening follows, and a diver could enter this opening and swim underneath the deck towards the stern.

Stone is scattered all over the deck, and there is a two-sheaved block lying on the deck in this area. After the cargo hold, the 5'-high stub of the mizzenmast is visible. It was noticed to have an octagonal base, vertical cleats, and a mast table. Behind the mast are the double cylinders of an older-styled hand pump sticking out of the deck. Beyond this is the cabin hole. Per normal for sinking events, the cabin blew off and is missing. Lying lengthwise on the bottom inside the cabin hole is the transom with another two-sheaved block mounted on a rail. This would have attached to the end of the mizzen boom. Lying on the bottom at the very stern of the wreck is the fallen rudder, and off to the port side slightly underneath the sharply undercut stern is the ship's stove. Lots of mast parts, booms, gaffs, and/or spars can be seen lying next to the ship, and some deadeyes are on the railings.

The now calm conditions allowed for a quick trip back to shore, where some divers gathered for lunch at Lisa's café before heading home. Despite the bad weather, four dives were done, and great underwater conditions were encountered. Overall, it was a good trip, and everyone had a fun time.