

**MONROE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  
DIVE OPERATION REPORT**

**DATE & TIME RESPONDED:** 03-17-07 0700      **TIME IN SERVICE:** 1730

**LOCATION OF DIVE:** Spiegel Grove wreck site off Key Largo 25, 03.986 / 80, 24.730

**DIVE TEAM LEADER:** Mark Coleman

**DIVE MEMBERS PRESENT**

- |                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Bob Jason   | 4. Nelson Sanchez |
| 2. Bob Guhl    | 5. Mark Coleman   |
| 3. Win Higgins |                   |

**DIVE REQUESTED BY:** USCG & MCSO

**CASE OFFICER:** Mark Coleman

**CASE #** 07OFF002362

**AGENCY REQUESTING DIVE:** MCSO

**REASON FOR DIVE:** Recovery of two deceased divers from Spiegel Grove artificial reef site.

**TASK PERFORMED:** Briefed with KLVFD Rescue Divers, who volunteered to penetrate ship to retrieve two deceased divers, who were located the previous day, and to bring them to a level accessible by MCSO Divers. Photo and video documentation preceded placement of two deceased persons in body bags in submerged ship. The bodies were then brought to the surface then transported by FWC to USCG Station Islamorada.

<b>CONDITIONS OF DIVE:</b>	<b>DAY X</b>	<b>NIGHT</b>			
<b>WEATHER:</b>	<b>SUNNY X</b>	<b>CLOUDY</b>	<b>FOG</b>	<b>RAIN</b>	<b>CLEAR</b>
<b>WIND:</b>	<b>NORTH X</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>WEST X</b>	<b>VELOCITY 15 KNOTS</b>
<b>VISIBILITY:</b>	<b>EXC X</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>POOR</b>	<b>NONE</b>	
<b>CURRENT:</b>	<b>NONE</b>	<b>LIGHT X</b>	<b>MED</b>	<b>HEAVY</b>	
<b>SURFACE:</b>	<b>CALM</b>	<b>CHOPPY X</b>	<b>ROUGH</b>	<b>STORMY</b>	
<b>TEMPERATURE:</b>	<b>AIR 67</b>	<b>WATER 76</b>			

**UNUSUAL CONDITIONS:** Offshore dive, good vis, manageable surface chop.

<b>DIVER LOG:</b>	<b>TIME IN</b>	<b>TIME OUT</b>	<b>MAX DEPTH</b>
1. Jason (photo & recovery)	1135	1152	95'
2. Guhl (recovery)	1135	1158	95'
3. Sanchez (video)	1135	1158	95'
(Standby/safety divers: Higgins & Coleman)			
1. Jason (photo & recovery)	1529	1549	95'
2. Guhl (recovery)	1529	1549	96'
3. Coleman (video)	1529	1549	94'

**EXPENSES RELATED TO DIVE:** 2 Nitrox rental tanks. Other tanks provided by FKCC. \$20.00

**NARRATIVE:** On 03-16-07 at approximately 1015 hours, U.S. Coast Guard notified Dive Team leader of a search for three missing divers at the Spiegel Grove artificial reef site off Key Largo. During the preliminary investigation, one of the three divers was found unconscious on the ship and brought to the surface by two divers from Atlantis Dive Center. This diver, identified as Kevin Coughlin, was pronounced deceased upon arrival at Mariner's Hospital. USCG and FWC Officers at the scene confirmed that there were still two divers missing, and it was believed that they were inside the ship, below the main deck, in the "belly" of the ship at a depth of approximately 130 feet.

**MONROE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**  
**DIVE OPERATION REPORT continued...**

It was determined that a search would require specialized equipment and personnel. Reserve Sgt. Bob Jason and Reserve Lt. Bob Smith offered to prepare equipment, including required air mixtures for the depth and to respond. During the course of these preparations, divers from Key Largo Volunteer Fire Rescue located the two missing divers deep inside the ship at a depth of 134'. It was reported that they were found with the regulators out of their mouths and tanks completely empty. The rescue divers confirmed that the two divers were deceased and access to them required penetration through narrow and obstructed passageways through a distance of at least 110' inside the ship. Additionally, there was no ambient light, and silt inside the ship was easily stirred, creating a zero-visibility environment.

Information gained from the fourth diver of the group, a Howard Spialter, who survived, was that he and his three acquaintances from New Jersey made two dives on the Spiegel Grove during the previous day (03-15-07) and that he logged a maximum depth of 142' in the sand wash-out below the bow of the ship. Spialter stated that he and one of the other divers in the group had penetrated the interior last year, accessing the pump room, without incident. On this date (03-16-07), they chartered the "Scuba-Do" out of Key Largo, providing tanks with Nitrox air mixtures that they analyzed at 28% and 29%. They were taken to the Spiegel Grove and entered the ship with a single 80 c/f tank each, leaving an additional 80 c/f tank for each diver at their access point in the port side, mid-ship. They also left strobe lights at the entrance. Without using line reels, the four divers descended approx. 40' vertically, then approx. 70' horizontally to the starboard side of the ship, utilizing older lines already in place for navigation aids. The group then realized that they were lost and Spialter realized that his air supply was low. He tried to signal the other divers to follow as he believed he knew the way out. Spialter grasped one of the other divers, trying to motion him to follow; however, the other divers moved in the opposite direction in a state of near panic. Spialter then continued in his direction and ultimately made his way to the stage bottles at the entrance. He then ascended to the dive boat, yelling to the crew that his three friends were lost within the ship. Spialter stated that he then descended to 20 feet to decompress.

After gaining this information, MCSO Dive Team leader met with KLVFD Dive Team leader, Rob Bleser, to plan a recovery operation. His dive team members wished to work on the recovery, with the understanding that they would not be directed by MCSO to do so and that their efforts were voluntary. It was determined that the amount of time required to plan and organize the recovery, the operation should be conducted on the following morning. MCSO Dive Team Leader contacted USCG asking for assistance in protecting the site, which was closed to civilians until the operation was complete.

On 03-17-07 at 0700 hours, MCSO dive team members attended a briefing at Quiescence Dive Center in Key Largo. The briefing included personnel from KLVFD, FWC, NOAA, Monroe County Marine Resources, and various civilian divers experienced in wreck penetration. The operation was divided into six phases in which the original team (Jason Nunn and Steve Campbell) would follow the line they had left upon finding the deceased divers, access one of the divers, remove his tank & regulator to facilitate transport through the narrow passageways, and move the decedent horizontally to a pre-designated location at the port side of the ship. This team would then surface to avoid decompression problems while a second team would enter the ship to the point of the victim diver, transfer him vertically to the open room where they had originally entered, then surface to avoid decompression problems. The third team, consisting of three MCSO Dive Team members, would then descend to the victim diver, video and photograph the decedent for evidence, then secure the decedent in a body bag. MCSO divers would then use a lift bag to bring the decedent to the surface. This operation was predicted to take place throughout the morning. After a three-hour surface interval, the operation would be duplicated during the afternoon to recover the second victim diver.

**MONROE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**  
**DIVE OPERATION REPORT continued...**

MCSO Dive Team members were transported to the scene by Deputy Lee Cowart and Deputy Sever Hustad aboard each of the MCSO 25' patrol vessels. Seas were in the 2' to 4' range, choppy, but smaller than predicted. The wind, blowing from the northwest at 20 to 25 knots early, calmed to 15 knots by 1100, then down to 10 to 12 knots by 1200 hours. Underwater visibility outside the ship was an estimated 80' with very little current.

The recovery operation was conducted as planned, with the first decedent brought to the surface at 1150 hours. The decedent's buoyancy control device and wetsuit were left on the body, and the weight belt was removed, then secured around the body bag. The body bag was temporarily placed on the dive platform of the "Island Ventures" before being transferred to an FWC vessel. FWC then transported the decedent to USCG Islamorada. The second recovery was conducted as the first, with the second decedent brought to the surface at 1545 hours. The second decedent recovered wore a dive mask, BCD, and wetsuit. His weight belt was removed and secured around the body bag, and was transferred just as the first. Both decedents were turned over to the Medical Examiner's Office.

A team of KLVFD volunteer divers then entered the wreck and recovered the decedent's tanks and regulators. The decedent's dive equipment will be analyzed. The video footage and photographs are being retained for evidence.

The investigation of the three fatalities to this point has established the following:

- The divers various levels of experience and at least two were instructors.
- It is unknown if either had certification or experience in cave diving.
- Each diver made his own decision to enter the wreck.
- Line reels were carried but not used.
- Each diver carried only a single 80 c/f tank into the wreck, being well aware of the depth prior to penetrating.
- An organized dive plan was not activated prior to the dive.

**PROBLEMS / SUGGESTIONS:** Considering the number of people involved in this process (at least 30) from the different agencies, the entire operation was very successful. The dives were executed as planned, with no problems encountered.

**MEMBERS ABSENT / REASON:** Remaining team members on standby.