

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 01000527

Date Listed: 05/31/01

SS Tarpon (shipwreck)  
Property Name

Bay  
County

FL  
State

N/A  
Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*for* Erika Martin Seibert  
Signature of the Keeper

5/31/01  
Date of Action

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

- \*The nomination is amended to remove Criterion A.
- \*The Ownership of Property section is amended to read public-State only.
- \*These amendments have been discussed with the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Ms. Barbara Mattick on 5/31/01.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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527  
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name S.S. Tarpon

other names/site number Naugatuck; SS Tarpon State Underwater Archaeological Preserve/BY885

2. Location

street & number 7.8 nautical miles offshore Panama City n/a  not for publication

city or town Panama City  vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Bay code 005 zip code n/a

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Janet Snyder Hartman 4/10/2001  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
Bruce Martin Seibert 5/31/01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 0            | 0               | buildings  |
| 1            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 0            | 3               | objects    |
| 1            | 3               | total      |

**Name of related multiple property listings**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: Water-related (ship)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: Water-related (shipwreck)  
Landscape: Underwater (underwater site)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

19th-century Steamship  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Metal: iron (hull)  
walls \_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other Metal: iron \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Maritime History

Transportation

Archaeology: Historic-Non-Aboriginal

**Period of Significance**

1887-1937

**Significant Dates**

1887

September 1, 1937

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

American Period (1821-)

**Architect/Builder**

Pusey & Jones Shipyard of Wilmington, Delaware

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

# \_\_\_\_\_



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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

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Bay County, Florida

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**SUMMARY**

The SS *Tarpon* (8BY00885) is the site of an iron-hulled schooner-rigged twin-screw steamship that was carrying cargo and passengers from Mobile, Alabama, to Carrabelle, Florida, when she foundered in a gale and sank off Panama City, Florida, in 1937. The wrecksite is in the Gulf of Mexico 7.8 nautical miles offshore of Panama City, Bay County, in 95 feet of water on submerged lands belonging to the State of Florida. The site includes the remains of the 160 foot-long vessel and associated artifacts. Non-contributing resources include two mooring buoys and a cement monument with inset bronze plaque that designates the shipwreck an Underwater Archaeological Preserve.

**SETTING**

The wreck of SS *Tarpon* lies on a sand and live-rock bottom at a depth of 90 to 95 feet, 7.8 nautical miles from shore and 11 nautical miles from the St. Andrew Bay Pass. The sunken ship is situated almost parallel to the shoreline; her bow is on a compass bearing of 290°. The underlying hardpan bottom has prevented the wreck from sinking into the sand although much of the wreckage has become flattened and disarticulated. Water clarity generally is good, although clarity varies with rainfall runoff and prevailing currents, and the wrecksite has attracted much marine life. Tropical fish, gamefish, and crustaceans inhabit the wreckage, while large pelagic species such as amberjacks and sharks often cruise nearby.

**DESCRIPTION**

The wreck of SS *Tarpon* is approximately 160 feet long by 30 feet wide; the bow is to the west. Two mooring buoys are anchored into the hardpan bottom near the wreck, one at the bow and one at the stern. A bronze plaque designating the shipwreck an Underwater Archaeological Preserve is set into a cement monument placed on the sand just to the south of the main wreckage near the ship's engines. The non-contributing buoys and the plaque do not adversely affect the site's historical or archaeological integrity as they are placed away from the shipwreck itself and do not interfere with the wreck in any way. Furthermore, the plaque may easily be removed if necessary.

Until the early 1970s, *Tarpon*'s hull was almost intact. During a summer storm, much like the one that sank her, the sides of the hull finally gave way. A large section of the bow was left standing, but the midships area and the stern were reduced to metal debris. In recent years, the bow section also has collapsed, with segments falling on either side of the ship's axis. The only upright feature that remains in the bow area is a vertical member just aft of the stempost. Some articulated longitudinal wooden deck planking is extant in the bow. Aft of the bow rubble on the port side of the keel lies the forward anchor windless, inverted, where it appears to have fallen from the forward deck.

Several iron hull plates, some with portholes, have been dispersed onto the sand outboard of the main wreckage. They represent portions of the port side of the hull and are situated almost perpendicular to the wreck's axis. At the forward starboard area of the wreckage is the ship's single main boiler, displaced from its original bed in the boiler room, which was amidships just forward of the engine room. Prominent features of

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*Tarpon*, the displaced hull plates and boiler are evidence of the enormous natural forces that have acted on the sea bottom to alter the integrity of the shipwreck over the years.

In the boiler room, the boiler bed is represented by a circular structure inside a square framework of fallen boiler supports. Aft of boiler bed is the ship's winch assembly with wire cable still wrapped around the drum. In the midships engine room, twin engine assemblies rise from the collapsed wreckage. These assemblies represent the remains of the ship's compound steam engines composed of two vertical cylinders per engine - one for high pressure and one for low pressure. Aft of the engines on the port side are the remains of an electric generator. Two small auxiliary, or "donkey," boilers with exposed coils for condensing steam are located both fore and aft of the main engines.

In the stern of the shipwreck, two composite propeller shafts run aft from the engines on either side of the keel. Supported by pillow blocks, segments of the shafts have become disconnected from each other at their flange joints. Joined to the shafts are the ship's propellers; blades of the starboard propeller are twisted and bent, perhaps from *Tarpon's* initial impact on the seabed, since she was reported to have sunk by the stern.

#### SITE INVESTIGATIONS

In November of 1994, in response to a long-standing invitation, State Underwater Archaeologist Dr. Roger C. Smith attended a meeting in Panama City to discuss local input on the possibilities of creating new underwater preserves in Bay County, which is noted for its shipwreck population. Present at the meeting were representatives from local dive shops, charter boat organizations, businesses, museums, and local government. From the meeting came five nominations for candidates to become shipwreck preserves: USS *Strength*, a World War II minesweeper that was used to train hundreds of U.S. Navy divers; *Chickasaw*, a 1908 steel tugboat built in Pensacola; *Simpson*, an 1877 tugboat that sank in 1926; *Tarpon*, an 1887 steamer that served the Gulf Coast and was lost in a gale in 1937; and *Vamar*, a 1919 steamer which supplied Admiral Byrd's Antarctic base but sank in 1942.

In response to the nominations, Smith submitted a grant application to the Florida Coastal Management Program of the Department of Community Affairs to seek partial funding for a partnership project to investigate and to assess the five Bay County preserve candidates. The application was approved, and federal funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was awarded to the Division of Historical Resources in partnership with Bay County and the Museum of Man in the Sea. Both state and local in-kind and cash resources were made available to match the grant award. Early in 1996, a Bay County Shipwreck Survey field office was established at the Panama City Marina to work with the local waterfront community. The mission of the Survey called for the assessment, through historical and archaeological research, of each of the five shipwreck candidates, and a ranking of their suitability to become a State Underwater Archaeological Preserves based on criteria such as historical significance, archaeological integrity, public access, and diving conditions.

Over a period of four months, the five preserve candidates were located, explored, recorded, and assessed. The shipwrecks were mapped by placing a baseline along the longitudinal axis of the wreck and taking 90° offsets and triangulations to accurately record the position of wreckage and machinery.

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Archaeological features also were recorded with underwater photographs and video. No excavation was performed and no artifacts were recovered.

A brochure was prepared that describes *Tarpon's* history and its role as an Underwater Archaeological Preserve. In 1997, SS *Tarpon* was dedicated as Florida's sixth Underwater Archaeological Preserve and the bronze plaque was placed on site. Bureau staff inspects the Preserve at least annually and a local dive shop has "adopted" the wreck and takes responsibility for keeping the plaque clean and removing debris.



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SUMMARY

*SS Tarpon* is significant at the state and local levels under **Criterion A** in the areas of **Maritime History and Transportation**, and under **Criterion D** in the area of **Archaeology: Historic-Non-Aboriginal**. Under **Criterion A**, this shipwreck is significant as one of the few remaining examples of the steam vessels that plied the waters of Florida in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Tarpon* represents an element of the early steam commerce that skirted the state, and occasionally wrecked in the offshore waters. Additionally, *Tarpon* is significant to the local history of the Florida Panhandle Gulf Coast for its role in transporting goods and passengers between the local ports. For over 30 years, *Tarpon* was a regular weekly source of transportation and communication between coastal communities.

The *Tarpon* wrecksite also is significant under **Criterion D** as it has stabilized in the marine environment and can, through future archaeological investigation, provide additional information about early 20<sup>th</sup>-century merchant ships, the combination of sail and steam propulsion methods in sea-going vessels, and coastal maritime commerce and transportation. Although plans exist for *Tarpon*, as well as for contemporary vessels, builders often made changes that were not reflected in the official blueprints. Ship captains and sailors also made their own modifications to their vessels that may only be recognized in the archaeological record. *Tarpon* is one of the last remaining examples in Florida of the steam vessels that regularly traversed the state's waters in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although once quite common in United States waters, relatively few of these vessels remain in the archaeological record due to the effects of salvage immediately after wrecking and subsequent removal of the wreckage for scrap. Additionally, *Tarpon* was built during the transition of sail power to steam and was schooner-rigged in addition to having steam propulsion.

HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: Advent of the Steamship

For centuries square-rigged sailing ships transported cargo and passengers across oceans and along coastlines. Beginning about 1840, however, steamships vied with sailing vessels in the trans-Atlantic run, although early steam technology initially was unreliable. By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, paddlewheel steamships crossed the Atlantic on regularly-scheduled packet voyages and proved to be faster and more dependable in maintaining arrivals and departures than sail-powered vessels since steamship did not rely on the vagaries of the wind. Steamships also were less expensive to operate because a smaller crew was required than for the same size sailing ship. Steam-driven vessels came of age during the American Civil War and some of the fastest Confederate blockade runners were ocean-going paddlewheel steamships. Developed as early as the 1830s, vessels driven by a screw propeller rather than a paddlewheel soon began to make oceanic steamship travel practical and predictable.

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century steamships were used for a variety of tasks, from transporting passengers and immigrants to laying telegraph cable to conducting warfare. As the United States began to turn its interests inland and focus more on developing trans-continental railroads, Great Britain emerged as the world's leader in the production of iron and steel steamships. Although steam technology rapidly advanced and became increasingly sophisticated, problems still existed with the machinery. Blown gaskets, seized pistons, and exploding boilers, among other hazards, were relatively common. At the worst, these dilemmas could

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cause a vessel to founder and sink; at minimum a ship equipped only for steam travel could be left drifting helplessly with the current, at the mercy of wind and wave. One solution that often was used was to rig steamships with masts and auxiliary sails as a precaution against catastrophic machine failure. Additionally, vessels that could utilize sail as well as steam power could save money by sailing when the wind was favorable and only using steam when necessary.

Steamships were used well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly for local and regional transport as large ocean-going ships began to switch from coal-fired boilers to liquid fuel powered engines. The humble coastal steam freighter that hauled loads of coal or grain may not be the most romantic maritime image, but these vessels were the marine workhorses of their time, transporting enormous quantities of goods and people along the coasts of the United States. Of the many that plied coastal waters some inevitably ran aground, were wrecked in storms, or foundered on hidden reefs or shifting shoals. Many were refloated to work again, and most others were salvaged for their value as scrap metal. A few, however, still remain off the shores of the United States, home to fish and other marine creatures and an attraction to fishermen and divers.

#### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

“The steamer *Tarpon* is no mere boat. To Pensacola and other coast cities the *Tarpon* is an entity, alive as some boats are, with the people and events which have made history. In time the *Tarpon* will become a legend, just as the *Robert E. Lee* of Mississippi fame has become. Captain W. G. Barrow. . . had the record of making runs, no matter what the weather, and of being always on time.” (History of Escambia County, Biography Section, 1934)

#### Early History

The twin-screwed steamer, official number 130381, was constructed in 1887 at Wilmington, Delaware, by the renowned shipbuilders Pusey and Jones. Christened *Naugatuck*, the new ship was delivered to the Naugatuck Valley Steamboat Company of Derby, Connecticut. Designed to provide freight and passenger service along the Naugatuck and Housatonic Rivers to New York City, the iron-hulled vessel measured 130 feet in length, 26 feet in beam, with an 8-foot depth of hold. Built with a bar keel and two thick fender strakes completely encircling the hull, *Naugatuck* spent her first winter helping to keep the Housatonic River channels free of ice as she went about her business. The superstructure and passenger areas were made of wood; originally she was equipped with a foremast with an eagle at the top, later a second mast would be installed. Propulsion was provided by twin compound fore-and-aft steam engines (nos. 779 and 780) designed to be handled by a single engineer, transferring power to two composite shafts to drive twin iron propellers.

Competition with local railroads caused hard times for the steamship company, and within two years the ship was offered for sale. *Naugatuck's* new owner was H. B. Plant, whose railroad empire terminated at Tampa, Florida, bridging the gap between North and South to become one of the largest conglomerates in the United States. Although Plant is best known for his railroad network, steamships also were used, primarily to expand rail operations by carrying merchandise and building materials across the sea. *Tarpon* was put into service in this capacity in the local Tampa area, expanding Plant's marine operations. In 1891, she was sent

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back to her builders, who lengthened her hull by 30 feet and added several staterooms. Renamed *Tarpon*, she returned to her Florida career, and may have been one of the dozens of Plant vessels used to transport troops and supplies to and from Cuba during the Spanish-American War. After Plant's death in 1889, *Tarpon* served his corporate successors until 1902, when she was sent to Philadelphia for sale. Her buyers, the newly-incorporated Pensacola, St. Andrews & Gulf Steamship Co., sent Captain Willis Green Barrow to bring *Tarpon* back to Florida. From this point onwards, the lives of the ship and her skipper were to become inseparable.

**Vital Statistics and Data for SS *Tarpon***

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Rig/Type of Craft     | Twin-screw, Steam-powered Vessel  |
| Official Numbers      | Hull # 241<br>Vessel # 130381   |
| Date of Construction  | 1887, alterations 1891  |
| Place of Construction | Wilmington, Delaware  |
| Builder               | Pusey and Jones Shipyard, Wilmington, Del.  |
| Trade                 | Freighter and Passenger Carrier   |
| Principal Dimensions  | Length: 130 ft. at the waterline (additional 30<br>ft. added in 1891, totaling 159 ft. 9 inches)<br>Beam: 26 ft.<br>Depth: 7 ft. 2 inches |
| Tonnage               | Gross: 449 tons Net: 281 tons<br>Displacement after rebuilding: 315 tons  |
| Power                 | 450 Horsepower<br>2 fore-and-aft Compound Engines<br>(originally coal, then switched to oil)  |
| Crew                  | 10 listed originally for <i>Naugatuck</i> ,<br>31 aboard when she sank  |

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Owners

Naugatuck Valley Steamboat Company,  
H. B. Plant,  
Peninsular and Occidental Steamship Co.,  
Pensacola, St. Andrew & Gulf Steamship Co.

Homeports

Derby, Connecticut  
Tampa, Florida  
Pensacola, Florida

**Gulf Coast Service**

Beginning in 1903, *Tarpon* and her master Captain Barrow became famous along the northern Gulf Coast, making weekly runs between the ports of Mobile, Pensacola, St. Andrews Bay (Panama City), Apalachicola, and Carrabelle. Barrow and *Tarpon* developed a reputation for reliability and dependability, transporting passengers and essential supplies while maintaining a strict schedule regardless of weather. The captain often was quoted as claiming that, "God makes the weather, and I make the trip." To the men, Barrow "was a rough and grumbly sea salt; to the ladies, he was a gentleman of the highest caliber; to the children, he was an inspiring hero." As of 1908, he also was the president and major stockholder of the steamship company.

Despite storms, hurricanes, groundings, fires, and a few yellow fever scares, *Tarpon* continued her weekly schedule between six Gulf ports year in and year out. In January of 1921 while approaching Mobile during heavy fog, the steamer collided with a five-masted schooner lying at anchor. *Tarpon's* stack and mainmast were torn away, but soon were repaired; no one in either vessel was reported to have been hurt. In December of 1922, Barrow celebrated twenty years as master of *Tarpon* by completing their 1,000<sup>th</sup> voyage to St. Andrews Bay with the distinction of having missed only one trip on account of the weather. An admiring local press estimated that in making the voyages, the steamer had traveled a distance of 700,000 miles - a distance equal to 28 times around the earth. In March of 1923, fire enveloped the entire main deck of the steamer while she was docked at Panama City; however, prompt response by the local volunteer fire department quenched the blaze. Extensive damage to the engine room was repaired. In September of 1926, *Tarpon* was blown ashore on Santa Rosa Island near Pensacola by a hurricane, and in 1929 she was stranded again by a hurricane at West Pass near Apalachicola. On both occasions, the steamer quickly was put back into service. By January of 1933, Captain Barrow celebrated his 30<sup>th</sup> year with *Tarpon*, completing 1,500 voyages to St. Andrews Bay, and the following year the legendary master and his wife observed their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in Pensacola; "flowers, gifts, telegrams, and letters told of their popularity; they are identified with the advancement of this city and section."

**Last Voyage**

On August 30, 1937, five weeks short of her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, *Tarpon* was loaded as usual at Mobile for her next voyage east. She had just passed her annual inspection and, before that, a dry-dock examination and a survey by the American Bureau of Shipping. As usual, her captain loaded as much cargo as he could fit on the

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steamer. Despite repeated reminders by local inspectors at Mobile, Barrow had neglected to paint the legally-required loadline on the hull of his ship. *Tarpon* often left port with her decks awash, but she always managed to reach her destination. As she left Mobile, she had over 200 tons of general cargo aboard, most of which had been loaded through four side ports - two forward and two aft along the sides of the vessel. Although she was licensed to carry a crew of 20 and an additional five "roustabouts" to help with cargo, on this voyage that number was exceeded. Mounted on the boat deck were three standard life-boats and one work boat with a carrying capacity of 61 persons.

*Tarpon* carried her regular crew of men concerned with navigation and engineering. On board were Captain L. E. Danford, first mate; Captain William "Billy" H. Russell, second mate; Lloyd Mattair, chief engineer; William McKnight, second engineer; Adley Baker, oiler; George Wolfe, purser-clerk, his son George Jr., assistant clerk; Dozier White, cook, and his wife, Lily, a maid and the only woman on board. In addition, there were a number of roustabouts for handling the cargo. In all, it is believed that there were 31 people aboard the steamer when she left Mobile.

The ship made port in Pensacola and departed for Panama City the evening of August 31. She had taken on, in addition to her cargo of flour, sugar, canned goods, and beer, a quantity of iron for the paper mills. Almost 200 barrels of fuel oil were in her tanks, as well as some 15 tons of fresh water carried forward in the hull. As *Tarpon* rounded the sea buoy and made for St. Andrews Bay, her freeboard was less than five inches.

At Mobile, Barrow had inquired about the weather. The forecaster predicted fair weather; however, by the time *Tarpon* left Pensacola the wind had freshened. As was his custom, the master retired for the night to his cabin, placing second mate Russell at the helm. At 2 a.m. (September 1) engineer Mattair was awakened by McKnight, who told him he was having trouble keeping water pumped from the bilges, due to a leak in the bow that was steadily increasing in rough seas. The ship began to list to port as the men worked the pumps. First mate Danford ordered the helm into the oncoming seas, and sent Russell below to jettison barrels of flour from the port side to counter the list. When she returned to an even keel, she was put back on course. In his cabin, Barrow had been informed of the problem, but remained confident of his ship despite the increasingly foul weather. Just before dawn, the wind reached gale force, and the pounding seas began to pour through *Tarpon's* wooden bulkheads, causing her to list to starboard. The roustabouts were sent below again to jettison more cargo, and Danford tried to keep the vessel headed into the seas. But the situation was futile; the engineers and mates realized that the ship could not be righted. Danford turned *Tarpon* toward shore, intending to try to beach her before she sank. Captain Barrow finally emerged from his cabin to receive the engineer's report that the ship was out of control. He ordered more cargo overboard, and then ordered Danford to put the vessel back on her course. But *Tarpon* had begun to sink. When Barrow finally gave the order to abandon ship, the vessel already was settling down into the sea by the stern.

The crew on deck frantically donned cork life jackets and tried to launch the four lifeboats. Most of those below remained trapped as the ship plunged beneath the waves. Only one boat was freed; it contained Lily White, whose husband tied her inside so that she would not be washed away. Unfortunately, she drowned when the boat capsized. Second mate Russell was killed by a falling boom as he tried to help Captain Barrow into another lifeboat. The chief engineer and Danford were both swept overboard, but managed to climb aboard

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a hatch cover. Seeing Barrow adrift, they pulled him aboard; but, around noon *Tarpon's* 81-year-old master succumbed, and his crew released him to the sea in a life jacket they found floating nearby. Elsewhere, oiler Adley Baker and crewman Cecil Smith floated among debris near other crew members, some of whom already were dead. As the weather cleared, Baker sighted land in the distance and decided to swim toward it, despite Smith's objections. Alternately swimming and resting, Baker finally staggered ashore somewhere near Philips Inlet, west of Panama City, after spending 25 hours in the water. It was 10 a.m., September 2.

In a twist of irony, while *Tarpon's* crew fought for their lives, the Coast Guard cutter *Triton* was only seven or eight miles away attempting to refloat a barge at the entrance to St. Andrews Bay. *Tarpon*, however, had no radio, and no distress flares were fired. A crewman on the fishing smack *Success*, which had anchored off Panama City Beach that morning, noticed the steamship between downpours about an hour before she sank; but, knowing her schedule, he paid little attention. Except for her crew, he was the last person to see *Tarpon* afloat.

A passing motorist on the Gulf Coast Highway picked Baker up and drove him to Panama City to report the disaster. News of *Tarpon's* sinking quickly spread by word of mouth and by telegraph; the Coast Guard dispatched the search plane *Victor* and the cutters *Kimball* and *Triton* to the scene to look for survivors. Rescued were Danford, McKnight, Mattair, Wolfe and his son, Cecil Smith, quartermaster Nixon Davis, fireman Claude McMillan, Clarence Reed, George Boykin, and roustabout Frank Jackson. The bodies of Captain Barrow, Russell, and an unidentified man were recovered. Dozier White, the ship's cook, made shore on his own. Some of the survivors had been in the water 33 hours. Of those aboard *Tarpon's* last voyage, 18 are believed to have lost their lives; some, including the roustabouts trapped in the cargo hold, were never identified.

On September 9, the Department of Commerce convened a hearing of the Marine Investigation Board at Pensacola. At the hearing all 13 survivors testified, as did the Coast Guard and weather officials. The findings of the Board were sent to the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation in Washington for final review. When the report was released, it placed full blame on Captain Barrow's "unwarranted determination to hold the vessel to her course in spite of the vessel's known peril, and in the face of strenuous efforts being made to beach her." The Board recommended that no disciplinary action be taken against any of the survivors, but that the local inspectors at Mobile be admonished for failure to force Captain Barrow to place a loadline on his vessel. The Board further recommended that ". . . all vessels, regardless of tonnage or number of persons on board, if they customarily travel out of sight of land, be required to have a radio."

### Epilogue

In the summer of 1939, almost two years after *Tarpon's* sinking, fishermen reported to the Coast Guard that they had seen the mast of a vessel nine feet below the surface of the water eight miles from shore, or 11 miles on a bearing of 265 degrees from the St. Andrews Bay entrance buoy no. 1. The Coast Guard quickly determined that the vessel was unusually large, and sent patrol boat *Nike* to investigate the derelict. When her crew finally found the sunken vessel, *Nike* radioed Coast Guard headquarters in Mobile that the derelict was believed to be *Tarpon*. The site was marked with a red flashing lighted buoy. Since the location of the derelict

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was to the east and slightly to the south of where *Tarpon's* survivors said the vessel sank, it was surmised that either Gulf currents, or perhaps a recent tropical storm, had moved the sunken freighter along the bottom.

The location marked by the Coast Guard in 1939 is where local fishermen in the 1940s and SCUBA divers in the 1950s and 60s found the sunken steamer in ninety feet of water. Early diving stories relate that one could swim through cargo hatches into the hold, where the remains of cargo, including stacked cases of beer, were visible.

Locally and state-wide, *Tarpon* is significant under **Criterion A** in the areas of **Maritime History, Commerce, and Transportation** because of its role in the commercial transportation of goods, products, and people along the shores of Florida. Additionally, *Tarpon* represents an early 20<sup>th</sup> century part of the collection of wrecked vessels that accumulated off the state's coast; these shipwrecks today are an important and integral element of extant turn-of-the-century maritime cultural resources. Additionally, *Tarpon* was an important and integral part of early 20<sup>th</sup> century coastal commerce and transportation along the Florida Panhandle Gulf Coast. With few paved roads or bridges, commerce and communication between Panhandle coastal communities was almost totally dependent on waterborne traffic connecting the bays and rivers with the Gulf of Mexico. *Tarpon* filled this need and, along with her captain, became famous for reliability and punctuality while delivering materials to develop the Gulf Coast and helping the area to communicate with the outside world.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

SS *Tarpon* is significant under **Criterion D** because of the high potential for new information the site can yield. Although parts of the ship have been removed or have collapsed, much remains of this important example of transitional steamship design and technology. Unfortunately, few, if any, portable artifacts remain on the shipwreck due to the effects of illegal looting and "souvenir collecting" by uninformed sport divers. Much architectural information, however, can be learned from the remaining hull structure, including the design of combination screw and sail powered craft. *Tarpon* was constructed with both steam-powered and sail-powered methods of propulsion. These types of vessels, while not uncommon in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, today are relatively rare and few examples remain either afloat or in the archaeological record. In particular, changes to the vessel during or after her construction that are not reflected in the official plans would be a valuable addition to the body of knowledge about transitional sail-to-steam commercial vessels.

An additional consideration is that SS *Tarpon* is one of a family of shipwreck sites that have been determined to be historically and archaeologically significant by the State of Florida. *Tarpon* was designated a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve based on its integrity and its potential for public education. *Tarpon* also is featured as part of Florida's Maritime Heritage Trail, a series of coastal and maritime sites including Historic Shipwrecks, Coastal Environments, Lighthouses, Coastal Communities, Coastal Forts, and Historic Ports, that are interpreted for public education, recreation, and tourism.

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**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The site boundary of the SS *Tarpon* is defined as a circle of 500 yards radius around the geographic coordinates Latitude 30°05.702' N, Longitude 85°56.555' W, lying offshore and below the mean low water mark of the Gulf of Mexico and encompassing the area of vessel wreckage.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The SS *Tarpon* site boundary is based on the Management Agreement for Sovereignty Submerged Lands between the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida and the Division of Historical Resources. This Management Agreement was entered into upon the designation of SS *Tarpon* as a State Underwater Archaeological Preserve in 1997. The purpose of the 500 yard radius around the site is to encompass the scatter of material culture relating to the shipwreck that may have dispersed with wave and current action away from the primary area of wreckage.

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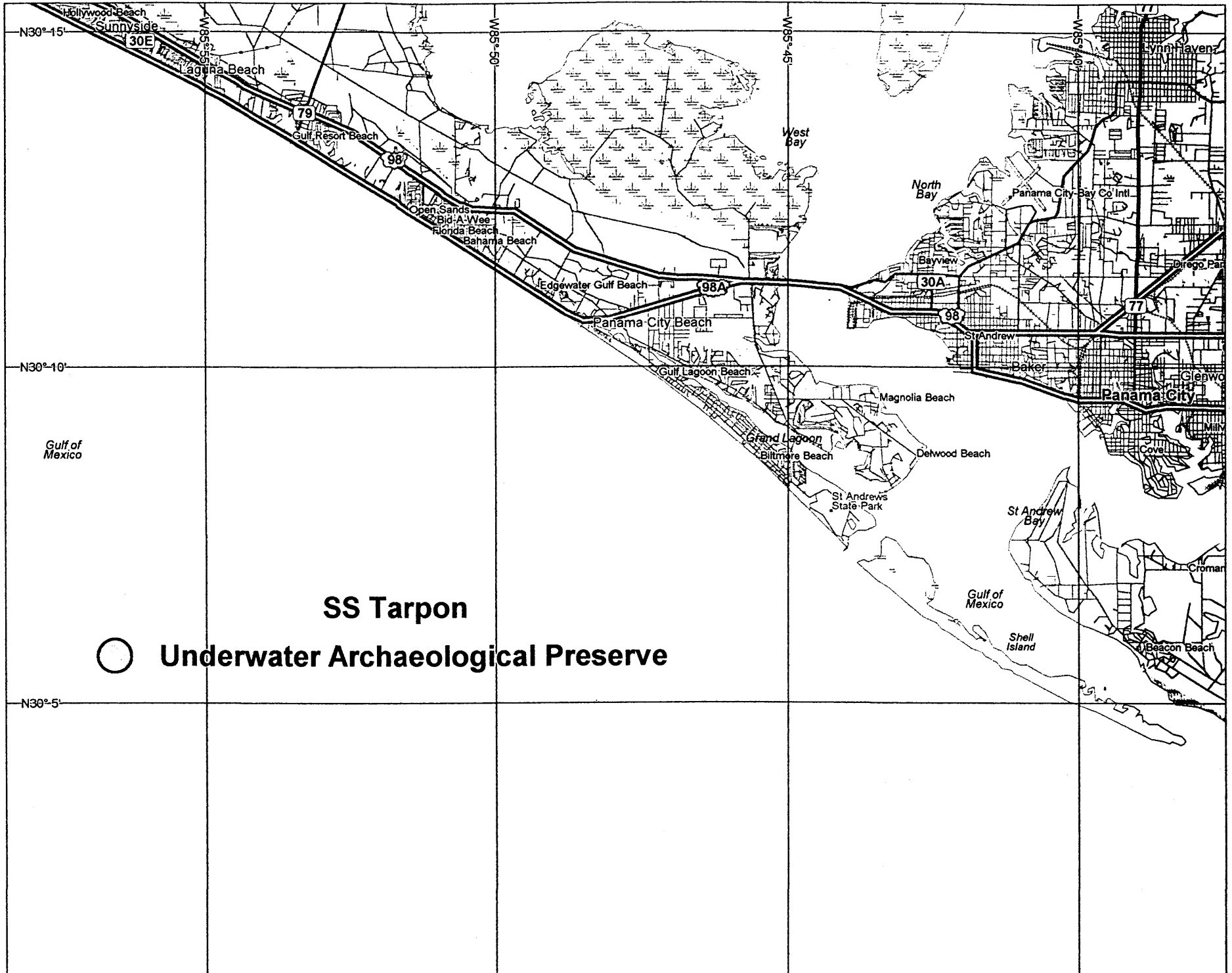
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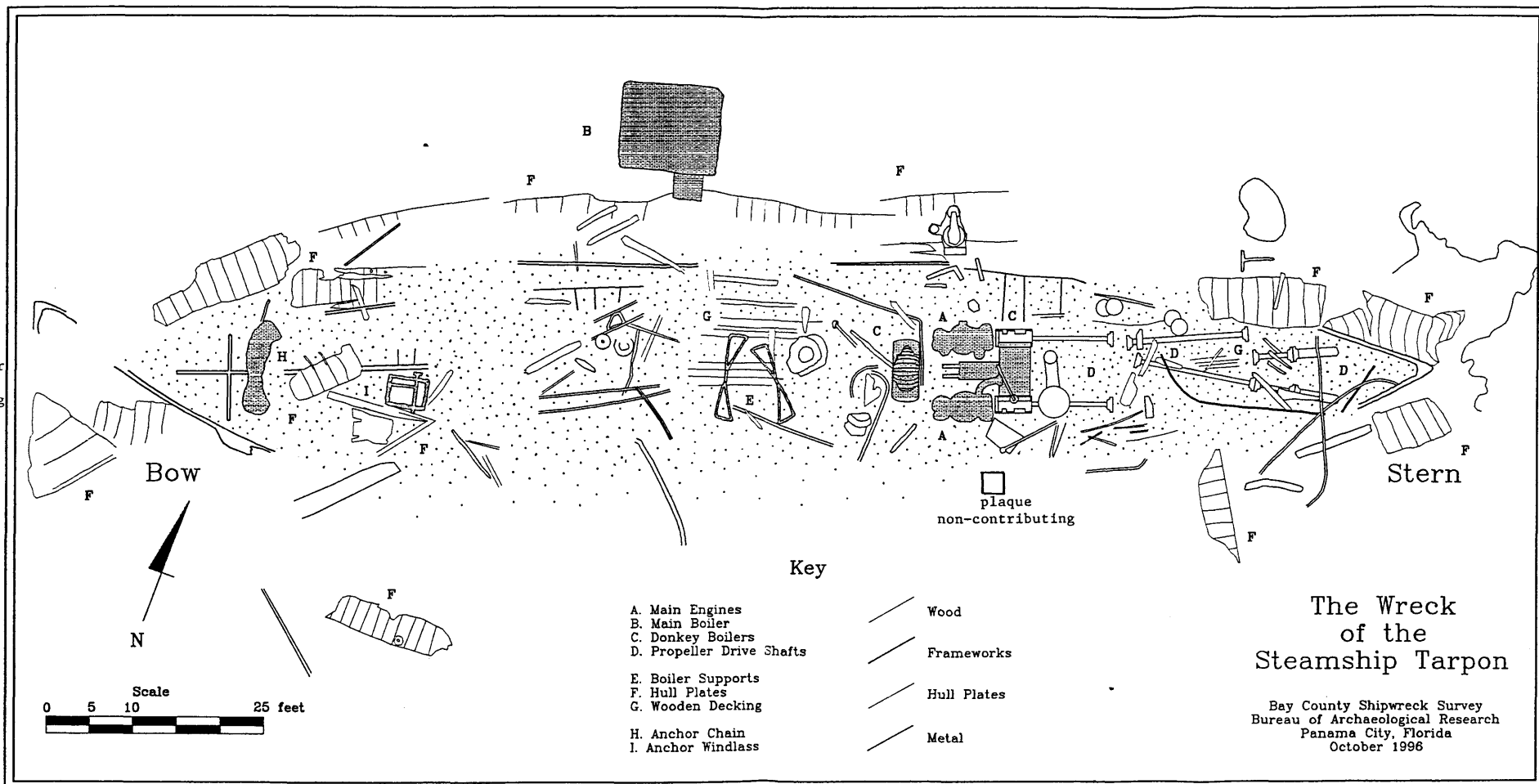
PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1.1) *SS Tarpon*
  - 2) Bay County, Florida
  - 3) Unknown
  - 4) Circa 1905
  - 5) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - 6) Photo of *SS Tarpon*, then *Naugatuck*, in port
  - 7) 1 of 3
  
- 2.1) *SS Tarpon*
  - 2) Bay County, Florida
  - 3) Unknown
  - 4) Circa 1920
  - 5) Pensacola Historical Society
  - 6) Photo of *SS Tarpon* under steam
  - 7) 2 of 3
  
- 3.1) *SS Tarpon*
  - 2) Bay County, Florida
  - 3) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - 4) 1996
  - 5) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - 6) Underwater photo showing wreckage amidships
  - 7) 3 of 3



mooring  
buoy anchor  
●  
non-  
contributing

wood  
buoy  
anchor  
●  
non-  
cont.



The Wreck  
of the  
Steamship Tarpon  
Bay County Shipwreck Survey  
Bureau of Archaeological Research  
Panama City, Florida  
October 1996