

It was a rainy overcast day on Sunday, August 14, 2011, when Cindy LaRosa and Kevin Magee headed to Barcelona, NY, to go diving on Osprey Charters. There was a north-northeast wind coming off Lake Erie with light rain falling and thunderstorms visible across the lake in the distance. However, the seas were manageable at 2'-3', and the conditions did not appear to be worsening. So, instead of the planned long run to the wreck of the wooden steamer "Swallow," it was decided to go to a closer wreck called "Schooner G," otherwise known as the "Admiralty Wreck" or "Dunkirk Schooner." This unidentified two-masted schooner of mid-1800s construction is in 170' of water and has lately been at the center of a legal battle over ownership between the State of New York and a treasure-hunting group called Northeast Research (NER). This Massachusetts company is headed by an investor in Dunkirk, NY, but is run by a professional treasure hunter from the Florida Keys.

The company originally filed an admiralty claim to arrest the wreck in 2004, and the federal court ordered the State of New York to issue an archaeological permit to the company to investigate the wreck. Initially, the company hinted to potential investors the wreck might be LaSalle's famous "Griffon," but its claims then shifted to it being a rumored lost military payroll ship before the company finally claimed it was the "Caledonia," a ship that participated in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. The company's diving operations started in earnest in 2007, but in October, 2008, the State of New York revoked their archaeological permit when significant damage and disturbance to the wreck was made known to them in photographs taken by local divers who had visited the wreck. Most disturbing, human remains had apparently been found but casually dumped on the deck while digging into the cabin continued against the stipulations of the permit. To counter these claims and perhaps distract from them, NER filed for ownership of the ship in 2009 and claimed they wanted to raise it and give it to the city of Buffalo, NY, as a tourist attraction. No serious long-term conservation plan or explanation of where the large amounts of money needed to do this was ever given. Finally, on March 25, 2011, the US federal district court ruled against NER's ownership of the wreck based on their inability to truly identify the wreck and prove it hadn't been abandoned. The court also refuted the company's claims that the damage to the wreck had been done by the local divers and not them.

Eleven divers were aboard the "Southwind" as it left the dock, including Marty Bailey, Bob Noble, Andrew Dennis, Carl Twilla, James Parkevich, and Jimmy Herbert, Jr. The last time Kevin saw this wreck in 2005 was before any damage had occurred, and he was curious to see what changes had happened since then. The seas were choppy when divers entered the water to find 10' of visibility on the surface and a warm 75 deg F surface temperature. Upon descending, the thermocline was found at 70' with unusually cold 39-40 deg F water below it. Visibility was good at an estimated 50', but the ambient lighting was very dark. The mooring was found to be tied to the stern on the port side, and the damage done to the wreck was immediately obvious. The tiller that had previously graced

the stern deck has been removed at its connection to the rudderpost and is lying on the deck off to the side. The small low-profile cabin, which was previously intact, now has its roof completely removed with all the boards stacked on the deck around the cabin. Both of these actions were obviously done by divers with a lot of time on their hands, not by anchors or the action of a few divers with only a few dives on the wreck. Looking inside the cabin, it is almost completely excavated of its silt, exposing the inside cabin walls with integral shelves. The stairs that formerly were in the front of the cabin going up to the central companionway are now completely broken away and gone. Odd pieces of broken furniture litter the deck, and a wooden chair has been thrown down into the first small cargo hatch forward of the cabin.

Fortunately, still intact is the decorative transom with raised wooden trim arching across the width of the ship above two large square windows. Both the trim and windows are unusual and attractive features. The rudder is turned slightly to starboard, and the stern is scoured out to reveal the underside shape of the hull. The ship rests at about a 30-degree angle to the starboard side, resulting in the port side being entirely exposed and standing about 10' high off the bottom while the starboard deck rests just a few feet above the bottom. Forward of the cabin at each corner is a small cylinder projecting about one foot out of the deck. Both have been cleaned of mussels, clearly revealing them to be hand pumps. The railings are intact on both sides, but the deadeyes that used to adorn them adjacent to both masts are now all missing. An unknown metal box rests on the deck on the port side forward of the cabin, and against the starboard railing is the ship's stove, which is now clearly identifiable since all the mussels have been cleaned off it. The entire wreck, in fact, has been scrubbed of mussels and silt, clearly revealing all items on it. Modern ropes run haphazardly across the wreck, requiring one to be careful when navigating around the ship.

Forward of the aft cargo hatch is the standing mainmast, followed by another cargo hatch and then the standing foremast. Standing masts are always nice to see, and it was a relief to find no damage to them. Resting against the starboard railing amidships are a boom and gaff from the foremast. The bow points west and has a windlass on the deck. There is a non-folding metal-stocked anchor resting on the deck on the port side of the windlass, and close examination reveals anchor chain hanging off the starboard side and down into the mud, probably leading to the starboard anchor now buried in the silt. There is a small cathead mounted to the railing on the starboard side, but the matching one on the port side is not evident. There is a pawl bitt in front of the windlass, and strangely it has a pyramid-shaped top to it rather than being flat. There is a notch in the railing at the stem for the bowsprit, but the bowsprit itself lies at a 90-degree angle to the wreck with one end resting on the stem and the other end diving down into the mud bottom off the starboard side.

In front of the stem is another centerpiece of the wreck, which thankfully was also not damaged. It is a large cutwater with a decorative scrollhead blended into it.

A delicate slatted wooden platform with a triangular shape blends into the scrollhead structure and the sides of the ship. During ascent, the 110' decompression stop was near the mainmast, which gave the divers something to examine while waiting. Both masts reach to about a 100'-110' depth and are missing their topmasts. After surfacing, the seas were found to have reduced to 1'-2', making for a comfortable ride back to shore with a following sea. Despite the damage done to this wreck by the salvagers, it is still a unique and interesting early-construction schooner to see. However, it was heartbreaking to see the changes, which can never be undone and which have diminished a once even greater wreck. Maximum depth was 166', 20/30 trimix was used with 50% nitrox and 100% O<sub>2</sub>, bottom time was 20 minutes, and total run time was 53 minutes.