



Prins Willem V – Sixty Years Later

By Cal Kothrade

WRECK OF THE PRINS WILLEM V - MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN - CAL KOTHRADÉ PHOTOGRAPHY

October 14 marked the 60th anniversary of the sinking of a Dutch owned freighter in Lake Michigan near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Nobody died when the *Prins Willem V* went down, so what makes it any different than the scores of other Great Lakes tragedies? This shipwreck is quite possibly the most dived wreck in all of the Great Lakes by volume of divers yearly. The "Willie", as she is affectionately called by local divers, has many reasons for her "rock star" status in the shipwreck world. For starters, she is a "modern" vessel and still intact on the bottom even though she was built in 1948. She is shallow, the deepest parts being about 85 ffw, with portions of the wreck rising to about 45 feet from the surface. The wreck affords penetration opportunities for novices and experienced divers alike. Getting there and back is easy because it's only 3.5 miles offshore, and it has a great history, having once been owned and sunk by the German military during WWII! With all these plusses, it's easy to see why she is the first or favorite wreck dive of so many.

The *Prins Willem V* is one of my favorite wreck dives to this day, even after too many dives on her to count. As a preservation-minded diver and maritime artist, I have drawn the wreck as it sits on the bottom today, written articles about it, given presentations about it, put its image on the back of shirts, and had my photographs of it grace magazine covers. But one last goal of mine regarding this wreck remained unrealized until this year. I always wanted to show the world the "Willie" in her entirety, with a photo-mosaic: that is, a single impossible photograph of how she sits on her starboard side, sinking into Michigan's clay bottom. That kind of image can't be captured due to the size of the vessel, unless you take many smaller ones, and then digitally stitch them together to create the final image, something like a jigsaw puzzle. That is exactly how this image was created. The final product took more than 40 computer hours, and over 55 still photos taken from just the right angles, painstakingly merged by hand in Photoshop. Just in time for her 60th anniversary!

Fellow divers and Willie lovers, enjoy! ■

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