

On Memorial Day weekend, May 28, 2006, David VanZandt and Kevin Magee kicked off the dive season on Dave's boat "Sea Dragon." They left Cleveland harbor looking for a good shallow wreck to start the season. However, due to the heavy rains from the previous week, the Cuyahoga River's discharge covered many of the shallow wrecks near the mouth with water the color of chocolate milk. The water's surface was also filled with a great amount of debris such as trash, tree limbs, and logs. The same proved to be true heading west along the coast due to the Rocky River's discharge, so it was decided to head out 18 miles offshore and dive the "S.F. Gale." This proved to be an excellent choice since the water turned a beautiful blue color and was free of all debris after traveling about 5 miles.

The "Gale" was a two-masted schooner carrying a load of stone from the quarries on Kelley's Island in Lake Erie's western basin to Erie, PA, in the eastern basin. The ship disappeared in November, 1876, during a large storm, and all hands were lost. The water was flat and calm during the trip out to the site, and anchoring was easy since the anchor line just hung limp in the water with no breeze to pull the line taut. Surface visibility looked very good with at least 10' of the line visible going down. The air temperature was a pleasant 70-80 deg F with a bright sunny sky, and the surface water temperature was 53 deg F. Upon descending to the bottom at 77', it was discovered 10'-15' visibility continued all the way to the bottom with 50 deg F on the bottom. The wreck was hooked on the bow, which points SW. The bow is split wide open and does not have any recognizable shape, probably due to its impact with the bottom with the heavy load of stone. There is no deck on the forward half of the wreck, but both sides are somewhat intact with the starboard side being more intact up to the stem. The stem is tilted over to the starboard side, and a hawse pipe can be seen nearby. On the starboard side are the remains of the windlass with its below-deck supports exposed and anchor chain wrapped around the spool. A pawl bitt is part of the windlass and has a strange rocking lever on the side opposite of the windlass. It could be either part of a hand pump, a way to ratchet the windlass, or a means to release the pawl. No pump barrels were found, but there are unusual large metal gears on the windlass spool on both sides of the bitt that could have attached to the rocking arm with now-missing mechanisms. Just forward of the windlass is a long metal rod lying on the bottom with a wooden handle at one end and square cross section at the other. This tool could have fitted into the square holes of the rocking arm and/or some holes at the end of the windlass spool. Standing up out of the silt aft of the windlass appears to be one side of either a fife rail or pin board with one belaying pin in it and two supporting legs, one at each end.

Lying lengthwise on the bottom along the centerline of the ship is the remains of a mast or large spar about 2' in diameter. Moving aft along it, the top of the centerboard box is exposed about 2'-3' above the silt. On the port side of the box is a fallen capstan with a cylindrical style head and a square patch of decking still attached to its base. The mast/spar stops aft soon afterwards. Attached to the

mast near this point is an unknown metal bracket with a loop of metal coming out of it. Decking begins near the center of the centerboard box with stone visible piled both on top of the deck and below the deck in the 1'-2' of space visible underneath. There is a hatch that is bisected by the centerboard box soon after the decking begins, and anchor chain is draped over the top of the box to make it appear as if the chain were rapped around a drum. Aft of the hatch is the centerboard winch, then a standing bitt for the mainmast boom. The top of the bitt has a concave shape, probably to allow the boom to rest on top of it when stowed. Aft of the bitt is a 2'-3' diameter hole in the deck for the mizzenmast followed by a hand pump in great condition with its discharge spigot pointing aft. Afterwards, the remains of one more hatchway can be seen followed by the cabin hole, which fills the width of the ship except for small walkways along the sides. Inside the cabin hole near the stern on the port side can be seen the ship's stove peeking out of the silt. Aft of the cabin hole is a small steering deck that is mostly collapsed, but visible is a small opening in the center of the deck and two tall bitts, one on each side of the steering deck. The transom is collapsed and missing, but standing about 6'-8' high off the bottom is the rudderpost with a cap on top that would have connected to steering gear for a ship's wheel. Part of the rudder is visible at the bottom, and it can be seen turned slightly to port.

Continuing back along the sides of the ship, adjacent to the mizzenmast hole can be seen four deadeyes on both railings with their chain plates attached to the sides of the ship below the railing. The railings on both sides are very intact at this point and stand about 5' off the bottom. They are made of extremely large stanchions, and a very large timber is used for the railing, making for an extremely beefy appearance. The sides get increasingly lower towards the bow, but the starboard side continues close to the stem. The port side is less intact and continues only halfway to the bow before falling apart with the side partially pulled out. Strangely, the remains of the port hawse pipe can be found in this area.

In addition to the great visibility, another important factor was almost no zebra mussels were seen on the wreck. It was almost all bare wood and metal. Only a few small gobies were noticed, but a small school of baby perch was seen. After surfacing, Dave and Kevin were so pleased with the dive they decided to do it again for a second dive. By then the lake had become mirror flat, and the air temperature had increased to 80 deg F. The only negative point of the day was the biting black flies, which were out in force, making Dave and Kevin stay in their drysuits during the surface interval to prevent being bitten. Dave's boat was soon coated in a layer of flies, who apparently hatch directly from the lake's water and live for the sole purpose of tormenting boaters and divers. After a great second dive, it was decided to head back to shore, and the smooth conditions allowed for a quick trip back to shore. It also blew away all the flies away.