

On Saturday afternoon, July 16, 2005, a group of LEWD, BAD, and AquaMaster members met at Osprey Charters in Barcelona, NY, to dive the great wrecks of Lake Erie's eastern basin. Although colder and deeper, these wrecks are well preserved, and the diving is easy off Jim Herbert's boat the "Southwind," a 50' aluminum crew boat. Going along on this trip was a full boat of 20 people comprising of Ann Stephenson, KB Sporck, Jon TePas, George Balas, Ed Selent, Ed Noga, Jack Papes, Mark Wilbur, Griff Ralston, Rhonda Miller, Tim Mowry, Greg Ondus, Georgann and Mike Wachter, Annette and Dave Soule, Dean and Eric Ziegler, Cindy LaRosa, and Kevin Magee.

The first wreck was the "Trade Wind," a wreck that is located southwest of Long Point on the Canadian side. In previous years this trip would have taken 2 hours, but with the new engines installed at the beginning of the season, the trip was made in a little more than an hour. The seas were moderate at about 2', making for comfortable travel. The "Trade Wind" was a three-masted barkentine that sank in 120' of water in a collision with another sailing vessel, the "Charles Napier," in 1854 during a December snowstorm. Its cargo was stoves, railroad rails, and two U.S. Government lifeboats, which came in handy and allowed the crew to escape the sinking with no losses. The "Trade Wind" was barely a year old when it sank, leaving the ship in excellent condition on the bottom. There was no mooring, requiring the first divers to set the hook before everyone else geared up. A thunderstorm began to gather overhead, and everyone hurried to enter the water and beat the weather.

Because of the topside conditions, late-entering divers found the ambient lighting to be dim and the resultant bottom visibility reduced to only 30'-40'. However, as the storm passed, the visibility improved to 40'-60' with bright ambient lighting. Surface visibility was respectable at about 20', and the surface temperature was a warm 75-77 deg F. A weak thermocline was encountered between 60'-70', and 41-42 deg F water was found on the bottom. The mooring was tied to the center of the ship on the fallen mainmast lying perpendicular across the deck near the capstan. The bow points south and has a forecastle elevated slightly higher than the main deck. Two large all-metal anchors can be seen on the forecastle deck on both sides. Catheads for the anchors stick out from the railings near the anchors, and the anchor chains pass from the anchors through the hawseholes and into the ship's bow in an orderly fashion. The bowsprit is missing, but the bow has an attractive shape when viewed directly from the front and stands 8'-10' high off the bottom. A large windlass is on the forecastle, and a square deck opening to the chain locker is visible immediately behind the windlass.

The deck level is at a 110'-115' depth and can be easily viewed while swimming at 105'. The ship's wooden railings are mostly intact except where broken on the starboard side near the bow, where a large gash extends into the side of the ship and a large pole extends across the deck and out into the debris field. This pole is most likely the jib boom from the "Napier" and was left behind on the stricken ship after the collision. The whole ship is tilted to the port (east) side, and on the

deck on this side are what appears to be many lumber planks scattered like match sticks. These are, in fact, the iron railroad rails that were part of its cargo. The deck, hull, and cargo openings are all completely intact, but this is hard to see at first because of the railroad rails and fallen mast pieces that litter the deck and the debris field off the port side. In this debris field lie the extensive remains of the three masts, mostly lying parallel to the ship's hull. Stepped topmasts, crosstrees, bracing platforms, spars, booms, and other parts form an impressive collection of rare barkentine mast structure lying on the bottom.

Moving aft down the length of the vessel, the following items are found: broken foremast stub, first cargo hatch opening, capstan, fallen mainmast, second cargo hatch opening, centerboard winch, hand pump barrels, third cargo hatch opening, and broken mizzenmast stub. In the third cargo opening can be seen two rectangular stoves from its cargo peeking out of the silt. The railings have some deadeyes on them, and the low-lying intact cabin fills the entire width of the ship at the stern. It has two companionways leading inside, one on each side. Peering into the cabin reveals that it is mostly filled with silt with pieces of interior debris poking out of the silt and 3'-4' of clearance overhead. On top of the cabin roof in the middle is a small skylight opening with raised framing. At the rear of the cabin's roof is found a square opening with a sunken floor and the ship's wheel mounted inside. This is a rather unique design since steering wheels were usually contained on separate aft steering decks. Viewing the ship from the stern reveals the impressive transom, rudder, and underside curves of the ship. The rudder is turned slightly and exists in a scoured hole where more than 120' depths can probably be reached.

There was a small problem with releasing the mooring. First, there was a miscommunication on who was supposed to release it, and then it became entangled in some old rope and could not be released. So, it was left in place for another trip the next day. The next wreck visited was the "Crystal Wreck," an unidentified two-masted schooner in 115' of water a few miles away. It got its name not from the dishes at the site but the beer that was drunk after this wreck was first dove. It was found because it was a known net snag to commercial fishermen, and it was originally called the "Hook" for this reason. The wreck has many nets on it as a result, especially at the bow, stern, and off the starboard side. There was no mooring present, so another mooring was temporarily installed and left for the next day.

The mooring was tied to the railing on the starboard side. The wreck is almost completely intact and stands 10'-15' high off the bottom. The only things missing are the masts, which are fallen, and the aft cabin, which blew off during its sinking. The deck is at 105' and can be easily seen at 95'-100'. The deck has only a few missing boards, and the railing is also intact around the ship's perimeter except for a section near the bow on the port side, where it is missing. The hull is also in good shape and shows no obvious signs of damage. The bow points east, and the bowsprit is intact for about 10'-15' of its length and draped in

netting that forms a decorative hanging bunting underneath. There is a significant amount of floating netting snagged on the port side of the bow, partially hiding an all-metal fluked anchor on the deck in this area. The starboard anchor is missing. A windlass is on the bow, and behind it is a square chain locker opening. This is followed by a hand pump minus its handles, foremast stub surrounded by a fife rail, cargo hatch opening, capstan, second cargo opening, centerboard winch slightly askew, third cargo hatch opening, and finally the mainmast stub without a fife rail. Curiously, there appears to be two mast stubs separated by a few feet at this location. Scattered at various places around the deck are several large blocks and other pieces of interesting equipment like a mast step bracket.

Aft of the mainmast is a large cavity where the cabin used to be located before the ship sank. The broken remains of the planked floor of the cabin can be seen about 5' below the deck level. At the southeast corner of the cabin is a square stove, and sitting around it are the remains of dishes, hammers, miscellaneous tools, and unidentifiable pieces found by divers and collected there for viewing. At the rear of the cabin is an elevated box-like structure that holds the ship's wheel. The box is partially draped in netting, and the netting also hangs down 10'-15' to the bottom behind the transom, forming a curtain that completely hides the stern. Peeking behind the netting, the rudder can be seen.

Upon surfacing, the seas had built to 3'-4', making for a rough ride home, and rain showers began to fall. Upon reaching shore late in the evening near sunset, it was steadily raining, and the boat was unloaded in the rain. Everyone then went to eat dinner at Jim Herbert's daughter's restaurant near the marina. She stayed open late for us, and the food and beverages were excellent and enjoyed by everyone before finally going back to the hotels to go to bed.

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After a good night's sleep, diving was resumed on Sunday morning, July 17, 2005. Ed Noga, Jack Papes, Mark Wilbur, Griff Ralston, Rhonda Miller, and Dean & Eric Ziegler left, and Niko Keca and Rick & Ruthann Landsman joined us instead. This made for 16 divers and a less crowded boat. The weather was a little rough at 2'-3' seas but otherwise acceptable. The dive was on the "Acme," an arched wooden steamer that sank in 125' of water during a November gale in 1867 with no loss of life. Niko brought a small scooter with him and showed it to admirers as we headed out to the site. Niko was one of the first divers in the water after the mooring was hooked, and he powered down the line to the wreck. Unfortunately, the scooter wouldn't shut off at depth, powered straight into the bottom, and began to dig a hole. The ensuing chaos made sure there was very little visibility left on the stern, which is where the mooring is tied to a concrete block about 30'-50' off the wreck on the port side. A jump line leads over to the port hogging arch. The two large hogging arches rise to about 100'-105' depth on both sides of the ship and cover about half of the total length of the ship. The

arches gave the ship longitudinal bending stiffness in the early days of wooden steamer construction. Vertical beams support the arches with diagonal X-braces in between the beams. There are also occasional horizontal connecting supports between the tops of the two arches. Most of the ship can be viewed at a depth of 105'-110' swimming between the two arches, which are the most distinctive feature of the wreck.

The wreck itself has sunken into the mud so the lake bottom covers most of the hull and deck. Sticking out of the silt around the perimeter of the hull are the gunwales and various wooden parts that allow the shape of the ship to be discerned. All cabins and superstructure blew off the ship when it sank, leaving a completely clean deck with only the engine and boiler sticking above the silt at the stern. The stern has an obvious rounded shape, and the rudderpost sticks 10'-15' high off the bottom with the steering quadrant attached. A burbot, or ling cod, was seen nestled in the quadrant. Swimming forward through the arches, small silt-filled hatch openings and pieces of debris can be seen sticking up through the silt on the bottom. At the bow, which points roughly west, can be seen a windlass and 10'-15' high large stem post. Another burbot was seen nestled in the windlass, and a third burbot was found amidships. There is just enough time at this depth to swim from the stern to the bow and back again without entering decompression. Visibility improved to 50'-70' at the bow, but bottom temperature was quite cool at 40-41 deg F.

The weather increased to 3' seas as we headed to the second dive, the "George C. Finney," a 3-masted wooden schooner that sank in 100' of water in November, 1891, with the loss of all 7 crew members and its cargo of wheat. The bow points east, and the mooring block is 20'-30' off the bow and slightly on the starboard side with a jump line leading over to the bow. Because of the shallower depth, the temperature below the 60'-70' thermocline was warmer at about 42-43 deg F. Visibility appeared to be a little less at about 40'-50'. The wreck stands about 5'-8' high off the bottom, and its sides are intact all the way around the wreck. The bow is missing its bowsprit, and the port anchor is missing, but the starboard anchor chain can be seen leading from the hawsehole down to the bottom, where a large wood stock is resting, presumably with the rest of the anchor buried in the mud underneath.

The bow's decking is intact, and seen were a square bit, windlass, chain locker opening, hand pump, foremast stub with a square fife rail around it, cargo hatch opening, and a small sheet winch. On the deck were seen anchor chain and blocks, and on the railings were seen deadeyes, which tensioned the standing rigging used to support the masts. The deck is missing after the first cargo hatch, but hatch frames and the centerboard box remain standing along its length. Afterwards, some collapsed decking can be found with a partially covered mainmast hole in the center. This feature helped identify the "Finney" since the mainmast was removed later in its career when it was converted into a

2-masted schooner to make more room for cargo. On another piece of collapsed deck near the stern can be seen a bit and another hand pump mounted to it.

In the middle of the ship was seen a dead burbot covered in moldy white paste as it slowly decomposes. An absolutely huge live burbot was seen in this area as well, and it was first mistaken for a sturgeon since it was so big. It was quite shy, however, and swam off to hide under some of the collapsed decking. At the stern the cabin is missing with a large empty hole in this area. At the extreme stern can be seen the transom and standing rudderpost. Lying on the bottom inside the cabin cavity behind the rudderpost and slightly to the starboard side is the fallen steering wheel with part of the steering gear still attached to it. The transom has a block attached to a metal rail at its center for the mizzenmast's boom.

Overall, it was a great weekend, and we were lucky with the weather since it stormed on both days after the last dive. It should be noted, however, that we had more than our fair share of equipment and back problems. For whatever reason, three people temporarily hurt their backs during the trip. Fortunately, all were not serious and healed within a short time. The equipment problems were many and varied: forgotten backplate wing nuts, forgotten special drysuit inflator hoses, regulator free flows, the infamous scooter incident, sheared off regulator hoses, broken drysuit zippers, etc. Some people missed dives or had to shorten them because of these problems. For a bunch of experienced divers, we were a pretty amusing bunch. Our thanks to Jim Herbert for providing another memorable weekend of great diving!