

Monster salvage from the back of the pick-up truck and dock carts.

Perseverance

by Cpt. Diver "Z"

This is a real "Dive into the unknown" story in every aspect of it. It is a story of courage, perseverance, and an amazing team effort. This is a story, telling what not giving up means and what results it can bring. It developed during severe cold winter storm weather, during a blizzard night, and ended the next freezing evening. The vision and thought were the driving forces, giving the only warmth to the whole monstrous operation.

Looking over the beautiful waters of Rockaway, undisturbed reflection from the marina dock is a calming sight for some, but it can be a site of challenge and a porthole to the unknown to down below for others.

It is about 16 pumps roaring and spraying water vigorously just like they are trying to fight and overcome one another. This is when all water calmness is disturbed by two 100 ft. long docks parallel to one another about 40 ft. apart framing the underwater monster territory.

The crew is busy managing the pumps, some bystanders are running around with phones, Go-pros, and no one really knows what to expect, besides a few members of crazy running salvage staff.

It looks chaotic but I know it is like a good Swiss watch precisely cutting into every moment of the presence.

It all started with a phone call for barge salvage, and our company submitted the bid and was awarded the project.

Down below there is a barge that needs to be refloated and towed away. For many, it was a task for big crane barges, boats, and so on. For us, it was designed from the back of the pickup truck and many trips with the dock carts. Let's do it!!!

It is cold, I mean very cold. The diver is down below and starts the first part of the mission. He is inspecting the barge, something not seen for a year. There are no longer memories of good times and parties when the barge was afloat and hosting happy summer days as a sailing club. It is far from all that. He may have some sun penetrating down below, but everything else is just the opposite-quiet, covered with marine growth, rusty. Here he finds the first hole - one of the first notes of the story "How it all went down and sunk."

He has a lot to do. The wreck has to be brought back to the surface.

The barge down below has inside compartments separated by walls, just like rooms in your house. Except these compartments are equal in size. Swimming on the deck reveals some treasures, flipped over barbecues, flag posts, ship bell, but certainly, no warm atmosphere of the past summer times is given away... The diver becomes cold, he feels the cold water flow on his body under the suit and needs every bit of focus and precision to complete the last task.

Here it is, right next to the big barbecue there is a large square hole in the floor... it is called a hatch and it is the entrance to the barge compartments, it is measured and marked. Number one is this one and five more will complete the full report of six hatches. Each hatch is precisely measured and inspected.

I can only hope, that all his tasks are going smooth and a shiver will not take away the focus from his measurements, mental notes,

and sketches he needs to come to the surface with, besides the air remaining in his tank! It is a time of waiting. Here we go...I got the first numbers and descriptions, writing it all down...thanks to the high-tech wireless communication system with the discovery frogman down below.

My notes are done and "Coming up" is the last transmission made before I find myself looking into the diver's eyes, wide-open-he is cold. As he floats, I'm taking weights and his equipment off. He is back on the dock, and through a portable hot shower regaining his senses.

We are done, for the moment. Now, someone needs to put all the intel from the notes together, design the hatches, the braces, and the locking system to keep the hatches in place. Pumping power has to be calculated, psi calculated, head pumping capacities of the pumps, design and the number of pumping ports has to be made, air introduction system- so as the water is removed, air can be pulled down below to make it buoyant again... A lot of moving parts to make an engineer quite busy.

Driving well over 4,000 miles to purchase all the pumps gave me just enough time to do all that.

Thousands of thoughts went through my mind to imagine all that, to make a visual picture in my mind of the whole process, to figure out all materials, adapters, connectors, and so on.

Sipping a good cup of tea at my desk, not even realizing that this was one of the most important times of the entire salvage operation. Pile of the paper with sketches gave birth to the first actual drawing of the hatch with all fittings, adapters, and so on.

After a few days of woodworking and running around and the hatches are made. With high-quality seals, diver-friendly brackets to hold it in place, with suction hoses, pump connectors, and all that, hatches are ready for the diver. This is a different construction- it has to be ready for transport, easy to assemble on rocking, floating docks with minimum tools, and it has to be diver-friendly, doable to maneuver, and install underwater.

All that in mind, cold water splash follows and the woodwork is being brought down below... I guess the advantage is that no one can see the process and the struggles.

After three days, the hatches are in. The "How-it-sunk-story-telling-holes" are patched now. The new story "How it all came up" is about the be written.

Cold Sunday morning right after the Northeastern storm, the sound of snow squeaking under footsteps as seven crew members are getting together at the marina. Grabbing their hard hats and headlamps to make a scene alive before the sunrise reveals the Northeastern storm snow coverage.

Good to go! Everything is prepared, all tools, equipment is where it needs to be and before long docks are full of boxes of supplies needed. Pump docks are towed along the envisioned borders of the wreck down below. Creating about 100 ft. of a walkway on the water along the perimeter of the wreck. Each dock has its own obstacle course made out of strapped-down pumps.

The diver is handing up the hoses he has just connected down below to the hatches and each pump gets a feed of cold water to be taken away from the sunken wreck. This will be a battle of forces, fast reactions, dedication, perseverance, and not giving up no matter what!

Low tide timing is the horn of the battle to begin! One by one, pumps are ingesting cold water, taking away what the wreck was holding on to for about a year down below.

It takes about 10,000 gallons per minute of pumping power to start replacing the wreck water with air.

The scene looks more like a giant octopus with all the hoses connected to the pumps on the docks.

There are tubes with the ends extending above the water, and the diver is dropping his flashlight in it to look inside of the barge. He reports from different hatches by signaling how many feet of water has been removed. What a sight - to see the inside of the barge from above. It is like peeking into a different world, a different time zone, a different galaxy.

Soon enough those two worlds will meet as the wreck is expected to reach enough buoyancy and float to the surface.

Pumps are roaring and everyone is looking at the water trying to imagine what to expect, trying to prepare themselves.

The diver is up, not sure if he shivers because of the cold or the nerves as he needs this operation to be a success.

It is his contract with no cure - no pay policy. He invested his hard-earned money and months of preparation. Now is the moment. It is beyond imagination to see what is going through his mind after cold months of diving, engineering, money spending, and preparations.

Pumps roaring take over anything that can be said, so just the hand signals can be seen to increase or reduce the power of the pumps to keep it all in balance.

Here we go!!!!



Slowing every pump down, the frantic crew is all over the place. Here is the house railing coming out of the water. For many, it is a surprise. What used to be a white railing is now covered with mud and marine growth. It is about a foot above the water framing perimeter of the wreck. Seems like the monster's territory was well estimated as the railing is right within and next to the docks with pumps.

Pumps are going on high again. It is painful to wait for the next few minutes. Will it reveal itself? Is there enough force to break the bond of the wreck with its territory? No one knows. The diver hopes for the best and hopes his plans were right.

Minutes passed, and here it is coming up!!! Here is the chair, a table, a barbecue, all covered with long seaweed.

The deck of the barge is up!!! Littered with the last picnic setup, hosting former sailing club summer events of good times.

It is raising rapidly. The front end of the barge is positioned about 10 ft. from the main dock. It is huge! Now it is about 4 ft. out of the water. It happened so fast. It is like the wreck just totally gave up and surrendered to unsurpassed power and the crew's will.

Seaweed and all the marine growth are dripping off stinky water, it is ugly and gloomy, but there is tremendous joy and happiness from the restless crew, but I think the biggest wave of joy is reserved for the diver.

He is relieved, it happened. It worked!!!

It is like a stand-off, facing the monster, staring at one another for a moment, and both have a story to tell.

It is an eye-to-eye, face-to-face dialog after both did something right.

The barge was a place of good summer times for friends of the sailing club, now the diver knows his good deed is removing a large piece of debris from the ocean floor to be scrapped.

It took 40 hours before the tug boat came to tow the wreck away, and a crew of three was constantly maintaining the pumps as the wreck had leaks. The crew endured a cold day, a cold night through the sunrise right on the docks, freezing into the new day when later the tug arrived and started the tow.

Waving the barge off with safe voyage thoughts was very emotional, underlined by a beautiful sunset over the Rockaway's beautifully calm waters - like nothing ever happened.

I would like to thank all crew members for their amazing dedication without which this barge project would never be successful!

For those who found themselves to be drawn to the story just a bit, I would like to invite you to a TV show Deep Sea Salvage on the Weather channel where you can witness it all as it happened.

Thank you all for your support.

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