The 1940 Storm Podcast

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|  | 3:40 Goldy *you must remember we were going through the worst storm that ever happened .. and that boat was rolling like a cork on the sea. It did everything but turn upside down.* |
|  | 12 ish lloyd *I turned the wheel hard over and nothing happened.. so we just ended up on the beach.* |
|  | **These are voices from Lake Michigan’s worst gale, The Armistice Day Storm of 1940. Three steel freighters were destroyed in 126 mile per hour winds.. Two entire crews vanished into the killer winds leaving no one to tell what happened.** |
|  | 19:24 *there’s been hundreds of boats went down. Literally hundreds of them. Most of them went down and nobody lived to tell about it. But the reason Novadoc made history it went aground and all the people except two lived to tell about it. That’s why it made history.* |
|  | **I’m Ric Mixter.. I've made it my life study to find eyewitnesses to history- and today we’ll hear from several men caught in a november gale three quarters of a century ago. These are exclusive interviews.. And I ask that you respect that by not reproducing any of the commentary without written permission from Airworthy Productions. this rare look at one of the Great Lakes most notorious storms is only found on (Jingle Mixtories)**  |
|  | **Let’s go back to the times of the Great Depression.. In Ontario Canada on Georgian Bay.. Where 16 year old Lloyd Belcher knew his family didn’t have money to send him to highschool.. And he knew he didn’t want to work in the grain docks that made his dad sick.** |
| My father worked at the grain elevator across the bay.. that was a Poorpen Nickel?  | :35 Lloyd Oh he died at 57.. a lot of grain dust.. you know that got to him. So I didn’t want to go to the elevator to work So the only other thing is sailing, so..  |
|  | Lloyd that was 1936 and there wasn’t too many jobs and to go to high school I’d have to go to Midland and it was quite costly.. and I didn’t want him to have to look after my education, so I said I’ll go sailing and see how I make out (laughs) |
| Clifford goldsmith | **Lloyd laughs because his sailing career would bring two narrow escapes from certain death while he was at the wheel in World War Two and during the Armistice Day Storm. His first adventure began aboard the British built *Novadoc..* A 12 year old small freighter designed for river use.** |
| Philip flavin halifaxJoe deshane toronto cook | Lloyd. 3 ish In fact, our last trip was down the Saganay river, and he got orders to go to Chicago and load powdered coke and take it back down to the Saganay port halfford.. and then we were going to make our last trip.  |
|  | **The *Novadoc’s* crew totalled 19.. Including a brand new sailor in the engine room. Howard Goldsmith was from Singhampton.** |
| Music to cover bites | 9:05 goldy *when we left Chicago.. it was dead calm. We were heading for montreal with a load of carbon coke it was our last trip of the season. Now little did we know that we were going out into the second worst storm that ever happened on the Great Lakes. In order for to realize what a storm like that was like.. you had to go through it.*  |
| Novadoc was sunk twice beforeThat summer ran aground | **Howard had fit out the *Novadoc* in the spring.. Taking an entry level job as a fireman, stoking the two massive boilers that created steam for the engine. It was his brother Clifford that coaxed him into joining the *Novadoc’s* crew..**  |
|  | 31:49 goldy *I really didn’t want to go sailing in the first place. I could make more money cutting wood then I could sailing. All I could make was 80 dollars a month sailing.. I could make more money than that cutting wood and selling it. And I didn’t want to go but my brother.. he wanted me to go. And I wish that I hadn’t gone* |
|  | **Run aground just a few months earlier, *Novadoc* had been a shipwreck at least twice before. Now with a newly repaired bottom hull, it was loading powdered coke for aluminum manufacturing in Quebec.** |
|  | 6:09 We were the first to load.. there were two other patterson fleet there.. we got out about 5am and as we went out the breakwater the captain yelled to the coast guard they had a station right there.. we were right along side of them.. and he asked for a latest weather report and well they said there wasn’t any change.. so we figured we were going to be all right. |
|  | **Captain Donald Steep was new to the *Novadoc*, but not to the lakes. He knew his ship was among the smallest freighters on the lakes and he’d need to take precautions as the barometer started to fall.. Indicating bad weather was moving in.** |
|  | 4:00 Lloyd it was blowing a bit but it wasn’t too bad and so the captain thought he’d go up the east side and then the wind was from the south east and we were protected on the shore. But through the course of the day the winds shifted around to the west.. the south/southwest. And the waves kept getting bigger and bigger and it was too late to go over to the other shore and so we just had to follow up, and it kept getting worse and worse.. and there was nothing we could do then. |
| Nov 7 narrows bridge collapsed | **The crew didn’t know it but this storm was actually born on the west coast, and on November 7th it had destroyed a suspension bridge in Tacoma Washington. Now it was roaring up the expanse of Lake Michigan. *Novadoc* had six hatches.. each essentially 29 foot holes in the deck that were kept watertight by metal lids covered in tarpalins. the integrity of these covers were crucial as the waves started washing over the deck. Wheelsman Lloyd Belcher remembers watching in horror as a cover started to rip apart in the tempest.** |
|  | 12:50 LLOYD As the waves were going over the deck there was a split in the tarp of the number one hatch and the captain sent me out with another man and we found a board in the forepeak and we nailed it over top of the split in the canvas. And we made it pretty secure. |
|  |  **In the back of the ship, fireman Howard was starting to get tossed around as he tried to keep the 10 foot diameter boiler fed with coal. ig was a crucial assignment.. As the steam kept the propeller turning.. And in control in the mounting storm.** |
|  | 11:00 Goldy *I’ll try to tell you what it was like. You couldn’t tell what was going on outside. You’re in that fire hole trying to keep steam up. And it was a hard job doing it alone. You couldn’t do it alone. So fred chessel knew what we were up against and he put four men in the fire hole to fire that boat. Two men to each boiler. One guy would hold the door open and other guy would bail the coal in. Firing a boat.. there’s something tricky about it. You take a shovel full of coal and when you go to throw it in you have to let the heal of the shovel hit the deadplate.. that way the coal spreads over the fire.. you can’t just throw it in a heap.. that wont work. You have to hit that deadplate. And that was a hard thing to do with that boat rolling like that.*  |
|  | 13:10 Goldy *everything was moving! The boat was just going like that and you had to wait until you got into position in order for you to do throw the coal in.. you couldn’t do it when the boat was up like that! You had to wait until it came down fairly level then you could throw it in!* |
| Novadoc just 12 years old built 1928 | **The direction of the winds were compounding their plight in the gale.. As the further north they go, the bigger the waves are building from the winds pushing up the lake. Now the *Novadoc* is rolling heavily with winds pushing 126 miles per hour.** |
|  | 10:30 goldy i*t’s terrifying.. because you can’t see what’s going on. And the boat is turning everything but upside down. It did! It turned everything but upside down and you have no idea what it was like down in the fire hole. It was something else!* |
|  | **The tops of the waves.. Called crests.. Were reaching 30 feet. *Novadoc* was falling into the valley of those freshwater mountains.. Called the trough.** |
|  | 3:40:38 (15:14) Lloyd We were in the trough for hours. Because I couldn’t steer it.. we were just rolling all the time. At one point he ah put the chadburn at double speed.. so the engineer would give it everything it had.. and I turned it hard a-port try to straighten it out. and eventually we did get it out. We got it straight and a big wave came up and broke all the windows out.and then we were in water up to our knees then. So we knew we were finished.. and we got back in the trough of the waves and kept pushing in ending up on the beach.  |
| (Simpel)  | **Now the waves were hammering the ship, and the glass in the pilothouse didn’t stand a chance. The first mate Richard Simpell.. Who had once been the skipper on the *Novadoc*.. Was hit by debris when the windows let loose.** |
|  | 33:07 Lloyd He was pretty close to the glass when it broke in the wheelhouse. It just missed me I was lucky. He was the worst one.. he got the brunt of it and the water came right in with it.. it was quite a mess there for a little while |
|  | **Captain Simpell later divulged this wasn’t his first maritime disaster.** |
|  | 11:13 It was in the paper that he was on 15 shipwrecks.. I don’t know.. something like that. I don’t know if it was that many or not. Ha |
| (simpell)  | 14:20Lloyd he wanted to swim to shore with a line.. but the captain woudlnt’ let him.. there was no way he’d make it into shore. The 13th.. the water was cold with a lot ice on deck.. in fact a lot of ice on the winches.. everything was coated with ice. |
| Oilers room | 13:36 goldy  *we were at the mercy of the waves and we knew it. That boat did everything but turn upside down .. and at 10 oclock at nite fred chessel.. he was the second engineer.. he says howard we’re going aground he says I want all you people to go up to the oiler’s room that was on the lee side of the storm. He says I want you to go up into that room I want you to stay there.. don’t go anyplace else. And that’s what we did. A few minutes later we heard a .. well felt a thud. We knew we were aground. A minute later there were 7 men standing in the oiler’s room.*  |
|  | 16:15 Lloyd When we hit bottom.. it just went bang.. and that’s when the deck split and it filled up with water fast.. when that happened the captain told the mate to see if he could go down and drop the anchors.. just in case that it started going back out again. Between waves he was able to do that and then he came back up.. But the wheelhouse was so wet that we ended up in the captains quarters and that’s where we spent the rest of the time.  |
|  | **The boilers were essentially time bombs as the cold water slowly crept into the engine room. Second engineer Fred Chessel opened the safety valves to prevent an explosion as the waves broke the gangway door into the engine room. With no generator power, the ship went dark. Lloyd Belcher abandoned his post at the wheel as the forward crew went below to seek safety from the storm.** |
|  | lloyd Yes.. we all got out of the wheelhouse went down to the next deck where his cabin was.. it was all dark and we had to feel our way in.. there was a bed and a few chairs there and we just sat around hoped for the best.  |
|  | **The reality of their stranding was tragically apparent with the break in the deck.. And no life-rafts forward. Escape on a lifeboat was also going to be impossible.** |
|  | 3:42:53 (17:30) LloydWe knew there wasn ‘t any lifeboats because they were broken up.. and one went floating right past us. I was still in the wheelhouse when the starboard lifeboat let go.. and it went right up alongside us.. but we thought.. it was no good anyways.. we’d never get back there. And they didn’t have floats or anything in the bow end |
|  | **With no telephone to talk to the back of the ship, the crew stared back across the deck for any sign of survivors in the stern.** |
|  | 21:35 Lloyd we knew they were in the oilers room in the corner on the starboard side.. we knew there was life back there because they had a port hole open and they were bailing water out. The door didn’t go down to the level of the deck it was up 12-14 inches.. so that’s how much water was in there all the time.. so all the ones in the stern were in water all the 36 hours.. and they took turns bailing.. continuous.. all the time. |
|  | 17:59 goldy *we bailed it out if we could. But most of it.. you see.. the step from the door was about oh about 14 inches high and the water would run out. the door wasn’t water tight. It would come up that level and then it would run out the door. But we tried to bail it out too as best we could* |
|  | 17:30 goldy (water) *it was coming from all over.. in the door, through the ceiling.. all over.. and don’t believe it.. it was COLD. Because there was ice over everything there was snow all over everything it was armistice day ya know the 11th of November you can imagine how cold it was.*  |
|  | 20:30 Lloyd The engine was out.. the lights were out. We didn’t have any light. We found a pail after daylight.. a steel pail in the captains room and we started breaking up furniture and putting pieces of wood in the pail and opened a porthole on the starboard side to let the smoke out and we took turns warming our hands.. it gave us a little bit of heat.. not a lot but enough to warm our hands every once in a while |
|  | **After a freezing first night on the stranded freighter, it was apparent there would be no meals for anyone on board.** |
|  | 21:14 Lloyd all the water around us but we couldn’t drink it.. no food.. so we were getting a bit hungry at the last.. but of course we weren’t thinking of that.. we were just thinking of getting rescued. |
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| 18:30 Lloyd the next day we saw people on the shore.. a car and maybe 25-30 people and as the day went on.. people kept coming and coming.. I think there was 100 there before the day was over.  |
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| Muskegon saved 5 duck hunters caught in the gale. over 50 would lose their lives as what was described as the best duck season in decades turned to a terrifying deep freeze when temperatures plumeted  | **The lighthouse keeper at Little Point Sable had already reported the *Novadoc* was in trouble, and the Coast Guard attempted to find the ship in the darkness. rescuers from White Lake were the first to arrive, replaced by the stations in Muskegon and Grand Haven, whose lifesaving gear was driven as far as they could on an old logging road. first reports were the waves were breaking against a 100 foot cliff and it would be impossible to assemble their rescue equipment. In Ludington the coast guard assembled their breeches buoy to rescue the crew and passengers on the City of Flint carferry.** |
| Coasg guafd and fishermen didn’t see signs of life until tues night | 20:05 Lloyd Well we knew there was a coast guard up at Ludington. Of course, there was at Pentwater too, but ah I don’t’ think they could have got out to us anyway.. it was too rough.. the waves were 20 feet high I guess and snowing and ah I don’t think they could have reached us. |
|  | **Calls to coast guard command in chicago brought instructions to ‘take it easy and don’t take any chances’. It seemed many believed *Novadoc* was aground and not going to sink further into the water.. And no one saw any signs of life until they had been stranded for nearly 18 hours. by then the beach was packed with on-lookers. Including two fishermen from Pentwater. Belcher remembers the encouragement they found with so many witnesses on shore.** |
|  | 19:15 to see all these people.. we thought well they’re going to do something for us.. I don’t know what.. but ah.. anyway.. every once in a while at night they would flash their car lights and that meant something to us and in the morning I took a sheet off the captains bed and ripped it in half.. and opened the door on the starboard side and waved that sheet up and down and I talked with some people afterwards.. and they said they saw that.. ha ha . |
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|  | **Rescue would still be at least 12 hours away. After a second night in sub zero temperatures.. Captain Steep decided it was safe enough to cross the broken deck and reunite the crew. He would find that Philip Flavin and Joseph DeShaw were missing.** |
|  | 26:25 Lloyd Yeah.. when the captain went back to get the after crew they told him that the cooks were gone.. they were washed overboard. The galley was pushed in and there was a skylight back there that was caved in.. you see the waves were just rolling over the whole stern. |
|  | 15:17 goldy *Tons of water started dropping in on us and I mean tons of it. It just shook us to pieces. And don’t think we weren’t afraid because we didn’t know what minute everything was going to collapse around us.* |
|  | **Fishermen Joe Fountain and Corky Fischer told boat owner Clyde Cross about the stranded sailors. The three offered help to the local Coast Guard but were refused.. So they decided to head out that next day to rescue the Novadoc’s crew.** |
|  | 23:28 goldy *that’s a great story. As I say we stood there in that room from 10 oclock Monday night until wendesday at noon. Wednesday at noon the storm started to abate and before long we saw this boat coming towards us.. and we thought to ourselves my God somebody’s coming to our rescue! And sure enough, that boat.. came up to the bow of the boat and took on everybody off the bow and they came back to the stern of the boat and the chief engineer and the second engineer stood there and helped us get into the boat and then they got in .. but they helped us in they looked after us.. they were marvelous people.. ya know.. and they helped us into the boat and then we started heading for shore..*   |
|  | **Coast Guardsmen tried to launch a rescue in Pentwater but found the water too shallow.. And they said they attempted to get Cross to pull them out of the mud. Cross, Fischer and Fountain all denied they heard calls for help.** |
|  | 23:50Lloyd yes there was a bit of friction between the two of them.. and ah.. I don’t know what ALL it was.. they said something when we were going by the coast guard to get out you see they had to go by the coast guard to get out..  |
|  | 25;31Lloyd But their main concern was to go out and get us.. in the papers it said they were going out to look at their nets but they were going for us. |
|  | **History has blurred how the rescue actually occurred. Newspapers seem to contradict Howard’s recollection. One article includes a quote from Goldy in 1940 saying the crew in the back made their way forward, and that John Peterson had to crawl across the break because of injuries he received from nails and wooden debris when the cooks were killed. Wheelsman Lloyd Belcher worried about everyone fitting into the tiny fish boat.** |
|  | \*\*25:48 Lloyd When I seen them pull alongside.. I didn’t think we could all get in it. There was 17 of us.. and everything the wave get up to the level of the deck one of us would jump in.. and then it would go down and come up again.. and another one would jump in.. and by the time 17 of us got in then we were well on the way. It took the boat down quite a little bit.. The old Buick engine he had in it.. he thought maybe it was going to conk out.. but it kept going. |
|  | 23:28 goldy *and don’t think that wasn’t a rough ride.. that little fishing boat did everything but turn upside down but it finally got ashore and they took us into the coast guard station.* |
|  | 23:38 Goldy *The Coast Guards.. they wouldn’t come out to get us.. it was too rough for them. They wouldn’t come. But that little fishing boat came out.. to get us . and they took us off. Took us into the Coast Guard station..*  |
| Talk on board 3brothers | **20 people were cramped into the Three Brothers.. And the 8 mile ride included conversations about other sailors who weren’t so fortunate.** |
|  | 28:44 Lloyd well we were talking about the other ships.. the fishermen had told us they were picking up bodies from the Anna C Minch and the William B Davock. I didn’t know anyone on the Davock.. that was an American ship.. but the Minch was Canadian and I did know quite a few on it. A lot of them were from Midland. |
|  | **The *Minch* was over a hundred and 30 feet longer than the *Novadoc*, Partially loaded with grain, it was headed to Chicago. Lloyd had seen the ship about 30 miles off Grand Haven before it turned around... possibly to try and find shelter from the gale.** |
|  | 30:45 we had met the *minch* earlier in the afternoon it wasn’t making any headway and we weren’t either.. that’s why both ships went down in the same place pretty well |
|  | **The Minch was a Canadian ship, and Lloyd knew several men among the 24 who were lost.** |
|  | 54:46 (30 min on DVD)my girl friend had two brothers on it.. in fact, when their bodies were found the morgue in Toronto I took mom and girls down to identify themwhen we got to the morgue I opened the car door and opened the door for them and they wouldn’t go in.. they said it was too much.. they couldn’t go in. so I went in and identified them. (who were those two boys) Clifford and howard contois. (Count-wah |
|  | **It was inconceivable to Lloyd that a modern steel freighter that size could vanish with all of its crew.**  |
|  | 31:13 Lloyd I had no idea it would go down.. it was a quite a big ship, it was twice the size of us. Captain kennedy was from Collingwood. He was on it. |
| Davock seq | **Only a few miles from the Minch the 420 foot steamer William B Davock rolled over in the gale. It’s rudder tore loose from the skeg and jammed into the propeller. Without propulsion, it was at the mercy of the storm. Port Sanilac native Captain Billy Allen was in command. His niece Peggy Moon-yoze remembers that it was Billy that paid for her teaching degree in 1940.. She named her first son William Allen in his memory.** |
|  | 4:04 *he’d come and visit us in Detroit in the winter time I can remember him coming over. He was a very affable really charming I think, you know the kind of person you take to right away*  |
|  | **Billy wrote a letter to his family which was picked up by the mailboat in Detroit as the Davock passed upbound for Lake Huron.** |
|  | (letter from Billy) 57:18*. I think the date was nov 9 and the storm that took him was Nov 11 so I think they must have gotten the letter when they knew the ship was gone*  |
|  | **Captain Billy joked that the Davock was a midnight ship.. Unloading at night in Buffalo and arriving at Erie Pennsylvania at Midnight to load. At the foot of German street he eased the Davock in to receive 7200 tons of coal. His letter tells of how he had to stop a fight that broke out when several firemen and oilers got drunk on rubbing alcohol. All but one of them was kicked off the ship when they loaded ore in Escanaba.** |
|  | 57:25? Billy family  *he had to I guess fire or put the ones who were fighting off and he picked up another sailor there in Detroit ..*  |
|  | **Captain Billy hoped to return to Michigan for thanksgiving but only his letter would make it home. After turning back from his course to Chicago, the Davock rolled over in heavy seas near Little Point Sable. 14 bodies were recovered including the mates who were wearing lifejackets. Captain Billy.. who survived the Great Storm of 1913.. was lost. His oversided wicker chair washed ashore near Ludington.** |
| in this particular picture of uncle bill and my grandmother and she’s sitting in a wicker chair and in one of the books I’ve read about the wreck that wicker chair washed up on the beach at Ludington.  | 2:29 (photo of capt billy in wicker chair) *one of the officials in the steamship company was there combing the beach looking for sailors and he saw that chair and said I saw that in Capt Allens room (cicada) I said how did you get it through the door.. they said they really had to work to get it through the door.. so that chair washed up whole on the beach I don’t know who has it now.. laughs.* |
|  | **Davockwas the largest of the ships lost in the Armstice Day Storm, but it’s not the biggest shipwreck in Lake Michigan. The massive Carl D Bradley, lost in 1958 is nearly 200 feet longer than the Davock.**  |
|  | 39:30 Goldy *it doesn’t matter how big a boat is.. she can go down the same as any other boat. The fitzgerald was a prime example of that. It went down with all people on board they never knew what happened.* |
| Aboard the tug Three Brothers for Nearly 8 mile run to Pentwater | **On November 13th, wheelsman Lloyd Belcher was thanking God for his arrival in Pentwater. The Coast Guard station was too icy to safely disembark, so Clyde Cross brought his tug into his fish shanty and the men were driven to the station.** |
|  | 32:08 It’s a long breakwater going down and some of us road on deck..others had to stay inside. the fish boat had a long cover over it and so as we went along we could see people on the docks watching and taking pictures and we landed at the coast guard station and that’s where we got off and went in. |
|  | 23:38 Goldy *and in the station was a pot bellied stove and it was warm. And they brought out all the rum we could drink. I had three or four shots of rum.. I dearly loved rum. And we stood there and drank rum and then they took us in for something to eat. And I never saw a pile of sausages like it! That platter must have been three feet long and the sausages was pilled two feet high! And boy we were hungry. And we had that feet of .. we had our dinner. Then they took us to a nice warm room and told us to lie down on the bed. We took our clothes off and they took the clothes and dried them out we were wringing wet! We went to bed with nothing on and they dried our clothes out for us. Which was nice of them to do that.*  |
|  | **Howard and the rest of the crew were brought to a telegram office to finally get word to their families that they had survived. Lloyd knew his family would be worried.** |
|  | 34:10 . My dad was deer hunting 200 miles north of Victoria harbor that’s where he lived.. and they had a battery radio. They picked up on the radio there was three ships were in trouble, and one was on the Novadoc. He knew I was on it.. so He told the fellas I want to go home. They had my car up there, but Dad couldn’t drive and one of the other fellas had drove them up. So they started for home and in Huntsville they went in a restaurant. listened to the news in there and it wasn’t very encouraging. The first report we were all gone. And then after he got home.. they said might be life..so they thought well there’s hope that they are going to get out of it.. Then they got another report that some were drowned and some were saved. Then when they got my telegram they knew I was alright. |
|  | **What Lloyd sent to his family was short and to the point. SAFE ASHORE. HOME SOON.**  |
|  | 36:00 I didn’t want to say too much.. I just wanted them to know I was safe. (nervous laugh) |
|  | **After a bus ride to Muskegon they were placed on a train for Toronto. It took LLoyd two Days to get back to Georgian Bay.** |
|  | 37:25 There was a lot of people at the station.. quite a few people there. I forget how many. I have some pictures taken at the station. Some of my relatives. And there was some people there from the *Minch*.. they wanted to talk to us too. And so it was quite a thing to be back in Toronto. They put us up in a hotel overnight there and then the next morning we went back up to midland.  |
| Sinaloa sequence | **A very similar shipwreck occurred nearly 140 miles northwest of the *Novadoc*. Coast Guardsman Doug McCormick had last seen it in northern Green Bay when the waters were calm.** |
|  | 2:44 Doug *it was a nice sunny day but it was 65 degrees and the wind was south east and we got a call from the Empire State that he’d lost his steering and they wanted ah.. they called a guy from Milwaukee and wondered if we’d pick him up. We went to door bluff and contacted the Sinaloa and talked to him and told him the barometer was very low but he thought he’d go down the lake. So he did.* |
|  | **McCormick tried to get an electrician aboard a freighter called the Empire State.. But the storm soon made that impossible. They then heard about a shipwreck some 30 miles to the north. Doug was at the wheel when they set course for Upper Michigan.** |
|  | 5:02 Doug *we clocked 105 mph. so and then we got this call that the Sinaloa was aground at Sac Bay by burnt bluff so we took off and we got out off boyer bluff in the passage of rock island passage and the sea was coming in from rock island and green bay and they were peaking and I was steering.. I remember marcus olson he was in charge and then we had phil Peterson aboard and he said marcus you’d better steer and marcus said oh mack is doing fine.. but I’d get up on one of those peaks and twirl around and go right around.. they’d peak you know. And boy did we make time going up to burnt bluff.*  |
|  | **Remember that these rescuers were in a boat only 36 feet long..**  |
|  | 8:31 Doug *it’s got a cabin aft and the engine is covered.. it has a compartment up in the bow. But they’re good boat.. you can roll them over and everything else.. sturgeon bay they came up and they ran over fisherman island.. right over the island and they rolled over and broke the spray shield off her and spray hood. That’s all they had was a hood. They never got up there*  |
|  | 6:53 *at that time at night.. the temperature went down to 14 below zero so we were icing up real bad with about a foot of freeboard and we continued to sac bay to the Sinaloa*  |
|  | **Doug found that local fishermen had already removed half of the 41 person crew from the back of the Sinaloa. Irv Bates interviewed his grandfather Cecil Shawl**  |
| *Cecil H. Shawl in the Fall of 1998.* | Grampa: 1:03  *they couldn’t stay in the…in the back end of the ship all night, because it was freezing….and the cabin was breaking up.* |
|  | ***19 men were brought ashore in rowboats, pulling a line that had been run ashore.*** |
|  | 3:50  *he (Tom Peterson) took a load of men and I took a load of men after we got out there….and one….one of em’ had a wooden leg. He had a little trouble siding down the rope…..they had to slide down a rope into our boat….and uh….so…..when we started back, I told the guys in my boat…to umm…..when they see a big wave coming…..I’d tell em’ to hold on tight* |
|  | ***Just like the Novadoc, the Sinaloa had broken its back and the forward crew were isolated from the aft. Munising’s Coast Guard arrived at 3am to begin taking them off the wreck in a breeches buoy. Cecil remembers the second to the last rescue was Captain William Fountaine.*** |
|  | 10:00Doug *he was about 400 pounds maybe 500 he was underwater most of the time. Ah..* 11:35 Doug *it wasn’t designed for it.. not that weight. You had to tighten up the lines pretty good. We got him in* |
|  | ***Cecil remembers a bonfire was made from wreckage washing ashore. It was used to warm the survivors after 48 hours in the storm.*** |
|  | 4:30 cecil*I’ll say one thing, the State Police were there and they weren’t afraid to wade out in the water and help them guys….they did that! And uh….I could see them big waves coming, so I’d tell the guys each time, “hold tight, don’t let…don’t let this wave take us”….so they’d all hold tight on the line.*  |
|  | **Howard Goldsmith knows exactly what it feels like to survive the Armistice Day Storm.** |
|  | 40:10 Goldy *you go through something like that and it was something you want to forget about. Like I wanted to forget about the novadoc for 60 years.. it was a terrible thing I went through and I would love to forget about it. The only way to forget about it is to just not talk about it. That’s the only way to forget about it. If somebody asked something just say I don’t know. That’s the only way you can escape that.*  |
|  | **It was fishermen who did the lion’s share of rescues during this storm.. And investigations were launched after heavy criticism was printed about the Three Brother’s rescue.** |
|  | 31:17 Goldy *because the coast guard didn’t have the guts enough to do it. They had the ability but not the guts.. that’s what it was all* *about. And the coast guard was as mad as hell because someone else did it. That was the story behind that.*  |
|  | **Pentwater station did get a rescue off the Novadoc just a few days after the wreck when a camerashop owner named Jerome Jorrison rowed out to the shipwreck with a friend to take pictures. They assumed the ship was abandoned..**  |
|  | 8:04 Jerome *after two hours of taking pictures we saw the rowboat wasn’t there.. It was half way to Milwaukee by then so I ran a sheet up the flagpole.* |
|  | **A local man saw the distress signal and called the Coast Guard. They were in the middle of their investigation and not happy about the trespassing.** |
|  | 11:17 Jerome *they said what the hell are doing out here? We wanted to claim the ship. You can’t do that.. i didn’t argue with the Coast Guard.* |
|  | **Back in Singhampton, Howard Goldsmith was just happy to be home.. His brother returned to the lakes but Howard had a reason to stay on solid ground.** |
|  | 34:44 Goldy *I was married to the nicest girl that ever lived.. his picture is there. She was a gorgeous girl. She was a school teacher we had one of the greatest romances two people ever had.*  |
|  | **Howard retired as a welder for General Motors.**  |
| No.. I didn’t want to go back. (phone)  | 33:50 Goldy *anything they wanted made. I made it for them. If they wanted a utility rack.. or something made.. anything they wanted made go and see Goldy he’ll make it for you.. and I did. And I was good at it. I was an excellent welder* |
|  | **Lloyd was reluctant to sail again, his next wheeling job was inside the cab of a truck.** |
|  | 39:20Lloyd I drove transport for a while and after I heard the whistles blowing in the harbor I thought.. I’m going back to sailing.  |
|  | **With a world war looming, he joined the Navy and became a helmsman on the Canadian frigate Mah-Than. Lloyd was at the wheel when they sailed into D-Day.** |
|  | 41:00 We were bombed off Bresden France. We were guarding the lower part of the channel during the invasion.The Germans had a bomb they could drop from a plane way up in the sky and radio it down. We turned one way and it turned too. We couldn’t get away from it.. it hit us not too far from the wheel house.. about 15 feet from the wheelhouse. |
|  | 41:55 It hit us on the deck.. right close to the side.. and went right through the deck and out the side and then it blew up. And then it filled up the Engine room . see it was the water tight compartments that saved us. So the engine room filled up with water.. Oil over the water. So after this was all over I went down and looked in the engine room. An awful mess. You could see Bodies floating around in there. It wasn’t good. |
|  | **Seven men were lost in the explosion and Lloyd stayed with the ship as it was repaired. It was his last combat assignment.. And his last time at the wheel of a ship.** |
|  | 45:17Lloyd *First thing I came home they asked me..the day I discharged they asked me if I wanted my old job back. I said no.. I was finished sailing forever. So I went building houses for Con-Smythe he was a builder and had maple leaf gardens and the hockey team here. And he was building houses in rose lands and tobico so I worked there for a while and was getting kinda cold.. and I thought oh.. I don’t want to spend the winters out building. So I was offered a job with A&P stores. In the carpenter end of it. I took that and well I’ll go for the winter.. it was inside work.. I spent 38 years there.. with them. So I was out doing new stores and remodeling the old ones.*  |
|  | **In 2001 i traveled to Ontario to record the interviews you are hearing today. Howard.. now nearly 87 years old.. didn’t mince words when asking me why it took so long for someone to be interested in the Armistice Day Storm.**  |
| Like I’m almost 87 years old | 20:31 Goldy  *what amazes me is this. You see that happened 60 years ago and why did they wait until NOW to bring up this story? Why didn’t they do it 25 years ago when all the main characters were alive? Like our chief enginner.. second engineer everybody was alive to tell their story.. why didn’t they do it then? I don’t understand that. They have to wait until Lloyd and I are almost dead and then they want the story.*  |
|  | **Empowered by Howard’s comments, I went searching for the rest of the story. The Davock had been discovered in 1972, but no good coordinates existed as to where it was. I hired wreck hunter David Trotter to relocate it.**  |
|  | Trotter 4:51 *another thing we’re seeing is additional debris off the main hull.* |
|  | **In just over 200 feet of cold Lake Michigan water, the shadow of an overturned hull is echoed back to the sonar. The printed image doesn’t look much like a freighter. Trotter says that’s where experience is key.** |
| Dave trotter on searching | 3:40 trotter *they always give you the pretty picture when they’re selling you the equipment but then you find out it takes a lot of skill and on hands experience to be able to interpret what comes out on the printer that you’re using.*  |
| Jeff Moore on diving deep | **Jeff Moore suited up for a single dive to the Davock, guessing where the stern was and follwing a floatline that was estimated to be near the rudder. Nearly blinded by cloudy water and darkness, his camera only found debris.** |
|  | 4:51Jeff *we had some suspicion's we could hook into the wrong spot.. that’s what i found on the bottom.. nothing looked familiar.. Twsisted metal and very dark.. Turns out i was on the stack.. a piece of debris 30 feet off the wreck.*  |
|  | **In our quest to find eyewitnesses to this terrifying storm we made many new friends.. and eventually someone gave me a keepsake from the storm. A piece of one of the 3 lifeboat oars from the largest ship lost in the storm, the William Davock. I knew I couldn’t keep it. It belonged in a museum.. or perhaps in the hands of the captain’s family who never got to bury their uncle.** |
|  | 8:06:33 *It’s amazing that just this one piece.. maybe it was longer and they cut it. Do you suppose it looks like..* (ric oh certainly in fact I think that is part of the paddle itself..) |
|  | **I shared Jeff’s footage of the Davock with the niece of Captain Billy.**  |
| Herald journal had photos of Belcher and Fisher visit 1993 | 56:01 (Billy Family divers visiting wreck) *I think it’s important to learn what you can about what a ship goes down. Obviously ah there are indications on the ship itself what went wrong and in the case of the Davock if the chain had broken if it really did happen it would be nice to have documentation o fthat.. and I think all of these are part of the history of the area and certainly I want to know everything I can. And the footage that ric showed me.. or the video you showed me.. it was like seeing a burial site of those men. And it’s so peaceful down there.. it’s something that should be available to people there’s an ending.. a finalization to it all.*  |
|  | **Lloyd Belcher also looked for that finalization.. Returning to Pentwater to see what was left of his ship.** |
|  | 46:30 Lloyd *In 1997 I guess it was.. I said to my wife Barbara I’d like to see where the Novadoc went down.. just to see it. And maybe some of the fishermen are still alive. We rented a tent trailer and went down to Meese Park. Right down on the water. And as we went in.. we got the tent up and stayed for about 3 days.**As we went in I spoke to the man on the gate and I asked him if Clyde Cross was around yet I said do you know him? And he didn’t. I asked about Corky.. and he knew Corky. I said he was on the fishing boat that saved us.. I was on the Novadoc. When it went down here.* |
|  | 47:49 Lloyd *He got on the phone and he got ahold of Corky.. and within a few minutes Corky was in to see me. So we had quite a chat! And then the Third fisherman.. he went down to Detroit and they never heard from him after, so. But Clyde went down to California, he did fishing down there. I guess he did a lot of fishing down there.. he was quite a fisherman.* |
|  | **the voices you’ve heard from the storm have all since passed away. Their stories were first broadcasted in my PBS documentary SAFE ASHORE, named for Lloyd’s brief telegram home to his parents. I also featured their stories in my book The Wheelsmen. As you can understand, Howard Goldsmith’s commentary is a highlight of every maritime concert we have put on.**  |
| 43:10 Goldy *as long as I live. The only time I’ll get relief from it is when I die.*  | 22:20 goldy *The crew of the Fitzgerald.. they went down and there was nobody to tell their story. This is what happens on the great lakes.. there have been hundreds of boats gone down in the great lakes and nobody has lived to tell the story. Like lake huron.. is a sailors graveyard. It’s been known about that for years.. so many people have lost their lives on lake Huron.. the boat simply goes down and the bodies wash ashore. That’s what happens. You see.. when we went down on the novadoc.. all but two of us lived to tell the story.. that’s why we made history.*  |
|  | **I hope you’ve enjoyed this Mixstory. It was fun to revisit these stories in such depth, and again I ask you to ask permission if you need to use them for maritime research. Credit for information found within this podcast should be to Airworthy Productions. Check out our topic list on Mixtories wherever cool podcasts are found or online at lakefury DOT com or RicMixter dot com. And please give us a rating if you like what you hear. It may just lead to another (jingle)**  |