

Divers visit Twin Capes 130 feet below the surface

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — In order to board the M.V. Twin Capes these days, a former Cape May-Lewes Ferry vessel, you'd have to dive more than 100 feet below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean.

The vessel made its final trip June 15 to the ocean bottom to serve as part of an artificial reef after holes were cut in the hull and valves were opened to let it sink.

A group of local divers visited the sunken ferry last week. According to diver Rustin Cassway, the Twin Capes is sitting on her port side in 130 feet of emerald green water, about 30 miles south of Cape May. He was joined aboard the Research Vessel Explorer, a scuba

diving boat, by Scott Tester, Rich Venuti and Kevin Krowicki.

"We dove the Radford, another ship, a few days after it sank and we dove the Zuni a couple of weeks after it sank," Cassway said. "I thought it would be cool to find out for the local fishermen how it's sitting, is it upright, is it upside-down?"

The former U.S. Navy destroyer USS Arthur W. Radford was sunk Aug. 10, 2011, and the former cutter the Zuni/Tamaroa was sunk into the reef 14 months ago.

The ferry extends up to about a depth of 55 feet. Cassway said from the surface, it is evident there is a ship below because it's painted white and the water was clear.

"It's going to be terrific for fishermen," he said.

Cassway said the cleanup of the ship before its sinking was excellent, as nothing is exuding from the vessel. He said the cleanup was funded by a federal excise tax on each piece of fishing gear sold.

The team spent about 40 minutes diving the sunken ferry. He said a grappling hook was thrown and it settled where big windows were formerly located on the ferry. Cassway said he swam down to move the anchor and saw the high point of the wreck, which is now the side of the ship, and the cutouts for the former car deck. He said rope was tied between the anchor chain and the ship.

Cassway said the ferry settled all in one piece on the ocean bottom.

"Give this about a year and it's going to be all covered with mussels and then the mussels grow in there and the sea life likes the mussels; it's an awesome ecosystem," he said.

Swimming through the ferry, signs are still visible for fire extinguisher stations and lifeboats, he said.

The Research Vessel Explorer is based at Utsch's Marina in Lower Township.

"Our basic mission in life is to go find shipwrecks," he said.

In addition, on July 4, the divers identified a ship hit by a German U-Boat missile



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Photo courtesy of Rustin Cassway

The team plunged 130 feet below the Atlantic Ocean to see the final resting place of the M.V. Twin Capes.

in 1942 off Cape May. The wreck of the D/S Octavian has been positively identified and confirmed through the recovery of the engine and boiler builder's plaque. This was further confirmed by Jorgan Johannassan of the Maritime Museum of Oslo, Norway. The wreck lies 70 miles from Cape May in 227 feet of water. The Octavian was owned by A/S Rederiet Julian and was a 250-foot Norwegian freighter carrying sulfur and wood resin.

The Octavian left Galveston, Texas, on Jan. 9, 1942, headed to St. John, New Brunswick. The freighter never arrived in St. John

and all 17 crewmembers perished without a trace. Due to an error, some history books have the Octavian located off Nova Scotia, which is north of New Brunswick, but there would be no reason for the ship to be in that location, according to Cassway.

"It's possible that St. John, New Brunswick and St. John, Newfoundland were confused and the coincidence of U-203 sinking an unknown vessel in the vicinity credited the 203 with the sinking," he stated in a release. "Interestingly there are footnotes in multiple locations, including warsailors.com, U-Boat

War against the Americas and researcher Edward R. Rumpf, that suggest that U-123 commanded by Reinhard Hardegen sank the Octavian.

U-123 is also credited with sinking the Cyclops, Norrness and Coimbra prior to the Octavian. U-123 then headed to Cape Hatteras, N.C., to sink four more ships and damage a fifth, according to Cassway.

The deck logs of the U-123 indicate that Hardegen sank an unidentified freighter in the location of the now identified Octavian on Jan. 17, 1942. The ship reportedly sank in a plume of black smoke in less than a minute as Hardegen used his last stern torpedo. The U-123 then reportedly departed at maximum speed toward Cape Hatteras.

"This is exciting news and we hope to bring closure to the families of 16 Norwegian sailors and one Canadian sailor," Cassway stated.

He said credit to this project and research should go to the RV Explorer team along with Gary Gentile; Hildrun Sommer, their assistant in Oslo and former Evie Dudas employee; the Maritime Museum in Oslo; diver Richie Kohler for providing the grid chart and explaining how to use it; Bob Cope of Fishing Fever and Sean Manni.

TIDES : July 11-18, 2018

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
11	6:56	7:22	12:47	12:40
12	7:52	8:16	1:41	1:35
13	8:48	9:08	2:35	2:30
14	9:42	10:01	3:28	3:26
15	10:37	10:54	4:20	4:22
16	11:32	11:48	5:12	5:19
17		12:29	6:05	6:18
18	12:43	1:28	6:59	7:20

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Surfer rescues boy

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beaches or after guards have gone off-duty. The Cape May Beach Patrol has operated 107 years without a drowning on a guarded beach. The chance of drowning at an unguarded beach is nearly five times the risk of drowning at a guarded beach, per the United States Lifesaving Association.

Rip currents are a concern on Cape May's beaches. The quick currents move offshore and are the most common cause of distress requiring lifeguard rescues. Anyone who spots a person caught in a rip current should call 911. People caught in a rip cur-

rent should swim parallel to the beach instead of directly to shore.

"I grabbed him and started swimming in to the shore with him," Dandridge said. "The surf was big and he was big enough to swim but was gasping for air and taking breaths. He was very scared and did not know how to swim or swim well."

With no visual confirmation that help was on the way from the boy's parents on the beach, Dandridge was alone in the ocean, trying to save the boy.

"It wasn't working for me to swim with him so I threw him on the surf board and I got behind him," Dandridge

said. "We started swimming in until a huge wave brought us to shore. The kid was shaking and very scared. He was probably scared for his life. His mom came up and was very thankful."

The boy's mother told Dandridge that she took her eyes off him for only a second.

"I told her that it was not a good place for kids to be swimming, even with a parent there," Dandridge said. "Poverty (Beach) is one of the strongest parts of the beach in Cape May. Even with lifeguards, it's a scary place to swim with kids."

Dandridge explained to the family the correct way to get out of a rip current is to swim parallel to shore.

"He was just treading water," Dandridge said. "I really believe he would've died if I hadn't been there. His mom would've been too late; you needed a board for a rescue. The other two kids weren't paying attention. It's one of those things that people don't realize that you need to keep an eye on your kids. I have three young kids; some people are just so out of touch. Even with a lifeguard, you should be watching your kids. Some people don't realize that."

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