

Sacramento Valley Detecting Buffs

A Nonprofit Organization
The Public is Invited to Attend
SVDB Newsletter
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Sacramento Valley Detecting Buffs

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Day-in-the-Park

Volunteer

Secretary's Minutes for Meeting of September 1, 2005

- Our president was back to preside over the meeting. Tales of treasures and glory. Well, not really. However, Ron, it was great to have you back.

Treasurer's Report: **Chuck Klein**

- New Balance: \$2717.76
- We spent \$1569.67 on silver for the monthly raffles – it's better and cheaper to purchase two months at a time. Now the cost of silver is going up.....

Secretary's Report: **Rick Costello**

- Rick is back but with nothing to report..

Librarian Report: **Tom Schweppe**

- Tom is back. Library is in great shape. Stop by and check out the books and mags. Great information!

Member Report: **George Magann**

- We now have 153 members.

AMDA Business **Carolyn Garrett**

Carolyn has retired and is living in Colorado – anyone going to Laughlin in October? We'll see her there.

New Business:

A very small turnout for the August meeting. I thought I would clean up at the raffle. Ha! Someone else beat me to all the goodies. Of course he probably spent more than the two bucks I spent.

Be there or Be Square: Founding members will be at our next meeting! Dick and Rita Carl are going to show up and enlighten the treat of us to the pleasures of metal detecting.

- Just a word – I have just finished the book "The Goat Doctor" by Gloria Hockensmith. I found it fascinating – a study in human nature and the gold country. This book is in our library. Check it out!

**Officers – think of Officers for the Club!
Nominations coming!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

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SVDB Day-In-The-Park

There are two day-in-the park hunts per month. The hunts are on the first Sunday and the third Sunday of each month. Breakfast at 8:00am with the hunt starting at 9:00 am. See the following for meeting place:

- ❑ **1st Sunday Hunt: Meet at Denny's at Watt and Auburn**
- ❑ **3rd Sunday Hunts: Meet at Pancake House at 21st and Broadway**

THE 1715 FLEET DISASTER

Author: John DeBry

The Prelude

Every year, two fleets traveled between Spain and the Americas; the Esquadron de Terra Firme from Spain to South America, and the Flota de Nova Espana toward Vera Cruz. Sometimes, these two fleets would travel together all the way to the Caribbean. The return voyage was more dangerous. The galleons were fully loaded with precious cargoes of gold, silver, jewelry, tobacco, spices, indigo, cochineal etc... The crews were tired and often plagued by health problems brought on by tropical diseases, malnutrition, and deplorable hygienic conditions on board. These conditions made ships even more vulnerable to attacks by pirates, but the greatest danger came from an uncontrollable element; the weather. The general weather conditions were more favorable during the summer months. The waters of the Atlantic Ocean were calmer, and the prevailing winds gentler. However, the very warm waters of the South Atlantic contributed to unstable weather, and the then unpredictable rapid development of violent and devastating tropical storms called hurricanes.

As a result of France's Louis XIV policies of expansionism, Europe was ravaged by two major wars, between 1688 and 1715. These wars disrupted trade between the Americas and the Old Continent, and Spain, highly dependent on the riches of the New World to finance her own policies of expansionism in Europe, suffered greatly. The first of these wars, the War of the

Grand Alliance, ended in 1697 with the Treaty of Ryswick, but in 1701 another broke out, this time over the succession of the Spanish crown. Charles II had died childless, but on his deathbed, had named as his heir Philip, the grandson of Louis XIV of France. Leopold I, the Holy Roman emperor, who wanted to see his son, Archduke Charles, ascend the throne, did not kindly receive this decision. Leopold also wanted to prevent at all cost any close alliance between France and Spain. War broke out, with England and the Dutch on one side, and Spain, France, Portugal, Bavaria, and Savoy on the other. The seas and oceans became the scene of naval battles and vicious encounters between merchant vessels and privateers. The sea routes between Spain and the Americas were no longer safe, and the vital flow of New World treasure was practically stopped. Things were going badly for young Philip V and his kingdom. In the year 1702 Spain received a tremendous blow when a large English naval force entered Vigo Bay, on the northwestern coast of Spain. An all-out battle ensued, with the English fleet sinking a large number of war ships, capturing others, and seizing a large treasure. The English sank another Spanish treasure fleet in 1708, off Cartagena, Columbia, and in 1711 another one of Philip's treasure fleets was destroyed by a hurricane off the coast of Cuba. The War of Succession was finally ended in 1715 by a series of treaties known as the Peace of Utrecht. The treaty between England and France confirmed Philip V's succession to the throne of Spain, while Philip renounced his rights to the French throne. England was given Newfoundland, the island of St. Christopher, and the Hudson Bay territory. Although the war had ended, the peace was an uneasy one, and much friction remained between the former foes.

At the end of this period of hostilities, Spain was in dire need of financial relief. At the King's order, a fleet was dispatched to America in order to bring back urgently needed gold and silver, which had been accumulating during the war. The eleven ships making up the fleet assembled in Havana in the summer of 1715. The fleet was made up of the Esquadron de Terra Firme, which served South American trade routes out of Cartagena, and of the Flota de Nova Espana which served the trade of Mexico and Manila Galleons out of Vera Cruz, on the southeastern coast of present-day Mexico. The Griffon, a French merchant ship under the command of Capitaine Antoine Dare, was given permission to sail with the Spanish combined fleet. Now, every one was busy getting

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ready for the long and treacherous journey back to Spain. Additional cargo was being loaded. Inventories were taken. Fresh water and food items were placed aboard each ship. After a two-year delay, the mighty Plate Fleet was ready to sail home to Spain.

The Storm

The Squadron of Tierra Firma was under the command of Captain-General Don Antonio de Escheverz y Zubiza, and consisted of six vessels. The Capitana-General was indirect command of the *Capitana*, the flagship, which was a captured English ship formerly named the *Hampton Court*, and was laden with a great number of chests of silver coins, gold coins, gold bars, gold dust, and jewelry, as well as tropical products. The flagship of the admiral, the *Almiranta*, was equally richly laden. The *Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion* carried gold coins and gold bars, as well as a number of chests of silver coins. The frigate *San Miguel*, the *El Ciervo*, and a patache, a smaller merchant vessel, completed the squadron.

The five ships of the New Spain Flota were under the general command of Captain-General Don Juan Esteban de Ubilla. Juan Esteban de Ubilla was himself on the *Capitana*, which carried some thirteen hundred chests containing 3,000,000 silver coins. There were also gold coins, gold bars, silver bars, and jewelry, as well as emeralds, pearls, and precious K'ang-Hsi Chinese porcelain which had been brought to Mexico by the Manila Galleons. The *Almiranta* carried nearly a thousand chests of silver coins, each individual chest containing some 3,000 coins. The *Refuerzo* carried eighty-one chests of silver coins and over fifty chests of worked silver. Another ship, a patache, carried some 44,000 pieces of eight. One frigate helped complete the Flota. The French ship *Griffon*, commanded by Captain Antoine Dar, had received permission to sail with the fleet. In his 1975 book, "The Funnel of Gold", historian Mendel Peterson estimated the value of the registered cargo of the combined fleet at 7,000,000 pieces of eight, which represented a real value of about \$86 million (1975) of our money.

The fleet had suffered many delays, and had been sitting idle for nearly two years. Pressure had been mounting for the fleet to sail. The Spanish crown was in dire need of money; so were merchants who had been unable to make

their exotic goods available for sale on the European market. Under this tremendous pressure, Ubilla made the decision to start the long and perilous voyage back to the Old World, even though the hurricane season had long begun. This decision would prove to be fatal, for unknown to the Spaniards a tremendous and exceptionally powerful hurricane was brewing to the southeast of Cuba. The great treasure fleet of 1715 sailed from Havana harbor in the early morning of July 24th, a beautiful and calm day, with a gentle breeze to help the ships find the Florida Current which ran north and up the Straits of Florida. Slowly and smoothly the ships of Ubilla's fleet gently followed the East coast of Florida, staying far enough away from the shore to take advantage of the Gulf Stream, and stay clear of the treacherous shoals and reef formations which fringed the Florida coast. For the first five days the voyage was uneventful with the weather remaining good and giving no indication whatsoever of the rapidly approaching killer storm. But on July 29th, long swells started to appear, coming from the southeast. The atmosphere became heavy with moisture with the sun shining brightly through the haze. A gentle breeze still blew and the sea was smooth, but the swells started to make the ship gently dip and roll. Experienced navigators, pilots, and old hands started to be concerned. They knew that these were the early signs of an impending tropical storm.

The storm was traveling north, almost due east of the convoy, but still many many miles away. The storm had reached alarming intensity with winds at the center of the storm now reaching one hundred miles per hour. By nightfall the hurricane had made a drastic change in course, suddenly veering directly to the west. On the morning of July 30th, along the east coast of Florida, just south of Cape Canaveral, winds had begun to pick up and by midday had increased to well over 20 knots, and the sea was rapidly building up. By late afternoon winds had increased to over thirty knots, and the waves were reaching twenty feet. Ubilla's fleet was relentlessly driven closer and closer to shore. The Captain General gave the order that all ships head into the wind in order to stay well clear of the reef and shoals, but the attempt was marginally successful. The velocity of the wind kept increasing, and by midnight, the ships were barely under control. Around 4 a.m. on July 31st, the hurricane struck the doomed ships with all its might, driving one ship after another on the deadly jagged reefs. The ships broke up like wooden toys. Ubilla's *Capitana* disintegrated,

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crushed on the reef like matchsticks. Almost all aboard were killed, including Captain General Ubilla. The entire fleet was lost, and of the some twenty five hundred persons aboard various ships, over one thousand perished. Contrary to previous accounts by various historians, there is no historical evidence to indicate that the *Griffon* survived the terrible storm, and we can assume that it was lost, as were the two other ships of the 1715 fleet, around the shoals of Cape Canaveral.

For those who had miraculously survived, the ordeal was just beginning. They were stranded in an inhospitable land, infested with disease-carrying mosquitoes, rattle snakes, wild animals, and hostile Indians, far from any settlement, without food, fresh water, or badly needed medical supplies.

When daylight came on that dreadful morning of July 31st, 1715, the full extent of the disaster could then be seen. The beaches of la Florida were littered with wreckage and bodies, and the survivors of this human tragedy were trying to comprehend what had happened to them. They were attempting to find their actual location. As the ships had wrecked at different locations, and were separated by sometimes several miles, it was impossible for the survivors to fully assess the extent of the disaster. They were stranded in this inhospitable land without food, water, or much needed medical supplies. Many were dying each day, adding to the already devastating number of casualties. Admiral Don Francisco Salmon undertook to immediately survey the extent of the damage. After observing that all ships had been wrecked, he decided, on August 6th, to send Nicolas de India, Ubilla's pilot, and 18 men, in a launch toward the island of Cuba, to give the alert, and to send a personal message to the governor, the Marques de Casatorres. It took ten days for the small boat to reach Havana. The alert had been given.

Within a few days several ships were leaving Havana harbor, loaded with emergency supplies, salvage equipment, government officials and soldiers, on their way to the East Coast of Florida. Salvage was to begin as soon as the relief expedition reached the survivors camps. Success came early as salvage sloops dragged the ocean floor for wreckage and quickly brought up chests of coins, as well as jewelry and gold. The Havana salvage Flotta was soon joined by Florida ships sent from St. Augustine to help in the recovery effort. By early September such was the success of the salvage team that Admiral Salmon

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wrote the governor asking him to send 25 soldiers and ammunition to guard the King's gold.

By the time the weather and sea conditions had become unsuitable for continuing salvage, in late October of the same year, over 5,000,000 pieces of eight had been recovered along with gold and jewelry, and a great part of the King's treasure. Although salvage was essentially completed, efforts continued well into 1718.

News of the disaster had swept the Americas and Europe much like the news of the Market crash would some 220 years later, and privateers, pirates and looters converged toward Palmar de Ayes (near present day Sebastian, Florida) like ravenous vultures. Early in January 1716, pirate Henry Jennings aboard his well armed sloop, the 40-ton *Barsheba*, and John Wills aboard his 35-ton *Eagle*, both having been commissioned by governor Hamilton of Jamaica, attacked the Spanish salvage camp at Palmar de Ays, and detained the defenders (no casualties were reported) while looting the camp. They made off with some 120,000 pieces of eight and other valuables, as well as two bronze cannon and two large iron guns.

When the Spaniards abandoned the salvage camp in 1718, great treasure still remained on the ocean floor. Some of the wreck sites were clearly marked by portions of the ships structures which could be observed protruding above water at low tide. For years after the official completion of the salvage operation, merchant ships sailing these waters would fish for treasure.

Little by little the sites were forgotten, and the great 1715 Spanish PLATE Fleet would eventually be forgotten and left undisturbed for nearly 250 years. Then, in 1955, a building contractor named Kip Wagner started a new page in the history of lost and found treasure.

Treasure Finders

Modern day salvage of the 1715 Plate fleet had to wait until the end of World War II and the appearance on the scene of a building contractor from Miamisburg, Ohio, named Kip Wagner.

Wagner, in search of a more hospitable climate had moved from Ohio to the small town of Wabasso, just north of Vero Beach, and was building a motel there, just

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a few miles south of Sebastian. Wagner's first contact with Florida was during the winter of 1921, when he and his brother had driven down from Ohio in a model T Ford. Half way down the coast the sunshine state they had a breakdown, and were forced to spend the night in the sleepy little town of Wabasso, just opposite the watery graves of some of the 1715 treasure galleons. Kip and his brother fell in love with the area, and as their construction business grew and thrived, they seized every opportunity they could to visit Florida. Wagner continued to dream of living in Florida, and he increasingly grew tired of the brutal Ohio winter weather. Finally, right after the end of World War II, Kip, and his wife Alice, and their young son Tom moved to Florida on a permanent basis. Although Wagner had no particular interest in treasure hunting, he was fascinated by the stories he would here from some of the locals, about corroded Spanish silver coins that would sometimes wash up on the beach during strong northeast winds, more particularly during the winter months.

Kip had first heard about sunken treasure and pieces of eight from a business partner named Captain Steadman A. Parker. One day, during a particularly severe rainstorm, unable to work on their construction project, Wagner and Parker had gone to a local bar and were having a couple of beers, when Parker suggested that it would be a good time to go look for coins on the beach. Kip asked naively "What coins?" Parker, amazed at Kip's ignorance of a fact that practically everyone in town knew about had responded, "Hasn't anyone told you about the old Spanish coins that wash up on the beach here?" Captain Parker went on to educate Wagner, and told him about the sunken Spanish treasure fleet, and added that he had full intention to find it one day.

Intrigued by Parker's stories, Kip started to investigate on his own, talking to old-timers. As his investigation went on Wagner became convinced that Parker had in fact spoken the truth. It seemed that most everyone in town new about the blackened Spanish silver coins and many had collected them through the years. In 1949, Parker initiated a salvage attempt, entering into a verbal gentleman's agreement with Wagner and three other individuals. The salvage operation lasted three months, cost the five men \$12,000, and was a complete failure. Everybody went back to work, and Kip continued beachcombing every time the opportunity presented itself. Success would have to wait until January 1961.

Kip Wagner had become friends with a local physician named Kip Kelso. Dr. Kelso was a history buff, and was also quite interested in the stories about Spanish sunken treasure. It was in great part to Dr. Kelso's scholarly approach that Wagner eventually struck it rich. Wagner and Kelso, however, disagreed on one major point; while Wagner theorized that the coins were washed up on the beach and originated from a nearby wreck site, Kelso was convinced that the coins had been buried under the beach as a result of a land-based event.

One thing the two men agreed upon was the fact that none of the coins found were dated later than 1715. Someone had told Wagner that the 1715 Spanish Plate Fleet had sunk off the coast of Cape Canaveral. Wagner then contacted another expert, Mendel Peterson, then curator of the Smithsonian's Armed Forces History Museum, in Washington D.C.. After examining the silver coin Kip had sent him, Peterson replied that this coin could not have possibly come from the 1715 Fleet, for the fleet had sunk off the Florida Keys, more than 150 miles south of Sebastian. Both Wagner and Kelso were confused. They now had two conflicting expert opinions. Either one was wrong and one was right, or both were wrong. Obviously more research would be needed.

In the summer of 1959, Doc Kelso and his family drove up to Washington and while his wife Becky and his children toured the Nation's capital, he began digging into the massive archives of the Library of Congress. Seeing how serious and motivated Kelso was, the staff pitched in and soon Doc Kelso uncovered interesting documents containing references to the 1715 Spanish Fleet. The single most important book uncovered was historian Cesareo Fernandez Duro's *Armada Espanola*, published in 1900. Another important clue Doc Kelso had unearthed was a reference book called *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* by the English cartographer Bernard Romans, published in London in 1775, just 760 years after the Plate Fleet tragedy. After locating the book in the rare books and manuscripts section, Doc Kelso found what he was looking for on page 273; "Directly opposite the mouth of the St. Sebastian River happened the shipwreck of the Spanish Admiral, who was the northern most wreck of the fourteen galleons, and a hired Dutch ship, all laden with specie and plate; which by (undistinguishable word) of northeast winds were drove ashore and lost on this coast, between this place and the bleach-yard, in 1715. A hired Frenchman, fortunately

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escaped, by having steered half a point more east than the others. The people employed in the course of this survey, while walking the strand after strong eastern gales, have repeatedly found pistareens and double pistareens, which are the kinds of money most probably yet remaining in the wrecks. This lagoon stretches parallel to the sea, until the latitude 27:20, where it has an outwatering, or mouth; directly before this mouth, in three fathom water, lie the remains of the Dutch wreck. The banks of this lagoon are not fruitful." In one of the book's flaps was the map. Now Wagner and Kelso needed more specific information such as the amount of treasure carried by each ship, and how much, if any, had already been salvaged.

Reading as many books on treasure hunting as possible, Wagner learned that the richest repository of Spanish Colonial documents is the General Archives of the Indies in Seville, Spain. Wagner quickly wrote the curator, Dr. Jose de la Pena, for more information, but was disappointed when the reply arrived. Dr. Pena's information was rather vague, and did not shed additional light on the 1715 tragedy. Disappointed perhaps, but not discouraged, Wagner and Kelso took a different approach. One of Wagner's friends, Mrs. Libby Walker of Vero Beach, was planning a vacation to Spain, and asked if there was anything she could do for Wagner while she was there. Kip asked her to personally contact Dr. Pena, and show him one of the silver coins he had found. This new approach worked, and resulted in Dr. Pena sending some 3000 feet of microfilmed documents written in archaic Spanish pertaining to late 17th and early 18th century Spanish treasure fleet. With the help of National Park historian Luis R. Arana, a recognized authority on archaic Spanish material, Wagner and Kelso had deciphered and translated most of the script in a year's time. The documents contained much detailed information about the fleet's cargo of gold, silver, and jewelry, early salvage attempts, and much information about the salvage camp, and the amount of treasure the Spaniards had successfully recovered. In all, the fleet carried 14 million pesos in registered treasure, and less than half of it had been salvaged. Wagner intensified his search of the beaches, using a World War II surplus army mine detector. His goal was to find the location of the Spanish salvage camp. He felt that if he could accomplish this, he could pinpoint the wreck.

After many weeks of intense search during which he uncovered mostly modern material, Wagner finally

succeeded. One day, as he was walking on the high portion of the bluff, he spotted a large depression, which appeared to be man made. As he walked around the area, visually checking the ground for clues, he noticed the old hound dog that accompanied him on some of his excursions, was drinking from a partially filled hole in the ground. Kip sampled the water himself, and sure enough it was fresh water. Could this be the well dug by the Spanish salvagers? Wagner drove home to get his metal detector, which he had forgotten to bring, and was back on the site within an hour. In no time at all he had found a ship's spike and a cannonball. He had found the salvage camp.

What Wagner had actually discovered was the Higgs site so named for the amateur historian who had conducted a limited investigation of the place in 1940-1942. Hale Smith had also done some archaeological research on the same location in 1946, focusing his effort largely on the bluff due to dense vegetation.

Encouraged by his new find, Wagner posted half an acre of land, rented a bulldozer, cleared the land, and, equipped with shovel, screen, and mine detector, proceeded to search the area inch by inch. After several months of hard work, he had uncovered hundreds of fragments of Spanish olive jars, Mexican ceramics, and blue and white Chinese porcelain. He also had found some encrusted metal objects, spikes, cannon balls, thirteen silver pieces of eight, and a gold ring set with a 2.5-carat diamond, and six small diamonds set around the band. Wagner's finds were reminiscent of finds made by Higgs and Smith.

Wagner still did not agree with Doc Kelso, and felt that the coins he found on the beach did not come from the bluff or the campsite, but from a wreck nearby. So, while conducting his hard and painstaking work, he took breaks from the overwhelming Florida heat, and searched the surf by peering through a small window installed on his homemade surfboard. Wagner knew he was searching for a shipwreck, but had no idea what a ship that had sunk such a long time ago would even look like. He repeated his this routine many times, but always without success, until one day he spied something that looked quite different from the surrounding coral reef. There on the bottom, exposed above the sand but covered with marine growth, were five large guns and a large iron anchor. Each cannon was approximately nine feet in length. Wagner

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now felt sure he had indeed found a wreck and that most likely this wreck had something to do with the coins he found on the beach as well as with the campsite he was busy excavating.

Were there other wrecks nearby? Higgs and Smith had reported that "wrecks" could be seen in the calm waters adjoining the campsite. So Wagner, always resourceful, rented a small aircraft and had the pilot fly him along the beach line. Every time he would spot something suspicious, he would drop a weighted coconut to mark the spot, then would have the pilot put down the plane on the beach, and would swim out to investigate his find. He found so many wrecks that he was now more confused than anything else. How could one tell a Spanish galleon from a more recent vessel?

Wagner acquired some scuba diving equipment and started to regularly dive "his" wreck. One thing very quickly became clear in his mind. A full-scale salvage operation would be a lot more involved than he had ever anticipated, and would require special equipment and money, as well as manpower. There was no way he could continue this project alone. No matter how indefatigable he might be, his body had physical limitations like anybody else. He continued his exploration, now concentrating on his underwater finds, and even explored other sites. One of them, a site well known to local sport skin divers, located just north of Ft. Pierce, some 30 miles south of Sebastian Inlet. A prominent ballast pile consisting of large river rocks marked the site. Little else was visible above the sand, but Wagner, over a period of time, was successful in recovering a handful of 1715 silver coins.

Kip Wagner now had treasure-hunting fever. Although until now his finds had been modest at best, he was more confident than ever that he was just inches away from a fortune in sunken treasure. He knew he had to either quit his almost full time pastime and concentrate on again on "working" for a living, or going at it full blast. Wagner was far from being the type of a person to quit, so his decision was relatively an easy one for him to make; he would become a full time treasure hunter. Mindful of the law, he knew that certain legal procedures would have to be initiated, and that some kind of permit would have to be obtained from the state.

He contacted Tallahassee and met with Van H. Ferguson, then director of the Florida Internal Improvement Fund, the office charged with the task of issuing salvage leases at the time. The State policy then was that the governor of Florida, and his cabinet, as owners of all submerged lands under the state's navigable waters, could lease the same for search and salvage operations. The cost of the annual lease was \$100.00 and the posting of a \$500.00 bond was required. In addition, during the exploration and salvage phases of the operation, a quarterly report had to be submitted to Tallahassee, describing exploration and salvage activities, and listing all finds. In return for this privilege, the State would receive 25% of all finds, 25% which they would select. In 1959 Wagner filed for an exploration lease covering a fifty-mile long area starting from the north at Sebastian Inlet, and reaching south to a point near Stuart, with exclusive pinpoint salvage-right leases on the precise sites he had investigated. This was one of Wagner's smartest moves.

What really got things underway was the appearance of Louis J. Ullian, a Boston-born long time resident of Ft. Lauderdale who probably knew more about beachcombing for Spanish treasure than anyone did. Lou had moved to Ft. Lauderdale when he was only 6 months old, and he had been looking for sunken treasure since the age of twelve. A graduate from Purdue University with a degree in mechanical engineering, he had joined the Navy in 1955, and had been trained in the disposal of explosives. Upon completion of his military obligation, in 1959, Ullian had gotten the job of Ordnance Engineer at the Air Force Missile Test Range at Cape Canaveral. Years later, he would play a major role in the research and recovery for the space shuttle *Challenger*.

His passion for treasure hunting had not faded, and he would seize any opportunity he could to continue his hobby. He had even found a wreck in the Florida Keys and correctly identified it as being part of the ill-fated 1733 Spanish treasure fleet. One day, in need of new SCUBA equipment he had gone into the dive store and chatted with the store owner, Delphine Long, who was also employed at Patrick Air Force base in the capacity of ground power equipment supervisor. The previous year, Delphine Long had founded a dive club and had even dove on a ballast pile just south of the Sebastian Inlet, without realizing what he had actually stumbled upon. Lou quickly joined the club, and days later met another member, Ervin Taylor, who lived near Sebastian. The

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three enthusiastically discussed their passion for wreck diving, and Taylor suggested that both Lou and Delphine meet a very interesting acquaintance of his whom lived in Sebastian and who share the same interest. His name was Kip Wagner.

A meeting was arranged, and the four men met at Kip's house. Their meeting continues long into the night, exchanging notes, describing the coins and artifacts found, with Lou relating his diving experience on the various wreck sites he had explored throughout the years. Late that night, Kip finally brought out his finds, including the diamond ring and all the silver coins. The spell was cast. They would join forces and retrieve the long-lost riches of the Spanish Main. Throughout the winter of 1959-1960 the four held many such meetings, discussing their plan of approach to a full-scale salvage operation. One thing was clear, their need for more manpower and more equipment.

One of Ullian's bosses was Colonel Dan F. Thompson. A veteran pilot about to wrap up a distinguished 24-hour career in the Air Force. Colonel Thompson was also an expert diver. It did not take long for Ullian to convince him to join the team. The next recruit was also a veteran pilot who had flown combat missions over the Himalayas, India and China during World War II, and who was now working for Thompson at the Cape. He was Lieutenant Colonel Harry Canon. His job was to push the destruct button on any out of control missile before it became a serious safety problem. He was also involved in the recovery operation of returning astronauts splashing down at sea in their space capsules. Although not a diver, Cannon was also fascinated by the lure of sunken treasure, and, above all, he had a twenty-one foot boat the "team" felt could be used for their salvage operation. Lisbon Futch, an experienced boatsman with an intimate knowledge of the treacherous Sebastian Inlet and its adjoining shoals, completed the team. The eight members of the group were Kip Wagner, now the most experienced in the field of treasure hunting, Lou Ullian, diver, treasure hunter and explosive expert; Delphine Long, diver, treasure hunter and electrical/mechanical expert; Ervin Taylor, diver and mechanics extraordinaire; Colonel Dan Thompson, diver, pilot, electronics engineer legal and organizational authority; Lieutenant Colonel Harry Cannon, diver, pilot, communications and electronics specialist, with a knack for business and promotion; Lisbon Futch, expert seaman; and last but not least, Dr.

Kip Kelso, physician, scholar, archival researcher, and authority on Spanish-Colonial history. Now they were ready to go to work, but Wagner had some doubts as to the ability of this diverse group to work as a team and remain so during the long months of hard and possible dangerous work that lay ahead. There was only one way to find out, and that was to test his friends by taking them to the wreck just north of the Ft. Pierce Inlet, and see how they would perform under adverse conditions. Wagner did see to it that conditions were indeed "adverse", and picked a cold and windy day in January 1960. Many more such dives took place in the ensuing months, and everytime the entire team passed the test with flying colors, their enthusiasm undiminished, and their spirit unbroken. Now Wagner was ready to lead his team to the promising wreck near Sebastian Inlet.

Although the newly formed team seemed solid, Kip Wagner wanted to make sure that these men were as reliable and trustworthy as they appeared to be. So, instead of going directly to his pet wreck south of the Sebastian Inlet as he had originally intended, he decided to further test them on a well-known site, which had little chance to produce anything valuable. It was situated just north of Ft. Pierce, about twenty miles south of the Sebastian Inlet. It was easily accessible, had unusually clear water, was in only 18 feet of water, and, as Wagner would later write, "Practically everyone on the coast within 100 miles knew about it." Wagner himself had dove on its ballast pile a number of times.

Using Lieutenant Colonel Harry Cannon's cabin cruiser, Wagner's team started their test diving on a cold January day, in 1960. On that particular day, the ocean was unusually calm and clear, but the water was quite cold and combined with the chilling wind typical for this time of year, the conditions were far from being ideal. They continued their diving activities over the next few weekends, gaining not only experience, but also gathering additional diving gear. As they started "attacking" the massive ballast pile made up of thousands of large river rocks, one thing became apparent; they needed a larger boat. Wagner and Libe Futch made a trip to a Navy salvage yard in Norfolk, Virginia, where they purchased a 40-foot liberty launch for \$1,200. As the saying goes "you get what you pay for", their new acquisition was a sorry sight, and, although afloat, desperately needed cleaning and fixing. Nevertheless, Lisbon Futch managed to sail the vessel all the way back to Florida. The boat looked so

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much like a blackened junk, they quickly christened it the Sampan. By April of that same year, the old Sampan was ready, after extensive repairs and modifications, to begin salvage in earnest.

The ballast pile was indeed enormous, stretching some 70 feet in length, 20 feet wide and at least 8 feet high. Wagner estimated that the pile, made up of rocks ranging in sizes from ¼ pound up to 50 pounds, must have totaled some 100 tons. If they were to find "anything", Kip figured that they would have to move the ballast. Used to stabilize the galleon, the ballast was carefully arranged below the cargo holds so it would not shift in heavy seas. Wagner felt that perhaps some small artifacts might have found their way through this mass of rocks. The task was formidable.

At first the crew of the Sampan preformed with great enthusiasm, moving up to 500 rocks a day, but as the task progressed and nothing but rocks was being found, their spirit started to diminish, but no one was giving any indication of wanting to quit. After many days of hard work, they had managed to clear a path across the midship area. Wanting to clear the sand away, they had rigged a homemade airlift, but the contraption proved inadequate and they had to continue to resort to working strictly by hands. Progress was painfully slow, and to aggravate the situation two members of the team, Doc Kelso and Libe Futch, were not divers, and the others, at the exception of Wagner, had full time jobs so they could only dive on weekends and holidays. As summer came to a close patience grew shorter, and in his book "Pieces of Eight", Wagner quoted Lou Ullian as saying that "Anyone who thinks treasure hunting is a glamorous profession is just plain crazy."

By mid-summer they had managed to modify the airlift and were busy clearing the sand away from their 10-foot path, when the dredge started to spit up hundreds of tiny Mexican potsherds chips as well as small pieces of blue and white porcelain. Cannon balls and a number of encrusted iron artifacts were also uncovered as well as some wood. Samples were taken and sent to Mendel Peterson at the Smithsonian Institution for analysis. What they thought was decayed wood turned out to be a blend of cow hair and tar. Peterson suspected that the compound was used by the Spaniards to coat the hull of the ship in a futile attempt to halt the damage inflicted by the destructive teredo worms of the warm Caribbean waters.

Spirits picked up, and Kip and his men started to take a more calculated approach to their excavation, and concentrated their efforts to an area that they believed could be the stern section of the galleon. By mid-August treasure was still eluding them and morale was at an all time low, but one morning that month things changed. Harry Cannon had been working a little area of his own, when he uncovered a black encrusted wedge-shaped object. Using a crowbar he quickly started to scrape the encrustation away. The scratched surface of the object shone brightly under the water. Harry had just found a silver ingot. Feverishly he fanned the sand away where he had made his find, and soon uncovered five more wedge-shaped silver ingots. Quickly surfacing Harry asked if that day was anyone's birthday. It so happened that it was Libe's birthday. Harry, with a broad smile in his face handed Libe one of the wedges and said "Well here. Here's a present for you". The entire crew went wild. Over the next few weekends they found an additional six silver wedges. Treasure was theirs at long last.

By the end of August the weather changed and the diving season came to an end with no additional finds, but the team was now solidified and Kip was ready to lead his now weathered and experienced team to a more promising site. His site.

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