

Local finds WWII sunken sub

By JOSH ROSENSON

Thursday, November 13, 2008

PORTLAND, Maine — Joe Cushing made quite a find last month when more than three years of research paid off with the discovery of the U.S. Submarine S-21.

"We located a U.S. Navy submarine that was sunk for testing purposes during World War II off the coast of Maine," Cushing, 51, of Strafford, N.H., said.

Cushing, who is not yet releasing the exact coordinates of the World War II-era vessel, said it was found about 12 miles off the coast of Portland. "It was a good find. We are excited to have finally located the thing. After you look for something for three years and you made a bunch of dives and you finally locate it, that's a great moment."

Cushing, who works at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, said the sub was used by the Navy to train airplane pilots and destroyer crews to detect enemy submarines. His quest began over three years ago when he went to Waltham, Mass., to search the National Archives Northeast region. Subsequently, through correspondence, he utilized the National Archives in Maryland.

"I was able to come up with a general location where the Navy had sunk the submarine," Cushing said, adding the information was classified during World War II. Through his research, Cushing also learned a salvager happened upon the site some 45 years back. "In 1963, a salvager accidentally stumbled across this wreck. He began to dive the wreck for salvage purposes, one of his divers got killed. Once his diver got killed, he picked up and left, never to return."

While Cushing did the research, a few years ago, he got a fellow technical diver involved in checking sites off the coast of Maine — Merchant Marine Capt. Bill Lussier, 45, of Eliot. Lussier, who owns Northeast Charter Boat and takes out other divers, is a former student of Cushing.

Cushing selected Lussier for his experience. Cushing also said the two dive together frequently.

"As far as technical diving goes, you need to be rather selective. He certainly has good diving abilities and plenty of time in the water. His comfort level is good," Cushing said of Lussier.

Cushing purchased a boat-towed magnetometer and began to search the general area of where he believed the sub to have been sunk. He said he picked up several anomalies, recorded them and contacted experienced side scan sonar expert, Garry Kozak.



[Click image to enlarge](#)

Pictured is a high-resolution side sonar scan of submarine S-21 taken by Garry Kozak. The S-21, which was sunk for training purposes by the Navy during World War II, was recently located by Joe Cushing, 51, of Strafford, N.H.

"We were able to identify the exact location and the target with his side scan sonar," on Oct. 5, Cushing said. Cushing and Lussier began diving within a couple of weeks. "That's when we began to document the sight and videotape also. We just want to document the sight before anyone else gets there with videotape and pictures."

So far, Cushing said the duo has made several dives when the weather permits and will continue to research the site.

The submarine, according to Cushing, is 220 feet long, and the center portion of the ship has been opened up by explosives, which he believes was done by the salvager.

The Navy knew the general location of the sub, but after World War II, "They pretty much just forgot about it," Cushing said.

Lussier said Cushing told him about the sub a few years back, and he was somewhat interested in the beginning, and became more so, deciding to move forward with the search.

"We took the boat out and covered a whole lot of the bottom, and we did some blind dives as well," Lussier said. "It's aggressive terrain offshore. Things can hide pretty well at the bottom."

In the past, the two had found some things here and there as part of their diving passion but nothing of this magnitude, Lussier said. He said his main task is videotaping. "It's truly amazing. The video is just phenomenal. I definitely have many more hours of video (taping) before we can splice it together for other people to enjoy as well."

As for the find itself, Lussier said it's nice to see the work come to fruition. "It's not an easy task. It's a lot of work out there. I find myself quite fortunate to be able to meet Joe years ago and meet Garry Kozak as well, recently," he said.

Kozak, 60, of Derry, N.H., said he has been involved in undersea searches for 32 years, including searches for Swiss Air 111 and Egypt Air. He also located Submarine O-9 off Portsmouth, N.H., which sank off the Isle of Shoals on June 20, 1941.

"My involvement was only to locate the (S-21). My expertise is locating anything underwater," said Kozak, who was hired by Cushing and Lussier.

Kozak said a number of groups had approached him over the years from places such as Boston, Mass., and Connecticut in search of the S-21.

"Bill and Joe were the real ones who put in time and the research, and felt confident they narrowed down a reasonable area to search," he said. Kozak also commended the efforts of Cushing and Lussier. "These are two unique individuals willing to take money out of their pocket for their quest. When you go searching for something underwater, there is no guarantee. The area was a difficult search because the bottom is totally saturated with rock outcroppings."