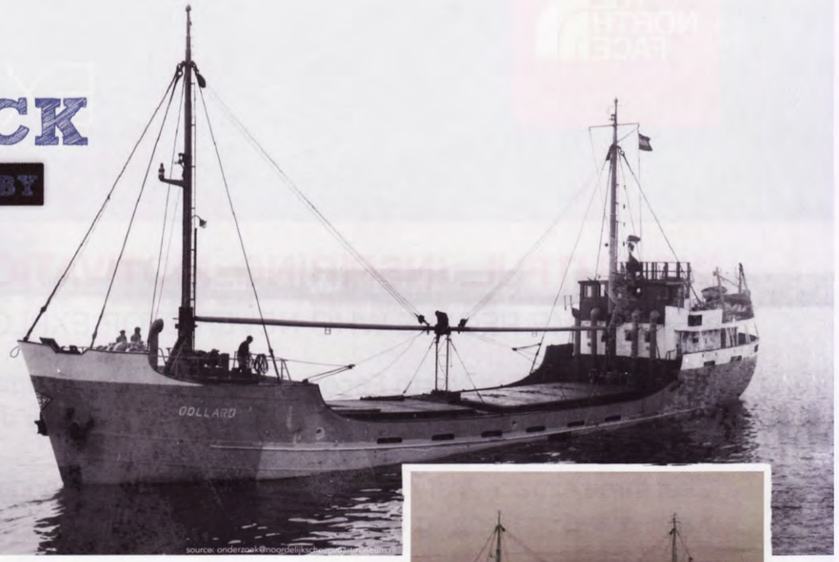
TRAVEL + ADVENTURE

LOST SHIPWRECK REDISCOVERED BY DUBAI AND SHARJAH DIVERS



source: onderzoek@noordelijkeduinen.com

source: www.scheepsrampen.nl

Words: Ian Hussey and Brian Lugg

What do the ships: "MV Isabel," "Thinner Wreck," "Dollard," "Ajman Glory" and "Mullah" have in common? Divers from the British Sub-Aqua Clubs, Sharjah Wanderers Diving Club and Desert Sports Diving Club in Dubai have just proved that these are all the same vessel, the "Ajman Glory," wrecked off the coast of the UAE 23 years ago this week.

The "Ajman Glory" (originally the "Dollard"), was a coaster, constructed in Haarlem in the Netherlands in 1957. After several changes of both name and owners, the ship was lost on 28th August 1989 whilst en route from Hamriyah to Bandar Abbas in Iran carrying a cargo of vinyl acetate monomer. It was abandoned by its crew prior to sinking so its final resting place remained unknown.

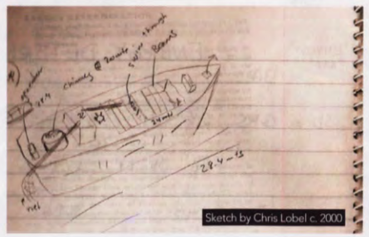
The "Ajman Glory" became a fabled wreck which eluded divers for many years. The original searches were conducted by the Brian King from Sharjah Wanderers Diving Club (BSAC 406) and were focused around the last reported coordinates. These searches were unsuccessful, which was perhaps not surprising, since the abandoned vessel could have drifted a considerable distance before going down.

About twelve years ago, Chris Lobel, a diver from Desert Sports Diving Club (BSAC 1339) in Dubai organized a wreck search based on some coordinates he had been given by local fishermen. He found a wreck near the location which he labeled the "MV Isabel," after his wife and fellow diver, or the "Thinner Wreck," because of the drums of what he took to be paint thinner in the cargo holds. Chris took some notes and made a sketch of the vessel which were kept in the Dubai club's records, but little further attempt was made to dive the wreck, possibly because the coordinates were not completely accurate, making it difficult to find.

In 2009, Chris was leaving the UAE and decided to make another attempt to find the wreck that he had last dived over a decade earlier. Chris and a team of divers from BSAC 1339 spent three hours searching in vain before giving up. Had they known it, they had probably come within 50m of their target.

"Ajman Glory" stayed in the thoughts of the BSAC divers but its location remained a mystery until a chance encounter in May this year. A team of divers from BSAC 406 led by Ian Hussey and Mike Anthony were diving the wreck of the "Dara," a well known dive site 12km north of Hamriyah. Also on the same site were some divers from World Seas Diving based in Umm Al Quwain and led by Ali Al Suhail. Ali was kind enough to give the Sharjah divers some coordinates for a wreck that was previously unknown to them, which he had called the "Mullah." BSAC 406 dived the "Mullah" several times over the following weeks and eventually passed the coordinates on to Brian Lugg, still with BSAC 1339 in Dubai.

Brian checked the club records and noticed that the location of the "Mullah" was


Sketch by Chris Lobel c. 2000

very close to the co-ordinates of the "Thinner Wreck" recorded twelve years earlier. Brian sent a copy of Chris Lobel's sketch to Ian Hussey and he and the Sharjah divers immediately saw the resemblance between the "Thinner Wreck" and the "Mullah."

Brian contacted Nelson McEachan, the Wrecks Officer of the UK Hydrographic Office who identified the link between Chris's description of the cargo of the "Thinner Wreck" and the cargo carried by the "Ajman Glory" on its last journey. Nelson wrote:

"The 'Thinner Wreck' is an interesting one. AJMAN GLORY was lost on 28.8.89 on passage Hamriyah for Bandar Abbas. She was initially reported as having sunk in 25 58N, 55 38E but this was later revised to being her last known position and as she was abandoned afloat; she could have drifted a considerable distance. The wreck was inserted on charts as a Dangerous Wreck, Position Doubtful in response to US charting action. She was 52.7m by 8.5m, with a draught of 3.0m. 497 gross tons and carried a cargo of vinyl acetate. Later in 1989 it was reported that '1,000 drums of toxic and inflammable chemicals has broken free from the wreck and have washed up on the UAE coastline,' however I have no information whether the cargo was in drums or in bulk."

Now that they had some specific and checkable information, the Sharjah club returned to the wreck to take some measurements. The vessel measured between 50m and 55m in length and 8.5m across the beam. These figures clearly suggested that the wreck was indeed the "Ajman Glory," but for a positive identification, more data was needed. Ian Hussey sent a message out to present and former members calling for information. Marc De Ruyter and David De Marneffe both responded promptly with some additional details and some photographs that they had found after some research on the internet.

The pictures closely resembled the "Mullah" wreck and the divers were confident that

Starboard side looking towards the stern. The rear cargo hold is to the right, The crew quarters and walk way are ahead.

the "Ajman Glory" had been found at last. For final confirmation, a systematic bow-to-stern visual inspection of the wreck was carried out by BSAC 406 and a video was made. The six drain holes along the sides, the remains of the four vertical pipes in front of the bridge, the trapezoidal cut-out at the bow, the anchors, the remains of the masts, the lifeboat davits and other features were all noted exactly as they appeared in the photographs.

All this information was passed to Nelson McEachan of the UK Hydrographic Office. Having studied the data and the photographs, he emailed the divers:

"I have looked at your dive report on the BSAC 406 website and I agree that this is the long lost Ajman Glory. A first-class job, so please pass our thanks to all the divers involved.

I will forward the data to our Regional Team with a recommendation that the charted Dangerous Wreck, Position Doubtful be deleted and this wreck be inserted."

THE "AJMAN GLORY" TODAY

The "Ajman Glory" lies approximately 15km off the cost of Umm Al Quwain in 28m of water or 20m to the highest point of the wreck. It is upright with the bow pointing in a northerly direction. The wreck is heavily encrusted with marine growth and is home to small shoals of snappers and jacks. There is also a resident turtle. The wheelhouse, which appears to have been a timber structure, is no longer there and both masts are horizontal, perhaps knocked down by another vessel passing overhead. The ship is otherwise almost intact. There is no sign of the cargo apart from two empty steel drums in the forward hold.

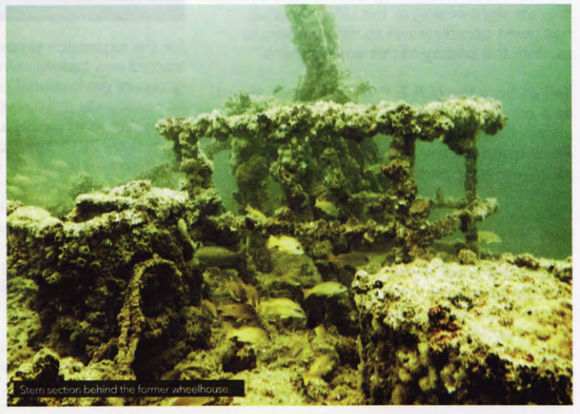
What caused the vessel to sink remains a matter of speculation. There is evidence of a collision on the port side of the stern but this is well above the water line and is unlikely to have been a factor. The physical condition of the wreck offers no other clues. The weather as recorded at Dubai Airport does not indicate any particular problem – indeed, 28th August 1989 seems to have been one of the calmest days of the month.

The following photographs were taken by Peter Jackson of Sharjah Wanderers Diving Club (BSAC 406) on 24th August 2012. The diver seen in some of the pictures is Ian Hussey.

Ian Hussey & Brian Lugg

Turtle at the stern behind the former wheelhouse.

Port side facing the bow section.


Stern section behind the former wheelhouse.