

PUTTING A FEW DEMONS TO BED

Iconic Wrecks of the Red Sea...

Diving the steam ships Rosalie Moller, Ulysses & Dunraven.

By James Neal

The S.S. Rosalie Moller holds a very sad and personal tale for me. Whilst in Egypt in 2014, aboard M.Y. Superior, I had to deal with the fatality of an Egyptian deckhand that was tying us into the wreck. It was a fairly traumatic experience to say the least, and one that has stayed with me. Subsequently a number of us have avoided diving this wreck out of respect for Samir's memory.

However, when it came to organising this trip some 5 years had passed since that fateful day and it was also the first time that we would all be together again. And so it was decided that perhaps now the time was right to show our respect in a different way, and to actually dive this wreck in his memory.

The mood on board M.Y. Nimar had been jovial all week, the diving had been sensational and we had been treated to some spectacular dives, an abundance of marine life, superb viz and flat calm seas.

The call went out for the briefing and we gathered in the saloon where a PowerPoint slide of the S.S. Rosalie Moller could be seen on the screen. Our guide went through the details of the wreck and we made our plans accordingly. She's a deeper wreck, sitting in just over 50 metres of water and her decks are at approximately 35 metres. Needless to say, at these depths, you need to plan properly and make sure you know when you need to be leaving the bottom and making your way back to the surface.

The mood on board had noticeably altered and my roommate approached me and asked if I had noticed the change in the atmosphere. The jovial air had gone. In its place was a tension that was palpable. I gave him the briefest of explanations.

Once kitted up we entered the water from the swim deck and headed round to the port side where we were tied into the wreck via a shot line. I ran through an S-drill and bubble-check on the surface before I signalled my buddy to make our descent. We stopped briefly at 6 metres to double-check our kit and then I hit the purge button on my Hollis Katana and allowed the pressure of the water pushing down on the wing to collapse it and vent the gas within. I tipped my head forward and kicked with my Atomic Aquatic Blade fins, the negative buoyancy pulled me down towards the seabed and the colour rapidly dropped away as the light was reduced by the marked increase in sediment within the water column. The Rosalie is a dark and foreboding dive...

As the depth increased the light decreased further, it was much more like your typical UK dive than what you'd normally expect from the Red Sea. Whilst surprised by this I was very much in my element and quite happy to descend further.

She started to appear from the gloom and I was immediately struck by how barren and devoid of life she is. A stark contrast to everything else that we had dived.

'... my roommate approached me and asked if I had noticed the change in the atmosphere. The jovial air had gone. In its place was a tension that was palpable...'

A single thought crossed my mind...
'What a horrible place to die.'

I had to put this thought to the back of my mind. My focus needed to be on the dive. Discipline is paramount. The time for reflection is on the boat afterwards.



As I reached the deck I injected a blast of air into the Katana and levelled off about two metres above the superstructure. We were just forward of the bridge. I head along the port side and penetrate the bridge deck. There is a passage running aft, I swim down through this passage, it is smothered in silt and within her a

careless fin stroke can easily stir up the decades of sediment that have settled and lie in wait for any careless diver that ventures within. This is a dangerous wreck to dive.

I continue heading aft along the passage and back out onto the main deck, just forward of the aft mast and adjacent to two of the huge cavernous holds. The ship is bleak, sterile and devoid of life, the only thing I can hear is the hiss of my 200LX first stages and the cracking of the expanding bubbles as they expel from the exhausts of the 2nd stage and make their escape towards the surface.

As I reach the stern rail I feel compelled to venture over, the huge

rudder is below and the gaping void between it and her massive propeller is too great an allure for me to resist. I reach for the pull dump on my Katana wing and give it a sharp tug, a short explosion of bubbles erupts from the dump behind my head and I drop down towards the mighty propeller and the seabed below. Just as I reach it I inject a couple of short blasts of air into the wing, just enough to arrest my descent and stabilise myself next to the enormous propeller that now towers over me. The only thought that crosses my mind at this point is 'wow', just 'wow'.

I turn to check my buddy is with me, knowing full well that he would be. He's grinning from ear to ear like a kid in a candy shop. I double check my depth and time, we're still well within the plan, but there's so much more yet to explore. I signal to him that we should head back up to the main deck, he gives me an 'OK' signal and we ascend to the deck and start heading forward.

There's something alluring about this wreck, it's a much more challenging dive than most of the others in the Red Sea, I think the fact that it's more of a technical dive sets it apart. You can't just jump in and dive this wreck, you'd certainly be a fool if you did!

We continue forward, working our way towards the impact site where she had been struck by aerial bombs and mortally wounded back in 1941. Her exterior plating bent outwards on itself in a gruesome contortion of twisted steel. The power of the explosion that sent this once mighty ship to the bottom was nothing like as intense as that of the explosion that tore the Thistle gorm apart, her sister ship. The damage is isolated to a single area on the starboard side, between her aft holds.

We continue the dive, pushing ever forward towards the bow. I desperately want to reach my goal and take a moment to turn back and take all of her in. To hang motionless before her and simply gaze back at her in awe! I absolutely love doing this, it somehow completes the picture for me. Connects me to the wreck and cements the image in my mind.

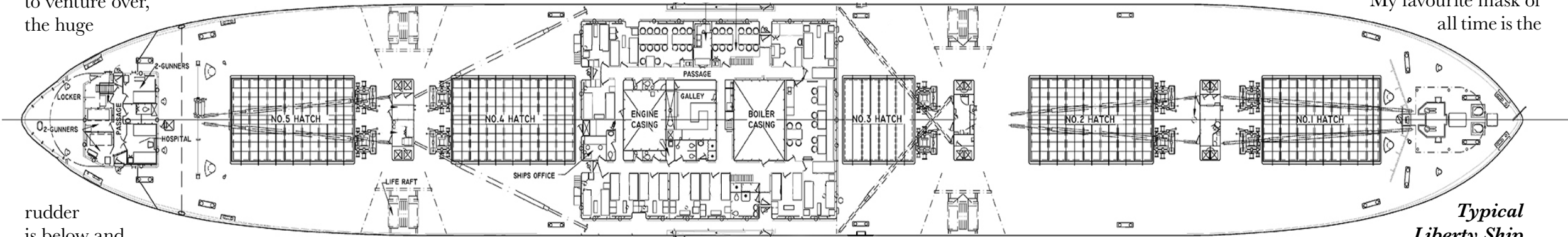
I check my computers and my gas, we're on schedule and within limits...

We reach the second shot line, which is our ascent line, and continue past it to the bow. And there, mid-water, I hang motionless, taking in the sheer splendour of the the wreck. She's awe-inspiring! I'm

I'm lost in my thoughts about the dive, the wreck herself and what she has come to represent for me. The dive has certainly put a few demons to bed, and for that I am grateful.

My equipment has performed faultlessly, the 200LX Hollis regulators deliver a crisp breath. They're great to dive and I genuinely like them. Likewise, the Katana wing has proved itself to be a beautifully designed piece of equipment. I prefer this wing to all the others that I have dived in the past. It trims perfectly and is a joy not only to dive, but to live with generally. Equally the BARE Velocity wet suit has done a remarkable job of keeping me both warm and comfortable in the water.

My favourite mask of all time is the



Typical Liberty Ship

blown away by her magnificence and simply hover, motionless, staring back at the wreck... the minutes ticking by, lost in my own little world.

It's time the make our way back to our ascent line and complete the sixty-three minutes of decompression that we've clocked up. The first stop is at 18 metres, it's only a minute, then three minutes at twelve metres, five minutes at nine metres and finally I settle in for the long forty-four minutes at six metres.

Oceanic Shadow. Its elegant simplicity is its strength. I absolutely love it. The Atomic Aquatic Blade fins deliver a serious punch when you need them to and they don't cause my feet to cramp at any point.

Together, all of this works in unison and permits me to undertake the types of dive that I love doing, dives like the S.S. Rosalie Moller, that will forever remain with me. Memories etched of an exceptional dive with great friends.

The S.S. Rosalie Moller.

West of Gobal Sheghir, 27 39' 03" N, 33 46' 17" E

Hurghada, Red Sea, Egypt.



The S.S. Ulysses was another new wreck for me. I didn't know a great deal about her and, to be honest, she was essentially put into the itinerary as a 'filler' between other wrecks in order to make the route work. We actually dived her on the fifth day, as a transit dive between the Rosalie Moller and the Salem Express. I'm delighted that we made this choice as she proved to be one of the absolute highlights of the trip...

Kitting up is part of the thrill of the dive as far as I'm concerned. I love the ritual involved in self-reliance. I get myself ready, run through all of my checks and ensure everything is operational and as it should be, I check my buddy is doing the same and he's watching me, just to make sure that neither of us miss anything. When we're both ready we exchange a look and give a nod, 'good to go'. We then approach the back of the swim deck and take the giant stride out into the blue abyss.

I'm immediately swallowed by the depths and drop straight down to six metres where I automatically run through my safety drills and set-up my camera before purging the gas from my Hollis wing as I simultaneously kick towards the wreck. At that same moment a flash of grey streaks past me, and then another, and another, the water around me erupts with a cacophony of squeaks and whistles and then the most wondrous thing happens...



S.S. Ulysses
Gubal Seghir Reef, Red Sea, Egypt.

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an entire pod of bottlenose dolphins decides to join us for our dive!

I immediately arrest my descent with a sharp blast of air into the Katana wing and then swing my camera around to try and capture a few shots of them. I don't, however, want to miss this experience by looking through a viewfinder for all of it, so I elected to make sure that I spent a good proportion of my time watching them as they interacted with us, and oh boy did they interact, coming right up to us, literally face to face, checking us out, blowing bubbles back at us and swimming around us in circles. One

of them had a calf with her, and it was incredibly curious and repeatedly came in close enough to touch and then it would dart back to the safety of its mother's side as she circled our position. It was a wondrous experience, simply magical, and a moment in time that I hope I will treasure forever.

Once the pod had moved out of sight we continued with the original dive plan and I reached across and purged the gas from my wing and exhaled, the reduction in buoyancy commenced my descent and I was soon on the seabed and searching for the wreck. We had drifted a little way, but a quick scan revealed the debris field and I simply followed this to the wreck itself.

The S.S. Ulysses was an iron screw cargo steamer, much like the S.S. Dunraven, she was also a topsail-schooner, thus she was something of a hybrid between steam and sail. She sank in 1887 and lies on the northern face of Gubal Seghir reef, in approximately 28 metres and shallows towards the smashed bow, which is in only five metres. She's a haven for marine life and is literally covered in coral and hundreds of extremely territorial Sergeant Major Damselfish have taken up residence on and within her. These make for superb photographic opportunities as they will literally attack the dome ports of any camera pointed at them!

There are also a number of anemone fish living within the numerous anemones surrounding the wreck, these also tend to be territorial and are really rather beautiful. I took several photographs of both species and was rewarded with



some cracking shots and a new found love for photographing fish... I'd never really been that bothered before, preferring to photograph wrecks and my fellow divers.

Penetrating the wreck is straight forward, all of her decking has rotten away and you can easily swim in between the enormous metal frames of her upper deck and access the decks below. From here I made my way up through the wreck and exited towards the smashed bow and out onto the reef. Once back out of the wreck I made my way across the reef towards our prearranged exit point. We were once again joined by the pod of dolphins who had never been that far away throughout the entire dive, I could hear them chattering away to each other throughout the time I was on the wreck.

As I shallow to six metres to complete my safety stop the dolphins came in to play once again, I needed to deploy my DSMB in order for the Zodiac to follow our position and they seemed to be fascinated by what we were doing. So much so that we ended up doing a significantly extended stop as these magnificent creatures performed a variety of acrobatic stunts in the water around us. Each of them would take it in turns to come in and inspect each of us, approaching gracefully, allowing their curiosity to be rewarded and then darting back into the blue. It was a wondrous experience.

We exited the water like a bunch of giddy school kids high on a sugar rush. Exchanging tales of the interactions that we'd experienced. Each one of us ecstatic from our encounters!

The S.S. Dunraven lies in approximately 30 metres of water just off the south west side of Beacon Rock. She struck the reef in April 1876 and sank some fourteen hours later.

She was lost to the world until 1977 and only identified some years later after a piece of porcelain was discovered bearing her name.

‘Sidemount has its advantages on this wreck, allowing you to not only carry lots of gas to extend your dive time but also a low enough profile to get through some tight squeezes.’

She can be a great wreck to dive. If the current is running across her she can be challenging to reach, but invariably worth the effort.

Sidemount has its advantages on this



BRAND AMBASSADOR - NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

wreck, allowing you to not only carry lots of gas to extend your dive time but also a low enough profile to get through some tight squeezes. You can easily clock up a lot of deco if you're not paying attention, so planning this dive is essential.

I'm geared up and sat on the side of the Zodiac waiting for the signal to roll off and make yet another negative entry, the shout goes out and I fall backwards into the water, the current grabs me and hurtles me towards the wreck. Now I have to fin hard to ensure that I get down to her before the current whips me past and out into the arms of the open ocean beyond. It can

be a hard swim, but the Atomic Aquatic Blade fins take up the challenge and I'm soon in the leeward side of the wreck and can take a moment to catch my breath and rest from the exertion. I then swim around the upturned stern and penetrate

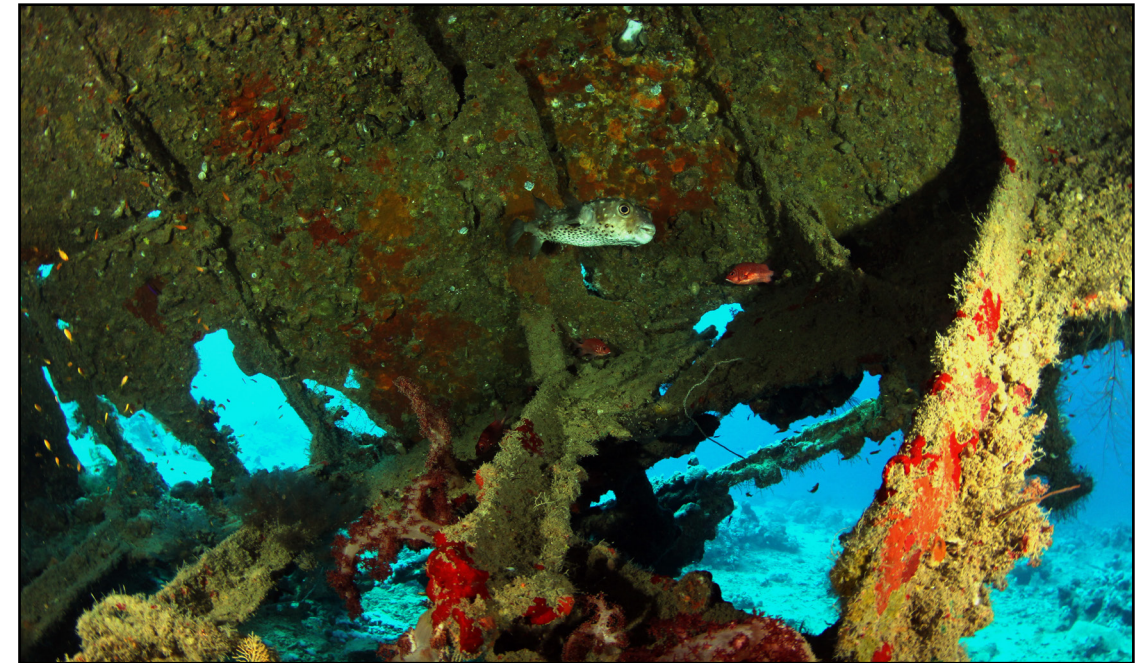
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the wreck at the seabed, once inside I'm sheltered from the current. Now the fun really begins... There are a couple of routes that you can take up through the wreck, the easiest option is to stick to the left, which is actually the starboard side, as this route has a bit more space, the alternative is to take either the right hand

side or to go over, which is actually under, the main boiler. Remember, she's upside down!

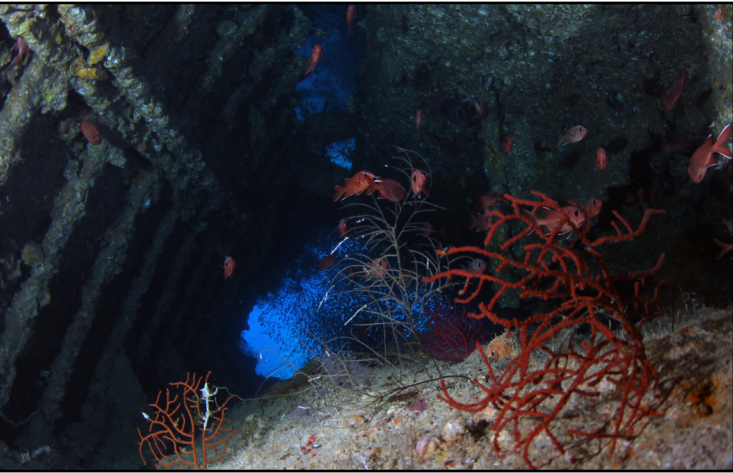
I turn on my Hollis canister torch and let its tight beam cut through the darkness in the corners of this wreck, some light from outside penetrates from the sides



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and partially illuminates her interior, which gets lighter as you make your way forward.



She's a haven for life, with a diverse number of species taking refuge within her interior. None more so than hundreds, if not thousands, of razorfish, who tend to congregate towards the forward part of the ship. Her bows have been torn clean off, so she ends abruptly with a heaving mass of fish and then open ocean.

Working my way up through the wreck I take the easiest route first and then double back around on myself and work my way back down through her interior only to switch back on myself again, this time opting to work my way through the tighter sections of the wreck and take full advantage of the low profile that my Hollis Katana wing offers me.

I take a deep breath in and allow the volume of gas within my lungs to expand just enough to lift me up a couple of metres so that I am in line with the underside of the boiler, I kick forward

and exhale a little, gliding I slip in between the gap that separates the outer hull and the underside of her boilers. It's a tight fit, but I am able to squeeze myself through and back toward the exit at her forward section. The razorfish swarm around me, the water vibrates to their tune and you can feel the charge that emanates from them.

A solitary Lionfish hovers above them in wait of an unsuspecting meal. I'm mindful of just how close it is to my head and how little room I have to maneuver past it, I exhale and send a stream of bubbles in its direction, unperturbed it simply turns and gives me a look, I'm convinced it is of utter disdain!

Exiting the wreck, I swim away and deploy my DSMB from its spool and let it make its mad charge for the surface and then I commence my ascent after it. At six metres I lock the line to the spool with the double-ended clip and then I simply

'Then I simply relax and allow the current to take me in her grasp and whisk me away...'

relax and allow the current to take me in her grasp and whisk me away...

I complete my decompression obligations and then reel to the surface. The sunlight hits me as I brake free of the depths and I grin like a delinquent who's just completed some untold mischief... Oh how I love being a diver. The boyhood joy that I feel after ascending is intoxicating!

