

AQUANEWS

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Tax Season is over for me

By: Peter Bein

As the tax season ground to another end for me, after 45 years of tax work, I was delighted to attend a presentation, on Thursday, April 17, at the Florida Keys Eco-Discovery Center at the Truman Waterfront. The subject was informative stating that the USS Vandenberg is poised to become the second largest ship ever intentionally scuttled as an artificial reef. She is to be sunk seven miles off Key West, on a sandy bottom, 144 feet below the waves. It is concluding a ten year quest to obtain the ship and get permitted for the venture.

The vessel has been towed from the James River in Newport News, VA, part of the mothballed ghost fleet, to Colonna's shipyard in Norfolk. It eased into a berth where crews will remove all toxins prior to sinking. It will take months to remove asbestos, lead based paint, PCB's in the wiring, and thousands of pounds of waste oil and fuel.

The 533 foot troop transport was built in 1943, under the name of the USS Gen. Harry S. Taylor, by the Kaiser Company in Richmond, VA. She was commissioned the AP-145 USS Gen. Harry Taylor in 1944. The Taylor was involved in the Pacific Theater until June of 1945 as a troop and supply transport when it was moved to the Atlantic Fleet serving to carry veterans back home from Europe at the war's conclusion until June of 1946. She was also in transport service during the Hungarian Revolution.

Between June of 1946 and July of 1958 she served for a period with the Army Transport Service before transferring back to the Navy as a troop and supply carrier.

She was placed in the National Defense Reserve in July 1958 before, once again, being transferred to the Air Force in July of 1961.

The ship steamed into the Bethlehem Steel Company's Brooklyn 56 Street Yard during the summer of 1961. Tracking dishes and an enormous assortment of electronic tracking equipment was secured to the decks and superstructure.

Recommissioned the USAFS the Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg on July 18, 1963 it began duties as a ballistic missile tracking vessel for the Air Force. She served until December of 1982 when she was decommissioned and put into storage in the MARAD reserve fleet.

General Vandenberg was one of the founding fathers of the US Air Force and the Director of the CIA during the 1960's.

The ship was leased to Sea Star Productions Company in 1996 for the filming of the movie Virus. Portrayed as a Russian communications ship that had been taken over by an alien virus. The Russian paint still adores her steel. She was returned to MARAD after the film was completed in 1997. After ten years the project is nearing fruition.

The managing company, Reefbuilders, is creating a new ecosystem. Thus saving our natural reefs and creating additional habitat within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

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AQUANEWS

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We possibly have a new home for our monthly meetings. We will be having our June 12th meeting at the Sunbridge College. Check our web site for more info before the meeting. You can check out the College at www.Sunbridge.edu. We will be bringing in some of the equipment that we have for sale. Also if anyone needs any repairs or if your tanks need to have a VIP & fill, bring it along. Paul will take it back to his shop and perform whatever is needed. Equipment can then be picked up at his house in Valley Cottage when they are ready. Directions to the College are as follows:

BY CAR, FROM THE SOUTH

Take the Garden State Parkway north to Exit 172 (Grand Avenue). Turn left at the bottom of the ramp, go under the overpass and turn right at the stoplight onto Chestnut Ridge Road (Route 45). Continue/or about two miles, through two traffic lights, the New York State border and a third traffic light. Just past the first sign for Green Meadow Waldorf School on your left, turn left onto Hungry Hollow Road (the Hungry Hollow Co-op will be on the far corner).

BY CAR, FROM THE NORTH OR EAST

Take the New York State Thruway (Route 87) to Exit 14A (Garden State Parkway). Take the first exit (Red Schoolhouse Road, also identified as Last Exit in New York), turn right at the stop sign and go to the stoplight at Chestnut Ridge Road (Route 45). Turn left, and then take the first right turn onto Hungry Hollow Road. (The Hungry Hollow Co-op and Green Meadow Waldorf School are on the north and south corners of Hungry Hollow Road.)

AS YOU GO DOWN HUNGRY HOLLOW ROAD:

The second driveway on your left is the entrance to the Green Meadow Waldorf School's Nursery/Kindergarten parking lot. Just past the bottom of the hill on your left is the parking lot/or short-term visitors to the Main House which houses Sunbridge's Offices, Dining Room and Teacher Training Room and Brookside Building. Orchard Lane, the first actual street on your left, is the entrance For Holder House (the student dormitory) and student parking. 100 yards further on your right, opposite the entrance to the Fellowship Community, is the entrance of the Threefold Auditorium, which also houses both the Sunbridge College Library and the Bookstore.

Members of the Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.

We need articles for our newsletter! Any help is appreciated.
Contact our webmaster webmaster@rocklandaquanauts.org

Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.
Mission Statement:

To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.

Tax Season is over for me

(continued from page 1)

As an artificial reef the ship will not only be a recreation resource for divers and fishermen, but will serve as an underwater classroom for the Florida Keys Community College. It will become a platform for the groundbreaking research in the reef monitoring as mandated by Sanctuary rules.

The Vandenberg falls into second place behind the air craft carrier Oriskany, scuttled May 17, 2006, 24 miles off Pensacola displacing the 510 foot Spiegel Grove six miles off Key Largo.

Diving the Vandenberg will be a learning experience for all level of divers. The crow's nest sitting on top of the superstructure can be reached at 40 feet which will also be visible to snorkels on the surface.

The Vandenberg will be the perfect wreck. It can be used as an introduction to wreck diving . More experienced divers with the proper training and knowledge may penetrate through accesses in the upper four decks with vertical entrances through stairwells, cargo holds and elevator shafts. The huge rudder will rest in the sand at 144 feet.

The cost of the entire project is expected to be between five and six million dollars. This is expected to be recovered by the increased tourist dollars spent as a result of the wreck. The scuttling is expected between January and May of 2008. I know that I cannot wait for it.

Peter Bein
April 27, 2007
Marathon, Florida

Accepted Hessian Lake Dives 2007

Sunday June 3rd at 9am
Saturday July 7th at 9am
Sunday August 5th at 9am
Saturday September 8th at 10am
Sunday September 30th at 10am
Saturday October 13th at 10am
Sunday October 21st at 10am

The Thunderbolt

The Thunderbolt, intentionally sunk on March 6, 1986, now lies upright on a sandy bottom in 120 feet of blue water approximately four miles south (offshore) of Marathon and Key Colony Beach in the Florida Keys. But she began and lived her life in a number of different ways, including having several different names.

Originally named the Major General Wallace F. Randolph and built under contract for the U.S. Army in 1942/43, the Thunderbolt began life as a Comanche-Class Auxiliary Minelayer. The ship was built, along with 15 sister ships, by the Marietta Manufacturing Company in West Virginia at a length of 188 feet with a 37-foot beam, displacing 1,300 gross tons. The ships were built to plant and tend defensive coastal minefields for the Army's Coast Artillery Corps.

In 1951, that all changed when the defensive coastal minefield operations were transferred to the U.S. Navy along with the Randolph. Now with the Navy, the Randolph was designated as an auxiliary mine layer ACM-15, although she was never commissioned into the U.S. Navy fleet. The Randolph was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina and later moved to Green Cove Springs, Florida as a member of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. In 1955, prior to moving to Florida, she was re-designated as the MMA-15 and her name was changed to Nausett.

In 1960, the U.S. Navy decommissioned the ship and in May 1961, she was sold to Caribbean Enterprises, Inc. in Miami, Florida. The company renamed the ship again to Sea Searcher, where she served as an oilfield exploration ship.

Florida Power and Light (FP&L) eventually purchased the Sea Searcher from Caribbean Enterprises as a research vessel. FP&L renamed the ship Thunderbolt because of her unique use. FP&L used the ship as a stationary point for lightning strikes by using two jet engines to blast ionized gas into the atmosphere. The gas attracted lightning strikes, which directly struck the ship. So, her name seemed only appropriate. Thunderbolt served as a research vessel for FP&L until the early 1980s when she was supposed to begin a new career as an underwater surveyor ship. That career never began because Thunderbolt sunk at its dock in Miami Harbor.

Shipwrecks make excellent artificial reefs and spurred the Middle Keys diving community and Florida Keys Artificial Reef Association to purchase and then clean and prep Thunderbolt for her final service as an artificial reef, where she could become home for a variety of fish, corals, and other marine life. Thunderbolt could also provide divers one of the best wreck dives in the Florida Keys, which she is now doing on a daily basis.

Diving Thunderbolt

The GPS alarms "waypoint arrival" as you slow your speed. Scanning the surface of the water for the standard Florida Keys mooring buoys leads to nothing. "Are you on the right numbers," you wonder. After double-checking the GPS, you realize that these are the right numbers, but where are the mooring buoys.

Mooring to Thunderbolt is different than many of the other wrecks in the Florida Keys. There is a bow and stern mooring buoy just like the other wrecks, but they're not on the surface — they're 15 to 20 feet underwater. Knowing this before you get there is a huge benefit so you can begin your search for the buoys underwater. Typically, visibility is very good on the Thunderbolt, so if your numbers are good, you can usually find at least one buoy fairly easily. The best thing to do is scan the area by having someone on the bow of your boat, someone watching the port side, and the boat driver watching the starboard side.

To moor, send a free diver down to the buoy with a line to secure to the buoy (there is a metal ring to tie into at the top of the buoy) and then tie the other end to the bow cleat on your boat. Make sure you determine if there is any current and which way it's running before dropping your free diver.

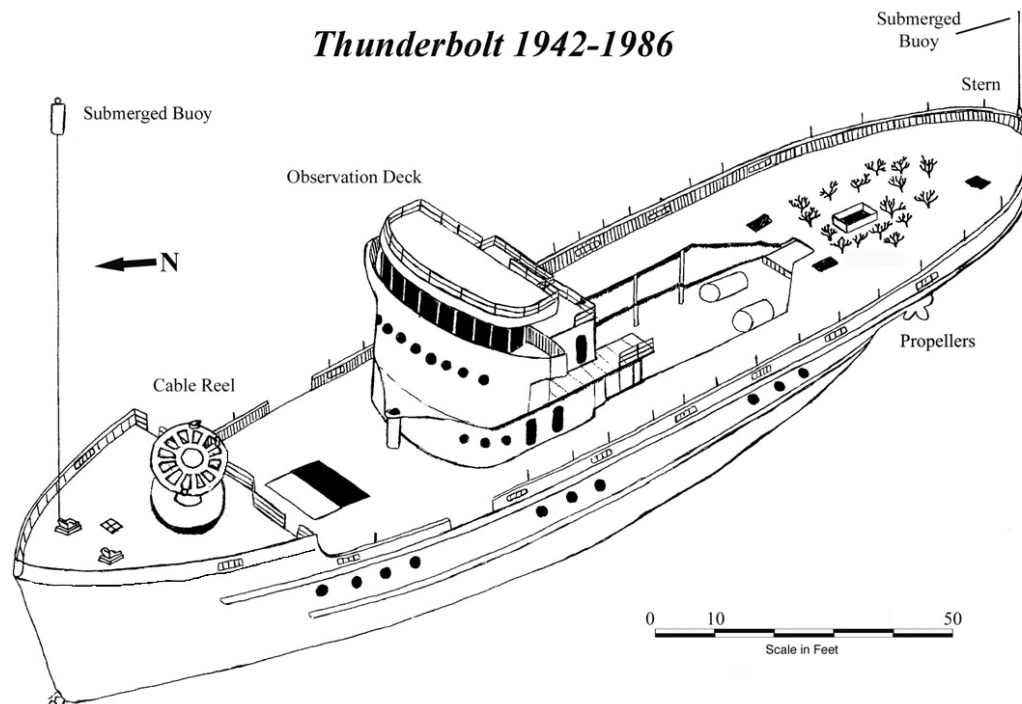
The Thunderbolt

Descending the mooring line to this 188-foot vessel is spectacular. With crystal blue water and great visibility, you can see the wreck within the first 20 feet or so of descent. As you descend, the ship gets larger and larger until you reach the deck in approximately 80 feet of water. If you hit the bow, a large cable-handling wheel sits decoratively on the deck. If you hit the stern, the deck is flat with a curved transom. The aft-end of the superstructure is cut away, exposing the interior of the hull at the engineering area. The rudder and props sit in the sand at 120 feet deep.

The observation deck and bridge area, located at the middle of the ship, rise to about 75 feet. The doors and many of the windows provide access into this area. Swim-throughs can be done easily with the natural light making for an interesting and exciting part of the dive. The open deck area behind the observation deck allow for exploration into other areas of the ship. The entire wreck can easily be seen on one dive, but to really have a chance to explore the many different areas, two to three dives is a must.

Marine life is prolific on the Thunderbolt, offering another excellent side to diving the wreck. Large fish such as tarpon, barracuda, grouper, goliath grouper, amberjack, and permit are typically on the wreck. Growth is abundant on the wreck bringing in tropical fish to feed and live amongst the hydroids, sponges, scallops, corals, and whips. Inspecting the vast marine life on Thunderbolt is a dive in itself. Parrotfish can also be seen munching on the various corals throughout the wreck.

The Thunderbolt shipwreck is one of the best wrecks in the middle keys area. Many of the local dive shops run charters to the wreck, so getting there with experienced dive personnel isn't a problem. It is considered a more advanced dive due to its depth and possible currents, so know your limits and dive within your plan and most of all, have a great time doing one of the neatest things in scuba diving...wreck diving.



ALP-MARITIMES MARINE INSTITUTE

MAKING A GOOD DIVER: What makes a good technical diver, or a good diver period? We have often extolled the virtues of helium based breathing gas. Of course it is great to have a clear mind and sharp wits. Still this alone is not enough.

Great modern gear well configured can be a huge help. Still all the best kit will not make you a good diver.

Oh yes, taking courses is the key, you say. Take all the courses you can from all the big name guys from all the powerhouse agencies. Do one course after another and have a sack full of cards; we call these people “course junkies”, and still this will not necessarily do it for you.

Well I know the next answer will be experience. Go out and dive a lot. Get every dive you can in your logbook, especially some big name trophy dives (Doria, Empress ect.). Bear in mind a favorite question I have for the person with a gazillion dives; “do you have a gazillion experiences or one experience repeated a gazillion times?” It is all too easy to just make the same dive over and over again, even if the location is different, and especially if you dive with the same people.

Sure you need the gas, gear and courses but what do you do with this base, go out and dive with your peers? Hockey players do not get better playing games, ski racers do not get better in races nor do pool sharks get better hustling games. The key is DRILLS and more DRILLS and still more DRILLS.

When was the last time you committed a whole dive to practicing a skill, any skill: buddy breathing, no mask swimming, power inflator breathing ect. Long time Eh? Sure I understand diving is a poor time/pleasure ratio, it takes so much time for a few minutes of fun, so why waste them on mundane drills? Why? Cause you’ll be a better diver and may just one day save your neck.

Even if you will not commit a whole dive to a drill, combine a few in your adventure dive. Things like: when at an easy deco spend some time opening and closing your valves with no depth change, when there is an easy ascent up the anchor line shoot a bag and do a swimming deco around the boat, descend a line with no mask/do deco with no mask, run a line when there is no real reason ect. Be creative use your “off time to drill”.

One other thing, vary your dive buddy. If you dive the same buddy team you tend to get too used to/dependant/role cast on a particular way. If that person is not there then bad stuff happens.

Last comment, as the underwater part of a trip is real short and the topside real long we tend to dive with people we like. Never the less, whenever an opportunity arises to dive with someone of acknowledged skills and experience, take it. True, we all know some great divers who have what I’d call “peculiar personalities”. It would be nice if all the great divers were super nice people but some are not. So for the sake of learning, bite your tongue and learn what you can from anyone that is better. I have not come up with anything new here, just advise on drilling hard, “no pain no gain”, all I offer is “blood, sweat, toil and tears”. Maybe for a victory and a finest hour.

<http://www.technicaldivingops.com>

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
2007 Dues

I guess it is that time of the year again, Membership Dues are due. Last year all our members received much more than they gave out to the Organization. As usual you will be receiving a tax donation for the first \$25.00. All members who attended the Annual Dinner not only received money off their own dinner but they also received money off their guests dinner. Everyone whom attended also received prizes, some worth many times the cost of their Dues. Don't forget the Annual Picnic as well as all the BBQ lunch's after the Lake Dives.

So please send in your \$42 dues early to;

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
c/o
Paul Galeazzi Jr.
4 Greensward Drive.
Valley Cottage New York 10989

Deadliest Sea Creatures

Cone Shell



Jeffrey L. Rotman, Corbis

This is a poisonous cone shell with its proboscis protruding. This proboscis is a hollow feeding tube with a barbed tooth on the end. The cone shell injects venom through the tooth and into its prey -- usually fish and molluscs. The venom from one cone shell could, in theory, kill 700 people. Sting symptoms progress from numbness to breathing failure.



**Rockland Aquanauts
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New City, NY
10956**

May 2007

The Thunderbolt, Making a Good Diver, New Meeting Home, Membership Dues, Hessian Lake Schedule

****Next Meeting****

June 12th 2007
(details inside)