

On Thursday, May 27, 2004, twenty-five divers from LEWD, AquaMasters, and AquaAmigos drove/flew to Morehead City, NC, from Cleveland, OH, to participate in some fabulous wreck diving off the North Carolina coast. This trip was organized by Ann Stephenson. Accompanying her were Annette & Dave Soule, Georgann & Mike Wachter, Linda & Dave Salmi, KB Sporck, John O'Connell, Cindy LaRosa, Kevin Magee, Ted Green, Rita Montorsi, Jacques Girouard, Marty Leonard, George Balas, Rich Sichau, Ken Marshall, Chris Pearson, Gail Gray, Flo Lohman, Mike Szloh, Connie Snow, Eric Mahnich, and Mark Mahnik. Also accompanying the group were non-divers Carmen Alcorn and Lora, who stayed ashore and explored the area while the divers were out to sea. The drive to NC was 750 miles and took anywhere from 12-14 hours, depending on the traffic. Because of the long drive, Thursday, May 27, and Monday, May 31, were dedicated to driving. Most tried I-77 through West Virginia, and a venturesome few tried I-95 through Washington, DC. Both ways turned out to have exactly the same mileage, but the Washington route managed to avoid rush hour transits while the West Virginia route caused Raleigh-Durham to be a problem during rush hour.

The first dive day, Friday, May 28, was sunny but unfortunately very windy, which canceled the diving. Instead, everyone used the time to explore the Cape Lookout National Seashore, the Beaufort Maritime Museum, and/or the Parker boat manufacturing plant. Blowouts are not uncommon for North Carolina diving, and one can expect 25%-30% of the days to be canceled due to weather. Because of this, it is best to plan 3-4 days of diving to make the trip worthwhile. Fortunately, the next day, Saturday, May 29, the seas were finally calm enough to go. On the two-hour, 30-mile boat ride out, 5'-8' seas with occasional 10' waves were encountered, and many felt queasy during this rough boat ride. However, everyone managed to gear up and get into the water. All diving was done off the "Olympus," the 65' aluminum crew boat from Olympus Dive Charters. It was fortunate it was a large boat, which allowed a faster trip to/from the dive sites and more stability in the rough seas.

The first wreck was the historic "U-352," a German Type 7C U-boat that was sunk in 1942 during World War II in 115' of water after she unsuccessfully attacked the USCG cutter "Icarus," which responded by sinking her with depth charges. It is a little known fact that U-boat attacks were common off the American east coast during the early days of the war. The mooring was tied to the port propeller shaft at the stern. The propeller was salvaged by divers, but the prop guards and twin rudders of the sub can still be seen. The starboard propeller is present but buried by sand since the sub lies with a 45 degree list to starboard. The sub was surrounded by vast schools of bait fish, which made the wreck itself hard to see through the fish. However, it is remarkably intact with about 50% of the outer hull and 100% of the inner pressure hull. Various pieces of equipment and piping can be seen in the gaps created by missing sections of the outer hull. All of the hatches are open since the sub surfaced and some of

the crew escaped before it sank, making penetration possible but dangerous inside the tight, silty interior. Wisely, no one from our group chose to enter.

Swimming from the stern, an open battery compartment hatch was found on the deck with two structural bars across it which allowed viewing of the interior but not entry into the sub. Swimming forward again, the intact conning tower was reached. Two periscope tubes protrude from the top, and one can peer down the open hatch into the tower's interior and into the control room beyond. Many fish congregate in this area, including large schools of jack, and some saw a very large ray swim past. Also found near the conning tower were a couple of spotted eels. Forward of the conning tower are two more open hatches and the mounting base for the 88-mm deck gun, although the gun was missing. Swimming forward, the bow was discovered to be partially broken off at a 30-degree angle to the starboard side. However, this exposed the torpedo tubes for easy viewing, and the bow still retains its shape to a pointy end. Visible on the exposed port side of the bow is a dive plane with a streamlined guard in front of it. Overall, this was a very memorable dive.

The second dive was on the "Schurz," a former German gunboat that was captured and recommissioned in US service in World War I. She sank as a result of a collision in June, 1918, in 110' of water and is known for her artifacts and heavy fish life. The mooring was at the bow. The wreck itself is very collapsed and hard to recognize except at the stern, where part of the starboard hull and deck framing are still standing. The highlights of the wreck are the large guns and ammunition found on the wreck. Many found small caliber ammunition underneath the sand. Two large caliber guns lie on the bottom off the port side at the bow, and two more lie on the bottom off the port side at the stern. Four large boilers are positioned amidships, two forward and two aft, each mounted side-by-side. Behind them are the remains of the engines. A large shrouded fan - possibly the remains of a stack blower - is between one engine and a boiler. Sprinkled throughout the wreckage were metal plates and beams with the obvious remains of electrical conduit, piping, and miscellaneous equipment from the ship, all in a very confusing jumbled array.

The wreck proved to have enormous schools of bait fish as well as schools of large 3' jacks, colorful queen angels, and many other forms of sea life. At the stern two large, brown toadfish were found hiding under the wreckage, and two spotted eels were found on the wreck. After the dive, the seas had calmed to 3'-5' with occasional 8' waves, making for an easier ride back to port. However, before pulling up the anchor we were treated to a large pod of 20 or more gray and speckled dolphins that played around the boat for a long time, some coming right up to the side of the boat, slapping their tails against the water's surface, and leaping from the water. It was a great way to end the diving and to start the trip back.

On Sunday, May 30, the seas were initially calm at 3'-5' seas, but whitecaps, a steady cold wind, and gray overcast skies foretold of building seas. Nevertheless, we all headed out again to dive the "Papoose," a tanker that was torpedoed by U-124 and sank in 115' of water in 1942 during WWII. The wreck lies upside down and is mostly intact except for occasional breaks in the hull along its length. She stands 30' high off the bottom, and penetration is fairly easy both under her gunwales and through the various breaks in the hull. The amidships is collapsed, and the stern is supposedly intact again, although this area was not explored. The mooring was at the bow, which is broken off and sits upright on the bottom. The remains of the chain locker and coils of chain can be seen scattered on the bottom between the hull and bow.

The highlights of this wreck are its sea life. Upon descending, we were immediately greeted by two 6"-8" lionfish only a couple of feet away from the mooring line. Lionfish are exotic red/brown and white vertically striped fish with long frilly fins tipped with poisonous spines. They were originally imported from the south Pacific and Indian Oceans for aquariums and somehow ended up getting released off Florida in the 1990's. They are still rare fish, and we were lucky to see them. Meanwhile, 50' away was a large group of sand tiger sharks, most about 6'-8' long, hovering off the bottom away from the wreck. Underneath them was a very large 5'-6' diameter stingray lying on the bottom. And in the opposite direction near the wreck were a dozen 3'-5' big grouper and a large school of Atlantic spade fish. It was tough to decide which direction to swim first! Most chose to visit the sand tiger sharks or lionfish first. The sand tigers, despite their menacing appearance, were harmless and a bit shy, but they could be approached to within 5'-10' if not swam directly at.

At the end of this dive, a large school of 3'-4' barracuda was seen under the boat during the safety stop. Cindy summarized the dive by saying, "Lionfish, sand tigers, and barracudas, oh my!" After such a spectacular dive, everyone decided to do the same dive again. However, the weather was worsening with occasional rain, wind, and seas building to 5'-8'. Everyone did the second dive, and everything was seen again. Some also found shark teeth on the bottom. However, because of the worsening weather, getting back on the boat proved to be a challenge, and several pieces of equipment were damaged or lost in this process. After starting the 2-hour ride home, the skies darkened, the seas built to occasional 10' waves, and a torrential downpour started that caused a complete whiteout and was some of the heaviest rain ever seen. It lasted half the trip, then slowly let up as we neared land.

Despite the rough seas and weather, everyone had a great time. The wrecks were spectacular, and the diving itself was easy with 75 deg F water temperatures and visibility typically in the 60'-80' range. On the first day, a moderate current was encountered, but no current was found on the second day. Also on the second day visibility was over 100', and there was a small thermocline at 65'-70' with 80 deg F water above. The water was so warm that

only a 3mm suit with no hood was necessary on all dive days. The only tough part was the long boat ride to and from the wrecks, which was well worth it once entering the water. Everyone had such a good time that planning has already started for this trip again next year.