

It was a warm 80-degree F day on Sunday, August 29, 2010, when Scott Harrison, Mike Gorek, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee met in Lorain, OH. The sky was clear and sunny, and Lake Erie was relatively calm with 1' seas and a slight 2' swell, so it was decided to make a long run out into the lake. They left the Black River in Scott's 26-foot Regal "Wreck-Reation" and ran 25 miles to the north across the Canadian border to the first wreck, the "Civil War Wreck." This unidentified shipwreck is possibly an early- to mid-1800s sailing vessel, which would make it a relatively rare early shipwreck in the Great Lakes. When the wreck was first found in the 1980s it contained several interesting artifacts, including clay pipes, remnants of furs, a pocket watch, shoes, brass buttons, a toothbrush, and a crock pot with "Tupper" on it. Unfortunately, these artifacts have now all disappeared, and several of them - especially the clay pipes - would likely have been datable and able to place the wreck to within a specific decade. The current dating comes from the crock pot since a potter named Tupper was active in Sandusky during the Civil War. However, another Tupper was also known to have supplied the United States Navy fleet during the War of 1812, so the potential range of this identification is pretty broad. What is currently left at the site is a vessel with some tantalizing early construction features.

The surface temperature was 75 deg F with 5'-8' of visibility, and upon descending the thermocline was at 35' with 55 deg F water below it. The lighting was dim on the bottom, but visibility was good at 8'-10', and one's eyes adjusted after a few minutes. The wreck lies in 64' of water, and Scott hooked the large ball of fishnet snagged on the port side at the bow, which points east. Kevin moved the anchor from the precarious fishnet to a more sturdy location on the bow, and they proceeded down the length of the wreck. The bow is split open with no stem visible in the center, making the wreck possibly a scow or just a badly damaged conventional hull. The port side is more intact, stands about 3'-5' high off the bottom, and terminates in what could be a stem, but it is offset to the port side. The starboard side tapers down to nothing at the bow and is separated from the port side by about 10'. Additionally, 10'-15' in front of the wreck was found a large elongated piece of debris consisting of planks and framing partly buried in the bottom.

The port side of the hull continues down the entire length of the wreck and is periodically covered with old fishnet. The starboard side is only a couple of feet high and is mostly broken down but also runs continuously down the entire length of the wreck. The interior of the wreck is completely filled with a large amount of irregular stone boulders 1' to 2' in diameter. This cargo presumably came from Kelleys Island, although a test of the stone would be necessary to know this with certainty. If this is indeed the stone's origination, then the wreck cannot be older than 1830, which is when stone quarrying began at Kelleys, or 1840, when quarrying operations were greatly expanded. Near the bow appears to be a standing wooden pump tube leaning to the port side. Lying on the stones on the starboard side was found a small metal rod intersecting a small cylinder at a 90-degree angle, part of some unknown mechanism. Amidships is a standing wooden box containing what is almost certainly a dagger board sticking out of the top of the box by about 3'. Dagger boards are a rare and unusual feature, so this is an exciting item. They were only known to exist in the late 1700s and

early 1800s, so it is possible this is an early shipwreck. The dagger board's box is about 10' long, one to two feet wide, and about 5' high. In front of it is attached the only deck beam visible on the wreck. Both the box and beam tilt to the port side, and the vertically-planked dagger board has two holes drilled through it, one at each end, possibly for attaching rope to raise and lower it.

Immediately behind the box is a square wooden bitt tilted to the port side. Further back is a small metal pipe sticking out of the pile of stones that is also tilted to port. Finally, the pile of stones ends near the stern, leaving a distinctive space where the cabin was located. Most of the artifacts were found in this area when the wreck was first discovered. A standing rudderpost is in the center, and the rudder appears to be turned almost 180 degrees so the rudder points into the cabin. The rudderpost is strangely square and has no steering cap on top. It was likely tiller-steered, another early feature. The vessel was measured to be 73' +/- 3' in length and 15' +/- 1' in beam. There are no items to hint at the total number of masts, but either one or two masts are possible. Overall, it is a fascinating vessel. Strangely, no signs of a windlass were seen, nor a capstan, anchors, or chain. The lack of any windlass is strange and possibly indicative of it being a small vessel. The lack of a capstan hints at its early age and/or small size, and the anchors could have been carried away by nets or divers. No zebra mussels or gobies were seen anywhere on the wreck, meaning anaerobic conditions were present. It also meant bare wood for easy viewing!

After the dive, the air temperature increased to a hot 85 deg F, the seas were a glassy 1', and the sky was a brilliant blue. The decision was made to run to the nearby "Marshall F. Butters," which Scott had dove the previous day with excellent conditions encountered. The "Butters" was a 164' x 30' wood steamer carrying lumber that sank in 60' of water during the infamous October, 1916, storm called "Black Friday." All 15 crewmembers miraculously survived the sinking by either taking to the lifeboat or being taken off the sinking ship by another passing steamer. The 5-mile trip did not take long, and the wreck is located exactly on the US-Canadian border with half of the ship on each side. The thermocline dropped the temperature to a warmer 58 deg F on the bottom, and visibility was a spectacular 10'-15'. However, the dim lighting conditions remained, making the bottom appear initially dark and gloomy until one's eyes adjusted. The anchor hooked the wreck at the stern, which points south. Due to the lack of wind it lazily draped all around the starboard side of the wreck, fouling the chain and rope everywhere. It also draped over the top of the large boiler, making this the first object encountered by the divers as they descended. The top of the boiler stands about 10' high above the wreck and has two large valves on top. A large-diameter pipe connects between the boiler and the compound engine aft. The engine stands at least 15' high above the wreck, and all its linkages and mechanisms inside the trussing can be examined underneath the engine. Both the engine and boiler are within a recessed cavity with intact decking encircling them. The cavity is about 5' deep, and a vast amount of debris clutters the bottom inside. The decks are at least 5' wide on the sides, and on both sides the hull has split away, causing the wreck to be another 10' wider. On the port side is a partly buried large metal box that may have been part of the boiler house or coal bunker.

Behind the engine the decking is also intact, and on the centerline is the ship's electric generator, complete with grillwork and wire windings. The "Butters" was the first electrified ship on the Great Lakes, making this piece of equipment a historic item. The deck ends about 10' past the generator with a standing rudderpost, which is sheathed in a thin lead or tin metal strip at its midsection. This would have served as a bearing surface where it passed through the hull. The stern is broken up, but a somewhat round shape is detectable. Wooden debris trails behind the ship on the mud bottom, and within this debris field is a standing rounded-style capstan still attached to a piece of decking underneath it.

Forward of the boiler the ship continues all the way to the bow. Due to the excellent visibility, the main deck could be viewed where it would normally appear to be an unbroken featureless expanse. The starboard side of the ship has been pulled away from the deck by 5'-10', causing the main deck to slope down into the bottom on this side at a 30-degree angle. The pulled away side still stands 5' high, however, and appears to be broken up on top. The port side is also partly separated from the deck by a couple of feet, but the deck is still attached. The main deck is completely intact and has three very large hatches. After the foremost hatch is reached, a large winch can be found on the centerline. After this winch the deck ends, and there is a large opening where the deckhouse would have been located. The starboard side is pulled very far away from the wreck at the extreme bow, resulting in a 15' gap between the starboard hull and the standing stem. There is a small 5' gap between the port side and the stem. The imposing stem stands at least 10' high off the bottom, and there is a pile of chain running through a hawse pipe on the bottom behind it. Again, no mussels were seen, and the entire ship was bare wood and metal. Combined with the great visibility, it was a wonderful dive with lots to see and explore. It would take many dives to fully explore this shipwreck, even with clear visibility, and that doesn't usually happen. The dive ended when Kevin - with much difficulty - freed the tangled anchor from the wreck. Afterwards, a leisurely trip was taken back to shore for dinner and rum runners at Jackelope's restaurant at the mouth of the Black River.