

In the early morning hours of Sunday, September 28, 2008, Kevin Magee drove from Cleveland, OH, to Barcelona Harbor, NY, to dive eastern Lake Erie with Osprey Charters. The trip was foggy and rainy, which made the drive in the pre-morning darkness more challenging. Upon arriving, it had stopped raining, and the seas were calm at less than 1', which was promising. Breakfast was at the Barcelona Café at the top of the hill outside the marina, and then everyone began loading dive gear onto the boat in preparation for an 8:00 am departure. There were nine divers, all part of an Aqua Specialists trip led by John Norris. The other divers, who had also dove off Osprey the previous day, were George Balas, Kevin Anderson, Mike Gowan, Franki Womack, Mike Held, and Jim Herbert's friend John. Griff Ralston also arrived from Cleveland for the morning trip. Unfortunately, by the time everyone was ready, the wind had started to blow out of the northeast, and the seas were building to 2'-3'. Air temperature was about 65-70 deg F.

Because of the deteriorating weather conditions, it was decided to run to a close wreck, the "John J. Boland." This large 250'-long steel ship sank in 125' of water in October, 1932, after a strong, sudden storm caught it with excess coal loaded on its deck and no hatch covers installed while attempting to run the short distance from Erie, PA, to the Welland Canal, Ontario. Four of the nineteen crewmen perished in the sinking of the ship, which suddenly rolled and sank when it filled with water from the unprotected hatches. As a result, the wreck lies almost upside down but partially on its starboard side, exposing the port deck and gunwale. The wreck lies with the bow SW. Since the weather did not allow easy traveling to another wreck, it was decided two dives would be done on the "Boland," the first at the stern and the second at the bow. The "Boland" is a long ship, making it difficult to swim the entire length in one dive, especially at that depth, so changing moorings is useful to see the entire wreck.

Surface visibility was about 10' with a 68 deg F surface temperature. Upon descending, the thermocline was found to be very deep at 85'. Furthermore, the bottom temperature was a warm 48 deg F, a far cry from the normal 41-43 deg F. Bottom visibility was good at about 40', but the ambient lighting was very dark, requiring a good light to see. The stern mooring is tied to the skeg of the large single rudder, which is mounted behind a four-bladed propeller. The rudder appears to be of an older and slightly archaic design when compared to modern rudders. The small stern deck is half buried in the mud and has a winch mounted to it that is half-buried in the bottom. Next to it the stern deckhouse has two hanging lifeboat davits and two cradles on the upside down roof that used to support the now-missing lifeboat. Very close to the bottom can be seen the raised skylights to the engine room partially buried in the mud. The side of the deckhouse has a covered breezeway aft and an open door forward. Inside the breezeway is another open door and two portholes. Looking into the doors and portholes, the plain metal interiors of the rooms can be safely examined without entering them. They are half-filled with silt and do not have any remarkable items in them. On the roof of the deckhouse at the forward end is a square box

that is partially buried in the bottom. A crew ladder leads from the roof to the deck. Mounted on the deck next to the deckhouse is a cargo winch. The aft-most cargo hatch is on a significantly raised deck section, and another crew ladder forward leads down to the main cargo deck.

On the main cargo deck are five more cargo openings that can be seen while swimming down the length of the wreck. This can be done while following the port gunwale at 100' depth. Upon encountering the sixth cargo opening at the bow, another cargo winch can be seen mounted to the deck aft of the hatch. The forward deckhouse is then encountered with the wheelhouse buried in the silt but the lower officer's quarters exposed. There is an open doorway at the aft end of the deckhouse, and peering inside, a wood-paneled hallway and rooms can be seen with doors, a steam radiator, and ceramic electrical insulators on the wall. Because of the upside nature of the wreck, it is disorienting to look at the interior spaces, and due to the thick silt buildup, penetration of the wreck is not recommended. In front of the deckhouse is a small bow deck with a half-buried windlass on it. The stem can then be seen curving gracefully into the bottom at the very front. The bow's mooring is tied to the port side's navy-style anchor, which is still stowed in its hawse recess at the bow.

Overall, despite the rough seas, which built to 3'-4' with occasional 5' waves, the dives were successful. Intermittent rain was encountered on the way back to shore, and once ashore everyone had a hearty lunch at the Barcelona Café before heading home.