

# Life of the Salvage Diver 'Z'

by Cpt. Diver Zdenek Ulman

[www.marinedivingservice.com](http://www.marinedivingservice.com)

Getting a phone call in the early morning hours, when sleep is best. Brief message about the location and what the situation is.

In this case, boats caught on fire in the marina, and are going down. The race starts, the diver is mobilized, getting all the dive gear necessary to work on the mid-January salvage. We live prepared, this is what we do. Packing up the truck with dive gear before 3 am, when the best sleep catches with most people, diver hits the road.

This is a time to get the blue tooth all connected for oncoming calls, when everyone will be calling each other as they are coming from all different directions, to make it happen. While traveling about an hour to the marina, phones don't stop, discussing with others about what we have, who is bringing what equipment, what boat is being sent and who knows what really happened. Picture of oncoming operation is taking shape.

A team with an environmental boom are almost at the scene securing the area. Fire trucks are gone, boat is bringing lift bags. The diver has all the fittings, air manifold and necessary shackles for the salvage.

Another crew is rushing down with a load of slings, and the generator. "Anyone with a spare gas can???" Text comes in. Two of us have small cans and making a stop at the gas station to get fueled up; coffee and gas for generators.

Half an hour into the drive and there are numerous phone calls, text messages shared to cope with the he situation and get the information flowing. This gives us a chance to get all we need while underway. First pictures of the scene are bringing the sight of the unfortunate disaster, and the sense of time running out. Images are revealing a vessel's burned bow slowly setting under.

Those of us passing by the tool storage make a stop here, and everyone else gets all they can think of for the salvage. I wish the same would apply to personal needs like getting a hot tea for the day and night of cold water diving, spare clothes and other goodies a diver needs to be comfortable.

No this is not in the cue now.

As the time lapses and the closer we get, the phone gets crazy again. For those of us lost on the road, finalizing the address or better yet repeating everything just like google does, not only takes precious minutes away, but also gets all the necessary team on the job scene.

We made it!! Cars, trucks, flickering head lamps running all over as we are unloading. It's a dark and cold night /morning. Some of us are fighting to deploy a boom in the water to contain all floating debris, as divers get their dollies weighted down with all the gear they need. It looks like an army on the move, or like watching the National Geographic "Ants" documentary -back and forth, back and forth, getting all that gear to the docks.

One boat has a bow still visible above the water, but it looks like we cannot get slings under it before it sets itself down into the murky waters covered with the oil spill. It will rest on the muddy bottom in a next few minutes. The divers' eyes are the most watchful ones of this happening. They are mentally trying to keep it afloat. Vessel staying partially up would save them hours and hours of the cold water bath, along with numbing pain in their toes and hands as the cold gets in. When they come up, if they are lucky, hot tea gets handed to them. Divers spill most of it right away as their hands are in pain and shaking out of control. Some just pour it right into their wet suit to "warm things up" and drink the second round.

In this salvage, 2 divers will go in. Generators, air bags, compressors are ready. Crew is laying down slings in order of length, while others are cleaning the snow off the docks with the marina shovels.

Lift bags are being mobilized by 2 man team-they are very heavy. All air hoses are prepared, air manifold is getting marked: port, starboard, stern and so on...

Portable lights are illuminating this madness, docks are almost completely covered with somewhat organized gear, while the top of the water is filled with mattresses, wooden tables and anything that burned yachts could not take down with them.

Diver one is ready to go in, followed by his buddy. Last look at the debris cover before sliding in. Darkness has its mercy to hide the oil sheen... at least for now. Wireless comms. are set, and after careful roll down into the water- they both disappear.

For a second, the top crew can see a large glow from powerful flash lights as they go deeper in. "Comms check, comms check, over?" (Top side speaks up to the headset)

"Loud and clear, over" (diver replies). "Loud and clear over" (confirmation from top side). That is the first communication and last sight of those two as they set themselves for their adventure down below.

There are 2 yachts side by side with tops totally burned off and one has a side burned out as well. Divers are swimming in dark, muddy waters, navigating by feel, brushing against countless debris, varying from ripped off railings, floating furniture, cables, dock lines, all of which are ready to keep them down there. Cold seeps in as they make their way around and report what they see. "Any attaching points?" "No, so far top deck is gone. Stern is still there. Second vessel has cleats at the bow on each side." "No way to reach props or find any gap underneath to put slings through to attach the lift bags". Not the best report. "Coming up". "Copy, coming up". 45 minutes into the salvage comes the first set of cups of tea for those two. Making a plan inside the boat, while drinking tea overloaded with lemon and honey. First drawing made by divers gives way for the number one salvage plan. How many plans we will make, no one knows. All hopes are set for this one. At the end, it takes 4 more plans! Past lunch time, one vessel is up, floating. Divers found some points to attach the bags and now the once attractive yacht is floating, and being dewatered. Time to take a break for divers. Shift is already 10 hrs. in, and pizza tastes like the finest of New York Restaurant week.

Next, 2 more dives and by 4 pm another plan is set. One diver sort



Photo by: M. Bele

of invented a system of how to jet slings under the wreck with available equipment on site. Bystanders are taking pictures, and it seems like a cold day can be lots of fun, at least for them. Top crew is getting exhausted; running around, setting all the pumps, lift bags, skimming oil, picking up the floating debris and making countless Home Depot runs. Everyone is wet, dirty, oily, and cold. Today was a really cold day

and as the evening sets in, it is getting colder. The end is not in anybody's projection by now- the yacht is still down below resting and binding with the bottom more closely as the hours are passing by. We are here to break that bond, and it is getting harder and harder. Diver's comms top side unit is being passed from one person to another as they have different ideas, and everyone wants to

say something revolutionary. The crew is getting nervous and scrambling for solutions. This creates a lot of messages just to confuse cold divers down below and interrupting their plan. This makes every task take longer and become more dangerous. All those good ideas are not accepted by divers, until a new plan is made. Seems like they are the only ones keeping their "cool". No one can rush a diver! Finally they put their time and precision planning together, and their well thought out work replaces any haste/waste. Results are on the way.

Divers Comms. get busy again.

"Air, 10 seconds to port and starboard stern, over." "Now this is the communication everyone up there was waiting for!!! Air inflation request for installed lift bags!! Things are looking up. "10 seconds port, starboard stern, copy"

Hoses are hissing on the docks and two slowly inflating lift bags are unfolded by divers down below. "All good, stop now." "10 seconds port starboard bow" Copy, 10 seconds port starboard bow" Air is carried down by reflective orange hoses from top side compressor. "Stop, stop, stop." "All stop" replying from the top. One bag got jammed, they are there to make precise moves to save efforts and time. Divers are ready to check out from cold waters, dexterity in their fingers is affected and pain sets in. Air is shut off, bag is straightened up and new command goes on. "5 second for each now". "5 seconds for each, copy." Now the divers surfaced with their index fingers pointing up and making circles, this means "fill them up". Flash lights are shining from the divers' rigs, blinding everyone around. It seems like time has stopped, watching the vessel emerging above the water into a dark cold evening, accompanied with huge air bags on each side. The vessel's new companions work well. Bottom is left where it belongs. Did time stop? When we first came, it was dark and lights got set up for the salvage operation. Now, the vessels are floating, while lights are still shining around..... No, time did not stop -these lights are on again. Stage changed -there is a lot now for everyone to look at!!! Last cup of the tea feels like an Olympic victory, - it would be a good time to celebrate as it is 10 pm. and most people would wind down by now. Pictures, flashes, huge audience on the dock...Divers are packing up and that National Geographic "Ants" documentary goes in reverse now till about 3 am until all is packed up like nothing happened.

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Boat Ride for Vets

by **Leslie Spencer**

Whites Marina, boat owners and volunteers are again looking forward hosting the 4th annual boat ride for vets followed by a picnic lunch on June 8th 2019. Rain date is June 9th. The Dutchess County Office of Veterans Services, collect the names of the veterans who would like to participate in this event (sign up is not until May 1st). The contact person at Veterans Services is Mark Coviello [mcoviello@dutchessny.gov](mailto:mcoviello@dutchessny.gov). The day begins at 10am with sign in, coffee, donuts and a flag raising ceremony with the singing of the national anthem. After that, boat owners and vets are paired up and asked to board boats for the two-hour ride to West point and back. Upon returning there will be a picnic lunch prepared for the veterans and all of those involved. Advanced thanks to the

boat owners who will take guests on the boat ride, to those who donate food for the picnic lunch, to those who donate finances to help buy supplies and to Whites Marina for hosting the event. Anyone interested in joining us in any facet is welcome! For more information you may contact George Mann at [jackrr42@aol.com](mailto:jackrr42@aol.com), or Leslie Spencer at [res12dive@gmail.com](mailto:res12dive@gmail.com). We ask that veterans and guests that desire a boat ride be ambulatory for safety reasons getting on and off the boats. If anyone is in need of a restroom during the boat ride please let us know as we will pair you up properly. Some of the smaller boats do not come equipped with such amenities. Bottled water will be available on all of the boats as well as on land. Mark your calendars for this event!



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