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(Eng.)

Diving for Pleasure and Treasure

by Clay Blair, Jr.

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Walter Bennett*

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C O H C

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To Joseph.

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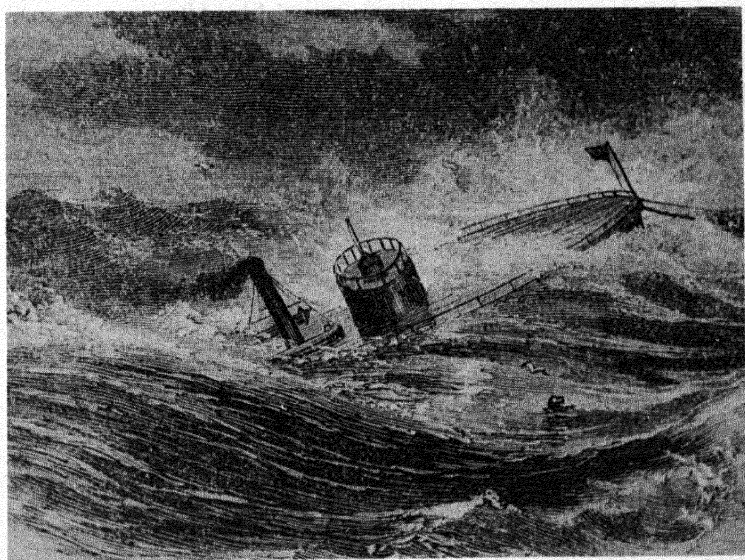
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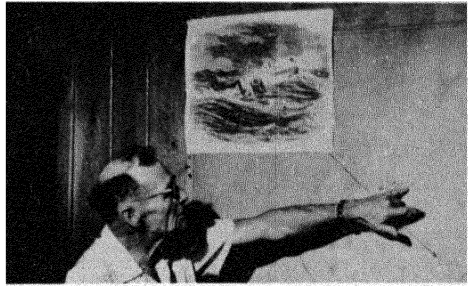
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Many persons helped us solve the riddle of our sunken galleon. Most are mentioned in the body of the text. In addition we would especially like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the following: Mr. Ben Hibbs, Editor, *The Saturday Evening Post*, for making the final and conclusive diving expedition possible and for permission to reprint some material which originally appeared in that magazine; Don José de la Peña, Director of the Archives of the Indies in Seville, Spain, for his hospitality and guidance during my stay in that treasure-house of history; Señor Enrique Otte, Seville, Spain, for assistance in bringing to light and briefing specific documents in the archives; Miss Vincénta Cortes, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, for translation of these old documents; Rear Admiral Julio Guillén, Director of the Naval Museum, Madrid, Spain, for his hospitality and authoritative information on eighteenth-century Spanish vessels and naval practices; Dr. Howard F. Cline, Director of the Hispanic Foundation, Library of Congress, and his staff; Mendel Peterson, Head Curator, Department of Armed Forces History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., for research guidance given to me and Mr. Robert Marx, and Mr. Thomas M. Ware, President, International Minerals and Chemicals Corporation, for technical assistance in analyzing the artifacts. None of the foregoing, of course, can be held accountable for the accuracy of the research or the conclusions presented herein.

PART I

The Elusive *Monitor*

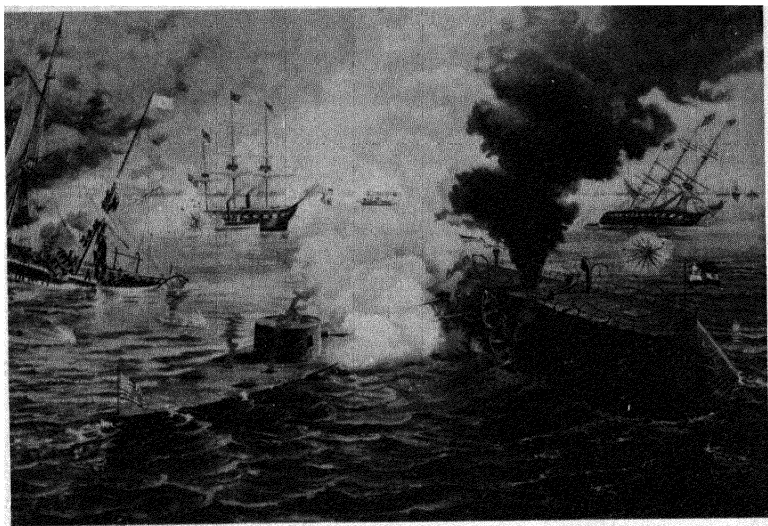




I

ON DECEMBER 30, 1862, a furious gale swept the bleak, islandlike sand strips off the eastern coast of North Carolina known as the Outer Banks. About ten miles off the easternmost tip of the Outer Banks, Cape Hatteras, the cold, gray Atlantic seas thundered down on the decks of two Union naval vessels. One was the paddle-wheeler *Rhode Island*. The other, being towed by the *Rhode Island*, was a weird-looking craft, the ironclad *Monitor*.

Few ships in the history of the U.S. Navy are more legendary or controversial than the *Monitor*. She gained fame in a single naval action off Hampton Roads, Virginia, March 9, 1862—her fight with the Confederate *Merrimac*. The *Merrimac*, a frigate raised and rebuilt as an ironclad, was renamed the *Virginia*, but she is generally known in history by her original name. Revolutionary in concept, the *Monitor* was designed by the fiery, imaginative Captain John Ericsson, who built the world's first screw-propelled vessel, the *Princeton*. The *Monitor* was small—172 feet long and 41 feet beam—and low-slung, with only one and a half feet of freeboard. She was devoid of ordinary superstructure; only her 9-foot revolving gun turret, 20 feet in diameter, encased in 8 inches of armor, and housing two 11-inch Dahlgren cannons, and a small wheelhouse on the forward deck were visible at a distance. For these reasons she was a poor target and earned her nickname, “Yankee cheese-box on a raft.”



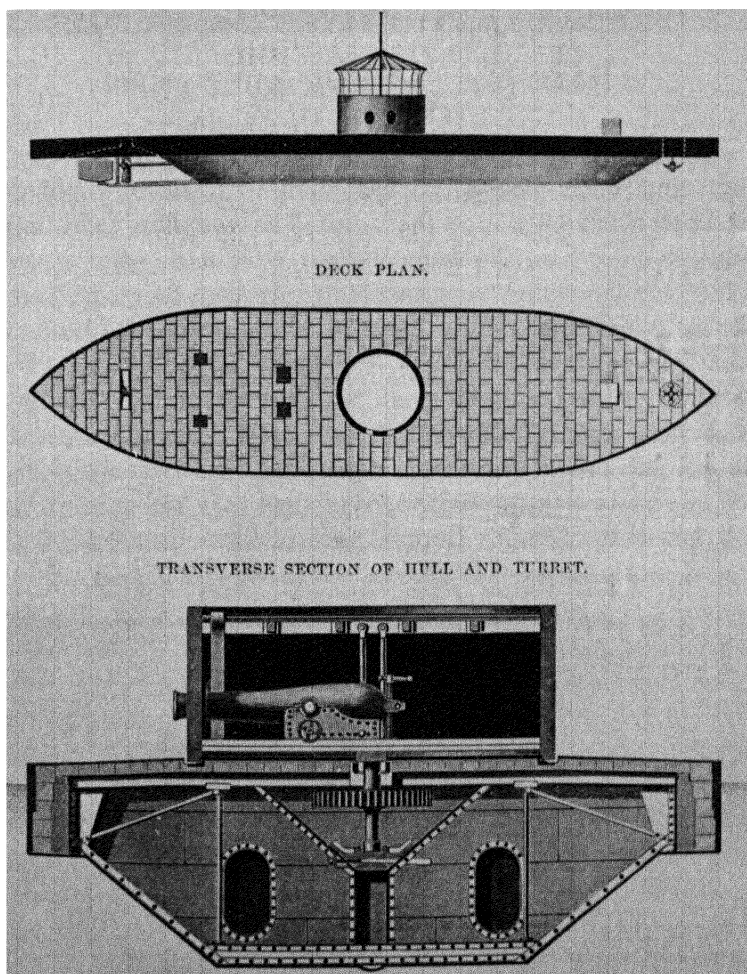
An artist's fanciful conception of the fight between the Monitor and Merrimac. From the Collections of the Library of Congress.

The various characteristics of the *Monitor*, the first of a fleet of Union ironclads, have long been debated, but one point was agreed upon by all: she was ill-fit for rough water. On her initial voyage from Green Point, Long Island, where she was built, to Hampton Roads, where she would fight her single famous engagement, she very nearly foundered in heavy seas when vast quantities of water leaked through her turret base and ventilating system.

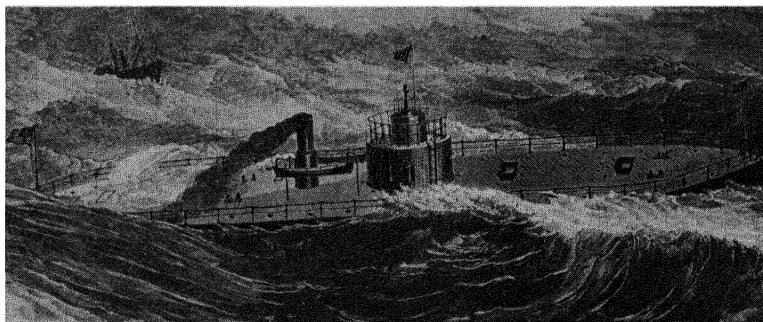
Many months after the *Monitor*'s historic encounter with the *Merrimac*, the South threatened to break the North's blockade off Wilmington, North Carolina. Lacking ships in quantity to meet this threat, as one historian put it, perhaps with a twist of irony, "the Navy chose quality." The *Monitor*, still moored in Virginia, was ordered to report for "further instructions" at a Union base near Beaufort, North Carolina, "on the first day after December 24 that promised a fair and peaceful voyage."

At 1430 on December 29, 1862, a little more than nine months after her arrival in Virginia, the *Monitor* got under-

way at Fort Monroe. Since the *Monitor's* top speed was only six knots, the Federal paddle-wheeler *Rhode Island*, a supply ship, took the gunboat in tow by means of two 12-inch hawsers. All went well until about noon the next day, when the two ships ran into the bad weather off Cape Hatteras, the "graveyard of the Atlantic."

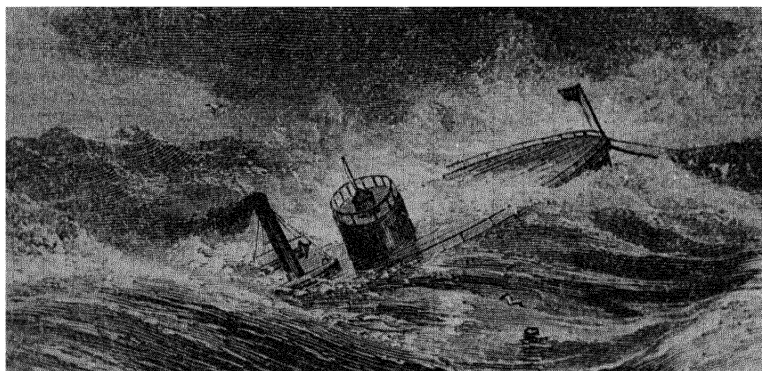


Plan of the Monitor.



A Monitor-class ironclad underway in heavy seas.

The mountainous seas soon tore a gap between the *Monitor's* hull and deck. The pilothouse filled with water; auxiliary steering was rigged atop the turret. The situation went from bad to critical on the *Monitor*. Just after dark when it was clear that the pumps were unable to cope with the rising water in the bilges, the captain signaled, by lighting a red lantern, that he was abandoning ship. The *Rhode Island*, dropping the towline, dispatched two small boats to rescue the *Monitor's* crew, but was soon prevented from rendering further assistance when the loose towline caught in the side-wheel and disabled her. In a futile attempt to stabilize the stricken ship, the skipper of the *Monitor* dropped anchor. But soon the *Monitor*,



The Monitor sinking off Cape Hatteras: From an old print.

partly flooded and helpless, dragged anchor and drifted off into the growing darkness with sixteen of her crew still on board.

There, among countless other hulks in the shifting sands of the Outer Banks, the *Monitor* slept in peace until July, 1955. Then there began a new, controversial chapter in her history.

2

In July, 1955, I was a correspondent specializing in military affairs in the Washington office of *Life* magazine. An ex-World War II submariner, I was especially interested in stories of underseas adventures and shipwrecks. Thus, when I picked up the newspaper one day, I was intrigued by this headline:

MARINE SKIN DIVER CLAIMS TO HAVE FOUND HULK OF *MONITOR*

I read the story. It said that Corporal Robert F. Marx, stationed at Camp Lejeune, the Marine Corps base in North Carolina, had located the Civil War hulk while skin diving off Cape Hatteras. Further exploratory efforts had been thwarted because he lacked money for a boat. "You can't rent a boat on a corporal's pay," Marx was quoted as saying.

All this had the makings of a good story. I phoned an editor in New York and proposed that the magazine mount an expedition to help Marx secure his claim. The editor agreed and soon I was en route to Camp Lejeune.

Corporal Robert Frank Marx was waiting for me at the office of the Commanding General of Camp Lejeune. Then twenty-one years old, he was tall and thin, with deep-set green eyes, disheveled blond hair, and large firm hands. Outwardly Bob Marx seemed a typical Marine—cocky, brash, confident. But as I came to know him well during the subsequent weeks I found beneath this Marine Corps veneer a man of extraordinary sensitivity and generosity. I also discovered that he was

much more than an amateur skin diver. He was a real expert in his field. And it was soon clear that his claimed discovery of the *Monitor* was no skin-diving lark but rather the result of intense research, prodigious work, a carefully laid plan, and a compelling obsession.

3

Marx was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on December 8, 1933. His father was Frank Marx, a German Swiss, who emigrated to the United States in 1928, married an American girl, and drove a trailer truck for his livelihood. Frank Marx had three children: Robert, the oldest; Edward, a year younger than Robert; and Nancy, born eight years after Robert. Edward studied for the priesthood.

Bob Marx is tight-lipped in discussing his early childhood. He recalls swimming in the lakes of Pennsylvania with goggles, exploring the bottom, and listening with great fascination as his father spun tales of buried gold and sunken treasure. As he grew older, the family moved from Pittsburgh to Ohio, then to Illinois, and Michigan. Marx hints vaguely of turbulence in the household, a separation, and states succinctly, "I lived for a while with various relations."

At the age of fourteen, Marx left home for good. He wandered eastward until he reached Atlantic City, New Jersey. Penniless, hungry, and having no place to sleep, he crawled into a deserted cabana on the beach. The following morning Joe Novak, a professional diver, found Marx asleep on the beach and invited him into his home.

Novak owned a small dredge and some deep-sea and shallow-water diving rigs. He made his living blasting old pilings from the sand, or in small-scale salvage operations on relatively new wrecks. Marx signed on as an assistant, begging for a chance to dive. By the time Marx was fifteen, Novak had taught him to use the bulky, complex, deep-sea diving rigs as well as the shallow-water equipment. Marx made several dives

to 60 and 80 feet, in filthy water. He was well on his way as an apprentice diver when his family traced him to Atlantic City. Since he had completed only the tenth grade, some officials had expressed concern about his incomplete education.

"So I had to bug out of Atlantic City," Marx recalls. "I went up to Bridgeport, Connecticut, and got a job with a small salvage outfit. They promised me that I could do some diving. But the weather was always bad and there seemed no likelihood that I would ever dive, so I left Bridgeport. I worked for a while in a lumber yard in Buffalo, New York, and then went to Los Angeles and looked up an aunt. That was in 1950."

Marx returned to school—Hollywood High—but his real interest lay under the sea. At the age of seventeen, he became the youngest member of the Los Angeles Neptunes, one of the oldest skin-diving clubs in the United States. Entrance requirements were tough. Marx had to catch a small shark barehanded, dive to a depth of 40 feet on his own breath and return to the surface with three abalone, spear certain large fish, and demonstrate a knowledge of lifesaving technique and near-professional swimming capability. He accomplished these tests with ease, was enthusiastically received, and soon became secretary of the club.

It was off the coast of California that Marx made his first dive using the modern Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (SCUBA) gear, and the dive almost ended his underwater career. When he had reached a depth of 80 feet, his air shut off. He dropped his weights—a bulky old-fashioned corset arrangement—and zoomed toward the surface. Coming up, he struck the bottom of a boat, and only quick emergency medical aid saved his life. "They put a hell of a lot of stitches in my head," he says.

In the evenings at home, Marx gave his homework cursory treatment, then spent the remainder of the time reading books about the sea and shipwrecks. Later he took to writing to museums and divers, as well as local "sea captains," for additional information on shipwrecks. Accumulating facts about the sea became an all-consuming interest. His room was soon

cluttered with boxes and footlockers cramped with records.

After high school, Marx attended Los Angeles City College and, for a while, the University of California at Los Angeles, working part-time as a diver, doing such odd and sometimes gruesome jobs as going down for lost outboard motors or searching the bottom of a reservoir for a drowned child. In August, 1953, with the draft board breathing hard down his neck, Marx joined the Marine Corps. Because of his talents in the water sports, he was picked to be a swimming instructor-lifeguard and assigned to duty with the 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune. He had not been at Lejeune more than a few weeks before he organized a skin-diving club, the "Sea Urchins." The club grew to 150 members. Most of them, including officers and enlisted men, were taught to dive by club president Marx.

4

For most unmarried Marines, Camp Lejeune, stuck away in a remote corner of North Carolina, leaves much to be desired. But for Marx, the location hard by Cape Hatteras with its colossal number of shipwrecks (estimates range from 600 to 2,600) was little less than paradise. He spent every weekend ranging along the bleak coast line or exploring out-of-the-way museums and maritime exhibits, talking with local historians and experts about wrecks, assiduously taking notes. He heard of Spanish galleons going down off Hatteras with holds crammed full of gold and silver, of Blackbeard's pirate base on Ocracoke Island, and of scores of ships sunk by German submarines in World War II. But the story that intrigued Marx most was that of the *Monitor*, which, in many ways, is Hatteras' most famous wreck.

Marx became determined to locate the hulk.

In his research Marx discovered that in the ninety-two years since the *Monitor* was last seen many historical societies and maritime museums had attempted to find the hulk in the shal-

low (10 to 50 feet or deeper) but treacherous waters in and about Cape Hatteras. These groups were ill-equipped and employed no divers. Mostly they were made up of old men looking through glass-bottom buckets. None of them were successful. Most recent expeditions, Marx learned, centered in an area just off Buxton on Cape Hatteras.

News of the attempts lent impetus to Marx's research. In Washington, at the National Archives, he dug out the official log of the towship *Rhode Island*, and read through the voluminous eyewitness reports from the *Monitor*'s survivors. From this wealth of material, Marx drew one conclusion: no one ever actually saw the *Monitor* sink. Thus, Marx deduced, there was no foundation to reports that she had sunk some twenty-five miles, or ten miles, depending on which eyewitness report is accepted, southeast or east of the Cape Hatteras light. The ship could lie almost any place off the cape, he reasoned.

In the fall of 1954, Marx traveled to Cape Hatteras to inspect the scene first hand. In Avon, he made friends with an elderly Outer Banker named Gray who thought he could help. He led Marx to an old record book which listed pertinent family history such as births, marriages, and deaths. The book also contained a notation made early in January, 1865, about two years after the *Monitor* sank, which described a family "old country Christmas celebration" down on the beach near the Cape Hatteras lighthouse, during which the "Yankee cheese-box on a raft" was seen in the breakers.

For Marx this was an exciting piece of information. But was it genuine? For example, was the *Monitor* called "Cheesebox on a Raft" at that early date? Marx returned to the Library of Congress in Washington and checked through the old newspapers and issues of *Harper's Weekly*. The *Monitor*, he found, was commonly referred to as the "Yankee cheese-box on a raft." Returning to Hatteras, Marx checked another fact: Had the same lighthouse been standing in the same position all those years? He discovered that it had not. The present lighthouse is a new one. But Marx found the foundations of the old one about 100 feet south of the new one, which was close enough.

There was now only one thing left to do: search the breakers. In January, 1955, Marx took a week's leave and lugged his diving equipment to Hatteras. There he rented a skiff and an outboard motor. "The man who rented it to me thought I was nuts," Marx recalls. Not actually nuts, just completely determined, whatever the hardship, to find the *Monitor*.

It was bitterly cold on the beach at Hatteras that January. Marx donned his rubber "dry suit" and tanks and began a systematic exploration of the breakers and the area just beyond, northeast of the lighthouse. The water was rough and full of porpoises which squeaked and played about this mysterious lone figure in the water. At night Marx slept under the porch of a summer cottage, the owner of which was unknown to him. His week-long search produced not a sign of the "Yankee cheese-box on a raft."

5

Marx returned to Lejeune, dejected and puzzled. "How could those people have seen the *Monitor* in the breakers if it just isn't there?" he asked himself over and over. Seeking the answer he turned again to his books and research. One day he discovered an old map of Hatteras. Marx was surprised to see that it put the location of the lighthouse quite a bit inland from its present position on the coast line. "Have I got the wrong lighthouse?" he wondered. Then the answer came. The coast line of Hatteras, battered by turbulent waves and currents all these years, has been receding—edging closer to the lighthouse. In the last one hundred years, it has crept in nearly a mile.

"That meant the *Monitor* could not be in the present breakers," Marx said, "but out in the water about a mile."

Meanwhile, from another source, Marx learned that the Union 20th Indiana Regiment had been stationed on Cape Hatteras during the time of the *Monitor* sinking. "If the ship washed into the breakers, maybe there is some record of it in the files of the regiment," he thought. Marx wrote a letter to

a historical society in Indiana. Weeks elapsed; then a letter arrived from an Indiana judge who had some connection with the society. Enclosed were the rare and valuable records of the 20th Indiana Regiment which, luckily, had survived the ravages of time.

Marx pored through them. Amid the mass of trivial notations, he found a clue: shortly after the *Monitor* sank, the bodies of five of the crew were washed ashore on Hatteras. They had been buried, the records stated, alongside a cedar tree on a small knoll, about a half mile behind the lighthouse.

Soon Marx was back on Hatteras, searching through the bramble on the knoll directly inland of the lighthouse. There was no sign of the cedar tree, but he found a rotted stump, large and unlike the pine trees which dotted the hill. He scouted the area near the stump. While making his way through the bushes he almost fell headlong into a deep hole. Could this be the grave? If so, who had unearthed it and why?

Marx climbed down into the hole and began casting aside the stones. He was busy at this task when he heard a crackle of twigs behind him and then a deep commanding voice:

"Why are you trespassing on my property?"

Startled, Marx wheeled around and saw an old wrinkle-faced man holding a rifle.

"I'm trying to find some evidence which will help me locate the *Monitor*," Marx said. He felt foolish.

"What's the *Monitor*?" the old man asked.

It is too long and involved to explain, Marx thought. Anyone who does not know of the *Monitor* is not worth talking to anyway. He climbed out of the hole, uncertain of his next move.

"Come up to the house and I'll give you a drink," the old man said.

This struck Marx, by then tired and frustrated, as an appealing suggestion, so he followed the old man to a weather-beaten clapboard house on a clearing overlooking the lighthouse. Inside, Marx adjusted his vision to the dark of the pine-paneled living room and then sank heavily in a chair. His eyes swept across the room, noting the sea shells, the old wheel of a ship,

and then, to his astonishment, a map of Cape Hatteras with the word "*Monitor*" splashed across it in a bold, red grease pencil. At the point where Marx thought the ship might be—that is to say, about a mile northeast of the lighthouse—there was a large red X.

While the old man prepared the drink, Marx got up and strolled casually around the room. In the bookcase he recognized at least two dozen books on or about the *Monitor* which he had read in the course of his research program, including an original copy of *Harper's Weekly* which contained an article on the sinking of the *Monitor*. Marx stared dumfoundedly. Then he remembered the grave which was no more than one hundred yards away. Had this frail old man dug out the heavy rocks? If so, why had he asked "What's the *Monitor*?"

As they sat drinking, Marx worked his conversation around to the subject of the *Monitor*. But the old man refused to be drawn out. With something of an uneasy feeling, Marx paid his respects and, after finishing the drink, left the house.

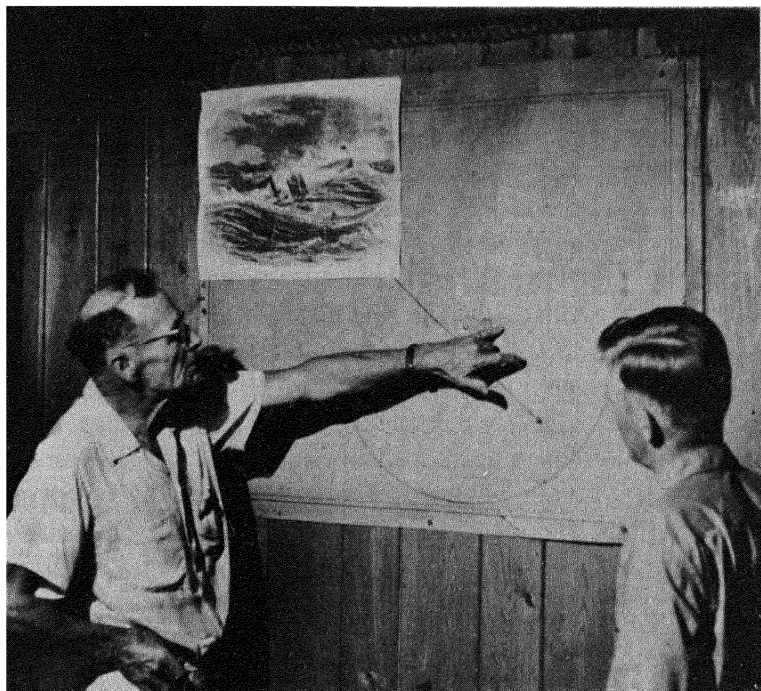
6

Not long afterward, Marx returned to the Outer Banks with a friend who was participating in an aviation celebration at Kitty Hawk, where the Wright Brothers first flew. There, mingling with the governor of North Carolina and other political brass, was the mysterious old man. Marx asked a friend, "Who is that man?"

The friend replied, "He's Ben Dixon MacNeill. Quite a fixture on the Outer Banks. Kind of a journalist and amateur historian. Does a lot for the Park Commission and other historical groups around here. His hobby is the *Monitor*, which was supposed to have sunk off Hatteras."

Later in the day Marx approached MacNeill. "I know all about your interest in the *Monitor*, Mr. MacNeill," Marx said. "Why don't we have a talk?"

They did—for many hours—and MacNeill told Marx every-



Outer Banker Ben Dixon MacNeill points to probable location of the wreck of the Monitor. Life photo by Peter Stackpole.

thing he had learned about the ship. Like Marx, MacNeill was convinced that the hulk had washed ashore at a position a mile northeast of the lighthouse. He said that he had searched the water many times from the air. Then he revealed to Marx the interesting fact that in these aerial searches he had seen a hulk believed to be the *Monitor* "nine times in seven years," and that he had obtained rough bearings.

"Conditions have to be near perfect in order to spot the hulk from the air," MacNeill related. "First, the water has to be perfectly still, like a millpond. Such days do not occur often at stormy Cape Hatteras. Next, the flight has to be made at 1100 or 1200 feet with the sun behind the plane as it flies toward the shoreline. Finally, the water has to be clear, a condition that does not often prevail because of the strong currents and sandy bottom in the area. However, the water clears fol-

lowing an east or northeast wind, in contrast to a south or southwest wind that brings sand up from the shoals."

Eventually out of these conversations emerged a plan to mount a joint effort to find the *Monitor*. MacNeill would furnish living quarters, food, an airplane, boats, and jeeps. Marx would come equipped with diving apparatus. He would dive on the ship after it had been precisely located and bring up a portion of it, such as the steering wheel, which could be positively identified as that of the *Monitor*. They agreed that if the ship were definitely located, it would be raised and turned over to a museum or historical society. Arrangements were completed to commence operations in early June. Marx spent the intervening period buying new diving equipment and studying detailed plans and drawings of the ironclad. He made several more trips to Washington, D.C., to visit the National Archives, Library of Congress, and Smithsonian Institution.

7

On June 5, Marx arrived at Cape Hatteras, along with a companion and member of his skin-diving club, Marine P.F.C. Donald Anderson, age nineteen. They moved into quarters in a beachside motel furnished by MacNeill and on the following day began operations, despite the fact that the weather was unfavorable and the seas mountainous and murky. Anderson climbed into the airplane and flew back and forth over the approximate spot, while Marx cruised beneath him on the water in a small boat. Whenever Anderson thought he saw an unusual shadow in the water, he signaled Marx by diving the plane directly toward the spot. Marx would then ease over the side and search the bottom around the area. Occasionally Marx scanned the bottom from a sea sled towed by the boat.

As the days passed, weather conditions worsened, tempers became short, and Marx and MacNeill began snapping at one another, a condition that seems ultimately to prevail in most salvage operations. On Friday, June 10, a friend of Marx's,

Marine Corporal Larry Holland, flew up from Camp Lejeune in his Aeronca "Champion" with Marine P.F.C. Marcia Green, a photographer for the Camp Lejeune newspaper. When MacNeill learned they had arrived he became upset. He complained to Marx that he was opposed to Marine Corps "publicity agents," since the hunt for the *Monitor* was supposedly being carried out with minimum fanfare. Marx told MacNeill that the two Marines were not "publicity agents," but were his friends and they would not let the secret out. However, MacNeill would have none of it. Soon the Marx-MacNeill partnership broke up, and the aircraft which MacNeill had furnished for the operation was withdrawn.

By then, Marx had become obsessed with the hunt for the *Monitor*. He determined to continue the expedition independently of MacNeill. After agreeing to foot the bill for gasoline and oil, he persuaded his friend Corporal Holland to fly his plane back and forth over the water. There was a strong wind blowing. In order to get the airplane in the air without tipping over, Marx, Anderson, or Marcia Green (depending on who was flying with Holland as an observer) ran alongside the highway which served as a runway, holding onto the wingtips. Then one Saturday Marx's hopes began to rise. He saw "dark spots" on the water and knew it was an indication that the water was clearing.

8

On Sunday morning, June 12, with the water clearing, Marx laid down a concerted air-sea attack on the probable area. He sent "Andy" Anderson aloft in the plane as an observer. Marx himself put to sea in a rubber life raft, carrying several buoys. The plan was this: when "Andy" Anderson spotted a dark object, he would waggle the wings of the plane and dive toward the location. Then Marx would paddle over the spot and drop a buoy. Later Marx would dive and search the bottom near each of the buoys.

The plane took off—it was the eighty-eighth flight over the water that week—its motor running unevenly because it was burning automobile gasoline instead of high-octane fuel, which was unobtainable on Cape Hatteras. Marx paddled out into the unusually calm waters waiting for the signal.

Marx recalls: “All at once, the plane buzzed my raft madly. The wings were wagging so hard I thought they would come off. They buzzed me again and again. I knew something important must be in the wind, so I tried to ‘up’ anchor. I couldn’t get the anchor up so I dove over the side and swam toward shore. The current pushed me two miles down the beach. Then I ran back to our base of operations where they had landed the plane.”

“Andy” Anderson was beside himself with excitement.

“Marx! Marx! Quick, get up there! You can see wrecks all over the place. You can see the *Monitor*. Close in by the shore.”

Marx jumped into the cockpit of the plane, lugging a tin-can buoy with a concrete-block anchor. The propeller turned over and the plane taxied out onto the highway. Holland opened the throttle wide and the plane picked up speed. But halfway through its take-off run, the plane’s right wing struck a road sign and, for a brief moment, the craft hung in the air on the verge of a catastrophic stall. Holland eased back on the throttle and the plane dropped to the highway. The two Marines scrambled to check the damage to the wing. It looked and was serious (later it was found that the main spar had been broken). But Marx was determined to get a look at the *Monitor* from the air.

“Let’s go,” he said to Holland, climbing back into the cockpit.

Holland gunned the motor again and the plane sped down the highway, fabric flapping from the ripped wing, the engine sputtering and coughing on its diet of low-octane gasoline. Holland turned seaward and climbed to an altitude of 1,200 feet.

Marx explains what they saw. “It was one of those rare days when the water was as calm as a millpond and you could see clear

to the bottom. We flew over the area, and as I looked down I could see at least a dozen wrecks scattered about like toy ships in the bottom of a bathtub. I told Holland to fly over the spot where the *Monitor* was supposed to be and, sure enough, there she was. I could see the gun turret and the little pilothouse sticking up on the bow. The stern was half buried in sand."

Holland flew back and forth over the *Monitor* while Marx made ready to cast the homemade buoy from the plane. He eased the heavy concrete block out of the cockpit until it dangled twenty or thirty feet below the fuselage. Then, as Holland flew directly over the wreck, Marx tossed the five-gallon lard can overboard. The can, caught in the slip stream, smashed against the rear of the fuselage, gouging out a large hole in the fabric. Then it arced downward and splashed into the water.

Marx's bombing was poor. The buoy landed a few hundred yards closer to the beach than the actual position of the *Monitor*. Marx made a mental note of this and then ordered Holland to fly the battered plane over the ship toward prominent landmarks on shore, such as the lighthouse and a radio tower. Using the plane's magnetic compass for bearings, Marx obtained an approximate fix.

9

By the time Holland got the plane on the beach again, the small encampment had reached a fever-pitch of excitement. Anderson, recalling that they had brought along a bottle of fine old wine to celebrate, if and when they found the *Monitor*, raced to the cabin. He emerged from the room still running, bottle in hand, whereupon he tripped on the sidewalk and fell headlong. The bottle was smashed and Anderson landed on the broken fragments, severely cutting his wrists and hands. The celebration was interrupted to rush Anderson to the local infirmary for medical repairs.

Meanwhile, back at the cabin, Marx dropped a quarter into the radio in his room. He was astonished to hear a weird

cacophony something like "Beep. Tweet. Bop," and then the words, "This is Monitor." It was the first time Marx had heard this new program, a feature of NBC, and when he heard the word "Monitor" he was suddenly seized with deep apprehension. He asked himself, "Am I going nuts?"

He ran from the cabin, shouting, "Anybody ever heard of a thing on radio called 'Monitor'?" He was not reassured until he found someone who had. Even so, for the rest of the day, he marveled at the coincidence.

By afternoon, the tumultuous celebrating in the Marx encampment had reached the ears of Ben Dixon MacNeill. Marx paid MacNeill a visit, again suggesting a reconciliation, but MacNeill refused to offer any kind of assistance. The schism was broad and deep and would remain so. Marx and the injured Anderson, who was swathed in bandages, returned to their camp to bid farewell to Holland and Marcia Green, whose weekend passes were nearly over. The plane waddled into the air. Later, Marx was told that after Holland landed near the Camp Lejeune base the right wing collapsed completely and the plane was junked.

Now that he had roughly marked the location of the wreck, Marx was anxious to get into his diving gear and go down to take a firsthand look. But difficulties mounted. He was near-penniless, eating fish he could spear in the sound. Typically for Hatteras, the weather turned bad again and the seas became rough. In spite of this, Marx urged fishermen to take him out in their big shrimp boats, free of charge. They just laughed.

Finally, the local sheriff, named Bassett, perhaps possessing a sense of history, offered to lend a hand. He transported Marx and his gear to sea in a small boat powered by an outboard motor. But in that rough water the craft proved unsuitable for diving. In fact it was all they could do to keep from swamping. Marx threw over twelve buoys to mark the approximate position of the wreck. Then, for the next four days, he sat on the beach, helpless, watching the buoys bobbing up and down at sea. In the middle of June his leave expired and he returned to Camp Lejeune, heavy of heart.

IO

Inevitably, word of the Marx expedition spread about Camp Lejeune. One day the commanding officer of the division, Major General Reginald Ridgeley, called the corporal in for a conference. Marx poured out the whole complex story. Shortly thereafter, Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington got wind of the tale. Ever watchful for copy that will reflect credit on the Corps, Headquarters ordered Marx to Washington to tell his story to the press. It was a decision soon to be regretted.

What happened in Washington is much too involved to relate in full here. It was one of those frequent comedies that takes place in our nation's capital when toes are trod on or some government official believes he has been slighted. It began when, somehow, the expedition story leaked to a single newspaperman who (alas!) was not covering for a newspaper from Marx's adopted home town of Los Angeles. A congressman from Los Angeles, one who had more than a casual interest in seeing that the Los Angeles papers were kept up-to-date (and not infrequently these news tidbits contained a comment or picture of the congressman), entered an objection. Suddenly, two- and three-star generals were dashing about town, and a full-scale congressional investigation had been launched. Amid this dizzy whirl of events strode young, resolute Robert Marx, telling his complex tale and unwittingly causing more trouble at every turn.

After two days of high-level confusion, the Marine Corps, the Navy Department, and others who had become involved in the "flap" were purposely avoiding Marx. He was never successful in getting his full story across, and those newsmen who interviewed him during this period found him strange and unpredictable. Bewildered by the massive powers that had begun to tug at him, Marx returned to the relative calm and safety of Camp Lejeune.

Meanwhile, trouble came from another source. A group known as The *Monitor* Historical Society, headed by a retired mail carrier from Michigan, Raynor T. McMullen, denounced Marx's claim. Later Marx learned that, in the previous summer, McMullen had searched the same area in which Marx had made his "find." McMullen hoped that his society could raise enough money for still another search. When Marx talked with McMullen, it appeared that the latter was sad over the fact that a young Marine had, in one stroke, achieved what he had spent the better part of his life preparing and hoping to achieve. It was also clear that if Marx's claim was substantiated, The *Monitor* Historical Society would be hard-pressed to collect further donations.

II

It was about this time that I saw the newspaper headline and suggested that *Life* sponsor an expedition. After a few preliminaries, Bob Marx gladly accepted our backing and I lost no time in preparing the new expedition. To help with the diving, Marx recruited twenty-five-year-old Marine Lieutenant Keith Ingram, a native of Houston, Texas. Ingram said he was a graduate of the University of Texas with a degree in general engineering. After college he had worked in the Texas oil fields and later gone on active duty at Camp Lejeune. Ingram and Marx had met through the camp's skin-diving club.

The three of us loaded my car with the paraphernalia of diving, including three sets of aqualungs, numerous face plates, snorkles, flippers, spear guns, an air compressor, rubber life rafts, crowbars, and so on, and we set off for Moorehead City, North Carolina, where we hoped to find a suitable boat. Marx believed that we must have a good fathometer to pick up the hulk once we were in the approximate position. But there were few boats in Moorehead City with fathometers and those that were so equipped were solidly booked by fishing parties. We decided to drive direct to Cape Hatteras and rent a boat there.

Turning back inland, we skirted up through New Bern, then out through the swampland and across the ferry to Manteo Island, where we spent the night. Saturday morning we pushed down the desolate wind-swept Outer Banks toward bleak and remote Hatteras, waiting for ferryboats and dodging the holes which pitted the rough pavement.

At midday we arrived on Cape Hatteras and set up headquarters in a tourist home operated by a man named William Cochran, who also owned and operated the only aircraft on Hatteras. We explained that we might need him in our operation to search for the *Monitor* from the air. In the early afternoon, we located a boat with a fathometer, a 64-foot fishing vessel, the *Sterling*, skippered by Harmon Willis, and made arrangements to get underway the following morning at 0500.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon checking the diving equipment and making buoys out of five-gallon lard cans, which seemed to exist in large quantity on the cape. Late in the afternoon, Cochran took Marx up for a flight over the water off the lighthouse. When they landed, Marx reported that the water was murky. Cochran, I believe, considered our project, and the personnel concerned, daft.

I 2

We got underway the following morning at 0600. Because of the shallow water, treacherous shoals, and other obstacles to navigation, the trip to the "search" area just off Buxton required three hours. On the way out, the three of us completed the marker buoys, attaching 60 feet of quarter-inch rope to the lard cans and the concrete building blocks which we used for weights. Half an hour before reaching the area, we broke out a chart and Marx plotted in his rough bearings which, up to that point, he had discreetly kept to himself. Since his "fix" was far from exact and his marker buoys had long since washed away, we blocked off an area a mile square around the probable position, thinking that surely somewhere inside that square we would find the ship.



Marx and helpers launch outboard into seas off Cape Hatteras. Boat was used in preliminary diving expeditions to locate the hulk of the Monitor.

At 0900 we arrived at the probable position and, after sighting some range beacons on the coast, and checking with Marx's compass, we tossed the first buoys over the side. Then we turned seaward and dropped two more buoys in line with the first, spaced about 350 yards apart. Finally, we laid out two more strings of three buoys in line with the middle, or first, row. When viewed from the masthead of our fishing vessel, the "probable" area looked enormous. But worse than that was the thought that if Marx's bearings were off one or two degrees, which was quite possible, the *Monitor* would lie beyond our marked area.

We steamed back and forth all day between the rows of buoys, keeping a constant watch on the fathometer. The seas were quite calm. From time to time we noted a rather unusual mark on the instrument at a point in the southerly row of buoys which we labeled Z, but nothing such as a five- or ten-

foot change in depth to indicate a hulk beneath us. Later in the afternoon, after we had received about four indications on the fathometer at Z, Marx decided to go down and take a look, so we anchored. On the bottom, at 43 feet, he discovered several ridges in the sand about 2 feet high, but nothing else. Since the water was unusually clear that day as viewed from the boat, we contacted Bill Cochran via ship-to-shore radio and told him to make a flight over the area. But he could see nothing.

We returned to port that evening somewhat discouraged after our first day's operation. It seemed obvious that the fathometer was inadequate for our purpose. We would need help.

Our best bet seemed to be a group of U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey ships which were plotting wrecks near Cape Hatteras. That evening we jeeped to the Cape Hatteras Inlet Coast Guard Station and, via radio, established contact with this group, commanded by Commander J. C. Mathisson. Mathisson had previously tried to make contact with Marx through a friend at Camp Lejeune and was familiar with the situation. He informed us that he would be glad to help as long as such assistance did not interfere with his primary task. As a starter, he said he would send one of his ships into the area off Buxton the following day at 0800.

Monday morning, July 11, the second day of operations, we got underway at 0500 and arrived on station at 0800 where we found the Coast and Geodetic Survey Ship *Stirni*, a 110-foot converted submarine chaser (SC), riding at anchor just outside our buoy pattern. We came alongside and went on board immediately to confer with the ship's commanding officer, Commander C. R. Reed, and the executive officer, Lieutenant J. R. Plaggmier. They asked how they could help. We requested a sonar-fathometer search through the area marked by our buoys. The *Stirni* got underway and within half an hour we were standing watch on the fathometer—an infinitely superior instrument to the *Sterling's*—as the ship cruised back and forth through the same pattern we had fol-

lowed the day previous. Later, we shifted closer inshore and steamed a similar pattern. Curiously, near point Z, the *Stirni's* fathometer also registered unusual indications.

At about 1400, Commander Reed ordered the fathometer run secured but, at our request, agreed to make several sonar sweeps, even though we were very close inshore (less than a half mile at times) where sonar is sometimes distorted. Ten minutes later, the sonar operator reported a good contact which we discovered was very near point Z. Commander Reed set up a pinging sonar run on the target, as though we were tracking down an enemy submarine, and we pinpointed the exact position.

The sonar operator said, "It is as good a metallic contact as we have had in a long time."

About this time, Commander Mathisson in the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Ship *Parker*, accompanied by still another ship, the *Bowen* (both 110-foot submarine chasers), returned from Diamond Shoals where they had been working that day. Commander Reed informed them via radio of what had taken place, especially of the indications at Z and the positive sonar contact, and shortly afterward Commander Mathisson granted our request that a drag be made through the probable area. We picked up our homemade buoys while two of the SC's strung out a massive 6,000-foot weighted cable and proceeded to drag it along the bottom. This operation consumed the remaining daylight hours. Interestingly, it produced a momentary "hang"—indicating the drag wire had temporarily caught on something—at point Z, in 43 feet of water.

Since the seas were fairly heavy that evening and there was little or no sleeping space on our fishing boat we were invited to remain on board the *Stirni*. Before turning in, we held a conference with Reed and Plaggmier about operations for the following day. We were informed that the *Stirni* would remain in the general vicinity and would be available for whatever use we could make of her. All agreed that diving operations ought to be conducted at point Z.

13

We were up at 0500 and underway shortly afterward, coming alongside our fishing vessel *Sterling*. We jumped aboard. The *Sterling* followed the *Stirni* to point Z, which Commander Reed plotted precisely. There we dropped a homemade marker buoy in 43 feet of water. The *Stirni* steamed to one side and let go her anchor. Meantime, Marx and Ingram began preparing the diving equipment. Then, at 0812, Marx went over the side wearing a double-tank aqualung. By then, the boat was to seaward of the buoy. A brisk wind was blowing from the southwest and the current was strong from the same direction.

Marx related what happened below. When he went under, he swam for the buoy line. The visibility was 5 or 6 feet. He got close enough to the line to see it and then descended to the bottom. Almost instantly, he picked up a peculiar trough-like formation on the floor of the ocean. Ordinarily, the ocean floor in the area is perfectly flat, hard-pressed sand. Hulks covered over by sand are sometimes delineated by such trough-like lines, caused by current working sand away from the hull.

Marx instantly realized that the trough marked a hulk, he says, so he started swimming down the gutter, pulling himself along by digging his hands in the sand. After about a minute or two, he came upon the *Monitor* turret, sticking out of the sand about three feet or less. He says he swam in a complete circle around the turret, looking it over carefully. He noticed the spacing of the large rivets. They compared favorably with those on the original plans of the *Monitor*, copies of which Marx possessed and had studied for months.

But the clincher, Marx thought, would be the two cannon ports. So he swam around the turret again, and soon found them. Only about 2 or 3 inches of the tops of the ports were visible above the sand. Marx put his gloved hand inside each

of the ports and felt something hard—something he identified as sand packed inside the turret. Then he swam up and down the trough again, noting that it formed an outline similar to the *Monitor*.

Believing he had enough identification, Marx swam to the surface, coming up directly over the turret.

Altogether there were five of us in the party on our fishing boat, the *Sterling*. They were the captain, the mate, myself, Marx, and Ingram, Marx's diving partner. At the moment that Marx surfaced we were disposed as follows: captain and mate were inside the cabin reading comic books; Ingram was in the water with a face mask and flippers, supposedly following Marx on the bottom, as a safety precaution; I was standing in the mainmast rigging watching Marx's bubbles.

I had followed Marx's trail. First I saw him swim toward the buoy, or toward land. Then I saw him double back toward sea and pass under the boat. Ingram, in the water on the land side of the boat, lost track of him. Since this was the direction of the current, I assumed that Marx was being swept along the bottom. Actually, he had been following the trough.

I was first to see Marx break water. He came up about 50 feet away on the seaward side of the *Sterling*. He pushed his face mask back on his head, jerked his aqualung mouthpiece from his mouth, and yelled. Since his sudden rise to the surface was a complete surprise (none of us expected that he would find the hulk so quickly) I assumed that he was in trouble. In fact, I believed that he had been attacked by one of the half dozen hammerhead sharks that had been prowling around the *Sterling* that morning.

I jumped to the deck and signaled Ingram to swim around and help Marx. Ingram hurried to the boat and scrambled up the ladder. Meantime, I ran back to the seaward side of the boat to keep watch on Marx. He was still yelling. Then I noticed that he was pointing both thumbs down into the water, jabbing.

In the confusion, the skipper and mate had come out of the cabin. On my instructions, they pulled in a quarter-inch hemp

rope which Marx was supposed to be holding in his hand as a safety precaution. But Marx had let the rope go. I picked up another line and tossed it to Marx. He grabbed it and I towed him to the boat. Coming up the ladder he was bubbling, "It's there! I saw it! The turret's sticking out of the sand."

I 4

Scarcely able to believe his words, but not daring to lose this lucky opportunity, I picked up a buoy and heaved it toward the spot where Marx had first come up. It sailed about 10 feet, splashing into the water about 20 feet short of the aiming point. My intention was to mark the turret.

"Go back down and tie a line to the turret," I said.

"Tie a line to it? Hell, there's nothing to tie a line to. It's perfectly round," he said.

"Put the line in one cannon port and bring it out the other," I said.

"You can't," he said. "It's full of sand or something."

Instead, Marx decided to mark the turret with two small yellow buoys anchored with fish-net weights. He instructed Ingram to accompany him below.

The aqualung tank which Marx wore was attached to his body by a kind of quick release like an airplane safety belt. Since Ingram was less experienced in diving, Marx gave Ingram that tank. Marx put on one of his new tanks which had a more complex release system. This was a tank Marx had used for a few minutes two days before on two dives to investigate contacts we had received on the *Sterling* fathometer at point Z. On each of the previous dives using this new tank, which presumably had been filled with air at the factory, Marx had returned to the surface complaining of the taste of the air. He did not know what caused the unusual taste.

"It must be the regulator or something," he had said.

Marx and Ingram went over the side about 0830. According to Marx, they swam down and quickly located the *Monitor's* trough and then the turret. Then they followed the trough out to either the bow or stern (it was impossible to determine which) and dropped the yellow marker buoys. Just at that minute, Marx's whole body was suddenly racked in pain. He became dizzy. His chest and throat burned. Then he was paralyzed. "My air tasted like smoke," he said later.

All he could think of was to spit out his mouthpiece and return to the surface. This he did, coming up in a few seconds. When he reached the surface I was in the rigging, watching the bubbles and yellow marker buoys.

I first realized there might be trouble when I saw that Marx had lost his face mask. I was a little confused at first because I didn't know whether or not he was trying to point out the turret again. But it was soon apparent that he was almost unconscious. We threw him a line and I pulled him to the side of the boat, then got down on the diving ladder and heaved him aboard.

"My air. My air," he moaned. "It's bad." Marx was dazed and half-conscious. We took off his lung and eased him on the deck.

Ingram came back on board a few minutes later and told me that he had passed over the turret and could see it clearly sticking out of the sand. Since the boat had swung nearly over the spot by then, I tossed over another large marker buoy. About that time, the wind shifted, blowing fresh from the northwest. A rain squall moved in, and the seas became choppy.

15

In the growing confusion on the *Sterling*, we were paid a visit by the navigator and three enlisted men of the *Stirni*, which was still anchored nearby. I briefed them on the events which had transpired and then asked if they would return to the *Stirni* immediately for two items: a sextant so that we could

take a fix, and material to make a reliable buoy of some kind to mark the turret. They pushed off in the outboard skiff.

Not long afterward, Marx was back on his feet, and for a while it seemed that he would recover quickly. He said he wanted to go down again.

I picked up a brick and tied it to the end of the safety line and said, "Look, just jam this brick inside one of the cannon ports and cover it up with sand. At least we will have a messenger line and later we can drag down a more elaborate buoy cable."

Marx would not hear of this. First, he insisted, he must stake a claim on the hulk. This desire arose out of the long background of feuding with MacNeill. Marx was determined to leave some kind of marker inside the turret. Accordingly, we took time to write a note: "*Monitor*: Marx and Ingram, 0900 July 12, 1955." We made a try at sealing the note in a Coke bottle, but we couldn't get the top back on the bottle. After this futile attempt, I poured the honey out of a Sioux Bee Brand honey bottle (how slowly it poured!), and put the note inside.

This done I was able to arrange a compromise with Marx. He agreed to take the brick down if he could also take the bottle. He stuck the bottle in his weight belt and, accompanied by Ingram, started down the ladder. Unfortunately, the honey bottle fell out of his belt and smashed on the deck. For a while I thought Marx would break down and weep, but after I agreed that he might put another bottle in the turret on the next trip, he consented to placing the brick in the cannon port. Marx was wearing the same tank he used on the first dive because the other tanks were low.

About then, the navigator returned from the *Stirni* with a steel-cable buoy and the sextant. At my request, he took a fix immediately. The bearings were as follows:

20 degrees—27 minutes—Loran Tower to Cape Hatteras Lighthouse.

95 degrees—51 minutes—Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to Kinnakeet Coast Guard Station (Askins Creek).

31 degrees--28 minutes--Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to
Buxton Water Tower.

23 degrees--8 minutes--Cape Hatteras Lighthouse to
Cape Hatteras Auxiliary Lighthouse.

Marx meanwhile had returned to the surface after only about one or two minutes. Again, he was dizzy and almost unconscious. For the second time, we pulled him on board the boat. He complained of a violent headache. We took off his diving equipment and sent him to lie down in one of the *Sterling's* bunks.

Ingram was still down. We watched his bubbles from the deck as he circled behind the boat.

Then, suddenly, Marx ran from the bunkhouse screaming, "Where's Ingram? Where's Ingram?"

Before we could reassure Marx, or even tell him that we had Ingram in sight, he grabbed a face mask and a snorkel breathing tube and dove over the side. We were all astonished by this performance. Thinking Marx was delirious, I started taking off my shoes to go after him. But suddenly he seemed rational again, swimming calmly along on the surface. However, when he neared the ladder, I climbed down, grabbed him by the back of his sweat shirt, and literally yanked him out of the water. After getting him back on board, we admonished him and ordered him to return to his bunk.

Ingram came back on board a few minutes later, carrying the brick, with the disappointing report that he was unable to relocate the turret. We told him to rest for a while until we had completed rigging the steel-cable buoy.

16

During this time--all that morning, in fact--our boat had been swinging around on its anchor. Since we had run out about 200 feet of chain we were, in effect, covering a fairly large area. To make matters worse, our marker buoys--lard

cans with concrete block weights—were drifting off. We knew we were swinging and drifting, but we were not overly concerned since we had a good “fix.” We were certain that we knew within several feet, one hundred at most, the position of the *Monitor*.

After considerable discussion of our situation, we concluded that our next move would be to relocate the turret and attach one of the *Sterling*’s anchors in the gun port. With the help of a couple of boatswain’s mates from the *Stirni*, we bolted the steel-cable buoy line to the anchor. Then we lowered the heavy anchor into the *Stirni*’s skiff and instructed Ingram to dive down and hook one of the flukes in the cannon port. We knew he would have trouble in spotting the turret, so we attached a 100-foot search line to the anchor. Ingram would go to the bottom after we had lowered the anchor, take the search line in hand, and swing around in a 100-foot arc until he found the turret. Then he would pull the anchor toward him with the search line. We would hold the anchor off the bottom so that Ingram could pull it along with minimum effort.

Ingram descended and we in the skiff followed his bubbles—holding the anchor just off the bottom. He swung out on the search line, he later reported, but couldn’t find the turret. This did not surprise us because it was already apparent that Ingram did not have his heart in the project. Inexperienced, he was reluctant to dive alone. He is to be commended for his adherence to this basic diving rule. However, at the time we believed he was overcautious, since we had a line attached to him and to the anchor, and if anything happened we could have pulled him to the surface rapidly.

In the end, we failed to put the anchor in the turret. The steel-cable buoy was left just as it was—near the boat and our cluster of buoys, none of which were more than 20 feet apart. Since all hands were exhausted, especially Marx, we decided to return to port. Feeling no need of keeping the *Stirni* around, we thanked the crew for their help and they returned to other tasks.

When we prepared to raise the *Sterling*’s anchor, we found

that it was fouled on the bottom. This fact struck the skipper as odd because, as he remarked, "There isn't a rock around here for miles." Only after great effort—straining, backing the boat, and going forward again—were we able to get the anchor up. When we saw it we were stunned: one of its heavy steel flukes was severely bent. There could be only one explanation: that advanced by the *Sterling's* skipper. Ironically our own anchor had caught in the turret port of the *Monitor*.

None of us doubted that the *Monitor* could be relocated with a minimum of effort. It was just a matter of pinpointing the hulk in a space not much larger than a basketball court. Therefore, that night I called Peter Stackpole, a *Life* photographer who specializes in underwater work. My thought was that we could take a picture of the turret and definitely establish Marx's claim. Stackpole agreed to come to Cape Hatteras immediately.

17

The *Sterling* remained in port Wednesday while we awaited Stackpole's arrival. Marx and Ingram spent the day on the boat pumping up the air tanks which had been emptied of the foul air. Later that afternoon Marx, who had been complaining of a lingering headache, paid a visit to the local infirmary, where he was thoroughly examined. The doctor thought that Marx had burst his eardrum. Apparently he had come up too fast on the dive when he first spotted the *Monitor*. Marx was advised to suspend all diving for the time being. He was crestfallen at the news.

"What a sick deal this is turning out to be," he said.

Later that evening Stackpole arrived and final plans were made for getting underway the following morning. We cast off at 0500 and once again made our way to sea—this time with tanks full of "clean" air. We arrived on station at 0800, and almost immediately relocated the steel-cable buoy. Ingram

and Stackpole squirmed into diving gear and went over the side to take a picture of Ingram sitting on the *Monitor's* gun turret. But a half hour later, they returned to the *Sterling* to report they could not find the *Monitor*.

The currents were very swift on the bottom and the visibility, they reported, was less than 6 feet. They rested, and at 1300, Stackpole went over the side alone. A few minutes later he reported sighting two concrete blocks, our lard-can buoy weights, near the anchor. The fact that the blocks were not silted or sanded up was encouraging; it indicated that the *Monitor* was probably still much the same as we had left it two days before.

Ingram made one final attempt to find the hulk later that afternoon. This met with no success, so we secured operations and headed for port. Marx was bitter.

Friday we got underway at 0500. En route to the operations area, the air compressor began to cough and sputter. This was a serious setback. All air tanks were low. After trying unsuccessfully to adjust the various needle valves, we dismantled the compressor. This work required about three hours and we were still low on air when we arrived on station. By noon, the compressor was back in commission and we pumped enough air for Stackpole and Ingram to make a search. After twenty-five minutes on the bottom, they came on board again to report they could see nothing. The currents were extremely strong. The men were being carried far away from the boat. Marx paced restlessly back and forth on the deck of the *Sterling*.

Later, in spite of the balky compressor, we managed to fill still another tank and Ingram went down again. His dive produced no positive results. The currents were so swift, the visibility so poor, that it was impossible to conduct an organized search. At about 1500 Friday, diving operations were secured and the *Sterling* returned to port. *Monitor* Expedition Number One was called to a halt.

At 0600 Saturday we packed up and departed Cape Hatteras, leaving the *Monitor* buried in the sand a mile offshore.

18

I returned to Washington and was soon swept up in other matters. But the lure of the *Monitor* was strong. To have come so close and failed at the very least to obtain underwater pictures of the hulk was exasperating. Within three weeks, I had proposed a second expedition to *Life's* editors. The Coast and Geodetic Survey agreed again to assist us. Since Marx was still out of commission, we made arrangements for a Navy Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) of frogmen on leave to handle the diving. The Secretary of the Navy, with whom I spoke at length about the project, refused any official co-operation.

Soon I was again on my way to bleak Cape Hatteras.

Our well-equipped Expedition Number Two seemed bound to succeed. We had our boat, the *Sterling*, as well as three Coast and Geodetic Survey ships, standing by. The Navy UDT team was composed of Lieutenant (jg) Daniel S. Scott, twenty-four, the commanding officer; Samuel S. Bailey, First Class Gunner's Mate, thirty-four, a strapping diver who joined UDT in 1945; and Frank E. "Kap" Kappesser, twenty-seven, a first-class diver and UDT man since 1947. We also secured a plane in case one of those rare days of perfect visibility came up. Most important, the weather was favorable. A terrible gale had swept the cape after we left but now the water was calm.

The *Stirni* was assigned as our escort ship. On the first day, we boarded her and steamed directly for the spot where we had taken the fix. But an interesting, indeed somewhat puzzling, situation arose. When we plotted the fix on the chart, it appeared to be about one hundred yards south of the point where we had obtained the original sonar fix. (There had been no reason to plot this position before.) Now the question was: Which was the right spot? Had the original plot been accurate? The *Stirni's* navigator was not sure. Had the boat swung



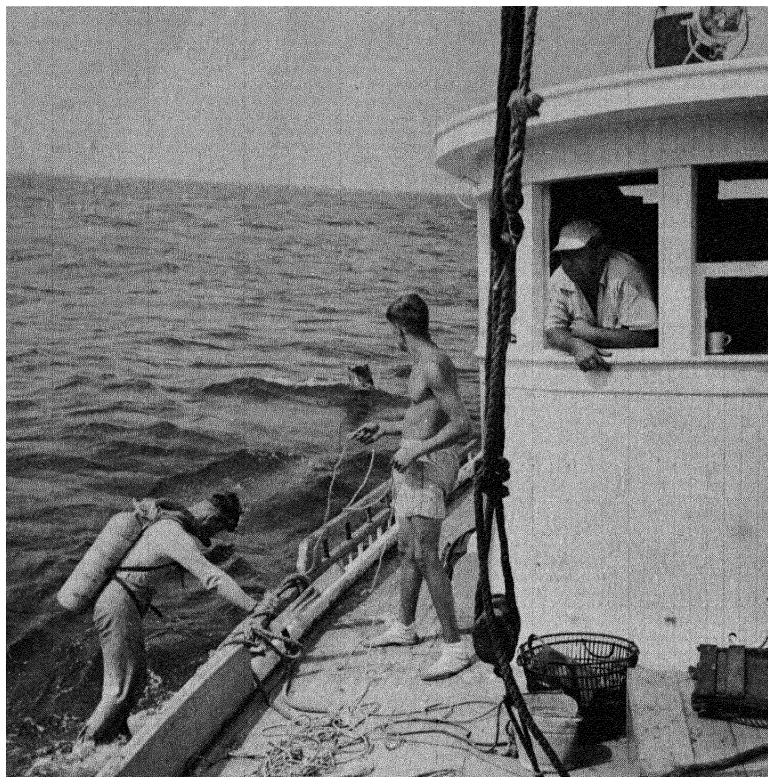
Conference off Hatteras between Navy divers on Sterling, Blair and Marx (right) on Stirni. Life photo by Peter Stackpole.

on its anchor before the fix had been taken? We tried to reconstruct the winds and currents, but they had varied so much that day that nothing seemed certain.

Since the navigator was uncertain, I asked him to drop a buoy at the point where the fix had been taken. This he did, after taking a series of twenty-odd sights to make sure we were over the exact spot. Full of high hopes, we sent the Navy divers down. They searched the bottom, which showed a depth of 40 feet, in circular patterns with a 100-foot line, working first one way and then the other from the buoy. Two hours of diving produced nothing.

We went back on board the *Stirni* for a conference.

Was this the correct place or was it 300 feet north? We studied the problem for some time, then decided the best thing to do was to search the complete area again with sonar. This we did for several hours, cruising back and forth from

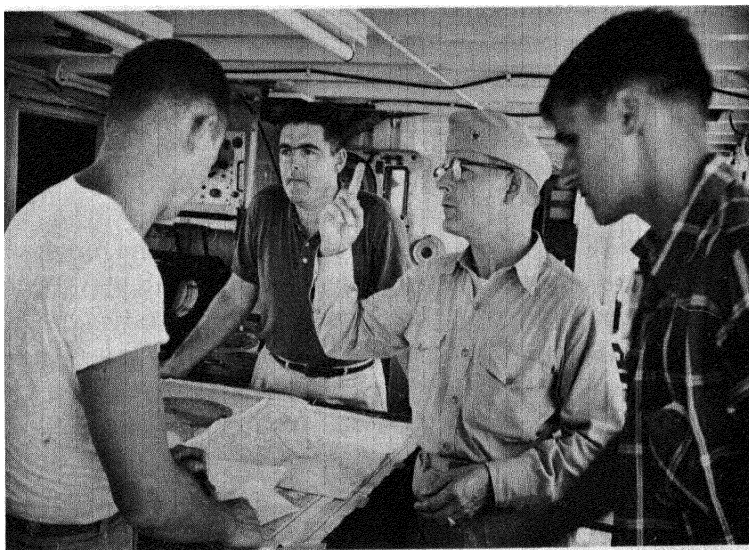


*Navy frogman enters water from Sterling.
Life photo by Peter Stackpole.*

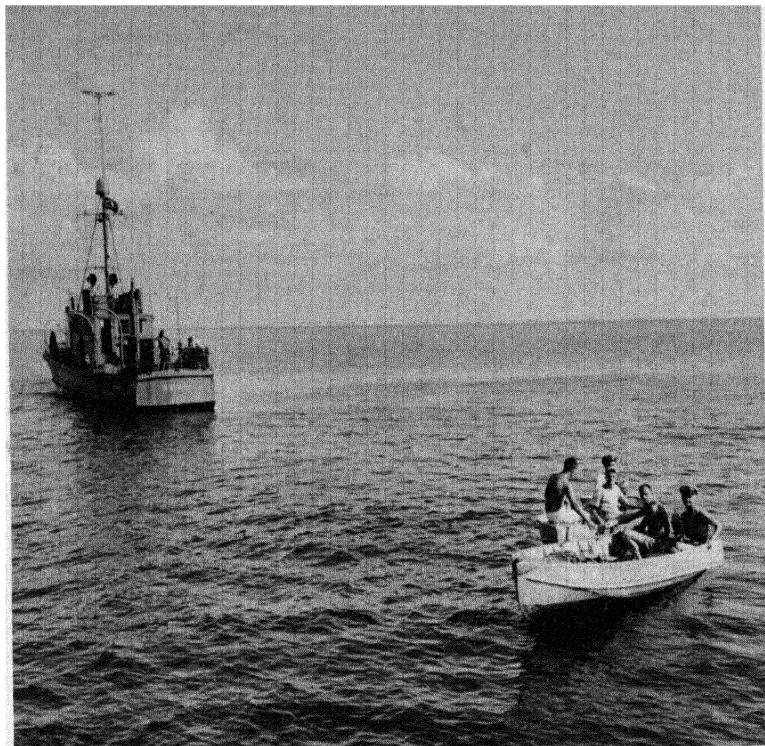
every conceivable angle, pinging away in our small area. On the first expedition we had obtained a strong sonar return, but this time there was nothing. Nightfall put an end to operations. We studied the charts and consulted the log which I kept, late into the evening, trying to decide what to do. There was only one answer: drag the bottom again.

The following morning at 0700 we rigged up a 100-foot drag line and stretched it between two of the *Stirni's* outboard skiffs. Then, for five hours, we dragged back and forth in wide circles around the buoy, edging slightly toward the north each time in the direction of the position where we had dropped the original buoy. When this produced nothing (it was not an effi-

*On the bottom at
Cape Hatteras, Navy
frogman searches for
wreck of Monitor.
Life photo by Peter
Stackpole.*



*Author Blair (background) and diver Marx (right) hold conference
with Coast and Geodetic Survey officers on board the Stirni.
Life photo by Peter Stackpole.*



Small boats of the Coast & Geodetic Survey Ship Stirni were used for dragging operations. Life photo by Peter Stackpole.

cient operation), we secured all the equipment and resumed the sonar search, steaming endlessly back and forth over the area.

At about 1300 that afternoon, we were joined by the other two Coast and Geodetic Survey ships, the *Parker* and the *Bowen*, and after a lengthy and detailed conference on board the *Stirni*, we decided to string out the mile-long drag line. When this was done, the *Parker* and the *Bowen* dragged through the area, once from sea toward shore and once from shore toward sea. The heavy weighted drag line was resting on the bottom throughout the operation. The experts told us that if anything stuck up as little as one foot the drag line would snag it. Again, on Expedition Number One we had gotten a "hang," but this time there was nothing.

We were all puzzled. No sonar contact. No drag "hang." We tested the sonar equipment to make sure it was working properly. The sonar easily picked up a steel weight, one foot in diameter, suspended from a buoy at a considerable distance from the ship.

After another lengthy conference, the Coast and Geodetic men came to the conclusion that there was nothing more they could do to help. We could only agree. They could not go on pinging forever. We had covered the area as thoroughly as possible. Another drag seemed futile since the two they had carried out were well done.

The next day, after getting the Coast and Geodetic ship to drop the buoy back in the original position (300 hundred feet north of the fix position), we went back out to resume search with the UDT team. We used the same system: moving in circles around the buoy. But, as before, we found nothing. The UDT men kept diving until we had nearly exhausted our air supply.

19

It was off Cape Hatteras on this *Monitor* expedition that I was finally coaxed into the underwater world with an aqualung. Until that day we had been too busy and too short of air even to consider my going over the side. Involved as I was in so many days of diving activity, I occasionally worked up a mild curiosity about the murky deep, but each time it was dampened by the appearance of slimy hammerhead sharks to which our divers paid scant heed.

Now, on that last day, we discovered that two of the Navy tanks contained about ten minutes of air each. It was still early in the afternoon and there was no reason to hurry back to port. Marx made the suggestion, within earshot of the Navy UDT men and the ship's crew, that I go underwater with one of the frogmen. All eyes turned toward me.

By the time Marx began strapping the heavy triple-tanks on



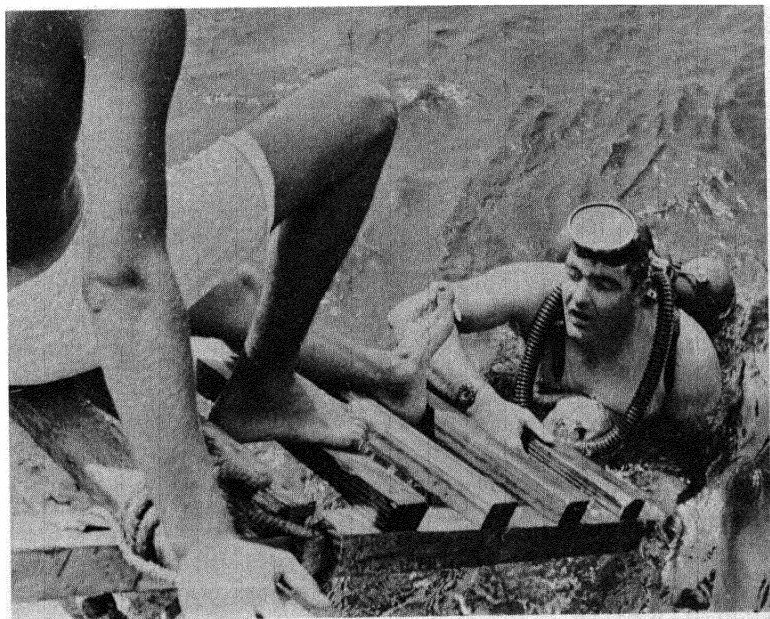
Author Blair dons diving tank for first plunge beneath the water off Cape Hatteras. Life photo by Peter Stackpole.

my back I was trembling. I could hear his instructions as though from far away: "If you start to run out of air, pull this valve. This is your reserve. It means you have five more minutes of air to get to the surface. No need to worry about decompression at this depth. Remember, don't come up faster than your bubbles. . . ." And so on. Meanwhile he had, it seemed, ensnared me in a hopeless tangle of straps and belts from which I was sure I could never extricate myself in an emergency. Next came the face plate with a strap behind my

head. Marx told me to spit on the inside glass first and quickly clean it with sea water. This would keep it from fogging.

The tanks made me unnaturally top-heavy and I staggered around the rolling deck of the *Sterling*, certain that any second I would fall over backward. To compensate, I leaned very far forward and almost fell on my face. Step by step, I backed toward the gunwale, then slowly I descended the boarding ladder. On the bottom step, I put the rubber mouthpiece in my mouth and began to breathe the compressed air. It was not unlike breathing through an oxygen mask in a jet airplane. Marx told me not to breathe so hard and fast, else I would use all the air before I got in the water. It was like telling a soldier plunging into combat for the first time to remain calm.

I slipped into the water, but I could not bring myself to submerge. For a few moments I bobbed aimlessly on the



Author Blair, choking on sea water, returns to diving ladder on first dive. Life photo by Peter Stackpole.

choppy surface. Then I lost my mouthpiece and half-choked on sea water. I struggled back to the foot of the ladder and hung on, ready to give up. Someone decided I needed more lead weights to offset my blubber, so these were handed to me and somehow I inserted them in the ammunition belt, dreading the idea of adding anything that would pull me down. Meanwhile, one of the Navy UDT men, Kappesser, eased over to the gunwale and then flipped expertly into the water backward. He swam to my side to help square me away. When he had adjusted my leaky face plate and got me breathing correctly, there seemed no other way to postpone the ordeal, so finally I stuck my head underwater.

I was amazed at how clearly the face plate enabled me to see. It was far beyond anything I had imagined. Close at hand I could discern all the fine detail of a tiny piece of seaweed floating in the water. Four feet away, I could see Kappesser clearly, in fact, magnified somewhat by the face-plate glass. One's first look underwater through a face plate is astonishing. There is no other way to describe it.

20

Although I had my teeth firmly gripped on the mouthpiece, I had yet to take a breath. I was locked in some psychological closet. I couldn't bring myself to do something I had instinctively avoided all my life: breathe underwater. Rather than do it, I pushed back to the surface, ripped the mouthpiece from my mouth, and gulped real air. I began to feel foolish, like a fish out of water, I suppose.

Marx leaned over the gunwale to urge me on. Sheepishly, I replaced the mouthpiece and descended until the water formed a wavy line across my face plate. My mouth was now completely under and I took a breath. No water came rushing into my lungs! I kept on breathing and submerged very slowly until the sea closed over my head. I shouldn't say I was breathing. I was sucking insanely on the mouthpiece and exhaling in

explosive gasps. I felt desperately in need of air, so I kept filling my lungs and exhaling rapidly. The excitement may have forced me to do this. The action of the regulator—the device on the lung which adjusts the air pressure to the water pressure on your body—made a frightening metallic racket.

I grasped the descending line which arced down into the light green water and then disappeared, seemingly about 10 or 15 feet below me. Then I turned my head down as I had been told, and worked my way down the line, with Kappesser immediately by my side. Once I stopped to look up. Amid the swarm of silvery bubbles rising from my lung, I could see every detail on the bottom of the boat: the motionless brass propeller, the foamy confusion along the hull's edge where it bobbed in and out of the water, a few barnacles, the rotten, broken bottom rungs of the diving ladder. I kept a wary eye out for the sharks, but I saw none.

As we inched deeper, my breathing slowed and the metallic noise of the regulator subsided considerably. I felt as though I might be going deaf, or as if I was descending into some deep cave where noise was cushioned or shut out entirely.

At a depth of about 10 feet I began to feel pressure on my eardrums. At 12 feet, or maybe it was 14, I felt a piercing, almost unbearable pain. I stopped and clung to the descending line trying to "pop" my ears which, as any airline passenger knows, is easily done by holding one's nose and blowing. But it is not easy to hold your nose when it is covered by a face plate. You have to push up on the bottom of the face plate until the soft rubber mashes against your nostrils. This is difficult enough on the surface, but 12 feet underwater, torn by anxiety and fear, it seemed almost impossible. However, it is necessary; otherwise, the pain would force one to stop the descent. I huffed and puffed and pushed on the face plate and finally I heard a kind of rapid whistling of air in my ears and the pain ceased instantly. From then on, I had no more trouble with my ears.

Having passed the eardrum barrier, we descended more rapidly through patches of cold and warm water which seem

to lie about underwater like clouds. As we went deeper, the water became darker. Where it was light greenish on the surface, it was now grayish and eerie. Then all at once, below me, I saw sand. It was the bottom. I was 40 feet down! I nearly perished at the thought.

The ocean bottom reminded me of some vast desert. The sand stretched as far as the eye could see, humped in tiny ridges. At the bottom, the visibility was quite good; it appeared as though somehow the sunlight penetrated to the bottom and then bounced off the sand and was reflected up about 4 feet. But above that, between us and the surface, the water was dark gray, like the low-lying strato-cumulus clouds you see tumbling along in the sky just before a summer shower.

We swam along the bottom in our private layer of light. Gradually, the panic subsided and I began to feel at ease. There were many sand dollars and starfish on the ocean bed so I reached down and grabbed a handful. Otherwise, I saw no other living thing except Kappesser, and I was very glad to see him.

I judged that we had been on the bottom about five minutes when Kappesser swam around in front of me and jabbed his thumb upward. I was disappointed. Now that I had become adjusted to my new environment, I was very reluctant to leave it. It was a fascinating, captivating place—a weightless world of new sights and sensations which I enjoyed. Kappesser put the ascending line in my hand and pointed up again. He was worried, I suppose, that I might run out of air.

I reached for the bottom rung of the boarding ladder, flung my sand dollars and starfish—solid proof that I had been to the bottom—onto the deck, and started climbing out. At once the tanks, which had been weightless and unnoticeable beneath the water, began to assume their former fearful burden and I returned to my tottering attitude. Finally, I found a place to sit down and Marx, bubbling with enthusiasm, rushed over to unstrap me. I grinned at my achievement.

Having found nothing, and weary of battling the fearsome currents of Cape Hatteras, the UDT men lost heart. Thus our second expedition came to a close. I puzzled over its negative

outcome for weeks, studying the meticulous hour-by-hour log I had kept on the two expeditions. Then finally I solved the mystery.

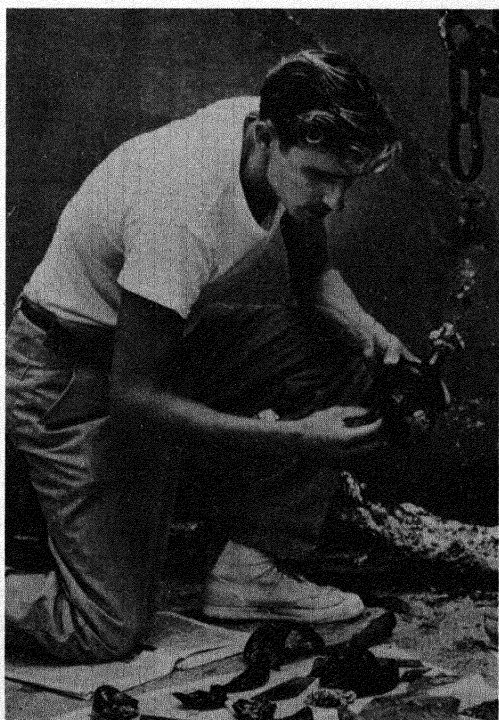
On the first expedition, I noted, albeit belatedly, that the depth of the water in our area measured 43 feet. On the second expedition the Navy frogmen had registered the depth at 40 feet. I checked with the fishermen on Cape Hatteras, asking how it was that I could have obtained two different readings on that flat bottom.

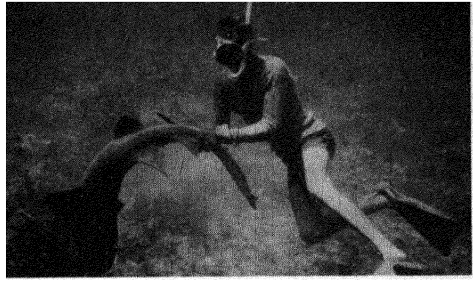
"Hell," they replied, "the depth of the water around here changes all the time. The sand sweeps back and forth on the banks like sand on a desert. A change of 3 feet is nothing. A change of 10 or 20 feet is common. In fact the change was probably caused by that big storm between your two expeditions."

At Hatteras, a shift in the water depth of 3 feet was considered "nothing." But for us it had been crucial. When Marx first found the *Monitor* turret, the only exposed portion of the *Monitor*, it was sticking above the sand bottom 3 feet. The change in bottom, from 43 feet to 40 feet, was just enough to completely cover the turret.

PART II

Hunting Sharks and Sunken Gold





I

THE FOLLOWING fall and winter Marx visited me often in Washington, where he came to do research on wrecks in the Library of Congress and the National Archives. We planned new expeditions to locate the elusive *Monitor* but, for one reason or another, none of them ever reached fruition. The next spring, Marx was transferred to the Caribbean to organize a Marine Corps diving school in Vieques, Puerto Rico. In September, 1956, after shepherding some 1,500 Marines through his school, Marx, by then a sergeant, left the Marine Corps and returned to southern California. He entered Los Angeles City College to study history and archaeology and in his spare time he worked with divers at the Scripps Oceanography Institute.

Except for an occasional weekend at the beaches near Washington, where I became proficient in the use of the snorkel, flippers, and face plate, my underwater activity was virtually shelved. As the months rolled by, I would occasionally hear from Marx by mail. Each time he mentioned some new plan to raise the *Monitor* and kept urging me to do this or that in connection with it. The old hulk was very much on his mind. And, although he had yet to raise it, the expeditions off Cape Hatteras had brought him widespread fame in the burgeoning clan of skin divers.

In September, 1957, by which time I had joined the staff of *The Saturday Evening Post*, I received a letter with a return

address of Island of Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico. In this letter, Marx reported with considerable feeling that he had discovered a diving paradise—the “clearest water in the world.” The island, he went on, was surrounded by wrecks of Spanish galleons and the reefs were teeming with every kind of fish. He predicted confidently that he would shortly find enough treasure to finance a new expedition on the *Monitor* and that I should be prepared.

I scurried around for an atlas and discovered that Cozumel was a small, remote island off the eastern coast of the Yucatan peninsula.

Several weeks later a second letter arrived from Marx announcing that he had positively located several old wrecks. From one of them he had recovered an ancient anchor. A picture was enclosed. It was a tempting scene: Marx, wearing a white T-shirt and white cap, straining to haul the anchor, encrusted with brilliant red coral, on board a small boat. A glance at the anchor in that picture stirred my imagination. I could envision a huge ungainly galleon being driven relentlessly toward the reefs, sails tattered, seamen huddled in the forecastle chanting the Hail Mary while wild hurricane winds flayed the rigging. Marx concluded his letter by urging me to come down and help him dive on the wrecks.

Sunken treasure! Spanish galleons! Cozumel Island! More diving! I turned these thoughts over in my mind. Then I rejected them. I had no time for chasing will-o'-the-wisps. But the picture of that anchor clung in my mind tenaciously, as though held there by a growth of coral. One day not long afterward, I rang up a friend, Walter Bennett, who was a photographer for *Time* magazine.

“Wally,” I said, “do you want to go to Cozumel Island and dive on some Spanish galleons?” Bennett was a diver experienced in SCUBA equipment. He was among the handful of pioneers of skin diving in southern California in the late thirties. For a while he had supplemented his income by diving for abalone and “bugs,” or lobsters.

“Where the hell is Cozumel Island?” he asked.

"Off the coast of Mexico," I said. "Bob Marx is down there and he has found some wrecks." Bennett had met Marx in Washington.

"Oh." Bennett paused. "What are we waiting for?"

The air age, we discovered, had placed this remote isle practically in our backyard. The first objective is Mérida, the capital of Yucatan. The flying time from Washington, D.C., is about six hours. From Mérida, Cozumel Island is but one hour by air, served by a small feeder airline called Tamsa, whose DC-3s fly a fairly regular schedule.

Bennett and I traveled by way of Miami and Havana. Then, in the late afternoon of the same day, our DC-7C circled low over Mérida, Yucatan, and touched down smoothly at the city's airport. Marx, deeply tanned and sporting a mustache, hurried out to meet and steer us through the complex customs and immigration channels. White-shirted, smiling greeters of the Barbachano Travel Service, the equivalent of our American Express, assumed much of the responsibility and this enabled us to be on our way with a minimum of delay. Soon we were comfortably settled in the cellar bar of the Mérida Hotel.

2

The Yucatan peninsula is a fascinating and unusual section of Mexico. Geographically and economically, it has little in common with the "mainland" from which it is set apart by a vast swampy jungle. Several times during Yucatan's stormy, colorful history, in fact, it has threatened to become a separate nation.

In very olden times, sometime after the birth of Christ, it was a center of the Maya civilization. These marvelously advanced people cross-hatched the peninsula with arrow-straight stone roads, and erected ornate temples and pyramids closely resembling those of the Egyptians. They alone, among the ancient civilizations of the New World, employed a system of

writing. They were astute astronomers and developed a calendar which, scholars say, was more accurate than the one we use today. They were a peace-loving, creative people, who were later conquered by warlike tribes from the area near Mexico City. This influx touched off a violent and prolonged series of civil wars and, by the time the Spanish conquistadors came on the scene, the Maya civilization was in a state of decline and many of the majestic temples had been abandoned.

Mérida is a modern cosmopolitan city whose buildings and parks reflect the Spanish influence. But beyond the city limits, Yucatan is still very much the same as the Spanish found it in the sixteenth century. The population is predominantly Maya, and in remote sections many of the ancient mores and customs prevail. The Mayas are a clean, proud people of sturdy character and unimpeachable honesty. Maya women still wear the same colorful embroidered frocks, called huipil, worn by their ancestors; the men still use the ancient methods of cultivating maize, which was the principal crop of the early Mayas. Under sponsorship of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C., Maya ruins at Chichén-Itzá, Uxmal, and several other sites have been excavated and partially restored. The Barbachano Travel Service operates modern hotels at these places for tourists. Elsewhere throughout the jungle-matted, flat peninsula, one can see huge mounds of earth, indicating other ruins yet to be explored.

After we had downed a bottle of beer, Bob told us his story. In the previous winter, he had become restless in Los Angeles. In the back of his mind, he had been playing with the idea of going to Yucatan to study Maya ruins with which he had become acquainted in his archaeology classes. Then, one day a movie producer who was making a film on skin diving for a manufacturer of skin-diving equipment mentioned that he was looking for a diving "actor" to do some scenes in Yucatan. Marx jumped at the chance. Most of the film had been shot among the fish-laden reefs off Cozumel but, like all travelers to Yucatan, the producers had become intrigued with the Maya civilization and the ruins.

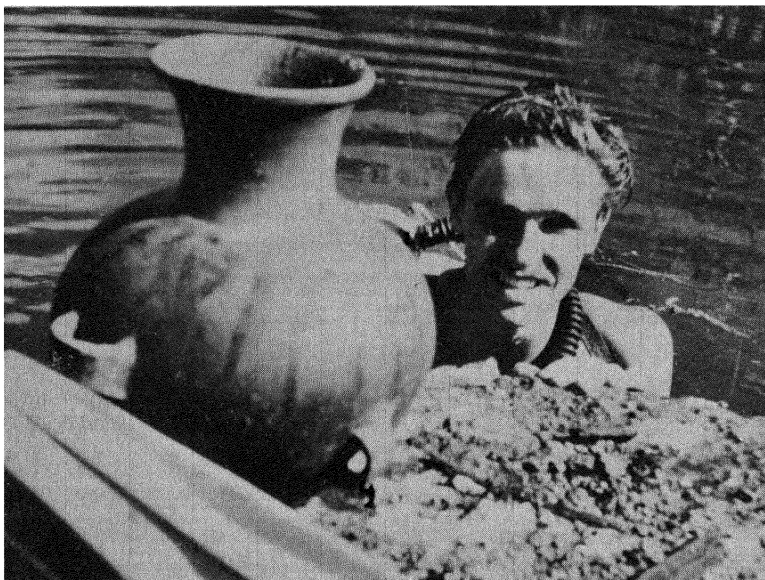
Of particular interest were the many cenotes, or deep and enormously large water wells, which pit the northern tip of Yucatan like bomb craters. The peninsula itself is a vast sheet of limestone, too porous to support many rivers. Rain water drains away through underground tunnels worn through the limestone. From time to time, the ceiling of a tunnel caves in, sealing off both ends, and leaving a large water-filled hole in the ground. And thus a cenote is formed. No one has ever counted the cenotes of Yucatan but more than a hundred can easily be spotted in an hour's flying time over the jungle.

Lacking other sources of water in riverless Yucatan, the Mayas built their temples near these wells. One well, the Sacred Cenote near the city of Chichén-Itzá, played an important role in Maya religious rites. When drought parched the peninsula, the Mayas hand-picked a half dozen of their choice virgins and, with elaborate ceremony, hurled these virgins into the deep Sacred Cenote to appease the rain god whom they believed lived at the bottom of the well. Along with the virgins they cast into the well many gold and jade trinkets. Shortly after the turn of the century an American archaeologist, Edward Thompson, dredged and later entered the Sacred Cenote in a deep-sea diving rig and recovered over eighty skeletons and, it has been estimated, a half million dollars worth of archaeological artifacts.

"We decided to use some footage of the Sacred Cenote in the film," Marx explained, puffing on his pipe.

"I was selected to be the 'virgin.' Appropriately dressed in women's clothing of the time of the ancient Mayas and padded in the right places, I was picked up by a couple of Mayas who were dressed as priests, and flung headlong into the well. It was 50 feet to the surface of the water. Somebody goofed, and in mid-air I turned flat on my back and struck the water in that position. It was like hitting a slab of concrete and, for a while, I thought I might become a bona fide sacrifice."

After that melodramatic scene, the cameraman returned to the States. But Marx, intrigued with Yucatan, had remained to explore the ruins and to dive with his aqualung in the cenotes



Diving in deep well in Yucatan, Bob Marx recovers ancient Maya pottery.



In jungle near Maya ruins in Yucatan, Bob Marx and wife Mary assemble fragments of Maya pottery.

and in the clear water off Cozumel. He lived in a hotel on the island, where he earned a meager living by teaching tourists the art of skin diving.

"I have helped quite a few archaeologists in the cenotes," Marx went on. "I brought up several pots, many pieces of jade, obsidian knives, and perfect idol masks which are now prized possessions of the Mexico City museum. Some of the stuff has been dated as 3,200 years old."

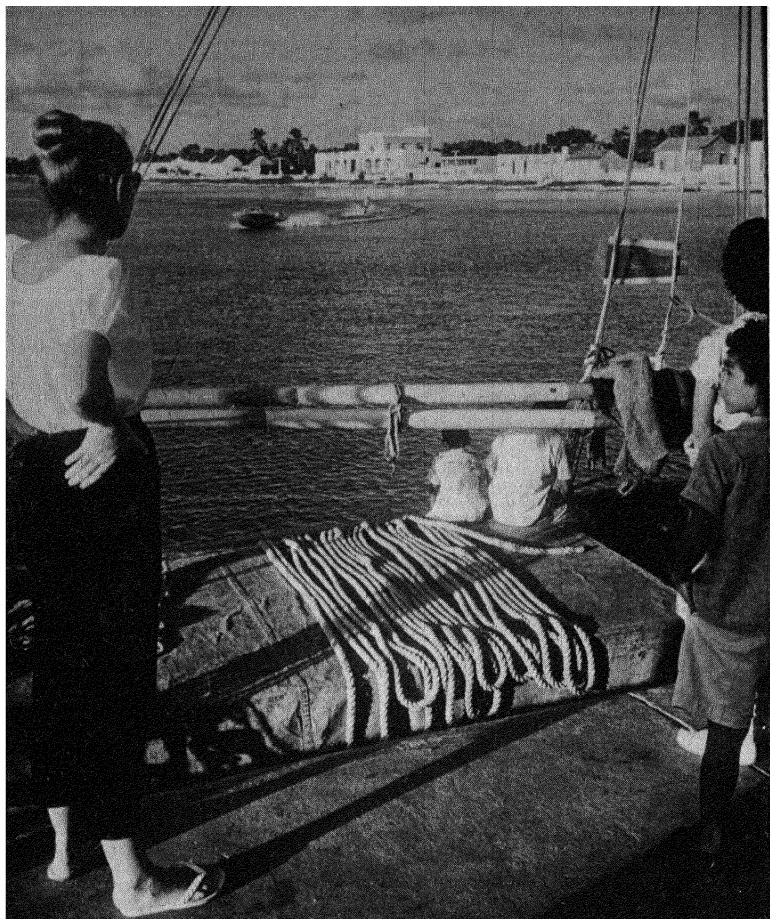
And so we talked, late into the night. Even in November it was quite warm in Yucatan, and when we took our room at the spotlessly clean Hotel Colón in Mérida we were grateful for the air conditioning. Somehow we awoke in time to get to the airport by 0600. The Tamsa DC-3 was waiting when we arrived. We bought our tickets and climbed on board. Soon we were airborne, flying eastward over the jungle.

3

Less than an hour after take-off, we passed over the eastern coast of the peninsula where we would soon explore a sunken galleon, and we gawked through the windows at the turquoise waters of the Yucatan Channel. Even from our altitude the reef was clearly visible close along the shore.

A few minutes later we got our first glimpse of Cozumel. It is a lovely island, 11 miles wide and 32 miles long, with many pure white sand beaches and a low, green profile. We could see the small seaport of San Miguel, the island's only town. Scores of small craft were anchored in the harbor and as we dipped low to make our approach for Cozumel airfield, the natives waved from the long concrete pier. Then our wheels touched down on one of the largest and finest airports in Mexico. (The field was built by the United States in World War II.)

I had expected to rough it on Cozumel but to my surprise the plane was met by a station wagon and a swarm of white-shirted attendants who took our bags and equipment through



The harbor of San Miguel, Cozumel Island. Photo by Bob Marx.

the proper channels. Then we drove into San Miguel to the Cozumel Beach Hotel where Marx lived and where we had rooms waiting for us. The hotel was quite comfortable. There were twenty rooms, all with private baths, and a dining room where carefully prepared meals were served with gusto. For those who preferred to remain shore-based, there was a swimming pool and open-air bar. Except for the hotel, there was little night life on the island.

The Island of Cozumel is immensely rich in history and

legend. Before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, it was a kind of religious mecca for the ancient Mayas. The Spanish historian Herrera wrote, ". . . what they venerated most were the temples on the island of Cozumel and the well of Chichén which were as Rome and Jerusalem are among us." Many of the stone roads on the Yucatan peninsula lead into a seacoast town named Pole, opposite Cozumel. The Mayas journeyed there and then made the perilous water crossing to Cozumel in canoes. On Cozumel they asked for remission of their sins. Many men were put to death in religious ceremonies in Cozumel's temples. A Spanish bishop, Diego de Landa, residing in Yucatan in the sixteenth century, complained: "Besides killing people in their towns they had those two infamous sanctuaries at Chichén-Itzá and Cozumel where they sent an infinite number of wretched people to be sacrificed. At the former they were flung head-on down a precipice and at the latter, they tore out their hearts."

There was one idol on Cozumel that was probably unique in Maya culture. It has been described by the historian Lopez de Cogolludo as a great hollow thing made of clay. A Maya priest climbed inside the idol and, when the Mayas came to recant their sins and to ask advice, the priest replied, no doubt, in a deep booming voice, and the Mayas were convinced that the idol itself had spoken. Another god, Telcuzam, or "Swallow-leg," who had a leg like that of a swallow, gave the island its name, for, in Maya, Cozumel (or Cuzamil) means "Place of the Swallows," or as some authorities interpret it, "Swallow Island."

When the Spanish conquistadors directed their attention toward Mexico, Cozumel Island, bossed by a friendly Maya chief named Naum Pat, served as a kind of steppingstone for the conquest. Hernandez de Cordoba coasted the island in 1517, and on returning to Cuba greatly excited the Spanish with tales of Cozumel's great temples. In the following year, Juan de Grijalva sailed from Cuba with a small fleet to explore Cozumel and Yucatan. In 1519, Hernando Cortés embarked on the expedition that would ultimately conquer most of Mexico, stopped at Cozumel to take on water and repair his

ships. While there he converted a Maya temple to a Catholic church.

The Yucatan peninsula opposite Cozumel was by-passed in the conquest for nearly a decade. Then in 1527, Francisco de Montejo, who had commanded a ship on the Grijalva expedition and later served in Mexico as one of Cortés' lieutenants, returned with a small force to conquer the peninsula. He stopped at Cozumel, where it is thought he named the seaport, San Miguel, and then pushed across the channel to the mainland. There Montejo, borrowing a page from the book of Cortés, destroyed his ships, the caravel *San Jeronima* and the brigantine *La Gavarra*, to preclude a retreat in the face of certain hardship. Montejo did not have an easy time of it. In fact it was not until 1547 that the peninsula was declared completely secure. It yielded little treasure.

From that period on, Cozumel, its native population decimated by diseases imported from Europe, declined in importance. By the middle seventeenth century, its temples were overgrown with jungle and its population reduced to fewer than five hundred people. A map published in 1766 shows no settlement at all on Cozumel. In 1842 the American traveler John Lloyd Stephens visited Cozumel and found only five mangy dogs and a group of deserted huts.

In 1848, so the story goes, the treasury of Yucatan being empty, Cozumel Island was put up for sale to any nation. There were no takers. However, following the great mid-nineteenth century War of the Castes in Yucatan, the government settled the island with refugees and some political exiles. And by 1900, the island's population had grown to a thousand or more. Farms, hacked out of the thick jungle, produced chicle, tobacco, henequin, coconuts, and delicious pineapples. The population grew to its present number of about 3,000.

Almost all the islands of the Caribbean are described as pirate hang-outs. However, there seems no doubt that this was true in the case of Cozumel. It was an ideal hideaway, lying athwart the galleon routes from Cartagena and Vera Cruz. Situated on the extreme eastern flank of Mexico, far from fortified sites, it was not easily or enthusiastically defended by

the Spanish. In olden times, near the south end of the island there was a well-concealed cove which could have served as a harbor. Today a stone "lookout tower" still stands at the entrance to this cove, which is called "Pirate Cove." The authentic histories of pirates frequently mention Cozumel as a base. Jean Lafitte made his headquarters on the Isla Mujeres ("Island of Women") only a few miles north of Cozumel.

Except for the buildings in San Miguel, most of which are made of stones obtained from Maya ruins on Cozumel, and the new airport, the island has changed very little since the arrival of the early twentieth-century settlers. The town square, typically Spanish, is never crowded. Almost all of the streets in San Miguel are grass covered—there are only a few dozen automobiles on the island. The pace of the natives is geared low as elsewhere in the tropics. There is little farming. Although the waters abound with fish, few men fish for a living. In truth, it is difficult to discern, from an economic standpoint, exactly what, aside from tourist dollars, sustains Cozumel. This mystery only contributes to the island's charm.

From the point of view of the sportsman, Cozumel is little less than a paradise. The waters and jungles of the island are teeming with fish and wildlife and there are no limits imposed on sportsmen. There isn't even a game warden on the island. In winter months, islanders say, the sky is black with ducks which migrate from the north. Doves are so thick that the natives build blinds in the road and bat them down with sticks. At certain times of the year the parrots of Yucatan flock there to lay eggs, since there are no poisonous snakes on the island. A few hours away by boat are the jungles on the mainland full of wild deer and jaguar.

All this, and treasure too!

4

As soon as we had unpacked our suitcases, Bennett and I joined Marx in his room. It was jam-packed with the paraphernalia of his profession: diving lungs, air compressors,

snorkels, face plates, maps, and five footlockers full of information on sunken ships. Soon we were avidly discussing the conquest of Mexico and Peru, the treasure galleons, and the pirates and buccaneers who roamed the Caribbean raising havoc and looting gold. Not surprisingly, Marx knew all of the legends and much of the history in detail, including the names of the ships involved, especially those that had sunk.

"How many wrecks have you located in this area?" I asked.

"There are four I know of for sure, and two 'probables,'" Marx said.

He had found them in much the same fashion that he had tracked down the *Monitor*. First, he had read assiduously about the conquest, with particular emphasis on the Cozumel-Yucatan area. Some of the books and monographs that had come under his scrutiny were old and obscure, although readily available to the diligent scholar, as I discovered later. In his research, Marx does not stop with the printed word. Upon completing a book or manuscript, he writes to the author requesting whatever additional information is available. He is forever corresponding with museums, libraries, and, of course, other divers. Today, I estimate he keeps a more-or-less running correspondence with fifty or more scholars, historians, librarians, and sea captains.

Then, as he did at Cape Hatteras, Marx obtained much of his information from local fishermen and boatmen, with whom he has an appealing but searching manner. In most areas, fishermen, especially those who use drag nets, are quite familiar with wrecks along the coast lines.

Marx began to fit together the bits and pieces: an old coin found washed up on the beach, an old anchor or cannon lying on a reef. Then he set about exploring the "probable" areas systematically, fearlessly, and usually alone. Almost immediately he had turned up the aforementioned anchor on the north end of the island. The anchor was dated by the Smithsonian Institution as eighteenth century or earlier. An anchor alone does not always indicate a wreck. Many anchor cables have parted in storms, or in routine operations, particularly in

olden days when tackle was often rotted or frayed from long use. But all the clues put together spelled "wreck."

Exploring further, Marx had journeyed to the desolate coast of the Yucatan peninsula opposite Cozumel. There he had found the remains of an ancient wreck, including a huge anchor and half a dozen cannons. Then he located two other wrecks near the first. Altogether he had counted 135 cannons along the reef. There were still two "probables" he had yet to check out. None of the four "certains" and two "probables" were more than twenty-five miles from Cozumel. No divers except Marx had ever thoroughly explored the area. The natives, fearing barracuda and shark, seldom entered the water. Cozumel, indeed, seemed a treasure hunter's paradise.

"Do you want to check the 'probables' or dive on the 'certains'?" Marx asked.

"Let's try the 'certains,'" I replied. "When I look for gold, I like to play it conservatively."

We looked over the charts of the nearby waters. Marx pointed to a blank reef near the mainland. "There's one here."

"What about sharks?" I asked.

"They're all over the place down here," Marx said. "But they don't bother you. All that stuff you read in treasure books is a lot of baloney. You've never heard of a serious diver complaining of sharks."

"But . . . what about those pictures I have seen in the papers of men bitten by sharks?"

"Usually that happens in airplane crashes, or when ships are torpedoed. Men are wounded, thrashing in the water; blood is all over the place. Mostly it happens far out at sea where big sharks roam, and where they can't find much to eat. Sharks are scavengers. They prey on wounded fish and men. But if you're alive, unwounded, and under control, don't worry."

My utter skepticism must have shown through my smile. Marx said, "All right, dammit, I'll prove it to you. We'll go shark hunting right here while they get the boat ready for the trip to the mainland."

From the pictures he showed us and previous accounts I knew that Marx considered shark hunting routine. He had landed many big ones, including a sixteen-foot hammerhead shark, with no physical damage to himself. Nevertheless, I slept fitfully that night. I was still uneasy when we got underway early the next morning, sailing north along the lee shore of Cozumel.

After an hour's cruise we anchored near a promising reef. We donned our face plates and flippers and readied our spear-guns. Marx chose a single rubber arbalet, ordinarily used to shoot fish of fifteen pounds or less. I was startled.

"Are you going to shoot a shark with that pop gun?" I asked. To me, it was comparable to setting out on an elephant hunt with a .22 rifle.

"Without an aqualung and a powerful gun it is more sporting," Marx replied.

One's first dive into the clear waters of the Caribbean is a breath-taking experience. The water is so clear, in fact, that Marx told us many of his tourists had experienced slight vertigo when submerged. Captain J. Y. Cousteau, the world-famous diver who developed the aqualung, had a similar reaction in the Salvage Islands between Madeira and the Canaries. He described it in his book *The Silent World*: "We exchanged glances and cautiously put our eyes under again, holding on to the ship," he wrote. "We saw the bottom a hundred feet down in naked detail. There seemed no water below us. There were no motes of animals, plants or minerals in that space. It was distilled water, not the benign speck-crammed element we called clear water, in which exceptional visibility embraced an area no bigger than a concert hall. We saw a horrible bright landscape. If we let go our handholds, we thought we would plummet through empty space and crash on the malign rocks that ranged far across the floor."

We took no accurate measurement, but I'm dead certain that we could see almost the length of a football field in all directions. Every detail on the dazzlingly white sandy bottom—the tiny washboard ripples in the sand, the minute shells,

sea growth on the king and queen conch—seemed to come rushing up at me as if I were looking through some powerful telescope. The coral reef appeared as a rugged miniature mountain range rising out of the sand, pitted with endless, intertwining caves and canyons, the whole of it splotted with the gay, brilliant colors of nameless sea growth.

This enthralling seascape was so alive and busy with fish hurrying in every direction that for a brief moment I had the impression we had dropped into the Times Square of the Underwater World. There were gaudy parrot fish by the score, with exquisitely made-up mouths, looking like so many chorus girls. Huge schools of red snappers and yellowtails moved to and fro slowly but determinedly on some business or other. Large Nassau groupers striped like zebras, and spotted groupers looking like leopards and changing colors as they passed from one background to the next, also nosed along near the bottom. Others—pompano, triggerfish, Spanish mackerel, and what else I cannot remember now—filled the intervening spaces. There was no sign of the desperate war of survival you hear so much about—bigger fish continually devouring smaller ones. Everyone seemed to be getting along just fine. I lay in the water stupefied by the vastness and variety of the population.

5

After a while I remembered I had come as a hunter and not as a sight-seer. I placed the butt of my speargun against my chest and hauled back on the thick rubbers which impart tremendous thrust to the spear, somewhat like a bow and arrow. Marx and Bennett were loading their guns (for safety reasons Marx would not permit us to load these powerful guns in the boat), and at the same time scanning the reef for a likely target. We had two immediate objectives in mind. First, to spear a pompano or snapper to serve as our noonday meal, and second, to bring back a boatload of fish for the natives on

Cozumel. All the while, of course, we would be on the lookout for sharks.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Marx jackknife and head for the bottom, his right arm and the speargun held out straight as an arrow. A large silvery pompano swam into his line of sight. Marx kicked gently with his flipper to close the range. The pompano moved toward the reef. Marx veered and skillfully placed himself between the reef and the fish (always the best strategy if it can be applied, he said later) and s-w-o-o-s-h, his spear left the gun and impaled the pompano. It struggled briefly while Marx hauled in on the retrieving line and then grasped the fish by its eye sockets. With the fish well in hand, Marx kicked hard for the surface. He had been down at least two minutes on his own breath. Bennett and I marveled at his skill.

Just then, we were surrounded by half a dozen barracuda.

A barracuda, glimpsed for the first time underwater, is a terrifying sight. When they hove in view, my initial impulse was to get out of the water—fast. I am sure I would have done so if I had been alone. But neither Marx nor Bennett seemed disturbed by the appearance of these fish so I fought down my panic and stared at them transfixed.

The barracuda is a disagreeable and formidable-looking fish. It is long and slim and it has an ugly mouth, crowded with razor-sharp teeth. Unlike most species of fish, it is unusually inquisitive and seemingly quite bold. Our group, for example, had closed to only several feet range. All of them were hanging dead still in the water staring wide-eyed directly at us, opening and closing their fearsome mouths in a menacing, rhythmic motion. They looked like a group of hoodlums.

Will barracuda harm a skin diver? Definitely not. Usually we were surrounded by scores of barracuda while diving at Cozumel. We were never attacked by a barracuda or even threatened. In fact, every time we swam toward one, it would scoot away in fear. In talks with many Caribbean and Florida divers, I have yet to hear of an attack on a diver. A search of the literature uncovered no instances of attack. Cousteau says: "Barracuda are no danger to divers. Despite undersea fairy

tales, I know of no reliable evidence of a barracuda's attacking a diver."

The barracuda is a scavenger. Most experts say it will attack anything in the water its size or smaller that might be described as out of control or wounded. We knew with certainty that every time we speared a fish at Cozumel, we could expect barracuda, if they were not there already. Many a line fisherman has hauled in a fish cut in half by barracuda. What brings them to the scene so quickly is not known. Some say they are attracted by the smell of blood, others say the dying cries of the fish, some of which are inaudible to the human ear, attract them. Marx leans toward the latter theory.

There is a widespread belief that barracuda may attack bathers, particularly those wearing shiny objects. Such attacks may have occurred in murky waters when the barracuda did not know that his victim was a human or when a bather foolishly dangled a hand or leg in the water from a moving boat. In all probability, attacks on bathers by sharks have in many instances been incorrectly designated barracuda attacks.

Trailed by the barracuda—they formed around us like fighters guarding bombers in formation—we swam down the reef with the current. Below me, I spotted a big grouper. He was nosing in and out of the shelf under the reef. He seemed near enough to touch. Now, I thought, I will spear my first fish!

I took several deep breaths through my snorkel, jackknifed, and headed down, holding my spear at arm's length. At a depth of about ten feet I stopped with a racking pain in my ears. I popped my ears, and continued on down, going deeper and deeper. Even before I had reached the bottom, my lungs were hungry for air.

I swam close to the brilliant white sand, peeping under the coral ledge. I could see nothing. Then suddenly, my grouper eased nonchalantly out of a hole, not more than three feet away! I kicked gently toward him, bringing him into my line of sight. The grouper swam away slowly, eyeing me with some suspicion.

Now all my air was gone and, though I wanted desperately

to shoot that fish, I could not linger. I turned my head up—the silvery surface appeared miles away—and kicked hard. It seemed hours later that I finally broke water, blew through my snorkel to clear it of water, and gasped in that first refreshing lungful of air.

Spear fishing on the bottom at 30 feet is not easy for an amateur or part-timer. Merely reaching the bottom requires considerable effort.

Bennett and Marx had swum on ahead. I hurried to catch up with them, escorted by several barracuda, one of which was at least 5 feet long. He was thick and covered with dark spots that reminded me of barnacles. We nicknamed him “grand-daddy.” He swam in quite close and showed no fear of us or the guns. In a fleeting moment of boldness, I was tempted to put a spear in him but I thought, Suppose I only grazed him, then what would he do? When I asked Marx this question later, he replied, “He’d run away.” Nevertheless, I refrained from spearing barracuda.

6

Suddenly, I saw Marx wave his long arm underwater and point toward a mushroom-shaped coral head. Then he removed his snorkel mouthpiece and shouted to Cappy, our Maya skipper who had been trailing us in the dinghy. Cappy rowed rapidly to Marx, who said in Spanish, “*Tiburón, Tiburón*,” which is Spanish for “shark.”

The very word literally sent chills up and down my spine. I held to the gunwale of the dinghy—prepared to leap on board—and looked underwater toward the coral. There was, about thirty feet down, an immense hulk of slate-gray stretched on the sand, partly sheltered by the coral.

My heart pounded wildly as I watched Marx tie a white line to his spear. The other end of the line was attached to the dinghy. If Marx successfully harpooned the shark, he would let go of the gun and the shark would pull Cappy around in

the dinghy until it became exhausted. Even with his endurance and wind Marx could not hope to land a shark that size alone.

I took another look at the monster. After a careful study, I estimated his size at 15 feet. Later, I discovered I had been deceived by the inevitable underwater magnification (viewed through a face plate, everything seems larger and closer than it really is). Even so, he was a big shark. Marx estimated his length as 10 feet. We think he was a tiger shark, but we are not certain because there are scores of species of shark and they are not easy to identify. He was definitely not a sand shark, which is tan or light brown, or a nurse shark, whose configurations are well known.

Marx cocked his gun and swam until he was directly over the shark. Bennett, holding an underwater camera, moved in close to get a picture. I hung back near the dinghy, watching underwater, breathing hard through my snorkel. Marx jackknifed and headed for the bottom with his spear arm held straight out. When the tip of his spear was within about one foot of the shark's head, Mark stopped and lined himself up more carefully. The shark was apparently asleep although there is no way of being certain because sharks have no eyelids.

Aiming for the brain on top of the shark's head, Marx let his spear go. Zingo! The shark, the coral, the sand, and my nerves simultaneously erupted in wild frenzy. While I stared in horrified fascination, the shark bent the spear into the shape of a pretzel, shook it loose, and then started swimming round and round the 15-foot coral head.

Marx, out of wind and spears, swam to the surface alongside the dinghy. Quickly Cappy reloaded his gun with a new spear. In less than a minute, Marx had recocked the gun and was heading down again after his wounded giant. Marx circled around the coral head in hot pursuit but he could not catch up with the shark. So, like a child playing around a big tree, Marx doubled back in the opposite direction and met the shark coming head on. Bang! Another spear whanged into the shark's head. This time the shark could not shake it loose. He swam away from his coral refuge.

Up to that point, as far as I was concerned, everything had

been going more or less smoothly. The eerie scene I have described had been taking place below me in slow-motion (everything seems to move in slow-motion underwater) as if in a kind of faraway land. But now the shark, in its slow, ponderous maneuvers, began gaining altitude. That meant he was coming closer to my dangling feet. Momentarily he veered directly toward Bennett, who looked ridiculous trying to balance himself underwater and focus his bulky camera on the shark. As the shark approached I saw Bennett back away in order to get the whole fish in the picture frame. The spear was still sticking up out of the shark's head like an automobile radio antenna.

Suddenly, the shark changed course again and headed toward me. I remember thinking, I hope he doesn't think we have him boxed in and that he must fight his way out. I'll gladly step aside and let him exit through my area. He was not moving rapidly but he was coming almost head-on. At that moment I had no gun. It was in the boat. What to do? In a flash of near-panic, I lifted my head out of the water to search for the dinghy. Too late! Cappy had moved it far beyond reach.

I recalled that the previous evening Marx had said, "If you're underwater and you swim toward a shark, he'll run away from you."

In retrospect it seems insane but that's exactly what I did. When the shark was about ten feet away and swimming directly toward *me*, I took a deep breath and went under—down to about five or six feet—and swam directly toward *him*.

How I have relived that scene in my mind! Every detail of it is indelibly engraved in my memory: the dull, hound-dog eyes, the mouthful of teeth, and the massive white belly. As I swam for him, I was neither praying nor getting set for certain death, as I suppose I should have been, but rather observing it all with a sort of uneasy detachment. The affair at that instant reminded me of the teen-age game of "chicken," in which two teen-agers drive cars down the road directly at

each other. According to the rules of this macabre game, the teen-ager who veers out of the way first is "chicken."

When he was not more than five feet from me, the shark "chickened." He veered away sharply and went back down again.

I came up for a breath of air, then went under again, thinking—needlessly as it turned out—that it would be better to present this wounded shark my full body rather than two dangling legs. I saw then that he had shaken loose the second spear and was swimming off in the gray, dim distance. Marx was alongside the dinghy loading still another spear. And then we were off, swimming after the shark. Marx was determined to land him.

We soon found him again, lurking under another coral head. Even from a range of twenty feet or so, I could see the two holes in the top of his head. They were neat and clean, like bullet holes in a piece of steel. Blood was pouring out of one of the holes. When he saw us, the shark swam away.

We lost him temporarily, so we spread out into a rough V formation, about fifty yards apart. Ten or twenty minutes later, I thought I spotted him again, hiding under a big piece of coral. I lifted my head out of the water and yelled, "*Tiburón*," but Marx was busy alongside the dinghy, and later I learned he had found our friend and winged him again. I had found a *new* shark, about the same size. I felt very much alone when I stuck my face plate under again for another look. Bennett and Marx were then about one hundred yards away.

I side-stroked toward them with my head underwater turned aft, keeping a good eye on my friend. Then, to my concern, I saw the shark move slightly and get underway, coming in my direction. I stopped swimming and got set to go through my bluffing routine again but the shark hugged the bottom, swimming toward Marx and Bennett. I was immensely relieved when his full length had passed under me.

I stuck my head out of the water and yelled, "*Tiburón! Tiburón!*" At that moment, Marx had again lost the wounded shark. When the new shark swam into their midst, Marx dove

for him, thinking he was the wounded one. The spear drove home and was quickly ejected. By the time I arrived on the scene, there was some confusion, and for a while no one would believe that a new shark had appeared. But it was clear to all a minute later when we saw both of them at the same time.

Then, to my growing concern, two more sharks appeared. One was about eight feet long, the other, a baby, about four feet. The small one was flying wing on the big one. I saw them first, coming in from the sea. They swam toward me, rising close to the surface, then arching back down again. By the time they had passed, I felt slightly faint. I was certain that the new sharks had come to eat the wounded, and that I would be mistaken for shark steak. I wished very much that I could get out of the water. But Marx pressed on after the first wounded shark, while the others swam around us.

He put another spear into the shark and lost that one. After two hours of chasing, we gave up. If Marx had been alone and had persisted, I'm sure he could have landed the shark. He does not like to let a wounded fish get away. It's part of the code of the sea.

We signaled for the mate to bring the big boat down the reef. When he pulled alongside, I climbed on board and collapsed on the deck, worn out. Bennett joined me and opened two bottles of beer. Marx hung back in the water with a new gun and spear, head underwater, still hoping to get a glimpse of the shark. Suddenly I heard him shout, "Grouper!" and down he went. We watched from the boat. Cappy was still in the dinghy.

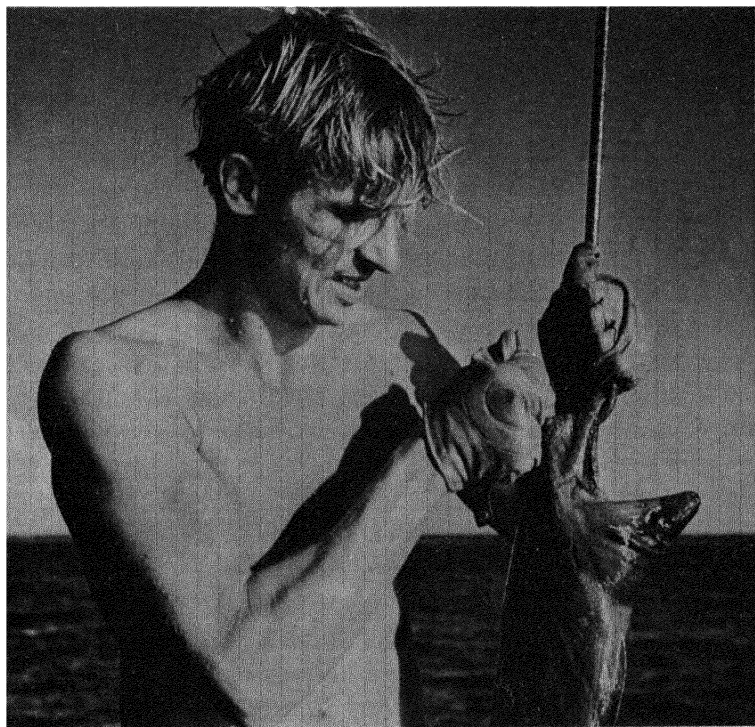
He was back up in a second, shouting for Cappy to reload his gun. "Damned moray eel," he said. "He's got my spear." We had begun to worry about the unending loss of spears because they are not easy to obtain in Mexico. However, almost all of the spears expended that day were later relocated and brought to the surface. The mate hammered the bent ones back into shape.

The moray eel is a long, green, slimy creature with a large mouth literally filled with teeth in both the upper and lower

jaws. In tropical waters, the moray grows to a length of 8 feet. They lurk in holes and caves, in uneasy truce with the giant clawless lobster or *langosta*. A large moray eel is extremely powerful and difficult to extricate from his hole against his will.

There are many skin divers who believe the moray will attack a human being only when the moray is disturbed in his cave. Marx disagrees. He knows of a dozen cases or more in which morays, unprovoked, severely wounded skin divers. He urged us to keep an alert eye for marauding morays when diving in tropical water, and to be prepared for an attack if we spotted one.

In this case, as Marx explained later, his eye had caught a



Marx inspects mouth of large moray eel which he speared.

Photo by V. J. Craig.

subtle movement in the shadows of a coral head. Thinking it was a big grouper, he dove down and peered under the dark ledge. Seeing two eyes peering at him from the cave, he brought his gun up and fired. Out of the cave lashed a huge moray eel—he measured 6½ feet when we got him into the boat—writhing in apparent agony, with the spear firmly embedded in his back. The eel then lunged back into the hole and dug in. Try as he might, Marx could not pull him out. Then Marx returned to the surface for another spear.

He went down again and presently there was a tremendous thrashing in the water and Marx emerged with the eel wiggling wildly to free himself from the second spear. Cappy rowed into the churning water and yanked the eel into the dinghy, almost sinking the tiny craft in the process, because the eel was so unusually large. Since all experts agree that the moray will bite *in extremis*, Cappy beat him over the head with a club. The eel withstood an amazing number of blows before he finally succumbed. When we pried open his mouth we found all of his strong teeth crushed into small bits and pieces.

By nightfall, in the safety and comfort of the hotel bar, I was ready to concede that maybe Marx was right about sharks. Maybe most of them are basically afraid of man, I thought. “To hell with them,” I said, swilling my rum collins and thinking what an enormous relief it was to have that point proved. However, a moment later I was startled out of my seat when Marx chortled, “Well, I’ll show you for sure tomorrow.”

7

On the second shark-hunting day, Marx chose an outer reef on the south end of the island. The water was deeper there—about thirty-five feet to the sand bottom on either side of the reef, and about twenty feet deep directly over the reef. The ordinary fish we saw there—pompano, red snapper, grouper—were much larger than the fish we had seen on the inner reef, and while I made several lung-bursting attempts to spear some

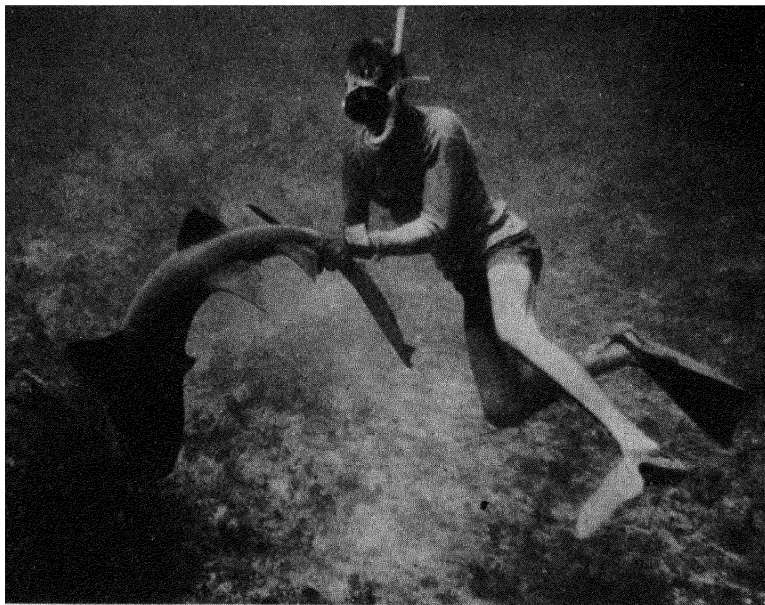
of them, I was never successful. When they saw me coming down, most of the fish darted under the reef ledge near the ocean floor and I simply did not have enough wind to carry out a methodical search. Marx, of course, landed one large grouper after the other, and soon the dinghy was half submerged under the load. After the first fish had been speared, a great horde of barracuda joined us and remained in our vicinity most of the day.

Within half an hour, we found our first shark. He was about seven feet long and like our friend of the day before dozing under a coral head. We got set again, determined at least to get a good picture because, when we had finally got to the boat the day before, Bennett discovered to his great anguish that the underwater camera had leaked and the film had been ruined.

As Marx began the first descent this day, I was not as shaky and I took up position almost over the shark, for a moment considering a joint speargun attack. However, since I had to stop to pop my ears (long experience in the water enables Marx to adjust his ears without pausing) and I was not sure I could get to the bottom and remain there long enough for a co-ordinated shot, I remained on the surface.

Marx went down quickly, gun arm outstretched. He was almost on the point of firing—he had been delayed while Bennett moved into position with the camera—when the shark suddenly came awake and scurried down the reef. Marx came up for air, and descended again in hot pursuit. He caught up with the shark, closed alongside, and fired the spear into the shark's gill. The shark shuddered from the impact, then thrashed to shake loose the spear. It had been a difficult but skillful shot. The shark could not dislodge the harpoon. Marx rose to the surface for another spear.

We now witnessed an extraordinary scene. While Marx reloaded, the shark, in a desperate attempt to get away, disappeared into a coral cave. Bennett and I kept an eye on the cave, and then pointed to it when Marx was ready to go under again. (This was unnecessary, because the white line from the dinghy to the spear in the shark's gill clearly pointed the way,



Underwater, Bob Marx grabs live shark by the tail. Later he speared it and brought it to shore. Photo by V. J. Craig.

but at least we had the feeling that we were helping out.) Marx swam swiftly down, approaching the cave which was almost on the sandy ocean bottom. Then, to my amazement, he *entered* the cave and disappeared from sight.

I looked underwater toward Bennett. He shook his head slowly as if to indicate Marx had lost all his senses. I shared this feeling.

Seconds later, we were aware of tremendous conflict within the cave. Sand and tiny bits of coral were expelled from the many holes and crevices on top and soon Marx emerged slowly carrying his empty speargun. He had fired at the shark inside the cave! Then the shark emerged through a "back door" on the opposite side of the reef, trailing two white lines. At that same instant a huge jewfish, apparently ejected from his home by the excitement, swam out of another gap in the coral. The shark had momentarily come to rest, so I watched the enormous tank-like jewfish as it lumbered by. It was fat and ugly.

Marx later estimated its weight at about five hundred pounds.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Bennett moving into action. He had traded his camera for a speargun and had descended toward the jewfish. He closed the range rapidly, spear arm outstretched. Compared to the jewfish, Bennett, who is 5 feet 10 inches and weighs 185 pounds, looked small. I couldn't believe that he really intended to shoot that monster. As it turned out, he couldn't. The jewfish, sighting Bennett coming up alongside, hurried off. It was just as well, because Bennett's spear line was not tied to the dinghy and if he had struck the jewfish we would have lost the spear and gun because the fish was too big to land.

Jewfish—enormously large sea bass—range up to eleven hundred pounds or more in size. Usually they hang out in caves or wrecks with their carnivorous mouths held open. They have no teeth to speak of and feed on fish which accidentally swim into their mouths. They are sluggish, ungainly fish and do not ordinarily attack men. There are known cases where, through carelessness, a skin diver has swum into the open mouth of a jewfish. Skin divers have beached huge jewfish. Marx caught one on Cozumel that weighed 820 pounds. But a successful assault requires careful planning, powerful guns, and elaborate tackle. Later, we would land a big one.

The jewfish that had momentarily claimed our attention disappeared down the reef, so we turned back to the wounded shark. After reloading, Marx moved into attack position and Bennett retrieved the camera. When Bennett indicated that he was ready by waving his hand, Marx plunged down. But by this time the shark was fully alerted and he made desperate efforts to break away, darting this way and that. The white line, chafing on the rough coral, was soon cut through, and the shark sped for the safety of a coral head, trailing the short ends of the line. We watched a wild battle around the coral during which the shark shook off all the spears (Marx picked them up) and sped off upcurrent. Marx gave chase for a few minutes, then, cursing, returned to our vicinity.

As we moved down the reef that day, we encountered one

shark after another. Most of them were about six to eight feet in length and gun-metal in color. All these sharks ran from us and, although we harpooned four of the twelve we saw, we were not then able to land one because the sharks either shook loose the spear or cut the line on the coral. (None of those we shot were seriously wounded.) Later we landed a small one. When we were diverted by other interesting sights or fish, we went about our business in the presence of sharks with no feeling of danger. In fact, the sight of sharks became downright routine.

8

Only one shark that day caused me any concern. We believe he was a mako—a clean-looking shark with a sharply pointed nose and a decidedly aggressive attitude. He swam toward us from the sea, circled inquisitively at some distance, then took up station about thirty yards behind, following us down the reef. He was so unusually bold and persistent in trailing us that I had an uneasy feeling. I kept turning back to take a look and occasionally stopped altogether. On such occasions, the shark would stop too.

Marx had been pressing on, oblivious of this fellow, and after about half an hour, I swam ahead of Marx and pointed to the rear (Marx had warned me never to touch another diver underwater or grab him by the fin, which seems to be the natural way to pass a signal or start a conversation, but a diver in this strange environment is likely to be startled by any such contact and may shoot without looking). We lifted our heads out of the water and I said, frankly, that I did not feel completely at ease because of our “shadow.” Forthwith, Marx turned and swam upcurrent toward the mako. We followed. The mako stopped hesitantly, then when he perceived that Marx was coming toward him in earnest he turned and scooted away. We never saw him again.

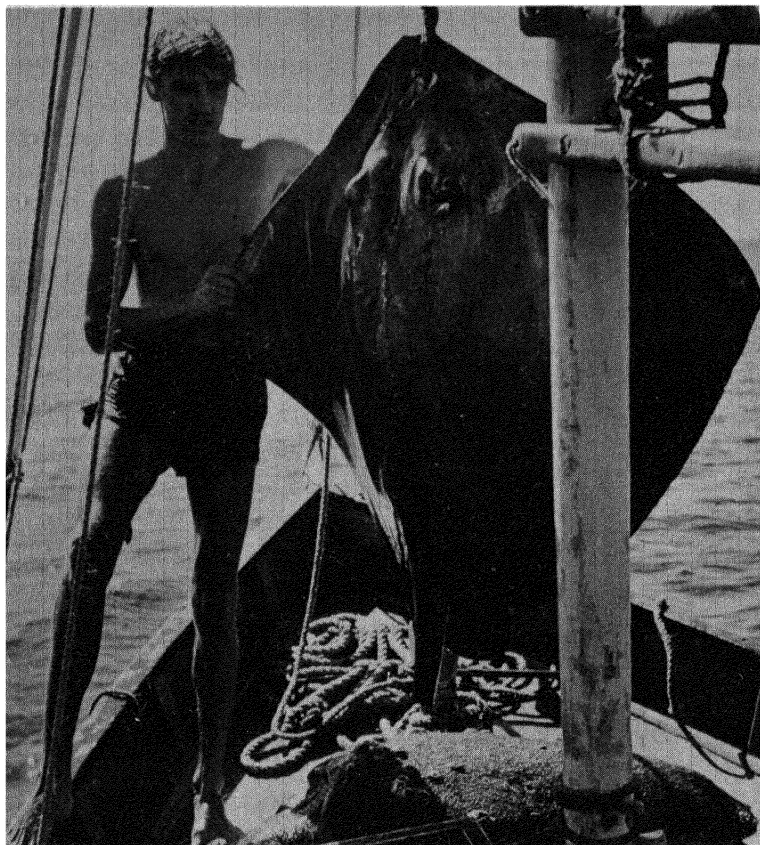
Not many minutes later, Marx waved us to a stop. He pointed toward the sandy bottom. I could see nothing at first.

As I peered intently, I made out the outline of a huge sting ray buried in the sand. As is well known, the sting ray is equipped with defensive armament, a whip-like tail with a sharp barb near the base. Many bathers have felt the bite of this barb when they accidentally stepped on a ray. But no ray has been known to attack man deliberately. Some skin divers have grabbed the eye sockets of huge sting rays and have been taken on wild rides through the deep.

We had already speared three rays, the largest of which weighed about 150 pounds. But this one was obviously good picture material, so Bennett once again got the camera ready while Marx readied the gun. Then down Marx went, aiming for the center of this valentine-shaped beast. I could hear the sharp high-pitched rattle of the spear as it left the gun. I believe the spear must have struck the ray squarely in the brain because it immediately went totally berserk and began careening around in every direction. I had no fear of the ray whatsoever, so I moved in with my gun to give Marx a hand. Bennett was struggling valiantly to get into a position that would put both Marx and the ray in the same picture frame but it was hopeless.

I joined Marx on the surface of the water. At that time the ray was flopping around in wide circles at the end of the line, flapping its wings like some huge bird. Marx took a bight on the line with the completion of each circle. I was trying to get into shooting position when, suddenly, the ray zoomed directly up toward us and crashed to the surface between Marx and me, thrashing madly. I was temporarily smothered by one of the massive, slimy wings, but the dangerous whipping tail missed us both. Then all at once, the ray died. He sank and hung motionless at the end of the white line directly beneath Marx.

Instantly, two very large tuna fish appeared on the scene, circling the dead ray. One of the tuna was quite large, probably two hundred pounds or more. The other was somewhat smaller. Even at their depth of about twenty-five feet, the sunlight sparkled and bounced off their smooth sides, making them



On bow of fishing vessel Bob Marx poses with sting ray he speared off reef of Cozumel.

appear pure silver and blue in color. I noted that Bennett had again traded his camera for a gun and was on his way down. I made haste to join him, but Marx brought me up short. Again, it was the same story: we could never land such game fish with our puny equipment. Bennett came quite close to the tuna but at the last minute he realized they were just too big. He came back up and helped us push the ray into the big boat. In port, it weighed out at 232 pounds. As usual, we had barracuda in the bleachers.

An hour or so later, down the reef, I looked back (I was

always looking back for some reason) and was surprised to see a huge turtle paddling rapidly in our direction. I put on extra steam and signaled to Marx. By the time I reached Marx, the turtle was quite close. There was no time for underwater photography. Marx swam up behind this dreadnought—it looked huge underwater—and put a spear into the tough leathery neck. The turtle made vain attempts to paddle off but he was hooked solidly. We maneuvered him alongside the big boat and Cappy and the mate lassoed him around the neck and flippers with a heavy line. We had something of a struggle getting this turtle into the boat, since he weighed 422 pounds. He was identified as a loot, or leatherback turtle, by the deep ridges in his hard-shell back. We turned him over to the natives of San Miguel along with the ray and other fish, and I guess everyone ate turtle steak for about a week.

Later, Bennett and I recalled that day on the reef with amazement. It seemed impossible that in such a brief period we could have grappled with such a great variety of sea monsters. For Marx, accustomed by then to the incredible abundance of sea life on Cozumel's reefs, it had been routine. "Actually," he said, "I've had much better days. And there have been few days that I set out to land a shark and failed."

Because of this tremendous indoctrination, my concern about sharks completely vanished for a while. I believed they were sissies. Much later I conducted some research in the Library of Congress on shark attacks and wrote to nearly every leading shark expert in the world (of which there are too few). Based on this work, and on the sharply increasing number of shark attacks on skin divers in recent months, I now believe our shark hunting venture was utterly reckless. After several near-misses with sharks—one black-fin shark bit off the end of his flipper—Marx has become much more conservative.

Very little is positively known about the habits of sharks. However, I can say this without fear of contradiction: Sharks certainly cannot be called sissies. They are completely unpredictable. When spearing fish, especially in murky waters, skin divers should be very much on guard against a possible shark

attack. No skin diver should ever deliberately spear a shark except in last-ditch self-defense. Under most circumstances, in my opinion, if a shark is sighted, the best thing to do is get out of the water as calmly and rapidly as possible.

9

Finally we were ready to mount the expedition to dive on the wreck. We worked late into the night getting the equipment in order and storing it on board our small auxiliary sailing vessel, the *Aguilucho* (Sea Gull) which was furnished by Miguel Joaquin, Cozumel's John D. Rockefeller. Joaquin's father, an industrious Lebanese, had settled on Cozumel in 1914. Little by little, he had acquired considerable land holdings which were left to Miguel Joaquin and his brothers, Nassim and Aurelio. Today they own everything in sight: the hotel, the bakery, the stores, the bank, the movie, the automobiles, the boats, and so on.

It was 0300 when we finally started the engine and backed out of the darkened harbor. Joaquin waved us farewell from the concrete pier. With Cappy at the helm, we moved out into the calm channel water, bound for the mainland. Marx, Bennett, and I closed the cargo hatch and crawled under the heavy canvas cover to sleep. The sky was a mass of brilliant stars. As we rolled along, the mast creaked rhythmically. I was soon fast asleep, dreaming of gold and jewels.

When I awoke the sun was high in the sky. Marx and Cappy were chatting rapidly in Spanish, and when I lifted my head I could see that we were close to land, already negotiating a narrow passage through the coral reef. The coast line itself reminded me of a Pacific atoll: pure turquoise water as clear as the water surrounding Cozumel, a brilliant white sand beach, and behind that thick groups of coconut trees. Near the edge of the beach, called Tancah, stood a pastel blue, perfectly square, Spanish-style hacienda. A rickety dock stretched from the beach out into the water.

"Where are we?" I called sleepily to Marx.

"The plantation," Marx replied. He was hanging over the bow, picking a course through treacherous reefs. He would signal left or right to Cappy, who responded appropriately at the helm. The engine was barely ticking over. Marx was puffing on his pipe. I noted that he had strapped on a machete and had jammed his .38 pistol in his belt.

I got up stiffly and opened a Coke, blinking my eyes to adjust them to the bright sun. I gave Bennett a poke in the ribs. He groaned and said, "Call room service." We laughed.

Inside the reef the water was not altogether placid and we experienced some difficulty in mooring alongside the dock. Two small boys had come down to the dock to watch, but otherwise there was no sign of life.

"We'll stop here for a cup of coffee and then see if the manager will take us to the ruins at Tulum," Marx said.

"O.K., but why the pistol and machete?" I asked.

"The mainland here is desolate and practically uninhabited. There is a little village up the coast with about twenty Mayas living there. Aside from that and this coconut plantation, there is no other life along this coast. Up until ten years ago, this area was a hang-out for untamed Indians, *handidos*, dope addicts, and other rough characters. There still may be some around. Sometimes the convicts who work the jungle collecting chicle get hopped up and come up this way. There are snakes here and sometimes you encounter a jaguar."

Once a center of the proud Mayas, today the mainland of the Yucatan peninsula opposite Cozumel is a land that time and progress have forgotten. The coast line is one long jagged coral reef indented occasionally by beautiful coves. The thick mangrove jungle of Yucatan, a haven for jaguars and boa constrictors, reaches almost to the water's edge. The few Mexicans who tend the primitive coconut plantations—narrow strips hacked out along the beaches—wage an unending battle against the encroaching jungle and its beasts. It is a place so remote that giant sea turtles waddle up on the beaches at night to lay their eggs. The jaguars are so aggressive, we learned, that no



The bleak, lonely coast of the Yucatan peninsula.

one ventures out after dark. In the daytime, the settlers always carry rifles.

From Montejo's day until only recently, this desolate coast has been torn with strife and controversy. Records are sketchy, but it is believed that the Indians inhabiting Tulum and the other coastal cities were subjugated and driven back into the jungles by the early settlers, against whom they launched occasional raids. One historian puts it this way: "The . . . history of the east coast of Yucatan is a monotonous list of uprisings, each of which was doubtless suppressed with many unrecorded acts of cruelty."

He adds: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Mexican government, jealous of the trade in chicle and precious

woods built up by the Indians, started a war of extermination on the east coast of Yucatan. For this purpose the jails of Mexico were emptied and the men thus released, accompanied by low-class prostitutes, were sent to Yucatan, where most of them died of malaria or venereal diseases. The war thus started was waged fiercely but intermittently by both sides. During its course the Great Wall at Tulum was occupied three times by the Mexicans, but they were unable to advance into the interior. Peace, which recognized the Independence of the Indians, was made in the year 1913. Since that time the east coast has gradually become safe for foreigners, although the presence of Mexicans is still resented. . . .”

When we approached the front door of the hacienda, a Mexican dressed in khaki clothes and wearing boots appeared and invited us in. He scurried around preparing coffee, which we drank while sitting in the shade of the dining room. Marx chatted with him in Spanish. The plantation, I learned, was owned by the man and his three brothers, all of whom lived in Mérida. Each brother spent a three-month tour at the plantation.

Our friend agreed to take us to the ruins of Tulum in his jeep. He picked up a rifle and placed it in the front seat. Soon we were bumping and grinding south along the jungle road, which bored through the heavy undergrowth like a tunnel. About two miles south of the plantation, near the coast, we crossed a grassy airstrip which, Marx explained, was used only by a few archaeologists visiting Tulum and by the brothers to reach their plantation.

Then we came upon a broken-down, jungle-covered, stone arch which led through the Great Wall into the ruins. We debarked, keeping a sharp watch for snakes. We saw no snakes but many iguanas of all sizes.

Like all of the Yucatan peninsula, the eastern coast is covered with overgrown Maya ruins. Tulum, once a great walled city which the Spanish explorers compared to Seville, was partially restored by the Carnegie Institution in 1922. Of all the ruins of the peninsula I have seen, Tulum is the most intriguing to



The ancient ruins of the walled Maya city of Tulum on the eastern coast of the Yucatan peninsula.

me. The city was built high on a cliff overlooking the beach. Seen from the sea, its temples and pyramids gleamed snow-white and many of the Spanish explorers remarked on its beauty, although decades passed before they set foot in Tulum. Even today few people have visited the site. No one is certain exactly how old the ruins are. The best guess is that the city was built around 900 A.D. Today a solitary soul lives there, a Mexican caretaker, who hacks away at the creeping jungle with a machete.

We spent several hours climbing through the ruins, picking up bits and pieces of ancient pottery, and studying some of the remarkable, colorful frescoes (among the best found on the Yucatan peninsula) which still adorn the walls inside the temples. At Tulum, many of the Maya gods are depicted in upside-down positions with hands clasped over their inverted heads, as if diving. The serious students of these gods call them "Diving Gods." In some of the frescoes, we thought we could

detect men holding spears underwater, but we were not certain. It could have been our imagination.

One could easily spend several days at Tulum, but since we were eager to get at the galleon we cut our visit short. We bounced back through the jungle to the plantation, bid our host *adios*, and re-embarked on the *Aguilucho*.

IO

We steered a northward course along the coastline, skirting the reefs. The water had become rough—rougher than it had been for months—and at the helm, Cappy muttered darkly to himself. We stopped briefly in the cove at Acumal where the twenty Mayas live in two thatch-roof huts along the beach. Two men rowed out in a dugout canoe to exchange greetings with Cappy. We hoisted the sails, took some pictures, and explored the wooden cages in the cove, where the Mayas kept an enormous quantity of turtles they had captured.

We inched through the reef to open water again, hugging the shore, while Marx trained his eyes on the desolate bank, searching for the marker—he had noted it some months before—that would give us a bearing on the galleon. Soon Marx signaled sharply to Cappy, and we hove to in the swells, dropping anchor about 150 feet from the shore. There was a spirited exchange between Marx and Cappy. I couldn't understand all of it, but I understood the general meaning. Cappy was uneasy about the weather. Dark, heavy cumulus clouds covered the horizon to the southeast.

Bad weather and lack of time prevented a full-scale diving expedition to the galleon. On the contrary, ours was little more than a sight-seeing tour. We had only one single-tank aqua-lung aboard, a tank that Marx carried on all boat trips as a matter of routine, and only a few small tools.

We donned our face plates, snorkels, and flippers and jumped into the water, poking our heads under immediately in a hurried search for shark. There was nothing in sight except a few



*Author Blair cruises in clear water along reef,
searching for wrecked galleon.*

small reef fish. We swam away from the boat, all the while being carried up and down by the heavy swells. We were very close to shore—so close that, underwater, I could see the water crashing against the cliff-like reef.

I was waiting to catch a glimpse of the sunken hull of our galleon, but I soon found that, in shallow tropical water, a sunken hull soon becomes unrecognizable. Mendel L. Peterson, Head Curator, Department of Armed Forces History, Smithsonian Institution, who specializes in underwater archaeology and history, reports in his *History Under the Sea*: “The underwater shipwreck of popular fiction usually lies listing on one side, hull intact, masts erect, moss streaming from the rigging and perhaps even a skeleton at the wheel. In actuality the wreck of a wooden ship over 100 years of age is marked only by coral or sand-covered metal objects, all exposed timber having been destroyed by the *teredo* shipworm. Metal remains that have lain in the sea water in the southern areas of the Florida Straits are covered within a few years by a natural

coral cement, which appears to be formed from the corrosion products of the iron object combined with the coral sand that abounds on the sea bottom in that area. Thus it is that a shipwreck site is camouflaged by nature and takes on the exact color of its natural surroundings.”

And so it was with our wreck. When I looked down, I could see nothing but a beautiful reef.

Marx had already scouted the reef briefly in two previous trips, so he knew the location of the big objects. Almost immediately he pointed out the massive anchor. It was lying in a small canyon, encrusted with coral. Its shank looked to be at least ten feet long or more. (Marx and I dived down and swam under the enormous anchor flukes while Bennett snapped our picture with the underwater camera.) Then as we swam along, Marx pointed out the cannons, lying askew and partially buried in the reef. Everything was covered with a thick coat of coral “cement” and was far too heavy to raise with our modest boat and equipment. These objects were so well cam-



Author Blair poses alongside the coral-encrusted cannon of the sunken galleon.

ouflaged that had I been swimming alone I am sure I would never have noticed them.

How does one find the smaller objects on a wreck? First, Marx told us, take the easy approach and dig in the sandy areas in the vicinity of the wreck. Bear in mind that when the ship first struck the reef, undoubtedly her bottom opened up and many objects cascaded to the sea bottom. Therefore, the logical starting point might be the sand on the seaward side of the reef. Then search the sand pockets, if any, in and around the reef itself. Since some small objects might be extremely fragile after prolonged submersion, it is best to "dig" by waving a ping-pong paddle back and forth across the top of the sand.

Distinguishing the preserved parts of the wreck in their natural coral camouflage is more difficult. In fact, even finding a large part is taxing. However, one should bear in mind, Marx said, that coral ordinarily grows in irregular patterns, with twists, turns, zigs, and zags. It rarely grows in a straight or perfectly round configuration. Spikes, cannons, anchor shanks and flukes have a straight edge and, unless completely buried in the coral, can be readily picked out by the knowing eye. Ballast stones—large smooth stones which were used in the old days—as well as cannon balls, are similarly discernible.

There were no sandy areas on our wreck, thus we did not need nor were we equipped with ping-pong paddles. All of us wore heavy bayonet knives and carried small pry bars because "searching" our wreck, we knew, meant digging and hacking into the tough coral. We skinned down to the bottom—twenty to twenty-five feet—and probed the rough coral formations. It was not easy to get down that deep or to stay there very long. We were all swept back and forth like coral fans by the heavy swells. We wore gloves so that we could cling to the coral formation while we worked.

II

Suddenly my eye caught a glint on the bottom. A fish? I swam down to see. Beneath a ledge of coral, half buried, I was surprised to find innumerable pieces of what appeared to be window-pane glass. I carefully dislodged several small pieces and bolted for the surface. A quick inspection above water revealed that it was obviously very old glass. I went back down again to look under the ledge and found a dark green object protruding from the coral.

I hacked deeper into the coral. As a little more of the green shape was exposed, I recognized it as a bottle—possibly a very old wine bottle, I thought. Clutching the reef, and longing for more air, I pounded away with my knife. Alas, the knife slipped and pierced the bottle, shattering it. At that instant, a bubble, released from the broken bottle, wandered crazily to the surface. I remember thinking: It must be the oldest bubble in history! I followed it up and signaled to Bennett and Marx. When they had joined me, I swam down and pointed out my digging spot.

Marx jackknifed to the bottom, got a good hold on the coral, and began hacking and prying with his small bar. Presently, he waved me down. He had dislodged another green bottle, completely intact. I took it to the surface. The glass was thick and imperfectly formed. At the top of the bottle, above the cork, a large piece of coral rose like a piece of cauliflower. Concluding that the bottle was very old indeed, I swam for the boat and gingerly handed it to Cappy.

While Marx had been working the bottle loose, I had observed, directly below, a rectangular shape in the coral about two feet wide and three feet long. Scooting up and down for air, I began prying at the shape with my bayonet knife. Soon my knife broke through the coral and plunged into something soft. The soft something immediately turned to fine black

powder which clouded the water like octopus ink. I thought it could be only one thing: rotted wood, held captive all these years by its coating of coral. I hacked on furiously, digging my knife into the soft substance. I worked down the side of the rectangular shape where I found more of the rotted wood beneath the coral outline. It seemed to me that I had stumbled on a wooden chest imbedded in the coral! I raced over and dragged Marx to my digging site.

After noting my discovery, Marx rose to the surface, and swam to the boat to put on the single-tank aqualung. Meanwhile, I hovered over the rectangular shape, mentally estimating how many doubloons it could hold. Marx returned wearing the lung, but also bringing the sad news that Cappy was concerned for the safety of the boat. The swells had increased considerably, and we were anchored perilously close to the reef. Like many Mayas, Cappy is very superstitious, and he looks with disfavor on treasure-hunters who tempt sharks and barracudas. He was anxious to get underway at once, but Marx had prevailed upon him to stay a little longer. However, from then on, it was a race against time.

Marx, trailing a stream of silver bubbles from the lung, descended on the rectangle and began jabbing away into the coral. By then I had a small sack, and I shuttled back and forth between Marx on the bottom and the anchored boat, loading and unloading the chunks of the reef, any one of which could contain a coral-encrusted doubloon. Suddenly I saw Marx cast aside his chisel and go pawing madly across the ocean bottom. Then he stopped and waved me down. When I reached his side, he very carefully deposited in my hands a shiny, hand-cut stone, seemingly, I quickly estimated, about a carat and a half in size. One thought blazed through my mind like a bolt of lightning: It's a diamond!

I put the stone in the pocket of my bathing trunks, buttoned it carefully, and, on a signal from Marx, descended again. This time he had three more hand-cut stones. One of them was greenish, like an emerald. It is impossible to find words to fully describe our excitement. When I reached the surface with

my precious cargo, I found myself breathing through my snorkel at about ten times my usual rate. Below, Marx was pounding away and soon he gave another signal.

I went back down and gathered up several shiny pieces of metal, cut clean by the chisel. There seemed no question in my mind about its composition—silver. Seconds later, he handed me a flossily engraved ornament that might have been a belt buckle or the outside trim of an important chest. I transferred these to the boat and, by the time I returned, Marx held three more white stones, as well as a handful of small, loose beads. Then, to my amazement, he came up with a chunk of wood, a piece of the chest that somehow had escaped the teredo worm. It appeared to be teak, although long years in the coral had turned it jet-black.

At that moment, a 4-foot, black-tipped shark sped onto the scene. He was traveling at a great rate of speed, and when he saw us he seemed to put on his brakes and skid to a stop. Later Bennett and I laughed about his juvenile antics. The shark stared wide-eyed at us for a moment, and then circled over Marx, curious, I suppose, at the flood of silvery bubbles from the aqualung. We had no time for him, so I shooed him away by lunging toward him underwater. Then I swam to the boat with another load of broken coral.

At the boat, I found Cappy impatient and chattering sternly in Spanish, and pointing to the dark, ominous-looking sky, which spelled storm. I knew he would stay no longer, and that if we did not get out of the water, he would certainly sail away and leave us in the water. Reluctantly we climbed into the boat, half exhausted, partly, I suppose, from the hard work and partly from the excitement.

I 2

On the return voyage to Cozumel and, still later, in the garden of the hotel, we made a careful survey of our "loot." Apart from the ancient wine bottle, perfectly preserved, we had col-



In hotel courtyard on Cozumel, Marx (left) and Blair examine "loot" from galleon. Photo by V. J. Craig.

lected seven white stones and one green one, all about the same size, as well as about thirty-one loose beads, and the flossy ornaments which, when cleaned with mild acid solution, glistened like newly-minted dimes. We observed that the white stones easily cut ordinary glass and, for several days, we were certain that we had found a cache of unpolished, crudely-cut diamonds. Later, we were informed by a diamond expert that the white stones were simply paste, probably clothing ornaments or trinkets, brought along by the Spanish to trade with the Mayas. The "silver" ornament turned out to be a fragment of a pewter buckle. Even so, no amount of money could have purchased the thrill and excitement of finding them.

Still later, in Washington, we submitted photographs of the wine bottle to M. L. Peterson at the Smithsonian Institution. He reported that the bottle appeared to be English and was probably manufactured in the period 1720-40. On the basis of

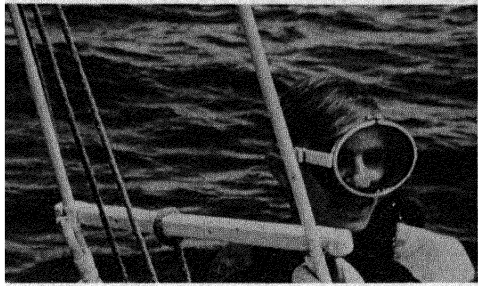
this, he guessed that the ship was an English merchantman. He added: "This is pure speculation, of course, because an English bottle could easily have found its way aboard a Spanish galleon, a French privateer, or some other vessel."

My vacation had run out, and there was no time to revisit the wreck. It was a crushing disappointment to leave Cozumel without breaking into the chest itself. Once again that old devil, weather, had done us in. However, we derived considerable satisfaction from the fact that we had explored an unknown wreck that was at least 220 years old, and possibly older. We found consolation in the knowledge that the chest would not float away. And only we—and Cappy, who, like most Mayas, does not like to explore sunken wrecks—knew the location.

PART III

Torpedoed by Gossip





I

THERE IS nothing quite like being bitten by the treasure bug. The disease grips the mind; all other matters suddenly become trifling annoyances. At least that was the way I found it. My thoughts seemed somehow frozen on that chest. At night when I lay down to sleep, it came into full view, shimmering in its tomb of pale green water, surrounded by its protective coating of coral. I cursed the fact that we had not had time to fully explore it.

Soon I was determined to return.

Marx, of course, was more anxious than I was to stage a serious expedition to the wreck. During the next four months we exchanged letters which, altogether, totaled tens of thousands of words. Meanwhile, I searched through the records in the Library of Congress for some clue to the identity of the wreck and I read up on every published account of a treasure hunt available. That no one in modern times had salvaged more than a few thousand dollars from a sunken Spanish galleon did not discourage us.

We found that virtually every treasure-hunting expedition in history had come to grief for two basic reasons: inaccurate maps and inept planning. The map was no problem with us—we knew the precise location of the wreck. Thus we were free to concentrate on the planning, and we were determined not to repeat the mistakes of other expeditions. We would mount the most carefully thought out, best-equipped expedition pos-

sible for two men in our limited financial circumstances. No pebble would be left unturned.

Early in our planning there arose the question of our wives. Should we take them along? Bob had married Mary Stanford, an ardent skin diver whom he had met some years before in Los Angeles. He was not anxious to leave her for a long trip so soon after the wedding. I wanted my wife, Agnes, to get a taste of treasure hunting. However, after considerable discussion, we decided that the camping on the mainland was too rugged for womenfolk, especially since both were pregnant. Regretfully, we would have to leave them behind.

Next we grappled with the problem of when to launch the expedition, weather being the most important consideration. Marx consulted the fishermen and local weather authorities on Cozumel. He wrote: "I have gone into this thing from A to Z with all the local people. It seems clear that the best month for our expedition is June. It is devilishly hot, but it will be hot any time and since we'll be underwater, it won't bother us. The rainy season here is considered May and June. But rain will not interfere. During the rainy season it just rains about once a day for about an hour. That's all. Again, we'll be underwater, so what matters a few drops of rain?"

Thus, we settled on the month of June.

Having decided these points, we turned our full-time attention to the equipment for the expedition. Equipment failure or malfunction had ruined many expeditions, we knew, so we were meticulous in our planning. We began with a list which Marx mailed in early spring.

Things Needed for Expedition on June 1, 1958, for Two Men

A. For Living and Sleeping.

1. First-aid kit (I will make one up with everything we might need)
2. Halazone tablets to purify drinking water (I have)
3. Dysentery pills (I have)
4. Vitamin pills (I will get)
5. Insect repellent (I have)

6. Sunburn lotion (I have)
7. Toilet paper (I will get)
8. Toilet articles (We will each bring our own, such as shaving gear, etc.)
9. Soap and plenty of towels (We can bathe in fresh-water rivers or streams)
10. Plenty of old clothes, such as bluejeans, sweat shirts, socks, underwear (Each of us will bring)
11. A good pair of boots in case we have to do any walking in the woods, etc. (I have a pair for myself and also another size eleven that you can use if they fit)
12. Two hammocks (I have one and will get another)
13. Two air mattresses to use on the boat for sleeping (I have both)
14. Raincoats (I have one and you can bring yours)
15. Flashlight and extra batteries (I have)
16. Rifle, pistol, cartridges, machetes, hunting knives, canteens, land compass to use if we have to explore anywhere on the mainland. (I have all this gear)
17. Conventional cameras, light meter, film, both black-and-white and color, flash, and bulbs (I have all this gear, but it would help if you also brought a camera and maybe some film)
18. Cigarettes and plenty of matches (We will have)
19. A logbook, pencils, etc. with which to record our daily "finds" (You will bring)
20. Sunglasses (I have a pair and you will bring yours)
21. Picks and shovels for land digging (I have)
22. Before leaving we should make sure we take charts, etc. of the wrecks.

B. Gear for Diving

1. Fins
2. Face plates
3. Snorkels
4. Knives
5. Underwater compass
6. Underwater flashlight
7. Depth gauges
8. Rubber suits

9. Grease (to keep warm if you dive all day)
10. Sweatclothes (to keep warm and to avoid scratching yourself on the coral)
11. Spearguns and extra spears
12. Weights
13. Aqualungs
14. Regulators
15. Pressure gauges to check amount of air in lungs
16. Tools with which to repair lungs
17. Compressor with oil, gas and tools
18. Gloves
19. Plastic writing pad to use underwater
20. Tools to use underwater such as chisels, axes, sledge hammers, crowbars, hack saw, files, ice pick, bags to put small things in, etc. (I will get)
21. Wire basket to lift things in off the bottom of the sea floor (I will make)
22. Plenty of rope of different sizes (I have some and will get more)
23. Cord (I have)
24. Underwater camera and film (I have two and you will probably bring one)
25. Things to preserve and clean relics: acid, paraffin wax, brushes, ice pick, separating screen, etc. (I will get these things in advance)
26. Shallow-water John Brown rig consisting of mask, harness, hose, and small pump (You check on this)
27. Tube of "Crystal Clear" that is good for John Brown rig (I have)
28. Underwater metal detector if possible (Maybe you might be able to get one)
29. Buoys both large and small (I have small ones and will make the larger ones)
30. Tennis shoes to use with John Brown rig (I have many different sizes)
31. Swim suits (We have)
32. Sea sled (I have a small one and will build a larger model)

C. Food.

1. Cooking gear, coffeepot, skillet, silverware, dishes, glasses, etc. (I will get)

2. Water barrel of some type for holding drinking water (I will get)
3. List of supplies we can buy before leaving:
 - a.* Nescafé
 - b.* Salt and pepper
 - c.* Sugar
 - d.* Mayonnaise
 - e.* Canned cream
 - f.* Canned fruits
 - g.* Canned vegetables
 - h.* Canned soup
 - i.* Crackers
 - j.* Bread
 - k.* Jelly
 - l.* Canned spam and corned beef
 - m.* Canned tuna
 - n.* Sardines
 - o.* Canned chicken
 - p.* Butter and eggs
 - q.* Mustard
 - r.* Lemons and fresh fruit
 - s.* Catsup
 - t.* Cookies
 - u.* Candy
 - v.* Fruit juices
 - w.* Baked beans
 - x.* Rice and potatoes
4. We can also buy Coke and beer.
5. We will catch lobsters, fish, crabs each day that we can cook.
6. We will also have to feed the boat crew and that means a few added items such as chili, etc.
7. Plenty of gasoline.
8. We can add more to this list later on.

2

As the weeks flew by, the list grew. We added such items as a short-wave radio, to keep track of hurricane reports even though hurricanes are not common in that area in June. From

a friend of Marx's, John Bender, an engineer in Houston, Texas, we obtained a galvanometer, a simple metal detector which would help us in finding metal hidden beneath the coral. Other items we needed included binoculars, a powerful, 50,000-candle Ansco underwater light, underwater light meters, film, handbooks on coins, cannons, and anchors, and so on. Special attention was given the first-aid kit; by the time the list was completed, it included sulfa drugs, five different remedies for dysentery, antacid pills, and a snake-bite kit, as well as the usual assortment of gauze, tape, iodine, and merthiolate.

Meanwhile, I looked into the purchase of our main item of equipment, the John Brown or shallow-water diving equipment. In the spring, while in California, I stopped off to visit Bob and Bill Meistrell, two of the West Coast's ablest divers, who own a diving-equipment shop—Dive N' Surf—in Redondo Beach, California. There I became acquainted with a new shallow-water diving rig known as the Hookah, manufactured by U.S. Divers Company. The Meistrells recommended this equipment over a John Brown rig.

A John Brown rig consists of a simple rubber mask which completely encloses the face. Air is pumped down to the diver through a rubber hose from a small compressor on the boat. The compressor supplies a rush of air into the mask that, hopefully, exceeds the diver's demand. If the compressor stops, the rush of air stops, but there is usually enough left over in the mask, held by a non-return valve, to enable the diver to ascend to the surface. Working at a depth of 33 feet or less, a diver can remain on the bottom for long periods of time, unencumbered by bulky aqualungs, which, of course, must be refilled often.

The Hookah unit is similar in principle to the John Brown, although the actual breathing apparatus is different. Air is supplied to the diver from a compressor on the boat through a rubber hose. In place of the full face mask, however, the Hookah makes use of a modified aqualung regulator. The diver breathes through a rubber mouthpiece, taking his air on demand, as with an aqualung. He wears a face plate to cover

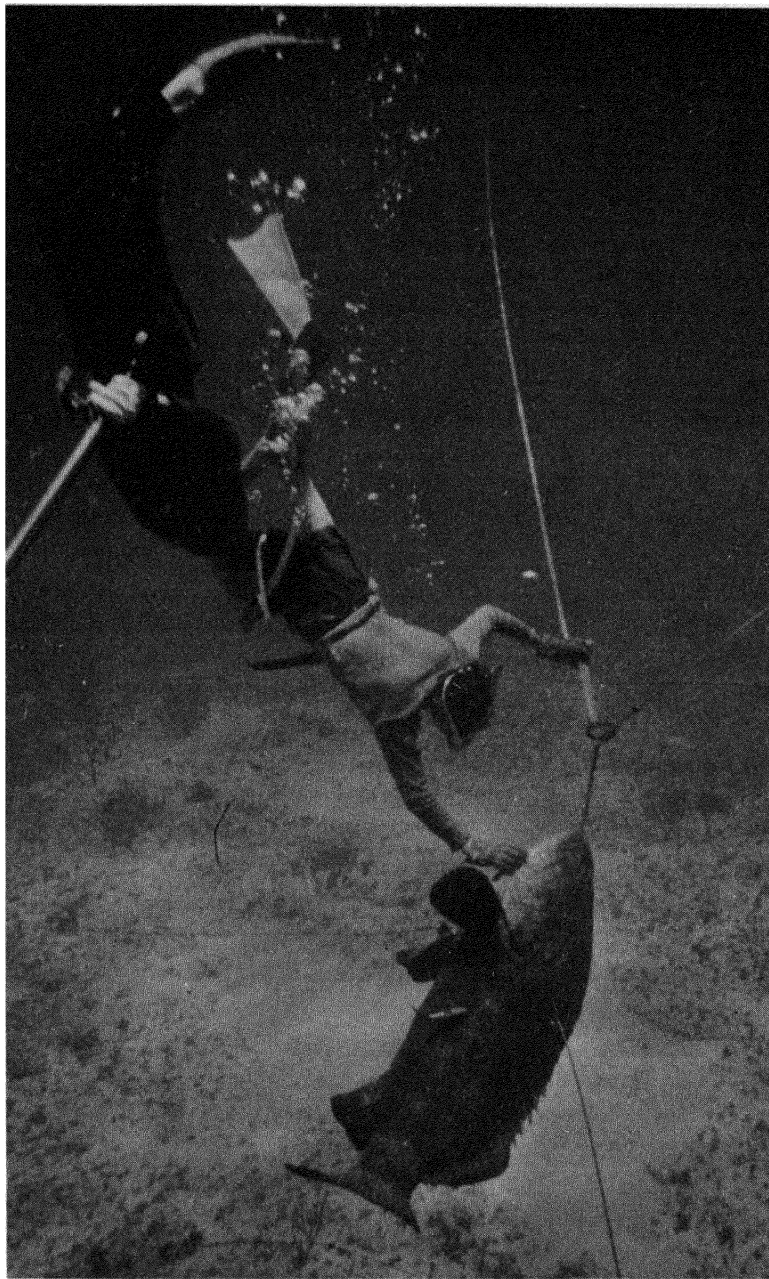
his eyes and nose. A heavy weight-belt must be worn with either the John Brown or the Hookah.

Some divers who have made prolonged excursions on the bottom with shallow-water diving equipment prefer the John Brown because the rush of air, they say, enables them to breathe easier. They complain that with a demand system, such as a Hookah employs, breathing is difficult. Others prefer the Hookah because they find the rush of air in the John Brown distracting and irritating. We felt the Hookah had one advantage over the John Brown. If an emergency occurred, two divers working together could use the "buddy breathing" system. That is, if the air failed on one unit, both divers could breathe from a single mouthpiece by passing it back and forth. As it turned out, on one occasion, we had such an emergency.

We ordered two Hookah units from the Meistrell brothers and these, along with weight belts (eight 3-pound lead weights attached to a belt with a quick release), were shipped by air freight directly to Marx on Cozumel. The job of assembling this gear and shipping it was done efficiently and expertly. We also bought from the Meistrells one of their newly designed, powerful guns for shooting big fish. Using this remarkable gun, which employs detachable spearheads and a flotation system for the line, we speared and easily landed a 400-pound jewfish and a 6-foot blue-fin shark.

Since our wreck lay in Mexican territorial waters, we carefully checked the laws of treasure-trove in Mexico. They specify that treasure found by one person on another man's land must be split between the two. If treasure is found on land controlled by the Mexican government, which includes the tidelands on which our ship and chest rested, half goes to the finder and half to the government. This was fair enough, we concluded. Marx consulted U.S. officials in Mexico, and Mexican officials on Cozumel and in the capital of Yucatan, to find out if special permits or registrations were required. The answer from every source was "No."

"Who ever heard of a permit to dive on a galleon?" a prominent Mexican official asked.



Blair and Marx land 400-pound jewfish. Photo by V. J. Craig.

Back in Washington, one evening, Wally Bennett stopped at my house. I told him of our elaborate plans to revisit the wreck. His eyes lighted up. In fact, momentarily, I imagined that they shone with the brilliance of yellow gold.

"Do you want to go?" I asked.

"Hell, yes," he said.

"It will mean four weeks of your vacation, terrifically hard work, and probably no reward for it," I said.

Bennett was by no means completely treasure-struck. But he, too, I discovered, had been thinking of that chest that we had left behind.

Soon we were expanding our equipment list to accommodate three men instead of two. We were both happy to have Bennett included in the party. He is a good diver. He could help with the digging. Moreover, he could advise us on photography and the use of our complex conventional and underwater cameras.

With only a few days remaining before Bennett and I were to leave Washington, a small crisis arose. We received a letter from Marx in which he said: "I hope the Hookah compressors run on regular gasoline. My portable compressor for filling aqualung tanks is supposed to run on white gasoline. There is no white gasoline on Cozumel. I run my compressor on regular gasoline but it frequently stops." We knew our diving operations would be considerably impaired if the Hookah compressors did not run evenly and constantly. Bennett and I bit our nails for twenty-four hours until we received the following cable from Marx:

GEAR ARRIVED STOP RUNS ON REGULAR GASOLINE
STOP I AM HOT TO GET STARTED AND TO BECOME
VERY RICH STOP

MONITOR MARX

3

Bennett and I again traveled to Cozumel by way of Miami, Havana, and Mérida, Yucatan. Fernando Barbachano, Jr.,

who operates the travel service in Mérida, met our plane and we joined him for dinner. Next morning, we took off for the island in a Tamsa DC-3, arriving on Cozumel at ten thirty. Bob Marx and his wife, Mary, were waiting at the airport.

The gear was ready. Our friend Miguel Joaquin agreed to again rent us the 26-foot fishing boat *Aguilucho* for a month. We spent the afternoon testing the Hookah units in the Hotel Cozumel Beach swimming pool, and purchasing food from Joaquin's grocery store.

Later that day, I mentioned to Marx that it might be a good idea to lay all the equipment out on the dock alongside the boat and photograph it, since, I felt, others might like to see the mountain of gear required on such an expedition. But when Marx proposed this to Joaquin, a look of concern clouded the latter's face.

"No," he said, "it is better that you do not do this. It would attract too much attention. It is better that you get underway early tomorrow, and it will be too dark for photographs."

We began loading the *Aguilucho* before dawn the following morning. The customs officials—men of the Mexican *Aduana*, as this arm of the government is called—meticulously checked our gear as it was stowed away in the hold. Just as dawn broke, we officially cleared our departure with the Captain of the Port of Cozumel.

I had a slightly uneasy feeling—perhaps imparted by Joaquin's insistence that we get underway speedily and quietly, perhaps due to the unusual attention shown us by the *Aduana*. Had I recognized it for what it was, I would have realized that we had departed under a dark cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, yet one that would soon grow, and finally reach the size of a towering cumulus.

I recall asking Marx, "What's up?"

"Damned if I know," he said. And we let it go at that.

The *Aguilucho* was loaded to capacity. Crammed into her hold were all the items on our carefully prepared and detailed list. Lashed down on deck were ten gasoline barrels, each holding ten gallons of gasoline—enough, we figured, to keep

the air compressors and the engine of the *Aguilucho* running for thirty days.

Inevitably, as the days passed, we discovered that there were a few minor shortcomings in our supply of equipment. In the hot tropical sun, we drank more water than under ordinary circumstances. All drinking water had to be boiled. The pot we brought for this purpose was too small. Each man came equipped with one broad-brimmed straw hat. During one windy day, while passing through a reef of rough water, Bennett and I lost our hats over the side. It was impossible to stop or turn back to retrieve them. It turned out to be a serious loss, because it is necessary to keep the head covered in the tropics. Two additional hats per man would not have been an excessive supply. Finally, there were times when more pries of varying lengths would have made our underwater digging job easier.

Our destination was Acumal, the small navigable cove north of the Maya ruin of Tulum. It was only a half hour by boat from Punta Matanceros, the site of the wreck.

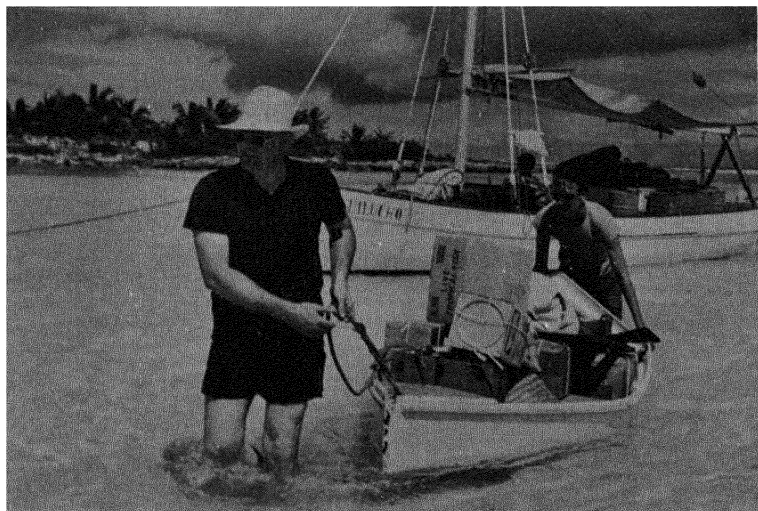


*Author Blair wearing a homemade hat
of palm frond.*

4

The six-hour trip to Acumal was rough and wet. Large swells were running in the channel which is usually, as Marx had said, "calm as a millpond." Soon the mainland was in sight, and I recalled what a desolate and sparsely populated place it was.

We approached the narrow channel through the reef at Acumal with extreme caution. A miscalculation of two or three feet would grind us on the jagged coral and rip the bottom planks out of the boat. Our mate, Elias, took station in the bow. Captain Blackfish handled the tiller, following Elias' signals. We felt a thump along the bottom—a slight scraping against a coral head—and then we were inside the cove, riding easily on the turquoise, incredibly clear water. We turned our eyes toward the pure white sand beach. Beneath the swaying coco-



In Acumal on second expedition, Blair and Marx unload Aguilucho.



Diving gear stacked on beach in Acumal. Photo by V. J. Craig.

nut trees, we could see three thatch-roof Maya huts. But none of Acumal's twenty citizens were about. It was siesta time, and they were all indoors sleeping in their hammocks.

We spent the next three hours unloading the boat, and stacking the equipment on the beach. Then we called at one of the huts and made arrangements to rent a Maya thatch roof on poles, which, until our arrival, was a piggery. The rent came to two pesos (about 16 cents) a day. We chased the pigs out, raked the dirt floor, built a barricade of boards around the bottom to keep the evicted pigs from returning, and stored our food on boards placed across the overhead roof rafters. We made arrangements with a Maya woman in the adjacent hut to do our laundry and supply us with tortillas. We obtained our drinking water, which we boiled pot by pot, from the rain barrels spaced about near the huts.



*The Maya hut in Acumal that served as shelter
on the second expedition.*



*Blair and Marx lived on fish speared in Acumal cove.
Here is a typical day's catch.*

During the late afternoon, we were paid a visit by Acumal's most prominent citizen, a white-haired sea captain named Algimiro Arguelles, who for many decades has been coasting the shores of Yucatan in a large two-masted schooner. He arrived in his boat while we were making camp.

Arguelles has a deep, leathery complexion, the horizon-seeking eyes of the sailor, and, considering his background, a surprisingly gentle nature. Since local sea captains and fishermen are frequently the best sources for information on wrecks, we welcomed his company and invited him to sit on a board by our hut.

We asked him how he had come to settle in Acumal. He replied in Spanish, which Marx translated: "I bought this land, and the land to the north and south of here, more than forty years ago, cleared the jungle away, and planted coconut trees.



Blair, Marx, and Captain Arguelles of Acumal discuss the treasure of Matanceros. Photo by V. J. Craig.

Those were very bad times. There were many fierce Indians living here and they were reluctant to give up the land. They massacred my workers. When we brought new settlers, we had to blast our way ashore with rifles. But then one time a small ship carrying a cargo of whisky crashed against a reef. The casks washed ashore where they were discovered by the Indians, who had never before had strong drink. They ladled the whisky out in gourds, and soon they were very drunk and fell upon one another at the beach. More than two hundred were killed that one night. After that, we were able to drive the remnants of the tribe back into the jungle. Many are still there, and to this day I wouldn't go on some of my land."

"We have come to dive on the wreck at Punta Matanceros," we told him.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I know that wreck well. Many cannon and anchor along the reef. A very old ship, indeed. When my settlers first came here, they found many beads, pearls, old rum bottles, and crucifixes washed up on the beach at the point. They sold the stuff to traders who came for the coconuts. Also there is supposed to be a treasure.

"They say that a few years before I bought this land a man came here from Cozumel and made friends with the Indians. According to the story, the Indians led this man to a huge cache of treasure which had been buried in the jungle just behind Punta Matanceros, not far from the spot where the crucifixes were later found along the beach. The man returned to Cozumel with the intent of fitting out an expedition to seize the treasure from the Indians. However, he became critically ill and was taken to Belize, British Honduras, where he died.

"On his deathbed," Arguelles went on, "he told a friend from Cozumel about the treasure and drew a map. The friend returned to Cozumel to form his own expedition but before he could think of a way of outfoxing the Indians, he, too, died. His wife, Señora Serafina Novelo Viuda de Rivero, has the map, and she lives on Cozumel today. But she is an old woman and will not let anyone see her map." It was a familiar story

but, somehow, the way Arguelles spun it, it had an authentic ring.

Arguelles told us that over the years many expeditions had been mounted to locate the treasure in the jungle, without the map, or with maps that were not genuine. "One time a general came here with a platoon of soldiers and dug for a month," he said. The outcome of this search is unknown, since one day the general and his soldiers departed abruptly. "I, too, have searched the jungle many times," Arguelles went on. "But I don't believe the treasure is there. I think it is still in the water, and I believe the map will show that it is in the water."

"Why do you think that?" we asked.

"Because I have seen chests lying along the bottom. Perhaps they have been there from the beginning. Perhaps they had been buried ashore, but were later put back in the water. I don't know. But on a calm day we can see four metal chests about a hundred meters off the point, lying in the sand in eight fathoms of water. Many times we have sent down natives with ropes, but the water is too deep for them and we have never been able to raise the chests." We leaned in, while Arguelles drew a crude map in the dirt.

If, during the tedious planning and execution of the project, our treasure fever had begun to subside, it now shot up several degrees. It was obvious to us that Arguelles was dead serious.

There was no telling what the metal chests contained, but whatever it was, we knew it would be of great value even if only from an archaeological standpoint. We knew we must explore the chests, and before the evening was over we had made a deal with Arguelles. If he would show us the exact location of the chests and furnish his big two-masted schooner, which had a boom that could be used to raise the chests, we would do the diving. The proceeds of this venture, we agreed, would be split equally among the four of us, after we had set aside the government's allotment. Arguelles was enthusiastic but advised that we must wait for calmer water. He would not risk his schooner so close to the reef in rough water. The reef at that moment was being pounded by a gale.

5

During the night the unseasonable gale—the natives call it a *chubasco*—increased in fury and by dawn, when we awoke, huge breakers were cascading over the reef at Acumal. “*Marejada*,” our boat crew reported, “very rough.” But, they said, it would be “*bonanza*,” or “calm,” on the following day.

We discussed the weather at great length.

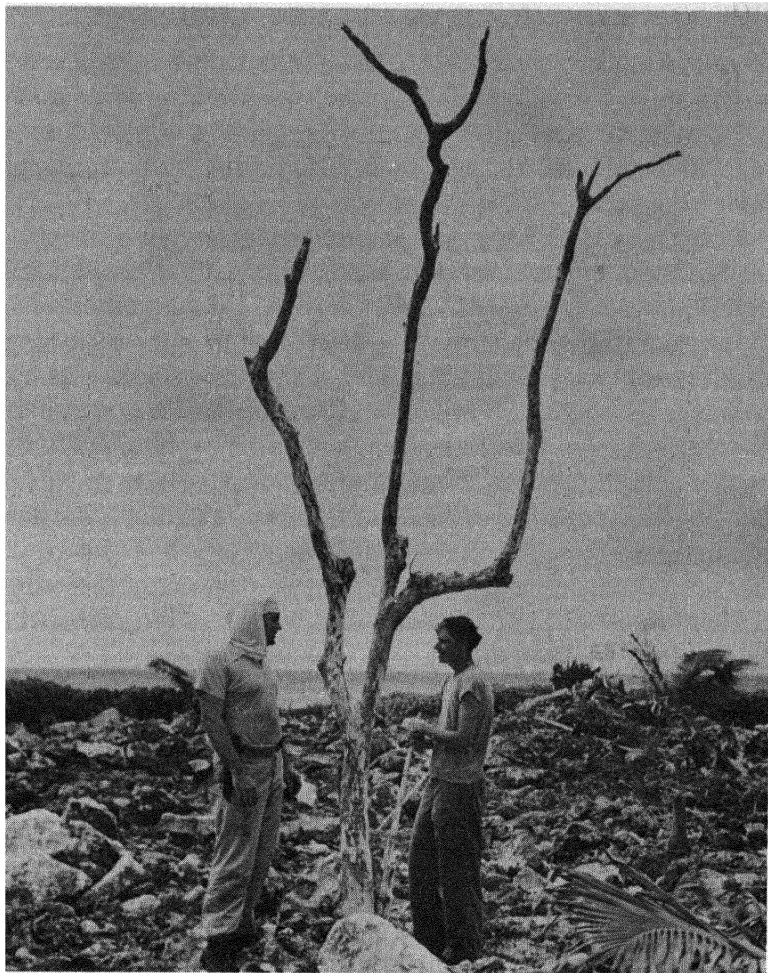
Marx finally said, “In Mexico, everything is *mañana*. If we keep waiting for *bonanza mañana*, we might never dive. How do we know how rough it is at the point? Maybe it is calm.”

I said, “Well, at least we might be able to skin dive and reconnoiter the area, staking out future digging spots.”

Marx agreed. By 0600 we were anchored off the candelabra-shaped tree which served as our beach marker. We knew that if we anchored directly in line with the tree, we would be quite close to the wreck’s anchor, which was about a hundred feet offshore. The swells were running five to six feet. The *Aguilucho* bucked and tugged at her anchor rope. Staggering about the deck, and maintaining a constant and firm hold on the rigging to keep from falling overboard, Marx, Bennett, and I donned our face plates and snorkels, and slipped over the side.

Our commotion in the water quickly attracted our gangster friends, the barracuda, but we paid them scant heed. Quite soon we found the giant coral-encrusted anchor. From the anchor we came north, close to the beach, porpoising to the bottom, searching for the small canyon which held the chest. We found it soon enough. Then we surfaced, and we noted its relative position to the boat.

The swells seemed to increase in height and force with the passing of each minute. Nevertheless, Marx was determined to try out the Hookah equipment. We returned to the boat and broke out one set. It seemed inadvisable for me to make my first Hookah dive in such rough water.



Blair and Marx pose beneath odd-shaped tree which served as beach marker for wreck.

Soon the compressor was roaring. Marx picked up a sledge hammer and chisel and jumped over the side. Bennett and I floated on the surface above him, standing by to shuttle chunks of coral to the boat.

There was not enough rubber hose to permit Marx to reach the chest, so Marx chipped on the several cannons which lay

almost directly beneath us. A few of the cannons, encrusted with a thick coating of coral, lay fully exposed to view. However, most of them were partially or nearly completely submerged in the reef. In some cases only a foot or so protruded above the coral.

Digging and hacking near a cannon can prove profitable. The cannon acts as a kind of barrier against the mysterious, debilitating effects of sea water on some submerged objects.

For example, a lone, small silver coin submerged for a long time in salt water will soon turn to silver sulfide, a black powdery substance. However, if by chance the coin comes to rest against a large mass of iron, such as a cannon, spike, or anchor, the large iron mass absorbs most of the chemical assault which otherwise would transform the coin. Thus the piece of silver is, in effect, "protected" by the iron mass. Larger chunks of silver, such as bars, protected in this way, can withstand years of submersion; only the outer surface will have turned to silver sulfide.

Silver is the one metal that suffers seriously from submersion. Objects made of pewter, copper, brass, lead, or bronze may become encrusted with coral, but usually they retain their structure. Objects made of iron or steel, wood, and leather will be found in fairly good condition, but extraordinary measures must be taken to preserve them when they are brought from the water, otherwise they will soon flake and disintegrate. Gold can remain submerged for centuries in salt water without suffering damage; and when it is brought to the surface, no special preservation techniques are required.

Marx hacked away briefly on four or five of the most prominently exposed cannons. Bennett and I lugged the diggings to the boat. However, within a very short period we were forced to secure operations because the *Aguilucho* was dragging anchor and the crew was afraid the boat might be washed against the reef.

When he came up from the bottom, Marx told us that beneath one or two of the cannons, he had seen—and in one case, had felt—coral-encrusted masses which he believed were gun carriages. This was important intelligence to us.

We became certain of our wreck site. Often, in the old days, when an armed sailing vessel was in danger of crashing against a reef, the crew dumped the heavy cannons over the side to lighten ship, and through this extreme measure many were able to escape death. Thus, cannons found along a reef usually but not always spell a wreck. Gun carriages, however, were bulky and not easy to cast overboard. Ordinarily they were left in place on the deck. Thus, the discovery of these carriages removed all lingering doubt about our wreck site.

The carriages told us something else—that our cannons had not been used as ballast. One puzzling thing about our wreck was that we had yet to find the usual, round ballast stones which positively indicate a wreck site. Frequently, worn out or cracked cannons which were worthless for combat were used as ballast on some ships. Since our cannons were covered with coral, it was not possible underwater to determine their condition and it was possible that they had been the ballast



On beach at Matanceros, Marx and Blair examine cannon which has washed ashore from galleon wreck.

of some unimportant coastal merchantman. However, when we found the carriages, we were certain that our cannons had not been used as ballast.

Thus, from this one item, we were able to deduce: 1) that we were positively on a genuine wreck site; 2) that the ship was heavily armed; 3) that the total absence of ballast, either of stone or broken cannon, probably meant that she was carrying an enormous, heavy load of merchandise in her hold.

We gave the diggings which had been hacked from the cannons a cursory examination en route to Acumal cove. We could see a few artifacts embedded in the coral, so we placed the chunks in a dory on the bow, and filled the dory with salt water—a protective measure until we had time to break the coral and properly preserve the objects.

6

When we arrived back at the camp site, about 1630, we were paid a visit by Arguelles. We briefed him on the water conditions at Punta Matanceros, pointing out that it was much too rough to risk the schooner. His four metal chests would have to wait. Arguelles said, "Don't worry. It will be calm soon."

We chatted a few minutes, telling Arguelles about the gun carriages. He then revealed a surprising bit of information. "There is a small cannon washed ashore from the wreck at Punta Matanceros."

One of Arguelles' men, who had joined our group, added, "The cannon has some numbers on it."

We were intensely interested in this news. Frequently wrecks have been dated and identified by the markings on the cannon. Although research data is scarce, it is possible, in some cases, to date a cannon by its dimensions, the position of the bands, called fillets and ogees, and other characteristics.

"How big is the cannon?" we asked.

Arguelles' man held his hands about four feet apart. "Two men could carry it," he said.

"How far is it to Punta Matanceros by land?" we asked.

"About two miles," Arguelles said.

It was late and we were tired, but the possibility of dating or establishing the nationality of the wreck by that cannon was very tempting. We picked up a canteen, a ruler, and a machete, and prepared to set off.

Arguelles' man waved to us and shouted, "*El tigre*"—their expression for jaguar. What he meant to convey was that it would be dark by the time we returned to the camp site and that we had better take a rifle. We took both the rifle and a .38 pistol.

All Mexican estimates, we soon learned, are vast understatements. A four hours' sail, for example, is really six. Two miles can be accurately translated as five. A cannon that can be lifted by two men would require at least six stevedores.

Thus, it was almost dark by the time we reached Punta Matanceros, which, by our calculation, was five miles by land from Acumal. We found the cannon, a 6½-foot cast-iron one which weighed easily 1,500 pounds, half-submerged in the surf. With the help of an Indian, we were able, after prodigious effort, to pry and roll it out of the water.

Rust had long ago obscured all markings on the cannon. However, by flashlight, we carefully measured it, noting the diameter of the bore, position of the trunnions, and other characteristics. Later, we spent many hours trying to match the dimensions of the cannon with those contained in our history of artillery, but our efforts were inconclusive. It could be either Spanish or English, sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth century.

As we sat on the point in the growing darkness that evening, resting after the ordeal with the cannon, we pondered its name, Matanceros, because frequently points, reefs, or cays are named after the ship which perished there. Spanish-language authorities had told us that, freely translated, *Matanceros* means "butcher" or "slaughterer." Hence: "Slaughter Point." This provided no clue to the identity of the ship but indicated to us either that many people had perished in the wreck, or

that the survivors, if any, were slaughtered by the hostile Indians after they reached the beach.

We hiked the five miles back to camp in complete darkness, keeping a sharp watch for jaguar, rifles held ready. Too exhausted to eat, we collapsed in our hammocks and slept soundly.

7

Next morning the hated *chubasco* was still blowing strong, defying all weather predictions of the fishermen and Captain Arguelles. Marx came in for some good-natured ribbing from Bennett and me. "Calm as a millpond" became a kind of grim, running joke.

It was an agonizing time for eager treasure hunters, and we



Stormbound, Author Blair and Bob Marx kill time by playing gin rummy in the hut.

paced the hut like caged lions, or else lost ourselves in prolonged games of gin rummy.

"Hell," I said to Marx, "let's go down south and look for the other wrecks."

In previous months, Marx had seen other cannons along the coast. Two of the "probables" were not far to the south. Two others were a four-hour sail away, just off the Maya ruin of Tulum. According to the local story, one of the wrecks off Tulum was a ship loaded with Chinese slaves. The survivors, it is said, intermarried with the local Indians.

Another project we had in the back of our minds was to search for the brigantine and the caravel that Francisco Montejo had destroyed at Soliman Point, after landing his disgruntled troops in 1527. Soliman Point was only an hour's sail to the south of Acumal.

"Why don't we case Soliman for Montejo's ships?" Marx asked. "If we found them, it would be a major discovery—the oldest wrecks found in this hemisphere."

I agreed, and soon we were underway, green water breaking over the bow of the *Aguilucho*.

There is a large *bahía*, or "bay," just to the north of Soliman Point. We sailed in, trying to guess where Montejo would have anchored his caravels and brigantines. We went ashore and searched the south side of the bay. There were no ruins, no evidence whatsoever of a town, but the terrain there seemed to fit the descriptions we had found in accounts of the expedition, especially the swamp to the west. We were puzzled, however, by the bay. It seemed too shallow for a caravel to negotiate. Since the water of the world has been gradually rising for the past centuries, it would have been even shallower in Montejo's day. How had he come in?

Then, on the north end of the bay, nestled among the coconut trees, we spied a Maya hut, and two natives working the surrounding trees. We waved to them, and they came out to the *Aguilucho* in a skiff. We presented them with a few fish and lobsters we had speared for this purpose, and then began pumping them for information.

We learned from them that the next cove to the south was deep enough to accommodate *grandes barcas*, or "very large boats." The cove lay between two points, Soliman on the north and Cadena on the south. We reasoned from this information that Montejo probably sailed into that cove, anchored, and unloaded his ships, establishing his town on the northernmost end—or Soliman Point. At Cadena Point, the natives told us, the reef curved in, and it was even possible to moor a large vessel, in calm water, directly on the point. Later, we learned from Arguelles that this was the only cove for miles along the coast capable of handling deep-draught vessels.

Had the Indians ever noticed anything underwater in the next cove or at the point?

Yes, they told us. At Cadena there was a short piece of chain with links at least a foot long. "Chain" in Spanish is *cadena*, hence the name of the point. Our ears pricked up at this information. In olden times, short pieces of chain were inserted between the anchor and the anchor rope, much like a leader on a fishing line, to prevent chafing when the anchor was catted.

Was there anything else at the point?

"Yes," they told us, "a large, old anchor."

What else?

Not much else, they said, just a big pile of bronze bars.

"How do you know the bars are bronze?" we asked.

"Because the bars are *muy brillante*—very brilliant," they replied.

"Brilliant?" we asked.

"*Sí. Sí*," they said, indicating with their hands that the bars were about four feet long.

"Would you show us where these bars are along the reef?" we asked.

"*Sí. Sí*," they said. "When the water is *mas bonanza*."

We made a date to return on the first calm day. En route to Acumal, Marx and I discussed this new information.

In all likelihood, the bars were brass and not bronze. Even so, it was strange that the bars were "brilliant." Both bronze and brass are discolored by long submersion in salt water,

usually assuming a grayish or dark-greenish appearance. Only one metal—gold—would remain “brilliant” after long submersion. Yet we knew that the Spanish had cast their gold bars in much smaller sizes, rarely more than a foot long. Certainly the bars—whatever they were—had not been on board Montejo’s ship. But it was possible that the chain came from his ship. We would have to scout the whole point, when and if the water ever became calm.

8

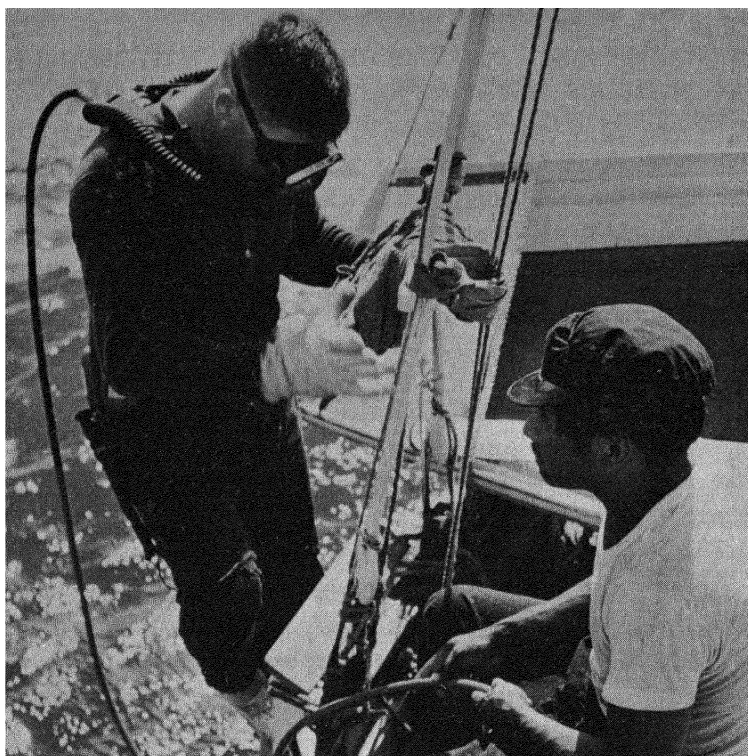
The next morning I awoke to the shouts of “*Bonanza! Bonanza!*” It was Marx hanging out of his hammock, pointing to the water. The white breakers were no longer to be seen. Without stopping for breakfast, we ordered the boat made ready, and by 0600, we were anchored at the wreck site, in line with the beach marker. The water was far from *bonanza*—much too rough, in fact, for the two-master. We decided to probe the first chest near land.

We broke out the Hookah compressors and lashed them down on the *Aguilucho*’s pitching deck. Then we squirmed into our tight-fitting, heavy woolen underwear. We slipped on our tennis shoes and heavy work gloves, eased into the Hookah harness, snapped on our twenty-five-pound weight belts, and, lastly, clamped on our face plates. The compressor motors roared into action, pumping a smooth stream of air through the 100-foot hoses into the regulators. The noise of the compressors made further talking impossible.

Marx picked up a heavy sledge hammer and large chisel and disappeared down the descending ladder. I followed a few moments later with a hatchet and small pick. My notes, made that evening, record the events that followed.

“At about thirty feet my tennis shoes strike bottom.

“The coral reef at Matanceros, as seen through the clear water below, looks very much like a miniature version of the rugged wastelands of the southwestern United States. There



*On wreck site, Blair, wearing Hookah unit, prepares to go below.
Shortly afterward, his air shut off and he nearly drowned.*

are stretches of flat or gently rolling coral that look like vast prairies, dotted with tiny patches of undersea flora which resemble tumbleweed and sagebrush. The prairie is cut by deep ravines and gorges, some with steep sides like the Grand Canyon. Here and there, small hogback ridges rise above the flat. Along this rugged terrain, scattered across an area about three blocks square, lay the surviving parts of the wreck, which we find with no difficulty now. We are beginning to know this bottom like our backyard. The big pieces such as the cannon and anchor are clearly visible, although embedded in coral. The smaller items, such as our chest, have long since submerged beneath the fast-growing reef. The wooden planking

and ribs of the ship were completely destroyed many years ago by wave action and the voracious teredo worm.

"My breathing unit works fine, much like a SCUBA, only no heavy or bulky tanks slipping around on my back. I let go the descending line. The visibility is good, or rather fair. If it were not for the heavy swells kicking up sand and bits of coral, it would be extraordinary. A reef fish, a black-and-yellow-speckled angelfish, comes close to my face plate. I wave an arm. He doesn't move.

"Bob is nowhere in sight. But I can hear the wavery 'clink, clink' of his sledge hammer striking the chisel, indicating he has found the chest. I see his red air hose floating on the surface 30 feet above me and I follow it from below like a road. When I look up, I can see the red bottom of the *Aguilucho* bouncing crazily. Her anchor, lying on the bottom to seaward, also bounces up and down. It is a strange sight. One wonders how the anchor holds the boat in place.

"It is impossible to 'walk' on the bottom. The surge of the swells is terrific. I take one step forward and move back three. I am thrown sideways as if caught in a hurricane of water. Ahead lies a mountain ridge of coral which I must negotiate. Breathing deep—I note the Hookah has a metallic clank like a SCUBA—I claw my way up the coral trying to avoid the antlers of coral which will sting even through the sweatclothes. I am glad now for the heavy gloves I am wearing.

"I cross the ridge of coral, staggering drunkenly down the opposite slope. My tennis shoes slip on the coral as though on ice. A surge catches me and sweeps me off my feet. I bounce through the water more or less weightless, and am thrown violently against the next coral reef. It is very rough going. I wonder if I am not out of my mind making my first Hookah dive virtually alone, and in this water. I am nearing the end of my hose now, and I can just barely make out Marx ahead, obscured in a swirl of black sediment.

"All at once, I inhale on my mouthpiece and no air comes. The effect on me is astonishing. I am startled—as though someone has set off a firecracker behind my back. Now I am

completely frozen by a stupefying panic. I calm down a moment and think: The compressor has probably shut off. They will restart it in a second and the air will return. It is too much effort now to go through emergency procedures and rise to the surface. I will have to start all over.

"How many seconds have passed? I inhale again. Nothing. Meanwhile, I have exhaled twice. My lungs are completely empty of air. I remember a time when I was a small boy and some other boys held me underwater, forcefully, long past the time I thought I would continue to live. Now I feel the same way. Will I black out? I recall an article I read recently describing this new phenomenon among skin divers who were diving on their own breath and staying down too long. Every man has a different threshold.

"I am succumbing to total panic."

I have always been a good swimmer, and have often wondered how other swimmers frequently described as "strong" or "good" have drowned. Now I know. When the unexpected happens in the water, all logic and control is drained from the mind and body. It is a terrifying thing, and I still shudder when I recall that moment at Matanceros. I knew exactly what to do if my air stopped: rip the quick release on my weight belt and rise slowly, exhaling to avoid air embolism, the fatal bursting of the lungs.

But how many more seconds passed before, somehow. I went into action? God knows. I can only remember that at long last—at the last second of consciousness probably—I thought of the weights, and pawed frantically at the quick release with, I suppose, the same clumsiness that pilots in emergency paw at the D ring of their parachute.

Returning to my notes: "I kick with my feet frantically, wishing now that I had worn flippers which would hasten my ascent. The sparkling surface of the water seems far, far away—too far. My lungs scream for air or anything, really, and I am certain that before I reach the top, I will uncontrollably gulp sea water. It takes all of my strength not to gulp. If I were not using my hands to help propel me to the surface, I would

use one of them to hold my mouth closed. I think of air embolism and try to exhale. But this is a joke. There is nothing to come out. Even so I keep trying to exhale because I am deathly afraid of bursting my lungs."

I reached the surface. I gasped so deeply—and loudly—that pain shot through my lungs. A wave crashed over my head and drove me under, tumbling me head-over-heels. At last I came to the surface again, and flopped head down in the water.

When he caught sight of me, Bennett, who was making his cameras ready on the boat, grabbed his flippers to come to my rescue. But Blackfish, who was tending my air hose, started reeling me in. They helped me up the ladder and I collapsed on the deck, grateful to be alive.

When I recovered after a couple of hours of sleep, I checked to find out what had happened to my air. The compressor had not stopped as I had thought. My hose handler, Blackfish, had stupidly fed out the hose with a knot in it. When I arrived near the end of my hose, the tension drew the knot tight, and closed off the air.

Later, after I had removed the knot in the hose, I returned to the bottom, and joined Marx on the chest site.

9

Hacking coral is difficult work, not unlike breaking up a concrete sidewalk. It is especially difficult in rough water, as I soon found when I took my turn with sledge hammer and chisel. Each large swell that passed overhead rolled us forward four or five feet. There was a second or two of peace, and then the outgoing bottom surge caught us and flung us seaward at a rapid pace. This unwanted journey usually ended when Marx and I smashed against the jagged seaward wall of our small canyon. In the brief interlude between waves, we would scramble back to the chest, brace our feet for the next incoming wave, and take one or two sluggish swings with the sledge hammer. Then we would be tumbled head-over-heels again.

It was like trying to work in one of those revolving, walk-through barrels in the fun house at an amusement park.

Only the lust for gold would compel a man to endure such savage underwater punishment, and lust we had. We hacked for hours, sending up large chunks of coral in a basket raised and lowered from the surface by the boat crew. In the afternoon, at last, we broke through the top of the chest, eagerly prying away the heavy, coral-impregnated slabs of teakwood. We looked inside.

Alas! No pile of gold doubloons met our eyes, just the dull outlines of scores upon scores of frayed, slimy knife handles, which on close examination proved to be made of horn and covered with a thin, crumbling coat of gold leaf. The blades

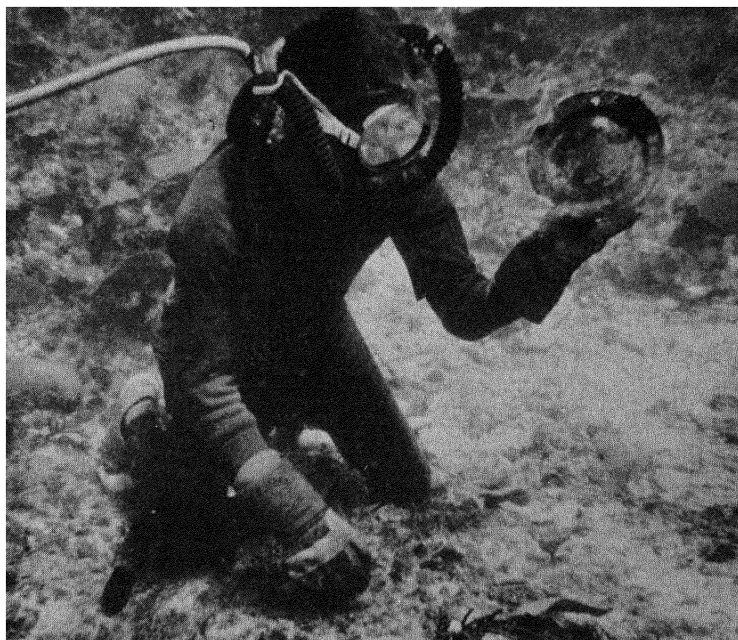


Marx ascends to diving boat after hard session on bottom.

Photo by V. J. Craig.

of the knives had apparently been made of silver, but in the long years of salt-water submersion, they had changed to black silver sulfide. It covered everything, including the exposed portions of our faces and necks. We sent the pieces of the chest and the knife handles—more than three hundred altogether—up to the surface.

The furious, determined digging went on for three days, despite the fact that the waves grew larger and the bottom surge stronger each day. There were quite a few chests embedded in the coral. However, most of the “goodies,” as we called the artifacts, were not in chests. It appeared as though someone had simply thrown tens of thousands of items—belt buckles, earrings, costume jewelry, mirrors, bottles, and so on—on the bottom and then covered them with tons of concrete.



On the bottom, Bob Marx holds a pewter plate he chipped from the coral.

It would have been tedious and wasteful to dig out each item separately. Instead we hacked out large chunks of coral containing many artifacts and sent them up to the boat. The digging was rich, especially in the ravines and canyons. Almost any place we dug produced goodies.

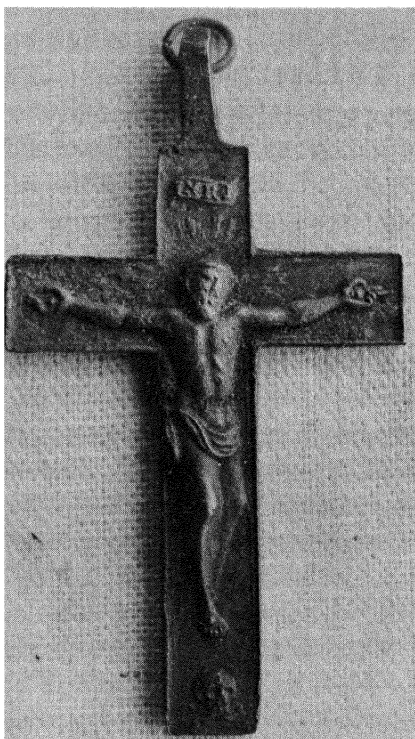
On the third day we began turning up a large number of unusual crucifixes, which we believed to be gold but were actually brass. We found them in two sizes: 1½ inches tall and 1 inch tall. Both sizes of crucifix were adorned with the figure of Christ nailed to the cross on one side, and the Virgin Mary standing lightly on a quarter moon on the other. The larger crosses bore the Latin words *Vitam Praesta* ("Give us Life") on the arms of the cross on the Virgin Mary side. The smaller crosses were stamped with the Latin words *Maria Mater* ("Mother Mary") in the same place. Beneath the figure of Christ were some letters and a skull and bones.

We cleaned the coral from a few of these crosses and studied them carefully. Unhappily we could find no dates nor manufacturer's marks. They all appeared to have been made by the same man or men. The figures of Christ and Mary on the two crosses were identical except, of course, for size. There was a slight flaw in the word *Praesta*, which appeared on all the large crosses. Thus we deduced that all the large crosses had been cast in the same mold.

The discovery of these crosses raised some questions. Was ours a Spanish ship, bound for a Spanish port? Would an antipapist English merchantman carry Catholic crosses? Were the crosses bound, perhaps, for the English Catholic colony of Maryland? There was, of course, no way of answering these questions, as yet. Many English ships had traded with Spanish colonies, either legally or illegally. In spite of the crosses, we continued to believe the ship was an English merchantman.

The next batch of goodies bolstered this belief. We found a chestful of graceful silver-dipped brass spoons which appeared to be English. Shortly after, Bob Marx discovered a batch of pewter plates, 8½ inches in diameter. Some of the plates

crumbled on touch, leading us to believe, at first, that they were silver. Several of them were in good condition. We cleaned their bottoms, searching for a hallmark. We found one—a double rose over which were the initials “BNO.” We believed at that time that anything stamped with a rose was English.



Medium-sized crucifix.

With our pile of goodies steadily accumulating, we faced a serious problem: If the goodies were exposed to the air without proper preservation, they might disintegrate. Since the weather could get worse at any time, we wanted to spend every possible moment in the water, digging. Another problem presented itself: The water was now so rough that the basket operated by the crew was unworkable. Because of all these

factors, we decided to lug our chunks of coral underwater to a patch of sand just to seaward of the reef, and leave them. Later, when we had finished digging, we could anchor the boat over that one spot—even in extremely rough water—and raise all the chunks at one time, preserving goodies as we went along.

We found still another chest—our fifth—solidly packed with silver-dipped copper spoons, but we left it after one blow of the pick. “Just more of those damned spoons,” Marx commented.

The further we probed the bottom, the more excited we became. It was now clear to us that, in all probability, our wreck had not previously been salvaged by either seamen or Indians. It seemed inconceivable to us that anyone “fishing” the wreck would leave behind such obviously valuable and easily recoverable (at the time of the wreck) items as chests of knives, spoons, and plates. We believed we had a rare item: a virgin wreck. From any standpoint, the cargo was valuable. And, more likely than not, the ship, even though probably a merchantman, carried some chests of coin and possibly bullion for trading purposes. It might already have made a stop in the New World where its crew traded goods for gold. The ship could have carried important passengers en route to the New World with valuable jewels and moneys. The treasure of Matanceros could be a fact!

We had finished lugging the chunks of coral of the third chest to the open area, and were looking around for another likely digging spot, when my air suddenly shut off again. I had just exhaled and my lungs were completely empty. I punched Marx on the shoulder and quickly drew a finger across my throat, a prearranged emergency signal.

Marx took a breath and then passed me his mouthpiece. I took a deep breath—enough to last me through the crisis—and returned the mouthpiece. Then I ripped the quick release on my weight belt and began a gradual ascent, exhaling all the way to avoid air embolism. When I reached the surface, I discovered that my air hose had completely unscrewed from the regulator on my back. Later, we concluded this disconnection had been caused by the constant tumbling head-over-heels on

the bottom. We made a rule to check all fittings every hour.

I swam to the boat and climbed up the pitching ladder, noting the modest pile of coral stacked in the dory on the bow, and thinking with great satisfaction of the large pile still on the bottom. Then to my astonishment I saw a ship—a much larger boat than the *Aguilucho*—hove to, close abeam. The ship was painted gray, and on its bow, in place of a name or number, there was a large, official-looking seal. The crew of the gray ship was lowering a small dory over the side. I looked at our own crew, perplexed.

“*Policia*,” Elias said.

IO

The *policia* boarded our boat on the starboard side at about the same time Marx clambered up the boarding ladder on the port side, lugging both our weight belts. Marx stared dumfoundedly. Then, after he had removed his gear, a great babble in Spanish ensued between the *policia*, Marx, and members of our crew, with the *policia* doing most of the talking. Finally Marx came back to the bow with a long face.

“These are *Aduana* men,” he said. “They said we are under arrest for ‘disturbing an archaeological site.’ We are to return to Acumal immediately where the boat will be searched. Then we must return to Cozumel to face charges.”

“Can we go back down for our tools?” I asked. I was also thinking of the treasure we had left in the sand.

“No,” Marx said. “They want us to leave now.”

We were engulfed with alternate feelings of bewilderment and fear. To come up from a long day’s diving on the bottom, straight into the arms of the law, is an unsettling experience. It is even worse in a foreign country, especially one in which Americans are generally regarded as poachers, bent on raping the country of its resources and archaeological relics. I had visions of spending ten years in a Mexican bastille. The fact that our whole, well-planned expedition might be in total jeopardy did not occur to us at that moment.

Marx said, "Don't worry. We'll get out of this." But his tone lacked confidence.

The boss of the *Aduana* team, an old Mexican who was bare-footed and wearing a red bandanna which gave him the appearance of a woman, steered us toward Acumal, while the gray boat sailed alongside in escort. When we anchored in the cove, our boat was searched from stem to stern, and all the goodies we had brought up—the knife handles, a few belt buckles, earrings, about three hundred pieces of costume jewelry, and chunks of coral in the dory—were impounded.

The *Aduana* were polite but cool. "Tonight you will return to Cozumel under escort," they said. However, this proved impossible because a severe *chubasco* blew up, and for three days no boat could leave the cove.

We found out, little by little, the reason for our "arrest." It seems that on Cozumel, a place where so little happens that a shift in the wind direction can supply an afternoon's conversation, our expedition had caused great excitement. In about two days' time, it became an acknowledged fact that we had found the treasure of Matanceros, and that once it had been loaded on board the *Aguilucho*, we would murder the crew, or leave them stranded on a desolate beach, and sail for New Orleans with the loot. A man, a relative of the old woman who owned the treasure map, we were told, actually filed an affidavit with the tax collector demanding half the gold. However, officials on Cozumel were powerless to act, since we had broken no law.

Then one day a man came into the *Aduana* office and filed an affidavit stating that we had on board the *Aguilucho* ten cases of dynamite with which we would blow up Matanceros reef in order to uncover the gold quickly. In Mexico, ever since the revolution, it has been against the law to have dynamite in one's possession without a special permit. The *Aduana* had inspected our boat before we departed from Cozumel; therefore, they were fairly certain that we had no such quantity of dynamite. But the pressure became so great that they were forced to put to sea in pursuit of us.

Our well-laid expedition had been torpedoed by a completely unforeseeable weapon: gossip.

On the second day of our confinement in Acumal, we had a long and earnest talk with the boss of the *Aduana* team. We made it clear to him that we had no gold, and that the prospects of finding gold on the wreck were pretty slim. We explained that our expedition had been mounted at great expense, and that two of us had come all the way from Washington for the express purpose of diving. We pointed out that the charges against us—"disturbing an archaeological site"—were legally questionable and that, moreover, we intended to turn over all archaeological artifacts to the museums of Mexico.

The *Aduana* boss was visibly moved. We were told then, by a prominent citizen of Acumal, that a few pesos would resolve the situation. But we stood on principle. We would not resort to bribes.

Late in the afternoon, we saw the *Aduana* chief again. He was solemn-faced but he told us that he had thought it over, and that it would not be necessary for us to return to Cozumel immediately. "But," he said, "consider yourself technically under arrest, and when you return to Cozumel report first to the *Aduana* office and get this straightened out."

We said we would.

"And you can keep these pieces of coral," he said. "However, do not do any more digging on the wreck."

"Well, can we go back and get our tools and take some photographs of the cannon and anchor?" Marx asked.

"Yes. That will be O.K. But no more digging."

"Very well," we said. "No more digging."

The following morning the seas were rough—rougher than at any time during our stay at Acumal. No boat could leave the cove. With nothing else to do, Marx, Bennett, and I laid plans to hike to Punta Matanceros and dig around the beach.

It was an ill-conceived journey. We had failed to reckon with the enervating, dehydrating tropical sun. By the time we reached the point, we were weak and thirsty. The small canteen was soon empty.

Even so, our search of the beach began in a frenzy. The area was covered with large coral boulders, cast up from the reef. We picked up these huge rocks and heaved them aside, clearing an area about fifteen feet square. Then we hacked into the hard dirt with the picks and chisels. We found pieces of rum bottles, costume jewelry and a few fragments of buckles, and glass or mirrors.

The digging pace slowed abruptly.

Marx said: "You guys keep digging. I'm going to look around for big stuff."

Bennett, Elias, and I dug for about five more minutes, and then we, too, gave up. The sun had melted all ambition. We wandered down to the beach where we could catch the breeze and we dug a few deep holes at random. Within a half hour, all three of us were sprawled out under a large coconut tree, drained of energy and initiative. We lay there for three hours, trying to recoup our strength for the hike back to Acumal, and assuaging our thirst with the milk of coconuts. Marx summed up the feelings of all of us when he said, "To hell with this buried land treasure."

In my notes I have only one underlined entry for that day: "DAY COMPLETELY WASTED."

II

That evening we noted that the small Maya children who usually scurried about completely naked were dressed. In fact, the smallest of the children, a boy of about a year and a half, was crying in agony because the shoes hurt his feet so much.

Marx pointed to the children and asked one of the men, "¿*Qué pasa?* What's going on?"

The man replied, "It's Saturday night."

Saturday night in Acumal! Storm-bound, prohibited from diving on our wreck by the *Aduana*, tired, and dispirited, we could see little to celebrate. Elias, who has the mind and patience of a philosopher, tried to cheer us up. "*Bonanza mañana*," he said, smiling.

It was not *bonanza mañana*, and my notes for the day are fragmentary and disjointed. "Rough water. I walked under a coconut tree and was stung by three wasps simultaneously on the face and neck. Many laughs from citizens and *Aduana*. Citizens began project to evict wasps and nests. Ran out of drinking water again. Asked Elias how far to the well which we had begun to use since rain barrels empty. He said: 'one hundred meters.' Good test case, we thought, en route to well. Paced it off. 138 meters. Confirms all Mexican estimates understatements. In morning, beat Marx at gin rummy 653 to 295. Bennett going nuts for lack of something to read. More tortillas and beans for lunch. Monotonous diet. Out of fruit juice. Went spear-fishing in cove after lunch. Water seems to be clearing. Elias says *bonanza mañana* for sure. I got two big hog-snappers. Marx got a couple of groupers and small ray. Natives like to eat ray. Bennett damned near trapped in cave by surging undertow. Tore his sweatclothes. Funny thing was we had just chased a fifty-pound or thereabouts grouper into same cave. Bennett didn't see. Also 6-foot sand shark came out of same cave. Gin rummy score at end of day: Blair 1255. Marx 1195."

On the following day, the water began to calm. The consensus of every man in Acumal was that it would be *bonanza mañana*. The *Aduana* would leave, and we could return to the wreck for "photographs."

We saw the *Aduana* chief on the beach that morning.

Marx said, a bit cheerily, "Well, we guess you'll be leaving in the morning?"

"*Sí. Sí,*" he replied. They were as anxious to leave as we were to have them leave. They had been on patrol for ten days when they received the message to "arrest" us. The unseasonable storm had kept them from rejoining their families on Cozumel.

Then the chief added gravely, "We have decided not to let you have the coral."

"Why?" we asked, startled.

"Because there are so many people here in Acumal that know about it. Arguelles will be returning to Cozumel tomorrow with his family and there will be much talk on Cozumel.

It is better for you and better for us that we take the coral."

"But," we countered, "if you take the coral back, the objects in the coral will disintegrate." We had left the coral soaking in salt water in the dory and up to that point the relics were safe. But we knew that if they took the coral, they would not keep it in water.

Marx added: "How about letting us break up the coral and extract the relics? Then we can clean them in acid, and coat them with the paraffin wax, and they will not disintegrate. The load will not be as bulky or heavy either."

The chief held a conference with his underlings.

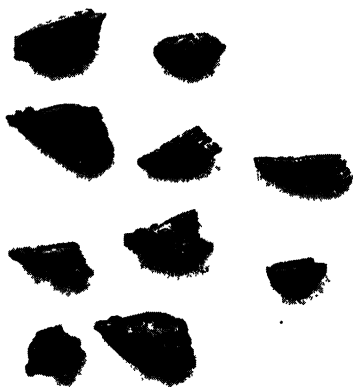
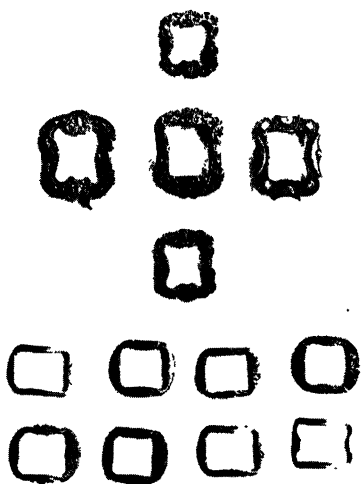
"O.K.," he said, "you can break the stuff up here on the beach."

The sun was almost directly overhead when we got this word. There was not much time, we knew. We hastened to the *Aguilucho*, unloaded the coral, and pulled it to the beach in a skiff.

Extracting relics from large coral chunks is no easy task. Had we had vast quantities of acid, we could have dumped each chunk in a vat and let the acid eat the coral away. However, we were not prepared for such an operation. Under the circumstances, there was only one way to do it, and that was with hammers and hatchets.

Each of us laid a small board—we called them "pounding boards"—in the sand. Then we stacked the coral in a huge mound near the boards. We would lay a chunk of coral on the board, tap it gently with the hammer until it began to fall away from the imbedded relics. Inevitably, and regrettably, in our haste, we shattered or broke many relics. Silver sulfide, which we recovered from the chest and from many pieces of coral, was stacked in a separate pile. When "cooked" on a very hot fire, silver sulfide will revert to silver. We thought that on Cozumel we might build such a fire. Later, however, we gave this up as a futile hope, and threw the sulfide away.

The coral chunks yielded a considerable array of relics. We recovered hundreds of pieces of costume jewelry, mostly small diamond- and emerald-colored glass stones, mounted in metal



A sampling of pewter buckles, knife handles, and fist-shaped Brazilian talismans from the wreck. The latter led divers to believe the ship had made a stop in the New World.

or ceramic settings. Many were joined together like cuff links, others were obviously used as buttons on dressy clothes. Some were earrings.

We found a score of beautifully cast, ornamental pewter shoebuckles, bronze buckles, and many fragments of pewter and bronze buckles of all sizes and shapes. We recovered several small brass knife handles which we called "butter knives." The handles had been inlaid with pearl shell or some similar substance which crumbled when we touched it.



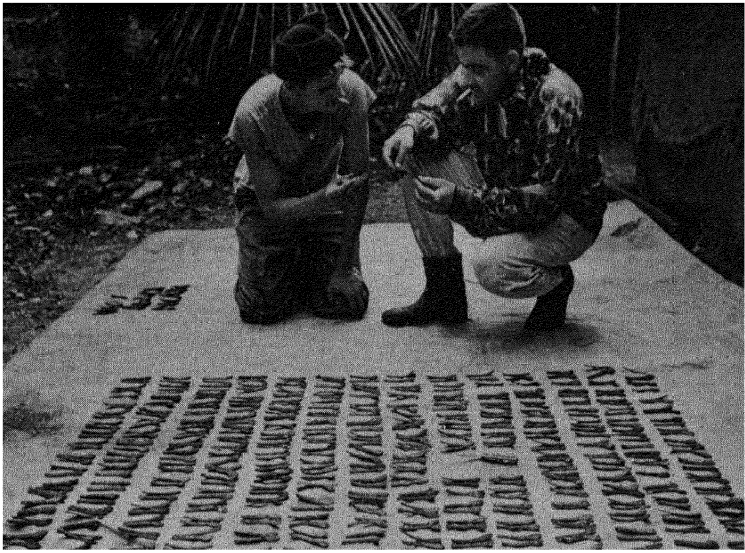
On beach at Acumal, Blair, Marx, and boatmen break up coral under eye of the Mexican customs officials. Photo by V. J. Craig.

To the growing stack of goodies, we added eight jet talismans which were carved in the shape of a fist. These appeared to us to be New World in design, possibly Brazilian, definitely the work of some Indian tribe. These, we surmised, had been obtained in trade at some port in the New World, a possible indication that the ship had made at least one stop before it met disaster.

Our prized recovery from the coral was a greenish (indicating copper) chunk of unidentifiable substance, about four inches square, from which a small gold necklace chain and other seemingly valuable items protruded. We stored the chunk away as it was, hoping that later we could dissolve it with strong, clean acid.

We hammered and cleaned furiously all afternoon under the watchful eyes of the *Aduana* men and a few curious citizens of Acumal. Elias carefully probed the remnants of the chest, extracting the remainder of the horn knife-handles. All objects were laid out on a tarpaulin and photographed.

Then darkness overtook us. The chief of the *Aduana* became



Marx and Blair make display of knife handles to be photographed.

impatient, and for the first time spoke harshly. “That’s long enough. Get all the stuff on our boat.”

We put all of the recovered objects in a wooden cheese-box, and covered the box with a coating of paraffin wax. Before turning the box over to the *Aduana* chief, I demanded a receipt. He was incensed.

Marx said, “Take it easy. We don’t want to get these people angry again.”

I retired to my corner, adamant. After a long conference with Marx, the chief told us to wrap the box with paper and sign our names on the outside. When this was done, we gave him the box, and he and his men departed for their boat. We had no intention of lugging the remaining coral chunks, pieces of the chest, and the knife handles to their boat, so these were left on the beach for the night. The next morning at dawn the *Aduana* boat, at long last, left Acumal cove. Oddly enough, the remaining coral chest and knife handles were left on the beach.

“Too much trouble to carry it out,” Marx said. We collected the chunks and took them out to the *Aguilucho*.

I 2

The water was not calm, but we decided to get underway for the wreck.

"There might be an explosion when the *Aduana* returns to C'ozumel without us," Marx said. "I think we better get out to the wreck and do what we have to do today. They may come back at any minute."

Soon we were anchored off Matanceros Point. My notes for the morning:

"It is rougher today than we have ever seen it. Tremendous waves are crashing across the bow of the *Aguilucho*. It is almost impossible to keep a footing on the deck. It is like standing on an air mattress in the surf. That the anchor holds at all is a mystery. We keep the engine of the boat idling constantly so that if the anchor gives way, the crew can immediately get underway and avoid the reef. We estimate the waves at eight or nine feet. Elias, damn him, smiles and says, '*bonanza mañana*.'"

It was much too rough for Hookah equipment. Marx, Bennett, and I put on face plates, snorkels, and flippers, and went over the side, edging cautiously toward the reef, trying to locate the wreck's anchor. We found it almost directly under the spot where the huge rollers were breaking. We were pounded, tumbled, and swept in and out as much as fifteen feet underwater, but we got the necessary photographs. Farther out, the water was less turbulent, and I managed to dive to 30 feet and embrace a coral-encrusted cannon while Bennett clicked off three frames of film.

That done, we collected our tools, which were still bouncing back and forth in the coral canyon where we had left them. Then our eyes fell on the huge pile of goodies-laden coral which we had stacked, prior to the arrival of the *Aduana*. Marx and I swam to the boat with the tools.

"Could lifting chunks of coral into the boat be considered digging?" I asked.

"It most certainly could not," Marx replied. "If we don't raise this stuff, it will soon be swept out to sea and nobody will ever see it again."

Having settled this point of jurisprudence, we moved into action. It took most of the day to raise our stack of coral but the job was done with clear conscience. That evening, however, when we cruised into Acumal we left everything on the boat, locked in the hold. No sense in giving everyone the impression that we had been digging again, we reasoned.

The following morning we got underway and sailed far up the coast to a deserted cove so that we could break up the coral without all the citizens of Acumal watching over our shoulders. At that point, we were undecided about how we would dispose of the goodies. Our main goal was to uncover something in the coral that would provide a clue to the identification, nation-



In lonely cove, boatmen, Marx, and Walter Bennett (drinking coconut milk) crack coral from goodies. Photo by Clay Blair.



Marx and Blair lay out goodies on canvas. Later these were buried near a palm tree on the beach. Photo by V. J. Craig.

ality, or age of the wreck. If we could positively identify the ship, we could find out its cargo.

We spread the chunks of coral on a tarpaulin on the beach, picked up our tools, and began smashing the coral into small pieces. The returns were astounding. Almost every chunk of coral was packed solid with treasure: exquisite religious medallions which we thought were gold but which later proved to be brass, hundreds of costume beads, hundreds of copper straight pins, scores of silver-dipped copper spoons, brass butter-knife handles, ornamental handles of larger knives, pewter, brass, and bronze shoebuckles, lead pistol balls, and so on. We even managed to salvage eight of the fragile pewter plates. After a fine bath in acid, which removed the thin crust of coral, we photographed these items en masse and close up, and then covered them with protective coatings of paraffin wax.

We were sprawled on the beach, hard at this task, when suddenly we spied a sail cruising down the coast toward us. "The *Aduana*!" we thought. "How will we explain all this treasure? They will surely think we have been out digging

again." Moreover, we were certain they would seize all of it—as they had the first batch—and that we would never receive our lawful share.

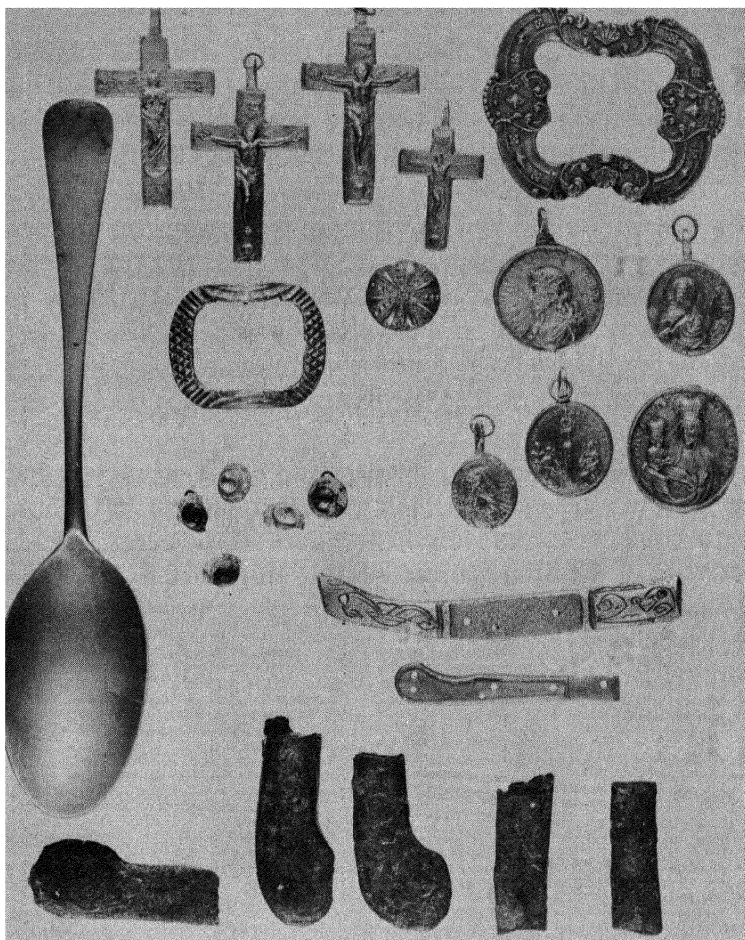
"Let's get it the hell out of here," Marx said.

With great speed, we dumped the cleaned goodies into waterproof plastic bags and hid them in the bushes behind the beach. Then we scattered the coral remains along the sandy beach. By the time the sail cleared the trees along the coast, and the hull itself came into view, we were lolling casually on the beach, drinking the milk of coconuts.

It was not the *Aduana*. Much to our surprise, we saw that the boat was the *Clipper*, Joaquin's big sailboat which he rarely operated beyond the lee of Cozumel Island. Obviously something important was in the wind. We immediately got underway, leaving the goodies in the bushes. When we came alongside the *Clipper*, the crew passed us a letter from Joaquin.

All Cozumel was up in arms, he wrote. The people were still certain that we had found the treasure of Matanceros. Joaquin advised that to avoid really serious trouble we should return to Cozumel and write Mexico City for permission to dive on the wreck.

It was clear that our little luck had run out. Marx and I then both had the same thought: What will we do with the goodies? In light of Joaquin's letter, we were certain to provoke trouble if we returned to Cozumel with them. It would be like waving a red flag in the people's faces. Moreover, under the confused and emotion-charged circumstances there seemed little chance that we would ever receive our share. There was only one thing to do: bury our treasure where we were. Marx jumped on board the *Clipper* and returned to Acumal to break camp. When the *Clipper* was out of sight, Bennett and I sailed back into the cove and retrieved the goodies from the bushes.



*Samples of goodies of the second expedition.
Photo: Smithsonian Institution.*

searched everything, including our personal gear. They confiscated the goodies-laden coral chunks but, oddly, allowed us to keep the knife handles and the pieces of the knife chest.

“Why do they let us keep this?” I asked Marx.

“They are looking only for gold,” Marx replied.

The next day, as instructed, we reported to the *Aduana* office, where we had a long and amiable—well, almost amiable

—talk with the chief of the *Aduana*, during which he admitted that we had broken no rules or regulations, and confessed that he had been forced to act because of political pressure from the townspeople, who were convinced we had found gold.

“This thing has gotten so big,” he said, “I must insist that you write to the Federal government for permission to return to the wreck.” He refused to return the cheese-box full of relics.

I spent ten days writing to officials in Mexico City for “permission” to dive on the wreck, but when these requests became hopelessly bogged down in government bureaucracy, I gave up and returned to the States. Marx went back to skin diving.

After studying the many photographs of the goodies, including the close-ups of the medallions and crucifixes, and hearing my account of the expedition to Punta Matanceros, Mendel Peterson of the Smithsonian Institution reported: “Your description of the site leads me to believe that it will prove to be one of the most important merchant ship sites ever discovered in this hemisphere.”

The name and nationality of the ship remained a mystery.

PART IV

“His Majesty’s Ship,
Woolworth”





I

FOR MONTHS Walter Bennett and I talked of little else than the galleon at Matanceros. Our artifacts had revealed no real clues. But in my mind I could clearly picture that enormous vessel, perhaps afire, or being pursued by a pirate vessel, bearing down on the jagged reef. I could imagine its copper-plated bottom crunching against the reef, the tremendous shudder that swept the ship from bow to stern, perhaps toppling masts and sails, and the frantic efforts of her crew and passengers to swim ashore in that terrible surf. I could visualize savage Indians hiding among the rocks and bramble ashore, axes ready, tensely waiting to attack those who survived the disaster . . .

Who? What? When? How? The answers to these questions, like the treasure of Matanceros, remained undiscovered, and they gnawed at us with fierce intensity. As time passed, and the discomforts of the expedition faded from memory, the unsolved mystery plagued us more and more. Against his own better judgment, Marx slipped back to the wreck from time to time. He dug up the goodies we had buried on the beach and hacked new ones from the coral, including a few Spanish copper coins, one silver coin, a real from the reign of Philip II (1556–98), a silver fork, two silver spoons, and the like. These items made it all the more urgent that we return to Matanceros.

Any more diving expeditions in Mexican waters obviously

would require some kind of high-level official permission from the Mexican government. The story of our fruitless struggle over a period of nearly one year to obtain this permission would fill ten volumes. Mountains of correspondence accumulated. From the highlights, included here as an object lesson for divers, treasure hunters, adventurers, and archaeologists, one may glimpse the frustrations of doing business in Mexico and other Latin American countries where the wheels of government turn slowly, or not at all.

These futile proceedings began with a letter from me to Dr. Eusebio Davalos Hurtada, Director of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, officially requesting "permission to continue diving on the galleon."

Dr. Davalos replied, in July, 1958:

With reference to the contents of your letter, please be advised that I brought the request made by you before the Secretary of Public Education so that you may continue submarine explorations off the Coast of Quintana Roo. In accordance with the law on the Protection and Conservation of Monuments, it is necessary to reach an agreement between the interested persons or institutions and the Office of the Secretary of Public Education through this Institute under my care.

The Secretary informed me that it would not be possible to grant, for the moment, the permission required by you, but that the case would be taken up with the Office of the Secretary of Foreign Relations to determine the advisability or inadvisability in authorizing said submarine explorations.

Months passed with no further word from the Mexican government. In December, 1958, I wrote to the U.S. Ambassador in Mexico City, Robert C. Hill:

Last June 23, you may recall, I wrote you a letter from Cozumel Island, Quintana Roo, requesting that you intercede in my behalf with the Mexican government for permission to continue diving on a sunken galleon off the coast of Quintana Roo.

A copy of this letter, as well as other correspondence on

this subject, to be referred to later in this letter, is enclosed. In substance the situation was and still is, this:

In November, 1957, Mr. Robert Marx, an American citizen now residing on Cozumel and manager of the Cozumel Beach Hotel, and myself, in company with Mr. Walter Bennett, explored the remains of the aforementioned ship which is located on the reef at Punta Matanceros, a few miles north of the Mayan ruin of Tulum, and five miles south of the settlement of Acumal. We recovered a wine bottle and other objects.

In June of 1958, Mr. Bennett and I returned to Cozumel to continue exploring the wreck with Mr. Marx. A month was set aside for the expedition which was mounted at great expense.

We were doing very well indeed with our wreck when our operations were interrupted by the Cozumel branch of the *Aduana*, who believed we were bringing gold off the wreck in great quantity. They also thought we were using dynamite. Those beliefs were fanned by rumors on Cozumel—all untrue. Part of the material we recovered from the wreck was confiscated by the *Aduana*, and is presumably still in their keeping on Cozumel. The remainder of it was buried on the coast of Quintana Roo.

Since returning to the States, I have been in contact with the Smithsonian Institution, namely, Mendel L. Peterson, Head Curator, Department of Armed Forces History. I submitted a vast number of color slides and also conducted several lengthy briefings for the staff of the Smithsonian. The Smithsonian is vitally interested in this wreck. It might well turn out to be the most important merchant ship site yet discovered in this hemisphere.

This is a rare and important wreck for several reasons. The principal one is that it is almost certainly a "virgin" wreck, that is, it has not been dived upon before, or salvaged by natives at the time of its disaster. We are certain of this principally because we feel sure that if someone had previously salvaged the wreck the chests we so easily recovered would not have been left behind. There are many other chests remaining that we were unable to raise because of the *Aduana*.

In fact, I can tell you confidentially that the bottom of that reef contains enough archeological artifacts to fill one room of every museum in the Western Hemisphere. The wreck may also hold objects of great value made of gold. In any case,

each and every one of the artifacts is of enormous interest to archeologists.

To sum up, this is the present situation: On the reef at Matanceros lies a great store of archeological artifacts of interest to museums the world over. We have explored the reef thoroughly and are familiar with the location of the remains of the ship. We have dived for hours in those tricky currents and know well their characteristics. We have sufficient diving equipment to mount a considerable expedition to recover these artifacts. We are experienced in handling artifacts and preserving them properly. Yet we have been refused permission to continue our explorations.

It seems to me that unless some action is taken to break this deadlock the objects contained in the wreck will simply remain there forever. This strikes me as a senseless waste to all parties concerned. And that is why I am writing to you again.

Can you please advise us how best to proceed from here? Who should we write to? Is it possible that one of your people could orally convey our desires—and past misfortunes—to the proper Mexican government authorities? Or do you think we should abandon this project?

I received a reply to this letter from A. B. Horn, Jr., American Consul in Mexico City, two and a half months later. He wrote:

The Ambassador requested before departing on a European trip that I reply to your letter of December 17, 1958, as soon as we had obtained information that might be useful to you in obtaining permission for the Mexican Government to recover the sunken galleon which you discovered off the coast of Quintana Roo. In view of what seems to be a very important historical find, the Embassy is interested in furthering any project that will add to the world's treasury of knowledge. We have made a number of inquiries among local officials and are endeavoring to obtain as much information as may be helpful.

There are several Mexican Government offices interested in archaeological explorations and discoveries. In addition, there are state and local government interests, institutional

interests, to be taken into consideration including the attitudes of various groups and the citizenry of Cozumel Island and of Quintana Roo. Coordination of these interests appears to be an essential element in carrying your project forward. As we gather information in this regard we will send it to you.

So far as the Federal Government is concerned, the right to authorize the issuance of permits for marine explorations lodges in the Ministry of the Navy. Dr. Davalos, the Director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, believes that a Navy permit would be in the form of a contract and that the contract would include stipulations regarding the ownership of any recovered articles. According to Dr. Davalos, Mexican law reserves to the Mexican nation the ownership of all recovered artifacts of an archaeological, historical, or artistic nature. With respect to any recovered treasure in the form of gold or other precious metal, he believes the Mexican Treasury would probably claim a percentage. We are checking on this. If the treasure were in the form of coins, Dr. Davalos' Institute would be interested in "several pieces" for preservation in a museum.

On receiving your letter, Dr. Davalos wrote to the Ministry of Education which in turn took the matter to the Navy. Two factors have contributed to the Navy not having replied yet. Firstly, your request is the first of its type received, as all previous inquiries regarding archaeological explorations have reportedly been related to discoveries on land. Secondly, bureaucratic changes associated with the new Government taking office last fall have affected the promptness at which decisions are made. Dr. Davalos said he would write to you as soon as he hears from the Navy.

The Embassy is endeavoring to obtain copies of any laws and regulations governing the exploration of archaeological discoveries of a marine type and the disposition of the findings. We will also try to find out if a contract with the Federal Government might take care of all other interests.

There seems to be concern, both local and national, that if considerable treasure is found, Mexico might lose control of its patrimony. Your having interested the world-renowned Smithsonian Institution in your venture might be of considerable importance, particularly if that institution were to take an active part in negotiating with the Mexican authorities.

2

There were other forces at play which slowed the action of the Mexican government to near-glacial pace. My reports in *The Saturday Evening Post* had transformed our lonely wreck into a famous, intriguing, underwater objective. Many people, including a number of wealthy Texans, with high connections in Mexico City, brought strong pressure to bear in order to obtain permission to dive on the wreck. The Mexican government itself found, as Horn pointed out, that there were no laws on the books regarding marine archaeological and treasure-hunting expeditions.

Then there was Pablo Bush Romero.

Pablo Bush is a fifty-four-year-old business tycoon in Mexico City, a suave, gray-haired, energetic man with interests that range from his Ford agency, the largest in Mexico City, to big-game hunting in India and Africa. He is, among other things, president of a Mexican skin-diving organization called *Club de Exploraciones y Deportes Acuáticos de Mexico* (CEDAM). Bush and CEDAM are very popular in the high circles of the Mexican government. Many government officials served on the board of governors of the club. CEDAM had staged several expeditions, including a hunt for the lost vessels of Hernando Cortés off Veracruz and a search for Aztec gold in a volcanic lake near Mexico City. CEDAM had also sponsored the placing of a large bronze statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico, underwater at Acapulco, a feat that earned the club nationwide praise and publicity.

Pablo Bush, having learned of the wreck at Matanceros, concluded that exploitation of the site was a job for Mexican nationals working under the jurisdiction of CEDAM. Accordingly, he petitioned the government in behalf of CEDAM for permission. Then he made a scouting trip to Cozumel Island.

Bob Marx, uncertain of how he should greet our newest competitor for the wreck, dodged him.

But even Pablo Bush, with his high connections, did not have an easy time of it. Months rolled by while he and CEDAM lawyers negotiated on the wording of the permission, and fought off the rough competition from Texas. Meanwhile, Marx and I renewed our letters to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, urging that we, as original discoverers of the wreck, be granted the permission.

Consul Horn replied:

I called on Dr. Eusebio Davalos, Director of the Institute of Anthropology and History. He informed us that since the Embassy's previous inquiries, a decision had been made by the Federal authorities to transfer jurisdiction relating to archeological discoveries in coastal waters from the Institute of Anthropology and History to the Ministry of National Patrimony. He suggested, therefore, that the matter in which you are interested be pursued in that Ministry. As the Mexican Government offices are generally out on holiday until June 1, we will have to wait until after that date to make further inquiries in accordance with the request in your letter.

There is a great deal of excitement in Mexico at present regarding the reported theft on January 31, 1959 from the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City of the famous Mexican sculpture of Aztec origin known as the "Coyote Emplumado." There are many references in the local press to poor protection being given to Mexican archeological treasures. Such publicity is likely to increase both justified and unjustified Mexican public suspicions and fears regarding explorations by foreigners of Mexican archeological sites.

In your letter of December 17, 1958 to Ambassador Hill you mentioned that the Smithsonian Institution is vitally interested in your reports on the sunken galleon off the coast of Quintana Roo. It occurs to us that if the Smithsonian Institute were able to take active participation with you and other persons, such as Pablo Bush Romero in developing these findings, the prestige of that institution might be helpful in quieting fears regarding the purposes of the exploration.

As soon as we are able to discuss this matter further with

officials of the Ministry of National Patrimony, we will try to get you some helpful answers to your most recent questions.

While I continued to fight the red tape and gobbledygook in Mexico City, Marx, stalling for time on Cozumel, got together with Pablo Bush, and said we *might* work with CEDAM. But Marx refused to sign a written agreement until we knew the final outcome of my efforts in Mexico City. All this was wasted intrigue. Unknown to us, Pablo Bush, with his high connections in the Mexican government, was continually informed of our every move.

Marx and I exchanged several letters, debating whether we should cast our lot with Pablo Bush or fight him. For a few more weeks, we continued the fight. However, our intelligence in Mexico City soon informed us that Pablo Bush was certain to get the official permission. Then, about that time, Bob Marx and I received a conciliatory letter from Bush, who seemed anxious to include both of us on any expedition to the wreck.

In his letter to Marx, Bush offered to allow Marx one half of the treasure recovered from the wreck after the Mexican government had deducted its 50 per cent share. The word "treasure," as defined by the Mexican law, applied only to precious metals, such as gold and silver. It did not apply to "archaeological artifacts," which would include such objects as crucifixes, spoons, plates, bottles, and other items which we called "goodies." Under the new Mexican law concerning galleons, archaeological artifacts remain the property of the Mexican government with one exception: when a large number of the same items are discovered, the finder can keep some of the duplicates under terms to be negotiated with the Mexican government. Although there was no absolute assurance that either CEDAM or the Mexican government would honor its commitment with a foreign national if a treasure was discovered, and the prospect of negotiating with the government to retain a share of the goodies appeared to be a lifetime work, the offer from Bush seemed, none the less, a generous gesture indeed.

3

We were convinced that Bush was playing fair with us. Nevertheless, we were determined to avoid a repetition of the *Aduana* snafu of the year before, and to get a solid commitment from CEDAM to split the treasure with Bob Marx. Thus I wrote Bush a letter, part of which follows.

Thank you for your letter of May 13 inviting me to join your diving expedition at Cozumel to begin around July 15. I am most pleased to accept, providing some of the following discussions and conditions are well understood in advance.

1. *Official Permission from the Mexican Government.* As you know Marx and I staged an expedition to Matanceros at great expenditure of money and effort only to have it torpedoed by the *Aduana*. I have been trying without success since last July to obtain official permission from the Mexican government to return to the wreck site. You say in your letter "Our Club has the only concession given out to explore the sunken ships on our coasts." Yet in the newspaper clipping you sent me it is reported: "If present plans are carried out CEDAM's first official expedition scheduled to occupy a month or more will start from Mexico City around the 10th following the signing of an agreement with the federal authorities to establish clearly the rights of the parties involved."

Now, my question is: do you have official permission from the Mexican government in writing, with all the terms clearly spelled out, or are you still in the negotiating stage? If you have such permission. I would very much like to see a copy of it, if this is convenient. Before embarking on the expedition I think it is imperative that official permission be obtained and that the authorities on Cozumel and in Quintana Roo be notified of this permission by the federal government.

2. *Terms of your agreement with Bob Marx.* As I understand it from Marx, your club has agreed, in return for his information, experience, and diving equipment, to give Bob

Marx half of whatever is recovered from the wrecks off Quintana Roo, after the federal government's share has been deducted. For the sake of all parties I believe this agreement should be in writing. A letter from you to Marx agreeing to those terms will be sufficient, provided such letter spells out explicitly what the government's "share" will amount to, and any such agreement between you and Marx should have attached a copy of the official government permission, and refer to it specifically. I would like to see a copy of all these agreements, please. A time element should be specified. That is to say, I assume the official government permission contains a terminal date, and the terminal date of the agreement between yourself and Marx should correspond.

Bush replied promptly:

I have received your lengthy, interesting, and most welcome letter, which has been read and reread by all of our Board of Directors. We are in agreement with most all of its contents, if not all.

Point One: We have the official permission from the Mexican Government. The *only* one given so far as we know by the present regime. We believe it is the intention of our government to give these permits only to our *Nationals*. We are sure that if we do a good job in Quintana Roo, we will get without any trouble all permits we can work, in any part of our coast line. We are reasonably sure that we shall get preference over any other person or institutions. All permits have to be more or less pin-pointed and are for one year. Our Board does not find it advisable to send a copy of our permit at this present moment, but it can be seen and read by any one that you authorized in Mexico. At the present moment we do not have it available as the Government is on vacation until June 1st. It has to be signed by two Ministries and it lacks the signature of one of them, but all is in the clear.

The permission clearly states that we have to conform to the law of treasures and archeological and historical relics. The law says that in so far as treasures are concerned, when not found on your own property (such as is the case on sunken ships), half goes to the Mexican Government. We will have a Government representative with us to see that this is

carried out. The law on archeological and historical relics says that all goes to the government. That they [Mexican Government] can give the finders one duplicate of each object found if they do not need it for Museums, etc. You can see by this that we have very little chance of keeping anything archeological or historical. Only the glory of finding it. This is the law and we have to conform with it.

Point Two: I have personally conducted all negotiations with Bob Marx. I have made two trips to Cozumel. On the first trip he would not even talk to me. On the second trip I thought I had made it. We had very nice talks. Then when I wrote him he did not answer my letter. I wrote again and he finally wrote me and we have ironed out what I thought was our last difference. I quote you part of my letter to Bob Marx on April 27th:

'I have already stated that on ships that you have located and that we know nothing about you can have half of our share. You can also have a part of anything that is recovered from any ship where you take part and assist in the diving.'

Pablo Bush closed his letter "For Treasure or Pleasure," a salutation borrowed from Bob Marx who, in turn, had borrowed it from the numismatist Robert Nesmith. In time, with the exception of government officials, all those corresponding on the wreck at Matanceros closed their letters in that fashion. And Bob Marx's word for the wreck's artifacts—goodies—came to be accepted officially by the Mexican authorities.

On June 30, Consul Horn of the U.S. Embassy wrote:

The Mexican Government now seems to be crystallizing its policies regarding marine explorations and it is hoped that the following information will be useful to you:

With regard to your letter of June 2, 1959 and mine of May 15, 1959, Mr. Gershenson and I have called on Sr. Juan Orozco Gonzalez, Director of the Department of National Property of the Ministry of National Patrimony. He informed us that:

1. The Ministry of National Patrimony has recently been given authority over the issuing of permission to explore

territorial waters with the advice of the Department of the Navy and the Institute of Anthropology and History.

2. Permits good for one year and limited to a specific area should be applied for in writing as follows:

Sr. Juan Orozco Gonzalez
Director de Bienes Nacionales
Patrimonio Nacional
Moneda #4
Mexico, D. F.

- a.* indications of the specific area to be explored.
- b.* method of exploration.
- c.* amount of time needed to complete explorations.
- d.* names of the persons who will do the exploring.
- e.* indication of the reliability and financial ability of the explorers.

Mr. Orozco said that on receiving an application his office would seek the advice of the other mentioned government agencies before making a decision.

3. Sr. Pablo Bush Romero will probably receive the first permit to be issued.

We were still unnecessarily worried about that one last signature on Bush's permission. At the eleventh hour I wired Señor Orozco to confirm the fact that Bush actually had the permission. He in turn replied (in a telegram dictated by Bush, I learned later) that the contract, properly signed, had been given to Bush on July 10. With that Walter Bennett and I made our plane reservations for Cozumel.

4

Meanwhile, in the States, I began readying some special equipment for the expedition. I shipped a Hookah rig to Marx by air freight. On a trip to California, I bought some new regulators—Aquamasters—which could be used either with the Hookah or the tanks, face plates, snorkels, spears, fins, and other items from Bob and Bill Meistrell at Dive N' Surf in Redondo Beach. The engineer from Houston, John Bender,

who furnished the galvanometer the year before, made final adjustments on two metal detectors (one for land, one for underwater) which he built especially for the expedition's use. I contacted Bender and made arrangements to pick up the detectors, and a young friend of Bender's, Jon Kalb. in New Orleans, on our way to Cozumel. Jon Kalb would operate and maintain the machines.

Marx had not been idle. He overhauled all of his diving gear, made arrangements for our boat and food, and reserved a thatch-roof hut for us in Acumal cove. He made a special scouting trip to Isla Mujeres, "Island of Women," about ninety miles north of Cozumel, where he had heard there were several cannon wrecks. On boat trips with tourists to the mainland of the Yucatan peninsula opposite Cozumel, he continued to search for wrecks, especially the two ships destroyed by Montejo at Punta Soliman in 1527, which, on the second expedition, we had to forgo because of the interference of the *Aduana*. Marx was certain he had located these two prizes. If he was correct, they would be a worthy objective for the CEDAM expedition—after Matanceros had been fully exploited.

While on one of these scouting expeditions to the Yucatan mainland, Marx had an extraordinary underwater experience.

Passing Punta Soliman with a boatload of tourists, as was his custom, he ordered the boat anchored. Then, alone, he dived over the side with face plate, snorkel, and flippers at a point where he had previously found what appeared to be an ancient grappling hook, believed to date from the Montejo period.

Swimming along the coral reef, Marx was suddenly aware of some strange thing in the water nearby. Taking a deep breath, he submerged and eased toward it. As Marx closed in, he slowed his pace. He could see that the submerged thing was enormous—seemingly the size of a whale. Marx stared wide-eyed at the "thing" which, according to Marx, "had a very humanlike face." It returned the stare and then seemed to laugh: "He—he—he—he—he."

Marx, stupefied by fear and excitement, backed slowly

toward the boat and shouted for the Mexican boatman, who could see the huge shape underwater near Marx, to load and pass to him the powerful speargun, which the Meistrells had furnished us for the second expedition. While the awe-struck tourists looked on, Bob grabbed the gun and closed in on the 20-foot beast. He brought the gun to within a foot of the face, noting the monster had whiskers and "arms, hands, and breasts, just like a woman."

In the excitement both the boatman and Marx had forgotten to cock the gun. When Marx nervously pulled the trigger, the released spear simply slid out and lightly touched the monster. When that happened, the beast charged past Marx "like a freight train" and disappeared in the distance, "laughing" insanely as it went.

By then Marx had regained his senses and realized at once what he had been dealing with: a manatee, sometimes called a "sea cow." These rare, huge, lumbering beasts of the sea, with their humanlike faces and breasts, are believed to have inspired the myth of the mermaid. Few men in recent times have seen one. No diver had ever speared one. Marx was determined not to let it get away. He searched the water for hours. Then he traded his gun for a camera, put on an aqualung, and swam in toward the reef.

Some distance from the anchored boat, Marx noted a slight change in the temperature and visibility of the water, indicating fresh water flowing out to sea. Turning, he followed the flow until, close to the reef, he spied a cave near the ocean bottom. Camera in hand, he dived down and poked his head into the opening. It was an exit point of some underground fresh-water river or spring.

Moved by curiosity, Marx swam cautiously inside the cave. It was pitch-black but he determined to go "another ten feet." Having swum those ten feet he decided to advance another ten. As he slid along in the inky blackness, small fish, panicked by his presence, rushed past, brushing his face plate and body. Then all at once Marx heard a familiar sound in the distance: "He—he—he—he—he." It was unmistakably the manatee. Its "laughter" seemed to come from deep inside the cave.

Marx swam on until, far in the distance, he could see a faint patch of light. Reaching this, he surfaced into a heretofore undiscovered, jungle-ringed, fresh-water lagoon. Marx thought that it must be a home for the manatees who came and went through the underground cave connecting the lagoon and the sea.

Submerging again, Marx explored the bottom of the lagoon. Rounding a corner of a rock, about ten feet down, he came face to face with the manatee. There were two others, smaller in size (no more than twelve or fifteen feet), behind the first. Quickly Marx brought his camera to bear, but when he moved his arms all three manatees, "laughing" hideously, swam for the bottom and buried themselves in clouds of mud. Marx waited for the water to clear and made one more effort with the camera, but when he approached them the manatees again stirred up the silt. It was then near sunset, so Marx felt his way underwater back to the cave, and swam out to sea.

When we learned of the strange encounter with these rare beasts, we added the lagoon to the list of areas to be explored on the CEDAM expedition.

5

Pablo Bush, a tireless worker, seasoned diplomat, and first-class cumshaw artist, was determined to make this greatest of all CEDAM expeditions a whopping success. In Mexico City, as the time of departure drew near, he worked night and day assembling supplies and equipment. In addition to the tons of ordinary diving gear, such as aqualungs, face plates, flippers, weights, and compressors, he provided: a light plane, helicopters (from the Mexican Navy), a jeep, a motorcycle with a sidecar, a decompression chamber, a land metal detector, tools, and two aluminum boats with outboard motors.

Through a friend, Bush made contact with George Clark of Chattanooga, Tennessee, president of the Yucatan Exploring Society (YES). YES agreed to join the expedition and to furnish a yacht, the *Pinch Hitter*, and three outboard boats and

other equipment. On Cozumel, Bush made arrangements with Raul Gonzalez to supply a diving boat, the *Marlin*, and to furnish the mainland camp with a cook, food, and water. Captain Arguelles, our old friend from Acumal, agreed to make available his sturdy two-masted schooner, the *Cozumel*, for lifting cannon or anchors, and for hauling heavy supplies between Cozumel and the mainland camp.

Under the rules CEDAM had circulated throughout Mexico, anyone so inclined could join the expedition for a price of 100 pesos (about \$8) a day. By the beginning of July a host of Mexican air-line pilots, erstwhile movie stars, and adventurers had signed on. Meanwhile Bush had recruited a team of Mexico's ablest divers. These included Carlos "Pete" Garcia-Robles, an engineer from Campeche, and Alfonso and Reginald Arnold, leading a team of eight able Acapulco underwater men, including Toribio Dorantes, the first man in the world to water-ski on one bare foot.

There were also a goodly share of misfits, governmental officials, and camp followers. In the first category there was an elderly diviner, equipped with mysterious capsules and gadgets which he claimed would lead him unerringly to gold. The Mexican government was represented by the Chief of the Navy frogmen, Commander Alphonso Argudin, his assistant, an archaeologist from the Ministry of National Patrimony, and a member of the secret police whose precise mission was never revealed. Finally, there were scores of Mexican newsmen who splashed our activities on the front pages in Mexico City for about twenty consecutive days.

By that time, two other American divers, friends of Bob Marx, had joined the U.S. contingent. These were Robert Allen and John Frizzle of East Lansing, Michigan, both druggists who had visited Cozumel often and who had previously dived on the wreck at Matanceros. They would work with Walter Bennett, Marx, Jon Kalb, the youthful metal-detector operator from Houston, and me, from Joaquin's boat, the *Aguilucho*, and share our thatch-roof hut in Acumal.

Marx was alarmed at the growing size of the expedition. As

near as we could calculate, there were already sixty Mexicans signed on. These, together with George Clark's contingent from Chattanooga, amounting to some ten men, our hard-core, six-man diving team on the *Aguilucho*, plus other assorted Mexicans and Americans who had indicated they were coming, put the total at over a hundred men. "If all these people dive, it will be very crowded on the wreck," Marx wrote. "But if it becomes impossible to work, we can always slip down the coast and dig on the Montejo ships."

6

In mid-July, Pablo Bush assembled an air armada consisting of an Aero Commander, two DC-3s and a C-82 Flying Boxcar in Mexico City to transport CEDAM and its equipment to Cozumel Island. The newsmen, divers, and other members of CEDAM climbed aboard the Aero Commander and the two DC-3s. The heavy gear, including two boats, outboard motors, the jeep and motorcycle, decompression chamber, electrical generators, refrigerators, Hookah diving rigs, medical supplies, picks, shovels, metal lifting baskets, and countless other items, were loaded on the Boxcar. Then all four planes set out for their refueling stop, Campeche.

The air trip proceeded without incident, until the Boxcar pilot noted one of his engines had developed an oil leak. An effort was made to repair it at Campeche; meanwhile, the three other planes left for Cozumel. At Cozumel's airport, a large number of islanders congregated to welcome the expedition, and to join in a ceremony during which CEDAM presented a miniature of the submerged statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the church on Cozumel.

Shortly after this ceremony, CEDAM members gathered at Raul Gonzalez' cottage hotel at Cozumel's San Juan Beach. By then George Clark's *Pinch Hitter* had arrived after a rough trip from Key West. Bob Marx joined the group—some seventy people—and there was much hand-shaking and expressions of



Disaster strikes at outset of the third expedition: the wreckage of a Flying Boxcar which was hauling equipment to Cozumel. Photo courtesy Pablo Bush Romero.

felicitude all around. Then, a few minutes later, Pablo Bush received a stunning report: The Boxcar had crashed!

Bush immediately sent off a party in the Aero Commander to survey the crash scene. Meanwhile, via radio, he pieced together the dreadful story. Ten minutes after its take-off from Campeche the Boxcar had lost one engine. The pilot was seeking an emergency landing strip when the second engine failed. Powerless, the heavily laden Boxcar lost altitude quickly. Picking out a road, the pilot made ready for a forced landing. At the last minute, a jeep appeared on the road. Swerving to avoid it, the pilot plunged the Boxcar into the bordering jungle. The wings of the plane were sheared off and the fuselage burst into flames.

The Boxcar is a notorious deathtrap. Very few men have ever walked away from the crash landing of a Boxcar, particularly in a jungle. However, all four men on the plane were either thrown clear or managed to crawl to safety before the plane's gasoline tanks exploded. Several hours passed before Bush

received the welcome news that there were no deaths or injuries. When that word came, he said, "It is a miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe." Few of the Mexicans felt willing to challenge this statement.

The men on the plane had survived, but the bulk of CEDAM's equipment, valued at about twenty thousand dollars, had been completely destroyed. Even so, no one wanted to cancel the expedition. Thus, plans were made to proceed with the gear, such as aqualungs, a few tents, and other supplies, which the Mexican divers had stowed on the other planes. Bush embarked the group on the *Pinch Hitter* to set up camp in Acumal. Meanwhile, he sent some men to find a replacement for the most critical piece of equipment: a high-volume air compressor, used to fill the aqualungs rapidly. They found one and transported it to Acumal, but the flywheel was not the proper size for the gasoline engine which had been obtained separately.

Unaware of this setback, Walter Bennett and I departed from Washington, D.C. In New Orleans, we met Houston engineer John Bender and the metal-detector operator, Jon Kalb. Gathering up the bulky machinery, we boarded a plane for Mérida, Yucatan. We arrived late and missed our Tamsa connection to Cozumel. Since the next plane for Cozumel did not leave for another three days, we chartered an ancient-looking twin-engine Beechcraft. After making an unsuccessful search at the air-freight office for my Hookah unit, which we knew had still not arrived on Cozumel, we climbed into the plane. We instructed the Mexican pilot to fly over the mainland camp site at Acumal on the way to Cozumel Island.

Our route took us over the ancient Maya ruin of Chichén-Itzá. It was a captivating sight from the air—tall Egyptianlike pyramids and domes rising out of the thick jungle, reflecting the reddish late-afternoon sun. Soon we reached the bleak coast line at a point south of Punta Matanceros and Acumal. The pilot turned the plane north. A few moments later we passed over the easily identifiable, treacherous Matanceros, and then Acumal cove, which was now strangely alive with



Aerial view of Acumal cove. Photo by Genaro Hurtado.

boats and people. As we buzzed the beach, lined with tents and flags, CEDAM members ran out and waved. Having dipped our wings, we set out across the water, and just after sundown landed at Cozumel's airport. Bob Marx was there to greet us.

Although he, too, had been disheartened by the loss of the Boxcar, Marx seemed in his element. At long last we were set to tackle the mystery galleon at Matanceros. The camp at Acumal was well organized. We had four large ships, the *Pinch Hitter*, the *Cozumel*, the *Marlin*, and the *Aguilucho*, and three outboards, furnished by Clark's YES group. There were plenty of diving tanks, and there would soon be a replacement high-volume air compressor. We had all of our gear from the year before—with the exception of my Hookah, which was still lost somewhere in the labyrinth of the Mexican air-freight offices. Best of all, the expedition was fully approved by the government.

However, diving expeditions, like wars, seldom go according to plan. Apart from endless mundane complications, divers must always deal with that mysterious spook which seems to

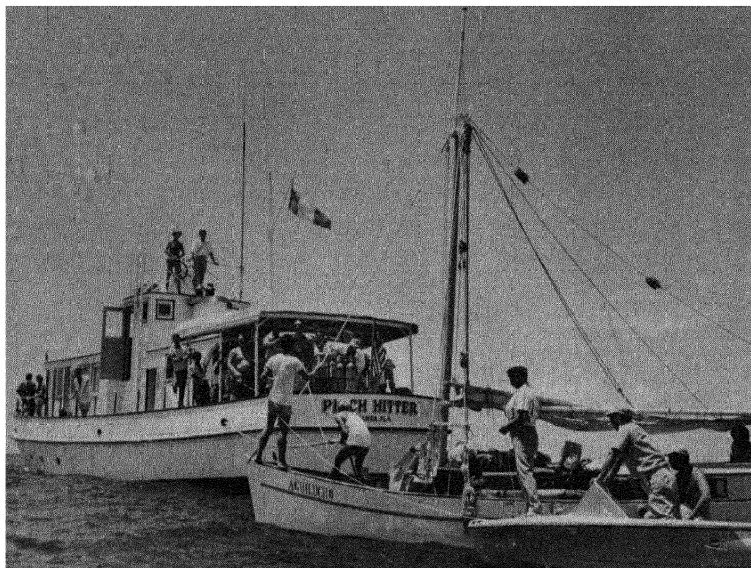
haunt every wreck. The loss of my Hookah and the Boxcar crash were clear proof he was already at work on our expedition. Before his work was completed, we would face almost every conceivable adversity: bad weather; a prolonged food crisis; near-fatal diving accidents; and finally, a threatened attack by armed Latin American revolutionary forces.

7

That night, after making our plans to depart for Acumal on the *Pinch Hitter* early on the following morning, we joined the Mexican group, and met Pablo Bush. We liked him instantly: he was obviously a man of great ability. Although the Boxcar loss had been a stiff blow, and we could detect a certain sadness because of it, Bush, a man who appeared to thrive on unexpected adversity, was pushing ahead with admirable energy and enthusiasm. He was still determined to make ours the greatest amateur diving expedition in history. After a few minutes in Pablo's company we were determined to help him succeed.

Bob Marx had sent most of our diving gear ahead to Acumal in the *Aguilucho*. Early on Sunday, July 19, we loaded the leftovers, including the metal detectors, on board the *Pinch Hitter*, and set off. George Clark and his *Pinch Hitter* crew, who had been working steadily for four days to help set up the camp and fill the gaps in the Mexican equipment, were already bone-tired but they greeted us affably and made our three-hour crossing to the mainland pleasant and comfortable. En route we engaged in prolonged discussion with Bush on various matters, including techniques to employ while diving on the wreck, safety precautions, and so on. I was designated leader of the U.S. contingent and given responsibility for their conduct; Bob Marx was to head all diving operations.

Unfortunately, the *Pinch Hitter* drew too much water to penetrate the reef at Acumal. Thus it was necessary to lay to outside the reef and transfer all supplies and equipment to



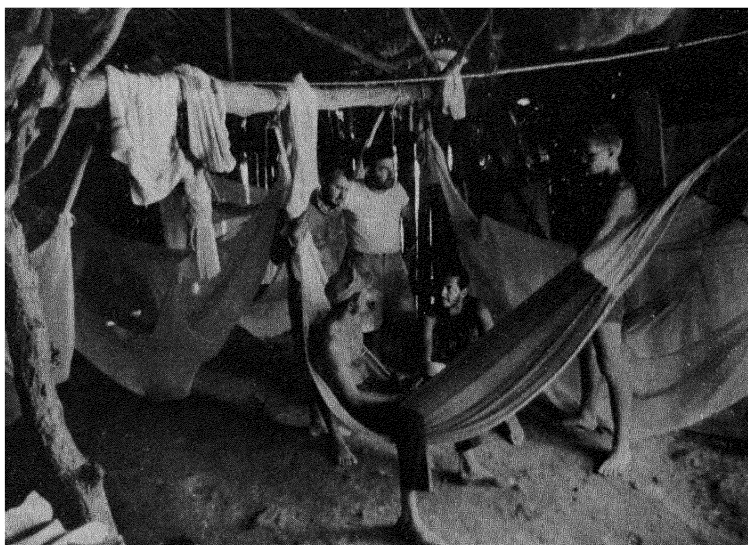
Off the reef at Acumal, the Pinch Hitter transfers supplies to smaller boats.

small shuttle boats such as the *Marlin* and the *Aguilucho*. Since there was a four- or five-foot sea running, this turned out to be a difficult, time-consuming, not to say somewhat perilous operation. But we reached the beach, without accident. There we were enthusiastically greeted by the Mexican divers, colorfully outfitted with bandannas and Indian feathers. In spite of the shortage of supplies, we observed that they had set up a camp which, compared to ours of the year before, was luxurious.

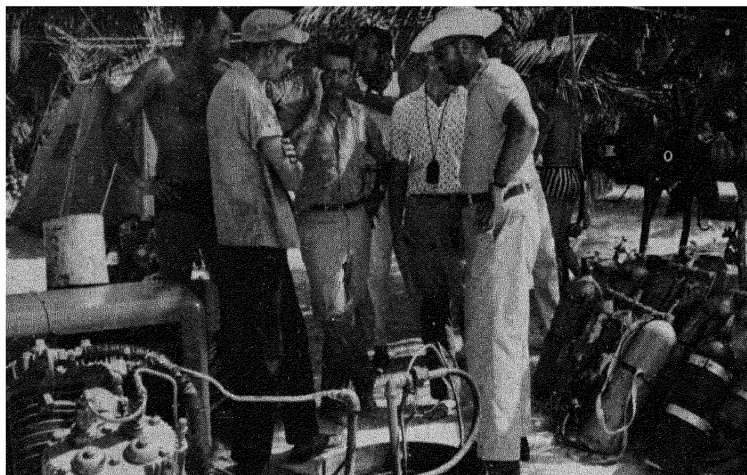
Bennett, Kalb, Allen, Frizzle, Marx, and I lugged our heavy equipment to the dilapidated Maya hut Marx had reserved for our use. (It was instantly named the "Acumal Hilton.") With the help of the *Aguilucho* crew, including our philosopher friend of the year before, Elias, who greeted us laughingly by saying, "*bonanza mañana*," we strung our Yucatan hammocks and mosquito netting. Then, completely enervated by our first heavy dose of tropical heat, we collapsed in our hammocks. During that time Bob Marx brought us up to date



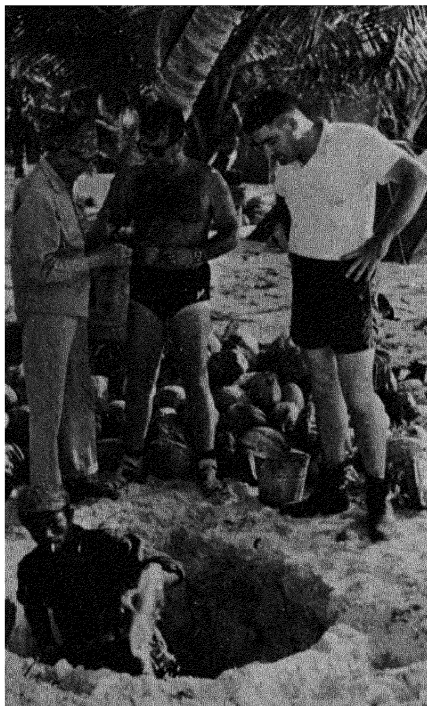
The “Acumal Hilton,” headquarters for the American contingent.



Inside the “Acumal Hilton” the men strung Yucatan hammocks.



In Acumal camp, alongside air tanks and high-volume compressor, the divers discuss a problem.



Diviner claims his gadgets will lead him to gold. While workman digs, Blair looks on skeptically.

on the plane crash and other events. "I showed the divers here where to find the wreck," he said, "but without any air, they have not been able to do much diving."

In the late afternoon, we joined the throng of Mexicans near Pablo Bush's headquarters tent, meeting people and taking the measure of our new diving companions. At first it was difficult to distinguish the Mexican divers from the Mexican newsmen and other hangers-on. However, one man was easy to pick out: the diviner. He was already walking the beach with his capsules and gadgets searching for gold. The Mexican divers, tough and caustic like divers the world over, had already nicknamed him *El Brujo*, "The Witch."

Our camp headquarters lacked one element: a nautical ornament.

Bob Marx said, "What about the old cannon washed up on the beach at Matanceros?" I winced when I recalled our laborious hike and struggle to move it the year before.

"With all these men and the truck, it'd be a cinch," Marx said. I agreed.

The "truck," which was owned by Captain Arguelles, was something to behold. Basically, it was an ancient Ford which



The truck. Photo by Bob Allen.



While men prepare to haul cannon from the reef, Bob Allen (left), Blair (center), and Marx (right), test new metal detector on beach at Matanceros.



Lifting cannon to truck. A big load.

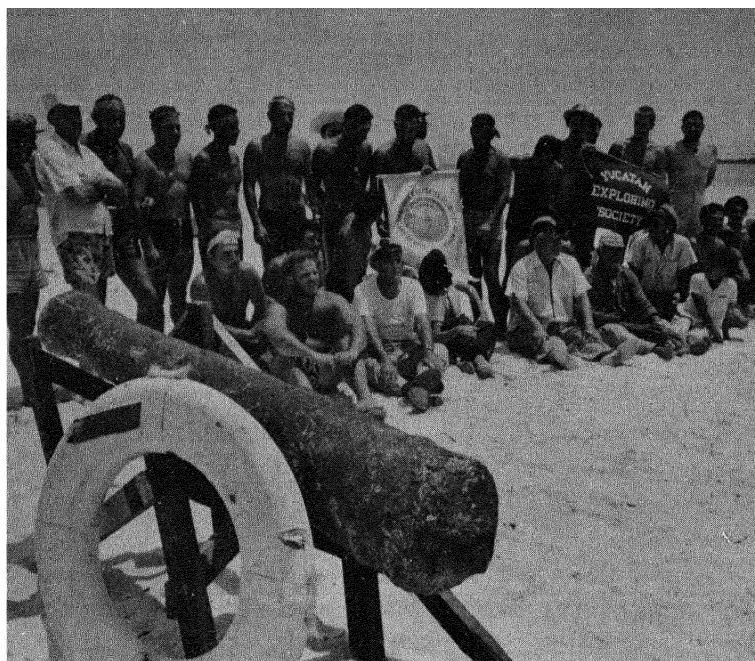
had been modified through the decades by, it appeared, scraps from shipwrecks. In the year previous, it had not been running at all. This year Captain Arguelles had "repaired" it, and was using it to transport coconuts from the grove to the beach at Acumal. Its motor, if it could be called that, was an ancient creation of some mechanical maniac; its wiring hung loosely together. The truck's top speed was about five miles per hour; every quarter of a mile the radiator boiled over.

About fifteen men jumped into the bed of the truck and we wheezed off through the jungle trailway, ducking the heavy palm fronds. After a half-dozen stops we arrived, about an hour later, on the beach behind Punta Matanceros. Carrying rope and poles we scurried down to the rusty cannon which was still as we had left it the year before: high and dry on the "iron" reef.

Three poles were strung to the cannon; fourteen men manned the poles. Even with such manpower we could barely



Pushing the truck.

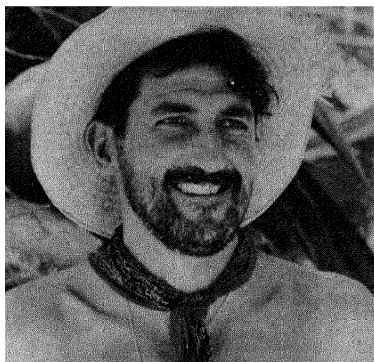


Divers of the third expedition pose on beach at Acumal.

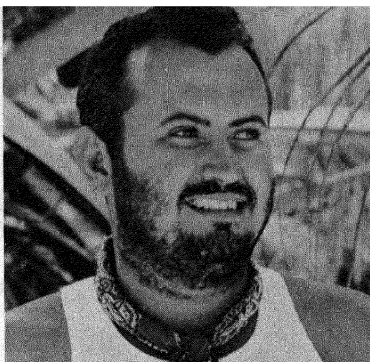
lift that massive piece of iron. We would shout, "All together now, LIFT," strain our utmost, and stumble along the rocky beach in unstable, ten-foot spurts. Two hours later, fourteen very worn-out men levered the cannon up a ramp to the bed of the truck.

The truck's engine coughed, sputtered, and died. No amount of tinkering or cranking (there was no battery) would start it. Sadly, there was nothing to do but push. Still the engine refused to start. A half-mile later, we gave out. Leaving the truck where it was, we hiked four miles back to camp, arriving just in time for a Mexican dinner, prepared by our camp cook.

A couple of days later the truck was "repaired" and returned to camp. The cannon was placed on a frail wooden frame in front of the headquarters tent. That was our second and last dismal experience with the cannon from the beach at Matanceros. I vowed never to return there again.



Pete.



Reggie.



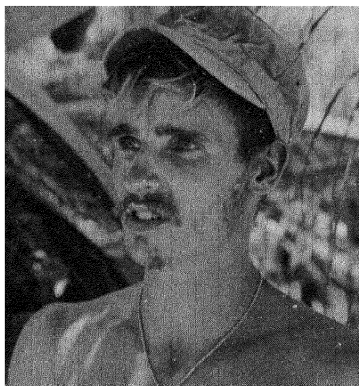
Al.



Pablo Bush Romero.



Bennett. Photo by Clay Blair.



Bob Marx.



Clay Blair.

8

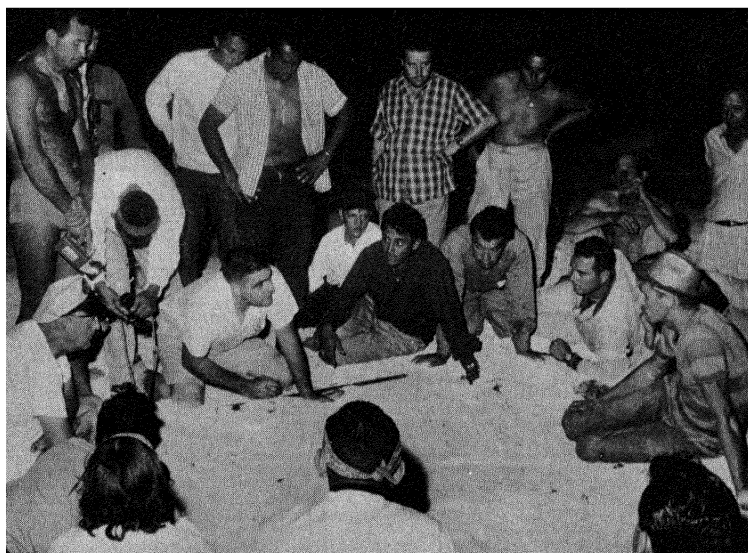
That first night in camp, Pablo Bush called a seaside assembly of all campers to explain the purpose of the expedition, the legal limitations, the safety rules, and the method of exploring the galleon. He spoke first in Spanish and then in English.

"Gentlemen," he said, "as you all know, the authorities of the Mexican government have granted CEDAM exclusive rights to explore the wrecks on the coast of Mexico. We are happy to have with us an American contingent. The latter are here as our guests. The Americans understand the rules we must follow, the rules laid down by the Mexican government. We must all work in an atmosphere of co-operation and friendliness. Let us remember that this is the first Mexican-United States diving expedition in history and all eyes will be watching us. The future of any such expedition may depend on our conduct."

He then explained that because of his experience in diving on the wreck, Bob Marx had been placed in charge of diving operations and that certain rules would be adhered to. These included: 1) all men would pair off and dive as teams; 2) all Hookah diving would be conducted from one boat, the *Agui-*

lucho, and no tank divers would use that boat; 3) all goodies raised would be turned in on one boat and would later be processed in camp; 4) to avoid possible injury to other divers and to avoid attracting sharks there would be absolutely no spear-fishing on the wreck site; 5) no dynamite or other explosives would be used on the reef; and 6) a shark lookout might be designated if it proved necessary.

On the *Pinch Hitter*, Bob Marx and I had agreed that the first step in the diving should be to construct an underwater map of the wreck site so that we could scientifically guide the divers to the most lucrative areas. In the past, our diving on the wreck had been a sporadic, hit-or-miss proposition, almost all of it carried out directly off the candelabra-shaped tree marker on the beach. It was possible that north or south of this marker there were other rich areas, perhaps even the coral-covered hulk of the galleon itself.



On the beach at night, Blair outlines mapping plans to Mexican divers.

Having explained the diving rules, Pablo Bush then introduced me formally. I constructed a scale model of the reef in the sand and described our idea for the making of the map. I told them we would place three buoys 200 yards to sea off the reef, defining a huge rectangular area parallel to the beach (shades of the *Monitor!*). A line 200 yards long, marked every 10 yards, would be strung from the beach to the first buoy. The divers would be stationed along the line at the markers. Then the whole group would proceed to swim from the north buoy toward the south. A man on the beach would "walk" along the line slowly; on the opposite end, at sea, a boat would move forward from one buoy to the next.

Bob Allen and I would follow the procession in a small boat. If a diver spotted an unusual object he would surface and notify us. We would come alongside and note the object's correct position on the scale map, co-ordinates being determined by the man's position on the line and the distance covered on the beach. Meanwhile, the diver would mark the object by driving a flagged spike into the reef. Once we had completely "swept" the entire reef in this fashion, setting down the position of all the cannons and anchors and other unusual objects, we would have a clear idea of the position of the wreck and its cargo. Moreover, the important objects on the bottom could be easily relocated by spotting the flagged spikes.

It was late by the time I finished outlining this grandiose plan. Even so the men hurried about to prepare equipment for the search. Some dug square holes in the sand and cast blocks of cement to serve as anchors for the sea buoys. Others made flags and attached them to the buoys. Jon Kalb made up several larger flags which we proposed to erect on the beach parallel to the sea buoys in order to define more clearly the rectangle to be searched. Bob Allen began the painstaking work of blocking out graph paper, which we had neglected to include in our gear, to serve as the basis for the map.

We turned to our hammocks feeling that the expedition was moving ahead nicely. There was, in fact, only a single sour note. The Mexicans, we detected from our talks that evening, believed that we already knew the location of the treasure of

Matanceros, and that our "map" plan might well be only a show. "They figure we found it last year," Marx said, "and are using the expedition as a legal means of claiming half of it, after the government's share."

We made a point from then on to stress over and over that we found only goodies the year before, and that we had buried only goodies on the beach. I believe we convinced Pablo Bush of the truth of this statement, and, later, some of the Mexican divers. However, even at the expedition's end, there were some Mexicans who believed we were holding out.

9

Was there in fact a treasure of Matanceros? Our opinion, then, was that the wreck was a richly laden English merchantman bound for New World ports. We believed she had probably made one stop in the New World to exchange a small portion of her cargo for gold or silver. Moreover, we were certain that her captain would have carried some gold to pay the crew, to make repairs, and for trading purposes, and very possibly there were wealthy passengers on board with jewels and coins of their own. Beyond this, we did not believe, at first, that the ship held "treasure."

Yet there was Captain Arguelles' story of the four chests that we had heard the year before, and now, new evidence collected by Pablo Bush and other CEDAM members from people on Cozumel, who spoke more freely to their own countrymen than to Americans. The new evidence had been collected, checked, and prepared in the form of a document which was sworn to by certain prominent leaders on Cozumel. We studied this document with great care.

The Treasure of Matanceros

In the course of the year 1900, the schooner *Libertad*, Captain D. Patricio Rivero, was making one of her trading runs across the Caribbean, transacting business in the Territory of Quintana Roo, the Island of Cozumel, and British Honduras.

During one of these trips between the Island of Cozumel and Belize, when the schooner was just about to leave the wharf of this latter port, a Frenchman approached the ship, asking to see the captain to find out if it would be possible that he take him to the coast of the mainland of the Territory, and stating that he would be willing to work off his passage as a deckhand. Since the schooner was one man short, the captain saw no objection against taking on the new man.

Once aboard, the Frenchman learned that the schooner was headed for a point called Inah, opposite the Island of Cozumel, where a ship loaded with palo de campeche wood, in those days highly prized in the Colony with which they dealt, had run aground. So the Frenchman asked the captain if they were passing near a location called Matanceros. The captain replied in the affirmative, since it was along the course to Inah, but that they would not approach or land at that site. The Indians of Tulum were in the neighbourhood, and these were constantly fighting with whom they called Mexicans, and would deal only with the British. But the captain said he would try to get as close as possible to the coast, so that the Frenchman might get a good look at the place.

The Frenchman then told the captain and the other members of the crew that he was in possession of a map showing the place where a supposedly British ship had run aground in foul weather, which had compelled the ship to sail too close to the coast. He said that upon landing and burying the important treasure which the ship had been carrying, almost the entire crew had been exterminated by the Indians who roamed in that region, only the man who later on drew the map having escaped. He told them that he was willing to share the spoils with the captain and the crew, if anything was found.

While the schooner was sailing along the coast off Point Herrero, in the Espiritu Santo Bay, they spoke to a fishing boat and were informed by the crew that a ship had run aground on the Chinchorro bank with all its cargo and had been abandoned. So the captain decided to alter course and sail for Chinchorro, where they actually found the ship mentioned, taking off its cargo and transferring it to the schooner, to take it for sale to Belize. Unfortunately, on the way, the Frenchman fell ill with fever and upon arriving in port it was necessary to send him to the hospital.

The ship's cook, who was only a small boy and who did not know what the Frenchman had revealed to the captain and the crew, picked up all the Frenchman's belongings, among them the treasure map, put them in his sea-bag, took them to the hospital where the Frenchman had been interned.

The schooner's captain ordered that they sail immediately for Inah to see if it was still possible to take off the wrecked vessel anything which could be used, telling the Frenchman that upon his return he hoped to find him up and well again, to hunt for the treasure mentioned.

Upon his return, he received the bad news that the Frenchman had died and that two days before his death a sailor had presented himself to take charge of the Frenchman's belongings. The captain could not ascertain the identity of that sailor.

The captain, naturally, regretted having lost the map which he had seen and had in his hands.

The years passed. The captain continued his trading with the Indians, the Island, and the Colony. One day he was called urgently by one of the sailors who had been part of the crew when the Frenchman sailed with them.

"Captain," he told him, "I am about to die and I want to confess to you that it was I who got there before you did, in order to be able to get hold of the treasure map for my exclusive benefit. But now I am sorry for it, since in those days we could have shared it. It was I who got hold of his sea-bag and of the map, which is now in my possession.

"D. Patricio, hand me over that box on the table, open it, and you will find the map. All I want is that you solemnly swear right here beside my death bed that when you go and search for the treasure, you will take along my son Pedro, who is but a boy twelve years of age, and that you will hand over to him the share that would have been mine."

The captain swore that he would do so.

By then, the captain was an old man with a long beard, and once he had the map in his possession, he went to see Captain Claudio Canyo, one of his best friends, and told him: "Friend Claudio, did you ever believe in the existence of hidden treasures?"

The captain replied that all the region had always been the refuge of pirates and that it was quite feasible that some treasure had been buried somewhere in the neighbourhood.

"Claudio," the old captain of the schooner went on, "I have in my possession a map showing the exact site where an important treasure has been buried, and I invite you to share the find with me. Get hold of two men in whom you can trust and invite them to come along and dig it out, since for only two of us it would be very dangerous to attempt it."

Two days later, Captain Claudio came to see the captain of the schooner, telling him: "D. Patricio, we are all set. I have found two men in whom I can trust and a schooner ready, and we are only awaiting your orders to tell us when to sail; the weather is favorable to overcome the risks of that region."

"What about sailing tonight, Claudio?"

"Right you are, Captain. Let us meet at eight P.M. at the corner near the wharf and take off."

At the hour set, the men gathered at the place indicated. When D. Patricio saw that the other two men were armed, as a precaution he called Pedro and told him:

"Look, Pedro, please take this note to Dona Serafina, my wife. Under no circumstances fail to deliver it to her personally, and then return. We'll be waiting for you. If anybody should ask you what I gave you, tell them it's simply a note for my wife."

The order was executed and when Pedro returned twenty minutes later, they all went to the little wharf, boarded ship, and set out for Matanceros (a name derived from the massacre which the Indians executed against the crew of the grounded vessel). There they landed with the aid of a small canoe which they had brought along.

"Look, Claudio, somewhere around here must be the cannon without carriage, which is the starting point to find the treasure." They commenced the search and after a little while Pedro shouted:

"Captain, the cannon is right here; it has dug head first into the sand."

They all rushed to see it. The captain sat down in front of the cannon, and seeing those men already in an argument and ready to kill Captain Claudio even before having located the treasure, he called them and said:

"Well, men, I am convinced that the treasure exists, since this cannon is the starting point on the map. We have found it, and upon some other occasion, when everybody has

calmed down, we shall come to dig it out. I do not have the map with me, since I sent it with Pedro to my wife before we left. After living for so many years, I have learned what ambition and cupidity can do to a man, and when I saw you armed, I knew what was going to happen. If you want to kill us, you can do so, but it won't do you any good, since you'd only have to flee from justice without any profit to you."

So they returned to the Island of Cozumel and Captain Patricio said: "Look, Claudio, the next time you, Pedro, and I shall go by ourselves, without inviting anybody else. I convinced myself that the cannon is there and that the Frenchman told the truth. I have to take a trip to Belize, but upon my return, my good friend, we shall go. Do not be impatient, there will be plenty of time to spend the money, if we find it."

So D. Patricio took off and Captain Canyo was offered the command of the coasting vessel *Alberto* for a trip to Vera Cruz, which he accepted. Upon his return they would meet again and search for the treasure. Don Patricio returned first, but a sick man, and a few days later he died, taking with him the secret of the site which he alone knew. Upon returning from his trip, Captain Claudio learned of the sad news.

One day, Don Claudio told Pedro: "It really is a shame that the map which we had in our possession, and which you in person took to D. Patricio's home, should have been lost, together with the secret about that important treasure."

Pedro, after having thought it over for a while, shyly told the captain: "Captain, I saw the plan which D. Patricio told me to take to his house, and though I do not quite understand what it meant, I remember that it showed a small cannon standing upright, a number 40 P with a W, something like a sponge with a P and 4 P with wings after that. That's all I remember. Captain, do you think you could do anything with it?"

"Yes, Pedro, of course, one of these days, you and I will go and dig it out." But a few days later, a severe hurricane struck, and nobody thought anymore about the great treasure.

Although that complicated tale smacked of fiction, it matched in substantial detail the story we had heard from Captain Arguelles and other sources in the area. As Bob Marx said, "There are many, many wrecks along this coast, any one of

which could be used as a basis for rumors of treasure. Yet we never hear anything about the others. It is always the wreck of Matanceros. I am convinced that something in the dim past, something concrete—or rather gold—happened to inspire these persistent stories of treasure at Matanceros.”

It was a telling point. The only problem was that in our eagerness to provide our camp site with a nautical ornament, we had moved the very cannon which, according to the story, had “pointed” to the treasure. No matter. We were now equipped with engineer Bender’s elaborate land metal detector. Moreover, as divers who instinctively shied away from “land digging” on that torrid beach, we still stubbornly clung to the belief that if there was treasure at Matanceros, we would find it underwater.

IO

We awoke—somewhat cramped after our first night’s sleep in the hammocks—at 0530. As usual at that time of the year in those latitudes, the sun was already bright. Marx, perhaps recalling his Marine Corps barracks days, routed us with salty language. We replied in kind. Our youngest member, Jon Kalb, the lone Texan, caught the brunt of Marx’s ribbing. In fact, Marx addressed him in the manner of a drill instructor at Parris Island lashing a new recruit. He labeled Kalb “Mo-Mo,” which, roughly translated from Marx’s slang, meant “idiot,” a nickname that stuck.

After a Spartan breakfast of coffee and tortillas, we picked up our diving equipment and waded out to our assigned boats in the cove. Then, beneath deep blue skies and billowy cumulus clouds, we cruised seaward toward Matanceros Point. On board the *Aguilucho* there was an atmosphere of joy and excitement. The Mexicans sang religious songs; the Americans cracked jokes. After months of anxiety, of frustrating hours spent writing letters, of hours preparing the equipment, we were, at last, underway for the wreck!

The events of the next few hours, no doubt influenced by our spook, changed our mood considerably. Everything on the mapping operation seemed to go wrong. The first sea buoy was dropped in place without incident, but the surf on the reef was tremendous. Nearly two hours passed before we strung the carefully marked line from the buoy to the beach, and that was accomplished only after two strong swimmers, including Bob Marx, battled the surge to the point of exhaustion. The powerful current then bowed the line into a great arc which made precise measurements impossible. Our communications with Mo-Mo, who was putting the larger flags in place on the beach, were primitive.

Finally, our twenty-six divers, wearing face plates, snorkels, and flippers, were stationed along the curving line. Bob Allen and I climbed into a small rowboat and took our position behind the line of divers. The graph paper, so laboriously put together by Bob Allen, was tacked to a board which I propped on my knees in the bow of the rowboat. Allen, in the stern, made ready the spikes and the small flags. On signal, the grand procession moved southward.



Underway in small boat the first day, Blair (bow) and Allen (stern) prepare to draw up map.

The Mexican divers who impressed us most were Al and Reggie Arnold of Acapulco. Carefree, fearless bachelors, when not participating in CEDAM expeditions and ceremonies Al and Reggie operated a skin-diving instruction service for tourists in Acapulco. The older brother, Al, twenty-eight, had served as an apprentice diver during a salvage operation on a sunken modern steel freighter near Acapulco; otherwise their underwater experience had been limited largely to sports diving. They had lost a jeep and much diving equipment in the Boxcar crash, but never complained. Bob Marx said, "Al Arnold is one of the best divers I have ever met."

Al was still suffering from a near-fatal diving accident which had occurred in Acapulco four months earlier. He had been spear-fishing with an aqualung at a depth of about 160 feet when his air began to run short. Preparing a routine return to the surface, Al pulled the reserve air supply on his tank. It was not functioning. Then suddenly Al had no air at all.

Desperately he finned toward the surface 150 feet above him. Under the circumstances, it was not possible to decompress. When he reached the surface alongside the diving boat, he was half unconscious. His boat crew pulled him aboard. Shortly afterward Al was stricken with "the bends." Rushed to a U.S. Navy hospital ship in San Diego, he was placed in a decompression chamber where he remained near death for eighty-six hours. He survived this record-breaking ordeal in the chamber only to be told by Navy doctors that he would be paralyzed from the waist down for the remainder of his life.

This news ill-suited Al Arnold who was, at heart, a swash-buckling adventurer. Moreover, it would severely impair his way of making a living which included, apart from diving, being an exhibition water skier, a movie stunt man, and a fast-draw star in Mexican westerns. Determined to recover, Al embarked on a rigorous schedule of exercise and muscular therapy. After one month he was encouraged: he was able to move a little toe slightly. In three months he was walking with a cane. Now he was back diving with us and, although still weak in the legs, capable of keeping pace with Bob Marx.

For over an hour the divers porpoised up and down in the heavy surf, moving southward, maintaining a semblance of a straight line. There were no "reports" until we were almost directly off the candelabra tree marker. The diver who made the first report was fairly close to shore. Even so, we ordered the Mexican manning the oars in our boat to row toward him. As we pulled near, shipping an alarming quantity of water, other divers began to sing out. Then all at once everyone seemed to be shouting simultaneously—in Spanish! I made notes on the map by guesswork—the marker line had long since parted.

Close in, the water was rougher and, busy taking the reports from divers, we failed to notice that the rowboat was getting dangerously close to the breaking surf. We were still shipping water in vast quantity, and had no bailer. All at once our tiny craft rose abruptly, seemingly to the height of the Empire State Building. Then we sank deep in a giant trough. I ordered our man to row to sea. But it was too late. The spook got us.



Mapping operations came to sudden conclusion when the small boat swamped.

We went down like the *Titanic*, a mass of oars, spikes, flags, map sheets, and board.

We were completely submerged, yet our boatman, a military officer who seemed determined to follow orders, continued to row toward sea. Dragged down by the weight of my wet clothing and boots, I nearly drowned laughing when Bob Allen shouted, "For God's sake, order him to stop rowing."

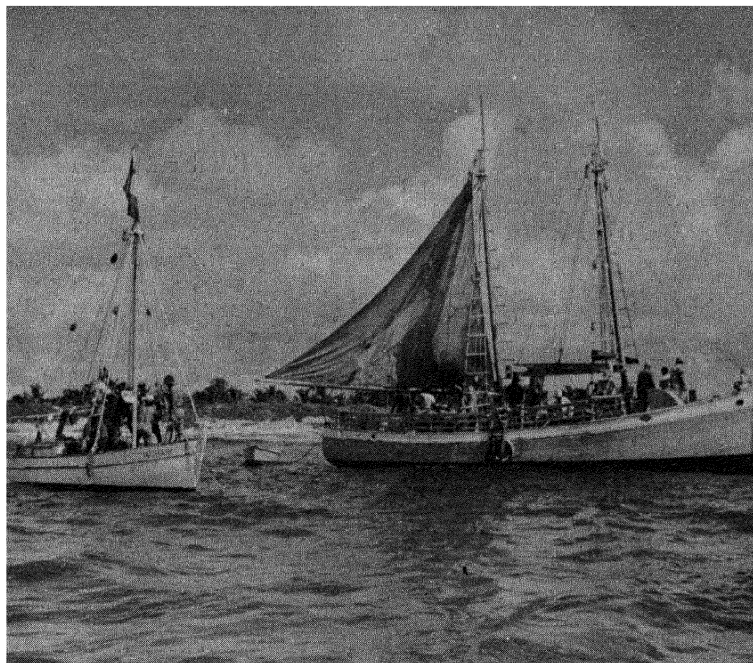
The men on the *Aguilucho*, then to seaward, had witnessed our disaster. They came hurrying in to "save" us, struggling desperately to conceal their amusement. By then Allen and I were too busy trying to stay afloat in the pounding surf to laugh. At last we got a line to the *Aguilucho* and crawled aboard.

Al Arnold, a man we had come to respect not only for his diving ability but also for his piercing commentary, climbed aboard the *Aguilucho*, surveyed his chagrined American compatriots, and asked, "What next, White Boss?"

II

The mapping operation, in the formal sense, was terminated. It had not been a total fiasco. The divers had searched the north end of the reef fairly thoroughly and we were satisfied that the bottom contained nothing noteworthy. The "reports" we had noted on the lost map could be recalled from memory. They were all concentrated in a space roughly one hundred yards in diameter, about one hundred yards off the beach directly in line with the candelabra marker tree. Much later a small group searched the reef to the south, and the area where Captain Arguelles reported seeing the four chests. We found nothing. We were satisfied that the wreck lay in one small, compact area.

Both diving boats were anchored near the wreck and soon the clear water was alive with nearly fifty eager skin divers. Many of them, exploring a cannon wreck for the first time, were disappointed. They had expected to find a hull intact,



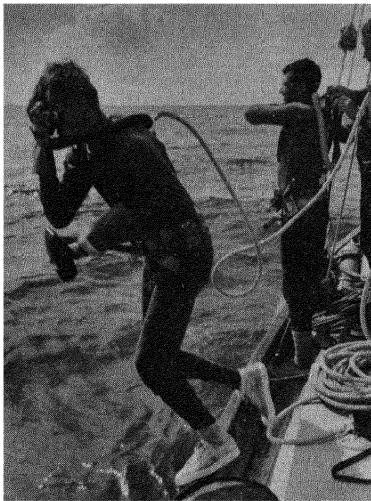
*At Punta Matanceros boats are anchored in preparation
for a day's work.*

and thought our work would consist primarily of breaking into one of the ancient, moss-covered hatches. They soon learned, as we had learned, that to get at the cargo of an ancient wreck in the tropics one must toil hour after hour, pounding chisels into a marble-tough blanket of living coral. There was relatively little pounding this first day. Our only source of air was the single compressor-fed Hookah unit on the *Aguilucho*. Marx donned this and his heavy lead weights, picked up his sledge hammer and chisels, and disappeared below. The rest of us tended his lines or skin dived in the rough surge.

Ramon Zapata, a Mexican diver from Cozumel, scanning the reef near the beach, suddenly surfaced holding a coral-encrusted, brass, double-transom cross about nine inches tall. We had previously recovered crucifixes from the wreck, but nothing like this one!



At first it was crowded on the wreck site. Photo by Genaro Hurtado.



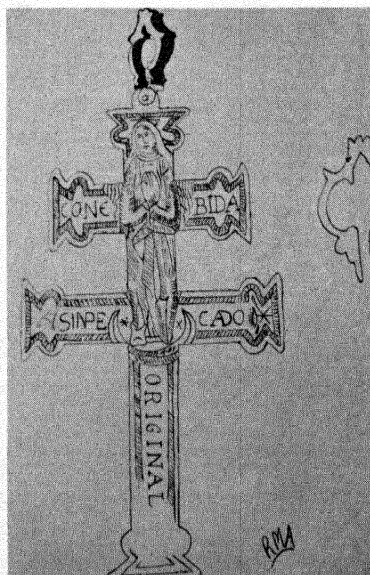
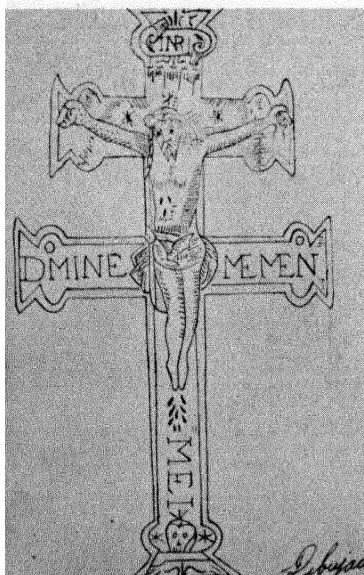
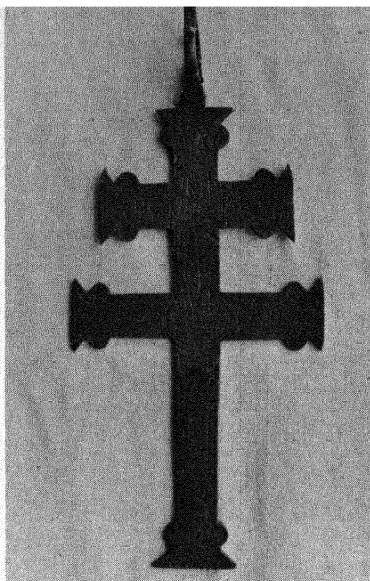
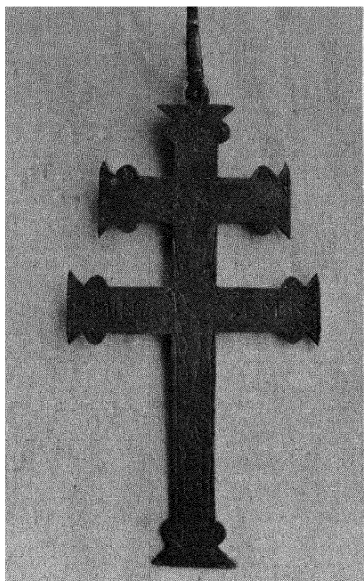
Marx leaps to begin day's work; Al Arnold prepares to follow.



Blair poses in water with cross of Caravaca just recovered from wreck.

After we had carefully cleaned it in a mild solution of muriatic acid and fine white sand, we studied the figures and engraved words on the cross. On the front was a figure of Christ and, in Latin, the words *Domine memen mei*. These were the words one of the thieves spoke to Christ on Mount Calvary. They mean "Lord, remember me." On the reverse side there was a figure of the Virgin Mary standing lightly on a quarter moon, and the words, in Spanish, *Concebida sin pecado original*, which means "Conceived without original sin."

There were no dates or manufacturer's marks on the cross. The only possible clue was the phrase, in Spanish, "Conceived without original sin." The Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin, was not officially promulgated until 1854. Thus, one might conclude that the cross was made after that date, and that our wreck was much newer than we believed. However, we rejected this theory. Catholics believed this doctrine centuries before the Church made it official, and it would not have been unusual, or illegal, for one of them to put it on a cross.



Close-up of Caravaca cross, front and rear (top), and drawings which reveal details of writing on cross (bottom).

Without reference books on crosses we speculated on the meaning of this unique find. I erroneously identified it as a "Cross of Lorraine," which led us to think for a while that the ship might be French. A scientist on Cozumel examined the letters on the cross and declared the cross to be the "crude workmanship of a crew member." But if it had been the work of a Frenchman, why the Spanish words? Perhaps, we thought, one of the crew, English or French, had made it to sell to the Spanish.

We noted a similarity between this large cross and the two types of smaller crucifixes we discovered on the wreck. Both were adorned with the figure of Christ on one side and the Virgin Mary on the other. On close inspection we saw that the figures, although different in size, were almost identical, down to the expressions on the face of Christ and the Virgin, and the folds in the clothing. However, much time passed before we found the real meaning of this intriguing cross.

Considering our slim supply of air, the first day on the wreck, in general, was a considerable success. In addition to the cross, Bob Marx, working with the single Hookah unit, dug up about one hundred pounds of coral, which, when cleaned back in camp that afternoon, yielded a vast quantity of goodies. These included pewter buckles, metal buttons, paste beads, glass, charred wood, spoons, and other items. The diviner, examining the objects with his capsules, which he swung like an incense burner, kept mumbling, "*Plata. Plata.*" meaning, "Silver. Silver." By then we had learned to ignore his chanting.

On the first day, also, Ramon Zapata reported that during the reconnaissance sweep, he had spotted a brass "plaque" about two hundred yards off the beach. This report came at about the time our small boat swamped, and we were not able to follow it up immediately. When we returned to the wreck, we spent about one hundred man-hours underwater searching for the plaque. Although the water visibility was excellent, we were never able to relocate it in spite of the fact that we knew its position within about twenty-five yards. We

made it a rule then, that if a diver spotted anything unusual he was to remain in the water over it until some means could be found to pinpoint its position precisely.

That night the *Pinch Hitter* failed to arrive as scheduled. This gave us no small amount of concern since the sixty-odd men in camp devoured food and drank water in tremendous quantities. It was already clear to us that the *Pinch Hitter* must make a supply trip every day. Moreover, at that point we were very anxiously awaiting the arrival of a new flywheel, which was needed to make the high-volume air compressor operable.

Tuesday morning, Elias came by our hut to awaken us with "*bonanza mañana*," his eternal jibe which we no longer found amusing. It was far from *bonanza*. In fact, white water was crashing over the reef at Acumal. Nevertheless, Bob Marx ordered the divers to the boats. At Matanceros we anchored in a pounding sea. While Marx again went below with the Hookah unit, we skin dived and tended his lines. The coral dug up that day produced the usual rich store of goodies.

When the *Pinch Hitter* had not arrived by four o'clock that afternoon, word was passed that a food-and-water emergency existed. The American contingent, although weary from the day's work on the wreck, donned spear-fishing gear and swam out into the cove. We returned to the beach with a respectable number of fish—enough at least for a lean supper. It proved unnecessary: later in the afternoon, the *Pinch Hitter*, a very welcome sight indeed, hove to outside the reef.

The *Pinch Hitter* brought two valuable items: a flywheel for the compressor and my long-lost Hookah unit. The boat also brought a new contingent of reporters and moviemen which would further strain our dwindling food and water supply. Marx and I went out to the *Pinch Hitter* to inform Pablo Bush, who was living on Cozumel, of the near-desperate situation in camp. Pablo agreed that we would have to trim the list of freeloaders.

On the following day a severe gale swept our camp at Acumal, making it impossible for the small boats to put out to sea. We were certain that in such weather the *Pinch Hitter*



During a critical shortage of drinking water the men laid canvas in holes on the beach to catch rain water.

would not negotiate the waters from Cozumel, so we battened down and prepared for the worst. Some men were assigned to spear-fish for food; others dug holes in the beach and laid canvas to catch rain water. (When it failed to rain we drank the milk of coconuts which we had in abundance.) The Mexican divers, who had at last got the high-volume air compressor running, happily filled aqualungs all afternoon. The diviner, declaring emphatically that his instruments had located either “gold” or “the anchor of the *Santa Maria*,” set two workers to digging a deep hole on the beach.

Land-bound and restless, and facing a crisis in the food department, we recalled the mysterious manatees Marx had encountered in the lagoon near Punta Soliman.

Marx said, “Hell. We eat land cows. Why wouldn’t a sea



Kept from the site of the wreck by exceptionally heavy seas, the American contingent plays poker.

cow be tasty? We can reach the lagoon where they live in the truck.”

The thought of going anywhere in the truck, especially some fifteen miles through the jungle, was repellent, but a sea cow, obviously, would keep us royally supplied in food for days. We loaded our diving gear, spearguns, and cameras in the truck bed and eagerly sought to start the balky motor. We might well have spent our time trying to nurse a sphinx to life. It was stone dead and refused even to cough.

Just at dark, to our great surprise and relief, we spotted the lights of the *Pinch Hitter* outside the cove. Braving heavy seas, the small boats put out to the yacht and brought some stores back to the beach. But it was too rough and too late to off-load the fifty-barrel drums of gasoline and water. Accustomed by then to continuing—or mounting—adversity we simply tightened our belts.

I 2

On Thursday the water was still rough and the men were hungry, but their air tanks were filled for the first time, and no power on earth could have held them back. We anchored on the wreck site by 0600. Whooping and singing, the Mexican divers put on weights, tanks, and sweat clothes—protection against the razor-edged coral—and plunged over the side. Soon the bottom was crowded with divers, all hacking away furiously. Al Arnold and Bob Marx concentrated on three cannons and one of the massive anchors which we hoped to



*On crowded deck of Aguilucho, divers prepare for day's work.
Photo by Genaro Hurtado.*

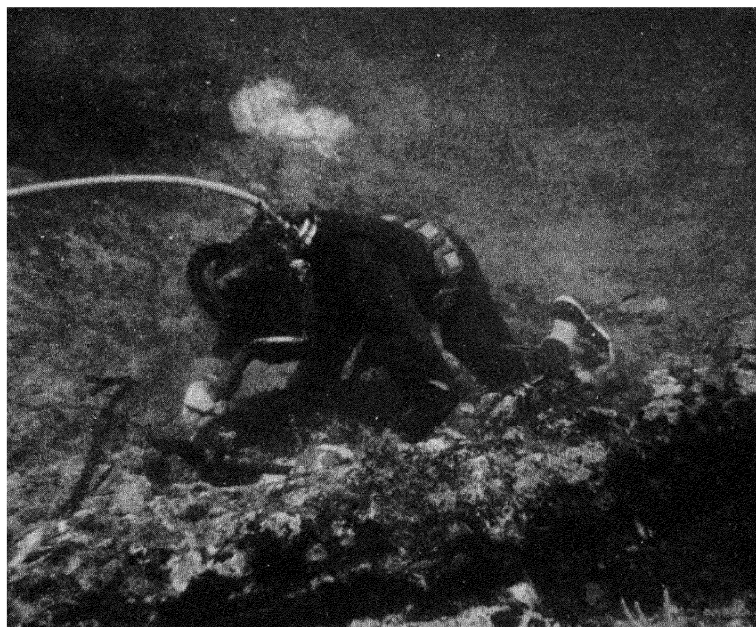
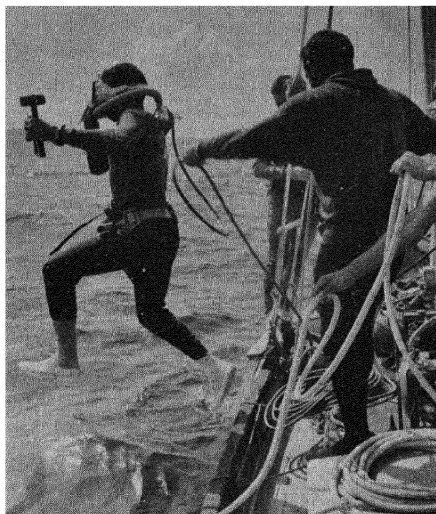


Al Arnold straps on weighted belts to hold him to bottom in heavy sea. Sweat clothes, tennis shoes were protection against coral.

raise in the first calm weather; the others dug for goodies. Unfortunately, the gasoline tank of my Hookah compressor had been broken in shipment and the unit could not be used. Skin diving, I shuttled coral to and from the boat.

Diving conditions at Matanceros were still much the same as we had always found them: perilous. Clinging to the bottom, from ten to thirty feet deep, almost directly under the breaking surf, the divers were bashed about unmercifully by the ebb and flow of the Niagara-like surge. Before they could perform any useful work, the Mexicans first had to learn how to survive submerged in that maelstrom. Al, Reggie, and Pete, the engineer from Campeche, learned fast, and began sending

Al Arnold goes over the side.



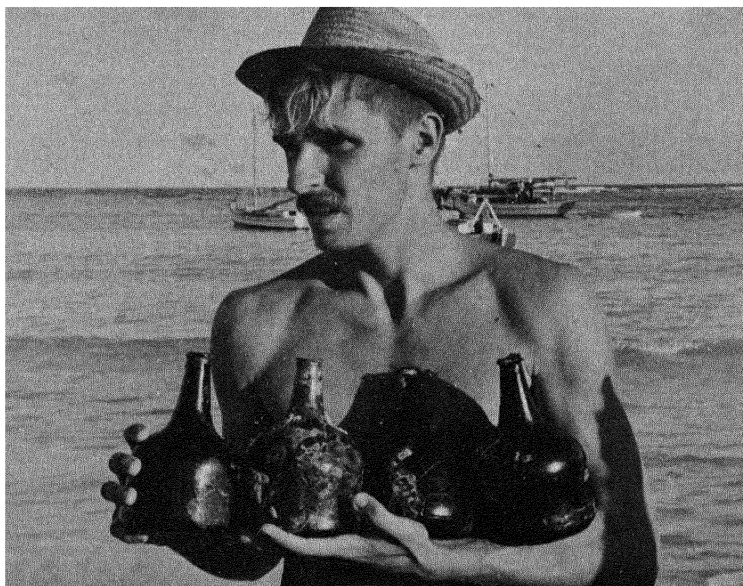
Marx, wearing Hookah rig, hacks at embedded cannon.

up an increasing flow of coral chunks. Bob Marx, oblivious to hardship, hacked insanely on two cannons lying side by side.

As he dug deeper, Bob discovered still another cannon wedged on the coral beneath the first. The new one he estimated to be nearly twice the size of the others, or about eleven or twelve feet long. We all dived down to take a look at this extraordinary piece of ordnance. How could our vessel mount such a weapon? We speculated that perhaps it was a cannon destined to arm a fort.

Soon Marx's excavation beneath the smaller cannons had grown considerably. In fact, his digging had left one of the smaller cannons precariously balanced on the other. He worked with extreme care lest he upset the balance and find himself crushed against the bottom by the weight of a cannon.

Digging further, Bob encountered an enormous quantity of plate glass. Some of the sheets, all of which were pressed



A hard day's work: four wine bottles, none broken.



In Acumal goodies were first cleaned and sorted on this table.

together and covered with a paper-thin layer of coral cement, were 3 feet long. From this, and other similar evidence, we deduced that the ship must have carried a huge cargo of window glass, perhaps intended for a cathedral or some large public building.

Far beneath the delicately balanced cannon, Bob felt the familiar shape of a rum bottle. He called Al Arnold. Gingerly extracting the sheets of plate glass—a dangerous operation in that surge—Bob and Al probed beneath the cannon. Soon they had the bottle in hand, and then, shortly afterward, they found three more, identical with the first. Just how these bottles had come to rest, unbroken, beneath a 1,500-pound cannon mystified us.

The rum bottles were highly prized; mostly our digging produced big chunks of goodies-laden coral which were processed almost on a mass production basis. During diving hours the chunks were stored in burlap bags on the ocean bottom. At the day's end these would be raised and transported to



In front of living quarters, Blair, Kalb (standing), and Marx repair broken bottles and glasses from wreck.

camp. In the afternoons after lunch, a few men would assemble at a specially built, elbow-level table near the headquarters tent. There, under Marx's supervision, the chunks were cracked with small tools and the goodies sorted. Special items, such as religious medallions, were cleaned immediately in muriatic acid.

On Cozumel, Pablo had established a laboratory, which was staffed by a woman and a guard who remained on the premises 'round the clock. All goodies were shipped to Pablo every day, if there was a boat returning to Cozumel. In the laboratory, the goodies were further cleaned, labeled, and inventoried. Some were put on display for the benefit of Cozumel's curious citizenry, a public relations gesture conceived by Pablo, who constantly had to remind the islanders that our expedition was not a piratical raid on the galleon but a legitimate scientific endeavor authorized by the Mexican government.

Around noon on Thursday our sharp-eyed lookouts spied the mast of the *Pinch Hitter* lying to off Acumal. Since the matter of food and water was of extreme urgency we recalled the divers and got underway for camp. Marx and I boarded the *Pinch Hitter*, carrying my broken Hookah motor. We talked with Pablo and George Clark while the *Pinch Hitter's* Captain Bob Black and YES man Sam Lowe soldered the broken gasoline tank. The water was rough and the top-heavy *Pinch Hitter* rolled heavily.

Our greatest single concern at that point was fresh water. The supply in camp was near zero. A note in the log of the *Pinch Hitter* that day hints at the difficulty encountered in supplying us: "The camp was in need of water. It was wholly impossible to transfer a barrel weighing 375 pounds to the small boats and dangerously foolhardy to try to bring one of the sailboats alongside. We siphoned a quarter of the contents out, tied a heavy cord around it, and rolled it overside. Jim Webster in one of the outboards tried to tow it to shore. The barrel floated but Jim could not maintain control of his boat through the reef while towing the barrel. He cast it loose. It went over the reef in heavy surf and floated into the cove."

Faced with these logistical problems, which were manifestly impeding the progress of the expedition, Pablo passed the word that all men not directly contributing to the work of the expedition would leave camp. That day the diviner and about fifteen other persons, many of whom were happy for the excuse, departed. This exodus eased the food and water crisis temporarily and reduced grumbling in the camp. As Marx put it when we returned to the beach with my repaired Hookah: "Well, we've shaken down this outfit pretty good. There are still some freeloaders here, but mostly we are all workers. Now maybe we can really get going on the galleon."

Pablo had brought us a huge batch of newspaper clippings which had been forwarded to him from Mexico City. Our wreck and expedition were big news: almost every paper gave us front-page coverage and long stories with many pictures (including one of Jon Kalb, immortalized in print as "Mo-

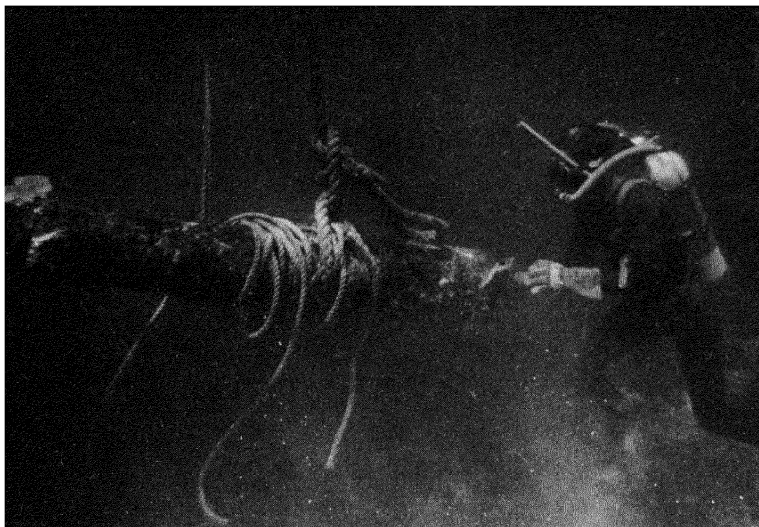
Mo"). However, the stories astonished us. The Mexican reporters in camp had described the diving operations as a tense "battle" on the bottom between the American and Mexican divers. The Mexicans, played as the underdogs, were described as doing the bulk of the work "even though their equipment compared to that of the Americans was puny."

Had they not been so laughably inaccurate, these clippings might well have infuriated all of us. The opposite was true: among the divers there was nothing but friendship and co-operation. We wore one another's diving clothes indiscriminately, interchanged equipment freely, and worked as mixed teams on the ocean bottom. There was no "battle" between the two contingents. On the contrary, the divers were closely allied in a single war—the one being waged against the currents, the stubborn coral, and the spook of Matanceros. The friendly beer party that night on the beach to celebrate Toribio Dorantes' thirtieth birthday, during which we sang Mexican and American songs and exchanged warm toasts, seemed a strange contrast to the press reports.

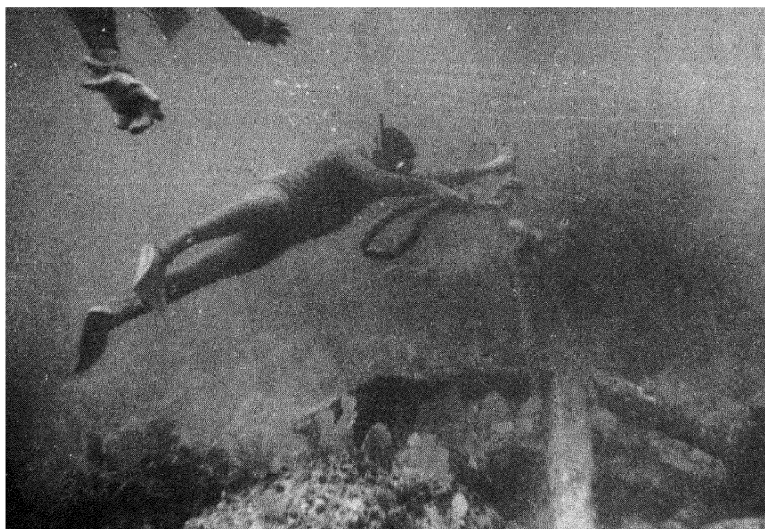
I 3

On Friday the spook took a holiday, and fortune at last blessed our frustrating expedition. The water was as calm as we had ever seen it. Taking advantage of this rare luck, we boarded the work boats without stopping for breakfast. At Matanceros Marx and Al Arnold, wearing my Hookah, finished prying loose the anchor and three cannons. Bob Allen, Walter Bennett, and I snorkeled in quite close to the beach, making the most thorough inshore reconnaissance up to that time. We located a second anchor and four or five cannons but they were too close to the beach to consider raising. At noon, the two-masted *Cozumel* arrived according to our instructions, and all hands prepared to lift the heavy pieces.

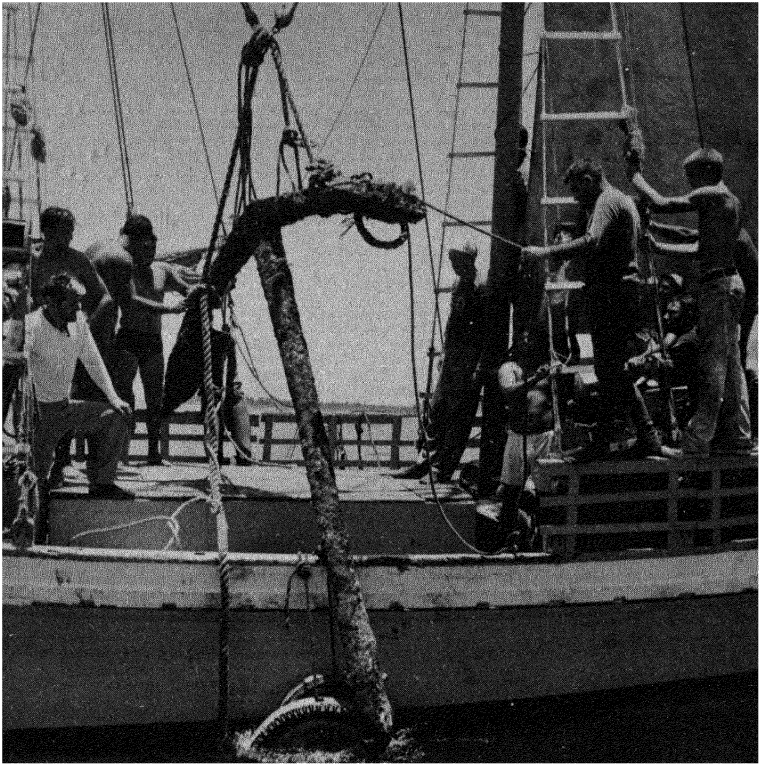
The *Cozumel* was moved into position and firmly anchored without difficulty. While Marx and the other divers fixed the



Cannon loose, Marx carefully guides it from below as it is raised to the surface.



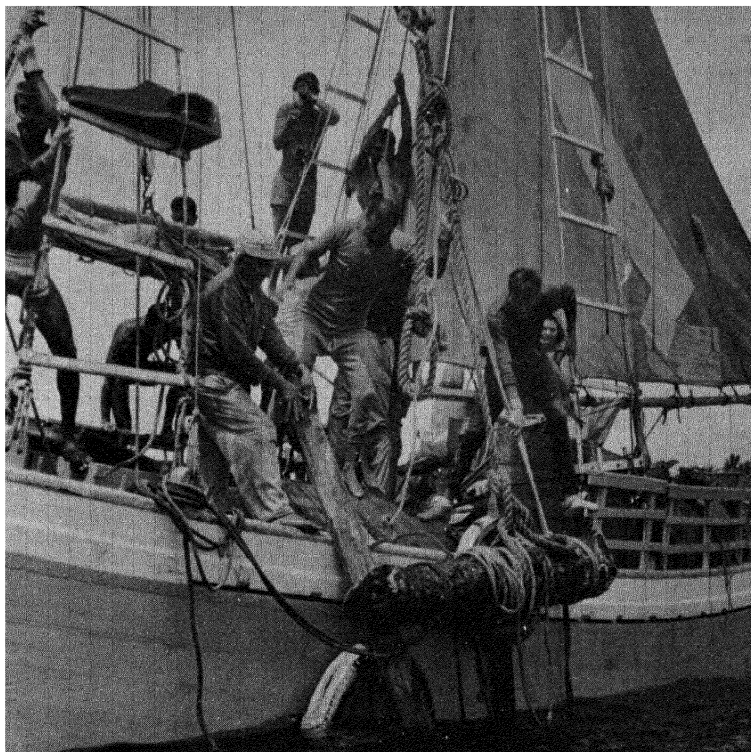
Author Blair tightens knot on line used to raise galleon's massive anchor.



The huge anchor is hauled aloft.

heavy lines to the first cannon, the *Cozumel's* crew rigged her booms and pulleys in seamanlike fashion. About fifteen men boarded the *Cozumel* to heave on the line. Although it was still completely underwater the cannon was unbelievably heavy. Our men, hungry and weary from the morning's diving, tugged and shouted. The best we could do was raise the cannon about an inch at a time. When it finally had been lowered into the hold we tackled the anchor, another agonizing experience. When that was on board the men refused to work another minute.

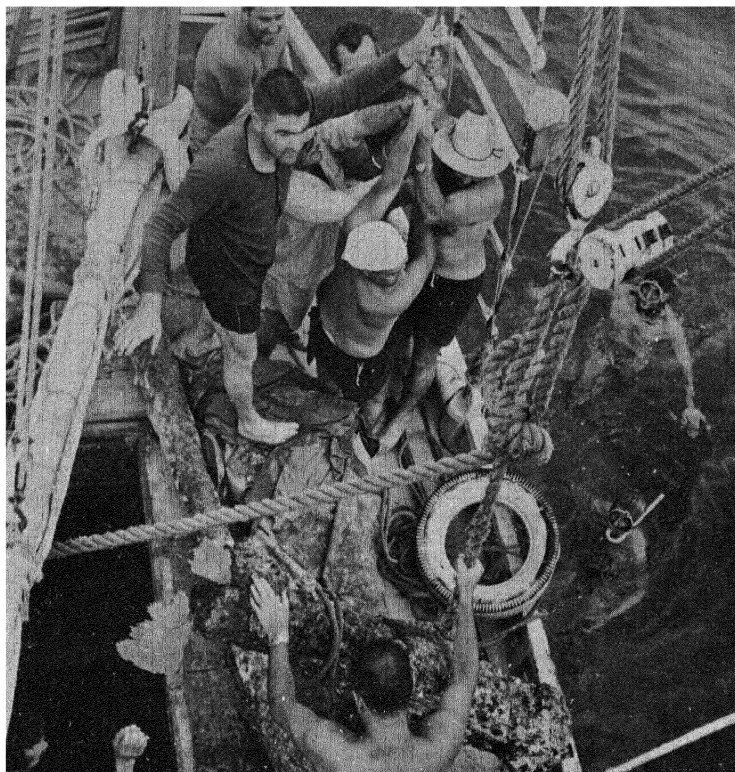
Back in camp, after lunch and a siesta, Marx called for an assembly of men to return to raise the remaining two cannons. The beaches, tents, and groves of coconut trees were strangely



Second cannon comes aboard.

vacant. Marx was incensed. He and the camp commander, Alphonso Argudin, and the skipper of the *Cozumel*, Captain Arguelles, met at the water's edge and engaged in a babbling debate. The *Cozumel*'s skipper was reluctant to return, saying, "Your men are lazy. They won't work." Argudin argued that the men needed rest. Marx, believing we would never again have such calm water, was determined not to waste the opportunity. His will prevailed. The men were rounded up. Refreshed and full of food, the men hauled up the two remaining cannon in half an hour's time.

All four of these massive objects were transported directly to Cozumel and unloaded on the village dock. Later, Marx and I carefully measured the cannons (6 feet, 7 inches long;



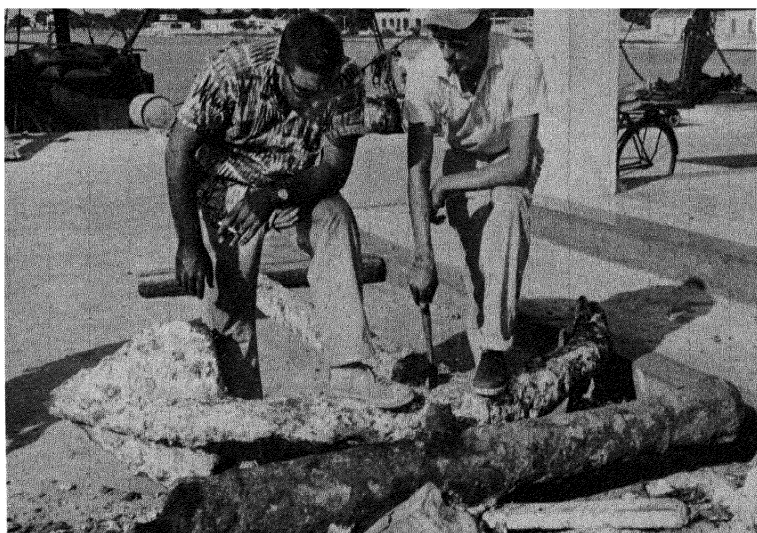
The cannon is lowered into the Cozumel's hold.

3 inch bore) and the anchor (11 feet, 7 inches long at the shank). Then we hacked the coral from the cannons. The coral, which was loaded with goodies, broke clean and we could see that only a minute layer of the cannons' surface metal had been eaten away. Knowing that nearly every cannon cast in recent history has some kind of date or founder's mark we carefully scrutinized every square inch of the surface metal. There was no mark of any kind. The cannon which we hoped might help solve our puzzle turned out simply to be one more baffling mystery in the wreck of Matanceros.

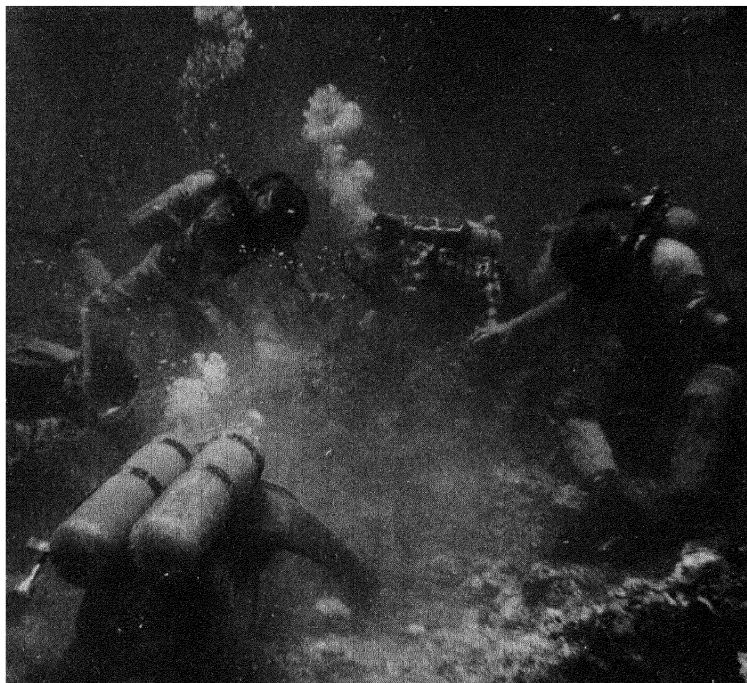
All that week our young Texan friend, Mo-Mo, heading a small party of Mexicans, had been searching the miserable beach, inch by inch, with the metal detector. The detector, an



The cannons and anchor as viewed from above, while Blair and Marx take dimensions.



In Cozumel, Blair and Marx hack coral from cannon searching for identification marks. They found none.



Work continued at a fast pace on the wreck site.



Author Blair, wearing sweat clothes, straps on diving tank.

adaptation of a mine detector, was extraordinarily sensitive. On one test it easily picked up a piece of metal no larger than a dime, 6 inches beneath the sand. Battling thirst, incredible heat, and swarms of mosquitoes, Mo-Mo and his men turned up pieces of pottery, rum bottles, ship's nails, and miscellaneous other items, which were added to the general goodies pile, but no hoard of buried treasure. Mo-Mo's job was, in our view, an assignment to Siberia. But it was a necessary and important phase of the expedition.

On Saturday, after notifying Marx that we refused to work until we had eaten breakfast, we returned to the wreck to hack goodies. Marx and Al Arnold manned the Hookahs, occasion-



Author Blair descends diving ladder.

ally relieved by Pete and Sergio Castillo; the rest of us dived with tanks. At about eleven o'clock, two Mexican Navy helicopters buzzed our diving boat, and shortly afterward we sighted the *Pinch Hitter* mast on the horizon. By then, each man had accumulated three hours underwater—a maximum daily limit imposed by the doctors—so we upped anchor and got underway for Acumal. In camp, we learned that Aaron Merino Fernandez, the governor of the state of Quintana Roo, in which we were camped, was on board one of the helicopters and had attempted to land for a visit. But the wind was too strong and he continued on to Cozumel.

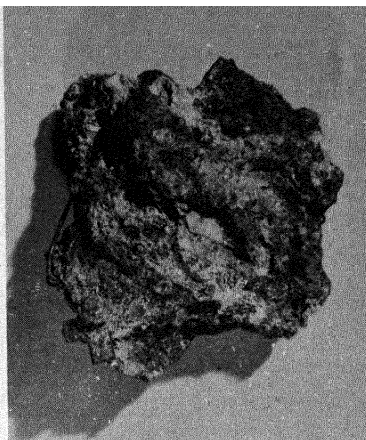
Pablo Bush came ashore from the *Pinch Hitter* to spread words of encouragement, and to tell us he had decided to remain full time on Cozumel in order to improve the logistics. He described the new goodies laboratory on Cozumel, and suggested that we could save time and effort by shipping the unbroken coral chunks directly to the island. Probably not by coincidence, he added, "I regret to say that I have been informed that some of the divers are stealing the goodies. I hasten to add that this is taking place in the Mexican contingent, and not among the Americans."

That day Marx and Al Arnold hacked out a curious object we had been observing all week. Embedded in the coral, it appeared to be a section of copper pipe. When extracted, its shape led us to believe that it was leg armor. It actually fit the legs of the Mexican divers. However, we knew that armor would have been made of steel, not soft copper, so for the moment we classed the strange object as "chafing gear" for the ship's lines. Later we learned the object was an instrument, originally mounted on a wooden handle, which was thrust into a cannon barrel to load a measure of powder. There was a Roman numeral VI stamped on the object. At first we thought this was the size of the armor. But later, we guessed this was probably meant to identify the measure as one to be used on a six-pounder cannon.

Except for a few badly worn Spanish copper coins, four worthless maravedi pieces from the reign of Philip III (1598–



*Three Spanish coins found
on the galleon.*



*Coral chunk, showing embed-
ded crucifix and goodies. Photo
by Empire Photosound, Inc.*



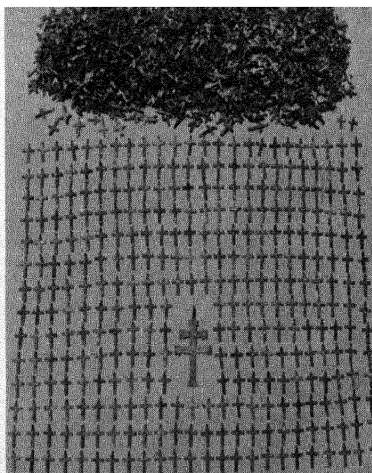
*X-ray photograph of coral above, showing embedded goodies.
Photo by Empire Photosound, Inc.*



At wreck site author Blair, wearing diving tank, displays wine bottle just removed from coral.



Part of the total of 600 silver-dipped brass spoons.

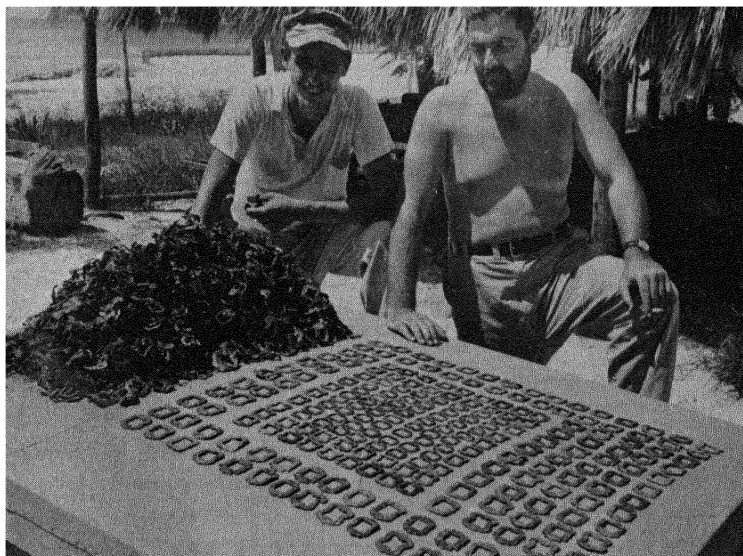


More than 3,000 crucifixes were recovered from the coral.

1621), our sampling of the first week revealed no sign of sunken treasure. We were not disheartened because the goodies were coming in by the hundreds.

In addition to the cannons, anchor, rum bottles, and the double-transom crucifix, they included hundreds of small brass crucifixes in two sizes; a dozen brass devotional medallions; pewter and brass buckles in several sizes; wood, horn, and brass knife handles (the blades, evidently made of silver or iron, had disintegrated); metal buttons in many shapes and designs; brass straight pins; glass beads; over one hundred silver-dipped brass spoons; a fragment of a wooden comb; ship's nails of all sizes; musket shot; flint; cannon balls; a key; a brooch; hundreds of paste beads resembling diamonds and emeralds; a decanter stopper; and many pieces of broken mirrors and drinking glasses.

Such was the variety and quantity of the English-looking goodies that we jocularly named our wreck "His Majesty's Ship, *Woolworth*."



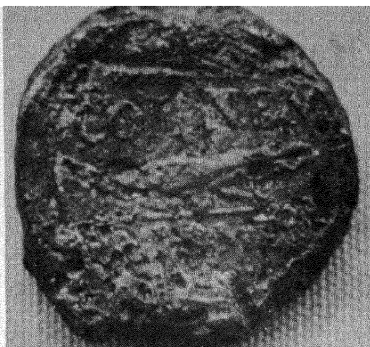
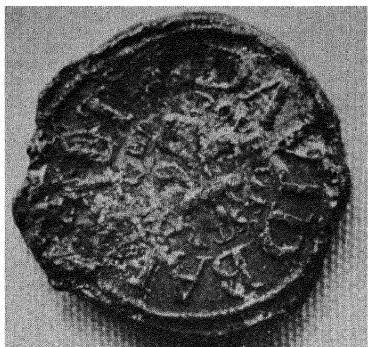
Part of the 3,000 buckles recovered.

14

That same afternoon George Clark announced that he and the *Pinch Hitter* must return to the United States. Marx, Bob Allen and John Frizzle, Walter Bennett and I returned to Cozumel on the boat. Allen and Frizzle had to leave the expedition and return to their drug store in East Lansing. Marx, Bennett, and I wanted to study the goodies and discuss the matter of a supply boat to replace the *Pinch Hitter* (we finally settled on the *Cozumel*). We left Mo-Mo behind to look after our gear and clean up the "Acumal Hilton."

At the laboratory we scrutinized the goodies, in an attempt to establish the date and nationality of our mysterious wreck. The copper coins, like the silver real Bob found earlier, were no help in dating the wreck. Coins of that kind, stamped and restamped, were in circulation in the West Indies for hundreds of years. Some of the religious medallions were adorned with recognizable popes and saints—St. Benedict, St. Thomas, St. Anthony, St. Agnes, etc.—but none of them had dates or manufacturer's marks.

Only one item provided a clue, a tiny French export seal, possibly one that had been attached to a wine bottle, which at first we mistook for a coin. Under a magnifying glass we could make out the engraving. On one side we could read the name "David Baumer" and the words "*Pour Lestranger*," [sic] which means "For Export." On the back there was a figure of an alligator chained to a tree beneath which was the word "*Nismes*," and above that the word "*Colnem*." The design resembles that on a Roman coin issued in the colony of Nemausus, or Nimes, France, in honor of General Marcus Agrippa who died in about 12 B.C. We sent off a wire to Washington requesting information on David Baumer of Nimes, France, but, as we were to learn, such inquiries require much time.



French seal with name of David Baumer (top, left); rear of seal (top, right), showing "Colnem," alligator chained to tree; and Roman coin from Nimes (bottom), with same chained alligator.

On Sunday, the governor, Aaron Merino Fernandez, announced that he would visit the camp in Acumal by helicopter. Thinking it a good opportunity to get some aerial views of the camp and the divers greeting this dignitary, I suggested to Walter Bennett that he arrange to go along. When he agreed, I said, "Wally, this is the greatest exhibition of heroism I have ever seen. You have not only volunteered to fly in a helicopter, but a single-engine Mexican helicopter. On top of that you will be flying fifteen miles over open sea with no pontoons." Marx, anxious to get back to the diving, hitchhiked a ride in the same chopper.

As they were about to take off I called to Bennett, "Wally, if you spin in, try to save the film!"

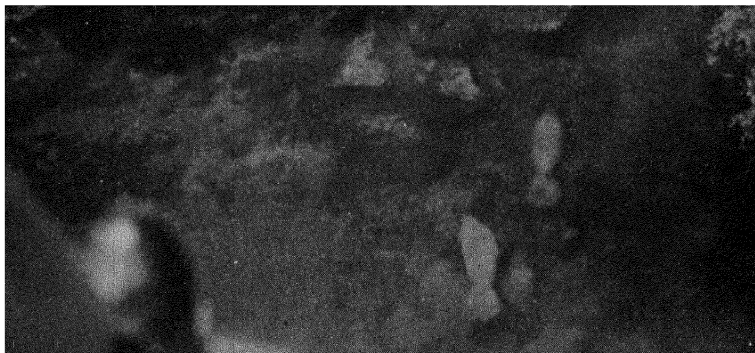
They rose vertically and flew directly across the water to the mainland. But their route to Acumal was blocked by a line squall. Turning inland over the dense jungle the pilot attempted



Walter Bennett about to leave for Acumal in the helicopter.

Photo by Bob Marx.

to skirt around the black skies. At one point they passed low over the lagoon which served as a home for the manatees. Sure enough, the sea cows were lolling on the surface like huge whales. Bennett clicked off two frames in his cameras before the manatees, frightened by the noise of the chopper, scurried for the muddy lagoon bottom.



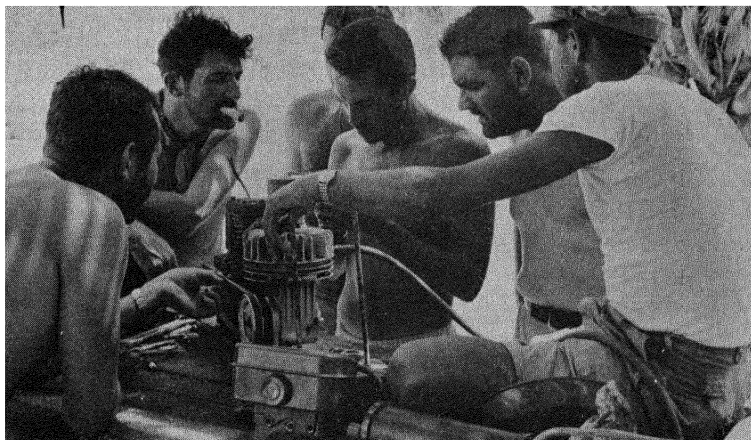
From helicopter, Bennett snapped manatees on surface.

When the helicopter reached Acumal, the camp was deserted. The divers had sailed south on the boat for a day's sight-seeing at the oceanside Maya ruin, Tulum. The governor went south to visit someone else.

Returning to Cozumel, Bennett's helicopter was again caught up in the violent gusts of the squall. The pilot eased the chopper, now very low on gasoline, onto a beach near a Maya hut. While the rain pelted the beach, Bennett and the pilot huddled in a lean-to, spurning offers of food and drink from the awe-struck natives. Finally they were air-borne again and reached Cozumel safely. Bennett summed up his feeling about the futile trip in one question to me: "Any more bright ideas, White Boss?"

15

The second week on Matanceros was, like the first, a prolonged series of crises and misfortunes. Only occasionally did rough weather deter us from reaching the wreck site; but the strong winds and pitching seas made our diving operations infinitely



In camp the divers deal with troublesome Hookah motors.

more perilous. Our greatest problem at sea turned out to be the Hookah air compressors, upon which we leaned heavily, since the Hookah units made our work on the bottom easier. Dampened by salt spray, the compressor motors failed; fan belts, worn flabby by constant use, flew off, leaving Al Arnold and Bob Marx far below, harnessed in forty pounds of lead weights, without air. Al and Bob dreaded the exhausting climb up the life line. Whenever possible, they held their breath, sometimes for two or three minutes, while the tenders retrieved a fan belt or restarted the compressor motor.

Ordinarily we stationed a man on the boat to tend the Hookah motors and a man floating on the surface of the water to watch the divers. However, the first day of the second week, with only a half-dozen Mexican divers remaining in camp, and Bennett and me on Cozumel, we were very short-handed. One man, our philosophizing Elias, was left on the *Aguilucho* to look after the motors. The spook evidently overpowered him.

Bob Marx was working furiously on the bottom when he suddenly realized that his air was coming hard. He looked up, but that day there was no floating observer to call a warning to the boat. Marx waited a moment, thinking that if the compressor had stopped or had thrown a fan belt Elias would soon correct it. Then, sucking desperately on the mouthpiece, Marx realized he would have to run for his life.

Nearly unconscious, Marx struggled to the life line and pulled himself up, hand over hand. Reaching the surface, he inhaled deeply, removed his face plate and weights, and called for Elias. But the boatman was nowhere to be seen. He had gone spear-fishing (violating one of the basic rules). Marx's untended compressor had simply run out of gasoline and stopped.

After that experience, and several close shaves suffered by Al Arnold, we made certain that the divers were properly tended at all times.

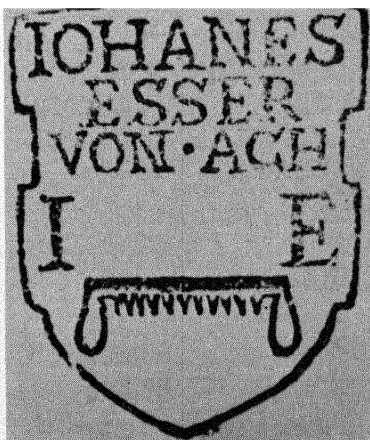
One day Al and Reggie Arnold clambered into the boat exclaiming excitedly, "We can see some writing down there. It might be a book or bible." A wave of incredulity swept over



*Blair and Marx examine needle packages through magnifying glasses.
At right Reggie and Al Arnold examine gold foil.*



Close-up of needle package.



*Trademark of Johannes Esser
Von Ach, from the archives in
Aachen.*

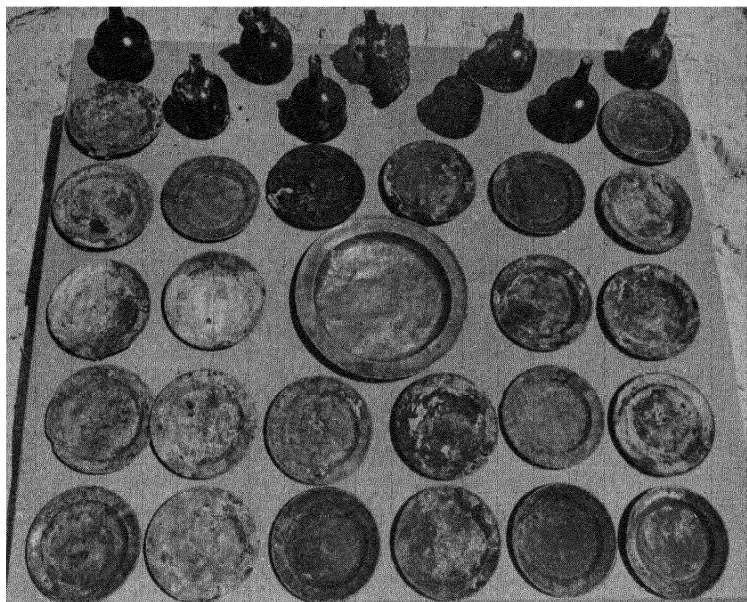
the work boat. How could paper survive a two-hundred-year bath in salt water?

Al and Reggie seldom exaggerated, so in spite of our doubts all hands quickly plunged into the water for a look-see. On the bottom, Al proudly pointed to a black jumble protruding from the coral. We waded the silt aside and poked our face plates up close. Sure enough we could discern writing. Hookah-equipped, Bob Marx staggered up with small tools and began the delicate job of dislodging the black mess. Had it been an ingot of gold, the find could have caused only slightly greater excitement in our ranks.

The "book" turned out to be hundreds of tightly-packed paper packages containing thousands of needles. Unlike the brass straight pins we had found, the needles disintegrated on touch. The paper packages were soggy and fragile. Back in camp, we separated them carefully and spread some packages in the sun to dry. Almost magically, the smudged packages turned white and the faint letters stood out bold and clear: "Johanes Esser Von Ach." Von Ach, we presumed, was the manufacturer of the needles. We fired off another wire to Washington.

This gentleman's name, appearing like that off the lonely coast of Mexico after all these years, made a profound impact in our camp. It whetted our desire to locate other labeled artifacts which would light an obscure closet of history and provide us with a definite clue to the date, name, and nationality of the ship. With that kind of information, we knew we could search the archives and quickly determine if she carried treasure. Thenceforth, our digging on the wreck became an absorbing hunt to uncover the artifact that would tell us the most.

They began coming up thick and fast. Shortly after the needle find, Bob and Al dug up a large cache of pewter plates in three different sizes. The smallest plates, 8½ inches in diameter, were identical with the plates we had found the year before. They were marked with the double rose "BNO" hallmark. I had already searched the hallmark books for "BNO" and found no reference.



A few of the pewter plates and wine bottles.



The unidentified touch on the smaller plates.

The two larger plates, which showed signs of having been used, such as knife marks, were 11 and 15 inches in diameter. After cleaning the plates carefully, we were able to make out the name "Alex Clee . . .," and the stamped figure of a hand holding a tudor rose. There was also a row of four small shield-shaped cartouches. The first contained a lion, the second a leopard's face, the third an ornate letter F and the fourth the initials A.C. At the time, none of this meant anything to us, but later, after we had studied books on pewter and hallmarks, we learned a great deal.

In early times English gold- and silversmiths were rigidly policed by government and guild. The quality of gold and silver was carefully controlled and every manufacturer was assigned a special emblem to identify his work, called a "touch." In addition, each article was stamped with four shield-shaped cartouches, all of which held special meaning. The first, the lion (or lion "passant"), meant that the object was made of fine grade silver or twenty-two carat gold. The second, the leopard, told that the object was manufactured in London (other cities had different symbols). The third, the letter, was a date mark, a different letter of the alphabet being assigned for each year. The fourth shield usually contained the initials of the manufacturer.

At first we were baffled by our hallmarks. The initials "A.C." in the fourth shield obviously were those of "Alex Clee . . ." whose touch was on the plate. The leopard signified the plate was made in London. But why would a pewter plate have the lion, indicating fine silver or twenty-two carat gold? Furthermore, we could find no date letter corresponding to the ornate "F."

Then we learned the answers. Pewter-makers were not closely policed and many of them resorted to trickery, for example putting hallmarks on pewter plates to give the illusion they were silver. The letter F, we found, was a special mark called the "Black F," and had no relation to the date of manufacture. Whenever a pewtersmith was caught in nefarious practices, he was ordered to stamp his work with the "Black F."



The so-called hallmarks on pewter plate.



The touch of Alex Cleeve.

Probing the pewter records, which, like the silver hallmark records, are amazingly thorough, we found a London pewter-maker named Alexander Cleeve. In fact we found two listings for Alexander Cleeve, father and son. The elder Alexander Cleeve registered his touch in London in 1689, the son in 1728. The touches were similar. However, the touch for Alexander Cleeve, Junior, exactly matched that on the back of our plates. We learned further that Alex Cleeve, Junior, discontinued his touch after 1740.

Thus, while the pewter plate carried no date mark as such, we knew that the plate was manufactured in London sometime between 1728 and 1740 by Alexander Cleeve, Junior. This time-span neatly coincided with the age of the rum bottles which the Smithsonian Institution had previously told us were English from the period 1720–40. In any case, the larger plates gave us one positive clue: the wreck could be no older than the Junior Cleeve's first year, 1728.

Adding to our collection of English artifacts, one day we found still another lead export seal. It was engraved: "JAMES COSACK * PACKER * *In London.*" With this find, crucifixes or no crucifixes, we were unshakeably convinced that our wreck was English. We sent off a wire to Washington requesting a check of Lloyds of London and the British Admiralty for major English ship losses in the area for the period, 1740–50.



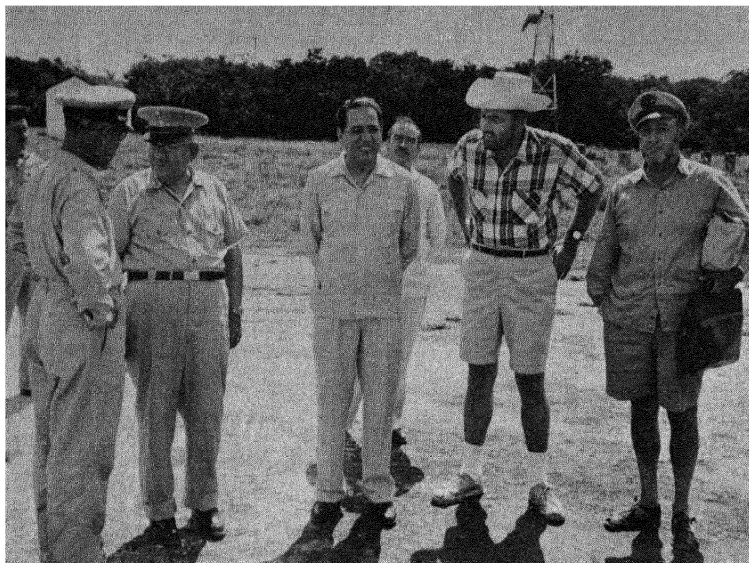
The seal of James Cosack, a packer in London.

I 6

When we returned to the wreck on Wednesday a startling sight greeted our eyes. The water was as calm as a millpond—calmer, said the old salts, than they had seen it in twenty years. With our diving tanks now filled by a second, new high-volume compressor and the Hookahs working moderately well, we swarmed over the side to take advantage of our luck. For two days we ripped coral from the bottom like men gone berserk. Our divers cruised almost to the beach with no fear of being crushed by tons of white water.

Probing the same coral clump which had produced the needle packages, the indefatigable Arnold brothers paused and stared in disbelief. A shiny substance clung to their chisels: gold! They hurried to the surface. In a flash we were on the bottom. The Arnolds had found a folded bundle of about one hundred large rectangles of gold foil. Each sheet was about the thickness of a piece of bond paper. Evidently it had been earmarked to adorn some altar or to gild the dome of a cathedral. However, this gold was destined to play a different role. Submerged for more than two hundred years, it now emerged to touch off a modern Latin-American drama.

Word of the find spread like wildfire. New arrivals in camp demanded to see it at once. We soon learned the reason. The gold, which actually weighed about one pound, had grown in the telling of the tale to 300 kilos, or about 660 pounds. At the current price, that much gold, in troy weight, would be worth about \$370,000. We made attempts to spike the false rumor, but we met with little success. We were up against the powerful, romantic psychology of the Mexican peasantry. They *want* to believe people find lost hoards of gold. Like the lottery, this belief provides them with a hope that one day they, too, will be lucky and escape from their prison of poverty.



Author Blair interviews dignitaries at airport on Cozumel, including Mexican Defense Minister (second from left) and the governor. Pablo Bush Romero is at extreme right.



Mexican sailors land in Acumal to protect divers from rumored bandit raid. Note corvette in background.

A few days later we, in turn, heard a startling rumor. A band of Fidel Castro's forces, which had previously found the secluded coves and dense jungle about us an ideal staging point from which to launch armed forays against the banana republics of the Caribbean, were set to attack our camp. They intended, so the story went, to overwhelm us and steal the gold to help finance their revolutionary movement.

Under any other circumstances this report would have been ignored. However, in this remote section of the Yucatan peninsula, long a haven for untamed Indians, bandits, outlaws, drug addicts, and Mexico's political exiles, anything can—and frequently did—happen. In fact, since we had been camped on the coast, the Mexican Navy had captured one armed Cuban gunboat. In the days immediately before our arrival three others had been seized.

Without delay we began to take emergency precautions. Our camp leader, Commander Argudin, distributed small arms to some of the men and then sent an urgent call for reinforcements. Next day a heavily armed contingent of Mexican soldiers arrived and spread through the camp. The Mexican Navy dispatched two corvettes to cruise our waters and disembarked a party of armed sailors. Mexican Navy helicopters reconnoitered the jungle and coves in our vicinity. The Secretary of National Defense, General Agustin Olachez, flew in from Mexico City, and, together with the local governor and a rear admiral who commanded the naval forces in our area, visited our camp.

"We are here to help in any way we can," the General said.

His saber rattling apparently was enough. Our alleged assailants evidently melted into the jungle because the attack failed to materialize. We were just as glad. All of the divers had grown heavy beards. It was possible, even probable, that we would be mistaken for Castro's men when the shooting started.

After the pressure eased, we shipped the troublesome batch of gold to Cozumel Island. The Secretary of National Defense returned to Mexico City, but the armed soldiers and one corvette remained with us for the rest of the expedition.

17

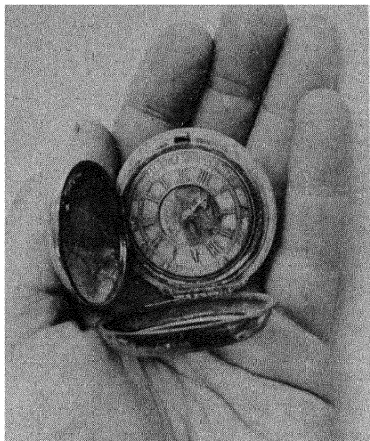
On the first day of the third week, en route to the wreck, Bob Marx said to me, "Today I'm really going to find something unusual. I feel it in my bones."

His prediction was accurate. During his second hour on the bottom, after chiseling out about a hundred pounds of goodies, Marx turned up the most astonishing find of the expedition, a gold pocket watch. Back in camp we attacked it eagerly with magnifying glasses, tweezers, and a mild solution of acid.

The inner works, such as the spring, had long since rusted away, but the outer case, the inner case, stem, glass, and face,



A tense moment: Blair opens the case of the gold pocket watch recovered from wreck.



The watch. Photo by Genaro Hurtado.

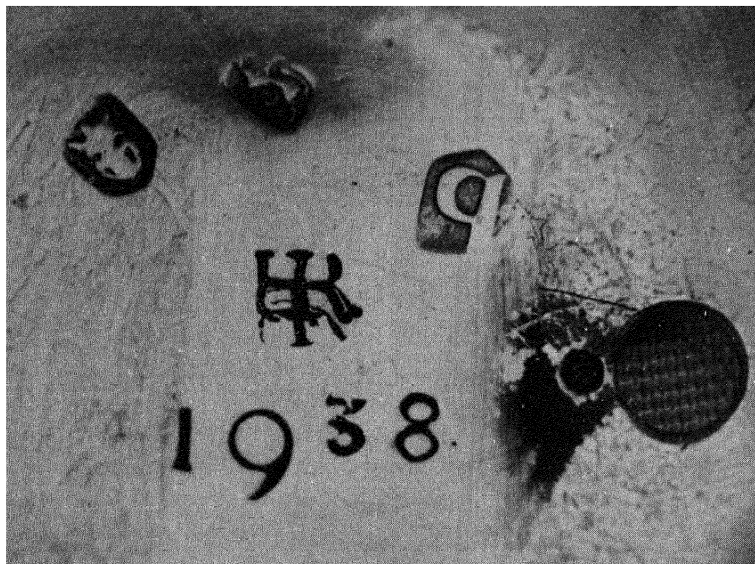


The ornate inner case.

including fragments of the hands, stopped at the traditional 8:20, were almost as good as new. (Most new watches are displayed with the clock hands set on 8:20 for reasons of symmetry, not because, as commonly believed, this was the hour at which Lincoln was shot.) When we cleaned the tarnish from the face, the words “Webster” and “London” were revealed. Swinging the works on its hinges, we read, amid ornate decorations: “Wm. Webster Exchange Alley.”

On the inner case we found three small hallmark shields. The first was a lion, which indicated that the watch was made of twenty-two carat gold. The second featured a crowned leopard, which meant the watch was manufactured in London. The third and most important—to us—was the date mark, a lower case *b*, which, according to the tables, meant the watch was manufactured in 1737 or 1738.

Beneath a pad in the inner case, apparently serving as a shim to prevent rattling, we found two scraps of newspaper. Although the paper had been submerged in salt water for over two centuries, we were able to lift it from the watch and read the printing on both sides. We noted the old custom of using an *f* for an *s* and carefully transcribed and photographed each surviving word.

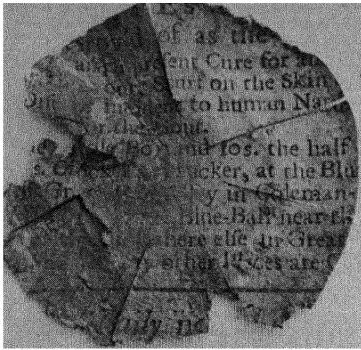


The hallmarks of the watch, with serial number below.

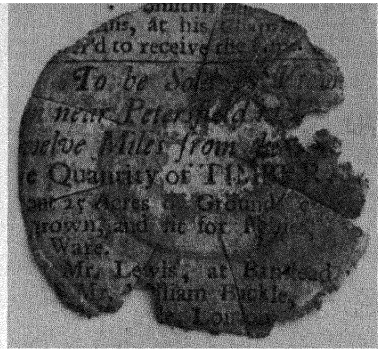
On one scrap there was an advertisement for a medicine reputed to cure “Scurf on the Skin,” “Gout,” and other ailments “incident to human nature.” The ad included a glowing testimonial from a “Mrs. Clocker, a Packer, at the Blue-Bell . . . of the Great Bell Alley in Coleman. . . .” On the back there was a second advertisement announcing that a “large quantity of TIMBER” was “To Be Sold In View” near “Petersfield.” A “Mr. Lewis, at Banstead [Banstead] and a “Mr. William Buckle” were mentioned, but their connection with the auction was not made clear.

On the second piece of paper, we discerned fragments of a news item which stated, if we pieced it together correctly, that “the groom of the bed chamber to the Prince of Wales . . . was safely deliver’d of a son.” Turning it over, we found these words: “. . . greatly diffatisfy’d with . . . Seckendorff; the ill Success . . . Hungary is laid entirely . . . condemn’d for not having . . .”

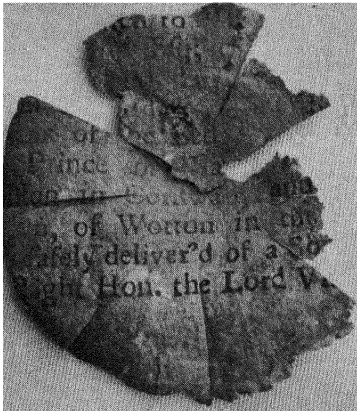
Later, in the Library of Congress in Washington, we searched back copies of old English newspapers, in an attempt to find



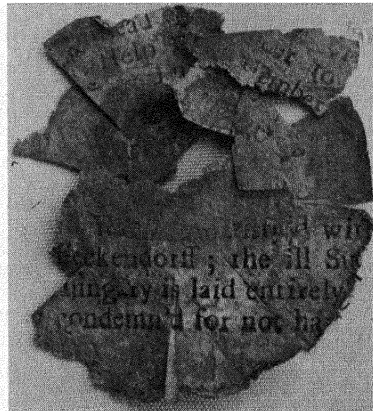
An ad for the gout.



*Announcement of timber
auction.*



Social note.



Mention of Count Seckendorff.

the exact issue from which Mr. Webster had snipped his shims. With the exception of the *London Daily Advertiser*, the file copies of old newspapers are incomplete. Thus, we were unable to find the exact issue. However, during the year 1737–38, frequent mention was made of Count Seckendorff in the available newspapers. He was an Austrian who led foot soldiers in a war against the Ottoman Turks, and later became the central figure in a controversial investigation.

There was actually no need to pin down the exact date of the newspaper. We knew from the hallmark that the watch was manufactured in 1737–38, which was close enough. We guessed it probably took a year or so for the watch to make its way from London to the West Indies. Thus we established the date of the wreck at about 1740. If there was any doubt that our vessel was English, the watch removed it.

18

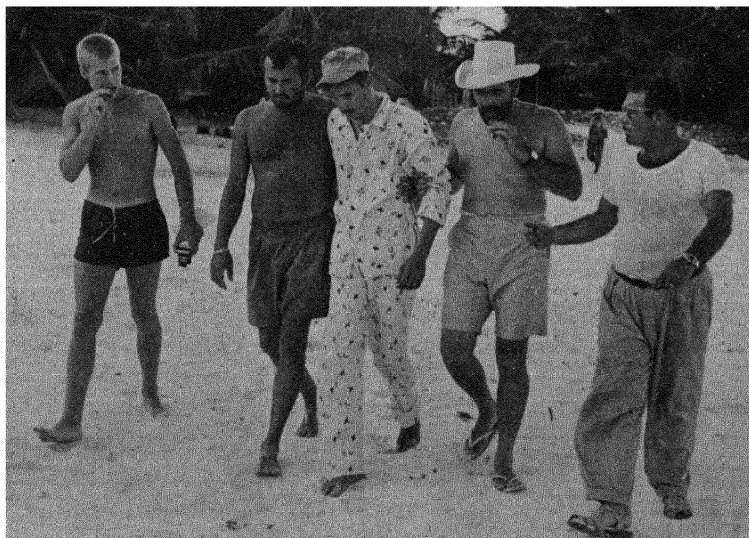
The spook now began to harass us wholeheartedly. A fifty-knot gale battered the camp. The cook, in some ways the most crucial man on our expedition, went on a drinking spree, and our food, already tasteless, became unpalatable. (One day the entire camp was felled by ptomaine poisoning.) There was a constant shortage of drinking water. In two weeks the men consumed over 1,000 coconuts. One by one our divers, exhausted by long hours on the bottom, breathing salt-permeated air or no air at all, and weak from improper food and lack of sleep, began to fall ill. Finally, the camp doctor, in consultation with our Mexican Navy physician, Lieutenant Commander (MC) Alberto Arellano, a specialist in underwater physiology, beached the entire crew for three days.

On the day that he found the gold pocket watch, Marx, who was by then carrying the full weight of the diving, complained of a violent headache. When the diving boat reached camp he went straight to the hut and collapsed in his hammock. Shortly afterward, he developed severe pains in his back, arms, and legs. Then he became delirious.

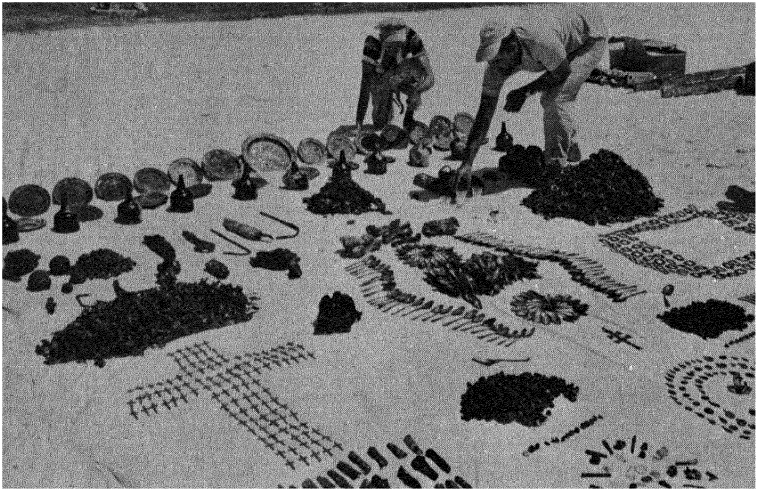
We were extremely concerned. Arnold's accident had instilled in us a healthy respect for the bends. The bends are usually associated with deep-water diving. However, they can come about, under certain circumstances, as a result of prolonged submergence in shallow water. Few men, if any, ever had accumulated as many hours submerged in shallow water, over so short a period, as Bob Marx. After examining Bob, our



In hut in Acumal, Bob Marx collapses, delirious.



Marx is helped to helicopter.

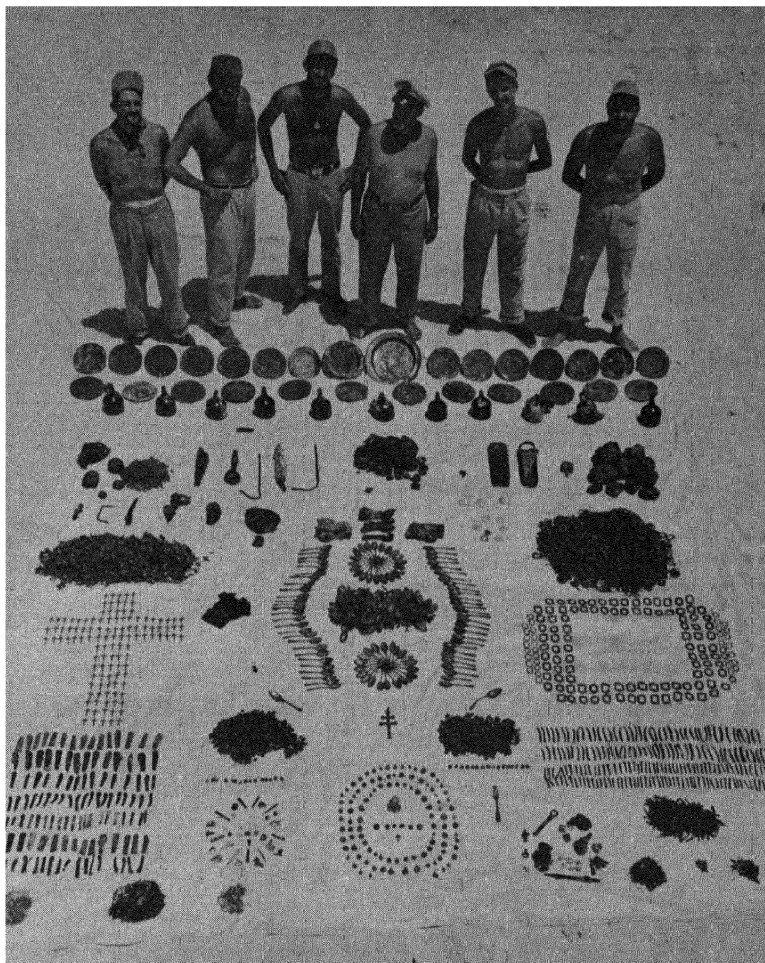


Bob Marx and Blair lay out mass of goodies to be photographed.

camp doctor sent out an emergency call for a helicopter. Meanwhile, on Cozumel, Pablo Bush requested that the Mexican Navy rush a decompression chamber to the island.

When the helicopter arrived in camp a few hours later, Bob was still delirious. We dressed him in pajamas loaned by one of the Mexicans and, with heavy hearts, placed him aboard. The chopper, piloted by Mexican Navy Lieutenant Carlos Mora Perez took to the air. On Cozumel, Marx's malady was diagnosed as an attack of malaria and within a few days he was back on his feet. We did not openly challenge the medical diagnosis. However, we felt certain that it was some physiological reaction to the prolonged shallow-water submergence. This is a field that has not been thoroughly explored. Until it has been, we believe that all divers should keep a close rein on cumulative diving hours even in water only 10 or 15 feet deep.

At the time of Bob's collapse, the group at Acumal had dwindled to about a dozen men. With our star bedridden, the remaining U.S. contingent—Bennett, Mo-Mo, and myself—broke camp and returned to Cozumel. The skeleton force of four or five Mexican divers, including the Arnold brothers,



The total haul of loot. (left to right) Pete, Reggie, Al, Pablo, Marx, and Blair. Photo by Genaro Hurtado.

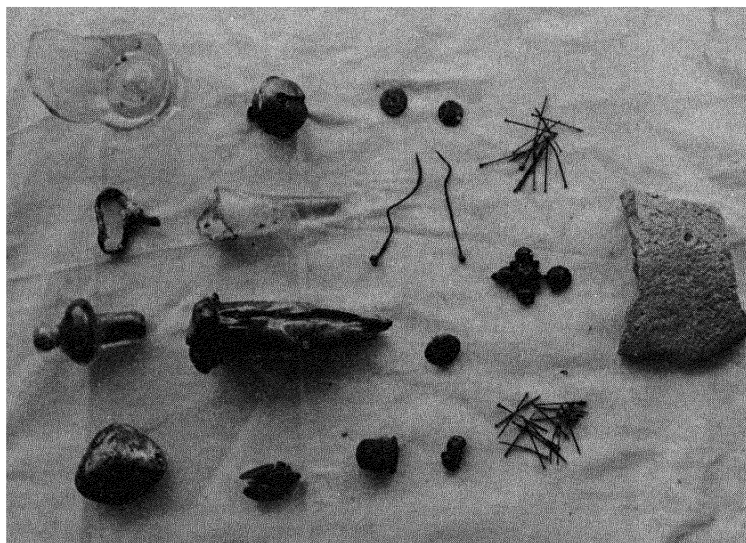
Sergio Castillo, and Pete, continued diving a few more days. Then bad weather drove them from the reef. The expedition, as such, was terminated.

On Cozumel for the first time, we saw the total accumulation of goodies. It was a stunning collection.

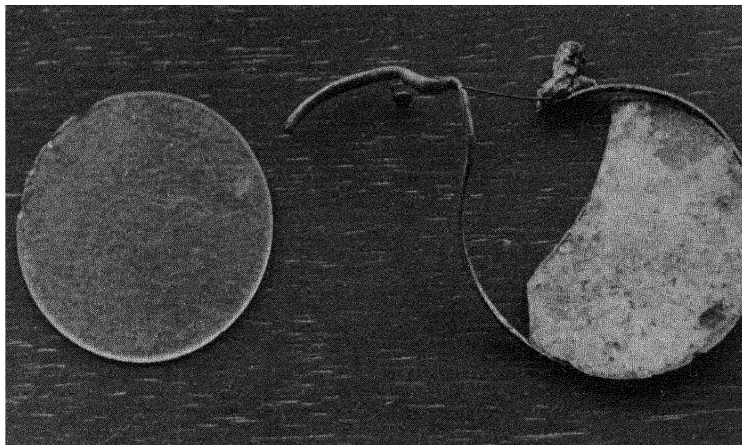
Among the more than 12,000 items were:

1. 140 devotional medals
2. 600 silver-dipped brass spoons
3. 31 pewter plates in three sizes
4. 14 rum, wine, or whisky bottles (4 with original contents tightly corked)
5. 8 complete glasses
6. 3,000 small crucifixes
7. 3,000 buckles (in 20 sizes, 12 different designs)
8. 2,000 metal buttons
9. 500 knife handles
10. 2,000 beads in metal settings
11. 300 musket balls

In addition to these and previously mentioned artifacts, we also recovered a brass pot handle, two rolls of copper wire, a funnel, hundreds of pieces of mirror, scores of flints, ballast stones, shot, cannon balls, a bell, Mediterranean coral beads, a loadstone, garnets, a pair of eyeglasses, two pipe stems, two



A variety of objects, including a bell, thimble, straight pins, buttons, pieces of glass, the stem of a wine glass, costume jewelry, and pottery.



One of two pairs of eyeglasses found on the wreck.



One of two brass bracelets, with agate stone.

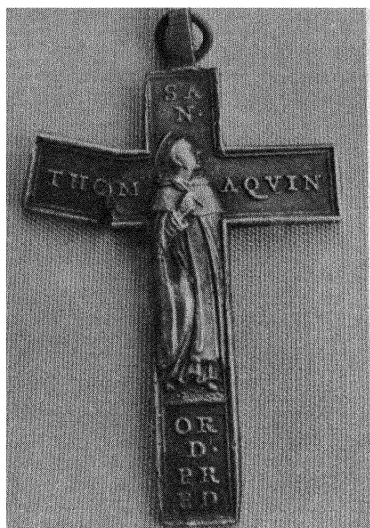


On Cozumel, Blair and Marx study goodies in laboratory.

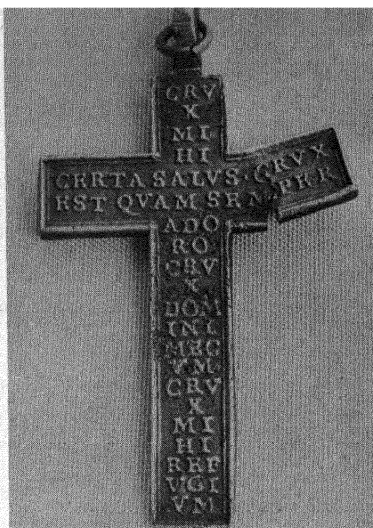
brass bracelets (one with agate stone), two thimbles, an ink-bottle top, a dozen Brazilian jet talismans shaped like a human fist, two brooches, several glass decanter stoppers, and hundreds of pieces of broken pottery and glass.

Among the small crosses we found one of special interest. In place of Christ, the cross was adorned with a figure of St. Thomas Aquinas. The back of the cross was crowded with Latin words and abbreviations: "CRVX MIHI CERTA SALVS. CRVX EST QVAM SEMPER ADORO CRVX DOMINI MECUM CRVX MIHI REFGIVM." The priest on Cozumel helped us translate these words, which made up a prayer: "The Cross is my certain salvation. The Cross is what I always adore. The Cross of the Lord be with me. The Cross is my refuge." This cross, like the double-transom cross, was set aside for special research.

Based on prices Bob Marx had been offered for goodies in the past by tourists, museums, and collectors, the loot was worth over \$100,000. The final disposal of the goodies is hazy. Some were displayed in a museum on Cozumel. Later Pablo Bush told us all had been declared national treasure. Many were removed to Mexico City. Much later, many showed up in the States. Bush offered some goodies to me. In light of the



*Unusual St. Thomas Aquinas
cross.*



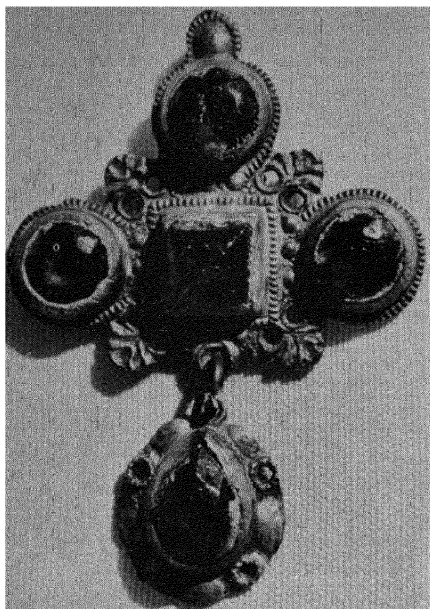
*Latin abbreviation on back of
Aquinas cross.*

fact they were national treasure, I refused them. Since CEDAM did not offer to share with Bob Marx any of the goodies, he got nothing for his efforts except the experience.

The spook had not finished his work. In the closing hours of the expedition, the helicopter which had served us so well crashed in the water near the village pier on Cozumel. There were four men on board. They were all able to unbuckle their belts and swim to the surface. The helicopter, the property of the Mexican Navy, was lost, but, luckily, none of the men were seriously injured. We remarked on the strange coincidence that our expedition had begun and ended with a plane crash.

After cleaning and extensively photographing the goodies, Walter Bennett and I bade farewell to Bob Marx, Pablo Bush, and our new friends, the Mexican divers. Back in Washington, I consulted immediately with Mendel Peterson at the Smithsonian Institution. At Pablo's invitation, Peterson flew to Mexico City to examine the goodies. He reported:

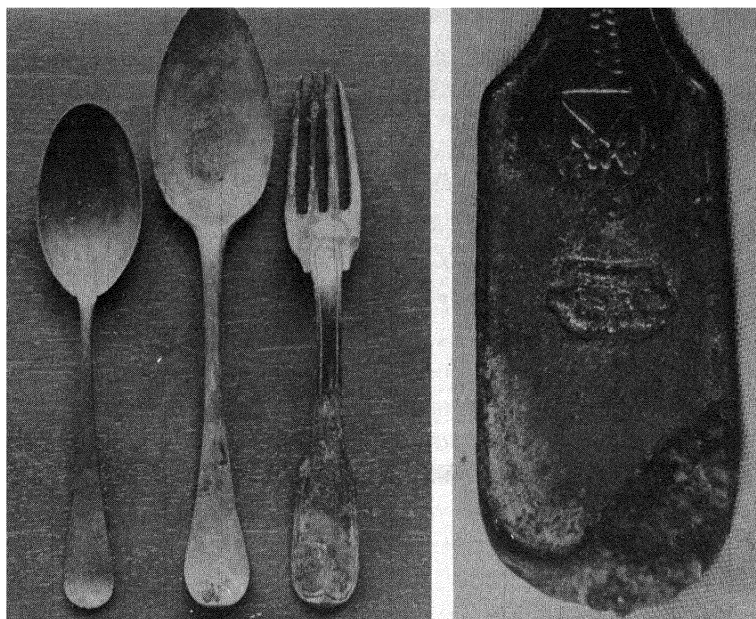
Through the courtesy of Pablo Bush Romero and C.E.D.-A.M. I was able to go to Mexico City and examine a complete



Costume jewelry. The stones are made of paste.

collection of objects from the Matanceros wreck. That examination convinced me that this is the richest merchant ship wreck yet discovered in the Western Hemisphere. While the ship contained little treasure in the classical sense of the word it has produced a "capsule of history" of great worth to historians of commerce and to the antiquarian. Here was an unopened "package" containing a typical cargo such as those carried to the Americas by European merchants during the eighteenth century. Every object in the cargo takes on added importance when it is considered in relation to other objects which were carried in the ship. While the ship was probably British we know that the merchant owners drew their trading cargo from Germany, France, Great Britain and probably from Italy. The labels and seals confirm the first three sources while the workmanship of the crosses and medals indicates an Italian origin.

While we do not yet know the exact circumstances of the wreck we can assume, on the basis of its location, that it was coming from Europe via Jamaica to Mexico or Cuba for purposes of trade. The ship evidently sank with much, if not all, of her cargo intact indicating that she had not yet completed



Silver dipped brass spoon (left), silver spoon, and silver fork; and a close view of “coat of arms” on spoons.



A place setting made up of items recovered from wreck.

her principal trading mission. According to present evidence, the ship went down about 1740. All of the objects in her cargo may be dated to within a few years of this date. Thus the collection taken from the site becomes a most valuable reference by which historians may accurately date similar objects found on land sites. The Matanceros find is indeed a rich "slice" of eighteenth century commercial history which enhances our knowledge of that important period.

Pablo Bush Romero's expedition had been, thanks largely to Bob Marx and the Arnold brothers, the most successful amateur marine archaeological effort in history. We had failed to find the elusive "treasure of Matanceros," but the objects from the wrecks recovered in the three expeditions totaled more than 15,000. For us, that was enough. From the standpoint of diving, we were finished with Matanceros.

There was one unfinished piece of business. After all our work, we still did not know the name or nationality of the

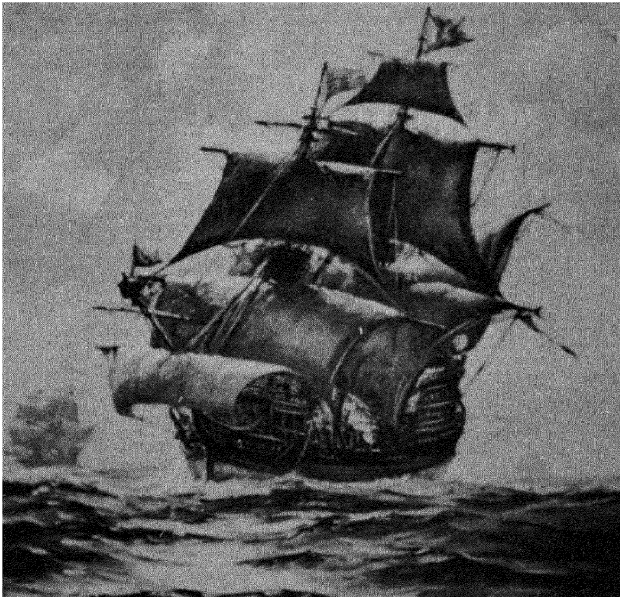


The crashed helicopter. Photo by Bob Marx.

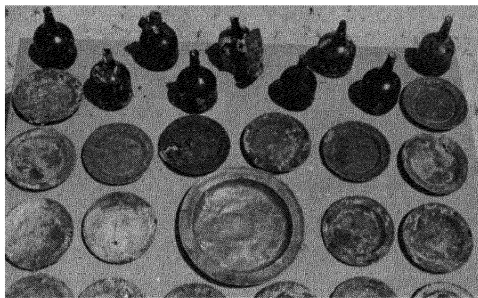
wreck. This time, however, we had collected many clues: Johannes Esser Von Ach, Alexander Cleeve, David Baumer, James Cosack, William Webster, Count Seckendorff, Mrs. Clocker, the Prince of Wales, Mr. Lewis, and Mr. William Buckle. These were ten people who lived, no doubt in widely varying circumstances, forty years before the American Revolution. Now, two centuries after their death, their names had been linked in a curious and dramatic fashion. Would they help us solve the mystery?

PART V

The Mists of History



MARINER'S MUSEUM



I

IN THE PERIOD 1738–40, our best guess for the time of the wreck, Spain still retained most of her New World possessions, including those areas now known as Peru, Colombia, Central America, Mexico, the southwestern United States, and Florida, but she had declined to a second-rate nation. In terms of sea power Spain lagged behind England, France, Holland, and Germany. The once grand Spanish fleets, made up of scores of fat-bellied galleons which sailed twice a year to exchange goods for New World treasure, had been reduced to a dozen merchant ships, many foreign-owned, escorted by three or four ships of the line.

Though greatly reduced in size, the Spanish fleets still followed the routes blazed by Columbus nearly two and a half centuries earlier. The ships sailed from Spain, making their landfall in the islands of the Lesser Antilles, such as Dominica or Guadeloupe. There, a small escort force known as the Barvolento Fleet joined the fleet, after which the ships split into two groups. Some sailed to Cartagena, Colombia, and Porto Bello, Panama; the others coasted the Yucatan channel, passing the island of Cozumel (and Punta Matanceros) to Vera Cruz, Mexico. Usually the fleet regrouped in Havana and returned to Spain as a unit via the Straits of Florida.

By the period 1738–40, English settlements in the New World, such as the Carolinas, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsyl-

vania, New York, and New England, were prospering. Georgia had been founded by Oglethorpe a few years earlier, in 1733. The English also held possessions in the West Indies—a few islands in the Lesser Antilles, the Bahamas group, and, of course, Jamaica, the stronghold of the seventeenth-century buccaneer Sir Henry Morgan. In 1738–40, English traders were busy raiding the rich mahogany forests in Honduras, to the annoyance of the Spanish who made repeated but unsuccessful attempts to drive them out.

England's sea commerce had expanded with the growth of her colonies. In the mid-eighteenth century London and Bristol were the busiest ports in the world. Carrying a continuous stream of colonizers and goods manufactured in England, Holland, Germany, and France, over 2,000 vessels a year sailed from London and Bristol for the New World. These ships, ranging in size from 60 to 300 tons, or larger, usually sailed a triangular trade route which took them from England to the West Indies, to the British colonies on the mainland, and back to England. In the West Indies, especially Jamaica, the ship captains sold some of the European goods and picked up sugar, rum, or logwood. On the mainland, they discharged the remainder of their European goods and took on a cargo of tobacco (Carolina-Virginia) or fish (New England-Nova Scotia).

English ships were severely limited in direct trade with Spanish colonies in the New World. For this reason many English products designed for Spain's New World possessions were shipped directly to Spain. From there they were carried to the New World in the holds of Spanish galleons. However, the twice-yearly Spanish fleets were insufficient to keep pace with the demands for goods in Spain's colonies. Thus, the Spanish colonies welcomed clandestine trade with English merchant ships, and for this reason a great many English ships regularly called at South and Central American and Mexican ports. There were also a number of quasi-pirate vessels plying between English and Spanish possessions in the New World.

In about 1738, for a variety of reasons, the long-standing

tension between England and Spain again began to mount. Cracking down on the illicit English trade in the Indies, heavily armed Spanish *guardacostas* (roughly the equivalent of our Coast Guard vessels) seized English ships. The English, in turn, attacked Spanish-flag vessels. English seamen captured in these skirmishes were severely dealt with by the Spanish. Typical was the case of the English captain Robert Jenkins, whose ear was cut off by the Spanish in Havana. Jenkins returned to England with the ear wrapped in cotton and stirred a storm of emotional controversy. Because of this and other similar incidents England finally declared war on Spain in 1739.

The decisive phase of this conflict, called the War of Jenkins's Ear, was played out mainly in the Indies. An English admiral, Edward Vernon (after whom George Washington's plantation, Mt. Vernon, was named) sailed a formidable English fleet to Jamaica. Operating from that island between 1739 and 1741, his force captured Porto Bello, and later bombarded Cartagena and attempted unsuccessfully to storm Santiago, Cuba.

Of the hundreds of ships that sailed the Indies in the period 1738–40—Vernon's warships, English merchantmen, loggers, pirates, Dutch and German traders, Spanish *guardacostas*, men of war and galleons—one was wrecked on Punta Matanceros. But which one? That was the question we were determined to answer. In time, hundreds of experts in the United States, Mexico, England, France, Holland, Germany, and Spain would join in our hunt, which was literally like looking for a needle in a haystack. The search would lead us down many obscure and fascinating byways of history.

2

We began by ruling out certain possibilities. For example, we did not believe our ship was a pirate vessel. From the massive anchors and large number of cannons we knew she was much larger than most light, swift pirate ships. We then ruled out men-of-war and *guardacostas*. Such ships, armed with as many

as 60 cannons, or more, and carrying a large crew to man the ordnance, were unable to ship a large cargo of trade goods. After careful analysis, we returned to the conclusion we had reached after our first, cursory search of the wreck. She was, we believed, a huge merchantman armed with about twenty cannons. The cargo led us to believe she was English.

We incorrectly surmised that English maritime records, traditionally meticulous and thorough, would quickly reveal the identity of the vessel. Thus, I wrote to Lloyd's of London, the London Public Records Office, Mr. C. Bernard Lewis, Director of the Institute of Jamaica, and the Archives in Belize, British Honduras, describing the wreck and her cargo in detail, and suggesting the year 1740 as the probable time of the wreck. I concluded my letter to the Public Records Office:

We believe that the wreck was a richly laden English merchant vessel of about twenty cannons. She carried a large cargo of pewter, brass spoons, watches, buckles, mirrors, buttons and other obviously English household effects loaded in London, possibly all of it by James Cosack. From London, we imagine that the ship sailed for Hamburg or possibly Amsterdam where she loaded on board needles and straight pins made on a semi-mass production basis in Germany and possibly the crucifixes, medallions, and wine bottles made in France for export by David Baumer. It is possible of course that the ship also made Cadiz or some other Spanish port, depending on the political situation, and from there set out for the New World. Perhaps the ship was a West Indian in route to Curaçao, touching first in Buenos Aires. (We found several ebony good luck pieces attributed to the Orinoco Indians of South America, seemingly indicating she had contact with these peoples or ports, although of course, such an object could easily have been obtained on Trinidad or some other Antilles landfall.) From Curaçao she might have been making for Jamaica when she was struck by disaster.

This of course is only speculation. It is possible that all of the cargo was loaded in London and the ship was en route to Jamaica or some other English port. However, judging from the quantity of Catholic religious artifacts, we believe the ship was ultimately bound for a Spanish port to trade and that she had not reached this ultimate destination at the time

of her disaster. In other words we are certain she was inbound from the Old World, fully loaded. We doubt she was a local privateer or pirate vessel because of her heavy armament and large cargo.

Her final demise is puzzling. The layout of the submerged wreckage and objects on the beach indicate she ran aground on a northwesterly course. Winds, including hurricanes, commonly come from the southeast in the area. However, both anchors were lying very close to shore, almost on the beach, indicating that no last minute attempt was made to anchor. Even in the roughest storm, we believe, some effort would have been made to anchor the ship rather than face a grounding on the reef.

There is definite evidence that the ship may have burned. We have found a considerable quantity of charred wood and other evidence indicating fire, such as melted or fused glass. It is possible that the ship caught fire accidentally at sea—perhaps she was struck by lightning—and was abandoned by the crew and thereafter drifted on the reef, explaining why no attempt was made to anchor. Or possibly the men on board the burning ship deliberately drove her on the reef to save themselves.

We believe that some of the crew were on board the ship when she struck. The Yucatan coast where she went aground was populated until recently by violently hostile Indians. The name of the point on which the ship was grounded—Matanceros—means, in Spanish, "Slaughter" point, which may indicate that some survivors of the wreck were slaughtered by the Indians. It may well be that the Indians killed all the survivors.

It was common practice to salvage wrecks in the mid-eighteenth century. However, we have concluded from our examination of the cargo of this wreck that no effort was ever made to salvage her. The chests we have recently raised from very shallow water would most certainly have been clearly visible to divers using the most primitive of equipment or no equipment at all, and would not have been left on the bottom. That the ship was not salvaged may be attributed to the hostility of the Indians or to the fact that the ship burned and was no longer visible to passing mariners, again indicating no survivors, or if there were survivors, they left the ship at sea and were not aware of her final resting place.

Lloyd's of London replied:

I have to inform you that casualty records were not permanently kept at Lloyd's (or other maritime organizations in this country) until early in the nineteenth century, and in the circumstances, I regret that I am unable to supply the information you require. The reason for such records not having been maintained is that during the eighteenth century (and earlier), reports of maritime casualties were conveyed either verbally or in writing. Such methods of communication were not always reliable and very lengthy periods often elapsed before the notice of casualty was received; consequently, it was not possible to keep accurate data at that time.

Mr. Bernard Lewis of the Institute of Jamaica wrote:

I have to acknowledge and thank you for your letter of the 18th September enclosing a copy of the letter which you recently addressed to the Public Records Office in London describing a remarkable English wreck on the Mexican coast which you and your associates worked over during the past summer. The research staff of our West India Reference Library is making every effort to assist you. It is too early to predict the result but you may rest assured that we will do everything we possibly can to identify the ship. You will hear from us again in due course.

The London Public Records Office, presumably busy with more pressing matters, suggested I obtain the services of a researcher to comb through their vast files. On their referral I retained Mr. D. W. H. Young of London. Mr. Young wrote me:

The Keeper of the Public Records Office has caused your letter of 17th inst. to be handed to me. I find this letter of intense interest to myself. My family have been connected with the Navy and Mercantile Marine since before the loss of the vessel whose name you wish to trace.

My first effort was to call at the Information Department at "Lloyds." I made little headway there. I had hoped to find some record of such an important loss as the wreck of this unknown vessel and cargo must have represented to the Underwriters of the day. I was told that no Casualty Returns were kept. I then went to the Offices of Lloyds Register,

hoping to find some record of such a vessel having been struck off the Register as "Lost." Again I was told that no such record was extant. There was a vast accumulated mass of undigested documents in the Offices. I would be given every facility for studying these. The work might take a couple of years, and in the end nothing might evolve.

Now as to the pocket watch. Webster was a very famous watch and chronometer maker in London. I had two of their chronometers and one of their watches in my own possession. I unfortunately found that they had recently gone out of business. If I trace that any of the firm's records still exist I would try whether there is a note as to for who the watch was made.

Since making notes on the subject of my reply to yours, Mr. Timings, one of the Assistant Keepers, has suggested that I make research in the Port Books at the Record Office Reference No. E 190. These give the name of the ship, date of departure, and the destination, together with a list of the cargo carried. I have searched one bundle 1740-3. I find many ships sailing for ports on the Eastern shores of America. They all seem to carry the same kind of cargo, including bottles, pewter, etc. but I do not find reference in any of the lists to the other interesting articles of which you give details. Mr. Timings is of the opinion that exhaustive research of these records would take at least a month. If you think it worth while I will continue the research. In the meanwhile I propose to try and trace whether any records of Webster's business still survive. Unfortunately the Hall and Offices of the Clockmakers' City of London Company were "blitzed" in the War.

I replied:

You mentioned that you have searched a bundle (1740-43) in Reference No. E. 190, which lists ships and their cargo departing for ports on the east coast of America. I wonder if these records show any losses. Also, I wonder if it would be possible for you to have photostated from Reference E. 190 the information and cargo list of one ship as a sample of the kind of information available in those files? Preferably one departing for Buenos Aires or some other Spanish or West Indies port?

We believe, but are not certain, that the ship probably touched in Buenos Aires or some other Spanish port in South America. This is because we have found Brazilian talismans on the wreck, small ebony pieces in the shape of a human fist. However, it is possible the ship was bound for Jamaica, or even North America, although the religious artifacts of the cargo suggest a Spanish port as the final destination.

We believe other sources might contain leads. One, suggested here by the Smithsonian, are the "Plantation Records" in the Office of Public Records. These are evidently reports from plantation owners or Lords in the New World. Perhaps in this correspondence there would be mention of a wreck, or a lost ship that failed to bring in supplies.

It seems to me also, that through street directories of London, or other sources, James Cosack, the English packer whose seal we found, could be traced. If so, perhaps the date of the wreck could be more firmly established. He definitely packed something that left aboard that ship. The wreck possibly occurred in 1738 or 1739.

3

As time went on, the research into this vessel's history grew tremendously complex and I was not able to devote the proper time to it. Bob Marx, who was more anxious than any of us to learn the ship's identity, flew to Washington, and in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress spent several months intensively searching the available records. During this period he read more than two hundred books in the Library of Congress covering every conceivable related subject.

First he retraced my earlier path through the technical books dealing with the artifacts. These reference works are sketchy and incomplete. However, based on the available evidence Marx made a pertinent observation. There was certainly no question that the pocket watch, the two large plates by Alexander Cleeve, and the lead Cosack export seal, were English. However, on close look, Bob found that buckles, small pewter

plates, costume jewelry, and other items identical with those of our cargo, were manufactured in Germany, France, Greece, Spain, and Holland. The reference books on artifacts manufactured in England are more numerous and, of course, easier to read, which helps explain our original assumption that most of the artifacts we recovered were English. However, Marx was perfectly correct when he said, "These objects could have been made in damned near any European country."

For example, we had long held to the view that our lopsided bottles were English. Everything about them smacked of old England. However, after a careful search of the books on the history of bottles and glass, Marx reported that this was not necessarily so. A great number of German manufacturers had produced products identical with the bottles recovered from the wreck. In fact, during 1740, bottles identical with ours were even manufactured in New Jersey, by a German immigrant named Wistar. (His bottles, widely admired, were known as Wistarberg bottles.)

This new conclusion prompted an exhaustive effort to learn more about the specific objects we recovered. We were soon to learn that such information is very hard to come by. The needle manufacturer, Von Ach, was one good lead. Thinking the "Esser" might be a mistake for "Essen" I wrote to the U.S. Consul in nearby Düsseldorf, Germany, Mr. Andrew Stadler. He replied:

Inquiries made to the various industrial associations and Chambers of Commerce, which were considered possible sources for the information you request, have disclosed only that records for the period in question have been destroyed. However, the City Archivist in Essen has located a family named von Acken, which was prominent in the life of that city during the 17th century, and has informed us that one Heinrich (Hinrich) von Acken, who was living in 1541, had been a member of a Merchants Guild and dealt in iron and iron products. The von Acken family continued to live in Essen through at least the following century although their business connections are not known at this writing.

A short time later I heard directly from Essen's city archivist, Dr. Schroter. He had solved the mystery:

I just received word from the city archives in Aachen, Germany, that Johannes Esser von Ach was an Aachen merchant, as I had assumed.

The trademark on the needle packages is known and is familiar in Aachen, so an error is impossible. There was great production and commerce in needles in Aachen.

Then, from the city archivist in Aachen, Dr. Kaemerer, we received a letter in which he enclosed a photostat of the Johannes Esser von Ach trademark, which he found on file in the archives. It was identical with that on our needle packages. Dr. Kaemerer reported additionally that Johannes Esser von Ach was a well-known and prosperous needle manufacturer who began making needles in Aachen in the year 1727, and carried on his business until the middle of the century. This time-span matched our other dates. There was no other information available besides the fact that great quantities of German needles were shipped to England during this period.

Turning back to the watch, we attempted to determine more precisely the date of its manufacture and information on Mr. Webster's clientele. If records survived in which the name of the person who bought the watch from Webster was listed, it was possible that through other sources we might learn the name of the ship on which this man sailed for the New World. Thus, I wrote to the British Horological Institute describing the watch and its serial number, 1938.

In addition there is what appears to be a serial number on the case below the hallmarks, and also on the back of the works, and on the flange or edge of the case. The number is 1938 with the "19" in larger numerals than the "38." Finally, there is on the inside of the case, below the hallmarks and above the serial number, the initials of what we think is the case maker. This appears to be an H and R, pushed together thus: HR

On the basis of this data, do you think you could supply us with further information? For example, the sources here list several men named "Webster" as watchmakers. Which

one made this watch? When was it made? Are there any records of when it was sold and to whom? There were no owner's initials or other personal markings on the watch and the hands were stopped at the traditional 8:20 which indicates to us that the watch was probably a new one being shipped to the New World for sale.

Is there any record of Webster selling a shipment of watches for the New World? Or one watch for shipment to the New World? Can you trace the date of sale or shipment by the serial number? If so, we would appreciate any information, particularly with reference to dates. We are most anxious to learn the identity of this important vessel and hope that with the watch we can obtain positive information on dates, and thus trace the ship. If you do not have such records, can you suggest a source that might have them?

Even if the watch was sold to a private individual, if we had his name it might be possible to search other sources for the date and vessel on which this individual sailed for the New World and thus identify the ship.

Mr. F. B. Cowen, Secretary of the Institute, replied:

Many thanks for your letter of 14th September, which I was very interested to read. I am afraid it is going to be an extremely "long shot" to get all the information you require, but I have set the ball rolling and will write you more fully in the course of perhaps a week or two, or a month or two.

In the meantime, William Webster of Exchange Alley, London, was a very eminent clockmaker, apprenticed to the famous Thomas Tompion. He was admitted to the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers in 1710; he died in 1734. This William Webster was succeeded by his son, another William, round about 1725. He became Master of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers in 1755. Like his father, he was an eminent clockmaker. From 1770 to 1800 the firm continued as William Webster and Son. Since then there is no record, and it is safe to say that there was no successor. It is a very sad fact that when many of the really fine old clockmakers of bygone days passed out of this life, their business went out of existence at the same time.

The hallmark you mention is the London hallmark for 22 carat gold for the year 1737.

I am endeavouring to find out what the number 1938 refers to, and also to trace the initials H. R., and am accordingly passing your letter round the members of our "Panel" in the hope that somebody will be able to fill in some of the information. I am also endeavouring to find out if any records are in existence to show to whom William Webster sold his watches.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, it is a long shot, but this is such an interesting problem that I will leave no stone unturned to discover all I can.

Later the *British Horological Journal* published a description of the watch, but none of these efforts produced the watch's owner.

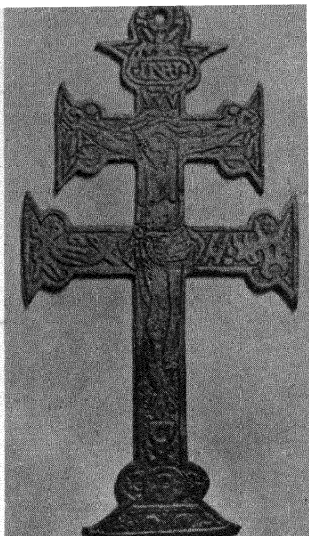
4

We then took up the question of the French trading seal of David Baumer of Nimes, France. I wrote to French archivists in Paris and in Nimes. Monsieur E. Allard of the Nimes Archives reported there was no record of our exporter, David Baumer. However, we noted for the first time that Nimes was very close to the French port of Marseilles on the Mediterranean, which in turn is very close to Spain, and a considerable distance from England.

Months later, I received a reply from J. Sablou, of the Archives Départementales du Gard in Paris. This researcher reported that there was indeed a record of David Baumer (or Baumet) of Nimes. He was the son of Jean Baumer, a wealthy merchant who manufactured silk stockings and cloth and enjoyed a great position in the city. David Baumer was born in Nimes, about 1700, and lived in the Prat-et-Mejan Quarter, near the old Roman amphitheater. In 1725 David Baumer married Anne Maigre, and went into his father's business of exporting silk clothes and stockings. He was still actively engaged in this business in the period 1730-40. This period matched our other time schedules and told us more of the cargo of the ship, but there was no specific record of a lost shipment of silks in the Baumer files.



Close view of typical religious medallion.



Caravaca cross found in book in Library of Congress.

Turning back to the religious artifacts, we consulted with Catholic religious authorities, including Father Daniel Power, a Jesuit priest at Georgetown University, Father Lino Canedo at the Franciscan Institute for Latin American Studies, and Father Charles Auth at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. These three men identified the saints on the various medals and helped us with the Latin, Greek, Italian, and Spanish abbreviations. But none of the medallions gave any clue to the date or nationality of the wreck.

The small cross bearing the figure of St. Thomas Aquinas was of special interest to the scholarly Dominicans, who especially revere the learned St. Thomas, "The Doctor of the Church." In fact the Dominicans still wear identical crosses, with the prayer in Latin abbreviated on the reverse side exactly as we had found it on our cross. This fact led us to believe that our unique St. Thomas cross was probably worn by a Dominican on our ship, possibly one transporting the other artifacts to some priory in the New World. Thus, we

searched the Dominican records to see if the wreck and the loss of a Dominican missionary were recorded. But we found nothing.

Marx then resolved the mystery of the double-transom "Cross of Lorraine." Searching through dozens of books on crosses in the Library of Congress, he found a photograph of a double-transom cross identical with ours. Everything matched, including the figure of Christ and the Virgin Mary. It was not a "Cross of Lorraine" but a "Cross of Caravaca," manufactured in a small town in southeastern Spain, Caravaca. The cross is modeled after a large one of the same shape in the cathedral of Caravaca. It was specially esteemed by Spanish seamen because it was thought to help them predict winds.

The Caravaca cross was the first item we discovered definitely to have been manufactured in Spain. Since the material, workmanship, and figures on the smaller crosses (including the St. Thomas cross) were similar, we concluded that all the crosses had been made by the same manufacturer, in Caravaca. Even so, we still stubbornly clung to the view that the ship was English, an inflexible approach investigators of sunken ships should not adopt. We were totally dominated by the Cleve pewter plates, the Cosack packing seal, and the watch. The crosses, we reasoned, somehow had found their way on board an English ship.

I was convinced that somewhere in the archives of England we would solve the riddle of Matanceros. I thought of all the retired British naval officers and maritime researchers, puttering about their clubs, who would like nothing better than to help us. But how to reach them? A light went on in the back of my mind.

I wrote to a friend, Charles Sutton, who was an editor of the *London Daily Mail*, a newspaper of huge circulation, reaching every corner of the British Isles. I proposed that Sutton take all our clues and publish them in his newspaper, offering a reward to the person who solved the mystery of this important English loss. Sutton, thinking this would hold vast appeal for his maritime-minded English readers, gave the story a large spread in two installments, offering £100 (about \$280) reward,

HELP SOLVE THE MYSTERY . . . AND GET £100 REWARD

The Riddle of Slaughter Point

by VINCENT MULCHRONE

A DUBBLE of air-imprisoned 200 years ago in a British sailor's rum bottle—sawed 20ft up through the clear water in frequent on the surface of the Caribbean: The diver wringed not the broken bottle and struck it with his chest at the morning's rest.

It was the first of the 100 years ago, when the bottle was found in the Caribbean.

The bottle was found in the Caribbean, and the bottle was found in the Caribbean.

And more the bottle was found in the Caribbean, and the bottle was found in the Caribbean.

And more the bottle was found in the Caribbean, and the bottle was found in the Caribbean.

And more the bottle was found in the Caribbean, and the bottle was found in the Caribbean.

CAN YOU

FIND A

CLUE TO

THE TREASURE SHIP'S NAME?

• See tomorrow's instalment for the full list of clues from the wrecked gold ship off Yucatan . . .



WHERE SHE LIES . . .

The London Daily Mail contest.

two months' salary for a retired officer, for any information. The *Daily Mail* was deluged with letters.

Sutton forwarded copies of the letters to me for study. There were reports from researchers, amateur historians, naval officers, mystics, crackbrains, pewter experts, watch authorities, and the like. They listed a variety of English wrecks in the West Indies, but none that fit the known facts of ours. As for the artifacts, these letters only confirmed or slightly amplified the research we had done. For example, a Mr. M. R. Apted in Edinburgh wrote:

The French export seal found on the wreck is said to bear on the reverse the impressions of an alligator chained to a tree and the words, Nismes and Colnem.

This device appears in a sixteenth century book published by a Frenchman called Claude Paradin who explains its significance as follows:

"There is used to this day certain brass money with the image of Augustus Caesar on it, upon the one side whereof is the portrait of a Crocodile chained fast to a palm tree, with

this inscription: COL. NEM. which is 'No Man hath ever bound me before.' By which sign Caesar would signify that none before him did ever subdue Egypt, and triumphed over it. For the crocodile represents Egypt, which is to be found only in the river Nile . . ."

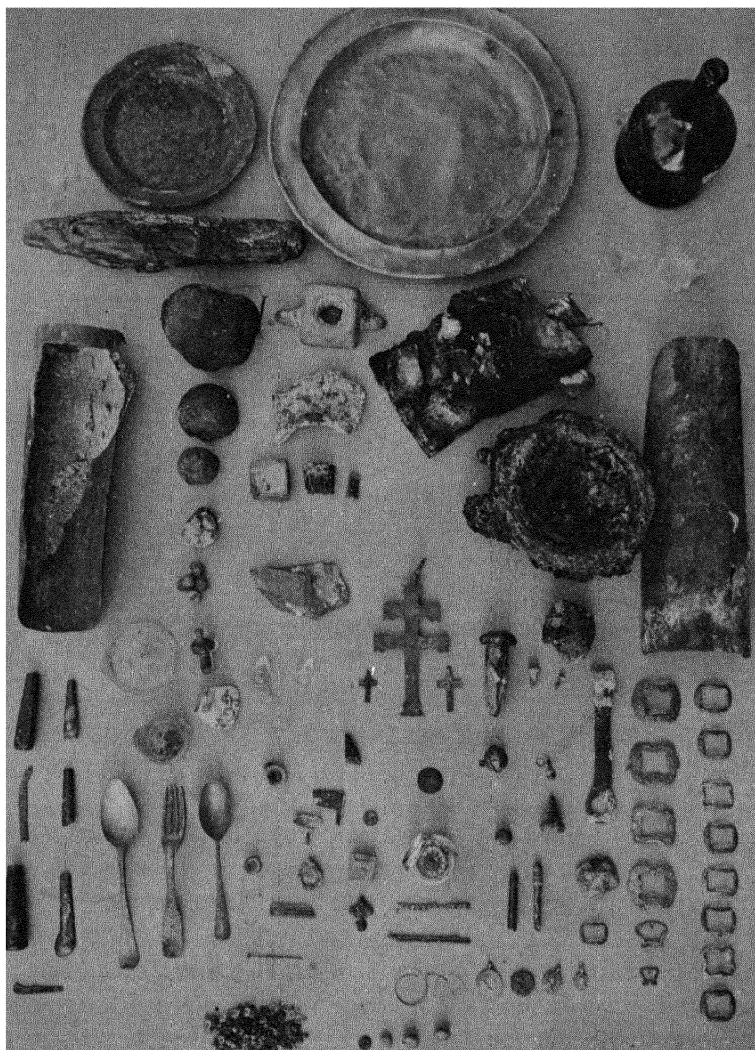
The device on the seal could have been derived either from a coin or from the symbol book but in either case the word COLNEM is short for the Latin "Colligavit Nemo" meaning "No Man hath ever bound me before."

We already knew, of course, that this symbol was used on an ancient coin issued in honor of General Marcus Agrippa in Nîmes, France. It was interesting to learn the meaning of *Colnem* but it told us nothing about David Baumer. Incidentally, we learned from another English correspondent that the alligator chained to a tree and the word *Colnem* may be found in the town crest of Nîmes (no doubt the inspiration for Baumer's seal), and that in the city park of Nîmes there are shrubs and flowers shaped like an alligator chained to a nearby palm tree.

Thus, while there was much information of this nature in the letters from the English readers, it led us nowhere. Most of the *Daily Mail* readers doubted the ship was English because of the large quantity of crucifixes on board.

Obsessed by the mystery, Marx and I pushed on, checking every source we could for shipping losses in the area. We read detailed accounts of English trade with America, the shipping records of London and Bristol (and we queried the archivists of those cities directly), accounts of English privateers, histories of the War of Jenkins's Ear, and Admiral Vernon's personal papers on file in the Rare Book Division of the Library of Congress. We also made studies of German immigration to the United States, Dutch trading in the New World, and various other accounts of ships and trade in the Indies. We found belatedly that the "Brazilian" talismans were Arab in origin and commonly worn by the Spanish in the Old and the New World.

With our growing knowledge, at long last, we began seriously to question our conclusion that the ship was English. By



*A sample of "one of everything"—except cannons and anchors—
from the wreck.*

then we had thoroughly studied the political climate in the Indies during the period. In view of the war between Spain and England in 1740, it seemed highly unlikely, as the *Daily Mail* contestants had stressed, that an English trading ship would be bound directly for a Spanish port. Yet, because of this very ten-

sion, and especially because Admiral Vernon's menacing fleet lay in wait, the Spanish fleets were not sailing in 1740. What, then, was the answer?

Once again we reviewed our facts, beginning with the crucifixes. By then, counting all expeditions, we estimated that we had raised a total of about 5,000 crosses. We knew that there were still thousands on the bottom. By extrapolation, we conservatively calculated that the ship must have carried a total of 50,000 crucifixes. What English trader could hope to dispose of such a number in a fleeting, clandestine trade in an unguarded Spanish port? It sounded more like the annual or semiannual shipment of a Spanish fleet ship, bound for Vera Cruz or some other large Spanish settlement. The single Caravaca cross, obviously the property of one of the crew, would not have been worn by an English sailor. And it seemed unlikely that a Dominican monk, wearing a St. Thomas cross, would be on board an English vessel.

Then, there was the question of the cannons and anchors. By now, we felt certain that all English cannons would be cast with the "broad arrow" insignia of England, or some other mark. After consulting such records as are available on cannons (and they are sketchy), Marx concluded that our cannons more nearly resembled those of Spain than England. The anchor, he discovered, was identical with some anchors recovered from Spanish galleons in Vigo Bay, Spain, by a salvage company in the last century.

There was another riddle. From our study of English hall-mark practice, we had learned that every piece of silver, gold, or pewter manufactured in England bore a special mark of the manufacturer. English gold and silversmiths were meticulous in these records, and any violation, as we have seen in the case of Alexander Cleeve, brought severe retribution. In none of the thorough English records could we find the hallmark "BNO," such as appeared on the back of the small pewter plates. Moreover, at Matanceros, we had recovered a total of three silver spoons and three silver forks. None of these, nor the pewter buckles, nor the silver-dipped brass spoons, bore hallmarks. It was possible that the English manufacturers deliberately left hallmarks off goods destined for clandestine

Spanish trade, but with the strict policing of the guild this seemed unlikely. We concluded, because they were unmarked, that the buckles, forks, and spoons were probably not English.

Finally, in a book on Spanish cutlery, Marx found ivory knife handles, decorated with small roses and sea shells, identical with knives we had recovered from the wreck. They dated from the period 1730–40. We knew from our detailed study of trade during this period that no prudent English merchant would buy knife handles in Spain when he could get them cheaper in nearby Holland, France, or Germany.

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Thus, after a very careful reappraisal of the existing facts, we reached the conclusion that only a small fraction of the ship's cargo was, without question, English. The bulk of it could have been manufactured in any country. The number and variety of crucifixes, knives, talismans, the proximity of Nimes to Spain, the cannons and anchors, the geographical location of the wreck, and the absence of any major loss in English shipping records for the period and place indicated to us a ship of Spanish registry. The more we discussed it, the more firmly we believed the wreck to be Spanish, possibly a prize taken from some West Indian port by Admiral Vernon in 1740.

I wrote to our English researcher, Mr. Young, and to Mr. Lewis at the Institute of Jamaica:

Based on investigation here we have some new thoughts. First off, if we had the date of the wreck correct—1740—it is possible that this ship was one of the fleet of Admiral Edward Vernon or perhaps a prize taken by him in Porto Bello or Cartagena. We have read here that Admiral Vernon took many prizes and sent some of them with English crews back to Jamaica, New York and England. Some of them, we read, did not reach the ports for which they were destined.

We have carefully studied the cargo. While it is true that the Cleeve plates, watch, and costume jewelry and Cosack

export seal are definitely English, we now have reason to believe a great deal of the cargo is not English, or not necessarily English. For example, the wine bottles could be German, French; the buckles could be German, and so on. The needles are definitely German. The religious medallions and crucifixes are definitely Spanish or Italian. The spoons, forks, both of copper and silver, have no hallmarks. We read here that *all* such items manufactured in England definitely had hallmarks (especially silver). Then, on the majority of the plates of pewter we have the "BNO" hallmark which we can find on no English pewter records, which are very thorough. This again indicates that more of her cargo, namely, the small plates, was non-English.

This, plus the fact that for the period concerned—1739-1740 during the War of Jenkins's Ear—we can't imagine an English vessel trading in Spanish ports in the Indies, leads us to the tentative belief that the ship was actually Spanish, perhaps a prize taken by Vernon. The watch might have belonged to one of Vernon's captains. He bought it in 1738 or 1739 before departing with Vernon for the West Indian Station, and then was assigned by Vernon to take the prize back to England. He came to grief and hence we find the watch, among the otherwise not-necessarily English cargo. The James Cosack packer seal and Cleeve plates could also have been brought aboard by this man and the crew, or they might have been on the Spanish prize to begin with, having been loaded in Cadiz before the outbreak of the war.

It is also possible, of course, that in spite of the war, privateers or other English vessels continued trading with the Spanish, or came prepared to trade, and were trapped by the war. In any case, we think the records of Admiral Vernon's campaign in 1740 would be worth checking. Can you tell if he lost any of his prizes? If so, where? What cargo were they carrying? Any mention of crucifixes or religious medallions in large quantity?

One of the real puzzles of this wreck is the cannons. As you know, we were dumfounded upon cleaning them to find absolutely no markings of any kind. From what we have read of cannon this seems a most remarkable fact. Almost all cannons have been elaborately marked with the founders' mark. In view of no marks, this thought occurred to us: is

it possible that during the period of the privateers in England (and specifically during our period, 1740) English foundries cast cannon with no markings deliberately so that the ships could not readily be identified as English? Or for some other reason?

Mr. Young replied:

I have been down the City in quest of a directory of the City of London, about 1740. I found a Directory of exactly that date, but nothing for fifteen years before or after. I failed to find the name of Cosack, but searching through all the C's, I found the last entry was James Cusock, of Coleman Street, Packer.

Now as to letter of 18th inst. which cuts right across our original thesis, I cannot agree. True, we are searching for a needle in a bundle of hay. All ships of any size were armed as defence against privateers. These guns were made in such places as the Iron Foundries in Sussex, and as arming of merchant ships was an accepted practice I would not say that the fact of the guns of the wreck bearing no mark was for the purpose of any concealment. In compiling an index for the P.R.O. of the Register of Commissions and Warrants. R.N. 1693 to 1740. I found a series of entries for the issue of letters of Marque to Captains of the East Indian Company's ships, authorizing them to take Enemy Prizes. Could not the wreck have been in a position to pick up a Prize before she met with disaster, which might account for the presence of articles of foreign origin? I have searched at the Westminster Public Library, but have failed to find any history of Vernon's Expedition. I will enquire at the Admiralty Official Library to find whether they can tell me anything. Then when the P.R.O. re-opens I will search to find whether Vernon's Despatches are there.

Further, I called on the Assistant Librarian of the Admiralty, but he could not help. He agreed with me that the observation of Prize Law was rather in the breach than otherwise. That is by the way. On the re-opening of the P.R.O. I went to Adm.1/32. The Despatches of Commodore Chas. Brown and Admiral Vernon, 1737-1742. After some six hours of careful scrutiny I failed to find any possible reference to the loss of any Prize Vessel at all.

All I have found of any interest is that James Cusack was in business as a Packer in Coleman Street, in the City of London, in 1740.

Now unshakeably convinced that our ship was a Spanish merchantman, we reviewed the situation. If she was not a prize of Admiral Vernon's, then she must have come to grief before 1739 or 1740 because as far as we were able to determine no Spanish galleons sailed in the West Indies during the War of Jenkins's Ear. Thus, we revised the probable date of the wreck to 1737 or 1738. It could be no earlier since the manufacture date of the watch had been precisely established as 1737.

We had learned by then that a rich source for such information was the contemporary newspapers and magazines. In those days, when almost everyone depended on ships for goods and news, newspapers were full of information on ship arrivals and departures, cargoes, and encounters with other vessels. They gave special attention to shipwrecks. In the days following, Marx and I combed *Gentleman's Magazine*, *The London Daily Advertiser*, the *Virginia Gazette*, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and all available issues of Bermuda, Halifax, and Jamaica newspapers, and other English journals, for the period 1737-42. We found mention of many ships carrying cargoes similar to our wreck. We took note of hundreds of sea disasters, both English and Spanish. But none of them seemed to fit our wreck.

Then one day Bob Marx turned to some extracts from *La Gaceta de Mexico*, a daily newspaper published in Mexico City, which were on file in the Franciscan Institute for Latin American Studies. Thumbing through the extracts for February, 1736, Marx, scarcely believing his eyes, spotted a Spanish ship named *El Matanzero*.

The complete newspaper extract was as follows:

Between the 18th and 25th of February, 1736, there were in this port [Vera Cruz] thirteen ships of a squadron that had fifteen ships. The fleet was under the command of his excellency, Lt. General of the Armada of the Ocean, Don Manuel Lopez Pintado. The two missing ships are *El Lafrancho* and

the frigate *Nuestra Señora De Regla*. These ships were last seen in Vigia de Zempoala just before a bad north wind.

The ships that compose the remaining flota of Señor D. Manuel Lopez Pintado are:

San Luis (General's flagship)

San Antonio (Admiral's flagship)

Santa Rosa (dispatch boat)

El Retiro

MERCHANT SHIPS:

El Rosario

N. Señora Del Rosario

La Nympha

Sancti Espiritus

La Paz

El Salvador

El Borlandin

El Matanzero, owned by D. Francisco Madrid, Jr.

El Poder de Dios

As mentioned previously, reefs, points, and cays are frequently named for the ships that perish upon them. For a long while we had puzzled over the name of our point, Matanceros. The name had never been published on a map or document. The spelling could be either "Matancero" or "Matanzero" since the "c" and "z" in Spanish are interchangeable. The Mexicans called it both "Matancero" and "Matanceros."

It is an unusual name, quite different from other points along the bleak coast, most of which have Maya names. Roughly translated, as described earlier, *Matanceros* means "Slaughters," hence Punta Matanceros is "Slaughters Point" or "Slaughter Point." We had believed that the name "Slaughters" or "Slaughter" referred to the fact that the men on the wreck had been slaughtered by the hostile Indians. The Spanish usually named their ships after saints. It never occurred to us that they might give a ship the odd name Slaughters or Slaughter. But they had and, astonishingly, Marx had found it. The ship, a Spanish merchantman, had been in the Vera Cruz trade about the time of our wreck. There was no question in our minds that Señor Madrid's *El Matanzero* was our ship.

Eagerly we searched the published extracts of the Mexican

newspaper for further reference to *El Matanzero*. But beyond the notice of her arrival in Vera Cruz in February, 1736, we could find nothing. We forwarded our information to Pablo Bush Romero in Mexico City and asked him to retain a researcher to search the full files of the newspaper. Alas, we discovered that the files of *La Gaceta de Mexico* for that period had suffered the fate of many old documents in Mexico: they had been stolen. But from other sources, his researcher turned up the bare facts that *El Matanzero* had been traced to Spain in 1737 and Havana in 1738. There was no further mention of her in the records.

Spain may be lacking in some respects in these times, but she is a country rich in history. The archives of Spain, carefully preserved through the centuries by the proud Dons, are among the richest in the world. In Seville, we knew, were the Archives of the Indies, a vast storehouse of handwritten documents detailing every movement of trade between Spain and the West Indies. The Naval Museum in Madrid likewise contains limitless documents dealing with Spain's long and illustrious naval history. Yet we also knew from talking with U.S. historians that the archives in Spain were understaffed and the documents imprecisely indexed. It would be hopeless, we were told, to pursue our hunt for the *Matanzero* by mail. So we temporarily shelved our efforts.

Not many months later, by chance, I visited Spain. Only a few hours after my arrival in Madrid, I caught a plane direct for Seville, which lies to the southeast near the Atlantic coast. Minutes after I had checked into my hotel in Seville, I was standing before the Archives of the Indies, which are housed in a sixteenth-century building, the Casa de Lonja (House of Merchants), across the street from Seville's enormous cathedral.

Inside the building I presented myself to Señor Don José de la Peña, the Director of the Archives of the Indies, a gentleman who has labored and studied in the archives for nearly thirty years. Señor Peña is urbane yet hospitable; few men know the documents under his care as well. Eagerly I described the wreck at Matanceros and our long, frustrating attempts to solve its secret. I showed Señor Peña a set of photographs of

the goodies and told him everything we knew, especially of the extract Bob Marx had found from *Gaceta de Mexico*. Señor Peña was intensely interested. It was rare that he had a visitor at the archives with tangible evidence of a wrecked Spanish galleon in search of answers.

Señor Peña took me on a tour of the archives. Proudly he showed original letters and documents written by Columbus, Pizarro, Cortés, and many of the great Spanish admirals, which were on special display beneath glass. But what interested me most were the millions upon millions of documents which dealt directly with the galleons.

There are an estimated fifteen million documents in the Archives of the Indies. These in turn are filed in 40,000 bundles—called *legajos*—neatly wrapped by red ribbon. The *legajos* are available for study by properly authorized researchers on a few moments' notice. The great problem is that the documents are indexed only under broad headings, such as "Letters from Mexico to Spain." It may take months and years for a researcher to uncover the exact document he is seeking. As one student in the archives told me: "An unwritten rule here is you never look for anything specific. You just start in someplace. You will always find documents much more interesting than the one you may be seeking."

Fortunately, the most thoroughly indexed documents in the archives are those listed under the Casa de Contratación (House of Trade), which in olden times was Spain's equivalent of our Merchant Marine Commission. During the last hundred years or so, researchers have catalogued the sailings of the treasure fleets; ships comprising these fleets, as well as ships sailing alone to the Indies, are listed in the "Book of Registers," which although not absolutely complete probably lists about 90 per cent of all the ships which sailed from Spain. I scanned these old books with great interest. The ancient scrawl is difficult to read.

When I told Señor Peña that I wished to make every effort to track down *El Matanzero*, he turned me over to a specialist on the archives, Enrique Otte. Otte is a German-born econo-

mist who, for the past seven years, has been studying in the archives, writing a history of Santo Domingo, the first city in the Americas. He is fluent in German, Spanish, French, and English, and can read the old Spanish documents as easily as we read a newspaper. Like Peña, Otte was fascinated by the pictures of the goodies, and quite willingly set aside his own research to give me a hand. He said: "The odds against finding anything in a short time are great, but let's go."

Actually, the notice from the Mexican newspaper told us a great deal. We knew, for example, the name of the ship, *El Matanzero*, the name of the fleet Admiral, Pintado, and the year the fleet arrived in Vera Cruz, 1736. This is far more information than the average researcher usually has available when he arrives at the archives. It was just a question, I told Otte, of tracing the fleet through a couple of more years, until say, 1738, when we would learn the circumstances of *El Matanzero's* demise. If a list of her cargo was available we could see if it matched and thus make positive confirmation.

We assaulted the documents. As we turned to the legajo of Admiral Pintado of 1736, the name *El Matanzero* popped up from the page. I was thrilled beyond words. Otte, I observed, was somewhat astonished that we had found anything so quickly. He began to catch some of my excitement. We observed that the ship returned to Spain in August, 1737, with Admiral Pintado. Then there were no further notices of fleets sailing to the New World. Otte was puzzled. But the long, agonizing detective hunt was coming to a climax.

"Things were getting very hot out there about then," I told Otte. "War broke out between Spain and England in 1739."

"Well," Otte said, "let's look in the Book of Registers under ships sailing alone." He did. Under "1739" he found the name *El Matanzero*. We filled out a slip for the proper legajo and sat down at a table in the reading room to await its arrival. Soon a porter brought a bulging bundle. We untied the red ribbons and inside the bundle cover found a dusty sheaf of handwritten documents—which surely hadn't been opened since they were filed over 200 years ago—marked *El Matanzero*.

Otte plunged into the stack of documents. "Well, here's the owner's contract," he said. "Do you want me to read that?"

"Yes," I said. "We want to know every detail about that ship."

Otte adjusted his glasses, pursed his lips, and read to himself, pausing only to brief me occasionally. We intended to have the documents copied by a private typist accredited to the archives, but I took notes as Otte combed quickly through the stack.

"Her owner was Francisco Sanchez Marqués de Casa Madrid," Otte said. "He must have been a very big man. He was a Marqués who lived in Cadiz." Cadiz is an important Spanish port on the Atlantic, not far from the mouth of the Guadalquivir River leading to Seville. Merchants of Seville and Cadiz fought for control of the India trade. Cadiz had one great advantage: a good harbor. But for most of the years of the Spanish trade monopoly with the Indies, Seville, with its power and money, retained control of the ships. After the mid-1600's, when the ships became too large to negotiate the Guadalquivir to Seville, Cadiz won out. *El Matanzero* was a Cadiz-based ship.

"Ah," said Otte reading on. "The Marqués de Madrid must have been an immensely wealthy man. I see here where he negotiated a contract with the government to bring three thousand tons of tobacco from Havana to Cadiz. *El Matanzero* was acquired by him and pledged for that purpose. The name, *El Matanzero*, by the way, was an alias, the ship's popular name. Her actual listing was *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, or *Our Lady of the Miracles*. The ship's captain was Cristobal Montaña. The owner here gives him complete power of attorney to act in his place in the Indies, to negotiate for the tobacco, a commonplace thing in those days when communications were poor."

Probing this bundle of documents at great length, we had a glimpse of her cargo--listed in total detail. There were cases of books for the Jesuit and Dominican monasteries in Havana; much medicine, wine, iron; for a Franciscan Mission, a case

of prayer books, brandy, chocolates, cakes, six cases of clothes, three hundred pounds of candles, one case of foreign books, religious images; and garments for the convent in Havana. A Father Juan de la Rosa was given a free permit to take six cases of clothes and one choir book for the Franciscans in Havana. Captain Montaña agreed in writing to go straight to Havana, after making a stop in Puerto Rico to deliver a special gift from the King of Spain to the governor. There was also a special gift for the church in Havana: two sculptured angels packed in elaborate boxes.

She also carried one barrel containing 50,000 penholders, 40 barrels of quill pens (no doubt for the legions of people writing documents in those days), and two large clocks which were to be sent on from Havana to Vera Cruz by another vessel. Among this fascinating but rather routine cargo was something which underscored the war clouds gathering on the horizon: 94 large cases of supplies for the army in Havana.

The documents revealed further information about the ship itself. Called a "Navio," *Neustra Señora de los Milagros*, 270 tons, was built in the West Indies. The exact place of her construction was not listed in the documents. She was probably built in Matanzas, Cuba, a center of New World shipbuilding. This would account for her popular name, "Matanzero," which in Spanish, we learned, can also mean "from Matanzas," or "born in Matanzas," a more likely meaning than "Slaughter." She was a medium-size ship for her times, 53 "elbows" long (about 75 feet) and 14 wide (about 19 feet). She had three decks and "rooms for passengers." She carried 4 large anchors, 2 small anchors, 16 iron cannons, 20 guns (*fusilados*), and 10 pairs of pistols. On this trip she loaded 400 cannon balls and 300 hand grenades, and a case of small balls for the guns and pistols, as well as 1,200 pounds of powder. Her crew consisted, in addition to the Captain, mate, and second mate, of one priest, a pilot, a carpenter, a barber, a yeoman, caulkers, a constable, a surgeon, 18 skilled sailors, 34 ordinary seamen, and 4 cabin boys, a total of 69 men.

The ship departed Cadiz on February 8, 1739, on her first

tobacco mission. The West Indies were teeming with English privateers, but *El Matanzero*, sailing alone, made it safely to Havana. There, after the ship had been careened and refitted, a large cargo of tobacco, sugar, and logwood from Campeche, Mexico, was loaded on board. By then English "pirates" were swarming across the Spanish trade routes. *El Matanzero* was delayed by them at Havana and, while approaching the European coast in the summer of 1740 in company with another "Navio," was pursued. Because of this activity *El Matanzero* was forced to break a strict rule and put into Lagos, Portugal. From there her cargo was sent in small vessels to Cadiz. Soon after, *El Matanzero* put on full sail and made it safely to her home port.

By the fall of 1740, Spanish trade with the Indies had nearly come to a standstill. The English Admiral Vernon had sailed with a large fleet to Jamaica intent on storming Spanish colonial cities. The Spanish treasure fleet, escorted by the French, had just barely made it back. No fleets were scheduled to depart in the fall. Spanish ships in the Indies were bottled up in port. A French armada was preparing to sail to give battle to Admiral Vernon. Most of Spanish attention was focused on an impending invasion of Italy. In fact, a Spanish fleet was outfitting in Cadiz for that purpose when *El Matanzero* returned to Cadiz.

We were not able to find specific documents which revealed what went on in the mind of Marqués de Madrid in these weeks but we can well imagine. His tobacco contract was hanging fire. Should he send the ship out again in the teeth of Admiral Vernon's fleet and the swarms of English privateers? It would be a tremendous risk; yet the wartime profits for the tobacco would be great. Furthermore, a vast cargo of household goods arriving in the Indies at this time would certainly fetch a staggering price. There was no telling how long the war might last or when another ship might get through. Whatever his reasoning the Marqués, perhaps so wealthy the loss of the ship would not greatly affect his fortunes, decided to gamble. *El Matanzero* was ordered to prepare for another trip to the Indies.

In those days the Royal Spanish officials zealously guarded Spain's trade monopoly with the Indies. There were a thousand-odd rules governing the sailing of ships, and mountains of paperwork to assemble. The Marqués, in partnership with another man, Don Luis Bernardo de Larrarte, had obtained permission to ship to the New World a thousand tons of trade goods. On this trip *El Matanzero* would take about one-third of this authorized amount; other ships would take the remaining two-thirds later. The legajos were full of permits to load cargo, reports on inspection of cargo and the ship itself by naval officials—who made certain it was a Spanish-built ship—and meticulous records of the ship's cargo and passenger capacity, measured to the nearest centimeter. Every nail, piece of wax, hammer, and sail needle was carefully inventoried, and made part of the official record. Looking at all those documents, I wondered why the Spanish trade had not completely strangled on red tape long before *Matanzero*.

Curiously, on this voyage the destination was shifted from Havana to Vera Cruz, Mexico. We do not know why. Perhaps the Marqués reasoned that in Mexico there would be much silver to take in exchange for his goods since that year the treasure fleet had been canceled. Perhaps it was his intention to strike both hungry markets: Vera Cruz first, and then Havana, where the ship could pick up his previously authorized tobacco shipment on the way home. A new captain, Juan Bacaro, was named to command *El Matanzero*. Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid, who may have been the Marqués' brother, although this is unclear in the documents, was appointed to oversee the cargo.

Thus, amidst the war preparations in the Cadiz harbor, a lone Spanish merchantman began to load a mammoth cargo. Significantly, it was made up of many small pieces, each of which could bring a good price, rather than bulky items. As Otte read the cargo manifest, my heart leaped to my throat. It was one now familiar to all of us: hundreds of baskets of ordinary knives and penknives, barrels of buckles, buttons, spoons, and many iron tools such as shovels, hoes, axes, and hatchets. In all there were loaded on board *El Matanzero* some

53 tons of knives, buckles, spoons, scissors, and needles. In addition, she carried hundreds of pounds of spice, oil, almonds, saffron, fruit, lavender, 110,000 quill pens, 10 tons of glass and crystal, and about 72 tons of iron, cast in bars. She also carried 20 tons of iron sword blades and machetes. Finally, *El Matanzero* was loaded with a huge quantity of highly prized wine, brandy, and other spirits, amounting, in all, to about 21,200 bottles, 745 barrels, 400 casks, and 204 cases.

I was waiting, of course, for some mention of the vast quantity of crucifixes. But nowhere on the manifest could we find these listed. It may be that they were entered separately as the property of some mission, or perhaps, as I surmised then, they were not required to be listed since they were religious items on which there was no tax. The cargo list (see Appendix) was compiled primarily for tax purposes, it would seem. In any case, the large quantity of crosses now made sense to me. Faced with a war, and a critical shortage of shipping, the deeply religious Spanish would want to make certain that the missions and subjects in the field and outposts were properly supplied with these items for the duration.

Otte also read off the list of supplies which the Marqués obtained for the crew of the ship. This list explodes the myth that Spanish seamen subsisted on wormy biscuits and brackish water. Among the supplies: 3,000 fresh eggs, bread, 150 hams, bacon, sausage, mutton, chicken, anchovies, salmon, corn, beans, preserved peaches, prunes, raisins, tea, coffee, chocolate, honey, spices, lavender, cheeses, olives, squash, cabbage, onions, lemons, melons, and so on. (See Appendix.) Mess supplies for the crew included 60 dozen napkins, 60 tableclothes, 60 pieces of table silverware, 16 dozen assorted knives, two dozen hand towels, aprons, 400 pounds of candles and wax, one box of glasses and cups, and 1,000 pounds of large and small metal plates (no doubt those pewter plates which we recovered). The quantity of spirits for the Captain and crew could hardly be called modest: 168 barrels, 36 cases, and six baskets of assorted wines, and two cases of cordials.

According to the Book of Registers, *El Matanzero* got under way and departed Cadiz—alone—on November 30, 1740. In

actual fact, we discovered in another document that she had sailed a few days before this and had put back into port because of unfavorable winds. After the notice of her sailing on November 30, there is no further mention of the ship in the Book of Registers. She is not shown as having arrived in Vera Cruz, or returning to the Indies again. Most ships that were lost were so noted in the Book of Registers. But perhaps in the drama of larger events—the invasion of Italy, the war in the Indies—the fate of *El Matanzero* was overlooked by the harassed bookkeepers.

For sailors on the high seas, it was a grim winter in more ways than one. According to contemporary accounts it was one of the worst in decades. Storms and blizzards lashed the northern hemisphere, freezing rivers and piling up unprecedented quantities of snow and ice in both America and Europe. Newspapers are full of accounts of dreadful floods, storms at sea, shipwrecks, and thousands of deaths from cold. The *Philadelphia Gazette* lamented in December, 1740, shortly after *El Matanzero* sailed, that the winter was so severe that “no one can remember the likes of it.”

It would have taken *El Matanzero* about thirty days to sail the traditional route from Cadiz to a landfall in the Indies. She would have raised the Lesser Antilles on or about the end of December, or perhaps a week or so later, depending on the winds. She probably remained there, in the lee of an island, perhaps Dominica, taking on food and water and gathering intelligence on the movements of the many English warships. Continuing on the regular route to Vera Cruz, she would have sailed just to the south of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola (perhaps putting into these Spanish bastions for further intelligence), hugging the southern coast of Cuba, aiming for the Yucatan channel, seeking the swiftly flowing northerly currents. There were no documents that we could find describing this leg of the voyage; thus her route is an educated guess, based on the study of available Spanish navigational material for the period.

In the beginning of the new year—1741—the war in the Indies was approaching a climax. Admiral Vernon was holed

up in Jamaica (just to the south of *El Matanzero's* route) with a large fleet, awaiting the arrival of the English Admiral Ogle, who was bringing enormous reinforcements. At that time Vernon's ships were nested in the harbor behind the protection of a floating log boom. But Ogle had already reached the Indies. In fact, it is most difficult to understand how *El Matanzero* avoided this huge armada, which, when joined with Vernon's fleet, was the largest "enemy" naval force ever assembled in the Indies.

At that very time, no doubt, Admiral Vernon's staff was making last-minute adjustments to the war plan for seizing Puerto Bello, Panama, and storming Cartagena, Colombia. Their spirits bolstered enormously by the presence of this fleet and the knowledge that by then most Spanish vessels were helplessly bottled up in port, and that the French fleet, supporting the Spanish, had yet to make a move, English privateers had a field day. They were under strictest injunction from Admiral Vernon—who was intent upon starving his enemy into submission—not to trade with Spanish ports, but on the high seas they were free to take prizes. Although English privateers had frequently conducted clandestine trade with Spanish ports in the past, it is not likely that they did so at this time, not so much out of fear of reprisal from armed Spanish *guardacostas* as from Admiral Vernon's patrol vessels. Many vessels, mostly French, were taken prize on the high seas during those weeks. *El Matanzero* could hardly have chosen a less favorable time to transit the Indies.

Having been apprised of this widespread enemy activity during her stop in the Antilles, *Matanzero* would have taken steps to prepare for action. In the olden days, it is true, many Spanish vessels sailed with cargo stacked so high on the upper decks that the guns were unusable. On *Matanzero* the temptation to do the same must have been great. But, despite English accounts, the Spanish seamen were not fools. We know little of *Matanzero's* new Captain, but certainly he was no greenhorn. Nor would a slovenly or cowardly Captain have sailed a Spanish ship to the Indies that particular year. The Captain had the confidence of a powerful man like the Marqués de

Madrid, who, no doubt in consultation with his partner, Larrarte, carefully sized up their new Captain in light of the uncertainty of the weather and the times.

Thus, as *Matanzero* probed northwestward into this hornet's nest, we can imagine her decks squared away in shipshape manner, her guns ready, her crew on alert for a sail on the horizon. Being fairly large, well armed, and prepared, she would not fear the smaller privateers, however bold. A sixteen-cannon ship such as *Matanzero*, ably manned, could defend herself handily, running before the wind. She would fear attack only from a large enemy ship—a man-of-war of at least 30 guns or more.

Turning northward, *Matanzero* eased between the Island of Cozumel and the Yucatan mainland, probably to pick up the four-knot northerly current in the sound, or perhaps to avoid English vessels cruising off Cape St. Antonio—the westernmost tip of Cuba and favorite stalking ground of the privateers. Unfortunately we do not know exactly what happened next, but the documents tell us that near daybreak the night of February 22, *Matanzero* drove ashore on the coast of Yucatan on the shoals of Yalcu, as the Spanish called that point in those days. Yalcu is a Mayan word, and seems appropriate for the coast. Some of the documents described the wreck as occurring in the “shallows of Cozumel,” still others in “Campeche” (see Appendix), a general word, often used by the Spanish to describe the entire Yucatan peninsula.

With the time and date established precisely, we searched desperately for a clue to the exact cause of the wreck. Newspapers in Jamaica, Virginia, and Philadelphia are full of accounts of storms that winter, carefully noted not only because of the interest in the fate of Vernon's mission, but also because there were many American vessels sailing in the Indies. A storm could mean financial as well as personal tragedy. But there was no mention of a storm in that area at that time. Again checking the thorough accounts of Admiral Vernon's expedition for this period, we found no mention of a ship named *El Matanzero*, or *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, as being pursued or under fire, or even encountered. After

studying the scores of documents dealing with the demise of *El Matanzero*. I feel certain, and Otte agrees, that if the ship had been driven ashore by a storm or by the enemy, this redeeming fact would have been mentioned some place. Throughout the documents, there is a curious silence as to the exact cause of the wreck.

Knowing something of the winds and currents in those waters, and having turned up no other clue, our guess is that the crew stupidly ran the ship aground. Perhaps after a nerve-racking open-water dash through hordes of prowling enemy ships, and gaining the comparative safety of the lee of Cozumel Island, and, from a navigational standpoint, the helpful swift-moving northerly currents, the Captain and the crew simply unwound and relaxed. At last after a hard journey, Mexico—or part of it at least, the Yucatan peninsula—was finally in view off the port beam! Perhaps at that point the crew celebrated prematurely—tapping a little of that huge supply of heady wine in the crew's mess. In any case, in the wee hours of the morning, that time of day when even the most alert seamen drowse on lookout and become sloppy at the helm, *El Matanzero* swerved too close to the shore.

As the alarm was shouted above the roar of green water pounding the reef, no doubt the decks of *El Matanzero* were suddenly transformed from serenity to bedlam. We can imagine the passengers racing from their cabins in nightshirts, stumbling about the deck, as the crew, groggy and coming awake fast, let go two of the ship's four anchors and hauled down canvas in a desperate but futile attempt to avert the tragedy. Then, with a sad finality, which only seamen can feel, the proud *Matanzero* ground on the reef.

We think her bottom opened, spilling out her cargo, and letting in tons of green water. Some people may have rushed back to pick up their valuables, but we imagine that all attention was focused directly on getting ashore. No doubt, as the men plunged into the water, they carried muskets and pistols to fight off hostile Indians. We *do* know it was a dreadful, tragic mess. Captain Bacaro and the mate drowned with the ship, one further indication of their high character. Others probably died as well, but we are not certain.

El Matanzero refused to slip into obscurity. At this juncture a new and controversial chapter in her history began. Her demise brought to light a scandal which threatened the honor of the Marqués and touched off an official investigation by the Royal officials, proving to us that the spook of Matanceros goes far back into history. We are able to lay bare this scandal—for the first time ever—because of the diligence of Otte and a researcher in the Archives of the Indies.

After searching a few of the legajos pertaining to the ship itself, I had to leave Spain. However, I left behind a request with Otte to search the correspondence between the officials in Campeche and Vera Cruz and the officials in Spain during January, February, and March, 1741, and if time permitted, later still, for some mention of the shipwreck. Otte and the researcher combed through about twenty legajos—probably close to 5,000 documents—and finally they found it: page after page dealing with the wreck! These documents, while admittedly only a microscopic sample, probably tell a great deal about the nature of Spanish trade in those years.

We don't know exactly what happened immediately following the wreck. Somehow word was brought to the Spanish port of Campeche, on the opposite side of the Yucatan peninsula. The governor of Campeche launched rescue operations, providing aid and comfort for the survivors. Perhaps they were guided overland to Campeche. More likely they were picked up by small sailing vessels. In any case, most of the survivors, including Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid, the man in charge of the cargo (the Marqués' brother?), wound up in Campeche, carrying a few trunks and personal objects which were washed or wrestled ashore.

At the same time, in spite of the English and the dangers of the reef, efforts to salvage the rich cargo of *El Matanzero* were set in motion immediately. Some goods were saved right off; others much later. The luckless Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid contacted some businessmen in Campeche. Then he requested that his "powers" be transferred "through the Governor and the Royal Officials to Don Agustin Barranco and Don Juan de Urrutia, citizens of the port of Campeche, for all that has been salvaged and will be salvaged and prove

usable. . . ." Here, at this early stage, the dark shadow of scandal first creeps into the documents. Don Joseph adds: "with the exception of those goods which were confiscated."

The sinking of a Spanish ship in the Indies in those days, as in these, was big news. The word spread swiftly, and many seamen, authorized and unauthorized alike, came to "fish the wrecks," or conduct salvage operations. There was much more of this going on than one might suspect. We have read accounts describing as many as 50 or more sloops "fishing" over a single sunken Spanish galleon. By a rule of the Seville House of Trade, promulgated in 1605, all Spanish vessels sailing to the Indies—amazingly enough—were required to have two divers on board. No doubt this regulation, like many others, was ignored. But it is a good measure of the interest in salvaging lost goods.

The documents reveal no precise information on how the salvage operations were carried out. Perhaps many unauthorized persons assaulted the hulk of *Matanzero* wedged on the reef. We do know that some material was picked up from the beach, and that divers were employed to probe the hull. These divers no doubt used a crude bell, which was lowered into the water like a bucket held upside down. To replenish their air supply, divers working on the bottom stuck their heads up into the submerged bell, which held air trapped in its top. It must have been a hazardous operation. Working without face plates or goggles in those treacherous waters, the divers no doubt missed many chests which were near at hand.

In time, Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid, accompanied by a few members of the crew, moved on from Campeche to Vera Cruz, where he made contact with the Marqués' business agent in that port. There, for at least six months, they awaited the outcome of the salvage operations. Then, at last, several boats arrived from Campeche with the salvaged goods. One of these was the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, also known as the *Señor San Joseph y la Soledad*, commanded by Captain Lucas Joseph Melero. The ship was a brigantine. She dropped anchor in Vera Cruz on August 17, 1741.

The brigantine contained much that had been officially registered in Spain on *El Matanzero*. The salvaged goods included seventy-one casks of aguardiente (it was noted that *Matanzero* departed Spain with seventy-two casks but the bottom of one was knocked out accidentally or otherwise and the contents "spilled"), seventy-four standard barrels of aguardiente, three barrels of wine, one small barrel of wine, eleven small bottles of almond oil, two small boxes of glassware, four boxes of almond oil and saffron, an additional small barrel of saffron, iron arches and barrel staves, and an unspecified amount of paper, caked wax, and "other metal articles" (which may have been salvaged earlier). All of these items were picked up "from the waves on the beach and in the water." Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid applied for custody of these legal goods, which were to be turned over to the Marqués' business agent in Vera Cruz. There is no mention of the very large quantity of pig iron.

Now the pent-up scandal broke loose in full force. Also included on Melero's brigantine were thirty-five bales, or cartons, which were *not* listed on the manifest of *Matanzero*. These bales, recovered from the water after long submersion, were in very bad condition. They consisted of contraband of the worst sort: English cloths and clothing. English cloth had traditionally been considered illegal in Spanish colonies. Now, in time of war with England, this contraband, coming to light as it did, evidently caused a tremendous flap. No doubt Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid could envision himself dangling from the gallows.

The salvor, Captain Melero, had listed these thirty-five bales as salvaged from *El Matanzero*. Yet Don Joseph lost no time in swearing before the Royal officials in Vera Cruz that "these articles were not contained on board the ship." He adds with an air of injured pride, contrived or otherwise: "I mention to Your Lordship and Royal Officials that I, not being able to locate the owner of these thirty-five bundles, request that you suggest disposal as you see fit . . . Thus, I request that you be so kind as to forward a letter relieving me of any

responsibility for the thirty-five bales of goods in the consignment, as they do not belong to me nor was I transporting them on said ship."

Don Joseph was given custody of the legal goods—those listed on the register—on his word, pending the arrival of a duplicate register from Spain for final confirmation. But a full-scale investigation was launched into the matter of the thirty-five contraband bales. Each survivor of *El Matanzero* then in Vera Cruz was interrogated, and made to swear to a statement. Each one denied any knowledge of the illegal cargo. Acala, the winemaster on the ship, reported that he dealt only with wine and water for the crew and passengers. Sola, the quartermaster, said that his duties were limited to overseeing food supplies for the Captain and crew. The ship's surgeon, Antonio Navaro, said that he had boarded *Matanzero* the day the ship sailed, so what did he know about cargo, hot or otherwise? Nothing. Reaching this impasse, the investigators pointed a finger at two men who could not defend themselves, the Captain and mate: "due to the death of the Captain and mate of the ship, who drowned in the wreck, it is not possible to obtain more information about the cargo of bales that were taken from the wreck of *El Matanzero*."

Four days later the Royal officials made the decision to open the bales and inspect the goods, which had been placed in the Royal storage house. Señor Don Alejandro Alvarez de Guitian, deputy official judge of the Royal vault of Vera Cruz, a notary, and two brokers, Don Pedro Xariza and Don Joseph de Morillo, gathered in the storage house. The thirty-five bales appeared from the outside to be embroidered cloth. The bales were opened carefully. The pieces of cloth, the notary carefully reported, tore at the slightest touch, "due to the length of time they have remained in the sea and not having been treated for the salt-water content contained in them up to this time."

The cloth was so fragile, and packed in so many different pieces, that it was difficult for the officials to count. Nevertheless, they opened all the bales, and finally "estimated" the pieces of cloth to number about 596. If it was just an estimate

one wonders why it was not rounded off to 600. The cloth was considered to have no value. However, the officials played it safe with this hot cargo and brought in two additional businessmen for an appraisal. These latter, the notary says, "were able to select two hundred and sixty pieces of cloth, which they considered to be worth, in their present state, four pesos each."

The bales contained other goods. These included: eighty-five pairs of men's black stockings from England; forty-six varas of purple taffeta from Granada; four embroidered gowns; ten varas of caramel-colored braid; one dress from Turkey, bordered with tassels; five varas of alpaca with gold flowers, seventeen varas of pieces of lustrina with silver flowers; eleven pairs of woolen stockings; eight pairs of women's stockings; one piece of a lead Golden Coach; one package with artificial pearls and crucifixes; and in the final bale, cinnamon.

This contraband inventory told us a great deal. For one thing it cleared up once and for all the mystery of English goods on a Spanish ship in time of war. If the ship carried English stockings and cloths, possibly packed by James Cosack, it could also have freighted English watches manufactured by William Webster, and the plates by Cleeve, although we believe the latter were not cargo but part of the crew's mess equipment. (See Appendix.) The contraband inventory contained the first and only mention of crucifixes. Those specified were metallic, with imitation stone settings. We found many of these on the bottom, along with the thousands of less ornate brass crucifixes. Since no crucifixes were mentioned on the register, it was possible that all of them were contraband. Possibly the great number we found on the bottom had, in some way, been deliberately left unsalvaged, along with a box of watches and other illegal goods, although this seems unlikely.

Having obtained the official appraisal, the Royal officials then sold the unclaimed, hot cargo at public auction, which evidently was the approved manner of disposing of such goods. The merchants gathered in the Royal storage house, in September, 1741, and an auctioneer, a Negro appointed by the Royal

officials, with a rapid line of chatter, hawked all the goods except the cloth. They brought a total of 1,248 pesos. The money was set aside by the Royal officials until approval came from Spain to divide it between the local government and the salvor in accordance with the custom of the time. The ragged pieces of cloth were kept in the Royal storage house, pending the arrival of a duplicate register, which might *possibly* contain some notice of their having been legally shipped. They were probably eventually burned, since they were, as the notary put it, little more than rubbish.

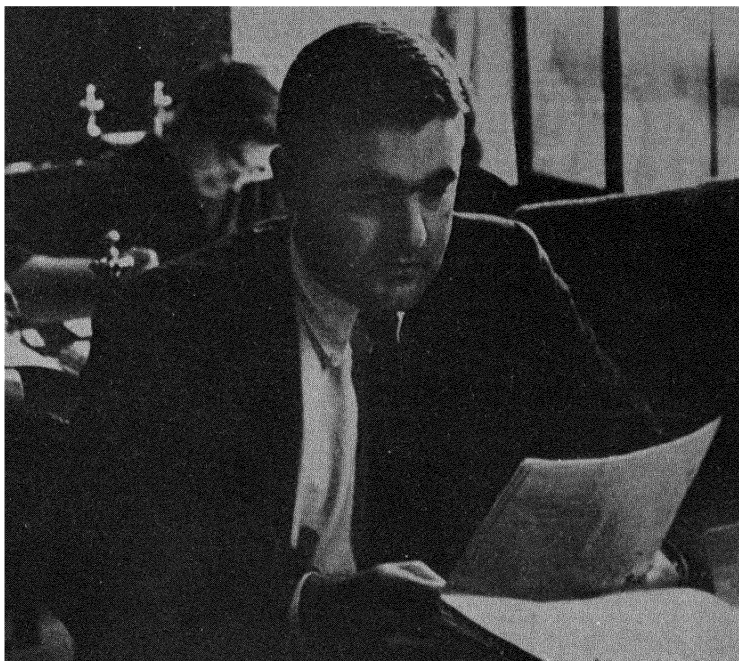
Unfortunately we are not in a position to render a final judgment in this grave matter. In the face of the sworn statement of Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid that he knew nothing of the contraband cargo, it is presumptuous to accuse him flatly of smuggling English goods into a Spanish port in time of war. Perhaps it was, as implied, the work of the Captain, an anticipated bonus for a dangerous voyage. But it is difficult to see how the Captain got 35 bales of goods on board *El Matanzero* in Cadiz without the knowledge of the Marqués, or for that matter, the Royal officials. Lacking any final ruling by the Spanish officials, and bearing in mind that smuggling was commonplace on Spanish vessels, outward-bound as well as homeward bound, we leave the matter for others to pursue.

The Marqués was a persistent man. After learning of the loss of *El Matanzero*, in late 1741 he applied for permission from the House of Trade in Spain to send two additional ships to the Indies "in compensation" for the loss of *El Matanzero*. This permission was denied. Whether this was due to the smuggled goods coming to light, or the investigation into the goods then in progress, or the war in the Indies, we do not know. From that point on the story disappears in the mists of history.

Of one fact at least we are certain. The tale of the treasure of Matanceros is, like most stories of buried or sunken treasure, a myth. *El Matanzero* had not set out into those war-troubled zones with big money on board. We certainly do not

now believe, as we originally believed, that she had made a trading stop in Brazil, or any other port. She had no important passengers carrying untold riches. They would have traveled on a more heavily armed vessel, or more likely, postponed travel altogether. *El Matanzero* was inbound with trading goods, both legal and illegal, with probably only a few dollars in the strongbox. If there was big money on board—a hoard in care of Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid for business purposes—we believe the first salvors got it; otherwise it would have been taken note of in some document.

El Matanzero was, we believe, directly or indirectly, a victim of the War of Jenkins's Ear, and in that sense, symbolic of Spain's ultimate colonial decay. Although Admiral Vernon's



*Author Blair studying Matanzero documents in the archives of Seville.
Photo by Enrique Otte.*

assaults were far from decisive, they were a clear warning to the colonial Spanish outposts that the mother country—however proud—could no longer be relied upon to protect them or to keep them supplied with trade goods. Certainly the brave but fruitless dash of *El Matanzero* was a far cry from an organized commercial enterprise. After the war, the English trade inroads were greater than ever and the Spanish treasure fleets never again achieved their former glory and prestige. They were henceforth a ragtag group dominated by the French. The stage had clearly been set for a revolt in Spanish colonies—a revolt that came not many decades after our own revolt against England.

It may be stretching the facts somewhat, but we like to believe that *El Matanzero*, the stubborn ship that still refuses obscurity, represents the last of a great era. She was, first, a member of the last of the big Spanish treasure fleets. When they collapsed in the face of Admiral Vernon, *El Matanzero* hung on desperately, making one final try alone. She carried no treasure as such. But if our premise be accepted, then her story—as much of it as we have been able to bring to light—and our work—especially our pioneering labor in the field of marine archaeology—take on significance that to us is more valuable than the gold doubloons we had sought.

Well, almost.

Appendix

The following pages contain extracts of ten documents from the Archives of the Indies in Seville, Spain, concerning the ship *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*. The original documents may be found in the Casa de Contratación section of the archives, Legajos numbers 1464 and 1485, and the Audiencia section, Legajos numbers Mexico 2966 and Mexico 852. These documents have been abbreviated, when possible, and stripped of legal terminology, of which there was considerable in each. Typed, full copies of all the documents listed here, and many others besides, the whole amounting to some 220-odd manuscript pages, have been presented to the Library of Congress by the author.

The documents are:

1. A general description of the ship, its equipment, and the make-up of the crew.
2. A list of supplies and equipment for the crew loaded on board the vessel on her final voyage.
3. The dimensions of the ship as per official inspection.
4. An extract of the cargo manifest on *El Matanzero's* last voyage.
5. An extract from a document, dated December 30, 1741, noting the loss of *El Matanzero* on the coast of Mexico.
6. A document pinpointing the loss of *El Matanzero* "in the shallows of Cozumel."
7. A letter from officials in Vera Cruz to the Council of the Indies in Spain, describing alleged contraband cargo salvaged

from *El Matanzero*, an official investigation, and the sale of the goods at public auction in Vera Cruz.

8. A notice giving authority to salvage *El Matanzero*, describing the precise location of the wreck and hour of disaster, and a list of articles salvaged.

9. Further list of goods salvaged from *El Matanzero*, including the detailed contents of 35 bales not listed in the register and considered, pending the arrival from Spain of a copy of the complete register, contraband, or smuggled goods.

10. A notice that the Captain and mate of *El Matanzero* were killed in the shipwreck.

Document No. 1

Archives of the Indies,
Seville
Contratación 1464

In accordance with the Order issued by the President and judges through S. M. of the Chamber of Commerce of the Indies located in Cadiz, I inspected, with the assistance of the chief master carpenter of the royal shipyards of La Carraca Nicolas Pinzon, the work on the vessel *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros* bound on a registered voyage to the Port of Havana, and this ship is of Spanish make, and of a tonnage shown by its capacity. Its master is Don Cristobal de Montaña, who has outfitted and made watertight the vessel making it ready to receive cargo. The ship is complete with all masts, yard-arms, topmasts, and rigging. In order to accomplish its journey the following items are requested:

Four standard anchors, two large anchors, five chains and hooks, four hawsers, one for the bow and bowlines, four hoists for the main, fore, and topsails, eight quintals* of mixed rigging, one quintal of line, marline, and ratline, one box of yardarm sails, one foresail, one mainsail, one-half quintal of sail thread, one hundred needles, twenty-five for sail mending, one mainmast, one Ym. from the bow, two topsail yard-arms and sails, one tiller, one rudder casing, one launch and

* A quintal is about 100 pounds

small boat with masts and sails, frames and blocks of all sizes, carpentry and caulking equipment, eight axes, twelve hatchets, 2 shielded pumps with four channels each, eight thousand tacks, four lead gangplanks, two iron sounding lines, one pump hook, one spit, three thousand nails, two quintals of assorted fishing hooks, two thousand spikes, one-half assorted, two thousand for planking and half-planking, twelve harpoon bolts with eye and hook, four blocks and tackle with chains for the main rigging and sail, six iron metal plated blocks for securing the mainsail and foresail, one jack, two copper binnacle lamps, seven running lights, four hand lamps, one stern light with six glasses, one hundred fifty pounds of wax in lamps, achotes, and candles, one quintal of oakum, one box of candle wax, one quintal of wax, one barrel of tar, four jars of grease, one barrel of pitch, one caldron for heating the pitch, one spoon for Ym., one ladle for Ym., several pair of tongs for removing bullets, six swabs for cleaning cannons, and pitch brushes.

ARMAMENT

Sixteen iron cannons mounted on their carriages with their levers, rigged with their trusses and sleighs, scoops, swabs, ramrods, four swivel guns with twenty rifles and cartridge belts, ten pairs of pistols, twenty swords, thirty lances, four hundred bullets arranged by fours, three hundred hand grenades, forty cannon balls, one munitions box of bullets for rifles and pistols, one quintal of fuse, twelve quintals of powder, fifty linen bags of bullets, one war box with bunting, flags, and pennants.

SHIP'S COMPANY

Captain and master, chaplain and yeoman, pilot and second mate, boatswain, watchman, carpenter, stoker, constable, steward, surgeon, barber, eighteen sailors, thirty-four apprentices, four cabin boys.

We submit this in the shipyard of Carraca on the 16th of December, 1738.

Ciprian Autran
Nicolas Pinzon

REGISTER TO HAVANA

To Havana

1739

The ship *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matancero*

OWNED BY The Marqués de Casa Madrid

THE CAPTAIN Don Cristobal de Montaña

*Document No. 2*Archives of the Indies,
Seville
Contratación 1485

Mr. President:

The Marqués de Casa Madrid, owner of the vessel *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*, which is readying for sea with registration for sailing to the province of Nueva España, states the need of provisions and maintenance for officers and crew for this voyage. The items are listed on the attached sheets.

We ask that you be so kind as to forward this to the Main Purser's Office for their compliance. It is with profound gratitude that I await a reply.

The Marqués de Casa Madrid

Cadiz, October 2, 1740

Compliance with the attached request for rations is hereby requested.

Varas

On the 3rd the contents of the dispatch were approved.

A list of the goods needed by the Marqués de Casa Madrid for his ship named *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*, which is preparing to get underway for the province of Nueva España. The provisions follow:

120 quintals of black bread.

20 quintals of white bread.

- 20 barrels of wheat flour.
- 50 barrels of salad meat.
- 150 hams.
- 20 strips of bacon.
- 200 pounds of northern pork.
- 200 pounds of cooking fat.
- 50 pounds of Genoa sausage.
- 40 mutton.
- 12 veal.
- 200 chickens.
- 40 quintals of codfish.
- 16 quintals of prepared tunny fish.
- 4 cases of jarred anchovies.
- 6 small barrels of the same.
- 3 barrels of salt salmon.
- 8 bushels of salt.
- 25 bushels of beechnuts.
- 10 bushels of beans.
- 6 bushels of peas.
- 3 bushels of lentils.
- 30 bags of ground corn.
- 2 arrobas* of mustard.
- 3 quintals of preserved peaches.
- 4 boxes of Marzella prunes.
- 10 quintals of Malaga raisins.
- 10 quintals of almonds.
- 1 arroba of pine nut seeds.
- 2 bags of grapes.
- 2 small barrels of coffee.
- 2 pounds of tea.
- 8 arrobas of various sweets in syrup.
- 2 quintals of anises and sugar plums
- 2 quintals of biscuits.
- 5 quintals of chocolate.
- 2 quintals of white honey.
- 2 quintals of sugar.
- 100 pounds of pepper.

* One arroba equals about 25 pounds.

- 10 pounds of herbs.
- 6 pounds of nutmeg.
- 10 pounds of saffron in two bottles.
- 100 pounds of carmel for the round trip and chocolate which there is prepared in a churla (spice bag).
- 1 arroba of bitter herbs.
- 4 bags of lavender.
- 16 cases of wines.
- 20 cases of bitter wines.
- 6 baskets of bitter and other wines.
- 6 barrels of Carlon wine.
- 12 barrels of wine.
- 150 barrels of white wine for the crew's mess for the round trip.
- 300 jars of cooking oil (12½ pounds).
- 6 casks of vinegar.
- 3,000 eggs.
- 4 quintals of Flanders lard.
- 8 quintals of vermicelli.
- 2 quintals of dough.
- 8 quintals of Flanders cheese.
- 4 quintals of domestic cheese.
- 50 kegs of olives.
- 50 kegs of medium and large capers.
- 50 large jars of various pickles.
- 60 dozen squash.
- 6 barrels of cabbages.
- 400 onions.
- 100 strings of garlic.
- 2 barrels of lemons.
- 6 bottles of lemon juice.
- 20 dozen melons.
- 25 dozen pieces of assorted pottery.
- 1 box of glasses and cups.
- 4 quintals of candles, wax achotes, and lanterns for the chapel.
- 200 arrobas of peat.

- 100 half pieces of cloth for aprons, towels, and swabs for the galley and mess deck.
- 6 dozen hinge locks and hooks.
- 2 quintals of assorted nails.
- 12 hammers.
- 60 dozen napkins.
- 60 tablecloths.
- 2 dozen hand towels.
- 60 pieces of table silverware.
- 16 dozen assorted knives.
- 10 quintals of large and small metal plates and other metal pieces.
 - 4 copper pieces for the mess.
 - 4 iron pieces of assorted sizes for the same.
 - 4 various pieces of tin and bronze.
- 6 pounds of fuse.
- 6 pounds of spun cotton.
- 16 reams of white paper.
- 4 reams of brown paper.
- 1 medicine box.
- 2 cases of cordial drinks.

All of which should come from this city, its bay, Puerto de Santa Maria, Isla de Leon, Puerto Real, Seville, Sanlúcar, or from any other area where it may be found.

Cadiz, September 20, 1740

Issue through the Main Purser's Office the supplies herein requested.

Varas

List of the goods needed by the Marqués of Casa Madrid for the voyage of his vessel *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matancero*, to Nueva España.

- 50 quintals of rigging of all types.
- 84 pieces of sailcloth for two small boats.
- 110 pieces of hemp line and hooks for the main sails (sail above mainsail), booms, sails, staysails, and sacos.

- 60 quintals of spikes of all sizes and nails.
- 12 thousand tarpaulin nails.
- 20 quintals of sail thread.
- 6 barrels of assorted paints.
- 6 cartons of glasses for staterooms and berths.
- 4 cartons of sulfur.
- 12 cartons of wax candles.
- 50 quintals of caulk.
- 30 quintals of caked wax.
- 15 barrels of tar.
- 80 quintals of pitch.
- 80 bottles of fat.
- 160 small barrels of smoked fish.
- 40 metal strippings for barrels of water.
- 8 barrels of tin plates for the fires, shelves of the Santa Varvara, and for the ship's ammunition hold.
- 50 bottles of linseed oil.

Which items shall come from this city's bay, port of Santa Maria, Puerto Real, and surroundings, and from other parts where they may be found.

On September 22, communication was issued stating the location of the above supplies and where others might be purchased.

(Back of Document)

To Veracruz

OWNER The Marqués de Casa Madrid

Permission to careen, rig for sailing, orders of this ship *El Matancero*. Also the rations (for crew's quarters).

Document No. 3

Archives of the Indies,
Seville

Contratación 1485

In Cadiz on the stated day I made known the information contained in the aforementioned decree to Don Ziprian

Autran, captain of Las Maestranzas of the royal navy. I certify, Sanchez.

Being on board the vessel *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*, which is mentioned in the preceding order, owned by the Marqués de Casa Madrid, anchored in the channel of the trocadero between points in the harbor of Cadiz on the 7th of September, 1740, Don Manuel Sedillo, director of the Real Academia de Caballeros, marine guards, and holding the position of ship-gauger for ships trading from Spain to the Indies, and Don Ziprian Autran, captain of Las Maestranzas [Royal Arsenal] of the royal fleet, in order to carry out the order of the preceding decree presented himself to the Doctor Don Joseph de Alzedo y Agüero of the Consejo de su Magestad and representative of the Real Audiencia and the trading house of the Indies who ordered the previously mentioned Don Pedro Manuel Zedillo and the captain of Maestranzas to take the measurements of the above-mentioned ship with the careful examination and accuracy called for in the decree of his lordship, the President. And in compliance, the above-stated men took the measurements with a bar, a hemp cord, and the codo* (said to be of the royal length) and stated the following:

The said Don Pedro Manuel Zedillo stated that this ship had a length of 53 codos of keel, forty-three codos, and 50 centavos.†

Width of 14 codos, and fifty centavos.

Stanchion, six codos and fifty centavos.

Level [water level?] seven codos and twenty-five centavos.

And by the referred captain of Maestranzas, Don Ziprian Autran, the following codos and inches were given for the ship.

Fifty-three codos in length (inside from bow to stern).

Fourteen codos and twelve inches in width (interior).

Six codos and twelve inches from beam to beam.

Seven codos and six inches wide.

Three codos and four inches high from the first bridge to the second from beam to beam.

* A *codo*—or elbow—is the length of the forearm from elbow to third finger—42 cm. or roughly a foot and a half.

† Centavo = 1/100 part.

And that said measurements were necessary as part of the formality for determining the ship's readiness for sea. And that the above-mentioned investigators after completing their check would submit a report to the President stating the ship's capacity. And in order that the above be valid I state that the representative has signed, and that I, the undersigned, certify, having been present, Doctor Alzedo. In my presence Pedro Sanchez Bernal. . . .

The vessel named *Nuestra Señora de Los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*, owned by the Marqués de Casa Madrid, has the following measurements. . . .

Length of fifty-three codos.

Keel forty-three codos and fifty centavos.

Width of fourteen codos, fifty.

Stanchion of six codos and fifty.

Level 7 codos twenty-five centavos.

A capacity, according to these measurements, of two hundred eighty-four and one-fifth tons, and subtracting fourteen and one-fifth tons in compliance with orders of the Contratación, rule 2, Chap. 15, no. 17, because of the masts and pumps. Thus the ship remains with a hold capacity of two hundred and seventy tons. This is in accordance with the usual procedure of merchant vessels trading with the Indies. The between decks space serving as quarters for passengers and crew has not been included as storage space for the cargo, likewise space for utensils has not been included, in accord with the above-mentioned rule.

Capacity of the ship *Matancero*, owned by the Marqués de Casa Madrid: three decks, after deck, fo'c's'le, cabins, has the following measurements:

Fifty-three codos long from the stern to bow inside.

Fourteen codos and 12 inches inside.

Six codos and 12 inches from beam to beam.

Seven codos and six inches wide at the (water level?).

Three codos and four inches high from the first bridge to the second from beam to beam.

Document No. 4

Archives of the Indies,
Seville

Contratación 1485

1740

To Veracruz

Main Purser's Office

VESSEL. *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*

OWNER AND ADMINISTRATOR The Marqués de Casa Madrid

Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid and Don Juan Bacaro

BILLS OF SALE FOR MERCHANDISE PURCHASED

List of the shipment issued by the President Don Francisco de Varas y Valdes as cargo for the vessel named *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros* (alias *El Matanzero*) owned by the Marqués de Casa Madrid, of a capacity of 270 tons which is to be utilized for the third of one thousand tons given by Don Luis Bernardo de Larrarte who has made payment in the amount of 180 thousand pesos in accordance with the specified conditions of the royal authority for sailing to Nueva España which are contained in its asiento.

Cadiz, 1740

To Nueva España

VESSEL *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, or *El Matanzero*

OWNER The Marqués de Casa Madrid

September 19, 1740

REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid were given orders by the President to carry on this ship 1,050 quintals castellanos of iron in 2,100 bars, part of 1,500 quintals in 4,710 bars of plated and squared which were issued through the request which he presented and for which he paid duty

Pesos of 8 reales	Pesos of 8 reales
of silver	of silver
(<i>Royal Mint</i>)	(<i>Royal Admiralty</i>)

750 -

33 - - - 24

<i>September 27</i>	Pesos of 8 reales of silver (<i>Royal Mint</i>)	Pesos of 8 reales of silver (<i>Royal Admiralty</i>)
REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 200 casks of aguardiente and 8 thousand small bottles of the same contained in 13 casks and 2 barrels all of which are from this city and he paid.	960 -	50 - 1 - 19
<i>September 28</i>		
REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 18 quintals of iron in 565 axes and hatchets, 854 large and small shovels, and 149 hoes for which he paid.	13 - 4	5 - 10
<i>September 30</i>		
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 450 quintals of iron in 2,610 bars of plated and squared complimentary to the order for 1,500 quintals on the 19th of this month in which duties are included.	-	-
REGISTER. To the same for 6,400 reams of paper in 400 thirds for which he paid. . . .	1,600 -	70 - 4 - 24
<i>October 7</i>		
REGISTER. To the aforementioned Marqués for 200 thirds of paper with 3,200 reams. He paid.	800 -	35 - 2 - 12
<i>October 8</i>		
REGISTER. For 50 baskets of knives with 125 quintals of steel tempered in accord with the order of the President on		

the 3rd of this month with consent of the consulate for which he paid.	250 -	12 - 3 - 9
REGISTER. To the above for one hundred barrels of aguardiente from this city. He paid	87 - 4	4 - 3 - 10
REGISTER. To the previously mentioned for 240 sword blades with 370 quintals of steel (tempered) by order which was issued in the first account today and consent of the consulate given. He paid	740 -	36 - 5 - 28

October 11

REGISTER. To the cited Marqués for 20 quintals of lavender. He paid.	5 -	1 - 26
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 200 standard cases of aguardiente from this city. He paid	75 -	3 - 5 - 14

October 14

REGISTER. To the Marqués for 150 barrels of wine from Sanlúcar. He paid.	93 - 6	4 - 3 - 10
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October 18

REGISTER. To the Marqués for 100 standard casks of wine from this city. He paid.	350 -	17 - 5 - 6
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 150 baskets of jackknives, buckles, and scissors with a weight of 270 quintals considered as steel by virtue of the order of the President of the 3rd of this month. He paid.	540 -	26 - 6 - 14

REGISTER. To the above for 300 barrels of aguardiente from Cadiz. He paid	262 - 4	13 - 1 - 30
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October 20

REGISTER. To the Marqués for 16 quintals of lavender. He paid	4 -	1 - 14
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October 24

REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 100 casks of aguardiente which came from this city. Only 26 casks were issued in order that the re- maining 74 be brought for deposit to Puerto Real on November 15, 1740. He paid	450 -	23 - 4 - 8
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REGISTER. To the Marqués for 13,200 small bottles of aguar- diente contained in 22 casks which come from this city and 50 casks for the ship El Sal- vador del Mundo, Don Phe- lige Basilio Dominquez, mas- ter. The remaining 70 for the French ship San Luis, its cap- tain, Don Carlos Langlin, which are making the voyage to Veracruz. He paid	7,099 -	5 - 1 - 14
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REGISTER. To the Marqués for 100 baskets of knives, jackknives, buckles, scissors, and needles with a weight of 400 quintals, considered as steel in virtue of the order of the 3rd which is located in the papers of the 8th. He paid	800 -	39 - 5 - 22
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October 31

REGISTER. To the Marqués for 100 cases of glassware with a weight of 100 quintals considered as steel by order of the President on the twenty-fifth of this month He paid . .	200 --	9 - 7 - 14
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 4 cases and 4 barrels of wine from this city, and one box of almond oil which measures 14 palms.* He paid	13 - 3	5 - 18
REGISTER. To Don Manuel Diaz de Sarabia for one large box of saffron weighing 57 pounds and measuring 8 palms and one half. He paid	5 - 6 - 25	2 18
REGISTER. To Don Luis Nicolas de Losada for 50 barrels of aguardiente from Puerto de Santa Maria and 50 barrels of wine for which the duties have not yet been contributed	75 -	3 - 5 - 14

November 2

REGISTER. To Don Luis Nicolas de Losada for 50 barrels of wine from Sanlúcar and in currency for 50 more barrels of aguardiente shipped on the 31st of October of this year.	--	--
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November 5

REGISTER. The Marqués de Casa Madrid for 12 boxes of wax measuring 168 palms and

* A palm is considered 8 inches

110,000 writing quills which are issued in virtue of the order of November 4th from the President. He paid.	170 - 4	9 - - - 2
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 36 boxes of almond oil measuring 288 palms and 17 boxes of saffron weighing 1,400 pounds and measuring 136 palms, in all 424 palms. He paid	291 - 4	15 - 4 - 24

November 7

REGISTER. To Don Nicolas Thomas Geraldino for 2 boxes of 240 pounds of saffron measuring 22 palms. He paid.	14 - 1	6 - 16
REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 100 cases of crystal with a weight of 100 quintals issued by decree of the President on the 25th of October and considered as steel. And likewise 800 bottles of one-half arroba of oil sent from this city. He paid.	275 -	14 - 2 - 24
REGISTER. To the Marqués for 150 baskets of knives, jack-knives, spoons, buttons, buckles, and scissors with a weight of 225 quintals considered as steel by virtue of the order of October 3rd. He paid.	450 -	22 - 2 - 23
REGISTER. To Don Juan Bautista. Charge for 2 boxes of saffron weighing 200 pounds, measuring 16 palms. He paid.	11 -	4 - 24

November 10

REGISTER. To Don Lorenzo de Ayessa y Navarrete for 8 large boxes of almond oil measuring 155 palms. He paid	106 - 4 - 17	5 - 5 - 20
REGISTER. To Don Francisco de Ortiz for 4 boxes of sweet walnut oil measuring 45 palms. He paid	30 - 7 - 17	1 - 5 - 8

November 11

REGISTER. To Don Nicolas de Robles for two boxes of saffron weighing 200 pounds, measuring 20 palms. He paid	13 - 6	5 - 30
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November 12

REGISTER. To Don Francisco de Verdeja Guerra for 2 boxes of almond oil which measure 16 palms, the order for which was issued on the 4th of this month. He paid	11 -	4 - 24
REGISTER. To Don Francisco Ruiz Arpon for one small box of saffron weighing 30 pounds which measures 5 palms. He paid	3 - 3 - 17	1 - 16

November 14

REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 50 quintals of buckles, knives, and jack-knives in 37 baskets considered as steel in virtue of the order of the President of October 3rd. He paid	100 -	4 - 7 - 24
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November 15

REGISTER. To the Marqués de Casa Madrid for 450 quintals of iron in bars for which he paid.....

225 - 9 - 7 - 14

REGISTER. To Don Lorenzo de Ayessa y Navarrete for two large boxes of almond oil which measure 19 palms. He paid.

13 - - - 17 5 - 20

November 17

To Don Juan Antonio Ruiz Moreño for one small trunk containing 2 boxes, 2 court dresses, one cloak, 2 dozen underwear, and other clothing belonging to Don Juan Joseph de Herrera, native of Zacatacas. This trunk measures nine palms and the owner contributed the duty.

6 - 1 - 17 2 - 22

November 20

To the Count of Savsedilla for one chest of various small items which measure 4½ palms for delivery to the Count of Lizarraga.....

3 - - - 25	1 - 11
9,900 - 4 - 33	480 - 1 - 14

Cadiz, November 18, 1740

NOTE: Through a testimony after the ship sailed and through a memorandum which the Marqués de Casa Madrid later presented, it was made clear that 200 barrels and 15 casks had been removed to lighten the ship, 15 casks and 110 barrels of aguardiente were put on board in his name and registered to his account. And that the 90 remaining, 40 of wine and 50 of aguardiente, were taken from the 100 charged to the account of Don Luis Nicolas de Lozada.

That for the 9,900 pesos, four reales, and 33 maravedis of silver which were collected in the royal taxes on the cargo of this vessel a receipt of payment was collected by the depositor, Don Gabriel Alonso de Herrera, on July 24, 1742, for partial payment of the account of 4,570,240 reales and 28 maravedis of vellon. . . .

Document No. 5

Archives of the Indies,
Seville
Contratación 1485

Cadiz, December 30, 1741

Through the main Contaduria of Contratación will be given to this party copies of the register for which I shall ask for those signed by me. And with regard to those prepared outside of the Contaduria, they shall be registered with the same.
Varas

NOTE: That on December 31, a letter bearing the signature of the President was issued.

It is a copy of the register which the vessel *Matanzero* carried on board, and for which I have been requested to issue by the Marqués de Casa Madrid, and I do so in Cadiz on December 31, 1741.

Don Francisco de Varas y Valdes

Mr. President:

The Marqués de Casa Madrid, placed at your disposition, says, that having sent out from this port to Veracruz his vessel named *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros* (alias *El Matanzero*) which departed November, 1740, had the misfortune of shipwrecking on the coast of Campeche and losing all of its papers and the ship's register; however we have salvaged and taken some of the cargo to Veracruz where it has been deposited with the royal officials until such time as arrives a copy of the register of sailing. The original is located at the main Contaduria.

We request that you be so kind as to forward copies of the register, and also that you sign them as you did with the original with respect to all the cargo contained on board and taken from the corresponding pages of the register. You can omit the certification for cargo that was to accompany—with the exception of the two orders issued by you on the 17th and 20th of November to Don Juan Ruiz Moreño and the Count of Sauzedilla which was made evident by your orders. We request that these copies be forwarded, signed, and sealed through the regular channels. My deepest thanks for your assistance in this matter.

Document No. 6

Archives of the Indies,
Seville, Audiencia
Mexico 2966

YEAR 1741

The Marqués de Casa Madrid asks permission for sailing with his ships, *El Gran Poder de Dios* and *San Francisco*, to the port of Veracruz, in compensation for *El Matanzero*, that he sent . . . last year and was sunk with all the cargo in the shallows of the island of Cozumel, eighty leagues from Campeche.

[permission] Denied.

Dear Sir,

In my last letter to Your Lordship, I mentioned that *El Matanzero* had set sail on the 27th of last month, and how she had returned to port as the winds had lessened and Don Manuel Granados felt that a voyage at this time would be dangerous. On the 30th day, with a strong wind from the northwest, she continued her journey. I sent this information to you in order that you deliver it to His Majesty.

Document No. 7

Archives of the Indies,
Seville, Audiencia
Mexico 852

Veracruz, December 18, 1741

The Governor and Officials

Received December 19, 1742

Council, January 9, 1743

Inform the Contaduria and pass to the Treasurer for action.

The accompanying requisitions of the Commission, made up of the different cloths taken from the ship *El Matancero* though not included in its cargo list, of a value of 1,248 pesos, remain here until the Commission verifies and confirms with a copy of the register that the mentioned cloths consisted solely of embroidered cloths. The pieces were not counted due to their damaged condition, although an approximation of 596 pieces was made consisting of stockings, taffeta, dresses, alpaca wool, artificial pearls, all of which were spoiled by the salt water.

Señor,

Governor and officials of Veracruz. Give notice to Your Majesty with orders to confiscate some goods taken from the ship *Matanzero*, not included in its register, which remain deposited here until such time as the Commission confirms it with a copy of the register.

Having shipwrecked on the coast of Campeche, the frigate *El Matanzero*, sailing from Cadiz to this port with a part of the 1,000 tons, which was granted by Don Luis Bernardo de Larrarte, it was ordered by the Viceroy Duque de la Conquista in the decree of June 14th of this year, at the request of Don Joseph Sanchez Madrid, that the salvaged cargo be transported to the city of Campeche.

In virtue of this order several Campeche government boats returned carrying, among other things, 35 cartons of damaged

cloths, of which there was no clothing, and we confiscated them.

At the same time Don Joseph Sanchez made known that the extra cargo did not belong to him, although with another list a package and a trunk (measured by palms) and five cartons of untailed cloth were brought ashore.

As the thirty-five cartons of embroidered cloths were in such a damaged state they were not able to count the complete pieces, and they approximated that there were five hundred ninety-six, but the officials considered these to be of no value. The other goods consisted of stockings, taffeta, dresses, alpaca wool, artificial pearls, all destroyed by salt water; nevertheless the officials estimated a very low price for them.

Not being content with this evaluation, we requested two other local merchants to estimate and they were able to select two hundred and sixty pieces of cloth, which they considered to be worth, in their present state, four pesos each.

However, the register from Spain did not arrive, and bearing in mind that the permit for the one thousand tons made no mention of clothing, and that the same consignee declared that he did not include in the shipment the thirty-five cartons, we declared these goods confiscated by an order issued on the 31st of August of this year. And in public auction these were sold (as a last resort, the only possibility being sold in a public auction), bringing a price (for all the items) of 1,248 pesos which was given to the Real Caja.

The Audiencia Gobernadora has been notified of the transaction in Campeche of the cargo of *El Matanzero*, and has ordered that the cargo be surrendered to its owner under the condition that he present a copy of the register indicating the legitimacy of his claim. And with respect to the confiscated cloths, it was ordered that they remain together in the Real Caja until the Commission has verified these items as part of the cargo.

All of which Your Majesty will recognize according to the testimony forwarded together with the orders. And until the register appears or a duplicate is sent from Spain, the 1,248 pesos from the sale of the cloths will remain intact and will

not be divided until such time when it appears evident that the circumstances were other [that is, that the cloths were not included as part of the ship's cargo].

May God bless and keep Your Royal Highness for the sake of Christians who need you.

Veracruz, December 18, 1744

Don Antonio de Benavides
Francisco de Alacron y Ocana

Document No. 8

Archives of the Indies,
Seville, Audiencia
Mexico 852

Excellency:

Don Joseph Sanchez, appointed by El Marqués de Casa Madrid to take care of the cargo of the ship named *El Matanzero*, respectfully declares that having sailed from the port of Cadiz on November 30, 1740, on board the above ship with register for this port (by decree of the Real Facultad which authorized a thousand tons for shipment from Cadiz, which was divided in equal parts between Don Jacinto de Arizon, Don Luis de Larrarte, and the aforementioned Marqués) and at daybreak on the 22nd of February was shipwrecked on the shoals of Yalcu, coast of Yucatan, and with regard to this incident the Governor and the royal officials of the above-mentioned province have given aid to the passengers and crew saved in the shipwreck; and with respect to the cargo which was salvaged, it is requested that you transfer my powers through the Governor and the royal officials to Don Agustin Barranco and Don Juan de Urrutia, citizens of the port of Campeche, for all that has been salvaged and will be salvaged and prove usable, to be forwarded to this city under your directions with the exception of those goods which were confiscated and were suitable for sale as compensation for the trouble which was caused. And likewise that the aforementioned orders be forwarded in the original in order that Your

Excellency might decide what steps are to be taken. I remain indebted for your kindness in this matter. . . .

Sres. Governor, Justice, Royal Officials:

Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid, connected with Spanish trade, resident of this city, and in good standing . . . hereby present before Your Lordship and Royal Officials, state that Don Agustin Barranco y Davila is a citizen of Campeche and my substitute (appointed attorney) in that locale for the salvaging of the cargo which is being sought from the vessel that was shipwrecked, by the name of *Nuestra Señora de los Milagros*, alias *El Matanzero*. He (Don Agustin Barranco) has written to me from the brigantine named *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, whose captain is Lucas Joseph Melero, which dropped anchor yesterday in this harbor, and at the bottom of the register list he is shipping to me 72 casks of aguardiente and 74 barrels of aguardiente and 3 barrels of wine, 4 boxes of almond oil and saffron and 11 small bottles of almond oil, 2 small barrels, 1 of saffron and the other, wine, and 2 boxes of glasses and 35 other bales of goods, which I understand to be durable, and other little items. which were all damaged from the water and were picked up from the waves on the beach and in the water, although I was bringing several loose pieces (which were lost with my trunks) from one package and one trunk (measured by palms) and several rolls of untailored cloth authorized by Sr. Don Francisco de Varas y Valdes, President of the Real Casa de Contratación. It is a fact that these articles [the 35 bales] were not contained on board the ship and I mention to Your Lordship and Royal Officials that I, not being able to locate the owner of these thirty-five bundles, request that you suggest disposal as you see fit and order for the rest of the barrels and casks of wine and the rest of the effects that were given to me as belonging to the register along with the other metal articles, paper, and caked wax aboard the sunken ship. Thus, I request that you be so kind as to forward a letter relieving me of any responsibility for the thirty-five bales of goods in the consignment, as they do not

belong to me nor was I transporting them on the said ship. And issue orders that the wine be given to me as well as the other items which are on board said brigantine and confirm and verify the above, which I swear is true.

Joseph Sanchez de Madrid

Document No. 9

Archives of the Indies,
Seville, Audiencia
Mexico 852

OFFLOADING OF BARRELS

In the new city of Veracruz on August 18 and 19, 1741, the following liquids and products were unloaded from the brigantine named *Señor San Joseph y la Soledad*, which finally arrived from Campeche captained by Lucas Joseph Melero.

Seventy-one casks of aguardiente de Castilla, and although there is mention made on the register of seventy-two, one had become empty [the bottom of the barrel had been damaged].

Seventy-four standard barrels, also of aguardiente.

Three barrels of wine.

One small barrel of wine.

Eleven small bottles of almond oil.

Two small boxes of glassware.

Four boxes of almond oil and saffron.

One small barrel of saffron also.

And some iron arches and barrel staves.

All of the above liquids and other products are from the wreckage of the ship *El Matanzero*, all of which were given over to the care of Don Joseph Sanchez de Madrid, whose testimony I affirm and swear to with the Royal Officials, Treasurer and Deputy and the Lieutenant of the Army and I, the yeoman Alarcon Alvarez—Juan Baptista Clavell—Joseph Sanchez de Madrid—Before me, Joseph Athanasio Calderon.

RECOGNITION AND EVALUATION

In the new city of Veracruz on the 21st of August, 1741, being in the Royal storage house, the Sr. Don Alejandro Alvarez de Guitian, deputy official judge of the Royal Hacienda and Caja (Royal vault) of this city, and the brokers Don Pedro Xariza and Don Joseph de Morillo who carried out the examination and evaluation of the casks of damaged goods contained in the preceding notices, and in the presence of Your Grace and before me, the scribe of the Real Hacienda, in the following manner:

Thirty-five bales, which from the outside appeared to be embroidered cloths and recognized for the most part as cloths, were opened and in some bales were found other various cloths which were included as part of the above bales. And having begun to make a count of the embroidered cloths, it was impossible to continue because so many pieces of various sizes appeared. Nevertheless, a count was made of the complete pieces and of those of varying sizes, and a total of five hundred and ninety-six was examined and checked to the satisfaction of the above officials, who said that they are not stating a price because of the poor condition of the majority of the pieces which tear at the slightest touch due to the length of time they have remained in the sea and not having been treated for the salt-water content contained in them up to this time. Thus they find no other recourse than to throw them into the fire before they become rubbish.

Eighty-five pairs of men's black stockings from England in a very damaged state were valued at 12 reales per pair.

Forty-six varas of purple taffeta from Granada valued at 2 reales, each doubled vara due to the loss of color and flimsiness.

Four embroidered gowns which, because of the salt water, have disintegrated to a point where the sleeves appear to be of oil, and they are valued at six pesos each.

Ten varas of caramel-colored braid, damaged and discolored, worth five reales each.

One dress bordered with tassels from Turkey, also damaged and discolored, worth 4 pesos.

Five varas of lustrina (alpaca) with gold flowers which, because of a loss of color and damage, are worth 8 reales each.

Seventeen varas of pieces of lustrina with silver flowers, at 12 reales each.

Eleven pairs of damaged woolen stockings, at 2 reales per pair.

Eight pairs of damaged women's stockings, at 3 reales per pair.

One piece of a lead Golden Coach which, because of its damaged condition, has no value.

One package with some artificial pearls and crucifixes with stones set in metal which, being loose and in pieces, were impossible to count, and because of this they are not given any value.

And, in the remaining bale which completes the thirty-five, there was found cinnamon which, because of its saline state, was no longer usable and no value was given to it.

Said examination and evaluation of the goods by the aforementioned officials made according to your conditions and specifications are not up to the usual price of goods which are sold in the city due to their very damaged condition. All has been executed faithfully under the oath which they have made and which they affirmed and ratified and signed with Your Grace and I, the scribe, being witnesses—Don Miguel de Larrainzar, Don Phelipe Braio, and Don Manuel Moscosso—Alexandro Alvarez de Guitian—Pedro Jimenez y Xariza, Joseph de Morillo y Castro—Before me, Joseph Athanasio Calderon.

Document No. 10

Archives of the Indies,
Seville, Audiencia
Mexico 852

Veracruz, September 30, 1741

With respect to the preceding declarations, due to the death of the Captain and mate of the ship, who drowned in the

wreck, it is not possible to obtain more information about the cargo of bales that were taken from the wreck of *El Matanzero*, nor to continue this investigation. Attach the referred declarations to the orders of the Commission in order that they make evident the collaboration of the Governor and Judges, Royal Officials, Treasurer, and Deputy Supernumerary. In accordance with your order—

Joseph Athanasio Calderon

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CLAY BLAIR, JR., was born in Lexington, Virginia, May 1, 1925, and was educated in public schools throughout the South. In 1943 he volunteered for the Navy and spent twenty-two months in the submarine service, participating in two combat patrols against the Japanese. After the war he attended Tulane and Columbia Universities. He joined Time-Life in 1949, and in 1950 was made military correspondent for *Time* and *Life* magazines. In March 1957 he joined the staff of *The Saturday Evening Post* as Associate Editor in the Washington office. He is author or coauthor of five previous books, including *The Atomic Submarine and Admiral Rickover* (1954) and *Nautilus 90 North* (1959), a national best-seller.

Mr. Blair is married to the former Agnes Kemp Devereux. The Blairs reside in Chevy Chase, Maryland, with their four children, two girls and two boys. Mr. Blair has long been fascinated by the underwater world. This interest led to his first experiences with skin diving, and to the high adventure and accomplishment of which he tells in this book.

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