



Issue #6, Winter 2013

The Lookout

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A Message From The Wheelhouse



Thanks for checking out Issue #6 of The Lookout, our periodic newsletter covering wide ranging topics that are historical, technical, and relevant to our diving community in Massachusetts Bay. This issue includes articles on the USS YF-415 and the story of the USS Zircon, summer diving highlights, a “wreck profile” of the Herbert, and finally some Gauntlet news. As you may know, 2013 was a big year for us, making a move from Salem to Beverly. In addition, we had a great summer filled with exploration that has set up a promising year for 2014.

We'd like to thank all our customers and crew for your continued support and participation aboard Gauntlet—and for helping to create great adventures on the high seas!

We hope you enjoy this issue of The Lookout!
Heather & Dave

The Lookout Newsletter

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A New Perspective on the YF-415 Sinking: The USS Zircon

More than 10 years after its discovery and first dives on July 20, 2003, the story of the USS YF-415 continues to intrigue. It is always amazing to observe history firsthand through diving, and to research the recorded history. Sometimes this leads to meeting living people connected to the event, bringing to light forgotten or never-told stories. In doing so, on occasion there is the opportunity to contribute to recorded history.

In July 2013, we were contacted by Lisa Bertone, daughter of Isidore “Teddy” Bertone, a sailor aboard the USS Zircon, the first vessel to respond aid the sinking YF-415 on May 10, 1944. He, and his best friend Anthony Sussino, wanted to tell their memories of the events on that day and correct inaccurate reports about the role of the Zircon. Almost 70 years after the sinking of the YF-415, the story of the USS Zircon has reemerged and given yet another perspective on this tragic accident.

A Review of the USS YF-415 Accident

On May 10, 1944 the YF-415 departed for the Naval Ammunition Depot in Hingham, MA under the command of Chief Boatswain's Mate Louis B. Tremblay of Marblehead, MA. The ship's orders were to proceed to Hingham and load ammunition to be disposed of in deep water off Boston.

For this trip the ship was loaded with approximately 150 tons of ammunition, which included obsolete pyrotechnics, black powder, and 50-caliber projectiles ranging from

3" – 5" in shell size, and other miscellaneous ordnance. The YF-415 was loaded to its maximum draft, though some claimed the ship was further weighted down to its gunwales.



The USS YF-415 upon completion in 1943. It would be lost in a tragic accident less than one year later

415, inspect the rocket containers to ensure the matches had been removed. The YF-415 successfully conducted two similar disposal runs without incident.

At approximately 11:30, the crew began dumping the ordnance. The relatively inexperienced enlisted African-American men from Hingham were charged with disposing the rockets. The disposal process proceeded as planned and without incident. However, according to testimony by Chief Boatswain's Mate Tremblay who observed the disposal operation, at about 12:30 pm there was a "terrific whoosh" – a fire from an explosion of rockets, which set off a chain reaction of explosions, quickly engulfing the port side of the ship, spreading from amidships to the entire main deck. The highly flammable, special use matches had not been removed from the containers, and when the containers were struck to crush them, an explosion resulted.

The fire aboard the YF-415 raged uncontrollably and attempts to man firefighting equipment were unsuccessful. Many were temporarily trapped in the crews quarters, located in the forward part of the ship, as intense flames and heat seared the YF-415. One crewman, William J. Bradley, managed to escape from the engine room but suffered third degree burns over 76% of his body and later died. Most men drowned in the water awaiting rescue. One sailor, Seaman second-class Yeo Jin was reported to have jumped into a shower during the panic in an attempt to shield himself from the fire on deck. He would not leave the crew's quarters despite the efforts of his fellow sailors. They were eventually forced to leave to save themselves. They did not see Jin alive again.

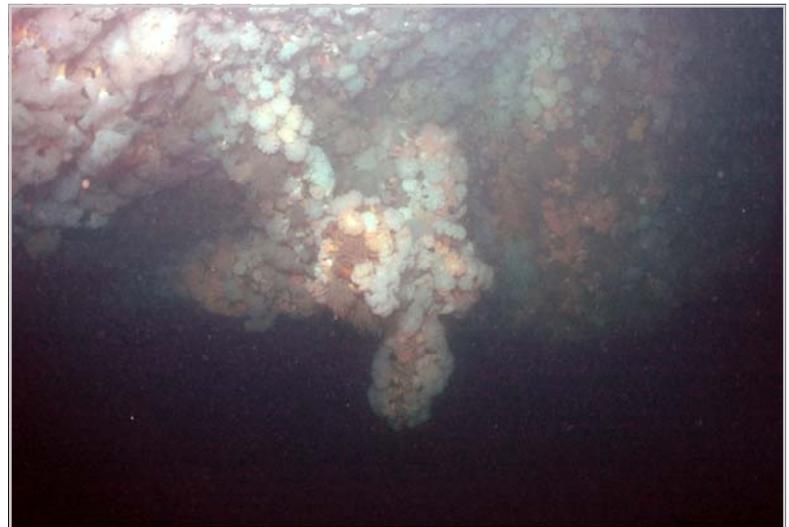
Numerous ships and vessels operating in the area were dispatched to conduct search and rescue operations. The USS Zircon, a nearby weather-observing vessel, was the first to arrive on scene.

A Rescue Operation: The USS Zircon

The USS Zircon (PY-16) was a private yacht procured by the

The YF-415 departed Hingham with five officers, ten men comprising regular crew and an additional work crew of sixteen African-American men from the Hingham ammunition depot for a total of thirty-one men. While underway, the crew prepared the ordnance for disposal. At approximately 11:30 am on May 11, the YF-415 arrived in the disposal area where the crew proceeded to uneventfully dump nearly two-thirds of the cargo, including much of the black powder and projectiles.

According to testimony and reports from the naval inquiry, the rockets intended for disposal were normally buoyant and required special preparation to sink. The Bureau of Ordnance procedures required puncture of the rocket storage containers and removal of the package of matches provided to ignite the rockets. However, the men were instructed by the YF-415 officers to load the containers with projectile shells and crush the containers to keep the rockets and projectiles from falling out. At no time did any officer, whether at the Hingham Ammunition Depot, or on board the YF-



The port propeller of the YF-415. It was surprising to learn the YF-415 began sinking stern first; the bow is buried in the sea floor.



Isidore Bertone among the crew. Bertone is pictured second from the right, kneeling.

Navy and converted into a weather observing vessel. On the day of the YF-415 sinking, the Zircon was on convoy duty under the command of Captain Douglas C. Bird, looking for U-boats and making weather observations in preparation for the June 1944 invasion of Normandy. The crew of the Zircon was made up by men mostly from New York, some of who were from the same neighborhoods and during their time on the Zircon, formed close bonds that carried forth throughout their lives. Such is the story of Isidore Bertone and Anthony Sussino.



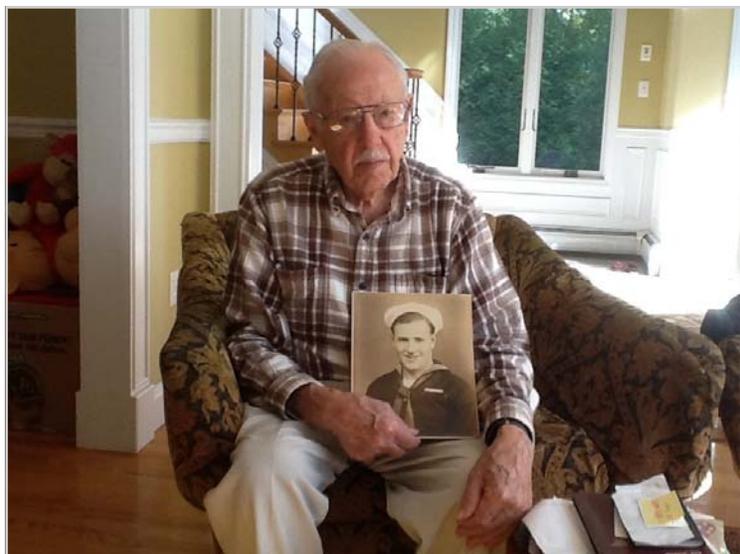
Anthony Sussino among the crew. Sussino is pictured sitting in the front row, on the left.

According to Bertone and Sussino, when the Zircon got the call to proceed to the YF-415, it was on a day with fog and limited visibility. Upon arriving on the scene, some of men were below decks finishing lunch, while others were on deck. When the general quarters alarm sounded, the men jumped to action and began looking for survivors. At first it was thought the YF-415 may have been torpedoed, but when shrapnel began striking the Zircon, they suspected it something else.

It is here where reports differ. News reports published suggested the Zircon was unable to get very close to the YF-415, but that was inaccurate according to Bertone and Sussino. The men of the Zircon took great risks to rescue as many men as possible. As they approached the YF-415, they were struck with shrapnel and threatened by explosions aboard the YF-415; they observed debris, including men's limbs, floating in the water. Still, they pressed on to rescue survivors. Sailor Johnny Powers took to the water in a motor boat, coming right up to the YF-415 to rescue men. He was later awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic efforts.

Anthony Sussino recalled the YF-415 as it sank. He described the YF-415 sinking stern first, which was a surprising piece of information given that the YF-415 sits on the ocean floor with its bow buried in the mud, and its stern raised. When asked about this and if he was certain, Sussino described how he witnessed a man clinging to the bow anchor of the YF-415 as it sank stern first, and he would never forget that.

Both Isidore Bertone and Anthony Sussino described horrific scenes of attempting to rescue men so severely burned their flesh was coming off. One man brought aboard the Zircon was so severely burned not even the doctor aboard the vessel could help him and he died on deck. For young men in their late teens and early 20s, it is difficult to appreciate the impact this has on a person throughout their life; however, nearly 70 years later, both men describe the events as if they occurred yesterday, with great conviction, passion and emotion.



Isidore Bertone in 2013, holding his Navy class photo.

Following the rescue, the USS Zircon was ordered to return to Boston, where Bertone stated they were denied liberty and not permitted to go ashore or speak with reporters. The negligence that led to the YF-415 accident was largely brushed away and the story was quickly pushed out of view. The men of the Zircon felt as though they did not receive the credit they deserved for their heroic acts that resulted in thirteen men surviving the disaster. Sadly, the missing sixteen men's bodies were never recovered.

Although there was a US Naval inquiry and some news coverage of the accident, the story largely ended there until the wreck's discovery in 230 feet of water in July 2003. This story of the USS Zircon and the heroism displayed by these young men was largely unknown until recently.

Isidore Bertone and Anthony Sussino highlight another chapter in the continuing story of the USS YF-415. It is this aspect of shipwreck exploration that is the most rewarding. The ability to uncover history and to bring to light forgotten or never-told stories that matter to people is a corner stone of shipwreck exploration.

When we called Anthony Sussino and introduced ourselves, stating we were calling about the YF-415, he responded, "You're calling 70 years too late!" Nevertheless, a generation later, the story has been told, and hopefully this story helps to bring closure to those involved, while reminding us to be grateful for the sacrifices of those who serve our nation.

It is our hope that with the coming 70th anniversary, a larger review of the story will be covered by a national newspaper, truly honoring those that were part of the USS YF-415 rescue.

Summer Diving Highlights

Missing: The Wreck of the Patriot:

The Patriot is a steel hulled western rig dragger built in 1997. The 62 foot long vessel had been resting in 100 feet of water on the northern portion of Stellwagen Bank after sinking on January 3, 2009 in heavy seas. There were no survivors, and the circumstances of the sinking were very controversial. Initially, it was suspected the Patriot may have been run over by a larger vessel or caught in the tow of a tugboat; however, final US Coast Guard investigation reports concluded the vessel sank due to a loss of stability in heavy seas.

In early 2013, we learned of reports that the Patriot was missing and could not be located at its last known charted position. Several operators, including us, conducted searches in the area, attempting to relocate the wreck. None were successful and as of December 2013, the wreck remains missing.



The Patriot in 2011. At the time, the name was still visible.

We have concluded the wreck moved from its last charted position at 42-24.416' N x 70-27.268' W, most likely due to the impact of heavy seas from several powerful ocean storms during the winter of 2012-2013. If you have any information about the Patriot and a potential new position/hang in the area, please contact us.

Stellwagen Diving:

Once again we enjoyed a great summer with a few trips to Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Although we did not have an ideal tide calendar with slack water periods during mid-morning on the weekends, we managed some great trips to the North Star and Paul Palmer.

Additionally, another shallow water wreck has been identified and is currently under evaluation to have a mooring installed. This would be the first historic wreck in the sanctuary to have a mooring system. The wreck, dubbed "engine wreck" rests in 100 feet of water and is believed to be either the Leah F or the Heroic. Both were eastern rig draggers, converted from mine sweepers built during WWII. Stay tuned for more information about this wreck site and a potential mooring!

These Wrecks they are a-Changing:

Over this past year, we have had the opportunity to observe some significant changes in some of our most popular wrecks in Massachusetts Bay. Although all of these wrecks are changing and degrading over time, the powerful ocean storms of 2012-2013, one of which was an official blizzard, caused significant impact in our opinion. As mentioned above, we believe these storms moved the Patriot. Here is a summary of some other wrecks and dramatic changes we have observed in the last year.



Inside the Pinthis looking aft. More collapse is evident.

Chester Poling:

There has been significantly more degradation of the overall structure. There are openings in the hull and pre-existing holes have become larger. The bulkhead at the break end of the wreck is degraded enough that it is now very easy to enter the oil hold. Inside the wreck, the engine room space is even more restricted and a constant "flow" of water through the wreck has resulted in very cloudy water.

Baleen:

The wheelhouse and the deckhouse of the Baleen have all but collapsed. The crumbling structure is heavily leaning to starboard, so much so that it is difficult to enter the interior of the deckhouse.



.The holes along the port side of the YF-415 are growing larger

YF-415:

The deckhouse of the YF-415 has begun to collapse, with the forward portion collapsing most prominently. It is no longer possible to swim through from one end of the deckhouse to the other. The port side of the wreck continues to degrade with more holes.

Pinthis:

The profile of the Pinthis continues to shrink, as the wreck gets lower to the bottom. It is hard to believe that this wreck once could be reached in about 60 feet of water. Hull plates continue to collapse, creating new openings. The tight swim-through from the engine room bulkhead out through the end of the wreck by the keel is no longer passable for a diver in back-mounted equipment.

Wreck Profile: The Herbert



The Cornelia, a sister vessel to the Herbert.

The Herbert was built by Robert Palmer & Son in Nook, CT in 1910, initially as a barge intended to carry stone. It was converted to a steam lighter in 1914 when engine and propulsion equipment was added. The wooden steam lighter was 128 feet long, had a 30 foot beam and displaced 349 tons. The Herbert was owned by the Boston Sand & Gravel Company of Boston, MA.

On August 6, 1924, the Herbert was on a voyage en-route from Boston to Ipswich, MA to pick up a cargo of sand. There was very dense fog that morning. In fact, the fog was so intense that Captain Brooks ordered the steamer to stop and wait for the fog to lift. While the Herbert was drifting, the steamer, City of Gloucester, collided with the Herbert. The Herbert, mortally wounded in the bow, sank in less than 20 minutes. All of her crew, which included the regular crew of four, plus seven additional crewmen aboard for that voyage, was rescued.

The Herbert now rests in 105 feet of water and despite being a small, mostly broken up wreck, is a very interesting dive. The wreck is low-lying with the exception of the stern section of the wreck, and a small portion of the bow. In the stern section, two single-piston steam engines are still standing. Directly in front of them are the two boilers, which extend about 10 feet off the sea floor. All around the engines and boilers is various types of debris. Looking under pieces of wreckage, one can spot fully intact china dishes that are fused into wreckage. Off the stern, one can see what appear to be the remains of a steering quadrant assembly.

The middle section of the wreck would have been largely cargo space and this portion is reduced down to the keelson and again, small bits of debris. The bow section has a few prominent features such as a large windlass, pieces of wreckage and piping.

Visibility tends to be on the lower side, but is consistently about 10-12 feet. Sometimes it can be quite dark; however, the wreck is easily navigated. On a day with good visibility, the engines and boilers make for a very pretty sight, as light filters through and around the structures. There are often schools of small fish that congregate around and on top of the boilers as well. This is a must-do wreck that is within recreational depths.



A view of the two single piston steam engines in excellent visibility .

Gauntlet News

Gauntlet's Big Move:

In late October 2013, Gauntlet moved from Pickering Wharf Marina in Salem, MA to Glover Wharf Marina in Beverly, MA. Gauntlet will now operate year-round from Glover Wharf Marina.

For 9 years, Gauntlet operated from Pickering Wharf Marina amidst a changing landscape in Salem. The expansion of the Salem Waterfront Hotel, located at Pickering Wharf, which is anticipated to begin in 2014, will significantly impact access to the docks and parking, especially during construction. Our concerns about access to the docks, as well as parking, lead us to make this move.

Glover Wharf Marina is located in Beverly and has great access and better parking. The docks are all newly constructed. Our transit times and access to various dive sites will remain nearly the same, as Beverly Harbor is adjacent to Salem Harbor. Beverly is the next town over from Salem and is just a short distance from our previous location.

Although we will miss being in Salem at Pickering Wharf, we are excited about being in Beverly at Glover Wharf Marina!

Dive Season 2014:

We finalize our dive schedule in March, so if you have any requests or are interested in technical training such as Introduction to Technical Diving, Technical Diver or Trimix Diver, please contact us.



Gauntlet, now located in a temporary slip at Beverly's Glover Wharf Marina. This marina has a wide, long ramp that remains relatively flat even at low tide and plenty of parking close to the ramp.