

Interview with Jack Haskins

broadcast on the television program Waterways
April, 1995

Re: Discovery of the remains of Nuestra Senora de Las Augustias, wrecked 1733, near the present Long Key bridge, Florida Keys

Interviewer: What was the first wreck you found?

Well, that was the Augustias, I guess - a 1733 ship, that sank on July 16, 1733 and this one - from the research - we knew was somewhere down off Long Key viaduct. I'm looking at this thing, 'it's got to be somewhere in there', so, we used a magnetometer to find it.

Interviewer: Now what is that?

Well, a magnetometer is an electronic instrument that detects anomalies in the earth's magnetic field. See, the earth has a steady-state magnetic field. It shifts a little bit from time to time but it's fairly steady. The lines that flow are parallel, more or less. So if you saw a piece of iron in there like a cannon or an anchor or something like that...if you had something lying on the bottom that is foreign to that magnetic field...that has a magnetic field of its own...it creates that's called an anomaly or rift in that normal electronic field and this electronic detector called a magnetometer detects this rift in the magnetic field, or anomaly. It displays it on a chart and the chart swings like this...little swiggles - it normally runs down straight like that then all of a sudden it will go like this...You say, "Aha!"...You drop the buoy and you go down and investigate.

Interviewer: But if it was that easy, wouldn't there be more people out finding this? There's got to be more to it than just that.

Well, a good magnetometer costs around \$ 25,000 so not too many people...actually, we had an old World War II magnetometer, an AFQ3 which we jury-rigged and used to beat on...so I took the chart out and we just laid out a little grid and said, 'well, we're going to go down there and put some buoys out' (so that we have a fairly consistent path, back and forth, try to cover everything). And so we did, and Jimmy Jones was with me, and, I think we had a little trouble with the engine on the way out of something, we fixed that and kept going and finally got there and threw the fish overboard, the magnetometer, and started towing it astern, about 100 ft.

astern, so the boat's magnetic field wouldn't influence it, get far enough away. And, we made about four passes, up and down, and on about the third pass we went in towards the bridge, we started getting some small, spurious anomalies and I said, 'well, that's probably junk off the bridge', you know - we were close to the bridge at that time! I don't think that's it. Then we made a turn to seaward and Jimmy Jones told me, he said 'hang on, I'm going to put you right on to something'. And he saw, in the water the ballast pile lying right there - a brown object, you know, and Jimmy had enough experience that he knew that had to be a ballast pile.

Interviewer: What depth of water?

Probably ten feet.

Interviewer: That's all?

Yeah, about twelve feet of water, I think.

Interviewer: That's unbelievable!

Well, anyway, when we went over that thing the old mag just went wild and of course I dropped the buoy and we threw the anchor out and pulled the fish in, and Jimmy Jones got so excited he threw his tank on, threw his flippers on, threw his mask on, jumped in the water, forgot to put the regulator on! He came back up, spitting away, and by that time I had mine on and I handed him the regulator! And we both went down and here was this beautiful, untouched, absolutely virgin ballast pile with all the fish and gorgonias, cannons and four anchors lying at one end - completely untouched. Absolutely untouched. Well we were absolutely beside ourselves - we knew we had found it!

Interviewer: How could that have not been seen from the bridge?

I don't know! We talked to a crawfisherman who had worked that channel for 20 years. He said, 'there's no wreck in this channel - what are you guys looking for, anyway?' He didn't even - well actually, he had probably seen that thing but just thought it was just a rock pile!

Transcription by Gail Swanson, April, 1995

For more on the discovery of the Angustius see Famous Shipwrecks of the Florida Keys, Bob "Frogfoot" Weller (1990), p.90-106. The Islamorada library also has the complete poem/song written by a survivor of the wreck, Jose Ignacio de Toca Velasco, and a photograph taken in 1972 by Key Colony resident Charles Anderson of Richard MacAllaster and the state agent with conglomerate pulled from the wreck.

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TREASURE HUNTER JACK HASKINS FINDS AN UNDERSEA FORTUNE IN THE DEPTHS OF THE LIBRARY

Time was when the complete treasure hunter needed only a tattered map, a seaworthy ship and a fair wind to the end of the rainbow. But when the *Summit* set sail last November in search of the sunken Spanish treasure ship *Concepción*, the quest had all the complications and calculations of a corporate enterprise. Most of the six years of preparation had been dry scholarship. Backed by a U.S. consortium that invested \$500,000 in the hunt, expedition leader Burt Webber went to sea with a \$15,000 photomosaic map of the ocean floor where the *Concepción* went down in 1641 and an impressive complement of equipment and specialists.

Indeed, even more vital to the success of the search than Webber was his partner in adventure, Jack Haskins. A self-taught expert in historical manuscripts, Haskins, 44, had traced the approximate location of the wreck through yellowed Spanish documents, and it was his detective work that attracted the investors. "Looking at this professionally," says Webber, "you wouldn't invest based on book research alone any more than you would dig a hole for an oil well on a student geologist's recommendation. It takes firsthand research, a feeling for nautical terminology and the idioms of the language, and expertise in Spanish colonial history. Very few people have all those things, and Jack Haskins is one of them." Webber's and the consortium's faith has been decisively vindicated. Three days after arriving at Silver Shoals, 80 miles north of the Dominican Republic, the expedition located the *Concepción* in 50 feet of water, just 150 yards from the spot Haskins and Webber had predicted. Estimates of the treasure run as high as \$40 million, and Haskins will receive 5 percent of what remains after the Dominican government has taken its half.

Born in Vermont, Goin Everett Haskins Jr. grew up in Lexington, Mass., and quit school to join the Navy when he was only 16. "I lied about my age," he explains. "I hated being taught. I'm a great believer that if somebody wrote it somewhere, I can learn it myself."

After PT-boat service in the waning days of World War II, he specialized in radar and electronics as a destroyer

crewman. Later he studied flying under the GI bill and eventually became an independent corporate pilot. One day he went along with a client to salvage the engines of a sunken pleasure boat in the Susquehanna River. "We worked about an hour in the muck, unbolting the engines by Braille," recalls Haskins. "That's how I got into treasure hunting."

By 1968 he had set his sights on the sunken Spanish galleon *Atocha*, eventually discovered by rival treasure hunter Mel Fisher (PEOPLE, May 15, 1978), and was buying it on his own 38-foot boat in the Florida Keys.

He spent two weeks in Spain photographing documents, then came home to learn what was in them. "I studied them with a dictionary in one hand,

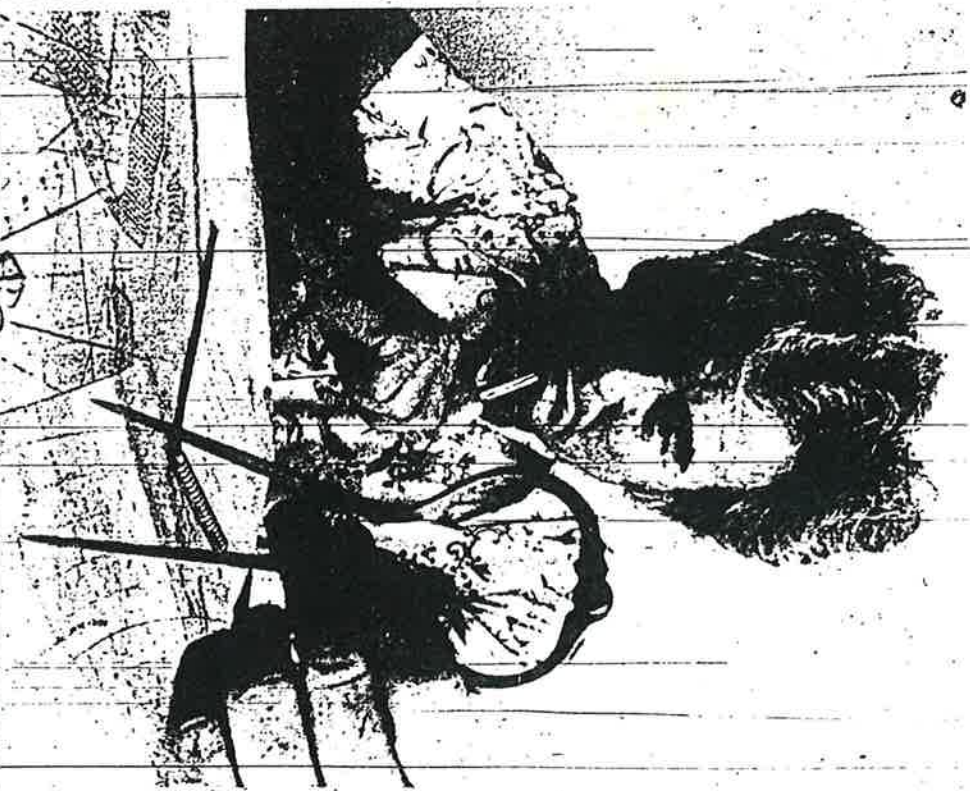
starting to learn Spanish," he recalls.

"It was like working a code. After three years I was actually reading those documents, but still not locating the *Atocha*." By 1972 Haskins was a regular visitor to Spanish archives in Seville and supporting himself trafficking in antique coins after a few years of playing the stock market. "I was working on a 1622 wreck and another one from 1656," he says. "Naturally, I was running across material on the *Concepción*, so I picked up all the information I could."

Though the *Concepción* had been

CONTINUED

Near his floating Florida home, Haskins explores underwater with a metal detector. A more sophisticated instrument was used to locate the *Concepción*, a galleon like the one inset. Below, he compares charts with divers.



INSET: TERRY ARNOLD CAMERA

Photographs by Tom Williamson

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Adventure CONTINUED

found once before, in 1687 by William Phips, the 21st son of a poor Maine farmer, much of its treasure had not been recovered. Haskins and Webber, an old rival who had become his friend and associate, decided to have a go at it themselves in 1977, but a four-month expedition proved fruitless. For years Haskins had been searching vainly for the missing log of Phips' vessel *Henry of London*. Returning to Spah in 1978, he began corresponding with a professor of economics in London, who had been studying the *Concepcion* for purely academic reasons. "He started giving me what he had," recalls Haskins, "and then he called with word that the missing log had been found in a county library in Kent." Haskins and Webber flew to England at once. "The Phips log was everything we thought it was," says Haskins. "The concept of research is like a puzzle. You get a piece here and a piece there, and pretty soon you have them all. We found our treasure that day in the library."

Already Operation Phips II, as they call it, has salvaged enough treasure to repay its backers, and the end is nowhere in sight. But Jack Haskins, with a fortune in prospect, is once again scouring the archives. "I never look back," he says, "because if you do you turn into a pillar of salt or something. Treasure hunting is the most satisfying thing I've ever done. Anybody can learn to do it, and it's a last vestige of free enterprise. It's the great American dream."

JANE RIEKER

William Phips, a Boston shipwright, was knighted by King James II after taking 32 tons of silver off the *Concepcion* in 1687.



THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE

MARINES, JACK (Scribble) ~~THIS~~ THIS!

He goes on to say, "y se rehacieron de dos indios buzos y luego salieron a Cayo de Pinero un dia de navegacion donde estuvieron 10 dias y seri hacieron de ocho indios buzos y de este fueron al cavo de dicho tiempo a Cayo del Marques y el secundo dia de este presente mes (Sept) salieron de dicho cayo en busca DE UN CASCO DE UN NAVIO QUE HAVIA DADO NOTICIA UN INDIO
LLAMADO JUAN LARGO 3 O 4 LEGUAS DE DICHO CAYO el Marques y estando en el paraje donde dijeron estava dicho casco hecheron 3 cayucos con los Indios y la canoa principal que llebaron del navio con quatro hombres de mar y Platico y un Grieco para que fueron a buscar dicho casco y haviendo ydo a esta diligencia volvieron diciendo que no havian hallado y al dia siguiente se llebaron y fueron al paraje donde havia dado rason un hombre llamado Lorenzo Platico que lba embarcado en dicho Fragata donde se presuma havian de estan el casco de dicho Almiranta perdida y estando en el se hizo la misma diligencias embarcandose los mesmos, porque aunque este declarante se quiso embarcar la primera vez dijeron que no hera necesario por entonces hasta que llegase el casco de descubria plata y se volvieron abordo diciendo tambien que no lo havian hallado y el dia siguiente volvieron al mismo paraje de antes donde se volvio a hacer la misma diligencia con dicho cayucos y dicho canoa y estando haciendo dicho diligencia se aparto uno de los cayucos en que yban tres de dicho Indios de los demas que estaron ya pescando porque se hacia uno y otro y fue para una mancha grande que havian descubierto por haver los parecido ser casco segun la relacion hicieron quando volvieron abordo y que alli han ponearon un carey y que volandolo se havia rompido el cordel por haverse embarasado abajo a donde dijeron have bajado uno de dicho tres Indios llamado El Mulato que havia visto un monton de piedra largo y ancho que parecia ser piedra de lastre y en el medio una cosa redonda que no pudo extinguir si hera palo o pieca lo qual dijieron que por entonces trataron de collar dicho Indios hasta certificarse otra dia porque aunque fueron abordo no dijeron nada ni se supo en la embarcacion hasta despues de haver salido de aquel paraje que lo confesaron con que haviendo de volver dicho en la misma diligencia se llebaron por haver descubierto una vela y ser dicho fragata de poca defense y estar con la conjuncion en la mano volvieron otra vez al cayo llamado Pinero a reguardanse de dicho conjuncion y a bolver a recibir dos Indios que se le havian que dado y el dia 21 Sept hasta quando estuvieron alli por falta del palos (wooden Spars) y hacer mucho calmas volvieron otra vez en demanda de dicho paraje donde se havia descubierto dicha mancha donde llegaron el dia 27 y haviendo dado fondo estuvieron aquella noche aguantando un tiempo que los havia entrado con mucha fuerza alados los mastereros y arriados los Verles y el dia siguiente por la manana no haviendo sejado dicho tiempo se llebaron para irse a buscar a un cayo que estava seca llamada Boca Grande estubieron Todo el dia barlovento ando sin poder lo cojer por la fuerza de dicho tiempo arriaron a este puerto donde entraron hoy dicha dia y esto responde..." Said he was 40 years old, etc.

I'm firmly convinced this Indian Diver was indeed on the ballast mound of the Atocha, somewhere slightly NW of Marquesas Rock...why else call it Marquesas Rock? It must be the sign whereby Gaspar de Vargas was able to always come

back to this spot!! Richard MacAllaster will encompass this area and, just in case, I'll take the area just East of his. The wreck has to be within these two leases! Mel isn't going to like this.